

MANUFACTURING MORAL PANIC:

Weaponizing Children to Undermine Gender Justice and Human Rights

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The **Elevate Children Fundators Group** is the leading global network of fundators focused exclusively on the wellbeing and rights of children and youth. We focus on the most marginalized and vulnerable to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence.

Global Philanthropy Project (GPP) is a collaboration of fundators and philanthropic advisors working to expand global philanthropic support to advance the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people in the Global South and East.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations in this report are organized into two categories: **How to Fund** and **What to Fund**. In the first category, we offer recommendations regarding fund allocation processes and structures. In the second category, we suggest specific areas for intervention. It is important to note that in order to fully leverage the changemaking potential of their grantmaking craft, funders, philanthropic networks, and other members of the progressive ecosystem should try **to engage with both sets of recommendations simultaneously** as much as possible.

HOW TO FUND

George Lakoff argues that the success gender-restrictive groups have had in expanding their influence and mainstreaming their worldview is not only due to the amount of funding they get, but, more significantly, to how they are funded. It is not only a numbers game (although of course funding is important). It is a matter of how the money is allocated, for what purposes, through which processes, with what requirements, and for how long.

The strategies and mechanisms gender-restrictive funders use and the worldview that informs their decision-making process are different from those of most gender-justice and other progressive funders (Lakoff, 2004).

The following chart summarizes the main differences between funding approaches, strategies and rationale that Lakoff outlines, as well as our own findings in this study.

By pointing out these general differences we do not imply that gender justice and other progressive funders should emulate these strategies uncritically, or that some or all of them are not already part of the grantmaking craft. Our hope is to provide a tool for a comparative analysis to continue to defend and advance women's, children's and LGBT rights.

Aspect	How Gender-Restrictive Organizations tend to Fund	How Gender Justice and Other Progressive Organizations tend to Fund
Time-frame	Long-term (40-50 years)	Short-term projects (1-5 years)
Funding Mechanisms	Block grants, endowments, trust funds	Project-based grants, capacity building, service procurement
Distribution of Funds	Duplication as a worldmaking strategy. Allows for several organizations to be working on the same thing at the same time; reinforces key messages in different contexts and through different media; contributes to long-term development of the gender-restrictive organizational ecosystem	Duplication as wasteful. Organizations must differentiate themselves from others; spreads money thinly, narrowing scope and diminishing impact of work; may promote competition instead of collaboration
Funding Constraints	Few constraints. Freedom to decide how to spend the money; encourages risk-taking and provides rapid response capabilities, flexibility and adaptability	Project-based, deliverable-driven and impact-evaluation-contingent. Cumbersome reporting procedures to donors; little flexibility, stymies creativity because it has little room for failure
Use of the Funds	Worldmaking strategies. Career development, cohorts of policymakers and analysts, media organizations, funding scholars to conceptualize and frame key issues	Reactive strategies. Expenses and personnel tied to specific projects and service provision programs, narrow set of deliverables
Issues Funded	Interconnected, worldmaking issues. Broad campaigns and slogans (e.g., "gender ideology") that simultaneously engage with all or several issues considered key for their gender-restrictive worldview, including women's, children's and LGBT rights, as well as anti-democracy efforts and environmental deregulation	Specialized and targeted funding that creates silos and makes cross-issue, cross-sectoral, transnational, and intersectional collaboration difficult

Crafting a More Diverse, Risk Tolerant, and Flexible Funding Ecosystem

In order to shift from a reactive funding approach to a worldmaking one regarding women's, children's and LGBT rights, progressive funders should:

- **Ensure grantees have access to long-term unrestricted funding.** If you are unable to support this type of funding directly, work with grantees to identify who else is funding grantees and work with other funders to identify which specific gaps you might be able to fill with restricted funding (such as funding advocacy and narrative framing capacity building, wellbeing and security etc.)
 - Cultivate a **diverse ecosystem of funding opportunities** for your grantees. Including direct,

project, general operating and core support to create stable projects.

- Fund **more flexibly** to allow grantees to adapt to the changing, malleable tactics of gender-restrictive groups. Provide more unrestricted support to allow grantees to react.
- Actively and repeatedly **communicate to grantees working in this space that you understand and acknowledge the long-term nature of this work** and that change will likely be incremental.
 - Remain accessible to grantee partners and actively harvest non-monetary foundation support and communicate scope of commitment clearly and honestly.

