



TRANSFORMATIVE SHIFTS: From Capacity to Movement Power

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AUTHORS

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American Jewish World Service is the leading Jewish organization working to fight poverty and pursue justice in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. By supporting hundreds of social change organizations in 17 countries and advocating for U.S. and international policies for human rights, we respond to the most pressing issues of our time—from disasters, genocide and hunger, to the persecution of women and minorities worldwide.

AJWS focuses its efforts on four key issues: We promote civil and political rights; advance sexual health and rights; defend land, water and climate justice; and aid communities in the aftermath of disasters. We fund more than 500 human rights organizations, from small grassroots groups to international social change organizations. We serve as a strategic partner to these grantees, accompanying them as they grow, strengthen and collaborate with their peers to build strong, united and effective movements for human rights. We promote their work to the media and foster their leadership on the international stage. And we advocate for justice by their side, advocating on Capitol Hill and globally for laws and policies that promote human rights in the countries where we work.

We also carefully evaluate our progress, studying the long-term effects of our strategies, and the organizations and movements we support. We use the findings to strengthen our work and that of our grantees, and to share best practices with other funders and policymakers working on these issues, to advance the field of human rights together.

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Most importantly, we wish to acknowledge and show our appreciation for the movement organizations and leaders who partner with AJWS. AJWS's accompaniment learning project and all our efforts are informed and guided by the people who are dedicating themselves to the service of their movements and communities. Learning from them enables AJWS to partner with them more effectively and together work toward our shared vision for a more just and equitable world.

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Abstract

Funders are reexamining their ways of working in response to concerns about inequitable and power-laden practices, particularly when those practices further disenfranchise and marginalize people and undermine the very social changes they are trying to support.¹ “Capacity building” is a common form of non-grant support funders provide. Organizations who receive this support have been criticizing capacity building as reinforcing funder power dynamics and distorting the development of civil society that serves communities and social movements.² Further, as part of diversity, equity and inclusion practices, funders are focusing on grantees’ responsiveness and accountability to communities, so it stands to reason that attention to grantees’ organizational capacities should support that focus.³ At American Jewish World Service (AJWS), our commitment to supporting marginalized communities, social change movements and our organizational values have caused us to forge a different path as we support our grantee partners. We realized retrospectively that the lessons we have learned from this community- and movement-serving path may be useful to other funders who are now seeking to reorient to more equitable approaches.

Introduction

In a Latin American country where LGBTQI+ individuals face harassment, violence and discrimination, Community Rights Protection (CRP, a pseudonym) is a grassroots organization working to promote and protect the human rights of members of that community. CRP provides psychosocial support, facilitates access to health services and advocates for laws and policies that recognize their community members’ dignity and fundamental human rights. They have contributed to successfully advancing public discourse and garnering some political support for a gender identity law. At the same time, they face security risks, struggle to pay competitive staff salaries and benefits, and find the demand for their support and services outgrowing their small office space. Over the past half-decade of partnering with them, AJWS has accompanied CRP as they have organized themselves, registered as a nonprofit and honed their work through leadership transitions and political upheaval. In addition to grant funding, an AJWS program officer and in-country colleague are available as thought partners with whom to develop ideas, like how to train community members to assist with legal emergencies, coach through crises such as leadership transitions and connect with other organizations doing similar work in other geographies as well as with other funders and strategic allies who can offer support.

AJWS’s Definition of ACCOMPANIMENT

To AJWS, accompaniment means cultivating trusting relationships with grantee partners that foster mutual learning in support of stronger communities and social movements.

We have adopted the following description of our approach to supporting grantee partners:

AJWS supports community-led change. We are an ally of social movements that prioritize the rights of excluded and marginalized people. Guided by feminist principles and values, we develop collaborative relationships with our partners that are founded on mutual trust and respect. These relationships allow us to accompany partners in a flexible, responsive and ongoing manner that supports their self-identified needs and priorities, as well as contributes to AJWS’s own learning and growth. Acting in solidarity with our partners and respectful of their autonomy, we strategically offer our insights, experience, and resources, and facilitate access to expertise from both within and outside of AJWS. Our long-term partnerships support organizations throughout their evolution to achieve impact, leading to sustainable social movements working toward progressive and deep, lasting change.

Increasingly, funders and other supporters of social change are reflecting on ways that international development norms are grounded in inequitable White supremacist frames and practices.⁴ Some philanthropists and practitioners are adopting changes to the language and terms they use,⁵ but the real challenge is changing the way they think and work. As funders focus on shifting power and engaging in more equitable practices, they also want to support their grantees to work in ways that are responsive to and grounded in communities and movements. This tension between aspirations to shift power and actual changes in practice to more equitable approaches plays out in capacity-building support. In response, this paper introduces an alternative model to “capacity building” that steps away from hierarchical, power-laden practices.

