



REIMAGINING GRANTMAKING

Lessons Learned from the Social Venture Partners
New Grant Committee, Winter 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SVP Seattle (SVP) launched our first New Grant Committee (NGC) under our Reimagined Vision in the winter of 2021. We invited more people to join the NGC, embraced the idea of creating grantmaking pilots, and committed to incorporate trust-based philanthropy. This report shares an overview of the process and the lessons learned.

New Grants Committee

We had our largest NGC to date, with 26 individual and community Partners participating. The committee split into two subgroups to develop different grantmaking processes. The subgroups developed two pilots – a nominations process and a Letter of Intent process – that SVP staff will implement this winter and spring.

LESSONS LEARNED:

Continue to include more people, especially BIPOC voices, in SVP's decision making and programs.

Letting go of power can be uncomfortable, but it's necessary if we truly want to shift decision making and resources to communities.

It's critical to keep evaluating and learning from the process, even after the committee work is done.

Trust-based philanthropy takes time.

Allow more time for the Cohort to meet, both with regards to the length of each meeting and how many times the group meets.

The participation and voices of BIPOC community Partners is critical - ask in advance what they need to fully participate in the process.

Elevate BIPOC voices in our discussions and decision making.

Be clear about our expectations to the entire cohort that BIPOC community Partners should make the decisions both about the grantmaking process and the grants themselves.

Be clear up front about the importance of attending the majority of meetings, so Cohort participants can decide if they can commit time.

Provide a clear, goal-oriented structure in place from the beginning so members can focus on selecting the right process and on choosing the grant receipts.

Learn in public - it's scary, but it's a practice of humility and vulnerability, and invites people into your learning process.

INTRODUCTION

In April of 2021, I announced SVP Seattle's (SVP) new [Reimagined Vision](#) at our Spring Partner Meeting. This vision serves as the North Star for how the organization will cement our practice of philanthropy that advances racial justice and equity.

At the heart of the Reimagined Vision is a commitment to life-long transformative learning. Learning together. Learning to make mistakes. Learning in public. Trying and learning, adjusting from our learning, and then trying again.

This report shares what we – SVP Seattle and Partners – learned from our New Grant Committee (NGC) in 2021. We set out to pilot new ways of grantmaking that involved more BIPOC voices, challenged traditional decision-making, and lessened the burden and time required of grant applicants. We knew we wouldn't get everything right. But we could try, take what we learned, readjust, and try again.

We celebrate our 25th year as an organization this summer. As we mark this milestone, I am reminded again that this organization continues to grow because we embrace learning as a core part of who we are. I am excited to take our learning about the NGC public with you – so that we can learn together, hold each other accountable, and dream about what we can learn together next.

Sincerely,

Emiko Atherton, Executive Director
Social Venture Partners Seattle

NEW GRANTMAKING COMMITTEE BACKGROUND

SVP's New Grant Committee (NGC) is our longest standing grantmaking program.

The original purpose of the NGC was to engage a cohort of SVP Partners in experiential learning on non-profit grantmaking. The program focused each year on one of our historic funding areas - kindergarten readiness, K-12 education, and environmental justice. The NGC also served as the committee that selected SVP's new multi-year grantee each year.

CO-CREATING A REIMAGINED GRANTS PROCESS

After our Spring Meeting in 2021, SVP set up the first of our Reimagined programs – our summer Co-Creation Cohorts. Three Cohorts, made up of members of the SVP community, were charged with exploring how the Reimagined Vision could transform our main program areas (advocacy, learning journeys, and grantmaking). The Cohorts would ultimately make recommendations on how to re-align our fall program activity with the new vision.

Thirteen people joined the Grantmaking Cohort, included Partners who were previously NGC members, Partners who were new to grantmaking, staff from former SVP Seattle grantee organizations, staff from organizations who previously applied for a grant but did not receive one, staff from other locally-based non-profits, SVP staff and board members.

