

THE HACK LIST: HUSTLER LESSONS FROM COMMUNITY GRANTMAKING BY AND FOR SEX WORKERS

Compiled by Red Umbrella Fund, Third Wave Fund, and UHAI-EASHRI

We created this checklist to share some hacks (or, creative work-arounds) that support funders to be more responsive to grassroots grantee experiences and needs. We've drawn on these strategies in our work as funds that are by and for sex workers, drug users, LGBTQI+ people, Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and others on the frontlines against the HIV epidemic. We list some opportunities to expand community access to funding, followed by various hacks that might help funders to do just that.

Before you dive in, an important note: this is an aspirational list! None of us does all of these things, and some of these strategies may not quite match your context. We're sharing these ideas to spark dialogue and collective learning so that you can draw on and adapt them to your particular funding setting.

These hacks are inspired by the creativity, resilience, and hustle of our communities, so, for your consideration, we offer you these Hustler Lessons. . .



Opportunity: Decision-makers can become more familiar with community needs.

Increase community participation in grantmaking:

- Provide meaningful opportunities for directly impacted community members to give input, feedback, and, where possible, sign-off on grantmaking processes
- Pay community members for sharing their knowledge and expertise, ideally at the same rate at which you would compensate any other expert consultant

Deepen grantmaker knowledge and prioritization of community experiences and needs:

- Invest in educating and training up staff and Board at all levels, including by participation in funder networks; the Sex Work Donor Collaborative is a great resource for sex work funding
- Award general operating grants to allow groups to set their own priorities
- Recruit staff and Board members from the movements you're seeking to fund
- Invest in leadership development programming to help community members build philanthropic skills, including through participatory grantmaking



Opportunity: Application and reporting processes can be made more accessible.

Reduce language and communication barriers:

- Invest in robust interpretation, translation, closed captioning, and transcription budgets
- Offer application materials and webinars with interpretation & translation into key languages used in the communities you seek to support, including sign language
- Use closed captions, transcription, and image descriptions to support participation from Deaf and hard-of-hearing, blind and sight-impaired, neurodivergent, and disabled people
- Allow prospective grantees to apply in their primary languages and build in time for translation before application review period
- Prioritize hiring and support for multilingual staff members

Expand access to technology and/or education to support more successful proposals and reporting:

- Allow applications and reporting via selfie video, phone call, or webconference
- Allow applications and reporting in formats outside of set templates
- Offer guidance on your specific application process via webinar
- Offer personalized feedback on applications, both during the call for proposals and to any groups that were not selected for grants

Create less burdensome application processes:

- Cut down on the number of questions and materials required
- Offer a one-step application process that allows minor changes after a grant is awarded
- If you require detailed applications, develop clear multi-step processes that require progressively more work from applicants at each stage
- Compensate applicants for the work that goes into proposals even if not awarded funding

Expand access to funding through open calls and ongoing information gathering:

- Wherever possible, invest time and money in open calls
- Where not possible, consistently gather information about the field from other funders and stay in the loop about movement developments to widen the range of potential invited applications

Make reporting more grantee-centered:

- Co-create individualized reporting and evaluation criteria with grantees based on their needs
- Use simple reporting templates and evaluation tools that are useful to both funders and grantees
- Create wiggle room for grantees on reporting deadlines by padding work plans in anticipation of shifts in organizational capacity

 **Opportunity: Grantmaking criteria can be made less restrictive.**

Expand funding for capital campaigns as well as regrants and direct support to individuals

- Aim to develop funding streams that will fund the types of projects that are necessary for community building (i.e., computers or basic renovations)
- Consider using stipends in exchange for activities with low barriers to participation (i.e., short surveys or receiving harm reduction kits), and where possible, allow cash rather than gift cards

Expand HIV funding for work that goes beyond biomedical interventions to support holistic well-being and addresses root causes:

- Adjust funding criteria to reflect the value and importance of popular education, political advocacy, and community organizing to address oppressions at the root of the HIV epidemic
- Provide funding for efforts that support mental health, nutrition, economic empowerment, and other key determinants of prevention and intervention

Create mechanisms that enable funding for newer, riskier, and smaller groups:

- Where possible, fund fiscally sponsored groups and groups without formal tax status
- If fiscal sponsorship is a minimum requirement, allow non-sponsored groups to apply for funding on the condition of getting fiscal sponsorship before receiving grant funding
- Provide education and support for groups to become non-profit organizations or fiscally sponsored, including vetting fiscal sponsors to ensure cultural competency
- Create funding pipelines by beginning with smaller grants and increase funding over time, both within your own portfolios and by leveraging and building partnerships with other funders
- Provide capacity building, leadership development, and conflict resolution grants and opportunities

Find work-arounds for restrictive criteria and processes inherited from your own funding sources:

- Public foundations: go beyond foundation grants and build up major donor and grassroots fundraising strategies to free up more general operating dollars for your own grantmaking
- Private foundations: Invest in donor and Board education and, if you find you still can't shift their restrictions? Consider grantmaking to other funders who can redistribute the funds more flexibly

Lack of rapid response funding:

- Try it out! Unsure of where to begin? Partner with community funds that already provide rapid response funding and document the learnings through the partnership
- Not a possibility for you? Fund existing rapid response funders

 **Opportunity: Funders can be more responsive to shifting grantee needs and capacities.**

Create more flexible and achievable grant deliverables:

- Work with grantees to think in terms of outcomes and impact rather than activities and outputs
- Where quantitative deliverables are required, support grantees to use achievable metrics that set them up for success

Maintain approachable and kind communication with grantees to foster shared problem-solving:

- Bring your own personality and humanity into the relationship: maintain ethical boundaries but never professionalism for professionalism's sake
- Regularly check in with grantees, not just at reporting stages, but to build relationships and rapport, especially at times of grantee stress and success
- From the beginning, communicate an openness towards troubleshooting challenges together, and then follow through on that commitment when problems do come up

We want to hear what you think! To share feedback, ask questions, or learn more about our work:



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