Participatory Funding:

An equitable form of *donation*

2025

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Introduction

In general terms, **Participatory Philanthropy** can be understood as the sharing of power between donors and grantees, grassroots communities, or organizations that benefit from funding. It represents a more horizontal relationship between those who provide resources and those who receive them within the sector.

Participatory philanthropy has proven to be a strategic pathway to broaden the reach of funding and diversify the profiles of supported organizations. By making methods more flexible and redistributing decision-making authority, this approach allows resources to reach groups and territories that are often excluded from traditional funding processes. Moreover, participatory practices have contributed to improving the outcomes and effectiveness of supported initiatives by incorporating diverse knowledge—from the definition of priorities to the implementation of projects. These effects highlight the transformative potential of participation as a way to reshape the field of philanthropy, making it more inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the realities it seeks to transform.

Although many funding institutions view this form of philanthropy and giving as a desirable, inclusion-oriented model, participation as a funding approach—particularly in Brazil—remains relatively new. There are still few incentives, limited research and debate on the subject, and a lack of systematized participatory methodologies and tools, which makes the implementation of participation a collective challenge.

Strategies to Implement Participatory Funding

Broadly speaking, Participatory Philanthropy can be integrated through a wide range of institutional and cultural actions, such as the development of institutional guidelines, the design of strategies, the planning and implementation of internal projects and programs, and external funding processes. In other words, there are multiple possibilities for adopting this model across different stages: planning and dissemination **(pre--funding)**; decision-making **(funding)**; and monitoring and evaluation **(post-funding)**.

We can affirm that the practice of funding—especially in decision-making regarding the allocation of resources—is by far the area of greatest power and influence for a donor organization or an individual donor. It is also the area where power imbalances and the perpetuation of inequalities are most concentrated, particularly when it comes to **diversifying, including, and sharing decision-making with grassroots organizations in peripheries.**

We recognize that the implementation of **Participatory Funding** is a challenge for donor organizations in the Brazilian context, for two main reasons: the fragility of our culture of giving, and the lack of debate in the field focused on discussing, synthesizing, and developing participatory methodologies, actions, and practices in funding.

Iniciativa PIPA is launching the study "Financiamento Participativo – Uma forma equitativa de doação" *(Participatory Funding – An Equitable Form of Donation)*, with the objective of *understanding participatory philanthropy*, its principles and values, challenges, and potential, in order to *develop* participatory practices and models as methodological funding tools. In doing so, we hope to encourage, support, and guide donor institutions that are willing to invest in this model.

To this end, we have systematized three participatory models in which participation can be incorporated at different stages of the funding process.

The creation of this study represents the commitment of Iniciativa PIPA to promoting the democratization and decentralization of resources from private social investment and philanthropy, ensuring that the peripheries are meaningfully included in funding processes.

What Are We doing To Do and What Do We Hope To Achieve?

We believe that this work reflects **PIPA's objectives**:

To **build** partnerships with philanthropic organizations and private social investment initiatives, helping them to rethink their structures and funding practices;

To **contribute** to racial equity in philanthropy and to center peripheries in the debates and solutions designed for the field;

To **develop** tools that connect Brazilian grassroots collectives and periphery movements with Private Social Investment and Philanthropy in the Global South.

Guided by these objectives, this study frames participation as **a more equitable approach to resource distribution**.

This report presents **three participatory models** designed to advance our core mission:

1. **Placing** peripheries at the center of giving in Brazil;

2. **Broadening** spaces for decision-making.

To achieve our objectives, the study relied on two methodologies:

4.1 A literature review, focusing mainly on studies and reports from international and national donor organizations that have adopted——or previously adopted—participatory models in their funding processes.

4.2 Semi-structured interviews with six donor organizations operating in Brazil that (for the most part) apply participatory models in their funding processes, at varying levels.

How Was the Study Developed?

We first developed an interview guide consisting of 12 core questions, along with two final open-ended questions (14 questions in total), which were grouped into **five sections**:

A total of **six donor organizations participated** in the study. The interviewees' profiles varied across the sessions and included **founders, executive directors, program directors, senior program managers, grassroots leaders, and academics**. Each interview lasted approximately 120 minutes. The donor organizations' profiles were intentionally diverse.[1]

Methodology

We sought to understand the step-by-step practice of participatory funding. At this stage, we gathered insights to present other funders with possible ways of building participation, drawing on practical methodological examples from different organizations.

Concept and Values

We explored how participatory funding is understood and which values and commitments sustain this approach.

Learnings

We gathered lessons from experience, including challenges and practices that did not work as expected.

