

## Resources for Funders Ready to Go

Sample templates (e.g., budgets and project outlines), practical tips, and other resources for when you are ready to start your participatory work



Operating Budget Checklist



Participatory Project Outline



Sample Project Scope



Project Roles



Participatory Compensation



Conflicts of Interest



Participatory Learning and Evaluation

## 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

Funders			
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"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Design</li> <li>• Grantmaking</li> <li>• Implementation &amp; Learning</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Design</li> <li>• Grantmaking</li> <li>• Implementation &amp; Learning</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Design</li> <li>• Grantmaking</li> <li>• Implementation &amp; Learning</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Design</li> <li>• Grantmaking</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Design</li> <li>• Grantmaking</li> <li>• Implementation &amp; Learning</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Design</li> <li>• Grantmaking</li> <li>• Implementation &amp; Learning</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Design</li> <li>• Grantmaking</li> <li>• Implementation &amp; Learning</li> </ul>	Significant

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## Project Roles *(continued)*

- **Very light engagement:** less than an average of 2 hours/month during the active phases identified
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- **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"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Design</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• Design</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• Design</li> <li>• Grantmaking</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• Grantmaking</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• Grantmaking</li> <li>• Implementation &amp; Learning</li> </ul>	Medium
Grantees	35 groups/organizations participated in the application process and received grants; some joined the Learning Community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grantmaking</li> <li>• Implementation &amp; Learning</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• Learning</li> </ul>	Light

# Participant Compensation



Compensating participants fairly and generously for their time and lived experience should be standard practice. Below are resources to help you handle common issues, identify good practices, consider the appropriate financial and legal issues, and reflect on the tangible and non-tangible benefits of compensation.

## A note on paying participants from authors Katy Love and Winifred Olliff

When we began our work as participatory philanthropy practitioners 15 years ago, it was rare for funders to pay participants for their contributions to participatory processes. We are encouraged that over the past several years, as more funders begin to center equity in their work, their practices around compensation have changed and grown. And as the sector continues to embrace participatory approaches that include people impacted by the work of philanthropy, we would like to see equitable compensation for participants become the norm.

Compensating participants equitably benefits not only participants, but also funders. It may help funders live up to their equity and inclusion principles. Because it reduces barriers and increases incentives for participants, funders have better opportunities to attract a range of qualified participants. For these reasons and more, funders should not see compensation as an extra expense, but as a productive part of the decision-making mechanism that moves resources to the people and communities at the heart of their work.

We believe that monetary compensation is necessary in most cases, but is insufficient on its own. Funders' participatory practices should be designed to offer other tangible and intangible benefits, as well. We suggest funders consider "[radical hospitality](#)" to create inclusive, accessible, and welcoming environments. We also recommend funders consider a range of alternatives to cash payments, such as gift cards and reimbursement for education expenses. Whatever funders choose, we suggest they make sure to understand their time and money commitments upfront, reviewing this new tool and taking advantage of other resources, such as the Participatory Philanthropy Toolkit's "[operating budget checklist](#)."

In this resource, we focus on the practical aspects of compensating participants. We start with tips to handle some of the trickier issues that might arise, then we offer checklists of good practices; summarize different legal frameworks for offering compensation; and provide ideas for alternatives to cash payments and what kinds of intangible benefits participants might also experience.

### Paying Participants: Compensation in Participatory Philanthropy



[Go to this blog post at Insights for Change](#)

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# Participant Compensation *(continued)*

## Paying Participants: Tips for Funders



### Calculating compensation

A fixed stipend may not amount to a sufficient hourly wage once you count the full amount of time participants work. Instead, take the hourly rate you typically pay an expert consultant for similar work, multiply that rate by a realistic estimate of the number of hours you expect a participant to spend on the process, and plan to pay that amount.

Think of compensation as a necessary cost of good grantmaking. Funders likely wouldn't launch a grantmaking program without a budget that covers staff costs. Similarly, don't launch participatory processes without a budget that would cover the cost of compensating participants.



### Identifying an appropriate compensation plan

Be sure participants understand that most forms of compensation should be reported as taxable income, and encourage them to assess how it could affect their eligibility for any public benefits. Consult with them about adjusting the timing of payments or amounts to fit their circumstances. Offer these options upfront so participants don't need to request alternatives.



