

IMPROVING EVALUATION PRACTICE IN THE FOUNDATION SECTOR:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE JIM JOSEPH FOUNDATION'S EVALUATORS'  
CONSORTIUM

A Dissertation  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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May, 2015

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## Acknowledgements

There's been times that I thought  
I couldn't last for long  
But now I think I'm able to carry on  
It's been a long, long time coming.\*  
---Sam Cooke

This dissertation has been a long time coming, and many times I thought I couldn't last for long. I owe my ability to carry on to many people who supported me through the process. I hope that in some small way this work contributes to “the change gone come”—in the field of Jewish education and in the use of evaluation and philanthropy for social betterment.

My research would not have been possible without the commitment of the board and staff of the Jim Joseph Foundation. In just a few years their investments in Jewish education have made an enormous contribution to the field. Their willingness to engage in and learn from evaluation provides a model for the fields of philanthropy and Jewish education. Special thanks go to Chip Edelsberg for his visionary leadership, his keen interest in this study, and his tenacious commitment to learning. Thank you to Lee Shulman, who conceived of and facilitated the Evaluators' Consortium, and to the participating evaluators, whose dedication and capability allowed the initiative to move forward. The program staff and the members of the Consortium gave generously of their time for my research and encouraged me along the way.

I am deeply indebted to my advisor, Jean King, whose confidence convinced me that I could accomplish this feat and whose mantra “keep writing” made me stick with it. I am grateful for her wisdom, her guidance, and her patience. For more than a decade she has been a generous teacher, mentor, and capacity-builder. She manages, even without using pompoms, to be an extraordinary cheerleader.

Thank you to the members of my doctoral committee, Laura Bloomberg, David Johnson, and Dick Krueger. They have been inspiring and encouraging teachers. Special thanks go to Laurie Stevahn of Seattle University for her guidance in thinking about the personal and interpersonal factors.

Thank you to my teachers and colleagues in the Evaluation Studies program at the University of MN, who taught me an enormous amount about the field of evaluation and the ways in which it can make a difference in the world both inside and outside the academy. The members of the MESI staff and steering committee have provided a professional community over the years and a context for extending my learning as an evaluator.

Over thirty years ago, the faculty of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles were my first graduate school teachers. Their teaching and guidance helped me launch a career in Jewish education. They gave me my first opportunities to participate in projects funded by foundation grants and helped raise my awareness of the role evaluation plays in this type of work.

Thanks to the folks at the Jewish Day School Standards and Benchmarks Project and the Experiment in Congregational Education for being my professional learning communities, cherished colleagues, and dear friends. Thank you to friends and to members of the Adath Jeshurun community who have inquired about my studies at the University over the last decade and for their understanding when I was busy studying, conducting research, and writing. They, too, played an important role in encouraging me to stick with it. My friend and former roommate, Diane Lichtenstein, played a pivotal role in keeping me on track with my work. Thank you to my parents, Irwin and Judith Reich, who supported my educational aspirations for many years.

My children grew into adulthood during my doctoral studies. Their excitement and pride as I reached each milestone was a source of delight to me. I am grateful to all of them—Elana, Talia, Gabe, and Yael—for their encouragement. I offer thanks, also, to my sister-in-law, Cynthia Kravitz, who cheered me on and cheered me up throughout this long process. No one could have been more supportive during this journey than my dear husband and partner, Harold Kravitz. His love and patience know no bounds. His belief in me was and is an enduring source of strength.

\*With respect for the Civil Rights Movement and with no intention to trivialize the original context and meaning of this song through this personal application.

## **Dedication**

To my mother, Judith Janson Reich, who understood long before I did that this journey was not only possible, but likely. I wish she could have been here to celebrate its completion.

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore what occurred when a foundation inaugurated an innovative approach to evaluation practice, examining factors that supported and impeded successful implementation. It sought to provide insights into the elements of organizational culture and structures that can support effective practices of evaluation in the foundation sector.

The study was a case study of the Evaluators' Consortium, an experimental initiative of the Jim Joseph Foundation, the purpose of which was to improve the Foundation's use of evaluation to support its strategy. The Foundation worked with representatives of four evaluation firms over the course of a year in an emergent style. As the experiment unfolded, the Consortium members helped to shape the cross-community evaluation of the Foundation's multi-year initiative of community-based, Jewish teen education and engagement.

Factors that supported the success of the Consortium included the Foundation's standing approach to evaluation, its willingness to take risks, its culture of learning, and its commitment to field building. Leadership was another important factor. The Foundation's professional leader, his commitment to the initiative in particular and to evaluation in general, and his ability to cultivate relationships with others played important roles in the initiative's success. Also critical was the intellectual leadership of Lee Shulman. Another supporting factor was the benefit to the evaluators that came with participation in the initiative. Challenges included logistics, the power differential

between the Foundation and participating evaluators, having emergent goals, and bringing together representatives of competing organizations in a cooperative situation.

The initiative produced several outcomes for the Foundation and the evaluators. The Foundation developed a number of new evaluation practices and clarified its ideas about effective evaluation practices. Foundation staff members and evaluators developed capacity. Relationships were strengthened between Foundation staff and evaluators and among evaluators and their firms. The initiative created relationships among competitors who entered into collaboration with one another. Through its success with the Consortium, the Foundation was emboldened to consider other new approaches to evaluation. Finally, as a result of the Consortium's work, the Foundation introduced evaluators and high quality evaluation practices to other funders and communities.

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## CHAPTER 1

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

#### Introduction

In August 2013, Bill Schambra delivered an address to the Hewlett Foundation on the problems of strategic philanthropy,<sup>1</sup> an approach the foundation had pioneered over the last decade. Published shortly thereafter in the online version of the *Nonprofit Quarterly*, the speech generated comments from people across the foundation and nonprofit sector: a response Schambra requested from Paul Brest, the immediate past president of the foundation; a response from Larry Kramer, the foundation's current president; and an opinion piece by Pablo Eisenberg in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*—all within a week's time. Both Schambra's speech and the responses it generated are evidence that the use of social science research and evaluation to guide decision making in foundations is an issue that is alive and controversial.

Schambra (2013), Director of the Bradley Center for Philanthropy and Civic Renewal at the Hudson Institute, criticized foundations' use of logic models and theories of change and what he called "abstract explanations for human needs." He asserted that if the purpose of foundations is to support nonprofit organizations to meet the needs of the people they serve, foundations should rely less on social science findings and empirical evidence and more on local knowledge, traditional wisdom, and common sense.

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<sup>1</sup> Strategic philanthropy is an approach to foundation practice that gained popularity in the first decade of the 2000's that involves assessing social problems, developing approaches to solving them, providing funding to organizations that work on identified problems, and tracking the results of their efforts over time. While rhetoric about strategic philanthropy is popular, its practice is far less common (Patrizi & Thompson, 2010; Thompson & Patrizi, 2009). Practitioners in the field use different definitions of strategy (see Chapter 2).

Employing intentionally provocative language, Schambra used a hypothetical foundation and community center from a case in Paul Brest's book on strategic philanthropy, *Money Well Spent*, and imagined a scenario in which the foundation and the center disagreed about the causes of and solutions to a problem in the community. He captured the perspective of the staff of the community center in this way:

It's [our duty] to meet the real, everyday, concrete human *needs* of those coming through our doors, regardless of the bewilderingly diverse causes that bring them to us. But the Community Foundation doesn't seem to value that. Since it has bought into strategic philanthropy, it wants us to sit around drinking herbal tea with its staff, filling whiteboards with guesses about why people have needs, and how to avert them altogether by getting at their root causes. It puts more trust in the college degrees earned by the public health director than in our hard-won, practical, face-to-face understanding of our own community, even though he's probably spent more time fussing over the color of his office drapes than visiting our neighborhood. So the foundation sends us back to face the pressing needs of our neighborhood not with a check, but with a copy of Paul Brest's book telling us how to come up with theories of change and logic models (para. 12-14).

Schambra pointed to the paucity of usable evidence or universally accepted approaches to solving social problem and concluded that a social-scientific approach, something upon which strategic philanthropy is based, is inadequate for solving such problems. Even having spent billions of dollars on strategic philanthropy using the

support of social scientific evidence, strategic philanthropy has not eradicated a single social problem by determining its cause. Finally, Schambra called on the foundation community to reconsider the notion of solving problems, calling it “a skewed and biased framework for approaching this question, privileging expert analytical solutions, and diminishing the unspoken, accumulated, idiosyncratic wisdom of the local and immediate community” (para. 37), and encouraged them to give money more freely to nonprofits.

Among those who responded to Schambra in the online comments in *Non Profit Quarterly* were those who agreed with his comments and criticized the paternalism of foundations. Others pushed back, recognizing the complexity of social problems. They acknowledged the need for foundations both to engage with nonprofit staff and the communities they serve and to work toward better solutions to problems. Paul Brest (2013) countered Schambra’s argument with another case, one drawn from history in which local wisdom interfered with the abatement of a cholera epidemic, an epidemic that was eventually stemmed by the use of empirical evidence and statistics. He concluded with a set of lessons for philanthropy that includes the importance of listening to the voices of beneficiaries, paying attention to empirical evidence, recognizing the need to try multiple approaches to solving complex problems by drawing on theories that can never be proven for sure, and using the best available evidence even if it is evidence of what does *not* work. He concluded with a critique of Schambra’s tactic, saying “eschew radical ignorance of science, whether natural or social. It is a rhetorical ploy and no way to help improve those most in need” (para. 16). Similarly, Larry Kramer (2013) asserted that an effective approach is to “[draw] on systematized knowledge acquired by

trained professionals as well as local experience and beliefs, using each to test and inform the other” (para. 4).

Eisenberg (2013) declared that this debate had missed a more important issue. Rather than their focus on strategic grantmaking and measuring of results, Eisenberg believes what prevents foundations from solving problems is their unwillingness to involve nonprofits more in setting the grantmaking agenda. According to Eisenberg, strategic philanthropy has led to a “fundamental shift in control and power by donors to call all the shots and excluded nonprofits with great new ideas” (para. 2).

Evaluation fits squarely into the realm of social science and uses assumptions, concepts, and methods that derive from fields across the social sciences. While Schambra did not specifically malign evaluation in his critique, his mention of the evaluator’s basic tools of logic models and theories of change are evidence that he sees evaluation as an ineffectual approach for foundations to use in addressing human needs. Similar logic leads to the conclusion for Brest and others that as a social scientific endeavor evaluation, indeed, does have the potential to support foundations in the work they do for the betterment of society.

The literature on evaluation in the philanthropic sector is replete with examples of confusion and frustration about evaluation’s role, its purposes, its practice, and its use—even for those who subscribe to its value. Many foundations hope to use evaluation to improve their work and the work their grantees do. Some foundations have launched initiatives to improve their practice of evaluation in order to achieve their missions. This dissertation studied one such initiative.

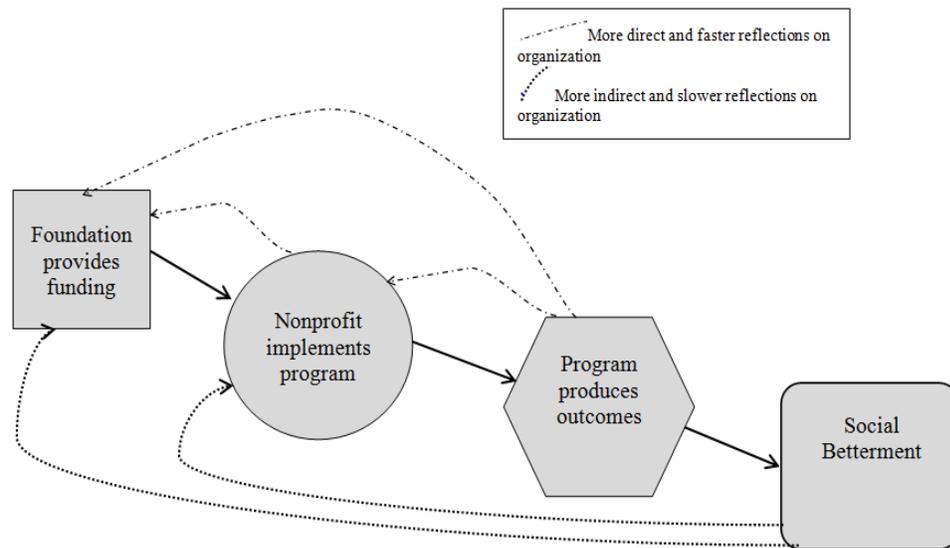
## **Background on American Foundations**

### **Unique Status of the Foundation as an Institution**

American philanthropy aspires to change society for the better in enduring ways (Slater, Constantine, & Braverman, 2004). Many argue that foundations, due to a combination of resources and legal circumstances, are particularly well-positioned in the United States for this ambitious agenda (Kramer, Graves, Hirschhorn, & Fiske, 2007; Tierney & Fleishman, 2011; Slater, Constantine, & Braverman, 2004). Unlike businesses, they are not accountable to shareholders. Unlike the government, they are not accountable to the electorate or to watchdogs. Even though they benefit from tax-exempt status and the concomitant saving of resources that permits, foundations are not accountable to the general public. While foundations spend considerable resources on nonprofit organizations from universities to hospitals, from food pantries to theater troupes, they are not accountable to any of these organizations, either. Other than the requirement to pay out five percent of their previous year's assets, foundations are able to set their own courses, guided only by the interests and commitments of their trustees and staff (Bolduc, Buteau, Laughlin, Ragin, & Ross, 2007; Cohen, 2007; Fleishman, 2007; Slater, Constantine, & Braverman, 2004).

