WHAT IS THE GIVING PROJECT?

The Problem

Today’s injustices are the result of structures and systems that have been designed by a few to enrich even fewer. In philanthropy, the power lies with those who hold and give money, and who create, understand, and benefit from the grantmaking process as it is. The faces of those who compete for and receive philanthropic funds do not match the faces of those who control the resources. We believe this needs to change.

The Solution

Changing the Face of Philanthropy

The Giving Project is an innovative new model for funding social change, building community, and leadership development.

The project brings together a multiracial, cross-class group of people who are passionate about social change and interested in building their skills in fundraising, grantmaking, and community building.

“What makes this model really special, to me, is that it disrupts the traditional philanthropic model... Donor > Foundation > Organization > Community

...replacing it with one in which the Community plays every role which, in turn, increases both engagement and accountability.

Over the course of six months, we learned from each other in workshops on race and class, grassroots fundraising, site visits, and, finally, grant making.”

-Jon, Cohort One Participant

How the Giving Project Works:

1. A cross-class, multiracial group of up to 25 individuals commits to 6 months of training and hands-on fundraising.

2. Through workshops and trainings, the group develops a shared understanding of race, class, and power within society.

3. Each person commits to fundraising from their friends, family, and community to support the financial goal of the group.

4. Each person makes a meaningful financial gift, whatever that means for them.

5. Participants are trained in Headwaters' democratic grantmaking process. As a group, the cohort uses their skills and power to grant money to some of the most inspiring, effective social change work in Minnesota.
THE GIVING PROJECT COHORTS

From the first days of project planning, Headwaters Foundation declared its commitment to recruiting diverse cohorts of individuals. Not only do we recognize a duty to include in our work people who have not traditionally seen a place for themselves in philanthropy, but we also believe that equity in our recruitment leads to better-informed, more equitable and more effective grantmaking.

This intentional outreach brought in many new people to the organization as first-time donors. Though many of the participants had heard of Headwaters, only four had previously volunteered or given to the foundation. The first two cohorts shared the following characteristics:

- 15-17 participants per cohort
- 50% people of color
- Over 60% women
- 40% identified as LGBTQ

In our first Giving Project, we had a broad spectrum of class backgrounds represented. In the second project, people who identified as lower and middle class were overrepresented. In both Giving Projects, between 24-26 participants were selected. Some participants decided not to continue the process for various reasons. This type of attrition, specifically among men and people of color, has also been experienced by peer programs. We are considering in what ways this experience might be limiting for people who are marginalized and how best to adapt the curriculum and process, while acknowledging great successes for many people of color who remained throughout the process.

Giving Project Cohorts 1 and 2 by the numbers:

- Raised over $140,000 total between the two six-month periods.
- Attracted 266 new donors who had never given to the Headwaters Foundation.
- 12 general operating grants to social justice organizations.

Fundraising is not easy! The majority of participants expressed concern or hesitation about their ability to raise money when they started the Giving Project. By the end, participants reported that their prior concerns had been allayed, and that they had gained skills and tools to continue to advocate for the causes and organizations that they believe in.

"Something about this project allowed me to do fundraising in a way I'd never been successful at before, and to have the people that I asked actually be excited to donate and participate. I think the combination of my belief in the project, the excellent trainings, and the community that we built made that possible for me."

- Ruby, Cohort One Participant

"The phrase that was said to me that stuck with me was the idea that you are asking someone to join the movement, you are asking them to be a part of the change. Would you not want to be asked? That really helped."

- Christina, Cohort Two Participant

The Giving Project awarded $10,000 grants to the following grassroots organizations:

1. Asian American Organizing Project
2. Black Lives Matter Minneapolis
3. Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en la Lucha (CTUL) *
4. Dream of Wild Health
5. Harrison Neighborhood Association
6. Hnub Tshiab: Hmong Women Achieving Together
7. Greater Minnesota Worker Center *
8. Inquilinxs Unidxs Por Justicia (United Renters for Justice) *
9. Neighborhoods Organizing for Change (NOC) *

* indicates organization granted by both cohorts
THE PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

"The Giving Project provided me an opportunity to learn about community, to support community and to build community through a social justice framework."

- Maria, Cohort Two Participant

"I didn't think at my age I could feel the passion for social justice the way I did 20 or 30 years ago, but it came right back, maybe stronger than ever, because the other Giving Project members and our Headwaters staff were so inspiring."

