

Strategic Grant Making Plan (2022 – 2026)



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Table of Contents

Message from Our Director	1
1. Introduction	2
2. Mission	3
3. Core Values	4
4. Overview, Opportunity and Commitments	5
5. Areas of Focus	10
5.1 Women’s and Girls’ Equality	10
5.2 Nature Conservation	11
5.3 Democratic Participation	13
5.4 Leadership Development and Training	14
6. Grantmaking Model	15
7. Strategy to Select Organizations	17
8. Attributes of Partner Organizations	17
9. Internal Capacity	18
10. Feedback Loops and Communication Channels	19
11. Grant Reporting Process	21
12. Incentivizing Cross-Pollination and learning Between Grantees	21



Message from our Director

I am pleased to present the first ever Grant Making Strategic Plan for the Luis von Ahn Foundation. The plan shares the collective vision of our Founder, our Board of Directors, and the team, as well as the practices we will follow as we implement a new grantmaking model in Guatemala, highlighting the areas of focus in which we will invest funds. In a philanthropic environment that has an inherent power imbalance between donors and grantees, and in which there is an increasing urgency to utilize these good grantmaking practices to reduce barriers to funding while still ensuring accountability, pursuing an outcomes-driven strategy and protecting our own intent, we must articulate clearly our Foundation's distinctive approach to Philanthropy. The plan shows how the Foundation will contribute to creating more opportunities to advance the rights of women and girls, promoting social justice, and the creation of an enabling environment for individuals to achieve their full potential. Through our partners, we attempt to help ensure that marginalized and vulnerable Guatemalans have the resources they need to cultivate leadership and solutions that can truly transform Guatemala.

Throughout the creation of this plan, significant consultation took place with potential grantees, non-profit leaders, other private and family foundations members, colleagues, staff and Board to better inform and align our decision-making. I have worked with staff and consultants to distill the information gathered into key areas, including the areas of focus and our grant making model.

Success requires a strong and comprehensive commitment from the Foundation, focusing on relationships with grantees that are based on trust defined by integrity, reliability, empathy and confidence in the leadership and visions of the organizations we provide funding to. Our aim is to partner with grantees to thrive in our joint vision, meet the needs of the most vulnerable, and provide pathways for collective progress.

The Luis von Ahn Foundation is ready to meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities that being a brand-new foundation brings. We are building upon the expertise and knowledge of numerous stakeholders, including our staff. In setting strategic priorities, we have a unique opportunity to be an example of how a different philanthropic model can be implemented in Guatemala, as well as expand our role and maximize our impact.

I acknowledge and thank everyone who has been involved in these many discussions and reports, including our Founder, our Board of Directors, staff, colleagues and non-profit leaders.

Together we have laid out a plan to help positively transform Guatemala.

Rodrigo Barillas
Executive Director



Board of Directors from left to right: Rodrigo Barillas, Global Director and Secretary; Luis von Ahn, Founder and President; Rogelio Alvarez, Director and Treasurer.

1. Introduction

Established in 2021, the Luis von Ahn Foundation, a private foundation, is committed to a future where all Guatemalans are equally valued, can thrive and are able to fully exercise their human rights. We believe that the status of our democracy, social and economic development, and inclusive growth of individuals and communities depend heavily on the advancement of women and girls and the protection of environment they live in.



Foundation team from left to right: Courtney Jones, Grant Manager; Rodrigo Barillas, Global Director; Evelyn Roquel, Programs Manager; Sonia Solis, Nature Conservation Director.

2. Mission

The Luis von Ahn Foundation seeks to support local community leaders and nonprofit organizations working on improving the lives of individuals, especially women and girls, in Guatemala.

By advancing the rights of women and girls, promoting social justice, and the creation of an enabling environment for individuals to achieve their full potential, the Foundation helps ensure that marginalized and vulnerable Guatemalans have the resources they need to cultivate the leadership and solutions that can truly transform Guatemala.

3. Core Values

1. Our relationships are based on trust defined by integrity, reliability, empathy and confidence in the leadership and visions of the organizations we provide funding to.
2. Because no individual, organization, or movement can defeat injustice and inequality alone, we cultivate positive relationships and effective collaborations that are grounded in honesty, humility, curiosity and respect. We share the optimism that listening and learning to one another and working together can help achieve our common goals.
3. As a core value, intersectional feminism helps us understand and address how Guatemalans varied social identities impact the way they experience injustice and inequality, and how this shapes their lives.

