

GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT LAB

2017-2018



OVERVIEW

In November 2017 on an organic farm in rural France 23 funders from a variety of grantmaking structures and philanthropic backgrounds, hailing from five time zones and speaking over ten languages began an exploration, study and praxis experience of systemic change philanthropy.

In April 2018 in New Orleans they “graduated” from EDGE’s inaugural Global Engagement Lab (GEL), becoming the first cohort within our community committed not only to exploring the root causes of the interconnected social, economic, environmental and systemic crises we face, but also to putting these learnings into collective action.

The Global Engagement Lab brought grantmakers and philanthropic professionals through a six month series of in-person retreats and online learning to focus on both theoretical frames and concrete experiences from around the world, combining intellectual/academic, political/historical, and cultural/personal education with practical skills building.



The goals of our first GEL were to:

- ▶ Deepen reflection on the contours of systemic crises, explore civil society responses, and reflect on funder roles in supporting them in ways that advance a just transition;
- ▶ Share learning and reflections with a wider philanthropic audience;
- ▶ Build a cadre of foundation leaders willing to engage together as advocates and organizers within the field of systemic change philanthropy.



2017-2018 GEL CURRICULUM

Our “participant advisors” accompanied the process, contributing to systemic alternatives theory and its global manifestations (Pablo Solón), the language and landscape of Just Transition at philanthropic and policy levels (Edouard Morena) and movement-building within a just transition framework (Michelle Mascarenhas-Swan).

The "living curriculum" approach, in which participants were encouraged to propose and pursue areas of study and practice outside the shared curriculum, ensured everyone had the same basis of understanding but still got to follow topics most relevant to her/his work and foundation. Individuals in this cohort proposed systemic alternatives narratives, cryptocurrencies, feminisms, indigenous wisdom and donor organizing as areas of particular focus, with all GEL members having a deep interest in philanthropic practice.



GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT LAB PARTICIPANTS

Sofia Arroyo	Sacred Fire Foundation, Mexico
Elizabeth Barajas-Román	Solidago Foundation, US
Peter Bokor	Morton and Jane Blaustein Foundation, US
Sanjay Kabir Bavikatte	The Christensen Fund, US
Ryan Canney	Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, US
Rachel Freed	Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, US
Tin Gazivoda	Open Society Initiative for Europe, Spain
Jovanna Gracia Soto	Grassroots International, US
Augusta Hagen-Dillon	Prospera Int'l Women's Funds, Netherlands
Cuong P. Hoang	Chorus Foundation, US
Rajiv Khanna	Thousand Currents, US
Romy Krämer	Guerrilla Foundation, Germany
Nicolas Krausz	Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation, Switzerland
Conniel Malek	True Costs Initiative, US
Erika Mandreza Sales	Mama Cash, Netherlands
Angela Martinez	Int'l Funders for Indigenous People, US
Philippe Mayol	Fondation Terre Solidaire, France
Michael Mazgaonkar	Global Greengrants Fund, India
Cara Mertes	Ford Foundation, US
Martin Modlinger	Renewable Freedom Foundation, Germany
Vivian Paulissen	European Cultural Foundation, Netherlands
Kiti Kajana Phillips	Open Society Foundations, US
Maria Amalia Souza	CASA SocioEnvironmental Fund, Brazil

ADVISORS

The group was accompanied by three participant advisors representing varied perspectives from global movements and civil

- **Michelle Mascarenhas-Swan**
Movement Generation, US

- **Edouard Morena**, University
of London Institute, France

- **Pablo Solón**, Fundación

With support from EDGE staff
and board, the GEL was
advised, organized and led by:

- **Arianne Shaffer**, Indie
Philanthropy Initiative, Canada

- **Samantha Harvey**, EDGE Just
Transition Fellow

THE GEL CULTURE

Developing a strong community and philanthropic practice that could best support the systemic shifts our civil society and movement allies have been building toward was critical to the GEL's success.

This meant that in addition to our more academic learnings we spent time building trust, becoming allies and making friends. The retreat format was crucial to developing our culture as a GEL cohort. While our areas of study and practice ranged from serious, academic, and political, we also created the space for the group to connect as individuals, activists, artists and fellow travelers.

Storytelling, shared meals, and retreat space to get to know each other as individuals really contributed to group collaboration and collective wisdom sharing throughout the six months. (Even though all GELers have busy schedules, in a post-GEL feedback form almost 60 percent said they would have wanted more in-person retreats. And although it's impossible to measure love, two months post-GEL a cohort-wide "WhatsApp" group is still going strong!)

