

## **Arctic Funders' Group Consultation – Web/Executive Summary**

The MacArthur Foundation hosted a meeting in July 2012 on the Russian Arctic as part of the Foundation's interest in exploring the possibility of funding projects as part of our new theme of "Russia's Global Engagement." Organized by the Arctic Funders' Group, the one-day event was designed to help funders gain a broad understanding of the Russian Arctic within the larger circumpolar context, and take account of the unique political, natural resource, and organizational landscape. The agenda was comprised of three interrelated sessions focused on 1) natural resources, 2) traditional peoples and their livelihoods and 3) geopolitics. Each session informed how recent trends – warming, energy extraction, mining, shipping, and industrialization – are impacting ecosystems, peoples, and biodiversity in the Russian Arctic.

This meeting also represented the first occasion for the Arctic Funders Group (AFG) to devote attention to the Russian Arctic. While AFG has served since 2008 as a collaborative for foundations working in the Arctic, most of its members have supported sustainable development of the U.S. and Canadian Arctic. AFG members have long recognized the need to explore the context of the Russian Arctic, but have lacked regional expertise. MacArthur's emerging work on the Arctic, and long history in Russia provided a timely opportunity to host a discussion of Arctic issues focused primarily on Russia and Russia's involvement in Arctic affairs. Participants included MacArthur International Program staff, representatives of the Oak, Margaret A. Cargill, Gordon and Betty Moore, Gordon, and Turner Foundations, as well as experts from World Wildlife Fund's Global Arctic Program, members of Russian Arctic indigenous groups, and US and Russian think-tanks.

More than fifty percent of the Arctic coastline and approximately sixty percent of the land in the Arctic lies within Russian territory. Most of the freshwater input to the Arctic Ocean originates from Russian rivers. Of the four million inhabitants of the Arctic, nearly 400,000 are indigenous, with about 100,000 living in Russia. In many parts of the Russian Arctic, these people are living in remote and isolated communities. The three largest communities above the Arctic Circle are in Russia, including Murmansk (population 325,100), Norilsk (135,000), and Vorkuta (85,000).

In recent years the Arctic has undergone tremendous change, with growing and far-reaching humanitarian, environmental, geopolitical, and economic implications for both Arctic nations and the world. New transportation routes and opportunities for natural resource extraction are opening up. Climate models have suggested that the Arctic could lose almost all of its summer ice cover by 2100, but ice extent is now declining faster than predicted. This summer Arctic Ocean sea ice coverage shrunk to the lowest level since modern records began, raising concerns that sea ice could be lost much sooner than anticipated. The extreme fragility and harshness of the region, combined with a lack of search-and-rescue arrangements and legal norms to protect the Arctic environment suggest the region is not prepared for current industry expansion, which is anticipated to increase exponentially with the loss of summer sea ice.

In addition, new ecosystems are emerging. Pollution, invasive species, wildlife disturbance, habitat fragmentation, permafrost degradation, black carbon, and noise pollution currently threaten regional biodiversity, and could be exacerbated by new development. These threats could impact migratory species of birds, fish, and marine mammals that rely on the Arctic for their summer breeding grounds.

Development and environmental change also place pressure on indigenous subsistence culture. Indigenous participation in both national and circumpolar decision-making processes is hampered by lack of financial resources and capacity. The loss of sea ice has disrupted the health of walrus populations and compromises indigenous food security.

All of these changes affect the political and economic calculations of nation states, especially Arctic countries whose governments fear that their national security and sovereign rights to waterways and natural resources may be compromised. As a result, the risks of secondary concerns grow, while critical environmental and maritime safety issues are inadequately addressed. Engagement of independent non-partisan actors, including philanthropies, could be instrumental to raising policymakers' awareness of Arctic challenges and undertaking the science needed to inform resolutions to these problems.

One of the objectives of this meeting was to help funders evaluate opportunities, roles, and challenges for philanthropy to support conservation and good governance in the region. A comprehensive list of practical suggestions emerged, which have been organized into the following broad topics:

- Strengthen international collaboration (bi-lateral or multi-lateral) in order to encourage Russian cooperation in the Arctic;
- Eliminate knowledge gaps through support for science and mapping;
- Develop good governance practices;
- Build the capacity of civil society to adapt to change and engage more directly in decision-making;
- Engage with the private sector to effect change around business practices in the Arctic;
- The Bering/Chukhi region emerged as a focal geography suitable for pilot grantmaking on the above five issues.

Additional complex challenges were also highlighted during the course of the discussions. There continues to be an effort on the part of the Russian government to restrict civil society and NGO influence. There is a dearth of capable partners to work on-the-ground in the Russian Arctic as well as in Arctic Canada and Greenland. Finally, the sheer size and remoteness of the Russian Arctic is intimidating and poses challenges to conducting work in region.

The importance of Russia as an Arctic nation cannot be understated. More time and thought is required in order to effectively unravel the salient and practical steps that will result in lasting positive impacts for the region. There is much yet to be learned, but this initial discussion provided a solid basis upon which to move forward.