4. Overview, Opportunity, and Commitments

The Foundation's grantmaking strategy, developed in 2022, is the mission-driven plan we will use to guide, execute, and evaluate our giving in the next five years. It includes the three thematic areas of focus described below plus investments in leadership development and training.

Our grantmaking strategy is based on our collective understanding of Strategic Philanthropy, and other emerging approaches such as Trust-Based Philanthropy and Direct Philanthropy. These approaches are not opposed to each other, but rather complementary, and so by applying the different principles we believe we are better prepared to partner with, and be supportive of our grantees in ways that are positive and constructive.

We realize that we are a small foundation working in Guatemala, a country with many socio-economic needs and challenges, and by applying a strategic framework we are better able to focus on specific areas to narrow the number of needs, projects and solutions we will influence with our giving, resulting in more impact. This framework will also help us identify nonprofits that are strategically doing their work and once we accomplish this, as a matter of principle, we will not impose our own strategic framework to use it to track and monitor the impact of our giving.

Rather we will let the organizations-those that are most proximate to the needs and to the communities and the people, and the challenges they're facing-lead the way. We will step in as allies to support these organizations' own strategic frameworks.

The Foundation does not stand by the appeal of supporting grantees without asking any questions and then going away until they need us again, and we reject a new paradigm where there are no applications, no outcomes tracking, no reporting and no strategic thinking behind our philanthropy.

We strive to be effective donors, and we understand that although there is a power imbalance in philanthropy, we can and should utilize these good grantmaking practices to reduce barriers to funding while still ensuring accountability, pursuing an outcomes-driven strategy and protecting our own intent.

Under this plan, we commit to the following practices and provide ideas of specific actions:

1. Give multi-year unrestricted funding for mission-aligned organizations.

We believe multi-year, unrestricted funding gives grantees the flexibility to assess and determine where grant dollars are most needed, which allows for innovation, iteration, emergent action, and sustainability.

Some actions could be:

- Provide grants to both 501(c)(3)¹ and non-501(c)(3) organizations.
- Inspire other organizations through our philanthropy and approach.
- Share the Foundation's mindset and values from the very beginning, through example and culture.
- Get a thorough understanding of our grantees experience, mission, and vision through:
 - * Accompaniment in on-the-ground execution
 - * Evaluation and follow-up on progress
 - * Flexibility on iteration (change of strategy or outcomes) after on-the-ground feedback.

¹ <https://www.501c3.org/501c3-services/start-a-501c3-nonprofit/>

2. Do the homework.

We believe that the responsibility of due diligence and of getting to know prospective grantees is on us and we should only ask them for information directly as our last resource during the vetting phase. Also, learning from local leaders and experts, approaching them with genuine curiosity and an open mind. We hope that by consulting with, we will be able to hear their authentic voices.

Some actions could be:

- Define the “checklist” of what we should evaluate/research.
- Profound research on potential grantees, for example: objectives, strategic plan, goals, values, and transparency in fund management.
- Assess the viability of their proposal.
- Get feedback from different stakeholders.

3. Simplify and streamline the paperwork.

We believe the grantees’ time is best used to engage in their important work and not have to fill out reams of paper and applications for us. That is why we will ask only for the additional information that is truly needed for due diligence. We will also streamline reporting requirements to collect actionable information about outcomes that are useful to us and our grantees (beyond the report). When needed, we will make reporting requirements proportional to the grant.

Some actions could be:

- Craft the application form and progress reports with the question “what do we really need to know?”.
- Craft clear, simple, and relevant questionnaires and/or progress reports.
- Do not define impact indicators.
- Onboard grantees and facilitate spaces to answer their questions.

4. Be transparent and responsive.

We believe in maintaining respectful and responsive interactions with grantees, and that open and honest communication supports relationships rooted in trust and mutual accountability. This includes being transparent about our mission, focus areas, and on what we do not fund.

Some actions could be:

- Lead through example; walk the talk of the Foundation’s mission and values.
 - * Promote the values of: transparency, open communication, trust, and empathy.
- Listen to grantees.
- Provoke a horizontal organizational structure vs. a hierarchical one.

