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Managing Expectations When Measuring Philanthropic Impact: A Framework Based on Experience

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Keywords: Program evaluation, impact, measurement, community foundation, ripple range, ripple effect, feasibility

Key Points

- In order to achieve more targeted community change than possible in conventional grantmaking, foundations have developed a portfolio of activities ranging from capacity building to venture and catalytic philanthropy.
- Key to each of these approaches is a desire for meaningful impact. Yet, funders across the nation express dissatisfaction with their ability to prove or demonstrate impact.
- Conversations with colleagues and personal experience suggest that part of this dissatisfaction is due to a disconnect between the expectations of board members, donors, staff, and participants on one hand and what is actually feasible to measure on the other.
- This article draws on national surveys of community initiatives and funders as well as the experience of the Central New York Community Foundation across a range of philanthropic activities to set forth a framework for measuring impact based on the scale of action taken.
- This framework is particularly intended to set the groundwork for discussion with active community members such as community foundation board members who help to oversee and set direction for initiatives but do not implement them. Such stakeholders depend on staff to communicate in simple and clear fashion – a view from 30,000 feet in the air rather than descending into the “weeds” of the complexity that staff confronts in their daily work.

Introduction

As the adage goes, “If you want something done right, do it yourself.” For foundations, governments, and other funders who seek much of their impact through funding the work of others, however, doing it “yourself” is not an option. Rather, there is a necessary middleman even in the less conventional attempts at targeted community change through such strategies as catalytic, capacity-building, or venture philanthropy.¹

This article addresses the critical matter of accountability for grantmaking dollars and staff resources dedicated to making an impact through such nonconventional approaches. This is an issue that grantmakers across the spectrum have confronted, whether they work for foundations or government agencies. For example, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (Read & Manno, 2011), William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (Brest, 2012), W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2004), and others have

¹ In general, conventional philanthropy refers to grants made in response to community needs as identified by organizations that submit proposals to foundations. Catalytic philanthropy describes a situation in which foundation staff addresses a community need, often by rallying community partners and funding collaborative strategies (Kramer, 2009). Capacity-building philanthropy refers to efforts by foundation staff, consultants, or instructors to work with staff at nonprofits to increase understanding and implementation of best practices in such areas as board development, leadership, and performance management. Venture philanthropy is practiced by foundations that champion a single practice or program that has demonstrated impact and seek to expand its regional presence, often with the foundation remaining involved in implementation during the scaling process.

wrestled with the value of program evaluation and the balance between emphases on proving a program works and improving how it works. Susan Stout, recently retired manager of the World Bank's Results Secretariat, summed up a large part of the dilemma:

There is incredible "silver bulletism" around in the donor (and perhaps foundation) worlds – seeking that "one special number" that will tell us if we are succeeding or failing. This is driven by bureaucratic fantasy, not reality. The chances that we could come up with a metric that avoids an inevitably subjective process of judgment and choice are infinitely small (else politics would be a much simpler and boring topic). It's usually driven by a desire to define "a bottom line" that will do for philanthropy and public sector management what profit/loss statements do for the private sector. It's just not going to happen that way. (Tuan, 2008, p. 9)²

For such organizations there is a strong desire for accountability in terms of wanting a demonstrable impact resulting from funds allocated. However, in the translation from funding to implementation there is a tendency for friction, misunderstanding, miscommunication, and frustration due to the mismatch between the types of accountability that are desired and types of accountability that are feasible.

This article sets out to help manage expectations of both funding boards and the funding staff when it comes to feasible accountability for various types of grantmaking. To do this, it first explores the terrain of philanthropic-impact measurement. It then introduces the concept of ripple-effect ranges as a tool for producing clarity about feasible expectations that are applicable for philanthropic strategies ranging from venture to capacity building and catalytic grantmaking. Finally, it offers a grid that summarizes how an understanding of ripple ranges can help grantmakers select feasible strategies for evaluating their impact.

² As an interesting counterpoint, Paul Brest, outgoing president of the Hewlett Foundation, reflects on survey data indicating that "although 21 percent of donors inquire into performance, only 3 percent actually use the information to determine which organizations to support" (2012, p. 44).

