



**FLGBTQI + ADAM Queer Youth
Initiative:
Reflections from the First
Foundation Cohort**

Funders for LGBTQ Issues seeks to mobilize philanthropic resources that create equity, enhance the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer communities, and advance racial, economic and gender justice

Prepared by:
N. Ordover

ADAM funding collaborative:
Ralph Alpert
Mike Dively
Weston Milliken

Funders for LGBTQ Issues Staff:
Bryan E. Glover, Communications Officer
Nancy Ordover, Program Director
Marvin Webb, Director of Operations and Member Services
Karen Zelermyer, President & CEO

116 East 16th Street, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10003
Tel 212-475-2930
Fax 212-475-2532
www.lgbtfunders.org
www.lgbtracialequity.org

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The FLGBTQI + ADAM Queer Youth Initiative: Reflections from the First Foundation Cohort

In 2007, the ADAM funding collaborative of Ralph Alpert, Mike Dively and Weston Milliken worked with Funders for LGBTQ Issues to launch a matching grants program designed to support and serve LGBTQ youth. Four years after the FLGBTQI + ADAM Queer Youth Initiative began, we spoke with foundation staff in the first cohort about their participation in this project and what it revealed about engaging youth, the value (monetary and otherwise) of matching programs for small grants, and the proven potential of these programs to create outsized returns on investment.

Each of the participating foundations received a grant of \$22,500 over a three year period with a 1:1 required match and was expected to award at least \$15,000 a year in grants that ranged from \$500 - \$4,000. These grants could be for general operating costs, project-specific support, or seed funding. The initiative prioritized funder applicants engaged with organizations using an intersectional lens and serving LGBTQ youth – particularly youth of color, young women, transgender & gender non-conforming youth, low-income youth, and youth living in rural areas. Preference was given to foundations whose grantee partners institutionalized youth involvement in organizational governance. Likewise, youth representation on the grants decision-making body was stipulated in the RFP circulated by FLGBTQI+ADAM Queer Youth Initiative.

ENGAGING YOUTH

One of the conditions for receiving funding was that youth (under 25) be represented on the grants-making body. In strategy and impact, this turned out to be one of the initiative's most significant characteristics. The four foundations interviewed here ran the gamut in their approach – from having a preexisting youth grants review panel ready to go to needing to retool their youth engagement to better drive their grantmaking process.

Berks County Community Foundation (BCCF) in Reading, Pennsylvania already had a youth advisory committee (YAC) when the FLGBTQI + ADAM Queer Youth Initiative put out its first RFP. Kevin K. Murphy, president of BCCF, says he didn't have any interest in setting up a committee of adults with youth representation. He wanted the committee to be all youth. "We went to our kids [on the YAC] and said, 'Look, you already do one round of grantmaking a year...would you like to do a second round of grantmaking? It's your call, but this is going to have some restrictions on it that you're not used to.' They were really enthusiastic about it and so we submitted the application and I let the kids do their thing."

Jeff Hedgepeth, grants program director at the Pride Foundation in Seattle, was similarly impressed by the grant review panel they assembled. “It was the first time we had an all youth grant review panel. It’s not that unusual for us to have a youth on grant review panels, but to have...seven or eight or nine of them on the same panel, we were just amazed at how seriously they took their task and how well they debated how to split up the money.”

Like BCCF, Pride Foundation had established and institutionalized relationships with youth (in Pride’s case, queer youth) prior to their involvement with this initiative. Pride was able to draw on their pool of scholarship fund participants for grants committee members. “We knew their stories, and we’d met them and they’d come to our scholarship breakfast.” Other members came via suggestions from queer youth programs that Pride had been involved with as an ally or a funder for years. While these preexisting networks went a long way toward assembling the committee, Hedgepeth also talks of the importance of offering members more than just the opportunity to sit on a grants panel. “We enticed them with going to a conference down in Portland about social justice organizing and [they] were really excited to go. If being a part of the Pride Foundation grant process went along with that then great. In the end I think they just got sucked into the process and loved it.”

