

Community Engagement: A Guide to Opportunities Throughout the Grant Life Cycle

Summary

The grant life cycle has key community engagement opportunities throughout its various stages – from the run-up to applications for funding to the process of evaluating performance and impact. Linked to the entry points are “In Practice” snapshot case studies and the new community engagement minimum expectations. The document also offers support, in the form of a Q & A and resources, to emerging community leaders who may not be as familiar with the Global Fund and its processes yet, but whose engagement is essential as we strive to meet 2030 goal targets.

In this guide to community engagement, we identify stumbling blocks impeding the engagement of communities in some of our processes, and we draw on the lessons that communities teach us about how to address these obstacles.

1. Introduction

The Global Fund funding and grant life cycle follows a relatively predictable three-year cycle of mobilizing and investing resources, implementing grants and complying with continuous evaluation and oversight. While the principle of community engagement exists throughout this process, there are specific entry points where community engagement is particularly important.

Communities can be defined as groups of people with similar characteristics or interests. People often self-identify as part of several communities that are defined in various ways such as shared geographic location, gender, age, or cultural or social identities.

Three distinct stages of the grant life cycle provide opportunities for heightened community engagement, and three new community engagement minimum expectations have been introduced.

Stage 1: Before applying

Even before Allocation Letters arrive in countries, CCMs can take steps to prepare for the new allocation period. Given that funding requests are prepared based on national strategic plans, it is key for communities to be actively engaged in the development of national strategies for HIV, TB and malaria, which increasingly set the direction of Global Fund investments and grants. As country allocations necessitate challenging choices, it is critical to coordinate community action across diseases and technical areas to make sure that collective priorities emerge.

Stage 2: Applying for funding and grant-making

In order to apply for a grant, CCMs need to comply with six eligibility criteria. These are:

1. Carry out a transparent and inclusive funding application development process.
2. Facilitate an open and transparent Principal Recipient selection process.
3. Submit and follow an oversight plan for all Global Fund approved financing.
4. Show evidence of membership of affected communities in the coordinating mechanism.
5. Ensure representation of nongovernmental members in the coordinating mechanism through transparent and documented processes developed by each constituency.
6. Adopt and enforce a code of conduct, and conflict of interest policy.

The first requirement, managing a transparent and inclusive funding application development process, ensures that affected communities are members of the coordinating mechanism. To be eligible for Global Fund financing, a country must carry out an inclusive and transparent dialogue during the funding request development process.

Before the grant-making phase and formal Board approval, CCMs must address feedback from the Technical Review Panel. Grant-making is the process of translating funding requests into grants that are ready for implementation. This also includes deciding which modules, interventions and activities in the funding request are allocated to which Principal Recipient (PR). This time-sensitive period leading up to grant decisions should be used to optimize the oversight of CCMs, including community representatives, and make certain that impacted communities are engaged in any significant deviations or adaptations made in the proposal and budget, especially in relation to community priority areas.

Stage 3: Grant implementation and oversight

PRs and the Sub-recipients (SRs) implement the grant, overseen by CCMs and the Global Fund. The Global Fund, coordinating with Local Fund Agents (LFA), CCMs and in-country partners, assess programmatic activities through the [Performance Update and Disbursement Requests](#) (PUDRs). Global Fund country visits are opportunities for stakeholders, including community representatives, to engage with the Fund Portfolio Manager (FPM), who is the focal point for the grant in the Global Fund Secretariat. Effective oversight is the responsibility of CCMs, the PRs, the LFAs and the FPMs; throughout the grant implementation, engaging with them on monitoring and evaluation, finance, procurement and legal issues is important. Community-led monitoring (CLM) and feedback from communities play a critical role in adapting implementation so that the grant meets its targets.

1.2 The Global Fund Strategy (2023-2028)

The Global Fund 2023-2028 Strategy “Fighting Pandemics and Building a Healthier and More Equitable World” commits to nuanced and intensified community engagement. While the primary goal remains to end AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, placing communities, human rights, gender equality and equity components at the heart of the Strategy highlights the critical role of community leadership and engagement. It focuses on working with and meeting the evolving needs of people and communities most affected and on enabling their meaningful engagement in decision-making and leading programs where best suited.

