

Mozilla Foundation

Mozilla Fellowships and Awards Program Executive Summary and Management Response

Simply Secure

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Mozilla F&A Program Evaluation and Impact Narrative

Authors:

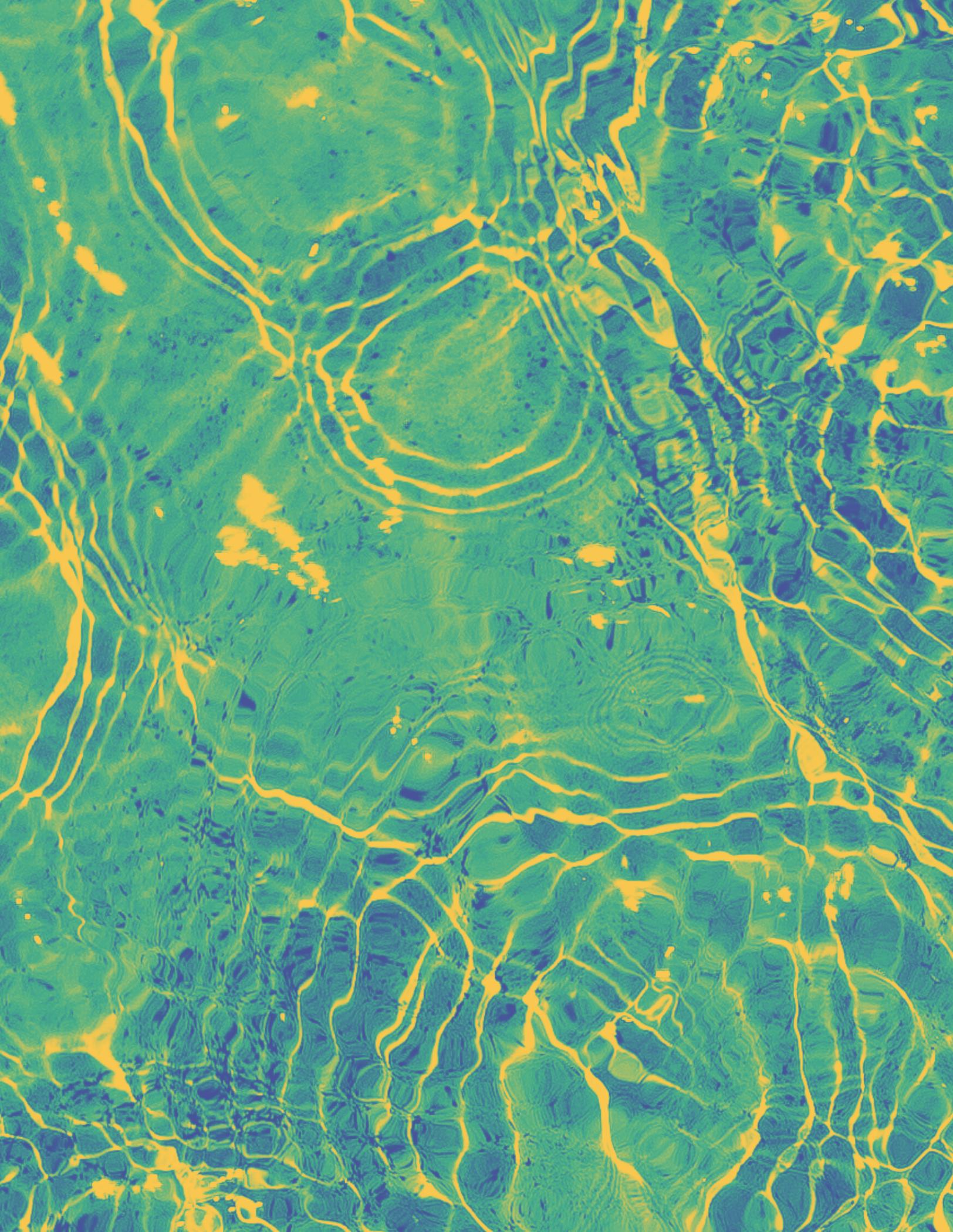
Simply Secure – *Program Evaluation*

Ayana Byrd & Kenrya Rankin – *Impact Narrative,
Management Response*

Mozilla’s Fellowships & Awards (F&A) program works to bring Mozilla’s organizational values into the broader world through social and tech-based solutions and projects. What follows is an evaluation of the program’s strategy and impact from the beginning of 2016 through mid-2020.