Foundations seek to make an impact on the world by funding nonprofit organizations and initiatives. According to Fleishman (2007), the essence of the work of a foundation is to “provide funds from . . . [its] income or endowment to support not-for-profit organizations, charities, or other programs and organizations in accordance with the mission designated by the founder” (p. 59). The impact of the work of these funded

organizations, then, has a significant relationship to the effectiveness of the foundations themselves (Bernholz, 1999; Brock, Buteau, & Herring, 2012; Buteau & Buchanan, 2011; Tierney & Fleishman, 2011). Figure 1 illustrates the relationships of the organizations as they work toward shared aspirations of social betterment and their dependence on each other for demonstrating effectiveness.



*Figure 1.* Logic of Foundation Support of Grantees. Foundation funding supports nonprofits to implement programs. Program outcomes reflect on and contribute to the effectiveness of the nonprofits and the foundation on the path to social betterment.

### **Pressure on Foundations for Accountability**

Scholars, members of the press, American citizens, and public officials have asked questions over the last several decades about whether foundations warrant the financial and legal advantages they enjoy and whether they live up to their promise (Fleishman, 2007). The recent exchange in *Non Profit Quarterly* is a reminder that the

question is ongoing. Pressures on foundations to demonstrate their impact and to be accountable have come as a result of increasing awareness of these benefits, as well as other events and trends. An early influence was the passage of the Tax Reform Act of 1969. The legislation established regulations on foundation payouts and requirements for public disclosure and led to practices in foundations captured in the 1980 Council on Foundations' Recommended Principles and Practices of Effective Grantmaking—like annual reports and the awareness of the need for evaluation (Frumkin, 1999). More recently, public scandals such as those involving Enron, WorldCom, and the United Way have exerted pressure for the accountability of foundations (Snibbe, 2006). Federal legislation requiring outcome measurement coupled with similar requirements by United Way also influenced foundations to demonstrate outcomes (Behrens & Kelly, 2008; Hoole & Patterson, 2008; McKinsey & Co., 2010).

Another source of pressure on foundations to demonstrate their effectiveness is the entry into the world of philanthropy of entrepreneurs, as foundation founders, donors, and board members from the world of finance and high tech, who bring their business skills to the solving of social problems along with high expectations for speedy return on investment and impact (Bishop & Green, 2008; Brest, 2012; Hall, 2004). Another factor is the professionalization of foundation staff, trained in programs of nonprofit management that include coursework on evaluation (Hall, 2004; Patrizi Associates, 2010). Finally, through the 1990's and 2000's the foundation community has seen an

increase in the number of foundations with spend-down deadlines,<sup>2</sup> increasing pressure for fast results (Behrens & Kelly, 2008).

These social, cultural, business and political trends have created expectations for foundations to demonstrate their value or social impact, especially given their privileged status in American society, and have helped put questions of effectiveness and evaluation on the agenda of the foundation community (DeVita, 2005; McKinsey & Co., 2010). Because of the unique legal position of foundations in American society, decisions about whether to examine their practice and to consider their effectiveness are entirely in the hands of individual foundations. The practice of evaluation of any kind, of the foundations themselves, or of the grantees they support, is self-imposed and self-directed.

Given increasing external pressures, if not an internal desire to operate as effectively as possible, evaluation experts working in the sector such as Millett, Patrizi, and Kramer, suggest that evaluation could have the potential to serve the needs of foundations. Among the possible uses of evaluation by foundations are establishing their value to society, demonstrating successful approaches to social change, making sound decisions about how to distribute their funds, and identifying exemplary nonprofit organizations (Kramer & Bickel, 2004). Ricardo Millet, speaking at the conference of the Minnesota Evaluation Studies Institute in 2010, went so far as to say that funders, and foundations in particular, ought to play a significant role in achieving social betterment, but do not yet live up to their potential to do so. He went on to make a case for the roles

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<sup>2</sup> Rather than maintain their assets in perpetuity, some foundations elect to spend all of their assets within a fixed period of time. This phenomenon is called a “spend down” (Mackinnon & Jaffe, 2007).

evaluation and evaluators, drawing on their experiences, knowledge, and expertise, might play in working with foundations, their grantees, and the communities they serve to realize this potential. Millet's lecture raised questions about the practice of evaluation in the sector of foundations and the nonprofits they fund.

### **Evaluation in the Work of Foundations and their Grantees**

Evaluation, which helps organizations explore questions of impact and effectiveness, could well be a core function of foundations in their own work and the work they do through grantmaking to nonprofits. Patrizi and Sedway (2006) make a compelling case for the potential evaluation has in this sector:

The promise of evaluation can be found in how it enables foundations to learn from their work, demonstrate accountability to stakeholders, improve their own practices and those of the field, and ultimately achieve their missions (p. 10).

Evaluation could be positioned at the nexus of the relationship between foundations and their grantees in the work nonprofits do with the financial support of foundations. We might expect evaluation to be a central topic of discourse between funders and grantees. We might predict collaboration between funders and grantees on evaluation in an effort to understand their shared effectiveness and impact and to learn together about improving their work. We might anticipate support by foundations for the evaluative endeavors of their grantees. A growing body of research on the subject, however, indicates that what is happening on the ground deviates from these

possibilities—both for foundations themselves and for the work they do with and through their grantees.

Brest (2012), in an article in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, summarizes a decade of “outcome oriented” philanthropy—an approach that attributes value to evaluation. Brest uses the term outcome-oriented philanthropy interchangeably with what others have called result-oriented, strategic or effective philanthropy, and defines it as “philanthropy where donors seek to achieve clearly defined goals; where they and their grantees pursue evidence-based strategies for achieving those goals; and where both parties monitor progress toward outcomes and assess their success in achieving them in order to make appropriate course corrections” (para. 2). Brest points out the birth in the past ten years of organizations like Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO), the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP), the proliferation of consulting firms like Bridgespan and FSG, the publication of books on the topic, and the growth of donor education programs as evidence that an infrastructure has developed to support outcome-oriented philanthropy. In spite of the development of this infrastructure, Brest acknowledges that outcome-oriented philanthropy still struggles to use information effectively to guide decision making. Even though Brest concludes by saying that philanthropy “remains an underperformer in achieving social outcomes” (The Coming Decade section, para. 3) he is hopeful that the momentum of outcome-oriented philanthropy can take root and have an impact.

## **Significance of the Study**

Certainly some foundations have made significant progress in developing an awareness of the need for evaluation and research to support the accomplishment of their missions to benefit society, including the Hewlett Foundation under Brest's leadership (Brest, 2012; William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, 2012). In spite of the progress and success in using evaluation to act more effectively, the field knows little about what innovations foundations have attempted, what supports these innovations, what results from them, and what distinguishes the foundations involved. What kinds of practices are they adopting? Which initiatives are promising and why? What enables their success? What facilitates innovative evaluation practice in the foundation context?

This dissertation addresses issues like these through a qualitative case study of one foundation's initiative to improve its own use of evaluation to support and further its strategy. The foundation worked with representatives of four evaluation firms to examine ways to improve its overall program of evaluation. By examining the experiment of the Jim Joseph Foundation, this study sought to provide insights into the elements of organizational culture, practices, circumstances, and/or structures that can support effective practices of evaluation in the foundation sector.

## **Research Questions**

The following questions framed the research for this study:

- What occurs when a foundation inaugurates an innovative approach to evaluation practice?

- What factors support the introduction of innovative structures or approaches to evaluation in a foundation context?
  - What roles do the personal and interpersonal factors play in the establishment of innovative evaluation structures or approaches?
  - What role do established evaluation practices, structures and organizational culture play in the success of the innovation?
- What are the challenges and impediments to introducing innovative structures or approaches to evaluation in a foundation context?

### **Glossary of Terms**

The following names and terms are used in the study.

Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP)	Founded in 2001, the CEP conducts research and creates reports on foundation performance assessment, foundation strategy, foundation governance, and foundation–grantee relationships for the purpose of supporting foundation effectiveness and impact. CEP has also developed assessment tools, such as the Grantee Perception Report <sup>®</sup> (GPR), which provides foundations comparative data on grantee perceptions of key elements of foundation performance (Center for Effective Philanthropy, <i>About Us</i> , n.d.).
Evaluation Roundtable	The Roundtable is a network of foundations whose purpose is

to improve how foundations learn about the results of their grantmaking and increase the impact of their work. Their approach involves holding events and conferences, commissioning case studies, and doing original research (Evaluation Roundtable, n.d.).

Foundation Center

The Foundation Center is a source of information about philanthropy in the US and around the world. On their website they maintain a searchable database on grantmakers, offer electronic training modules, post research studies on trends and blogs on issues. They also sponsor training programs (Foundation Center, n.d.).

General operating support (also unrestricted, core and general purpose support)

This is funding provided to a nonprofit organization to fund its general operations rather than specific projects or programs, allowing the nonprofit discretion over how the money is allocated (Independent Sector, n.d.).

Glasspockets

An initiative of the Council on Foundations launched in January, 2010. Working with organizations of philanthropies like the Center for Effective Philanthropy and with foundations, this undertaking uses a website to focus on transparency in philanthropy. They seek to inspire private foundations to greater openness in their communications, to

increase understanding of best practices in foundation transparency and accountability in an online world, illustrate how institutional philanthropy is relevant to contemporary issues, highlight stories of philanthropy that show how private wealth is serving the public good, and illuminate successes, failures, and ongoing experimentation so foundations can build on each other's ideas to increase impact. Among the foundations currently listed on the Glasspockets website are Ford, Gates, Hewlett, and McKnight. They are rated across a set of 23 transparency practices and six communications practices (Glasspockets, n.d.).

#### Grantee Perception Report (GPR)

First piloted in 2001, these reports are based on survey research conducted by the Center for Effective Philanthropy to gather perceptions from grantees on a wide range of issues in their work with their foundation funders. The reports provide funders with comparative feedback on issues such as quality of interactions, application and reporting processes, and perceptions of impact. More than 190 funders have used the GPR, and more than 52,000 grantees have responded to the confidential surveys.

The GPR's quantitative and qualitative data are intended to

help foundation leaders evaluate and understand how their organization is perceived, and how that compares to their philanthropic peers. Through the GPR, grantees can anonymously provide reactions to funders—providing funders with information they may not otherwise receive. Some foundations have made their GPR results public on their websites. (Center for Effective Philanthropy, *Grantee Perception Report (GPR) and Declined Applicant Perception Report (APR)*, n.d.)

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO)

GEO is a membership organization for foundations that holds conferences and convenings of grantmakers, offers peer learning opportunities and a resource library, creates publications, and supports networking among foundations through a listserv, online directory and newsletters. Their stated goal is to help grantmakers improve practices in areas which have been identified by innovators in the field as critical to nonprofit success. (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, n.d.)

Private Foundation

A nonprofit organization established with funds from an individual, family or corporation that is managed by trustees. It provides funds to other nonprofits in service of the public good

and is required to file a 990-PF with the IRS each year. Both individual and corporate foundations are considered private foundations. In the case of the former, the foundation's endowment fund is an individual or family, representatives of whom often serve as trustees. A corporate foundation receives its funds from the company but is a separate legal entity (Foundation Center, *Foundations Today Tutorial*, n.d.).

Program Support (also Program-Restricted or Project Support)

The most widespread form of foundation giving to nonprofits both in number of grants and number of dollars, this type of support is designated for a specific project or program approved by the funder (Huang, Buchanan, & Buteau, 2006).

Strategic Philanthropy

An approach to foundation practice that gained popularity in the first decade of the 2000's, strategic philanthropy involves assessing social problems, developing approaches to solving them, providing funding to organizations that work on identified problems, and tracking the results of their efforts over time. While rhetoric about strategic philanthropy is popular, its practice is far less common (Patrizi & Thompson, 2010; Thompson & Patrizi, 2009). Practitioners in the field use different definitions of strategy (see Chapter 2).

## **Overview of the Study**

This dissertation consists of six chapters. The first chapter explicates the problem the study addresses, lays out the research questions, and outlines the significance of the study. In addition, the chapter includes a glossary of names and terms. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature from the fields of philanthropy and evaluation that explores several categories of challenges to the practice of evaluation in this context—those related to foundations, to nonprofits, to the relationships between these institutions, and to evaluation itself. It also examines approaches that might prove valuable to bolstering the practice and use of evaluation in the sector. Chapter 3 describes the case study research methodology used, along with a rationale for this particular design. Chapter 4 provides a description of the case, an experimental initiative working with a team of outside evaluators to improve the practice of evaluation at the Jim Joseph Foundation. The fifth chapter is an analysis and interpretation of the data collected and the findings derived from the data with connections to the literature. Chapter 6 presents responses to the research questions based on the findings, addresses the implications of the research for the fields of philanthropy and evaluation, and considers possible future research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

The following chapter explores the literature on current evaluation practices in the work of foundations and their grantees. Building on the background from the previous chapter on American foundations and their increasing desire to demonstrate their value and effectiveness, the chapter explores several categories of challenges to the practice of evaluation in this context—those related to foundations, to nonprofits, to the relationships between these institutions, and to evaluation itself. Finally, it examines approaches that might prove valuable to bolstering the practice and use of evaluation in the sector.

