



THE FUND
FOR GLOBAL
HUMAN
RIGHTS

FROM THE FRONT LINES

GRANTEES SHARE
STRATEGIES, CHALLENGES,
AND FEEDBACK

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alison Miranda is the Fund's director of learning and assessment. She leads the Fund's learning and assessment team and program to enable values-driven learning and assessment of our contribution to change.

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ABOUT THE FUND FOR GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS

The Fund for Global Human Rights equips grassroots activists across the globe with the financial and strategic support they need to improve lives, mobilize movements, and build a better future for their communities. Since 2002, the Fund has raised and invested over \$100 million into the work of community activists in more than 25 countries, providing these bold local leaders with the funding, tools, and contacts they need to tackle some of the world's greatest challenges. As a result, millions of people worldwide now have access to basic resources and opportunities to participate fully and equally in society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to thank all those who participated, especially during a time of unprecedented challenges. The data and insights obtained are of great value as we strive to meet our grantee partners where they are at and provide the kinds of support they need most, not only at this crucial moment but going forward as well.

INTRODUCTION

As part of our learning and assessment efforts, the Fund gathers evidence across our programs to explore and evaluate aspects of our **theory of change**, our values, and our practices as a grant-maker. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, for the first time, the Fund circulated a survey among grantee partners to learn more about the effects of the crisis on their work.

From September to October of 2020, we invited Fund grantees to participate in a follow-up survey. This survey was intended to help us document the needs, priorities, and strengths of current grantees. We also sought to understand how grantees have adapted and responded to the global pandemic over the past year. Finally, we hoped the findings would inform our work and contribute to grantees' efforts to advance human rights around the world.

This report presents key findings from the second survey. Most of the findings below reflect grantee experiences including and beyond their relationship with the Fund. The final section includes grantee feedback specifically about the Fund.



METHODOLOGY

WHO DID WE INTEND TO REACH WITH THE SURVEY?

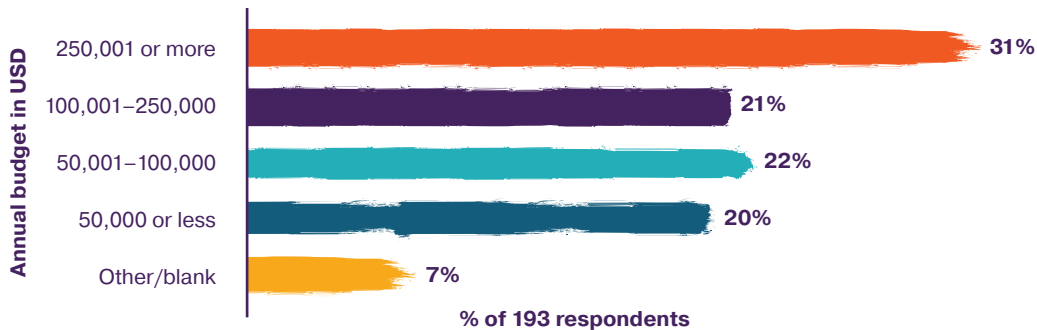
The survey targeted grantee partners with active funding through the Fund’s core programs. This did not include groups that only received emergency relief through the COVID-19 Grassroots Justice Fund or that have a grant through a donor-advised funding mechanism. The Fund distributed the survey in six languages (Arabic, Burmese, English, French, Spanish, and Thai) and accepted responses online and offline between September and October 2020.

WHO RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY?

