

# Ten Creative Funding Strategies for Collaboratives

## Yes! We Rise Podcast - Episode 56 with Christine Gyovai

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We are often asked how networks and collaboratives can develop innovative and creative funding strategies, especially for long-term changemaking work. In this episode of the Yes! We Rise podcast, I'll talk about the intentional approach we use at our firm, Dialogue + Design Associates, in working with collaboratives, cultivating long-term networks, and ideas to creatively fund networks when faced with a crossroads moment, including a shift in funding sources, noting it takes time to cultivate funding resources and relationships..

Creating a path forward in how a collaborative can adjust and support themselves when faced with a significant change is key. There are important questions to ask during seasons of change, and we've identified four key models we've found that networks and collaboratives use for the long haul – you can learn more about those key questions and models in [Episode 48 of the podcast](#), Building Resilient Networks and Sustaining Long-Term Collaboratives.

There are also three core domains for networks to use build resilience and lasting success, and we'll focus on the third one today - **funding** - including:

- **Collaboration**, which includes governance and structure including decision-making processes; building relationships and trust; who is participating and engaging people over time; how the collaborative works; the mission, vision, values, and goals, and how they shift; evaluation and iteration; and building team culture, capacity and peer learning.
- **Action**, which includes implementation; coordination of actions; sharing ideas and resources; bringing new ideas in; and implementation actions across teams and groups.
- **Funding**, which includes identifying long-term sources of funding from multiple streams, including the potential for self-generation of revenue, innovation, and creative partnerships.

Creating a sustainable funding model, with diversified funding sources, that is not reliant on a single funding source or organization for implementation and ongoing collaborative work is essential.

Some best practices: in general, create and maintain an annual activity-based budget detailing the collaborative's projects and needs, including the core costs and needs for basic operations (for expenses such as staff time, food for meetings, meeting rental costs, facilitation, implementation and action, etc.).

Establishing an open-budget process with a Steering Committee can be a key element of successful collaboratives. This often involves decision-making about the collaborative at the Steering Committee scale, with decisions ideally being made by consensus.

Funding collaboratives through diverse and innovative strategies can enhance their sustainability and impact. Here are **ten** creative approaches:

1. **Cultivate multiple sources of funding** - build a diversified funding base for stability if funding shifts. Just like a stool, a collaborative should have at least three legs or bases of support – if one goes, there will be others in place to keep the work moving forward until shifts can be made to stabilize funding.
  - a. Another tip is to maintain a list of ready-to-fund projects if partners or agencies have surplus funds from a grant or funding source that needs to be spent down in a time-sensitive manner.
  - b. The Upper and Middle James Riparian Consortium in Virginia is doing this through implementing its Resilient Collaborative Model with identifying different funding streams to be able to pivot if needed. Learn more at [jamesriverconsortium.org](http://jamesriverconsortium.org).
2. **Grant funding and foundations** - cultivate funding prospects from private sources and grants from local, state and federal agencies, and build long-term relationships with those funders. They are people too, and they want to know about you and your story. Consider contacting foundations to see if you could set up a brief info session or take a program manager out for coffee. Specific ideas and examples include:
  - a. At the state level, consider specific outreach to heads of agencies and secretaries or leaders within the state-level leadership.
  - b. Consider sector-focused private trusts for grants, sponsorships, or donations.
  - c. **In-kind contributions:** Seek non-monetary support such as donated goods, services, or volunteer time to offset expenses.
    - i. The **RE-AMP Network** is another fascinating example regarding its collaborative strength, organizational structure, and guiding principles to reach their shared mission “to set collective strategy and enable collaboration on climate solutions in the Midwest. Our North Star Goal is to equitably eliminate greenhouse gas emissions in the Midwest by 2050.” Their motto which is to *Think Systemically and Act Collaboratively*” The Network has grown to over 130 non-profit organizations and foundations, recognizing each has an area of distinct strengths and approaches. (RE-AMP website, Feb. 2023). One tool they have developed is around **Visualize Federal Funding map:** To help simplify the complicated federal funding landscape, RE-AMP built this beautiful map to visualize the flow of federal funds, individual grants, who can apply and expiration dates. Check out the website or show notes [for the link](#).

