

A Feasibility Study to Explore the Potential for Participatory Grantmaking (PGM) in North Yorkshire



LITERATURE REVIEW

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‘Participation teaches everyone that people are worthwhile, and they matter. Who makes the decisions is really important’.

1.0 How long has PGM been a field of practice?

The desk research is divergent.

'The [Funding Exchange](#), founded in 1979, is often seen as initiating PGM within modern philanthropy. The group, founded by young progressive activists with inherited wealth, called for "change, not charity." Their model of "activist-advised grantmaking" was used by 16 organizations across the USA, many of which remain active today. 'Although many PGM practitioners were connected before, it wasn't until 2020 when Hannah Paterson, as part of her research on PGM, began convening practitioners monthly. This monthly gathering turned into the Participatory Grantmakers Community, which now has over 600 members from around the world.'ⁱⁱ

'Participatory Grantmaking (PGM) has been around for 30 years but gained significant momentum in recent times. It has become a focus of interest and study'ⁱⁱⁱ.

'One of the first attempts by a national foundation to undertake a national participatory grantmaking initiative was in 2007, when the Case Foundation created and launched Make it Your Own (MIYO), a grants programme aimed at supporting and lifting up examples of "citizen-centered civic engagement." The foundation invited the public to participate in every step of the grantmaking process—including setting grant guidelines, serving as proposal reviewers, and voting on which proposals should receive grants. Proposals for the programme were submitted by thousands of people across the country seeking to improve their communities.'



For a more detailed history, linked to the development of social change philanthropy, please see Participatory Grantmaking, Has its Time Come? Cynthia Gibson, page 12. Alternatively, please visit the PGM Slack Channel / Community of Practice 'Reading Room' pgmcommunity.slack.com

2.0 Desk research findings

Efficacy studies relating to PGM are scarce, despite experts in this field saying that PGM has existed since 1979. But herein lies an immediate difficulty as whilst in most research studies or trials efficacy – *the ability to achieve desired results* – is a standard avenue of enquiry, those who have written about PGM point out that it does not lend itself to such a linear line of thinking. Indeed, one of the distinct characteristics of PGM – *if done well and in its purist form some argue* – is the unpredictability of outcomes that needs to be associated with such grantmaking. Some go further to say that a theory of change for PGM is inappropriate, instead positing that the question ‘what has changed’ is the right framing for PGM outcomes evaluation, not ‘has that change happened?’^{iv}

So perhaps it is little wonder that there is limited discussion about PGM efficacy and impact, rather a prevalence of studies, abstracts and thought leadership articles^v that explore these topics instead:

- The role of PGM as part of desired changes to philanthropic infrastructure and practices – *in short participation is becoming a lever to disrupt and democratise philanthropy*.
- The importance of participation and more participatory approaches *for Foundations*.
- The role of PGM in relation to:
 - Power shifting dynamics - *as devolving power to those directly affected by grantmaking is intended to help overcome systemic inequality*^{vi}.
 - Movement building.
 - Human rights, social justice and social activism.
- The associations between PGM and devolved decision making.
- How PGM – and philanthropy more generally – can learn from other fields that have participation at their core, such as community organising, community development, public problem solving, and deliberative democracy^{vii}.

Published evaluations of PGM are similarly rare and where reports refer to them, the source material is not available to review the methodological strengths and weaknesses. The literature suggests that PGM pilots, typically funded by an originator, often then managed by an expert intermediary organisation, are more focused on evaluation of the **processes rather than outcomes**; and on **learning and improvement**. Where identified here are excerpts from some of the evaluations that have been published:

- The Ford Foundation is one of the most visible in the PGM field. In 2017, to determine the efficacy of participatory grantmaking for an institution like theirs—global, multi-issue, and not tied to any particular place or identity group, they commissioned a [monograph](#) by Cynthia Gibson, and in 2018, supported the [GrantCraft guide](#) referred to earlier. More recently, the Foundation has used grantee consultation and co-creation workshops to develop initiatives like the [BUILD developmental evaluation](#). In 2019, the Foundation commissioned nine research projects that would build the evidence base about participatory Grantmaking with interim learning available to view [here](#)^{viii}.
- The Ford Foundation has engaged with the Women’s Funding Network to examine participatory grantmaking practices of **place-based women’s funds**. This study aimed to understand how these funds conduct their grantmaking, leadership, and advocacy work, including the principles of participatory grantmaking.

‘Through the participatory process by which we selected these research projects, and from the future results of the projects themselves, we hope to continue learning about—and leaning into—these shifts in practice and power. As I am learning through my own efforts to practice this, it can lead to different — and I would argue, better—decisions about who and what to fund. Funders ceding power over grant decisions is relevant now more than ever given the momentum of movements for justice.’ - Christopher Cardona, Program Officer, Philanthropy.

