BENCHMARKING
Foundation Evaluation Practices
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For more information on CEP, please visit www.effectivephilanthropy.org. For more information on CEI, please visit www.evaluationinnovation.org and www.evaluationroundtable.org.

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Dear Colleague,

In 2015 and 2016, the Center for Effective Philanthropy and the Center for Evaluation Innovation partnered for the first time to benchmark current evaluation practices at foundations. We wanted to understand evaluation functions and staff roles at foundations, the relationship between evaluation and foundation strategy, the level of investment in and support of evaluation work, the specific evaluation activities foundations engage in, and the usefulness and use of evaluation information once it is collected.

To explore these topics, we collected survey data from 127 individuals who were the most senior evaluation or program staff at their foundations (see Methodology). These individuals came from independent and community foundations giving at least $10 million annually, or foundations that were members of the Evaluation Roundtable—a network of foundation evaluation leaders who seek to support and improve evaluation practice in philanthropy.

The result of this effort is what we believe to be the most comprehensive review ever undertaken of evaluation practices at foundations.

It is our hope that the data presented in this report will help you and your foundation determine what evaluation systems and practices align best with your foundation’s strategy, culture, and ultimate mission. What resources should you invest in evaluation? On what should your evaluation efforts focus? How can you learn from and use evaluation information? We believe that considering these questions in light of this benchmarking data can allow you to more thoughtfully answer these questions. Ultimately, we hope the information in this report helps you prepare your foundation to better assess its progress toward its goals and its overall performance.

We hope you find this data useful.

Sincerely,

Ellie & Julia

DEFINITION OF EVALUATION USED IN THIS STUDY

In the survey, we defined evaluation and/or evaluation-related activities as activities undertaken to systematically assess and learn about the foundation’s work, above and beyond final grant or finance reporting, monitoring, and standard due diligence practices.
Respondent Demographics

Of respondents:

- **EVALUATION STAFF**: 58% are evaluation staff
- **PROGRAM STAFF**: 35% are program staff

**CEO**
- 62% report to the CEO/President

**SENIOR PROGRAM STAFF**
- 23% report to senior or executive level program staff

**ROLE AND TENURE**

Thirty-eight percent of respondents have had responsibility for evaluation-related activities at the foundation for two years or less.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1 year</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8 years</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 9 years</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of respondents:

45% have an advanced degree in the social sciences or applied research.

37% have received training in evaluation through workshops or short courses.

5% have an advanced degree in evaluation.
34% of foundations **have a dedicated evaluation unit or department**, separate from the program department.

Of these departments:

- 19% were **newly created during the past two years**.
- 21% have had their **name changed in the past two years**.
- 79% have their own grantmaking and/or contracting budget.

Larger foundations are **more likely** to have a dedicated evaluation unit or department.¹

66% of foundations **do not have a dedicated evaluation unit or department**.

Of respondents at these foundations:

- 89% work in **program departments**.
- 20% work in **operations or administration departments**.
- 19% work in the **President’s office or executive office**.

¹ A chi-square analysis was conducted between whether or not foundations have asset sizes greater than the median in our sample and whether or not foundations have a dedicated evaluation department. A statistical difference of a medium effect size was found. A chi-square analysis was also conducted between whether or not foundations give more than the median annual giving amount in our sample and whether or not those foundations have a dedicated evaluation department. Again, a statistical difference of a medium effect size was found.
About half of foundations have 1.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff or more regularly dedicated to evaluation work.

Larger foundations tend to have more staff regularly dedicated to evaluation work.²

For every 10 program staff members, the median foundation has about one FTE staff member regularly dedicated to evaluation work.

Staff with evaluation-related responsibilities:

- **direct and manage all or most work related to evaluation at 45% of foundations**
- **provide advice and coaching to other foundation staff who manage all or most work related to evaluation at 21% of foundations**
- **hire third parties to direct and manage all or most work related to evaluation on behalf of the foundation at 14% of foundations**

 MODELS OF HOW EVALUATION RESPONSIBILITIES ARE MANAGED

EVALUATION SPENDING

- **$200k**
  - About half of foundations spend $200,000 or more on evaluation (in U.S. dollars).³

- **$40k**
  - About one-quarter of foundations spend $40,000 or less on evaluation.

