

Fund for
Shared Insight

Participatory Philanthropy Toolkit

Learn how to integrate participatory practices that share decision making, build trust, and shift power.

Explore the toolkit to learn how to design and implement participatory grantmaking programs.

When high-quality listening opens up opportunities for more participatory practices, you can be ready. Here you will find discussion guides about launching a participatory philanthropy process, concrete tools to help you design or improve your grantmaking, and reflections on how power shifts can happen in your philanthropy.

Introducing the Toolkit

We created this resource to offer insights, recommendations, and the nuts and bolts of design and implementation to inform and inspire your own journey toward more participatory practices.

- **Participatory Philanthropy Primer**
- **How to use the toolkit video**
- **Glossary of Terms**
- **Our Appreciation**

Funder Readiness Assessment

Find here questions and discussion prompts to advance conversations about participatory philanthropy within your organization before deciding how you might implement new practices or programs.

- **Financial Resources**
- **Power**
- **Capacity and Time Constraints**
- **Practitioner Skills**

Key Insights and Recommendations

Drawing from Shared Insight's own participatory grantmaking initiative (see the "How We Did It" section for details), we offer reflections on our experience and ideas for how you can apply the learning to your own philanthropy. Here are nine insights and the practices we recommend in response.

1. **Use Expansive Definitions and Approaches**
2. **Take a Holistic Approach to Funding**
3. **Be Open to Communities' Definitions of Geographic Boundaries**
4. **Explore Trust-Based Participatory Philanthropy**
5. **Aim for Radical Hospitality and Inclusion**
6. **Increase Participation in Each Phase of Work**
7. **Embrace Interconnectedness (Including Conflicts of Interest)**
8. **Identify and Shift Administrative Risks and Burdens**
9. **See Beyond the 501(c)(3)**

Resources for Funders Ready to Go

When you are ready to start planning your participatory work, go here for sample documents and templates, like budgets and a project outline.

- **Operating Budget Checklist**
- **Participatory Project Outline**
- **Sample Project Scope**
- **Project Roles**

For online-only sections of the toolkit, visit our webpages to:

- Explore discussions and hot topics featured on our blog, Insights for Change, that will inform and inspire your work with the Participatory Philanthropy Toolkit
- Read "How We Did It," a step-by-step look at our Participatory Climate Initiative, the one-time grantmaking program on which this toolkit is based. This case study offers a detailed description of each phase of that work — what, how, and when it all happened — with takeaways to inspire or kickstart your own participatory processes.

[Explore toolkit online](#)

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Participatory Philanthropy Primer

For funders committed to shifting power to, and sharing power with, those most impacted by their work, participation is key. Participatory approaches in philanthropy center the leadership, wisdom, and voices of communities. They shift power from philanthropy's traditional power centers (i.e., the donors and institutions that control the money) to the people and communities directly affected by the issues being addressed.

Done right — authentically, with an open mind, and with a commitment to equity — participatory approaches allow funders to truly listen, respond to what they hear, and shift power to meet the needs and aspirations of the communities they aim to serve. Participatory approaches leverage the invaluable knowledge and insights that can be gleaned only from firsthand experiences, and cultivate partnerships that enable individuals to play an active role in shaping their own destinies. **Participation can mitigate power imbalances; surface the most-effective solutions; promote trust, accountability, and transparency; and lead to more equitable philanthropy.**

Participatory philanthropy is a broad approach that calls for participation not only in grantmaking, but across the entirety of a foundation's functions, including governance, grants administration, and evaluation. Participatory grantmaking is an approach under the participatory umbrella that cedes decision making around grants.

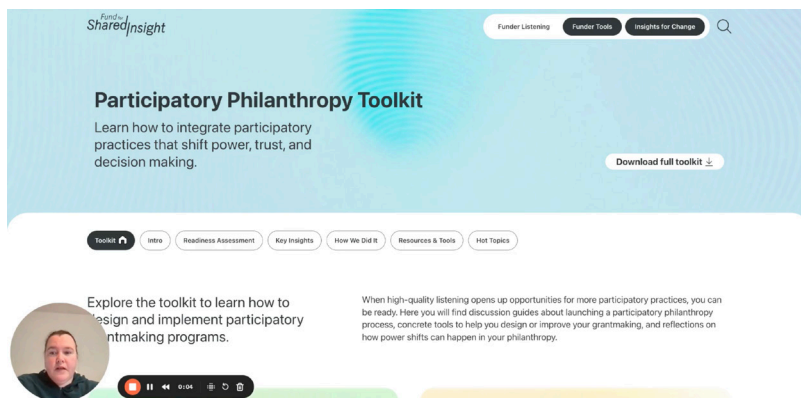
Funders across the country are moving toward participatory practices at different rates and from different starting points and perspectives. Shifting power is not easy work and requires a strong internal commitment and continuous learning. It's best to be clear on your organization's motivations, capabilities, and goals when considering including participatory approaches in your work.

A Look at Shared Insight's Participatory Philanthropy Project



[Watch video online](#)

How to use the toolkit video



The screenshot shows the top of the 'Participatory Philanthropy Toolkit' website. At the top left is the 'Fund for Shared Insight' logo. To the right are navigation buttons for 'Funder Listening', 'Funder Tools', and 'Insights for Change', along with a search icon. The main heading is 'Participatory Philanthropy Toolkit' with a sub-heading 'Learn how to integrate participatory practices that shift power, trust, and decision making.' Below this is a 'Download full toolkit' button. A horizontal menu contains 'Toolkit', 'Intro', 'Readiness Assessment', 'Key Insights', 'How We Did It', 'Resources & Tools', and 'Hot Topics'. The main content area features a video player with a thumbnail of a man speaking and a play button. Text to the right of the video reads: 'When high-quality listening opens up opportunities for more participatory practices, you can be ready. Here you will find discussion guides about launching a participatory philanthropy process, concrete tools to help you design or improve your grantmaking, and reflections on how power shifts can happen in your philanthropy.'