- Elizabeth Dale, an assistant professor at Seattle University, conducted a study on how the Pride Foundation is shifting its grantmaking practice to align with the organisation's **racial equity core** and include **greater community participation** in setting funding priorities and making grant decisions. The MacArthur Foundation meantime reflected on its Chicago Commitment programme, which incorporated participatory grantmaking elements. They found that **trust, time, and transparency** were key themes in their process. This initiative sought to include diverse voices in philanthropy and distribute resources more equitably^{ix}.
- In 2007, the Case Foundation launched its first public grants programme (ended in 2009), the 'Make It Your Own' programme^x which challenged people from all walks of life to discuss what matters most to them, decide what kind of community they want and take action together. With nearly 5,000 applicants and more than 15,000 voters, the programme involved the public in nearly every aspect of **decision making** and used the latest web 2.0 tools to empower applicants to raise funds and supporters. In addition to supporting local civic engagement projects that reflected this ethos, the foundation decided to invite **non-grantmakers to participate in every step of the grantmaking process**—including setting grant guidelines, serving as proposal reviewers, and voting on proposals submitted by thousands of people across the country. Non-grantmakers selected the top 100 finalists with no input from the Foundation based on criteria they had developed in partnership with foundation staff members. The Foundation also collected data about every step, which was analysed by a set of outside evaluators to determine to what extent this program had been able to help **strengthen and support citizen-centered approaches to civic engagement**.
- Key results from the evaluation^{xi} were that 'two years after grants were awarded, 80% of (the 5,000 people who applied to the program) grantees were still highly engaged with their projects, took some kind of action in their communities and more than half of MIYO grantees had achieved 'concrete and significant outcomes at the two-year mark'. The attention this initiative received in the mainstream and field media also generated interest among other national foundations that met with MIYO organisers to help develop their own participatory approaches to grantmaking.

CITIZEN-CENTERED APPROACHES ARE:

- Focused primarily on **culture change**, rather than short-term outcomes, issues, or victories.
- Representative of a **cross-section** of the entire community, rather than parts of it.
- Concerned with **deliberation** as much as tactics to address issues.
- About giving people the chance to form and promote their **own decisions**, self-govern, and build open civic processes.

CITIZEN-CENTERED APPROACHES ARE NOT:

- **Structured** or pre-determined programs or campaigns to plug into.
- Focused on providing **training** or education.
- Planned, structured, or driven by outside **experts** or organizations.
- Attempting to inspire, persuade, or **manipulate** people to adopt a particular view or position.

The evaluation of MIYO offered useful learning relating to **citizen-centred approaches** and the benefits of participatory approaches. Interestingly, one of the main findings of the evaluation was that **the best decisions and ideas emerge when both experts and "real people" are involved in exploring them**^{xii}. Recognising that grant decisions voted on by the public can quickly become nothing more than popularity contests, the Foundation brought in a small group of advisors with experience in community building to help cull the list of finalists selected by non-grantmakers from 100 to 20. Those 20 proposals were then put forward to the public, who selected four grantees to receive larger grants. According to Diana Scarce, Gabriel Kasper, and Heather McLeod Grant in the Stanford Social Innovation Review: *"This mid-level culling allowed the Foundation to balance the creativity and emergent decision making of the group with the professional advice of experts in order to choose ultimate winners aligned with the Foundation's goals."*

- As the Case Foundation example illustrates, the challenge for philanthropy—and for participatory work overall—is considering two, sometimes competing objectives at once: “**Fairness**” (participation involves those who will be affected by the outcomes of the process); and “**Wisdom**” (participation involves those who can inform the process to achieve better outcomes). Often, these objectives are not in conflict, because a fairer and **more inclusive process will most likely lead to better decisions**. But in other cases, it can be a difficult balance as foundations and others seek to create processes that draw on the expertise of those affected as well as that of individuals and groups who are deeply knowledgeable of the issues and possible solutions.
- According to *Engaging Residents: A New Call to Action for Community Foundations*, authored by CFLeads’ Cultivating Community Engagement Panel, a diverse group of thirty-four individuals from philanthropy, academia, government, and neighbourhood and community organisations that work closely with residents—the ‘**result has been more involved communities and a high level of satisfaction with both the process and the outcome of public decision making**^{xiii}.’
- Interviews with more than thirty participatory grantmakers around the world, conducted as part of the research for Candid’s GrantCraft publication *Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources Through Participatory Grantmaking*, underscore why this approach needs to be taken seriously. First, these funders have found that involving people with lived experience in the grantmaking process leads to **better grant decisions and outcomes**. Second, the **process itself increases participants’ sense of agency and leadership**. For these reasons, participatory grantmakers believe funders who aren’t using participatory approaches may actually be impeding the impact they say they want to see.
- One evaluation completed in 2020-21 by CEI for the Paul Ramsay Foundation’s Peer-to-Peer (P2P) program^{xiv} – a multi-step model for collaborative decision making on grant allocation - in Australia provides insights on how a PGM approach can **support in achieving community outcomes and supporting collaboration and capacity-building for grantees**. However, obtaining peer-reviewed published evaluations of PGM has been challenging as the literature appears thin on the ground.
- ‘While there are increasing amounts of European and global grantmakers utilizing more participatory methodologies in their grantmaking as a means **to move power** and increase the collective ability to **create social good**, there is yet to be any literature specifically exploring the links between these two fields. This conceptual paper concludes that ‘user-driven innovation’ (and in particular **co-creation / co-production** as a strategy to user-driven innovation) may provide the best examples of theory and practical relevance for those **utilizing PGM as a means to democratize philanthropy** in Europe and beyond.’

