Community Foundation Family Philanthropy Services Evaluation Toolkit

The collaborative learning initiative, *Excellence in Family Philanthropy: Community Foundations Working Group* (EFP), brings together a select group of 19 U.S. and Canadian community foundations to deepen their understanding of issues related to family philanthropy and increase their capacity to offer family philanthropy services. Participating foundations have identified "measuring success" as a topic of common interest and concern. They would like to ensure that their efforts to provide family philanthropy services are in alignment with their respective foundation's goals and result in added benefit for their donors, communities, and their own organizations.

The Philanthropic Initiative (TPI), the initiative's facilitator, engaged Blueprint Research & Design, Inc. to craft this evaluation toolkit for community foundations to track the impact of and learn from their efforts to work with philanthropic families.[1]

We designed the toolkit with the expectation that the community foundations' own staffs would be the primary users of the evaluation findings. The aim is to provide information and insights that will help foundations allocate their resources more effectively, make strategic refinements to services, justify to foundation management the need for enhanced services, and communicate to donor families the range of services offered and their expected outcomes. And, by using these tools to continuously assess their services and products for philanthropic families, community foundations can strengthen their evaluation and monitoring capacity.

Specifically, the toolkit is designed to provide community foundations:

- A brief introduction to program evaluation.
- Guidance for prioritizing what they want to learn from their evaluation efforts.
- A stand alone data collection, analysis and reporting tool – a donor survey – that can be implemented by community foundations, regardless of organization size, data management capacity, and evaluation expertise, to evaluate their family philanthropy programs.
- Recommendations of three additional evaluation strategies (focus groups, internal reflection sessions, and donor data tracking and analysis) that will augment the insights gained from the donor survey. By using these recommended tools, community foundations can gain complementary types of information (qualitative data in the case of the focus groups, and quantitative data in the case of the donor data tracking), and address research questions that the survey does not.

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[1] Blueprint Research & Design, Inc. (www.blueprintrd.com) is a strategic consulting firm dedicated to helping grantmaking foundations, individual and family donors, and philanthropic networks achieve their missions.

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The Family Philanthropy Services Survey Manual is a separate document containing:

- Detailed instructions for setting up and implementing the survey of
- A copy of the online survey instrument
- Tools for analyzing the survey data
- A survey reporting template

Guiding Concepts for Program Evaluation[2]

What is program evaluation?

Program evaluation is the **systematic** collection of **information** about the **activities**, **characteristics**, and **outcomes** of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming. (Patton, 1997)

What are common purposes of evaluation?

1. Judge merit or worth of a program
   - "Summative (outcomes) evaluation"
   - Ensure program accountability and quality control
   - Inform cost-benefit decisions
   - Decide a program's future

2. Improve programs and program strategies
   - "Formative evaluation"
   - Identify strengths and weaknesses
   - Inform continuous improvement
   - Enhance program quality
   - Become a learning organization
   - Manage more effectively

3. Generate knowledge
   - Develop generalizations about effectiveness
   - Extrapolate principles about what works
   - Synthesize patterns across programs
   - Inform the field

What principles or elements underlie this evaluation toolkit?[3]

- Evaluation is a process of asking good questions, gathering information to answer them and making decisions based on those answers.
- Evaluation is not a single event, but a process; not episodic, but ongoing.
- Evaluation is a developmental, not a report card, process.
- Evaluation invites collaboration within an organization and with external parties such as clients, donors and grantees.
- Effective evaluation occurs in an environment that is as risk-free as possible.
- Evaluation is the responsibility of everyone.
- Evaluations should be shared with others.

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[2] This section draws heavily from the writings and teachings of Michael Quinn Patton.
[3] These key elements were originally proposed by Independent Sector in its 1993 publication, *A Vision of Evaluation*. They are further described by the Marguerite Casey Foundation at http://www.caseygrants.org/documents/thinkingpieces/preliminary_thoughts_on_evaluation.pdf.

- The output of evaluation is organizational learning – a way for the organization to assess its progress and change in ways that lead to greater achievement of its mission.

What is the best way to conduct program evaluation?

There is no one right way to conduct program evaluation. The types of information you decide to collect, how you collect them, and from whom, will depend upon:

- The questions that you want to answer
- How you intend to use the answers to those questions
- The feasibility of gathering the information
- The resources (staff time and expertise, information management systems) dedicated to your evaluation

Your evaluation strategies will also be influenced by how you intend for its quality and credibility to be judged. When thinking about evaluation, the criteria that most often come to mind are those of traditional social science research: objectivity, rigor, the validity and reliability of the data. However, many organizations use alternative criteria such as whether their evaluations:

- Promote dialogue and voice multiple perspectives by acknowledging biases, building trust, and reflecting authenticity
- Move people by getting an emotional response and making them care
- Empower people, improve conditions by building people's power and capacity for change through participating in the evaluation process
- Facilitate people's ability to make decisions about programs by being usable, systematic, fair, and grounded in integrity and honesty

Which of these criteria—or combination of them—you use will depend upon your organization's values and its goals for the evaluation. Your program evaluation need not epitomize scientific rigor. Yet, by systematically asking questions and gathering information to help answer them, your evaluation can bring to your organization what Michael Quinn Patton calls the *"biases of evaluation"—intentionality, clarity, and specificity.*

What is a common pitfall of program evaluation?