[Watch video online](#)

Glossary of Terms

Consensus: an approach to decision making where every member of a group of decision makers must meaningfully agree to support a decision/outcome before moving forward.

Consultative Grantmaking: a structured process in philanthropy through which participant-stakeholders with lived expertise in a relevant issue area are consulted about grantmaking decisions, improving the knowledge of the grantmaker but without the funder ceding power.

Participatory Grantmaking: a structured process in philanthropy through which community members with lived expertise in a relevant issue area (non-funders) make decisions about grants. Participatory Grantmaking is an approach within Participatory Philanthropy, and Participatory Grantmaking refers specifically to participation in decisions about grants.

Participatory Philanthropy: a philanthropy practice that explicitly includes the participation of community members with lived expertise in a relevant issue area (non-funders) and shifts power from traditional foundation decision makers to participants during any part of the philanthropy process and in the organization more generally, including strategy, planning, design, grantmaking, implementation, communications, fundraising, and/or evaluation. Participatory Philanthropy may include a variety of approaches to participation at different stages of the philanthropy cycle, and includes Participatory Grantmaking as one approach.

Participatory Design: in the context of Participatory Philanthropy, a structured process through which participant-stakeholders with lived expertise in a relevant issue area define or influence a funding program's design. Participatory Design is an approach within Participatory Philanthropy that is specific to decisions that are made prior to any grant decisions, about how a funding program will work.

Spectrum of Participatory Decision Making: refers to degrees of ceding power within a decision-making process, from autocratic decision making (not participatory) through well-executed participatory consensus-based decision making.

Trust-Based Philanthropy: an approach to philanthropy that centers relationships, deprioritizes control and surveillance, and works from the assumption that funders and grantee partners are working together in good faith toward similar goals.

Our Appreciation

Fund for Shared Insight is grateful to all who participated in, supported, and contributed to our Participatory Climate Initiative, on which this toolkit is based. Please see online the list of organizations and individuals who participated as Design Team members, Grantmaking Group members, participant or grantee nominators, grantees, funders, fiscal sponsors, evaluation partners, or toolkit reviewers. We deeply appreciate everyone who participated and the contributions they made.

[See our appreciations online](#)

**Have questions about the toolkit?
Or want to learn more?**

Please reach out to Katy Love (katy@fundforsharedinsight.org), the toolkit's co-author with Winifred Olliff, both consultants with experience and expertise in participatory grantmaking.



[Contact Katy](#)

Funder Readiness Assessment

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Financial Resources

Understanding what investment is required by your organization up-front can be an intimidating challenge for organizations that are new to participatory philanthropy. Use these questions to demystify this challenge.

Discussion Prompts

Do you have sufficient resources to support an operating budget that will make your participatory philanthropy efforts successful?

[See Operating Budget Checklist](#)

Do you have sufficient resources, like a substantial grant budget?

It is important to have meaningful resources for the participants to decide about. What is meaningful will depend on the context.

Do you have funds available to compensate participants?

Payments to participants are another way you can resource and support communities and payments will make it possible for more people to participate. Compensating participants can make the process more equitable and less extractive, honoring the expertise, networks, reputations, and credibility you are asking participants to share. An appropriate hourly rate might be comparable to what your foundation pays other staff or consultants. Always disclose the details of these payments to participants to ensure they understand what payments will be taxable and must be reported to the IRS. Be mindful that payments may have tax implications for participants or affect their eligibility for public benefits.

Have you invested in building sufficient expertise in-house not only to initiate this program but also to carry the work forward?

Remember that the skills required for successful participatory philanthropy may be very different from those required for a traditional grantmaking program. The role of the program team in participatory philanthropy tends to shift toward managing the process on the back end, engaging participants, and liaising with fund applicants. If you do not have this expertise in-house, consider how you can bring it into the process, build your expertise in the long term, and make plans that are realistic and achievable for your organization at this time.

[See Roles & Engagement Levels](#)

Q.

Does your organization have resources available to make participatory philanthropy happen?



The costs of participatory philanthropy may seem intimidating at first, but will decrease as the programs and practices become a regular part of your organization's operating strategy. Many costs are one-time start-up costs and will not be required over time. If you are having difficulty making a case for its value with respect to cost, focus on the many benefits that go beyond making high-quality and impactful decisions, such as building long-term trust and credibility with the communities your organization works with.

Power



Where and how is your organization ready to cede power to participants in meaningful ways?

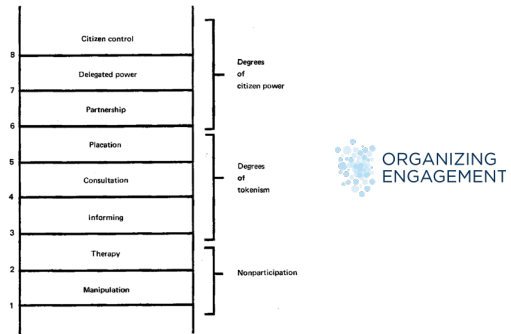
Sharing power is at the heart of participatory philanthropy, yet it is a challenge for many organizations to discuss power dynamics explicitly. While these discussions are not always comfortable, they are absolutely necessary. There is a substantial difference between inviting people's feedback or consulting them and ceding decision-making power.

Discussion Prompts

Where will you fall on the spectrum of participatory decision making?

When you invite people's input but you intend to make decisions, be explicit about that. When power sharing is overstated, you risk breaking trust with participants when the "real decision makers" do not follow through on their decisions or recommendations after a lengthy participatory process. And when the norms and practices of power are not made explicit, everyone operates from their own assumptions – and those with less formal power will bear the consequences of the resulting confusion.

See Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation to consider where you will fall on the spectrum of participatory decision making.



Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation

Have you identified who the key decision makers are in your organization or community who will need to commit to ceding power in order to move forward?

They may be people in formal or informal positions of power within your organization or community, such as leadership like board members, directors, or community leaders.

Do decision makers require training and/or support to fully understand what it means to cede power in this context?

If this is not fully understood, any commitments they make may not be meaningful. It is critical for you to understand any concerns or barriers, and any requirements that decision makers have established.

Are you able to secure wholehearted, firm, and specific commitments from decision makers, preferably in writing or in a context that is public or recorded?

It may feel easier to informally agree to the principles of sharing power, but you may want to create an agreement to refer back to during the process. Keeping decision makers informed and involved will facilitate good communication and avoid difficulties.

A Funder's Reflections on a Participatory Philanthropy Initiative



[Read viewpoint](#)

(continued on next page)

Power *(continued)*

Discussion Prompts

Does the decision makers' agreement clearly define and document the parameters, conditions, and limits of how power is being ceded to participants?

Setting clear boundaries will help decision makers feel confident and could even reveal opportunities to cede more power in the future as your practice grows. This allows you to communicate clearly with participants so that they do not lose trust in the process.

Participation benefits a foundation by ensuring grant decisions are more grounded in context, but ask yourself, how will it benefit those who join in and participate?

How can you be sure to cause no harm? How will you ensure people who become involved benefit from their experience?



If you are still having difficulty securing the agreement of decision makers, consider whether or not there are ways you can further limit the scope of your participatory philanthropy work in order to secure their commitment. For example, can you shift to a time-bound project or a smaller grant budget? If you need to make adjustments, apply the budget recommendations to ensure results will still justify your investment. Evaluate whether or not your work can still be considered participatory if you are using that terminology.

[See Glossary of Terms](#)

Capacity and Time Constraints

People are often excited when starting their participatory philanthropy journeys, but planning overly ambitious or aggressive timelines for participatory work is a common pitfall that can lead to less-than-ideal results.

What requirements do you have for the timeline for your participatory philanthropy work, and do you truly have the capacity to implement your participatory philanthropy work within that timeline?

Discussion Prompts

Has your organization already built up a substantial foundation of knowledge and a substantial network in the issue area you would like to influence?

If not, your planning and design phase should take at least several months to a year and will likely require significant resources, including staff and/or consultant time.

Is your organization committed to important principles that are relevant to your participatory work?

Examples of relevant principles are racial justice, disability justice, language justice, and gender justice.

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Capacity and Time Constraints *(continued)*

Discussion Prompts

What factors will influence the schedules and availability of potential stakeholders?

These may be seasonal considerations, a need for some folks to plan far in advance, or availability at certain times that may not align with a traditional work day. Ask your potential stakeholders before you assume you understand all the barriers and needs.

Do the project sponsors and key staff/consultants already have sufficient skill, knowledge, and awareness to begin to carry this work forward?

If not, plan time to build your team's capacity for this work before you move beyond the planning phase.

Are your estimates for how long it will take to complete work in each phase truly realistic?

You will want to take into account the complexity of your field of stakeholders, limits on their availability that may make it difficult to schedule things in a timely way, how the pace of your work with participants impacts project outcomes, overlapping phases of work that could stretch capacity, and scheduling dependencies.

Resources for Funders Ready to Go

When you are ready to start planning your participatory work, go here for sample documents and templates, like budgets and a project outline.

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If your organization is simply not ready to proceed or if you need to learn more before building your organization's capacity in the long term, consider funding intermediaries (i.e., community foundations or regranters) that use participatory processes to direct resources and/or join a funder collaborative that practices participatory grantmaking.

Practitioner Skills

Below you will find a list of skills that practitioners utilize to deliver high-quality participatory processes.

Discussion Prompts

How much capacity is there on your staff team in areas such as facilitation and group decision-making processes?

Do staff members have the interest and time to build up capacity in the short and/or long-term?

Q.

Which are the areas where you might need to grow your team's capacity?

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Practitioner Skills *(continued)*

Discussion Prompts

In which areas might you be able to get external support or training?



Use this inventory to help assess what skills your organization has and might need.

Facilitation & group management

- ✓ Experience recognizing and mitigating bias in people and systems
- ✓ Practice of radical hospitality and inclusion
- ✓ Knowledge of care practices
- ✓ Competence in listening, paraphrasing, and holding multiple perspectives
- ✓ Facility with a wide range of decision-making tools and techniques
- ✓ Facilitation expertise specific to online or in-person environments, if required
- ✓ Comfort navigating and destigmatizing conflicts of interest
- ✓ General facilitation expertise, including difficult conversations and inclusive methods
- ✓ Understanding of “do no harm” principle as it relates to working with stakeholders outside of the foundation
- ✓ Knowledge of and comfort with exploring and navigating power dynamics

Analysis, influence & decision making

- ✓ Ability to thrive in complex multi-stakeholder environments
- ✓ Skill in leading through influence and by motivating others
- ✓ Facility with analyzing and synthesizing information from many sources
- ✓ Comfort with making decisions that involve trade-offs, guided by values

Philanthropy experience & commitment

- ✓ Knowledge of participatory philanthropy principles
- ✓ Knowledge of trust-based philanthropy principles
- ✓ Commitment to a grantee-centered approach at every stage of the process

Project management

- ✓ Strong project management skills, including scheduling expertise

Cultural & language competencies

- ✓ Skill navigating and managing multilingual environments
- ✓ Cultural competency, as relevant
- ✓ Multilingualism, as relevant
- ✓ Network weaving
- ✓ Willingness to experiment, innovate, fail, and learn
- ✓ Careful use of language that honors the intentions of participants
- ✓ Competence with disability accessibility, and inclusion

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Contact Katy

Key Insights and Recommendations

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1. Use Expansive Definitions and Approaches



The Idea

As funders engaging people outside of philanthropy who are more connected to issues and impacted communities, we should expect to be pushed outside of our comfort zone in many ways, beginning with how issues are defined and framed. If philanthropy continues to rely on rigid frameworks and definitions that are rooted in a false notion of objectivity, we risk failing to include people who are most impacted by the issues we are seeking to address; continuing to fund organizations that lack community backing and legitimacy; and remaining unaware of and unable to benefit from innovative knowledge that has sustained and advanced communities over many years.

