

An aerial photograph of the Kansas City skyline at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and purple. In the foreground, a large, light-colored building with three prominent arched entrances is visible. To its right, a multi-lane highway stretches into the distance. The city skyline is filled with various buildings, including several tall skyscrapers. The overall scene is a vibrant and detailed view of the city.

GreenLight Fund | Kansas City

A CASE FOR COMMUNITY CONSULTANTS AS A GRANTMAKING STRATEGY

The report is intended for both internal and external audiences, including community collaborators and the broader philanthropic community, to inspire and inform equitable practices in grant making and community-driven solutions through the implementation of similar approaches.

PREPARED BY



ROOTED STRATEGY

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The GreenLight Fund is a national nonprofit organization that aims to address economic mobility and opportunity gaps in high-poverty urban areas across the United States. The organization's model centers on a community-driven process to identify critical unmet needs in a city, select proven programs from around the country that can effectively address those needs, and support the expansion and launch of those programs locally.

The GreenLight Fund was founded in Boston in 2004 and has since expanded to 13 sites across the country, including greater Kansas City, forming a national network of locally-run sites. The Kansas City office (GLFKC) launched in 2018 with the mission of partnering with local leaders, organizations and residents to address systemic barriers to economic opportunity in the metro area. As part of the GreenLight network, GLFKC benefits from national best practices, resources and support, while also innovating solutions specifically tailored to the local context. This reciprocal learning allows sites to gain insights from national expertise while also disseminating locally-generated ideas across the network.

GLFKC provides multi-year unrestricted funding and active partnerships to support selected programs, known as portfolio organizations, to launch, grow impact and become sustainably rooted in Kansas City. GLFKC is focused specifically on the areas of Kansas City that face high rates of poverty, racial disparities, distressed neighborhoods and lagging social mobility. Nearly 1 in 3 children in Kansas City, MO live below the poverty line. The community also grapples with deep-rooted inequities along racial lines in income, health, education and more. GLFKC is committed to addressing the pressing barriers to economic mobility faced by families and children affected by systemic injustices.

Through the implementation of the GreenLight Method, GLFKC aims to elevate community voice, knowledge and priorities to drive collaborative solutions. Community engagement strategies in philanthropy often include activities that center perspectives from various individuals and groups, helping to inform investment processes for a truly community-driven approach to change. A core component of community engagement for GreenLight is the development of a local Selection Advisory Council (SAC) made up of diverse community collaborators to guide the selection of programs to address urgent needs.

This case study describes and highlights learnings from GLFKC's innovation in community engagement beyond the traditional use of the SAC through the development and piloting of the community consultants program. This new program builds on GreenLight's community engagement strategy to uniquely focus on deeply engaging the voices and lived experiences of historically under-resourced communities, honoring their specific needs, and, most importantly, shifting the paradigm of influence away from traditional gatekeepers.

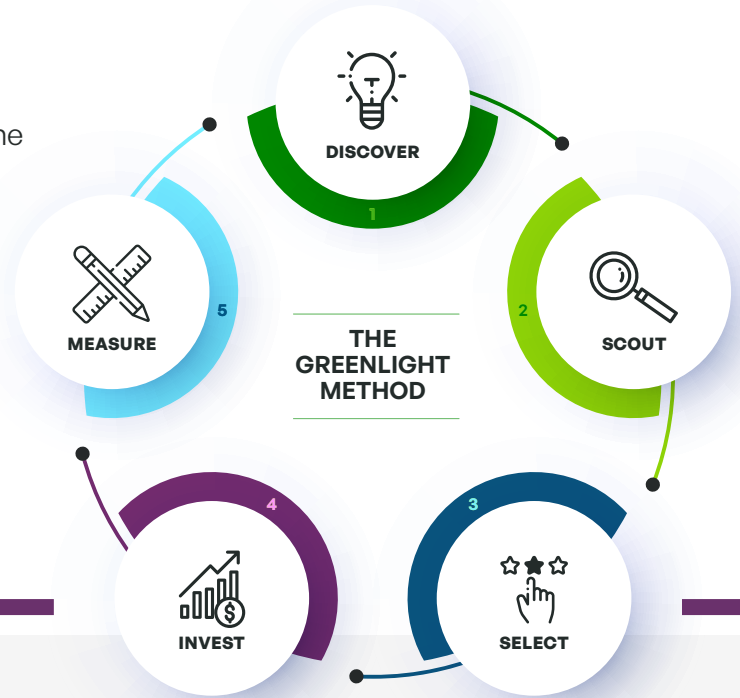
Community Consultants are local leaders who utilize their lived experience and leadership to contribute to investment decisions, in partnership with GLFKC's SAC, as part of the GreenLight Fund grantmaking method. With the addition of Community Consultants, GLFKC seeks to champion an equity-centered approach that fosters collaborative solutions, promotes inclusivity, and advances economic mobility within its grantmaking initiatives.



