Sample E-mail to Advisory Board Members:

Introduction to Portfolio Reviews and their role in them

Dear all,

You may already be familiar with the portfolio review process, the centerpiece of OSF’s efforts to assess our results and improve effectiveness.

The process takes an approach based more on meaningful reflection than on metrics, and more on our own performance than that of our grantees. A **portfolio** is defined as a body of work (grants, advocacy, litigation, and other activity) that relates directly to a particular thematic priority, geographic context, or strategic method. In a **portfolio review**, colleagues, supervisors, board members, and, in some instances, OSF’s president, come together in a live meeting to look backwards at such a body of work. By collectively exploring the results of past efforts and the program’s role in bringing them about, these meetings can help staff generate valuable insights as to how to adjust the portfolio moving forward and become better decision makers.

In general, the role that we ask you to play in portfolio reviews differs from the more familiar one you play in helping us with strategy development. Rather than contributing to forward planning in the context of the larger field, with portfolio reviews we ask you to look backwards at discrete pieces of our work to assess our own actions. Although you do not have deep intimacy with the work – actually, *because* of this fact – your perspective on how we have carried it out is especially valuable, and we encourage you to share your impressions, pose provocative questions, and make proposals. By offering friendly, constructive criticism, you challenge us to reexamine our assumptions and decisions and consider how we might be more effective going forward.

As board members, you will not only participate in board-level reviews, but may be invited to serve as a discussant or moderator in a presidential or staff-level review.

* The **moderator** manages and guides the discussion by ensuring that the meeting follows the portfolio review format, and by encouraging an inclusive, probing, and productive conversation. She should ensure that participants’ contributions are focused on benefiting the portfolio in question and reference specific pieces of the work carried out, and encourage broad participation.
* The **discussant** acts as “friendly critic” in responding to the portfolio lead’s opening presentation and the portfolio review materials. He asks challenging questions, identifies unvoiced assumptions, and offers reflections and supportive critique.

[Program name] will have [one/two] presidential review[s] in 2016. In order to meet the expectation that we review all of our work in a two-year period, we will also conduct a number of staff- and board-level reviews. The latter will take place in the context of our already-scheduled advisory board meetings, so will not require additional time on your part. Attached is a tentative list of planned reviews for 2016; if there is a particular review you are interested in participating in or a portfolio that you would like to see reviewed at the board level, please let me know.

I have also attached a quick-reference sheet on portfolio reviews and would be happy to share the most recent version of the Strategy Unit’s guidance upon request. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out. We look forward to engaging with you in this process.

Best,

[ ]