

# LEARNING AND WORKING TOGETHER: A FRAMEWORK FOR DONOR COLLABORATION

*January 2016*





# CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
2	WHAT IS COLLABORATION?	4
3	WHY COLLABORATE?	4
4	INITIATING COLLABORATION	5
5	TYPES OF FUNDER COLLABORATION	7
5.1	NETWORKING	7
	CASE STUDY: THE ECD DONOR FORUM	8
5.2	COOPERATING AND COORDINATING	9
	CASE STUDY: BRIDGE POST SCHOOL ACCESS WORKING GROUP	10
5.3	PARTNERING	11
	CASE STUDY: GREENMATTER	12
	CASE STUDY: ILIFA LABANTWANA	14
6	GOALS OF FUNDER COLLABORATION	17
7	LESSONS IN COLLABORATION	18
	10 CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION	21
8	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COLLABORATION	22
9	CONCLUDING REMARKS	23

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Collaboration by grant-makers and social investors is a strategy that is gaining traction worldwide. To date in South Africa this has been limited, but given the scale of its socio-economic, education and skills development challenges, increasingly donors and social investors are interested in exploring collaboration as a means of increasing the impact of their initiatives.

The purpose of this document is to offer a framework for effective collaboration among South African grant-makers and social investors. This framework sets out guidelines for effective collaboration and provides practical suggestions for initiating it. Case study examples are used to illustrate different approaches to collaboration.

## 2. WHAT IS COLLABORATION?

Collaboration is a process through which people, groups and organisations work together to achieve desired results.

Several catalysts may initiate collaboration – a problem, a shared vision, a desired outcome, to name a few. Collaboration then needs to be built and sustained in order to achieve defined goals and greater impact.

Potential members of a collaboration should work together to shape their vision and to link this to agreed-upon outcomes. While a vision articulates a picture of the future that the group seeks to create, outcomes represent the desired changes. It is this commonality that brings members together to focus on realising their vision and goals.

Indeed, the Packard Foundation describes “...aligning on a clear common vision and goals” as a key strategic requirement for raising the chances of success<sup>1</sup>. A group focusing on defining the desired outcomes in the initial stage of building the collaboration is more likely to be effective; it is also more likely to attract more participation by a wide cross-section of people and groups.

“

...more than ever, donors view collaboration as a way to stretch limited resources for maximum results.

## 3. WHY COLLABORATE?

The motivation for collaboration is well described in the **Donors’ Guide to Facilitating Collaboration**<sup>2</sup> :

*By and large, donors facilitate collaboration because they seek to increase the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of their philanthropic giving.*

*Nonprofit organizations may provide a valuable program or service, but lack the human and financial capacity to leverage the program or service through collaboration, which can lead to disjointed and small-scale accomplishments rather than large-scale community change. Or, organizations may have a program or service that works, but need investment to effectively collaborate to bring the model to scale. Donors have the opportunity to form strategic alliances ... to leverage their philanthropic dollars while having real benefit to the community.*

The achievement of increased impact by working and learning together is a powerful reason to collaborate: it has been observed that “...more than ever, donors view collaboration as a way to stretch limited resources for maximum results”<sup>3</sup>.

1) <http://www.packard.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Lessons-in-Funder-Collaboration.pdf> , p.8

2) <http://thecne.org/donors-guide-facilitating-collaboration>

3) <http://www.bridgespan.org/Publications-and-Tools/Advancing-Philanthropy/Donor-Collaboration-Can-Bring-Big-Results,-but-Mos.aspx#.VdzVKfmqpBd>

Because sectoral challenges are often large, intractable and complicated, for funders to work alone to identify an issue, implement a solution and measure progress is very difficult. Instead, funders can identify and engage an array of stakeholders to build a shared understanding of the problem, mobilise resources that match the scale of the challenges, and work together to test a range of possible solutions. Working with others also helps create more efficient feedback loops to facilitate collective learning about what works and informed action, both during and after any intervention. This helps to ensure the sustainability of interventions.

Furthermore, because donors and social investors have more flexibility than government in piloting innovative practice, a collaborative approach can ensure that innovations that work do not remain as isolated pockets of practice, but can be shared beyond the immediate sites. Shared learnings and methodologies from successful projects enable a project to be adapted and extended as it is implemented in different contexts. This can create a snowball effect so that the intervention becomes scaled and systemic.

A linking structure in which members commit to working collaboratively, avoid interventions in the same areas and share working practice can facilitate an increase in scope and scale. Collaboration is a way of increasing reach, avoiding duplication and cutting costs.

### The benefits of collaboration include:

- More efficient use of available resources
- Creation of new partnerships for increased impact and reach
- Access to pooled information and expertise
- Opportunity to develop new grant-making strategies
- Ability to leverage philanthropic resources
- Increased public attention to critical issues
- Opportunity to share the risk with partners
- Potential to achieve greater impact.



Collaboration is a way of increasing reach, avoiding duplication, and cutting costs.

## 4. INITIATING COLLABORATION

Initiating a collaborative effort is not without its challenges and it requires the commitment of considerable time and energy. However, there are certain enabling factors that can help to facilitate collaboration. From its experience, the Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers<sup>4</sup> believes that there are three factors that tend to propel collaborative groups into existence:

Table 1: Factors that promote collaboration

Source: Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers

1	A <b>supportive climate with strong interpersonal networks</b> and a congenial environment for coming together, which may be provided by a regional association or other infrastructure organization
2	A <b>credible champion</b> willing to take on the issue and devote the necessary time, energy and resources to bring the idea to fruition
3	The <b>right timing</b> for addressing a critical issue, which often coincides with a special opportunity such as outside funding and/or a change in circumstances that results in a crisis or an environment “ripe” for change (e.g., a change in political or school system leadership). This is usually complemented by a <b>perceived value to learning or working together</b> – something that can’t be done as easily (or at all) on one’s own.

