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DPRI

Democratizing
Philanthropy
Research
Initiative

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Executive summary

The Democratizing Philanthropy Research Initiative (DPRI) is a global network of individuals interested in collaborating on research to inform the practice of philanthropy. Philanthropy in its broadest sense are acts of generosity, help, and responsibility for one another and our communities that have existed across cultures and civilizations long before the word philanthropy emerged. Philanthropy can be practiced by individuals –where people act with the intention to benefit others, by institutions such as private foundations and community foundations –which may offer support to human service or social change organizations, as well as by less institutionalized forms such as giving circles, mutual aid groups or networks, and solidarity economies.

DPRI was formed partly in response to critiques that philanthropy is undemocratic and reflective of power inequities in the broader society. While these are not new critiques, many in the field of philanthropy are interested in ways to practice philanthropy and partner with communities to create just and equitable societies. This is evident in trust-based philanthropy and participatory grantmaking initiatives but also most notably in community led philanthropy efforts around the globe. DPRI aims to undertake research to inform these efforts and, in so doing, contribute to the larger public conversation on democratizing philanthropy.

Because academic institutions and researchers have been subject to many of the same critiques facing philanthropy, DPRI advocates for research that is collaborative and co-created with those in the field. More specifically, we aim to facilitate the co-creation of research on the democratization of philanthropy by convening scholars and community partners who have a track record of engaging in the realm of democratizing philanthropy, including but not limited to people and organizations experienced with community philanthropy, trust-based philanthropy practices, feminist funding practices, participatory grantmaking and evaluation, and community-centric fundraising. By bringing together those engaged in democratizing philanthropy, either through direct practice or research, we will facilitate a learning community that conducts collaborative, cutting-edge research and develops evidence-based practices.

POSITION PAPER

Democratizing Philanthropy Research Initiative:

A research-practice network to democratize philanthropy

Opening Statement

The Democratizing Philanthropy Research Initiative (DPRI) is a global network of individuals interested in collaborating on research to inform the practice of philanthropy. We aim to achieve this through critical, relational, and collaborative research and practice that involves and informs communities and people related to philanthropy. Our mission is to bridge the gap between theory and lived reality by applying practices and processes that are, in themselves, efforts to transform histories of power imbalances within and reproduced by philanthropy and institutional structures, such as academia. With this position paper, we set out our shared goals to facilitate collaboration between any person, community, organization or institution committed to democratize philanthropy – with the aim to increase democratic structures and practices in philanthropy, and through this, create more just and equitable societies.

Philanthropy

The DPRI understands philanthropy in its broadest sense —as acts of generosity, help, and responsibility for one another and our communities. Although the term originates from the Greek 'Philanthropía': for the love of humankind, we recognize that its origins began in traditions of benevolence, duty, reciprocity, balance and collective care that have existed across cultures and civilizations long before this word emerged.[1] We recognize that, in many contexts, the practices and relationships that sustain communities may not be named as philanthropy. DPRI therefore uses the term with humility and reflexivity, seeking not to overwrite local meanings, traditions, and vocabularies of care, reciprocity, and collective responsibility. Our use of the term philanthropy in our name, research, and practice includes both individual and organized philanthropy. Individual philanthropy refers to actions people take with the intention to benefit others, including – but not limited to – sharing the five T's: Time, Treasure, Talent, Ties, and Testimony. Individual philanthropy is practiced by everyone, regardless of identity or intersectional identity traits, income, title, or location. There are several forms of organized philanthropy, including – but not limited to – highly institutionalized forms such as private foundations and community foundations, as well as less institutionalized forms such as giving circles, mutual aid groups or networks, and solidarity economies.[2]

To fulfill our vision, the Democratizing Philanthropy Research Initiative (DPRI) brings together a variety of people, including those primarily involved in practicing philanthropy: founders, directors, program managers, administrators, advocates, activists, artists, community leaders, fundraisers, donors, policymakers, government members, staff from international organizations and non-profits, and also those primarily involved in researching philanthropy and/or educating philanthropy practitioners, including consultants, trainers, and academics.

[1] https://www.historyofgiving.org/introduction/
[2] Organized philanthropy is defined in more detail below, with Figure 1.
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What do we mean by 'democratized philanthropy'?

DPRI acknowledges that contemporary forms of institutionalized philanthropy are to a large extent a result of histories of oppression sustained through structures of colonization, capitalism and patriarchy.[3] In this regard, elites have traditionally held the power to determine the scope and nature of philanthropy, reflecting and reproducing societal inequalities. That is why our initiative aims to collaboratively transform power structures within and across philanthropy. We argue that, in its ideal form, philanthropy enables and supports local communities to work towards the creation of just and equitable societies. Therefore, a more democratic philanthropy takes place when power is held by people and local communities working to create more equitable and just societies and is created and supported within local communities. A more democratic philanthropy seeks to acknowledge that communities can marshall power and philanthropy from the ground up. In this paper, democratization does not refer only to consultation or inclusion within pre-existing structures. It also involves shifts in who defines problems, who frames legitimate knowledge, who controls resources, who makes decisions, and who is able to shape narratives, priorities, and accountability.

