

The Foundation Review

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Front Matter

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The Foundation Review is the first peer-reviewed journal of philanthropy, written by and for foundation staff and boards and those who work with them implementing programs. Each quarterly issue of *The Foundation Review* provides peer-reviewed reports about the field of philanthropy, including reports by foundations on their own work.

Our mission: To share evaluation results, tools, and knowledge about the philanthropic sector in order to improve the practice of grantmaking, yielding greater impact and innovation.

The Foundation Review is a proud product of the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University.



Front cover photo:
Fountain on the campus of Grand Valley State University.

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We believe that the forthright sharing of information among foundations and nonprofits builds a knowledge base that strengthens their ability to effectively address critical social issues. We encourage foundation donors, boards, and staff to honor this transparency in their own practices and to support others who do so.

editorial

Dear readers,

As usual with our unthemed issues, this issue includes articles on a broad range of foundation practices, with several focusing on evaluation. We start the issue with **Frantzen, Solomon, and Hollod's** article on building grantees' evaluation capacity using a highly participatory process. While there has been a great deal of emphasis on nonprofit capacity building in recent years, the process used here is somewhat unusual in focus on individual grantee needs and the particular barriers to evaluation that each of them faced.

Two articles share a “less-is-more” approach to foundation work. **Pond, Shah, and Sak** provide a case study of how a small foundation, with limited resources for assessment and impact evaluation, approached the challenge of evaluating their overall impact. The foundation funds youth-led social change, using a cohort model. They found improvements in five of six key outcome areas in the two cohorts they examined. They used the results of their assessment to revise some of their reporting approaches as they expanded their grantmaking to a new city.

Polanco and Snow share the Financial Health Analysis Tool that can be used to foster conversation with potential and ongoing grantees about their financial position. The tool presents four years of key financial indicators in graphs and charts that create a kind of dashboard of a nonprofit's financial health over time. This small set of metrics highlights patterns and trends that can help grantmakers and nonprofits see how the financial management of an organization is advancing its mission and strategy.

While most of the emphasis on data in philanthropy has been in the context of evaluation, **Bixler, Zappone, Li, and Atshan** identify the many ways in which data are used by foundations, including needs identification, evaluation and learning, and measuring community impact. They have six recommendations for effective practices in integrating a data perspective into philanthropic work. These include: view evaluation as a tool for learning, create a safe space to share data, clarify what is “good data” and “good evaluation”, fund evaluation efforts of partners, support evaluation capacity, and advocate for community data infrastructure.

While there has been a fairly extensive body of work on partnerships between foundations and government, less has been written about partnerships between foundations and private sector organizations. **Scott, Lamont, Wandersman, Snapper, Shah, and Eaker** draw upon an evaluation of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Humana partnership to highlight key insights for forming and implementing a formal partnership between a philanthropy organization and an investor-owned business. They note that many of the basic principles of good partnerships are the same, with some nuances due to the differences in organizational priorities.



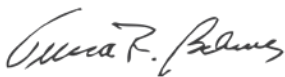
Teri Behrens

Landers, Minyard, and Price share reflections on the Colorado Health Foundation's efforts to create a collective impact initiative to help tackle the state's complex, systems-level health issues. They describe the role of developmental evaluation and a realist framework in aiding both the initiative's steering committee and the Colorado Health Foundation's decision making. Ultimately, the collective impact frame as implemented did not prove to be appropriate and sustainable in this context.

There has been a global shift in political leadership over the past decade that has resulted in increasing pressure on civil society. **Allan and DuPree** reflect on how funders can adapt to changing political environment. They identify three characteristics that are especially critical: flexibility; diversity and redundancy; and resourcefulness and ability to learn. Drawing on lessons from the experience of those working in countries of concern, this article proposes a conceptual framework for weathering threats from changing conditions, with the aim of providing a simple yet powerful way of assessing and improving current practices.

From analyzing the financial data of individual organizations to positioning philanthropy in the context of global political challenges, this issue represents the breadth and depth of the field. The range of knowledge, skills and perspectives needed to be effective in the field continues to change and expand.

We're pleased to be on this journey with you.



Teresa R. Behrens, Ph.D.

Editor in Chief, *The Foundation Review*

Director, Institute for Foundation and Donor Learning,

Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University

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Partner-Centered Evaluation
Capacity Building: Findings from a
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