

Foundations and Evaluation

A project funded by the David and Lucile Packard
Foundation

Jana Kay Slater, PhD
Public Health Institute
jslater@phi.org
530.756.0146

Marc T. Braverman, PhD
University of California, Davis

Norman A. Constantine, PhD
Public Health Institute & UC, Berkeley

Foundations and Evaluation

1. Background on the project
 2. Things about foundations that evaluators need to know
 3. Things about evaluation that foundations need to know
 4. Ways that evaluation can be used to help foundations and grantees
 5. Challenges to effective evaluation
 6. Steps to bridge the gap
-

Background

- Heightened interest in evaluation among foundation personnel
 - 1993 Government Performance Results Act - outcomes
 - 1996 United Way of America - outcomes
 - Project began in 2002
-

Background - Workgroup

- ❑ **John Bare**, The Knight Foundation
 - ❑ **Marian Bass**, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
 - ❑ **Lester Baxter**, The Pew Charitable Trusts
 - ❑ **William Beery**, The Group Health Community Foundation
 - ❑ **William Bickel**, University of Pittsburgh
 - ❑ **Deborah Bonnet**, Lumina Foundation for Education
 - ❑ **Marc Braverman**, University of California, Davis
 - ❑ **Paul Brest**, The William & Flora Hewlett Foundation
 - ❑ **Hodding Carter**, John S. & James K. Knight Foundation
 - ❑ **Ross Conner**, University of California, Irvine
 - ❑ **Norman Constantine**, Public Health Institute, and UC Berkeley
 - ❑ **Wendy Constantine**, Research and Evaluation Systems
 - ❑ **Mike Cortes**, Institute for Nonprofit Organization Management
-

Background – Workgroup (con't)

- **Jane Davidson**, Western Michigan University
 - **Peter Dobkin-Hall**, Harvard University
 - **Jennifer Greene**, University of Illinois
 - **Rodney Hopson**, Duquesne University
 - **Ernie House**, University of Colorado
 - **Michael Howe**, East Bay Community Foundation
 - **Barbara Kibbe**, The David & Lucile Packard Foundation
 - **James Knickman**, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
 - **Mark Kramer**, The Center for Effective Philanthropy
 - **Judith Kroll**, Council on Foundations

 - **Victor Kuo**, The David & Lucile Packard Foundation
 - **Carol Larson**, The David & Lucile Packard Foundation
 - **Risa Lavizzo-Mourey**, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
-

Background – Workgroup (con't)

- ❑ **Laura Leviton**, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
 - ❑ **Melvin Mark**, The Pennsylvania State University
 - ❑ **Kent McGuire**, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation
 - ❑ **Marli Melton**, Community Foundation for Monterey County
 - ❑ **Ricardo Millett**, Woods Fund of Chicago
 - ❑ **Patricia Patrizi**, Patrizi Associates
 - ❑ **Michael Patton**, Union Institute & University
 - ❑ **Edward Pauly**, Wallace Foundation
 - ❑ **Carolina Reyes**, The California Endowment
 - ❑ **Debra Rog**, Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies
 - ❑ **Michael Scriven**, Claremont Graduate University
 - ❑ **Jana Kay Slater**, Public Health Institute
-

Why evaluation in foundations is
not business as usual...

Things about foundations that evaluators need to know

- ❑ Foundations began as largely personal and private endeavors
 - ❑ Fiduciary accountability has been and continues to be a priority
 - ❑ Conducting evaluation for learning and improvement is usually optional
-

Evaluators need to know that...

- ❑ Evaluation tends to be endorsed most readily by larger foundations
 - ❑ Large and small foundations tend to have different needs
 - ❑ Focus may be on the grantee or on the foundation (or both)
-

Evaluators need to know that...

- Foundation activities are strongly influenced by grantmaking cycles
 - Individual grant
 - Program life cycle
 - Payout
 - Business
-

Evaluators need to know that...

- The culture of foundations is unique

 - Relationships between the foundation and its grantees are complex
 - Culture of good intentions
 - Culture of entitlement
 - Funder, mentor, partner?
-

Things about evaluation that foundations need to know

- Evaluation is a diverse and rapidly evolving field

 - Over the years it has expanded to include the following perspectives:
 - Scientific
 - Decision-focused
 - Program improvement
-

"By *evaluation*, we mean

- a wide range of information-generation activities
- (well beyond the traditional assessment of program impact)
- that can support decision processes and learning in organizations."

(Leviton and Bickel, p. 119)

Foundations need to know that...

