kindle project

SpiderWeave Flow Fund
2017-2019
Introduction to SpiderWeave

In early 2017, a young woman donor approached Kindle Project with a dream of creating more connection and joy through her giving and a desire to share power by experimenting with flow funding. SpiderWeave was founded in the spirit of giving with curiosity, joy and pleasure. The intention was about harnessing the wisdom of communities, uplifting unseen voices, building trusting bonds, and flowing resources to places and people that we couldn’t dream up on our own. SpiderWeave was created to be in community and live the experiment of what creative collaboration looks like.

As leaders and innovators in participatory grantmaking, Kindle Project collaborated with this donor to create the SpiderWeave Flow Fund, a trust-based philanthropic program that would bring a small community of unlikely decision-makers into a giving process that was deeply rooted in trust.

Our three-year experience has come to a close, and Kindle Project is eager to celebrate the impacts of SpiderWeave. This program brought together a circle of inspiring women and non-binary community organizers who resourced people and projects that were off the radar of mainstream philanthropy. For three years, a cohort of six Flow Funders, the Kindle Project team, and the donor combined unique voices and experiences in a process of profound collaboration. This collaboration led to important questions about and insights into the power dynamics at play in the field and in hierarchies at large. Through a close-knit group process that evolved each year, the program harnessed the individual and collective wisdom of the Flow Funders to move money in new and exciting ways.

Who is Kindle Project?

We are a women-founded, women of color-led, grassroots philanthropic organization working intersectionally to build bridges, flip power, and support community-driven philanthropy. Kindle Project is invested in democratized, collaborative, and strategic grantmaking that aligns donors and projects for meaningful impact. We ignite creative ideas for moving money, elevating trust-based, people-powered giving models, and participatory decision-making practices. We contribute to emerging alternatives and solutions for personal, collective, and planetary resilience. We create new grantmaking practices that democratize the flow of money, discover and support projects that are often overlooked by mainstream philanthropy, and share resources that are by and for the community.
What is trust-based philanthropy?
For Kindle Project, trust-based philanthropy encompasses a participatory grantmaking approach and a trust that the recipient of funding knows best how and what funds should be used for. Trust-based philanthropy empowers people to make decisions for their own community and is a holistic approach toward giving and receiving.

What is Flow Funding?
Flow Funding is a grantmaking approach that empowers innovators, individuals, and organizations outside of typical philanthropic institutions with funds that they recommend as grants and gifts to communities and organizations of their choice. Flow Funding seeks to break open predictable patterns of philanthropic decision-making and allows for the democratization of funding decisions. This shift in decision making helps shift power and resources so that they reach unlikely places that are not visible from within a traditional funding model.

Participatory Grantmaking and Experimentation in Action
This Flow Fund was given the name SpiderWeave in order to artfully capture the web of trust and connection that was the founding intention of the program. In its first year, the SpiderWeave Flow Fund circle was made up of three Flow Funders, the donor, and the Kindle Project team. The three Flow Funders were invited in by the donor in an effort to grow a space where trust, vulnerability, and deeper support and learning would be fostered. The Flow Funding circle included Black, white, and Indigenous members who all shared a connection through food, seed, place, motherhood, and their unique work on the ground in their respective communities.

While the Flow Funders, the donor, and Kindle Project each had distinctive roles in the program, SpiderWeave created a space where each participant could authentically share, learn, and hold one another in vulnerability and safety. The Flow Funders’ role was to move allocations of money to people and projects on the ground. Additionally, the Flow Funders offered invaluable insight into the challenges and dynamics they faced both in their personal lives and in receiving monetary support for their communities and their work. The donor’s role was multifaceted. First, the donor provided the funds for the Flow Funders to regrant. More importantly, however, the donor offered personal experience and wisdom regarding the triumphs and difficulties of being in a position of decision-making power over resources. Both the Flow Funders and donor’s vulnerability and storytelling laid the groundwork for a level of intimacy that ignited quickly and became the heartbeat of the program.
As an intermediary, the role of Kindle Project was threefold. First, Kindle Project provided the infrastructure, systems, and administration for the money to move. This service allowed for the donor and Flow Funders to focus on project discovery, personal growth, group connection, and to explore the nuances of philanthropy rather than having to shoulder the burden on the backend of actual grantmaking.

