

2015 Strategy Guidance

A note from OSF President Chris Stone

We all use strategies every day. We have personal strategies for getting to places we need to go; for attending to our health; and for acquiring things we need. Sometimes, if we face great obstacles or complications, it helps to write a strategy down. Making our plans visible helps us see our assumptions, recognize alternatives, and share our ideas and commitments.

And if writing out a personal strategy is helpful, writing out a group strategy can be even more valuable. With a clear road map, teams can pursue shared goals, align actions, assess progress, and be more responsive when a change of direction is needed. When we work in groups, putting our ideas into a common document improves our chances of shared success.

In a formal organization like OSF, written strategies are essential. Documenting our distinct organizational strategies can help us delegate authority, budget resources effectively, and hold ourselves accountable. Seen clearly together, the strategies of each of our almost 50 entities provide us with a fuller picture of how we are seeking to realize our shared ambitions. The diversity and breadth of our collected strategies are among OSF's most distinctive strengths. By pursuing many strategies at once, we multiply our chances of success, spread our risk, and take advantage of our vast array of tools, experience, and expertise.

Over the past two-and-a-half years, it has been a great privilege for me to engage with you and your teams through the strategy and budget discussions, grant-making procedures, and portfolio reviews we've been putting into place. I hope this year's strategy process will give you an opportunity for this kind of interaction not just with me, but also with colleagues across the network and the Global Board. We've already provided each other much greater visibility into the work we all do, why and with whom we do it, and what approaches have helped us get there, and I hope these next four-year strategies will take us much further.

Our strategy documents are not meant to be rigid straightjackets but meaningful, living documents. Fundamentally, the test of an excellent strategy is not whether it uses any particular vocabulary or follows a particular form, but whether it leaves the reader with a clear understanding of the choices you are making: both the changes in your continuing efforts and the decisions to begin new work in particular ways. Providing a common vocabulary across the Open Society Foundations to describe our strategies, and a consistent format for organizing strategy documents are not ends in themselves, but efforts to help make your thinking clear to colleagues and board members. I encourage you to use the terms described in these pages and to follow the formats suggested, but please always bear in mind that the goal is clarity, not compliance. Make your written strategy as clear and straightforward as possible.

Please use the strategy and budget process this year to advance your own thinking, to stretch your own ambitions, to act on what you have learned about your own efforts, and to help all of us align our work more closely together. For some programs and foundations this may require only modest adjustments to what you have been doing; others may choose to use the occasion to revise their strategies much more thoroughly. Different programs and foundations will use the process differently, depending on the degree of change in their fields, in the places where they work, and in the vision of the program's or foundation's leadership. None of these is ever static, so some change in the formal strategy and budget is always expected, but the degree of change will vary greatly.

Finally, I hope you and your colleagues will actually enjoy the process this year, using it to strengthen your relationships with each other as well as with colleagues across the Open Society network. Even in this moment when powerful actors in the world seem hostile to open society values and principles, other individuals, organizations, and movements are taking up issues that we and our grantees have long pursued. Let's find and seize the opportunities in this process to make common cause with all those defending and advancing open society.



Strategy Reviews in 2015

Starting in 2015, OSF will review strategies in alternating cycles annually, focusing this year on the strategies of *thematic programs* as well as a small number of other entities with new leadership appointments. Next year in 2016, strategy reviews will shift back to focus on geographic programs, foundations and advocacy offices. Administrative and support offices will follow other strategy guidance that will be forthcoming shortly.

This Strategy Guidance is presented in the following three sections:

1. **Strategy Document Guidance** – the main instructions and structure you should follow in re-drafting your next four-year strategy document;
2. **Overview of the 2015 Strategy-Budget Cycle** - a brief description of the activities, deliverables and dates in this year's strategy-budget cycle;
3. **Strategy Resources** – a set of reference and resource materials including the 2015 Strategy-Budget Cycle Timeline Graphic; Categories of Work Resources; The Top Ten Questions Asked by the Global Board Committee; Sample Sections from Existing OSF Strategies; and Strategy-Budget Talking Points for Directors and Managers.

