

An abstract painting with a dark, textured background. The composition is dominated by deep blue and black tones, with vibrant streaks and patches of orange and red. The brushstrokes are thick and expressive, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is one of intense energy and complexity.

Governance Analysis:

How 10 participatory grantmaking initiatives and funder collaboratives work

Heather Wooten
Samantha Graff
Christine Fry

Onside Partners

www.OnsidePartners.org



Introduction

Governance structures codify the rules, norms, and relationships around decision-making for organizations and groups. For participatory grantmaking initiatives, where an intent is to disrupt traditional power dynamics that exist between funders and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by expanding the circle of people who have the power to make decisions, governance design provides an opportunity to operationalize egalitarian values.

Governance fills the space between an aspiration—to make social change, to be inclusive—and exactly how that happens in practice. An analysis of governance structures can reveal useful insights into how a variety of grantmaking initiatives grapple with power, participation, representation, and other important issues.

This report summarizes research and analysis on the governance structures of 10 initiatives organized as participatory grantmaking endeavors, funder collaboratives, or a blend of both. Many excellent resources exist to inform those interested in adopting a more participatory, collaborative approach to grantmaking, notably GrantCraft’s content series.¹ The intent in publishing this analysis is to add to the body of participatory grantmaking governance literature, and in particular, to highlight how design decisions regarding the nuts and bolts of governance provide meaningful pathways to put values into practice.

This report is organized into the following sections:

- [Introduction: Overview of the project, its featured initiatives, and selection criteria](#)
- [Insights: What we learned about governance looking across all 10 initiatives](#)
- [Analysis of governance characteristics: A deeper dive into the roles of governance members and wider communities, as well as initiative administration and grantmaking](#)
- [References and sources](#)

Defining Terms²

Participatory Grantmaking: A form of grantmaking that shifts decision-making power about strategy, criteria, and funding either partially or entirely to non-donors who represent the field that donors aim to serve.

Funder Collaborative: A group of funders that pools expertise, resources, and decision-making power in a collective effort to achieve a shared long-term, systems-level vision.

Selected grantmaking initiatives

For this analysis, we selected 10 grantmaking initiatives using the following criteria:

- Representative structure:** While some participatory grantmaking initiatives make decisions through voting by the public or a large community of members, the selected initiatives generally rested decision-making with smaller bodies of representatives.
- Focus on field building:** Initiatives that fit this criterion aimed to connect stakeholders, strengthen networks and relationships, and build alignment around shared priorities.
- Brings together funders and NGOs:** Initiatives that include both funders and activist/NGOs in governance groups make up the bulk of the selected initiatives.
- Governance members have expertise and/or a professional stake in the work:** As opposed to recruiting from the general public, selected initiatives' members have – through professional or lived experience – a tangible stake in the respective initiative's purpose and aims.
- Focus on social justice or equity:** Many of the selected initiatives include, through their mission and grantmaking, a primary goal of addressing historic and ongoing inequities in access to resources and opportunities that are rooted in racism, colonialism, sexism, and ableism.

Initiative	Brief description	Grantmaking approach
100Kin10	A cross-sector collaborative aimed at addressing STEM teacher shortages	Funder collaborative
Building Equity and Alignment for Impact (BEA)	An initiative bringing together grassroots environmental justice organizations to support shared infrastructure	Both
CPER	A national funders collaborative focused on grassroots-driven education reform efforts	Funder collaborative
Disability Rights Fund	A grantmaking collaborative that supports persons with disabilities around the world to build diverse movements, ensure inclusive development agendas, and achieve equal rights and opportunity for all	Both
FundAction	A participatory fund making grants for social transformation, organized around a community of activists based in Europe	Both
Global Greengrants Fund	An initiative that makes grants to grassroots efforts around the world in support of environmental justice, human rights, and sustainability	Participatory grantmaker
RE-AMP	An initiative to build connections and capacity around a shared goal of clean energy in the Midwest	Both
Red Umbrella Fund	A global fund that makes grants to sex worker-led groups, organizations, and networks	Both
RSF Social Finance	A nonprofit with a mission to create financial relationships that are direct, transparent, personal, and focused on long-term social, economic, and ecological benefit	Participatory grantmaker
Social Equity Collaborative Fund (SECF)	An initiative to fund organizations in San Diego led by people of color and serving people of color	Both

Insights

Our research yielded a few overarching insights that cut across individual aspects of governance design.

