



Reimagining Measurement

A better future for monitoring,
evaluation, and learning

The Reimagining Measurement initiative is an independent research effort of Monitor Institute by Deloitte. It was supported by the David and Lucile Packard, James Irvine, Robert Wood Johnson, S.D. Bechtel Jr., W.K. Kellogg, and Wallace foundations. The findings in this document are derived from an intensive, year-long research and design process that engaged more than 125 foundation executives and program staff, evaluation experts, nonprofit leaders, data wonks, and other stakeholders in thinking about the future of monitoring, evaluation, and learning; they do not necessarily represent the opinions of initiative funders.

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Executive summary



Reimagining measurement

The Reimagining Measurement initiative has been a year-long research and innovation project dedicated to how organizations in the social sector can better use data and information to address essential questions:

- What do we want to accomplish?
- Are we doing what we said we would do? (Should we be doing something else instead?)
- How are we doing and what can we do better?
- What impact are we having?

The initiative has focused on thinking about where monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) are likely to head over the next decade; what practical and mindset limitations funders and nonprofits face in their collection and use of data; and what broader changes are happening that create new challenges and opportunities for the sector to learn, improve, and understand impact. Our aim has been to hold up a mirror to the field—not endorsing any one approach, nor the views of any single institution or project sponsor. Through extensive interviews, research, and convenings, we have asked: *What do we need to let go of, what do we hold on to, and what do we need to create anew?*

The expected and better futures

A key part of this initiative has involved exploring the differences between the *expected future*—the default view of what most people anticipate if they simply project forward current trends and behaviors, without any specific interventions – and the *better future* they hope the field can realize.

As we’ve spoken with many in the field, it’s become clear that there is a real divergence between the future people expect, and the future people hope for.

The “expected future” people see is often an expansion and deepening of what we already see emerging today. Data are becoming more accessible than ever, yet figuring out how to effectively integrate information into decision-making remains a challenge for foundations and nonprofits. There’s been a flowering of new data methods, tools, and analytics, but nonprofits struggle with the complex landscape and insufficient resources. And despite a growing movement to incorporate “constituent voice” into evaluation activities, monitoring, evaluation, and learning too often continue to be more for foundations than for the benefit of grantees and the communities intended to gain from their programs.

The hoped-for future looks quite different. It's one where continuous learning becomes a core management tool; where foundations, as commentator Van Jones once put it—"stop giving grants and start funding experiments"¹; where foundations and grantees share data, learning, and knowledge openly and widely; and where constituent feedback about what is needed and what success looks like is central to strategy development and review.

Expected and better futures enable us to explore common points of agreement about our hopes for monitoring, evaluation, and learning; and to investigate what concrete steps we can take to increase the chances of achieving a better future, rather than the expected one. The innovation tools used in the Reimagining Measurement initiative are meant to catalyze such experimentation and action learning for a better future.

Three characteristics of a better future

There are Three Characteristics that stakeholders both within and outside of the field have identified as defining pillars for monitoring, evaluation, and learning in the better future. These characteristics are relevant for nonprofits, funders and the third party organizations that serve them, although they may be expressed differently across different types of organizations. We consider the organizations as part of a system, since their relationships and the incentives embedded in those relationships drive much of how and what information is used, which perspectives are privileged, and how we think about what's possible. (For more information, please see Information flows in the Appendices.)

More effectively putting decision-making at the center is about the "why" of monitoring, evaluation, and learning. It involves both the generation of data-driven insight and its application at an important organizational moment to change behavior. As we intentionally move the state of art to a better future, we embrace "decision-based evidence making." While this has been a clear goal for the field, it is difficult to achieve in practice. In a better future, we are more successfully able to address challenges with incentives, data gaps, learning practices, and capacity limitations to better achieve data-driven decision-making.

Better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion is about the "who." It is about reframing who gets to define what is needed, what constitutes success, and what impact we are having. If we view constituents as active participants rather than passive recipients in any intervention, their ability to provide input and obtain access to data is inherently vital and valuable. Further, the collection and use of data is itself infused with power dynamics and the means of addressing or perpetuating inequities. Who gets to benefit from and control what gets collected and how it is used? Moving to a better future demands we embrace multiple perspectives, including all those in the activity system or who may be affected by the activity system, and act fairly and justly when considering multiple interests. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are at the heart of a better future for monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

More productively learning at scale is about the "what," or getting better at learning from and with each other—the good, bad, and inconclusive—to better match the scale and complexity of today's social and environmental problems. There is an opportunity to make a bigger difference more quickly if we can better combine the insights individual organizations or programs have across multiple organizations and many programs. New opportunities abound to develop collective knowledge and integrated data efforts that promote learning at the scale of the problems we face.

Using innovation principles and practices

While we have found much agreement on a broad vision for a better future, getting there poses incentives-based, technical, cultural, and capacity challenges. The good news is there is exciting and innovative work being done – in the social sector and its adjacencies – to overcome these challenges. As we see from the expected future, however, much more intentional, transformative, and coordinated action is needed.

The Reimagining Measurement methodology is intentionally designed to spur new solutions to obstacles and to help spread advances across the field. Much of the approach is rooted in innovation principles and practices meant to help understand the larger context, get inspired by what's possible, spread leading edge practices, and develop transformational next practices. We have identified and elevated existing bright spots and “positive deviants;” challenged outmoded assumptions and orthodoxies that get in the way of progress; surfaced relevant adjacencies and parallels; and analyzed the new opportunities and challenge that are emerging from demographic shifts, technological trends, and other inescapable global forces.

This report brings together many of the materials we've developed through the initiative. We include a catalogue of practices and calls to action that can be adapted, implemented, and tested by funders, both individually and collectively. Some actors will be ready to try more radical approaches; others may just take baby steps. The idea is to create clear movement towards the future of monitoring, evaluation, and learning that we aspire to build.

How to use this document

This document is meant to inspire you to help your organization and the social sector more effectively use data and information to put decision-making at the center; better empower constituents and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); and more productively learn at scale. This report does not have all the answers. Instead, it provides the best thinking from the field about what our ambitions should be, where people want to go, and thoughts both about leading edge practices to spread and innovations to try.

The document has been structured to be used in a variety of ways, so that you can access detailed sections or summary information to help answer specific questions. The “How to Use This Document” section provides an orientation to point you to information about key trends, expected and better futures, the Three Characteristics, and the innovation elements for the Three Characteristics. You can also access overview documents to answer what bright spot practices you can access today to help your organization, as well as calls to action can help move the field to a better future.

The most fruitful areas of innovation and useful leverage points to try to change will depend on the specifics of your organization and the issue areas in which you work. This is meant to be an ongoing exploration in the field as we collectively come together to further develop and new ideas, engage in action learning, and share what we learn.

Where we are: A call to action

Where are monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) in philanthropy likely to head over the next decade?

For many, the “expected future” will be a continuation of what we already see emerging today. Data are becoming more accessible than ever, yet figuring out how to effectively integrate information into decision-making remains a challenge. There’s been a flowering of new data methods, tools, and analytics, but the diversity has also produced a fragmented monitoring, evaluation, and learning landscape that can be confusing to navigate for funders and grantees alike.



Despite a growing movement of funders and nonprofits incorporating “constituent voice” into their evaluation activities, monitoring, evaluation, and learning too often continues to be more for foundations than for the benefit of grantees and the communities intended to gain from their programs.

In this future, most foundations continue to hold evaluation results close due to reputational concerns and fears about regulation and grantee exposure. More and more organizations use data analytics, but subscale datasets and a lack of systemic data sharing limit their helpfulness.

In essence, an expected future is marked simultaneously by the promise of greater understanding and impact, and frustration, as individual monitoring, evaluation, and learning “bright spots” in the field multiply but don’t necessarily sum.

On the other hand, it’s also possible to imagine a more positive future for monitoring, evaluation, and learning, one where continuous learning becomes a core management tool; where foundations, as commentator Van Jones once put it, “stop giving grants and start funding experiments”; where foundations and grantees share data, learning, and knowledge openly and widely; and where constituent feedback about what is needed and what success looks like is central to strategy development and review. In this “better future,” monitoring, evaluation, and learning become an integral part of funder and nonprofit strategy development that guides better, more informed decision-making and social action.

“Organizations don't have the data they need, but rather than being desperate, they're resigned. That keeps change from happening more than any technical restriction.”

- Chief officer for funder

Unfortunately, if funders simply continue to act as they always have, the future we get will almost certainly be the future we expect, rather than the future we hope for.

That’s why the Monitor Institute by Deloitte launched Reimagining Measurement, a year-long, field-wide research and innovation process supported by the David and Lucile Packard, James Irvine, Robert Wood Johnson, S.D. Bechtel Jr., W.K. Kellogg, and Wallace foundations. Our goal is to hold up a mirror to the field—not endorsing any one approach, nor the views of any single institution or project sponsor—and to put forward a catalog of potential actions (both individual and collective) that organizations might take to move towards a better future for monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

About the initiative

The Reimagining Measurement initiative used a specially-developed innovation and design methodology that aims to shift mindsets and spur field-level change. The process is rooted in the design approaches that innovation strategy firms like IDEO and Doblin often apply to help companies develop new products and businesses, but it is adapted to re-imagine not just an individual organization but the whole practice of monitoring, evaluation, and learning in the social sector.

The process engaged more than 125 leaders within and outside of philanthropy to deeply understand the monitoring, evaluation, and learning landscape, the changing context inside and around philanthropy, and the key challenges and opportunities that are emerging. The research and conversations involved several key elements:

- *Surfacing bright spots in current monitoring, evaluation, and learning practice.* A key step in any innovation process is to look for what is already working in the field. In their book *Switch*, Chip and Dan Heath referred to this as finding the “bright spots”—looking inside a system to find the elements that are already succeeding or showing promise and elevating those approaches for others to see.
- *Identifying unproductive orthodoxies.* We all have orthodoxies—deeply held beliefs about “how things are done” that often go unstated and unquestioned. But examining and potentially challenging outmoded assumptions that get in the way of progress can often lead to drastic improvements in practice.
- *Learning from parallels and adjacent spaces.* Discussions about impact measurement in foundations have historically tended to be insular; foundations primarily just talk to other foundations when they think about their work. But there are a wide range of other lessons, tools, techniques, and strategies that can serve as important sources of inspiration and ideas from spaces like sports analytics, patient-centered health care, and behavioral economics.
- *Understanding key trends.* Building a better understanding of the trends that are changing both philanthropy and the world around it can help funders anticipate what these shifts might mean for monitoring, evaluation, and learning, and for philanthropic decision-making processes.
- *Imagining the expected and better future.* By convening philanthropists, nonprofits, evaluation experts, and other stakeholders, we were able to begin to build a clear picture of the “default” future that people expect will unfold, as well as a hoped-for, better future for monitoring, evaluation, and learning.
- *Brainstorming organizational experiments and collective solutions.* We used innovation methodologies to engage groups of foundation and nonprofit professionals in developing new linkages, insights, and generative thinking that might serve as the underpinnings of future monitoring, evaluation, and learning approaches.

“The future is already here; it’s just not evenly distributed.”

– William Gibson

Altogether, these different inquiries helped us explore what the field needs to let go of, what it needs to hold on to, and what it needs to create anew to steer individual funders, nonprofits and others towards a better monitoring, evaluation, and learning future.

What we are talking about when we talk about monitoring, evaluation, and learning

Language relating to data collection, assessment, and use in the social sector is often imprecise and a source of real confusion. “Evaluation,” in particular, is a term that is used both narrowly to define point-in-time assessments and broadly to cover all manner of measurement.

A striking realization throughout the interviews for this initiative has been the emotion and contention around what language to use. Regardless of the terms we used, we got back different meanings and associations, at times (negatively) connected to particular points of view in the field.

We therefore tried to keep the key questions practitioners care about answering—rather than terminology about activities, roles, or functions—at the forefront as we conducted this work. These questions are of deep interest and concern to all those who seek to make a difference in the social sector:

- What do we want to accomplish?
- Are we doing what we said we would do? (Should we be doing something else instead?)
- How are we doing and what can we do better?
- What impact are we having?

Broadly speaking, we use the terms “monitoring, evaluation, and learning,” which are defined in more detail in the definitions section of the appendix, to describe the activities involved in answering these questions.

Sources: Questions amended from GEO. 2012. Four Essentials for Evaluation Essentials. Monitoring, evaluation, and learning definitions come from David and Lucile Packard Foundation’s Guiding Principles and Practices for monitoring, evaluation, and learning.



How to use this document

This document is a resource that isn't necessarily meant to be "read" cover to cover. It includes sections with information in both summary and detailed form, so that you can dive into the right material based on the questions you'd like to answer:

- How can I **learn about key trends** affecting monitoring, evaluation, and learning?

You can find an overview of relevant trends on **p. 14**

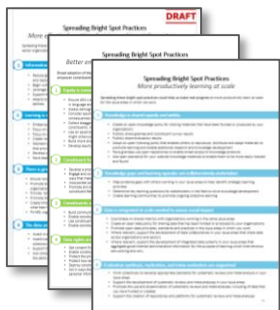
- What if I want to understand **expected and better futures for monitoring, evaluation, and learning?**

You can learn details about the expected and better futures for monitoring, evaluation, and learning on **p. 17**



- What if I want to **dig into the details** of one or all of the Three Characteristics of a better future?

You can find detailed information on the components of each characteristic of a better future, including: overviews, relevant trends, bright spots, bright spot practices to spread, adjacencies for inspiration, and calls to action beginning on **p. 20**



- What **can I do today** to help my organization?

We have collected together all the bright spot opportunities to spread in summaries that you can find in the appendices on **p. 62**

- How can I help **move the field** to a better future for monitoring, evaluation, and learning?

We have collected together all the calls to action to create a better future in summaries that you can find in the appendices on **p. 66**

Where we want to go: Innovation landscape



Characteristics of a better future

Throughout our research and conversations, we consistently heard three essential principles that stakeholders both inside and outside the field believe are necessary to create a better future for monitoring, evaluation, and learning: (1) more effectively putting decision-making at the center; (2) better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion; and (3) more productively learning at scale.

The three characteristics of a better future

More effectively putting decision-making at the center

The capacities, incentives and practices to create useful and meaningful evidence, integrate it effectively in decision-making, and subsequently change behavior continue to be elusive for most organizations.

More productively learning at scale

New opportunities abound to develop collective knowledge and integrated data efforts that promote learning at the scale of the problems we face. However, incentives for transparency seem insufficient, infrastructure development requires resources, and collective action problems remain difficult to untangle.

Better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

Despite widespread aspirations, many social sector organizations continue to struggle to develop incentives and integrate feedback processes to consistently engage constituents in ongoing, systematic, and measurable ways.

Understanding the characteristics of a better future

Putting decision-making at the center

Putting decision-making at the center is about the “why” of monitoring, evaluation, and learning. It involves both the generation of data-driven insight and its application at an important organizational moment to change behavior. If we focus on the questions we want to answer, their importance for essential decisions about how to allocate resources, make strategy adjustments are clear:

- What do we want to accomplish?
- Are we doing what we said we would do? (Should we be doing something else instead?)
- How are we doing and what can we do better?
- What impact are we having?

On the one hand this is obvious, and data for decision-making is an idea that’s widely embraced. However, it is difficult to achieve in practice. Too often the starting point for measurement is understanding reporting requirements and on what metrics and methods to use, rather than on deeper questions about what decision-makers need to know to make smarter choices about creating impact. As one expert told us, “Instead of evidence-based decision-making, we need decision-based evidence-making.” Strategy and decision-making require more agile and continuous feedback loops that link decisions with the right data, the development of persuasive analysis, and the integration of these insights into decision-making processes.

Better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion

If putting decision-making at the center is about the “why,” then *better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion* is about the “who.” It is about reframing who gets to define what is needed, what constitutes success, and what impact we are having. It is also about data as an asset, and who gets to benefit from and control that asset. If we view constituents as active participants rather than passive recipients in any intervention, their ability to provide input and obtain access to data is inherently vital and valuable.

This characteristic brings together two important strands that are interconnected but not identical: a focus on constituent voice and an emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion. We bring these two strands together in the context of monitoring, evaluation, and learning because they support and reinforce each other. Enabling constituents to define what matters and what works is an important path to inclusion and equity. Using an equity lens in the creation of data and knowledge opens up possibilities for engaging and empowering all constituents.

More productively learning at scale

More productively learning at scale encompasses the interrelated, but distinct ideas of knowledge-sharing and collaborative learning. Knowledge sharing depends on individual programs and organizations sharing what they are learning: the good and the bad. Knowledge-sharing allows the social sector to marshal its

resources effectively by avoiding duplication of effort in articulating social problems, developing potential solutions, and determining what works in what contexts. Through knowledge-sharing, organizations can build on what has come before them rather than recreating knowledge for individual use or replicating solutions and strategies that have previously been found insufficient.

Collaborative learning refers to cross-program or cross-organizational efforts to collectively create data and information that everyone can use. Collaborative learning is required for the social sector to develop field-level insights and support interventions at a larger scale. Complex, system-level problems require coordination and the development of a shared data infrastructure to promote broad hypothesis-testing and analysis.

Throughout our work, we have found that these key elements—which we refer to in this document as “the Three Characteristics”—serve as an important touchstone for understanding and organizing the types of changes that practitioners and experts in the nonprofit and philanthropic arena believe will lead to a more impactful future.

