Guiding Principles and Practices for Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Five Guiding Principles for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

Perhaps the single most important question for our Foundation is, "How are we doing?" Because, in the end, we are working to steward the legacy of resources left to us by David and Lucile Packard toward the greatest possible good.

We care not only about what grant funds accomplish, but also about how we do that grantmaking, engage with grantees and improve over time. We are guided by a set of five core values: integrity, respect for all people, belief in individual leadership, capacity to think big and commitment to effectiveness. These values, in particular our commitment to effectiveness, have led us to a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) approach that emphasizes learning and continuous improvement, with the end goal of making the greatest difference possible in our areas of focus.

In this spirit, we have developed a set of five guiding principles for our monitoring, evaluation and learning efforts:

1. **Continuously learn and adapt**
2. **Learn in partnership**
3. **Inform our decisions with multiple inputs**
4. **Cultivate curiosity**
5. **Share learning to amplify impact**

A Note on Language

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.

PRINCIPLE #1: CONTINUOUSLY LEARN AND ADAPT

Making progress on tough issues requires continuous feedback, learning and timely use of insights to inform and adapt our strategies. At the Packard Foundation, we generally take on thorny dynamic problems that have many moving parts, complex interdependencies and require a long time to see meaningful progress. Our emphasis on continuous improvement recognizes that once our strategies hit the ground, they are likely to require adaptation as we learn about what works and the context changes.

By keeping our monitoring and evaluation efforts in close dialogue with strategy, we are able to bring timely data to the table for reflection and use. When developing our strategies, we develop clear and measurable goals and build in feedback loops for tracking progress on those goals. When implementing (and adapting) our strategies, we gather information about what works and how the context is shifting, and then use our insights to navigate a path forward. As our strategies wind down, we owe it to ourselves, to our partners in the field and to our Trustees to reflect upon, capture, and share what we learned and how we did. In our commitment to using our evaluative insight, we are, in effect, holding ourselves accountable.

PRINCIPLE #2: LEARN IN PARTNERSHIP

We listen closely and learn in partnership with our grantees, funders, constituents and other stakeholders.

We engage our partners, in particular grantees, in monitoring, evaluation, and learning design and implementation. We work to design processes and products that grantees and others will value.

It is also critical that our grantees have the capacity to engage meaningfully and gain benefit from the work. Therefore, we seek out opportunities to build monitoring, evaluation and learning capacity for our grantees and stakeholders, and in our geographies.

PRINCIPLE #3: INFORM OUR DECISIONS WITH MULTIPLE INPUTS

External evaluations on their own don't drive decisions for the Packard Foundation. We analyze multiple sources of information and combine our learning with that of external evaluation results to inform our decision making. We rely on our program staff to act as trusted and intelligent filters of many sources of information. Program staff listen closely to grantees and our partners in our fields and tap into a variety of inputs, qualitative and quantitative, in order to make well-reasoned decisions to help drive our impact.

PRINCIPLE #4: CULTIVATE CURIOSITY

Cultivating a culture of curiosity is essential to surfacing insight into our successes, our failures and emerging possibilities. By listening closely and learning about what is coming out of our work, how our fields are changing, and what others are doing and thinking, we can identify opportunities to improve our strategies and increase program impact.

We prioritize learning and experimentation within and across our programs, with Trustees and with our partners in our fields. In practice this means creating intentional spaces for individual and group learning, with our grantees and other leaders in our fields, and within the Foundation.

PRINCIPLE #5: SHARE LEARNING TO AMPLIFY IMPACT

We believe that openly sharing what we're learning can generate value for our constituencies and drive impact in our fields. We seek out strategic opportunities to share what we are learning, to co-create openly insights with our partners, and to use these insights to inform and galvanize change in our fields. In doing so, we seek to steer a sensible course between total transparency and respecting grantee privacy and trust, sharing findings whenever possible without compromising grantee or program goals.

How We Put the Principles into Practice

Our monitoring, evaluation, and learning practices are driven by their intended use. We care about delivering timely insights for well-defined audiences. To this end, our MEL activities are designed with the following in mind:

➢ **Be clear about purpose and audience**

When designing our MEL efforts, we start by clarifying who the audience is, what they want to learn and how they might use the findings. While program staff are often primary users (and lead architects) of our monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities, many of our efforts are directed toward different audiences with different needs, such as grantees, other funders and Trustees. The design of these processes and products should reflect the intended audiences and their capacity for using the evaluative insight so the data and knowledge we are generating can have the highest possible impact.

➢ **Monitor extensively, evaluate selectively, and learn intentionally**

When implementing our strategies and exploring potential new directions, we are continuously monitoring progress and scanning trends in the field. In doing so, we take in many different

types of information, including research data, our qualitative insights from site visits, and grantee stories.

We believe that it's important to invest in systematically collecting and analyzing data and engaging rigorous third party evaluation at select moments in time—e.g., when looking for proof that a model works, when in need of credible data to inform an important decision, when stepping back to assess how we're doing across a portfolio of work, or when seeking insight into how a high risk or big bet investment is going. The timing for these evaluations is driven by a particular decision-making need.

At all points in the strategy lifecycle, we create the space for reflective practice and learning from our monitoring and evaluation data, so we can use it to inform action. We recognize that learning is "real work" and is essential to delivering on our strategies. Learning requires a deliberate attempt to connect data and insights to actual strategic decisions and, in order to do so, specific attention needs to be paid to facilitating how and when it happens.

> **Design with cost-benefit ratio in mind**

The potential benefits of our monitoring, evaluation and learning efforts must outweigh the costs. Foundation staff, grantees and our partners in our fields must weigh the relative merit of doing the work versus assessing the work and make smart decisions about where to invest time and money. So, we are rigorous about prioritizing what we want to know and ensuring that our monitoring, evaluation and learning efforts will generate value worthy of the resources invested.

What We Monitor and Evaluate

We track, assess, and learn from our work at multiple levels: individual grants, clusters of grants, strategy, and field. We are selective in our evaluation of individual grants, focusing on those of high cost or high degree of risk, models that could be leveraged, and work with high learning potential for the field.

We also look at our contribution beyond grant dollars: how we're connecting and convening players in our fields, how we are effectively using the Foundation's voice, how we are building capacity and our use of program-related investments.