Governance is an exercise in managing polarities

Any participatory grantmaking initiative must manage “polarities,” which are tensions between seemingly opposing concepts.³ Polarities cut across almost every aspect of governance; examples include making decisions in a timely versus inclusive fashion, or balancing transformation versus continuity of mission or approach. Research on polarities affirms that leaders and organizations that are adept at maximizing the upsides of any individual polarity and minimizing its downsides are more effective than those that do not.⁴

Polarities are at play when deciding who is eligible to submit a Request for Proposals (RFP): should this be open to the any member of the initiative or broader field, or should applications be targeted and invited? Similarly, polarities inform the question of length of governance member terms: longer terms allow for greater preservation of institutional memory and deep relationships, while shorter terms allow more people to participate in decision-making.

Neither of these examples have a “right” answer; they are dilemmas that must be decided based on what yields more positive results in a given context.

Form follows function

Looking across 10 case examples, form follows function when it comes to an initiative's structure and grantmaking approach.

With a global footprint and a focus on creating a cleaner environment while empowering grassroots efforts, it makes sense that Global Greengrant Fund's grantmaking bodies are made up of small teams of local advisors with expertise on environmental issues in a particular country or region. In contrast, RE-AMP is a community of 140 nonprofits and funders working on climate solutions in the Midwest. With a regional membership and similar levels of relevant expertise across members, the decision to have governance group members elected at large from the general membership also makes sense. Initiatives with diverse aims will need to build their own responsive governance playbooks.

Democratic processes do not always result in representative outcomes

When diversity and inclusion are placed front and center in the recruitment of governance group members, a less participatory process may be preferable because it can lead to more representative outcomes.

For example, by making appointments themselves, the founding funders of the Social Equity Collaborative Fund (SECF) were able to “pay close attention to intersectionality and many types of diversity,” ultimately appointing a “dream team” that included a range of community members with lived experience and direct knowledge of the focus communities⁵. According to Jennifer James, a consultant to the steering committee, the community initially expressed skepticism about the process but came to accept the outcome fairly quickly, largely because the steering committee was diverse and representative.

Compare SECF's experience with two other examples that used more democratic processes in seating governance groups. Wikimedia Foundation's approach to seating its inaugural

governance group was an international election with 1000s of voters from around the world. This resulted in a demographically and geographically homogenous committee.⁶ FundAction uses “sortition,” or random selection from a pool,⁷ to select members of their grantmaking and governance groups. In theory, sortition is a highly democratic practice, but consider what happened when FundAction established a nominating committee for re-seating their governance group: despite using an algorithm that takes into account gender and geography to select members, they ended up with a group where four of the five members were women, and three were from the same city.⁸ The results were “random” but not diverse or representative, which caused a member of the Facilitation Group to reflect:

We can't rely on technology to be the holders of democracy in our processes, and we can't simply trust that processes that were assumed to be fair in design will necessarily result in fair outcomes when they're implemented. Human intervention is essential to ensure that our aims of democracy and fairness are actually being met.⁹

Both examples illustrate how a highly inclusive process doesn't necessarily result in an equitable outcome.

More decision-makers means a greater need for alignment and focus

In theory, any grantmaking mechanism – from an open call for proposals to a public challenge to closed nominations – could function in a participatory grantmaking context. In practice, however, the realities of aligning stakeholders with diverse perspectives and expertise requires an intentional approach.

Participatory processes require more decision-maker alignment and pre-work than traditional grantmaking. The involvement of stakeholders with diverse perspectives and experience in grant decision-making is both an asset and a potentially complicating factor. Expanding the number of people involved brings greater expertise into the process and leverages networks to increase reach but may also increase the potential for disagreement about what merits funding.

Notably, of our 10 initiatives, only three use an open, public grantmaking mechanism. For the other seven, the governance members are responsible for identifying or generating fundable organizations and projects. Narrowing the pool of candidates allows for a more manageable review process as opposed to debating the merits of numerous worthy ideas from applicants who respond to an open call.

Participatory grantmaking requires clarity on eligibility criteria and funding priorities, regardless of grantmaking approach. The clearer the priorities and criteria, the smoother the process of getting to alignment on where to award funds. In each of the three examples of participatory grantmakers that issue open funding calls, the initiatives articulate very specific priorities and eligibility criteria. In addition to facilitating decision-making by a diverse grantmaking group, this has the added benefit of ensuring under-resourced NGOs don't waste time developing proposals that are unlikely to receive funding.

Participatory grantmaking initiatives can benefit from participants' diverse expertise. Participants have their own knowledge, networks, and relationships to deploy in finding and selecting grantees. Processes that tap participants for specific asks, such as nominating a partner for grant funding or developing the focus of an RFP, put participants' assets to work.