### Reducing steps to receive compensation

Funders often have cumbersome payment processes that require recipients to create accounts with usernames and passwords and submit extensive personal information. Participants may find the systems unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or overwhelming, and, if a payment is to be relatively small, they might even choose not to pursue payment. These administrative hassles are not only a practical burden, but they can also further entrench harmful power dynamics among funders and their participants.

Work with your administrative team to understand exactly what participants will need to do in order to receive compensation. Walk through the process yourself, if possible. If there are steps you can remove or take on yourself to reduce the burden for participants, do so. Consider providing additional compensation to cover participants' time spent on administration. Also, share information about how to receive payments with participants at the time you reach an agreement with them and not after the work has been completed.

## Other thoughtful takes and resources around participant compensation

By Urban Institute

**Equitable Compensation for  
Community Engagement  
Guidebook**

Georgia Booth's

**10 Thoughts About  
Compensating Girls &  
Youth Activists**

By LeapAmbassadors'

**How Foundations Can  
Compensate Stakeholders**

and Melinda Tuan's

**Shared Insight's approach**

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# Participant Compensation *(continued)*

## Good Practices for Compensating Participants

### Determining appropriate compensation

- ✓ Develop an accurate estimate of the time and effort required of each participant
- ✓ Use what you pay an expert consultant doing similar work as a benchmark
- ✓ Monitor the time and effort participants are spending and make adjustments if needed
- ✓ Be aware of power dynamics; participants are likely not to feel empowered to negotiate
- ✓ Err on the side of providing too much compensation rather than too little

### For paying participants

- ✓ Provide participants with options for how they can be paid and when
- ✓ Offer information about how and when payments will be administered in advance
- ✓ Avoid unnecessarily burdensome administrative practices, especially for small payments
- ✓ If the process to receive payment is time-consuming, compensate participants for the additional time
- ✓ Offer alternative forms of compensation (see examples below) up front, in case participants deem the cash payment process too burdensome

### For communicating with participants

- ✓ Recognize that conversations about compensation may be uncomfortable for some
- ✓ Do not set false expectations for future payments
- ✓ Provide as much information as you can in advance about how your process will work
- ✓ Commit to making timely payments and keeping participants informed
- ✓ Make the purpose of the compensation and your expectations clear in writing
- ✓ Notify participants whenever they will need to report compensation as income

### Determining who should be paid

- ✓ Offer to compensate individuals or organizations based on their preference
- ✓ Compensate participants who spend time on your work
- ✓ Compensate participants who are offering their expertise
- ✓ Consider any legal restrictions, such as your conflict of interest policy

### For monitoring

- ✓ Trust that participants are doing their part
- ✓ Avoid making compensation contingent on meeting certain milestones
- ✓ Observe the time and effort of participants and increase compensation if needed
- ✓ Request feedback from participants about how compensation works for them

### For budgeting

- ✓ Fully secure the funding before you contact any participants
- ✓ Recognize that compensation is a necessary cost of doing business, not an extra
- ✓ Recognize that compensation is yet another tool for supporting communities and achieving your mission

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## Participant Compensation *(continued)*

### Frameworks for Compensation

This table is specific to funders funding from the U.S. Other countries may have different options for compensation. This table is intended as a general information tool. Always seek professional legal and financial advice when evaluating these options for your specific circumstances.

Frameworks for Compensation				
	Honorarium	Stipend	Grant	Contract
Frequency	One-time	Recurring	One-time or multiple disbursements	One-time or multiple disbursements
Purpose	Recognition of one's general contribution	Expenses and training (not work performed)	Public benefit	Payment for work performed
Restriction	Often capped by organizations at \$599 due to IRS requirements to file a 1099	Few restrictions but not provided by many nonprofit organizations	Subject to many complex and eligibility requirements (covered in IRC Section 4945)	Flexible but requires legal supervision and is often subject to internal processes
Recipients	Individuals, companies, 501(c)s	Individuals only	Often 501(c)s but may be offered to individuals and companies with certain restrictions	Individuals, companies, 501(c)s
Taxable for the recipient?	Taxable income for the recipient (even if under \$600)	Usually taxable income for the recipient	Varies depending on the status of the recipient	Taxable income for the recipient
Requires a written agreement?	Does not require a written agreement	Does not require a written agreement	Type of contract (generally requires a written agreement by definition)	Generally requires a written agreement by definition

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# Participant Compensation *(continued)*

## Beyond Monetary Compensation

We are sure that these lists of benefits are not exhaustive! If you've used other creative ways to compensate participants, we'd love to hear from you.