#### **Why Evaluation Has Struggled to Fulfill Its Promise for Foundations and Grantees**

Foundations have not for the most part succeeded in using evaluation to improve the effectiveness of their processes or outcomes or those of their grantees. On the basis of the work of Patrizi (2002), Bickel, Millett, and Nelson (2002), Easterling and Csuti (1999), Snow (1996), and Knickman (2000), Kramer and Bickel (2004) conclude that “despite the resources consumed, few evaluations appear to produce significant changes in the behavior of foundations, other funders or grantees. Similarly, few foundations seem to have discovered how to use evaluation results consistently to foster organizational learning” (pp. 52-53).

In a survey of evaluation leaders from the largest foundations in the country, along with other foundations known for their commitment to evaluation, Thompson and

Patrizi found that even though respondents reported an increase in the need for evaluative information, both funding for evaluation and size of evaluation staff had decreased in the two years prior to the study. They concluded by stating that they have serious questions about how much foundations know about the impact of their work (Thompson & Patrizi, 2009). On the nonprofit side, there is a commonly held belief that the reports they produce at great cost of time and staff effort for their funders are used to monitor compliance, but have little impact on their work or that of their funders (Bearman, 2008; Eakin, 2007).

Scholars and practitioners have offered several explanations for the failure of evaluation to live up to its promise for foundations and their grantees (Figure 2). Some are related to the structure and culture of philanthropy in the United States. Some are connected to the nature of nonprofit grantee organizations and how they work. Others have to do with aspects of the relationships between foundations and their grantees. Still others focus on evaluation itself—ranging from how it is defined to what purposes it is expected to serve to who engages in the work. For the purposes of this analysis, we will examine these explanations separately, even though some of them overlap and situations in the field reflect more than a single explanation.



*Figure 2.* Evaluation in Philanthropy: Where Are the Challenges? This figure outlines the categories of challenges for the practice of evaluation in the work of foundations and their grantees.

### **Challenges Related to Foundations**

The first set of challenges grows out of the operations and culture of foundations. Fleishman (Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2003) and Kramer (Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2003) attribute the problems with foundations in general, and with their use of evaluation in particular, to their lack of accountability in society beyond basic requirements of the IRS and state attorneys general and foundation boards. From this perspective, demands for accountability are simply inadequate, and this inadequacy does not serve foundations well. As a result of existing low expectations, foundations do not collect adequate data about their work and impact, and, if they have data, they fail to disclose what lessons they learn from both success and failure, thus depriving the nonprofit field of useful insights.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> An exception is “Glasspockets,” an initiative of the Council on Foundations, launched in January, 2010. Working with organizations of philanthropies like the Center for Effective Philanthropy and with foundations, this undertaking uses a website to focus on transparency in philanthropy. According to the website, [www.glasspockets.org](http://www.glasspockets.org), Glasspockets seeks to inspire private foundations to greater openness in their communications, to increase understanding of best practices in foundation transparency and

**Boards.** Since the only stakeholders to whom foundations are really accountable are their board members, board members *could* hold their foundations accountable for particular practices and results, but this is rare in practice (Kramer & Bickel, 2004). Kramer (2003) claims that boards do not set expectations for their foundations that are high enough or clear enough, diminishing the perceived need for strong evaluation (Kramer & Bickel, 2004). Patrizi and Sedway (2006) assert that there is lack of consensus in the foundation world about what accountability means. While some claim that foundation board members do not set high enough expectations for accomplishment and accountability, others assert that board members who come from the world of business set expectations that are too high and not reasonable for the nonprofit world (Owens, d'Amico, & Huang, 2005).

A number of elements of the culture and organizational structure of foundation boards helps to explain the failure to set high standards of accountability and to use evaluation regularly and effectively. Foundation board culture is characterized by the values of civility and conflict avoidance, and civil behavior inhibits criticism and the recognition of failure (CEP, 2003; Patrizi & Sedway, 2006). Another commonly held value is efficiency, concretized by a desire for low administrative costs relative to grant money distributed. For many board members a low ratio of administrative costs to grant

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accountability in an online world, illustrate how institutional philanthropy is relevant to contemporary issues, highlight stories of philanthropy that show how private wealth is serving the public good, and illuminate successes, failures, and ongoing experimentation so foundations can build on each other's ideas to increase impact. Among the foundations currently listed on the Glasspockets website are Ford, Gates, Hewlett, and McKnight. They are rated across a set of 23 transparency practices and six communications practices.

money distributed serves as an indicator of effectiveness. Evaluation can cost dearly, and the costs of evaluation can interfere with perceived efficiency and effectiveness thus defined. Program staff members, too, consider evaluation costs a drain on resources for programs (Patrizi & Sedway, 2006).

Certain shortcomings that are typical of foundation board members also limit the prominence of evaluation at foundations. A common phenomenon is for foundation board members to have varying views about the purposes (planning, improvement, tracking progress), types (quantitative, scientifically rigorous studies conducted by outsiders; informal reporting by grantees), uses (decisions about funding, decisions about strategy, sharing knowledge), and costs of evaluation (FSG, 2009 *Let's Discuss*). Board members often lack the know-how to examine grantmaking strategies and decisions critically, lack expertise and experience in nonprofit management, and have limited understanding of the complex social problems foundations seek to address through their grantmaking. At the same time, foundation staff members have a high level of professional autonomy, with limited oversight from the board on the development of strategies and initiatives. Structural constraints, such as a lack of time at board meetings to consider past grantmaking, a lack of time for trustees to learn more deeply about the work of the foundation, and the time pressure that results from the need to pay out the amount of money each year required by law, also act as impediments to evaluation in foundations (Kramer & Bickel, 2004; Patrizi & Sedway, 2006).

**Professional leadership.** Ambivalence toward evaluation among professional leadership in foundations is another factor that limits its use and effectiveness. According

to Patrizi and Sedway (2006), many leaders do not see evaluation as part of the foundation's core business of making grants. The roles of evaluation staff at foundations are assorted and ambiguous (Patrizi & Sedway, 2006). In cases where a foundation has an internal evaluation department or unit and it reports directly to the CEO, there is a greater likelihood that more financial and human resources will be devoted to evaluation and evaluation information will be disseminated more broadly to all stakeholders (Thompson & Patrizi, 2009).

**Organizational operations.** Structural elements of foundation work pose other challenges to evaluation work in foundations. One of these is the legal requirement of foundations to distribute 5% of the value of their net investment assets per year (MN Council on Foundations, n.d.). For staff to be in compliance with this requirement, their grantmaking work takes priority, and, as a result, there is less time for other functions, including evaluation (FSG, 2009 *Let's Discuss*; Patrizi & Sedway, 2006). Schedules for grantmaking are another impediment to the use of evaluation. Program cycles and timelines for evaluation are not necessarily aligned with cycles of grantmaking, and evaluation is not completed before decisions about funding have to be made (Patrizi & Sedway, 2006; Patrizi & Thompson, 2010).

Another barrier to extensive and effective use of evaluation in foundations themselves is a lack of clarity on the part of stakeholders—board members, CEOs and staff—about foundation purposes (Patrizi & Sedway, 2006). A recent study by the Center for Effective Philanthropy (Buteau, Buchanan, & Brock, 2009) indicates that the board members (along with the CEO and staff) of many foundations (52% of respondents) do

not have a shared understanding of goals. Without clarity about goals, many evaluation tasks would be difficult if not impossible to carry out—especially if a foundation wanted to assess impact or measure progress. In a seminal study of foundations, Ostrower (2004) concluded that foundations were unable to express with clarity and specificity what they meant by effectiveness. Patrizi and Thompson (2010) affirmed that conclusion several years later.

**Evaluating foundation effectiveness.** Without having resolved the aforementioned challenges presented by the structure and culture of foundations, foundations have begun to focus attention, perhaps instead, on evaluating their own work. This approach, begun around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, involves the examination of a foundation’s practices and strategies, rather than the evaluation of individual grants or clusters of grants (Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2002). A 2011 study of CEOs on the state of foundation effectiveness indicated that CEOs place importance on assessing their effectiveness, feel they have improved in recent years in doing so, and understand they need to do more work in this area (Buteau & Buchanan, 2011). The assumption of the approach is that by conducting assessment of their work, foundations can improve their effectiveness, leading to increased impact on the people and issues they aim to affect.

How to determine effectiveness, though, is a challenge that has not been solved. One challenge has to do with what constitutes effectiveness and how to measure it. CEOs of foundations, in CEP’s (2002) earliest study on this issue, indicated that achieving impact was the most important and most difficult to measure aspect of effectiveness.

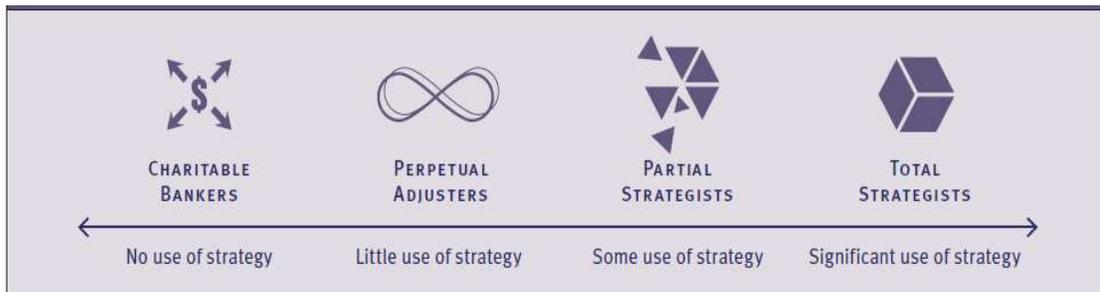
Toward the end of the decade, another CEP study found that determining how to measure complex outcomes, defining performance indicators, and deciding which data to collect in pursuit of foundation outcomes remain challenges (Buteau, Buchanan, & Brock, 2009). Another CEP study found that foundations do appear to be using more information than ten years earlier to assess financial, operational, and programmatic performance, and many use a combination of these findings to assess their work overall (Buteau & Buchanan, 2011). Patrizi and Thompson (2010) point out the added difficulty that defining effectiveness depends on the type of foundation and its work.

*Evaluating strategy.* Throughout the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, foundation staff began to explore the place of strategy and strategic planning and the evaluation of those as keys to examining the foundation effectiveness (Buteau, Buchanan, & Brock, 2009; GEO, 2009; Kramer et al., 2007; Patrizi & Sedway, 2006; Patton & Patrizi, 2010; Thompson & Patrizi, 2009). Evaluation is used both to develop and to assess strategy (GEO, 2009), and strategy is seen by all foundation stakeholders as necessary to the achievement of social impact (Bolduc, Buteau, Laughlin, Ragin, & Ross, 2007).

*Strategy as defined by the Center for Effective Philanthropy.* The Center for Effective Philanthropy developed a definition of strategy:

A framework for decision-making that is 1) focused on the external context in which the foundation works and 2) includes a hypothesized causal connection between use of foundation resources and goal achievement (Bolduc et al., 2007, p. 2).

The first component of the definition, “external orientation,” means that foundations tend to consider data about relevant issues, communities, fields, populations, existing models, and best practices. When developing strategy, these foundations solicit input from grantees, stakeholders, beneficiaries, and consultants. They are also inclined to adjust or change their strategy as new research becomes available. The second component, “logical connections,” means that there is an assumed link between the use of foundation funds, generally expressed in a logic model, and the accomplishment of particular goals (Bolduc, Buteau, Laughlin, Ragin, & Ross, 2007; Buteau, Buchanan, & Brock, 2009). Their research on foundation strategy identified four categories of decision makers ranging from non-strategic to strategic, using the two-part definition of strategy: charitable bankers, perpetual adjusters, partial strategists, and total strategists, illustrated along a continuum in Figure 3. Figure 4 includes more detailed characteristics of each of the categories of foundations.



*Figure 3.* Four Categories of Strategic Decision Makers among Foundations. Based on a study by the Center for Effective Philanthropy conducted in 2007, these categories indicate the extent to which foundations are strategic, that is, their decision making has an external orientation and logical connections (Bolduc, Buteau, et al., 2007, p. 9).

<p><b>Charitable Bankers: No use of strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer to external context only when citing goals, not how they will achieve them</li> <li>• Decision-making focuses on grantmaking process</li> <li>• Assessment is at the grant level; data comes from grantee reports and site visits</li> </ul>
<p><b>Perpetual Adjusters: Little use of strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision-making frameworks used are not strategies</li> <li>• Attempt to appeal to many stakeholders by shifting processes used to review goals and decision-making</li> <li>• Numerous options for focus</li> </ul>
<p><b>Partial Strategists: Some use of strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use at least one strategy; for many decision-making frameworks they do not specify hypothesized causal connections between use of foundation resources and goal achievement</li> <li>• Generally use external data to develop strategy</li> <li>• Mostly assess success of decision-making frameworks through review of individual grants</li> <li>• Find assessment difficult → doing less of it</li> <li>• Measurement is a challenge</li> </ul>
<p><b>Total Strategists: Significant use of strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use an externally focused framework for decision-making</li> <li>• Have a hypothesized causal connection between foundation resource use and goal achievement</li> <li>• Can cite data they use</li> <li>• Assess at grant and foundation levels</li> </ul>

*Figure 4.* Categories of Strategic Decision-Makers in Foundations. This figure lists the patterns in approaches to decision making in foundations, based on a two-part definition of strategy (Bolduc et al., 2007; Buteau, Buchanan, & Brock, 2009).