Governance changes over time

A final observation is that almost every initiative evolved their approach to governance over time, both via incremental tweaks but also major shifts in decision-making processes and structure, as the following case examples highlight:

- ▶ *Several initiatives (FundAction, RE-AMP, Red Umbrella Fund) made representation tweaks to the funder/NGO member ratio of governance groups.*
- ▶ *The Red Umbrella Fund started off wanting to minimize hierarchy but ended up creating co-chair positions within their governance group when they realized they needed core point people for communicating with staff on a more frequent basis.¹⁰*
- ▶ *RE-AMP seated its first steering committee with a representative of each of their initial topical working groups, along with funder representatives. Later, it switched to elections at large in which the 140 network organizations vote for candidates who choose to run. This was an improvement for RE-AMP because it resulted in a steering committee looking out for the overall membership rather than divided by special interests.*
- ▶ *BEA initiated a wholesale reexamination of their governance in 2019, recognizing that the existing structure was placing unsustainable demands on their grassroots participants and that additional staffing, alongside other changes to governance, were needed for the initiative to achieve its goals.¹¹*

These examples highlight how **strong participatory initiatives adapt over time based on what participants learn about what works in their situation.** (Note, also, that the fact that elections worked poorly for Wikimedia Foundation but well for RE-AMP reinforces the overarching insight that form follows function, suggesting that the best approach depends upon the given situation, as well

as the maturity of the initiative.) In fact, Red Umbrella Fund's coordinator, Nadia van der Linde, advises participatory initiatives to identify explicitly as learning organizations and establish three-to-four year cycles of action/reflection for intentional deliberation about what is and isn't working in governance.¹²

Analysis of governance characteristics

This section delves into greater detail about how case examples compare with one another for each individual element of governance examined for this project. The intent is to capture commonalities or distinctions wherever possible.

Role of governance groups

How many governance groups are there? What role do(es) the governance group(s) play in the initiative? What decision rights does the governance group have?

For the purpose of this analysis, governance groups are bodies with decision-making authority (as opposed to groups providing recommendations; see “Wider Community” on p. 10). The number of groups range from one to two dozen, depending on the size and scope of the initiative. While roles varied widely, two of the most central decisions that a grantmaking entity will make are to define its strategy and to make funding decisions. Several initiatives bifurcate strategy and grantmaking amongst two or more different groups.

Membership

Who is eligible to be a member of the governance group?

All the governance groups comprise people with pertinent expertise and a stake in the issue of focus. From there, eligibility closely follows the purpose of the initiative. For instance, BEA’s governance includes representatives of “big greens,” grassroots environmental groups, and

funders, while Disability Rights Fund includes people with disabilities and contributing funders.

In addition to considering diversity and inclusion in eligibility (discussed in further detail below), initiatives also take into account “human expertise” (or emotional intelligence, “E.I.”) along with technical expertise. “The most successful grants are made when the individuals making decisions really understand people and power dynamics, and can navigate those carefully,” according to Allison Davis, Director of Regional Programs at Global Greengrants Fund.¹³

Representation criteria

Does the initiative set priorities around diversity of governance membership? How is diversity defined?

The initiatives tend to seek diversity explicitly in terms of type of organization represented (e.g., grassroots versus large NGOs, or funders) and geography. Most initiatives implicitly emphasize gender and racial diversity but lack formal descriptive representation policies mandating that governance groups reflect specific demographics.

Initiatives aiming for inclusivity and authentic representation grapple with the tension between clarity and accountability on the one hand and flexibility on the other. For example, even though participants in FundAction put inclusion at the center of the initiative from the beginning, they found that their initial round of member recruitment skewed more male, whiter, and less diverse in terms of age than they had hoped.¹⁴ Reflecting on this outcome, initiative leaders considered potential root causes: although invitations to join were made to both women and men, men were more likely to accept the invitation; in addition, the group’s participation platform is English-speaking and online.¹⁵

FundAction’s experience points to the importance of continually examining where, why, and how efforts to inclusively engage diverse participants are or are not working—and to making proactive changes to governance when an aspirational value is not being realized in practice. (This point extends past recruitment, and into ongoing retention and engagement of initiative participants).

Even when diversity criteria are included in the selection of governance group members, that doesn’t mean that the criteria are set in stone. The need for specific perspectives may change in response to shifts in strategy or, as governance members term off, to re-balance the group of people who are already participating. For example, for the 2018 recruitment process for Red Umbrella Fund’s governance group, only sex worker rights activists from certain global regions were eligible to join because other regions were already represented.¹⁶

Funder-to-field ratio

Are funders and field representatives participants in governance? In what proportion?

Of the five initiatives that include both funders and field members in governance, one is divided 50-50 and all the others have field members in the majority (up to 100%). This is likely a reflection of the impetus behind many participatory grantmaking initiatives to disrupt traditional power dynamics that tilt heavily towards funders; ensuring that they are the minority reduces the likelihood that funders will dominate discussion and decisions.