For an organization like CRP, conventional approaches to funding and supporting organizational development or capacity building⁶ are anachronistic. These approaches tend to focus on the organization’s deficits and align with a narrow set of standards and performance criteria, which are often determined by funders and used to determine “readiness” for further funding.⁷

The persistence of these models and approaches is a barrier to organizations like CRP that are engaged with and responsive to communities and movements. As with many funder-grantee constructs, capacity building emphasizes the grantee’s accountability to the funder for results, rather than focusing on whether and how well the support enables the grantee to deliver results for their communities and movements. As alignment with these externally developed norms and standards is rewarded, organizations may contort to structure themselves and work in ways that appeal to funders rather than in ways that make sense for the communities or movements they are serving. The locus of measurement in more conventional capacity building approaches is on an organization’s performance. It may be measured externally with or without the organization’s participation and, therefore, often experienced as an audit rather than a supportive, learning-based experience. The notion of capacity as a needle to be moved or vessel to be filled is also deceptive, suggesting a linear process from “unbuilt” to “built.” In practice, an organization is much more dynamic as it navigates internal changes and growth and responds to changes in community and context.

These conventional approaches are also unbalanced. The onus for results often rests on the receiving organization rather than holding capacity “builders” accountable for the quality and effectiveness of their support. The construct of capacity building seems to center and serve the “builders,” whose role is legitimized by the absence of capacity detected in others. At the same time, they often fail to integrate the funders’ accountability and role in this ecosystem. For example, there is a paucity of examples of capacity assessments that evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the support provided as well as the performance of the recipient organizations. Finally, these conventional approaches often fail to recognize the benefit to funders in terms of the knowledge, insight and experience they gain through interactions with grantees that in turn inform their own strategies and work. Based on these dynamics, conventional capacity-building approaches have been criticized as narrow, directive and causing organizations to contort themselves in the likeness of their funders.⁸

It is difficult to shift and share power in the funder-grantee relationship without addressing the structures and practices in which those dynamics are embedded. Despite some changes in rhetoric, practices are still grounded in deficit models and aligned with a narrow construct of an effective organization. Based on these concerns, what does it look like to work with grantees in a way that centers on shared values of inclusiveness, self-directed learning and development? How can funders support the resiliency of grantees working in highly dynamic and challenging contexts? How can funders support organizations to work in ways that are grounded in the communities and movements they serve?

We propose a novel solution to a problem that organizations in the U.S. and other countries are grappling with as they endeavor to shift to more equitable practices that balance power and deliver results.⁹

Responsive accompaniment to build movement power

Adopting a model of walking alongside, rather than leading from out front or pushing from behind, is a first step in balancing inequitable power dynamics. It also creates space to embed support in a broader, movement- and power-building orientation.

The defining characteristics of conventional *capacity-building* approaches contrast with responsive *accompaniment*— a *partner-driven approach* to working in solidarity. Accompaniment involves offering partners our insights, experience and resources, as well as facilitating access to expertise from both within and outside of AJWS in ways that respect their autonomy. As outlined in Table 1, these two approaches are very

different ways of supporting partners. These differences relate to what norms and criteria are used to determine “capacity,” how needs are identified, how support is provided, how effectiveness is measured and what supports providers need. Of course, capacity building takes many forms and is widely interpreted (from organizational development to systems and structures like operations and governance to skillsets such as monitoring and evaluation or advocacy). As such, our observations reflect the common characteristics organizations that receive such support have identified.

AJWS evolved toward responsive accompaniment based on our organizational and grantmaking values, our commitment to serving marginalized people, our overall goal to support movements and the types of organizations we partner with to advance those goals. By nature, focusing on supporting movements

Table 1 Comparison of Capacity Building and Accompaniment Approaches

	CAPACITY BUILDING	RESPONSIVE ACCOMPANIMENT
Standards and criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizational capacity checklists and frameworks Often requires organization to have attained a level of “readiness,” typically defined by funder¹⁰ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grantees’ identification of needs and interests
How organizational development needs and interests are determined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizational capacity assessments based on standards and criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal and informal discussions with grantees
Typical support modalities (in addition to funding)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal training program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple, iterative modes as needed and as resources allow Problem-solving discussions Information sharing Access to local support providers Connection to other partners
How effectiveness is measured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizational performance assessments Ability to attract more funder resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback about the quality of funders’ support Organizations’ practices and infrastructure that enable them to work as community- and movement-based organizations
Required funder capacity/condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources to offer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trusting relationship with grantees Trusting relationship with movements Resources to offer

demands different approaches. It is not enough to focus on supporting organizational development. When funders concentrate on developing individual organizations, the organization is the unit of change. For social movements, an organization focused on building robust internal systems and skills only matters if it then uses those assets to support the movement.

As a philanthropic organization, we provide grants as well as direct support to our partners, most often through our country-based (“in-country”) colleagues and staff. We support social movements, activists, local grassroots organizations and actors and allies of movements for social justice in countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean that champion human rights and fight poverty. We strive to ensure all our work is grounded in our core AJWS values, rooted in Judaism’s imperative to pursue justice for all people and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: dignity, humility, inclusivity, accountability and courage. A fundamental expression of these values is that our partners know best. Our historical orientation toward supporting movements serving marginalized people, which are often working at the leading edge of human rights and in volatile environments, also demands that our support be flexible and responsive.