5. Request and act on feedback.

We believe that grantees and communities provide valuable perspectives that can inform our strategy and approach, inherently making our work more successful in the long run. A streamlined approach focused on dialogue and learning can pave the way for deeper relationships and mutual accountability.

Some actions could be:

- Meet the organizations' team to keep a fluid communication.
- Facilitate spaces to support, listen, and understand grantees' needs.

6. Offer support beyond funds.

We believe that responsive, adaptive, non-monetary support bolsters leadership, capacity, and organizational health. When possible, we will provide additional support such as technical assistance, enable spaces for collaboration among grantees, and facilitate introductions to other potential donors.

Some actions could be:

- Facilitate spaces for cross-pollination among grantees; promote collaboration among grantees through additional funds.
- Build a community that lives the values of Trust-Based Philanthropy.
 - * Encourage an abundance mindset, e.g., open-mindset on sharing knowledge, resources, tools, and contacts in newtwork.
- Facilitate a space for learning, sharing lessons learned, best practices, and tools to reduce the learning curve and accelerate impact among grantees.
 - * Inspiration from amazing speakers.
 - * Workshops by different grantees or partners (e.g., development of a strategic plan).

5. Areas of Focus



5.1 Women's and girls' equality

Outcome: To accelerate progress towards more gender-equal communities by addressing the barriers that keeps women and girls from being fully active in their homes, economies, and societies.

Grantmaking strategies:

- Education and empowerment
 - Improving access to sexual and reproductive health and rights
 - Advancing women's rights
 - Making public health more accessible to all
- *Engaging boys and men will be a cross-cutting strategy under this area.

Strategic goals (regional and country-specific):

* Sustainable Development Goals

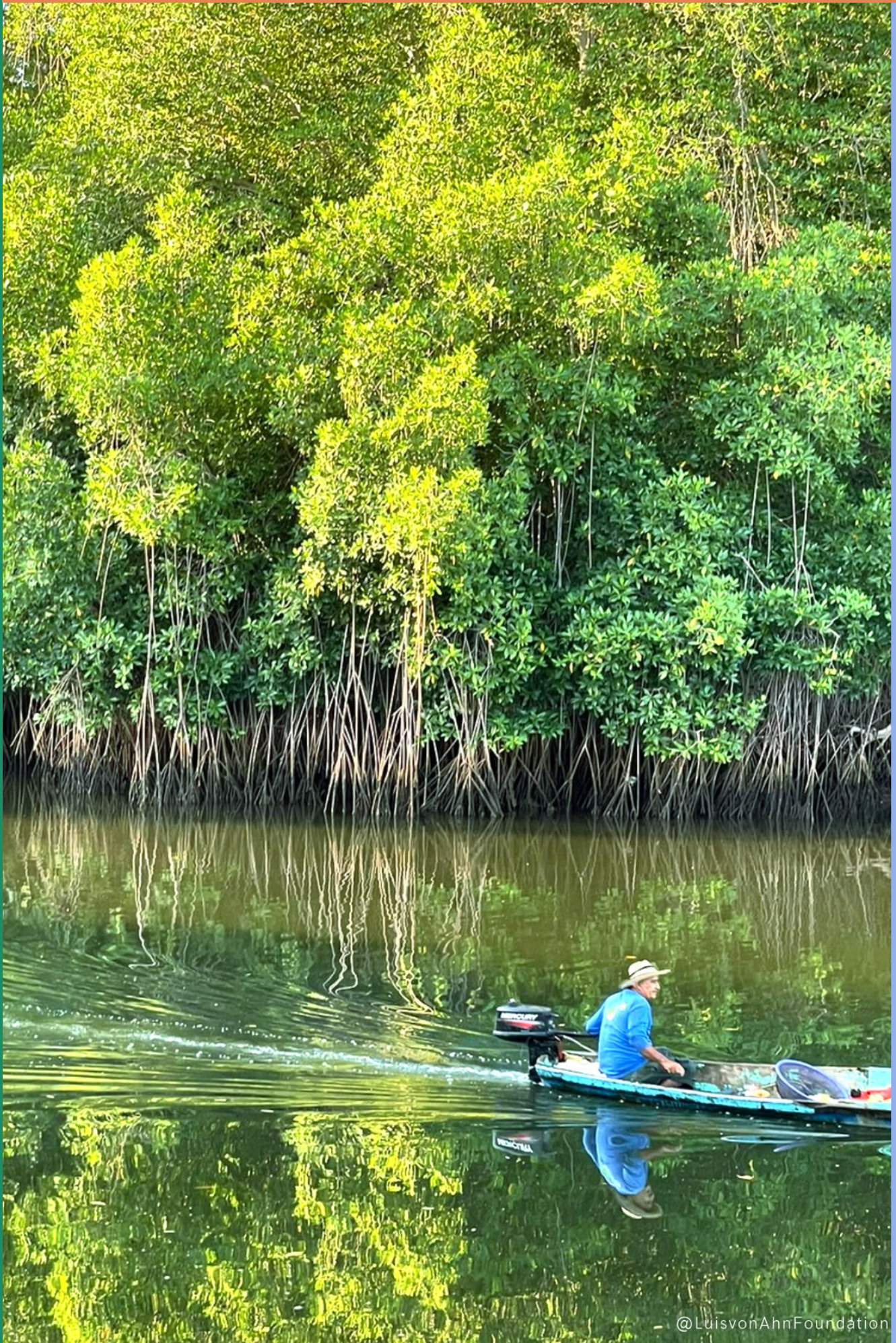
- SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
- SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