Compensation

Are governance members compensated for their time? If so, how is compensation determined?

There are many different approaches to this question. About half of the initiatives include at

least nominal compensation for governance members. In several initiatives, being a member is a criterion for receiving grant funding, so there is an opportunity for participants to receive remuneration indirectly for their involvement. RE-AMP learned that providing compensation to working groups members above the cost of participation resulted in perceived conflicts of interest, so they stopped compensating governance members altogether. And SECF’s steering committee members unanimously decided to forgo compensation because they wanted all the money to go to the field.

As a general practice, compensating participants (especially those serving as representatives of grassroots organizations or as independent activists) acknowledges that participants’ time is valuable, and that organizations with smaller budgets may struggle to adequately staff their own work, much less contribute to collaborative efforts. Compensation is also an opportunity to recognize and correct for ongoing disparities in resources going to members of marginalized groups, such as women and people of color.

Initial selection process

How was the initial governance model launched? How were the governance group members seated? Who decided who decided?

For the pure funder collaboratives (two out of 10 case examples), the start-up governance groups comprised the initiative donors.

The eight participatory grantmaking initiatives had three general approaches to seating their inaugural governance groups. (It is worth noting that in a GrantCraft survey of 30 participatory initiatives, the answers to “Who decides who decides?” varied widely.¹⁷)

- **Original funder(s) or a 501(c)(3) backbone appointed the inaugural governance group members.**

- ▶ *The founding funders of SECF articulated qualities of their “dream team” and then recruited people who met those criteria to join them in a funder/NGO governance group.*
- ▶ *Staff of Global Greengrants and RSF Social Finance, both initiatives organized as independent 501(c)(3)s, appointed the initial grantmaking governance group members. In both cases, staff and boards of directors played a central role in setting strategy, alongside the governance group members.*

- **A limited group of self-appointed funder and NGO “founders” served as initial governance members.**

- ▶ *Red Umbrella Fund's start-up governance group was made up of five funders and six advocates who had all been working together under a precursor initiative.*
- ▶ *Disability Rights Fund was designed and launched by a small group of funders and activists.*

- **The founding funder(s) invited a small selection of people to a meeting and the governance group members emerged from the invitees.** Based on the information available, it appears that these processes happened through informal consensus.

- ▶ *FundAction: Four founding funders invited 30 people to a meeting and the start-up governance group emerged from that meeting, with representation from two funders and seven activists.*

- ▶ *RE-AMP: The founding funder invited representatives of 12 nonprofits and seven foundations to participate in a design process, and the first steering committee included four of the nonprofit representatives as well as a handful of funders.*
- ▶ *BEA for Impact: The founding funders convened a group of 40 advocates and funders, and working groups emerged from the meeting.*

In general, appointments are a much faster way to move forward than a lengthy recruitment process, such as a public call for nominations or the establishment of a nominating committee, which may be why appointments—either by founding funder(s) or by a small group of funders and NGO representatives—are common in start-up.

Beyond the mechanics of deciding who forms the first group of decision-makers, there are other common dynamics that appear across the case examples. At the beginning of any participatory grantmaking initiative, the vision, will, and resources to create something new will initially rest with a small group. Often members of this small group will serve as start-up governance members because of their stake in and knowledge of the initiative. Eventually, however, a healthy participatory grantmaking initiative will open itself up to wider community ownership. This transition is managed differently in different initiatives.

When it comes to the founding funders, they have played governance roles in the majority of case examples. That said, founding funders have frequently participated in a slightly higher proportion during the start-up phase. For example, the governance groups of both FundAction and Red Umbrella Fund reduced their funder/activist ratio once the initiative was firmly established.

Terms

What are the terms for governance group members? Are there term limits?

About a third of the samples have no term limits, and the rest range from one to four years. There appear to be two main reasons for having no term limits: either an initiative has (or likely has) a finite length, or an initiative has a small pool of eligible representatives from which to draw.

Justifications for longer term limits include ensuring institutional memory, retaining highly committed participants at the table, and facilitating the implementation of long-term strategy. Initiatives with shorter term limits have the advantage of allowing more representatives to rotate through and of making it easier to commit from a time and resource perspective.

Ongoing nomination process

How are members seated in the long run (after initial start-up)?

