



**URGENT  
ACTION  
FUNDS**

# **Sisterhood Feminist Principles of Philanthropy**





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# ABOUT THE PRINCIPLES OF PHILANTHROPY

Dear reader,

We are in a transformative moment of multiple crises. While the COVID-19 pandemic brings renewed grief and rage against endemic economic, racial, social, and global inequalities, we find respite and hope in the enduring joy, strength, and power of feminist movements. On this rapidly shifting ground, these movements are helping us to imagine and build new worlds.

As the Sisterhood of Urgent Action Funds, we are proud to share these Feminist Principles of Philanthropy as our vision of a world in which people and the planet flourish, and where bold, vibrant, and resourced social change movements bring about the equitable sharing of power and resources among all. These Principles speak to our commitment to use our unique positions in philanthropy – as independent feminist funds rooted in our regions – to bring about a world characterized by regenerative and nourishing interdependence, cultures of sharing, and collective care. We believe that as more and more of us practice these Principles, a new world can emerge.

We developed the Principles collaboratively over a two year process, most of it during the pandemic. They represent our collective wisdom across geographies and generations. In this document, we share a taste of our conversations and where we landed, along with examples of how the Principles show up in our practice.

We put them out into the world as our commitment to the women and LBTQI+ defenders we work with every day. We hope they give inspiration and guidance to those who contribute to transforming the practices and places of power. And we hope they will encourage more of you to join us on this journey.

In solidarity and co-responsibility,

Ndana Bofu-Tawamba, Urgent Action Fund-Africa

Virisila Buadromo and Vinita Sahasranaman, Urgent Action Fund Asia & Pacific

Laura Carvajal, Terry de Vries and Lorena Medina, Urgent Action Fund Latin America & Caribbean

Kate Kroeger, Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights

## ABOUT THE URGENT ACTION FUNDS

**The Urgent Action Funds are a global consortium of feminist funds that provide support for women and LGBTQI+ human rights defenders across the globe. Through our four Sister Funds – Urgent Action Fund-Africa (UAF-Africa), Urgent Action Fund Asia & Pacific (UAF A&P), Urgent Action Fund Latin America & Caribbean (UAF-LAC), and Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights (UAF WHR) – we collectively support feminist leadership and activism in more than 160 countries. We bolster feminist movements through Rapid Response Grants, coalition-building, collective care and protection, and feminist advocacy. Together, we have mobilized and provided over \$32 million in resources for women and LGBTQI+ defenders.**

In 1997 UAF WHR pioneered a new philanthropic model. We started with a simple but audacious idea: rapid, flexible grants that respond to the urgent and tactical needs of women human rights defenders. Why? Because that is what defenders said they needed. Rapid Response Grants support the resilience of women and LGBTQI+ defenders at critical moments for their activism, in times of both crisis and opportunity.

Within the first five years of UAF WHR’s founding, we listened to activists in Africa who said that they

wanted their own fund. African activists called for the establishment of an autonomous fund in Africa that could make grants and develop strategic initiatives more relevant to the continent. UAF-Africa was registered in 2001. With its founding, our Sister Funds model was born and has continued to grow.

Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & Caribbean (UAF-LAC) was launched in 2009. UAF-LAC has a special focus on care and protection from a cross-cultural and feminist lens, land and environmental rights, and on supporting human rights activism by women in contexts impacted by armed conflict.

Finally, Urgent Action Fund Asia & Pacific launched in late 2017, resourcing the resilience of women and LGBTQI+ human rights defenders by strengthening and sustaining webs of security and care as well as building a solidarity economy and transformed culture of giving in the regions.

**Together, we are the UAF Sisterhood. We are four Sister Funds, rooted in our regions and connected globally, working to sustain feminist movements.**

These Feminist Principles of Philanthropy shed light on the connected and distinct ways of how each of us works in our unique contexts, underscored by shared practices, threaded conversations, and shared commitment to defenders.





