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A Competition with Many Winners
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A Competition with Many Winners

100&Change sought to add value to participants by helping to raise the profile of a variety of meaningful solutions.

BY KRISTEN MOLYNEAUX

From the outset of our inaugural 100&Change, we recognized that a competition is inherently biased toward thinking of one organization as a "winner." However, that was not how we at the MacArthur Foundation defined success nor how we designed our competition. Instead, we set out to raise the profile of meaningful and impactful solutions to our world's most pressing problems, using the competition as a mechanism for surfacing those solutions. Every step of the way, we tried to build an application process that would bring added value to all participants whether they were ultimately selected for the award or not.

While we had notions of what that meant at the beginning of the process, we did not fully understand what that would mean until we were in the thick of the competition. Some of this uncertainty was due to the challenge of running a large-scale competition for the first time and our natural learning curve; the other was because we chose to use a design-build philosophy throughout our process. The design-build process enabled us to outline what we planned to do and afforded us the flexibility to adapt based on our real-time learnings. This provided the team with opportunities to adapt to what we were hearing from participants in terms of what was working, what was not working, and what we could do to strengthen the process. All of these elements came together as we worked to build a competition that added value to participants, maintained rigor, and provided the foundation with the kind of information it needed in order to make such a bold award.

The guiding values for our inaugural 100&Change focused on openness, transparency, and ensuring value-add to participants.

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In order to set expectations from the outset, we provided all applicants with a transparent process, clear criteria, and the timeline for the competition. Over the course of the competition, we have written and spoken frequently about the ways that we held ourselves accountable to our values of openness and transparency. However, we have spent less time discussing the added value for participants. Here, we will discuss those elements and provide greater insight into how we conceptualized participant value-add throughout the competition.

LEARNING TO SCALE

From the outset, we recognized that a yearlong competitive process would be time-consuming and intense for teams. As part of the semifinalist phase, we built additional activities into our timeline that went beyond asking teams to simply revise their proposals. These activities included applicants' authentic engagement with their communities of interest as well as stakeholders of their proposed project. In an effort to increase awareness of their work and to respond to questions from the broader public, MacArthur also asked that all semifinalist teams hold live internet events on Facebook Live or Reddit Ask Me Anything. Teams were also asked to share learnings on our 100&Change Perspectives blog. Technical tasks were required of each team, such as responding to reviewer feedback, working to make their proposals more inclusive of people with disabilities, hosting site visits for MacArthur staff, and participating in meetings with our board of directors.

Our focus throughout this process was on helping teams build stronger proposals that would enable them to thoughtfully scale their work to their ambitions and reasonably deploy a large philanthropic award. From our traditional grantmaking experience, we recognize that many organizations struggle with scaling successful interventions, and while many assume these struggles are due to resource constraints alone, it is also true that many organizations simply lack a clear plan for adapting to the unforeseen barriers that can arise during the scaling process. In an effort to mitigate these challenges, we decided to focus extensively on supporting teams to develop a scaling plan.

"While there is no generally accepted definition of scaling," writes Larry Cooley, president emeritus and senior advisor for Management Systems International (MSI), "we view it as expanding, adapting, and sustaining successful projects in a geographic space, over time, to reach a greater number of people."

While all barriers and challenges to successful scaling cannot be planned in full, there are ways for organizations to better prepare themselves for scaling activities and to think critically about the types of partnerships, resources, and plans that they need in order to increase their chances of success. To help our semifinalists build robust scaling plans, we enlisted the help of MSI, a US-based development firm that has a long history of providing support to organizations that are scaling interventions. Over the course of six months, MSI worked individually with each semifinalist team to help them build scalability plans and act as a critical friend and thought partner. From these activities, we hoped that all eight teams would walk away with a compelling, strong revised proposal with a built-in scaling plan that could inspire a broad set of donors.

During this same time, MacArthur staff conducted site visits of 100&Change semifinalist teams and commissioned technical reviews of their initial and revised proposals from field-

level experts and experts on the inclusivity of people with disabilities. These experts provided teams with extensive feedback on where gaps remained in their plans and provided insights on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed approach. All of this feedback was given to participants to continue to strengthen their proposals and incorporate feedback received.

In tandem, our legal team continued its own due diligence to identify any work proposed in sanctioned countries, review legal structures and memorandums of understanding, and conduct background checks on key personnel associated with each of the proposals. In addition, our financial and impact-investment teams assessed the financial standing of each organization. Neither analysis focused on disqualifying teams; rather, they sought to better understand and identify areas worth targeting for additional support should the team become an award recipient.

