

Multi Nation Program



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Dr. Liisa Suvikumpu directs two eminent cultural foundations in Finland, where she plays a leading role in several cultural institutions. She was previously founding COO of the Finnish Council of Foundations, an association of over 120 philanthropic associations in Finland, and is a prominent expert in European cultural history. Dr. Suvikumpu's fellowship focused on best practices, good governance, and innovation in the philanthropic sector; increasing interest and engagement in cultural heritage and intercultural dialogue; and gaining new, more innovative and transformational leadership capabilities.

Dr. Suvikumpu was fortunate to launch her fellowship at the Council on Foundations annual conference held in Philadelphia just following the Fellows' opening seminar. One of her main interests was to learn about different best practices and governance norms, which she soon came to realize "are in many ways identical with the ones used in Finland and Europe. Still, in many concrete practices like multifaceted capacity building, intensified board understanding, and active evaluation of grant making – rather than just being an ATM for grantees – the level is much more advanced and professional in the U.S. This is due in part to the sophisticated foundation associations and regional associations of grantmakers, as well as organizations like Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) and GuideStar." While noting the strong will and commitment of board members and donors to the work of foundations and philanthropy in general, she noted "the biggest surprise for me in the foundation field in the U.S. is its extremely fragmented and diversified nature."

Visits to the National Endowment for the Humanities, state and city councils on the humanities, and university humanities departments all underscored "a striking difference, namely the nonexistence of a ministry of culture/education similar to other western countries, resulting in a lack of strong political commitment, interest and advocacy in the fields of arts, culture, humanities and education. This raises problems that have to be tackled by the foundations." Meetings with leaders at the Rockefeller Foundation, William Penn Foundation, and Starr Foundation, among others, provided "leadership lessons and dozens of innovative, concrete ideas of very useful new tools to start to build even more sustainable and better qualified foundation practices in Finland. The possibility to meet and have exclusive conversations with the foremost leaders in the fields of America's most significant foundations, trusts and non-profit organizations - as well as major policymakers of the U.S. - gave me totally new tools to improve my leadership skills in the future. I have gained a great deal of self-confidence just through the fact that these powerful leaders have been willing to share their time with me. I have gotten an insight into my own personal leadership style, and now find it easier to clarify my visions and values."

"My Eisenhower fellowship has already had a very strong effect on me not only strictly professionally, but also widely within the frame of cultural understanding and broad international perspectives. Having a group of highly intelligent, interesting professionals in their fields as my fellow Fellows has been a real learning experience. Cultural encounters, necessities in every modern society, are interestingly altered when sharing the same totally new experience together with people from 19 various nationalities with completely different backgrounds, values and perspectives. I must add that the presence of the USA Fellows was of great significance for us all."

"I strongly believe our experiences will have solid and extensive effects in Finland. On my behalf, I'm going to serve by implementing the lessons learned during my fellowship, firstly in my own institutions with new approaches, programs and more general practices, and, secondly, in years to come, even more widely in new organizations. At the end of my fellowship period, I feel that the Eisenhower fellowship is more a friendship than any other -ship; it is a state of mind that will last for the rest of my life. In this strong belief I am happy and honored to join the impressive group of EF alumni and hope to be of assistance for everyone in the EF family in the future."

Leaders bettering the world around them.