The Legacy Fund of the Columbus Foundation and Milwaukee’s Cream City Foundation had very different experiences pulling together their respective grants committees. Staff at The Legacy Fund report relative ease in finding members through word of mouth. They were able to bring together youth from public and private schools – high school juniors and seniors as well as students at local colleges and universities. Fund co-chair Susan White explained, “We didn’t try to get 10 or 15, we really wanted four or five youth and then we added one or two adults to that pool, to try to keep it fairly small so that you can get something done. I think back to the three years as youth rolled on and off...all of them had some degree of participation, gave some sort of opinion or participated in the discussions. I don’t think there were any wallflowers in that group.”

For Cream City, there were some challenges: Work, family, and/or school commitments made participation in the committee difficult for many youth. Others moved away or lost interest. “Most of the youth were college students and it was hard to keep them connected,” says former executive director, Maria Cadenas. “We used representatives and leaders from Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) but found that these groups had a high leadership turnover. We had to constantly figure out, ‘How do we identify and engage them?’” Making grantmaking sound compelling to youth who were more inclined toward other sorts of involvement in their communities was also an issue. “To be honest, most of the youth weren’t that excited about

philanthropy. They wanted to be out in the streets. They wanted to be in the schools. They wanted to be in an active engagement or organizing type of activity and not in planning where the grant was going to go.”

Cream City began to involve youth through focus groups that were “instrumental to any decision that was going to be made to the granting process.” Says Cadenas, “It’s not quite the same as having them in the position of board leadership, and we knew that, but it fit our convening grant model and allowed for leadership shifts.” The foundation laid out a plan for moving forward incorporating rotating youth leadership and a deliberate effort to recruit from community colleges to ensure representation of low-income youth among the 18-25 year olds they work with.

Both Kevin Murphy and Jeff Hedgepeth remarked on the larger effects that serving on the grants committees have on youth – both queer and straight. “A number of them have become leaders in communities and colleges all over the place,” Hedgepeth relates. “Being trusted with giving away \$25,000 by Pride Foundation through this grant really did open their eyes to what youth face around the region. Some of these folks were from large metropolitan areas and took having a youth drop in center for granted. Then they read the stories of folks from Walla Walla, Washington; the kind of struggle that they’re having in putting together a queer youth center and the fear that youth had in being identified in going to the center. All of that it enriched their sense of what it’s like to be queer youth in a variety of different settings. That was very cool.”

A number of youth that served on Pride’s grants committee for this initiative are still involved with the foundation. Some of their parents have even joined grant review panels. “I would be very surprised if in the future they were not Pride volunteers or donors for a long time to come.”

BCCF’s Murphy likes to tell one story in particular of the impact that the FLGBTQI + ADAM Queer Youth Initiative had on a straight identified 16-year-old member of the YAC from a religious, conservative family. BCCF had received an application for funding for an evening drop-in program for queer youth.

He said, “I don’t think we should fund this program because I don’t agree with the lifestyle these people have chosen.” Our [YAC] advisor Rick said “Okay, but do me a favor and go on the site visit, and...if you want to come back here and argue we shouldn’t fund this for those reasons that’s fine, but go on the site visit.

The kid goes on the site visit, he comes back....[On] what ... we call youth advisory committee decision making day...he stands up to talk. The worst thing in the history of humanity is that we didn’t have video cameras running as this boy stood up and talked

about his visit to Spectrum and how he talked to the kids there and how much this program meant to them and how he realized that they were really kids just like him and they were just wrestling with a different set of issues than he was wrestling with, and he asked if he could make the presentation to our board to propose that grant.

While the composition and involvement of each grants committee was different (e.g., there were no self-identified LGBTQ youth on BCCF's YAC while both out youth and straight allies sat on the Legacy Fund's committee; Cream City made a conscious decision not to work with minors while the Legacy Fund's panel included high school juniors and seniors) the staff and board members interviewed for this piece all concur that youth leadership in these types of initiatives is vital. "Having a committee run by youth – not a committee of adults with a youth on it – works," says Murphy. "I think we would have gotten a different and not terribly interesting set of answers if the adults had run the show. They are way better grantmakers than we are." He maintains that "any community foundation CEO who tells you his grantmaking team is better than his youth advisory committee is lying. Their noses are right there on the ground and political considerations don't occur to them."

