

Participatory grantmaking

A summary report sharing learnings from Foundation North's experiences with participatory grantmaking approaches.

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Participatory grantmaking

What is participatory grantmaking?

Participatory grantmaking (PGM) is a community-led, collaborative philanthropic approach that actively involves communities in the design and decision-making process of funding. This approach promotes equity by shifting decision-making power from funders to the communities and individuals with lived experience who will benefit from the funding.



Pacific Youth Future Makers 2022

Why participatory grantmaking?

When done well the approach can be:

- **Inclusive:** Local and diverse communities are engaged, with insights and expertise for better and more informed decision-making, and fairer and more representative allocation of resources.
- **Transparent:** Open communication about how decisions are made, including criteria and processes for selecting grantees.
- **Collaborative and community-led:** Working in partnership encourages collaboration, relationship building and trust among participants¹, funders, grantees and other stakeholders.
- **Empowering:** Building the capacity and capability of community members to participate effectively in the grantmaking process.

¹ Participants refers to people or community representatives engaged in participatory grantmaking who are not part of the philanthropic institution.

Considerations for your participatory grantmaking journey

Based on Foundation North (FN)'s experience, some values-based questions to ask your organisation and board include:

- Do you have the belief that turning over decision making power to the community is the right thing to do and will result in better decisions?
- Do you want to increase communities' sense of agency and control over the decisions that impact them?
- Do you have the resources to invest in building capacity and capability to ensure communities are empowered and equipped to engage in PGM, along with valuing their time and contribution?
- Do you value the voice of lived experience and community knowledge and expertise about living with an issue or in a geographic area?
- Are you willing to work collaboratively and in relationship with co-funders, ensuring there is clarity about your respective roles and expectations, and available to support them if necessary?
- Do you have the resources and time to invest in your own organisation, and develop the capability and mindset required to undertake PGM and work alongside communities?
- Are you flexible around shifting timeframes and accommodating new processes that may not have been anticipated?
- Are you ready to let go of preconceived ideas and traditional power dynamics?
- Are you ready to work in an iterative, process-orientated and relational way with communities?

Along with the values that align with a PGM approach, practical questions for funders to ask themselves include:

- What's our purpose and reason for investing in PGM?
- 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?

Foundation North's learning from PGM in practice

- FN have made a number of observations about the practice of PGM, based on five case studies about their experience with PGM. The case studies, undertaken by Centre for Social Impact (CSI) in 2023, explored different approaches to PGM and highlighted the factors that contribute to success, challenges faced, and lessons learned by Foundation North, participants, stakeholders and other funders.
- Appendix 1 offers a high-level summary of five case studies that showcase PGM's diverse forms. The case studies highlight that there is no single way to implement PGM, they vary according to who is involved, the purpose of the fund and how the fund will operate.

What are the benefits of PGM?

Build and strengthen relationships and connections

PGM creates opportunities to build and strengthen relationships and connections with participants, other funders, or community delivery agencies². These relationships open the door for funders to better engage with and support the communities and grantees they work with. Good relationships, built on trust and transparency, facilitate co-design discussion and help navigate the tensions that PGM will inevitably surface about power and control, fund parameters, and scope of influence for participants.

—— “The exposure and networking opportunities from the pitching event had a significant impact on the grantee group. Following the pitch, the DIA representative working with Kōrero Mai Papakura as co-funder approached the CEO (of the grantee group) and expressed interest in their programme. This eventually led to the DIA funding the delivery of a pilot programme through the Lotteries Discretionary Fund and 18 months later, the Ministry of Social Development is funding programme delivery.”

Kōrero Mai Papakura

² Existing organisations on their own, or in partnership with other organisation, who are fund holders and responsible to deliver a participatory grantmaking process.

The case studies highlight many instances where relationships and connections resulted in unexpected outcomes and benefits, including new collaborations, innovative grant applications, and unanticipated funding opportunities. Additionally, fostering relationships among participants during their grantmaking journey created personal and community connections, building a strong foundation for decision-making. Relationships with other funders can lead to the leveraging of additional funding which increases the resources available for PGM.

