ORIGINATE: OFP GUIDING QUESTIONS

These questions are fundamental to developing an effective road map for a strategy or initiative. Some may be more relevant to you than others. What is key is that you at least consider all of them in your due diligence.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM OR OPPORTUNITY

- What is the problem or opportunity you are seeking to address? Why does it matter?

- What is causing or caused the problem or opportunity? What led us to want to act?

- Who does this problem or opportunity primarily affect? Are there particular opportunities to help those who are disadvantaged?

- What gives you confidence that now is the time to take this on — that change is possible? E.g., a political shift, new champions inside or outside the foundation?

IDENTIFYING PROMISING APPROACHES

- What proven or promising approaches could address the problem? What has worked, what has not, and why?

- What is the evidence base? Is it strong enough to make the case for change? Does the field need support testing and developing possible solutions?

- What are others advising us — including experts, potential grantee partners, and, as feasible, our intended beneficiaries?

EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEVERAGE AND PARTNERSHIP

- What is philanthropy's role, if any? What is the Hewlett Foundation's added value — both through and beyond grantmaking?

- Who else — government, the private sector, other foundations — is funding in this field and what is their focus?

- If there are other funders, how might you leverage their investments — e.g., pooling funds or using our dollars in other areas?

SETTING THE GOAL AND OUTCOMES, TRACKING PROGRESS, AND EVALUATING THE WORK

- What is your aspirational goal — the overarching guide star for your efforts?

- What are your intended specific, or at least directional, outcomes? If directional, why is greater specificity impractical at this time?

- What implementation markers will you use to track progress, learn, and consider course corrections?

- What are your most important evaluation questions?

- What is your ideal sequencing for answering those evaluation questions in the strategy lifecycle?

DEVELOPING THE STRATEGIC APPROACH AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

- How will you get from problem or opportunity to your desired outcomes? What activities will the foundation support?

- How much alignment exists with organizations in the field?

- Do potential grantees have enough capacity to partner with us on this work? If not, would we have to build it? What are the implications in terms of resources, timing, and results?

- Who are potential allies, including unlikely bedfellows? Who are opponents or skeptics and what is their perspective? How might you and your grantees contend with them?

- What assumptions are driving the strategy — i.e., about whether, how, and why particular activities will advance or impede progress?

- What are the risks — strategic, operational, reputational, legal — and potential mitigation tactics?

- What is the timeline for the work?

- How will you allocate staffing and budget resources? If you do not have enough internal capacity, how will you adjust?

- Have you consulted with other departments, particularly those that work closely with programs in creating new strategies — the Effective Philanthropy Group, Communications, Grants Management, Human Resources, and Legal?

PROCESS

- Gather information through a field scan, literature review, and interviews reflecting a range of perspectives, including those of the intended beneficiaries to the degree possible. Consider whether an external consultant would be helpful, but only in a way that does not outsource your thinking

- Consult with other departments — particularly the Effective Philanthropy Group, Communications, Grants Management, Human Resources, and Legal — as needed; at minimum, share an early draft strategy document with these teams

- Pressure test ideas and drafts internally and externally

- Seek the president's review and approval of a written strategy document

- Seek your Board Advisory Committee's counsel

- Seek the board's approval; the two-meeting standard consists of (1) a concept paper to inform an initial discussion and (2) a final paper to inform a decision

- Work with Communications to develop a communications strategy

INFORMATION AND PRODUCTS

Most of what results from the guiding questions and process will be synthesized in a strategy document for the board. But it also should be captured in other forms — e.g., internal team documents, grants management tools, and external materials. The overall theory of change will draw on this information.

- Clear statement and analysis about the problem or opportunity

- Field scan and literature review, including proven solutions or promising practices on what has worked, what has not, and why

- Aspirational goal — the overarching guide star for the strategy

- Specific or directional outcomes

- Approach for achieving the outcomes: activities, potential grantees, other partners, and internal capacity

- Implementation markers for tracking progress, learning, and informing course corrections

- Assumptions underlying key components of the proposed strategy

- Evaluation questions to address and the sequence of evaluation(s)

- Risks and potential mitigation tactics

- Timeline

- Budget and staffing

SOURCES OF SUPPORT

There are many sources of support to tap inside the foundation. Among them:

- Effective Philanthropy Group. Staff specializing in strategy, evaluation, monitoring, grantee capacity building, organizational learning, and philanthropic partnerships act as in-house consultants for programs across the strategy lifecycle.

