

Readiness for Evaluation and Learning:

Assessing Grantmaker and Grantee Capacity

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WHAT IS EVALUATION READINESS? WHY DOES IT MATTER? When undertaking a new organizational or program approach to evaluation, begin with questions of readiness. *What is the existing EVALUATION PRACTICE of my organization or program? What is the existing EVALUATION CAPACITY of my organization or program?*

Evaluation readiness is a term used to describe an organization or program's ability to successfully implement an evaluation project or framework. Evaluation readiness has multiple components, including leadership support for evaluation, organizational culture in support of learning and improvement, evaluation skills and expertise, and resources. Suggested steps for grantmakers to assess readiness for evaluation:

- 1) Assess grantmaker readiness for evaluation and learning using a tool such as the CORE tool (see page 3).
- 2) Use the data from the grantmaker assessment: Understand grantmaker readiness for evaluation and learning, and plan for capacity and practice improvements as necessary. Ask and answer questions such as:
 - > Are there internal organizational, programmatic or external factors that would make it difficult for our organization to increase emphasis on learning-focused evaluation?
 - > Do program staff have the skills and knowledge it takes to support learning-focused evaluation?
 - > Are our grantee evaluation requirements realistic given grant sizes?
- 3) Assess grantee readiness for evaluation and learning using a tool such as the CORE tool (see page 3).
- 4) Use the data from the grantee assessment: Understand grantee readiness for evaluation and learning, and plan for capacity and practice improvements as necessary. Ask and answer questions such as:
 - > What is the grantee's existing readiness for evaluation and learning?
 - > Given our interests and the grantee's interests, which areas do we want to strengthen? How might we build readiness and capacity? (For some ideas, see *Evaluation Capacity Building: Examples and Lessons from the Field*, also in this series.)
 - > Do we provide the necessary support for grantees to be successful with evaluation efforts?
- 5) Consider resources: What resources are necessary to support the evaluation and learning improvements for grantmaker and/or grantee?

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Michele Guzmán, assistant director of research and evaluation, started an internal conversation with her colleagues about evaluation and learning ideas from *Evaluation in Philanthropy* (GEO, 2009).

GRANTMAKER CAPACITY FOR EVALUATION AND LEARNING Grantmakers may need to engage in evaluation and learning in two ways: first, to assess and strengthen their own grantmaking activities; and second, to be an evaluation resource and advocate to grantees. When working with grantees, grantmakers need not be full-fledged evaluation experts. Rather, grantmakers can play a facilitative, reflective role that encourages grantees to strengthen their evaluation and learning practices in service of improved outcomes for programs and stakeholders. Working with grantees, grantmakers have a role in all phases of the evaluation cycle, and have an expanded role in two phases (Evaluation Planning, Analysis & Reporting).

PHASE 1: EVALUATION PLANNING: Grantmakers should work with grantees to align the evaluation to meet the foundation's and grantee's learning and accountability needs. Additionally, grantmakers can right-size the evaluation scope and expectations to grant conditions and overall feasibility, for example, ensuring that the evaluation is measuring outcomes realistic to the grant period. Keep in mind: If a grant includes a data or evaluation component, ensure that the necessary funds are included and earmarked.

PHASE 2: DATA COLLECTION: Grantmakers have less of a role to play, but can support grantees with resources to ensure the collection of high quality data. For example, grant resources may support staff time to collect data, fund the time of an external evaluator, or allow for the purchase of technology tools to collect and store data.

PHASE 3: ANALYSIS & REPORTING: The primary role for grantmakers is to ask helpful questions and provide feedback from their outsider perspective. This is an area for improvement: only 51 percent of grantees who participated in a reporting or evaluation process indicated having had a discussion with their funder (Buteau and Chu, 2011). Four valuable questions to ask about evaluation results are: *What does this mean for the program/strategy/organization? What does this mean for the grantmaking strategy? What information should we share externally to build the field? What does this mean for the next round of evaluation?*

PHASE 4: ACTION & IMPROVEMENT: Grantmakers may be less engaged in the fourth and final phase, as this is usually more appropriately the work of the grantee. But grantmakers can play a supportive role, for example, by checking in with grantees about how they're using evaluation data and findings, or even providing additional funding to ensure that the evaluation learnings and recommendations are implemented.

