



**Inatai**  
FOUNDATION

# GRANTEE ENGAGEMENT EVALUATION

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## INTRODUCTION

*Please note: Until February 1, 2023, Inatai Foundation was Group Health Foundation. This evaluation was conducted and finalized under the name Inatai Foundation. For more information, visit [www.inatai.org](http://www.inatai.org).*

Inatai Foundation, in recognizing the expertise and wisdom that communities bring, is working to transform the balance of power to ensure equity and racial justice in Washington state and beyond. As a result, Inatai funds a wide range of organizations and projects engaged in advocacy, leadership development, cultural reclamation, community healing, civic participation, organizing, anti racism work, narrative change, and much more.

Since 2018, Inatai has met with organizations engaged in transformative work across the state led by Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC); immigrants and refugees; people with disabilities; members of the LGBTQIA+ community; people living on a low income; and many who hold several of these identities and experiences. These relationships and leaders' insights have helped to shape Inatai's giving and inform how the organization approaches community engagement, grantmaking, advocacy work, research, and evaluation.

### As a result, Inatai refined and reset its values in 2022 to include:



Racial Justice



Collective Liberation



Joy



Freedom, Justice  
and an Inclusive  
Participatory  
Democracy



The Seven  
Generation  
Principle



Accountability



Learning



Abundance



Determination

As a result, Inatai refined and reset its values in 2022 to include: racial justice, collective liberation, joy, freedom, justice, and an inclusive participatory democracy, the seven generation principle, accountability, learning, determination, and abundance. Following this fundamental reset of its values, Inatai engaged Frontline Solutions to better understand: (1) how well its policies, processes, and practices align with these values, and (2) its grantees' experience of working with Inatai overall.

By engaging a third party, Inatai hoped to mitigate funder/grantee power differentials, to learn where it needs to grow and improve to best position grantees to ensure communities have the power and freedom to define health and well being in Washington State.

The findings from this report will inform Inatai's longer-term strategies to guide the Foundation's work in the years to come. In undertaking this inquiry, Inatai joins the vanguard of philanthropists challenging the status quo and embracing community-centric and trust-based philanthropy principles in the face of the vast and widening social, health, and economic disparities brought to light in the past several years.

**The report offers an overview of the research design and related findings and recommendations. To guide this inquiry, the Frontline team anchored the work in the following approaches:**

- **Leveraging data, learning, and storytelling as a catalyst for positive social change**
- **Humanizing processes and methodologies to center the voices of those closest to and impacted most directly by the work**
- **Centering learning and evaluation processes that create opportunities for co-design and partnership and values multiple forms of expertise**
- **Working with other BIPOC and allied researchers and evaluators as a movement to advance equity and disrupt harmful power dynamics in the field of learning and evaluation**

Yakima Valley community members celebrate Latina art, poetry, dance, and song at La Casa Hogar's Día de la Mujer event in March 2020.  
Photo: La Casa Hogar.





## RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design for this evaluation was intentionally crafted to align with Inatai's values and commitment to equity and racial justice. In consultation with a small advisory team at Inatai, Frontline organized the evaluation around the following research questions:

### **Policies, Processes, and Practices**

- How does Inatai embody its values and approaches through processes and practices? Where are the opportunities for growth in this respect?
- What are Inatai's areas for growth overall?
- What barriers get in the way of Inatai meeting its mission and purpose?

### **Grantee Support**

- How do grantees experience working with Inatai?
- How has Inatai lived up to its aspirations of supporting community-based assets?
- How do grantee organizations understand Inatai's mission and purpose?
- What are the indicators of a good funding partner, according to grantees?
- What hopes do Inatai grantees have for how it can or should show up as a funder?

## Evaluation Design Detail

The Frontline team collected retrospective data from 2021 grantmaking during the summer of 2022. Data collection included surveys and interviews with Inatai grantees, staff, leadership, and board members. As part of the interview process, we conducted one-on-one interviews with 29 grantees, 6 staff members, and 3 board members. Frontline also administered two surveys; one to 53 single year grant recipients and one to 114 multi-year grant recipients. The single-year survey had a 35% response rate, and the multi-year survey had a 58% response rate.

The survey was anonymous, and we conducted the interviews confidentially. The analysis looked at themes and trends in the aggregate to protect the identity of the participants. The team used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software tool, to analyze themes across interviews and surveys.

