Getting to Results: A Tool and Lessons from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's K-12 Education Portfolio

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Key Points

- In 2002, the Annie E. Casey Foundation adopted a results-based accountability (RBA) framework to track and report on the results of their philanthropic investments.
- The RBA tool was piloted in a few program areas, including its K-12 education portfolio.
- Grantees were highly engaged in an iterative process to determine appropriate measures, refine the theory of change, and how to track progress.
- Overall, the RBA tool enabled staff to get a sense of how grantees were doing and therefore how the foundation was doing in a way that hadn't been possible before.
- The K-12 program got a much clearer sense of what it wanted to achieve in its program area and a deeper understanding of how individual grantee work contributed to the foundation's overall goals.
- Lessons learned about implementing the RBA include the importance of grantee involvement, accepting that not every project will achieve every goal, and the importance of a communications strategy.

Introduction

If education grantmakers want to achieve change and ultimately have an impact in any domain of K-12 education, they must start with a clear sense of what they want to accomplish. They must clearly define what success means, the results they want to achieve, and how they will track progress to achieving those results. Only then should they enter into partnerships with grantees whose work aims to achieve the same results. This alignment between grantmaker and grantee is the core task of the donor and the essence of strategic giving. Moreover, it creates the framework and makes possible genuine impact and accountability for results.

To define success, specify results, track progress, and align its work in this way, the Annie E. Casey Foundation developed a flexible but rigorous "results framework" tool that enabled it to focus its investments and choose grantees that shared its aims. The tool also helped staff and grantees assess progress towards goals, forge a common language to talk about results, reflect on practice, and course-correct as necessary to achieve the desired ends. Its K-12 program area was part of a group of program areas that piloted the development of the tool before it was expanded to include the entire foundation.

To develop the tool, the foundation worked in consultation with grantees to create a structured yet flexible approach that would enable results to be aggregated and progress to be assessed while leaving room for each grantee to express its individuality. Creating and using the framework allowed program staff and grantees to become more adept at defining results, measuring progress toward goals, learning and adapting on the fly, and talking cogently with others about their work.

The framework includes an understanding of two different types of accountability: population accountability and program accountability. It also

lays out a way to think about results in three overarching categories: impact, influence, and leverage. And it requires that progress be documented and that lessons learned lead to real-time course corrections as work unfolds.

This paper describes how the tool was developed and tested with grantees and shares lessons learned for other philanthropies that are interested in creating a dynamic results framework to spur and focus efforts to achieve positive change, improvement, and impact in the field of education. It includes data from interviews with foundation staff, grantees, and partners, and it offers a candid discussion of a decade of results from the foundation's K-12 education portfolio investments.

Genesis of the Tool

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is the 15th largest private foundation in the United States. Its mission is to foster public policies, human service reforms, and community supports that meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. It is a philanthropic legacy of Jim Casey, the founder of United Parcel Service (UPS), a business that has long been known for its precision and efficiency. Said Doug Nelson, former president of the Baltimore-based philanthropy:

> It shouldn't be surprising that (members of the foundation's board), most of whom are lifelong UPS-ers, are tireless in their advice to us that we measure everything we can in our efforts to improve the lives of young people, families, and communities.

Those words, which came in 2002, kicked off an initiative to create a results-based accountability (RBA) framework to track and report on the results of all the foundation's philanthropic investments. This approach begins with the desired ends – improved conditions of wellbeing for children, families, and communities – and works backward to identify the best means to achieve those ends.

At the time, the foundation's major multiyear initiatives had already begun to use grantee performance measures to track system-level improvements in outcomes for disadvantaged kids and families, but smaller, targeted investments did not regularly use outcomes-focused performance measures. Accountability for these investments was geared toward describing process: Did the grantee meet the conditions of the general scope of work to which the grantee was committed? Were timelines met? Was money expended in support of activities specified in the letter of agreement's scope of work?

