

# Strategy Self-Assessment DISCUSSION GUIDE

This guide is intended to help facilitate group discussions about results of the Center for Effective Philanthropy's (CEP's) strategy self-assessment. It aims to spark discussions about individuals' use of strategy in their work as well as the Foundation's programmatic goals and strategies.

## PREPARING FOR THE DISCUSSION

- 1. Determine:**
  - a. What you hope to accomplish with the discussion
  - b. Which staff members should be a part of the discussion
- 2. Send the Strategy Self-Assessment Web link to all discussion participants**
- 3. Tailor the discussion to meet the needs and purpose of the group**
  - a. Pick and choose sections and/or discussion questions to focus on – keeping in mind the time allocated for the discussion

## BEGINNING THE DISCUSSION

### ***Getting on the Same Page about the Foundation's Programmatic Goals and Strategies***

Have participants take a few minutes to write down their responses to the following questions:

- » **How would you describe the Foundation's programmatic goals?**
- » **How would you describe the Foundation's strategies for achieving its goals?**

Ask participants to share what they wrote down. What aspects of the Foundation's programmatic goals and strategies were consistent across multiple participants' descriptions? Were there any parts of the descriptions that were not consistent?

### ***Bringing the Self-Assessment Results into the Conversation***

Ask whether anyone would be comfortable sharing their reactions to their self-assessment results, keeping in mind that some participants might not be. Guide the sharing of reactions by asking the following questions:

- » **What surprised you about your results? What didn't surprise you?**
- » **Where would you want to be located on the Summary Score of being strategic? How does this compare to where you are?**



After discussing the Foundation's programmatic goals and strategies and reactions to the self-assessment results, structure the discussion so that it touches on the defining elements of being strategic and the key characteristics of strategic decision making. Consider whether participants' reactions to their self-assessment profile results differ. How do they differ? Are there particular areas of the self-assessment profiles that should be given more focus in the discussion?

## HAVING THE DISCUSSION

### DEFINING ELEMENTS

**EXTERNAL ORIENTATION**—Explore how the Foundation uses external information and data when making decisions about how to achieve the Foundation's programmatic goals.

- » **What information and data about the external context do you use when making decisions about strategy?**
  - How is this information and data used to make decisions?
  - Is this information and data updated regularly?
- » **What are the Foundation's external feedback loops?**
- » **How often do you interact with the stakeholders and communities with which you work?**
- » **Have you received external feedback in the past that informed your decision making or actions?**
- » **What other types of information about the external context in which you seek to have an impact could be collected and used?**

**LOGICAL CAUSAL CONNECTION**—Discuss the connections participants have made between how they use the Foundation's monetary and nonmonetary resources and how they believe the Foundation's programmatic goals will be achieved. Have participants form small groups (or partners) and ask each other:

- » **Looking beyond the selection of particular grantees, how will the ways in which you use the Foundation's resources (e.g., money, staff's time, and staff's expertise) likely lead to goal achievement?**
- » **What are the underlying hypotheses that guide how you make decisions in your programmatic work every day, and how do you believe those decisions will help to achieve the Foundation's programmatic goals?**
- » **If the Foundation has a written logic model or theory of change, what are the assumptions inherent in the logic model or theory of change?**
  - How accurate are those assumptions? How do you know?
  - How often do you test those assumptions?
- » **If the Foundation does not have a written logic model or theory of change, why not?**
  - What are the barriers to writing a logic model or theory of change?
  - How can they be addressed?



## HAVING THE DISCUSSION — CONTINUED

Direct the participants to discuss the key characteristics that distinguish more- and less-strategic decision makers: having a board-approved, written strategic plan; publicly communicating strategies; being proactive in grantmaking; and using indicators, metrics, or other tools to assess strategies.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF STRATEGIC DECISION MAKING

- » **Does the Foundation have a board-approved, written strategic plan?**
  - If **yes**, how and when do you reference the strategic plan? How helpful is it in guiding your work?
  - If **no**, why doesn't the Foundation have a board-approved, written strategic plan? How can the barriers to having a board-approved, written strategic plan be addressed?
- » **Does the Foundation publicly communicate its programmatic strategies?**
  - If **yes**, where and how do you publicize the Foundation's programmatic strategies? What else could you do given the Foundation's resources and goals?
  - If **no**, what prevents you from publicly communicating the Foundation's strategies? How can this be addressed?
- » **Are you more proactive or more responsive in your grantmaking? Why?**
  - If you are more **proactive** in your grantmaking, how does your strategy help you to select the organizations/programs you want to fund?
  - If you are more **responsive** in your grantmaking, how does your strategy factor into the selection criteria for your grantees?
- » **Do you have indicators, metrics, or other tools to assess the Foundation's programmatic strategies? What are they?**
  - Are there other indicators that you could be using (either that you currently collect or could consider collecting)?
  - How do you use the information you gather from these indicators, metrics, or tools?

After the participants respond to these questions, have the group brainstorm about how these key characteristics could be used to improve on the defining elements of strategy: external orientation and logical causal connections.

## ENDING THE DISCUSSION

Finally, finish the discussion by asking the following questions:

- » **What are the barriers to being more strategic for you and your foundation? What are some ways these barriers can be overcome?**
- » **Name one thing you, as an individual, will work on after leaving this discussion. What is one thing the Foundation as a whole could work on?**

Please visit CEP's Web site to learn more about foundation strategy. ([www.effectivephilanthropy.org](http://www.effectivephilanthropy.org))

- » **Research Reports**
  - Essentials of Foundation Strategy
  - Beyond the Rhetoric: Foundation Strategy
- » **Case Studies**
  - Becoming Strategic: The Evolution of the Flinn Foundation
  - Striving for Transformative Change at the Stuart Foundation

