



ECCP Community Fund Learning Brief

FIRST FUNDING CYCLE: 2025

ECCP COMMUNITY
of PRACTICE

environment, climate, conflict, and peace



GENEVA
GRADUATE
INSTITUTE

CENTRE ON
CONFLICT,
DEVELOPMENT &
PEACEBUILDING

ECCP COMMUNITY
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ECCP Community Fund

A REFLECTIVE LEARNING BRIEF ON THE FIRST FUNDING CYCLE

The following findings emerged through collective reflection with the project leads involved in the first cycle of the ECCP Community Fund. They highlight patterns across diverse contexts rather than project-specific results, and point to how small-scale, trust-based funding can shape participation, relationships, and learning in practice. This learning brief was co-created by ECCP members Eliza Urwin, Annika Erickson-Pearson, Amanda Woomer, and Jennifer Thornquest, shaped through in-depth conversations between Eliza Urwin and the project leads, a shared learning call, and iterative collective reflection.

DATE
2025

THEME(S)
Environmental
Peacebuilding;
Climate & Conflict;
Community Funding;
Participatory
Grantmaking;
Learning &
Communities of
Practice

LOCATION
Global, with local
initiatives in six
countries

DONORS
Supported by
PeaceNexus
Foundation and the
Austrian Centre for
Peace

INTERVENTION TYPE
Participatory Micro-
Grant Fund;
Community-Led
Allocation

TOTAL FUND SIZE
Small, flexible grants
(USD 400–2,000)
6 grants awarded

FACILITATION
ECCP Community of
Practice;
Centre on Conflict,
Development and
Peacebuilding

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2024, ECCP received donations from two funders and used them to pilot a small Community Fund with the idea to create a transparent pot of funds that the community itself would allocate to small projects. The Fund ran on a light touch participatory budgeting model. Project ideas were submitted through a very simple Google form, where applicants briefly described what they would do with the money. A voluntary budget committee made up of ECCP members reviewed proposals against basic eligibility criteria and shortlisted those that fit. Everyone who submitted a proposal was then invited to vote on the shortlist. The winners received a microgrant to do what they had proposed, with the core requirement to work with at least one other person or institution, whether a member of the ECCP or not, so that each grant also strengthened relationships in and out of the network. All funds from this first round have now been disbursed, and the activities are complete.

BACKGROUND


This brief draws on in-depth conversations with the six project leads from the first round of the Fund, plus a shared learning call held in November 2025. Together, these stories show how very small, well-placed grants can have effects much larger than their monetary value. The grants shifted who got to participate, opened new conversations, and modelled a different kind of relationship between funders and partners. The findings below are organised around five themes that emerged from implementation and interviews.

PROJECTS SUPPORTED THROUGH THE ECCP COMMUNITY FUND

Six Projects Six Stories



GRANTEE	ORGANISATION	PROJECT DESCRIPTION
Innocent Musore	<u>GER-Rwanda</u>	One day ecosystem for peace forum linking environment, climate and peace with women, youth and local leaders.
Ruth Rhodes Allen	<u>CDA Collaborative Learning</u>	Co-designed a learning agenda on Indigenous knowledge, peace and climate finance with <u>Rights and Resources</u> .
Samunda Jabini	<u>The Association of Saamaka Communities (VSG)</u>	Brought Saamaka and Indigenous women together to share stories on land rights, forests, culture and environmental peace.
Emily Sample	<u>Alliance for Peacebuilding</u>	Hosted a world café style meetup in DC to reconnect the environmental peacebuilding community across generations and sectors.
Dancan Okoth	No organization affiliation for the activity, Dancan managed independently	Ran an eight-subcounty sports tournament that turned football, volleyball and netball into a platform for youth-led climate action.
Hassan Mowlid Yasin	<u>Somali Greenpeace Association (SOGPA)</u>	Organised a side event at the Africa Climate Summit to amplify Somali CSO and youth voices on climate security to national leaders.



Finding 1. Small amounts of funding can dramatically shift who gets to participate

ACROSS ALL SIX PROJECTS, THE MICROGRANTS CHANGED THE COMPOSITION OF THE ROOM AND THE TERMS OF WHO IS “ALLOWED” TO SPEAK, AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF NEW AND NON-TRADITIONAL ACTORS IN WAYS THAT INSPIRE CHANGE.

