

A participatory, iterative and adaptive developmental evaluation of the Ford Foundation’s BUILD model

NIRAS is providing real-time feedback for learning and programme adjustments to the grant-making programme to ensure its efforts strengthen social justice and equality are on track.



Emelie Pellby
Project Manager
T: + 46 85 455 3324
empe@niras.com

The Building Institutions and Networks (BUILD) initiative is a five-year, US\$1 billion investment in the long-term capacity and sustainability of up to 300 social justice and civil society organisations around the world. The support aims to strengthen these institutions, making them more effective at achieving their core missions, and reducing inequality in all its forms.

This initiative is different from most other donor practices, as BUILD introduces another way to support civil society through a combination of grant-making strategies that include unrestricted general operating support, multi-year commitment, core support for institutional strengthening, convening of grantees to share their learning, and technical assistance.

BUILD grantee organisations work across a range of sectors including: civic engagement and governance; creativity and free expression; gender, racial and ethnic justice; internet freedom; and natural resources and climate change.

The role of NIRAS

NIRAS is conducting a developmental evaluation of the BUILD model, not an evaluation of specific grantees, programme strategies or teams. Designed to be participatory, iterative and adaptive, developmental evaluations are flexible, enabling programmes to track and understand outcomes as they emerge. The evaluation assesses the impact of the programme’s approach and facilitates learning about the mechanisms and conditions for success and improved implementation. It covers BUILD in the US and Global South.

The NIRAS team is collecting quantitative and qualitative data, providing real-time feedback for learning and programme adjustments, informing the next

phase of BUILD, and tracking both emerging issues as well as longitudinal impacts. In the words of the Foundation: “Ultimately, our hope is that the evaluation will contribute to more nuanced evidence and compelling stories about BUILD as a grant-making approach, which will help shift the field of philanthropy toward providing more flexible, grantee-centered support.”

Description of MEL tasks

Following a [Familiarisation Study](#) in 2018, where NIRAS documented some early observations about BUILD and posited a few hunches about programme impact to explore further, NIRAS moved to an evaluation built on seven intensive case studies to interrogate the programme’s value proposition and assess the extent to which it is making a difference.

The first case studies focus on ‘distance travelled’ and seek to analyse changes during the course of the five-year grant among established, emerging and network organisations as well as organisations undergoing a leadership transition, and grassroots mobilising organisations.

The second type of case studies consist of ‘deep dive’ analyses exploring how grantees are dealing with a given challenge or opportunity. These are being conducted among organisations and networks that are mobilising to confront an acute existential threat, including protection risks, and also organisations led by people of color or indigenous people.

Another aspect of the evaluation is to discover implications of changes in the BUILD approach over time – how Ford Foundation regional offices and themes that invested quickly at the start of BUILD differ from those who waited and started with BUILD once the approach had time to mature.

Client
The Ford Foundation

Location
USA and the Global South

Total contract value:
US\$3,584,525

Duration
February 2018-
June 2021