*March 16, 2015*

**Soros Foundation Kazakhstan**

**Portfolio Review by the Public Policy Initiative**

**Focus/Project: “Public Policy Initiative Fellowship Program”**

Bota Ayazbayeva, Public Policy Initiative Director, presented the policy fellowship program within the Public Policy Initiative. The first cycle of fellowship program started in 2014, and nine fellows finished in February 2015. In 2015 eighteen candidates to the fellowship were selected on the basis of applications and 10-11 fellows will be selected based on the full research proposals.

The goal of this program is to promote evidence-informed decision-making processes, to develop advance policy literacy and skills of policy communities in Kazakhstan.

The presentation was followed by the discussion centered around the following questions:

**Why do we use fellowship as a tool? What is required for an effective fellowship program? What are the main advantages of a fellowship as compared to other instruments at our disposal?**

* Fellowship is a useful tool because it helps build long-term and in-depth relationship with our partners. This is what makes fellowship so different from one-off trainings or research projects, and even from scholarships.
* Fellowship is also about shaping intellectual leaders in various fields: public policy, human rights, media, etc.
* Fellowship is a useful tool for bringing public attention to the themes relevant for the foundation.
* The goal of this particular fellowship program is to create a Public Policy Network, an analytical community with its own (high) professional standards, including ethical standards. Follow-up research grants and continued engagement of fellows on topics of shared interest can serve to this purpose. Forming short-term research task forces (analogous to Soviet-era ВНИКИ) is a good alternative to working in a think-tank in the context of Kazakhstan.
* In the very beginning we should be very clear about the goal of the fellowship and our expectations from our fellows.
* In terms of sustainability, one option for a fellowship program is to become integrated into the curriculum of some Kazakhstani universities.
* To provide for a follow up and longer-term engagement, there can be several levels/circles of fellowship: candidates, fellows, senior fellows. Senior fellows can be involved in the program in a variety of ways, including training for candidates and mentorship for fellows.
* It is useful to develop a clear identity for the fellowship which can be communicated through a designated logo, Facebook/Twitter account, listserve, etc.
* Networking and informal communications with the fellows is one success factor, especially at the initial period.
* Building warm emotional atmosphere within a group of fellows is critical. Interaction between fellows participating in different programs and possible exchange of fellows (in SFK case, between Human Rights Program, Media Program and PPI) is a useful method for shaping and sharing experience.
* We also need to make sure fellows share our values. Otherwise there is a risk of them using acquired knowledge and skills against open society (as it happened with some alumni of our debate program).

**What should have been done differently? How can this particular program be improved?**

The following changes were made to the fellowship design in 2015:

* Number of thematic areas: 15 vs 7 in 2015
* Number of thematic mentors: 9 vs 4 in 2015
* Selection of thematic mentors, experienced in policy area
* Duration of fellowship: 7.5 months vs 12.5 months
  + Increased research period
  + Feedback on the second draft by thematic and metrological mentors before final external review
* Clear expectations of/from thematic mentors and fellows:
  + Policy research design workshop first
  + Orientation session for both thematic mentors and fellows
  + [Checklist](fellowship_milestones_2015_orientation.docx) with roles, timeline and products of the fellowship for both thematic mentors and fellows
  + Exchange session between incoming and graduating fellows
* 2 phased competitive selection process of fellows

**Conclusion:**

Fellowship is an effective instrument for the development of intellectual leaders in fields key to SFK work.