Some articles make claims that sound logical and reasonable but without referencing the basis for their assessment it is difficult to rely upon the assertions being made. Here is an example: ‘Studies on participatory decision making show that **involving communities meaningfully leads to better outcomes**—if the community has a say over what gets funded, they are more likely to buy in and commit to making it effective. Community insights that might not be visible to outsiders can also lead to **more effective grantee selections**. Participatory grantmaking is also **more equitable**. Top-down decision making skirts the line into savior rhetoric that damages community trust while painting an unrealistic picture of problems and their solutions^{xv}.’

Meantime, a report recently published (May 2023) by the Centre for Evidence and Implementation explores **the state of evidence in participatory grantmaking (PGM)**. It investigates the benefits and challenges of PGM and provides recommendations for the sector on advancing practice and understanding. The report noted the lack of high-quality research in this area, due in part to the novelty of the practice and a general scarcity of research into grant-giving. However, the report highlighted the potential positives of a participatory approach, such as **stronger community relationships, greater networking, and innovation in grantmaking**, while also acknowledging challenges like the need for more time and resources, ensuring diversity, and addressing biases.

The research reveals that there is no “one way” to enable participation by grantees in decision making. Approaches range from low-consultation models to ones in which grantees drive allocation decisions. Moreover, the design of these approaches – who is involved, how, and in what decisions across what remits – varies significantly across institutions. Each approach has strengths and weaknesses depending on the context. As this is one of the strongest sources of evidence reviews identified for this feasibility study, its key findings are reproduced in full next and a webinar recording organised by Philanthropy Australia is also available [here](#)^{xvi}.

'While there is very little high-quality research available on PGM, the research that exists can give funders confidence that PGM holds promise and is worthy of further investment. While the evidence base does not support or disprove the claim that PGM is more effective than other ways of distributing funds or more likely to deliver innovative solutions^{xvii} the preliminary evidence suggests that PGM is a promising approach that may enable:

1. **Relationship building:** PGM *may* be an approach for grantmakers to strengthen relationships with the communities and/or grantees they work with, and even between these communities / grantees themselves. Tapping into pre-existing networks to engage in PGM provides an accessible starting point, but grantmakers should consider the potential selection bias of doing so and ways to mitigate that.
2. **Networking and collaboration opportunities:** PGM *may* offer increased networking and collaboration opportunities for non-grantmakers through activities embedded in the programmatic design. Grantmakers that are interested in helping non-grantmakers strengthen their networks *may* potentially help open doors to further collaborative efforts through engaging them in PGM approaches.
3. **Knowledge about grantmaking, as well as capability-building:** PGM *may* offer non-grantmakers a chance to learn about grantmaking firsthand. Guidance and training should be provided to build capacity and knowledge of non-grantmakers.
4. **Flexibility and innovation:** Engaging in PGM *may* help grantmakers adopt more flexibility in responding to changing needs and support increased innovation for different models or ways of working.
5. **Transparency:** Grantmakers *may* also enable and showcase greater transparency through PGM approaches, but this may be limited to cases when grantmakers implement transparent practices and processes.

The report also states that the PGM approach is not without its challenges:

1. **Time and capacity needed to build relationships and implement processes:** Shifting to PGM approaches may take time and resources to build trust and ensure accessibility.
2. **Difficulty in ensuring diversity and representativeness of participation:** Grantmakers should consider what representation of the target community looks like, how to ensure accessibility, and how to create a safe environment for participation.
3. **Inherent bias in the decision making process:** PGM does not eliminate bias in the decision making process; it shifts biases from grantors to grantees. Biases can manifest themselves in PGM and may partially be addressed through shifts in design.