- **$1M**
  - About one-quarter of foundations spend $1 million or more on evaluation.

- **35%**
  - Thirty-five percent are quite or extremely confident in the dollar estimate they provided.

Of respondents:

- **50%**
  - perceive that funding levels for evaluation work at their foundation increased relative to the size of the program budget over the past two years

- **45%**
  - perceive that funding levels for evaluation work at their foundation have stayed about the same relative to the size of the program budget over the past two years

² An independent samples t-test indicated that foundations with asset sizes greater than the median foundation in our sample were more likely to have a greater number of evaluation staff. This statistical difference was of a medium effect size.

³ In the survey, we did not put parameters around what respondents should or should not include in the dollar value they provided. Respondents were told it is understandable that it may be difficult to give a precise number, but to provide their best estimate.
Half of respondents report that most or all of their grantmaking is **proactive** (e.g., the foundation identifies and requests proposals from organizations or programs that target specific issues or are a good fit with foundation initiatives and strategies).

![Proactive and Responsive Practices](image)

**50%**

About one-quarter of respondents report that most or all of their grantmaking is **responsive** (e.g., driven by unsolicited requests from grant seekers).

**27%**
PRIORITYTIZATION OF EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

- respondents spending time on the activity
- respondents spending time on the activity who say it is a top priority

Provide research or data to inform grantmaking strategy
- 90%
- 35%

Evaluate foundation initiatives or strategies
- 88%
- 51%

Refine grantmaking strategy during implementation
- 87%
- 26%

Develop grantmaking strategy
- 86%
- 34%

Design and/or facilitate learning processes or events within the foundation
- 79%
- 27%

Evaluate individual grants
- 71%
- 34%

Compile and/or monitor metrics to measure foundation performance
- 71%

Design and/or facilitate learning processes or events with grantees or other external stakeholders
- 70%
- 15%

Improve grantee capacity for data collection or evaluation
- 69%
- 14%

Conduct/commission satisfaction/perception surveys (of grantees or other stakeholders)
- 60%
- 7%

Disseminate evaluation findings externally
- 57%
- 9%

Half of respondents report spending time on at least nine of these activities.
INVESTMENT IN EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

Percentage of respondents who say their foundation invests too little in the following evaluation activities:

- **71%** Disseminating evaluation findings externally
- **69%** Improving grantee capacity for data collection or evaluation
- **58%** Designing and/or facilitating learning processes or events with grantees or other external stakeholders
- **55%** Compiling and/or monitoring metrics to measure foundation performance
- **48%** Designing and/or facilitating learning processes or events within the foundation
- **44%** Evaluating foundation initiatives or strategies
- **42%** Providing research or data to inform grantmaking strategy
- **41%** Conducting/commissioning satisfaction/perception surveys (of grantees or other stakeholders)
- **39%** Refining grantmaking strategy during implementation
- **26%** Developing grantmaking strategy
- **22%** Evaluating individual grants

CHALLENGES

Percentage of respondents who say the following practices have been at least somewhat challenging in their foundation’s evaluation efforts:

- **83%** Having evaluations result in useful lessons for the field
- **82%** Having evaluations result in useful lessons for grantees
- **76%** Having evaluations result in meaningful insights for the foundation
- **70%** Incorporating evaluation results into the way the foundation will approach its work in the future
- **63%** Allocating sufficient monetary resources for evaluation efforts
- **59%** Identifying third party evaluators that produce high quality work
- **36%** Having foundation staff and grantees agree on the goals of the evaluation
- **31%** Having programmatic staff and third party evaluators agree on the goals of the evaluation

*Respondents were asked to rate how challenging each of the practices has been to their foundation’s evaluation efforts on a 1-5 scale, where 1 = “Not at all challenging,” 2 = “Not very challenging,” 3 = “Somewhat challenging,” 4 = “Quite challenging,” and 5 = “Extremely challenging.” The percentages included above represent respondents who rated a 3, 4, or 5 on an item.*
**MOST COMMON APPROACHES TO FUNDING GRANTEES’ EVALUATION EFFORTS**

- **41%** of foundations have **no common approach** to evaluating grants because funding evaluation efforts differs widely across the foundation’s program or strategy areas.

