



# Some Lessons from Participatory Grantmaking and Meditations on Power for the Field

July 2022

## Introduction

As the saying goes, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The same might be said about power and power sharing.

In 2019, the [Fund for Shared Insight](#), a national funder collaborative seeking to improve philanthropy by promoting high-quality listening and feedback in service of equity, created a participatory process of design, grantmaking, and implementation. The full initiative is still underway, but at this moment, we, Shared Insight's learning and evaluation partner, want to reflect on and share back what we are learning from extant data review, observations of meetings and events, conversations with staff, and data collected at up to three time points from those involved in the participatory processes.

While there are many useful lessons to learn about how to do participatory grantmaking and what was learned specifically around issues of climate for people in the regions of focus, **one of our unique areas of inquiry was to hear directly from those involved about how they felt about shifts in power through the process.** We noticed some divergence in perspectives that we thought worthy of exploration. Given the focus on learning from this work, this report is less a full accounting of all lessons and outcomes and more a deeper look to help the funder collaborative and the field grapple with questions around power based on the lessons from this participatory grantmaking initiative.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A note on language: because of historical mistreatment of Black and Brown people, we often use the word "initiative" instead of "experiment" in our writing. Also, we note that Shared Insight's own language around equity and the people at the heart of the work continues to evolve. When we are quoting material from the time of its production, we use the originally drafted language, not updating to reflect the most current thinking and preferences.



## Where the Process Started

To understand how listening, meaningfully connecting, and sharing power has played out through the participatory grantmaking initiative, it is useful to ground ourselves in how this effort started and its original goals and parameters.

Much of the focus in the first few years of Fund for Shared Insight was on helping nonprofits have higher quality feedback practices with their constituents or people at the heart of their work. As time went on, participating funders expressed increased interest in extending this focus into work that was not direct service oriented, with a specific interest in how to help advocacy organizations more meaningfully connect with the people they are intending to help. This led the Shared Insight funders involved with the Advocacy/Policy Committee to commission [a landscape scan by the Aspen Institute](#) that explored “whether and how US funders and nonprofits seek to meaningfully connect with the people and communities that their advocacy and policy work is intended to benefit.” The research revealed four types of practices, which included informing, listening, co-creating, and relationship building.<sup>2</sup> As the Aspen report stated, meaningfully connecting in this space went beyond input and feedback.

To build upon this report, the Advocacy/Policy Committee fairly quickly narrowed in on the importance of participatory processes and explored an array of options in early 2019 to address two goals: meaningful connection in advocacy/policy space and experimenting with a participatory process. In 2019, **Shared Insight gave directional approval for a participatory grantmaking process to support meaningful connections between advocacy/policy organizations focused on climate change and the people least heard yet most vulnerable to and impacted by climate change**, with \$1 million for grantmaking.

The goals for this effort, as described in late 2019, were as follows:

- Experiment with ways to support a range of advocacy/policy organizations working on climate change to meaningfully connect with the people their work impacts
- Identify efficiencies in supporting this kind of capacity, if possible
- Experiment with participatory grantmaking to help elevate beneficiary voice and share power

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<sup>2</sup> James Key, "Insights for Change: Landscape Scan: Meaningfully Connecting with Communities in Advocacy and Policy Work," Fund for Shared Insight website. The full report is available here: <https://fundforsharedinsight.org/evaluation/landscape-scan-meaningfully-connecting-with-communities-in-advocacy-and-policy-work/>


## Where Things Landed

By February 2020, independent consultants Katy Love and Winifred Olliff were hired to design and lead the process. The participatory process has included the phases, participants, and activities listed in Table 1.

Table 1 | Participatory Process Phases, Participants, and Activities

| Phase                    | Participants   | Activities  |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Planning Phase</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent consultants, Katy Love and Winifred Olliff</li> <li>Shared Insight's Advocacy Committee</li> <li>Field Partners</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-created the scope for this project, including the creation of the learning goals for the project and a list of requirements and recommendations</li> <li>Formed Design Team based on Field Partner recommendations</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Design Phase</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent consultants, Katy Love and Winifred Olliff</li> <li>Shared Insight's Advocacy Committee</li> <li>The Design Team, 12 individuals from across the United States and territories who were selected by field partners, plus one funder representative from Shared Insight</li> </ul>   | <p>Design Team provided consultation to the Advocacy Committee on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Values to guide the grantmaking phase</li> <li>Updated purpose statement and goals for the fund</li> <li>Geographic focus areas</li> </ul> <p>Advocacy Committee made decisions on these elements, ultimately fully adopting the Design Team's recommendations</p> |
| <b>Grantmaking Phase</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent consultants, Katy Love and Winifred Olliff</li> <li>The Grantmaking Group was composed of 14 individuals with expertise in each region—seven from the Kōlea region (Alaska and Hawai'i) and seven from the Southeastern United States region—along with two Shared Insight funder representatives; seven had served as Design Team members</li> </ul> | <p>Each geography-specific Grantmaking Group (i.e., Kōlea and Southeastern United States) decided, by consensus, how much grant funding each grantee in their region would get among groups that had been identified as the potential portfolio of grantees through a participatory process informed by the design phase</p>  |

Additional information about each phase follows. [Further information about the process and implementation](#) has also been captured and made available by the Consultant Team.



