

March 29, 2012

Dear Friends,

We hope you enjoy this week's edition of the Newsflash!

Sincerely,

The Firelight Team

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(Call for Proposals) Catalytic Fund Call for Proposals: Youth and the City Challenges

(Call for Proposals) Project Inspire for Women's Empowerment: \$25,000 Grant Opportunity

(Call for Proposals) [fundsforngos.org](http://fundsforngos.org) announces its first Small Grant Prize for NGOs & Networks in Developing Countries

(Resource) Admitting to Failure

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(Call for Proposals) Catalytic Fund Call for Proposals: Youth and the City Challenges

The Cities Alliance, a global partnership for urban poverty reduction and the promotion of the role of cities in sustainable development has issued its second call for proposals under its Catalytic Fund.

The theme under which the funding would be provided is "Youth and the City: Challenges of and Visions for Demographic Change."

The thematic call has three main objectives in line with the 'catalytic' nature of the Fund:

- To raise awareness of the role of youth in urban development at a time when cities, grappling with an historic urbanisation process, appear ill-prepared to provide improved governance, meaningful representation, or economic and social roles for their youthful populations.
- To select and support, both technically and financially, innovative youth-focused urban projects and to revisit traditional Cities Alliance areas such as city development strategies, slum upgrading and national policies on urban development with an emphasis on youth.
- To provide a flexible platform for successful projects to develop peer-to-peer

learning networks and to systematically extract and share knowledge that both informs and influences urban practices as well as policy dialogues at the local, national and global level.

The proposed project must be implemented in countries that are on the OECD DAC List of Aid Recipients.

Grant size requests must be limited to between US \$50,000 – US \$250,000.

Deadline for submission: April 30, 2012

For more go to: <http://www.citiesalliance.org/ca/node/2788>

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(Call for Proposal) Project Inspire for Women's Empowerment: \$25,000 Grant Opportunity

The Singapore Committee for UN Women and MasterCard have come together to organize this joint initiative called "Project Inspire: 5 Minutes to Change the World." This competition aims to help young changemakers create a better world of opportunities for women and girls in Asia Pacific, the Middle East and Africa.

The competition seeks entries from 18-35 year olds to submit a 5-minute platform to pitch their inspired idea to the world. There is an opportunity to win a \$25,000 grant. The grant must show creativity and sustainable impact in the lives of women and girls across Asia, Pacific, the Middle East or Africa through entrepreneurship.

Entries should be submitted in the form of a (maximum) 5-minute video or a (maximum) 2-page A4-sized proposal.

Video entries are to be uploaded on any public video-sharing sites, such as YouTube or Vimeo. Links to the videos must be provided on the submission e-form.

Submissions, either video OR written, must be made in English.

Each proposal should address the following questions:

- What is your inspirational idea?
- How will your project change the lives of women and girls in the short and long term?
- How will you/your team carry out the project?
- How will you spend the US\$25,000 grant to carry out the project?
- How will you measure the success of the project?

Submissions should be accompanied by information on the existing program, biographies of the team members and any supporting materials (e.g. website, social media channels, media clippings, past awards)

Deadline for Submission: June 30, 2012.

For more go to: <http://5minutestochangetheworld.org/about.php>

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(Call for Proposals) [fundsforngos.org](http://fundsforngos.org) announces its first Small Grant Prize for NGOs & Networks in Developing Countries

[fundsforngos.org](http://fundsforngos.org) is providing a funding opportunity to small NGOs and NGO networks in developing countries to through the Small Grant Prize. Organizations can get nominated or submit their own nominations in order to participate in this small grant support.

The objective of this Small Grant Prize is to raise awareness about various activities of [fundsforngos.org](http://fundsforngos.org) that ultimately lead to improve the capacity of NGOs and help them become financially sustainable.

Only registered NGOs and active Networks in good standing are eligible to receive the prize (an exception can be made for NGOs active in countries where it is not possible to legally register).

The Small Grant Prize does not seek any lengthy proposals or concept notes, but simply requests applicants to fill out a short registration form. The winners will be selected on a lucky draw basis.

Two winning NGOs or Networks will receive a cash award of \$500 each and technical support in fundraising and management in terms of free participation in our webinars. In addition to the two winning NGOs or Networks, we will also select 10 runners up who will also get free participation to the webinars. The webinars are offered by skilled trainers offering advice on raising funds for NGOs and other areas of capacity development.

Deadline for Submission: April 1, 2012.