We have attempted to keep this set of Guidance as short and simple as possible, yet we recognize you might have questions along the way. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the Strategy Unit if you would like clarification or support in any area. Nadia Gomes, Associate Director, will answer or direct your question, and can be reached at nadia.gomes@opensocietyfoundations.org or 1.646.402.9538 (x1538).

Strategy Document Guidance

Your 2016-2019 strategy narrative is meant to be a living document and a natural extension of your regular planning and reflection processes. This year, there are three important changes you should consider as you revise your strategy:

1. First, because strategies are meant to reflect changes that occur over time, **your strategy narrative should clearly indicate what is new or different in your work since you wrote your original 2014-2017 strategy two years ago**. This year's strategy process is the chance to "catch up" your written strategy document with the adjustments you have already accommodated in your daily efforts.
2. Secondly, **your strategy narrative should reflect the revised Categories of Work language and structure** that you developed with the Strategy Unit and other network colleagues in late 2014. While Fields, Concepts, and Shared Frameworks are still the building-blocks of strategies and budgets, we have now collectively identified a set of Themes and Sub-Themes that help us categorize our work. You should describe your work using the specific Themes and Sub-themes you have defined and chosen.
3. Third, you should **make clear the logic that informs how you hope change will occur as a result of your proposed strategic goals and activities** (see further direction provided in the text box on page 4).

Keeping these three important aspects in mind, please draft your strategy document using the outline and guidance provided below.

A note on length: While the main body of your strategy document should not exceed ten (10) pages, large and complex programs are welcome to include appendices that expand on the plans they introduce in the main

document. If, as a large program, you choose to use the appendix to convey important aspects of your strategy, please use this space to provide additional, new examples rather than adding more detail to work or examples that have already been cited in the main strategy document.

- I. **Executive Summary:** This is not an introduction to your strategy, but a high-level overview or synthesis of your full strategy. In this section, please make sure to include one or two sentences that highlight the significant changes you mention in section II (Notable Changes) below. You should write your Executive Summary *last*. Please see the [Strategy Resources](#) for examples of clear Executive Summaries as well as strong examples of other sections. *(Word limit: 500 words)*

- II. **Notable Changes (NEW):** While many aspects of your current strategy may remain the same as described in your last strategy document, you have inevitably encountered some changes over the past two years that required an adjustment in your work. Please use this short section to note these shifts, using no more than a few sentences to describe each of the following: *(Word limit: 250)*
 - **What is new?** What is completely new in your strategy proposal that was not present in your last document? Why have you integrated these elements, and what changes do they respond to?
 - **What has changed?** Among work you are continuing, please note any relevant significant changes in context or approach.
 - **What did you drop?** Have you discontinued any significant pieces of your prior strategy? Why?

- III. **Field Analysis:** This short section asks you to describe the primary context (field, domain, region, or country) for your work, with a focus on today's trends, actors, innovations, and key questions or debates that most inform your strategy. *(Word limit: 500)*
 - Who are the significant advocates, opponents, and donors active in the same space, and how do you interact? These can be actors you fund, those you do not, or emerging players you are watching. You should also mention any central debates, or understudied but significant questions facing the field.
 - Please also briefly list your geographic priorities in this section. Thematic programs should specify the specific regions and countries where you will focus your attention. Geographic entities should note your sub-regional or country priorities. These geographic priorities will be compiled and shared by the Strategy Unit to update our collective understanding of where our work is focused, and to support knowledge and discussion between thematic and geographic entities working in similar locations. If you need more space to accurately list your priority geographies, please use a brief appendix.

- IV. **Program Positioning:** This section summarizes the distinctive role of your program in the field in 2015. You should focus on aspects of your program's unique role or approach that are relevant to contemporary trends and the change you would like to see in the field over the next four years. For programs revisiting their strategies after two years, this section should emphasize how your program is distinctively positioned to respond to any of the changes you note in the Field Analysis section above. If relevant, you should also briefly signal any significant internal developments, such as changes to your team's structure, skills, or roles but any further description on these operational aspects of your strategy can be included in the optional final section (see section VI below). *(Word limit: approximately 250)*

Reflecting Your Goals and Your “Hypothesis for Change” in Your Strategy Document

In our choice of which fields to support and which concepts to pursue, we make an implicit set of assumptions about the near-, middle- and long-term changes we hope to see, and how our proposed strategic goals and activities contribute to these shifts.