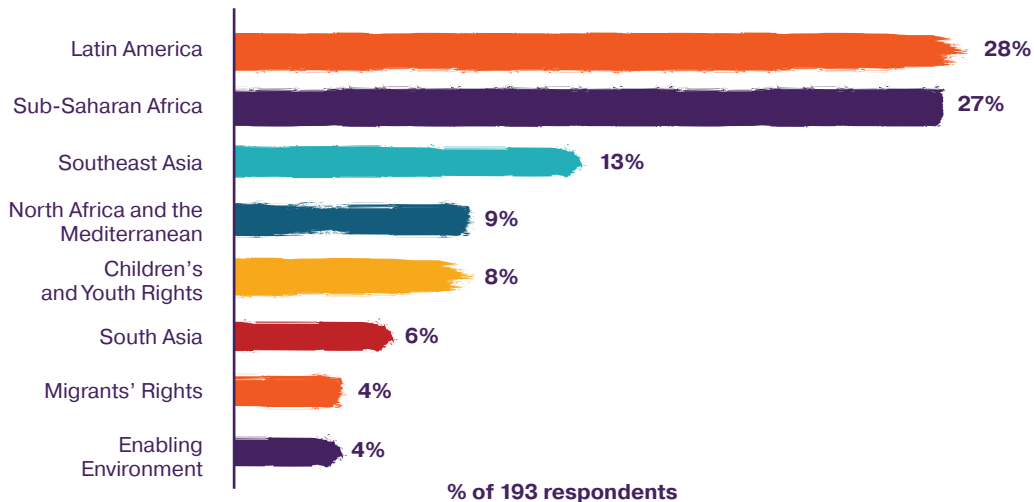
The survey achieved a 76 percent response rate (193 of 254 grantee organizations). Among the groups that responded:

- 66 percent (128 respondents) identify as self-led groups
 - Self-led groups are either funded or led by a group of people from the communities on whose behalf they work. This includes people who have directly experienced the kinds of injustices their work seeks to address.
- 50 percent (97 respondents) have 10 or fewer paid full or part-time staff members
- 42 percent (82 respondents) identify as a women’s rights group
 - Women’s rights groups or organizations work primarily on women’s rights issues, empowerment, and/or participation.

GRANTEE ORGANIZATIONAL 2019 BUDGETS



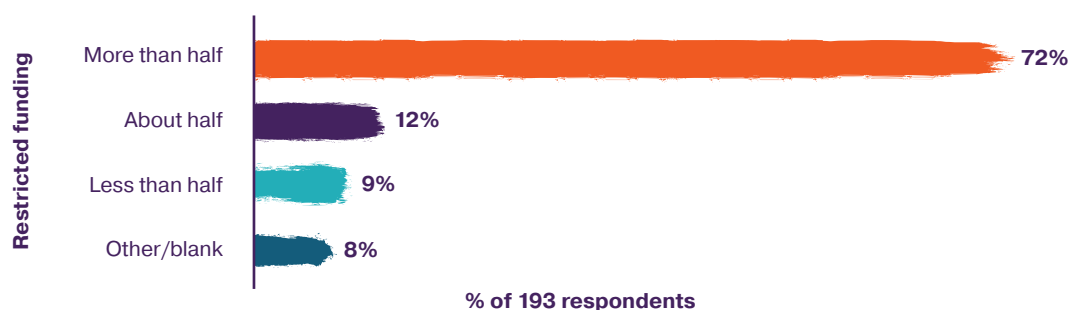
PRIMARY FUND PROGRAM FOR SURVEY RESPONDENTS



ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES AND PRIORITIES

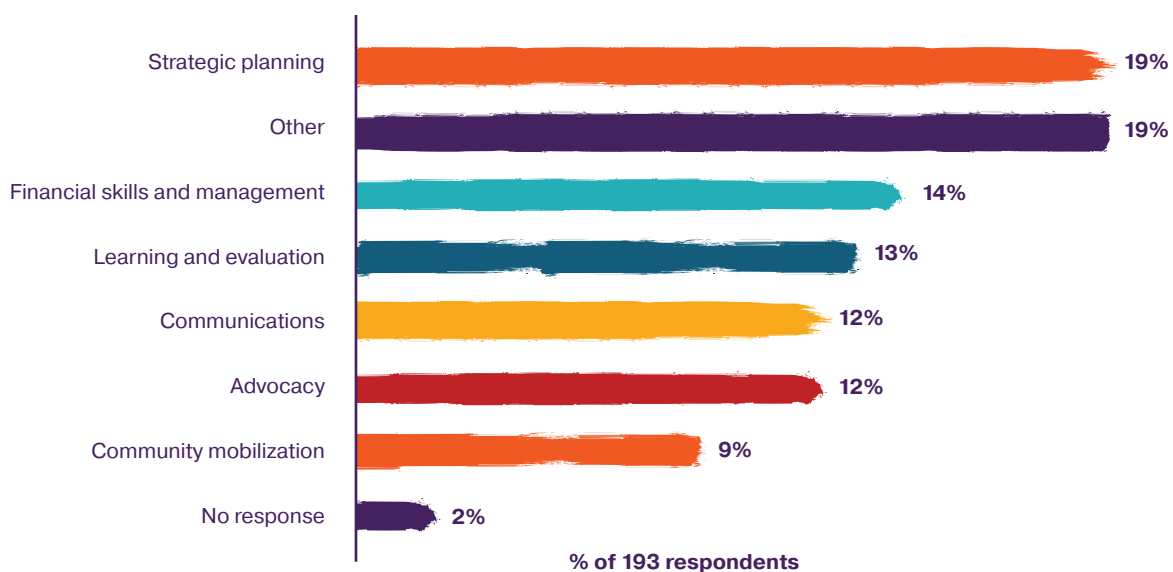
GRANTEES FACE A CONTEXT OF MOSTLY RESTRICTED FUNDING

Most respondents (138 out of 193) estimate that more than half of their overall funding is restricted to use for specific projects and cannot be used for general operating expenses.



GRANTEES REPORT DIFFERENT PRIORITIES FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

The most frequent responses represent a combination of priorities (37 groups selected “other,” 19 percent of responses) and “strategic planning” (36 groups, 19 percent of responses). The “other” priorities often include plans to pair communications with other focus areas to expand the reach of their work and mitigate pandemic-related restrictions to in-person engagement.



“...the priority would be Communication and Advocacy, since these times of pandemic has represented a challenge to develop alternative forms of communication and continue the defense of women’s human rights with greater restrictions from justice officials.”

