



What's the Difference?

How Foundation Trustees View Evaluation

Trustees Know

EVALUATION MATTERS

Trustees care deeply about impact. Understanding results is part of their fiduciary duty. As foundations strive to improve performance, advance accountability and share knowledge, their desire for evaluation — reliable data on organizational effectiveness — grows.

EVALUATION ISN'T MEETING OUR NEEDS.

Trustees wish that current approaches generated more useful information. In too many cases, foundation evaluation practices don't align with trustee needs.

IT CAN WORK BETTER.

Trustees across the United States believe there are ways to improve how we determine the effectiveness of social investments. Many are already using proven, practical approaches today.

FSG Social Impact Advisors, with funding from The James Irvine Foundation, interviewed dozens of foundation trustees, CEOs and evaluation experts to uncover critical issues and exciting ideas related to evaluation. This document shares highlights from these interviews.

What Trustees Say

ABOUT EVALUATION

I'M HERE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Trustees are personally and passionately motivated to make a difference. While some hold a perspective that “if the grant sounds good, we’ve done our job,” the vast majority feel a weighty responsibility to themselves, their staff and their communities. They want to learn from past results to ensure that foundation resources are being used to achieve the greatest possible effect.

If something isn't working, we need to know it. We need to know that we're not wasting money.

Mariam Noland, Trustee
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

EVALUATION IS PART OF OUR JOB.

Trustees take their fiduciary duties very seriously. And, they see evaluation as an important part of fulfilling these duties. They feel that spending foundation assets wisely is just as essential as investing and managing them wisely.

There is a fiduciary responsibility that boards play, and evaluation should inform the judgments of trustees about the reach and impacts of the foundation's work.

Dr. Kent McGuire, Trustee
Wachovia Regional Foundation and California HealthCare Foundation

WHEN IT COMES TO EVALUATION, OUR ACTIONS DON'T ALWAYS MATCH OUR CONVICTIONS.

While trustees say evaluation is important, many admit that it gets lost in the shuffle as they press onward with projects. Those interviewed say it would help to set clearer, more concrete goals and strategies that build in evaluation from the start. They say evaluation deserves more time, attention and resources than it currently receives.

It's so interesting and exciting to keep working on what's in front of us... it's tough to make yourself stop and look back.

William Getty, Trustee and CEO
Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation

MANY EVALUATION APPROACHES DON'T DO THE JOB.

The way foundations pursue evaluation often doesn't meet trustee needs. Conducted by academics and social scientists, many evaluations result in long reports where key insights are buried and lost to busy trustees from the worlds of business, politics and nonprofit leadership. Some are summarized so briefly that their meaning is diluted. Some evaluation findings are purely retrospective and do not inform future grantmaking decisions. They often come too late — after the next round of grants is already out the door. Poorly aimed, packaged and timed reports chip away at the usefulness of evaluation, leading some trustees to view the practice as an excessive administrative cost.

The field is filled with evaluation reports that are unused, in part because their implications are not adequately translated to practice.

Fay Twersky, Director of Impact Planning & Improvement
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

What Trustees Want

FROM EVALUATION

THE TRUTH CAN BE UNCOMFORTABLE.

Trustees, staff members and CEOs are all personally invested in foundation projects and programs. They want them to succeed, and because reputations and legacies factor into this desire, they sometimes find it painful to face and disclose grim results. Evaluators who are hired by foundations also hesitate to share negative findings candidly with their clients. Though these conflicts of interest often go unspoken, they are real, and they threaten the existence and utility of evaluation.

Foundation boards and staff often experience a conspiracy of graciousness.

Eugene Cochrane, President
The Duke Endowment

EVALUATION SHOULD BE PRACTICAL AND FOCUSED ON LEARNING.

While some trustees critique today's evaluations as ill-timed and unfocused, others see potential. They envision a new type of evaluation: It's forward looking and directly tied to upcoming decisions. It's multifaceted and pragmatic in practice. It reports back in real time to allow for midcourse corrections. It feeds organizational learning and offers insights that other foundations across the field can run with for a progress-accelerating ripple effect.

You don't wait until a project is complete to see what you're getting.

Lise Yasui, Trustee
William Penn Foundation

GIVE ME A CLEAR, BIG PICTURE — WITH NUMBERS.

Many trustees are strategists. They have experienced analytical rigor in business and academia, and they know it helps them make tough calls on when to hold on and when to get out. But it's a mistake to mire them in details. To make informed decisions, trustees need salient facts about large investments, most often at the program strategy or foundation level and less often about individual grants. They also want information on relevant external trends. Stories are good for conveying emotion and context, but for many trustees, numbers paint a more telling picture. Social impact may be difficult to describe with quantitative data, but according to trustees, this is no excuse not to measure.

The board wants high-level findings, and information on the rigor of the evaluation. They look at it from 30,000 feet... in their role as strategists.

Risa Lavizzo-Mourey,
Trustee and CEO
Robert Wood Johnson
Foundation

IT'S MORE ABOUT RESULTS THAN RECOGNITION.

Getting credit for a job well done is nice, but it shouldn't be the reason for doing evaluation. Most trustees want evaluations to tell them whether the foundation's efforts have contributed to the goals they set out to achieve. Some observed that no one organization has the resources to make *the* difference, so it's more important to focus on the progress being made than on whether the change can be attributed to their foundation's intervention.

Our board is realistic, and the trustees know that in some areas we will never be able to attribute success solely to our contribution.

Christy Pichel, President,
Stuart Foundation

What Trustees Want

FROM EVALUATION

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HELP ME CHAMPION EVALUATION.

When trustees have accurate expectations for what's achievable (and what's not) through evaluation, they can help drive demand for it and hold foundations accountable for results. Trustees can help make evaluation a worthwhile endeavor by:

- Asking questions early on about program design, goals and milestones, and how the evaluation will measure success
- Expecting staff to use data in shaping plans and guiding implementation
- Making time at board meetings to discuss the results of past grants and the implications for the future
- Using evaluation results to inform judgments about resource allocations and strategic decisions
- Being efficient about information requests: asking for only the data they'll use and taking advantage of information other funders have already gleaned from grantees

The trustees want to learn about the type of grants they should be making, and how effective our investments are. They want to know the impact of what we're doing and see tangible, bottom-line outcomes.