All teams were also required to identify an external evaluator to serve as a partner over the five-year grant period. The purpose of this evaluator was to help teams identify areas where they needed to change course or adapt their work as well as track impact over time. Each evaluation plan was reviewed by the foundation's evaluation team, and another layer of feedback was provided on how semifinalists could work to strengthen their overall evaluation structure.

The extensive due diligence of our six-month semifinalist phase produced a set of proposals that had been extensively vetted, iterated, improved, and strengthened over time. It represented an achievement that boosted each participant's confidence. "If you had asked me in December 2016 if I felt we would have been able to execute on our initial proposal, I would have said yes, but I would have been a bit unsure if we could do it," a member of one of the semifinalist teams said. "Today, six months later, I *know* that we can execute on this plan."

In September 2017, our board selected four finalists from our eight semifinalists, and we entered what we called "Phase III" of the competition. During this time, the teams focused mostly on preparing for the Finalists Live event in December, after which the board would make its decision. We did not want our finalist event to focus solely on the board's decision-making process; instead, we wanted to highlight and promote the work of all the semifinalists and finalists for other potential donors. Although

we intended to pick just one team for the award, we were committed to helping each team try to find funding for their solutions.

To learn how to increase their donor base and better understand the needs of donors looking to make larger philanthropic contributions, the finalists and semifinalists attended the Big Bettable workshop, held by The Bridgespan Group, which focused on pitching big ideas. The two-and-a-half-day session focused on how to break proposals into smaller pieces that would provide donors with clear investment opportunities while also tying those opportunities to impact.

In the end, we have had varying success with this part of the process and are rethinking how

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we can build the next application to support this type of staged investment approach and provide active opportunities to bring donors along in our process. However, this event, coupled with many additional fundraising activities since the 100&Change announcement, has led to broad general interest and significant (more than $50 million to our semifinalists after 2018) follow-on funding from other donors.

THE TOP 200

While working with our eight semifinalists, we also started to realize that there was a wealth of interest from other donors and high-net-worth individuals in the types of organizations that surfaced through our competition process. It was not until we started talking to donors about the more than 1,900 applications from various sectors all around the world that we fully realized the treasure trove of information we were sitting on. A new purpose for our 100&Change process was born: We began to focus on finding ways to better connect big ideas to philanthropists, donors, and intermediaries looking to make larger "big bets" for social impact.

Over the course of the same yearlong process that the semifinalists and finalists were working to refine their proposals, we partnered with several agencies to create new ways to profile and highlight the many high-quality ideas we

received. During this time, we embarked on four significant activities to try to bring greater visibility to these proposals:

- We identified the top 200 scoring proposals and published them in a publicly accessible interactive directory.
- Our partner Charity Navigator identified the 37 organizations already on its highly rated charities list and promoted them as "Charities with Bold Solutions."
- The Center for High Impact Philanthropy at the University of Pennsylvania published a guide titled *Bold Ideas for Philanthropists to Drive Social Change*, which highlighted 16 proposals as "Best Bets" and promoted 81 organizations in total.
- We started the 100&Change Solutions Bank, a publicly accessible, searchable database that is a repository of all the proposals we received.

This work has been fruitful for a subset of organizations, particularly those from within the Top 200 list. While not every organization has received funding through this process, many organizations have found creative ways to use their Top 200 designation to interest new donors or to incorporate the feedback they received from judges to build stronger proposals that they presented to existing donors. In both cases, for some organizations, this has led to increases in grant dollars received.

Today, we continue the fundraising work we started during the 100&Change process. We are helping to support several donor collaboratives that have formed around many of our finalists and have linked semifinalists to donors and other competitions. In addition, we continue to promote the work of all Top 200 applications and, where possible, are tracking where these organizations have received interest from donors. Some applicants received direct funding from judges who were part of the competition, some saw an uptick in direct contributions through Charity Navigator's Web pages, and others are still seeking ways to best take advantage of the various designations and profiles that 100&Change provided.

The 100&Change competition, with all of its learnings, has demonstrated that inspiring donors and the public does not come from a single proposal, a single interaction, or a single idea. Rather, each of the steps outlined here provides an opportunity to forge new relationships and strengthen existing connections by presenting a clear narrative of where you are trying to go and how you plan to get there. ⊗