DPRI recognizes how philanthropy can be viewed as a contested concept as well as a controversial practice.[4] Contemporary institutionalization of the philanthropic sector has largely been informed by and embedded within Eurocentric projects of colonialism and capitalism, which has resulted in primarily vertical forms of philanthropy. In line with these critiques, DPRI engages with ongoing debates to move beyond categorizing the world around developed and underdeveloped, Global South and Global North, givers and receivers, which are dichotomous labels that reproduce power asymmetries.[5] These asymmetries are not only historical; they continue through the coloniality of power and knowledge, shaping which languages, methodologies, institutions, and forms of expertise are recognized as legitimate in philanthropy and in research about philanthropy. DPRI pursues research practices and outcomes that rethink if and how philanthropy can be part of global efforts for social and epistemic justice.[6]

Source image: 2016 GFCF #ShiftThePower symposium

[3] INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, *The revolution will not be funded: Beyond the non-profit industrial complex* (2020); Villanueva, *Decolonizing wealth: Indigenous wisdom to heal divides and restore balance* (2021).
[4] Daly, *Philanthropy as an Essentially Contested Concept* (2012). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-011-9213-5
[5] Ndlovu, *Nuances of Othering in the Three-Worlds Model of Geopolitics. On Naturalized Naming Practices* (2025).
[6] Doan, *What Is Community Philanthropy A guide to understanding and applying community philanthropy* (2019); Narayanaswamy, *Race, Racialisation, and Coloniality in the Humanitarian Aid Sector* (2024).

DPRI acknowledges and respects a more inclusive approach to philanthropy, long understood as a prosocial practice, in which any living being can engage, including humans, animals, and plants.[7] This approach offers a more communal, and thus, horizontal, understanding of philanthropy, including mutual help or aid groups and solidarity economies.[8] In the majority of countries, these ancient traditions of caring for each other in local communities have been observed (e.g., religious associations, burial societies, labor sharing groups), including among underrepresented social groups[9]).

As philanthropy became institutionalized across contexts, evident from the appearance of laws and policies, norms and best practices, training and certifications, benchmarks and standards arose, there were both intended and unintended consequences. For example, dividing community members (us) into beneficiaries and donors (they/them) created separation. While the origins of philanthropy encouraged care, solidarity, and reciprocity, the formalization of the sector refashioned mutual exchange relationships into hierarchical, institutionalized donor-grantee relationships.

The image on the previous page, drawn during the 2016 #ShiftThePower symposium, organized by the Global Fund for Community Foundations, captures the difference between philanthropy "by and from" communities themselves and philanthropy "to or for" communities. With the latter presenting important democratic challenges. The past decades have been marked by many critiques of especially institutional and High Net Worth philanthropy. Scholars have extensively argued the undemocratic nature of philanthropy.[10] A key example includes Rob Reich's book "Just Giving", in which he argues institutional philanthropy undermines democratic values by allowing wealthy individuals to wield unaccountable influence over public life.[11] Through philanthropy, systematic inequalities are often being reinforced rather than broken down.

As scholars Anheier and Leat have said: Foundations are "perhaps the most unaccountable organizations in democratic societies",[12] because they are not held accountable like democratic institutions are, or even the way corporations are held accountable by their shareholders. In the case of the traditional philanthropic foundations, it is often the foundation that determines which problems need solving, and who gets to decide how these problems will be solved. Rarely people and communities affected are involved in this process. This leads to a loss of care or cohesion, where solutions are forced upon communities, and solutions are often not effective because they are not locally owned nor implemented.

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[7] Lynn and Wisely, *Four Traditions of Philanthropy* (2006); Ruesga, *Civil Society and Grassroots Philanthropy* (2011); Suárez, *Grant making as advocacy: The emergence of social justice philanthropy* (2012); Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (2013); Wilkinson-Maposa, *Gauging the horizontality of community philanthropy organizations*: *The development and validity testing of an instrument* (2016); Mottiar and Ngcoya, *Indigenous philanthropy: Challenging western preconceptions* (2016); Fowler and Mati, *African Gifting: Pluralising the Concept of Philanthropy* (2019); Freeman and Williams-Pulfer, *Liberating the Archive, Emancipating Philanthropy.* (2022); Zhou and Le Han, *Striving to be Pure: Constructing the Idea of Grassroots Philanthropy in Chinese Cyberspace* (2019).
[8] Fowler and Mati, *African Gifting: Pluralising the Concept of Philanthropy* (2019); Okaomee, *Giving in Nigeria: Strong Cultural and Religious Traditions of Generosity and Donor-dependent Civil Society Sector* (2022); Yasin, *The Organization of Civil Society and Culture of Helping in Ethiopia* (2022).
[9] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People* (2001); Freeman, *Madam CJ Walker's Gospel of Giving: Black Women's Philanthropy during Jim Crow* (2020).
[10] See for example: Dula et al., *Philanthropic Foundations and the Exercise of Power* (2025); Giridharadas, *Winners take all: The elite charade of changing the world* (2018)l; Saunders-Hastings, *Private virtues, public vices: Philanthropy and democratic equality* (2022); Villanueva, *Decolonizing wealth: Indigenous wisdom to heal divides and restore balance* (2022).
[11] Reich, *Just giving: Why philanthropy is failing democracy and how it can do better* (2018)
[12] Anheier and Leat, *Philanthropic foundations: What rationales?* (2013).

Bridging theory and practice: Democratizing Philanthropy Research Initiative

DPRI seeks to contribute to more democratic forms of philanthropy by developing critical, practice-relevant research rooted in ethical and bottom-up practices. This means DPRI aims to transform power relations in philanthropy and academia simultaneously. We aim to facilitate the co-creation of research on the democratization of philanthropy by convening scholars and community partners who have a track record of engaging in the realm of democratizing philanthropy, including but not limited to people and organizations experienced with community philanthropy, trust-based philanthropy practices, feminist funding practices, participatory grantmaking and evaluation, and community-centric fundraising. By bringing together those engaged in democratizing philanthropy, either through direct practice or research, we will facilitate a learning community that conducts collaborative, cutting-edge research and develops evidence-based practices. This research will allow us to move the field beyond a set of shared principles around the democratization of philanthropy, through evidence-based and informed practices that are academically strong and socially relevant. The experience and expertise of everyone involved will be invaluable in guiding the research towards the questions that are most meaningful for both academia and society and consequently will enable the development of evidence-based practices that democratize philanthropy and contribute to the creation of a more just and equitable world. DPRI is attentive to the possibility that the language of democratization may sometimes be used to renew the legitimacy of existing philanthropic structures without meaningfully shifting power; part of our work is therefore to examine under what conditions democratizing practices lead to substantive transformation rather than symbolic adaptation.