Impacts

We aimed to understand how participatory funding affects supported organizations, particularly in terms of strengthening

Final Comments

An open space for interviewees to raise anything not previously addressed but considered important.

1 We emphasize that all responses shared were treated with confidentiality, upholding our commitment to the integrity of the information. Therefore, no names of interviewees or their organizations will be attributed during the analysis of the content collected in the interviews. The names of organizations that participated in the study and agreed to be identified in the report, through prior authorization, will be mentioned only in the acknowledgements.

Based on the various ways **participatory grantmaking** has been conceptualized, Iniciativa PIPA introduces the concept of **participatory funding**, with the purpose of placing grassroots organizations in peripheries at the center of giving. We define participatory funding as:
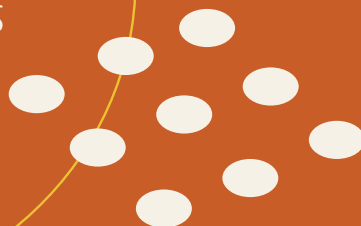
What Are We Considering as

Partipatory

Funding

An equitable approach to funding, whose goal is to temporarily share the power of donor organizations' funding and decision-making processes with the grant recipients. This model seeks to **recognize** the ownership and legitimacy of territorial organizations regarding the experiences, realities, needs, and demands of the issues surrounding them and, from this perspective, to enable their strategic **presence** in decision-making spaces related to funding. This ensures that decisions are better informed, producing stronger results and greater impact on the problems they aim to address.

To this end, participatory funding models bring together a variety of methods under a framework of democratic governance, aiming to ensure greater transparency in actions, active listening to territories, more flexible funding processes, institutional strengthening of organizations, and the expansion of power-sharing spaces.

We also propose
a **simple model**
that incorporates
the basic principles
of participation

Basic Principles of Participation

INTENTIONALITY

PLURALIZATION

DECENTRALIZATION

HORIZONTAL STRUCTURE

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Although the definition of participation may appear broad, it is a multifaceted, fluid, and adaptable concept that shifts depending on the context and situation, as its integration can occur at different levels and degrees. In other words, while decision-making on the management and allocation of financial resources represents the highest level on the scale of participation, there are different ways and degrees of implementing this appro-ach within the funding process, as we will see later.
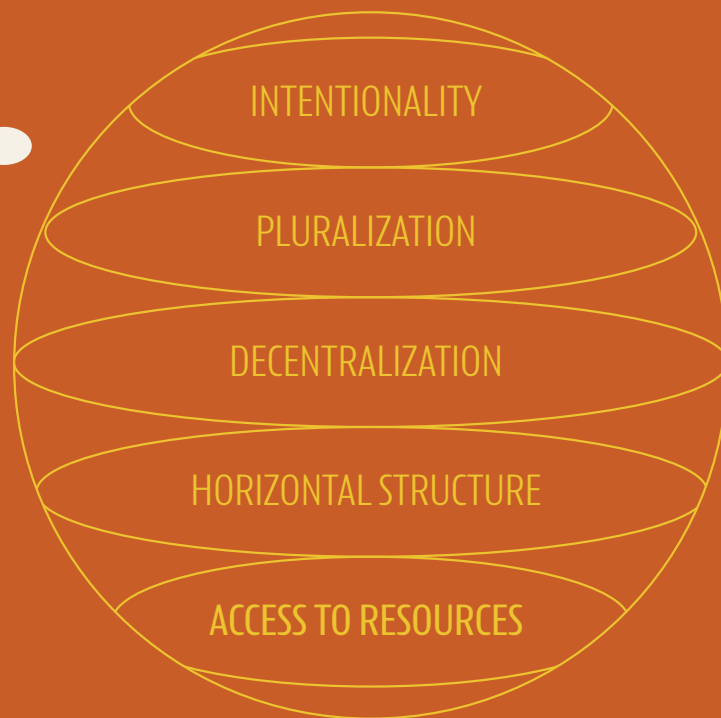
Who Should Participate, and Why?

Traditional giving practices do not guarantee impact if the same groups that have always occupied the center of decision-making continue to be the ones participating. Beyond considering the method, it is essential to ask: Who are the stakeholders invited to take part in decision--making? What is the profile of those who should be included in participatory funding? And furthermore, beyond simply being invited to make decisions: how are the conditions createt, or strengthened, so that these stakeholders can truly participate in decision-making?

