

Shared Gifting

A Toolkit to Empower You to Democratize Giving

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About the Document

The purpose of the RSF Shared Gifting Program is to give full decision-making authority of grant funds to community leaders. RSF began experimenting with this model of funding in 2010. This document shares our current best practices around creating and facilitating a successful Shared Gifting Circle.

This is an abbreviated version of our Shared Gifting Tool Kit. For a copy of the full 20 page document including example templates please email Kelley Buhles at kelley.buhles@rsfsocialfinance.org

This document was last updated 10/11/2019

Introduction

RSF Social Finance's participatory grant making program, Shared Gifting, gives full decision-making authority of grant funds to community leaders. Our intention for the Shared Gifting process is to transform the power dynamics that typically exist in the current paradigm of philanthropy. By moving control of grant funds from the donor to the organizations, trust, accountability, reciprocity and community are created in a way that counteracts traditional philanthropic models. It shifts the decision-making authority to community leaders, transforming the power dynamics from power over to power with.

The Shared Gifting process is an effective and engaging way of disbursing grant funding. By having no pre-determined outcomes or objectives for how the recipients use the money, the group is called upon to use its collective wisdom to determine the best use of the funds. It also frees the recipients to create mutually beneficial relationship-based collaborations, beyond the financial one. Such emergent collaboration is rare in traditional competitive models.

Shared Gifting allows community leaders to decide what are the most urgent funding needs, rather than the funders. There are no required outcomes of the process other than what is determined by the participants during the Circle. The follow-up reporting is relationship based, with the group accountable to one another and the work they are all collectively doing in the field.

Our overarching intention is to have the community decide how community wealth is distributed.

What does success look like?

We believe that philanthropy, in the transition to a regenerative economy, is community governed. When facilitating a Shared Gifting Circle, we identify success when power over funding decisions is shifted to the community, collaboration emerges unprompted, and philanthropy is transformed.

Below are real-life examples of the outcomes we have witnessed in various Circles:

Shifting Power to Community

"It was extraordinary to sit on the funding side of a panel. As a man of color, I have never felt so empowered to actually determine the funding of another organization like I did with Shared Gifting. To revolutionize funding this way would actually transform our society." – David Lozano, Cara Mia Theatre Co.

Fostering Collaboration

"For me, the community aspect was really powerful-having the opportunity to see all of these programs within our region, and to think about how we can spread the resources that we have amongst our peers. It was a very different way of thinking about our organizations, how they relate to each other, and how we are all funded. It made us think more about what our priorities are as a community." – Ethan Schaffer, Viva Farms

Transforming Philanthropy

"From this experience, we have learned that we can develop a learning community with grant partners. Moving forward, we are going to look for more opportunities where we can have a similar impact and create more of a community experience rather than just granting out to organizations individually." – Diane Hosey, Embrey Family Foundation

Guidelines and Process

For a brief four-minute film on the process, follow this link to our Shared Gifting photo film (<https://vimeo.com/247229187>).

At every opportunity, RSF looks for ways to access the collective wisdom of our community for decisions about the fund. Our community of borrowers, grantees, donors, and investors is solicited to nominate organizations doing great work in their field. RSF does not determine a strategic focus for the Circles, but rather seeks any organization doing work under our broadly defined focus areas. This leaves room for the needs of the region and/or field to emerge.

All nominees are then invited to submit a proposal. The proposal specifically requests the author to identify how both they and their organization have experienced collaborative grantmaking in the past. It may be necessary to follow up with nominees to explain the Shared Gifting model. A cross-disciplinary group at RSF reviews the proposals and selects a final group of participants based on their potential to collaborate, either as an individual or as an organization.

Every Shared Gifting cohort process is different, as each of the participants in the Circle bring their own vision, needs and way of being. Preparing the participants to be present in the Circle is one of the most important factors of a successful gifting Circle. Once the selected participants are notified, individual interviews are setup with each of them to hear their hopes, fears and expectations. It is also an opportunity to share with them an overview of the process and our intentions for the meeting.

We begin the process of forming a Circle through a request for nominations. We solicit qualified nonprofit organizations working in the specific focus area and region, through our community of donors, borrowers, investors, grantees, colleagues and partners in the field. This open call for nominations allows us to leverage community wisdom through the whole trajectory of the Shared Gifting process.

After the initial introductions, the submitted proposals are distributed among the group for review before the meeting, and a full day meeting is planned.

The essential elements of all Shared Gifting full day meeting agendas are:

- sharing of personal biographies;
- introducing and explaining of organizational mission and work;
- review and discussion of proposals, highlighting organizational needs;
- allocating and distributing grant money to other participants by inhabiting the role of grantor;
- becoming givers to fellow participants through a process of gifting and continuing the circle of reciprocity by optionally redistributing their grants.

After the meeting, RSF sends a follow-up survey to get feedback on the entire process from the participants. RSF also helps facilitate any future commitments or follow-up items from the meeting. In the past, RSF has also hosted a reception to follow the meeting. At the reception, the participants may invite their staff, board members, and funders to come and learn more about both Shared Gifting and the collective work going on in the field and region.

Contact information

We welcome your feedback! At RSF, we continue to experiment with this model of fund sharing and welcome your feedback on our process. We are curious to hear about similar work being done in the world and are happy to support cultivating this model elsewhere.

We also continue to raise funds to support our Shared Gifting work and are happy to engage with any partners or donors who are interested in being involved in this new model of community grantmaking.

Please contact me at:

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