Our grantmaking values both guide us to and reinforce this approach. We are flexible in the types of organizations we support, in what we are willing to fund and in how we work with groups. We are committed to supporting inclusive movements and groups and prioritizing organizational processes and spaces that enable democratic practices to emerge. We seek to address existing systems of power and privilege, guided by feminist perspectives and applying insights from analysis of multiple axes of inequality. We strive to engage with grantees based on solidarity, respect for their expertise and partnership. We recognize that the types of social change we seek to advance are difficult, and we are willing to take risks. We also recognize that lasting change takes time, and requires our commitment to long-term processes of change.

In other words, we are able to operate without the constraints of short-term, project-based, outcome-based grantmaking that has shaped, in part, some conventional capacity-building approaches.

Organizationally, we adopted the lingua franca of “capacity building” and generally referred to ourselves as “building the capacity” of our partners. While we may have arrived with “capacity building” to offer, the broader movement-based change we are supporting demanded that we work differently. For example, the approach to support community- and movement-grounded partners involves investing in relationships and facilitating support through locally based in-country colleagues. Over time, we’ve developed an “accompaniment” model that reflects the mutual benefits of our relationships with partners (Figure 1). We work alongside our partners to support and follow their lead to buoy their priorities for their organizations’ health and vitality.

Conventional capacity building often focuses on strengthening a prescribed set of systems, processes and technical skills. Our experience and research from others argue that support should respond to needs that an organization agrees are needs, rather than funder-identified deficits. They know what their organizations need, and their expertise guides our support and strategies. What organizations are often seeking is support and facilitation to identify their needs. We find that the trusting relationship we develop together with partners—rather than an assessment or checklist—enables conversations that support their ability to tell us what their needs are and our ability to understand their priorities.

Rather than measuring grantee performance or their “fundability” based on attractiveness to other funders, effective accompaniment is measured by the quality of the support provided. Centering questions on how well resources and support responded to grantee needs, and in a way that enables problem-solving and growth, shifts attention to fitness for purpose as a starting point. So, for example, accompaniment involves following up to understand what was useful about the support provided and what wasn’t, then recalibrating accordingly.

In order for a funder to have the capacity to work from this values-based perspective, it must develop relationships with grantees, learn about their context and priorities and accompany them to offer support and resources. From this perspective, effective capacity

support is as much about the quality of the relationships and offerings of the funder. We also understand from related research that impactful support enables an organization to learn and adapt—in other words, to be self-renewing—and does so in service to communities and movements.”

A shift from a hierarchical to a more power-balanced model illuminates an often-unacknowledged truth: Learning about grantees’ context and priorities is not just to benefit the support they provide to that individual grantee. Through those relationships and connections, funders build their own capacity, developing insight, knowledge and experience that they can use to be more effective funders and supporters.

While in practice we were doing what we now call “responsive accompaniment,” we referred broadly to this work as “capacity building.” Our organizational theory of change and strategy state broadly that we are committed to “build capacity” to develop “strong organizations and leaders.” We have allocated significant staffing and financial resources to support this work. So, how did AJWS realize that while we were calling our work “capacity building,” we were really trying to do something else?

Defining and measuring responsive accompaniment

Our path to reviewing and redefining our approach to supporting partners was prompted by a Strategic Learning, Research and Evaluation (SLRE) question: Given the centrality of our support to partners, how do we know if we are making a difference?

This question prompted a series of research activities to better understand the various ways in which we were supporting partners in addition to the grant funding we provide.

Through confidential interviews, we asked current and former grantees what support they received, what was helpful and not, and how they experienced it. We reviewed the information we had already collected in our SLRE systems to catalog the topics covered by our support and the modes through which we were providing it and other related information. Reviewing existing data also helped us understand whether we were already collecting data that could be repurposed to measure our support of partners. We interviewed program teams to understand their approaches to supporting partners and what they were interested in learning. And we also reviewed the work of other organizations and broader capacity-building literature to understand others’ approaches.

AJWS’s Accompaniment Practices

1. Partner with human rights organizations that are or desire to be community- and movement-grounded.
2. Support needs and interests are expressed by the organization; they are not directed by the funder.
3. Orient support in ways that reinforce working in ways that are community- and movement-grounded.
4. When providing support, focus on problem-solving that supports self-reflection and learning practices that enrich and enable an organization’s own capabilities to grow and sustain its work.
5. When providing support, focus on problem-solving that strengthens inclusive and equitable internal organizational practices and external engagement with partners and others and reinforces community- and movement-groundedness.
6. Support in iterative, responsive ways, which may involve layers of support as partners learn and understanding of the problem they are trying to address evolves.
7. Prioritizing longer-term relationships with partners means that during the course of these relationships any number of topics may be covered through many different mechanisms. Over the years, organizations change and evolve. Even as they may “build” stronger practices, new needs and interests may emerge. AJWS’s response should iterate and evolve as well.

These practices embed a fundamental shift in how funders provide resources for organizational strengthening work, how they’re held accountable and how they can shift power and practice in a way that authentically reflects equity.

As we were undertaking this process, the conversation in the world around us was elevating attention to how funders wield power, interest in supporting movements and raising challenging questions about equity. These conversations pushed us to further examine and challenge our own roles and ways of thinking about hierarchical funder-grantee relationships.