Case examples used three different ways of seating governance groups over time:

- **Invitation: Existing governance group identifies and invites new members.**
 - ▶ *Global GreenGrant's current advisory members, as well as staff, identify and vet new advisory board members.*
 - ▶ *FundAction members invite new activists and funders to join the General Assembly.*
 - ▶ *SECF added two grantees to their governance body after the initial seating to ensure connectivity between the steering committee and grantees.*
- **Nomination: Existing governance group accepts nominations from the initiative membership or the wider field and then decides.**
 - ▶ *The Red Umbrella Fund issues a public call for self-nomination that includes specific membership criteria.*
 - ▶ *Any member of BEA can self-nominate to join the Fund Advisory Board.*
 - ▶ *Similarly, any member of FundAction's General Assembly may self-nominate to join the Facilitation Group. A unique aspect of their approach is to randomly select five members to serve on a selection committee alongside two members who are terming off the Facilitation Group, rather than simply having the existing Facilitation Group or a subset thereof select new members.*
 - ▶ *RSF Social Finance staff use their own networks as well as those of partners (including donors and grantees) to solicit organizations to nominate themselves to participate in a Shared Gifting Circle.*
- **Election: The full membership of the initiative elects representatives.**
 - ▶ *After starting out with an appointment process where working group chairs served on the governance group, RE-AMP participants now elect steering committee members at-large.*

Invitation and nomination are the most common approaches across our case examples. The approach retains some control over who is ultimately seated, which may allow the governance groups or initiative staff to ensure diverse representation and positive working dynamics. For example, because Global Greengrants Fund advisory board members are

ultimately representatives of the organization, staff want the opportunity to vet members for personal integrity as well as qualities they find important to being a good grantmaker, such as the ability to lead from behind and set personal ego aside in decision-making.¹⁸

Leadership

What does leadership of the governance group look like?

Four of the case examples have chairs or co-chairs. Generally, the people who play these roles are members of either a working group or governance group who then serve on an “executive committee” and/or engage in more frequent communication with staff. For example, The Red Umbrella Fund’s coordinator highlighted the benefits of having point people on governance groups for staff in order to streamline flows of communication—this is particularly important for a global initiative that translates all its communication materials into three languages.¹⁹ The manner of selecting the chair or coordinator varies from election to appointment by the funder or fiscal sponsor to the lead funder serving in the role.

Decision-making process

How is decision-making facilitated?

Although details about facilitation were not available for most samples, we were struck by the crucial role the SECF facilitator has played in building a culture of trust and action, allowing for difficult conversations, and carrying the thread between meetings. SECF is also notable for inviting a content expert on nonprofits and race to speak at an early meeting about issues like the balkanization of nonprofits. RSF SF similarly emphasizes the role of thoughtful facilitation and meeting design in creating successful

experiences for participants of their Giving Circles.

What is the decision-making process used?

A few governance groups make decisions by majority vote, but most use consensus (at least four of which use voting as a backup if consensus cannot be reached). Voting is also used by FundAction to select recipients of certain types of grants and to winnow a pool of grant applications from which a final slate of candidates is drawn for consensus-based funding decisions.

Wider community

What is the role of the wider community in the initiative? Who is eligible to be a member of the wider community? How do stakeholders join the wider community?

For this analysis, “wider communities” are groups of people who are engaged with an initiative but who are not decision-makers (i.e., not members of governance groups).

Five out of 9 initiatives (i.e., those for which we were able to find information)²⁰ have formal wider communities made of either small groups of nominated advisors with relevant expertise (Disability Rights Fund, Red Umbrella Fund) or invited members of a wider movement or field (100kin10, FundAction, RE-AMP). Two initiatives (CPER, SECF) engage their grantees as advisors in less formal wider communities. It is worth noting that none of these examples have an “open” wider community; each uses a process (invitation, nomination, being a grantee of the initiative) to vet and decide on prospective members.

In the case examples with formal wider communities, members tend to be people who are playing active roles in the given initiative, as opposed to being loosely affiliated or merely informed. For example:

- ▶ *RE-AMPs community members are NGO representatives who are willing to support the overall initiative's goal and accept a short list of ground rules for information-sharing and other collaborative activity. Members are expected to participate in a state table (governance group), an action team, or a grant making committee; to attend the annual network meeting; and to complete an annual membership survey.*
- ▶ *100kin10's community of NGOs and funders—called partners—collaborate on efforts to increase the number of STEM teachers by 2021. They participate in convenings, share resources, and work together on project teams. Funders pledge a minimum amount of funds (\$250,000) over three years to fund the STEM teaching and learning work of one or more 100Kin10 partner organizations.*

Both examples above highlight the role of wider communities in the field-building aspects of their respective initiatives. In both cases, they focus not simply on making strategic investments in the field, but also in strengthening relationships, networks and developing the capacity of those who are engaged in a specific social change mission.

Additionally, wider communities are frequently engaged in an advisory capacity on strategy and grantmaking, making recommendations that are then approved by a governance group. Five initiatives draw from a wider membership or community to form small advisory, working group, or grant review panels.