Participation **WITHOUT EQUITY** Can Simply Reproduce Power

Participation must be structured to minimize historical inequalities. This requires recognizing that certain voices need to be prioritized, amplified, and placed at the center of decision-making. For this reason, critical philanthropy does not pursue generic participation, but rather participation rooted in intentionality, resource redistribution, and reparation. Through participatory methodologies, Black people, individuals from peripheral territories, Black women, LGBTQIAPN+ people, among others, are repositioned as priorities within the funding process.

Participatory funding grounded in equity does not begin with a notion of formal or classical equality, in which everyone is simply allowed to participate. Instead, it is rooted in diversity—where historically marginalized groups must be centered in order to make reparation possible.

Equity should not be understood as a **potential outcome of participation**, but rather as the guiding **principle that shapes participation itself**.

HOW CAN WE **BECOME**
PARTICIPATORY

It is common to have concerns, reservations, or uncertainty about where to begin when it comes to investing in a new funding model. After all, in the midst of so many urgent demands faced by those working to advance rights, it often feels as though there is never a right moment to pause, reassess actions, and reflect on how things are being done. Yet this reflection is essential for donor organizations to act in alignment with their mission and purpose. It represents a challenging shift, one that may or may not be systemic in nature.

Drawing on the systematization and articulation of participatory methods and practices collected, we developed three models of participatory funding as methodological tools that can be implemented by funders committed to greater equity. Viewing participation as a broad spectrum of actions, these models can be applied comprehensively, from pre-funding to post-funding stages, or partially, within one or more steps of the process.

The proposal is not to promote rigid funding models, since "this is not a methodology that can simply be 'taken from here' and 'applied there.' It is not possible to transpose one model to another without considering the local context" (Interviewee C). The models can—and indeed should—be adapted according to the specific demands and contexts of territories, as well as the capacities of funders.

Reminder

Feel free to use creativity, drawing elements from one model and blending them with others, or applying different models to different funding formats, such as programs or projects, depending on the context of your organization.

14

Only the Planning Stage
Is participatory – **(Basic Level)**

Joint funding is an excellent first step for those who want to begin but have concerns about implementation and results. Precisely for this reason, partnering with other donor organizations is one of the least risky steps, as it is a collective experience—meaning there is a greater chance of success.

Stage 1: Partner with one or more donor organizations to start a joint participatory funding initiative.

Stage 2: This partnership should have a common purpose: to involve grassroots organizations in designing a funding project. Beyond this, the experience may or may not include other intentions, such as:

- **Funding** directed to shared thematic areas;
- **Funding** directed to common target groups;
- **Funding** directed to shared territories;
- Or simply the **intention** of adopting a participatory model as a pilot project, regardless of who will ultimately be funded.

Stage 3: Meet and collectively draft an initial document—though not finalized—on the criteria that will define the funding project. As in any funding process, decide on objectives, themes, target audience, area of activity, and criteria for applicability and eligibility. Keep in mind that this document is a draft to be further discussed.

Stage 4: Each donor organization should invite a set number of grassroots organizations or periphery leaders, whether or not they are already grantees, partners, or members of their networks. Additionally, the purpose of the invitation should be made explicit: to participate in the design of a funding project or program.

Pre-selection: Curate the organizations interested in participating. **Important:** organizations or leaders that join the committee/council will not be eligible to apply for this funding. This pre-selection may occur:
· Through an open call;
· Internal call with existing networks;

Final Selection: From the pre-selection stage, organizations may be chosen through:
· A lottery among those interested;
· Classification matrix, based on the pre-established criteria for the project: theme, target audience, funding criteria, and so on.

Single Selection: Invitations may also be extended to organizations or leaders with whom there is already some form of collaboration and/or who are already on the radar.

Stage 5: Once the initial connection has been established between funders and the organizations participating in the process, hold parallel meetings or organize an event with the aim of reviewing the draft document, particularly the criteria that will guide the funding.

Stage 6: Let the voice of the invited organizations be both predominant and decisive. Each element of the preliminary draft of the funding proposal can, and should, be jointly reviewed with grassroots organizations.

Stage 7: Finally, the completed proposal should be put to a vote, ensuring the participation of territories and communities in planning the pilot funding initiative. The voting process itself may also take place at different levels of participation. For instance, the distribution of votes may be structured as follows:

· Between **10%** and **30%** of votes are external, representing the organizations;
· Between **30%** and **60%** of the votes are external, representing the organizations;
· More than **60%** of votes are external.

– If the goal is to increase the decision-making power of the invited groups, assign greater weight to their votes compared to those of the funders.

– Or allow the entire vote to be carried out exclusively by external organizations.

This initial step will help ensure that the funding responds, in some measure, to the needs and demands of the territories.