* UNDP's Gender Inequality Index

* National Demographic Health Survey (ENSMI)

* Population Reference Bureau - World Population Data Sheet.





5.2 Nature Conservation

Outcome: To ensure that our environment thrives with healthy, productive and resilient ecosystems facing climate change in supporting social-economic development, sustainable livelihoods and providing abundant resources for generations to come.

Grantmaking strategies:

- Prioritized landscapes: Improve the balance between human well-being and nature in high conservation value sites such as: Río Achiguate Basin, Sierra de las Minas Biosphere, Sierra del Lacadón National Park and the Pacific coast including its wetlands and mangroves.
- Conservation workstreams: Contribute to implement natural resources management protection activities, research, sustainable practices and disaster risk management focusing on the following workstreams within the four prioritized landscapes.
 - Watersheds
 - Ocean
 - Climate Change
 - Forest and Mangroves
 - Fauna
 - Plant genetic resources

Strategic goals:

* Sustainable Development Goals

- SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
- SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
- SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
- SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably management forests, combat desertification and halt and reserve land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

* International Conventions and Protocols

- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).
- The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (Sendai Framework).



5.3 Democratic Participation

Outcome: To protect and strengthen democratic principles and the vitality of governance.

Grantmaking strategies:

- Advancing reconciliation and peace
- Supporting youth leadership and participation

Strategic goals (regional and country-specific):

* Sustainable Development Goals

- SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
- SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

* UNICEF's Strategic Plan (2022 - 2025) Goal Area #2

- Every child (including adolescents) learns and acquires skills for the future.



5.4 Leadership Development and Training

Outcome: To advance the professional development of emerging and established leaders by providing opportunities for them to learn the different skills necessary to be competent and effectively lead their organizations.

Grantmaking strategies:

- Support leadership development and training opportunities for individuals leading grants, and potential grantees, nonprofits.
- Offer capacity building opportunities that support nonprofits to become more strategic, effective, and stable.



6. Grantmaking Model

As a relatively small foundation working in a country with so many needs, we believe that by focusing on a few specific areas in the first five years of our work we'll have time to delve into the issues, build relationships with organizations and leaders already doing the work, and ease into other areas and grantmaking responsibilities.

Our strategic approach will be deep: grant generous financial support to few (handpicked) nonprofits vs. the wide approach: support many organizations with little financial resources. We chose the deep approach because we want to:

1. Enhance the quality of grantees.

- Develop an intentional filtering and application process of nonprofits aligned with our mission, values, and focus areas.
- Support organizations doing great, impactful work.

