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editorial

Dear Readers,

How foundations do their work is getting increasing attention in the field of philanthropy. Articles in this issue contribute significantly to the growing knowledge base how foundation structures and practices contribute to – or impede – effective grantmaking.

In a two-article special section, **Easterling and Metz** and **Metz and Easterling** describe the contributions of implementation science to effectively enacting foundation strategy. They highlight the use of two tools – practice profiles and implementation drivers assessment – to deepen understanding of how foundation staff roles and structures need to be adapted to fit the demands of a particular strategy. Paired with Patton, Foote, and Radners' (2015) work on Theory of Philanthropy, these articles provide a deep and comprehensive framework for foundations seeking to align their work internally and externally.

Berman and Webb and Bell focus on particular internal foundation structures. Berman shares her research on the role of senior leadership teams in shaping the direction and culture of foundations and their capacity to collaborate both internally and externally. Webb and Bell describe why and how to build high-functioning program teams within a foundation. At both executive and programmatic levels, structures that help foundations better integrate across their internal silos may contribute to greater effectiveness.

Sherer shares a framework for thinking about how the extent and type of evaluation required should match the foundation's mission, strategy and reasons for conducting evaluation. This article may be particularly helpful for foundations that are in the early stages of designing their evaluation approach.

Two articles in this issue report on the results of major foundation initiatives. **Yu, Henderson-Frakes, and Peña** share the results of a five-year evaluation of a large-scale field-building initiative: Blue Shield of California Foundation's Strong Field Project. Their data suggest that in addition to leadership and network building, funders need to invest in challenging traditional assumptions and entrenched patterns as part of field-building.

Djang, Andersen, Masters, Vanslyke, and Beadnell report on a major initiative to improve school nutrition and food literacy in Santa Barbara, Calif. The initiative involved 84 schools and more than 50,000 students over its nine years of programming. In order to tailor programming to specific needs, the foundation emphasized stakeholder involvement throughout the process.

Two other articles describe strategies for foundations' work in communities. **Jessup, Parsons, and Moore** offer a typology of partnerships that includes three types: project-focused, formal-systems-focused, and community-grounded. Among other suggestions for how to stimulate partnerships committed to deep systemic change, they urge funders to actively participate in community partnerships.

Fehler-Cabral, James, Long, and Preskill share insights and implications generated at a convening titled *Is This a Better Place? The Art and Science of Place-based Evaluation* and reflections by the authors, who also facilitated convening sessions. The convening produced a number of considerations, presented in this article, for how funders, and their investments in evaluation, can support the design, implementation, and overall success of place-based efforts. Increasing understanding and use of systems thinking tools is one key suggestion.

As with any relationship, integrity and consistency are important to building trust between funders and grantees. These articles suggest ways to better align how foundations do their work internally and externally to contribute to more effective relationships and better outcomes.

Theresa R. Behrens, Ph.D.
Editor in Chief

Reference

PATTON, MICHAEL QUINN; FOOTE, NATHANIEL; AND RADNER, JAMES (2015) A Foundation's Theory of Philanthropy: What It Is, What It Provides, How to Do It. *The Foundation Review*. 7(4) 7-20. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1263>

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Building a Field: Blue Shield of California Foundation's Strong Field Project Leaves a Legacy and Valuable Lessons

Hanh Cao Yu, Ph.D., and Jennifer Henderson-Frakes, M.P.P., Social Policy Research Associates; and Lucia Corral Peña, J.D., Blue Shield of California Foundation

Keywords: Field-building, domestic violence, movement building, philanthropy

Key Points

- Relatively few comprehensive evaluations have assessed the principles, elements, and impacts of philanthropic organizations' field-building endeavors. To help fill this gap, this article shares the results of a five-year evaluation of a large-scale field-building initiative: Blue Shield of California Foundation's Strong Field Project.
- The project's goal was to strengthen the domestic violence field by equipping it with a critical mass of diverse individuals and organizations to lead a stronger movement to end domestic violence in California. Its approach aimed to strengthen field leadership and organizations, and to create vibrant collaborative networks.
- Evaluation data show that the project achieved much of its desired impact on the domestic violence field in California, in particular by challenging long-held assumptions and entrenched patterns that had stalled the development of the field. The Strong Field Project may serve as a model for field-building initiatives across the nation.

campaign, launched in 1906, to reform the field of medical education to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's drive to improve end-of-life care in the 21st century (Fleishman, 2007; Patrizi, Thompson, & Spector, 2011). Despite decades of philanthropic investment, however, questions remain on how to build a field most effectively. Relatively few comprehensive evaluations exist to test the principles, elements, and impact of field building.

In recent years, some new resources have been created for funders interested in designing field-building initiatives. The Bridgespan Group's Strong Field Framework (2009) calls attention to fostering the development of key components of a field: shared identity, standards of practice, knowledge base, leadership and grassroots

What is a Field?

A field is defined as a branch of knowledge, policy, and practice composed of a multiplicity of actors in relationship with each other. It involves both knowledge and action. Actors in a field produce facts, solutions to problems, models of good practice, and messages to help people grasp the dimensions of a problem and promote desired changes. Field actors form a community whose members play different and complementary roles in solving social problems – advocates, program developers and implementers, communicators, leaders, organizers, researchers, policymakers, funders, and others (Petrovich, 2011).

Introduction: Philanthropy and Field Building

Although foundations have shifted toward an outcome-oriented approach to funding in recent years, philanthropy has a long history of supporting field building. Well-known philanthropic field-building efforts range from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's

BSCF's commitment to large-scale social change led it to adopt a field-level lens and develop a strategy for creating the conditions in which domestic violence leaders and organizations could more effectively address the issue.

support, funding, and supporting policy. Similarly, Bernholz, Seale, & Wang (2009) offer principles for foundations interested in strategically building a field, based on a research review of the MacArthur Foundation's five-year investment in digital media and learning as well as other foundations' field-building initiatives. Many of those principles reinforce those of Bridgespan's Strong Field Framework. For example, in the area of advancing the knowledge base, Bernholz and colleagues posit the importance of establishing a research base, adopting standards, and sharing knowledge. Other principles offered by Bernholz are not present in Bridgespan's framework: recognizing philanthropic opportunities, prioritizing actors and networks, and developing a network infrastructure. The emergence of such frameworks and principles provided Blue Shield of California Foundation (BSCF) ideas to build upon when developing the field-building strategies of its Blue Shield Against Violence (BSAV) domestic violence grantmaking program.

Why a Field-Building Strategy for BSCF?

Established in 2000, Blue Shield of California Foundation has been strongly committed to ending domestic violence in California. Since 2002, its grantmaking has focused on providing core-support operating grants to more than 100 domestic violence agencies in urban and rural communities in California. Given the fiscal and organizational challenges faced by

domestic violence agencies during the 2008 economic downturn and California's budget crisis, it became apparent to the foundation that core and programmatic support were not enough.¹ Ultimately, BSCF's commitment to large-scale social change led it to adopt a field-level lens and develop a strategy for creating the conditions in which domestic violence leaders and organizations could more effectively address the issue.

From the outset, BSCF's leaders knew that to be effective, its field-building initiative had to be firmly grounded in the realities and needs of the field, which arose more than 30 years ago as a social-change movement to reframe domestic violence as a public health issue (Lehrner & Allen, 2009). The planning process began with intensive field research in 2009, which entailed asking hard questions,² convening grantees, and determining what its Blue Shield Against Violence program could do to make a measurable difference as the biggest investor in the domestic violence field in California (Bendet, 2009). This yearlong process included commissioning several studies that surveyed and interviewed domestic violence leaders to gain insights into the state of the movement in California, including such aspects as leadership, organizational capacity, fiscal health, and collaborative efforts among domestic violence agencies. The BSAV project also reviewed promising models from other leadership and grant programs (Adefuin, Rubin, & Yu, 2010). Most significantly, it carefully listened to people actively engaged in domestic violence work in order to identify strategic opportunities and areas needing attention.

This research determined that although it had evolved into a highly professionalized, regulated, service-oriented field, it was relatively reactive, crisis-driven, and less proactive about preventing

¹ In 2012, Blue Shield Against Violence awarded a total of \$3.2 million in core grants to 218 domestic violence agencies, with grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$40,000.

² Questions included: Where has the domestic violence field had success and where has it fallen short? What has led it to become fragmented and under-resourced? What does the field need to become stronger? What supports does it need to collaborate or engage the community to develop a shared vision around a unified social-change and policy-advocacy agenda?

domestic violence, addressing its root causes, and empowering survivors. Domestic violence leaders acknowledged that the field had become too dependent over the years on public funding to sustain the shelter model, and shelters, as a primary strategy for mitigating the human impacts of domestic violence, could not prevent or end it. As a result of the daily crises they faced and the fiercely competitive funding environment, leaders had developed a fortress mentality that hindered cross-agency coordination and collaboration. It was also clear that the domestic violence field needed better leadership-succession planning and cultivation of diverse, culturally responsive leaders.

Nevertheless, at the heart of the field in California was a group of passionate and resourceful leaders who shared the vision of ending domestic violence. These leaders were a complementary mix of veteran founders of the domestic violence movement, who brought a social-change perspective and deep understanding of the field's history, and relative newcomers who were brimming with potential, energy, and new perspectives that could revitalize the field. Fueled by a merger in 2005 of the northern and southern California domestic violence coalitions to form a statewide coalition – the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence – the field was well positioned to collectively optimize its strengths and respond to the myriad challenges it confronted (Adefuin, et al., 2010).

Key Components of the Strong Field Project

Blue Shield of California Foundation designed the Strong Field Project (SFP) based on the findings of its initial research on the status of the field. The SFP would be a multimillion-dollar,³ four-year initiative running from 2010 to 2014 with the ultimate goal of strengthening the domestic violence field by equipping it with a

As a result of the daily crises they faced and the fiercely competitive funding environment, leaders had developed a fortress mentality that hindered cross-agency coordination and collaboration. It was also clear that the domestic violence field needed better leadership-succession planning and cultivation of diverse, culturally responsive leaders.

critical mass of diverse leaders and organizations with sufficient capacity and the right support, tools, skills, and knowledge to lead a stronger movement forward to prevent and end domestic violence. To work toward this goal, the SFP would use a three-pronged approach:

1. Strengthen leadership. The Leadership Development Program, overseen by CompassPoint, would develop the leadership capacity of a critical mass of individuals (in three cohorts of 20 individuals each), giving them stronger leadership and management skills, helping them build more robust networks, and supporting them in their efforts to meet individual goals and better serve the field.
2. Build organizational capacity. The Organizational Strengthening Grants Program, overseen by the Women's Foundation of California, would provide funding for domestic violence organizations to build capacity in ways important to them and to develop and test new practices that would benefit the entire field.

³ From 2010 to 2015, BSCF invested \$30.3 million in the domestic violence field: \$15.2 million in direct investments in SFP core components; \$2.7 million in complementary technical assistance (e.g., strategic restructuring/mergers, financial management, and IT); and \$12.4 million in core support grants to domestic violence agencies.

BSCF established two critical structures to ensure that the Strong Field Project benefited from the wisdom and input of domestic violence leaders and remained responsive to the field. The 10-member advisory group of domestic violence field leaders played a critical role in developing and refining the initiative logic model, which in turn guided program development, implementation, and evaluation.

3. Expand collaborative networks and knowledge sharing. The Network Building and Knowledge Sharing strategy, jointly administered by the Jemmott Rollins Group and the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence, would strengthen the networks that connect California's domestic violence organizations by convening conferences, holding trainings, and fostering a learning community dedicated to sharing new models and best practices.

BSCF established two critical structures to ensure that the Strong Field Project benefited from the wisdom and input of domestic violence leaders and remained responsive to the field. The 10-member advisory group of domestic violence field leaders played a critical role in developing and refining the initiative logic model, which in turn guided program development, implementation, and evaluation. (See Appendix 1.) The SFP coordinating committee, consisting of representatives from BSCF, the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence, the Women's

Foundation of California, Jemmott Rollins, and CompassPoint, played a crucial role in designing, implementing, and making midcourse corrections to the initiative.

With extensive input from the advisory group and coordinating committee, BSCF developed the SFP Logic Model, which became a guiding framework for the initiative. The logic model identified key values, assumptions, inputs, strategies, goals, and outcomes that reflected the months of careful listening to and engagement with the field. The assumptions, which greatly resonated with field leaders, acknowledged the challenges the domestic violence field faced. More importantly, BSCF framed the major assumptions in terms of strengths so that they could provide a vision for pathways of change in the field:

- Stronger collaborative and individual leadership will improve the domestic violence field's impact.
- Technically and financially well-resourced organizations are needed to lead the field.
- A critical mass of respected domestic violence leaders recognizes the need and opportunity for change.

Several key aspects of the Strong Field Logic Model are important to highlight. First, because SFP leaders emphasized the importance of evaluation and documentation, BSCF engaged the evaluator, Social Policy Research Associates (SPR), to kick off the evaluation by using a highly participatory process to refine and finalize the model before the official start of the project. (See Appendix 1.) Second, the nine outcomes – both short term and long term in scope – allowed the evaluation to establish benchmarks against which multiple levels of field strengthening could be measured. Articulation of these outcomes from the beginning allowed all stakeholders to have a clear sense of the complexity of the work and to be accountable for shared outcomes. Third, the logic model was a dynamic and living document; it underwent some important

revisions in 2011 and 2012 in response to feedback from the SFP participants and the evaluator.

Progress and Outcomes: The Legacy of the Strong Field Project

From 2010 to 2015, SPR took a mixed-methods approach to assess the progress and outcomes of the Strong Field Project, seeking to understand how it “moved the needle” on field building and to document the initiative’s long-term impact on individuals and organizations (Yu, et al., 2015). To gather data for the evaluation, the evaluation team (1) conducted semi-structured interviews with 316 SFP advisory group members, intermediaries, foundation staff members, domestic violence leaders, and other stakeholders from 2010 to 2015; (2) administered a field-wide outcome and social network survey (n = 169); (3) surveyed 24 Leadership Development Program (LDP) and Organizational Strengthening Grant Program (OSG) participants (SFP “alumni”); (4) assessed the leadership skills and working conditions of 60 field leaders before and after their participation in the LDP; (5) assessed the organizational capacity of 30 OSG grantees at the beginning and end of their grant periods using scaled survey questions; and (6) reviewed event/training evaluation forms, grantee proposals, and reports. This long-term, multipart evaluation informs the following summary of the Strong Field Project’s outcomes and impacts.

Strengthened Leaders

One of the most powerful legacies of the Strong Field Project is the cadre of strengthened leaders that the initiative has fostered. Leadership Development Program alumni, as well as those who have worked with these individuals, reported profound impacts from their participation. The SPR analysis of pre- and post-leadership assessments and interviews with leaders showed that the LDP had significant positive impacts on individuals’ leadership and management skills. Leaders increased their self-awareness and self-confidence and enhanced their abilities to lead in multicultural milieus, manage finances, plan for succession, manage change and conflict, and contribute to field leadership. Furthermore, at the end of their LDP participation, 67 percent of LDP

FIGURE 1 Pre- and Post-LDP Involvement in Local, Regional, and State Leadership Activities

alumni reported holding leadership positions in local, regional, and statewide domestic violence networks. Indicative of the persistence of difficult working conditions, self-care and work-life balance continue to be areas of challenge for leaders in the domestic violence field and showed the least effect from LDP participation.

In general, the LDP has fostered leaders who are not only empowered and re-energized, but also well positioned to become more effective field and movement leaders. Some cohort members already had local and statewide leadership roles. (See Figure 1.) But participation in the LDP served to greatly increase their sense of connection to the field and movement, their interest in applying what they learned, and their courage to raise issues critical to the future of the broader field and its relevance to ending domestic violence. The pre- and post-LDP results show a strong increase in field and network leadership. Specifically, Cohort I’s level of participation in state-level leadership doubled by the end of the LDP (from 20 percent to 40 percent) and Cohort III’s increased from 20 percent to 63 percent (a 43 percent increase). Overall, all the cohorts made significant gains in local and state leadership, reporting increased activities in many different roles.

FIGURE 2 Cohort III Networking Pre- and Post-SFP

Disparate groups and individuals with few or no interpersonal connections into a dense and highly interconnected network.

Strengthened Organizations

The Strong Field Project strengthened domestic violence organizations through multiple channels. Twenty-seven OSG grantees were funded to build capacity in various priority areas. Key outcomes for the first cohort of grantees included the implementation of transformative organizational models, such as shared leadership models and domestic violence program models that integrated community organizing and family trauma services. The most valuable outcomes for the second cohort of grantees were the building of solid foundations for improved infrastructure and systems and shifts in organizational culture.

The OSG grantees reported increases in capacity in two areas that were the weakest at baseline: using systems to manage and coordinate goals and activities, and using monitoring and evaluation data. They also reported better interdepartmental collaboration, positive shifts in the philosophy-guiding service provision, expansion of services, increases in service capacity, more co-location of services, and development of more partnerships. A broad group of OSG grantees reported fund-development-related strengthening as a result of their OSG work. These grantees

made changes to their approach to fundraising and increased their organizational capacity to engage with potential funders.

Strengthened Field and Collaborative Networks

The Strong Field Project has been strongly guided by the value of collaboration as well as by long-term objectives to strengthen statewide and local coalitions and other means of networking and mutual support. The final analysis of the SFP showed increased professional connections among LDP and SFP participants.

Over the course of its members' participation, LDP Cohort III transformed itself from a collection of disparate groups and individuals with few or no interpersonal connections into a dense and highly interconnected network. (See Figure 2.) Prior to joining the LDP, several cohort members had no previous connections with any other members, even at the networking level. Within the first six months of the program connections among cohort members proliferated, and by the end of the program all members reported interactions and connections with each other. Other LDP cohorts likely experienced similar increases in network interconnections, but we lack the

pre- and post-participation networking data needed to make such conclusions.

At the end of the SFP, there is evidence that strong relationships and supports are in place among cohort members. Participants frequently check in with one another via phone calls, texts, and email to discuss personal and professional challenges and accomplishments. Cohort III has put in place a resilient support system to sustain its relationships and facilitate further growth. Cohort III has also begun organizing around specific projects, such as collaborating on Blue Shield Against Violence Cultural Competency grants and serving on the board of the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence.

In terms of connections to the broader field, as of the end of the SFP, representatives from all LDP cohorts occupied central roles in the statewide network, reflecting a high level of interconnectivity with other key leaders in the field. Cross-cohort LDP connections have played a key role in improved collaboration on a regional level and in the development of the Domestic Violence Information Resource Center, an online collaborative community for domestic violence agencies. LDP participants from different cohorts have joined the partnership's board, co-facilitated capacity-building trainings, and partnered to apply for grant funding from Blue Shield and other sources.

The SFP participants and alumni noted several important ways in which the project has made a positive impact:

- The field has stronger networks and there is less of a sense of isolation. The SFP has played an important role in bringing leaders together, providing the space for connecting and building the capacity of leaders to network.
- The SFP has allowed for critical conversations and infused the field with new life and momentum. The project has provided the space, motivation, and safety needed to discuss topics and issues that have historically been too risky or scary to address or acknowledge.

From their participation in the Leadership Development Program, regional institutes, and SFP institutes, staff members and leaders in domestic violence agencies all over California have learned about LDP “gems”: strengths-based leadership tools, multicultural leadership principles, and adaptive leadership models.

- The field has become more diverse and made progress toward bringing in new leaders, nontraditional partners, and innovative ideas. Largely due to the SFP, the field has become more diverse since 2010 and is more open to new individuals, new approaches (e.g., trauma-informed care, leaders of color, cultural competence), geographic diversity, and inclusion of individuals from rural organizations.
- The field has made progress toward developing a shared language and a shared vision. Although the field has not been fully united around a shared vision, there is evidence of an emerging shared language and set of values. In addition, many leaders in the field are reaching agreement on the topics that need to be addressed for a common vision and agenda to be fully fleshed out.

Strengthened Knowledge Base

From their participation in the Leadership Development Program, regional institutes, and SFP institutes, staff members and leaders in domestic violence agencies all over California have learned about LDP “gems”: strengths-based

leadership tools, multicultural leadership principles, and adaptive leadership models. These powerful ideas and concepts are gaining critical mass within many organizations as multiple participants from the same domestic violence organizations take part in the LDP, and as LDP alumni effectively share valuable knowledge with those who have not been part of the SFP.

The Organizational Strengthening Grants Program has helped many domestic violence agencies learn invaluable lessons during the course of their organizational development work. Particularly rich knowledge was gleaned in the areas of fund development, theories of change, mergers and holistic service delivery, shared leadership models, and leadership development/policy advocacy.

Momentum for Sustained Field Building

To demonstrate its long-term partnership with the field as the initiative drew to a close, BSCF made several large grants to support leaders' expressed desire to self-organize to continue the field-building work. To sustain momentum, energy, and focus, the foundation provided support in three key areas: the development of a thought innovation lab, the creation of a movement and mobilization institute, and continued collaboration and networking activities. (See Figure 3.) BSCF laid the groundwork to transfer capacity-building tools and knowledge management structures to the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence, the statewide domestic violence coalition. The foundation also invested in the creation of the SFP Legacy website to communicate successes, challenges, and lessons, and to ensure that new knowledge, tools, and resources would remain broadly available to others within and outside of the domestic violence field.

Challenges

As a time-limited initiative with finite resources, the Strong Field Project was not able to fully achieve its many ambitious goals and desired outcomes. The evaluation showed limited progress in increasing the diversity and cultural competency of the domestic violence field. Due

in part to the long-term nature of the endeavor, the SFP was limited in its ability to build a full-fledged pipeline that would diversify the leadership of the domestic violence field for the future. The foundation also came to the conclusion that it needed to be more explicit in building the cultural responsiveness of domestic violence service providers. (In 2013, BSCF launched a separate initiative exclusively devoted to incubating and disseminating innovative approaches to providing culturally responsive domestic violence services.)

The SFP also encountered challenges in engaging leaders to shape and coordinate a domestic violence policy-advocacy agenda and strengthening local and statewide coalitions that promote collaboration and support and sustain the domestic violence field in California. The foundation learned that in order for positive change to be sustainable, the field needed to self-organize; in particular, the state coalition needed to lead the effort to develop a shared and coordinated policy-advocacy agenda. For this to come about, it was necessary for the foundation and state coalition to clarify leadership roles and responsibilities within the Strong Field Project and beyond.

Lessons on Field Building

The SFP provided valuable lessons in designing, implementing, and exiting field-building initiatives. These lessons apply not only to philanthropic organizations, but also to organizations promoting social change through collaboration, direct organizing, advocacy, and service provision (Yu, Henderson-Frakes, & Nash, 2015).

Lessons on Designing Field-Building Initiatives

Learn by listening to those working in the field. The yearlong information-gathering, or listening, process that identified several key areas where the SFP should focus its efforts was critical to the success of the initiative. It meant that BSCF's efforts would go toward solving the most relevant problems and ensured that most participants in the initiative felt ownership of the project.

Develop a field-building logic model through a thoughtful, participatory process. When careful thinking and the perspectives of all stakeholders

go into the creation of a logic model for an initiative, goals and assumptions are made explicit; this allows the model to serve as an important reference point for ensuring initiative impacts.

A strengths-based approach is an effective tool for building a field. Rather than approaching field building as an effort to fix problems, those developing an initiative should affirm characteristics that can be the foundation for positive change. The SFP's strengths-based approach allowed for re-examining entrenched habits and behaviors rooted in a scarcity mindset and for reimagining the possibilities of a stronger field with new will and commitment. A strengths-based approach can also support collaboration, networking, and the creation of new and powerful narratives.

Logic models should be treated as living documents. While fidelity to a logic model facilitates the evaluation process and the integration of project components, the logic model itself should remain flexible to allow for nimble midcourse corrections.

Collaborative, participatory leadership generates buy-in and a sense of common purpose. Throughout the SFP, the coordinating committee and advisory group brought together leaders and partner organizations from both inside and outside the domestic violence field to collaboratively shape the course of the project. Similar leadership structures may be critical to the success of broad initiatives like the SFP.

Involving leaders from outside the field can help spur innovation. An important outcome of the SFP was the realization that while this field is well established, there is high value in engaging new partners around a shared vision to end domestic violence. Involving leaders from related fields and expertise spurs innovation and more holistic and longer-term solutions for domestic violence survivors.

Lessons on Implementing Initiative Components

The more strategic the thinking behind a logic model, the better the model can integrate the main programmatic components of an initiative and facilitate synergy and cross-program impact. Throughout the implementation of the SFP, the strategic

Rather than approaching field building as an effort to fix problems, those developing an initiative should affirm characteristics that can be the foundation for positive change. The SFP's strengths-based approach allowed for re-examining entrenched habits and behaviors rooted in a scarcity mindset and for reimagining the possibilities of a stronger field with new will and commitment. A strengths-based approach can also support collaboration, networking, and the creation of new and powerful narratives.

framework articulated in the logic model pushed the SFP coordinating committee members to think outside their respective areas of responsibility. They actively checked for tendencies to become siloed and searched for opportunities to integrate and cross-fertilize so that the individual SFP strategies could interact synergistically to strengthen the field as a whole.

Developing the capacities of diverse and emerging leaders in a field is a "high impact" investment. The success of the Leadership Development Program – regarded by many as the engine for change in building the field – demonstrates that preparing veteran as well as emerging domestic violence leaders to be catalysts for change generates significant dividends. As more and more alumni of the LDP brought new content, skills, and frameworks

Many fields are subject to sudden funding drop-offs in a fluctuating economy, changes in the public visibility of the field's core issues depending on local and national media coverage, and shifts in demographics. In an uncertain environment, leaders must be able to adapt and take on entirely new challenges.

back to their organizations, the LDP's influence on the domestic violence field expanded, building critical mass for positive change.

Leadership development is about more than skill development. The LDP demonstrated that the context and processes of leadership development are as important as its content. Leaders respond when they experience optimal conditions for learning and building trust, connection with other participants, and validation of their roles and experience.⁴ Tools and frameworks such as strengths-based leadership, adaptive leadership, peer-coaching circles, and focused attention to mission-driven decision making proved effective in growing the kinds of leaders a field needs to have maximal impact.

Focusing on the practice of adaptive leadership, rather than short-term technical fixes, leaves a field better able to manage change and confront challenges. Many fields are subject to sudden funding drop-offs in a fluctuating economy, changes in the public visibility of the field's core issues depending on local

and national media coverage, and shifts in demographics. In an uncertain environment, leaders must be able to adapt and take on entirely new challenges. Leaders trained in the skills of adaptive leadership are more likely to experiment, take risks, embrace failure as an opportunity for learning, and mobilize others to solve problems.

Financial support of organizations' capacity-building efforts achieves its greatest impact when it encourages networking and sharing among organizations. The OSG demonstrated that the growth experienced within separate organizations can be spread outward into the field when there are opportunities for peer learning and exchange. The OSG created such opportunities by bringing grantees together in regular convenings and by making Peer Exchange Learning Fund grants after the end of the OSG II grant period.

Some important forms of organizational strengthening are not quantifiable. The OSG grantees realized critical changes in culture, infrastructure, and practices. Furthermore, a subgroup of grantees emerged with tremendous potential for bringing positive change to the larger domestic violence field by disseminating the models and tools they developed under the OSG Program.

Building networks and sharing knowledge is an important component of any field-building initiative. Webinars, institutes, convenings, and other knowledge-sharing opportunities help those working in a field build skills, relationships, and connections, and to engage in critical conversations. Knowledge sharing also helps break down isolation, increase the accessibility of best and promising practices, and leverage the effects of the other initiative components through the sharing of programmatic "gems." The regional institutes showed promise as a means of exposing members of the field to field-strengthening activities, such as strengths-based leadership training.

Creating a safe and vital space where leaders in a field can reflect and have conversations about sensitive issues may be a prerequisite for positive change. In the domestic violence field, meaningful change could not occur without leaders asking hard questions about power, privilege, diversity, and

⁴It is important to note that long-term leadership development makes a qualitative difference, in addition to a quantitative one, for the domestic violence field. The long duration of the LDP experience – 18 months per cohort – allowed time for participants to build a strong community and a foundation of trust.

FIGURE 3 Building Field Leader-Driven Momentum

staff turnover. These frank discussions were made possible, in turn, by the foundation's explicit efforts to ensure that field leaders felt safe talking about their challenges and grievances and sharing their ideas for moving forward.

It is possible to mitigate the effects of leadership turnover by insuring the continuity of key factors. Leadership turnover is inevitable, and it can compromise the effectiveness of an initiative due to the loss of the knowledge, skills, and relationships gained through initiative activities. In the SFP, the effects of leadership turnover were mitigated by engaging multiple individuals from the same grantee organization, allowing leaders who left their organizations but stayed in the domestic violence field to continue as SFP participants, maintaining a consistent group of intermediary organizations, and institutionalizing the initiative's key learnings.

Lessons on Exiting From a Field-Building Initiative
A graceful exit from a large-scale field-building initiative requires early planning and the maintenance of transparency throughout. Blue Shield of California Foundation was mindful of the importance of

planning a respectful and responsible exit from the SFP. The foundation began planning its exit strategy early (midway through the five years of the project), and resolved to be transparent and firm about the sunset date of the initiative and never give mixed messages about its transition out of the funding role. These strategies should prove effective for any field-building initiative.

Respectful exits entail carefully listening to field leaders to sustain field-initiated momentum. To sustain the momentum, energy, and focus of field-building efforts, the foundation supported the development of a thought innovation lab, a movement and mobilization institute, and continued collaboration and networking activities. BSCF also laid the groundwork to transfer capacity-building tools and knowledge-management structures to the statewide domestic violence coalition. Steps such as these ensured that new knowledge, tools, and resources would remain broadly available to others within and outside of the field.

Exiting a field-building initiative does not mean exiting the field. The exit strategy can include efforts

to encourage and facilitate leadership within the field, to sustain the outcomes achieved by the initiative, and to continue a role as an effective partner, active learner, and willing leader in the field. For its part, for example, BSCF continues to make strategic grants to domestic violence agencies to advance its mission to end domestic violence. Grantee partners need to hear a clear message from the foundation about its continued commitment to the issue and presence in the field.

Conclusion

By strategically engaging leaders and organizations as partners in program design, the feedback process, and creating powerful spaces for new ways of thinking and leading through the SFP, Blue Shield of California Foundation tested long-held assumptions and entrenched patterns that have stalled the development of the domestic violence field. Overall, the SFP achieved much of its desired impact on the domestic violence field in California using a collaborative approach that meaningfully engaged leaders in the field. The insights on leadership, collaboration, and capacity building that the project has generated will continue to help strengthen the domestic violence field in California for the foreseeable future. It has justifiably captured the interest of domestic violence coalitions, leaders, and funders across the U.S. and may serve as a model for field-building initiatives across the nation.

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APPENDIX Strong Fields Logic Model

Key Ingredients for School Food Systems: An Evaluation of the Orfalea Foundation's School Food Initiative

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Keywords: School food, evaluation, foundation, rubric, mixed methods

Key Points

- In 2007, the Orfalea Foundation launched a nine-year strategic effort aimed at empowering public school districts in California's Santa Barbara County. The purpose was to implement food-service operations that offered nourishing meals and to create a culture that prioritized the health and wellness of children and families.
- The initiative, which involved 84 schools and more than 50,000 students, assessed the capacity of the county's school food services, including existing skill levels and equipment needs. Striving to tailor programming to specific needs, the foundation emphasized stakeholder involvement throughout the process.
- The foundation took a number of steps to understand the value and impact of the initiative, including working with Evaluation Specialists, an outside evaluator. This article shares best practices and lessons learned with organizations interested in learning from and replicating the initiative's efforts, and with policymakers and school districts interested in improving school food.

and an environment that helps them make educated food choices throughout their lives.

Santa Barbara County, located on the central coast of California, has a racially and socioeconomically diverse population of 425,000. The county is approximately 70 percent White/European American, two percent African American, one percent Native American, and five percent Asian American and Pacific Islander. About 43 percent are Hispanic or Latino, primarily of Mexican background. Approximately 32 percent of the county's 140,000 households have children under age 18; these children make up approximately 22 percent of the county's population. The median income for a family is \$54,000 and the county's per capita income is \$23,000. About nine percent of families and 14 percent of the total population live below the poverty line, including 16 percent of children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The county's 100-plus public schools serve 65,000 students, from transitional kindergarten through 12th grade, across 20 districts; 60.8 percent of them are eligible to receive free or reduced-price school meals as part of the National School Lunch Program. Among California's 58 counties, Santa Barbara is ranked 14th worst in meeting residents' daily food needs; 13.5 percent of its residents are food insecure and children make up 23.3 percent of that group. Infants and toddlers in food-insecure households are 30 percent more likely to have a history of hospitalization, 90 percent more likely to be reported in fair or poor health,

Introduction

In 2007, the Orfalea Foundation launched the School Food Initiative to improve the quality of school food and promote food literacy in the public schools of California's Santa Barbara County. The goal was to use school food and food-related systems as mechanisms to create a community of healthy children and families across the county

nearly twice as likely to have iron deficiency anemia, and two-thirds more likely to be at risk for developmental delays (Pringle, 2013).

The Orfalea Foundation contributed \$14.3 million in its efforts to improve the quality of food in the county's public schools between 2007 and 2015. The foundation initially conducted site-specific assessments in schools across the county to observe the capacity of food service and assess existing skill levels and equipment needs associated with improving school food. Striving to meet each school where it was and to tailor programming to specific needs, the foundation engaged with willing schools and districts, emphasizing stakeholder involvement throughout the process. Eighty-four schools, with a total of 50,561 students, had some level of interaction with the School Food Initiative over its nine years of programming.

The initiative was a strategic, multipronged effort aimed at empowering the school districts to implement and sustain food-service operations that offered nourishing, cooked-from-scratch meals, and to create a culture that prioritized the health and wellness of children and families. This effort entailed:

1. *Culinary Boot Camp.* Over five years, the initiative hosted 13-week intensive culinary trainings for 350 public school food-service personnel. Working alongside chef instructors and their peers, attendees practiced the skills required to integrate more scratch-cooking techniques into school kitchens.
2. *Technical support.* Following Culinary Boot Camp, it became clear that food-service workers needed ongoing support to adapt the training to the daily realities of school campuses. Four full-time chef instructors were assigned to designated school districts to offer hands-on support with adapting recipes, time management, procurement and processing of local produce, and maximizing the use of equipment. Developing the curriculum, preparing for and facilitating the training, and providing ongoing technical support represented the

The initiative was a strategic, multipronged effort aimed at empowering the school districts to implement and sustain food-service operations that offered nourishing, cooked-from-scratch meals, and to create a culture that prioritized the health and wellness of children and families.

foundation's most significant investment – a total of \$1.5 million.

3. *Kitchen equipment and infrastructure.* Over the past 50 years, schools stopped cooking from scratch and switched to highly processed, heat-and-serve food. In making this switch, schools lost both skilled workers and the cooking and dishwashing equipment necessary for preparing healthy meals. The School Food Initiative invited districts to apply for grants to purchase this equipment and to fund kitchen and cafeteria renovations; the funding ranged from \$10,000 for reusable dishware to \$1.1 million to help renovate a school district's central kitchen. These strategic investments increased scratch-cooking capacity, expanded procurement of locally grown produce that could be processed in-house, and increased student and adult participation in school meals. Grant agreements included stipulations designed to ensure that the investments drove initiative goals and were achievable for food-service operations. Most of these stipulations were targeted at menu changes such as removing flavored-milk options, reducing or eliminating processed cheese, increasing the variety of entree options, and maximizing the use of local, seasonal produce.

It is important to note that the initiative was launched just before an increase in national and regional attention to school food issues, and it significantly benefited from the resulting progressive policy reforms on the federal and state levels. This fortunate timing made it possible for the initiative to overcome some challenges and accelerate positive changes.

4. *Programming to promote food literacy at all grade levels.* The initiative supported a variety of school-based food-literacy programs in classrooms, cafeterias, and school gardens, including Junior Chef (involving 13,700 students), Chefs in the Garden (6,250 students), and Food Play (21,000 students), as well as Salad Bar Ambassadors and Food Clubs. Food Play was discontinued after post-program surveys revealed the “one off” aspect of the intervention did little to instill ongoing healthy eating behaviors. To better integrate the 36 installed school gardens with other food-literacy efforts, the Junior Chef program was wrapped into Chefs in the Garden, an interactive program based on five core lessons adaptable from kindergarten to sixth grade. Salad Bar Ambassadors – older elementary school students – helped younger students optimize salad bar selections and try new fruits and vegetables by “eating the rainbow.” The Food Club was an effort to facilitate feedback between high school students and the food-service director on breakfast and lunch offerings and to integrate more opportunities to learn about where school food comes from. These programs were designed to

connect students to the food they eat and the environment they live in, encouraging them to make healthy choices for their bodies and their world.

5. *Wellness committees.* The U.S. Department of Agriculture requires any school district receiving federal funding for meals to create a wellness policy that addresses food-related policies, nutrition education, and physical activity. In Santa Barbara County, districts complied with these regulations generally by downloading boilerplate policy templates, and teachers and students remained largely unaware that such policies existed. Initiative staff not only recognized the wellness policy as an opportunity to integrate and embody a culture of health and wellness on school campuses, but also saw it as instrumental in sustaining the work. Chef instructors helped existing wellness committees create individualized wellness policies and produce a user-friendly, one-sheet version for teachers and parents. In school districts without an active wellness committee, the instructors played a key role in forming committees that included administrators, parents, teachers, students, and program partners. Chef instructors also supported parent-led organizations in organizing healthy fundraisers, health fairs, and other educational opportunities.

The School Food Initiative was supported by an evolving staffing structure that started with one full-time manager and a consulting team and grew to a full-time director, a food-literacy manager, four chef instructors, and a number of independent subcontractors to provide subject-matter and programmatic expertise. The foundation also employed staff that supported the initiative in marketing and communications, public policy and advocacy, and program evaluation.

It is important to note that the initiative was launched just before an increase in national and regional attention to school food issues, and it significantly benefited from the resulting

progressive policy reforms on the federal and state levels. This fortunate timing made it possible for the initiative to overcome some challenges and accelerate positive changes.

The significant investment in the initiative has drawn to a close, and the foundation has taken a number of steps to understand its value and impact to share best practices and lessons learned with other funders and school communities. One of these steps was working with an outside evaluator, Evaluation Specialists (ES). This article is for organizations interested in learning from and replicating these efforts, and for policymakers and school districts interested in improving school food.

Mixed-Methods Evaluation Design

The evaluation attempted to answer the following questions, which were identified through discussion between ES and foundation staff:

- Which elements of the School Food Initiative were most valuable?
- How did the initiative influence each of the intended outcomes?
- How do school characteristics influence the relationship between the initiative and the intended outcomes?
- What were the barriers to and facilitators of successful initiative-related change?
- What do schools and districts believe they need to sustain these efforts?

Working with foundation staff, ES selected a mixed-methods retrospective evaluation approach and used data collected by the foundation prior to ES engagement as well data collected specifically for the evaluation. Four methods were chosen for this triangulation design, which is commonly used to “obtain different but complementary data on the same topic” (Creswell, 2011, p. 77).

Stakeholder Interviews

Using a semi-structured interview guide, ES conducted in-person or telephone interviews with 46 individuals engaged in the initiative. The guide was developed by ES to answer the overarching evaluation questions; the foundation reviewed it for context and clarity, and provided feedback that was incorporated into the final guide. ES identified sampling criteria and the foundation identified individuals who met that criteria.

Sixty-one individuals were invited to participate in in-depth, one-on-one interviews in the spring of 2015; 46 agreed. Chef instructors, district- and school-level leaders, and school food personnel – district food-service directors and school-level food-service staff – were among the interviewees. Conforming to the intentional sampling plan, the interviewees represented various regions of the county: those with low and high proportions of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; those serving various grade levels, with both large and small numbers of students; and schools with varying levels of engagement with the School Food Initiative. ES did not interview staff at schools that declined to participate in the initiative.