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According to Patrick McCarthy, Casey's current president, the foundation's board decided to expand results tracking efforts to all of its investments because it wanted to begin to get more concrete information about impact and "return on investment" and be more deliberate about future funding decisions. As a result, the board charged the senior management team with expanding the use of performance measures, and senior management made the development and implementation of the RBA framework one of its major, foundation-wide organizational priorities.

To accomplish the work, senior management created an RBA staff work group to develop, implement, and institutionalize a framework. Program officers also attended conferences about performance measurement and training sessions about how performance measures could factor into their budgeting processes. Rather than plunging ahead with an organization-wide overhaul in accountability and reporting practices and mandating it for all grantees, the RBA tool was piloted in a few program areas, including its K-12 education portfolio.

Working With Grantees to Create the Tool

Grantee participation was a key element in the development of the results-measurement system from the beginning to ensure the right questions were asked and to foster grantee buy-in. The work began with convening five out of almost 50 education grantees at an all-day meeting in late 2002. Participating organizations were selected to represent different types of work – advocacy, technical assistance, policy analysis, community engagement – and different sizes of investments, ranging from about $35,000 to $350,000 per year.

> *Foundation staff members were judicious in their demands on grantees' time. Rather than ask them to travel back and forth to the foundation's Baltimore offices to work on the tool, staff and consultants went to them and were in frequent contact via telephone, email, and daylong site visits.*

At the session, the RBA concept was introduced and grantees' perspectives and ideas were elicited. Participating grantees were eager to understand the foundation's thinking and expectations regarding results, and they expressed a desire to create a results-based culture within their own organizations. At the meeting, it became clear that good relationships with grantees would be extremely important in creating a grantee-friendly approach to RBA for the education portfolio, and accountability became a joint effort at being transparent in expectations, clear about local context and problems, and honest about disappointments and unexpected opportunities.

After this initial gathering, foundation staff members were judicious in their demands on grantees' time. Rather than ask them to travel back and forth to the foundation's Baltimore offices to

work on the tool, staff and consultants went to them and were in frequent contact via telephone, email, and daylong site visits. Said Sally Sachar, former president and chief executive officer of the Children's Scholarship Fund, a Casey education grantee based in Washington, D.C.:

> I participated in two rounds of testing and feedback. The process was very straightforward and grantee focused, designed to reach us where we were, as opposed only to piloting something for a larger project. And the process of my involvement was relatively orderly and efficient – it felt like good use was being made of my time.

Challenge 1: The Theory of Change

The first order of business was for each grantee to discuss the logic models that it was using to make decisions about its work and to then define a theory of change that derived from the logic model. These conversations served to motivate grantees to focus on their goals and the best strategy to achieve them. This proved to be difficult work for grantees, because most of them hadn't been exposed to this approach before. In short, grantees would need coaching and other forms of technical assistance.

Next, grantees were asked to answer specific questions in their interim and final yearly grant reports. These questions included what developed into three core performance questions: What are you doing? How well are you doing it? What difference does it make? At this stage, not much was imposed or required in the way of reporting requirements to allow grantees to show what information they currently had available. The data that emerged were vague and not particularly helpful in clarifying a sense of either grantee accomplishments or needs.

In 2005, the Bridgespan Group began work with the foundation's staff to scan the field and identify relevant experiences in doing this type of work at other foundations. Bridgespan found that, at that juncture, few foundations had developed robust measurement processes. Even fewer could aggregate grantee results to articulate their program performance as a whole.

FIGURE 1 The Annie E. Casey Foundation Education Portfolio RBA Model

Challenge 2: Performance Measures

Setting performance measures – and putting documentation processes in place to track them – proved to be the second most difficult thing for grantees to do. Foundation staff and consultants worked extensively with each grantee to determine which handful of key measures would really give them insight into what they were achieving and what they might need to improve upon. The education portfolio's letters of agreement was revised to include specific reporting guidelines, augmenting the three broad performance questions outlined above with each question's

unique set of performance measures established in collaboration with each grantee. The foundation selected a core set of measures and grantees selected additional measures.

