

GRASSROOTS FUND GUIDING VALUES

The New England Grassroots Environment Fund's values can be traced back to our founding principles and remain an important touchstone for all of our work (see side bar). Building from this foundation, the Grassroots Fund is increasingly finding ways to work on a deeper level with grassroots groups to examine longer-term impacts and humane systemic change. We share these values to start a conversation with applicant groups as we define together how grassroots groups can play contributing roles in finding systemic solutions.

Just Transition and strategic considerations

Our values are rooted in co-creation, fairness, and equity. Our strategies and programs are increasingly focused on efforts to move from an extractive fossil-fuel driven economy grounded in consumerism, militarism, the exploitation of land, labor and resources to a local, living, loving economy grounded in ecological and social well-being, cooperation, and regeneration.

To make transformative social change, the Grassroots Fund will always advance direct democratic decision-making and community organizing efforts that ensure those who are being impacted by a problem are a part of the solution. We believe in supporting those closest to environmental and social problems in determining their own solutions. The power of grassroots organizations is their ability to organize, to educate, and to mobilize. We aim to reorient power to be more local and democratic.

How we do this:

We are increasingly identifying innovative and effective strategies that bridge various issues and lead to real social change. We leverage all of the Fund's resources - grants, community stories, tools (webinars, workshops and conferences) and collaboratives with funder and nonprofit partners – to bring in more support to more community activists.

As we look to the future, the Grassroots Fund is building off of the *Just Transition* framework. This approach encompasses a range of social interventions to assure secure jobs and livelihoods in times of shifting economies. Just Transition means shifting from dirty energy to energy democracy, from funding highways to expanding public transit, from incinerators and landfills to zero waste, from industrial food systems to regional food sovereignty, from gentrification to community land rights, and from rampant development to ecosystem restoration ([visit Movement Generation's website for more background](#)).

Shifting Power: Transparency, accountability, democracy

We believe it's critical that grant decisions are made collectively, by both those who donate money *and* by those who receive grants. The Grassroots Fund grantmaking committee transforms the traditional funder-applicant structure where one person, or a small group of people with money, make all the decisions. We seek to create opportunities for people and groups to work *together*, particularly with those outside of their regular network, so that they may share their expertise and experiences. We serve as an advocate for democratized, equitable grantmaking practices and are an avenue for widespread grassroots grantmaking through formal and informal funder networks.

How we do this:

The Grassroots Fund's grantmaking committee consists of representatives of the regional grassroots community and the funding community, invited by staff and committing to serve 2-year (renewable) terms. Our online grant review system allows

Founding Document excerpts:

Grassroots groups are marginally integrated into the mainstream environmental movement, and their institutional scale often makes them invisible to the environmental funding community. Yet, fueled by energy, creativity and commitment, grassroots activists form the basis of an environmentally responsible democracy.

Most funding organizations are not capable of responding to grassroots needs and concerns.

Foundations have difficulty in evaluating the large universe of ad hoc organizations that develop around a wide spectrum of local concerns, and then disbursing small grants.

us to share access to grant applications with a large pool of advisors and partners and includes a commenting system to share input. Transparency and accountability are crucial to the success of the democratic processes. We make decisions based on clearly defined values and funding criteria. Key decisions and discussion at meetings are summarized in minutes and shared publicly.

Lowering barriers to funding

We treat applicants with great respect. We view applicants as colleagues catalyzing innovative change or addressing systemic challenges, casting bold visions, and garnering financial support to do their good in the world. We are committed to removing barriers to funding. Barriers may include – lack of the ‘right connections’; lack of a formal (organizational) 501c3 tax status; lack of knowledge that the funding exists; language and literacy obstacles; complex, written applications and reporting forms; and labels like ‘in startup phase’, ‘too small’ or ‘too radical’.

As a funder we believe it is our responsibility to both fund through our grantmaking and to help leverage and catalyze more grantmaking that lowers barriers – essentially serving to increase grants from other funders to communities most affected by environmental and social degradation and extraction and disproportionately face funding barriers.

