



Institute for
Nonprofit News

Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Guide to Collective Fundraising

PILLAR 1

PILLAR 2

OVERVIEW

This guide is structured around a set of pillars to help newsrooms set up and manage collective fundraising efforts.

PILLAR 1

Establishing the foundations:

How news organizations can establish their collective, its rationale and vision, and the relationships from which to activate fundraising efforts.

PILLAR 2

Ways of working:

How collectives can establish and manage ways of working and related supporting structures to underpin their collective fundraising efforts.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Key activities and tasks are outlined for each pillar to guide you on your collective fundraising journey. The guide also has four types of supplemental information that support the activities in each pillar.



PRO TIP:

These tips add nuance to the tasks in each activity.

RESOURCE:

These are live links.

Click resource links to be taken to additional supplemental resources.

Keep in mind:

Similar to Pro Tips, each Keep in Mind is a reminder of possible pitfalls and hurdles you may encounter.



Quotes are from INN Network members and others who have made their own collective fundraising efforts. Their real-world advice can help ground your newsroom in their experience. Note that all quotes have been lightly edited for coherence.

LETTER FROM INN'S NETWORK PHILANTHROPY DIRECTOR

I'm Stephanie Schenkel, Network Philanthropy Director at the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN), and your go-to person for INN fundraising support and resources. I've been a fundraiser in nonprofit organizations for over 15 years, and I've practiced in the nonprofit journalism space for 10 of those years.

During my time in nonprofit news, I've managed collective fundraising projects, and I've grappled with many of the issues that you might be facing as you think about your own work like: How do I build consensus among the differing perspectives of journalists and development staff? How do we build a strategy that reflects my own newsroom's needs, but also the needs of my entire collective? And of course, how, in good faith, do I create an allocation system to divvy funds in an equitable manner, so that I keep the peace among my collective partners?

Let's first acknowledge that challenges are to be expected - and quite honestly, if you're asking these questions, you're off to a strong start. To help answer the tough questions and provide a framework for thinking about them, we've brought in experts at **Collective Mind**, a social enterprise focused on improving the practice and impact of networks. Collective Mind prides itself on fostering effective and impactful networks of all shapes and sizes. We believe that Collective Mind's expertise and history paired with the grounding of INN's position in the nonprofit journalism industry brings just the right mix to help you navigate this tricky collective fundraising work with greater clarity, order, and framework.

This do-it-yourself (DIY) guide is designed to support the development and functioning of your collective fundraising initiatives. It presents insights, good practices, and tools gathered from both within and beyond the journalism sector. It's a resource for **INN members**, particularly in the beginning stages of working with one another, to generate philanthropic revenue. Come join me, as we begin this journey!

Stephanie Schenkel

Network Philanthropy Director
Institute for Nonprofit News

COLLECTIVE+MIND



Institute for
Nonprofit News

INTRODUCTION

Why collective fundraising?

The nonprofit news industry is at a critical juncture. While for-profit newspapers around the country continue to contract, nonprofit journalism is rapidly growing, expanding, and evolving. We are learning from veteran journalists about what works and what we might do differently, but most importantly, we are also learning from our communities about what the delivery of news and information means to them today and what it might look like in the future.

Collective fundraising can help newsrooms raise more philanthropic revenue by extending the reach of their message and reducing the fundraising burden on individual newsrooms. As leaders in the news industry, INN sees promise in the ability of collective fundraising to help newsrooms raise more philanthropic revenue to sustain this new journalistic work.

We define collective fundraising as fundraising undertaken together by multiple organizations that establish the necessary systems, processes, and structures to raise and manage those funds jointly.

The premise of collective fundraising is that building collectives between organizations – in INN’s case, newsrooms – to fundraise or can create new opportunities to increase revenues. These members share fundraising responsibilities and receive funds through the collective to manage and implement their own programming and activities. They may seek to achieve any number of enhanced outcomes – cultivating new donors, raising revenue above and beyond existing organizational philanthropic funding, diversifying philanthropic funding streams, and growing revenue from hard-to-reach sources such as major gifts.

Collectives may be topically or geographically focused or organized around other key criteria. They may fundraise using different methods (grants, donations, crowdfunding, special events, etc.) and target different funding sources (philanthropy, corporate sponsors, individuals, etc.). The core rationale is that organizations combine efforts to enhance their collective financial viability and sustainability.

Image courtesy of *Chesapeake Bay Journal*.



Image courtesy of *Cicero Independiente*.



Image courtesy of *India Currents*.