Dr. James Knickman, CEO
New York State Health
Foundation

SOURCES

The Evaluation Kit for Trustees is a project of FSG Social Impact Advisors, with funding from The James Irvine Foundation. It is based on interviews with foundation trustees, CEOs and evaluation experts from across the country, as well as findings documented in *From Insight to Action: New Directions in Foundation Evaluation*, a report on emerging approaches to evaluation in the philanthropic field produced by FSG and funded by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Irvine engaged Williams Group to develop this kit to help foundations and their trustees act upon the research findings.

FSG Social Impact Advisors is an international nonprofit consulting and research organization dedicated to accelerating social progress by advancing the practice of philanthropy and corporate social responsibility. (www.fsg-impact.org)

The James Irvine Foundation is a private, nonprofit grantmaking foundation dedicated to expanding opportunity for the people of California to participate in a vibrant, successful and inclusive society. (www.irvine.org)

Williams Group helps people and organizations do better through communication. The firm plans, designs and manages strategic communications programs for a variety of nonprofit and corporate clients. (www.wg-site.com)

ADVISORY BOARD

We would like to thank the members of this project's Advisory Board for providing their guidance and feedback.

Gale Berkowitz	Evaluation Director	David and Lucile Packard Foundation
Paul Brest	President	William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
Marty Campbell	Vice President for Programs	The James Irvine Foundation
Anne Vally	Special Initiatives Officer	The James Irvine Foundation
Jim Knickman	President and CEO	New York State Health Foundation
Ken Moore	Director of Evaluation and Technology, Trustee	Gordon E. and Betty I. Moore Foundation
Edward Pauly	Director of Research and Evaluation	Wallace Foundation
Steven Schroeder	Director	The James Irvine Foundation and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

INTERVIEWEES

The following foundation trustees, CEOs and evaluation experts participated in interviews for this project.

Annie E. Casey Foundation

Tony Cipollone, *Senior Advisor and Vice President for Assessment & Advocacy*
Thomas Kelly, *Manager of Evaluation*

Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers

Betsy Nelson, *Executive Director*

California HealthCare Foundation

Walter Noce, *Director*
Mark Smith, *President and CEO*
Gene Washington, *Director*
(also *Trustee of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*)

The California Wellness Foundation

Gary Yates, *President and CEO, Director*

Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation

William Getty, *CEO and Trustee*
Newt Thomas, *Trustee*

The Duke Endowment

Eugene Cochrane, *President*

Gordon E. and Betty I. Moore Foundation

Ken Moore, *Director of Evaluation & Technology, Trustee*

The Grable Foundation

Gregg Behr, *Executive Director*

Harry C. Trexler Trust

Malcom Gross, *Trustee*
Robert Wood, *Trustee*

Houston Endowment, Inc.

Larry Faulkner, *President and Director*

Independence Foundation

Phyllis Beck, *Trustee*
Susan Sherman, *President and CEO*
Bart Silverman, *Trustee*

The James Irvine Foundation

Jim Canales, *President and CEO, Director*
Toby Rosenblatt, *Director*
Steven Schroeder, *Director*
(also *Trustee of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*)

Janice Wood Consulting, Inc.

Janice Wood, *Principal and Evaluation Expert*

John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Robert Briggs, *Trustee*
James Crutchfield, *Trustee*
Paul Grogan, *Trustee*
(also *President and Trustee of The Boston Foundation*)
Alberto Ibargüen, *President and Trustee*
Mariam Noland, *Trustee*

Kendall Foundation

Ted Smith, *Executive Director*

National Philanthropic Trust

Eileen Heisman, *President and CEO, Trustee*

NeighborWorks

Tracey Rutnik, *Evaluation Expert*

New York State Health Foundation

Jim Knickman, *President and CEO*

Patrizi Associates

Patricia Patrizi, *Principal and Evaluation Expert*

INTERVIEWEES {continued}**The Pew Charitable Trusts**

Lester Baxter, *Chief Evaluation Officer*
Rebecca Rimel, *President and CEO, Director*

The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation

Wendy Garen, *President and CEO*
Gayle Wilson, *Director*

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Risa Lavizzio-Mourey, *President and CEO, Trustee*

Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Inc.

Stephen Heintz, *President and Trustee*

The Skillman Foundation

Carol Goss, *President and CEO, Trustee*

Skoll Foundation

Roger Martin, *Director*
Sally Osberg, *President and CEO, Director*

Stuart Foundation

Stuart Lucas, *Director*
Christy Pichel, *President*

Unihealth Foundation

Mary Odell, *President*

Wachovia Regional Foundation

Lois Greco, *Senior Vice President and
Evaluation Officer*
Eleanor Horne, *Director*
C. Kent McGuire, *Director*

Wallace Foundation

Edward Pauly, *Director of Research and Evaluation*

Walter and Elise Haas Fund

Pamela David, *Executive Director*

William Penn Foundation

Michael Bailin, *Director*
Feather Houstoun, *President*
Chris James-Brown, *Director*
Lise Yasui, *Director*

Woodcock Foundation

Alexandra Christy, *Executive Director*
Stuart Davidson, *Trustee*
(also *Trustee* of the Acumen Fund, REDF,
Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, and
Phalarope Foundation)
Steven Liebowitz, *Program Fellow*

To learn more, please visit www.fsg-impact.org/ideas/item/trustee_evaluation_tools.html

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Snapshots

How Foundation Trustees Use Evaluation



EVALUATION HELPS US.

Foundation trustees offer many compelling stories about times when evaluation delivered big benefits for them, their organizations and society. They say that evaluation can be an important tool to:

Better plan our work. Evaluation can help us answer the really big questions: Where should we focus? What results should we aim for? How will our grants create change? Where should we allocate our limited resources?

