



## Participatory Climate Initiative

April 2022

Dear Colleagues,

This longer note was prepared for those of you who would like to learn more about this initiative. This is provided to you both to 'close the loop' about what we did, but also because many of you asked to be able to learn from our experiences.

### Overview of this Initiative

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#### How did we create a bridge between the Design Phase and Grantmaking Phase?

#### What exactly happened during the Grantmaking Phase?

#### So what's next?

We are grateful for your engagement and we warmly welcome your questions and feedback if you would like to reach out to us. If we've gotten something wrong or you have any concerns, we encourage you to let us know.

Cheers,

Katy & Winifred





## Participatory Climate Initiative

### Overview of this Initiative

This project took place in four phases from its inception several years ago, beginning in earnest in 2020, through implementation in 2022 and beyond:

- 1. Planning Phase:** the committee collaborated to define the scope of this work and set requirements and recommendations to guide the design process.
- 2. Design Phase:** 12 participants from communities impacted by climate change across the United States and Territories collaborated to define this program's purpose and share their ideas for how the Grantmaking Phase should work.
- 3. Grantmaking Phase:** 14 participants from communities impacted by climate change in each focus region made decisions by consensus about how to allocate \$2 million and were joined by two funder representatives.
- 4. Implementation Phase:** 35 grantees received funding for their advocacy work (expansively defined) around climate change (holistically defined).







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### Big Ideas from the Design Team

- 1. Expansive Definition of Policy/Advocacy:** The Design Team pushed the funders to consider a definition of Policy/Advocacy that went beyond a traditional approach. In particular, they felt it was important for communities to define their own priorities in ways that were meaningful to them and to do this through developing models and implementing ideas.
- 2. Holistic Approach to Climate Change:** From the beginning of our outreach work, stakeholders and participants encouraged us to think about the idea of climate change more broadly, in a way that better reflected the experiences and priorities of people most impacted by this issue. They encouraged funders to see the links among issues and themes like traditional ecological knowledge, culture, community, traditional advocacy, disability justice, healing, food, agriculture, and more. They encouraged funders to recognize that these issues were interrelated and to meet communities where they were at in defining climate change impacts for themselves.
- 3. A Joint Focus on Alaska & Hawai'i:** This turned out to be a major highlight of the initiative, although it was perhaps an unusual way of thinking about a geographic focus area. This joint focus emerged out of the Design Team's thinking and its relevance was confirmed through our consultations with stakeholders as well. Participants and grantees valued the opportunity to explore common ground and deep connections between these two geographic areas while appreciating their differences. These included but were not limited to a focus on Indigenous land and sovereignty, ecosystem links (such as migrating mammals and birds), and cultural practices around traditional navigation.

### What was unique or interesting about the process?

- 1. Bringing Together Trust-based Practices and Participatory Philanthropy:** We implemented the Design Team's ideas, which included trust-based principles like giving unrestricted funding, limiting burdens on grantees, being responsive, and soliciting feedback. This sometimes involved making trade offs. Some grantmaking group members felt they did not have as much information about each grantee as they would have liked, for instance. Encouraging grassroots groups to accept our invitation to participate, even with a guarantee of a minimum \$10,000 grant, was challenging in many cases, since most were not used to being invited into a process in this way.



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- 2. Cascading Participation:** The planning for this initiative included traditional decision-makers (funders) but was collaborative. This group of decision makers ceded power by asking partner-selectors to select Design Team members. We provided the partner organizations with a role description that outlined the requirements, benefits, and expectations, and asked them to select someone from their community who might be interested, along with a small honorarium. The Design Team worked in a participatory way by providing their input and making decisions about a limited number of things: a purpose statement to guide the fund and the geographic focus areas. The Grantmaking Group used a participatory decision-making approach by consensus. Grantmaking Group members and grantees are now partnering to form a learning community together with funders.
- 3. Inclusive Approach to Facilitation:** Significant efforts were made to include participants and grantees with different backgrounds, needs, preferences, and communication styles through a high-touch approach that was tailored to each person involved. This included, for example, multiple ways of providing input through forms/surveys, e-mails, phone calls, video calls, and text. This style created space for participants to show up in ways that were meaningful and convenient to them and have their voices heard.
- 4. Embracing Interconnections among Stakeholders:** Due to our approach of expanding our outreach in concentric circles, stakeholder groups often overlapped. For example, some Grantmaking Group members were also Design Team members and Grantmaking Group members and Design Team members were connected in some way with many of the grantees. One partner-selector was also a grantee. We managed potential conflicts in a responsible way, while acknowledging that these interconnections were a strength of the process and not a flaw. We embraced the complexity of these interconnections.

