



The Putnam Guide

Increasing Speed in Philanthropy

by Kris Putnam-Walkerly, MSW

“If we believe that what we do matters, then we should seek to make dramatic improvements as quickly as we can.”

In philanthropy, we seem to be perpetually rushing from one thing to the next, both as individuals and as an entire industry. There's always a new technology to learn, more grant applications to evaluate, and another nonprofit coalition forming. Yet while everyone is moving quickly and feeling busy, the real change we seek comes along at the pace of snails. We're spending so much time working harder that we're not thinking about how we can work smarter. To start focusing on impact instead of deadlines, we need to change both the mindset and the work patterns that hold us back. And to do that we need to slow down — to question, brainstorm, and plan — so that we can move fast when it comes adapting to the dynamic changes of philanthropy.

Why is this important? Because every delay prevents our ability to have an impact — and impact in philanthropy is about people's lives. When we're talking about ensuring access to high-quality preschools, preventing drug overdoses, or reforming immigration policies, we are talking about changing people's lives. And if we believe that what we do matters, then we should seek to make dramatic improvements as quickly as we can.



Think about the ways you or your foundation might be slowing down the effectiveness of your work. Have you found yourself guilty of any of these examples?

- You spend six months debating whether you should engage in policy advocacy and whether it's too risky — and end up missing a policy window. Your ability to influence legislation is gone.
- You drag out the amount of time you spend internally to develop a new funding initiative and copyedit your Request for Proposals, getting you too close to the funding deadline. To make up for this lost time, you shorten the amount of time you give grantees to apply and end up funding projects that are not well thought out and are less likely to succeed.
- Your days are filled with back-to-back meetings and you rarely have time to think, much less plan.

The goal is not to create efficiency for efficiency's sake. It's to do our work better, make smarter investments, and change more people's lives. Yes, it's critical to make sure grant investments are worthwhile, deliberate, and have clear impact. But smart, effective philanthropy can happen with both efficiency *and* speed if we think differently about how to approach our work. That means making assessments on three levels: as an individual, as an organization, and as a partner to grantees.

As an Individual: 15 Ways to Get Time Back in Your Day, Every Day

First, let's start with you, the individual. Taking charge of your own schedule and your work requires a shift in mindset. We all get into daily work patterns — some of them healthy, some not. How often do you find yourself so focused on the to-do list that you've lost track of why you're doing the work? Everyone can improve their work habits, and even if the changes are simply tactical, they can add up to a clear, focused approach to the job rather than an exercise in constantly putting out fires.

Here are 15 ways you can capture more of your own time:

1. Don't check email first thing in the morning.

This one is a hard habit to break for many of us. You're worried you might miss something

important, so you start your day by clicking through endless emails. In reality, though, you're giving control of your time and mental energy to others instead of starting your day focused on something you know want to accomplish.

2. Set your top 3 priorities for the day right at the start.

Make these manageable, but not so tactical that you've finished them in the first hour. These priorities are meant to help keep you focused and on track — don't simply create a to-do list.

3. Spend the first hour of your day doing something creative or tackling something that's been causing you stress.

Creative doesn't mean you have to do something artistic — it means doing something that generates ideas or gives you energy. It might be taking the time to brainstorm your next funding initiative, thinking about how to reorganize your team, or contemplating what professional development experiences can help you move forward. An equally effective alternative is to eliminate a stressor, whether that means installing better lighting in a dim office or figuring out how to terminate an ineffective or detrimental professional partnership.

4. Prevent technology from taking over — no beeps or notifications. Ever.

Go through your phone and computer and remove all the notifications (e.g., for new emails, breaking news stories, and social media posts). Make this change permanent. It will help clear your head and eliminate constant distractions. Ruthlessly unsubscribe from unnecessary emails that are a drain on your time and offer you little substance. Send certain types of emails automatically into folders so you can peruse them at a point in the day that you've set aside specifically for reading. Finally, check your email three times a day — not all day long.

5. Keep email replies brief and to the point.

Don't spend 10 minutes drafting and editing an email that only needs 20 seconds of your time. That 10 minutes done five or six times amounts to an hour of your day spent responding to emails that each really only required a simple "Yes, thank you" or "Sounds good." One tip: There's a



difference between being simple and being terse. Remember to add that “thank you” or to put in an exclamation point when it makes sense to show gratitude or enthusiasm.