Backbone organization

Administrative structure

*In what type of organization is the initiative housed (funder, NGO, something else)?
How did this organization become the*

central/backbone organization? Is there a fiscal sponsor?

It is interesting to note how frequently fiscal sponsorship is used by our case examples: seven out of 10 use this structure. One reason may be that fiscal sponsorship is an effective way to manage a pooled fund and its staff.

It may also be because participatory grantmaking, as an endeavor, is well suited to an administrative structure with less of the formal hierarchy that governs independent 501(c)3s, in particular, resting power and accountability primarily with boards of directors and executive officers. The aim of intentionally engaging a wider group of stakeholders in setting strategy and making decisions could come into conflict with this model.

That said, the three case examples that are independent 501(c)3s (Disability Rights Fund, Global Greengrants Fund, and RSF Social Finance) have all found ways to include their boards of directors and staff in decision-making while expanding that power beyond the walls of their institutions. In each case, doing so is a central tenant of the mission and vision of the organization.

Staff

What is the role of staff vis a vis governance and the wider community?

Every case example except one has paid staff that deliver robust administrative and operational support, and in the case of the initiative without program staff (FundAction), members of the governance group receive stipends to compensate them for their administrative responsibilities. Initiative staff in most cases provide some combination of additional services including facilitation, grant review, technical

assistance, communications, outreach, or evaluation/learning.

Some case examples house staff in a central location and others in host organizations from different regions, although the latter may pose challenges. For example, initially, RE-AMP was staffed by part-time employees of member organizations, but the lack of central oversight created a problem of accountability. Now RE-AMP employs a Chief Network Officer who manages three other staff members also employed by RE-AMP, oversees operations of the network, and facilitates the governance and grantmaking groups.

Grantmaking

Grantmaking model

Are grants made from a pooled fund? Do funders make their own grants aligned to priorities set by the initiative?

Nine out of 10 of the samples use pooled funding, and two also provide aligned funding opportunities (100kin10 and RE-AMP), where grantmaking decisions are made by individual funders under a strategic direction set by the initiative.

Requests for proposals

How are project ideas surfaced? What is the RFP process?

Three case examples issue public RFPs, while seven either invite applicants or limit eligibility to members. Because most of the case examples use some version of a closed RFP process, the governance group members play a key role in identifying applicants and developing project ideas.

Grant review process

Is there peer review in the grantmaking process? Who makes grant decisions?

For the purposes of this analysis, “peers” mean individuals who are not funders and who have relevant expertise, whether professional or lived experience. The two pure funder collaborative initiatives have no peer review. The remaining eight initiatives all include peer review in grantmaking. In most case examples, the peer review is conducted by a small set of field representatives participating in either a governance group or as a member of a “wider community.”

Conflicts of interest

How are conflicts of interest established? How are they handled?

All the initiatives with peer review (eight out of 10) have a conflict of interest policy that forbids decision-makers from participating in funding decisions involving their own organizations. However, there is some variation across policies, from those that restrict governance group members from grant eligibility, to those that require recusal from decision-making on a particular grant for which a conflict of interest exists. For example:

- ▶ *BEA’s conflict of interest policy states that Fund Advisory Board member organizations cannot be considered for funding during the term the organization’s staff or representative serves on the Fund Advisory Board.*
- ▶ *FundAction selects five random members of the General Assembly who did not apply for a grant round to serve on Grant Committees.*
- ▶ *Disability Rights Fund requires Grantmaking Committee members whose organization or network has applied for a grant to recuse*

themselves from decision-making on that potential grant.

- ▶ *SECF's policy asks members to disclose conflicts; if a specific conflict exists ("personal or financial interest in an applicant or one of the applicant's partner organizations or a strong positive or negative conviction that does not allow committee member to be unbiased") members may participate by providing factual information but not in ranking or decision-making.²¹*

In discussing SECF's conflict of interest policy, Jennifer James noted that the steering committee has a strong culture of trust.²² In addition, from a practical standpoint, SECF's members come from the same urban region and the likelihood that some conflict of interest might arise during decision-making may be higher than in other initiatives (e.g., members are likely to know one another outside of the initiative, may have worked at each others' organizations, or may have served on each others' boards). A less stringent conflict of interest policy, but one that still requires disclosure, would be appropriate under such circumstances. If trust is lower, a stricter policy may lend more credibility to decisions.

References and sources

Sources for this project include staff interviews, initiative websites and reports, and grey literature on funder collaboratives and participatory grantmaking. We hope to have captured information accurately and completely; however, we were not able to reach initiative representatives in every case. If you have corrections or additional information about any of the initiatives, please contact Heather Wooten at Onside Partners (heather@onsidepartners.org).