Trends



Embracing the Three Characteristics will become even more important in the coming years as dramatic societal shifts create both new opportunities and new challenges related to monitoring, evaluation, and learning. These shifts in the landscape of philanthropy—and the world around it—are fundamentally transforming the context for decision-making within social sector organizations and for the broader practice of monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Key trends cut across a range of different dimensions:

- **Social trends** – demographic shifts that influence the populations and organizations with which an organization works
- **Technological trends** – digital developments that influence the information that can be collected, accessed, analyzed, and applied
- **Behavioral trends** – changes in perceptions, expectations, and preferences that influence how individuals engage with organizations and with one another
- **Political trends** – transformations in policy that influence the requirements and priorities for funding and accountability

Understanding these trends allows us to anticipate the future we can most likely expect for monitoring, evaluation, and learning (absent active intervention). And it can help the field imagine how the trends might be harnessed to create a better future that we'd like to see. On the following pages, we explore a number of the trends that are most likely to have significant implications for the future of monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

Trends

Social



Increasing racial and ethnic diversity

The U.S. is becoming a majority nonwhite country; by 2020 more than half of the children born in the US are expected to be part of a nonwhite race or ethnic group. Minorities have increasing economic and political power as an ever-larger share of college students, entrepreneurs, and voters. The present U.S. electorate is the country's most racially and ethnically diverse ever; almost one-third of eligible voters are Hispanic, African-American, Asian-American or another racial or ethnic minority. These demographic shifts are changing the composition of communities and workplaces, creating the need for organizations to inclusively adapt to the priorities and perspectives of a broader range of constituents, staff, and other stakeholders.²



Next generation leadership and organizations

New people are entering the workforce and new types of organizations are driving change. More than one in three U.S. workers today are Millennials, and in 2015 they surpassed Generation X to become the largest share of the American workforce. Millennials bring with them greater familiarity with technology and data, new definitions of success, and new attitudes about supporting "causes" over organizations. Millennials, along with new "Digital Native" organizations that fundamentally integrate technology into their business models, are changing approaches and expectations about how data is collected, analyzed, and integrated into decision-making.³



Blurring of the sectors

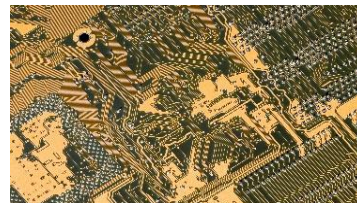
The social sector, private sector, and government are increasingly intertwined. Innovative new models that blend elements from multiple sectors – including impact investing, social impact bonds, social enterprises, and B Corps—are increasingly prevalent. The number of B Corps, for example, has grown exponentially since 2007. In the social sector, greater numbers of staff have private sector experience and bring expectations, tools, and approaches rooted in their business experience. As organizations and individuals work across sectors, it's also becoming more difficult to distinguish between funding for investing, philanthropy, and political activity.⁴

Technological



Accessibility and sharing of information

The spread of technology and near-universal internet access has changed the way we access and share information. There is now more data than ever at our fingertips. Technology now allows us to find and broadcast information both simultaneously (in real time) and asynchronously (for information posted online that can be found and retrieved indefinitely)—making it easier than ever before to share and collect data, and for people to find the information they need when they need it. As important, the rise of environmental sensors, "smart cities," and the "internet of things" means the digital data collection process envelopes us everywhere. However, access is not universal or equitably distributed, and the more information that goes online, the more isolated those without access become.⁵

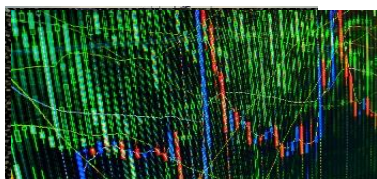


Growing connectedness and aggregation

Technology is not only increasing our access to data, but also making it cheaper, faster, and easier for people to collaborate, connect data sources, and create entirely new knowledge by mashing up and building on information they find. Organizations can now pool individual information into much larger, more powerful, collective datasets, and protocols for interoperability are making it possible to stitch together disparate data sources to aggregate information like never before. At the same time, individuals are becoming more aware of a lack of control over their data, and interest in privacy-protecting, data-destroying, and encrypted messaging tools is on the rise.⁶

Trends

Technological



The power of data analytics

The growing accessibility of information and exponential improvements in data processing technologies have resulted in a rapid increase in the speed and scale at which data can be processed. For example, in 2003 it took 8 years and \$1 billion to sequence a genome. Today it can be done in a few days for a few thousand dollars. Advances in our ability to analyze, visualize, and make sense of data is increasingly enabling society to ask and answer new—and often more challenging—questions. However, the skills and capacities to do this credibly and ethically – and to understand the findings – are not well distributed. Further, algorithmic analyses of large data sets include racial, ethnic and other biases. The data sets used to train artificial intelligence, machine learning approaches, and analytic methods rely on data sets also contain biases and other limitations.⁷

Political



Demand for greater transparency, accountability, and measurement

Efforts to make government data more open and available have succeeded in multiple countries. Civil society organizations have been both proponents and beneficiaries of this movement, and robust subsectors of “civic tech” organizations have emerged, alongside new programs at nonprofits that depend on access to digital government data. The U.S. government has in turn increasingly emphasized an “evidence-based approach” to government social policy, tying more funding to data on effectiveness. There are still not clear guidelines on data sharing across sectors, and many nonprofits are challenged to meet often conflicting demands for privacy, accountability to funders, and non-discrimination or bias laws. Governments are also finding that controlling access to data can be as powerful as controlling funding when it comes to shaping civil society.⁸

Behavioral



Increasing expectations for “say”

New technologies and methodologies are raising public expectations for greater participation and voice. The social, private, and government sectors are, with varying degrees of success, engaging users and constituents earlier and more frequently in decision-making. For example, product and program development is increasingly incorporating user-centered design that places the customer or citizen at the center of the process (e.g., patient-centered or student-centered design). And this shift has been complemented by growing knowledge of human behavior supplied by disciplines such as behavioral science and social marketing. At the same time, individuals are becoming more aware of a lack of control over their data, and interest in privacy-protecting, data-destroying, and encrypted messaging tools is on the rise.⁹



Growing recognition of the power of collaboration and ecosystems

Given the interconnectedness of today’s world and the scale of the challenges we now face, no independent business, agency, or organization, no matter how large, can succeed on its own. For-profit companies are increasingly recognizing the importance of thinking about value chains and ecosystems—auto, transportation, and technology companies, for instance, are working together with lawmakers and regulators to advance clear rules of the road for self-driving cars.¹⁰ Meanwhile, foundations and nonprofits are embracing collective impact approaches and figuring out ways to align independent action to advance progress towards shared social goals.

Expected and better futures



Playing out these different trends, both individually and in combination, allows us to begin to anticipate what the future might look like for monitoring, evaluation, and learning. As we talked with field leaders and experts across multiple disciplines, two very different outlooks became apparent for monitoring, evaluation, and learning:

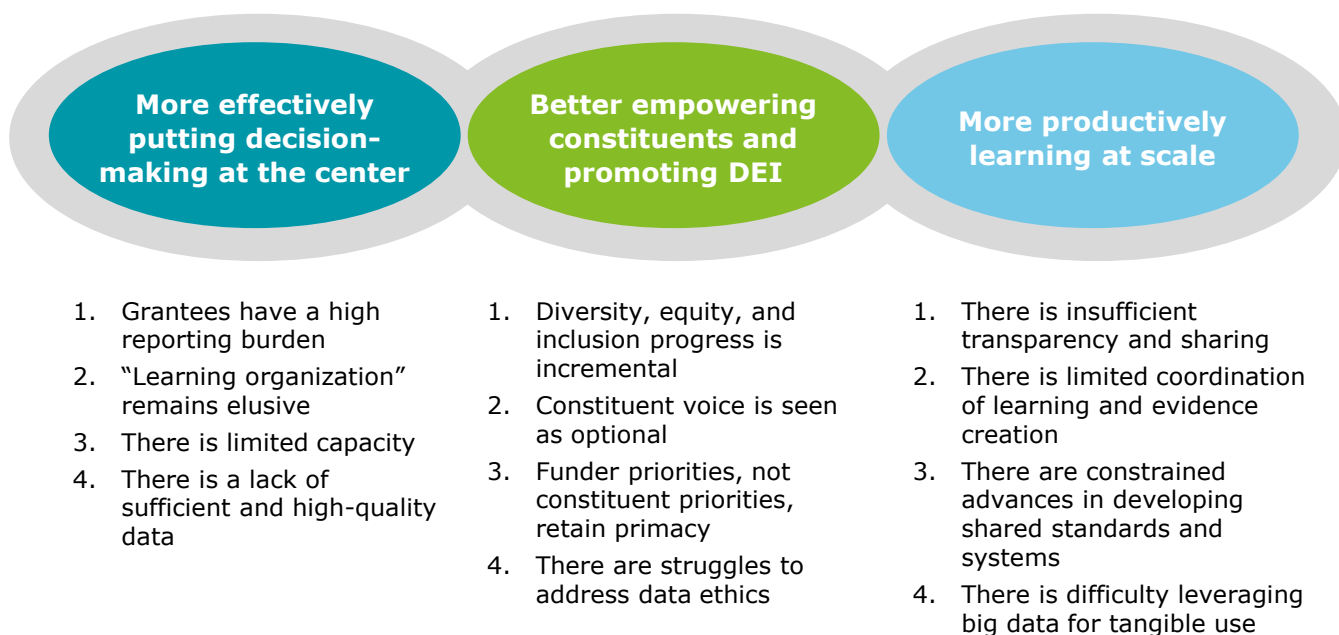
- There was a clear **expected future**—the default view of what most people anticipate if they simply project forward current trends and behaviors, without any interventions
- But people also saw a more promising, **better future** that they hope the field can realize, which will require organizations to change current behavior and make targeted interventions in the larger system

It is important to note that these futures are not intended to be predictions, and complete agreement isn't necessary for every particular aspect within them. Instead, the concept of the expected and better futures provides a way to enter into a productive conversation about what our hopes are for monitoring, evaluation, and learning; where we'd like to be; and what concrete steps we believe are needed to increase the chances of achieving a better future, rather than the expected one.

An expected future

Across multiple convenings and conversations, we heard consistent themes about an expected future for monitoring, evaluation, and learning in the social sector. There was widespread concern that key barriers to putting decision-making at the center; empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion; and learning at scale would remain unresolved. Specific concerns include:

An expected future



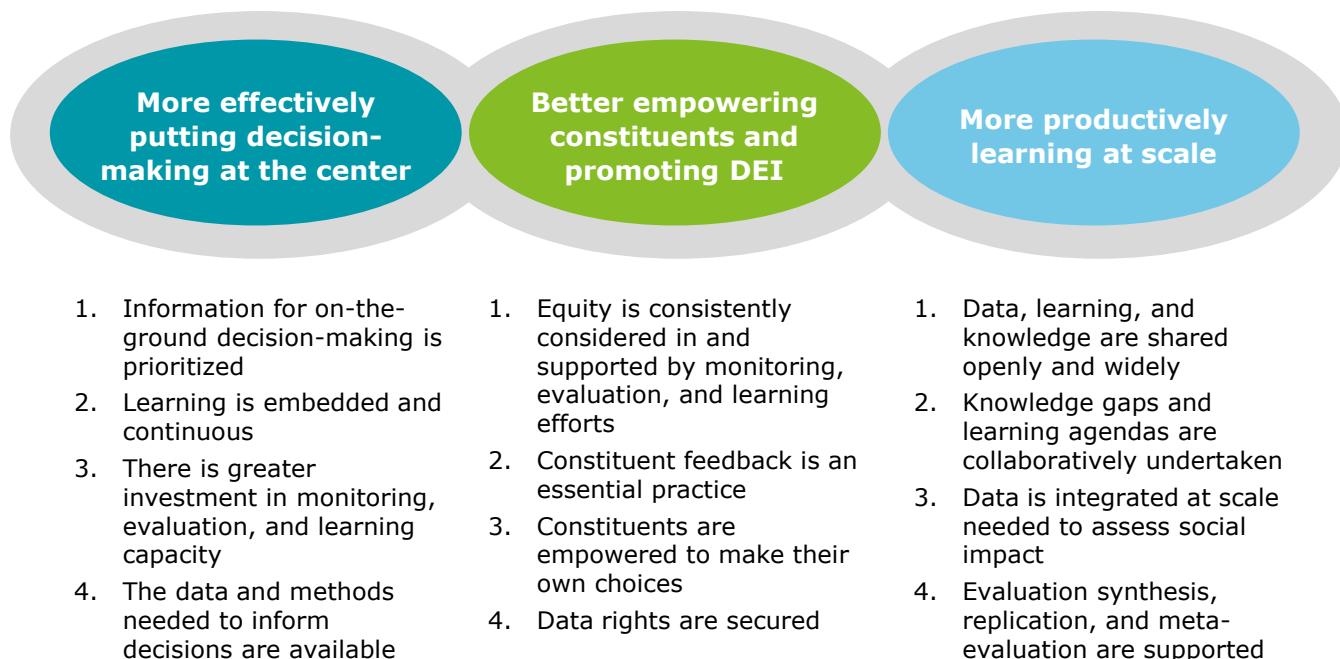
While many experts believe that an expected future will involve incremental progress, the most prominent sentiment we heard around an expected future was one of doubt that we would make substantial advances towards embracing the Three Characteristics of a better future.

Despite common aspirations in these areas, It was clear that obstacles to transformative progress remain. Specifically, the need to invest in the capacity of grantees, prioritize constituent needs, and create incentives to embrace sharing and experimentation were identified as high priority obstacles that need to be overcome.

A better future

In a better future, people imagined that the Three Characteristics would become defining pillars of monitoring, evaluation, and learning in the social sector, and felt the field would embrace key elements of each characteristic.

A better future



In a better future, people imagined that the Three Characteristics would become institutionalized at the core of monitoring, evaluation, and learning. While there remains healthy debate on certain topics—for example, the extent to which we should pursue common metrics and shared systems—we heard considerable consensus around what the key elements of a better future would look like.

The elements listed for each characteristic capture the areas of broad agreement. For example, there was widespread support that “continuous learning and improvement” should be the adopted philosophy within the field. We also heard that shorter cycles of strategic planning, implementation, and measurement would promote more learning opportunities for foundation and grantee staff, which could improve subsequent cycles of decision-making. There was also widespread agreement that the collection of constituent feedback should become essential practice, with a strong underlying focus on equity.

In the next section, we define these key elements of a better future in greater detail.

Getting to a better future



In this section, we discuss innovative ideas and sources of inspiration for each of the Three Characteristics for a better future. You can read across all Three Characteristics or dig more deeply into one as you prioritize actions to try for your organization and the issue areas in which you work.

What do the trends mean for this characteristic

For each of the Three Characteristics, we begin with a review of trends that are relevant for that characteristic. This is meant to help stimulate thinking about new realities we need to adapt to and new opportunities we can harness. Then for each element we discuss:

- **Bright spots**

We provide multiple examples of bright spot organizations that are already succeeding or showing promise in one or more of elements of the Three Characteristics. These are meant to provide inspiration and examples of how innovative practices have actually been implemented.

- **Collected bright spot practices**

We list practices distilled from bright spots and research that you can integrate into your organization as you innovate in a specific element. A summary of opportunities for all of the elements can also be found in the appendices.

- **Where else can we find inspiration?**

We share an example from an adjacency that might help generate new or adaptive ideas to improve a better future element. Additional examples of adjacencies to spur innovation thinking are available as part of our supplemental innovation materials.

- **Calls to action**

At the end of the sections for each of the Three Characteristics, we list promising new ideas, some for individual organizations and some that can be done in collaboration, to test additional hypotheses about how to propel the field forward. These calls to action were developed through research, our innovation lab, and multiple convenings. Some calls to action will be more or less relevant, depending on your organization and issue area, but they are meant to cover a range of opportunities.

Key resources

While not listed in this section, note that in the appendices there are additional materials for creating change for each of the Three Characteristics. These are not exhaustive, but they include practical guides, tools, and other resources that may be particularly helpful.

A better future:
More effectively putting decision-
making at the center

More effectively putting decision-making at the center

A better future

...for putting decision-making at the center is one where:

- *Information for on-the-ground decision-making is prioritized*
- *Learning is embedded and continuous*
- *There is greater investment in monitoring, evaluation, and learning capacity*
- *The data and methods needed to inform decisions are available*

What do the trends mean for this characteristic

The larger context

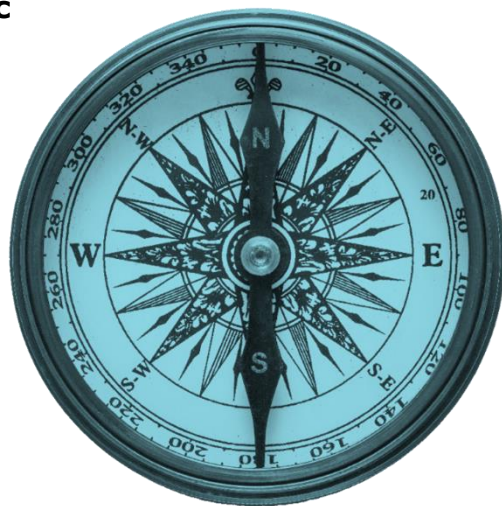
What is knowable has been utterly transformed, as the sheer speed, quantity, and accessibility of data that organizations can produce has exploded. Ninety percent of all data presently available did not exist two years ago.”¹¹ Millennials, along with “digital native” organizations that fundamentally integrate technology into their business models, are changing expectations about what data should be available and how data is collected, analyzed, and integrated into organizational decision-making. However, because digital data is not universally or evenly distributed, it puts those without access at an increasing disadvantage.

More data also does not necessarily mean better decision-making for behavior change and can lead to further confusion or decision paralysis. There is a strong focus in data analytics on techniques that use large amounts of data for predictive (i.e. using statistical models to determine “what could happen”) and even prescriptive (i.e. using optimization and simulation algorithms to determine “what should we do”) purposes. Technology start-ups have pioneered lean analytics methods to use data to quickly iterate and learn. These fit into larger agile management approaches that prioritize a rapid, incremental and adaptive method of management with a strong user-centered focus.

The transformation in data availability and speed has been complemented by a growing sophistication about, and recognition of the limitations of, how people make decisions. Providing people with even the most clear and compelling information will not necessarily lead to changes in decision-making or behavioral change. Behavioral design incorporates behavioral science insights around common decision-making heuristics and barriers to action and integrates them into product and service design development. We are also seeing the emerging application of customer design thinking to employees, as organizations how to apply user-centered design principles internally for a better employee experience and improved decision-making.

Within the social sector

Across the social sector, there has been an increase in demand for measurement and evaluation driven by board members, new philanthropists, and government. There is greater emphasis on right-sized and cost-effective monitoring and evaluation, as well as greater variation in monitoring and evaluation approaches. A focus on organizational learning has been added to more traditional monitoring and



evaluation efforts across many organizations. However, there is considerable uncertainty about what this means in practice, and there are continued challenges to the effective use of data for organizational and strategic decision-making.

Nonprofits, foundations, informal associations, and social movements increasingly rely on digital technologies. From their networked printers to document storage in the cloud to the use of CRM and payment systems hosted by commercial vendors, today's social sector is built almost entirely on third party servers and data collection systems. Digital data is changing expectations about what we can know about social impact and how data is collected and analyzed. However, the market of software solutions that would allow nonprofits to control their data with the same alignment to mission that they control their money is underdeveloped, as open source and nonprofit-built software solutions are harder to find and to use.¹²

“Organizations are flying the plane with 2/3 of the instruments in the cockpit functioning. They do not have a stream of data coming back on the impact they’re creating, and their purpose is to create impact.”

- Funder senior leader

Data analytics efforts in the social sector have considerably lagged efforts in the private and social sector, and the sector has both struggled with a lack both of sufficient data to make many of the data analytics techniques applicable and of sufficiently high-quality data throughout data supply chains.

As a result, we heard expectations of incremental progress rather than real change in the expected future. Without serious efforts to institutionalize changes in practice, most small- to mid-sized nonprofits will continue to operate with extremely limited capacity. Monitoring and evaluation will continue to be seen by many as an add-on or burden, and the reporting burden on grantees will remain high. It is expected that many evaluation staff at larger nonprofits and foundations will not be adequately prepared for the new demands of their roles (e.g., data science, facilitation, cultural competence). Being a learning organization will remain an elusive concept for most organizations in the expected future, and many nonprofits and foundations will continue to suffer from a lack of sufficient and high-quality data.

Where do we look for inspiration to get to a better future?

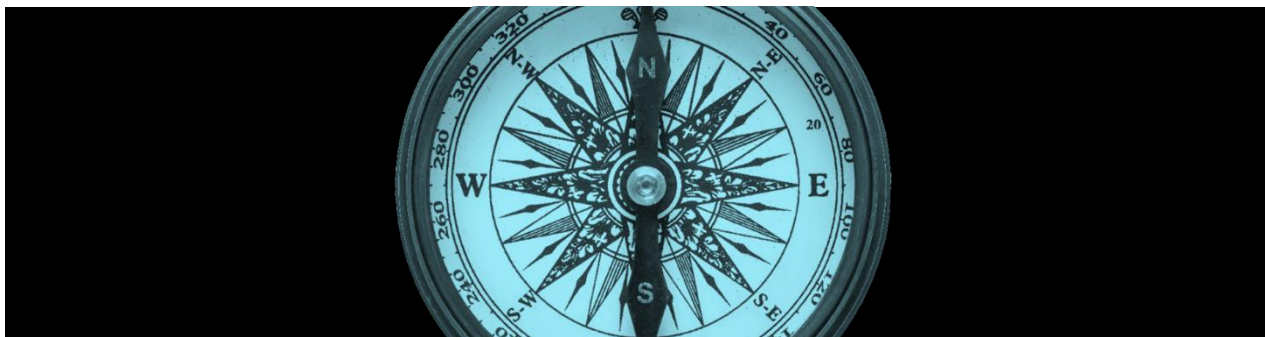
In the social sector, there are innovation efforts along multiple fronts that can be more widely supported and/or scaled. Performance management efforts that incorporate a continuous improvement mindset, combined with advances in understanding what makes a learning organization, provide useful tools and practices for integrating evidence into strategic planning and decision-making.