Define in advance which dimensions of the proposal will or will not be decided by the territories. This can be done in two ways:

· **Organizations have the authority to revise the entire draft planning document**, adding, modifying, or removing proposals that will shape the project;
· **Organizations may add, modify, or remove proposals** only in relation to certain points of the document, already pre-established internally by the funders.

Pilot, etc.

Public

Operating Area, etc.

Theme

Territory

Target Audience

Objectives

1 Stage

Allince of Funders

2 Stage

Project Design

3 Stage

Preliminary Document – Funding Standard

Stages of Participatory Planning

7 Stage

Voting and decision-making

4 Stage

Invitation and selection of peripheries organizations

Pre-selection, Final Selection or Single Selection

5 Stage

First Meeting

Donors and organizations participating in the process

6 Stage

Collective evaluation of the proposal (full or partial)

The Planning and Decision-Making Stages are Participatory

(Intermediate Level)

If your organization has the institutional practice of relying on an advisory committee to support decision-making in funding processes and/or turning to a deliberative council for voting on decisions, this practice can be maintained, **provided it is pluralized and expanded**.

If your organization does not yet have this practice, now may be a good moment to begin. Below, we share some practices on how to select members of the committee.

One possible pathway to incorporating participation in funding decision-making as an institutional practice is **to include leaders from grassroots organizations in peripheries, social movements, or collectives in the advisory committee or deliberative council**.
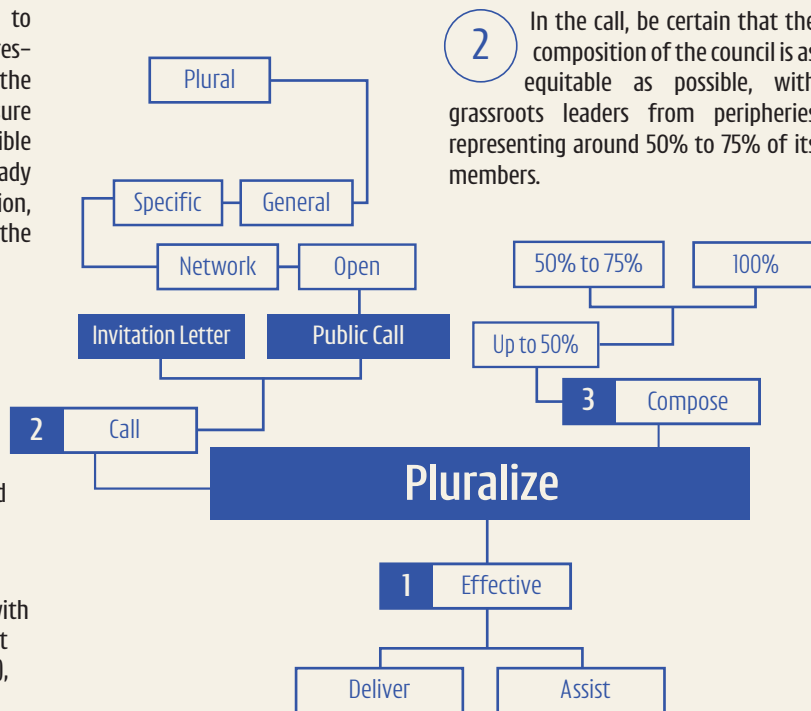
Where To Begin?

1 Issue an open call to identify those interested in joining the council or committee. Ensure that participation is accessible to organizations already supported by the institution, members of its network, or the general public.

1.1 Establish simple and effective criteria for the call, ensuring a combination of:

General: Thematic area, target audience, and location aligned with the organization's mission;

Specific: Organizations with limited resources, without formal registration (CNPJ), with few members, and composed primarily of volunteers;

And plurals: Ensure participation reflects diversity in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, and territory.

1.2 Another option is to invite strategic organizations or leaders already in collaboration or on the radar, ensuring selections go beyond personal relationships of those managing the process.

2 In the call, be certain that the composition of the council is as equitable as possible, with grassroots leaders from peripheries representing around 50% to 75% of its members.

3 Ensure effective leadership participation. To do this, keep in mind that these individuals may need financial support to attend these spaces.

2.1 If it is not possible to ensure broad representation, give greater weight to the votes of these leaders, so that their vote(s) carry more influence.

2.2 Since few Black and Indigenous people are on decision-making boards, promoting plurality in key spaces of power is a pillar of equitable participation.