In our [Participatory Climate Initiative](#), a Design Team member created this definition, which we used to guide our work.

Policy is a set of decisions that prioritizes what we think we need to live. Climate policy needs to state firmly the foundations, guidelines, and boundaries that society must have to maintain a livable climate, but these must be determined by a true representation of the communities that have faced the worst consequences of environmental and energy policy.

And the Design Team did not use the term "climate change" that the funders had picked for the initiative, instead choosing more expansive language. The purpose statement the team developed, for example, reads in part that the program would 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."

Recommended Practices

Solicit meaningful input

Solicit meaningful input and create opportunities for power sharing with communities, rather than relying on mainstream organizations to represent them.

Value traditional knowledge and lived expertise

Value traditional knowledge and lived expertise on equal footing with "technical knowledge," and choose which "experts" to fund and rely on accordingly.

Use holistic definitions

Use holistic definitions and approaches whenever setting funding priorities. Be aware of differences in language used by communities and funders.

Be familiar with and adopt existing definitions and frameworks that are relevant to communities

For example, activists in the environmental and economic justice movement created the [Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing](#).

2. Take a Holistic Approach to Funding



The Idea

While philanthropy organizations often separate funding programs based on technical expertise and conventionally defined issue areas, this approach often does not match the needs and solutions on the ground. Issues such as climate change mitigation, climate adaptation, climate justice, environmental racism, food systems change, the teaching of traditional knowledge, and land rights are not distinct and should not be siloed in funding. While there can be value in zeroing in on specific issues, funders often do this at the expense of more holistic and integrated approaches and thus opportunities for greater impact.

Recommended Practices

Meet communities where they are by using language that resonates with them

For instance, ranchers in the Southwestern United States may have no interest in getting together to address climate change, but could be highly engaged in a discussion about water and agriculture. Another example is that some Native communities may not use the term “climate change,” and focus more on connection to land, language, and traditional ecological knowledge. If you don’t know what language resonates, ask!

Create cross- or multi-issue funds that reflect the complexity of the problem you seek to solve

Create cross- or multi-issue funds that reflect the complexity of the problem you seek to solve, and engage experts with traditional knowledge and grassroots organizing know-how along with technical experts.

Provide flexible, unrestricted multi-year grants

Since communities and the many issues impacting them cannot be dissected or separated, provide flexible, unrestricted multi-year grants, taking a holistic approach that recognizes the reality that meaningful systems change takes decades and long-term investments.

Commit substantial funding to a wider range of innovative grassroots initiatives

Recognize the limits of traditional grantmaking, such as requests for proposal processes and funding in silos, and commit substantial funding to a wider range of innovative grassroots initiatives.

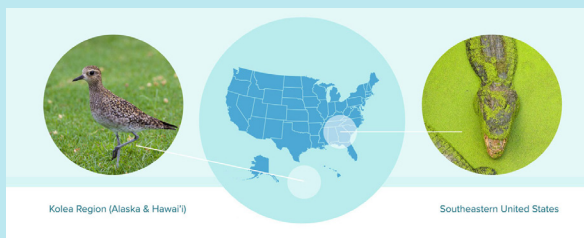
3. Be Open to Communities' Definitions of Geographic Boundaries



The Idea

Funders that typically work in specific geographies or with a narrow geographic lens may find those conventions limiting in a participatory grantmaking effort. Geography can be an important way to understand how people are impacted by issues like climate change. For example, it can be a tool for focusing funding in areas like the Southeastern United States that have experienced systemic disinvestment and extensive extraction by industry. However, funders should not rely on political boundaries alone, but should be open to participants exploring geographic focus areas based on their own stated priorities, such as ecosystem links and land sovereignty issues.

In our [Participatory Climate Initiative](#), selecting a geography was a lengthy and somewhat painful process, particularly for grassroots activists working to build solidarity across regions. The Design Team ultimately selected two unique geographic focus areas:



1. The Kōlea Region, which encompassed Alaska and Hawai'i and was named for a migrating bird representing the links between the ecosystems of the two distant states and the historic, cultural, and navigational connections among Native peoples in the Pacific.
2. The Southeastern United States, which was defined as including U.S. Territories, like Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, areas that have experienced longtime disinvestment and overburdened infrastructure while facing severe impacts of climate change.

Recommended Practices

Consider cultural, historical, ecological, and thematic connections

When applying a geographic lens to funding programs, don't rely on conventional political definitions or boundaries. Consider cultural, historical, ecological, and thematic connections.

Remain flexible, creative, and open to unconventional definitions and the many benefits they may bring

Be prepared for difficult and time-intensive discussions. Remain flexible, creative, and open to unconventional definitions and the many benefits they may bring.

Act with sensitivity

Be mindful of the impact discussions about geography, or limiting the scope of your program in general, may have on participants who are working to build solidarity across regions and movements. Act with sensitivity.

Be open and transparent with everyone involved

Be open and transparent with everyone involved about what definitions you are working from and how this may impact funding opportunities or other opportunities for involvement.

