Chan Zuckerberg Initiative

Community Fund

A Participatory Grantmaking Case Study

Executive Summary

The Chan Zuckerberg Initiative (CZI) Community team is committed to creating a more equitable, inclusive, and just California full of opportunity, where everyone and every community has the power to shape their future. Key to advancing this mission is CZI's Community Fund, which supports nonprofit organizations across San Mateo County, providing essential programming and acting as catalysts for social change in their communities.

Since its inception in 2017, the Community Fund has supported 175 organizations with close to $26 million in grants. These grants empower local changemakers to tackle structural inequities in their communities, from the housing crisis to educational barriers. We hope that the fund — and its impact — will continue to grow, bettering the quality of life for people across San Mateo County and the Bay Area for generations to come.

This report maps out the history and growth of the Community Fund, as well as the creation of the Fund's participatory grantmaking practice in the 2021 and 2022 grantmaking cycles, which propelled grants totaling $13 million to 139 organizations across San Mateo County. This collaborative funding approach engages directly impacted community members as part of the grant funding decision-making process in an effort to build trust and prioritize community voice.

This approach has led to deeper partner relationships and support for the program and to increased representation of organizations in the portfolio with Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other people of color at the staff, leadership, and board levels. This report first dives into the history and structure of the Community Fund in order to give context and demonstrate the fund's readiness for the pilot. The case study then dives into the team's steps to design and operationalize the participatory pilot.

We hope this report provides inspiration and tools for others who wish to make participatory practice a pillar of their work.

Community Fund

A Participatory Grantmaking Case Study

Author: Curtis Yancy | Contributors: CJ Callen, Elisa Espinoza, Rosa Cabrera, Taina Jones

January 23, 2023

This case study outlines the Community Fund's participatory grantmaking pilot in the 2021 and 2022 calendar year cycles. Beginning with the history and details of the Community Fund, this case study encapsulates the steps taken and learnings from the Fund's participatory grantmaking pilot within one of the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative's most community-centered programs.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Community Fund, led by Chan Zuckerberg Initiative's Community team, supports local organizations in San Mateo County that are increasing access to the building blocks of social and economic well-being, like housing, health care, education, job, and career skills. Through this funding stream, our goal is to ensure that communities have access to the tools, resources, and power they need to shape their lives and communities. Using principles of targeted universalism, the Community Fund focuses on supporting organizations serving communities impacted by systemic inequities.

Many of these practices originate in communities of color with collectivist cultural values in which the saying "it takes a village" is not just an idiom but a major part of life.

A Note on Participatory Grantmaking:
Participatory philanthropy and practices have a deep history that should not be ignored. Long before institutional philanthropic practice, many communities engaged in acts of collective care and love, both organized and organic. Many of these practices originate in communities of color with collectivist cultural values in which the saying "it takes a village" is not just an idiom but a major part of life. Additionally, participatory practices have long existed in community organizing, public health, and government practices such as participatory budgeting and the Black Panther Party's free breakfast program, which was conceived, funded, and carried out by the neighborhood. It should also be noted that institutional philanthropy also has a deep history of community participation in giving circles, community foundations, philanthropic activists, and in some larger institutions. Some examples include practices that started during the civil rights era in which communities demanded more accountability and transparency from foundations, which led to the creation of various foundations and philanthropic networks that pushed the ethos of participatory grantmaking. This specific case study outlines a participatory grantmaking practice at the decision-making phase of the process because "community knows what community needs."

Context and History

Community Fund History

In 2014, Mark and Priscilla launched a Bay Area fund focused on increasing educational outcomes for low-income students across the Bay Area. The Community team was a product of that commitment. After engaging in that work, the team realized the need for responsive local work and believed that the San Mateo County community should be empowered to voice their needs and have resources available to own and design their pathways to addressing those needs. As a part of that core commitment, the team began developing the CZI Community Fund, which became an annual request for applications from organizations supporting the communities near CZI offices.