- ❑ The academic preparation of professional evaluators is wildly variable
 - ❑ There are no established competency standards and no certification process for evaluators.
-

And evaluators can be found in many places...

Mountain View Evaluation Consultants
(530) 756-0146



Ways that evaluation can be used to help foundations and grantees

- Accountability
 - Enhance learning and decision making
 - Build knowledge
-

Accountability

- ❑ Foundation leadership – satisfies fiduciary responsibilities
 - ❑ Foundation staffs - evidence to support grantmaking choices
 - ❑ Grantees - evidence that funds were spent appropriately
-

Enhance learning
and decision making

Foundation leadership use this information to...

- Learn about unmet needs in the targeted field
 - Learn about grantee effectiveness
 - Inform decision-making about future investments and new initiatives
 - Provide evidence of organizational effectiveness to external audiences
-

Program officers use this information to...

- Support grantees in their improvement efforts
 - Make decisions about awarding new grants or renewing grants
-

Grantees use this information to...

- Strengthen program implementation
 - Increase effectiveness
 - Leverage additional funding
-

Build knowledge

- ❑ Strengthen the targeted field (e.g., education, health) through dissemination
 - ❑ Help other funders improve their own grantmaking
 - ❑ Contribute to a climate of collaboration for innovation and change
 - ❑ Accelerate the pace of social change
-

So why isn't evaluation
used more widely?

Challenges to effective evaluation

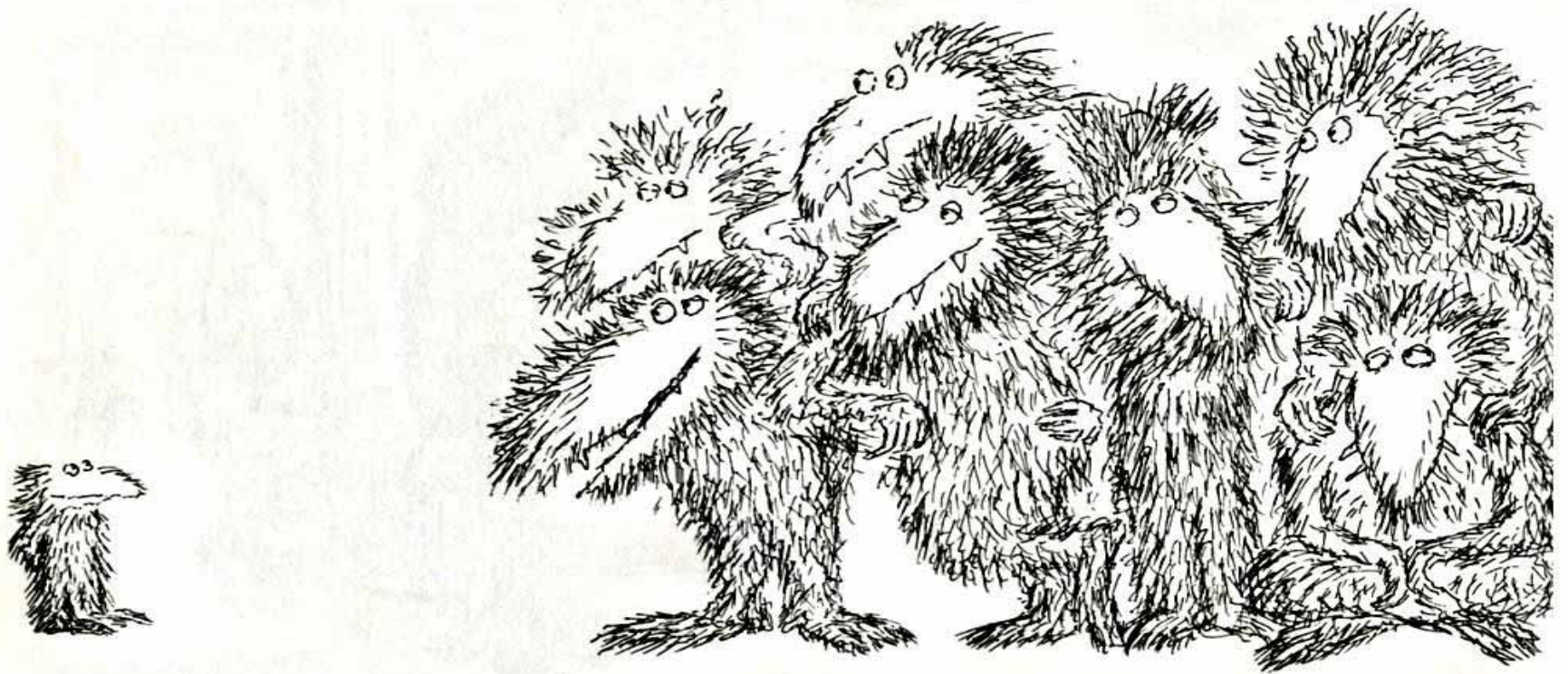
- The interests of diverse stakeholders are difficult to prioritize
- Foundations may not want to burden grantees or staff with additional evaluation-related tasks