Before the interviews, ES electronically provided interviewees with an information sheet that discussed consent and asked each if there were any questions about the process or purpose of the study. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The lead evaluator created a codebook to capture responses directly related to the overarching evaluations, and coded each transcript against these initial codes via line-by-line coding. Then, in an inductive thematic coding process, additional codes were created as they emerged from the data via line-by-line coding by three evaluators, and the codebook was iteratively refined based on input from the full analysis team. To validate findings, one evaluator compared final themes against the notes and observations that were recorded during data collection.

Trends were assessed across all participants collectively, and across each respondent group independently, to enable evaluators to draw between-group comparisons. Major themes were

identified, as well as subthemes within the major themes and other minor themes. These subthemes and other minor themes were identified by examining data for additional patterns while also considering contradictions and negative evidence. Analyses were conducted with Dedoose.²

Survey of Cafeteria Managers

Evaluation Specialists designed and conducted a countywide online survey of cafeteria workers, using a method known to provide reliable estimates of short- and long-term change. This method, the “counterfactual self-estimation of program participants,” was developed by Mueller, Gaus, and Rech (Mueller, 2014) and positions evaluators to retroactively collect baseline perceptions better than would a traditional retrospective pretest.

The survey instrument was designed by ES to directly align to the overarching evaluation questions. The foundation reviewed it for context and clarity, and provided feedback that was incorporated into the initial draft instrument. To pilot test the instrument, select cafeteria managers were invited to take the survey and participate in a follow-up phone call with ES evaluators. Feedback collected from these phone calls was incorporated into the survey instrument to ensure content validity. The instrument was then finalized and launched electronically via SurveyMonkey.

All cafeteria managers who led school food efforts in the county’s public schools and who had some interaction with the School Food Initiative were invited to participate. Eighty-four schools, led by 67 cafeteria managers, fit those criteria. District supervisors were made aware of the survey and asked to encourage participation. ES invited cafeteria managers to take the survey and offered gift cards worth \$25 to \$30 (depending on the timing of the survey completion) in exchange for their participation. Forty-five cafeteria managers (67 percent) responded to the survey.

Evaluation Specialists analyzed this data using Generalized Estimating Equations³ (GEE), a regression procedure that applies the generalized linear model to multilevel data. (See Table 1.) GEE’s flexibility made it well suited to these analyses: they can be adapted to a variety of data types, including ordinal, linear, and binary distributions. GEE also avoids incorrect results due to misspecification of the covariance matrix; specifically, it is robust to violations of covariance matrix assumptions. The data analyst may also choose from a variety of assumptions, allowing the selection of the best-fitting matrix.

Analysis of Change in School- and District-Level Data

Foundation staff collected data on school food offerings from schools and districts throughout the School Food Initiative program cycle. ES compiled and analyzed these data, then assessed change using GEE as the statistical approach. (See Table 2.)

Development and Application of Evaluation Rubric

With Orfalea Foundation staff, ES designed and applied an evaluation rubric to guide the synthesis and interpretation of findings from the three data sources. This rubric was designed to provide definitions of initiative success using a four-point scale ranging from “not successful” to “highly successful,” and initiative impact on a four-point scale ranging from “not impactful” to “highly impactful.”

School Food Initiative Results

Most Valuable Elements

The School Food Initiative was composed of five programmatic activities. The evaluation indicates that all five contributed to improving school food systems, and that four activities were more successful than anticipated: Culinary Boot Camp, the kitchen equipment and infrastructure grants, on-site technical assistance, and the support offered to schools and districts to improve school culture. (See Figure 1.)

² A copy of the instrument can be found on the Orfalea Foundation website: <http://www.orfaleafoundation.org>.

³ A copy of the instrument can be found on the foundation website: <http://www.orfaleafoundation.org>.

FIGURE 1 Success of Initiative Activities

- Culinary Boot Camp was highly successful in improving the professionalism and culinary skills of food-service personnel and helping them understand the school food system and their role in it. They learned important professional content, including food-safety requirements, knife skills, recipe conversions, baking techniques, organization skills, and practices for enhancing team relationships. Food-service personnel also learned about their role in children's health and in school food reform efforts. Culinary Boot Camp and on-site technical assistance helped them understand federal and state regulations and expectations for school meals. Implementation practices ensured that expectations were similar within schools and across district lines.
- Grants for kitchen equipment and infrastructure were highly successful in funding specialized equipment and resources necessary for scratch cooking and its delivery. Study participants reported that the alignment of these grants with lessons learned at Culinary Boot Camp was instrumental in helping them adopt more scratch-cooking practices. Participants described these two initiative efforts as synergistic: the training increased intentionality and developed expertise, while the funding provided the materials necessary to apply that training to their work environment.
- On-site, targeted technical assistance by chef instructors was highly successful in improving systems thinking, compliance, and work-flow efficiency among food-service personnel, and helped them to balance department budgets. Chef instructors provided on-demand and ongoing assistance via phone, email, and in person. Support took a variety of forms, such as assisting with menu preparation and recipe development, side-by-side cooking, identifying ways to cut costs, eliciting student opinions, helping establish relationships with local vendors, advising on public relations and marketing efforts, and suggesting new practices (e.g., how to serve or plate food).
- Efforts to assist districts in establishing or improving wellness committees were highly successful in shifting school culture and creating wellness policies. Many of the policies crafted by these committees were aligned with federal and state guidelines, and were then adopted by the individual schools.
- Support of school-based food-literacy programs was successful in engaging students and staff. School gardens were specifically instrumental in helping students make the connection between where food comes from and the meals they are offered at school.

Influence on Intended Outcomes

The initiative impacted all seven intended outcomes and two unanticipated outcomes. It

FIGURE 2 Initiative Impacts

drove substantial improvements in the expertise and empowerment of school food personnel and in food-service facilities. (See Figure 2.) It also accelerated improvements in food-related school policies, the quality of school food, food literacy, students' food-related behaviors, and, to a lesser degree, community involvement in school food systems.

Although the initiative did not intend to influence other outcomes, findings indicate that teacher participation in school food and food literacy among families also improved. Overall and by a statistically significant margin, food-service personnel rated related outcomes as superior as a result of the initiative compared to what they would have been in its absence.

1. School food quality and what was offered to students was positively impacted. Schools provided healthier breakfasts and lunches by:
 - adding more fresh fruits and vegetables to menus;
 - offering salad bars more frequently;
 - serving more whole-muscle meats;
 - sourcing more organic and local goods;
 - using healthier, scratch-based recipes;
 - reducing use of processed ingredients;
 - offering flavored milk less frequently; and

- surpassing federal and state guidelines for sugar, salt, and fat in meals.

These changes reflect overall improvements in the food offered to students as a result of the School Food Initiative and the new standards implemented in 2010 through the federal Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act. In addition, more adults and more paid meals were served at lunch, indicating a perception of improved food quality. (See Figure 3.⁴)

2. Expertise and empowerment among school food personnel were impacted more positively than expected, which was seen as a particularly important outcome. As a result of the initiative, personnel were more likely to report:
 - feeling more professional and empowered;
 - understanding the importance of customer service in their work and seeing students as customers;
 - modeling principles of healthy eating and making positive changes in their personal food choices;
 - understanding and applying culinary business practices, including how to balance a budget;

⁴ These differences, and all differences presented in graphics throughout this article, are statistically significant at the standard criterion of $p < 0.05$.

FIGURE 3 Initiative Impacts on Food Quality as Perceived by Cafeteria Managers **FIGURE 4** Initiative Impacts on Expertise and Empowerment as Perceived by Cafeteria Managers **FIGURE 5** Initiative Impacts on School Food Facilities as Perceived by Cafeteria Managers **FIGURE 6** Initiative Impacts on School Policies and Culture as Perceived by Cafeteria Managers

- improved cooking and nutrition knowledge;
- increased self-confidence and a desire to institute change;
- greater mastery of knife skills; and
- being perceived more favorably by other school staff.

While school-level data were not collected to substantiate it, school food personnel reported that they were able to balance their department budgets, and in some cases create a surplus, by shifting to healthier food and being trained in business operations. (See Figure 4.)

3. School food-service facilities were positively impacted, even more than expected. By providing grants for kitchen equipment and full kitchen redesigns, the initiative positioned schools to prepare and deliver scratch-cooked foods in ways they otherwise could not have done and made cooking from scratch feasible and more efficient. (See Figure 5.)

4. Food-related school policies and culture were positively impacted. (See Figure 6.) The initiative supported the creation or expansion of school wellness committees to promote a culture of wellness and healthy eating and as a way to develop

FIGURE 7 Initiative Impacts on Food Literacy as Perceived by Cafeteria Managers **FIGURE 8** Initiative Impacts on Community Involvement as Perceived by Cafeteria Managers **FIGURE 9** Initiative Impacts on Student Behavior as Perceived by Cafeteria Managers

and implement policies aligned with best practices on food service, including more user-friendly cafeterias, nutrition programs such as the multistate Breakfast in the Classroom, and scheduling recess before lunch. These efforts promoted culture shifts that:

- supported wellness and healthy eating,
- raised the professionalism of food-service personnel,
- engaged school staff in school food and related efforts,
- led to plating meals for students in a thoughtful manner, and
- led to serving healthier foods at parent-teacher campus gatherings and school staff meetings.

5. Food literacy among students and staff was positively impacted. (See Figure 7.) Students were exposed to new foods as a result of the initiative, which improved their understanding of nutrition and food systems and the importance of adequate hydration. While little overt nutrition education occurred in the classroom or during school meal times, study participants reported that they believed their encouragement of students to taste new foods led to improvements in food literacy. Student involvement in food-literacy programming, particularly the school gardens, also led to improved understanding. This improvement was most common in schools serving younger students. School staff also increased their food literacy in these areas.

6. Community involvement and partnerships supporting school food, health, and wellness were positively impacted, though less than expected. (See Figure 8.) The initiative helped forge relationships among school districts, schools, and local partners such as farmers, and helped schools identify creative ways to engage parents. The initiative had less success than originally anticipated in encouraging community involvement

FIGURE 10 Relationship Between Student Need and Initiative Success as Perceived by Cafeteria Managers

How many students were willing to try new foods your team offered?

FIGURE 11 Relationship Between School Engagement and Initiative Success as Perceived by Cafeteria Managers

How many meal items (sauces, dressings, entrees) were prepared from scratch?

and creating partnerships, though it did not dedicate as much effort and resources to this goal as others.

- Students' food-related behaviors and choices were positively impacted. (See Figure 9.) Students are making healthier choices by selecting made-from-scratch entrees more often than unhealthy a la carte or vending options. Many study participants noted that students were choosing to try new foods, using the salad bar as a way to do so, and incorporating these healthier foods into their diets. Study participants familiar with high school environments reported that some students chose to eat healthier options on campus rather than going off-campus to eat at local fast food restaurants.

In addition to the seven intended outcomes, study participants identified two positive impacts to which the initiative contributed:

- School staff.** Teachers and administrators ate more food prepared at school following improvements in the quality of the meals, and were more likely to discuss healthy habits with students.
- Food literacy among families.** Initiative activities engaged families in creative ways; parents were exposed to healthy food concepts

and new food products through their children and through initiative activities.

School Characteristics and Relationship Between Initiative and Intended Outcomes

The School Food Initiative most influenced schools with high proportions of students in need and those highly engaged in the initiative. Highly engaged schools – those that were consistently engaged in initiative programming – showed greater need for support to improve food-related practices before participating in the initiative and benefitted as much or more than less-engaged schools (those that were only initially engaged and then did not continue engagement, or schools engaged only in one aspect of the programming). The same finding occurred for schools with high proportions of high-need students (i.e., above-average eligibility for free or reduced-priced lunch). (See Figure 10.) Cafeteria managers at schools with fewer high-need students reported that they believed students would be more willing to try new foods than those in higher-need schools regardless of participation in the initiative. Managers at both types of schools, however, agreed about students' willingness to try new foods in the presence of the initiative, suggesting that it was able to close the initial gap in outcomes.

Another pattern occurred was seen in schools with greater proportions of high-need students

TABLE 1 Survey Results From GEE Analysis

Counter-Factual (Imagined Pre-Test)		Factual (Post-Test)		Wald Chi-Square					Survey Question
M	SD	M	SD	Index (Time Point)	Interaction (Foundation Engagement)	Interaction (Need)	Interaction (Size)	Interaction (Level)	
School food personnel expertise and sense of empowerment									
2.89	0.84	3.45	0.65	27.46*	19.93*	5.01*	3.08	0.14	School staff treated me with respect.
2.62	0.95	3.12	0.83	21.44*	0.042	3.63	4.39*	21.62*	School staff treated me like I was highly skilled in my job.
2.54	0.99	3.18	0.83	16.54*	1.17	9.11*	1.63	4.69	School staff appreciated me and my role in improving children's health.
2.68	1.01	3.73	0.61	28.24*	4.34*	7.95*	0.19	1.22	How often were you encouraged to share ideas about improving the food or how food was prepared or distributed?
3.14	0.75	3.86	0.35	22.00*	3.18	4.65*	0.03	0.21	How often did you feel confident in your job?
3.24	0.79	3.84	0.37	14.14*	5.33*	1.74	0.16	0.01	How often did you feel a sense of self-respect in your job?
2.97	0.79	3.78	0.42	23.81*	5.78*	2.86	0.74	0.48	How often did you feel highly skilled in your job?
2.51	0.98	3.76	0.76	26.25*	3.18	2.94	0.09	1.06	How often did you use the skills you learned in Culinary Boot Camp in your job?
2.41	1.09	3.22	0.97	26.45*	5.12*	10.66*	3.47	1.25	How often did you feel you knew about culinary business operations (such as budgeting, management)?
2.86	1.08	3.89	0.32	19.58*	1.33	0.01	0.26	2.92	How often did you think about the importance of plating the food when serving meals to students?
2.57	0.87	3.24	0.85	25.97*	31.42*	3.76*	0.77	0.34	School and district leadership made me feel like I could make decisions related to my job.
Food-related school policies and culture									
1.91	0.73	2.29	0.96	36.42*	3.35	22.58*	0	0.13	How many of the food-service staff in your district had full-time positions and benefits?
2.97	0.93	3.51	0.8	5.07*	0.13	1.37	0.73	1.15	How often did you eat healthfully to be an example to students?
2.24	0.69	3	0.72	23.14*	0.24	12.37*	0.29	2.55	How many school staff ate healthfully to be a good example for students?
3.11	0.81	3.76	0.44	20.01*	0.264	5.7*	1.23	2.04	How often did you make a conscious effort to eat healthfully?
School food quality and what is served to students									
2.76	0.89	3.62	0.83	19.07*	1.64	3.3	0.14	0.33	How often were breakfast entrees healthy?
2.97	0.76	3.92	0.28	28.7*	2.98	1.89	0.06	0.42	How often were lunch entrees healthy?
2.06	0.86	3.22	0.89	30.89*	19.7*	6.51*	1.05	0.74	How many meal items (sauces, dressings, entrees) were prepared from scratch?
3.27	0.87	4	0	T=22.84 [†]	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	How often were students offered a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables?

TABLE 1 Survey Results From GEE Analysis (continued)

Counter-Factual (Imagined Pre-Test)		Factual (Post-Test)		Wald Chi-Square					Survey Question
M	SD	M	SD	Index (Time Point)	Interaction (Foundation Engagement)	Interaction (Need)	Interaction (Size)	Interaction (Level)	
School food quality and what is served to students									
3.13	0.92	3.96	0.19	19.16*	0.45	1.62	1.41	4.64	How often did scratch-baked items meet federal and state guidelines for sugar, salt, and fat?
2.58	0.51	2.79	0.48	7.01*	1.72	0.27	1.24	0.34	How much food offered at school was thrown away?
1.94	0.84	2.35	0.68	8.86*	8.65*	4.19*	0	0.17	How many school staff members purchased meals or meal items from the cafeteria?
Students' food-related behaviors and choices									
3.22	0.67	3.27	0.96	13.93*	0.03	5.46*	0.83	2.81	How many students chose to purchase or receive a la carte options?
2.3	0.85	3.05	0.91	12.7*	0.12	0	0.27	2.2	How many students chose to purchase or receive scratch-cooked entrees when they were offered?
2.32	0.71	2.97	0.76	12.11*	0.01	4.42*	1.59	0.04	How many students were willing to try new foods your team offered?
2.22	1	2.81	0.99	7.82*	0.59	1.35	0.82	6.12*	How many students chose to drink water instead of sugar-sweetened beverages?
2.21	0.64	2.62	0.83	6.09*	22.71*	0.21	0.15	1.04	How many full-price students participated in school-provided meals?
2.06	0.61	2.13	0.51	0.85	0.11	1.32	0.06	0.62	How many students bringing food from home brought healthy meals?
2.32	0.71	3.03	0.79	15.99*	0.01	2.61	0.63	0.11	How many students were excited to try new foods that your team offered?
Students' food literacy									
2.18	0.76	3.03	0.78	18.52*	2.4	7.48*	0.19	2.08	How many students understood the importance of making healthy food choices?
2.06	0.68	2.79	0.78	16.85*	2.81	0.92	1.64	0.14	How many students understood where their food comes from?
2.43	0.95	3.21	0.81	21.73*	0.24	2.21	0.58	0.08	How many students understood the need to drink plenty of water?
Community involvement and partnerships around school food									
1.94	0.84	2.75	0.87	19.02*	0.14	1.07	1.71	2.06	How much of the food you served at school came from local farmers and producers?
1.84	1.02	2.15	1.13	22.55*	14.42	0.73	1.29	3.45	How often did your school invite parents to the school to learn about or taste school food?

Responses were reported on a four-point scale, from low to high.

* = <0.05

¹ All schools rated this a 4 ("most of the time") regardless of school need, school size, school type, and engagement level. There are, therefore, no relationships between these variables and these outcomes.

TABLE 2 Results of Foundation-Collected Data From GEE Analysis

School-Level Output Variables Grouped by Outcome Domains (n = 47)								
	Timepoint							
	Baseline		Post		Overall Change			
Output	Mean/%	SD	Mean/%	SD	X ² (2)	p	d ^(a)	
Students' food literacy								
Food-related school policies and culture								
Do the kitchen and cafeteria compost kitchen waste and food scraps? (percentage answering yes)	19.4		15.6			0.66	-0.15	
Are disposable utensils, trays, and other dinnerware used in the cafeteria? (percentage answering yes)	66.7		80.4			0.18	0.32	
School food quality and what is served to students								
How many times per month								
... are whole grains served?	11.47	15.66	19.02	3.56	10.12	0.0	0.43	
... are vegetarian entrees offered at lunch?	9.4	6.79	7.69	5.14	1.77	0.18	-0.27	
... are scratch-made sauces offered?	3.06	2.57	4.59	4.52	3.62	0.06	0.4	
... are scratch-made dressings offered?	3.39	5.97	1.57	1.49	4.06	0.04	-0.3	
... is dessert offered at lunch?	1.51	4.55	0.4	1.45	2.49	0.11	-0.23	
How many times per week								
... is a salad bar offered?	4.12	1.73	4.47	1.39	1.07	0.3	0.24	
... is processed cheese served at lunch?	3.27	3.3	5.08	15.15	0.56	0.45	0.12	
... is pizza served at lunch?	2.03	1.53	2.38	2.58	0.46	0.5	0.16	
... is flavored milk offered at lunch?	0.09	0.44	0.0	0.0	2.36	0.13	-0.2	
How many								
... lunch entrees are offered to high school students each day?	1.09	2.41	1.32	3.78	0.06	0.8	0.17	
... lunch entrees are offered to elementary school students each day?	1.36	1.08	1.36	0.66	0.0	1.0	0.0	
... lunch entrees are offered to middle school or junior high school students each day?	1.5	2.65	1.58	2.3	0.02	0.9	0.11	
Are a la carte food and beverages offered at lunch? (percentage answering yes)	20.7		14.3			0.48	-1.07	
School food-personnel expertise and sense of empowerment								
How many food-service workers								
... demonstrate mastery of knife skills after Culinary Boot Camp?	2.13	2.12	3.74	2.11	10.07	0.02	0.64	
... express desire to institute achievable improvements?	2.21	2.49	3.42	1.99	5.26	0.02	0.39	
... request to do more scratch cooking after Culinary Boot Camp?	1.94	2.14	3.64	2.1	10.58	0.0	0.67	
... report making changes in personal behavior after Culinary Boot Camp?	2.0	2.05	3.45	2.01	9.65	0.0	0.54	
How many days per week do food-service workers wear chef coats?	0.98	1.62	1.26	2.12	0.49	0.49	0.17	
How many times per month are Culinary Boot Camp materials being referenced?	7.59	8.26	7.71	7.51	0.0	0.95	0.02	
What percentage of fresh produce is processed in-house each week?	52.39		43.98			0.22	0.0	
School food-service facilities								
Does the kitchen have a working white board? (percentage answering yes)	29.60		58.70			0.02	0.52	
Students' food-related behaviors and choices								
Community involvement and partnerships around school food								
Teacher participation in school food								
How many adults are served at lunch each day?	4.61	3.85	5.75	5.25	1.25	0.26	0.21	
Family food literacy and practices								

TABLE 2 Results of Foundation-Collected Data From GEE Analysis (continued)

District-Level Output Variables Grouped by Outcome Domains (n = 9)							
	Timepoint						
	Baseline		Post		Overall Change		
Output		SD	Mean/%	SD	X ² (2)	p	d ^(a)
Students’ food literacy							
Food-related school policies and culture							
Is the food-service department profitable? (percentage answering yes)	85.7		87.5			0.92	0.03
School food quality and what is served to students							
How many times per month							
... are scratch-made sauces offered?	6.19	7.19	27.11	40.1	2.1	0.15	0.51
... are scratch-made dressings offered?	2.0	2.71	3.89	6.21	0.56	0.46	0.51
... are canned fruits served?	2.5	3.16	0.89	0.33	2.45	0.12	-0.51
... are vegetarian entrees offered at lunch?	20.81	43.34	11.44	9.02	0.4	0.53	-0.25
... is dessert offered at lunch?	4.3	8.79	3.78	6.46	0.02	0.9	-0.18
... are Culinary Boot Camp recipes used on the lunch menu?	12.33	13.58	10.22	7.19	0.13	0.72	-0.32
How many times per week							
... is processed cheese served at lunch?	8.43	6.92	10.67	24.25	0.06	0.81	0.08
... is a salad bar offered?	3.88	1.81	5.22	1.09	3.56	0.06	0.73
... is flavored milk offered at lunch?	1.71	2.36	0.67	1.66	1.09	0.3	-0.66
How many entrees are offered at lunch to elementary school students?	2.38	3.16	2.89	4.22	0.08	0.78	0.41
What percentage of meats served per week are whole muscle versus processed?	5.0	7.46	9.67	5.74	1.88	0.17	0.65
School food-personnel expertise and sense of empowerment							
What is the average food cost per lunch?	\$1.20	0.18	\$1.36	0.38	0.98	0.32	0.39
What percentage of fresh produce is processed in-house each week?	50.0		71.78		1.2	0.27	0.01
School food-service facilities							
Students’ food-related behaviors and choices							
How many							
... free and reduced-price meals are served at lunch each day?	1,536.86	1,624.97	1,943.71	2,448.15	0.13	0.71	0.33
... paid meals are served at lunch each day?	663.88	695.25	845.50	860.36	0.22	0.64	0.81
Community involvement and partnerships around school food							
Teacher participation in school food							
How many adults are served at lunch each day?	17.29	20.25	57.0	81.29	1.57	0.21	0.5
Family food literacy and practices							

^(a) Cohen's d: is an effect size reflecting the magnitude of change. Interpretation: 0.20=small effect, 0.50=medium effect, 0.80=large effect.

¹ Pringle, 2013.

and in schools with greater engagement. Using preparation of meal items from scratch as an example, cafeteria managers in higher-need schools presumed that some outcomes would have been worse without the initiative. (See Figure 11.) However, they then reported that the initiative helped to not only close this gap, but to surpass lower-need schools. This pattern also occurred when comparing schools with greater versus lesser engagement. Specifically, cafeteria managers in more highly engaged schools presumed things would have been worse without the initiative, but saw outcomes as better with it. These findings suggest that school context may be important to consider in program planning, and that schools may benefit from tailored programming.

Barriers to Initiative-Related Change

- *Initial resistance to change.* Students, school food personnel, and other key stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, and administrators) often initially resisted efforts related to healthier school food and eating. The foundation occasionally met leaders who did not share its vision, supported the status quo, or actively impeded reform. This perspective was unpredictable and could change the course of the work swiftly, directly impacting the foundation's ability to meet predetermined outcomes. Initiative staff therefore found that working with stakeholders already invested in the work was instrumental to making progress, and that other stakeholders gradually gained interest after observing success.
- *Rigidity of federal and state guidelines and related policies.* Initiative staff perceived regulations as overly restrictive, often stifling creativity in food-service departments and thereby limiting scratch cooking. There was some tension between the realities faced by school food personnel and the ideals of the initiative.
- *Cafeteria infrastructure.* Schools needed more volunteers and improved infrastructure to handle the increased demand that resulted from improved school food.
- *Employment practices.* Low pay, few benefits, inflexible schedules, and low status among other school staff did not reflect the importance of the work of school food personnel in influencing student health.
- *Lack of resources dedicated to program evaluation.* At the onset of the initiative, the Orfalea Foundation did not have the staff to prioritize program evaluation. Metrics of success were identified three years into the initiative and data collection started at that time. Data collection was also a shared responsibility among the five chef instructors, which made it challenging to standardize the process.

Facilitators of Initiative-Related Change

The initiative was multipronged and aligned to personal and community beliefs. This approach to addressing a systemic problem helped everyone stay focused on the ultimate goal – improving children's lives by improving school food.

- *Support and involvement from key stakeholders.* One of the primary contributors to the success of any large-scale systems-reform initiative is leadership. Support from district leaders facilitated changes in school food systems and led to sustained investment. The initiative owes some of its success to their experience, passion, and integrity. Initiative staff invited these stakeholders to participate in the programming early in the process and kept them abreast of shifts and progress.
- *Personal belief systems.* Alignment between study participants' personal belief systems and the values of the initiative helped participants persist and spur change at the school and district levels.
- *Incremental change.* Being encouraged and willing to make changes slowly, rather than expecting immediate and monumental change, facilitated success. One district, for example, piloted the healthier cooking practices at two schools, learned that it was able to do so while still balancing department

budgets, and then rolled the practices out to other schools.

- *Aligned community attention.* Communitywide interest in and nationwide attention to healthier living assisted with efforts to effect change at the school and district levels.
- *Shared skills and beliefs about the importance of healthy food.* Training school food personnel together during Culinary Boot Camp led them to hold similar views of the value of healthier cooking and share a comparable level of expertise in scratch cooking.

Sustaining Initiative Efforts

Many study participants expressed optimism about sustaining the initiative's efforts. The new way of working is widely seen as the "new normal" and practices for cooking healthier foods are now systematized and part of the routine. Study participants reported feeling that these practices were no longer daunting or seen as cumbersome; rather, they were ingrained in school culture and community expectations. Participants also reported that since they are personally tied to the work and believe in its value, they are confident that neither they nor other staff instrumental to the work will allow progress to unwind.

Schools and districts also said that sustaining the initiative's benefits would be more likely with further support from funders or initiative partners in several areas:

- *Ongoing professional development.* Staff training, particularly for new school food personnel but also for teachers, was an expressed priority in order to respond to inevitable staff turnover. Resources for future training can offer substantial returns; training builds concrete skills while spreading the vision of school food reform.
- *School gardens.* Study participants recognized the value of the school gardens in developing food literacy among students, and they

Many study participants expressed optimism about sustaining the initiative's efforts. The new way of working is widely seen as the "new normal" and practices for cooking healthier foods are now systematized and part of the routine.

argued that additional personnel and funding are needed to continue these efforts.

- *Wellness committees.* Additional support would help the committees continue to implement food-related policies, retain focus on efforts to improve school food and healthy school environments, and raise funds.
- *Policy and standards.* Districts would benefit from improved compensation and working conditions for school food personnel, and from state and federal standards for school meals that are better aligned with the realities of the school environment and the benefits of scratch cooking.

Limitations

This study has three primary limitations. First, it relied on recall and perception to answer questions about success and impact. The mixed-methods retrospective design of the evaluation, however, allows for triangulation of results, thereby establishing validity of the findings. Second, considerable turnover among School Food Initiative staff in its early years limited institutional knowledge of initial practices; in addition, resources for evaluation were not dedicated at inception of the effort, depriving the evaluators of reliable baseline data. Third, initiative staff intentionally chose to focus on Santa Barbara County's public schools, rather than all

The school districts that at first hesitated to embrace healthier, scratch-cooked meals are now their greatest champions, and some required very little financial investment to facilitate that level of buy-in. Foundations often target investment to schools with the highest percentage of low-income, underserved students, but this should not be the only criteria. The level of advocacy from leadership, parent engagement, and the existing culture of health and wellness should also be assessed to determine the best entry point for initiative involvement.

schools (e.g., charter and private), thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings.

Conclusion

The School Food Initiative has accelerated and supported change in personnel professionalism, improved the quality of school meals, and increased students' exposure to and acceptance of healthy foods. School food personnel were better trained in and equipped for healthy-cooking techniques, and school culture and policies were more aligned to the goal of improving student health. Further, the initiative's impacts seem to be as relevant to high-need students as they are to those from families with higher socioeconomic status, although they may have

had greater influence on high-need students, young students, and those in schools that were more heavily engaged with the initiative. These findings indicate that future similar efforts have a strong likelihood of positive impact within a variety of contexts and settings, particularly those serving higher-need students. Study participants expressed a commitment to supporting healthy-eating efforts and sustaining positive changes for the good of students and school food personnel.

Several promising practices were identified throughout the course of program implementation and as a result of this evaluation. Promising practices from program implementation draw upon lessons learned as initiative staff reflected on their work. Promising practices that surfaced from the evaluation were taken from trends related to the initiative elements that were most and least successful; the impacts that did and did not manifest as a result of this work; the barriers and facilitators to implementation; and the requests for additional support. These may inform the efforts of other organizations to conduct or fund similar work, preemptively overcome barriers to implementation, and sustain change.

Promising Practices Identified by the Foundation

- *Systematically reflect.* When bringing on new staff or leadership of the program or initiative, take the opportunity to re-examine your theory of change. This will build buy-in and support for your direction as well as provide the opportunity to make revisions and ensure that you are staying on track. Periodically re-examining your theory of change will also prevent discrepancies and gaps when conducting your summative evaluation.
- *Be transparent.* When evaluating a specific grantee's performance (i.e., change in behavior and values), it is important to share the metrics by which they will be assessed. Even more valuable is to create a shared theory of change and evaluation

framework that the grantee can then incorporate into its organizational culture or align with its strategic plan. This creates a culture of continuous improvement that benefits both the funder and grantee, and builds a pathway to sustainability.

- *Be more strategic about how, when, and why you invest.* The school districts that at first hesitated to embrace healthier, scratch-cooked meals are now their greatest champions, and some required very little financial investment to facilitate that level of buy-in. Foundations often target investment to schools with the highest percentage of low-income, underserved students, but this should not be the only criteria. The level of advocacy from leadership, parent engagement, and the existing culture of health and wellness should also be assessed to determine the best entry point for initiative involvement. It is worth the effort to build engagement slowly, because the returns over the long term are that much greater.
- *Invest in evaluation.* Foundations should allocate sufficient resources, staffing capacity, and expertise to evaluation. This investment will support the integrity and rigor of the data collection and analysis processes, therefore improving the credibility of the evaluation findings. Furthermore, investment in evaluation provides the opportunity to share findings and recommendations with other foundations and communities, thereby leveraging the impact of investments and minimizing duplication of efforts.

Promising Practices Identified by the Evaluation

- *Remain up-to-date on the school food climate and related regulations.* School food quality is a trending issue nationally, which can mean frequent shifts in regulations and expectations. Improving school food requires understanding school politics and processes. Understand the realities that school food personnel face, and operate within them.

Consider a multipronged approach to supporting school-food personnel: they are critical to improving school food.

- *Create an overarching vision and strategic plan.* A thoughtful and connected plan helps everyone stay focused on the ultimate goal of improving children's lives by improving school food. Such a plan also helps stakeholders weather challenges related to change, guides storytelling and marketing activities, and includes a sustainability framework.
- *Recognize the importance and contribution of school food personnel in improving children's health and well-being.* Include this as a topic in trainings. Work to improve the employment policies and professionalism of this crucial workforce.
- *Consider a multipronged approach to supporting school-food personnel: they are critical to improving school food.* Provide them with training, funding for tools, follow-up support, and a peer-support mechanism. When equipped with the necessary skills, equipment, infrastructure, and peer-accountability system, they can make improvements stick.
- *Get stakeholders on board early and hold them accountable for change.* Engaging parents, administrators, teachers, students, coaches, and school food personnel before launching an initiative to improve school food increases the likelihood of success. Doing so prior to rollout can create buy-in and make implementation easier. Explore ways to expand outreach to families and communities to sustain changes made within school walls.
- *Engage first with the willing.* Before beginning a school food initiative, identify readiness in stakeholders and in the community.

There can be ups and downs even in a program with many successes, so develop and foster a sense of tenacity in your stakeholders. Some food-service departments saw a dip in revenue in the initial implementation of scratch-cooking techniques, but later became profitable as a result of perseverance and creativity. In the end, participation in their meals programs increased.

Initiate activities first with those who demonstrate an inclination toward food-related efforts. Consider implementing activities with younger students first; when students are provided scratch-cooked school meals from a young age, they can grow up in food-literate school environments and expect healthy meals.

- *Consider context.* Consider individual schools as part of program planning, perhaps tailoring initiative activities to various subgroups. There is some indication that this work is particularly effective with schools that are highly engaged and schools with higher-need students.
- *Embrace change and start small.* Help stakeholders embrace change rather than fear it. The work of improving school food is often perceived as daunting, but with a coalition of supporters can be easier than anticipated and get easier with time. Recognize that incremental change is part of the plan and thus worthwhile.
- *Engage policymakers and advocates.* Policy-level issues affect on-the-ground conditions for school food initiatives. Be prepared to discuss policy-level issues with key stakeholders who can support or impede change. Discuss the value of school food personnel – in particular, ways to demonstrate their value through better compensation, ongoing professional development, and greater respect. Highlight the unintended consequences of school food regulations in discussions with activists and policymakers.
- *Develop and sustain persistence.* There can be ups and downs even in a program with many successes, so develop and foster a sense of tenacity in your stakeholders. Some food-service departments saw a dip in revenue in the initial implementation of scratch-cooking techniques, but later became profitable as a result of perseverance and creativity. In the end, participation in their meals programs increased.

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Partnerships, Paradigms, and Social-System Change

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Key Points

- Social systems structures stem from underlying paradigms that are made up of beliefs, perspectives, and assumptions. Changing paradigms is a powerful way to change social systems. Such change is difficult and old paradigms keep pulling systems back to their former state.
- This article examines three types of partnerships that focus on these deep structures and paradigms, and that go beyond implementing a project or initiative to create fundamental, lasting change in the underlying beliefs, perspectives, and assumptions on which such systems are grounded.
- The functions of each type – project-focused, formal-systems-focused, and community-grounded partnerships – are identified, along with the ways each partnership maintains attention to paradigms and systems thinking. The configuration suggests ways for funders and initiative and organizational leaders to enrich their capacity to bring about systemic change within communities.

Introduction

Communities frequently confront issues entangled in a web of multiple social systems and underlying assumptions, perspectives, and beliefs. Managing this complexity can seem overwhelming. Consequently, communities often narrow their focus to a few manageable projects in order to make some movement on their issues.

But imagine that there is a way into this complexity, a way to understand and leverage fundamental change in these complex systems to produce more lasting change. In this article,

we invite you to imagine partnerships that go beyond implementing a project or initiative to creating fundamental change in social systems. By fundamental change, we mean a change in the underlying beliefs, perspectives, and assumptions on which the systems are grounded.

System-change expert Donella Meadows (2008) identified paradigm change as one of the highest leverage points for systemic change, a shift that influences entangled problems in a fundamental and lasting way. However, systems have a tendency, as Brenda Zimmerman (2015) phrases it, to “snap back” to their prior state and way of thinking. This happens, Meadows argues, because unrecognized, deeply embedded assumptions pull the system back to its former state. All parts of the system stem from the existing paradigm. Thus, change is needed throughout the system to prevent it being pulled back into the old paradigm.

The Importance of a Partnership Focus

We have been involved in the formation, support, and evaluation of partnerships over several decades. We have seen that partnerships all too often limit their role to implementing a project and declaring success. Thus, partnerships miss their potential to address lasting systemic change.

Over these same years, research and evaluation have repeatedly identified the importance of leadership, shared vision, mutual respect, trust, legitimacy, and representation within partnerships (Fawcett, Foster, & Francisco, 1997; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Mattessich, Murray-Close, & Monsey, 2004; Pollard, 2005; Varda, 2010). For example, the Wilder Collaboration Factors

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Inventory (Mattessich, et al., 2004) assesses partnerships on these and other elements. Kania & Kramer (2011) have posited five conditions – common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations – necessary for collective impact to gain significant results. As valuable as these conditions and frameworks are, they do not necessarily reach the deep systemic structures that bring about fundamental social-system change.

In this article, we offer a partnership configuration with three types of partnerships that focus on the deep structures and paradigms that shape social systems. The configuration provides funders, initiative leaders, and organizational leaders with ideas on adjusting existing partnerships and creating new ones to enrich their capacity to bring about systemic change within communities. We conclude with concrete actions that funders and leaders can take to stimulate partnerships committed to deep systemic change.

The basic argument for partnerships is well known. Complex issues, such as prevention of child neglect and abuse, involve more than one organization or service system. Typically, each of those (e.g., health, education, social services) is looking at only one piece of the big issue. But for individuals, families, and communities, these issues are not divided into discrete parts – they

are part of a whole and interconnected life. When different organizations address different aspects of an issue in a segmented and segregated way, the issue is not seen as holistic and change efforts are often ineffective. By joining in partnership, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, funders, businesses, and stakeholders can seek to create a synergy where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

We recently evaluated a national initiative that sought to address child abuse and neglect by changing the underlying paradigm. The initiative focused on the interaction between service providers and parents and the ways that the structure of social systems supported that interaction at community and state levels. The initiative included partnerships as well as evidence-based practice models. This evaluation, coupled with our past experiences, gave us deeper insight into the significance and challenges of changing the underlying beliefs, perspectives, and assumptions on which social systems are based. To get partnerships to attend to paradigm shifts, we saw that they needed to be designed in a way that keeps the focus on the connection between the paradigm and the structures of the social systems.

Partnerships alone are unlikely to create a paradigm shift. If intentionally designed to support a paradigm shift, however, they can be a powerful component of the change process. Partnerships that use systems thinking and recognize the importance of changing an underlying paradigm:

- Provide a place for collective, critical reflection on the often-unstated beliefs, perspectives, and assumptions that underlie individual and organizational actions.
- Consider concretely how these beliefs, perspectives, and assumptions play out in language, interactions, and relationships.
- Recognize the interconnections and the need for coherence across the social domains of individuals, families, organizations, agencies, and the community.

- Reground communities in their core values.
- Take action to reconfigure social systems to align with and support the desired values of the community.

These partnerships are structured with careful attention to both their position within the local web of system structures and the systemic implications of a paradigm shift. Failing to so structure the partnership can result in one that is locked in the past or stuck with superficial changes, rather than one engaged in addressing the consequences of changes in demographic, technological, environmental, and economic conditions. Many of these social changes call into question the boundaries of formal systems such as health, education, and criminal justice. Existing boundaries can limit interactions among people involved in these systems. Accommodating the existing boundaries may cause partnerships to focus on immediate symptoms rather than dealing with underlying fundamental beliefs, perspectives, or assumptions that perpetuate the issues.

Three Types of Partnerships Focused on a Paradigm Shift

We suggest that partnerships that contribute to changing underlying paradigms be attuned to the desires of those partners that will be central actors in the paradigm shift. These members need to be guiding the partnership: they lead the changes with support and assistance from other partners.

Our experiences led us to distinguish three types of partnerships, based on their focus: project-focused partnerships, formal-systems-focused partnerships, and community-grounded partnerships. The makeup of each type differs according to the structures or interconnections the partnership aims to address. The type of stakeholders may be the same in each partnership, but different concentrations of stakeholders or different people (e.g., service providers, clients, executives) represent the same organization. Any of these partnerships may be functioning at a given time.