The Association goes on to say that “... key words to the survival and effectiveness of a collaborative group are flexibility and innovation.” As suggested above, the successful efforts often begin with a single champion, or a small group of funders who have a passion for engagement and addressing an issue collectively.

4) [http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.abagrantmakers.org/resource/resmgr/abag\\_publications/local\\_donor\\_collaboration.pdf](http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.abagrantmakers.org/resource/resmgr/abag_publications/local_donor_collaboration.pdf)

From experience in the field, the following steps are needed to bring about successful collaboration.

**Table 2: Initiating collaboration**  
**KEY STEPS TO INITIATE COLLABORATION**

*Source: Bridge*

1	Start by inviting other funders to get together to discuss experiences and ideas. An informal meeting with other donors can provide an opportunity to compare notes and explore similar interests.
2	Identify questions and issues you are jointly interested in exploring.
3	Be clear about your understandings of the benefits and goals of collaboration.
4	Select the level of collaboration you feel is appropriate (see below), as explored in this framework: networking, cooperating and coordinating, or partnering.
5	Define expected outcomes. What will be accomplished? What impact will this collaborative relationship have on knowledge acquisition, current and future giving, and on the chosen issue or problem? What will be different if this collaboration is successful?
6	Assess the commitment that will be required. What resources (including both time and money) are required for participation and how significant is this commitment? Will the potential benefits be worth the commitment?
7	<p>Make sure that the rules are clear and workable. Consider questions such as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will there be a memorandum of understanding or operating agreement that specifies what is required for membership, how decisions are made, who will provide leadership, what processes will be used for ongoing communication, the expected timeframe for initial commitments, etc.?</li> <li>• Do all involved funders have an equal voice in making funding and overall governance decisions?</li> <li>• Does the collaborative have a mechanism for evaluating the results it achieves?</li> </ul>

## 5. TYPES OF FUNDER COLLABORATION

There is not only one form of collaboration: collaboration may simply mean the sharing of information and knowledge; or it may go further and entail agreement on a shared approach, or a collaborative project with joint funding.

Collaborations range from loose to highly structured bodies. Different types of collaboration involve different levels of intensity.

A simple typology used in this Framework includes three kinds of donor collaboration: **networking, cooperating and coordinating, and partnering**. A description and examples of each are given in the sections below.

### 5.1 Networking

Networking collaboration involves low-key leadership, minimal decision-making, flexible links among members, loosely defined roles and typically a non-hierarchical structure. Its communications tend to focus on knowledge and information sharing, where donors exchange information and discuss their common

interests, or on co-learning, where donors agree to explore a particular issue or problem together.

In the US, an example of networking collaboration is the Packard Foundation's **Early Childhood Funders Collaborative**<sup>5</sup>. This is a group of funders of early childhood education that meet regularly to discuss developments in the field, their grant-making, and what they are learning. The Collaborative is over 25 years old and has more than 40 member foundations, about half of which are very active. Participating foundations come together three times a year to exchange information on topics such as trends in early childhood education and development, new learning about effective practice, shifts in member foundations' strategies, and emerging grant-making opportunities. Membership is diverse, and includes major national US funders of early childhood education like Kellogg, Gates, Annie E. Casey and Packard, as well as smaller family foundations and community foundations.

A similar Donor Forum exists for Early Childhood Development donors in South Africa.

---

5) <http://elevatechildren.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2015/06/Lessons-in-Funder-Collaboration.pdf>

# CASE STUDY

## THE ECD DONOR FORUM

South Africa's National Early Childhood Development Donor and Development Partners Forum (ECD Donor Forum) is a network of funders, corporate entities, development partners and related entities which invest financial resources in quality early childhood development services in South Africa. Membership is both voluntary and free and members' participation is self-funded.

Although it was established in 2006, the formalisation of its structure only happened in 2014. It now has a chairperson and deputy chairperson, both of whom are elected on an annual basis. It meets four times a year. Each member organisation is allowed one seat in terms of voting/decision-making. UNICEF serves as the ECD Donor Forum's secretariat and handles its administration, minute taking and record keeping.

The purposes of the ECD Donor Forum are to:

- Facilitate co-ordination, collaboration and synergy among its members
- Provide a consolidated voice for the ECD Donor community
- Strengthen collaboration among the donor community, the Government of South Africa and ECD service delivery organisations
- Advance investment in the early years through quality early childhood development interventions.

The Forum's vision is that of "... a united and diverse donor community working hand-in-hand with Government and civil society to advance universal access to quality ECD services in South Africa". Its mission is to "... advance universal access to quality early childhood development services in South Africa by working collaboratively, acting catalytically and investing resources strategically".

The ECD Donor Forum invites key individuals, thought leaders and organisations to attend meetings on an ad hoc basis and advise members and keep them well-

“

The impact that networking has had on members is a lessening of isolation and a better understanding of the sector.

informed. The network continually seeks to engage with government on priorities, policy and operational matters in the sector. The current chair says that members feel it is a safe and neutral space in which they can network and discuss the issues that face donors. Members do not pool funding, co-fund or do joint work.

