

A conversation with Erika Gregory on September 22, 2014

Participants

- Erika Gregory – Founding Director, N Square: The Crossroads for Nuclear Security Innovation
- Nick Beckstead – Research Analyst, the Open Philanthropy Project
- Howie Lempel – Research Analyst, the Open Philanthropy Project

Note: This set of notes was compiled by the Open Philanthropy Project and gives an overview of the major points made by Erika Gregory.

Summary

Nick Beckstead and Howie Lempel spoke to Erika Gregory as part of an Open Philanthropy Project investigation into nuclear weapons policy. Conversation topics included: raising public awareness of nuclear issues, N Square's goals, and the need for innovation.

Raising public awareness

Nuclear weapons pose a serious global threat but nuclear security is no longer a high-profile issue. Ms. Gregory believes the issue needs be revisited because nuclear weapons pose a greater threat now than during the Cold War.

She credits diplomacy, philanthropy, technology, and Ploughshares Fund investment in the policy space for reducing the number of nuclear weapons around the world. However, uncertainty remains regarding:

- the security of fissile materials
- the number of nuclear weapons in existence
- what actors pose a threat
- the vulnerability of command and control systems governing decisions around the use of nuclear weapons in today's networked society.

In addition to increasing public awareness around nuclear security issues, Ms. Gregory would like to see more people enter the field. Nuclear policy would benefit from engaging a diverse group of experts with experiences solving economic, environmental, and political problems.

N Square: The Crossroads for Nuclear Security Innovation

Ms. Gregory leads N Square, a \$2.4 million, two-year pilot program supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Skoll Global Threats Fund, and Ploughshares Fund.

The initiative provides an opportunity for funders to stimulate new interest in the field by engaging in disruptive work, but at arm's length from the individual foundations. N Square seeks to catalyze innovation by promoting cross-sector partnerships and engaging influencers, particularly millennials and baby boomers.

N Square's goals during its first year:

- Educating and engaging millennials on nuclear issues.
- Building networks and creating problem-solving opportunities between established actors and new actors.
- Identifying promising ideas and credible value propositions for philanthropic organizations and the private sector.

The need for innovation

Ms. Gregory sees the initiative as an opportunity to bring diverse perspectives together and explore uncharted avenues. She is interested in learning how analogous problems have been solved in other fields. Offering prizes may attract new ideas and help spur innovative problem solving. For example, innovation could help address technical problems during each stage of the nuclear fuel cycle – from uranium extraction to disposal. Attracting new people to the field requires making the conversation around nuclear issues accessible to problem-solvers from other sectors.

People to talk to:

- Philip Yun – Executive Director and COO, Ploughshares Fund
- Samara Dun – Director of Development, Ploughshares Fund
- Peter Hayes – Executive Director, Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development
- Rose Gottemoeller – U.S. Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security, U.S. Department of State
- Alexandra Bell – Director for Strategic Outreach, Office of the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security; former Project Manager at Ploughshares Fund

*All Open Philanthropy Project conversations are available at
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