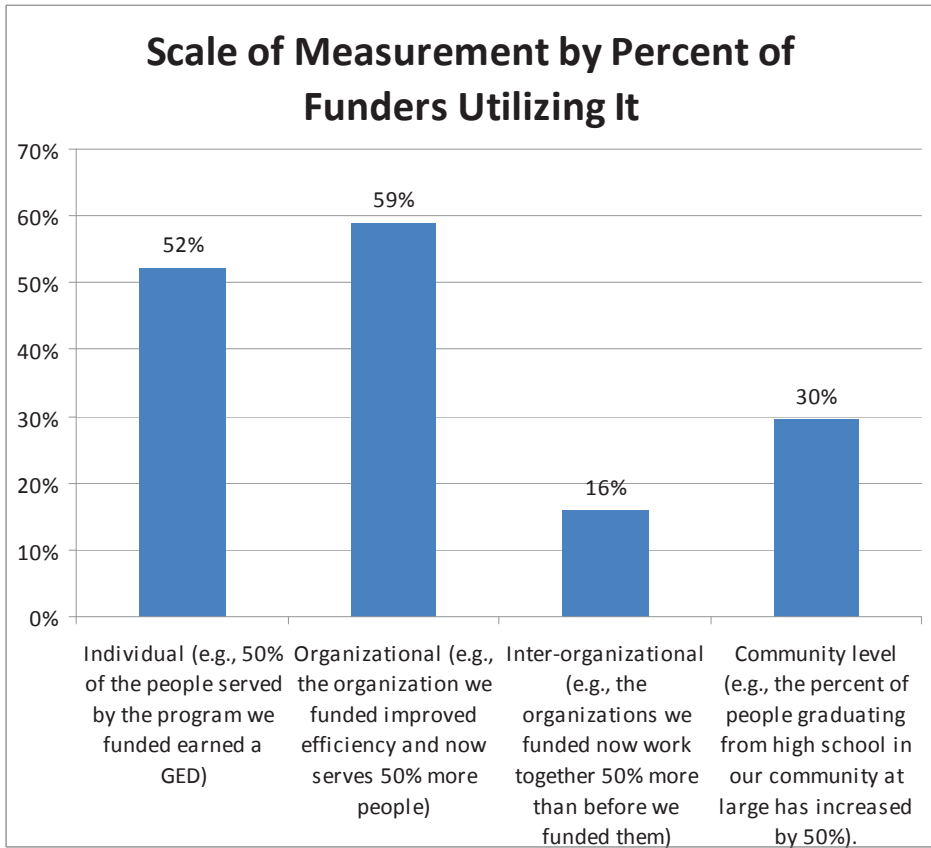
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Learning From Experience: How Many Can Read Now?

Like many in the foundation world, literacy has been a passion of the Central New York Community Foundation (CNYCF). It is a common denominator of many intractable social problems, including poverty, crime, and unemployment. It was with this commitment that the foundation launched its *read ahead* initiative in 2003 (Ridzi, Carmody, & Byrnes, 2011). This multifaceted approach to catalytic philanthropy featured a host of best practices identified by staff to catalyze community change, including a public relations campaign, preschool readiness events, literacy-instruction training for child care providers, and adult literacy tutors. In the first four years the foundation spent approximately \$1.4 million (Ridzi, Carmody, & Byrnes, 2011). Since the CNYCF staff, as with many in the philanthropic field, were focused heavily on making a positive impact from the onset, it should have been no surprise when board members pointed to a billboard from the PR campaign that stated "61,000 adults in our community can't read this billboard" and then asked, "What is the number now?" While this is an eminently practical question for a board member to ask, staff members were unable to answer it.