- Communications. Staff help programs develop, implement, and measure the success of communications strategies, identify and mitigate risks, and monitor the media and field for important developments.

- Grants Management. Grants officers spot potential grantmaking challenges and opportunities, facilitate problem-solving, ensure compliance, and analyze grants data and trends to inform strategies.

- Legal. Staff help programs vet grants, activities, and contracts; identify and mitigate risks, including helping programs understand what policy advocacy and election work the foundation can and cannot do; structure funding collaboratives; and monitor important legal developments.

- Board Advisory Committees review strategies and initiatives at every stage of the lifecycle, pressure testing approaches and ideas and providing support and problem-solving as needed.

In implementation, there is no single moment or fixed event to trigger consideration of the guiding questions. Staff can and should reconsider them whenever problems arise, but they should be sure to review this guidance at least once a year.

SELECTING, SUPPORTING, AND ENGAGING GRANTEES

- What criteria are guiding your grantmaking choices? Are they clear and well understood?

- Is the strategy serving as a useful filter for soliciting and choosing from among grantee proposals? If not, what adjustments might you make?

- Do your grantees need capacity-building support to do their work effectively? How are you planning to address those needs?

- In what ways are you planning to support grantees "beyond the grant dollar" — e.g., convening them, introducing them to other funders, bringing attention to their research? How do you know which type of support is most helpful to them?

- How and to what extent do your efforts to select, support, and engage grantees reflect the foundation's commitment to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion?

- How will you collect and use honest feedback on the strategy and your performance from grantees and partners?

ENGAGING OTHER FUNDERS AND STAKEHOLDERS IN THE FIELD

- In what ways are you communicating with other funders? How are you staying abreast of their work and interests? Have you considered opportunities to collaborate?

- How are you engaging others in the field as appropriate — e.g., relevant non-grantee organizations, the media, the business sector, decision makers?

TRACKING PROGRESS AND EVALUATING THE WORK

Questions marked with an asterisk* are identical to questions programs need to address in their annual strategy and budget update memos.

- What were your anticipated outcomes and key implementation markers for the past year?*

- How did you do against them, and why?*

- Are you and your grantees able to collect useful data to track progress and to learn? Are you collaborating with grantees as needed to develop efficient, reliable, and useful data collection tools and systems? If not, why?

- Are you making progress in answering the evaluation questions identified in the original or refreshed strategy? Are there new or different questions you want to ask or assumptions you want to test?

- What are you learning from targeted evaluations in this stage? How are you adapting in response?

- How are you sharing what you have learned with grantees and the field?

- What refinements or course corrections, if any, are you considering making to your outcomes and implementation markers as a result of everything you have learned to date?

- Have you further specified your outcomes or implementation markers since the strategy was launched or refreshed? If not, why — and when do you anticipate doing so?

- What are your anticipated outcomes and key implementation markers for next year?*

MONITORING THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL LANDSCAPE

- What important developments have occurred outside or inside the foundation that could affect your strategy? Are course corrections needed?

- Are your implementation markers helping you track progress and monitor developments? Are adjustments needed to make them more effective?

- Are you tapping other departments — the Effective Philanthropy Group, Communications, Grants Management, and Legal in particular — for consultation and support?

PROCESS

- Revisit the guiding questions whenever helpful, but at least once a year

- Plan for, commission, and/or manage third-party evaluations of targeted parts of the strategy as appropriate

- Annually update and seek counsel from your Board Advisory Committee

- Develop annual strategy and budget update memos, including progress indicators

- Present to staff at least once every two years

- Work with Communications and grantees as appropriate to implement an external communications strategy

- Work with Legal staff and grantees as appropriate to ensure strategies comply with private foundation legal requirements and mitigate legal and reputational risk

INFORMATION AND PRODUCTS

Answers to guiding questions will be written in board papers, evaluation(s), internal team documents, grant management tools, and external materials.

