

PEACEBUILDING PROGRAM
2011–2018 Program Review Summary
Ariadne Papagapitos and Karen Karnicki
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INTRODUCTION

In March 2011, the Peacebuilding program completed an intensive review, culminating in a new program name, thematic focus, and set of guidelines.¹ It transitioned away from the framework that had been in place since the 2001 inception of the Peace and Security program to instead focus more explicitly on conflict transformation. The revised program was built on three key pillars:

- 1) An understanding that **drivers of conflict** are most often related to power dynamics, economic interest, resources and wealth, and geopolitics.
- 2) A focus on strengthening **human security** approaches. Stability cannot be created solely through military strength; rather, people's basic needs must be taken into account when considering sources of threats and solutions.
- 3) Attention to **gender equity**. Efforts to resolve conflict tend to be dominated by men. Women's participation in conflict transformation processes strengthens prevention and sustains peace.

In addition, the program would operate under the following principles:

- Peacebuilding work must empower communities experiencing conflict to develop and **communicate their own agenda** and to lead in identifying solutions to transform conflict.
- Building a movement for peace requires creating political will for change by influencing the internal and external dynamics that sustain conflict. This means **building constituencies** for peace among populations in conflict zones and in other places that have bearing on or are directly affected by conflict.
- **The United States is a linchpin**. Because of U.S. and other outside powers' involvement in conflict, change requires the creation of channels through which those powers can be influenced by the aspirations and needs of the people experiencing conflict.
- Given the program's long-standing concern with **U.S. global engagement**, particularly in the wider Middle East—including unilateralism and the militarism of foreign policy—we cannot avoid the foreign policy problems that drive disenchantment with the United States in the region.
- While there are certain dynamics and drivers that are common across conflicts, the grantmaking approach should be **responsive to the specific context** in each geographic area of concern.
- **Regional networks** are best placed to address regional threats.
- **Private foundations** can play a unique role in conflict and fragile state contexts where the majority of active donors are governments, many of which are advancing a political agenda and restricted in their modalities of funding.
- The program architecture should be **transferable to other conflict situations**.

¹ [2011 Peacebuilding Program Memo](#)

Two strategies² emerged to direct the program’s grantmaking toward a goal of building just and durable peace:

- 1) Supporting innovative and collaborative approaches and policies for conflict prevention, management, and transformation at the multilateral, regional, and national levels, or “top-down engagement”
- 2) Strengthening constituencies and political will for conflict transformation and durable peace, or “bottom-up engagement”

Together, these strategies aim to create the conditions for peace, understanding that transforming conflicts by tackling their drivers requires a long view and sustained engagement.

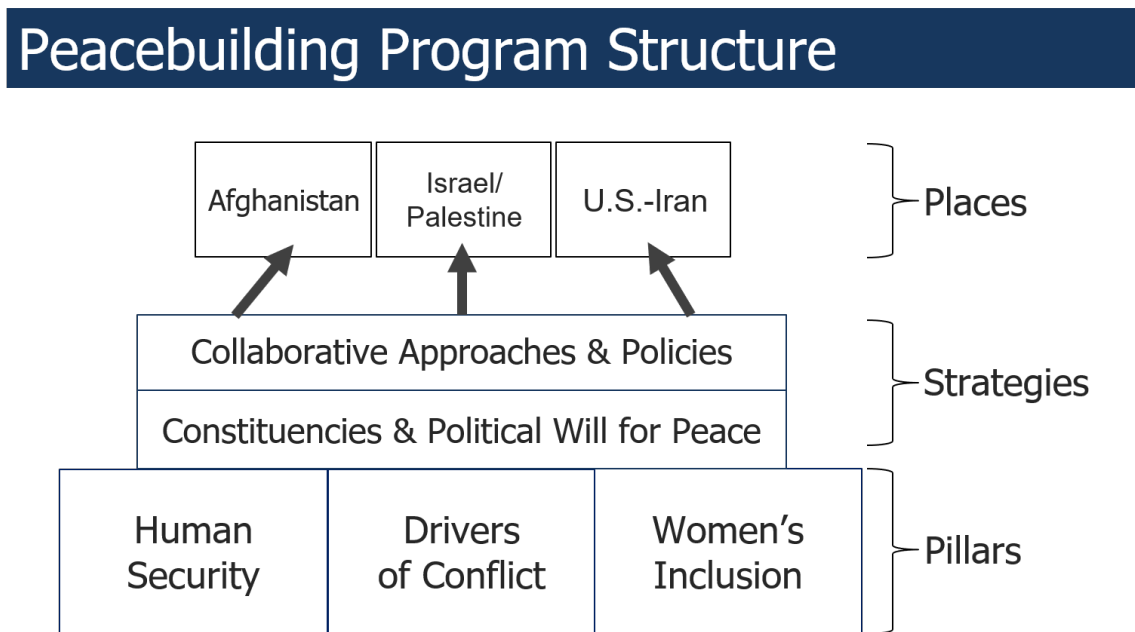
To further focus the program’s grantmaking toward its ambitious goal, the Fund elected to work on specific conflicts chosen according to three primary criteria: disproportionate influence on international peace and security, significant involvement of the United States, and prior RBF experience.

