

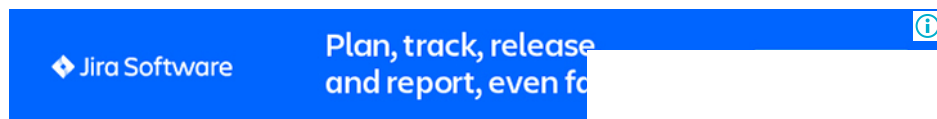


Rohini Nilekani: 'Funders, lead with trust when working with nonprofits'

By The CSR Journal - July 15, 2021

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One of India's most recognisable philanthropists, Rohini Nilekani believes it is important for funders to lead with trust, when working with their nonprofit partners. She was speaking at the first virtual roundtable on the GROW Fund recently helmed by leaders of the philanthropy sector. When asked about the intersections and differences between trust-based philanthropy and data-backed philanthropy, she said that if the mission is to cause real long term change, the scale of the problem and the response to the problem, have to be imagined simultaneously. Further, it is important to design philanthropic solutions for what will work at scale, and distribute the ability to solve for the problem.

The GROW fund is an initiative developed and promoted by EdelGive Foundation, with the aim to raise Rs. 100 Crores towards building, supporting, and sustaining 100 grassroots organisations across India, over a period of 24 months. Core partners include BMGF, Manan trust, Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies, A.T.E Chandra Foundation, Ashish Kacholia, Edelweiss Group and two other anonymous institutional funders. Leaders and role models like Sanjay Purohit, Sanjeev Bikhchandani have joined as community participants.

The first roundtable on the GROW Fund discussed how we can collectively create sustainable and resilient grassroot organisations. It was expertly moderated Ingrid Srinath, Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy (CSIP), Ashoka University. During her introduction, Ingrid Srinath set the tone for the entire roundtable, by speaking about and presenting slides on CSIP's survey to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on the social/development sector. As part of the survey, it was revealed that:

i) While a sizeable majority of the organisations surveyed were adversely impacted in terms of funding and operations, the impact was felt disproportionately more by smaller

non-profit organisations i.e., those with budgets less than Rs. 50 lakh.

ii) 62% of the non-profit organisations surveyed said that their programs and organisations had suffered a negative impact. In fact, as many as 38% of them had suspended their operations.

Ingrid pertinently pointed out that the nonprofit organisations that were agile and able to respond well during this crisis, were only those with deep roots in the community and a listening approach, Resilience (financial, organizational, institutional funding and long term commitments from their funders, and a true partnership with their donors), technology and communications.

Pritha Venkatachalam from Bridgespan India took the reins to speak about the Pay-What-It-Takes Initiative, and a Bridgespan survey that covered 388 nonprofits representative of the sector, as well as a financial analysis of 40 leading and relatively well-funded nonprofits. Some relevant points from the presentation were:

i) A staggering 68% of the organisations surveyed were under-funded – which was reflected by the gap between actual expenses incurred for indirect costs versus money allocated to these costs.

ii) 54% of the organisations surveyed had less than three months of financial reserves remaining.

The spotlight then moved to Vidya Shah, the Executive Chairperson, EdelGive Foundation, who was asked to provide her insights on the unique nature of the GROW Fund. Some of Vidya's highlighted submissions are as follows:

i) The GROW Fund has been designed for both scale and inclusion – where inclusion involves cause, geography, language, and maturity and sophistication of the organisations.

ii) Speaking about the importance of building resilient grassroots organisations Vidya stated that nonprofit organisations that are not equipped, resilient, financially secure etc, will always remain niche as regards their focus areas of work.

Amit Chandra, Founder, A.T.E. Chandra Foundation spoke of his experiences in philanthropy, stating that nonprofits would have to evolve and move away from functioning on the basis of anecdotal evidence, and move to a more data-oriented approach.

Amit pointed out that an M&E framework was important to compile data, in order to take the decisions needed for an organization to achieve its mission. However, as data is not always available, donors would need to assist organisations invest in basic capabilities before they can get to the stage of data collection and analysis. From a Donor's

perspective, Amit further point out that donors must do what makes their heart sing. There is no template for philanthropy. It all depends on how each individual is wired.

Ashish Kacholia, Founder, Lucky Investment Managers Pvt Ltd., spoke about the immense suffering experienced by millions of Indians during the pandemic, and highlighted the importance of giving back to society, and giving back generously. He provided some insights on his approach to philanthropy: Donors should not wait make endless amounts of money before they begin their journey in philanthropy. The must give as they earn. Ashish mentioned that he approached philanthropy like he did his commercial investments i.e., he is always looking for the potential return on his investment.

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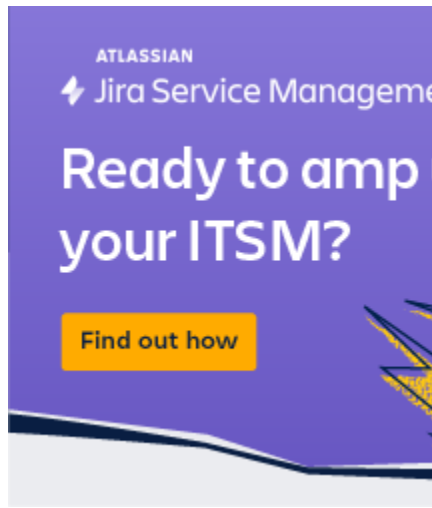


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