Often, particularly when using evaluation for accountability purposes, we are tempted to focus our efforts on addressing the seemingly simple question "Did it work?" Yet framing evaluation in such yes-no terms sets us up to judge programs as successes or failures without contributing to our understanding of how and why they succeeded or failed. Nor does this yes-no framework acknowledge that the successfulness and degree of impact of individual projects varies. In many cases, it is more meaningful to ask:

"What worked, for whom, in what ways, under what conditions, with what implications?"

Getting Started

Toolkit Development

This evaluation toolkit was designed based on the input of members of the Excellence in Family Philanthropy Initiative (EFP). We asked all of the participating community foundations to tell us about their family philanthropy programming and goals via two online surveys. In addition, five of the community foundations participated in a working session in Kansas City and were asked to review pieces of the toolkit during its development.[4]

The donor survey and the additional data collection strategies that we recommend using are driven by:

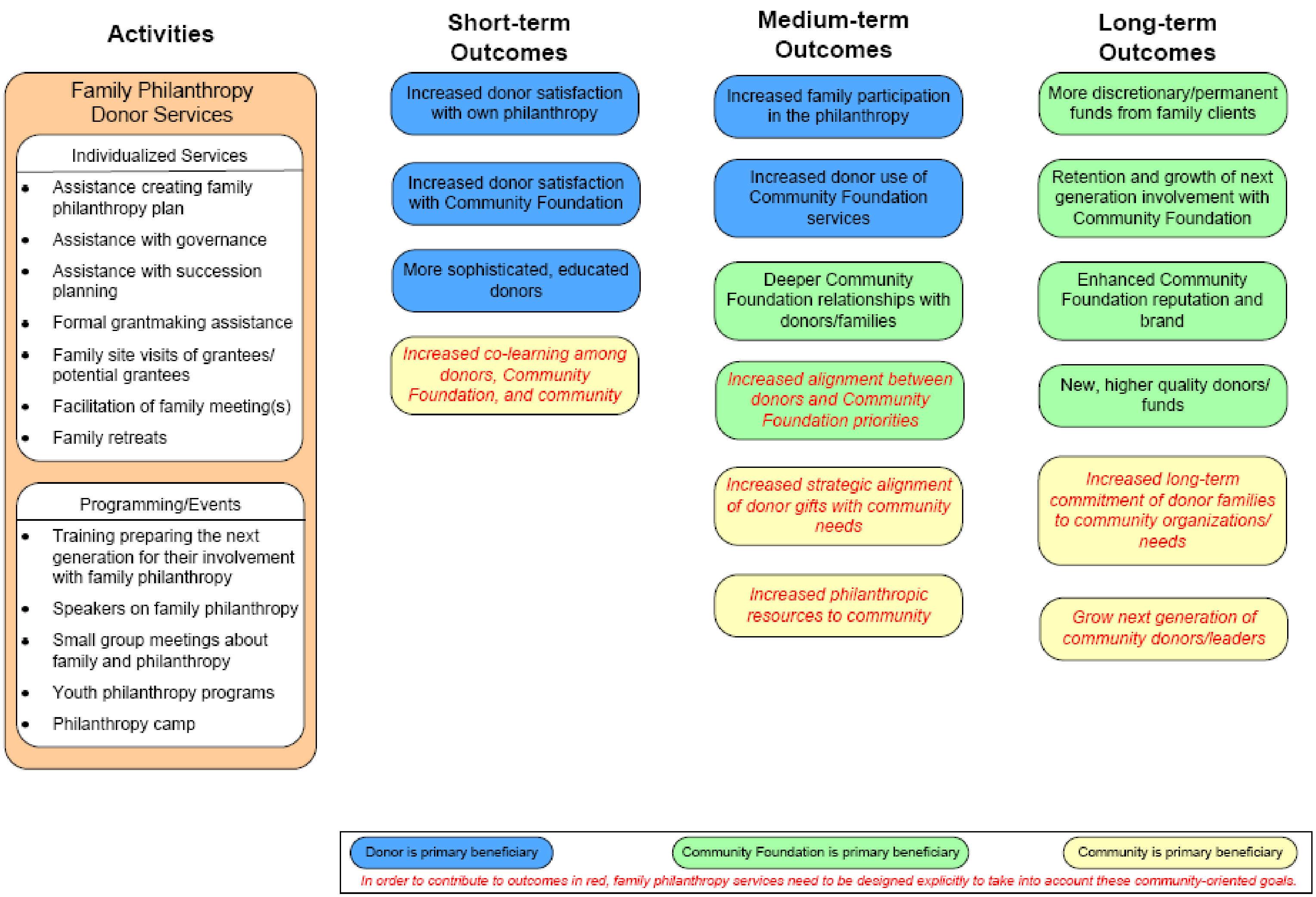
- The outcomes of highest priority to the initiative participants.
- The guiding evaluation questions identified by the working group.
- Our understanding of the data collection, management, and analysis capabilities of community foundations. The working group participants especially tasked us to develop tools that could be implemented by their peers at smaller community foundations.
- The recognition that any one research tool cannot address the full range of research questions of interest, and that by using multiple strategies, community foundations can gain more complete answers to their questions than they would using a single tool.
- The desire by Initiative participants to potentially aggregate and compare their evaluation findings.

