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PRACTICAL WISDOM FOR GRANTMAKERS

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WORLD SUMMITS & CONFERENCES

GRANT MAKING ON A GLOBAL STAGE

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world summits& conferences

grant making on a
global stage

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What are international summits? What can they accomplish? And what issues can be expected to arise along the way? This chapter lists a few opportunities and challenges that grant makers may encounter.

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Grant making in connection with summits can offer short-term benefits to participants and longer-term impacts on policy. There are costs as well as benefits associated with mobilizing governments and non-governmental organizations at a worldwide gathering. So, before stepping into this arena, it's wise to understand the debate about summits. Here are issues commonly raised and how some grant makers respond.

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United Nations summits

and other international meetings have emerged over the past 15-20 years as important forums for addressing worldwide problems. This guide explains why some grant makers choose to support summit-related activities and what they've learned about working with grantees, colleagues, journalists, and meeting organizers at every stage of the process.

This guide was written by Rebecca Nichols and Anne Bailey, with assistance from Ellen Arrick and Anne Mackinnon. It is part of the GrantCraft series..

Publications and videos in this series are not meant to give instructions or prescribe solutions; rather, they are intended to spark ideas, stimulate discussion, and suggest possibilities. Comments about this guide or other GrantCraft materials may be sent to Jan Jaffe, project leader, at j.jaffe@grantcraft.org.

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Setting the Stage

International summits grew in importance during the 1990s as a series of United Nations conferences on the environment, human rights, population, social development, and women occurred in rapid succession. Many social change activists were hopeful that these gatherings, with the participation of U.N. member governments and thousands of non-governmental actors from around the world, would overcome the constraints of national borders and become powerful engines for social, economic, and political advancement. As a grant maker in environment and development observed, “Whether you like them or not, these summits are a moving set of global law and governance agendas in progress.”

World summits have led to new local and international institutions, programs, and policy changes. For example, a permanent anti-racism unit was established at the U.N. as a result of the World Conference Against Racism in 2001. Within three years of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, 130 countries had developed national action plans based on the Beijing Platform for Action, and 22 countries had enacted new laws on women’s political participation.

One grant maker described how environmental principles established at the 1992 Earth Summit informed state government policies in Brazil’s Western Amazon to be more concerned with sustainable forestry practices. In addition, the “programs of action” produced by summits are frequently used by donors and U.N. agencies to guide their spending in developing countries.

The impact of these conferences hasn’t been limited to the production of official consensus documents or sets of policies jointly approved by member states. The conferences have also represented powerful opportunities for the voluntary, civic, and public-interest groups that constitute “civil society” to bring public, governmental, and media attention to key social justice and development issues and to build global coalitions of like-

For brevity’s sake, we use the terms “summits” and “conferences” throughout this guide to refer to international gatherings of all kinds. Technically, “summit” describes a meeting of governments — and in the strictest sense, heads of state. But the word is more loosely used for all sorts of meetings where the purpose is worldwide deliberation on an international issue. For most of the purposes of this guide, the definitional distinctions aren’t crucial, so unless specified otherwise, we use “summit” in the broadest sense.

minded actors. For example, a grant maker working in human rights reported that the World Conference Against Racism gave new visibility to the discrimination experienced by Afro-Latino communities in South America, and also provided opportunities for different communities of Afro-descendants to strategize with one another on a regional level. “We went to WCAR as black people,” said one grantee from the region, “and we came out Afro-descendants.” This community began to see itself as rooted in a larger historical and cultural tradition.

The sheer size, expense, and political and logistical complexity of conferences raise a host of issues and problems that come with bringing people from a wide range of perspectives together to address social inequities and development challenges. This is an ambitious goal and, not surprisingly, governments, the U.N., and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have expressed frustration about the process and its outcomes.

By their very nature, summits make debates about how to address social inequities available to global audiences and not everyone is going to agree on the best solutions. Reaching joint recommendations for solutions is an important and challenging task.

Some countries are reluctant to host the meetings because of the time and resources needed and the risk involved in airing internal policy issues in an unpredictable intergovernmental forum. Some NGOs have questioned whether summits are the best use of their staff time and finances, and some are asking how to integrate more grass roots organizations into the summit process.

WHAT FORMS DO INTERNATIONAL SUMMITS AND CONFERENCES TAKE?

There are four general types of international gatherings, each of which is described in more detail elsewhere in this guide. In brief terms, these are the categories:

■ **An official U.N. summit** is typically an official meeting of governments convened by the United Nations to address a vital social and economic issue affecting all countries, for example sustainable development, the status of women, or racism. At a summit, governments seek to arrive at a consensus on core norms and standards that are then codified in a conference document and serve as recommendations for action at the country or international level. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) need to get “accredited” to attend (see page 10 for information on what this entails) and even then they can only do so as observers unless governments invite them into delegations beforehand. But from the corridors, NGOs can make an enormous impact.

■ **An NGO forum** is a meeting of non-governmental organizations

that may run alongside an official summit — often nearby, and concurrent with the summit proceedings. Its purpose is usually to help the participating organizations share ideas, consolidate their points of agreement, and find ways to inject their message into a global discussion that includes governments and the private sector.

■ **An international civil society meeting** is also an NGO gathering, but it tends to focus specifically on advancing a social movement or solving a complex problem. It is usually a main event in itself, not a side conference to a summit or other government negotiation. Some, such as the World Social Forum or the International AIDS Conference, are annual or biennial events.

■ **Meetings of multilateral institutions** like the World Bank or the World Trade Organization are usually not open to official participation by NGOs, but the latter may be able to participate as observers. These meetings are regular events, occurring annually or sometimes even more often.

While the pace of U.N. conferences has slowed down, follow-up work from the summits still needs to be done if the goals and objectives laid forth are to be achieved. Civil society continues to use the summits as a base to work across

WORLD CONFERENCES CAN BE CONTROVERSIAL

Summits almost by definition involve spirited, public discussion of controversial issues. It's not uncommon for debates to flare. As one grant maker noted, "Summits are volatile. If you think about it from the point of view of an activist, a summit is a way to speak to the world." With that reality in mind, grant makers offered the following advice about deciding to support activities associated with an international meeting, planning for it, and handling conflicts should they occur:

- **Weigh costs and benefits.** It's important, said one grant maker, to recognize that incidents may take place and things may be said that are highly offensive to some people and even run counter to a foundation's core values. "When you're a funder," he cautioned, "you have the idea that you're funding something specific. But in the court of public opinion, there's an assumption that if you fund it you must agree with it. So you need to look at the whole summit and do a risk analysis."
- **Support international meetings as part of longer-term goals.** Although no single activity will solve a major world problem on its own, summits—even very controversial ones—can be crucial in moving an issue forward. Said one previously skeptical grant maker, "At first, I actually thought the [2001 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS] was going to be an exercise in futility, but now I'm being proven wrong. The advocates are holding governments accountable for what they signed on to do."
- **Communicate clearly about your support.** Whether your main motivation is advancing global solutions to a problem, increasing democratic governance, or building the capacity of grantees, clarity of purpose can help you prepare for the meeting and calmly weather any strife that occurs.
- **Identify likely areas of contention.** Study the issues and seek different perspectives to inform yourself, your colleagues, managers, and board about what might become sticking points in debates. Remind everyone in advance that summits are always much more complex than depicted in the media. One grant maker advises monitoring the web sites of meeting organizers and other key groups "to see what kind of messages they're using and what proposals they might be putting forth or supporting."
- **Brief grantees about what to expect.** As one grant maker noted, "We remind grantees, 'When you're at the conference, you're on a world stage. It's not like being back home and talking to your own local constituency.'" Some funders encourage grantees to prepare for media attention by developing messages and training spokespeople in advance.
- **Talk with the summit organizers.** Prior to the 2004 World Social Forum in Mumbai, staff members from one foundation spoke with meeting organizers about how they would react to bigoted comments or symbols: "What we said was, 'It would help us to know that you'll do something.'" The organizers subsequently made public statements "about what they wanted to see happen, what they thought the World Social Forum stood for, and things they didn't want to see."
- **Have a plan for responding.** One grant maker advised that it's important to be prepared to react rapidly: "You might easily have a microphone thrust in your face after a workshop at which [offensive] things were said. You have to be prepared for that. If things happen that go against your values, you'll need to make a statement."
- **Try to focus attention on the meeting's purpose.** When controversy erupts, the media tends to focus on it, often to the exclusion of more constructive developments taking place at the event. In the words of one experienced funder, "We've learned that it's possible to denounce something or disagree with something that happens without throwing away the whole summit." Acknowledging controversy is not the same as allowing it to overshadow the entire conference.

borders to attain their goals. And, the various conferences have spawned new organizations and networks dedicated to meeting conference goals.