- Work with partners to develop **alternative mechanisms to measure and/or understand the impact** along the way of long-term cultural change.
- Consider expanding funding **beyond individual organizations and key actors** to consider funding cohorts, networks, collective impact, etc. at the national and local levels.
 - Resource the ecosystem- work with other funders to ensure a robust and diverse civil society (cohorts, networks, collectives) at national and regional levels.
- Ensure **diversity of actors/voices** in these models and set expectations that the backbone of organizations will prioritize inclusivity and practices that prevent gatekeeping.
 - When funding feminist and/or women’s organizations do due diligence work to ensure they are not trans-exclusionary.
- Be conscious of **limiting donor influence**, agenda-setting, and credit-taking considering the neocolonial sensitivities in the gender-restrictive narrative.
 - Actively work to decolonize your grantee / foundation relationships within the parameters of the existing model.

Leadership for Coordinated Collaboration

Additionally, funders should consider **investing resources in leadership and coordinated collaboration** to maximize the conditions for cooperation, coordination, co-learning, and identification of action steps,

- Identify and begin to build **cross-issue, cross-national, and intersectional alliances** with key groups in the development and humanitarian sector who don’t necessarily see themselves as rights-based.
 - If their language isn’t rights-based, you could use resources like this report to identify aspects or concerns that would resonate to open communication channels.
 - If you don’t know who those actors are in the context in which you work, map them (ideally in partnership with other funders).

- **Identify potential pathways for collaboration within your own foundation**, whether that’s between geographic and issue-focused teams or across different issue-focused teams whose key populations are affected. Collaboration could span from ensuring these other teams are aware of this issue/research and sharing how it is affecting grantees to more intentional co-funding.
 - Fund to the edge of your grantmaking mandate.
 - Join funding collaboratives and co-funding tables to reduce risk, increase opportunity for shared learning and increase impact.
 - Build intra team initiatives at your foundation to strengthen institutional knowledge and strategic confidence.
 - Encourage thematic teams in foundations to work with the geographic teams in co funding and learning/knowledge development.
- When opportunities for collaboration with other funders emerge, make sure you know and are being **clear about what comparative advantage/ strength you bring to the table** and what you are and are not able to do/tolerate in terms of risk.
 - Leverage your institution’s strengths and know the limits to risk tolerance and mandate when entering partnerships and co funding agreements.
 - **Identify your organization’s tolerance for taking risk and committing to long-term funding** of an issue that may be perceived as “too risky.” Where are the hard lines and where are the opportunities to nudge towards the edge? If possible, do so in partnership with other teams internally, working to create an internal “advocacy” strategy that supports shifts towards the type of funding and strategy that will help move the needle.

WHAT TO FUND

A GUIDE TO HOPE-BASED COMMUNICATIONS

- *Talk about solutions, not problems*
- *Highlight what we stand for, not what we oppose*
- *Create opportunities, drop threats*
- *Emphasize support for heroes, not pity for victims*
- *Show that “we got this”!*

Source: [“Open Global Rights”](#)

Narrative Change, Framing, Worldmaking Strategies, and Creative Communications

Commit to and invest in **long-term work towards cultural shift and narrative change**.

- Support the creation and dissemination of **alternative, all-encompassing narratives** that creatively frame human rights values, take into consideration local histories and values, remain sensitive to the root causes of the anxieties and resistance mobilized by gender-restrictive groups, and reclaim the language of human rights and family values.
 - Emphasize and highlight **opportunities, solutions, heroes, and creative work** around key issues, not (only) problems or what gender justice or human rights advocates are reacting against.
 - Work with partners to **rethink the visual language and narrative** of human rights. Include storytelling, art, imagery, play, and interactivity in the communication process.
 - “Humanize the data.” Support work to **frame scientific research and evidence** in a way that connects with, and is meaningful and easy to understand for **the “movable middle”** in order to maximize its impact.
 - Amplify and distribute **narratives that do not equate religiosity with gender normativity**.
 - Work with partners to shift communication strategies to change perceptions that consider

human rights, whether children’s, women’s or LGBTI, as a very professionalized area that people don’t understand.