- **19%** of respondents report that grantees can spend a portion of their **grant dollars on evaluation** if they request to do so.

- **12%** of respondents say the foundation commissions **outside evaluators** to evaluate individual grantees’ work.

- **10%** of respondents report that grantees receive **general operating support dollars**, and they can choose to use these dollars for evaluation.

**Percentage of individual grants funded for evaluation**

- **63%** of respondents say their foundations fund evaluations for **less than 10 percent** of individual grants.

- **13%** of respondents report that grantees can spend a portion of their grant dollars on evaluation if they request to do so.

**RANDOMIZED CONTROL TRIALS**

- **19%** of respondents report that their foundations provide funding for a **randomized control trial** of their grantees’ work in the past three years.

Of those who have provided funding for a randomized control trial:

- **63%** found it quite or extremely **useful in providing evidence** for the field about what does and does not work.

- **42%** found it quite or extremely **useful in understanding the impact** the foundation’s grant dollars are making.

- **38%** found it quite or extremely **useful in future grantmaking decisions**.

- **25%** found it quite or extremely **useful in refining foundation strategies or initiatives**.

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1 All other response options for this item were selected by fewer than 10 percent of respondents and not shown here.
**TYPES OF EVALUATION**

Frequency with which different types of evaluations are conducted on grantees’ work and foundation initiatives or strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Type</th>
<th>Grantees’ Work</th>
<th>Foundation Initiatives or Strategies</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regularly</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summative</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COLLABORATION**

Over 40 percent of respondents say their foundation has engaged in efforts to coordinate its evaluation work with other funders working in the same issue areas.

- **Yes, we are already engaged in such efforts** 28%
- **No, but we are currently considering such efforts** 6%
- **No, we considered it but concluded it was not right for us** 24%
- **No, we have not considered engaging in any such efforts** 42%
Grantee organizations it seeks to affect: 46%

Fields it seeks to affect: 35%

Communities it seeks to affect: 22%

Ultimate beneficiaries it seeks to affect: 20%

Program staff’s time: 91%

Program staff’s level of comfort in interpreting/using data: 71%

Program staff’s attitudes toward evaluation: 50%

Program staff’s lack of involvement in shaping the evaluations conducted: 40%
Percentage of respondents who say program staff are likely to use information collected through, or resulting from, evaluations to inform the following aspects of their work:

- **80%** Understand what the foundation has accomplished through its work
- **76%** Decide whether to expand into new program areas or exit program areas
- **74%** Decide whether to adjust grantmaking strategies during implementation
- **71%** Decide whether to renew grantees’ funding
- **63%** Strengthen grantees’ future performance
- **57%** Hold grantees accountable to the goals of their grants
- **56%** Communicate publicly about what the foundation has learned through its work
- **40%** Decide whether to award a first grant

**Use of Information**

**Level of Engagement of Senior Management**

**Over Two-Thirds** of respondents say senior management engages the appropriate amount in communicating to staff that it values the use of evaluation and evaluative information.

No engagement: 6%
Too little engagement: 24%
Too much engagement: 68%
Appropriate amount of engagement: 2%

**About Half** of respondents say senior management engages the appropriate amount in modeling the use of information resulting from evaluation work in decision making.

No engagement: 9%
Too little engagement: 39%
Too much engagement: 52%
Appropriate amount of engagement: 52%

**Less Than Half** of respondents say senior management engages the appropriate amount in supporting adequate investment in the evaluation capacity of grantees.

No engagement: 16%
Too little engagement: 39%
Too much engagement: 44%
Appropriate amount of engagement: 1%

When a respondent says the foundation’s senior management engages less than the appropriate amount in evaluation, the foundation is significantly more likely to experience the following evaluation challenges:

- Allocating sufficient monetary resources for evaluation efforts
- Incorporating evaluation results into future work
- Having evaluations result in useful lessons for the field
LEVEL OF SUPPORT FROM BOARD

- **No support**
- **Little support**
- **Moderate support**
- **High support**

**ABOUT HALF** of respondents say there is a high level of board support for the use of evaluation or evaluative data in decision making by staff at the foundation.