What we heard: themes and lessons learned

- A committee run by youth is critically different than a committee of adults with token youth representation and subsequently will produce vastly different results. The former is critical to cultivate and advance youth leadership on the issues that affect them.
- Youth involvement in the grant process can yield long term relationships between a foundation and the youth on its grants panel(s) and other members of their families.
- Offer youth more than just an opportunity to serve on a grants panel: The chance to build skills, go to conferences, etc. can heighten their participants' engagement with philanthropy and the larger community.

THE EXPONENTIAL POWER OF MATCHING GRANTS

Although we had two decades worth of involvement with queer youth programs around the northwest, this [FLGBTQI + ADAM Queer Youth] grant helped solidify our image as a knowledgeable partner in the arena of queer youth programming and we were able to parlay that into a much larger grant from the Gates Foundation to focus on five youth programs mainly in Washington and in Portland.

– Jeff Hedgepeth, Pride Foundation

Every respondent was unequivocal about the power of the *FLGBTQI + ADAM Queer Youth Initiative*'s small grants model to leverage more funding – particularly through the required matching grants but also via planned gifts and increased fundraising capacity among grantees.

Kevin Murphy reports that during the first matching grant BCCF “definitely had donors write us bigger checks. We definitely had donors come to us that hadn't been donors before” and not only for queer youth programming. ADAM afforded Pride Foundation a chance to approach larger foundations – including two they had not been successful with in the past – for help with the match. Maria Cadenas explains that the match provided an opening for Cream City to reach out to the surviving partner and sister of a deceased donor who had established a scholarship fund that “had a small endowment and whose restrictive structure prevented it from having the impact the donor originally intended: helping LGBT youth.”

We used the ADAM match as an opportunity to reach out to the surviving partner and sister and say, “John really wanted to help youth and you know that's what he wanted. Would you be willing to lift the restrictions and convert the assets to a general youth fund?’ We offered to keep the name of the donor fund attached to the new fund and showed how the ADAM match would allow us to grow the endowment much faster and have the ability to do bigger things. They understood that while the funds would not be matched, they would catalyze a new effort to focus on youth and agreed to the change. So...this new permanent youth fund, the John Cowles Youth Fund, wouldn't be there if that match hadn't come.

Legacy Fund co-chair Scott Dewhirst called the matching grant scenario “perfect” for organizations like theirs. “It allowed us to do grants that we probably wouldn't have been able to do before by being able to go out and issue challenges in a positive way, to get matches for the things that we would need to make these grants.”

Steve Moore, associate director for donor relations and regional giving at the Columbus Foundation, says that grants like the ones made available by the *FLGBTQI + ADAM Queer Youth Initiative* align with the Legacy Fund's strategy of enabling people to see themselves as donors:

In some ways it's an audience development program. You can't attract planned gifts or any other kind of gift unless you are able to show the value of your work. And grants do that for foundations, they allow people to see how they might contribute and be a part of that foundation...[T]he small grants become the face of us – in some ways even a little bit of the soul of the Legacy Fund – because people can buy into that and they're like 'yeah, you know what I get that, I want to be a part of that, here's my planned gift.'...**[G]rants become the marketing aspect of any foundation.**

Grantee and stakeholder convenings were cited as yet another way in which a matching grants program can be both catalyst and launching pad for extremely effective fundraising. Cadenas describes the process as it unfolded at Cream City:

[I]t was amazing; it basically turned a small grant into a way to focus and frame our youth grantmaking. We used the match as vehicle to introduce a new convening grant model. We started by committing an additional \$75,000 of our own assets to supplement the grant. Then we convened leaders and organizations working on youth issues and LGBT issues and basically said: We have this match and on top of that the foundation is committing to \$75,000 over three years towards LGBT youth. You know the needs and the community better than us, so we are inviting you to be at the table and look at needs, gaps, and identify the opportunities where these funds can have the greatest impact. The table will decide where the funds go. The area of need and most potential impact that emerged was homeless youth – specifically youth aging out of foster care 18-25 in danger of homelessness.