DPRI objectives

Short-Term Objectives

Bridge: Connect like-minded individuals, groups, and networks.

Coordinate: Design a strategy for regional and global coordination.

Share: Create online and offline platforms for open exchange of resources, progress, and evidence across the community.

Research Agenda: Co-create a shared research agenda.

Medium-Term Objectives

Connect: Help form and/or connect research-practice partnerships.

Achieve Learning: Advance research on efforts to democratize philanthropy and philanthropy research through peer learning sessions.

Facilitate: Update research agenda based on emerging data.

Update: Ensure that the new evidence is shared broadly, in accessible formats among researchers and practitioners.

Long-Term Objectives

Democratize philanthropy through the co-creation of philanthropy research.

The role of academic research in the Democratizing Philanthropy Research Initiative

Academic research can be a vital tool for:

- understanding which approaches are working,
- how they work,
- for whom they work,
- learning about what may not be working,
- how these approaches could work better to enhance philanthropy's democratic potential.

Unfortunately, academic research in the philanthropy field is underdeveloped, often lacks practical relevance, and is not easily accessible to people practicing philanthropy, be it because research is behind paywalls, reports are filled with jargon, or the questions and topics under study were not developed in collaboration with affected communities. In order to support philanthropy's role in the creation of more just and equitable societies, robust, evidence-based, practically relevant, and user-friendly research is needed. By co-creating research between academics and those practicing philanthropy, DPRI aims to conduct thorough and co-created studies on critical issues, enhancing philanthropy's democratic potential, with a commitment to making this data publicly accessible.

Principles and research questions in the Democratizing Philanthropy Research Initiative

In this section we provide a non-exhaustive, crowdsourced list of principles DPRI is interested in working on through the co-creation of research with academics and those practicing philanthropy globally. First, we aim to share the principles that guide the goal of simultaneously democratizing philanthropy and academia. These principles support the cultivation of scholarly processes that are critical, ethical, and relevant for practitioners in philanthropy worldwide.

Democratizing Philanthropy Research Initiative Principles:

1. **We are committed to co-creating research:** We aim to facilitate reciprocal collaborations across those engaged in democratizing philanthropy, either through direct practice or research, to jointly agree on the process, paradigms, questions and outcomes relevant to democratizing philanthropy.
2. **We are committed to co-producing research that bridges theory and practice:** We aim to co-design and co-implement research with those engaged in democratizing philanthropy, to build an evidence base for this work
   a. We use Open Science Research Principles[13]
   b. We use research objectives and methods that are ethical and appropriate/valid from the perspective of participating communities, local leaders, and civil society organizations
   c. We promote findings and interpretations that are considered relevant/valid by communities, local leaders, and civil society organizations
   d. We establish shared language and epistemologies that value both lived experience and critical scholarship
   e. Our research leads to recommendations and actionable steps for practice

[13] Three examples of open science research principles: Open Science Framework, Declaration for Sharing and Opening Research Data for Sustainable Development, Open Science in Horizon Europe.

f. We translate complex research into accessible formats that serve diverse audiences, using user friendly, non-violent language, multiple languages where relevant, and varied media formats to ensure findings reach and resonate with community practitioners, grassroots organizations, and marginalized voices

3. **We are committed to applying research methods that not only honor and respect the communities and people philanthropy aims to benefit, but engage with them in a non-extractive manner.**

    a. We discourage solely metrics-based evidence. We acknowledge the inefficiency, limitations, and harm in gathering purely metrics-based evidence.
    b. We prioritize communities affected by philanthropy, encourage them to co-create knowledge and define outcomes on their own terms.
    c. We believe that qualitative and quantitative methods of research are equally rigorous.
    d. We believe that participatory and community-engaged research can enhance the rigor of qualitative and quantitative research.
    e. Any research produced should offer a way forward rather than a focus on problems and challenges.

4. **We are committed to sharing our progress and findings to advance this work:** We intend to share our progress and findings broadly, both within our network and externally. We will do this by:

    a. Regularly sharing updates (progress, and interim findings) within the initiative and with the communities taking part in the research.
    b. Sharing our findings with practitioners, academics, and communities for feedback, exchange and continual learning.

DPRI is also framed around a set of key research questions that were collectively drafted and discussed to support evidence-based practices that democratize philanthropy.[14] These questions are included as an appendix with this document (see Appendix C).

Organizing the Democratizing Philanthropy Research Initiative

Leadership & governance

DPRI is sustained through a circular and agile ecosystem composed of a global secretariat with regional and thematic leaders who voluntarily coordinate efforts across local and transnational partners. With volunteers from the global secretariat we are exploring the best way we can further build the DPRI community during Spring 2026.[15]

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[14] These questions were co-created through input and feedback provided to a first version of this position paper and webinars (Summer 2025; link to original position paper). In November 2025, these questions were further discussed and enriched by partners in North America at an in-person DPRI event, organized before the ARNOVA conference in Indianapolis (November 19, 2025).
[15] In the second half of 2025 and in the first half of 2026, DPRI is supported by the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (Department of Sociology and Center for Grantmaking Research) with administrative and coordinating support for one day a week, provided by Miriam Ocadiz.