After three meetings, the cohort encouraged SVP Seattle to consider the following values in our grantmaking:

- Sharing power, collaborating, and co-creating with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color individuals and organizations
- Practicing inclusivity and engagement
- Modeling for philanthropy by centering BIPOC voices
- Removing the barriers and burdens for non-profits to apply
- Embrace trust-based philanthropy

SVP committed to use these values to design our next New Grant Committee, beginning in Fall 2021.

WHAT IS TRUST-BASED PHILANTHROPY?

“An approach to giving that addresses the inherent power imbalances between funders, non-profits, and the communities they serve.”

– *The Trust-Based Philanthropy Project*¹

1. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/607452f8ad01dc4dd54fc41f/t/6165b42c2543b05926f6910c/1634055212836/6+Grantmaking+Practices+of+TBP_Oct2021.pdf

THE NEW GRANT COMMITTEE

The 2021 NGC comprised 26 people - 50% of whom worked for or represented non-profits in King County. Robert White, SVP Board Member, and Pamela Oakes, owner of The Profitable Non-Profit, served as co-chairs of the committee. SVP staff provided guidance, administrative support, and subject-matter expertise. The original timeline was planned for eight meetings over eight weeks. However, the committee ultimately extended their meetings into mid-January of 2022.

Recruitment

SVP wanted the NGC to have a mix of experience with SVP, lived experience, race, class, age, and gender, as well as at least half of the committee members rooted in a local non-profit. To recruit, we sent out an email to our entire list of Partners, alumni, current grantees, and past grantees, as well as anyone else on our mailing list. We also recruited Partners who had expressed previous interest, people nominated by our Partners, and community leaders we knew. We also asked community leaders for recommendations of who to invite. We offered a \$750 stipend to anyone who participated to compensate people for their time and talent.

Approach

The NGC started by grounding themselves in SVP's former grantmaking and learning more about new models for grantmaking. We shared articles, had group discussions, and heard from current grantees about their experience with SVP. SVP staff also laid out the charge for the committee:

DESIGN A GRANTMAKING PROCESS FOR TWO GRANTS THAT

- 1) removed the burden from interested non-profit applicants, and
 - 2) addressed the power dynamics between those who decided the grant and those who want to receive the grant, with an emphasis on addressing racialized power dynamics.
-

The grants also needed to be made to a Black, Indigenous, or People of Color led and serving non-profit working in King County. The grant would be an \$25,0000 general operating support for one year, but SVP would be entering into a multi-relationship with the organization. Last, the organization could work in issue areas including (but not limited to) environment and education.

After initial research and discussion, a subgroup identified four different grantmaking options the NGC could pilot. These included:

- 1 Open process: letter of intent/request for proposals
- 2 Intermediary/hybrid: SVP creates an intermediary to select the grants
- 3 Closed process: nominations of organizations
- 4 Closed process: community-based

After a discussion on the timeline, the cohort selected the **Letter of Intent** and **Nominations of Organizations** process. Because of the size of the cohort, the NGC split into two subgroups. Robert White led the Nominations subgroup and Pamela Oakes led the Letter of Intent subgroup.

LETTER OF INTENT SUBGROUP

This subgroup focused on three issues:

- 1 Creating a process for diversified outreach
- 2 Streamlining the application process
- 3 Removing bias in selection of a new SVP grantee

Creating a process for outreach that cast the widest net possible for organizations to learn about the opportunity

The subgroup brainstormed ways to be as inclusive as possible and identified tools to advertise and share the opportunity with SVP's community. Tactics included sharing and recommending that SVP Seattle staff utilize the "Ethnic Media Guide" that has contact information for 143 organizations that are racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse.

Streamlining the Letter of Intent and application process

The subgroup created a simple and multi-faceted way for a self-qualified organization to demonstrate interest in pursuing the multi-year relationship and funding opportunity. This process included sending an email, completing a survey, sharing a video, or joining a call with SVP to demonstrate a desire to be considered.