Second, Kindle Project, in collaboration with the donor and with feedback from the Flow Funders, innovated the design and developed the program from inception to closing. This required being attuned to the needs and vision of the donor and the Flow Funders and creating responsive and creative approaches and methodologies to meet both. And lastly, Kindle Project, in its special role as an intermediary, built the bridge for trust and connection to take place. By fostering deep relationships with everyone involved, Kindle Project maintained the fabric of the relationship between participants and provided the container for healing and friendship to carefully unfold.

In its second year, SpiderWeave evolved to experiment further in the trust-based approach by expanding the Flow Funding circle. The founding three Flow Funders were invited to welcome in another person to sit in the circle, creating a cohort of six total who were part of the Flow Fund for two years together. As a cross-race and cross-class group, all of the participants celebrated small victories, collectively problem-solved, and unpacked the nuances of power through a commitment to listening and sharing.
SpiderWeave Nuts and Bolts

The program was organized into three one-year cycles. At strategic moments, the cohort connected via 12 group calls and two in-person retreats over the course of three years. In between calls and retreats, all participants connected with one another in a variety of ways. A key goal of the grantmaking of SpiderWeave was to enable maximum flexibility to give and receive money. At the inception of the program, Kindle Project conducted significant research and put time into finding a financial structure that met that goal. Through the utilization of two accounts, it was made possible to support individuals, informal groups, fiscally sponsored projects, and tax-exempt organizations.

Over the course of three years, a total of $230,000 went into honoring gifts, individual gifts, and grants to organizations. 47 people and projects were the recipients of SpiderWeave gifts and grants. The total includes a financial gift to honor the Flow Funders for their time.

Facilitation and Design

The design of SpiderWeave had to have an intrinsically emergent style in order to match its goals and vision. As such, Kindle Project created the framework with room for intentional co-creating from the cohort themselves. It was important that in the pedagogy of the program harmful systems of traditional philanthropy weren’t being replicated by assuming that funders and intermediaries knew what the cohort community needed. Instead, we invited the Flow Funders into the process by sourcing themes and discussion questions for our cohort calls and retreats. Kindle Project encouraged the Flow Funders to be in co-learning and co-leadership with each other. Perhaps most importantly, space was made by all participants for deep sharing and unpacking of issues and concerns that came up in a given moment. The impact of this intentional design proved to support a transformative experience at varying levels. It allowed for trust to be built, relationships to be strengthened, and for money to flow more easily from the Flow Funders themselves because they had the mutual support and learning that mattered most to them as decision-makers.

Overarching Themes of Conversations

The iterative design of this program was supported by some fundamental aspects and offerings that Kindle Project used to ground the exploration of the desired directions of the cohort members. We made sure to offer space to share learnings from traditional and trust-based philanthropy, explore frustrations with philanthropy, and celebrate positive funding relationships. For the Flow Funders, the most common themes returned to were:

- Self-care and healing
- Power structures and community dynamics
- Decision-making and intuitive giving
- Issues and explorations of racial and social justice
- The impact of philanthropy on their communities
SpiderWeave Participant Share

As part of the growth of this work as a whole, Flow Funders, the donor, and Kindle Project all took time to capture key reflections to share with the world.

I have been nourished by this experience because of the...

- Sisterhood behind the giving
- Cross cultural solidarity that grew
- Creative thinking that helped open up in my own work
- Ability to support others doing amazing work outside philanthropy
- Joy of knowing that money moved into the world through personal connections
- Beautiful relationships that developed
- Community that really cares about me

Flow funding would be better if...