6. Ask yourself: How can I do this in half the time?

Make it a habit to continuously ask yourself how you can accomplish anything in half of the time you typically take. This might include staff meetings, preparing for board meetings, or designing your next funding initiative. Force yourself to come up with a solution that requires half the time. Chances are, this will involve some other changes as well, such as more efficient prep for meetings, less duplication of information in your board docket, or streamlined information gathering — and that’s a good thing!

7. Identify your procrastination destination and remove it.

My friend, consultant and author Val Wright shared this concept with me, and I’ve found it helpful to share with my clients: We all have “procrastination destinations” — the personal place we go, mentally or physically, when we want to procrastinate. For some people, this can be Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. For others, it might be walking the halls and talking to coworkers. Whatever it is, it’s delaying you and taking up time in your day, so you need to identify and eliminate it. If Facebook is your procrastination destination, remove the app from your phone so that you’re not constantly looking at it. If getting up and talking to colleagues is your procrastination, schedule an hour on your calendar specifically for the project you need to work on, and don’t get up until the hour is done.

8. Identify your “productivity propensity.”

What are the conditions under which you are most productive? Are you better focusing on one thing for hours or would you be more productive if you spent 60 minutes each day on the project? Are you more productive in a working environment with or without music? Do you need solitude or do you prefer the sounds of colleagues or peers working nearby? Get clear on your ideal conditions for productivity and rework your schedule or arrange your office so you can be your most productive.

9. Calculate the cost of your time.

Often, foundation leaders do not think at all about how much things cost in terms of staff time — their

own or that of their employees. Take the example of planning a business trip to see just how easy it is to waste money when you waste time. In an effort to be cost-efficient for an upcoming conference, you spend one-third of a day researching the cheapest hotels, the cheapest flights, and the most affordable public transportation — and you manage to save \$500. You’re saving money up front, but what you haven’t calculated into the equation is the amount of *time* you’ve wasted — and that’s only in the planning stage. Once you’re on the trip, sure, you’re in a cheaper hotel than the conference venue, but it’s 10 blocks away. You took a more affordable flight, but you had to catch one or two connecting flights instead of going nonstop. You spent three hours researching travel, and the new itinerary you’ve created for yourself is five hours longer each way, because it’s not a direct flight. You’ve already tallied up 13 unnecessary hours in research and air time, and that’s before you’re even on the ground at the conference — where, instead of taking a taxi or Lyft (or just the elevator), you’re taking a bus and a subway ride.

If you quickly calculate your hourly wage (by looking at salary plus approximately 25% in benefits and dividing it by 2,080 working hours per year), you’re likely to find that a senior-level person at a foundation is making around \$75 per hour. If you multiply that by 13 hours, it just cost you \$975 to save \$500 in travel expenses. And the bigger questions are these: What else could you have accomplished with those 13 hours? What’s the impact of being exhausted from 10 extra hours of travel, or getting up at 3 a.m. to catch a cheaper flight, or getting home after midnight?

10. Say no.

How many times a week do you get requests to “pick your brain” or “grab a quick cup of coffee”? It’s not always necessary to meet someone in person to give career advice or consult about a project. You have to start saying no to all those requests for your time that really are not advancing your own personal or foundation goals. Of course it’s important to be open, especially to grantees and the community, but there are still ways you can be useful and helpful without having to physically use your time.

For example, one of my clients was the director of race equity and inclusion at the Annie E. Casey



Foundation. They've done a fantastic job of operationalizing equity at that foundation, and the director was flooded with requests from other funders to share ideas, visit with staff, do board trainings, etc. She wanted to further the field of equity and inclusion but also needed to make sure that wasn't taking away from her own role in the foundation. As a result, she decided to document how the foundation operationalized equity in its work. This became part of the strategy of her work — not a separate distraction. The case studies she created are now hugely helpful to her own staff and board; save her time once spent in meetings and trainings; and they add to her organization's weight in the field, since other foundations regularly request them to learn from the Casey Foundation how to understand equity issues without having to reinvent the wheel.

11. Get enough sleep.

Funders and high net-worth donors cannot do their job if they're not taking care of themselves, and a big part of that is making sure you're well rested. Lack of sleep is a true health problem, and it has significant negative implications for our well-being. Simply put, if you don't get enough sleep each night, you will not be successful. Many studies will tell you that you need eight hours of sleep per day. Make sure that's part of your schedule.