The problem with this question was not that it was an unreasonable one to ask; indeed, staff members believe that their activities have

FIGURE 1: Scale of Measurement By Percent of Funders Using It



helped to bring about an increase in adult literacy. Rather, the problem is that there was a mismatch of scale between the level and magnitude of actions and investment taken by the foundation and the expected scale of impact. Even if the foundation had spent its entire grants budget on literacy programming (which was not feasible given its charter as a community foundation) and even if its programs were entirely successful, it was unlikely that we would see the percentage of illiterate adults change in a statistically significant way – the foundation was serving too few people to make a noticeable dent in these numbers.³ It would be like trying to spot the impact of one remarkable school’s test-score improvement by looking at the national test-score average. It would take many schools to improve, even

perhaps many states, before the national average changed in any meaningful way. In other words, you have to throw a pretty big rock into the water to be able to see its ripples on the other side of the pond, and this task demands a much bigger rock (representing more money and community ownership) the larger the pond.

Needless to say, the inability to identify what changed in the community after spending \$1.4 million was uncomfortable for all. When viewed from a glass-half-full perspective, however, it was a learning experience that led the foundation to be more thoughtful and proactive about measurement. Following this experience, it set out to learn how to better measure impact. Staff became active in literacy initiatives across the nation; the foundation even partnered with the Literacy Funders Network (LFN), a Council on Foundations affinity group, and secured research support

³ Measurement was further complicated by the fact that the national survey used to estimate non literate adults was not repeated in following years.

from Le Moyne College to survey 75 literacy initiatives about how they measure impact. What was learned is that measurement of impact tends to group in silos that roughly correspond with levels of scale. In other words, initiatives tended to measure in one or sometimes two of the following scales, but usually not all:

1. Individual: Measure the outcomes of programs that serve individuals and that have traditional outcomes (e.g., “x percent of the people served by the program earned a GED”).
2. Organizational: Measure the increase in capacity for agencies that receive professional or organizational development resources (e.g., “the organization improved efficiency and now serves 50 percent more people”).
3. Interorganizational: Measure the collaborative networks that are born (e.g., “the organizations we funded now work together 50 percent more frequently”).
4. Community level: (e.g., “the number of people graduating from high school in our community has increased by 50 percent”).

The foundation, in partnership with the LFN, then surveyed more than 40 funders in the area of literacy, ranging from community foundations to the United Way and private national funders. The findings revealed that the foundation’s experience was not unique. Only 11 percent of funders were happy with their measurement efforts and thought they adequately measured impact. On the other hand, 71 percent reported making a very strong measurement effort but still felt that it didn’t adequately measure impact. Only 11 percent measured across all scales (individual, organizational, interorganizational, and community), with the largest concentrations (23 percent) measuring at both the individual and organizational and at the organizational alone (18 percent). A full 23 percent did not measure impact at all!

Altogether, the most popular scale of impact measurement for funders (see Figure 1) was the

organizational level (59 percent), followed by the individual level (52 percent). A little over a quarter (27 percent) tended to use only one scale of measurement, while 32 percent used two scales; only 18 percent used more than two scales to measure impact.

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Based on this realization that the foundation was not alone – that is to say, dissatisfaction with ability to measure impact and measurement at one or two scales only was the norm – it set out to develop a principle to help manage expectations for funders.

The Ripple Range and the Limitations of Measuring Philanthropic Impact

As philanthropists, we are all familiar with the metaphor of the pebble in the pond. As with many good deeds, making a philanthropic investment in the community is like throwing a pebble in the pond – the positive consequences ripple out in all directions. For instance, the CNYCF has made the assumption that investing in a family reading program may encourage parents to read with their children more (indeed, its surveys of families bears this out). The ripple effects may include a greater literacy preparedness for kindergarten (data are also collected on this). Together we would expect that school readiness and more frequent reading (encouraging an affinity for reading among these children) will lead to more positive attitudes toward school. These may in turn lead to greater tenacity in the face of difficult coursework, which may translate to better grades, graduation (an infrastructure to

track grades and graduation also exists), the decision to pursue higher education, and ultimately a fulfilling career. These successful children turned adults will then share a love for reading with their own children and the cycle will repeat itself. An initial investment in family-reading events can be seen to ripple through the life of a single child and ultimately benefit the community in the form of productive, taxpaying residents who avoid having to access public assistance or the criminal justice system. We might expect similar ripple effects for a job-training or environmental-conservation project.