Toolkit Priority Outcomes

Community foundations have a wide range of motivations for providing family philanthropy services. Excellence in Family Philanthropy Initiative participants identified nearly twenty potential goals for their programs. We have presented these outcomes in the approximate chronicle order in which we would expect to see them achieved in the graphic on the following page.

[4] The following community foundations participated in the family philanthropy evaluation discussion at the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation on June 13, 2007: The Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta, Battle Creek Community Foundation, The Boston Foundation, Central Indiana Community Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Silicon Valley.

Community Foundations' Family Philanthropy Services
Potential Activities and Outcomes



To focus the evaluation toolkit, we used these goals, which are itemized on the EFP "Measures of Success Worksheet," as a basis for identifying the outcomes of greatest interest to the most initiative participants.[5] Following from a survey of all initiative participants as well as the facilitated session in Kansas City with a subset of the group, the following five outcomes rose to the top of the list:

- Grow more sophisticated, educated and fulfilled donors
- Increase donors satisfaction with their own philanthropy
- Increase donors satisfaction with community foundation
- Deepen community foundation relationship with donors/families
- Attract new, higher quality donors/funds

The donor survey was designed explicitly to help community foundations assess the extent to which their family philanthropy services are contributing to achieving the first four of these five goals.

Assessing progress toward the fifth goal, "Attract new, higher quality donors/funds," will require including a question during the introductory meetings with new donors about whether the family philanthropy services were a factor in their decision to open or contribute to a fund at the community foundation, coupled with tracking of donors' fund contributions and grantmaking over time. In addition, community foundations will need to define more specifically what they mean by "higher quality donors/funds."

Toolkit Guiding Evaluation Questions

During the June evaluation discussion in Kansas City, we asked representatives of the five participating community foundations what they would like to learn from an evaluation of their family philanthropy services. The evaluation questions clustered below emerged from that process. We used these questions to inform the development of the donor survey and our additional recommendations for data collection and analysis.

Internal capacity and costs

- To what extent and how does providing family philanthropy services strengthen our position or image in the community?
- How well are we providing family philanthropy services within our current structure? What changes to our structure would allow us to better serve our donors' family philanthropy needs?
- How well are we supporting the intensive staff time family philanthropy services entail?
- What is the opportunity cost of providing family philanthropy services?
- How well do our family philanthropy services fit within our donor services system? What role should they play within the system (i.e., central/core or peripheral)?
- What are the costs of providing these services? Have we established appropriate fees? Are we adequately covering our costs using the existing fee structure?

[5] We separated "Increase donor satisfaction with the CF and their own philanthropy" into two outcomes for the purposes of our survey.

Quality of services

- What is the most beneficial product or service?
- Are we providing the highest level of quality of these services? How can we improve them further?
- How are we helping our donors?
- What is most valued by our donors?

New money into foundation

- To what extent do donors feel a greater connection to the foundation as a result of using the family philanthropy services?
- Are they making bigger gifts?
- Are our family philanthropy services attracting new donors that are making large investments in the community foundation?

More informed donors

- To what extent and how are our family philanthropy services helping donors become more informed, passionate, and, engaged?

Future donors

- To what extent and how are we building getter relationships with next generations through our family services?
- Are donors meeting their goals?
- Are they happy with services?
- Are we meeting their expectations?
- Are we helping to advance the donor family's goals?
- Does use of the family philanthropy services lead to changes in family's philanthropic behavior?
- What is of most benefit to clients? In what ways are they transformed?

Establishing your own guiding research questions and outcomes to track

The first steps to implementing this toolkit and evaluating your community foundation's family philanthropy services are for your evaluation team to determine your program's priority goals and the questions that you would like your evaluation to address.

Your evaluation team should consist of a range of stakeholders. Along with staff members involved in the various aspects of providing family philanthropy services, you may want to include representatives from the foundation's executive team and grantmaking department. By involving people with different interests, perspectives, and levels of power, you are more likely to earn commitment to the evaluation across the department and organization, ensure that the evaluation addresses questions of importance to key players, and gain valuable insights and analyses that would otherwise be missed.

Your Community Foundation's Priority Outcomes

Work with your evaluation team to identify the four to five goals of your family philanthropy programming that are of greatest importance for your foundation. These are the outcomes that you will want to track progress toward over time.

The graphic above can serve as a useful starting point for the discussion. Which of the outcomes on the graphic do you hope to achieve? How do you expect your family philanthropy work to contribute to those outcomes – i.e., can you tell the story of how your services and related activities (e.g., marketing) would help lead to the outcomes that you hope to see? What goals do you have that are not on the graphic? How, exactly, do you see your family philanthropy services and related activities contributing to these outcomes?

If you are unable to tell the story of how your family philanthropy services would contribute to an outcome, then either revise your expectations for the program or alter your activities so that the outcome is within reach.

Your Community Foundation's Own Guiding Evaluation Questions

Also working with your team, and using the graphic as a reference, brainstorm and then prioritize the questions that you will use to guide your evaluation. One way of doing this is to ask each team member to provide you in writing their responses, phrased as questions, to the question "What would you like to learn from an evaluation of our family philanthropy services?" And, for each question that they brainstorm, ask them to note how they would use the answer in their work. This will help with your prioritization later by focusing attention on the questions that will be of the greatest use for the foundation to address.