We aim to engage with all regions worldwide. While this is a work in progress, we currently have representation in the following regions:

1. Sub-Saharan Africa
2. Asia Pacific
3. Europe
4. Middle East & North Africa (upcoming)
5. Latin America & the Caribbean
6. North America

The DPRI welcomes further participation and representation from additional regions that may be interested in participating. Through co-creation as a tool for democratization, this position paper sets out our shared vision of how we can democratize philanthropy, inviting individuals and organizations motivated to create more equitable and just forms of philanthropy to interact with this initiative. DPRI aims to cultivate critical research with and for people, communities, and networks of people committed to developing and enhancing democratic forms of philanthropy.

Communications

DPRI is present across diverse communication channels as an emerging and distinctive global network that connects scholars, practitioners, and communities to advance more democratic philanthropic practices worldwide. Communication is understood not only as a tool, but also as a space in itself—one that reflects DPRI's principles of transparency, accountability, care, reciprocity, and ethical storytelling.

A coordinating, volunteer-based team is working to position DPRI as a visible and credible platform for actors and organizations interested in democratizing philanthropy, and to disseminate the network's co-creative and evidence-based research in ways that are both academically robust and relevant for practice.

Through LinkedIn, a listserv, and a tailored website, DPRI aims to develop and sustain an active community of scholars, practitioners, organizations, grassroots communities, and funders. Communication will prioritize co-creative opportunities and outputs, and evidence-based narratives that are meaningful for practitioners, while using accessible language to translate academic insights for diverse audiences and promoting multilingual and culturally sensitive communication.

Resource mobilization

From time to time, the DPRI may need to mobilize resources, including money to support the network's needs. Our goal is to be democratic, transparent, and reflective in our approach to resource mobilization.
For the next six months of operation, the DPRI Global Secretariat proposes to engage one part-time staff member to support coordination and communications. The DPRI proposes to initially raise funds for this part-time staff person from within our network, and potentially identify a source of matching funds. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, a key institutional partner of DPRI, has invited the DPRI to use its crowdfunding platform, free of charge, for this purpose.[16]

[16] While there are aspects of online crowdfunding that make it more democratic than other approaches to mobilizing resources, the use of a crowdfunding platform hosted by a university in the Netherlands can also produce inequities. The DPRI Global Secretariat is committed to making the process transparent, reflecting on its appropriateness (e.g., who has access/who does not), identifying and mitigating any issues that may arise, and sharing learnings from our experience. We are committed to appreciating and acknowledging all contributions, of any resources (e.g., time, skills/talents, and money).

In the future, the DPRI Global Secretariat and Regional Hubs may wish to mobilize resources, at the global, regional, or national level, to support the organization of exchanges or convenings among scholars, communities, and practitioners, the coordination of communications, the support of participatory and co-creative research, and the dissemination of evidence-based knowledge. For any such endeavor, DPRI commits to making the process transparent (e.g., how much was mobilized, from whom, for what purpose), reflecting on its appropriateness (e.g., who has access/who does not), identifying and mitigating any issues that may arise, sharing learnings from our experience, and appreciating and acknowledging all contributions, of any kind (e.g., time, skills/talents, and money).

The campaign will invite individuals, institutions, grassroots organizations, and foundations to invest in a shared infrastructure and to actively contribute to DPRI's collective work for community learning, shared responsibility, and mutual accountability.

Appendix A - The role of power in philanthropy

To illustrate the shift in power pursued by DPRI to achieve more democratized philanthropy, the figure below adapted from Gibson et al.[17] shows the different levels of institutionalization of philanthropy (horizontal axis) and the power distribution for different philanthropic funding strategies (vertical axis).

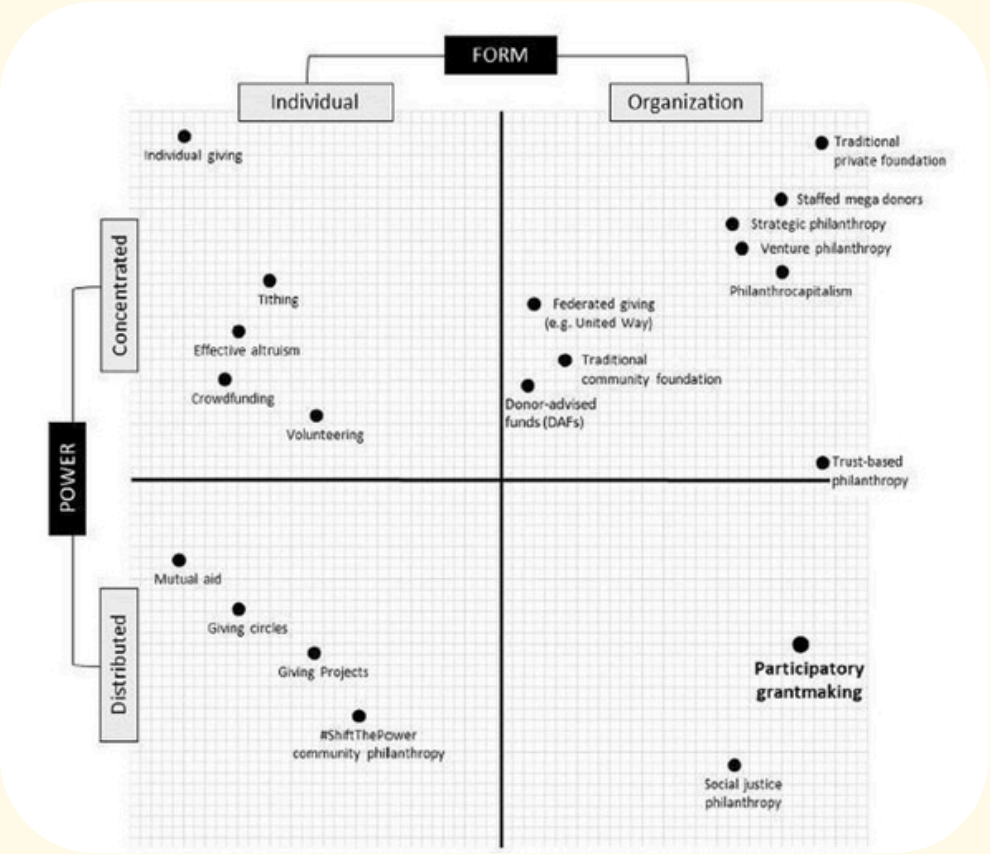

Figure 1: Philanthropic funding strategies based on the level of institutionalization and distribution of power.[18]