ABOUT THE GREENLIGHT FUND METHOD

GreenLight Fund's grant decision-making process, known as the GreenLight Method, consists of five steps to bring community-centered solutions to each of its sites across the country. The Method aims to elevate local priorities, match unmet needs with proven solutions, and drive collaborative investment and support.

This sequential process combines rigorous due diligence, community-informed decision-making, and hands-on support to drive collaborative solutions tailored to local priorities and needs. The GreenLight Method exemplifies the organization's commitment to community-centered philanthropy.



1

The first step is **Discover**.

The local GreenLight team engages in community conversations, data analysis, landscape mapping, and discussions with the Selection Advisory Council (SAC) to deeply understand the most pressing needs not adequately being addressed in the area. This phase centers on lifting up community voice and priorities.

2

Next is **Scout**.

The team researches and vets innovative nonprofits across the country that have demonstrated success in addressing needs similar to those identified locally. The goal is to find programs with evidence of impact that could be a strong fit.

3

The third step is **Select**.

Working closely with the SAC, the GreenLight Executive Director chooses one nonprofit program to invite into the community that best aligns with the elevated local needs and priorities.

4

After a selection is made, the process moves into the **Invest** phase.

GreenLight provides multi-year unrestricted funding and on-the-ground support to help launch the selected program locally. The goal is to help the program build partnerships, assemble resources, and sustainably scale impact in the community.

5

Finally, there is the **Measure** step.

GreenLight works closely with the selected nonprofit partner to establish goals, identify indicators for success, and track performance over time. The aim is to maintain accountability and drive impact.

ROOTED IN COMMUNITY: FROM PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, GreenLight Fund Kansas City recognized the need to adapt its selection process particularly related to GreenLight's core value being rooted in the community. During the pandemic, GLFKC evolved into a more deliberate and transformative approach of intentional community engagement with residents with lived experience. This shift represented a crucial move for Kansas City, where the intention was greater community representation with the inclusion of community members most affected by the issues being addressed.

Previously, GLFKC's Selection Advisory Council (SAC) had served as the primary strategy for community engagement, but it became evident that the actual beneficiaries of investment decisions needed to be an integral part of the conversation. As the GLFKC Executive Director Sarah Courtney Haberberger aptly stated:



Our goal is to invest in solutions that work for the community. The people who live in our communities have dreams and hopes and know what is best to help them achieve it. Therefore, they are best positioned to make decisions.

Sarah Courtney Haberberger
Executive Director
GreenLight Fund Kansas City

The pivot to more intentional community engagement was sparked, in part, by critical feedback from the SAC in early 2020. Council members advocated for “more organic processes” that bring in “community voice” and “boots on the ground” perspectives. This constructive input from community leaders got the ball rolling.

To deeply understand how families were coping with the pandemic and what support was most needed, the team pioneered a new community engagement approach during the Discover phase of the 2020-2021 selection cycle by initiating conversations with community residents. GLFKC recruited individuals who sought services, such as food access, from local nonprofit agencies. GLFKC staff conducted virtual interviews and focus groups, hearing directly from these community members about their experiences. These conversations revealed personal experiences and pressing community needs that would help shape GreenLight's focus areas for investment.

It's a brilliant way to engage with the community in a way that is respectful and honoring of their time and talents.



Erica Andrade
Executive Director, El Centro
Greenlight Fund SAC Member

The common themes and insights revealed during the Discover phase were so insightful that GLFKC wanted to go even further. GLFKC continued to engage community residents through the Scouting phase with more targeted focus group discussions that aligned with identified focus areas. This second round of focus groups is where GLFKC began to identify a few natural leaders to serve in a paid consultant role. This is how the community consultant program began.

As the 2020-2021 selection cycle progressed, the team brought on nine Community Consultants to participate throughout the steps of the Greenlight Method. These consultants, who were natural leaders in their communities, joined exploratory calls with potential portfolio organizations and prospecting calls with potential local partners. They also attended debrief meetings with the GLFKC team.

ROOTED IN COMMUNITY: FROM PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE *Cont'd.*

Community Consultants provided invaluable guidance alongside the Selection Advisory Council when choosing between finalists. Since this was a pilot program, there was no predefined viewpoint on how to engage the Community Consultants. The research and insights from the field of community engagement in grantmaking points to some best practices, which include active communication and feedback loops. These practices were essential for onboarding the Community Consultants. GLFKC trained the Community Consultants by preparing for the next steps in real-time, such as providing preliminary information about the groups they would meet with and hosting debrief sessions to ensure everyone was aligned and informed.