Please also note that some of the tangible benefits included here may be considered "cash equivalent items" by the IRS (such as gift cards) and must be reported to the IRS as taxable income. Make sure that participants are adequately informed of this, and that all parties seek the professional legal and financial advice needed.

### Tangible benefits to offer participants in addition to cash payments

Note: Some of these items could be "cash equivalent items"

- ✓ Providing gift cards
- ✓ Paying for educational expenses
- ✓ Paying for or providing training
- ✓ Providing technology equipment
- ✓ Providing access to software that participants can continue to use
- ✓ Providing quality internet access
- ✓ Paying for dependent care
- ✓ Providing quality food, refreshments, and accommodations
- ✓ Funding travel or networking opportunities that benefit participants directly

### Benefits, beyond monetary compensation or other tangible benefits, that participants might experience

- ✓ Having an impact on a cause they care about or on their communities
- ✓ Feeling of service to their communities or a cause they care about
- ✓ Feeling more connected to others
- ✓ Building relationships and connecting with other participants or funders
- ✓ Expanding and strengthening their networks
- ✓ Building new skills and strengthening existing skills
- ✓ Enhancing their profile or building their reputation
- ✓ Learning something new
- ✓ Gaining inspiration from the work of others
- ✓ Receiving recognition for their work and feeling a sense of accomplishment

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

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



[Contact Katy](#)

# Conflicts of Interest



Almost by definition, participatory processes are about relationships and interconnectedness. To preserve the benefits of those connections while avoiding conflicts of interest or the appearance of such conflicts, funders must take steps to manage and destigmatize the risks.

## Definitions

Conflicts can occur when participants in decision making have a personal, financial, or professional interest that could, consciously or unconsciously, influence their judgment or actions.

This could lead to participants making unfair decisions, and could also have legal consequences. Even if decisions are considered fair and in the best interests of the program overall – not just the potentially conflicted participants – situations involving conflicts could place emotional strain on participants, strain their relationships, or damage the reputation of the program or participants.

**Conflicts of interest:** Participants themselves or a family member could benefit directly from a funding decision. Participants might be incentivized to make decisions that are in their own best interests rather than in the interests of the program they are working on.

**Conflicts of loyalty:** While a participant might not benefit directly from a decision, a group they are affiliated with could benefit. Participants might be motivated to make decisions in the best interests of that group rather than the program they are working on.

**Perceived conflicts:** There is not actually a conflict of interest, but someone might perceive that there is a conflict. Decisions are unlikely to be affected, but a perceived conflict could still damage reputations and relationships, and challenge the integrity of the whole process.

## Case Study: Steps taken by Shared Insight's Participatory Climate Initiative

### Policy and process 📋

We developed a policy to define conflicts of interest and outline how to handle them appropriately. If your organization does not already have a policy in place governing conflicts of interest, make sure to draft one in partnership with your legal and compliance team. It is important to ensure that your policy is compliant with any local laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest as well as your organization's internal policies.

### Disclosures and action plans 📝

We asked participants to report any potential conflicts of interest, disclosures we collected from each participant through a form. We recorded each reported potential conflict and created an action plan for each participant, which we reviewed together with that participant. Through one-on-one discussions, we ensured that each participant understood the action plan and what was required of them. In some cases, we needed to inform the full group about how we planned to manage certain conflicts, but we never did so without discussing this with each participant first to ensure their confidentiality was respected. Keep in mind that some conflicts may be sensitive for participants, which is one reason why in-depth one-on-one work with participants is necessary to understand their needs.