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Just as organizations work together in a partnership, partnerships engage in networking. They leverage one another's work to affect the complex web of social systems. One evaluation referred to these partnership networks as a "partnet" (Parsons, Hammond, & Lupe, 1998). Working together to bring about change, partnerships adapt to one another; to their varying focuses, roles, and functions; and to the changing conditions in the community. The three types of partnerships help provide a balance between the formal and informal structures of the community. In its own way, each type can help keep the focus on the deep values of the paradigm.

For each type of partnership, we identify the functions and roles of the partnership and the ways the partnership maintains attention to paradigms and systems thinking. We will use examples from the child-abuse initiative for which we served as cross-site evaluators.¹ In that initiative, three national organizations focused on the well-being of children and families were funded by the federal Children's Bureau to develop and oversee an initiative in four locations across the U.S.² We draw from this experience to illustrate how partnerships with different emphases take action that strengthens the paradigm shift in their locations.

¹ See Parsons, Jessup, & Moore, 2014.

² See *The Journal of Zero to Three*, September 2014, for additional information on this initiative. The theme of the issue is "Exploring New Paradigms for Evaluation and Service Delivery: The National Quality Improvement Center on Early Childhood."

Each site implemented a carefully designed research project in which service providers worked with individual parents and carried out an evaluation structured to assess changes for the parents. Each site's project was based on the Protective Factors Framework (see sidebar) and was implemented with a different population: parents with low incomes served by a major hospital in a large city in the Northeast; parents of children with disabilities across a state in the South; pregnant women in substance-abuse treatment centers in the Midwest; and new parents involved in a home visitation program within a community-based support structure in the Northwest.

Protective Factors Framework

The Protective Factors Framework, developed by Strengthening Families at the Center for the Study of Social Policy (Brown, 2014), is an approach that expresses a paradigm shift. The shift is from service providers focusing on problems – risk factors – that families are facing to providing services to help support a family around specific protective factors that position them to address the problems in their own lives and to move through stressful times and circumstances with greater resilience. The five interconnected factors are:

- parental resilience,
- social connections,
- knowledge of parenting and child development,
- concrete support in times of need, and
- social-emotional competence of children.

There are multiple implications of this paradigm shift:

- All families need these protective factors in their lives, not just those presenting with problems.
- Families “own” the resources to face their difficulties.
- Both risk and protective factors are embedded into complex, interconnected systems that families navigate across all aspects of their lives.

The Protective Factors Framework points to five conditions that, when present in a family, provide protection against the risks and stresses that are considered to increase the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. The framework shifts the focus of social systems from reducing risk factors related to child abuse and neglect as its underlying paradigm to one of supporting parents in building protective factors to encourage optimal child development even when families live in risky situations. This paradigm shift alters how service providers view families and how parents approach problems in their lives. This shift ripples through the complex landscape of multiple formal systems and the community as a whole.

Because the Protective Factors Framework is an approach to working with parents based on a paradigm shift, and not a specific intervention, it can be implemented in conjunction with a variety of interventions. Each site was using an evidence-based practice (e.g., the High Fidelity Wraparound process) that had been previously tested in other situations.

Each site was required to involve an existing partnership to support the work and to address changes needed in the larger social systems relevant to their work. The partnerships varied in structure, focus, and membership. The national initiative leaders required an existing partnership because they were well aware of the time it takes to develop a new partnership. And, partners that worked together previously had established the trusting relationships that would provide a foundation for more in-depth attention to the paradigm, and were in a position to connect to larger ways in which the Protective Factors Framework might be used to support the underlying paradigm change in their organizations and community.

Each site's evaluators focused on parental-outcome data and project implementation at the parent and service-provider level. For the cross-site evaluation, we focused on the work of the partnerships, did secondary analysis of the parental-outcomes data, and drew on theories of complex systems to look for patterns across sites.

Throughout the remainder of this article, we draw on our findings and experiences with the partnerships within the initiative. The partnerships did not specifically have each of the three types of partnerships that we describe here; rather, the configuration of these three types represents our interpretation of how to increase systemic change in support of a shift in an underlying paradigm.

Project-Focused Partnerships

Functions and Roles

Many initiatives funded by foundations involve implementing new ways of providing services and/or interacting with those being served to see if and how a particular project works in a given location. When a project involves more than one organization, a partnership is often needed to ensure that it can actually be carried out as designed. Too often, there is limited focus on the paradigm underlying the project; usually the project is assumed to be congruent with the underlying paradigm or system structure. However, if a project is based on a shift in the underlying system paradigm, it is important to intentionally attend to the paradigm shift.

Attention to Paradigms and Systems Thinking

A project-focused partnership that is grounded in systems thinking and contributing to a paradigm shift has the following characteristics:

It supports project implementation while reinforcing the paradigm being addressed. Partners individually and collectively assist in ensuring that the project is implemented in a way that reinforces the fundamental change that the project is intended to address. In the work with pregnant women in substance-abuse treatment, a systemic shift away from the old paradigm of risk factors and toward the new paradigm of protective factors became possible as substance-abuse treatment workers and the state-level program director realized that reports to the state could be structured around the Protective Factors Framework. By using the framework, treatment providers would maintain a focus on protective factors and state leadership would tie accountability to protective factors.

Because the Protective Factors Framework is an approach to working with parents based on a paradigm shift, and not a specific intervention, it can be implemented in conjunction with a variety of interventions. Each site was using an evidence-based practice (e.g., the High Fidelity Wraparound process) that had been previously tested in other situations.

It helps project implementers adapt the work to their particular situations. The systemic context of the project cannot be ignored. In each of the four projects in our example, the partnership was attentive to the child welfare system and other systems in which their work was embedded. Partners in two sites needed a strong familiarity with the Early Intervention system that provides services for infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities. One of these sites also needed knowledge of the substance-abuse treatment system represented among the partners. Another site needed familiarity with the local systems in place to help families deal with income and food insecurity. Understanding the project within these larger social systems helped partners consider which existing systems and structures that are close to the service providers – and, in our example, parents – might be influenced by the new paradigm. It also helped them consider whether they needed additional partners or access to additional perspectives.

It increases support for the paradigm shift. The partnership provides insight into ways that project implementers can increase support for the paradigm shift and adapt to changes being created by the project. By requiring training related to

Throughout the project, the partnership formally reflects on both implementation and the paradigm that it is expected to support. It is important both to zoom in for a close look at the project and its implementation and to zoom out for a wider view of how the project work is fitting with the larger shift.

the Protective Factors Framework for the Early Interventionists who worked with parents of children with disabilities, a key partner helped ensure that the focus on the framework would continue. Partners worked through this important issue during, rather than after, project implementation, and agreed on adjustments in implementation and evaluation that increased the likelihood of a lasting change in Early Intervention training, a key system structure.

It periodically reflects on the bigger purpose of the project. Throughout the project, the partnership formally reflects on both implementation and the paradigm that it is expected to support. It is important both to zoom in for a close look at the project and its implementation and to zoom out for a wider view of how the project work is fitting with the larger shift. In the annual site visits, the cross-site evaluation team and project director met with each partnership and asked questions to stimulate this reflection, such as: Are front-line workers adequately supported and trained to make the paradigm shift? What emerging issues must be addressed to support the shift? As change occurs, what is needed to sustain the paradigm shift for families, service providers, and their agencies? Each partnership also had other ways of doing such reflection.

It thinks in new ways about sustainability. The partnership considers how the work fits into the community and the larger system. It also considers different approaches to adhering to the paradigm, such as embedding the principles of the project in other work. For example, one of the three national organizations refocused its training emphasis from the prevention of child abuse and neglect to the nurturing of child well-being. For one of the project sites, sustainability involved making the Protective Factors Framework the organizing framework around the partners' collective work as well as much of the individual organization's work. Thus, even though the funded initiative ended, the commitment to embed the framework into its collective service work in the community continued.

Formal-Systems-Focused Partnerships

Functions and Roles

In our discussion of formal-systems-focused partnerships, we are referring to partnerships that focus on making changes in extant norms, infrastructures, policies, and habitual practices within member organizations and within and across formal social agencies and organizations.

Such partnerships focus on making changes in formal social systems, such as child welfare, education, and health, to support the new paradigm. The partners recognize that key organizational norms, infrastructures, policies, and habitual practices are not in tune with the new paradigm. Partners attend to changes in both their own organizations and the boundaries between and interconnections among organizations.

Formal-systems-focused partnerships are often the hardest type to keep focused on the paradigm shift, because making the shift is likely to alter the power dynamics in and among organizations. If the paradigm is indeed fundamental, there are multiple places and ways in which the existing paradigm has been woven into the fabric and infrastructure within and across organizations. Shifting a paradigm can make both obvious and subtle changes in how – and by whom – power is wielded. Certain systems, groups, or roles are privileged; changes can affect which

ones are privileged. Also, shifting to a new paradigm may involve changes in organizational boundaries – certain activities, for example, may need to be shifted to or from organizations. Rules, practices, and roles shape people's sense of identity. Sometimes rules and regulations have been in place for so long that people don't realize change is an option. The new paradigm may require shifts in ways that may be surprisingly hard for people to recognize and adjust to because of the link to their sense of identity.

Attention to Paradigms and Systems Thinking

A formal-systems-focused partnership that is grounded in systemic thinking and contributing to the paradigm shift has the following characteristics:

It includes members with influence in their own organizations and their partner organizations. Partnership members are politically positioned to help apply the paradigm shift to their organizations. The partnership includes a combination of formal leaders and informal opinion leaders who are well regarded in their own organizations (although not necessarily at the highest level of the organization) and know how to influence and use both informal and formal connections within their organizations. These partners maintain conversations with essential parties from within their own organization – not only top leaders or service providers, but also those in the middle of the organization, where infrastructure gridlock is most likely to occur.

It pays attention to partners' home organizations and the larger system. Members are included in the partnership because of their own or their organization's connection to the paradigm shift and the possible role they or their organization can play. As partners deepen their understanding of the paradigm shift, they bring it back to their home organizations and deepen the understanding of the new paradigm there and what it means to operate from it, including the implications of the shift for organizational personnel and policies. For example, additional training or a reallocation of resources may be needed. Partners also recognize that the partnership is bigger than the individual organizations. They zoom out to the

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larger system and consider what changes (e.g., in policy) are needed to support the new paradigm across their organizations.

It stays connected to practice. The partnership stays connected with those who are experiencing the changes in practice based on the new paradigm (e.g., providers and parents). The partnership attends to what actually is changing and what is not, how easy or difficult the changes are to make, what the consequences of these changes are, and what organizational conditions they and their partners can address to support rather than interfere with the desired paradigm shifts. At one site, service providers involved in the project talked in depth with the formal-systems-focused partners about the amount of help they needed from the specially trained supervisors. The service providers wanted help in recognizing when they were using their habitual ways of interacting with parents rather than the new approaches embedded in the Protective Factors Framework.

It practices applying the paradigm shift to system structures. In dialogue, partners look at the interconnections of actions – a beginning aspect of deeper systems thinking – to understand the impact across the organizations or systems. Partners play out how shifts in the paradigm connect to other aspects of the partnership, organizations, and broader situation. For example, they hypothesize what changes in partner organizations would be needed to support the new paradigm in a particular situation. Partnership members consider places to make changes in their own organizations in support

The partnership continually learns about system dynamics and conditions of social systems in order to be able to expand ways of influencing social systems. It attends to local dynamics and conditions as well as occurrences in the larger system (e.g., state or federal policies) that support or undermine the paradigm.

of the paradigm shift in manageable ways that minimize disruptions but don't compromise on the necessary changes. Because the changes in complex systems are embedded within a web of connections, it helped for partners to engage with other members who were often in similar roles in different social systems and had a depth of understanding of the type of changes each faced. These conversations helped partners identify interconnections and work through practical issues.

It addresses the power shifts embedded in the paradigm shift. Partners consider current power conditions within and across organizations, including who may be threatened by long-standing practices and what changes might bolster trust. For example, a key organization in a partnership in our example served as an intermediary for service funding in early childhood. The organization also received direct-service money. In the next funding cycle, the organization decided not to compete with its partner organizations for the direct-service money. Instead, the organization chose to focus on its intermediary role, which it saw as especially important in the new configuration of relationships that was forming through the partnership in support of the new paradigm

in the community. The organization's decisions increased confidence within the partnership that serious systemic change was underway.

It continually develops knowledge about the dynamics and conditions of social systems. The partnership continually learns about system dynamics and conditions of social systems in order to be able to expand ways of influencing social systems. It attends to local dynamics and conditions as well as occurrences in the larger system (e.g., state or federal policies) that support or undermine the paradigm. The partnership finds its place in the system by mapping the partnership and its organizations – zooming in for a close look at the partnership and existing interconnections, and zooming out to see where the partnership sits in the bigger picture. Partners become familiar with relationships, boundaries, and the history of organizations in the social system and how these are changing as a consequence of the paradigm shift. For example, the project located in the medical center had to consider how the work of the service provider in facilitating access to services could be sustained in light of health insurance limitations.

It reflects, systemically. Ongoing reflection is essential. The partnership members reflect on practical areas (e.g., policies) where they can create support for or dampen interference within organizations for moving into the new paradigm. At the site addressing families with children with disabilities, for example, the state agency responsible for disability services amended its memorandum of understanding with private Early Intervention agencies to require training in the Protective Factors Framework. This relatively small change increased the likelihood that all Early Interventionists would be familiar with the framework and be able to work with families from this perspective. To ensure that this change was sustained, however, it was important to formalize it in organizational policies. Additionally, the partners needed to trace the ramifications of this change to see what else it was connected to in their organizations.

It reframes. The partnership uses the knowledge gained to reframe and imagine other actions as potential next steps in operating from the new paradigm. As work moves forward, partners also reconsider the partnership in light of the bigger purpose, including what other voices need to be heard as the project proceeds. Reframing can also include taking on different roles, such as advocacy and capacity building. One site in our example began to use the Protective Factors Framework as a way to organize their responses to requests for proposals. As another site considered concrete needs in the community, the partners recognized that housing was not being addressed. They had to determine the feasibility of bringing housing representatives into the current partnership.

Community-Grounded Partnerships

Functions and Roles

Partnerships all too often are made up of people from formal agencies and organizations, with few representatives of the community being “served.” The third type of partnership turns this on its head. A community-grounded partnership is largely made up of residents who represent the range of a community’s cultural groups. The partnership emerges from the present activism of residents who see a better way for their community, who are committed to rethinking the way it functions, and who want the systems within the community grounded in what the community values most – not what professionals think is best. The momentum for change comes from residents organizing and drawing on their culturally grounded community assets and collective wisdom to address community concerns.

Formal agencies and organizations do have a place in the partnership. Residents enter into strategic alliances with agencies and organizations that respect community perspectives, support community organizing, and provide resources and expertise that they view as genuinely of service to the community. At any point in time the focus of the partnership might be on a particular issue (e.g., housing), but the partnership perspective is one that respects and values all segments of the community in all of its complexity.

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Attention to Paradigms and Systems Thinking

A community-grounded partnership ensures that the interpretation of the paradigm shift is centrally congruent with the values and perspectives of the community. It is often facilitated by a largely resident-based organization, such as a neighborhood association or a group of faith-based organizations.

It understands, articulates, and represents the diverse values, needs, and interests of the community. The partnership develops with community leadership and ensures involvement of the full range of

Avoid seeing the partnership as the end goal. The survivability of the partnership sometimes becomes the end goal. Instead, funders and leaders can help ensure a continuing focus on how the partnership supports the paradigm shift.

stakeholders in ways that keep central the community's interpretation of the paradigm. Rather than aiming for consensus and compromise, the partnership uses the community's diversity to stimulate creativity and engagement as well as new ways to take action. The partnership seeks to determine how best to enhance the well-being of the community through appreciating the values, needs, and interests of all groups for the common good. The partnership includes people who have an understanding of and respect for all within the community. The membership is not necessarily proportionate to the number of people in a given group. For example, there may be few of a particular ethnicity or few with disabilities, but those in the partnership value diverse perspectives and ensure their inclusion. The partnership also seeks understanding of the different cultures and norms that exist in the community. The partnership looks for where values and interests are and are not shared, and works to find common interests on which to build (e.g., the well-being of children). Taking the perspective of the residents, the partners seek to identify where specific actions by agencies and organizations align or stray from community values and the desired paradigm. The partnership maintains a commitment to the diversity of the community; it rejects "one size fits all" approaches.

It is responsive to the cultural groups within the community. The partnership recognizes the different and shared norms and values among cultural groups and focuses on building relationships

among them. The partnership is deeply grounded in the complexity of the community's cultures and regularly engages with people across the larger community. It recognizes the importance of community events that bring people of multiple perspectives together to interact, person to person, in a trusting, caring environment. At one site, for example, a faith-based organization positioned people within the communities to help support, catalyze, consolidate, and give voice to community concerns, ideas, and efforts at change. These people were given the apt name of "community lightning rods." The partnership is aware of and attempts to mitigate or change institutional policies and practices that routinely produce cumulative adverse results for people of color while routinely advantaging whites. At another site, the involvement of a Hispanic-serving organization helped ensure that the partnership integrated cultural considerations in its planning and interventions.

It operates from the stance of working "with" one another or alongside one another, not doing "to" or "for" others. The partnership rejects terms such as "gaining input" from the community, "getting buy-in," or "building support for the new orientation." It might even reject the concept of the community "owning" the partnership. Rather, the partnership is seen as emerging from the essence of the community as a whole. The partnership draws on tools such as community and parent cafés to involve the community. For example, one site used parent cafés, in which parents came together for structured, small-group conversations to discuss their concerns and consider how to use the Protective Factors Framework to address these concerns.³

It maintains an awareness of the balance of power within the community. The partnership has representation that ensures that the balance of power is acknowledged and that power imbalances are addressed in the way discussions unfold and decisions are made. Some communities have organizations that focus on supporting community organizing and community-based action. These organizations can help support these partnerships without taking power away from the

³ See http://www.ctfalliance.org/initiative_parents-2.htm.

residents. For example, a site that had multiple faith-based organizations working together benefited from their connections with each other and with residents, so any power imbalances that emerged could be addressed.

It reflects on projects or changes being implemented in the community. The partnership engages in dialogue with people from across the community, particularly those most likely to be affected by the new paradigm. The partnership listens to the community to find out how neighborhoods and communities are already addressing issues related to the paradigm shift and how it can build on desired actions that are already taking place. The partnership regularly reflects on activities and how these do or do not align with community values. It provides concrete feedback regarding changes that agencies or organizations are making to ensure that the core values of the community are supported.

Implications for Funders and Partnership Leaders

Both funders and community leaders play an important part in stimulating partnerships that are committed to deep systemic change. Here are seven practical actions for funders and community leaders.

- *Avoid seeing a project as the end goal.* Rather than focusing on how the project contributes to the paradigm shift, partners too often begin to see a particular project as the end goal. The partners might begin searching for additional funding to continue the project rather than focusing on the knowledge gained from the project and how to fund efforts related to that new knowledge and the fundamental shift.
- *Avoid seeing the partnership as the end goal.* The survivability of the partnership sometimes becomes the end goal. Instead, funders and leaders can help ensure a continuing focus on how the partnership supports the paradigm shift.
- *Keep tenaciously focused on needed infrastructure changes.* The power of the current system structures to create snap back is a constant threat. By tenaciously focusing on needed infrastructure changes, funders and leaders can recognize how the infrastructure of organizations may be undermining efforts to make and maintain the desired paradigm shift.
- *Balance depth and breadth in partnership focus.* Funders can play an important role in helping partnerships remain cognizant of the larger system, related areas of that system, and on all segments of the community. Partners can focus too much on the part of the social system they are trying to change and lose touch with other partnerships and related areas of the system. When a partnership focuses on integrating a particular practice into or across organizations, for example, the partnership may overlook contradictory practices, such as practitioners being incentivized to take actions contrary to the new practice. Additionally, the partnership might begin to focus on one or a few segments of the community without connecting them to the larger picture or seeing ways in which broader community change can occur. An associated sign is that the partnership begins to believe that community change is the same for all groups within the community. A funder can help to keep this larger perspective in mind.
- *Recognize how language can reinforce a paradigm.* Language can serve to either reinforce the old paradigm or advance a paradigm shift. For example, when issues arise that are of concern to the partners, using terms such as “troubleshooting” implies that something is wrong and that issues must be resolved in order to maintain some specific approach. The issues might not be “trouble,” but may be the result of changing conditions stemming from project implementation. Talking about “adaptation” to these changing conditions would be more in keeping with the paradigm of system change.
- *Talk about power and the importance of the power shifts embedded in the paradigm shift.* Partners avoid addressing power shifts

We believe that each type of partnership has a reasonable scope to take the actions needed to make long-lasting change. As the partnerships connect with one another, they can reflect deeply on all parts of the social systems in the community to truly address the issues of our day.

because they seem too big or politically sensitive. Conversations regularly need to address fundamental issues of power.

- **Participate.** Avoid sitting outside or alongside the community rather than being a part of it. When partnerships or partner members see themselves as separate from the community, they might not engage with the community or seek to understand the values of the community. Just as partnerships need to be part of the community, so too do funders need to see themselves as part of the partnership.

In this article, we have shared our current thinking about the interplay between the purpose, focus, and scope of three types of partnerships and their attention to systemic changes. We believe that each type of partnership has a reasonable scope to take the actions needed to make long-lasting change. As the partnerships connect with one another, they can reflect deeply on all parts of the social systems in the community to truly address the issues of our day.

We are grateful for the role philanthropy has played in helping us explore these ideas and share them with you. We hope the ideas presented in this article help you imagine partnerships as going beyond implementation of a project or initiative to creating fundamental change in social systems.

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Developing a Framework for Grant Evaluation: Integrating Accountability and Learning

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Key Points

- Despite broad consensus among foundations on the value of capturing grant outcomes, there is no consensus on what to evaluate and how to define success, which makes it difficult for staff and grantees to navigate and apply multiple interpretations of evaluation “best practices.”
- This article presents three questions designed to help foundations develop a framework for grant evaluation that reflects their beliefs about accountability and learning, balances evaluation costs and benefits, acknowledges the diversity of grants within the foundation’s portfolio, and allows their grantees to understand the foundation’s expectations for evaluation reporting.
- A key takeaway from this article, drawn from insights shared by CEOs and program officers representing 17 foundations in Pennsylvania’s Allegheny County, is that foundation boards should not feel constrained to adopt uniform evaluation practices for all grants. This serves as a discussion guide, providing a starting point for conversations about the purpose of evaluation for each type of grant, along with a range of possible evaluation processes and criteria.

Kramer & Bickel, 2004; McCray, 2011; Ostrower, 2004) and struggle to redefine evaluation as learning (Hoole & Patterson, 2008) while maintaining their own commitment to accountability (Mosher-Williams & Woodwell, 2015). As a result, many foundation professionals have developed alternative evaluation strategies (Coffman, Beer, Patrizi, & Thompson, 2013). However, interviews conducted for this article reveal that foundation chief executives and program officers continue to have concerns about the burden evaluation places on foundation staff and grantees. In response, they have taken a somewhat different path, embracing “lean data” concepts emerging from the social enterprise sector (Dichter, Adams, & Ebrahim, 2016) and moving away from traditional practices, including logic models.

Drawing from insights shared by 27 CEOs and program officers representing 17 foundations in one metropolitan area, this article presents three questions designed to help other foundations develop their own framework for grant evaluation that reflects their beliefs about accountability and learning, balances evaluation costs and benefits, acknowledges the diversity of grants within the foundation’s portfolio, and allows their grantees to understand the foundation’s expectations for evaluation reporting.

Introduction

Existing research provides a compelling case for grant evaluation, often citing its benefits in terms of accountability and learning (Braverman, Constantine, & Slater, 2004; Brest & Harvey, 2008; Isaacs & Colby, 2010). However, survey data and practitioner insights indicate that funders inconsistently assess grant awards (Damon & Verducci, 2006; Fleishman, 2007;

Literature Review

The literature on grant evaluation extols its virtues (Buteau & Huang, 2006; Global Leaders Tomorrow Task Force on Philanthropy, 2003; Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2006; Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2002), including fiduciary accountability (to ensure that the

grant was spent as intended), organizational learning (though the distinction between foundation and grantee learning is not always clear), and knowledge sharing with the field. However, the literature also makes clear that deciding what to evaluate and how to define success is difficult, given the nonprofit reality of multiple bottom lines (Behn, 2003; Carnochan, Samples, Myers, & Austin, 2013; Elkington, 1997; Salamon, Galler, & Mengel, 2010), multiple stakeholders (Benjamin, 2013), and the subjective nature of performance assessment (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983; Simon, 1997).

While there is broad consensus on the value of capturing grant outcomes, there is no consensus on what to evaluate and how to define success, which makes it difficult for foundation staff and grantees to navigate and apply multiple interpretations of evaluation “best practices.”

In addition, foundations cannot always use the same evaluation process for all grants, given that fundamental differences between place-based (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2014), advocacy (Beer & Reed, 2009; Teles & Schmitt, 2011), capacity-building (Graves & Culbreath, 2003; Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, 2010), and operating grants (Brest, 2003; Buteau & Huang, 2006) require varied approaches. Finally, thorough analyses of evaluation practices focus on only the very largest foundations, most of which have dedicated evaluation staff (Coffman, et al., 2013), which is not representative of independent foundations (Boris, Renz, Barve, Hager, & Hobor, 2006).

Collectively, these factors leave most foundation staff unsure of how to navigate multiple interpretations of evaluation “best practices” (Amirkhanyan, Kim, & Lambright, 2013; Boris & Kopczynski Winkler, 2013; Carter, 2004; Coffman, et al., 2013; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2010; Hall, 2012). This tension is revealed in foundations’ ongoing internal struggles about the purpose and value of evaluation (Greenwald, 2013; McNelis & Bickel, 1996). These dynamics take a heavy toll on grantees (Brock, Buteau, & Gopal, 2013; Brock, Buteau, & Herring, 2012),

generating frustration (Salamon, et al., 2010), gaming (Benjamin, 2008a, 2008b), and confusion (Carman, 2009; Ebrahim, 2002).

Research Methodology

Twenty-seven foundation staff (CEOs and program officers) from 17 private foundations in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, area were interviewed for this study.

This article focuses on staffed, financially independent, private foundations in Pennsylvania’s Allegheny County with diverse grant awards of at least \$500,000 annually over the last three years or with assets of at least \$30 million. Community foundations, funding intermediaries, corporate foundations, and federated funding groups (such as the United Way) were excluded to minimize the influence of resource dependency on grantmaking practices (Gronbjerg, 2006; Howe, 2004). Data sources identified 21 foundations that met these criteria (Economic Research Institute, 2014; Foundation Center, 2014). Forty individuals from these foundations were contacted for interviews. Twenty-seven (66 percent) individuals (16 chief executives and 11 program officers), representing 17 (81 percent) foundations, agreed to participate. Participating foundations reflect the composition of the local foundation community, ranging from small, family-run foundations to large, regional grantmakers. None had dedicated evaluation staff. The CEO and at least one program officer from seven foundations and multiple program officers from two foundations were interviewed.

Defining “Grant Evaluation”

Grant evaluation encompasses four dimensions: scope, method, metric, and intensity.

Interviews with foundation CEOs and program officers make it clear that foundation boards and staff must explicitly define what they believe to be the purpose and value of evaluation in order to identify a meaningful evaluation framework. Interviews reflected a variety of interpretations, ranging from monitoring to ensure that the grant is spent consistent with the grant

agreement to capturing the outcomes of the initiative supported by the grant award. Interviews also indicate that evaluation is multi-dimensional. Though existing research suggests three dimensions (Tassie, Murray, Cutt, & Bragg, 1996), foundation staff interviewed for this study extended this to four dimensions – scope, method, metrics, and intensity:

- *Scope elements:* Program, organization, and community, depending on grant type.
- *Method elements:* Quantitative (numeric), qualitative (secondhand narratives), and experiential (firsthand experiences, meaning a personal experience with the effort funded by the grant). Contrary to standard research terminology, foundation staff differentiated between personal experiences and second-hand stories.
- *Metric elements:*
 1. Inputs – providing evidence of “best practice” processes, e.g., “doing the right things”;
 2. Outputs – reporting tangible items or specific numbers;
 3. Outcomes – reporting an outcome or proxy impact indicator;
 4. Engagement – providing evidence of collaboration with other organizations, funders, or community members; and
 5. Learning – demonstrating and/or sharing lessons learned.
- *Intensity elements:* Intensity of the evaluation process varied depending on the relative difficulty of:
 1. Defining success, e.g., How difficult is it to “define a win”?
 2. Predicting the results, e.g., To what extent is the theory of change behind the proposal experimental or evidence based?
 3. Assessing the grant, e.g., How much time and effort is required to adequately conduct an evaluation?

... boards should not feel constrained to adopt a uniform evaluation approach for all grants in the portfolio. With this in mind, the first question to consider is the type of grant the board is interested in evaluating.

To identify the evaluation elements and practices that meet a foundation’s objectives, the next section poses three questions that foundation boards can discuss to ensure that their evaluation framework is consistent with their own beliefs about accountability and learning, acknowledges the diversity of grants in their portfolio, and enables clear communication with grantees.

What Type of Grant Is the Board Interested in Evaluating?

Foundations award an array of grant types, commonly including project, strategic-initiative, capacity-building, capital, advocacy, general operating, and annual awards, each of which may require different evaluation practices.

In the words of one CEO, “All grants are not created equal.” Foundations award many types of grants, and foundation staff reported that the specific elements incorporated in their evaluation practices depends on the type of grant being assessed. The implication is that boards should not feel constrained to adopt a uniform evaluation approach for all grants in the portfolio. With this in mind, the first question to consider is the type of grant the board is interested in evaluating. Those interviewed for this article carried between two and nine distinct grants in their portfolio, with a median of five. The most common were:

- Project/program grants, which fund defined project or program expenses, usually for one year.
- Strategic initiative grants, which are similar to project grants but fund the foundation's own strategic initiatives and may be multi-year awards. These are perceived as riskier because they are based on untested theories of change that the foundation hopes will generate either new information or improved outcomes.
- Capacity-building grants, which fund professional development, strategic planning, or equipment. Most allow capacity-building grant awards to fund new staff positions needed to support and improve a grantee's internal operations. For purposes of evaluation, some staff differentiate between capacity-building grants for equipment and those for professional development, but others do not.
- Capital grants, which fund the construction of new facilities or significant renovations.
- Advocacy grants, which fund efforts to educate policymakers or raise public awareness about specific social or community development issues.
- General operating grants, which are unrestricted and support the organization as a whole rather than specific programs.
- Annual awards, which are grants made annually to organizations that either have special ties to the deceased founder or active family members; a long history with the current foundation staff or board based on close mission ties; or consistent, highly successful past grant performance.

Once the board determines the types of grants it would like to evaluate, the next step is to articulate the primary reasons for evaluating each of the identified grant types to ensure a balanced investment in evaluation costs and information.

Why Is the Board Interested in Evaluating Grants?

Both accountability and learning motivate foundations to evaluate grants. However, foundations have multiple-accountability stakeholders and learning audiences, which carries implications for the type of information desired from the evaluation process.

Foundation staff expressed a variety of reasons for evaluating grants, which fell into two categories: accountability and learning. Evaluation practices varied depending on who foundation staff felt accountable to as well as who they hoped would learn something from the evaluation process. This suggests boards identify evaluation practices that will meet their expectations by discussing the relative importance of accountability and learning to and for different stakeholder audiences.

Those interviewed for this study described perceived accountability to some combination of four stakeholder groups: board members as fiduciaries, board members as stewards, grantees, and community members/beneficiaries. Most interviewees mentioned just one or two stakeholders; none mentioned all four. In almost every case, the board as a fiduciary was one of these stakeholders. Grantees were mentioned by approximately half of the interviewees, with only a few making reference to the other stakeholders.

Similarly, interviewees described four learning audiences: the foundation, grantees, the field (e.g., the collection of other professionals involved in the relevant subject-matter areas), and community members/beneficiaries of the grant. Most interviewees mentioned just one or two learning audiences; none mentioned all four. In almost every case, the foundation was one of these learning audiences. Grantees or the field were mentioned by roughly half, with only a few others making reference to either community members or grant beneficiaries. Interviewees' beliefs about the purpose of evaluation depended on their perceptions about primary stakeholder accountabilities and learning audiences. (See Table 1.)

TABLE 1 Identifying Key Stakeholders and Information Needs

If a primary reason for evaluation is ...	... then key stakeholders involved in formulating the evaluation process are ...	... and the audience will be most interested in information that provides ...
Accountability ...		
As a fiduciary	Board members	Verification that grant awards were spent as the board intended
As a steward	The board and program officer	Evidence that the result of the grant aligned with the foundation's mission and strategy
To the grantee	The program officer and the grantee	Evidence that the grant award furthered the grantee's mission and strategy
To the community/beneficiaries	The program officer and community/beneficiary representatives	Evidence that the grant was spent on meeting at least one perceived need of the community/beneficiaries
Learning for the ...		
Foundation	The board and program officer(s)	Reflections on and lessons from the selection/award process as well as the results of the grant
Grantee	The program officer and grantee	Reflections on and lessons from the implementation and results of the effort funded by the grant award
Field	The program officer and selected other subject-matter experts in the field	Evidence that the results of the grant contribute to field knowledge and can be replicated or brought to scale
Community/beneficiaries	The program officer and community/beneficiaries representatives	Evidence that the results of the grant met perceived needs/goals and provided information that the community/beneficiaries can use to identify next steps or make choices/decisions

While these accountability and learning motivations are not mutually exclusive, developing evaluation strategies to capture all of them increases costs for both the foundation and the grantee. Therefore, prioritizing stakeholder accountabilities and learning audiences performs three critical functions. First, it provides the board with an opportunity to discuss the fundamental purpose of evaluation for each type of grant. Second, it determines which stakeholders should provide input into formulating the evaluation process and criteria. Third, it determines the type of information the evaluation should be designed to generate. Articulating these priorities will ensure that the evaluation strategy reflects stakeholders' interests and provides the intended learning audiences with the information they need.

How Does the Board Envision Using the Evaluation Findings?

Evaluation is more often viewed as a fiduciary accountability of grantees than as a tool to inform the foundation's decision-making. Formal, third-party evaluation to support decision-making is typically reserved for strategic initiatives in which the foundation is either investing or hoping to invest significant resources.

Staff members interviewed for this article revealed that evaluation data are used in a variety of ways, depending on primary accountability and learning objectives. For example, grantees who did not provide evaluation reports that fulfilled the foundation's fiduciary

In general, interviewees did not express favorable views of formal evaluation, describing it as too resource-intensive, methodologically vulnerable, and generally outside their scope or role.

accountability needs rarely received future grants. In only a select few cases did interviewees indicate evaluation played a role in strategic decision-making. These examples involved grants for a specific initiative in which the foundation was either investing or hoping to invest significant resources around education, community well-being, or economic development. Foundation staff explained that these grants were often the foundation's most important and uncertain projects. Therefore, they were most interested in, and willing to pay for, an outside, objective view to determine effectiveness. As one CEO said, "At the strategy level, you will see more rigorous commissioned research." The implication is that if the evaluation results inform strategic direction (for the grantee, community, or foundation), then the grant evaluation itself may warrant more substantial investments of time and money than if the evaluation primarily serves a monitoring/fiduciary function.

Without exception, foundation staff indicated that the vast majority of evaluations were conducted in-house and by program officers. Formal evaluations were clearly not the norm. In general, interviewees did not express favorable views of formal evaluation, describing it as too resource-intensive, methodologically vulnerable, and generally outside their scope or role:

Even with the largesse of foundations, really good research costs a lot of money ... and there's an opportunity cost to that.

The trustees have already agreed [that] as far as evaluation ... we don't think we're big enough to afford or don't choose to afford the money and staff time to evaluate, in any kind of formal way, every grant that we do. ... And even if we target those things where we do have metrics, and we do, where we have them we do definitely have our grantees agree on a set of metrics. The problem is that you can't define causality or isolate causality sufficiently to know in some cases.

We commissioned research from [a third-party evaluator] to assess ... a single grantee ... doing a very complicated thing. ... Nobody knows the answer to that question. So you ... find someone who at least pretends to know.

Proving [success/results] within individual programs is extremely expensive because it requires control groups and the whole nine yards. ... If you help a first-grader to read, you know I don't need somebody to do a longitudinal study with a control group for 20 years to tell me that is going to be effective. So that is part of the reason why I am somewhat skeptical on evaluation.

Putting It All Together: Developing an Evaluation Framework

Grant type plays a significant role in determining evaluation practices across all four dimensions of evaluation.

Though the actual process and criteria elements that staff used varied with the foundation's accountability and learning priorities, staff consistently described their evaluation practices in terms of the four dimensions of evaluation: scope, method, focus, and intensity. (See Figure 1.)

This analysis also revealed that most foundations use similar elements within these dimensions for similar types of grants. These commonalities provide a starting point for board and staff conversations about evaluation approaches for each of the grant types in the foundation's portfolio. (See Table 2.)

Project Grants

For project-grant evaluations, the scope was typically programmatic. Most participants

FIGURE 1 Developing an Evaluation Framework

TABLE 2 A Grant-Based Evaluation Framework

Grant Type	Dimensions and Elements of Evaluation			
	Scope	Method	Metric (with examples)	Intensity
Project/program	Program	Quantitative	Outputs (numbers served)	Low
Strategic initiatives	Program/ community	Qualitative/ experiential	Outcomes (percentage improvement in key indicator(s))	High
Capacity building (strategic planning, professional development)	Organization	Qualitative/ experiential	Learning (demonstrated shift in organizational behavior)	Low
Capacity building (infrastructure, systems)	Organization	Qualitative/ experiential	Outputs (system implemented) Outcomes (demonstrated improvement in organizational mission achievement)	Low
Capital	Varies widely; organization or community	Varies widely; quantitative or experiential	Varies widely; outputs (building completed)/outcomes (impact on community)	Varies widely, from low to high
Advocacy	Community	Qualitative/ experiential	Varies widely; inputs (doing the right things)/outputs (providing education) Outcomes (policy change)	Medium
General operating support	Organization	Experiential	Inputs, Outcomes	Varies, from low to high

... sometimes they do not have purely objective indicators for assessing the grant retrospectively. Instead, they often rely on the “wisdom of the crowd” – that is, the extent to which the strategic-initiative project attracts other funding: “For some of those larger initiatives, your evaluation is based on whether other funders buy in”; “as those startups hopefully grow and hire more people, have future investors that like them and fund them in future funding rounds.”

considered these grants relatively easy to assess and the most amenable to quantitative methods. For example, these grants were often used for tangible items or had an output metric that related directly to the program or project:

When it comes to the actual programming of something, we are looking at how many people were they able to meet the needs of, was the programming run on time, was it run in the area that it was supposed to run in, did they have an increase in ... the number of participants.

Grantmakers were also more likely to see project/program grants as transactional: “It is very contractual, so you give the money, and they go and do it.”

Since these grants are usually for one year, grantmakers openly acknowledged that efforts to quantify impact or outcomes lean heavily on

output numbers or proxy indicators: “Indicators are more output numbers, measurable percent change on an indicator, always looking at impact on a specific population. Never, hardly ever, [do we care] about organizational impact.” For many project grants, informants didn’t see the value in asking for more than output metrics, as in this grant to a food bank: “How much food did you give; number of folks that were served. We think for those that to require more would be costly and of questionable value.”

Strategic Initiatives

For strategic initiatives, the assessment process is much more intensive than for typical project grants. While the scope is primarily programmatic, the foundation also tracks specific communitywide metrics to mark progress over time for these initiatives:

The grant I was describing to you represents a strategy we have for a particular grant, but it doesn’t tell you on the meta level – is the foundation making an impact. So for that, we have to begin to aggregate data from individual grants and maybe look at larger community-wide indicators.

Field and foundation learning were consistent motivations for assessing strategic initiatives. In addition, the foundation is often learning as it goes. Thus, the outcomes of the grant are much less certain:

In a new initiative, you’re much more tolerant of ambiguity.