The top left quadrant includes more individual, less institutionalized forms of philanthropy, in which the power is typically held by donors. These forms include individual giving, tithing, crowdfunding, and volunteering. Informal helping would also be positioned in this quadrant, and this includes helping, caregiving, and remittances outside formal organizations. This helping is prevalent globally, especially in regions with limited formal and Westernized philanthropic and governmental infrastructure.[19]

[17] Gibson et al., *Participatory Grantmaking in Philanthropy: How Democratizing Decision-Making Shifts Power to Communities* (2025), p. 16.
[18] Gibson et al., Participatory *Grantmaking in Philanthropy: How Democratizing Decision-Making Shifts Power to Communities* (2025), p. 16.
[19] Yasin et al., *How and Why do people give informally? A Systematic Literature Review* (2025).

The top right quadrant includes the most institutionalized forms of philanthropic funding strategies, with the least distribution of power. On the top right in this figure, traditional private foundations are positioned: they are highly institutionalized and hold most of the power in philanthropic relationships. In their purest form, traditional private foundations retain all power, ultimately making all funding decisions themselves. Similar distributions of institutionalization and power can be observed with staffed mega donors, venture philanthropy, and philanthrocapitalism.

A somewhat more "democratized" funding strategy is a funding philosophy known as trust-based philanthropy. Trust-based philanthropy gained significant traction in the United States over the past few years,[20] and is positioned as similarly institutionalized compared with traditional private foundations, but with more shared power. However, the power still primarily lies with the funders, and it is positioned just above the horizontal axis.

Positioned in the bottom right quadrant, a philanthropic funding strategy practicing more democratized institutional philanthropy is participatory philanthropy, also known as participatory grantmaking (PGM). While it is also highly institutionalized, as can be seen in the figure, more power is shared between the funder and the people supported, as noticed in the box below.

Turning to the bottom left quadrant, we observe the most democratized forms of philanthropic funding strategies. This quadrant embeds the "shift the power" movement and community philanthropy, which are less institutionalized than the other forms discussed above and both share power between funders and those supported to a much larger extent. Community philanthropy has its roots in centuries-old practices of "exchange, mutual aid, solidarity and community development".[21] Community philanthropy is both a method of and a driving force for locally-led development. It enhances community capacity and voice, fosters trust, and—most importantly—draws on and strengthens local resources, which are collectively mobilized to build and sustain a vibrant and resilient community. With community philanthropy, often local communities are explicitly involved in creating the solutions; they are the creators, owners and executors of the solutions. Values fundamental to community philanthropy include reciprocity, solidarity, transparency, obligation, and trust.

[20] Trust-Based Philanthropy Project (2025). https://trustbasedphilanthropy.org/
[21] Doan, *What is community philanthropy? A guide to understanding and applying community philanthropy* (2019).

Appendix B - Definitions & Resources

In the box below, we provide an overview of definitions and resources for the (more) democratized philanthropic funding strategies which are the focus of DPRI.

Definitions & Resources

Trust-Based Philanthropy (TBP)
Trust-based philanthropy is a funding philosophy where funders collaborate with grantee organizations or partners in a way that holds all parties accountable to each other. It aims to break the traditional power dynamics in the philanthropic sector, emphasizing equity and the achievement of common goals. Trust-based philanthropy responds to the needs of society. Through learning, reciprocity, and transparency, philanthropic partners can tackle complex problems together.

Organizations that operate based on the principles of trust-based philanthropy follow these guidelines:

- Multi-year, unrestricted funding.
- Doing your homework. Know what you are talking about and what the issues are, so that recipient organizations do not have to explain them.
- Minimizing application and reporting pressure.
- Being transparent and open, building relationships with recipient organizations.
- Being open to feedback on the organization and how it operates and acting on this feedback.
- Providing the support and resources that organizations need, not just money.[22]

Resources:
Trust-based Philanthropy Initiative. Link to website.
Vertrauen Macht Wirkung. Link to website in German.

Participatory Philanthropy or Participatory Grantmaking (PGM)
PGM is used for a variety of grantmaking practices, typically characterized by the involvement of beneficiaries in the decision-making process. This involvement varies from informing to consulting, involving, collaborating to empowering, and may vary from soliciting feedback on spending plans to actual participation in budget decision-making.[23] Gibson defines PGM as follows: "Participatory grantmaking cedes decision-making power about funding including the strategy and criteria behind those decisions—to the very communities that funders aim to serve".[24] This definition of PGM highlights the importance of actual influence on decision-making. This definition also implicitly suggests that handing the decision-making power over to beneficiaries is the right thing to do.[25] With PGM, the democratization of the decision-making process starts - in theory - through a shift in the balance of power. In this way, control over resources is (partially) transferred, and existing hierarchical structures are critically questioned.[26]

Resources:
Participatory Grantmaking Community (link to website; link to resources gathered by the Participatory Grantmaking Community).

