

Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION^{Review}

Philanthropy and Power Supplement
Sponsored by Chorus Foundation

Power to the People
By Sadaf Rassoul Cameron & Arianne Shaffer

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community visioning workshops that will shape, guide, and clarify the routes to this outcome that our members wish to see.

Use all the tools in the toolbox. | Through experience, we know that building power requires multiple, sequenced, and integrated tools. Building our local base and leadership development work has been at the heart of APEN's work from the beginning. And yet this is not enough on its own. These efforts must be closely connected to other strategies, such as state-wide organizing and advocacy, electoral organizing, movement building, direct actions, strategic narratives, and using values-aligned resources.

Last year, as the California Air Resources Board (CARB) moved to develop its scoping plan for addressing climate change, APEN, together with our environmental justice allies, demanded a phaseout of oil production and a future beyond oil. In just a few months, we sent 10,000 letters to CARB; mobilized 750 people to participate in marches and rallies in Richmond, Sacramento, and virtually; worked with Richmond members to provide testimony; organized toxic tours in Richmond with decision makers; developed parameters and scoping plan language for an interagency phasedown of oil production; wrote a big-tent advocacy letter with over 80 organizations signing on to oppose the use of carbon capture for fossil fuel infrastructure; devised a paid media campaign including billboards, mailers, radio ads, and TV ads tying the state's push for carbon capture to oil and gas lobbyists; created timely social-media content connecting our scoping plan demands to climate-related news; and generated illustrated op-ed pieces.

Despite an initial unfavorable power analysis, the momentum that accumulated from our strategies led to major wins, such as doubling the state's goals for reducing vehicle miles traveled (requiring scaling up investment in mass transit), stopping the expansion of gas power plants and setting a strong interim target to retire gas plants and bring more clean, renewable energy online, and calling for a multiagency process to phase down oil refining and extraction in line with in-state demand, which is projected to drop 83 percent by 2045.

JOIN US

In Richmond we have shown that frontline organizing works, from voters seeing through Chevron's efforts to buy the election to young people finding power and agency to fight for a different world. Across the country, many communities are winning fights for climate, economic, and racial justice by building grassroots political power in its many forms. Working-class communities are developing visionary demands and resources. Power structures are shifting to advance community governance and agency.

Philanthropy has often focused on shorter-term or new initiatives, but durable, consistent partnerships are what we need. Behind every APEN member testifying at a hearing are the many intentional steps that brought them there: community connection, political education, outreach and recruitment, leadership development, neighborhood meetings, phone banking, organizing the vote, and more. As our experience shows, sustained, long-term grassroots political power building is the key to countering our well-funded opponents who are able to pursue their goals over the course of many years. We need democracy funders, climate funders, and racial justice funders to organize in frontline communities in the long term and at scale to create a just world. □

Vivian Yi Huang is codirector of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

At Kindle Project, we have embraced power-sharing models for more than a decade. Although we have gained many new insights, we continue to maintain that philanthropy must share power with the communities it seeks to uplift.

BY SADAF RASSOUL CAMERON & ARIANNE SHAFFER

In a world where vast inequalities of wealth and opportunity persist, power sharing has emerged as a transformative approach to philanthropy. Power sharing is not a trend but a necessity. But how can more funders and donors share power in lasting ways, and why should they?

At Kindle Project, we have worked for more than a decade to elevate trust-based, people-powered giving models and participatory decision-making. We have seen the impact of this work on communities and donors alike. As one community-based decision maker put it, sharing power "is a way to start knocking down the walls of power imposed on philanthropic relationships to [make way for] one that is more generative, accessible, transparent, and with humanity at the center."

Power sharing centers communities, allowing them to decide for themselves what they need, how much they need, how they need to receive it, and how to define success. Without community self-determination, disrupting the systems we hope to change proves impossible. In the words of Ash-Lee Henderson, coexecutive director of the Highlander Center and a leader in the Movement for Black Lives: "Fund us like you want us to win." Lasting wins are only possible when power is shared.

WHAT IS POWER SHARING?

Power sharing, sometimes referred to as participatory grantmaking, democratizes philanthropy by inviting community members to become decision makers. (They may also be called community-based decision makers, flow funders, or community advisors.) Community members might make grant decisions, choose areas of impact, weigh in on budgets, shape strategy, and hold positions of influence. Power sharing remakes conflict of interest into *confluence* of interest, whereby preexisting, trusting relationships are valued as assets. It raises webs of connection within and among communities (including philanthropy) and enables community-based decision makers to exercise agency over resources in ways that traditional philanthropy does not allow.

