An experiment with participatory grantmaking to support people without papers in the Netherlands

'It is truly a bright spot in rather dark times' (participant 1D)

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Executive Summary

This case study explores Participatory Grantmaking (PGM) in an experimental set-up in the Netherlands. In PGM, decision-making about the allocation of a funder's resources is transferred to the community the funder aims to support. The goal is to democratize decision-making processes in philanthropy. In 2024, the Dutch foundation Kansfonds initiated a PGM process within a new program titled *"A Home Without Papers"*, aimed at people without valid residence documents. Within this program, an action network of nine organizations was formed, which collectively decided on an initial budget of €300,000 in 2024. We examined the impact of PGM on collaboration and power dynamics both among the organizations in the action network and between them and the funder, Kansfonds. The research focused on the first year of the experiment (2024), while the program runs from 2023 to 2027. To evaluate the impact of PGM, we used a short survey, participatory observations, and semi-structured interviews with all participating organizations. The key findings are as follows:

Who is at the table?

The action network consists of a diverse group of organizations, varying in location (both within and outside the Randstad), size, and level of professionalism. This diversity is largely seen as positive. However, participants raised questions about how Kansfonds selected the organizations, noting a lack of transparency in the process. In this PGM experiment, people without papers did not have a direct role in decision-making. Their representation was indirect, via the participating organizations. Views among participants varied on the possibility and necessity of direct representation—some considered it undesirable due to the vulnerability of the group, while others saw it as essential for developing projects that truly benefit the target group.

Collaboration and quality

The action network fostered new connections and more intensive knowledge exchange among organizations, as they met more frequently and got to know each other better. Participants felt this collaboration led to better projects, developed from multiple perspectives and areas of expertise. Decisions about resource allocation were also seen as improved by the participants, drawing more on field knowledge than decisions made solely by the funder. However, questions remain about the decision-making process for the allocation of resources and whether it was conducted in the most democratic manner. A bottleneck in some projects was the limited (flexible) capacity of organizations to implement the designed initiatives.

Power dynamics

While PGM theoretically shifts the power balance by decentralizing decision-making, the case study shows that full equality between funder and grantees is unrealistic. Nevertheless, the PGM process did make the relationship more equal, mainly through more intensive contact. The process also surfaced existing problems and tensions among participants, including issues related to power differences. Mutual trust is essential to navigate the PGM process collectively. Discussing differences in vision, values, and capacity early on is important to reduce tensions during decision-making.

<u>A transparent process</u>
The study highlights the importance of a well-structured process, especially when working with organizations of varying levels of professionalism. This includes decision-making strategies at all project stages. A voting system where organizations can vote for themselves appears less desirable. Transparency is crucial throughout the process: regarding the funder's role in shaping the process, how participants were selected, and how decisions are made. Currently, the 'rules of the game' were sometimes unclear, and there was ambiguity about Kansfonds' role in decision-making.

<u>Conclusion</u>
This experiment shows that PGM is a promising method for democratizing philanthropic decision-making by transferring control over resource allocation to the target community. PGM can enhance both project quality and collaboration in a fragmented field. However, refining the process is necessary to better address inherent power dynamics and tensions. Recommendations are to:

- Address differences in vision, values, and capacity from the start to reduce decision-making tensions.
- Clearly define and jointly evaluate rules and decision-making procedures in advance, ensuring transparency.
- Increase involvement of the target group where possible.
- Identify and address potential bottlenecks, such as limited organizational capacity, early on.
- Ensure appropriate funding—both for participation and by aligning the funding cycle with project needs.
- Remain attentive to the power relationship between funder and participants.

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Introduction

In this case study, we study a participatory grantmaking (PGM) experiment in the Netherlands. In 2024, Kansfonds, a nationwide societal fund, initiated a program titled 'A Home Without Papers', aimed at benefiting groups most underrepresented in Dutch society, namely, people without valid residency permits. In this program, Kansfonds used PGM through bringing together 9 organizations in an action network and letting them decide the distribution of resources made available by the fund. The first year's budget was 300,000 euros, which could be increased and repeated after yearly evaluation. We studied the effects of PGM on the collaboration and power dynamics within, as well as between organizations in the action network and Kansfonds.

<u>Participatory grantmaking</u>
PGM is a relatively new method of grantmaking used in the Netherlands, in which democratic decision-making is a key guiding principle. PGM is used for a variety of grantmaking practices, typically characterized by the involvement of beneficiaries in the decision-making process. This involvement may vary from soliciting feedback on spending plans to actual participation in budget decision-making (Meyer et al., 2021, p. 23). Gibson (2018) defines PGM as follows: "Participatory grantmaking cedes decision-making power about funding including the strategy and criteria behind those decisions—to the very communities that funders aim to serve" (Gibson, 2018, p. 7). This definition of PGM highlights the importance of actual influence on decision-making. This definition also implicitly suggests that handing the decision-making power over to beneficiaries is the right thing to do (Hauger, 2023, p. 635). With PGM, the democratization of the decision-making process starts - in theory - through a shift in the balance of power. In this way, control over resources is (partially) transferred, and existing hierarchical structures are critically questioned (Gibson, 2018, p. 7).

When the rise of PGM is mentioned, a reference is often made to the 'disability rights movement' with its slogan "Nothing about us without us". This refers to the idea that those who are most impacted by decisions have the right to make them (Hauger, 2023, p. 635). This social justice perspective is often mentioned by proponents of PGM (Evans, 2015; Gibson, 2017, 2018; Paterson, 2020). However, in a study on PGM motivations among large US-based funders, these justice-based motives were less prominently mentioned. Instead, these US-based funders state as the most important reasons for involving beneficiaries in funding decisions that it improved beneficiaries' financial decision-making and allowed them to develop innovative solutions (Husted et al., 2021, p. 34). In addition to the social justice perspective, the desire to strengthen beneficiary participation is also rooted in the recognition that those with lived experience possess valuable knowledge about local contexts, needs and solutions (Meyer et al., 2021, pp. 23–24).