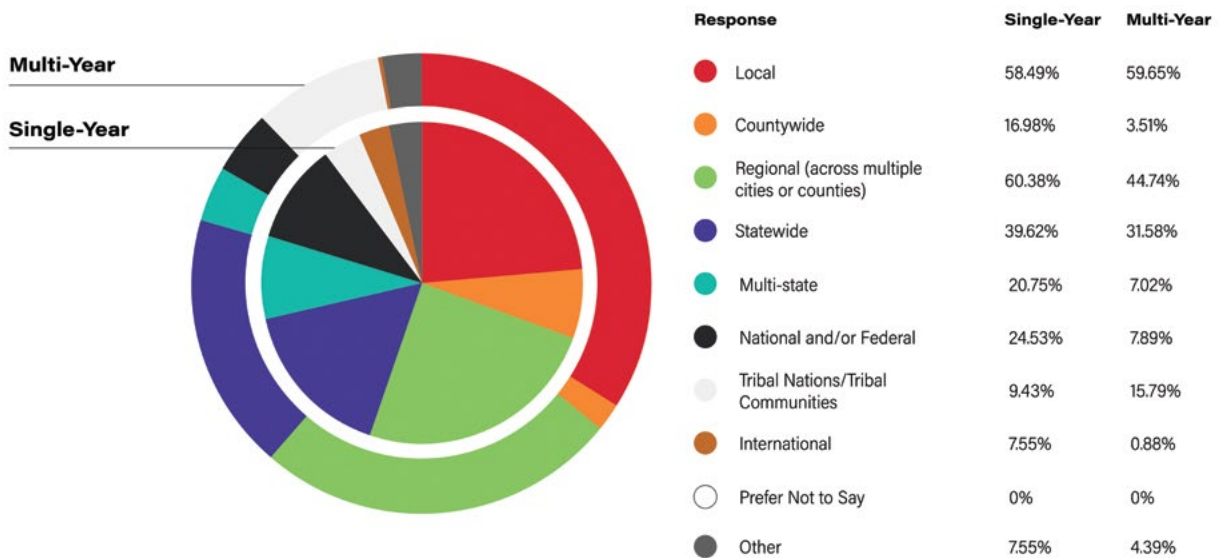
## Survey Context

We have incorporated survey findings into the larger findings and recommendations; however, to provide additional context we offer the following details, which provide a snapshot of who responded to the survey.

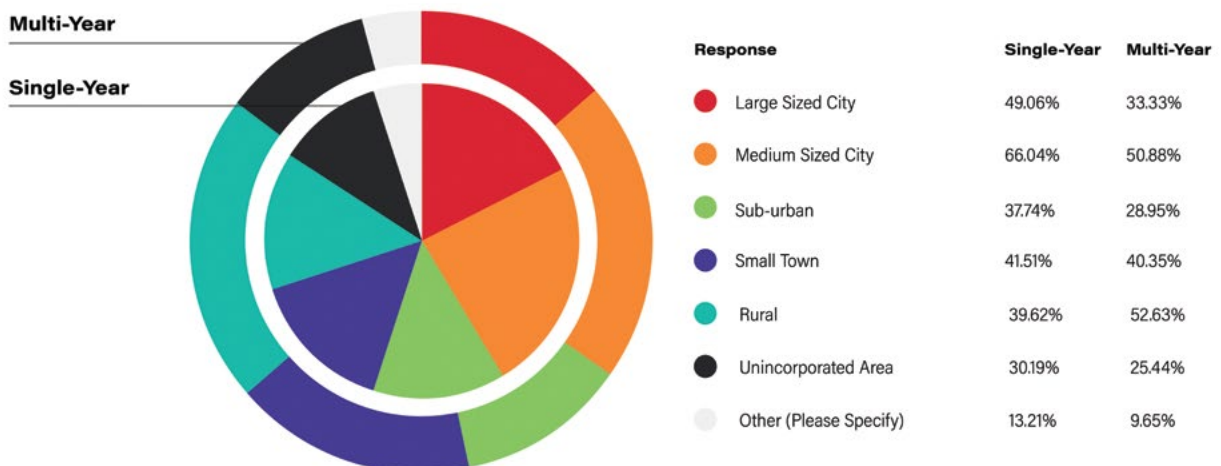
For the single year survey, 79% of respondents were 501(c)(3) nonprofits, 13% were fiscally sponsored, and 11% had 501(c)(4) status. The multi-year survey closely mirrored these figures. Of single year organizations that responded, 54% had operating budgets under \$1 million dollars, with 32% reporting budgets between \$50,000 and \$500,000. Of multi-year survey respondents, 69% reported budgets under \$1 million, with 42% reporting budgets between \$50,000 and \$500,000. Of multi-year respondents, 73% reported having been a grantee between one and three years.

Single-year survey respondents reported working across broad geographic contexts (per the chart below) Multi-year survey respondents reported working primarily in rural areas and medium-sized cities:

### Which of these terms best describes your work? (check all that apply)

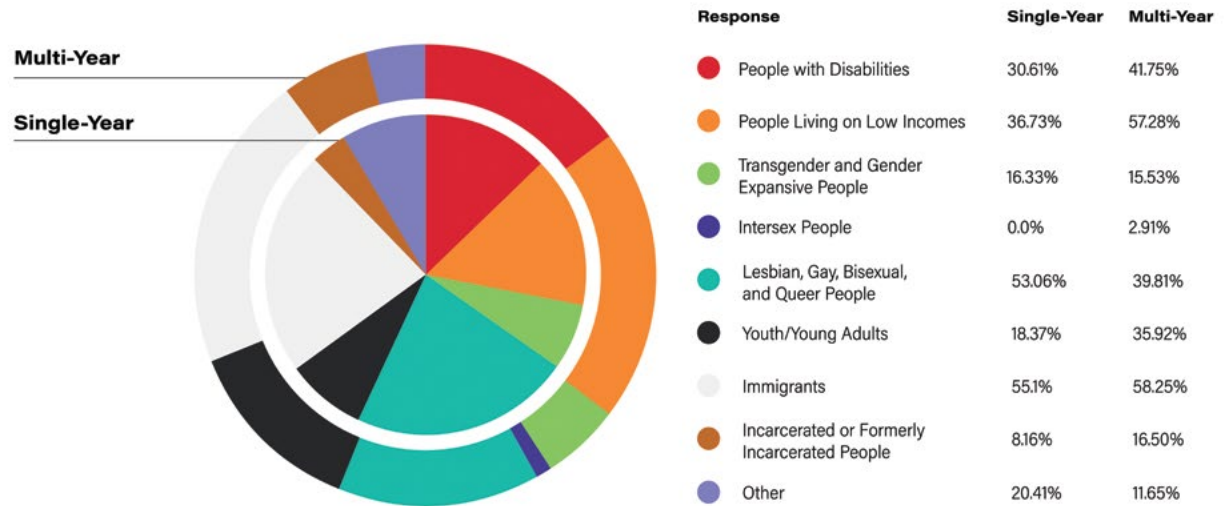


### How would you describe the area where your work happens? (check all that apply)



In terms of who is leading organizations funded by Inatai, grantee single-year funding respondents reported majority BIPOC-led organizations, with substantive diversity among organizational leaders who have historically marginalized identities. Among those who indicated “other,” respondents included identities of those who are non-binary, those with lived experiences in orphan/foster care, and civil rights leaders.

**Please mark which of the following identities are held by your organization’s leadership (CEO, executive director, board of directors) (check all that apply):**

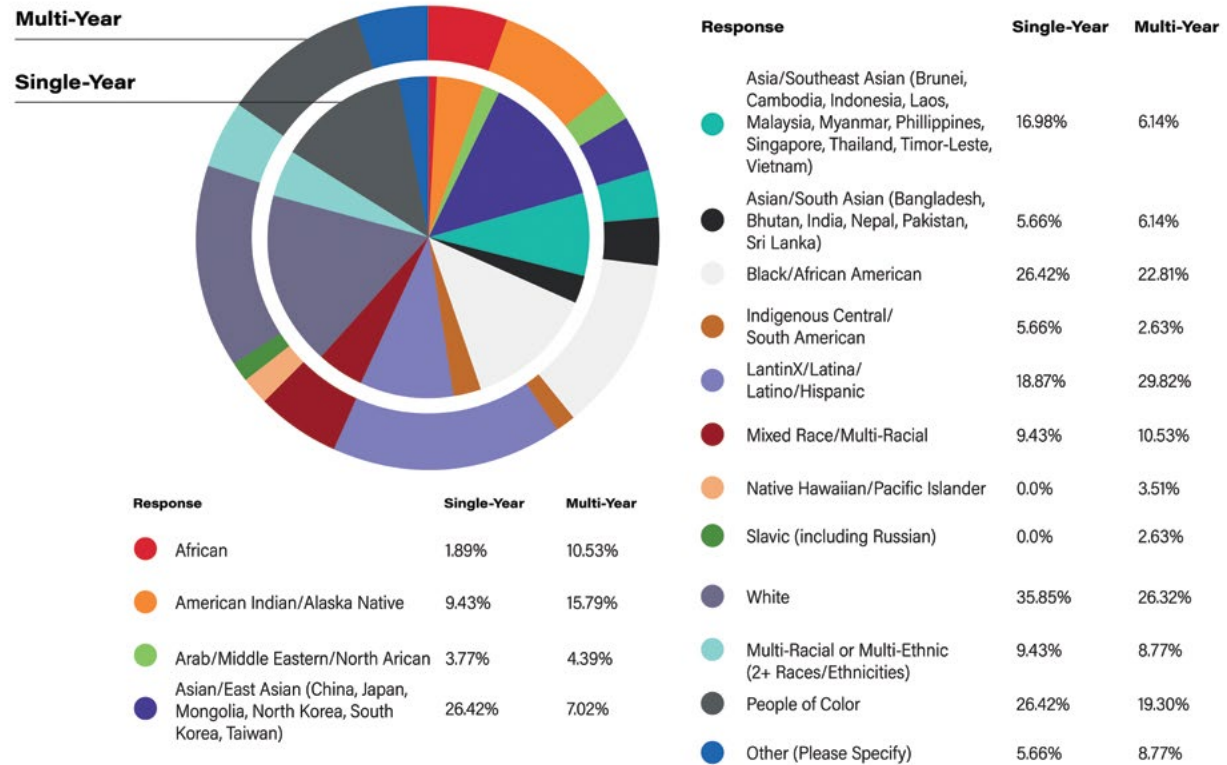


**For respondents that indicated “other,” and chose to self-identify, their responses included:**

- Federally Recognized Indian Tribe
- Survivors of domestic and/or sexual violence
- Undocumented
- Former farmworkers/agricultural workers
- Parents of children with disabilities
- Monastics
- Tribal/Urban Health Directors
- Seniors over 65 years old
- Veterans
- Asylees

They also reported majority BIPOC leadership and representation from multiple marginalized identities. The following identities are held by Inatai grantee organizational leadership according to the single and multi-year surveys:

**Which of the following race/ethnicities comprise over 50% of your organization’s leadership (CEO, executive director, board of directors)? (max 3)**





# Findings and Recommendations

The following findings and recommendations are drawn from the analyses of both surveys and interviews with grantees. The findings are summarized in the following sections.