Our research suggested that, at its best, AJWS's approach is translating to the ownership and agency that user-driven and durable support should strive to achieve. The key ingredient was the relationships developed between our in-country colleagues and staff, who themselves are typically part of the movements they support. However, there was a range of related interpretations of AJWS's role and practices and a lack of clarity about AJWS's point of view about capacity support. Significant information gaps due to lack of documentation confounded our understanding of how well we were meeting grantees' priorities and also limited transparency about learning. One of the clear, early points of guidance from the programs staff was that introducing measurement frames and tools to grantee partners creates a risk that we shift their focus and attention to aligning with our priorities rather than those of their communities and movements.

Collectively, these results told us that we needed to clarify our model of supporting partners and how it reflects our organizational values. Based on this, we had an opportunity to develop more systematic and consistent processes to track grantees' support needs, the actions taken and the resulting changes—all of which would help AJWS and grantees understand the prevalence of our successes, identify the challenges and develop opportunities for improvement.

In 2019, AJWS's Programs Leadership Team supported SLRE's plan to form a working group of program staff, including in-country colleagues, and SLRE to lead this work for the organization. Rather than changing AJWS's accompaniment model, we aimed to develop approaches to better define, measure and learn about the best of our accompaniment practices in order to amplify and expand on what is already working. We hypothesized that an explicit vision for this work, a consistent yet flexible approach and more robust flows of information and learning would enable AJWS to amplify its strengths and optimize resources.

Over a year and a half, the Accompaniment Working Group articulated AJWS's values-based accompaniment approach to supporting our partners:

- **DEFINED AND UPDATED TERMS TO ACCURATELY REFLECT AJWS'S VALUES AND APPROACH**

While AJWS used the common language of "capacity building," we felt the term was archaic and grounded in inequitable development practices. Our practices were, in many ways, more dynamic and equitable than the language we were using. By reexamining and updating our terms, we aimed to bring our use and interpretation of terms in line with our principles of partnership and grassrootsness. Identifying language is only part of the equation. We are learning that acculturating and embedding more careful and specific language requires a significant investment of time and attention.

- **CLARIFIED WHAT WE MEAN BY "STRONG ORGANIZATIONS AND LEADERS"**

AJWS's theory of change calls for supporting strong organizations and leaders, but we didn't have a clear and shared definition of what we meant by this phrase. The working group drew on SLRE's research with grantees about their priorities and the capabilities they valued and developed our *Framework for Building Organization and Movement Power* (Figure 2) in consultation with program leadership. This framework clarifies our values and outlines the practices of "strong organizations and leaders" in a way that reflects the diversity of our partners and does not unintentionally privilege particular types of organizations. It also centers on practices, rather than performance or achievement of certain skills or systems. These practices are like muscles to be developed as organizations grow and learn, rather than capacity to be achieved or not. As we piloted the framework, we understood that some partners request technical guidance and support to respond to changing government regulatory and funder conditions. Compliance with these conditions are not values-based but essential, as doing so has implications for the ability of an organization to legally operate and to obtain resources. So, we added a "compliance" dimension to our framework. We also stress-tested the framework against ourselves, asking how and

ACCOMPANIMENT AS AN ITERATIVE PROCESS

The relationship with Community Rights Protection enabled us to accompany the organization as they adapted to Covid and the needs of their community. In 2021, during a conversation about their adjustment to personnel and funding reductions resulting from other funders changing priorities, they shared that they were seeing an increase in requests for support from community members in crisis due to the Covid pandemic. We supported their idea to pilot a virtual psychosocial support group, talking through options and plans. As that test was successful, they successfully applied to another funder for a grant that included psychological support and an emergency fund for immediate evacuation, medical attention, food and economic support for trans men that are victims of violence or forced displacement. They also received additional funds from AJWS to find an appropriate space that enables them to safely gather and make psychosocial assistance a permanent area of work. For us, effective accompanying of Community Rights Protection required building a trusting, well-informed relationship and approaching our support in various ways over time, rather than solely through the lens of our own grantmaking.

how well AJWS as an organization reflected the “strong” practices we identified in the framework.

- **CLARIFIED THE MODEL**

We needed to define AJWS’s model to support partners because we did not identify with conventional “capacity building” models and measures. Such models are typically hierarchical and deficit-focused, with “capacity” flowing from those with resources to those with limitations. These one-directional “deficit” models miss the fact that funder partners must also learn and develop. We also wanted to move away from a simple, linear treatment-and-effect model and better reflect the dynamic ways that organizational strength develops over time and in different ways. In response, we’ve created a model (Figure 1) that illustrates how we actually work and reflects grantees’ agency and power and our own need to develop our capacity.

