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Editorial

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EDITORIAL

DEAR READERS

As usual for our non-thematic issues, this quarter's articles address a broad spectrum of current issues in philanthropy.

Simon, Slichta, and Monroe focus on the results achieved through improvement collaboratives – short-term learning systems that bring together teams from multiple organizations to seek improvement on a focused topic within the organizations. The Health Foundation for Western & Central New York adapted the Breakthrough Series model for use in a multi-organizational setting. They found results both within and across agencies. This represents an important contribution to our understanding of ways to increase grantee capacity to effectively implement programs.



Castillo, McDonald, and Wilson identify outcomes for both students and foundations that participated in an innovative course in grantmaking. Through a partnership between a foundation and a university graduate program, students were able to actively engage with the foundation on making grants, beginning with the request for proposals. The foundation benefitted in a number of ways, including increased rigor, an infusion of fresh perspective and energy, and an expanded awareness of a region's nonprofit landscape. Students benefitted by learning what works firsthand. As the number of foundations continues to grow, developing people with grantmaking skills is increasingly important. Such partnerships may be one way to build the pool of people equipped for this work.

Alongside a growing interest in nonprofit capacity-building programs is a growing concern with program impact. **Brown** describes how the McKinsey Organizational Capacity and Assessment Tool and the Abt Associates survey have been used to assess changes in nonprofit capacity. Drawing on field experience, the author compares the benefits and costs of these instruments from the perspective of evaluators and survey respondents. Brown's research provides guidance for foundations seeking to use surveys to evaluate their capacity building efforts.

Abramson, Soskis, and Toepler have studied the growth in public-philanthropic partnerships (PPPs) over the past decade. These partnerships involve managing a number of tensions, such as defining the appropriate roles for each sector and the best ways to maintain transparency. They note that roles changed somewhat during the Great Recession. Structures to manage these cross-sector relationships are being put in place at local, state and federal levels and some lessons are beginning to emerge.

In another view of transparency, **Buteau, Chaffin, and Gopal** note that foundations and nonprofits do not always see eye-to-eye on the issues that affect their work together. This article brings to light topics on which nonprofit and foundation CEOs' views are not aligned, as well as topics on which they are but progress is not where either group would like it to be. The authors

discuss four aspects of foundation practice: transparency with the nonprofits they fund, support for nonprofit-performance assessment, awareness of nonprofits' challenges, and the degree to which foundations use their resources to help address nonprofits' challenges.

Dean-Coffey, Casey, and Caldwell reflect on how the evaluations produced, sponsored, or consumed by philanthropies may be inconsistent with their missions if they are not culturally competent. The American Evaluation Association's Statement on Cultural Competence provides those who produce, sponsor, and use evaluation an opportunity to examine and align their practices and policies within a context of racial and cultural equity and inclusion. This article seeks to open a discussion of how philanthropy can use an equitable-evaluation approach to apply the principles of the AEA statement.

In a reflective practice article, **Hughes, Colombo, Hughes, Plachta Elliott, and Schneider-Munoz** share insights from the Skillman Foundation's learning process that moved them from a traditional grantmaker to a place-based investor and change-maker. A deep understanding of the communities in which they work, clarity about overarching goals, and a willingness to engage in rapid learning processes were critical factors in shaping the foundation's approach to youth development. This is the fourth article about Skillman's work in Detroit to appear in this journal since 2009 (Brown, 2012; Brown, Colombo and Hughes, 2009; McDonald, 2011); the transparency about the continuing evolution of their thinking is a tremendous gift to the field.

A continuing theme in *The Foundation Review* has been the importance of learning. **Frusciante** explores the growth of the knowledge-development function in foundations. Knowledge development sits at the convergence of movement toward engagement, data-based decisionmaking, and networked learning for social and policy change. This article includes tools and frameworks developed at one family foundation for increasing organizational learning, beginning network learning, and informing both program and operations for enhanced strategy implementation.

I hope you find food for thought and action in this issue!



Teresa R. Behrens, Ph.D.

EDITOR IN CHIEF

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