Wise Use of Funding in Movement Efforts

By Neil Van Hyderstadt, with contributions from a network of global movement leaders and practitioners

Neil Van Hyderstadt (pseudonym) currently resides in the MENA region where he focuses on an expansion of movements across the region. Since the late 1990s, the Lord has taken him to over 30 countries and has given him the incredible privilege of working with remarkable brothers and sisters whom God is using to do amazing movement work in the world today.

I first became involved in movement work in the late nineties. At that time, I had never even heard of a "church-planting movement." I was working in an Asian country and just wanted to see the same transformation that happened in me and my family happen throughout the entire country. My vision was a bit simple. I saw that Paul traveled and seemed to start multiplying networks of churches in many locations. I wanted to see the same thing happen.

I was fortunate to come alongside of and co-labor with amazing local brothers and sisters. We saw hundreds of new churches start and thousands of new disciples made. It was an incredible journey. But the story was much more complicated than that. Deaths. Persecutions. Hardships. Spiritual resistance. Disciple making challenges. And more. One area that consistently seemed to cause difficulty was, surprisingly, money—and often specifically, outside funding. I was consistently left pondering how something with such good intent could so often cause problems.

After it became clear that my residency in that country was concluding, I briefly returned to my passport country, and there I first heard the term "Church-Planting Movements." I remember reading

Garrison's seminal work on movements. It was so encouraging, but he too had seen the frequently problematic nature of money. I read Jonathan Bonk's hard-hitting book, *Missions and Money*. My heart was crushed by some of the stories he shared. These and other readings, combined with my own first-hand experiences, gave me great caution regarding the use of funding in movement efforts. I saw that even when donors are well-intentioned and funds are being handled by godly men or women, there is still a long history of money causing problems. However, despite these troublesome realities, certain types of funding, at the right time, have seemed to assist movement work, particularly advanced/mature movement work.

Thus, I began a multi-year journey of trying to answer the question, "What are wise ways to use funding in movement efforts?" Over these years, I gained more firsthand experiences from multiple countries and collected field experiences from outsider- and insider-movement catalysts and leaders. Finally, after years, I approached a few respected colleagues asking them if they would be willing to compile or write a practical, field-level, practitioner-focused document on the best practices regarding funding in movements. While no one agreed, more than one of them challenged me to the task.

So, over the next three years, I met with leaders and practitioners from across four continents. Their experience covered work across nearly 100 countries. I talked with Western leaders and global South leaders who collectively had more than 20 million new disciples within their movements. Most conversations were face to face. From these meetings, I looked for common points and themes and began to craft and cobble together an emerging list of principles, helpful practices, and not-so-helpful practices. Eventually, I held two workshops on the topic at regional movement gatherings where I collected even more data and stories. As this document began to further develop, I was able to send drafts to other practitioners and leaders around the world and get them to add their insights. In total, the underlying document that has become this article went through close to thirty different revisions.

While this topic could easily be examined in much more depth, my goal was instead to compile a practical, succinct, accessible, and straightforward list of principles, helpful practices, and not-so-helpful practices regarding the use of funding in movement efforts for *movement practitioners*. This document is specifically for those in the earlier stages of movement work. For those in more advanced or mature stages of a movement, they will have already needed to learn many of these principles in order to reach that stage of growth.

In this article, I have grouped these principles and practices into the following five major categories:

1. Foundational principles that should always be kept in mind regarding funding situations.
2. Funding practices that are generally inefficient.
3. Funding practices that have frequently caused problems.
4. Funding practices that have been used fruitfully by movements.
5. Other helpful principles and practices related to movement funding.

Six Foundational Principles Related to Funding Movement Work

1. Be cautious.

Many successful movement practitioners, both outsiders and locals, have learned to be cautious with the use of money. Funding can often have unintended, negative consequences. Even with the greatest of intentions, funding has often created more harm than good and set bad precedents in the process.