Regardless of the communication option selected, all applicants would need to submit basic contact information and declare that their organization met the requirements as follows:

- Is BIPOC led and serving
- Based in King County
- Is a 501(c)(3) organization
- Shares values with SVP Seattle
- Is committed to be in a multi-year relationship with SVP Seattle

Removing bias in selection of new SVP Seattle grantee

The subgroup focused on creating a decision-making process that removed bias and didn't pit organizations against one another. There was widespread agreement that within the parameters for eligibility all the organizations would be deserving of partnership with SVP. Furthermore, many believed that creation of a process to grade and rank organizations against one another would perpetuate the inequitable power dynamics that the cohort was trying to mitigate. Based on these factors the group hypothesized that the best way to remove bias was with the random selection of an organization.

NOMINATIONS SUBGROUP

This subgroup focused on two issues:

- 1 Nominating BIPOC led and serving organizations in King County for a grant
- 2 Determining a selection process for the nominated organization

Nominating an Organization

The subgroup discussed how they could develop a list of nominated organizations, given the limited timeframe. They ultimately decided that community members from the NGC would nominate organizations for a grant. SVP would contact the nominated organization and ask if they would like to “opt-in” to the nomination before being added to a final list.

Selecting a Nominee

The subgroup also aimed to remove the barriers and biases inherent in attempts to assess deserving organizations in comparison with each other. They decided that SVP staff would randomly select the grantee from the nominations list using a lottery system.

LESSONS LEARNED

We developed these lessons learned via committee discussion, interviews with NGC members, a survey sent to all members, and reflections from SVP staff.

TAKE RISKS

On inviting more people in.

Cohort members enjoyed being part of SVP's first new Reimagined Program. They appreciated the process, building relationships, and collaborating on a program SVP will implement. Cohort members also expressed an appreciation for being invited to be part of SVP's community, when previous Partner dues excluded people from participating.

Lesson Learned

Continue to include more people, especially BIPOC voices, in SVP's decision-making and programs.

Even if it's uncomfortable.

There were many times that it was uncomfortable for SVP staff to give up decision-making power, especially when it came to the discussion around decision-making for the grants.

"Trust-based philanthropy is uncomfortable for both funders and grantees. We need to get past the notion of vetting and accountability norms."

"This work while rewarding also has its challenges, and a challenge that SVP and we as Partners will need to continue to work on and overcome is becoming more aware of our own inherent biases, and assumptions, and shifting away from our comfort zones".

Evaluate what worked.

The lottery process caused some members of the Cohort to question whether that was the best way to make decisions about the grant. The subgroups selected the lottery process because they felt it would be challenging to determine who was "worthy" of a grant and wanted to pilot a process that removed that type of decision-making. However, others expressed concern whether the process was truly shifting power and decision-making to community members. We know that it is critical for us to evaluate both the LOI and Nominations process and get the feedback of those organizations who participated in both processes.

"...although it feels like the results with the random selection seem unusual, I am totally up for it, and I am excited about where it's headed".

TAKE TIME

To build relationships and give the process the time it needs.

While Cohort members enjoyed the meetings, members expressed frustration that there was not enough time in both meetings and throughout the overall process. They said meetings often felt rushed at the end, and often went over the allotted time. Overall, members said that they wish there had been more time allocated for the process.

To meaningfully shift decision making and power.

Some Cohort members who worked for non-profits did not fully understand why they were asked to serve on the committee or what their role was on the committee.

Lesson Learned

Trust-based philanthropy takes time.

Allow more time for the Cohort to meet, both with regards to the length of each meeting and how many times they meet.

“Change is messy and takes time, but it is always better to go slow at first to go fast down the road.”

“Change takes time, but when bringing thought partners together, we can reach our stated goals. Collaboration is the key to change.”

“More ‘storming’ time up front to get to know each other, establish clear goals, timelines, and design parameters...”

Lesson Learned

The participation and voices of BIPOC community Partners is critical; ask in advance what they need to fully participate in the process.