The study by Histed et al. (2021) also showed that participatory practices of larger grantmaking foundations are largely limited to consultation and the involvement of beneficiaries. Only 10% of the 148 surveyed foundations actually allowed beneficiaries or members of their target population to participate in decision-making about the distribution of financial resources (Husted et al., 2021).

Core elements of PGM are:
- It is 'values-based';
- The process itself is an important outcome;
- It is about more than money;
- PGM involves the community in all parts of the decision-making process, utilizing a broad range of other participatory practices;

- The application and reporting process is simple and flexible;
- PGM is transparent;
- PGM builds on and strengthens broader social movements (Gibson, 2017, p. 11).

PGM models

Evans (2015) distinguishes seven different types of PGM models.

Representative Participation	Ranging from a single voice bringing 'lived experience' and practical knowledge to a board predominantly consisting of donors, to entire boards composed of individuals from the target group.
Rolling Collective	Beneficiaries become members of a funding committee, usually for the next round of funding.
Closed Collective	All organizations that work on similar topics in certain geographical areas are brought together. These organizations then collaborate to decide how the funds should be distributed.
Open Collective	All stakeholders are involved through a voting process.
Direct Transfers	Unconditional gifts are provided directly to beneficiaries, without involving an intermediary.
Crowdfunding	Where an individual or community gathers resources for a particular cause they deem important through social networks, primarily online.

Source: Evans (2015)

Gibson (2017) developed an additional framework for PGM that distinguishes between different forms of participation: *informing, consulting, involving* and *deciding*. *Informing* refers to the foundation informing the beneficiary. *Consulting* involves the foundation listening to the beneficiaries. *Involving* describes a two-way conversation between the foundation and the beneficiary, though the foundation maintains the decision-making power. Finally, *deciding* reflects two-way communication that leads to collaborative decision-making between the foundation and the beneficiary.

Research question

PGM is a relatively new way of working in the philanthropic sector, certainly in the Netherlands. In this study, we examine this form of funding, specifically the experiment that Kansfonds initiated with a network of organizations supporting undocumented immigrants. Our research question is: *What is the effect of participatory grantmaking (PGM) on collaboration, power dynamics and trust within the action network of organizations supporting undocumented immigrants?*

In this study we examine how PGM affects mutual collaboration between organizations within the action network and with the funder, Kansfonds. We further examine how the PGM process affects the trust between these actors. Our assumption is that the PGM process can improve mutual collaboration, reduce power imbalances, and increase trust between all involved. This then has a direct impact on how effectively organizations collaborate to support undocumented immigrants, which has an indirect effect on how well undocumented immigrants are supported and represented in the Netherlands.

For both science and practice, it is relevant to understand whether improved collaboration through PGM does indeed lead to better projects and improved capacity building within the field. In addition, knowledge of PGM could help address apprehension among other funders to start working with participatory methods.

Case Study: The Kansfonds program - a Home without Papers

Kansfonds is a hybrid foundation (an endowment foundation generating fundraised income) in the Netherlands with the mission "Everyone a home; a roof over your head, enough money to cover basic needs and the deep sense that you belong". Established in 1957, the fund operates from the Kingdom of the Netherlands (therefore including the Dutch Caribbean Islands) and has an annual budget of approximately 13 million euros (Kansfonds, 2023, p. 64). Kansfonds focuses, among other things, on supporting undocumented immigrants because the goal of "a home" – the core of their mission – is under significant pressure for this population. Since the introduction of the "Koppelingswet" [a law that ties an individual's ability to provide residency documentation to their eligibility for social services] in 1998, undocumented immigrants have been formally excluded from a variety of services, ultimately placing them outside of Dutch society (Koppelingswet, 1998). This results in these individuals living 'under the radar' out of fear of deportation, making them practically invisible to both the authorities and society at large. A substantial part of the population works in the informal sector, making them vulnerable to exploitation due to their marginalized position (Ombudsman Metropool Amsterdam, 2021). Because of this Kansfonds developed a program specifically targeting this population. In 2023, Kansfonds explored the need for support within the field of undocumented immigrants. From various conversations with organizations established in the field (e.g., a meeting with 12 organizations supporting this target population), the need for greater collaboration clearly emerged. This includes, for example, collaborating on more efficient and effective service provision to the target population as well as making changes to local and national policies. Organizations are aware of each other's activities, but there is very limited collaboration. The field is fragmented, and organizations lack the resources to do more than what is strictly necessary. As a result, collaboration has not been sufficiently established so far. In addition to increased collaboration, there was a desire to experiment with social innovation to solve issues undocumented immigrants are struggling with and enhance the organization's own learning capacities.

The duration of the program is five years (2023 – 2027). Kansfonds has included the realization of a so-called "action network", in which organizations supporting undocumented immigrants were brought together to collaborate. The program has been established with the following objectives:

- "To find humane solutions and scale them up.
- To ensure better accessibility to what individuals are entitled to.
- To improve societal awareness and understanding through storytelling.
- To find (or create) space for a more humane government policy" (Kansfonds, n.d.).

Kansfonds finances and facilitates the establishment of this action network. An important part of the program is that the organizations in the action network actively participate in contributing ideas and making decisions about the distribution and allocation of funding to projects or solutions. For this an experiment with participatory grantmaking was developed.

Kansfonds had previous experience with PGM in the program 'All Youths a Home' catered to homeless youths. There was a 'youth advisory council' involved with the selection and evaluation of applications for this program, in which homeless youth was consulted. For the program 'A Home Without Papers', the fund aims to go a step further, moving from 'consulting' to 'involving' and 'deciding' within Gibson's framework (2017).

Kansfonds justifies its choice for Participatory Grantmaking (PGM) based on three key aspects: the target group, the process, and fundraising.

First, the target group is diverse, and the issues they face are complex and multifaceted. Solutions require deep knowledge and expertise—not only about the target group itself but also about the legal,

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political, and social contexts in which these problems arise. The participating organizations are in close contact with the people concerned and possess this knowledge. This approach also ensures that the voice of the target group—whom these organizations work with daily—is better represented in the decision-making process.