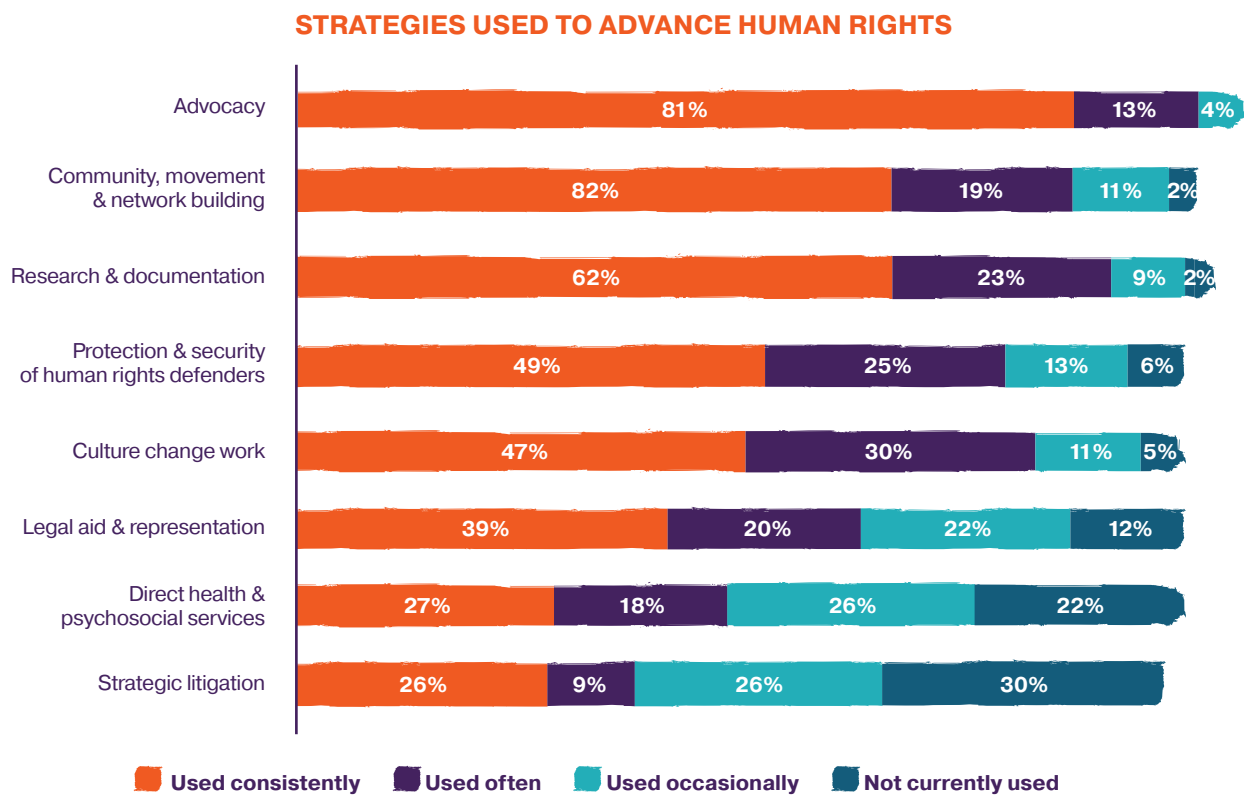
– Group in Latin America

“A combination of building online communications strategies with communities across different locations, building capacities of youth to facilitate the community mobilisation process.”

– Group in South Asia

STRATEGIES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE HUMAN RIGHTS

GRANTEES DRAW ON A DIVERSE RANGE OF STRATEGIES IN THEIR WORK



THE MOST EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES ARE TYPICALLY THOSE THAT GRANTEES USE MORE CONSISTENTLY

Grantee responses indicate that their most effective strategies align with the three most regularly used: advocacy; research and documentation; and community, movement, and network building.

There are two types of strategies where reported regularity of use and effectiveness are not aligned.

- **Legal strategies:** Both legal aid / representation and strategic litigation are often mentioned as effective, despite relatively lower levels of reported use. While grantees report using strategic litigation quite infrequently, groups using this strategy report that it is relatively effective.
- **Protection and security of human rights defenders:** While grantees report using this strategy relatively frequently, very few groups mention it as their most effective.

Other effective strategies noted beyond the options above include community and constituent empowerment, as well as training and awareness-building efforts.

GRANTEES ARE ADAPTING HUMAN RIGHTS STRATEGIES TO MEET NEW NEEDS DURING THE PANDEMIC

As groups experience the ongoing pandemic, grantee responses reflect various new areas of work where they see opportunities to strengthen or expand their efforts. Survey responses indicate that groups are applying human rights strategies to this new work, such as community engagement, awareness-raising campaigns, and documentation of state actions. This suggests that many groups are adapting to the context with both near- and longer-term implications for their future efforts.

The most frequently noted areas of opportunity include:

- Expanded use of **digital technologies and platforms** in grantees' operations (virtual staff work) and engaging communities and other stakeholders in their programming
- Awareness raising and information sharing around **COVID-19 prevention**
- Advancing **economic rights and livelihoods**, especially among women and girls, in both urban and rural areas
- **Monitoring and documenting** the effects of the pandemic itself and the actions of state, government, or corporate actors on the communities or populations with which grantees work

“Covid19 has pushed some of the work online. Young people from the communities who are better adjusted to the new platform have become more active. This is an opportunity to strengthen their capacities as young leaders, the secondliners. Our campaigns have also moved online and required us to be agile. Media work, therefore has become an indispensable strategy and an opportunity to strengthen further.”

– Group in Southeast Asia

“The pandemic has offered us an opportunity to explore new areas where the organization can scale up its operation especially in the rural areas where there has not been other organisations reaching out to the LGBT members.”