‘PGMis an area with significant interest among funders but, as this (CEI) review shows, [there is] **limited existing knowledge of what works**. We therefore recommend that grantmakers pilot, trial, and evaluate PGM approaches. We strongly urge grantmakers to share their learnings publicly so that the sector can accelerate better practice. As PGM continues to gain traction in mainstream philanthropy, we expect stronger evidence of what works in PGM, when, for whom, and under what conditions, to emerge. We’d love to see more grantmakers publishing and sharing their pilots and evaluations of participatory approaches. This will help the whole sector accelerate best practice in the field.’

And in this related call to action; ‘Major funders who call for evidence on the benefits of participatory grantmaking should fund some learning infrastructure such as impact evaluations. Recently the European Cultural Foundation did this by supporting a values-led^{xviii} evaluation of FundAction, the new participatory fund and platform in Europe. This will support FundAction’s development and help build evidence on the benefits and challenges of this approach^{xix}.



These studies and experiences indicate that while participatory grantmaking is seen as a promising approach to philanthropy, further research and evaluation is necessary to fully understand its impact and efficacy.

In its PGM Toolkit Camden Giving’s response to this FAQ: ‘What is the evidence PGM works?’ is as follows: ‘PGM is currently a fringe movement and there have been **no formal studies establishing it as a "better" way of giving grants than traditional funding mechanisms. But it’s worth noting that there is little evidence that traditional funding mechanisms are having an impact on long-term structural power imbalances**. Camden Giving has published a report on the impact of PGM in practice over the last 5 years. As of 1st September 2022, Camden Giving has awarded **£6.1m** in the form of **575 grants**, awarded by **180 community resident panellists**. These grants have been made via a variety of (*15 participatory*) funds, each with a range of criteria, aims and aspirations. The report ‘shines a light on the brilliant impact Camden’s grassroots organisations have been able to achieve as a result.’

The 5 year outcomes report is organised thematically, with examples of practice that support the general finding that their evolving PGM experiences are contributing to **better outcomes for Camden citizens**.

The prime enabler of effective PGM is local knowledge. ‘The knowledge of community panellists on very niche, specialist areas alongside **experience of the intersections of inequality and barriers, which may not typically be held by traditional grantmakers**, is a key asset to participatory grantmaking.’

OUTCOMES FROM 5 YEARS OF PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING

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The report posits:

‘At best, most grantmakers are responding to the needs of Londoners by reviewing research and consultancy, which by its nature only captures things that have happened and varies in reliability. Grantmakers may consult with their potential or previous grantees, but this will never truly be a representation of the views and wants of London’s communities. In contrast, participatory grantmaking works with the deep knowledge that communities have, taking in to consideration millions of factors that real lives teach us.

Camden Giving’s participatory grantmaking has benefits from being informed by knowledge that traditional grantmaking struggles to capture, this ultimately means that funding goes to places where it is most helpful.’ Examples of the benefits of PGM include:

- How it more equitably **funds under-funded marginalised community leaders** as an important means of overcoming injustice. At Camden Giving 70-80% of projects funded are Black or minority ethnic led, this is because participatory grantmaking decision are made by people who have experienced marginalisation and are therefore more likely to have trust in and recognise the strength of Black and brown community leaders.
- How it enables more **equitable access to funding for grassroots organisations** with support for them to become more financially sustainable and less reliant on securing small grants from Camden Giving.
- How it provides a mechanism **more likely to fund well-regarded organisations** that can deliver for communities owing to the influencing factors of community reputation and perception – this is seen in the way decisions are made at panels about who does or doesn’t receive funding locally.
- Decisions to award projects that have fully considered **accessibility and inclusion factors** for residents – those that fail to consider practicalities are more likely to not receive funding.
- **Responsive funding** to meet, sometimes rapidly changing, community expectations which are also often hard to predict. PGM is thought to have moved quickly to reflect what was important in Camden during lockdown for example. Interestingly, Camden Giving (professional) staff expected communities to place a greater emphasis on urgent basic relief and whilst these were supported, the emphasis on valuing arts and culture activities in the borough was strong.

PGM experiences in Camden suggest that it enables **better outcomes for communities** and that ‘participatory grantmaking builds power, connectivity and networks within communities. The value of the process is as important as the outcomes of the grants.’ There have been benefits in:

- Better awareness of local assets and services resulting in **better community signposting** - Camden Giving have seen people involved in participatory grantmaking also signposting to projects that they didn’t fund.
- **Employment** - the majority of the people involved in Camden Giving’s participatory grantmaking are unemployed or underemployed. We’ve seen that around 10% of panellists have directly gained employment through participatory grantmaking, this is down to an increased confidence, skills and networks.
- The way in which 1 in 10 of the people involved in participatory grantmaking in Camden go on to **initiate some sort of social action within their community**. PGM is a catalyst for community-led change beyond the grantmaking itself.

Participants feeling **increased self-determined power**: ‘At Camden Giving we survey all out-going participatory grantmakers and ask them if they feel more powerful and 100% of those responding say awarding grants has made them feel more powerful.’ Other skills developed through PGM included **critical thinking, empathy, self-awareness and new knowledge** in funding and how it works for services they attend.

