

Smart Philanthropy

GIRL'S BEST FRIEND FOUNDATION

set out to change the world.

In 14 years, we changed our corner of it.

We used \$8.3 million in grants, nearly \$1 million in programming, deep staffing, visionary leadership, laser focus, and (last, but truly not least) partnerships with powerful groups.

Together, we strengthened organizations and developed young women leaders in Chicago.

And that's what it was all about.

Here's what worked for us.

How can foundations develop mutual honesty and trust with grantees?

- 1 Accept grantee organizations as they are while helping them become what they wish to be.
- 2 Offer input in the spirit of a true partnership.
- 3 Directly voice questions, encourage tested practices, and offer resources.
- 4 Be reliable and practice what you preach.
- 5 Learn from grantees what is hot and what is not in their field of practice; rely on this information when reviewing funding priorities.
- 6 Give credit to and seize opportunities to promote grantees' work with prospective supporters.

"I knew it would be
a safe conversation.
I knew I could make
the call without
jeopardizing my funding."

—GBF GRANTEE



How can grantee and foundation staff be learners and leaders?

- 1 Clearly articulate vision, goals, and tools to be used. Focus your work and align resources. Review regularly.
- 2 Emphasize and fund an expansive definition of professional development.
- 3 Build in time for reflection — after programs, grants cycles, years' ends. Make new insights and ideas explicit. Apply them, and reflect again.
- 4 Routinely ask for and use feedback, questions, and ideas (a.k.a. evaluation).
- 5 A foundation program can be an incomparable learning lab.

"GBF's Leadership Circle was an amazing experience. It was really about developing each of us in terms of what we needed from our organizations to progress. There were opportunities for self-reflection, to voice dreams, and also to deal with challenges."

—GBF GRANTEE



How can a foundation take intelligent risks?

- 1 Combine high expectations with high resources for high impact by grantees.
- 2 Combine high expectations with high resources for high impact by foundations.
- 3 Encourage everyone to ask critical questions and consider possible outcomes to decide if benefits outweigh risks.
- 4 It's smart to test the waters, but when you jump, jump deep; fully commit to the effort.
- 5 Be real — not every grant will succeed. But without risk, experiments and new directions are sadly limited.
- 6 Budget to respond to unanticipated opportunities and crises of grantees and across the field you support.

"As a guiding force, GBF's founder,
Cyndie McLachlan,
urged her sister board members and
staff to think big, be bold,
and take risks with and for girls."

—EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Girl's Best Friend Foundation



How can foundations promote faster, rooted social change?

- 1 Acknowledge and fund girls and youth as key, often overlooked social change movers and shakers.
- 2 Most adults need to learn to be effective allies of young people. Urge training as an essential component of their intergenerational work.
- 3 Prioritize work that develops lifetime activists. Prioritize activism for today... and the long run.
- 4 Accelerate organizational and movement capacity by funding over time, generously, and aiming for a mix of interconnected activities.
- 5 Break isolation and build cooperative power with a menu of peer learning opportunities.

"I didn't consider
myself a leader
until I got involved in the
[GBF girls] program—and it's
funny, you never consider
yourself being
a leader until
somebody
tells you."

—GBF GRANTEE



How can foundations foster the development of powerful girls and youth?

- 1 Fund gender conscious spaces where young people can be themselves, discover, and create.
- 2 Balance concern for individual development with attention to collective power.
- 3 Ready adults to support youth participation and decision-making within organizations.
- 4 Support teaching girls and youth how to use participatory evaluation and action research to examine, question, and analyze issues.
- 5 Generously make professional development and networking opportunities possible for youth workers.
- 6 Be curious — notice what catalyzes the involvement of girls and youth, and share your findings.

"I really liked when we worked on a video about young women and media because we were making our own documentary. I liked that power.

—GBF GRANTEE



How can "sunsetting" help foundations do their best work?

- 1 Use a finite lifespan to let loose with an ambitious vision.
- 2 See the strategic opportunities illuminated by an endpoint.
- 3 Use a high focus, high engagement model of philanthropy to achieve powerful results.
- 4 Use all the foundation's resources — money, connections, expertise, a bird's eye view, meeting space, authority, research, and much, much more — to make rapid, lasting change.
- 5 Aspire to put into motion valuable programs, organizations, and modes of thought and practice that had not existed before.

"GBF is revolutionary.
They're not just leaving;
they're leaving a mark.
I think it's so phenomenal.
They'll still be here even
though they're not here."

—GBF GRANTEE



Powerful Philanthropy

To learn more about what girls, youth workers,
and community leaders said about GIRL'S BEST
FRIEND FOUNDATION'S impact, see our online
evaluation at www.girlsbestfriend.org.

Our website will be available through 2012.

GIRL'S BEST FRIEND FOUNDATION was created
by Cynthia K. McLachlan. It opened in 1994 and
closed in 2008. Foundation records and materials are
archived in Special Collections of the University of
Illinois, Chicago, www.uic.edu/depts/lib/specialcoll.



Act like a girl:
Be bold. Be curious. Be yourself.