I’ll get a report back that says, “well we thought we would do this; we tried this and we thought we’d have this outcome, but we got that outcome.” You know, you are ready for that. You want that here. ... Your expectations are not as high; it is more exploratory. It is much more trying to learn and understand.

Each engagement has its own specific set of benchmarks, and in some cases, we are still learning from those ... and we’re using the first couple of years of experience to build the indicators.

This uncertainty also means that funders are less able to articulate grant-evaluation criteria up front. In fact, sometimes they do not have purely objective indicators for assessing the grant retrospectively. Instead, they often rely on the “wisdom of the crowd” – that is, the extent to which the strategic-initiative project attracts other funding: “For some of those larger initiatives, your evaluation is based on whether other funders buy in”; “as those startups hopefully grow and hire more people, have future investors that like them and fund them in future funding rounds.”

Capacity-Building Grants

For capacity-building grants, evaluation scope included completion of the “task” of the grant, (i.e., training program) but emphasized organizational impact. As a result, the metrics were a mix of outputs and outcomes. Without exception, informants found capacity-building grants for skill building and staff positions less amenable to quantitative methods and, in terms of process, assessed these grants over a longer time horizon.

A lot of things can go wrong: they can fund the position, the person can get hired, the person could leave the position, and they may not find that person in the time period of the grant. Also, the sustainability of the position is questionable.

Skill building is more nebulous: ... You don't know how effective is it for a number of years. ... Then we went to see the director next time; they were working ... somewhere else. So part of the challenge with skill building is that we may develop skills, but they now are in Atlanta, ... really taking advantage of the skill we helped them to develop.

You look at them differently because you don't always see a direct impact right away. ... You'll come up with your short-term metrics, short-term indicators, but then the real impact often doesn't come until five or 10 years later.

If you are really going to build capacity under multiple definitions, you are not going to do that in 12 months.

For capacity-building grants that fund new infrastructure, informants mentioned that the assessment criteria often focus on relatively short-term, organizational efficiency metrics: “We now have the infrastructure. ... We have electronic health records, our billings are now up to 95 percent, whereas before we were collecting 80 [percent]”; “with internal capacity building, it is all inside their four walls, so they should be able to relatively easily figure out whether that happened or not.”

As these comments indicate, informants find assessing capacity-building grants that support professional development or staff positions to be different from and more difficult than assessing project grants. For the most part, informants rely on professional judgment to assess staff-oriented capacity building: “It may be hard to evaluate, but it is, you know, the instinct that your mother told you.” They also track short-term indicators – did the staff attend training, did the grantee develop a new strategic plan, has the position been filled – even though they believe these indicators to be inadequate:

Did enough people complete the training? Yes, great. Home run. Well, maybe not. The feedback is, they weren't paying attention, they were there but they were on the phone, and now they have gotten back to the organization and they haven't implemented anything.”

Capital Grants

In this study, evaluation practices for capital grants varied widely and across all dimensions of evaluation. For some, the scope is project oriented:

The assessment of a building is: Well, did you build it, and are you operating programs?

Capital grants are easy. Someone presents you with a request, ... you go look at the site, ... you give the grant, and about two years later maybe the building is done and you say, great, the building is done. And then you check the box for it.

In contrast, others hold the grant open for five or 10 years, using organizational and community scope elements:

The bricks and mortar: ... Is the organization performing better because the facilities are better?

What is this new center going to bring to the community? Thinking the bigger picture: ... since this center opened in the community, was there a decrease in violence or was there a decrease in [Children and Youth Services] calls in the community?

I think the difficulty with bricks and mortar, sometimes I feel like we are often better able to evaluate a project grant rather than a bricks-and-mortar grant. I think we can evaluate whether the need is valid. ... But the end result – did it really add value to the community?

Still others struggle somewhere in the middle, acknowledging that capturing long-term metrics is difficult but maintaining it is simply insufficient to measure capital projects based solely on a completion metric:

This is something I'm struggling with. ... Say we make a grant to [a university building]. How long do we want to leave that grant open? I am sure that in the next 10 years, we're going to see higher SAT scores on the students [the university] is accepting, ... but are we really going to keep that grant open for 10 years to watch that? Probably not.

Advocacy Grants

Foundation staff expressed a consensus view that advocacy grants are particularly difficult to assess. Several had made concerted efforts to research how other funders were assessing these grants, but were not convinced that anyone really had a handle on how to do it:

Advocacy is not tangible. So that's how that is totally different, and I know that I've struggled in talking with our advocacy organizations ... about how we better measure advocacy. ... There are reports out there that I've read, ... professional people coming out and saying this is how you do it, but I'm like, how much do I trust this? It sounds good, but I don't see it. ... It is just really hard to measure advocacy.

Others mentioned the challenge of defining the desired outcome in the first place:

With advocacy, you rarely see real outcomes, and you know it's hard to define what a win is, ... so you are just sort of assessing whether ... the activities were good activities. ... You do it because you believe it is the right thing to do, but you don't necessarily see real wins all the time because of it.

As a default position, most rely on secondhand qualitative feedback more than outcome indicators or even their own experiences. Typically, the scope was organizational and the metric was an input, i.e., the grantee "doing the right things":

With the advocacy one, you can't see it. All you can rely on is the data that's provided.

Advocacy is tricky, because how do you prove a bill passed because [grantee] rallied a thousand parents to call their legislators? Though anecdotally we've heard legislators say, "I didn't really care about this issue, but I got a hundred calls." So that's the sort of anecdotal feedback.

Others incorporated metrics that captured actual public attitude, policy, or funding changes, which requires a long time horizon:

We try to change public opinion, to change culture and normative behavior.

If we were pushing for increased funding in a particular sector, did that happen or not? If you want people to adopt a specific position on an issue, did that happen? So that's ... the way I think about outcomes for that type of work.

General Operating Grants

Although the selection process was outside the scope of this study, informants found it difficult to separate selection from evaluation for general operating grants:

You just want to look at the quality of the agency, and how they are delivering on what they think is important. ... We love the strategy. You decide how, rather than micromanaging. So we love what you are doing; show us your results; here's the money.

In terms of evaluation processes, general operating grants are also distinct in that there is no

specific endpoint or deliverable to assess: “With general operating, it’s more an update, it’s a progress report, because you’re never going to be completely done.” To evaluate these grants, foundations look less at programs than at organizational or community-level outcomes through either quantitative or experiential methods for evidence of organizational health and continued mission achievement: “Health of the organization, evidence of past results, prospects for achieving future success, that is what it boils down to.” The process varies from a modest summary of the organization’s overall work to more involved analysis of the organization’s operations:

Look at the work and the mission, but it has more of a programmatic focus, but it is not looking at a specific project. ... It’s looking at the overall work of the organization. ... It’s more tied to their overall mission of community engagement.

So there’s a different process for them that really focuses on operations, over the previous cycle: ... what had you planned to do; what actually happened; what changes did you have to make along the way, if any; and what changes are you contemplating in the next cycle. ... So there is sort of a continuity approach. ... It is a special relationship.

Annual Awards/Long-Term Grantees

Foundation staff indicated that annual awards are provided to a select few organizations via an abbreviated application and/or reporting process and may be awarded as either general operating support or earmarked for specific programs. For example, several informants stated that long-term grantees typically provide one annual summary of activities that serves as both its final report for the prior year’s grant and its application for an upcoming award. Evaluation processes for long-term grantees varied widely in terms of intensity and metrics. The scope consistently centered on the organization, but methods varied from quantitative to experiential. For some, long-term grantees’ awards were basically on autopilot: “I can’t tell you the last time that we cut off a significant long-term grantee.” For others, long-term grantees were subject to annual assessments, but the process differed for them:

In terms of evaluation processes, general operating grants are also distinct in that there is no specific endpoint or deliverable to assess: “With general operating, it’s more an update, it’s a progress report, because you’re never going to be completely done.”

For the institutional and long-term grant ones, we folded [the final report] into their proposal. So the first question in the proposal is, What did you accomplish last year? That’s the exact phrasing; it’s like a mini-report. So it makes it easier on them.

Others had more intensive reporting relationships: “For our annual grantees ... we have a tendency to look at more things. The old cliché about to whom much is given much is expected.”

Conclusion and Next Steps

For most foundations, the best approach to evaluation is not one uniform set of practices, but rather a reasoned process that fulfills the foundation’s accountability and learning objectives for each type of grant in its portfolio.

This article serves as a discussion guide and framework for foundation boards and staff who are interested in developing or refining their evaluation strategy but who are also concerned about the cost-benefit tradeoffs of evaluation itself. These discussion questions provide a starting point for conversations about the purpose of evaluation for each type of grant in a foundation’s portfolio, along with a range of possible evaluation processes and criteria.

A key takeaway from this study is that foundation boards should not feel constrained to adopt

uniform evaluation practices for all grants. Accountability and learning objectives for grants that are more transactional may be very different from those that fund strategic priorities. These differences will require different evaluation approaches. As the board engages in these conversations, the most important outcome is that the board articulates the fundamental purpose of evaluation so that the investment in evaluation, on the part of the foundation staff and grantee, integrates accountability and learning expectations and generates meaningful information at a reasonable cost.

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Critical Team-Building Tools in Philanthropy

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Keywords: Team-building, collaboration, feedback, communication tools

Key Points

- Using the experience of a team at a large, U.S.-based foundation over a four-year period, this article examines four essential tools for cultivating high-performing teams in the philanthropic sector.
- The tools are giving and receiving feedback, the art of appreciations, organizing meetings to produce accountability, and assessing team communication styles, all applied with a racial equity lens. Use of these tools resulted in a more cohesive team that performed well when buffeted by changing priorities and substantial global problems.
- The tools are likely applicable in every sector. But when used by foundations where large-scale social issues are the crux of the work, the resulting high-performing teams are most likely better equipped to confront concerns vital to philanthropy.

Introduction

Philanthropy, like many other sectors, organizes its workers into teams. In a highly networked and interdependent world, individual actors will not find solutions to intergenerational and intractable problems. Any lone grantmaker likely lacks the full knowledge to correctly identify the root cause of a problem, much less to figure out how to assemble the best solutions for tackling the challenge.

A team, according to Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith (1993), is "a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable" (p. 112). Teams are a fundamental way people organize

to successfully tackle work. We think better together than we do apart.

Building effective teams in the philanthropic sector should be an easy task. Where else are there so many extraordinarily passionate, well-educated people, motivated and willing to apply their expertise to making the world a better place?

Unfortunately, the structure of the sector creates a significant barrier to highly effective teams. With only the organization's vision and mission as a guide and without a measurable bottom line – like the profit measure in the corporate sector – teams within foundations struggle to row in the same direction (Drucker, 1990). The predisposition to organize into silos impedes collaboration and knowledge sharing among colleagues. Team members often become confused about the foundation's role in the change process, mistaking grantmaking for an end goal rather than an input to achieving enduring social change.

Using the experience of one team in a large U.S.-based foundation over a four-year period, this article examines four essential tools for cultivating high-performing teams in the philanthropic sector. The tools discussed are giving and receiving feedback, the art of appreciations, organizing meetings to produce accountability, and assessing team communication styles, all applied with a racial equity lens.

By no means was this an exhaustive list of effective team-building practices. However, when applied with focus, rigor, and sufficient investment of time for teams to learn and practice new habits together, these tools resulted in a more cohesive team that performed well when buffeted by changing priorities and substantial

global problems. The enumerated tools are likely applicable in every sector. But when assembled and practiced in foundations, where large-scale social issues like poverty alleviation are the crux of the work, the resulting high-performing teams are most likely better equipped to confront concerns vital to the philanthropic sector.

Building an Effective Team

In 2008, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation began concentrating up to two-thirds of its grantmaking resources in several priority places, including Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, and New Orleans. Internationally, it worked in micro-regions in Haiti and Mexico. By focusing a majority of annual grantmaking to a limited number of geographic locations, in full partnership with communities and over an extended period, the foundation hoped to create lasting change for children and their families in those places.

In 2010, the Kellogg Foundation created a new place-team structure by assembling a diverse group of staff from existing teams in the foundation to form three new teams, focused on improving conditions for vulnerable children. Separate teams were composed for Michigan, New Mexico, and a team for Mississippi, and New Orleans combined, joining an established Latin America team. Teams already existed for the foundation's national work in education, health, and family economic security, along with racial-equity and community-engagement teams. The focus of all the foundation's teams was the audacious vision of improving outcomes on behalf of vulnerable children.

The Michigan team was comprised of 14 racially diverse individuals with impressive academic credentials, deep content knowledge, and organizational skills. However, this group of foundation staff had not worked together before. The new team needed to learn how to work across a variety of differences – including but not limited to age, race, gender, and organizational role – in support of the foundation's deep commitment to racial equity. There were four geographic teams within the Michigan team (Battle Creek, Grand Rapids, Detroit, and statewide), which added to the complexity of functioning as one place team.

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To help with team building, the Michigan team engaged InPartnership Consulting, an organizational development and strategic change firm with a strong practice of supporting philanthropic teams.

The process began with an assessment of how the team organized relationships, communicated within and across the foundation, and delivered on results. The first year's data painted a picture of a good team with a passion for making a difference on a range of issues. The initial report findings were summed up by one team member: "We're clear on the what; being clear on the HOW we're going to get to success is what we need now. We're tackling society's biggest issues in the hardest recession we've ever had, in the hardest-hit state!"

The assessment also revealed a tendency within the team to avoid conflict, due in part, to a "culture of niceness" (a self-description that the team considered to be a cultural norm in the Midwestern region where team members worked). Respondents also highlighted another trend: "[We don't] handle mistakes well"; "[we are] critical of errors." Interview feedback suggested that these tendencies had a corrosive effect on the team, reinforcing silos and undermining team success.

The team identified three key challenges:

1. too many meetings,

One key skill was developing a practice of giving and receiving feedback, which proved to be the most critical competency. The organization benefited when teammates were able to exchange honest and timely information about issues that prevent work from moving forward.

2. too much time spent responding to urgent issues or crises, and
3. not enough time available to plan and build trusting relationships across the team.

In light of these findings, the team's leadership made – and stuck to – a decision that proved to be a core breakthrough for the team: In part to nurture and strengthen relationships, they decided to dedicate two full days every month for the team to strategize, plan, and learn new skills together.

The team members' reactions to this innovation ranged from skepticism to relief. InPartnership, meanwhile, saw an opportunity to support a good team's transformation into an aligned, collaborative, and trusting team focused on results. Between 2010 and 2014, the team added new members and lost others, bringing it to 21 members. For four years, 2010 to 2014, InPartnership administered an annual assessment to each team member to track the team's progress. Using the assessment data, the team was able to track its progress in applying several critical tools and make corrections as needed year to year.

Giving and Receiving Feedback

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If the feedback process was so valuable, why was it so hard to do well – or at all? A simple answer: The human brain appears hard-wired for protection from pain or discomfort. Criticism may be perceived as a threat, which triggers the primal "fight or flight" instinct – part of the "minimize danger, maximize reward" mechanism that neuroscientist Evian Gordon calls "the fundamental organizing principle of the brain" (as quoted in Rock, 2009, para. 5). When faced with feedback, a stress reaction complete with the release of the steroid hormone cortisol is not uncommon. As a result, hearing and sharing honest feedback among team members had somehow morphed into an expectation of the "gotcha" game. Given the brain's response to a perceived critic, practicing receiving feedback was as valuable as knowing how to give it. Engaging people in this highly sensitive area became a valuable tool for team development. The feedback tool was practiced in nine of 20 meetings from January 2011 to June 2014.

A first principle for giving feedback was that the person must be sure that the information will help the recipient be more successful. When feedback was framed as a tool for improving another's performance, the interaction was robbed of its ability to sting. Feedback needed to be planned in advance of its delivery. Nothing good for a team happened in the heat of the moment. Practicing developing a written plan for giving feedback proved crucial to the team's progress, because such introspection allowed the giver the opportunity to think deeply about the feedback's content and purpose.

Another critical element was asking permission to give feedback. "Is it a good time for me to give you some feedback?" may sound at first like an odd question. However, the act of asking permission allowed recipients to prepare for new information and, if needed, to arrange for an alternate time when they were more likely to be able to hear the information.

A simple "thank you" was important to remember when receiving feedback. This courtesy acknowledged that one teammate cared enough about another's success to give a gift of feedback. Asking questions – for clarity or to improve understanding – was the next step. Receivers needed to make sure they deeply understood the feedback. Sometimes, those two steps were all that were needed for success.

When they first started practicing giving each other feedback, the groans were audible and the anxiety on colleagues' faces was plain. Filling out short forms to structure the feedback helped to relieve some of the pressure. In Partnership designed a structured feedback process where peers provided feedback to one another about their strengths and contributions to the work. (See Figure 1.) The intent was to provide positive, constructive information that allowed team members to improve their work and relationships.

Consistent feedback helped team members build trust. Regarding the practice, a teammate commented: "I thought I was going to die, but it wasn't bad. It was helpful."

In an assessment of growth in communication skills from 2011 to 2014, the team rated skills in giving and receiving feedback as having improved on a five-point scale, from lowest ratings of 3.1 and 3.8, respectively, to 3.5 and 4.1 in 2014. (See Figure 2.)

Appreciations

Practicing the powerful art of appreciation provides a balance to delivering feedback that may sometimes be perceived as negative. As noted by researchers Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman (2013) in the *Harvard Business Review*: "Only positive feedback can motivate people to continue doing what they're doing well, and do it with more vigor, determination, and creativity" (para. 8).

In most meetings, applause becomes an automatic and perfunctory response signifying thanks. By contrast, when verbal appreciation was expressed for team members' contributions, it compelled givers to engage thoughtfully with

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what they had heard or experienced. Effective appreciations were specific and directed at a single person.

The team practiced appreciations at every team meeting from January 2010 until June 2014, the period under review, and at every team meeting since. Members have begun to bring the practice to other foundation teams. Team members now regularly make time to appreciate each other. The first time they receive a verbal appreciation in front of a group individuals tend to be startled, but they quickly learn to enjoy and benefit from the praise.

Decision Action Log

Disorganized meetings that produce little action are the root cause of underperformance for many teams. According to the Mayo Clinic (2012), disorganized people are more likely to feel anxiety and stress, which can result in diminished mental and physical health. As a result, disorganized meetings may take a toll on the health of a team. Business consultant Audrey Thomas (2014) cited

FIGURE 1 Sample Form to Structure Giving and Receiving of Feedback

Michigan Team Feedback 2.0

POP Your Conversation!

1. What's my purpose in giving/receiving this feedback?
2. Is it the right purpose from my point of view?
3. Is it the right purpose from the other person's point of view?
4. Is my primary goal coaching, evaluation, or appreciation?

Ask

1. What's one thing you see me doing (or failing to do) that holds me back?

During the Conversation

1. Spot the topic(s).
2. Stay on track.
 - Ask: Are we on the same track? (If you are aware of more than one topic, name the two topics and give each one a track.)
 - Ask: What is the real topic here?

When You're the Recipient of Feedback

1. In what ways is this feedback right?
2. How do I get in my own way?
3. Where have I heard this before?

Move to Action

1. Determine one small step (action) you could try to see if the advice is useful.
2. Agree on a time by when you will take the step.
3. Identify a time to check in and determine if the feedback and actions taken have improved conditions for both of you, or if more conversation is needed.

(Stone & Heen, 2014)

FIGURE 2 Communication Effectiveness on a Five-Point Scale, 2011-2014

“inability to make decisions” (para. 8) among the root causes of disorganization reported by her clients.

One tool to combat disorganization was the Decision Action Log (DAL): a simple chart of what action must be taken, who will take it, and by when it must be completed. When used consistently and correctly, the DAL was a powerful tool of accountability and facilitated team agreements around moving work forward.

In this practice, a team member was assigned to note decisions made by the team during a meeting on a large flip chart that everyone could read; this created a clear record. At the end of the meeting, detailed review of the DAL ensured that the entire team understood all items discussed and agreed upon. Checking the previous DAL at the beginning of the next meeting reinforced a culture of accountability, and helped create more useful and efficient meeting agendas.

The DAL was introduced at the inception of the new team and was practiced at all 20 team meetings from 2011 until 2014. Using this tool well proved harder than the team imagined, however. In reviewing the previous DAL at the next meeting, the team asked questions like, “Does anyone remember what that task was?” During the review of items, another challenge was to not use meeting time to start working on an item – an easy habit to fall into – but instead to check for completion and to assign a new deadline if the task had not been completed. Use of the DAL has now spread across many Kellogg Foundation teams, improving colleagues’ accountability to one another and making meetings more productive and valuable.

Mapping Interpersonal Style

No one would start a journey to an unknown destination without a map. Why, then, would an organization undertake to build a team without first developing an understanding of its members?

Individuals bring their preconceptions of others into any team environment. As Brenda J. Allen (2004) discusses in *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity*, “when we interact

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with people, we often draw on what we expect and assume about the groups they represent to form our attitudes and to direct our behaviors” (p. 2). Finding a common language to describe and complement differences was an important part of building a high-performing team. There are hundreds of ways to assess individual styles, including the venerated Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Using the Interpersonal Leadership Styles (ILS) survey, the team mapped every individual’s preferred communication and thinking style.

The ILS assessment identified people as one of four types – Directors, Analyzers, Counselors, or Persuaders – as well as the level of intensity of each type (e.g., extreme Persuader; on the line between Analyzer and Counselor). While the ILS did not capture the important and complex identities that shape how we see and interact with the world, it did provide insight into how

Various configurations of styles brought different strengths and challenges to the team. Awareness of similarities and differences in styles contributed to the team's performance.

individuals use their power to get things done, how they like to work, how they tend to focus their actions, and the amount of order they like to have in their life.

Using the ILS provided the team members with a nonjudgmental language for talking about differences and similarities. As new members joined the team over the years, the ILS was administered and the team discussed the meanings of different roles. Analyzers dominated the team at its inception; four years later, the team has a larger number of Directors. Persuaders have historically been fewer in number, and the number of Counselors has shrunk to just one on the current team. There was no magic mixture of styles; the understanding each member's style helped build stronger working relationships.

Various configurations of styles brought different strengths and challenges to the team. Awareness of similarities and differences in styles contributed to the team's performance. Project planning now included an intentional effort to bring a mix of ILS styles to the design of plans and programs. The goal is to maintain a balance of perspectives and approaches to improve program results.

Building Racial-Equity Skills

To fulfill their organization's vision, the Michigan team required not only a set of tools to support its development, but also a way to operationalize the foundation's deep dedication to racial equity. In 2010, the team completed Bennett intercultural sensitivity self-assessments. In 2011, the foundation as a whole took the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a

50-item assessment of intercultural competence and the capacity for shifting perspective and appropriately adapting behavior to cultural differences and commonalities. The foundation received an organizational score, each team was given its score, and each individual had a personal score.

With the introduction of this tool to the foundation, the Michigan team had additional language to discuss its score and the members' individual journeys. Improving the team and individuals' scores became part of every team member's annual goals. The team goal for 2011-2012 was simple: "Understand and improve our team IDI profile." A reassessment in 2013 showed improvement in both the foundation as a whole and the Michigan team. The IDI measured progress across a continuum from denial to adaptation; the Michigan team had moved from the middle space, minimization, to the next stage of acceptance.

The team's conversations about both assessments led them into discussions of race, power, and culture. The team realized it needed to develop a shared language, approach, and perspective for talking about race and thinking about racial equity – and to build capacity for addressing cultural dynamics as a vital component of cultivating a strong and trusting team.

Over the next few years, during each monthly meeting the team invested time in thinking about and working to build understanding of how the dynamics of race impacted their work – with each other, and with community members on foundation-funded projects and initiatives. After the first year of focused racial-equity work during the team meetings, one staff member commented: "We've had really good discussions. ... We're starting to feel comfortable sharing and asking questions. ... Everyone's heart is in it." But other staff members acknowledged, "We still have a long way to go."

As a result of this engagement, the team now owns the responsibility to bring a racial-equity and healing lens to every aspect of its work. In the 2013 assessment, one team member described

this new level of rigor: "To enter into difficult conversations is new for us. ... [We've created] a safe space for ... people [to] speak up honestly. ... [T]hat is a very new behavior. It has been easy and comfortable."

Acknowledging this plateau allowed the team to identify that a deeper dive would be needed to ultimately improve the lives of children in Michigan: "We need to go deeper into racial equity and get everyone to contribute to the conversation, so that we can help grantees understand why they need to integrate racial equity" into their approach.

Conclusion

By understanding individuals' communication and thinking styles, team members maintained a sense of who they were as a group, even as the team doubled in size and some members departed while others joined. Through an annual assessment, team progress was measured by employing the four tools described in this article: giving and receiving feedback, appreciations, using the Decision Action Log, and assessing team communication styles. Evidence of progress can be seen in the change in average team effectiveness scores, which rose between June 2011 and January 2014 from 3.5 to 3.9. The tracking of assessment scores also unearthed the ups and downs of team building. In June 2012, when the size of the team doubled, collaboration and effectiveness ratings dipped. In January 2014, an increase in team size was accompanied by a dip or flat-lining in scores.

Lower scores could be attributed to the learning curve that accompanies the onboarding of a significant number of staff members – each of whom must adapt and buy in to the prevailing team framework, and develop skill in the use of team-building tools. Interview comments also pointed, however, to a need for deeper understanding of the impact of constant internal fluctuation and frequent staff transitions on the team, as well as improved mechanisms through which team members adapt to change. Having the annual assessment and frequent refreshers on the tools made it possible for the team to then make progress on critical indicators.

These tools, practiced with consistency and rigor, provided the team with the foundation for capacities and ways of working that allowed them to produce results in service to vulnerable children while successfully managing change, maintaining trust, and building collaborative relationships.

From observation, the shifts in capacity can be summed up as:

- from "what can I contribute?" to "what can we accomplish together?"
- from a "stay out of my business" approach to thinking about how to contribute to each team member's success, with feedback that leads to action, appreciating each individual's contributions, and supporting everyone's success.
- from leading with control and certainty to practicing how to model vulnerability, candor, and humility in the work.
- from "I'll do it myself" to making the conscious choice to ask for help and to solicit other team members' input in order to make the best possible decisions.
- from silence on issues and dynamics impacted by race, gender, age, power, and other dimensions of difference to talking regularly about how identity, race, and privilege shape perspectives and daily experiences – allowing team members to more fully bring themselves into the team and be affirmed, and leading to greater awareness and opportunity to build respectful relationships across differences.

The larger question of whether improved team cohesion will eventually lead to improved outcomes for vulnerable children in the three cities of focus continues to be much more difficult to measure. In the corporate sector, it seems widely accepted that teams drive organizational success – the more organized and cohesive the team, the better the bottom line (Ancona & Bresman, 2007). Our assumption in undertaking these

The belief was that aligned grantmaking had the potential to foster regional coalitions and networks, and build a larger base of support for policies benefiting children and families. Measurable progress toward this goal began to emerge around 2012: Significant work was now underway across the three places, for which the Michigan team credited the fact that they had built mechanisms for collaborating.

team-building practices was that the same was true in the philanthropic sector.

In the four-year window covered in this article, with child poverty in Michigan hovering at 25 percent, certainly no large-scale improvement in child-level outcomes was realized and none was expected. From the time the team was assembled, however, one of its stated goals was to align grantmaking across the three places and connect it to state policy levers. The belief was that aligned grantmaking had the potential to foster regional coalitions and networks, and build a larger base of support for policies benefiting children and families. Measurable progress toward this goal began to emerge around 2012: Significant work was now underway

across the three places, for which the Michigan team credited the fact that they had built mechanisms for collaborating. "We've co-created strong, measurable, achievable goals for this year," one team member commented. Another observed, "Team members show up in alignment wherever we are."

The team continued to work toward the highest level of performance with disciplined use of these tools and assessments. Monthly meetings, for which the team once needed two full days for in-depth team-building strategy and practice, evolved into more effective half-day sessions.

The team has met its grantmaking deadlines, moving a significant percentage of the foundation's annual budget. One of the only federal requirements for foundations is that they distribute 5 percent of their investment assets for charitable purposes (Renz, 2012). One measure of team success could be narrowly construed as the Michigan's team contribution to the foundation meeting this requirement. For three of the four years under review, the Michigan team was able to move more funds than it had been assigned in its annual budget, between 22 percent and 24 percent of the foundation's annual payout.

Given its commitments in its priority places for the next 25 years, the Kellogg Foundation continues to refine its measurement and evaluation efforts, including examining the connection between team cohesiveness and overall outcomes, to answer that larger question of how its grantmaking contributes to improved outcomes for children and their families.

As Jim Collins (2001) concluded in *Good to Great*, "Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice and discipline" (p. 310).

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Enhancing Foundation Capacity: The Role of the Senior Leadership Team

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Keywords: Foundation leadership, foundation accountability, theory of the foundation, organization design

Key Points

- This article examines the issue of foundation organization design and assesses how foundation leaders might think about their organizations as institutions.
- Noting that any organization structure inhabited by human beings creates silos and territorial issues, foundation leaders are increasingly using two primary mechanisms to minimize these artificial barriers and maximize collaboration: enhanced headquarters functions to help integrate across the organization, and senior leadership teams.
- This article reviews the structure, roles, responsibilities, and value-add of senior leadership teams at 19 foundations. The senior leadership team plays a crucial role in foundations, functioning as an advisory group to the president and chief executive officer as well as helping to define the foundation's overall vision and goals.
- This article also seeks to develop shared concepts, frameworks, and tools for foundation leaders to use individually and in discussion or partnership with other foundations, and to spur more effective collaboration among foundations and with other sectors.

value-add of SLTs. The research was done as part of RPA's Theory of the Foundation initiative, which aims to enhance the capacity of foundations to align their resources for impact by identifying promising theories for foundations, as well as operating models, organization structures, and leadership practices.

Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors launched the Theory of the Foundation initiative in the fall of 2013. Its inspiration is Peter Drucker's 20-year old article, "The Theory of the Business" (1994), which asserted that every organization needed to understand and regularly re-evaluate its own specific enterprise theory. Given the many and profound changes among large foundations, ranging from new entities to new approaches to new pressures, RPA felt that the time had come to assess how foundation leadership might think about their organizations as institutions. This article also seeks to develop shared concepts, frameworks, and tools for foundation leaders to use individually and in discussion or partnership with other foundations. Finally, we hope to extend the field of knowledge about foundations as institutions and encourage its development. Through this shared understanding, we hope to spur more effective collaboration among foundations and with other sectors.

Introduction

The senior leadership team (SLT) plays a crucial role in foundations, functioning as an advisory group to the president and chief executive officer as well as helping to define the foundation's overall vision, institution-wide priorities, and annual goals.

Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA) analyzed more than 40 large foundations, looking at the structure, roles, responsibilities, and

This article is based on a collaborative research model for which 19 foundations provided financial support, ideas, and analysis, and served as part of a working group. We deeply appreciate their support, as well as their active role in developing the areas of exploration for the project. Notably, foundation participants encouraged us to expand the scope of the early phases of the initiative to include evaluation of operating models as well as theories of foundations. In

FIGURE 1 "Product Structure" Model

(Galbraith, 2014; reprinted with permission)

developing this initiative, we interviewed more than 60 foundation leaders and experts in foundations and management. We also reviewed and analyzed published works on the role of foundations, foundation effectiveness, corporate operating models and structures, public-sector models, family-owned businesses, organizational management, culture, and leadership.

Organization Design in Foundations

To provide context for this study of senior leadership teams, we looked at the broader issue of foundation organization design. Several foundation leaders noted in interviews that any organization structure inhabited by human beings creates silos and territorial issues. Part of leadership's role is to minimize these artificial barriers and maximize collaboration. Foundation leaders are increasingly using two primary mechanisms to help achieve these goals: enhanced headquarters functions to help integrate across the organization and senior leadership teams.

Among the large foundations whose organizational structure we reviewed, the dominant model is what's called the Product Structure Model. (See Figure 1.)

The other common organization structure models among the foundations studied are:

- **Functional:** Classically, this model is used for an organization that produces a single type of product or service, and its divisions (viewed on a chart from left to right) essentially mirror their processes. (See Figure 2.)
- **Geographic:** Organized by region or country.
- **Channel:** Organized by how a product or service is delivered (e.g., online, in company-owned stores, in department stores).
- **Client segment:** Organized by type of client (e.g., consumer, mass affluent, high net worth, ultra-high net worth).
- **Hybrid:** For example, organizations that sell some products or services regionally but others globally might have a global product division alongside regional divisions.
- **Matrix:** A system in which unit heads report jointly to more than one division. For example, a unit head may report to the head of a geographic region and to the head of line of business.

FIGURE 2 "Functional Structure" Model

(Galbraith, 2014; reprinted with permission)

At a foundation with a product structure organization, each division does its own research, strategy, program design, convening, grantee relations, technical assistance, partnership outreach, knowledge creation, field building,

networking, professional development, and recruiting. The divisions may get support from centralized staff functions (such as human resources or grants management), but tend to make significant decisions separately. (See Figure 3.)

FIGURE 3
"Product Structure" Model for Foundations

*This position exists in about half the foundations we studied.

Administrative functions include corporate roles, such as finance and investing, but also shared services such as technology, human resources, grants management, communications and, often, evaluation. The extent to which these functions operate independently of program areas – in oversight roles, in service roles, or in combinations of all three – varies greatly from foundation to foundation. It is also a rapidly evolving area in the large foundation sector.

For many foundations, the appeal of this structure is that it allows program groups to operate in an independent and entrepreneurial way, with the headquarters function providing very broad strategic guidance and administrative support. Advocates of this structure believe that program teams that are so deeply expert in specific issue areas and so close to grantees and the communities they serve can be highly responsive and effective.

But foundation leaders also note challenges to this model. First, every program area is effectively operating independently, and opportunities for leverage are missed. In addition, useful

knowledge and relationships, in a health care group, for example, may never reach the education group, and vice versa. Grantees and partners may find themselves juggling multiple relationships with one funder for activities that, from their perspective, are tightly interwoven.

A second challenge that foundation leaders noted is that as foundation activity has broadened from pure grantmaking to a more activist role, the skill set demanded of a program officer or director has mushroomed. In the product line model, program staff needs to be skilled not only in research, program design, nonprofit evaluation, and grantee relations, but also in coalition building, collaboration, advocacy, and communications.

Whether product structure is the best organizational design for foundations is an open question. The prevalence of this design reflects the continuing centrality of the industrial manufacturing industry in both the theory and practice of large organizations, despite the rising importance of the service sector. It's as if all analysis of organization design still starts with Alfred Sloan's work about General Motors (1964). Even in Jay Galbraith's 2014 edition of *Designing Organizations*, there are more manufacturing than service company examples.

Some foundations have begun to push back on the product structure, looking to organize around major initiatives or challenges, although it is not clear how that will affect actual organization design and reporting relationships. But one emerging structural model looks very much like a functional organization, with centralized research and development, strategy, program development, coalition building, communications, evaluation, and talent development. Program units in essence become more like the manufacturing units of a functional corporate structure: they make what the upstream divisions of research, strategy, and program development tell them to make. This organizational and strategic design has profound implications for program-officer and program-director roles in foundations. (See Figure 4.)

FIGURE 4 Emerging Structural Model

Of course, grantmaking foundations are not making tangible products (with the minor exception of some things like publications). They are providing a service, and so organization design for the service sector may be a better analogy. Yet, many service companies simply translate classic product design to their lines of services. Others organize by customer type, which might offer some intriguing ideas for foundations, where customers would be translated as beneficiaries.

Another potential source of organization design ideas for the foundation sector is the professional-services sector, which includes law, architecture, design, research, accounting, physicians, and consulting firms. Most are privately held and use a partnership model. For these firms, organization design tends to be a complex blend of service type, geography, and customer and key relationships.

For foundations, this comparison to professional-services firms is interesting because both types of organizations have strong professional identities and codes. Often members of professions belong to or are certified by a standards body, and they have a broad belief that they are responsible for some greater good beyond their business interests.

The comparison is also useful to foundations because professionals in both sectors tend to operate with a high degree of independence and with a unique base of expertise and relationships. Despite its organization chart, noted the former head of a major law firm, “it’s not a command-and-control hierarchy.” More cynically, an executive in another professional-services firm said,

“You cross a moat about every 10 feet.” And one retired law firm partner flatly insisted that “managing” a professional-services firm was an oxymoron. According to our interviewees, leading a professional-services firm requires less emphasis on structure or process and more on soft leadership skills, such as motivating and influencing independent of hierarchy or proximity, as well as the capacity to work with people who are outside the leader’s own discipline. Reward systems may be particularly important to encourage collaboration among professionals who are, or have been trained to be or prefer to be, essentially, independent actors (Maister & McKenna, 2006).

Integrating the Organization: The Role of the Headquarters Functions

In recent years, foundation leaders have sought new ways to reduce the isolation of siloed program areas to increase the foundation’s efficiency and effectiveness. Organizations of all types face the integration challenge and use a variety of functions, systems (such as compensation) and processes to overcome the boundaries of organization design.

Galbraith (2014) refers to some of these as lateral processes, referring to the flow of information and decision processes across the organization’s structure. (See Figure 5.) Vertical processes are more centralized and hierarchical (e.g., planning and budgeting), whereas lateral processes are designed around workflow (e.g., new product development), so that decision-making is more dependent on mutual agreement and relationships. Galbraith notes that the level of integration achieved relates directly to the amount of time and effort required. At the lower end of time/

FIGURE 5 Types of Lateral Processes

(Galbraith, 2014; reprinted with permission)

effort, informal groups are easy to operate but not likely to achieve significant integration; at the most intense end, a matrixed organization is fully integrated but at tremendous cost.

Foundation leaders have focused largely on the middle range of this spectrum to achieve integration, using integrator roles at the headquarters level and formal groups. In our review of large foundations, we found that more than half have created senior positions that were quite rare a decade ago, including learning officers, heads of strategic planning, and chiefs of staff, all designed to improve integration. Roles that combine various functions, thus giving a single executive a broad line of sight across the organization's functions and operations, are increasingly common. About half the foundations seek integration through a top program officer to whom all the program areas report. In the other half of the group, this integration occurs at the CEO level. The study also found:

- 72 percent of foundations combine titles in two different support areas (e.g., finance and administration; finance and human resources);

- 60 percent include roles that do not fall into traditional categories (e.g., research and evaluation; learning; strategy; chief of staff); and
- 50 percent have a top program officer position; 50 percent have two or more program leaders reporting to a CEO.

Overall, foundation leaders in our study expressed confidence that these cross-cutting roles, often filled by nontraditional candidates – those from outside the philanthropy sector or with experience less obviously related to the roles – have helped their organizations improve. There is as yet no clear way to measure this improvement, other than through indirect indicators such as employee attitude. The same is true in the corporate sector. In a recent Harvard Business School review of research on corporate headquarters, the authors found “sparse evidence” that specific characteristics of headquarters staff directly affected business performance. They did find, however, that these staff had broader and deeper internal networks than others, implying that they are succeeding at least in improving communications and spreading information (Menz, Kunisch, & Collis, 2013).

The Senior Leadership Team in Foundations

The second lateral process that has become common in larger foundations is the growing role of a senior leadership team in solving the integration challenge. As part of our Theory of the Foundation initiative, we explored this management process in depth, seeking answers to some very specific questions posed by foundation leaders who made up the working group:

- How are foundation SLTs structured?
- What roles and responsibilities do they have?
- How do they contribute to the effective functioning of their organizations?
- What best practices and trends are emerging for such teams?

Nineteen foundations – five family-led and 14 independent – participated in our exploration of the SLT. (See Appendix.) Three of the foundations are headquartered outside the U.S.; four others have international offices. Six have living donors. The group includes a spend-down foundation, a conversion foundation, and several that are part of a networked group of charitable organizations. Two-thirds of the participants have more than 40 employees. The study included both an online survey and a phone interview.

Size, composition, and structure

The number of SLT members in individual foundations participating in the study ranged from three to 15. Generally, the size of the SLT rises with the size of the annual giving budget and/or total staff numbers. Most, but not all, members of an SLT report to the CEO of the foundation.