The Community Fund's initial development was rooted in participatory principles. The team embarked on a listening tour in local communities, engaging in outreach to local funders and community leaders. These preliminary outreach efforts resulted in hosting a town hall-style listening session with 90+ attendees and a survey with 300+ respondents from local communities and leaders to understand the needs and guide the Community Fund's focus.

Shifts

History of Decision-Making Framework
In the first few cycles, the Community Fund utilized an application review panel consisting of 20 – 50 volunteer CZI staff. The volunteer process was open to any employee interested and willing to review applications.

Before going into the Community Fund's fourth round, the team made significant strategic and process shifts in order to deepen its community-centered and trust-based practices. This included rethinking the decision-making process to include community members with valuable lived experience.

Program Framework

At the heart of the Community Fund is a straightforward framework of support. The Fund strives to support organizations engaging in asset and power building. The objective of using this framework is to ensure that funding is flexible and responsive to community needs. It also reflects a commitment to supporting impacted communities to meet their immediate needs while building a just and sustainable future.

Asset Building
We hope to build assets to ensure communities have access to the building blocks of social and economic well-being, like supporting basic needs (food security, stable housing, etc.), health, education, job and career skills, and social support.

Power Building
We hope to build power, so communities have the agency to change or create new systems that shape the decisions that affect them. This work includes organizing, advocacy, civic engagement, and base building.

This framing reminds us as grantmakers that this Fund is anchored in trust and that community members with lived experience should have the power to influence the decisions impacting their lives.

Theory of Change and Values

The Community Fund aims to increase socioeconomic opportunity in priority geographies across San Mateo County for marginalized and disenfranchised people most impacted by structural inequities, including low-income households, people of color, immigrants regardless of documentation status, and people who identify as LGBTQIA+, and other communities impacted by systemic inequities. The Fund pairs general operating grants with co-designed capacity-building programming to support leadership and organizational development.

Theory Of Change (Short Form)
- In order to increase access to socioeconomic opportunity for marginalized populations, communities require sustained investment in programs that build community assets and power.

- The CZI Community Fund provides flexible resources for organizations engaging in asset- and power-building. We strive to support leaders and groups

that reflect and actively listen to their communities — because they are uniquely positioned for the challenges facing local residents in San Mateo County.

This theory is rooted in the understanding that, as funders, we operate in a supportive role and that communities themselves are armed with the necessary expertise, wisdom, and knowledge to determine the best solutions.

Decision-Making Framework
The Community Fund utilizes an application review rubric that is based on five criteria. Reviewers use this rubric to score an application's alignment with each criterion.

Decision-Making Criteria
The Community Fund Review Panel, used the following criteria to review and assess applications. The criteria are further broken down into a scoring rubric that separates each criterion into sections and provides scoring guidance from 1 – 5. The criteria are meant to capture the nuance of how an organization approaches its work.

Response to Community: Preference will be given to organizations that support the economic and social well-being of communities that have been impacted by systemic inequities, including Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other people of color; low-income households; immigrants, regardless of documentation status; and people who identify as LGBTQIA+. The organizations we fund are working on expanding access to the building blocks of social and economic well-being — including focus areas like food security, safe and affordable housing, and job training.

Geography: Organizations should be working in communities in San Mateo County.

Community Engagement: Preference will be given to organizations that (1) center the voices of those with lived experience, and (2) demonstrate a long-term commitment and connection to the communities they serve.

Intended Impact(s): Preference will be given to organizations that (1) demonstrate a clear and nuanced analysis of issue(s) and opportunities

locally; (2) clearly outline their approach; (3) define what short-, medium-, and long-term success looks like; and (4) identify potential challenges and possible solutions for those challenges.

Leadership, Staff, and Governance: Preference will be given to organizations whose leadership, staff, and governance (1) have deep experience in the communities supported; and (2) reflect the rich diversity and stories of the communities they support.

Collaboration: Preference will be given to organizations that demonstrate a collaborative spirit through (1) an awareness of available overlapping and complementary efforts; (2) partnerships to increase impact, where appropriate; and (3) an understanding of local community context and the desire and ability to leverage existing community relationships and/or build new ones.