**Planning Phase:** During this phase, the Consultant Team (Katy and Winifred) worked with the Advocacy Committee to co-create the scope for this project, including the creation of the learning goals for the project and a list of requirements and recommendations. This phase included **extensive outreach work to identify potential participants and led to the creation of a plan for the design phase.** The learning objectives they laid out and have consistently been oriented to are the following:

- Funding work that involves people in the policy decisions that impact them, with a focus on those least heard and most impacted by policy change
- Using 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

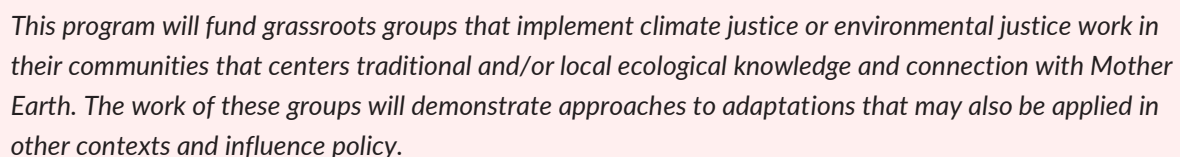
Even this shows an evolution of thinking from the original landscape study and goals, shifting from a focus on engaging traditional/mainstream advocacy groups that are very distant from the people impacted. This was in part due to early feedback from Native Americans in Philanthropy and First Nations Development Institute, among others, which led the Consultant Team to make early changes to better encompass Indigenous points of view in the language of the program. This early engagement also led to developing a Design Team through a partner selection process rather than an open application call for participants. This change decreased the burden on those with the lived experience and knowledge needed as well as shifted power from Shared Insight on deciding on members to select partners who leaned upon their relationships and knowledge in communities to recommend participants.

**Design Phase:** This engagement with field partners led to the formation of a Design Team, composed of 12 individuals from across the United States and territories along with one funder representative from Shared Insight. The design phase specifically made space for divergence, ideation, and thinking about many possible answers to complex questions. Ultimately, **the Design Team selected the geographic focus areas, defined the values to guide the grantmaking phase, and created an updated purpose statement and goals for the fund.**

#### **Original Purpose Statement**


*Support meaningful connections between advocacy/policy organizations focused on climate change and the people least heard yet most vulnerable to and impacted by climate change.*

#### **Refined Purpose Statement**



*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 adaptations that may also be applied in other contexts and influence policy.*





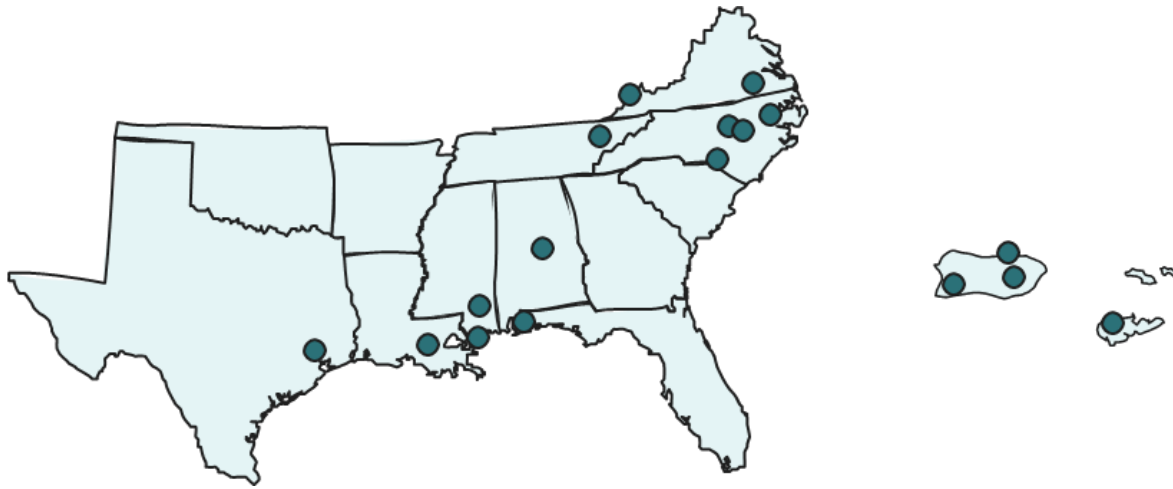
After completion of the design phase, most Design Team members continued their engagement with the participatory grantmaking initiative to help ensure that the grantmaking process stayed true to the Design Team's purpose statement and goals. This extension was an added way to ensure participation and a degree of accountability to the plan that resulted from the design phase. During this time, **the Design Team set the eligibility criteria for grants, advised the Consultant Team on the nominations process, connected the Consultant Team with potential grantees, reviewed the list of grantees before it was final and asked funders for additional funding.** The original participatory grantmaking budget had been to provide grants of \$1 million. The Design Team was interested in focusing the funds in two regions: the Southeastern United States, defined inclusively to include U.S. territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, and the "Kolea region," including Alaska and Hawai'i, but the \$1 million initially allocated was not sufficient to do this. The Design Team asked the funders to increase the budget. Ultimately, Shared Insight fundraised an additional \$1 million, resulting in a total of \$2 million to be split across two regions rather than narrowing the focus to just one region or the other.

**Grantmaking Phase:** Following the Design Phase was the formation and facilitation of a [Grantmaking Group](#). The Grantmaking Group was composed of 14 individuals with expertise in each region—seven from the Kolea region (Alaska and Hawai'i) and seven from the Southeastern United States region—along with two Shared Insight funder representatives. Of these 14, seven had served as Design Team members. All Design Team members with regional expertise decided to continue their participation in the Grantmaking Group. Through a facilitated process, **the regionally-specific Grantmaking Groups made decisions by consensus about how much grant funding each grantee would get.** Groups had been identified as the potential portfolio of grantees through a participatory process informed by the design phase. The grantee portfolio came from a number of sources: via Design Team members, Grantmaking Group members, the organizations that originally nominated Design Team members, and in some cases, organizations on the grantee list nominated other groups as well. Any group included on the list would receive a minimum of \$10,000, though ultimately all groups received more than the guaranteed minimum.