*Principle One*

**WE PRACTICE TRUST  
AND RESHAPE  
ACCOUNTABILITY**





## PRINCIPLE ONE - WE PRACTICE TRUST AND RESHAPE ACCOUNTABILITY

**We trust and fund women and LGBTQ+ human rights defenders. We act in solidarity with and fund a wide variety of women and LGBTQ+ defenders: those who live with and resist structures and systems of oppression. This includes people with disabilities, sex workers, Black communities, Indigenous communities, people living in poverty, people in high conflict areas, and more. Often these activists are not funded by anyone else.**

We trust our advisors. Across the Sister Funds we have treasured relationships with defenders in the communities in which we work. They possess unique, local knowledge about and insights on other defenders in their community and region who would benefit from our support. We expand our networks on their strategic suggestions. They provide immediate advice to help us respond to grant applications and share their reflections on important trends in our regions. We are continually integrating these insights and adapting our funding to meet evolving needs.

We trust organizations and movements. We put energy and resources into being guided by and respecting their autonomy. This means we do not impose our own agendas, strategies or perspectives. We challenge the disproportionate demand for monitoring and results, making our grants available with limited reporting. We offer flexibility and empathy in light of the daily challenges that activists face. In doing so we aim to reduce stress and build supportive and horizontal relationships.

We trust our board and staff. We are feminist activists ourselves who come from movements we support. We back each other's knowledge, experiences, and insights. We trust our ability to understand the context of what we hear and to hear not only what is being said, but also what is not being said. That is, as activists, we understand what might be behind the pauses, the silences, the awkwardness. And we know how to pull a thread, how to unravel a complex issue and begin to find new ways to solve the dilemma.

**As one of our partners said: “When you speak with Urgent Action Fund, you’re speaking at eye level: activist to activist.”**

We are both funding recipients and donors, a key dual identity that we bring into our understanding and reshaping of accountability. We endeavor to challenge the inequalities and systems of privilege in traditional donor relationships, which are detrimental to building a just and equitable world. In our relationships with our donors, we strive to build relationships of mutual respect and recognition of our shared common purpose.

As Sister Funds, we trust each other. We co-create feminist philanthropy with grantees, advisors, staff, boards, and other feminist funds. We take seriously the imperative of taking time to reflect on our impact and share lessons learned. We ground our decision-making in our accountability to movements and the wider ecosystem. We ask ourselves: is this action appropriate for the UAF Sisterhood or is it something that is better led by others?

## MEETING THE COVID-19 MOMENT

**We began nearly 25 years ago as an experiment in rapid response grantmaking – a feminist response to rising threats to women and LGBTQI+ defenders across the globe. As Sister Funds working with shared values and principles, we have centered trust in defenders and accountability to movements ever since.**

This approach was critical when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Through immediate dialogue with our communities – and from our experience responding to other epidemics and pandemics – like Ebola and HIV – we understood early on that survival in this public health and human rights crisis was a political act of resistance for activists and defenders. We broadened our grant criteria, expanding definitions of ‘care,’ ‘security,’ and ‘sustainability’ so we could fund communities’ basic needs. Quickly adapting our funding to meet movement needs, we collectively doubled our grantmaking from 551 grants in 2019 to 1091 in 2020. As the pandemic continues, we’ll continue to practice movement accountability by consulting, adapting, and flexing our support as needed to meet our mandate of sustaining feminist activism worldwide.





An illustration featuring two hands, one from the top and one from the bottom, holding a large green leaf. The hands are rendered in shades of brown and tan. The background is a mix of colors including orange, green, and purple, with various patterns like floral and geometric designs. The overall style is modern and artistic.

*Principle Two*

# **WE INTERROGATE AND CHALLENGE POWER**

## PRINCIPLE TWO - WE INTERROGATE AND CHALLENGE POWER

### **The UAF Sisterhood exists within a complex galaxy of power structures and power relations.**

As we stand with women and LGBTQI+ defenders, we navigate power structures on a day-to-day basis. In our vision of a world in which all people and the planet flourish, we support those who are transforming systems of oppression. We are committed to the co-creation of new structures and systems predicated on interdependence and the equitable sharing of power and resources.

We know each of us exists within a particular constellation of power and privilege, so we seek to be self-aware of these dynamics and relationships. We navigate between power structures and relations in our own interactions – within our individual Sister Funds, within the Sisterhood, and with grantees, donors, other feminist funders, and the broader funding ecosystem.

