

# An OSF Consultation on Shared Frameworks

## Meeting Summary – Friday March 22, 2013

The following summary describes the outputs and next steps generated at an all-day working meeting on Shared Frameworks attended by a diverse group of twenty-seven (27) OSF staff on Friday, March 22, 2013 from 9 AM – 5 PM at the Parish Center of St. Paul the Apostle in New York. Together, the group addressed a set of questions and issues central to the Shared Framework process, and explored in depth issues of governance, decision-making, budgeting, and other operational and technical elements of the Shared Framework process.

### Summary of Outcomes

The structure of this report follows the day's agenda. Two interactive morning sessions built connections among the group and identified the top priority issues, questions, hopes and concerns about the Shared Framework process and the Souk (*Interactive Plenary* and *Mapping What We Need to Discuss*). Later sessions delved into these core operational and substantive issues through small group work with participants exploring examples and drivers of existing OSF collaborations, prototyping a set of Shared Framework concepts, and developing ideas and proposals for addressing several operational, process and governance issues (*Collaboration at OSF Today*, *Shared Framework Prototyping*, and *Moving from Concept to Implementation*). The report concludes with a list of the concrete outcomes generated by the meeting (including a revised concept template and proposals for governance and process improvements that will be shared with senior management) a selection of participant reflections on the meeting, and a brief description of next steps.

### Opening Circle and Interactive Plenary

The opening circle introduced 27 NY-based OSF staff from a broad range of thematic and regional programs and operational offices to one another, many whom were meeting each other for the very first time or attending their first OSF-wide meeting<sup>1</sup>.

A group exercise (demonstrated theatrically by Daniel Wolfe, Steve Hubbell and Johanna Chao Kreilick) enacted by the full group identified questions and issues of concern related to the Shared Frameworks model and practices in the Souk. This Human Spectrogram technique<sup>2</sup> invited participants to work in small groups with colleagues they did not know and to brainstorm provocative statements relative to OSF and Shared Frameworks, in order to invite feedback from fellow OSF staff on each statement by standing along a line marked across the room where one end was labeled "Totally Agree" and the other was labeled "Totally Disagree".

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<sup>1</sup>Participants included members from the following thematic and regional programs, offices, partner organizations and operational departments ,including, Susan Allen (Grants/President's Office), Joe Behaylo (Grants Management), Phillip Binder (Burma), Neal DeLaurentis (SEDF), Shawn Dove (US Programs), Maryam Elahi (Int'l Women's Program), Kathleen Freis (Scholarships), Rachel Hart (Communications), Julie Hayes (Office of Programs), Steve Hubbell (Fellowships), JK Keller (Communications), Michelle Mullings (Finance), Julie McCarthy (Transparency), Lenny Noisette (US Programs), Gladys Onyango (Youth Initiative), Daphne Panayotatos (Int'l Ops), Erica Razook (Justice Initiative), Bipasha Ray (Fellowships), Anthony Richter (MENA), Cathy Ross (Latin America Program), Naomi Spitz (Migration Initiative), Julie Toffoli (Office of Programs), Daniel Wolf (Public Health), Amy Yenkin (Documentary Photography), and Nancy Youman (Climate Change). We greatly appreciate each participant's valuable contributions of time and insight, the generosity of the OSF programs that lent staff for the day, and Allen "Gunner" Gunn of Aspiration for his invaluable contributions to the process and event.

<sup>2</sup><http://wiki.sos.wa.gov/PeerLearning/Human-Spectrogram.ashx>

The exercise made visible the varying range of agreement and disagreement on a series of provocative assertions including:

- OSF’s culture of self-interest cannot change
- OSF does not have a technical platform to make the Souk work
- Shared Frameworks is all about the money
- Structure and technology will kill knowledge sharing
- OSF is not serious about adopting ideas from below
- Collaboration will make us less nimble

Group discussion on these statements demonstrated and explored the range of hopes, doubts, opinions and questions in the room and demonstrated how positions actively shifted with nuanced discussion and reflection.

### **Mapping What We Need to Discuss**

In the second session, a fast-paced discovery process<sup>3</sup> produced an inventory of high-priority operational issues that participants wanted to address, and built on initial feedback contributed during event planning. These group-generated topics provided the focus of the small-group work later in the afternoon and included resource concerns (staff capacity, time and budget allocations), governance processes (decision making, authority, approval), process and planning issues, and technology concerns (KARL capabilities).

