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PhiLab

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À propos du PhiLab | About PhiLab

Le Réseau canadien de recherche partenariale sur la philanthropie (PhiLab), anciennement Laboratoire montréalais de recherche sur la philanthropie canadienne, a été pensé en 2014 dans le cadre de la conception de la demande de financement du projet développement de partenariat CRSH intitulé « Innovation sociale, changement sociétal et Fondations subventionnaires canadiennes ». Ce financement a été reconduit en 2018 sous le nom d'« Évaluation du rôle et des actions de fondations subventionnaires canadiennes en réponse à l'enjeu des inégalités sociales et des défis environnementaux ». Depuis ses débuts, le Réseau constitue un lieu de recherche, de partage d'information et de mobilisation des connaissances des fondations canadiennes. Des recherches conduites en partenariat permettent la coproduction de nouvelles connaissances dédiées à une diversité d'acteurs : des représentants gouvernementaux, des chercheurs universitaires, des représentants du secteur philanthropique et leurs organisations affiliées ou des partenaires.

Le Réseau regroupe des chercheurs, des décideurs et des membres de la communauté philanthropique à travers le monde afin de partager des informations, des ressources et des idées.

The Canadian network of partnership-oriented research on philanthropy (PhiLab), previously called the Montreal Research Laboratory on Canadian philanthropy, was thought up in 2014 as part of the conception of a funding request by the NRCC partnership development project called "Social innovation, social change, and Canadian Grantmaking Foundations". From its beginning, the Network was a place for research, information exchange and mobilization of Canadian foundations' knowledge. Research conducted in partnership allows for the co-production of new knowledge dedicated to a diversity of actors: government representatives, university researchers, representatives of the philanthropic sector and their affiliate organizations or partners.

The Network brings together researchers, decision-makers and members of the philanthropic community from around the world in order to share information, resources, and ideas.



Social Sciences and Humanities
 Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
 sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

ÉTUDES DE CAS | CASE STUDIES

Trois études de cas vous sont présentées : une sur la narration et la réflexivité en philanthropie, une autre sur le transfert du pouvoir décisionnel dans les mains des communautés, et une dernière sur une communauté de pratique portant sur la philanthropie et l'équité.

Three case studies are presented here: One on storytelling and reflexivity in philanthropy, another on placing decisions in communities' hands, and a final piece on a Community of Practice focused on Philanthropy and Equity.

Artiste | Artist: Kai Yun Ching



ÉTUDES DE CAS | CASE STUDIES

Decisions in communities' hands: Learning by grantmakers in Canada

By Juniper Glass, MPNL, independent researcher and principal of Lumiere Consulting



Juniper Glass, MPNL, is an independent researcher and principal of [Lumiere Consulting](#), which provides strategic planning, impact assessment and other nonprofit management services to grantmaking foundations, Indigenous organizations and national nonprofits. Juniper is a member of PhiLab and co-editor of this edition of The PhiLanthropic Year. She lives in [Tiohtià:ke/Mooniyaang](#) (Montreal).

A growing number of foundations and other grantmakers are being asked to democratize their practices and advance justice and equity. Participatory grantmaking is an important practice, being developed and explored by funders around the world, to respond to this ongoing call to action.

People who have studied participatory grantmaking in depth, such as Hannah Patterson and Lani Evans,

identify several models of what shared power in grant decisions can look like (check out the side bar: Models of participatory grantmaking). Variations on these models are being invented all the time so I set out to find examples in Canada.

Some public foundations have practiced forms of participatory grantmaking for a long time. Probably the most common model is grants committees at community foundations. However, without careful selection and design, even those committees often lack adequate participation by lower income, racialized, Indigenous and other communities. And what about the lack of diversity in foundations' boards of directors, which often have the final say in which groups get funding?

Rachel Pereira, an independent researcher in Edmonton and co-author of [Unfunded: Black Communities Overlooked by Canadian Philanthropy](#),

has been exploring participatory grantmaking. She thinks that a shift in mindset is needed for foundations to open up to shared decision making, particularly how they think about the purpose and evaluation of their funding: “It’s not just giving a certain amount of money to achieve certain goals. What about evaluating the granting process? It’s good for grantmakers to ask: ‘Were we successful in shifting power? Did people feel they were heard?’ Those will be important markers of success as well.”

Rachel is particularly enthusiastic about the “closed collective” model, in which a group of organizations from a certain geography or community decide together how to allocate philanthropic funds amongst themselves: “This model allows for discussion and idea generation in a different way than if the organizations were competing for grants.”

