



2019

ANNUAL LEARNING REPORT

At the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, we believe that collecting and analyzing data and reflecting on the results can lead to important learnings that improve our work moving forward. Over the past year, associates, grantees, and other partners developed hundreds of new insights and lessons through grant reports, external evaluations, community engagements, and other strategic documents. This brief summarizes the five key themes from the lessons developed in 2019.



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Projects that aim to **create new programming** or **expand existing programming** can increase their impact by investing in significant planning activities.



- Assessing the costs and benefits of existing technology platforms or curriculum, rather than building them in-house, can allow organizations to scale or expand more quickly.
- Projects that require collaboration among various stakeholders benefit from moving slow at the beginning, allowing time for the building of trust, a shared vision, and common goals among stakeholders. The collaboration period is especially critical for programs aimed at serving a new or expanded target population.
- Organizations coming into a new region can benefit by allotting ample time for developing relationships with local organizations to build trust and develop a regional presence. The time put into these efforts increases the likelihood of community buy-in and long-term impact.

1

EXAMPLE

The strategic plan of a current grantee includes a strategy to help grow minority businesses in their community through the use of a technology platform to streamline and expand access to business development services and resources. During the initial rollout, the grantee discovered that building its own technology platform would be far costlier and more complicated than expected. As a result, they conducted an analysis of other potential solutions and found that purchasing an existing technology solution would lead to easier implementation, faster rollout, and lower maintenance cost.

Addressing systemic barriers faced by underrepresented populations in entrepreneurial and educational ecosystems requires a complex, multi-tiered approach.



- Spending time to better understand the local barriers faced by underrepresented populations can create opportunities to support policy change. Understanding these barriers allows for the development of both local programmatic solutions and higher-level advocacy strategies for policies to eliminate or reduce these structural barriers.
- In addition to spending time listening, organizations aiming to reduce these barriers must also address issues of equity and inclusion in their own organizations. These efforts can improve the relevance and quality of the organization's programming in addition to building stronger lines of communication and trust with the communities that organizations are intending to impact.
- Throughout the work to reduce these barriers, the collection, analysis, and communication of key data can be used to track the impact of interventions, raise awareness of institutional biases, and share best practices for increasing equity in the field.

2

EXAMPLE

A grantee working to increase the diversity of entrepreneurs in their community found that in order to provide services to more underrepresented participants, the organization needed to first build lines of trust with the community. Building these lines of trust required the organization to develop not only a diverse organizational leadership, but also a stronger understanding of racial bias, which it prioritized through organization-wide racial equity training. In addition, due to the time spent understanding barriers facing local minority businesses, this grantee identified specific policy issues and worked with the local government to create solutions, including a change in the local procurement policy to increase the participation of minority-owned businesses.

Incorporating the **end-user into the design of a new program** is likely to increase its chances of meeting the needs of its intended stakeholders.



- The advisory committee or board of an organization has a significant impact on its mission, goals, and the quality of its programming. By ensuring that the composition of these bodies represent the intended beneficiaries, organizations can work to increase the relevance of its programs, reduce biases, and ensure efforts are targeted toward the intended audience.
- Intentional efforts to gather feedback from and engage the end-user throughout program design are essential for building buy-in and ensuring the needs of the end user are met. Implementing intentional feedback loops with intended end-users (through focus groups, surveys, or other methods) enables programs to continuously refine their efforts and make important course corrections.
- For projects involving research, strong engagement with practitioners is critical to ensure relevant research questions are addressed. In addition, these relationships could be used to help researchers translate and disseminate their findings to practitioners and policy advocates.

3 EXAMPLE

We recently supported a grantee to implement two separate interventions to improve educational programming in their school. The first addressed a need identified by the teachers themselves and provided training to equip staff with strategies to improve student behavior. The second intervention, identified by school leaders, implemented strategies to smooth the transition for students between the elementary and high schools. The grantee found the implementation of the first effort to be much stronger as the end-user had been integral to identifying the training need, leading to stronger buy-in and more relevant programming. The second effort faced more opposition and did not lead to the same strong results.

Strong communication pathways between Foundation staff and grantees are an important tool to promote program success.



- Long-term projects face challenges along the way as strategies shift and goals change. Ongoing and consistent communication between the grantee and Foundation staff can ensure appropriate support to address challenges and adjust program goals and metrics.
- The ability to develop and use data analytical tools can be a challenge for some grantees. Consistent communication between the grantee and Foundation staff provides an opportunity to identify these gaps and provide additional support or capacity to the grantee.
- Ongoing communication and regular check-ins help to uncover any confusion around programmatic scope and goals, providing the grantee and the Foundation the opportunity to clarify the project's next steps and to provide technical support where needed.

4 EXAMPLE

We provided a multi-year grant to an organization that aims to increase postsecondary outcomes by connecting students to key resources and supports. During implementation, the grantee received feedback that its partner schools felt overwhelmed with the need to report a variety of metrics into multiple systems, including the grantee's own data dashboard. As a result, the project's focus shifted to new metrics that were better aligned with its partner schools and ultimately, more aligned with the goals of the project. By maintaining strong and consistent communication between the grantee and Foundation, the grantee was able to be responsive to community needs and the Foundation was able to provide additional support and adjust the grant metrics to increase the likelihood of success.

The long-term sustainability of programs requires the development of **carefully crafted and targeted financial plans** that consider internal organizational capacity and external need.



- Projects that include clear fundraising targets are helpful in setting expectations for the time-limited nature of grant funding and help ensure grantees embark on activities to sustain programs beyond the grant period.
- Successful fundraising efforts take time to engage the community and potential donors through surveys and other data collection methods. The results of these efforts are used to inform marketing and branding content to improve long-term funding streams.
- Fundraising and development expertise are critical for organizations looking to develop and implement targeted fundraising platforms for long-term sustainability.

5 EXAMPLE

We provided a grant to a news-focused grantee to improve their fundraising by implementing a variety of engagement strategies to understand how to best communicate with its audience. Efforts included using website data to identify the best and worst performing stories, using experiments to test potential headlines, and segmenting data to deeply understand the preferences of its audience. As a result, visitors to its website significantly increased, which is likely to lead to an increase in loyal members.