



Small Stone, Big Ripple

12 Strategies For Spreading Your Small Grant Further

Do you want to make a big splash with grant dollars, but you can only make a small gift? Not a problem! Some of the most effective change starts with a small grant. By following a few simple strategies, you can create a growing ripple effect with a small gift. The following are 12 ideas to help you make a big impact. Whether you invest in a person or an organization, partner with other donors, make a multiyear investment, or choose another avenue, you will discover that there really is no such thing as a too-small gift.

1. Educate yourself.

Be fully informed about your issue. Who else is funding it? What are the current needs? Where can you help create the biggest impact? Devote a day to researching your topic. Conduct a search on Google and review everything you find. As you read, identify key experts and foundation program officers most closely aligned with this issue. Call or e-mail these people to schedule informational interviews. Ask them to share their best knowledge about the field and to offer opinions on how your funding can make a difference.

2. Invest in a great leader.

Identify leaders you believe in, find out what they need to become more effective, and then provide support for them. Perhaps they could use executive coaching or management training to build a more effective team. They may want to participate in a leadership development program or take a sabbatical to reflect on options and opportunities. By supporting great leaders, you are creating ripple effects for change now and in the future.

3. Invest in a great organization.

Identify a nonprofit that is creating social change and contribute to its long-term sustainability by funding organizational capacity building. Because so many funders like to earmark grants for programs, nonprofits often must stretch their organizational dollars further. Your funds for general operating support, strategic planning, a feasibility study, improved fiscal management, fund development, communications activities, or management information systems will be cherished more than you know.

4. Focus your giving.

The more focused your giving, the greater your impact. Focus on a single issue, a specific strategy, a targeted region, or an affected population. You might also identify several organizations with proven track records in your chosen area and direct your giving to their most promising programs or projects. No matter what you choose, a focused grant often feels more personal and engaging.

5. Provide multiyear funding.

If you would like to make a grant that helps free up some of the nonprofit's fund-raising time, make a multiyear commitment. When you support an organization over two or more successive years, you are ensuring that the staff can spend a little more time focusing on programs and a little less time focusing on fund-raising, at least while you are committed. In addition, your gift will also tell other potential funders that this issue or organization is worthy of a serious commitment.



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6. Leverage your resources.

What kind of gift can you make if you pool your resources with other grantmakers who share your passion for a purpose, a region, or a population in need? Partner with other donors and foundations to pool resources, leverage knowledge, and extend impact. Or get involved in an effort to leverage larger public funding efforts and watch the “thermometer rise.” You might also join existing funding collaboratives, giving circles, donor networks, or community foundations. Explore your local regional association of grantmakers or community foundations to see what options they offer.

7. Convene nonprofit leaders.

You can play a critical role by simply bringing people together to learn from one other. You might convene organizations focused on similar issues in your city, state, or country. Provide a conference room, reimburse meal or travel expenses, or help plan the meeting agenda. This is a great way to get the conversation about change going; you may even find have a biannual or annual event in the works. If you can’t be a host, another tactic is to cover the conference costs for a nonprofit staff member who would not be able attend a distant or local beneficial conference without help.

8. Fund an evaluation.

Nonprofits know they need to conduct thorough evaluation of their programs, but they also often lack the time, resources, and expertise to conduct unbiased and scientific evaluation. It is a catch-22 for these organizations, as securing new funding often means demonstrating proven effectiveness. Even a modest grant can allow organizations to determine their impact by conducting surveys, interviews, or focus groups.

9. Fund policy change.

Effective policy change can start with small steps, but funding for advocacy and policy change often gets put on the back burner behind program support. Local, state, and national policies can have far-reaching impact on people and communities. Support policy change by funding research and dissemination of findings on critical issues. Fund media advocacy, policy advocacy organizations, and advocacy training for grassroots leaders. All of these activities can be done safely within the regulations that apply to funders.

10. Provide program-related investments.

Extend your resources by providing program-related investments (PRIs). A PRI might be a good investment if a nonprofit has the potential to generate income to repay your gift. You may also make a below-market or no-interest loan, or pledge your credit as security for an organization’s bank loan. When you support a nonprofit in this way, you are proving that you have faith in its work and ability to be successful.

11. Fund globally.

Small grants go far when you send them across the world. Consider making micro loans to invest in low-income entrepreneurs to help them start or expand their businesses. Or make a donation to a community that is rebuilding after a tragedy, such as the typhoon in the Philippines. Send funds to support families and children whose communities have been devastated by unsanctioned military actions. You can also contribute to emerging community foundations in developing countries or regions.



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12. Offer challenge grants.

Jump-start an organization's development efforts by offering a matching grant. For example, promise to donate \$10,000 if they can secure three more gifts of \$10,000 each. Your gift will inspire both the grantee and other donors. Challenge grants have been known to help organizations raise much more money than their initial goal stated, inspiring entire families, faith-based organizations, schools, businesses, and others to get involved in the effort.

Small gifts can create ripple effects that help you reach far beyond your initial impact. Remember that with each gift you make, no matter the size, you are helping to empower others, encouraging new and different partnerships and laying the groundwork for future accomplishments. Make a list today of three ways that you can start to make big change with small grants, and ask the rest of your foundation staff or board to do the same. Then, get together and choose a few ways in which you will use a small grant or two within the next two months to start your own ripple in the pond.

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