Over time, you should have:

- Useful criteria for soliciting and choosing from among grantee proposals

- A portfolio of work and grantees that, over time, aligns as much as possible with the strategy's outcomes and approach

- Capacity-building support for grantees as needed

- Ways to engage grantees, other funders, and other stakeholders beyond the grant dollar

- Increasingly specific outcomes and implementation markers, developed and implemented in collaboration with grantees as appropriate and practical

- An efficient system for identifying, collecting, and analyzing useful data to track progress and learn, developed and implemented in collaboration with grantees as appropriate and practical

- Targeted evaluations underway of specific parts of the strategy to test key assumptions and inform your ongoing work and refresh

- Ways of sharing what you learn

SOURCES OF SUPPORT

There are many sources of support to tap inside the foundation. Among them:

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- Communications. Staff help programs develop, implement, and measure the success of communications strategies, identify and mitigate risks, and monitor the media and field for important developments.

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- Legal. Staff help programs vet grants, activities, and contracts; identify and mitigate risks, including helping programs understand what policy advocacy and election work the foundation can and cannot do; structure funding collaboratives; and monitor important legal developments.

- Board Advisory Committees review strategies and initiatives at every stage of the lifecycle, pressure testing approaches and ideas and providing support and problem-solving as needed.

We encourage staff to review the materials on origination — the first worksheet and chapter 2 of the guidebook — before launching a refresh. Much of the work during refresh consists of revisiting and updating work done while creating an original strategy.

As in origination, some questions may be more relevant to you than others. What is key is that you at least consider all of them in your due diligence.

ASSESSING PROGRESS TO DATE

- What are your intended outcomes and implementation markers, and what progress have you made toward them? What have been your key successes and misses?
- What factors have enabled or inhibited progress?
- Which activities (e.g., research, policy advocacy, citizen engagement) have been most and least effective, and why?
- If progress has been made, what can you say about whether and to what degree grantees had a role in driving it? Which grantees have been most effective and why? Least?
- Which "beyond the grant dollar" activities have been most and least effective, and why? Consider activities such as convening grantees, introducing them to other funders, and bringing attention to their research.
- What were the strategy's original assumptions? Given what you know now, were they valid? Are they still? Why or why not?
- What targeted evaluations did you conduct during implementation? What were the major takeaways? How will these inform a full strategy evaluation during refresh?
- Did the anticipated risks play out? If so, how did you mitigate them?
- Did the strategy have unintended consequences, whether positive or negative? Did you make unexpected changes? What key lessons should you take away?

SCANNING FOR DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FIELD AND AT THE FOUNDATION

- Has the external landscape, including the nature of the problem or opportunity, changed significantly and, if so, how? What, if any:
  - important new research, data, or knowledge about the problem has emerged?
  - significant opportunities have emerged — e.g., new science, funders, readiness for action by decision makers?
  - major challenges have emerged or worsened?
  - noteworthy organizations have entered or exited the field?
- Have internal conditions changed significantly? If so, how — e.g., a program officer departure or other major staff transition, board interest, funding levels? How might that affect the work?
- Have you consulted with other departments, particularly those that work closely with programs in refreshing strategies — the Effective Philanthropy Group, Communications, Grants Management, Human Resources, and Legal?

REFINING THE STRATEGY

- Based on everything you have learned, what, if any, changes should you make to the following?
  - problem or opportunity statement
  - outcomes and implementation markers
  - key investments to support the theory of change
  - "beyond the grant dollar" efforts
  - substrategies, grant clusters, or individual grants
  - assumptions underlying key components of the proposed strategy
  - support for building grantees' capacity
  - timeline
  - budget and staffing
  - expectations of risks and mitigation plan
  - evaluation questions and evaluation plan
  - communications strategy

CONTEMPLATING EXIT

See the worksheet on Exit for full guidance.

- Under what circumstances will you exit the work? (E.g., it is a time-limited initiative, or the strategy has succeeded, failed, or irreversibly lost traction.)
- If you foresee an exit, what is the anticipated timeline?
- How will you know whether these circumstances exist?

