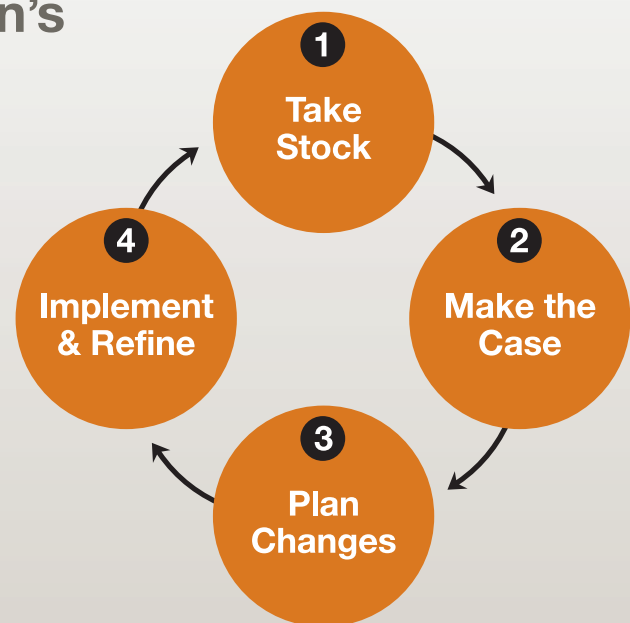




GUIDE TO STREAMLINING SERIES

Making Streamlining Stick

Develop your organization's streamlining strategy



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A collaborative initiative of the



In partnership with

Association of Fundraising Professionals
Association of Small Foundations
Council on Foundations
Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers
Foundation Center
Grantmakers for Effective Organizations
National Council of Nonprofits

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Project Streamline is an effort of funders and nonprofits to improve grant application, monitoring and reporting practices. It is a collaborative initiative of the Grants Managers Network, in partnership with the Association of Fundraising Professionals, the Association of Small Foundations, the Council on Foundations, the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers, the Foundation Center, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, and the National Council of Nonprofits. For more information, go to www.projectstreamline.org.

The Grants Managers Network (GMN) improves grant-making by advancing the knowledge, skills and abilities of grants management professionals and leading grant-makers to adopt and incorporate effective practices that benefit the philanthropic community. GMN has more than 1,400 members from 1,000+ grantmaking organizations who represent the breadth of the philanthropic community including small family foundations, prominent national foundations, grantmaking public charities, and socially responsible corporations. For more information, go to www.gmnetwork.org.



Project Streamline At A Glance

What can funders do to improve their grant application and reporting processes, reduce the burden on nonprofits, and free up more time for mission-critical activities? How can grantseekers support these efforts?

Project Streamline has worked with leaders in grantmaking and nonprofit organizations to identify challenges, propose solutions and develop resources to help you streamline.

Streamlining Challenges

Drowning in Paperwork, Distracted from Purpose, a Project Streamline study, found ten flaws in the current system of grant application and reporting:

1. Enormous Variability
2. Requirements Aren't "Right-Sized"
3. Insufficient Net Grants
4. Outsourced Burdens
5. Trust Undermined
6. Reports on a Shelf
7. Fundraising Gymnastics
8. Due-Diligence Redundancy
9. Double-Edged Swords
10. Time Drain for Grantmakers, Too

Streamlining Solutions

Our research suggests four core principles that grantmakers can adopt into practice to make things easier on nonprofits.

Principle 1: Take a fresh look at information requirements. Begin with a rigorous assessment of what kind of information you really need to make a responsible grant.

Principle 2: Right-size grant expectations. Ensure that the effort that grantseekers expend to get a grant is proportionate to the size of the grant, is appropriate to the type of grant, and takes into consideration any existing relationship with the grantee.

Principle 3: Relieve the burden on grantees. There are many ways that funders can reduce the burden that grant-seeking places on grantees. By minimizing the amount of time, effort, and money that nonprofits spend getting and administering grants, funders increase the amount of time, effort, and money devoted to mission-based activities.

Principle 4: Make communications clear and straightforward. Good communication is critical to a streamlined process and essential for fostering a mutually respectful relationship between grantmakers and grantseekers.

Streamlining Resources

We provide resources to help you streamline.