Yet despite the controversy over the U.N. summit format, other forms of worldwide deliberation and social activism have begun to increase in importance as organizations see the value of working across borders to get their voices heard. For example, non-governmental conferences such as the World Social Forum have begun to attract the numbers (more than 75,000 participants in 2004) and the media attention formerly reserved for official U.N. summits. In addition, activists are increasingly seizing opportunities to organize around the intergovernmental meetings of multilateral financial and trade institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, or the World Bank.

Which brings us to this guide ...

Despite their limitations, summits and world conferences can give grantees an important opportunity to contribute ideas to governments and international agencies, and to link with counterparts and kindred movements around the globe.

By giving leaders and organizations experience with international forums, issues, and media, participating in these meetings can help grantees build crucial skills in advocacy, policy formulation, and communications — skills that are as useful at home as on a world stage.

Drawing from grant makers' experiences and reflections, this guide tries to convey the sense of opportunity and promise that summits can offer, along with some of the dilemmas and con-

troversies that they produce. It also suggests some ways to decide whether making grants in connection with world gatherings will fit your purposes, as well as some of the forms such grants can take and how they might be tailored to the various stages of the summit process. Even if you decide not to make grants in connection with a U.N. summit or world conference, the guide offers ideas for supporting other kinds of large scale meetings of grantees focusing on new issues or common interests.

WHERE THE INFORMATION IN THIS GUIDE COMES FROM

Grant makers, U.N. officials, and staff of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) shared their experiences for this guide. While many other important U.N. summits have taken place, most of the experiences on which this guide is based were associated with the Sustainable Development Summit (Johannesburg, South Africa, 2002), the World Conference Against Racism (Durban, South Africa, 2001), the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, China, 1995), the Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1992), and the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, Egypt, 1994) and their accompanying NGO forums, as well as the 15th International AIDS Conference (Bangkok, Thailand, 2004), the World Social Forum (Mumbai, India, 2004), the World Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen, Denmark, 1995), and the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, Austria, 1993).

For links to information about these and other U.N. summits and world conferences, see page 15 of this guide.

Why Fund in Connection with a Summit?

“It’s like shining a big global spotlight on the issues that you’re working on.”

International gatherings are complex, sometimes unruly events with enormous potential to address global problems. Grant makers can make important contributions by helping grantees participate, making sure fresh voices are heard, and bringing information exchanged at the meeting to the attention of wider audiences. They can support grantees with strong technical skills in assisting less experienced participants.

What results might come out of an international summit? A successful summit might be expected to produce these general outcomes:

- government commitments to implement new or reinforced international standards, to which they can be held accountable
- the exchange of new perspectives, information, and learning, including how NGOs can wield more influence in the United Nations and its various forums and deliberations
- the creation of new institutions, networks, and campaigns to turn early progress into tangible gains
- the broadening and consolidation of social movements worldwide

The United Nations, governments, and NGOs usually take part in international gatherings in the hope of achieving one or more of those general outcomes. Here, the grant makers who contributed to this guide describe some of the specific ways in which funding in connection with a summit or conference helped advance their grantees’ goals:

- **The summit addresses issues vital to the goals of the donor and**

grantees. “It’s like shining a big global spotlight on the issues that you’re working on.” Provided that planning starts well in advance, summits can help grantees gain and apply skills, inform constituencies, form new networks, and influence government perspectives and actions.

- **The summit may advance international standards on those issues.**

As one grant maker noted, “Summits are unique opportunities to have universal consequences.”

The consensus documents emerging from U.N. summits generally contain norms and standards, and in some cases the identification of concrete benchmarks for success, on which governments have signed off. They are also used as working documents for follow-up sessions on the same issue, to measure whether goals have been met.

- **The summit may advance the policies of particular countries on those issues.** “Over 400 African-Brazilians participated in the Conference Against Racism, and media coverage of the Conference was extensive. Further, the presence of members from African-Brazilian organizations in the Brazilian governmental delegation influenced its opinion concerning the Platform for Action. Now, after the conference, new policies in Brazil include: implementation by the Ministry of Agrarian Reform of a quota system to enhance recruitment of black employees, launch by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of a scholarship program for 20 black students per year to attend the diplomatic school,

Summits can provide unique opportunities for grantees to broaden their perspectives ...

implementation of affirmative action programs for black and indigenous students at several state universities, and passage of affirmative action legislation at the local level.”

In other words, the grantee’s goal doesn’t have to be exclusively global: The attention that a summit can attract nationally can impel individual governments to listen to new constituencies and change policy.

- **The summit increases the visibility of those issues.** “The boost that comes from having the U.N. hold a world conference around an issue is incredibly important in legitimizing the civil society voices that have been advocating for attention on that issue. It says, ‘OK, the governments of the world are taking notice.’ And even if the conference doesn’t come up with a solution, it creates a space for a whole host of things to happen on the national level that otherwise may not happen.” For example, the role of women as environmental managers, care-takers, and activists was made visible through the conference on the environment in Rio. Summit processes can offer opportunities to educate and even engage the public — not to mention decision makers, the media, and even other NGOs — on formerly invisible or complex issues. In fact, despite the fears of some donors that summits may generate an unacceptable level of controversy, in some sense the old adage “no publicity is bad publicity” can hold true for introducing important issues to the world stage.

- **The summit can expand grantees’ view of their mission and opportunities.** “We found a greater awareness of internationalism among people who went, which is absolutely critical and has often been missing in the United States.” Summits can provide unique opportunities for grantees to broaden their perspectives and place their agendas in an international context. They can also help advance a field itself. For example, one grant maker in reference to the Conference on Human Rights talked about an important shift in perspective: “The concept of women’s rights as human rights was a main achievement of that conference and actually shifted the global frame. This greatly influenced the next Women’s Conference in 1995.”

- **The summit may help build or strengthen international social movements.** “During the Conference Against Racism some 20,000 participants, representing oppressed peoples, were able to get together for the very first time.” Summits can provide a galvanizing force for organizing that NGOs are increasingly adept at using. At the Sustainable Development Summit, for example, although the NGO forum itself lacked structural or logistical coherence, a variety of well-planned, well-attended, and large-scale NGO meetings took place, such as the Kimberley Summit of Indigenous Peoples and the Children’s Earth Summit.

WHAT IT IS / WHAT IT DOES

THE OFFICIAL U.N. SUMMIT

While often perceived as the exclusive domain of governments, summits and their preparatory and follow-up activities can involve literally tens of thousands of non-official actors engaged in a wide range of advocacy, networking, capacity-building, movement-building, and public education efforts. Indeed, a large and growing proportion of summit attendees represent NGOs and other civil society actors from throughout the world. At the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, some 4,000 of the nearly 8,000 accredited participants were NGO representatives.

The main categories of people at international summits are:

- Representatives of U.N. member states (the only voting category)
- Staff of the U.N. conference secretariat
- The U.N. Secretary General and representatives of the U.N., its agencies, programmes, and funds
- Representatives of NGOs and other civil society groups
- Media representatives

Summit preparations generally take about three years, with several important steps occurring early in the process. One is the selection of a host country, which is responsible for most of the summit costs. Another is the convening of official regional or sub-regional preparatory meetings. These are designed to feed into the meetings of the official Preparatory Committee, where U.N. member states develop an agenda and program of work, and negotiate working documents that will be considered for approval at the summit itself.

Preparatory Committee meetings – often called “PrepComs” for short – also address rules of access and procedure for the summit, including rules of access for NGOs. These offer a crucial early window through which to contribute ideas for agreements and documents, and to focus public attention on the summit agenda. Also, a PrepCom’s success in finalizing the summit document can affect who will attend the summit itself. In general, the more finalized the document, the more likely it is that governments will send high-level delegates to the official meeting. At the summit, member states draw primarily on the PrepCom document to arrive at a final negotiated consensus, but may also refer to statements by coalitions of governments, NGOs, U.N. agencies, or others. Summit outcomes typically include a program or platform for action and a political declaration, committing member states to a range of measures upon return to their home countries.

After a summit has ended, the relevant U.N. Commission (such as the Commission on the Status of Women in the case of the Beijing Conference) generally takes responsibility at its yearly session to review progress made on summit commitments. In some cases, the U.N. General Assembly will convene a Special Session five years after the summit to assess the overall status of implementation. These so-called “plus-five” reviews, such as the 1999 Cairo+5, following the 1994 Population Conference, are generally held at U.N. Headquarters in New York. Ten years or more after a summit, the U.N. sometimes convenes what amounts to a follow-up summit. For example, the Sustainable Development Summit in 2002 was convened as a follow-up to the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development (better known as the Earth Summit).