There are bright spots among funders to promote evaluative thinking and capacity building beyond the individual grantee level, working to promote learning across multiple grantees and providing resources for the field. Some funders are providing greater flexibility and working with grantees to determine the most useful metrics and shared sources of learning across grantees. While the incorporation of data analytics has been slow in the social sector compared to the private and public sectors, there are some isolated digital native nonprofits that point the way to a more data-focused future, as well as some adoption of rapid cycle and lean approaches to increase the speed and connection from insight to action.

“The evidence and evaluation structure need to correspond with the decision the decision maker is trying to make. ”

- Community foundation CEO

More effectively putting decision-making at the center



A better future for putting decision-making at the center is one where:

Information for on-the-ground decision-making is prioritized

In a better future, data collection, methods, and analytic tools balance the need for rigor with practicality, relevance, and responsiveness. Funders consistently work with grantees to agree on reporting that informs grantee decision-making, reduces the grantee reporting burden, and satisfies funder needs. Priority is given to the information needed on the ground by grantees to best serve constituents.

Bright spot practices to prioritize on-the-ground decision-making at your organization

- **Reduce grantee reporting burden** and simplify what's needed by funders to minimize diversion of time and resources
 - **Begin with data needed by front-line for decision-making** and build reporting requirements from there
 - **Leverage data as by-product of user actions** and transactions when possible
 - **Support the development of low-cost tools** useful for front-line users
 - **Attend to totality of data collectors' and data users' experience**, addressing individual motivations and abilities
-

Existing bright spots in the field¹³

- *Reducing grantee reporting burden through a blended mix of in-person and online approaches*

DentaQuest Foundation, a corporate funder focused on promoting oral health in the United States, lessens the reporting burden on grantees by paying significant attention to making its evaluation requirements useful for the grantee. DentaQuest provides opportunities for grantees to shape their overall evaluation strategy and approach, invites (rather than requires) grantees to participate in learning-focused monitoring and evaluation efforts led by its external evaluator, and encourages grantees to develop reporting and evaluation products (such as videos and communication collateral) that allow grantees to share their impact not only with DentaQuest but with their local stakeholders. The intention is to balance accountability and learning and make evaluation processes and products useful tools for the grantees to advance their strategies—in effect, building reporting requirements into the kinds of data-collection efforts that the grantees would have wanted to pursue anyway to guide decisions on interventions and methods of engagement.

- *Using low-cost technologies to gather social and market data that enterprises actually use*

Acumen, a nonprofit impact investor, prioritizes the collection and use of data that their investees actually value. Its approach, which it calls Lean Data, uses surveys delivered largely by mobile to gather quality data directly from end consumers as cost and time efficiently as possible. This data enables Acumen and its social entrepreneurs to listen at scale to the people whose lives they aim to improve, allowing them to better understand the impact of their work as well as a range of fundamental customer feedback topics. In the last two years Acumen has worked with more than 40 companies inside and outside of their portfolio to implement Lean Data projects to have conversations with more than 25,000 Base of the Pyramid customers. For example, Acumen used mobile interviews to reach the customers of d.light, a global enterprise that sells solar products. The data revealed a range of positive social benefits but also that 36 percent of customers that had experienced an issue with their product did not reach out to the company. The company has since made more proactive steps to reach out to customers.

- *Conducting low-cost randomized control trials (RCTs) to demonstrate program value*

Family Connects in Durham, North Carolina (**Durham Connects**) is a community-wide home visiting program that provides nurse visits to parents of newborns in Durham County at no cost to families. The investigators designed a relatively inexpensive RCT to demonstrate the program's value. Durham Connects had sufficient funding to conduct brief evaluation interviews with families when infants were approximately six months old, but not enough funding at the time to evaluate long-term program impacts. The program addressed this limitation by using hospital billing records to conduct a low-cost evaluation of program impacts on mother and child medical emergency care (emergency department visits plus hospital overnight admissions) utilization through child age 24 months. By finding a solution that relied on existing administrative records rather than new data collection, Durham Connects demonstrated evidence of impact while staying within financial constraints.

- *Using behavioral insights to overcome resistance to evidence-based decision-making*

Root Solutions, a nonprofit organization working with environmental leaders, uses behavioral science to bridge the gap between data and decision-making. The organization provides conservationists and policy makers with tools and resources specifically driven by behavioral science principles such as setting the appropriate expected and social modeling and framing, to help organizations tailor energy, water, and habitat data and messaging to promote behavior change and increase the impact of environmental initiatives.

Where else can we find inspiration?

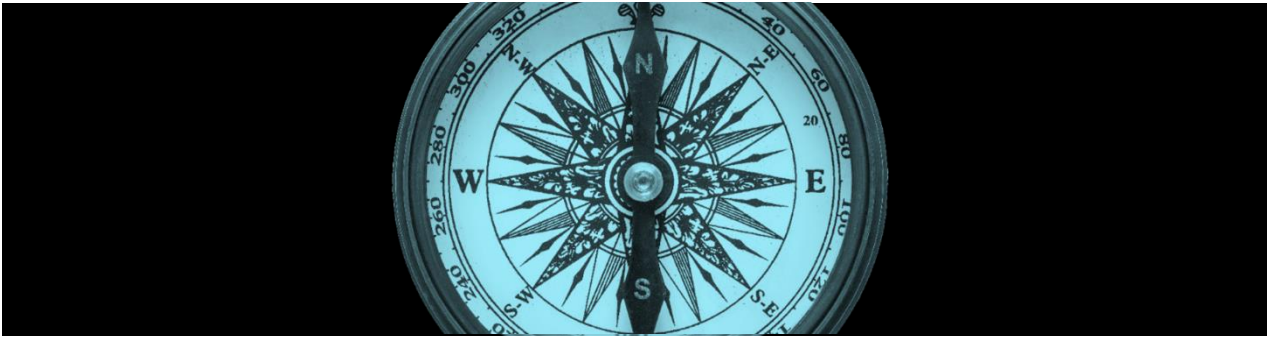
Developing common standards to reduce the reporting burden

The Common Application is an undergraduate college admission application that applicants may use to apply to more than 700 member institutions from around the world. The Common Application reduces the administrative burden on students for low-value tasks (e.g., data entry), allowing them to allocate more time to high-value tasks (e.g., essays), while still enabling member institutions to collect information core to their decision processes through supplemental information requests.¹⁴

What would it look like if funders could agree on common standards that eased the reporting burden on grantees?

For more examples of agencies related to more effectively putting decision-making at the center, see companion adjacency materials.

More effectively putting decision-making at the center



A better future for putting decision-making at the center is one where:

Learning is embedded and continuous

In a better future, reflective practice is embedded in foundation and nonprofit culture. Practitioners no longer say “I want to but I don’t have time” when learning initiatives are mentioned. Continuous learning allows for experimentation to iteratively test approaches.

Bright spot practices to promote embedded and continuous learning at your organization

- **Embed experimentation, hypothesis-testing, and course correction** to continuously improve
 - **Focus on what works and what doesn’t for improvement** rather than identifying success and failure
 - **Focus on closing feedback loops** with behavior change as a result of new learnings
 - **Create incentives** for data use, learning, and adaptation throughout the organization
 - **Maintain a supportive learning environment** that is open to new ideas and differences of opinion, and that provides time for reflection
 - **Develop concrete learning processes and practices** with clear purpose and goals
 - **Have leadership promote and reinforce** the value of learning processes and practices
-

Existing bright spots in the field

- *Embedding experimentation to discover the best methods and continuously improve results*

One Acre Fund (OAF), a nonprofit that supports smallholder farmers in East Africa, embeds experimentation in its work by gathering data to test, prototype and refine approaches with new changes in place for each crop season. Every innovation is moved through a rigorous, multi-phase trial process, and if proven successful, is scaled across its farmer network. For example, OAF found that many smallholder farmers want to grow green leafy vegetables like collard, but lacked the seed supply and know-how to plant it correctly. OAF created a collard seed support package that now reaches hundreds of thousands of farmers.

- *Shifting the emphasis from program staff “grading” to learning and adaptation*

The Open Society Foundations (OSF), the international philanthropic network founded by George Soros, are shifting their emphasis to learning and adaptation. The organization separates conversations focused on learning from conversations about strategy approval and funding allocation. Every two years on a rolling basis, it conducts a “portfolio review” of each area of work with program staff and board members to self-critique their activities and assess what has worked and what has not. Program allocation decisions then occur separately as part of a strategy and budget review up to two years later that reflects not just program performance, but also refinements to OSF’s approach that emerge from the learning-focused portfolio review.

- *Prioritizing learning in addressing systems-level change*

Omidyar Network (ON), the “philanthropic investment firm” founded by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar, has developed a deliberate, learning-focused model that recognizes the difficulty of proving causality and the non-linear nature of systems-level change. ON explicitly seeks evidence of both direct and sector-level routes to impact, where sector-level impact may include pioneering a new business model, providing industry infrastructure, or influencing policy.

- *Developing and deploying easy-to-use tools to support emergent learning*

Fourth Quadrant Partners is a technical assistance provider that employs a set of principles and a suite of tools collectively called “Emergent Learning.” Delivered directly and through certified practitioners, emergent learning helps teams build learning and reflection directly into the work itself instead of learning that happens away from work or in a classroom. Emergent learning stresses making thinking visible and turning work into learning calls to action as a means of accelerating results through the use of such tools as Before- and After-Action Reviews and Emergent Learning Tables. Teams use these and other emergent learning methods to plan, test, track results and adapt iteratively, to help them improve their ability to engage in real-time learning in simple, fit-for-purpose ways.

- *Integrating behavioral science and iterative user-centered design to create solutions*

HopeLab, a social innovation lab focused on designing science-based technologies to improve the health and well-being of teens and young adults, makes connections between social processes, human behavior, neuroscience, and the human genome to create effective digital solutions. The organization identifies promising behaviors that support health and well-being, researches the psychology that motivates or inhibits those behaviors, tests potential solutions in rapid feedback cycles using user-centered design principles, and creates technology that engages psychology drivers to change behavior. For example, HopeLab developed the “Mood Meter” app in collaboration with Marc Brackett of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence to develop emotional awareness by helping users plot their feelings and providing tools and strategies to help users shift their mood to a more positive state.

- *Promoting cultures of data and learning to drive performance in the social sector*

Performance Imperative (PI) is a framework developed collaboratively by the Leap Ambassadors Community, a group of nonprofit leaders, funders, and thought leaders working to advance the mission-critical message that “performance matters.” PI provides a clear definition of “high-performance organizations” for the social sector and lays out the pillars and principles that promote high-performance. The pillars include a culture that values learning, internal monitoring for continuous improvement, and external evaluation for mission effectiveness. For each of the PI’s principles, the Performance Imperative Organizational Self-Assessment (PIOSA) presents one or more specific practices or behaviors that represent manifestations of that principle in action.

Where else can we find inspiration?

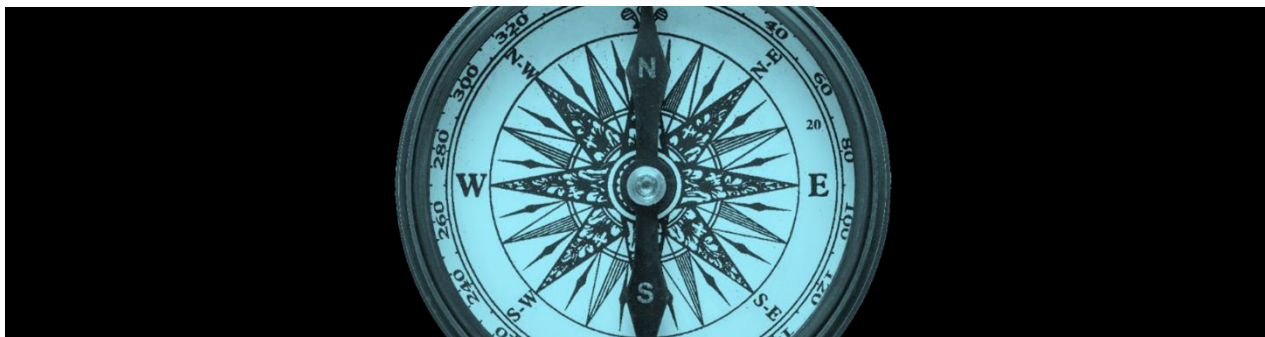
Creating a widespread culture of learning

Intuit has created experimentation platforms for all their workers, ranging from customer support to logistics and marketing. Workers across the company are encouraged to brainstorm many possible solutions and then quickly test the best ideas, creating an environment where people can rapidly learn and are allowed to fail.¹⁵

What would it look like if funders built platforms for grantees expressly focused on facilitating experimentation and learning?

For more examples of adjacencies related to more effectively putting decision-making at the center, see companion adjacency materials.

More effectively putting decision-making at the center



A better future for putting decision-making at the center is one where:

There is greater investment in monitoring, evaluation, and learning capacity

In a better future, it is standard to have sufficient capacity among nonprofits and foundation staff to analyze data and think evaluatively. Funders prioritize building capacity in ways that benefit the field broadly.

Bright spot practices to better invest in monitoring, evaluation, and learning capacity at your organization

- **Ensure nonprofits have sufficient resources** for funder data requests, including funding for monitoring, evaluation, and learning design
 - **Promote broad and in-depth data-oriented capacity building** that integrates data use into organizational culture and leadership practices, technology, data processes, and strategy development
 - **Provide “embedded resources”** to help organizations better use data and evaluative thinking
 - **Promote peer, individual organization, and group learning** and training
 - **Create time for more and deeper discussions between funders and grantees** about learnings, including what hasn’t worked
-

Existing bright spots in the field

- *Providing a long-term training program to build evaluation capacity and encourage evaluative thinking*

Building Evaluation Capacity (BEC), an eighteen-month program co-created by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and Anita Baker, E.D., of Evaluation Services, provides nonprofit leadership and staff with comprehensive, long-term training to increase both evaluation capacity and organization-wide use of evaluative thinking. This program is offered to the nonprofit community through the foundation’s Nonprofit Support Program (NSP). Participants are selected from the foundation’s existing grantees and potential grantees. As part of BEC, participants receive training sessions and dedicated guidance through the development and implementation of a rigorous evaluation design for a selected program from each organization. Forty-five organizations have completed BEC since its introduction in 2006, with a new cohort of organizations starting the program every other year.

- *Building nonprofit evaluation capacities through communities of practice*

Measure4Change, an initiative of Urban Institute and the World Bank Group, hosts a community of practice for nonprofit evaluation staff in the Washington, DC area to enable them to learn from one another. The community meets quarterly and the sessions are intended to make performance management more accessible by helping nonprofit leaders learn from their peers. By participating in the community of practice, nonprofit leaders can better understand the range of performance management practices, assess their programs compared to their peers, and explore how they can advance their work. In addition to the community of practice, Measure4Change also offers grant support and one-on-one technical assistance to small cohorts of nonprofits and a series of knowledge briefs bear on strategic management and policy decisions. Among other efforts, the Project trains and places “data fellows” in partner organizations to provide in-house data analytics support, help develop evidence-informed policy, and improve the organization’s ability to leverage strategic analytics.

- *Providing a multi-pronged approach to help nonprofits create data and learning-oriented cultures*

Edna McConnell Clark (EMCF)’s PropelNext, an integrated three-year program for selected youth organizations, promotes “results-driven nonprofit cultures” by helping organizations strengthen their capacity to collect, analyze, and apply data for ongoing improvement and learning. The program provides grantees with support from coaches and consultants with program design and performance management expertise, group learning sessions, a peer network and online learning community, and unrestricted funding. A recent assessment found that the combination of each of these elements working together was important to overall performance improvement. The 13 organizations that completed the program in 2015 have expanded their impact, attracted new resources and funding, and built partnerships to further amplify their impact on the lives of disadvantaged youth.

- *Providing “embedded resources” to help organizations develop their evaluative thinking and data capabilities*

Harvard’s Strategic Data Project, an initiative of the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University, partners with school districts, states, and nonprofits to bring high-quality research methods and data analysis to bear on strategic management and policy decisions. Among other efforts, the Project trains and places “data fellows” in partner organizations to provide in-house data analytics support, help develop evidence-informed policy, and improve the organization’s ability to leverage strategic analytics.

Where else can we find inspiration?

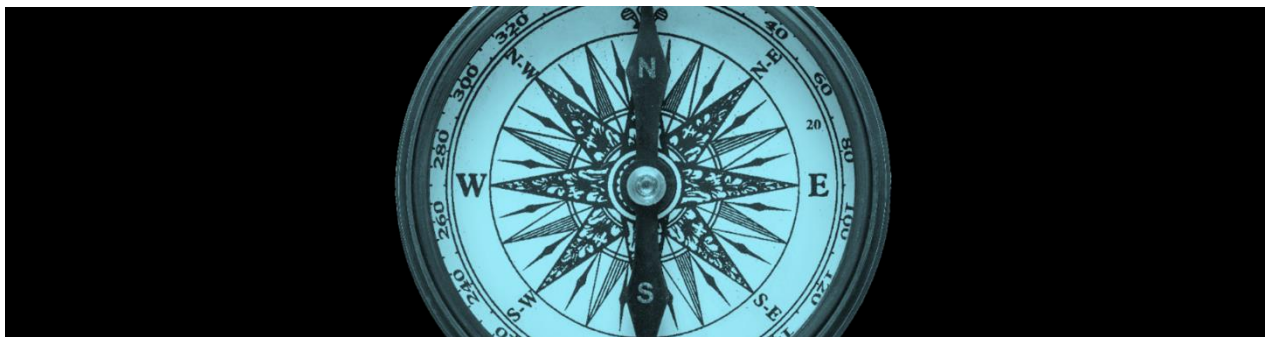
Using technology to increase access to specialized expertise

Project ECHO is an initiative to make specialized medical knowledge more accessible in rural and underserved communities. Specialist teams at academic medical centers connect to local clinicians through virtual clinics, where they provide case-based training and mentorship in treating patients with complex conditions. The initiative has expanded from its original focus on treatment for hepatitis C to now address more than 55 diseases in more than 20 countries.¹⁶

What would it look like to use technology to spread specialized evaluation expertise to organizations that couldn’t otherwise afford it?

For more examples of adjacencies related to more effectively putting decision-making at the center, see companion adjacency materials.

More effectively putting decision-making at the center



A better future for putting decision-making at the center is one where:

The data and methods needed to inform decisions are available

In a better future, greater investment in the supply chain of data addresses the often insufficient and low-quality data that is currently pervasive in the social sector. With greater investment in data, big data and data analytics tools and techniques like predictive analytics are increasingly helpful in answering key questions. Further, social science and data science methods are integrated so that practitioners can use the best approach (or a hybrid approach) for a given decision.

Bright spot practices to ensure data and methods needed to inform decisions at your organization

- **Invest in data and analytics infrastructure** needed for learning and decision-making
 - **Incentivize good data collection throughout the data supply chain** by making sure it's relevant to data collectors and informed by user needs
 - **Support the development of tools** for non-expert users
 - **Use compatible applications across the organization** to enable timely and ongoing data sharing, with the ability to parse information in different ways
-

Existing bright spots in the field

- *Investing in data and analytics infrastructure to build understanding and guide programming*

Polaris, a nonprofit that combats human trafficking, invests in large-scale data collection and analysis to more effectively understand and prevent trafficking. Since December 2007, Polaris has operated the National Human Trafficking Hotline and established the Polaris BeFree textline in March, 2013. Polaris realized that each human trafficking situation reported to these helplines contained untapped data. Polaris invested in meticulously coding and documenting nuanced information about the more than 30,000 suspected incidence of human trafficking which have been reported to the helplines. The organization then analyzed this data and connected it with public sources to create a detailed picture of how trafficking networks operate. That knowledge, in turn, shaped Polaris's prevention efforts, policy work, and even law-enforcement investigations.