- Pat, Cohort One Participant

Participants enter the Giving Project with varying levels of familiarity with Headwaters Foundation and with community-led grantmaking. Over the course of six months, they learn about our methodology and situate their cohort’s work in a broader framework of racial and economic justice. A key component of the curriculum is a two-day Race and Class Workshop, which sets the foundation for the fundraising and grantmaking trainings that follow.

Participants hold what they learned through these conversations, and they center race and class critically in their decisions about which social justice organizations they will fund. Participants reported both breakthroughs and challenges with this highly personal journey of analyzing race and class, but also point to this content as highly impactful:

"Exploring your relationship with race and class is hard personal work. It is rare to be allowed into such a safe, intentional, and affirming place to do that work and gather with others on the same journey, all with the goal of having a positive impact on real, relevant issues facing our community. The Giving Project has changed how I connect to the place that I live, and my role in it. I look forward to telling my Giving Project story to as many people who will listen, and supporting Headwaters and the critical work they are doing."

- Alyssa, Cohort One Participant

"The level of respect and thoughtfulness -- borne out of months of intentional community-building -- really showed up in the room in amazing ways."

- Grace, Cohort Two Participant

The fundraising and grantmaking content at the heart of the curriculum was equally valuable to cohort members. Beyond personal relationships, they reported that raising money as a group, conducting site visits, and making grants decisions were highly rewarding aspects of the program.

The individual commitment to contribute a meaningful gift was also powerful. One participant tearfully explained to her peers how it felt to be asked for money for the first time in her life. Coming from a community on the receiving end of grant funds, she was finally being invited to participate as a donor.

The vast majority of Giving Project participants plan to continue their involvement with the Headwaters Foundation, and several members of the first cohort served as mentors for participants in the second. Other members discussed concrete plans for using what they have learned in work, leadership, and volunteer positions throughout our community.

"The most revolutionary thing that I learned/gain from the Giving Project was the ability to demand constituency representation in organizations serving vulnerable or historically disenfranchised populations. As an emerging public health professional, I have become much more vocal and critical of the recruiting work that is done in academic and professional settings."

- J’Mag, Cohort Two Participant
Philanthropy often creates artificial silos between donors and activists. Headwaters is using the Giving Project as a means for building intentional community and generating more support for social justice. This work is an example of the power that can be created when people of different backgrounds are supported to get real about the role that race and class play in our society, build relationships with each other, and do something about the injustices they see in the world.

David Nicholson, Executive Director

The Giving Project is about more than grantmaking. I witnessed people dig deep into their own experiences of race and class, and invest in each other as they took risks and made hard decisions. We are equipping people with the skills to inspire people to give and get involved in their communities. But Giving Project participants aren’t just fundraisers. They are donor organizers building the movement for racial justice.

Maria De La Cruz, Associate Executive Director

We learned that our community-led grantmaking process is tested and replicable as we trained a new community of grantmakers. The Giving Project is a resource intensive yet powerful way to engage donors and move additional dollars and people toward supporting organizations that are led by people of color and those most directly affected by injustice.

Allison Johnson, Giving Project Associate

Headwaters Foundation is in it for the long haul. We are committed to supporting movement building and infrastructure for advancing racial justice in our state, and the Giving Project is a contribution to that work. We believe that achieving equity and justice requires a deep investment in communities and individuals who are boldly taking action through community organizing, policy advocacy, and civic engagement.

In our pilot year, we aimed not only to give participants confidence to raise funds but also to empower movement leaders. Alumni from the first cohort of the Giving Project served as mentors to participants in the second cohort, and many reported that their guidance and experience was invaluable through the fundraising and grantmaking process. In future cohorts, we will continue to harness the expertise of participants and develop this aspect of the participant experience. In addition to mentoring, Giving Project alumni now serve as volunteers for our other grant committees and as board members. We will continue to connect Giving Project participants with opportunities to sustain and deepen their involvement in fundraising and grantmaking at Headwaters and in service to the broader movement.

In January 2017, Headwaters will launch the New Majority Fund, which will support organizations led by and for communities of color. Using the Giving Project framework, a multiracial, cross-class group of people will join together to raise the resources for grantmaking, and the fund will provide two-year general operating grants. We are excited to implement the lessons learned during the first two Giving Projects to create a curriculum that is impactful for participants and enables them to amplify the power of community to advance equity and racial justice.