

Proposal: Creating, Implementing and Assessing OSF Shared Frameworks¹

Introduction

The following proposal outlines a way for OSF to mobilize the diversity of resources within its own network in order to intervene with greater effect in the often thorny and complex issues involved in strengthening open society. The proposal sets out a process to develop integrated frameworks for joint action on a small number of OSF priorities while retaining a pluralistic problem-solving approach. The Strategy-Budget-Performance Assessment design team's primary charge in drafting it is to improve the effectiveness of OSF's work and of the strategic planning, budgeting, and assessment processes that are its backbone.² Second, this proposal intends to broaden participation in our highest priority projects from the start so that they incorporate the full range of useful resources available to OSF, as well as increasing the transparency of these efforts for staff, boards, and the public.³ Along with these main purposes, the design recognizes other important aspirations including the desire that this process support the emergence of bold, new ideas, a deeper commitment to rigor and self-critical analysis, and continued responsiveness to and respect for the agency of local actors.

Part I: Nomination and Development

Collaboration Souk: an open platform for developing shared efforts

OSF should develop an online internal platform for proposing, developing, and discussing collaborations at a wide variety of scales and maturity. [See issue #A.2.] We will call this a "Souk", the Arabic word for marketplace or bazaar – a shared space to display your wares, see what else is on offer, make connections and exchange comments. OSF staff, board and advisory board members, and fellows will be encouraged to post and comment on ideas for a variety of collaborations that might become an OSF shared framework, including new blue-sky thinking, descriptions of smaller collaborations already under way in the network, proposals to integrate currently separate lines of work into a new larger-scale framework, and mature proposals; these would be organized into tiers as described below.

In addition to being a live repository for OSF's shared efforts, the Souk would be a filter and refinery: participants could point out overlaps and intersections with other work, propose improvements, and distinguish good ideas (which are ready to be developed further) from embryonic ideas (which need more time to incubate) and ideas that are non-starters. Outlines should be tagged and searchable by keyword, as opposed to being arranged into pre-conceived and mutually exclusive categories.

To make the Souk easy to navigate, it could be organized into four tiers, which correspond to the phases described below.

- **Tier 1: concept** outlines of early-stage ideas for future OSF shared frameworks or blue-sky concept papers. Descriptions of small-scale collaborations (funded from unit budgets) are optional, but welcome.

¹ [See issue # A.1]

² This proposal focuses on strategic processes that engage multiple parts of OSF in high-level, shared work. It will certainly have implications for the strategies created by units (our term for those programs, foundations, and offices that currently submit strategies and manage budgets). Unit-level strategies are touched on only briefly here and will be addressed in the design team's subsequent work.

³ The aim is not to make the process democratic, as OSF is not a democracy. Rather, the arrangement proposed here should increase creativity (by creating new opportunities for serendipitous linkages between disparate ideas) and inclusion. It should also improve the quality of decision-making by exposing ideas to a range of commentary and critique at all stages of their gestation and implementation.

- Tier 2: **proposals** for shared frameworks; emerge after a 1-2 month process including a minimum two-week community comment period.
- Tier 3: **shared frameworks** and associated **strategies**; developed in detail over the course of 2-3 months, culminating in a public vetting charrette.
- Tier 4: shared frameworks and strategies **approved and under implementation**, posting regular updates and progress reports to the Souk.

Definitions

concept - a very brief (2-3 page) description of an idea for a shared framework, together with a rationale for OSF engagement.

proposal (4-5 pages) - a general definition of an issue, a set of broad time-bound goals, a preliminary landscape analysis, a preliminary list of units to be involved and how change could be achieved, a rationale for OSF engagement and an analysis of OSF's existing capacity to meaningfully address the issue, including an outline of possible counterarguments against the proposal. Preparation of the proposal may require baseline research.

shared framework – a refined analysis of an issue, a broad aim and an overarching set of time-bound, desired goals (usually in a 4-year timeframe but grounded in a longer-term vision), an assessment of who else is working on those goals and where gaps exist, a list of OSF units which will be involved, theories of change and how the different tools within OSF might be deployed singly or in combination to achieve the goals, geographic outline, and cost estimate; can encompass a variety of theories of change and specific strategies.

strategy - a specific set of objectives and an action plan based on a particular theory of change and tools to be employed, with a budget; aligned with an overarching shared framework as defined above.