The ripple range is basically a principle stating that you can expect to have reasonably good measures of the ripples you cause near your efforts – within the scale that you have taken action – and that your ability to detect and measure impact will fade as you look farther away from that scale.

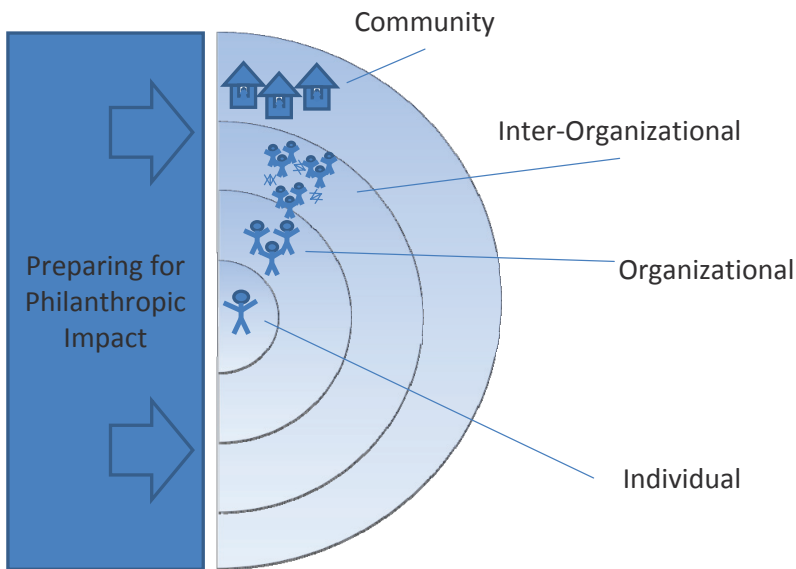
But serving individuals is not the only way we can make an impact that has ripples. According to the national data noted earlier, foundations often prefer to make investments at the organizational level. Furthermore, many aspire to increase their investments at the organizational and interorganizational levels through such things as capacity building for organizations (74 percent of those surveyed) and catalytic community initiatives (69 percent). In fact, the CNYCF invested heavily in both of these levels. It created a performance-management learning community to help nonprofits measure outcomes and make strategic managerial decisions based on their findings. The foundation anticipates that the ripple effect of this investment will be efficient use of community resources to provide more effective services to

individuals, which will benefit the community on many fronts. Similarly, it has invested in literacy coalitions in two counties in the hope that by building a collaborative network, the community will be better able to meet future challenges. With respect to coalition building, collaboration is an end in itself: “Interventions come and go; sustaining the capacity to collaborate means the community will always have a durable resource with which to address common concerns” (Aldrich, Silva, Marable, Sandman, & Abraham, 2009, p. 147).

As with its other investments, the foundation fully expects that this capacity to collaborate on the interorganizational level will produce more resources to serve more people with more effective programming. (In fact, its short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals help to chart a course of impact that stretches across all four scales, from the individual to the community). In the end, the foundation expects that all these efforts will ripple through the community at large. Foundations in some communities have even acted directly at the community level by advocating and in some cases lobbying for such things as universal health care for children and economic development at the state or county level.

While most (if not all) grantmaking has some sort of ripple effect on a community, the trouble comes when we try to measure it. It would be overwhelming to measure the ripple effects of a swath of responsive community grants ranging from a stove for a soup kitchen or a bathroom for developmentally disabled adults to nature classes for urban students. However, what if we were to focus on a single community need and a single initiative of a funder to respond to it? For such philanthropic initiatives it becomes not only possible to measure change, but imperative in order to gauge the success of the investment. It is for precisely these types of efforts that the concept of the ripple range becomes helpful – when funders don’t just throw a metaphorical pebble in the pond (e.g., a money grant), but actually jump in, throwing all resources that they have at a problem. Such efforts can take many forms, but for each the ripple range can help guide planning

FIGURE 2: The Ripple Range of Philanthropic Impact



and manage expectations when those who have jumped in head-first come up for air and assess how things are going.