Improve our implementation. Evaluation can help our foundation and our grantees learn how to improve results while we work on our grantmaking initiatives.

Track progress toward our goals. Evaluation can help us gather big picture data and find out whether circumstances are improving as we had hoped.

The primary purpose of evaluation is to allow us to test whether we are using our resources to the greatest positive effect. The board is anxious to have the greatest possible impact. They want to take retrospective looks at what we've done to validate the direction we are going, or to make changes.

Larry Faulkner
Trustee and CEO
Houston Endowment Inc.

FSG Social Impact Advisors, with funding from The James Irvine Foundation, interviewed dozens of foundation trustees, CEOs and evaluation experts to uncover critical issues and exciting ideas related to evaluation. This document highlights brief stories illustrating a variety of evaluation techniques — and purposes — employed by U.S. foundations today. Additional examples and recommendations can be found in From Insight to Action, available at www.fsg-impact.org/actions/item/177

EVALUATION HELPS US

Better plan our work

GROUNDING CHOICES IN THE FACTS.

WACHOVIA REGIONAL FOUNDATION

Evaluation results gave board members a more realistic understanding of how long it might take to see impacts.

As the Foundation was reviewing its program of neighborhood planning grants to disadvantaged urban communities, staff and trustees began to grapple with a persistent question: Should they expand their reach into new neighborhoods in other communities or provide additional funding to existing grantees? When their program work was evaluated, results convinced the Foundation's staff that it would be unwise to add very many new grantees to the portfolio.

"We learned that a number of organizations which Wachovia has been supporting might need additional support from the Foundation to meet goals laid out in the plans we had already funded," said Dr. Kent McGuire, a trustee of Wachovia Regional Foundation.

"This was an important insight and had a clear effect on the board's thinking about what the Foundation should do to be most successful," he added. "In early years, we were pleased with due diligence and making a good grant versus looking at whether the grant was bearing fruit. But doing evaluation raised questions about implementation and that was an important lesson — I don't know how we could have learned what we did without the evaluation."

SUPPORTING WHAT WORKS.

WALTER & ELISE HAAS FUND

Positive evaluation results moved multiple foundation boards to continue an initiative they'd slated for termination.

"The Creative Work Fund was started by four related family foundations in order to support artists," said Pamela David, CEO of the Walter & Elise Haas Fund.

"When I began as CEO, the program was at the tail end of a 10-year commitment and several of our partners said they were done funding it.

"However, the results of our evaluation showed that it was the best program of its kind in the country. It was incredibly well-run, there are very few resources available for artists who are doing new work, and if this program did not exist it would be seen as a big loss to the community. The evaluation results motivated our trustees to take formal ownership. We put in more money ourselves, and got additional funding from the James Irvine and William and Flora Hewlett foundations. It was the evaluation that helped us make the decision, because it showed us that if the program went away it would have a big impact on the field."

EVALUATION HELPS US

Improve our implementation

REFINING STRATEGY
AND IMPLEMENTATION.

GORDON AND BETTY MOORE FOUNDATION

Evaluation changed the lens through which the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation's board viewed a major initiative by providing a framework to evaluate the sustainability of the initiative's conservation efforts to date.

An evaluation of the Foundation's Andes-Amazon conservation initiative delivered both positive results as well as recommendations for altering the balance of the initiative's major strategies — suggesting that the Foundation decrease funding for its original plan of creating new conservation areas and increase focus and funding on existing area consolidation and management.

"The initiative had helped create many very large protected areas, but we needed some way for those that were created to endure. If all we did was delay their destruction by a few decades, we would have failed. The evaluation recommended that the Foundation explore various sustainable financing solutions and offered a methodology to track progress toward long term sustainability," said Ken Moore, a Foundation trustee and the director of evaluation.

The board and the initiative team adopted the framework as a means to assess progress and sustainability and ultimately to determine whether conditions have been established to exit.

Based on evaluation findings and recommendations, the Foundation increased its commitment to the Andes-Amazon initiative with substantial additional funding specifically for sustainability strategies.

SURFACING ISSUES
AND MAKING ADJUSTMENTS.

WILLIAM PENN FOUNDATION

Evaluation helped the William Penn Foundation board refine its youth development initiative. Feather Houstoun, CEO of the Foundation said, "Our youth development initiative was designed to create a network of all the youth-serving organizations in a neighborhood — helping the groups work together and share responsibility."

"Several board members and I were somewhat skeptical about the probability of success. So, we undertook a process evaluation which showed us that some of the four networks we funded were congealing properly and achieving what we were looking for at a process level. That process evaluation also led us to drop one of the networks."

"We also contracted with an expert in the field, to assess whether what we were doing made sense. The results showed that we were making progress, but the program definitely wouldn't work unless we put the time, effort and resources into it. So, we upped our investment, deciding that as long as these groups were progressing in the way we wanted them to, then we would stick with this program. The evaluation provided a key injection of information that helped us make a decision — it was effective even though it was a modest investment because it came at a pivotal juncture."

"We are now conducting an outcomes evaluation to see if the networks not only help the agencies improve their services and stay connected with participating youth, but also help the youth improve their daily choices and educational outcomes, leading to a healthy transition to young adulthood."

EVALUATION HELPS US

Improve our implementation

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MAKING THE CASE FOR A NEW DIRECTION.

THE JAMES IRVINE FOUNDATION

A midcourse evaluation caused staff and trustees of The James Irvine Foundation to reconsider and significantly redirect their eight-year, multimillion-dollar after-school initiative.

“It was a huge, extremely ambitious program,” said Toby Rosenblatt, a Foundation trustee. “What we learned about halfway through was that we were not having impact.” The evaluation showed that the number of participants fell short of goals, cost per participant was more than double the expected amount, program quality was generally rated poor to moderate, and desired educational outcomes were not being achieved.

Jim Canales, the Foundation’s president and chief executive officer, said, “We brought the evaluation results to the board, which raised the question of whether this program was a wise investment of resources. We had to decide if we should pull the plug, or stick with it because of our prior commitment to do the work and the reputational implications.”