12. Pick up the phone instead of sending multiple emails.

It's often true that email can be more efficient than a phone conversation, but when "just one quick email" becomes a back-and-forth conversation of multiple paragraphs, you know it's time to just pick up the phone. You may worry about interrupting someone, but you'd be surprised at how many people answer their phones (or Skype or Slack calls) and are happy to reach a faster conclusion in a personal conversation rather than by sending back yet another email. And if you don't reach the person directly, you might reach an assistant who can help you schedule a meeting or find the information you need.

13. 80% there? Then move on.

Stop laboring over the final details of a project, and instead send it on to the next phase to keep it moving. Success is not about perfection. As one of my mentors, Alan Weiss, has shared with me, too often we find

ourselves spending an inordinate amount of time on that last 20% of anything we do, but those details tend to be far less important. It's far better to get it nearly done and start moving on it with the confidence that you can make course corrections along the way. For example, if you're writing an article or a speech and you've covered all your bases, don't spend excessive time debating whether you should make three points or five points, or in what order. If you're launching a new funding initiative and you've done enough evidence-based research to have figured out 80% of your strategies, don't keep it to yourself — send it on to your project partners so you can all get it moving forward together.

14. Assign it to someone else.

As a general rule, if someone else can do the work, hand it off. (You'll notice that this dovetails well with tip #13.) Assign certain tasks to another staff member or consultant so you can focus on the work that only you can tackle. For managers, that might mean having staff summarize their performance discussions with you and then emailing you those write-ups. If a summary is accurate, great — file it away. If it's not, reply with corrections and then file. You've dispersed the work, and you've helped that person understand and internalize the conversation.

15. Complete the joy/hate/delegate exercise.

Make a list of all the activities that you do in your work — even in your personal life. Make the list extensive, organize it, and group it by categories, and then create three columns to the right of that list. The first column is for activities that either bring you joy or give you energy. The second column is work that is OK but could easily be delegated. And the last column is that work that takes away your energy or you simply hate doing. You should be spending 80–100% of your time on the work that gives you joy. Period. And the hate column? Stop doing all of it. That's right — immediately remove that work from your day. Perhaps it no longer needs to be done at all (e.g., mandatory site visits for every applicant, or summarizing grant proposals three different ways for board dockets). Delegate it to someone else or consider hiring an assistant to handle it for you. Others might find joy in the activities you dislike (house cleaning, representing your foundation at events). When you focus on the work that brings you joy, you accomplish more and you do it in less time.



	Brings Joy	OK But Can Delegate	Hate
Conducting site visits		✓	
Editing board docket			✓
Developing partnerships	✓		
Public Speaking	✓		
Serving on the XYZ board			✓
Performance write ups		✓	
Developing budgets		✓	
Bookkeeping			✓
Social media		✓	

As an Organization: 2 Ways to Speed up Your Work

Once you've tackled the challenge of your own personal work habits, the next part is to focus on organization-wide change. Funders often struggle with efficiency when it comes to creating new programs or evaluating impact. The solution is not to give everything a cursory glance. Instead, focus on speed that makes a difference.

Take time to regularly look at *how* you're doing your work. Lift up your own hood to identify areas of duplication, waste, redundancy, barriers, blocks to decision making, and policies and procedures that no longer serve you. Then systematically determine how to eliminate or dramatically improve them.

One foundation I know provides an annual award to a nonprofit for excellence in managing their business. The focus here is less on programming and more on the way the organization is run. One year the funder decided to turn the tables and fill out the application themselves, as if they were trying to earn the award. Doing this gave them a lot of internal information about best practices they had been recommending to grantees yet weren't doing themselves.

Once you've taken the time to examine how you're doing your work, you also have to prepare yourself and your staff for organization-wide change. Change isn't easy for most people, and when you alter or remove the structures they rely on, you may find resistance, or at the very least frustration. You need to be clear that this isn't about revising work habits for the sake of shaking things up; it's about changing the dynamic of how you approach your ability to make a true impact. That might mean a complete culture change, such as a shift to a focus on intentional learning, continuous improvement, and speed.

But this is also an opportunity for your staff to open up and share their ideas and concerns. And once they feel part of the solution, you can bet they'll be more willing to adjust. Everyone can think of areas in their work that have been frustrating, but often we don't provide staff members the opportunity to voice those frustrations. Many times organizational improvements don't happen because you haven't had time to focus on them, or it's "the way things are done around here," or your organizational environment doesn't encourage change and continuous improvement. What made sense for your foundation when it first started, or even five years ago, might not make sense in today's environment — and may even be holding you back.