—— “The participatory budgeting initiatives facilitated community networking and relationship building through hosting events where community members could pitch their projects and vote. With residents, community groups and funders all congregating in one space, many new connections were forged, and some new groups may have been inspired to seek funding in the future.”

Roskill Decides

Facilitate community building

PGM can include a range of community building activities such as community events, team building and workshops. These provide the space for participants or community members to share information, learn, and create links for collaborative or innovative projects or funding applications. They help build a sense of community or shared purpose, which can strengthen larger community movements, or lead to unanticipated opportunities.

“The community pitching event was a chance for community leaders to showcase work, publicising the wide range of positive initiatives happening in Papakura. The in-person format including the provision of kai was seen to have enabled much networking and service promotion, with many fruitful connections made on the day. The atmosphere was described as lively and supportive, with a strong sense of camaraderie across groups and good engagement from community members.”

Kōrero Mai Papakura

Opportunity to demonstrate inclusivity

PGM puts local knowledge, and diverse perspectives and experience front and centre. Communities have the best insight into how grantmaking processes should be designed and promoted. For example, simplified application forms with less onerous requirements than traditional grantmaking, broad review criteria, and submission processes that remove barriers to participation. By listening to local ideas and aspirations, PGM can include groups and initiatives that are often overlooked by conventional grant-giving avenues. This approach helps realise values of equity and fairness, strengthens community ties, and broadens the impact of the grantmaking process.



“One grantee reflected that Roskill Together had made funding accessible to small groups or projects such as theirs, that might otherwise be excluded or put off by the complexity of seeking grants via “mainstream” channels. They reflected that at their school the students have lots of ideas and energy for projects that the school itself lacks capacity to fund and that the fund enabled these to be actioned.”

Roskill Decides

Enable individuals and communities

Investment in capacity building enables individuals, community delivery agencies, and wider communities with knowledge, skills and opportunity to engage in designing funds, grantmaking and resource allocation. This investment, which includes financial recognition of individuals time, can build confidence and prepare people to engage better in other grantmaking processes, whether that is preparing grant applications or moving into leadership or other decision-making roles. The investment is made with an eye on the future – seeking to build and sustain benefits for the wider community with long-term impact.

“Their (youth) involvement with PYFM accelerated the leadership opportunities emerging for them as changemakers and influencers of other young Pasifika people in South Auckland. Opportunities that

emerged included governance roles, new jobs, awarding and receiving contracts, mentoring, and friendships.”

Pacific Youth Future Makers

Challenges of PGM and what to watch out for

“All philanthropic approaches have challenges, and participatory grantmaking is no exception. But participatory funders say that while it can be nuanced and complex, that’s no reason to reject it out of hand. In fact, grappling with these challenges is part of the approach itself.” (GrantCraft, 2018. p. 24)

Allow enough time and resources

“Participatory grantmaking can take more time and incur more costs, but practitioners say the benefits outweigh the costs.” (GrantCraft, 2018. p. 9)

Genuine participatory processes involve multiple parties, relationship building, engagement, co-design and planning (amongst other activities), all of which require significant time and resources. However, the investment enables effective engagement and robust decision-making processes.

Key considerations:

- **Time management:** Allocate sufficient time for all stages of the PGM process. This includes preparation, execution and follow-up. Funders need to be patient, providing plenty of time for deliberations. Participating community members need to be fully informed about their roles and the commitment involved.



The Happy Kids Project - Asian Artists' Fund grantee 2022

- **Resource allocation:** Ensure financial resources and staffing are adequate. This includes acting on recommendations to alter internal granting processes to manage workloads, build trust with communities, and maintain quality participation and overall effectiveness of the grantmaking.
- **Support mechanisms:** When necessary, support community delivery agencies with governance models and decision-making processes.
- **Recognise contributions:** Community participants invest their own skills, cultural and community knowledge, and time, which needs to be recognised and adequately recompensed.

