

Participatory Grantmaking: A Guide for Funders

Helping funders shift power and collaborate with communities

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What is Participatory Grantmaking and Why?

Participatory Grantmaking is an approach to funding that:

- Shifts decision-making power to communities with lived experience
- Challenges traditional funding models
- Focuses on creating a more equitable and inclusive grantmaking landscape
- Offers a range of process and tools that funders can use

Benefits of Participatory Grantmaking include:

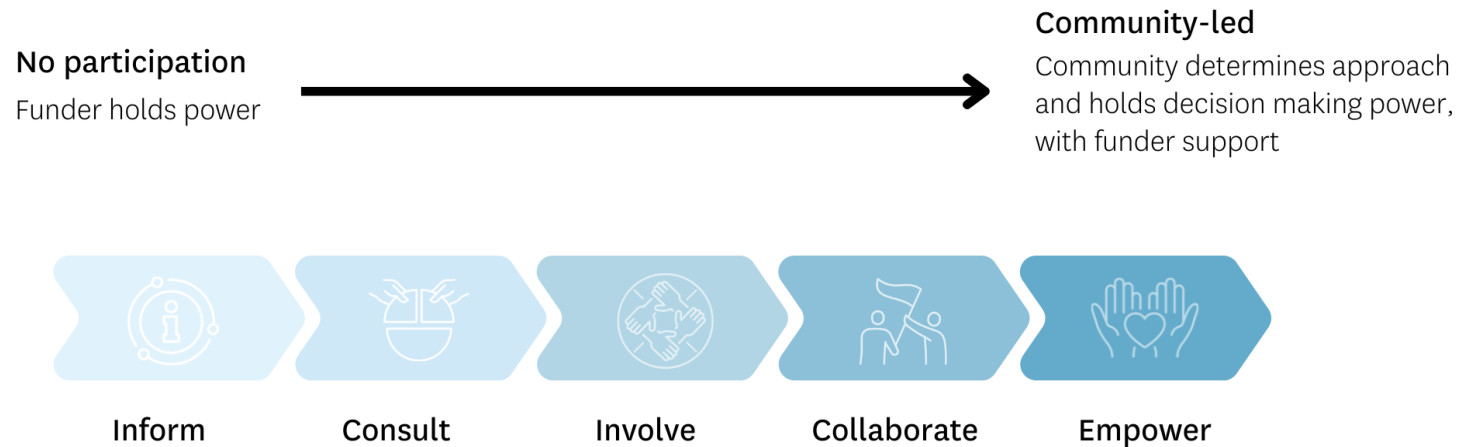
- Inclusive: Reflects local knowledge and lived experience
- Transparent: Open processes and clear criteria
- Collaborative: Builds trust with communities and stakeholders
- Empowering: Strengthens community capacity
- Values-based: Grounded in respect, trust, and adaptability

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A Spectrum of Participatory Grantmaking Approaches

- Participatory grantmaking exists on a continuum, from funder-led models to community-led approaches – with levels of community participation increasing across the continuum.
- Funders can blend approaches to create hybrid models that increase community influence and retain some funder oversight






Spectrum of community participation



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Participatory grantmaking continuum

The table shows different levels of participation and decision-making, ranging from funder-led approaches to fully community-led initiatives. It includes examples that show how participatory grant-making principles can be implemented, which may involve a selection of actions across the spectrum depending on the context and level of risk tolerance.

Level of participation	Inform 	Consult 	Involve 	Collaborate 	Empower 
Decision-making roles	The funder sets priorities and decides where and to whom funding will be allocated.	Funder seeks feedback but input is not binding. Final decisions remain with the funder.	Funder engages the community to help shape funding criteria, policies and programme design.	Fund design and decision making by communities with final sign off by funder.	Community leads and holds full decision-making power. The funder acts as a resource.
This might look like	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional top-down approach, with limited engagement. Funding decisions made without community input, with community informed of the outcome after the fact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sector experts are engaged to work with the funder and inform funding decisions. Community surveys, focus groups, or lived experience advisory boards provide recommendations, but funders retain decision-making authority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community representatives join funding panels or help define funding priorities. Community may be consulted on funding priorities or design. This might include mapping local strengths and needs to inform decisions. Community representatives design and implement marketing and promotion of the fund, using language and approaches that reach their audience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-led funding panels where community representatives make decisions and/or recommendations. Community representatives review and shortlist applications before final funder approval. A funder hands funding over to another funder who is closer to the community to distribute. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-led grant-making, where people with lived experience set priorities, design processes, and make funding decisions using approaches such as voting and lived experience panels. Funded community intermediaries where funders provide a grant to community-led groups, which then distribute funds. Funders provide capital and may offer additional support, such as capacity building or technical assistance.

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Is Your Organisation Ready?

Is your Board:

- Willing to share power and comfortable with uncertainty and change?
- Ready, and has capacity and resources to invest?
- Recognising that community with lived experience should have greater control over decisions that impact them?

Are your management and staff:

- Committed to working in partnership with communities and ready to listen, take on feedback and adjust?
- Ready to be adaptable and adopt a learning mindset?
- Will to accommodate shifting timeframes and work in a collaborative and iterative way with communities and co-funders?
- Ready to invest in building internal capacity for participatory grantmaking?

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Key Questions to Get Started

- Do our values align with a participatory grantmaking approach?
- What's our purpose and reason for investing in participation and consulting with communities?
- What strategies will we use to reach and engage with a community?
- What's our rationale for partnering with other funders or agencies?
- What resources do we have available to commit to the process?

Resourcing Participatory Grantmaking

In addition to the fund to be dispersed to grantees, an operating budget needs to be allocated to cover things like:

- Paying panellists or community members in recognition of their knowledge and experience (including time contributed, milage, food, etc).
- A fee for a community partner if they are engaged to support panellists to deliver the fund.
- Modifications to funding portals to make it easy for panellists to access, particularly when reviewing applications.
- Additional staff time to:
 - recruit, train, and support panellists
 - be responsive and available to engage with community members.