We recognize that dominant ‘cultures of giving’ have reinforced global economic inequalities and perpetuated legacies of the colonial state through the power of the ‘donor’ over the ‘recipient.’ We draw from women’s rights activists Srilatha Batliwala, Lisa VeneKlasen, and Valerie Miller’s explorations of power, and their observations that ‘power over’ derives from direct power and positional authority, is associated with control over resources, and can quickly slide into domination<sup>1</sup>. To counter this, we envision ‘cultures of sharing’ instead.

We hope that, over time, our vision of ‘cultures of sharing’ will lead to shifts in who gives, how communities expand their understanding of who has the greatest needs, and how communities embrace a more expansive and transformative agenda as they share their resources with others to meet those needs.

In our vision of ‘cultures of sharing’ we adopt the ‘power with’ model – standing shoulder-to-shoulder in creating solidarity, mutual support, and collective expression to create change and speak truth to power. Using the ‘power with’ lens, we ask who in our community needs the most and how we can share resources more equitably. We notice when it is easier to redistribute resources and when it is harder. We focus our attention on the peoples who miss out, challenging their marginalization and the ways in which their needs are diminished or dismissed. We also learn from Indigenous peoples and their cultures of sharing power, including how they navigate the shadow side of sharing – noticing who holds the power in defining who, what, and how sharing occurs.

We believe we can find ‘power within’ ourselves, even though we may not always recognize or use it. Batliwala reminds us that “[p]eople are often made to believe they are powerless or inferior because of their location in a social power structure... but [w]hen we connect this inner power with the power that lies within others, we can build change processes that can dismantle and transform seemingly unchangeable power structures.”

We observe the role of ‘power under’ – particularly in social justice movements. Batliwala describes ‘power under’ as the unhealed powerless rage of people who have survived injustices.<sup>2</sup> It manifests in the survival tactics of people living under the oppression of ‘power over,’ like sabotage or false flattery. If we have not healed our past harms, we are likely to carry those tactics into our work in social justice movements. In these moments our Sisterhood honors our shared humanity, love, and solidarity and encourages individuals to develop personal practices for self-reflection and self-awareness of power.

Equally important, we seek to disrupt power patterns through reflection and naming: exploring the different expressions of power that are being manifested and calling each other in with care, through both individual and organizational self-reflection. We make space for intentional, hard, courageous, and compassionate conversations to interrogate power in all its manifestations and to set a vision for the changes we want to see.

### **We are power with.**

<sup>1</sup>Srilatha Batliwala. *Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation: Clearing the Conceptual Cloud*. CREA, 2011; Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller. *Power and empowerment*. PLA Notes, 43: 39-41, 2002.

<sup>2</sup>Batliwala, 39-40.

## **BUILDING ‘POWER WITH’ IN PHILANTHROPY**

**The Sisterhood is a generative site for the navigation, disruption, and healing of unequal power relations. As leaders and representatives of our Sister Funds, we step into conversations about power with care and vulnerability, interrogating how power and privilege manifest among us along lines of race, ethnic or cultural identity, age, gender and sexuality, geography and proximity to funders, and fluency and ease in English.**

As we move in the philanthropic ecosystem, including resourcing our work and navigating relationships with donors, there is a perpetual dance to resist and reframe the colonial dynamics still present in the sector. Donors continue to look for our northern headquarters, which does not exist. While UAF-LAC, UAF-Africa and UAF A&P invest time in building direct relationships with U.S and Europe-based donors, U.S.-based UAF WHR consciously works to shift the gaze of those donors to the collective leadership of the Sister Funds across the world. We also rotate leadership of funding partnerships, meaning that each Sister Fund takes turns receiving grants and disbursing funds to the others, as one practical step towards building a decolonial and Global South feminist philanthropy.