— “While panellists were informed about the requirements of the role, they hadn’t fully appreciated the amount of work, time and effort that would be required to distribute the fund within the timeframe. Working through processes and long decision-making sessions all took time.

Delivering various media campaigns to promote the fund and invite applications took a lot of additional time.”

Pacific Youth Future Makers

Be conscious of bias

Bias is a challenge in PGM that can undermine fairness, inclusivity and credibility of the process. Unintentional bias can manifest across a range of dimensions – from the pre-existing networks that funders and community delivery agencies tap into to provide an accessible starting point to PGM, to privileging applicants who are good at preparing funding applications, and the geographic focus of a fund.

Key considerations:

- **Awareness and monitoring:** Regularly review and adjust processes to identify and mitigate potential biases.
- **Inclusive networks:** Broaden outreach efforts to avoid proximity bias and ensure a wide circle of people are aware of and can access the fund.
- **Representation:** Ensure appropriate representation at all levels of the process, prioritising the voices of those with lived experience.
- **Accessible processes:** Design application processes that are accessible and equitable. Simplify forms, offer low-tech or high-tech voting solutions depending on community needs, and provide support for those less experienced in grant applications

“I think one of our biggest risks is claiming reach into a community and then not actually achieving it because there’s always some bias at play and who gets to hear about things and who gets close enough to make an application. Proximity bias can happen. Our challenge is making sure we have a wide enough spread of people who are influencers and have community connections and knowing that when they reach out, they bring a wide circle of people towards the fund.”

Funder - Asian Artists Fund

Sharing insights from Foundation North’s learnings

“It’s not formulaic – you can’t just roll it out, get all the pieces in place and you’re good to go. It means there’s a bit of new thinking required each time, figuring out your resources, how it might run, and that we don’t do that in isolation from the community.”

Funder – Asian Artists Fund

Learn from others – no need to reinvent the wheel

Take time to learn from the experiences of other funders and understand how different PGM funding approaches have been practised. Find out what’s worked, the challenges encountered, and study case studies and good practices to avoid common pitfalls. Adopting proven strategies can save time and resources, inform the fund’s purpose and intentions, and ensure PGM is a positive experience for funders and participants alike.

“There’s so much work being done in participatory grantmaking and by people who’ve been doing it for a while. Talk and learn from them - don’t reinvent the wheel. Yes, the way you apply their knowledge may be different, but it’s ok to tweak because you have to start somewhere.” (Grantcraft, 2018, pg 56)

Look internally – embed in strategy and policy

Participatory grantmaking isn’t a tactic or one-off strategy; it’s a power-shifting ethos that cuts across every aspect of the institution’s activities, policies, programs, and behaviours (GrantCraft, 2018, p. 9). For PGM to be successful, it must be embedded within the funder’s overall strategic framework and operational policy. This involves integrating participatory principles into the strategic plan, securing buy-in from the board, and establishing internal structures to support the delivery of PGM. Ensuring alignment with the organisation’s mission and goals is crucial for creating a cohesive and supportive organisational environment for this approach. PGM is one of the key mechanisms for Foundation North to realise their strategic plan - Tō Tātou Rautaki. It underpins the pou to Increase Equity - Hāpai te ōritetanga.

Foundation North will do this by supporting priority communities across the Auckland region to decide what they need, lead their own solutions and achieve their hopes and dreams.

Find workarounds for internal structures

Funders may need to modify or navigate existing internal structures to accommodate new PGM processes. Barriers that result from organisational priorities, regulations or potential ‘conflict of interest’ need to be identified and workarounds implemented that support, rather than hinder PGM processes.

“We were starting with a blank piece of paper. We had very loose bullet points around what the fund needed to achieve. Which means design away. The container was the Trusts Act and what trustees can devolve.”

