

THE PROGRESSIVE PHILANTHROPY PROJECT

Realigning Foundation-NGO-Local & Indigenous Community Relationships to Sustain
Ecosystems, Economies, Cultures & Communities

A PROJECT SUMMARY PAPER: Development Phase

March 2014

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SECTION ONE. THE WHY: Project Context

Project Origins

Over a ten-year period, the International Society of Ethnobiology (ISE) researched and developed a Code of Ethics (CoE)¹. The CoE was formally adopted in 2006, with further additions made in 2008. Since that time, ISE has been working on a CoE Toolkit² to assist in the Code's practical implementation. The toolkit is being contextualized and customized for four focal areas—Research, Legal, Policy, and Education—to facilitate CoE implementation. Implementation guides are also in development for specific user groups, such as university researchers, students, community members, and funders.

In the lead up to the 2012 ISE Congress, ISE Ethics Program Co-chairs and several ISE members and partners recognized that the CoE Toolkit could be of relevance and value to philanthropic institutions, particularly those working in ethically challenging or politically charged contexts. A Concept Note (Note) was written to capture “why funders should care about ethics in grantmaking, and catalyze conversation around the CoE and best practices.” The root of this “why” was our potentially seditious vision of philanthropy and a critical pathway of enduring partnership, systems-thinking, shared decision-making, and solution co-creation. Our end goal was to contribute positively to the ongoing evolution in grantmaking philosophy, norms, and practice.

With a skeletal Concept Note in hand, a Project Advisory Board and Core Group of Principle Investigators worked on finalizing the Note for circulation and designing a phased strategy for capturing and integrating learnings. The Core Group, with support from the Advisory Board, was responsible for leading efforts to identify

¹ For details about ISE's CoE Program: <http://ethnobiology.net/what-we-do/core-programs/ise-ethics-program/code-of-ethics/>

² For more information about the CoE Toolkit: <http://ethicstoolkit.net/>



and reach out to potential philanthropic partners. Details of Project membership and participation are sketched in Section Two (The How & Who) of this Summary Paper.

Problem Statement

It is fairly well established in the fields of conservation philanthropy and sustainable development that effective grantmaking



requires not only a fluency in local ecology but also, an understanding of cultural and socio-economic drivers, and perhaps most importantly, authentic engagement with local people. This particularly is the case in indigenous landscapes and seascapes. The strategic advantages of including local people in conservation and development initiatives are undeniable, and there is growing recognition that cultural knowledge, economic viability, and social justice are vital to realizing conservation and development goals and achieving durable impact.

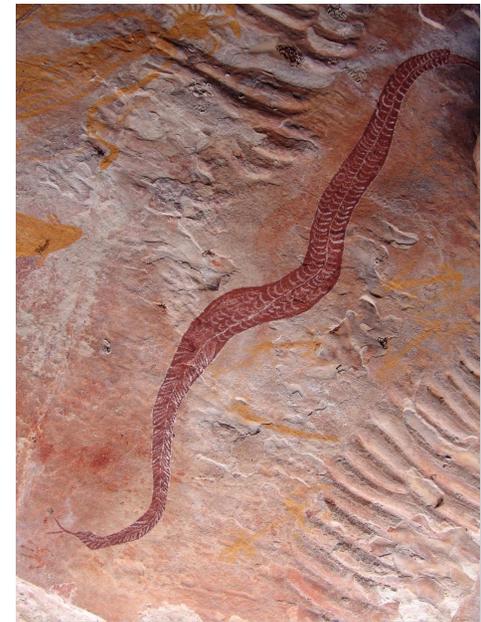
Unfortunately, realizing these tremendous opportunities is not always a straight, easy to follow line of engagement. It

can be challenging to operate in the complex arenas of conservation and development without a clear sense of the key questions to ask or the guiding principles needed to frame grantmaking relationships. Ultimately, the emergence of the Progressive Philanthropy Project was driven by recognition of the vital importance of this challenge and a dogged desire to meet it. One of the driving assumptions behind the Project was a belief in the development and implementation of “progressive” philanthropic strategies. In our

analysis, progressive strategies are grounded in systems thinking and the resilience of social-ecological structures; they are framed by biocultural diversity and ethically considerations. These strategies can overcome the history of unintended consequences in the fields of conservation, development, research, and conservation philanthropy, and begin to address the legacy of impact in indigenous and local communities.