It is useful to give team members examples of the types of things about which they may have questions. For instance you can ask them what questions they have about the foundation's internal capacities and costs; the processes for providing the services; the quality of services; the influence of the services on family members' philanthropic giving and their relationships with the foundation.

When you have collected all of the brainstormed questions and their uses, you can create a master list – omitting duplicate questions, rephrasing questions as needed, and clustering questions by any themes that emerge. Then, your team can come together in person to discuss the list and identify the highest priority questions. When deciding upon the top evaluation priorities, keep in mind that at this early stage of your foundation's family philanthropy programming, questions that will help you to improve your internal processes and your services are more essential to address than those that are simply about documenting program results. In other words, along with asking "What happened?" be sure to ask "How and why did it happen?" and "What can we do differently to improve our work?"

Using This Toolkit

With your priority outcomes and evaluation questions in hand, you can begin integrating evaluation into your family philanthropy practices by using the tools described in the following sections. We recommend using all four of the tools included in the toolkit. We have selected this set of complementary research methods to facilitate *triangulation*, i.e. collecting qualitative and quantitative information in multiple ways from multiple sources. The triangulation process helps ensure that your data is valid, allows the various methods to inform each other, and captures more breadth and depth of information than is possible using any one method. The matrix below highlights the contributions of each tool.

Evaluation Tool	Types of data collected & timeframe	Examples of evaluation questions addressed
Family Philanthropy Services Survey	**Quantitative** Donor-focused Outcomes-oriented Annual event (or every other year)	▪ To what extent do donors feel a greater connection to the foundation as a result of using the family philanthropy services? ▪ Are they making bigger gifts as a result? ▪ Does use of the family philanthropy services lead to changes in family's philanthropic behavior? ▪ To what extent and how are our family philanthropy services helping donors become more informed, passionate, and, engaged? ▪ To what extent and how are we building better relationships with next generations through our family services? ▪ Are donors happy with our family philanthropy services? ▪ Are we meeting their expectations? ▪ What is the most beneficial product or service? ▪ What is most valued by our donors?
Focus Groups	**Qualitative** Donor-focused Process-oriented Annual event (or every other year)	Details of "how" and "why" related to the questions listed above.

Evaluation Tool	Types of data collected	Examples of evaluation questions addressed
Internal Reflections Sessions	**Qualitative** CF-focused Process-oriented Periodic throughout the year	▪ How well are we providing family philanthropy services within our current structure? What changes to our structure would allow us to better serve our donors' family philanthropy needs? ▪ How well are we supporting the intensive staff time family philanthropy services entail? ▪ What is the opportunity cost of providing family philanthropy services? ▪ How well do our family philanthropy services fit within our donor services system? What role should they play within the system (i.e., central/core or peripheral)? ▪ What are the costs of providing these services? Have we established appropriate fees? Are we adequately covering our costs using the existing fee structure?
Tracking and Analyzing Donor Data	**Quantitative** Donor-focused Outcomes-oriented Data collection ongoing Analysis periodic throughout the year	▪ Are we retaining and growing the next generation of donors' involvement with the community foundation? Is this growth related to donors' use of our family philanthropy services? ▪ Have the donors that have used our family philanthropy services increased their giving to our discretionary/permanent funds? Do they give to these funds at higher rates than our other donors? ▪ Have the donors that use our family philanthropy services increased their philanthropic giving to the community [as defined by the foundation's mission and geographic reach]? Do they give to our community at higher rates than our other donors? ▪ Are the donors that use our family philanthropy services increasing their use of our other donor services?

Donor Survey

We created an online donor survey to help community foundations to understand the relationship between their family philanthropy services and four of the top priority outcomes identified by EFP participants:

- Grow more sophisticated, educated and fulfilled donors
- Increase donors satisfaction with their own philanthropy
- Increase donors satisfaction with community foundation
- Deepen community foundation relationship with donors/families

The unique value of the survey and manual are that

- Any community foundation can implement the survey and obtain meaningful information, regardless of the level of evaluation or data management expertise on staff; conducting the survey does not require changes to the community foundation staff's workflows.
- Because the survey is standardized, data can be aggregated and compared across community foundations. The survey presents a significant opportunity to contribute important new knowledge to the entire field of community foundations.
- The survey is designed to be of value and interest to donors. Unlike client satisfaction surveys, this survey provides donors an opportunity to reflect upon their giving practices. It is primarily about themselves and their families, rather than about the Community Foundation.

The survey addresses (to varying degrees) the following specific questions that were generated by the community foundations we consulted when developing the toolkit:

- To what extent do donors feel a greater connection to the foundation as a result of using the family philanthropy services?
- Are they making bigger gifts as a result?
- Does use of the family philanthropy services lead to changes in families' philanthropic behavior?
- To what extent and how are our family philanthropy services helping donors become more informed, passionate, and, engaged?
- To what extent and how are we building better relationships with next generations through our family services?
- Are donors happy with our family philanthropy services?
- Are we meeting their expectations?
- What is the most beneficial product or service?
- What is most valued by our donors?

We've provided detailed instructions for setting up and implementing the survey, a copy of the online survey instrument, tools for analyzing the survey data, and a survey reporting template in a separate document, **The Family Philanthropy Services Survey Manual**.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are designed to collect rich, qualitative information that can help you understand the forces at play in donors' family philanthropy. Following from what you learn from your Family Philanthropy Services Survey, focus groups can provide more in-depth and complementary information about donors' motivations, experiences, and needs related to your services.