Funder – Asian Artists Fund

Listen to feedback and adapt – be open-minded

An adaptive mindset that can respond to challenging feedback and complex issues that PGM will surface is key. Creative or novel solutions may be required to ensure the grantmaking process is relevant and responsive to communities. This might require deep reflection about what’s working and what’s not, testing new models or ways of working, and building skills and confidence to support staff practice. This might include embracing a mindset of ‘unlearning’ traditional practices in favour of more inclusive approaches, which will

help build stronger relationships, improve participation, and design processes better reflecting the voice of lived experience.

“The Asian artists involved with the delivery of the AAF built and maintained a close working relationship with relevant staff at FN. They (FN staff) were acknowledged for demonstrating responsiveness to feedback, availability to problem solve, effective communication with FN management, and willingness to be flexible and make adjustments. This created the conditions to trial a devolved funding model with the Asian arts community.” (Asian Artists Fund)

“The funder opened the door for being challenged and questioned. It provided the opportunity for the funder to reflect on the accessibility of language used, how they engage with and make people feel comfortable, transparency, and systemic barriers to funding.” (Asian Artists Fund)

Let go of preconceived ideas and power

PGM provides the opportunity to test alternative funding models and experiment with how things can be done differently. However, even innovative approaches can be limited by what is known and familiar. It requires letting go of assumptions, building confidence, and creating space to step back and let others take the lead. This approach demands agility, commitment to co-design processes, and genuine engagement with communities, which can challenge traditional power dynamics.

“There was no blueprint for the AAF – it was an opportunity to test alternative funding models, allowing for experimentation and flexibility, and FN was keen to explore how they could do things differently. However, even a new approach can be limited by what is known and familiar, and FN acknowledged the importance of letting go of assumptions at the beginning, building confidence, and creating space to step back and let others step in.”

Asian Artists Fund

Cultivate a learning mindset for evaluation

Funders may ask whether there is evidence that PGM is more effective than other ways of distributing funds and is more likely to deliver innovative solutions. Evaluating this question may inadvertently reinforce existing power dynamics, overlook the importance of process and community involvement, and fail to capture the qualitative and iterative nature of participatory practices.

The effectiveness of participatory grantmaking should be assessed with evaluation approaches that are inclusive, flexible, and process-oriented, emphasising the meaningful involvement of all stakeholders. This approach helps build trust and ensures that the nuanced and incremental changes brought about by participatory practices are accurately captured and valued.

“Like other philanthropic approaches, participatory grantmaking can benefit from

evaluation that assesses value, highlights best practices, and suggests improvements. However, because participatory grantmaking is more process-oriented, iterative, and relational than traditional grantmaking, its outcomes are arguably more difficult to codify or reduce to quantitative outcomes.” (GrantCraft, 2018. p. 45).

See this report for examples of how participatory grantmakers evaluate their work.

Resources



1. Grantcraft - Deciding Together: A comprehensive guide for participatory grantmaking. While published in 2018 it is still highly relevant and helpful with insights from a diverse range of grant makers. GrantCraft, 2018. [Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources Through Participatory Grantmaking.](#) [pdf]

participatory budgeting methods to distribute funds within communities. Centre for Social Impact. 2023. Participatory grantmaking with principals of participatory budgeting: Tāmaki Makaurau learning case studies. Contact Foundation North if you'd like to receive a copy of the case study. Email: info@foundationnorth.org.nz
2. Participatory grantmakers: This website offers an extensive collection of resources on PGM from philanthropy and the social sector.
3. Getting your board on board with participatory grantmaking: This article provides strategies and insights on how to effectively gain the support of board members for PGM initiatives. Paterson, H., 2020.
4. Candid learning – Participatory grantmaking: This website holds a suite of diverse PGM resources including reports, videos and other material.
5. Asian Artists Fund case study: This case study outlines Foundation North's process and learning from the PGM fund designed and delivered with Asian arts practitioners, in partnership with Creative New Zealand. Centre for Social Impact. 2023. Asian Artists fund: A learning case study. Contact Foundation North if you'd like to receive a copy of the case study. Email: info@foundationnorth.org.nz
6. Pacific Youth Future Makers Fund case study: This case study outlines Foundation North's process and learning from the PGM fund designed and delivered with a group of young Pacific Leaders. Centre for Social Impact. 2023. Pacific Youth Future Makers (Pasifika Way Makers Fund): A learning case study. Contact Foundation North if you'd like to receive a copy of the case study. Email: info@foundationnorth.org.nz
7. Participatory grantmaking with principles of participatory budgeting: This report shares learning from the delivery of three funds using