4. Explore Trust-Based Participatory Philanthropy



The Idea

Some principles of trust-based philanthropy and participatory philanthropy may appear to be opposed or mutually exclusive, while others are complementary. Both approaches have value and each design decision you make will involve trade-offs. While there is no roadmap for integrating these two approaches, we were able to refer back to the values participants identified as important when making tough decisions about these trade-offs.

Find more discussion about combining trust-based and participatory philanthropy principles in this [blog post](#) at Center for Effective Philanthropy and this video of our “[Nuts & Bolts](#)” webinar.

Examples of the tensions between participatory philanthropy and trust-based philanthropy from our [Participatory Climate Initiative](#):

- The Design Team had a strong preference for a very simple application process that would limit burdens on those who would receive the funding. At the same time, some of the same participants, when it came to decision making, lamented having less information than they would have liked in reviewing grant applications and making decisions.
- Participants wanted time to get to know grantees and establish relationships with them, but did not want this process to be burdensome for grantees. And yet, arranging meetings among many participants and 35 grantees became a complex logistical puzzle, and not every meeting met all needs for the grantees and the Grantmaking Group members. Grantees invested time in preparing for and participating in those calls.
- Groups being considered for funding were guaranteed a minimum grant of \$10,000. This was a requirement of the Design Team, and is good practice in philanthropy, but it also at least somewhat constrained the Grantmaking Group's options for their \$2 million.

Recommended Practices

Recognize that both trust-based philanthropy and participatory philanthropy have value

Recognize that both trust-based philanthropy and participatory philanthropy have value and build your organization's understanding and practice in both approaches.

Compensate those you consult for their time and expertise, and share back with them the results from your work

Seek the advice of people with experience with each of the approaches so you can define the values that guide your work and effectively evaluate the trade-offs. Compensate those you consult for their time and expertise, and share back with them the results from your work. Consider how your work can add real value and be beneficial to those people.

Experiment and innovate as you seek to balance both approaches

Continue to experiment and innovate as you seek to balance both approaches. Be prepared for challenges and bumps in the road as you create new ways of working.

5. Aim for Radical Hospitality and Inclusion



The Idea

Since participatory philanthropy efforts will often (and sometimes by definition) include a diverse group of participants – across race, geography, language, culture, religion, expertise, age, disability, gender, and sexual orientation – significant effort and expertise must go into creating a truly inclusive and accessible experience. Everyone should bring their full selves to this work and build meaningful connections with one another. This includes funders, grantees, and the people facilitating the work.

To optimize opportunities for inclusion and access in our [Participatory Climate Initiative](#), we:

- Worked toward digital inclusion, offering participants resources to meet technology needs, including equipment and stipends for internet or data usage and reimbursement for mileage costs associated with traveling to access the internet. We also worked with participants individually, collecting their input through their preferred communication method like phone or text, instead of asking everyone to submit written input to us.
- Actively sought out the opinions of those who participated less, starting by tracking who was speaking during group discussions. We then analyzed recordings to understand whether or not speaking time was shared equitably, making adjustments as needed, and actively seeking out the opinions of those who participated less.

Recommended Practices

Devote adequate resources to facilitation

This may involve hiring experienced facilitators or building your capacity for facilitation in-house and ensuring staff are assigned to this work. Facilitators should have experience in areas that are relevant to the group, such as racial justice and disability justice.

Welcome participants as their full and authentic selves

Foster meaningful relationships with and among participants that go beyond their roles in the work, including opportunities for sharing their experiences, personalities, and cultures through activities like group discussions, paired conversations, and journaling.

Use different methods to share and receive information among participants, including written narratives, videos, audio files, illustrations, and more

Apply principles of disability justice and language justice, and consider how different methods of sharing and receiving information may or may not be accessible to all participants.

Design a schedule, time expectations, and a general pace and time commitments for activities for participant engagement

Share these requirements in advance to avoid asking more of participants than they originally committed to. Stick to these commitments.

Be intentional about navigating power dynamics within your group

Be intentional about navigating power dynamics within your group. Even when working outside of a traditional hierarchical structure, the roles and positionality of participants may influence outcomes and participant comfort. For example, be intentional about when you do or do not include funders in your space with participants.

Ask yourself who is not participating, and why

Is everyone participating? Notice who is contributing and engaging in activities and meetings. Seek to identify people who are not participating and consider access needs and what they would need to participate meaningfully. When in doubt, ask them.

6. Increase Participation in Each Phase of Work Boundaries



The Idea

Participatory philanthropy approaches should be applied to the continuum of the funding process so that not all parameters are set by funders. If participatory practices are used only at the point of decision making about grants, for example, participants don't have the chance to define the funding focus or criteria, or to continue to support and learn from grantees during the implementation and evaluation phases of the work.

As we planned the [Participatory Climate Initiative](#), we considered how power was shared among different people during each phase of the project and how these shifts in power carried through or changed in each subsequent phase of work. This cascading approach had many benefits, since participants had an increasing voice in the design of the initiative, then in decision making, and then in implementation and evaluation.

Here is an idea of how we thought about power sharing and participation within the context of this initiative during each phase:

PLANNING PHASE:

Decision-making power is held by traditional decision makers (funders) in a collaborative space who establish the size of the portfolio and define a general focus of the fund; participants begin to inform the work immediately through consultation.

DESIGN PHASE:

Power is partially ceded to participants with some limits in place; participants hold influence and shape the plan for the next phase including the goal, eligibility criteria, geographic focus, and values of the fund.

GRANTMAKING PHASE:

Power is formally ceded to participants, who are responsible for making decisions about grants independently of funders.

IMPLEMENTATION & PRACTICES:

Responsibilities are shared among funders and participants.

Some participants noted that the extent to which power was able to shift systemically was limited by the scope of this initiative, since long-term work with significant resources would be required to shift power within the global philanthropy system. Significant power is also held by those who decide who is participating in each phase of work. By reaching out to many people during the early phases of this initiative, we were able to involve people with relevant expertise in making subsequent decisions about who was involved in each phase.