*Principle Three*

**WE NAVIGATE RISK  
WITH CARE**

## PRINCIPLE THREE - WE NAVIGATE RISK WITH CARE

**In feminist work, risk is intrinsically political. In our work we are speaking back to the structures of ‘power over,’ mobilizing the collective’s ‘power with’ to challenge inequality and injustice. Risk is inherent.**

We notice the geopolitical dimensions of risk and draw attention to the western fixation on ‘risk management’ – the irrational notion that you can enforce a sense of control over the inherent uncertainty of life. Who gets to define and determine the appropriate level of “risk”? Why is the risk of funding something new valorized in venture capitalism but too often a deal breaker when it comes to funding new groups of activists? Is backlash to a grantee partner’s work a failure of risk management or is it a sign that power has effectively been challenged?

Nonetheless, we are mindful to ensure we do not add to the danger activists face. Over two-thirds of the Sister Funds’ support goes to defenders impacted by conflict and in countries where civic space is considered ‘closed.’ In solidarity with defenders who work with regular threats to life, we often do not publicize our relationships and we work with flexibility to ensure our resources reach them safely without exposing their identity.

Defenders tell us that a focus on physical risk trivializes less visible threats, such as defamation, slander, and other forms of psychological abuse. These are also violations. Equating the definition of a defender as one exposed to physical risk also delegitimizes activists who have been at the forefront of defending human rights, who live with daily intimidation and derogation. We also understand “unhealthy” activist and funding practices as a source of risk, as they lead to burnout and other impacts on individual and collective wellbeing. In our funding of care, we seek to reduce those risks and nurture more sustainable approaches, so activists can sustain and enjoy their lives and work.

We feel it is important not to glamorize risk, which heralds the individual hero and diminishes the strategic support of social movements that sustain activists. We fund activists to build proactive responses to the unabated risks they face, including ecosystems of collective care and protection, and not only ad hoc emergency assistance.

Lastly, we realize that managing the inherent risks of our work requires building resilience – not only externally, but also within our Sister Funds. We hold this with care, too.

## FACING RISK WITH COURAGE AND CONVICTION

While women and LBTQI+ defenders face risks everywhere, threats increase in times of conflict and unrest. As the crisis in Afghanistan grew, the Sister Funds mobilized resources and relationships to meet women and LBTQI+ defenders' escalated and urgent needs. Relying on their network of 26 advisors across Afghanistan and neighboring countries, UAF A&P significantly sped up processing of grant applications. With the collapse of the Afghan financial system, we successfully moved resources through widely-used informal cash transfer systems and disbursed nearly 100 grants to women and LBTQI+ defenders and groups facing extreme risk. Grants continue to support safe passage to neighboring countries, refuge and resettlement, and security, protection and psychological support for activists who remain. UAF A&P and UAF WHR worked closely together to identify and respond to requests in the surrounding countries of Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan; advocate for the holistic needs of defenders in international spaces; and mobilize increased resources for the long road ahead.

As we work to support the safety and resilience of defenders facing extreme risks, we are also mindful about the risks that we bear ourselves as the channels for these resources – a critical node in the funding ecosystem and one that needs care and support too.



*Principle Four*

# **WE GROUND IN COLLECTIVE CARE AND PROTECTION**



## PRINCIPLE FOUR - WE GROUND IN COLLECTIVE CARE AND PROTECTION

**The Sisterhood asserts a politicized practice of collective care and protection, recognizing that the two are inseparable: without collective care, the protection of defenders is not sustainable. We help women and LGBTQI+ defenders, communities, and organizations sustain their lives and long-term social change work. We also help them to stay safe – physically, emotionally, and digitally. We interrogate the root causes of collective emotional, mental, and spiritual distress caused by persistent forms of exclusion, violence, and marginalization.**

We recognize that each struggle is an experience felt in the body. Our bodies are gendered and racialized, penetrated by material conditions, as well as by age, skills, limitations, and other factors. Therefore, our bodies are impacted by the inequalities to which they are subjected, whether rural, Indigenous, Black or mestiza women, urban lesbian or trans youth, or people with disabilities. If we are to protect and care for defenders, it is essential to recognize these differences: even if the threats are similar, the risks are not.

We go beyond a focus on an individual's access to leisure time and activities, or mental health management strategies. Our collective care and protection includes activists, families, organizations, community, and environment. We focus on the ways in which our networks can nurture us. And we believe fundamentally in the wisdom of women and LGBTQI+ defenders to find their own solutions to their care and protection needs.