But the size of the teams remains rather fluid as the role of this function evolves: 85 percent of foundations altered the SLT composition within the past five years. Most – 70 percent – have expanded their SLT over the past several years. Two foundations created an SLT for the first time during that period. Three foundations reduced the size of their team. This underscores that

membership is dynamic rather than static, shifting in response to the needs of the institution and/or leadership changes at the president/CEO level. Senior leadership teams in all the foundations studied include the CEO and the head or heads of program areas.

For those foundations with no chief program officer, the most common number of program heads on the SLT was three to four. But in a few foundations, as many as six or seven program areas are represented on the SLT. The chief financial officer and head of communication are the most frequent members of the SLT outside of the CEO and program leaders. (See Table 1.) No single best-practice model emerged from the study; the size and composition of individual teams varied.

TABLE 1 Senior Leadership Team: Most Common Participants

CEO	100%
Program leader(s)	100%
CFO	80%
Communications	70%
Administration/Operations	60%
Chief Investment Officer	50%

Meetings

Meeting frequency varied widely. (See Figure 6.) While the average time between SLT meetings is two weeks, the scheduled frequency is almost evenly divided among weekly, biweekly, and monthly sessions. This is a significant time commitment and is indicative of the high value placed on the SLT by the executive leadership of the institution. In addition to the SLT meetings, many presidents/CEOs routinely conduct separate meetings with program staff. Most SLT meetings are scheduled for two hours or less, with longer (often one- or two-day) meetings/retreats two to four times per year, or as needed.

Agendas are typically set by the president/CEO, with input from the SLT members. The majority of those interviewed did not feel agendas

FIGURE 6 Meeting Frequency

were dominated by program-related discussions. A number of the foundations in the study had a written charter or procedural document that described the role of their SLT.

Value of the Senior Leadership Team

By and large, the SLT is not a decision-making body. Rather, the SLT functions as advisory to the president/CEO, helping to define the foundation's overall vision, institutionwide priorities, and annual goals. As one individual said, it is what helps the president/CEO (and, by extension, the governing board) to think most deeply about the "so what" question.

As many members describe it, the SLT members bring information, ideas, and suggestions to the meetings and then communicate priorities and decisions. When asked whether there was a greater value in "influencing up" or pushing information "out and down" in the organization, most saw equal merit in both. Several of those interviewed mentioned that, while the SLT is critical, it is also important to pay attention to middle management – finding ways to enlist and engage that cohort in policy recommendations and the operations of the foundation. Alignment and collaboration are also important roles. (See Box 1.)

Several of the CEOs interviewed emphasized the critical role their SLT has played in helping break down program silos and spur cross-functional thinking. Examples include the use of the SLT to articulate the framework for an

organizationwide strategic planning process; to begin a dialogue regarding mission-driven investing and its relevance to the foundation's theory of change; and to determine whether to close a satellite office.

The SLT is also a primary steward of foundation culture, expected to model behavior that is consistent with the institution's vision and values. As one respondent commented, "It is understood that the operating behavior of each SLT member carries more cultural weight than any memo or

Senior Leadership Team: Roles

1. Functions as advisory to the president/CEO, helping to define the foundation's overall vision, institutionwide priorities, and annual goals.
2. Ensures executive alignment on major policies, procedures, and expenditures.
3. Encourages collaboration, innovation, and learning by sharing information across functional areas.
4. Helps manage/recruit talent.
5. Serves as primary steward of the culture of the foundation.
6. Elements mentioned most often as critical to the successful function of an SLT:
 - strong support from the president/CEO,
 - clear and open communication, and
 - shared vision, trust, and mutual respect.

policy directive. The organizational culture lives and dies on SLT member behavior.”

In addition to these general integration and communication roles, members of the SLT increasingly have actual responsibilities for key functions in the foundation, especially related to talent development and to coordination of approved projects. They are less likely to be involved, however, in the actual planning of these activities. (See Table 2.)

TABLE 2 Senior Leadership Team: Responsibilities

1. Coordinates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training and development (70%) • Talent strategy (60-plus %) • Knowledge sharing (60%)
2. Coordinates in part	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-functional/divisional projects (70%) • Succession planning (50%)
3. Less likely to coordinate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-functional/divisional planning • Cross-functional/divisional partnerships

Study participants also spoke about the special role that SLTs can play during transitions (e.g., a new president/CEO is hired, next-generation family members join a foundation board), both in maintaining staff morale during a period of uncertainty and in serving as a source of institutional memory. A number of those interviewed also highlighted the significant role their SLTs play in risk management and institutional branding, as well as their ability to function as a “rapid response” team when quick action is required. Another individual spoke about how cohesion on the SLT can encourage responsible risk-taking and innovation by building individual team members’ confidence that they have the backing and support of the foundation’s executive leadership. (See Box 2.)

Attributes of a Highly Functioning Team

Elements mentioned most often as critical to the successful functioning of an SLT are strong

support from the president/CEO, clear and open communication, a shared vision, trust and mutual respect. Other factors include role clarity; the ability to disagree (as one participant commented, arguments in the room are fine – but not after); confidentiality; inclusion; appreciation of individual talent; and having the right people at the table. Several respondents also cited the importance of the CEO carving out time for the SLT meetings so that they are seen as a high priority.

Four of the foundation representatives interviewed noted that their SLT had worked with organizational design consultants or executive coaches as a team and that this had proven very helpful in understanding individual working styles, building trust, and improving communications. A number of foundations in the study have moved to establish shared performance goals for the SLT and/or base membership in the group on the foundation’s theory of change.

Conversely, behaviors that limit the effective functioning of teams include micro-management by the CEO; working in silos; politics (ambition, ego, hidden agendas, competing for resources); disrespect; lack of direct communication; absence of trust; and, most importantly, a lack of shared goals/vision. Those interviewed also spoke about the harm that can occur if members of the SLT aren’t aligned on key issues and/or send

Senior Leadership Team: Value-Add

- Break down silos and encourage cross-program and cross-functional work.
- Spur innovation.
- Foster an integrated learning environment.
- Ensure executive alignment and consistent messaging on policy or programs.
- Model behavior that is consistent with the foundation’s values and culture.
- Play a special role during transition periods.
- Function as a “rapid response” team when quick action is required.
- Provide risk management and institutional branding.

conflicting messages about institutional priorities to the rest of the foundation staff. The ability to work as a team is critical. And one respondent, whose foundation had recently reduced the size of its team, commented on the importance of staying focused on strategic/organizational decision-making, rather than operational management.

Emerging Practices

The ways in which the use of SLTs has evolved over the past five years are consistent with changes in how foundations define their missions and manage their operations. Among the changes we would highlight:

- The SLT's role in modeling and shaping a foundation's values and culture is now recognized as one of its most critical responsibilities.
- As foundations espouse a more cross-functional, interdisciplinary approach to their work, CEOs have come to rely on the SLT as a vehicle to foster that approach and encourage greater institutionwide innovation, collaboration, and risk-taking.
- The value of the SLT as a team is being emphasized, with performance goals established for the team and/or membership in the group directly linked to the foundation's theory of change. In support of that, resources (e.g., coaches, organizational design consultants) are being used to strengthen team functioning.
- Senior leadership teams are taking on expanded responsibilities in risk management and institutional identity.

Conclusion

Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors' research found that senior leadership teams vary widely in size and that more than three-quarters of the foundations we studied have altered the composition of their teams in the past few years. While no single structure has emerged, all have profound implications for the role of the program officer and program director. "Program" now

frequently encompasses more than grantmaking, which means that the roles require skills beyond issue-area expertise. Additionally, we noted that leadership teams at foundations draw talent from a broad array of sectors (including consulting, finance, and general management), with vastly different core competencies and experiences.

The range of structures and roles among SLTs highlight that today's foundation leaders are principally experimenting with approaches to leadership design, rather than drawing on conventional wisdom.

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APPENDIX Study Participants

Robert Bosch Foundation: Olaf Hahn, senior vice president & head, Department of Society & Culture

Andrea & Charles Bronfman Philanthropies: Jeffrey Solomon, president

The California Endowment: Robert K. Ross, president & chief executive officer

Margaret A. Cargill Foundation: Terry Meersman, vice president for programs

Annie E. Casey Foundation: Patrick McCarthy, president & CEO

Fondazione CRT: Massimo Lapucci, secretary general

Ford Foundation: Hilary Pennington, vice president for Education, Creativity and Free Expression
Kay Lee, project manager, office of the vice president

Gates Foundation: Kurt Fischer, chief human resources officer

Hewlett Foundation: Jean McCall, director of human resources

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: Robin Mockenhaupt, chief of staff
Rona Henry, director of staff development

Kresge Foundation: Ari Simon, chief strategy officer & deputy to the president

MacArthur Foundation: Jeff Ubois, program officer
Joshua Mintz, vice president & general counsel

Gordon & Betty Moore Foundation: Kerri Folmer, chief of staff and planning
(now director of Monitor Institute)

Newman's Own Foundation: Lisa Walker, managing director

Oak Foundation: Vinit Rishi, director of administration

Schusterman Philanthropic Network: Sanford Cardin, president

Simons Foundation: Maria Adler, chief financial officer
Adrienne Greenberg, director of business operations

Surdna Foundation: Phillip Henderson, president

Wallace Foundation: Will Miller, president

The Art and Science of Place-Based Philanthropy: Themes From a National Convening

Giannina Fehler-Cabral, Ph.D., and Jennifer James, M.A., Harder+Company Community Research; Meg Long, M.P.A., Equal Measure; and Hallie Preskill, Ph.D., FSG

Keywords: Place-based initiatives, place-based evaluation, place-based philanthropy, place-based systems change

Key Points

- This article shares insights and implications generated at a convening titled *Is This a Better Place? The Art and Science of Place Evaluation*. Participants included funders, evaluators, and community partners who came to discuss and share effective learning practices and the role of evaluation in place-based work.
- Place-based work requires a long-term investment in collaborative partnerships to create, nurture, and sustain local and systemic changes. In order to support this complex work, partners have to incorporate approaches that are nimble, iterative, and responsive to the changing needs of a “place” over an initiative’s life span.
- The convening produced a number of considerations, presented in this article, for how funders, and their investments in evaluation, can support the design, implementation, and overall success of place-based efforts.

Introduction

For more than 50 years, philanthropic and public-sector organizations have invested in numerous place-based initiatives to address persistent and pervasive poverty in communities around the country. Place-based initiatives use a comprehensive and intentional set of strategies to address the social, health, and economic needs of a neighborhood, city, or region. Place-based work requires a long-term commitment to a particular community, development of ongoing relationships with multiple community stakeholders, and supports and resources beyond grantmaking.

As our understanding of the complex, interrelated, and systemic issues affecting place has led to more sophisticated conceptual frameworks (Ferris & Hopkins, 2015), it has also resulted in a resurgence of interest in place by multiple affinity groups (e.g., Grantmakers for Effective Organization’s Place-Based Philanthropy Community of Practice, the Neighborhood Funders Group’s Working Group on Place-Based Community Change), large-scale public-sector initiatives (e.g., Promise Neighborhoods), and as evidenced by the importance of place within the national collective impact movement. Nationally and locally, we have not leveraged the collective knowledge of this work and established a strong place-based field. In many cases, multiple and parallel place-based investments in the same community are not intentionally integrated, and in some cases conflict with one another.

In response to this trend, the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions and the Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG) decided to collaborate on a series of convenings about place-based initiatives in 2014 and 2015. Aspen’s interest in this topic stems from its national Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund, which is supporting 21 communities across the U.S. in improving education and employment for young adults. The NFG is a network of foundations and other philanthropic organizations working to improve economic and social conditions in low-income communities.

The first event was *Towards a Better Place: A Conversation About Place-Based Philanthropy* (Aspen Institute & NFG, 2015). It sparked

various topical threads,¹ including interest in learning more about the role of evaluation and evaluators in supporting place-based work (Aspen Institute & Neighborhood Funders Group, 2015). In response to this interest, Aspen and NFG collaborated with the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation, a community development organization working in San Diego's Diamond neighborhood, and a national planning committee to develop a follow-up convening, *Is This a Better Place? The Art and Science of Place Based Evaluation* (Aspen Institute, 2016).

This article shares key insights and implications from this convening and subsequent reflection by the authors (who also facilitated convening sessions) about how funders and their investments in evaluation can support the design, implementation, and overall success of place-based efforts. To provide context, the article first provides a brief overview of how the convening was organized and introduces the place-based life span framework that was used to guide the convening. It then discusses how place-based initiatives have evolved to address systems change. This framing leads into the key insights from the convening, which are presented according to the life span of place-based initiatives. In each stage, we describe the funder's role in place-based work and the intersection with evaluation.

The Making of a Convening

In recent years, a number of groups have convened place-based experts and thought leaders to explore the evaluation of place-based initiatives. This included *Place-Based Initiatives in the Context of Public Policy and Markets: Moving to Higher Ground*, at the Sol Price School of Public Policy at the University of Southern California, and *Place-Based Evaluation Community of Practice*, convened by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations. As an extension to these efforts, *Is This a Better Place? The Art and Science of Place-Based Evaluation* had three goals:

1. to share effective, innovative learning practices for dynamic, complex environments;
2. to identify appropriate questions and metrics at different developmental stages of place-based initiatives; and
3. to explore evaluation's role in the power dynamics of place.

The convening's organizers sought to create a unique experience by inviting triads of funders, evaluators, and community representatives engaged in place-based initiatives to anchor a semistructured, conversation-based format aimed at fostering understanding among the roles.² It was attended by 125 people, approximately 10 percent of whom identified as community representatives, from more than a dozen initiatives across the country.

A national planning committee of a dozen experienced evaluators, consultants, and funders working in place-based initiatives developed a Place-Based Initiative Life Span framework to organize key questions faced by place-based funders and the role that evaluation plays in supporting the multiple stakeholders. (See Figure 1.) The committee also identified key questions in each stage's domain to guide peer exchange. (See Table 1.) These questions triggered rich discussion among participants and offer reflection points for the larger field.

Place-Based Initiatives Through the Lens of Systems Change

Through trial and error, place-based work has evolved from focusing on a targeted place to the realization that in order to make sustainable change, place-based initiatives have to incorporate a "systems-based" approach (Hopkins, 2015). New conceptual frameworks have therefore suggested focusing locally and systemically, being aware that "place" is an open, evolving system

¹ Threads included a special edition of *The Foundation Review* focused on place-based philanthropy (Volume 7, Issue 3) and a long-term plan by Aspen and NFG to sustain the conversation through periodic national convenings; the next is this year in Aspen, Colorado.

² The format incorporated the Spark model, a method of providing short presentations at trade shows. Similar to Ted Talks, Spark presentations are intended to be targeted, address a provocative question, and in this case, highlight different perspectives of funder, evaluator, and community representative.

FIGURE 1 Place-Based Initiative Lifespan

that requires a “macro” lens to examine the systemic barriers that may impede or support sustainable and scalable impact. These frameworks have also stressed that it may not be feasible or realistic for pilot initiatives to be transplanted into new communities and that strategies will need to be tailored to local contextual factors (Ferris & Hopkins, 2015; Centre for Community Child Health, 2012).

The reconceptualization of place-based work has required experts and funders to engage in

critical dialogue about the state of place-based initiatives. Can a single initiative, or even a set of similar initiatives, move the needle in a specific place given the national trends of poverty and other socio-economic epidemics? What approaches used by funders, practitioners, and evaluators are the right fit for complex place-based systems change requiring engagement with diverse stakeholders in the community? Field experts are also arguing for the importance of making implicit systemic structural issues such as race, class, gender, and power explicit in

Place-Based Work Is About Systems Change

Systems change was an important topic at *Is This a Better Place: The Art and Science of Place Evaluation*. This definition of the term “place based” (Karlstrom, Brown, Chaskin, & Richman, 2007) was used to ground the conversations at the convening.

Place-based work is the intentional, strategic, long-term engagement in a place ..., which can be a central city, an arts district, or a neighborhood. It seeks to provide opportunities for those living in the target area greater involvement in a foundation's priority-setting and decision-making process. It requires a commitment to a particular community over an extended period of time, direct and ongoing relationships with multiple community actors, and community relationships as a primary vehicle of philanthropic operation, and supports and resources beyond grantmaking.

The authors suggest that place-based work is also, essentially, about creating, nurturing, and sustaining changes in systems because it often involves catalyzing changes in local, state, or national systems – either intentionally or as an unintended consequence. The following definition illustrates this connection:

Systems change is an intentional process designed to alter the status quo by shifting the function or structure of an identified system with purposeful interventions. It is a journey which can require a radical change in people's attitudes as well as in the ways people work. Systems change aims to bring about lasting change by altering underlying structures and supporting mechanisms which make the system operate in a particular way. These can include policies, routines, relationships, resources, power structures, and values. (Abercrombie, Harries, & Wharton, 2015.)

TABLE 1 Convening Questions for Sessions on the Place-Based Initiative Life Cycle

Early stage: Planning, assessment, and creating a strong foundation	
1. Getting ready and developing a learning agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are key considerations for assessing funder and community readiness in the early phase of place-based initiatives? What does it mean to be "ready"? How can evaluators provide support? How do power dynamics influence discussions about roles, decisions, expectations, and how communities and funders work together? How can evaluators support reflection and learning during this early phase? What are the appropriate evaluative and learning questions to assess and measure in the early phases of work? How can evaluators engage both funders and community stakeholders in developing a relevant and shared learning agenda?
2. Supporting community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are effective strategies for assessing and understanding the role and influence of race, culture, and power dynamics? In the context of the community engagement (e.g., history, norms regarding stakeholder interactions), as well as in evaluator's role in the community engagement? How can evaluation support and facilitate learning about these issues? With attention to who is included in the learning and what happens with the learning? How does evaluation assess and support community engagement strategies? Including definitions of community engagement and units of analysis (individual, group, organization, collaborative, neighborhood)? How can evaluators support planning and data-driven decision-making? Including values that undergird decision rules, chosen metrics, and capacity-building considerations?
3. Building capacity for implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can evaluators assess and support community capacity-building efforts, particularly capacities to addressing race, culture, and power dynamics? What are effective ways to promote continuous and timely learning among diverse stakeholders? What are effective strategies for evaluators to facilitate the engagement of diverse stakeholders in evaluation? What evaluative questions and planning tools are most helpful to provide direction and guidance during early-stage work?
Implementation stage: Deepening the work	
1. Strengthening leadership and governance structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can evaluation support responsive, accountable, and collective leadership? What are some indicators of responsiveness, accountability, and collective leadership? What are the characteristics or indicators that residents have significant influence and leadership in the initiative? Should evaluators be "seen, but not heard"? If not, what does leadership need to hear from evaluators?
2. Strengthening collaboration and cross-sector engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can evaluation help groups to surface, understand, and leverage the motivations of different sectors to participate in and commit to the work? What is the role of evaluation in identifying and surfacing elephants in the room that can interfere with collaboration, such as power dynamics, cultural assumptions and disconnects, and the impact of local history around collaboration? How can evaluation assess and support deeper community engagement and network building (building social capital) and surface opportunities to build networks that can address inequities? How can evaluation support accountability and responsiveness to the needs of different communities, including communities experiencing disparities?
3. Assessing progress and supporting a learning culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are strategies and techniques to promote team (rather than individual) learning with a diverse set of stakeholders (within foundation, within community, between foundation and community)? What are the roles of the evaluator and the foundation in creating a culture of learning (structured spaces and practices that support learning, reflection, and adaptation)? What are successful models? How can the measurement of outcomes support the learning process in a dynamic way, rather than becoming a singular focus?
Sustaining stage: Maintaining momentum and assessing results	
1. Managing change and transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What role can evaluation play in assessing and supporting the various transitions and phases of place-based work? How do you maintain momentum when leaders, organizations, or circumstances change? How can evaluators assess and surface issues that help funders more effectively manage place-based efforts as the initiative matures (i.e., coordination of multiple contractors, communications, funder-community dynamics)? What are some of the key considerations, challenges, and strategies for effectively managing transitions?
2. Supporting sustainability efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does sustainability mean for place-based initiatives? How can evaluation support local capacity to sustain community change efforts? How can evaluation identify and assess efforts to leverage existing resources and identify new resources (i.e., funding; partners and allies; knowledge; places and spaces) as the place-based initiative matures? What are other ways that evaluation can support sustainability efforts for community change? What does successful sustainability look like?
3. Connecting community change to systems change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can evaluation help stakeholders connect to and toggle between complimentary community and systems-change efforts to increase influence and alignment? How can evaluation help bring to the fore the power dynamics that exist in community change and systems-change work (including the dynamics spurred by the evaluation itself) in a way that productively moves both efforts forward? What are some common evaluation questions and metrics that have been – or can be – applied to local systems-change and community change efforts?

place-based work (Ferris & Hopkins, 2015; Juarez & Associates & Harder+Company Community Research, 2011). Despite these complexities, funders and community leaders launching new initiatives illustrate the optimism that the next generation of place-based initiatives will have a greater chance at achieving impact when they work strategically, factoring in larger socioeconomic contexts, broader public policies, and the market economy (Ferris & Hopkins, 2015).

In order to do complex, place-based systems-change work, foundations and their partners must adapt their strategies. Philanthropic, public, and corporate funders must embrace building collaborative partnerships and aligning, blending, or braiding funding across sectors to bridge gaps and break down organizational and systemic silos (Hopkins & Ferris, 2015). The convening highlighted numerous examples of collaborative partnerships among funders, most notably Promise Zone communities.³ They also must examine their organizational culture and assess whether community-engagement practices and underlying assumptions about race, class, and power truly support the work that is happening on the ground (David & Enright, 2015; Mack, Preskill, Keddy, & Jhavar, 2014). Funders will also need to take a learning orientation to

evaluation that promotes real-time adaptation, rather than one based purely on accountability (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2009).

Evaluators, as critical thought partners to philanthropy, must also adjust their traditional approach. They must be skillful about navigating the complexity of place-based initiatives by using methods that are adaptive, iterative, and supportive of both learning and capacity building (Preskill, Gopal, Mack, & Cook, 2014). The traditional sense of “rigor” in evaluation in place must be reconsidered, shifting the focus from accountability to quality and credibility while balancing cultural responsiveness and engaging stakeholders in using timely data to inform learning and adaptation (Lynn & Preskill, 2016). This is not to say that more traditional formative and summative evaluation approaches should not be applied to place-based systems-change initiatives. In fact, a variety of evaluation approaches – developmental, formative, summative, and impact assessments – should be used to both inform the work and document how systemic changes contribute to desired community- and population-level changes.

Early Stage: Critical Questions for Funders

- How do our organizational assumptions and practices align with the values and needs of the community?
- Do we understand the needs and assets of the community? Do we know their history and culture?
- How can we engage the appropriate group of community members as partners in this work?
- What evaluation approaches are most appropriate for our dynamic learning needs, development, and growth?

Insights from the Convening

To build on the conversation in the field about the state of place-based initiatives and the role of funders and evaluation, event organizers made an open invitation to funders, community organizations, and evaluators in their networks that are working on initiatives across the U.S. to contribute their knowledge and experiences. The following sections focus on the key insights from the three stages – early, implementation, and sustaining – discussed at the convening.

Early Stage: Planning, Assessment, and Creating a Strong Foundation

The early stages of place-based initiatives focus on planning and provide an important opportunity to address foundational capacity building and norm setting among all partners. The work in this stage includes creating mechanisms for authentic community engagement and developing a shared learning agenda, which will help all partners understand what is working and what may need to be refined over time. Early-stage

³ For other examples of successful funder partnerships, see the Collective Impact Forum at <https://collectiveimpactforum.org>.

work also includes building capacity of partners for implementation, building partnerships, and creating an inclusive and functional governance structure for an initiative (e.g., First 5 LA's Best Start Communities, the Colorado Trust's Community Partnerships).

The early stage is also an important time for funders to clearly explain to community members and stakeholders how they expect to engage with the initiative. Funders should describe the role that they expect to play and their expectations of the time frame for progress and impact. Preparation for the early stage of place-based investments is a key opportunity for all stakeholders, and funders in particular, to assess the underlying structures, values, policies, and resources that promote or prevent a community from thriving.

Evaluation can be particularly helpful in this process, especially with an evaluator who understands the complexity of place-based work and uses strategies that promote learning, capacity building, and community engagement. Evaluators can:

- map community assets and realities,
- help a funder assess its own readiness,
- build understanding of a community's history and cultural context,
- build trust with local stakeholders, and
- inform how the funder should interact with the community over the course of the initiative.

This is the appropriate phase not only to establish a learning agenda, but also to begin setting up evaluation practices and structures that will fuel a formative and summative evaluation that can help key stakeholders tell the implementation, progress, and impact stories. Discussion at the convening produced some guidance for partners in the early stage of a place-based initiative.

- Funders should be prepared to assess their own organizational readiness, practices, and assumptions while allowing the community to develop at its own pace. Funders must be keenly aware of their assumptions and practices. An evaluator who is serving as a learning partner can assist this self-reflection process to identify the foundation's culture, the role it plays in the community, and the perceptions of residents, nonprofits, and other stakeholders (David & Enright, 2015). Funder self-awareness is critical to launching a place-based investment because it clarifies aspirations and limitations, what the funder can and cannot do, its risk tolerance, and its understanding of the time needed to achieve results. As funders engage in a reflection process, communities must also understand their own needs and assets. In other words, rather than having funders or even representative community-based organizations define the communities' needs and assets, it is important for funders to

What Should Funders Look for in a Place-Based Evaluator?

- A community-based approach: Experience in focusing on the unit of place and the network of community interrelationships.
- A systems lens: Attunement to shifting the function and structures of an identified system.
- A multilevel perspective: Proven ability to balance community, organization, and system levels.
- Responsiveness: Ability to create rapid-cycle feedback loops and adapt learning questions and plans appropriate for various stakeholder groups as the initiative evolves.
- Long-term planners: Skill in establishing data-collection processes and mechanisms that can be transformed into formative and summative assessments.
- Rigorous flexibility: Ability to balance the need for rigorous design and methods with requirements for relevant and useful findings.

create a space to create solutions with community residents in a process that allows all parties to build their knowledge of the place (e.g., participatory community-needs assessment). This clear assessment process by both funder and community will identify the alignment or disconnect between the two partners.

- Build trust by sharing agenda-setting responsibility with the community. A key to creating a strong foundation for place-based work is to engage the community (i.e., local funders and service providers, community residents) and external stakeholders (e.g., national funders, intermediaries, and technical-assistance providers) at the earliest stages to develop initial goals and objectives. Place-based approaches cannot succeed if community members are not active participants in developing the work (Barnes & Schmitz, 2016). Evaluators can provide important support by capturing, reflecting, and communicating timely information about the shifting nature of the work to foster open, transparent communication among stakeholders. Evaluators can also capture how the initiative is fitting with community and cultural norms, behaviors, and expectations. This feedback loop supports the development of trust, partnership, and collaboration.
- Know the community – people, context, history – and the role that the funder plays in this context. Place-based funders should not rely exclusively on representatives of community-based organizations as the voice of a community. These organizations have their own constituencies and are not necessarily tuned into community needs, particularly when those needs are not within the organization's core mission. Similarly, different types of funders – local, national, public, private, and/or individuals – have their own relationships and influence on the work in the community. Evaluation partners play a critical role by continually identifying various perspectives and stakeholder needs, including how a funder is perceived

by the community and how community partners are actively engaged in the work. In addition, an evaluation process that is attuned to cultural differences among stakeholder groups is critical to understanding past successes, traumas, and experiences. As one convening participant suggested, “You need to understand each other's world view, including a community's past, which may shape present world view.”

- Invest in participatory and developmental evaluation approaches that promote learning, engagement, and capacity building while also creating the infrastructure for later formative and summative evaluation. Since place-based work involves engaging the community and partners in evaluation and learning, evaluation methods should be timely as well as developmentally and culturally appropriate. Incorporating participatory methods also promotes genuine community engagement rather than relying on proxies such as community-based organizations. Human-centered design charrettes, data fairs, interactive community-asset mapping, and scenario mapping are examples of data-driven approaches that facilitate collaborative dialogue and build stakeholders' capacity to understand their community's needs. These methods can also be embedded in a developmental-evaluation approach (Patton, 2011; Preskill & Beer, 2012), which uses real-time or rapid-cycle feedback to support routine reflection, learning, and strategy development. In the context of place-based efforts, these feedback loops require additional consideration for the various audiences (e.g., community partners, organizations, funders). The structure of a feedback loop may depend on the stakeholder group and the decision-making processes in which they are involved. Evaluators, for example, may provide data to funders to help understand and inform strategies at the broader implementation level (i.e., across various sites), whereas community stakeholder groups working within the broader initiative may find it more useful to receive community-specific

data (i.e., community friendly and linguistically appropriate) to inform their local strategies (Harder+Company Community Research & Special Service for Groups, 2014).

In order to use these approaches effectively, convening participants emphasized that evaluators should be involved from the beginning to create trusting relationships and foster evaluative thinking. Participants also recommended that funders invest in long-term evaluation to support the development of the initiative and strategies, instead of limiting evaluation to discrete strategies (Ferris & Hopkins, 2015; GEO, 2009). Finally, the early stage the time to set up data-collection systems and processes that will inform formative and summative assessments.

Implementation: Deepening the Work

As place-based efforts move into implementation, the work shifts to leadership development and governance structures. This includes supporting effective collaboration and cross-sector engagement that moves beyond information sharing and knowledge exchange to shared action and mutual accountability. This phase requires a concerted effort to address new tensions and possible operational conflicts stemming from imbalance of power, race, and equity dynamics. Partners in place-based initiatives also need to reassess and address engrained community “ways of working” and structural barriers that impede progress. Evaluation should continue to support a learning culture, while deepening the focus on implementation. Evaluating implementation progress includes assessing whether the expected policy or practice changes are supporting the community-level outcomes established in the early stages of the work.

- Create space for open conversations about race, class, and power. Convening participants talked a lot about issues of race and equity that are central to working with marginalized, low-income communities, which have historically been deprived of formal power and access to resources. At the convening, keynote speaker Michael

McAfee, vice president for programs at Policy Link, argued,

When it comes to evaluation and change, we have to do some work that has not been done in a long time, and that is the uncomfortable work about talking about structures that were designed [to take] opportunity out of communities. We need to talk about race, we need to talk about class, we need to talk about culture, and we need to talk about gender.

“Power dynamics are directly related to systems change because those who have the power make the changes. Does there need to be a change in power to make change happen?”

– Session participant

Funders, evaluators, and community stakeholders need to create the space to collaboratively and purposefully assess how race, class, equity, and power issues impact change. As these discussions unfold, power dynamics become particularly important to name and openly discuss. This includes the power funders have in distributing the resources for the work as well as the power

Implementation Stage: Critical Questions for Funders

- How are we addressing race, power, and equity issues? Have we built enough time and space to reflect on how these issues impact the communities and how we do our work together?
- Are we paying attention to the power dynamics unfolding among partners and stakeholders? What is our role in how these dynamics play out? How do we respond?
- How are we engaging community partners in what we are learning through our evaluation? How can this level of engagement strengthen the value and use of data to inform strategy development and decision-making?

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evaluators have given their access to various perspectives. The information produced through evaluation can also potentially shift an initiative in favor of a funder, nonprofit, or other stakeholder group. Therefore it is important for an evaluator to recognize how their findings (and dissemination of findings) can have ethical implications on the power dynamics of an initiative.

- Use the funders' position of influence to understand, leverage, and shift motivations for participation and action. Participants noted the critical role that funders and evaluators have in continuously assessing and helping to maintain motivation in the long arc of place-based work. Place-based stakeholders have different motivations for engaging in the work and, in part, it is the funder's and evaluator's role to help understand what these motivations are, how they can be leveraged, and how they can be constantly refreshed so motivations for shared action are current. For example, a community partner such as a developer may first be motivated to be at the table to prevent its development from being blocked by the community. This motivation may shift as the developer realizes that including the community may be more beneficial

to securing the development's financing. In these cases, evaluation plays a critical role in uncovering the different motivations and how funders can use their influence to support stakeholders to align their work toward a common agenda.

- Create opportunities for the community to guide and actively learn from the evaluation process. Whether funders invest in evaluations that uncover power dynamics, surface motivations, help define the problem, or explore solutions, it is critical that community stakeholders are involved in interpreting and using results. Participants suggested various supports for community engagement and learning, including work groups where stakeholders can guide the development of the evaluation and help interpret results, community-friendly learning briefs after key events, infographics to visually communicate strategies and evaluation findings, and learning communities where information can be shared and discussed.
- Normalize setbacks and nonlinear change as part of growth, and rely on developmental and formative evaluation to track overall progress. Place-based work is messy. Funders who work with communities must be willing to take risks and expect the unexpected, despite well-articulated theories of change. Participants talked about how evaluation plays a key role in making sense of the setbacks, so that even failures are important ways of learning about how change happens in a place. All partners (funders, community partners, evaluators) should view setbacks as opportunities to support reflection and the understanding that "we're in this together." At the same time, a more focused formative evaluation – one that documents implementation process, milestones, and intermediate outcomes – can help determine whether the initiative is heading in the hoped-for direction. This includes assessing whether there is sufficient evidence that the activities are in fact likely to influence the desired policy and practice changes, whether these policy

and practice changes are likely to influence the desired community outcomes, and what – if any – unintended consequences are likely. The formative evaluation process can also help identify accelerating or impeding factors that stakeholders can either leverage or manage if it is a factor that could present an obstacle as the initiative moves forward. While the work is messy on a day-to-day basis, evaluators can help community partners maintain focus on the larger picture of progress and change.

Sustaining Stage: Maintaining Momentum

A place-based initiative is a long-term endeavor, one that, at its core, is an iterative process of learning, building capacity for implementation, and adjusting strategies as needs evolve (Juarez & Associates & Harder+Company Community Research, 2011). Participants noted that place-based initiatives often involve a decade or more of commitment and focused support, and that long-term place-based initiatives require active maintenance and reassessment. At the sustaining stage, funders must continue to check assumptions about the work, identify evolving needs, monitor and understand shifting community contexts, strengthen new and existing relationships, support community empowerment and capacity building, and address emerging power dynamics. Funders should monitor and tend to relationships, structures, and processes to ensure that the place-based investment continues to be relevant and connects to ongoing and evolving community priorities. This is also a critical stage for funders to link and weave place-based, systems-change, and collaborative or partnership-focused efforts into a cohesive whole.

- Develop mechanisms to continuously reassess the most appropriate role for the funder at more mature stages of the initiative. As place-based initiatives shift to maintaining the momentum of the work, the funders' roles and responsibilities should evolve. For example, in early phases a national funder may support a community to launch a change agenda, while in later phases its role may pivot to connect the local initiative to other national public and private change efforts that support momentum and provide additional resources. Similarly, a local foundation deeply engaged in the day-to-day work in early phases may shift to a capacity-building role to support community ownership and sustainability. This was cited as a place where an experienced evaluation partner can help the funder understand the most appropriate role to play at any point in time.
- Balance the time and energy needed to manage long-term, transparent, open relationships with communities and stakeholders, while managing internal foundation expectations about progress and impact. Place-based or systems-change efforts require all stakeholders to commit to multi-year and even multidecade efforts. Funders must invest their resources and time to maintain trusting relationships by listening to emerging concerns, meeting and integrating new partners, reflecting on changing community needs and priorities, and paying attention to power dynamics. At the same time, foundation staff must be a continuous advocate and case-maker internally within the organization to help the board and leadership understand the long-term nature of the investment as well as the incremental and more substantial implementation progress underway. Evaluators who are documenting the progress of place-based work can provide helpful support for balancing these tensions.
- Monitor context and weave investments, initiatives, and change strategies into a cohesive whole. In the sustaining stage, community partners and the funder should arrive at a full picture of the community and systems being impacted by the investment. An important role for the funder and the evaluator is to monitor the context and the community environment for new change efforts and investments, and to intentionally weave and connect these investments into a comprehensive whole. It is natural that new programs, investments, and initiatives will come and go – each frequently with its own evaluation efforts.

Funders who plan for this stage of the work are in a unique position to guide place-based investments so that they reduce redundancy and understand all of the issues addressed in earlier stages of the work. The funder can also help connect and leverage complementary evaluation efforts and provide incentives for stronger collaboration and coordination of data collection, sharing, and analysis. This will reduce the burden on the community and strengthen what is learned. Furthermore, this alignment increases the likelihood of a successful set of complementary initiatives and establishes a more robust evaluation narrative.

- Invest in evaluation practices that help both refine strategy and tell the story of progress and impact. Place-based evaluations are situated in complex, unpredictable systems where change is constant. Evaluators can help make sense of this complexity and support the use of information to adapt strategies. Strategy informs what to evaluate, and evaluation informs the ongoing adaption of strategy. When these two processes are reinforcing each other, there is a greater likelihood of increased social impact and

change. Funders should invest in evaluation learning processes that help communities identify pivotal moments in the life cycle of the initiative that ask key questions: What worked? What didn't work? What should we try this time? What are our new data telling us? With whom else should we partner? Answers to these types of questions can help drive strategic refinement, document implementation, and demonstrate the impact of place-based work.

Final Reflections

Place-based work by nature is a complex, long-term investment that can be unpredictable. This convening highlighted the critical role of funders in place-based work – not just from an investment standpoint, but also as a partner in the process. Preparing for place-based initiatives requires funders to make numerous considerations in preparing and implementing this work:

- *Identify your role.* Funders should carefully consider and articulate what role they want to play in a place-based initiative. There are many roles funders play (e.g., convenor, agenda driver, co-participant, but not driver) and the role they choose will be a major

The Place-Based Initiative Life Span Redux

The concept of an initiative life span was helpful for organizing the convening's conversation. It recognized that funders' questions and concerns will be different based on the stage of the initiative's development. Yet, the convening's discussions emphasized that change in place-based initiatives does not occur in a sequential or linear way. "Early stage" questions will need to be addressed repeatedly as the political, cultural, or leadership ecosystem changes. Questions explored in the "sustaining stage" should be posed early on to prepare stakeholders for the future. In this more nuanced presentation of place-based-initiative life spans, evaluation plays a key role in supporting real-time decision-making, capturing long-term impacts and change, as well as a key knowledge-management function (tracking learnings and reminding stakeholders of past successes and challenges).

At its best, evaluation can support a place-based investment to be an ongoing, dynamic relationship that supports broader positive change in a community. Three core approaches should be considered:

1. *Developmental evaluation*, to understand the results and implications of current strategies and related significant events to inform real-time adjustments. This evaluation supports grantee critical reflection.
2. *Formative evaluation*, to understand the "through line" of the work and document how significant events and contextual influences affect change. This documentation frequently offers funders a level of confidence that change is headed in the right direction.
3. *Summative evaluation*, which links the initiative's activities to the targeted policy, practice, and community change outcomes. This approach is critical to understanding if the desired change occurred.

influence on the work. Clarity of role may help avoid misunderstandings and unmet expectations, not to mention frustrations with those in place.

- *Reflect and check assumptions.* Funders should reflect and clearly articulate their assumptions and expectations about the work ahead, and have an open and continuous dialogue with partners as the work begins and evolves, and as expectations or assumptions change. Being transparent about what the funder needs to continue to make a case for supporting the work of the community – what the funder needs to “bring back to the board” – helps everyone be on the same page when it comes to expectations.
- *Set the table for establishing trust.* Set the foundation for creating trusting, transparent relationships that will form collaborative partnerships among stakeholders (funders, community partners, community-based organizations, local businesses, evaluators) that will help sustain the work even after funders transition out.
- *Acknowledge race, class, and power dynamics with humility.* As Ferris and Hopkins (2015) note, “Place based initiatives are about race and power” (p. 85). Funders have the responsibility to create the space to openly discuss how these issues have historically impacted community partners, including becoming vulnerable to the role that philanthropy has played in contributing to these dynamics. In order to create an equal distribution of power, funders need to genuinely engage the community as partners in shared decision-making – a process that often requires dedicated and deliberate capacity building as part of the investment.
- *Invest in an iterative, multilevel evaluation approach.* Funders should seek evaluators that incorporate flexible approaches that guide learning and adaptation while also supporting formative and summative assessments. This has the three-fold benefit of helping to shape and refine the change strategy, document implementation and attainment of critical milestones to show necessary progress, and provide the opportunity to make statements of impact as the initiative sunsets.
- *Reassess strategies as needs evolve.* Funders and partners should continue to reassess roles and strategies as needs evolve, considering the changing systems (e.g., the regional economy, local and state policies) that impact the implementation of an initiative.
- *Focus on sustainability from the onset.* Rather than waiting for the final stages of the investment to think about sustainability, leverage opportunities and resources that will support sustainability and systems change from the beginning. Consider conducting a scan of existing public, private, philanthropic, and individual assets and investments at the onset and assist communities in blending and braiding these resources in support of a cohesive agenda.