Image courtesy of *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

Establishing the foundations

Establishing the foundations focuses on how news organizations can establish their collective, its rationale and vision, and the relationships from which to activate fundraising efforts. A set of key activities and tasks is articulated that any new – or existing – collective should undertake collaboratively.

PILLAR 1

Establishing the foundations

In many ways, these activities happen in parallel, not in a sequence. Likewise, these are evolving activities that will never be final and complete. Achieving them isn't a box-checking exercise – they are ongoing conversations to be thoughtful and intentional about who your collective will be (journalists, development staff, operations) and how it will occupy a space together.



PRO TIP:

Collaborative processes are required for collectives to function effectively. No single individual or newsroom is in charge, driving the work, or making all the decisions. In the below, “you” refers to the collective, not an individual development person or journalist. Every action described in this guide should be undertaken through a collaborative, inclusive, and participatory process with the collective's membership.

KEY ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

Establish membership of your collective

- **TASK:** Determine who your members are and why
- **TASK:** Determine whether and how to formalize participation/membership for journalists, development professionals and other staff members

ACTIVITY 2

Establish a clear rationale for collective fundraising

- **TASK:** Foster alignment between members' objectives
- **TASK:** Develop a shared mission, agenda, and priorities

ACTIVITY 3

Establish shared expectations

- **TASK:** Be realistic about what can be achieved on what time horizons
- **TASK:** Start small and experiment

ACTIVITY 4

Foster group formation within the collective

- **TASK:** Build trust
- **TASK:** Build relationships
- **TASK:** Facilitate a shift away from a scarcity mindset

ACTIVITY 1

Establish membership of your collective.

“Members” are those newsrooms that participate in the collective and its collective fundraising efforts. Members will contribute to the shared efforts and benefit from them.

They must believe that the collective has a strong shared purpose, clear rationale, and potential for results. They will join and participate in the collective to realize a return on investment of their time, attention, energy, and other contributions and to achieve greater results, for their own newsroom or the nonprofit journalism field as a whole, than they could on their own.

RESOURCE:

Determining membership for collective fundraising

Use this guide to define who your collective’s members will be, how they will join, and how they will participate.

Source: *Institute for Nonprofit News*

Keep in mind:

Membership of your collective will potentially evolve over time. Such evolution could include the entry and exit of newsrooms or simply the ebb and flow of their participation. Be aware of and ready for this.

Task: Determine who your members are and why

A collective doesn’t operate without clarifying who will participate in it and who won’t. You can establish basic criteria to guide this clarity.

1. First and foremost, the members of your collective should align in terms of both a) the relevance of their work to the collective and b) their interest in and willingness to actively participate in shared fundraising efforts.
2. Beyond these two foundational criteria, you should consider the differences that exist between the values and cultures of each newsroom. Differences in core values can hinder constructive working relationships.
3. Finally, you’ll need to include members who have skills for and experience not just in journalism but also with fundraising. Or, if this isn’t possible, you’ll need to develop a plan to bring in that knowledge/skills/experience from outside the membership. Not having the requisite skills and experience at your disposal can hinder action.

Take the time to understand members’ fundraising experience. Make sure to unpack the claims members make about their past experiences, including the differences between what their newsroom has done and what that individual as a representative within the collective can bring to the fundraising efforts.

ACTIVITY 1

This includes pooling the strengths, experiences, and assets from across the collective and its membership. Members can bring different strengths and assets such as communications expertise, contacts and relationships with funders, proposal writing skills, etc. A diverse set of experiences and skill sets can be pooled towards greater fundraising efforts. Individuals with different profiles can be tapped to take on specific tasks. This is particularly true given that different types of fundraising require distinct approaches, skills, and knowledge.



Pro Tip:

Recognize that different types of funding require specific skills and experience. For example, seeking and managing government grants for journalism is wildly different from organizing benefit galas. Be sure to match the capacities in your collective with the types of funding you seek to raise.



My recommendation would be to spend a little more time really sussing out people's fundraising background. It would have been more helpful for our group to understand each other before they started to fundraise together. In a fundraising circle that I've been recruiting, we had our first meeting and it was beautiful to hear people talk about the different kinds of backgrounds that they have.

I feel like know who to lean on for what more clearly, in ways that I never did with our previous steering committee, because it was never clear who actually had fundraising experience, and who was just kind of bluffing along."

Task: Determine whether and how to formalize newsroom participation/membership

Once you've clarified who your members will be, you must determine whether you need and want to formalize your collective's membership or participation in your collective. Formalizing newsroom membership can entail establishing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or other formal, legal agreement by which members define their participation and are held accountable to it. It may also likely entail establishing an application and vetting process for members to join the collective.

