

FundWell

A Swift Summary of Wellbeing Stuff for Funders

December's edition of FundWell is curated by [Laura Bacon](#), Strategy Lead & Facilitator, Funder & Wellbeing Group, The Wellbeing Project

Dear FundWell Community / Changemakers,

I'm writing this newsletter on my journey back from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where I just spent a week with the [Funder & Wellbeing Group](#) (FWG). FWG is a vibrant funder community of learning, part of [The Wellbeing Project](#). We work across four layers of wellbeing: 1) Wellbeing for humans in philanthropy; 2) Wellbeing as a funding organization; 3) Wellbeing for those we fund; and 4) Wellbeing field norms in our sector.

Our group of funders met in Malaysia for our annual in-person retreat to reflect on wellbeing priorities, to learn from previous wellbeing initiatives, and to plan for 2025. We met with local / regional funders and civil society leaders to explore organizational wellbeing issues in Malaysia. And we attended Asia's first [Regional Hearth Summit](#), hosted by Impact Hub Kuala Lumpur and The Wellbeing Project.

Three key questions emerged during our retreat: 1) What can we change and where can we let go?; 2) How can funders improve grantmaking practice to minimize harm to grantee partners?; 3) How can funders actively enhance grantee partners' organizational wellbeing and resilience?

We started our time together by discussing the famous serenity prayer, which asks for serenity to accept the things we can't change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference. Together we grappled with what – as funders – we can change and/or influence, versus what we can't. We asked ourselves how we can be more courageous, especially given funder privilege and power, and be the change we wish to see. We also played (literally) with the concept of letting go.

When we gathered with civil society leaders in Malaysia, we learned about unique challenges in their local context. But we also heard echoes of issues that threaten civil society globally. One of these issues, which funders truly have the ability to change, is harmful grantmaking practices. These put additional stress on civil society actors who already face shrinking civic space, burnout, and trauma.

Finally, our funder group spoke extensively about how to listen carefully to what our grantee partners need and to actively support their organizational wellbeing. We highlighted unique funder initiatives that have enhanced grantee partners' resilience, and made plans to build on these in 2025.

All of the tools, practices, and quotes below come directly from our retreat. We hope you enjoy and find inspiration in them.

In gratitude,

Laura Bacon, Strategy Lead & Facilitator, Funder & Wellbeing Group, The Wellbeing Project