- Fund the creation of an ecosystem that allows the **collaborative creation of resources** that both acknowledge and address the damage done by disinformation campaigns about women’s, children’s, and LGBT rights.
 - Support the creation of **open-source resources** for everyone to use and adapt.
 - Focus on creating **targeted, youth-centered messaging** that presents an affirming and positive view of gender justice and human rights.
 - Consider funding **cross-sectoral problem definition and messaging workshops** with movement leaders and communications professionals.
- Support initiatives that aim to maintain the pace of **increasing communications training** and capacity development at the national level in **key/contested countries**.
 - Identify and fund **investigative journalism** with the intent of bringing visibility both to the issue and the actors. In particular, consider journalists and organizations who adopt creative, effective approaches to the format and distribution of these stories.
 - Fund a robust, diverse journalistic and documentation ecosystem that is disruptive, innovative and promises broad distribution.

Support Collaboration between Diverse Stakeholders and Frontline Organizations

- In collaboration with other funders, create space and fund **diverse groups of actors within key countries (and across key countries) to come together** to build alliances, learn from each other, and identify opportunities and who is doing what.
 - Do ensure these spaces are not donor-driven or designed around donor agendas.
 - Do ensure youth and communities are supported to participate authentically.
 - Support training and convenings to strengthen movement cohesion, cross regional learning and cohort leadership development.
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movement cohesion, cross regional learning and cohort leadership development.

- Prioritize working and engaging with **local governments and institutions**. Do not always—or exclusively—engage at the national level.
 - Support efforts to **monitor the particular political and economic situations in each country or region**, and consider providing resources to define country-specific strategies that involve local stakeholders, and funding initiatives beyond children’s, women’s, or LGBT rights.
 - Provide grantees with funds to **access communities and advocacy training** and capacity building at the local level. If possible, do so with cohorts of grantees and with other funders working in the same country.
- Prioritize working and engaging with youth. Partner with existing participatory funds who are already experienced and well-practiced in resourcing and **engaging youth** (including girls and LGBTI youth) authentically.
 - Ensure they are aware of this issue/research.
 - Generate strategies for youth participation and community participation where the needs of women and LGBTI people emerge organically, as opposed to importing international curricula, discourses, or best practices.
 - Bring children and LGBTI people into philanthropic spaces as advisors, contributors and participants.
 - Support work at the school level to articulate CSE and progressive values more deeply into the classrooms and in such a way that it acknowledges the cultural diversity and contextual differences.
- Provide grantees with resources to identify and **amplify the voices of local, regional, and international churches, religious leaders, and inter-faith organizations** that uphold their faith while affirming LGBT, women’s, and children’s rights and rejecting gender-restrictive agendas.
- Do ensure that grantees are supporting **trans-inclusive feminist work**.
- **Make any financial support for security (personal, infrastructure, physical, etc.) explicit and accessible** in grant agreement letters, reporting requirements, and other formal structures.
- Partner with existing organizations to **devise participation mechanisms to communicate and**

negotiate with the general population when progressive initiatives and policies, such as CSE, are being discussed.

Promote Shifts in Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes in Progressive Organizations

- If you are going to provide capacity building and training to support grantees working in gender justice and human rights, consider whether you are able and willing to **support grantees in identifying their own priorities and consultants they would like to engage**.
- **Cultivate a culture of learning**; fund actionable research that does not duplicate existing efforts.
 - As much as possible, try to fund the consolidation/synthesis/analysis of existing research on related issues (effective approaches to public mobilization, narrative-framing, etc.) before commissioning new research.
 - Consider whether the existing evidence base already adequately captures the work of activists, youth leaders, and truly community-led organizations.
 - Support efforts to monitor political and economic situations in each country or region that can help in the definition of country-specific strategies that involve the collaboration with local stakeholders.
 - Consider funding local or regional data monitoring centers and initiatives.
- Commission a **mapping of non-rights based (potentially humanitarian) development and foundations who fund children** to identify key potential partnership and/or leverage opportunities and actively engage in non-rights-based donor spaces.
 - Share resources, build learning tables and produce accessible materials to build authentic relationships.
- As much as possible, consider funding research to understand **concrete grant craft** for these issues: skills, tools, approaches, models, innovations, and lessons learned from previous projects.