Be sure to understand the purpose of formalizing your membership through a legal agreement, for example:

- Do you need to set criteria for participation?
- Do you need to clarify participation for potentially interested parties?
- How will you ensure appropriate, active participation?
- Do you need to articulate specific contributions, benefits, or commitments that members will sign up to?
- How will you clarify decision-making roles, responsibilities, and protocols?

ACTIVITY 1

Be aware that you don't necessarily need to formalize membership. There is no default requirement to do so. Newsrooms can be a part of the collective in an informal fashion that entails their (active) participation in discussions and activities. But you must recognize that there are tradeoffs between formalizing and not.

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Membership is informal and the processes for making decisions about priorities, what to go after, or how to structure the design of that funding are open and transparent. They're also ad hoc with a new and different, organic process for each.”

What would you lose out on by formalizing membership?

What would hold your collective together if you did not formalize participation?

How would more ad hoc and/or organic processes benefit your collective if you don't formalize it?

How can you be clear, open, and transparent about decision-making and participation without a formal agreement?

How can formal agreements facilitate interactions and decision-making?

Another option is to define basic eligibility criteria for participation without formalizing it via agreements. You can define and articulate a set of foundational rules for participation. These can be more administrative – e.g., that all news organizations are registered nonprofits, are eligible to fundraise, are members of INN – or more focused on engagement such as bringing contacts to the table, meeting minimum participation requirements, etc.

Consider what your collective really needs to undertake fundraising together now and into the future to determine what agreements need to be established and how. Clarify for yourself the circumstances in which it would be necessary to formalize participation, for example, when funds are being exchanged or disbursed or when distinct roles and responsibilities need to be fulfilled.

Whether you will formalize or not, it's critically important to start with and have ongoing conversations about expectations and responsibilities including how members will make decisions together and how to build an open and transparent working culture within the collective.

Keep in mind:

Whether and how you formalize membership or participation in your collective can evolve over time as relationships between newsrooms and activities evolve. Perhaps in the early days, you want to stay loose and informal in order to establish proof of concept for collective fundraising; when you later become more expansive in your efforts, it may become more necessary to define formal, legal agreements.

RESOURCE:

[Discussion questions for operationalizing membership](#)

Use this guide to facilitate conversations about how members will operate separately and together within your collective.

Source: *Institute for Nonprofit News*

ACTIVITY 2

Establish a clear rationale for collective fundraising.

A clear rationale is the collective's "vision" in terms of goals and objectives. The rationale should embody the common interest and commitment of the newsrooms. The rationale also sets the scope for what will be undertaken collectively: it's foundational for the collective's strategies and activities. It's necessary to define shared goals and foster alignment behind a clear agenda first, or the actions required for collective fundraising won't be possible.

A collective's clear rationale will embody two sides of the same coin – a) alignment between newsrooms' separate organizational objectives and b) shared objectives of the collective itself. These two sides ensure the value proposition for members to show up and participate: that they will achieve a return on their investment of time, attention, and energy.

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Key was the relationships we already had and the trust we already had in one another as collaborators. Our missions are similar. Our commitment to journalism was similar. Not just the people in the relationships, but the alignment related to what each organization wants to accomplish is pretty critical also.”

Task: Foster alignment between the objectives of member newsrooms

Each newsroom will have its own objectives for joining and participating in the collective based on their needs, interests, and fundraising goals. A first step to establishing a clear rationale for the collective is ensuring that the objectives of the collective's members align with each other.

Alignment does not mean that all newsrooms have the same goals – but their separate goals must intersect at a point that establishes a shared agenda to facilitate collaboration. For example, an organization with a small staff may seek to increase its fundraising capacity by joining the collective or an organization with a specific journalistic or geographic scope might want to collaborate with organizations focused differently to create a more holistic approach that will pique funders' interest.

The different, diverse objectives across collective members need to align enough to facilitate the setting of shared goals and activities toward achieving them.

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They knew it was going to be hard for them to do their own separate campaign, and they were struggling to raise money for themselves because they were tiny nonprofits with 2 or 3 staff and a board. They didn't really have a whole lot of fundraising capacity.

So they liked the idea participating in a national campaign where it was going to be a whole lot easier for them. It was going to be a much lighter lift in terms of having access to resources that they could just immediately plug in and use, or maybe tweak a little bit.”