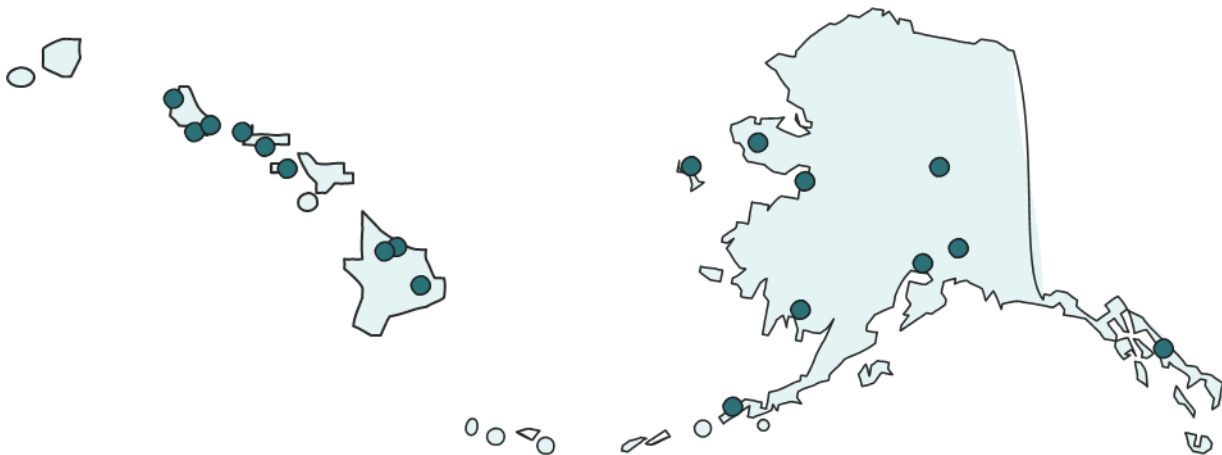
**Implementation Phase:** Grantmaking decisions were made in November 2021, and grants were made in January 2022. **Grantees are implementing activities and additional supports, such as convenings, and exchanges will be provided through 2022.** Ultimately, \$2 million was distributed to 35 grantees: 17 in the Southeastern U.S. region and 18 in the Kolea region (including 9 in Alaska and 9 in Hawai'i). In both regions, there were two sizes of grants made. Grants focused on these priorities:

- Southeastern U.S. region: transformational work, especially food sovereignty; grants that would leave communities better off; and funding that will make a meaningful difference
- Kolea region:
  - Alaska: grassroots efforts and tribal sovereignty
  - Hawai'i: networks and data sovereignty

**\$1 million to 17 grantees in the Southeastern U.S. region** (including three in Puerto Rico and one in the U.S. Virgin Islands):



**\$1 million to 18 grantees in the Koola region** (nine in Alaska and nine in Hawai'i):





## Initial Observations

The initial questions we explored for the evaluation included the following:


- What were the benefits to participation for Design Team and Grantmaking Group members?
- What feedback did those involved have on the process? Did they feel respected and heard?
- What did it mean for Shared Insight to listen?
- Where does power sit? How do members experience their power and /or power in the process?

Following we share initial findings related to these questions.

**There is much success to celebrate: grantmaking was completed through a participatory process, and members felt good about the process and experienced many benefits.** As noted in the prior section, the process resulted in an updated strategy as well as grants adding up to \$2 million to 35 organizations, double the original budgeted amount.

The Design Team reported feeling valued, heard, appreciated, inspired, and energized by the process. Similar sentiments were reported by the Grantmaking Group members, who also felt that the process was meaningful and purposeful; that it felt right and aligned with their values; that it was uplifting and empowering; and that it made them feel seen, respected, hopeful, and appreciative that there was recognition for this kind of grantmaking. They also felt that it gave them a sense of solidarity and connection with other team members, and they enjoyed spending time with each other. The process allowed for deeper thinking and analysis of issues they cared about, and while it was intellectually challenging and stretching, it was satisfying to not go with the easy route of making decisions—such as making equal grants to all in the grant pool.

In addition to having a positive experience, Design Team and Grantmaking Group members expressed finding many benefits from the process, as outlined in the table that follows. These included personal benefits, such as changes in knowledge and connections, feelings of joy and optimism, increased interest and skills around funders/funding, and new ideas about how things could be different.



