

Project Report:

Equitable funding processes — lessons from RES' community consultations

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Project Beginnings

Roundtable Educational Society (RES) is a registered charity with a mission to “explore and build a new model for charities that provides more equitable access to resources for grassroots groups working to improve the lives of their communities in BC & Canada.” The groundwork for RES began with the recognition that the funding landscape is full of inequitable access, where organizations that tend to already receive charitable donations were swiftly funded, but those leading newer justice-based movements were not.

Community Consultations

At the beginning of this course, RES had just begun its community consultations project. This was a series of consultations with [grassroots](#) organizations and [funders](#) to gain insight into their experience accessing and navigating the charitable sector, where the outcome would be used to plan RES' 2024 internal strategy. As a relatively new organization, RES' consultations were designed to be a community-building project and explore the work that these organizations are doing, the groups they serve, and the challenges of navigating the charitable sector.

To build on the project's original goal of internal strategy development and in pursuit of RES' 2023 goal of introducing “[RES to the public and building relationships with like-minded community organizations.](#)” we've decided to analyze and synthesize the data collected in the community consultations to produce public-facing materials which can be shared on RES' social media and website.

Due to our participation, the need for a [Community Partnership Document](#) which could be shared with the consultation participants emerged. This document highlights the relationship between RES and ACAM, as well as the steps that would be taken to anonymize and deidentify any information used.

Before we began synthesizing and analyzing the consultations. We reviewed materials previously created by RES. This includes the [Navigating the Charitable Sector](#) document and

the [Guide to Building Equitable Charitable Partnerships](#) document. Both of these sources created a baseline for us to understand the charitable sector.

Findings

For our project, we're analyzing the data gathered from consultations with 6 organizations: 2 funders and 4 grassroots organizations seeking funding. The grassroots organizations do a variety of work within racialized communities, with different projects aimed at different demographics. As the consultations went on and by examining [our notes](#) from them, 3 big themes emerged as common barriers to accessing funding.

The first one is limited funding for operational costs. All four of the grassroots organizations we spoke to mentioned lack of operational funding as a pressing issue. Without long-term security to plan bigger projects, organizations are confined to shorter timelines, which limits the scope of projects that can be proposed. And it is those longer-term projects that allow organizations to build the relationships necessary for enacting that change that they hope for.

The second theme is the inaccessibility of the application process. The grant writing process can be long and arduous, but many grassroots organizations will lack the resources to compensate staff for their work and institutional knowledge. Multiple organizations also mentioned the need to appeal to the funder's expectations dominates the funding application.

Lastly, participants spoke of the precarity of funding due to a lack of trust from funders. Funders are hesitant to grant money to newer, less established initiatives, and may often be more inclined to fund bigger organizations. This results in a lack of resources available to the grassroots initiatives that are in dire need. The power imbalance between government funders and organizations also means that nonprofit workers fear that public political dissent can result in cut funding.

As a product of our conversations with the consultation participants, we've outlined a series of suggestions in our 1-page document for funders interested in more equitable funding practices.

Deliverables

For the final deliverables, we decided to explore communication to two very different audiences, and the forms followed that logically. For a wider, community-based audience, we've chosen to produce social media posts, and for an institutional audience, we've created a 1-page document.

Social media graphics

From the synthesis of our findings, we created social media graphics that can be shared on RES' Instagram. These graphics break down information about the charitable sector, such as terminology, the precarity of the funding process as well as the practice of trust-based philanthropy. We've consulted RES' past Instagram posts for theme and colour design. The Instagram slides include explanations of terminology that is commonly used in the charitable sector, which can equip an audience to participate in and understand ongoing conversations around funding. We also have graphics that communicate our research findings in simple and accessible language and quotes for effective purposes. For the slides around trust-based philanthropy, we use a brief description and then a few examples of what it can look like in practice to urge community members to take part in reimagining equitable funding processes. These graphics aim to educate the broader community, specifically those who may be entering the charitable sector and are unaware of its precarious nature.

1-page document

We also created a 1-page document specifically for institutional audiences based on our discussion with Vincent from the Vancouver Foundation. In it, we summarize the three overarching themes in terms of barriers that grassroots organizations face, and present three suggestions that arose in the community consultations for how funding bodies can take part in sustainable and equitable funding practices. We urge funders to create funding for overhead costs. Discretionary funds and access to operational funding lead to the ability to plan for a more sustainable future, meaning more consistent output. Operational funding allows for staff to be more adequately compensated for their time and labor. We also explore trust-based philanthropy which is an approach that allows grassroots organizations to have autonomy, flexibility, and build trust with funders which is necessary for their success in the charitable sector and their work. It allows for critical response and shifts to emerging challenges, which are easier for organizations that are smaller to address because they are attuned to the needs

of the community. Grassroots organizations also often already have pre-existing relationships with community members, as well as knowledge and language capacities that drive their work. This trust and reciprocity allow for more creative initiatives to emerge. The last suggestion is simplifying the application process: one of the ways this can be done is through oral funding applications, which are more accessible to organizations that don't have the capacity for long and extensive applications. We've used bullet points to cut down on the text and aimed to communicate our findings in precise and succinct language.

In conclusion, the purpose of our project was to share our findings from the community consultations, so that this information can be accessible to both community organizations, and the broader community at large (i.e. people who might be interested in starting non-profit projects), as well as funders, who may seek to identify pre-existing gaps and make the funding more accessible.