How Some Grant Makers Prepare

Once you have decided to make grants in connection with a summit process, contributors to this guide suggest taking these steps to prepare yourself and your own organization:

■ **Develop long-term goals as early as possible in the summit process.**

"You have to think about what your goals are, going in. Now, my goals are often to help grantees spotlight an issue – to pluralize the voices that are engaged in these debates, to bring voices to that debate that would not have been there without us. That's very easy to measure." Funders can steer a clearer course through complex summit processes if they know what outcomes their grantees hope to achieve. Many grant makers recommended exploring these matters quite carefully. They also suggest that it is helpful to grantees to inform and enlist the support of other areas of the grant maker's organization.

■ **Learn more about related policy issues from the perspective of other countries, regions, and organizations.** It makes sense early on to confer with other funders, grantees, policymakers, and scholars to learn their views on a summit and related opportunities, and where the issues to be addressed fall within their spheres of work. In particular, as one grant maker observed, "Funder networks or affinity groups can be great vehicles to familiarize funders with a whole sector."

■ **Build a network and establish key contacts with NGOs, private sector organizations, and government agencies.** Experienced grant makers

recommend devoting some of their advance information gathering to setting up relationships with a range of other actors early in the summit process. Regular briefings from grantees and other experts can provide funders with important information and insights, and governmental and U.N. contacts can keep donors abreast of the progress of official planning.

■ **Learn the basics of the summit preparatory process itself.** Summits are highly complex political and bureaucratic events, in which such banal details as accreditation deadlines can make or break the effectiveness of a grant. Donors probably need not become as expert in a summit process as grantees eventually need to be. But grant makers should get an overview of the summit's major players at the U.N. and among governments, the summit timeline, and its general rules of procedure. (A list of helpful links is available on our web site.)

■ **Develop informational networks and funding partnerships whenever possible within and outside your foundation.** In the early days of summit planning, funders and grantees can play an important role in informing colleagues who are less knowledgeable about summit processes. These kinds of activities generate partnerships that can increase the impact of any one donor. Regarding the Beijing Conference, a China-based funder reported: "We started a group for donors where we did a lot of strategizing around key questions ... What's the platform likely to look like? What are the con

KEEP YOUR EXPECTATIONS REALISTIC

Optimism and idealism can run high around an impending summit, and many funders warn against inflated expectations:

International summits are one step in a much longer process. For example, in connection with the U.N. Millennium Summit, held in September 2000, some 189 countries pledged to halve the number of people globally who live on less than a dollar a day. "We are nowhere near" reaching those goals, said one high-ranking U.N. official, "but we've left the starting block."

By contrast, funders involved with annual or biennial meetings like the International AIDS Conference noted that people tend to bring more modest expectations to those gatherings. Said one, "No one thinks that the AIDS meeting is going to create a paradigm shift or a whole new way of doing things. The issue is that people come with very different levels of experience and knowledge. Some of us have been coming for 15 years; others are coming for the first time. The meeting organizers have to learn to work with that."

WHAT IS ACCREDITATION?

For non-governmental organizations, the term “accreditation” is used in the U.N. orbit in more than one way. Here is a short breakdown of its various meanings.

- **ACCREDITATION TO A SUMMIT:** This is a credential that allows an NGO to attend an official U.N. summit as an observer. The summit accreditation process, which is overseen by the secretariat, governs who may apply to attend and on what terms.
- **ACCREDITATION TO THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (ECOSOC):** Also known as consultative status, this is a credential that entitles an NGO to be invited to all U.N. summits as an observer. The application process is sometimes lengthy, but it offers several advantages for NGOs that want to participate regularly in the workings of the U.N.
- **ACCREDITATION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION (DPI):** NGOs with information programs on issues of concern to the United Nations may apply for association with the U.N. Department of Public Information. The application process is less complex than for ECOSOC, and DPI status also allows some access to U.N. Headquarters. But it does not grant access to U.N. summits.
- **ACCREDITATION TO OTHER U.N. ENTITIES:** Many of the programs, agencies, and funds under the U.N. umbrella have their own separate mechanisms by which NGOs can become accredited or otherwise brought into the fold. An NGO in consultative status with UNICEF, for example, will have rights and privileges related specifically to that agency, though not to the U.N. as a whole. Still, association with a specific U.N. unit can render it easier to obtain accreditation to a summit specifically germane to that entity’s work (in UNICEF’s case, the U.N. Special Session on Children, held in May 2002). While NGOs don’t need accreditation to attend the NGO forum that runs parallel to a summit, they must be registered with the NGO conference organizer.

For links to other web sites that have more information on ECOSOC and DPI accreditation processes, see page 15 of this guide.

tentious areas going to be? What’s the difference between the agenda of the governmental meeting and the non-governmental meeting? What are the agendas of the groups that we work with?”

■ **Consider hiring a consultant or adding an intern to your team.**

Keeping track of a summit’s progress can be time-consuming. Depending on the level of resources available for summit work, donors may wish to retain a consultant or fund an intern to help monitor the summit’s progress and help with related program activities. Networks of funders and grantees could also use this tactic to keep the whole group informed at a level that would be beyond the means of any one member.

- **As the meeting approaches, think strategically about who should attend from your organization.** “We studied the program,” recalled one grant maker whose foundation sent staff to the World Social Forum, “and identified workshops where conflict seemed likely. We wanted to be sure we had people there so we’d know what happened.” For more on deciding whether or not to attend an international meeting, see page 14 of this guide.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Working with Grantees

Whether you choose to provide strategic, logistical, or infrastructure support, the most commonly offered advice from grant makers experienced in the summit process is to engage early in the process and be prepared to support organizations interested in implementation and monitoring.

The early days of a summit process — up to three years before the official start date — can provide opportunities for grantees to participate in substantive agenda-setting at international and local levels, learn key issues and positions of governments, undertake networking, training, and public education activities, and plan ahead to seize openings for strategic action. (For help in planning ahead for grant making “points of entry,” see the *Sample Timeline for a U.N. Summit* on pages 26–27.)

Some of the ways that grant makers have funded grantees in connection with an international summit include:

STRATEGIC & ISSUE-ORIENTED

■ **Work with grantees to facilitate coalition-building and discussion around critical issues.** A grant maker who funded groups involved in the Population Conference in Cairo recommended early funding for preparatory work among groups of NGOs. “Ahead of time we funded groups that were helping to develop their country strategies in Egypt and the Philippines. We put quite a bit of money into bringing groups together to strategize and figure out where some of the trouble spots might be. For example, how should the

women’s movement engage population issues? Differences of opinion were worked out to reduce the level of discord when people got to the conference.”

■ **Support grantee participation in Preparatory Committee meetings (PrepComs).** Even well before the summit, NGOs often take advantage of the critical mass of people attending an official PrepCom to hold planning meetings of their own. A U.N. official remarked regarding NGO participation, “It’s better if they can be there at the beginning, because the first round is actually shaping what is the agenda.”

Much of the platform for action is written at the PrepCom, and consensus is developed there. Major areas of dissent are left for the final summit. Those NGOs who are prepared to engage official delegations at PrepComs can contribute to outcomes.

■ **Create or support mechanisms to strengthen diverse voices.** A funder who worked on the International Conference on Population and Development realized early on in the process that one group of religious leaders — that wasn’t reflective of the diversity of opinion on reproductive and gender issues — was likely to dominate the discussion. In response, the grant maker and her colleagues convened a more diverse set of religious leaders “to think through perspectives before the conference. We did not support groups to hammer out U.N. language. We brought people together to hammer

A VARIETY OF APPROACHES

Contributors to this guide describe a number of approaches to supporting grantees and other non-governmental actors in a summit. These grant making approaches typically fall into three areas:

■ **Strategic & Issue-oriented** support including advance research work and preparing materials that enables grantees and others to advocate for particular policy viewpoints and/or shape the substantive agenda of the meetings.

■ **Logistical & Navigational** assistance with travel, translation, electronic communication, or other activities that help grantees to understand or navigate the summit process.

■ **Infrastructure & Capacity Building** support for planning, advocacy training, or networking opportunities — activities that build the capacity of grantees to make the most of the summit but whose benefits carry over beyond the summit itself.

(For additional approaches a grant maker might consider in working with the media, see the next chapter.)

out ideas, concepts, and strategies that, even without the conference, would have been useful.”