For example, focus groups could provide an opportunity to gain deeper insight related to the question, "To what extent do donors feel a greater connection to the foundation as a result of using the family philanthropy services?" by allowing the foundation to hear from donors why and in what ways the services influence their sense of connection with the foundation.

Focus groups can benefit both the community foundation and its donors. The community foundation gains valuable data about itself and its services, and donors have an opportunity to reflect, hear from peers, and deepen their own thinking about philanthropy.

Step 1: Choose your Guiding Questions

Use you survey findings to identify the two to three most important questions to explore further with your focus groups.

Let's say, for example, your community foundation's survey revealed that the donors that use the family philanthropy services do not feel a greater connection to the foundation than other donors and do not necessarily structure their family's giving in more strategic ways. You may choose to use your focus groups to learn:

- What are the factors that promote donors' connection with the community foundation and their use of sound family giving practices? How can the family philanthropy services most effectively foster them?
- For those donors that did use the services, what would it take to increase their sense of connection to the foundation and strengthen their family's philanthropic practices? How could the family philanthropy services more effectively achieve these goals?

These guiding questions will determine your choice of focus group participants and help you determine what specific questions you will ask them.

Step 2: Choose your Groups

Choose the participants of your focus group(s) based on what you want to learn. Because more community foundations' family philanthropy programs are new and not yet heavily utilized, we anticipate that conducting a focus group with donors that have not yet taken advantage of the family philanthropy services will be as important as conducting a focus group with those that have used the services.

For example, to address the questions provided in Step 1, you could convene two focus groups. In the first, you would bring together donors that are highly engaged with the foundation and that are coordinating their family's philanthropy especially well to ask them about their pathways to their current philanthropic practices and how family philanthropy services, if they had been available, could have benefited them along the way. Based on what you learn from this focus group, you could consider ways to revise your family philanthropy services with these "success factors" in mind. The second group would consist of donors that used the services. The discussion with this group could be used to tease out patterns in how their pathways differ from the donors in the first group and to gain a deeper understanding of their family's philanthropic goals and how the foundation's services could better support them.

The most successful focus groups are homogeneous (participants have relevant characteristics in common) and composed of members who are not acquainted with one another (to limit interpersonal dynamics that may affect respondents' behavior). Pulling together groups that are both homogeneous and made up of people that don't know each other will likely be difficult, especially in smaller communities. Just do your best.

The ideal size for a focus group is between eight and ten participants. Fewer participants will work fine too—you can still get good information with a group of five. It is difficult to have an in-depth conversation with full participation with many more than ten participants. If necessary, consider holding two smaller groups. As a general rule, you can expect about 80% of those you invite to attend—so, identify about 11-13 potential participants for each group.

Step 3: Choose your Facilitator

The focus group facilitator should be someone experienced in conducting focus groups and someone with whom you believe your donors will have a good rapport. This person should also have familiarity with your foundation and community. You can have either someone in-house or outside your foundation conduct the group. There are pros and cons to both, as outlined in the table below.

	In-house facilitator	**Outside facilitator**
Pros	• Donors might be familiar with and have a good rapport with the facilitator • Lower cost • More control over the how the questions are asked • Staff might be more engaged in the process	• Donors may feel more comfortable talking about your foundation with an outside party • The facilitator may have more expertise in conducting focus groups than your staff • The facilitator may be in a better position to provide objective, in-depth analysis
Cons	• Donors may not feel comfortable providing constructive comments in the presence of foundation staff • It might be easier on the foundation to outsource the work	• There may be issues of privacy, for both donors and your foundation • More expensive • Less control over how the focus group is run

You should also decide whether you want to have a note-taker for your facilitator or whether you want to record the session. It's generally best to have both—record the focus groups as a backup to note-taking, and vice-versa.

Step 4: Choose the Time and Location

Holding the focus group at your community foundation is preferable, so that your participants can see your office and get to know your foundation better. If hosting the group at your office is not an option, try finding a centrally-located community space for rent. Absent a good community space, marketing firms often rent their facilities for focus groups. These rooms often come equipped with video and/or audio recording systems and one-way mirrors. These are not necessary for your focus group, and they may even create distractions and an unnecessary air of secrecy.

Plan for your focus group to last between one hour and one hour and a half, but no longer than two hours. Build in some time on your end for people to arrive and socialize briefly, both before and after the scheduled time.

Step 5: Send Invitations

Invite participants between two to four weeks ahead of time. Choose the method to send the invitation—US mail, e-vite, email, or telephone calls—that works best for your donor pool. Send out the invitations and follow up within a week with non-respondents. A sample invitation is drafted below:

> Dear [Name],
>
> As our community foundation strives to improve our services, we would like to better understand the interests and needs of our donors—especially in regards to their families' philanthropic goals and strategies.
>
> We would like to extend a special invitation to join a focus group discussion about whether and how families coordinate or otherwise share in the process of giving – and how the community foundation can best support these efforts.
>
> [Hired Facilitator] from [Company] will facilitate this focus group discussion. **The discussion is scheduled for Wednesday, July 19th, from 12:30 - 2:00 pm** at our office [link to map], located in downtown San Francisco. We will provide lunch. To express our appreciation for your time and thoughts, we will offer a $10 gift card for your local coffee house at the close of the session.