PGM is thought to have **influencing benefits** too says Camden Giving: 'We know that, to overcome local inequality, we can't do the work alone. We have seen businesses, funders and local government, who hold significant power in Camden, devolve decision making powers, increase participatory and democratic approaches and adopt learnings from Camden Giving. We've seen that they are better targeting their efforts on key issues and have an increased local impact for local resident and communities through our interactions. Camden Council have delegated funding through Camden Giving across a number of grant programmes, from Future Changemakers fund to our COVID-19 Emergency response, because they acknowledge that there is often a lack of trust between civil society organisations and local government officials, know that we can reach communities who are underfunded more effectively and that we can move funding and resources to grassroots organisations much quicker. Most recently we have also seen an increased desire for them to work in a more participatory, collaborative way to devolve grant funding to those furthest from accessing funding, including granting funds to individual citizens through the We Make Camden Kit; of which 45% of grants of £1500 have been awarded to Camden citizens.'

As more of these practical examples build over time, led by inspired organisations such as Camden Giving, confidence in PGM's ability as an approach to derive benefits will build as the evidence base becomes stronger. In the meantime, we must be dispassionate in the current assessment for this feasibility study which finds no **reliable evidence** that PGM routinely, or in a generalisable, way:

- Delivers **better or more effective decisions** compared to 'onward grantmaking' or more traditional grantmaking methodologies. And many commentators ask, 'who decides whether a decision is more effective than another anyway?'
- Provides **more sustainable individual, organisational, community^{xx} or system change outcomes than alternatives methodologies**.
- **Shifts power**. This is a much wider topic than the scope of this limited feasibility study and more forensic review would be required to identify the correlations between PGM and power dynamics. There is meantime a belief that PGM and associated participatory approaches have a role to play in activity promoting social justice and equity.
- Compares favourably in terms of **cost-benefit analysis** or **value** to other community grantmaking methods.

Instead, we find literature that tends to explore the theorised benefits of participation more generally rather than the specific benefits of PGM. Participation is *theorised* to add value in terms of:

- **Legitimacy** – *Participation lends credibility to and conveys authenticity about the process.*
- **Outcomes** – *Participation leads to better/wiser outcomes, decisions or actions.*
- **Agency** – *Participants gain a sense of agency and control over the processes and decisions affecting them.*

This is not to say that PGM could or does deliver these kind of benefits. It is just that the evidence base is currently weak in being able to assert such claims in a way that someone thinking about investing in PGM as an alternative to or displacement of current grantmaking could rely on.



We have not been able to identify any evidence-based study that suggests one model of PGM is more effective than another. The field of PGM is still evolving, and the effectiveness of different models appears to depend on various factors, including **the specific goals of the grantmaking programme, the context in which it is applied, and the stakeholders involved**.

There are, however, many learning lessons and reflections shared by Foundations and intermediary organisations about the approaches they trialled and how those models were selected, learned about and executed. While comprehensive comparative studies may be limited, individual case studies and analyses of specific PGM initiatives can provide valuable insights into the strengths and

challenges of different approaches. For example, studies on the impact of PGM in specific sectors like **arts funding, social justice, or community development** can offer insights into the effectiveness of various models in those contexts. Where such case studies are published these are the observations and insights:

- **In the arts sector:** Observations: PGM often focuses on involving artists and community members in the decision making process. This can lead to more diverse and inclusive funding decisions, supporting a broader range of artistic expressions. Insights: Studies and reports in this area may highlight the impact of PGM on fostering community engagement, supporting underrepresented artists, and promoting cultural diversity.
- **Social Justice:** Observations: PGM in social justice often aims to empower marginalized communities and ensure that funding aligns with the actual needs and priorities of those communities. Insights: Research in this sector might explore the role of PGM in enhancing the effectiveness of social justice initiatives, promoting equity, and addressing power imbalances in funding.
- **Community Development:** Observations: In community development, PGM can play a significant role in ensuring that local communities have a say in how funds are used, which can lead to more sustainable and relevant projects. Insights: Studies may focus on the impact of PGM on community engagement, local empowerment, and the long-term sustainability of development projects.

The most comprehensive mapping of PGM in the UK^{xxi} appears to have been undertaken by The Advocacy Team for The National Lottery which reported its findings in 2023. Whilst not evaluative in scope, it provides useful insights about the PGM activities and behaviours of 40 organisations completing the survey. As with the other literature, the research suggests that it would be beneficial to evaluate different types of participation models and assess the impact of PGM funding compared to non-participatory grantmaking.

Survey question: What are the main benefits of using PGM approaches for funders and for the people and communities that you involve?