For more go to: <http://www.fundsforngos.org/small-grant-prize/>

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(Resource) Admitting to Failure

**The development community is failing...to learn from failure. Instead of recognizing these experiences as learning opportunities, we hide them**

**away out of fear and embarrassment.**

Admitting Failure's Vision

**We're all in this together, thousands of people working to eradicate poverty, inequality and unnecessary suffering around the world. It's an incredible, global effort, but there is a problem. We aren't sharing information. With that many people working independently towards the same goal, it's inevitable that approaches will be duplicated. That's wonderful if the idea works, but wasteful if it's already been proven ineffective. Unfortunately, it happens all too often, and the results aren't just financial. Lives are quite literally at stake every time a failure is repeated.**

[Admittingfailure.com](http://Admittingfailure.com) aims to change that reality. At its simplest, it's a space to publicly acknowledge that something didn't work in order to ensure that the mistake isn't repeated. But it also aims to be a catalyst for change within the development sector that goes well beyond simple information sharing.

Imagine field staff who have the freedom to publicly share results, good and bad, in order to ensure subsequent efforts are not simply repetitions of ideas that have already been proven ineffective.

Imagine project managers who create space for field staff to innovate, rewarding learning as much as success.

Imagine NGOs that adapt and adjust constantly to the stream of information coming from the field – always looking for ways to improve the effectiveness of their work and making real-time adjustments when possible.

Imagine donors who are willing to support intelligent innovation and experimentation, accepting the possibility of failure as a necessary step on the path to success.

[Admittingfailure.com](http://Admittingfailure.com) is an effort to make these ideas into realities, accelerating development by ensuring that we learn from failures instead of repeat them—that we are failing forward.

## **Why Admit Failure**

Fail-ing For-ward [fey-ling fawr-werd] noun

- Operating in a safe environment for testing risky innovative ideas
- Recognizing failures early
- Admitting failures open and honestly

- Learning from these failures
- Adapting actions based on the learning in order to improve upon risky innovative ideas

**The progression from “new idea” to “lasting change” is one of prototypes, failures, learning and the eventual scaling of innovations that work. Yes, success is occasionally achieved on the first try, but more often, it requires a process of failing forward**—it’s how we got the light bulb. The Model T. And just about everything we now accept as a successful innovation. All of these required risk tolerance, a desire to innovate and transparency in sharing results. That environment doesn’t exist in the development sector today.

Somewhere in Tanzania, a sanitation program proves ineffective. That result isn’t shared, because it may upset a donor. As a result, the same program is implemented two years later in rural Ghana. Then again in Mali. Failures are repeated because we hide them.

At the same time, a project officer at an international NGO writes a memo proposing a pilot project that would target only market-ready farmers. That memo is never sent—the idea is too different, failure is a possibility and innovation isn’t rewarded. Finding out if it’s a good idea is just too risky, so the project officer elects to maintain the status quo.

**By admitting our failures, we end failure cycles and begin a linear progression of failing forward.** It’s why this site exists. We’re on the same side, if not the same team. We’re working towards a common goal. By sharing what doesn’t work, we collectively accelerate the process of finding what does.

For more go to: <http://www.admittingfailure.com/>

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(Report) 2010 Failure Report: Learning from Our Mistakes

“Live and learn” is a familiar saying, but its importance stems largely from what goes unmentioned: failure. In fact, the primary use of this saying is to acknowledge that everyone makes mistakes and encounters failure. The important thing is to learn and improve from these experiences.

**Indeed, learning and failing are both lifelong experiences. But whereas most institutions and individuals strive to be continuous learners, they strive equally hard to avoid failure and rarely acknowledge when it occurs. This approach is wrong and problematic. The lessons learned from failure and mistakes are often the most important, and they commonly have relevance and value to others. This is particularly true in the complex arena of international development, where problems do not have a single**

**or clear solution, and where there are so many potential risks and challenges.**

With the 3rd Edition of its Failure Report, Engineers Without Borders (EWB) Canada continues its bold leadership on this practice, by highlighting several mistakes and failures made throughout the year and analyzing how they have learned and improved. EWB Canada is doing incredible work in Canada and on the ground in Africa through the joint power of its staff, volunteers, and chapter members. But with a mission of tackling the roots cause of poverty and achieving catalytic or systemic change, mistakes and occasional failure are unavoidable. Some of the stories in this report reflect a failure of insight or of understanding how to work in a foreign land, while several others reflect organizational or project management mistakes. In all cases, it is impressive that individuals are publicly acknowledging failure and in many cases confessing to individual blame for mistakes so that others can learn.

These stories have significant value for other EWB staff and volunteers, as well as similar institutions and individuals working on development around the world. I am optimistic that this good example will strengthen the global dialogue on how to learn from failure to achieve the greatest impact for those we are looking to serve.

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(Article) At Failfaire, Speakers Muster Their Courage to Offer Candor About Mistakes

This FailFaire marks the third public event MobileActive, a nonprofit that promotes the use of cellphones for social change, has organized, and it will be putting together a similar session for the International Conference on Information and Communication Technologies and Development in March. Meanwhile, other institutions, such as the World Bank and Unicef, have held private gatherings to talk about unsuccessful projects.

