A Global Funder Collaborative Working Towards More Just and Accountable Governance
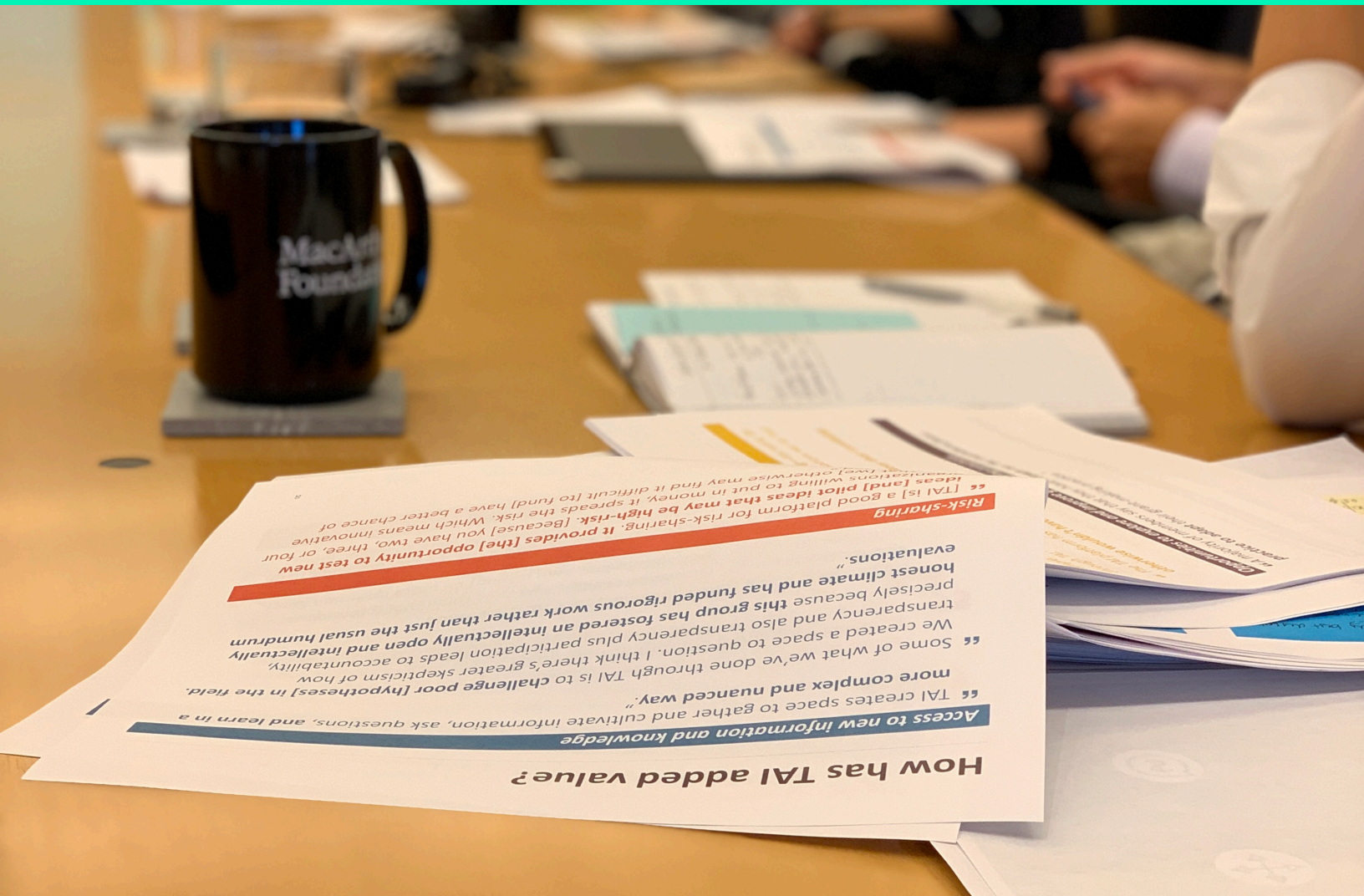
Summary of Evaluation Findings and Learnings

Citation: Transparency and Accountability Initiative. "A Global Funder Collaborative Working Towards More Just and Accountable Governance: Summary of Evaluation Findings and Learnings." (2020). Washington, D.C.

Report designed by TAI. Cover photos by TAI.

Overview

Transparency and Accountability Initiative (TAI) is a collaborative of the leading funders of transparency, accountability, and participation efforts worldwide. TAI commissioned an evaluation in 2019 as an input to our new strategy starting in 2020. This evaluation brief headlines the findings and conclusions from that evaluation report and notes the key insights we will take into our future strategy and work.