In addition to embracing equitable participation as part of philanthropic practice, this also represents a legitimate shift in institutional policy toward the decentralization of resources.
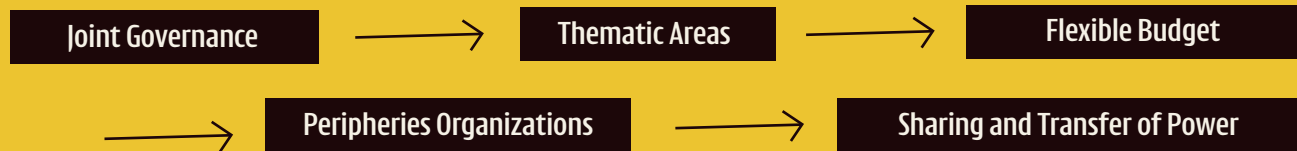
3.1 At the start, reserve time, space, and resources to ensure leaders can join committee and board meetings.

Plural

Specific | General

Network | Open

Invitation Letter | Public Call

2 Call

50% to 75% | 100%

Up to 50%

3 Compose

Pluralize

1 Effective

Deliver | Assist

Co-governance and Self-Management Model **(Advanced Level)**

At an advanced stage, participation stops being just a space within the organization's structures and becomes a core part of governance and resource flows. It is a model in which the institution and the peripheries are co-responsible, from design to evaluation, with autonomy to set priorities, allocate budgets, and review processes together.

Joint Governance → **Thematic Areas** → **Flexible Budget**

→ **Peripheries Organizations** → **Sharing and Transfer of Power**

1 Joint Co-Decision Committee on Funding:

Establish a **co-decision committee** composed of half foundation members and half representatives selected by the participating communities, serving on rotating terms. This committee:

- **Approves** calls for proposals, programs, or projects prior to publication or the implementation of a strategy;
- **Reviews** eligibility criteria and evaluates applications in direct dialogue with the proposals submitted;
- **Issues** binding decisions, effective only if approved by a qualified majority and cannot be overturned.

2 Directed Participatory Budgeting:

Allocate unrestricted funds (beyond open calls for proposals) to be entirely managed by grassroots **organizations in peripheries** (composed of Black women, young people from territories, trans people, etc.). These organizations:

- **Develop** their own internal regulations for the use of resources, in accordance with the amount granted;
- **Decide** on timelines, deadlines, and reporting formats—within the timeframe agreed upon with the donor institution;
- **May reallocate funds** among projects without direct intervention from institutional funders.

3 Thematic Areas to Be Supported:

Invite community groups to co-design new lines of support in alignment with the priority agendas of grassroots collectives and periphery organizations. This involves not only revisiting pre-existing proposals, but also:

- **Defining success indicators** (including metrics for territorial strengthening and political autonomy);
- **Developing peer-to-peer mentoring processes** for grantees;
- **Co-producing impact reports** that value local narratives and evidence.

Do not forget to:

- **Set** aside emergency funds for potential contingencies;
- **Adapt** indicators and metrics in ways that recognize and value the context of supported groups;
- **Create** spaces for ongoing dialogue, rather than one-off meetings, establish permanent cycles of engagement.

4 Practice Transformative Governance in Any Funding Initiative:

Amend bylaws and internal regulations to ensure that, on specific issues (e.g., defining racial and territorial equity policies), community votes carry greater weight than institutional votes within majority councils. In this way, governance moves beyond consultation to become a genuine process of power-sharing and the transfer of authority.

Foundations of Participatory Funding

Transparency

Feedback   **Flexibility**

Plurality

The definition of participation may vary in scope, depending on the conceptual approach considered. In our effort to identify the elements that structure participatory funding, we outlined **four** key foundations of this approach: **transparency, feedback, flexibility, and plurality**.

"Participation as a principle, not an appendix"

To illustrate the principles being presented, we created a visual strategy simulating a **fictional website** with a list of tabs, topics, and practices that can be highlighted on public institutional platforms.

We believe that incorporating these values paves the way toward meaningful participation.

TRANSPARENCY

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It refers to the act of communicating **publicly, clearly, and accessibly about activities, practices, internal policies, budgets, partnerships, developed funding processes**, and other relevant information for the general public and for the peripheries. Websites and social media serve as tools that give visibility to the work of funders.*

Together with Brazilian peripheral organizations, we found that this often becomes a barrier to fundraising and to understanding how the sector operates overall.

In this sense, the question is: Is this enough? Does it truly help the public understand the full funding process? When it comes to funding, what is disclosed and what remains hidden? **Transparency is one of the fundamental elements in building credibility and trust between territories, communities, and donor organizations, as well as in initiating the debate on the decentralization of resources.**

It can only becomes a bridge to participation when the public is informed about: who decides; how decisions are made; for what and for whom decisions are taken; what the guidelines, criteria, results, and flows of processes and resources are; who is involved in this construction—and who is not; who the beneficiaries are; and what models and types of funding the institution adopts, among other factors.