Task: Develop a shared mission, agenda, and priorities

Beyond alignment between members' objectives, the collective itself needs to set goals that the members co-define and buy into to ensure their participation and harmonization of efforts behind the goals. The shared objectives should translate into a shared mission as well as an agenda and priorities for fundraising. These objectives must, of course, align with the separate missions and objectives of newsrooms.



PRO TIP:

Don't start talking about money first! Money can't be your collective's rationale. It is clearly a driver, but it can't be a starting point. The starting point, and the foundation for your collective's shared mission and objectives, must be the needs that you will fulfill for your communities and towards the missions of newsrooms. What are you trying to do? What do you want to do together? What do you need funding to achieve? Funding is the "how": you must start with the "what" and the "why". You must be clear about how fundraising will make a real-world difference in your journalism – and define your objectives and mission from there.



We found that people wanted to start the conversation with how much money we are trying to raise this year. And we said, that's not the question. The question is, what does your community need that you can do that journalism can assist wit?

What is the problem that journalism could be part of the solution around? Start having the conversation there and then that way everybody has a common starting point. Then you can get creative in the conversation of how might we do this. It switches the conversation 90 degrees, but it's really important."

The collective's mission must be clear and compelling enough to motivate and incentivize collaboration within the collective. The mission can cohere shared values that further facilitate collaborative efforts. A clear and compelling shared mission can also be critical to fundraising outcomes when articulating it to potential funders serves as a key selling point.



PRO TIP:

Staying focused on the shared mission as the collective functions and evolves can help mitigate politics and conflict within the collective. It is the common ground that everyone can find even when tensions inevitably arise. A strong, consistent focus on the shared mission can (re)invigorate members from all backgrounds - journalists, development staff, operations staff - when complications occur or progress is slow, and can infuse a sense of optimism about what's possible.



Keep it focused on the mission. And for us, it's the public media mission serving our communities, giving people really great stories and news that it's local, regional, national, and international. We come in through the regional aspect and support the local stations. And when we bring people together, you hear it loud and clear – we really all have the same mission. We're in different parts of the region, but we all have the same overarching mission which is to grow our audience to expand our impact.

There's a reason for that. We want to grow our impact and our reach. It's serving our community. If we put aside any concerns about what my station gets out of this, if we understand that we're all marching toward the same goals and that together we're stronger than we are individually, then we can help each other meet our mutual goals. Then we're ahead of the game."

ACTIVITY 3

Establish shared expectations.

As you clarify membership and your shared goals and mission, you must develop a shared understanding of what can be expected, both separately by members and together as a collective.

Task: Be realistic about what can be achieved on what time horizons

Your collective must level-set your expectations by recognizing that success in collective fundraising will take time and persistent effort. Collective fundraising isn't, and cannot be, a quick fix or a means to fill urgent budget gaps. Both collaboration and fundraising are long-term efforts – so collective fundraising is inherently long-term too.

It can take years to foster a strong enough collective to design and implement successful fundraising. Building key elements like trust and buy-in that will enable members to commit and collaborate openly and effectively are long-term processes. Shared clarity around rationale, mission, and objectives emerges slowly. Members of the collective must understand and agree that fundraising together is a long-term shared endeavor that will be iterative and incremental.

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It takes a while to get a group to agree to do this. It took 1 it took me, I think, 3 years of arguing for [collective fundraising]. It isn't meant to be rushed. If I had tried to impose my will too early, it wouldn't have worked.

The buy-in ramp – trying to earn their buy-in enough to get them to commit – is so long, especially if you have a new idea you want to collaborate around.”

Task: Start small and experiment

Collective fundraising is a long-term commitment that requires agility and adaptability along the way, while continuously managing expectations over the long run. The collective must build a practice around fundraising together, grounded in strong, trusting relationships.

A critical way to achieve this is to take small, experimental steps towards collective fundraising. An experimental approach allows the collective to build a culture of collaboration and learning to adapt and improve over multiple contained efforts without draining the members' energy. This can mean setting very limited goals for a fundraising effort – or not setting a numeric goal at all, simply focusing on working through the process together effectively and learning from it to undertake another effort that will hopefully be more lucrative.

Such experiments should be small-scale and short-term with limited commitments on the part of members to test out different collective fundraising

models. These experiments can achieve a “proof of concept” both that collective fundraising is feasible and value-added for your collective of newsrooms and that the collective is capable of fundraising collaboratively.

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Resist if you can, setting a numeric goal for your first year. I think that the idea behind our first year was just to learn and to not embarrass ourselves.”