SOMALIA

In Somalia, the grant paid for travel and a side event at the Africa Climate Summit. A formal speaking slot on a main panel cost around USD 3,000, effectively shutting most Somali civil society organisations and activists out of the conversation. By using the grant to create their own side event, Somali civil society, including a woman from Somali Women Environment and Action Group, had a speaking platform alongside government and international actors. Without this grant she would have been a silent observer.

SURINAME

In Suriname, the fund paid for an unprecedented gathering of Saamaka and Indigenous women from different nations. Women travelled for hours by road and river in the middle of the planting season. Together they cooked, sang, exchanged gifts, and spoke openly about land grabbing and forest concessions and how these affected their communities, in ways that were sometimes similar, sometimes very different. The group included the wife of a Paramount Chief, someone almost never visible in any, let alone environmental peacebuilding, discussions. The organiser realised she had never heard this perspective before, and other participants said the same. The grant made it possible for these specific women, and these specific voices, to be in the same room.

WASHINGTON D.C.

In Washington DC, the grant created space for a world-café style meet-up that brought together students, practitioners, former State and USAID officials, and even a high-school student trying to decide whether this field has a future for her. This was not a group that is systematically excluded in demographic terms, but one that had been politically silenced as institutions like USIP and parts of USAID were shut down or hollowed out. The grant shifted participation from scattered individuals to a community in a room, giving people who had lost their platforms a place to compare notes, find their voice again and imagine next steps together.

KENYA

In Kenya, a small grant allowed Dancan to run an eight-subcounty sports tournament that brought out nearly two thousand spectators and 125 players. On the surface it was about football, volleyball and netball; in practice it became a forum where young people could talk about environmental protection and climate action with officials from the forestry ministry and county government. Climate conversations that usually happen in distant capitals were relocated to the football pitch, and youth got to engage with the government directly about their concerns.

Finding 2. Small amounts of funding are inherently valuable – and their ripple effects are complex

SEVERAL PROJECT LEADS DESCRIBED THE GRANT AS “A SEED” OR “A FOUNDATION STONE”. THEY DIDN’T SEE THE MONEY AS A TOKEN GESTURE OR AS ONLY A STEPPING STONE TO SOMETHING “PROPER” LATER BUT AS A REAL, TIMELY, AND IMPORTANT PART OF THE REAL WORK. THE SMALLNESS AND ACCESSIBLE NATURE OF THE GRANT ITSELF WAS PART OF THE VALUE: IT CREATED URGENCY, FOCUS AND A BIAS TOWARD ACTION NOW.

SOMALIA

In Somalia, the grant came just in time to allow travel to the Africa Climate Summit and to organise a side event. This one roundtable generated a cluster of new relationships: with a key government focal point who later joined another forum, with the Office of the Prime Minister, and with other organisations working on climate and displacement. These were not predictable outcomes at the proposal stage; rather, they emerged because the team could creatively leverage a small sum at a critical moment.

WASHINGTON D.C.

In Washington DC, the grant allowed Emily to act on something she had wanted to do for a long time: create a “small but meaningful” convening with no pressure to produce big outputs or impact metrics. There is no other fund like this that can provide the support for people to gather around food and share ideas. The event has already led to new collaborations for PeaceCon and the EnPax conference in Ottawa. Again, these were unpredictable offshoots from a deliberately modest intervention.

RWANDA

In Rwanda, Innocent stressed that he did not need a larger amount at this stage. What mattered was being able to test a new framing – “ecosystem for peace” – and see how his community responded. Participants have already recommended a longer-term programme, and Innocent now wants to grow this idea into something sustained. The seed is sprouting.

From a systems perspective, the pattern is: small, well-timed interventions in complex systems do not produce neat, linear outcomes. Instead, they seed multiple possible pathways, some of which may only become visible months or years later. The stories here suggest that there is value in small grants on their own terms, not only as pilots to be “scaled up”, but as legitimate, impactful contributions to change.





Finding 3. Funders can lead with curiosity over compliance, and it changes what becomes possible

**“The activity is not the metric.
The learning is the metric.”**

When budgets get cut, monitoring, evaluation, and learning gets cut. Ruth described the broader aid sector as being in an “extinction-level event” for organisations that prioritise learning. In that context, ECCP’s stance felt unusual. Several grantees contrasted this fund with donors whose primary relationship to partners is through compliance: long forms, rigid plans, and heavy audits. Here, the emphasis was different.