Project Goals, Objectives & Expected Outcomes

The Progressive Philanthropy Project set its sights on co-creating a holistic vision for bringing forward philanthropic models that were not only more contextually relevant but also, replicable, scalable, and leverageable. In conceiving the Project, the intention was to capture and build on knowledge currently alive in the field—while simultaneously giving rise to a new and emergent collective understanding of guiding principles and grantmaking strategies capable of hastening reconciliation and ensuring the resiliency of ecological, cultural, and socio-economic systems. The Project hypothesized this type of philanthropic engagement model would produce more apposite, effective, and durable outcomes.



The Project adopted a phased design—each subsequent phase incorporating data from the previous phase via an iterative learning strategy. This Summary Paper reports on the Developmental Phase of the Project, whose focus was to establish the firm informational and relational context needed for sound strategic development and the long-term success of the Project. The primary objective of this initial work was to identify issues and questions for discussion and create a safe space for a series of small, topical meetings or gatherings. This "Gatherings Series" was

expected to bring together funders, conservation organizations (grantees), indigenous people and organizations, and local communities to dig into the challenges alive in the field and focus on inspiring engagement in deep dialogue, shared learning, and collaborative action.

The Gatherings were expected to generate several core products, including a series of briefing papers or “thinking papers”; best practices and case studies; relational collaborative networks; and web-based tools. A series of meta-level questions were developed to guide these early exploratory conversations. Questions like:

- How can the effectiveness of philanthropic projects in biologically and culturally rich systems be maximized?
- How can enduring partnerships between philanthropy, conservation and development, and indigenous people be realized?
- How can blind spots be mitigated so unintended consequences, such as the disempowerment of local stewards or the destabilization of community initiatives and/or institutions, are avoided?

SECTION TWO. THE HOW & WHO: Project Methodology

Strategy & Critical Pathways

The nucleus of the Progressive Philanthropy Project methodology was the Concept Note and its driving energy or expression was iterative learning through consultation. The schematic of the Project-launching Concept Note was an evidence-based case for why philanthropy is ripe for new ethical frameworks and toolkits to guide grantmaking. A history of projects gone awry, of unintended outcomes, of splintered strategic frameworks and relationships were pointed to—as were the opportunities inherent in a more explicitly ethically cognizant philanthropy. A case was made for investing in exploration, inquiry, and partnership around the



development of guiding codes, principles, and/or frameworks foundations could rely on to give rise to more contextualized, durable, just, and ultimately successful grantmaking.

The Concept Note was put through an extensive internal review process before being more broadly distributed. This work was primarily driven by the Core Group of Principle Investigators and focused on the solidity of content, effectiveness of frame and messaging, and strategic targeting. Colleagues in the philanthropic community were then sought out for reaction, comment, and critique—in essence constituting an informal peer review or consultation process. Three primary goals guided the peer review: 1) capture critical feedback that tests Project assumptions, theory of change, and critical pathways; 2) identify catalytic leaders and



potential Project partners and supporters; 3) spark Project buy-in and ownership.

A strategic focus was placed on developing a diverse sampling of voices. Foundations actively working in the arena of biocultural conservation, indigenous rights, and social justice were sought out, as well as foundations focused on biological conservation with geographic priorities overlapping indigenous territories or Native-led projects. A total of 26 individuals, representing 20 organizations, agreed to review the Note and in most cases, participate in more in-depth consultations.

People were willing to give their time generously and a significant number of the participants agreed to discuss the Project on multiple occasions, reviewing multiple iterations of the Concept Note. The conversations tended to be open and transparent—exhibiting a concrete willingness to dive into the heart of what are often perceived to be sensitive or twitchy issues. Most of the

consultations took place over the phone; a number occurred in-person; and a small percentage happened via email. The conversations all extended over an hour; a few stretched into several hour roundtables.

The Core Group revised the Project's goals, strategic approaches, and critical pathways based on the findings from these informal consultations. The learnings were integrated into the group mind via regular conference calls and more formally through Concept Note revisions. A final re-write of the paper was circulated through late summer and early autumn of 2013 for another round of comments. At this time, a formal expression of interest in funding and/or participating in the Project was requested.

