



New England Grassroots
Environment Fund Inc.

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Request for Proposals: Consultant to assist in developing a learning framework that embeds ongoing evaluative tools throughout participatory grant decision-making processes to determine impacts on participants' priorities & practices

Organizational Background

The [New England Grassroots Environment Fund, Inc.'s](#) (Grassroots Fund) mission is *to energize and nurture long-term civic engagement in local initiatives that create and maintain healthy, just, safe and environmentally sustainable communities.*

Founded 24 years ago by the philanthropic community to support deeper grassroots organizing and tangible local projects, the Grassroots Fund plays an integral role across New England both by supporting local action and by connecting and sharing practices & trends between grassroots groups, non-profit colleagues and funding partners. The Fund believes that when communities have agency, they are more likely to resist injustice and create lasting environmental change.

The Grassroots Fund is committed to moving resources to community-based organizers and shifting power in decision-making to those impacted by the work. Grantee groups are not required to have a 501(c)3 status or fiscal sponsor, removing a key barrier to accessing resources for volunteer-led community efforts. We are committed to ensuring deep representation (based on age, race/ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, sexuality, and ability) throughout our grantmaking programs and convenings.

The Grassroots Fund's programs seek to:

- **foster innovation** by providing grant dollars to largely volunteer-driven (often unincorporated) groups;
- **convene changemakers** through Community of Practice calls, Pop-up offices, Catalyst Convenings and RootSkills Training Series;
- **amplify voices** through participatory decision-making, Guiding Practices toolkits and strategic communication channels;
- **revolutionize philanthropy** by shifting power and disrupting the dominant culture of problem-solving.

With the introduction of [guiding values](#) in 2016, the Grassroots Fund has re-committed to equity as a core value and is co-creating with on-the-ground groups as we pilot approaches and processes that allow for the participation of a broad range of lived experiences. We continually hone [participatory decision-making practices](#) in our grantmaking programs, as well as in our convenings and governance.

The Grassroots Fund's Guiding Practices inform our priorities in programming, grantmaking, and strategic planning. They are rooted in our commitment to undoing the systems that cause social and ecological harm. The Guiding Practices are invitations and ideas for how to begin to live our values through in our



work. The practices ask us to consider how decisions are made and who we believe should have the right or authority to make those decisions. We believe that these interventions are not only values-aligned, but also necessary to building resilient solutions to the multiple crises we face. Undoing the bias that prevents us from working with people of various lived experiences and perspectives is the best opportunity we have for creating a more socially and ecologically just world.

Through the Seed, Grow and Young Leader grant programs, the Fund received around 280 applications in 2019. The Grow and Young Leader grant review process engaged over 200 individuals as application readers in 2019, with 40 readers participating in 2-day grantmaking retreats to make final decisions on requests (ultimately distributing over \$470k). Readers are asked to review 8 to 10 applications over a 3-week period and fill out a rubric to provide input in the review process.

The Fund's online grantmaking system contains a wealth of data and through google forms we track demographic characteristics of participants to guide outreach. Spring 2020 marks our sixth participatory grant round, and while there have been significant changes in process since 2018, there is a pool of 250+ readers who have been engaged in the process to date. The organizational goal is to engage 150 readers this Spring in our Grow review (March - May).

Description of Need

The Grassroots Fund aims to leverage the participatory decision-making process to encourage reflection and learning across all participants. As readers engage, they read through the proposal narratives of 8 to 10 applicants. These reviews can be seen as opportunities for observation and form a powerful opportunity for learning around how guiding practices show up throughout the work.

While we are getting anecdotal input of such impact, we aim to develop a framework that can both guide this learning for all participants (and styles of learning) and at the same time track how this learning is happening. To aid the philanthropic sector's understanding of the impact of participatory approaches, we seek to better track how participants are benefitting from these decision-making processes and what mechanisms are most effective in capturing such benefits.

Through this project we seek to identify both impacts of our process of participatory grantmaking and establish on-going learning frameworks that close the 'identify, learn, improve' loop on the reflective cycle for all participants.

The Grassroots Fund is seeking proposals from consultants with experience in equitable evaluation and in establishing learning frameworks that incorporate evaluation measures. Outcomes of this project will be an evaluation and report on the benefits of our participatory grantmaking process as well as improved frameworks to create learning loops with evaluative mechanisms for the ongoing benefit of the organization, grassroots organizers and philanthropic community. In addition to informing the on-going work of the Grassroots Fund, the consultant's report will serve as an external report for the philanthropic community on the myriad benefits of participatory grantmaking processes grounded in equity considerations.

We are seeking assistance in methods to evaluate and create learning loops around questions such as:

- How has engaging with our training program and toolkits shifted the perception and assumptions of reviewers and grantmaking committee members?
- What new actions are reviewers and grantmaking committee members taking as a result of these shifts in perception and assumptions?



