

Securing the core



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Philanthropic ambitions to secure health outcomes need an intersectoral approach. How to mobilise adequate funds to coordinate these efforts is the million-dollar question

In 1991, a group of medical professionals at a public hospital in Rio de Janeiro reached a fundamental conclusion about the relationship between poverty and health: traditional medical care was incomplete if it did not also consider the social determinants of health. Since then, this founding group of 30 individuals has grown into the Dara Institute, a nonprofit, social entrepreneurial organisation that, for the past 33 years, has worked to alleviate poverty and promote the social inclusion of Brazil's most vulnerable families.

This work is incredibly varied, with funded initiatives including the Dara food project, the Children's Mental Health Project, and People's Kitchen, among many others. Practically, we offer direct support to around 2,000 individuals every month and through our intersectoral Family Action Plan, we provide a two-year participatory programme for families to track their progress out of poverty in areas of health, housing, income, citizenship, and education.

Applying this methodology with municipal governments and civil society organisations in Brazil and abroad, we're proud to say we've impacted the lives of over 100,000 people in Brazil to date, and over one million individuals through organisations that have replicated our approach.

It has taken 33 years to establish this system of providing services and tools for families to take charge of their development and a significant investment of resources to develop a truly fit-for-purpose programme. Large, unrestricted funds have been crucial to this process, offering the stability to get projects off the ground and the freedom to facilitate growing ambitions.

The route to grants of this scale has, however, been varied, and for others looking to emulate our success it is worth noting these funds have been secured through quite different pathways. To illustrate this point, we reflect on three of our largest grants to date.

Winning large, unrestricted funds

The first, a recurrent, annual Linde Foundation grant (totalling \$4.75 million

since 2007), grew from an initial encounter following a presentation at the Federation of Industry of São Paulo. This somewhat spontaneous meeting marked the beginning of a deep partnership that we still nurture to this day. Separately, it was through the social entrepreneurship nonprofit organisation, Ashoka, that we were helped to develop a long-standing partnership with the Ursula Zindel-Hilti Foundation from which we received a yearly grant totalling \$3.6 million between 2007 and 2022. Lastly, we received a one-time grant of \$1 million from MacKenzie Scott in 2021 that resulted from their own independent selection processes.

Thinking about these grants, we can see how continuously reaching out to funding opportunities and presenting the impact of our work has been vital to secure the variety and quality of funds we rely upon. This has been particularly true in an international context as Brazil's modern philanthropic culture remains in its infancy, and global networks such as Ashoka, Avina, Schwab and Skoll, have played an important role in bringing us closer to international sources in Europe and the US.

For those looking to apply for similar grants, we would encourage participation in such networks and establishing relationships with donors who align with your mission. In return, donors of large grants should look to enter deep and long-term relationships with their grantees and accompany them through the challenges, opportunities, and growth of being an evolving organisation.

Investing in long-term impacts

Beyond improving our immediate services, unrestricted funds have allowed us to invest in programmes to measure and extend the long-term impact of our own work.

Using the funds from the Linde Foundation we were able to commission research from Georgetown University, whose study found that three to five years after completing our Family Action Plan, there was a reduction of 86 percent in recurrent hospitalisation. In the same period, the research further demonstrated that participant families almost doubled their income, increased their perception of well-being by 51.2 percent (compared to figures on arrival of 28 percent), and achieved homeownership levels of 50 percent.

Similarly, unrestricted resources allowed us to hire more professionals at our service locations, including doctors, psychologists, architects, and social workers. Sub-specialists have also been part of this story, with our ability to increase full-time, early years child psychologists being particularly transformative for our communities.

More broadly, the MacKenzie Scott donation made it possible for us to build a strategic vision for our methodology, including how to replicate the approach in different environments and cultures. With this in mind, we were able to create a knowledge and information sharing unit that supports our expansion and shares our learnings with other partners. Paired with support from the Linde Foundation and Skoll Foundation, we have now expanded our programme to 23 hospital-related organisations in Brazil and three social assistance municipal programmes. We are currently in negotiations with a fourth municipality.

Outside Brazil, we have expanded to a community programme linked to Maryland University in the US and a nonprofit organisation in Mozambique.

We were also able to invest funds from the Scott donation towards the upgrade of our IT system, which facilitates the multisector understanding of each family as they navigate the Family Action Plan journey. A small example of this can be seen in how our partner medical nutritionists can now quickly cross-correlate digital information about a child's food compulsion with a mother's previous drug addiction,

helping to join up the dots and expedite understanding.

Lastly, the Scott grant allowed us to update our website (dara.org.br), upgrade physical spaces such as play areas, training rooms, and an auditorium, and develop a social change platform (hubep.org.br), curated by nine civil society organisations. The Hubep Network (Hub de Erradicação da Pobreza/Poverty Eradication Hub) has since become a forum for learning and sharing knowledge and experiences in different areas of social change, providing opportunities for joint impact and influence across public policy.

Looking ahead

Unrestricted, multi-year grants have, undoubtedly, changed the trajectory of our work at the Dara Institute, transforming the scope and quality of our services beyond recognition.

We have found that converting one large grant into tangible outcomes has made it easier to secure additional grants of a similar nature, and the more we grow and improve our work, the more resources we hope to attract to help people out of poverty in Brazil and beyond.

Given our experiences, and the knowledge of how difficult it can be to secure that first 'big bet', we encourage organisations to not be intimidated by network settings but to participate actively where you can. By establishing personal relationships with donors, you can create

new pathways to evidencing your work, and vitally, secure opportunities to invest money in contingency funds and endowments.

These are the strategies we use to navigate increasingly difficult times but as our vice-president, Cindy Lessa, often says: 'The nature of the entrepreneurial organisation is to continuously grow and innovate with each challenge they come across in their journey. Often, they will find that the solution is in the problem.' ●

Below: The Dara Institute has so far impacted the lives of 100,000 people in Brazil.