Second, Kansfonds argues that it has been proven that a participatory decision-making process—one that involves not only content but also the allocation of resources—leads to greater commitment and engagement, better coordination, and stronger collaboration. One of the main reasons for developing the program was to foster cooperation among organizations and reduce fragmentation in the field. In PGM, the process is at least as important as the outcome, and it enhances equality and active involvement of all participating partners. Moreover, PGM offers organizations the opportunity to build a collaborative structure that can ensure continuity in addressing the issues at hand. If organizations can now succeed in setting priorities and allocating resources together, they will be able to do so in the future as well—regardless of political shifts or circumstances.

Third, Kansfonds sees PGM as an opportunity for fundraising. Precisely because this approach is innovative, it may attract potential co-funders. The proposition includes not only the impact of the projects themselves but also the impact of the collaborative approach used to implement them.

Methodology of the action network 'A home without papers'
The participants of the action network have been selected by Kansfonds, using input from the field[1]. The organizations within the action network receive core funding to participate in the network (€7.500 – €12.500 per organization annually). In addition, a budget of €300.000, - for the first round of PGM is made available for the network to set up projects to meet the abovementioned goals in 2024. There are four rounds included in the program plan, each with a growing budget.

The network meets at least four times a year and determines the agenda for the coming years. What themes are currently important to focus on? Which developments or current events can be leveraged to achieve the goals? What solutions can be pursued? To implement a solution in practice, the network considers which organization(s) would be best to collaborate with. This collaboration can take the form of a working group consisting of people from various organizations across different cities. The working group determines the final format—such as a project, action research, or knowledge sessions—to work on the solution. Progress is reported back to the action network, which provides input and ideas from the group when needed.

Kansfonds selected the 'collaborative distribution' PGM model, where relevant issues are collaboratively identified and addressed. This model closely aligns with the 'Closed Collective model' of Evans (2015, p. 13). The network strategically explored which solutions could work and drive change, as well as who is best suited to implement them. All organizations were actively involved in reviewing the project plans. Kansfonds hired external facilitators who organize and facilitate meetings for the action network. Kansfonds was represented by two employees, which actively participated in the action network and held one vote in any voting procedures.

The following frameworks were established by Kansfonds for the PGM process. First, the projects must fall within Kansfonds' regular spending policy and must comply with their general guidelines. Second, the projects must be carried out by at least two organizations from the action network. Third, Kansfonds has an 'alarm procedure' in place, which gives them the opportunity to intervene if the process risks stalling.

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[1] See appendix 1 for an overview of participants in the action network in 2024.

In January 2024, there was a two-day session where participants of the action network got to know each other and collaboratively decided on which themes the action network should focus on. Seven themes were chosen. Consequently, groups were formed based on the selected themes and projects were developed accordingly. The decision-making day was on April 18th, when participants decided how to distribute the €300.000. Prior to this day, ground rules were set by the process facilitators, which was coordinated with the participants. The decision-making took place through a voting procedure, where each participating organization ranks the seven projects from 1 to 7. The participants came together on the 27th of June 2024 to discuss the progress of the projects, to get to know each other better and to address the changes made to the two plans. Finally, including the target population and the need for refining the process was also discussed. On the 28th and 29th of November, there was a two-day session where the progress of the projects and the participant's mutual collaboration are reflected upon. Alongside shared moments, there is close contact within the project groups and between the external process facilitators and participants.

Context

The action network was established during a period when the political climate in the Netherlands was becoming increasingly unfavorable for the program's target group, those without valid residence papers, and when funding for the work of organizations supporting this group came under pressure. On November 22, 2023, just before the start of the action network, parliamentary elections were held in the Netherlands. The PVV emerged as the largest party with 37 seats, followed by the VVD with 34 seats (NOS, 2023a). On May 16, 2024, the PVV reached a coalition agreement with the VVD, NSC, and BBB, and on July 2, the new cabinet was sworn in. A key focus of both the coalition agreement and the final government program was migration. The new government committed to implementing "the strictest asylum policy ever" (Rijksoverheid, 2024). One of the first measures taken by the new cabinet that directly affected undocumented people was the termination of the national contribution to the Landelijke Vreemdelingen Voorziening (LVV) [National Facility for Undocumented Migrants] (NOS, 2023b). The LVV was launched in 2018 with the aim of finding sustainable solutions to support the basic needs of undocumented people, and until 2024, €17 million was allocated annually to support it (Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Datacentrum, 2022).

Data and Methods

For this study, we collected data at three time points. First, in April 2024, we conducted a short survey using Qualtrics with mainly open-ended questions from representatives of the 9 participating organizations in the action network, prior to the first decision-making process on April 18th, which we also observed using participatory observation.

In May and June 2024, we conducted 13 semi-structured interviews with representatives of all organizations included in the action network, the Kansfonds representatives and the external facilitatirs of the PGM process. These interviews lasted approximately an hour and were mainly conducted online, while two were on-site. Discussed were participation in the action network, the PGM process and the relationship between the participants of the action network and the funder, Kansfonds. In addition, the discussions also covered the unrestricted funding provided by Kansfonds. The results of this latter topic are not covered in this paper.

In November 2024, we used participant observation to study the action network, the Kansfonds representatives and the external facilitators of the PGM process during a two-day meeting. At this meeting, the progress of the PGM projects was discussed, as well as follow-up plans for the action network in 2025.

For the analysis of the semi-structured interviews, we applied *first* and *second-cycle coding* (Miles et al., 2018). To prepare for the first cycle coding, Pamala Wiepking developed, through deductive coding, a list of descriptive codes based on the interview topic list. Thereafter, through coding two interviews, she edited this list inductively to develop a preliminary coding scheme. Eline Crins coded the remaining interviews using this coding scheme, at the same time editing where necessary. Lastly, Eline Crins applied the second coding cycle, during which she further refined some themes and coded commonly occurring themes.

Results

Survey

Before the decision-making day in February 2024, a short survey including mainly open-ended questions was sent to participants of the action network regarding their ideas and expectations of PGM. The results of the survey show that most participants expect their involvement in the action network to help achieve their goals, because joint efforts are made to solve the target population's problems and funding is available for this. This is seen as the main advantage of PGM: It promotes collaboration. The major risk mentioned in the first phase of the project is the significant differences between organizations. These disparities might undermine collaboration, such as when competition among organizations arises. The process until the day of decision-making is perceived positively. Participants appreciate the time and space available to work together. Some perceive this process as moving too quickly and believe that more time should be spent on building trust, while others find it difficult to invest so much time in a process without knowing whether it will ultimately result in a funded project.

