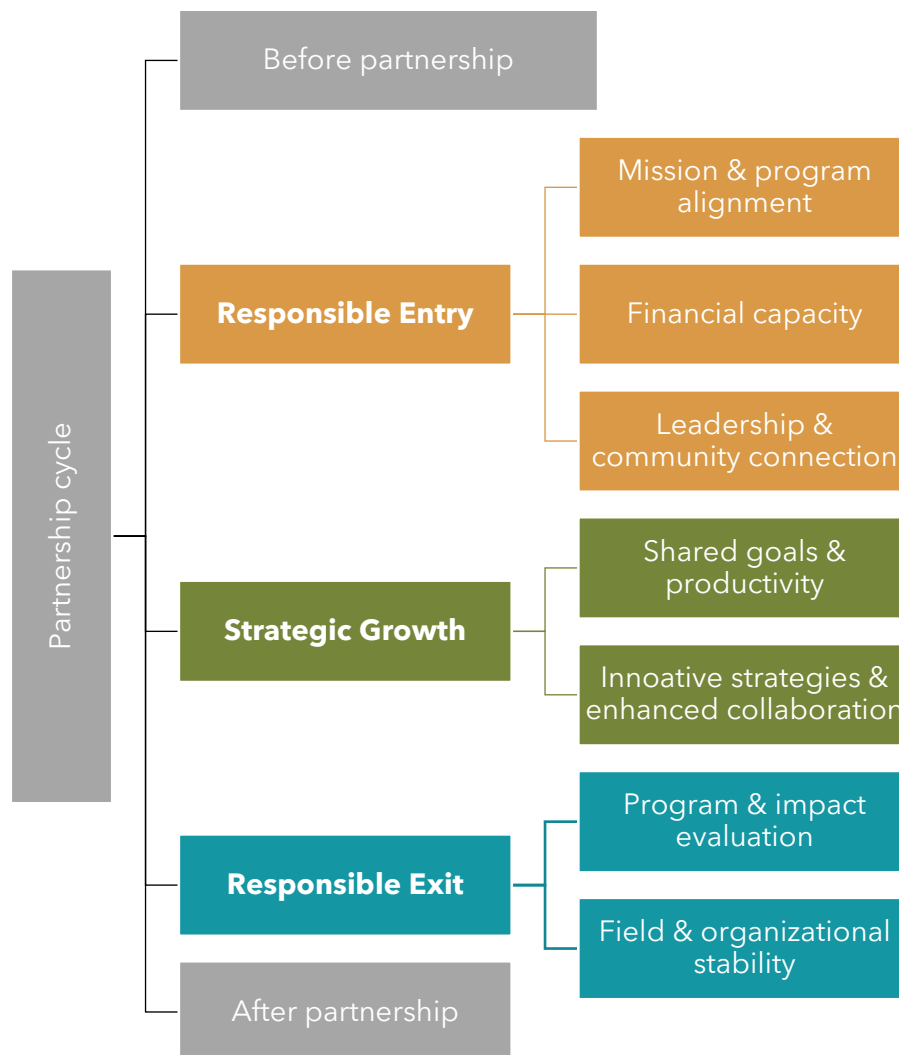


Partnership Framework

Updated June 18th, 2024.

The Better Way Foundation is a small family foundation focused on building better futures for children and families through early childhood education. We support community-based, culturally grounded organizations in the United States to help children reach their full potential. We see our grantees as **partners** and believe in **cultivating and fostering collaborations and networks** to catalyze innovation and change. We know that being a good partner means being transparent about expectations, how decisions get made and accountability measures, not just for partners but also for ourselves. We have created a framework to ensure that our partners know what partnership means to us and to help communicate how funding decisions are made.

An outline of our Partnership Framework:



BEFORE PARTNERSHIP

Better Way is focused on transformative, long-term changes and, in that spirit, ensures partners have appropriate time and support needed for impact. Grounded in our mission, vision, and values and—harnessing the lessons learned from previous partnerships and the expertise of Board and committee members—we define 10-year program initiative(s) that outline the impact the Board would like to see in the next phase of work. Staff conduct an initial landscape and research review to gauge impact opportunities and inform program recommendations so Board and staff can align on impact strategies, initiative goals, geographic focus, and budget for new partnerships. The Board also determines what will happen if there is a shift in priorities during the 10-year initiative. Staff then begin the Responsible Entry process.