At the foundation's Pasco Office Opening Party during July 2023.  
Photo: Ignacio Marquez



## Finding 1:

### Inatai's Approach Puts Grantees First

#### Application Process: Simple and Flexible

Grantees overwhelmingly praised Inatai's approach to grantmaking and reporting as simple and flexible. Instead of requesting proposals that take an extended amount of time or a well-staffed development team to complete (as many funders do), the Foundation has created a process that is clear and does not demand significant back and forth on required documentation. Given that many of Inatai's grantees are smaller organizations, and some are even volunteer-led, this approach allows applicants to experience the Foundation's culture of relationship-building and valuing community time and efforts from the outset.

One grantee shared that the Foundation has *"simplified the process so that it is not overwhelming, that it is not cumbersome, that it doesn't require multiple staff to engage for long periods of time. I think the idea of letting organizations do the work that they do and not interrupting that work with a cumbersome process is really important."*

#### Grantmaking Approach: Innovative & Effective

While many philanthropic institutions strive to create innovative and effective grantmaking programs, few have been successful in their implementation. Inatai puts people first in its approach to grantmaking. Grantees unanimously agree that they feel the positive impacts of this. They report consistently seeing Inatai's approach to grantmaking as innovative and effective. Many grantees expressed pleasant surprise at having been contacted by the Foundation about an interest in their work. They also shared that they appreciate the innovative, effective approach to grant unrestricted general operating funds, which they noted is not the one that most funders take. In fact, many felt that most funders would not even consider them or provide a larger amount of funding because of their size, the size of the community they serve, or their structure (e.g., all volunteer based). Grantees shared that Inatai is great at funding lesser-known organizations, especially those that are rooted in their communities.

## MULTI-YEAR SURVEY RESPONSES

**92%** of multi-year respondents agree that the Inatai Foundation demonstrates a relationship model for funders and grantees that prioritizes equity, power building, transparency, and mutual trust.

95% of majority BIPOC-led organizations agree

**89%** of multi-year respondents agree that the Inatai Foundation staff models humility, empathy, and vulnerability in their interactions with our organization.

89% of majority BIPOC-led organizations agree

**81%** of multi-year respondents agree with the statement, "I feel like my work and humanity are celebrated in my engagement with the foundation."

78% of majority BIPOC-led organizations agree



As one grantee shared, “GHF [Inatai] focuses on sustainability as part of its grantmaking—other funders could learn from and implement this focus into their grantmaking strategy.”

## Trust

While many philanthropic organizations strive to build trust with the organizations they support and in the communities they serve, Inatai’s people-first approach to relationship-building and grantmaking makes trust-building possible from the beginning. One of the most consistent feedback from grantees was how appreciative they are to feel that the Foundation sees them as the experts in their own communities and trusts them to do their work without limitations or judgment.

As one grantee said, “We asked about restrictions, and we were mindblown that someone would entrust us with so much money and support us to that extent.”

Inatai’s grantees see its approach to grantmaking as a much-needed and refreshing approach that differs from how many philanthropic institutions approach them and their work. A number of grantees noted that other foundations could stand to learn from Inatai’s approach. In addition, grantees offered suggestions for opportunities to strengthen the Foundation’s efforts, which are reflected in the recommendations to the right.

While there is great appreciation for the flexibility of grants externally, there are opportunities for expectation-setting, clarity, and structure, so that grantees better understand the grantmaking process. Grantees expressed that, at times, the process is not clear, for both new grants and grant renewals. Grantees also expressed curiosity about how Inatai determines funding amounts.

Overall, Inatai is a leader in the field of philanthropy around relationships and trust-based grantmaking processes. The section to the right offers several high-level recommendations for how Inatai can continue to refine its approach.

## Recommendations

- Prioritize remaining in dialogue with grantees about the current process for grantmaking for both new grants and for grant renewals. If there are adjustments to the grantmaking process, communicate these changes to grantees early and often.
- Ensure clarity around the parameters of Inatai’s ongoing relationship with a grantee. Examples include being clear about whether there are opportunities to move from a single year to a multi-year grant and what it takes for continued funding, as well as sharing a set of questions or program officers’ “curiosities” with grantees in advance of check-ins.
- Establish a tool for grantees to give ongoing feedback about their experiences—outside of the grant reporting and check-ins with program officers. This could be in the form of annual surveys or an open, online tool.
- Develop a standard protocol for all grantee engagement, such as building in a cadence and structure for Inatai engagements with grantees, so there’s a clear understanding of those activities in which the Foundation expects grantees to participate and which are optional.

## Finding 2: Values-Alignment and Communications

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Based on grantee interviews and surveys, it is clear that grantees experience Inatai's core values in action through their relationship with Inatai staff, communications, and storytelling, as well as through the grantmaking process. Both in the single- and multi-year surveys, respondents agree that Inatai values are evident from its grantmaking process.

As a part of our research methodology, we did not provide interviewees with a list of Inatai values. Instead, we sought to assess which values were top-of-mind for interviewees or which they were most likely to recall in interviews. When asked to describe Inatai values, grantees named: humility, transparency, community, compassion, trust, equity, racial justice, care, and community knowledge—all of which resonate with Inatai's values. Board members also shared that Inatai is unique in how it talks about and enacts its values throughout various board operational processes.