2. Build strong, long-term relationships.

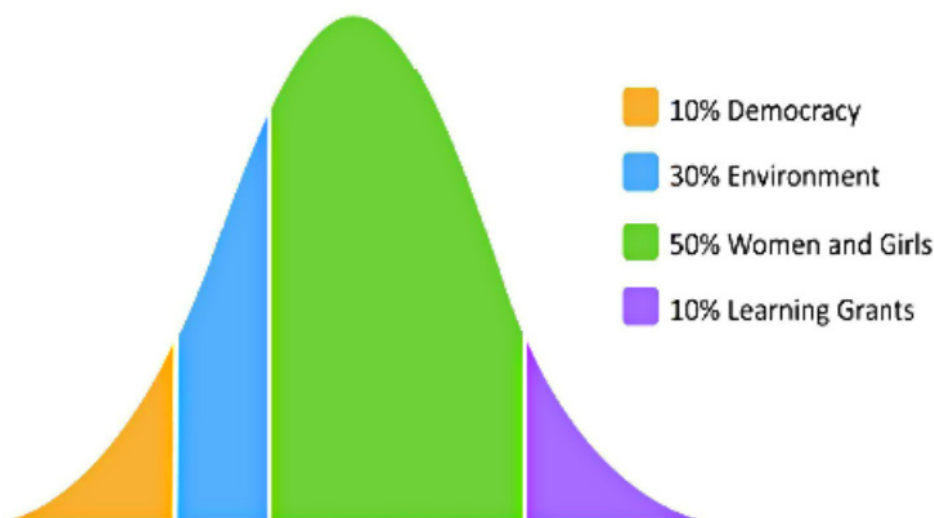
- Opportunity to get to know, in a deeper level, the nonprofits' objectives, values, and outcomes.
- Being supportive throughout the grant period and beyond, end goal: sustainability.

3. Impact.

- With less grantees/organizations, impact will be more straightforward and evident.
- In five years, we will be able to visualize progress and growth of our philanthropic approach.

Our annual grantmaking budget will be allocated as follows:

Foundation's Grant Distribution Model 2022 - 2026



Core focus areas (90% of annual grantmaking budget)

This group is made up of a small number of exceptional nonprofits who are aligned with our Foundation's mission and values, and whose work will have a direct impact on our vision of Guatemala. These organizations are renowned for their exceptional professionalism, strategic work and impact. Based on grantee's current strategic plan and goals, nonprofits in this group will receive multi-year grants and when possible unrestricted funding at a level that is significant to their organizational budgets.

The distribution of the total grant budget under this group will be:

- 10% Democracy
- 30% Environment
- 50% Women and Gil's Equality

Learning grants or semillero² (10% of annual grantmaking budget)

Small annual grants to a broad range of community-based organizations so that we can learn and better understand their unique context, their activities, and their work. Grantees in this group will include less-established, smaller, and/or grassroots organizations that frequently do not have access to major donors.

Learning grants will last no less than one year, and no more than 2 years. This will give us and the nonprofits the opportunity to connect, collaborate, interact, and build a relationship with each other. Organizations receiving learning grants can move on to be part of the Foundation's core group of grantees.

2. Semillero: an area of land prepared and conditioned specially to place the seeds in order to produce their development with the best conditions and care, so that it can grow without difficulty until the plant is ready for transplantation.

7. Strategy to Select Organizations

In order to attract organizations aligned with our mission and vision, we will invite organizations to submit a proposal when we have reason to believe their work is aligned with ours. We will also ask our current sample of grantees for referrals. Our current network can give us suggestions of organizations they are currently collaborating with. This allows for cross-pollination of projects and collaboration within grantees. It will pave the way for a collaborative culture and community to form amongst the organizations.

We believe that this in turn will maximize the impact of our resources. Also, the Foundation's team will suggest organizations they have collaborated with or heard about, so that these can be vetted and potentially included into the funnel (see below).

This is a deliberate decision to ensure we are respectful of people's time. We recognize that there are limitations in this approach. Our decisions are informed by the perspectives of our grantee partners and their leaders, and their alignments to our areas of focus. Our Foundation will "do the homework" and research for public information before approaching organizations to ask for legal, financial, mission, and vision, and other information.

If their information is not public, we will set clear expectations when asking possible grantees for more information, e.g., "we're getting to know you, we haven't decided to give you a grant yet".