In addition to numerical performance measures, grantees were asked to provide anecdotes, stories, and other types of qualitative information, because results are about more than numbers. Qualitative information helped bring the numbers to life. Foundation staff also developed and disseminated three documents over the course of a two-year period that explained the educa-

tion portfolio's strategy and approach to results measurement.

Components of the RBA Tool

Based on these and subsequent conversations with grantees and in collaboration with national consultants – especially Mark Friedman of the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute – education portfolio staff developed its RBA framework (Figure 1). The tool includes the following key components, presented here with a focus on how they were used to improve K-12 education strategy and grantmaking.

> *The shorthand description of this theory of change is:*
> *Quality Choices + Robust Connections = Adult Success*

A Core Result

RBA begins with the desired end in mind – the core result – and works backward to identify the best means to achieve it. The core result describes a fundamental, population-level outcome that can be measured in a meaningful way. The education portfolio chose the following as its core result: One day, all young people in tough neighborhoods will achieve the aspiration their families have for them – to graduate from school prepared for adults success and well-being in the worlds of work, family, and citizenship.

Theory of Change

In the language of RBA, a theory of change defines what must be done to "turn the curve" in a positive direction toward achieving the core result. It is a set of plausible ideas or hypotheses about what needs to happen in order to make improvements and have an impact. An organization's theory of change is bigger than itself, and it describes the forces and levers in a broad field of work, like K-12 education, that the organization believes will cause its desired impact on the core result.

For the education portfolio, the starting point was the fact that the nation's K-12 education system was not performing well for young people in disadvantaged neighborhoods, as evidenced by the achievement gap, a major indicator. It then asked the following questions:

- What are the conditions under which a system like K-12 education is likely to perform at high levels?
- What would need to happen for the performance of that system to improve dramatically?
- Is the system inclined to reform itself internally, or will it require external pressure?
- What should this pressure look like, and how might the foundation's education investments contribute to it?

Based on its answers to these questions, the education portfolio developed a straightforward theory of change about what should happen to achieve its core result: If we create quality school choices for young people and their families, and if these schools foster robust connections with families and community institutions, then it is possible for all young people in tough neighborhoods to graduate from school prepared to succeed as adults in the worlds of work, family, and citizenship.

The shorthand description of this theory of change is:

Quality Choices + Robust Connections = Adult Success

Based on this theory of change, education portfolio staff decided to invest in two program areas that it believed held special promise for closing the achievement gap and helping low-income children in tough neighborhoods do well in life:

- Creating quality education choices for low-income families.
- Building strong connections among schools, families, and communities.

Through these two investment areas, program support was provided for three broad categories

of activities, making sure to focus support on the targeted geographies favored by the foundation overall:

- Startup, planning, and early implementation efforts.
- Technical assistance, capacity building, and network development.
- Policy and data analysis, advocacy, and building public will.

Interestingly, going through the process of defining the core result and theory of change led to reframing and refining the K-12 investment strategy. When the process began, the foundation's K-12 grantmaking was organized around the kinds of entities being funded – schools, networks, and organizations. As the RBA development process moved forward, K-12 investments were reorganized according to a higher order of thinking and around two clear strategies – investing in quality choices and investing in robust connections – for achieving the portfolio's core result. Engaging in the RBA process made it possible to assess and reorganize the K-12 portfolio, shifting resources away from some investments that weren't contributing directly to the core result and toward other investments that were.

The Foundation Investment Summary

A key element of the RBA tool is the Foundation Investment Summary (FIS). The FIS lays out an organization's investment strategy and performance measurement approach. It includes:

- core result and barriers to achieving it,
- theory of change,
- investment strategies, and
- performance measures, documentation plan, and results reporting plan.

The FIS lays out what you will achieve, how you will achieve it, and how you will know whether what you set out to do was accomplished. In creating it, an organization must go through a careful process of thinking through a core set of questions:

- What problems are we trying to address?

- How do we think the problems will be solved?
- What kinds of investments and partnerships contribute to that solution?
- How will we know if we are successful?