The chair describes the ECD Donor Forum's collaboration as one focused on networking, sharing of information on working practices and successes, and supportive engagement. The impact that networking has had on members is a lessening of isolation and a better understanding of the sector. The chair describes the support of UNICEF as key.

The network has about 16 members, but in practice about eight to 10 members attend any single meeting. The chair reports that attendance numbers have increased since the structure has been formalised, with better cohesion and networking. She says that sustaining a network of this kind requires energy, the fostering of trust, which she sees as key to the further development of the network, process facilitation and, consequently, funding for it. However, it may be that a financial demand on members would disincentivise them and hamper collaboration.

## 5.2 Cooperating and Coordinating

This includes facilitative leadership, group decision-making, semi-formal links, somewhat defined roles and the formation of sub-groups. Communication includes structured planning and engagement for activities and impact. Informal strategic alignment sees donors working together to explore a common challenge.

The following are examples of cooperating and coordinating collaborations in the US:

- The **National Network for Collaboration** has created a collaboration framework<sup>6</sup> to assist citizens and practitioners in their collaborative efforts.
- The Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation<sup>7</sup> has aligned its grant-making with a range of other donors with the goal of ensuring that every child in a particular community enters Grade 4 reading at the appropriate level. The **Funder Collaborative for Reading Success** works to support this goal and strengthen and advance early literacy skill development in children from birth to age nine.

- **Grantmakers for Education**<sup>8</sup> (GFE) is the largest and most diverse consortium of education philanthropists in the US. Founded in 1995 on the premise that collective insights, shared resources and constructive collaboration enable grantmakers to make more intentional and impactful investments, GFE set out to demonstrate the power of networks in effecting greater change. Today, it has a membership of nearly 300 organizations and 1,400 individuals collaborating to extend the reach and expand the influence of education philanthropy.

In South Africa, **BRIDGE's National Maths and Science Learner Support Community of Practice** includes funder cooperation and the coordination of effort and resources.

---

6) See <https://www.uvm.edu/extension/community/nnco/collab/framework.html>

7) <http://davisfdn.embolden.com/matriarch/default.asp>

8) See <http://www.edfunders.org/>

# CASE STUDY

## BRIDGE POST-SCHOOL ACCESS WORKING GROUP

The Post-School Access Working Group is a sub-group of BRIDGE's National Maths and Science Community of Practice (CoP), which is a multi-stakeholder network for individuals and organisations working in the area of mathematics and science learner support, funded by the Zenex Foundation. Established in 2010, the CoP runs quarterly main-community and sub-group meetings. It uses a defined facilitation methodology to ensure that common purpose and trust are intensified among members so that they share resources (both physical and intellectual), link their practice to policy, and collaborate to collectively impact on the system (with the whole being greater than the sum of the parts).

The Post-School Access Working Group consists of members from the larger CoP who are specifically interested in post-school issues such as opportunities and pathways to tertiary education. This group has become a mature and active collaboration space, and has undertaken some remarkable innovations and streams of activity. Examples are:

- In 2012, the group created a 'post-school access chain', a map which charts the progress of a learner from Grade 9 to the world of work. Members, including funders, have mapped their work against the chain so that they can identify gaps, duplications and opportunities. Additionally, ideas emanating from this conceptual work have found their way into the draft of the national policy for careers development through members of the CoP who represent government.
- In 2013, a 'champion' funder from the CoP hosted a post-school access dialogue which brought together donors who fund learner bursaries for school and tertiary education and who provide other types of support (such as career guidance, bridging and life skills, university and bursary applications, academic, psycho-social and medical support). Participants included stakeholders from tertiary institutions, government institutions providing learnership programmes and NGOs. The purpose of the dialogue was to explore avenues for partnerships with the aim of increasing learner tertiary access and output.
- A major undertaking of the group is the creation of an accessible, comprehensive web-based repository of post-school access information and pathways. It will offer detailed information on TVET, Work Integrated Occupational Programmes, Higher Education and Informal Skills Acquisition, as well as highlight general strategies for success. The knowledge will be widely

“

it's vital to recognise that collaborating donors can move from information sharing to a common purpose that benefits everybody in the group, and that this kind of collaborative engagement does not necessitate pooling funding or a common project.

available as an open educational resource. This initiative aims to serve as a stepping stone in the national agenda to increase post-school throughput. Much of the development work is complete.

One donor comments that this community's collaboration started with the sharing of information, and its focus was initially on networking, trust building and relationships. However, as a consequence of their involvement in this community of practice, several donors have set up structured partnerships. They are not pooling funding as such, but instead leveraging off a network of mutually-beneficial relationships. She said that funders' joint engagement with the post-school access chain and plotting out their respective roles against it, led to immediate bilateral partnerships among donor members of the group.

She attributes this working together to the linkages that were made as a result of participating in this community of practice. Working in silos has been reduced, and at the same time donors have been learning from each other about how best to work with learners in schools and other contexts around tertiary access. She feels that it's vital to recognise that collaborating donors can move from information-sharing to a common purpose that benefits everybody in the group, and that this kind of collaborative engagement does not necessitate pooling funding or a common project. It does, however, require initiator champions who must be prepared to let the ideas of the group develop and change. The initiator becomes participant and co-creator within the group.