8. Attributes of Partner Organizations

- **Resourceful and dynamic** Big problems often require inventive solutions and some outside-the-box thinking. We enjoy working with organizations that are bold, proactive and creative in their approaches to problem-solving.
- **Resilient and nimble** We recognize that all organizations are occasionally faced with unexpected challenges. We look to partner with organizations that are capable of responding quickly and effectively to these moments.
- **Focused with vision** While addressing immediate and basic human needs is often critical, we are curious about how organizations also integrate a disciplined focus on addressing root causes.
- **Efficient but not cheap** We know some projects are smaller-scaled than others in terms of numbers of clients served, but we do always look for meaningful interventions with an evident and clear cost-benefit ratio. While we are not fixated on allocations, we will look at your financials to understand the expense distribution to evaluate efficiency and impact.
- **Embody an abundance mindset** We value actions that demonstrate a commitment to collaboration with others.

In addition, we generally will not fund:

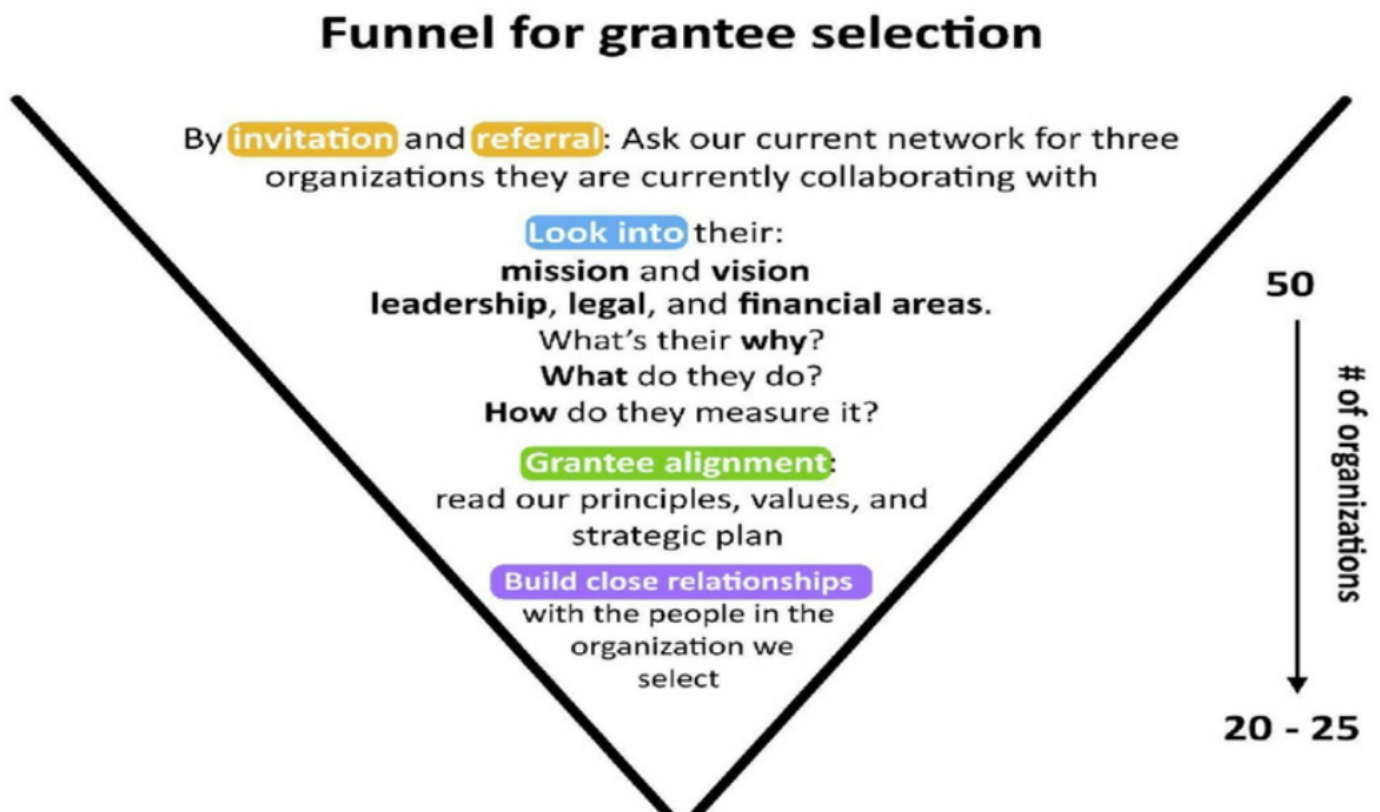
- Individuals
- Organizations that are dependent upon a religious affiliation
- International Non-Governmental Organizations (we will evaluate funding local offices/branches on a case-by-case basis)
- Educational scholarships
- Endowments or capital campaigns
- Partisan organizations or political parties
- Organizations that undermine democratic principles
- Institutions that discriminate in policy or practice