“Process creates dissatisfaction and conflict for grantees”



Challenges (con't)

- The asymmetrical power relationship between foundations and grantees impedes honest communication
 - Grantees may feel pressure to demonstrate positive results
-

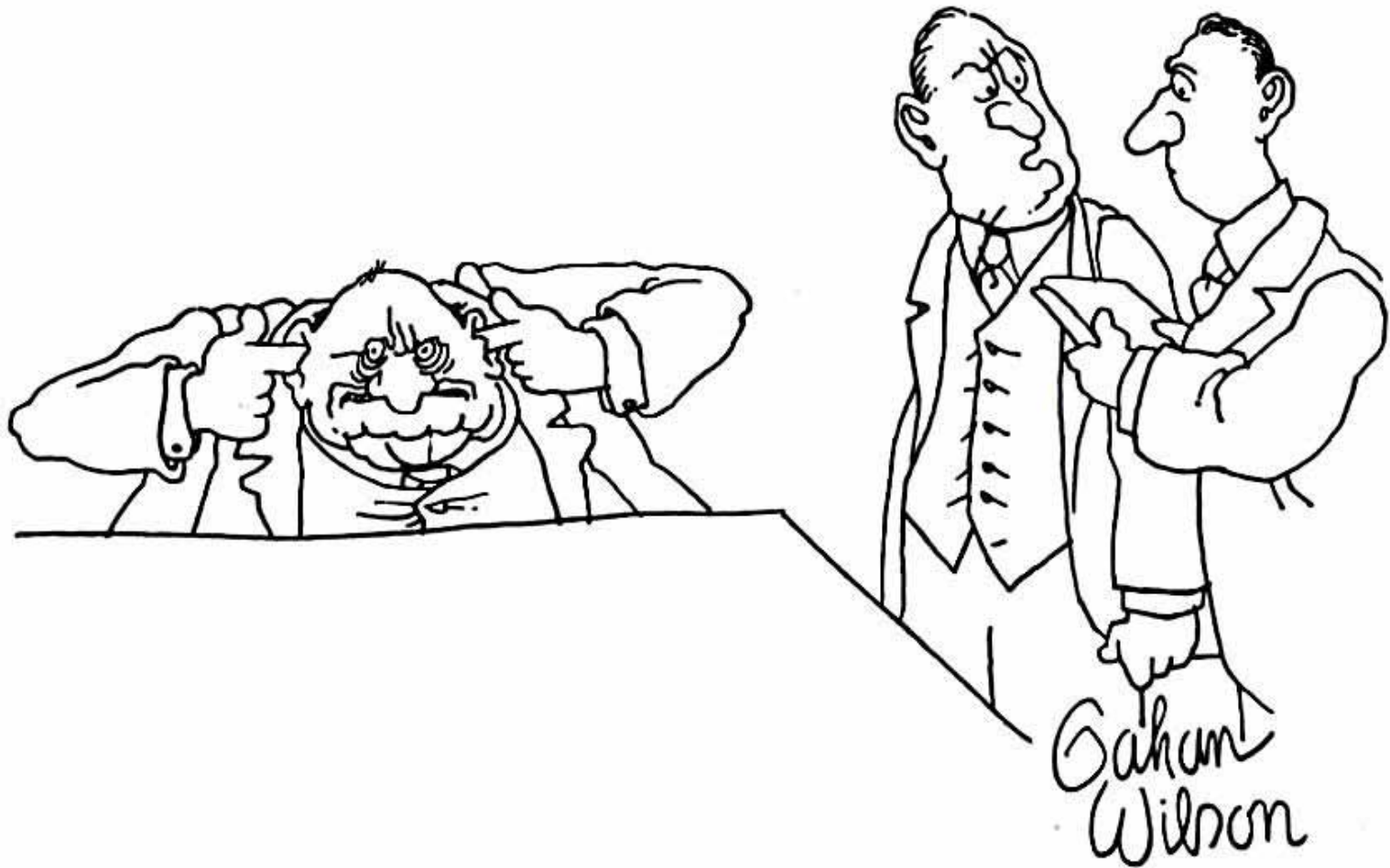


"We're just family."

