



FUNDING LOCALLY-LED PEACEBUILDING:

Guiding Principles and Strategies for Funders



Local leadership is vital for effective and sustainable peace.

Peacebuilding results are often the strongest when local peacebuilders define problems and solutions, and determine outcomes, goals, and timelines. While funders and other external actors can play important roles (e.g., being a sounding board, offering knowledge of best practices in other locations), for peacebuilding efforts to be sustained, the leadership for ending violence and building peace needs to be owned and led by those who live in the place impacted by conflict.

Based on our experience supporting locally-led peacebuilding in conflict zones around the world, the Locally-Led Peacebuilding Working Group of the Peace and Security Funders Group offers these core principles and strategies as a practical resource for supporting locally-led peacebuilding, and as an opportunity for continued dialogue and learning among funders and with local peacebuilding partners. Indeed, these guiding principles can be the basis of best practices for all funders, not just those who focus on locally-led peacebuilding.

DEFINING LOCALLY-LED PEACEBUILDING

Peacebuilding initiatives led by the people most proximate to and impacted by conflict. “Local” could mean a community, a nation, or any sub-group or geography in-between, depending on the scope of the conflict.



There are a wide range of funding organizations with different opportunities and constraints in supporting locally-led peacebuilding.

This document focuses on direct funding to local peacebuilders. However, partnering with “pass-through” entities can also be effective. As a funder, if you are passing funding through a non-local operating foundation or non-governmental organization (NGO), be sure to:

1. Examine proposals and budgets to ensure that the majority of funding is going directly to local peacebuilders as the leaders of peacebuilding work.
2. Get references from the operating foundation’s or NGO’s previous local partners to ensure that their approach to working with local peacebuilders is consonant with the principles and strategies in this document.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR POSITIVE LOCALLY-LED PEACEBUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

- **Local peacebuilding leadership is critical;** this can be supported and strengthened by external funding. Local people know their culture, conflicts, needs, resources, and the challenges their communities face. The knowledge, networks, trust, motivation, and long-term staying power to best transform conflict and create sustainable peace are present in the places and peoples experiencing conflict.
- **Partnerships built on strong relationships are foundational.** Partnerships between local organizations and funders should demonstrate equality, respect, trust, solidarity, and mutual accountability.
- **Self-reflection for funders is necessary** in order to be aware of biases and blinders, especially regarding power imbalances. Power imbalances between funders and local peacebuilders are inherent, so it is critical to seek to understand and address how biases may affect the nature and success of partnerships.



STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVELY FUNDING LOCALLY-LED PEACEBUILDING

Adapt funding approaches to the realities of local conflict contexts

- Support unrestricted and core funding.** The sustainability of local peacebuilders depends on more than project costs. Covering core costs and providing unrestricted funding ensures that local peacebuilders can continue to pay staff and cover essential costs during crises, as well as allow for flexibility to respond to evolving contexts.
- Lessen administrative burdens.** The field of peacebuilding doesn't often show quick quantitative results, so allow for more flexible and qualitative monitoring and evaluation, and more cyclical planning by reviewing learning, progress, and adapting plans regularly. Work with your local partner to build practical means of assessing and learning into the program design. Reduce unnecessary reporting burdens.
- Support and promote flexibility** to reinforce local organizations' autonomy, adaptability, and resilience. Local organizations' ability to respond rapidly to changing contexts or risks is crucial for achieving impact. Allow partners to make changes to their work quickly when necessary without extensive requests and bureaucracy, and expect to make changes in your internal organizational and funding processes. Consider providing rapid response funding that can be mobilized at times of urgent need, threat, or opportunity.
- Take safety and security of local peacebuilders into account** in funding mechanisms and partnerships. Many local peacebuilders can face serious risks as they aim to disrupt the status quo, including the power held by armed actors. In addition to rapid response funding, funders can leverage political connections or other support networks for local peacebuilders facing serious risks and provide support for security protocols.