ACTIVITY 4

Foster group formation within the collective.

Fundraising success as a collective ultimately rests on the functionality of the collective. The connections and understanding between members underpin the potential for collaboration.

Task: Build trust

Collective fundraising requires trusting relationships as much as it requires fundraising skills. As a collective's rationale can't be money-focused, you likewise can't focus on fundraising tasks to the exclusion of developing ways to work together. If you can't work together, you can't fundraise together. This task is particularly important when it comes to building relationships between journalists and fundraisers whose perspectives may appear misaligned until trust is built.



PRO TIP:

Don't skip steps past developing your collaborative capacities. Money is the last thing you do together. Start by doing other things together and moving up a ladder of intensity of collaboration. Practice the skills and processes for coming up with ideas and developing them, including shared decision-making. These are necessary collaborative capacities that will strengthen your collective fundraising efforts.

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You know, money is the last thing you do. You have so many steps before you get there in the evolution of that collaboration. If they couldn't even come up with an idea to do a story together, can you imagine fundraising together? You can't skip steps. Fundraising was like the 15th step on the ladder. In the first year you start by sharing content that you're producing individually, then you move to creating content together. Then you move to doing audience engagement events together. And you keep moving up the ladder. How to make collective decisions on how to use resources is one of the most difficult and thorny issues and can only happen when you have really built up that trust muscle. You need to do all the prep work

RESOURCE:

[How to Build Trust in Collaborative Fundraising](#)

This blog outlines 5 ways collaborative groups can build trust in fundraising. Source: *SEE Change*

Building and maintaining trust is necessary to develop and implement joint fundraising plans. For example, the willingness to share ideas or contacts requires trust and the willingness to ask for help necessitates a shared capacity to be vulnerable. Likewise, making decisions about how to use resources can be exceedingly difficult. Thinking about equitable distribution of funds requires trust as does making choices about what funders the collaborative will approach and who individual participants in the collective can approach outside of it. Just like building trust between journalists and fundraisers in their own newsrooms, building the collective's muscles for decision-making requires a strong sense of trust.

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The idea when you fundraise together is that you're thinking of an equitable distribution of funds. So you really need to think about the whole. And that only comes through trust.”

Challenges will arise even where there is trust. Trust is a means to counter the difficult, messy, and complicated nature of collaboration. It also counters the uncertainty of collaboration, sustaining editorial control for newsrooms, and fundraising collectively. Members have to trust that you're in it together and believe that everybody is making their best faith effort to contribute.



PRO TIP:

One strategy for building trust is to establish shared values. Articulating a set of values or guiding principles together can clarify how the collective's members will work together and participate in fundraising.

Task: Build relationships

Relationships are the foundation for collective fundraising and relationship-building must be integrated into your collective's operations via regular interactions. Developing knowledge and understanding of one another from an interpersonal perspective can bolster mission alignment and culture building for the collective, fostering participation in the collective as a shared experience in which everybody is helping everybody else to meet their goals.

Relationship-building must be explicit, thoughtful, and intentional. Processes to do so require effort to design and facilitate them, and time to allow connections to be formed and deepened, sometimes even years. Ensure time, space, and means for people from different newsrooms and in different roles to get to know one another on professional and personal levels and form bonds such as by incorporating opportunities for members to share, learn from, and connect into regular work-related activities.

At the same time, recognize that people will have diverse needs, interests, and approaches to connecting with others. Meet people where they are and foster their engagement in ways that will feel meaningful and manageable to them, recognizing that different people will engage in diverse ways.

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By designing your collaboration process so that there are tiers, people who are not able to go deep can still be involved at the edge, and people who can go deep and want to can be like a core. The long-term game of collaborating is that there's room for those various depths of collaboration. Doing that takes more effort on the design side and more effort to communicate. But I see the value in not losing the people who can't go that deep.”

RESOURCE:

How to Build Collaborative Fundraising Relationships 

This blog outlines steps to build collaborative fundraising relationships. *Source: SEE Change*

Collective Fundraising for Greater Impact 

This blog articulates the lessons learned by a collaborative over multiple years of collective fundraising. *Source: India Development Review*

Task: Facilitate a shift away from a scarcity mindset

A key, widespread impediment to collective fundraising is competition between members arising from an entrenched scarcity mindset. Members may fear their existing funding sources will be cannibalized should they share contacts or approach their existing donors with others. They may approach the collective's activities with suspicion based on assumptions that fundraising is a zero-sum game rather than with a belief in the possibility of expanding the pool of resources from which all members can benefit.