- When are participants in the participatory process better able to translate understanding of bias in decision-making and systemic oppression to specific practices and protocols that guide participant's own work?
- Is there a broadened understanding of intersectional issues (environment and social justice, for instance) and the diversity of stakeholders engaging in such work in community?
- Which grantee partners are shifting proposed solutions and projects that appear in applications over time towards just transition and systemic issues and how does the feedback through the participatory process support this shift?

While the initial step is to set up equitable evaluation methods to assess impacts of participatory grantmaking, we envision that those methodologies will utilize and identify mechanisms and questions that help participants reflect on their experience, consolidate and prioritize their key take-aways, and commit to implementing their own practices and interventions to disrupt dominant dynamics in their own work. Part of this work is understanding the platforms and structures - within our organizational capacity - to keep these learning loops active and to continuously track the impact(s) in terms of culture change and behavioral impacts.

Applicants should demonstrate specific experience incorporating a racial equity and environmental justice lens throughout previous work.

Timeline, Deliverables & Scope of Work

This contract will be organized in two phases: Phase I will be approximately seven months, likely late March-September, and Phase II will be two month, toward the end of 2020. This timeline takes into account key dates for our core grantmaking program, with our Spring Grow review (March – June) offering opportunities for initial research and data collection and our Fall Grow and Young Leader grant programs (September – November) offering opportunities for testing and evaluation.

Phase I - Design & Implementation - March 2020 - September 2020

- **Internal pre-work** - Working with Grassroots Fund staff, consultant will conduct internal research of organizational and programmatic documents and practices and gather input from previous external participants to help 1) examine and document the organization's existing theories and assumptions of the impact of participatory grantmaking process, 2) develop archetypes of learners and identify anecdotal evidence of learning encountered throughout the process to date.
- **Identify, improve and establish learning loops with evaluative elements across grantmaking programs** - Consultant will guide the Grassroots Fund in developing robust evaluative learning mechanisms that help identify impacts and benefits of the participatory process itself. A goal is to understand different learning styles, developing approaches to encourage reflection and learning and prioritize short to mid-term learning loop frameworks (key questions and reflective exercises) that will most help further organizational objectives.
- **Work with staff to implement evaluation method(s) throughout the 2020 spring grant review process** - We are open to non-traditional evaluative methods (for example ripple effect mapping) and seek approaches that can clearly articulate an emphasis on equity. We are seeking to develop a process that serves all participants - in real time - based on equitable values. This emphasis should include accessibility and co-benefits (for the Grassroots Fund and those being interviewed/evaluated) of mixed evaluative methods to gather data (e.g. surveys, interviews, focus groups, etc.).



Phase II – Evaluation & Interpretation - October 2020 - December 2020

- **Develop platform & tools for ongoing learning framework implementation** - Given the Grassroots Fund’s capacity and existing platform(s), the consultant will make recommendations on how to integrate the learning framework in ways to perpetuate the learning cycles with each grant round.
- **Review & evaluate effectiveness of learning framework** - After fall Grow and Young Leader grant rounds.
- **Provide guidance on data/learning interpretation** - Draft external report for the philanthropic community on evaluation findings related to benefits of participatory grantmaking.

Budget

The total fee for services is not to exceed \$25,000, with total cost being one of the selection criteria. Proposals should break down costs by specific proposed components.

Proposal Submission Requirements & Deadline

Selected consultants must be prepared to begin working with the Grassroots Fund **no later than the end of March 2020. Proposals are to be submitted no later than 5:00PM EST on March 11th, 2020**, but will be reviewed on a rolling basis. Please send your PDF application file to: rfp@grassrootsfund.org with the Subject line: “Participatory Grantmaking RfP”. Questions? **There will be a webinar to answer questions about the project/RfP on Monday, March 2 at 11AM EST - [pre-registration required](#). Or direct specific questions to [email](#).**

Proposals should follow the outline presented below with a maximum of five pages:

- 1) **Introduction** - At a minimum, identify the offering firm and/or contractor including name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number.
- 2) **Approach to the work** - Describe your understanding of the Grassroots Fund’s objectives and requirements, demonstrate your ability to meet those requirements, and outline a plan for accomplishing the specified work with timeline and benchmarks.
- 3) **Qualifications and References** - Provide summary information about your qualifications for this work demonstrating understanding of the Grassroots Fund’s Guiding Values and experience working with clients in developing learning frameworks with evaluative measures that apply equity/justice lenses. Please provide 2 samples of comparable projects performed for other clients and at least three references of comparable agencies that the Grassroots Fund can contact as references for your work.
- 4) **Budget** - Provide a budget not to exceed \$25,000 with hourly rates or by deliverables, and time anticipated for this proposal. Please break down expenses by different components proposed.

Selection Process

A review committee consisting of Grassroots Fund staff, board members and external advisory team members will review and evaluate the proposals received with final selection made by the Executive Director. Notification will be provided by March 20th, 2020.

The New England Grassroots Environment Fund is a nonprofit organization and an equal opportunity employer. New England Grassroots Environment Fund expects that any company or service provider with whom it does business will be committed to equal opportunity practices as well.