Participatory Grantmaking Process and Design

Participatory Process Overview

Grantcraft, a service of Candid, describes participatory grantmaking as "requiring philanthropy to cede decision-making power, including the strategy and criteria behind those funding decisions — to the very communities that funders aim to serve." Done thoughtfully, participatory grantmaking can serve as a lever for democratizing philanthropy and enabling community members to play a centralized role in allocating dollars.

Practice Overview

At the core of the Community Fund ethos is the belief that the voices of those impacted should be central to the creation and support of solutions within communities. This philosophy drove many of the decisions made in the creation and execution of the Community Fund's participatory process. The outline below breaks the design phase into steps and dives into the thought process. This is a quick overview of the process.

Recruitment: The team reached out to current partners, primarily engaged in power-building work, to recruit review panel members using the recruitment criteria below. The team then went through an intentional screening and interview phase to ensure that the candidates met the criteria, understood the requirements of the role, and were still interested. This included going over details such as NDAs and payments. The payment was based on AMI and broken down into an hourly rate.

Learning Series: The review panel then engaged in a learning series that consisted of multiple sessions meant to connect and ground the group; support the group's learning about philanthropy, grantmaking, and the Community Fund itself; and train them on reviewing applications using the Fund's review and scoring rubric. The review panel members were given time to review applications and then collectively discuss and calibrate their scores.

Review and Support: The group was prepared to review applications after going through the community building and learning series. The program team offered standing office hours multiple times per week as well as 1:1 support for anyone who could not make the office hours, both during normal business hours and in the evening.

Finalizing the Decision: The team's primary focus when finalizing the decision was to ensure that the voices of the reviewers were respected. The team utilized a set of values and goals to guide the decision-making process along with goals related to balancing the focus areas and geography within San Mateo County. The team took a few steps to "normalize" reviewers' scores by calculating standard deviation and ensuring that each reviewer's average scores fell within 1.5 standard deviations of one another. This was done to account for differences in scoring that could be attributed to the reviewer or other confounding variables. After doing this, scores were adjusted, and the recommendation was balanced based on the Fund's values and goals.

The following walks through the design process for the Community Fund's participatory grantmaking pilot in 2021 and 2022.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THEORY OF CHANGE

Several factors were well aligned with building a participatory grantmaking practice into the Community Fund, including the values, place-based structure, and previous review panel structure and engagement. The Community team was also well positioned with deep relationships with community partners who would later support review panel recruitment.

The Community Fund team that worked on this pilot was also made up of individuals with relevant and useful experiences and skill sets, lived experience, philanthropic practice, organizing/power building, group facilitation and training, DEI practice, and other related experiences and skills. These skills facilitated effective relationship-building and learning. Participatory grantmaking was well aligned with the Community Fund's team, theory of change, and values.

STEP 2: CONSTRAINTS AND POWER MAPPING

In order to set up the pilot proposal for success, it became important to think about the context of the program and work. This included considering the history, capacity, and expertise needed to do this work well. The team also took time to consider other practices and literature on participatory frameworks. A report by the Ford Foundation was particularly helpful in deciding what phase and depth of participatory grantmaking would be most likely to be approved and have the intended impact and deep participation. It

was also important for the program team to reflect on its own willingness to truly cede some of the decision-making power to the community review panel. Executing a participatory grantmaking practice at the decision-making phase only to significantly alter community input and recommendations is at odds with the philosophy underlying the practice and the Community Fund's theory of change. The team also took time to consider what depth of practice would be realistic given internal organizational processes and decision-making practices.

### STEP 3: DETERMINE TIME FRAME AND DEPTH OF ENGAGEMENT

After understanding constraints and power-mapping, the team defined the point and depth of engagement of their participation, as well as the amount of decision-making power the review panel would have. The image below, adapted from the report: Participatory Grantmaking: Has Its Time Come? (page 6), illustrates the range of engagement points when employing a participatory framework. The program team incorporated a participatory lens in the "granting process" during the Deciding phase. Ultimately, the program team engaged in a deep values-based partnership with reviewers to land on final grant recommendations.