After discussion between board and staff, fueled by evaluation findings, the Foundation decided to redesign the initiative: “We reshaped how the program was being administered, and the content,” said Rosenblatt. The changes emphasized improvements in program quality and delivery, with a new focus on literacy.

The correction was not easy. According to Rosenblatt, “Having been around when the initiative was adopted, we had to swallow pretty hard when we got the evaluation that said it was not doing what we hoped it would do.” But the course correction gave the Foundation a reason to believe better outcomes could be realized — a hope that bore fruit through subsequent implementation and evaluation of the redesigned initiative. “I’ve become convinced that you can get real benefit from using external assessments to make a program better,” Rosenblatt concluded.

EVALUATION HELPS US

Track progress toward our goals

REVEALING THE BIG PICTURE.

THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS

The board and management of The Pew Charitable Trusts used evaluation to re-assess and mitigate the risks of a major project.

Les Baxter, director of Planning and Evaluation at Pew, said, “We were supporting a project that aimed to remove four large dams on the lower Snake River, as the means of promoting the survival of all wild salmon species there. This project started in the mid- to late-1990s. In 2002, we looked at the progress to date, and the feasibility of the project’s objectives.”

“The evaluation showed that the project had been doing terrific work, but when we looked at the surrounding context, the prospect of the federal government removing the dams was highly uncertain, and not favorable, at least through the end of the decade. The board decided to go forward, but also asked staff to find a funding partner willing to share the ‘high-risk’ nature of the project with Pew, thus, providing a stronger base of support for the grantee while also reducing the Trust’s exposure.”

CREATING INFORMATION THAT CHANGES MINDS.

STUART FOUNDATION

The Stuart Foundation’s Child Welfare Program aims to ameliorate the child welfare system’s impact on foster youth. Evaluation data helped change the system.

According to Stuart Lucas, a Foundation trustee, “The child welfare system has had its share of problems: Children who were abused or neglected weren’t helped quickly enough, or too often when they were placed in foster care, they ended up having multiple placements. Ongoing evaluation plays an important role in identifying problems and it informs key partnerships seeking improvement. The Stuart Foundation has provided long-term support for a statewide longitudinal database and website that provides the infrastructure for child welfare administrators and community members to understand, monitor and improve outcomes for children in the foster care system. The database provides critical information on each aspect of safety, permanency and well being at the state and county level and has become the backbone of the outcomes and accountability system in California.”

Lucas said, “This investment has provided key data to monitor progress toward comprehensive system reform to serve young people better. It tracks metrics on a child-by-child basis — confidentially.” As a result of the evaluation process, the Child Welfare Program has detailed outcomes data that it never had before. “Since the data is available, it attracts research, which in turn helps to continually improve the system,” said Lucas. “The social workers who were reticent are now craving the data, using it in their work, and gaining more satisfaction from the results they produce.”

To learn more, please visit www.fsg-impact.org/ideas/item/trustee_evaluation_tools.html

1

Let's Consider Evaluation

A Self-Assessment Tool for Foundation Trustees

WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON EVALUATION?

What purposes does it serve? How should it be used by the board? How much should it cost? Many of the foundation trustees interviewed by FSG Social Impact Advisors said evaluation was important, but their points of view on why and how to use it ranged widely.

This survey is designed to capture individual trustee and CEO perspectives and inform a board discussion that can enhance the use of evaluation as a tool for organizational learning and improved performance at your foundation. In the three sections that follow, please rate your level of agreement with each statement.

I. PURPOSE: WHY SHOULD WE EVALUATE?				
<i>For Better Planning...</i>	NOT IMPORTANT			VERY IMPORTANT
1. Help us plan clear and measurable program outcomes before we begin making grants	1	2	3	4
2. Enable program staff to make more informed decisions	1	2	3	4
3. Enable the board to make more informed decisions	1	2	3	4
4. Test our theory of change	1	2	3	4
<i>For Improved Implementation...</i>	NOT IMPORTANT			VERY IMPORTANT
5. Fulfill our fiduciary duty to ensure the foundation's resources are used effectively	1	2	3	4
6. Understand how multiple grants work together	1	2	3	4
7. Improve our implementation through midcourse corrections in grant programs	1	2	3	4
8. Help us identify the most effective grantees	1	2	3	4
9. Help grantees learn and improve their work	1	2	3	4
10. Hold grantees accountable for their use of grant money	1	2	3	4
<i>For Tracking Progress...</i>	NOT IMPORTANT			VERY IMPORTANT
11. Assess the effectiveness of our program strategies	1	2	3	4
12. Show the outcomes of individual grants	1	2	3	4
13. Demonstrate the foundation's overall impact	1	2	3	4
14. Track key indicators of progress toward our goals	1	2	3	4
15. Persuade others to join or replicate our successful initiatives	1	2	3	4
16. Safeguard the foundation's reputation	1	2	3	4
17. Additional comments on purposes of evaluation:				

II. METHOD: HOW SHOULD WE EVALUATE?				
<i>What Evaluation Data Should Look Like...</i>	STRONGLY DISAGREE			STRONGLY AGREE
18. Compiled from many different sources , formal and informal, throughout the duration of the grant program	1	2	3	4
19. A rigorous social science study that compares outcomes against a control group	1	2	3	4
20. Qualitative and anecdotal information to describe the experiences of those affected by our funding	1	2	3	4
21. Quantitative measurements providing hard numbers about the outcomes of our funding	1	2	3	4
22. Limited to the results that can be attributed to our own funding	1	2	3	4
23. A participatory process that engages grantees and funders in mutual learning	1	2	3	4
<i>We Should Use Evaluation Findings to...</i>	STRONGLY DISAGREE			STRONGLY AGREE
24. Decide whether or not to renew grant support	1	2	3	4
25. Evaluate staff performance	1	2	3	4
26. Shift resources away from programs with limited results to those with a higher potential	1	2	3	4
27. Share positive evaluation results with the field to encourage others to follow our lead	1	2	3	4
28. Share negative evaluation results with the field to prevent ineffective use of resources	1	2	3	4
<i>Our Process for Using Evaluation at the Foundation Today...</i>	STRONGLY DISAGREE			STRONGLY AGREE
29. Serves the purposes I identified as most important in Section I	1	2	3	4
30. Provides information in a format that is easy for me to use and understand	1	2	3	4
31. Is timely and useful for the board's grantmaking decisions	1	2	3	4
32. Is timely and useful for the board's broader direction-setting and strategic decisions	1	2	3	4
33. Fosters a culture where staff is comfortable sharing good and bad news with trustees	1	2	3	4
34. Enables us to improve our effectiveness over time	1	2	3	4
35. Additional comments on methods of evaluation:				