– Group in Sub-Saharan Africa

SOLIDARITY AND COLLABORATION AMONG HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS

GROUPS ARE OPERATING IN ENVIRONMENTS THAT DO NOT INCENTIVIZE COLLABORATION

Grantees report experiencing barriers to collaboration relatively evenly across three main categories. Collectively, these factors introduce burdens and distractions, pose individual and group risks, or strain the sustainability of working in partnership with other groups.

1) Internal barriers

- Insufficient financial resources to cover membership dues, travel expenses, or other costs
- Human resource constraints, such as limited people or time to dedicate to collaboration

“Each organization is working under their own stress and risks, which is already a burden to normal day to day work, let alone strategising with other organizations that have different burdens.”

– Group in North Africa and the Mediterranean

2) Group dynamic barriers

- Lack of shared vision, stemming from ideological differences or divergent issue positions
- Competition for scarce resources to support groups' own work and collaboration

“The struggle for resources, spaces for donor attention for more funding often overshadow the need to collaborate and work as a team for the benefit of the people served.”

– Group in Sub-Saharan Africa

“Locally...civil society actors have a weak culture of working in synergy and this is maintained by some donor partners who continue to individually support organizations in the community instead of synergies/networks.”

– Group in Sub-Saharan Africa

3) External barriers

- Related to where grantees work:
 - **State structures or government actors.** This includes laws that criminalize civil society's work or authorities who are unresponsive or hostile toward civil society.
 - **Insecurity.** This includes security concerns in the geographic area where grantees work or ineffective or malicious state security forces.
- Related to communities and issues that grantees support:
 - **Stigma, intolerance, and backlash.** Politically or socially marginalized groups with which grantees work (e.g., LGBTQ people, sex workers, or migrants) or the values grantees support (e.g., religious freedom or gender inclusion) often draw negative attitudes or actions.
 - **Safety and well-being.** Some grantees reported concerns for the safety of their staff and partners. Other respondents note that this backlash can affect group dynamics by diminishing the willingness of potential partners to collaborate with them.
- Related to the types of change grantees pursue:
 - **Rate of change.** Several groups note that long, slow struggles for justice and accountability might contribute to unreasonable expectations or strain the durability of partnerships.

“Movement building is a long-term struggle that requires a lot of patience which not very many entities are willing to walk.”

– Group in Sub-Saharan Africa

DESPITE BARRIERS, HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS ARE PURSUING MULTILEVEL COLLABORATION

Most grantees report working in coalitions or networks at the local, national, regional, or international levels to advance their work.

- 90 percent (174 respondents) of groups work in some form of collaboration
- 72 percent (139 respondents) of groups pursue a distributed approach at two or more levels, while 18 percent (35 respondents) work in a singular approach at one level

GRANTEES ARE INTERESTED IN FUTURE COLLABORATION AROUND JOINT ACTIONS AND LEARNING

Nearly 90 percent (173 out of 193) of respondents have future plans or goals to collaborate with other groups, coalitions, or networks. The three most frequently noted interests include:

- **Joint advocacy** efforts such as petitions, campaigns, or collective agendas
- Networked efforts to **consolidate protection efforts** and respond to crackdowns
- **Learning and sharing** experience with like-minded groups, both locally and transnationally

“Networking with other collectives and activists is fundamental for us.... Organizations and communities defending rights face common risks and criminalization. It is important to promote common protection strategies.”

– Group in North Africa and the Mediterranean

“There are actions that require networking to change things. If human rights defenders are arrested, for example, one organization will not be effective in getting them released, but pressure from all organizations will quickly produce results.”

– Group in Sub-Saharan Africa

“We would love to connect to more countries or regions ... who have tea growing workers, bonded labor and bonded slavery. We want to expand our understanding of the tea sector in Asia and Africa and also learn about strategies around women who are doing unpaid work and domestic workers in Latin America.”