■ **Support targeted policy research.**

Research on a summit topic, provided it is undertaken well in advance, can help to inform advocacy and media outreach. As an expert on foreign funding trends observed, for donors who are trying to address particularly sensitive topics, or who support work in difficult environments, “supporting research can be a moderate start to bringing up controversial issues.”

LOGISTICAL & NAVIGATIONAL

■ **Fund travel assistance for partici-**

pating grantees. “We tend to think it’s not very fulfilling to give travel grants. They’re boring. But if you’re not there, you’re not a player. That’s the bottom line.” Travel assistance for grantees in connection with preparatory meetings as well as the actual summit can be critical to the process – provided

the grantees have received accreditation to attend.

■ **Ensure that grantees know about accreditation and how to work within a U.N. summit process.** The rules of access to U.N. summits and their PrepComs are complex and can vary from summit to summit. “Funders should check with grantees to be sure they know how to become accredited to the official conference and should connect them with other NGOs who are more experienced with the U.N.” (For further information on accreditation, see page 10.)

■ **Fund advance orientation activities.**

World summits and NGO forums can seem like international bazaars of immense proportions, and grantees can easily become stymied by logistical obstacles or lose sight of strategic goals. Grant makers should ensure that grantees are fully conversant with the summit process and rules for NGOs, procedures for participating in the NGO and government forums, the layout and logistics of the host country and city, and how to make the best use of their time. One donor remembers, “We worked hard with our grantees to strategically figure out where they wanted to be. Did they want to influence U.N. language, or did they want to facilitate networking of NGOs? This was important because it was really hard to do both.”

■ **Provide targeted support to the summit secretariat.** While the host country and some U.N. member states assume the lion’s share of a summit’s costs, in some instances there may be reasons to support the summit’s organizing body as the

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THE NGO FORUM

Taking the summit agenda as a point of departure, an NGO forum generally engages large numbers of people from non-governmental organizations around the globe. In conjunction with the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, roughly 30,000 people participated in the NGO forum. In fact, in some circles this one gathering is credited with increasing the visibility and importance of NGO forums overall. While the main purpose of the forum is to connect with the official proceedings in some way, many participants attend to form networks, hone their skills in the global arena, and learn. Forums are usually governed by international NGO committees and run by a forum secretariat, and they are often the result of complex planning processes. Important partners in staging a forum can include the U.N. conference secretariat, the host government, a local host institution, and donors (often primarily private).

process moves along. For example, one grant maker recalled such a grant as the Beijing Conference was approaching:

"It seemed odd to fund the U.N., but we realized that the conference secretariat wasn't communicating effectively with the media or NGOs, and that the conference lead-up was suffering. Fairly late in the game, we made a grant to the secretariat specifically to hire public relations people, which had a big impact."

■ **Fund mechanisms for sharing information and strategies among grantees and with others.**

Newsletters, e-mail listserves, and e-mailed or faxed bulletins are just a few of the ways that grant makers can help grantees communicate in advance of summits. Before the Sustainable Development Summit, for example, one grant maker funded the production and e-mail distribution of update bulletins that helped grantees and other donors keep track of the summit's complex process. Supporting the translation of key documents into several languages and simultaneous translation during NGO meetings can also help ensure that grantees can communicate with counterparts in other countries.

■ **Support daily briefings for NGOs.**

At the summit itself, daily NGO briefings have proven indispensable in recapping events of the day before, highlighting the risks or opportunities of the day ahead, mustering support for particular positions on emerging issues, and providing opportunities for dialogue with U.N.

and government representatives. Held on summit premises, daily briefings are generally planned by an NGO committee.

■ **Support daily bulletins or newspapers.** Like daily briefings, daily bulletins or newspapers at a summit can help grantees track progress in the official negotiations and where they should concentrate their attention on any given day. One funder present at the Beijing Conference remembers:

"We funded an NGO bulletin that came out early every morning that summarized the official discussions of the day before. Basically, this grantee tried to have someone in every meeting. It was a vital record for NGOs who wanted to follow the debates. They also put the bulletins online, so people could follow from abroad." These publications can also help participants at the NGO forum to follow the proceedings.

■ **Support mechanisms to report summit developments to groups back home.**

"We funded one group to set up a large Internet site at the NGO forum. People really appreciated being able to report back home from the spot, and many people got trained on the Internet and e-mail who didn't know how to use them before." Several funders pointed to the importance of on-site hookups (at both the summit and forum) and staffed Internet cafés where grantees can inform global networks of developments. Internet cafés can also provide a vital training ground for NGOs from around the world in Internet technology. (For the story of a foun-

There may be reasons to support the summit's organizing body as the process moves along.

*Early support for the nuts and bolts of
forum planning can be crucial.*

SHOULD YOU, AS FUNDER, ATTEND?

“You bring in three NGOs to a grant maker convening and you have three NGOs. But if you go to a world meeting, you can connect with a much larger number of people.”

Attending a world summit or its companion NGO forum can be costly for grant makers both in time and money, and gaining entry to the official summit can entail the same access travails that NGOs face. Not every grant maker is prepared with either the resources or the skills to be effective at an international gathering. And it's true that at some summits, a donor presence can have unintended consequences — if, say, the grant maker is preferred over NGOs for access to the official meetings. Nonetheless, if the latter factor can be controlled, grant makers who are able to attend a summit or forum often find that their presence can have surprising benefits.

Participating grant makers can, for example:

Hear directly from people who are closest to the issue, who can bring new perspectives and suggest alternate solutions.

A grant maker who supported microcredit programs for women found that what she learned at the Beijing Conference caused her to take a broader approach to advancing women's well-being. In her words: “A \$50 loan to a woman may not bring about systemic change on its own. What about a health system that functions? What about roads, education, and so on?”

Play a brokering role for grantees with the U.N., the media, and others.

“It was really a matter of making sure we listened, we asked, we knew what was going on. We weren't directors here, we were matchmakers. We also fed journalists. Well, I mean we had all kinds of receptions that we invited different sorts of people to. Everybody's hungry, everybody wants to meet people.” Funders gain visibility by being at the summit or preparatory meetings, and can use that visibility even beyond the summit itself to help grantees gain access and credibility with high-ranking officials, the media, and others. While there, they can also play an important role in forging links among grantees and other groups.

Manage problems, should they arise, in real time. In one case, a U.S. grant maker was able to react quickly to a press story criticizing certain comments made during a session: “Because our people had been there, we were in a much better position to say, ‘you know what, those comments were taken out of context, and they weren't said by our grantees.’” If the foundation had waited until later to respond, he noted, the explanation “would have looked like a back-handed excuse.”

dition that supported and produced a webcast of the International AIDS Conference in Bangkok, see page 18 of this guide.)

INFRASTRUCTURE & CAPACITY BUILDING

■ **Fund advocacy training and activities.** PrepComs can provide good opportunities for grantees to learn more about effective advocacy — what works with policy makers and what doesn't. The advocacy skills that grantees acquire can be useful not only for the summit process but also in their work back home. Besides trying to contribute to the public debate, grantee advocacy can also encourage governments to include NGOs in their delegations or simply buy-in to the summit process itself. As seen at the Conference Against Racism, some key governments' lack of advance commitment to a summit can endanger the official outcomes. Advocacy that encourages engagement by the host country government can also be important to ensure that it is committed to the success of the NGO forum and other civil society events that accompany the summit.

■ **Provide planning support for the NGO forum.** NGO forums provide critical venues for civil society groups to try to influence summit outcomes, to attract world attention to their views, and to meet and build relationships with one another. Early support for the nuts and bolts of forum planning can be crucial. As one funder recalled, “We gave a grant to cover women from developing countries [to serve] on the NGO

Steering Committees for both the Population and Women's Conferences. There was a critique early on via the international networks that this was totally dominated by groups based in New York and Geneva, so we gave travel grants for planning meetings and early prep meetings for grantees coming from diverse locations. Funding the infrastructure was really important."

■ **Help build the capacity of host country groups, including linkages with foreign counterparts.** There are many good reasons for supporting host country groups. For one thing, those groups often play a central role in planning for the NGO forum, and can benefit from advance assistance. For another, the opportunities to build their overall capacity are too good to miss. Said a grant maker based in China during the lead-up to the 1995 Beijing

Conference on Women, "I very much looked at the world meeting in terms of goals for the Chinese women's movement. I wanted to make sure that they got the most that they could out of this international event that was happening on their soil." The same funder talked about the importance of having ensured that Chinese women participated in the regional preparatory meetings leading up to the summit. By the time the summit started, real relationships were already in place.