One of the values that is most clear to many grantees is Inatai's commitment to racial justice. Of multi-year survey respondents, 96% say that this commitment is clear in how staff show up for grantees. However, Black leaders, Native American leaders, and leaders in large cities were slightly less likely to agree that Inatai demonstrates a commitment to racial justice. Of organizations with majority Black leadership, 72% were in agreement that the Foundation demonstrates this commitment, and of organizations with majority Native American leadership, 78% agreed. This could partially be attributable to the historical experiences with philanthropy that Black and Native American leaders have had previously. More inquiry is needed to interrogate and better understand what is behind these responses and the specific experiences of Black and Native American leaders.

In terms of the types of questions Inatai asks in the grantmaking process and the way the staff asks those questions, Grantees see Inatai's intentionality in living into its value of racial justice. There is also an appreciation of the understanding by Inatai staff and

board members of equity in deeper ways beyond diversity, as well as that the Foundation holds a broad view of equity and how it is inextricably linked to race and gender. This keen understanding of power dynamics and intersectionality supports grantees in experiencing Inatai's commitment to racial justice in practice as not merely on paper. From interviews, a couple of grantees also said that they noticed that the representation of staff, speakers at events, and businesses with which Inatai contracts reflect the diverse communities they serve.

*As one grantee put it, "I can tell that they're trying to do it from an anti-racist mindset, which is really helpful and makes it a less traumatizing experience."*



At the foundation's Pasco Office Opening Party during July 2023.  
Photo: Ignacio Marquez

Another Inatai value that resonates with grantees is self-determination. The Foundation's flexible view of how each grantee makes an impact in the world creates opportunities for them to do the work in the best way they see fit—and for Inatai to learn alongside grantees. Inatai's approach does translate to the fact that it does not only fund organizations that have “figured everything out,” nor prescribe narrow goals and outcomes, but sees grantmaking as an opportunity to learn from the organizations it funds.

In addition, 100% of respondents in the multi-year survey and 92% of respondents in the single-year survey feel that Inatai's value of collective liberation is evident from the Foundation's processes and practices. In a powerful expression of this, one grantee stated, *“If it wasn't for Group Health [Inatai], we wouldn't be able to do the work that we need to do now.”*

It's also clear from our interviews and surveys that Inatai grantees have been able to experience Inatai staff **practicing joy in community**, especially when Foundation staff attend community events and when it shares community stories in the Foundation newsletter. One grantee says that it feels like Inatai is *“inside the community and understands the stories of community.”*

While 81% of respondents of the multi-year survey agree that their engagement with Inatai celebrates their work and humanity, only 65% of organizations with Black leadership felt the same. Inatai should take note of this finding and seek to explore and understand their grantee partners more deeply in relationships with those from the African Diaspora.

Inatai grantees also experience Foundation staff as living their values through ongoing communications. Based on the multi-year survey, Inatai program officers initiate half of the communication with grantees, and 30–40 percent of the time Foundation staff and grantees execute communication equally. Most grantees reported hearing from Inatai staff at least once every few months. Grantees named that they welcome the autonomy that Inatai's hands-off approach has given them, and they also appreciate that Foundation staff freely offers them the opportunity to reach out when they need to speak with someone.

At the same time, across interviews and surveys, there was a general desire for more touchpoints with Inatai. Some grantees—particularly those who had received foundation grants more recently—expressed that they want more communication from their program officers.



The foundation team at an October 2022 retreat in Bothell.  
Photo: John Lok



As one grantee put it, *"For the grant we got in December, I connected with the officer but haven't heard from him since—which is great that they trust us, but also want to entrust we are doing things wisely and being good stewards of their grant money so by having regular communication—I want to make sure we aren't missing anything by keeping in touch with them."*

Another grantee said, *"I would like more connection about how the grant is going—we have imposter syndrome, and it would be helpful to know if we should be doing things differently and using the money differently."*

Grantees expressed that they don't necessarily know what to hold Inatai accountable for; this could be due in part to the fact that the Foundation has not shared how its values inform its work and what those values look like in action. This could provide an opportunity for Inatai to articulate other Foundation values that its grantees may still find unclear.

In addition, grantees were curious to know if the Foundation funds organizations that do not fully align with Inatai's values. One grantee shared that *"There are conservative Latinx organizations and they are harmful to us, so it's helpful to know who is funded and aligned."*

One value that Inatai might want to explore with the grantees is **learning**. Although community-learning grants have supported both grantees and staff, there is a general desire among grantees for more opportunities to network and learn outside of the grantmaking process.

## Recommendations

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- Prioritize a subset of values that Inatai would want to share intentionally with grantees in the next year, and create messaging and programming to convey how it defines these values and what they look like in action.
- Align with grantees around communications expectations on both sides—especially for the benefit of potential or first-time grantees. This could include clarifying and standardizing communication and grantee relationship-building practices with all Inatai grantmakers or developing shared understanding around the purpose and frequency of grantee check-ins.
- Provide more clarity and specific descriptions of Inatai's grantmaking priorities, so grantees understand how other grantees are values-aligned with Inatai, how Inatai makes funding decisions, and Inatai's short- and long-term philanthropic goals.



### Finding 3:

### Power-Building and Community

Interviewees and survey respondents discussed power- and community-building, both as a positive impact of Inatai funding on current grantees and as an avenue to provide future opportunities for them to connect with their fellow grantees. They discussed these ideas in context of supporting long-term organizational sustainability, which Inatai could support through skill-building activities.