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We were all afraid of cannibalism. Why should I bring one of my big donors to the table? I need you to put your donor on the table, too, before I bring my donor. As much as we trusted each other, there was still that level of suspicion.”

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There's a saying in Spanish that money begets money. Now, of course, some contexts are more difficult than others. But really it is a very important thing to get over that scarcity mindset. That it can't be done, or we can't do it. You need to get creative. You need to think nontraditionally, you need to think about partnerships that work.”

Such a scarcity mindset is particularly notable in the nonprofit journalism space where funding may feel hard to come by. The potential for competition between members must be recognized and resisted by calling out tensions and addressing them when they arise. Solid relationships based on trust make open, honest conversations about these tensions possible. If not addressed, tensions can inflame into conflict, threatening any fundraising efforts and risking the collapse of your collective altogether.

Shifting a scarcity mindset is playing a long game – you can't change minds or behaviors overnight. Addressing it has to be built into the ways your collective operates, and how you work together on interpersonal and interorganizational levels, based on the relationships and trust that you build over the long term.

ACTIVITY 4

Your collective must practice this shift in mindset by employing multiple, diverse tactics. You can identify common values that members can all buy into and that serve to guide behavior. You can collectively elaborate and articulate the increased value you can offer to funders as a collective and what new funding sources you can access as a collective that you can't access separately. You can also get creative and think about non-traditional fundraising methods that don't just redistribute funds but grow the available pool of them.

RESOURCE:

Collaborative fundraising Isn't the solution; it is one of the solutions

This article summarizes a panel discussion amongst a group of journalism professionals sharing insights from their experiences of collaborative fundraising. Links are included to the discussion recording.

Source: *The Lenfest Institute*

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Some philanthropists or other types of grantors really do like to see a regional impact or the potential regional impact of multiple newsrooms coming together. I think that's one of the motivators for us when we're talking to stations. Because what we don't want is for folks to think that we're cannibalizing [their funding].”

Ways of working

A collective's ways of working and related supporting structures must be established and well-managed to underpin their fundraising efforts. A set of key activities and tasks is articulated that any new – or existing – collective should undertake collaboratively.

PILLAR 2 KEY ACTIVITIES

Ways of Working

ACTIVITY 1

Establish infrastructure for governance and decision-making

- **TASK:** Set up a subgroup for decision-making
- **TASK:** Put in place memorandums of understanding (MOUs) or other formal agreements as appropriate

ACTIVITY 2

Establish infrastructure for coordination and management

- **TASK:** Establish a backbone to ensure communications and coordination
- **TASK:** Foster the backbone support as champion, moderator, facilitator, and mediator

ACTIVITY 3

Operationalize equity between participants

- **TASK:** Manage roles and responsibilities based on what people from different newsrooms can bring, do, and contribute
- **TASK:** Structure fundraising and disbursement to mitigate competition

ACTIVITY 1

Establish infrastructure for governance and decision-making.

Any collective will need to have mechanisms and procedures in place for making decisions collaboratively for and on behalf of the collective. Open, clear, and transparent decision-making is fundamental to effective collaboration in any scenario and indispensable when dealing with money. Members need to ensure consensus and buy-in not just for final decisions but also how those decisions will be made either by them or on their behalf.

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What is important is that there is consensus on what the road is going to be. So if the group decides, no, you cannot go to a funder that the collaborative is already reaching out to fine.

Or if the consensus is yes, you can go to a funder that they collaborate with, that's fine, too. As long as everybody buys into this, as long as there is consensus.”

Task: Set up a subgroup for decision-making.

There are a variety of options available to collectives to structure decision-making and establish protocols and procedures for it. Where it doesn't make sense to make all decisions as a full collective, you can set up a subgroup that is vested with this responsibility on behalf of the group.

Whatever you need depends on the purpose and composition of your collective. Such a subgroup – perhaps called a steering committee – should have an articulated scope that defines its membership, responsibilities, protocols, and procedures. As with your membership writ large, you need to ensure you have the right profiles, with the necessary skills and experience, to comprise your decision-making subgroup. And, in defining your decision-making structures and processes, recognize that the different internal procedures and cultures of diverse newsrooms and participants will impact decision-making within the collective.

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We have a Governance Council that's composed of the general manager or another top person as a rep from each of the stations. We meet quarterly with them. They vote on the budget. They have a big say on discussions around collective revenue or collective fundraising.”