We accompany organizations and networks as they develop their care responses. We stand in solidarity and co-responsibility, asking clarifying and prompting questions and providing funding to develop and deliver these responses.

Our approach to collective care and protection also necessitates changes in organizational cultures – both our own and those within movements. We rethink our ideas and approach to risks to consider them in relation to the entire ecosystem – the people and planet. We work hard to support the digital security of grantees. We collectively respond to emotional weariness. We change our policy frameworks to incorporate individual and organizational practices of care. We offer practical support. And we create opportunities to spend sacred time together when we meet.

We also acknowledge and work with 'woundology,' a concept that Hope Chigudu and Rudo Chigudu draw on to describe the dynamic of "investing in the authority of wounds as opposed to actually healing them."<sup>3</sup> We continue our practice of questioning and critiquing even the most sacred tenets of our movements and ways of organizing, challenging them when they lead to disillusionment and burnout.

<sup>3</sup>Hope Chigudu and Rudo Chigudu. Strategies for Building an Organisation with a Soul. African Institute for Integrated Responses to VAWG & HIV/AIDS (AIR), 2015.

## AN EVOLUTION OF CENTERING CARE

Our work on collective care and protection emerged through our practice of actively listening to women and LBTQI+ defenders. As we began to receive requests to support health and wellbeing, we held conversations with activists about physical and emotional burnout and the deeply personal cost of their efforts. In 2007, UAF WHR's book *What's the Point of Revolution if We Can't Dance?* sparked a new era of dialogue about activists' wellbeing, challenging funders and activists alike to re-define sustainability and support self care. Led by UAF-LAC – a leader in the Sisterhood for its deeply grounded work on care – we are on the cusp of releasing new global research, inspired by the first book. This forthcoming publication shares an evolution of the original thinking, captures the shifts in practice that have emerged as we have worked with defenders to reconceptualize collective care and protection, and lifts up the new questions and reflections we have in this moment.

One example of this evolution is UAF-Africa's creation of the Feminist Republik – a platform for women human rights defenders in Africa that centers holistic security, safety, wellbeing, and collective care. Another is UAF A&P's Webs of Safety and Care, which seek to establish sustainable ecosystems and networks of care anchored in communities, rather than individuals or organizations. Each Sister Fund has deepened and extended its support for collective care. We are now evolving our work even further with *Care at the Center: a global offering from the Urgent Action Funds*, a multi-year effort to build holistic collective care infrastructure for our movements, rooted in our regions and woven into global projects. From healing farms and centers for rest and respite to a transnational healing justice fellowship and Global South-based feminist risk registry, the initiative is the latest expression of our commitment to deepening the resilience, wellbeing, and safety of defenders and centering care in all that we do.







*Principle Five*

**WE ARE  
INTERDEPENDENT  
AND INDEPENDENT**

## PRINCIPLE FIVE - WE ARE INTERDEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT

### **We are interdependent and independent as a political choice.**

We stand together, valuing our connection and interdependence, while celebrating our diversity and independence. We are rooted in our own regions, which brings immeasurable strength to the support we offer our communities. Together, we build cultures of power sharing and co-responsibility.

The unique UAF Sister Fund model of international philanthropy upends the paradigm of organizations headquartered in the Global North with branches in the Global South. In our model, each Sister Fund has its own registration, board, staff, budget, and advisors. This allows for locally-driven programs and nuanced work in each region. Each is solely responsible for receiving applications and making grants and has full autonomy over its own programs and work.

While we are independent, we have a shared herstory and set of values – a common DNA. We operate from a feminist perspective characterized by trust, cooperation, collaboration, compromise,

and respect for the dignity and autonomy of each Sister Fund. Our work is at its strongest when we find a constructive balance of autonomy and collaboration.

Together, the UAF Sister Funds build global visibility through our shared identity and collective voice, enabling us to speak with one megaphone on advocacy issues that are relevant to each and all. We share a deep curiosity that drives us to learn and innovate both together and independently. While there is ongoing coordination on shared initiatives, no one Fund oversees the work of the others.