In moving from principle to practice, our motivation is to be authentic and get real feedback from our community. In practice, GreenLight Fund is open to transparency, sincerely considering input from others, and allowing the true needs voiced by people to shape our priorities and guide our actions.

Danielle Robinson

Program Manager
GreenLight Fund Kansas City

GLFKC drew inspiration from other GreenLight Fund sites, particularly Detroit and Boston, which had already begun experimenting with similar approaches to community engagement. The GLFKC team combined elements of what had worked at other sites with their understanding of Kansas City's unique context. Notably, GLFKC pioneered the concept of compensating all residents who participated in community engagement activities at a fair market rate that was determined based on local research analyzing how community members are compensated for focus groups and similar activities.

GLFKC operationalized the community consultant program by creating a toolkit to guide the work, including templates for interviews, focus groups, and engagement plans. GLFKC staff began defining the role of Community Consultants, outlining their number of hours, work dates, incentives, pay structure and methods (Community Consultants would be compensated at a rate of \$50 per hour, regardless of the meeting's duration), and responsibilities. This demonstrated the organization's commitment to building the infrastructure to sustain this approach over the long term.

Building on this foundation, GLFKC expanded its community engagement efforts for the 2022-2023 cycle using a similar method as in prior cycles. As COVID restrictions eased, the GLFKC team was able to transition to a hybrid model, incorporating virtual and in-person focus groups. Four Community Consultants*, including two previous Community Consultants, were brought on once again, this time taking on even greater leadership roles. They facilitated meetings with finalist organizations and provided key guidance to the SAC and GreenLight in choosing a portfolio organization.

Extremely fascinating how community can be impacted with tools/resources received. Everyone has something to give to Kansas City. A healthy society starts with healthy people.



Germaire

Community Consultant
GreenLight Fund Kansas City

Across GreenLight's selection cycle steps, GLFKC intentionally shifted towards more participatory engagement, seeking to share power and prioritize tangible, relevant experiences that align with the site's larger goals. The strategy evolved to engage community members, build trust and relationships, and empower Community Consultants to take on leadership roles more deeply. This evolution aligned with GLFKC's values of centering community voice, building mutually beneficial partnerships, and confronting systemic inequities. Seeing the success of community engagement strategies in Kansas City, GreenLight sites across the country shifted budgets and resources towards localized community engagement work. Deeper community engagement practices have become a core part of how GLFKC and GreenLight sites nationwide live out their values and advance equity.

*The 2022-2023 selection cycle consisted of one focus area, while the 2020-2021 selection cycle included two focus areas, with four consultants for each priority.

2020-2021 SELECTION CYCLE

MAY 2020

Pandemic pivot to conduct virtual 1-on-1 interviews and focus groups to understand how families were coping during COVID-19. Focus groups revealed themes that helped determine focus areas for the selection cycle

WINTER 2021

Hired nine Community Consultants to participate in virtual management team calls and site visits with potential portfolio organizations. Provided guidance to SAC on finalists

FALL 2021

Community Consultants participated in debrief focus groups to document their experience

2022-2023 SELECTION CYCLE

WINTER 2022

Hired four Community Consultants to participate in virtual calls and site visits with finalist portfolio organizations

FALL 2022

Transitioned to a hybrid model with virtual and in-person focus groups and conversations with residents most proximate to focus areas. A Kansas City-based consulting group helped facilitate Discover phase focus groups

MARCH 2022

Started a new selection cycle, beginning with virtual 1-on-1 conversations with residents

SPRING 2023

Community Consultants took on leadership roles by facilitating meetings with finalists. Provided guidance and perspective to SAC during investment discussions

SUMMER 2023

Community Consultants participated in a case study to document their experience over two selection cycles

Community Consultant Cohort 1

- Expanded reach by starting with 1-on-1 conversations
- Started with focus groups to understand community needs during the pandemic
- Later brought on Community Consultants to participate throughout selection process

Community Consultant Cohort 2

- Transitioned to a hybrid model of virtual and in-person meetings to continue building relationships and trust
- Once Community Consultants were selected, they took on more leadership roles by leading a number of meetings with finalist organizations

WEAVING COMMUNITY VOICE INTO THE GREENLIGHT METHOD

Community engagement spans all aspects of GreenLight’s work, including the implementation of the Method. It is also localized and enriched by site-specific practices designed to build authentic relationships and partnerships with community members most proximate to and/or who have lived experience confronting barriers to economic opportunity. As part of GreenLight’s local focus, site staff have discretion to design practices that are responsive to the needs and assets of their communities in order to achieve the strategic intent of their work. These practices range from moments of outreach and input to longer-term collaborations with community members.

