Transformational Grants

When Wendy Steele first created the Impact100 model, she was responding to two urgent needs she saw in her community: nonprofits were under-resourced and struggling to dream big, and women wanted to give back but faced real barriers—time, money, clarity, and impact. Her solution was radical in its simplicity: bring 100 women together, pool donations of $1,000 from each, and fund a single $100,000 grant that could change the trajectory of a nonprofit and the community it serves.

The decision to award grants in $100,000 increments is not arbitrary—it's foundational to our model. It ensures transformation, honors member intent, and fills a critical gap in the funding landscape. This document explains why we hold firm to that principle—and why we intentionally choose not to divide our grants into smaller awards.

The Power of a Six-Figure Grant

- **Creates transformation, not just support.** Most grants in the $10,000–$15,000 range help nonprofits meet urgent needs—but they rarely enable strategic growth. Impact100's large grants allow nonprofits to *think big*, *plan long-term*, and *fundamentally shift how they deliver their mission*.
- **Reduces fundraising pressure.** By giving one organization a six-figure investment, we free them from the hamster wheel of short-term grant cycles, enabling them to focus on their mission.
- **Encourages bold ideas.** The size of our grants encourages nonprofits to propose visionary projects that would otherwise be out of reach.
- **Promotes long-term sustainability.** We evaluate grants not only for their immediate impact but for whether they will continue to thrive after our funding ends.

Why We Don't Split the Grant

- **We must protect donor trust.** Our members join under the clear promise that their collective donation will fund *one or more full, transformational grants.* If we dilute that commitment, we risk eroding the confidence that drives engagement and renewal.
- **Splitting grants weakens impact.** Smaller grants might provide temporary relief—but they do not create lasting change. We are not trying to be "all things to all people." Instead, we aim to *fill a unique role* in the funding ecosystem—one of the few sources of large-scale, unrestricted support.
- **Recruitment and visibility suffer when grants are small.** A $100,000 grant captures attention and drives new member interest. We've seen time and again how *the promise and delivery of transformational grants* fuels membership growth. For many of our members, it is the power of a large grant that fuels their commitment to their local chapter.

- **"Consolation grants" blur the purpose.** While it may seem kind to offer small awards to Finalists, it can confuse the clarity of our model and undercut the transformational intent of the member donation. We encourage members to support finalists independently if they wish—but the pooled funds should remain focused.

What About the Nonprofits Who Don't Win?
Even nonprofit Finalists who don't receive the grant *still benefit in powerful ways*:

- **Increased visibility** with hundreds of potential new donors.
- **Connections to other funders**—many finalists report receiving follow-up grants after being showcased by Impact100.
- **Volunteers and skills-based support** from members who were inspired by their mission.
- **Increased publicity** after being named a Finalist and through the Impact100 chapter network.
- **Ongoing recognition** and future opportunities, including applying again in the future.

This ripple effect—what we call *"The Impact of Impact100"*—ensures that our grantmaking has a broad reach, even when the funds themselves are focused.

Tips for Dealing with Questions from your Leaders and Members

Inevitably, as your chapter grows and your membership becomes more diverse, questions and suggestions about tweaking the model will arise. You may see ideas in surveys, hear comments at events, or receive off-hand feedback from members eager to "try something new." Chapter leaders may feel pressure to respond quickly—but slow, thoughtful engagement is best.

Before you act on any request to change our process, please remember this:

- 99% of the time, the root cause isn't a flawed model; it's a gap in understanding *how* and *why* it works.
- Each element of the Impact100 approach—one woman, one donation, one vote; five focus areas; 100% volunteer leadership; 100% of gifts to grants—was crafted to preserve maximum community impact, democratize decision-making, and member empowerment.
- Quick fixes or piecemeal adjustments that ignore the model's intent can weaken the very benefits our members joined to experience.

When you hear a suggestion:

1. **Pause.** Acknowledge the idea and thank the member for their deep care and concern for the chapter's success.
2. **Educate.** Offer a concise explanation of the history and purpose behind the process in question:
3. **Listen.** Ask what concerns or goals lie behind the suggestion. Members who feel heard will better appreciate the "why" once you share it.
4. **Reinforce.** Highlight how the existing model already addresses the member's underlying goal, whether it's deeper engagement, broader grant impact, or greater inclusivity.
5. **Invite exploration.** If, after education and dialogue, a true innovation still seems warranted,

propose a small-scale pilot or discussion with Impact100 Global for guidance on upholding the model's integrity.

Our strength lies in the simplicity, transparency, and proven impact of the Impact100 model. By pausing to clarify ***how*** we do what we do, and ***why*** each carefully designed element matters, you'll preserve the collaborative magic that has made us a global force for good.

Chapter leaders may face suggestions or questions about changing certain aspects of the Impact100 model. They may appear in answers to surveys or simply mentioned at events or in casual conversation. It's tempting to eagerly respond by making changes.

However, based on over 24 years of experience, 99% of the time, the questions or suggestions arise because **the member doesn't understand both the how and the why of the Impact100 model**.