I came across relatively few examples of participatory grantmaking in Canada, therefore I think it is even important to listen to what is being learned where this practice is being experimented.

I spoke with a few of these trailblazers: Jennifer DeBues of Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough, and three of the wonderful people behind the Arctic Indigenous Fund: Shene Catholique Valpy, Marion Ravna, and Verner Wilson. I heard a humble spirit of learning and community service in each of these conversations.

Moving towards power-sharing in grantmaking means humility, exploration, learning, working together, and listening. It requires an awareness that the journey to greater justice in decision making and funding is continuous. We hope that by sharing experiences, other funders will be empowered to experiment with letting go of some of their power and working with communities to dream up new methods of creating philanthropic relationships and allocating funds.



Arctic
Indigenous
Fund

Arctic Indigenous Fund

Purpose: [Arctic Indigenous Fund](#) supports thriving Indigenous communities across the circumpolar North.

Type of participatory grantmaking: Community Board

How it works:

Young Indigenous leaders work together to distribute funds to community initiatives.

Who is involved in decision-making: Eight [Advisors](#), two from each region (Greenland, Sápmi, Alaska and Canada)

Role of Advisors:

- use consensus decision making about the structure and policies of the fund
- spread awareness of the Fund and act as spokespeople, in collaboration with each other
- interview and select the next Advisors

This structure ensures that the Fund is “rooted in Indigenous cultures, traditions, and self-identified goals for the future.”

Donors: McConnell Foundation, NoVo Foundation, Tamalpais Trust

Insights:

Verner Wilson, an Advisor for Alaska, has worked in the environmental and research worlds and observed how too often non-Indigenous people think they can work in the North without community relationships and collaboration. “I became an advisor with Arctic Indigenous Fund because I want to help the long-term wellbeing of the communities and lands of the North. If you want to make a difference, you have to actually go to the region and listen to what communities’ care about. That is why it’s so important to have advisors who know the cultures, the communities, the people and the issues here.”

Shene Catholique-Valpy, the Manager of AIF agrees: “We are living here, we have these relationships, we know best where the funds should go.”

Marion Ravna, a Sápmi Advisor, has observed that Indigenous values are the key to how AIF works, such as sharing food and cultural exchange (when in person

gatherings are possible) and consensus decision making: “We treat each other as family.”

She has also learned that the role of Advisors is not just giving funds away, but building the capacity to make grants possible in regions where Indigenous communities face barriers to philanthropy. “At the moment we are within six countries - each has different structures and our communities have different views of grantmaking. In Norway, for Sami people we have a social democratic political system and there is a lot of state funding for culture and languages. Sami organizations are used to very strict regulations, so when AIF offers grants that have private foundation sources and that have almost no requirements, people are actually skeptical! We had to make sure that we are trustworthy and build a good relationship with grant partners.”

“In Greenland, Indigenous groups are doing great work, there are few who have formal organizational structures to allocate funds to. There are strict rules there, and we did not want our grants to jeopardize any funds that Indigenous groups already receive through public funding. [RSF Social Finance](#) has been a great financial partner, helping our community partners meet the requirements for accepting grants from AIF.”

The experience in AIF, then, has gone far beyond grants decision making to decision making to outreach, relationship building and capacity building with Indigenous groups to allow a new source of funds to flow in support of their self-determined priorities.

Shene also points out that “for us as Indigenous people, wealth is seen differently than settlers who have generational wealth that stays in a family. For us, our wealth is culture and traditional knowledge and relationships to the land. Because wealth is seen differently, it’s a bit scary to relate to the world of settler philanthropy. We don’t know if there are strings attached, if you can trust the system. That is why we focus on relationship building. If you don’t have trust and understanding, you don’t get to build a relationship. We are not just giving to grant partners. We want to make sure that they give to us as well, through sharing traditional knowledge, sharing food, sharing stories.”

Marion’s advice for grantmakers who are exploring how to do decision-making differently: “Be aware of how you create trust. There will be distrust, and

trust takes time to build, especially in Indigenous and smaller communities. That is why having reference people, people who have the connections to the communities, is key.”



Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough

Purpose: [Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough](#) inspires giving and invests in the people, ideas and activities that support community vitality.

Type of participatory grantmaking: Closed Collective

How it works: Representatives of local organizations work together in a granting circle to decide how a funding envelope should be distributed.