RESOURCE:

Sample Terms of Reference (TOR) for steering committee

Use this sample to develop a TOR for your steering committee or other decision-making subgroup. *Source: Institute for Nonprofit News*

Task: Put in place memorandums of understanding (MOUs) or other formal agreements as appropriate

Pillar 1 articulated the need to determine whether and how to formalize your membership. Depending on the needs and decisions defined through thoughtful reflection, you may determine that one or more formal agreements are needed for your collective.

This can include an operating or governing agreement for the collective itself – such as a charter, constitution, terms of reference (TOR), or bylaws – and/or may entail agreements with or between the members themselves separately that define their participation, contributions, and benefits. An MOU or other legal agreement may formalize the relationships with the collective’s members. It may clarify elements related specifically to fundraising – such as how money will be disbursed – as well as requirements and processes for other activities such as sharing content.

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We did have to create an MOU that includes contingencies and guidelines around if a station wants to leave the collaborative and all those sorts of things. There's an operating addendum that includes some editorial expectations. The great thing about our collaborative is that stations are by and large, very active. We don't have to worry about them not contributing editorially or through content. But it was important for us to have an MOU just so everyone's on the same page.

That's what I encourage folks to do. And it's best if that's written because if it's just a verbal agreement, leadership changes, things can get lost, and there could be different perceptions about what's expected or what's not expected.”

You should consider the depth of formality that you seek for your collective and the needs related to what must be clarified or formalized. Different scenarios compel specific responses. In some cases, setting legal agreements will provide clarity and freedom of action because members have greater peace of mind about how things will operate; in others, these agreements may feel overly restraining and limit the ability of the collective to be nimble and adaptive. You should consider what exists at present and what needs may arise in the future: for example, relationships may be strong but should members’ organizational leadership change, shifts might occur and articulated agreements could minimize confusion or tension about expectations and ways of working.

Even if you ultimately determine that you don’t need formal legal agreements, you can use these reflective processes and discussions to think through and anticipate issues that may arise as you work together. It can be exceedingly beneficial to set some minimal ground rules for how to interact and behave together, even if these are not formalized legally.

RESOURCE:

[Sample Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#)

Use this sample MOU to consider the legal elements of your relationships that you need to clarify and articulate. *Source: Institute for Nonprofit News*



PRO TIP:

There’s a spectrum of options between extensive legal documentation and none at all. For example, your collective may articulate verbal agreements via follow-up emails, or you may have written agreements with minimal elaboration. Figure out what works best for your group and seek legal advice if/as needs, concerns, or issues arise.

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We recommend that you do have some kind of MOU just to lay things out. They're complicated, and they're never complete. But just the practice of starting to think about what you need, what you need to account for, what happens if something arises, is important.”

[Nonprofit Collaborations: The Structural Options](#)

This blog outlines the legal structures that collaboratives might utilize. *Source: NEO Law Group, Nonprofit Law Blog*

Establish infrastructure for coordination and management.

Any collective requires dedicated capacity for coordination and facilitation of the members and organization of their activities. That capacity can take the form of a focal point or centralized hub, whether one or more individuals, that can be considered the collective's backbone. This backbone is likely a neutral, external party and not one of the participants given the potential contradictions and conflicts of interest.

Task: Establish a backbone to ensure communications and coordination

The backbone will fulfill several core functions. First and foremost, members need shared and centralized communications to ensure clarity within the group and effective messaging externally. The backbone must bring strong communication skills for sharing information and supporting cooperation within the collective as well as to collaboratively define messaging and manage external communications.

Second, collective fundraising requires a coordinated strategy. The collective will need the backbone to facilitate co-creative processes to design these strategies. This person(s) will also hold the strategy once it's developed, which entails project management for activities and ensuring member participation in them. The backbone should likewise ensure that all activities are collaborative, participatory, and inclusive of the full membership.

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Success requires a champion or a person who's in the center. and who is a very clear communicator. I feel like it's so important that someone can very clearly communicate why we're doing what we're doing and how to get on the same page or wavelength.”

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When you have a collaborative strategy, you really need one point person because otherwise, it gets confusing and messy. You need to have an experienced fundraiser who's going to be the main point person to coordinate across all the other members and make sure that there's a coordinated strategy and that funders won't be hit up multiple times by the same organization or different members.”

Task: Foster the backbone support as champion, moderator, facilitator, and mediator

As articulated above, the backbone should serve as a facilitator, coordinator, and project manager for the collective. Critically, the backbone should fulfill these roles while embodying a set of key qualities that are fundamental to fostering collaboration within the collective.

