

Kindle Project

GRANTMAKING PRIORITY-SETTING AND STRATEGY

What are your grantmaking and/or strategic priorities (in terms of geographic focus, issue, etc.)?

We are an agile philanthropic organization invested in democratized, collaborative, and strategic grantmaking that aligns donors and projects for meaningful impact. We run an experimental philanthropy lab, innovating creative and participatory grantmaking methods and programs.

One of our creative programs is a pay-it-forward model through which others, including grant recipients, are asked to recommend organizations and initiatives for funding. We are a matchmaking bridge between inspired donors and visionary projects, and we give grants/awards to leading-edge projects and people. We also offer support beyond money and act as cultural curators, sharing stories from our partners that inspire, provoke, and motivate.

Kindle Project fosters a nexus of creative ideas and cultivators to inspire and support possibilities for change. We are holistic, cross-pollinating grantmakers, who recognize that the challenges of our time are interconnected and interdependent and must therefore be met with the same interconnected approach to problem-solving. We therefore focus on diversity of how funding happens to reach unsuspecting who's to be supported.

Who decides the grantmaking priorities? The overall strategy for the fund?

Kindle Project approaches all strategy decisions in a collaborative manner, inclusive of staff, donors, Steering Committee members, and sometimes the broader community. All Kindle Project staff are involved in determining priorities and overall strategies for funds. Kindle Project also works very closely with donors throughout the lifetime of the funds to shape programs and strategies. **Steering Committee** members are also regularly invited to weigh in and provide input to long-term strategy for each fund.

What's the process by which these decisions are made?

Depending on the funding program, decision-making processes vary. Overall, decisions are made through opening spaces for creative dialogue and shared learning.

How are these practices socialized within your organization?

These practices are socialized through open and transparent communication.

TYPES OF GRANTS

What kinds of grants do you provide (e.g., general, rapid response, capacity building, field-building, etc.)?

General support, rapid response, startup seed funding, Flow Funds, and financial awards to individuals. Our Flow Funds are where we ask our grantees/awardees, and other community leaders or organizations to recommend a grant or gift recipient.

What is the range in amount of the grants you award?

Grants and awards typically range from \$500-\$25,000, and on occasion larger grants are provided.

Is the participatory decision-making process the same for all grant types and sizes? If not, why?

Our grantmaking decision-making processes vary across programs and evolve over time. Currently, we are running several participatory grantmaking programs, many of which are Flow Funding programs.

All Flow Funds are decided by Flow Funders who are made up of either grantees, awardees, community leaders, Steering Committee members or participants of one of our Flow Funding cohort programs. For example, with both our **SpiderWeave** and **Slow Fuse Flow Fund** programs, a cohort of flow funders comes together (either by phone or in person) to talk through power dynamics, challenges, celebrations, and the various elements that go into making grantmaking decisions. While the final decision lies with each Flow Funder as an individual, the cohort process has been very effective in supporting these individual's autonomous leadership in philanthropy.

Do you earmark funding for a specific purpose in order to ensure diversity in who/what you're funding?

Our Flow Funding model prioritizes diversity in whom and what we fund by expanding the decision-makers of grant funds to those outside the traditional circles of philanthropy. Our programs are designed to diversify decision-making power throughout the process, and not just when it comes to considering who should receive a grant. For our other grant programs that are not Flow Funds, we make an effort to ensure that each portfolio represents a range of recipients, both in who they are and what they do.

Who determines the type and size of grants, and how?

Funding is determined by the type of **program** (of which we have a few), and this in turn determines the type of grants. For many of the programs, Kindle Project staff works closely with donors to determine the size of grants. However, for Flow Fund programs, the final funding amount is determined by Flow Funders themselves and must be under a predetermined cap. For general support grants, Kindle Project makes grant size determinations internally among staff.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Who is eligible to apply for a grant?

Different programs have different eligibility requirements. Due to limited staff capacity, our Kindle Project Fund grants are solicited and awarded by invitation only. Organizations, projects, and individuals that are considered come from various nominations from Kindle Project staff, our Steering Committee, donors, friends and colleagues, and from our grantees and awardees themselves. For our flow funding programs, there are no applications required unless that is determined by the flow funder themselves.

However, throughout the past 10 years we occasionally have an open call to the public. These open calls are carefully crafted so that we can be mindful of staff time while ensuring that the public can participate. An example of this is our **2018 Carousel Awards** in celebration of our 10-year anniversary.

What kind of outreach happens to make potential grant applicants aware of your grantmaking?

For our grantmaking programs that are open to the public, we rely on heavily on communications strategies, existing relationships, and word of mouth.

How often do you accept applications/grant proposals?

We operate on a seasonal grant cycle, accepting proposals in summer, fall, winter, and spring.

Can applicants get assistance in applying? If so, what kind?