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Getting Real With Strategy: Insights From Implementation Science

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Keywords: Foundation strategy, implementation science, operationalizing strategy, organizational learning, implementing innovations, practice profile, implementation drivers

Key Points

- Foundations are increasingly coming to appreciate the importance of strategy. But simply having a strategy – even an explicit strategy – does not guarantee that a foundation will actually achieve its goals.
- To implement a strategy effectively, a foundation needs to operationalize it in the form of specific functions that staff will carry out and needs to create an organizational infrastructure that supports the strategy. The field of implementation science offers a set of tools for helping foundations address these tasks.
- After introducing some general principles of implementation science, this article describes in depth the concepts of *practice profiles*, which translate programs or strategies into specific activities to be carried out by implementation staff, and *implementation drivers*, which point to organizational factors that determine whether a program or strategy is implemented well enough to achieve its intended outcomes.

Introduction

In their seminal 1999 article, "Philanthropy's New Agenda: Creating Value," Michael Porter and Mark Kramer criticized foundations for not taking full advantage of their privileged position of controlling billions of discretionary charitable dollars: "Not enough foundations think strategically about how they can create the most value for society with the resources they have at their disposal" (p. 122). Porter and Kramer argued that strategy should be central to the practice of philanthropy. Just as businesses need to execute a clear and coherent

strategy to succeed in the marketplace, foundations need to clarify their goals, identify strategic leverage points, and focus their resources on the highest payoff activities, programs, people, and organizations.

Over the subsequent 17 years, much more has been written regarding strategic philanthropy – what it is, what it isn't, what it requires of foundations, how it affects grantees, how to measure if it's working, and whether it's actually good for the world (e.g., Brest, 2005; Dorfman, 2008; Buteau, Buchanan, & Brock, 2009; Kramer, 2009; Patrizi & Heid Thompson, 2011; Kimball & Kopell, 2011; Brest, 2012; Kania, Kramer, & Russell, 2014;). While there remain a number of open questions and unresolved debates, it is safe to say that foundations are increasingly coming to appreciate that they need to have a coherent and well-grounded strategy¹ if they have any hope of creating a discernible impact in the world.

In a 2007 survey of foundations with over \$100 million in assets conducted by the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP), 89 percent of the responding chief executive officers and program staff reported that they use the word "strategy" to describe how their foundation goes about achieving its goals. The majority of these foundations had adopted a formal strategic plan, but some referred to more implicit strategies (Buteau, et al., 2009).

¹ The literature is replete with conceptualizations of "strategy" that differ in terms of the loftiness of the goals, the time horizon, and the specificity of activities, outcomes, and pathways (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 2005; Patton & Patrizi, 2010; Patton, Foote, & Radner, 2015).

In other words, foundation strategies are often grounded in a weak or vague “theory of change.” These theories fail to take into account the full range of factors that contribute to the problem the foundation is hoping to solve, as well as other efforts underway in the community that either complement or compete with the work that the foundation is funding or stimulating.

Problems With Foundation Strategy

Having a strategy – even an explicit strategy – does not guarantee that a foundation will actually achieve its goals. Buteau, et al., (2009) argue that in order to operate in a “strategic” fashion, a foundation needs to make its decisions based on a variety of information, including information from external sources, and to map out the logical connections that explain how its resources and actions will lead to the desired outcomes. A number of organizational and evaluation consultants who work with foundations have made the case that these conditions are frequently not met (Patton & Patrizi, 2010; Patrizi & Heid Thompson, 2011; Patrizi, et al., 2013; Patton, et al., 2015). They point out that foundations often develop their strategies in insulated settings – board retreats and staff meetings – without the benefit of harsh critics and doubters. The resultant strategies are too often grounded in idealized theories of how change occurs and overly confident assessments of the foundation’s ability to influence the course of events. In other words, foundation strategies are often grounded in a weak or vague “theory of change.”² These theories fail to take into account the full range of

factors that contribute to the problem the foundation is hoping to solve, as well as other efforts underway in the community that either complement or compete with the work that the foundation is funding or stimulating.

With an incomplete understanding of the problem and the context, the foundation develops a strategy that is based on unrealistic expectations of what will happen in response to the foundation’s package of inputs (e.g., grantmaking, convening, capacity building, advocacy). Within the theory of change, the foundation’s inputs look potent enough to generate impact, but once the strategy is introduced into the real world, a thousand underappreciated factors come into play and dwarf whatever influence stems from the foundation’s strategy.

Along these same lines, foundation strategies tend to over-assume what other actors will be willing and able to accomplish. Many foundations presume that they can use their financial resources to recruit well-positioned people and organizations to join into their strategy – as grantees, intermediaries, or “partners.” In fact, these actors may be less than committed to serving as agents of the foundation’s strategy (CEP, 2013). If these actors do join with the foundation, they may not be capable of operating in the envisioned manner. And even if they are both willing and able, it might turn out that the organization doesn’t have as much influence over conditions, people, policy, etc., as the strategy presumes.

Beyond making unrealistic assumptions in designing their strategies, foundations also fail to adapt their strategies based on what is learned – or what should have been learned (Buteau, et al., 2009; Patrizi, et al., 2013; Coffman, et al.,

² A theory of change delineates the pathway(s) through which a foundation’s resources and actions will translate into outcomes and impacts – initially the changes that are expected to occur among the organizations that are directly touched by the foundation (e.g., new or improved programming, increased organizational capacity, stronger leadership role in the community, more collaboration or networking with other actors), and ultimately the broader and deeper improvements in well-being that the foundation is seeking (Weiss, 1995; Patrizi & Heid Thompson, 2011; Patton, et al., 2015).

2013; Kania, et al., 2014). Foundations too often stick with whatever strategy is initially implemented, sometimes because that is what the board approved and sometimes because the foundation doesn't have the interest or ability to adapt its strategy based on evaluation data. This shortcoming is particularly problematic in cases where the foundation has a simplistic, unrealistic, and/or overly deterministic theory of change. But even when a foundation is rigorous in developing its strategy, a number of realities and issues will not be apparent in the design phase. It is also critical to acknowledge that the environment within which the foundation does its work will inevitably shift in ways that influence the strategy's effectiveness, either negatively or positively.

Building on Henry Mintzberg's (2007) concept of emergent strategy, a number of writers have called on foundations to adjust their strategies on an ongoing basis through formative or developmental evaluation, as well as disciplined learning (Patrizi, et al., 2013; Coffman, et al., 2013; Kania, et al., 2014). The evaluation needs to provide quick-turnaround assessments of how the strategy is being implemented, how the key actors are responding, what is working according to expectations, and what isn't. In addition to helping the foundation to refine its strategy, the evaluation should also lead to a more complete and accurate view of the environment within which the strategy is being implemented, as well as a deeper understanding of how change occurs or might occur within that environment. Patton and Patrizi (2010) point out that this sort of strategy evaluation requires a broader lens and more adaptive methods than are typically applied in program evaluations. Snow, Lynn, & Beer, (2015) offer a nice example of how the Colorado Health Foundation evolved its advocacy strategy based on this sort of wide-ranging and nimble evaluation approach. But these intentional, thoughtful, data-driven adaptations to strategy are more the exception than the norm in philanthropy.

Challenges With Implementing Strategy

The literature cited above has begun to build awareness among foundations of shortcomings in strategy design and evaluation. This article focuses on another critical shortcoming that has

By definition a new strategy represents a change in direction for the organization that develops and executes it. For a foundation, this implies changes in practice among program officers and other foundation staff, new messages to various constituents, revised organizational procedures, and possibly new policies to accommodate the new work.

received less attention – inadequate implementation. Even if a foundation has a well-designed strategy (grounded in data, theory, and logic) and a rigorous system for evaluating and adapting the strategy, there still remains the task of ensuring that the activities specified in the strategy are fully implemented. To quote Thomas Edison, "Vision without execution is hallucination."

By definition a new strategy represents a change in direction for the organization that develops and executes it. For a foundation, this implies changes in practice among program officers and other foundation staff, new messages to various constituents, revised organizational procedures, and possibly new policies to accommodate the new work. Patrizi and Heid Thompson (2011) contend that foundations have often fallen short in their strategies because they do not take the time to map out the new work that staff needs to carry out and to identify prevailing practices that need to shift. Likewise, Davis, Bearman, and McDonald (2015) observe that, "Although many funders value practice in theory, it's not always evident in their day-to-day work."

This failure to translate strategy into practice is due in part to a blind spot on the part

of foundations. According to Patrizi and Heid Thompson (2011), “Beyond funding grantees, most strategies focus on what others will do” (p. 57). In other words, the intended impacts of the strategy are expected to occur through new actions on the part of grantees and partner organizations. Foundation staff and trustees don’t look in the mirror to see that the strategy requires that they will likely need to change their own behavior as well.³ If a foundation doesn’t fully recognize its own role in generating the desired impacts, it won’t make the organizational changes necessary to execute the strategy.

This article focuses on two defining tasks that need to be accomplished for a strategy to be implemented. The first is to operationalize the strategy in the form of specific functions, activities, and performance metrics for foundation staff. The second is to create an organizational infrastructure (defined in terms of staffing, structures, processes, policies, culture, etc.) that is conducive to carrying out the activities that the strategy requires.

In order to promote effective implementation, we urge foundation staff and trustees to consider the following two sets of questions as they develop their strategies:

1. **What is required of those actors who are charged with implementing the strategy?** What actions do they need to carry out? What decisions do they need to make? What sorts of relationships do they need to build? What mindset do they need to bring to the work? And what competencies are required to carry out this body of work?
2. **What else is required of the foundation to ensure that the strategy is implemented as intended?** What sorts of supports does the foundation need to provide in order for the implementing actors to be successful? Does the foundation need to hire staff with new

competencies? How does the foundation need to change its administrative processes and policies to support full implementation of the strategy? Does the organizational structure or culture need to change in order to be aligned with the strategy?

The field of implementation science offers a set of tools to help foundations answer these questions and to put in place the supports that are needed to implement a strategy. Implementation science is concerned with the design and implementation of interventions that are aimed at improving conditions and outcomes among a defined population. This might be a new model of service, a medical treatment, a public-health intervention, or any of a number of deliberate approaches to attain an individual- or societal-level outcome. For the purposes of this article, we focus specifically on foundation strategy as the intervention to be designed and implemented.

Frameworks, tools, and research from implementation science are helpful in determining precisely what is required to implement a foundation’s strategy. This article highlights two concepts that appear to us to be under-appreciated within philanthropy: practice profiles and implementation drivers. A practice profile translates a program or organizational strategy into specific functions and activities that need to be carried out by those staff members who are responsible for implementation. Implementation drivers point to a specific set of organizational factors (e.g., selection, supervision, and training of staff; administrative processes; financial resources; leadership; culture) that determine whether a program or strategy is implemented well enough to achieve its intended outcomes.

After introducing some general principles of implementation science, we provide in-depth descriptions of each of these two concepts, focusing specifically on the implementation of foundation strategy. “Using Implementation Science to Translate Foundation Strategy,” which accompanies this article (Metz and Easterling, 2016), discusses how the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust has used these practice profiles and implementation drivers to redefine the work of its

³ Easterling and Csuti (1999) made a parallel point with regard to evaluation, arguing that foundations generally focus their evaluation efforts on assessing whether grantees are meeting expectations without evaluating the foundation’s own behavior and its effect on grantees.

program officers and to revamp organizational structures and processes to align with its place-based initiative, Healthy Places NC.

Overview of Implementation Science

Implementation science refers to the “methods or techniques used to enhance the adoption, implementation, and sustainability” of an intervention (Powell, et al, 2015; Fixsen, Blase, Metz & Van Dyke, 2015). Within this definition, an “intervention” is a defined effort to create a particular set of outcomes. The field of implementation science is concerned with what it takes for an intervention to produce value – and especially optimal value – for its intended beneficiaries.

Within this frame, implementation scientists focus on considerations such as:

- Is the intervention appropriate to the purpose and context?
- Has the intervention been operationalized in a way that allows those who are responsible for carrying it out to know what is expected of them?
- Are they specifically aware of how their work needs to change as the implementation unfolds (i.e., stage-specific activities and modes of operating)?
- Do they have the necessary competencies?
- Does the organization provide the supports that staff requires to implement the strategy as designed and intended?
- Are there data systems and procedures in place to promote learning and adaption?
- Are the various partners and stakeholders engaged and supportive?
- Are the policy, regulatory, and funding environments hospitable to implementing the intervention effectively?
- Are there feedback loops in place that allow learnings from the field to inform

Contrary to the prevailing conversation in philanthropy, implementation science does not equate “effective” with “evidence-based.” Rather, an effective intervention is one that is deliberately chosen using available knowledge to suit the needs of the target population, the intent of the organization, and the context within which that organization operates. In other words, the intervention is “appropriate” if it is:

- *matched to demonstrated need among the target population,*
- *takes into account the available research evidence, and*
- *feasible to implement within the given context.*

policyholders who have influence over the intervention?

Among implementation scientists, the commonly accepted starting point is selecting an effective intervention. Contrary to the prevailing conversation in philanthropy, implementation science does not equate “effective” with “evidence-based.” Rather, an effective intervention is one that is deliberately chosen using available

FIGURE 1 Implementation Science Formula Describing Requirements for Success

knowledge to suit the needs of the target population, the intent of the organization, and the context within which that organization operates. In other words, the intervention is “appropriate” if it is:

- matched to demonstrated need among the target population,
- takes into account the available research evidence, and
- feasible to implement within the given context.

Once an appropriate intervention has been selected, the next step is to operationalize it. This is where the specific work and way of working are mapped out in concrete terms. Even programs that are evidence-based or evidence-informed need to be operationalized in order to be effective in a particular context. However, most health and human services agencies fail to complete this step when they put a new program or service in place (Dane & Schneider, 1998; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Michie, van Stralen, & West, 2011; Stirman, et al., 2012).

After operationalizing an appropriate intervention, the organization begins the actual process of implementation. Successful outcomes require both effective implementation methods and an enabling context. Effective implementation methods means that the people responsible for implementing the intervention have the competencies that the intervention requires and they employ effective methods to carry out, improve, and sustain the intervention. An enabling context means that the organization delivering the intervention has instituted administrative and technological processes to support those responsible for carrying out the intervention.

The context also includes conditions outside the implementing organization, including conditions that are controlled by funders, regulatory agencies, and partner organizations. For the context to be truly “enabling,” all these stakeholders need to provide the resources and commitment that allows the implementing actors to carry out the required work, while also supporting the process of ongoing learning and optimization. (See Figure 1.)

The formula in Figure 1 summarizes these ideas. In order to obtain the socially significant outcomes that the organization has in mind, it needs to select an effective intervention, implement the intervention with effective methods, and carry out this work within an enabling context. These three conditions refer to what is implemented, how it is implemented, and where it is implemented. The formula is multiplicative because weakness in any of these three areas will severely compromise the possibility of achieving the intended outcomes.

It is useful to point out that implementation science shares much of the thinking and some of the tools that exist within program evaluation, especially from a formative or developmental framework (Patton, 2011). Throughout the process of implementing an intervention, implementation science emphasizes the need for continuous quality improvement through the systematic assessment and feedback of information and data related to planning, implementation, and outcomes (Chinman, Imm, & Wandersman, 2004). Reflecting and evaluating refers to “quantitative and qualitative feedback about the progress and quality of implementation accompanied with regular personal and team debriefing about progress and experience” (Damschroder, et al., 2009, p. 11).

Implementation science focuses specifically on “improvement cycles” as a means of refining interventions based on feedback. In other words, implementation science presumes that interventions (and especially strategies) will evolve. One of the best-known improvement cycles is the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycle (Deming, 1986; Shewhart, 1931), which is a specific form of what implementation science refers to as an “improvement cycle.” Within the context of foundation strategy, the PDSA cycle calls for the following linked steps: (1) specify the plan that helps move the strategy forward, (2) focus on facilitating the implementation of the strategy, (3) develop assessments to understand how the strategy is working, and (4) make changes to the next iteration of the strategy to improve implementation and results.

Improvement cycles are one of the better-known tools that implementation science offers as a means of improving the implementation and adaptation of strategy (or any intervention). In the remainder of this article we introduce two lesser-known tools that we regard as particularly valuable, especially with regard to implementing foundation strategy, practice profiles and implementation drivers.

Operationalizing Strategy Using Practice Profiles

When a foundation adopts a new strategy, it will invariably require new ways of acting, interacting, and even thinking among various actors inside and outside the foundation. These new requirements, however, are often not clearly specified within the documents that describe the strategy. This leads to uncertainty, differences in perception, and possibly confusion among those who are charged with implementing the strategy (Hall & Hord, 2006). Managers and evaluators may find it difficult to determine if the strategy is actually being implemented. More fundamentally, failing to translate a strategy into concrete expectations and specific work makes it unlikely that the strategy will achieve its intended outcomes, regardless of how much theory or evidence supports the strategy.

A practice profile operationalizes an intervention in the form of specific functions and activities that a particular implementing actor needs to carry out. Practice profiles provide the people who are charged with carrying out the strategy with a clear and concrete description of what they are expected to do.

When presenting staff members with the responsibility to implement a new program or strategy, it is important to also describe the core activities and expected benefits associated with this new way of working (Cooke, 2000; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Kallestad & Olweus, 2003; Ringwalt, et al., 2003). In the terminology of implementation science, operationalizing an intervention makes it “implementable” and “useable.”

A practice profile operationalizes an intervention in the form of specific functions and activities that a particular implementing actor needs to carry out. Practice profiles provide the people who are charged with carrying out the strategy with a clear and concrete description of what they are expected to do. Position-specific profiles are developed for each implementing actor.

In the general case, practice profiles answer the question, “What does the intervention require of those actors who are responsible for implementing it?” In the case of a foundation strategy, we are particularly interested in the implications for program officers. The program officer’s role is comparable to what practitioners do in many health and human services settings (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). In both cases, the program officer and practitioner

The strategy's underlying values and principles should apply to all actors with responsibility for implementation. Thus, each practice profile associated with a strategy will have the same starting point. There may, however, be variation across actors with regard to those values or principles most relevant to their work.

can be described as “interventionists.” While considering the program officer as interventionist may be a new concept for foundations, it demonstrates explicitly that a strategy’s success depends on specifying the program officers’ new work and supporting them in executing the required functions and activities. We provide an example of a practice profile in the accompanying article that focuses on Healthy Places NC (Metz and Easterling, 2016).⁴

Components of a Practice Profile

Developing a practice profile is equivalent to operationalizing a strategy for a particular implementing actor. The process involves constructing:

1. a clear description of the values and principles that undergird the strategy;
2. a clear description of the essential functions that define the strategy;
3. operational definitions of the essential functions (Metz, Bartley, Blase, & Fixsen, 2011;

Hall & Hord, 2006), or in other words, the core activities that allow the essential functions to be teachable, learnable, and doable by staff or practitioners as a set of activities for staff or practitioner to conduct; and

4. practical assessments of the performance of staff or partners who are implementing the strategy (Fixsen, Blase, Metz, & Van Dyke, 2013).

These components reflect four increasingly specific ways of defining what a strategy looks like when it is being implemented by a particular actor. All four levels are critical to gaining a full understanding of what actors should do and how they should approach various situations when carrying out the strategy.

How Are Practice Profiles Developed?

The first step in developing a practice profile is to identify or affirm the values and principles on which the strategy is based. Depending on the strategy, the foundation might be guided by such values and principles as transparent grant-making, engaging new partners, power sharing, collaboration, respecting local wisdom and decisions, organizational learning, data-driven decision making, or encouraging the adoption of evidence-based programs.

Values and principles are often a focus area when foundations develop their strategies, in which case the first step involves affirming and clarifying. But sometimes, the strategy is defined primarily in terms of what will happen rather than how things should happen. In this case, foundation leaders and trustees may need to engage in the fundamental work of defining the philosophy, principles, and values that they are seeking to advance with the strategy.

The strategy’s underlying values and principles should apply to all actors with responsibility for implementation. Thus, each practice profile associated with a strategy will have the same starting point. There may, however, be variation across actors with regard to those values or principles most relevant to their work.

⁴For the practice profile tool, see <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/tfr/vol8/iss2/13>.

Once the strategy's values, principles, expectations, and overall approach are defined, the next step is to identify the essential functions of each of the implementing actors. Essential functions describe in functional terms how the implementing actor is supporting the success of the strategy. These functions might pertain to communicating various messages to various audiences, interacting with grantees and applicants, facilitating community processes, encouraging or coaching local actors, advocating for policies or community change, or assisting with evaluation and learning. Each strategy generates its own distinct set of essential functions for the various implementing actors.

The next stage in operationalizing the strategy is to identify the core activities that go along with each function. Core activities describe the concrete behaviors that foundation staff carries out, day to day, to bring the essential functions to life. What should we observe the staff doing as they communicate with different audiences, interact with grantees and partners, facilitate meetings, build capacity, etc.? Specifying these core activities allows the new strategy to be teachable, learnable, doable, and assessable.

Once the essential functions have been operationalized in the form of concrete behaviors and activities, it becomes possible to assess staff performance. The practice profile eventually will include specific performance metrics that allow for an ongoing assessment of how fully foundation staff and leadership are implementing the strategy as intended. These performance data are crucial in supervising, training, and coaching these implementing actors so that the strategy is optimally implemented.

The major challenge in developing a profile is to ensure that the implementing actor's work is both aligned with the theory of change that undergirds the foundation's strategy and consistent with the research and best practices on how to carry out the work that the strategy requires. To meet these two requirements, implementation science researchers have developed a five-step methodology for creating and refining practice profiles: (1) review of initiative-related

documents; (2) systematic scoping review (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005); (3) semistructured interviews; (4) vetting and consensus; and (5) testing and evolving the practice profile (Metz, 2016). The accompanying article describes how these steps were carried out in developing the practice profile for the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust program officers who carry out Healthy Places NC.

How Are Practice Profiles Used?

Practice profiles are valuable in selecting and supporting the people who are responsible for implementing a strategy. In particular, the essential functions and core activities point to specific forms of knowledge, skills, and abilities that need to be in place for a program officer to meet the expectations associated with the profile. Recruitment and hiring can be tailored to find individuals with the necessary competencies. Likewise, training and coaching strategies for newly hired staff can then be tailored to reinforce and grow these same competencies.

Beyond translating a strategy into specific functions and activities, developing a practice profile will often point out where the strategy is underspecified or unrealistic. The first version of the profile may call for actions and outcomes that are unlikely to be realized in practice.

From a quality-assurance perspective, a detailed practice profile provides indicators to assess implementation quality. A comprehensive evaluation of a foundation's strategy will include not only an assessment of longer-term outcomes and impacts, but also an ongoing process evaluation of how and how fully the strategy is being implemented (Patton & Patrizi, 2010). The practice profile is valuable because it describes what "good" implementation looks like, and thus provides a standard against which actual implementation can be compared.⁵ From a learning and improvement perspective, these regular assessments of implementation (i.e., the extent

⁵ Ideally, implementation of the strategy will be assessed not only from the perspective of the foundation staff and consultants who are delivering resources and acting in specified ways, but also from those who are on the receiving end of the strategy.

In carrying out the functions in the practice profile, the foundation's staff is, by definition, implementing the foundation's strategy. As they learn about the effects and the effectiveness of their actions, they are also learning which of the strategy's assumptions are accurate and which are off base. In other words, the practice profile provides an analytic framework for testing the validity of strategy's underlying theory and for improving the strategy.

to which the practice profile is implemented as intended) facilitate reflection, remediation, and adaptation of the practice profile.

Beyond their role in monitoring and improving the performance of the people who implement the strategy, performance metrics derived from the practice profile are helpful in evaluating the strategy per se. In carrying out the functions in the practice profile, the foundation's staff is, by definition, implementing the foundation's strategy. As they learn about the effects and the effectiveness of their actions, they are also learning which of the strategy's assumptions are accurate and which are off base. In other words, the practice profile provides an analytic framework for testing the validity of strategy's underlying theory and for improving the strategy.

Virtually all foundation strategies will be sub-optimal in their first incarnation (Mintzberg,

2007; Patton & Patrizi, 2010; Patrizi, et al., 2013; Kania, et al., 2014). As such, refinement is an inevitable and important aspect of strategy implementation (Mintzberg, 2007; Patrizi, et al., 2013; Chambers, Glasgow, & Stange, 2013). Effective change, however, rests on the premise that we know what we are changing. Performance metrics derived from a practice profile facilitate data-informed adjustments to both the design and implementation of strategy.

Implementation Drivers

New strategies typically impose new demands on the organizational infrastructure. For example, if a foundation devises a new strategy to promote community collaboration, it is likely that people and systems will need to adapt. Grant processes and funding cycles may need to be redesigned to involve local actors more collaboratively in proposal development. Program officers may need training and coaching to effectively engage community members.

Sometimes foundations make these adjustments, but more often the existing staff, job descriptions, procedures, and policies remain in place. This leads to organizational misalignments such as those described by Patton, et al. (2015). The accompanying article describes various misalignments that came to light when the Reynolds Charitable Trust implemented Healthy Places NC. In moving from a conservative-responsive style of grantmaking to an emergent community development initiative that required continual, hands-on engagement with a wide variety of local actors, the trust found that expectations for its program officers were seriously out of sync with historical practice. In addition, many of the administrative procedures underlying the grantmaking process were no longer appropriate.

The bolder the strategy, the more likely that the existing infrastructure will be out of alignment and poorly suited to support the new work that the strategy requires. This is when it is particularly crucial to test whether the organizational infrastructure is hospitable to the new strategy.

The Drivers Framework

The starting point for creating a hospitable organizational infrastructure is to identify a key areas on which to focus the organizational-change work.

In other words, what are the highest-leverage factors that drive successful implementation of a strategy – or any intervention, for that matter? Implementation scientists use the term “implementation drivers” to reflect this concept (Fixsen, et al., 2005; Metz & Bartley, 2012). Three distinct clusters of implementation drivers have been identified – competency, organization, and leadership:

- Competency drivers are mechanisms to develop, improve, and sustain an individual’s ability to implement a new innovation or strategy with intended benefits.
- Organization drivers intentionally develop the organizational supports and systems interventions needed to ensure that the individuals carrying out the innovation or strategy are effectively supported and that data are used for continuous improvement.

- Leadership drivers ensure that leaders are using the appropriate strategies to address implementation challenges.

These three sets of drivers form a triangular foundation for effective implementation. (See Figure 2.) Along the left side of the triangle are the competency drivers. Staff selection sits at the bottom, as an organization’s first opportunity to ensure competent staff. Once staff are hired, training and coaching activities should be implemented to grow and sustain staff competence. Along the right side of the triangle are the organization drivers. Decision-support data systems should be used by organizations to ensure that timely, relevant, and actionable information is collected and used to improve the intervention or strategy. Administrative and systems support must also be put in place to create the enabling context for staff to carry out the expectations of the new intervention or strategy. At the base of the triangle is leadership; effective leaders support the installation of each of the competency

FIGURE 2 Implementation Drivers

An Implementation Drivers Assessment is a tool based in implementation science that identifies new supports that an organization needs to put into place, as well as existing organizational features that need to be revised or removed. The assessment asks specific questions about the three sets of implementation drivers with the intent of testing whether the organization has in place the specific supports that the strategy requires.

and organization drivers so that these drivers are in service to the new way of work.

Fidelity sits at the top of the triangle. Fidelity is defined as the extent to which delivery of an intervention or strategy adheres to the intended principles and components. When the implementation drivers are fully and effectively engaged, we should observe fidelity in the delivery of the intervention. For example, using recruitment and hiring protocols that assess for competencies associated with the new way of working increases the likelihood of selecting staff that will have the skills necessary to carry out the new strategy. As another example, ensuring that data systems capture information that can be used to assess and improve the implementation of the new strategy increases the likelihood that the strategy will be implemented as intended.

The upward flow of arrows signifies that the drivers support not only fidelity, but also optimization of the strategy. This occurs through ongoing

experiments, which lead to cyclical improvements in both the delivery and the design of the strategy. Optimal delivery of an optimal strategy is how the foundation produces expected and reliable outcomes for the intended beneficiaries.

The middle of the triangle denotes the integrated and compensatory nature of the drivers. The more integrated the drivers, the more effectively the strategy will be implemented. For example, if an organization identifies the competencies needed to use a new intervention or strategy, then selection, training, and coaching drivers should all be in service to developing, improving, and sustaining those same competencies. The drivers can also be compensatory. For example, if an organization is unable to hire new staff for the new way of work, robust training and coaching drivers can be used to compensate.

Assessing Implementation Drivers for a Particular Strategy

On the surface it may appear that the organization has the people, procedures, systems, and supports that would allow a new strategy to be implemented. Digging deeper, most foundations that shift their strategic direction will find that many aspects of the organization are supporting old ways of work. When a foundation adopts a new strategy, it is crucial to make visible the existing infrastructure. This is the first step in putting the needed infrastructure in place. Both transformative and incremental changes will be needed to create a visible infrastructure that is truly in service to new strategies.

An Implementation Drivers Assessment is a tool based in implementation science that identifies new supports that an organization needs to put into place, as well as existing organizational features that need to be revised or removed. The assessment asks specific questions about the three sets of implementation drivers with the intent of testing whether the organization has in place the specific supports that the strategy requires.

An Implementation Drivers Assessment can be in the form of either quantitative ratings or qualitative interviews. In either case, the assessment

generates an analysis of which best practices are in place for each driver and makes recommendations for strengthening each driver. One example of the quantitative approach is described in Fixsen, et al., (2015). This approach relies on a particular rating scale developed by the National Implementation Research Network to assess how fully the organization supports program implementation at distinct stages of the process.

The qualitative approach, which relies on interviews with multiple actors inside and outside the organization, is more flexible and is well suited to the case of foundation strategy. With a qualitative approach, data are collected through a series of semi-structured interviews conducted by an outside organization with expertise in the assessment process. The purposes of the interviews are to better understand the current functioning of each implementation driver and the extent to which implementation drivers are in service to new ways of work associated with the intervention or strategy. It is crucial to gather multiple perspectives on ways to strengthen each driver. The structure of the interview ensures flexibility in how and in what sequence questions are asked, and in whether and how particular areas are followed up and explored with different interviewees. The structure also ensures that the interview is shaped by best practices for each implementation driver. The implementation drivers offer a science-based framework for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting information, which leads to a more normative analysis than occurs with typical organizational assessments.

Qualitative methods are used to code interview data related to the extent to which best practices are perceived as present for each driver and suggestions for strengthening each driver to support implementation of the organization's new intervention or strategy. A summary of findings and recommendations are shared with organizational leadership and staff. Findings are not shared for each interview respondent or groups of respondents (e.g., leaders, staff) in order to maintain anonymity for those who participate. Findings are meant to promote reflection and action planning for the organization. The accompanying

article describes this process in the case of the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust.

Implications for Creating a Hospitable Infrastructure

Assessing a foundation's standing on the three sets of implementation drivers provides tailored guidance on what needs to change to ensure that there is support for implementation. From a more general perspective, implementation scientists have identified a set of best practices within the drivers framework (Fixsen, et al., 2005; Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Wallace, 2009). The following recommendations are particularly relevant in the case where a foundation strategy is the intervention that is being implemented, tested, and improved.

Building Staff Competency

Effective staffing requires the specification of required skills, abilities, and other prerequisite characteristics. Once these prerequisites have been identified, the foundation needs to decide whether existing staff have the required competencies or, at the very least, can gain those competencies through training and coaching.

- *Selection.* Regardless of whether or not the foundation retains its existing staff, it needs to look ahead to hiring new staff with the required competencies. This requires recruitment methods that will identify qualified candidates, protocols for interviewing candidates, and criteria for selection. Comparable procedures need to be in place to bring on partners who have the required skills as delineated in their respective practice profiles.
- *Training.* Staff and partners involved at foundations need to learn when, how, and with whom to use new skills and practices. Training should provide knowledge related to the theory and underlying values of the approach, use adult learning theory, introduce the components and rationales of key practices, and provide opportunities to practice new skills to

A new strategy calls for the foundation to identify administrative issues that must be addressed to promote effective use of the strategy. This can involve rethinking nearly every aspect of how the foundation conducts its business, including the timing of its funding cycles, how grant opportunities are publicized, how applications are reviewed, how applicants are notified, how grants are monitored, and how subsequent grant decisions are made.

create and receive feedback in a safe and supportive training environment.

- *Coaching.* Most new skills can be introduced in training, but must be practiced and mastered on the job with the help of a coach. Implementation science would recommend that the foundation develop and implement formal plans that stipulate where, when, with whom, and why coaching will occur. The foundation should also use multiple sources of data to provide feedback to program officers and staff, including direct observation, and use coaching data to improve practice and organizational performance.
- *Performance assessment for foundation staff and partners.* Evaluation of staff performance is designed to assess the application and outcomes of skills that are reflected in selection criteria, taught in training, and reinforced

in coaching. In implementing its strategy the foundation should develop and implement transparent staff and partner performance assessments, use multiple sources of data to assess performance, institute positive recognition so assessments are seen as an opportunity to improve performance, and use performance-assessment data to improve practice and ensure fidelity to strategy implementation.

Building the Right Structures and Systems

A new strategy calls for the foundation to identify administrative issues that must be addressed to promote effective use of the strategy. This can involve rethinking nearly every aspect of how the foundation conducts its business, including the timing of its funding cycles, how grant opportunities are publicized, how applications are reviewed, how applicants are notified, how grants are monitored, and how subsequent grant decisions are made.

One of the most crucial areas for infrastructure development involves the data systems that the foundation has in place for monitoring grants, tracking proposals, assessing performance, and evaluating the processes and outcomes associated with individual grants and initiatives. These data systems need to be designed or redesigned so that they are able to support implementation, assessment, and improvement of the strategy. Implementation science brings intentionality to an organization's various data systems so that they become "decision-support data systems." These systems include quality-assurance, fidelity, and outcome data. Data need to be reliable, reported frequently, built into practice routines, accessible at actionable levels, and used to make decisions.

The Special Role of Organizational Culture

Among the many elements of organizational infrastructure, culture is arguably the most important when testing for alignment. It is also the element that is most likely to derail an innovative strategy. Culture refers to the behavioral norms and expectations that exist within an organization (Hemmelgarn, Glisson, & James, 2006), and more commonly is described as the

“way things are done around here.” Culture influences – and often constrains – the choices that an organization is willing and able to make in order to bring people, processes, procedures, and policies in line with strategy.

In a recent Grantmakers for Effective Organizations publication, Tom David and Kathleen Enright (2015) contend that a foundation’s strategy is “unlikely to yield progress without fundamental changes to organizational culture to match funders’ strategic aspirations” (p. 4). Research on the implementation of innovations in health and human services underscores this point, demonstrating that assessing and addressing organizational norms, expectations, and perceptions are necessary components for the effective implementation of innovations (Glisson, et al., 2008).

Both organizational culture and the infrastructure it supports are often invisible to staff within an organization. This makes it all too easy to ignore or wish away any misalignment between what the foundation is and what it needs to be in order to support its new strategy. This problem is confounded by the fact that the “invisible infrastructure” often reflects and maintains the status quo within the organization (Koerth-Baker, 2012). When a major shift in approach and expectations is introduced, the invisible infrastructure “fights back” and jeopardizes effective implementation of an innovation (Metz & Albers, 2014).

Creating Lasting Change Through Leadership

Administrators provide leadership and make use of a wide range of data to inform decision making, support the overall processes, and keep staff organized and focused on the desired innovation outcomes. Foundations should ensure leadership is committed to the new strategy and available to address challenges and create solutions.

The organizational changes required by a new strategy can be profound. The CEO and other leaders play a crucial role in creating the conditions that allow for these transitions. Their job includes gaining buy-in from staff on the value of a transition to a new strategy; addressing challenges and creating solutions; developing clear

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communication protocols and feedback loops; adjusting and developing policies and procedures to support the new way of work; and clarifying the rationale, pathway, and imperative of whatever shifts in organizational culture are required to implement the new strategy. That last task should not be underestimated.

Summary

One of the key insights from implementation science is that organizations fail to operationalize

Foundations can only improve their strategic impact when their strategies are well defined, allowing for testing, adapting, and optimizing the strategy in practice. Practice profiles are a tool for operationalizing a conceptually defined strategy through the assessment of data and information related to strategy development, engagement with foundation staff who will implement the new strategy, and consensus-building activities with foundation leadership, staff, and key community partners.

their interventions in terms of the specific work that staff and partners need to carry out. This is certainly true of many foundations when they develop and attempt to implement strategic initiatives. The practice profile offers a particular means of operationalizing strategy. It would be useful for foundations to incorporate this step explicitly into their strategy-development process – prior to introducing the strategy to the world, and certainly prior to engaging grantees and partner organizations in conversations about their role in executing the strategy.

The practice profile can be viewed as an extension of the strategy-development process. Foundations can only improve their strategic impact when their strategies are well defined, allowing for testing, adapting, and optimizing

the strategy in practice. Practice profiles are a tool for operationalizing a conceptually defined strategy. This occurs through the assessment of data and information related to strategy development, the active engagement of foundation staff who will implement the new strategy, and consensus-building activities with foundation leadership, staff, and key community partners. Practice profiles provide greater specificity of the strategy, which improves the likelihood that foundation staff can competently execute the activities designed to bring a foundation's values, vision, and mission to life in real-world interactions.

Similarly, the Implementation Drivers Assessment provides the foundation with critical data for bringing the overall organization into alignment with a new strategy. This assessment can be viewed as a complement to the “theory of philanthropy” approach that Patton, et al., (2015) recently introduced. Both methods are aimed at producing alignment between a foundation's strategy and its organizational processes, policies, staffing, and culture. The two approaches differ primarily with regard to sequencing. The “theory of philanthropy” approach is a comprehensive and simultaneous analysis of all aspects of the foundation's role, mission, philosophy strategy, staffing, processes, resources, and culture. The overarching questions are: (1) What kind of foundation do we want to be? and (2) How do we need to act and structure ourselves in order to be that kind of foundation? Some aspects are taken as given, especially mission and values, but all the remaining aspects are open for consideration and reconfiguration.

In contrast, implementation science – and, more specifically, the Implementation Drivers framework – focuses on the development of an infrastructure in service to a selected strategy. It assumes that the organization has chosen a strategy that fits its mission, values, and vision. What remains open for analysis and revising is the organizational infrastructure, including staff positions, the people in those positions, supervisory structures, administrative processes, resource allocation, leadership, and organizational culture.

Developing a theory of philanthropy can be a useful step in aligning a foundation's strategy with its mission, values, goals, procedures, staff capacities, organizational structure, and culture. However, once the theory has been articulated, the foundation still must wrestle with the difficult task of putting the strategy into practice. Implementation science clarifies the new work that the strategy requires and identifies the implications that this new work will have for everyone within the foundation, as well as for procedures, systems, and culture.

Likewise, recognizing that the foundation's strategy will evolve is crucial in orienting the board and staff to the importance of evaluation, learning, and adaptation. But even with an adaptive mindset, the foundation needs guidance on how to translate its learning into appropriate revisions to strategy. Implementation science provides the foundation with a diagnostic map of the strategy which points toward specific hypotheses that need testing and specific elements that may need refining. Specific tools drawn from implementation science, such as improvement cycles, can be directly incorporated into the implementation of strategy in order to accelerate learning and adaptation.