[22] Adapted from: Trust-Based Philanthropy Project (2025). https://trustbasedphilanthropy.org/
[23] Gibson et al., Participatory Grantmaking in Philanthropy: How Democratizing Decision-Making Shifts Power to Communities (2025), p. 23.
[24]Gibson, *Deciding together. Shifting power and resources through participatory grantmaking* (2018), p.7.
[25] Hauger, *Nothing about us without us: Innovating grantmaking processes with participatory methodology* (2023).
[26]Gibson, *Deciding together. Shifting power and resources through participatory grantmaking* (2018), p.7.; adapted from: Crins and Wiepking, *A participatory grantmaking experiment to support people without papers in the Netherlands* (2025).

Community Philanthropy (CP)
The academic and practitioner literature offers various definitions of community philanthropy (CP). Important similarities among these definitions include: a collaborative process within a defined community, whether place-, identity-, and/or values- based; enhancing or leveraging resources already available within a community; and balancing or shifting power dynamics in decision-making. The CP definition we use comes from research from two DPRI members: "Community philanthropy is both a form of, and a force for, locally driven development that strengthens community capacity and voice, builds trust, and most importantly, taps into and builds on local resources, which are pooled together to build and sustain a strong community".[27] One study suggests community philanthropy has three distinct roots: (1) CP that builds upon local cultural practices and traditions of mutual aid and solidarity; (2) CP as a progressive political response, emphasizing people's rights; and (3) CP as a response to third sector dynamics.[28]

Resources:
Global Fund for Community Foundations. Link to website.
Doan, D. (2019). What is community philanthropy? A guide to understanding and applying community philanthropy. Johannesburg, South Africa: Global Fund for Community Foundations. Link to paper.
Jakovljević, M., & Doan, D. (2022). Community Philanthropy, Women's Philanthropy, and Feminist Philanthropy. Johannesburg, South Africa: Global Fund for Community Foundations. Link to paper.

Community-Centric Fundraising (CCF)
Community-Centric Fundraising is a fundraising model that is "grounded in equity and social justice and led by fundraisers of color. CCF prioritizes the entire community over individual organizations, fosters a sense of belonging and interdependence, presents nonprofits' work not as individual transactions but holistically, and encourages mutual support between nonprofits" (CCF, 2024). There are 10 core principles that are central to the CCF movement, included with the resources below (CCF, 2024).

Resources:
Community Centric Fundraising (CCF). Link to website.
Community Centric Fundraising (CCF) Principles. Link to website.

Social Justice Philanthropy[29]
Social justice philanthropy seeks to advance social, environmental, economic, and racial justice by supporting and collaborating with organizations, funders, and communities to address systemic forms of oppression. This approach reframes traditional top-down philanthropic models by embedding the meaningful participation of people affected by injustice in decision-making processes and by prioritizing transparency, accessibility, and reciprocity. Rather than limiting philanthropy to hierarchical forms of financial support, social justice philanthropy promotes deeper and more equitable partnerships that enable the exchange of knowledge, skills, time, networks, and operational support.

Resources:
Giving Compass. Link to website.
Barry Knight, "The Emerging Story of Philanthropy and Peace," Alliance Magazine, April 23, 2024. Link to paper.
Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace. Link to website.

[27] Pond and Hodgson, *How Community Philanthropy Shifts Power: What Donors Can Do to Help Make That Happen* (2018), p.7.
[28] Jakovljević, Community philanthropy, women's philanthropy, and feminist philanthropy (2022). https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/news/connectingdotscpwpfp/
[29] Adapted from Giving Compass, *What Is Social Justice Philanthropy?* https://givingcompass.org/article/what-is-social-justice-philanthropy

Avila Kilmurray and Barry Knight, "Grantmaking for Social Justice and Peace: Some Practical Lessons," Philea. Link to paper.[30]

Mutual Aid[31]
Practices of people caring for one another are often described as informal, decentralized, nonhierarchical, and reciprocal. Mutual aid networks have been described as "settings in which people with a problem in living or a common experience come together on a voluntary and equal basis to share their experiential knowledge and to provide and receive informal social support".[32] Some examples include:

- Fraternal societies (e.g., Freemasons), which provide members with tangible support (e.g., money, food, care) and intangible support (e.g., job referrals)
- Jane Addams' settlement house - providing opportunities for residents to support one another.
- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society: supported resettlement of Jewish refugees in the USA after WWII.
- Mutualistas - Mexican American mutual aid organization focused on health and wealth.[33]
- Queer community has come together to support one another.[34]
- Crisis-oriented mutual aid - community efforts after natural disasters or shared challenges.[35]

Resources:
Migration Solidarity Mutual Aid. Link to website.
Mutual Aid Hub. Link to website.

Solidarity Economies[36]
Solidarity economies constitute an organizing framework aimed at redistributing power and resources through a sustained commitment to interdependence and collective economic liberation. They respond to the material needs and aspirations of communities that have been historically marginalized by colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, and ableism. Solidarity economies are commonly articulated through three key strategies: personal transformation, the creation of alternative institutions, and the challenging of dominant institutions. As bottom-up movements informed by Indigenous knowledges from the Americas, solidarity economies are grounded in cooperative principles of self-management, redistribution, solidarity, reciprocity, and relationality.

Resources:
Solidarity Economy Principles. Link to website.
Andrés Thompson and Florencia Roitstein, "Cuando la filantropía comunitaria se encuentra con el género y la política: historias de América Lat," ellasfilantropia, September 19, 2019. Link to article in Spanish.
Organización el Buen Vivir. Link to website in Spanish.