2. Core movement work is significantly built on an unfunded model.

Fundamentally, most frontline movement growth needs to be built on an unfunded model. That means that discovery group leaders and house church leaders are not funded, and people hearing about Jesus and the Bible are hearing from unfunded, common believers (there are rare exceptions). By creating a growth model that all believers can participate in, this amplifies the growth of a movement.

3. Avoid creating a model or mindset that only funded people do ministry.

Do not fund/pay for what every believer is expected to do. When people get paid for this, it can make non-funded people think, "I can't do [this kingdom task], because I don't have a salary/expense account." If this mindset gets created, it will greatly limit the speed and quantity of disciple making. Thus, we should diligently seek to avoid funding that creates, even unintentionally, a precedent or model of a "paid professional" class of believers who are the ones expected to do most of the work.

4. Movements usually do need some funding.

Nearly all movements do eventually need some forms of reliable ongoing finances as well as some occasional time-limited or seed funding. More details will be shared later, but for now it is important to know that movements do need money, and when funding is used wisely and at the right time, it can help with movement growth.

5. Local funding can help the health and sustainability of movement work.

Local funding often has a positive impact on movement growth. It increases local ownership, commitment, and sustainability. It also helps support the personal spiritual growth of those giving. Additionally, local funding can proportionally keep increasing as a movement grows. By contrast, movement fruit/work can usually outgrow available outside funds. Thus, local funding should be encouraged.

6. Avoid bypassing or undermining local ownership, initiative, or contribution.

If an idea for a project originates from the outside, is funded only by outsiders, is overseen by outsiders, is based on what the outsider thinks the local people need, and does not include local input, then there is a high likelihood that it will not be a good use of funding. In great contrast though, if fruitful local leaders of a strong and healthy movement have created their own initiative to expand into a new location and local believers are already sacrificially contributing to the effort, then partnering with such initiative has a much higher chance of being fruitful. In short, when outside funding is used, it should be used to support or accelerate fruitful local initiative or capacity, not bypass it, or be used in a way that creates dependency or undermines local ownership and local giving.

Two Funding Practices That Are Generally Inefficient

1. Funding with the Hope that People Become Fruitful

Paying/compensating people with the hope that they become fruitful is not a very fruitful practice. Most newly trained people do not go on to become highly fruitful movement practitioners. Thus, funding people with the hope that some will become fruitful movement leaders or practitioners is generally considered an inefficient use of funds. It is a significant expense for a limited return.

2. Expensive Training Models

Expensive training models are usually not sustainable, scalable, or reproducible and should be avoided. If you are paying for trainees to come and participate in a training, there is a good chance your model is not sustainable or reproducible—at least not to the scale needed for movements. This is particularly true for early-stage, introductory movement training. Typically, more than 95% of participants from such training will not go on to become committed movement practitioners, so immediately 95% of the funding is not fruitful. By contrast, training should generally be low-cost to no-cost and be as localized as possible.

Eight Funding Practices That Have Frequently Caused Problems

1. Micromanagement by Donors of Local Leaders' Use of Funds

When partnering with proven, fruitful, local movement workers, outside donors need to avoid micromanaging the use of funds. Such leaders are generally able to use money much more effectively than if that funding were directed from the outside. Also, the micromanaging of finances is time-consuming for all involved.

2. Funding Too Early

Starting funding too early can be problematic. For example, paying first or second generation leaders when there are only two to three generations of churches is generally too early. This quickly creates a funded model for churches and leadership. Future growth is likely to stagnate and will usually be limited to those receiving funding. Breaking that model becomes exceedingly difficult and seeing deep multi-generational growth will not be likely. Thus, early funding that creates a funded model of leadership or churches should be avoided.

3. *Funding Too Late*

Providing funding too late can also be problematic. When an emerging movement clearly needs money to help continue to expand, then there is no reason to delay seeking it. A lack of needed funding can slow progress.