Yes, we usually have a series of conversations with grant applicants prior and during the application process. Applicants are always welcome to ask questions or ask for help and clarification. We are aware that applicants may have time and capacity constraints, and that they may need support in filling out lengthy applications. So, we encourage phone conversations and relationship-building prior to the actual application submission. Because of this model, we rarely receive applications that don't get funded. With our programs open to the public, we currently don't have capacity to assist individual applicants.

What type of information is collected from applicants, and who has access to this information?

Our applications require contact information, proof of 501c3 status or fiscal sponsorship information (if applicable), and a summary of the organization to be used in public communications. We also ask applicants to talk about what makes them unique, innovative, and how they approach systems change. We like to know what they consider as success and failure of their endeavors. This information is accessible to Kindle Project staff and fiscal sponsors prior to grant approval.

INITIAL VETTING/SCREENING/ DUE DILIGENCE

If more than one person is involved, how do you ensure that the same criteria has been considered in all cases?

Kindle Project does not openly solicit grant applications and therefore does initial screening of potential organizations before reaching out to them to invite them to apply. There is a standard application that is provided to each applicant. Decision-making is then conducted as a full staff group. Once Kindle Project decides we would like to pursue providing a grant to an organization or has conducted initial eligibility screening for Flow Fund recommendations, we then request approval for the grant from our own Donor Advised Fund. Before providing this approval, our Donor Advised Fund conducts further due diligence checks in order to ensure the organization has the correct documentation and legal status.

GRANTMAKING DECISION PROCESS AND PANEL

Who comprises your grantmaking selection panel(s)?

This depends on our grantmaking program, which can shift from year to year depending on the funds we have raised. For our Kindle Project Fund, the final selection team is the Kindle Project staff.

For our Flow Funding programs, the individual Flow Funder solely holds the power to recommend organizations for support. The Flow Funder is welcome to use Kindle Project as a sounding board for those decisions, should they choose.

Historically, we have run a community-based decision-making program called **The Solutions Lab**. In this case, we ran an open call to the public, and applications were vetted and selected by Kindle Project staff, Kindle Project Steering Committee, and our grantees from the geographical area and area of focus for the open call.

Our Carousel Awards decision-making team is comprised of a selection panel that rotates monthly. This panel is made up of Kindle Project staff, Steering Committee, Kindle Project grantees, awardees, community members, allies, and other colleagues in the field.

How do you think about representation of specific population groups or geographies?

Kindle Project consistently seeks to ensure our portfolio of grants and awards encompass a diverse range of groups and individuals. Furthermore, we actively seek out recipients who are on the peripheries of mainstream grantmaking such as grassroots groups—those who are new, experimental, or untraditional in approach or are simply less structured than mainstream grantees.

What, if any, is the term limit for members of the selection panel? Why?

We do not have term limits for staff members, Steering Committee members, or donors involved in the selection panel. Flow Funders act as decision-makers for the extent of their Fund's cycle, which varies by program. For open calls, term limits vary by program.

What is the process by which the selection panel determines grant decisions?

Kindle Project facilitates spaces for creative dialogue and shared learning to take place in order to arrive at final decisions.

What considerations are taken into account to ensure inclusive and streamlined decision-making processes?

Due to our small size, Kindle Project is fortunate to be able to take the time to include everyone involved in a respective fund (whether it be staff, Steering Committee members, donors, or community members) in the decision-making process.

Can decision-makers on grantmaking selection panels be applicants? If so, are there any special processes or a conflict of interest policy tied to this occurrence?

Kindle Project Staff and donors are not grant applicants. Flow Funders, those who recommend decisions, are often, but not always, recipients of a grant or gift as per the Flow Fund program they are part of. This is not a payment for services, but rather, the nature of how we approach Flow Funding—as a mechanism of “paying-it-forward”—and honoring the time and wisdom of the Flow Funders. Flow Funders are required to confirm that there is no potential conflict of interest with the flow fund recommendations they are submitting. This includes organizations they or their family benefits financially from, or organizations they are directly involved in either as a board member or staff member.

What happens if there is disagreement among the decision-making committee? How is this resolved? (e.g., consensus, voting, etc.)

Always through consensus, and we discuss until a consensus is reached.

How are selection panel members trained and supported?

Our selection panel is internal and comprises all staff. Therefore, support and training is a general and shared duty between all. However, for individuals and organizations who are asked to recommend Flow Fund recipients, we often provide cohort and individual support to ensure the organizations and individuals feel empowered to make the decisions they want and to talk through any hurdles or complications. For example, in one of our Flow Fund programs, the cohort of Flow Funders meet virtually four times during the year to provide support and insights to the full team. In addition, Kindle Project staff is available anytime for one-on-one discussions.

What recourse do grants applicants have to challenge the decisions?

This has not been an issue since we do not openly solicit for grants.

GENERAL STRUCTURE

What percentage of staff members are “peers”, i.e. of the population the foundation seeks to benefit?