Participatory observation decision-making day

On April 18, one of the researchers observed the decision-making day. During this day, the various projects were presented, questions could be asked, and the seven projects were ranked from 1 to 7. The participants' high level of knowledge displayed during the discussions was a notable aspect of the day. Participants clearly had deep understanding of the target group and the issues involved, which led to highly substantive feedback on the plans. One of the plans—a national lobbying initiative named 'battle plan'—faced significant resistance. Some participants felt that a single unified vision was unrealistic and that the collaboration required for such a plan would be too complex. During the decision-making process for the allocation of funds, this resistance resurfaced, as the scores for this plan varied widely. Further questions were raised about both the content and the budget of the plan. The day concluded with a decision on how the available funds would be distributed.

Semi-structured interviews

In May and June 2024, we conducted semi-structured interviews with all participants in the action network, representatives from Kansfonds, and the external facilitators of the PGM process. Below, we discuss the results of these interviews.

The action network: motivation for participating

All interview participants voiced the need for collaboration as the reason for participating in the action network. Collaboration is important to the participants as it facilitates knowledge exchange and joint activities, particularly aimed at lobbying for the target population. They considered it especially crucial in this political reality, where the far-right PVV became the largest party in the national elections of November 22nd, 2023. '… it is necessary as we live in a political reality where we must find solutions together,' (participant 1F).

Seven participants indicated that they expect to do more for the target population by working together.

Actually, the main reason is that I am very happy that diverse NGOs have been brought together to think about what is now truly important for the target population. In this way, we are not all 'inventing the wheel 'across the country, because I believe that by working with multiple NGOs, we can achieve more than by doing it alone. (participant 2C)

For another participant, working with those outside of the 'Randstad' was a reason to participate. Two participants also highlighted the available funding as their reason for participating.

That you can achieve much more together, exchange knowledge, and leverage the added value of organisations to deliver results for the target population. That is, yes, truly a leading driver of participation. And of course, I would be lying if one didn't also think, well, we need funding for our activities. (participant 1A2)

Composition of the action network

The diversity in organizational size and geographical spread across the Netherlands is generally regarded positively. However, three respondents note the absence of organizations from certain cities outside Randstad [most populated area in the Western Netherlands] as well as expertise different from what is currently available in the action network. There is uncertainty about how the selection of participants was decided upon. Participants indicated not to have had any influence and did not to know how Kansfonds arrived at the final selection.

The target population, undocumented immigrants, are indirectly represented in the action network.

Well, indirectly it is ensured because it was a condition for the proposals we wrote. In those proposals, it was essentially already included as a fixed requirement. It must be in there, that before starting to write your project proposal, you must have talked to or gathered input from the people you are writing it for. So, in that way, it was ensured. (participant 1E)

Seven participants indicated that they are satisfied with this, mainly because indirect representation is difficult and particularly taxing on the target population.

I personally do not think that because no one from the target population is present, that they cannot be represented. I think that a lot of people at the table work directly with this population, and they can definitely represent the target population. (participant 2B).

Two participants were of the opinion that direct representation is necessary. One participant stressed that involving the target group is of the most importance.

It must always be about the target population. If you do not involve them, well, we could all come up with something, but imagine that the target population might not even want it. I am therefore definitely missing this involvement. (participant 2C)

The application of PGM as a decision-making strategy

Participants were asked what they thought of the idea of involving participants of the action network in the decision-making about the distribution of resources through PGM. Eight participants felt positive about this. However, one participant, together with the board of their organization, had doubts because of concerns about rising competition between the members of the action network. Another participant indicated being positive about the idea but was unaware before the first meeting that PGM would be used. The positive aspects mentioned include increased autonomy and jointly deciding the direction of the program.

> What I really appreciate is that you actually come together to ask: What do we need? Or what do undocumented people need? What can we make possible? That you indeed do that together, rather than each organization deciding for themselves: what are we going to do next year? And what will we be asking funding for? (participant 1B)

The quoted participant wonders whether you could set the course collaboratively while letting Kansfonds decide on the funded projects to prevent conflict between participants.

Influence of PGM on collaboration between participants
Participants are generally positive about the influence of PGM on mutual collaboration. The main positive effect mentioned is that the action network has led to new contacts and new or improved collaboration.

> I also think that regarding the projects that had to work together, that started to work together, that found each other, so to say, there were sometimes surprising matches that turned out to be very fruitful. Or that you got to know each other again or better, or discovered new aspects of someone. That definitely happened. (participant 2A)

That collaboration does not only confine itself to those within the action network.

> And there is much more contact with other organizations, which now makes it easier for us to reach out and connect in other areas as well. If I need information about something or want to brainstorm about how we can address issues in local politics, I'll now call somewhere else much sooner than before. (participant 1B)

And a few participants indicated that this improved collaboration matters: 'And I think that we, especially in this field with such scarcity, it is especially beneficial that […] our network becomes stronger' (participant 1C).

The difference in types of organizations and the diversity of expertise are assessed in different ways. It is expressed that these differences are beneficial because they allow you to leverage the capacities of other organizations.