As a result, the Peacebuilding program focused on the following areas experiencing conflict:

- 1) Afghanistan
- 2) Israel/Palestine
- 3) The U.S.-Iran relationship

In addition to grantmaking on these three conflicts, the program has supported work to address regional drivers of conflict in the wider Middle East.

The diagram below presents the Peacebuilding program structure:



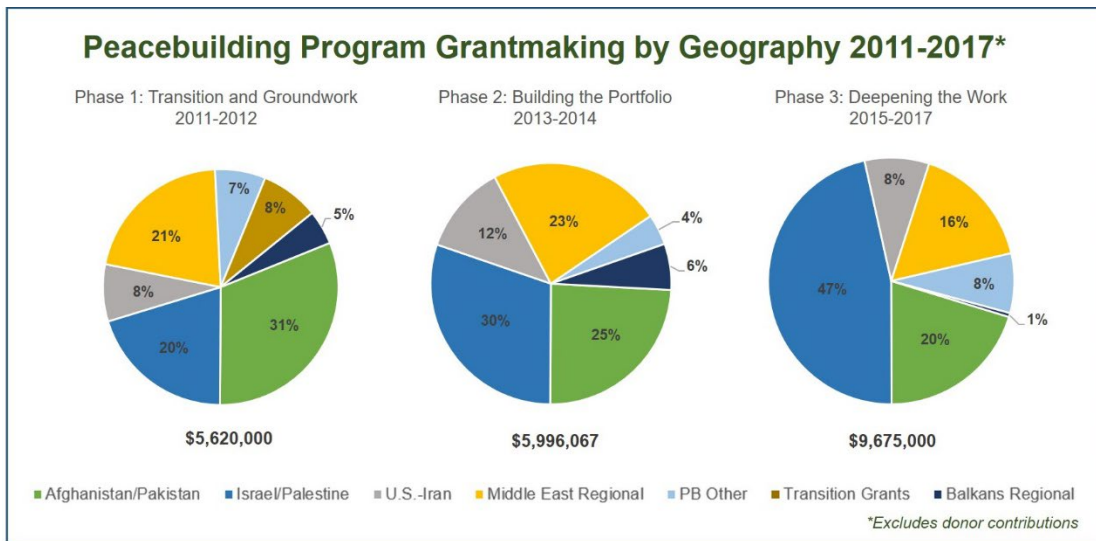
² A third strategy, “Exploring solutions to emerging transnational threats and drivers of conflict,” which signaled an early interest in grantmaking at the nexus of conflict and natural resources, arms, and other relevant issues, was subsumed into the other two strategies in 2014.