"What got you here won't get you there."
—Marshall Goldsmith, Executive Coach

1. Get started on change.

Making an organizational shift can be daunting, whether you're a small funder with minimal staff or a large foundation with an ever-growing organizational chart. Don't try to change everything at once. Give yourself some quick wins by following three steps: keep it simple, focus on the low-hanging fruit, and make it fun and rewarding. You can help your team make some quick, easy strides — and feel good about it — by doing any of the following:

- Ask everyone on your team to identify one aspect of their work that seems exceptionally slow, cumbersome, or unnecessary. It might be reporting processes, length of time to make



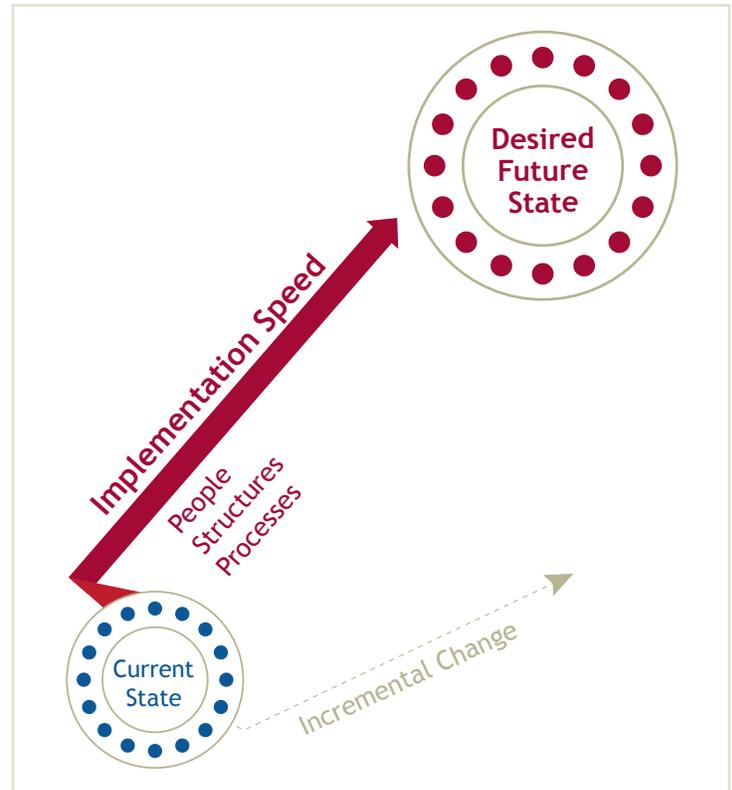
a grant, time to prepare for board meetings, or the number of meetings. Then ask them to come up with potential solutions to speed things up.

- Each week or month, identify one department — finance, human resources, grants management — and collectively brainstorm areas of bureaucracy, slow pace, duplication, or waste. Brainstorm possible solutions together, and then prioritize immediate next steps, including who is accountable for what and by when.
- It's critical that the CEO model this self-evaluation. Culture change is not about blame. *We all* can improve our work processes.
- Consider rewarding people, particularly in teams, when they come up with a creative solution or idea to “cure” areas of duplication or bureaucracy. Incentives are motivating.

2. Reassess your goals and how you achieve them.

When it comes to speeding up the larger work of your organization, there are several different approaches. The most important thing is to give yourself the space to think deeply about your work. This is not about quick fixes. Instead it's about redefining the way you accomplish your mission.

- *First, identify how you define success and work backward on how you can achieve it.* The goal is to make dramatic improvement quickly, not sluggish, incremental change. For example, maybe your foundation gives out a slew of \$5,000 grants each year, and every grant requires a full proposal and five-step review process, including site visits. Is this the best way for you to invest in the issue? Think about what these grants are trying accomplish. Are you trying to meet basic needs? Expand access to high quality tutoring services? Are there better ways to invest? Think about the impact you could make with fewer, larger grants, or by supporting systems change or policy change. Another way to get there quickly might be to reduce the five-step process to two steps. Focus on what you're trying to accomplish with your philanthropic investments, and what the best approach is to help you get there. It's not about the greatest potential for *process* — it's about the greatest potential for *success*.