> I thought it was rather funny and refreshing to also involve organizations like [org_1f]. I only knew them by name, but during the conversations and while working together, they are definitely activists, you know. While we are a lot more, well, a more conventional organization, busy with policy and that sort of thing, they go raise their voices and take action. And still, you have to collaborate, which is only, yes it is a lot of fun and very interesting. (participant 1E)

There are participants who discovered that other organizations had certain expertise they were not aware of. Differences in professionality was also observed:

> There are also quite a few organizations that are largely based on volunteers, and that's always different from professionals. It's not about intelligence or anything like that, but more about the fact that volunteering, in the end, also involves a certain level of optionality. I also think that many of the organizations involved only have one or half an FTE, and that says a lot about whether the activities you put on paper can actually be carried out in practice with that organization, yes or no? (participant 1A2)

> When organizations have limited capacity, they also have little ability to spend many hours on this. I had the idea that this was reflected in the proposals we made, but also in how the budget was assessed (participant 2B)

> But that also has to do, I think, with the differences in expertise present in the action network. That actually experienced organizations should play a more active role in ensuring the success of many projects. (participant 1F)

This difference in professionality between organizations is perceived by some as hindering collaboration. Participants furthermore mention that there are different visions and perspectives on what is now needed: 'Actually, one would also want to consider the DNA of the organizations; some organizations are much more activist, others more diplomatic' (participant 2B). Knowledge of each other's vision, perspective and expertise were highlighted as important for collaboration. Some participants experienced a lack of this understanding within this phase of the process. 'The lack of attention is the core of the organization… Why does your organization exist, what is its DNA? Too little attention has been given to this, to the relationship' (participant 1A2). It is further mentioned that the formation of project groups does not always lead to coalitions that have the most expertise on that specific theme. This is possibly caused by the limited time available for the formation of coalitions as well as influenced by the distribution of projects across groups.

> Tension and friction, especially during the decision-making day, emerge as the most significant negative effect of the PGM process on collaboration.Eventually, after the final meeting, when I was riding the train home, I didn't have the feeling of, 'yes, we are doing well, and we are building a strong network'. No, exactly the opposite. I had the feeling of 'this is not going well at all'. This is not really okay, and it causes more friction. All of this then has to be straightened out, explained and resolved. (participant 1E)

> Because what you're really doing with something like Participatory Grant Making—if trust isn't being built—is risking exactly what has now happened. It also concerns the existential security of an NGO. So it's very logical that, when money—let's put it in black and white—is available, it becomes a matter at the organizational level, because it's about financial survival. And I think that became very clear during the decisions that were made. (participant 2B).

It was also noted that more attention to mutual trust and the "DNA" of organizations earlier in the process might have helped prevent tension—or at least allowed for better use of each other's capacities. Trust in each other's capabilities is also a point of attention. This includes aspects such as budget planning, lobbying expertise, and the amount of time an organization has available.

> I find it really difficult to hand over the responsibility of representing this group's story and its support work in the political arena. I really need to have trust in that, and so much depends on it. I truly wish that this had been explicitly addressed by the organizations—that if you want to do this, everyone needs to be on board. And I didn't feel like we fully got there, which I actually find quite unfortunate. (participant 1D)

The different interviews revealed that the tensions between some participating organizations already existed before the start of the action network. These organizations have been working in the same field for years, but from different perspectives and values ("the DNA" of organizations mentioned by some participants) and with different objectives.

> In the first sessions, which were held in that monastery, there was already a moment where someone made comments like - oh, these are personal vendettas. That was really

uncomfortable for me, a feeling which stayed for a while, because it mixes up professionality and content with the personal, and you really carry that with you. (participant 1D)

One participant noted that the emergence of tensions does not necessarily have to be something negative, because now it is out in the open.

When the discussion arose around the 'battle plan' [a plan which sparked a lot of debate among participants], the atmosphere became very grim and unpleasant. Then it became immediately clear that; wow something serious is going on here [...]. That was of course a very negative moment, but I do think it is very positive that it happened, because now people have to deal with it. (participant 2C)

Influence of PGM on the quality of project proposals
De meeste participanten zijn van mening dat het toepassen van PGM de kwaliteit van de projectplannen heeft verbeterd. De reden voor die verbetering is met name het toepassen van meerdere perspectieven.

Most participants agree that the application of PGM has improved the quality of the project plans. The main reason for this improvement is the inclusion of multiple perspectives.

Definitely, because I think that when you do something from one organization, then you will also only get one perspective. Where you now approach things through multiple lenses. I ultimately think that diversity is actually involving multiple perspectives and drawing the best conclusions from them. So I think that it is, in that sense, a very nice way to indeed increase quality, both from how you look at things and in the exchange of ideas. (participant 1D)

Most noted that the plans would not have developed without the action network, as there is now time and space available, alongside the presence of deadlines. The existence of time pressure and support were regarded positively. A few mentioned that the plans became worse as a result of PGM, for instance when merging existing plans: 'Well, we both already had a plan. That was already there, then we needed to merge them, which made things quite complicated' (participant 2C).

With regard to the selection of project plans, a significant number of participants indicated an improvement in the choice of projects, as these are based on expertise from the field.

But I think that what you really saw is that the organizations that were present had more in-depth knowledge of what is smart to do, what is needed and where the money should go. (participant 1D)

Whether people without documentation are eventually better supported as a result of the projects is hard for the participants to say at this point in time. A couple of participants expect they will be better supported because multiple parties oversaw the creation of the plans and multiple parties worked on the projects together, but also because of the result-oriented focus of the PGM process to come up with plans. Others expressed having less trust in a couple of projects. Nonetheless, half of the participants shared that they think the legitimacy of plans has been strengthened by PGM. The other half cannot give a clear answer about this.

Influence on the sector
Most participants expect that the projects coming from the action network have a positive effect on the whole sector as the projects often transcend municipal boundaries and benefit other organizations that are not a part of the action network.

But something like building a shared knowledge network or an online platform that all participating organizations across the Netherlands can benefit from—something that increases expertise, professionalism, and competence, even for the smallest groups active in places like Winterswijk or Maastricht—yes, undocumented migrants will of course benefit from that indirectly in a big way. (participant 1E)

However, some participants also mention that the action network might also have a negative effect on the sector because non-participating organizations (may) feel excluded.

Influence of PGM on decision-making

Regarding the process, participants mainly commented on the decision-making day. A significant number of comments are about the lack of time and space available for feedback, specifically to incorporate feedback.

We really tried to seriously delve into the project proposals, but how I experienced it is: Well, then small changes were made in just two minutes, okay, we strike this through, or that amount, or this. That was not, there just wasn't enough space for it. (participant 2A)

Several participants also indicated that not everyone was equally heard.