participatory budgeting methods to distribute funds within communities. Centre for Social Impact. 2023. Participatory grantmaking with principals of participatory budgeting: Tāmaki Makaurau learning case studies. Contact Foundation North if you'd like to receive a copy of the case study. Email: info@foundationnorth.org.nz
8. Nothing about us without us: This article explores the experiences and insights of indigenous communities in Aotearoa regarding PGM, emphasising the importance of culturally responsive funding practices. Ngaroimata Fraser, T., McLachlan, A. and Cone, M., 2022. Navigating participatory grantmaking: Insights from indigenous communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Third World Quarterly.
9. Pacific Future Makers: This report outlines early insights and outcomes from FN's implementation of PGM, focusing on the involvement and impact on young Pacific leaders. Foundation North, 2021. Learnings from participatory grantmaking: The Pacific Future Makers Fund.
10. Participatory grantmaking: This report investigates the benefits and challenges of PGM, offering recommendations to advance practice and understanding within philanthropy. Ang, C., Abdo, M. and Rose, V., 2023. Participatory grantmaking: Building the evidence. Centre for Evidence and Implementation.
11. Participatory philanthropy: This report provides an overview of participatory philanthropy and the importance of involving communities in decision making processes. Evans, L., 2015. Participatory philanthropy: An overview.

Appendix



Pacific Youth Future Makers

FN’s purpose for investing in the fund	Grow leadership confidence and capability amongst Future Makers; fund more grass-roots work in Pacific communities in South Auckland; learn new skills to work and share power with young Pacific people.
Who was involved in design and delivery of the fund	10-15 young Pasifika people from South Auckland with support from youth facilitators and FN staff.
How were decisions made to allocate funding	Pacific Youth Future Makers made final recommendations with final decisions made by Foundation North CEO.
How was the fund promoted	A sub-group of the Future Makers created an effective communications campaign using FN social media platforms to promote the fund and invite their community to submit grant applications. The content resonated strongly with relevant audiences.
How was capability building incorporated into the fund	External facilitators, supported by the FN team, led sessions with the Future Makers covering team building, philanthropy and grantmaking, design of the fund, decision making, and conflict of interest, amongst other topics.

	2019	2021	2023
Funding contribution and funder	\$100,000 – Foundation North	\$110,000 – Foundation North \$110,000 – Ministry of Youth Development	\$110,000 – Foundation North \$110,000 – Ministry for Pacific People
Fund allocation		\$200,000 – grants \$20,000 – operating budget ³	\$200,000 – grants \$20,000 – operating budget
Grant amount	\$2,500, \$5,000 or \$7,500	From \$1,000 to \$15,000	\$10,000 (x20 grants)

³ Included facilitator costs, koha for panel members, room bookings, food, petrol vouchers and other miscellaneous costs.

Asian Artists' Fund

FN's purpose for investing in the fund	Encourage greater participation and opportunities for Asian artists in Auckland and Northland.
Who was involved in design and delivery of the fund	Key community stakeholders from the Asian artist community in Auckland and Northland with support from FN staff.
How were decisions made to allocate funding	Asian artists made final recommendations with final decisions made by Foundation North CEO.
How was the fund promoted	The fund had its own landing page on the FN website and content was developed by the Asian artist stakeholders to ensure accessibility. An in-person event was held to introduce the fund and the outreach advisors.
How was capability building incorporated into the fund	Outreach advisors were incorporated into the design of the fund. They were experienced Asian artists who supported and mentored grant applicants (both new and experienced) to prepare funding applications. The result was high quality grant applications across a range of different artistic mediums.