WHAT WE WANTED TO KNOW

- **TAI as an organization:** assess TAI's theoretical, organizational, and operational model, and whether and how we offer value to members.

- **TAI as an influencer:** document progress towards TAI's outcomes and assess whether and how members have influenced others beyond the collaborative.

- **TAI as a collaborative:** identify how TAI has contributed to collaboration, learning, and other collective member practices.

WHAT WE FOUND

Main Successes	Members prize TAI as a platform that promotes connections, learning, and exchange that would not be feasible on their own.
	Members have funded new partners, co-invested with other funders, and adapted or coordinated grantmaking strategy and practice.
Main Challenges	**Internal:** Consistent member engagement mired by lack of clarity on expectations of level and type of effort needed to advance the strategic outcomes.
	External: TAI faces the dual effort of adapting to ever-evolving geopolitical contexts and funder member strategic and staffing shifts.

WHAT WE WILL TAKE INTO OUR FORTHCOMING STRATEGY

- Clarify our funder collaborative purpose as a platform for member exchange and learning that yields connection and action within and beyond TAI.

- Amplify our role as a connector, to add value to members' work and learn with and from other funders and the practitioner field.

- Hold up our collective ambition for systemic change through TAI's vision and mission, and design measurable and achievable outcomes relative to our collaborative purpose.

- Maintain a member-serving posture and strengthen communication structures and organizational governance.

TAI as an Organization

Key areas of inquiry: Purpose and vision; organizational and operational structure; member value proposition

KEY INSIGHT

TAI members find value in the collaborative as a platform to access collective wisdom, share learnings and future practice, and spot opportunities for coordination and collective effort.

Purpose and vision

Collaborative Success Benchmark	TAI Evaluation Key Findings
Collaborative fulfills a unique purpose	Members agree that TAI is pursuing goals that would be difficult for any single funder to achieve independently.
Members hold a shared vision for the collaborative	Overall, members report clarity on what the collaborative aims to accomplish. However, TAI members have undergone strategic shifts and restructuring, which places strain on the sense of shared purpose and vision. There can be tension, and at times divergence, between collective priorities and evolving member institutional needs, which strains the Secretariat focus on member responsiveness against collaborative adaptations.

TAI Members agree that TAI fills a unique purpose

Strongly agree 40%

Agree 60%
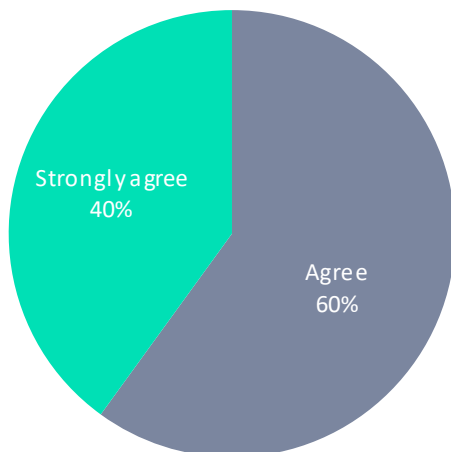
> We need a recommitment to what TAI's mission and purpose is. It seems to me that that's been lost a little bit by the changes of strategy and changes in folks and so on.
>
> —TAI Member

TAI's Value-add for Members

Members value TAI as a:

- Platform for learning, coordination, and risk sharing with trusted peers
- Source to inform smarter and more efficient individual funder results
- Bridge to the transparency, participation, and accountability field

86% of members report that they benefit from TAI participation

As a result of TAI, members expect and have been able to

- Generate, assess, and test new ideas with others
- Adapt or develop new practices or strategies
- Access relevant information, expertise, and networks
- Demonstrate leadership and influence / be influenced by other funders

Members wish for even more ability to

- Coordinate to use their institutional resources efficiently
- Amplify their institution's influence and impact on pressing issues
- Leverage collective resources to meet sector challenges

The Secretariat has been really helpful to us in terms of establishing relationships with other donors. I also think that [it] really helps us stay connected to the other donors and [informed about] other actors in the field.

–TAI Member

TAI's member-serving model, while recognized to bring value, also requires care to ease risks of exclusionary groupthink and missed opportunities for external engagement. Furthermore, this model has not been clearly communicated to others, particularly grantee organizations who are unclear about their role or engagement.