Recommended Practices

Expand participatory philanthropy practices to include participation in multiple phases of your work

Expand participatory philanthropy practices to include participation in multiple phases of your work beyond just making decisions about grants. Incorporate the process and the ethos of participation beyond your grantmaking.

Consider how participation or a lack of participation in each phase of your work will influence what happens in the next phase

Are you moving decision-making power to your stakeholders in meaningful ways? Are community participants benefiting from their participation? Are they compensated?

Conduct a power analysis

Conduct your power analysis accordingly so that you can be intentional about how much power each group of stakeholders holds during each phase and communicate this power analysis with participants so it's clear to them how much power they have in each phase.

7. Embrace Interconnectedness (Including Conflicts of Interest)



The Idea

Since one approach in participatory grantmaking is to get to the grassroots by working with people with the broadest and deepest ties in their communities, stakeholder groups tend to overlap. There may be little or no separation among the people and organizations designing the program, nominating grantees, and receiving the funds. As long as potential conflicts of interest are acknowledged and addressed, this interconnectedness is a strength of the process and not a flaw.

In our [Participatory Climate Initiative](#), some Grantmaking Group members deciding about grant funding were also participant partner-selectors, Design Team members setting the focus and criteria, grantee nominators, and/or grantees receiving funding. Many of the participants often shared ties among each other. We recognized that participants came from different backgrounds and had different ideas about what constitutes conflicts of interest and how to navigate them. Many may have dealt with conflicts as part of their movement work and had negative experiences. To mitigate these concerns, we sought to destigmatize the idea of conflicts and manage them by:

- **Providing participants with good information about conflicts early in the process**, explaining that conflicts were a normal and necessary part of doing participatory work, and that many strategies were available for addressing them.
- **Giving participants time to prepare to disclose their conflicts and hands-on support and guidance throughout the process**, including by providing a personalized set of recommendations to help them manage each conflict and consulting with them to make sure they were comfortable with the advice.
- **Offering transparency to the full group about the mitigation measures we applied for each potential or real conflict of interest.**

Recommended Practices

Encourage participants to participate in overlapping roles at different stages of your funding process

For example, invite participants who are part of a participatory design phase or who serve as nominators to join the group of decision makers. Proactively manage any potential conflicts of interest that might arise.

Seek out participants with lived expertise and extensive networks who are active in their communities

Consider these ties and connections assets rather than liabilities.

Early on in the process, provide all participants with good information about the nature of conflicts of interest and how to manage them with transparency

Work proactively with participants to manage conflicts of interest in ways that feel relevant to them. Have an organized process for managing conflicts that gives participants confidence and offer them ongoing support in this area throughout their engagement.

Do initial work to destigmatize the notion of conflicts of interest and increase the comfort of participants

Talk openly about the benefits of being connected to one's community, and how knowledge, experience, connection, and commitment is valuable in participatory processes, as proximity offers meaningful insights. At the same time, be mindful that some participants may have had negative experiences in the past, particularly if they have had to make decisions to support some — but not all — of their communities. Speak with participants privately about any potential conflicts and support them with appropriate mitigation strategies that maintain the integrity of the decision-making process.

8. Identify and Shift Administrative Risks and Burdens



The Idea

When working with frontline, grassroots, or any type of nonconventional nonprofit or community organization, funders should take extra care to identify potential pain points in financial transactions. Grantees might not have the staff time, adequate technology, or experience with typical foundation payment systems and practices, leading to delays, or, worse, misunderstandings that could negatively impact the funder-grantee relationship. Work proactively with grantees from the start to anticipate and resolve administrative issues, listen to their feedback, and show them that you are taking action to improve. Wherever you can, shift the administrative burden away from grantees and community participants.

Despite the best intentions among ourselves and our fiscal sponsor, the process of distributing grants and honoraria in our [Participatory Climate Initiative](#) did not go smoothly for every grantee and participant. Not everyone offered an honorarium chose to receive it, and at least one participant declined to receive one, deeming the process too burdensome because of the amount of paperwork required and the number of steps needed to receive the money, which included having to set up a login and password through an online portal.

In some cases, administrative hurdles caused significant delays in distributing funding. Getting money to organizations without 501(c)(3) tax status as expenditure responsibility grants was the most complicated. For those grantees that were not 501(c)(3) or equivalent, our fiscal sponsor required evidence of legal status, tax documentation, audited financial statements, and financial and narrative reports, as well as detailed budgets documenting how grant funds would be used for charitable purposes. While we did not otherwise have reporting requirements, groups receiving expenditure responsibility grants did have financial and narrative reporting requirements.

Recommended Practices

Conduct an impact risk analysis

Conduct an impact risk analysis (such as this one from [Spring Impact and Open Road Alliance](#)) to assess your organization's risk appetite. Then determine where your processes can and need to be more flexible, with the goal of shifting risk from grantees to your institution in the longer term.

Discuss, agree, and document general procedures and ways of working

Involve administrative staff with relevant expertise from the start of any initiative to clarify and, if needed, adjust administrative requirements during the planning stages of your project. Discuss, agree, and document general procedures and ways of working.

Ensure your organization is equipped to give out grants of the type that your program requires in the way that your program requires

For instance, do not plan to give out flexible general support funding if your current administrative systems do not allow you to do this. If you are not equipped, you will need to improve your systems, seek help, or adjust your plans accordingly.

Create a process for documenting administrative delays and hurdles when they occur

You can refer to these experiences when you are in the early stages of designing your next initiative and better predict where difficulties may occur and plan how to mitigate them.

Do your best to set realistic expectations for grantees about what documentation may be required and the timeline for receiving funding

Be conservative in your estimates and be communicative, transparent, and honest about any mistakes by the foundation.