Those values included centering community review panelists' voices and refraining from significantly altering any reviewer's score. The team balanced this with program goals related to budget and balance of focus area and geography support.

Participatory Grantmaking: Draft Overall Framework

Informing	**Consulting**	**Involving**	**Deciding**
Grantmakers tell	Grantmakers receive	Two-way communication that leads to grantmaker decisions	Two-way communication that leads to joint decision-making
Non-grantmakers receive	Non-grantmakers tell		

| | | | PRE-GRANT | GRANTING PROCESS | POST-GRANT |

Adapted from the Participation Grantmaking Overall Framework by Cynthia Gibson
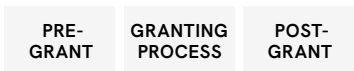
STEP 4: DETERMINE RESOURCING

The team scoped a budget for the review panel that included support to ensure access and inclusive practices for items such as additional facilitators and language justice.

All external reviewers were compensated based on the area median income and the projected number of hours they would spend from application through review. The budget also included money to support accessibility for individuals to cover things like child care and meal costs during learning sessions and other items such as internet connectivity.

STEP 5: IDENTIFY CRITERIA FOR REVIEW PANEL

After receiving approval to execute the participatory pilot, the Community Fund team needed to determine a process to recruit and train external and internal review panelists that aligned with team values, which included:

- Developing strong partnerships with local members of the community.

- Recognizing the individual agency of each member and building a sense of shared community.

These values guided the design of the review panel as the Community Fund team considered the implications of the criteria and outreach strategy. Within the initial design of the review panel, the team wanted to build in requirements for lived expertise and equitable compensation.

Review Panel Criteria and Application

The program team set out to recruit an equal number of CZI employees and community reviewers from the Community Fund's priority geographies by developing recruitment criteria that would apply to internal and external review panelists. The team believed holding internal and external members to the same criteria would create a deeper sense of community and reflect the guiding principles and theory of change driving the work. The evaluated merits of every criterion are captured below:

- You have firsthand experience as a member of a socioeconomically disadvantaged community.

- You have a deep connection and understanding of BIPOC communities and opportunities in San Mateo County.

The most important aspect of the criteria was communicating the need for lived experience, which was articulated as being a member of a socioeconomically disadvantaged community. The term socioeconomically disadvantaged was left up to interpretation as this could encompass a wide variety of individuals, from racial minorities to those living with a disability, to individuals who have experienced homelessness. The team focused on recruiting community members who identify as Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other people of color because they make up a large portion of San Mateo County's extremely low-income communities. The team also strived to get a diverse representation of community members.

- You are 18+ with a desire to advance racial equity and racial justice in your personal and/or professional life.

In the development of the Review Panel Criteria, the team decided to add an age requirement of 18+ due to limited time and capacity. This decision came from the team's understanding of the time and intention it takes to support a group that includes youth.

- You are passionate about creating community-centered solutions.

Along with the lived expertise requirement, the team required participants to have a baseline knowledge of nonprofit practice and grassroots activism. While the team planned robust training, these sessions alone would not be enough for individuals completely new to the space.

Reflection on community participants: Ultimately, not all review panelists had a baseline knowledge of nonprofits and philanthropy. Even members who had experience with community-based organizations shared concerns about the learning series curriculum being too dense.

- You have internet access and basic tech fluency. Training and application review will be online. (We can provide support and training if necessary.)

In line with the last bullet, the team thought carefully about our ability and capacity to support the panel. A technology criteria was included because the meetings and reviews would be virtual at this stage of the pilot due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The application review platform is also online. The team understands that members of the community can face technology barriers, which is something that will be addressed in future cycles.

The team budgeted to bring on a language justice service in order to ensure full access for non-English speakers. All learning sessions were held live in English and Spanish. Additionally, all materials, including the grant applications themselves, were translated for review. There was also a budget for an experienced facilitator to lead the early community-building sessions as well as community-building sections in subsequent sessions (this did not continue into the second year of the pilot as the program team has experienced facilitators). The team also budgeted for external facilitators to run sessions related to the history of philanthropy and racial equity and justice in philanthropy (Justice Funders). The team found it important to bring in external experts to facilitate these sessions.