The concept of the ripple range is demonstrated in Figure 2. Simply put, when you jump in (or cannonball, as your strategy may dictate) you make a splash that is largest at the scale (individual, organizational, interorganizational, or community) you entered. This splash makes ripples to be sure, but from where you are treading water after entering the pond, the ripples are harder to see as they move farther away. The ripple range is basically a principle stating that you can expect to have reasonably good measures of the ripples you cause near your efforts – within the scale that you have taken action – and that your ability to detect and measure impact will fade as you look farther away from that scale.

For instance, standing at the edge of the pond (at the point of “preparing for philanthropic impact”) you can choose to jump in at a variety of locations. You can strategically jump in near to shore and directly help individuals who need assistance. You would expect the effects of that investment to

ripple through the lives of those individuals, but to get those ripples to reach through the entire pond – to where you would be able to measure the height of this ripple on a community level – you would need to help a large number of individuals (i.e., make a huge splash). Furthermore, to be able to measure that impact it would have to be clearly tied to your efforts. Otherwise the foundation might fall into the trap of taking credit for the work of others.

Depending on your strategy, you could also attempt to jump farther out into the pond and land at the level of organizations, improving their functioning and expecting a ripple effect of better services for individuals and, perhaps, even better relationships with other organizations in the community. Or you might choose to invest at the interorganizational level, perhaps helping create a community coalition or facilitate collaborative community planning. The hope is that this would have ripple effects that stretched to each participating organization to strengthen them and ultimately improve the service they deliver (raise everyone’s boat, so to speak). Finally, you might choose to affect change at the community level

by lobbying for the passage of legislation. Such a change would send ripples through the professional networks of the community and transform organizations and, ultimately, the lives of those individual clients or residents.

Some exciting progress is being made on communitywide databases that track clients from multiple organizations and without duplication in a single centralized database. Such efforts have the best potential to measure the ripple effects, but given their costs we might consider such data systems to be community initiatives in themselves rather than merely strategies for measuring impact.

For each of these scenarios, the goal is often to make a splash that sends waves large enough to be seen throughout the community. In the literacy example at the start of this article, this was indeed the case; but the actions taken and the scale at which outcomes were expected to be visible were mismatched. The ripple range is useful here because it helps us to understand what can and cannot feasibly be anticipated given our scale (individual, organizational, interorganizational and community) and level of investment (e.g., dollars and staff time) within a host of community-context factors.

The ripple effect helps to clarify for board members and other stakeholders who have limited time where normal assessment of impact would tend to end and where extraordinary efforts would need to be made to detect impact. Imagine

that we had invested in the scale of building the capacity of nonprofit organizations. Now, theoretically, if we are helping to strengthen these organizations, that improvement should manifest itself in better outcomes for their clients. But, think about the social capital involved in gaining access to data. How appropriate would it be to say to an organization, “We worked with you for a year on board development. Now we would like access to your database of clients so that we can examine whether your service provision has improved and outcomes for clients have gone up.” I am not so sure I can see a happy ending to this story.⁴ While it is technically possible to carry out such a research design, the cost in social capital and goodwill could very well undo the rapport building that occurred during the course of the previous efforts. Community organizations already tend to see evaluation activities as forced upon them by funders and policymakers (Aldrich et. al., 2009; Bare, 2010), what Baum, Gluck, Smoot, and Wubbenhorst (2010) refer to as “top down” or “two towers” evaluation. Furthermore, if it was carried out and data did show an improvement in service outcomes, the chain of causality would be highly suspect. What would make us so sure that board development led to these improvements and not the legion of other programmatic changes taking place at the same time and/or other environmental variables in clients and staff etc.?