- *Using data mining to improve understanding of key ingredients for successful programs*

Algorhythm, a technology company dedicated to fostering greater social impact through data-driven decision-making, used analytics and data from 27 youth development organizations, 80 programs, and more than 3,000 youth to understand the various positive youth development practices that drive success for young people in out-of-school programs. Algorhythm found thirteen “positive deviant” programs that significantly outperformed their peers, posting twice the gains on social and emotional learning outcomes than peer organizations. Using this analysis, Algorhythm identified four key areas of practice that drove better performance and identified actions that improve the likelihood of a positive outcome.

- *Creating low-cost tools to make rigorous assessment easier and more affordable*

Mathematica Policy Research, a nonpartisan research organization that conducts policy research, data collection, and data analytics, has launched a new software tool, **RCT-YES**, which enables organizations to more easily assess the impact of their programs. RCT-YES, which can be downloaded for free, allows users to enter program inputs and then produces an R or Stata computer program that calculates and presents analysis results in formatted tables and graphs. For example, if a school district randomly sent half of its teachers an email encouraging them to participate in a new technology training course, the RCT-YES software would help non-evaluation experts quickly and cheaply determine answers to questions like “*Did the invitation lead to increased usage of the technology?*” And, “*Did the technology lead to improved outcomes for students?*”

- *Creating a highly replicable, data-driven model that enables wide-ranging comparisons*

Rare, an international conservation organization, uses a social marketing approach with the motto “find what works and repeat it” to promote environmental behavior change in more than 50 countries. The organization embraces a data-driven culture that includes training local partners to establish baselines and to track knowledge, attitudes, and behavior change. Since the basic social marketing approach is the same whether it’s applied, for example, to preventing slash and burn agroforestry techniques or to stopping trash dumping in protected marshland, the organization can track and compare percentage point changes in behavior across a wide range of projects and countries.

Where else can we find inspiration?

Using predictive analytics to anticipate challenges

The Pennsylvania Bureau of Child Support Enforcement built a predictive model that yielded a “payment score calculator” to estimate how likely individual parents are to meet their child support commitment. Because the system shows the drivers of a low score, caseworkers can address potential problems —such as explaining the importance of contacting the agency in case of job loss — and suggest programs to help struggling parents.¹⁷

What would it take to widely use predictive analytics in the social sector?

For more examples of agencies related to more effectively putting decision-making at the center, see companion adjacency materials.

Calls to action

More effectively putting decision-making at the center

Through our research, innovation lab and multiple convenings, we've gathered promising calls to action to inspire innovation. These calls to action include actions that individual organizations can undertake, as well as calls to action for collections of organizations. They are hypotheses about what can spur decision-making at the center, and they are meant to provoke further ideas, adaptations, and refinements.

1

Information for on-the-ground decision-making is prioritized

Putting decision-making at the center means first and foremost that front-line decision-makers serving constituents directly have the information they need for effective decision-making beyond a focus on accountability reporting. These calls to action explore possible calls to action to reach that goal:



Innovating new ways of creating and sharing monitoring results: Grant reports are typically a great deal of work for grantees, yet are too often left unread and are seldom used in significant ways by foundations for ongoing decision-making. What could it look like if grant reporting was fundamentally rethought? What if a funder worked with grantees (individually or in related clusters) to use data that is meaningful for the grantees first and foremost, or data that is already collected by the grantees, but would suffice for compliance and monitoring purposes for the foundation?



Differentiating the roles of funders and nonprofits in developing evidence: Nonprofits do not generally have the resources, skills, or incentives to rigorously evaluate impact. What if a foundation or group of foundations took responsibility for testing the quality of broad ideas (e.g. does microfinance work) and nonprofits were only responsible for assessing the quality of their implementation (e.g. monitoring)?¹⁸

2

Learning is embedded and continuous

To get to a better future where foundation and nonprofit cultures better promote ongoing learning for improvement, possible approaches include a focus on barriers, incentives, and promoting innovation:



Applying behavioral design principles to help organizations better understand the barriers to organizational learning: Many foundations and nonprofits aspire to be "learning organizations," but struggle with how in practical terms to embed organizational learning into their culture and operations. Can we adapt materials in the rapidly emerging behavioral design space to create a diagnostic and tools to help funders and/or nonprofits understand where and why measurement processes break down and better implement organizational learning?



Incentivizing iterative, rapid-cycle and adaptive learning: The fear of sharing negative information can stifle innovation and growth. Can a group of funders systematically experiment with multiple approaches that reward grantees for identifying problems and solutions rather than the results themselves?



Lifting up learning as a core pillar: Given that establishing learning cultures in the social sector continues to be a challenge, what if funders explored how to promote "decision-based evidence making"? What if a group of funders held a challenge or offered incentives for organizations that developed innovations in testing hypotheses and experimenting to promote action-oriented learning?



Developing ratings and benchmarking of philanthropies on their setting of strategic goals and their learning: Using established learning organization best practices, can we develop ways to assess how well organizations are integrating strategic learning into their practices to drive improvement and accountability?

Calls to action

More effectively putting decision-making at the center

3 There is greater investment in monitoring, evaluation, and learning capacity

Beyond simply increasing resources spent on individual capacity-building, we have heard ideas to promote realistic expectations for leadership and efforts to promote creative ways to serve the field more broadly:



Training board members to set more realistic expectations for evaluation: Board members play a crucial role in determining the priorities of their organizations, yet they often have little knowledge about the challenges and limitations for assessing impact. Can we create board training materials that both inform board members of what to look for and set realistic expectations for evidence development?



Developing a “minute-clinic”-like mass MEL offering: With a focus on right-sized and cost-effective approaches, can evaluators move beyond an individualized approach to provide mass customization serving large numbers of nonprofits as needed? Could a funder pilot an offering that promoted widely available, “good enough” services?



Promoting rotating resources: What if funders supported evaluation “circuit riders” who could cost-effectively rotate through a number of nonprofit organizations to act as coaches in evaluative thinking and the use of available organizational and issue area evidence?

4 The data and methods needed to inform decisions are available

To get to a better future with higher quality and more sufficient data, we need to think beyond incremental improvements. The following are calls to action that could be tried to jump-start wider analytics and technology use in the sector:



Creating integrated data and social science approach(es) for evidence development: The role of data scientists in the social sector is likely to grow substantially over time, yet data scientists and social scientists have very different training, knowledge, and assumptions. What if data scientists and social scientists were brought together in a systematic effort to define an integrated approach to roles and evidence creation in the social sector?



Creating embedded technology capacity to develop widely needed tools: Insufficient and low-quality data is pervasive in the social sector. Technology tools and infrastructure development could help simplify MEL tasks for organizations, and cross-functional teams could help build internal capacity. What if a funder or funders promoted a “Code for America”-like model with MEL and data analytics teams for a year of service to develop digital tools? The team could be embedded in a single foundation, but could would work on organizational-level tools and technologies that would be relevant across an issue area.



Conducting R&D on promising technologies: There is some debate about the efficacy and biases of new technologies and techniques for the social sector, such as predictive analytics and machine learning. What if a funder supported an R&D initiative to test the applicability and usefulness of data analytics approaches (i.e. how accurate and effective were they, given concerns about underlying data)?

A better future:

Better empowering constituents
and promoting diversity, equity,
and inclusion

Better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion

A better future

.....for empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion is one where:

- *Equity is consistently considered in and supported by monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts*
- *Constituent feedback is an essential practice*
- *Constituents are empowered to make their own choices*
- *Data rights are secured*

What do the trends mean for this characteristic

The larger context

We are in the midst of a revolution about “say” in both the private and public sectors that is enabled by new technologies and the accessibility of data. Social media has transformed consumers from passive recipients to active creators of media content. Customers “have become both critics and creators, demanding a more personalized service and expecting to be given the opportunity to shape the products and services they consume.”¹⁹ And civic tech efforts are facilitating greater participation and engagement of citizens in reporting problems with social infrastructure, as well as prioritizing and coordinating solutions.

These changes are underpinned by transformations in design, marketing, and customer experience. User-centered design, which focuses extensively on end-user needs, wants, and limitations throughout the design process, is now standard practice, as is focusing on the user experience throughout the lifecycle of an engagement with a company. This shift has been complemented by a growing sophistication about how people make decisions through the application of behavioral science principles and practices.

In the U.S., efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion are increasingly essential yet continue to be insufficient, partial, and contested. While American society and workplaces continue to become more racially and ethnically diverse, the racial wealth gap has widened. New data technologies can also offer democratizing opportunities or, without focused attention, reinforce inequities. The data sets used for machine learning training can be rife with historical bias. Newer tools, such as facial recognition software, are being trained on populations that look like the people creating the software, not the broader public. For example, African-Americans are more likely than others to have their images captured in databases and reviewed during computerized searches for crime suspects.²⁰

Within the social sector

In this context, the social sector lags the public and private sectors in a reorientation toward a more constituent-centered approach to strategy and programmatic design, implementation, and adaptation. Despite widespread aspirations, many social sector organizations continue to struggle to develop incentives and integrate feedback processes to consistently engage constituents in ongoing, systematic, and measurable ways.



There is widespread agreement in the monitoring, evaluation, and learning field that cultural competence and diversity, equity, and inclusion matter and are important. An embrace of methodological diversity and focus on community-based evaluation provides multiple evaluation methodologies that are participatory. However, there continues to be a serious lack of diversity in the field, and the drivers and parameters of evaluations are largely top-down.

“The mentality in philanthropy is that you hire the smartest people who analyze the world’s problems, create a strategy for solving them, measure them, and then assess the results. People never say ‘Who’s we? Are we the experts?’”

—Nonprofit CEO

user-centered design provide key tools, technologies, principles and practices. The private sector has fallen down on privacy and security issues, but there are individual efforts and collective mobilization that can be learned from.

Much work has been done in civic tech to bring these elements to the public sector and change the relationship between constituents and their government: to move from government doing things for constituents to constituents directing what gets prioritized, what solutions can look like, and brainstorming solutions and helping to direct support. Civic tech also, however, offers a warning. Equity hasn’t been an explicit priority, and those with greater access to technology and resources having a disproportionate say.

For diversity, inclusion, and especially equity, learnings from the private and public sectors are more about individual bright spots than definitive solutions. What is clear is that attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion requires ongoing, thoughtful and conscious work. We can look to diversity management efforts in private sector HR for concrete processes, procedures and resources, as well as individual equity exemplars in the public sector.

As a result, we heard expectations of incremental progress rather than real change in the expected future. Without serious efforts to institutionalize changes in practice, the percentage of evaluators of color would improve somewhat but remain relatively low, and incremental improvement would be made on emphasizing cultural competence for evaluators. Constituent voice would grow, but it would continue to be an aspirational practice. Absent changes in incentives, most monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts would continue to be driven by funders and not widely shared with or used to directly benefit or empower constituents. Without coordinated action, we would continue to insufficiently address data ethics issues, such as algorithm biases and the protection of constituent data.

Where do we look for inspiration to get to a better future?

In the social sector, there is already interesting work happening in places around constituent feedback and community participation. There are also efforts to formalize data rights. There are a few shoots on empowering constituents, some around data and some more globally.

This is much more rooted in the private and public sectors. In the private sector, the extensive body of work and examples from customer satisfaction, customer experience and

“We need to understand what impact and success looks like for a community and not assume that we know what that is.”

—Foundation program director

Better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion



A better future for empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion is one where:

Equity is consistently considered in and supported by MEL efforts

In a better future, an equity lens is used for the process of monitoring, evaluation, and learning, including the determination of what information is relevant and important. To support this goal, the evaluation field includes a substantial proportion of professionals drawn from the communities being served, and there are significant improvements in the cultural competence of evaluators. Further, monitoring, evaluation, and learning are used to promote equity, with equity articulated as an explicit goal. Organizations use asset framing and measure equity indicators to assess progress.

Bright spot practices to ensure equity is consistently considered at your organization

- **Ensure AEA's statement on cultural competence essential practices is followed**, including eliminating bias in language and using culturally appropriate evaluation methods
- **Assess demographics** and identify relevant existing inequities
- **Consider equity implications** of intervention and monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts, including intended and unintended consequences
- **Collect disaggregated data** on the effects of an intervention broken out by different groups of constituents. Look for gaps between groups
- **Use an asset-based framing** in data collection and analysis, including social and cultural resources that might otherwise be overlooked (e.g. informal child care or cultural sources of strength)
- **Build more diverse and inclusive staff and partnerships** for monitoring, evaluation, and learning roles
- **Develop diversity, equity, and inclusion competencies and capacities** for staff engaged in monitoring, evaluation, and learning

Existing bright spots in the field

- *Integrating equity as a key dimension of community well-being*

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is integrating equity goals into its efforts to promote a national "Culture of Health" in the United States, focusing a portion of its work specifically on creating healthier, more equitable communities. To assess community health, the Foundation is using measures that are broader than traditional health measures and include equity indicators, such as housing affordability and residential segregation. The Foundation is tracking these measures across

30 communities, chosen to reflect geographic and demographic diversity, to better understand how communities make progress or encounter barriers in improving members' health and well-being.

- *Developing simplified tools to determine if a program is meeting its equity goals*

The EquityTool, a free app developed by a collaboration of nonprofits and social sector actors, enables programs to quickly and easily assess whether they are serving the poor in the low- and middle-income countries in which they operate. Metrics for Management maintains and supports the EquityTool, which provides a brief and simple country-specific questionnaires (for 30+ countries) to assess the relative wealth of respondents by asking questions such as, "What kind of fuel does your household mainly use for cooking?" The EquityTool can be run offline on any mobile or tablet device and offers integration with a variety of data collection platforms. When data is uploaded, the EquityTool automatically calculates the wealth distribution of the population served by the program.

- *Using a data-focused approach to measure progress on equity*

The Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo participates in the Racial Equity Roundtable, a group of 30 community leaders from public, private, nonprofit, and faith institutions, committed to tackling gaps in racial equity in the region through a data-focused approach. The Roundtable identified 16 equity indicators across four areas that span education and job readiness, criminal justice and safety, quality of life and neighborhoods, and income and wealth. The Foundation will use this detailed equity mapping to track equity impacts over time.

- *Building the pipeline of evaluators of color to challenge old assumptions and contribute new perspectives*

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, through its Leaders in Equitable Evaluation and Diversity (LEEAD) initiative, is strengthening the pipeline of historically underrepresented minority evaluators by priming them to be leaders in evaluation. The program duration is one year and consists of three components: an online-based evaluation coursework; ongoing mentorship from senior experts in evaluation; and a residency at a research organization, think tank, foundation, or private firm. The Foundation partnered with the University of Wisconsin-Stout to provide credit-bearing course modules from their online Evaluation Studies Certificate program.

Where else can we find inspiration?

Providing broad-based cultural competence training

Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) provides the **Tool for Assessing Cultural Competence Training (TACCT)** for use in medical schools, to integrate cultural competence in all aspects of medical training. TACCT is a 67-item self-administered tool to evaluate cultural competence content across the entire medical school curriculum, in an effort to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health care.²¹

What would it look like if funders and nonprofits made cultural competence training a necessary part of their requirements in hiring external evaluators?

For more examples of adjacencies related to more effectively putting decision-making at the center, see companion adjacency materials.

Better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion



A better future for empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion is one where:

Constituent feedback is an essential practice

In a better future, nonprofits, with the financial support of funders, are expected to collect constituent feedback in a way that is systematic, comparable to other organizations, integrated into strategic decision-making, and useful to their constituents. There are more frequent, field-wide efforts to demonstrate and document the benefits of soliciting constituent voice, as well as the tangible drawbacks of excluding it.

Bright spot practices to ensure constituent feedback is an essential practice

- **Develop a process of ongoing constituent feedback** for learning, collaboration, and improvement
- **Engage and co-create with constituents** throughout the feedback process, from design through action, in ways that make them feel valued and consulted
- **Incorporate constituent feedback** into decision-making to make course corrections
- **Promote skill development and training** to provide staff with the capacities needed to develop and use constituent feedback tools and technologies

Existing bright spots in the field

- *Systematically using constituent feedback to improve and benchmark organizational performance across related organizations*

Fund for Shared Insight (Shared Insight), a collaborative effort among funders to improve philanthropy, builds capacity among foundations and nonprofits to establish feedback loops and give greater voice to constituents. Through its Listen for Good initiative, Shared Insight is working with 46 nonprofit organizations across diverse fields to implement a largely standardized questionnaire for their constituents based on the Net Promoter System methodology (an approach used in the private sector that can help predict future growth and profitability). The approach allows the organizations to benchmark constituent feedback data against comparable organizations over time.

- *Deploying an app to empower citizens to provide real-time feedback to hold governments accountable*

DevelopmentCheck, an app for real-time citizen feedback on the transparency, inclusiveness, and effectiveness of development projects, helps local citizens engage directly with service providers and

government to ensure local projects are delivered successfully. The app gives citizens a collective, instant, global voice; provides visibility into development projects; and enables community monitors to report on the “Fix-Rate” for problems identified through the app. In general, as fix-rates improve, so too does trust between community, service providers, and governments. The app measures access to information, project effectiveness, and community engagement.

- *Creating better incentives for nonprofits to prioritize constituent feedback*

GlobalGiving, a global crowdfunding platform for nonprofits, incentivizes the collection of constituent feedback by tying it to perks on the platform that typically lead to increased funding. Through GlobalGiving Rewards, a program similar to a frequent flier program, organizations earn points for engagement (e.g., reporting on their progress) and effectiveness (e.g., listening to their constituents). GlobalGiving uses points accumulated by nonprofits to measure growth and translates that growth into a status (e.g., Emerging, Superstar). The higher an organization’s status, the more GlobalGiving drives donations to that organization through its platform.

- *Bridging the information gap between nonprofits and constituents using technology tools*

VOTO, a social enterprise, uses a mobile phone-based platform to help businesses, governments, and NGOs understand and communicate with the people they serve. VOTO integrates voice, SMS, and analytics into a platform that facilitates mobile-based mass interaction and helps organizations reach individuals who are normally unheard. For example, VOTO helps organizations reach rural women by first testing the best ways to engage women through mobile phones. The organization’s robust evidence base can be analyzed to determine whether having a female voice present the survey instead of a male voice helps ensure completion by women.

- *Growing nonprofit capacity to build feedback loops with constituents*

Feedback Commons (FC), an initiative of Keystone Accountability, provides nonprofits with the tools and resources to close feedback loops with constituents. FC simplifies the workflow often required to administer surveys, enabling nonprofits to focus on designing, collecting, analyzing, and communicating their survey results more effectively, with support from FC resources. The platform also encourages nonprofits to opt into a “neighborhood” (i.e., a network of organizations with a common community of practice), merging surveys about human relationships to establish community benchmarks and define good practice.

Where else can we find inspiration?

Fostering a constituent-centric culture

Alex Turnbull, the CEO of **Groove**, spends at least 20 hours each week on customer support. The company’s all-hands customer service model—where everyone on the team spends some time responding to customer support requests—helps employees “feel the pain” of the customer and be more empathetic when making product decisions.²²

What would it look like for funders and nonprofits to build greater global awareness of their respective constituents’ wishes and preferences?

For more examples of adjacencies related to more effectively putting decision-making at the center, see companion adjacency materials.