*"I am overjoyed by the outcome of this process and for our small community organizations. However, I am uncertain if it will continue, though hopeful that it will! It needs to. The smaller organizations we help, the broader the reach will be. I **hope the process of grantmaking morphs into a bottom up.**"*

*"I was inspired by other team members' stories and reflections and sad that I did not have more time to share with some of the other team members. I felt ignorant, inquisitive, and curious to learn more about the work that is being carried out by **grassroots organizations who come from or work with communities that have and maintain other worldviews and traditional knowledge.** I also had this feeling with participatory grantmaking in general, which I did not know about and had never participated in something like this."*




Table 2 | Benefits from Participating in Different Phases of the Process

|                               | Design Team  | Grantmaking Group  |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Different Perspectives</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-mindedness to other perspectives</li> <li>• An increased sense of the impact of their work</li> <li>• Greater appreciation and trust for participatory processes</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A sense of joy about the outcome of the process and hope for small community organizations</li> <li>• A deeper sense of what “meaningful” means in terms of providing resources to communities, villages, and groups</li> <li>• A different flavor of optimism about relationships around funding and a sense of how things could be different</li> </ul> |
| <b>Increased Knowledge</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A broadened knowledge base—for example, around the work of other grassroots organizations and around participatory practices</li> <li>• Better insight into challenges faced by activists, grassroots leaders</li> <li>• Better understanding of funder networks</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An understanding of grantmaking and of the challenges of grantmaking and philanthropy</li> <li>• Learned ways to build group consensus and how to bring equitable processes to grantmaking</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Stronger Connections</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A better sense of other change agents in other locations</li> <li>• An opportunity to listen and learn from others about how this opportunity could benefit their communities</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A feeling of being better equipped to engage with other donor groups</li> <li>• A deeper sense of connection to other minority and culture-specific groups; new relationships</li> </ul>  |

Funder representatives, too, have shared that even their roles participating in the process—but not making decisions with the group—were meaningful and transformative. All three have publicly talked about the way in which participating and observing the work was a privilege. They all have spoken to the benefits of being in proximity with people who were sharing their contexts, life experiences, and knowledge of place and history and of being able to build relationships with different members. They described learning a lot and recognizing the limits of their own areas of expertise within the process and how it was a way to stretch their thinking beyond traditional grantmaking processes and approaches.


**Shared Insight, especially staff and Advocacy Committee members, listened and adapted in many ways throughout the process.** As you may have noticed as you read the introductory sections, where the process started and where it landed involved making some significant shifts. Listening—and responding to what was shared—had substantive impacts on the process and design, including shifts in focus, amount of



grantmaking dollars, and process elements to support inclusion and full participation of Design Team and Grantmaking Group members.

Table 3 | Meaningful Shifts

|                           | Original Plan   | Updated Plan  |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Changes in Focus</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support meaningful connections between advocacy/policy organizations focused on climate change and the people least heard yet most vulnerable to and impacted by climate change</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A more Indigenous worldview. In practice, this meant taking a more holistic and relational point of view on climate issues and considering stewardship and traditional ecological knowledge as relevant foci of the work and including other issues of justice (e.g., food justice, data sovereignty), recognizing interdependence versus more narrow distinctions for climate issues, going against white/mainstream philanthropic norms.</li> <li>Going beyond supporting policy advocacy within traditional legal structures into a broader array of activities connected to advocacy.</li> <li>Support for organizations of the community instead of those distant from their community.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Changes in Funding</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$1M in grant dollars</li> <li>Support 501(c)3 organizations</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$2M to provide resources across two geographic foci.</li> <li>Shared Insight also expanded the boundaries of who could receive grants beyond nonprofit 501(c)3s to federally- and state-recognized tribes, LLCs, fiscally sponsored organizations, and unincorporated groups and collectives.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Changes in Process</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open call process for Design Team and Grantmaking Group</li> <li>One way to engage</li> <li>Honoraria to acknowledge expertise and time offered</li> </ul>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shifting from an open call to a selection partner process, moving from assumptions at the start that an open call would be more equitable based on feedback from Native philanthropic infrastructure groups early on.</li> <li>Katy and Winifred modeled by supporting a variety of ways for members to engage, including texts and phone calls instead of virtual fora, videos alongside written materials, and the ability to process outside of just cognitive/head space through photos, poetry, and other ways of knowing.</li> <li>In addition to an honorarium, Shared Insight provided a laptop to someone who had lost access to their technology, reimbursed for mileage and Wi-Fi access for those who had to travel to get online, completed reimbursement forms for members, and so forth.</li> </ul> |




In staff and funder reflections on why there was a high amount of flexibility and adaptation, **a few important enabling conditions emerged:**

- Within this funder collaborative structure, there were fewer entrenched interests, fewer requirements to expend political or social capital to foment change, and less history and/or dogma to work against when staff and funders want to do grantmaking differently.
- Shared Insight's overall commitment to living values of equity, diversity, and inclusion; listening and meaningful connection; as well as "walking the walk" meant requests to shift from original assumptions or expectations and specific asks to support individuals' participation fell on supportive ears.
- Finally, many have credited the partnership, leadership, and vision from Katy and Winifred as experienced participatory grantmaking consultants as key parts of why the process unfolded as it did. They brought a strong ethos of inclusion and trust in the process without having stakes in the concepts undergirding the original conception of climate change advocacy work (as a science or climate program officer might).

**Sharing power was a stated goal of this effort, and Shared Insight successfully ceded decision-making authority in many ways.** Participatory grantmaking processes can vary in how they are structured. Shared Insight did turn over grantmaking decision authority to the Grantmaking Group. While there were minimal \$10,000 grants guaranteed to those groups under consideration, the Grantmaking Group fully decided how money was distributed.