### Training and communication 🗣️

We took a careful approach to training, including training toward the very beginning of each decision-making process. Training ensured participants were on the same page and began to destigmatize the issue for participants. Rather than make participants feel they needed to avoid conflicts of interest, we reminded them that conflicts of interest are inevitable in this context of interconnectedness. The important thing was to disclose any potential conflicts of interest and take appropriate steps to manage them with the support of the facilitators. Training also prepared us for the one-on-one discussions and work with each participant that followed.

### Implementation 🔄

Throughout the group decision-making process, we ensured that access to materials and discussions was controlled as outlined by each action plan. That meant, for example, a participant who disclosed a potential conflict of interest involving an organization seeking funding would not have access to the materials related to that potential grant. Along with limiting document sharing, we were also prepared to moderate group discussions to ensure that action plans were followed.

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## Conflicts of Interest *(continued)*

### Sample Scenarios

Keep in mind that action plans may vary significantly depending on your organization's structure, legal and regulatory obligations, and internal policies, as well as the needs of participants.

#### Scenario 1

##### Potential Conflict:

A participant who is a member of the grantmaking group making decisions about grant funding also serves as a member on any kind of governing body of a grant applicant.

##### Action Plan:

This participant should not have access to any information, analysis, or discussion pertaining to that applicant. The participant will recuse themselves from any decisions, and a note describing this recusal can be included in the written decision at the participant's request.

#### Scenario 2

##### Potential Conflict:

A participant who is on the grantmaking group that makes decisions about grants happens to live and work in the same community as an applicant and knows many of the people involved in the project very well.

##### Action Plan:

This participant is not required to recuse themselves from any decisions, but they have requested to do so in order to avoid any appearance of a conflict in their community. They may have access to information and analysis, and may participate in discussions to provide the rest of the group with information or context about this grantee.

### Practical Tips

- ✓ Plan well in advance and get started with training and communication right away.
- ✓ Ensure you have the expertise to understand disclosures and recommend actions, or seek support.
- ✓ Create space for difficult feelings that participants may have about conflicts.
- ✓ Ensure participants can disclose conflicts at any time during your process, not just at the beginning.
- ✓ Be aware of technology needs and procedures for limiting access to materials to ensure the right people have access to the right materials.
- ✓ Remember that active moderation may be required to ensure compliance.

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## Conflicts of Interest *(continued)*

### Reflection Questions

Use these questions to advance conversations about destigmatizing conflicts of interest within your funder organization:

Q.

How relevant are your organization's existing policies around conflicts of interest to participants?

Q.

What is your own attitude toward conflicts of interest and what is your organization's attitude? How might this influence your work with participants?

Q.


Is concern about conflicts of interest creating barriers to doing more participatory work? Why or why not?

Q.

Where do you see opportunities to reframe and destigmatize conversations about conflicts of interest in your work?

For further discussion on this topic, see a related post at Insights for Change.

**Conflicts of Interest in Participatory Grantmaking: Addressing, Destigmatizing, and Embracing Interconnectedness**



Conflicts of Interest in  
Participatory Grantmaking

### How We Did It:

#### Shared Insight's Participatory Climate Initiative

Our participatory grantmaking initiative was created to involve people impacted by climate change in the funding and policy decisions that affect them. The Participatory Philanthropy Toolkit is based on the first-hand experiences of the funders, consultants, and community members who were involved in our Participatory Climate Initiative, a one-time program to explore participatory practices in grantmaking. The 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.

[See Case Study](#)

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

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[Contact Katy](#)

# Participatory Learning and Evaluation Planning



Participatory learning and evaluation is relatively rare in philanthropy, even by funders practicing participatory grantmaking, but it is an important part of the philanthropy process that offers significant opportunities for funder organizations to shift power to the communities they serve. (For further discussion on this topic, see a [related post at Insights for Change](#).)

Participatory learning and evaluation is an approach that involves the people who are impacted by the work in the learning and evaluation process. It shifts some of the power held by external or staff evaluators to the people who are closest to the work. Participatory approaches in philanthropy, including participatory evaluation, center the leadership, wisdom, and voices of communities. They shift power from philanthropy's traditional power centers to the people directly affected by the work.