The focus group discussion will help us develop better services for you and other donors as we work together to build a stronger community. We are eager to hear your ideas and perspective and hope you will join us!

Please RSVP to [Staff Member] at 415-555-5555 or staffmember@ourcf.org
If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at 415-555-5555.

Sincerely,

Foundation President

Incentives

It may be challenging to get busy participants to come to your focus group—especially if your target group is people who do not use your services. Do not let this dissuade you from trying, however; generally, people like to be asked for their opinions and find focus groups interesting. To attract participants, consider hosting the focus group in a pleasant setting and over a meal. You could also offer a small incentive such as a gift card and/or paying for parking and other transit.

Step 6: Create Your Focus Group Questions

Use the guiding questions that you identified in Step 1 to create discussion questions that will elicit responses and get your group talking. There are no hard-and-fast rules about the number of questions to ask, but it is best to have five or fewer major questions, with additional probing questions as needed. Structure the discussion to begin with general questions and ease in to the more specific—both as you move from question to question as well as between probing questions. If you conduct more than one focus group on a topic, you can refine your questions based on what you learned from earlier groups.

It's good to start with a warm-up question to get everyone comfortable and "on the same page," but at the same time you do not want to spend too much time on gratuitous background information. Sometimes a round of introductions and a brief "'ice breaker" can help set a relaxed, open tone.

The questions asked should be aimed at the whole group, but it's okay and even desirable to ask pointed, follow-up questions to individuals during the focus group as well. The protocol should be the facilitator's "map" to making sure the group provides the data the foundation is looking for; it's not necessary to ask every probing question if it has already been addressed.

Let's say that your evaluation team decided to focus on the questions from the example in Step 1:

- What are the factors that influence donors' level of connection with the community foundation and how can the family philanthropy services most effectively foster them?
- For those donors that did use the services, what would it take to increase their sense of connection to the foundation and bolster their family's philanthropic practices? How could the family philanthropy services more effectively achieve these goals?

The following is a sample protocol for the focus group made up of highly engaged donors with strong family giving practices.

SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Introduction

- Welcome and introductions
- Short background on the community foundation
- Goal for today: This focus group will inform us as we consider what resources we can offer to our donors.
- Confidentiality: All of your responses will be kept confidential, and we will not attribute comments to you (or your organization/company).

1. What are your goals for giving, and in what ways, if any, do you conduct your giving in concert with other members of your family?

2. Think about your relationship with the community foundation. What makes it a successful relationship?

   Probes/Focusing Questions:
   - What are the things you like best about the community foundation?
   - How have your interactions with the community foundation's staff helped you meet your giving goals? Hindered them?

3. How has your family's giving changed over the years? (E.g. amount, funding vehicles, focus areas, etc.)

   Probes/Focusing Questions:
   - What were the factors that contributed to the change? Why did your family's giving change?
   - What do you especially value or enjoy about how you and your family go about your giving?
   - What shared understandings or values underlie your family's approach to giving?

4. Looking back, which of the foundation's family philanthropy services, if any, do you think would have been helpful to your family as you navigated these changes? (Facilitator would need to introduce what the services are.)

5. What would you like your family's giving to look like 5 years from now? What, if any changes, in how your family works together would be needed for this to happen?

   Probes/Focusing Questions:

- Which of the foundation's family philanthropy services, if any, do you think would best help your family achieve these goals?
- What other services would you like to see out there (either with the community foundation, or elsewhere) to help your family meet these goals?

6. Any final thoughts?

Step 7: Conduct your Focus Group

Get to the room at least a half hour early to set up and make sure everything is comfortable for your participants. It's best to have a round table with chairs so everyone can see each other—the power of the focus groups lies in the conversation that builds from each participant's responses. Have nametags filled out ahead of time or have participants write them as they come in. Either way, the print should be large enough for everyone in the room to see it.

If you are offering a meal, allow time for participants to arrive, greet each other, and get their meals ready.

Day-of Focus Group Checklist

- Recording device, if necessary
- Markers and flipcharts, if necessary
- Pen and notepad and/or laptop for you and recorder
- Snacks/meal for participants
- Incentives
- Parking vouchers
- Nametags/name tents and markers

Some facilitators like to record the main questions on a flipchart to help the group stay focused. This is optional and depends on the style of your facilitator.

The facilitator's job is to keep the conversation flowing in an informal manner. He or she does that by asking the questions and keeping everyone on track. It's often easy to get off track in focus groups, so the facilitator should be comfortable jumping in to bring the group back to the question at hand. Facilitators will also clarify what a participant is saying, ask follow-up questions, and engage less-talkative respondents. The facilitator may also need to ask participants who dominate the conversation to step back at times; it can help to let the group know at the beginning to expect this.

Step 8: After the Focus Group

Thank the participants. Send a follow up email or hand written note.

Transcribe your recording. This is optional.

Analyze your data. For in-house facilitation, jot down your initial reactions right after the focus group. It's best to review your notes and record any observations as soon after the focus group as possible, while the conversation is still fresh in your mind.

If you've hired an outside facilitator and a member of your staff observed the focus group, have the staff member jot down his or her observations and share them with the facilitator. The staff member and facilitator should have a conversation about their observations, reactions and analysis of the focus group.