How we do this:

The Grassroots Fund’s process welcomes groups without tax-exempt status (groups who aren’t a formal nonprofit or have an established fiscal sponsor). Grassroots Fund staff actively cultivates relationships across a broad range of focus areas and at times we allow verbal applications and a reporting format that does not solely rely on written responses. Within the broad frameworks of environment, resilience, and Just Transition, the Grassroots Fund welcomes innovative ideas that are supported by community. The Grassroots Fund particularly seeks to support leaders who face a disproportionate struggle in accessing traditional funding mechanisms.

Flexibility and “risk-taking” in grantmaking

We are interested in supporting projects that offer creative, new, community-based solutions and which are unlikely to receive grant funding from other sources. We believe that grant guidelines can be flexible at times and that we must trust recipients to use the funds effectively. We are willing to take risks in our grantmaking and seek to learn together with grantee groups to understand what works and/or what does not. We understand that some projects may ‘fail’ to achieve the original objectives, and that some will have unimaginable success. In all these cases, we feel there is value in the learning. Our main objective is to support long-term systems change through shared learning with our applicants and grantees.

How we do this:

Grassroots Fund staff vets every request by contacting every applicant. Given the complexity of community-based work and the fact that many applicants are first-time grant seekers, we understand that it is not always easy to fully capture everything in a written application. Through conversations, we seek to better understand the context for project ideas and initiatives. As a result of these conversations to clarify how valuable they are, we are able to connect applicants with similar grantee projects and vetted useful resources. This creates an ongoing dialogue that allows everyone to learn together.

The Fund is created to provide assistance in a form that is and can be reached by grassroots groups seeking help in an efficient, fair and accountable fashion.

Often the need for assistance arises suddenly, and most foundations cannot respond quickly.

The Fund will concentrate on the priority objectives of building networks, increasing community involvement, and fostering environmental stewardship within the citizenry of the region.

The Fund is designed to be responsive and flexible, with lower overhead expenses and high value-added inputs. While grantmaking will

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Change versus charity

Our assistance is designed to share information and lessons learned to address root causes, not symptoms. The Grassroots Fund is a relatively unique organization, and often the only source of funding for unincorporated volunteer groups. While we acknowledge that this position means we need to provide a range of services to meet the demand, our core commitment is to helping groups realize their initial project visions and then address the root cause of problems rather than the symptoms. We are committed to providing access to resources, both financial and technical, to give groups the support they need.

How we do this:

We have designed our tiered grant programs to allow grassroots groups to match their work to the 'stages of project development'. Applicants can apply for Seed, Grow and/or Harvest grants. In addition to funding, we strive to provide technical resources to help groups find alternative sources of income in case our grant programs are not a good match or are insufficient to meet the needs of groups. Grantee groups returning for repeat funding are expected to show how they are increasingly addressing root causes. We expect groups to explore why a challenge or opportunity exists and how they understand barriers for anyone to meaningfully co-create solutions - a community garden may launch a food policy council to propose ordinance changes that block food system development, a local energy group may move from a CFL campaign to a community solar campaign to increase access to small generation options for all neighbors, or a discussion group on new economy may develop alternative models like a tool lending library or a community revolving loan fund to implement real facets of the sharing economy. When groups start to address various focus areas (local food, local energy, land & water, new economy) into one project, we really get excited!

Community-based Fundraising

We believe in equity and recognize the inherent inequities involved in philanthropy. We are committed to creating a more balanced income portfolio with new and more sustainable sources of funding based on the solidarity of the many, rather than the generosity of the few.

How we do this:

The Grassroots Fund is working to better engage a broad network as donors. Over the next few years, we want to provide meaningful opportunities for all individuals to contribute to community-based change, inviting everybody to be philanthropists and offering opportunities to participate in OUR collective work.

Process is the Product

We take risks in our structures, processes, and our funding decisions. As a result we regularly evaluate ourselves, through grantee reports and partner surveys, so that we may continually evolve and test different approaches. The way we do our grantmaking and how well we are connecting a community of grassroots leaders to one another is our real work. We believe in adaptability and understand that our relevancy depends on bringing in many perspectives, lowering barriers for engagement at the local level, and holding space for co-creating solutions across all viewpoints.

How we do this:

Our values are a living document, which we periodically assess and evaluate. We welcome all feedback.

comprise much of the Fund's activities, it is also expected to be an interactive program that is engaged in conversation with grassroots groups in the region.

The Fund's governance is comprised of grassroots and foundation representatives.