- We all lived in the same town (making it easier to connect)
- We had more experience doing it
- We had more resources to share with our community
- I had more time to dedicate to it
- We did more team funding. Pairs or triads combining our powers, or all of us give a chunk to a pot of practice cooperative decision-making
The best part of being a Flow Funder is...

- Getting to support under-resourced, badass, amazing community work
- Building connections and exploring relationships to money and privilege
- Having the ability and space to build these relationships
- Having open, honest dialogue about wealth, historical trauma, power, equity, etc.

As a Flow Funder, I learned...

- How to surrender, how to ask for help in deciding, how to be anonymous
- A gift, once made, is no longer my business
- To sit through discomfort
- It's okay to make mistakes

Sharing power in philanthropy means...

- Trusting other non-rich people to make decisions about "your" money
- Honoring that when you 'give' you are really just giving back what has been stolen
- Having more people at the decision-making table to start
- Shifting values and people making decisions to be POC-led
Dear philanthropy, I need you to know...

- Joy of knowing that money moved into the world through personal connections
- Study and commit to reparations as a framework for giving
- The only reason philanthropy exists is because of inequality. Why do white people have all this money to give away? Genocide and slavery and land theft, eco-cide.
- Allow people to apply in their first language. Provide video/audio alternatives to written applications
- Communities you give to do not owe you anything
- Fund general operating costs and make multi-year commitments
- Be humble: grassroots folks are the experts
- Be the first dollar for "risky" projects
- Less than 7% of your grantmaking benefits POC/COC
- Demand less time of grassroots organizations: simple applications and reporting, no required gatherings
- Spend it down: wealth disparity is inherently unjust
- Provide fiscal sponsorship and technical assistance
It is an impressive and inspiring array of individuals and organizations that were supported through Flow Funds during these years of SpiderWeave. Some work very locally, some work across states. Some are teams of just one, while others have teams of many. Some are focused on just one issue, others on many. What is a common thread across all, however, is dedication and perseverance to making our world more fair, tolerant, just, and kind. We have been especially struck by the number of flow funds that went out to women of color and women of color led organizations. This is testament to how decision-making by community members themselves, ends up better representing the ground realities and the diversity of our communities. Here are some numbers for you to see for yourself.

**TOTAL GIVING 2017-2019**

$228,000 across 47 Grantees and Awardees

- Total honoring gifts to flow-funders ($63,000)
- Total grants to organizations ($39,500)
- Total gifts to individuals ($125,000)

**LOCATION**

- Urban-based
- Rural-based
AGE

- Youth or led by (under 25)
- Middle ages or led by (25-40)
- 45+ or led by

GENDER

- Men of color or led by
- Men or led by
- Gender non-conforming or led by
- Women of color or led by
- Women or led by
Victoria Quevedo
I work at La Mujer Obrera’s Tierra es Vida Community Farm in El Paso, where we practice growing culturally relevant food and medicinal herbs for the Chamizal neighborhood. I also work with La Semilla Food Center on food policy that takes the lead from families impacted by food insecurity in Doña Ana County, NM. In my spare time, I volunteer with Familias Unidas del Chamizal, to fight for dignified, safe education for children in one of the poorest, most contaminated areas of El Paso. Part of this work is recuperating ancestral practices and celebrating the vibrancy of Mexican culture.

Margot Gibney
I serve as the executive director for the Encampment for Citizenship, a social justice youth leadership development program for youth from around the country. I work from the premise that we are all teachers and learners and leaders and followers. I believe that youth — and people of all ages — need the opportunity to develop their own voices and experience the power of community, collective creation and action. In my work I am very fortunate to see the creativity and power that youth manifest when provided with the opportunity and support. It is that power and spirit that gives me hope.