As Ruth put it, “The activity is not the metric. The learning is the metric.” For her, this meant her organization could adapt when a large partner (Rights and Resources) was simply too stretched to deliver a full workshop as originally planned in the grant application. Instead of forcing the original plan, they used the grant to conduct a series of interviews, build a learning agenda and prepare a “post-COP: now what?” reflection. The Fund did not penalise this shift, and the ability to adapt was seen as a sign that the project was responding to reality rather than ignoring it.

For Hassan, curiosity over compliance showed up as a very short application, a requirement to find a co-partner, and the fastest money transfer he has ever received. He and a partner drafted the concept and budget in a single evening. The small size and light process signalled that ECCP trusted them to know what was needed, and that it was acceptable to focus on a single, tightly framed activity.

For others, the Google form, rapid email responses, and flexible attitude when plans shifted all contributed to a feeling that they were working with people, not a bureaucracy. Fund organisers stayed in touch throughout. There was an explicit intention to document and share stories, not only to “tick the box” on reporting. On the learning call, Ruth named the sense of solidarity that came from knowing the funders wanted to amplify their experience, not just close a file.

Taken together, these experiences illustrate that curiosity and lightness are not the opposite of seriousness, but can be the basis for honest learning and innovation.

Finding 4. Peer learning and capacity support are natural complements to small grants

This round did not formally include capacity development. Even so, peer learning emerged on its own during peer review, during implementation and again in the shared learning call. Almost every project lead said that reading and scoring others' proposals helped them learn. They saw design choices they might borrow next time and gained a sense of what environmental peacebuilding looks like in other contexts. For Innocent, seeing other submissions suggested ways he might strengthen future applications. For Samunda, the peer review process made her feel that applicants were learning together rather than simply competing.

At the same time, several project leads explicitly asked for more structured support in future rounds. They mentioned guidance on proposal writing and budgets, basic financial systems for small organisations, communications and advocacy strategies, and chances to see how others have navigated similar challenges. Hassan, for example, noted that support on financial systems and proposal development would directly strengthen his ability to later manage larger, more conventional grants. In other words, a small investment in capacity now could prepare organisations to absorb bigger funds later.

Informal opportunities for learning have already emerged organically from the way this fund is designed. The invitation now is to build on that in simple, intentional ways. Small grants could be paired with light scaffolding for shared reflection, skills exchange and gentle connecting of projects with overlapping interests. Ideas that surfaced included match making between similar proposals, occasional thematic learning cohorts and short story rich briefs that circulate lessons across the network. The core grant process can stay simple. With a few careful additions that strengthen human connection and learning, the fund could add more value without becoming heavy or bureaucratic.



Finding 5. Small grants can be powerful tools for community building and communities of practice

THE FUND CLEARLY CONTRIBUTED TO BUILDING AND SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE LOCALLY, ACROSS REGIONS, AND FOR THE BROADER ECCP GLOBAL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE.

Locally, each project created or revitalised a small ecosystem of relationships. In Washington DC, the meet-up re-stitched a fraying professional community and reminded people that they are not alone. In Suriname, Saamaka and Indigenous women began to build a shared practice around land, forest and culture, grounded in mutual recognition and story. In Kenya, a network is forming around youth, sport and climate action, with community members now asking Dancan to formalise a year-round community-based organisation. In Somalia, a cluster of civil society organisations, government officials and international actors now have a shared reference point in the Africa Climate Summit side event.

Across the ECCP network, people described a deeper sense of belonging. Innocent said the fund made his organisation feel

“ known and valued ”

not just as recipients of knowledge but as contributors to the community. Ruth spoke about the importance of shortening the distance between people who could work together, and of experiencing ECCP as a space where hierarchy is deliberately softened. On the learning call, several project leads highlighted that the fund gave them not only money, but a community, through peer review, joint decision-making and a space to reflect together afterward. Funders echoed this. They said that what they received, in addition to concrete stories, was a sense of hope and solidarity in a frightening moment for the field.

THIS SUGGESTS THAT THE FUND'S MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION MAY BE LESS ABOUT SIX DISCRETE ACTIVITIES AND MORE ABOUT NURTURING COMMUNITIES, BOTH LOCALLY AND AS A DISTRIBUTED, GLOBAL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE AROUND ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING, ONE THAT INCLUDES SMALL ORGANISATIONS, STUDENTS, ELDER, YOUTH, ACTIVISTS, RESEARCHERS AND DONORS IN THE SAME CONVERSATION.



Contact

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