The backbone should serve as the glue for the members in their collaboration. They should build relationships, foster trust, and build the collective's collaborative culture, including shifting away from a scarcity mindset. The backbone should promote shared values in their approaches to the work, ensure that members have adequate opportunities to be involved and promote the collective's shared views and ideas. They should operate as a good faith mediator, especially with legal, financial, or budgetary issues. They should ensure transparency and limit their own discretion in activities and decisions.

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Our processes are super collaborative. Everybody's involved in developing the budget. It all gets done very transparently with the backbone staff facilitating the process.”

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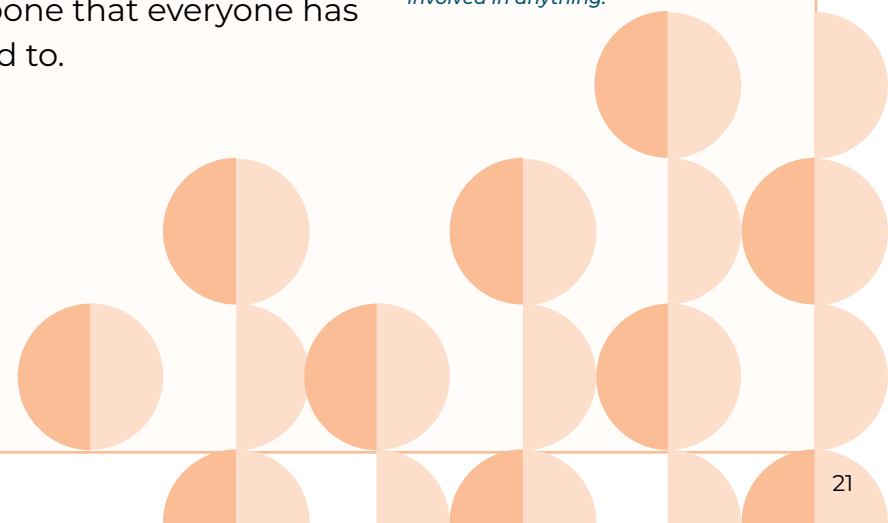
The secret sauce is that we as the backbone don't have to compete for that funding ourselves. We only take a 10% admin fee and only on some projects. So there's no scarcity mindset to it. We're always looking at where we can get more resources for everybody.”

The backbone should ensure a neutral approach. This is often premised on the backbone receiving the funds it needs to operate without competing with the members for funding. The backbone can be most effective when not competing for funding, whether because separate funding exists or there are clear and transparent processes for funding the backbone that everyone has agreed to.

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We as the backbone act as a good faith moderator, for example, helping to mediate and negotiate budget allocations per partner in a bid. There's a fair amount of staff influence and discretion about where to put effort – especially our own effort which then influences broader priorities – but other partners could have that influence if they're also putting in the time and getting behind projects.

We work hard to make sure things are transparent, ensuring info sharing from partners who are leading, making sure people have opportunities to get involved in anything.”



ACTIVITY 3

Operationalize equity between participants.

Ensuring that the collective's members believe in the equitable distribution of funds raised by the collective is necessary to both foster participation and mitigate any conflicts between newsrooms.

Task: Manage roles and responsibilities based on what people can bring, do, and contribute

Collective fundraising, like any collaborative effort, must be grounded in equity and inclusion amongst the members because collaboration only works when participants participate. As mentioned in Pillar 1, each member will bring their own strengths, skills, and assets into the collective. They should, and will likely opt into, certain roles and responsibilities based on those profiles and the types of activities and contributions that are most interesting or valuable to them.

A range of opportunities should be available for members to get engaged and an appropriate division of labor should be established with the recognition that roles and responsibilities will evolve and change over time. Any tensions that arise related to roles and responsibilities should be addressed in open, transparent ways.

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There were two main people who had all the links to all the funders and had arranged for all the initial efforts. Everyone else was sort of just a talking head when it came to fundraising.

And these two people not only had all the ideas, they had all the relationships, and that soured some people. It made it too easy for others to just continue aping on without any real knowledge of how fundraising works.”

Task: Structure fundraising and disbursement to mitigate competition

As the draw by newsrooms to the collective will presumably be the potential resources to be had, how funds are raised and how they're distributed amongst the collective's members must be clear, transparent, and consistent. Importantly, they must also be equitably disbursed amongst the members based on criteria that the collective agrees upon. Ideally, fundraising efforts and disbursement would be equalized based on contributions and participation. These arrangements may be articulated in any MOUs or formalized legal agreements.



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