#### Power-Building

Discussion about building power among grantees highlighted organizational sustainability, skillbuilding, and continued support for investments that foster political power, such as funding 501(c)(4) organizations. Survey responses show that 11% of single year grantees and 3% of multi-year grantees were from 501(c)(4) organizations. Grantees that benefited from this type of support discussed how Inatai funding has enabled them to continue to support politically focused work, on issues from civil rights to campaign activities. One grantee shared that Inatai funding enabled their organization to use funding for ballot initiatives. A 501(c)(4) grantee was also able to fund an executive director position. Another grantee shared, *"The grant helped [the organization] go from having zero staff to six (6) staff who now have c4 deliverables in their work plans. This includes our first ever Political Director."*

#### Networking and Community-Building

Multi-year survey responses show that about 3 out of 5 grantees agree that Inatai provides opportunities for networking and learning beyond the grantmaking process. This finding slightly varies by location (60% in rural areas and 63% in mid-sized cities). Many grantees agreed that they have had opportunities to learn alongside Inatai, including 68% of BIPOC-led organizations. There are some variations in location, with 80% of respondents who do work in large cities agreeing that their organization is engaged in learning alongside Inatai, compared to 78% of suburban organizations and

## MULTI-YEAR SURVEY RESPONSES

**89%** of majority BIPOC led organizations requested additional networking opportunities from the foundations.

**68%** of majority BIPOC led organizations agreed grantees have the opportunity to learn alongside the Inatai Foundation

**63%** of respondents who do work in mid-sized cities agreed that the Inatai Foundation provides opportunities for networking and learning beyond the grantmaking process.

**60%** of respondents who do work in rural cities somewhat agree the Inatai Foundation provides networking and learning opportunities

**80%** of respondents who do work in large cities agreed that their organization is engaged in learning alongside the Inatai Foundation.

**65%** of respondents who do work in mid-sized cities agreed

**78%** of suburban organizations agreed

65% of those working in mid-sized cities. Exploring these findings further could highlight opportunities to ensure that all organizations can optimally engage in learning with Inatai.

Across the surveys and interviews, grantees shared that they would value more opportunities to network and community-build with other grantees. The majority of BIPOC-led organizations requested additional networking opportunities from Inatai (89%). Grantees noted that the COVID-19 pandemic limited opportunities for community-building; some grantees expressed a desire to—as pandemic-based restrictions lighten—increase in-person activities that support community-building. Some grantees would like opportunities to network with other grantees in their region and those who work on similar issues. These connections would support peer learning and foster collaborative opportunities, which could ultimately improve sustainability and resilience among grantees.

*As one grantee put it, "I'd like to see [Inatai] continuing to support organizations they're currently funding while continuing to open up to more small, rural, under-funded organizations outside of King County. I truly think introducing your current grantees to other funders and each other can help them build more resiliency[,] as [the] funding support may end."*

*Another grantee said, "We want the ability to build the ecosystem of liberatory organizations in our area. We are small. We don't have the capacity to organize a convening. GHF [Inatai] convenings can be the way we build community and collective power."*

Grantees discussed another type of community-building: celebrating its organizations' successes and achievements. One grantee encouraged Inatai to "[p]roactively work to highlight the many varied approaches to justice and celebration of diversity, ensuring that all feel connected and valued."

A board member shared this same sentiment, highlighting the impact of hearing grantees' experiences and perspectives. They shared that they "have [a] feeling

*of joy when GHF [Inatai] hears amazing perspectives and experiences from people when they're invited to be all of who they are and all the spaces that they need to be. The board should consider bringing in grantee voices during non-presentation meetings."*

Creating opportunities to share stories, swap experiences, and highlight accomplishments also helps grantees to connect with Inatai. Responses suggest that grantees—and especially single-year grantees—desire to build deeper relationships with Inatai.

### **Grantee Skill-Building**

Interview and open-ended survey questions suggest that grantees seek opportunities for learning. Grantees shared that Inatai could foster opportunities to strengthen the grantseeking skills of its grantees, such as identifying new opportunities for funding and learning how to build relationships with funders beyond Inatai. As one grantee said, "*I think being able to provide more opportunities to build upon our knowledge of sustaining ourselves[,] Or being able to have trainings around approaching other funders."*

Grantees also said they desire opportunities to develop other skills outside the grantmaking process. Several grantees shared that skill-building



Comunidades organizes with White Salmon residents against evictions. Photo: Comunidades.



opportunities could focus on skills needed for successful nonprofit operations, especially skills that would support organizational sustainability. Grantees discussed learning from Inatai staff as one way to build the skills they need to help sustain their organizations and the work they are doing. As one grantee suggested, Inatai could *"offer organizations the option to connect with employees from the Foundation who can offer technical support to help develop the organization."*

Grantees feel that Inatai staff has experience and expertise in multiple areas that, were staff members to help grantees build those skills, could support grantees in managing their own organizations. Organizational sustainability was a shared concern among grantees, who feel that they could benefit from more opportunities to learn from Inatai around skills that would support their own organization's sustainability. This could also foster a sense of community among grantees and Inatai staff.

Grantees also expressed interest in specific skills to support their organizations. One grantee shared, *"We are so grateful for GHF [Inatai] support, and as a start-up organization, technical support in accounting and technology would be immensely helpful."*

This same grantee also noted that learning from other Inatai-funded organizations through networking opportunities would be "invaluable." These comments point toward more opportunities for the Foundation to deepen its relationship with grantees and for its grantees to deepen their relationships with one another.