PROCESS

- Consider conducting a third-party evaluation
- Revisit information generated during origination and implementation, including the strategy paper, memos to program directors, and key team documents
- Update information as needed through field scans, literature reviews, and interviews with grantees, other important stakeholders, and intended beneficiaries to the degree possible
- Pressure test ideas and drafts
- Seek consultation and advice from other departments
- Review exit guidance if you have reason to contemplate exiting the work in the foreseeable future
- Seek the president's review and approval of a written strategy refresh document
- Seek your Board Advisory Committee's counsel
- Seek the board's review and endorsement; the one-meeting standard consists of presenting a strategy refresh document
- Work with Communications to share information externally

INFORMATION AND PRODUCTS

Most of this information will be synthesized in a strategy refresh document for the board. It also should be captured in other forms — e.g., team documents, grants management tools, and external materials. A revised theory of change will draw on this information.

- Third-party evaluation
- Analysis by staff and evaluators of the following:
  - progress toward outcomes and enabling or inhibiting factors
  - effectiveness of the approach, including key activities and grantees
  - significant external or internal changes
  - validity and accuracy of key assumptions
- Updates to the following with a rationale for making changes or maintaining the status quo:
  - problem or opportunity statement
  - measurable outcomes and implementation markers
  - approach: activities, portfolio of grantees, and other partners
  - assumptions
  - evaluation plan
  - risks and potential mitigation tactics
  - communications strategy
  - timeline
  - budget and staffing

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- Board Advisory Committees review strategies and initiatives at every stage of the lifecycle, pressure testing approaches and ideas and providing support and problem-solving as needed.

Occasionally, we have to exit a strategy either because we have succeeded or because the strategy has not met expectations. Either way, we take care to exit a line of work with respect, careful advanced planning and with clear communication with all relevant parties. These questions are meant to help in that process.

PLANNING FOR AN EXIT

- What is the rationale for ending this strategy? This is usually not applicable for initiatives, which are time-bound from the outset

- What is the anticipated end date for the work?

- Which departments — e.g., the Effective Philanthropy Group, Communications, Finance, Grants Management, Human Resources — will need to be involved in the exit? How and when will you work with them?

- Have you commissioned a third-party evaluator?

- Should aspects of the work continue? If so, why, and in what form? What are the implications for the foundation and the field?

UNDERSTANDING AND SUMMARIZING RESULTS

- What were the strategy's goal, outcomes, and key implementation markers? To what extent did the strategy achieve them?

- What were your major accomplishments? Shortfalls?

- What were the most significant factors in enabling or inhibiting success?

- What lessons did you learn? What would you have done differently?

- What are your recommendations for your colleagues, other foundations, and the field?

MANAGING THE EXIT WITH EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

- How and when will you communicate with grantees to help them plan for the change?

- How will you create the softest landing possible for grantees — e.g., with tie-off grants or introductions to other funders?

- If you are providing tie-off grants, what are the criteria you will use in determining the size and duration of support?

- How and when will you communicate, consult, and coordinate with others in the field, including funding partners, leaders of important organizations, and relevant public officials?

- What are other potential implications of leaving the field? What can you do, if anything, to mitigate negative, unintended effects?

- How can you sustain the positive impact of the work?

- How and when will you engage the president, your Board Advisory Committee, and the full board?

USING AND SHARING WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

- Are you working with Communications to develop and implement a communications plan?

- Are you consulting and coordinating with grantees and funding partners, or at least keeping them apprised throughout the exit process?

- Are you pursuing opportunities for sharing during In-Town Weeks and other foundation events?

PROCESS

- Provide notice as early as possible to grantees, funding partners, and key stakeholders

- Develop a plan for providing tie-off grants or other support to grantees

- Commission a third-party, final evaluation

- Seek the president's review and approval of a final report

- Seek your Board Advisory Committee's counsel

- Seek the board's review and endorsement; the one-meeting standard consists of presenting a final report

- Work with Communications to develop and implement a communications plan

- Share information with foundation staff about why the work ended, what it accomplished (or did not), and what lessons were learned

INFORMATION AND PRODUCTS

Answers to guiding questions will be written in board papers, evaluations, internal team documents, grant management tools, and external materials.

- Clear rationale for the decision to leave the field

- Analysis of the potential implications of leaving the field, and a plan to address them

- Plan for communicating the exit internally and externally, including working with other funding partners

- Final budget and timeline

- Final report and supplemental materials as needed for the board, Board Advisory Committee, other internal audiences, and external audiences; includes:

  - answers to the guiding questions under "Understanding and Summarizing Results" in guidebook

  - an explanation of how you sought to manage the exit and how it went

  - the third-party evaluation

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