– Group in South Asia

GRANTEE FEEDBACK ON THE FUND'S WORK

More than 90 percent of survey respondents (176 groups) offered feedback on the Fund values and strategies they appreciate most; 60 percent (125 groups) offered recommendations to improve Fund practices.

GRANTEES RECOGNIZE FUND VALUES ARE ALIGNED WITH OUR GRANT-MAKING PRACTICES

Fund values most appreciated by grantees

(each mentioned by 10–25 percent of 193 respondents)

- **Agility** of the Fund's financial and other support, which allows response to crises (including the pandemic) and taking on new work
- **Respect** of grantee partner autonomy and mutual trust in relationships with Fund staff
- **Sustainability** and longevity of funding relationships with the Fund

Grantee feedback to deepen Fund values

(each mentioned by up to 7 percent of 193 respondents)

- **Sustainability** in funding to enable proactive planning rather than reactive, short-term fundraising
- **Integrity** through more strategic and timely communications around grant proposal and reporting moments
- **Agility** in continued support for grantees adapting to new contexts or shifting priorities

BEYOND FUNDING, GROUPS ARE CALLING FOR MORE TECHNICAL SUPPORT AND CONNECTION WITH OTHERS

Fund strategies most appreciated by grantees

(each mentioned by 33–50 percent of 193 respondents)

- **Financial** resourcing whether through core support, for the range of thematic issues supported, or how grant funds are disbursed
- **Connection** and accompaniment through Fund staff expertise, coaching, solidarity, and site visits (although disrupted by the pandemic)
- **Technical resourcing**, in general, to strengthen organizational capacities

Grantee feedback to bolster Fund strategies

(each mentioned by 13–25 percent of 193 respondents)

- **Financial resourcing** at higher amounts and some suggestions to combination core and project support
- **Connection and collaboration** with peer groups and other funders around where they work and the issues they work on
- **Targeted technical resourcing** for skills and capacity areas such as advocacy approaches, fundraising, and staff retention

Fund Values

These values drive the standards and quality of the Fund's work:

Respect: We respect the knowledge and wisdom of local activists and trust that they know how best to achieve social change in their communities.

Integrity: We are honest and accountable in our relationships and practices with grantees, board members, donors, peers, and each other.

Agility: We strive to be flexible, responsive, quick, and innovative.

Sustainability: We understand that creating lasting social change is difficult work that takes time.

Inclusivity: We seek to harness the talent and energy of everyone who can contribute to our work, regardless of their background.

Fund Grant-making Strategies

The Fund employs a range of strategies and practices to support human rights activists. We:

Shift power by moving financial and technical resources to the front line of human rights struggles

Bolster resilience of human rights defenders and movements

Enable resistance to restrictions on activism

Connect pioneering community-based groups and promote collaboration across borders and issues

Expand awareness of and support for human rights activism

CONCLUSIONS: USING THIS DATA TO STRENGTHEN OUR COLLECTIVE EFFORTS

Fund staff have referenced the survey data to hold internal reflection and learning discussions, to inform programmatic strategies, and—most importantly—to understand how we can best contribute to ongoing efforts to advance human rights during the pandemic and beyond. While the data gathered has been invaluable to us, it is our hope that the findings from the survey also will be useful to grantee partners.

- Fund grantees might use these survey findings to reflect on their experiences in the context of global human rights activism. Where are you facing similar or different challenges?
- Grantee partners may also want to use the survey findings to frame conversations with us. How can the Fund improve our work and practices as a grant-maker?
- Fund staff and grantee partners might draw on these findings together to inspire learning, exchange, and collaboration across human rights issues or geographies.
- Finally, the Fund will use the survey findings within the international philanthropic community to make the case for flexible support to human rights activists. Grantees might draw on the survey findings to inform similar conversations with other funders.

We hope that Fund staff and grantee partners will continue to find value in the perspectives and experiences reflected in these findings to help us improve and strengthen our collective efforts toward achieving the change we seek.



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