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Executive Summary

Authors:

Simply Secure

Kenrya Rankin & Ayana Byrd

From the beginning, the Fellowships and Awards program has worked with partners to invest millions of dollars in individuals and ideas that improve transparency in and the accountability of technology and pave the way for increased internet health. Along the way, F&A's funding strategy has evolved in many directions, but there has been one throughline that's embedded in Mozilla's DNA: openness. As an investment strategy, that manifests by putting money into programs that improve openness in technology — and pushing other sectors and the institutions that undergird them to adopt openness as a foundational value.

This evaluation is an analysis of the Mozilla Foundation's grantmaking and fellowship work led by the F&A team from the beginning of 2016 through mid-2020. It seeks to understand: 1) the impacts of the programs on individual funding recipients and organizational partners, on the issues the programs endeavor to address, and on the people most affected by those issues, 2) the strengths and challenges of the programs, for Mozilla staff, program participants and other stakeholders 3) how F&A's work supports the impact goals laid out in Mozilla's AI Theory of Change and 4) the ways in which the F&A program contributes to and is perceived by the broader internet health ecosystem.

This evaluation was carried out in two parts. First, Simply Secure carried out an analytical review and initial impact assessment based on Mozilla-provided internal and external planning, strategy, management, and output documents. Kenrya Rankin and Ayana Byrd then provided a further synthesis of those findings and conducted additional independent interviews to complete the impact narrative that follows. The second part of this report is the program evaluation, for which Simply Secure collected primary survey and interview data to evaluate the experience and impacts of the F&A program: 84 responses to three surveys and 47 anonymous interviews with current and former fellows, awardees, Foundation and F&A staff members, funders, and ecosystem stakeholders.

The evaluation found that the program furthers the foundation's internet health goals and overall theory of change by investing in research, writing, art, and code that explores the role of the internet in society. The program attracts and grows a network of technologists, coders, educators, scientists, journalists and activists who are committed to advancing Mozilla's mission. It also found that impact has been limited by a lack of clarity and communication around how program design and theory of change inform one another. Those surveyed felt that making the connection explicit would help the ecosystem and participants have clarity around the intentions of Mozilla's work, crystalize strategy internally and externally, and help the foundation develop more effective impact measurements.

Respondents indicated that the strengths and challenges of the F&A program were largely consistent across program tracks, types and models. This finding indicates that individual F&A programs have more in common than the team currently acknowledges, and that the different programs ultimately offer similar experiences to funding recipients.

A multi-tiered approach was used to measure the ways the F&A program—and by extension, Mozilla—has impacted the tech landscape:

Individual impact measures if a person or group who received a fellowship or award was able to further their career or devote more energy to their area of expertise. The fellowship program has been successful in helping early- and mid-career technologists become leaders in their fields.

Organizational impact measures how partner organizations' strategies evolve after hosting an embedded fellow. In many cases, not only have organizations amended their internal structure as a result of F&A program knowledge sharing, but they have made those amendments in ways that align with Mozilla's strategic goals around trustworthy AI.

Movement impact directly examines the effects of a project that was completed by a fellow or grantee. In the most impactful scenarios, there was a major shift in how everyone from activists to the general public understood a topic, there was an increase in philanthropic investment around an issue, or there was some other

positive change on the internet health or social justice movements.

We also analyzed how fellowships and awards disbursed funds from 2016 through 2020 to determine if the Fellowships and Awards program's investments furthered the impact goals laid out in the AI Theory of Change. While the data make it clear that F&A is moving closer to those goals, it is also clear that there is an opportunity to better align the investment strategy and timeline with program end goals to scale programmatic impact. And while Mozilla's focus is squarely on the consumer tech space, the waves created by this work have the potential to have influence in other key areas. As one funding partner put it, *"Every field needs this."*

"The environmental field will need data scientists who can work with the social justice and environmental framework to work in the organizations that haven't already recruited them. The criminal justice field will need data scientists or technologists who can actually understand the black boxes that are being deployed in all layers of the criminal justice system at this moment. Every single established field is going to need this kind of jumpstart to their most important organizations. There is a real opportunity for Mozilla to have these programs really scale and be infrastructure for all of the right fields, to recruit and incorporate the right kind of tech lens into more mature legacy organizations that frankly need to be caring about these issues, but don't fully understand them."