Organizational and Operational Model

Decision-making processes are clear and inclusive: Members generally find decision making to be open and inclusive. Steering Committee diversity improved with mixed director- and program officer-level representation, but inconsistent meeting participation can slow decision-making progress. Members desire greater clarity on how divergent views are reconciled in TAI's collaborative initiatives.

Regarding member roles and responsibilities support governance, greater clarity is necessary:

Many members reported needing help understanding:

Their own role	**47%**
The Secretariat's role	**47%**
The differences between core and associate membership	**47%**
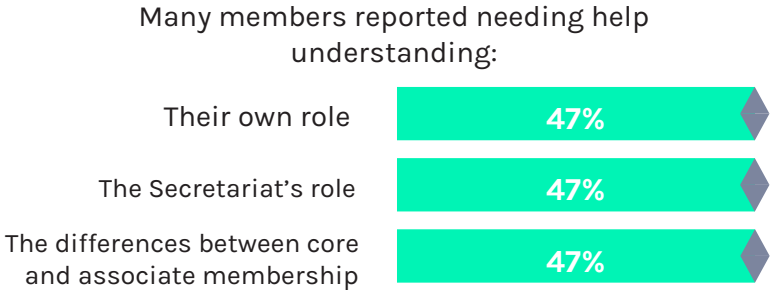
People and Resources

Collaborative Success Benchmark	TAI Evaluation Key Findings
Secretariat is staffed for needed skills and functions	Secretariat staff and work are appreciated and supportive of TAI's overall success. Members disagree on what the preferred role is for the Secretariat in identifying and leading collective initiatives.
Collaborative has adequate funds and "people power"	There was no member consensus on whether current resourcing levels are sufficient. In the context of ambitious, field-level strategic outcomes, perhaps not. With a clearer collective purpose, a more modest workplan and resource level may be more appropriate.

Collaborative Success Benchmark	TAI Evaluation Key Findings
Members are relevant to the work	The current members are a good fit for TAI's vision, but there are opportunities to strengthen diversity around TAI's table. Including more program or regional colleagues beyond the Steering Committee would help current members to deepen the benefits of and diversify their institutional commitment. And interest in expanding overall membership was tempered by a need to first clarify TAI's purpose. The collaborative may have to cultivate such engagement where people or institutions do not readily identify their work with "transparency" or "accountability."
Members are engaged in advancing the work	Members are engaging in an array of lighter and deeper effort activities. Participation levels vary by initiative theme or topic, and time and competing priorities are common barriers to engagement. Members seek greater clarity on expectations of their own levels of engagement and of collective accountability for ensuring progress.

Members Ranked the Most Important Secretariat Functions

- **Coordinate and facilitate** member communication and collaborative initiatives

- Enable funders to **navigate and connect** with philanthropic peers within and beyond TAI

- **Encourage and amplify** lesson sharing and strategic (co)funding opportunities

- **Intelligence gatherer and thought partner** with a systemic perspective

TAI as an Influencer

Key areas of inquiry: Strategic progress; approaches to shape our work and that of others

KEY INSIGHT

Participation in TAI yielded benefits and results for members across the four strategic pillars; however, misalignment between long-term, field-level aspirations for change and operational realities likely hampered progress on this strategic framework.

Collaborative Success Benchmark	TAI Evaluation Key Findings
Achievable outcomes paired with relevant implementation plan	TAI's strategic framework established inspiring, ambitious goals, many of which were not likely achievable during the strategy period. Furthermore, many of the strategic outcomes do not align with the collaborative's: timeline and nature of activities; donor-serving focus; or sphere of influence. Nonetheless, there was evidence of some progress in TAI's intermediate outcomes (detailed assessment of strategic pillars was beyond the evaluation scope of work).

"
Even though there are donors pursuing similar work and priorities and moving in the same direction, they don't align with the "transparency" label. Is the focus on improved transparency and accountability an end goal or a means to an end?
                          – TAI Member

Progress on TAI's Strategic Pillars

Learning for Improved Grantmaking

TAI dedicated over half of its resources to this pillar. There is member consensus that this works, though sometimes more ad hoc than intentional, adds value to how funders do their work and has inspired funder practices that support grantee effectiveness.

Strengthening Civic Space

Members recognize this pillar as a critical enabling factor for their work and grantee organizational resilience. TAI offered a valued space for members to share information on this topic, resulting in at least one new member investment. However, this work lacked momentum or member consensus on shared purpose.

Data Use for Accountability

This work included guidance to inform future interventions and yielded member learning efforts and co-investments to support data use for the public good. However, Secretariat bandwidth constraints limited work on data privacy strategic outcome. Member integration of "data" funding across portfolios hindered clear member ownership or points of contact for this pillar.

