

**AMERICA FOR  
BULGARIA  
FOUNDATION**

America for Bulgaria Foundation

**Location:**

Sofia, Bulgaria

**Annual Grantmaking:**

\$20 million

**Year Established:**

2009

**Type of Grantmaker:**

Independent Foundation

**Mission:**

The America for Bulgaria Foundation (ABF) is an independent, nonpartisan, and non-political grantmaking foundation working in partnership with Bulgarians to strengthen the country's private sector and related democratic institutions.

## BEYOND THE GRANT:

# Insights on Non-Monetary Assistance from a Top-Performing Global Foundation

### INTERVIEWEES:

**DEISLAVA TALIOKOVA**

Executive Director

**IVANKA TZANKOVA**

Director, Impact Assessment and Evaluation

**IVO BOSSEV**

Impact Assessment and Evaluation Officer

Many funders seek to give more to their grantees than just a grant check. A recent Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) [study](#) found that 83 percent of foundation leaders say their foundation's staff directly provides assistance beyond the grant, and 67 percent say their foundation pays for third-party organizations to provide assistance beyond the grant. Yet providing non-monetary support to strengthen fields, communities, and grantee organizations isn't as easy as it might seem.

The funders that do this work best do it deliberately, embedding it in their broader approach and providing their grantees with intensive assistance — multiple types of support provided to an individual organization over the course of a grant. These types of non-monetary support can include management and strategic planning assistance, facilitated collaborations and introductions to other leaders in a grantee's field, assistance developing skills of grantee staff, and more.

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What does it take to provide this support beyond the grant in meaningful ways that will strengthen grantee organizations and effectively position them for success?

Desislava Taliokova is the executive director of the America for Bulgaria Foundation (ABF), a nonpartisan foundation working to strengthen Bulgaria's private sector and related democratic institutions. Her colleagues Ivanka Tzankova and Ivo Bossev work on ABF's Impact Assessment and Evaluation team. When the Foundation gathered feedback from its grantees through the [Grantee Perception Report](#) (GPR) in 2019, ABF ranked in the top 5 percent of CEP's comparative dataset for the proportion of grantees that reported receiving intensive assistance patterns. ABF received similarly high ratings for grantees' perceptions of the Foundation's impact on grantees' organizations, placing ABF in the top 10 percent of funders in CEP's dataset.

When asked about how ABF approaches providing assistance beyond the grant, Taliokova, Tzankova, and Bossev point to several principles they have found to be effective.

### **UNDERSTAND GRANTEE'S NEEDS**

To determine the types of non-monetary support most needed by their grantees, Taliokova says she and her team "work very closely with grantees from day one and listen to their local needs." "It's always a case-by-case approach, depending on the organizational capacity of the grantee," Tzankova explains.

Beginning with the grant proposal process and continuing throughout the partnership, ABF works proactively to identify additional avenues of support for their grantees — for example by administering surveys and conducting on-site visits. Perhaps relatedly, ABF ranks in the top 5 percent of funders in CEP's comparative GPR dataset for grantees' perceptions of the Foundation's awareness of grantees' organizational challenges.

### **DEVELOP TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY**

In order to receive accurate feedback to understand their grantees' needs, Taliokova stresses the importance of fostering a relationship between the Foundation and its grantees that is grounded in trust and transparency. "We want to make sure that we develop a relationship where, during the course of a grant, [grantees] share not only their successes but also their failures and issues," she says.

### **FACILITATE NETWORK DEVELOPMENT**

Taliokova explains that one of ABF's major functions is to act as a convener for its grantees — "We wanted to create a strong network," she explains. In 2017, for example, ABF gathered all its grantees for an in-person meeting to introduce them to each other and hold sessions dedicated to networking and community building. "We instill this attitude in our staff about the importance of community building and seeking synergy among grantees," Taliokova says.

### **SUPPORT INTERMEDIARY ORGANIZATIONS**

In addition to organizing meetings and events, ABF seeks to support collaborations and cross-cutting intermediary organizations in grantees' specific domains and throughout Bulgaria. "In addition to working with NGOs, we work with umbrella organizations that can provide support" to grantees on topics such as building



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a board, legal matters, and developing a corporate social responsibility (CSR) program, Taliokova says. “We support [intermediary organizations] because we see that they positively impact other nonprofit organizations,” thereby indirectly helping all grantees and fostering a culture of support, explains Bossev.

### USE RESOURCES CREATIVELY

When ABF and a grantee identify a capacity-building need, the Foundation turns inward to see what internal resources they may be able to deploy to meet that need, either from within the Foundation or from across their partner organizations. At weekly staff meetings, Tzankova says her team discusses new opportunities. In those meetings, “each program person is willing to jump in to make the appropriate connections to respective programs that might be helpful,” she says. Facilitating these connections creates the conditions for grantees to “work together and build upon each other’s strengths.”



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If you’d like to learn more about understanding and improving your relationships with grantees, including through collecting grantee feedback via the **Grantee Perception Report (GPR)**, contact CEP Manager, Assessment and Advisory Services, **Charlotte Brugman**, who is based in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, at [charlotteb@cep.org](mailto:charlotteb@cep.org).



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