3. **Show up - get the word out for support, volunteers and donations!** It isn't just about money. Simplify, meet around a kitchen table with a pot of chili, and talk about how to roll up your sleeves to get the work done. And, showcase the story of your collaborative and successes on the network through various communication channels such as on the website, brochures, partner website, and during in-person events. Share the story of the network – particularly the value-add of the collaborative to partners and the collective work and efforts – on podcasts and other outreach channels.
  - a. How does it make partners' lives easier by participating? Is it because they know who to call when they have a problem, to troubleshoot, or celebrate a win? That is a value add we've heard time and time again in collaboratives.
  - o Make sure everyone in your region knows what your network is up to – consider tabling at the farmers market, giving talks at schools, placing billboards, ads on community or public radio, and sending press releases to area newspapers. Word of mouth is one of the best ways to get the word out, including at community events, parades, at lobby days and receptions.
    - Develop and promote new outreach and promotional materials, press releases, sharing the impacts and metrics with existing and new partners of the network.
    - Develop a way for donations to be accepted on the collaborative's website, during meetings and Summits, and other events.
4. **Consider innovative and out-of-the-box funding sources, creating new partnerships and doing shared fundraising.** Create new events such as an animal balloon tying competition or a kite flying festival to raise awareness. Think out of the box! There are many ways to go about this – try experimenting to see what might work. Examples include the Rivanna Conservation Alliance work around the Rivanna river in Charlottesville, Virginia and invasive plant volunteer days which double as an opportunity for people to learn about the work of many organizations. Learn more at [rivannariver.org](http://rivannariver.org).
5. **Corporate Partnerships:** Collaborate with aligned businesses for sponsorships, joint ventures, or in-kind support. Such alliances can provide financial resources and expertise where appropriate and where it is a value-add.
6. **Membership Models:** Implement tiered membership structures where individuals or organizations pay dues in exchange for benefits, creating a sense of ownership and steady income.
7. **Fee-for-Service Offerings:** Develop services or products that generate revenue, such as training programs, workshops, or consulting services. Create business ventures related to the collaborative's mission to generate income, such as selling merchandise or intellectual property.
  - a. One organization who is doing this is the Love No Ego Foundation. Through their four pillars, Spirituality, Exercise, Education, and Community, they help ignite the intuitions of our youth while also bringing awareness and recognition to the ego and egotistical

behaviors that may be limiting their human productivity. We use internal as well as external resources to help our young people consistently show up as their best selves.

PROGRAMS include:

- i. Motivational Speaking - boosting the morale and esteem of the whole environment
  - ii. Mentoring - one on one sessions providing the tools for sustainable growth
  - iii. Workshops - group session that provide in-depth collaboration and communication helping to combat everyday pressures of our youth
    1. Funding comes from grants, speaking events, mentoring, partnering, and collaboration all help fund this non-profit organization. Learn more at: [www.lovenoego.org](http://www.lovenoego.org).
8. **Crowdfunding Campaigns:** Utilize platforms to raise funds for specific projects, engaging a broad audience and building community support.
9. **Innovative Funding Sources including:**
- a. **Social Impact Bonds:** Partner with investors who provide upfront capital for social projects, with returns paid by outcomes achieved, aligning financial and social returns. Create a slide deck and invite them to a meeting - you won't know unless you try, and for most people, it is a scary venture. Do it scared.
  - b. **Community Investment Funds:** Establish funds where community members can invest in local projects, fostering local engagement and financial support.
10. **Develop Collaborative Grant Applications:** Join forces with other organizations to apply for grants, pooling resources and expertise to increase the likelihood of funding. An example includes the Lancaster Clean Water Partners, which has a clear call for partner organizations to join, share grant-making resources, and guidelines for participation. Learn more at [lancastercleanwaterpartners.com](http://lancastercleanwaterpartners.com).

These examples demonstrate how collaborative networks can sustain long-term impact through diversified and innovative funding strategies.

We'd love to hear what is working for you, what challenges you are facing, and what ideas you have. Share your ideas with us on social or in the comments, and check out the links at the webpage [yeswerise.org](http://yeswerise.org). Be sure to subscribe, like and share the episode so we can continue sharing episodes far and wide.

Be well changemakers and solution-seekers, and thank you for the work you do in the world to make it a brighter place, and for joining the Yes! We Rise podcast.