- 6% No support
- 40% Moderate support
- 52% High support
- 2% Little support

**FORTY PERCENT** of respondents say there is a high level of board support for the role of evaluation staff at the foundation.

- 7% No support
- 14% Moderate support
- 39% High support
- 40% Little support

**ALMOST 40 PERCENT** of respondents say there is a high level of board support for the use of evaluation or evaluative data in board-level decision making.

- 22% No support
- 39% Moderate support
- 38% High support
- 1% Little support

**ONLY ONE-THIRD** of respondents say there is a high level of board support for foundation spending on evaluation.

- 3% No support
- 19% Moderate support
- 44% High support
- 34% Little support

When a foundation's board is less supportive of evaluation, the foundation is significantly more likely to experience the following evaluation challenges:

- Allocating sufficient monetary resources for evaluation efforts
- Having evaluations result in meaningful insights
- Incorporating evaluation results into future work
- Having foundation staff and grantees agree on evaluation goals
- Having evaluations result in useful lessons for grantees
- Having evaluations result in useful lessons for the field

**SHARING INFORMATION**

Percentage of respondents who say evaluation findings are shared with the following audiences quite a bit or a lot.

- **Foundation's CEO**: 77%
- **Foundation's staff**: 66%
- **Foundation's board**: 47%
- **Foundation's grantees**: 28%
- **Other foundations**: 17%
- **General public**: 14%
Looking Forward

Foundations will be more strategic in the way they plan for and design evaluations so that information collected is meaningful and useful.

“Implement more strategic evaluation designs to measure initiatives and key areas of investment.”

“Develop clear strategies and goals for what [the foundation] hopes to measure and assess.”

“My sole wish is that evaluation data is meaningful—that it is actually linked to strategy.”

Of evaluation staff who responded to our survey, 74 percent, or 94 of 127 respondents, answered the open-ended question, “In five years, what do you hope will have changed for foundations in the collection and/or use of evaluation data or information?”

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Foundations will use evaluation data for decision-making and improving practice.

Use evaluation deliverables to inform decisions that improve our foundation and grantee performance.

I would like to see the full integration of evaluation into foundation daily practice and routine decision making.

More and more effective use of evaluative data and information for the purpose of learning and improvement for foundations.

3

Foundations will be more transparent about their evaluations and share what they are learning externally.

More public sharing both internally and externally and more frank conversation about what worked or didn’t work.

I want to expand our ability to share information to inform the fields in which we work and to inform our audiences, such as donors and policymakers.

To improve the level of transparency surrounding evaluation, less emphasis on perfection and more on discovery.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the purpose of evaluation at your foundation?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How do your foundation’s evaluation efforts align with its goals and strategies, if at all?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How does leadership at your foundation use information from the foundation’s evaluation work, if at all?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How do your foundation’s evaluation efforts align, or not align, with its organizational culture?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. How does your foundation make decisions about each of the following:

How much to budget for evaluation work?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Which costs will be categorized as evaluation costs (e.g., salaries of staff with evaluation responsibilities, third party evaluators, data collection efforts, etc.)?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. How are responsibilities for evaluation work structured at your foundation?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How many staff have evaluation-related responsibilities at your foundation?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

In which department or area do staff with evaluation-related responsibilities work, and why?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What are the evaluation-related job responsibilities of these staff members? On what do they spend their time?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
### METHODOLOGY

#### SAMPLE

Foundations were considered for inclusion in this sample if they:

- were based in the United States or Canada;
- were an independent foundation, including health conversion foundations, or community foundation as categorized by Foundation Directory Online and CEP’s internal contact management software;
- provided $10 million or more in annual giving, according to information provided to CEP from Foundation Center in September 2014 and the Canada Revenue Agency, with help from Philanthropic Foundations Canada;
- or, were members of the Center for Evaluation Innovation’s (CEI) Evaluation Roundtable.