While it is highly unusual for any single program or agency to achieve a population-level result on its own, each program or agency can be held accountable for the results of its work and for making a contribution to a population-level result.

A key element in the FIS is the distinction between population-level and program-level accountability. Population accountability specifies a measurable result for a large group. For example, a population-level result in education might be: Young people graduate from school prepared for college or work. Progress toward achieving this result is measured by indicators that describe how well this population of young people is being prepared for college or work – such as trends in reading and math scores, high school graduation rates, rates of college admittance and completion, and number of well-paid jobs attained.

Program- or agency-level accountability measures the performance of the organization that is delivering a service or product to the specified population. Imagine, for instance, a local nonprofit organization that places high school students in a work internship. Program accountability attempts to determine whether the organization is in fact making students more knowledgeable about the multiple demands of a work environment.

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Performance Measures and Documentation

Performance goals are desired levels of results on specific performance measures within a set time frame. Performance measures are measures of how well a grant portfolio, initiative, agency, or other entity is operating or working. They determine how well a foundation, its grantees, and its other partners are doing their particular program work, and they quantify the quality and effect of specific grants, activities, or programs. These measures attempt to correlate the relationship between effort (or inputs) and effect (or outcomes).

The impact, influence, and leverage framework ensured that a common language was developed to discuss progress towards results. It also changed the focus of grantees' conversations so they spent more time talking about what they were achieving and learning and less time on describing process.

Creating a useful performance measure takes four steps:

- Determine the question you want to answer.
- Decide on the data you will use.
- Refine your question until it is simple enough that your data will be able to provide concrete "yes," "no," or "number result" answers.
- Determine the documentation and calculations necessary to provide the concrete answer.

From this general model, three questions emerge that any good performance measurement system should answer. As a side note, the RBA tool articulated the questions in simple language because grantees requested it.

- *What are you doing?* This question focuses on inputs and quantity and includes the following kinds of measures: number of individuals or organizations served, number of products developed and disseminated, types of services or activities supported by the grant.
- *How well are you doing it?* This question focuses on process and quality and includes the following kinds of measures: Is the service or product timely? Are people using it? How are they using it? How do they evaluate their experience?
- *What difference are you making?* This question focuses on effectiveness and outcomes. Casey and its grantees found it useful to further break this question down into three key areas of results:
  - *Impact results,* which are countable and refer to improvements in the success and well-being of children, families, or communities directly served by your organization. These can include things like the number or percent of your primary clients that show improvement in performance, knowledge, skill, or circumstance. Examples include the number of schools making progress on student performance, the high school graduation rate, and the college going rate.
  - *Influence results,* which refer to positive changes in opinions, practices, or policies as a result of your work. Examples include new policies enacted, number of districts adopting similar approaches, and number of organizations adopting comparable programs.
  - *Leverage results,* which refer to new or increased public or private co-investment in your activities that lead to better results for children, families, and communities. Examples include number of new partnerships, amount of in-kind support attracted, and amount of new funds attracted.

The impact, influence, and leverage framework helped sharpen the education portfolio's strategic focus, and it guided the selection of new investments and the portfolio as a whole. Perhaps the greatest change to the foundation's education grantmaking was derived from the work done on influence results. As a result of considering

the specific audiences that were to be targeted and influenced through the work of grantees, the actions that these audiences would take, the messages that would have to be crafted to accomplish this, and the messengers that would have to carry these messages, the K-12 program was able to be much more intentional about the organizations and projects that it would fund.

In addition, the impact, influence, and leverage framework ensured that a common language was developed to discuss progress towards results. It also changed the focus of grantees' conversations so they spent more time talking about what they were achieving and learning and less time on describing process.

A Results Matrix

There was a significant challenge in developing and testing the RBA framework. At the outset, the foundation staff expected that the framework would yield a rigorous quantitative reporting of outputs that would enable statistical analysis of aggregated data across the portfolio. In practice, it proved difficult to create a workable data collection template that would produce aggregated results while giving diverse grantees room to name their own additional performance measures and express their individuality.

