

## **Annex 1: Portfolio Review Roles**

*April 2014*

Portfolio reviews are the centerpiece of OSF's emerging approach to assessment. They are meant to be thoughtful conversations that demonstrate and refine programs' decision-making processes and evaluative thinking by assessing concrete aspects of past efforts and identifying adjustments to the work going forward.

Establishing this new ritual within the organization requires many of us to take up different roles than we may have in the past. What follows is a brief guide to the main roles participants assume during portfolio reviews at OSF. As with many other parts of the process—especially during this first year of experimentation—these designations are subject to interpretation based on each program's needs.

### **Lead Staffer**

The lead staffer is the program person with the deepest knowledge of the portfolio and primary responsibility to represent the program's perspective on it before, during, and after the review. He typically is the main author of the portfolio review document and the first presenter at the review itself. In preparing for this five to seven minute presentation, the lead staffer can assume that attendees have read the portfolio review document and should not attempt to summarize it. Instead, his initial remarks should illustrate the program's experience with the portfolio via reference to some specific examples, revealing the logic and assumptions behind a program's decisions and how those played out in reality. The lead staffer should finish by posing some questions for discussion, being careful to root them in the actual experiences and lessons learned during the period covered by the review.

Occasionally lead staffer responsibilities are split between two colleagues, particularly in the case of large or complex portfolios.

### **Moderator**

The moderator's job is to manage and guide the discussion in two ways. She is responsible for ensuring that the meeting follows the portfolio review format, which calls for two or three short presentations followed by open discussion, wrapping up with a summary of themes that emerged and considerations for the program going forward. The moderator also has a specific obligation to encourage a probing and productive conversation, albeit with the support of the other participants. This means ensuring that those assembled refer as much as possible to specific pieces of work carried out within the portfolio; that all contributions are focused on benefitting the portfolio in question; and that participation during the meeting is sufficiently broad. To help build this sense of shared purpose—and if time allows—the moderator might ask all participants to identify themselves and briefly state their expectations at the outset of the discussion, returning to the group at the end to have them offer parting thoughts or questions to the program. A time-saving variant is to ask participants to write these things down and share them with the program and Strategy Unit staff later.

In reviews with Chris, he often takes the moderator role; in others it could be played by a board member, program director or staffer, or other OSF colleague.

**Discussant**

The discussant usually follows the lead staffer and responds to the portfolio review document and presentation. His role is that of the friendly critic, posing provocative questions and pinpointing unvoiced assumptions. In some cases, the discussant may want to offer wider context, but his remarks should mostly consist of reflections and supportive critique of the program's past work in the area.

In addition to acting as moderator, Chris often plays a discussant role in his reviews. However, many programs arrange for an additional discussant to speak before Chris; this could be a board member, program director or staffer, or other OSF colleague.

**Program Director**

Along with any other role the program director may take up, her main job is to ensure that the full program's perspective is brought to bear on the portfolio in question. This can mean sharing her own thoughts on relevant grantees or activities, offering insights on the state of the field or the logic behind the program's decisions, or signaling where other staff could usefully enter the conversation.

**Board Members**

In addition to other parts they may play, board members are encouraged to offer their unique take on the portfolio, pose questions to staff, and make proposals. Although we often look to board members to help us with strategy development and forward planning, in this case we first ask them to join us in looking backwards to assess discrete pieces of our past work.

**Other Contributors**

Similarly, other OSF staffers join to offer their views of the work and help answer the questions that arise. While their interventions will certainly be informed by their experiences, they should be focused on supporting the thorough review of the pertinent portfolio rather than offering supplementary detail on their own work or related efforts. Contributors can include staff from the program under review, colleagues from other OSF programs, or, more rarely, consultants or outside experts.

**Observers**

A small group of observers attends each review with Chris and, less frequently, staff- or advisory board-level reviews. They are tasked with supporting the portfolio review process, but may comment on substance when invited by the moderator or when their experience warrants it. Observers typically include two Strategy Unit staffers and a presidential fellow. The president's board liaison may also join on occasion.

**Rapporteur**

Programs should assign one staff person to take notes on the content of the discussion. These will inform the two main outputs of each portfolio review held at the presidential or board level: 1) a two- to three-page outcomes summary that recaps themes covered, questions to be pursued, and conclusions; and 2) marginal annotations to the program's strategy that describe the approach to the portfolio as it evolves.