Taxation and Tax Governance

Members and non-members benefited from this work, including clarity on the state of the funding ecosystem, and of civil society work on tax reform. Through regular meetings, program officers coordinated around field funding and other needs. Global policy results suggest potential member contribution to beneficial ownership transparency, but further evidence is needed to fully assess this linkage.
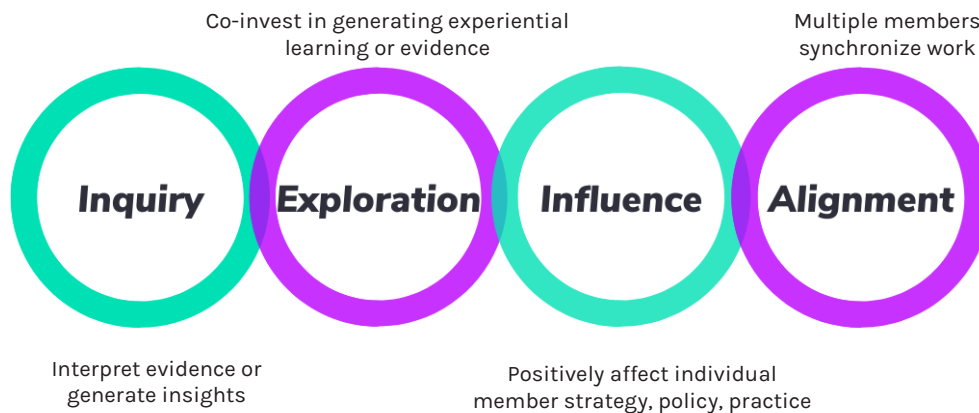
TAI as a Collaborative

Key areas of inquiry: Collaboration, learning, and other collective practices

KEY INSIGHT

TAI creates an open environment for communication and collective inquiry and fosters relationships that advance individual and collective work.

Collaborative Success Benchmark	TAI Evaluation Key Findings
Collaborative is useful for member institutional and collective work	TAI serves as a social capital and network builder, enabling members to work together within and beyond the TAI platform. These functions are particularly valued by funders that are newer to the field.

How are TAI Members Collaborating?

Co-invest in generating experiential learning or evidence

Multiple members synchronize work

Inquiry   **Exploration**   **Influence**   **Alignment**

Interpret evidence or generate insights

Positively affect individual member strategy, policy, practice

Inquiry and Exploration: These are the most frequently cited ways that members are working together through and beyond TAI-hosted spaces. Topics range from strategy, to programs, and due diligence.

- 60% regularly request and share information and ideas with each other
- 64% have co-invested in new knowledge or evidence

Influence: Members report being influenced by others in the collaborative

- 71% have drawn on others' grantmaking practices to adapt their own
- 57% note that another member influenced their strategy or practice

Alignment: Members report some instances of co-investment but tend to synchronize other actions, such as streamlining reporting requirements or mapping players and gaps together to inform institutional funding.

- 66% have funded a similar organization or other opportunity

How Can TAI Deepen Member Collaboration?

▬ Members desire even more:

- Communication and coordination with each other, both supported by and independent of the Secretariat
- Openness to new approaches and opportunities to work together
- Willingness to compromise to align and achieve shared goals

Among TAI Members

27% strongly agree
53% agree

that they feel included in major decision-making processes.

Methods

TAI partnered with Arabella Advisors to design and conduct an evaluation of TAI's work and progress during the 2016-2019 strategy period.

▬ **Data sources**

- Document review: 150 sources reviewed; 30 documents coded and analyzed
- Online member survey: 15 respondents across 6 TAI member funders
- Interviews: 27 stakeholders (TAI Secretariat and members, member grantee organization staff, other donors and field practitioners)

▬ **Learning sessions**

- Initial findings: virtual member discussion
- Complete findings: in-person member sensemaking workshop

Transparency and Accountability Initiative is a collaborative of leading funders of transparency, accountability and participation worldwide. It envisions a world where citizens are informed and empowered; governments are open and responsive; and collective action advances the public good. Toward this end, TAI aims to increase the collective impact of transparency and accountability interventions by strengthening grantmaking practice, learning and collaboration among its members. TAI focuses on the following thematic areas: data use for accountability, strengthening civic space, taxation and tax governance, learning for improved grantmaking.

TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVE

1110 Vermont Ave NW #500, Washington, DC 20005

www.transparency-initiative.org

@TAInitiative