THREE PHASES OF GRANTMAKING (2011–2018)

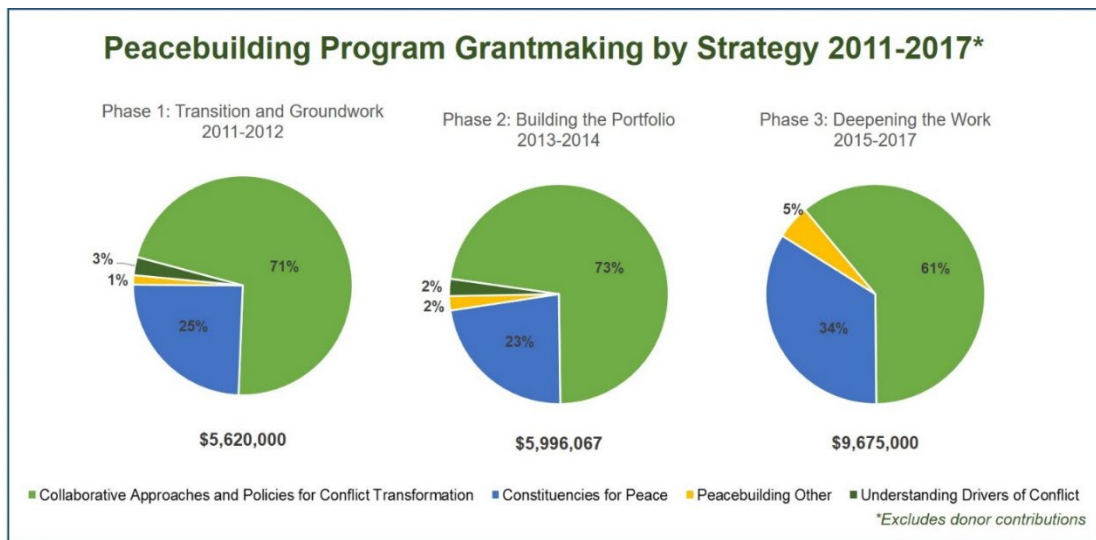
The program’s evolution can be divided into three phases: 1) Transition and Groundwork (2011–2012); 2) Building the Portfolio (2013–2014); and 3) Deepening the Work (2015–2018).

From 2011 to 2017, the program committed \$21,291,067 and an additional \$10,000,000 in donor contributions to conflict transformation efforts that aim to advance just and durable peace in Afghanistan and Southwest Asia, Israel/Palestine, and the U.S.-Iran relationship. In that period, grantmaking for Israel/Palestine increased, and Afghanistan/Pakistan work became more closely focused on Afghanistan.

The program also supported regional activities and initiatives to address drivers of conflict and promote interstate cooperation and inclusive conflict resolution. In 2017, staff committed \$500,000 to a preliminary exploration of opportunities to address the regional refugee crisis as both a symptom of conflict as well as a driver of further violence and state fragility.



The majority of the program’s grants in this time were directed toward the first strategy, collaborative approaches and policies for conflict transformation. Grants to help build constituencies for peace, the second strategy, increased over time.