We are committed to practices of co-responsibility and power sharing. For us, this means an ongoing reflection on our personal and collective practices, decisions, actions or omissions, grounded in the awareness that we are mutually engaged and share responsibilities – as opposed to power sitting with any one individual or organization. We see this as a continuation of our political decision to pursue interdependence and independence.

# CHARTING OUR SHARED PATHS

Our shared commitment to the Sisterhood is documented in a formal collective agreement that guides our work together. The agreement outlines our collaborations in the areas of fundraising, communications, advocacy, and learning and impact; maps out roles; and provides a framework for decision-making. We also have a set of *shared values* that guide our collective work: working with a soul; collective visioning and experimentation; celebration of diversity; and power-sharing, interdependence, and co-responsibility. And, of course, we have these *Principles of Philanthropy*. Overall, we work to balance our independence and interdependence, our autonomy and collaboration, by creating processes that allow individuals and Sister Funds to step up and back when needed, while collective work moves forward based on trust.

On a shared initiative like *Care at the Center*, for example, each Sister Fund holds full autonomy over the work in her regions. Each global component of the initiative is anchored by one Sister Fund, who leads the collaborative work on behalf of the Sisterhood. Major decisions that impact all Sister Funds are subject to collective discussion and decision-making, guided by our collective agreement, shared values, and Principles. Along with the deepened relationships and trust with each other that we have built over the years, these foundational pieces have served us well in reaching consensus easily. All Sister Funds have an equal say, and if there is any disagreement or question, we make space to discuss the issues and make the necessary changes or accommodations until we reach common ground.

*Principle Six*

**WE BUILD OUR  
RESOURCES WITH  
POLITICS AND ETHICS**



## PRINCIPLE SIX - WE BUILD OUR RESOURCES WITH POLITICS AND ETHICS

**Our approach to generating and granting funds is grounded in our politics and ethics. This means we pay careful attention to the what, how, and who of our resourcing.**

When we think about the ‘what,’ we foreground our commitment to the emergence of a ‘regenerative and nourishing interdependence’ – the shift from systems and structures predicated on human domination over nature to one which recognizes the interdependence of natural and human ecosystems. Therefore we explore the colonial legacies of our political, cultural, and economic systems and structures. We challenge the hierarchies of power and knowledge that favor patriarchal and western knowledge and practices at the cost of other forms of knowledge and ways of relating.

We grow our resources to fund women and LBTQI+ defenders. We do this recognizing that the money/politics/power nexus too often acts against these defenders, and that philanthropy systemically underfunds their movements. This is at the heart of our politics and ethics: to pause and pay attention to who needs care and how best to offer that care, to re-imagine how and why we share power and resources, and to advance our vision of interdependence.

Regenerative and nourishing interdependence embraces solidarity economies that value the full cost of human activities to all people and the planet. It asks us to challenge and transform values at the heart of the orthodox economic system: to make visible who and what is valued and not valued, as well as whose interests are served and whose are subjugated.

As such, we seek to transform the politics of resourcing. We move towards a collective culture of sharing, activating new and emerging national and regional resources beyond the Global North, and cultivating middle-class philanthropy. In diversifying who gives resources, we can shift power in who sets the agenda and how we share resources. We hope that over time, this collective culture of sharing will lead to communities embracing a more expansive and transformative agenda as they share their resources with others.

As we consider the ‘how,’ it is important for the Sisterhood to strategically position our voices in solidarity with defenders. This means recognizing that while sometimes we can affect greater change by entering into a partnership with a funder, at other times this change comes about by refusing to be aligned with specific forms of money/power/politics. To stand in solidarity with those seeking to draw attention to the ethical limitations of a particular resource, sometimes we will have to decline funding.

Equally, it is important to us as Sister Funds to stand together when the geopolitics of donor priorities give rise to inequities in funds available for some regions over others. This means leveraging our collective strength to try to intervene in the inequitable funding landscape. Our feminist politics tell us that our liberation is bound together; the struggles in any one region are as important as in all of them.