To Learn More

For information about the United Nations and U.N. summits, see the web site of the **U.N. Non-Governmental Liaison Service** (NLGS) at www.un-ngls.org. The NLGS office helps NGOs and others learn how to enter and participate in the summit process, including implementation and follow-up activities. NLGS often provides orientation sessions prior to PrepComs. Of particular interest on the site is a planning document, "Gender on the Agenda: A Guide to Participating in Beijing+5," which was prepared to assist NGOs prior to the five-year follow-up to the Beijing Conference on Women. It contains useful logistical and strategic information on how NGOs can prepare for any summit.

Within the United Nations' web site, the **Economic and Social Council** (ECOSOC) provides listings of past and upcoming U.N. conferences and General Assembly special sessions at www.un.org/docs/ecosoc/. Information on a particular summit can generally be found via links to the functional U.N. commissions at www.un.org/esa/. The ECOSOC site also provides a section on NGO participation, with directions on how to obtain consultative status.

The **Non-Governmental Organizations Section of the U.N.'s Department of Public Information** (DPI) also offers programs

and information for NGOs, including briefings, orientations, and an annual conference. To find out more about their resources, see www.un.org/dpi/ngosection/.

Another organization that supports participation by civil society organizations in U.N. summits is the **Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations** (CONGO). For information and links, see www.ngocongo.org.

There is no central clearinghouse for information about international conferences and meetings that take place outside the umbrella of the United Nations. For information on the biennial International AIDS Conferences and related meetings, see the web site of the International AIDS Society at www.iasociety.org. To learn more about the World Social Forum, how it is organized, and how to participate, see www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/.

The major multilateral financial institutions offer some information on upcoming meetings. See the web sites of the World Bank, at www.worldbank.org; the International Monetary Fund, at www.imf.org; and the World Trade Organization, at www.wto.org.

Engaging the Media

“I know for a fact that journalists have a very difficult time trying to figure out how to report on these gatherings.”

Good press is a vital but uncertain commodity that can shape the public’s perception of a summit and its outcomes. Don’t assume that journalists have a deep knowledge of the topic, the processes that govern the meeting, or the groups represented there. The journalist’s job is simply to find a good story and report it in an interesting way.

A grant maker who has attended numerous meetings noted, “I know for a fact that journalists have a very difficult time trying to figure out how to report on these gatherings. The World Social Forum, for example, often gets reported as a festival of ideas, or this sort of chaotic fairground. The analogy has very little to do with the substance of what’s actually going on and more to do with the setting itself.” Another funder asked, “How do we find better ways to tell the individual stories that are heard at an international summit?”

The challenge of finding a story is one reason why journalists sometimes limit their coverage to sensational events.

One of the better known cases of this was when reporting on the 2001 Conference Against Racism became focused on the walk-out of government delegates from the U.S., Israel, and India after some of the conference delegates proposed controversial conference resolutions. Many valuable activities took place at the conference before and after this event, but they were never reported because the conflict dominated the press.

So what can be done to improve media coverage?

■ **Provide support to grantees that already work well with media, and**

make training and technical assistance available to those who need it. One grant maker who was heavily involved with the Earth Summit said: “Everyone knows who their grantees are who work well with the media. Those who are good all year will be good at the summit. We did a bunch of high-level briefings for the press, including social events with well-known journalists as guest speakers.” Grantees who have less media experience can either receive training by media specialists or link with more experienced counterparts.

A media specialist recommended: “You want to bring someone on board who can work with the grantees, help refine strategy, and coordinate the necessary technical assistance. Such a person could work with clusters of grantees to identify spokespeople and training needs, and help them get everyone on board”

■ **Help grantees to reach out to journalists early in the preparation stage.** In the words of one reporter, “A lot of reporters do not know what these issues are. NGOs can provide one sheet of paper saying, ‘Here are the issues, here are the contacts and how to reach them for the next two weeks during this PrepCom.’ The best press kit has the information you need to know. Statistics are helpful; life is too short to look it all up.” But even in advance of a PrepCom or summit, as one funder observed, “We should really be supporting grantees overseas to reach out to journalists, columnists, and editorial boards from their regions, to help brief them in advance on the

“It’s easy to find out who will be covering the conference ... and try to involve them in pre-conference briefings.”

conference so that they’ll have a peg to make stories relevant to their readers.”

■ **Find out which elements of the press corps will be attending, and help grantees to reach out to diverse media representatives.** A media specialist observed, “It’s easy to find out who will be covering the conference, because they have to register, and there’s an official list. So you can easily try to get in touch with these folks in advance and try to involve them in pre-conference briefings.” A funder suggested it is useful to help grantees reach out to mainstream and alternative press. Another grant maker suggested, “Wherever the conference is taking place, you should work with the foreign correspondents based there, because they will be asked by their papers to be writing about this.”

■ **Support programs to train journalists on key issues.** Without basic background information on a contentious topic, even well-meaning journalists can produce misleading or incomplete reports. Sometimes, reporters learn more from one another, or from organizations where they already receive training, than from advocates or other sources. One funder experienced in working with international summits has made some grants directly to a journalists’ organization to help raise the level of reporting on summit matters: “Our foundation is funding a group that is training journalists of South Africa on gender violence — what it is, and how it manifests itself, and ways in which it needs to be analyzed. This

group is a group of former journalists training other journalists.”

■ **Contract with a freelance writer to provide broad coverage.** A foundation-based media specialist suggested, “You can get a freelance writer to go and cover the conference and write stories, and try to sell those stories to various media outlets. You have some control in that way, because you can choose a writer who you feel understands

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THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY MEETING

International civil society meetings come in all sizes and shapes, but some can seem positively summit-like in their numbers of participants. Annual or biennial conferences such as the World Social Forum and the Montreal International Forum, as well as the periodic gatherings of such international membership associations as CIVICUS and the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID), can be sizeable indeed. While most meetings probably hover in the range of a thousand to several thousand participants, the 2004 World Social Forum hosted more than 75,000 representatives of 2,660 organizations from 130 countries — making it a kind of worldwide congress of civil society.

In the case of civil society meetings, the focus tends to be on the goals of a social movement, rather than affecting the outcome of official government negotiations. AWID, for example, focused on advancing the status of women, and the World Social Forum concentrated on finding alternatives to current patterns of globalization. A donor wishing to strengthen a movement and its actors (as opposed to trying to elicit particular commitments from governments) might support such a meeting in the hope of generating international or national campaigns for action. Procedural and logistical issues can be much easier than at official U.N. summits. Because civil society meetings are not bound by the complexities of the intergovernmental system, donors do not have to enter the process as early or be as concerned about whether or not their grantees are going to be allowed to attend. Civil society representatives — generally NGOs — are the main actors. Grants can be smaller and less complicated, supporting basic necessities like the organization of the meeting or participant travel. Another consideration is that such gatherings can attract surprisingly strong interest from local media and policymakers, which may be useful for donors who want to advance program goals in the meeting’s host country.

your issues and has access to the right people.”

■ **Be creative in thinking about grassroots communications strategies suitable for the host country.** “In China you can’t paint anything or put posters up anywhere, so we came up with an idea. We had thousands of beautiful stickers made that were black and red, and we put them on the taxis [at the time of the

Women’s Conference]. They said “Unity is Strength” in Chinese, a revolutionary slogan which everyone understands. And it became the NGO slogan. First of all, it connected with the Chinese Government’s own revolutionary past, though they hadn’t actually ever used it in terms of the women’s movement. But it worked, and they didn’t go stripping it off everywhere. They became proud of it.”

The “Official Webcaster” of the Bangkok AIDS Conference: A Mini-Case

When the fifteenth International AIDS Conference was held in Bangkok, Thailand, in July 2004, people around the world were able to watch the proceedings on **Kaisernetwork.org**, a web site and online multimedia unit of the Kaiser Family Foundation. Each day, Kaisernetwork staff produced, edited, and posted videos and transcripts of the major conference sessions, along with summaries of the day’s events, science and policy features, interviews with prominent attendees, and publications and other resources.

“We did our first webcast of an International AIDS Conference in Barcelona in 2002,” recalls Larry Levitt, editor-in-chief of Kaisernetwork. “Bangkok was our second, and the first one at which we were the ‘official webcaster.’” What that meant, he explains, was closer involvement in planning and problem solving, both before and during the event: “We helped develop the communications strategy, organize the media center, and promote the conference to journalists. During the meeting, we helped with all kinds of day-to-day stuff. And our material was featured prominently on the conference web site.”