Guide to Streamlining Series

Guides on:

- Due Diligence
- Right-Sizing
- Grant Budgets and Financial Reports
- Online Applications and Reporting
- Communications

Making Streamlining Stick

Explores four steps to develop your organization's strategy:

1. Take stock
2. Make the case
3. Plan changes
4. Implement and Refine

Online Self Assessment

Tool to assess your current practice

Workshops

Interactive sessions for grantmakers

Website

Resources, events, ideas

Newsletter

Stories, voices, research

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

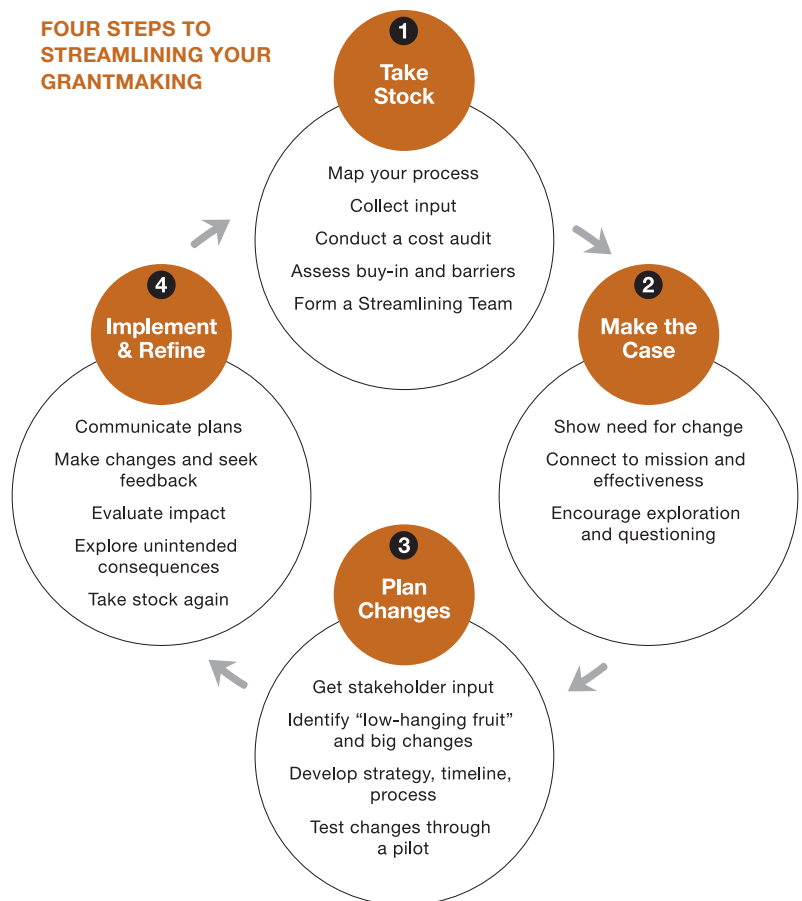
You have decided to streamline your grantmaking process—congratulations! Your organization could be just beginning to explore ways to make your application and reporting requirements less burdensome to grantees. Or you might have a team deeply engaged in a change process already. This framework illustrates the four basic phases that many grantmakers move through as they streamline and suggests activities and questions that can propel your process forward.

Wait! Why do we need a process?

We've found that organizations that walk through these steps in a thoughtful way enjoy more success in their streamlining efforts. They're more likely to address the issues of greatest concern to their grantees and staff and less likely to make hasty decisions that result in unintended consequences. Your organization can approach each step with different levels of intensity, doing a little or a lot, depending on your circumstances. Streamlining can be a comprehensive effort, or something that happens in small, manageable bites.

In many cases, you won't be able to jump directly to planning and implementing changes, no matter how obvious it is to you that they're needed. Most changes—even small ones—require a shift in the way people work that can ripple through the organization. Everyone needs to share an understanding of the issues and be ready to pursue the solutions.

Your streamlining process may be challenging for both your organization and grantee constituents, so we urge you to take it slow and get it right. That way, you'll make the most of this opportunity and will be less likely to wish you'd done things differently down the road.



