

Funding the Grassroots, Becoming Family

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2016 TJFP Panelist

I was honored to be selected as a 2016 community grantmaking panelist for TJFP. This experience included reading about 130 applications and trying to decide which ones I thought should be funded. The easy answer would have been all of them.

The applicants were doing amazing things all around the country, and working on expanding their ability to reach out to transgender and gender non-conforming people with an amazingly diverse array of ethnicities, identities, needs, and challenges.

The experience also included a weekend trip to New York City, during which I spent most of my time with the five other panelists, facilitators, and TJFP staff. This community-led funding process had clearly been fine-tuned over the course of the three previous funding years.

Six trans and gender non-conforming activists from different lived experiences and geographic areas sat down at a table, and tried to decipher how more than \$200,000 might be distributed between small grassroots groups polka-dotting cities, towns, and rural areas all across America.

It was an honor, indeed.



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We began the grantmaking panel on a Friday evening. Like each of the other panelists, I had studied all the applications thoroughly. I was a little unsure about how my small-town, Midwestern, white-influenced opinions would align with the perceptions of the other panelists.

In the back of my mind were memories of my own grant applications to TJFP in 2013 and 2014. In 2013, the Kansas Statewide Transgender Education Project (K-STEP) was awarded \$1,000 and we used that money to help fund the first two-day regional transgender conference in the state of Kansas. The following year, K-STEP's request was not funded. We were disappointed, sure, but at that point K-STEP had established itself. We had just celebrated our sixth anniversary, by which point we had provided more than 400 educational presentations across Kansas, from police departments, jails, and prisons to faith institutions, health agencies, and mental health centers.

August 26 and 27, 2016 was the fourth annual TransKansas Conference. It is hard for me to say that K-STEP would have been so successful without that first \$1,000 we were awarded from TJFP back in 2013.

Being part of the 2016 funding panel had so much meaning for me, far beyond the honor of being asked to serve. I'm not sure how TJFP did it, but the mix of lived experiences in this group of panelists seemed like it had been orchestrated with great skill. We worked together – we agreed, we disagreed, and we agreed to disagree. But I don't believe there was a moment in which I didn't see the dedication and commitment from each of the panelists.

We ended up funding most of the applicants in various amounts – out of 132 applications, we were able to give money to 102 groups.

As we finished our extraordinarily special quest, it seemed to me that we had become family in a way that always surprises me, even though it might have been predictable.

By lunchtime on Sunday, we had completed our task and took time to share thoughts and gratitudes. I shared my experiences with requesting funding from TJFP in the past – one application granted and one denied. I shared that because it gave me great comfort to know that both of my funding requests were given the same dedication and commitment that I saw around the room that weekend and I was honored to be a part of the 2016 community grantmaking panel.

Out of these grassroots efforts, led by people on the ground who are dedicating their lives to creating a better world for trans and gender non-conforming people, and with the help of the TJFP, times are changing.

I am changed. I have seen the world through the eyes of many. And I have seen honorable actions that make me believe that America is moving – even if kicking and screaming – toward the day when we will truly have liberty and justice for all.