More unusually, the design phase also meant an earlier group of participants with lived expertise had much more input on the overall strategy than is typical. The Design Team started with some requirements and recommendations from the Advocacy Committee. When they ultimately provided the values, purpose statement, and geographic foci that informed the plan, their work redefined some of the assumptions. Underlying the original conception of funding, traditional advocacy organizations who would be assumed to be far from those most impacted and were working on policy changes were the focus. The Design Team's work focused in on grassroots groups, Indigenous groups, and those impacted by and adapting to climate impacts. **While the work was formally consultative and the Design Team didn't have decision-making authority, the Advocacy Committee honored and implemented their recommendation** and did not hold them to original requirements and recommendations. For example, one recommendation was that the Design Team "Consider integrating this work with decision-making tables that already exist and could benefit from more community involvement with policy decisions." Ultimately, this recommendation was not met because the Design Team felt that "focusing exclusively on traditional decision-making tables that already exist is not compatible with the vision of the Design Team, which considers an expansive definition of advocacy with a focus on implementation."

Additionally, the Design Team was engaged beyond the initial design phase to ensure the work leading up to the grantmaking phase stayed true to and was accountable to the Design Team's intentions. While we have not specifically collected data from staff, committee members, or other core funders, our sense from observing conversations around the work is a sense of pride around the degree of flexibility and



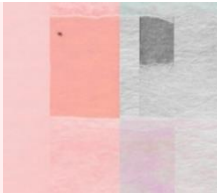
willingness to have the design and grantmaking led so thoroughly by the Design Team and Grantmaking Groups.

**However, reflections on power shifting from those engaging in the process suggest there is more to unpack.** Because there was a documented goal to share power in this work and shifting power to communities is a cornerstone of participatory grantmaking, one of our key questions for the members of these processes was the following:

*One purpose for engaging you is to shift power from funders to communities when making decisions about what issues are funded, how they are funded, and by how much. Tell us about your sense of power as a Design Team/Grantmaking Group member.*


**At the end of their engagement, the Design Team members shared that they largely did not experience a shift in power but rather felt that the process was more for giving input and feedback rather than making decisions.** While the recommendations were ultimately accepted as made, the Design Team members did know that their work was consultative at the start. As the Design Team individuals stayed engaged leading up to the grantmaking process, they had mixed thoughts about power relative to this work and continued to question where power really sat throughout this process. It was mentioned that even in this participatory process, there still seemed to be a power imbalance and that tables seemed pivoted in the direction of who has the most control of the most resources.

*"I am still left wondering how participatory it is, when there's still a power imbalance at the end of the day—in terms of information of the long-term investment and impact the funders of these funds intend to have in the communities and peoples we are a part of and serving. **The tables still seem pivoted in the direction of who has the most control of most of the resources.**"*



Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion consultant to Shared Insight Gita Gulati-Partee shared that she observed among Design Team members the ethos to first identify the need and then to look for the resources to address it. This is in contrast to typical philanthropic processes, including Shared Insight's, which begin with setting a budget for the participatory process then allowing some degree of "freedom" to divvy up those dollars within designed parameters. While \$1 million to \$2 million is a notable sum of money and the decision to increase funds available by 100% is impressive, Grantmaking Groups noted that both of these figures are still woefully inadequate when measured against the existing needs of impacted communities. She also shared her observation inviting these groups to participate in that process was an innovation for shared Insight and yet participants were still constrained by the assumptions of white dominant worldviews.

While Design Team and Grantmaking Group members commented on ways it seemed like the funder had more power, it was also noted that communities have been doing important work with or without funding, acknowledging the inherent power and self-determination that exists.



*"Because I don't think the communities need the real work. They are doing the work, with or without funding, but **the funders are the ones who need the education and change.**"*

Grantmaking Group members hoped that by being part of the process, they'd be able to prove to funders that participatory/community-centric processes actually work and that more funders would utilize this approach in future grantmaking processes. They also hoped that voices least heard would be elevated in funding conversations, that smaller groups/organizations doing great work would receive funding to carry out their work, and that the grants made would result in transformative change. Overall, there was hope that participation will have a positive impact on the work and those impacted by it.

*"The first thing that came to mind for me was **to prove that a participatory model works** so that more funders will consider taking this approach in centering communities and having participatory processes...I'm hoping to see a shift at some point and **where it's more community centered and not like, what makes wealthy people happy.**"*


The perception of power changed slightly among Grantmaking Group members. A few members (3) of the Grantmaking Group felt that they experienced a shift in power because of the end results: small organizations/groups were granted funds in the end, and they were involved in making the decision about what amounts were awarded to each organization.

*"Yes, I do feel that **the goal of shifting power to the community was accomplished through this grantmaking process**; a/many small, grassroots organization which is fiscally sponsored by a 501c3 because it does not have its own, was recognized and actually awarded. The competition for funding is harsh! Our smaller organizations do not stand a chance against other large-capacity organizations. At the same time, we know that many of them are doing the work and sometimes even more work strictly through volunteerism."*

More Grantmaking Group members (7) felt that the shift in power was partial because of the following:

- Funding was not permanent/ongoing
- The amount entrusted to these groups/organizations/communities was still significantly smaller than what is given to "big greens" now
- It's hard to say whether this process would lead to sustained relationships between the funder and organizations funded
- This process involved having funder representatives, which was much appreciated, but their presence still presented a power dynamic that may have influenced certain conversations





*“For me, a true power shift would occur if we had been entrusted with \$100 million—or even more—enough to start to truly even the playing field. As it stands, with the \$2 million we will see some amazing work be able to root, blossom and fruit but I just imagine what it could look like if we had been given enough to really tip the scale. Funding still depended on what the funders hear about what these communities are doing or have done.”*

Others shared ways in which they brought different types of power to the process. One member mentioned that power was in the community relationships and connections that one had with potential grantees, even though the process might suggest these kinds of relationships are “conflicts of interest.” Another, in responding to the question about power, reflected on her inherent power and humility in being able to share her perspective, not only as an Indigenous woman but as one who has also had experience seeking grant funds.