The **Making Streamlining Stick guide** can help you work through the changes in mindset, organizational culture, and behavior that streamlining requires—the complex issues that have no ready-made answers. Making Streamlining Stick is a companion piece to the Project Streamline Action Workshop, which helps teams from foundations and other funding organizations step back from day-to-day duties and develop plans to streamline their grantmaking processes.

Much of the “Guide to Streamlining Series” provides technical solutions to technical problems. Answers exist and can be provided. For example, if you want to know more about what to look for in a nonprofit organization’s financial statements, Project Streamline has a top ten list for you.

On the other hand, if you want to figure out how to get your organization thinking differently about its relationship to grantees and its role as a grantmaker—a shift often needed to make streamlining stick—there’s no single, simple answer. In this guide, we provide a road map that will help you navigate these more complex types of questions.

In an ideal world, you might begin with Step 1: Take Stock, and proceed methodically around the circle. However, there are different ways to streamline and different entry points. Many funders have found that they make changes iteratively, with small experiments paving the way for larger efforts to follow.

The Making Streamlining Stick guide is just the beginning. We encourage you to consider the following:

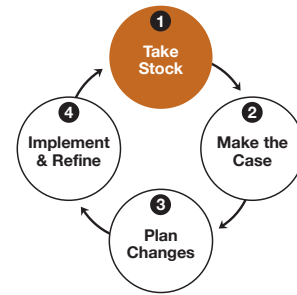
- Join or host a Project Streamline Action Workshop. These interactive workshops bring teams from diverse grantmaking organizations together to explore their own potential for streamlining and create concrete plans to move forward.
- Let us know how you use, modify, or supplement this Guide to make streamlining stick in your own organization.

To share your streamlining stories and learn more about our Action Workshops, visit the Project Streamline website: www.projectstreamline.org.

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**You can’t change anything
 by fighting or resisting it.
 You change something by
 making it obsolete through
 superior methods.**

—Buckminster Fuller

Streamlining Step 1: Take Stock



If you suspect that streamlining may be in order, a logical first step is to take stock of your current situation and explore how your organization and grantees can benefit from a change. Once you understand your current system, its impact on grantseekers, and its effect on your organization's efficiency and effectiveness, you'll be able to make much better decisions.

The following suggestions come from grantmakers who have successfully tackled this first step of streamlining. They can be completed in any order or simultaneously. If you have stories to share from your own experiences, please post them at www.projectstreamline.org.

1. Map your process: If you are like most grantmakers, you may have never mapped your full application and reporting process, and may have only a general idea of how many steps are involved from start to finish. We recommend creating a diagram of each step in your application process. Include steps for your staff as well as steps for grantees. Be sure to accurately reflect every step—even the smallest ones.

2. Collect input: Unless your organization regularly seeks feedback from grantees specifically about your grantmaking process, you may not have a clear picture of how it affects them. There are many ways to get input from grantees, from casual conversations to anonymous surveys to third-party research. Be aware, though, that the power dynamics between funders and nonprofits can make it very difficult to receive candid feedback, even when you have strong relationships with your grantees.

- *Request feedback via an anonymous survey*, using Survey Monkey, Zoomerang, or another online tool. These tools are inexpensive, easy for the layperson to design and use, and can ensure anonymity for respondents. You can contact all grantees/grantseekers at once to gather feedback. Or, you can post a survey link on your website or in your communication acknowledging the receipt of a proposal or report. This will allow you to capture ongoing, fresh feedback from organizations that have just completed your requirements.
- *Seek feedback via telephone calls to current grantees* (those who are not currently concerned about an upcoming grant from you). Explain the goal and ask them how your grantmaking process could be improved. One way to get excellent information without putting grantees on the spot is to ask them to describe another grantmaker's application and reporting process—one they consider especially well streamlined.
- *Use a third-party to conduct a thorough assessment.* Commissioning a study (via interviews, focus groups, or survey) by a third-party consultant will demonstrate to your grantees that you are serious about hearing their concerns. It may also yield more complete and candid information.

HOT TIP:

WALK IN GRANTEE SHOES

If you have never completed your own application process, complete with budget, now's the time!

We also recommend that you survey grantees to find out how long it takes to complete your application. Many grantmakers are surprised by the answers.