Power sharing is lived, learned, and relational. It is not a science, and we cannot algorithm our way through the process. It is about relationships and trust.

Power sharing represents a departure from traditional models where donors, predominantly white men behind closed doors, control wealth across generations and dictate the direction of charitable endeavors, including strategies and indicators of success. Some statistics illustrate this point:

- There are 127,595 foundations in the United States, with assets totaling \$1.2 trillion. Total giving is \$90 billion, which means that \$1.11 trillion does not move due to philanthropy's tendency to hoard with the 5 percent rule.
- Currently, 92 percent of US foundation presidents are white, 83 percent of full-time executive staff are white, and 68 percent of program officers are white.
- More than 40 percent of the US population is not white, and yet less than 7 percent of total grantmaking is directed to the benefit of communities of color. (It is safe to assume that very little of it is moved with power-sharing intent.)
- At a minimum, power sharing aims to establish more equitable partnerships between donors, communities, and organizations working on the ground. In the elite sector of philanthropy, creative imagination and diverse approaches are desperately needed.

There are many bold efforts afoot in the progressive philanthropy sector, and even more buzzwords to describe them: trust-based philanthropy, participatory grantmaking, post-capitalist philanthropy, social justice philanthropy, decolonizing philanthropy, just-transition philanthropy, bolder giving, indie philanthropy, community-based philanthropy, and more. Often these trends co-opt or re-dress practices that have already been active for generations in communities and even in philanthropy. Pressures to "innovate" run the risk of keeping the philanthropic sector in navel-gazing mode, rather than doing the necessary work of exploring and activating practices that match the values of justice touted by many foundations and donors.

While buzzwords and philanthro-celebs can galvanize followers, create movements, and become anthems, they might also dilute the original intent or call to action. By simply checking a box, anyone can call themselves a trust-based funder, a social justice donor, or a participatory grant maker.

And yet there is a long list of individuals and groups working to dismantle the sector's old structures by shifting power. Marion Rockefeller Weber brought her vision of Flow Funding to the world more than 30 years ago. Today, powerful examples of institutions that share power include international flow funding programs (Regenerosity) community advisory committees (Radical Imagination Family Foundation); boards that feature community representation (Panta Rhea Foundation); international intermediaries that use localized decision-making models (Global Greengrants); community-informed rapid response programs (Urgent Action Fund); activist-driven foundation strategy creation and decision-making (Guerrilla Foundation); and foundation-initiated giving circles (North Star Fund). This evolving list includes social justice funder organizers working to move the sector (we see you, Justice Funders, Solidaire, EDGE Funders Alliance, Change Philanthropy, and Participatory Grantmakers, to name but a few).

WHY SHARE POWER?

The rationales for sharing power are diverse. Some institutions believe that shifting power is right and necessary to tip the scales toward justice.

Acknowledging the systems that have created vast wealth inequality can also serve as an impetus to use power sharing to disrupt the status quo. Others view power sharing as a form of reparations, or simply believe in it as a guiding principle. When some foundations reflect on their effectiveness, they find that closed-door decisions can fall flat and more often do harm. To address the chasm between what goes on inside the gated green zone of a foundation and the outside world, institutions have turned to power sharing in various forms to bridge this gap.

For individual donors, the motivations can be more personal. Many feel a sense of isolation, since giving is often done in secrecy, with anonymity providing a protective layer. Class dynamics create compartmentalized identities for wealth holders, which can show up as divisiveness between the wealthy and the rest of the world. Donors turn to shared power to find community, to find alignment with their values, and to align with collective values. With each power-sharing act, the capacity for empathy emerges as a new currency that breaks through silos for both funders and community members, to share a walk-a-mile-in-my-shoes experience. As one flow funder we work with said, "Only when we build together will we heal together."