People

Our deepest appreciation to the following individuals who contributed background, insights, and expertise to this report:

- Allison Davis, Director of Regional Programs, Global Greengrants Fund
- Melinda Fine, Director, Philanthropy & Strategic Partnerships, TCC Group
- Melissa Gavin, Chief Network Officer, RE-AMP
- Cynthia Gibson, author and advisor on funder collaboratives and participatory grantmaking
- Jennifer James, Senior Vice President, Harder & Co.
- Yasmin Sabrina Fodil, National Director of Community, 100kin10
- Nadia van der Linde, Coordinator, Red Umbrella Fund
- Diana Samarasan, Founding Executive Director, Disability Rights Fund

General resources

Gibson C. (2017). Participatory Grantmaking: Has Its Time Come? Ford Foundation.
Gibson C. (2018). Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources through Participatory Grantmaking. GrantCraft.
Gibson, C. & Mackinnon, A. (2009). Funder Collaboratives: Why and How Funders Work Together. GrantCraft.
Seldon, W., Tierney, T. J., & Fernando, G. (2013). High Stakes Donor Collaborations.
The Lafayette Practice (2014). Who Decides: How Participatory Grantmaking Benefits Donors, Communities and Movements.
Thomas, M. (2016). Guide to Collaborative Philanthropy. San Diego Grantmakers

Initiative-specific sources

The following sources were consulted in the development of this report.

100Kin10

100kin10. (2019). About Us.
100kin10. (2019). Grand Challenges.
100kin10. (2019). A Network Overview.
100kin10. (2019). We're Growing the 100kin10 Network!
100kin10. (2019). Partner nomination form.
100kin10. (2019). Self-nomination form.
100kin10. (2018). 2017 Annual Report.
100kin10. (2017). Funder's Collaborative Prospectus.
100kin10. (2014). Funder's Collaborative Prospectus.
100kin10. (2012). Nominee Toolkit.
Ford, C. (2015). Building on Success at 100Kin10. Carnegie Corporation of New York.
Milgrom-Elcott, T. (2016) Networked Impact: This is Not Your Grandfather's Coalition. Stanford Social Innovation Review.

Building Equity and Alignment for Impact (BEA)

Building Equity and Alignment for Impact (BEA). (2019). About Us.
Building Equity and Alignment for Impact (BEA). (2019). BEA Transition Message.
Building Equity and Alignment for Impact (BEA). (2018). Structure.
Building Equity and Alignment for Impact (BEA). (2017). Building Equity and Alignment for Impact Fund: Grantmaking Strategy and Governance.
Building Equity and Alignment for Impact (BEA). (2017). The BEAI Fund.
Grassroots International. (2018). BEAI Fund.
The Overbrook Foundation. (2014). Building Equity & Alignment Initiative – UPDATE.
The Overbrook Foundation. (2014). 2013 Annual Report on Grants.
The Overbrook Foundation. (2013). Movement Building and Money in Politics Initiatives.

CPER

[NEO Philanthropy. \(2019\). Archived: Communities for Public Education Reform.](#)

[NEO Philanthropy. \(2014\). Strengthening Collaborations to Build Social Movements: Ten Lessons from the Communities for Public Education Reform Fund \(CPER\).](#)

Disability Rights Fund

[Gibson C. \(2018\). Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources through Participatory Grantmaking. GrantCraft.](#)

[Disability Rights Fund. \(2019\). Our Team.](#)

[Disability Rights Fund. \(2019\). For Grantseekers.](#)

[GrantCraft. \(2018\). Participatory Grantmaking Mechanics: Disability Rights Fund.](#)

FundAction

[GrantCraft. \(2018\). Participatory Grantmaking Mechanics: FundAction.](#)

[FundAction. \(2019\). About FundAction.](#)

[FundAction. \(2019\). Blog on the FG Renewal Process 2019: Learning so We Can Do Better.](#)

[FundAction. \(2019\). Frequently Asked Questions.](#)

[FundAction. \(2019\). Welcome to FundAction's Assembly!](#)

[FundAction. \(2019\). Who can Become a FundAction Activist?](#)

[FundAction. \(2018\). FundAction's Facilitation Group.](#)

[FundAction. \(2018\). Renewal Facilitation Group.](#)

[FundAction. \(2018\). The FundAction Facilitation Group \(and a Bit of its History\).](#)

[FundAction. \(2017\). FundAction's Coordinator: Role and Expectations.](#)

[FundAction. \(2017\). FundAction's Facilitating Group: Roles and Responsibilities.](#)

Global Greengrants Fund

[Global Greengrants Fund. \(2019\). Who We Are.](#)

[Global Greengrants Fund. \(2019\). Financials.](#)