4. *Giving More Than Is Helpful*

When funding is given, it is possible to give too much. A donor should be cautious to not let their excess or generosity undermine local ownership or initiative or create unsustainable models or unhelpful local perceptions.

5. *Having a Narrow or Restrictive View of the Sources of Funding*

A limited view of where finances can come from can create problems. If money is only seen to be available from outsiders (like from the West for example), this can lead to problems such as dependency, paternalism, or even inaction. Also, outside funding is often the most unstable. By contrast, funds can come from many sources and always ultimately from God. Common sources include:

- Locally generated income (from local employment, work, business, income-generating projects)
- Contributions or giving from local believers
- Micro-loan projects (revolving funds)
- Donations from outsiders (non-Western)
- Donations from outsiders (Western)
- Funding via grants or partnerships with local or state governments
- Funding via grants or partnerships with NGOs or INGOs

6. Funding Contingent on (Reports of) Growth

Funding that is contingent on continued numerical growth incentivizes inflated reporting. Some movement efforts around the world have discovered that this was being done as a means of securing ongoing or expanded funding. This is not an easy situation to solve. Funding, especially ongoing funding, without any results is probably not wise. Similarly, constant suspicion in a funding partnership is also not healthy. Anyone involved in giving that is performance or review based, needs to be very aware of this dynamic and must have a clear and transparent plan to avoid potential downfalls.

7. Requiring Reports to Reimburse for Expenses

Similarly, when expense reports must be submitted for reimbursement, it can unintentionally create a system that incentivizes inflated expense reporting. Again, it is best to avoid systems that incentivize such reporting. Some fruitful practitioners have found that it is better to use third-party or publicly available reference costs instead of requiring reported expenses. So, for example, if it is known that a typical trip to a city costs ″X ,″ then that amount should be given without the need to turn in expense reports each time. This helps avoid any inflated reporting. It also helps reduce administrative load, as reporting and processing expense reimbursements is time-consuming for everyone involved.

8. Funding a Local Pastor to Do the Responsibilities of a Local Pastor

Using outside funding to pay a salary to carry out the duties of a local pastor nearly always creates challenges for movement growth. Such giving undermines the shepherd-sheep relationship. It also limits local "ownership" of the church, reducing sacrificial local giving as believers feel that easy money can come from elsewhere. Such funding sets expectations that undermine generational leader equipping, because when one generation gets a foreign salary, then subsequent generations feel they need the same.

Ten Funding Practices and One Principle That Have Been Used Fruitfully by Movements

1. Later Stage Funding for Those Who Are Already Highly Fruitful

While funding people with the hope that they will become fruitful movement leaders is not a "best practice," by contrast, helping to fund the most fruitful practitioners after they have a demonstrated record of fruitfulness can be helpful. When a leader has so many groups, so many generations, and so many leaders under them that they simply cannot keep up, and the work is now suffering because the leader is over-extended, then the leader may need some funding to help free them up to have more time and resources to commit to the work.

Importantly, by the time this occurs, the front-edge of growth (for example fifth and sixth generation growth) is already growing on an unfunded model. So, introducing some funding to a first generation leader is not likely to suddenly make fifth and sixth generation leaders think they need money. They most likely will not even be aware that someone in generation one is receiving funding.

2. Opportunities for Natural or Organic Growth into New Areas

Sometimes people in a movement can relocate into a new language, ethnic, or geographical group (new "E-3" work) through natural opportunities and without much cost.[1] Examples of this include someone

1 "E-3" refers to cross-cultural outreach, as opposed to same-culture or near-neighbor outreach. See Winter (1975, 215).

returning to their home village, someone relocating for a job opportunity, someone going to or returning from a university in a different area, a cross-cultural marriage, etc. These organic opportunities can sometimes also be seasonal or temporary, such as someone whose job requires travel or is working on a project in another location for a period of time. These types of natural opportunities should be strategically and prayerfully considered. But even when these organic, low-cost opportunities occur, some funding might be needed, such as assisting with relocation costs or travel costs for on-site coaching. While these organic opportunities can be a big blessing for movement growth, movement expansion should not be limited to just these opportunities.