- *Second, step back and start over.* Think about how you would create the work if it were built from the ground up today. What would be different? It might be your program area, your legal department, your professional development strategy, your entire foundation. Whatever it is, if you started today from scratch, what would you want in place? For example, you might dream of creating an app that would allow grantees to track the progress of their application, and allow your staff to make funding decisions on the run while they're at various conferences or meetings. This approach allows you to let go of all the baggage of your current processes and start fresh. Solicit input from everyone on staff. The goal is to create really different approaches to your work.
- *Third, allow for course corrections along the way.* Don't focus on plotting the perfect course at the beginning. Instead, give yourself the chance to make effective changes. If an approach isn't working, take the time to adjust. One strategy that can work well is tracking time. Have yourself, your team, or



everyone in your foundation spend some time tracking all of their activities and how much time they're taking, and then analyze that information to see what needs to change for effectiveness.

HOW THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION DID IT

A few years ago, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation was considering new approaches to their Forward Promise initiative. The goal was to make ten \$500,000 grants to ten different organizations. Initially they received 1,200 proposals — the most proposals they had ever received for one initiative in the foundation's 40-year history. They needed to get those 1,200 down to 300, and then to 50, then to the 20 that would receive site visits, and finally to the ten that would get funding.

The fastest part of the whole process was whittling down the 1,200 to 300 — normally a time-consuming task even with far fewer proposals to consider — because the foundation had invested time and resources into a very robust and sophisticated online application and reviewing system. All of the applications were submitted online, and then teams of reviewers from around the country were electronically assigned specific proposals to read. The criteria were entered online so reviewers could score them online. Winnowing the huge batch of proposals went shockingly quickly, because the foundation had taken the time up front to think through and design an ideal process, supported by the necessary technology.

For example, one individual philanthropist was starting a new foundation, and she was frustrated that it was taking so long to get things moving. She began tracking her time and realized that there were plenty of activities that she could easily delegate to an administrative assistant. She had spent so much time working hard and feeling busy and overwhelmed that she hadn't thought about the best use of her time. When she took a step back and analyzed what was taking so many of her hours, she decided to hire a part-time administrative assistant to handle scheduling, review proposals, do basic research, and look at office space. This freed up the philanthropist to focus on

the big-picture issues: the vision, the partnerships, and how get the work underway.

Yes, this up-front work may actually take time in the beginning, but the reward is that you can zero in on the approaches that hold you back over the long term. Once you've identified those, you can act quickly to implement necessary changes that will streamline your work and promote your mission's success. In other words, go slow for a moment of internal reflection so you can go fast in the long run.

As a Partner to Grantees: 3 Ways to Support Their Efforts to Streamline

When it comes to the grantmaking process, it would be difficult to find a nonprofit that has concerns about things moving too quickly. Often the hoops we're asking potential grantees to jump through are so labor intensive that we end up decreasing our number of applicants. If we streamline the grant process, not only are we strengthening our foundations but we're supporting efficiencies for our grantees as well.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation has made significant changes to some of their grantmaking practices, while increasing their impact. First, they make grants on a rolling basis, up to and including \$1 million, with only president — not board — review. It allows Hewlett to be both responsive and timely in meeting needs.

Second, when it comes to general operating support grants, Hewlett often reviews only the grantee's annual report and audited financials — no special proposal or budget needed.

Finally, several of Hewlett's grant programs allow grantees to submit the exact same applications that have already been submitted to other funders. Instead of having grantees take a previous funder proposal and attempt to rework it into Hewlett's application, the grantee can submit it with no changes at all.

Each of these process modifications has been made to help Hewlett be nimble and place the grantee experience at the center of their efforts. Imagine how much you could streamline your work and the work of your grantees if you took on even one of these approaches!



With that example in mind, consider these three possible simplifications for your own organization:

1. Simplify the up-front grant process.

Take the time to think about what information you really need from a grantee in order to make an investment decision. Are there portions of the application you just skim over before getting to the full intention of the work? Some foundations have stopped requiring all grantees to submit a full application and instead asked for a simpler letter of intent. What information could a letter of intent provide that would help you decide whether you need to review a fully fleshed-out proposal? Eliminating the workload for your grantees also means eliminating the time you spend reviewing needless information.

2. Streamline your review.

Have you ever taken the time to track exactly how many hours are spent reviewing applications and how many “touches” the application receives? Think about what happens when the application first comes through the door: Someone opens the envelope, then it goes on someone else’s desk, then it might be photocopied for others, filed in mailboxes, entered in a database, and so forth. Then five different people have to sign off on just one of those applications before it can be approved.

