



Published on National Council of Nonprofits (<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org>)

Original URL: <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/articles/mouths-funders-and-nonprofits-20-ways-build-better-relationships>

# **From the Mouths of Funders and Nonprofits: 20 Ways to Build Better Relationships**

By: Henry Berman and Jennifer Chandler

Last week, we held two Great Funder-Nonprofit Relationships programs in partnership with [Exponent Philanthropy](#), generously supported by the [Fund for Shared Insight](#). More than 200 total participants, representing both funders and nonprofits, joined us for candid conversations in Los Angeles and San Francisco.

## **What does a great funder-nonprofit relationship look and feel like?**

We asked this question during the program and gathered 30 responses that summed up the participants' collective vision:

- Open
- Honest
- Comfortable
- Transparent
- Trusting
- Authentic
- Informative
- Aligned
- Transforming
- Personal
- Responsive
- Flexible
- Two-way
- Accountable
- Thoughtful
- Realistic
- Accepting
- Humanistic
- Evolving
- Intentional
- Strategic
- Rewarding
- Mutually beneficial
- Sustainable
- Curious
- Inspirational
- Patient
- Collaborative
- Relaxed not rushed
- Fun!

As a funder or a nonprofit, we think you'll agree that these characteristics contribute to true partnerships. We've purposely not indicated if each came from a funder or a nonprofit because we found that both groups expressed interest in building relationships with the other that reflect these qualities.

## **How do we make these characteristics a reality? How do we move from transactional to transformational relationships?**

From participants, here are 20 ways funders and nonprofits can work together, starting today, to be more intentional about building relationships with our mission partners:

- Share mistakes
- Get to know each other like I know my friends
- Engage each other with radical candor
- Be less defensive and open to bigger pictures beyond individual programs
- Take risks
- Be strategic
- Listen
- Learn
- Be open to multiyear funding
- Be human-centered in how we design our work
- Connect each other to resources
- Be intentionally educational
- Have open communication
- Be interactive and feedback-friendly
- Adapt to change
- Don't always be rushed; take time to be relaxed
- Engage for the longer term
- Build on common interests
- Keep each other informed
- Be easy-going

Do you agree? We look forward to hearing your responses and sharing more of what we are learning about building and maintaining great funder-nonprofit relationships.

---

Henry Berman became Exponent Philanthropy's CEO in 2011, previously serving as acting CEO, board member, and committee member. Through his experience as a foundation co-trustee and Exponent Philanthropy member since 2003, he brings a firsthand understanding of the needs of grantmakers to his role. Henry is a board member of the National Council of Nonprofits.

Jennifer Chandler is Vice President of the National Council of Nonprofits and has served as a consultant, legal advisor, and board member for charitable nonprofits, as well as a trustee of a private foundation.