

Community Development Pathways for Grantmakers

What does it mean to be a grantmaker with a community development perspective? How will this impact on practice? What are the impacts of deciding that the vision of the grantmaker is community development and that grantmaking is just one tool among many others in the toolbox.

These are among the central questions in my Master's thesis. The following information is extracted from the Conclusion.

Criteria

On the basis of the literature, theory and interviews the following criteria for community development focussed grant making and related activities have been formulated:

Criteria for a community development focussed grant maker:

- The activities, strategy and philosophy will be consistent with Treaty of Waitangi based practice. That is that it will acknowledge the values and processes of Maori culture.
- The grant maker will focus on issues that are identified by the community as important for development rather than being solely focussed on the grant makers view of a good society. It will be respectful of the right of the community to determine its own future.
- The grant maker will seek to minimise the power imbalance between grant maker and grant seeker.
- The grant maker will be concerned with ensuring the central place of education. This is not necessarily formal education processes but also informal learning.
- There will be a focus on social change that creates greater levels of social justice.
- The grant maker will encourage inclusiveness and a group focus rather than individual centred culture within the community.
- The grant maker will recognise that social change is a long term process and will commit to longer term interventions.
- The grant maker will be unafraid to support social change through advocacy based activities.
- The grant maker should focus on systems, structures, social infrastructure and underlying causes rather than only alleviating the symptoms of social ills.
- The grant maker should demonstrate congruency. That is that the processes, structures, decisions and strategy should all be consistent with the stated values of the organisation.
- The grant maker should be open, transparent, and accountable to the community it serves and encourage open and honest relationships with its stakeholders.

Treaty based practice

In the Aotearoa New Zealand context the Treaty of Waitangi is a central and founding document whose place has been increasingly recognised over the past 20 years. The document, however, gives very little guidance as to how it will be interpreted in practice. In practice it means having relationships with Maori that are respectful, that recognise legitimate aspirations, that recognise cultural norms and obligations, and that value inclusiveness and social justice. It is clear from this description that the attitudes that are

needed to be a community development centred grant maker and to be a treaty based organisation have a great degree of overlap. And on the other side of the coin a community development centred grant maker will act in a way that respects the Treaty of Waitangi.

Activities that might be undertaken by the grant maker:

- There should be Maori representation in areas where policy, strategy and decisions are made. In a practical sense this means having board members who are Maori and where appropriate Maori staff members.
- Where required training should be provided to assist with Treaty understanding and implementing actions.
- Treaty based policy and practice should be developed.
- The concept of koha or donations in Maoridom usually involves an expectation of reciprocity back to the donor. In order for Maori to feel comfortable about approaching the grant maker there needs to be a clear understanding that the reciprocity expectations of the grant maker are that the donee will reciprocate through providing benefit to the community so as to implement the strategy of the grant maker to build stronger community.
- Where conferences are held there should be an effort made to ensure that Maori perspectives and processes are incorporated into the conference.
- Manaakitanga is important. On a practical level this means being able to provide good hospitality during meetings with Maori, where the grant maker controls the venue and contributing koha to cover other situations.

Focus on issues identified by the community

In an environment where grant makers only hear good things about themselves it is not difficult for grant makers to play God. A community development approach is a very useful antidote to this temptation.

There is a role for grant makers in facilitating or funding the facilitation of processes that allow the community to determine the nature of the issues being faced and solutions that are right for that community. There is a caveat. It is important that the grant maker has a strong and clear view of the ideal community and social justice and that proposals from the community are checked against this wide concept. With the benefit of hindsight there are very few grant makers who would want to have supported Nazist, Apartheid or other similarly abhorrent initiatives in their communities.

Activities that might be undertaken by the grant maker:

- The facilitation of community meetings and other processes that help a community to determine courses of action in response to community needs.
- Attendance at community meetings as an observer to hear the views of communities.
- Collecting of information about the nature of communities such as census statistics, health, education and justice statistics or information about effective social interventions.
- Involvement in processes that identify key issues facing communities such as discussion forums or listening carefully to grant seekers.
- Collation of information about the needs of grant seekers as revealed through applications.

