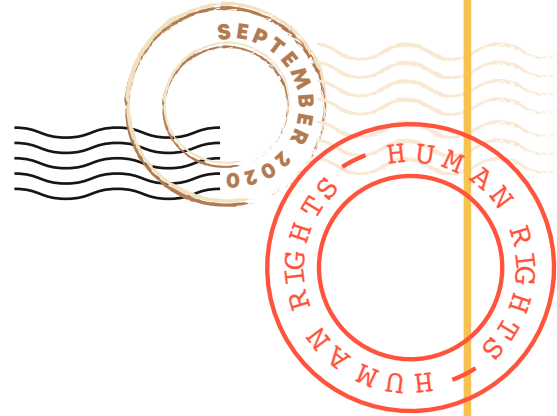




# HUMAN RIGHTS GRANTMAKING PRINCIPLES



## WHY THESE PRINCIPLES?

These principles are intended to help funders align their grantmaking practices with human rights values. They were developed by Ariadne–European Funders for Social Change and Human Rights, Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN), and Gender Funders CoLab in consultation with our members, peer funder networks, and representatives from civil society organizations that receive human rights funding.<sup>1</sup>

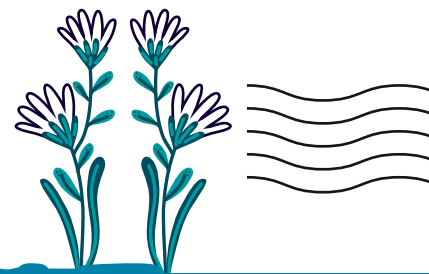
The field of human rights philanthropy has grown to over 849 institutions providing more than \$3.2 billion annually to support organizations and movements working across the full spectrum of human rights.<sup>2</sup> Funders in our networks overwhelmingly agree that values or principles should guide their grantmaking, yet a significant number are less certain whether their institutions have articulated values or principles to guide grantmaking, or if staff members are consistently using them.<sup>3</sup> These principles are a tool to address that gap and challenge our networks to live up to a higher standard. They are especially vital in the current moment given the need for philanthropy to push for a more just and equitable world.



## HOW SHOULD THESE PRINCIPLES BE USED?

These principles can help foundations explore their practices internally, catalyze conversations among funders from different institutions, and support funders to share and learn together with others in the human rights field. They are meant as a tool for self-reflection and growth. For some they will seem extremely challenging to achieve. For others they will not go far enough. For some foundations, change may take time and require a long process of mentality shift, internally and externally.

Our aim is for the principles to be digestible, actionable, memorable, and—when applied in concert with each other—transformational. We ask that funders set tangible benchmarks and hold themselves accountable to these shifts in practice. To help guide funders along this journey, we will work with our members on companion resources illustrating the principles in practice.



## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY HUMAN RIGHTS?

Human rights are universal. They are the basic rights and freedoms every person is entitled to simply by virtue of being human. They are grounded in the inherent dignity of every human being and are inalienable and should never be taken away. Human rights are outlined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent treaties and declarations, and prescribe a standard all countries are expected to uphold. Human rights are actualized by the activists, communities, and movements who defend and enjoy them.

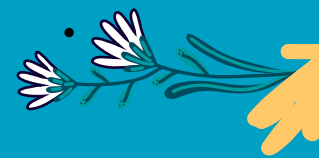
Human rights are indivisible, interrelated, interdependent, and mutually reinforcing. Civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights should be given equal attention and importance, and individual rights should not be privileged over collective rights. Furthering human rights requires an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach, and a focus on the root causes and structural obstacles that prevent rights from being respected, protected, and fulfilled.

While the human rights framework offers a powerful vision for equality and opportunity, it is not without its limitations. International human rights norms were primarily developed by privileging dominant systems of belief over others, including Indigenous Peoples' value systems. We aim to build upon the framework by incorporating values and perspectives held by feminist, social justice, and environmental justice movements. A focus on the redistribution of resources and power is a critical addition to our conceptualization of human rights, along with a responsibility to protect the earth and environment.

<sup>1</sup> We gathered feedback through surveys, in-person meetings, and virtual town halls. Approximately 300 funders and human rights advocates from over 40 countries provided their recommendations.

<sup>2</sup> For more information about the human rights funding landscape visit [humanrightsfunding.org](https://humanrightsfunding.org)

<sup>3</sup> In a 2019 survey of 130 funders from organizations in 21 countries, 85% strongly agreed that values or principles should guide their grantmaking, 62% strongly agreed that their institutions have articulated values or principles to guide their grantmaking, and 39% strongly agreed that staff members consistently use these values or principles to guide grantmaking.