## Recommendations

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- Continue funding 501c(4)s to support local and regional political-power building activities. This also enables 501c(4)s to invest in organizational infrastructure that can help sustain their political activities.
- Provide regular community-building and networking opportunities within regions and among grantees working on similar topic areas.
- Include skill-sharing and -building as part of community-building opportunities to support sustainability (e.g., technology, accounting, etc.) and the ability of organizations to apply for and obtain other funding sources.
- Consider engaging grantees as co-designers and collective power-builders and develop opportunities for grantees and community leaders to inform the Foundation's programming, strategies, and processes.



## Finding 4: Aligning Internal Team for External Impact

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### Building Skills Internally with Staff

Many Inatai staff addressed skill building needs within the current team. They discussed the need to expand current staff members' skill sets while identifying and hiring candidates that can bring additional experience and skills that will fill in some of the gaps on the team. Some staff members shared that a significant amount of new staff are relatively new to the field of philanthropy. Staff noted that Inatai should require all new hires to possess a baseline of grantmaking experience, but also employ an open-mindedness that does not reflect the typical philanthropic mindset.

Board members stated that they remain in a learning mode in terms of identifying skill sets that enhance the work of the organization and its grantees. More specifically, board members shared two relevant skills that are critical:

- Strengthening the board's power-building muscle requires that individual board members are willing to acknowledge the community assets that Inatai supports while using their own power and influence to help remove any roadblocks. Currently, board members are still trying to figure out how to fully activate this skill, both individually and collectively.
- Learning and adopting effective conflict-resolution allows board members to honor differences and tensions across the communities that Inatai serves, through constructive agreement/conflict, with the goal of reaching consensus that supports and uplifts communities.

### Partnering with Grantees and Communities

In context of the above findings about what grantees shared, it's clear that there is mutual energy among grantees and staff to explore ways to deepen relationships and engagement. Staff members shared that Inatai focuses sharply on partnering with organizations that serve marginalized communities, especially those led by individuals who are a part of those communities. There is an emphasis on continuing to lean into enacting Inatai's values. One staff member shared that Inatai *"does grantmaking in a way that supports, listens, and learns from communities. We take the lead from communities."*

Many staff members highlighted that they enjoy communicating with grantees. What really motivates them on a daily basis is hearing directly from grantees about what's working, what challenges they face, and what additional support/resources they need. Staff mentioned a joint commitment to implementing two formal check-ins with grantees per year that explore these areas.

Furthermore, staff shared that grantees often contact them for support with other functions of their work beyond direct grantmaking. Many expressed a desire to connect grantees to other parts of the Foundation, including: (1) public policy engagement, (2) learning and evaluation, (3) technical assistance, (4) resource-sharing, and (5) relationship-building with like-minded funding peers. This includes collaboration, to build the internal processes and systems needed to facilitate and support these activities.

Additionally, staff members expressed their interest in supporting potential grantees whom the Foundation did not fund during their first or second attempt. Staff mentioned the need to develop a process that allows them to connect with these organizations, to offer direction on how to create clear and compelling applications.

Board members identified their primary role as identifying potential grantees and introducing them to Inatai. The role of board members demands a greater level of intentionality around sharing with grantees and the public that Inatai’s grantmaking strategy is broader than health-related causes. Furthermore, board members mentioned that, when connecting with grantees, they feel deeply how much they value the voices and perspectives that grantees share. Some board members expressed a desire to hear directly from grantees and members of the community—beyond any board presentations that grantees/community members may make. One board member recommended that Inatai *“incorporate more grantee/community voices into the internal decision-making process related to grantmaking strategy.”*

Board members mentioned that creating more space for grantees and community leaders to inform strategies and processes would align with how staff are already collaborating effectively with grantees.

**Internal Culture Shifts**

There is a shared understanding among staff members that a significant part of their role is to show other funders how to partner with and support grantees and communities—by employing approaches and strategies that differ from how philanthropy typically operates. Staff noted that being able to model community engagement for other funders requires a shift in who contributes to internal (and external) shifts in organizational culture. As one staff member said, *“GHF [Inatai] needs more folks who represent different communities from different areas through WA, as we are hiring folks to help build and improve [Inatai’s] understanding of both folks/communities that represent both different identities and locations.”*

Staff noted that their internal work is highly relational. Peer support primarily helps staff members develop strong working relationships with one another and navigate the work collectively. Many mentioned there are both high and low points in the work across the Foundation, and thus having a strong but informal peer-support system could

make the work feel less siloed. As one staff member observed, *“There’s a lot of wisdom on the team.”*

In terms of day-to-day operations, Inatai staff mentioned two key points:

- They would prefer to shift away from frequent internal meetings and towards allocating time to support current grantees as well as research and connect with potential new grantees.
- There is a growing desire to return to the physical office, in person, on a more frequent basis. Staff say they feel more connected to one another within a shared office space, as opposed to building internal relationships and working collaboratively via virtual platforms.

Inatai’s board mentioned the importance of continual intentionality and focus on prioritizing nontraditional board voices. This includes shifting to including more community representation: younger people, those without significant academic credentials, BIPOC people, and geographic representation from different communities across Washington State.



Photo: Open Doors for Multicultural Families.