Or think about the hours of work that go into preparing grant dockets for your board meetings — and the exhaustion that causes you and your staff. How many of your board members actually read through the entire docket? Why are you wasting the time and the paper to prepare those folders for board meetings? For any of these processes, take a hard look at what’s really necessary work, and what steps you can eliminate.

3. Speed up for greater impact.

Remember that one of the main reasons we want to speed up the grant application process is so that we can speed up our ability to make an impact. Much of what’s needed is a mindset change — knowing the outcome we seek and determining the fastest way to get there. For example: Who must be engaged in the work, and can we share information online rather than waiting three months for busy schedules to allow everyone to meet in the same room? It could be better to think about the external

conditions that might influence your grantmaking schedules. Can a change in approach help you better respond to shifting federal or statewide policies and regulations? When President Trump began his efforts to change immigration policies, several California foundations came together to develop an agile response. In a matter of months, these foundations introduced more than \$40 million in emergency support to California nonprofits through a rapid-response philosophy. The California Endowment offered \$500,000 and condensed its usual six months of pre-grant evaluation into eight days. Both the James Irvine Foundation and the California Endowment provided more than \$1 million to build a “data hub” on the contributions of immigrants to California’s economy.

When Haste Makes Waste

While the focus here is on streamlining to speed up, obviously the fast approach is not always the best approach. Here are five times when it almost always makes more sense to slow down.

1. Your instinct says no.

This can be a lot like dating. When your date looks good on paper but your gut is telling you something isn’t right, take the time to look more closely. One foundation was looking for an intermediary organization to lead a new initiative, and one seemed to be the right fit. But the funder didn’t quite feel right about this potential grantee’s leadership. Instead of trusting his instinct, and feeling pressed for time, the foundation leader went ahead and funded the organization, and it turned out to be a bad investment. The grantee leader publicly embarrassed the foundation leader in a meeting, and couldn’t achieve initiative goals. By not trusting his instinct, the funder made the whole process much slower because everything had to start over again.

2. You’re creating something new.

The next time you want to do anything you haven’t done before — create a new funding program, engage in policy advocacy for the first time, or expand your investment portfolio to include impact investing — start with yourself. Spend a solid hour writing down everything you can think of regarding the topic *before* reaching out to others for their ideas. You probably know 75% of what you need



to do if you just take the time to think and write it down, and you will save yourself a lot of time in the long run. Yes, it's good to seek out advice and guidance from experts, but first be clear about exactly what you need and what you already have in front of you.

3. You're launching a comprehensive initiative.

Let's say your new initiative has five goals. Don't launch all five right at the beginning. Start with one or two goals to get some traction and have some wins under your belt. This allows you to get your systems in place and then platform in the rest over time.

4. You're building relationships.

You can't rush a relationship, especially when you are entering a new field, working with new communities, or approaching your work in different ways. Strong, trusting relationships are what will sustain your work in the long run and help you weather storms. It's worth the investment of time and resources to develop trust and maintain those relationships.

5. You're hiring new staff.

According to Entrepreneur's Organization, "the average hiring mistake costs 15x a person's base salary, not to mention the drain on your personal time." It's more important to find the right fit than to simply fill the spot. One foundation was in such a rush to hire a new leader that they conducted phone interviews only, without ever meeting their new hire in person. This turned out to be a disaster and ultimately cost the foundation both time and money.

Fast-Tracking Your Strategy

Developing a streamlined approach to strategy is as important as building streamlined work processes. Let's face it: In today's ever-changing environment, it's impossible to plan well five or ten years in advance. Three years ahead can be a challenge, and one year is the most realistic. Unfortunately, foundation leaders often find themselves taking closer to 18 months just to create an extensive strategic plan, given the time they spend developing the RFP, gathering proposals, interviewing consultants, conducting external interviews, hosting brainstorm sessions, conducting focus groups, engaging the board in rounds of discussions, and more.

Instead of spending all that time in a boardroom developing a 30-page plan that gets stuck in a drawer, you need to think of strategy development as taking six weeks — or even six hours — as part of an annual process. This will allow you to be much more nimble and responsive to external needs while also reducing the time and cost of extensive strategic planning sessions. While the planning process recommended below is designed to move quickly, the work is intentional, planned, and structured to deliver quick and focused results. It's not about shortcuts — it's about movement.