The match also gave us the momentum to engage other donors to help us and to see LGBT youth as part of their youth portfolios. Very quickly we had an endowed youth fund, momentum to meet the match, a commitment to help fund the grant strategies determined by our table of leaders, and a diverse and set of leaders talking about LGBT youth outside of LGBT circles.

So from our initial match from Funders [for LGBTQ Issues + ADAM] to the money that we raised on our own I can say that we easily raised close to...\$200,000.

Our grantee/convening partners developed a strong connection through convening, and such focused strategic planning that they were able to use the model and program they developed through us and respond to a Department of Housing and Urban Development proposal request. They secured an estimated \$800,000 for LGBT-specific out-of-home youth funding. **So our small investment became almost a million dollars to LGBT youth.**

What we heard: themes and lessons learned

- Matching grants can be catalysts for increased giving to your foundation and for enhanced fundraising by your grantees directly – even beyond meeting the required match.
- Matching grants allow more people to see themselves as donors and act accordingly.
- Convenings can serve as more than just sites of temporary coalescence: They can be launching pads for considerable fundraising and mobilization among community stakeholders and a sites of collaboration, practical problem-solving, and network building for grantees.

SMALL GRANTS, BIG RETURNS

“Money,” states Steven Moore, “doesn’t solve problems. The size of the grant isn’t what’s going to move the needle....Smaller grants, if they’re executed well and have buy-in can actually get a broader community engagement.” Cream City’s experience illustrates this well. Here, says Maria Cadenas, a small grant in a very localized setting – coupled with a local, public foundation well

positioned to leverage more funding and forge relationships between LGBT and non-LGBT groups – became “an igniter.” It wasn’t so much the success of the program itself, she says, but the “*connection of the community* and the focus on youth, on LGBT youth conversations, especially homeless youth. It was just dramatic. Nobody knew about this issue and then all of a sudden it was on the cover of the gay papers, it was in the straight media, there was a documentary that was produced following some of the kids that were participants in the program. It just exploded...”

Bringing organizations together – LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ alike – to move issues forward and expand the number of stakeholders is at the core of ADAM funders’ stories. The Legacy Fund found one of the greatest benefits to be the ability to draw organizations and entities not previously invested in queer youth into the conversation. Scott Dewhirst says, “I think what was most valuable to us and most satisfying was that we were able to then begin working with groups that traditionally did not reach out to this population; creating a sense of ‘this is something that we want to do, this is something that we want to put on our agenda,’ and we view that as important.” Steven Moore explains:

We don’t want to marginalize ourselves and we can’t serve our own kids and only our own kids and be all things to them. We have to rely on the mainstream a little bit. ...These grants sort of spread out...You call them *small grants*, **I call them *spread grants*. We’re able to plant that seed in multiple non-traditional organizations, which I think is probably the biggest impact.**

Small grants can also help raise the profile and increase the efficacy of public and community foundations. Their unique position in the community, together with the visibility and credibility that come from being able to support (in this instance) LGBTQ youth in culturally competent ways, can help position these foundations as the go-to resources and/or partners for donors and other funders. Jeff Hedgepeth points to ADAM funding as one reason why Pride Foundation was recently approached by donors who “turned to us for our expertise and have started an area of interest fund in focusing around youth suicide.”

Dewhirst underscores the ultimate outcome: “As a small foundation like ours, that is really getting its feet wet and getting itself established, I mean it’s crucial to us... as far as being able to use these [small grants] to network [with] other funds and to get our name out there because by getting our name out there, we are able to then move ourselves to the next level to help more people in all parts of our community.”

Jeff Hedgepeth emphasizes that a little can go a long way. “I sit back and I read evaluations that come in, and...the stories...of what they’re able to stretch [a small grant] to do are pretty amazing.

That goes from the smallest organization to an organization that might be embedded in a much larger organization and yeah, [a few thousand dollars] makes a huge difference. That might be another week that they're open or an entire year in some places."

Hedgepeth emphasizes that knowing how to structure and operationalized a small grants program is critical to its success. "We keep all of our application processes to the minimum and we don't ask them to do a lot for evaluation because we realize that [a small grant] to an organization really should support what they're doing and not have them do double the work for us."

