



**Fund the
People Toolkit**

Discussion Guides

**Talking Talent Between
Funders & Nonprofits**





Talking Talent Between Funders & Nonprofits

Objectives



This tool will:

- Provide guidance and a shared vocabulary that facilitates productive conversations about talent
- Increase the number and frequency of conversations that funders and nonprofits have about talent needs and potential talent investments
- Increase funders' understanding of the strengths and challenges of nonprofit talent, and the mutual benefits that can result from such investments

Purpose of Guide

Talking about talent development can feel challenging—even scary—for nonprofits and funders. Let's face it: most nonprofit leaders don't want to announce to their funders that they don't have the capacity they need to accomplish their missions. They may believe that talent development is a luxury they can't afford. And funders may not recognize the needs or know how to ask about them. They also may not know how they can best support their nonprofit partners with talent funding. We encourage grantees and funders to be open, honest, and transparent with one another when engaging in discussions about talent development.

And yet, if you're using this discussion guide, you probably share our belief that nonprofit impact is strengthened by investment in talent. So get the conversation started and help funders and nonprofits reach a mutual understanding of possibilities for talent investment!

How to use

This guide will be most useful if both the funder and nonprofit organization have had their own internal discussions about talent funding and talent needs. You can use Fund the People's [Talking Talent Between Funders & Nonprofits](#) and [Talking Talent for Nonprofits](#) if you'd like help with this step. If it isn't possible to have a full discussion about this topic, we suggest that you consider having a few separate discussions that build upon each other to help funders and grantees fully address this issue.

Ideas for Use

- **Provide copies of the full Ask the Question guide for all participants in the conversation. Transparency is the name of the game here, so it's helpful for everyone to see all the questions.**
- **You can prepare for your conversation by reflecting on and writing notes about the answers you'll give to the questions you will be asked.**



- Create a comfortable environment for the conversation, so that it doesn't feel overly formal.
- Schedule this conversation for a time when other funding (if relevant) isn't on the table or in jeopardy.

Useful Materials

• [Funder Myths & Realities](#)

• [Nonprofit Myths & Realities](#)

- Notes (if any) from internal discussions

For Funders

It's not easy for nonprofits to talk about their talent investment needs with their funder. They may assume that your foundation won't or can't assist them with talent investments because nothing relevant is mentioned on your website, grantmaking guidelines, application questions, or proposal budget template. They may see talent development as a luxury that comes only after everything else is funded. They may also feel that other funding will be in jeopardy if they appear to lack capacity.

The best time for this conversation is when other funding is not in jeopardy—either because you are approaching the nonprofit solely about talent funding or because you've already invested in them (organizationally or programmatically) and are considering the addition of talent funding.

The most important question that you can ask your grantee (or potential grantee) about funding is:

Do you have the leadership and talent you need to accomplish your strategic goals?

This is a hefty question, so some more detailed prompts might help you dig more deeply.

1. *Tell me about your current organizational structure and talent. Where do you feel strongest? Where do you feel you could grow?*

2. *How does your staff learn how to be most effective in their work? Are there internal learning opportunities? External learning opportunities?*
3. *How do you assess staff performance now? Are there ways you'd like to grow or change your current performance management system?*
4. *How is your organization incorporating equity and inclusion into your current organizational structure and talent strategies? If you haven't done so, how could you begin to include this focus in your talent development planning?*
5. *How do you reward excellence or address poor performance?*
6. *As the organization's leader, how do you get your professional learning? What would help you be even more effective in your job?*
7. *What type of talent investment would make the biggest difference to your ability to achieve your objectives?*
8. *If the organization is taking on new work: How will you do this new/additional work? Will you add staff or increase capacity of current staff? Either way, what will your training and staffing needs be?*

For Nonprofits

- Grantmakers may shy away from funding their grantees' talent-development needs. They may not even realize that there's a need, because nonprofits generally don't discuss their staffing challenges, professional development needs, human resource policies and practices, or other talent-related issues.
- They might think that the results from their investment in talent would be impossible to track or assess. And they may not be sure of the best way to help.
- For a more detailed look at what prevents talent investment, check out our [Funder Myths & Realities](#) and [Nonprofit Myths & Realities](#) resources.



The most important question that you can ask your funder (or potential funder) is:

How can you help me build our organization and team so that we can have the greatest impact in our work?

This is a hefty question, so some more detailed prompts might help you dig more deeply.

1. *Has your foundation invested in talent in the past? If so, what have you seen to be the benefits to the nonprofit? The community? The specific issue area? The foundation itself?*
2. *If relevant, tell me about your current approach to funding talent development. Do you invest in individual leaders or staff—at the organizational level or as part of a wider ecosystem of nonprofits? (See our **Menu of Talent-Investing Opportunities** for more on these distinctions.)*
3. *What would a great talent investment look like to you? How would you like to communicate with us about our progress on this front?*
4. *How has equity and inclusion factored into your talent investments? If it hasn't been an explicit focus in the past, how are you thinking it could be embedded in your work moving forward?*

5. ***When talking with a funder primarily focused on supporting programs or projects:*** *Is your foundation willing to help us explore ways to maximize performance of our leaders and staff so that this project/program is most effective?*

6. ***When talking with a funder primarily focused on supporting capacity building:*** *How can we maximize your capacity building support with some targeted investments in our team's development?*

7. ***When talking with a funder primarily focused on supporting general operating support:*** *Are you open to increasing the benefit of general operating support by applying it to some targeted investments in our team or by adding a targeted talent investment?*

8. *How else can you help us grow? Are there other organizations we could learn from, or specific resources, other funders, or consultants you'd recommend? Do you know of good professional growth opportunities for nonprofit leaders?*

Reflection (for funder and nonprofit)

1. *What did you hear in the discussion that resonated?*
2. *What additional questions do you have?*
3. *What are your next steps?*



About Fund the People



Fund the People is the national campaign to maximize investment in the nonprofit workforce. To achieve this goal, we make the case, equip for action, and build a movement to change the attitudes and behaviors of funders, fundraising nonprofits, and the intermediaries that support them. There is a long-standing, sector-wide deficit of investment in the nonprofit workforce. Nonprofit professionals work in environments typified by high burnout and stretched resources. So there is a real demand for equitable salaries and benefits, more and better professional development, improved

human resources functions, and healthy organizational culture. Together, we can address these challenges by reshaping existing resources to prioritize nonprofit people as the central asset of nonprofit performance. Now more than ever, we can ensure that America's civic leadership is diverse, well-supported, high-performing, and sustainable for the long haul. Launched in 2014 and headquartered in Beacon, NY, Fund the People (originally known as Talent Philanthropy Project) is a project of Community Partners. Our work is informed by an Advisory Council of diverse leaders and a team of skilled staff and consultants, and is supported by a coalition of regional and national foundations.

To learn more about Fund the People visit:

fundthepeople.org

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