[Global Greengrants Fund. \(2019\). 2018 Donor List.](#)

[GrantCraft. \(2018\). Participatory Grantmaking Mechanics: Global Greengrants Fund.](#)

RE-AMP

[Confluence Philanthropy. \(2017\). Job Announcement: RE-AMP Chief Network Officer.](#)

[Grant, H. \(2010\). Transformer: How to Build a Network to Change a System. Monitor Institute.](#)

[RE-AMP. \(2011\). On the Leading Edge: An overview of RE-AMP.](#)

Red Umbrella Fund

[GrantCraft. \(2018\). Participatory Grantmaking Mechanics: Red Umbrella Fund.](#)

[Red Umbrella Fund. \(2019\). History.](#)

[Red Umbrella Fund. \(2018\). Join the ISC.](#)

[Red Umbrella Fund. \(2018\). Join the PAC.](#)

[Red Umbrella Fund. \(2017\). Red Umbrella Fund: The Creation of a Collaborative Fund by and for Sex Workers.](#)

RSF Social Finance

[Buhles, K. \(2012\). Shared Gifting: Transforming the Dynamics of Philanthropy. RSF Social Finance.](#)

[Grantcraft. \(2018\). Participatory Grantmaking Mechanics: RSF Social Finance.](#)

[RSF Social Finance. \(2019\). Shared Gifting.](#)

[RSF Social Finance. \(2019\). How We Work.](#)

Social Equity Collaborative Fund

[San Diego Grantmakers. \(2019\). Social Equity Collaborative Fund.](#)

[San Diego Grantmakers. \(2016\). Social Equity Collaborative Fund Conflict of Interest Policy and Disclosure Form.](#)

[The San Diego Foundation. \(2019\). \\$300,000 in Grants Available to Advance Racial and Climate Justice in San Diego.](#)

[Thomas, M. \(2016\). Guide to Collaborative Philanthropy. San Diego Grantmakers.](#)

Citations

¹ See GrantCraft's content series on [Participatory Grantmaking](#) (2018) and [Advocacy Funder Collaboratives](#) (2010).

² Definitions are modified from the following resources:

Gibson, C. (2017). [Participatory Grantmaking: Has Its Time Come?](#) Ford Foundation.

Gibson, C. (2018). [Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources through Participatory Grantmaking](#). GrantCraft.

Gibson, C. & Mackinnon, A. (2009). [Funder Collaboratives: Why and How Funders Work Together](#). GrantCraft.

Seldon, W., Tierney, T. J., & Fernando, G. (2013). [High Stakes Donor Collaborations](#).

The Lafayette Practice (2014). [Who Decides: How Participatory Grantmaking Benefits Donors, Communities and Movements](#).

Thomas, M. (2016). [Guide to Collaborative Philanthropy](#). San Diego Grantmakers.

³ Johnson, B. (2012). [Conscious Capitalism and Leveraging Polarities](#).

⁴ Id.

⁵ Interview with Jennifer James, Senior Vice President, Harder & Co. (4/26/2019)

⁶ While Wikimedia Foundation was not included in our case study examples, this example was a helpful contrast and is drawn from: Gibson, C. (2018). [Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources through Participatory Grantmaking](#), p 34. GrantCraft.

⁷ Wikipedia. (2019). [Sortition](#).

⁸ FundAction. (2019). [Blog on the FG Renewal Process 2019: Learning so We Can Do Better](#).

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ Interview with Nadia van der Linde, Coordinator, Red Umbrella Fund (5/14/2019).

¹¹ Building Equity and Alignment for Impact (BEA). (2019). [BEA Transition Message](#).

¹² Interview with Nadia van der Linde, Coordinator, Red Umbrella Fund (5/14/2019).

¹³ Interview with Allison Davis, Director of Regional Programs, Global Greengrants Fund (4/30/2019).

¹⁴ GrantCraft. (2018). [Insight on Participatory Grantmaking: Romy Krämer, FundAction and Guerrilla Foundation](#).

¹⁵ Id.

¹⁶ Red Umbrella Fund. (2018). [Join the ISC](#).

¹⁷ Gibson, C. (2018). [Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources through Participatory Grantmaking](#), p. 34. GrantCraft.

¹⁸ Interview with Allison Davis, Director of Regional Programs, Global Greengrants Fund (4/30/2019).

¹⁹ Interview with Nadia van der Linde, Coordinator, Red Umbrella Fund (5/14/2019).

²⁰ We were not able to garner information about BEA's wider community.

²¹ San Diego Grantmakers. (2016). [Social Equity Collaborative Fund Conflict of Interest Policy and Disclosure Form](#).

²² Interview with Jennifer James, Senior Vice President, Harder & Co. (4/26/2019)