The community consultant approach piloted by GLFKC builds on the traditional community engagement approaches within the GreenLight Method, and also places more focus on continuous engagement, relationship-building, and leadership development throughout the process. The challenge and opportunity lay in making intentional community engagement integral to each stage. On the front end, the approach was broad and deep, involving quantitative data analysis and discussions with residents through focus groups to understand community needs and opportunities.



Without Community Consultants, the work would get done, but this process is made better because we come from a different viewpoint or perspective. It helps the funders make smarter investments.

Tonya

Community Consultant
GreenLight Fund Kansas City

Once focus areas were identified, GLFKC worked to build a pipeline of portfolio organizations within those areas. This involved an iterative approach, delving deeper into focus areas and uncovering potential programs for investments, through in-depth interviews and discussions.

There are two examples, beginning with the 2020 selection cycle, that highlight GLFKC’s evolving approach to community engagement:

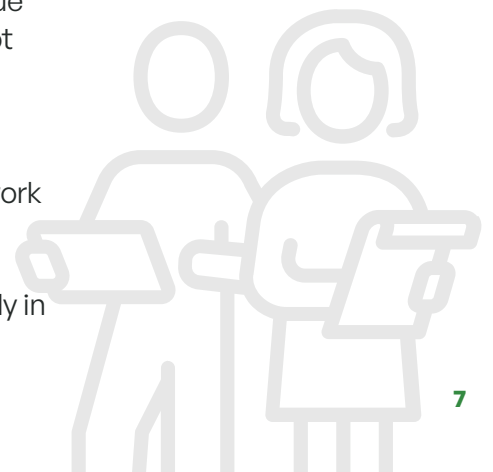


During the Scouting phase, management team calls were held between the GLFKC team, prospective organizations’ program teams, and Community Consultants. Including Community Consultants at this phase signaled to organizations that community engagement was a critical component for successful replication. With their participation, the selection was narrowed down to 6-8 potential programs.



In the final, more intensive diligence phase, Community Consultants took on a more active role. They attended numerous meetings, including finalists’ virtual site visits, and played a key role in designing agendas and hosting meetings. Their unique perspective led to questions that the GLFKC team might not have thought to ask.

As the community engagement process evolved, the GreenLight Fund network began to shift practice as well. GreenLight demonstrated its dedication to equity and community centered investment by approving a new budget line item, allocating specific community engagement dollars for each site actively in a selection cycle.



MEET THE KANSAS CITY COMMUNITY CONSULTANTS

Tonya, age 62

Tonya is an African American woman who was born and raised in Kansas City, MO. She first got involved with GreenLight Fund Kansas City as a Community Consultant because someone from GLFKC shared with her a community consultant job description, and she saw it as an opportunity to help improve lives in her community. Tonya found meaning in having a seat at the table to share her perspective and advise on critical decisions. She valued feeling that her voice was heard and respected throughout the process, and feels that she was an active contributor to solutions. She would tell others that serving as a Community Consultant is a great chance to create positive change.

Maribel, age 37

Maribel is a Hispanic woman and mother who resides in Kansas City. She became a Community Consultant because she wanted to share ideas, learn from others, and contribute to her neighborhood. Maribel appreciated the chance to provide thoughts on issues affecting her community. She also valued the opportunity to receive income by participating. Maribel believes being a consultant enabled her to express herself and propose possible solutions to local problems. She would tell others it's a great way to have your voice heard on community matters.

Aryonna, age 29

Aryonna is an African American woman who decided to become a Community Consultant so she could influence decisions that would help people like herself. She felt it was impactful for people of her demographic to have their perspectives elevated and input considered. Aryonna believes the experience let her voice be heard on behalf of her broader community. She would tell others that being a consultant presents a meaningful opportunity to provide input that can lead to positive community impact.

Germarie, age 30

Germarie is a young Hispanic woman eager to assist her community. She chose to participate as a consultant in order to learn and help. Germarie would tell others that becoming a Community Consultant enables you to support your neighborhood and neighbors. For her, it was a chance to contribute to something larger than herself.

The process allowed each of these women to share their views, feel heard, and directly participate in shaping solutions to local issues. They valued having the chance to collaborate and put their diverse perspectives to work for the greater good. The experience was empowering and eye-opening. Most importantly, it allowed them to act on their desire to create meaningful change in their communities.

PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNITY CONSULTANTS FROM A PORTFOLIO ORGANIZATION:

Food Connect

Founded in Philadelphia, Food Connect uses technology and logistics expertise to bridge community food system gaps, partnering with local food and hunger organizations to provide equitable food rescue and redistribution, delivering food affordably and reliably and designing food programs that improve health outcomes. Their hunger relief tech solution is now a network of more than 1,300 partners across six states delivering 200,000 last mile meals monthly. Food Connect is a GreenLight Fund portfolio organization in Kansas City as well as the San Francisco Bay Area in California.

Food Connect works with organizations like food pantries, schools, and federally-qualified health centers with the goal of reaching 70,000 Kansas Citians over four years through a combination of food rescue, meal delivery and food programming. This work officially launched in Kansas City in October 2023.

During the 2022-2023 selection cycle, Food Connect staff regularly interacted with the Community Consultants as part of the selection and diligence process. Aurica Donovan, National Director of Development and Impact at Food Connect, provided the following insights on her organization's experience with the Community Consultants:



Going through GreenLight Fund Kansas City's selection process was an intense experience that was a "little nerve-wracking" because the stakes were high: Food Connect had to make a case for why it's a worthy organization. That required a deep commitment to understanding and speaking to the unique local context, so Food Connect spent time learning about the Kansas City market and the unique characteristics of the community, such as the varied community priorities across the dividing lines of Kansas and Missouri.



Food Connect felt initial skepticism or "mistrust" coming from Community Consultants who wanted proof that Food Connect could truly help the Kansas City community and not just leave after getting funding. There were references to other organizations in the past coming in, shaking things up, then leaving. Food Connect had to prove that it was committed, so building authentic relationships was key to overcoming this skepticism. Having Community Consultants injected a layer of authenticity - they asked direct questions and didn't let Food Connect "BS" them. Community Consultants wanted Food Connect to not only tell them what we would do in the community, but also to show them.



The community consultant engagement pushed Food Connect to accelerate forming partnerships with local organizations earlier than usual, even before funding was confirmed. A member of Food Connect's leadership team volunteered with local partner organizations, and this kind of hands-on engagement helped build real relationships and gain insights into their needs.



By teaming up with the folks who really know the community's needs, we quickly figured out where we could help the most.

Aurica Donovan

Food Connect
GreenLight Fund Kansas City Portfolio Organization

INSIGHTS LEARNED FROM THE COMMUNITY CONSULTANT PROGRAM

While the community consultants program at GLFKC has not been without its challenges, it has undeniably brought significant value to all parties involved. This initiative extends beyond grantmaking; it stands as a testament to community stewardship, forging trust, and exposing individuals to the essence of being a good neighbor while making wise use of resources. From the perspective of those who served as Community Consultants, it meant much more than just participation—it signified having access to deeper insights about their communities. It meant cultivating a heightened awareness and analysis of the intricate problems and potential solutions. Above all, it meant having the power to actively inform the decision-making process.



No one knows what we're going through but us. Without Community Consultants, how would you really know if you're helping.

Aryonna

Community Consultant
GreenLight Fund Kansas City

For Community Consultants, the program presented a unique opportunity for both professional and personal development. They were not merely thrown into the role; rather, they were prepared through guided mentorship and encouraged to conduct their own research. This research spanned various aspects, from gaining a comprehensive understanding of the geographical nuances of Kansas and Missouri to delving into the organizations and services under consideration. They even explored videos on how to effectively express themselves as English language learners. What's more, Community Consultants had the chance to assume leadership roles, such as leading meetings and preparing meeting agendas.

Challenges and Constraints

As with any evolving program, there were challenges, tradeoffs, and lessons to be learned. The linear nature of the GreenLight Method sometimes clashed with the need for flexibility and relationship-building, which is a core condition for community engagement. This occasionally led to tough choices and disappointments, particularly given the time commitment required for a small staff with limited capacity.

Another tradeoff was the potential missed opportunities to build a stronger GLFKC brand. While the focus had been on the community consultants program, there were potential opportunities related to growing the funder network or other vital community stewardship initiatives that might have been overlooked due to limited staff capacity. With only a small team, GLFKC has had to make strategic choices about where to allocate time and resources. Balancing these considerations remains an ongoing challenge for GLFKC as they continue to refine their community engagement approach and optimize staff capacity to take full advantage of engagement opportunities.

While the preparation for grantmaking activities was primarily informational, equipping consultants with essential information about the organizations they would encounter and questions to ask, some Community Consultants expressed a desire for more comprehensive training. They sought a more hands-on approach, potentially involving mock training to illustrate what meeting participation would entail.

There is recognition of a potential selection bias, as individuals who participated often had access to transportation, technology, and other resources. GLFKC acknowledged the need for a more representative set of Community Consultants to broaden perspectives. The question remains of how to reach deeper into the community to involve a more representative group of consultants.