Invest in process, not just products

© Peace Direct



- **Fund process over time.** Plan to invest time and money upfront in relationships with local partners and create as long a funding horizon as possible. Learn together over time about how to transform complex systems. Long-term commitments unlock the capacity at the local level to address underlying, systemic issues; to grow approaches that are effective; and to get results that are sustainable. They also enable trust-building and leadership development. Integrate periodic assessments to ensure that the strategies are responsive and the work does not become “business as usual.”
- **Fund consultations** that allow local peacebuilders to gather stakeholders to define the problems and solutions, and to identify existing resources that address the challenges. Funders can also support partners’ local efforts to be as inclusive and representative as possible, for example, by making sure women, youth, and marginalized groups are involved in meaningful ways.
- **Create cross-network learning opportunities and exchanges.** Local organizations can benefit from exchanges with and lessons learned from peer organizations working in different contexts, which funders can facilitate.
- **Link local, national, and international efforts.** In some cases, funders have access to local and national governments, and national and international organizations that local peacebuilders have difficulty accessing. Funders can potentially make connections between local, national, and international organizations that could contribute to the local peacebuilder’s work and vice versa – introducing an important local perspective to national or international work.

Learn about contexts and identify local peacebuilding partners

- **Engage journalists, networks, and local peacebuilders** to help identify local organizations and leaders who have visions that complement your own. Learn who people trust and respect as peacebuilders. Include a wide range of local people in consultations, using inclusive and participatory approaches, and with special attention to those who aren’t usually involved, like women, artists, youth, marginalized groups, religious leaders, security sector actors, and business owners. This sometimes requires drawing out those who have been silent in public discourse. Actively listen to local peacebuilders and their solutions for conflict transformation.
- **Look for existing mapping — or include funding to do it** — to identify local peacebuilding organizations, leaders, and existing alliances in order to understand who is already doing what, where new funding partnerships

may be most effective, and what efforts could be strengthened through funding partnerships. Are there structures in place to ensure continuity in the long-term, such as local volunteers, committees, or the commitment of local authorities? Ensure that any consultative process also involves transparency and communicating with local participants about how the information will be used and any final decisions about strategy.

- **Learn about the context and what matters most to people** in terms of religion, spirituality, cultural beliefs, identity, power dynamics, and values, and pay attention to local, grassroots, and indigenous approaches to peacebuilding that already exist. Consider cultural and religious factors, including the interplay between religious and political dynamics, and engage local religious leaders where appropriate.



Cultivate true partnerships

- **Co-create strategy with local peacebuilding partners from the outset** and in ways that do not overburden them. Co-creation can support learning and modifying plans as situations evolve. Local peacebuilders should lead in setting the strategic direction, design, and desired outcomes. Note that sometimes local partners just need flexible financial support and freedom to do the work they know best.
- **Plan for mutual accountability and build honest feedback loops** between funders and local peacebuilders. Establishing this process is critical in promoting regular listening, learning, and reflection, not just in terms of quantitative monitoring and evaluation, but in terms of continuous joint reflection on what is and isn't working in the partnership. Ongoing communication about how the work is unfolding helps identify necessary program changes, needs, and lessons learned, and gives funders the confidence that resources are being directed in ways that meet their mission and legal requirements. Third parties could be invited to evaluate, mediate, or intervene before trust is built or if it has been broken.
- **See value beyond money.** In the kind of mutual relationship needed to support locally-led peacebuilding, it is important to identify contributions beyond money that a funder can offer. There are many “accompaniment” roles, including organizational development, strategic planning, training opportunities, leadership development, listening, encouragement, and high-level advocacy on the partner’s behalf.
- **Bridge the personal and professional.** Trusted local peacebuilders sometimes do not conform to cultural norms valued by western “professional” organizations. As a funder, look for local peacebuilders with practical experience and qualities that enable them to connect at a personal level, demonstrate respect for people from all educational and cultural backgrounds, and allow for different work styles. Also consider how you – as a funder – can connect as a person first, not just in a “professional” role.
- **Consider how partnerships will end, change, or transition, and set clear expectations from the beginning.** Clear timelines should be discussed for partnerships, as well as transition plans. Funders cannot always provide resources to local peacebuilders forever, but they are often well positioned to help local peacebuilders develop sustainability plans, identify additional resources, or plan for ending or transitioning programs.

Thank you to all the PSFG members, partners, and local peacebuilders who contributed to these principles.