According to Levitt, Kaisernetwork’s Bangkok work had three objectives: “First, we saw an opportunity to take a global AIDS event and bring it to a grassroots level by making it available to people who couldn’t attend. Second, we wanted to produce a permanent record of the conference. And third, we wanted to assist the broadcast media by setting ourselves up as a resource. For example, we had the biggest tape library at the conference, and we made it available to everyone. When CNN wanted a tape of

Kofi Annan speaking, we gave it to them. Our interview with [U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator] Randall Tobias was broadcast in the media center, and anyone who wanted to could just grab it and use it.” Kaisernetwork also coordinated with other units of the foundation. “Kaiser organized several special sessions,” says Levitt, “and we covered those. We also did a lot of work with [actor and AIDS activist] Richard Gere, who came to announce a program we’re collaborating on in India. He ended up being a star of the conference.”

Reflecting on Kaisernetwork’s ability to work closely with conference organizers, grant makers, and journalists, Levitt explains that he and his colleagues have “worked hard to establish our identity as an information organization. We’re not press. Our unique role is to bring technical expertise in broadcasting and online communications together with substantive expertise in the topics we cover.”

How would he advise a grant maker who wanted to support something similar? The Bangkok operation came in at around \$100,000, he reports, including the “not inconsiderable” cost of transportation. “But that’s true,” he adds, “because we already had technical, editorial, and production staff on board. The communications apparatus, such as web site and video streaming server, was already in place. And we already owned much of the equipment.” Without that infrastructure, he cautions, “the cost would be many times what we spent. But it’s possible to contract with production companies for much of the work, so it could be done.”

Beyond the Summit

“One of the things that we foundations are criticized for, and rightly, is making a big pot of money available for civil society to be able to participate in global meetings, and then congratulating ourselves and walking away.”

It can be tempting, when a summit ends, for a grant maker to walk away with a sigh of relief. Nonetheless, such a move can waste any real potential that a summit process — and its NGO actors — has to effect change down the road. There are a range of follow-up activities that a donor might want to consider, some free-standing or one-time events, and others more long-term. While grants for the first category, such as for feedback forums or even for follow-up media activities, are generally fairly straightforward, those for the second can be harder to frame.

A core issue for many grant makers is what kind of impact a summit, including both its official and non-official outcomes, should or can have on their plans for grant making. For example: Would support for a summit on race, with the expected outcome of a strengthened international movement against racism, suggest making fewer grants for national-level work in the future, and more for international collaboration and networking? Does a strong platform for action advancing the status of women change the way that local women’s rights advocates should be funded to do their jobs?

The answers to questions like these are going to vary greatly from summit to summit, and from donor to donor. This guide can’t provide answers to suit every reader, but the following sugges-

tions represent ways for funders to begin thinking about follow-up, as they grapple with a summit’s longer-term implications for their work:

■ **Facilitate and support various forms of debriefing with and among grantees.** “The real action was on the NGO side for the Chinese women’s movement. It was extraordinary to hear about, and very important to debrief. I hosted several banquets for the leadership of the All China Women’s Federation afterward, just to hear their reactions and to know what difference it would make in their work.” Debriefings can help funders understand what grantees have gotten out of the experience, and what this might mean for their future work. Debriefings, or feedback forums, can also be good ways for grantees “who have participated in a summit to share what they’ve learned with communities back home.” One caveat: Grant makers should prepare grantees in advance of the summit to expect and plan for these kinds of follow-up activities.

■ **Fund other ways to disseminate information and learning in connection with the summit.** An international grant maker described dissemination as an ethical requirement, “a way of mitigating against the problem of a few activists building their own knowledge base and nobody else’s.” Funders have experimented with a whole variety of ways beyond debriefings to bring a summit home. “We made a point of translating the Platform of Action into readable Chinese. And that really mattered, so that people had the

Find ways for grantees “who have participated in a summit to share what they’ve learned back home.”

“How do you keep the issues in the public limelight?”

actual text and knew what they were talking about.” Using a less traditional approach, another grant maker reported that “we funded a grantee to put together a one-woman show in which she assumed different identities to tell the stories of women in countries around the world. It was a very creative way to convey some of the key information in reports that came out of the Women’s Conference.”

■ **Continue working on media strategies.** In the words of one funder, “Media work needs to extend well after the event. At the Sustainable Development Summit, all the big media outlets did their summary coverage a few days before the conference even ended. And after that, nothing.” In thinking through follow-up media activities,

it can be vital to review the impact of earlier strategies. As a media specialist observed, “I really think we should insist that some assessment of communications and media work be done after the conference. Just what did it yield? Was it successful? What worked, what didn’t? Have any of our grantees succeeded in positioning themselves as resources to media to cover these kinds of issues? And then we should encourage grantees to take the list of journalists who wrote about this and follow up with them.”

■ **Fund networks of organizations that will monitor the implementation of summit agreements.** “You have to fund organizations who will press governments to honor the documents. That is a whole agenda in itself. How do you keep the issues in the public limelight?” For example, following the Summit on Social Development, an international civil society coalition formed to monitor and publicize whether governments have fulfilled their commitments to eradicate poverty and achieve gender equity. With yearly, widely-disseminated publications that update government action or inaction at the country level, in the words of one funder, “This is the most thorough follow-up activity to a U.N. summit that I’ve ever experienced.”

■ **Support new networks or organizations to continue work on summit goals.** A grant maker remembered, “One outcome of the Rio conference [on the environment] in 1992 was the creation of a progressive big-business outfit. It was created as the business arm to

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MEETINGS OF MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS

These large international meetings of special purpose institutions like the World Bank or World Trade Organization can seem summit-like. As with summits, civil society representatives may attend these meetings as observers, but with many of the same constraints imposed on access and participation as may be found at official U.N. summits, if not more.

Like summits, the meetings of multilateral financial institutions are convened for the purpose of reaching agreement on a specific topic through intergovernmental negotiations. So a donor might wish to fund NGO participation in such a meeting for much the same reason as for a summit: to monitor and try to influence governmental positions and the outcome of the negotiations. Since each multilateral financial institution tends to hold its meeting on an annual or periodic basis, grant makers might fund NGOs to attend more than one meeting, and, as with summits, track the actions of governments and the institution itself during the interim. Also, in addition to supporting grantees to try to connect with and contribute to the negotiation of specific agreements, donors may wish to support grantee efforts to try to improve the overall transparency of these processes.

feed into Rio, and in the last ten years after Rio it has remained viable and active.” Funders can affect a field well beyond the summit if they identify and support coalitions, networks and organizations that reach a broad base of members and have credibility with diverse constituencies.

■ **Support new relationships that emerge from the summit.** “At the Sustainable Development Summit,” one grant maker recalls, “garbage collectors from the Zebaleen community of Cairo met with members of the South African Orange Farm township community, which is overrun by garbage and solid waste, to advise them on ways to develop a self-managed garbage collection and recycling system. Now an exchange visit is planned for Soweto residents to learn from these Egyptian experts.” As in this funder’s story, one of the most positive outcomes of a summit can also be one of the least predictable: the relationships that NGOs forge with counterparts from other countries or sectors. Funders should be alert to these opportunities, and be prepared to support the openings that can arise from them.

■ **Fund grantees to monitor the field over the long term to identify opportunities or needs that**

emerged from the summit. As a veteran international grant maker put it, “We should really be thinking about: OK, what came out of this global meeting, now that some time has passed? What are we hearing, from the groups that we supported on the national level, that they need now?” In the years to follow a summit, grant makers should be sure that key grantees are in place to monitor the global picture and identify opportunities for follow-up action, particularly in connection with periodic U.N.-based reviews.

■ **Encourage grantees to take strategic advantage of follow-up meetings.** As an example, one funder described how a grantee is using the “plus five” and “plus ten” review processes to hold governments accountable for commitments they made in Beijing in 1995: “Equality Now put out a publication that compiles all the laws that discriminate against women and took it to Beijing Plus Five (in 2000). It included the actual language of the laws and an analysis of the language. By taking that publication to a global meeting and putting people on the spot in front of their colleagues, they were able to shift legislation in some of the countries they highlighted. It was very simple and very strategic.”

The Debate about Summits

No summit, at least thus far, has ever “solved” a complex social issue. What’s more, they tend to be messy in planning and execution, are time-consuming and expensive, and generate outcomes that can be measured only over the long term. Nonetheless, many funders find it worthwhile to engage in summit-related grant making. What are some of the concerns they face when they decide to go down that path? Here we offer a point-counterpoint discussion of the issues they mentioned most often:

True summits (those convened by governments) do not treat NGOs as full partners.