We recognized early on in the process and were told by the Design Team and Grantmaking Group that \$2 million is a very small amount of money related to the scope of challenges around climate change advocacy. Therefore, we tried to keep our expectations that this approach could truly shift power right-sized from the beginning. We do hope our experience and learning can inspire other funders to experiment with and adopt participatory approaches at the appropriate scale. That's why we're happy to share what we can about it.





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### What exactly happened during the Planning Phase?

This initiative was first conceived by Fund for Shared Insight's Advocacy/Policy Committee in 2019. It was developed in response to a [landscape scan](#) performed by the Aspen Institute, which highlighted participatory decision making as a way to connect meaningfully with stakeholders in the advocacy/policy space. The Advocacy/Policy Committee determined their work should occur at the intersection of participation, climate change, and policy/advocacy work and brought the two of us (Katy Love and Winifred Olliff) in to manage the initiative.

Next, we convened the Advocacy/Policy Committee to co-design a scope for the project and approve a detailed plan for the Design Phase. The Advocacy/Policy Committee created a list of requirements and recommendations to help guide the participatory Design Phase and then we began our initial outreach work.

The funders created these learning goals. The project, focused on climate change, will support funders to deepen their practices areas:

1. Funding work that involves people in the policy decisions that impact them, with a focus on those least heard and most impacted by those policy decisions.
2. Participatory grantmaking as a way to elevate beneficiary voices and share power, with a focus on those least heard and most impacted by funding decisions.

We consulted people and organizations working at the intersection of policy/advocacy, climate change, and the grassroots, and they connected us to others. During this time, we spoke to about 40 people during the initial outreach phase of our work, which led to a participatory design process that included people from across the United States and Territories who were from communities that were impacted by climate change and often excluded from traditional philanthropy spaces. Those of you who participated in outreach generously offered your ideas, criticism, insights, and introductions, which formed the foundation of our work with the Design Team.

Outcomes from the Planning Phase:

- Learning goals
- Scope for the initiative
- Plan for the Design Phase
- Requirements & recommendations for the Design Team



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### What exactly happened during the Design Phase?

The participatory Design Team was made up of 12 members and they were joined by one funder representative. These Design Team members were selected by 12 partner-selector organizations who were identified during our outreach work and nominated for their expertise across different geographic and thematic areas that were relevant to the project. The partner-selector organizations were connected to their communities at the local level—about half were intermediary funders, and half were climate or environmental policy/advocacy organizations. Once selected, the partners were given full discretion in selecting Design Team members and each partner was compensated for their efforts. Design Team members hailed from rural and urban communities across the U.S. and Territories, including Alaska, Hawai'i, Appalachia, the Gulf South, the Midwest, the Southwest, the Pacific Northwest, and Puerto Rico. All Design Team members were compensated except the funder representative.

The Design Team met over 10 weeks between October 18, 2020 and January 4, 2021, both online and asynchronously, to create this purpose statement for the fund:

This program will fund grassroots groups that implement climate justice or environmental justice work in their communities that centers traditional and/or local ecological knowledge and connection with Mother Earth. The work of these groups will demonstrate approaches to adaptation that may also be applied in other contexts and influence policy.

They also determined that the initiative would have a geographic focus and recommended that we focus the initiative in two regions: the Southeastern United States and the Kōlea Region. You can [learn more about the techniques we used during the Participatory Design Phase.](#)

Outcomes from the Design Phase:

- Purpose statement and geographic focus areas
- Holistic approach to climate change and expansive definition of policy/advocacy
- Values and design principles, such as trust-based principles and inclusive design





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### How did we create a bridge between the Design Phase and Grantmaking Phase?