INSIGHTS LEARNED FROM THE COMMUNITY CONSULTANT PROGRAM *Cont'd.*

Opportunities and Wins

The unique perspective and lived experiences of Community Consultants proved invaluable in spotting critical gaps or service opportunities that might have eluded others. For instance, during the review of a program assisting people in applying for the SNAP program, one Community Consultant actively used the tool to apply for SNAP benefits and identified a valuable feature that she recommended the organization promote more prominently. Another consultant raised a significant question about sustaining benefits once they were received—a question that may not have surfaced without the input of someone who directly benefited from SNAP. In essence, Community Consultants brought a fresh set of eyes, direct experience, and a unique perspective that added depth to the grantmaking process.

Moreover, Community Consultants played a pivotal role in helping other stakeholders, such as the SAC and staff, prioritize issues, perspectives, and questions that might not have received the same level of attention without their involvement. Their contributions enriched the deliberation process and ensured that a wider range of voices and concerns were heard.

In an unexpected twist, one Community Consultant not only contributed her insights but also personally benefited from the program. She utilized the financial literacy services of the potential GLFKC grantee by opening her first savings account—an example of the reciprocal nature of the initiative.

The opportunities we have created for Community Consultants are leading into community stewardship - exposing people to different aspects of what it means to be a good neighbor.

Danielle Robinson

Program Manager
GreenLight Fund Kansas City

It means belonging to a group of people who want the well-being and improvement of others. Being part of a team that works to do their best. It has given me the opportunity to talk to my kids about the importance of working hard to help others.

Maribel

Community Consultant
GreenLight Fund Kansas City



CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE COMMUNITY CONSULTANT PROGRAM

Throughout the journey of the community consultants program at GLFKC, insights have emerged that inform the program's potential future evolution.

One possibility on the horizon is exploring expanded elements of community engagement, with Community Consultants taking an even greater leadership role in shaping community-driven processes within GreenLight. This could involve:

- Investing in the development, leadership, and advocacy capacity of community members already civically active in their communities.
- Evolving the leadership role of Community Consultants by engaging them to guide the future evolution of GreenLight selection processes and participatory grantmaking approaches.

There are also opportunities to diversify the perspectives represented through Community Consultants, such as:

- Recruiting more youth and representatives from traditionally underrepresented groups.
- Providing access to technology and evening volunteer time to reduce barriers to participation.
- Exploring term limits and organizational structures to support sustained community engagement.
- At the same time, it will be important to continue honoring the talents and experiences current SAC members bring and their ongoing contributions.

Broader community engagement efforts could involve:

- Supporting Community Consultants' external interests and opportunities beyond GreenLight activities.

The community consultant program has demonstrated the profound reciprocity and mutual learning that comes from authentic community engagement. As the program continues to evolve, there are exciting opportunities to scale impact by empowering community leaders to guide decisions, processes, and partnerships. Most importantly, the community's voice and priorities must remain at the heart of this work.

Hearing the community perspective is a game-changer. We come to better solutions when we have a diversity of voices at the table. Community Consultants are involved in the entire process and that's why it's working. They are able to see the fruition at the end of it.

Leigh Anne Taylor Knight

Executive Director
DeBruce Foundation &
GreenLight Fund Kansas City
SAC Member

Don't let go of the Community Consultants! Always get different points of view from different people. More people = more insight.

Aryonna

Community Consultant
GreenLight Fund Kansas City



REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GREENLIGHT FUND KANSAS CITY

GreenLight Fund Kansas City's experience piloting and evolving a strategy to more deeply engage community members with lived experience in grantmaking processes has provided profound learning about what it takes to engage a community authentically and the kinds of questions an organization should consider before embarking on similar initiatives. Here, GLFKC's executive director, Sarah Courtney Haberberger, and program manager, Danielle Robinson reflect on the lessons they learned.



What advice do you have for grantmaking organizations that are exploring ways to embed community engagement in their processes?

SARAH:

Be sure that internally you start with two things - 1) a universally understood organizational definition of community engagement and 2) clearly defined goals aligned with the organization's mission.

We learned that the word community engagement means different things to different people. Early on as we developed our strategy, we struggled to advocate for additional resources in the organization to support the execution of our plans because we didn't have a shared definition and common language. We also needed to articulate how our goals for the community consultant program and other community engagement activities were directly tied to our mission and values.



DANIELLE:

Authentic community engagement is an investment in people and in relationships. That investment requires organizational resources - financial, time, and energy. As we began this work in 2020, we approached our compensation strategy for individuals who engaged in interviews, focus groups, and the community consultant program the same way that we approach hiring any outside consultant - with respect for their time, value, and contributions to our process.