At Kindle Project, we consider 100% of staff as peers with those we seek to benefit. Outside of our work with Kindle Project, we have each been involved in the very kinds of organizations and initiatives our grants seek to support. We are artists and activists and come from diverse walks of life with a breadth of experience and education.

What percentage of board members are peers?

100%. Each of our Steering Committee members also come from the community and are engaged in endeavors similar to our funding recipients. They are members of grassroots initiatives that seek to change power dynamics, address social or environmental harm, or are culture-makers.

What percentage of the grantmaking decision-making committee(s) are peers?

Since all staff members and Steering Committee members are part of the decision-making team and are peers to the grant recipients, 100%. Kindle Project Flow Funders represent members of our communities and the fields that we advocate in and for. Therefore, we also consider them peers and allies.

Are there other committees or operational processes that involve peers?

Kindle Project frequently engages in informal and formal discussion groups with peers (recipients past and current as well as other individuals and organizations outside the recipient pool). This is done through webinars, working groups at nonprofit grantmaking gatherings, and community discussions.

How does the role of paid staff differ from that of peers?

While we consider paid staff to also be peers, the role of paid staff is different to that of Steering Committee members and the peers involved in Flow Fund decision-making.

Do you pay members of your panel/committee?

Our selection panels are sometimes comprised of all Kindle Project staff, who are paid. Donors, who are sometimes included in the selection processes are unpaid. Flow Funders are sometimes recipients of a grant or gift as per the Flow Fund program they are part of, but this is not a payment for services. Rather it is the nature of how we approach Flow Funding.

REPORTING, LEARNING, AND PROCESS ITERATION

What, if any, are your reporting requirements for grantees? Who develops them?

Grants equal to or over \$5000 require a narrative and financial report within a year, as well as an informal phone conversation around 6 months into the year. Grantees can use their own templates for this report; however, if they prefer, we provide them with a template that has been developed with participation from all Kindle Project staff.

Do you do any kind of formal evaluation? If so, what is asked of grantees and who conducts the evaluations?

No formal evaluation is conducted. However, occasionally Kindle Project will conduct spot surveys with previous grantees to determine lessons learned about the grantmaking processes or ideas for future funding areas. Additionally, Kindle Project staff annually meet with our Steering Committee to discuss programs, feedback from our grantee community, mission, and vision, and from there we plan our strategy around changes that may need to take place.

How do you evaluate impact?

Kindle Project does not formally evaluate impact. Kindle Project grants are nearly always unrestricted as we believe our grantees should be allowed to use the funds as they see best fit to support the activities they feel are important. This means that grantees may also use the funds purely for general support to ensure they are able to conduct day-to-day activities. By providing unrestricted grants, we empower grantees to be the central decision-makers of how funding is used and where they concentrate efforts. Because of this, we cannot determine impact as a measure of “change” because we do not have baselines for measurable change.

Rather, Kindle Project establishes close relationships with grantees and use these to gather information about how grantees are growing and evolving. We consider storytelling and sharing as a helpful evidence of impact and we ask grantees during the application process to share how they define success for themselves. This is an important departure from traditional philanthropy for us, as we hand over defining success to the grantees. We encourage them to be transparent with us, as we are with them about what success and impact may look like and how it can be shaped. We then ask grantees to share their stories on our website and social media channels because we believe impact comes in many shapes and forms.

How do you learn about participants' experiences, both as selection panelists and applicants?

Through ongoing and frequent informal and open-ended discussions internally, with grantees, as well as with and between Flow Funders. Occasionally, Kindle Project will use surveys to learn about how participants view various processes.

With whom do you share the results of what you learn?

We share results internally with our Steering Committee and donors, and with the public depending on the nature and relevance of the information.

Have you made changes to your programs based on feedback? If so, what is an example?

We regularly make changes and tweak our programs based on the feedback we receive through structured surveys or through informal discussions with stakeholders, including grantees themselves. Most notably, Kindle Project created the **Indie Philanthropy Initiative (IPI)** in 2014 as a direct response to a call from our grantees. We had asked our grantee community for feedback about working with us and one thing we heard from so many of them was a request to connect with other funders who were relationship-based and non-traditional. It was then we realized that Kindle Project was very uniquely positioned in the field of philanthropy to help bring together and connect outside-the-box grantmakers. After creating, incubating, and launching this initiative at Kindle Project, IPI had grown into its own education and philanthropic organizing entity and spun off from Kindle Project in 2016. We remain close allies and collaborators and are grateful to our grantees for noting this gap in the philanthropic landscape.

For more information about Kindle Project, contact Sadaf Cameron at sadaf@kindleproject.org.

This resource was developed as a companion piece to the GrantCraft guide on participatory grantmaking. This resource is part of a suite of resources that showcase the rich and varied practices of participatory grantmaking across various organizations, reducing the burden on each funder to repeatedly outline their model. The guide and companion resources give insight to the philanthropy landscape about the what, how, and why of participatory grantmaking.

Visit grantcraft.org/participatorygrantmaking to explore further.