

# WRITING

Clear writing indicates clarity of thought and capacity to communicate to stakeholders.



Clear writing indicates this organization's proficiency with English and says little about the organization's capacity to engage stakeholders from diverse backgrounds and with different styles of communication.

# WRITING

WHAT ELSE MIGHT WE LOOK FOR?

## **Metaphors, examples, references**

*Why? Applicants may indicate what's inspiring their work, or how they understand it, through comparisons and reference points.*

## **Relationship to community, preferred methods of communication and engagement.**

*Why? More significant than the applicant's ability to communicate with you is their success engaging a community who is typically left out of shaping systems.*

# EXPERIENCE

Larger organizations more experienced in systems change work are a better bet, a safer investment. This work takes a different kind of capacity to what most organizations have.

DOMINANT LOGIC

FLIP THE LOGIC



A diversity of organizations supported to shift to a systems change approach will have greater long term impact. Also, while higher resource organizations may have a known track record of systems change work, grassroots groups with a lot of lived experience in their ranks may represent more personal and deep histories of systems change efforts.

# EXPERIENCE

WHAT ELSE MIGHT WE LOOK FOR?

**Organizations with closer relationships to equity-denied communities, new reference points and strategies**

*Why? A deep appreciation of the experiences of those not well served by our current systems is a real asset in systems change, as are perspectives informed by different inspiration, and ways of thinking*



# TIMELINE

A thorough plan shows this organization can break down a big piece of work into clear, sequential steps, and will be responsible stewards of grant dollars.



DOMINANT LOGIC



FLIP THE LOGIC

A thorough plan says little about this organization's capacity for emergence, adaptation and learning: three core features of systems change.

# TIMELINE

WHAT ELSE MIGHT WE LOOK FOR?

## Strong guiding questions

*Why? If the applicant is clear about what they want to learn, they can respond to emergent opportunities.*

## Starting points and phases

*Why? A rough map that indicates what will be explored or tested in different periods of the project indicates starting hunches but also openness to emergent learning.*

# PARTNERSHIPS

Evidence of partnerships shows this organization knows how to engage community and that their work & learning will have more impact.



Listing community partnerships in a first round application says little about the quality of relationships, and more about an organization's bandwidth to contact organizations in advance. We know systems change requires resetting rather than replicating power dynamics, and takes dedicated resource.



# PARTNERSHIPS

WHAT ELSE MIGHT WE LOOK FOR?

**The type of stakeholders and resources they would like to engage.**

*Why? Applicants who are able to go beyond 'the usual suspects' may have a better sense of how to shift sticky systems and find new approaches. VF funding will only increase their ability to bring different players to the table.*

**What learning is valued and how it is documented.**

*Why? While a small or remote organization may not have the network to share its learnings broadly, if what they are seeking to learn and document has broad appeal, VF can help to bring it to a wider audience.*



# DEFINITIONS

To be systems change this project must show it's doing activities that address the root causes of the problem. Direct service is not generally systems change.

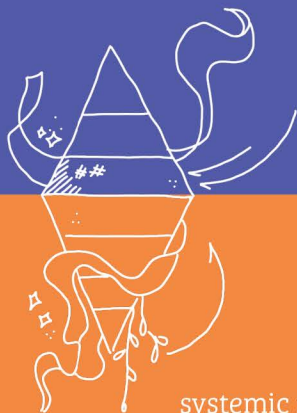
WHAT ELSE MIGHT WE LOOK FOR?

**How the logic and/or values of the proposed work is counter to that of the dominant system**

*Why? Systems change isn't necessarily top down, from policy change, or legislation, for example. It also relies on new interactions and ways of relating, on the ground.*

DOMINANT LOGIC

FLIP THE LOGIC



What makes a project systemic is more about its intent and capacity to disrupt status quo logics, power dynamics, resource flows and policies. For example, a direct service that tackles stigma, or redirects resources to marginalized folks could be systems change.

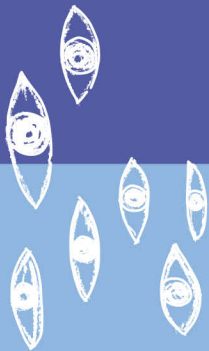
# DEFINITIONS

# PERSPECTIVE

Systems change work is good, regardless of the kind of systems change proposed.

DOMINANT LOGIC

FLIP THE LOGIC



Not all systems change work moves us closer to a more just society. Interrogating the perspective from which the system is understood and whose experiences desired changes reflect is critical for building more just systems.

# PERSPECTIVE

WHAT ELSE MIGHT WE LOOK FOR?

**How lived experience of systemic harm is shaping the work.**

*Why? Participation is a continuum not a yes/no question. What evidence is there that marginalized people are able to influence alternatives to the status quo, that draw on their wisdom?*



# BUDGET

A clear budget shows this organization knows its activities and can manage resources.`

DOMINANT LOGIC



FLIP THE LOGIC



A clear budget shows this organization has experience writing grants and thinking linearly. Systems change requires a capacity for agile project management and responsiveness to ground conditions, which are likely to change between grant submission and decision.



# BUDGET

WHAT ELSE MIGHT WE LOOK FOR?

## Strong values

*Why? If there are strong guiding values, spending decisions can be principled and advance the work.*

## Spending priorities that reflect the values and logic of the proposal

*Why? Shows the applicant can extend and apply the logic of the system they are trying to create to the process of creating it (ie. Let ends dictate means).*

# DATA

Citing statistics, research and data indicates the organization has a strong basis for its work.

DOMINANT LOGIC



FLIP THE LOGIC

Citing statistics, research and data without critiquing dominant perspectives and methods may indicate there is little understanding of systemic bias. Citing other wisdom traditions and ways of knowing indicates capacity to hold a multiplicity of perspectives: a core feature of systems change.

# DATA

WHAT ELSE MIGHT WE LOOK FOR?

## **Diverse or broadened sources of data**

*Why? An ability and disposition to find value in different knowledge bases is a sign that the applicant may have capacity for systems change. That might include valuing subjective and contextual data, such as stories and experiences.*