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Using Implementation Science to Translate Foundation Strategy

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Keywords: Implementation science, foundation strategy, practice profile, program officer, operationalizing strategy, competencies, place-based initiatives, performance assessment, implementation drivers, organizational culture

Key Points

- New strategies sometimes require foundations to shift their staffing, organizational structures, administrative processes, and, possibly, their culture. The field of implementation science offers guidance to foundations as they effectively implement strategies that depart from prevailing practice.
- This article focuses on two specific tools from implementation science: the practice profile and the Implementation Drivers Assessment. The practice profile answers the question, "What does the strategy require of particular foundation staff?" The implementation drivers analysis explores the broader question, "What does the strategy require in the way of organizational change within the foundation?"
- These two tools were used by the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust in implementing its place-based initiative, Healthy Places NC. In the process the tools brought to light a number of fundamental misalignments, which were resolved by shifting the organization rather than retreating on the strategy.

outcomes to occur (i.e., an unrealistic theory of change).

2. The strategy fails to appreciate what the strategy requires with regard to new and different work on the part of the foundation.
3. The foundation is overly confident in the willingness and ability of grantees and partner organizations to accomplish what the strategy expects of them.
4. The foundation fails to carry out the work that the strategy requires.
5. The foundation fails to put in place procedures and systems that promote learning and the adaptation of the strategy.

The accompanying article, *Getting Real With Strategy: Insights From Implementation Science*, introduces a set of frameworks, principles, and tools from implementation science that are valuable in overcoming many of these shortcomings. Research and theory within implementation science examines the factors that lead to effective selection, design, and implementation of programs and strategies, as well as effective replication and scaling of evidence-based models.

The concept of "active implementation frameworks" (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005; Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Wallace, 2009; Metz & Bartley, 2012) is particularly relevant to improving how foundations operationalize and implement their strategies. Tools derived from this line of implementation science are useful in addressing not only the

Introduction

A number of recent articles describe how foundations have come up short as they design, implement and refine their strategies (e.g., Patrizi & Heid Thompson, 2011; Patrizi, Heid Thompson, Coffman, & Beer, 2013; Coffman, Beer, Patrizi, & Heid Thompson, 2013; Kania, Kramer, & Russell, 2014; Snow, Lynn, & Beer, 2015). Those shortcomings can be summarized as follows:

1. The strategy is based on a weak or naïve theory of what is required for the intended

fourth shortcoming (i.e., failure to carry out the required work), but also the failure to understand what the strategy requires of the foundation and its partners (the second and third shortcomings), as well as suboptimal learning and adaptation of the strategy (the fifth shortcoming).

This article illustrates two specific tools from implementation science, the practice profile and the Implementation Drivers Assessment. A practice profile delineates the work that a specific actor needs to carry out in order to implement the strategy. Assuming that a new strategy is a departure from the foundation's prior approach to grantmaking, foundation staff will need to shift their practice in some manner. This is particularly true for program officers and program directors, because they have the most interaction with grantees and other organizations that are expected to advance the outcomes specified in the strategy. A practice profile describes the roles, functions, activities, and underlying values that program staff needs to exhibit as they carry out the strategy. In the process of defining what program staff needs to do in order to implement the strategy, we are also operationalizing the strategy – in other words, translating the strategy from conceptual terms into specific work and specific expectations.

While the practice profile answers the question, "What does the strategy require of particular foundation staff?," the implementation-drivers analysis explores the broader question, "What does the strategy require in the way of organizational change within the foundation?" If a new strategy requires program staff to act in new ways, the foundation will likely need to add new forms of training and coaching that allow program officers to succeed in their roles. If the new practices are a major departure from how program officers have traditionally performed their role, the foundation may need to recruit new employees with the requisite competencies. Other organizational shifts may also be required to implement the strategy, including changes in grant applications, selection procedures, and monitoring; evaluation; communications; technical assistance; and convening. If the new strategy

Assuming that a new strategy is a departure from the foundation's prior approach to grantmaking, foundation staff will need to shift their practice in some manner. This is particularly true for program officers and program directors, because they have the most interaction with grantees and other organizations that are expected to advance the outcomes specified in the strategy.

is a significant departure from the foundation's prevailing way of doing business, successful implementation may also require a shift in organizational culture. The Implementation Drivers Assessment is a specific approach to inventorying factors within the organization that are crucial to implementation. Results from the assessment point to the infrastructure issues leaders within the foundation need to address in order to bring the organization into alignment with the strategy.

This article describes how the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust used the practice profile and Implementation Drivers Assessment in implementing its place-based initiative, Healthy Places NC (HPNC). These two tools provided an empirically based reality check on what HPNC required in the way of organizational change. This allowed for fuller and quicker implementation of the strategy, but it also brought to light a number of fundamental misalignments, which were resolved by shifting the organization rather than retreating on the strategy.

Unlike typical place-based initiatives, Healthy Places NC does not begin by convening local stakeholders to conduct a planning process. Instead, the initiative relies on the Trust's program officers and a range of partner organizations to cultivate new work and new ways of thinking that have the potential to achieve community-level improvements in health. This process of community change is expected to play out in phases over many years.

Healthy Places NC

The Reynolds Charitable Trust is a statewide funder based in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, whose mission is to improve the quality of life and the quality of health for the financially needy of North Carolina. Five years ago, the Trust began focusing its resources and attention on rural North Carolina, particularly underserved rural communities. HPNC serves as the cornerstone of the Trust's rural strategy. The Trust expects to invest at least \$100 million over 10 years to create lasting improvements in health conditions in 10 to 12 of North Carolina's Tier 1 counties, which are defined by the state's Department of Commerce as rural and economically challenged. These counties are typically in the bottom third among the state's counties as measured by the University of Wisconsin's County Health Rankings.

Rather than funding individual projects scattered throughout the state, the Trust is making

concerted investments in specific low-wealth communities that are poised to make fundamental changes in health care, programming, and behavior. Allen Smart (2015), the Trust's vice president for programs and interim president, spells out the undergirding philosophy:

[We were] skeptical of a funder's ability to be effective in creating change and engaging people in rural communities when using traditional grantmaking. A top-down prescriptive model doesn't fit how people in these communities live and think, and whom they trust to help solve local issues. Grantmaking needs to foster and cultivate local assets, allowing change to come from within. (para. 4)

HPNC is the Trust's primary strategy for achieving these ends. It uses a place-based approach to improve health in challenged rural counties.

The Place-Based Approach

Place-based initiatives bring concentrated resources to a defined geography in order to support local actors in addressing critical issues and improving quality of life. The term "comprehensive community initiative" is often used interchangeably with place-based initiative. According to Auspos and Kubisch (2012), the defining principles of these initiatives are: 1) they focus on a defined geography and aim to affect the entire resident population; 2) they are comprehensive, meaning that the initiative works across a broad spectrum of social, economic, and physical conditions, and aim at changing individuals, families, communities, and systems; and 3) they seek to build community in terms of social capital, community capacity, and civic voice, as well as attending to racial diversity and equity.

Many of the foundation staff, consultants, and evaluators who have been engaged in place-based initiatives over the past three decades believe that these initiatives have not lived up to their transformative expectations (Brown & Fiester, 2007; Kubisch, Auspos, Brown, & Dewar, 2010; FSG, 2011; Mack, Preskill, Keddy, & Jhavar, 2014; Hopkins & Ferris, 2015). They are calling for a shift in how foundations enter into communities and engage with local stakeholders, paying more

attention and respect to local structures and politics (e.g., Brown, et al, 2003; Kubisch, et al., 2010; Brown, 2012; Aspen Institute & Neighborhood Funders Group, 2015). The field is moving more toward the philosophy of engaging more segments of the community and supporting these local actors in making their own decisions and developing their own solutions (Aspen Institute & Neighborhood Funders Group, 2015).

The HPNC Approach to Place-Based Grantmaking

The design of the HPNC is entirely consistent with the principle that foundations should support local actors in developing, implementing, and advancing their own solutions to the issues that they themselves view as most critical. Unlike typical place-based initiatives, HPNC does not begin by convening local stakeholders to conduct a planning process. Instead, the initiative relies on the Trust's program officers and a range of partner organizations to cultivate new work and new ways of thinking that have the potential to achieve community-level improvements in health. This process of community change is expected to play out in phases over many years. The Trust supports the change process with grants, technical assistance, training, encouragement, and other forms.

The Trust encourages a developmental and iterative approach to programming and strategic thinking. As initial project ideas are developed and funded, the Trust expected a few overarching issues to emerge as focal points for subsequent strategizing. As such, a HPNC county's strategy for improving local health is expected to take shape over multiple phases of planning, project development, implementation, evaluation, and learning. The Trust is not expecting or asking for a comprehensive health-improvement strategy on the front end (i.e., before investing in programming).

In most of the HPNC counties there are few nonprofits that have any experience with foundation funding. To deal with this reality, the Trust adopts a cultivation model for drawing out new work from anywhere in the community that

promising ideas arise. During the early stages of a county's involvement in the initiative, the program officer casts a wide net to solicit grant proposals. At this stage, the Trust has relatively modest expectations. These first-round projects are expected to be thoughtful and relevant to the local context, but the Trust is not expecting immediate payoff in terms of population health improvements. When these groups apply for a subsequent grant, they are asked to show how their work is evolving, expanding, and becoming more strategic, possibly with involvement by partner organizations. Additional grants raise the bar even higher, requiring applicants to propose more comprehensive, multiparty approaches that build on earlier work.

The program officer plays an active role in cultivating the initial body of work and encouraging local actors to become more strategic and ambitious. For the first year of a county's involvement in the HPNC, the program officer spends six to eight days a month visiting with a range of people who express an interest in being involved in efforts to improve health. These meetings, conversations, and follow-up emails are intended partly to provide the program officer with information about local issues, actors, and opportunities, and partly as a means of encouraging new thinking and initiative-taking. A locally based program-officer extender assists the program officer by organizing follow-up meetings, providing information about HPNC opportunities, and facilitating planning meetings.

The program officer's work is supplemented by a variety of additional resources provided by partner organizations commissioned by the Trust. Shortly after a county is selected to participate in the HPNC, the Trust convenes local forums that include presentations by representatives from the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps (CHRR) program at the University of Wisconsin. The CHRR staff present local health data and introduce a conceptual framework that identifies the broad range of factors that influence health. Around this time, the national KaBOOM! nonprofit organizes two playground-building projects that engage local residents in tangible health-improvement work.

The HPNC strategy also calls for the program officers to gradually lessen their engagement in their assigned counties, with the understanding that a regional support organization will step in to extend their work. These organizations (currently, there are two) provide ongoing support, technical assistance, and brokering of resources for actors who have stepped forward to develop and carry out health programming.

As the work progresses in an HPNC county, additional supports are introduced. The Center for Creative Leadership, based in Greensboro, North Carolina, provides leadership-development training, typically for a cohort of participants who are addressing the same health issue (e.g., reducing the incidence of childhood obesity, increasing access to behavioral health services). The North Carolina Division of Public Health deploys a catalyst who supports planning and programming in the area of healthy eating and active living. A Durham, North Carolina-based consulting firm, MDC Inc., oversees a grantmaking and capacity-building strategy aimed specifically at community colleges in each HPNC county.

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for actors who have stepped forward to develop and carry out health programming. These services help local actors maintain their momentum and deepen the work that was initially stimulated by the program officer.

A Contrast to the Trust's Prior Grantmaking

HPNC represents an innovative approach to place-based grantmaking and a major departure from the Trust's prevailing manner of doing business. By orders of magnitude, HPNC was a much more complex effort than the Trust had previously attempted. Among the more pronounced shifts in approach:

- With HPNC, the Trust is investing its grant dollars in rural communities that have relatively modest nonprofit sectors. In the past, the Trust had preferred to make safe grants to well-established institutions, including hospitals, universities, professional associations, and health departments. Most grantees, especially those receiving large grants, were based in urban areas.
- HPNC seeks out nonprofit organizations and government agencies that have innovative ideas for improving health, regardless of whether they are a health organization and regardless of whether they have experience as a Kate B. Reynolds Trust grantee. Formerly, the Trust had a track record of repeatedly funding the same organizations.
- HPNC encourages ongoing, in-depth interactions with grantees, as well as with local actors and organizations that don't actually receive a grant. In the past, the Trust's engagement with grantees had been largely hands-off and transactional.

These shifts in grantmaking approach have major implications for the Trust's program officers. Rather than simply soliciting well-formulated proposals from organizations with a strong track record, each program officer is expected to become a visible, accessible cultivator in his or her assigned counties. In this role, the program officer reaches out to a wide range of organizations and residents, only some of which have

plans for fundable projects, and encourages these local actors to take initiative, develop their ideas, and move those ideas into actionable strategies. The program officer also cultivates new relationships by connecting local actors with one another, looking in particular for opportunities with people who have complementary interests but don't know one another. Prior to HPNC, the Trust's program officers interacted with non-profit organizations and government agencies primarily through highly defined advance consults. To be invited into an advance consult, the organization needed to be savvy enough to reach out to the Trust with an idea for a grant proposal.

HPNC also calls for program officers to spend much more of their time out of the office, meeting with a variety of people within their assigned counties. On average, program officers are expected to be in their counties approximately seven days a month, although this figure varies over the course of the year as a function of grant cycles. Program officers spend more time in the office when they have proposals to review and recommendations to write up, and then focus more on their HPNC cultivating work during the rest of the year. This means that program officers are consistently busy but focusing on different tasks at different points in the year. According to Allen Smart (2015), this was a big shift from what had traditionally been expected of the Trust's program officers: "When we were not in active grant cycle, the program officers had little to nothing to do."

Operationalizing HPNC With a Practice Profile

It became clear early in the implementation of HPNC that the Trust's program officers would need guidance in shifting from their traditional notions of what a program officer is supposed to do and to adopt the roles, responsibilities, and expectations that come with the initiative. Toward this end, the Trust engaged the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) to develop a practice profile for the HPNC program officer position. NIRN has a long history of supporting service-delivery agencies and other organizations in implementing new programs and strategies, with a particular focus on clarifying

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the expectations and competencies for staff members who are directly responsible for carrying out the new work. In addition to developing a practice profile for the Trust's program officers, NIRN provided the program officers with coaching, training, and implementation exercises that helped them develop the competencies and behaviors specified in the profile.

A practice profile operationalizes a program or strategy in terms of the specific work that an implementing actor needs to carry out. According to Fixsen, Blase, Metz, and Van Dyke, (2013), a practice profile should contain the following elements:

1. a clear description of the values and principles that undergird the strategy;

2. a clear description of the essential functions the actor needs to perform in order to implement the strategy;
3. operational definitions of the essential functions – the core activities that allow the essential functions to be teachable, learnable, and doable by staff or practitioners as a set of activities for staff or practitioner to conduct; and
4. criteria for assessing the performance of the implementing actor.

The accompanying article by Easterling and Metz provides more details on these elements as well as how the practice profile serves as a vehicle for operationalizing strategy.

Methodology for Developing the Practice Profile

NIRN generated and refined the practice profile for the HPNC program officer through a systematic and iterative process: a review of initiative-related documents, a systematic scoping review, semi-structured interviews, a vetting and consensus process, and testing and evolving the profile.

1. *Review of initiative-related documents.* NIRN staff reviewed all available documents describing the theory and logic underlying HPNC, the Trust's expectations for program officers, the Trust's process for soliciting grant applications and awarding grants, and the process for selecting the HPNC counties. County-specific materials were reviewed to gain a sense of the context within which program officers are expected to carry out their initiative-related work.
2. *Systematic scoping review.* The goal of the scoping review was to access and review published research that focused on identifying competencies of program officers and foundation staff when launching new strategies. The review looked specifically at the question, "What competencies have been identified as important for program officers supporting complex community initiatives?" Studies and articles were identified through literature reviews and

a snowballing technique involving key sources such as the consultants to the initiative. Themes were identified and summarized, and integrated with findings from the qualitative interviews to inform the practice-profile development. This scoping process was based on a model proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005).

3. *Semistructured interviews.* Individual interviews were conducted with program officers and key foundation staff to identify the principles that guide program officers' work with HPNC counties and the specific activities program officers are engaged with to bring these principles to life. Program officers were asked to provide examples from the field to illustrate the use of guiding principles and core activities related to the HPNC strategy; they were also asked to consider successes and challenges in implementing the HPNC strategy. (See Table 1.) Findings from the interviews were coded for themes, and a draft description of the practice-profile criteria was developed.
4. *Vetting and consensus building.* Program officers, foundation leaders, and key consultants vetted the initial draft of the practice profile through a facilitated process designed to achieve consensus. This process involved a number of phases, which took place over the course of several meetings. In the first phase, the program officers and other foundation staff reviewed an initial draft of the practice profile and indicated what they believed to be the strengths and gaps. In the second phase, they provided specific feedback and suggestions for revising each essential function. Through facilitated conversation the group achieved consensus on the essential functions and identified specific activities that would need to be carried out to achieve those functions.
5. *Testing and evolving the profile.* Once consensus was achieved, the practice profile became the official guide for how program officers should carry out their work in HPNC counties. At the same time that

TABLE 1 Interview Protocol for Developing the Practice Profile

1. In what ways does your current role as a Healthy Places NC program officer feel different than your role in initiating or managing other grants?
<p>2. How would you describe the overarching principles that guide the HPNC initiative and the way you work with counties? Probe, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing resources to rural counties where compelling opportunities for health improvements exist; addressing pervasive and entrenched health problems; addressing structural determinants of racial and ethnic disparities. • Encouraging more emergent processes of exploration, conversation, and analysis (relying less on formal strategic planning). • Focusing on local context and culture; tailoring grants and resources to local context; an emphasis on changing local culture where it might be warranted for improving health outcomes. • Stimulating new problem-solving efforts. • Focusing on capacity building, adaptive problem solving, and effective leadership. • Approaching work with counties through a developmental lens: problem-solving strategies may change, new resources and supports may be needed. • Focusing on bidirectional learning and collaboration, emergent strategies to meet grantee needs. <p><i>Here's what I heard you say (summarize the principles we heard them offer): Is this right? Could you tell a story that exemplifies one of these principles operating in an HPNC county or in your work? Alternatively, has actualizing any of these principles been particularly challenging?</i></p>
<p>3. Given the principles you have discussed, what specific activities have you been engaged in that bring these principles to life? What do you think a program officer needs to say and do to achieve these principles? Probe, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joining stakeholders (rather than convening stakeholders). • Brokering exchanges and relationships. • Active listening and respect. • Supporting inclusion and mobilization. <p>What should be avoided?</p>
4. In your role as an HPNC program officer, what have been your successes so far? What have been your challenges? What do you find yourself thinking about as you go about this work?
5. What do you hope the National Implementation Research Network will bring to the table? How can the NIRN be most helpful to you?

program officers were acting in accord with the practice profile, they were actively testing the “usability” of the profile. Usability testing allows for rapid testing of the essential functions with small sample sizes. In the case of HPNC, program officers reported each month on a small sample of interactions with community actors: Do program officers implement the essential functions as intended? Do local actors respond in the way that

the profile assumes and the strategy hopes will occur? These data were synthesized across program officers to provide feedback on the overall usability of the practice profile. During this 18-month period, NIRN provided coaching and support with program officers to meet benchmarks in the practice profile. When consistent challenges occurred, the profile was adjusted to be relevant to the real-world implementation of HPNC.

The Actual Profile

This process generated a practice profile with all the recommended components:

- the underlying philosophy, principles, and values that need to be exemplified through the program officer’s work;
- a set of 10 essential functions that program officers need to perform to ensure that the HPNC is fully implemented, each of which is described in both conceptual and concrete terms; and
- more specific “core activities,” which operationalize each essential function and

provide a means of assessing how well program officers are performing the functions.

Practice profiles are always a work in progress. As a strategy moves further into practical realities, it is highly likely that the roles and responsibilities of the implementing actors will shift and expand. In the process of developing and updating the practice profile, we learned that different functions are required at different stages of a program officer’s engagement with local actors in a HPNC county. The practice profile specifies three developmental phases of the program officer’s work: explore, initiate action, and learn together. (See Table 2.)

TABLE 2 Phases of the Program Officer’s Work

IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE	Explore	The focus of Healthy Places NC program officer (PO) in the “explore” phase is to engage a wide range of local actors in a wide range of conversations, form relationships with people and organizations, and diagnose local situations. Through such conversations and meetings, POs will become “visible” in the counties and serve an “activating” role, and broker new relationships and connections with county people and organizations across sectors and lines of divisions. The use of data to stimulate awareness to action is introduced in Phase 1 through activities such as a County Health Rankings & Roadmaps session for local actors. Essential functions for Phase 1 include active listening, building & managing relationships, communication, power analysis, and brokering connections.
	Initiate Action	The focus of the POs in the “initiate action” phase is on networks and initial infrastructure. The POs will continue to build and manage relationships, but with particular attention to networking and cross-sector collaboration for mutual benefit. They will seek to build the capacity of organizations and to increase problem-solving and leadership skills among local organizations so that an initial infrastructure and county leadership for facilitating networks emerge. With attention on milestones, the POs will also consider how to leverage other resources in service to the kind of Kate B. Reynolds Trust-funded projects aimed for in the next phase. When appropriate, the POs will connect with intermediaries and other funders to support county efforts to improve health outcomes. In addition to attention on those functions carried out in Phase 1, essential functions for Phase 2 include facilitating networks & collaboration and strategic analysis & problem solving.
	Learn Together	The focus of the POs in the “learn together” phase is on developing comprehensive and effective projects and strategies and building momentum and continuous improvement on the part of local actors. The HPNC POs will continue to build and manage relationships and facilitate networks, but with particular attention to developing collaborative and comprehensive proposals and funded programs with support from the Trust and, potentially, other sources. As relationships with local actors may also shift from networking to funded programs, the PO may also evolve into an advisor role for continuous learning for broader and extended impact. In addition to attention on those functions carried out in Phases 1 and 2, an essential function for Phase 3 is questioning & advising.

The practice profile specifies which functions and activities are relevant at each phase of the work.¹ In the course of this analysis, NIRN also identified milestones describing what should be accomplished within each phase, as well as “road signs” that tell the program officer that it is time to begin shifting to the next phase of work.

Essential Functions and Core Activities

The core of the practice profile is the set of essential functions. For the HPNC program officers, the practice profile specifies 10 essential functions: active listening; building and managing relationships; communication; power analysis; brokering connections; facilitating networks; strategic analysis and problem solving; grant-making, management, and monitoring; questioning and advising; and critical thinking.

In order to demonstrate the specificity with which the practice profile describes the work of the program officer, we highlight three specific functions that are core to carrying out the HPNC strategy. As noted above, HPNC cultivates new health-improvement work in a manner that is much more interactive and nuanced than occurs in a traditional place-based initiative.

Building trusting relationships with community members is seen as a key to success for all community change efforts. How, though, are foundation staff to build these relationships? How long will it take? When will foundations know that trust has been established? The HPNC Program Officer Practice Profile includes several interrelated essential functions of the program officer's role and operationally defines such functions as active listening, relationship building, and brokering connections with a series of core activities that program officers conduct in the field.

Looking at the function of building and managing relationships, the program officer (PO) is expected to cultivate and begin developing diverse, authentic, respectful, trusting relationships with community residents and key stakeholders, especially among a diverse set of

When engaged in conversation with local residents (or anyone else involved in the initiative), program officers are expected to make a conscious effort to not only hear the words someone is saying, but to understand their “message” and “story.” They need to listen with three distinct purposes: obtain information, understand, and learn.

established and emergent leaders and those who, despite varied levels of power, have a strong stake in decisions at hand. The POs also work with these leaders to lift up the voice of community members and consumers of services. The POs also seek to understand power dynamics and apply this knowledge to effective relationships.

At a more specific level, the profile delineates a set of particular behaviors:

- identifying informal leaders in the community and seeking to cultivate trust through one-on-one meetings,
- acknowledging community assets,
- acknowledging discomfort in new and emergent conversations, and
- engaging in critical reflection with local actors.

Another function that supports strong relationships is active listening. When engaged in conversation with local residents (or anyone else involved in the initiative), program officers are expected to make a conscious effort to not only hear the words someone is saying, but to understand their “message” and “story.” They need to

¹ For the Program Officer Practice Profile tool, see <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/tfr/vol8/iss2/13>.

listen with three distinct purposes: obtain information, understand, and learn. Mastering this function requires a number of specific behaviors:

- During one-on-one meetings the POs speak 20 percent of the time; community stakeholders speak 80 percent of the time.
- The POs provide feedback on what they've heard through paraphrasing, such as "What I hear you saying is ..."
- The POs defer judgment on what they are hearing until they have a fuller understanding of context and perspectives.
- "Storytelling" is valued by time spent in the field listening to community stakeholders, especially those on the periphery of leadership.

In the course of interacting with local actors, the program officer is also expected to broker connections. This means helping individuals and organizations connect to other individuals, organizations, and resources (ideas, knowledge, and data) where there might be some mutual benefit. The POs also will serve as connectors to other funders when appropriate. This function is operationalized through the following behaviors:

- serving as connectors between existing organizations, as well as in the development of new organizations, by connecting key local actors;
- determining when to broker new relationships (and, eventually, networks of people and organizations) by understanding how these individuals and organizations might mutually benefit from working together, assisting organizations to see mutual benefits, and generating synergy to achieve the goals of HPNC; and
- when appropriate, serving as connectors between organizations and other potential funders.

A final example speaks to the program officer's role as a positive disruptive force in the

community. Before deciding how to act with any given local actor, the program officer needs to have a sense of the landscape and how the community operates. Critics of philanthropy are calling for a deeper consideration of the race and class power dynamics in how they approach their place-based work. According to the 2015 conference report issued by the Aspen Institute and Neighborhood Funders Group,

These are complex issues that require funders to understand in any given place how systems, policies, and politics historically and currently structure the opportunities that exist or do not exist in these communities in the context of race and class. (p. 6)

How, though, are foundation staff able to attend to these complex issues of race and power without clearly defined guidance on the "saying and doing" of this work? How do they analyze power dynamics? How do they use such an analysis to inform their day-to-day practice?

The HPNC Program Officer Practice Profile includes power analysis as an essential function of the program officer's role, defined as continually and frequently seeking to clarify and understand a county's power structure and identify people and places of influence and power, especially related to issues of race/ethnicity and economic disparity. The POs also work with a diverse set of established and emergent leaders and those who, despite varied levels of power, have a strong stake in decisions at hand to lift up the voice of community members and consumers of services.

On a more specific level, power analyses require the following behaviors:

- During one-on-one and group meetings, identify self-interests, constituencies, and connections among local actors and organizations as much as possible.
- Track those in the county with "observable decision-making power," the "ability to set a political agenda," and the "ability to shape a meeting."

- Map the power “sources”; they will identify opportunities for collaboration and facilitate the inclusion of nontraditional partners.
- Use results from the county power analysis to assess how particular strategies can be employed to ensure the HPNC goals are met.

Using the Practice Profile

The HPNC practice profile is a living document that actively guides practice on the part of the Trust’s program officers. It has also been used by Trust leaders to recruit, orient, train, supervise, and assess the performance of program officers. Consultants from NIRN use the profile as a point of reference for coaching, training, and setting up experiments for the program officers to test the effectiveness of specific behaviors and approaches to implementing the initiative.

Performance Assessment

The profile contains explicit expectations for how program officers should perform when interacting with various actors, organizing meetings and other events, cultivating grant proposals, communicating critical messages, and carrying out additional activities that advance the outcomes associated with HPNC. Those expectations are incorporated into performance reviews conducted by supervisors as well as the program officers’ self-evaluations of performance.

In practice, the expectations associated with HPNC have proven quite ambitious. Each program officer has displayed strengths as well as performance that calls for professional and personal development. Overall, some have succeeded more than others. The practice profile has provided clarity in all these respects.

Recruiting and Selecting Program Officers

As the essential functions and core activities were spelled out, it became clear that HPNC was calling for a new breed of program officer. Job descriptions were revised to reflect the new expectations and competency requirements.

The HPNC practice profile is a living document that actively guides practice on the part of the Trust’s program officers.

The protocol for job interviews was also revamped to allow for an explicit assessment of each candidate’s ability to carry out essential functions such as active listening and critical thinking. The interview questions focus on functions that are known to be crucial to effective implementation of HPNC. Candidates are asked to rate themselves on these dimensions and to explain their ratings. They are also presented with specific scenarios that call for the essential functions to be exercised, and then asked to describe the emotional and behavioral responses that would likely arise in the scenario. This line of questioning has allowed interviewers to quickly determine whether the candidate should be seriously considered further for the program officer position. Candidates consistently remark that these interviews are very different from anything they have experienced.

Coaching and Training

The profile also serves as a point of reference for coaching program officers and tracking their progress. NIRN developed a set of tailored assessment forms that program officers used to track how and when they used the different essential functions in various community settings, as well as the successes and challenges they encountered.

The data that program officers collect with these tracking forms are compiled by NIRN and presented back to the entire program team in a monthly learning-collaborative meeting. Those meetings provide an opportunity for sharing and reflection about the program officers’ interactions with local actors and the results they are observing. NIRN compiles notes on what has worked and what has been challenging; those notes are incorporated into the next iteration of the practice profile. In addition, rapid-cycle

Beyond redefining the job of the program officer, HPNC called for the Trust to develop new competencies and procedures around communications, grants administration, contracting with and managing consultants, and coordinating multiple partners operating at both the initiative and individual county levels.

testing is used to test out specific tactics for dealing with issues and advancing the work.

In between the monthly meetings, NIRN staff have conversations with each program officer to identify and resolve specific challenges that are arising in carrying out the profile. Coaching is provided by eliciting clear descriptions of interactions with local actors and by asking the program officers to connect their activities to the essential functions. NIRN uses a strengths-based approach to provide critical feedback and assigns each program officer specific exercises to try out over the next month.

Evolving the HPNC Strategy

The tailored assessment forms used for program-officer learning and coaching also support the process evaluation of HPNC. As program officers collect data in the field, they are helping to evaluate how well the overall HPNC strategy is working, where barriers are being encountered, and where attention is needed.

By analyzing the tracking sheets and engaging the program officers in conversation at the monthly learning-collaborative meetings, these strategy-level questions have been answered:

- What are program officers learning about the strengths and opportunities that exist

within the HPNC counties (e.g., among leaders, connectors, networks, capacities)?

- What barriers exist? What needs attention?
- What changes have program officers seen in the county as a result of using the essential functions?
- With whom are the program officers using the essential functions?
- Under what conditions are program officers leaning in or pulling back?
- Are there essential functions that program officers need to emphasize more? Emphasize less?
- What work needs to be done before the program officer can move to the next phase of work in the county?
- What connections can program officers make to technical resources to help move local actors to action?

These questions and the associated data have also been brought to the larger HPNC design team, which includes leaders within the Trust and consultants who have been instrumental in designing, implementing, evaluating, and refining the strategy. This has fostered a practice of ongoing reflection and adjustment.

Aligning the Organization to Support Implementation

As the Trust's program officers entered into communities to implement the HPNC, they displayed variable success in achieving the expectations spelled out in the practice profile. During the initiative, two program officers selected out of their positions because of a lack of fit. This is one example of how much HPNC represented a departure from the Trust's previous approach to grantmaking, and indeed from its prior identity as a foundation.

Beyond redefining the job of the program officer, HPNC called for the Trust to develop new

competencies and procedures around communications, grants administration, contracting with and managing consultants, and coordinating multiple partners operating at both the initiative and individual county levels. Among the new requirements that HPNC imposed:

- Organizations such as KaBOOM!, the University of Wisconsin's CHRR, and the Center for Creative Leadership play a key role in the community change process that the HPNC catalyzes. The Trust, however, did not have much experience contracting with national organizations and organizing the events where these organizations play a central role.
- The concepts of program-officer extender and rural support organization were new to the Trust. It had no experience hiring people or organizations to serve as the face of its strategy or to carry out local work in coordination with program officers.
- Because HPNC does not have a central planning body, it was necessary to create communications vehicles that would allow the residents of each HPNC county to remain informed about the various efforts. Prior to HPNC, the Trust's communications strategy had been confined largely to publishing annual reports, maintaining the website, and publicizing grant opportunities.

Once the practice profile for program officers reached stability, the Trust contracted with NIRN to conduct a comprehensive assessment of how well suited the organizational infrastructure was to the HPNC strategy. The charge to NIRN was to help the Trust build the supports that would allow staff to implement HPNC, as well as to take a broader look at how the foundation's staffing, processes, policies, systems, and, possibly, culture needed to shift in order to align with the strategy.

Implementation Drivers

The starting point for creating a hospitable organizational infrastructure is to identify a limited set of factors on which to focus the

organizational-change work: What are the highest-leverage factors that drive successful implementation of a strategy – or any intervention, for that matter? Implementation scientists use the term “implementation drivers” to describe the factors that need attention when implementing an intervention (Fixsen, et al., 2005; Metz & Bartley, 2012). Three distinct clusters of implementation drivers have been identified: competency, organization, and leadership:

- *Competency drivers* are mechanisms to develop, improve, and sustain an individual's ability to implement a new innovation or strategy with intended benefits. The four competency drivers are selection, training, coaching, and performance assessment.
- *Organization drivers* intentionally develop the organizational supports and systems interventions needed to ensure that the individuals carrying out the innovation or strategy are effectively supported and that data are used for continuous improvement. The three organization drivers are decision-support data systems, facilitative administration, and systems interventions.
- *Leadership drivers* ensure that leaders are using the appropriate strategies to address implementation challenges. Both technical and adaptive leadership are important.

These three sets of drivers form a triangular foundation for effective implementation. (See Figure 1.) Along the left side of the triangle are the competency drivers. Staff selection sits at the bottom as an organization's first opportunity to ensure competent staff. Once staff is hired, training and coaching should be implemented to grow and sustain staff competence. Along the right side of the triangle are the organization drivers. Decision-support data systems should be used by organizations to ensure that timely, relevant, and actionable information is collected and used to improve the intervention or strategy. Administrative and systems supports are needed to create the enabling context for staff to carry out the expectations of the new intervention or strategy. At the base of the triangle is

FIGURE 1 Implementation Drivers

leadership. Effective leaders support the installation of each of the competency and organization drivers so that these drivers are in service to the new way of work.

Assessing the Implementation Drivers

The implementation-drivers framework points to a number of specific questions that deserve exploration within an assessment. NIRN used this to guide its assessment of the Trust. (See Table 3.)

NIRN conducted interviews with 19 individuals, including the Trust's president, vice president for programs, program officers, director of communications, director of evaluation and learning, administrative staff, and a key consultant supporting the strategic oversight and direction of the HPNC. A semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore the guiding questions formulated by the NIRN, which addressed:

- Competency drivers:

1. How does the foundation select staff and partners with the required skills, abilities, and other innovation-specific prerequisite characteristics to support HPNC?
2. How does the foundation ensure that foundation staff and partners receive training related to the theory and underlying values of HPNC, and opportunities to gain skills to support the new strategy?
3. How does the foundation provide on-the-job coaching to allow staff and partners to practice and master the new skills?
4. What methods does the foundation use to evaluate the extent to which foundation staff and partners are implementing HPNC as intended?

- Organization drivers:

1. Do the foundation's administrative processes facilitate HPNC?

TABLE 3 Guiding Questions for the Assessment of Implementation Drivers

Driver	Key Questions to Answer to Support Implementation and Scaling
Selection	What prerequisites (skills, value knowledge) do Kate B. Reynolds Trust staff and partners need to implement Healthy Places NC effectively? What features of the HPNC initiative would be helpful to assess through verbal vignettes during the selection process for Trust staff and partners? What aspects of the HPNC initiative would be important to include in the job expectations?
Training	What training would need to be completed by Trust staff and partners to support effective implementation of the HPNC strategy? How can training opportunities incorporate opportunities to practice these skills and receive feedback?
Coaching	How can coaching on the HPNC implementation be built into regular supervision with Trust staff? How can coaching on the implementation be built into partner activities? What types of tools and resources are needed for coaching? What data might we collect to know that coaching is having intended effects with all key partners?
Performance Assessment	What are some ways in which Trust staff performance assessments can be more directly linked to HPNC strategies? What are some potential data sources for assessing whether Trust staff and partners are implementing the HPNC as intended?
Data-Guided Decision-Making	How can we ensure that data are used to drive decision-making at all levels of the system? What process and outcome data are important to include in a decision-support data system? How can we ensure that data collection is built into regular practice routines and reported frequently by all key partners?
Facilitative Administration	Will new policies or procedures need to be developed by the Trust to support effective implementation and scaling of the HPNC? What role does leadership need to play at Trust and partners levels to reduce administrative barriers to implementation? How can the Trust institute feedback loops? Will these loops ensure that barriers related to implementing the HPNC are communicated to Trust leadership?
Systems Interventions	How will Trust leadership need to work with external systems partners to ensure the resources required to implement the HPNC are available? How can Trust leadership reduce systems-level barriers to implementing the initiative? How can Trust leadership engage multiple champions of the HPNC at the systems level?

2. Do new data systems need to be set up to support data-driven decision-making for improving HPNC implementation and outcomes?

3. Were there clear communication and feedback loops within the foundation?

- Leadership drivers:

1. Did the Trust provide the necessary leadership to address challenges and create solutions?

2. Did Trust leaders adjust and develop policies and procedures to support HPNC?

3. Did Trust leaders reduce administrative barriers at the institutional level?

In addition, information was collected to determine whether key stakeholders were on board to provide the necessary financial, organizational, and human resources required to support the new strategy.

The infrastructure analysis made clear that program officers did not choose the new work that HPNC required – they “inherited” a new way of working when Trust leaders decided to launch the initiative. The new functions that HPNC requires were unfamiliar and a challenge for some of the program officers to carry out.

Key Takeaways

Findings from the Implementation Drivers Assessment were used to provide feedback to the Trust for action planning. Specifically, short- and long-term plans were identified to ensure the Trust’s infrastructure is fully aligned with expectations of the new strategy. Below are examples of findings for each driver, and related action-planning steps to strengthen individual drivers and improve the Trust’s overall infrastructure to support the HPNC.

Staff and Partner Selection

The infrastructure analysis made clear that program officers did not choose the new work that HPNC required – they “inherited” a new way of working when Trust leaders decided to launch the initiative. The new functions that HPNC requires were unfamiliar and a challenge for some of the program officers to carry out. Although the practice profile spelled out the essential functions, it was only through experience and consultations with NIRN that program officers fully grasped the competencies required to carry out these functions.

Trust staff reported that the roles of key partners were less defined, making it challenging to develop selection criteria. Recommendations

for strengthening the selection driver included developing more detailed expectations for Trust partners, focusing on how the competencies, roles, and functions of partners align with the roles and functions of Trust staff.

In a response to these findings, the Trust took two key steps. First, the process of recruiting and interviewing program officers was revised to ensure that the competencies would be explicitly assessed. Interview protocols now include a series of self-assessments and interactive verbal vignettes to gauge the extent to which potential foundation staff has the necessary skills and abilities to carry out the HPNC strategy. Second, the Trust has supported the development of a practice profile for the regional support organizations to more fully operationalize their roles and functions and, perhaps more importantly, their roles and functions vis-à-vis the roles and functions of the program officers. As partner roles and functions are more clearly articulated, the Trust will be in a better position to select appropriate partners and provide the necessary supports for these partners to contribute effectively to HPNC.

Training for HPNC Implementation

Trust staff identified key issues with staff and partner training, noting that developing training curricula for HPNC that covers both the deliberate and emergent strategies for the initiative was challenging. The infrastructure analysis also found that formal onboarding for new Trust staff as it related to the HPNC initiative had not been developed. Recommendations for strengthening the trainer driver included identifying the training needs of all partners in order to develop competency-based training modules. Training should provide knowledge related to the theory and underlying values of the approach.

As a response to these recommendations, the Trust is developing an orientation and training plan for new program officers. Part of this requires the development of materials and resources that highlight the theory of change and the evolution of the strategy over the past two years. The learning officer at the Trust has begun to develop these materials. Two new program officers have been

hired in the past three months, which will allow testing of new on-boarding processes.

Coaching for HPNC Implementation

Trust staff reported receiving group coaching for new skills required for the HPNC initiative, but also noted that more intensive, one-on-one coaching would be helpful. Trust staff also described the need for coaching Trust partners supporting the HPNC initiative to ensure that work in the communities was aligned across Trust staff and partners interacting with community organizations and networks. Recommendations for strengthening the coaching driver included ensuring a more robust coaching strategy for Trust partners to promote consistency in implementation of the strategy at the local level.

