
Structure and Leadership Changes

The Grand Challenges for Social Work initiative began in 2012, with the formal launch taking place in January 2016 at the annual Society for Social Work and Research conference. A steering committee was developed at that time in order to serve in the role that the Co-Chairs had held in leading the Executive Committee (which was expanded from its original version). That steering committee has been in place until now.

As a result of growing momentum and widening participation in the Grand Challenges the time has come for changes in structure and leadership roles. The first several years of this bold initiative have been successful beyond all expectations, but we cannot rest on these accomplishments. In order to move to the next level of success over next several years, reorganization is essential.

There is also a need to address issues such as diversity, sustainability, and goal attainment. Greater diversity—individual, institutional, and regional—will strengthen our vision, reach, and impact. Renewed leadership will increase energy and capacity. Clarity of responsibilities will enable us to use our expertise more effectively, and to be more successful in securing external support and funding. This is a natural stage of growth and we're thrilled that the Grand Challenges for Social Work has reached this point!

New Structure

In general, a more typical form of **board organization in volunteer and leadership roles** has been adopted, as follows:

- The names of the Grand Challenges Executive Committee and the Grand Challenges Steering Committee would be changed to match their function. The Executive Committee will become the **Leadership Board**, with the Steering Committee re-designated as the **Executive Committee**. We believe that this more typical structure will have greater appeal to foundations and other potential donors.
- The Leadership Board will consist of 20 members, including eight external partners (Leaders of the St. Louis Group, SSWR, NASW, CRISP, AASWSW, CSWE, NADD, and GADE.) Other partners may be added.
- The Executive Committee will consist of five members.
- Each member of the Executive Committee will have responsibility for one of the major functions of the Grand Challenges, as follows: (1) Initiatives and Programs, including Networks and Consortia; (2) Finance, Resource Development, and Budget; (3) Communications and Visibility; (4) Constituents, Membership, and Governance, including partnerships with organizations, advisory groups, and new board member recruitment; (5) Strategic Review and Planning; (6) Education and Learning; and (7) Policy and Practice.

The Executive Committee will be comprised of James Herbert Williams, Michael Spencer, Michael Sherraden, Marilyn Flynn, and Rick Barth. Eddie Uehara is transitioning off of the leadership with our deepest gratitude and indebtedness and some worry about how we can proceed without her wisdom and humor.

Committees

Each member of the Leadership Board will join one of the committees noted above. Each committee will set its own agenda, informed by an annual review and planning session of the leadership board. External partners would automatically join the Constituents, Membership and Governance Committee. Over the next few years, there will be an orderly transition of Executive Committee members. (Retiring members of the Leadership Board

can be invited to join a Grand Challenges Advisory Committee and respond to occasional calls on their expertise.) We will also ensure that we soon have a clearer process for nomination and selection of Executive Committee and Leadership Board membership and terms.

Partnerships

From its inception, staffing of the Grand Challenges has been shared among universities and nonprofit organizations. This will continue through premier and sustaining sponsorships, and contributed time and resources from universities and organizations. Notwithstanding these substantial and broadly-based commitments, talented and stable core staffing is imperative to ensure success of the initiative.

The purpose of the Grand Challenges—as from the beginning—is to create a more just and cohesive society by addressing some of our deepest social problems. The centrality of universities and colleges in this effort has become more manifest. Going forward, we should build on this strength to more fully engage social work practitioners and constituencies outside of social work, and to further extend the reach of the Grand Challenges into evidence-based practice and policy and sustained social change.

Centralized Administration

Centralized administration is necessary to stimulate, facilitate, and track research, education, policy, and field action and achievements in each of the 12 Grand Challenges; cultivate and coordinate strategic communications among members; develop standardized communications materials; manage contracting relationships; organize and manage convenings; update the website; contribute to social media; and other core functions. Based on evidence of effort since its inception, GCSW central administration could be managed with a personnel effort of 2.5 FTEs. Funding at this level would maintain a full-time position for a central administrative officer with access to local staff support, as well as personnel at other universities or contracted firms to carry out work of the central administration.

The Director position will be maintained at the University of Maryland, replacing the previous Executive Director position, and supervised by Rick Barth. At the request of the Steering Committee, Rick will serve as Chair of the Executive Committee, replacing the previous tri-chair arrangement (Marilyn Flynn, Michael Sherraden, and Eddie Uehara). This modification will ensure budgetary continuity, pinpoint responsibilities, resolve uncertainty about who should set the meeting agenda, and formally represent the Grand Challenges to external audiences. (Rick will continue in this position after transitioning from the deanship in June 2020 and until the Executive Committee determines that a transition is desirable.)

Looking Ahead

The Leadership Board and Executive Committee will meet, together, in this new configuration on January 19, 2020 which is our usual Sunday meeting following SSWR.

We greatly appreciate the work of the leadership board and the network leads, and also recognize that we have not consistently provided the level of support that would have further accelerated the advancement of the Grand Challenges. We hope that the hiring of a new director and the re-organizational efforts described, above, will generate such support.

Sincerely yours,

The Grand Challenges for Social Work Executive Committee