

GEO Member Spotlight



Reeta Roy, President and CEO
of The MasterCard Foundation

Through leading by learning — and learning by listening — The MasterCard Foundation has embraced a learning culture well-aligned with its three stated values of “[Collaborate, Innovate and Achieve.](#)”

Reeta Roy, President and CEO of The MasterCard Foundation, shared that the Foundation has maintained a healthy commitment to learning since its relatively recent beginning in 2006 — but it’s been the Foundation’s specific use of listening to those on the frontlines that has provided some of its most unique and valuable insights.

“Unless you have the human connection and emotional intelligence components coupled with the science and facts, you don’t have a true sense of what change really means,” Ms. Roy said. “That’s part of the journey for us in terms of learning.”

Ms. Roy shared that listening may uncover the emotional realities of an issue. Something that may seem less significant on the surface may in fact carry much more weight for an individual who benefits from the foundation’s grants.

“When you see these things and experience them, it’s almost as if you can bring another level of emotional intelligence, which is so different than when you get a report that says certain interventions created certain outcomes,” Ms. Roy said. “Listening is an art that needs to be refined and needs to be practiced in multiple ways.”

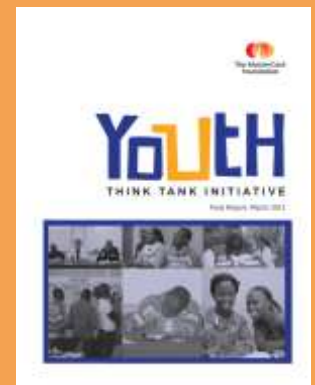
According to Ms. Roy, asking honest questions and listening to others has been a driving force behind how the foundation designs projects, finds effective partners, and establishes healthy structures for partnerships.

The MasterCard Foundation’s efforts to learn by listening are seen in its Youth Think Tank.

The Youth Think Tank was created by the foundation in January 2012 with the task of “advising on and, ultimately, helping to shape [The MasterCard Foundation’s] work in this sector,” according to a March 2013 report by the foundation.

Over a six-month period, a group of nine young people — ranging in age from 19 to 24 and hailing from Ghana, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Kenya — engaged as part-time qualitative researchers in their respective

To read The MasterCard Foundation’s recent report on the Youth Think Tank Initiative referenced in this spotlight, click on the image below:



Being part of the think tank has been a wonderful experience. ... Young people have ideas and solution to most of the problems; they just lack a platform to share their views. I have built a strong bond with the YTT and the foundation.

—YTT Team Member Olivia
Kyomuhendo, 22, Uganda

communities, gathering insights that helped connect The MasterCard Foundation staff to the real-world experiences of young people living in Sub-Saharan Africa. The group specifically focused on opportunities for youth employment in growth sectors, conducting interviews with 51 community and business leaders and 119 peers. In addition to sharing their research with the foundation’s management and staff, the Youth Think Tank members were also invited to provide their input to the foundation’s Board of Directors - a measure indicative of how deeply the foundation has embraced a learning culture and the important value it places on community engagement.

Ms. Roy shared that in addition to gaining valuable feedback for the foundation, the [Youth Think Tank](#) provided a tremendous leadership development opportunity for the participants, and the idea reverberated over to other partner organizations who said they would like to establish similar groups themselves. The experience of working with these young leaders in a structured learning environment proved beneficial to The MasterCard Foundation, and Ms. Roy indicated that similar projects should be the norm and not something extraordinary among foundations today.

“This should be just part and parcel of how we learn, how we listen, and how we think about what it means to generate insights and to really understand how change comes about,” Ms. Roy said.

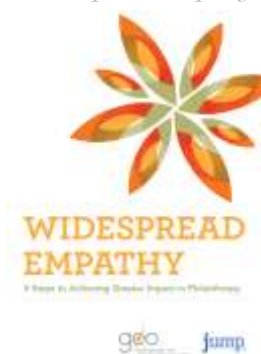
Another alignment between The MasterCard Foundation’s work, its values, and its culture of learning is an emphasis on communicating its learnings to other funders and stakeholders.

Ms. Roy added that listening to personal stories is also a valuable component of the learning process, which allows the foundation to share its findings with others who can appreciate what the foundation has learned — first as human beings and then as policy makers and funders.

“Our role may start with understanding an issue, the context, and how to problem solve through our funding and projects and partnerships, but the other part of learning is then to convey what we have actually achieved, learned, and generated in terms of results, data, information or knowledge,” Ms. Roy said. “It’s about us figuring out how we contribute to that kind of conversation while bringing the distinct values and the particular approach that we have around collaboration, creating space, using our convening authority — which we have to earn — to create spaces for other voices who don’t always get heard at the policy table.”

GEO resources that relate to the topics covered in this member spotlight:

Widespread Empathy



Building Community Capacity for Participation in Evaluation



Listen, Learn, Lead



Find these and other resources for grantmakers at www.geofunders.org