Mozilla is poised to use the data of its impact on the tech landscape and civil society uncovered by this evaluation, to more effectively achieve its impact goals and to power movements. The challenges and pain points identified through the interviews and surveys highlight opportunities for improvement around four main areas: strategy, participant experience, data collection and operations. Findings also emphasized the need for the organization and the tech philanthropy field to collaborate around impact measurements, as the primary benefits and beneficiaries of the F&A program and partner efforts emerge over time and in ways that may be difficult to quantify. There is an opportunity for common metrics to aid the field as a whole.

Strategy

- As indicated above, this evaluation spans three different strategic visions and plans for the organization. Internal and external respondents related a general lack of cohesive and consistent strategic vision for the program, which participants also echoed in their experience of Mozilla and its programs. Lack

of internal clarity around program goals and intentions is one major sticking point. The broader field of funders and stakeholders, also, are aware of Mozilla's many leadership, strategy and staffing changes over time, which has led to a perception that the F&A program lacks focus. Strategic consistency is also challenging due to tensions and misalignments between program design, Mozilla's goals and the various funders' goals.

- More closely aligning F&A's investment strategy and timeline with Mozilla Foundation's now-adopted Trustworthy AI Theory of Change has the potential to steer the movement to develop an artificial intelligence ecosystem that is worthy of consumers' trust. Launching programs—and selecting fellows and awardees—with impact in mind will better support the Foundation's mission.
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) are important priorities to Mozilla and the F&A team, but the program lacks consistent vision and implementation around DEI practices. Some funding recipients, especially those from the Global South, articulated that their experience with the F&A program was too US-centric, in both operations and cultural positioning.

Participant Experience

- Fellowship length and schedule make it difficult to achieve the fellows' desired goals, and can be an interruption to their careers that, without support for planning their next step, can feel like a post-award "cliff."
- Funding recipients reported varied experiences with the F&A programs' support structures. Additional and more robust systems of support were desired by participants across programs to improve participant experience, and provide a spectrum of support for their varying, individual needs.
- Participants who were hosted by an organization emphasized that expectation setting, boundaries and communication are absolutely essential to these partnerships flourishing—lack of role definition has led to difficulty and conflict historically.
- Staff reported that F&A is missing an opportunity to extend and deepen its relationship with fellows and awardees. Establishing an alumni network would allow Mozilla to tap their expertise while also putting them in community with each other, expanding their networks and their ability to impact movements.