Better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion



A better future for empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion is one where:

Constituents are empowered to make their own choices

In a better future, communities have the power to influence the strategy and programming of the foundations and nonprofits with which they work. Foundations and nonprofits invest in communities, develop local capacity, and share information with constituents in a way that is useful for them. Monitoring, evaluation, and learning are used to foster a marketplace of choices driven by constituents' preferences.

Bright spot practices to empower constituents to make their own choices at your organization

- **Build community capacity** to collect, analyze and use their own data
- **Enable constituents to define what is most relevant** and needed
- **Enable constituents to guide development** and changes to programs and initiatives
- **Enable constituents to co-create** together interventions that work for them

Existing bright spots in the field

- *Using data to build trust and tailor resource allocation*

Family Independence Initiative (FII) is an organization that trusts and invests directly in low-income families across the nation so they can work individually and collectively to achieve prosperity. FII leverages the power of technology and information to allow families to strengthen existing and create new social networks while also providing them access to financial capital to support one another in achieving mobility. FII has integrated constituent feedback into the core of its work, not only to help direct how it deploys dollars to families, but also to empower families to make their own choices about improving their lives. To do this, FII has created a web-based data platform for families to set their own financial goals and connect with other families in the effort to find solutions to the challenges they face, from child care to saving for a home to affording tuition. FII's platform helps families track their own progress, and FII matches their self-determined efforts with financial capital to accelerate attainment of their goals.

- *Giving constituents a voice in guiding the programming for their families*

The Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) is a nonprofit collaborative of organizations that exists to close the achievement gap and end multi-generational poverty in North Minneapolis. NAZ empowers parents to voice their perspective to help guide programming that supports a culture of

achievement in the community. To strengthen diversity and improve dialogue with parents, NAZ has created a parental advisory board to advise leadership, and has also assigned two seats on its Board of Directors to parents. This structure facilitates a more inclusive dialogue, which allows parental priorities, concerns, and definitions of success to be conveyed directly to leadership throughout the organization, making strategic decisions for the collaborative.

- *Building community capacity to access data and measure what is valuable to communities*

The California Endowment's (TCE) Building Healthy Communities initiative, which operates in fourteen communities across California, is building community capacity to measure progress against their own priorities. In TCE's learning and evaluation model, an evaluator is selected by the local site leaders in each community to help develop learning and evaluation plans, facilitate data collection and analysis, and participate in cross-site learning. Based on a set of shared goals and indicators identified in the Building Healthy Communities North Star Goals and Indicators, the foundation is now exploring the best way to set up a coordinated measurement database to allow each community to access data and generate reports specific to their interests. This could include evaluating whether healthcare access or rates of chronic absenteeism or expulsion have improved in each community over time.

- *Promoting constituent-guided research to improve the quality and relevance of information available to constituents*

The Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI), an independent nonprofit organization that aims to provide data to help patients and their caregivers make better informed health decisions, works to advance the shift in clinical health research from "investigator-driven" to "patient-centered" studies. PCORI involves patients in all aspects of the research process—choosing research and outcomes topics, developing and conducting studies, and sharing the results. For example, patients, clinicians, and researchers share in governance of the network and data use decisions for PCORnet, PCORI's initiative to harness patient data to facilitate more efficient and powerful research studies.

- *Nurturing talent within communities to create local evaluation capacity*

W.K. Kellogg Foundation has been working to develop local evaluation capacity by fostering the talent of leaders in rural New Mexican communities. The Foundation recognized that comparatively few existing evaluators understood the culture and reflected the diversity of these communities. As part of the effort to develop local talent, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation is supporting an evaluation training program with students at the University of New Mexico.

Where else can we find inspiration?

Co-creating with users to discover new ideas

LEGO Ideas is an online platform where participants can submit their own designs and discover ideas by other fans. Fans provide feedback on product ideas and vote on design submissions, and the LEGO Review Board evaluates all ideas that get 10,000 votes. Those that are chosen become LEGO products that are sold worldwide. The product creator earns a percentage of the sales and is featured on packaging and marketing.²³

What would it look like if social sector organizations, as a habitual practice, sought input and ideas from constituents in the design of programming?

For more examples of adjacencies related to more effectively putting decision-making at the center, see companion adjacency materials.

Better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion



A better future for empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion is one where:

Data rights are secured

In a better future, foundations and nonprofits consistently acquire information in ethical ways and safeguard the data rights of constituents. To that end, digital data is collected with consent and stored securely. Data “rights language” that acknowledges the obligation to protect constituent data is widely adopted.

Bright spot practices to ensure data rights are secured at your organization

- **Get consent from constituents** for data collection and make clear how it will be used
 - **Enable constituents to access and remove their data** where relevant if they choose
 - **Protect the privacy of constituent data** and prevent them from being identified
 - **Protect how sensitive information is shared**
 - **Destroy constituent data** when it is not needed
 - **Act in ways that promote equity, fairness and the best interest of constituents** when collecting and using personal information
-

Existing bright spots in the field

- *Providing principles, templates and best practices in digital data use*

The Digital Civil Society Lab at the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society investigates the challenges and opportunities facing civil society organizations in the digital age, and develops resources to help organizations use digital resources safely, ethically and effectively. The Lab runs the **Digital Impact program**, which has developed a suite of tools and resources for civil society organizations to inform data management and governance. Resources include a policy wizard and templates for developing relevant digital policies, digital data inventories and tools, and engagement guidelines.

- *Enabling constituents to control the use of their data and opt-in to participating in data collection*

OpenPaths, part of the Health Data Exploration Project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and managed by researchers at UC San Diego, provides a “secure data locker” that allows individuals to track and record their geolocation data, independently analyze their own data, and share their data with researchers only if the individuals choose to do so. OpenPaths gives

individuals control over their data, while supporting research initiatives (for example, a project that tracked community patterns to understand the spread of the Tiger mosquito) by facilitating the participation of OpenPaths users who consent.

- *Protecting the digital data of vulnerable populations*

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) provides a **Service Info** tool accessed through a computer or mobile device to allow approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon find assistance and give feedback on the services relevant to them. Crucially, all feedback goes through a review process and the compiled feedback is disseminated to service providers anonymously (unless providers of feedback choose to make their identities known). The general “feedback report” can only be viewed by service providers to help them learn and improve their performance, not by members of the public as a way to rate program quality. However, members of the public are able to view service providers’ responses to feedback when responses are provided, in order to close the feedback loop.

- *Creating technology safeguards to protect data rights*

Benetech, a nonprofit that empowers communities through software for social good, transforms how people with disabilities read and learn, makes it safer for human rights defenders to pursue truth and justice, and connects people to the services they need to live and prosper. Benetech advocates for a software and data revolution that delivers positive and lasting social impact at scale. Benetech’s data-driven approach, called Data for Action & Impact, uses data to not only help the social sector better respond to today’s needs and to improve efficiency, but to also establish that interventions lead to lasting change. As a software nonprofit headquartered in Silicon Valley, Benetech serves as bridge between the social sector and Silicon Valley by working closely with both communities to identify needs and software solutions that can drive positive social change.

Where else can we find inspiration?

Promoting personal data ownership

Datawallet, an online marketplace for data that empowers individuals to take control of their own data. Once an individual signs up, Datawallet collects that individual’s data, anonymizes it, and produces analyses. When companies buy the data, Datawallet pays the users who generated that data, instead of the revenue being diverted to data brokers.²⁴

What would it look like if funders and nonprofits provided constituents with more authority over how their data is used?

For more examples of adjacencies related to more effectively putting decision-making at the center, see companion adjacency materials.

Calls to action

Better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion

To get to a better future in which equity is integral to monitoring, evaluation, and learning, and we consistently engage constituents in ongoing and systematic feedback that provides choice and agency, we need to actively chart a new path. The following are some high-priority hypotheses about how to get to the better future.

1 Equity is consistently considered in and supported by MEL efforts

Without explicit efforts to integrate equity into everything we do, we are unlikely to make the transformative changes that our field leaders and experts across multiple disciplines identified as part of a better future. For monitoring, evaluation and learning efforts, we've heard multiple ideas to try:



Developing asset-based resources: Many actors use data with a deficit-frame, focusing entirely on challenges communities face rather than also including strengths and resources they have to draw upon. By focusing solely on deficits, funders can often overlook real assets that can be used to help solve critical community challenges. What if we developed best practice resources and a toolkit for asset-based monitoring, evaluation, and learning, including for the creation of relevant data?



Developing standards for cultural competence and equity-focused evaluation: While the AEA has guiding principles for cultural competence, there aren't clear standards for evaluators to demonstrate evidence of cultural competence during the selection process. What could it look like if clear evidence of proficiency were a standard part of evaluator selection? Could a third party develop a cultural competence examination and issue certification to evaluators?

2 Constituent feedback is an essential practice

How can we get to a better future where collecting constituent feedback is an expected, systematic, and ongoing practice for nonprofits and foundations? The following calls to action are just the beginning in broadening and deepening practice:



Create tools to help organizations systematically collect constituent insight. While momentum to gather constituent feedback exists, collecting constituent feedback and insights still appears elusive to many organizations. Could a group of organizations create a "constituent insight toolkit" that helps social sector organizations navigate the range of available options (e.g. direct feedback, behavior tracking) and catalogues resources for quick and easy implementation?



Measuring and tracking the integration of constituent insight to help hold organizations accountable for its use: Could the field develop a way of measuring the incorporation of constituent voice to enable donors to make funding decisions based on the use of constituent voice and to enable organizations to benchmark against themselves and others for improvement? Could a group of organizations in an issue area agree to prioritize these benchmarks in funding decisions, with assistance for implementation?

Calls to action

Better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion

3 Constituents are empowered to make their own choices

To get to a better future in which constituents have agency in defining their needs and assessing the success of interventions, there are a range of approaches we could try:



Providing the infrastructure for constituent decision-making: Some resource allocation and other initiative decisions could be made by constituents themselves if the infrastructure existed to enable them to provide their votes. What if funders supported an initiative to model what real constituent-informed decision-making would look like and how it would operate?



Connecting constituents with each other: Constituents can be an important source of information and assistance for each other. What if one or more organizations scale platforms and/or develop resource guidelines to enable organizations to promote sharing and connection between constituents?



Identifying interventions where cash transfers are a meaningful counterfactual: What if we developed an analysis of issues and types of interventions where cash transfers could be a viable counterfactual, to promote calls to action to determine if specific interventions outperformed cash transfers? This would both shift the paradigm to one that presumes constituent agency and knowledge and create a useful experimental comparison.

4 Data rights are secured

Without assurance that we can adequately safeguard the privacy and security of constituents' data, we won't make true progress across many of the elements of the characteristics of a better future. We can try multiple paths to make real progress:



Using data stewards: There are particular concerns about the development of open and integrated data systems with the data of vulnerable populations. Could funders support the establishment of data stewards for key data systems who would make informed decisions to ensure the integrity of the data use?



Developing common tools and technologies: Nonprofits often don't have the resources to adequately ensure that their constituent and other data is safe and protected. What if one or more funders supported the development of a shared software for nonprofits to install add-ons for privacy, security, etc., or the development of shared digital services?



Compensating constituents for their data: Constituents are not directly compensated when their data is used. Are there certain data, issues, or populations where compensating constituents would be productive? What if funders compensated constituents for their data financially or through other means, or otherwise treated it as a real asset belonging to the constituents?

A better future:
More productively learning at
scale

More productively learning at scale

A better future

...for more productively learning at scale is one where:

- *Knowledge is shared openly and widely*
- *Knowledge gaps and learning agendas are collaboratively undertaken*
- *Data is integrated at scale needed to assess social impact*
- *Evaluation synthesis, replication, and meta-evaluation are supported*

What do the trends mean for this characteristic

The larger context

Technological advances are creating greater opportunities for collaboration and making data aggregation and analysis dramatically easier and less expensive. Open data systems enable people to easily share and access data, while integrated datasets combine multiple data sources to enable new insight through the combination of expanded reach and different types of data. Large quantities of data from multiple sources are being used to report real time traffic conditions, identify changes to tropical forests globally, track malaria through mobile phones, and enable real-time monitoring of complex global supply chains.

Given the interconnectedness of today's world and the scale of the challenges we face, as well as government retrenchment, organizations are increasingly focusing on ecosystems and collaborative approaches across sectors. For example, the number of public-private partnerships has grown to 400, compared to 50 in the late 1980s. Innovative new approaches and models blend elements from multiple sectors.

There is a broad open data movement to make data more accessible, with a specific focus on access to governmental information and the use of government administrative data for public benefit. Civil society organizations have been both proponents and beneficiaries of this movement, and a vibrant "civic tech" movement and ecosystem has emerged. However, these technological innovations also bring the challenges of data privacy and ownership, data quality, and diverse data standards, which must be overcome in order to realize the full potential of learning at scale.

Within the social sector

Productively learning at scale has been historically difficult in the social sector, which has established an "opt-in" culture for transparency and sharing, rather than an "opt-out" culture. Knowledge is generally closely held, although cross-currents exist. When foundations and nonprofits do share, they are incentivized to share only those results that reflect positively on their organizations, handicapping the field's understanding of what works. Nonprofits that are transparent about failures in particular are vulnerable to a loss of funding.



Although technology is making it easier to productively learn at scale by collecting, analyzing, sharing, and aggregating information, overall the social sector lags behind the private and public sectors in the development of these platforms and tools. There are limited forums for sharing information and those that exist aren't widely used, but some are slowly gaining traction. However, there is considerable disparity in collaboration in different issue and geographic areas, and some areas such as health and education have experienced much more data sharing than the rest of the social sector.

As a result, we heard expectations of continued knowledge silos and an inability to take full advantage of the possibilities for field-level learning in the expected future. Without serious efforts to create incentives and reduce barriers to collaboration and collective action, organizations are not expected to truly prioritize sharing learnings with the field. Evaluations are expected to continue to largely be conducted in silos, with some increased coordination among funders. Shared data standards and integrated data systems may become more common, although without more systematic intervention real hurdles will likely remain. There's greater interest in big data and analytics, but most datasets are expected to remain small and historical without a data infrastructure push, and big data analytics only shows real promise in a few specific applications.

Where do we look for inspiration to get to a better future?

In the social sector, there are some ongoing and emergent efforts to aggregate and share learnings from the field that can be further promoted and supported. There have been multiple efforts to increase accountability and transparency about how foundations operate and make decisions, including foundation grants, performance data, and funding decisions. Platforms exist to share evaluation learnings, along with "what works" repositories. There are also multiple efforts to create common indicators to enable benchmarking of data, as well as a few bright spots in platforms for data aggregation and sharing.

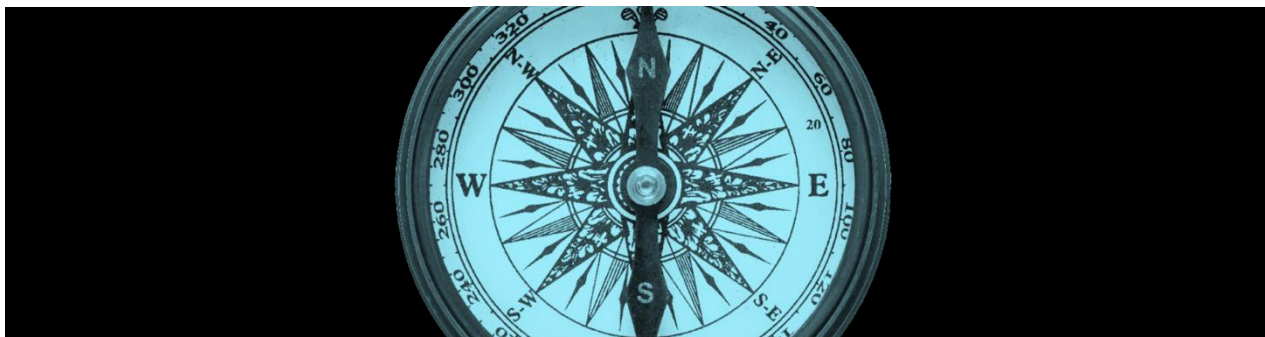
Outside of the social sector, there is wide array of exemplars and lessons to draw from with large companies using big data across geographies and organizational boundaries, industries that have solved common standards and interoperability issues, and multiple stakeholder open source and open data efforts. Efforts to open up and build on government data in particular offer important opportunities, examples, and lessons learned.

"Foundations themselves are struggling. They don't share evaluations across their own programs, let alone across a sector. They still rely heavily on calling each other up to make decisions, relying on networks, trying to shortcut the information overload by asking trusted partners what to read in order to feel as though they've done their due diligence."

—Director of an organization serving foundations and nonprofits

"There are increasing expectations for sharing and collaboration and an open source mentality. This applies not only to sharing information, but also to being collaborative and trying to be a thought partner..." —Foundation M&E professional

More productively learning at scale



A better future for learning at scale is one where:

Data, learning, and knowledge are shared openly and widely

In a better future, foundations and nonprofits use monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts to build evidence, and they share the results regardless of strategy or program success. They share information as openly and widely as possible while still respecting ethical considerations. Prior to sharing, organizations invest in translating their information so that it is helpful knowledge for other actors.

Bright spot practices to ensure knowledge is shared openly and widely at your organization

- **Create an open knowledge policy** for sharing materials that have been funded or produced by your organizations
 - **Publicly share grantee and constituent survey** results
 - **Publicly share evaluation results**
 - **Adopt an open licensing policy** that enables others to reproduce, distribute and adapt materials to promote learning and enable additional research and knowledge development
 - **Have grantees use open repositories** to enable broad access to knowledge products
 - **Use open standards for** your website knowledge materials to enable them to be more easily tracked and found
-

Existing bright spots in the field

- *Developing an open data policy*

The Laura and John Arnold Foundation (LJAF) created Guidelines for Investments in Research, criteria to ensure that research funded by LJAF meets the most rigorous standards of quality and transparency. The Guidelines require researchers receiving funding from LJAF to preregister their studies through the Open Science Framework before statistical analyses are performed and, if possible, before data are collected. In addition to preregistering studies, researchers are also expected to make their datasets and computer code publicly available to the extent possible while respecting any confidentiality or privacy requirements. Finally, researchers must report the results of the studies even if they are not published in a peer-reviewed journal. LJAF instituted the Guidelines to reduce publication bias and improve the reliability of empirical analysis.

- *Developing a social sector repository that makes open access to social sector knowledge an easy and expected practice*

Foundation Center's IssueLab is an open repository, providing free access to more than 20,000 social sector knowledge products such as case studies, evaluations, and white papers. Operating on the principle that "knowledge is a public good" which should be freely accessible to all, IssueLab encourages and enables the open publishing of field-based knowledge as expected practice in foundations and nonprofits. It also works with organizations to develop and curate topical collections that build on – and in turn, contribute to – the larger IssueLab platform when materials are added.

- *Enabling field-wide learning by sharing detailed data with researchers*

Crisis Text Line, a nonprofit that provides counseling services to teens via text message, shares detailed, anonymized data with approved researchers. Over 32 million text messages have been exchanged via Crisis Text Line since its launch, making it the U.S.'s largest open set of crisis data. The volume of messages and variety of content enables researchers to investigate trends and explore services and policies that can better support teens facing personal crises. One group of researchers, for example, is investigating how LGBTQ youth in various zip codes talk about their experiences and then is comparing those experiences to local school and government policies.

- *Using prospective registries to promote transparency and avoid the dangers of "publication bias"*

AllTrials, an international initiative led in the U.S. by Sense About Science USA, Dartmouth's Geisel School of Medicine and the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy & Clinical Practice, promotes the pre-registration of studies with an agreement to fully disclose study methods and results. The objective is to reduce the tendency of organizations to publicly share only positive results, which skews the field's understanding of what works and what doesn't. One example of the dangers of this "publication bias" was discovered with an anti-arrhythmia medication Lorainide. Numerous people died because original studies pointing to problems weren't published, resulting in other manufacturers developing similar drugs.