3. Conduct a cost-audit: What is the cost of your processes? You can audit the amount of time that staff spend making and tracking a grant and determine, roughly, the cost to your organization. Some time and expense is necessary, of course, to make good grants. But some funders have found that costs were higher than expected—especially for small grants—and that staff were spending the bulk of their time on paperwork, time that could have instead been devoted to relationship-building.

Learn more about the cost of your process to grantees as well. If you know how long your process takes, you can estimate its cost to the grantseeking organization.

4. Assess buy-in and barriers: Before you move on to the next step, take stock of how your organization's internal stakeholders think about streamlining. Do you have interest and preliminary buy-in from executive staff, program officers, and grants managers? How about your trustees? You will likely not succeed in streamlining your process without support from the top. And without support from the staff that interact with grantees, streamlining will be an uphill battle.

As you assess buy-in and barriers, keep in mind that it can be hard to gauge resistance when a change is merely hypothetical. Your colleagues may support streamlining in theory—but may find it challenging to give up old ways of working. The best way to manage the normal fears and resistance that streamlining activities might spark is to communicate regularly and engage as many people as possible in the process.

5. Create a streamlining team: A streamlining team or workgroup can be a good way to engage key staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders. Team members will provide important advice and serve as ambassadors to others in your organization. An effective team should include:

- Individuals with decision making power
- Staff with expertise about the grantmaking process
- People with an interest in the idea of streamlining
- Those with reasonable objections. Including naysayers can be helpful for several reasons: it brings alternative perspectives to the table during the process (rather than afterwards), it may help to calm fears about what streamlining will mean, and it may help to channel resistance into constructive collaboration.
- Teams also benefit from having a variety of skill sets. Populate your streamlining team with a combination of idea people, critic/clarifiers, implementers, and evaluator/developers.

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A rough cost audit can simply involve tracking the number of hours spent on making and monitoring grants by all staff and using salary information to translate those hours into dollars. Factor in any ancillary costs that are not related to personnel. For example, you might consider copying, printing, and telephone costs, as well as the costs of travel and convening (if your grant process involved meetings).

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Streamlining Stories

When the **Ontario Trillium Foundation** undertook a large streamlining effort, they hired an internal staff person to lead the charge. They knew that streamlining would require input and buy-in from across the organization, its volunteers, and its grantee stakeholders, so they created more than 20 working groups to investigate opportunities and plan the change. Some, like the “Quick Hits” team—designed to identify inefficiencies that could be eliminated immediately—were short-lived. Others, like the cross-departmental “Design Team,” will continue to exist until the entire process is finished.

The Trillium Foundation’s streamlining effort was divided into three major phases:

Phase 1: Business Process Review

In this phase, keeping in mind the dual objectives of improved customer service and internal efficiencies, Trillium staff members asked: What do we require? Why are we asking for this information or this attachment—and at this time in the process? What amount of information will allow us to make an informed decision but not create an onerous process for the applicants?

During this phase, grantees and foundation volunteers were interviewed and surveyed, and the entire grantmaking process was examined for redundancies and duplication. As a result, the Design Team recommended that a grantee’s information be separated from project information using a repository (or registry) system. In this new model, organizations could enter their core information once, without having to re-submit every time they apply.

Phase 2: Business Process Improvement

During this phase, working groups examined specific aspects of the grantmaking process, from application to reports to coding practices, and recommended improvements.

Phase 3: Business Process Transformation

In this final phase, the organization is making the suggested improvements, including designing and implementing a software solution to enable storage of grantee information and simplify online processes, including application review. The organization piloted its new system and process, and so far, the feedback has been extremely positive from volunteers, staff, and grantseekers alike.

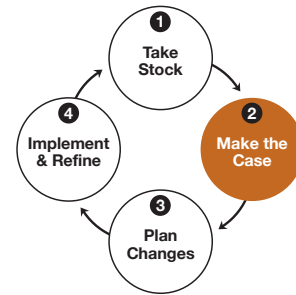
In this final phase, Trillium Foundation reports significant early results, including:

- Fewer application questions and requirements
- Pre-loaded information for some categories of applicants
- Fewer and more intuitive codes and coding processes
- Improved work flow
- Functioning call center to answer questions and provide support
- Reduced paper, including paperless Grant Review team meetings
- Many “quick-hits”—simple steps eliminating redundant requirements and processes

The key lesson here was management and board support. Without their leadership and commitment, this wouldn’t have worked.

