



ASSESSING PERFORMANCE: PROGRAM STAFF PERSPECTIVES

Assessment of how well foundations are progressing toward their programmatic goals continues to present significant challenges for program staff.

TECHNICAL CHALLENGES

Program staff overwhelmingly refer to a variety of technical challenges related to the nature of the problems their work addresses. "Our investments are generally quite long term with respect to the results we are buying," says one program staff member, "therefore, it is difficult to sift through short-term data to make rational decisions about short-term adjustments and the impact they may or may not have on long-term results." Another describes the multi-layered challenges of "getting the metric and data source right. Some things ... can be difficult and expensive to track, and then add to that the challenge of linking/assessing our role." Foundations struggle with "how to quantify intangible progress (i.e., a stronger sense of community)" as well as how to identify the causal role they play in the complex efforts they fund. "These are very difficult goals to achieve. We have purposely kept the bar very high, but we are not in full control of all of the factors that will contribute to the achievement of these goals. Some might take until longer than 2015 to attain."

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

These technical challenges make assessment time-consuming to address, calling for significant

organizational commitment. But program staff struggle with finding the "time and staff that can assist when needed" and the "lack of time to properly assess and detail findings." Efforts for program staff to engage in assessment can further be hampered when the "CEO has other priorities" and "decisions are being made on board intuition."

GRANTEE CAPACITY AND SKILL

The challenges extend beyond the foundations' walls. The difficulties grantees face in assessing their performance hampers foundations' assessment efforts. "Nonprofits are still not very sophisticated in planning outcomes and then tying this back to the impact on the people served," says one program staff member. "No information is collected by grantees, and there's been little assistance from the foundation to assist them in this capacity."

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