Challenges (con't)

- ❑ Foundation staff may be uncomfortable with the use of evidence and its implications
- ❑ Foundations may want to avoid being judgmental with their grantees

“Findings may criticize a grantee’s work”



"You're not telling Mr. Bennett what he wants to hear!"

Challenges (con't)

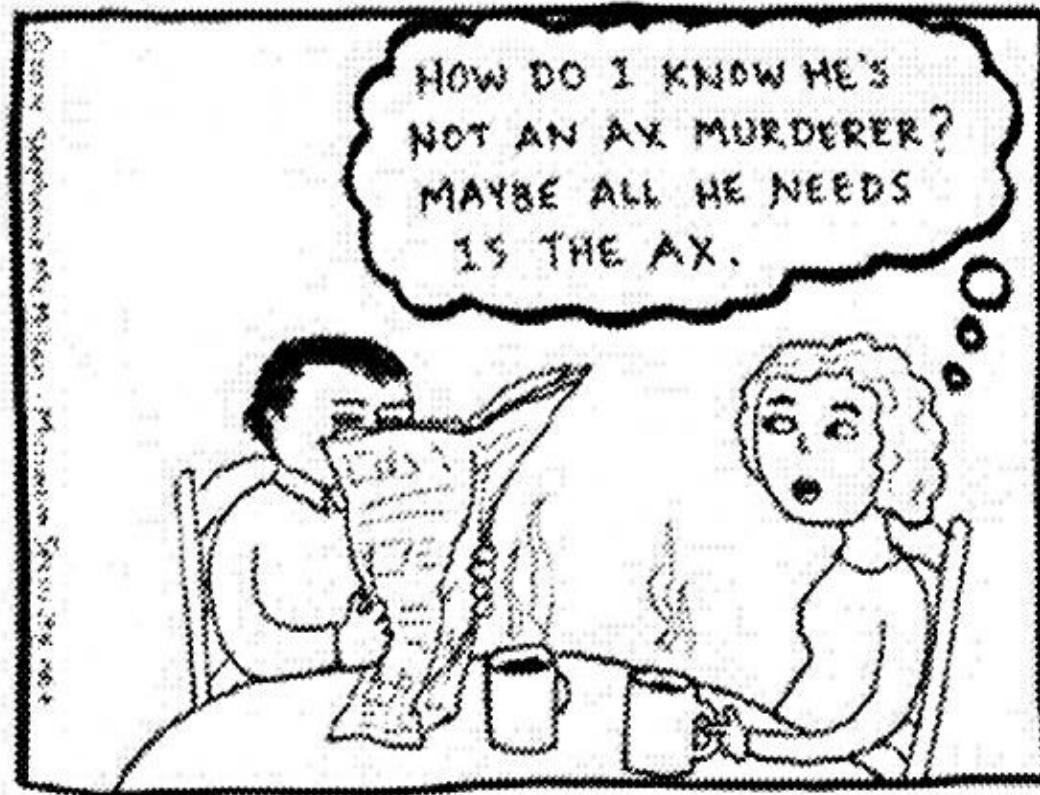
- Evidence-based decision making might slow down response time
- Evaluation timelines aren't always synchronized with foundation grantmaking cycles

“Evaluators overpromise and underdeliver”

Challenges (con't)

- The fear that evaluation results may be damaging for a grantee...
-

"Evaluators are ax murderers"



Steps to bridge the gap



Recommendations for foundations

- Become an informed consumer of evaluation approaches

“You can observe a lot
by watching.” Yogi Berra

Recommendations for foundations (con't)

- ❑ Use due diligence when hiring an evaluator
 - ❑ Plan ahead for how you will use and disseminate your evaluation findings
 - ❑ Promote evidence-based decision making
 - ❑ Encourage organizational learning in your grantees and your own foundation
-

Recommendations for foundations (con't)

- ❑ Do not penalize failure, as long as learning takes place
 - ❑ Value and learn from “negative” findings as well as “positive” findings
-

Setting an example is not the main
means of influencing another, it is the
only means.

Albert Einstein

Recommendations for evaluators

- Understand and accommodate the context and culture of foundations
 - Spend time up front learning what the foundation *truly* wants from the evaluation
-

Recommendations for evaluators (con't)

- Understand relationships between your foundation client and its grantees
 - When communicating evaluation results – speak the same language as the client
-

I read
the evaluation
on my desk

which you probably
expected
me to read
days ago

Forgive me
it was delicious

so clear
and so concise.

Armand Brint

Recommendations for evaluators (con't)

- Be an educator! Plan post-evaluation activities to enhance learning
-

Peruvian Proverb

Little by little
One walks far