In 2007, staff and a consultant drafted a performance measurement guidebook and an accompanying spreadsheet for education grantees. Initially, the hope was that the guidebook and spreadsheet would be all that grantees would need to get up and running with systematic RBA data collection. Early trials revealed, however, that although the ideas and language were clear, the RBA tasks and spreadsheet were overwhelming.

In addition, the organizations in the education portfolio were so diverse in size, scope, and mission that it proved difficult to create a spreadsheet that was simple and straightforward to use. The RBA matrix spreadsheet that was developed to accommodate the range of activities and outcomes proved to be too vast and daunting for most grantees to deal with.

As a result of this experience, the education portfolio ultimately steered away from the spreadsheet and settled instead on the performance measures and reporting guidelines it had started to include in its letters of agreement. To aggregate results, it allocated resources to fund a consultant to review and compile the data and trends from these reports.

The learning agenda was a bit of a hard sell to grantees, because they typically had their hands full with running an organization, doing their program work, and implementing the new performance measurement system. To persuade grantees to experiment with learning, the education portfolio modeled it in its own work.

A Learning Agenda

Performance data make it possible to measure whether programs are doing enough to achieve objectives, but good measures and data don't do this by themselves. If an organization doesn't create mechanisms to reflect on its experience and what it is accomplishing, then gathering data is just an exercise. What's needed is a systematic and intentional reflective practice to ensure that an organization's work is relevant and moving toward achieving the core result. Organizations also need to notice if what they are doing is working or not, then course-correct and adapt the work accordingly. A learning agenda can include project-specific evaluation, hiring a knowledge manager, and sharing knowledge with others.

The learning agenda was a bit of a hard sell to grantees, because they typically had their hands full with running an organization, doing their

program work, and implementing the new performance measurement system. To persuade grantees to experiment with learning, the education portfolio modeled it in its own work. It also provided funding incentives for grantees to develop and use a variety of learning mechanisms. Over time, grantees became convinced that a well-designed, iterative learning practice made the rest of the RBA tool useful and helped them achieve their core result.

> *The RBA framework required systematic thinking, which led to a refined strategic focus for the education program and to decisions and prioritization of grantmaking over time.*

In one example, Civic Builders, which develops charter school facilities in New York City, received Casey support to create a learning system that included reflecting on successes and failures and articulating best practices and lessons learned. It hired a dedicated knowledge manager to set up and manage a documentation system and to train staffers to use it. This person sat in on meetings, participated in debriefing sessions, wrote up summaries for a variety of internal uses, and helped leaders check in on progress toward results. "Three years ago, we might not have sought money to support the knowledge management function, but now, we're hooked on it," said David Umansky, co-founder of Civic Builders.

In another example, early support for ongoing evaluation at New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS) enabled that organization to better align its programmatic work to its ultimate goal of improving student achievement in urban schools. At first, staffers weren't sure about what questions to ask or why. "Now, evaluation has a huge value to the organization, but it took time to make it valuable," said NLNS co-founder Jon Schnur.

"We routinely look at the data to figure out what is and isn't working. All of our conversations are grounded in data now."

Exchanging knowledge and lessons learned with other practitioners working to achieve similar results is another part of the RBA learning agenda. To support this activity, grantees were funded to publish chronicles of their work that included lessons and results and to use these publications to jump-start learning conversations with peers and funders.

Learning About Impact by Using the Tool

Aligning work and targets between grantees and the foundation and using the results framework made it possible for the foundation to get clarity on what it was and wasn't able to achieve. Using the RBA tool made it possible to see that, over a seven-year period, K-12 investments did result in clear contributions to policy conversations at national, state, and community levels; improved outcomes for children in individual schools; and improved outcomes for children in the foundation's targeted geographies.