A short time later, have your evaluation team members read over the notes and/or transcriptions of the focus group(s). Come together and have a discussion about the findings. Summarize the focus group conversation question by question. What were the main points that emerged? Were there any surprises? What are the trends and patterns? Then go back to your guiding questions and discuss further what you have learned. What do the findings mean for your foundation?

Write a summary. Depending on how you plan to use your team's findings and analysis, this might take various forms. A basic summary will include the original goals and guiding questions, a brief overview of your method (how and when the focus groups were conducted, who was involved, how they were chosen, who conducted it, etc.), a highlight of the key points that emerged, and the implications these points have for your foundation. You may want to create a version of this summary to share with participants.

Internal Reflections Sessions

The community foundations that we consulted when developing this toolkit identified several evaluation questions relating to their organizations' internal capacities and the costs of providing family philanthropy services:

- How well are we providing family philanthropy services within our current structure? What changes to our structure would allow us to better serve our donors' family philanthropy needs?
- How well are we supporting the intensive staff time family philanthropy services entail?
- What is the opportunity cost of providing family philanthropy services?
- How well do our family philanthropy services fit within our donor services system? What role should they play within the system (i.e., central/core or peripheral)?
- What are the costs of providing these services? Have we established appropriate fees? Are we adequately covering our costs using the existing fee structure?

To address questions like these, community foundations can implement systems such as staff time-tracking, detailed cost analyses, staff performance goal setting and tracking, and tracking progress toward meeting fund development targets. These are important and useful sources of data which involve implementing changes to community foundations' workflows and organizational processes that are beyond the scope of this toolkit. We encourage those community foundations that have a strong desire for quantitative information as well as the staff capacity and flexibility necessary to explore these options.

For those not yet ready to revise their operations or unsure as to which quantitative data about their internal working would be most valuable to collect and analyze, we recommend regularly scheduled staff reflection sessions. This qualitative approach is simple to implement, yet provides the foundation a way to systematically and intentionally address vital evaluation questions that may otherwise be neglected. Even for those that are using quantitative data to track their work, this approach offers a depth of analysis and insight that is not possible to gain strictly from the numbers. Along with helping to assess "what" is happening, the reflection sessions will help uncover "how" and "why" things are working the way they are.

The internal reflection sessions can also be used to draw upon staff members' experiences with donors to help address questions about the quality of the foundations' family philanthropy services such as:

- What is the most beneficial product or service?
- Are we providing the highest level of quality of these services? How to improve?

How frequently should this happen?

Hold the sessions monthly, quarterly, or bi-annually—at intervals that will be most useful for informing your family philanthropy program decision making. For instance, the reflection sessions can be scheduled around key program decision milestones. The timing of the sessions can also be based upon key events. For example, they can be scheduled to regularly occur a few weeks in advance of board meetings. Your commitment and attention to the sessions is nearly as important as the sessions themselves, so it is important to look ahead and schedule them over the course of one year, for example – and then follow through with those scheduled commitments.

Who should be included?

The purpose of the sessions is to systematically gather information and insights from staff members involved with the family philanthropy services. This calls for involving staff from all levels of your development team. Also, at least on some occasions, it will be worthwhile to include staff members from the foundation's grantmaking program. All of the parties have different perspectives and experiences with the same processes, and together they will learn and inform each other.

Facilitation

The sessions should be no longer than two hours and can be facilitated by different members of your staff (you could rotate turns). Or, you might consider hiring an outside facilitator who can also analyze your findings and present them back to you. The key is that the facilitator's own agenda and the organization's power dynamics do not push the discussion in a direction that is not productive.

The sessions will be most constructive where a culture of learning already exists—where staff members share a clear purpose, mistakes are understood to be opportunities for learning, mutual trust and respect exist, and information is shared. When implemented well, the sessions can also contribute to building this type of culture within an organization.

When initiating the reflection sessions as part of the foundations' internal learning processes, department leaders should be explicit about the goals and purposes of the meetings, as well as about how they intend to use the information in their decision making. We recommend using the sessions as data collection opportunities, withholding major decision making for afterwards. However, it will likely make sense to identify "next steps" at the close of each session.

Questions to ask

The focus of each session is upon one or two of the overarching evaluation questions. The discussion can then be guided by addressing a series of sub-questions. When appropriate and possible, given the guiding research question, we recommend asking questions about the program's successes and strengths to date – and how those can be built upon.[6] By identifying

[6] This method of asking questions about successes and strengths is adapted from the Appreciative Inquiry approach to data gathering.

what is working well and why, the team can consider how to apply the factors for success to strengthening processes all around. This helps the group avoid falling into the demoralizing trap of focusing on difficulties and assigning blame. Moreover, this approach can lead the discussion toward identifying concrete solutions and opportunities. The aim is to have an action-oriented discussion.

For instance, if the guiding research questions for a session are "How well are our family philanthropy services working within our current structure? How will we need to change?" the questions discussed in detail could be:

- From your perspective, and in light of all of your job responsibilities and workload, what is the best aspect of the ways we are providing family philanthropy services?
- What do you enjoy most about providing family philanthropy services?
- What helps you do your best work?
- From your perspective, which donor services does our community foundation provide best? Why?
- What are our team's core strengths?
- How can we apply these strengths to our family philanthropy services?
- Where are the current gaps and how can we fill them?