III. COST: HOW MUCH SHOULD WE INVEST IN EVALUATION?				
<i>I Think We Should...</i>	STRONGLY DISAGREE			STRONGLY AGREE
36. Reserve a larger percentage of the foundation budget for evaluation	1	2	3	4
37. Allocate more staff time to analyzing and interpreting the results of past grants in order to improve future grantmaking recommendations	1	2	3	4
38. Allocate more board time to discuss evaluation results in order to make better informed decisions	1	2	3	4
39. Provide more capacity building funds for our grantees to develop better performance measurement processes	1	2	3	4
40. Additional comments on cost of evaluation:				

To learn more or download an electronic version of this survey, please visit www.fsg-impact.org/ideas/item/trustee_evaluation_tools.html

Let's Discuss Evaluation

A Framework for Trustee Conversations

2

FINDING A COMMON PATH AMID DIVERGENT PERSPECTIVES.

Evaluation plays many roles and is handled in many different ways across philanthropy. It's common for perspectives on evaluation to vary significantly even among the trustees and staff of a single foundation. While many different views about evaluation may all be valid, no foundation can use evaluation effectively if its board and staff disagree about basic premises, such as desired purposes, types, uses and costs of evaluation.

This resource may be used following completion of the self-assessment tool, Let's Consider Evaluation. This discussion framework provides insights from experts in the field of foundation evaluation—as well as key questions for discussion. You are encouraged to focus your discussion on areas of your choosing, which will depend on your foundation's particular priorities, points of difference and areas of consensus.

I. PURPOSE

Why should we evaluate?

Agreeing on purpose is the most important first step in setting an effective evaluation strategy. When trustees agree on purpose, a board committee or staff can return to the boardroom with a plan or set of recommendations that helps trustees decide how evaluation will be handled and what it should cost.

Perspectives from the field

Foundations are using evaluation to better **plan, implement and track** their work. They see it as an essential tool to clearly and realistically define measurable outcomes they seek to achieve. They want to improve the implementation of current grant programs through real-time feedback from stakeholders. They also use evaluation to monitor overall progress on an issue.

Rather than using evaluation to ascertain the impact of a single grant, increasingly, foundations are evaluating clusters of grants or multi-year program strategies. While some still want to know what exactly the grantee accomplished with grant dollars, a growing contingent of foundations want to use evaluation to find out whether their strategies, choices and theories of change are right. Simply put, emphasis is shifting away from grantee accountability to helping board and staff make better decisions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Which purposes of evaluation are most important to us?

- To better plan our work
- To improve our implementation
- To track progress toward our goals

At which levels do we focus our evaluation?

- Individual grants
- Grant clusters
- Program strategies
- Theory of change

How should we use evaluation findings to inform resource allocations?

Is there anything about the way we use evaluation today that is inconsistent with the purposes we care about most?

II. METHOD

How should we evaluate?

TYPES OF EVALUATION

Good evaluations are implemented in many ways — but choices about evaluation are difficult when some board members trust only quantitative, scientific, independent results and others find greater value in lessons reported informally by grantees and program officers. A wide variety of information can inform decision making and provide useful insights into grantmaking effectiveness. Precision, timeliness and objectivity can vary. What's most important is that evaluation fulfills its intended purpose.

Perspectives from the field

Trustees interviewed were evenly divided on the issue of **attribution** — those who wanted evaluation to produce findings that could be directly tied to the foundation's grants and those who did not expect that findings could be attributed to the foundation's efforts.

They also split over whether results reported by program staff had to be corroborated by **independent sources**, versus those who trusted that foundation staff would not gloss over bad news or report overly optimistic results.

Every foundation would like to have incontrovertible **evidence** that its funds created a significant social impact not otherwise possible. But the cost, complexity and duration of such impact studies limit the ability to use them and the application of their findings. In reality, foundations very rarely achieve anything alone. Each is typically one among multiple funders, relying on a grantee that has built up its capacity over many years, working on an issue that is influenced by countless other organizations, individuals and government activities. Once a foundation moves beyond the requirement for absolute proof of impact, a wider range of information becomes available, often at much lower cost.

Many foundations are expanding the range of evaluation techniques and methodologies to include additional forms of evaluation beyond the traditional options. Some are engaging in a more informal **participatory evaluation**, that engages foundation staff, grantees and even the beneficiaries in a shared process of learning and improvement throughout the course of the grant.

Most trustees interviewed wanted to see some quantitative data, supplemented by qualitative or anecdotal reports — the latter alone was considered too unreliable. A number of foundations have started using one- to three-page dashboards that **summarize** quantitative data, supplemented by more in-depth reporting on key initiatives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How do we want evaluation to work and in what circumstances?

- Extent of rigor
- Frequency of updates
- Outside evaluators vs. report by program staff
- Involvement of grantees
- Whether results must be attributed to the foundation's efforts

Are these types of evaluation consistent with the purposes of evaluation that we prioritized?

In what ways can we use evaluation more effectively? (see examples in *Snapshots, How Foundation Trustees Use Evaluation*)

II. METHOD

How should we evaluate?