Phase 1: Discussion in the Souk

On an ongoing basis, staff, fellows and board members post outlines for possible future shared frameworks. Descriptions of existing collaborations, funded from existing unit budgets may also be posted if the units involved wish to share the information.

In order to be considered for the shared framework process, ideas must be posted on the Souk. Ideas from outside the network would need to be fed into the Souk via staff, board members, or fellows.

Internal Facilitation Unit

This proposal envisions a key role for a new, internal facilitation unit that would safeguard the integrity of the process (a technical role) as other OSF actors engage on content. Its role in the development phases would be to help facilitate the development of the shared frameworks and in particular ensure both that network input is being fairly integrated and that the shared frameworks and strategies that ultimately emerge have been developed with sufficient rigor. During implementation the unit would guide the development and use of a workable monitoring and assessment plan. The unit would be lightly staffed with those having skills in facilitation, shepherding multi-stakeholder processes, and assessment, but have the ability to commission expertise in specific areas as needed. The unit might need to rely on the assistance of a Performance Assessment and Learning Coordinator to perform meaningfully all its envisaged functions.

Phase 2: Nomination and development of proposals

Nomination of the outlines from Tier 1 for further development occurs when three members of the Senior Management Committee (SMC) agree to sponsor an idea for a shared framework. This endorsement by

SMC members affirms that an outline has high-level support for developing a proposal, and commits the sponsors to provide ongoing support during its development, vetting and implementation. [See issue # A.3.] Requiring this endorsement ensures early engagement with the SMC, and multiple pathways for an idea to gain attention (as opposed to a single committee).⁴ Outlines may also be put forward jointly by OSF's chairman and president without requiring additional sponsorship.

Once an idea is selected, the SMC names one or more leads that coordinate a team (generally the group originating the outline) to flesh it out into a proposal by defining a set of potential goals, mapping other work being done on the issue, and conducting baseline research into needs and opportunities for intervention. Draft proposals are made available for a mandatory minimum two-week period of comment, soliciting suggestions for improvement by the OSF community on the Souk before they are considered for selection.

Fast-tracking

There should be no back-door process which would avoid community review and feedback. However, there may be cases where urgent action is required, so that strategy proposals may need to be fast-tracked through this and subsequent stages. Such proposals should be highlighted by management and in the Souk so as to get feedback from OSF colleagues as quickly as possible. It should be possible to go through all phases in 4-6 weeks if necessary, including a community comment period.

Phase 3: Selection and development of frameworks and strategies

A committee appointed by OSF's president now makes a selection of proposals to be developed as shared frameworks with a set of component strategies. The selection committee could include members of the Global Board, senior management, and mid- or junior-level staff. Service on the committee would be for relatively short terms, perhaps one or two years at most, to ensure a flow of fresh perspectives. Center-periphery balance should also be taken into account. While various measures could be used to encourage an open and self-critical debate (see below), the committee would make its final recommendations in a closed session, providing a brief written explanation of why a proposal was accepted, rejected, or sent back for further refinement. The selection of proposals is recommended to the Global Board for approval.

