

Culture Design Institute

A Fiscally-Sponsored Organization of ORI-CES

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Mission Statement

Our vision is to build a global network of culture design labs where every community that strives for greater health and resilience is potentially a field site for applied cultural evolution research. We build monitoring, analysis, and training capacities—informed by the best social sciences available—to help change practitioners engage in rigorous and effective approaches to intentionally evolving their cultures, landscapes, and institutions in a manner that is consistent with ecological principles.

The Culture Design Institute is a yet-to-be-formed entity that bridges two worlds. One is the world of scholarly scientific research in complexity science, evolutionary studies, the cognitive and behavioral sciences, public health and prevention research, the social sciences, and related disciplines that span within and among them. The other is the world of change practitioners grappling with real-world challenges who lack access to this vast body of tools and knowledge.

As the coordinator responsible for guiding the Cultural Evolution Society¹ through its two-year formation process, I have been privileged to gain a unique view of

¹ <http://www.culturalevolutionsociety.org>

conciliatory patterns across the biological and social sciences that make it possible to achieve unprecedented levels of knowledge synthesis in the next few decades. The academic world has become entrenched in *institutional silos* throughout its developmental history in the last 100 years, keeping this grand synthesis unattainable even as all relevant fields have increasingly embraced whole-system perspectives at their overlapping and porous boundaries.

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Community practitioners around the world seek increased health and resilience in their cities, towns, villages, and rural landscapes during what is now recognized to be the most profound period of ecological change our species has ever known. I don't need to rehash the litany of global challenges humanity know faces—anthropogenic climate change and the dominance of exponential trends for population and technology are sufficient representatives for what the 21st Century holds in store for our collective future.

While diligently mobilizing the activities to set up the Cultural Evolution Society on a Templeton Foundation grant in 2016/17, I have carefully mapped out an intersection of opportunities and needs for *applied cultural evolution* that dramatically increases the efficacy of social change practices. What I have found is a glaring omission in the institutional landscape. **No organization exists with the mission to vet, organize, and translate the vast bodies of scientific knowledge about cultural change into a “network solution” of monitoring and guiding change practices in communities as they struggle with real-time disruptions across scales of time, space, and complexity.**

At the same time, I have observed how funding programs at the National Institutes of Health and similar philanthropic organizations in the civic sphere tend to invest in public health interventions. Again the *topics are framed as separate issues* such that funding is available to study smoking cessation among teenagers or to address bullying in elementary schools—but very little is attempted at the community scale where *cultural interventions* are needed to tackle complex, systemic, and deeply interconnected issues that affect entire societies.

This is where the **Culture Design Institute** comes into play. It is a nonprofit entity that creates community-scale cultural interventions that require the synthesis of knowledge, tools, and practices that are currently unavailable in existing social change efforts.

The activities of this institute will initially be organized around four sources of funding:



- ◆ Apply for foundation grants to engage in integrative social scientific studies, gather and curate best practices, and build institutional capacities for large-scale social change efforts.
- ◆ Attract donations from individuals seeking to support our mission and build awareness about what we are striving to birth into the world.
- ◆ Offer consulting services on projects with clients—city governments, nonprofits, and foundations being prime candidates—where our researchers and facilitators contribute to real-world social change efforts.
- ◆ Provide training and certification services to individuals seeking to become culture designers and for organizations that lack relevant expertise in program evaluation and related social change assessments.

For this effort to get off the ground, I propose that we incubate the Culture Design Institute (CDI) as a fiscally-sponsored project of ORI-CES. What this means in

practical terms is that CDI would set up its own branded web presence and service offerings with administrative supports from ORI-CES that are paid for by the standard overhead surcharge from all revenue garnered by CDI activities.

The CDI entity can initially be set up with an *advisory committee* comprised of ORI scientists who express interest in getting involved along with external experts with relevant expertise. During a trial period of six months, the CDI would process all funding inquiries using the established checklist approval process used for all ORI-CES inquiries. Over time this can be honed into a “pre-approval” protocol that allows CDI to pursue funding opportunities that meet criteria established during the trial period such that it is streamlined and no longer encumbers the ORI-CES staff or governing board.

It may prove desirable at a future date to spin the CDI out as its own 501(c)3 nonprofit. At that time, a formal governance structure and bylaws would need to be approved by the leadership existing at that stage in its development. Our purpose in incubating the CDI within ORI-CES is partially to get the ball rolling sooner by leveraging the 501(c)3 charter that already exists.

Additional Benefits for ORI Ecosystem

Laura Akers has suggested that all ORI-affiliated scientists who want to be part of the CDI can be listed as CDI Fellows on its website and use the organization to pursue grants or consulting/training opportunities (with ORI-CES as the pass-through with core admin supports). This creates several possibilities for cultivating future synergies that benefit all three ORI organizations.

A great deal of thought has gone into my desire for this to be housed within the Oregon Research Institute. I needn't say anything about the tremendous history and legacy of ORI—or how nicely the CDI mission fits with what all ORI scientists are striving to do in the world. What I will say is that my hope for CDI is that it will be an attractor of future talent and that it enables us all to work together over a period of ten years or longer to build new integrative capacities across the ORI ecosystem.

One example that has been discussed with Deb Shelton-Johnson and a few others is that the in-house expertise about program evaluation and ethical considerations for research involving human test subjects has not been fully capitalized upon to improve the larger infrastructure of public health or prevention science. Similarly, the arrival of health economist, Gulcan Cil, indicates a capacity for attracting “general purpose” talent that can enhance all projects at ORI. Her ability to engage in multi-variable data analysis is suggestive of what can be done by recruiting data analysts, network scientists, complex systems modelers, and others with broadly applicable skills.

My intention is that CDI becomes an additional pathway into and across the ORI ecosystem to build such skill-based capacities and demonstrate their efficacy for other programs that come to emulate what we do here in Eugene and across our networks of collaborations and partnerships around the world.

Let us discuss having the CDI formally approved by the ORI-CES board with conditions agreeable to a trial period of activities in early 2018.

Onward,

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