[30] Lynn and Wisely, *Four Traditions of Philanthropy* (2006); Ruesga, *Civil Society and Grassroots Philanthropy* (2011); Suárez, *Grant making as advocacy: The emergence of social justice philanthropy* (2012); Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants (2013)*; Wilkinson-Maposa, *Gauging the horizontality of community philanthropy organizations: The development and validity testing of an instrument* (2016); Mottiar and Ngcoya, *Indigenous philanthropy: Challenging western preconceptions* (2016); Fowler and Mati, *African Gifting: Pluralising the Concept of Philanthropy* (2019); Freeman and Williams-Pulfer, Liberating the Archive, Emancipating Philanthropy (2022); Zhou and Le Han, Striving to be Pure: Constructing the Idea of Grassroots Philanthropy in Chinese Cyberspace (2019).
[31] Spade, *Solidarity not charity: Mutual aid for mobilization and survival* (2020); Aldrich, *Building resilience: Social capital in post-disaster recovery* (2012); Solnit, *A paradise built in hell: The extraordinary communities that arise in disaster* (2010).
[32] Nelson et al., *Nothing about me, without me: Participatory action research with self-help/mutual aid organizations for psychiatric consumer/survivors* (1998), p. 89.
[33] Pycior, *Democratic Renewal and the Mutual Aid Legacy of US Mexicans* (2014).
[34] Spade, *Solidarity not charity: Mutual aid for mobilization and survival* (2020).
[35] Spade, *Mutual aid: Building solidarity during this crisis (and the next)* (2026).
[36] Adapted from Solidarity Economy Principles, What Do We Mean By Solidarity Economy? https://solidarityeconomyprinciples.org/what-do-we-mean-by-solidarity-economy/

Appendix C - Research Questions

The list of questions below were co-created through input and feedback provided to a first version of this position paper and webinars (Summer 2025; link to original position paper[37]). In November 2025, these questions were further discussed and enriched by partners in North America at an in-person DPRI event, organized before the ARNOVA conference in Indianapolis (November 19, 2025).

Questions about impact:

1. How can we best communicate the impact of CP and CCF?
2. Can, and if so, how can the democratization of philanthropy lead to a more just and equal world?
3. What communication approaches most effectively shift public perception from charity mission-based to justice-based philanthropy?
4. How do funders' practices, including their "convening role," influence ecosystem impact?
5. Is democratizing philanthropy the end goal or a means to realize other specific purposes (e.g., social cohesion, relationships, belonging, equity, civic engagement, justice)?
6. What are the potential risks and harms (in addition to benefits) of democratizing philanthropy?
7. How do we know whether these democratizing practices genuinely shift power, rather than merely modernize existing political and economic structures, and potentially introduce new forms of inequity or harm and/or tokenize marginalized groups? How do we prevent reproducing power imbalances?
8. Is there a shared definition of CP that is robust enough to illuminate how CP contributes to democratizing philanthropy?
9. Reciprocity–the experience of giving and receiving–is a universal experience we participate in throughout our lives that helps knit us together. How is this institutionalized in ways that result in separation?
10. Does 'forever philanthropy' impede democratization of philanthropy? Would reparative philanthropy abolish intergenerational wealth? How do you change 'forever philanthropy' to not be 'forever'?
11. For which types of funder and grantee organizations (e.g. sector, role in sector, level of organizational development) is unrestricted funding most effective, supporting their mission achievement?
12. How does participatory grantmaking relate —if at all— to participatory democracy initiatives, and can the evidence base around the latter help inform PGM practices?
13. Do PGM practices democratize decision making?
14. How do PGM processes align foundation's strategic priorities with community issues?
15. In what ways has PGM improved foundation performances (or not)?
16. What is the impact of participation in participatory grantmaking over time? What is the longitudinal benefit of introduced participatory relationships?
17. In what ways has PGM shifted power (or not)?
18. Is there too much reporting and too little philanthropy happening at present? How does all this reporting and collective knowledge sharing by various philanthropic entities shift the needle on actual philanthropy?
19. How and to what extent does philanthropy address and/or perpetuate social inequity and oppression? (related to question below)
20. How do philanthropic institutions and practices reflect and perpetuate colonial, imperialist, racist, and capitalist systems and harms?

[37] In the process behind this position paper, we acknowledge that not all the knowledge traditions that inform this initiative are formally recognized in academic reference lists. Many ancestral, territorial, racialized, spiritual, and community-based wisdoms have been essential to the existence of democratizing practices in philanthropy, even when they have not been fully documented or cited within dominant scholarly systems.

21. What role does language and framing play in either perpetuating or dismantling hierarchical philanthropic relationships?
22. How do communication strategies and narratives about philanthropy either reinforce or challenge existing power structures?
23. What are the roots of funders' resistance? What is the influence of the mental models funders hold? What is the role of beliefs and norms that inhibit the democratization of giving by funders?
24. To what extent have trust-based philanthropic approaches been connected with greater impact?

Questions about best practices:

25. What democratizing practices are favoured by grantees and why?
26. What can history teach us about efforts to democratize philanthropy (e.g., Haymarket Peoples Fund of 1974; Gibson et al., 2024)?
27. How can the work of democratizing philanthropy inform the debate over the reconfiguration of international cooperation?
28. How can external (philanthropic) resources be deployed to foster cultures of democratic governance, create spaces in which those at the margins of society can experience what it is like to be consulted, to decide, to be accounted to – and how this, in itself, can help flex a social muscle which might, over time, strengthen communities to make claims of other power holders (in the parlance of more formal rights' discourses)?
29. What insights have been gained from recipient organizations' leaders on how to solicit, leverage, and/or evaluate/report on unrestricted funding?
30. What are best practices in PGM?
31. How interconnected are the funders and the grantees? How much consultation/ reporting/exchange is there between them and how does this relate to the funders' resistance vs trust/comfort of handing over control?
32. How to recognize and address power dynamics in the relationship between funders and grantees? (Mogotsi & Hauger, 2024)
33. How to overcome the resistance of funders to giving up control, shifting power, systems/structures that resist change?
34. How can we demonstrate/communicate the value of shifting power to other funders?
35. What have been the most effective strategies used to support trust-based philanthropy?
36. What case studies and lessons learned can be identified to support knowledge and best practices in the philanthropic sector?
37. What are the key elements of trust-based philanthropy?
38. What could be done to mitigate these challenges at the foundation level and at a sector level?
39. What are the practices, policies, and institutional forms that promote more democratic philanthropy?