*Other perspectives on strategy.* Another definition or framework for strategy is also found in the literature about strategy and evaluation. Patton and Patrizi (2010), drawing from the work on management expert Henry Mintzberg, define strategy as a consistent pattern in organizational behavior over time. They distinguish this behavior-based definition from one that focuses on rhetoric about strategy and strategic plans.<sup>4</sup> In Mintzberg's framework, strategy involves both perspective (the organization's values and core beliefs, its ideas about how it can operate most effectively) and position (the organization's ideas about where it works and with whom, what it does and what outcomes it aspires to). Mintzberg (2007) distinguishes between intended strategy (what was planned, some of it implemented deliberately and some not) and realized strategy (combining deliberate and emergent or unplanned elements).

In this framework, evaluation of strategy is positioned as a tool for examining the alignment between perspective and position, tracking strategy (intended, implemented, dropped, emergent, and realized) over time—mostly as source of learning and adaptation within the organization (Mintzberg, 2007; Patton & Patrizi, 2010). Patrizi outlines four categories of criteria for evaluating strategy—characteristics, relationship among elements, characteristics of organization's approach to strategy, and strategy execution--and points out the value of developmental evaluation for conducting prospective evaluation of strategy (Patrizi, 2010).

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<sup>4</sup> Mintzberg, a critic of strategic plans, acknowledges their pervasiveness in organizations. Patrizi (2010) likens strategic plans to theories of change and points to their value as a source of data about organizations for evaluation purposes.

*Challenges to evaluating foundation strategy.* Several challenges emerge with regard to evaluation and foundation strategy. Related to strategy, a basic issue is that stakeholders in the philanthropic arena have widely diverging understandings about what strategy is and identifying their own strategies (Patrizi, 2010). Furthermore, regarding specific strategies, foundations often have difficulty moving from plans to implementation. Leaders of foundations tend to privilege the presence of a strategic plan over the actual logical steps that constitute a strategy (Buchanan, Buteau, & Brock, 2009). As strategies morph over time, foundations have difficulty accounting for changes to those strategies once implementation has begun. When foundation grantmaking strategy is not well-defined or implemented, effective use of evaluation is challenging (Patrizi & Thompson, 2010).

The underlying theory, one widely held by people working in the field, is that strategy leads to impact, with evaluation providing data to develop, refine, and test strategies and enabling informed decision making (Bolduc et al., 2007; Fleishman, 2007; GEO, 2009).<sup>5</sup> Some research reinforces the notion that strategy is a necessary component of effectiveness and that strategic leaders are better able to understand the difference they are making, but the link between strategy and increased impact is yet to be demonstrated (Bolduc et al., 2007; Buteau, Buchanan, & Brock, 2009). According to CEP research conducted in 2008, foundations struggle with the assessment of results against strategies. Among the challenges faced by staff is what data to collect and how to collect them, how

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<sup>5</sup> Bolduc et al. (2007) discovered that even though many foundation leaders extol the benefits of a strategy, their practices do not qualify as strategic according to the authors' definition of strategy, either because they do not focus on the external context of their work or because the work is not based on a hypothesized causal link between the use of foundation resources and the achievement of their goals.

to establish performance indicators, how to measure complex outcomes, and how to support grantees in the work of measuring outcomes. The study indicates that there is a greater use of performance indicators since 2002, but that only 26% of foundation staff respondents said that they have indicators for all their strategies (Buteau, Buchanan, & Brock, 2009).

In spite of rhetoric about strategy and its evaluation in the foundation world, recent research found that foundations have a limited understanding of their own impact (Thompson & Patrizi, 2009). Inadequate funding and methodological challenges contribute to the problem. Thompson and Patrizi (2009) discovered that funding for evaluation had decreased and only small amounts of money were invested in evaluation, amounts inadequate to determine the effects of strategic decisions. Among the problems encountered by those foundations attempting to use evaluation to inform their strategy were the problem of metrics tracked not aligning to strategy, expectations for results out of proportion with the amount of money invested, and metrics for goals so distant that they cannot inform strategy.<sup>6</sup>

Kimball and Koppell (2011) call into question the enterprise of “strategic philanthropy” altogether, and in particular the practices of designing specific solutions to social problems and focusing on singular paths to particular goals. The issue for them is not whether foundations can determine the effectiveness of their strategy, but if they

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<sup>6</sup> According to Patrizi and Thompson (2010), to be more strategic and effective foundations need to refine, adjust, and develop strategy as it is implemented, rather than having it remain fixed; to involve grantees in the development of strategy; to develop cultures and structures that are flexible and value learning; and to specify their own roles once the strategy is in progress (i.e., beyond the granting of money) for supporting social change.

should focus on strategy to begin with. They claim that such efforts are attempts to control social systems that are far too complex and powerful to be controlled by foundations. In using these approaches, foundations undermine rather than strengthen the nonprofit sector by diminishing the capacity of organizations to develop their own coherent vision and strategy, weakening their internal motivation, undervaluing their expertise in addressing problems, and creating inefficiencies. Moreover, they overlook strong organizations and programs because they do not align with the foundation's strategy. By focusing on singular strategies foundations underplay systemic complexity and its need for experimentation. Instead, Kimball and Koppell advocate for a different approach to innovation based on examples from business, government, and the nonprofit sector with design thinking, rapid prototyping, distributed decision making, and working with flexibility and openness across a system. They propose that foundations be "tight on goals and loose on means (p. 40)," giving general operating support to organizations and leaders with proven track records, allowing them to develop their own strategies and creating a diverse portfolio of investments for foundations, developing strategies along with nonprofits and other stakeholders, and sponsoring competitions and giving prizes to award innovation (Kimball & Koppell, 2011).

**Summary.** Aspects of the organizational structure and culture of foundations, as well as the social-legal context in which they operate, act as stumbling blocks to the practice of evaluation in the sector. The American legal system extends a great deal of freedom to foundations and minimizes their accountability to external audiences. Within foundations, practices of civility, boards with limited knowledge of the nonprofit sector,

pressures for administrative efficiency, ambivalence of professional leadership toward evaluation, and lack of clarity about what constitutes effectiveness are among the challenges to effective use of evaluation. While many foundations have begun to focus on strategy both for themselves and in relationship to their grantees in an effort to assess effectiveness, foundations still struggle to understand their impact.

### **Challenges Related to Nonprofit Grantee Organizations**

**Background information on nonprofits and evaluation.** The second set of challenges to the effective practice of evaluation in the sector is related to the structure and function of nonprofit organizations in the United States. Understanding the challenges requires an understanding of some basic information about nonprofits and evaluation. In the United States, nonprofit organizations receive contracts and funding from government, foundation, and private funders to deliver a wide array of public services. The expectation of them, from their funders and the larger public, is to provide high quality, effective services. Evaluation often plays a role in these relationships and arrangements (Carman & Fredericks, 2008).

***Statistics on evaluation practice in nonprofits.*** Surveys of nonprofit organizations in 2010 and 2012 by Innovation Network found that most nonprofit organizations do evaluate their work, with 85% reporting they did so in 2010 and 90% in 2012. Of those organizations that do evaluations, 100% of them report using and communicating their results. Large organizations, with annual budgets at or above \$5 million and organizations twenty years or older were more likely to evaluate their work. Based on the 2012 data, Innovation Network estimates that 28% of nonprofits have

promising capacities and behaviors in place to meaningfully engage in evaluation, which they define as meeting all three of the following criteria—(1) having some internal evaluation capacity, (2) the existence of some evaluation tools, and (3) a practice of at least annually engaging in the process (Morariu, Athanasiades, & Emery, 2012). These results are based on responses from a sample of nonprofits that are larger than the national average, based on budget size. Based on the finding that larger organizations are more likely to evaluate, the numbers in the study probably overestimate the amount of evaluation being done in the sector.

**Definitions.** One of the pitfalls in the nonprofit world regarding evaluation is the lack of consistency in the sector about what constitutes evaluation, similar to the situation in foundations. All of the following activities are considered evaluation: accreditation, financial audits, personnel evaluation, record reviews, and reporting to funders, as well as more traditional program evaluation and performance measurement. Sometimes these activities are done formally and other times quite informally. Only 65% of nonprofits surveyed engage in actual program evaluation; most were collecting data on inputs and outputs. In addition to lack of clarity about what constitutes evaluation, there is also lack of clarity about what constitutes effectiveness, even across stakeholders within a given nonprofit (Carman, 2007; Sandfort, 2008). Nonprofits may also lack clarity on their own strategies.

**Multiple funding sources.** Nonprofit organizations are likely to have multiple foundation funders, with 75% in a recent study having more than four and half having more than eight. Almost half report a lack of consistency in information requirements

from one foundation to another, as well as different definitions of terms and different metrics (Brock, Buteau, & Herring, 2012; McKinsey & Co., 2010; Sandfort, 2008). In such a situation, nonprofits are faced with the need to collect different types of data, to use different methods for collecting the data, and to have different structures for reporting data. One effect on many nonprofits is to end up “drowning in data” that are difficult to manage and use effectively (Behrens & Kelly, 2008; Snibbe, 2006).

Being funded by so many sources imposes numerous managerial challenges to nonprofit organizations (Sandfort, 2008). Because any given grantee of a foundation and even individual programs run by the nonprofit receive funding from multiple sources (government, individual donors, other foundations), it is impossible to attribute particular results to money from a foundation’s grant or any other individual source—even when there is a desire to do so (Owens, d’Amico, & Huang, 2005).

**Staffing.** Issues related to staffing in nonprofits can also be a stumbling block to evaluation. While primary responsibility for evaluation is internal to most nonprofits, few nonprofit administrators, program directors, or line staff have training or experience with evaluation or with the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data (Major & Brennan, 2011; York, 2003). While some nonprofits, usually through arrangements with their funders, work with external evaluators, that work is limited to specific funded programs and not to the entire complex of services and activities in the organizations (Carman, 2007). Other staff-related challenges are resistance to evaluation, and especially to the evaluation of complex social change, and the concern that time and resources for evaluation detract from service to clients.

**Resources.** Another issue in nonprofit agencies is the amount of funding available for doing evaluation. While most nonprofits report doing evaluation, 70% spend less than 5% of their annual organizational budgets on evaluation (Morariu, Athanasiades, & Emery, 2012). Sixty-two percent said they wanted help from their foundation funders, only 32% said that foundation funders have helped their ability to assess progress, and 71% reported receiving no support, either financial or otherwise, from foundation funders. Nonprofit leaders want funds to measure outcomes and find it particularly difficult to face unfunded mandates from foundations for such studies (Brock, Buteau, & Herring, 2012). Given the choice between using scarce resources for evaluation and providing services to clients, many nonprofits would prefer to provide services, seeing evaluation as a resource drain and a distraction from their primary purpose (Carman & Fredericks, 2008). Leaders are also interested in other forms of support—discussions about data collection and how to conduct it and about the results of data collection efforts. Of particular interest is guidance on building staff capacity to collect and interpret performance data (Brock, Buteau, & Herring, 2012).

**Capacity.** A study of nonprofit leaders published in 2012 discovered that nonprofits have a strong desire to understand their performance and are attempting to do so. Eighty-one percent believe they should demonstrate effectiveness by using performance measures, 81% say that a top priority for their boards is understanding the organizations' progress toward goals, and 80% say they regularly use data to inform efforts to improve performance (Brock, Buteau, & Herring, 2012). In Innovation Network's 2012 survey, 80% of nonprofits surveyed reported having moderate to high

evaluation capacity (Morariu, Athanasiades, & Emery, 2012). The finding is surprising given that respondents to the same study indicated that limited staff time, insufficient financial resources, and limited staff expertise in evaluation were challenges to conducting evaluation. These organizations appear not to understand what constitutes evaluation capacity.

**Summary.** Nonprofit organizations also face struggles in the practice of evaluation. The sector lacks clear understandings of what constitutes evaluation and effectiveness, and many nonprofits do not have a clear sense of what their strategies are. Given multiple funding sources and reporting requirements, nonprofits collect a lot of data and often find themselves overwhelmed by and uncertain about what to do with so much information. Nonprofits also lack resources and capacity to carry out evaluation and see evaluation as a drain from program resources. At the same time, nonprofits report a desire to understand their performance, indicate in surveys that they are doing and using evaluation, and display interest in having more support to do assessment or evaluation work.

### **Challenges Related to Relationships Between Funders and Grantees**

As we have seen, features of the organizational structures and cultures of both foundations and of nonprofits create stumbling blocks to the regular and effective practice of evaluation. A third set of challenges arises from particular aspects of the relationships between foundations and their nonprofit grantees. Recent research indicates that the quality of these relationships does matter for helpful reporting and evaluation processes (Buteau & Chu, 2011).