This is not to say that such measurements cannot be done. Indeed, some exciting progress is being made on communitywide databases that track clients from multiple organizations and without duplication in a single centralized database. Such efforts have the best potential to measure the ripple effects, but given their costs we might consider such data systems to be community initiatives in themselves rather than merely strategies for measuring impact. It is also possible, and quite

⁴ Project Streamline’s widely circulated 2008 report, “Drowning in Paperwork, Distracted From Purpose” reports that grantmaker efforts to “aggregate their impact across multiple grants” are often perceived by grantees as “unfamiliar, burdensome, or not particularly useful” (Bearman, 2008, p. 25). As a result, funders spend considerable resources to make sure grantees collect meaningful data. The report recommends that funders and grantees come to agreement about what is useful to track and that funders pay directly for these measures (p. 37).

desirable, for measurement activity in one scale to spark related measurement in an adjacent one. For instance, the literacy coalition the CNYCF sponsored on the intraorganizational scale asked members that directly serve individuals to track that individual-level data in a uniform format for the benefit of the wider coalition's goals. In addition to creating ripples that cross the organizational borders into the scale of the individual, the coalition is reaching toward the community level as well by discussing governmental and state policies that the coalition's nascent advocacy arm could rally to change.

The message here is not that these types of cross-scale measurement are not possible or even desirable, just that they are projects in their own right that will demand considerable resources and community commitment. Given this reality, it is critical to be aware of the feasibility of such undertakings at the stage of "preparing for philanthropic impact," well before jumping in.

The Ripple-Range Principle:

1. Ripples are harder to see beyond the scale or range in which you dive in and make your splash. Getting access to the data is also easier when you have direct contact with the people who hold it – such direct contact tends to be with the major actors within your range.
2. The more resources you dive in with, the bigger the splash and more likely that ripples will be visible beyond the scale you dive into. But strategy and form also matter and influence what scale you target.
3. If you jump into multiple scales intending a cumulative impact, the splashes need to be well coordinated – think synchronized swimming – to measure the ripple effect.

Using the Ripple Range to Determine Research Feasibility

In an attempt to learn from its experiences, the CNYCF has applied the ripple-range principle in dramatically overhauling its literacy initiative and setting reasonable expectations for measure-

Ripples are harder to see beyond the scale or range in which you dive in and make your splash. Getting access to the data is also easier when you have direct contact with the people who hold it – such direct contact tends to be with the major actors within your range.

ment with its board. As discussed earlier, the foundation at one point suffered from a significant disconnect between the expectations for measurement of impact and their feasibility. To address this, staff tested the ripple-range principle to arrive at a shared narrative that both connected philanthropic action to measurable benchmarks and avoided burdening board members with the intricate details of daily implementation and measurement protocols.

The CNYCF began with the concept of the scale and reconsidered at what levels it was best and most committed to taking actions with. The foundation discerned that it was best when not directly running projects but rather building the capacity of others in the community to do so. Inspired by catalytic philanthropy and collective impact, the CNYCF transitioned its literacy initiative into a coalition-building effort (Ridzi, Carmody, & Byrnes, 2011) and eventually helped this coalition launch direct-service literacy programs for youth. In terms of the ripple-range principle this meant a decision to address the community need at the interorganizational level, but because of the coalition's direct services the CNYCF has closely monitored its individual-level impact on the community. The result has been greater clarity and a more constructive ongoing discourse with the board. Because the CNYCF measures at two levels and clearly distinguishes them, the board has come to see that staff do have

the expertise for rigorous evaluation of changes in the reading practices of individuals, but also that using those tactics is less appropriate for assessing progress with coalition building. As Paul Connolly (2011) points out, humanistic and technocratic approaches to assessing philanthropic impact do not need to be mutually exclusive and can each be more appropriate in certain circumstances.

The combination of affordability, timeliness, and access suggests to the researcher not what is doable, but what is practicable. These three components are more likely to be present in the nearer rings – nearer to where you jump in – of your ripple range, making things beyond it incrementally less feasible.

Managing Expectations

The CNYCF's experience illustrates that when it comes to managing expectations among boards, staff, clients, and the community, a working knowledge of the ripple range can be crucial. While technically almost any evaluation that can be conceived of is possible, a much smaller number are feasible.