GRANTEE CAPACITY FOR EVALUATION AND LEARNING Grantee evaluation capacity centers squarely on the ability to assess and learn about program, strategy, and/or organizational success. Grantee evaluation capacity is valuable to grantmakers—high quality evaluation data is of value to grantmakers for a variety of reasons (e.g., internal reporting, assessing strategy, understanding the field), and learning-focused grantees improve the odds of successful grantmaking. Depending on the situation, it may make sense to invest in building grantee internal evaluation capacity, or it may be better to engage an external evaluation consultant.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES For more information, check out these resources:

Bruner Foundation. 2010. *Evaluative Thinking Assessment Tool*.

http://www.evaluativethinking.org/docs/2010_docs/evaluativethinking.assessment.BL.xlsx

Buteau, Ellie and Chu, Timothy. 2011. *Grantees Report Back: Helpful Reporting and Evaluation Processes*.

[http://www.effectivephilanthropy.org/assets/pdfs/Data in Action/CEP DatainAction GranteesReportBack.pdf](http://www.effectivephilanthropy.org/assets/pdfs/Data%20in%20Action/CEP_DatainAction_GranteesReportBack.pdf)

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and Council on Foundations. 2009. *Evaluation in Philanthropy: Perspectives from the Field*. <http://www.geofunders.org/publications>

Preskill, Hallie and Torres, Rosalie. 1999. *Readiness for Organizational Learning and Evaluation Instrument (ROLE)*. [http://www.fsg.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/ImpactAreas/ROLE Survey.pdf](http://www.fsg.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/ImpactAreas/ROLE_Survey.pdf)

Welsh, Myia and Morariu, Johanna. 2011. *Evaluation Capacity Building: Funder Initiatives to Strengthen Grantee Evaluation Capacity and Practice*. http://www.innonet.org/client_docs/funder_ecb_final.pdf

FOR MORE INFORMATION Please contact:

- Innovation Network (www.innonet.org, info@innonet.org) or
- GEO's *Scaling What Works* initiative (www.scalingwhatworks.org, scalingwhatworks@geofunders.org).

CAPACITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS FOR EVALUATION (CORE) TOOL

Directions: For each statement, indicate if the action or environment *never*, *sometimes*, or *often* occurs within the organization that is being assessed. After completing the tool, review the *never* and *sometimes* columns—these are the actions and environments that must be strengthened to build capacity and readiness for evaluation and learning.

| | Frequency of Occurrence | | |
|---|-------------------------|-----------|-------|
| | Never | Sometimes | Often |
| Culture/Learning Environment | | | |
| 1. Employees use data, information, and evidence in decision-making to both support and challenge the work of the organization. | | | |
| 2. The organization builds in time for individual and group reflection about services, products, and processes. | | | |
| 3. Employees continuously look for ways to experiment and innovate to improve services, products and processes. | | | |
| 4. Employees' constructive mistakes are viewed as opportunities for learning, not punishment. | | | |
| 5. Employees value frank and challenging discussions about the organization and its work. | | | |
| 6. Employees regularly engage in knowledge sharing and transfer. | | | |
| Organizational Leadership | Never | Sometimes | Often |
| 7. Leaders demand appropriate and authentic evidence for decision-making from staff. | | | |
| 8. Leaders walk the talk and demonstrate commitment to evaluation, organizational learning, and evidence-based decision-making. | | | |
| 9. Leaders support capacity building for evaluation and learning, and devote necessary resources/time. | | | |
| 10. Leaders create/support staff positions to be responsible for systematic and ongoing evaluation and learning. | | | |
| Resources, Systems, Structures, and Process | Never | Sometimes | Often |
| 11. Employees are given regular opportunities to learn and develop new skills. | | | |
| 12. Organizational departments effectively share information. | | | |
| 13. There are structures and systems in place to systematically gather, store, analyze, and use data. | | | |
| 14. Information is regularly gathered from stakeholders to gauge organizational and programmatic strengths and weaknesses. | | | |
| 15. Organization processes rely on evidence-based decision-making. | | | |

Works consulted: Building an Evaluative Culture for Effective Evaluation and Results Management (Mayne, 2008, Institutional Learning and Change), The Readiness for Organizational Learning and Evaluation Instrument (Preskill and Torres, 2000); A Checklist for Building Organizational Evaluation Capacity (King and Volkov, 2005)