## Conceptualizations of Power

This feedback gives us the opportunity to hold potentially conflicting ideas at the same time: people appreciated the process and have critiques. Shared Insight listened and ceded a lot of authority, and many participants still question the degree to which power shifted. Why the differences?

When we talk about “power,” it might be easy to think we are all talking about the same thing. But **to really interrogate and investigate how power is shared or being perceived as shifting, it's important to understand how different people might understand it.**<sup>3</sup> We're going to present three different ways of thinking about power to interrogate the differences raised:

- 1) Faces of power
- 2) Vital powers
- 3) Transformative love

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that we offer these frameworks from our explorations into power, not to lift up which framework(s) the Design Team and/or Grantmaking Group members subscribe to. We thought they had useful aspects to help interrogate why there could be differences and how we want to think about power going forward.

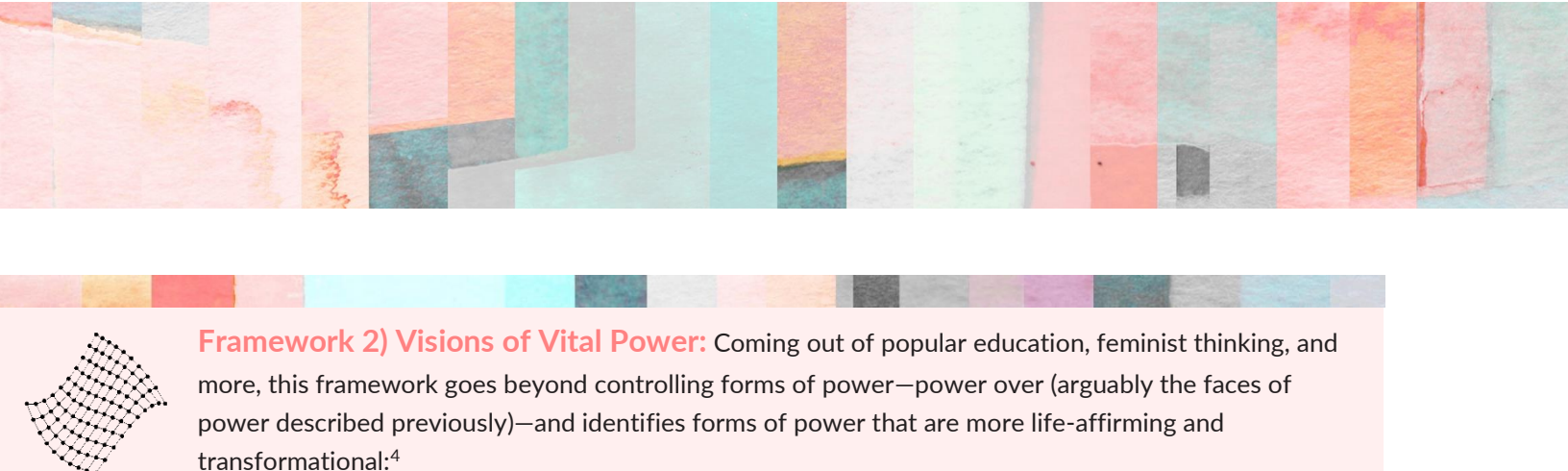


**Framework 1) Faces of Power:** The idea of three faces of power is a common framework for understanding power in political science. This framework lays out three types of power:

- **Decision-making power:** authority and control over resources and policies
- **Non-decision-making power:** the power to shape agendas
- **Ideological or narrative power:** the power to shape ideologies, worldviews, wishes, and beliefs

This framework treats **power as something that is held, wielded by those with power on those without power.**

Within this framework, it's easy to see the parameters of the grantmaking program and the distribution of the dollars as the "power." It is clear that the participatory grantmaking approach meant Shared Insight granted the process and its participants a lot of the decision-making power. They ultimately relinquished a lot of control around initial recommendations and conceptualizations by agreeing to the Design Team's purpose statement, values, and geographic focus areas, as well as the grantmaking decisions overall. Yet the other two faces of power—the power to shape agendas and ideological or narrative power—were still mostly retained by Fund for Shared Insight. Therefore, it's understandable that some participants didn't feel like power had shifted. If members of the Design and Grantmaking processes don't buy into all the worldviews and ideologies of Western philanthropy, some of the boundaries of what is the work, what is up for debate, and what is possible are still held by Shared Insight, meaning the types or amount of power shifted had meaningful limits to them. Others could even fundamentally question the idea that resources are power at all, versus relationships, lived experience, or other aspects of the work.



**Framework 2) Visions of Vital Power:** Coming out of popular education, feminist thinking, and more, this framework goes beyond controlling forms of power—power over (arguably the faces of power described previously)—and identifies forms of power that are more life-affirming and transformational:<sup>4</sup>

- **Power within:** a person's sense of self-worth and self-knowledge. The capacity to imagine and have hope.
- **Power with:** to find ground among different interests to build collective strength based on mutual support, solidarity, collaboration, and recognition and respect for differences.
- **Power to:** the unique potential of every person to shape their life and world.