In 2021, only 1 percent of foundation grant recipients accounted for nearly half of all grant dollars. Participatory grantmaking breaks open this predictable pattern and creates space for money to flow to groups who sit off the radar of mainstream philanthropy even while doing some of the most urgent work. Community-based decision makers recognize these frontline efforts because the work is happening in their backyards. Place-based funders in particular benefit from giving community members power over grantmaking dollars. For example, with our Kindle Project Slow Fuse Fund, a New Mexico-based gender justice participatory grantmaking fund, several women invested in many groups we had never heard of in our 15 years of working in the state. Power-sharing enlarges our radar, revealing underfunded work. It is the communities that intimately know the solutions they are working toward.

Sydney Fang, former network officer for Chorus Foundation and former just-transition organizer for Justice Funders, facilitated a long-term participatory grantmaking program between Chorus Foundation and Richmond Our Power Coalition. Fang described the profound impact

exerted by community decision makers, especially when it comes to place-based funding: "Who's on the committee is really important; these are the folks engaged in everyday campaign work who know what local folks need and what movement terrain is. Even if a grant application wasn't perfect, committee members could recognize, 'Oh, this partner is really effective at doing turn-out and organizing, we're already familiar with them'—leaning on direct knowledge that wouldn't be possible if they weren't already part of the community."

In all our funds at Kindle Project, we explore this confluence of interest. Starting in 2020, our Indigenous Women's Flow Fund (IWFF) brought together a cohort of five Indigenous women to act as decision makers over grantmaking dollars and shape the fund

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according to their vision. These women are fully compensated for their participation, as are all of Kindle Project's community-based decision makers. Simultaneously, donors engage in their own peer-learning cohort. To date, the program has moved more than \$1.8 million to over 80 Indigenous-led projects across the country. The Indigenous women's cohort knows what their communities need and turn to one another for insights when questions arise about a grantmaking decision. In turn, donors have trust in these women, which translates into a flexible funding approach.

Indigenous peoples receive only 0.4 percent of philanthropic dollars. Out of 43 percent of philanthropic professionals in the United States who are people of color, only 0.8 percent identify as Indigenous. These numbers alone should be convincing enough to hand over power.

When communities provide resources and uplift one another, the need for outside saviors disappears, which in turn supports resiliency. A more dynamic and diverse ecosystem can emerge to counteract the dangers of philanthropic homogeneity. Funding predictable groups feels safe but only reinforces the weaknesses of the systems we are trying to fix.

CHALLENGES

Money comes with uncomfortable power dynamics and historical traumas. When certain people are invited to sit at the table, it becomes apparent that others are not in the room. Sometimes the pace of participation cannot meet perceived urgency. Organizations that receive funding may not fit into a predesignated strategy. The list of challenges is long.

Consider some of the baseline challenges for donors and foundations:

- Donors may expect a certain level of contact, closeness, and sharing. But the transfer of money and power does not guarantee connection. It can be difficult to accept that no one can buy their way into authentic relationships.
- When you let go of decision-making power over money, you may not agree with the grant decisions made by community members.
- Challenges can arise while moving toward shared power within existing financial structures (family foundations, donor-advised funds, etc.).
- There can be eagerness to move toward sharing power, but uncertainty about how, and limited experience in foundations that lack personnel with participatory experience. Donors may need a team to implement power sharing.
- Some donors grapple with their sense of purpose or self-worth once power over money is no longer theirs. (Most donors who are ready to share power, however, have already crossed that bridge.)

Community-based decision makers, on the other hand, face the following challenges:

- Many difficulties that donors face are also experienced by community members who are new to making financial decisions. It is common to feel isolation, pressure, and the desire to fall back on habitual grantmaking practices.
- Power in the hands of community members can pose challenges for those who step into leadership positions. Community dynamics are nuanced, and power over dollars can disrupt the balance. Some decision makers therefore choose to be anonymous. While anonymity provides safety, transparency deepens trust and can be a salve to historical trauma.

- It can be difficult to balance intentional time for programs and decision-making with existing professional and community commitments.
- At some point in the process, community-based decision makers may need or want to share their own power to stretch beyond their known circles.

While the work of reshaping how money is moved must be done carefully, it is important to remember that challenges are a natural part of change.

FUNDAMENTALS OF POWER SHARING

As an ongoing process, power sharing is not formulaic. It is the antithesis of what we might call CrossFit-style philanthropy—go hard in the shortest amount of time, responding to crises with urgency to move money in a predetermined “right” way. Rather, power sharing is lived, learned, and relational. It requires community, accountability, and willingness to experiment. From start to finish, trust is vital.