*Our community is global, diverse, and multilingual. The terminology we use is vast and nuanced. While we have aimed for clarity and simplicity in naming the principles, we recognize that funders will use different terms in describing their work. Our intention is to define specific concepts and articulate their underlying values as a starting point to our work together.*

*\* The materials produced through the Principles Project are open source and free for anyone to use and incorporate in their work. Please reference "The Principles Project, a collaboration of Ariadne – European Funders for Social Change and Human Rights, Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN), and Gender Funders CoLab."*

# PRINCIPLES

## 1. Power Sharing and Shifting

Human rights grantmaking involves challenging and transforming how power is held and used. Unequal relationships persist that impede our collective work to advance human rights, including between donors and grantees, between the Global North and the Global South and East, and between large well-funded international organizations and small national or local groups and movements. Human rights funders should seek to share and shift power by incorporating power analyses across our work, establishing participatory decision-making processes, and building relationships based on trust and equal footing. Funders can challenge inequitable power structures by resourcing those whose rights are under attack to build and exercise their own power. This should include providing flexible and unrestricted funding so that grantees have the power to set their own priorities and establishing straightforward grant processes which do not place undue burden on grantees. Funders must directly acknowledge and redress power imbalances within our grantmaking processes and across all relationships.

## 2. Accountability

Human rights funders must recognize our own institutions and selves as accountable to the movements, organizations, and individual rights-holders we aim to support. In practice, foundations are more commonly accountable to trustees and donors rather than grantees. This problem will persist until funding institutions commit to being responsive to field needs in our grantmaking priorities and practices, and establish clear accountability mechanisms that include avenues for complaint and redress in cases when we betray trust. Human rights funders should be open and transparent about our goals and approaches, including our context analysis, priorities, how decisions are made within our institutions, and (where possible) the sources of our funding. Funders should continuously assess and respond to changes in the human rights landscape, including emerging issues or those that may be under the radar. Recognizing that power differentials can be an obstacle to demanding transparency and answerability, we should be proactive in sharing information with and incorporating feedback from the constituencies we serve. Being mindful that accountability includes being good stewards of information, we must balance transparency with the safety of our grantees, and only share details publicly that will not place them or their communities at risk.



## 3. Collective Care

As human rights funders, we should support our grantees to pursue holistic safety and protection (including physical safety, mental health, and digital security), as well as community care and healing. Human rights defenders face trauma, violence, and burnout as a result of their work. Threats to safety may be physical, social, emotional, economic, legal, political, or reputational. First and foremost, human rights funders must always seek to do no harm and mitigate risks. Funder actions can expose grantees and communities to risks; potential risks should be evaluated in collaboration with those affected and held above all other concerns. Recognizing the high incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder, self-sacrifice, and overwork present in human rights organizations and movements, funders should support improved working conditions and adequate compensation so that self-care is at the heart of internal working cultures.

## 5. Equity

Human rights grantmaking recognizes that every person deserves the same rights and seeks to address the root causes of injustice and inequality. This entails applying an intersectional lens to understand how a person's multiple identities and characteristics—including but not limited to race, caste, age, sex, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, class, culture, and disability—can compound discrimination and oppression. As human rights funders, we must strive to deconstruct our biases and be anti-sexist, anti-racist, and anti-classist in all of our work. In addition to developing grantmaking priorities that center marginalized groups, we should shift resources to institutions and movements that have the least resources (including those based in the Global South and East) and address the ways in which our own institutions fall short with respect to being diverse, equitable, and representative. We must move beyond merely increasing the diversity of voices and perspectives within our institutions to ensuring that there is fair and equal participation and power, particularly at leadership levels—including boards of directors.

## 4.

## Community Driven

Human rights grantmaking should encompass two distinct elements: a commitment to support community-led groups and a commitment to community-inclusive decision-making processes within our funding institutions. Human rights funders recognize that individuals and communities experiencing injustice should lead in articulating the change they wish to see and the paths taken towards its realization. Impacted communities—and the social movements that represent them—must lead not only because we want to shift power, but because they know better than anyone else about their own needs, contexts, and possibilities for change. Human rights funders should prioritize funding that enables organizations and movements to implement their own visions, strengthen their capacity, and adapt to changing circumstances over the long term. We should make our grantmaking processes more inclusive and participatory by directly engaging impacted communities (with a particular focus on marginalized and excluded groups within those communities) in identifying problems, analyzing structural causes, and determining solutions. We must ensure that this engagement is not extractive, but rather supports the self-determined objectives of these communities and has their full consent.

## 6. Adaptability and Learning

Human rights funders should recognize the importance of innovation, experimentation, and creativity in driving social change. This requires moving beyond our comfort zones to build new capacities and fund emerging groups and evolving strategies. At the same time, we are mindful that the drive for innovation can discard time-honored and effective practices. We should therefore complement our openness to new approaches with ongoing commitment to tried and true strategies. Recognizing that systemic change requires a long-term commitment, we should adjust our timelines and expectations for impact accordingly and be mindful that, in some contexts, human rights work means holding one's ground and preventing changes that erode human rights. We should foster a culture of learning and speak honestly about failures, unexpected outcomes, and mistakes. We must also create space for open and candid conversations with our grantees to build a community of practice that makes us all more effective in advancing human rights.

