



Participatory grantmaking in action

Insights from Trust for London's
disability justice fund and top tips

Photo credit: Candoco Dance Company, 'Face In', by Yasmeen Godder, 2017. Photo by Hugo Glendinning.

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What is participatory grantmaking?

Participatory grantmaking “is an approach to funding that shifts decision-making power away from grant-making organisations and to the people and places that will benefit from the money.”

In other words, **it’s an effort to make sure that people from the communities the grants are trying to help have a say over where the funding goes.**

Why use participatory grantmaking?

Funders are increasingly seeking to shift decision-making and power to the communities they fund. The reasons for this include to:

- **facilitate trust-** and respect-based philanthropy
- ensure understanding of where and how funding can **make the most difference**
- recognise the **knowledge and perspectives** of the people who will benefit from the money

For more on what participatory grantmaking is & why funders are using this approach, read [the National Lottery Community Fund’s report](#)

Context: The disability justice fund

Our recommendations in this report are based on our experiences of the **disability justice fund**, a participatory fund joint-funded by Trust for London and the City Bridge Foundation. Trust for London were responsible for administering the fund.

There are many approaches to participatory grantmaking. For the disability justice fund, we:

- **Recruited a panel** of eight Disabled activists
- This panel **led on shortlisting and decision-making** for the fund
- To recruit the panel, we asked Disabled leaders in London to **nominate two panel members each**



£3m

participatory fund

31

grants awarded

8

member decision-making panel



Participatory grantmaking: Where to start

Before you start a participatory grantmaking approach, we suggest **asking the following questions...**

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About participatory grantmaking

- Why are you thinking of taking a participatory approach to grantmaking?
- What will it achieve?
- Are you thinking of participatory grantmaking as a time-limited experiment? The foundation or pilot for fundamental change? Or will that decision depend on outcomes?

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About your organisation

- How much control is your organisation comfortable with giving away?
- How much control does your governance structure allow to be delegated?
- What role is it envisaged that staff and trustees will play?
- What skills do existing staff have?

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About resources

- What external expertise might you need to bring in such as facilitator(s) or learning partners?
- What's the grant timeline, and how far does it allow for the extra time needed for a participatory approach?
- What's your budget, and is it sufficient for effective participatory grantmaking?

Top tips from Trust for London's experience

Here are our top 10 pieces of advice for organisations beginning a participatory grantmaking approach, based on learnings from the disability justice fund.

1

Develop a clear set of information resources

Before you recruit participants, develop a clear and simple set of information resources.

This should include:

- Your initiatives **aims and backgrounds**
- The **expected timeline**, including when you plan to review progress and any hard deadlines
- **Details of your budget** and any budgetary constraints
- A clear outline of participant, staff and trustee **roles and responsibilities**, and which powers are and aren't delegated
- An **outline of the organisation's structure**, aims, and grantmaking philosophy
- A concise **glossary of grantmaking terms**: while some participants may have sectoral experience, others won't.

2

Focus on building relationships and trust

- Commit as much time as possible for **induction**
- Make sure staff and participants have the **time to get to know each other** and participants have time to develop an **understanding of your organisation** before decision-making starts.
- Commit to **on-going, open and responsive dialogue** between participants and staff
- Issues will arise, and this approach means they can be addressed in a timely, mutually respectful manner
- Consider whether a **chair or facilitator** is best placed to enable and support effective communication. If so, how will they be appointed?
- Make sure staff have a **clear line through which to escalate any issues** that they do not have the power to resolve

3

Be fair and clear in your approach to remuneration

Pay participants at a level that demonstrates that your organisation values their input, experience and expertise.

Trust for London paid £450 per day. It's important to note that we weren't working with people in receipt of benefits. If you are, it's important to make sure your remuneration doesn't affect their benefits. You may find it helpful to reference [The Social Change Agency's payment for involvement playbook](#).

Be clear about **what your organisation will pay for**. For example:

- Will you pay for time spent reading papers or answering emails?
- Is there a maximum number of hours or days people can claim for?
- Will you fund travel expenses? What about childcare?

Plan and budget for **addressing participants' access needs**.

These will vary depending on the communities you're working with and can include **adjusting the decision-making process** (including extending timelines) and providing equipment or assistance.

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Allow everyone the opportunity to contribute both lived and learned experience

- Participants are often viewed only through the lens of the characteristic for which they were recruited, their professional (or 'learned') expertise disregarded
- Staff are often perceived only through the lens of their role/professional expertise: their lived expertise disregarded
- Remember that participants and staff have both professional and lived expertise. Consider allowing everyone the opportunity to contribute both.
- Thinking about how participants and staff can work together as one team can help this approach

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Clarity of communication is vital

- Explore what this means for each participant
- This is particularly important when participants are Deaf, Disabled or if their English is not fluent

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Remember that your applicants / funded partners are the most important aspect of the work

- Participatory processes are both resource and attention-hungry
- While ensuring that the participatory process runs as smoothly as possible for everyone involved, you need to keep everyone focused on why you're all there - to make grants.

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Participatory processes are complex and untidy, time and resource intensive

- Some issues are foreseeable, and can be mitigated through research and planning
- Some issues are unique to each group of participants.
- Do staff have the time / skills to support and enable the process? Will they need support / training in eg: project management, addressing participants' access needs, providing essential information in accessible formats, facilitation?
- Emotional labour for participants and staff that requires skills and resources to manage effectively
 - Build in more contingency time and budget than you anticipate you'll need
 - Remember that participants recruited for lived expertise related to the grant purpose have skin in the game, and will take their decision-making responsibilities very seriously, which means the emotional temperature of the participatory grantmaking process is likely to be higher than in 'traditional' grantmaking processes

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Talk to a range of organisations before you start

- Talk to a range of organisations and individuals who have been involved with participatory grantmaking, before embarking on your initiative

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User test key documents

- This includes user testing with people unfamiliar with the grantmaking context or your organisation
- This will help to ensure your documents will work for participants with no prior grantmaking or participatory process experience

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Keep watch for mission creep

- Participants are likely to be highly enthusiastic, will see opportunities and may have more radical change agendas than the organisation!

Bonus tip: Be careful using the term 'co-production'

- Be careful about using the term 'co-production' when talking about participatory grantmaking
- 'Co-production' was coined for service co-design, and can engender expectations that can't be met in a grantmaking context
- This can lead to avoidable and time-consuming misunderstandings.

Acknowledgements

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If you'd like to know more about our experiences, get in touch. We're happy to talk.

The full disability justice fund evaluation report is available on request.

Photo credits

Front page:

Candoco Dance Company, 'Face In', by Yasmeen Godder, 2017. Photo by Hugo Glendinning.

Page 2:

Top row, left to right:

Breaking out of the Bubble; Filmpro (photo by Jon Rees from the *filmpro with ten* launch event); Deafinitely Theatre (photo by Becky Bailey from the show 'Everyday 2022')

Bottom row, left to right:

Touretteshero CIC (photo by Ro Murphy); Suvai Deaf East Community



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