## 5.3 Partnering

Partnering typically involves shared leadership and decision-making, formal links, defined roles, goal-focused groupings and communications that focus on joint conceptualising and funding for a specific goal or project. Formal strategic alignment sees donors agreeing to align their grant-making and create structures to work together. Targeted co-funding allows donors to retain individual grant-making control but coordinate their investments in a specific project or initiative. Pooled funding entails donors contributing to a collective fund that is usually administered by a lead donor or a third party.

The following are examples of partnering collaborations in the US:

- The **Donors' Education Collaborative**<sup>9</sup> in the New York Community Trust is dedicated to the systemic reform of New York City public schools.

Its members pool funds to advance equity, opportunity and excellence for all students.

- In Iowa, ten foundations in the **Education Funders Network**<sup>10</sup> have agreed to jointly fund an early reading initiative.
- In Arizona, the state's leading philanthropic organizations have joined with public agencies and more than five dozen community nonprofits to create **Read On Arizona**<sup>11</sup>, an effort aimed at improving language and literacy outcomes for children from birth to 8 years of age.

In South Africa two notable examples of partnering collaboration among donors and between donors and government, are found in GreenMatter and Ilifa Labantwana.

---

9) <http://www.nycommunitytrust.org/AboutTheTrust/CollaborativeFunds/DonorsEducationCollaborative/tabid/396/Default.aspx>

10) See [http://www.iowacounciloffoundations.org/filesimages/Article%20Attachments/ICoF\\_EdFunders\\_Report.pdf](http://www.iowacounciloffoundations.org/filesimages/Article%20Attachments/ICoF_EdFunders_Report.pdf)

11) See <http://readonarizona.org/>

# CASE STUDY

## GREENMATTER

The Lewis Foundation, a conservation-focused donor, and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) have collaborated successfully on GreenMatter. Launched in 2010, GreenMatter is a public-private partnership programme for graduate level skills development and transformation in biodiversity. GreenMatter is implementing a Human Capital Development (HCD) Strategy developed in response to the call in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan to address the shortage of skilled personnel, particularly black people, in critical areas of biodiversity research, management and conservation.

After a strategy review in 2008, the Lewis Foundation decided to focus on long-term projects that would catalyse systemic change. A consultative process showed that there was poor capacity in higher level biodiversity skills and general human capital development in the sector, and that this poses a significant risk to the current and future management of biodiversity in South Africa. The need for a human capital development strategy in the biodiversity sector became the Foundation's area of focus, and collaboration its method of addressing this strategic area. SANBI was chosen as a partner as it had a mandate from the department of environmental affairs. GreenMatter was launched with just a memorandum of agreement between the two parties. This is an example of a donor collaborating with a government partner through developing a vision of systemic impact and creating an initiative that is by the sector for the sector.

GreenMatter's strategic foundations are solid, with high investment into this phase of the collaboration. As GreenMatter moved from planning into implementation, the nature of the capacity building required crystallised.

*It became evident that while numbers and qualifications were important goals (e.g. to increase the number of black post-graduates in the field) some subtle, less tangible aspects were also highly significant. Many of the biodiversity workers we consulted felt that the quality of the leadership in the field needed to be strengthened. Others mentioned that not only the number of mentors needed attention (there were too few) but also the quality of mentoring relationships, as mentoring in many organisations was plagued by mistrust with racial and political roots, and inter-generational differences in expectations.*

“

... developing trust was the first and most important factor in their collaboration.

*It also became apparent that while black students now had political and financial access to higher education and science careers, it was not enough. Outside of the mainstream of highly educated and employed society, youth from remote rural and equally marginalized township schools were finding it difficult to move successfully from first degrees to further education and into suitable work places, despite having financial support. Other forms of access needed attention, too, for example, access to academic and professional networks and career guidance<sup>12</sup>.*

In response, GreenMatter undertook to strengthen networking, mentoring and career guidance. They also started a sector-wide conversation about leadership. “The participants in this conversation distilled the idea of leadership for biodiversity<sup>13</sup>, as distinct from leadership in biodiversity”. GreenMatter has also developed a Fellowship programme which now provides graduate students and employees with access to funding and support to develop higher-level skills. In the Fellowship, graduates and young professionals are also encouraged to pair with mentors, often seasoned professionals, in a more structured and potentially longer-term relationship.

The relationship between the Lewis Foundation and SANBI was described by a representative of the Lewis Foundation as ‘rocky’ in the beginning: there were issues of territory, mandate and trust. The Lewis Foundation wanted excellence and the right people for the right job, while SANBI had to deal with matters of mandate and transformation. However, there was real commitment from both sides and they developed a superb strategy that was insightful, in-depth and layered. Both partners also agreed that GreenMatter should not be about ownership and that implementation should be through partnership. Partners were brought in to do specific things, which helped to make this a sector-led initiative.

GreenMatter has a lean core team, consisting of a director, a fundraiser, and a marketing and communications specialist. The brand is a 'cause brand', and anybody can use it as it represents HCD for biodiversity. The partners insist that it is bigger than individual organisations. It has a brand and a profile and stakeholders see it as a sector-based organization, which is not owned but exists to develop human capital. However, the partners have recently undertaken a process of organisational development and feel GreenMatter now needs to be taken to the next level. Sustainability will depend on both the ability to raise money and on getting the sector to own the brand: GreenMatter needs to exist in a form suitable for these purposes.

