

Exploring Equity in Funding: A Case Study of Participatory Grantmaking for North Carolina Community Gardens

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Traditional grantmaking often follows a rigid structure, with decisions made solely by funders, limiting the potential for applicant creativity and flexibility. Conversely, participatory grantmaking (PGM) aims to empower applicants and partners by involving them in decision-making processes, fostering innovation and flexibility in project funding.

In 2023, the Food, Fitness, and Opportunity Research Collaborative (FFORC) at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill's Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, piloted a new PGM approach. The Community Garden (CG) Program, funded by USDA's SNAP-Ed program, implemented a PGM initiative called Network Voting. This initiative aimed to shift power dynamics, encourage community engagement, and foster collaboration among garden managers.

Participants actively engaged in the grant process, submitting proposals for review by fellow CG managers, the FFORC Team, and FFORC's Community Advisory Board (CAB). Through collaborative feedback and ranking, FFORC awarded a total of \$82,500 via a tiered system, ranging from \$12,500 to \$7,750 per partner.

While challenges were encountered, such as technical difficulties in proposal submissions, participants expressed eagerness to participate again, highlighting the value of networking and learning from peers. Recommendations for future PGM programs include extending program timeframes, expanding participant involvement, and exploring in-person engagement opportunities.