**“This field is hobbled by a lack of resources—time, money, competent staff, et cetera,” says Ms. Verclas. “Given that, shouldn’t we maximize our chance of success?”**

**The goal is to identify common problems and help other organizations avoid making the same mistakes.**

Crucial Lessons

While the events have so far focused on failed technology efforts, the FailFaire style of talking openly about misfires in the hope of preventing future failures could be valuable in other fields, say organizers. **The most important lessons**

**that have come out of the early events—such as the critical need to start with ideas from the people an organization hopes to serve and to plan for a project’s growth from the beginning**—are relevant to many nonprofit projects, says Rajesh Anandan, a senior vice president at the U.S. Fund for Unicef, in New York, which co-hosted the recent gathering.

Mobile Technology for Community Health, also known as Motech, seeks to use text-message alerts to improve health care for pregnant women and their children in northern Ghana. But busy community health workers complain that it is difficult and time-consuming to enter patient information via cellphone into the system that generates the reminders, Ms. Stone tells the audience. When incomplete data is entered, the system sometimes sends erroneous text-message alerts to patients telling them it’s time for another checkup, which can result in patients walking long distances to a clinic unnecessarily.

And in reality, she says, women’s access to cellphones isn’t as high in the region as the project’s initial research suggested. “Sure, a woman might have a phone, but it broke last year and she hasn’t been able to buy a new one,” says Ms. Stone. “Or maybe her uncle, who she lives with, has a phone, but he has to ride a bike 10 kilometers to have it charged, so he’s not really thrilled to have his battery drained for whatever this Motech thing is.” The most successful part of the program has been the introduction of standardized paper ledgers, designed to get all the community health workers collecting the same data and originally envisioned as an interim step to the mobile-phone system.

Summing up the lessons she’s learned, Ms. Stone cautions her international-development colleagues not to let technology drive program design. “Look at the problem you’re trying to solve,” she says. “Think really hard. Does a mobile-phone intervention really target that problem, or am I just trying to twist this problem into something that can be solved with a mobile phone?”

Ms. Verclas says that finding speakers who are willing to publicly broach the delicate issue of failure hasn’t been as difficult as she expected. FailFaire guidelines give speakers the option of giving their speech off- the-record, meaning that event participants are asked not to talk about the presentation outside that room—or blog and tweet about it later. Two speakers at the first FailFaire took advantage of the offer, but everyone else has been on the record.

That’s not to say that sharing professional disappointment with a roomful of peers is easy. “It’s super-terrifying,” says Christopher Fabian, co-leader of Unicef’s technology-for-development group. “Because it’s a new discourse, the rules for talking about failure haven’t been established yet.” Mr. Fabian’s experience taught him how tricky it can be to explain the nuances of an organization to outsiders.

Whenever a project stumbles, it's painful—for the people running the effort and, more importantly, for beneficiaries, says Ms. Stone, of Motech. With so much excitement about the potential of technology in international development, and a tendency for reports to talk only about “glowing success,” she says people in the field have a responsibility to share what they’ve learned from their mistakes.

Says Ms. Stone: “To minimize failure in the future, we have to talk about failure in the present.”

For more go

to: [http://philanthropy.texterity.com/philanthropy/20120119?sub\\_id=xc8c2qyxOR5Q#pg20](http://philanthropy.texterity.com/philanthropy/20120119?sub_id=xc8c2qyxOR5Q#pg20)

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(Video) David Damberger: What happens when an NGO admits failure

International aid groups make the same mistakes over and over again. At TEDxYYC David Damberger uses his own engineering failure in India to call for the development sector to publicly admit, analyze, and learn from their missteps.

David Damberger’s work with Engineers Without Borders has taken him from communities in India to Southern Africa where he ran development and infrastructure program

To watch the video go

to: [http://www.ted.com/talks/david\\_damberger\\_what\\_happens\\_when\\_an\\_ngo\\_admits\\_failure.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/david_damberger_what_happens_when_an_ngo_admits_failure.html)

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As part of the Firelight Foundation’s Capacity Building Program, Firelight provides “Newsflashes” to share relevant resources and information with our active grantee-partners via weekly emails and via post on a monthly basis. We hope that by facilitating access to information for grassroots, community-focused organizations, programming for children and families, as well as organizational development, is enhanced. Past editions of the Firelight Newsflash can be found on our website: <http://www.firelightfoundation.org/newsflash.php>.

We welcome your comments, feedback and ideas for upcoming Newsflashes at [newsletter@firelightfoundation.org](mailto:newsletter@firelightfoundation.org).