At one time or other, almost every government has proven less than eager to have its deliberations influenced, or even witnessed, by non-governmental organizations. This reticence can contribute to limitations on the number of NGOs allowed entry to the official summit, and to barriers on NGO access to important sessions within the summit. Logistical and security issues or administrative confusion can further hinder NGO participation. One grant maker involved with the Sustainable Development Summit, for example, recalled that “civil society participation was severely curtailed by the limitations in space at the official summit, and by the distance between this and the Global People’s Forum and other civil society events. Entry to the official conference facility for civil society participants was restricted to 1,300 per day. Seventeen thousand were officially registered!”

Frustrations over NGO access are a feature of virtually every summit. Yet participation in summits has grown markedly through the 1990s, and more and more countries have proven willing to include NGO representatives on official delegations. NGOs have also become skilled at working with the secretariat early in the summit process to try to ensure that basic access rules are fair, and that accurate information on registration procedures reaches groups around the world. And somewhat ironically, given the range of access obstacles, NGOs at a summit or Preparatory Committee meeting can often have otherwise unprecedented access to high-level government officials. For example, at the Sustainable Development Summit, forest community members from Mexico met with Mexican President Vicente Fox.

Summits privilege well-established, northern, or international NGOs.

A donor who has made grants in connection with more than one summit remarked: “I’ve found it’s hard to completely get around the international NGO ‘star system.’ It’s just easier to get these folks [the big international players] to world summits, and then for them to function well once there.” There is little question that summits can be tough to access for community-based groups in developing countries, and for the “second tier” of younger leaders within more established NGOs. Familiarity with U.N. processes

is scant, travel resources are scarce, and mobility may be limited by political or cultural constraints. Further, relatively few NGO leaders in developing countries speak more than one U.N. language, and interpretation for NGOs at summits and NGO forums is generally inadequate or negligible. The result is usually far less diverse NGO representation than is desirable.

This problem is not going to disappear in the near term, but it does seem slowly to be shrinking. Groups in developing countries are increas

ingly sophisticated about U.N. processes, with a number of international NGOs channeling information and training to people at the community level. Donors can support developing country networks to do their own strategic work and initiate links with other international groups. Helping to circumvent the traditional “star” system is also an

area in which donors can make a difference. In connection with the Conference against Racism, for example, one funder supported the preliminary training and then participation of representatives of the *dalits* of India, who were able for the first time to make their case against caste- and descent-based racism on a world stage.

Summits have no teeth.

After all the time and resources that get poured into summits, it can seem inconceivable that they don’t result in a more immediate change in government action. Part of the reason for their limited effect might be summit fatigue or cynicism regarding U.N. processes on the part of governments — an attitude that in turn can translate into their sending low-level delegations. But even when that is not the case, and where summit consensus documents represent real progress in addressing a complex social issue, governments seem free to return to business as usual in the aftermath, with no international body having the power to enforce implementation. According to the views of one grant maker regarding the Earth Summit: “Rio was done perfectly. It had tremendous preparation. There was a very well funded, huge citizen forum. There were also good outcomes: three international conventions, commitments on funding climate change, etc. The problem is that there hasn’t been enough follow up, and we haven’t met the goals we’d originally set.” Some worry that future meetings will back-track on goals already set.

Governments may very well wish to return to business as usual following a summit, but here again, funders can make a difference by helping to equip domestic and international NGOs to hold governments accountable to their commitments. As one grant maker observed, “The key to funding these meetings is not to look at [a summit] as an event, but as a signpost along the way — part of a multi-year funding strategy.” NGOs have become increasingly skillful at monitoring government follow-up to world summits, and at using national and international stages to publicize government action or inaction. For example, at the five-year review of the Beijing Conference on Women, an NGO committee gathered national “alternative” reports from all over the world, paralleling those produced by governments at the request of the U.N. The reports provided counterpoint information — in effect, a reality check — on progress made in implementing the Platform for Action. The committee presented this compendium to the Chair of the Special Session and made it available to government delegates and the press. Funders can support this work (of research, and monitoring, and convening) within and outside summits organized to review progress made on recommendations.

Summits distract from important work on the ground.

With grantees often stretched to capacity in their day-to-day work, and funders limited in their own time and resources, summits can seem like extravagant if not wasteful exercises. Even given the potential handle for policy-based advocacy that a summit can offer, should the majority of non-governmental organizations, or their funders, be distracted from their principal constituencies and activities? In the words of one grant maker: "Does perspective change translate into real change for people on the ground? It seems as if a very elite group of people end up controlling these processes."

Summits and NGO forums offer opportunities to enrich or advance grantee work at the front lines, provided that participants identify their goals well in advance of the meeting itself. For one thing, preparation for a summit, such as advocacy training, can position grantees to have more impact with local or national authorities. And the networking and movement-building potential that summits offer can be unique. As a grant maker active in the international peace movement remarked: "Face-to-face networking is the most important strategy for building unity. Otherwise it's too fractured. You can't organize via e-mail, you can only share your rage. You can't kiss anyone over e-mail."

Summits generate more controversy than consensus.

In intergovernmental negotiations at a summit, progress toward consensus can often seem to take a back seat to other political, economic, cultural, or diplomatic calculations. This can be exacerbated by the press, with intense media focus on contentious issues actually playing a role in summit developments. Complicating matters still further, summits sometimes end up accentuating – or even introducing – internal tensions or fragmentation within NGO sectors or movements themselves, which can stymie the establishment of common goals or actions.

Most summits have provided important road maps for policy and action. One new grant maker who participated as a grantee at different summits commented: "Each represents a global consensus on issues though there are a few points of controversy that remain unresolved." While it is admittedly hard to control for controversy at a summit, this fact highlights the unique strength of such gatherings: the diversity

of voices heard, especially those of people who are usually discriminated against or marginalized. At Beijing, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was discussed in the U.N. for the first time. As in all good grant making it is important to be aware of the issues at hand and to be prepared for political controversy. (See sidebar on page 4 for special advice.) These meetings "take the lid" off issues that have not been discussed as publicly before, and there is potential for a period of sorting out while they are debated on a global stage, often for the first time. The Conference on Racism provided a good example of how such a gathering can amplify the voices of those who had not previously been heard on the world stage (for example, the dalits, Afro-Brazilians, and the Roma of Eastern Europe). It was difficult to predict what would happen when this new mix of players, some more and some less experienced in this kind of effort, came together. But one effect was unquestionably the airing of points of view that had previously been obscure or silent outside their own communities.

Key Lessons from Grant Makers

■ **Get grantees involved as early in the process as possible.** “Many people come away from these world meetings disappointed, as they don’t realize that to shape the policy agenda you need to be involved the year before the meeting. If you’re going to a world meeting to network or for public education, that’s great. But if you want to shape the process, you need to understand the entry points and begin much earlier.” Donors should be exploring their possible interest in a summit, and looking for grant making points of entry, from the very beginning of a summit process — typically three years or more before the opening gavel falls.

■ **Consider carefully, on all levels within the foundation, how your grantees’ goals and those of the summit will fit with your short- and long-term programmatic goals.** Grant makers who contributed to this guide agree that every attempt should be made to ensure that there is a close fit between the goals of the proposed summit and the programmatic goals of the foundation and its grantees.

■ **Consult with grantees and others about the summit, and identify particular substantive or operational goals that you want to achieve.** “I would recommend fun-

ders identify a couple of objectives. If, for example, there is an upcoming conference on the environment and you are involved in supporting solutions to toxic waste dumping, you may want to monitor that issue alone. Find out what everybody is saying on toxic waste dumping. This would help you to track the issue from multiple points of view.” Working with grantees and independent experts can help funders narrow the field. Most grant makers do not have the time or resources to be engaged in all the substantive aspects of a summit.

■ **Forge partnerships with colleagues within your foundation and with other donors wherever possible.** “Being part of this donor delegation is absolutely going to have an impact on my funding and the way I see my programs,” said a grant maker who attended a summit with a group of other funders. Partnerships with other donors can be a very important way to maximize the resources available for summit planning and follow-up. In addition, such partnerships can also act as tutorials for grant makers and grantees who are less experienced in international or global programming on a particular issue, and can have a long-term impact on program choices and goals.

■ **Try to keep media representatives informed from the beginning — whether directly or through your grantees, or both.** “The media will always focus on the most controversial and negative aspect of the conference. It’s important to get out ahead of the spin. Make sure you frame the conference positively early on.” Many grant makers emphasized the importance of equipping grantees to deal effectively with the media throughout a summit process.