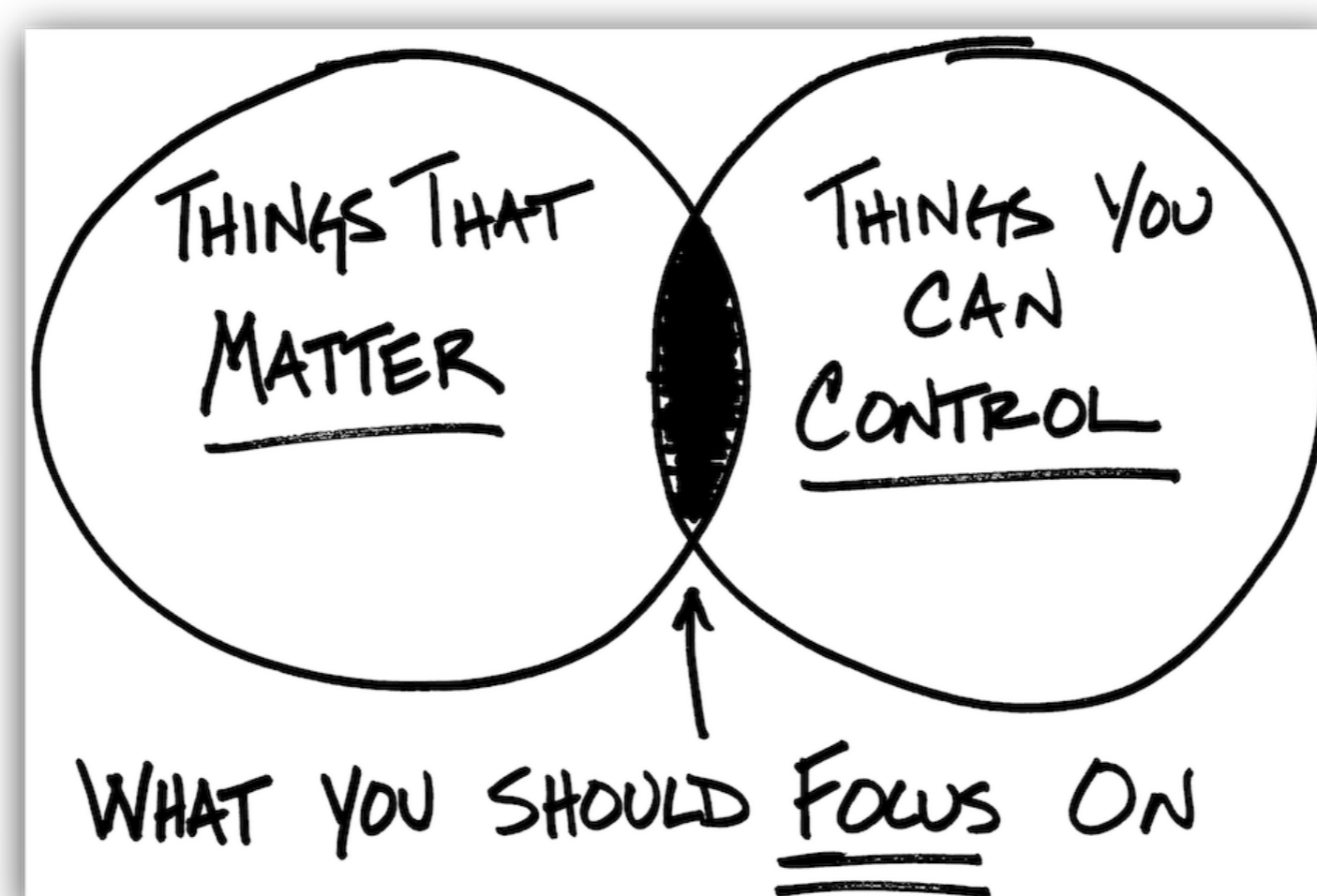


Image Description: A Venn diagram shows "Things That Matter" and "Things You Can Control," with their overlap labeled "What You Should Focus On." It highlights the power of prioritizing what matters within your influence.
Image from: <https://relaxandsucceed.com/2017/08/09/the-emotional-wobbles/>

FundWell Essentials

- As funders, we must examine where we have control and influence versus where we don't. We used the ["Circles of Influence"](#) framework to discuss this. We explored Deepa Iyer's [Social Change Map](#) to identify various roles in the ecosystems in which we operate. We also spoke about the importance of letting go. Facilitated brilliantly by [The SHOOPERY](#), we played with concepts of getting out of one's own comfort zone, improvising, and infusing joy into our work and life.
- There are many ways in which funders can improve our own practices to minimize harm and maximize wellbeing. For instance, we raised [trust-based philanthropy](#) and [care-based philanthropy](#) as frameworks for improving our practices. We spoke about learning from the [movement to call out crappy funding practices](#). Finally, many of us use the [Grantee Perception Report](#) as a tool for listening carefully to grantees, publishing findings for accountability, and – most importantly – acting on them.
- Funders have used many organizational development tools to promote wellbeing amongst their grantee partners. For instance, we spoke at length about [wellness stipends offered by Luminare](#), [SHM Foundations's Ember Mental Health Initiative](#), [General Services Foundation's grants to promote grantee safety, resilience, and joy](#), and more. Civil society in Malaysia also mentioned how [coaching stipends \(like those of Luminare\)](#) and [funder efforts to support leadership transitions](#) have supported them. [Ford's BUILD program](#) was discussed as a scaled-up initiative to promote organizational and network resilience. Finally, we learned more about the [William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's organizational effectiveness program](#), especially their [grants to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion](#).



Photo Description: Funders + Wellbeing Group meet with local Funders



Photo Description: Funders + Wellbeing Group meet with Civil Society Leaders

Talking Points: pick one and start a conversation!

- In your professional sphere, what can you control? Where in Deepa Iyer's social change map do you find yourself? How can funders – given their power and privilege – be more courageous with the social change roles they take on in the ecosystem?
- When was the last time you truly let go? Got out of your comfort zone? What would it look like if you brought more improvisation and play into your work life? How can your team build on one another's ideas through a "yes, and" approach?
- What is the relationship between organizational development, resilience, and wellbeing at your organization? What specific practices have you seen funders adopt to enhance the wellbeing and resilience of grantee partners?

Words on Wellbeing

Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, and Wisdom to know the difference

-Attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr and Winnifred Wygal, adapted by Alcoholics Anonymous

"Do not ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive"

-Howard Thurman

Fire

*"What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water would.
So building fires
requires attention
to the spaces in between,
as much as to the wood.
When we are able to build
open spaces
in the same way
we have learned
to pile on the logs,
then we can come to see how
it is fuel, and absence of fuel
together, that make fire possible.
We only need lay a log
lightly from time to time.
A fire grows
simply because the space is there,
with openings
in which the flame
that knows just how it wants to burn
can find its way."*

-Judy Brown

Looking to go deeper? Explore our [Philanthropy x Wellbeing Hub](#).

How does your funding organisation define wellbeing? Does it support wellbeing for its stakeholders? [Reflect and share here, in the Funders + Wellbeing Survey](#).

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