3. Sending Fruitful Laborers to Begin Work in New Locations

When proactively sending cross-cultural workers ("E3 sending") through non-organic channels, this usually requires money. For a movement to expand into new regions, languages, peoples, or countries, they will often need to send supported workers. Funding cross-cultural (E3) work is a "good" practice. Movements will typically only do this when the person/family being sent has already shown movement fruitfulness in their existing location. Finances can come from both internal and external sources since both the movement and the global body of Christ share the responsibility of reaching these new groups.

4. Bible Translations

Having the complete Bible available in the heart language of a people has been a key factor in helping with significant movement growth. It results in stronger, healthier disciples who are able to better withstand persecution. Similarly, the lack of Scripture in the heart language can hinder movement progress. Thus, financially supporting Bible translations has been a fruitful funding practice.

5. *Helping to Create Additional Funding Streams*

Funding that helps create additional/ongoing funding streams has been quite helpful, particularly in some larger movements. It is common for larger movements to even have leaders who focus on creating businesses and income-generating opportunities for the growing movement. Helping movements develop this could be done by providing business startup training, business development training, micro-enterprise loans, or other startup/angel funding.

6. *Seed or Startup Costs to Help Leaders Generate Ongoing Income*

Helping to fund efforts that equip or train movement leaders to produce their own income can be helpful. Ideally, these income-generating opportunities should not be very time consuming. The ideal job gives the leader both access to people and sufficient time to be a movement leader. Sometimes these income-generating opportunities might only supplement the meeting of the family's/person's needs, but every leader that is able to generate all or part of their own income reduces the need for the movement to obtain funding from others. Importantly, there is often a training component required to help train leaders in how to do these income-generating activities. One movement even created short training videos for leaders and believers sharing ideas on how to start income-generating initiatives/businesses.

7. *Building Social Identity for the Expanding Believing Community*

One of the beautiful things that happens to a movement is when the believing community starts to develop a clearer identity within society. This usually happens as a movement matures and begins to significantly multiply throughout its area. We see this in the early church when the non-believers started to recognize and identify existing communities of

Jesus followers—calling them "Christians" at the time (Acts 11:26). This can be a powerful and positive stage of development. It lets the greater society know that from among and within their own people there is a community of Jesus followers. This cultural recognition can create in the minds of non-believers that there is an alternative to consider.

Building "identity" is thus valuable, a fruitful cause to contribute to financially. However, what helps to positively build social identity versus what could potentially harm such efforts varies widely and depends significantly on local context. Due to the diverse and sometimes even seemingly contradictory nature of what has or has not worked, I am hesitant to provide examples. However, two small examples illustrate this. In one movement, believers worked together to create beautiful, but low-cost, calendars. These calendars had beautiful images from the country and a Bible verse on each page. This shared experience of believers and non-believers alike seeing this calendar in homes across the country was positive. In another example, leaders in one movement regularly wrote notes of congratulations for public events or celebrations, such as business openings, school openings, political victories, sports victories, etc. These notes of congratulations and support were sent on behalf of the Christian community.

8. Alternative Models of Funding

It can be helpful to recognize funding is not an "all yes or all no" issue. We need to see that there are more than just "salary models" of finances. Many movements have found that other "in-between" models are helpful. For example, helping to fund transportation costs for a leader to travel and follow up with groups/leaders might be an option. Giving fruitful workers startup/seed funding, but not ongoing funding, has also been helpful. For example, this might mean helping a very fruitful worker to buy a motorcycle, rickshaw/tuk-tuk, or taxi. This could provide ongoing work and also give the worker access to new people. Also, driving around town in a taxi can be a very secure way of having leaders' meetings. Another example could be giving a leader startup capital to open a shop or business. These ideas not only help with financial need but often help create access or other ministry opportunities. These alternate models of funding also tend to create longer term, more sustainable forms of funding.

