Think Layers, Not Ladders

The strategy of grassroots grantmaking

is built on the engagement of local residents

Effective grassroots grantmakers maintain their commitment to the fundamental work of stimulating and supporting active citizenship, then build other work on this platform – like adding layers to a cake. They also realize that more layers require more resources and more institutional commitment and risk taking.

Thinking layers, not ladders, suggests that “building on” rather than “moving on” (i.e., stepping up the rungs of a ladder) is the most effective strategy for grassroots grantmaking.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **More institutional commitment and resources required** |  | FOCUS | TOOLS |
| **Citizen-centered change** | * Bringing shared vision to policy-level discussions * Building political will and muscle * Co-creating a shared vision and an action agenda * Commitment to strategic change | * Community organizing * Partnerships and collaborations * Critical analysis * Build key relationships * Management & Leadership development * Small grants * Tailored capacity building * Convening * Recognition/celebration |
| **Community capacity, resident voice** | * Strengthening internal and external connections * Building organizational strength and resiliency * Identifying and nurturing community leaders | * Critical analysis to develop strategic outlook * Build key relationships * Management & Leadership development * Small grants * Tailored capacity building * Convening * Recognition/celebration |
| **Citizen action, relationship** | * Strengthening social capital * Supporting citizen-initiated action * Encouraging people-powered projects * Provide co-learning framework | * Small project-oriented grants * Technical assistance * Convening * Recognition/celebration |

**What is layering strategy?**

Grassroots grantmaking occurs in three areas:

* Stimulating and supporting active citizenship
* Building community capacity and strengthening resident voice
* Supporting citizen-centered change

A layering strategy builds on each of these areas over time, meaning the nvestment in stimulating and supporting active citizenship is ongoing. And this investment is strengthened when additional engagement and tools are are added to the mix, resulting in a strong, sustainable foundation for work focused on building community capacity and supporting citizen-centered change.