## We have identified three core principles of participatory evaluation:

- 1 Learning and evaluation is a two-way street that benefits everyone involved
- 2 People closest to the issues are the experts of their experiences
- 3 People closest to the issues should be able to participate in learning and evaluation

## Key Recommendations for Participatory Learning and Evaluation Planning

### Conduct a Power Analysis

As you embark upon your participatory evaluation journey, take some time to understand learning and evaluation as a power center in your organization and where you have opportunities to shift power to participants.



### Key questions for evaluators to explore:

Q.

What power do either internal or external evaluators hold in your organization right now?

Q.

What would it look like if more power was shared with communities closest to the work in the learning and evaluation process?

Q.

Where in the learning and evaluation process are there opportunities to shift power to communities immediately?

Q.

How can the learning and evaluation process change to open up more opportunities to shift power?

## Key Recommendations *(continued)*

### Start Somewhere

Start with what is possible for your organization, and be clear and upfront about what aspects of your learning and evaluation process are participatory or not participatory.



### There are many approaches

Launching a participatory evaluation for the first time may be overwhelming. Remember that participation may be understood on a spectrum and that participatory evaluation is not an all-or-nothing proposition. There are many ways, large and small, that you can make learning and evaluation at your organization more participatory. It is not necessary (or even helpful in most cases) for you to implement every participatory approach at the same time. Perhaps you are not ready to cede power over the entire evaluation process to participants, but it is possible to involve them in deciding what is measured or in interpreting data collected or in creating your final evaluation report.

### Defining the scope of the evaluation

One question that funders frequently ask when defining the scope of their participatory evaluation is, “Should participants come from the grantees we work with or the people those groups serve?” Our answer is, “Either or both, depending on your context.” Including grantees and their beneficiaries in the same group may be complex, but also may have additional benefits for participants. Depending on your goals and your existing relationships, it may be more realistic to start by working directly with your grantees and work on expanding your group of participants at a later time.

### Shift from Evaluation for Accountability to Evaluation for Learning

When making a shift toward participatory learning and evaluation, we also recommend that you shift from an evaluation mindset to a learning mindset. This is because a learning mindset emphasizes benefits for everyone involved in the learning process. An evaluation mindset may imply that the evaluators involved bring an objective perspective, but learning emphasizes working together for the benefit of all. Evaluations also typically turn the lens on the grantee and not the foundation – but consider how and where grantees or others can give feedback on their experience with your foundation.





## Key Recommendations *(continued)*

### Redefine Expertise

#### Consider the expertise of those closest to the issues as just as valuable

Across philanthropy, but especially in fields like health, science, and climate solutions, a certain type of expertise is given more weight in both decision making and evaluation. Over the years, this has meant that people with credentials like PhDs, MDs, or JDs, have made decisions for the people most impacted by the issues, often without consulting the people affected or without appropriately valuing non-academic expertise. While the rigorous knowledge people with academic credentials have is certainly valuable in many contexts, participatory learning and evaluation recognizes that it is not the only type of knowledge or expertise that should be valued.



#### A significant mindset shift, not only from funders, but from community members is required

Consider the expertise of those closest to the issues as just as valuable, or in some cases more valuable, than traditionally held forms of academic expertise. This approach can be challenging because it requires a significant mindset shift, not only from funders, but from community members themselves, who may often undervalue their own expertise. Participatory evaluation explicitly acknowledges this power dynamic and prioritizes integrating the most relevant types of expertise to the work that is being done.

We recommend that you, as a funder, continue to interrogate the ways you value expertise throughout the learning and evaluation process, and make explicit efforts to center the expertise held by people affected by the work you are funding.

### Adapt as You Go

Participatory learning and evaluation can be challenging to plan, since the way participants engage and what they recommend is beyond your control.

#### Tips for effectively planning for participatory learning and evaluation

1. Budget and plan for your participatory evaluation from the very start of your project, at the same time that you secure resources for the rest of your project.
2. Be as clear as possible with participants about what power they do or do not have to change things, such as the evaluation process and timeline.
3. Consider a concurrent evaluation approach, conducting evaluations while the work is underway. This approach may allow for more opportunities to course correct and adjust resources throughout your evaluation.
4. Reduce pressure to complete your evaluation by a certain date by communicating with senior leadership and other key stakeholders about the need for flexibility in your evaluation timeline.

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

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



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