## REGENERATING RESOURCES

**In practice, this principle requires constant attention. When it works well, what it looks like is the Sisterhood collectively developing a feminist political analysis of a source of funding and assessing whether there is alignment. It looks like a strategic discussion about opportunities for influence, or a Sister Fund receiving a call from a donor and taking it to the Sisterhood rather than accepting it for their region alone. It looks like the Sisterhood collectively stepping back from a funding opportunity, or one or two Sisters declining while others go forward: all with conscious intent.**

Yet it doesn't always look like this. In those moments, the geopolitics of donor strategy and priority have worked for some in the Sisterhood and not others. In those moments, we have reflected retrospectively, sat in conversations of vulnerability and accountability, and drawn lessons into new commitments for the Sister Funds and Sisterhood.

As we build our collective strength, we are seizing opportunities to build cultures of sharing. In 2020, we received a transformative gift from MacKenzie Scott: \$20 million, wholly unrestricted. As we considered how to use these resources, we co-developed three intentions to guide our stewardship of the gift: we seek to be regenerative, to grow the gift so that it reverberates beyond the Sister Funds; be creative and take risks; and foster reciprocity and cultures of sharing. Accordingly, a portion of the funds will be invested so it regenerates over time. Another portion will be gifted to organizations in our regions, so it is shared with partners in our movements. The rest will be used for each Sister Fund's needs and creative, bold visions.

*Principle Seven*

**WE CHALLENGE  
DOMINANT  
NARRATIVES  
ON EFFICIENCY  
AND TIME**







## PRINCIPLE SEVEN - WE CHALLENGE DOMINANT NARRATIVES ON EFFICIENCY AND TIME

**Our founding impulse – to get urgently needed funds into the hands of women and LBTQI+ defenders quickly and with ease – underscores our innate commitment to deconstructing traditional notions of efficiency and time.**

From the get-go we have challenged the status quo, examining how concepts and constructs serve (or do not serve) women and LBTQI+ defenders and centering those defenders – rather than donors – in our deliberations. For activists facing immediate threat or a short window of opportunity, we move rapidly to release funds and subvert the usual timelines of funding decisions. We commit to standing with defenders on their terms and with timelines that meet their needs.

We have also learned the importance of pausing – as a space in which to settle and build the relationships that will support our ability to move quickly when the circumstances require it, as well as to nurture our ability to move slowly in the rapidly paced world of these times. In slowing down we make the time to listen

carefully for the voices that can sometimes be hard to hear amidst the clamor of this frantic world. We make time to see each other's whole selves, and we create a collective space that allows people to step in-and-out as their lives require. We pause to take time to pull threads, unravel assumptions, expand into unexplored corners of a debate, build a collective knowledge base, and support a multiplicity of voices to contribute to it.

This collectivized speed-up-slow-down/step-in-step-out model speaks to our belief that in reframing efficiency and time we deepen the solutions we are able to generate in this complex world. It also speaks to our resistance to the late-capitalist version of harried worker-humans. We instead embrace our commitment to being with each other as whole humans. By inviting our authentic selves to be present at work, we contribute to the co-development of bold, vibrant, and creative movements that will bring about the interdependent world that our people and planet need.

## MOVING AT THE SPEED OF CARE

**Over the years, we have continued to redefine what it means to be a ‘rapid’ response grantmaker. When we moved to mobile text-based funding requests, we sped up our processes. Our Rapid Response Grants can be released within a 72-hour window, but sometimes the imperative of our work requires even more: in 2020, UAF-Africa broke its prior grantmaking record and released a grant in just two hours.**

On the other hand, when the COVID-19 pandemic increased the calls on our speed and we began to receive an unprecedented number of applications, it was also a time for us to find individual and collective moments of pause. In each Sister Fund, we rethought ‘productivity,’ adopting practices like shortening work weeks, closing our virtual offices, and providing psychosocial support to team members. We experimented with new leadership structures that allowed for power-sharing so colleagues could step in and back as needed, sharing workloads to allow for rest while minimizing disruption to our work. In the Sisterhood, we acknowledge the impacts of unequal access to vaccines and proper health care. We continue to interrogate how to practice feminist solidarity with each other and adapt our feminist leadership practices so we can respond to our sisters’ needs and still hold the work that lies ahead. We also seek to influence donors to challenge some of their own narratives about efficiency and productivity, encouraging them to shift practices that create stress for activists.