The seeming limitations of small grants can be stretched by unquantifiable intangibles. Hedgepeth notes that even \$4,000 grants "gave a lot of those organizations a sense that they were actually going to be around for a while." Likewise, BCCF's Murphy maintains, "The dollar amounts that were available for this thing – I can't tell you it changed the world or it transformed the way we do business but I sure as hell define victory in that guy who decided that these kids were just like him only wrestling with a different set of issues. [It] is worth every penny we spent. This kid is a bright kid...this kid is going to be somebody doing something some day and if we spun him around, I'm good."

Without a doubt, his is a powerful story. For Maria Cadenas, however, a goal of longer term, communitywide change necessitated thinking beyond the initiative's time limited grantmaking. She says it was important not to let the work be seen as a "Cream City effort because it's not sustainable. It's not like Cream City could commit to a similar match again." The foundation, she says, was very clear with its grantees about the limited time commitment. "A long term vision of change is fundamental – knowing that in order to leverage money it's just not services, but it's services *and* research *and* policy making. Those three things are connected when you are trying to leverage grants to move people to a new level of conversation. The local groups are still working together on different projects that they we're not even a part of because they know each other now and they trust each other."

And that type of ongoing collaboration may be the biggest and most meaningful return any initiative can be lucky enough to realize. It is evidence of the way small and matching grants can contribute to landscape-changing outcomes.

What we heard: themes and lessons learned

- Small grants can do mighty things when funders know how to leverage these gifts and work within their limits. Among other measures, this may entail adapting simplifying application and evaluation processes so that grantees can direct their resources to the work at hand.
- Framing the work as collaborative and not as the domain of a funder is critical for sustainability. Clarity with grantees and stakeholders about the time-limited nature of the funding commitment is essential for long range, post-grant planning.
- Well-executed small grants can yield exponential results if there is buy-in from the larger community. This may translate into more organizations (including those previously uninvolved with and uncommitted to LGBTQ issues) actively participating in more conversations, providing more services (and more *culturally competent* services), and leveraging more resources for queer youth.
- Public and community foundations play a critical role in the success of small and matching grants, particularly in local settings: they know the community; they have the ability to forge relationships between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ entities; and they can leverage more funding.

CONCLUSION

For matching grants to work you have to have that trifecta of good leadership, position, and an organization that has the ability to convene and leverage relationships; some existing infrastructure based on the issue or population that you are targeting; and some existing financial relationships in the community that will immediately help accelerate those small grants.

– Maria Cadenas

More than just standard report backs, wishful thinking, or vague summations, the funders we spoke to were precise about their tactics, bottom line commitments, and fall back positions. For example, youth leadership was key and youth participation imperative. For some this came easy. For others, it entailed incentives and significant reconnoitering yet they were limber and committed enough to make it happen. The resulting impact on youth participating on review panels or active in grantee organizations or simply negotiating the realities of their own lives cannot be gauged. The effects on the foundations themselves look to include ongoing relationships with community partners, youth, their families, and other allies.

Likewise, foundation staff spoke with specificity about the power of convenings and relationship building – to foster collaboration for the long haul and to assure the work continues on beyond a

given grant period. This, along with new and growing commitments by the larger community to queer youth issues, was consistently cited by FLGBTQI + ADAM Queer Youth foundations as one of the most important outcomes of their participation in the initiative. It is due in large part to where public foundations are situated. Their intimate knowledge of local resources, the landscape of community organizations, and their subject matter expertise has given them the ability and authority to leverage small grants into something much bigger.

The individuals we interviewed were open about the strategic thinking necessary to put small grants in the service of significant change. They provided tactical guideposts – honest accounts of how they leveraged small amounts of funding and worked internally and with their grantees to effect the greatest possible impacts.

In sum, the stories of the first cohort of the *FLGBTQI + ADAM Queer Youth Initiative* demonstrate the centrality of community foundations and funds in building the kind of local support that can give queer youth programs and projects longevity far beyond the scope of initial grants. They describe an initiative that helped institutionalize commitments to LGBTQ youth not only inside these four foundations, but in the community organizations in the areas where they operate. Finally (and not surprisingly), these stories illustrate how transformative and indispensable a youth-driven process can be.