Advancing Evaluation

Conversations with philanthropic leaders on strategic evaluation | Issue 2

We are happy to share with you this issue of the "Advancing Evaluation" newsletter from the Strategic Learning and Evaluation Center at FSG, which we hope will offer you interesting ideas and points of view about evaluation. Today, we feature a conversation with Gene Cochrane, President of The Duke Endowment, about the ways in which the Endowment integrates evaluation into their ongoing decision-making and learning processes. I hope to hear from you to continue the exchange at evaluation@fsg-impact.org.

Sincerely,
Hallie Preskill, Executive Director
Strategic Learning & Evaluation Center at FSG

Gene Cochrane, The Duke Endowment, on evaluation as culture

“At the Duke Endowment, our primary interest in doing evaluation is to learn and gain insights into what is working and how we can make things better; and, we see the link between evaluation and communicating findings as critical to our success.

This has led us to think very differently about evaluation. We used to have a fairly formulaic approach to evaluation that really left none of us happy. It was an appendage to our work and it wasn't engrained in our management structure. The flow of evaluation information stopped with our program staff. As a result, there was no way to share what we were learning with the rest of the Endowment staff, with our board, or with our grantees.

In recent years, we have completely changed our approach by building evaluation processes into our organizational structure. We have tried to be deliberate about integrating evaluation into all aspects of our culture in a way that is meaningful and aligned with our program strategy. The result has been the development of a strategic evaluation system that utilizes multiple evaluation approaches and methods rather than simply embracing a single, one-size-fits-all approach to evaluation. After all, our grantees are so different - from supporting 1400 rural Methodist churches to the development of highly researched national models of childcare.

Communicating with our grantees about the purpose and value that evaluation brings to our combined efforts is also important. At the start of an engagement we need to be clear about what metrics we will be tracking and what we hope to gain from the evaluation so we'll know if progress is being made. We try to look at the purpose of each evaluation and identify what we hope to learn from it. We also invite our grantees working on similar projects to come together and share their progress and learnings with each other.

Our trustees care about accountability and they use evaluation results to guide the foundation. It really doesn't matter if the outcomes are positive or negative; what is important is that we share with them the learnings and knowledge evolving from our work. That means we need to monitor our grants throughout their lifecycles, rather than only at the end of the grant period, so that we can report information back to our trustees on an annual basis. In turn, the trustees feel more engaged in our work and invested in monitoring the progress along with us.

We've also had to change our approach to communication in order to share our evaluation findings more effectively. We've made changes to all of our communications, including our website and graphics, to establish a much closer tie between communications and evaluation. Our goal is to have evaluation fully integrated into our culture so that it is a part of everything we do - from the beginning of our work with a grantee, all the way through an understanding of the outcomes. We need to communicate effectively if evaluation is to become a catalyst for learning at the Endowment and among our grantees."

Gene Cochrane, Jr.
President
The Duke Endowment

http://www.fsg-impact.org/nl/evaluation/eval_culture/index.html
About FSG's Strategic Learning and Evaluation Center

The Strategic Learning and Evaluation Center at FSG offers field-building and client services including tools, training, and research to introduce and support innovative evaluation practice. Click to learn more about FSG's Evaluation Center, or contact Hallie Preskill, Executive Director of the Strategic Learning and Evaluation Center.

Quick Links

[Strategic Leaning and Evaluation Center @ FSG](http://www.fsg-impact.org/nl/evaluation/eval_culture/index.html)
The Duke Endowment
[FSG Social Impact Advisors](http://www.fsg-impact.org/nl/evaluation/eval_culture/index.html)