- **ADDED SUPPORTIVE STRUCTURES, BUILDING ON EXISTING FRAMEWORKS AND DATA COLLECTION**

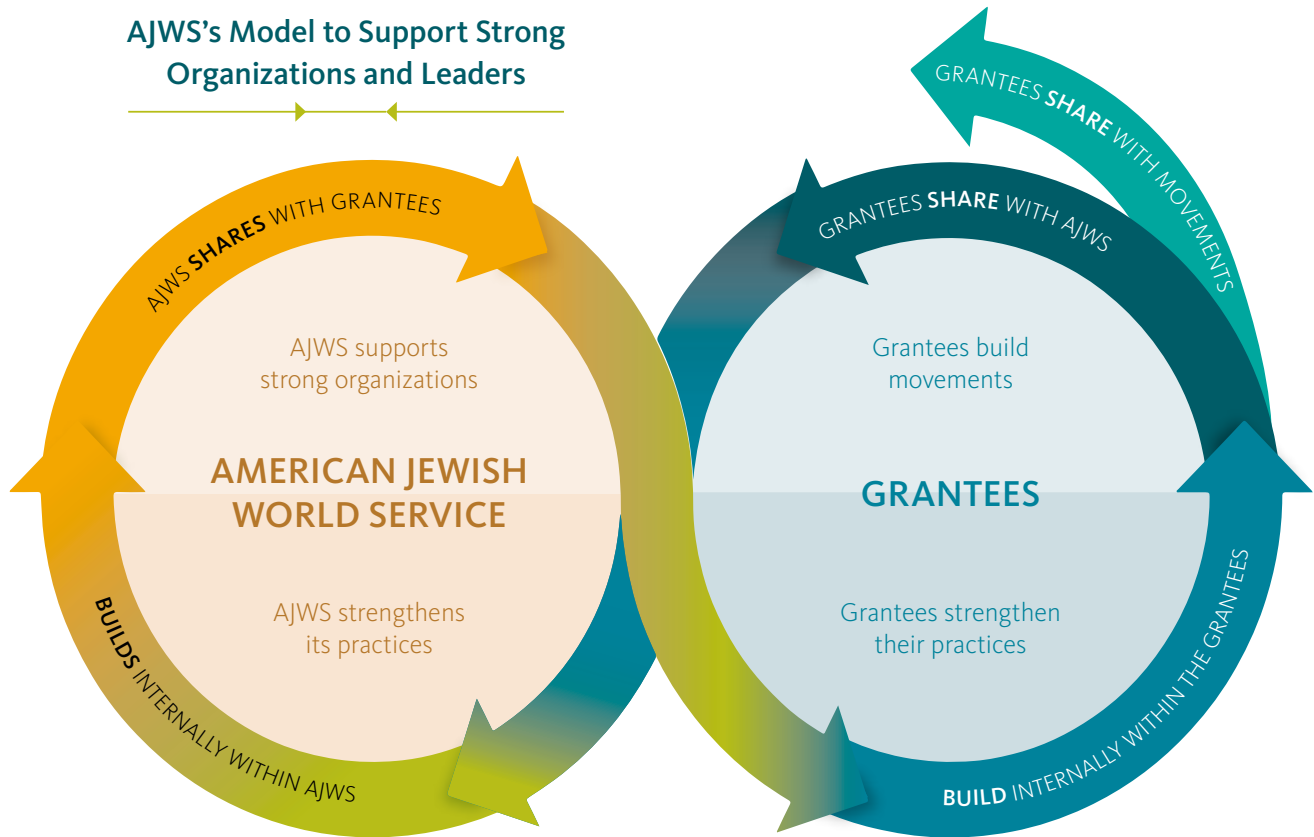
We recognized that frameworks to guide the identification of strengthening needs, the support provided in response and analysis of progress could be helpful tools for both AJWS and grantees. These must also take care not to “NGO-ize” grantees by imposing artificial norms or standards. We were emphatic that measurement should not be burdensome. This shift represented one of many moments where we made decisions that may have felt

uncomfortable, because we eschewed conventional measurement practices that center the grantee as the unit of analysis (the problem to be solved). Instead, we focused on what we really need to learn: What are we doing, and are we successfully fulfilling our role as providers of accompaniment support? In response, we drafted a simple measurement tool for use by in-country colleague and program staff to support their own reflection and learning as well as that of the organization that we began pilot testing in 2021.

To be clear, this is not to suggest that AJWS is equipped to support all needs of all grantees or address all needs simultaneously. Instead, having a consistent internal reference point that clarifies the eventual practices that AJWS prioritizes support for will guide our internal learning about effective ways to support our grantee partners.