This case study illustrates several lessons:

- Collaboration responded to a clearly defined need agreed on by the partners;
- Timing was crucial in the sense that the intervention reacted to current concerns in a sector;
- Developing trust was the first and most important factor in their collaboration;
- The stakeholder engagement process identified the priorities for HCD in the sector, and developed the vision and strategy of GreenMatter;
- A core team with key skills was critical to ensuring that the strategy remained on track;
- Appropriate partners were brought in when needed;
- No ownership by any donor has been a key enabling factor, but champions and drivers are vital; and
- A developmental and flexible approach with democratic patterns of governance, hosting and responsibility has been essential.

Ultimately, the Lewis Foundation sees itself becoming less and less important in the work. It is prepared to go the distance but wants to reduce dependence on it. It has seen itself as a catalyst; now it is pushing for sustainability. Success is defined as no longer being needed.

---

12) From "Leadership for Biodiversity – Principles and Practices in the GreenMatter Programme for Transformation and Capacity Development in South Africa" by Eureka Rosenberg & Sibusiso T. Manzini

13) Ibid

# CASE STUDY

## ILIFA LABANTWANA

### Origin

Between 2008 and 2010, the DG Murray Trust, the ELMA Foundation and the UBS Optimus Foundation formed a strategic partnership, which they called Ilifa Labantwana (Ilifa). Their wish as donors was to collaborate in order to contribute substantially to address key gaps in Early Childhood Development (ECD) service provision in South Africa. Each initially contributed R20 million towards achieving their overriding goal: influencing the ECD sector as a whole to achieve integrated, scalable and sustainable interventions through the implementation of South African ECD policy.

Ilifa started out as a project (originally called Sobambisana) of the DG Murray Trust. The DG Murray Trust sought to increase its reach and momentum by inviting other prospective donor partners to collaborate on it. In 2008, ELMA and DG Murray created a formal partnership for this purpose. Additional partners were sought to increase the resource and strategic possibilities of the project and in 2010 the UBS Optimus Foundation formally joined the partnership.

### Funding

Each donor committed an equal investment of R20 million over a four-year period. Together, the three partners sought to balance their different institutional cultures and strategies, recognising that the partnership created an opportunity to realise a collective vision for ECD beyond their individual achievements. In 2012, an additional funding partner was incorporated. The Kellogg Foundation provided USD300,000 as core support to the programme, while remaining an arm's length partner in terms of governance and strategy. In early 2013, Ilifa's focus on government partnerships and national systems change for ECD led to an approach from a potential new partner for Phase II of the programme, the FNB Fund. In October 2013, the FNB Fund became an equal funding partner, and at the same time as UBS Optimus moved into a less active donor role.

“

Formalising organisational structures .... helped them ensure that their individual agendas for ECD were interpreted into a joint set of project objectives and deliverables, which framed a shared vision and direction.

### Strategy

Ilifa is donor-driven, with a clear strategy on which it acts. It focuses on testing and demonstrating scalable, cost-effective models of intervention for poor and marginalised communities. The programme works to key objectives with high delivery standards, but also takes a developmental approach that allows it to integrate what it learns into the programme. Consequently, a key factor of Ilifa's development is its commitment to monitoring its implementation and progress and evaluating its impact. During 2012, Ilifa commissioned a formative review of the programme to assess and understand its influence and to draw on lessons learned in order to sharpen its strategic focus. This resulted in the development of a substantial case study, a review report and a verification process.

### Type of collaboration

During the lifespan of Ilifa the processes of the partnership have been formalised into an organisational structure. In 2010, a partnership agreement was agreed on, a project manager was appointed and the partners defined a set of eight core strategic objectives. This helped them ensure that their individual agendas for ECD were interpreted into a joint set of project objectives and deliverables, which framed a shared vision and direction. The development of a core Ilifa team, led by a strategic programme leader from 2011, was a critical factor in Ilifa's ability to make strides in its delivery and functioning. The capacity of the team has been increased over time to assist Ilifa to move productively into its next phase.