After the participatory Design Team provided their ideas and insights, we created a plan for the Participatory Grantmaking Phase based on their work. Eleven of 12 Design Team members stayed involved with the initiative through this phase to offer further insights and ensure their ideas were implemented. This work was critical to ensure greater accountability and create a link between the Design Phase and the Grantmaking Phase. This bridge work included creating a nominations process for groups, nominating groups for funding and facilitating introductions to other nominators, further refining our geographic focus areas, and reviewing and improving the portfolio of potential grantees before sending invitations.

During our next phase of outreach to prepare for the Grantmaking Phase, we reached out to tens of people, with a focus on the two regions we were working in. Design Team members and partners who helped with outreach assisted us by making recommendations and introductions to potential nominators, grantees, and Grantmaking Group members. Non-funders were offered a small stipend for each conversation to appreciate their time. Through the outreach, we choose three organizations to be nominators based on their geographic and thematic expertise. Nominators, which received an additional honorarium in recognition of their role, nominated eight of the 35 grantees. Three of the grantees were nominated by other grantees, and 24 were nominated by Design Team members or Grantmaking Group members.

### What exactly happened during the Grantmaking Phase?

Once a list of potential grantees was reviewed by the Design Team, we reached out to those groups to invite them to join the process, explain the role, and set expectations for participation. Upon the advice of the Design Team, we kept requirements for their participation to a minimum, in line with trust-based practices. They were asked to complete a questionnaire with three short-answer questions and be available for a phone call, in addition to completing the administrative requirements for their grants. The three questions we asked were: 1) "How is your group's work related to the purpose statement?"; 2) "How is your group led, managed and supported by people from the communities you work in?" and 3) "Tell us about your group's long-term vision, or what your group would like to achieve in the long term."



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We committed to giving a \$10,000 grant to all groups that agreed to participate. Thirty-five of 38 groups that were invited accepted our invitation to participate as grantees. We imagine that some groups were reluctant to accept because of a lack of prior relationship with Shared Insight or a Design Team member, due to capacity concerns, or perhaps because the process was much different from the types of funding processes with which they are used to engaging.

We convened seven Grantmaking Group members from the Southeastern United States and seven Grantmaking Group members from the Koola Region. Each region was joined by one of two funder representatives. Of the 14 Grantmaking Group members, seven were also Design Team members.

Both Grantmaking Groups began and ended their processes together and worked in parallel as their discussions and approaches began to diverge. They met online and asynchronously over 10 weeks. This included two meetings for the group as a whole, and in addition:

- 5 formal meetings and 4 optional, drop-in meetings or regional caucuses in the Koola Region
- 4 formal meetings and 2 drop-in meetings in the Southeastern United States.

Weekly activities included journaling, responding to questionnaires, paired and group activities, and sharing resources. Both regions worked to make their decisions by consensus within each region after extensive deliberations, resulting in 17 grant awards in the Southeastern United States and 18 in the Koola Region, for a total of \$2 million dollars across both regions. You can [learn more about the grantees here](#).

Outcomes from the Grantmaking Phase:

- Geographically and thematically diverse portfolio of grantees in each regional focus area
- Decisions about \$2 million of grants across 35 organizations made by consensus
- Recommendations to funders about a learning community for grantees and participants





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### So what's next?

This is a one-time initiative from Fund for Shared Insight. While we will not be continuing the initiative, we encourage other funders to adopt similar models and will continue to share our learning more broadly. See for instance this [blog post](#) by Melinda Tuan, who served as a funder representative in the Kolea region. We also shared some reflections and learning at a [webinar](#) April 2022.

We have been working with grantees to send them their grants to implement their activities. We will be following up with grantees after their grants are concluded to engage them in a reporting phone call. In the meantime, we are working with the Design Team and Grantmaking Group to create a learning community over the course of 2022. This will include opportunities for funders, participants, and grantees to meaningfully connect and share virtually and in-person.

You can reach out to [katy@fundforsharedinsight.org](mailto:katy@fundforsharedinsight.org) with feedback, questions, or corrections.