Organisations highlighted benefits in several key areas:

1. **More responsive and informed grantmaking:** People and communities with lived experience of specific issues bring unique expertise and understanding, which enables grantmaking to be more impactful.
2. **Reaching a wider range of marginalised groups:** PGM can often be the best way to fund the most radical work neglected elsewhere. It can also remove barriers to certain groups and people applying because they know their funding applications are being evaluated by fellow members of the community.
3. **Less bureaucratic processes:** PGM can enable a less bureaucratic selection and reporting process, which allows for a greater focus on the impact of the work.
4. **Wider changes to funding approaches:** Adopting PGM approaches has led to broader conversations about power and collective decision-making elsewhere in the organisation.
5. **Contributes to shifting power in the funding ecosystem,** by ceding decision-making power to communities served. This in turn helps to build trust and greater knowledge equity between funders and the people and groups they fund.

- Organisations noted that specific benefits to people and communities served through PGM include **access to paid opportunities to make direct funding decisions** and participating in forums where they can **exercise agency** and be **recognised for their expertise**, both as a result of their lived experience as well as in other areas, as relevant to the work.

"[PGM] helps us as a funder to keep our finger on the pulse in an ever-changing environment. If we didn't work with community leaders and residents and enact on what's happening on the ground, we would likely become static and not serving our purpose."

There has meantime been a huge amount of evaluation and learning about **Big Local**^{xxii} which requires further time than this feasibility study has afforded to truly understand. A number of papers have been considered including the May 2022 'Residents in Control' community grants in Big Local

Area report by Local Trust and IVAR which identifies lessons around **decision making** linked to Big Local's ambition to **increase community control** and also the theme of **building local capacity** – *a theme readers will see later was an important topic in the primary research for this study.*

Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, the consultant did not see explicit or obvious reference to PGM in the Big Local research literature on its work to learn lessons about the context, conditions and considerations for what it regards as successful community grantmaking, a topic perhaps worth picking up nationally with The National Lottery, Local Trust and IVAR? Similarly, there is literature about putting power into the hands of communities that is beyond the scope of this study, but that is very relevant to the wider context within which PGM might potentially be framed in North Yorkshire in future (for example the series of reports by Local Trust around trust and power^{xxiii}).

Thus, this feasibility study becomes more about understanding **the potential and promise of PGM** rather than something that can be proven to deliver greater impact, value for money or added value compared to other grantmaking approaches. The literature reviewed appears forged by authors of the **belief** that PGM is the right thing to do. For even the most experienced PGM practitioners it is still described as an **ethos** (or **set of principles**) and **processes** requiring a mind-set that is predisposed to **risk and experimentation**. There appears to be nothing certain about PGM and this is important for any individual, organisation, institution, community, system or place to recognise if considering whether to start or amplify participatory grantmaking in their context.

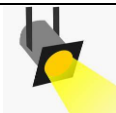
Some literature reviewed posits though that PGM is not merely an experimental model rather a practice rooted in the commitment to transform power relations between those with resources and those without. It's driven by the need for representation, transparency, and accountability to movements, particularly in a rapidly changing world. PGM allows grantseekers to actively participate in decision making processes rather than being passive recipients of aid. This approach can theoretically build trust and accountability between grantmakers and grantseekers, fostering stronger and more effective community engagement.

In this 2019 NPQ article: 'Moving beyond Feedback: The Promise of Participatory Grantmaking' author Cynthia Gibson acknowledges that there is much for the field of philanthropy to learn from '**other fields that have participation at their core, such as community organising, community development, public problem solving, and deliberative democracy**'. For decades, practitioners and scholars in those fields have grappled with how to engage ordinary people in decision making that goes beyond asking them for feedback and/or input to seeing them as actors in all facets of planning, implementing, assessing, and developing efforts to strengthen communities. What can philanthropy learn from their efforts? A lot. A review of this work, in fact, surfaces knowledge that's remarkably consistent across these different fields:

- Decision making and problem-solving processes need to involve the people most affected by an issue or problem because they have first-hand knowledge and experience.
- Authentic participation involves two-way or multidirectional communication, rather than didactic approaches that inform or "educate" people with no venue for their feedback, input, or active engagement.
- Collaborative problem solving that involves the equitable participation of diverse people, voices, ideas, and information can lead to better outcomes and decisions.
- Community organisations and government need to work with—rather than for—the public.
- Experts and professionals aren't necessarily the drivers of problem solving or decision making but are partners with the public in those processes.
- Transparency—about decision making processes, who is involved, what decisions are made, and how they will be implemented—is essential to authentic participation^{xxiv}.

The article goes on to say: ‘Some funders who want to experiment with participatory approaches say they’re hesitant because they’re not sure what the “rules” are. One of the beautiful things about participatory work is that because it’s inherently iterative and relational, there is no “right way” to do it. So, while there is general consensus about the values that drive participatory grantmaking, there’s considerable variation in how it’s practiced^{xxv}.’