Where else can we find inspiration?

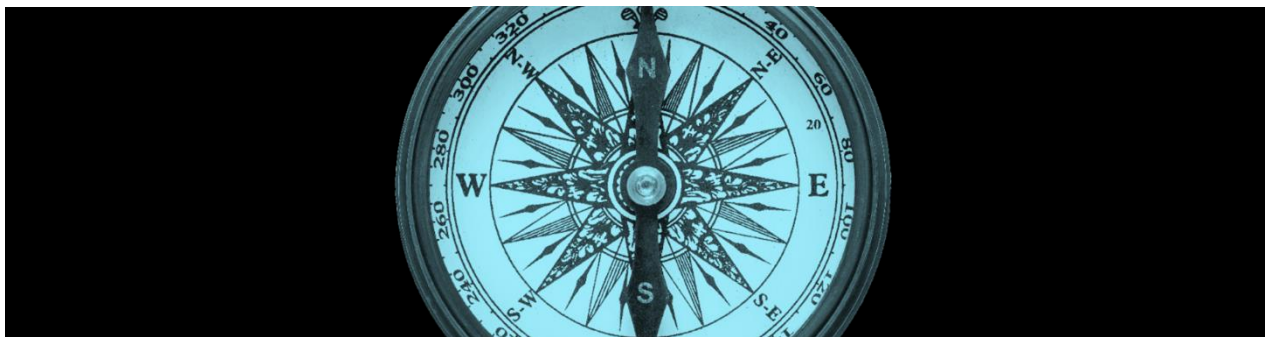
Using third parties to mediate data sharing

The Yale School of Medicine Open Data Access Project (YODA) serves as an independent third party reviewer for requests from researchers seeking access to Johnson & Johnson's clinical trials data. YODA takes full responsibility for investigating the requests and making decisions on data sharing.²⁵

What if a third party intermediary served as a responsible gatekeeper to increase accessibility to and safeguards for key social impact datasets?

For more examples of adjacencies related to more effectively putting decision-making at the center, see companion adjacency materials.

More productively learning at scale



A better future for learning at scale is one where:

Knowledge gaps and learning agendas are collaboratively undertaken

In a better future, there is greater focus on working collaboratively with actors in the system and learning together as a field. Organizations within issue areas consistently work together, perhaps via formalized communities of practice, to identify knowledge gaps, collaborate on learning agendas, and build collective evidence.

Bright spot practices to ensure collaborative undertakings at your organization

- **Map evidence gaps** with others working in your issue areas to help identify strategic learning priorities
- **Determine key learning questions** for stakeholders in the field to drive knowledge development
- **Create learning communities** to promote ongoing collective learning

Existing bright spots in the field

- *Collaborating with grantees to create a shared learning agenda and collectively prioritize issue areas*

The Vancouver Foundation's Fostering Change initiative created a learning community of its multi-year grantees and collaborated with them to develop a shared "learning agenda." The learning agenda, driven by the grantees' challenges and open questions, enabled the Foundation and its grantees to prioritize issue areas and tackle them together. Managers and frontline staff from each organization met every six weeks as a "shared learning and evaluation" working group. A different grantee hosted each meeting, allowing the grantees to see one another's sites and further enabling peer-to-peer learning.

- *Creating grantee cohorts that learn together with built-in evaluation support for the collective*

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, a private funder in Southern California, embeds collective learning in its six strategic initiatives, each of which may involve as many as 50 grantees working toward a shared set of goals. An external partner manages the evaluation and learning for each initiative. Edmund Cain, vice president of grant programs with the foundation, describes the approach: "[The evaluation partner's] job is not to issue a report card on each grantee's performance but to track the collective impact...on that particular issue over time." This strategy not only promotes collaborative learning, but also reduces the burden on grantees to manage their evaluation and learning.

- *Mapping evidence gaps to help identify strategic research priorities*

3ie, an international development grantmaking NGO, develops evidence gap maps (EGMs) to facilitate evidence informed decision-making about program and research investments. EGMs are collections of information on the effects of development policies and programs in a particular sector or thematic area, such as education, water, sanitation, hygiene, and adolescent health. They provide a graphical display of existing and ongoing systematic reviews and impact evaluations in a sector or sub-sector, structured around a framework of interventions and outcomes. 3ie maps are available on an interactive online platform, which allows users to explore the evidence base and findings of relevant studies. By identifying what we know and do not know about “what works”, the EGMs can be used to inform strategic priorities. For example, 3ie found that in the land use and forestry sector, few studies assess if forest protection activities result in trade-offs between food security and climate change mitigation, suggesting new studies are needed to address this gap.

Where else can we find inspiration?

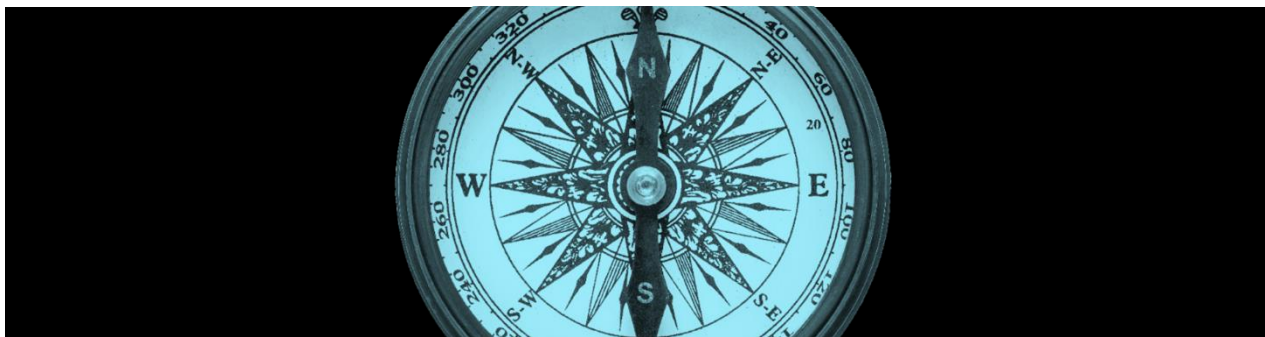
Mapping data gaps to determine where to focus efforts

Earth Microbiome is a crowd-sourced open science effort to analyze microbial life on the planet that includes the mapping of “dark matter” as part of its efforts. Up to 99% of microbial organisms are deemed unknown dark matter, which biologists can’t culture in a lab due to limited knowledge or insufficient growth conditions.²⁶

What if funders could broadly map out existing knowledge to help identify where there are critical gaps in information that need to be addressed?

For more examples of adjacencies related to more effectively putting decision-making at the center, see companion adjacency materials.

More productively learning at scale



A better future for learning at scale is one where:

Data is integrated at the scale needed to assess social impact

In a better future, data is integrated across organizations through common indicators or data interoperability. Shared data systems are common and developed using open source, open standards, and open innovation principles and practices. Integrated data systems overcome data silos and facilitate issue-level learning at the scale of the problems that organizations seek to address.

Bright spot practices to ensure data and methods needed to inform decisions at your organization

- **Coordinate on shared metrics** with organizations working in the same issue areas
- **Create an open data policy** for sharing data that has been funded or produced by your organizations
- **Promote open data principles, standards and practices** in the issue areas in which you work
- Where relevant, **support the development of data collaboratives** in your issue areas that share data across organizations and sectors
- Where relevant, **support the development of integrated data systems** in your issue areas that aggregate governmental administrative information for the purpose of learning which interventions are working and why

Existing bright spots in the field

- *Using a shared measurement system to see the progress of both the field and individual organizations*

Grounded Solution's HomeKeeper program standardizes the way affordable housing programs across their sector track data, measure outcomes, and implement effective practices. Over 70 member organizations pay an annual fee to use HomeKeeper, a cloud-based app. Built by and for practitioners, HomeKeeper helps programs manage their day to day program activities, while tracking a core set of fields to produce a common social impact report. HomeKeeper organizations seamlessly share social impact data with the HomeKeeper National Data Hub where information is aggregated and shared across the sector. HomeKeeper's shared measurement system creates an understanding of how the field as a whole is meeting the needs of underserved buyers, but also allows members to benchmark their data to their peers.

- *Connecting local place-based initiatives to inform national field building*

National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP) combines local expertise with the power of a national peer-learning network to strengthen communities. NNIP is made up of independent data intermediaries in 30 cities that have a shared mission to help community stakeholders use neighborhood-level data for better decision-making, with a focus on assisting organizations and residents in underserved communities. NNIP is supported and coordinated by the Urban Institute, a nonpartisan research organization. One of Urban Institute's roles is to lead cross-site initiatives across local partners, enabling them to share their successes and challenges, and then synthesizes lessons from their work to inform other localities, as well as national policy. The Partnership recently launched "Turning the Corner", for example, a pilot project in Detroit, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and other cities to develop protocols and methodologies for monitoring neighborhood revitalization that can then be adapted by other cities and used to advance the field.

- *Creating a location-based open data platform to improve transparency and decision-making*

Connecticut Data Collaborative (CT Data), a cross-sector partnership, compiles data from disparate sources including the state's various departments, integrates and curates the data, and provides open access in order to inform residents, nonprofits, policymakers, and funders. CT Data enables users to access organized, processed data or download raw data for independent analysis. CT Data provides over 135 datasets that can be explored by topic (e.g., education, housing) and Connecticut geographies. By making data accessible, CT Data has informed planning, policy, and decision-making. For example, as part of the Racial Profiling Prohibition Project, communities have access to town-level traffic stop data by race.

- *Building a social sector big data platform to share social impact data*

Illumidata, a suite of data services currently under development by the Council of Michigan Foundations in collaboration with leaders in data analytics, aggregates and analyzes data for social sector actors of all sizes. The platform will provide access and analysis for baseline data that includes more than 500,000 social data sets across issue areas. Organizations can also contribute their own data, protected by a rigorous data rights management policy. Users can then overlay their own program data with related public data and the shared data of other users, leading to greater insight, more meaningful impact assessment, and the identification of gaps and trends.

- *Bringing diverse datasets together to make invisible connections visible*

The Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX) is an open platform managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to share data about humanitarian crises. The goal of HDX is to make data easier to find and use for analysis. Over 200 organizations are sharing 4,400 datasets that are being accessed by users in almost every country in the world. For example, HDX includes 84 datasets for the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, covering changes in global food prices, landslide locations, health infrastructure, and population movements. These datasets can be analyzed together to understand recovery efforts in Nepal. Building on the work of HDX, OCHA will establish a new Centre for Humanitarian Data in The Hague in mid-2017 to further increase data use and impact in the humanitarian sector.

- *Using common indicators to compare progress across geographies*

The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta joined 20 states and four cities in producing an annual Civic Health Index, using common indicators that enable comparison across the participating geographies and through time. When the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta made the Civic Health Index its primary gauge for progress, it adopted the common indicators already used by the other participating geographies. It collected the same data points for comparison in 2014, and has continued to collect data at regular intervals thereafter. In the interim, the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta has enhanced its efforts to seek common data within the metropolitan region's 23-counties and has worked with the Atlanta Regional Council's "Metro Voices" project. Consistently using these common indicators, enables the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta to compare across peer organizations and across time.

Where else can we find inspiration?

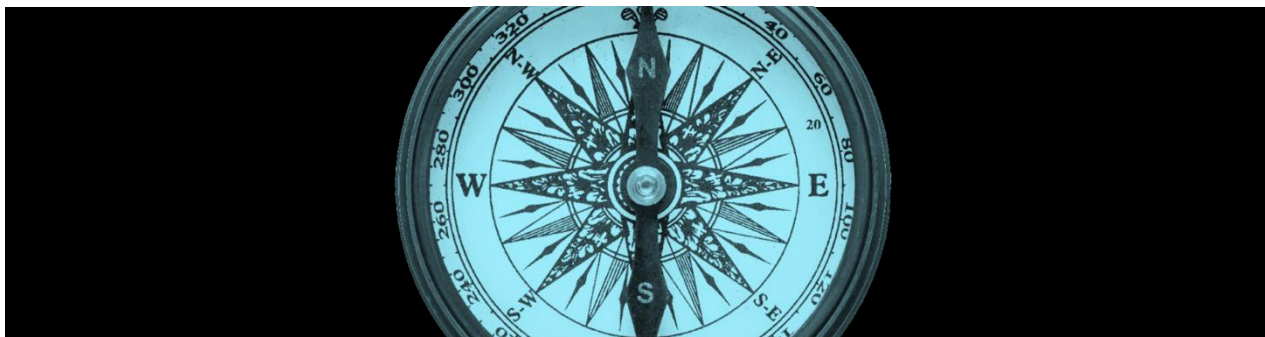
Aggregating individual data on collective platforms

PatientsLikeMe's Open Research Exchange is an open platform for developing, validating, and sharing health outcome measures that better reflect patients' experiences with a disease. Researchers, can get feedback from real patients to test and improve health outcome measures to make them more relevant to a patient's health and quality of life.²⁷

What would it look like if funders aggregated data so that it could be made more accessible and useful for informing the day-to-day work of grantees?

For more examples of adjacencies related to more effectively putting decision-making at the center, see companion adjacency materials.

More productively learning at scale



A better future for learning at scale is one where:

Evaluation synthesis, replication, and meta-evaluation are supported

In a better future, evaluation synthesis, replication, and meta-evaluation become standard practice. Investments in shared infrastructure enable organizations to access higher quality information and synthesize, replicate, and learn from that information. Synthesis, replication and meta-evaluation enable foundations and nonprofits to make effective strategic choices based on that information.

Bright spot practices to support synthesis, replication, and meta-evaluation at your organization

- **Support the development of systematic reviews** and meta-analyses in your issue areas
- **Promote the use and dissemination of systematic reviews** and meta-analyses, including of data that you have funded or created
- **Support the creation of repositories and platforms** for systematic reviews and meta-analyses

Existing bright spots in the field

- *Promoting replication to confirm the robustness of impact evaluation evidence*

3ie, an international development grantmaking NGO, established its replication program in 2012 to improve the quality and reliability of impact evaluation evidence. It incentivizes the replication of influential, innovative, and controversial evaluations of development interventions. 3ie supports efforts to use existing data to reproduce and test the strength of published results. Independent replication lends increased credibility to impact evaluation evidence, whether the studies confirm the robustness of the original findings or provide additional insights suggesting alternative pathways. 3ie oversees the multi-stage replication paper review process, publishes the resulting papers, and acts as a thought leader for research transparency.

- *Aggregating clearinghouses across multiple issue areas*

The Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative created the Results First Clearinghouse Database, a one-stop online resource that provides information on the effectiveness of various interventions as rated by eight national research clearinghouses. The clearinghouses included in the Database conduct systematic research reviews to identify what works in areas including youth development, criminal justice, and education. To address the challenges posed by the existence of multiple clearinghouses, the Database compiles the information in one place, reconciles the different clearinghouse rating systems, and provides the data in a clear, accessible format.

- *Creating a "one-stop meta-analysis shop" to help improve collective knowledge*

Cochrane, a global network of researchers, professionals, patients, and people interested in health, works to improve evidence-informed health decisions by producing high-quality, systematic health study reviews. Cochrane's network of 37,000 members from more than 130 countries, can serve as a powerful resource for meta-analyses of what works. The systematic reviews provide transparent overviews of the range of research studies on a given health subject to assess the current state of knowledge for that topic.

- *Synthesizing existing evaluative evidence to inform strategy*

Foundation Center's IssueLab collaborated with a foundation on a synthesis review of key success factors required to achieve social, economic, and ecological benefits for small-scale coastal fisheries in developing countries. The synthesis review aggregated existing data from more than 150 reports to identify 20 key factors believed to influence success in small-scale fisheries. For each factor, the review lists what is known in the literature, identifies different stakeholder priorities, and provides critical questions for funders and implementing organizations. The final synthesis, an interactive visualization of key findings, and a digital collection of the reports used in the synthesis, were all openly licensed and made freely available through IssueLab. The foundation used the findings to guide the development of a new initiative strategy.

Where else can we find inspiration?

Enabling independent verification of the information of others

Provenance, a UK-based company, is using new blockchain technology to stamp out illegal fishing. Blockchain is a digital ledger originally used for the currency Bitcoin. It enables local fishermen to send SMS messages to register their catch on the blockchain, and the identification of the fish is then transferred to a supplier at each stage along the supply chain. Information about the complete journey of the fish can be accessed and verified by end buyers using their smartphones.²⁸

What would it look like if philanthropy leveraged technology to make its data and results more transparent so others could learn from or confirm findings?

For more examples of adjacencies related to more effectively putting decision-making at the center, see companion adjacency materials.

Calls to action

More productively learning at scale

To get to a better future in which we are able to overcome knowledge and data silos to more productively learn at scale, we need to go beyond what we're doing today to embrace much more coordinated and integrated monitoring, evaluation, and learning. However, it is important to note that most activity will likely be at the level of issue areas rather than the social sector as a whole. The following are some high-priority hypotheses about how to get to the better future for learning at scale.

1 Data, learning, and knowledge are shared openly and widely

How can we share what we're learning, good and bad, at a much greater level than we do today? Beyond the open knowledge and data policies discussed in the earlier section, there are multiple calls to action that funders can try:



Overcoming disincentives to share among nonprofits: Nonprofit programs are typically evaluated individually. What if a funder or group of funders provided incentives to a group of grantees working in the same issue area with different theories of change to support aggregated learning and evaluation across multiple organizations?



Expanding the scope of “what works” directories: One concern about “what works” directories is the focus on wide applicability of program-level evidence. What if a directory or directories experimented with compiling evidence using more selection criteria than experimental rigor: looking at the likelihood of effectiveness in different settings and populations, with variation in implementation approaches; and/or at community and systems-levels? ²⁹



Building trust among intermediaries through anonymization: One disincentive to share data is that foundations and nonprofits do not want to be publically penalized for adverse results. What if several nonprofits in an issue area submit their data and results to a trusted intermediary, who then anonymized and aggregated the data? Or if a foundation incentivized nonprofits to contribute?

2 Knowledge gaps and learning agendas are collaboratively undertaken

To get to a better future where we work more collaboratively with other organizations in understanding and developing learning agendas in our issue areas, the development of evidence maps and synthetic literature reviews we brought up. We also heard other creative ideas that could be tried:



Creating a diagnostic for helping groups learn together: Some issue areas are much further along in terms of shared learnings, data collaboration, and collective knowledge development than others. What if a funder supported the creation of a diagnostic that detailed and assessed the conditions that need to exist and key choices for collective learning for an issue area?



Promoting issue-level, action-oriented learning: What would it look like if more foundations operated as “learning foundations,” orienting grantmaking to help answer key questions needed by other decision-makers in the issue area? What if one or several existing funders experimented with using a part of their portfolio to focus specifically on funding to answer key learning questions to spread the practice? What if organizations who work with those setting up new foundations helped explore this approach?

Calls to action

More productively learning at scale

3 Data is integrated at scale needed to assess social impact

Open, shared and integrated data are watchwords in thinking creatively about what to try to increase the scale and speed at which we learn:



Enabling better sharing of data through integrated data sets: Governmental administrative data often contains important data related to social interventions, yet it is often either not available to social sector organizations or not configured to answer outcome-related questions. What if a group of funders working on a particular issue mapped and developed the ecosystem for the use of administrative data sets to understand intervention outcomes?



Promoting open source and data extraction: There are basic technical challenges involved in sharing data in the social sector given the number of proprietary systems and the structure of existing systems that limit data extraction. This can be relevant for sharing across organizations and within them. What if a funder or funders supported the development of tools to enable data extraction and sharing from key systems for a given issue area?