{continued}

USES OF EVALUATION

Unless evaluation information is actually used in making decisions, it will atrophy as the staff and grantees recognize that the exercise is empty. But what consequences should evaluation carry? Making the right decision will depend on the circumstances at the time, but it is important to surface trustee attitudes about evaluation uses in advance.

Perspectives from the field

Foundations don't want to fund unsuccessful programs, but they may **not wish to abandon** a project when first efforts fail.

Staff and grantees should be held **accountable** if their projects go awry, yet we cannot expect them to solve major social problems with every grant.

Fellow funders, grant beneficiaries, policymakers and program operators can all benefit from the evaluation **lessons of others**, but we're hesitant to over-promote our successes or unwisely undermine a grantee by publicizing failure.

Many foundations use evaluation data to help them refine their strategy or theory of change for future grant cycles, but some attach more **explicit consequences**, such as:

- Allocating more funds to the program areas that show positive evaluation results and less to those that make no progress.
- Examining cost per outcome of different grantees and shifting grants to the best performers.
- Linking staff bonuses to evaluation results.

Foundations also vary in their willingness to **go public** with evaluation results. Approaches include:

- Posting a summary of the outcome of every grant on the foundation's website.
- Sharing both positive and negative evaluation results to influence government policy and spending, shape practice in the field, or influence funding decisions at other foundations.
- Publishing the results of program evaluations, enabling other organizations to apply key insights to their own work to achieve greater effectiveness and avoid pitfalls.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What kinds of board decisions or actions should evaluation inform?

- Changing course or ending a program/project
- Evaluating staff performance
- Changing a grantee relationship

Are we comfortable sharing results — positive and negative — with outside stakeholders?

- In what circumstances?
- With what level of transparency?

II. METHOD

How should we evaluate?

{continued}

EVALUATION IN PRACTICE

Once the board has agreed on the purposes and uses of evaluation, the foundation can create an evaluation plan that is tailored to serve those needs. Some trustees find that the timing and format of the data collected is not well-suited to the decisions they need to make: Progress reports may arrive after the grant renewal decision has been made, or highly technical studies may lack actionable recommendations. Other challenges to the practice of evaluation may stem from the degree of trust and openness within a particular foundation.

Perspectives from the field

Many barriers to using evaluation effectively are merely **logistical**. Staff members don't have enough time to monitor grant programs underway because they're busy preparing for the upcoming board meeting. Trustees don't have enough time at the board meeting to discuss past results because they're busy approving the current grant docket.

Management and culture also factor into a foundation's evaluation practices. If the CEO doesn't consider evaluation important to decision making, the staff won't either. If the foundation lacks a culture of openness, honesty and respect, staff may not be willing to share evaluation results fully and candidly.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Is evaluation information being shared with the board in a way that is easy to understand and use? If not, what improvements can we make?

- Evaluation timing that allows for board action
- Helpfulness of presentation method

Are internal discussions about failures and successes possible and comfortable?

III. COST

How much should we invest in evaluation?

It's satisfying to see as much money as possible go to grants — so sometimes it's easy to relegate evaluation costs to “overhead” status. But if the information gained through evaluation enables the staff and board to direct grant funds more effectively, and it helps other funders, thought leaders, policymakers, grantees and concerned citizens better determine how to strengthen programs vital to their communities, then the costs are well justified. Conversely, commissioning expensive studies that never influence future decisions is ill advised.

Perspectives from the field

Evaluation is essential to any foundation that seeks to improve its effectiveness over time, but it cannot achieve its purposes without an **adequate allocation** of resources.

The amount foundations spend on evaluation varies widely, both in absolute dollars and as a percentage of their grants. Trustees' willingness to spend resources on evaluation depends largely on whether they perceive that it has **productive uses**.

Evaluation costs extend beyond the money spent on external evaluation consultants. They include the staff time to gather and interpret information, as well as the board time that must be reserved to act on the lessons learned. They include the costs borne by grantees to collect and analyze the data requested by the foundation. They also include the cost of communications that bring findings to the attention of key decision makers.

Often, **data can be collected informally** by staff without commissioning expensive studies. Online surveys, site visits and publicly available information can all contribute to better decision making at low cost.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Does our foundation place enough value on evaluation?

What level of investment in evaluation should the foundation make?

- Hiring external evaluators
- Allocating more staff time
- Allocating more board time
- Funding evaluation activities conducted by our grantees

How selectively should evaluation be used?

- All grants are evaluated to some degree
- Selective evaluation (what criteria should we use to determine which ones to evaluate?)

Should we collaborate on metrics with other funders to avoid asking grantees to do extra work?

To learn more, please visit www.fsg-impact.org/ideas/item/trustee_evaluation_tools.html

Let's Discuss Evaluation

A Facilitator's Guide

2a

WHAT'S OUR TAKE ON EVALUATION?

Any foundation's board of trustees is likely to include a spectrum of perspectives on what evaluation is and should be. It's good to get these viewpoints out — to identify areas of consensus and disagreement as well as open questions. Trustees can start the process by completing the self-assessment tool included in this kit.

This facilitator's guide is a companion to *Let's Discuss Evaluation: A Framework for Trustee Conversations*. Use these tools to plan and lead a fruitful dialogue about evaluation.