The sessions can also be used to further identify the community foundation's data needs and priorities. Toward the end of the session, the facilitator can ask:

- What data do we already have that would help address these questions? Where does this information reside?
- What additional data would be most useful to have on hand when addressing these questions? How could that information be collected, managed and analyzed, by whom, at what cost?

Documentation

Reserve the last fifteen minutes of the meeting to identify and document the key takeaways of the discussion. What "ah-ha"s did the group have? What are the potential implications for the family philanthropy program? What next steps follow from the conversation?

Tracking and Analyzing Donor Data

To help assess the extent to which your family philanthropy services are contributing toward many of the outcomes of interest, you might consider tracking and regularly analyzing your donors' uses of the foundation's services and their grantmaking activities over time. Specifically, a foundation that consistently collects and analyzes relevant donor information can assess its progress toward the following outcomes:

- Attracting new, higher quality donors/funds
- Increasing donor use of CF services
- Retaining and growing next generation involvement with CF
- Gaining more discretionary/permanent funds from family clients
- Increasing alignment between donors' and foundation priorities
- Increasing strategic alignment of donors' gifts with community needs ["community" is defined by the foundation's mission and geographic reach]
- Increasing philanthropic resources to the community [as defined by the foundation's mission and geographic reach]

What information to track

Exactly which data you decide to collect and in what ways you analyze them will depend upon the outcomes of highest priority to your foundation, your database systems, and your staff's data management and analysis capacities. The staff reflection sessions described above can be used to help determine your priorities for data tracking and analysis.

Some of the fundamental pieces of information to track or calculate for each donor include:

- Year first invested at the community foundation
- Total dollars invested over time at the community foundation
- Percentage payout in each fiscal year
- Total dollars granted in each fiscal year
- Total dollars contributed to discretionary/permanent funds in each fiscal year
- Total dollars granted to foundation subject areas for each fiscal year (defined by NTEE code, for example)
- Family relationship with other CF donors
- Usage of each donor service offered in each fiscal year. Ideally, this would be tracked in the same data system as information about the donors' funds. If not, it would be tracked in a system that allows the data to be linked with the funds data for analysis (for example, by assigning each donor unique user IDs)

Processes for collecting and using your data

Effectively using your foundation's data systems to inform your family philanthropy programming decisions requires significant commitment of staff members, some of whom are outside of the donor development department. Before using the systems, the development department will need to learn what data are already collected, the quality of the data, and whether the information is coded in a way that is useful for your purposes. For those pieces of information that do not yet exist in the foundation's data systems, it may be worth paying an expert to assist with the process of defining the data fields, determining the categories within each field, and how the data will fit within or link to the existing data systems.

To collect the data, department staff members' workflows and processes will likely need to be revised to incorporate data collection into their activities. And, to ensure that the data is meaningful and consistent, the foundation will need to provide training and documentation about proper data entry.

The development of standardized reporting templates will allow for consistent, comparable analyses over time and general ease of use. This may require paying for assistance from your database provider or from a consultant with database expertise. As your team uses the reports, you may find that your analysis needs are different from what you expected and the reports need to be reworked.

Getting started

Depending upon your foundation's ambition for its effective use of data, the staff and financial resources available, and staff members' openness to change, you may choose to undertake a significant overhaul or enhancement of your data systems at one time. The benefits of this approach are that it provides an opportunity to holistically look at and revise your data systems, allows for the collection and use of more data sooner, and may have an overall lower cost than otherwise because the time of outside experts or software companies can be more efficiently used. The downsides include potentially high costs upfront and the introduction of a significant amount of change for staff members who may not recognize the value of the data.

We recommend instead that you begin systematically and regularly using the data that is already collected and easily analyzed within your existing systems. From here, you could identify a small set of outcomes or evaluation questions of priority for which to begin tracking data. The benefits of this approach include demonstrating to staff the value of the foundation's data for informing their work, which could help build staff members' buy in and their desire for more data; building staff members' comfort and capabilities for working with data step by step; limiting the amount of turmoil introduced at any one time; as well as a lower upfront cost. The potential downsides are that the enhancements to your data systems may be piecemeal and therefore more clumsy, and that the overall cost of the process may be higher if you need to employ an expert or engage the company that developed your data system each time you want to add more data fields and create report templates.

Collaboration

You may also want to coordinate your efforts with colleagues at other community foundations that are evaluating their family philanthropy services programs. Together you can brainstorm and problem solve, as well as create standardized data coding schemes and reporting templates. Along with opening up the potential for comparing and aggregating data across your foundations, collaboration offers the possibility of sharing the costs of database development and data analysis and minimizes the extent to which each foundation “reinvents the wheel.”

Related Resources

The following resources provide further introduction to evaluation.

Level Best: How Small and Grassroots Nonprofits Can Tackle Evaluation and Talk Results
by Marcia Festen and Marianne Philbin. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007)
An accessible introduction useful to any organization new to evaluation.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook
available online at http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub770.pdf
Although written for nonprofit grantees, the handbook provides a thorough review of evaluation basics.

GrantCraft's Evaluation Techniques Series
available online at
http://www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageID=742
Five short downloadable publications designed to introduce key aspects of evaluation to foundations and other funders.