For foundations that were members of CEI’s Evaluation Roundtable, the foundation’s representative to the Roundtable was included in the sample. For all other foundations, the following criteria were used to determine the most senior person at the foundation who was most likely to have evaluation-related responsibilities:

An individual was deemed to be evaluation staff if his/her title included one or more of the following words, according to the foundation’s website:

1. Evaluation
2. Assessment
3. Research
4. Measurement
5. Effectiveness
6. Knowledge
7. Learning
8. Impact
9. Strategy
10. Planning
11. Performance
12. Analysis

To determine which evaluation staff member at a foundation was the most senior, the following role hierarchy was used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Senior Vice President</th>
<th>2. Vice President</th>
<th>3. Director</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Deputy Director</td>
<td>5. Senior Manager</td>
<td>6. Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Senior Officer</td>
<td>8. Officer</td>
<td>9. Associate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If no staff on a foundation’s website had titles or roles that included the above words related to evaluation, the most senior program staff member at the foundation was chosen for inclusion in the sample. Program staff were identified as having titles that included the words “Program” or “Grant,” or mentioned a specific program area (e.g., “Education” or “Environment”). The same role hierarchy described above was used to determine seniority.

### 4. How, if at all, does your foundation use information from its evaluation work to inform programmatic decisions?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

### 5. How are decisions made about with whom evaluation information will be shared:

Inside the foundation?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Outside of the foundation?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

### 6. What changes would you like to see regarding evaluation at your foundation?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What would you hope would happen as a result of these changes?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Only those individuals who had an e-mail address that could be accessed through the foundation’s website, CEP staff knowledge, or CEI staff knowledge were deemed eligible to receive the survey.

In September 2015, 271 foundation staff were initially sent an invitation to complete the survey. Two new members of the Evaluation Roundtable were later added to the sample and sent the survey. Later, 19 individuals were removed from the sample because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. Completed surveys were received from 120 staff members, and partially completed surveys, defined as being at least 50 percent complete, were received from seven staff members. Thus, our final sample of respondents included 127 of the 254 potential respondents, for a response rate of 50 percent. Of the foundation staff who responded to the survey, 58 percent were evaluation staff, 35 percent were program staff, and six percent were staff with a title that did not fall into either of these two categories, based on our previously defined criteria.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS
To analyze the quantitative survey data from foundation leaders, descriptive statistics were examined. Chi-square analyses and independent samples t-tests were also conducted to examine the relationship between foundation size and evaluation structure. An alpha level of 0.05 was used to determine statistical significance for all testing, and effect sizes were examined for all analyses.

Because our sample only consisted of 32 community foundations, we were unable to rigorously explore statistical differences between independent and community foundations in this study.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS
Thematic and content analyses were conducted on the responses to the open-ended question, “In five years, what do you hope will have changed for foundations in the collection and/or use of evaluation data or information?” A coding scheme was developed for this item by reading through all responses to recognize recurring ideas, creating categories, and then coding each respondent’s ideas according to the categories.

A codebook was created to ensure that different coders would be coding for the same concepts rather than their individual interpretations of the concepts. One coder coded all responses to the question and a second coder coded 15 percent of those responses. At least an 80 percent level of inter-rater agreement was achieved for each code.

Selected quotations were included in this publication. These quotations were selected to be representative of the themes seen in the data.
CEP FUNDERS

We are very appreciative of the support that made this work possible. See below for a list of funders.

$500,000 OR MORE
- Fund for Shared Insight
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- The Rockefeller Foundation
- The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

$200,000 TO $499,999
- The David and Lucile Packard Foundation
- Ford Foundation
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation

$100,000 TO $199,999
- Barr Foundation
- The James Irvine Foundation
- The Kresge Foundation
- Rockefeller Brothers Fund
- S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation

$50,000 TO $99,999
- Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation
- The Wallace Foundation

$20,000 TO $49,999
- Carnegie Corporation of New York
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- The Duke Endowment
- John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
- Lumina Foundation
- Surdna Foundation
- W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation

UP TO $19,999
- The Assisi Foundation of Memphis
- California HealthCare Foundation
- The Colorado Health Foundation
- The Columbus Foundation
- The Commonwealth Fund
- Doris Duke Charitable Foundation
- Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund
- The Heinz Endowments
- Henry Luce Foundation
- Houston Endowment
- Kansas Health Foundation

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- New York State Health Foundation
- Oak Foundation
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- Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation
- Saint Luke’s Foundation
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