In the tradition of social science, a research undertaking is feasible only when it is affordable, doable in a reasonable time frame, and when access to data can be sensibly obtained (i.e., ethically and without compelling the data sources to participate) (Adler & Clark, 2010). We have learned that the combination of affordability, timeliness, and access suggests to the researcher not what is doable, but what is practicable. These three components are more likely to be present in the nearer rings – nearer to where you jump

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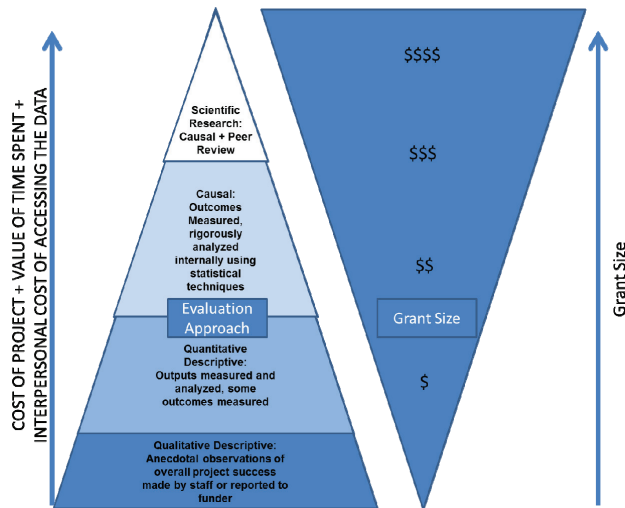
For instance, interviewing every resident of the county about their literacy experiences to determine the impact of a literacy coalition is theoretically doable, but compared to the value of what you would learn it would be too costly, take too long, and many people would likely not agree to be interviewed. You might think of this as a market where the value of the knowledge gained must be greater than or equal to the dollar cost of doing the research plus the value of the time you spend doing it, plus the social, emotional, or interpersonal cost of accessing the data and trying to interpret and utilize it for some form of social good:

Value of knowledge gained \geq cost of project + value of time spent + interpersonal cost of accessing the data.

The cost of the project is self-explanatory; it involves the material resources including computers, surveys, and other devices used to carry out the evaluation. Time spent includes the salaries of the people conducting the research and the opportunity cost of having them not do other tasks that may be of equal or greater importance (and opportunity cost cannot be overlooked when so many foundations feel they are understaffed). Finally, the interpersonal cost of accessing data has to do with the relationships between grantors and grantees, or the community members that funders involve in their philanthropic work. Being heavy handed, demanding too much, or expecting too much compliance in return for a financial gift that is small relative to the project's overall budget can harm those interpersonal relationships, diminish the social capital funders hold, and even undermine their philanthropic mission. They can furthermore weaken the capacity of the nonprofits funders serve at points where their growth and accomplishment of mission can be stifled.⁵

⁵ This course of action might furthermore reinforce a perception that funders are self-centered. The Center for Effective Philanthropy reported that more than 50 percent of nonprofits surveyed agreed that foundations prioritize information for their needs over those of the nonprofits (Brock, Buteau, & Herring, 2012).

FIGURE 3: Pyramid of Evaluation Feasibility



Considering these costs, can a community foundation spend more money, time, and social capital to evaluate the impact of a grant than it spent on the grant itself? Absolutely. Figure 3, inspired by the work of Kuo and others (Conner, Kuo, Melton, & Millett, 2005), illustrates this relationship whereby increasing complexity of evaluation involves an increase in the costs noted above, thereby making it less feasible to conduct on grants that are lower in amount. Spending more on evaluation than was made in the initial grant is most likely to happen when the expectation for impact measurement extends beyond the ripple range of your intervention.

The ripple-range principle serves to quickly discern the most efficient and feasible approach to evaluating grantmaking impact. It deals not with the realm of the possible, but with the feasible and practical. It is meant to save the time of a full cost-benefit analysis of the value of knowledge gained against the costs, time, and access.

