**2020 Annual Board Meeting**

# April 20th, 2020 – Video conference

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| **ATTENDING**    **External Board Members**  Yuko Harayama  Nikunj Jinsi  Beverly Malone  Emilie Marcus  Geraldine Richmond  **Ex Officio Board Members**  Kumsal Bayazit  Suzanne BeDell  Youngsuk (YS) Chi  John Danaher  Esra Erkal  Márcia Balisciano | **The Elsevier Foundation Team**  Ylann Schemm, Director  Domiziana Francescon, Program Officer  Maria Markova, Treasurer  Ken Thompson II, Legal counsel |

1. **Welcome**

YS Chi opened the Board meeting on behalf of the Elsevier Foundation. He noted the objectives of the meeting: to review the business of the Foundation, conduct a brief program review and hold a strategic discussion with the Board. Kumsal Bayazit opened on behalf of Elsevier and highlighted two recent contributions to gender equity: the launch of the 2020 analytics report, [The Researcher Journey through a Gender Lens](https://www.elsevier.com/connect/gender-report) and the new external [Inclusion & Diversity Board](https://www.elsevier.com/about/inclusion-diversity-board). Kumsal also provided a quick update on Elsevier’s operations during the COVID-19 health crisis and the relevant freely available [COVID-19 content](https://www.elsevier.com/novel-coronavirus-covid-19)  including 25,000 articles to support researchers and health practitioners.

1. **Administrative procedures**

YS asked the Board if they had any comments or questions about the 2019 Board Meeting minutes from April 8th and October 14th 2019. The 2019 Meeting Minutes were ratified through a unanimous vote.

YS shared introduced the draft conflict of interest policy recommended by the Elsevier Foundation legal counsel, Ken Thompson, to ensure that official guidelines are in place in order to protect the Foundation’s status as a tax-exempt organization when agreements are entered with a board members or staff.[[1]](#footnote-1) Ken Thomson clarified that the new policy does not aim to replace the awareness documents already in place and that no amendments to the current Code of Conduct are necessary. Board members will be asked to sign the policy for the official record. Geri Richmond expressed her satisfaction with the document and that it was consistent with the policies of other boards that she sits on. The document was ratified by a unanimous vote

YS welcomed the new ex-officio member of the board, Ezra Erkal, EVP of Global Communications at Elsevier. Ezra introduced herself and shared her rich experience in previous roles with the rest of the Board.

**III Recap of Priorities & Programs**

YS provided a brief recap of the Elsevier Foundation’s 15 year anniversary including the transition from RFP focused programs to a partnership approach in service of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). He highlighted the unique contributions of the Foundation in inclusive health and research through a tech-embedded approach to partnering. In light of the pandemic, YS highlighted the timely efforts of the Foundation to embed technology across many of its programs including the implementation of the FAO’s Research4Life training MOOC.

YS underlined the need for both the Foundation and Elsevier to continue supporting the UN SDGS. He also noted that since 2016, the Foundation has supported programs through a multi-year funding cycles, which offer partnerships time to mature, develop and deliver but ties down funding and limits the Foundation’s ability to respond rapidly when the need arises. YS urged the Board find viable solutions for the Foundation to continue supporting its ambitious programs, while allowing for optimal flexibility in a rapidly changing world.

1. **Overview 2019-2020: Highlights, Evaluation and Recommendations**

As Elsevier Foundation Director, Ylann Schemm shared insights on the newly released 2020 Elsevier Foundation Board Report. The Report embeds key evaluation metrics and elements adopted from the Mission Measurement pilot, including mapping each partnership to the SDGs.

Ylann also provided an overview of the Foundation’s programs, structure and funding which is effectively distributed across five areas: 20% for the Matching Gift program, 26% for health programs – which reflects the two new health tech pilots, 18% for Research in Developing Countries, 16% for gender and 20% for underserved youth partnerships. The latter area was established in 2016 within the Diversity in STM program area and financed through the original funds allocated to women in science. Ylann asked board members to consider the right balance in funding and underscored that women in science should remain a critical area for the Foundation given the wealth of in-kind expertise, networks and content.

**Partnership Highlights & Review**

Ylann presented highlights from the past six months including the OWSD-EF Women Scientists Awards, the Pre G3 Girls Inc. program, the Research4Life FAO MOOC and the launch of JIBU. She went on to review two partnerships in particular: Green & Sustainable Chemistry Challenge (GSCC) and the Matching Gift Program.

The GSCC is now in its fifth year of collaboration with Elsevier Chemistry journals and its second year with the international NGO, ISC3 which has brought a rich network of policymakers, NGOs and startups to the existing academic network. In total, the GSCC has had 10 winners and 25 finalists, contributing to a growing community of green and sustainable chemistry researchers from developing countries. However, the Challenge has begun to suffer from a lack of innovative projects, judging fatigue, logistical hosting issues and a low uptake in effectively incorporating a gender dimension across projects. Ylann proposed reserving a small amount of funding for alumni engagement in 2021 and assessing the Challenge’s efficacy, focus, gender dimension and scope going forward.

