Redefining Trust-Based Philanthropy: Our Participatory Grantmaking Pilot

What becomes possible when community members are given the power to decide how to spend grants?

To find this out, Redefine Alliance designed and piloted a participatory grantmaking fund, in collaboration with our national Community of employment social enterprise (ESE) leaders.

Participatory Grantmaking (PGM) is a funding model in which decision-making authority is given to the communities affected by those funding decisions.

$400,000
GRANT FUND

20 ESE leaders
SELECTED FOR "THE POWER 20," THE GRANTMAKING TEAM

40
GRANTS MADE

OUR APPROACH

Transparency & commitment

Learning as an integral aspect

Ceding power of decision-making

As convener and administrator, Redefine Alliance prepared the process and selected 20 ESE leaders from across the Community, called **the Power 20**, to both design the fund and select the grantees. The Power 20 also had access to consulting partners Kin Consultant Group and external PGM experts.

FUND DISTRIBUTION

The Power 20 leaders designed three funds to address critical needs within the ESE sector:

1. **Leadership Opportunities for People with Lived Experience ($180,000, 6 grants):** Funds for leaders with direct experience of employment barriers.
2. **Innovative Ideas ($180,000, 7 grants):** Flexible support for novel ideas to grow businesses and deepen impact.
3. **Care Benefit ($40,000, 27 grants):** Supporting care for direct service workers within ESEs.

TIMELINE

JUNE 2024 — Power 20 Selected

NOV 2024-AUG 2025 — Fund Design Process

SEPT 2025 — Grantmaking Selection Begins

DEC 2025 — Grant Funds Disbursed

HEAR FROM A GRANTMAKER

"My experience in the design work helped me recognize – and put words to – the need to learn alongside peers... I want to keep growing as a leader, and being part of a cohort with others who are further along in their roles or organizational development really made a difference."

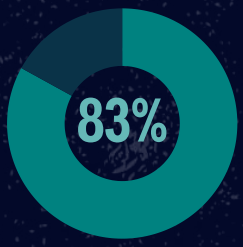
– Power 20 member

MEET THE GRANTEES

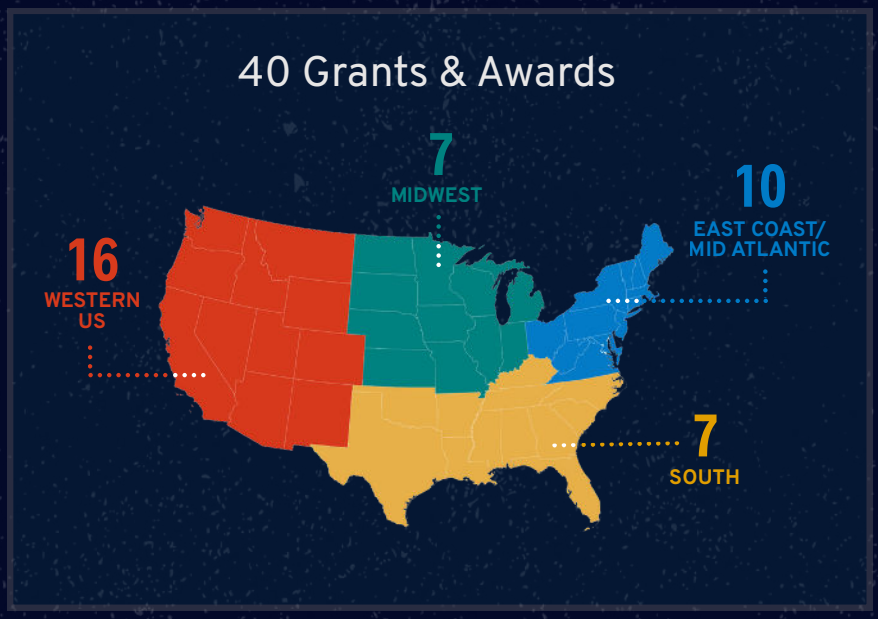
40
FULL TIME EMPLOYEES
on average

38
PARTICIPANT EMPLOYEES
on average

12.2
YEARS IN OPERATION
on average



Are small businesses with <$3 million revenue



The most common populations served are opportunity youth and people with experiences of homelessness or in the justice system

GRANTEE ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDE:

BDC HUB BUSINESS · PIIKUP · seat · Sustainable Labor Alliance · BIKES NOT BOMBS · MARYLAND REENTRY RESOURCE CENTER · TURN90 · Parents by Choice · AVPH Antelope Valley Partners for Health · Chi Fresh Kitchen · COVENANT COFFEE Hope in a cup · ENVISION Your Pathway · Ready for Good

WHAT WE LEARNED

3 Key Takeaways from PGM

As we learn from this pilot and continue to cultivate our community of mission-driven enterprises, we're eager to share our learnings, keep testing, and integrate participatory approaches widely.

For other funders considering PGM, here are three simple recommendations for getting started:

1. **Move at the speed of trust:** Attempt to build trust with your community and keep that trust as a central priority. Conveners should operate as part of the broader PGM community.
2. **Commit to a "box":** Get clear about your commitments and the boundaries between each decision-making authority.
3. **Practice a participatory ethos:** Programs that use PGM can get messy. Prepare to apply a participatory mindset that redistributes decision-making, prioritizes transparency, and flexes to meet the participants' needs and the program challenges collaboratively.

Special thanks to kin CONSULTANT GROUP

redefinealliance.org

redefine ALLIANCE