There has been less published activity about PGM practiced by local authorities although ‘*A Better Way Network*’ helpfully convened PGM discussions about PGM in February 2022^{xxvi} which attracted a mixed audience including local authorities who were trialling PGM as part of wider efforts to **share and build power** with residents and communities. The summary of that convened session is reproduced below:



Spotlight on Barking and Dagenham

The first opening speaker was Cameron Bray, from **Barking and Dagenham Giving**, who explained how an endowment fund of £1 million had been created from external fund-raising and income from social housing and half of this is being determined through participatory means, using various approaches in a ‘big DJ mixing deck approach’, as follows:

A panel model, with participants being representative in terms of geography and also community of identity. Members shape the priorities of the fund and take the final decisions. A community steering group was being developed to design investment policy from scratch with the freedom to determine priorities. A closed collective pilot run by a young people’s network, where they collectively make decisions and are sharing the power and accountability between themselves.

Learning: These approaches need a lot of resources, he said, including paying people for their time and induction, but they had found the process was valuable in itself as an investment in the community and its empowerment.



Spotlight on Avon and Bristol

Lucy Gilbert, from the **Quartet Community Foundation in Avon**, told us about her experience of *participatory budgeting*, explaining that they were part of Bristol City Funds, set up in collaboration with **Bristol City Council** and Bristol and Bath Regional Council, which was implementing a ‘One City Plan’ to deliver systemic change. They too had found that processes were almost more important than the money itself and they had been exploring different ways for shifting power:

Setting up a grant panel for their health and well-being budget of £1.3 million, where 40% of the panel had lived experience and members are given training and payment for their time.

A panel of 100% people with lived experience making decisions for the Bristol Local Food Fund, which is a £60K fund raised through crowdfunding specifically to go to local food organisations. Members will be trained and paid at Living Wage rates.

A pilot ‘City Lab,’ with decisions for a fund of £14,000 over 6 months devolved to people with lived experience of mental health difficulties, and local organisations and involving a community research exercise to come up with solutions and committed to developing fundable projects.

The most visible local authorities – and or name-checked local authorities mentioned by primary research interviewees for this study - appear to be in London, particularly councils that are part of [‘London’s Giving’^{xxvii}](#) which describes itself thus: Place based giving is a movement that is taking hold across London and is mobilising communities at a grassroots level to act to strengthen their boroughs’.



Barking and Dagenham, Camden and Islington

Councils in particular have been mentioned by interviewees during this study and each has shared resources relating to PGM practice from their ongoing learning about the practice such as: [‘Participatory Grantmaking Toolkit from London Funders and Camden Giving’^{xxviii}](#) last updated in May 2023. This resource is a very worthwhile read. Other local authorities that are known to be involved with PGM are Bristol City Council^{xxix} and Plymouth City Council^{xxx}.

If readers are interested in a more comprehensive system-change approach to participation please visit [Participatory City](#) which describes the significant endeavours in Barking and Dagenham to embed participation in its ‘every one every day’ projects. Please note this goes well beyond the scope of PGM which is the focus of this feasibility study.

Summary: evidence about PGM

The evidence base relating to the efficacy and impact of PGM is currently limited and the debate about the best way anyway to measure its success is a point of contention. PGM is believed to deliver a range of benefits that could be distinguished from non-participatory grantmaking methodologies, but the type and scale of changes will depend on the specific context wherein PGM is being practiced.

Case studies and available evaluations point to PGM’s promise rather than its proven ability to achieve desired outcomes.

The literature suggests that PGM offers promise, potential and a different value to non-participatory grantmaking alternatives. It may lead to different and more unpredictable outcomes with gains reported for individuals (agency, self-determined power, critical thinking, self-awareness, supported leadership), grantees (capacity building and equitable access for ‘grassroots’), communities (relationship building, different decisions about who and what gets funded reaching more marginalised people than the norm, enduring community action, community leadership), funders (more equitable resource distribution).

Conversely, PGM is not without its challenges as it requires time and capacity to build relationships and implement processes, difficulty in ensuring diversity and representativeness of participation and a shift in bias in the decision making process.

There are, however, many live, useful practical resources, guides, publications, toolkits, blogs and a dedicated global PGM community of practice for those wishing to start and / or improve their PGM practice.

Please see Appendices for a list of useful links.