## Governance

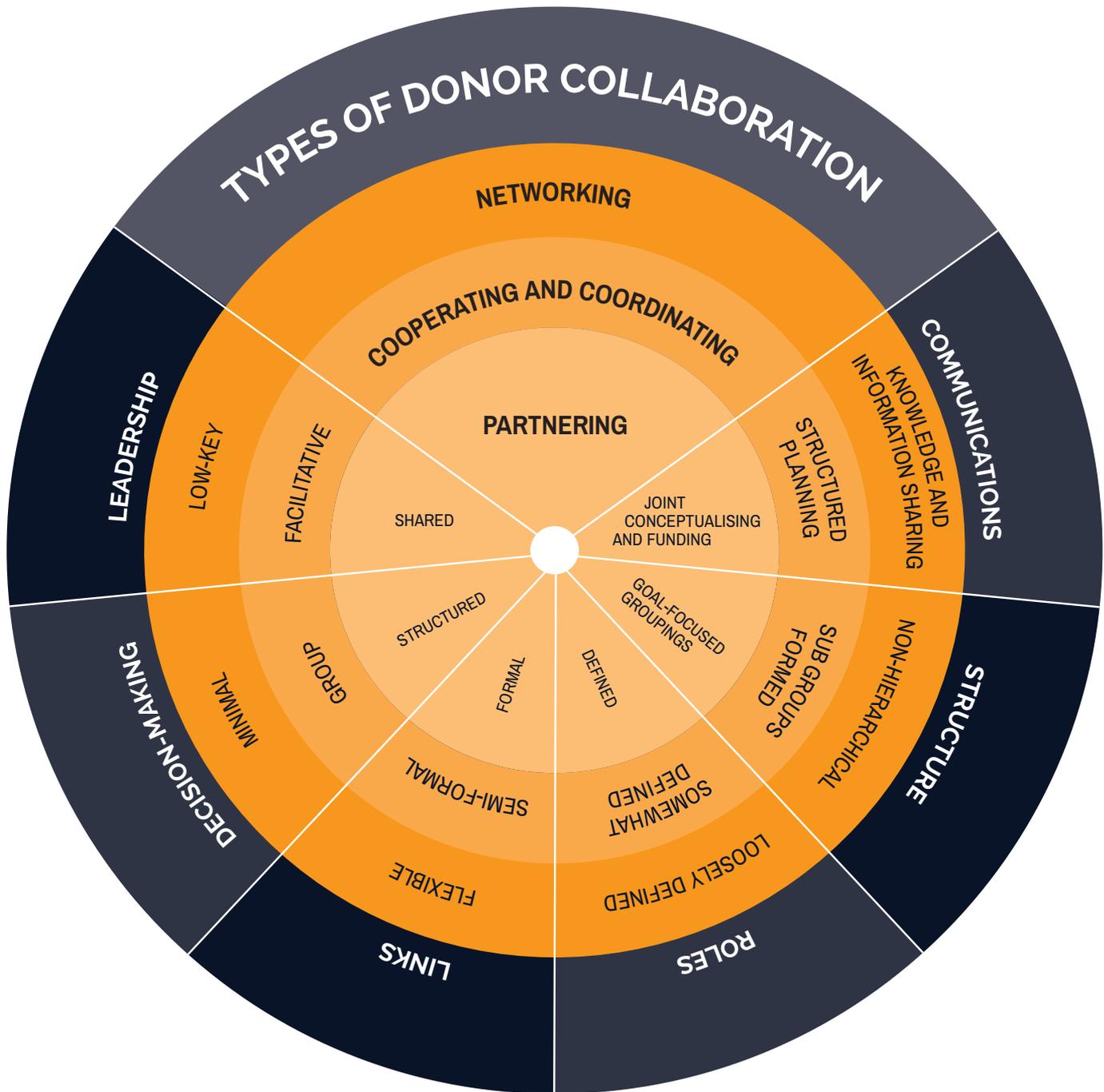
The governance and administrative procedures followed by Ilifa have kept it functioning at a high level of accountability. These management practices have also provided regular opportunities for funding partners to ensure that their strategic interests are realised. Infrastructural support and leadership have been provided by the DG Murray Trust, in whose offices the programme is based. Originally, monthly decision-making and accountability processes were the responsibility of Ilifa's so-called 'Ordinary Executive', comprising one representative from each of the three core funders. In addition, strategic sessions were held biannually with a 'Special Executive', with extraordinary sessions being held as needed. The role of the Special Executive is to approve budgets and engage on issues of strategy, deliberating on the best way for the programme to represent the broader strategic objectives of each of the lead funding partners.

The Ordinary Executive has been replaced by a monthly Management Meeting, still involving partner representatives. Without compromising on the value-add offered by regular interaction with the partners, this development has freed up Ilifa to move in a more nimble but focused way. The Special Executive has been kept in place as Ilifa's strategic advisory body, where the major donor partners are represented at a senior level.

---

## Figure 1: Collaboration Framework for Funders

A summary of the nature of the different types of collaboration is provided in Figure 1 below.



## 6. GOALS OF FUNDER COLLABORATION

Networking, cooperation and coordinating, and partnering can be designed to achieve different goals and outputs such as:

- Offering peer support and developing a common understanding;
- Sharing information, knowledge and working practice;
- Ensuring resources are leveraged and maximized, and duplication reduced; or
- Influencing policy and/or the wider system.

The table below sets out examples of the kinds of activities that could be undertaken in order to achieve these kinds of outcomes.

Table 3: Types and goals of collaboration

TYPES	GOALS			
	To offer peer support and develop a common understanding	To share information, knowledge and working practice	To ensure resources are leveraged and maximised and duplication reduced	To influence policy and/or the wider system
Networking	A forum is established for dialogue	Briefing notes are shared	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal partnerships are established within the forum, but limited</li> <li>• A list of members and their resources is drawn up and distributed</li> </ul>	Forum discusses policy/system and first-level briefing note is produced
Cooperating and Coordinating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The forum meets formally, at least quarterly, and is facilitated</li> <li>• Objectives are defined</li> <li>• Trust is deliberately developed through facilitated processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A knowledge management platform is invested in and utilised for the sharing of knowledge</li> <li>• Knowledge management capacity is invested in</li> <li>• A database of which donor/funder/philanthropist is funding what is developed and shared</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach, range and scope of donor activity are documented and disseminated to members and others</li> <li>• A part-time centralised secretariat is established</li> <li>• A joint approach to funding a particular sector/type of NGO/specific NGOs is agreed on</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy response goes through levels of drafting and discussion and second-level document produced</li> <li>• Facilitated multi-stakeholder engagement occurs between government and donors</li> <li>• Sub-committees are set up and tasked for action</li> </ul>
Partnering	Dialogue circles are established for sharing and refining learnings and knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring and evaluation data and learnings systematically shared among members</li> <li>• A joint monitoring and evaluation system and approach is developed</li> <li>• Knowledge is shared more broadly with other stakeholder groupings using a range of media</li> <li>• A map of initiatives is developed and disseminated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint plans are developed and joint funding is undertaken</li> <li>• A mutually-developed structure and guidelines for operations are developed</li> <li>• A fulltime centralised secretariat is established</li> <li>• A tool for collaboration is developed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various levels of government are engaged</li> <li>• Advocacy channels are developed and utilised</li> </ul>

## 7. LESSONS FROM COLLABORATION

The experience gained from collaborations such as those outlined above has produced important lessons that are documented in the literature on funder collaboration. Some examples of international thinking on the topic are provided below.