	2021	2023
Funding contribution and funder	\$220,000 – Foundation North \$220,000 – Creative NZ	\$350,000 – Foundation North \$350,000 – Creative NZ
Fund allocation	\$430,000 – grants \$10,000 – operating budget	\$650,000 – grants \$50,000 – operating budget
Grant amount	Up to \$35,000	Up to \$35,000

Roskill Decides

FN's purpose for investing in the fund	Reach groups and initiatives often overlooked by conventional grant-giving avenues.
Who was involved in design and delivery of the fund	Roskill Together Trust, based on their knowledge of their local community.
How were decisions made to allocate funding	Community members voted at a community event where grant applicants displayed and pitched their ideas to the community. Results were revealed at the end of the event.
How was the fund promoted	Online promotion via Facebook (including boosted posts), local board communications, council magazine, posters, and brochures. Also, face to face promotion via intensive community engagement to encourage applications.
How was capability building incorporated into the fund	Application support was provided by Roskill Together Trust via three workshops across the Mt Roskill/Puketāpapa area, with one-on-one application support also provided where requested.

2021

Funding contribution and funder	\$13,000 – Puketapapa Local Board \$10,000 – Roskill Together Trust
Fund allocation	\$20,000 – grants \$3,000 – operating budget
Grant amount	\$2,000 (x10 grants)

Kōrero Mai Papakura

FN's purpose for investing in the fund	Grow grassroots community leadership; enable community members who might not have had the resources or capacity to access funds; surface ideas and innovations “by and for the community” that could potentially be further supported by FN.
Who was involved in design and delivery of the fund	A steering group with representatives from Kootuitui Ki Papakura (fund holder), the local Member of Parliament's office, and a mana whenua representative and board member of Papakura Marae. They employed a local project coordinator to deliver the project.
How were decisions made to allocate funding	A community panel, representing lived experience and diverse perspectives was set up by the steering group. Grant applicants were invited to present their projects at a community pitching event and the panel scored them against criteria and made the final decision at the event.
How was the fund promoted	Online promotion via social media. Posters were shared at marae and community groups, and local schools received promotional materials. Fund representatives attended a monthly community network and distributed promotional materials broadly via that network's digital database.
How was capability building incorporated into the fund	While no capacity development was built into the fund, two younger community members involved in project delivery noted that they had valued the opportunity for personal learning and professional development. The experience had been inspiring and given them ideas about how to make change and grow community capacity in future initiatives.

2022

Funding contribution and funder	\$10,000 – Department of Internal Affairs \$15,000 – Foundation North \$15,000 – Tindall Foundation
Fund allocation	\$30,000 – grants \$10,000 – operating budget (included project coordinator salary)
Grant amount	Up to \$2,000

Oranga Decides

FN's purpose for investing in the fund	Increase equity by supporting approaches that achieve the aspirations of Māori and Pacific communities; put decision-making into the hands of local communities; address systemic and intergenerational inequalities.
Who was involved in design and delivery of the fund	Auckland Council staff from The Community Innovation Unit and Oranga Community Centre.
How were decisions made to allocate funding	Community members using an on-line voting system (Social Pinpoint). There were a few rounds of on-line voting: (i) community members voted on-line for two (out of six) key priority areas, (ii) voting for the proposed projects to ensure they reflect local aspirations, and (iii) ranking the proposed projects according to importance and potential impact.
How was the fund promoted	The fund was promoted through Facebook, leaflets and posters. In addition, community groups and schools were approached and invited to put forward project ideas.
How was capability building incorporated into the fund	The delivery team were on site at the Oranga Community Centre to clarify the application process, discuss aspirations and draw out the opportunities for possible projects. Support with applications was also provided as required.

2023

Funding contribution and funder	\$25,000 Maungakiekie Tamaki Local Board \$25,000 Foundation North
Fund allocation	\$50,000 – grants No operating budget allocated
Grant amount	Allocated to 6 grants

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