On August 7, 2008, at the XVII International AIDS Conference in Mexico City, representatives of more than 50 philanthropic grantmaking organizations came together to discuss how funders can best collaborate to address HIV/AIDS around the world. Without formal presentations, the gathering focused on informal sharing of funder experiences, perspectives, and ideas about collaboration. The discussion was moderated by Stuart Burden, a former FCAA Board member. Several important themes emerged, and those are discussed in this Dialogue Report.

In addition, two publications were created for distribution at this event. Funder Collaborations Addressing HIV/AIDS: Examples from Around the World features profiles of 19 different collaborations among a diverse group of grantmakers. Approaches and Considerations in HIV/AIDS Grantmaking and Collaborations is a brief overview of eight considerations and related resources for grantmakers interested in collaborative opportunities. Both are available at www.fcaaids.org.

• **Tackle Crazy Ideas**

In his introductory remarks, [Peter Piot](http://example.com/peterpiot), outgoing Executive Director of UNAIDS, called on philanthropic donors to continue in their role as engines of innovation, noting the unique ability of the private sector to catalyze new programming toward social, political, and public health change in the fight against HIV/AIDS.
Participants raised several examples where foundations had, or could, collectively raise the profile of an issue, motivate systemic change, and/or develop innovative programs. Grantmakers asked aloud how collaborations might be expanded to help communities to examine and improve major governmental and multilateral funding mechanisms such as the Global Fund and PEPFAR. As an example of success, Jennifer Kates of The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation reviewed the history of the Global Media AIDS Initiative (GMAI), hatched from a ‘crazy question’ by (then) UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, “what if we brought the world’s corporate media leaders together with community leaders and created media to save people’s lives?”

Peter Piot, UNAIDS
“In the global AIDS effort, we continue to need to politicize AIDS, renew our leadership and our coalitions, and mobilize new funding. We face a struggle, not least inside our own organizations, to continually innovate and take risks in these areas. Foundations, in all your diversity, play an essential role in all of this, in promoting leadership, supporting innovation and risk-taking, supporting pioneers and crazy new ideas. You are all needed now more than ever.”

Allocate Funding for Collaboration

Participants called on each other to make room in their portfolios and strategies for collective efforts. Practical suggestions were raised, including examples of partnership models, unified application forms, harmonized monitoring and reporting efforts, and ways that foundations had modified or waived their own institutional or strategic requirements. As a result of the meeting, several grantmakers began conversations about how to align funding on behalf of common grantees, and at least one topic-specific meeting was proposed to create a harmonized international funding effort.

Todd Summers, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
“We as funders should work together more closely to allow grantees to respond to a full continuum of needs related to HIV, health, and human rights, and we as individuals should push our organizations to fund HIV issues, populations, and interventions that we haven’t funded before, in ways that we haven’t before.”
Sharon Bissell, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Mexico
“Funder flexibility in funding priorities and allocations is essential to support innovation and change.”

Jennifer Kates, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation
“Partnerships require all of us to create room for new and collective work in our portfolios. To collaborate, each of us needs to be ready to put aside our detailed plans, our core agendas, and think beyond what we’ve done before. Occasionally setting aside our own institutional agendas in favor of collective action – that’s what will allow all of us to think more creatively, work more efficiently, and accomplish greater outcomes with a greater reach, more than any of us can do alone.”

Dedicate Sustained Funding and Multiple Partners Toward Change

Funding collaborations were also cited for their ability to bring together diversity of experience and sustainability of funding commitments. Many participants described specialized needs in HIV/AIDS funding related to programs, interventions, communities, fundraising, and grantmaking processes.

Community-centered foundations and grantmaking processes were especially lauded for their ability to engage local community partners in grantmaking decisions, to contribute specialized knowledge about HIV-related needs, and to act as a buffer between multiple sectors. Organizations whose grantmaking is supported in part or entirely by grants from others strongly rejected the terms ‘re-grantor’ or ‘intermediary,’ noting that their contributions went beyond the act of writing checks.

Kandy Ferree, National AIDS Fund
“Many Community Foundations have been at the forefront of HIV/AIDS philanthropy in the U.S. since the beginning of the epidemic. They are uniquely positioned to provide leadership on public health and social justice issues like HIV/AIDS. They know their local communities, can convene diverse constituents – service providers, individual donors, media, corporations, elected officials - and can use their position to bring public and private funders to the table. The National AIDS Fund has over 30 funding partnerships across the country and community foundations provide leadership and serve as the local convener of many of them.”
FCAA will continue to work to broaden its support of collaboration among grantmakers on funding related to HIV and AIDS. FCAA invites grantmakers and others to visit www.fcaaids.org to learn more about FCAA’s work to encourage collaborations among HIV/AIDS grantmakers.

**Desiree Flores, Ms. Foundation for Women and Outgoing Chair, FCAA Board of Directors (2005-2008)** Let us take this opportunity to reflect on the power of our relationships and collective leadership. We’re all in this together because we can’t afford not to be. Collaborations allow us to challenge each other, trust each other, and build from each other’s work. Collaborations allow us to learn from our successes, avoid failures, and see what our efforts add up to. During the past two decades, AIDS funders have created a powerful legacy of funding for health and social justice work. **Let’s commit to carrying that legacy forward.**

Also at the gathering in Mexico City, FCAA launched its brand new funder-only intranet site, **FCAA Connect**, where grantmakers can network, share ideas and concerns, and engage in meaningful conversations around the issues that are most important and relevant to their work.

To join, please visit http://groups.fcaaids.org, or send an email to info@fcaaids.org.

FCAA would like to thank Sam Avrett for his contributions to this event.