PRE-RESPONSIBLE ENTRY

1. Program build-out and learning:
 - a. Using the Board-approved strategies, goals, and budget, staff conduct initial field analysis to understand local conditions and landscape, and gather baseline data, connect to networks
 - b. Staff create a program implementation plan and timeline
 - c. Staff create program theory of change, update the Evaluation Framework, data plan, dashboard and update the grant application, annual survey, and report templates
2. Before entering partnership with a prospective grantee, Better Way spends approximately one year engaging with the organization on its objectives and goals and conducting a landscape analysis. (Complementing this, Better Way is transparent about its work toward total resource activation to advance its mission—that is, how we invest resources across programmatic and investment priorities—and is committed to annual updates for partners on this topic.) This “runway” intends to ensure the foundation understands local needs, barriers, and opportunities and, ultimately, builds strong, effective partnerships in which the prospective grantee is ready to receive investment.

RESPONSIBLE ENTRY PROCESS

1. Staff conduct initial partnership inquiry research, due diligence, introductory calls/visits to better understand the stage of ECD programs, impact opportunities, and potential partners, then solicit letters of inquiry or proposals
2. Staff work with partners to understand the Better Way Partnership Framework and complete full grant applications and prepare funding recommendations for the committee/Board (at this time, staff engage with the prospective partner to determine if/whether permission is needed from Tribal Administration for Better Way funding)
3. Initial phase of partnership includes development of long-term plan for partnership, relationship building, developing a shared vision for: success, capacity building, succession plans, evaluation, impact measures, programmatic and organizational development goals, 6- to 9-year impact on the field, and, to what extent the prospective partner wishes to engage in any cohort learning and development opportunities
4. Staff will work with the Program & Impact (grants) Committee and/or Board to determine how partnerships initiated in the middle of a 10-year initiative will be handled

Note:

- Grantee partners must be prepared for course-correction planning if grant terms cannot be met, priorities shift, or funds remain unspent. Maintaining transparency and open communication with staff is essential to mitigate any disruptions and ensure partnership continuity. Better Way will entertain amendments to grants, though typically limits the number of amendments to one per grant; and, while not a typical situation, the foundation invites partners that cannot utilize grant funds to return those funds back to Better Way. The foundation welcomes partners to re-engage in the Partnership Lifecycle (for consideration for grant funding) when they are ready.
- For organizations that began partnership with Better Way prior to the foundation adopting this framework, staff typically consider the organization to be in Strategic Growth (depending on years of grantmaking, progress toward meeting objectives, etc.).
- Grant reporting—following Responsible Entry, as well as during Strategic Growth and following Responsible Exit—is as much about ensuring effective stewardship of philanthropic dollars intended to help fuel impact in communities, as it is about sharing learning, progress, and what worked and didn't with Better Way so the foundation can learn and leverage impact to inspire other foundations to include Indian Country in their grantmaking and/or investment portfolios.

RESPONSIBLE ENTRY FRAMEWORK (year 1)

	Criteria	Assessment values	Tool & assessment process
Mission & programmatic alignment	BWF and grantee partner are committed to broad shared goals & aligned strategies	Alignment with BWF mission, vision, and values	Letter of inquiry, phone-call/site-visit protocol, and notes
	Partner has the desire, vision, and capacity to catalyze innovation	Grant proposal: Finalize project and partnership goals, definition of success, and impact measurement plan	Application form
	Partner has experience capturing and applying lessons learned and changing or adapting systems and structures	Review of current challenges, successes, and lessons learned	Application form, field analysis
	BWF and partner commit to shared engagement and additional support needs	Alignment with program goals and strategies, capture additional support needs—cohort and/or evaluation projects	Entry assessment to capture how partners want to be supported
Financial capacity	Partners' financial health and organizationally stability support growth	Financial assessment criteria	Application form

	Partner demonstrates capacity to absorb major, multi-year grant support from BWF in the strategic partnership phase (this major support is a catalyst for growth, not a drag on the partner's organizational capacity)	Capacity assessment criteria	Application form, organizational stability metrics: project reliance ratio, organizational reliance ratio, percent of direct costs, number of other funders, diversity of funding sources
Leadership & community connection	Partner demonstrates a strong, well-articulated organizational vision and strategic plan with measurable goals	Leadership and organizational capacity assessment criteria	Application form, partner strategic plan
	Potential partner demonstrates connection to community with appropriate community input and feedback loops	Community connection assessment criteria	Application form

For any partner to graduate from one phase to the next, Better Way, as part of the evaluation and grant reporting process, expects that a reasonable number of grant objectives have been met and that the partner can speak fluidly about progress and impact.