Alla Sonder
I am the founder and lead organizer of the Trans Asylum Seeker Support Network, although I am in the process of training activists so we can democratize our collective and be nonhierarchical. The Network is an internal collective of revolutionary abolitionists working within a broader network of volunteers and our community to get transgender and genderqueer asylum seekers across the US-Mexico border, out of ICE detention, and help them win their cases and build thriving lives in Western Massachusetts. We are also expanding to do indigenous sovereignty and Palestine solidarity organizing. We are committed to radically loving relations, resilient community, and transformative justice. centering Black children.
Green River Doula Network
The GRDN’s primary mission is to facilitate access to doulas for families in the childbearing year. We believe that healthy parents raise healthy children and that parents are most effective when they receive the support they need. This belief underlies our unique approach to serving the entire family by focusing on the needs of the birth parent. The majority of our funds support our Birth Doula Stipend Program, which pays a stipend to experienced doulas who support low-income families. We also provide ongoing continuing education opportunities for doulas and other birth professionals, and host monthly community meetings.

Akwesasne Task Force on the Environment
Shé:kon (greetings) Our Farm Project at the Akwesasne Freedom School (AFS) is improving each year. We are growing more food, saving more seed and performing more teachings in our gardens that benefit our AFS family. We focus on our three sisters, corn beans and squash. This year we grew nearly two acres of blue flour corn, several varieties of beans and two different types of squash. The grant funding will go towards our three greenhouses which are in much need of repair/upgrades, and soil amendments so that we may extend our growing season. Niawenhkó:wa-Thank you very much!

Ysanet Batista with Mama Tinga Farm Cooperative
Ysanet Batista is a queer Black-Dominican woman, born in Harlem, NY and raised in between the Dominican Republic and Hialeah, FL. Ysanet graduated from Johnson & Wales University in Providence, RI and spent a couple of years working in major hotel companies before transitioning to community based work. She is the creator of Woke Foods, a worker cooperative focused on offering Afro Caribbean plant-based foods through catering, cooking classes, and workshops in NYC. When she is not working on developing Woke Foods, Ysanet is helping other people start their own worker-cooperative businesses at Green Worker Cooperatives as the teaching assistant for their Coop Academy. She is currently a student at Farm School NYC earning a certificate in Urban Agriculture and is working towards acquiring land and starting a farm cooperative in her homeland of the Dominican Republic soon.
**Jessika Greendeer**
All life begins with a seed; a seed that is nurtured and nourished during its infancy until the point where life begins again. Jessika Greendeer, a tribal member of the Ho-Chunk Nation, reached a crossroads and found the path to where her life would begin again. The U.S. Army combat veteran had begun her quest to find where her food came from, but unbeknownst at the time, she had picked up the seed keeper torch left behind from her late father and thousands of ancestors. Today, she strives to protect the seeds of her ancestors and continue to nourish her people.

**Leaders of the Free World (LFW)**
An international experiential learning and leadership development program for young Black men. Our mission is to develop dynamic leaders who are globally-minded, self-aware, and service-driven. The project operates as a year-long global perspective and professional development program, that provides international exposure, while expanding each participant’s leadership capacity. Currently, African-American men make up less than 1% of students who study abroad or receive international experience. In a more globalized society, LFW recognizes the imperative for young leaders to gain a broader understanding of the world and themselves. LFW’s goal is to create a network of leaders whose development impacts their own lives, their communities, and the world; grooming the next generation of changemakers.

**Maria Dominique Villanueva**
Maria wants to live in a world where force fields around clothing exist, making laundry obsolete, vegan chocolate cake can be found in every grocery store, everyone has access to fresh vegetables, and all children are in bed by 8pm. With an education in health economics and a corporate work history, Ms. Villanueva has a varied history of working to improve the wellness of her community, whether it be through the AHA recognized Latinx Health and Wellness Outreach Program that she developed and managed or more recently through maintaining farm space and teaching 620 PreK-5th grade students in partnership with Birmingham City Schools. Her newest undertaking, Fountain Heights Farms, combines much of her former wellness and economic development work into a single project to benefit the community where she lives and works. When she’s not tilling, planting, and harvesting on fountain heights farms, she can be found folding laundry (because the force field doesn’t exist), hosting dance parties in the kitchen, and daydreaming of sleeping in past 6:00am.