—Joanne Richmond,
project manager

Streamlining Step 2: Make the Case



After you have taken stock of the need for streamlining, a next step is to make a case that will resonate with other stakeholders whose support you need.

There are many ways to build a case for streamlining, but we think that these three are particularly helpful. If you have other ideas, please share them at www.projectstreamline.org.

1. Show (don't just tell) why change is needed: Perhaps you have decided to explore streamlining options because your organization has received input from nonprofit partners about your process. Or perhaps you have noticed that internal inefficiencies make the lives of staff and trustees harder than necessary. Whatever the impetus, think about how you can show the need in a way that appeals to the heart, rather than merely tell to convince the mind¹.

Tell... A grants manager, leading an effort streamline, explains to her colleagues that, according to her analysis, the foundation collects 50% more information from grantees than it uses.

Show... The grants manager walks into a full staff meeting carrying a stack of manila folders that towers over her head and dumps it onto the table. She then passes around a single folder containing the information that, in her analysis, was actually used to make the decisions.

2. Connect streamlining to mission: In conversations about streamlining, emphasize the potential gains to your organization. Application and reporting practices are not simply nuts and bolts. They have implications for how your organization is perceived in the community, how it regards its role as a grantmaker, and how it evaluates its impact. Your organization (staff and/or board) might want to discuss the following questions:

- How do we want our grantees to view our customer service?
- What do our materials say about our organization to our constituents?
- How can a more streamlined process advance our organization's mission?

3. Encourage exploration and questioning: Your board and staff may not be ready to adopt wholesale changes to your application and reporting practices. We have found that you can build a case for streamlining by encouraging staff to explore small ways to reduce burdens on grantees, and using those smaller successes as a springboard to discuss possibilities of larger change.

HOT TIP: KNOW THE NET GRANT

The concept of a "net grant" can be powerful in building a case for streamlining. *How much money is left over after a successful applicant has applied for and reported on use of your funds?*

For example, a \$5,000 grant that takes 8 staff hours to apply for, 4 hours to report on, plus a 1-hour site visit with 3 hours of preparatory work... is really only a \$3,400 net grant.

\$5,000 – \$1,600
(16 hours of staff time @ \$100/hr)
= \$3,400

1. For more on how "show" strategies can be critical ingredients in change initiatives, see *"The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations,"* by John P. Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, in particular their distinction between "see-feel-change" and "analysis-think-change" starting on page 8.

Streamlining Stories

When Barbara Bach, Director of Grant Management for the **Rasmuson Foundation** in Alaska, returned from a Project Streamline workshop in Seattle, she was fired up to make changes to the foundation's grantmaking process. But, as the economic downturn had increased workloads on already busy staff, she found that there just wasn't the time or inclination to make sweeping changes right away.

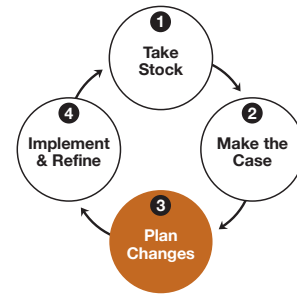
Instead of pushing her colleagues before they were ready, Barbara focused on enabling small streamlining efforts on a case-by-case basis, such as allowing a grantee to submit a budget in its own format as long as it contains the information needed. Getting staff accustomed to questioning established practice and making small modifications for individual grantees allowed them to explore different streamlining options before jumping to entirely new processes or policies.

Barbara counsels patience when streamlining. "Know the readiness of your organization," she says. "You don't need to make a 10% or 20% change right away. If you make a 1% change today and another 1% change in a week or a month, it will accumulate over time."

**Know the readiness
of your organization.**

—Barbara Bach

Streamlining Step 3: Plan Changes



The task of streamlining can feel enormous, but it doesn't need to be overwhelming. Often you can find the low-hanging fruit or easy wins that can help you get started quickly with a few simple changes. Once your team has identified some streamlining possibilities, this step asks you to determine a timeline for making changes and identify who will take responsibility. Without a plan, your great intentions will not become reality.

