



THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION'S SCORECARD OF FOUNDATION PERFORMANCE

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has devised, and is constantly refining, a comprehensive system to provide its board and staff leadership an annual assessment of the foundation's overall performance. In introducing their approach, Dr. Lewis Sandy and Maureen Michael discussed the process the foundation uses to collect data, present it to staff and board members, and make decisions based on the information.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has a clear foundation mission, four agreed upon goals, and explicit theories of how it can most effectively create change and reach its goals.

While the foundation had a long history of program evaluation, senior foundation leaders realized that this level of evaluation was not enough to answer the board's question, "How are we doing as a foundation?" and the staff's question "How can we do better overall?"

"We learn a lot from grant and program evaluations, but something was missing. In a few cases we were able to show that our grants and programs had accomplished their specific goals, but we were not achieving our desired overall outcome because the strategies we'd decided on weren't working," Sandy told the group in explaining how they knew program level evaluations were not sufficient to answer their questions of overall foundation performance.

So, Sandy and his colleagues developed a system for assessing performance at three levels: the program level, which they were already doing; the strategy level, through evaluations of clusters of programs and projects; and the organizational level. They then synthesize a subset of this information and present it in a scorecard allowing staff and board to see progress on key indicators in one, simple format.

Collecting the data and creating the scorecard gives the staff an opportunity to step back and talk about how the organization is doing. The scorecard is then presented to the board, which discusses it in an annual

three-hour session and uses the information to help set direction for the foundation.

ELEMENTS OF THE SCORECARD

The scorecard's key indicators show progress on four dimensions — program, service, impact, and staff. They are informed by a variety of evaluation information, research and data:

- Confidential grantee surveys annually provide information on key aspects of service.
- Surveys of rejected applicants inform their assessment of the foundation's communications and application processes.

"The major benefit of focusing strategy is sharpening your idea about how you can make change. But the perfect measure doesn't exist and trying to get there is a fruitless search." —Lew Sandy



DR. LEWIS SANDY, ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION

- Surveys of private and public decision-makers help the foundation understand the context for pursuing its strategies and gauge its reputation in the fields it wishes to advance.
- Public opinion surveys give information on the public's health care priorities and test the effectiveness of public awareness efforts.
- Surveys of foundation employees, conducted every other year, allow management and the board to hear staff perceptions of how well the foundation is meeting its core commitments, including its management and program targets and its commitment to staff.
- Information culled from journals helps the foundation understand the reach of its sponsored research and evaluation projects.
- Data from the foundation's grants management database provide additional information on the foundation-grantee relationship as well as an overview of where and how the foundation is investing funds.
- Other administrative data provide information related to the foundation's internal operations.

Measuring impact in its program areas is the most challenging part of the foundation's assessment effort. The search for the perfect measure of social impact often frustrates foundations in their attempts to assess their performance and stymies their efforts altogether, according to Sandy. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, instead, looked for intermediate indicators in each program area that could be measured in the short-term and give some sense of their progress toward reaching their goal.

For instance, reducing the number of uninsured people is a key strategy in pursuit of the foundation's goal to assure that all Americans have access to basic health care at a reasonable cost. A central way foundation staff believed they could address this was by funding activities that supported greater enrollment of eligible children in public programs like the State Children's Health Insurance Programs and Medicaid. They were then able to track whether public policy barriers to enrollment decreased and enrollment itself increased. They began counting those states that did not require face-to-face



MAUREEN MICHAEL, ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION

"Starting with any measure and working to make it better over time is really worth the effort."

—Maureen Michael

meetings or asset tests for enrollment, as well as the number of children enrolled in these programs with 12-months of continuous coverage.

Sandy and Michael emphasized that a key to begin the effort of overall performance assessment is to try to measure what matters most. Sandy encouraged foundations to decide what their theory of change is and then measure something that is relevant. "Refine it if it's not perfect," he said, but there is value in making an effort to measure as a start. "Starting with any measure and working to make it better over time is really worth the effort," emphasized Michael.

AN EVOLVING SYSTEM OF PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation plans to continue to refine and improve its system of performance assessment. The foundation intends to incorporate more syntheses of formal grant and program evaluations into the scorecard. It also will institute a trustee survey to solicit their ideas for improvement. Foundation staff are working on ways to create a public version of the scorecard that they can share with the field.

HOW HAS IT HELPED? WHAT HAVE THEY LEARNED?

Sandy and Michael highlighted several of the benefits of undertaking such an effort. Some benefits they could have anticipated, they said; others were more serendipitous.

- The assessment process has provided formal time to reflect on performance.
- It has produced new data for management and staff to use in a variety of ways.
- It has provided a forum to allow the staff and board to identify areas for follow-up and improvement.
- And, it has engaged the trustees more fully in the work and the strategic direction of the foundation.

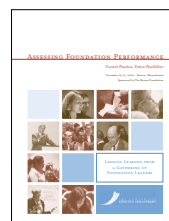
They left seminar participants with the lessons they have learned in the process of implementing such a comprehensive performance assessment process.

- To be successful, you must have the buy-in of leadership, as well as staff and grantees.
- Engaging the board invests them in the process.
- Engaging the staff in identifying problems and solutions builds their commitment to making needed change.

- Creating a “safe” forum for critics and listening carefully provides needed and valuable information.
- Perfect measurements are hard to find, but there’s value in the search for good measures and a commitment to improving them over time.
- Finally, and critically, clarifying targets and strategic objectives sharpens everyone’s thinking about change.

Lewis Sandy, M.D., is the executive vice president of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and leads the foundation’s strategic planning efforts, program and budget development and management, and operations. He has both M.D. and M.B.A. degrees, and in addition to management and grant programs positions at the foundation, he continues to practice and teach medicine.

Maureen Michael is the program officer of the Robert Wood Johnson Research and Evaluation Unit where she helps to manage Health Tracking, a network of projects aimed at understanding changes unfolding across the country’s health care system. She has held posts at the Department of Health and Human Services, the National Institute on Aging, the Domestic Policy Advisor’s office, and in the office of Senator Bill Bradley.



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