Looking back on that day, I found it very problematic, because the idea—at least as we see it— is that everyone is equal and everyone should have an equal opportunity to speak. And the interests of smaller organizations are especially important, and organizations outside Amsterdam should also be heard. We strongly support that. But there wasn't enough space for that, and that's also because no behavioral agreements were made in advance. If you had those, you could hold each other to them. You could say: listen, you've spoken a lot already, your point is clear, let's also listen to people who agree with it. (participant 2B)

Some participants also remarked that the 'rules of the game' were sometimes unclear or did not seem firmly established.

I felt like too much was left up to the group itself. Too often it was like, 'okay, we discussed this with each other.' But if we decide on something else 10 minutes later, that would also be possible. This did lead to disagreements. (participant 1A2)

This participant elaborates on how this uncertainty about the 'rules of the game' led to an unpleasant situation.

Then, at the moment when Participatory Grant Making was introduced and the rules for how we were going to do it were unclear, we ended up in a situation where scoring had taken place, a big discussion arose about whether that scoring made sense, and that created a lot of room to reduce funding for some parties in order to give budget to another party or project that hadn't even scored within the budget. We really experienced that as very unpleasant. And the third thing—well, actually two more things—is that, in my view, doing Participatory Grant Making where you're also allowed to vote for yourself raises a lot of questions. (participant 2B)

This participant summarizes the critical remarks about the process as follows:

And taking responsibility for the process—that's something you share with each other to some extent, but it can really only work if you agree on behavioral rules together: how do we interact within the network, what do we say, what don't we say? That part of the process was skipped. So in that sense, everyone is responsible for how the process is carried out together, but taking the lead in the process—I don't think that should lie with the organizations themselves, because of the interests at play. You can't ask that of the organizations. If you ask them, 'Would you vote for yourselves?' of course everyone will say yes, because that's logical—it's about money, it's about survival, and it's about a field where there's a lot of scarcity, where organizations year after year don't know if they'll still exist the next year. So that's a context you really need to take into account when doing PGM. (participant 2B)

Many questions were raised about the decision-making process used to determine which projects would receive funding. '… that the decision, the voting, didn't go entirely properly. So then the decision-making itself wasn't entirely proper either.' (Participant 2C). The concerns mainly focused on the voting method and the preparatory process leading up to it.

A strange power dynamic arose on the decision-making day because a couple of organizations had only one person there, while [org_1a] was with three. You know, the organizations from Amsterdam were with seven people all together, while almost all smaller organizations were alone, except Eindhoven. Especially, you know, the two organizations from Nijmegen. Yes, they each had equal voting power, but during the discussions, they were of course by themselves. (participant 1F)

An important point of criticism about the voting process was the fact that participants could also vote on their organization's own plans.

That whole lobbying plan [the previously mentioned 'battle plan'] ended up being ranked first by the people who wrote it, and last by those who didn't. That was, of course, a bit strange. That's not consensus. So, I don't really know how else you should do the scoring or how to reach consensus, but it didn't have much to do with the quality of the content—because if you can vote for your own plan… What was good, though, was the transparency. They really did show how everyone voted, which led to a conversation. I thought that was really good. It allowed us to see: hey, something odd is going on here. (participant 1F)

Although a significant number of participants felt that the process was democratic, some questioned whether (democratic) voting was the best way to make decisions. 'I personally would have preferred more of a process in which we truly arrived at a joint decision, rather than a vote at the end.' (Participant 2A). Some participants suggested that in a possible follow-up, voting should be replaced by reaching consensus through dialogue.

You are, of course, voting on things which are quite significant, and sometimes it felt like an element of depth was missing. I think that—it was very democratic in the purest sense, but there was also an element of necessity involved. I found it challenging that for one proposal, someone would be firmly on one side of the divide, while another person would be on the other. Maybe that part felt incomplete to me. I think I'm a strong proponent of reaching consensus, and that turned out to be a little difficult. (participant 1D)

Influence of PGM on equality
There are various perceptions about equality among participants. Four participants emphasize equality in terms of voice and space within the PGM process.

> In principle, yes. But in practice, no—because an [org_1b] can't just say: we'll bring in another person to carry something out. So it all stays in the Randstad [with the larger organizations]. [Interviewer 1]: 'Yes.' [Interviewee]: 'But I do really feel a strong sense of equality and being able to contribute, and that my ideas and opinions are heard just as much as anyone else's.' (participant 1B)

Participants, like participant 1B, also mentioned that there was inequality between participants, especially due to the differences in organizational size.

> There is a very large group of undocumented people in Amsterdam. There are many organizations involved with this, many of which are also quite well-funded, so there is simply a lot of capacity to respond, to develop initiatives, to set agendas. Yes, that's really great. But there's also a downside to this. The risk is that in other cities, it can sometimes create the impression—or it can be felt—that this is very much an Amsterdam-centered issue, that it all happens in Amsterdam, and that the agenda is largely determined by the organizations based in Amsterdam. That. And that can sometimes be a bit difficult. (participant 1E)

The relationship between Kansfonds as a funder of the action network and the participants in the action network is not perceived as equal. It is often stated that this is not possible because Kansfonds holds power and money, creating a dependency: '… they [Kansfonds] really did a great job in how they acted throughout the entire PGM process. But no, of course not. They have the money. So equal? No.' (participant 2A). Additionally, some participants felt that Kansfonds staff had a stronger influence on the process than the other participants. '[...] It just remains a relationship of dependency in a certain sense, I think.' (participant 1D)

Various participants indicated that the relationship with Kansfonds has become more equal through the PGM process. For instance, a participant states that it now becomes clear that Kansfonds employs a wide range of individuals holding various viewpoints. Another participant observed that Kansfonds fosters greater equality because the PGM process provides recognition for the expertise of organizations.

> Because they took that step toward Participatory Grant Making—because they really acknowledged that there is certain expertise in the field that they themselves don't have—it does feel much more balanced than in some other relationships, so to speak. So no, it's not completely equal, but yes, it comes very close, and it's also a very… it's not an unpleasant or disproportionate power dynamic that you can't work with, so to speak. (participant 2B)

When it comes to greater equality, people also point to more frequent and more accessible contact with Kansfonds. This doesn't necessarily have to do with PGM, but rather with the fact that Kansfonds is participating in the action network: '… you're part of one network, one team, you know, so for me it definitely contributed to Kansfonds being more approachable.' (participant 1C)

<u>Results of participatory observation – two-day meeting, November 2024</u>
During a two-day meeting of the action network on November 27 and 28, 2024, we observed the PGM process. The meeting focused on two main areas: the action network itself—its ambitions, collaboration, and the use of the second funding round—and the substantive progress of the funded projects.