9. Leadership Development

While there could be inefficient or even unhelpful funding regarding leadership development, leadership development is essential in movements. Healthy movements extensively work on developing and growing their leaders. Yes, it should be done in a sustainable way, using local resources, etc., but nearly always, funding will be needed at some point for leadership development. When used wisely, this can be a very fruitful practice.

10. Crisis or Emergency Situations

Crisis, wars, natural disasters, and other emergency situations often represent a great opportunity or Kairos moment for local believers to demonstrate the love of Christ to their community. However, it is during these situations that internal financial resources are often the most constrained. While outside funding during crises has a mixed historical record, we have seen that giving to highly trusted local movement leaders in order to help with crisis response can be fruitful.

A Principle to Note: The Evolving Needs for Funding

In addition to the specific type of tasks or actions listed above, it is important to recognize a broader principle: many movements have found that funding needs change over time. For example, a leader who has three generations under them with 2-3 key leaders in 2-3 cities has a certain demand on their time and finances. By contrast, a leader with 5-6 generations under them and 10 key leaders across 5 cities will have a higher demand on time and resources. A movement leader who has 100,000 believers under them and has work across 5 countries will have an even greater demand on time and resources. Thus, funding might start with certain expenses which expand to covering more expenses and might eventually expand to a full-time salary as the work progresses. Importantly, much of the decision to increase funding depends on the history of the apostolic agent. Wise and effective use of prior funds by a key apostolic agent might indicate opportunities for greater collaboration in the future.

Other Helpful Practices and Principles Related to Movement Funding

Culturally Informed Decision-Making

When funding decisions are being made, there are often many complex cultural layers to consider. This should not be overlooked. Factors like age, family reputation, honor, group decision making versus individual decision-making, and more can impact cultural views of how money should be distributed. This can include whether funding should be given equally to each person/project (valuing equity), to the most fruitful people/projects (valuing achievement), or based on status (valuing social order). It does not mean that all funding has to blindly follow cultural rules, but that leaders need to consider these issues as a means of making the best decisions.

Outsiders/"Alongsiders" Helping to Connect to External Sources of Funding

When outside finances are needed, if there is an outside catalyst or coach connected to the movement, then this person should realize that they are probably uniquely positioned to help access outside funding for the movement. This does not mean though that the money should come directly from the outsider catalyst/coach. Often, the outsider's best role is to serve as a connector to funding streams (large donors, grants, foundations, investors, etc.). This can help avoid adding the complexity of money into the relationship between the outside catalyst/coach and the local movement leader(s) and can also possibly help the movement to have access to potentially larger or more consistent funding.

Alternatives and Models That Do Not Need Funding

Also, as a general practice, alternatives to needing funding should regularly be sought. The number of possibilities is nearly limitless, but here are some diverse ideas offered by movements:

- Can an existing house or available facility be used instead of renting a space?
- Are there ways to reduce expenses through local wisdom?
- Can *non-cash gifts* or *gifts-in-kind* be used to reduce the need for funding, such as loaning vehicles, allowing event participants to stay in local homes, locals providing food, etc.?
- Are there any believers or local cooperative businesses that can offer services at a discount as a means of contributing to the positive efforts of the believers?
- Is there a way to have a training session closer to the people (requiring less travel for the trainees)?
- Can longer retreats or trainings that require expensive overnight stays be replaced with multiple "day use only" events where participants return to their own homes each night?
- Are leadership models considering the "span of care," that is, how many people is each leader responsible for? If each leader disciples three or four leaders below them (who then each disciple three to four leaders below them and so on), this is a sustainable model and usually would not require funding. Most people with regular jobs are still able to disciple three to four leaders below them.