Annual reports

| 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |

Volumes of **resources** and **beneficiaries**

R$ 0
in **resources**

000
beneficiaries

Guidelines for resource allocation

Who can request funding

Standard for project selection

Eligibility standards

How to apply for funding

How to develop a project

Financial statements

Annual income and expense **report**

Institutional **resources** and **costs**

Resource allocation

Transparency in funding processes, in addition to facilitating fundraising, is the first step toward building trust between territories, communities, and donor institutions.

Horizontal communication between funders and grantees, allowing both parties to share opinions, feedback, or suggestions on processes, decisions, or outcomes. **This is active listening!** It involves dialogue, exchange, and listening at every stage of the funding process.

FEEDBACK

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INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS
FUNDING
TRANSPARENCY
DONATIONS AND MONITORING

Map of partners and supported

Text here text here

Filter by:

Organization   **Country**   **Region**   **Years**

Stories of supported groups

Text here text here

Text here text

Contact us

Text here text here text here text here text here text here text here text here text here text here text here text here text here text here text here text here text here text here

Name (optional)

Email or phone (optional)

Message

Evaluation and testimonials from supported groups

Text here text

First Name Last Name
Position/Organization

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First Name Last Name
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(FAQ)

1	⌄
2	⌄
3	⌄
4	⌄
5	⌄
6	⌄
7	⌄

How to implement:

01

Conduct surveys, satisfaction studies, or periodic focus groups with grantees;

02

Implement online platforms for continuous communication, tailored to each group: non-funded applicants, grantees, participants, and members of networks,

03

Integrate evaluation into the post-funding process;

04

Publicly share how feedback has been used—whether in shaping agendas, actions, or future proposals.

Ongoing dialogue is one of the structural **principles of participation**, since each participatory funding model must be discussed, assessed, and, above all, adapted according to the context, needs, and demands of each territory. Active listening is fostered primarily through learning that takes place in dialogue.

FLEXIBILITY

Strengthening this process requires legitimizing the varied formats of territorial organizations by creating mechanisms that embrace their specificities rather than exclude them.

One of the most frequently mentioned examples by interviewees is **budget flexibility, particularly in relation to the transfer of funds**:

Flexibility is the process of making rules, structures, and procedures more adaptable and accessible to different realities and contexts. In the case of funding, **it refers to reducing bureaucratic barriers**, ensuring that processes adjust to the conditions of supported organizations, rather than requiring organizations to conform to rigid procedures

.

This is one of the key mechanisms that guarantee **the effectiveness and legitimacy of participation**, particularly when incorporating organizations working in peripheries. Unlike traditional funding models, which demand a high degree of formalization and adhere to rigid standards for project selection, evaluation, disbursement, and reporting, participatory funding recognizes the diversity and complexity of local realities.

"The issue of transferring funds to individuals is also a challenge, especially for those receiving social benefits from the government. Each case needs to be carefully analyzed to avoid problems, which often leads to alternative solutions, such as using association accounts to manage resources [...] There are other complications in the process. We've already advised that we do not recommend individuals who receive government benefits to open the account, because even with a donation agreement proving it is for the group, they could lose their benefit." **(Interviewee T)**

As one participating organization explained:

"Budget line changes should be allowed. If the project's priorities shifted slightly, it was enough to report it during the periodic meeting." (Interviewee J)

Budget flexibility did not compromise transparency but instead acknowledged the dynamic and evolving nature of projects.

We also affirm that democratizing and adapting communication and evaluation tools can bring positive results, such as making evaluation formats more flexible and generating richer data and contexts:

"We work with a community organization where internet access is precarious [...] I used my phone to record audio messages, asking questions and requesting responses. Later, I compiled everything into a document [...]. This approach turned out to be much richer than if we had requested a formal written report." (Interviewee W)

We recognize that each case has its specificities, but this testimony makes clear that flexible evaluation formats not only enabled participation but also generated richer and more contextualized qualitative data than written reports alone.

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INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS
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Funding models and types

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Emergency Funds

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Who can request support?

When to request support?

What is the amount of available funds?

How to request support?