### **Collaboration at OSF Today**

The purpose of this third session was to generate a partial inventory of current collaborations across the OSF network, and to characterize both the best practices and challenges associated with each.

Small-group discussions surfaced the range of productive collaborations already in existence across the OSF network and served to characterize what makes OSF collaborations effective, and how they come to be. This stock-taking exercise helped infuse later afternoon discussions on the proposed Shared Frameworks implementation process with a richer understanding of what is already working—and what doesn’t - in current collaborative efforts. The exercise acknowledged twenty-one (21) effective OSF collaborations of a variety of scopes and scales, including:

- a Justice Initiative and US Programs collaboration on Ethnic Profiling
- a project partnership between Scholarships and Disability Rights
- a program between OSIWA, AFRIMAP and the Youth Initiative on Constitutionalism in Senegal
- an internal OSF staff discussion on the Occupy movement
- a Campaign to Stop Torture in Health Care, knitting multiple program streams within one unit
- the DH Case on Roma rights in education, involving 15 active OSF collaborators
- a collaboration between the International Migration Initiative and TIFA, OSF’s Foundation in Indonesia.

The broader set of 21 examples and others provide opportunities for continued best practice learning, and generated a list of Collaboration “Positives” and “Fails” that can be built upon as a typology or set of criteria to inform Shared Frameworks and purposeful collaborations of all kinds.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://facilitation.aspirationtech.org/index.php?title=Agenda:Hacking>

| Collaboration “Positives”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Collaboration “Fails”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build understanding and agreement at the outset by clearly identifying shared goals and interests even if collaborators pursue different theories of change, strategies or tactics.</li> <li>• Clearly distinguish roles, decision-making processes, and allocation of resources from the start. Interdependent or shared leadership models create more of a sense of shared purpose and burden sharing – including shared staffing models and co-budgeting.</li> <li>• Regular, scheduled interaction and consistent, clear communication practices and information sharing are vital to success and include defining common language of terms and concepts used in the work</li> <li>• Objectives should be revisited often and carried through the whole process including being at the forefront of meetings (to avoid fruitless or excessive gatherings).</li> <li>• Best results achieved when local knowledge is recognized, respected and amplified along with OSF and (OSF facilitated) external partner expertise.</li> <li>• Foster continued attention to promising, dynamic or unlikely voices across the life of the project.</li> <li>• Put junior staff in the project “drivers’ seats” to result in consistent high-quality input across unit hierarchy- to bring fresh, and sometimes contemporary perspectives into discussion</li> <li>• Most impact achieved where OSF was able to tap its distinctive intellectual and experiential capacity in a distinctive value-added role in the field.</li> <li>• Precedent-setting work or pilot projects can help chart paths forward for larger collaborations.</li> <li>• Creating opportunities for peer-to-peer learning the most valuable source for unlocking knowledge.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of each other’s goals, practices and interests is not adequately achieved. Lack of clarity on direction/outcome dooms continued efforts.</li> <li>• “In person relationships remain the most important source of information about work and practices.” Newer staff is at a particular disadvantage here given lack of process of orientation to substantive work being done across the network.</li> <li>• Building enthusiasm on new ideas without the capacity or outlet for resolution or follow up.</li> <li>• Competing views on priority of complex issues halt progress.</li> <li>• Communication and coordination challenges arise when many players become involved.</li> <li>• Unequal resources brought to bear in an unmediated fashion can spur imbalances and conflict.</li> <li>• Tough to separate and balance your unit work load from your collaboration work load.</li> <li>• Organizationally dominant voices dictated agenda and priorities.</li> <li>• Turf battles – and also <i>perceived</i> turf battles - when there really weren’t any.</li> <li>• Collaboration works when there are clearly defined shared interests. Collaboration just for collaboration sake is not a useful.</li> </ul> |

**Shared Framework Prototyping**

This session invited participants to organize themselves in small groups to generate, in real-time, a range of interesting, believable ideas for potential shared frameworks. This module provided an experiential

understanding of the kind of strategic thinking, operational issues and group process raised when formulating Shared Frameworks, for example, how to generate a “minimum viable prototype” that conveyed a clear articulation of the goal and concept but loose enough to invite input from a diverse audience of potential contributors. Each group imagined a prospective framework based on six (6) concepts identified among the group including:

- Corporate Secrecy
- Mitigating the Corrosive Effects of Austerity Policies on Open Societies
- International Campaign on Drones
- Increasing Access to Education for African Women and Girls
- Increasing Equity in Roma Education
- Continuing Support for Open Society in Burma

## **Moving from Concept to Implementation**

Working in small-groups in this final session, participants tackled five (5) thematic areas identified collectively in the morning mapping session. Discussions focused on distinguishing areas requiring further attention or on generated user-informed models and proposals on the following topics:

1. *Governance Group 1: Democratizing participation:* This group identified a broad set of pragmatic approaches for encouraging a plurality of voices in the Shared Framework process, including the need to:
  - a. create more entry points for non-management staff to get involved and have a voice beyond email and KARL (i.e. well-moderated, voluntary Working Groups or Communities of Practice, in-person brown-bags, Salons, and “Shared Framework Fridays”),
  - b. design and facilitate OSF’s various Shared Framework governing bodies to encourage diverse participation,
  - c. give higher weight to Shared Frameworks which represent a plurality of voices,
  - d. continually extend a clear invitation to non-management staff and programs and foundations from outside the network “hub” to share and discuss substantive ideas on the Souk
  - e. be sensitive to cultural cues and differences amongst OSF entities
  - f. Develop and promote mentorship and professional growth opportunities that support and align with competencies required by Shared Frameworks including substantive expertise and process-related skills in facilitative leadership, active listening, ability to give and receive constructive feedback, team management skills etc.
  - g. achieve greater transparency and communication by the Senior Management Committee and the Global Board relative to Shared Frameworks,
  - h. hone an internal communications strategy including:
    - i. “telling the story better” – conveying results of shared framework activity and process in creative and compelling ways
    - ii. Provide balanced moderation of Souk discussions to ensure diverse inputs into Shared Framework concepts and policies;
    - iii. Conduct active outreach and dissemination of information and updates,
    - iv. Encourage directors to communicate with and engage their staff better
    - v. Achieving better clarity across the “complex.”
2. *Governance Group 2: Conflicts of Interest:* This group discussed a set of risks potentially surfaced in collaboration and brainstormed ways to mitigate some of these conflicts of interests. The group first brainstormed examples of the type of conflicts of interest that Shared Frameworks might generate including:
  - a. staff wanting to submit ideas their directors might not understand or support

- b. OSF units working in ways considered counterproductive to the approaches of others (i.e. field building or support-to-government efforts vs. demand-side advocacy strategies)
- c. Disagreements on the assignment of specific individuals for Process and/or Implementation leads.

The group then explored constructive approaches to surmounting these conflicts including:

- a. developing mechanisms to track value of investment in a particular Shared Framework project, in addition to ongoing monitoring,
- b. creating participatory processes to identify candidates for Process Lead assignments and hires,
- c. ensuring Process Leads represent collective OSF interests over fidelity to any specific unit, issue or program by considering external candidates or internal OSF candidates who are widely known for balanced and fair leadership and managerial competence and who have support of involved colleagues;
- d. requiring collective SMC discussion of any SMC Shared Framework endorsement
- e. aligning internal policy and communications - with perhaps enhanced guidance from OSF's legal department – to maximize effectiveness of the work without damaging our ability to engage with the outside world (This thread of aligning internal structure and policy with thematic work was also discussed in the Corporate Secrecy prototyping exercise);
- f. Requiring that Shared Framework concepts must be active on the Souk for a set time period before they are able to be considered for SMC endorsement.