9. See Beyond the 501(c)(3) Boundaries



The Idea

Partnering with communities around grantmaking will mean – and should mean – being open to funding organizations that are not 501(c)(3)s, including informal groups and collectives, individuals, community development corporations, small businesses, farms, LLCs, tribes with various types of state and federal recognition, and unrecognized tribes/communities. If you currently fund only 501(c)(3)s, examine how grantmaking may be influencing how communities are resourcing and structuring their work. Are they having to develop cumbersome and unnecessary tax and financial and reporting structures simply to secure resources? To make sure your grantmaking strategies are sustainable for and beneficial to communities in the long term, consider looking beyond 501(c)(3)s.

In our [Participatory Climate Initiative](#), as soon as we began to reach out to stakeholders, they urged us to design a program that would support both 501(c)(3)s and non-501(c)(3)s, and we quickly adopted the idea of including all kinds of organizations, including tribes, small businesses, and informal collectives. Reaching out to groups who were not registered as 501(c)(3)s, we encountered both enthusiasm and skepticism. While some were excited about the opportunity because funding for these structures is rare, at least one group shared that they had structured themselves as an LLC precisely to move out of potentially problematic and extractive dynamics between nonprofits and philanthropy and they were hesitant to engage. Distributing money to a variety of types of groups was challenging and in some cases imposed significant administrative burdens on grantees. We did our best to mitigate them.

While we had been open to funding individuals, the Design Team chose not to do so because of concerns around whether they could ensure that such grantees would have significant enough accountability to and buy-in from the communities they worked with. The team also observed that when philanthropy elevates and supports individuals within communities, it can be problematic and do more harm than good.

Recommended Practices

Develop administrative systems that will enable you to manage the risks associated with funding individuals, tribes, informal groups, and for-profit entities

Seek support and guidance – externally if needed – about what the risks actually are. Weigh these risks against the impact risk associated with not funding organizations that are doing excellent work with community support.

Consider the different needs that grantees with different structures might have as they engage in your grantmaking process

For example, consider how you can prepare to discuss your requirements for expenditure responsibility grants with small farmers before you embark on a plan to fund these groups.

When working with communities with limited experience with funders, don't assume shared language and understanding of financial and legal terminology

For instance, “expenditure responsibility” is not terminology most are familiar with. Be prepared to talk through options and trade-offs in lay language.

**Have questions about the toolkit?
Or want to learn more?**

Please reach out to Katy Love (katy@fundforsharedinsight.org), the toolkit's co-author with Winifred Olliff, both consultants with experience and expertise in participatory grantmaking.



[Contact Katy](#)

Resources for Funders Ready to Go

When you are ready to start planning your participatory work, go here for sample documents and templates, like budgets and a project outline.

- [Operating Budget Checklist](#)
- [Participatory Project Outline](#)
- [Sample Project Scope](#)
- [Project Roles](#)

Operating Budget Checklist

Each participatory philanthropy program is unique, but this checklist will give you a general idea of what to consider when planning your operating budget. Not all of these items are necessary for every participatory process, but it's important to secure adequate support for the things your organization will need to implement a participatory process. Many of these resources can be covered within your organization's existing structures and operating costs, so may not present as additional costs. Those costs particular to participatory philanthropy have an asterisk (*) next to them.

What to consider when planning your operating budget:

Staffing and management

- ✓ Staff resources or consultant fees for planning, design, project management
- ✓ Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion consultants or staff expertise in this area
- ✓ Legal and/or HR consultants/staff to provide support and help manage risks
- ✓ Finance/Operations consultants/staff (software tools, travel, payments, etc.)
- ✓ Fundraising consultants/staff (raising funds, reporting to donors, etc.)
- ✓ Designers and/or video editors for materials produced
- ✓ Professional translation and/or interpretation
- ✓ Communications resources (especially for reaching larger audiences)
- ✓ Evaluation consultants/staff or an external evaluation firm

Participation

- ✓ Coaching for staff (e.g., on decision-making approaches and tools, facilitation)*
- ✓ Accessibility costs and support (e.g., meeting accommodations or providing equipment or internet to participate)
- ✓ Trainings for participants (e.g., philanthropy, decision making, addressing bias)*
- ✓ Honoraria/payments for stakeholders (consultation phase)*
- ✓ Honoraria/payments for participants (designers or decision makers)*
- ✓ Care packages/support for participants (sickness, hardship, etc.) or gifts for participants*

Meeting and convenings

- ✓ Professional facilitators (for meetings/convenings and asynchronous participation)*
- ✓ Celebration expenses (branded merchandise, convenings, gifts, etc.) Travel, food, accommodation and care expenses (for in-person and hybrid gatherings)
- ✓ Meeting expenses for in-person gatherings (venue, activities, equipment, insurance, etc.)*
- ✓ Hybrid meeting support and additional equipment rental fees (for hybrid gatherings)
- ✓ Graphic recorder (for in-person or virtual gatherings)
- ✓ Communications resources (especially for reaching larger audiences)

Participatory Project Outline

While we do not expect that funders will replicate the approach we took for our [Participatory Climate Initiative](#) in full, this outline can help you incorporate participation into your organization and different phases of the philanthropic cycle.



Sample Project Scope

Shared Insight developed this Project Scope for our [Participatory Climate Initiative](#). Below are the initiative's learning goals, requirements, and recommendations – defined by the funders and passed along to our Design Team. Consider what are the required parameters of your funding before opening up decision making to those outside of the foundation.

Learning Goals

The project, focused on climate change, will support funders to deepen their practices in these two areas:

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.

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.

Requirements for the project

Requirements are firm decisions that are made by Shared Insight's Advocacy/Policy Change Committee before the participatory design phase. The participatory design team must abide by these requirements.

Grants will fund work in the broad area of climate change policy.