Selection Criteria: To be selected for development as shared frameworks, proposals would have to meet the following criteria:

- *High ambition and boldness:* they should stand out for audacity and a commitment to risk-taking that is considered, deliberate, and aware of limitations while being bold and ambitious
- *A multi-faceted approach:* drawing on several domains of expertise, pertaining to more than one geography (though there may be exceptions) and requiring more than one of OSF's "tools" for execution
- *Time-bound:* articulating specific goals within a clear timeframe
- *A strong case for why OSF* in particular should take on this challenge or opportunity, *and why now.*
- *An awareness of opportunity costs* (i.e. what other possibilities are being passed over in order to make this commitment)

Following the approval of the Global Board, the SMC names one or more leads to coordinate a group to develop the proposal into a shared framework.⁵ Each shared framework is likely to include a number of constituent strategies. Each strategy may have one or two lead individuals who oversee its development. In order to avoid groupthink and premature consensus, alternative strategies may be developed based on different theories of change, but adhering to the same shared framework. For the same reason, individual strategies may be developed under the guidance of two leads representing different backgrounds or areas

⁴ These sponsors should ideally represent at least two different kinds of units at OSF, to ensure a balance of thematic, geographic or functional perspectives.

⁵ The lead(s) could be the same person or people who developed the initial proposal, or someone else.

of expertise. In addition to the basic elements mentioned in the “definitions” box above, each strategy should propose specific ways of measuring success, and a monitoring plan.

As shared frameworks and component strategies evolve, the role of OSF’s tools or functional units within those frameworks and their relationships to each other will become clear. These tools have been identified as grantmaking; advocacy; litigation; program related investments; fellowships; and assistance to governments. Each has their own set of conditions and contexts that have to be respected. With regards to advocacy for example, the role of each advocacy office to develop the profile of OSF and their responsibility for official engagement and relations in that location should be complemented by the advocacy work around a shared framework. [See issue # B 5]

The development process is expected to take two to three months. Depending on the level of complexity, network interest, and urgency, the selection committee may want to arrange a mid-point OSF community consultation, drawing on ideas from the box below or others. It will also be important to involve some potential external stakeholders, to ensure that the strategies are consulted with key partners, and other individuals outside OSF who are knowledgeable about the issues and context. [See issue # A.4].

Ensuring a Lively Debate
 It is particularly important at this development stage that we be open and self-critical. Ideas include:

- *Moot courts* that allow for a ritually adversarial (and perhaps public) examination of a proposal, possibly with someone in the designated position of devil’s advocate
- *“Premortems”* that encourage the drafting team to anticipate what could go wrong with the work so as to strengthen it
- *Webcasts* of the committee’s deliberations for broader community input
- *Charrettes* for public vetting, as a final culmination (see below) or at an earlier, idea-generating stage.

Phase 4: Vetting charrette and approval

The development phase ends with a public vetting event – a “charrette” – where proposed shared frameworks and strategies are rigorously and critically reviewed and the best ideas are approved. It is likely that most charrettes would endorse the shared framework under discussion, although it might not endorse every idea presented for strategies that is attached to that framework.

This event provides an opportunity for the OSF community and, potentially, some external stakeholders to observe decision-making on shared frameworks in a way that makes visible OSF priorities in an evolving way of working. The final decision should be made (most likely in closed session by a specially appointed jury) soon after the public event, and include a firm budget commitment. The final decision is reviewed and confirmed by the Global Board at its next meeting.

Charrette Criteria:
 Within the vetting charrette, proposed strategies would be expected to be able to demonstrate the following characteristics, among others, in order to be approved within a shared framework:

- salience of the issue and its importance to advancing OSF values
- potential for impact
- quality of strategic thinking
- quality of the underlying theory of change and its evidentiary basis
- a thorough understanding of the context, actors, agendas and dynamics involved, and of the added value of OSF engagement
- OSF capacity for execution
- cost-benefit balance

Part II: Implementation and Assessment

Once an OSF shared framework is launched, involved staff and units begin to implement the strategies, while monitoring changes in the context in which OSF is operating as well as progress (or lack thereof) toward the change objectives. Implementation and assessment includes four main elements:

- Clarifying roles, responsibilities, and resources
- Implementation
- Monitoring, assessment and adjustments to strategies
- Communication with internal and external audiences

Clarifying roles, responsibilities, and resources

Before beginning implementation of the approved OSF shared framework, expectations should be clarified regarding coordination, communication, and responsibilities. A team leader or leaders⁶ for the shared framework selected by the President and Senior Management Committee (SMC) will work with the team in order to establish this clarity.