1.3 Communities: recognizing diversity, differences and differentiation

Many communities do not have equitable access to healthcare due to stigma, discrimination, marginalization and criminalization. Factoring in gender and age across the three disease communities adds to the importance of differentiation.

Responding to and engaging with the diversity of specific communities across and between the three diseases—including in pandemic preparedness and response – allows for finetuning of engagement opportunities. People may identify with more than one group and there may be overlapping vulnerabilities

Community cohesion, solidarity and campaign-building vary widely between HIV, TB and malaria and depending on context. For example, in challenging operating environments - countries or regions in crisis - there are increased barriers and threats to safe community engagement. This has a direct impact on *who* meaningfully engages in Global Fund processes at the country level, and on how such engagement is conducted.

1.4 The minimum expectations

The three new minimum expectations for community engagement will increase transparency, accountability, and opportunities for community engagement across the grant life cycle.

Each minimum expectation will give rise to a series of actions by CCMs and the Global Fund Secretariat:

- **Minimum Expectation 1:** The funding request development must include transparent and inclusive consultations with populations most impacted by HIV, TB and malaria, across gender and age. This process will result in a document called “Annex of funding priorities of civil society and communities most affected by HIV, TB and malaria”.
- **Minimum Expectation 2:** To further their involvement in oversight, community and civil society representatives in the CCMs must have timely access to information on the status of grant negotiations and any changes to the grant.

• **Minimum Expectation 3:** Community and civil society representatives in the CCM have timely access to information on program implementation.

2. The Grant Life Cycle: Entry Points, Tactics and Levers

2.1 Entry point: the Country Coordinating Mechanism

The CCM is a national, multi-stakeholder body that includes representatives of all sectors involved in the response to the three diseases, and which has two primary responsibilities:

- It submits funding requests to the Global Fund on behalf of the country.
- It oversees the implementation of the grants.

CCM responsibilities are inherently challenging, especially those ensuring that the breadth and scope of diverse community perspectives are adequately reflected in its makeup.

Determining grant priorities frequently means making difficult and potentially controversial trade-offs, as the scale of unmet need outstrips the available financial resources. Making difficult choices that reflect the importance of community, rights, gender and equity considerations underlines the imperative of community engagement to ensure decisions are based on lived realities and actual needs.

How to engage with the CCM:

- Familiarize yourself with the community and civil society representatives on the CCM
- Understand the role and function of the CCM representatives and identify ways to ensure that representatives are supported in their leadership role
- Request to attend CCM meetings as an observer
- Reach out to your CCM Secretariat
- Request regular two-way feedback from the CCM community representatives
- Participate in the election of the CCM community representatives
- Work in partnership with other community organizations to routinely reach out to the CCM about substantive HIV, TB and malaria issues that are affecting your and your partners' communities
- Learn the CCM governance guidelines

2.2 Entry point: funding request development and National Strategic Plans

Country dialogues involve people most affected by the three diseases sharing their experiences and helping define the programs and services that can best meet their and their communities' needs. These dialogues are meant to continue throughout the entire grant life cycle. They are broad, open and transparent consultations that comprise a range of key stakeholders, including the public sector (e.g., from the ministries of Health and Finance); the private sector; faith-based organizations; civil society and community led and based organizations; human rights experts; networks of key populations and women's organizations; people living with and most affected by the three diseases; and other technical agencies and development partners. The country dialogues serve to provide groups that are not represented in the CCM or that have weak representation with the opportunity to participate meaningfully and provide input to the funding requests and other grant processes. Country dialogues are relevant to all aspects of grant life cycle, from discussing national priorities, through the development and negotiation of funding requests, to grant implementation and oversight.