Project Partners & Participants

To date, the Progressive Philanthropy Project has been driven by a close collaboration between a diverse group of individuals and institutions with a long history of involvement in all aspects of philanthropy and conservation. The Project's Core Group leadership is made of the following Co-Principle Investigators and Advisors:

1. Kelly Bannister, Ethics Program Co-Chair, International Society of Ethnobiology (ISE); Co-Director, POLIS Project on Ecological Governance at the Centre for Global Studies, University of Victoria;
2. Jim Enote, Executive Director, A:shiwi A:wam Museum and Heritage Center;
3. Guujaaw, Firekeeper for the Hereditary Chiefs, President of the Haida Nation from 1999 to 2012, strategist and negotiator for Council of the Haida Nation;
4. Cristina Mormorunni, Founder & Director, TERRAMAR consulting group;
5. Gleb Raygorodetsky, Ethics Program Co-Chair, International Society of Ethnobiology (ISE); Adjunct Research Fellow, United Nations University-Traditional Knowledge Initiative; and
6. Terri-Lynn Williams Davidson, Lawyer, White Raven Law & General Counsel for the Haida Nation.



In turn, this Core Group relies on an experienced Advisory Board, representing all dimensions of the Grantmaking-Indigenous-Local-NGO continuum:



1. Jessica Brown, Executive Director, BioLab Foundation;
2. Liz Hosken, Director, Gaia Foundation;
3. Gary Martin, Executive Director, Global Diversity Fund; and
4. James Stauch, Principal, 8th Rung; and Chair, IFIP.

Cristina Mormorunni of the TERRAMAR consulting group served as a voluntary Project Manager, leading all aspects of the Project with support from Amelia Jade DuVall, TERRAMAR Program Associate, the Project's Core Group, as well as ISE's Managing Director, Natasha Duarte.

SECTION THREE. WHAT WE LEARNED: Project Outcomes

Contributions & Responses: Voices from the Field

From the onset, there was a great deal of interest in the Progressive Philanthropy Project from our colleagues in the philanthropic community. All the participants felt the Project was critically important, posing difficult but urgent questions. The call for critique was well received and all the individuals contacted responded positively to requests for consultation.

The recognition of the need and importance of the Project was underscored; the call for deep dialogue around issues of indigeneity and grantmaking, ethics and grantmaking, systemic change and grantmaking was unanimous. It was clear that there are a number of fora and organizations working to advance these vital conversations, but most of the participants expressed the view that, to date, these dialogues may not have gone far enough and/or translated into enough real change on the ground.

The perception that more is needed was prevalent. In several conversations, participants speculated that the underpinnings and structures of current conversations probably are not “safe” enough—i.e., not grounded in the level of trust and transparency needed to securely dive into the murky waters that reconciliation, vision co-creation, and new partnership pathways require.

In summary, the Project’s initial findings illuminated the belief that if this important work is to gain traction and drive actual systems change, more people need to be brought into the room; more of the right questions need to be asked and asked more candidly; and more strategic, sensitive frames need to be designed.

The majority of the consultations highlighted the very real challenges this type of Project faces. The obstacles discussed fall roughly into three general categories or types:

- The Philanthropic Context: Virtually every interview pointed to the fact that most foundation Program Directors or Officers are overcommitted and time constrained. The success of the Project would require significant time commitments to ensure the depth of engagement needed to realize inherent opportunities. Even if additional time could be squeaked out from people’s busy schedules, justifying this to Boards, management, and staff would mean the Project would have to be of clear and immediate strategic relevance to accomplishing larger organizational mandates and/or strategic programmatic goals. In many cases, these larger drivers do not align directly with the vision the Progressive Philanthropy Project is holding out for the philanthropic community.



- Focus & Relevance: One of the central goals of the Project was a perceived need to bring more funders into the conversation—and specifically those funders not directly engaged in indigenous issues but whose programmatic and geographic priorities are based in and/or potentially impact indigenous territories, cultures, economies, and communities. In the Developmental Phase of the Project, the bulk of foundation outreach concentrated on conservation funders. While all of the conservation funders consulted completely agreed that additional work is needed in the often charged interface between culture and conservation, they spoke to the challenges inherent in prioritizing a project like this one, given the seemingly nonlinear link between achieving conservation goals and outcomes and supporting the vision and goals of indigenous people and communities. Clearly, at times these visions and goals do align perfectly, but these instances are perceived to be limited and in most cases, conservation funders’ theory of change, strategies, and desired outcomes are much more narrowly focused than indigenous approaches to conservation and development.



-Doing It: Another aspect of relevance is revealed in the fact that many of the organizations interviewed felt they currently are working along the arc of a changing philanthropy. Either they are biocultural funders and therefore actively work in partnership with indigenous people; they only fund indigenous organizations; or in the cases of some conservation funders, they are applying a ‘biocultural’ or ‘indigenous rights’ frame to their grantmaking where they can, when they can, and how they can, given organizational and programmatic constraints.