The Matching Gift program provides $200,000 in annual matching funds to charitable organizations supported by Elsevier employees. In 2017, the Foundation began working with CyberGrants, a Matching Gift vendor. While the Foundation’s US matches have enjoyed a relatively smooth and streamlined process, the non-US matching process has been less than ideal. CyberGrants’ vetting process for non-US donations is subject to onerous IRS vetting requirements for 501 (c3) donations to international charities. This has caused considerable delays for the roughly 10% of non-US matches, which, in the long run undermines the Elsevier Foundation’s goodwill for non-US employees. Ylann recommended that the Board provide direction on alternative solutions.

**Strengths, Opportunities and Gaps**

Ylann provided a brief assessment on the Foundation’s strengths and opportunities to prepare for the Board’s strategic discussion including: the 15-year legacy of contributions in research, gender, and global health (ca $15m.); Elsevier’s substantial in-kind contributions to the Foundation which have helped to increase impact and reach; The Foundation’s own contributions which have helped to form the basis of Elsevier’s growing thought leadership in gender; The high profile and high impact EF-OWSD Awards and a significant partnership presence in Sub-Saharan Africa.

She requested that Board members consider gaps in other high profile partnerships, lack of footprint in Asia, Latin America or Middle East as well as the lack of major US or Asian Gender partnerships. She also noted that funding has been flat since 2014 and that the Foundation needs additional administrative support.

**Recommendations**

In order to contextualize recommendations, Ylann noted that the Foundation receives an annual donation of $970,000 with the majority of funding allocated until 2022. She then made a number of recommendations including simplifying the program structure to Inclusive Health and Research; making a decision on whether to continue the GSCC; repurposing the non-US Matching Gift Funds; phasing out underserved youth partnerships and smaller, less impactful projects to free up funds; ensuring that 1/3 of the funding is available to fund new projects each year; Developing fewer, bigger, more impactful and high visibility projects; raising the budget and supporting an EF admin/coordinator to grow capacity in the EF team and portfolio.

1. **Board Discussion**

Ezra opened the floor for discussion and called for Board members to reflect on the recommendations and share their insights.

Suzanne DeBell asked Ylann to clarify her first recommendation regarding the simplification of overlapping programs and questioned whether it would result in an increased focus on women in science. Ylann clarified that many partnerships touch on multiple aspects of inclusion, beyond gender. Ylann also responded to Suzanne’s inquiry on the phasing out of underserved youth projects and noted that the Girls Inc. NYC partnership has the potential to be a flagship, high-visibility gender partnership but that other underserved youth partnerships such as Imperial College London’s Makerspace could be phased out in 2021.

Beverly Malone highlighted the importance of inclusion but questioned the concept of ‘Inclusive Health’. Ylann explained that the emphasis lay on increased engagement and opportunities for all in the health domain. Beverly agreed and also supported the recommendation to develop fewer, bigger, more impactful and high visibility partnerships. Geri stressed the importance and broad usability of the concept of “inclusion”. She stated that the gender dimension is always present within projects, whether the Foundation focuses on issues relevant to developing countries or underserved communities.

Geri also reflected on the GSCC noting that a number of key players are already working on similar projects in targeted regions. She pointed out the difficulties in supporting researchers in developing countries and more particularly in Africa due to logistical complications, i.e. lack of supplies and chemicals to undertake research projects on sustainable and green chemistry.

Geri noted that Girls Inc is a large organization with a significant number of fundraisers and expressed her concern that the Foundation might therefore not have sufficient impact on the organization. She noted that investing in smaller organizations in which the Foundation could act as a catalyst or incubator could be more beneficial in terms of impact.

Geri went on to voice her concern about the Foundation’s budget, stressing the need to increase it and consider the successes achieved with minimal support. Nikunj Jinsi concurred and questioned the ways in which Elsevier could increase its corporate commitment to the Foundation. He also agreed on the proposed recommendations overall and recommended narrowing the focus of the Foundation further while more fully leveraging Elsevier’s data and expertise. He also suggested mapping the funders working in the same areas to gain a better understanding of the environment in which the Foundation operates. A funder mapping could allow the Foundation to assess whether some sectors have enough funding and redirect it towards others. It would also facilitate the decision-making process when choosing new partnerships or projects to fund in the fields of inclusive health and research. Nikunj offered to introduce the team to World Bank colleagues to help leverage existing networks given that the Elsevier Foundation is a small player in the development sector.

Beverly argued for the need of an Elsevier Foundation coordinator and supported Geri’s comment on increasing corporate commitment to the Foundation. She expressed her appreciation of the productivity of the team, whilst questioning its viability in the longer-term given the workload.