A Kansfonds representative explained how the action network was formed, citing criteria such as geographic distribution, capacity to participate, and a certain level of financial stability. It was also clarified that the decision not to involve undocumented people at the start was made in consultation

with the participants. It was emphasized that PGM was chosen to strengthen collaboration and ownership, and because the participants possess significant knowledge and expertise. The rationale behind Kansfonds holding a tenth vote was also explained: to participate as an equal partner, to contribute a helicopter view, and to build internal trust within Kansfonds—especially at the board level—during this first PGM experiment involving real decision-making power transfer.

The group discussed what they were satisfied with, what was missing, what would define the experiment's success, and what the network should focus on in the future. There was satisfaction with the shorter lines of communication, strengthened collaboration, and reduced fragmentation. What was missing was joint action and recognition that the network can also lead to friction, especially given the precarious existence of many organizations. Some participants noted a lack of expertise in certain projects and a need for clearer frameworks. According to participants, the network would be successful if it delivers impactful projects for the target group and fosters openness about what does or doesn't work. Looking ahead, the network should focus on strengthening collective advocacy and better alignment with the broader migration chain.

The group worked together to define a shared ambition. Tensions emerged between systemic solutions and the need for shelter and support. There was also debate about the action network's focus: What should the network do, and what should others do? What must be done collectively? Should there be a unified narrative? Ultimately, a shared ambition was formulated and endorsed by all but one participant:

> "We work toward systemic change so that exclusion based on residence status is no longer accepted. We do this through projects in collaboration with organizations both within and outside the action network, selected based on expertise. We aim to scale these projects to drive national change, in consultation with people without valid residence status."
> *(Notes from the November 2024 two-day meeting)*

The role of the action network within the broader field was also discussed. To what extent is collaboration with others possible? How can exclusivity be avoided? What is the network's role toward others? It was noted that the network should act as a catalyst and collaborate with others. Attention was also drawn to the focus on the organizations themselves—does this come at the expense of attention to the target group?

In subgroups, three questions were discussed: Who makes up the action network? Where and how do we allocate our funds? What do we expect from each other?

Regarding the first question, some specific organizations were noted as missing from the network. It was also suggested that there should be feedback, advice, and input from a panel of undocumented people.

On the second question—how the budget should be spent—it was emphasized that the budget should be available for "risk-taking" and that funds should be quickly accessible for urgent actions. Participants also stressed the importance of funding organizational capacity and questioned whether this always needs to be done per organization. The current project durations were seen as too short to bring about real change.

Regarding mutual expectations, participants expressed a desire for more transparency from Kansfonds about its role, which some currently perceive as unclear or overly directive. Among each other,

expectations included: keeping the target group central, adopting a cross-organizational mindset, ensuring safety and honesty in feedback, maintaining continuity in participation, securing internal support within organizations, and fostering openness and flexibility within and between projects (e.g., through shared expertise or personnel).

During the project discussions, there was confusion about the nature of the session—was it a progress report or an evaluation? It also became clear that the timing of decision-making did not align well with project implementation. Some projects required contract extensions before decisions on continuation had been made. Finally, it was noted that some organizations struggled to make capacity available for project execution, as not all had easy access to additional flexible resources.

Discussion

<u>Power balance</u>
PGM has the potential to shift the power balance in the philanthropic sector by transferring control over financial resources from the funder to the beneficiary. This study examined to what extent that power balance actually shifts in the case of PGM in the Kansfonds project *Een Thuis zonder Papieren* [A Home without Papers]. Although participants indicated that the action network contributed to greater equality between Kansfonds and the organizations in the network, they all acknowledged that the relationship cannot be completely equal, as a funder inherently holds more power. The question arises whether the increased sense of equality in the relationship is solely due to the delegation of decision-making over resources, or whether it is also or more related to the increased contact between Kansfonds and participants through the activities of the action network.

Although Kansfonds has, in practice, largely transferred the decision-making over resources to the group, a significant amount of power remains (implicitly) with Kansfonds. This is because Kansfonds assembled the action network, set the framework, and its representatives have a voice in the decision-making process. Furthermore, the relationship between Kansfonds and the beneficiaries is not limited to the context of the action network; they also collaborate in other settings. This broader collaboration may also contribute to the perceived imbalance in the relationship.

With PGM, it matters who has a seat at the table, as this determines to whom power is being transferred. In a *closed collective model*, such as the one applied in the action network, it is important to involve all stakeholders. Although it is difficult to clearly define the field when it comes to undocumented people, some participants believe that not all stakeholders are currently involved. While the literature emphasizes the importance of including people from the target group at the table, this is not self-evident for participants in the action network—mainly due to a desire to protect the (vulnerable) target group.

<u>Working more effectively through improved quality and better collaboration</u>
Kansfonds indicates that they implemented PGM with the goal of supporting initiatives more efficient and effective. The idea is that organizations from the field know better what is needed to support the target population compared to a funder like Kansfonds. Participants feel that plans and funding decisions have indeed improved as a result of the implementation of the PGM process.

Kansfonds also states that PGM was implemented to stimulate collaboration in the field. According to Kansfonds, strengthening collaboration is necessary because the field is fragmented and the challenges are significant. Participants also acknowledge this and indicate that it is the main reason for their participation, and that the action network has led to new and improved collaborations. An important lesson from this study is that PGM does not automatically strengthen collaboration; a certain level of

trust must already be present in order to make joint decision-making work well. The decision-making around the allocation of funds brought existing tensions to the surface and intensified them.

To foster constructive collaboration, it is important to understand each other's vision, values, and working methods, and to know who brings which capacities to the table. The diversity within the network, for example, now led to significant differences in these areas within the network. These differences might have been better addressed earlier on, with more attention given to the varying values and motivations of the organizations. Additionally, some organizations could have been supported earlier in developing the capacities needed to participate more effectively in the network. It is also important to recognize that PGM and collaboration within an action network can put pressure on organizations—what might be called *collaboration pressure*.