In this assessment, we think **less transactionally about power as authority and control that is held by some to a concept of power that is built and supported across many.**

In this conception, members shared ways in which the participatory grantmaking process helped to foster and build upon the “power within.” Additionally, we saw echoes of the idea of “power within” in the comments from those who seemed to chafe against the idea that power was something that sat only within this process, such as the comment that groups are already doing this work and they will continue to do so whether this process happened or not. Different Grantmaking Group members described the ways in which the process helped build hope and a sense of empowerment. Comments from them suggest it also helped to build some sense of “power with,” especially as groups continue to have an interest in staying connected and building upon this initial process and base of work. The rub in perspectives here likely lies in what constraints they felt in what was in the field of possibility in their “power to” do. This feels salient with regards to the comments that power sharing felt partial to many when they saw many other possibilities for how they would have liked to build or use their power to shape the world differently.

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<sup>4</sup> Just Associates (Written by Valerie Miller, Lisa VeneKlasen, Molly Reilly, and Cindy Clark). *Making Change Happen: Concepts for Revisioning Power for Justice, Equality and Peace*, 2006. Available here: [https://justassociates.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/mch3\\_2011\\_final\\_0.pdf](https://justassociates.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/mch3_2011_final_0.pdf)



**Framework 3) Transformative Love:** This may seem like an outlier when we think about power, but we bring it forward because we believe it offers a decolonized worldview that is perhaps best able to stretch our thinking and mental models. In their piece “Measuring Love in the Journey for Justice: A Brown Paper,” Shiree Teng and Sammy Nuñez lay out four components of emergent, transformative, catalytic love with 12 dimensions described beneath each component:

- **Self-love:** conscious of how we’re in integrity with our own values; critical analysis of our own thought and behaviors; self-care as revolutionary acts of resistance
- **Love others:** deep listening; compassion and understanding; forgiveness, chance to do over
- **Love as a community practice:** organize and develop leaders; spread vision and hope; fight for material change
- **Love fused with power:** own and materialize our power; share power with; build power for collective liberation

In this schema, love and power are inextricably linked and multifaceted.

Their paper puts forward love as an action that is critical to achieving justice and transformation, something that must be tied to concepts of power:


*“Power, properly understood, is the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, or economic changes. In this sense power is not only desirable but necessary in order to implement the demands of love and justice. One of the greatest problems of history is that the concepts of love and power are usually contrasted as polar opposites. Love is identified with a resignation of power and power with a denial of love. **What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.**” —Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>5</sup>*

We see many ways love was exercised through the process. Processes encouraged participants to share themselves and their values with each other and how they engaged in the process (self-love). Deep listening and compassion (love others) led to many efforts to support participants in ways that are outside the mainstream of how funders might be in relationship with participatory grantmaking members, such as the efforts to make the process inclusive and accessible through supports for mileage reimbursement and technology and the willingness to reach out to people in preferred ways (e.g., text, phone calls, emails). The groups used the process as a chance to create visions for hope and material change that were deeply

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<sup>5</sup> From *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Boston, MA, Beacon Press: 1967.





connected to their lived reality (love as a community practice), not a top-down understanding of the issues or opportunities at hand. Finally, as seen with other frameworks, we start to bump into some differences in how much change is allowed, how far the extension of power goes, and how much we are in a transactional process versus a shared fight for collective liberation (love fused with power).

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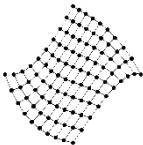

Perhaps because there were so many ways in which the process fostered various types of love-power, there was a willingness to want more, to express greater possibility beyond what had been originally charted.

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*"The Fund for Shared Insight has done **its due diligence and conducted an extremely thorough process to cultivate trust, relationships and a table of grassroots leaders** that I think should grow and become a true global giving circle, funded with substantive resources to make a deep impact closest to the ground, to mother earth we are all doing our best to protect, and keep healthy enough so we can all live well together."*

These frameworks are not mutually exclusive or exhaustive; they can be used together to understand, expand, and/or facilitate further conversation about what we mean by power. Regardless of which framework(s) we use, what is most important is to develop a shared understanding that allows us to more clearly articulate what we mean by power so we can identify how different people perceive and experience it.

Table 4 | Overview of the Three Different Ways of Thinking about Power

|  | Framework  | Key Components  | Brief Assessment   |
|--|--|---|--|
|    | <p><b>Faces of Power:</b> <i>power as something that is had and wielded in particular ways</i></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision-making power</li> <li>• Power to shape agendas</li> <li>• Power to make meaning on the terrain of ideology and worldview<sup>6</sup></li> </ul> | <p>Shared Insight granted the group the power to shape the agenda and make decisions; some chafing might have been felt at the inability to change the ideas of what was possible and what the boundaries of the process were.</p>   |
|    | <p><b>Visions of Vital Power:</b> <i>goes beyond controlling forms of power—power over—and identifies forms of power that are more life-affirming and transformational forms<sup>7</sup></i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power within</li> <li>• Power with</li> <li>• Power to</li> </ul>  | <p>Shared Insight and the process supported many aspects of power within and power with, though participants seem to have felt constrained in the boundaries of their power to go beyond the bounds of this initiative.</p>  |
|  | <p><b>Transformative Love:</b><sup>8</sup> <i>love as action that must be tied to how power is exercised to achieve justice</i></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-love</li> <li>• Love others</li> <li>• Love as a community practice</li> <li>• Love fused with power</li> </ul>                                     | <p>Many aspects of the process fostered self-love, love others, and love as a community practice. There appear to be differences between members and Shared Insight around love fused with power and the boundaries of using these powers toward greater transformation.</p> |