■ **Work with grantees to follow up on the achievements of the summit.** “The process is worthless unless it leads to meaningful follow-up and implementation of the groundwork laid in the conference process.” Follow-up is critical to gauge the effect of international summits and the success of funding strategies; to feed information and insights back into home communities; and to ensure that grantees are prepared to take advantage of emerging opportunities. External evaluations, feedback forums, and funding for groups to monitor government actions are all examples of follow-up activities to consider.

SAMPLE TIMELINE FOR A U.N. SUMMIT

"All the member states in a conference essentially put their items on the table in the first few rounds. These inputs come from all directions. They come from regional meetings. They come from national consultations. Some of the agencies will have done special papers. All of these things are poured into the process."

This hypothetical timeline gives an idea of what kinds of strategies funders could pursue at various stages of the summit process. A foundation looking to make a major commitment might take on funding at all stages, while smaller or local grant makers might be attracted to such discrete items as follow-up feedback forums. In all cases, as the quote above by a U.N. official suggests, donors should identify their grant-making strategies as early as possible.

Indeed, the preliminary lead-up to a summit is generally packed with windows of opportunity that may close as the summit approaches. For example, the deadline for NGO registration for a summit may very well fall more than a year before the meeting dates, with implications for what grantees will then be able to attend. Advocacy training is another item that should take place well before the summit, ideally before even the PrepComs. Organizing space and the necessary technological infrastructure for an on-site Internet café can also call for considerable advance negotiation and preparation. So, while a summit process suggests particular grant making strategies at various points along the way, most of these should be in the works from the beginning.

THREE YEARS PRIOR TO THE SUMMIT

The United Nations makes the initial decision to hold an international summit on a specific issue. Among other items accomplished early in the process are the selection of the host country, the convening of the Preparatory Committee (consisting of the functional commission most relevant to the summit topic), the establishment of the secretariat, and the framing of preliminary rules guiding NGO participation in the process.

FUNDING SUGGESTIONS:

- Provide support for technical assistance and training to NGOs on such issues as working with the media, how to participate within summit processes, government advocacy, and translation services.
- Support communications, coalition building, and networking among grantees and others to hash out positions and strategies in advance of the official sessions.
- Fund activities to strengthen groups in the host country and to ensure their exposure to counterparts around the world.

TWO YEARS PRIOR TO THE SUMMIT

The Preparatory Committee holds the first of two or more planning sessions (PrepComs). The committee meets in conjunction with a regular session of the relevant functional commission. Among other matters, the committee and secretariat finalize logistical details on issues such as the number of NGOs that will be permitted to attend the summit, and the accreditation process.

Regional preparatory meetings, generally organized by the U.N. Economic Commissions (such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, known as ECLAC) are convened to feed into the PrepCom process. Intergovernmental groups and/or individual governments also convene their own planning meetings.

FUNDING SUGGESTIONS:

- Continue support for earlier strategies, and
- Support attendance of grantees and others at regional preparatory meetings and PrepComs, and provide assistance for NGO gatherings in connection with those meetings.
- Provide support for the infrastructure of the NGO Forum and/or host institution, and consider targeted support for the Summit Secretariat on such issues as outreach to civil society.

ONE YEAR PRIOR TO THE SUMMIT

The deadline for accreditation passes.

The second PrepCom takes place, commanding more focus than the first, as negotiations pick up speed closer to the summit. The time allotted for the PrepCom usually proves insufficient for finalizing preliminary negotiations, so that the Preparatory Committee both extends the session and plans to reconvene shortly before the summit.

Logistical details, such as visas, housing, and transportation, begin to assume more importance. The secretariat needs to facilitate such matters with the host country on behalf of NGOs.

FUNDING SUGGESTIONS:

- Continue support for earlier strategies, and
- Fund work to generate positive media coverage, such as outreach and training for journalists, and exploration of other non-traditional media strategies.
- Provide travel assistance.

THE SUMMIT

The summit usually lasts for about two weeks and is a complex and crowded event. Internal negotiations take uncharted pathways, and at times are closed to NGOs.

FUNDING SUGGESTIONS:

- Support briefing and orientation activities at the summit, including the cost of simultaneous and written translation, as well as on- and off-site meetings on key issues of interest.
- Support communications mechanisms to keep summit participants informed, such as daily NGO bulletins or newspapers, as well as ways for them to stay in touch with home country communities, such as Internet cafés and related training.

ONE YEAR LATER

Following the summit, governments return home theoretically to put in place the vision codified in summit outcome documents. At the U.N., responsibility for reviewing government and, in some cases, agency actions to implement commitments made at the summit reverts to the relevant commission at its yearly session.

FUNDING SUGGESTIONS:

- Fund debriefing and feedback sessions among grantees and in various local communities.
- Provide support for communicating summit outcomes to home communities, including translation and distribution of key official documents.
- Provide assistance to organizations that will monitor implementation of summit agreements by governments, as well as summit follow-up at the U.N.
- Fund new organizations or networks created to continue work on summit goals.
- Support mechanisms such as consultancies to monitor the summit's impact over time on grantees.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

- **Accreditation:** In this guide, we use the term to refer to the process by which an NGO gains official permission to enter the meeting grounds of a particular summit. For details about the credentialing process, see *What is Accreditation?* on page 10.
- **Caucus:** A group of organizations and individuals interested in similar issues or regions that come together during a summit or PrepCom to exchange information, hold briefings, and formulate positions or statements relevant to the proceedings.
- **Commission:** There are ten functional commissions of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Commissions. Made up of member states, they work to monitor and promote action on key social and economic issues. Relevant commissions, such as the Commission on the Status of Women in the case of the 1995 Beijing Conference, are often appointed by the Preparatory Committee for a particular summit. In those cases, summit PrepComs then take place in connection with the commission's regular session, and the commission is generally assigned responsibility for summit follow-up. The Commission on Sustainable Development was actually created as a result of the 1992 Earth Summit, and thus was already in place for the follow-up Summit on Sustainable Development a decade later.
- **Host Country:** The U.N. member state chosen by the United Nations to host a summit.
- **Member States:** Member governments of the United Nations, the only voting category at a U.N. summit.
- **NGOs:** Non-governmental organizations.
- **PrepCom:** While technically shorthand for the official Preparatory Committee convened by the U.N. to plan a summit, "PrepCom" more commonly refers to the committee's meetings. As many as four PrepComs can take place before the actual summit, and each can last from one to four weeks. Negotiations regarding draft declarations and other issues on the agenda take place at that time.
- **Programmes, Platforms, or Plans of Action:** Official summit outcome documents — often titled differently, depending on the summit — detailing the assumptions, norms, and standards on which member states agree. The aim of summit negotiations is to develop outcome documents that all member states will adopt by consensus but these are not treaties to which governments become signatories.
- **Regional Meetings:** Official preparatory meetings convened by the U.N.'s Economic Commissions for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Asia to negotiate regional positions in connection with a summit. Regional preparatory meetings are generally timed in order to feed into the PrepCom process. They often produce regional documents which may continue to be used for regional policy purposes.
- **Secretariat:** The U.N. division, agency, fund, or office designated to plan and convene the summit and to serve as interlocutor with member states, the host country, and civil society.

WAYS TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide was written primarily for grant makers and donors who may be considering funding in connection with a world summit or conference. It is intended as a first step in helping them decide whether and how to proceed, and where to go for more information. But it may also be useful to distribute copies to others who can be important to your success. For example:

With Your Board — If you are prepared to consider support in connection with a world summit or conference, board members might want some guidance in thinking through the special considerations that such activities may raise. You could offer this guide with questions such as these in mind:

- For a given field and our organization, what are the benefits of funding in connection with a world summit or conference? What kind of controversies might come up and how will we handle them?
- Do we have, or want to develop, the resources – time, management, budget – necessary for success?

With Colleagues and Advisors — You might find it helpful to discuss this guide with other grant makers with whom you might collaborate, or with experts who advise you on grant

making, either informally or on a more structured basis. This guide could prompt a discussion about:

- What approaches have others found useful in targeting world summits or conferences?
- What would it be helpful for us to learn, or what technical advice do we need, to help in formulating our decisions?
- What is the potential for collaboration across organizations and programs?

With Grantees — If you feel ready for an exploratory conversation with a grantee or grant applicant about whether funding in connection with a world summit or conference makes sense, this guide could assist in organizing that conversation. You and the grantee could use the conversation to consider:

- What activities would it make sense for the grantee to carry out before, during, and after the summit?
- How would the grantee organization and its field benefit from involvement in a world summit or conference?
- What organizational, management, or fundraising strains might this work entail, and would the likely benefits be worth the cost and effort?

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