



NATIONAL CENTER FOR  
FAMILY PHILANTHROPY

## Family Giving Online Knowledge Center Board Activities and Training Procedures

**TITLE:** Monitoring, Assessment, and Evaluation Policy

**SOURCE:** Emily Hall Tremain Foundation

[For more information, please go to: <http://www.tremainefoundation.org/>]

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### MONITORING, ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION (EMILY HALL TREMAINE FOUNDATION)

The Foundation believes that taking risks goes hand in hand with making an important difference. It fully recognizes that, in taking risks, both the Foundation and its grantees by definition risk failure.

The Foundation views monitoring, assessment and evaluation as important tools to manage risk and as powerful tools for learning. All three play central roles not only in assuring the effectiveness of the Foundation's own program area strategies and grants but also in offering insights that strengthen grantees and others in the field.

- These tools are customized to the type, size, complexity and scope of specific initiatives.
- They are designed collaboratively with grantees and, where appropriate other funders.
- The Foundation takes steps to assure that they are not unreasonably restrictive or burdensome
- It carefully considers what level of effort is appropriate
- It provides sufficient resources
- It recognizes that precise quantitative measurement is sometimes not fully possible or applicable
- It understands that the effects of Foundation funding can rarely be fully isolated from other influences.

## **Definitions**

The Foundation uses the following broad definitions of monitoring, assessment and evaluation:

### **Monitoring. Is the Foundation or grantee doing what it said it was going to do?**

Monitoring is usually conducted on an ongoing basis. It tracks actual **activities** in relation to established milestones and schedules. Its primary purpose is to assure accountability and that the program is being implemented as planned.

In the case of grants, typical tools are written reports, informal communications and, where appropriate, site visits.

The Foundation's pursuit of its broader program strategies is typically monitored through workplan and milestone reviews by staff and Program Implementation Committees.

### **Assessment (also known as "Formative evaluation"). Is program experience validating assumptions that program strategies and activities will have certain interim results?**

If employed, assessment is conducted while a program is still in progress. It examines the interim **effects** of program strategies and activities. Its primary purpose is to strengthen program design by identifying problems and providing feedback that enable timely mid-course corrections.

**Tools range from anecdotal evidence to focus groups, surveys and more structured studies.**

### **Program impact evaluations. What is the end result and what real difference did it make?**

When conducted, impact evaluations occur at points when measurable change is expected. They examine **project impact** in relation to the program's ultimate objectives.

The primary purpose is to determine what difference the program is actually making or has made. When indicated and possible, they may also seek to identify the strategies or activities that contributed to program success or failure.

Tools may range from simple self-reporting to rigorous independent full fledged research.

### **Cluster evaluations. What overall difference did strategically related initiatives make?**

Cluster evaluations examine the **collective impact of several initiatives** and measure progress toward overarching objectives. Their primary use is to consider what difference a common strategy is making as it was executed through multiple Foundation projects or through Foundations projects in concert with the projects of others.

Tools may include "umbrella reviews" of two or more project impact evaluations and complementary or joint research with other funders.

## **Considerations in plan design.**

Planning for evaluation, assessment and monitoring bring discipline and rigor to program planning and development. It is essential that these processes be fully integrated from the outset.

All plans include provisions for monitoring to assure accountability that the program is being implemented as intended. The rest of each plan is determined by considering four basic questions:

Given what is at stake in this case, for what essential purposes must assessment and evaluation be conducted? Examples include:

- To make timely mid course corrections in program strategy or design
- Determine the program's ultimate impact
- Test whether strategies that theoretically work actually accomplish change
- Identify what worked and what didn't (e.g. whether a "failure" was due to a flaw in strategy or implementation.)
- Improve the impact of future grant-making
- Provide lessons and insights that will inform replication efforts
- Provide advocates with a documented case for policy change or expanded funding
- Provide valuable new basic insight and intelligence to the field

How and by whom will the results actually be used?

Given the purposes and uses, what information must be obtained?

What approaches and degree of "rigor" will be sufficiently credible to the Foundation and others who need to know?

### **The plans.**

Once these parameters are established, structured materials are developed as part of the final approved written program area strategy or grant. These materials are intended to assure that program expectations are clear and shared from the start and that any benchmark and other data needs are anticipated.

Written materials will include:

- Measurable program objectives
- Key program strategies, activities and implementation milestones
- Reporting schedules
- Benchmarks, methods and timetables for monitoring, assessment and evaluation, as appropriate.