1. Formulation vs. implementation

Whether you're an individual philanthropist or part of a fully-staffed foundation, your goal is to develop a strategy that takes the present state of your work and moves it to a future state. You can divide your approach to strategic development into two processes: formulation and implementation. *Formulating* your strategy means you focus on *what* you want to accomplish overall. If you were to paint a picture of your future, what would it be? What impact do you want to have on society? *Implementing* your strategy is all about *how* you will get there. Who are the people who must be a part of the work? What structure is needed (the way people are put together) and what processes do you need (the ways in which they work together)?

2. Six-week strategy development

There are three key sections of this approach to strategy development, allowing funders to break down the work into two-week increments. This will keep the process lean and manageable. And while it can be helpful to engage an outside consultant, especially to facilitate a strategy retreat, consider ways you can engage your staff or trustees, especially in the information-gathering stage.

Weeks 1–2: Gather information.

- Start with identifying exactly what you want to learn. Yes, there are a thousand questions you could answer, but what do you need to know that you don't know already?
- Brainstorm the best sources of information. These could be your board members, grantees, staff, experts, and community members. You can also look to bases of information such as websites, needs assessments, data sets, etc.



- Gather and consume information by reading reports, reviewing grantee data, and conducting interviews of critical audiences.

Weeks 3–4: Summarize and share findings.

- Consider some of the common themes that are generated through your information gathering.
- What are some of the immediate concerns and opportunities that rise to the surface?
- Develop potential scenarios and recommendations that help you address those themes and opportunities. These don't need to be perfectly fleshed out. You're trying to push some ideas out there to see what resonates.
- Share your findings with whomever will be attending your strategic planning retreat (e.g., your board and staff), along with any key materials to help them prepare for the retreat.

Weeks 5–6: Host the planning retreat.

- Your strategy retreat can be conducted in one to one-and-a-half days. This time can take up a full day or more, or be spread over several partial days.
- Share themes that have bubbled up from your findings. Engage participants in three to five discussion questions. These should help you explore and understand the findings and help develop those “aha” moments.
- Consider the ideal state for your organization. What will it be like one year from now, three years from now, five years from now?
- Take the time to consider where you're already achieving your goals and where you're misaligned and falling short.
- Brainstorm the actions you want to take, and cull them down to no more than three key priorities — more than that and you're setting yourself up for failure. Consider the most significant things you can do as a funder, and choose the 20% of the work that delivers 80% of the result.
- Walk away with clear action steps. Take time to define the results you are targeting, the timeline you're acting on, and who is responsible for each step. Be sure to assign someone to summarize the key decisions, priorities, and action steps that come out of the retreat.

Why Strategy Moves Slowly

As important as it is to streamline your foundation and make your strategy more effective, knowing

why things become bogged down in the first place is also important. Philanthropy isn't the only field that can be slow when it comes to strategy. Any corporation or department of government faces the same struggles in trying to remain responsive to current conditions. The best way to pick up speed when it comes to strategy is to face these six common challenges head-on.

1. Fear

Fear is the number one reason work slows down. Funders fear they don't have all of the answers or they haven't done enough research to fully vet the project. Often there's a delay because of fear that the board hasn't had enough time to provide feedback.

But what is it that you're really afraid of? The purpose of philanthropy is to make investments that make an impact. That doesn't mean you'll get the approach right 100% of the time. Having a brush with failure or making course corrections are ways that you build the field of learning in philanthropy and recognize what works and what doesn't.

2. Lack of urgency in the field

In the field of philanthropy, you're not dealing with stockholders who constantly watch their shareholder value, nor are you answerable to a public that questions whether you're a true public servant. There is very little external accountability for funders, meaning you have to take charge and challenge yourself even when outside forces aren't pushing you to do so.

3. Power dynamic

If there were a group who would hold funders accountable, it would likely be those we serve — grantees and community members. They're the ones who know what funders have accomplished and what they haven't. But the power dynamic is such that those who seek funding will certainly never question those handing it out — or the speed at which they operate.

4. Herd mentality

When you look around at your peers and see others moving slowly with their work, it's natural to follow the same slow pace. It starts to seem as if that's the way it must be done. Add onto that the development of massive data projects, tiresome



slide decks, and countless meetings where board and staff are continuously asked for feedback, and you start to see how the “normal” approach is holding you back. This constant checking in and revisiting the work might make you feel like you are in control and being thoughtful, but this will not help your foundation succeed in fast-changing times.