Questions about processes:

40. How do you monitor/evaluate the building of social cohesion, considering relationships and relationship building for creating change and liberation?
41. How does CP foster trust, social cohesion, power, voice, participation?
42. How do you foster democratic practices when the systems/structures are top-down?
43. How is expertise in its diverse forms (mis)understood, integrated, and applied in democratized philanthropy?
44. How does PGM and/or other democratic approaches to philanthropy make the invisible more visible?

45. How do PGM processes shape donor engagement, bringing beneficiaries and donors along divides?
46. How do those facilitating PGM processes understand, mediate, and reconcile divergent viewpoints between grantor leaders and participants external to the funder?
47. How has the sector as a whole plausibly influenced (or not! influenced!) certain fields over time?
48. How do PGM processes shape the perception of the quality of the relationship with grantees?
49. How can foundations/funders select and connect problematic power dynamics partners and cultivating trust as an everyday practice?
50. How can trust-based philanthropy move away from centering donors and their ability to trust the "other" (grantees, vertical relationship across power differentials) towards a more mutual form of trust?
51. How can TBP be used strategically, advancing both funder and grantees' missions?
52. How do funders overcome issues and challenges with accountability in TBP? What evidence/data exist or can be produced to persuade donors of the value of TBP?
53. How can philanthropic resources, applied effectively and strategically, help strengthen trust within, and between, communities as well as in multiple directions across power differentials (a shift from "you" to "us")?
54. How do democratic philanthropy practices manifest (or are embedded in) online volunteering forms?
55. How is democratic philanthropy affected by autonomous volunteering forms?

Questions about barriers and/or drivers:

56. What legal, tax, or regulatory barriers exist to democratized fundraising models (e.g., collective giving circles, mutual aid funds, or crowdfunding) and how can they be reformed?
57. What are barriers to the recognition and integration of diverse forms of expertise among participants in democratized philanthropy?
58. Why and how do "reimaginations" of philanthropy include or disregard community philanthropy? Do they do this, and from what perspective?
59. What are pitfalls to avoid when working with participatory grantmaking?
60. What challenges have prevented trust-based approaches from taking root? How have foundations, communities, and organizations been successful in implementing TBP?
61. What social, political, and cultural dynamics are presently advancing or inhibiting the democratization of philanthropy?
62. What is driving the resurgence of efforts to democratize philanthropy today? What are the global perspectives of democratizing philanthropy?
63. What drives foundations to adopt PGM approaches to governance and grantmaking?

Comparative research questions:

64. How does 'democratizing' philanthropy relate or interact with decolonizing and antiracist approaches to philanthropy?
65. How does democratized philanthropy intersect with movements for economic justice, reparations, or climate justice?
66. How does democratizing philanthropy look in different global contexts?
67. How inclusive are different participatory practices? Feedback: What participatory practices are most grounded in community realities?
68. What can different worldviews, contexts, and epistemologies teach us about democratic, people-centered, and community-led approaches to philanthropy?

69. *How do similar 'participatory' grant programs compare to 'non participatory' grant programs?*
70. *How is PGM different from traditional grantmaking?*

Questions about measurement, methodology, research:

71. What are the potential benefits and liabilities of empirically measuring efforts to democratize philanthropy?
72. How can we best study the impact of CP and CCF?
73. How do we build evidence that influences systems without flattening complexity?
74. Which evaluation approaches lift up and value emergent learnings and emergent outcomes?
75. What matters, to whom, and how should we study it? (e.g., social cohesion, relationships, belonging, equity, civic engagement)?
76. How can we create more in-depth insights into community realities and priorities, including rapid assessment procedures?
77. Would ethnographic case studies be a good research instrument to achieve more in-depth insight into communities realities and priorities?
78. How can we best use participatory research methods to center people's experiences and day-to-day experiences on the ground?
79. How can we compare outcomes from PGM approaches with outcomes from traditional grantmaking approaches? How do we know if and how PGM approaches are more impactful compared to non-participatory grantmaking?
80. How can research drive more collective fundraising efforts and minimise the competition between npos/csos for private funding? Within and beyond North America
81. Should we compare outcomes from PGM approaches with outcomes from traditional grantmaking approaches?
82. How can research help practitioners both achieve their goals to 1) raise funds 2) drive the giving ecosystem towards a more comprehensive approach?

Other questions:

83. What are the challenges and opportunities of making (more democratic) philanthropic networks accessible? What makes these networks more inclusive towards some people/groups and less open to others?
84. How cost-effective are PGM approaches?
85. What is the role of philanthropic networks in shifting norms, practices, and systems towards democratizing philanthropy?
86. What factors drive the cartelisation and concentration of philanthropic networks around individual philanthropists? How does that affect members and communities who may not be able to be part of such cartelized collectives?
87. How does experience with PGM influence or change grantmaking organizations' logics, operations, and culture?
88. How do we prioritize and centre, and normalize, expectations and practices of transparency and accountability in philanthropy? Who defines accountability and transparency? And how we problematized these labels?
89. What needs to be democratized, and how, in terms of foundations' and philanthropists' investments of funds outside of their grantmaking (i.e., their stocks and options and mutual funds)?
90. How does the dominant aid system of international cooperation understand CP?

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