

FAILING TOGETHER

Key lessons on how to have constructive conversations about failures in development and peacebuilding

Development and peacebuilding is about tackling complex problems with different stakeholders in contexts that change every day. There is no way to solve these problems without failing. But we are reluctant to talk about failure, especially on the record. Veronica Olazabal from [The Rockefeller Foundation](#), Lane Pollack from [USAID](#), and Leslie Wingender with [Humanity United](#) recently spoke about what it takes to learn from failure as part of the [InterAction Evaluation & Program Effectiveness Community of Practice](#). Here are some key lessons from the conversation:



Lead by example

Donors should take the lead and create space to talk about failure. Implementing partners should practice authentic conversations where they share what's not working with concrete plans for what to do next. NGOs and donors should co-own failures



Plan for failure

Change can be hard and can cost money. Plan for inevitable changes right from the beginning. It's always easier to adjust when that thinking is already built-in.



Think in terms of risks

Frame your thinking about failure in terms of minimizing risks. Ask questions about risk incurred if you don't adapt. Who bears that risk? What is the risk of the donor if this doesn't go right? What is the risk to you? What is the risk for participants? How can we reduce these risks.



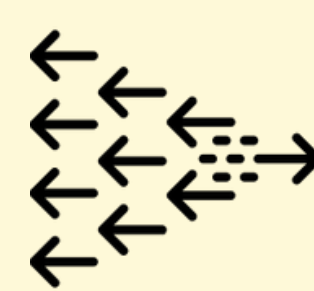
Build trusting relationships

Enter into conversations about failure with a "we" mindset. Address what's not working collaboratively. Have authentic conversations with donors and provide them with the information they need to make the case for a pivot to their stakeholders.



Right-size your data

Think about how you are going to collect just enough data to make decisions you need. To often we build overly technical information systems that is not a good use of time and resources. Think about the big picture of what you need to know and who needs to know it.



Invest in leaders who support change

Invest in leaders who have experience adapting in complexity. Have better alignment between learning and decisions. Invest in learning so that you know when and how to pivot and learn fast enough to make a difference.



Prioritize the people you serve

Center the voices and experiences of the people you serve. Build feedback loops that work for them and lift up their voices. Create more space to hear from them when something isn't working.



Define your terms

Definitions matter. Think about who decides what counts as failure. Failure for one person could be an adaptation at a tactical level or an operational pivot. Failures happen and we need to make sure that we, NGOs, and donors are talking the same language.

Want to hear more about what donors had to say about learning from failure? The event recording is [available here](#).