Power issues

There is often a considerable power imbalance between grant makers who have resources such as money and influence and grant seekers who normally have few resources. It is essential that grant makers try to address the power imbalance in order that there can be an honest and respectful relationship. Such a relationship is important as the requests from grant seekers are an important source of information for the grant maker.

Activities that might be undertaken by the grant maker:

- Be clear about the values, philosophies and strategies underpinning policies and processes and ensure that these are congruent with public pronouncements.
- Be open about priorities as part of a respectful relationship with the community. This means that grant seekers will not spend time on applications that are clearly outside the priorities. Grant seekers accept that there is not unlimited funding available and appreciate openness from the grant maker.
- Be clear about criteria for funding and ensure that restrictions are not placed on applications above those required by law or the trust deed. Arbitrarily restrictive criteria can encourage grant seekers to submit "creative" applications.
- Provide information on grant seeking and fundraising. This can be through direct provision of professional development opportunities or one to one advice or through grant making activities.
- Negotiate outcomes so that evaluation is based around outcomes that are meaningful. Many organisations have accountability mechanisms that report back to their own members or beneficiaries and where possible hooking into such processes is preferable to placing the onus of further accountability.

Education focus

Education is a pivotal part of the community development process as it is through education that communities develop a sense of the potential for themselves and understand the dynamics of change and the forces that work against change. On an individual level education is also important to ensure that community organisations understand the nature of issues facing the community and what interventions are most likely to be successful. From the grant makers perspective education will ensure that the funding available to communities is spent wisely to achieve the optimum outcomes for each dollar spent.

Activities that might be undertaken by the grant maker:

- Fund thinking time for community organisations. This may involve helping to fund facilitators for planning or funding sabbatical leave for key staff to enable them to focus on the bigger picture.
- Organising conferences and seminars that expose staff and board members of community organisations to stimulating and provocative ideas can help to encourage creative responses to community issues.
- In other cases the grant maker could consider funding study leave and paying for relief staffing.
- Provide mentoring and organisational development opportunities for those with passion but a lack of skills. Skills can be learned and passion can not, so it is important to invest in people with passion.
- Recognise the life cycles of organisations. Initial passion is rarely sustained for a long period and it is important to ensure the organisation has sound systems and processes to ensure survival past the initial stage.

- Provide opportunities for community organisations to network. This may be structured or unstructured and would include formal networking meetings and informal invitations to coffee. This allows the community organisations to understand each other better but is also an opportunity for the grant maker to listen carefully to the concerns of the community which will help the grant maker to become more responsive.

Focus on social justice

Inherent in community development is a sense of social change that will deliver a greater level of social justice. If a grant maker is committed to a community development approach then there is also a requirement to be courageous in supporting social justice issues either through grant making or through other activities.

Activities that might be undertaken by the grant maker:

- Be prepared to fund new approaches to solutions to social issues but make sure they are well researched and likely to work. Be prepared to fund independent external evaluation for such projects and negotiate protocols about dissemination of useful information to other organisations in the community.
- Consider a fund for “outside the square” proposals. This fund would typically be a small proportion of total funds and should contain, or be matched by, a component for the independent expert evaluation of the results of such projects.

Inclusiveness and Group focus

Implicit in the concept of community is a focus on group rather than the individual. Processes that utilise the strengths of the group usually lead to more sustainable outcomes. This is true of good decision making processes where the diversity of the group is utilised and respected in order to obtain more robust decisions. Such decisions are more likely to be supported during the implementation phase.

Activities that might be undertaken by the grant maker:

- Find ways to ensure that the voice of the community is part of the decision making process. While there are obvious conflicts with the stewardship and fiduciary roles of trustees it is important to find appropriate ways to reflect the values and aspirations of the community in their decision making. This can involve consultation with the community in determining vision, mission or purpose statements to provide a framework within which decisions will be made.
- Provide sufficient detailed accountability information that will allow the community to critique the activities of the grant maker.
- Reward group rather than individual initiatives and achievements.
- Promote the concept of working in partnership with other organisations and institutions and model the behaviour.