This paper was produced by Alan Graver of Skyblue Research Ltd

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- ⁱ A compelling quote from one of the respondents generously sharing their rationale for PGM in their locality as part of this feasibility study in 2023/24
- ⁱⁱ [A Primer for Participatory Grantmaking - Non Profit News | Nonprofit Quarterly](#)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Monitoring and evaluating participatory grantmaking, Discussion paper for the Baring Foundation, prepared by Ceri Hutton
- ^{iv} 'In terms of collecting evidence on outcomes, moving from a theory of change to outcome mapping model (with associated open-ended exploration and an increased capacity to self-define) may be a useful shift,' Baring Foundation 2016
- ^v For example see the 'reports' section of [Resources \(notion.site\)](#)
- ^{vi} [Report: Participatory grantmaking - Building the evidence | ceiglobal.org](#)
- ^{vii} For decades, practitioners and scholars in those fields have grappled with how to engage ordinary people in decision making that goes beyond asking them for feedback and/or input to seeing them as actors in all facets of planning, implementing, assessing, and developing efforts to strengthen communities. Source: [Moving beyond Feedback: The Promise of Participatory Grantmaking - Non Profit News | Nonprofit Quarterly](#), August 2019
- ^{viii} [Participatory grantmaking matters now more than ever - Ford Foundation](#)
- ^{ix} [Sharing and Shifting Power: Lessons from Participatory Grantmaking - MacArthur Foundation \(macfound.org\)](#)
- ^x [CASE MIYO researchReport_39092d.indd \(casefoundation.org\)](#)
- ^{xi} [CASE MIYO researchReport_39092d.indd \(casefoundation.org\)](#)
- ^{xii} Participatory Grantmaking: Has its time come? Cynthia Gibson, October 2017, page 21
- ^{xiii} Cultivating Community Engagement Panel, *Engaging Residents: A New Call to Action for Community Foundations* (Kansas City, MO: CFLeads, July 2013).
- ^{xiv} [Paul Ramsay Foundation – Peer to Peer Program](#). The Paul Ramsay Foundation created the Peer to Peer Program in partnership with Philanthropy Australia and Social Impact Hub as an innovative form of philanthropy where organisations work together on projects and successful grantees are determined by the applicants themselves. Ten organisations with ten new well-formed ideas to help break the cycle of disadvantage came together to collectively develop and evaluate each proposal before determining the five ideas that would receive funding. Video of participating organisations available.
- ^{xv} [How to master participatory grantmaking by engaging the right voices | Candid Learning for Funders](#)
- ^{xvi} **14 June 2023: VIEW WEBINAR recording**
- ^{xvii} A Husted et al. (2021) landscape study of foundations found that these were the top benefits ascribed to the approach.
- ^{xviii} FundAction values: We are guided by the following core values: democracy, inclusivity, openness, peer-to-peer working, transparency, trust, respect and autonomy. Our values determine how we run our processes and how we decide and engage with each other in the FundAction community
- ^{xix} [Whose Impact Are We Measuring? Proving the Efficacy of Participatory Grantmaking | Candid Learning for Funders](#)
- ^{xx} One theory of change for participatory philanthropy including PGM is that the participation of non-grantmakers in decisions on important issues strengthens communities overall because individuals and groups that are directly affected by those decisions are connected, informed and engaged. Participatory Grantmaking, Has its Time Come, Cynthia Gibson, October 2017 page 20
- ^{xxi} [UK PGM Survey National Lottery Community Fund Final Report FINAL - Google Slides](#)
- ^{xxii} Big Local outcomes: The outcomes set for Big Local at its outset were deliberately broad: * Communities will be better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them. * People will have increased skills and confidence, so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future. * The community will make a difference to the needs it prioritises. * People will feel that their area is an even better place to live. * [About Big Local - Local Trust](#)
- ^{xxiii} Trusting Local People: Putting real power in the hands of communities, February 2023 and 'Reforming neighbourhood governance to realise community potential, July 2022.
- ^{xxiv} See Cynthia Gibson, *Participatory Grantmaking: Has Its Time Come?* (New York: Ford Foundation, 2017), 26.
- ^{xxv} [Moving beyond Feedback: The Promise of Participatory Grantmaking - Non Profit News | Nonprofit Quarterly](#)
- ^{xxvi} [Sharing and building power: participatory grantmaking — A Better Way](#)
- ^{xxvii} [London's Giving | \(londonsgiving.org.uk\)](#) - A Place Based Giving Scheme (PBGS) is a partnership, initiative, or organisation which understands, highlights, and responds to local needs. It brings new resources and approaches into a borough and creates better solutions through working together. Key activities include some or all of fundraising, volunteering, in-kind giving, grantmaking, capacity-building, influencing and convening.
- ^{xxviii} [Participatory Grantmaking Toolkit from London Funders and Camden Giving | London's Giving \(londonsgiving.org.uk\)](#)
- ^{xxix} [Revolutionising community funding processes through co-design and participation – Bristol City Council | Local Government Association](#)
- ^{xxx} [Rank launches Plymouth Participatory Grant Making Programme - The Rank Foundation](#)