The RBA framework also made it possible to begin to get a picture of the foundation's role in advancing its education reform agenda on a national level. For example, multiple grantees reported specific evidence of contributing to improved charter-school climates in certain target geographies, including Indianapolis and Baltimore. Other grantees that focused on national charter research and advocacy demonstrated influence on state and national policy. Taken together, these results made it possible to say with some confidence that the foundation's K-12 investments were having some influence on the national charter and school-choice climate. Aggregated results also made it clear that investments were contributing to increased rigor in school accountability systems in multiple jurisdictions, in multiple kinds of schools.

However, the education portfolio was not as successful as desired in garnering buy-in from other funders in the form of significant co-investments of their dollars. What did occur, though, were

many conversations about performance, success, and impact, and this was a satisfying result in the influence category.

The education portfolio's RBA work also had a notable influence on the foundation overall. The K-12 pilot effort (along with similar pilot efforts in other program areas) helped other program staff see how they could increase their own clarity on what success could and should look like. The RBA pilot also introduced a model for more disciplined thinking into other program's investment strategies.

Finally, there was also a tangible difference at the board level. Because they were receiving new kinds of information from different staff portfolios, board members found themselves more able to engage on strategic issues rather than getting lost in the weeds of individual grant decisions.

Reflections on the RBA Experience

Developing and using the RBA framework led to breakthroughs in a number of ways. Overall, the RBA tool enabled staff to get a sense of how grantees were doing and therefore how the foundation was doing in a way that hadn't been possible before. The K-12 program got a much clearer sense of what it wanted to achieve in its program area, and it got a much better idea of what grantees were doing and a deeper understanding of how their work contributed to the foundation's overall goals.

For grantees, the RBA framework helped them quantify their impact and keep their eye on the big picture. "The results framework gave us tools to talk about results in a complex and meaningful way, and it constantly reminded us that the bottom line is, did our work change anything for families and kids?" said Mike Kromrey, executive director of Denver's Metro Organizations for People, a Casey grantee.

The RBA process also resulted in practical changes that improved communication and accountability for both grantees and the foundation. The contents of grantee letters of agreement changed to include specific performance measures, and interim and final grant reports referred back to these measures and reported progress against them. These clear and specific letters of agreement made it easier for grantees to track progress and to report out on what they did with grant monies. They also made reporting easier because grantees were able to routinize the content, and the process got easier over time. Said Sally Sachar, the former Children's Scholarship Fund CEO:

> Now that we've done it once, it doesn't require a significant amount of time. Every six months, several members of our staff spend a portion of a day to collect our measures. We are able to leverage this time spent on measures, because we are able to use the product with other funders and partners.

Moreover, the RBA framework required systematic thinking, which led to a refined strategic focus for the education program and to decisions and prioritization of grantmaking over time. In addition, rolling up individual grantee results to the portfolio level allowed the education program to make informed assessments of investments and shift resources to support grantees that were doing the most effective work. By asking grantees to develop plans for measuring performance and results, the process engendered the same kind of careful thinking in them that foundation staff had to do. Over the course of developing the tool, new grant proposals from participating grantees reflected increasing clear objectives, theories of change, and strategic priorities.

It also enabled grantees to better manage and improve programs. "We are focusing our thinking with the end in mind and how we can modify our activities to better achieve that end," said Bob Pavlik, assistant director of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University. "Now, we set more honest, possible goals."

For both staff and grantees, using the framework and the data and reflections it generated enabled them to communicate successes and added value to external audiences. For grantees, it also helped them attract additional investment and supported their relationships with other grantmakers.

Said Sachar:

> We use the report that we generated for [Casey] in other venues. When we report to the U.S. Department of Education, for example, we used the same measures. We also use it with other grant applications. The document is simple, concrete, and speaks very clearly about what we're trying to do.

A learning agenda is an essential component of a successful results framework. Failure is a result. It happens. Admit it, reflect on it, and fold the lessons learned into a reformulation of theory and strategy.

In addition, the process of developing this new approach gave grantees a clearer sense of how their work fit into the national policy landscape. "What the approach has done for us is to help us look more effectively across the sector and see how we fit into the larger public policy context," said Kimberly Cambridge, who oversees technical assistance to school-based community centers for the Fund of the City of New York. "We have more of a sense of where we're contributing on the larger scale."

