

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

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Introduction

- FFORC's Community Garden (CG) Program is one of it's longest standing initiatives funded by the USDA SNAP-Ed Program
- Historically, funding for the CG program has been restricted in total amount and criteria considered acceptable programming
- As an attempt to tailor a more value-based grant award process, in 2023, FFORC piloted a form of participatory grantmaking (PGM) called *Network Voting*

Traditional Grantmaking	Participatory Grantmaking
Funder decides amount provided to recipient	Partners have decision-making power around the prioritization of projects funded and funding amounts
Application process determined by funder, is often lengthy, limits creativity and flexibility	Application process design involves partners, allows for creativity and flexibility
Recipient is most likely unaware of other recipients	Allows for partners to be "in network" with one another
Limited flexibility in spending based on pre-established budget with line items	Partner has the flexibility to spend their funding where they see fit without pre-approval

Objective

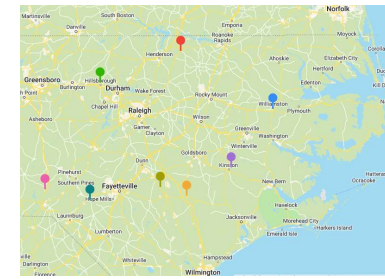
- Provide funding to advance community engagement through shifting power and decision-making to those receiving the funding
- Allow flexibility and creativity for community partners in defining programs that fit community needs
- Support collaboration across garden managers
- Foster clear and transparent communication with community partners in utilizing a network funding model

Limitations

- As these funds are from the USDA's SNAP-Ed program, all programming must align with the USDA's SNAP-Ed priorities and reporting requirements
- *Network Voting* is a pilot program; the FFORC team had limited experience and had to gauge their own and CG partners capacity at each stage and accommodate accordingly

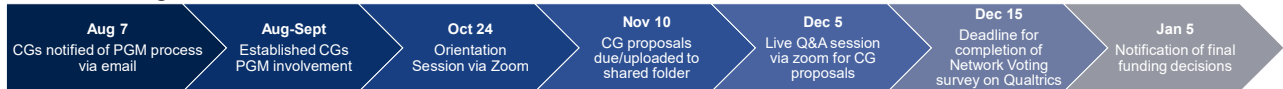
Methods

- **Study Participants**
 - 8 CG partners
 - 9 FFORC team members
 - 3 Community Advisory Board (CAB) members
- **CG Program participant selection:** all of FFORC's CG partners (13) were met with, pitched the Network Voting award process, and were given the option to opt in
- **Network Voting Process/Timeline**



Community Garden Partner Participants

- Coharie Community Garden
- Diversity Nurtures Achievement
- Entity Enterprise Garden
- Fairview Community & Garden
- Hoke County Health Department
- Little Bud Thorbs
- Mineral Springs
- Oak Chapel



- **Proposal Criterion:** alignment with goals of garden/organization, alignment with SNAP-Ed objectives, feasibility of proposal, commitment to community engagement, presentation format

Results/Findings

- \$110,500 was available for allocation by FFORC to CG Programs
- \$82,500 was awarded via the *Network Voting* tiered system

CG Partner	Proposal	Network Score
Fairview Community & Garden	expansion/bed installation general materials acquisition	58
Oak Chapel	educational programming community activities	62
Coharie Community Garden	renovate/raise garden beds renovate/beauty center	73
Mineral Springs	build a walking trail improve high tunnel	73
Little Bud Thorbs	finish high tunnel installation invest in wellness facility/park	76
Hoke County Health Department	expand compost efforts invest in sustainable practices	80
Diversity Nurtures Achievement	general materials acquisition youth/senior programming	82
Entity Enterprise Garden	general materials acquisition labor support	108

- Participants received \$250 for their engagement in the process
- Participants had the most challenges with the video-making + uploading
- Participants all would participate again, most enjoyable aspect was meeting and learning from the other participants

Discussion

- FFORC's *Network Voting* PGM process was, overall, well-received by all program participants

- The use of technology was both an asset and a hindrance for CG partner participation:

- All meetings/sessions were held on Zoom which essentially negated any issues/favorability regarding proximity to FFORC
- Spanish translation/live interpretation was available in real-time using the respective Zoom feature, utilized by Fairview Community & Garden, a majority Spanish-speaking CG
- CG rurality and CG leader's age/low affinity for modern technology made it harder for some partners to produce and upload quality proposal videos or ask questions virtually

Future Directions/Recommendations

- Perform follow-up evaluations to gauge interest in similar future programming, actual award allocation, proposed project progress, etc
- Consider implications of a longer program timeframe, more participants, and/or in-person participation