*Principle Eight*

# **WE LEARN AND EVOLVE**

## PRINCIPLE EIGHT - WE LEARN AND EVOLVE

**We learn and evolve together by respecting the insights and contexts that drive each Sister Fund and the activists we work with. Learning, action, and experimentation are all critical components of our collective practice as we work to change ourselves as well as the work we do together. While our tools and approaches differ, what unites us are our commitments. These are to listen to what our grantees, advisors, staff, boards, and feminist fund peers are saying; set aside time for careful consideration, reflection, and learning; and integrate the lessons into our strategic approaches and daily practices.**

As with our other principles, we bring our feminist politics to our learning and evolution. We recognize that learning is about power. The power to define when we learn, how we learn, and what tools and data we use to learn. Power undergirds our decisions on what change is being sought, how the change will be measured, what data is considered valid, how it will be captured, who will determine the story the data tells us, and what lessons will be acted upon.

Regardless of the framework we use for learning, we try to take a feminist, participatory approach. Feminist monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) is not so much a universal framework, but rather a set of approaches that enable questions of power and politics in MEL to be unpacked. We challenge the power of

the ‘MEL expert’ and explore processes that democratize the design, data collection, sense-making, and knowledge building. This also requires the traditional power holders that usually drive MEL processes – like researchers and funding partners – to relinquish power.

Learning and evolution are in our DNA. In our first breath, we evolved and transformed the traditional approach to getting funds to women and LGBTQI+ defenders and became the first to design a rapid response grantmaking model. In the breaths we’ve taken since, we’ve expanded new life into concepts of ‘security’ – evolving to focus, instead, on collective care and protection.

The regular pauses we take to reflect and learn – within our Sister Funds, the Sisterhood, with the activists we work with and the feminist funding ecosystem – are a political practice on our part. We allocate funds to show we value this work, that we see it as core to who and what we are, as funders of feminist transformation.

The pace of our world runs counter to these reflective spaces, but they are central to our commitment to the emerging cultures of sharing and a world built on regenerative and nourishing interdependence.

## LEARNING TO STRENGTHEN PRACTICE

**Our Sisterhood offers rich opportunities for collective learning, strategy, and practice. One example is when we came together to create a ‘learning circle’ to support our shared commitment to better meet the needs of women and LGBTQI+ defenders working for disability justice. Each Sister Fund was at a different point in its journey to meaningfully center disability justice in our work: some had conducted organizational disability audits; others had held consultations with defenders and facilitated participatory research; some had women with disabilities among their staff, board, and advisors; and others had revamped their outreach and grantmaking strategies. We came together to share experiences, develop a learning agenda, and craft a shared framework that is in constant dialogue with context-specific approaches in each region.**

Another example is our deepening commitment to language justice. Engagement in the Sisterhood has inspired each Sister Fund to understand language justice more profoundly and to strengthen our practices, both globally and in our regions. For example, A&P has translated its application forms into an increasing number of languages, along with making their website accessible. At the collective level, we ensure that interpretation is available in our internal and external practices and take care with how our terminology translates into multiple languages.

## A NOTE ON LANGUAGE JUSTICE

**Language forms us and our ideas about the world around us. Yet language is a deeply implicated part of the inequitable power structures and systems of oppression in which the Sister Funds operate. Language justice calls on us to work in a way that ensures all people can communicate in the language and accent in which they feel most comfortable and fully human. It makes evident the ways in which historical and present-day inequalities are perpetuated through policies and practices of language injustice.**

In developing these Principles of Philanthropy, alongside our Sisterhood Theory of Change, we used English as our common language, and we have experienced both its limitations and

opportunities. We recognize the power and politics of English as the language of the colony. We have also had the benefit of working in a language that engages with gender and grammar differently than others that rely on masculine and feminine constructions. This has particularly affected some concepts at the heart of our model: Sister Funds and Sisterhood. In English, these words evoke an ethos, though they are undeniably gendered in a way that is limiting. In French, Portuguese, Arabic, and Spanish (the languages of our initial translations) they are difficult to translate – both technically and conceptually. We are evolving a work-in-progress space for the Sister Funds to explore contextually-appropriate language to convey our core concepts, and to bring the politics of language justice into our day-to-day practices and discussions.





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