Arabella Advisors<sup>14</sup> offers five key elements of successful collaboration:

“

Key words to the survival and effectiveness of a collaborative group are flexibility and evolution.

Table 4: Keys to successful collaboration

Source: Arabella Advisors

1	<b>Take time to build trust.</b> Successful co-funding initiatives are built upon honest dialogue, healthy compromise and a willingness to contribute. Investing time and effort early on to build trust and open lines of communication among participating donors yields great benefits over the life of the collaboration.
2	<b>Don't lose sight of home base.</b> Co-funding efforts, especially pooled funds, provide a unique opportunity for donors to participate in grant-making separate from their home institutions. However, successful collaborations keep in mind the range of issues “back home” that can impact them. For example, collaboratives often need to devise ways to keep their members’ respective boards apprised of activities, align collaborative grant cycles with member institutions’ funding schedules, and coordinate activities in a way that ensures the full support of each donor’s home institution.
3	<b>Find a structure that works.</b> Given that each funder enters a collaborative with different aspirations, restrictions, and funding capabilities, finding an optimal decision-making structure can be challenging. To ease tension and increase efficiencies down the road, funders should decide up-front on a governance structure and decision-making process for their co-funding effort, and define the parameters for participation, be they set contribution levels or other forms of commitment. While the structures will vary based on the specific needs of each collaborative, having these difficult conversations early on makes a difference.
4	<b>Implement for success.</b> Co-funding initiatives often underestimate the amount of time and resources it takes to facilitate efficient decision-making, provide logistical support, keep participants connected and deploy grants. A smart staffing and operations plan that aligns with the collaborative’s broader goals and strategy is key to successful implementation.
5	<b>Prepare to evolve.</b> While great effort goes into developing a collaborative strategy, governance structure, and operations plan, it is important for donors to recognize that all co-funding efforts evolve over time. Raising questions early on, such as how a co-funding effort will manage growth, navigate shifting priorities and respond to developments in the field can prove immensely helpful. It is also beneficial to make time, on an ongoing basis, to take the pulse of the collaborative and adjust course as needed.”

14) From <http://www.arabellaadvisors.com/2013/03/13/5-keys-to-effective-donor-collaboration/>

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation<sup>15</sup> has disseminated its lessons on funder collaboration from the range it has undertaken.

**There is a time to lead, a time to follow, and a time to say no:**

Packard has sometimes initiated and led a collaboration, and other times it has followed. Program staff describes these decisions as based on several factors, including the Foundation's level of expertise, the ability of program staff to dedicate time, and the degree to which the Foundation has an interest in driving strategy. In certain cases, Packard also has made the decision not to join a collaboration due to time and resource limitations, the lack of tight strategic connection, or a concern about the structure of the collaboration.

**It's important to make sure the collaboration is worth the investment:**

Staff time spent on individual collaborations does not necessarily correlate with dollars invested. Some collaborations that entail relatively small financial commitments require significant time from program staff. For example, the Out-of-SchoolTime Collaborative, in which Packard made a \$498,000 investment, takes approximately 15 percent of staff time. Other programs that involve relatively large financial support are structured to minimize the time spent by program staff. The Conservation and Land Use Alliance, a \$12.7 million investment (plus additional financial support of ClimateWorks), takes approximately 5 to 10 percent of staff time. Time spent is more often a function of the collective capacity of other funders, the staffing and capacity of the funded entity, and the degree to which funders have collaborated together in the past. In general, we found that staff time was most significant as the collaboration was being established and at key transition points, such as new phases of funding, strategy reassessments, and staff changes.

15) <http://www.packard.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Lessons-in-Funder-Collaboration.pdf>

**Some collaborations require significant CEO engagement:**

The CEOs' involvement can help raise the profile of a collaboration and attract attention and commitment by other partners. In the case of California Forward, the involvement of several large foundation CEOs helped attract leaders like Leon Panetta (former director of the Central Intelligence Agency) and Bruce McPherson (former California Secretary of State) to the effort. The CEOs can also play an important role in setting the tone of a collaboration, even without playing a deep day-to-day role. In the CLP, for example, the CEOs of each foundation set a tone for their staffs to be creative, even if it meant recommending changing normal foundation policies to be successful. And sometimes CEO involvement is essential to getting results.

After investing hundreds of millions of dollars in the ClimateWorks Foundation collaborative, Packard's CEO, along with the leaders of other funding partners, recognized the need to become involved to a much greater extent—by joining the Board of Directors—to achieve the full strategic value expected from the collaboration. In short, there is no single "right" model of collaboration. Whatever the model, we see examples of success as well as challenges across the spectrum. What is clear is that given the investment required for high stakes collaborations, unrelated to size, Packard's experience highlights the importance of carefully weighing the benefits relative to the costs before entering a collaboration.

Other lessons are offered by the Iowa Council of Foundations<sup>16</sup> :

Collaborative projects take time.... In order to move forward on a project, participants must know one another and have good working relationships. This often requires that groups hold in-person meetings, especially early on in the project, which increases the participants' time commitment. The ability to pull busy people together was noted as an inhibiting factor in the group's progress on this project.