**Power imbalance.** Because foundations give money to nonprofits and those nonprofits depend on foundation funding for their basic functions and even their survival, their relationship is imbued with a significant imbalance of power (Jagpal, 2009; Tierney & Fleishman, 2011). The imbalance is exacerbated by the requirements of many foundations that their nonprofit grantees be accountable for the accomplishment of promised outcomes (Shannon, 2004). A key finding of a study sponsored by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and The Interaction Institute for Social Change indicated that the power imbalance between the two leads to counterproductive relationships and can impede grantee success (Bourns, 2010). The power imbalance, the dependency of nonprofits on their funders, and demands for accountability contribute to nonprofits' being fearful of disclosing problems, challenges, and especially failures. They worry that honesty about these issues could jeopardize future funding (Tierney & Fleishman, 2011). In a 2012 survey of nonprofit organizations, only 37% agreed with the statement that funders are accepting of failure as an opportunity for learning (Morariu, Athanasiades, & Emery, 2012). Many nonprofits, according to Millett (Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2003), in order to attract attention from funders and to get funded, overpromise on outcomes rather than being honest about what they can realistically achieve.

**Trust: Program vs. operating support.** A common practice in the work of funders with grantees suggests to grantees that their relationships with funders are not grounded in trust—distributing grants in the form of programmatic support (also known as program-restricted support) as opposed to general operating support (also called unrestricted, core, and general purpose support). Program specific support has been the

more prevalent form of support in the hundred-year history of foundation giving,<sup>7</sup> but significant players in the foundation world, including Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, Pablo Eisenberg, and Paul Brest, have advocated for increased general operating support in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a path to greater effectiveness for nonprofits (Brest, 2003; Eisenberg, 2009; Huang et al., 2006; Jagpal, 2009). One of the reasons cited for advocating general operating support, beyond its contribution to nonprofit capacity, infrastructure, sustainability, and incentivizing of innovation, is its fostering of trusting relationships between funder and grantee (National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 2003; Jagpal, 2009).

When in receipt of general operating funding, nonprofits drive the decision-making process about how to allocate funds, they have more flexibility about the use of funds, and they have the ability to respond to changes in the environment. By contrast, programmatic support requires grantees to conform their plans to the requirements foundations set, sometimes stretching beyond their missions to qualify for funding and suggesting to nonprofits that foundations do not value or trust the decisions they will make about the goals to set or the funds to allocate to achieve results (Cohen, 2007).

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<sup>7</sup> Findings from CEP's study conducted in 2006, based on data from grantee and foundation CEO surveys and from interviews with nonprofit grantees, found that most grants made even by large foundations were program-restricted, small, and short-term (Huang et al., 2006). Survey data from 2008 Grantmakers for Effective Organizations based on responses by over 800 foundations indicate that 80% of respondents gave operating funding, with the majority devoting a median of 20% of their grant dollars to operating grants (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2008). Their follow-up in 2011 indicated almost exactly the same findings: 83% of respondents gave some grant money to operating grants, and 20% was the median proportion of budget devoted to general operating support (McCray, 2012).

**Interactions and communication.** A recent analysis of research conducted over an eight-year period identified a number of challenges related to the relationships between grantees and funders—from the perspective of grantees. This study identified factors associated with the constructs *interactions* (based on survey items of fairness of treatment by foundation, comfort approaching foundation if a problem arises, responsiveness of foundation staff) and *communications* (based on survey items of clarity of communication of foundation’s goals and strategy, consistency of information provided by different communications). (See Figure 5 for a summary.) Grantees reported the need for improvement in these areas. The best predictors of a strong relationships measure were a foundation’s understanding of the funded organization’s goals and strategies, helpfulness of the selection process and mitigation of pressure to modify priorities, understanding of fields and communities, and initiation of contact with appropriate frequency. (See Figure 6 for a summary.) Neither the types of grants (operating vs. programmatic) nor the duration of grants appeared in the research as important factors for predicting strong relationships (Bolduc, Buchanan, & Huang, 2004; Buteau, Buchanan, & Chu, 2010). Specific program officers appeared to play a role in the quality of relationships between funders and grantees, and variance was found within foundations by program officer (Buteau, Buchanan, & Chu, 2010). Practices of program officers who contribute to a relationship of trust include responding in a timely manner to contact from grantees, communicating honestly about prospects for funding, and showing empathy for the situation of nonprofit staff (Jagpal, 2009).

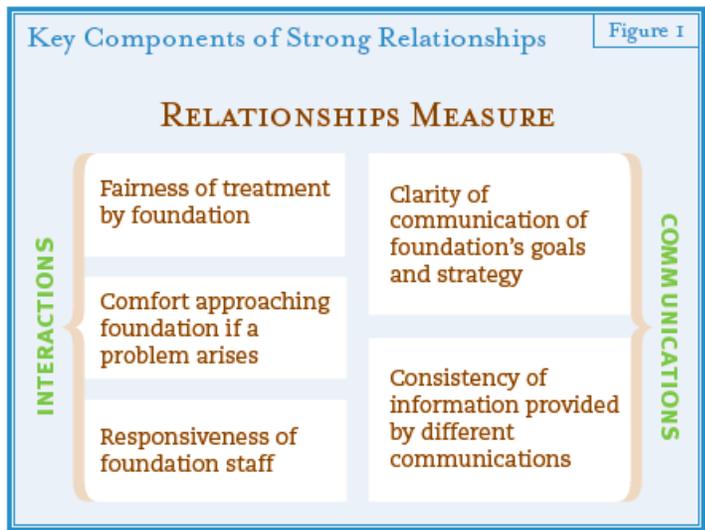
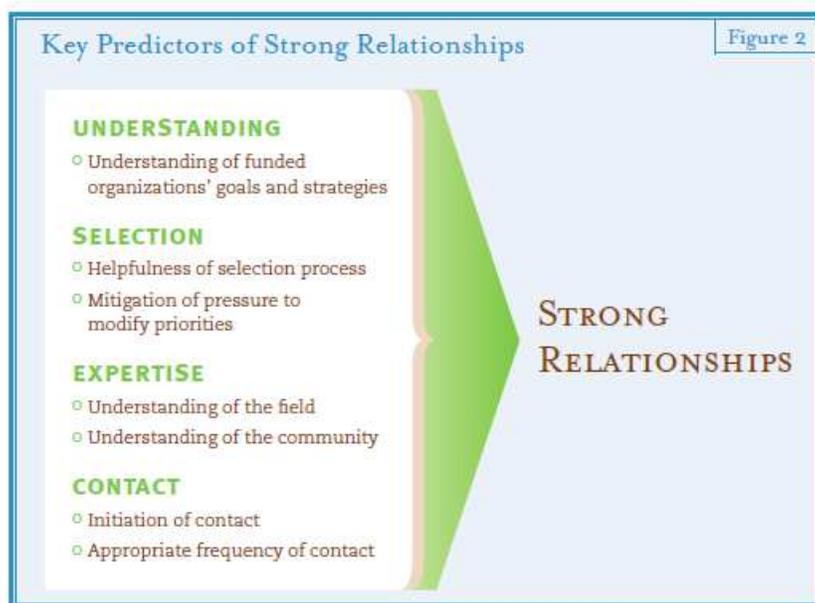


Figure 5. Key Components of Strong Relationships. These items were associated with the factors *interactions* and *communications* and were associated with the construct *relationships* in CEP research on grantee perceptions of their funders, based on the Grantee Perception Report (Buteau, Buchanan, & Chu, 2010).



*Figure 6:* Key Predictors of Strong Relationships. These items predicted strong relationships between grantees and funders, based on the Grantee Perception Reports (Buteau, Buchanan, & Chu, 2010).

**Mismatch in ideas about nonprofit performance assessment.** Research by the Center for Effective Philanthropy from studies of nonprofit and foundation leaders indicates that foundation leaders say nonprofits need to do more and better work to assess performance, while nonprofit leaders report both effort and commitment toward performance assessment in their agencies (Brock, Buteau, & Herring, 2012). One interpretation of these findings is that foundation and nonprofit leaders define performance assessment differently and consequently the information yielded by the process is not valued to the same degree. Another is that foundations have an unrealistic idea about the kind and extent of assessment possible by nonprofits, especially given their

limited financial resources and evaluation skills and knowledge (Brock, Buteau, & Herring, 2012).

**Reporting requirements.** A recent study by the Center for Effective Philanthropy found that on average grantees do not find reporting and evaluation processes helpful to improving their organizations or programs (Buteau & Chu, 2011). Foundations' requirements for reporting from grantees create several kinds of difficulties.

*Accountability and trust.* Data from studies by Ostrower (2004) and Bearman (2008) indicate that most funders use what they collect primarily for the purpose of monitoring compliance. Grantees perceive the demand for reporting for the purpose of accountability as a sign of the power imbalance between them and often interpret these requirements as an indication of the foundations' lack of trust in them. This perception is sharpened when nonprofits compare the requirements of foundations with those of individual donors on whose support they also depend (Bearman, 2008).

*Producing reports.* Beyond the demands for reports and how grantees perceive them, a number of aspects of the work of producing reports add tension to the relationships between funders and grantees. Reporting requirements strain the resources of nonprofits—of time, money and expertise. Varied application and reporting structures across foundations mean significant investments of staff time, especially since most grantees apply for and receive funds from more than one foundation (Bearman, 2008; Jagpal, 2009; Johnson, 2006). Nonprofits bear significant overhead costs to apply for grants and to comply with funders' application and reporting requirements.

Funders are often unaware of or inattentive to these costs, or they underestimate them. The 2008 and 2011 studies by GEO found that only 12% of funders collect information from their grantees about the amount of time grantees spend complying with funders' administrative requirements, including reporting and evaluation. Foundations with median grants of \$50,000 estimated that their grantees spent a median of eight hours for reports and evaluation, while a study by the Center for Effective Philanthropy on behalf of Project Streamline found that grantee survey respondents spent a median of ten hours on evaluation. Grantees are hesitant to disclose their costs directly to funders out of a desire to appear as efficient as possible (Gammal, Simard, Hwang, & Powell, 2005, cited in Snibbe, 2006; Tierney & Fleishman, 2011). Staff time and expertise to complete the requirements are often out of proportion with the size of the grant, a phenomenon identified and named by Buechel, Keating, and Miller (2007) as "insufficient net grants," the amount of the funding minus the cost of applying for the grant and fulfilling the funder's reporting requirements.

Adding to the frustration borne by nonprofits from reporting requirements is their widely held notion, supported by research, that foundations do not use most of the reports they require (Bearman, 2008; Jagpal, 2009; Ostrower, 2004; Snibbe, 2006). And while grantees report a desire to discuss and receive feedback on their reports, this rarely happens (Bearman, 2008).

*Content of reports.* Funders frequently ask for information that is different from the kind of information grantees want for their own learning and ask for it within a timeline that may work for the funder but not for the grantee (Major & Brennan, 2011;

York, 2003). Nonprofits often report that they complete the accountability requirements that foundations establish without seeing a value in the enterprise for themselves (Bearman, 2008). The majority of nonprofits surveyed in a 2012 study conducted by the Center for Effective Philanthropy believe that funders are interested in performance information for their own purposes, rather those of the nonprofits themselves (Brock, Buteau, & Herring, 2012).

**Summary.** Certain characteristics of the relationships between foundations and their grantees also complicate the practice of evaluation in the sector. At the heart of the issue is the power imbalance created by the flow of money from foundations to grantees. Related to this imbalance are issues of trust, fear about honest communication regarding expected and actual outcomes, and differences over performance assessment, reporting requirements, and report use. Other issues include the quality of interactions and communication by foundation staff.

### **Challenges Related to Evaluation**

Conditions in the field of evaluation also contribute to the difficulty of its assuming an essential and effective place in the work of foundations and their grantees. Ricardo Millett (2010) noted that there is limited diffusion of evaluation in the foundation community and asserted that there is limited understanding or use among foundations and nonprofits of evaluation tools and practices, in spite of foundation rhetoric about being strategic (cited in Patton & Patrizi, 2010).

**Limited understandings of evaluation.** In the foundation and nonprofit worlds, there is lack of agreement about what evaluation is, how it is conducted, and what it means to use evaluation (Carter, 2004; Leviton & Bass, 2004; Patrizi & Sedway, 2006). The field of evaluation has fallen short in making clear to the foundation community that evaluation can serve multiple purposes. Evaluators have not dispelled the widely held notion that evaluation's primary purpose is to prove something to someone else (York, 2003). The field has not communicated clearly what various evaluation methods are capable of accomplishing (Behrens & Kelly, 2008). Due to communication or educational failings within the field, many foundations and nonprofits mistakenly believe that evaluation for accountability and evaluation for learning are mutually exclusive, either because of methodological or financial limitations (Patrizi, 2003; York, 2003).

**Difficulty of accomplishing desired purposes.** Many foundations hope that evaluation can help them prove a causal connection between particular programs and both short-term and long-term impacts, often referred to as attribution (Brest, 2003; Jagpal, 2009). It is exceedingly difficult to aggregate the results of the giving foundations do, especially across different program areas, to measure complex and sometimes slow-moving social change and to attribute changes in social systems to foundation contributions (Behrens & Kelley, 2008; Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2003; Hall, 2004; Owens, d'Amico, & Huang, 2005; Twersky, 2012).

**Timing and usefulness or value of evaluation results.** Timing can also be a challenge to the effective practice and use of evaluation. Often evaluations are conducted on a schedule that is out of sync with the schedule for decision making, and evaluation

data are not available to use for decision-making purposes (Behrens & Kelly, 2008; Patrizi & Sedway, 2006). A study of foundation board members by FSG (2009, *Let's Make Evaluation Work*) indicated that evaluation results are often not actionable by boards.