You may find the “Guide to Streamlining Series” to be a useful resource at this point. These guides include recommendations and resources related to online systems, budgets and financial reporting, right-sizing, and legal due-diligence.

1. Get more stakeholder input: The first thing to do is to ask around. If you haven't already done so, now is a crucial time to ask your grantees what they would recommend. What kinds of changes would make the biggest difference to them?

It's also important to ask members of your staff, especially grants managers and program officers (if you have them). What do they see as unnecessary or overly burdensome steps? Sit down with your Streamlining Team and your application and reporting forms and ask three questions²:

- *Do we really need this information?* Do we use the information that we collect in our decision making process for all or most of our applicants, or are we collecting some information “just in case”?
- *Can we get it in another way?* Is this information available on websites, public resources, or in other ways that we could access without asking our grantees to provide it?
- *Have we sufficiently explained why we need it to our applicants?* Some information you really need, but your applicants and grantees may not understand why you do or how it is used. You'll get better cooperation and better information if you communicate clearly about your requirements.

2. Identify the issues: The elements of your process that cause grantees and staff the most pain are targets for change. Make a list of those issues and spend time getting feedback on it.

HOT TIP: **BE THE CHANGE AGENT**

Who brings change to an organization? It can be anyone. A change agent, according to *Grantmakers for Effective Organizations*, is a grantmaker who finds success using uncommon approaches to common problems and who recognizes that philanthropy can be more effective and is willing to lead change to make it happen.

Streamlining may be best inspired and driven by those in the trenches—grants managers and program officers—who live with the funder's system of application and reporting every day.

“Grants managers tend not to be change agents, but we can be. Who better to know what changes need to be made?” said Dee Slater, Grants Manager at the Dekko Family Foundation. “If you feel that you don't have a seat at the decision making table, pull up a chair. And the way that you pull up a chair is by proposing solutions for how things can be better.”

3. Identify “low-hanging fruit”: Low-hanging fruit, or easy wins, are simple changes that are relatively easy to implement and can have an immediate impact. Sit down with your Streamlining Team and brainstorm a list of possibilities. It might include things like:

- Eliminate the requirement that grantees send multiple copies of applications and reports
- Accept submissions via email
- Make application forms available as a Word document so that applicants can type into it directly
- Eliminate redundant questions in the application form
- Accept your region’s common application or reporting form, if it is in use
- Eliminate quarterly or twice-yearly reporting, except for high-risk grantees
- Replace reports with check-in calls with grantees, which has the added benefit of building stronger grantmaker/grantee relationships.
- Eliminate operating support grant reports since the two main purposes of requiring grant reports—compliance and evaluation—don’t apply. An organization receiving general operating support is considered in compliance as long as it operated during the grant period with no major changes to its tax status or mission. And, while the organization’s programs may have specific outcomes, operating support does not have a direct, cause-and-effect connection to them that can be evaluated.

4. Consider high-impact changes: Solutions that are easy to implement and will have high impact are obvious choices for quick action. Those that are hard to implement but will have high impact are candidates for further serious consideration, study, and planning. As you look at the list of issues you generated and think about the types of solutions they require, consider changes that go beyond tweaks and require rethinking of systems and processes.

- *Implement a multi-step process:* Grantmakers often receive full application packages up-front from every applicant, even when most applicants will not receive funding. This is almost never necessary. A short Letter of Inquiry or other short application form can be a labor-saving first step for grantees and for your grantmaking.
- *Stage the timing of requirements:* Some grantmakers have also greatly reduced burdens to their grantees by changing the timing of when various pieces of information are collected.
- *Hold onto records:* An online repository system can allow applicants to enter information once and then retrieve and revise it year after year. Even short of a fancy system, it may be possible to hold onto certain grantee information so that applicants don’t need to send redundant information.

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A HIGH IMPACT EXAMPLE

A health conversion foundation decided to collect paperwork related to due-diligence only after they were fairly certain that they would fund the nonprofit. This saved applicants the trouble of gathering board lists, copies of audited financials, and other materials until they were reasonably confident that funding was forthcoming.