In last year’s strategy discussions, the global board Committee expressed a great interest in this area, and frequently asked programs to speak directly to their assumptions or “hypothesis for change,” asking how staff imagined that their proposed strategic goals and activities would effect change in their fields and regions.

We therefore encourage you to write your strategy so that your basic set of assumptions about how the desired change will happen are as clear as possible, even while recognizing that change is hardly ever solely attributable to our own intervention, that influencing our fields is often a long-term project, and that our work is in constant flux as we respond to unexpected events. We are *not* asking you to undertake a log-frame or theory-of-change exercise, nor to adopt standard planning and evaluation language unless you are already using it. Our purpose is rather to help you anticipate the Committee’s question in this area.

You can therefore flexibly choose the most appropriate place in your strategy at which to articulate your “change hypothesis” and related goals: either at the Theme or Sub-Theme level, by Approach, or perhaps by a portfolio of work that exists somewhere in-between. Essentially, wherever you have identified something you want to change, you should briefly describe how you expect that to happen.

A Short Note on Goals: We recognize that all units organize their work differently, and may articulate their goals at different levels of their strategy. For example, a unit might have a small number of broad, high-level goals, such as the Roma Initiative’s three Network Goals on Roma. Alternatively, a unit might organize its work by thematic pillars, and have goals related to narrower bodies of work that fall within broad focus areas; for example, the Justice Initiative’s four clusters.

The “Portfolio” around which you articulate a goal can be a single Approach, a collection of Approaches, an entire Sub-Theme, or even a high-level goal at the Theme level. At whatever level you choose to organize your “Portfolios” of work - by Theme, Sub-Theme, or Approach - you should articulate a clear change hypothesis that explains in one or two sentences how you see each goal being achieved. A “Guide for Managing by Portfolio” will be forthcoming from the Strategy Unit’s Results Assessment team in early February 2015.

- V. **Categories of Work**¹: This section is the main vehicle for laying out your proposed goals and activities. The Committee continues to be interested in knowing how you distinguish the different levels of agency you plan to exercise in your activities and which different operational tools you will apply in these efforts, including the balance you propose between supporting essential actors in a field (Field support) versus pursuing your own big ideas and combining tools (Concepts and Shared Frameworks). **An important difference this year is that you are asked to describe your Field, Concept, and Shared Framework goals and activities using the Themes and Sub-Themes you have defined and chosen.**

¹ *Categories of Work* resources are available including a Glossary that lays out the difference between Fields, Concepts, and Shared Frameworks; a list of Themes and Sub-Themes; Graphic Illustrations; and background on the current Categories of Work revision effort.

We recognize that programs may choose to structure this section differently, depending on the logic of how you organize your work and articulate your goals. One approach to organizing this section might be to first decide which Themes and Sub-Themes you would use to categorize your work, and then, taking these as headings, draft high-level descriptions of each specific Approach you will undertake within these headings.

Alternately, you might choose to organize the Categories of Work section by goal areas, pillars, or portfolios that carry a logic that you define, based on your program's unique needs, rather than strictly by separate Theme and Sub-Theme. Following this approach, the section could be structured by each goal, pillar, or portfolio, each which would then encompass Themes and Sub-Themes, as well as corresponding fields, concepts and shared frameworks. Below are some additional aspects you can consider when describing your approaches:

- a. **Fields:** What are some of the main strengths and areas for development of the organizations and actors you trust to advance your shared goals? Why are you delegating agency to these partners? Put differently, why are these particular partners the best choice to achieve the proposed goals in this area? What will you do to make them stronger and more responsive to events? Why is now the time to support them? In brief (one-sentence) summaries for each Field, please convey how your current support to these actors will help advance your shared goals. Please note: it is your general perspective that is of interest here, not a partner-by-partner analysis. As noted above, you may describe your Field support by sub-theme or by goal, pillar, or portfolio, depending on how you organize your strategy and your work.
 - b. **Concepts:** What are your ambitions for advancing the concepts in each of the themes and/or sub-themes you have selected? Why are you proposing a high-agency approach on these issues? Specifically, what opportunity do you see, what distinctive insight and capacity do you bring to the work, and what is the unique role for OSF in this area that is not being played by others? Why is now the time to pursue it? What tools will you apply in this work? In brief (one-sentence) summaries for each concept, explain how you expect your proposed high-agency role and tools to help achieve the goal to which the activity contributes. Similar to the direction on fields, you may outline your concepts by sub-theme or by goal, pillar, or portfolio, depending on how you have chosen to organize your strategy and your work.
 - c. **Shared Frameworks:** This is the place to note existing Shared Frameworks you are engaged in and signal any new proposals. In either case, you should include a sentence describing how each Shared Framework fits into your broader strategy and how it advances your unit's ambitions.
- VI. **Optional Last Section:** Please include in this section anything additional that you want the network or the global board Committee to know. This might include any significant internal developments, such as changes to your team's structure, skills, or roles or any other aspects related to your strategy that you think important to highlight. (*Word limit: approximately 250*)

Overview of the 2015 Strategy-Budget Cycle

Below is a recap of the full set of dates and deliverables across the entire 2015 strategy-budget cycle. An accompanying “quick-glance” graphic is also provided for your reference (attached at the end of this document). In late May, you will receive further instructions for the budget side of the strategy-budget cycle from the Budget Office (June through December 2015).

January - March (Groups A & B)

Units up for review discuss (1) what has changed in your work and strategies since your original four-year strategy was approved in 2013, (2) how to organize your work using revised Categories of Work Themes and Sub-Themes, (3) any other issues relevant to your strategies. Units should take up these conversations with their advisory boards as appropriate, and all materials provided to Chris and the Committee should be vetted by your board chair.

March

- **March 6 - Group A Preliminary Strategy Materials Due:** Units assigned to Group A send their preliminary strategy documents to the Strategy Unit for circulation to Chris Stone and global board Committee. These preliminary strategy materials could take one of several forms depending on where your program is in the strategy process: options include 1) a custom memo to the Committee; 2) an adaptation of an internal document that you have been using to discuss strategy among your team; 3) a rough draft of the ultimate proposed strategy you are preparing for June. If you have specific strategy-related issues or questions you would like to raise in this discussion, you can convey those in your cover email to the Strategy Unit (StrategyBudget@opensocietyfoundations.org).
- **March 23-25 – Group A Strategy Reviews:** Preliminary strategy review conversation with programs in Group A take place in London with Chris Stone and the global board Committee. Discussions will focus on (1) significant changes since your original strategy was approved in 2013; (2) your categorization of work according to the revised Themes and Sub-Themes; and (3) other issues of interest to the program, the president and the Committee. Please see Strategy Support Resources (below) for more detail on these in-person strategy discussions. Group A entities will receive written feedback from these March discussions by mid-April so that they can use this input to finalize their proposed strategies due on June 3.

Group A (March Reviews): Asia Pacific Regional Office; Early Childhood Program; Education Support Program; Information Program; Program on Independent Journalism; Roma Initiatives.

Group B (May Reviews): Documentary Photography Project; Eurasia Program; Fiscal Governance Program; Global Drug Policy Program; Human Rights Initiative; International Migration Initiative; Open Society Fellowship; Open Society Justice Initiative; Public Health Program; Scholarships Program; Women’s Rights Program.

April

- **April 10 - Group A Requests for Headcount Changes due to Human Resources:** Your headcount request should establish a clear rationalization of how current headcount and requested additional headcount derive from your strategy and your grant-making approach. Your explanation should make clear what alternatives (shifts in funding approach, re-alignment of current positions, etc.) you considered and why they are not optimal. Human Resources will work with each program, advocacy office and administrative department to help you develop a personnel plan for 2016 and will provide additional guidance for analyzing staffing needs shortly. Human Resources is also available to support all programs and departments in developing their headcount requests. In

the meantime, if you have any questions regarding personnel planning, please contact Elaine Kurtz (Elaine.kurtz@opensocietyfoundations.org) for US/Latin America and Dora Felegyhazi (Felegyhazi@admingroup.hu) for Europe.