**Evaluators.** The variability in the training and experience of evaluators and the lack of certification among evaluators make the identification of evaluators a challenge to foundations (Kramer & Bickel, 2004; Patrizi & Sedway, 2006). There is sometimes a misalignment between the style and approach of many evaluators and the style and culture of foundations, with evaluators lacking the appropriate interpersonal skills to work within a foundation system (Patrizi & Sedway, 2006). Foundations sometimes want evaluators to play many roles, leading to role confusion for evaluators (Patrizi & Sedway, 2006). Differences in approach from one evaluator to the next make comparisons across evaluations challenging to foundations (Kramer & Bickel, 2004). Even when evaluators are engaged with nonprofits and foundations, their influence is limited; they are not necessarily positioned to influence the cultures of nonprofits or of foundation funders to include evaluative thinking and prioritizing of evaluation (Kramer & Bickel, 2004; Patrizi & Sedway, 2006).

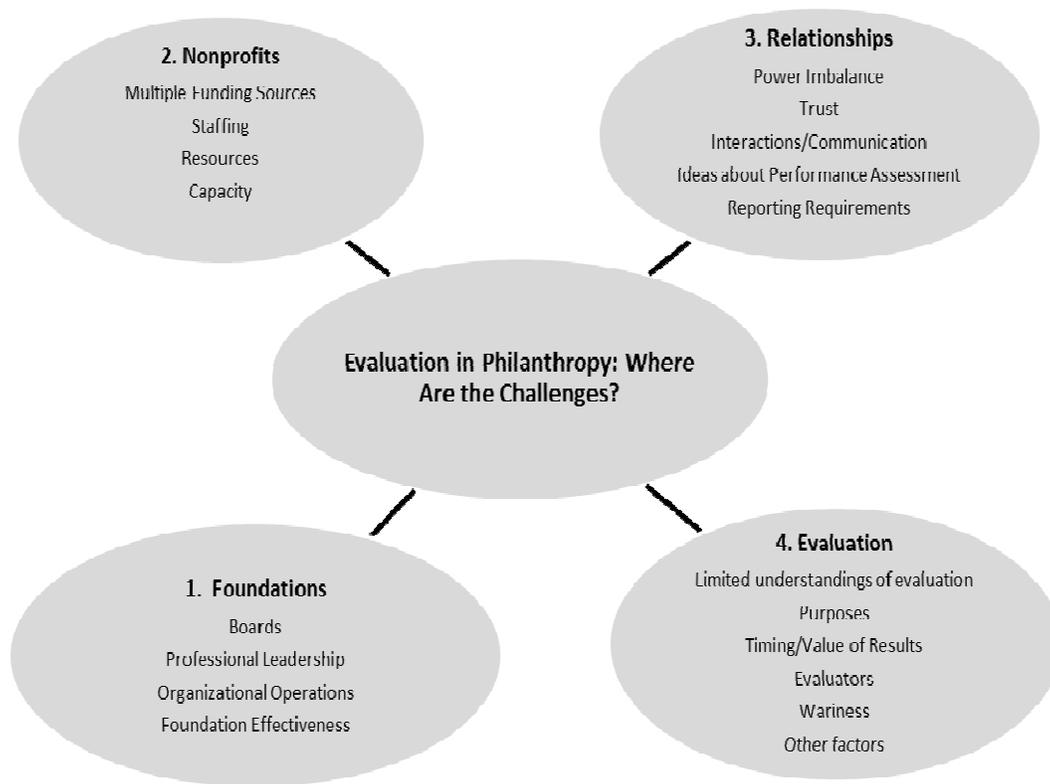
**Wariness.** Evaluation engenders discomfort and anxiety for a number of reasons. One is the perceived costs (financial, time) of conducting evaluation. In an environment of scarce resources, costs alone are a source of concern. Those concerns are exacerbated by the prospect of diverting funds from the actual work or service to clients in order to conduct evaluation (Hall, 2004; Leviton & Bass, 2004; Patrizi & Sedway, 2006; Slater,

Constantine, & Braverman, 2004). Because evaluation implies judgment to people, many nonprofits and foundations fear that evaluation will expose weaknesses or failures (Carter, 2004; Patrizi & Sedway, 2006). Finally, negative experiences with poorly conducted evaluations—based on unreasonable expectations or using inappropriate methods—have damaged perceptions of evaluation in the foundation world (Behrens & Kelly, 2008; Kramer, Graves, Hirschhorne, & Fiske, 2007).

**Evaluation as one consideration among many.** A complex set of dynamics comes into play in all organizations, including foundations, when they make decisions and develop strategies. Evaluation is one among many conscious considerations and unconscious influences. Weiss enumerates the following factors beyond information that impact decisions: “costs, ideology, self-interest, public relations, the rules and standard-operating procedures of the institution” (Weiss, 1987, pp. 44-45). Like contemporary behavioral economists and psychologists, she recognizes that rational thinking, including the use of evaluative information, is sometimes overridden by intuition, tradition, customs, fads, the influences of others, personal biases, and power (Kahneman, 2011).

**Summary.** The field of evaluation also shares responsibility for being difficult to practice effectively and consistently in the foundation-nonprofit sector. Stakeholders find it difficult to understand what it means to conduct and use evaluation, to identify the various purposes it can serve, and to recognize what they can reasonably expect of it. They find evaluation results difficult to understand and use. Finding evaluators appropriately trained and experienced for the sector is not easy. Finally, stakeholders in the sector perceive evaluation as risky for a number of reasons. Figure 7 enumerates the

challenges to the practice of evaluation in the foundation/nonprofit sector across four categories.



*Figure 7.* Evaluation in Philanthropy: Where are the Challenges? This figure outlines both the categories of challenges for the practice of evaluation in the work of foundations and their grantees and summarizes the subcategories detailed above.

### **Pursuing the Promise of Evaluation for Foundations and Grantees**

We have seen various explanations of the challenges to the successful practice of evaluation in the work of foundations and their grantees. Some of these are related to the particularities of foundations, some to the nature of nonprofits, some to the relationships between the two types of institutions, and some to evaluation itself. Drawing on

empirical research, theory, and participant experience, the literature on this field of work also includes recommendations for stimulating effective practice of evaluation in the sector.

### **Foundations**

Changes within the structure and culture of foundations hold potential for enhancing their practice of evaluation (Fleishman, 2007; Kramer & Bickel, 2004; Owens, d'Amico, & Huang, 2005; Patrizi, 2009; Patrizi & Sedway, 2006; Patrizi & Thompson, 2010). Kramer characterizes the challenges as ones of management and leadership and recommends the setting of reasonable expectations by foundation boards, making decisions through a process characterized by transparency, consistency, and candor, expecting and tolerating some failure, and anticipating and accepting the higher administrative costs and ratios incurred through evaluation (in Owens, d'Amico & Huang, 2005). Fleishman's (2007) recommendations also focus on management and strategic practices. He sees the need to "charge foundation boards with directing the CEO and staff to create and implement strategic plans for grantmaking programs, benchmarks for assessing grant and program success, and metrics for measuring the foundation's effect on the fields in which they work" (p. 5). Patrizi and Sedway (2006) come to similar conclusions about the significant role of foundation leaders in their study of two days of discussions by 50 foundation professionals at the Evaluation Roundtable. They present a systems analysis of evaluation success in a foundation, highlighting the critical role of board and professional leadership support in fostering attitudes toward evaluation and learning and expectations for their use, creating processes to support the use of evaluation

(including the engagement of program officers in evaluation), and actually using evaluation to make decisions. Their ideas are represented graphically in Figure 8.

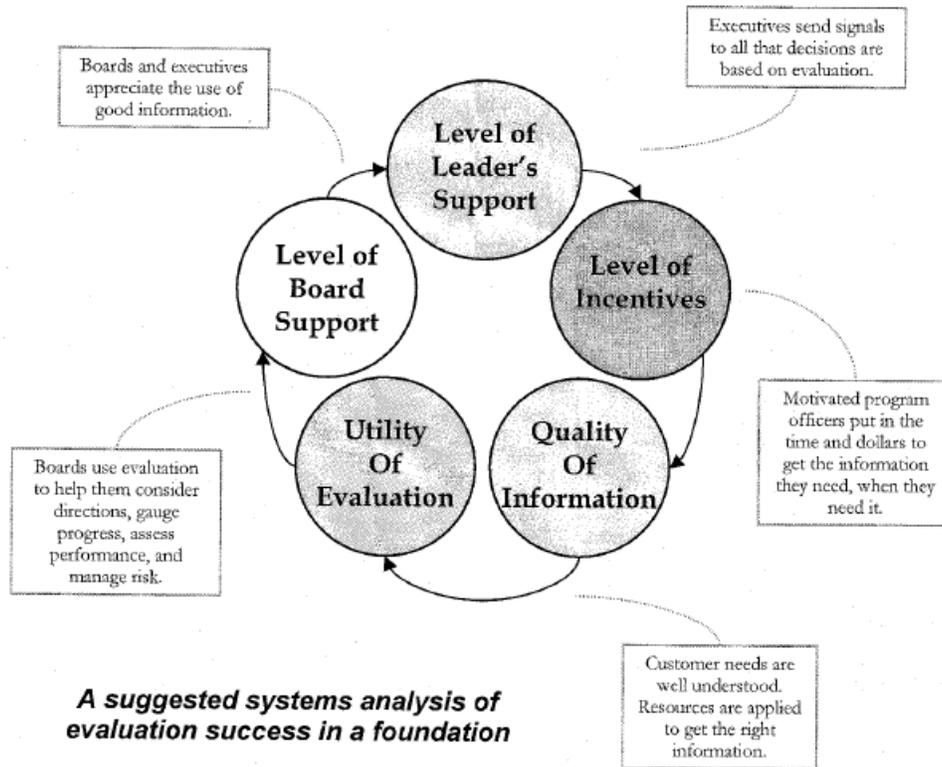


Figure 8. A systems analysis for supporting success in the practice of evaluation in a foundation by Patrizi and Sedway (2006, p. 5).

### Relationships Between Funders and Grantees

Another approach to changing the practice of evaluation in the sector is to make changes in the relationships between funders and their grantees. Tierney and Fleishman (2011) advocate addressing two elements of grantee-funder relationships in order to improve effectiveness—a shared definition of success (goals that are strategically aligned) and a productive working relationship (benefiting both partners because the

relationship helps grantees produce results). Using a matrix based on goals and working relationships, Tierney and Fleishman define four kinds of connections between funders and grantees: Train Wreck (opposing goals, dysfunctional relationships); Amiable Association (opposing goals and a productive working relationship); Forced March (shared goals, dysfunctional relationship), and Partnership (shared goals, productive working relationship). These categories overlap with findings about relationships from research conducted by the Center for Effective Philanthropy that revealed the importance of the quality of interactions and communications, as well as clarity about goals and strategies (Bolduc, Buchanan, & Huang, 2004; Buteau, Buchanan, & Chu, 2010). Like Tierney and Fleishman, Kimball and Koppell (2011) assert that shared goals are critical. They also advocate for flexibility regarding the means nonprofits use to accomplish goals. They promote the granting of general operating support to organizations and leaders with proven track records.

The elements of effective relationships could support the conduct and the use of evaluation in the sector. The 2010 CEP report that analyzed 9,600 comments from grantees found that nearly 25% of their recommendations about improving their work with foundations focused on improved communication and interactions –both in terms of quality and frequency, and who took the initiative in communication (Buteau, Buchanan, & Chu, 2010). Other recommendations for changing the practice of evaluation by addressing the relationships between funders and grantees include funders’ working in closer collaboration with their grantees on evaluation, changing the expectations around evaluation and reporting, providing more support to their grantees in the form of tools,

funding, and/or capacity building, discussing grantee reports with them, and focusing evaluation on what grantees define as useful to them, and upgrading the level of understanding and expertise of foundation staff on the fields in which the nonprofits work (Bearman, 2008; Bolduc, Buchanan, & Chu, 2010; Brock, Buteau, & Herring, 2012; Kimball & Koppell, 2011; McKinsey, 2010; Patton, Bare, & Bonnet, 2004; Tierney & Fleishman, 2011). Project Streamline makes a case, for example, that if funders require reports or evaluations for the purpose of determining the impact of their giving on social problems, thus having the evaluation serve their purposes, that they should be responsible for paying for the costs of that evaluation. To do otherwise is “outsourcing the burden” or doing “what is essentially the grantmaker’s work without compensation” (Bearman, 2008).

## **Evaluation**

Recommendations for increasing the effective use of evaluation also focus on specific ideas about evaluation. One set of recommendations addresses ways to improve the positioning and practice of evaluation in the sector; the other set deals with different purposes for evaluation.

**Positioning and practice of evaluation.** One set of recommendations has to do with evaluators helping foundation leaders position the practice of evaluation in the sector. To understand and be able to make a case for the value of evaluation to foundations, foundation leaders need evaluators to understand their political context and improve their capacity to work within it, to provide examples of exemplary practice, to develop approaches that serve a broader range of purposes and that allow collaboration, and to

create ways to integrate evaluation into strategy and decision making (Patrizi & Sedway, 2006).