Grants will fund work that involves people in policy decisions that impact them.

The grantmaking process and the design phase will be participatory.

The participatory design team will integrate equity/diversity/inclusion lenses from the beginning of the design phase, and be explicit about including the voices of people most impacted and least heard.

No climate deniers will be involved with the participatory design phase.

Grants will fund work happening only in the U.S. (inclusive of all 50 states, territories, and Washington D.C.). (Note: We are discussing language that will also be inclusive of tribal nations and Native communities that may not be adequately included in this definition.)

Requirements around grantmaking will be defined by our fiscal sponsor. Shared Insight will not add additional requirements that narrow the parameters set by our fiscal sponsor.

Recommendations to design team about the project

Recommendations will be considered by the design team, but they are not requirements. Shared Insight's Advocacy/Policy Change Committee will accept the decision of the design team in these areas, even if they diverge from recommendations.

Design for learning. For example, a focus on a specific geographic area may enable us to more effectively trace results and learn from them.

Consider integrating this work with decision-making tables that already exist and could benefit from more community involvement with policy decisions.

Align the geographic or thematic focus with work that Shared Insight members are already involved in to encourage interest in the results among funder institutions.

Avoid the use of terms like "climate justice" in favor of a "big tent" approach that adopts inclusive language that will not alienate stakeholders.

Consider focusing grants exclusively on Native or Indigenous communities, and take into account the historic exclusion of Native or Indigenous people from advocacy and philanthropy.

Project Roles

While we don't anticipate that all elements of our approach would be fully adopted by another funder, below are the roles, phases of involvement, and engagement levels of our initiative that can help you think about yours.

- **Very light engagement:** less than an average of 2 hours/month during the active phases identified
- **Light engagement:** less than an average of 3 hours/week during the active phases identified
- **Medium engagement:** less than an average of 15 hours/week during the active phases identified
- **Significant engagement:** more than an average of 15 hours/week during the active phases identified

Fundors			
ROLE	DESCRIPTION	PHASE INVOLVED	ENGAGEMENT
Funders	Contributed to the initiative budget and overall governance of the donor collaborative that housed the initiative; reviewed and approved plans and budgets and each phase of the initiative; participated in learning activities related to the initiative several times throughout the year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Design • Grantmaking • Implementation & Learning 	Very light
Committee Members	Funders who sat on Shared Insight's Advocacy/Policy Committee that initiated this work; played an active role during the planning phase; participated in learning activities related to the initiative about every other month; responsible for bringing learning back to their home organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Design • Grantmaking • Implementation & Learning 	Very light
Committee Co-Chairs	Members of Shared Insight's Advocacy/Policy Committee who were more active and involved with planning this work; met regularly with the project sponsor and project managers throughout the initiative to offer feedback and guidance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Design • Grantmaking • Implementation & Learning 	Light
Funder Representatives	One funder representative joined the Design Team as liaison with Shared Insight's funder committee; two funder representatives joined the Grantmaking Group. The funder representatives participated as observers and were charged with bringing their observations and learning back to the funder committee and beyond.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Design • Grantmaking 	Medium
Project managers and support and support team			
ROLE	DESCRIPTION	PHASE INVOLVED	ENGAGEMENT
Project Sponsor	The managing director of Fund for Shared Insight was responsible for hiring the Consultants and supervising the project under the direction of the Advocacy/Policy Committee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Design • Grantmaking • Implementation & Learning 	Medium
Support Team	Support from Fund for Shared Insight and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors' team of staff and contractors included grants administration, disbursing payments, communications, design, equity/diversity/inclusion support, logistics, and more.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Design • Grantmaking • Implementation & Learning 	Medium
Facilitators & project managers	The project managers planned and implemented each phase of the initiative under the direction of the project sponsor. Consultants with expertise in participatory philanthropy and group work served as facilitators and project managers. They were responsible for supporting the Design Team, Grantmaking Group, and Learning Community meetings and asynchronous collaboration. (These roles could be separated.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Design • Grantmaking • Implementation & Learning 	Significant

(continued on next page)

Project Roles *(continued)*

- **Very light engagement:** less than an average of 2 hours/month during the active phases identified
- **Light engagement:** less than an average of 3 hours/week during the active phases identified
- **Medium engagement:** less than an average of 15 hours/week during the active phases identified
- **Significant engagement:** more than an average of 15 hours/week during the active phases identified

Community members			
ROLE	DESCRIPTION	PHASE INVOLVED	ENGAGEMENT
Stakeholders Consulted	Stakeholders participated in 30-to-60-minute phone/video calls during the Planning and Design Phases. Stakeholders had experience with issues on climate and environment, philanthropic funding flows locally, and community leadership efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Design 	Very light
Partner Selectors	12 partner organizations deeply embedded in regional work at the intersection of climate/environment and advocacy/policy were invited to select someone from their community to join the Design Team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design 	Light
Design Team Members	12 Design Team members with strong connections to their region and climate/environment issues considered key design questions and created a purpose statement for the fund; 11 members continued their engagement during the Grantmaking Phase; several joined the Grantmaking Group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design • Grantmaking 	Medium
Nominators	Stakeholders with specific expertise were invited to nominate groups for funding that met the criteria created by the Design Team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grantmaking 	Very light
Grantmaking Group members	14 Grantmaking Group members (seven from each region) made decisions about how \$1 million would be distributed in each region; they also communicated funding decisions; some joined the Learning Community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grantmaking • Implementation & Learning 	Medium
Grantees	35 groups/organizations participated in the application process and received grants; some joined the Learning Community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grantmaking • Implementation & Learning 	Light
Learning Community	Mix of Design Team, Grantmaking Group members, and funders who are interested in exploring the productive tensions in philanthropy; convened once a quarter or so to discuss these issues with an optional in-person gathering.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning 	Light

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