Social Change is a long term process

The virtue of patience is hugely valuable in a grant maker. Social change is a very long term process, often with many setbacks. It is therefore important that the grant maker is able to take a long term view and accept that there will be challenges along the way.

Activities that might be undertaken by the grant maker:

- Be prepared to enter into longer term funding commitments.
- Do not change grant criteria unless it is absolutely necessary.
- Where projects or programmes do not deliver the outcomes expected then it is important for the grant maker to work alongside the community organisation to help both parties understand what has happened and to learn from the experience.
- Be prepared to fund mentoring services to help organisations learn and become stronger.
- Where the project or programme warrants evaluation negotiate the process and outcomes to be evaluated with the grantee. Include organisational learning as an area for evaluation so that mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn rather than something the grantee hopes the grant maker will not discover.

Advocacy

Advocacy is not well defined in Aotearoa New Zealand. Current taxation law does not allow advocacy as a charitable purpose although there is interest in finding an acceptable definition that would allow organisations to advocate and remain charitable. Presently advocacy is allowed as a peripheral activity but not the main activity. It is important to distinguish between education which seeks to increase public information around an issue and advocacy which seeks to change legislation, public policy or structures. Unless the issue is generic or directly affects the grant maker it is preferable for community organisations to advocate for themselves. There is a role for the grant maker in funding advocacy activities in community organisations and using its influence to open doors.

Activities that might be undertaken by the grant maker:

- Recognise that there are situations where advocacy is appropriate. These situations are as follows:
 - Where the issue is about the structure of the sector such as the distinction between government and community responsibilities, funding of the sector or wider social policy issues.
 - Where the grant maker is asked by the community to represent its interests and the community may be placed in a vulnerable situation if it advocates on its own behalf. A typical situation may be in advocating for a different funding system from government where to criticise current policy may put existing funding in jeopardy.
 - Where the grant maker is able to use influence in order to pave the way for community organisations.

Causes rather than symptoms

There is a fine balance between providing some help in the face of immediate need and addressing the underlying causes of the need. There is a lovely saying often quoted in philanthropic circles "I was hungry and you did some research and I was still hungry". The saying implies that it is not enough to do lots of research and disseminate that research. There must be a preparedness to take action required. Addressing immediate need is often easier, less risky and tends to make decision makers feel good on an emotive level. Addressing causes is a more difficult issue that requires a thorough knowledge of the causes and of effective interventions. There is often a lag while research is undertaken and potential interventions thoroughly scrutinised for unintended consequences.

Activities that might be undertaken by the grant maker:

- Disseminate research findings.
- Be prepared to fund or facilitate training in strengthening infrastructure, networking and opportunities for discussion.
- Be prepared to give grants that are for the purpose of changing systems
- Be prepared to be involved in public information campaigns that are about changing public attitudes.
- Recognise that the grant maker has far more resources than money. Influence, expertise, access to research, opportunity to dialogue, can all be very valuable resources to the community.

Congruency

Processes used give important messages about values. If a grant maker is committed to a community development approach then there is a need to consider carefully what is done and how it is done. Communities will recognise incongruity and it has the potential to damage both relationships and credibility.

Activities that might be undertaken by the grant maker:

- The grant maker should never buy anything for themselves that the grant maker would not give a grant to a community organisation to buy.
- Processes that are consistent with community development principles are to be preferred even if they take longer and are sometimes frustrating.

Transparency and Accountability.

It is important that grant makers are accountable to the community for their activities. Grant makers are the stewards of valuable community resources and it is important that the community have the information to be able to critique their activities. Many grant makers require accountability from grant seekers and the issue of congruency is important.

Activities that might be undertaken by the grant maker:

- Have very clear protocols around declining of applications. Giving reasons can help the organisation to either frame future applications better or, where the proposal is clearly outside criteria, encourage application to alternative sources of funding.
- Encourage organisations to learn from failures and mistakes and do not penalise them for being honest about failures or mistakes.
- Be open in reporting to the community and provide sufficient information that allows the community to critique the activities of the grant maker.

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Community Trusts Conference 2010