Reflections and Learnings

The following section outlines key learnings and takeaways captured from the participatory process. At a high level, successes from the process included:

- **Forging strong relationships:** The team built trust with the community by being transparent about the grantmaking process and opening it up to external review. This allowed the team to connect with and learn directly from community members. For staff engaged in the Community Fund process, it was the closest they felt to the San Mateo County Community. The strong relationships and trust developed as a result were represented in a recent blog post. There was also a spillover effect of increased trust and connection with other local programs.

- **Recruitment:** Because this was an initial pilot, the team leveraged existing relationships with community-based organizations to recruit panelists for the community review panel. Working with partners lent credibility to the Fund's decisions. Focusing outreach efforts with known partners allowed the team to recruit from a pool of highly qualified community leaders who understood the work. They shared a commitment to building a healthier, more just community in San Mateo County.

- **Language justice:** Language justice was a success and led to important learning. The team embedded a new practice into the work to allow for the participation of Non-English speaking community members. While there were only two monolingual Spanish speakers, having bi/multilingual panelists and speakers created a more inclusive environment. Virtual interpretation tools were used to conduct meetings in English and Spanish, and the learning series started with reminders on language justice principles.

- **Reviewer bias**: The team noticed that bias showed up in reviews. This was evidenced by leniency toward specific organizations that provided resources that may have been particularly salient to a reviewer's lived experience. There were also reviewers who scored, on average, higher or lower than most. It is normal to have this kind of distribution, so the team normalized scores in order to bring them within 1.5 standard deviation of another. The team also compared reviews of applications translated to Spanish with English reviews to ensure that there was not a statistically significant difference between reviews due to translation; there was not.

OUTCOMES

- The team received feedback from multiple organizations that they were impressed by CZI's commitment to centering community voice in the decision-making process and that other philanthropies should consider similar practices. This led to deeper partner relationships and support for the program.

- Preliminary findings indicate that this participatory approach resulted in an increased representation of grassroots organizations receiving community funding for the 2021 – 2022 funding cycle.

- This process also resulted in an increased representation of organizations with Black, Indigenous, Latinx, or other people of color at the staff, leadership, and board levels.

FUTURE TAKEAWAYS

- The team will continue using this practice as it has helped deepen relationships with current and prospective partners.

- The team will consider how they may be able to build participatory practices beyond the decision-making process, including further developing the program's strategy and framework as well as the decision-making criteria.

- A future vision for this work includes building this participatory grantmaking engagement into a larger emergent leadership training opportunity in which local leaders are able to go through a leadership development program culminating in this review experience. This could act as a pipeline for those with lived experience into philanthropic and nonprofit leadership.

Draft Logic Model

INPUTS

The Community Fund team structured an inclusive process with a panel of local and internal leaders with lived experience.

- High % of panelists are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) and/or identify as individuals with lived experience of the issues and opportunities within San Mateo County and meet other panel criteria.

- 5 – 6 organized philanthropic and community building workshops totaling 40 hours committed to the panel.

- 1:1 support for review panel members throughout the process.

- Language justice and inclusive facilitation.

OUTPUTS

Recommendations from the review panel informed CZI's support of local organizations.

- $13 million awarded to 139 organizations in the form of general operating support grants.

- High percentage (~72.5%) of small to mid-size organizations represented in the Community Fund portfolio.

- High percentage (72.5%) of organizations staffed and led by BIPOC and individuals that are representative of the Community Fund priority geographies.

- 13.75% of organizations identify power building as their main body of work.

OUTCOMES

The Community Fund portfolio will contribute to increased socioeconomic opportunity in communities with a focus on low-income individuals, BIPOC families, immigrants regardless of documentation status, LGBTQIA+, and other historically marginalized groups.

- Increased opportunities for families and individuals of color.

- Levers for long-term and systemic change are more resourced.

- Community support is increasingly driven by those with lived experience resulting in deeper and more impactful work as aligned with the Community Fund theory of change.