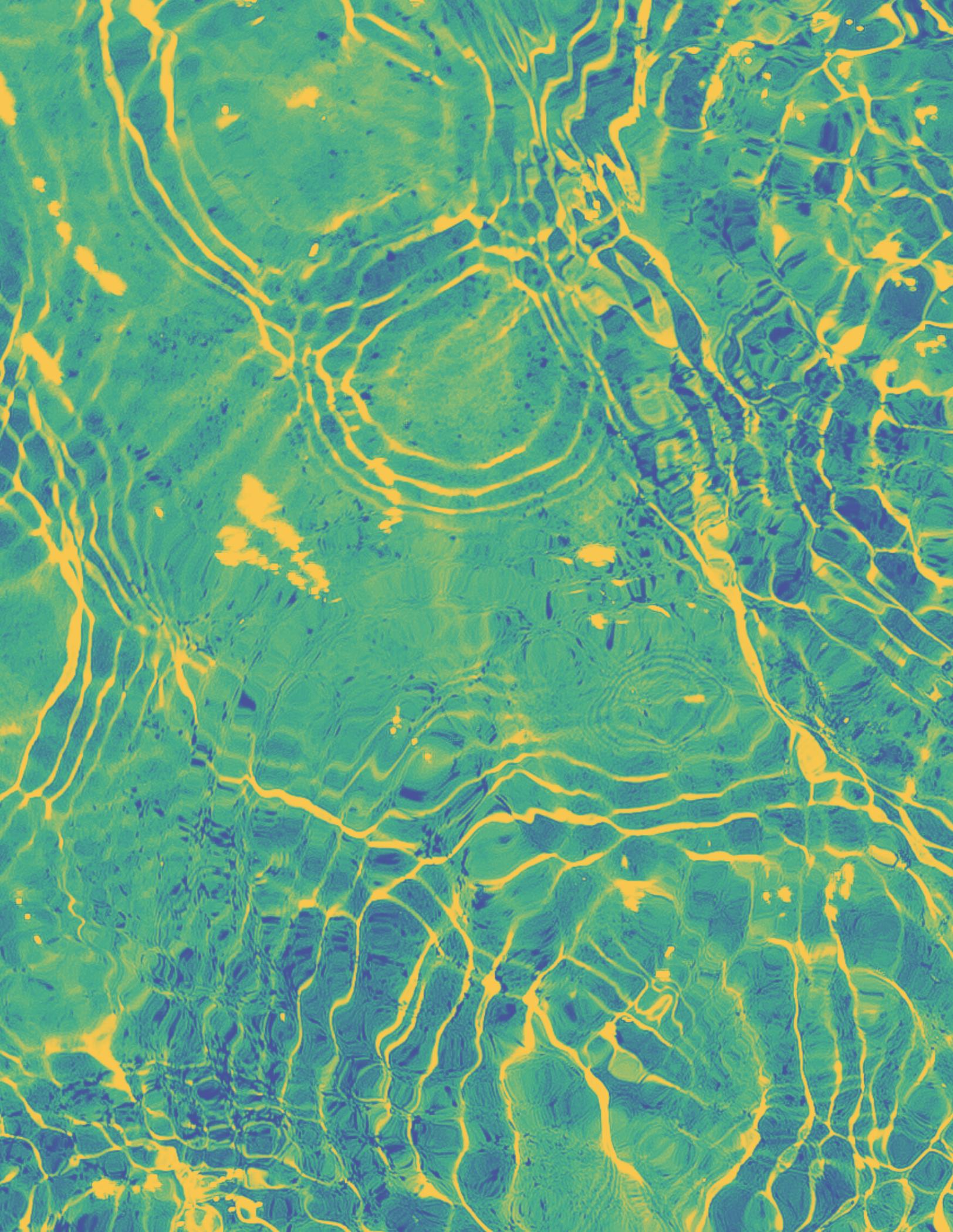
Data Collection

- The primary impacts of the F&A program—ecosystem change, narrative shifts and ripple effects—are hard to measure and require metrics that can be deployed over time. Fostering longer-term data collection relationships is critical to both understanding and maximizing the program's impact.
- Inconsistent data collection and management has meant that Mozilla cannot easily use the huge pool of information, resources and connections generated through the F&A program to its maximum potential.
- F&A needs to create a qualitative and quantitative measurement and evaluation framework that both protects the data of the people who are directly impacted by the programs and standardizes the information that is collected so it can yield useful insights into the programs.

Operations

- The F&A staff is rich in expertise and experience, and has an excellent reputation in the field and amongst funding recipients. At the same time, there is an immense opportunity to empower the F&A staff through improved leadership, communication and collaboration. High-level changes, such as leadership, strategy shifts and staff turnover have been destabilizing and have left a lasting impact on the staff. Staff voiced concerns about job security, lack of clarity around their work in relation to current strategy and siloing of F&A work.
- The operational end of running the F&A programs is complex and challenging; past participants illuminated various pain points, particularly regarding the logistical complexities of running global programs.
- Some staff urged Mozilla Foundation to consider the ways the F&A teams and projects are united within the organization. This evaluation can be used to guide conversations about how fellowships and awards—and the ways they are deployed—can best be used to support the impact goals.

Mozilla has an exciting opportunity to use the reflections of program participants and current and former staff and the learnings of this evaluation to build a more strategically focused, supportive and communicative set of programs that furthers its essential work within the digital rights ecosystem. The final section of this report details key opportunities and suggested design interventions that respond to these findings and work to situate Mozilla and the F&A program more powerfully on the side of program participants and the future of a healthy internet. The Management Response attached to this report is a Q&A with J Bob Alotta, VP Global Programs, and Hanan Elmasu, Director of F&A, illuminating what's next for F&A, changes already in play, and how Mozilla plans to grow from this evaluative process.