Building Local Generosity/Giving

Living sacrificially and giving generously is not only good for the one giving, but also increases the overall health, strength, and growth of movement work. To help encourage this, many mature movements have fruitfully developed generosity training for local churches/believers. This increases local funding and also contributes to the expenses of the kingdom work. Generosity training is not just about giving money, but about faithfully following the teachings of Scripture, like 1 John 3:17–18 and countless other passages. People learn to faithfully steward their resources for the kingdom. This could be fish, loaves of bread, a printing house, a motorcycle repair shop, a meeting room, a recording studio, or many other things.

Funds Managed and Overseen by Groups Not Just Individuals

Group oversight and group decision-making regarding funding can be quite helpful. This can range all the way from having three people count and report on money in a house church to having all the key leaders of a large movement knowing the full amounts of funding available and making decisions together. Similarly, some donors have found it more fruitful to give funds to a group of leaders instead of just to a single individual.

The Priesthood of All Believers Counters Unhealthy Precedents

One point frequently came up during my interviews and conversations, which indirectly, but still importantly, relates to funding. Within movements, we frequently see a strong emphasis on the core biblical value of the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9). We regularly see the intentional effort to equip all believers to know how to make a kingdom impact within their real daily lives—in their homes, in their neighborhoods, and in their jobs. When disciples understand that all believers are called to and have the opportunity to do ministry and make disciples in their regular lives, then this breaks down a false view that only people who are paid/supported can do ministry. When all disciples understand their responsibility to make disciples and understand how to do that as part of their real daily lives, this dramatically increases the number of total gospel workers. This helps to reduce or even avoid the pressure to create a model or precedent where someone needs to be paid in order to do ministry or make disciples.

A Final Insight: The Uncomfortable Prayer-Funding Connection

While my research question focused on funding, more than one respondent connected the issue back into prayer, and specifically the extraordinary prayer needed for movements. Specifically, we excessively rely on funding, because we do not understand the power and role of prayer. We expect money to do the miraculous instead of petitioning God to do the miraculous. We end up having a once-a-week, voluntary prayer time for our ministry, and yet spend huge amounts of attention on attracting donors and growing our budgets. We end up becoming fundraisers more than devout intercessors. Funding becomes a significant focus instead of deep and desperate times of prayer and fasting, in what one catalyst described as a "sin of substitution."

This unhelpful inversion is an acute problem in secular-humanistic (usually Western) societies, from which it has been exported around the world through traditional western missions. This promulgates a model that overrelies on funding and and underrelies on prayer. When this mindset spreads, a common outcome is placing western Christians in positions of power (because of access to significant funding) and diminishing the power and importance of many non-western brothers and sisters (who may lack equal access to funding). Resources are sought from the West, instead of seeking provision from God and tapping into the resources within the harvest.

However, through many miraculous movements today, we are learning that in order to get this funding question right, we need to decrease our relationship with money and instead greatly deepen our relationship with God.

Conclusion

Personally, I have benefited from this journey of trying to answer the difficult questions regarding wise uses of funding in movement efforts. I have seen that overly simplified views about money being *good* or *bad* for movements are difficult to support. Money indeed can and has frequently hindered movement work. At the same time, all successful movements that I have encountered do require some form of funding. I believe that collecting these principles and practices has helped me to avoid some of the more unhelpful uses of money and instead has helped me to develop practices where wise, and even generous, funding can be beneficial. I hope you will have a similar experience as you reflect on these ideas.

Author's note: A special thanks to the many brothers and sisters around the world who shared thoughts, experiences, stories, critiques, and more in helping compile these principles and practices. I hope my findings have honored your contributions.

Questions for Conversation

1. What foundational principles resonated with you the most? Are there any you disagree with? Do you have another principle that you would add?
2. What cultural values and practices in your context influence funding models and priorities? Which of the funding practices listed could you implement in your context?
3. How can you develop local generosity in your context? If you are working among a poor or vulnerable population (such as refugees), is this possible? What alternative models of giving could you implement?

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