

Stronger Foundations

Terms of reference for the working groups

Aim of Stronger Foundations initiative

Stronger Foundations is a flagship two-year project of ACF, which aims to help grant-making charitable foundations identify and pursue excellent practice.

Through this process, ACF will support its members to be ambitious, effective and expert, so that foundation resources are allocated for social good in a way that maximises the potential benefit to the individuals, communities and societies they support.

Essential to the initiative will be contributions from those beyond the foundation community. This will include experts from other sectors, funding beneficiaries, and academics, who will be invited to be involved in a variety of ways throughout.

This paper sets out the terms of reference for the six ACF member-led working groups, which will be a central driver of the Stronger Foundations initiative.

1. Working group purpose and contribution to products

- 1.1 Each of the six working groups will focus on a theme identified through consultation with ACF members and others. These are: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Impact and Learning; Transparency and Engagement; Funding Practices; Intentional Investment; and Strategy and Governance.
- 1.2 Each group's principal purpose is to examine, discuss and debate a series of challenging questions about foundation practice related to its theme.
- 1.3 The working groups will contribute significantly to the raw material gathered through the initiative as a whole, from which ACF will create a variety of outputs and products.
- 1.4 Significant products, to which the groups' work will contribute, are likely to include: A 'rapporteur's report' of the working groups, which will summarise the breadth of discussions and evidence gathered; a self-assessment tool for foundations to consider their practice and steps they could take to become 'stronger' across a range of domains; and a narrative summary highlighting key principles and case studies of excellent practice.
- 1.5 ACF will publish a range of outputs throughout, including articles and blogs, which may include a disclaimer that they are intended to be read as 'provocations' by an individual author, and are not necessarily reflective of others. Working group members will be actively encouraged and supported to contribute in this way.
- 1.6 Subject to resources, it may be possible to support discrete projects to inform the working groups' deliberations. Group members are welcome to suggest ideas at any time, which ACF will consider and support if capacity and resources allow.

2. Governance, oversight and accountability

- 2.1 ACF's trustee board is responsible for the Stronger Foundations initiative, with its staff team tasked with delivering it day-to-day.
- 2.2 ACF staff will support the working groups with capacity (e.g. as secretariat, organisers, hosts) and resources (e.g. venues, catering, communications).
- 2.3 An internal ACF steering group will review the initiative's progress, including that of the working groups, and will report to ACF trustees on a quarterly basis.
- 2.4 ACF staff will liaise with each working group chair in between the group's meetings.
- 2.5 A Reference Group will be formed towards the end of the initiative, to sense-check and refine significant products as they emerge. This group will be comprised of the chairs of each working group, ACF board members and others.
- 2.6 Outputs and products that arise from the working groups are the responsibility, sign-off and ownership of ACF.
- 2.7 Working group members will draw upon expertise from their day jobs, but they and the individual organisations they work for are not responsible for any Stronger Foundation outputs or products, which will not necessarily represent any individual member's views.

3. Working group membership

- 3.1 Each working group will be comprised of up to 15 senior staff from ACF members, selected by ACF following a call by ACF to its membership for expressions of interest. ACF will invite one member of each working group to be its chair.
- 3.2 Each group will be comprised of staff from a cross-section of ACF members, and include a representative from ACF's trustee board.
- 3.3 Membership of the group will be for the duration of the initiative, unless the individual leaves their role and is no longer a member of ACF. If an individual steps down from the group, ACF may invite a replacement or may choose not to.

4. Meeting format and focus

- 4.1 The group will meet up to 7 times over an 18 month period.
- 4.2 ACF will organise all aspects of the meeting, and support the group's chair in running each session.
- 4.3 After each group's first meeting, ACF and the group's chair will shape a programme of meetings, drawing upon suggestions from the group and others.

- 4.4 A detailed note of each meeting will be produced for the group to review, and a short summary made available for others (see also below in 'group behaviour and communication').
- 4.5 Meeting papers will be sent to group members in good time before each meeting, and notes of meetings shared as soon as possible.
- 4.6 Each meeting will vary in format depending on the topic and desired content. However, they are likely to include presentation of evidence (by internal and external experts), small group discussions, and whole group exercises. Other formats, such as visits, may also be possible.

5. Group behaviour and communication

- 5.1 Working group meetings are intended to be private discussions to enable open discussion and debate. To that end, a record of the meetings will be taken, but this will not be shared beyond ACF and the group.
- 5.2 Short summaries of each meeting will be produced by ACF for external use, and learning from the meetings will inform outputs and products, but content will not be attributable to any individual or organisation.
- 5.3 The meetings will be considerate, collegiate, and include challenging discussion. The group will agree on the behaviours it will adhere to in its first meeting.
- 5.4 Group members can share resources and materials with other group members by sending these to ACF to collate and distribute. This will enable a steady, but not unmanageable, flow of communication.
- 5.5 Confidential materials will be marked as such with watermarks or passwords.
- 5.6 There will be a Stronger Foundations section on the ACF website, which will include a page for each working group. This will include a list of group members, short summaries of each meeting, related articles/blogs, and other content (e.g. video interviews with expert speakers).

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