The advantage of the ripple range is that it can quickly and efficiently establish expectations for the level and type of evaluation that are feasible for a given initiative. Doing this with ease relatively early on allows evaluation to be more

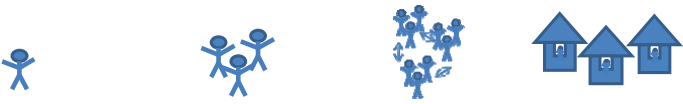
fully present in the discussion of a funding initiative's design, rather than an afterthought. It also allows us to more readily take into account the thresholds for proof of impact of our planning committees and boards. For instance, there is often a tradeoff between what intuitively feels like the most appropriate programming tactic and the level at which we individually would like to be able to measure our impact. We may have to accept a less desired tactic in order to obtain greater impact measurability, or vice versa.

In practice, the ripple range allows us to produce a grid (see Figure 4) that matches the level of impact desired (individual, organizational, interorganizational or community) with some of funders' more common evaluation methods,⁶ a snapshot of what data will look like, what they are useful for, and how success will most likely be operationalized or measured.

The concept of the ripple range also helps to reinforce the principle that evaluation approaches tend to correspond with wherever you jump into the water and make your splash. In Figure 4, this translates to concrete methods of evaluation in

⁶ See Carlson et al., 2011; Frusciante & Siberon, 2010; Strong & Kim, 2012; and Yegian, 2010.

FIGURE 4: Matrix of Feasible Impact Measurement



Scale or Level of foundation impact i.e. what level outcomes you work toward most directly	Individual	Organizational	Interorganizational	Community
Methods Funders can use for aggregating accountability of grant making:	Formative Assessment of Implementation	Organizational Change Narratives	Collaboration Indicators	Community Indicators Indicating Change Over Time
	Summative Assessment of Client Outcomes	Pre-Post Assessments of Staff Attitude, Knowledge & Behavior	Milestone Accomplishments Institutionalizing Change in Relationships	Community Indicators Comparing Different Communities
What data look like:	Outcomes for the Participants- change in knowledge, status, behavior	Attitude/ Behavior Changes of Staff	Key Milestones of the Process	Community-Wide Statistics
These data are useful for:	Assessing Change in Clients	Assessing Organizational Change	Ongoing steering of Collaboration Efforts	Ongoing steering of Community Change Efforts
End Result- Success is when:	Clients are Transformed	Organizations are Transformed	Community Relationships are Transformed	Community is Transformed

your level of involvement. If your foundation engages at the individual scale or level, for instance, appropriate evaluation approaches include summative assessment (evaluating success at reaching the outcomes that you are in business to address such as test scores, change in status, knowledge or behavior etc.) as well as formative evaluation of program implementation (evaluating the outputs involved in how you stay in business such as a process measures, cycle time, and hours of instruction). While some foundations may find that it is also appropriate to assess the health of the organization you are working with on an organizational level by chronicling narratives of staff change or conducting pre- and post-assessments of increases in staff capacity, this would require extra thought and effort and greater financial investment. Furthermore, you could potentially evaluate the level of collaboration used to implement your program and track communitywide indicators as is typical of the interorganizational level, but, again, this will require further investment.⁷ Finally, you can most certainly use a community-level assessment to indicate whether your project has

made ripples large enough to reach to all edges of the community (i.e., pond), but you are only likely to notice significant results here if you jump in with enough heft and good form (i.e., strategy).

Managing expectations when measuring philanthropic impact is a challenging and, indeed, often tricky undertaking. Since new initiatives typically take foundations out of the realm of the familiar, expectations are often based on the experiences of staff and board members in other, often dissimilar situations. In such uncharted territory, the ripple-range framework offers principles based on philanthropic experience in both implementing a variety of approaches and struggling to measure their impact as reasonably as possible.

For organizations such as the CNYCF that choose to manage a diverse portfolio (from venture to capacity building and catalytic grantmaking), a familiarity with the terrain of evaluation writ large is not enough. To effectively manage expectations of all involved from the onset, one must have a working knowledge of evaluation practices that is context specific to the philanthropic world. The intent of the ripple range is to offer a useful starting place to those on similar journeys.

⁷ One example is the CNYCF's communitywide indicators project: www.cnyvitals.org. Such indicators projects have taken hold nationally, as seen in the growth of the Community Indicators Consortium (<http://www.communityindicators.net>).

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