

## GEO Learning Conference 2015

### Designing, Piloting and Evaluating Major Shifts in Grantmaking Strategy

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#### Session Framing Questions

1. *How can a foundation design, pilot and evaluate major shifts in its grant-making culture and processes?*
2. *What does a foundation learn from such an experience about itself, its staff and the relationship with its grantees?*
3. *What long-lasting impact does such a learning experience have on the foundation and its constituencies?*

#### 2. Session Outline

- **Introduction:** Setting the case for learning.
- **01. Background.**
- **02. The Grant-Making Design Team (GMDT)** - Formation, Work, and Recommendations. Introducing the Pilot.
- **03. Evaluating the Pilot.**
- **04. Pilot Results and Lessons Learned.**
- **Q&A and Closing**

#### 01. Background

##### The Mandate:

To examine how OSF could streamline grant-making processes in ways that benefit both grantee organizations and its own operations while contributing to an effective yet distinctive grant-making culture that:

- i. Emphasizes the importance of critical thinking and professional judgment, and
- ii. Recognizes the role of healthy and effective organizations in strengthening the fields and places to which OSF is committed.

##### The Four Questions:

1. *Can we decentralize grant approval to qualified organizations so program directors and other staff can authorize more grants themselves and do so more quickly?*
2. *Can we create criteria and streamlined processes for qualifying organizations to receive OSF grants, separate from considerations of specific projects?*
3. *Can we balance decentralized grant-making authority with greater accountability to advisory boards, senior management, and the Global Board?*
4. *Can we substantially increase our use of general support grants while maintaining focus to our grant making?*

##### Question for Discussion:

*Imagine you'd been asked to coordinate this effort. How would you have tackled your mandate?*

## 02. The Grant-Making Design Team - Formation, Work, and Recommendations. Introducing the Pilot.

The GMDT consisted of eight OSF staff from a range of thematic, geographic, and operational units, as well five grantees from organizations of different sizes, focuses and regions.

### GMDT Recommendations

1. **Decentralize** the authority to approve grants under \$1M to program directors in order to streamline OSF's grant making and diversify decision making. Pilot further decentralization in 2014.
2. Introduce **organizational assessments** as a tool for qualifying organizations to receive OSF grants.
3. Adopt **portfolio reviews** as a centerpiece of OSF's system of accountability and learning.
4. Promote the increased use of **unrestricted funding** where appropriate, to increase strategic flexibility for both grantees and OSF.

## 03. Evaluating the Pilot

### Question for Discussion

*How would you have approached the pilot evaluation?*

**Pilot Monitoring Team:** Representatives from the Grant Making Support Group, Strategy Unit, President's Office, and one external advisor.

### Goals of the Pilot Monitoring Process:

1. To track the outcomes of the pilot experiments in each of the six participating pilot programs systematically.
2. To reflect upon those outcomes throughout the pilot in order to adjust both pilot experiments and related monitoring processes.
3. To aggregate and make sense of the collective results of the pilot experiments in order to validate and/or improve the GMDT proposals and provide a final list of tested recommendations on grant-making transformation to OSF's President, Chris Stone.

## Timeline

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- **July 2012** – Chris Stone becomes President of Open Society Foundations
  - **February 2013** – Chris Stone creates the Grant Making Design Team (GMDT)
  - **September 2013** – Creation of the Grant Making Support Group
  - **November 2013** – The GMDT finalizes its recommendations  
The GMDT Pilot Monitoring Team is formed
  - **January 2014** – GMDT Pilot kickoff meeting
  - February – September 2014** – Pilot Phase
  - **October 2014** – In-person Pilot closing meetings
  - **January 2015** – Pilot Process Final Report delivered to OSF's President