John Danaher shared insights on how data scientists are reacting to the COVID-19 situation by participating in different open source projects. He suggested focusing on in-kind support, recommending volunteering opportunities within the company. Ylann responded by highlighting the ongoing volunteering opportunities such as the Research without Borders program and the resources needed to manage in kind help. Ezra indicated that the Foundation should clarify the skills needed and stressed the need to focus on specific areas to provide more targeted support internally.

Emilie Marcus expressed her appreciation of the Board’s expertise and skills. She also agreed with the need to increase the Foundation’s budget as well as to support an Elsevier Foundation coordinator position. She pointed out that these two go hand in hand. She also urged the team to look for ways to embed inclusion across more of the Foundation’s programs and asked for additional clarification regarding the suggestion to “tap the expertise in Elsevier’s I&D Advisory Board to identify new gender partnerships”. Ylann stressed the importance of gender partnerships and indicated that members of I&D Advisory board might have unique insights into potential gender gaps where the Foundation could provide meaningful support. Emilie Marcus went on to raise a question about the COVID-19 health crisis, inquiring whether it would impact the overall strategy of the Foundation or whether the Foundation would continue working on the same program areas. YS noted the importance of Emilie’s question. Nikunj responded by noting that while all our lives are currently impacted by the COVID-19 health crisis, the Foundation should question whether it wouldn’t continue to address other equally important health issues.

Yuko Harayama shared her experience, disclosing that she was often the only woman in her department. She commented on the critical importance of inclusion and that the Foundation should not just focus on empowering women but remember to educate all parties involved. Yuko emphasized the critical role that the Foundation has to play as an incubator and the need to have good partnerships to allow smaller projects to move on to the next phase. She also agreed with the need to reserve funds to make space for new ideas each year. Given the pandemic, Yuko recognized the difficulties in organizing face-to-face activities and inquired how the Foundation plans to manage its partnerships in the coming time. Ylann responded by stating that it is reasonably positioned to continue activities given the journey that the Foundation has taken to embed technology over the past few years.

Marcia thanked Ylann and Domiziana for the report that they have drafted to accompany the Board meeting. In response to Suzanne’s comment, she also questioned whether data analytics could be further embedded in Foundation projects to continue aligning the expertise of the business with Foundation partnerships. Marcia pointed out that as an information analytics company, Elsevier can provide evidence-based insights—for instance through the Gender Report-- on gaps and solutions, helping to refine our partnership focus. She also reiterated the need to review the Matching Gift program and expressed her concern regarding budget gaps in Elsevier’s non US RECares giving program. Finally, Marcia commented that while she was mindful of Geri’s reflections regarding Girls Inc, the visibility of the organization was correlative to their budget. She suggested revisiting calls for proposals with a more increased focus on certain areas such as gender or indigenous research.

Ylann noted the existing tensions between the incubating role of the Foundation and the need for visibility and impact. Geri recommended to assess the situation through an investment lens and to create a balanced portfolio in terms of risk and impact with both high visibility and high impact projects. Kumsal noted that historically the Foundation has tried to pursue a balance, but expressed her concerns that, given the pandemic, the Foundation might need to make a choice as a number of smaller organizations might disappear due to the global health crisis. The Foundation should strive for a balance between smaller and high-visibility projects with a focus on making a difference. Kumsal also noted that she will consider the budgeting requests. Geri added to Kumsal’s observations on the pandemic repercussions, noting that there will likely be less philanthropy and that it will be a matter of “the survival of the fittest”.

Beverly pointed out that the WHO has issued the World’s Nursing Report[[2]](#footnote-2) which states that the world needs 6.6 million nurses in the next 4 to 5 years, even without the pandemic. She argued that the pandemic has shown that that we need more nurses overall and that we need to put them in leadership positions. She recommended that the Foundation invest in nursing, while acknowledging her vested interest.

Suzanne, Esra and Kumsal agreed with discontinuing the non-US Matching Gift program, tapping RE Cares Champions for an alternative solution.

1. **Concluding Remarks**

YS Chi reviewed the items discussed throughout the Board meeting. He underlined the different dimensions that were discussed within the meeting and assessed its key themes:

1. The scope of Elsevier and Foundation contributions in both funding and expertise.
2. The balance between high visibility and high impact projects.
3. The need to focus on our unique contributions in engaging the health and research communities.
4. Elsevier and the Foundation’s guiding principles – technology, innovation, hard work and collaboration.
5. The incorporation of the concept of inclusion that goes beyond gender.

YS Chi also underlined the expertise of the Board, Elsevier employees and partners in contributing to these unique contributions. Kumsal officially closed the meeting and thanked the Board for attending. She also thanked Ylann and Domiziana for their hard work and support.

1. NLN/Elsevier HBCU Innovation in Technology Excellence program and the Latino Diabetes Citizen Scientist partnerships. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *State of the World’s Nursing Report – 2020*, World Health Organization, 2020. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/nursing-report-2020> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)