Suggestions:

- Articulate compelling goals that align with the organization's overall mission to center community voice
- Develop a definition for community engagement to include the depth of the relationship and the specific resident population to engage for each strategy
- Identify sustainable financial support to fund the initiative and allocate resources to the appropriate organization departments
- Establish a contract in partnership with participants and a compensation structure for community engagement participants
- Hire experienced community engagement professionals and provide technical support for current staff

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GREENLIGHT FUND KANSAS CITY *Cont'd.*



How did you cultivate trust and value add for community participants?

DANIELLE:

Any engagement with the community requires trust, which is built or rebuilt over time. As an organization that was new to Kansas City, it was essential to develop trust in the communities we wanted to engage.

That meant two things - 1) we needed to invest the time to build those relationships and 2) we needed to build partnerships with existing trusted community organizations. We also had to remember that our community members may have had negative experiences with previous outreach activities. The time it takes to mend trust in a skeptical community is unknown, so we paid attention to thoughtfully building and validating relationships one person at a time.



Suggestions:

- Demonstrate trustworthiness - be honest, transparent, and admit fault
- Develop guiding principles to cultivate a community engagement practice that prioritizes resident voice
- Join established meetings and committees where residents gather regularly
- Recruit participants from partners with similar equity goals
- Build into the discussion with diverse community collaborators, opportunities for mutual learning and collaborative problem-solving



What do you know now that you wish you had known when you began this work?

SARAH:

There's a quote from Quincy Jones - 'leave room for the magic' that really became a mantra for me in this work. Quincy was talking about leaving space for creativity to walk through the door when making music but in the context of community, I learned that we needed to make thoughtful plans but not become so wed to them that we couldn't see opportunities or make pivots.

It also meant that we needed to pause frequently and reflect on our progress and where we needed to do better. Sometimes being responsive meant that our internal timelines needed to be adjusted, so we also had to remain flexible and adaptive. While grantmaking processes might be linear, relationship building is not.



Suggestions:

- Have adaptable timelines that both demonstrate results and meet the organization's investment priorities
- Proactively design evaluation and reflection practices that document learnings and communicate impact
- The community engagement plan must be adaptive and responsive to unpredictable developments

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GREENLIGHT FUND KANSAS CITY *Cont'd.*



How did you integrate community engagement activities into your existing grantmaking processes?

DANIELLE:

Intentionally embedding deeper community engagement and new community engagement strategies into our process was one of the bigger challenges we faced. Grantmakers typically have predetermined timelines for investment cycles and specific roles for staff and community.

We had to simultaneously hold fidelity to our existing model while also introducing new relationships and community engagement practices. It was important for us to acknowledge and address that tension - understanding where we could be flexible and where our boundaries were. Additionally, it was important to be clear about roles and decision-making authority.



Suggestions:

- Identify what components of an investment strategy will benefit from intentional long-term engagement with residents with lived experience
- Be clear about specific roles and limitations of the grantmaking process, including what group has the final decision-making authority
- Know where a plan requires broad engagement and where deeper engagement practices, such as Community Consultants are needed that prioritize continuous communication, inquiry, and feedback
- Provide clarity for Community Consultants with a role description that includes a list of responsibilities and their participation timeline
- Recognize what power dynamics are present on an advisory council with people of privilege vs people with lived experience



KEY TERMS DEFINED

GreenLight Fund Annual Selection Cycle

A selection cycle is a series of steps defined by the GreenLight Method to select and invest in a proven program that matches a community-identified need. On average, a selection cycle is 12-16 months from the kick-off of the Discover phase to executing the engagement agreement with the portfolio organization. The selection cycle is designed to focus on investments where they will have the most impact.

Selection Advisory Council

An intentionally diverse group of leaders and experts from all sectors of the community. SAC members partner with the GreenLight staff throughout the process including identifying and vetting organizations based on their potential to meet local unmet needs with measurable results and significant impact. GreenLight recruits and accepts new SAC members on an ongoing basis who can add value to the current membership, meet the member profile, and fulfill the required one-selection cycle commitment, including 3-4 meetings.

Portfolio Organization

A portfolio organization is a nonprofit organization selected and funded by GreenLight to implement evidence-based programming that meets the unmet needs identified by the community, has measurable results, is scalable, and is in alignment with the site's strategic goals and objectives. The portfolio consists of a group of strategic organizations that address the priority needs as defined by the site's community and have been brought to the community to help remove barriers to inclusive prosperity for individuals and families.