<sup>6</sup> Richard Healey and Sandra Hinson, *The Three Faces of Power* (Mountain View, CA: Grassroots Policy Project). Available here: [https://grassrootspowerproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2\\_GPP\\_3FacesOfPower.pdf](https://grassrootspowerproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2_GPP_3FacesOfPower.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Just Associates (Written by Valerie Miller, Lisa VeneKlasen, Molly Reilly, and Cindy Clark). *Making Change Happen: Concepts for Revisioning Power for Justice, Equality and Peace*, 2006. Available here: [https://justassociates.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/mch3\\_2011\\_final\\_0.pdf](https://justassociates.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/mch3_2011_final_0.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Shiree Teng and Sammy Nuñez, *Measuring Love in the Journey for Justice: A Brown Paper*. Available here: <https://latinocf.org/wpcontent/uploads/2019/07/Shiree-Teng-Measuring-Love.pdf>



## Concluding Thoughts

We offer these different frameworks as ways to broaden our worldviews and mindsets around power. It could be easy to reach the end of this initiative and feel legitimately good about the ways in which the process was inclusive, responsive, and truly a more expansive sharing of power than might always be the case in participatory grantmaking.

### And yet, to what degree was power shared or shifted?

The gift here is the insight into how those not formally in the philanthropic sector feel and think about power. When we look across these frameworks, we see that part of the discrepancy may lie in a different perception of power: those within the processes' idea of power are bigger and more encompassing than giving away grant dollars. While this particular participatory grantmaking effort was a valuable and appreciated exercise for those on the Design Team and Grantmaking Group, their concept of power looks beyond this one-time initiative and questions what else is possible and what it would look like to shift toward different, more transformative possibilities. It may be that, because those in the process are more closely connected to climate-impacted communities who often suffer other types of oppression and injustice, they have more to gain and lose than a funder who is less proximate. Their livelihoods, communities, and cultures are at stake, so of course they want to reimagine what else could be possible—and even question philanthropy's existence. It could also be the difference in worlds that are more dominated by white supremacist and colonial thinking compared to more Indigenous or decolonized worldviews. These comments raise the question:

### Who gets to decide *how much* power is enough or what *kind* of power matters?

The Design Team and Grantmaking Group members are telling us things about power, need, philanthropy, and an alternate future. We'd posit it is an act of love for these individuals to share their expectations for a more transformed approach to philanthropy. As with any feedback, people on the receiving end must choose what they will take on and respond to. The opportunity for philanthropy is to become more clear about the power they hold and interrogate their willingness to cede and shift it in ways that are meaningful to those they invite into such processes.



## Appendix: Notes About the Evaluation

The ORS Impact team has benefited from collaboration, partnership and feedback from many people in doing this work:

- Participatory Grantmaking Consultants, Katy Love and Winifred Olliff
- The Advocacy/Policy Committee co-chairs over time, including Linda Baker (previously with the David & Lucile Packard Foundation), Genny Biggs (Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation), and CC Moore (William K. Kellogg Foundation)
- The Evaluation Committee
- Shared Insight Managing Director Melinda Tuan
- Equity, Diversity, Inclusion Partner, Gita Gulati-Partee

We also could not have produced this without the generous participation of the Design Team members and Grantmaking Group members who answered our surveys or participated in phone calls to share their thoughts and experiences:

- A-dae Briones
- Annie Jane Cotten
- Austin Ahmasuk
- Billy Kinney
- Crystal Yankawgé Nelson
- Cynthia Naha
- Dewey Kk'oleyo Hoffman
- Donald Bogen
- Elsie DuBray
- Fix Cain
- Garrett Blaize
- Janiece Watts
- Jayeesha Dutta
- Katia R. Avilés Vázquez
- Kilia Purdy-Avelino
- Miwa Tamanaha
- Reverend Leo Woodberry
- Rosalinda Guillen
- Soledad Gaztambide-Arandes



Following we share our core areas of inquiry and data sources. We are midway through the participatory grantmaking evaluation and will continue to collect data and share back findings through the implementation phase.

Table 5 | Areas of Inquiry for the Midpoint Product

| Among Whom   | Focus Areas  |
|--|--|
| <b>Design Team and Grantmaking Group Members</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Where does power sit? How do members experience their power and /or power in the process?</i></li> <li>• <i>Feedback on the process, feelings of respect, being heard</i></li> <li>• <i>Benefits to participation</i></li> </ul> |
| <b>Shared Insight</b><br><i>("Walking the Walk")</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How has Shared Insight walked the walk around inclusivity?</i></li> <li>• <i>What has listening meant for the work?</i></li> </ul>   |

#### Data Sources

- **Interview/survey of Design Team members** in January 2020 (10 of 13 participated, funder representative included)
- **Interviews/surveys of Design Team members** ahead of grantmaking phase in September 2021 (6 of 11 participated)
- **Interviews/surveys of Grantmaking Group members** in January 2022 (10 of 14 participated, funder representatives not included)
- **Review of extant data**, including Advocacy Committee materials (presentations, notes), Core Funder Meeting memos and minutes, process materials created by Katy and Winifred, and transcripts from events, such as the December 15<sup>th</sup> Funder Learning webinar

## Other Notes

As noted, these findings came from a relatively small dataset at various points in time from those who engaged as Design Team and Grantmaking Group members. We made the data collection as accessible as possible, so some responses came through an online form while others were collected through short phone calls. The draft document was reviewed and commented on for accuracy and input by Gita Gulati-Partee, Melinda Tuan, Katy Love, and Rick Moyers. Design Team and Grantmaking Group members have had the opportunity to read and share feedback. ORS made choices to change content that reflected inaccuracies, augmented our understanding, or helped to clarify the points at hand.