Elevate BIPOC voices in our discussions and decision making.

Be clear about our expectation to the entire cohort that BIPOC community Partners should make the decisions both about the grantmaking process and the grants themselves.

“Based on my experience when community partners were not present at the sessions, there was a mismatch between what they knew was needed for the community and what the SVP Partners had provided. I would also like to see an even greater trust being put into the community Partners to a point where the traditional application process is fully eliminated.”

“I feel like because of the imbalance ratio of community Partners vs SVP Partners, community Partners tended to follow the status quo, and I think as a result, they did not feel empowered enough to make decisions and in a sense, their ownership was taken away from them”.

BE CLEAR

About full participation.

Cohort members expressed their frustration that the meetings often had uneven participation, leading to a need to recap and explain what had happened. This contributed to some members feeling surprised by decisions made by the group.

About expectations.

Some Cohort members said SVP Seattle did not provide enough clarity around what needed to be accomplished. They expressed a desire for more clarity around action tasks and objectives that needed to be met in between weekly sessions.

Lesson Learned

Be clearer up front about the importance of attending the majority of meetings, so Cohort participants can decide if they can commit time.

“It was a bit frustrating when members couldn’t show up to meetings and we would have to explain what we had accomplished in every meeting to get those individuals up to speed, it felt a bit circular.”

Lesson Learned

Provide a clear, goal-oriented structure in place from the beginning so members can focus on selecting the right process and on choosing the grant receipts.

BE BOLD

With humility and vulnerability.

We knew we wouldn't get everything right with our first pilots. However, we knew it was important to be open about the process if we want to truly reimagine our programs.

Lesson Learned

Learn in public. It's scary, but it's a practice in humility, vulnerability, and invites people into your learning process.

Continue to be bold and pilot even more racially-inclusive ways of grantmaking.

"I enjoyed working on the specifics around the language and being able to tell SVP Partners that this language is paternalistic and needs change and it was so nice seeing people who were willing to be vulnerable and adaptive to change, so they wouldn't be making the same mistakes".

"I applaud the organization for opening up the conversation to the community-based organization, it was important to bring our perspective, and unlike other CBOs we had received SVP awards and engagement which allowed us to talk with specificity around topics like what does it mean to engage with SVP beyond funding, how do we involve Partners, should there be an SVP lead".

"I am still processing the new direction on whether funding equity at the intersection of racial and economic justice should be left by chance through a random selection but maybe this is me learning to give up my power. For future sessions, I suggest we reflect and improve on what it means to give up power in decision making, democratize who participates and be accountable to the communities we hope to be in partnership with. I would like to see SVP continue to practice putting full trust in frontline communities to lead, identify solutions, and have the power to decide where and how resources should be allocated."

NEW GRANT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

We thank and honor the time and time of our New Grant Committee Members!

Co-Chairs

- Robert White, SVP Board Member
- Pamela Oakes, The Profitable Non-Profit

Members

- Alison Morton, Kindering Center
- Asia Wisecarver, Playworks Education Energized
- Bre Jefferson, Puget Sound Sage
- Cindy Sackett, Invest in Youth
- David Coven, Scholarship Junkies
- Dave Habib
- Helen Wong, Chinese Information and Service Center
- Jackie Schultz
- John Clements
- Kelly Chang
- Kris Kaminishi
- Leslie Haynes, United Indians of all Tribes Foundation
- Mahnaz Eshetu, Refugee Women's Alliance
- Malachi Williams, Scholarship Junkies
- Marlyn Twitchell, Washington Toxic Coalition
- Marylou Brannan
- Michael Tarlowe
- Parvathy Ramanathan
- Regina Elmi, Supporting Partnership in Education and Beyond (SPEB)
- Ryan Quigtar, Renton Innovation Zone Partnership
- Shereese Rhodes, Bill & Melinda Gates and Moms Rising
- Shiho Fuyuki, People's Economy Lab
- Stacy Sage, Open Doors for Multicultural Families
- Trisha Comsti