Process

There are two key lessons regarding the process. First: transparency is crucial. Unlike when advising and decision-making take place within the Kansfonds organization, PGM involves sharing project plans, feedback, and decisions openly with all participants. Our findings show that there was still insufficient transparency in some areas. Participants indicated that they did not know how decisions about the composition of the action network were made by Kansfonds. Additionally, the 'rules of the game' were not experienced as clear enough by participants.

Secondly, according to some participants, the way decisions about funding were made was not entirely fair. On the decision-making day, internal power dynamics and self-interest became very apparent. This raises the question of whether one can still vote 'fairly' when deciding on one's own funding. It is important in a PGM process to make the different interests of organizations and the internal power relations discussable and to take these into account when designing the decision-making process.

Conclusion

This case study explores Participatory Grantmaking (PGM) in an experimental set-up in the Netherlands. In PGM, decision-making about the allocation of a funder's resources is transferred to the community the funder aims to support. The goal is to democratize decision-making processes in philanthropy. In 2024, Kansfonds launched a PGM experiment within a new program titled 'A Home Without Papers', aimed at people without valid residence documents. Within the program, an action network of nine organizations was formed, which collectively decided on an initial budget of €300,000 in 2024. We investigated the impact of PGM on collaboration and power dynamics both among the organizations in the action network and between them and the funder Kansfonds. The research focused on the first year (2024) of the program. In this first year, the working conditions for participants were challenging due to national political developments. A new government coalition of PVV, VVD, NSC, and BBB [Dutch political parties] announced in their coalition agreement that they would pursue "the strictest asylum policy ever" (Rijksoverheid, 2024). This had direct consequences for the livelihood of organizations working with undocumented people, as well as for the position of undocumented people themselves in the Netherlands.

To evaluate the impact of PGM, we used a short survey, participatory observations, and semi-structured interviews with all participating organizations. The key findings are as follows:

Who is at the table?

The action network consists of a diverse group of organizations, differing in location (both within and outside the Randstad [most populated area in the Netherlands]), size, and level of professionalism. This diversity is largely seen as positive. However, participants raised questions about how Kansfonds selected the organizations, noting a lack of transparency. In this PGM experiment, undocumented

people did not have a direct role in decision-making. Their representation was indirect, via the participating organizations. Views among participants varied on the possibility and necessity of direct representation—some considered it undesirable due to the vulnerability of the group, while others saw it as essential for developing projects that truly benefit the target group.

<u>Collaboration and quality</u>

The action network fostered new connections and more intensive knowledge exchange among organizations, as they met more frequently and got to know each other better. Participants felt this collaboration led to better projects, developed from multiple perspectives and areas of expertise. Decisions about resource allocation were also seen as improved, drawing more on field knowledge than if made solely by the funder. However, questions remain about whether the decision-making process was truly democratic.

<u>Power dynamics</u>

While PGM theoretically shifts the power balance by decentralizing decision-making, the case study shows that full equality between funder and grantees is difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, the PGM process did make the relationship more equal, mainly through more intensive contact. The process also surfaced existing problems and tensions among participants, including power issues. Mutual trust is essential to navigate the PGM process successfully. Discussing differences in vision, values, and capacity early on can help reduce tensions during decision-making.

<u>A transparent process</u>

The study highlights the importance of a well-structured process, especially when working with organizations of varying capacities and levels of professionalism. This includes the decision-making strategy. Voting where organizations can vote for themselves appears less desirable. Transparency is crucial throughout the process: regarding the funder's role in shaping the process, how participants were selected, and how decisions are made. Currently, the 'rules of the game' were sometimes unclear, and there was ambiguity about Kansfonds' role in decision-making.

Recommendations

Based on this study, we formulated the following recommendations for the different phases of the PGM process:

Preparation phase

- Get to know each other and each other's capacities: This is essential for a successful PGM process. Invest time before the process begins in building trust among participants.

- Assess and strengthen capacities: As a funder or facilitator, take time to assess participants' capacities together and, if desired by the participating organization, support capacity building—especially for smaller organizations.

- Acknowledge ecosystem shifts: Building a new 'ecosystem' often means dismantling something else, which can cause friction. Create space to address this.
- Provide (flexible) funding: Offer unrestricted funding to allow participants to free up time to engage in the PGM process. Ensure equality in funding for all participants.

- Align funding structure with project needs: Ensure the form and duration of funding match the type of projects being developed. For systemic change, short-term funding may be inadequate.

The decision-making cycle should also align with project timelines, including staffing and flexible resources.

During the PGM Process

- Regularly check with project groups whether they have sufficient capacity (including time) to implement the project, and consider adding people with specific skills if needed.

- Ensure a structured and transparent process with clear rules and a well-defined decision-making procedure. Document this thoroughly.

- Be mindful of power dynamics between the funder and participants, as well as among participants themselves. For example, Kansfonds concluded that allowing participants to vote on their own projects during decision-making moments was not desirable.

- Provide strong process facilitation. This helps uphold the rules and reduces the burden and responsibility placed on participants for managing the process.

- Consider alternative decision-making methods if the initially designed process does not work as expected—such as consensus-based approaches. The goal is for all participants to perceive the process as fair.

General Recommendations

- Ensure transparency throughout the entire process: regarding how participants are selected, the role of the funder, and the decision-making procedures.

- PGM is about transferring power to those most affected. In this PGM process, the target group was only indirectly involved. Explore ways to give the target group direct influence in the PGM process without placing unnecessary or excessive burdens on them.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1. Participants action network

1. Stichting Vluchtelingen in de Knel (Eindhoven)
2. Stichting Here to Support (Amsterdam)
3. Stichting ASKV-Steunpunt Vluchtelingen (Amsterdam)
4. Stichting STIL Utrecht
5. Stichting Gast (Nijmegen)
6. Stichting Rotterdams Ongedocumenteerden Steunpunt (ROS)
7. Stichting Noodopvang Vluchtelingen Nijmegen (SNOV)
8. Human Rights Initiatives (Amsterdam)
9. Stichting LOS (Landelijk)