Management Response

Authors: Kenrya Rankin & Ayana Byrd

In November 2019, J. Bob Alotta, former executive director of Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, joined Mozilla Foundation to serve as vice president of Global Programs. Bob recruited Hanan Elmasu, a human rights lawyer with a background in philanthropy focused on technology and activism, to the organization in August 2020 to be director of the Fellowships and Awards program. Both have backgrounds in activism and leading human rights initiatives that acknowledge how critical internet freedom is to building and sustaining movements. In their short time with the Foundation, they have begun shifting and clarifying strategy to align with the organization's AI Theory of Change and movement building strategy. Alotta and Elmasu also commissioned an impact evaluation of the Fellowships and Awards program's operations from the beginning of 2016 to mid-2020 to see where it was—and where it could go. Here, they discuss the report and how it will help advance the Foundation's work.

Why did you decide to commission an evaluation of the Fellowship and Awards program's impact?

J. Bob Alotta: I was tasked with operationalizing Mozilla's movement building strategy globally, and grantmaking and fellowships are incredibly impactful tools in that toolbox. Our programmatic work has the potential to leverage significant power and impact, and it's really important to not just reinvent the wheel. So first, this evaluation is a way to concretize and canonize the excellent work of Fellowships and Awards to date. Second, it is a way to validate decision making. We're committed to openness, and this helps us to learn and iterate and pivot accordingly. It underscores changes we've already put in place, and it gives us solid ground to stand on as we move forward.

What do you want people to learn when they read this evaluation?

J. Bob Alotta: A lot of really good work happened. There are incredible fellows, there are incredible grantee partners, there were incredible grants made. Also, these years really reflect the fact that the Foundation was finding itself. There was experimentation, the way tech entities do. Much less so in the world of philanthropy. It wasn't a traditional foundation making grants, it was a tech company figuring out how to be a foundation, and it was learning how to express its philanthropic identity while doing so. So we're honoring and learning from the past. There's a lot of goodness to bring forward—we're bringing along folks and adding new people into the mix to grow the F&A team, as well as Global Programs. We are ready to press go on this work. Our commitment is unwavering.

Hanan Elmasu: I also hope people see the door that's opening. It's a point in time that we're assessing and that has passed, but we're building on it. That means seeing the things that work and the things that didn't work. What we're doing now is taking all of those things and learning and growing from them. This evaluation is part of an infrastructure we're creating to build toward the future.

What does that future look like?

Hanan Elmasu: Mozilla's F&A future will include a group of really amazing individuals who are aligned with our values around transparency, bias and building movements and working in this open way with organizations that share a similar focus. In terms of building community and creating space, our role is to populate that space with more brilliance.

But that brilliance needs to be supported to thrive, and our future will reflect that. The evaluation highlighted some really important operational gaps that we knew existed; we're building an accompaniment strategy that ensures our community is better connected and equipped to tackle big issues. We're designing and resourcing an alumni program to provide continued support and connection post fellowships and awards. We're also adding additional technical expertise to our team and hiring a communications officer to tell the story of our work in different ways and more places, and to support fellows and awardees as they do the same. We're thinking through how we can support learning across our field to work more collaboratively for greater impact and to partner across different movements. And we're updating our strategy to ensure that our values are reflected in all of our decision making.

J. Bob Alotta: We're really committed to interoperability, both methodologically and programmatically. The [Data Futures Lab](#) is a good example of that. It centers around networks of practice and employs a cohort model for the grantee partners. And to Hanan's point, while we're still bringing on individual fellows, we're really looking at them as a cohort, regardless of the kind of fellowship. Which means we're envisioning wraparound support and peer communities for learning and growth. It also means we'll take stock of how their work interacts and intersects with Mozilla's Theory of Change and our specific organizational goals and commitments.