- ***April 27 - Group B Preliminary Strategy Materials Due:*** Units assigned to Group B send their preliminary strategy documents to the Strategy Unit for circulation to Chris Stone and the global board Committee. These preliminary strategy materials could take one of several forms, depending on how far along your program is in the strategy process: options include 1) a custom memo to the Committee; 2) an adaptation of an internal document that you have been using to discuss strategy among your team; 3) a rough draft of the ultimate proposed strategy you are preparing for June. If you have specific strategy-related issues or questions you would like to raise in this discussion, you can convey those in your cover email to the Strategy Unit (StrategyBudget@opensocietyfoundations.org).

Engaging Consultants in the Strategy Process:

For some units, strategy development and assessment is an entirely internal effort, while others engage a volunteer board member or a consultant to help facilitate these processes. Consultants cannot be hired to write your strategy however, nor can a board member be paid as a consultant to facilitate this effort.

May

- ***May 12 – Group B (and all remaining units) Requests for Headcount Changes due to Human Resources:*** As with Group A in April, HR will be working with each unit to support your development of a personnel plan for 2016. Any requests for headcount changes in 2016 should be submitted to Human Resources no later than May 12 for all units other than Group A. For any questions, please contact Elaine Kurtz (Elaine.kurtz@opensocietyfoundations.org) for US/Latin America and Dora Felegyhazi (Felegyhazi@admingroup.hu) for Europe.
- ***May 13-15 – Group B Strategy Reviews:*** Preliminary strategy review conversation with programs in Group B take place in New York with Chris Stone and the global board Committee. Discussions will focus on (1) significant changes since the original 2014-2017 strategy was approved in 2013; (2) categorization of work according to Themes and Sub-Themes; and (3) other issues of interest to the program, the president and the Committee. Please see Strategy Support Resources (below) for more detail on these strategy discussions. Group B entities will receive written Committee feedback from these May discussions within one week so that they can use this input to finalize their proposed strategies due on June 3.
- ***May 22 - Budget Targets Distributed to All Units (Groups A and B):*** Programs submitting strategies in 2015 will receive budget targets for both 2016 and 2017, as they are not expected to be up for review again until the 2018 budget cycle. All other programs, foundations, advocacy offices and administrative departments will receive targets for 2016. Units scheduled to revisit their strategies in 2016 -- primarily geographic programs and national and regional foundations -- will also receive budget targets for 2017 and 2018 around the completion of their strategy discussions in 2016.

June

June 3 – All Finalized Strategies Due (Groups A and B): Finalized proposed strategies from both Groups A and B are due to the Strategy Unit at (StrategyBudget@opensocietyfoundations.org).

July

July 10 – Proposed Budgets and Workplans Due (Network-wide): All proposed 2016 budgets and work plans are due on Friday, July 10.

August and Early September

August 4-15 and September 7-11 – Individual Budget Meetings (Groups A and B): Individual budget meetings take place between Chris Stone, unit directors, and members of the Budget and Strategy teams. These discussions are meant to provide each director with a chance to review aspects of their individual unit budgets with Chris in preparation for the management-level budget discussions with the Committee on September 28-30. More information on the content and schedule for these sessions will be forthcoming from the Budget Office.

September

September 28-30 – Management Presentation of Budget: Management presentation of the overall network budget to the global board Committee, in sessions organized by Theme and coordinated by thematic directors.

October

Mid October: George Soros reviews recommended budgets.

November

Early November – Budget Notification: All entities are notified of their 2016 recommended budgets.

December

December 8-10 – Budget Approval: Global Board reviews and approves recommended 2016 budgets.

December 18 – Budget Distribution: Distribution of final approved budgets to all units.