As a response to these recommendations, the Trust has sought strategies to strengthen internal capacity to provide more frequent one-on-one coaching of program officers as well as coaching of partners. An example of this is the development of the HPNC director position, allowing for increased support for those staff and partners implementing the initiative. As noted above, the Trust has also provided resources for the development of a practice profile for the regional support organizations which, when completed, will facilitate coaching on the core functions of their role.

Performance Assessment for Trust Staff and Partners

The infrastructure analysis found that performance assessments had not changed significantly since the inception of HPNC. Trust leadership noted that it was important to identify the indicators of progress for the HPNC strategy to better understand the performance expectations for program officers. Trust staff reported that outside of the Trust, there has been no formal process to assess the performance of key partners for HPNC. Although grantee progress reports were submitted to the Trust, questions were not targeted to assess partner performance or contribution to HPNC. Recommendations for strengthening the performance-assessment

... the Trust has sought strategies to strengthen internal capacity to provide more frequent one-on-one coaching of program officers as well as coaching of partners. An example of this is the development of the HPNC director position, allowing for increased support for those staff and partners implementing the initiative.

driver included developing a plan to strengthen grantee progress reports to include targeted questions on HPNC performance and contributions and identifying new performance indicators for program officers related to new expectations.

In a response to these findings, the Trust has begun to restructure the progress-report format that partner organizations use when they describe how they are carrying out their respective portions of the HPNC strategy and the associated results. The regional support organizations that provide ongoing consulting to the HPNC counties report on the specific services they provide, the degree to which they engage with various local actors, what those interactions lead to, challenges, and recommendations to adapt the approach. This detailed reporting is invaluable to understanding how HPNC is being implemented and how well it is working. But it also required reprogramming of fields within the Trust's grants-management software system. The Trust is also exploring how performance data from the progress reports can be extracted and shared more readily among staff. The creation of the HPNC director position will allow for more targeted assessments of staff and partners as it relates to HPNC implementation.

In initiatives as complex and multifaceted as HPNC, the use of data by partners often takes place in silos. The Trust is focused on developed methods to share data in a timely fashion across partners and used to assess and improve the strategy at different levels of the system (foundation, partners, and communities).

Decision-Support Data Systems to Improve and Assess Strategy

The assessment indicated that key forms of data were not being systematically analyzed and shared for the purposes of improving the HPNC strategy. Trust staff noted that it would be helpful to be more explicit about the “learning approach” for HPNC. For example, how can the Trust support a learning strategy that addresses the following questions: What are we learning? Should we pivot or adjust our approach based on what we are learning? How will we know if the adjustments we make are effective or an improvement in overall HPNC strategy? Recommendations for strengthening the decision-support data-system driver included refining the Trust’s learning strategy for HPNC to ensure timelier, relevant, and consistent data from grantees to enhance internal learning.

In response to these findings the Trust has allocated more resources for its learning strategy and, in particular, the evaluation component of the initiative. The Trust has also provided resources to identify current data-collection efforts by the Trust, outside evaluator, technical-assistance providers, and key partners. In doing so, the Trust will be able to identify opportunities to share and leverage data to answer key

questions regarding HPNC strategy implementation and performance. This is an important first step for the development of a decision-support data system. In initiatives as complex and multifaceted as HPNC, the use of data by partners often takes place in silos. The Trust is focused on developed methods to share data in a timely fashion across partners and used to assess and improve the strategy at different levels of the system (foundation, partners, and communities).

Foundation Leadership Practices to Support HPNC Strategy

Administrators provide leadership and make use of a wide range of data to inform decision-making, support the overall processes, and keep staff organized and focused on the desired innovation outcomes. Foundations should ensure leadership is committed to the new strategy and available to address challenges and create solutions, develop clear communication protocols and feedback loops, adjust and develop policies and procedures to support the new way of work, and reduce administrative barriers.

The infrastructure analysis found that the flexibility, adeptness, and openness of the Trust to bring in resources or partners needed to support the initiative has provided a hospitable environment for HPNC implementation and scaling efforts. The strength of the communication protocols for HPNC was also highlighted, and changes in technology were identified. The new, decentralized approach for program-officer activities (i.e., spending more time in the counties than in the office) required changes in two ways: 1) technology that facilitated remote work, including lightweight surface tablets, generous data plans, portable Wi-Fi, improved virtual private network access, and increased bandwidth for Wi-Fi at the Trust’s offices; and 2) technology-assisted reduction in paperwork and administrative tasks to free up time for program officers to be in the counties (e.g., changes to graphics interchange formats).

The infrastructure analysis also pointed out a fundamental concern about the overall design and understanding of HPNC: the

“organizational glue” for initiative was a handful of key people, as opposed to institutionalized processes and procedures. This focus on people may leave HPNC vulnerable to administrative and staffing changes. Recommendations for strengthening the facilitative administration driver included providing a forum for “courageous conversations” – open, honest, inclusive conversations regarding the challenges of HPNC implementation and the needs of program officers and staff to support this new strategy. Other next steps included restructuring the Trust’s project meetings to maximize all learning opportunities for HPNC.

In response to these findings, the Trust has continued to support communication efforts through the outsourcing of some communication tasks to lessen the burden on its limited internal communications resources. The Trust has also redesigned internal meetings for HPNC to promote a shared learning strategy and facilitate real-time data collection of program officers’ and partners’ successes and challenges in specific communities. Most importantly, the Trust has continued conversations with its trustee to develop more flexible resources for the initiative. Early efforts by Trust leadership have focused on hiring an additional program officer and creating the HPNC director position. It is expected that increasing staff resources will provide staff with more time for training and coaching agendas and participation in ongoing learning and improvement strategies.

Systems Interventions for Strategy Implementation

The infrastructure analysis found that the Trust should partner with additional stakeholder groups as HPNC expands to additional counties. Trust staff also discussed opportunities for strengthening policy-practice feedback loops and the need to focus on policy-change opportunities and ensure that such opportunities are “fed up the system” to Trust leadership and appropriate advocacy or policy groups at the state level. Additional next steps included developing and implementing buy-in strategies with other funders and considering strategies for engaging

public-sector partners. As a result, the Trust continues its efforts to build partnerships and gain buy-in for the HPNC strategy. This is evident through local and national communication and dissemination strategies.

Conclusions

Implementation of new strategies involves a variety of stakeholders engaging in work that is often complex, iterative, and messy (Nutley, Walter & Davies, 2007). Implementation science has identified specific implementation drivers that are necessary for successful implementation of any new intervention, innovation, or strategy. Assessing how fully these drivers are in place allows a foundation to come to terms with the adequacy of its organizational infrastructure and the alignment between its strategy and its existing way of doing business.

This case study illustrated how a practice profile and an Implementation Drivers Assessment can support the implementation of a complex strategy. The practice profile operationalizes the strategy in ways that program officers know what to do when working with various actors in various settings. The assessment provided the Trust with a set of specific organizational issues that needed attention in order to bring itself into alignment with HPNC.

At the outset of HPNC, there was a wide gap between what the initiative required of the foundation and its staff versus the infrastructure that the Trust had historically relied upon to carry out its responsive approach to grantmaking. The Trust’s leaders were firmly committed to the HPNC strategy, and thus took the steps required to bring the organization into alignment. It is crucial to point out that many of these steps were difficult and emotionally painful for at least some of the Trust’s staff members. For example, the HPNC initiative necessitates periods of intensive and emergent work throughout the 12 months of the year for the entire staff – not just the program officers. According to Allen Smart (2015), “this is not the deal that many signed on for.” Some staff positions have turned over as the requirements of HPNC have become clearer and

In instances where the board of trustees has firmly and knowingly committed itself to a new strategy, the organization will need to be brought into alignment. This is where the leadership driver is most essential.

as leaders have instituted changes in procedures and policies.

From the perspective of the authors, there has also been a notable shift in the organizational culture of the Trust. In the past, the Trust was a relatively low-profile, responsive grantmaker that prided itself on its clear grant guidelines and efficient processing of applications. With the advent of HPNC, as well as other strategic initiatives in recent years, the Trust has embraced the role of change agent and has gotten comfortable with both the messiness and the emergent nature of place-based philanthropy.

It is easy to envision an alternative scenario when a foundation conducts an Implementation Drivers Assessment and discovers that its organizational infrastructure is misaligned with its strategy. If a new strategy demands competencies, procedures, systems, supports, and norms that don't reside within the foundation, the easiest way to restore equilibrium is to revise or even abandon the strategy. This may in fact be the most responsible remedy as well – if it turns out that the foundation is actually ill suited to do what the strategy requires.

In instances where the board of trustees has firmly and knowingly committed itself to a new strategy, the organization will need to be brought into alignment. This is where the leadership driver is most essential. The Implementation Drivers Assessment provides the foundation's

leaders with concrete guidance on what needs to change, but it is up to those leaders to make those changes happen. This work demands well-developed strategic thinking, strong communication and interpersonal skills, and a compelling vision of what the foundation will become and why this is a crucial direction for the foundation to move. But at the end of the day, the most essential leadership competency may be the willingness and ability to let go of organizational features that have outlasted their effectiveness as the drivers of the foundation's strategy. Carrying out this act of leadership can be painful and even traumatic to the foundation's staff and board, but it is a fundamental feature of truly strategic philanthropy.

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Using Implementation Science to Translate Foundation Strategy

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Keywords: Implementation science, foundation strategy, practice profile, program officer, operationalizing strategy, competencies, place-based initiatives, performance assessment, implementation drivers, organizational culture

APPENDIX Program Officer Practice Profile

Healthy Places North Carolina: Program Officer Practice Profile

Healthy Places North Carolina (HPNC) distinguishes itself from other foundation-sponsored community change initiatives by promoting the crucial role that program officers play in cultivating positive community change. Program officers meet individuals and organizations from throughout the community, encourage them to pursue new projects, introduce new ideas, promote grant opportunities, and connect actors who are not currently working together. To serve as effective cultivators, program officers are expected to develop and make use of a core set of “essential functions,” including active listening; building and managing relationships; communication; power analysis; brokering connections; facilitating networks; strategic analysis and problem solving; grantmaking, management, and monitoring; questioning and advising; and critical thinking. This practice profile describes how program officers carry out these essential functions of the HPNC strategy and support the funded communities in achieving their goals.

The program officer’s “initiating action” role in HPNC is comparable to what practitioners do in many health and human services settings (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). In both cases, the work can be made more deliberate and effective through the use of clearly defined programs and practice models that identify core activities and the expected benefits associated with this new way of work (Cooke, 2000; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Kallestad & Olweus, 2003; Ringwalt, et al., 2003). Just as health providers and other practitioners use defined practices and programs to guide their interactions with children, families, adults, and groups, HPNC program officers will use a shared set of developmental strategies and approaches to guide their interactions with key stakeholders in selected HPNC counties.

To be useful in practice, any program or practice model should describe the model’s philosophy, values, and principles; the core components of the model; core activities associated with each core component; and practical assessments of fidelity (Fixsen, Blase, Metz, and Van Dyke, 2013). Well-defined programs allow organizations to build supports and hospitable environments necessary to promote and sustain practitioner competence and confidence.

One of the key components of any program model is a clear description of what the practitioners do to implement the model. In the case of HPNC, we have characterized the program officer’s role along the following dimensions:

- The philosophy, values, and principles that underlie HPNC. These guide the program officers’ decisions and evaluations and ensure consistency, integrity, and sustainable effort across all HPNC counties.
- The temporal, developmental, or iterative phases of the work that frame sets of activities that can then stage reflection for next steps, and their connections to the milestones or objectives to be accomplished (“How do we know the HPNC is working?”).
- Clear description of the essential functions that define the role of the HPNC program officer and inform activities within each phase of work. Essential functions provide a clear description of the features that must be present to say that this is the role of an HPNC program officer rather than a traditional

program officer role. (“Essential functions” sometimes are called core components, active ingredients, or practice elements.)

- Operational definitions of the essential functions. Practice profiles describe the core activities associated with each essential function of the HPNC program officer; allow the program officer’s role to be teachable, learnable, and doable across a range of community and network contexts; and promote functional consistency across program officers at the county level. (“Profiles” sometimes are called innovation configurations [Hall and Hord, 2006.]

Practice profiles have several benefits for HPNC program officers:

- They provide a fully operationalized practice model for engaging and supporting HPNC counties.
- They facilitate the development of effective training protocols, coaching strategies, and staff performance assessments for HPNC program officers.
- They refine the organizational and systems supports the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust will need to install to facilitate consistent and effective practice across the HPNC program officers.
- They promote the use of continuous-improvement strategies and data-driven decision making as essential functions and activities of the HPNC practice model are tested in interactions with county stakeholders.
- They increase the replicability of the HPNC practice model across a range of settings and contexts.
- They inform ongoing strategic planning efforts to inform next steps, and leverage resources that can advance what program officers are trying to accomplish with counties.
- They ensure that outputs and outcomes as they relate to expected county milestones can be accurately interpreted.

Philosophical Principles

The HPNC Program Officer (PO) Practice Profile begins with the philosophical principles that apply to all phases and functions of the POs’ work and provide guidance for all decisions and evaluations across HPNC counties. It continues with the essential functions and core activities that define the role of the PO. These principles, functions, and activities apply to all phases of the work. Taken together, these dimensions of the PO profile enable the role of the PO to be teachable, learnable, and doable across a range of community and network contexts, and promote functional consistency across POs at the county level.

Philosophical Principles (These apply to all phases of the work and essential functions.)

Reflective Practice: Intent on self-awareness, POs regularly assess and seek to understand how their personal characteristics, values, and assumptions influence their interactions with local actors in HPNC counties. POs examine “what works” in terms of PO roles and strategies in the counties, and connect what they are learning to best practices, theory, and conceptual frameworks for effective place-based grantmaking.

Context Specific: POs explore programs with counties as appropriate to and consistent with the local context, health issues, and resources. The Trust and POs ensure that grants and resources are tailored to the local context rather than allocated according to a formula or payout target.

Strength Based: POs focus on and facilitate people and communities to build on their resources, skills, and assets to come together, plan for, implement, and affect positive change. POs trigger local actors to new ways of thinking to address challenges and build community capacities to think and do creatively in the presence of often tremendous need.

Culturally Informed: POs inquire with openness, and listen and interact with counties without making assumptions. POs respect and learn from the counties’ unique characteristics, histories, and strengths, and bring this understanding of “their story” into subsequent county interactions and activities.

Community Driven: POs support a process in HPNC counties that empowers counties to take initiative and play a leadership role in defining and addressing issues that affect them. POs support counties in recognizing strategic issues through an emergent process of exploration, conversation, and analysis. POs ask probing questions, but refrain from telling local actors what goals they should adopt or strategies they should select.

Philosophical Principles (These apply to all phases of the work and essential functions.) (continued)

Collaborative: POs establish and maintain interactive, mutually beneficial, and well-defined relationships with county partners to achieve the goals of the HPNC. The POs learn alongside the HPNC counties and evolve strategies to meet the needs and opportunities presented by the counties.

Inclusive/Shared Power: The Trust and POs interact with counties in ways that reflect the core belief that power should be shared within the community. POs are mindful of the wisdom and experience at the local level, and stimulate conversations with and seek input from a diverse set of established and emergent leaders, including those who, despite varied levels of power, have a strong stake in decisions, and those who represent different community sectors.

Decentralized, Dynamic, and Emergent: Instead of formal or centralized processes, the Trust and POs take a dynamic and developmental approach to HPNC planning, programming, and funding. Strategies used by POs are flexible and emergent, ebb and flow easily, and adjust to county needs. Existing coalitions and processes that are inclusive, strategic, and demonstrate movement toward tangible outcomes may be supported.

Impact Focused: The Trust and POs focus on creating impact and value in the HPNC counties. Strategies used by the POs focus on improving the capacity and performance of HPNC counties, ensuring superior performance in the health arena, and improving measurable health outcomes.

Phases

The Healthy Places North Carolina Program Officer Practice Profile describes the three-phase approach that POs carry out to support communities in achieving their health goals. While not a linear process (POs may revisit activities as needs emerge), certain levels and progress of work (e.g., brokering connections) may be required before moving into others (e.g., facilitating networks). Within each phase are a set of core approaches that POs apply with local actors and organizations to achieve county milestones and facilitate communities' readiness to move to the next phase of the work.

In Phase 1, POs explore the HPNC counties focused on gathering information, analyzing data, forming relationships, and discovering/characterizing the situation. During Phase 2, POs initiate action, prompting and facilitating local actors to think and act differently, facilitating networks, cross-sector collaboration, and problem solving. In Phase 3, POs learn together with local actors and networks to develop new, effective, and comprehensive projects and strategies. While foundations discuss the importance of partnership with local communities they fund, the power balance in the funder-grantee relationship exists. In the HPNC, it is expected that the power dynamic will be reduced by advances in trust, relationships, and partnership that are made in the first two phases of the work.

As POs move through phases of the change process, their activities are also guided by a set of HPNC milestones – signs that the HPNC is “working in the counties”: changes in individual actors; relationships and networks; organizational capacity; programs, projects, and activities; and community context. These milestones may be applicable during each phase of the work and may evolve as progress is made. For example, seed projects and activities may be followed by bigger, more strategic projects and, finally, coordinated, higher-level projects as the work advances. Additionally, relationships may begin with individual people and organizations and grow into networks as trust, ideas, and mutual goals emerge. As the HPNC progresses, it will be important to identify specific indicators of each milestone within each of the three phases to outline progression of the work and to clarify even further what POs are trying to accomplish with local actors. The PO Practice Profile frames a set of essential functions of the work under the three phases.

The Practice Profile guides POs' overall work in phase-based activities and in ongoing testing of the expected linkages between functions and the achievement of county milestones:

- *Guides phase-based work.* The three-phase approach aids POs in identifying which phase they are working in with a particular group of local actors. It helps POs determine the readiness of local actors or organizations to move forward to a subsequent phase, or, when conditions or readiness are absent, barriers that need attention in order for progress to occur. Such issues might also serve to frame a kind of "pro and con" analysis for POs to consider the timing and selection of certain technical resources to leverage for strategic planning and local action.
- *Links core functions to county-level changes.* As POs enact and document the specific essential functions they use with local actors in the community, linkages can be tested between these core functions and the achievement of expected county milestones that are also based on phases of the work.

It should be noted that essential functions listed as part of a particular phase are not exclusive to that phase.

While POs may emphasize certain essential functions during particular phases, it is assumed that POs will continue attention to previous functions as they begin to test out and apply others in subsequent phases and activities.

Essential Functions Guided by Phases

PHASES	1 – EXPLORE		2 – INITIATE ACTION		3 – LEARN TOGETHER
<i>Forming relationships with people and organizations; gathering information, analyzing data, and discovering/characterizing the situation</i>		<i>Prompting and facilitating local actors to think and act differently together; facilitating networks and cross-sector collaboration; problem-solving</i>		<i>Working closely and openly with local actors to develop more effective and comprehensive projects and strategies</i>
MILESTONES (indicators of results, benefits)	Changes in Individual Actors Relationships & Networks		Relationships & Networks Organizational Capacity Programs, Projects, & Activities		Relationships & Networks Organizational Capacity Programs, Projects, & Activities Community Context
CORE FUNCTIONS	Active Listening Building & Managing Relationships Communication Power Analysis Brokering Connections		Facilitating Networks & Collaboration Strategic Analysis & Problem Solving		Strategic Analysis & Problem Solving Questioning & Advising
	Critical Thinking (in phase)	Critical Thinking (between phases)	Critical Thinking (in phase)	Critical Thinking (between phases)	Critical Thinking (in phase)

Range of grantmaking, monitoring, and management
as a vehicle for partnering, initiative taking, and programs in service to the HPNC

Phase 1: Explore

The focus of HPNC POs in the "explore" phase is to engage a wide range of local actors in a wide range of conversations, to form relationships with people and organizations, and to diagnose local situations. Through such conversations and meetings, POs will become "visible" in the counties and serve an "activating" role; POs will broker new relationships and connections with county people and organizations across sectors and lines of divisions. The use of data to guide decision-making is introduced in Phase 1 through a County Health Rankings and Roadmaps session for local actors. Essential functions for Phase 1 include active listening; building and managing relationships; communication; power analysis; and brokering connections.

Essential Functions	Core Activities
<p>1. Active listening. POs listen to obtain information, understand, and learn. POs make a conscious effort to not only hear the words someone is saying, but to understand their “message” and “story.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During one-on-one meetings, POs speak 20% of the time; community stakeholders speak 80% of the time. • POs provide feedback on what they’ve heard through paraphrasing, such as “What I hear you saying is” • POs defer judgment on what they are hearing until they have a fuller understanding of context and perspectives. • “Storytelling” is valued by time spent in the field listening to community stakeholders, especially those on the periphery of leadership. • POs learn about the community with the community.
<p>2. Building & managing relationships. POs will cultivate and develop diverse, authentic, respectful, trusting relationships with community residents and key stakeholders, especially among a diverse set of established and emergent leaders, and those who, despite varied levels of power, have a strong stake in decisions. POs also work with these leaders to facilitate lifting up the voice of community members and consumers of services. POs also seek to understand power dynamics and apply this knowledge to effective relationships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kate B. Reynolds Trust engages counties through mutual selection activities and invitations to participate. • POs identify informal leaders in the community and seek to cultivate trust through one-on-one meetings. • POs acknowledge community assets. • POs acknowledge discomfort in new and emergent conversations. • Over time, POs demonstrate authentic relationships with local actors through critical reflection with each other.
<p>3. Communication. POs will be the primary messenger of the HPNC’s vision, goals, and agenda. POs will work to effectively send and receive information regarding HPNC progress, goals, and expectations within the appropriate local context both to provide information and respond to community needs. POs facilitate delivering “audience based” communication, serving as respectful and authentic translators of HPNC goals and decision points with local actors, extenders, partners, and key stakeholder groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POs work with and assist the Trust’s communications director to prepare written and verbal communications to share with local actors. • POs coordinate the timing and content of communication with the communications director. • POs gather feedback from local actors to validate and strengthen communications. • POs identify local barriers to or complications with effective communication and work with the Trust’s communication directors to resolve these challenges.
<p>4. Power analysis. POs will continually and frequently seek to clarify and understand a county’s power structure and identify people and places of influence and power, especially related to issues of race/ethnicity and economic disparities. POs also work with a diverse set of established and emergent leaders, and those who, despite varied levels of power, have a strong stake in decisions at hand to facilitate lifting up the voice of community members and consumers of services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During one-on-one and group meetings, POs will identify self-interests, constituencies, and connections among local actors and organizations as much as possible. • POs will track who in the county has “observable decision-making power,” the “ability to set a political agenda,” and the “ability to shape a meeting.” • As POs map the power “sources,” they will identify opportunities for collaboration and facilitate the inclusion of nontraditional partners. • POs will use results from the county power analysis to assess how particular strategies can be employed to ensure HPNC goals are met.
<p>5. Brokering connections. POs help individuals and organizations connect to other individuals and organizations and resources (ideas, knowledge, and data) where there might be some mutual benefit. POs also will serve as connectors to other funders when appropriate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POs will serve as “connectors” between existing organizations as well as in the development of new organizations by connecting key local actors. • POs will determine when to broker new relationships (and eventually networks of people and organizations) by understanding how these individuals and organizations might mutually benefit from working together, assisting organizations to see mutual benefits, and generating synergy to achieve the goals of the HPNC. • POs will, when appropriate, serve as connectors between organizations and other potential funders.

Phase 2: Initiate Action

The focus of the POs in the “initiate action” phase is on networks and initial infrastructure. POs will continue to build and manage relationships, but with particular attention to networking and cross-sector collaboration for mutual benefit. POs will seek to build the capacity of organizations and to increase problem solving and leadership skills among local organizations so that an initial infrastructure and county leadership for facilitating networks emerge. With attention to milestones, POs will also consider how to leverage other resources in service to the kind of Trust-funded projects aimed for in the next phase. When appropriate, POs will connect with intermediaries and other funders to support counties’ efforts to improve health outcomes. In addition to attention on those functions carried out in Phase 1, essential functions for Phase 2 include facilitating networks & collaboration and strategic analysis & problem solving.

Essential Functions	Core Activities
<p>6. Facilitating networks & collaboration. POs will connect local actors and organizations to think and act differently together to facilitate the “initial infrastructure” for the HPNC. Emergent networks of local actors and organizations will represent a diverse set of established and emergent leaders, including those who, despite varied levels of power, have a strong stake in decisions at hand, and those who represent different community sectors. POs will connect internal and external resources that build on local resources, skills, and assets to come together, plan, implement, and effect positive change and improvement for a common purpose.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• POs will begin to follow up with, join, and convene local actors and organizations that have the potential to serve as an infrastructure to move the HPNC to the next level (e.g., using data to select strategies).• POs will activate new connections, leaders, and approaches for local actors to work together to solve community problems.• POs will assist groups of local actors through a continuum of activities – including exchanging information, sharing resources, and enhancing the capacity of others – for mutual benefit.• POs look for threads of connections across organizations and small groups of organizations.• POs offer ideas, then wait and see what local actors pick up. POs play out scenarios, then see what gains traction at the local level.
<p>7. Strategic analysis & problem solving. POs will engage in feedback cycles with local actors for understanding and improvement (“learning while doing”). POs will extend critical-thinking skills into understanding and defining problems and their complexity, and assisting counties to generate, evaluate, and select from alternatives. In doing so, POs will set in motion new thinking and behaviors that ultimately translate into more effective and comprehensive health strategies and a more health-promoting culture.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• POs will support counties to clarify and prioritize next steps.• POs will use formal problem-solving methods (e.g., PDSA).• POs will engage in regular, ongoing feedback loops with counties to learn from their experiences and deepen and broaden the work.• POs will identify and highlight opportunities, alternatives, and early wins.• POs will seek to build the capacity of local actors to identify and solve health problems and to design and implement programs and policies that advance community health.• POs will activate local actors to take more initiative in solving problems.• POs will use data generated from ongoing power analyses to develop strategies to address challenges related to county power structures.

Phase 3: Learn Together

The focus of the POs in the “learn together” phase is on developing comprehensive and effective projects and strategies and building momentum and continuous improvement on the part of local actors. The HPNC POs will continue to build and manage relationships and facilitate networks, but with particular attention to developing collaborative and comprehensive proposals and funded programs with support from the Trust and, potentially, other sources. As relationships with local actors may also shift from networking to funded programs, the PO may also evolve into an advisor role for continuous learning to achieve broader and extended impact. In addition to attention on those functions carried out in Phases 1 and 2, an essential function for Phase 3 is questioning & advising.

Essential Functions	Core Activities
7. Strategic analysis & problem solving (continued) [ongoing, enhanced]. POs will work with local actors to explore opportunities to expand the “health” space and design high-impact work. These activities may include exploring alternative yet relevant partners (e.g., urban planning). In doing so, POs will stimulate and set into motion new, effective thinking and behaviors that ultimately translate into effective, comprehensive action for a more health-promoting community and culture across the county.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar activities as noted in previous phase, but with enhanced and broader attention to expanded networks and partnering for larger, longer-term, high-leverage projects.
8. Questioning & advising. POs will continue regular, ongoing interactions with counties to ask probing questions of local actors and organizations with whom they interact, while not imposing their viewpoint. As these interactions and exchanges focus on funded programs and looking ahead with grantees and other partners to a comprehensive county health strategy, POs may move into the role of advisor and colleague, working with counties to critically explore strategic focus and impact. Doing so may address both programmatic and organizational themes related to strengthening comprehensive projects and strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POs will advise counties through both proactive/ assertive and responsive methods. • POs will raise questions to engage in dialogue and check for understanding upon conversation (mutual receptivity to feedback). • POs may seek to identify an organization to manage local work (programmatically) and provide a degree of accountability for grants. • POs provide constructive feedback that inspires and supports counties to move their ideas into actionable strategies that focus on impact. • POs look for and encourage local actors and networks to make mid-course corrections in keeping with the strategic focus for change. • POs will facilitate learning among and across grantees for strategic focus and to enhance impact.

Bridging Functions Across Phases

Critical thinking and grantmaking are “bridging” functions that inform work within and across phases. In terms of critical thinking, during the “explore” phase, POs may ask themselves, “What am I learning about strengths and opportunities among leaders and organizations? What are some priority points of contact that might leverage opportunities for next steps?” Additionally, between exploring and initiating action, POs may ask themselves, “What connections to technical resources can I make to help move local actors to action?” In terms of grantmaking, POs will use grantmaking for different purposes across the three phases. During the early phases, for example, grantmaking provides an opportunity to identify key actors and communicate expectations and principles associated with the HPNC; in later phases, grantmaking can be used to leverage comprehensive projects that address pressing health problems.

Essential Functions	Core Activities
<p>9. Critical thinking. POs will explore diverse elements involved in a situation, examine assumptions and make conscious choices, evaluate evidence and interpret data to make informed decisions, understand context, and facilitate the use of tailored and appropriate support to help counties.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• POs gather information, recognize technical and adaptive challenges, prioritize next steps, distinguish content from process issues, interpret data, gauge strengths and opportunities, and consider alternative approaches.• POs use data to help counties solve problems, facilitate learning, assess accomplishments, draw conclusions, and further test the generalizability of particular strategies.
<p>10. Grantmaking, management, & monitoring. The Trust and POs use a range of grantmaking to support health-improvement programming, and serve as a vehicle to stimulate partnering, initiative taking, and programs in service to the HPNC. POs are leveraging relationships and ideas, not grants per se, as the resources for change cannot be leveraged effectively without buy-in and innovative, strategic ideas from local actors.</p> <p>Timing is situational, and grantmaking will build on community thinking and strategic momentum. Early awards will yield bigger, more strategic projects that yield coordinated, high-leverage programs and activities for an overall, comprehensive strategy to improve community health. Grantmaking will be aligned with the expectation that comprehensive health improvement strategies take time to evolve and that investments in initial partnering/project ideas will help to identify key leverage points for other strategizing at the county level and the Trust’s longer-term investment. POs will guide HPNC counties in their understanding of and application for funds, work with consultants to address county needs and add value to the initiative, and monitor active grants in the counties.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• POs use grantmaking to engage a range of partners in activities and projects with a common purpose and potential for mutual benefit.• During early phases, POs use grantmaking as a means of establishing a presence, identifying key actors, building relationships and capacities (e.g., leadership), and communicating HPNC’s expectations and principles.• In later phases, POs use grantmaking to leverage projects that address fundamental determinants of the county’s pressing health problems.• As appropriate, POs encourage proposals for selected evidence-based programs; POs also connect local actors to other funding sources and opportunities related to but possibly outside of Trust domains.• POs clarify funding parameters/procedures and provide preproposal technical assistance to those seeking to submit proposals.• In light of identified needs (e.g., implementation, evaluation), POs also connect funded HPNC grantees to outsourced technical assistance and capacity-building providers of the Trust.• POs facilitate learning among and across grantees at all stages of grantmaking to enhance strategic focus and enhance impact.

IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE

Link to Strategic Planning and Field Leadership

As POs interact with and reflect on interactions with local actors, such reflections (on both progress and barriers) should occasion and inform ongoing strategic-planning efforts to guide next steps and leverage resources that can advance what POs are trying to accomplish with counties.

Additionally, and more broadly, POs will work with the support of Trust leadership to strengthen the platform internally and to engage others and help align interests in ways that can support the HPNC initiative and health outcomes in Tier 1 counties in North Carolina. These activities will enhance the credibility of the HPNC initiative on a national stage.

Other Players

While the purpose of the Practice Profile is to outline core functions of the HPNC POs, it is expected that other individuals or organizations may serve “partner,” “extender,” or “intermediary” roles in supporting, or at times advancing, the implementation of these functions when deemed appropriate by POs and Trust leadership. Criteria for engaging and selecting extenders or intermediaries will be developed and included as an addendum to this Practice Profile.

RESULTS

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Building a Field: Blue Shield of California Foundation's Strong Field Project Leaves a Legacy and Valuable Lessons

Hanh Cao Yu, Ph.D., and Jennifer Henderson-Frakes, M.P.P., Social Policy Research Associates; and Lucia Corral Peña, J.D., Blue Shield of California Foundation

Philanthropy has a long history of supporting field building, but few comprehensive evaluations have assessed the principles, elements, and impacts of these endeavors. This article shares the results of a five-year evaluation of a large-scale field-building initiative: Blue Shield of California Foundation's Strong Field Project. It aimed to strengthen field leadership and organizations, and to create vibrant collaborative networks. Evaluation data show that the project achieved much of its desired impact on the domestic violence field in California, in particular by challenging long-held assumptions and entrenched patterns that had stalled the development of the field.

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Key Ingredients for School Food Systems: An Evaluation of the Orfalea Foundation's School Food Initiative

Holly Carmichael Djang, M.A., Evaluation Specialists; Barbara Andersen, M.P.A., Orfalea Foundation (formerly); Tatiana Masters, Ph.D., Jan Vanslyke, Ph.D., and Blair Beadnell, Ph.D., Evaluation Specialists

Among California's 58 counties, Santa Barbara is ranked 14th worst in meeting residents' daily food needs. In 2007, the Orfalea Foundation launched the School Food Initiative to improve the quality of school food and promote food literacy in the county's public schools. The initiative involved 84 schools and more than 50,000 students over its nine years of programming. Striving to tailor programming to specific needs, the foundation emphasized stakeholder involvement throughout the process. The foundation took a number of steps to understand the value and impact of the initiative, including working with an outside evaluator. This article shares best practices and lessons learned.

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TOOLS

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Partnerships, Paradigms, and Social-System Change

Patricia Jessup, Ph.D., Jessup & Associates; Beverly Parsons, Ph.D., InSites; and Marah Moore, M.C.R.P., i2i Institute

Communities frequently confront issues entangled in a web of multiple social systems and underlying assumptions, perspectives, and beliefs. In this article, the authors offer a

partnership configuration with three types of partnerships: project-focused, formal-systems-focused, and community-grounded, that focus on the deep structures and paradigms that shape social systems. The configuration provides funders, initiative leaders, and organizational leaders with ideas on how to adjust existing partnerships and/or create new ones to enrich their capacity to bring about systemic change within communities. They conclude with concrete actions that funders and leaders can take to stimulate partnerships committed to deep systemic change.

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Developing a Framework for Grant Evaluation: Integrating Accountability and Learning

Shelley C. Scherer, Ph.D., The Pittsburgh Promise

Existing research provides a compelling case for grant evaluation, often citing its benefits in terms of accountability and learning. Drawing from insights shared by CEOs and program officers representing 17 foundations in Pennsylvania's Allegheny County, the author presents three questions designed to help other foundations develop their own framework for grant evaluation. A key takeaway is that foundation boards should not feel constrained to adopt uniform evaluation practices for all grants. This serves as a discussion guide, providing a starting point for conversations about the purpose of evaluation for each type of grant, along with a range of possible evaluation processes and criteria.

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Critical Team-Building Tools in Philanthropy

Ali Webb, Ph.D., W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and Michael Bell, B. A., InPartnership Consulting

With only the organization's vision and mission as a guide and without a measurable bottom line, teams within foundations struggle to row in the same direction. Using the experience of one team in a large U.S.-based foundation over a four-year period, this article examines four essential tools for cultivating high-performing teams in the philanthropic sector. The tools discussed are giving and receiving feedback, the art of appreciations, organizing meetings to produce accountability, and assessing team communication styles, all applied with a racial equity lens. The tools are likely applicable in every sector, but when used by foundations where large-scale social issues are the crux of the work, the resulting high-performing teams may be better equipped to confront concerns vital to the philanthropic sector.

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SECTOR

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Enhancing Foundation Capacity: The Role of the Senior Leadership Team

Melissa A. Berman, Ph.D., Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors

Noting that any organization structure inhabited by human beings creates silos and territorial issues, foundation leaders are increasingly using two primary mechanisms to minimize these artificial barriers and maximize collaboration: enhanced headquarters functions to help integrate across the organization and senior leadership teams. This article reviews the structure, roles, responsibilities, and value-add of senior leadership teams at 19 foundations. The senior leadership team plays a crucial role in foundations, functioning as an advisory group to the president and chief executive officer as well as helping to define the foundation's overall vision and goals. This article also seeks to develop shared concepts, frameworks, and tools for foundation leaders to use individually and in discussion or partnership with other foundations, and to spur more effective collaboration among foundations and with other sectors.

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The Art and Science of Place-Based Philanthropy: Themes From a National Convening

Giannina Fehler-Cabral, Ph.D., and Jennifer James, M.A., Harder+Company Community Research; Meg Long, M.P.A., Equal Measure; and Hallie Preskill, Ph.D., FSG

For more than 50 years, philanthropic and public-sector organizations have invested in numerous place-based initiatives to address persistent and pervasive poverty in communities around the country. This article shares insights and implications generated at a convening titled *Is This a Better Place? The Art and Science of Place Evaluation* and reflections by the authors, who also facilitated convening sessions. The convening produced a number of considerations, presented in this article, for how funders, and their investments in evaluation, can support the design, implementation, and overall success of place-based efforts.

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SPECIAL SECTION: IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE

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Getting Real With Strategy: Insights From Implementation Science

Douglas Easterling, Ph.D., Wake Forest School of Medicine, and Allison Metz, Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Foundations are increasingly coming to appreciate that they need to have a coherent and well-grounded strategy if they have any hope of creating a discernible impact in the world. To implement strategy effectively, foundations need to operationalize it in the form of specific functions that staff will carry out and to create an organizational infrastructure that supports the strategy. The field of implementation science offers a set of tools for helping foundations address these tasks. This article describes in depth the concepts of practice profiles, which translate programs or strategies into specific activities to be carried out by implementation staff, and implementation drivers, which point to organizational factors that determine whether a program or strategy is implemented well enough to achieve its intended outcomes. DOI: 10.9707/1944-5660.1301

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Using Implementation Science to Translate Foundation Strategy

Allison Metz, Ph.D., University of North Carolina, and Douglas Easterling, Ph.D., Wake Forest School of Medicine

The field of implementation science offers guidance to foundations as they effectively implement strategies that depart from prevailing practice. This article focuses on two specific tools: the practice profile and the implementation drivers assessment. The practice profile answers the question, "What does the strategy require of particular foundation staff?" The implementation drivers analysis explores the broader question, "What does the strategy require in the way of organizational change within the foundation?". These two tools were used by the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust in implementing its place-based initiative, Healthy Places NC. In the process the tools brought to light a number of fundamental misalignments, which were resolved by shifting the organization rather than retreating on the strategy. DOI: 10.9707/1944-5660.1302

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call for papers

FOR VOLUME 9, ISSUE 2

Abstracts of up to 250 words are being solicited for Volume 9, Issue 2 of *The Foundation Review*. This issue will be an open (unthemed) issue. Papers on any topic relevant to organized philanthropy are invited.

Submit abstracts to submissions@foundationreview.org by Aug. 30, 2016. If a full paper is invited, it will be due Jan. 30, 2017 for consideration for publication in June 2017.

Abstracts are solicited in four categories:

- **Results.** Papers in this category generally report on findings from evaluations of foundation-funded work. Papers should include a description of the theory of change (logic model, program theory), a description of the grant-making strategy, the evaluation methodology, the results, and discussion. The discussion should focus on what has been learned both about the programmatic content and about grantmaking and other foundation roles (convening, etc.).
- **Tools.** Papers in this category should describe tools useful for foundation staff or boards. By “tool” we mean a systematic, replicable method intended for a specific purpose. For example, a protocol to assess community readiness and standardized facilitation methods would be considered a tool. The actual tool should be included in the article where practical. The paper should describe the rationale for the tool, how it was developed, and available evidence of its usefulness.
- **Sector.** Papers in this category address issues that confront the philanthropic sector as whole, such as diversity, accountability, etc. These are typically empirically based; literature reviews are also considered.
- **Reflective Practice.** The reflective practice articles rely on the knowledge and experience of the authors, rather than on formal evaluation methods or designs. In these cases, it is because of their perspective about broader issues, rather than specific initiatives, that the article is valuable.

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Please contact Teri Behrens, editor of *The Foundation Review*, with questions at behrenst@foundationreview.org or 734-646-2874.

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