The team leader(s) will also review the specific arrangements for the use of financial and human resources. The shared framework is likely to have some mix of centrally allocated funds and additional contributions from program unit budgets. In a context where these frameworks aim at building on existing OSF interest/engagement, and represent OSF high-level priorities at a given moment, it is expected that interested units will gradually allocate some of their resources to the frameworks relevant to them. As we do not anticipate that units will have large unallocated reserves of their own, it is understood that units' financial participation in and dedication of staff to shared frameworks would evolve over time. While the contributions of units toward the frameworks will be defined during the development stage, these will be reviewed at the outset of implementation, discussed among the team and the program directors of the contributing units.

There are a variety of options for how both financial and human resources might be handled. Budget and staff could be housed entirely within the program units, associated with the shared framework and a working group created for this purpose, or assigned in a mixed arrangement; in any case, allocations of staff time will need to be clearly defined. The particular mix of federated resources mostly housed in unit budgets vs. more centrally housed resources need to be thought through carefully, and will depend on the type of strategy and the degree of current commitment OSF has to the issues involved in the shared framework. The SMC and the implementing team will decide the mix of centrally vs. unit-based resources the shared framework will draw on.

Teams will benefit from the support of the internal facilitation unit throughout the creation and implementation of the shared frameworks. Some larger teams may need to set up a committee or secretariat for easier coordinating and communication. Staff working on these frameworks will in most instances continue reporting to their unit directors (in some cases, they may be seconded entirely to a framework team). The team needs to clarify what kind of reporting to the team lead(s) is expected of team

⁶ In the implementation phase, for the purposes of coordination and accountability, the design team envisions that there will ordinarily be one team lead. However, the President and SMC may choose two team leads or other management arrangements, depending on the nature of the shared framework.

members for the purposes of the shared framework. Some teams may want to set up a system to help people track the time they are spending on the frameworks as opposed to unit-level work.

While the strategy development phase will have identified desired outcomes or change objectives, as well as ways that progress will be measured (indicators, benchmarks, etc.), and a plan for how monitoring will take place, the team should fill in any gaps in these areas before the outset of strategy implementation. Similarly, if a set of core partners and allies for the framework has not been involved in the development phase, the team should consider an early communication about OSF's shared framework, including orientation or guidelines, as well as negotiation and agreement with partner organizations on outcomes and monitoring.

Implementation

The shared framework will be implemented as outlined in the approved strategy (or strategies, if there are more than one). Grantmaking, convening, advocacy, strategic litigation, development and maintenance of relationships, and other elements of the framework are carried out by the team. The team leader(s) is/are responsible for coordinating the effective implementation of the shared framework.

Monitoring, assessment and adjustments to strategies

On the basis of previously articulated outcomes and indicators of measurement, the team will monitor the context and signs of progress toward our objectives. Every six months, the team will more formally report on progress through a written report, and will hold a full team meeting (in person, or by video or phone conferencing) to discuss how the shared framework is going and whether adjustments should be made. Monitoring reports will cover what has changed in the context; what the measures we have been monitoring tell us; whether any interim outcomes have been achieved; and, if so, how these came about. What was the contribution of OSF and partners? Are there other drivers of change that we have not been monitoring? Given what we have been tracking, what changes, if any, should we make to our strategies?

Besides the support to the development and roll out of the shared frameworks, the envisaged internal facilitation unit, with the support of a Performance Assessment and Learning (PAL) coordinator, will set standards and provide templates, tools and active support for monitoring and assessment of OSF shared frameworks⁷. It will ensure that this monitoring and assessment feed into reflection and learning by the organization as a whole. Assessment methodologies will need to be tailored to the nature and needs of a given framework, but could include a combination of self-assessment, peer review, and independent evaluation by internal or external evaluators.