Power sharing is not an exact science, but those who have experimented with it can offer wisdom to help develop its practices.

VALUES | Ethical participatory grantmaking requires a foundation of shared values and alignment toward equity between partners. Without such values, participatory grantmaking can be wielded to frightening effect in the service of antidemocratic efforts seeking to undermine equality rather than expand it. Bigoted funders and community-based decision makers can use similar methods to cultivate hateful grassroots/astroturf groups that advance populist ideologies. These tools are so powerful that they must be expressly aligned with social and economic justice values and lifted up as a North Star for each initiative.

Effective power sharing is best executed when a North Star-like vision is created from the ground up when those who sit at the table are in alignment with the values of represented communities. Practices within participatory grantmaking should be an expression of those values in action, and the North Star provides a compass to return to over the course of the project. Communities and donors alike should identify and commit to the values that underpin their work and connect to greater social movement values. One community-based decision maker defined her North Star as “a world in which all feel a sense of belonging, where we see the Earth and animals as family, where we live into the fullness of our somatic selves, valuing emotional intelligence and experience as much as rational and cognitive thought, and where we practice methods of healing and justice that address the root causes of injustice and suffering.”

MAKING AND TAKING TIME | Like a healthy democracy, participatory grantmaking takes time and requires participants to make space to address dynamics as they emerge. Without space to air out the complexities that power and money present, there is a risk of replicating the systems that are being confronted. Many communities have culturally relevant practices that take time to carry out. For example, with IWFF, the cohort of Indigenous women makes decisions according to the cycles of nature and the seasons, aligning with their cultural practices. This requires that we at Kindle Project approach our internal programmatic plans with malleability. The role of the donor/foundation is to honor community processes, despite assumptions about responding to urgency. The pace to do this well can be a complex tension to hold, but with curiosity and



openness to sit with discomfort, funders may learn different ways to relate to need and crisis.

In the program she facilitated with the Chorus Foundation and Richmond Our Power Coalition, Sydney Fang reiterated that time considerations are intrinsic to the process: “A challenge I’ve heard about participatory grantmaking is that it takes people away from doing the work, running the campaigns, engaging the community. We addressed that in our process by making sure the committee’s time was not only focused on applications or numbers, but also on how the grantmaking itself is advancing their work; thinking about how the processes engage partners in ongoing movement building to make sure the grantmaking is serving the coalition, rather than vice versa.”

INTERMEDIARIES | Power-shifting endeavors flourish with the support of seasoned intermediaries and facilitators. These entities play a critical role, not only as bridge builders, problem solvers, and holders of healthy spaces, but also to operationalize grand visions into tangible outcomes. The role of the intermediary and facilitator cannot be overstated, yet it is often underfunded and overlooked.

In the case of IWFF, what has become possible with Kindle Project as an intermediary is that both donors and flow funders move at their own pace, within the safety of their own cohorts, to learn and explore the most pressing issues for them. Not only do we take on all the administrative labor, allowing the Indigenous women to focus on what matters most to them, but we also help address power imbalances that can arise when donors and community members are in a shared space. As one donor to a Kindle Project program explained: “By shifting our relationship to resources and power, what becomes possible is a remembering that we don’t have to have all the answers ... that there can be bridgers and translators to help us feel that connection.”

Sharing power cannot be done alone, and philanthropic intermediaries play a key role in building bridges and community.

FLEXIBILITY | Power sharing is about relationships and building lasting trust. This requires fluidity and elasticity to meet communities on their terms. Participatory grantmaking does not mean being passive. Instead, it is a proactive approach, centering the wisdom of communities that is best executed with transparency, a solid structure, and clear parameters. This means that funders should come to power-sharing initiatives with a flexible framework that is malleable enough to be adapted over time. A level of shared decision-making and basic agreements on limitations are especially helpful from the inception of a new program. Over time, initiatives evolve, and this balance can shift. Remaining flexible also means allowing for greater impact to emerge in ways that perhaps were not initially expected.

A PATH FORWARD

Sharing power is a practice that evolves over time and brings its own challenges. Rather than trying to fix every issue at once, what becomes possible if we learn to sit in the discomfort of the unknown and relinquish control? Instead of stepping into the roles of outside heroes or problem solvers, philanthropists must walk alongside communities, uplifting their agency while remaining available to participate when asked. Power sharing is an ethical imperative but also a necessary strategy. □

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