

Grantmaking for SOGI programmes

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With issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity a relatively new field for funders, the opportunity exists for funders to exert strategic influence on the development of improved policy and practice.

The availability and limitations of funding can heavily influence response to forced migration. Because issues of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) are relatively new to many state and NGO actors in this field, and because current economic pressures are forcing some tough choices at all levels, current funding patterns are playing a decisive role in the development of this issue.

The term ‘funder’ needs definition for the purposes of this discussion. Indeed, the practice of many in this and other fields is to group all sources of funding under the category of ‘donor’, thereby sidestepping the various restrictions and opportunities associated with each type of funding:

Public: controlled by government officials and arising out of the budgets of governmental and intergovernmental agencies. This includes bilateral development and international cooperation funds as well as UN funding. Public funding is often driven by foreign policy priorities and commitments of states.

Private: includes funding from foundations, both public and private (which leads to some confusion). Roughly speaking, a private foundation receives funds from one or a small number of sources for the purposes of supporting charitable activities. Funds disbursed by the private foundation come from its assets. Public foundations receive ongoing support from the public, or at least a larger number of sources. Often they must engage in constant fundraising in order to maintain their giving programmes. A public foundation is essentially the same as an NGO; the difference is that public foundations accomplish their mission – and can influence policy – by raising money and making grants while NGOs accomplish their

mission by raising money and conducting advocacy, providing services, etc. The absence of cumbersome government administration allows some private funders to be more flexible and innovative in their grantmaking.

Sources and streams of funding

The latest and most comprehensive report tracking all international SOGI grantmaking identified a total of US\$35.5 million provided in 2010 by 64 institutions to organisations and projects in 94 countries working internationally or in the global South and East. This included public and private funding. Most dollars came from private funders. Although Sweden, the Netherlands and Norway all ranked amongst the top seven donor countries, the total of all public funding constituted was only 36% of the \$35.5m; the median grant size was \$15,000 and 91% were one-time awards.

Very little of this funding goes to forced migration issues. Half of all funds addressed human rights in a broad sense. Only \$601,550 were designated as addressing the issue of ‘Immigrant/Migrant Rights’ (including refugees and asylum seekers), representing 5.5% of the grant funds.

Equally informative is the question of which entities are making grants. The report identified the top grantmakers according to the total amount of dollars for SOGI issues. A comparison of that list with lists of major funders in the field of forced migration reveals little intersection.¹ Only a handful of foundations with the largest assets fund actively in both fields. If one looks at LGBT funders with the highest number of LGBT grants, as opposed to the largest amount of dollars, the overlap between the two funding communities is almost non-existent.

These data raise several issues. First, SOGI issues are still emerging in the field of forced migration. As is the case with issues where the obligation on states is still not settled, private funding, though small, will precede and exceed public funding. When governments establish LGBT people as a target of programming, the funding programmes will shift to incorporate SOGI issues. Second, even among private funders those most active in the field of forced migration are not engaging in these issues. Third, the current amount of funding, as well as the size of grants by funders in the SOGI field, is insufficient to support certain projects.

Recommendations for funders

These funding patterns present opportunities for funders, particularly private funders. First, private funding has been and can continue to be the primary source of support for activities to document and publicise trends of violence and discrimination as well as the establishment of networks within which LGBT people can identify themselves. In the same way that private funding has supported the development of demographic research techniques in the field of health and census-taking for LGBT people, private funding could also support the development, testing and validation of interview and investigatory guidelines regarding the complex area of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Second, private funders, through NGOs, could support professional development and training for staff at UNHCR and local agencies throughout the world. Until SOGI issues are considered part of the core practice of agencies dealing with forced migration, such programmes will often require outside assistance. As policy develops in this area, training and knowledge acquisition will be crucial.

Third, private funders can support the development of practices surrounding asylum claims, detention and status determination by providing representation to displaced persons. The funding role here is not to provide generalised services but rather to provide services with the goal of raising issues of practice in agencies working in this area, where their expertise does not include SOGI issues.

Last, funders whose primary grantmaking activities are in forced migration issues currently have the ability to strategically advance SOGI issues with a small number of grantmaking decisions. Until funding patterns change, the opportunities to establish models and precedent will remain strong. These funders hold a high degree of expertise and can guide initial innovations in the field.

We should note two potential caveats for the use of private funding for the support of LGBT individuals facing displacement. First, private funding, given that grants are usually small one-time disbursements, may increase risk. Such a grant may support an LGBT person to leave immediate danger, only to have the person fall short of a durable solution or be placed in a situation where their long-term vulnerability is increased. Secondly, private funders cannot be held accountable for whether their decisions – where and how to spend their funds – conform to international norms concerning displaced persons.

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1. This article relied on the following sources: Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues *A Global Gaze: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender And Intersex Grantmaking In The Global South And East 2010* www.lgbtfunders.org/files/A_Global_Gaze_2010.pdf as well as an internet search of the Foundation Center Philanthropy/Insight interactive map www.philanthropyinsight.org

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