



Community is a Verb

Glo Ross, TJFP Facilitator

Each year, TJFP brings together a group of trans and gender non-conforming activists from across the country to choose the grantees. This past year I was honored to serve as a co-facilitator for the fellows' decision-making process. It was the second year in a row that I had done so and just like the year before, I was feeling, well, nervous.

What if the fellows couldn't agree on the grantees to fund?

What if they disagreed so deeply that our process reached a stonewall, an impasse, or, worse, the point of indifference?

Facilitator anxiety is real, y'all, but what's equally real is the need to acknowledge the fears and trust—deeply trust—the process and the strength and resiliency of everyone in the room (including yourself). In those times, I've learned to just do it—even if it means doing it nervous.

Facilitator anxiety is real, y'all, but what's equally real is the need to acknowledge the fears and trust—deeply trust—the process and the strength and resiliency of everyone in the room (including yourself).

So the time eventually came and over the course of a few days, the fellows worked through hundreds of grantee applications, discussing each and every last one until all viewpoints were heard and positions



Detroit REPRESENT, Detroit, MI, 2018 TJFP Grantee

were expressed. Was it all seamless? Nope. Was it all easy? Nu-uh. But it was powerful, it was real, it was work, and it was a moving reminder that real community takes effort. The fellows dove in deep—relying on their experiences and identities, ancestors and neighbors, movement victories and setbacks, past lessons and liberatory visions, and more, in order to arrive at collective decisions. By the end of the first night, my nervousness was gone—we were going to be OK.

In reflecting on that experience, I think about the fundamental truth of community: decisions made from our collective energy and investment are more creative, powerful, and impactful than if we make them alone. As a card-carrying introvert, it pains me a little

to write that—but it's true! We all know it. The other truth is that it doesn't end there. To harness that potential, it isn't enough to just show up; we have to show up fully, authentically, and unapologetically in our truth, AND respect and honor those in the room who are doing the same. Despite our best intentions, sometimes that can be hard and it can feel easy to lose hope. And honestly, the fellows' decision-making panel is no different. But the difference is in our strength of purpose and vision. It's abundantly clear to every single person in that room that our work—the collective work of TJFP—extends far beyond the four walls we sit in and far beyond the discomfort that we feel in the moment. So we push through, knowing that on the other side of the hardness is something much greater than our individual selves.