If the team is monitoring the situation on the ground effectively, there will be moments where frameworks and strategies need to be adjusted more quickly and flexibly—for example, if an unexpected political opportunity appears, or if a particular development in the context makes it unlikely that change will come about in the ways previously identified. In that case, OSF should be agile and flexible enough to assess the situation and adjust rather than sticking to a plan that is not likely to succeed.

⁷ Alternatively, OSF could create a small Performance Assessment and Learning unit to perform these and other monitoring, performance and learning functions.

The 6-month assessment reports will be posted to the Souk. Anyone across the network is free to comment on these reports. In addition, the internal facilitation unit should engage with the assessment report and help to facilitate team assessment meetings as well.

Expanding OSF's Assessment Toolbox

With the guidance of the proposed internal facilitation unit and the PAL coordinator, OSF should develop a broader set of tools for monitoring and assessment of shared frameworks, and support staff in putting them to use. Here are a few examples:

- Real-time monitoring of grants and projects could be supported by collecting and analyzing web and social media metrics and using network mapping tools; these could be pulled together into dashboards.
- Conduct regular surveys of grantee and partner perceptions.
- Use polling (e.g. piggybacking on the World Values Survey) to track large-scale attitude and social value shifts.

The SMC will hold an annual performance assessment of progress within the shared framework, on the basis of the 6-month reports and a conversation with the SMC sponsors, the team lead(s), and additional members of the team who wish to attend. Interested members of advisory boards of contributing units will also be welcome to join. The performance review may result in changes in the framework, or in particular strategies within the framework expanding or winding down earlier than planned. If changes to the strategies are agreed upon, they will be posted to the Souk and open for review across the network. In addition, as work within a shared framework develops, units that were not initially involved, but that may be interested in contributing or participating can make their case to the SMC sponsors and the team lead(s). The internal facilitation unit should be asked to facilitate, co-manage or manage mid-term and endpoint evaluations, helping to ensure a consistent approach to assessment and learning across the organization.

At the mid-term of the programmed shared framework period (generally 4 years), an assessment of the progress made under the framework should be carried out. We suggest that this mid-term assessment involve internal peer review and be organized by the internal facilitation unit under the guidance of the PAL coordinator and with the participation of SMC sponsors and interested staff and advisory and global board members.

Towards the end of the programmed shared framework period, an evaluation will be conducted to assess progress against the shared goals identified at the onset, decide whether the framework will continue, change or end, as well as to inform strategic reflection within OSF and learning by the broader community of partners in the field.

Calibrating the Strategy Process

This is a new process and it will require ongoing experimentation and adaptation as it is rolled out. We need to have ways of reflecting on the process of the creation, implementation and assessment of the first shared frameworks which will emerge, determining what works and what does not, and adjusting the process accordingly.

The SBP design team is not presuming to know what particular shared frameworks may emerge, nor is it presuming that all OSF ongoing discussion on cross-cutting themes will become frameworks. Some existing cross-cutting discussions in OSF may, however, offer interesting opportunities to test components of the model we are proposing before it is rolled out.

Communication with internal and external audiences

Internal communication aims to ensure learning across various domains, relating to what strategies and tools are effective in what circumstances and to the shared framework itself. External communication aims

to share lessons learned with the field, engage other partners in the work to increase impact, and encourage replication/expansion.

Because the concept of OSF shared frameworks is new, it will be important to communicate what they and their component strategies entail, how OSF is moving forward with them, and what will be cut back in order to make room for them. In addition to the Souk, OSF may want to ask Communications to take on a more comprehensive internal role, possibly through a quarterly newsletter or a dedicated area on OSF's public website.

Communications staff will also support the team leads in relevant internal and external communications about the strategy. Team members can also post to the Souk news about interesting developments within their strategies.