

In recent years, philanthropy and the act of giving have begun to resemble more closely investment or purchase transactions. What ancient and archetypal qualities of gift money have been lost to society when gift money is treated this way? Further, what impact has this shift had on the work non-profits are doing in the world? Is gift money the appropriate form for these types of transactions?

These are some of the questions that have emerged as we at RSF work to create a new model of granting intended to bring back some of the qualities of gift money that we have seen disappear from our economic system concurrently with the industrialization of philanthropy.

In archaic times, gift and gifting were the primary form of exchange within communities. Gifts by their nature are meant to flow towards the needs of the community members while building a social fabric within that community. With no expectation of returns, gifts allow for innovation, education, experimentation and failure. A true gift will continue to grow in value and circulate in the world endlessly.

In the industry of philanthropy the process by which most grants are distributed doesn't allow for these qualities of gift to be present. Customarily, donors and advisory groups determine how money is put to work in the world, rather than the communities themselves. The grant process creates competition among the non-profits applying. Increased expected outcomes and data tracking on grant reporting limits a non-profit's ability to problem solve and innovate as it deals with some of the most challenging problems our world faces. The power dynamic that exists is one of a donor or foundation's power over the process and grantees. Ultimately the qualities of trust, community, and innovation are sacrificed in the current paradigm of philanthropy—at least from the perspective of grantees.

In order to transform the dynamics of current practice in philanthropy, RSF has been experimenting with a new model of grant making that brings some of the qualities of gift back into the philanthropic realm. The Shared Gifting model provides an alternative approach for distributing grant funds that shifts the power dynamic from power *over* to power *with* across the peer sharing group.

Based on supporting 15-plus years of a fund sharing group in the Mid-West, our experience with the Shared Gifting model, involving seven non-profit food and agriculture based organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area, demonstrated that this model of grantmaking is a tool that builds community, creates collaborations, and allows for more effective use of grant funds to problem solve in the world. At the meeting, participants experienced a transformative shift in becoming grantors to and for each other. They collaborated, shared resources beyond the grants funds, and even gave back to RSF demonstrating how reciprocal the giving process is. Participants felt that the process was more efficient than current models and that it both democratized and inspired the grant making process.

We invite you to learn more about our Shared Gifting program by contacting us at:

RSF's Philanthropic Services team at:
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