Lessons Learned
- *Start with results and work backwards.* Clearly articulate your vision of a core result and your strategy for achieving it before starting to create your results measurement framework. Begin with a clear sense of the desired results and intended impact. From there, work backwards to a set of strategies, tactics, and metrics that will enable you to determine if these results are being attained.
- *You must have broad institutional support at your foundation if you want to design and implement a successful RBA effort.* Strong leadership at the senior staff and board levels

was crucial, as was the resulting allocation of resources over the multiyear period required to do the RBA work. Furthermore, the work could not be placed on the shoulders of existing staff alone. In the education portfolio's situation, where a single staff person oversaw an entire portfolio of investments, the effort required support and expertise from skilled consultants.
- *Relationships with grantees and understanding their local context matter when creating a tool that works for both parties.* Involving grantees in developing a results-focused approach takes considerable time, but such consultation can lead to important insights and contribute to the establishment of mutual trust. It also helps anchor the results process in reality and encourages compliance. Discussions with grantees about local context and environment may further elucidate what results matter most at what time. This process can make accountability a joint effort that fosters transparency in expectations, problems, disappointments, and results.
- *Including grantees in the process requires special skills.* You need to get enough training and experience in the work of creating and using a results-based accountability tool so that you can function as an effective coach for your grantees. Be prepared to interact with them a lot, face-to-face and on their turf, over at least a year. This is a multiphased, iterative process, and grantees require coaching at every step along the way.
- *Sustaining a results program is not natural and includes building capacity.* An investment or set of investments will not automatically produce a sustainable program, activity, or set of results. It is far easier to revert to familiar habits than to maintain or increase momentum towards the desired goals. For that reason, it is imperative to discuss program and results sustainability with grantees sooner rather than later. These conversations are best undertaken with feedback from multiple sources, including grantees themselves, people served by the program, consultants, and professional staff. In addition, the process requires capacity development for grantees, including developing new knowledge and skills that reinforce a focus on results. Finally, make sure to test and refine

your results measurement tools so that as much as possible they work for everyone.

- *Not all investments achieve every type of result.* Often, a program area's grants are composed of many investments from which significant results are expected. Different investments are targeted at different kinds of results, and you should only report on the kinds of results that make sense. In addition, investments vary in size, and it is unrealistic to seek major impact, influence, or leverage from a limited financial investment. Modest investments should have modest expectations about the results that can be realistically achieved.

- *Think carefully before investing in developing a spreadsheet as part of your results toolkit.* Experience suggests that developing a spreadsheet for grantees to use in reporting their results is problematic if the tool is too complex. If a portfolio includes a diverse range of organizations that do diverse kinds of work, it might prove difficult to avoid an overly complex results spreadsheet.

- *Communicating results is about more than numbers.* Not everything a donor needs to know about an investment is best expressed by a numerical performance measure. Indeed, results reports come to life when they detail accomplishments, lessons, and stories. All this information puts a human face on the numbers. It also helps develop a more compelling and focused message about your investment achievements. Furthermore, a good success story, coupled with meaningful statistics, is much more likely to move policy debate forward than the statistics on their own.

- *A learning agenda is an essential component of a successful results framework.* Failure is a result. It happens. Admit it, reflect on it, and fold the lessons learned into a reformulation of theory and strategy. Even short of failure, some investments do not achieve the results that were sought. Others achieve mixed results. Make sure that suboptimal results are shared with and studied by foundation staff and grantees. Periodic efforts to review mistakes should be part of every philanthropic investment. In fact, creating a learning agenda is in many ways the most important lesson. It serves as a reminder of why results-based accountability

is, in the end, so vital in philanthropy. Amid the tedium of performance measures and reporting requirements, it is easy to lose sight of the ultimate purpose of all of philanthropic activity: maximizing effectiveness in the effort to improve and have a significant, positive impact on people's lives.

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