5. Develop a timeline and process for making change: There are several key questions that are useful to answer when planning for a change effort:

- Who is responsible?
- Who will be consulted?
- Who needs to approve/sign off?
- In what sequence will changes be made?
- By when will the changes be made?
- How will we know if a change is successful?
- How will we assess unintended consequences?
- How will we communicate about the change within and outside our organization?

6. Test changes through a pilot: A pilot allows you to test a change in a smaller context, make revisions, and perfect it before rolling it out organization-wide. A pilot may also alert you to unintended and unanticipated consequences of the change.

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A PILOT EXAMPLE

In response to feedback from grantees, a family foundation decided to begin accepting application and reporting materials via email, rather than requiring grantees to send multiple hard copies. To test the system, they tried it first with a small, targeted RFP directed specifically toward libraries. As a result of the pilot, the foundation's single staff-person learned that she needed to specify file type and require that grantees name their files in a consistent way.

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Streamlining Stories

As senior director of grantmaking at **Arcus**, Cindy Rizzo was inspired by Project Streamline's *Drowning in Paperwork, Distracted from Purpose* report and her prior experience at a community foundation. When she joined the Arcus staff, she saw opportunities to make the foundation's application process more streamlined. Rizzo created a quick online survey for grantees and past applicants asking how they felt about each step of the application process and how it compared to other foundations.

The results? She learned that grantees found portions of the Arcus process to be more challenging than that of other funders. "Grantees asked us to streamline the process for organizations requesting continued funding," says Rizzo. "There was a lot of push back on our demographic profile form from our non-U.S. grantees and other grantees."

With this feedback in mind, a small task force of program and grant management staff analyzed each form, question, and application step from the point of view of both grantseeker and foundation. They then discussed the results with the larger program department and brought recommendations to Arcus' executive director, who made the final decisions³.

The outcomes were positive. The foundation adopted a number of streamlining processes, implementing changes that enabled returning grantees to provide fewer documents and less narrative information. "Grantee response has been very positive," said Rizzo.

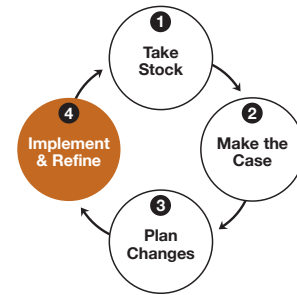
Currently Arcus is revising some of its forms and processes to accommodate a new evaluation process, but it is using this opportunity to implement further streamlining, including the possibility of "right sizing" its application process for smaller requests. "We view streamlining as an ongoing process," explained Rizzo. "It's like the concept of infinity—the idea is to keep working to approach it, so that you can never rest by thinking you've reached it."

It's like the concept of infinity—the idea is to keep working to approach it, so that you can never rest by thinking you've reached it.

—Cindy Rizzo,
senior director of grantmaking

3. Excerpted and revised from the *Project Streamline* e-newsletter, Spring, 2009 edition.
http://projectstreamline.org/newsletter/2009_spring_grantmaker.php

Streamlining Step 4: Implement & Refine



The time has come to put your plan into action. Making a planned change is a feat of choreography—everyone needs to understand and be prepared to execute their role. After you have implemented your streamlining changes, you'll want to know how they fared. Did they have the desired effect of making your requirements less burdensome for your grantees? Did staff receive the information needed to make good decisions? What were the unintended consequences? A good assessment, whether formal or informal, will help you to answer these important questions and to figure out what to do next.

You may find the “Guide to Streamlining Series” to be a useful resource at this point. These guides include recommendations and resources related to online systems, budgets and financial reporting, right-sizing, and legal due-diligence.

1. Communicate planned changes: Before you begin, make sure that your team has communicated clearly and thoroughly internally and externally. And then, communicate again. People generally need to receive information multiple times and in multiple ways before it sticks.

- Let grantees know that your processes or requirements have changed. Explain to them that you are working to streamline your processes and eliminate waste and unnecessary burden.
- Ensure that information on your organization's website and other communications materials is accurate and up-to-date.
- Remind staff and board members that the planned changes are about to go into effect, and preview how the changes will affect them.