Some of these individuals felt that because they were already “doing it” not much could be gained through participation in the Project. Others felt that because they were “doing it” there were learnings that could and should be shared with others that were “doing it” or wanted to but did not know how. For most of the conservation

funders, relevance and stretching resources without a clear strategic or organizational mandate was a significant limiting factor.

SECTION FOUR. WHAT'S NEXT: Project Conclusions

The analysis of the findings emerging from this investigation uncovered several interesting insights about the potential of philanthropy to drive social change, as well as about its inherent limitations. Foundations are unique institutions, with significant power to invest in changing thinking, theories, and systems. It is important to recognize this potential is not without restrictions. Foundations are beholden to the vision, values, and theory of change of their Trustees and Boards and it is not easy, and in some cases not even possible, for a Program Officer or Program Director to operate outside these defining boundaries. Direct links back to programmatic priorities must be clear, even when pursuing unexpected opportunities or creative new approaches. Finally, at a more granular or practical level, it is clear that codes of conduct or codes of ethics may not be as relevant to framing grantmaking as charitable tax codes.

Although our study was limited in scope, it supports our inceptive assumption that the foundation community holds significant interest in exploring the interstitial spaces between conservation and culture, between grantmaking and ethics, between indigenous people's interests and strategies and those of NGOs. And not only is there interest, but there is a deep desire for honest, open dialogue about these integral issues and, perhaps even more significant, a recognition of the need to dissect the challenges and collaborate on solutions without defensiveness or finger-pointing.

Our work also supported the hypothesis that biocultural or rights-based frames are not currently prevalent in philanthropy. A very small number of foundations actively are supporting indigenous approaches to conservation or development or are investing in





advancing sovereignty or indigenous rights. An even smaller number of foundations fund indigenous people or organizations directly. And finally, we did not find a single organization explicitly relying on formal ethical guidance, such as a code of ethics, to guide their grantmaking, let alone their engagement with indigenous people.

These findings point to significant gaps in the field and illuminate critical next steps. Despite the interest in and support for the Progressive Philanthropy Project and its message, only one foundation—the Oak Foundation—stepped forward with concrete financial support. Our hypotheses are preliminary and a better understanding of the ‘whys’ is warranted. However, we firmly believe in the validity of the originally proposed “Gathering” framework. Only through creating a space where funders, NGOs, and indigenous/local communities can explore the nature of their relationship and respectfully share their lessons, best practices, and learn from their successes and mistakes, can we move the field of conservation philanthropy forward. Our initial findings suggest catalytic

leadership within the philanthropic community is needed to get this type of project successfully off the ground. Without leadership, we do not feel the conversations will advance, let alone gain momentum. For a project like the Progressive Philanthropy Project to move forward, foundation leadership and investment is needed to create a gravitational pull strong enough to overcome the realities of overcommitted calendars, competing demands, hazy relevance, hard conversations, and even harder solutions.³

³ Photo credits: image p. 7: shutterstock_161989352; image p. 9: yuris/shutterstock; image p. 10: ozphotoguy/shutterstock. All other images: cristina mormorunni/terramar 2013-2014.

APPENDIX ONE: Consultations

- Anonymous
- Jennifer Astone: Swift Foundation
- Kyra Busch, Jeff Campbell, China Ching & Ken Wilson: The Christensen Fund
- Laurie Betlach: Lannan Foundation



- Guillermo Castilleja: The Gordon & Betty Moore Foundation
- Steve Cornelius: The John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
- John Daly: Champion Foundation
- Penny Davis: Ford Foundation
- Jaune Evans: Tamalpais Trust
- Jenny Grimm: Arctic Funders Network
- David Gordon: Margaret A. Cargill (M.A.C) Foundation (currently with Richard & Rhoda Goldman Fund)
- Kim Hardy, Steve Ellis, Ross McMillian & David Secord: Tides Canada
- Anne Henshaw: Oak Foundation
- Richard Jeo: The Nature Conservancy: Canada Program

- Denise Joines: Wilburforce Foundation
- Brian Keane, USAID
- Fred Munson: 444S
- Jennifer Sokolove: Compton Foundation
- Tom Steinbach: The William & Flora Hewlett Foundation
- Sam Tucker: The David & Lucile Packard Foundation