STRATEGIC GROWTH PROCESS

1. Partner implements the project/program and reports annually on progress towards program/project goals and BWF's initiative program goals
2. Partners participates in initiative activities to enhance collaborations including capacity building efforts, technical assistance, cohort meetings, and/or formal evaluation
3. Staff and partner evolve and refine grant activities to ensure progress towards goals and impact
4. Staff work to amplify the voices and impact of the partner and to connect it to networks and other supports

STRATEGIC GROWTH (typically two 3-year grant cycles)

	Criteria	Assessment values	Tool & assessment process
Shared goals & productivity	BWF and grantee partners engage in an intentional transition process to move from Responsible Entry phase to Strategic Growth phase	At least 75% of grant goals and outcomes are met and/or plans and course corrections are made to achieve impact goals in other ways	Application, annual survey, phone call check-ins, and interim and final reports
	Building on the initial grant, partners and BWF commit to	Partners develop a proposal to work or report on progress	Program initiative theories of change, Evaluation Framework

	and/or make progress long-term outcomes and outputs Evaluation and learning cycles are completed	toward outcome metrics outlined in BWF's initiative program strategies Partner engages in evaluation and progress monitoring efforts	
Innovative strategies & enhanced collaboration	Grantee partner and BWF commit to organizational development outcomes that lead to long-term sustainability for partners	Partners report on progress toward organizational stability metrics	Organizational stability metrics: project reliance ratio, organizational reliance ratio, percent of direct costs, number of other funders, diversity of funding sources
	The framework for years 3-5, outcome-based funding model is understood by BWF and partners; this may include partners identifying: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to amplify their efforts, if desired, with or without Better Way collaboration, to address broader ecosystem innovations • Sustainable funding models to ensure long-term organizational sustainability 	Co-designed plan for enhanced collaboration, how BWF can help beyond the grant	Enhanced collaboration plan describing what BWF will offer beyond funding to support partners as they work toward their goals and organizational sustainability

RESPONSIBLE EXIT PROCESS

1. Board makes informed decision to exit
2. Intent to exit communicated to partner by staff with a minimum of one year before exit; communications remain active during the exit process
3. Staff complete analysis of transition grant support needs, conducted in partnership with grantee, and recommends transition grant amount and timeline
4. Transition recommended by Program & Impact and approved by the Board
5. Transition grants awarded with final reporting requirements
6. Exit plan communicated to external stakeholders by staff as needed
7. BWF documents key learnings from partnerships

RESPONSIBLE EXIT (final 1-2 years)

	Criteria	Assessment values	Tool & assessment process
Program & impact evaluation	At least 75% of program/project goals and outcomes have been achieved	Partners report on progress towards outcomes outlined in BWF's initiative program strategies	Program analysis based on program initiative theories of change
	Evaluation and learning cycles complete	Evaluation & learning outcomes have been captured and shared	Evaluation Framework
Field & organizational stability	Field analysis indicates partners have had meaningful impact toward 6- to 9-year initiative goals	Initial field analysis and research, compared to mid- and final field analysis and research	Program statement outlining 6- to 9-year initiative goals, field analysis
	Define impact of BWF's exit on the field and partner organizations, co-design a plan to mitigate negative impact and a timeline and plan to replace needed funding	Timing needed to replace funding, plan to connect partners to other funders/funding sources	Exit assessment, plan, and timeline– determine 1- or 2-year exit grant plan

AFTER (A FUNDING) PARTNERSHIP

The foundation will share learnings and evaluations with other foundations interested in previous programmatic areas of focus by posting previous partners, evaluation documents, lessons learned or impact summaries on our website and/or publishing or presenting learnings or other useful information as needed.

Better Way is committed to engaging with partners even after funding is complete. The foundation is committed to maintaining ongoing dialogue about broader ecosystem barriers and opportunities and will continue to examine collaboration opportunities following the Better Way Partnership Lifecycle.