**Beyond accountability to other purposes for evaluation: Evaluative learning.**

One recommendation for bolstering the value of evaluation in the context of foundations and nonprofits is to use evaluation for the purpose of learning and increasing programmatic and organizational effectiveness. The evaluation literature uses a number of names for this approach—learning approach, learning-driven assessment, and evaluative learning—and distinguishes itself in purpose from the traditional or accountability approach to evaluation (Johnson, 2006; Major & Brennan, 2011; McKinsey, 2010). Its functions are providing information for decision making and improvement of practices in a program or organization, and capacity building (Baker, 2011; Preskill & Torres, 2000; York, 2003). This approach to evaluation is based on the principles of constructivist education which involves the making of meaning by participants in a social setting. Key elements of effective evaluative learning address the purposes, audiences, designers/conductors of evaluation, data used, report used, interpreters of findings, and frequency of evaluations and have these characteristics:

- Ongoing (rather than periodic) and timed to provide information to inform key decisions
- Collaboratively designed by stakeholders and outside evaluators
- Led by organizational stakeholders
- Focused primarily on organizational learning, with nonprofits as the main audience (not funders)
- Multiple forms of data
- User-friendly reports
- Key stakeholders provide interpretive feedback on findings

- Changes traditional boundaries of program and evaluation
- Shifts the role of evaluator to include educator, facilitator, coach, consultant, mediator as well as technical expert (Preskill & Torres, 2000; York, 2003)

Such an approach requires building trust between funders and grantees, for funders to shift expectations about what they require and how they work with grantees, and for funders and grantees to articulate evaluation purposes collaboratively and to agree on outcomes, indicators, timelines and evaluation uses (Major & Brennan, 2011; York, 2003). Over and above these changes, GEO asserts that such an approach requires the development of capacity in nonprofits to do the work, and advocates for funders to support the development of this capacity, in particular the ability to apply the learning from evaluation to make changes. The type of capacity building would depend on the nonprofits' purposes and needs.

Some foundations have conducted structured, ongoing learning communities where participants compile, analyze, and interpret data together for the benefit of all stakeholders (Chin, 2006). In some cases funders are participants, whereas in others they fund these initiatives (Johnson, 2006). Some communities are based within a single nonprofit, others bring together groups of nonprofits funded by the same foundation (Chin, 2006; Johnson, 2006). The Bruner Foundation recently sponsored a pilot program to teach evaluative thinking, a set of skills related to evaluative learning, to staff representatives of two foundations. Their hope was to increase the use of evaluative thinking in order to inform their efforts to improve their use of external evaluations, to

guide their grantees more effectively to do evaluation, to evaluate their own work more effectively, and to further organizational learning (Baker, 2011).

**Beyond accountability to other purposes for evaluation: Strategic learning.** A related approach is strategic learning, defined as the use of data and insights from a variety of information-gathering approaches—including evaluation—to inform decision making about strategy (Coffman & Beer, 2011). Strategic learning can use evaluation, but it is not considered by its proponents as an approach to evaluation.

Evaluation intended to contribute to strategic learning requires particular thinking about evaluation questions, roles for the evaluator, timing of data collection, and framing of findings. It is guided by a set of principles (Coffman & Beer, 2011, p. 4):

- Evaluation is a support for strategy and as such, is part of the development of strategy from its inception
- Evaluation is integrated; evaluators are embedded and use a collaborative and participatory process.
- Evaluation emphasizes context
- Evaluation is client-focused
- Evaluation places a high value on use, and helps to support it
- Evaluation data to inform strategy can come from a wide variety of sources and methods
- Evaluation must take place within a culture that encourages risk taking, learning, and adaptation
- Evaluation is flexible and timely, and ready for the unexpected
- Evaluation is constructivist

Strategic learning shares many of the principles and practices of evaluative learning, but differs in its singular focus on strategy and the purpose of decision making about strategy. The approach is intended for organizations that already have learning cultures, not for those establishing learning cultures.

**Beyond accountability to other purposes for evaluation: Research and development.** Peter York (2011) outlines another approach to working with information for learning in organizations that he believes differs from program evaluation as the world of foundations and nonprofits commonly use it. He calls it R & D (research and development) for the social sector. York contrasts the typical purposes of evaluation in the sector as validating a program's right to exist or identifying solutions to complex social problems through experimental design. By exploring what works and what does not from the perspective of the target of the intervention, the R & D approach intends to "incrementally improve the combination of elements that make up a solution in order to grow the results (p.2)." The goal is learning to facilitate emergent or incremental change of a program, allowing designers to extend program results to as many of targeted beneficiaries as possible.

York points out a series of differences between R & D and traditional evaluation. R & D looks at cause and effect relationships between program elements and short-term results for individual and sub-groups of program participants, not participants as a whole group. Among the processes R & D employs are gathering data directly from program recipients, working with leaders and staff to interpret client data, establishing outcome measures by documenting success stories of clients, and using the learning to inform ongoing program design. In summary, York says that the R & D approach "ensures that organizational leaders and key stakeholders receive and use accurate, timely, and rigorously collected data to not only determine 'if something worked,' but most importantly, pinpoint the specifics of 'what worked, for whom, and under what

conditions” (p.15). York’s R & D approach shares many of the purposes and approaches of evaluative learning listed above.

**Beyond accountability to other purposes for evaluation: Developmental evaluation.** Another relatively new approach to evaluation with potential to contribute to the effective use of evaluation in the world of foundations and grantees is developmental evaluation. It uses a learning approach, and has the purpose of supporting the development of innovations in complex systems where there is uncertainty about how to solve problems, and stakeholders disagree about the most appropriate approaches or interventions (Gamble, 2007; Patton, 2011).

Developmental evaluation is intended to support innovation in complex and dynamic circumstances, in distinction to other approaches to evaluation which support making improvements over the life-span of a program, predicting outcomes and measuring the attainment of goals. It is used to its greatest effectiveness during phases of program exploration, supporting the use of rigorous data alongside creative thinking to inform innovation. In developmental evaluation, the evaluator plays the role of team member and often participates in the shaping and testing of new approaches, using skills of facilitation and group process alongside those of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Gamble, 2007; Patton, 2011).

Developmental evaluation uses many of the same tools as more traditional forms of evaluation, but differs from both formative and summative evaluation in purpose, is appropriate for use in particular circumstances and contexts, requires particular skills on the part of evaluators, and has the capacity to support both learning and accountability

(Gamble, 2007; Patton, 2011). Key features of developmental evaluation are framing the issue, that is, defining the problem that needs to be addressed by the social innovation; testing quick iterations, that is, providing systematically gathered, time-sensitive information about experiments being conducted; and tracking the trajectory of the innovation, that is, recording the process of innovation, including routes not taken, unintended consequences, and surprises along the way (Gamble, 2007).

The use of developmental evaluation in the context of foundations and nonprofits would require a desire on the part of the funder to support emergent approaches to social problems. Gamble (2007) posits that developmental evaluation “holds promise as a mechanism to bridge the flexibility requirements of innovators with the accountability requirements of sponsors (p. 58). Patton (2011) asserts that developmental evaluation shifts the “locus and focus of accountability (p. 13). Whereas traditional accountability addresses stakeholders external to the grantee for the purpose of ascertaining if funding has been appropriately used, accountability in a developmental evaluation context is internal to the grantee, focusing on questions related to its commitment to its vision, the realities of context, and the relationship between that context and vision. It is an approach to accountability that, while different from the tradition one, can be shared by funders. As Patton writes, “those funding innovations join in the questioning and need to understand that the seriousness of inquiry and resulting learning constitutes accountability” (p. 13).

**Combining learning and accountability.** Stakeholders in the foundation and nonprofit sector use the word accountability, but there is a lack of clarity about what it actually means—for foundations and for grantees, and for people playing different roles

in those organizations. One commonly held notion is that accountability and learning are mutually exclusive or in conflict with one another (Patrizi & Sedway, 2006). Even in cases where a funder has particular evaluation requirements, approaches, and instruments, evaluation can be structured to allow for organizational learning, and might be done most effectively when facilitated by an outside evaluation expert (York, 2003). A useful step would be to clarify the meaning and requirements of accountability (Patrizi & Sedway, 2006).

**Summary of approaches to evaluation beyond accountability.** Table 1 provides a summary of four approaches to evaluation with purposes other than accountability that various writers have proposed to support effective evaluation practice in the foundation/nonprofit sector. While the approaches differ in specific uses for evaluation, they share a number of characteristics: the primary audience for evaluation is staff, and in all cases those staff members are engaged in some or many aspects of the evaluation process—especially data interpretation; data collection is ongoing or timed for use in decision making, and the evaluator plays a facilitative role at some point in the process.

*Table 1.* Summary of Evaluative Learning Approaches

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Purpose(s) in the Context of Foundation/ Nonprofit Sector</b>	<b>Characteristics/ Principles</b>	<b>Theoretical Framework or Model</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Roles of Evaluator</b>
Evaluative Learning	Increase program effectiveness	Ongoing, timed for decision-	Constructivism	Organizational stake-	Facilitator/ consultant Technical

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Purpose(s) in the Context of Foundation/ Nonprofit Sector</b>	<b>Characteristics/ Principles</b>	<b>Theoretical Framework or Model</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Roles of Evaluator</b>
	Increase organizational effectiveness	making		holders participate in many aspects of evaluation	expert
Strategic Learning	Inform decision-making about strategy	Evaluative information is one source of input for decision making  Part of the development of strategy  Ongoing, timely  Culture of risk-taking	Collaborative or participatory  Constructivism	Stakeholders engage in evaluation along with evaluator	Embedded partner/facilitator in the development of strategy and evaluation
Research & Development (R & D)	Improve program such that it extends results to more targeted beneficiaries	Focus on what which elements of a program worked, for whom, and under what conditions	Business product research and development	Stakeholders play a role in interpreting data	External, works with stakeholders to interpret findings
Developmental Evaluation	Support the development of innovations in complex systems under conditions of uncertainty	Focus on defining the problem testing quick iterations, and recording the process of innovation	Systems thinking	Stakeholders participate in all aspects	Team member, facilitator, technical expert

## **Implications for My Dissertation Research**

The literature on the practice of evaluation in foundations and nonprofits demonstrates a wide range of challenges related to the structures and cultures of those particular organizations, to the relationships between them, and to the field of evaluation itself. Common to many of the challenges are a lack of clarity around definitions and language (e.g., what is meant by strategy, accountability, evaluation); lack of capacity (of staff, of boards) to do and to use evaluation and its results; inconsistency between beliefs and practices (acknowledgment of the value of evaluation vs. the failure to fund it adequately; resources of time and money spent on evaluation vs. frequent failure of evaluations to make an impact on the work of foundations or nonprofits); ambiguity about roles, responsibility, and communication; and lack of clarity about realistic expectations.

A segment of the literature on this field of inquiry lays out approaches that hold the potential for strengthening and improving the practice of evaluation. These include greater focus on evaluative learning, combining learning and accountability as evaluation purposes, clarifying definitions and refining expectations for evaluation, integrating evaluation from the early stages of a program's design, and addressing the relationships (through communication and interactions) between foundations and their grantees. Much of the writing on the topic consists of practical recommendations based on theory and writers' experience in the field. While there are some empirical studies, few researchers have explored empirically stories of innovative evaluation structures and practices in foundations—motivations behind these innovations, the factors that made them possible,

the nature of the innovations or the results when foundations attempt to improve their practice of evaluation.

This study contributes to the literature on evaluation by telling one such story, the story of the Evaluators' Consortium of the Jim Joseph Foundation. It addressed the following questions:

- What occurs when a foundation inaugurates an innovative approach to evaluation practice?
- What factors support the introduction of innovative structures or approaches to evaluation in a foundation context?
  - What roles do the personal and interpersonal factors play in the establishment of innovative evaluation structures or approaches?
  - What role do established evaluation practices, structures and organizational culture play in the success of the innovation?
- What are the challenges and impediments to introducing innovative structures or approaches to evaluation in a foundation context?

By exploring these questions, the research uncovered knowledge with the potential to guide foundations in strengthening their practice of evaluation in support of achieving their missions.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand an initiative focused on evaluation within a foundation, undertaken in order to strengthen the foundation's own work, its contributions to the field in which it operates, and the work of its grantees. By exploring this initiative, the study sought to examine practices, structures, and impacts related to the practice of evaluation in the philanthropic sector.

This chapter addresses the methods that were used to respond to the research questions in the study. After situating the study within the paradigm of qualitative research, the chapter includes a review of the research questions, an explanation of case study methodology, and a rationale for the use of case study to answer the questions. It moves on to a discussion of the limitations of the methodology and how I addressed these limitations, as well as researcher subjectivity and how I accounted for it.

#### **Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry**

Qualitative research calls for the systematic and in-depth study of social or human problems through the detailed examination of events and processes unfolding in their natural setting (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The goal is to develop an insider's perspective on the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). By talking to people and observing them, through discovery rather than through manipulation, the qualitative researcher examines how people interpret their experiences

and what meanings they give to them (Patton, 2002). The researcher is the main instrument of data collection and interpretation and works inductively with the data to uncover themes and patterns and to develop concepts or hypotheses or theories. A qualitative study produces a rich, holistic description of the phenomenon of interest (Merriman, 2009; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995).

This study examined a new evaluation initiative as it developed, sought to understand the context from which it emerged, explored the factors that supported and impeded it, and observed some of its early effects. Qualitative research, with its emphasis on understanding a phenomenon from within and its desire to capture the meaning of experiences, was fitting for the study.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions framed the research for this study:

- What occurs when a foundation inaugurates an innovative approach to evaluation practice?
- What factors support the introduction of innovative structures or approaches to evaluation in a foundation context?
  - What roles do the personal and interpersonal factors play in the establishment of innovative evaluation structures or approaches?
  - What role do established evaluation practices, structures and organizational culture play in the success of the innovation?