Promoting common data hubs: Connecting program management software to a common data hub for a given issue area can enable benchmarking and aggregated information. What if a set of funders and grantees worked to assess the necessary conditions for developing this or related models for specific issue areas and then put their learnings into action?

4 Evaluation synthesis, replication, and meta-evaluation are supported

To get to a better future with higher-quality information in the social sector, the following calls to action may help us better learn across individual studies, data sets, and methodologies:



Testing different large-scale approaches: There are presently different hypotheses about how best to learn about variability in what works in an issue area, including multi-site evaluation approaches and data analytics approaches (e.g. machine learning). What if a funder chose an issue area and compared learnings using both approaches?



Dedicating resources to synthesize existing literature: There is extensive existing research in the field, but much of it is unavailable in a digestible way. For a given issue area, what if a funder or collection of funders shared data/studies and support issue curators/translators to synthesize existing research to create a series of comprehensive issue area reviews?



Enabling safe independent verification of the information of others: It can be a challenge to balance data openness with privacy and usage. For a particular issue area, what if a third party intermediary served as a responsible gatekeeper to increase accessibility to and safeguards for key social impact datasets?

Appendix I: Collected bright spot practices

Bright spot practices

More effectively putting decision-making at the center

Spreading these bright spot practices could help the field gain traction on a better future in which social sector organizations more effectively put decision-making at the center.

1 Information for on-the-ground decision-making is prioritized

- Reduce grantee reporting burden and simplify what's needed by funders to minimize diversion of time and resources
- Begin with data needed by front-line for decision-making and build reporting requirements from there
- Leverage data as by-product of user actions and transactions when possible
- Support the development of low-cost tools useful for front-line users
- Attend to totality of data collectors' and data users' experience, addressing individual motivations and abilities

2 Learning is embedded and continuous

- Embed experimentation, hypothesis-testing, and course correction to continuously improve
- Focus on what works and what doesn't for improvement rather than identifying success and failure
- Focus on closing feedback loops with behavior change as a result of new learnings
- Create incentives for data use, learning, and adaptation throughout the organization
- Maintain a supportive learning environment that is open to new ideas and differences of opinion, and that provides time for reflection
- Develop concrete learning processes and practices with clear purpose and goals
- Have leadership promote and reinforce the value of learning processes and practices

3 There is greater investment in monitoring, evaluation, and learning capacity

- Ensure nonprofits have sufficient resources for funder data requests, including funding for monitoring, evaluation, and learning design
- Promote broad and in-depth data-oriented capacity building that integrates data use into organizational culture and leadership practices, technology, data processes, and strategy development
- Provide "embedded resources" to help organizations better use data and evaluative thinking
- Promote peer, individual organization, and group learning and training
- Create time for more and deeper discussions between funders and grantees about learnings, including what hasn't worked

4 The data and methods needed to inform decisions are available

- Invest in data and analytics infrastructure needed for learning and decision-making
- Incentivize good data collection throughout the data supply chain by making sure it's relevant to data collectors and informed by user needs
- Support the development of tools for non-expert users
- Use compatible applications across the organization to enable timely and ongoing data sharing, with the ability to parse information in different ways

Bright spot practices

Better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion

Broad adoption of these bright spot practices could help the field avoid the expected future and instead better empower constituents and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion through monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities.

1 Equity is consistently considered in and supported by MEL efforts

- Ensure AEA's statement on cultural competence essential practices is followed, including eliminating bias in language and using culturally appropriate evaluation methods
- Assess demographics and identify relevant existing inequities
- Consider equity implications of intervention and monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts, including intended and unintended consequences
- Collect disaggregated data on the effects of an intervention broken out by different groups of constituents. Look for gaps between groups
- Use an asset-based framing in data collection and analysis, including social and cultural resources that might otherwise be overlooked (e.g. informal child care or cultural sources of strength)
- Build more diverse and inclusive staff and partnerships for monitoring, evaluation, and learning roles
- Develop diversity, equity, and inclusion competencies and capacities for staff engaged in monitoring, evaluation, and learning

2 Constituent feedback is an essential practice

- Develop a process of ongoing constituent feedback for learning, collaboration, and improvement
- Engage and co-create with constituents throughout the feedback process, from design through action, in ways that make them feel valued and consulted
- Incorporate constituent feedback into decision-making to make course corrections
- Promote skill development and training to provide staff with the capacities needed to develop and use constituent feedback tools and technologies

3 Constituents are empowered to make their own choices

- Build community capacity to collect, analyze and use their own data
- Enable constituents to define what is most relevant and needed
- Enable constituents to guide development and changes to programs and initiatives
- Enable constituents to co-create together interventions that work for them

4 Data rights are secured

- Get consent from constituents for data collection and make clear how it will be used
- Enable constituents to access and remove their data where relevant if they choose
- Protect the privacy of constituent data and prevent them from being identified
- Protect how sensitive information is shared
- Destroy constituent data when it is not needed
- Act in ways that promote equity, fairness and the best interest of constituents when collecting and using personal information

Bright spot practices

More productively learning at scale

Spreading these bright spot practices could help us make real progress in more productively learn at scale for the issue areas in which we work.

1 Knowledge is shared openly and widely

- Create an open knowledge policy for sharing materials that have been funded or produced by your organizations
- Publicly share grantee and constituent survey results
- Publicly share evaluation results
- Adopt an open licensing policy that enables others to reproduce, distribute and adapt materials to promote learning and enable additional research and knowledge development
- Have grantees use open repositories to enable broad access to knowledge products
- Use open standards for your website knowledge materials to enable them to be more easily tracked and found

2 Knowledge gaps and learning agendas are collaboratively undertaken

- Map evidence gaps with others working in your issue areas to help identify strategic learning priorities
- Determine key learning questions for stakeholders in the field to drive knowledge development
- Create learning communities to promote ongoing collective learning

3 Data is integrated at scale needed to assess social impact

- Coordinate on shared metrics with organizations working in the same issue areas
- Create an open data policy for sharing data that has been funded or produced by your organizations
- Promote open data principles, standards and practices in the issue areas in which you work
- Where relevant, support the development of data collaboratives in your issue areas that share data across organizations and sectors
- Where relevant, support the development of integrated data systems in your issue areas that aggregate governmental administrative information for the purpose of learning which interventions are working and why.

4 Evaluation synthesis, replication, and meta-evaluation are supported

- Support the development of systematic reviews and meta-analyses in your issue areas
- Promote the use and dissemination of systematic reviews and meta-analyses, including of data that you have funded or created
- Support the creation of repositories and platforms for systematic reviews and meta-analyses

Appendix II: Collected calls to action

Calls to action

More effectively putting decision-making at the center

Through our research, innovation lab and multiple convenings, we've gathered promising calls to action to inspire innovation. These calls to action include actions that individual organizations can undertake, as well as calls to action for collections of organizations. They are hypotheses about what can spur decision-making at the center, and they are meant to provoke further ideas, adaptations, and refinements.

1

Information for on-the-ground decision-making is prioritized

Putting decision-making at the center means first and foremost that front-line decision-makers serving constituents directly have the information they need for effective decision-making beyond a focus on accountability reporting. These calls to action explore possible calls to action to reach that goal:



Innovating new ways of creating and sharing monitoring results: Grant reports are typically a great deal of work for grantees, yet are too often left unread and are seldom used in significant ways by foundations for ongoing decision-making. What could it look like if grant reporting was fundamentally rethought? What if a funder worked with grantees (individually or in related clusters) to use data that is meaningful for the grantees first and foremost, or data that is already collected by the grantees, but would suffice for compliance and monitoring purposes for the foundation?



Differentiating the roles of funders and nonprofits in developing evidence: Nonprofits do not generally have the resources, skills, or incentives to rigorously evaluate impact. What if a foundation or group of foundations took responsibility for testing the quality of broad ideas (e.g. does microfinance work) and nonprofits were only responsible for assessing the quality of their implementation (e.g. monitoring)?¹⁸

2

Learning is embedded and continuous

To get to a better future where foundation and nonprofit cultures better promote ongoing learning for improvement, possible approaches include a focus on barriers, incentives, and promoting innovation:



Applying behavioral design principles to help organizations better understand the barriers to organizational learning: Many foundations and nonprofits aspire to be "learning organizations," but struggle with how in practical terms to embed organizational learning into their culture and operations. Can we adapt materials in the rapidly emerging behavioral design space to create a diagnostic and tools to help funders and/or nonprofits understand where and why measurement processes break down and better implement organizational learning?



Incentivizing iterative, rapid-cycle and adaptive learning: The fear of sharing negative information can stifle innovation and growth. Can a group of funders systematically experiment with multiple approaches that reward grantees for identifying problems and solutions rather than the results themselves?



Lifting up learning as a core pillar: Given that establishing learning cultures in the social sector continues to be a challenge, what if funders explored how to promote "decision-based evidence making"? What if a group of funders held a challenge or offered incentives for organizations that developed innovations in testing hypotheses and experimenting to promote action-oriented learning?



Developing ratings and benchmarking of philanthropies on their setting of strategic goals and their learning: Using established learning organization best practices, can we develop ways to assess how well organizations are integrating strategic learning into their practices to drive improvement and accountability?

Calls to action

More effectively putting decision-making at the center

3 There is greater investment in monitoring, evaluation, and learning capacity

Beyond simply increasing resources spent on individual capacity-building, we have heard ideas to promote realistic expectations for leadership and efforts to promote creative ways to serve the field more broadly:



Training board members to set more realistic expectations for evaluation: Board members play a crucial role in determining the priorities of their organizations, yet they often have little knowledge about the challenges and limitations for assessing impact. Can we create board training materials that both inform board members of what to look for and set realistic expectations for evidence development?



Developing a “minute-clinic”-like mass MEL offering: With a focus on right-sized and cost-effective approaches, can evaluators move beyond an individualized approach to provide mass customization serving large numbers of nonprofits as needed? Could a funder pilot an offering that promoted widely available, “good enough” services?



Promoting rotating resources: What if funders supported evaluation “circuit riders” who could cost-effectively rotate through a number of nonprofit organizations to act as coaches in evaluative thinking and the use of available organizational and issue area evidence?

4 The data and methods needed to inform decisions are available

To get to a better future with higher quality and more sufficient data, we need to think beyond incremental improvements. The following are calls to action that could be tried to jump-start wider analytics and technology use in the sector:



Creating integrated data and social science approach(es) for evidence development: The role of data scientists in the social sector is likely to grow substantially over time, yet data scientists and social scientists have very different training, knowledge, and assumptions. What if data scientists and social scientists were brought together in a systematic effort to define an integrated approach to roles and evidence creation in the social sector?



Creating embedded technology capacity to develop widely needed tools: Insufficient and low-quality data is pervasive in the social sector. Technology tools and infrastructure development could help simplify MEL tasks for organizations, and cross-functional teams could help build internal capacity. What if a funder or funders promoted a “Code for America”-like model with MEL and data analytics teams for a year of service to develop digital tools? The team could be embedded in a single foundation, but could would work on organizational-level tools and technologies that would be relevant across an issue area.



Conducting R&D on promising technologies: There is some debate about the efficacy and biases of new technologies and techniques for the social sector, such as predictive analytics and machine learning. What if a funder supported an R&D initiative to test the applicability and usefulness of data analytics approaches (i.e. how accurate and effective were they, given concerns about underlying data)?

Calls to action

Better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion

To get to a better future in which equity is integral to monitoring, evaluation, and learning, and we consistently engage constituents in ongoing and systematic feedback that provides choice and agency, we need to actively chart a new path. The following are some high-priority hypotheses about how to get to the better future.

1 Equity is consistently considered in and supported by MEL efforts

Without explicit efforts to integrate equity into everything we do, we are unlikely to make the transformative changes that our field leaders and experts across multiple disciplines identified as part of a better future. For monitoring, evaluation and learning efforts, we've heard multiple ideas to try:



Developing asset-based resources: Many actors use data with a deficit-frame, focusing entirely on challenges communities face rather than also including strengths and resources they have to draw upon. By focusing solely on deficits, funders can often overlook real assets that can be used to help solve critical community challenges. What if we developed best practice resources and a toolkit for asset-based monitoring, evaluation, and learning, including for the creation of relevant data?



Developing standards for cultural competence and equity-focused evaluation: While the AEA has guiding principles for cultural competence, there aren't clear standards for evaluators to demonstrate evidence of cultural competence during the selection process. What could it look like if clear evidence of proficiency were a standard part of evaluator selection? Could a third party develop a cultural competence examination and issue certification to evaluators?

2 Constituent feedback is an essential practice

How can we get to a better future where collecting constituent feedback is an expected, systematic, and ongoing practice for nonprofits and foundations? The following calls to action are just the beginning in broadening and deepening practice:



Create tools to help organizations systematically collect constituent insight. While momentum to gather constituent feedback exists, collecting constituent feedback and insights still appears elusive to many organizations. Could a group of organizations create a "constituent insight toolkit" that helps social sector organizations navigate the range of available options (e.g. direct feedback, behavior tracking) and catalogues resources for quick and easy implementation?



Measuring and tracking the integration of constituent insight to help hold organizations accountable for its use: Could the field develop a way of measuring the incorporation of constituent voice to enable donors to make funding decisions based on the use of constituent voice and to enable organizations to benchmark against themselves and others for improvement? Could a group of organizations in an issue area agree to prioritize these benchmarks in funding decisions, with assistance for implementation?

Calls to action

Better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion

3 Constituents are empowered to make their own choices

To get to a better future in which constituents have agency in defining their needs and assessing the success of interventions, there are a range of approaches we could try:



Providing the infrastructure for constituent decision-making: Some resource allocation and other initiative decisions could be made by constituents themselves if the infrastructure existed to enable them to provide their votes. What if funders supported an initiative to model what real constituent-informed decision-making would look like and how it would operate?



Connecting constituents with each other: Constituents can be an important source of information and assistance for each other. What if one or more organizations scale platforms and/or develop resource guidelines to enable organizations to promote sharing and connection between constituents?



Identifying interventions where cash transfers are a meaningful counterfactual: What if we developed an analysis of issues and types of interventions where cash transfers could be a viable counterfactual, to promote calls to action to determine if specific interventions outperformed cash transfers? This would both shift the paradigm to one that presumes constituent agency and knowledge and create a useful experimental comparison.

4 Data rights are secured

Without assurance that we can adequately safeguard the privacy and security of constituents' data, we won't make true progress across many of the elements of the characteristics of a better future. We can try multiple paths to make real progress:



Using data stewards: There are particular concerns about the development of open and integrated data systems with the data of vulnerable populations. Could funders support the establishment of data stewards for key data systems who would make informed decisions to ensure the integrity of the data use?



Developing common tools and technologies: Nonprofits often don't have the resources to adequately ensure that their constituent and other data is safe and protected. What if one or more funders supported the development of a shared software for nonprofits to install add-ons for privacy, security, etc., or the development of shared digital services?



Compensating constituents for their data: Constituents are not directly compensated when their data is used. Are there certain data, issues, or populations where compensating constituents would be productive? What if funders compensated constituents for their data financially or through other means, or otherwise treated it as a real asset belonging to the constituents?

Calls to action

More productively learning at scale

To get to a better future in which we are able to overcome knowledge and data silos to more productively learn at scale, we need to go beyond what we're doing today to embrace much more coordinated and integrated monitoring, evaluation, and learning. However, it is important to note that most activity will likely be at the level of issue areas rather than the social sector as a whole. The following are some high-priority hypotheses about how to get to the better future for learning at scale.

1 Data, learning, and knowledge are shared openly and widely

How can we share what we're learning, good and bad, at a much greater level than we do today? Beyond the open knowledge and data policies discussed in the earlier section, there are multiple calls to action that funders can try:



Overcoming disincentives to share among nonprofits: Nonprofit programs are typically evaluated individually. What if a funder or group of funders provided incentives to a group of grantees working in the same issue area with different theories of change to support aggregated learning and evaluation across multiple organizations?



Expanding the scope of “what works” directories: One concern about “what works” directories is the focus on wide applicability of program-level evidence. What if a directory or directories experimented with compiling evidence using more selection criteria than experimental rigor: looking at the likelihood of effectiveness in different settings and populations, with variation in implementation approaches; and/or at community and systems-levels? ²⁹



Building trust among intermediaries through anonymization: One disincentive to share data is that foundations and nonprofits do not want to be publically penalized for adverse results. What if several nonprofits in an issue area submit their data and results to a trusted intermediary, who then anonymized and aggregated the data? Or if a foundation incentivized nonprofits to contribute?

2 Knowledge gaps and learning agendas are collaboratively undertaken

To get to a better future where we work more collaboratively with other organizations in understanding and developing learning agendas in our issue areas, the development of evidence maps and synthetic literature reviews we brought up. We also heard other creative ideas that could be tried:



Creating a diagnostic for helping groups learn together: Some issue areas are much further along in terms of shared learnings, data collaboration, and collective knowledge development than others. What if a funder supported the creation of a diagnostic that detailed and assessed the conditions that need to exist and key choices for collective learning for an issue area?



Promoting issue-level, action-oriented learning: What would it look like if more foundations operated as “learning foundations,” orienting grantmaking to help answer key questions needed by other decision-makers in the issue area? What if one or several existing funders experimented with using a part of their portfolio to focus specifically on funding to answer key learning questions to spread the practice? What if organizations who work with those setting up new foundations helped explore this approach?

Calls to action

More productively learning at scale

3 Data is integrated at scale needed to assess social impact

Open, shared and integrated data are watchwords in thinking creatively about what to try to increase the scale and speed at which we learn:



Enabling better sharing of data through integrated data sets: Governmental administrative data often contains important data related to social interventions, yet it is often either not available to social sector organizations or not configured to answer outcome-related questions. What if a group of funders working on a particular issue mapped and developed the ecosystem for the use of administrative data sets to understand intervention outcomes?



Promoting open source and data extraction: There are basic technical challenges involved in sharing data in the social sector given the number of proprietary systems and the structure of existing systems that limit data extraction. This can be relevant for sharing across organizations and within them. What a funder of funders supported the development of tools to enable data extraction and sharing from key systems for a given issue area?



Promoting common data hubs: Connecting program management software to a common data hub for a given issue area can enable benchmarking and aggregated information. What if a set of funders and grantees worked to assess the necessary conditions for developing this or related models for specific issue areas and then put their learnings into action?

4 Evaluation synthesis, replication, and meta-evaluation are supported

To get to a better future with higher-quality information in the social sector, the following calls to action may help us better learn across individual studies, data sets, and methodologies:



Testing different large-scale approaches: There are presently different hypotheses about how best to learn about variability in what works in an issue area, including multi-site evaluation approaches and data analytics approaches (e.g. machine learning). What if a funder chose an issue area and compared learnings using both approaches?



Dedicating resources to synthesize existing literature: There is extensive existing research in the field, but much of it is unavailable in a digestible way. For a given issue area, what if a funder or collection of funders shared data/studies and support issue curators/translators to synthesize existing research to create a series of comprehensive issue area reviews?



Enabling safe independent verification of the information of others: It can be a challenge to balance data openness with privacy and usage. For a particular issue area, what if a third party intermediary served as a responsible gatekeeper to increase accessibility to and safeguards for key social impact datasets?

Appendix III: Definitions

Definitions

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning

- **Monitoring** “is the ongoing collection of information about program implementation and the shifting strategic context. It helps us understand what is and is not working, and what is emerging in our fields.”
- **Evaluation** “is the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data for the purpose of determining the value of and decision-making about a program or policy. Evaluation looks at what we have set out to do, what we have accomplished, and how we accomplished it.”
- **Learning** “is the use of data and insights from a variety of information-gathering approaches—including monitoring and evaluation—to inform strategy and decision-making.”