Both staff and board members stated that the organization needs to challenge itself to slow the current pace of work. They specifically named the need for a shift in how the organization identifies and responds to community needs, given that Inatai cannot respond to every urgent need. In doing so, respondents say, the Foundation risks diluting its impact.

### Aligning Values

Staff are highly focused on supporting organizations that exhibit values that align with those of the Foundation. Many shared that they use the values to guide decisions related to selecting grantees. Values that staff commonly named include racial justice, equity, and community- and relationship-building.

Board members mentioned that part of their role is to ensure that the Foundation's values show up in how it engages and implements the work, both internally and externally. They continuously examine how Inatai can embed its values even more deeply in all that it does. Among the values the board named are equity, joy, racial justice, community, and accountability.

As with regard to Finding #2, this points to an opportunity to focus on values alignment, both internally and externally.

## Recommendations

- Invest in expanding the skill sets of both existing and new staff members.
- Consider previous grantmaking and philanthropic experience when interviewing/making new hires, especially interest in/experience with values-driven philanthropic approaches.
- Support board members in strengthening their power-building and -sharing skills in collaboration with grantees.
- Consider investing in conflict-resolution skills training for board members.
- Carve out space for staff to develop internal processes and procedures to address grantee requests for support around: public policy engagement, learning and evaluation, technical assistance, resource sharing, and relationship-building with like-minded funding peers.
- Create mechanisms to connect with organizations that the Foundation has declined to support, to provide feedback on how those organizations can create clear, compelling applications.
- Support staff bandwidth by reducing the amount of internal meetings so staff can focus on supporting current grantees as well as researching and connecting with potential new grantees.
- Add more "nontraditional" board members (e.g., younger people, those without significant academic credentials, BIPOC people, represent different areas of the state of Washington).
- Consider slowing the pace of the Foundation's work, to avoid/reduce staff burnout and weakening the Foundation's impact. This could include longer grant cycles, extended deadlines, and/or refined priorities.



## Finding 5: Opportunity to Influence the Field

In the last several years, foundations have pledged billions of dollars toward funding to advance racial equity and social justice, but [still only a fraction of charitable giving goes toward racial-justice causes](#). At the same time, the rise of the [Trust-Based Philanthropy](#) movement has been central to the conversation in the field about philanthropy’s role in redistributing power and advancing racial equity.

Inatai’s grantmaking model is rooted in trust, inclusion, and equity and more grantees want to see other funders operating in this manner. As staff echoed a felt responsibility to play a role in shifting power dynamics within philanthropy, Inatai grantees shared high praise for the organization’s style of grantmaking and invited the Foundation to play an even larger role in trying to influence the field more broadly. As one grantee put it, *“[Inatai] can challenge other foundations and challenge the culture of philanthropy in general to rethink their giving structures, [and] share their lessons learned. Given the size of the foundation, they could really be leading culture change.”*

Inatai has worked hard to refine an equity-driven approach and consciously attend to building relationships with grantees. There is an appetite for justice-oriented funders to come together to share best practices and energy from funders who are at an earlier stage in their journey to learn from those who have long been working this way.

## Recommendations

- Create venues to share the Inatai grantmaking approach with other funders, via briefings, webinars, and blog posts. Given that there are few opportunities for funders to “look under the hood” at how other foundations enact their values, organizations like [Philanthropy Northwest](#) can be great platforms for sharing best practices.
- Consider convening other funders across the state or in specific regions for targeted conversations about topics such as: centering equity in grant-making, sharing resources, and communicating out inspiring work that grantees are leading. This would create space for new and longstanding funders to come together around the role of philanthropy in advancing social justice and cultivate relationships among other funders that may be grappling with similar issues.
- Consider a “common application” approach (as in [Massachusetts](#) and [New York](#)) to make the process easier for grantees, while incentivizing funders to align around a common set of questions for grantees.
- Form a funders collaborative, whereby Inatai convenes local funders to rally around a specific issue, type of grantee (e.g., grassroots organizers), or one-time campaign (e.g., COVID recovery)—to pool resources and make fundraising easier for grantees. This would also increase exposure to a broader pool of potential funders for smaller or newer organizations in the Inatai network.

**With whichever avenue Inatai chooses, there is much enthusiasm to build on from grantees and staff in terms of exploring ways to bring along more funders to do more relational and more equitable grantmaking. Inatai is in the position to leverage its positive reputation and considerable critical social capital to influence the field of philanthropy in powerful ways.**

## CONCLUSION

Inatai has worked hard to be a leader in equity-driven philanthropy, and the hard work is paying off. Grantees, staff, and board members alike express pride and gratitude for Inatai's approach to grantmaking. The feedback offered here aims to refine Inatai's approach and amplify its impact in the field. As this report highlights, Inatai is building from a solid and powerful foundation to increase equity and racial justice in Washington State. As Inatai charts a course for the future, the findings and recommendations in this report are designed to highlight the opportunities for living into Inatai's values in service of the Foundation's mission to transform the balance of power to ensure equity and racial justice across Washington and beyond.



Inatai team members gathered for a meeting.  
Photo: Inatai



**FRONT:** People gather for King County Equity Now's Juneteenth Freedom March in 2020 holding #PayTheFee and Black Lives Matter signs and a Garvey flag.  
Photo: Inatai

**BACK:** Vice President of Programs Carmen Berkley at an Inatai Board of Directors meeting in Bingen during fall 2022