Collaborative projects require progressive opportunities for organizations to officially commit (or opt-out).

It may be helpful to determine deadlines for the project as it moves forward to help create a sense of urgency to propel the group.

16) [http://www.iowacounciloffoundations.org/filesimages/Article%20Attachments/ICoF\\_EdFunders\\_Report.pdf](http://www.iowacounciloffoundations.org/filesimages/Article%20Attachments/ICoF_EdFunders_Report.pdf)

From all the advice provided, we can summarise the most critical factors in the table below.

**Table 5: Critical factors for effective collaboration**

*Source: Bridge*

**10 CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION**

<b>1</b>	Respond to a need and share an understanding of the need
<b>2</b>	Develop trust first
<b>3</b>	Work together to develop vision and strategy
<b>4</b>	Set goals
<b>5</b>	Have champions and drivers
<b>6</b>	Be willing to change in your role as initiator or champion
<b>7</b>	Share ownership
<b>8</b>	Be flexible, developmental, iterative and open to ideas
<b>9</b>	Have a democratic approach to governance, hosting and responsibility
<b>10</b>	Understand that change takes time!

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COLLABORATION

To achieve the maximum impact from their initiatives, donors and investors in South Africa should build their capacity for effective collaboration across a range of interventions.

Recommendations for increasing collaborative efforts:

- Requiring donor-funded organisations to work collaboratively;
- Strengthening their capacity to do so;
- Committing to monitoring and evaluation. This means that funders agree to:
  - » share approaches to monitoring and evaluation,
  - » disseminate the results of monitoring and evaluation, and
  - » invest in collaborative evaluations across different funders and projects.
- Committing to and investing in effective knowledge management. This includes:
  - » sharing lessons which come out of project evaluations. This also involves making evaluations and learnings public, so that the sector as a whole can learn from both the successes and failures of various interventions, and
  - » learning from experience, so that past mistakes can be avoided.
- Innovating in relation to scale and sustainability. Current thinking is to look at large-scale collaborative action in which participants contribute to the same project and adopt a single model for a particular issue to take it to scale. An alternative approach is to combine what many projects are doing in a common area in a way that enhances the systemic impact and ensures that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. This can work by aligning the focus of multiple projects with a key government strategy and clear theory of change. Resources can be shared and spread across the projects, and duplication avoided. Implementation lessons and successful practices are shared amongst the projects in order to increase impact. Collective power and knowledge is used to engage more effectively with government on adoption and implementation of policy.
- Strengthening the capacity of the private sector in promoting government's adoption of policy or large-scale implementation of successful innovations on the ground. This requires understanding a number of elements: knowledge of government's needs, processes and constraints; the dynamics of working collectively, and collaboratively with government; and how to use collaboration platforms, among others.

In support of these ideas and to further the development of this framework for collaboration, two proposals are made:

---

1

### **Establish a donor and investor Collaboration Forum**

which would meet regularly and be supported by a convening agency. The forum would allow for:

- The development of trust, peer support and common purpose among social and CSI investors
- The sharing of lessons, innovations and data between members
- The maximizing of resources and funding
- The development of a 'collective voice', which would have more influence than the individual voice.

---

2

### **Develop a managed data instrument and repository**

which would allow for the sharing of different kinds of information about donor activity and projects available so that collaboration is made easier. The repository would be a source of information for identifying potential partners and for planning effective collaboration. Some examples of the categories of information that could be provided for access by funders and innovators are:

- Mapping of funders and the areas in which they work.
- Mapping of service providers (NGOs and commercial) as potential partners. This could include a database of organisations and individuals who have expertise in evaluation. This mapping could also be done on the basis of sectoral interests, such as education or health services.
- A 'project register' giving details about funded activities in the development space. In education, for example, this would refer to who is doing what in which provinces, districts and schools in any given year. This would help funders avoid duplication and open the doors to collaboration.
- Databases of:
  - » the different kinds of programmes that have been implemented over a particular period in given sectors;
  - » project evaluations, accessible for review so that learnings from prior projects can be used to inform any project planning and implementation; and
  - » professional associations that could be tapped for expertise or involvement. In the schooling sector, for example, this would include those working in subject areas such as mathematics or reading.

## 9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

South Africa faces critical systemic problems in many sectors of society. Donors and social investors have been active for decades in attempting to address these with both funds and expertise, but often with limited effect. Given the scale of the societal challenges, the need to increase the reach and impact of funders' efforts is undeniable. Collective endeavours are one way of achieving this. Increased impact is not only about effective implementation on the ground for the benefit of a particular programme, but also about potential impact on policy. Successful innovations can have systemic effects in that they feed into debates about what works and what doesn't work in order to shape policy.

The illustrative examples on collaborative programmes given in this document suggest that there is a rich pool of experience from which we can draw, both locally and internationally. Many of these emerging or established partnerships illuminate different benefits of collaboration as well as some of its challenges. The framework offered in this document embraces the idea of a flexible approach, making allowance for different stages and elements in partnership arrangements. The options – networking, cooperation and coordination, and partnering – need not be fixed but can grow and change, becoming looser or tighter as influenced by the demands of a programme or of changing circumstances.

By definition, all categories of grant-makers and social investors are committed to developing and growing the sectors in which they work. If collaboration is seen as one way in which the return on investment can be improved, and the reach, impact and sustainability of interventions enhanced, then it is time to get serious about making it happen. This framework is offered as a first step in this process.

BRIDGE, November 2015



ZENÉX  
FOUNDATION