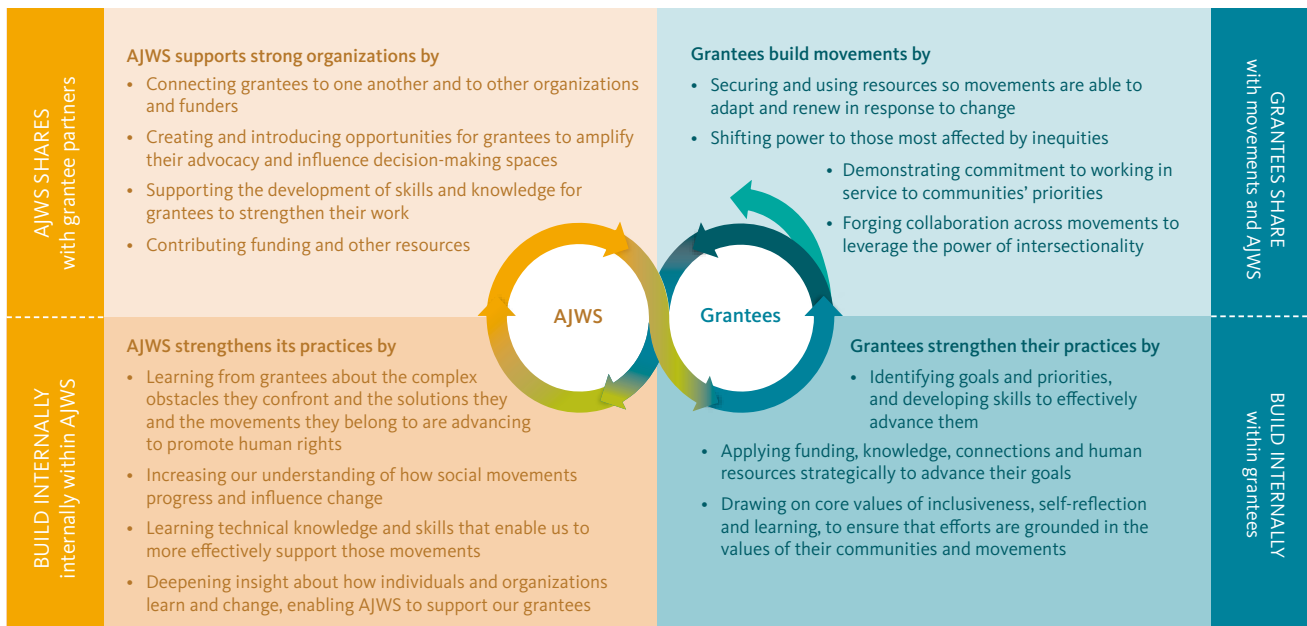
In adopting these language changes, and frames and measurement approaches that reflect our values, we have intentionally departed from some accepted “capacity building” conventions. We feel doing so respects the agency of our partners, moves away from inequitable practices and supports our efforts to build relationships of mutual trust with partners.

Figure 1 Funders' capacity benefits from relationships with grantees



AJWS's Model to Support Strong Organizations and Leaders

(In Detail)



Six transformative shifts

Drawing from our learning, we offer six shifts in practices for funders and other supporters of other organizations’ ability to serve communities and movements, who are exploring working in more equitable, effective ways.

1. RECOGNIZE THAT FUNDERS DEPEND ON GRANTEES FOR LEARNING

Including funders in the change model recognizes that funders also benefit from the relationships with grantee partners. The model (see Figure 1) acknowledges that the organizations we fund are the holders of knowledge and insight that we depend on to do our work. Recognizing a mutually beneficial

relationship can shift the frame through which funders see grantee partnerships to include our own capacity and practices.

As a starting point, to make this shift, approach this work with humility. It means challenging the assumption that the resource holders are the holders of knowledge and “capacity.”

2. DROP LANGUAGE THAT EMBEDS AND REINFORCES INEQUITY

Language and terms implicitly and explicitly reinforce power. The term “capacity” is firmly grounded in the idea of an empty vessel to be filled. Adding modifiers fails to challenge the fundamental assumptions embedded in that term. In our experience, it also doesn’t reflect

Figure 2 Overview of AJWS’s Framework for Building Organization and Movement Power

VALUES				COMPLIANCE	
	Inclusiveness <i>Transparency, equity and inclusion in organizational practices</i>	Self-reflection and learning <i>Organizational self-development practices</i>	Community-grounded <i>Practices for mutual learning and engagement with communities</i>	Movement-grounded <i>Practices for mutual learning and engagement with movements</i>	Regulatory compliance <i>Ability to comply with criteria established by funders and other authorities as a condition for support and operating</i>
INTERNAL	Internal ways of sharing power through leadership and decision-making practices	Goal-grounded organizational culture and practices that support personal and organizational strengthening	Internalized recognition of the organization’s role in the community	Internalized recognition of the organization’s role in movements	Organizational systems, processes and activities to enable and demonstrate compliance with funder and government terms and conditions
EXTERNAL	Orientation to value and opportunity created through engagement with others	Engagement with others to learn and innovate	Works in ways that are guided by and intended to support communities	Works in ways that are guided by and intended to support movements	Works in ways that mitigates how funder or government compliance may undermine community and movement accountability and ownership

Organizations and individuals in turn build movement power

Self-renewing by securing and using resources so movements are able to adapt and renew in response to change

Shifting power to those most affected by inequities

Delivering for communities and movements by demonstrating commitment to working in service of their priorities

Leveraging the power of intersectionality by forging collaboration across movements

the ebbs and flows that organizations experience, particularly when they are working on complex issues in challenging contexts and are not seeking to hew to a particular managerialist NGO model.

To make this shift, start by asking, How do our terms implicitly or explicitly convey or contradict our values? How do our terms implicitly or explicitly reinforce a specific organizational model as legitimate? Are we speaking about our support in ways that center our role (“capacity builders” or “capacity strengtheners”) rather than that of our partners?