"I have rarely seen a group of funders with such different areas of expertise and such widely different personal histories"

"I have never experienced a group that so enjoyed being together and working together."
- GEL participants on group dynamics

SNAPSHOT OF WORKSHOPS FROM OUR TWO RETREATS

- ▶ Storytelling Sessions for Systemic, Transformational Change
- ▶ Contours of the Crisis and Global Movement Response
- ▶ Movement Mapping and Philanthropic Landscapes
- ▶ Traditional Philanthropy vs. Systems Change Philanthropy
- ▶ Agroecology farm tour and Food Sovereignty as a case study of systemic change in action
- ▶ Intersectional Thinking and Funding: How Does it Work?
- ▶ Synthesizing Systemic Alternatives and How to Move Forward as a Systems Change Funder
- ▶ Power, Privilege and Identity Workshop
- ▶ Infrastructures and Organizing: How Philanthropy Fits In
- ▶ Breaking Free from Silos



A SAMPLING OF WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN IN PERSON RETREATS

At the first GEL in-person retreat each participant developed an “action project” relevant to their own work and institution. These projects ranged from augmenting transformational work already underway, to strategizing how to more effectively organize across the field, to finding effective ways to speak to foundation colleagues about just transition, systemic change and gender justice. During monthly GEL check-ins and through our online platform, members shared updates, kept abreast of each other’s work and sought feedback on action projects by sharing resources, collaborating and supporting each other and the cohort as a whole.

GEL members shared their experience with 200 funders and allies at EDGE’s annual conference [in New Orleans](#). In a conversation facilitated by Indie Philanthropy Initiative’s Arianne Shaffer, Pablo Solon eloquently described systemic alternatives and the stakes for funders, and Sofia Arroyo with Sacred Fire Foundation, Sanjay Bavikatte with Christensen Fund and Vivian Paulissen with the European Cultural Foundation shared key takeaways and ways the GEL experience continues shaping their understanding of the roles they can play in supporting civil society partners working for social change and transformation.



GEL AND THE JUST TRANSITION COLLABORATIVE WEBINARS



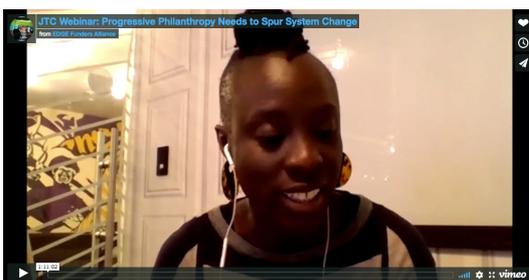
During the course of their six month cohort journey GEL members were deeply involved in the curation, moderation, and content for our monthly EDGE Just Transition Collaborative (JTC) Webinars. You can click through below to see the recordings of these webinars and read more about the speakers.



[Framing the Systems Change Debate](#)



[Radical “Municipalism”: Resistance and Systemic Change from the Ground Up](#)



[Progressive Philanthropy Needs to Spur Systems Change](#)



[Integrating Gender Justice in Systemic Change Philanthropy](#)

WHAT WILL THE GEL 1 COHORT DO NOW?

GEL graduates are pursuing individual strategies for incorporating their learning and experiences into their work and for supporting EDGE in a variety of ways. Two have now joined EDGE's Board of Directors, and others our Europe and North America Strategy Groups. One is co-chairing next year's annual conference planning committee.

A number are helping guide the work of our Gender Justice Initiative, and launching new working groups initiatives seeded during the GEL. Three now-veteran GELers are advising the next cohort, and five are serving on editorial committees for the two funder guides and other learning materials that will be published over the coming months.

Throughout these and other collaborative activities those who learned together and forged long lasting ties are determined to stay in touch, build their community, and strategize together to take their understanding and insights out to the broader philanthropic field.

The group is eager to continue engaging collectively in this work, as organizers and advocates on the leading edge of systemic change philanthropy.



"Getting to know inspiring individuals on a peer to peer level, understanding how other institutions work and think, being pushed to reflect on my own work and role in different ways"

- GEL participant citing highlights of the experience

Information about EDGE's 2018-2019 GEL can be found [HERE](#).

QUESTIONS?

Feel free to reach out to Arianne Shaffer anytime with questions, at jtc@edgefunders.org.