5. Mystification of the strategic planning process

There is so much weight put into the idea of a strategic plan that it becomes incredibly difficult to pull the trigger and take the first steps toward action. In philanthropy, the strategic plan has become the holy grail of social change — we expect compelling, well-written prose, eye-catching infographics, complex theories of change. In reality, the simpler the plan, the more likely you are to succeed.

6. Lack of focus

One of the key reasons foundation leaders often hire an outside consultant to do strategic planning is to keep the group focused. When you have a solid group of staff or board in the room, it’s tempting to throw in a couple of other things you’ve been

meaning to discuss that fall outside the range of strategic planning. Be careful: Doing this pulls you away from deeper thinking and visioning, and it puts your group right back in the more immediate business of putting out fires.

Join the New Philanthropy

Many funders and philanthropists will resist change and say that giving money away wisely takes time and must be done at a deliberate pace. But if you’re not feeling a sense of urgency around your philanthropy, you need to change your approach. We’re living in a world that continues to struggle with massive income inequality, environmental destruction, broken public school systems, a criminal justice system that punishes the poor, and more. I don’t say this to depress you — I say this to *move* you. Old-school philanthropy, where people sat around fancy dining room or boardroom tables talking politely for hours while poring over mounds of documentation, is gone. We need nimble, responsive investors who are ready to make a difference and fund true social change. If you’re ready for high-impact philanthropy, it’s time to pick up the pace.

Putnam Consulting Group is an award-winning global philanthropy consultancy. Since 1999, we've helped foundations, corporations and philanthropists strategically allocate more than \$400 million in grants and gifts to increase impact, share success, and advance mission. We provide experienced advising, strategy development, and communications savvy to help foundation leaders and individual philanthropists engage in transformational giving.



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Confident Giving • Dramatic Return

“The Putnam team stands out because they always take the time to really understand what we need, and they maintain their objectivity to make sound recommendations. I highly recommend them.”

- Mark Smith, former CEO, California HealthCare Foundation

“Kris is great at making the complex easy to understand, and helps grantmakers shift their thinking to embrace new possibilities and opportunities. Her presentations to our board were engaging, informative and inspiring, and have set us all on a clearer path toward effectiveness.”

- LaTida Smith, President, Moses Taylor Foundation

WHO WE SERVE

Since our inception, we've worked with more than 60 foundations and philanthropists on more than 100 projects specifically designed to increase their impact and deliver dramatic results. A partial list of clients includes:

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
David and Lucile Packard Foundation
Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation
Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust
The Cleveland Foundation
The California Endowment
Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation
California HealthCare Foundation

Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy
Fujitsu
Avery Dennison Foundation
Heising-Simons Foundation
The James Irvine Foundation
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
The Stuart Foundation
Walton Family Foundation

KRIS PUTNAM-WALKERLY

- A globally recognized philanthropic expert and advisor, named one of America's Top 25 Philanthropy Speakers in 2016 and 2017
- Author of *Confident Giving: Sage Advice for Funders*, named a Top 10 Corporate Social Responsibility Book in 2016 and a finalist for the 2017 International Book Awards
- Forbes.com contributor, and quoted in the Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, BusinessWeek and other media outlets
- Co-editor of the first edition of *The Foundation Review* dedicated to the field of philanthropic consulting
- Author of the highly acclaimed *Philanthropy 411* blog, *Smart Philanthropy*SM podcast, and *Confident Giving*[®] newsletter
- More than 70,000 followers on social media
- Former trustee of the Community Foundation of Lorain County and Horizons Foundation



OUR SERVICES

PHILANTHROPIC ADVISING

- Provide trusted advising to foundation leaders and donors
- Advise and coach new CEOs to jumpstart their leadership
- Mentor high-net-worth donors to develop and launch new foundations
- Serve as “safety net” for funders working in isolation
- Educate trustees in innovative philanthropic practice

SPEAKING

- Deliver keynotes, speeches and workshops at national, regional or local meetings and conferences
- Tailor speaking engagements with customized research
- Immediately put new skills and ideas into action with tailored, post-speaking training sessions for staff or board

STRATEGIC CONSULTING

- Conduct strategic planning
- Design grantmaking strategies and new funding initiatives
- Conduct environmental scans
- Identify funding partners and intermediary organizations

COMMUNICATING RESULTS

- Create strategic communication plans
- Craft compelling case studies
- Build toolkits to support your issue
- Share lessons learned
- Disseminate your story via our broad network of press and social media