3. SUPPORT PRACTICES GROUNDED IN SHARED VALUES

Values-based practices focus on how the work takes place, whose voices are included and what will best support an organization to grow and learn. Focusing on values-based practices is an intentional step away from focusing on what is considered the hallmark of an effective, “fundable” organization and a set of “must-do” activities, systems or processes. AJWS decided to prioritize using these values in ways that fit with its relationships with partners and to guide how AJWS works and learns. We described these in the Framework for Building Organization and Movement Power (see Figure 2), which we use for internal reflection and learning. It was important to us that we not use our values-based framework to create a new checklist of things to which the grantee must aspire or in a way that interferes with their self-determination.

To make this shift, funders can start by clarifying the values that guide the work of both funder and grantee partners. Then, focusing on the practices that reflect these values, allow a more expansive focus on supporting conditions for organizations to work and behave in ways that serve their communities and movements, rather than being overly oriented to serving the interests of their funders. As we learned, it may also be pragmatic to layer in dimensions that are not aligned with values, such as compliance with government regulations, which partners may prioritize to serve the real-world conditions under which they operate.

4. INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS TO ENABLE EFFECTIVE, USEFUL ACCOMPANIMENT

Trusting relationships with partners and deep knowledge of their context are fundamental prerequisites to providing quality accompaniment. Accompaniment means having the sort of relationship where: a) a grantee feels confident raising a problem with the funder (without fear of losing funding, for example); b) there’s space and a basis for the country-based team member to explore the causes of the problem; and c) there’s continuity for the country-based team member to offer support and followup.

To make this shift, funders need to invest in relationships. Grantee-funder relationships follow the structure of resources, where longer-term, flexible funding can help create the space for those relationships to develop. Local staff who are embedded in communities and movements, and who are engaged, accessible, and credible can also build trust and lower the typical funder-grantee barriers and inhibitions.

5. DEVELOP LEARNING SYSTEMS THAT HELP FUNDERS BETTER UNDERSTAND THE SUPPORT THEY ARE PROVIDING

Translating concepts of “measurement” to focus on tools and processes that support information sharing and reflection enables transformation from accountability to learning. These tools and processes are not integrated with the accompaniment support, in part so that they do not reinforce the power dynamic between funder and grantee and undermine the authentic, grantee-directed determination of support needs. As such, the tools and processes do not measure grantees’ performance. AJWS’s learning centers on the support provided, with attention to our capacity to respond to grantees’ needs and interests with quality support and using what we learn to adapt our tactics and resources in response. Indeed, learning from our partners tells us that in the best-case scenarios, their strengthened practices result from a combination of flexible and iterative support and resources from AJWS over time, partnership with AJWS in problem-solving and their experience working to advance the goals of their movements and communities.

RELATIONSHIPS, TRUST AND ACCOMPANIMENT

When Women for Justice (a pseudonym) approached AJWS for support with securing its electronic files following increased government suppression of civil society, it led to a larger conversation about the physical risks and mental health strain staff were experiencing. We responded by providing additional resources to support their electronic security, and after discussing ways to support the mental health of their staff, also provided additional resources for staff to receive psychosocial accompaniment to address issues of stress and burnout.

Without our in-country colleague's familiarity with the context and the stresses faced by civil society at that particular moment in that country, or the relationship with the grantee that enabled them to reveal and willingly explore their vulnerabilities, the support may have focused solely on training on digital security.

This example also illustrates the point that effective accompaniment means supporting an organization through multiple modalities (coaching, resources, connections with others) which may or may not include the formal training that is often considered the primary mode of capacity building.

To make this shift, reconsider measurement, monitoring, evaluation and learning from the perspective of who they should benefit, make decisions based on the cost benefit to all involved (particularly grantees) and design approaches accordingly.

6. INVEST IN PROCESSES TO DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO ACCOMPANYING PARTNERS

Funders and supporters of partners need to turn the assessment lens on their own organizations. These transformational shifts involve changes in culture, practices, approaches and perhaps even organizational models and structures. Starting with an asset-based lens, identifying shared values and taking stock of good practices that the funder can build on can illuminate opportunities as well as

approaches that need to shift, and may be deeper and more systemic than initially anticipated. Like any organizational change and learning process, change is incremental and must involve the people doing the work. External support can facilitate it, but cookie-cutter approaches and templates are unlikely to result in changes in practices.

To make this shift, invest and reinvest in processes to explore values and approaches and make them explicit. Exercise patience and involve staff, particularly those involved in building relationships with grantees and responding to the organizational strengthening needs of those partners. Expect to iterate and learn yourself, just as one might when supporting the strengthening of a grantee partner.

What's next

This paper reflects AJWS's work in progress. We are taking note of our own approach by adopting an iterative process to explore, test and learn about our accompaniment model. We have begun pilot testing tools and processes that support our learning. We are focusing on how best to collect and share information from our team members who are engaged with partners. We aim to better understand how those tools and processes can facilitate internal conversations and learning, and guide decisions about resources, strategy and expanding our impact. We are figuring out how to acculturate new staff and adjust practices that may be influenced by the broader ecosystem that hews toward a narrowly defined NGO model of performance, compliance and structures. Some of the questions we are grappling with are:

- Are AJWS staff capacitated to provide the support our partners need?
- What is the risk of slipping into problem-solving short-termism with a responsive accompaniment approach? Are we giving sufficient attention to supporting longer-term visioning for partners' organizations?
- How do we support grantees who struggle to secure funding in an ecosystem that prioritizes compliance with an NGO model?

