



geo

**rooted &
responsive**

Rooted & Responsive Spectrum

Change is shaping philanthropy, and how leaders respond matters. When faced with disruption, our instinct is often to either resist change or react without a clear long-term direction. Rooted & Responsive, GEO's multi-year leadership initiative, helps grantmakers do something more enduring and more valuable. It helps funders stay rooted in our collective commitments while adapting strategically to what nonprofits and communities need.

This leadership initiative helps funders lead through change with clarity, purpose and courageous integrity. GEO's approach connects the personal practice of leading through change with institutional practices that shift culture, structure and impact. This ensures that what funders learn individually translates into organizational transformation communities can feel.

The Rooted & Responsive Spectrum offers a way to reflect on how leadership shows up in practice — across decision-making, relationships and risk — and where alignment between values and action can be strengthened.

Organizations may see themselves in different places depending on the dimension or context. The spectrum provides a shared language for reflection and conversation, supporting values-aligned, community-driven practice over time.



Use the spectrum on the following page to reflect on current practice and identify opportunities to deepen alignment.

DIMENSION OF LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

EMERGING

DEEPENING

EMBODYING

Anchoring in Vision

Maintains clarity during disruption

Cultivates the ability to stay rooted in values, relationships and key goals amid uncertainty — discerning when to hold steady and when to move with purpose.

Reflexive Responsiveness

- Responds to change with short-term fixes or risk mitigation
- Prioritizes stability or control in decision-making
- May pay less attention to broader, long-term impacts on relationships, communities or factors that are harder to assess from a single perspective

Intentional Alignment

- Explicitly names tradeoffs and uncertainty in decision-making
- Creates space for reflection and alignment with team members, community members and partners before acting
- Prepares to navigate discomfort and complexity, recognizing them as inherent to change

Grounded & Adaptive

- Holds long-term vision steady while adjusting strategy in real time
- Maintains alignment with values, relationships and key goals, even during periods of pressure or rapid change
- Discerns when to stay the course and when to shift, moving with clarity and purpose through cycles of change

Practicing Interdependence

Invests in collective effort over individual action

Recognizes philanthropy as part of a larger, multi-sector ecosystem and sustains partnerships that center shared expertise and leadership.

Internally Oriented

- Primarily relies on internal expertise to shape strategies and funding decisions, with limited external input
- Engages with partners in ways that are episodic or transactional and primarily within the philanthropic sector
- Discusses power in informal settings or outside of formal decision-making spaces

Building Partnerships

- Brings partners into strategy conversations at defined points that are communicated early
- Shares learning and information with partners and begins comparing goals and gaps across organizations
- Builds relationships that reflect an awareness of power and are grounded in shared purpose and values

Deep Interdependence

- Practices shared leadership and decision-making with partners and communities
- Sustains long-term collaborations that shape joint strategy, not just joint implementation
- Seeks out or builds funder and cross-sector collaborations to advance broader systems change

Culture of Courage

Continues values-aligned action despite risk

Acts with integrity and honesty about risk, aligning decisions and resources with values.

Protective Posture

- Avoids or delays decisions that introduce reputational, relational or financial risk
- Defaults to familiar approaches, even when they limit potential for deeper impact
- May not yet have the infrastructure or support needed to act on stated commitments to change

Practicing Courage

- Surfaces risks and tradeoffs in internal and external conversations
- Takes calculated risks aligned with stated values, even when uncomfortable or unprecedented
- Engages advisory expertise (e.g., legal, technical, financial) to balance risk with emerging needs and strategic priorities

Courageous Integrity

- Aligns resources — like funding, time and influence — with stated commitments, even when outcomes are uncertain
- Takes principled action in partnership with communities
- Engages in reflection and peer dialogue to surface fears, clarify values and prepare for action
- Shares the reasoning behind decisions transparently with peers and communities