2. Make the changes—and seek feedback: As the previous section describes, many change efforts benefit from a pilot phase, in which changes are tested before being implemented wholesale.

It's helpful to have a built-in mechanism for collecting feedback from staff and grantees as you implement. You'll be more likely to catch issues as they arise, and you'll demonstrate your grantmaking organization's ongoing commitment to learning and improvement. Some easy ways to capture feedback in the moment could include:

- Ask applicants to track the amount of time they spend on your new process (but keep in mind that it's a new process to them, so it might take a little longer the first time).
- Ask applicants to compare your “before” and “after” processes and provide feedback via an anonymous survey.

- Include an assessment question as part of the application. Reassure applicants that you are truly interested in their candid feedback, and that being honest will not hurt their chances of getting funded.
- Offer a “help line” or “call center” that can answer and track the questions that come in from applicants.

3. Evaluate impact: Evaluation can sound daunting, but there are many ways to figure out whether or not something worked as intended. And evaluation can be tailored to the level of change—so that a small change, such as removing redundant questions from an application form might be evaluated simply, while a large change might have a more robust assessment.

- *Internal assessment meeting:* After a round of changes has been implemented, call staff and/or trustees together for an assessment meeting. Review the changes and invite feedback on what worked and what did not. Be sure to get details about why things didn't work, and suggestions for what would work better. A simple +/D (plus/delta) chart—in which you note successes on the “+” side and things you'd like to change on the “D” side—can be an effective way of seeking constructive feedback.
- *Follow-up survey:* Send a brief follow-up survey to grantees who experienced your new process, asking for their feedback about each step of the process. This is a good way to learn more about unintended consequences.
- *Third party interviews:* Use a neutral third party, such as a consultant, to contact grantees for brief interviews about your process and provide you with a report and recommendations.
- *Focus groups:* Convene a focus group of recently-funded grantees to discuss your new process with you. Asking specific questions about aspects of your application and reporting process will help them to give you specific feedback.

4. Explore unintended consequences: There is a temporary learning curve that accompanies any change, but sometimes a change that was supposed to make things easier actually makes them harder. Check carefully for these unintended consequences; you don't want your cure to be worse than the disease!

For example: After unveiling a sophisticated new online system, one large grantmaker found that the character limits that it had established for its online fields were not having the desired impact. The funder had hoped that the limits would keep grantee responses succinct, reducing work for grantees

HOT TIP:

REFOCUS RESISTANCE

Don't be surprised if you encounter resistance once the idea of streamlining begins to take concrete shape in planned changes. For most of us, well-known systems are comfortable, even when they don't work very well. Resistance may well come from legal and financial advisors, whose authority is rarely questioned.

Understand what's behind the resistance. Resistance is energy. Some staff may have fears that their jobs will change beyond recognition. If this is the case, have a clear plan for how staff will learn the new processes of their work, use their time differently, and transition to new duties.

Hear and acknowledge. At times, people just need to be heard. They need you to know that the piece of information that was eliminated was useful to them, or that they resent pulling financial information from form 990. Listening can help defuse concerns.

Turn objections into objectives.

Often, objections are rooted in legitimate concerns about risk or decision-making processes under a new, streamlined system. These can be incorporated into your process as important cautions. Your pilot can help you figure out how to address such concerns along the way.

and the grantmaking staff. Instead, they learned that the character limits made it impossible for grantees to cut and paste existing language into the application, and that grantees were spending hours of unnecessary time picking through their responses, shortening words and eliminating spaces so that their answers would fit within the designated limits. Fortunately, staff were able to fix this unintended consequence by resetting the system's requirements and eliminating the character limits. Instead, they added a "recommended word count" to guide the length of grantees' responses.

5. Take stock... again: Once you have made a round of changes, you may find that you see other things that need to be modified. Return to earlier steps and take stock again, identify new opportunities, or plan for another round. And repeat! As we said at the start of this guide, streamlining is an iterative process.

We Want to Hear Your Streamlining Story

If your grantmaking organization has streamlined its application and reporting practices, we'd love to hear from you. Let us know how the guide was useful—or not—in helping you to develop a streamlining plan.

Visit Project Streamline at www.projectstreamline.org.



Improving Grant Application and Reporting

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