PREPARE FOR THE DISCUSSION

- Offer these pre-reads: *What's the Difference? How Foundation Trustees View Evaluation* and *Snapshots: How Foundation Trustees Use Evaluation*. Consider additional excerpts or case examples in *From Insight to Action: New Directions in Foundation Evaluation*, available at www.fsg-impact.org/actions/item/177
- Administer *Let's Consider Evaluation*, the self-assessment tool for trustees. Tally responses by question and highlight both areas of agreement and disagreement in the responses received. Compare your trustees' responses to the field perspectives described in the *Let's Discuss Evaluation Framework*. Make copies of the assessment results to distribute at the meeting, along with the framework tool.
- Decide how to direct your discussion. You may not be able to probe every aspect of evaluation in the time allotted with your trustees. Given what you know about this group and about your organization's needs, narrow down possible discussion topics in order to 1) further areas of agreement, 2) hash out areas where self-assessment responses differed the most or 3) focus on just one key aspect of evaluation (i.e., Why should we evaluate? How should we use evaluation? or How much should we invest in evaluation?) and save the rest for a follow-up discussion.
- Make printouts of *Let's Make Evaluation Work* to use as a reference and handout for the final segment of the discussion.
- Reserve 60 to 90 minutes of board time for discussion.
- Arrange for a flipchart notepad or marker board to capture thoughts. Designate writing space for each of the key aspects of evaluation listed below.
- Early on in the session, work to surface opposing points of view on evaluation issues. Later, identify common ground and build alignment on areas of consensus.
- Conclude by agreeing on at least one concrete step that your foundation will take to use evaluation more effectively — even if that step is just inviting in a speaker or appointing a committee to deliberate further. This is the start of a process that may evolve over several years.

STATE THE AGENDA

1. START THE CONVERSATION

Following welcome comments (which may involve both the CEO and board chair), help create a comfortable atmosphere for discussion and break the ice by starting with a sharing of individual perspectives. For example:

Thank you all for taking time to review the pre-readings and complete the self-assessment questionnaire. As you have moved through this process, did anything surprise you? What one thought would you like to share regarding the potential to use evaluation differently at our foundation?

2. REVIEW SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Provide an overview and summary of trustee self-assessment results — highlighting areas of agreement and divergent viewpoints that surfaced. Invite the group to comment on these areas of initial agreement and disagreement. Following some general conversation in this regard, lead the group through more focused dialogue around key aspects of evaluation addressed in the self-assessment.

3. DISCUSS KEY ASPECTS OF EVALUATION

Use questions from *Let's Discuss Evaluation: A Framework for Trustee Conversations* to lead the bulk of the meeting discussion. Other important resources for this conversation include results of your trustees' self-assessment and *Let's Make Evaluation Work*, a planning tool that helps trustees identify the most appropriate ways to navigate around barriers to evaluation.

4. IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES AND NEXT STEPS

Encourage participants to get ideas from the examples and samples provided, but to adapt them to suit your foundation. Be prepared to outline some potentially actionable options based on the discussion.

What's needed to make changes we discussed?

- *Agreement to adopt specific changes*
- *Additional research/discussion required*

What's our process?

- *Staff prepares options for board to review*
- *Committee of board members appointed to deliberate further*

What's our timeline for next steps?

To learn more, please visit www.fsg-impact.org/ideas/item/trustee_evaluation_tools.html

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Let's Make Evaluation Work

A Planning Guide for Foundation Trustees

3

WHAT KEEPS EVALUATION FROM WORKING?

Four basic issues tend to hamper evaluation intentions or actions, according to foundation trustees, CEOs and evaluation experts interviewed by FSG Social Impact Advisors. This tool identifies these issues, offers example solutions and encourages foundations to commit to actions that enhance evaluation.

Informed by the trustee self-assessment and dialogue, use this tool to identify next steps for your foundation's growth as a learning organization.

ISSUE 1:

There Isn't Enough Time to Discuss Evaluation Results

REAL SOLUTIONS	STEPS TO CONSIDER
<p>Focus on strategy. “Our new board chair’s mantra is that the board should spend its time doing things that only the board can do. Staff can do grants, figure out the grantees and the budget. The board should spend time on strategy and investment outcomes, thinking big thoughts, and less time on the specifics of the grants. If you focus too much on individual grants, you’ve eaten up all the time at the board meetings.” <i>– Mark Smith, CEO, California HealthCare Foundation</i></p> <p>Dig deep. “We just made a major step forward to hold fewer but longer board meetings. We changed to only three meetings per year, but they now last a day and a half. To do that the board had to agree to increase the president’s authority to approve grants between meetings. Now the president has the authority to make grants up to 25 percent of the budget. Up until now, board meetings were consumed by going over grants. One of the major motivations in moving to this format was to really dig into the data from the evaluations, understand them deeply, and document the lessons. In the past, the meeting might allow at maximum an hour and a half for evaluation discussions. Now, we can spend a whole morning or afternoon.” <i>– Stephen Heintz, President, Rockefeller Brothers Fund</i></p> <p>Set aside an extra hour. “We have a Performance Measurement Committee: Two to three of the Foundation’s senior management meet with the trustees for at least an hour before each board meeting to go over evaluation in depth. We devote a specific portion of the meetings to an analysis of how well our program sites are doing based on the performance measures we’ve identified, and then we discuss what the Foundation is doing to help sites to meet those needs.” <i>– Tony Cipollone, Senior Advisor/ Vice President for Assessment & Advocacy, The Annie E. Casey Foundation</i></p>	<div data-bbox="812 384 1485 898"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Set aside one board meeting or retreat per year to reflect on strategy and evaluation results. <input type="checkbox"/> Restructure regular board meetings, using a consent agenda to approve more routine grants in advance and decreasing grant-approval time during the meeting. Free up time for learning from the progress of past and current grants. <input type="checkbox"/> Form a board subcommittee to delve deeply into evaluation and report back a summary of key findings at full board meetings. <input type="checkbox"/> Redefine the board’s role: Instead of making decisions on all grants, it focuses on the most significant funding commitments and sets foundation and program strategy. <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ </div> <div data-bbox="812 947 1485 982"> <p>TAKE ACTION</p> </div> <div data-bbox="857 1031 1365 1094"> <p><i>Make notes on plans you want to pursue to address this issue.</i></p> </div>

ISSUE 2:

Evaluation Results Are Not Actionable

REAL SOLUTIONS	STEPS TO CONSIDER
<p>Get to the point quickly. “We’re very performance oriented. When we report to the board, we keep the evaluation results from the evaluator concise — four pages, without jargon. The program officer is allowed a two-page response, e.g., “This is how I’m going to change my strategy, or this is why I shouldn’t.” Then we act on the information. We zero-base budget the program areas every year, and reallocate grant funds based on performance. We allocate more grant dollars to program teams that delivered results successfully in the past. Evaluation matters only if decisions are going to be based on it.”</p> <p>– <i>Rebecca Rimel, President and CEO, The Pew Charitable Trusts</i></p> <p>Be clear about what you are measuring from the start. “It is important to set the right milestones, use evaluation as a design criterion, and think about it at the outset of the process. If you know where you are going, what objective the grant or program is trying to achieve, it’s much easier to think about measuring. Often, people don’t know what impact they are trying to achieve, and so they are inclined to measure everything. Then, you end up with a huge data set that is hard to analyze and interpret.”</p> <p>– <i>Stuart Davidson, Trustee, Acumen Fund, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, REDF and Woodcock Foundation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Plan for evaluation before you approve a grant. Engage board members early on in specifying the intended outcomes and agreeing on the evaluation process to ensure that their questions are answered by the evaluation process. <input type="checkbox"/> Anticipate key decision points. Match the timing of evaluation information to board decisions. Will evaluation data be known before the grant is up for renewal? <input type="checkbox"/> Cultivate a pragmatic attitude toward data collection. Rigorous studies that prove the impact attributable to a foundation grant are costly and time consuming. Consider other kinds of data to inform the board along the way. Discuss which kinds of information would be “reliable enough” to support a decision. <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that recommended actions accompany every evaluation presented to the board, e.g., an increase in funding or a change in strategy — and then act on them. <input type="checkbox"/> Create a learning agenda: Identify what we need to learn to test our assumptions and how we will collect and analyze the information in order to get desired answers. <input type="checkbox"/> Hold an evaluation-focused retreat where board members learn about the nuances of evaluating social impact, explore the use of qualitative and quantitative data, and help set high-level priorities for evaluation at the foundation. <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
	<p>TAKE ACTION</p> <p><i>Make notes on plans you want to pursue to address this issue.</i></p>

ISSUE 3:

Information Isn't Presented in a Format That is Helpful for Trustees

REAL SOLUTIONS	STEPS TO CONSIDER
<p>Tailor presentation and timing for ease of use. “The board gets an electronic monthly briefing, along with friends of the Foundation. It’s a way of managing and smoothing the information flow so that busy people can digest it. For the board meetings, the consent docket includes Results Reports summarizing each board-approved project after all related grants have closed. It has the verbatim language of the grant when it was approved, what happened with it after approval and then a section on lessons and implications for the Foundation going forward.” <i>–Mark Smith, CEO, California HealthCare Foundation</i></p> <p>Play to the audience. “If you’ve got an audience of business people, you need to understand how they like to receive data. For example, for the business-oriented trustees of a foundation I previously worked with, we created “stock reports.” The reports had all the information you would have on a business you invested in: charts of trends, risk profiles, profiles of the management team and so forth. It is important to understand your audience and provide them data in a way that they can understand it, digest it and use it.” <i>–Fay Twersky, Director of Impact Planning & Improvement, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation</i></p> <p>Invite a critical eye. “We started hiring investigative reporters to look at our major programs and just tell what they find. It’s another way of being transparent. A reporter’s skill is to find what happened and write it in a way that people want to read it, as opposed to something written for academics. In one case, the reporter found out things that we had never thought about. Now, we can make corrections. It helps keep us focused on what is happening and what to do about it.” <i>–Alberto Ibarguen, President and CEO, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Distill evaluation results into a short summary highlighting the findings relevant to trustees; use language appropriate to their backgrounds. <input type="checkbox"/> At the board meeting, encourage a dialogue between the evaluator and program staff; encourage the board to direct questions to both parties. <input type="checkbox"/> Layer information. Provide brief summaries or dashboards for all trustees, and guide those who want to delve deeper to more in-depth information. <input type="checkbox"/> Invest in communications. Hire communications experts to repackage evaluation data to reach different audiences, such as trustees, policymakers, other funders or the media. Different audiences absorb information in different ways. <input type="checkbox"/> Hire expert narrators, such as storytellers or journalists to gather evaluation information or summarize evaluation reports. <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ <p>TAKE ACTION</p> <p><i>Make notes on plans you want to pursue to address this issue.</i></p>

ISSUE 4:

Trustees Don't See Value in Evaluation

REAL SOLUTIONS	STEPS TO CONSIDER
<p>Bring trustees along. “Integrating evaluation into our work means changing the way we work as a foundation, and we need to bring our trustees along. For example, we’ve taken trustees on site visits and we talked to them about how to use data. We use dashboards in our materials so they can see progress on our initiatives. We rarely discuss individual grants — although that information is available to them. We discuss with them how this contributes to the success of the overall strategy, and how it helps us get to the goal of improving the lives of children in Detroit.” <i>–Carol Goss, President and CEO, The Skillman Foundation</i></p> <p>Find the right frame. “Boards are composed of folk for whom return on investment is an important consideration. The key question is how this is measured. Hence, staff members are playing a role in the education of their trustees. The trustees don’t get educated in three- to five-year intervals, they get educated all along the way.” <i>–Dr. Kent McGuire, Trustee, Wachovia Regional Foundation and California HealthCare Foundation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Develop an evaluation plan for the foundation. Describe the role of evaluation in organizational learning and its potential to help the foundation reach its mission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clarify what evaluation is and is not. - Develop a common understanding of evaluation’s purpose. - Determine how the foundation will use evaluation internally, e.g., to inform strategy, make budget allocation decisions, improve processes or learn about impact. <input type="checkbox"/> Create the foundation’s own evaluation educational materials, including concrete examples. Share these with current and incoming board members. <input type="checkbox"/> Invite outside speakers to a board meeting, including trustees or CEOs from other foundations or a panel of evaluation experts, to discuss how foundations are using evaluation. <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that learning from and about evaluation is embedded into evaluation processes. <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
	<p>TAKE ACTION</p> <p><i>Make notes on plans you want to pursue to address this issue.</i></p>

To learn more, please visit www.fsg-impact.org/ideas/item/trustee_evaluation_tools.html



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