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

- **Diversity** “encompass[es] the demographic mix of a specific collection of people, taking into account elements of human difference, but focusing particularly on:
 - Racial and ethnic groups: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Hispanics/Latinos/Latinas, African Americans and blacks, and American Indians and Alaska Natives
 - LGBT populations
 - People with disabilities
 - Women”
- **Inclusion** “[r]efers to the degree to which diverse individuals are able to participate fully in the decision-making processes within an organization or group. While a truly “inclusive” group is necessarily diverse, a ‘diverse’ group may or may not be ‘inclusive’.”
- **Equity:** “Improving equity is to promote justice, impartiality and fairness within the procedures, processes, and distribution of resources by institutions or systems. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the underlying or root causes of outcome disparities within our society.”

Constituents

- **Constituents** are the people who are intended to benefit from a program or other intervention. “A beneficiary passively receives what its benefactor gives it. A constituent authorizes what aid and philanthropy can do. A beneficiary is not empowered to control what affects it. A constituent can affect decision-making.”

Sources: Questions amended from GEO. 2012. *Four Essentials for Evaluation Essentials*. Monitoring, evaluation, and learning definitions come from David and Lucile Packard Foundation’s *Guiding Principles and Practices for Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning*. Diversity, equity, and inclusion definitions come from D5 Coalition. *What Is DEI?* Distinction between the terms “constituent” and “beneficiary” come from Feedback Labs. 2015. *Do you still use the word “beneficiary”?*

Appendix IV: Information flows

Information flows in the social sector

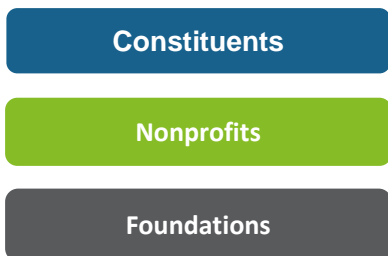
The following “Information Flows Map” shows the different places that data and information are exchanged among actors in the social sector to enable greater understanding in identifying challenges and generating new ideas. This Flows Map underlines that we are talking about foundations, nonprofits, and the constituents they serve; and that monitoring, evaluation, and learning take place both between and within the boundaries of organizations. It also enables us to think through the many feedback loops involved in these exchanges.

Mapping “Current State” Information Flows

- This map is intended to depict the flow of information (i.e., not resources)
- This map reflects the current state, not an ideal or future world
- As much as possible, this map depicts a “typical” flow of information, intended to be generally applicable while recognizing that there are many variations among foundations and nonprofits
- External actors are **not** included in the map. However, external actors do have influence in shaping incentives, providing expertise, and sharing learnings. These external actors include: government, business, publications & media, evaluators, academia, and software & analytics providers.

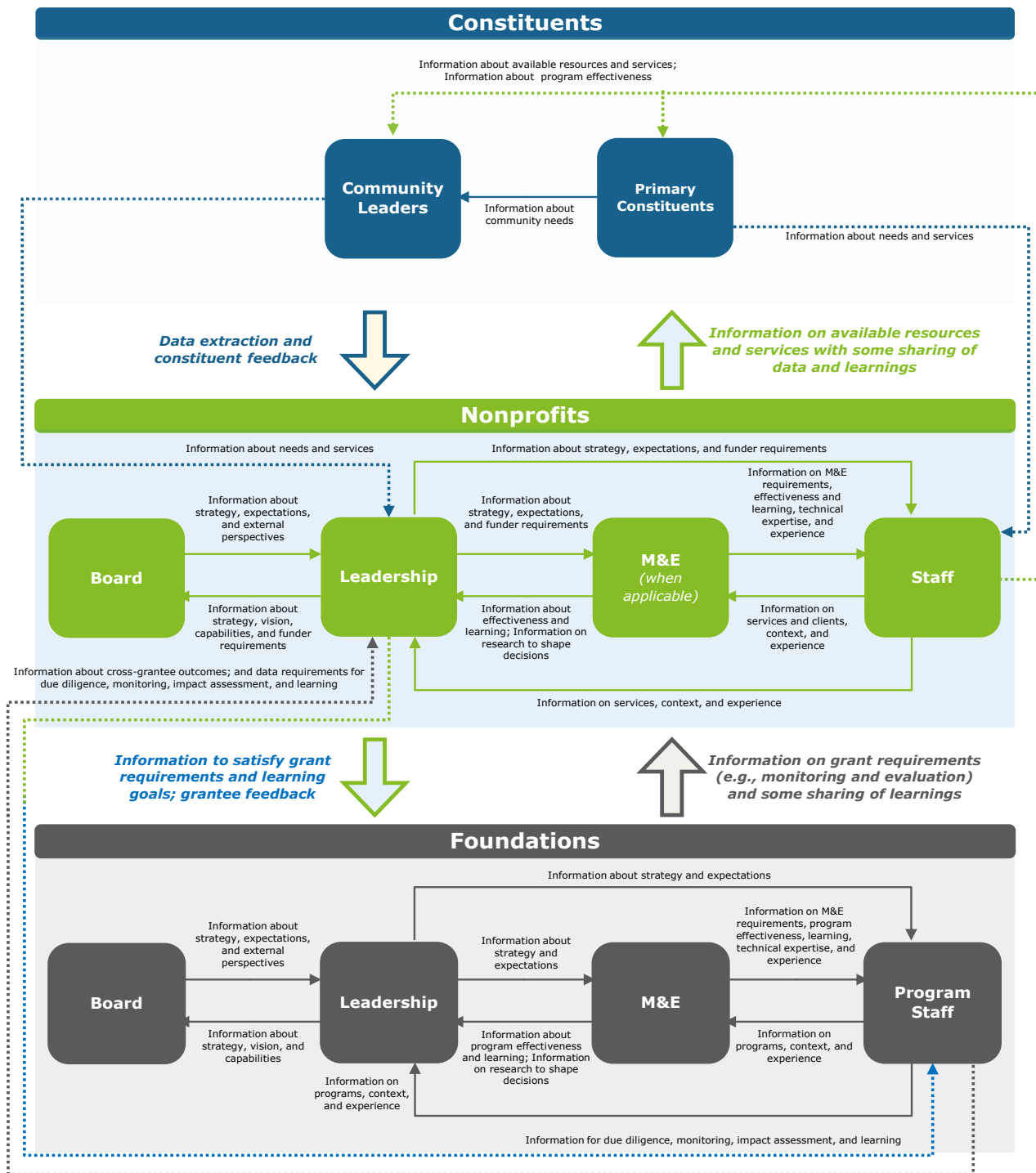
Key

- Colors by Actor:



- Lines have the color of the originating actor (e.g., If a nonprofit is sharing information with a foundation, the line will be blue)
- Solid lines indicate information flows within one actor; dotted lines indicate information flows across actors

Information flows in the social sector



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Appendix V: Key resources

Key resources for putting decision-making at the center

The following are a few practical guides, tools, and other resources for using monitoring, evaluation, and learning practices we found most useful to more effectively put decision-making at the center in your organization.

Organizational learning

- The Strategic Data Project at Harvard University's Center for Education Policy Research has a [Strategic Use of Data Rubric](#) and [Self-assessment Guide](#) that provides elements of effective data use across an organization, with steps to move toward using data more strategically.
- David Garnin et al.'s [Is Yours A Learning Organization?](#) Discusses organizational building blocks and provides a survey instrument for assessing learning within an organization.
- GEO's [The Smarter Grantmaking Playbook: Learn for Improvement](#) offers a range of documents providing guidance on learning, including how to use evaluation for learning, creating a learning organization, and developing a culture of learning for improvement.
- The [Performance Imperative](#) provides a framework to develop high-performing nonprofits that monitor for continuous improvement, have cultures that value learning, and assess effectiveness through evaluation.
- Marilyn Darling et al.'s [Emergent Learning: A Framework for Whole-System Strategy, Learning, and Adaptation](#) includes tools encouraging experimentation around strategies, and supporting whole-system learning, which requires shorter, faster, more rigorous real-time learning and more cross-pollination among peers.
- Katie Smith Milway and Amy Saxton's [The Challenge of Organizational Learning](#) identifies common barriers to knowledge sharing and defines key elements of learning.



Behavioral design and the science of decision-making

- Center for Evaluation Innovation's [How Cognitive Traps Cut Us Short: Cognitive Traps in Philanthropic Decision-making](#) tracks common cognitive traps that impact foundation decision-making and clear step to overcome them for more deliberative decision-making.
- The World Bank's [World Development Report 2015: Mind, Society, and Behavior](#) provides information on what is known about the science of decision-making, with implications for adaptive design and in a development context.
- The UK Government's Behavioral Insights Team wrote [EAST: Four Simple Ways to Apply Behavioral Insights](#) to synthesize the literature and their team's learnings about understanding of behavioral approaches.
- John Beshears and Francesca Gino's [Leaders as Decision Architects](#) reviews behavioral economics concepts and discusses implications for improving decision-making in organizations.
- Michael Quinn Patton's [What Brain Sciences Reveal about Integrating Theory and Practice](#) explores decision-making processes under conditions of complexity.

Key resources for putting decision-making at the center cont.

- Piyush Tandia's [The New Science of Designing for Humans](#) discusses the integration of behavioral science and impact evaluation to test and iterate on new ideas.

Data analytics and technology

- Matthew Salganik's [Bit by Bit: Social Research in the Digital Age](#) discusses social research in the digital age, bridging data science and social science.
- Global Pulse's [Integrating Big Data into the Monitoring and Evaluation Programs of Development Programs](#) details the characteristics of big data analytics and provides guidelines for integrating big data into monitoring and evaluation efforts. While it focuses on development programs, it has more general applicability as well.
- The [Data Maturity Framework](#) from University of Chicago's Center for Data Science and Public Policy helps you assess and improve your organizational, tech, and data readiness for data-driven social impact projects.
- The [Principles for Digital Development](#), provides principles for using technologies in development projects through human-centered, contextually appropriate, collaborative, safe, and sustainable design.
- Kopernik's [Impact Tracker Technology \(ITT\) catalogue](#) features a compilation of low-cost, information communications technology-based tools intended to help those working in development collect data, communicate with their clients and measure their impact.

Rapid cycle evaluation and lean analytics

- HHS's [Rapid Evaluation Approaches for Complex Initiatives](#) compares a range of rapid evaluation approaches for projects at different levels of complexity.
- Acumen and Root Capital's [Innovations in Impact Measurement](#) discusses lessons learned from Acumen's Lean Data and Root Capital's Client-Centric Mobile Measurement initiatives, which apply innovations in data collection technology to enable inexpensive and quick-cycle customer feedback on social and environmental performance.
- Code for America lists [multiple resources](#) on iterative development and rapid idea testing.

Capacity building

- The Bruner Foundation's [Project Clearinghouse](#) includes multiple resources on evaluation capacity building, including training, coaching and technical assistance.
- CEP's [Assessing to Achieve High Performance: What Nonprofits are Doing and How Foundations Can Help](#) discusses how nonprofits are assessing their performance and what they need from funders.
- GEO's [How Can We Help Our Grantees Strengthen Their Capacity for Evaluation?](#) provides guidance on helping grantees improve their capacity for measuring impact, improving programs, and better serving communities.
- Jared Raynor et al.'s [Capacity Building 3.0: How to Strengthen the Social Ecosystem](#) discusses capacity building in the broader social ecosystem, new innovations and techniques being used for effective capacity building.

Key resources for empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion

The following are a few practical guides, tools, and other resources for better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in your organization and with organizations with whom you work.

Cultural competence and equity in monitoring, evaluation, and learning

- The Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment has a range of [publications](#) to help integrate cultural and contextual dimensions into evidence creation.
- American Evaluation Association has a [Statement On Cultural Competence In Evaluation](#) providing a definition of cultural competence, its role in evaluation, and essential practices.
- Jara Dean-Coffey et al. article, "[Raising the Bar – Integrating Cultural Competence and Equity: Equitable Evaluation](#)," describes the concept of equitable evaluation alongside and an approach for building equitable-evaluation capacity.
- The [Racial Equity Toolkit](#) provides tools on how to operationalize equity. While it's specifically focused on government efforts, it is also relevant for more general tracking of differential impacts, data on racial inequity, and constituent engagement.
- UNICEF has published a guide, [How to Design and Manage Equity-focused Evaluations](#), on how to conduct and oversee evaluations that focus on the equity dimensions of interventions.
- Annie E Casey's report [By The Numbers: A Race for Results Case Study](#) offers lessons on using disaggregated data to inform policies, practices, and decision-making.
- UN Women's [How to Manage Gender-Responsive Evaluation](#) provides advice and tools for managing every step of an evaluation oriented to gender equality and women's empowerment, how gender and power relations change as a result of an intervention, and how interventions affect men and women differently.
- Racial Equity Tools includes an entire section on [evaluation](#). Some are general evaluation tools and some are specific to racial equity, with a focus on issues of power and privilege.
- D5 provides [resources](#) for collecting demographic data.



Constituent insight and accountability

- Feedback Labs includes a number of [guides](#) and [tools](#) that address every stage of feedback loop creation, from design through course correction.
- Fund for Shared Insight shares learnings across multiple organizations in promoting the collection of feedback [overall](#) and through [Listen for Good](#).
- Development Initiatives' [Beneficiary Feedback Mechanisms: A Literature Review](#) includes a list of projects involving beneficiary feedback.
- The Global Partnership for Social Accountability has a [knowledge repository](#) with a range of materials related to social accountability.

Key resources for empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion cont.

- Threlfall Consulting's [Perceptual Feedback: What's It All About](#) provides definitions, typologies and techniques for gathering constituent perceptual data.

User-centered design and customer experience

- Stanford's Design School provides a range of [design tools and resources](#).
- Code for America lists user-centered design [resources](#), including guides and toolkits.
- The Global Innovation Exchange lists [resources](#) for human-centered design, including ones with specific attention to evidence of impact and evaluation.
- Paul Brest et al's [Problem Solving, Human-Centered Design, and Strategic Processes](#) applies human-centered design principles for the social sector to help foundations improve their understanding of the problems they are trying to solve.

Participatory and community engagement

- The AEA's [Collaborative, Participatory & Empowerment Evaluation TIG](#) has a number of [resources](#) for evaluations that involve stakeholders in the evaluation process and that provide communities with the tools and knowledge to monitor and evaluate their own performance.
- [The Art & Science of Place-based Evaluation](#), which grew out of a convening by the Aspen Institute, Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation, and Neighborhood Funders Group, synthesizes place-based evaluation's topics and themes, involving "adaptive, learning-based models to support change."
- Laurenellen McCann's [Experimental Modes of Civic Engagement in Civic Tech: Meeting People Where They Are](#) compiles multiple processes for integrating user-centered design and community engagement into community-driven processes for creating technology for the public good.
- The Building Movement Project's [Nonprofits Integrating Community Engagement Guide](#) includes tools and resources to help nonprofit groups develop core competencies on constituent and community engagement, including for evaluation and measuring impact.
- GEO's [Building Community Capacity for Participation in Evaluation](#) provides steps for engaging community residents in evaluation and learning.
- [Harnessing the Power of Collective Learning](#), edited by Roy Steiner and Duncan Hanks, provides case studies and insight on the value of feedback, accountability, and constituent voice to enable constituents and communities to transform their circumstances.

Constituent data privacy and security

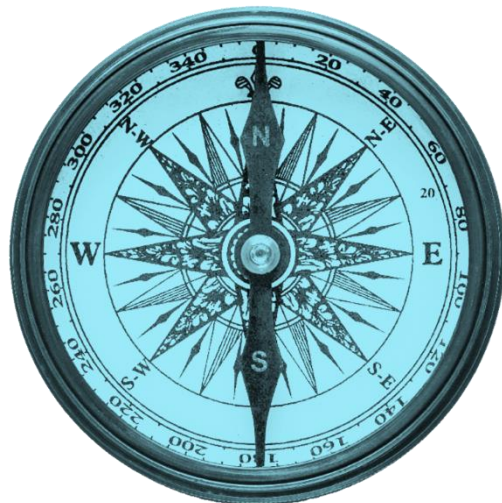
- Digital Impact at Stanford's Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society provides [policy and agreement templates, tools and resources](#) for protecting digital data and the privacy and security of constituents.
- The Responsible Data Forum lists [practical tools and resources](#) on data security and developing responsible data policies.
- The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs offers the guide [Building Data Responsibility into Humanitarian Action](#).
- The Cash Learning Partnership has [multiple resources](#) on personal data protection.

Key resources for learning at scale

The following are a few practical guides, tools, and other resources for more productively learning at scale in the issue areas relevant for your organization.

Transparency, open knowledge and licensing

- Glasspockets has [transparency tools](#) to help foundations become more transparent, including a practical guide [Opening Up: Demystifying Funder Transparency](#).
- IssueLabs lists collectively created [open publishing principles](#), as well as guidelines for [open knowledge practices](#), [open licensing](#) and enabling better [discovery](#) and [tracking](#) of your publications.
- Creative Commons provides [Open Licensing Resources for Foundations](#), including examples of foundation policies, how to communicate open licensing and attribution best practices.
- Hewlett has publicly shared a [toolkit](#) it uses to assist its staff in advising grantees about its open licensing requirements, including grantee communications resources.



Repositories

- IssueLabs has guidelines for the use of [open repositories](#) and includes information about how to use an open repository to share your existing website publications and how to create a repository.

Open data

- Open Knowledge International's [Open Data Handbook](#) discusses the legal, social and technical aspects of open data, as well as including open data resources. OKI hosts [Dataportals.org](#), which lists open data portals from around the world.
- The Open Data Initiative has a number of [open data guides](#), including practical guides related to writing an open data policy, data licensing, and creating a resilient data ecosystem.
- NYU's GovLab has produced a report with Omidyar Network, [Open Data Impact: When Supply and Demand Meet](#), that includes social sector examples and information about enabling conditions and challenges for open data projects.
- The National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP) has a [Guide to Starting a Local Data Intermediary](#) that explains how to establish and operate information systems on local conditions that provide direct, practical value for nonprofit organizations, governments, foundations, and residents.
- The National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership's [Lessons on Local Data Sharing](#) provides strategies and examples of agreements to obtain local government agency data for data sharing. The site also includes information about [open data resources and initiatives](#).
- The Open Data for Development Network's [Open Data Impact Map](#) is a public database of organizations that use open government data from around the world.

Key resources for learning at scale cont.

Shared learning and learning communities

- GEO's [Learning Together: Actionable Approaches for Grantmakers](#) provides key steps that grantmakers can take to make shared learning work.
- GEO's guide [Learn and Let Learn: Supporting Learning Communities for Innovation and Impact](#) provides information about how to build successful learning communities.

Common standards

- Community Indicators Consortium lists resources in the creation of [community indicators](#), as well as a [database](#) of community indicator projects that often span public, private and social sector organizations
- BetterEvaluation provides a [list](#) of outcomes and performance indicator resources across a range of issue areas.
- Guidestar's [Common Results Catalog](#) includes a range of (mostly output) metrics across multiple issue areas.
- PerformWell provides a range [of outcome indicators](#) across multiple issue areas.

Integrated data systems

- University of Pennsylvania's Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy provides [resources](#) on integrated data systems, which link individual-level administrative data from multiple sources. Resources include legal agreements and other supporting documents, best practices, and examples of use.
- The National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership has resources on [Integrated Data Systems](#).

Data collaboratives

- NYU's GovLab has produced [multiple resources](#) on the creation of data collaboratives, including information about types of data collaboratives, examples, and a [guide](#) to designing data collaboratives.

Systematic reviews

- 3ie has [resources](#) on how to collect and where to find systematic reviews.

Endnotes

Endnotes

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Monitor Institute

by **Deloitte.**

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