Continuing to challenge ourselves with these questions will help AJWS learn about the conditions and connections that are most useful to our partners and how we can most effectively fulfill our role as their partners and supporters.

ENDNOTES

¹ See, for example: Allen, T., Enright, K., & Pennington, H. (2021, March 30). Sharing Power and Curbing Racial Inequities: How Grant Makers Can Commit to Real Change a Year After Covid. *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*. <https://www.philanthropy.com/article/sharing-power-and-curbing-racial-inequities-how-grant-makers-can-commit-to-real-change-a-year-after-covid>; Devlin-Foltz, D., Dilliplane, S., Schlangen, R., Touré, C., & Tumbo, J. (2022). Evaluation of the Hewlett Foundation's Sub-Strategy to Support Local Family Planning and Reproductive Health Advocacy in Sub-Saharan Africa [Evaluation report]. Aspen Planning and Evaluation Program.; Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, Phone: (202) 898-1840, & Info@geofunders.org. (2021). *Reimagining Capacity Building: Navigating Culture, Systems & Power*. Grantmakers for Effective Organizations. <https://www.geofunders.org/resources/reimagining-capacity-building-navigating-culture-systems-power-1340>.

² See, for example: Devlin-Foltz, D., Dilliplane, S., Schlangen, R., Tumbo, J., & Touré, C. (2020). Power Sharing and "Capacity Development": Lessons from the Hewlett Foundation's Strategy to Support Local Advocacy in Sub-Saharan Africa. *The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation*.; Vu. (2019, June 24). Funders, you want to help build organizational capacity? Then stop trying to build organizational capacity and just give Multi-Year General Operating Dollars (MYGOD!). *Nonprofit AF*. <https://nonprofitaf.com/2019/06/funders-you-want-to-help-build-organizational-capacity-then-stop-trying-to-build-organizational-capacity-and-just-give-multi-year-general-operating-dollars-mygod/>.

³ See, for example: Misra, S., Bamdad, N., & Winger, N. (2020). What Is Needed to Build Community Power? Essential Capacities for Equitable Communities. *Change Elemental*.; Nishimura, A., Sampath, R., Le, V., Sheikh, A. M., & Valenzuela, A. (2020, Fall). Transformational Capacity Building (SSIR). *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 18(4), 30–37. <https://doi.org/10.48558/B2F5-0904>.

⁴ See, for example: Baguos, A. (2020). Aid Re-imagined [Blog]. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/@aidreimagined>; Global Development Institute. (2018, November 20). Decolonising development—what, how, by whom and for whom? *Global Development Institute Blog*. <http://blog.gdi.manchester.ac.uk/decolonising-development/>; Pailey, R. N. (2020). De-centering the 'White Gaze' of Development. *Development and Change*, 51(3), 729–745. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12550>.

⁵ Bond. (2021). Bond's Language Guide: Taking British politics and colonialism out of our language. Bond.; Guy, D. (2016). Aid workers talk endlessly about capacity building—But what does it really mean? *The Guardian*. Aid workers talk endlessly about capacity building—but what does it really mean?; Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, (2021). *Reimagining Capacity Building: Navigating Culture, Systems & Power*. Grantmakers for Effective Organizations. <https://www.geofunders.org/resources/reimagining-capacity-building-navigating-culture-systems-power-1340>. Scheid, Patricia, and Kris Helé. "How Funders are Strengthening Nonprofit Capacity: Findings from a Field Scan." *William & Flora Hewlett Foundation*, March 2022.

⁶ Generally speaking, we use these as an umbrella term for resources and approaches to support the performance, health, and sustainability of a non-profit or civil society organization.

⁷ Scheid, Patricia, and Kris Helé. 2022. *How Funders Are Strengthening Nonprofit Capacity: Findings from a Field Scan*. *William & Flora Hewlett Foundation*.

⁸ For example, see Nives Dolšak and Aseem Prakash, "NGO Failure: A Theoretical Synthesis," *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, September 30, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00416-9>; Patricia Scheid and Kris Helé, "How Funders Are Strengthening Nonprofit Capacity: Findings from a Field Scan" (*William & Flora Hewlett Foundation*, March 2022).

⁹ See, for example, *The Hewlett Foundation's Power Sharing and "Capacity Development": Lessons from the Hewlett Foundation's Strategy to Support Local Advocacy in Sub-Saharan Africa (2020)*; Grantmakers for Effective Philanthropy's *Reimagining Capacity Building: Navigating Culture, Systems & Power (2021)*.

¹⁰ Based on observation/experience and also argued in: Nishimura, A., Sampath, R., Le, V., Sheikh, A. M., & Valenzuela, A. (2020, Fall). Transformational Capacity Building (SSIR). *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 18(4), 30–37. <https://doi.org/10.48558/B2F5-0904.v>

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. 2011. *Facilitating Resourcefulness: Synthesis Report of the Evaluation of Dutch Support to Capacity Development*: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.



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