Ways to engage during the funding request and National Strategic Plan development process:

- Find out from the CCM Secretariat when national and (if any) sub-national country dialogues will take place to inform the NSP
- Reach out to community and civil society CCM representatives and other community organizations to coordinate preparation for the dialogues and ensure early alignment on priority issues
- Make a request to the CCM Secretariat through the CCM community representatives on the CCM for agreement to attend the dialogues
- Conduct a community-oriented review of the NSP to ensure that it has a strong articulation of community needs in specific areas such as human rights, gender and community led responses that will

provide a good basis for the funding application. (This could partly be supported by the CCM through reprogrammed grant funds)

- Lead and participate in assessments that strengthen the evidence to support priority issues, such as gender assessments, stigma assessments, or human rights assessments
- Engage partners like WHO, UNAIDS, the Stop TB Partnership and the RBM Partnership to End Malaria and donors for assistance, including through the provision of accessible data, guidance and practical tools, to enable the full expression of community interests related to the three diseases
- Participate in community and CCM-led consultations and any relevant technical working groups to identify priorities and interventions for inclusion in the [Funding Priorities of Civil Society and Communities Most Affected by HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria Annex](#)
- Access ongoing peer support through the [Community Engagement Strategic Initiative](#)
- Follow up with the CCM Secretariat about funding options to support constituency engagement. 15% of CCM funding is reserved for constituency engagement

2.3 Entry point: grant-making

Grant-making is the process of transforming funding requests reviewed by the Technical Review Panel and the Grant Approvals Committee into a grant agreement, used as the basis to release funding. The Global Fund Secretariat works with the organizations selected by the CCM to manage the grants, known as Principal Recipients, to develop a performance framework. This includes indicators and workplan tracking measures to track progress, a budget and a workplan. The country dialogue process is also an important part of grant-making, ensuring that input from those who will benefit from the programs is taken into account in the detailed program design and that the latest technical and operational guidance is used.

Entry points to engage during the grant making process:

- Verify that any issues that may have been flagged by the Technical Review Panel (TRP) are resolved.
- Request the CCM and PR for a briefing on the process and outcome of grant-making and on program design
- Ask the CCM community representatives to share regular updates about the status of grant-making, including any automated grant-making milestone notifications
- Keep checking in with the CCM community and civil society representatives on the status of the submitted community priorities and advocate for the involvement of those representatives in any decision that affects interventions that were set at highest priority by communities and civil society, with their corresponding budgets

2.4 Entry point: grant implementation and grant revision

Implementing and monitoring grants takes the most time across the three-year funding cycle, as this includes PRs reporting on the grant (technical and financial reports), as well regular oversight to make any adjustments or manage bottlenecks. It is important for civil society and community groups to be aware of which PR is responsible for which intervention and activity. This is critical for monitoring, oversight and accountability during implementation. In particular, it is important for civil society and community groups to find out which PR or Sub Recipient (SR) has been assigned to manage interventions for key and vulnerable populations, human rights and community systems strengthening.

Information is key. Collecting, reviewing and acting on quality data allows communities and their partners to anticipate challenging issues, fast-track successful approaches, foster innovative implementation science and highlight the quantitative impact of interventions on the lives of communities. Pulse Checks are a quarterly tool used by PRs to provide visibility in Global Fund investments and identify emerging risks, allowing for course correction. Emphasis is placed on data quality and accountability, and community-led monitoring is increasingly relied on as a means of promoting accountability and driving changes that will impact communities.

Ways to engage during the grant implementation and grant reprogramming processes:

- Request routine meetings with the Fund Portfolio Manager and country teams when they are in the country; offer to develop a collective community agenda that should be shared in advance of the meeting

- Work with other community organizations to develop a set of collective discussion points with the PRs
- Ensure that the CCM community representative sits on the CCM Oversight Committee
- Suggest using Pulse Checks as an additional assurance to assess community engagement during grant implementation
- Suggest additional ideas to validate community engagement across the grant life cycle
- Suggest ways (including convening meetings during grant monitoring discussions) through which technical community expertise can be highlighted in support of grant implementation – especially on some of the challenging issues and bottlenecks
- Set up regular engagement touchpoints with the assigned PR and SRs and develop clear accountability communication channels
- Participate as observers in budgeting processes and planning reforms that promote domestic financing and sustainability