LESSONS LEARNED

1. **The “top-down” and “bottom-up” strategies have proven to be an effective way to organize grantmaking on some of the most entrenched conflicts.** Building interconnections between the two levels—through network-building and delegations of grantees to decision makers, donors, and media—can strain program capacities, both human and financial, but is essential for enduring change.
2. **On issues about which U.S. policy can be intractable, building the strength of constituencies that create the conditions for a shift in political will are needed to secure peace.** We have found opportunities for innovation in constituency building that lays the groundwork for political shifts while taking a long view on concrete policy change.
3. **Some of the greatest impact has come from non-grantmaking activities,** including convenings that have contributed to field building and fresh approaches to conflict resolution. This is the nexus between strategies one and two: the space where bottom-up efforts can meet centers of power to advance the program’s core principles and ideas.
4. **Our focus on specific geographic contexts positions us to connect initiatives and local experts across regions** so that they can learn from each other’s shared aspirations, approaches, and challenges. For example, we have built relationships between civil society in the Western Balkans and in the Middle East that have resulted in important bodies of work such as publications on the arms trade between the Balkans and the Middle East.
5. **A gender equity lens can be integrated across peacebuilding efforts to realize equality and sustainability in peacebuilding.**
6. **Progress toward durable peace is fundamentally unrealizable in the absence of equitable and just societies.** Most grantees consistently report that they “engage diverse perspectives” rather than citing specific internal policies or practices. Trainings and initiatives around racial equity and inclusion appear to be primarily one-time events rather than consistently pursued as part of a broader strategy. Most significantly, diversity remains at the administrative level across both U.S. and non-U.S. grantees, and the board level remains highly homogenous.
7. **Funding for policy development and grassroots organizing by groups from the region and diaspora enabled constituencies with a direct stake in peacebuilding processes to communicate their agendas and to highlight the flaws in peacebuilding policies emanating from external actors.** The public discourse in the United States today is more attuned to the most acute drivers of conflict, such as U.S. government assistance to authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, political corruption in South Asia, militarization of development aid, the war economy, and lack of human security and basic rights. Since 2011, the program has worked to advance this discourse.
8. **Elevating diverse groups in Israel and Palestine that undertake courageous advocacy expanded the parameters of conversation in donor, policy, and civil society communities.** Advocacy work in the region had previously experienced a critical funding gap that weakened civil society’s ability to act as a counterweight to government policy.
9. **Early analysis indicated that the dynamics that drive and sustain conflict are partly related to political economy.** An increased focus on the political economy of conflict enabled us to shed light on the murky links between politics, military aid, and the arms trade. Partnership in this area with other RBF programs has enabled us to develop this body of work carefully and responsibly and to contribute to the “business and human rights” field.

10. **By taking measured risk in complex contexts, the Fund brought benefits to communities in conflict that previously lacked support.** Many of these communities have sprouted substantial movements for peace, secured grants from other donors, and built broad, collaborative advocacy networks. The Fund has developed processes for identifying, evaluating, and managing risk, including ongoing internal and external awareness raising and education with staff and trustees.
11. **Collaboration with other RBF programs, donors, and networks of civil society advocates has helped us test innovative ideas, engage new partners, and increase the reach and impact of our modest portfolio.**
12. **Regional divides hampered regional work more than we anticipated.** Divisions between states in the region have only deepened in the last seven years and, in many ways, have affected the ability of civil society to connect across borders, as have restrictions on movement and the increasing severity of in-country crises. We have supported some regional civil society initiatives, but the extent of regional fault lines and worsening conflicts have made progress difficult.
13. **There is tension between the fast pace of changing dynamics—for example, the wars in Syria and Yemen—and the reality that our resources are limited.** Responding meaningfully to new conflicts would require ending other areas of ongoing work and challenge the Fund's "long-view" approach to grantmaking and change.
14. **In the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, the region is no more democratic than before.** Even in moments of optimism, political developments have only reinforced the need to amplify the voice of civil society and the next generation of leadership and to not expect change to come from the top.
15. **On a highly politicized and emotional set of issues, competition and disagreements can be fierce.** Building coalitions to strengthen our collective power is not easy: our first attempts surfaced tensions between groups and reminded us that funders are viewed with a dose of suspicion.

CONCLUSION

Our work has fulfilled three important aspirations: 1) empowering critical yet unheard voices from within conflicts that have significant impact on international peace and security; 2) supporting innovative approaches that address root causes of intractable conflicts; and 3) introducing a new conceptual framework for resolving long-standing conflicts. We have already seen some progress, but the real impact of our framework will be realized over the long term.

A revised preamble for the [program guidelines](#) conveys the rationale for the conflicts we've selected, includes forced migration as a driver and consequence of conflict, and makes explicit the key pillars that have guided our work.