Who is involved in decision-making: Local organizations that have either nominated themselves or have been identified by staff through a consultation process. Each organization receives a grant from the Community Foundation just for being active in the participatory grantmaking process. (The amount of this guaranteed grant varies and is sometimes determined by the participants themselves.) They each present a brief application describing their organization, the people they serve, issues they face, and the kinds of programs they offer. Each organization reads each other’s proposals, participates in a group process, and comes to a decision by consensus about how much each organization should receive in grants.

CFGP has experimented six times in the last two years with thematic participatory granting, on these themes:

- 2020 Fund for [Gender Equality grants](#)
- 2021 COVID-19 Community Response Fund grants
- 2021 [Vital Community grants](#) for equitable COVID-19 recovery.

Donors: Varies, but has included donors and discretionary funds of the Community Foundation,

Community Foundations of Canada, and Equality Fund.

Insights:

Jennifer DeBues is the Co-Executive Director of the Community Foundation. She started experimenting with participatory grantmaking out of intuition, seeking a way to bring decisions more into the community's hands and reducing competition for grants.

"When we think about all the decisions that have to be made in the granting journey," Jennifer explains, "we realize that community participation can be brought in at any point. At the Community Foundation, with our experiments in participatory grantmaking, we do a bit of thinking at the front end as staff about the theme and eligibility, and then we ask participants to make all the other decisions."

What has been the key learning to date? "In a 'closed collective' model, we have found it really important to set the groundwork through open, honest, enthusiastic, empathetic facilitation during the grant allocation conversations, so that people feel safe enough to actually say what they think."

Many of Jennifer's colleagues at other community foundations have asked for a step-by-step guide to how the Community Foundation did these participatory granting processes. But she has learned that no two foundations are the same, and no two grant calls are the same: "I think it needs to be authentic to your community and your foundation. I encourage people to be brave and explore. Be transparent with the community: Say: 'we have this much money and this is what we are doing, this time around.' Then learn as you go."

"To support community-led granting, you have to have an open mind. The foundation has to be prepared to be hands off. It is about shifting power and that means letting go of power, preconceived ideas, ideals, timelines, all those things. You have to go into it thinking: 'Anything can happen.' And you might be surprised - I have had those moments of pleasant surprise every time we have tried this."

To sum up why it has made sense to allow granting decisions to be made in community, Jennifer says: "Participatory grantmaking really puts community at the heart of our community foundation."

“

To support community-led granting, you have to have an open mind.

”

A few more inspiring community-led grantmakers in Canada

[Groundswell Community Justice Trust Fund - Decision making board](#) made up of activists, supporting [grassroots groups](#) across the country

[Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund](#) - Decisions made by the [Advisory Council](#) of Indigenous people active in philanthropy, granting to Indigenous-led organizations working to foster resilience in Inuit, Metis and First Nations communities

[Indigenous Youth & Community Futures Fund](#), at the Laidlaw Foundation

Resources to learn about and transitions to community-led grantmaking

[Participatory Grantmakers](#): a global community of practice with monthly meeting, a Slack channel, and many [written resources](#) and [videos](#)

[Grassroots grantmaking: Embedding participatory approaches in funding](#), by Hannah Patterson

[Participatory Philanthropy](#): An Overview, by Lani Evans

[Letting Go: How Philanthropists and Impact Investors Can Do More Good by Giving Up Control](#), by Ben Wrobel and Meg Massey.

Additional Resources: Models of participatory grantmaking (some but not all!)

Illustrations by [Hannah Patterson](#). Model typology by [Lani Evans](#) and Hannah Patterson.

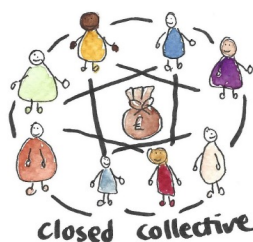


Representative Participation

Including some sector experts, individuals with lived experience or community members on decision making panels, committees or boards.

Community Board

Where the whole decision-making board is made up of community members, sector experts or individuals with lived experience. There are various ways of choosing who these people are such as interview, selection or democratic election.

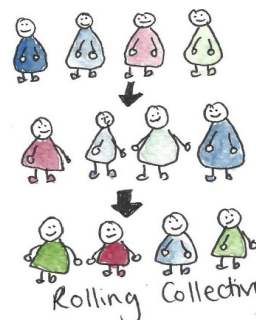


Closed Collective

Involves bringing all relevant organisations together to collectively understand needs and decide how best to spend funding available through consensus decision making. Most appropriate for a small place or sector.

Rolling Collective

All grant recipients are involved in the process of both receiving and giving funding. Those who receive funding will then make decisions for the next round of funding.



Open Collective

All interested parties, including applicants, participate in funding decisions through voting. This can be in person or online.

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