9. Internal Capacity

Each one of our team members has the capacity to build relationships and work, in a personalized way, with a limited number of organizations at a time.

Building a relationship with our grantees will include making at least two field visits per year and informally meeting with and calling each one of our grantee's other numerous times. We currently have 4 team members. As the Foundation grows, both in budget and staff, more partner organizations will be incorporated into the core and learning groups.

The following diagram depicts the way in which the Foundation will select the organizations to partner with during the current 5-year plan:



10. Feedback Loops and Communication Channels

In order for the Foundation to receive constant feedback and transparent communication, we acknowledge that it is our responsibility to open and offer intentional spaces for communication between us and grantees, and to minimize power dynamics by being transparent with the information that we share. As part of the communication channels, we will:

1. Set clear expectations. Together with grantees, set expectations and reassure organizations that our grants will not be affected if the grantees share mistakes, failures, or challenges. Our goal as a Foundation is to support and help them grow.

- **Establish an exit strategy.** (divorce clause) where it is clear for the grantee how to end a collaboration with us if things are not working for them. This way they are empowered to end a grant in case they are not satisfied with the relationship.

2. Establish 4 check points per year, including at a minimum 2 phone calls and 2 in-person meetings with our grantees.

- **Coffee time/happy hours:** Schedule informal conversations (calls or meetings) with no set agenda, at least once every 3 months. This will be an opportunity for grantees to tell us about what they have been thinking, working on, and struggling with. In case no topics come up, we might have a set of prepared questions such as: “How are you doing?”, “last time we spoke you said you wanted to try x, how did that go?”, “what challenges are you currently facing?”, “what success stories and challenges have you had?”.

- **Schedule at least 2 field visits per year.** This gives grantees an opportunity to open up. Field visits also allow us to observe and experience what is happening, talk with people on the field (staff, users) who aren’t members of the executive team (whom we’ll be in communication with).

3. Communicate openly and transparently our values and how we are different. This includes creating a website by late 2022. Copy all grantees in our emails so they can meet and collaborate with each other.

4. When possible, include Luis von Ahn in our activities (formal and informal) so that the grantees can know him, his vision, and feel a part of our “family”.

5. Actively reflect and shift course as needed. Build time for regular, through reflection. This will include the insights and data we've collected from grantees, as well as our own assessment of what's gone well and what could be adjusted.

These examinations could lead us to make changes mid-process (e.g., grant application guidelines that may be unclear or overly stringent), or on a more macro level, in-depth reflection at the end of each fiscal year would give us a good opportunity to get an overview of our impact, gain perspective, and assess potential areas for growth.

6. Request and act on feedback from our grantees. This feedback should inform our strategy and approach, and that it can pave the way for deeper relationships and mutual accountability.

11. Grant Reporting Process

1. Define specific questions for each strategic area. Ask only for necessary information, and information that will allow the Foundation to know a potential grantee better. Include a maximum word count.
2. Share the questions with our grantees early-on in the onboarding process for clear expectations.
3. Request numbers, metrics, legal information and storytelling so we can better share the impact of the Foundation. Allow for pictures and videos to be uploaded to help with storytelling.
4. Not all reporting needs to be done annually. Some may be longer term, based on implementation times and expected impact.

12. Incentivizing Cross-Pollination and Learning Between Grantees

In order to maximize our resources, we want grantees to collaborate, to communicate and work with each other. In order to achieve this our Foundation will create safe and productive learning environments for them to interact and learn with and from each other. As part of the Foundation's fourth area of focus: Leadership Development and Training, we will host capacity building opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, conferences and/or training sessions in which we will invite experts in the different fields and host co-creation sessions amongst grantees.

Luis von Ahn
FOUNDATION