

# Brooklyn Community Foundation

## GRANTMAKING PRIORITY-SETTING AND STRATEGY

*What are your grantmaking and/or strategic priorities (in terms of geographic focus, issue, etc.)? Who decides the grantmaking priorities? The overall strategy for the fund?*

*What's the process by which these decisions are made?*

*How are these practices socialized within your organization?*

We have two programs that use a participatory grantmaking approach, our Neighborhood Strength program and our Youth Voice awards.

◆ **Neighborhood Strength:** Our Neighborhood Strength program focuses on a defined geographic neighborhood, and funding priorities are determined by residents of the neighborhood. For example, since 2015 this program focused on Crown Heights, Brooklyn—a diverse and rapidly gentrifying community largely comprising African American and Black immigrant residents that is also a long-time home to the Chasidic Lubavitch community.

The overall strategy for the fund is to put the decisions about community investments in the hands of community members, which aligns with our belief that those who are closest to the challenge are closest to the solution. Each year, we allocate \$100,000 in investments to be determined by Crown Heights community members (the Crown Heights Advisory Council).

The process begins with community visioning sessions. We held three open sessions for public engagement in Crown Heights to identify strengths and challenges and subsequently determine an area of focus for Brooklyn Community Foundation's (BCF) investments. The Crown Heights Advisory Council makes the final investment recommendation after reviewing the top issue areas and selecting one priority for grantmaking. This past year, the issue was public space.

We then facilitated an open RFP process, through which local nonprofits submitted proposals within the priority

area. The Council reviewed applications, interviewed finalists, and chose five programs for funding, ranging from \$10,000 to \$30,000. Moving forward, the Council will review progress on the five grants and determine which projects to continue funding and how to fund new projects within the same issue area.

◆ **Youth Voice Awards:** Our Youth Voice Awards program supports projects initiated by youth ages 14–25 in partnership with local nonprofits. Grantmaking priorities are developed by our Brooklyn Youth Fellows, an annual cohort of 10–15 youth who create and lead this small grant program to. The Fellows have identified seven “justice pillars” (racial and gender justice; immigrant justice; educational justice; food justice; health and reproductive justice; housing justice; LGBTQ justice) as well as specific selection criteria (neighborhood based, community-driven approach) through which they focus their grantmaking. Grants range from \$500–\$2,000.

## TYPES OF GRANTS

*What kinds of grants do you provide (e.g., general, rapid response, capacity building, field-building, etc.)?*

We make general, project related, one-year grants.

*What is the range in amount of the grants you award?*

- ◆ **Neighborhood Strength:** Up to \$30,000
- ◆ **Youth Voice Awards:** Up to \$2,000

## APPLICATION PROCESS

*Who is eligible to apply for a grant?*

- ◆ **Neighborhood Strength:** Nonprofits serving the defined geographic area.
- ◆ **Youth Voice Awards:** Youth ages 14–25 applying in partnership with a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization or fiscally sponsored group.

*What kind of outreach happens to make potential grant applicants aware of your grantmaking?*

- ◆ **Neighborhood Strength:** We use a “street team” led by a Neighborhood Strength Fellow to do street-level outreach and hand out flyers. We also do extensive local media outreach and sponsored social media advertising.
- ◆ **Youth Voice Awards:** We do targeted outreach to youth-serving nonprofit organizations in Brooklyn; the Fellows also host a youth-led conference leading up to the grant program to directly engage with potential applicants. Promotion for the conference includes handing out flyers, direct outreach to nonprofits, social media posting, and paid social advertising.

*How often do you accept applications/grant proposals?*

Annually for both programs.

*Can applicants get assistance in applying? If so, what kind?*

The coordinators of the programs are accessible to provide support and feedback to applicants.

## INITIAL VETTING/SCREENING/ DUE DILIGENCE

*Are applications initially screened or vetted to ensure eligibility? How and by whom is this done?*

Applications are initially screened by Foundation Program staff to ensure eligibility.

## GRANTMAKING DECISION PROCESS AND PANEL

*Who comprises your grantmaking selection panel(s)? How are they selected (e.g., by nomination, application, etc.)?*

- ◆ **Neighborhood Strength:** Our Crown Heights Advisor Council comprises 10-15 residents from the community, including local advocates, business owners, youth, civic leaders, and nonprofit workers, who are representative of the neighborhood’s long-standing communities. Members joined the Council either via nomination or participation in the program’s community outreach events.
- ◆ **Youth Voice Awards:** Our Brooklyn Youth Fellows make up the grantmaking selection panel; they are young people of color ages 14-24 from across the borough who are leaders within their own communities and nominated by youth-serving nonprofits.

*What is the process by which the selection panel determines grant decisions?*

- ◆ **Neighborhood Strength:** The Foundation reviews applications and recommends a set of finalists for in person interviews with Council members. Ultimately, the Council votes on grant decisions.
- ◆ **Youth Voice Awards:** Grant decisions are made by Brooklyn Youth Fellows via vote.

*Can decision-makers on grantmaking selection panels be applicants? If so, are there any special processes or a conflict of interest policy tied to this occurrence?*

No.

*What happens if there is disagreement among the decision-making committee? How is this resolved? (e.g., consensus, voting, etc.)*

When disagreement has emerged, we have added opportunities for conversation to ensure the issue is thoughtfully and thoroughly discussed. The final decision is made via vote, not consensus.

*How are selection panel members trained and supported?*

Foundation staff provides technical assistance for orientation to new decision makers.

## REPORTING, LEARNING, AND PROCESS ITERATION

*Do you do any kind of formal evaluation? If so, what is asked of grantees and who conducts the evaluations?*

The evaluations are conducted by the coordinator and then reviewed by Foundation staff.

*How do you evaluate impact?*

The Neighborhood Strength work is evaluated to ensure that progress is made on issues and determining if additional time and resources need to be invested.

*How do you learn about participants’ experiences, both as selection panelists and applicants?*

Requests for feedback is made at the end of each cycle.

*With whom do you share the results of what you learn?*

Foundation leadership.

*Have you made changes to your programs based on feedback?  
If so, what is an example?*

We have added program supports for the Fellows because they wanted to have more opportunities for impact than just grantmaking, for example, rallies to Washington DC and other ways to elevate voices.

For more information about the Brooklyn Community Foundation, contact Liane Stegmaier, [lstegmaier@bcfny.org](mailto:lstegmaier@bcfny.org), or Kaberi Banerjee Murthy, [kbm@bcfny.org](mailto:kbm@bcfny.org).

This resource was developed as a companion piece to the GrantCraft guide on participatory grantmaking. This resource is part of a suite of resources that showcase the rich and varied practices of participatory grantmaking across various organizations, reducing the burden on each funder to repeatedly outline their model. The guide and companion resources give insight to the philanthropy landscape about the what, how, and why of participatory grantmaking.

Visit [grantcraft.org/participatorygrantmaking](https://grantcraft.org/participatorygrantmaking) to explore further.