3. *Endorsement & Implementation: Suggested Process Improvements:* This group brainstormed directions for improving the endorsement (approval) and implementation process in three areas:

- a. Simplifications to the Process:
  - i. SMC endorsement: Should related-subject matter expertise be required of endorsers?
- b. Clarifications of the Role of Decision Makers and External Partners:
  - i. Define Terms of Reference of various governing bodies (SMC, Presidential Review Committee, Global Board, Charrette Jury)
  - ii. More clearly define decision-making criteria of governing bodies that recognize effective strategies rather than simply rewarding collaboration for its own sake;
  - iii. Role of outside "experts?"
- c. Building Flexibility into the Process:
  - i. Pay attention to whether a different process is required depending on how much in-house expert knowledge we have on the concept
  - ii. Consider how different issue areas may best be served by different processes

4. *Staffing and Resources:* This group addressed questions related to staffing and resourcing Shared Frameworks including:

- a. How many shared frameworks can be worked on at once?
- b. How can we balance unit work with contributions to Shared Frameworks?
- c. What staffing competencies (not necessarily substantive expertise) are required in the management and implementation phase?
- d. How can staff participation be incentivized?
- e. Will participation be tied to staff performance evaluation?

Emerging provisional ideas included:

- a. Consider budget and time allocations from the beginning and create or better align operational systems to maximize efficiency
- b. explore flexible ways to get work done including external resources (e.g. researchers, specialists, etc.) to fill gaps in expertise
- c. Senior management and operations leaders to develop structures and guidelines for flexibly

allocating and tracking resources (staff, money, time).

5. *Strongly Suggested*: This group identified a list of non-negotiables that should inform the Shared Framework process including:
  - a. Aligning incentives for participation, i.e. providing supplemental staff resources and compensation for supplemental work and aligning human resources policies, including professional development, with Shared Framework goals and structure;
  - b. Ensuring transparency at all levels of process and decision-making;
  - c. Developing a clearer description of the added-value *and* limits of Shared Framework collaboration;
  - d. Making sure participation in Shared Frameworks didn't come at a professional cost;
  - e. Ensuring Shared Frameworks fit within OSF's core business and mission statement;
  - f. Understanding in advance what senior managements' non-negotiables are so that staff don't waste time on areas where there is not room to gain purchase;
6. *Template Improvements*: Participants brainstormed improvements to the Template for submitting a Shared Framework concept on the Souk, informing a revised version [here](#).

### Reflections on the Day and Next Steps

A Closing Session invited participants to reflect on what was learned and what appreciated during the day. A collection of contributions included the following reflections:

"I was very skeptical at the beginning, but afterwards I was full of hope."  
~ Neal DeLaurentis, Soros Economic Development Fund

"The most valuable elements were the radical honesty and refreshing candidness that characterized the spirit of the day, combined with exposure to the thinking of people outside my immediate environment. Follow up will be really important now so that people see that their ideas contributed to the process."  
~ Erica Razook, Justice Initiative

"The Framework prototyping exercise was particularly great in surfacing new ideas and helping people think through abstract questions and issues in a way that produced fresh, creative and useful outputs."  
~ Julie McCarthy, Transparency & Accountability Program

"I discovered very useful knowledge from peers I would not have ordinarily thought to approach because they specialize in areas distinct from mine. The ideas we came up with were substantive and enriching and discussions had an egalitarian feel which helped build confidence in what can be an intimidating process." ~ Kathleen Freis, Scholarships

Johanna restated that the goal of the meeting was to receive direct input from Souk users as we hone and roll out the Shared Framework nomination, endorsement, implementation and assessment process. She reiterated the promise that the Shared Framework process would invite honest, collective thinking that models the kind of collaboration and leadership we want Shared Frameworks to manifest, provide transparency in communication, honor and appropriately attribute the good thinking that gets done, and provide an open door approach that welcome any and all levels of participation.

Since the meeting, many of the resulting recommendations have already adopted or integrated into existing efforts including 1) deliberations by the SMC at their early April meeting on their role in the endorsement process, 2) a revision of the concept Template 3) exploration with OSF Communications and other units about how to demonstrate impact of Shared Framework projects once they are underway 4) discussions with HR and

the Professional Growth Design Team about the kind of resources, trainings and tools that could support professional competencies required by Shared Frameworks, 5) ongoing explorations with OSF-IT about KARL capacities and collaboration software options for the future, and 6) how existing efforts and models like the [Ideas Initiative](#) and [Working Group Calls](#) can foster Shared Framework development and help support knowledge exchange, creative thinking, and a culture of effective collaboration at OSF.



If you would like to learn more, if you are interested in co-hosting some version of this conversation in your office, foundation or program, please reach out to Johanna at x1343, or by email at [Johanna.kreilick@opensocietyfoundations.org](mailto:Johanna.kreilick@opensocietyfoundations.org)