Mozilla is committed to upending current mechanisms of data extraction; and the technical, regulatory and cultural structures that promote bias; or obfuscate transparency in an effort to actualize AI that is trustworthy. We are also committed to doing so with partners across movements and across geographies. So we are making investments in our own organization, in our data infrastructure, and in our programs that reflect these commitments and to hopefully have immediate, medium-term and long-term impact. We're asking questions like: How do hosted fellows serve as a bridge between Mozilla and its strategic goals? What does it mean for fellows to be embedded in civil society organizations whose primary mission isn't necessarily digital freedom or internet freedom, but other social justice movements—and how do we support those fellows as the organizers they are? And then how do we look at host orgs as the key grassroots players in the fields in which they work?

The idea is to adopt a grassroots-to-grasstop strategy that's enduring and impactful, so that when we do this evaluation five years from now, we can say, "We're moving in the right direction, and it's synchronized and choreographed in a way that's meaningful. Furthermore we're actually leveraging our power in a way that mitigates the imbalance of power." We're also building the infrastructure to recognize when we're not moving in the right direction—and we have the tools to course correct.

In addition to just making a grant, we are also answering the question: what does it mean to make a Mozilla grant? In addition to receiving a fellowship, what does it mean to receive a Mozilla fellowship? And how do you benefit from our unique place in the ecosystem, our role as both a foundation and a company? We don't just make grants and give fellowships, we convene, have MozFest, produce research and analysis, do advocacy and campaigns, and have a robust comms department. So, how do grantee partners and fellows really benefit from that?

What is one immediate shift you're making as a result of the evaluation findings?

J. Bob Alotta: The analysis underscored the need to develop a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) strategy that can be applied across programs and addresses global perspectives and definitions of DEI. We're not looking at that as a standalone or a 2020-fueled commitment—we're asking, "What does that look like in the context of our work in an enduring way that will induce the long-term investments we should be making in grantee partners and people?" Even the language of DEI is very North American, so how do we actually embed into our strategic vision a change that is meaningful in different geographies? It must be an approach that will honor and center local people, talent, issues and engagement.

Hanan Elmasu: This has really shown up in our emerging strategy as an anchor for our theory of change and how we approach all of our work. We're centring our decision making within some key principles: recognizing the complexity of movements and geographic issues; integrating open source practice as both a movement and approach; using the human rights framework as a powerful approach to guide our interactions; a commitment to community justice, including where and how inequality manifests globally; a longer term commitment to a healthy, open internet in our philanthropic work; and incorporating an intersectional approach. These principles are reflected in the recent recruitment for 2022 senior fellows, and they anchor new technical funding streams and future phases of programs like the Responsible Computer Science Challenge.

The evaluation shows that while there are a number of good things happening in the organization, there is still a lot of work to be done. What do you find most exciting about this moment in time for the F&A program at Mozilla?

J. Bob Alotta: The report talks about the nascency of our relationships with institutions and fellows, but now they're actually matured—they're longstanding relationships, they're longstanding bodies of work. So, we get to catalyze those relationships to build an even stronger presence in the field. We now have clarity of purpose in a way that, by virtue of it being an experimental beginning, we didn't previously have. And we have a strategy and institution rallying behind this. It's not just the Fellowships and Awards team, every team at Mozilla is rallied around the same theory of change. We're leveraging each other's superpowers to meet those ends and to clarify opportunities and avenues for engagement. And that can only benefit the folks on the ground with whom we're grantmaking and the fellows with whom we're working.

Hanan Elmasu: The excitement for me is around the fact that there was this metamorphosis over the last five years, and we're now at a really opportune moment to emerge from our chrysalis with all of this amazing stuff. We now have this evaluation as a body of work. And it's supporting us to create the infrastructure needed to continue to learn and grow as a grantmaker. Also, I think the world is also more ready for us than it was five years ago. Things were very different then when it came to digital rights. Nobody knew what that meant then, but now there's a real understanding of what it means to not have internet; what it means to have an internet shutdown; what it means to have your voice silenced on digital platforms.

J. Bob Alotta: Yes! Plus, we're here! We're doubling down on our investment and our commitment. We already see what happens if we don't strategically invest in this work. How many democracies are tenuous at this stage because of unfree and unsafe and unstable internet and access? I'm excited that we get to work toward making that secure while in true partnership with so many other movements and players in the field and rogue brilliant actors. There's so many more people who we're going to get to work with and whose work will be out in the world because we have a clear and committed path toward investing in them and partnering with them and learning from them, and changing who we are as a result of those relationships. I mean, that's pretty exciting.

