

FEASIBILITY SUMMARY REPORT

STUDY COMMISSIONED BY RAWA TEAM

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BACKGROUND

Rawa: Creative Palestinian Communities Fund seeks to fill a vacuum in resources to promote the work of often overlooked Palestinian communities that are creative in their approach to community health and development, and are striving to secure viable and dignified lives under conditions of occupation and structural discrimination. The planning and exploration period has been supported in part by Rockefeller Brothers Fund, The Open Society Foundations, The Middle East Children's Alliance, Global Fund for Community Foundations, and the Ford Foundation.

The working team behind Rawa had a feasibility scan undertaken to assess the general financial viability of the Fund and inform early-stage decision making related to governance, operations and program strategy. In addition to desk research, comprehensive interviews were completed with 24 philanthropy and program experts from North America, Europe, Middle East and Africa. They were selected based on sectoral and/or regional expertise.

COMPELLING INITIATIVE

There was considerable enthusiasm for Rawa's **goals and vision**. Most of those interviewed agreed that the Fund can play a vital role as an intermediary for small organizations, CBOs, unregistered groups and individuals that may otherwise be effectively "locked out" of current donor structures. Being an **intermediary, and de facto advocate**, for community-based and grassroots organizations that are not part of the "NGO economy" resonated strongly. It was understood that many organizations and community initiatives are not able to access funds, and many donors that might want to invest in community-led solutions are unable to reach these constituents. Rawa's potential to act as a **bridge between donors and communities** was considered very compelling and could generate considerable donor support.

Similarly, if Rawa can make its case to donors that are not currently funding in Palestine because they feel there is not a reliable vehicle they can use, that has appropriate capacity, it could help to unlock new resources. Donor and public education can also play an important role in this. If the Fund can raise the profile of local efforts and community engagement, and can **help shift the current - largely negative - dominant narratives** about Palestine, that can also unlock not just funds, but also have a larger positive effect over time.

The **blended approach** Rawa proposes was also very appealing, drawing on the best and most effective elements of multiple models and creating something distinctive that challenges the conventional donor paradigm. This includes the governance structure that draws heavily on **deep and diverse community involvement and leadership**, program strategy that is also community-driven, and a multi-purpose approach to grant-making. In addition, the **light administrative requirements** and ability to initiate and implement projects quickly, using an established and proven NGO as a fiscal conduit, was another favorable distinction.

RECURRING QUESTIONS

While the overwhelming reaction to Rawa was positive, there were also a number of questions that arose in multiple conversations. The key points raised focused on:

- **Limitations related to the US Patriot Act:** While the Patriot Act has cast a shadow over cross-border giving, it is not, in fact, a serious hurdle. Rawa's fiscal conduit has been successfully providing funds to Palestinian organizations for 25 years, as have many other donors.
- **Identifying the "right" partners and people:** There were concerns about the "hyper-politicization" within Palestine and whether/how Rawa could identify a balanced and diverse set of partners and highly-respected objective advisors. Rawa organizers have been intentional about conferring with and engaging a broad cross-section of local and international stakeholders. They are aware of, and sensitive to, the politicization of community concerns, are committed to further diversifying their "clusters" (locally-based advisory teams), and will continue to work with a strong and respected set of local and regional actors.
- **Program foci and goals:** While many were intrigued by the democratic approach to program decisions, many were simultaneously concerned by what seemed a possible lack of clarity and recommended that Rawa set clear guiding principles for program and funding decisions. Similarly,

some questioned monitoring and evaluation plans in the absence of specific program goals. As described in Rawa's plans, they are establishing a community-driven process that works with clusters to ensure local agency and voice. Challenging the still all-too-prevalent norm of establishing programs through external "experts", Rawa works with and supports locals to identify their most pressing needs and, critically, their own proposals for addressing them and they will establish criteria and goals. This is a crucial aspect to locally-driven decision-making and sustainability.

- Can it work? Rawa is carving an intentionally distinct path and exploring a new model in global philanthropy. It will take time to test, and improve, the model and the organizers have therefore planned a 3-year pilot phase. Rawa is working with communities that have proven to be highly resilient and creative and will draw on those same traits to craft a model that can support and expand their efforts. Early progress is already visible.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

In addition to the questions that were raised, a number of general recommendations were made, including:

- Clarify the unique and compelling points that distinguish Rawa from other efforts, ensuring the 'unique selling point' is immediately clear and persuasive.
- Better articulate the vibrant theory of change to build confidence among prospective donors.
- Engage local community and regional donors early on, demonstrating local buy-in and support.
- Identify who – specifically – is involved in leadership and decision-making.
- Start! Some donors will require "proof of concept" before investing; initiate work as soon as is feasible and continue to build out capacity, and vision, as Rawa evolves.

WHAT ELSE?

Many of those in the donor community that were interviewed indicated high interest and high hopes, but at the same time they wanted to see how things develop before making clear commitments. Money flowing into Palestine is not lacking – this has created a donor-funded (so-called) "NGO economy" – but support for grassroots sustainable solutions is still in short supply. Rawa seeks to help fill that gap and, simultaneously, to challenge the current donor model that overlooks the incredible strength and creativity of local communities and their innovative approaches to a multitude of complex challenges. Rawa's ability to implement, refine, and demonstrate impact on the ground will be the most important factor in attracting new donors. Monitoring, evaluating and sharing what is learned in these early days is vitally important to convincing hesitant donors that this new model can work, and that these communities deserve investment in their own right. Rawa anticipates sharing an update one year out regarding what they are learning, early successes, and changes wrought by experience.

In addition, the power of small and individual donors should not be overlooked. The growth of crowd-funding sources offers additional opportunities for Rawa and the communities and programs it will support. Beyond the financial support, which is critically important, the ability to help raise awareness about the versatility and innovation of these stressed communities suggests that crowd-funding is a potentially strategic approach for Rawa to explore. This 'long tail' of philanthropy is often overlooked but has high levels of flexibility and vitality and is another aspect of funding that Rawa will actively pursue.

CONCLUSION

The financial feasibility scan confirmed that, without question, Rawa is pursuing a distinct, valuable and – in the best sense – risky path. Their bold and experimental approach raises many questions for traditional donors and challenges much of the conventional wisdom that has been driving most of the international funding for Palestine heretofore. There is a significant opportunity for Rawa to prove that a new approach, that soundly puts power back into the hands of local communities and draws on their collective knowledge, strength and creativity, can unlock impactful and sustainable solutions. Rawa has to prove it can deliver on what it promises; but as it does so, there are significant funding opportunities that it can unlock to support Palestinian communities – communities that are vulnerable and resilient in equal measure and are ready for a new approach that allows them to more effectively deliver their own solutions.