BENCHMARKING FOUNDATION EVALUATION PRACTICES 2020

CENTER FOR EVALUATION INNOVATION
The benchmarking survey, administered every several years, collects data on evaluation and learning practices at foundations.

We want to understand:

- staffing and structure
- investment and support
- roles and responsibilities
- relationship with strategy
- usefulness and use
- barriers
Our approach to the research.
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.
The 2019 survey was sent to 354 US and Canadian independent and community foundations. They were foundations that:

- provided $10M or more in annual giving
- and/or were participants in the Evaluation Roundtable

It was completed by the most senior staff person responsible for evaluation.
The survey had a 45 percent response rate. 161 foundations responded. Median giving of respondents was $30M.
How to interpret the findings.
Benchmarking results do not necessarily signal best practices.
Evaluate the findings against a goal.

What is it that you are trying to accomplish with your approach to evaluation and learning?

What will that take in terms of how evaluation and learning is positioned and resourced in your foundation, or in the sector?
These are real-life examples of how those departmental goals can differ.

**EXAMPLE: Evidence Support**

We are uniquely staffed and situated within the organization to provide objective evidence on, and facilitate learning around, the impact of the Foundation’s grants, programs, and strategies.

We report directly to the CEO and have a separate budget – designed to ensure the objectivity of our work.

To maintain our distinctive role, evaluation staff do not make decisions about program strategy. Rather, we help staff to: 1) clarify their strategies; 2) identify hypotheses, causal assumptions, and learning questions; and 3) integrate evidence and reflection into discussions about how strategies might shift moving forward.

**EXAMPLE: Culture of Learning**

We focus on establishing the key processes (strategy, impact frameworks, measurement, evaluation, systematic reflection etc.) as well as nurturing the right culture (openness, trust, curiosity, risk taking, experimentation. etc.) needed to foster a vibrant learning organization committed to social justice.

We sit within the strategy team, work closely with our futures and explorations team, and collaborate with teams across the organization.
Findings: structure and staffing
In 42% of foundations, staff responsible for evaluation were housed in a unit or department separate from program staff.

This increased from 34% in 2015.

n(2019) = 159; n(2015) = 127
At almost three-fourths of foundations, the evaluation leader was at the VP or director level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Vice President</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Officer</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Half of evaluation leaders reported directly to the CEO or president.
Less than half of job titles had the word *evaluation* in them.

We saw a big uptick in the term *learning*. 
21% had staff responsible for supporting learning separate from evaluation.

n = 153
One-third of evaluation leaders were new to their roles, in the position two years or less.

Length of Time with Evaluation-related Responsibilities at this Foundation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1 yr</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2 yrs</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–5 yrs</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–8 yrs</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥9 yrs</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 161
69% had previously been external consultants in philanthropy.
The median number of evaluation staff was 1.0 FTE. There were 16 program staff for every 1 evaluation staff.

Evaluation and Program Staff

Median FTE Evaluation Staff = 1.0

Median FTE Program Staff = 15.75

This widened from 2015 where there were 10 program staff for every 1 evaluation staff.
At larger foundations, while program staff increase, the number of evaluation staff does not.
40% of all evaluation and learning staff were people of color.

Race / Ethnicity of All Staff with Evaluation Responsibilities

- White: 60%
- People of Color: 40%
- Asian: 12%
- Black: 12%
- Hispanic: 8%
- Multiple: 4%
- Middle Eastern: 2%
- American Indian: 1%
- Pacific Islander: 0.2%

n = 147
Findings: investment and support
68% had their own grantmaking or contracting budget.

The median budget was a little over half a million dollars.
More than half said they spent less than $200K annually on evaluation contracts or grants with external evaluators.
Findings: roles and responsibilities
Evaluation staff were positioned as evaluation managers or as supports to other foundation staff.

- 55% Directed and managed all or most evaluation work.
- 35% Provided advice and coaching to other foundation staff.
Evaluation staff divided their time among a wide range of responsibilities. A lot of time went to internal strategy support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% that prioritize as top 4</th>
<th>% that spend time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating foundation initiatives or strategies</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing research or data to inform grantmaking strategy</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing and/or facilitating learning processes or events within the foundation</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compiling and/or monitoring metrics to measure foundation performance</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing grantmaking strategy</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Less time was spent on grantees or external stakeholders.

