Background MSMs and Trangendered persons are often described as difficult to reach. Using a Community Systems Strengthening Framework, the ISEAN-Hivos Program provides regional HIV interventions for MSM and Transgender communities in Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and Timor Leste. Aside from capacity building for MSM and TG Community Based Organizations (CBOs), a key initiative of the Program is the allocation of competitive small grants that support local projects of community organisations related to HIV-AIDS prevention.

Methods Through the Stop AIDS Now Fund (SAN Fund), the Program announced an open call for applications. An evaluation was conducted based on the initial response of the communities to the grants process and how it served as another venue for them to learn about improved organisational functions.

Results As a requirement for grant application, they developed their strategic plans and organisational documents. The CBOs also had to develop a feasible proposal that can be implemented within the timeline and budget. The early strategic evaluations of this competitive small grants scheme have shown that:

1. The communities can work together to improve their own organisational structures and functions;
2. Quality proposal may be produced, with some technical assistance;
3. Creativity was encouraged based on the open nature of kind of project to be proposed;
4. Community members learned about fund management at a smaller scale and the requirements for effective management of grants.

Conclusions These results from the early evaluation of the Program’s competitive small grants scheme have provided evidence that initial seed funding, once provided in the bigger context of providing technical assistance for organisational/fund management, is a good catalyst for further increasing the participation of MSM and TG communities in their local and national responses to HIV-AIDS. This approach may well lead to improved community participation in working with service providers towards better health outcomes on HIV-AIDS and STI.