



DECOLONIZING GRANTING PRACTICES

Decolonization is a vital process to challenge and dismantle colonial systems and ideologies. It involves everyone, as colonization affects us all. To achieve it, we must take action, deconstruct settler-imposed systems that oppress Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, and address the lasting legacies of colonialism for a fairer society.

To advance decolonization, it is crucial to reevaluate and reshape the conventional approaches to grant practices. Often, traditional grantmaking perpetuates power imbalances and reinforces colonial structures without critically examining how wealth was accumulated through colonization and enslavement. Therefore, it is commendable that Laidlaw has taken significant steps towards decolonization. Some of the initiatives they have implemented include:

Streamlining Administrative Processes

A single, long, pink feather with a detailed barbed structure, positioned vertically on the left side of the page. It has a soft, painterly texture.

To alleviate the administrative burden on grantees, Laidlaw eliminates the requirement for written narrative reports. Instead, it encourages grantees to participate in roundtable reflections—a meaningful conversation between program staff and the grantee—where they can discuss the outcomes of their projects. By adopting this approach, Laidlaw enables grantees to allocate more time and energy towards project implementation rather than completing extensive reports. Verbal reports are well received and preferred by many grantees.

Embracing Trust-Based Philanthropy

Laidlaw adheres to the six principles of trust-based philanthropy from the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project. This approach prioritizes building relationships with grantees based on trust, respect, and open communication. By embracing trust-based philanthropy, Laidlaw aims to empower grantees, foster collaboration, and promote a more equitable distribution of resources. Additionally, Laidlaw also adheres to participatory philanthropy ideals which can directly incorporate grantees' feedback into grantmaking practices like the application process and reporting.

Centering Community Leadership

Laidlaw recognizes the importance of community leadership and ensures that its grantmaking practices are guided by the wisdom and expertise of Black and Indigenous communities and youth. Through the Indigenous Advisory Committee for the Indigenous Youth and Community Futures Fund, which is made up of Indigenous youth, Laidlaw actively involves the community in the decision-making process and seeks their guidance on which projects to fund. For the Youth Action Fund, the Granting Committee leans on community knowledge and expertise offered by Black and Indigenous external advisors. By centering community leadership, Laidlaw acknowledges that local communities are the experts in determining what is best for their own development and well-being.

Redefining Success and Impact

Laidlaw takes a critical stance against Eurocentric notions of success and impact. It recognizes that relying solely on quantitative measures and numbers may not capture the true value and impact of projects. Instead, Laidlaw embraces a more inclusive approach by acknowledging and valuing diverse ways of knowing, being, and doing. It encourages the consideration of alternative indicators of success that align with community priorities and goals. For example, Laidlaw may prioritize initiatives that focus on the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and wisdom, ensuring the preservation and growth of cultural heritage for younger generations. For multi-year projects tackling systemic issues such as the overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous youth in the child welfare system, Laidlaw understands the importance of moving beyond limiting metrics of success like program attendance and focus more on the impact felt by youth leaders and participants. By redefining success and impact, Laidlaw aims to break free from colonial frameworks and support initiatives that are rooted in the aspirations and values of the communities it serves.

Funding Non-Qualified Donees

Laidlaw wholeheartedly believes in funding organizations who are non-qualified donees (NQDs) as we trust communities and smaller non-incorporated groups who are on the ground to make meaningful changes. Laidlaw recognizes the colonial structure embedded within the system of incorporation and acknowledges that these processes are not accessible nor practical for all groups. Black and Indigenous organizations have historically received less funding due to far too rigorous processes and are disproportionately seen as higher risk by grantmakers, funders, and institutions.

Promoting Wellness and Wellbeing

Laidlaw embraces the concept of the 4-day work week, recognizing that it can contribute to a more equitable distribution of labour and enhance the well-being of employees. However, it's important to note that the intention is not to increase the workload in fewer days, but rather to reduce the overall workload. By adopting this approach, Laidlaw challenges the traditional work week structure and promotes a healthier work-life balance for its staff. Moreover, as part of its commitment to promoting wellness and well-being, Laidlaw generously allocated funds to cover fitness expenses, including gym memberships, for its employees.

Laidlaw recognizes that groups we fund who are impacted by legacies of colonization, criminal system, education, and child welfare systems might experience grief and loss at higher rates. Laidlaw provides supports to grantees who are grieving a loss in their groups (core team, participants, community, etc.).

Additionally, with skyrocketing inflation rates, Laidlaw gave all 2022 grantees funded by the Indigenous Youth and Community Futures Fund and the Youth Action Fund a 5% top up to their grant to cover costs of living increases.

Decolonizing grant practices is an ongoing and iterative process that requires self-reflection, learning, and continuous adaptation. Collaborate with others, including Black and Indigenous communities and organizations that are leading decolonization efforts, to develop more inclusive and equitable grant practices.

To decolonize practices, there are various approaches that can be considered. Here are some suggestions:

1. **Embrace the wisdom of the seasons:** Align your practices with the natural rhythms of the four seasons. Acknowledge the significance of summer as a time for harvesting and productivity, while recognizing winter as a season for rest and rejuvenation. Allow for extended breaks during these seasons to honor and align with the cycles of nature.
2. **Implement a 4-day work week:** Move away from the traditional 5-day work week and consider adopting a 4-day work week. However, it's important to note that the intention is not to increase the workload in fewer days, but rather to reduce the overall workload. This shift aims to promote work-life balance and well-being for individuals.
3. **Adjust working hours in winter:** Recognize the impact of shorter daylight hours in winter on productivity and mental health. Consider implementing shorter work days during this season to ensure that employees have access to sufficient natural light and are able to prioritize self-care during the darker months.
4. **Acknowledge time on the land:** Value and respect the importance of spending time on the land and returning home as an integral part of individuals' lives and well-being. Avoid viewing this time as a vacation or personal time off, but rather as a necessary aspect of connecting with cultural, ancestral, and environmental ties.



Image created by Claire Shannon-Akiwenzie