CLICK HERE

Guidelines for requesting funds

Who can request funding ⌄

Project selection standard ⌄

Standard eligibility ⌄

How to request funding ⌄

How to develop a project ⌄

Calls and Grants

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Period	Name	Theme	Target Audience	Resource
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text here text here	NAME OF THE CALL OR GRANT	text here text here	text here text here text here	
text here text here	NAME OF THE CALL OR GRANT	text here text here text here	text here text here text here	

Selection process for calls and grants

Title 1	Title 2	Titulo 3
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To be flexible is to think about:

Selection Criteria

Simplify application forms, using accessible language.

Accept different formats for project proposals, such as videos, audio recordings, or interviews, instead of requiring only written proposals.

Value traditional knowledge and community trajectories, even without formalization or previous experience with calls for proposals.

Recognize territorial legitimacy and local leadership as relevant criteria, regardless of formal registration status (CNPJ).

Project Evaluation

Adapting indicators and metrics to the local context.

Allowing changes in the action plan or project priorities during implementation through simple communication.

Replacing traditional reports with more accessible formats, such as video recordings, interviews, and other documentation.

Evaluation focused on qualitative and participatory aspects, based on listening and understanding the process rather than only on quantitative results.

Financial Disbursement

Allow the transfer of funds to individuals, analyzing each case and identifying alternatives to avoid negative impacts, such as the loss of social benefits.

Use association accounts or joint accounts as solutions for informal organizations.

Provide flexibility for reallocating budget lines, as long as there is justification and dialogue with the funding institution.

Guarantee technical support for financial management when necessary, respecting the pace of the organizations.

Accountability

Accept alternative receipts, such as simple receipts, handwritten notes, or informal purchase records from local businesses.

Use photos or videos as valid forms of documenting resource use.

Replace a logic of oversight with ongoing, dialogical monitoring that builds relationships of trust and mutual support.

Provide technical assistance, human resources, and financial support for accountability, regardless of the reporting model.

Adjust deadlines for submitting accountability reports, considering the routines, human resources, and technical realities of each organization.

PLURALITY

One of the systemic challenges that persists in the philanthropic sector is the lack of diversity in the governance of donor institutions in terms of race, gender, and territory, and the slow pace of change in this regard.*

Diversity can be understood as the inclusion of peripheries and politically marginalized groups as **strategic partners** in building debates, producing collective knowledge, and challenging unspoken norms that continue to uphold privilege both old and new.

This is one of the foundational principles that underpins participatory philanthropy and must be embedded in the funding process. Participation only becomes effective when spaces of power are shared with those driving change in the territories, ensuring that these spaces reflect the profile of the peripheries.

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WHO WE ARE
OUR HISTORY
TEAM AND BOARD
TEAM AND BOARD COMPOSITION
INTERNAL POLICIES

About the **fund**

Text here text text here

Title 1

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Title 2

Text here text here text text here text here text here text here text here text here text here text here text here text here text here

Team and **Board**

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Executive team

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Board

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Internal policies to promote plurality

01 Title

02 Title

03 Title

04 Title

How have donors, in practice, committed to recognizing and creating opportunities for the participation of peripheries in decision-making?

See more in: Guia das Periferias para Doadores (PIPA, 2024)*

Advantages and Challenges

Implementing participatory processes in funding is, above all, a commitment to a living practice, one marked **by experimentation, continuous learning, and, not infrequently, risks**.

For many donor organizations, this choice has meant stepping away from absolute control over resource management and opening up to other ways of managing, deciding, and shaping paths for change.

It is not a ready-made model, but an ongoing journey.

"It is a process of continuous learning. One must be willing to take risks, because the gains can be transformative." (Interviewee C) — **to begin, make mistakes, learn, and improve**

Advantages

1

Autonomy:

Flexible support makes it possible to respond not only in the most critical moments, but also, in the long term, it builds greater autonomy and self-confidence for supported organizations.

2

Plurality in the territory:

"The participatory approach opened doors and created internal spaces for discussion that didn't exist before, even across different sectors. [...] We probably would have focused on the peripheries of the Southeast, for example, which are equally important and face challenges, but there is neglect of other regions. The education sector, for instance, usually does not prioritize the North. The Amazon, for example, is central to discussions on climate and sustainability, and these two issues are deeply interconnected." **(Interviewee T)**

3

Impact and results:

Participation generates more effective results and impacts compared to traditional approaches, since solutions are designed by those working directly in the territory.

This was unanimous among participants:

"The same groups would not have been selected in a different process." **(Interviewee G)**

"The result was wonderful, because we were able to support things we would not have funded through the traditional approach." **(Interviewee M)**

"The participatory approach opened doors and created internal spaces for discussion that didn't exist before." **(Interviewee W)**

4

Transparency:

Participation fosters deeper transparency and shifts the inherent power dynamics that shape decisions on resources and how those decisions are made.