Strategy Support Resources

The 2015 Strategy Guidance provides the basic structure and instructions for the strategy document required of thematic programs and the few additional entities who are revising their strategies this year. Some of you will rely on your own practices and methods to generate that end product. Others of you might prefer more direction. Therefore, we have developed the following optional strategy resources to support the basic Strategy Guidance. These materials can be downloaded from the Strategy Unit's KARL site and include the following:

Resources for Preparing Your Written Strategy Document:

1. [2015 Strategy-Budget Cycle](#): A printable graphic of the timeline and deliverables across 2015 is attached to this document. For those advance planners among you, a timeline of the 2016 Strategy-Budget Cycle focusing on strategy reviews is available [here](#).
2. [Preparing for your Strategy Review Sessions](#): Tips for how to prepare for your 90-minute in-person strategy discussion, including materials referenced in these conversations, who should be there, and the "Top Questions asked in Strategy Reviews."
3. [Strategy-Budget Talking Points](#): A communication tool developed at the request of senior staff interested in communicating to their wider teams about the drivers that inform our strategy and budget practices at OSF and how the strategy, budget and assessment cycle can support program management.
4. [Categories of Work Resources](#):
 - A Graphic of the Categories of Work Taxonomy Structure
 - Categories of Work Frequently-Asked-Questions and Responses ("FAQs")
 - A User's Guide to Categories of Work ("User's Guide")
 - Themes & Sub-Themes List and Definitions ("Glossary")
 - Background on the ongoing Categories of Work revision effort
5. [Selected Samples from Current OSF Strategies](#): Strong examples of Executive Summaries, Field Analyses, Program Positioning, Fields, Concepts, etc. – *Coming early February*.
6. [Presentation Resources](#): Including 1) sample presentation formats for *materials* and 2) suggested presentation formats for meetings/discussions. – *Coming early February*.
7. [Ideas for Managing by Portfolio](#): – *Coming early February*.

2015

Strategy-Budget Cycle

Phase	Date	Event	Group
STRATEGY	Early Jan	Strategy instructions distributed	
	March 6	Preliminary strategy materials due (Group A)	GROUP A
	Mar 23-25	Preliminary strategy discussion meetings (Group A – London)	
	Early April TBD	Strategy discussion feedback from Global Board Committee distributed (Group A)	
	April 10	2016 Headcount submissions due (Group A)	
	April 27	Preliminary strategy materials due (Group B)	GROUP B
	May 12	2016 Headcount submissions due (Group B & All Remaining Units)	
	May 13-15	Preliminary strategy discussion meetings (Group B – New York)	
	May 22	Strategy discussion feedback from Global Board Committee distributed (Group B) Budget targets distributed (All Units)	
	May 29	President/HR recommended headcount to Budget Office	
BUDGET & WORKPLAN	June 3	Proposed strategies due (Groups A and B) Admin support requests to Admin Departments (Groups A and B - Date to be confirmed)	GROUPS A & B
	June 10	Budget materials and instructions distributed	
	June 16-17	Meeting with SMC and Thematic Directors (to include morning call with Foundation Directors on second day) (New York - Content to be confirmed)	
	July 10	Proposed 2016 budgets and work plans due	ALL UNITS
REVIEW & APPROVAL	Aug 4-15 & Sep 7-11	Budget review meetings with Chris Stone and Management: by Theme and/or Unit	
	Sep 28-30	Budget review meetings with Global Board Committee: By Theme	
	Mid-Oct TBD	George Soros review of recommended budgets	
	Early Nov TBD	Distribution of recommended budgets	
	Dec 8-10	Global Board review/approval of recommended budgets	
DISTRIBUTION	Dec 18	Confirmation of approved budgets distributed	ALL UNITS

2015

Strategy-Budget Cycle

GROUP A

March 23-25: Strategy Reviews London

ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL OFFICE
EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM
EDUCATION SUPPORT PROGRAM
INFORMATION PROGRAM
PROGRAM ON INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM
ROMA INITIATIVES

GROUP B

May 13-15: Strategy Reviews New York

DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT
EURASIA PROGRAM
FISCAL GOVERNANCE PROGRAM
GLOBAL DRUG POLICY PROGRAM
HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATIVE
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION INITIATIVE
OPEN SOCIETY FELLOWSHIP
OPEN SOCIETY JUSTICE INITIATIVE
PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM
SCHOLARSHIPS PROGRAM
WOMEN'S RIGHTS PROGRAM