



## Improving Grant Application and Reporting

From website comments to national and local meetings to philanthropic blogs, the response to Project Streamline has spurred conversation, comment, and questions from both grantmakers and grantseekers. Project Streamline would like to share the feedback we've received on the four core principles outlined in the report as we work towards finalizing those principles.

### **Begin from Zero**

Summarized by Taylor Kate Brown

Several grantmakers shared their experiences of revisiting their processes and requirements with nearly unanimous feelings that the exercise of examining current practices and requirements resulted in improved processes for both themselves and their grantseekers.

However, for many conversation participants the idea of starting from zero seemed to be overwhelming, with comments ranging from "a huge undertaking" to "unrealistic" for reasons related mainly to a lack of time to conduct such an assessment and a feeling that many practices were working and didn't need to be changed. The suggestion to restate this principle as more of "Asking Why" a requirement exists gained more traction among participants. They felt this would result in the same outcome—improved application, monitoring, and reporting practices—without having to overcome fears related to designing a grantmaking program from scratch.

Other comments included:

A hard look at grant requirements would probably face its toughest challenge against staff and boards entrenched in the status quo. While the time it would take to streamline would be a barrier to "changing the way we've always worked", leadership within the bureaucracy would be helpful. One grantmaker shared that it recruited one of its vice presidents to champion streamlining. The vice president asked for three ideas from each employee to make the grantmaking process easier for both the

funder and its grantees. These ideas were then reviewed and prioritized for implementation.

Grantseekers said they tended to “shy away” from groups that “throw all sort of hurdles up”. One described a funder who asked for testimonials and photos of clients. “It’s difficult enough to get traumatized, stressed-out people through an intake application without asking for extra information just because funders find it interesting.”

Some outsized application requirements were largely in response to problem organizations in the past. Abuses of the system, including misuse of funds or poor to non-existent reporting, led to blanket requirements intended to cover risk. Some believed that such problems should be treated as exceptions, so that not all grantees are punished, others considered it a question of fairness – that even groups that are current grantees should be treated the same as all applicants.

Not everyone agreed that less is more. “Sometimes our ‘hoops’ are a way to build organizations’ capacity,” one grantmaker said. Their requirements helped grantseekers to think through their goals or uncovered issues with their application before it became a problem during the funding period. Others believed that a two-step approval process (including a LOI) was an absolute must for larger foundations.