5

Decentralization of funding:

According to interviewees, many organizations supported under this model reported that their first—or only—funding came from institutions that adopted more participatory practices. Because of this, funding ends up being more aligned with territorial demands, distributed more equitably, and reaching organizations that often operate with little or no resources.

6

Moving away from exclusionary philanthropy:

This methodological alternative actively inserts groups in peripheries into decision-making, moving away from philanthropic practices where exclusion has long been the rule.

7

Programmatic strengthening:

Through a participatory approach, programmatic strategies become denser, stronger, and more comprehensive. Collective methodologies and practices enhance funding processes, making them more effective.

8

Languages, access, and mediation:

Making funding truly democratic means more than broadening access to resources: it requires creating processes and languages that respect different forms of expression, oral traditions, writing styles, and ways of listening. More user-friendly digital platforms, more accessible calls for proposals, and collective listening sessions are some of the strategies that have gained political relevance.

Challenges

1

Restricted donations:

Funds received, in most cases, come with numerous restrictions imposed by donors. One possible pathway is to establish which criteria will be negotiable—or non-negotiable——within the process.

2

Sustaining the participatory commitment:

As donor organizations grow and manage larger resources, offering and maintaining participation can become more complex. It is essential to keep in mind that, in order to align growth with participation, funding strategies and processes must be continuously adapted and renegotiated.

3

Higher costs:

Involving actors beyond funders increases the costs of the funding process, as more people are engaged and require support.

4

Process duration:

Time management becomes longer and more complex, considering the multiplicity of collaborators.

It is important to highlight that, **regarding these two points—cost and time**—there was relative consensus among donor organizations that participatory processes do not necessarily **require more time or resources**. Building trust-based relationships, engaging multiple actors, and making collective decisions does require sustained dedication. However, there is also agreement that **the impacts generated by these practices are significantly greater**—both in terms of institutional strengthening and the effectiveness and legitimacy of supported initiatives. In other words, the additional time invested is more than compensated by the results achieved.

There is no clear consensus that participatory processes are necessarily more expensive than traditional models. In practice, costs vary depending on how the process is designed.

5

Conflicts of interest

There are divergences between organizations and leaders involved, but the emergence of conflicts does NOT mean the process has failed. On the contrary, it is natural for disagreements to arise — that is part of the richness of participation.

"It is quite challenging, because occasionally there are conflicts of interest among organizations regarding what they want to do. But they always reach some point of agreement, and in the end it works out." Another interviewee added: "It wasn't always easy to reach consensus […] There was one case of conflict that we had to mediate carefully." **(Interviewee G)**

The key point is **to be prepared from the start**:

1 Establishing coexistence agreements in advance

2 How decisions will be made

3 What criteria will be applied in the case of a tiebreaker;

4 What strategies will be adopted in case of deadlock or disagreement

These are **fundamental measures** to ensure that conflicts are addressed with care and in alignment with the principles of participation.

Participation as a Path to Transforming Philanthropy

Throughout this study, we have sought to demonstrate that participatory philanthropy is more than just a methodology—**it is a political commitment to redistributing power** and recognizing the legitimacy of the peripheries. Its impacts go beyond the formal boundaries of calls for proposals and rigid financial disbursements: it reshapes how resources circulate, how decisions

For these effects to take root, however, it is necessary to confront the inherent challenges of the process, such as the costs of mediation and the complexity of institutional negotiations. Building a philanthropy committed to racial, territorial, and gender justice necessarily involves embracing creative conflict, active listening, and reciprocal transformation. After all, as the experiences compiled here have shown, participation is not a promise of harmony, but rather an essential practice for the democratization of both resources and power.

Based on the experiences presented, it is possible to affirm that participation, when taken seriously, not only expands the reach of actions but also challenges and transforms the very foundations of philanthropy. **This requires a willingness to listen, to adapt rhythms, to revisit operational logics, and to unsettle hierarchies**.

Active listening ceases to be a stage in the process and instead becomes an organizing principle. In this way, participatory funding emerges as a practice that shifts the centrality away from the donor and invites institutions to revisit themselves——in their timing, their language, and their priority agendas.

The adoption of participatory practices does not only transform territories and supported organizations—it also profoundly impacts donor institutions themselves. Participation functions as a two-way street: by engaging more closely with groups in peripheries, funders are also prompted to revisit their own structures, ways of operating, and perspectives on the territories. **In this sense, participation is less an endpoint and more an ongoing process of institutional and political transformation.**

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