Management Team Calls

A deeper conversation with a prospective organization's leadership team to better understand the organization's mission, program model, evidence-based outcomes, scale readiness, high-level program costs, and high-level commitment to racial equity. Organizations are selected for management team calls based on feedback gathered from the community during the Discover and Scout phases of GreenLight's Method.

Site Visits

As part of full diligence with a potential portfolio organization, site visits allow GreenLight staff an opportunity to experience the program model first-hand, understand the model and its impact from different perspectives (including the program participant), and deepen conversations with key organizational staff and other internal and external collaborators – including members of the local and national staff and leadership team, board, funders, etc. The visits are conducted with up to three organizations that meet the criteria of feasibility in a new market. While most site visits are done in-person, some portions of site visits can be done virtually.

COMMUNITY CONSULTANT JOB DESCRIPTION

About Greenlight Fund

Since its founding in 2004, GreenLight Fund has worked at the intersection of social innovation and community needs. GreenLight Fund focuses on identifying the most urgent barriers to economic mobility for families and children impacted by systematic injustices and addressing them by selecting and bringing in the country's best social innovations that have proven results. We do this by running a process in our communities that brings together key local leaders and people with lived experiences to:

- Identify critical, unmet needs in our community.
- Find and bring innovative, entrepreneurial social programs into the community that can have a significant, measurable impact in addressing those needs.
- Galvanize local support to help programs reach and sustain impact in the new city

We have successfully run this investment selection process in our thirteen sites: Boston, San Francisco Bay Area, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Detroit, Charlotte, Atlanta, Kansas City, the Twin Cities, Baltimore, Newark, Chicago, and Denver-collectively helping more than 400,000 annually. To learn more about the GreenLight Fund, please visit www.greenlightfund.org.

2022-2023 GreenLight Fund Community Consultants

The primary role of the Community Consultant is to serve as a link between the community and GreenLight Fund Kansas City, strengthening our commitment to removing barriers to resident voice in the grant-making process. The consultant will spend a considerable amount of time participating in the investment selection process sharing his or her experience from a local context and speaking up on the issues that matter most. In collaborating with GreenLight Fund's Selection Advisory Council (SAC), Community Consultants additional perspective during the investment process ensures the Kansas City team invests in solutions that meet the needs of Kansas City families.

Responsibilities

- Attend and participate in Management Team Calls with potential candidates, GreenLight Fund staff, Kansas City's SAC, and other Community Consultants. Management Team calls are meetings with potential organizations' executive teams to learn more about their program's model and how their programming will support Kansas City residents. All calls are virtual.
- Attend and participate in Virtual Site Visits with up to three prospective organizations. Site visits are an opportunity to dive deeper into understanding the organization's model and its impact from different perspectives including program participants, key organizational staff, and other internal and external collaborators such as board members. The virtual calls are an opportunity for Kansas Citians to ask questions about the organization's mission, values, financial sustainability, and program related questions.
- Participate in two SAC meetings and local meetings with Kansas City community organizations.
- Lead biweekly meetings to discuss and review organizations that are potential candidates for Kansas City's pipeline for investment. Lead and facilitate other meetings where appropriate during the investment selection process.
- Alongside the SAC, advise GreenLight Fund Kansas City's Executive Director in the final decision-making stages of the investment selection cycle and attend final presentations by the organizations in May.

COMMUNITY CONSULTANT JOB DESCRIPTION *Cont'd.*

Time Commitment and Hours per Week

The community consultant role is a seasonal part-time commitment from December to May. Hours will vary per week. This will include 30-minute to 1-hour onboarding and 1-hour debrief sessions to review organizations as a group. Type of activities:

- Virtual meetings with national and local organizations and leaders
- Debrief meetings with GreenLight Fund Kansas City
- Surveys or other small written assignments

Compensation

Community Consultants are compensated \$50/hour. Hours will vary per week. Consultants will need to complete a 1099. At the end of each month, you will receive your total compensation for hours completed. Types of activities:

- Attendance at virtual meetings and in-person meetings when appropriate
- Attendance at debrief meetings facilitated by GreenLight Fund Kansas City
- Completion of surveys or other small written assignments

Technology

Consultants are required to have internet access with acceptable devices to accommodate Zoom video conferencing.

GreenLight Fund | Kansas City

This report was produced by Rooted Strategy, a strategy consulting firm based in Kansas City.

Kathryn Evans, President of Rooted Strategy, was the lead consultant and author for this case study. Interviews and analysis were provided by Lindsay Harmon, Project Consultant at Rooted Strategy.

The Rooted Strategy team completed interviews with four Community Consultants, two staff of GreenLight Fund Kansas City, and two members of the Selection Advisory Council (SAC), and a member of Food Connect which is a portfolio organization of GLFKC.

Interviews took place in August, September and November of 2023.