- Evaluating foundation initiatives or strategies: 28% prioritize, 68% spend time
- Compiling and/or monitoring metrics to measure foundation performance: 24% prioritize, 66% spend time
- Designing and/or facilitating learning processes or events within the foundation: 16% prioritize, 63% spend time
- Providing research or data to inform grantmaking strategy: 16% prioritize, 62% spend time
- Developing grantmaking strategy: 10% prioritize, 57% spend time
- Refining grantmaking strategy during implementation: 10% prioritize, 57% spend time
- Improving grantee capacity for data collection or evaluation: 16% prioritize, 63% spend time
- Designing or facilitating learning processes or events with grantees or other external stakeholders: 16% prioritize, 62% spend time
- Conducting/commissioning satisfaction/perception surveys (of grantees or other stakeholders): 22% prioritize, 56% spend time
- Evaluating individual grants: 22% prioritize, 56% spend time
This is consistent with how evaluation findings were shared. Internal audiences were prioritized.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Very often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation CEO</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation staff</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation board</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation grantees</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General public</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other foundations</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foundations commissioned all types of evaluations.

### Developmental
- **2019**: 30%
- **2015**: 42%

### Formative
- **2019**: 13%
- **2015**: 25%

### Summative
- **2019**: 11%
- **2015**: 22%

The Foundations commissioned all types of evaluations.
Considerations When Conducting and Commissioning Evaluations

Frequency of consideration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Regularly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cultural appropriateness of the methods used

| 16% | 32% | 52% |

Diversity of the teams, including cultural as well as disciplines, beliefs, and lived experiences

| 16% | 49% | 34% |

Ability of the design to reveal structural and systems-level drivers of inequity (present-day and historically)

| 28% | 43% | 29% |

Degree to which people/communities being evaluated have the power to shape and participate in the evaluation process

n = 142

Equitable evaluation principles were applied sometimes.
Findings: barriers and supports
The same challenges were still showing up.

Rank Ordering of Biggest Evaluation Challenges

1. Having evaluations result in meaningful insights for the foundation
   - 2019: 73%
   - 2015: 83%

2. Having evaluations result in useful lessons for the field
   - 2019: 73%
   - 2015: 82%

3. Having evaluations result in useful lessons for grantees
   - 2019: 69%
   - 2015: 76%
Boards were overall supportive.

**Board’s Level of Support for Evaluation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>None</th>
<th>Little</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Use of evaluation or evaluative data in decision-making by staff at the foundation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>None</th>
<th>Little</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The role of evaluation staff at the foundation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>None</th>
<th>Little</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Use of evaluation or evaluative data in board-level decision making**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>None</th>
<th>Little</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Foundation spending on evaluation**

n = 131
Respondents said senior management say they support evaluation, but don’t always show it.

Senior Management Engagement with Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communicating to staff that it values the use of evaluation and evaluative information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Modeling the use of information resulting from evaluation work in decision making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Supporting adequate investment in the evaluation capacity of grantees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>42%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering the results of evaluation work as an important criterion when assessing staff performance

n = 129
Foundation staff have to navigate a lot of change. 30% had a change in CEO.

Foundations that Experienced Each Change During the Previous Three Years

- Organization-wide strategic planning or strategy refresh: 68%
- Organization/staff restructuring: 61%
- Change in priority issues within program areas: 59%
- Organization-wide Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) effort: 56%

40% saw changes in all three.
Discussion.
Now go back to your goal.
What would it take to accomplish that goal?

1. What are you charged with? Is your purpose clear to you and understood by others?
2. Who do you need to influence in the organization? Are you positioned to do that?
3. Who should be prioritized as users? Does how you spend your time line up with that?
4. Do you relate to strategy in a way that integrates evaluation and learning in the way you intend it to?
5. How are you making sure that evaluation and learning are useful?
Thank you!

www.evaluationinnovation.org