

ELEMENTS OF A GOOD MONITORING AND ENGAGEMENT PLAN

A monitoring plan is a framework or logical model for synthesizing information compiled through the application of various existing grantmaking tools and analysis, assigning importance, and selecting additional tools and practices to address opportunities, risks, and information gaps.

This overview provides worksheets and guidance for each step. The aim is to align action plans with considerations arising from portfolio strategies, due diligence, and other sources, rather than duplicate those efforts. The framework should serve as a check for strategic thinking (Am I attending appropriately to the major opportunities and risks, and crucial information gaps?) and to assess time management (Am I factoring in opportunity costs? Have I selected the most efficient way to get needed information?).

Step 1. Identify risks, opportunities, information gaps (start with a simple list; you will need it to complete Worksheet 2)

Build on the analysis already conducted through due diligence, and your knowledge of the field. The following categories are illustrative (and often overlapping). You may encounter others.

- a. *Organizational opportunities and risk factors surfaced through due diligence and the Resiliency Guide;*
- b. *Field or portfolio opportunities and risk factors, including external conditions crucial to the success of the project, noted in proposal preparation and due diligence;*
- c. *External or contextual risk factors (normally would be highlighted in grantees' strategies and theories of change as well as program officer knowledge);*
- d. *Assumptions and uncertainties*

Step 2. Map the opportunities and concerns that drive the need for engagement (Worksheet 1)

Many strategic grants have been classified as high, medium, or low engagement already. The worksheet may be useful if you wish to re-examine your classification (for example, focusing on projected future engagement in addition to experience to date).

Note that level of engagement is determined as much or more by risk and reward calculations as by strategic importance. A highly important/strategic grant to a highly capable partner carrying out proven approaches might require less time than a moderately important/strategic grant with great potential for learning.

Step 3. Build an action plan (Worksheet 2)

Are there opportunities to achieve multiple objectives with each report or contact? To align Foundation requirements with the grantee's work flow?

Often we reflexively schedule reports on the anniversary of the grant or payment, or check-ins on an arbitrary monthly or quarterly rhythm. It can be more productive as well as supportive of good relationships to consider "right timing" these activities for grantees and for the Foundation.

Worksheet 1. What's Driving the Need for Engagement?

1. **Importance** to portfolio and strategy

A. Lower third	B. Middle third	C. Top third
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2. **Size** of grant/level of Foundation investment (relative to portfolio)

A. Lower third	B. Middle third	C. Top third
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3. **Confidence**/proof of concept: Have the key players done this before? Is it a proven approach?

A. Yes	B. To some degree	C. No
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4. Level of **concern**: known or potential risks, uncertainty about fundamental assumptions or conditions for success

A. Low	B. Medium	C. High
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5. Potential for **learning**, creation of opportunities to advance the work or the field (relative to other grants in the portfolio, as well as other kinds of opportunities)

A. Low	B. Medium	C. High
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6. Willingness to invest **additional Foundation resources** (capacity building grants, support for evaluation and learning communities, consultant assistance, etc.) to respond to opportunities or performance concerns

A. Low	B. Medium	C. High
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7. Gaps in your **input/feedback loops**: Would you be likely to get information or a heads-up about external or internal issues affecting performance of this grant/initiative through informal channels, either from the grantee or leaders of the initiative, or from your network in the field?

A. Yes, good communications and trust in place	B. I think so	C. No or not sure
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Assess:

For each question, A indicates a lower engagement strategy, B a moderate engagement strategy, C a high engagement strategy.

- Did your answers fall primarily in one category, suggesting overall more or less engagement?
- Do you have outliers? Specific issues you need to watch more closely, or can ease up on?
- Did you answer "A" to question 3? This indicates an option to take a lighter approach, engaging as time and your learning agenda permit.

Worksheet 2. Topics + Tactics + Timing + Tools = Action Plan

The worksheet on the next page should help you move from a “laundry list” of ways to engage, to a schedule of activities that creates the most value and learning from the appropriate investment of time (yours and the grantee’s).

Use the left-hand columns

- To check your thinking about what’s important to stay on top of (key opportunities and risks, crucial information gaps) – with enough attention to protect the Foundation’s investment and contribute to success, but not so much as to divert you from more important opportunities or risks. **(Topic)** Consider topics at four levels: Field, External Factors, Organization, Program/Project
- To make sure that your “tracking agenda” is specific, actionable (interventions or adaptations available to the Foundation to leverage or resolve arising issues) and measurable (what indicators – “green lights,” “red flags,” or evidence would signal that it’s time to consider such an adaptation?) **(Tactics)**
- To plan and schedule activities at times that make sense to the Foundation and the grantee, aligning with milestones in the workplan and calendar (fiscal year, school year, project timeline, key events such as annual meetings) and spotting opportunities to approach your network contacts and reading/research agenda prepared to get exactly the information you need across multiple grants or objectives. **(Timing)**

Then connect the dots by drawing a line from the information need to the appropriate **tool** or mechanism in the righthand column. Can you reduce the number of tools you have to apply by getting more out of each one?