- What are the challenges and impediments to introducing innovative structures or approaches to evaluation in a foundation context?

### **Case Study Methodology**

To address these research questions, the study employed a single case study design and examined the case of a new evaluation initiative of the Jim Joseph Foundation. Stake (1995) outlines some of the basic features of case study:

A case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case . . . We study a case when it itself is of very special interest. We look for the detail of interaction with its contexts. Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances. (p. xi)

The case was an initiative of the Jim Joseph Foundation, one that foundation staff considered an experimental approach to their program evaluation involving four “preferred evaluators” (C. Edelsberg, personal communication, July 16, 2013).<sup>8</sup> By preferred evaluators the foundation meant people with whom they had worked before and whom they identified as likely contractors for future major foundation grant evaluations. The goals of the initiative were to establish a more efficient process for selecting evaluators for foundation grants, to stimulate collaboration among the evaluators, to explore possibilities to conduct cluster evaluations or meta-analyses, and to examine ways the foundation could improve its overall program of evaluation. The initiative was

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<sup>8</sup> At the early stages of the initiative it was called both the “Preferred Evaluators” and the “Evaluator Consortium.” By January of 2014 the Foundation’s board decided to use the name Evaluators’ Consortium exclusively.

facilitated by Lee Shulman, emeritus professor from Stanford University, who earlier conducted a study of the foundation's program of evaluation.

As it was first conceived, the experimental initiative would consist of two components:

A. Lee Shulman's meeting with each of the preferred evaluators to learn about the firm and to review the evaluation(s) they have done for the foundation.

B. Over a six-month period, the preferred evaluators would meet together with Shulman and foundation staff for two or three learning and work sessions in San Francisco at the foundation office.

The plans for the initiative continued to develop emergently over the course of a year. The first convening of the group was held in late September/early October, 2013. A turning point came a year later when the Foundation awarded a million dollar four year contract to two of the participating firms for a cross-community evaluation of a set of grants, co-funded with local funders, of initiatives to encourage Jewish teen education and engagement. During the year the Consortium met for two face-to-face gatherings and two web-based conferences. There was also email communication among participants throughout the year.

**Conditions for the use of case study methodology.** Yin (2009) outlines three conditions under which case study is an appropriate methodology, all of which were met by the case study I conducted: (1) the research questions are "how" or "why" questions, that is, they are in search of in-depth descriptions and explanations; (2) the researcher cannot control events, that is, the conditions are not subject to manipulation as in a

laboratory; and (3) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context.

This study was a descriptive and exploratory qualitative case study that documented the elements of a new and emergent approach, its rationale, and its early effects. In this case, I wanted to understand how and why a particular foundation undertook a new approach to evaluation. I studied an evolving process from conception to implementation, one that is a component of the ongoing work of the foundation and the participating outside evaluation firms.

**Selection of the case.** In qualitative research the selection of the sample is guided by the criterion of information richness relative to the research questions (Patton, 2002; Yin, 009). In considering cases for study, the researcher makes a purposeful selection of cases using this criterion. According to Patton (2002), an information-rich case allows the researcher to learn a great deal about the issues of interest, and makes possible a depth of understanding of a phenomenon.

***Attributes of the foundation.*** The information richness of the new evaluation initiative of the Jim Joseph Foundation derived from attributes of the foundation, the focus of the foundation's giving, the foundation's history with evaluation, and the nature of the evaluation community in the Foundation's field of Jewish education. The Jim Joseph Foundation (also known as the Shimon ben Joseph Foundation) was established in 2006. According to the audited financial database of the Foundation Center, updated September 21, 2013, the foundation is the 69<sup>th</sup> largest foundation in the United States

according to asset size (Top 100 Assets, n.d.).<sup>9</sup> From 2009 through 2012 the foundation distributed annually approximately \$40 million in grants (Portfolio Analysis, 2013). Because of the size of its assets and the amount of giving it does, the foundation is considered prominent in both in the foundation community at large and within the Jewish community (Ludwig & Weinberg, 2012). The size of the foundation draws the attention of the philanthropic world to their work.

*Jewish Philanthropy.* Beginning at the end of the nineteenth century and continuing through the present, local Jewish communities across the United States have addressed the needs of social welfare and education through “federations.” Run by professional staff and volunteer boards, local and autonomous federations conduct centralized communal fund-raising campaigns and allocate funds to local, national and international organizations; provide centralized services; and plan for communal needs. Through the twentieth century, federations were the main actors in the world of Jewish philanthropy (Feldstein, 1998). Since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the number of Jewish foundations and their giving have grown. These foundations, including the Jim Joseph Foundation, have had an increasingly important impact on the Jewish community through their funding of central Jewish community organizations, as well as start-ups and innovative projects (Ludwig & Weinberg, 2012). The amount of money the Jim Joseph Foundation contributes to Jewish concerns draw the attention of the Jewish community to their work.

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<sup>9</sup> As of 12/31/11 the Jim Joseph Foundation has assets totaling \$920,762,522.

The foundation's area of focus is Jewish education and between 2006 and June, 2014, they granted over \$300 million to increase the number and quality of Jewish educators, to expand opportunities for Jewish learning, and to build a strong field for Jewish learning (Jim Joseph Foundation, 2014). This is the very field in which I have had a career of more than thirty years. I was able to bring to the case a wealth of experiences and knowledge with which to understand not just matters related to evaluation, but to the content of the work the foundation supports.

***Commitment to evaluation.*** The case is also information-rich because of the foundation's demonstrated commitment to evaluation. The foundation has a section of its website dedicated to evaluations of projects they have funded, and declare there that "[e]valuation has been integral to the Jim Joseph Foundation's work since its inception. As part of the Foundation's initial strategic planning process in 2006, the Board determined that evaluation would be fundamental to the Foundation's philanthropy" (Jim Joseph Foundation, Evaluation and Research, 2013). Private conversations with the executive director and one of the program officers of the foundation corroborated the commitment and the ability of members of the foundation's staff to speak knowledgeably about their approaches to evaluation and their desires to think about evaluation more boldly. The initiative brought together representatives of four research and evaluation consulting firms, all of whom were expert informants for my research—about evaluation in general and about evaluation in the philanthropic sector in particular. Finally, the facilitator of the initiative, Lee Shulman, brought many years of experience and expertise as an educational researcher and evaluator, and an active participant in the work of

philanthropy. Shulman is Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education Emeritus at Stanford University. From 1997 to 2008 he served as president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (The Gordon Commission on the Future of Assessment in Education, n.d.). In the Jewish community he has done work for the Jim Joseph and Mandel foundations.

***Evaluators of Jewish education.*** The nature of evaluation in the field of Jewish education added another layer of information-richness. The field of Jewish education is a small one, and the number of individual evaluators and evaluation firms who conduct evaluation on behalf of funders and organizations in the field is quite limited. Some who conduct evaluation in the field focus their work entirely on Jewish educational programs and initiatives. Among them it is common to find people working in the field because of faith commitments or a sense of responsibility to Jewish culture and the Jewish people. Others have portfolios of projects and clients extending beyond the field of Jewish education. The diversity of the evaluators, the size of the field, and the commitments of the evaluators contributed texture to the case.

**Uniqueness of the case.** One of the rationales for a single case study is that the case is an extreme or unique one (Yin, 2009). A unique case is out of the ordinary, and its atypical nature makes it interesting and filled with potential for learning. Its very uniqueness can be critical to understanding it (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). In addition to being information-rich, this study of the Jim Joseph Foundation's evaluation initiative constituted a unique case—one with unusual features. Fay Twersky, Director of the Effective Philanthropy Group at the Hewlett Foundation and an expert in foundation

evaluation, called the Jim Joseph Foundation's work in evaluation "an outlier" (Personal communication, May 1, 2013). It is rare in the philanthropic sector for evaluation firms to work collaboratively with the foundations with whom they contract. In essence, they agreed to work alongside the organizations with whom they compete for contracts and to share their expertise with one another. As a relatively new foundation (founded in 2006), the Jim Joseph Foundation began its operations with a commitment to evaluation, which by 2006 had become more widely accepted and expected in the philanthropic sector. The small size of the field of Jewish education and the sub-field of evaluation of Jewish education added to the uniqueness of the case. Being accessible for study was another dimension of the case that made it unique. While there are foundations doing innovative and exploratory work with evaluation, it was not easy to get a foundation to agree to open themselves to inquiry by a researcher. It may be that because the JJF desires to be a leader in the field, at least in the Jewish community, they granted me access to their work.

**Unit of analysis.** Case study is considered a methodology, but case study also refers to delineating the subject of a study, the case (Merriam, 2009). A case, or the unit of analysis, is a "specific, unique, bounded system" (Stake, 2000, p.436 quoted by Patton, 2002, p. 446). Cases can be individuals, groups, cities, organizations, products, or policies, among others. The Evaluators' Consortium is a project of the Jim Joseph Foundations intended to examine and improve the practice of evaluation in the foundation.

Because the foundation defined the initiative under scrutiny as a process with a beginning and end, with particular purposes and steps, it constituted a bounded system, a necessary condition for case study research (Merriam, 2009). While the initiative was a bounded phenomenon, its variables were inextricably bound to its context, the Jim Joseph Foundation, another indicator of the appropriateness of a case study (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2008).

**Aim of case study research.** This research explored the uniqueness of the single case—the Jim Joseph Foundation’s Evaluators’ Consortium. As a case study, its purpose was not to make broad generalizations. Rather, it was to describe, understand, and interpret a particular phenomenon with the hope of grasping something about the larger contexts in which the case was situated. The case study of the Jim Joseph Foundation’s evaluation initiative yielded a richly descriptive, holistic account that offers insights and sheds light on meanings for both the stakeholders and others in the field (Merriam, 2009). While I, as a researcher, was not be able to make generalizations from the examination of this single case, readers of the research are able to consider its descriptions, analyses, and interpretations and their implications for their own contexts (Merriam, 2009). This case study research holds potential for transferability to the work of foundations in general, to those that work within the Jewish community, and to other possible settings.

**Entering into an agreement for the study.** Coming to an agreement with the Jim Joseph Foundation to serve as the research subject for this study involved a lengthy process of relationship building and negotiation with the Executive Director of the Jim Joseph Foundation (JJF), Charles Edelsberg, after an unanticipated introduction. At the

North American Jewish Day School Conference in February of 2013, I mentioned my research interest in foundations and evaluation to a colleague who then served as a program officer for the JJF. She told me that her foundation was quite committed to evaluation and thought the executive director might be interested in speaking to me about my work. She offered to put us in touch after the conference. After an email introduction, Edelsberg and I began a series of phone conversations. Edelsberg requested a copy of my literature review during our first conversation. He also described an initiative he was considering where the foundation would bring together representatives of several evaluation consulting groups with which they had worked in the past to explore ways of collaborating and enhancing the overall work the foundation does in evaluation.

When Edelsberg finished reading my literature review, he called me to discuss it and asked if he could send a copy to Lee Shulman, the person with whom he was talking about facilitating the evaluation initiative. I asked if I could send a proposal for studying the initiative for my dissertation research, and he agreed to accept such a proposal. Several email and phone conversations followed with updates about the process that included conversations with JJF staff and board members and the leadership and potential participants in the initiative. In addition to taking the steps necessary to plan the initiative, Edelsberg also discussed the possibility of the dissertation research with some of the stakeholders. He reported on the difficulty of scheduling the first gathering of the preferred evaluators; the first two attempts fell through, but they finally found a date at the end of September, 2013. In July, 2013, Edelsberg requested a “memorandum of understanding” with additional details about the scope, purpose, and focus of the

research. In August, due to fortuitous circumstances, I had a face-to-face meeting with Edelsberg and Sandra Edwards, the associate director of the Foundation. During the meeting it became clear that there were additional steps to be taken to reach an agreement on the research involving communication with the participating evaluators and the board.

The first contact with the Foundation program officer was in early February. The agreement to engage in the research came on September 16, 2013. While the Foundation was quite open to this process, I anticipated two challenges.

Confidentiality was one of the challenges. Because the field of Jewish educational philanthropy is so small, Edelsberg was concerned that even if I assigned pseudonyms to all participants, it would be easy for those familiar with the field to identify the various players. He addressed this issue with the board and with the evaluators and they came to a decision to identify only the Foundation by name. Actual names were used only with the permission of the individual or when they appeared in public documents.

The experimental, emergent nature of the process presented additional challenges in the early stages of the research. The professional leaders of the Foundation, along with their consultant, Lee Shulman, drafted a plan for the first convening of the Consortium. Their intention, though, was to have the evaluators participate in the development of the agenda—both for the first meeting and for the meetings to follow. They were not certain exactly what would happen at the first meeting and they didn't know when the second gathering would take place. They planned to schedule the second meeting during the first, but the scheduling happened after the first one through email correspondence. One of the concerns Edelsberg raised was the possibility that the process would implode. He

wondered what would happen to the research under those circumstances. My response to him was that if the process fell apart, the research would trace that process and try to understand what led to its failure. That had the potential to be a source of learning.

### **Approach to Data Collection**

While case study research does not demand specific approaches to data collection, this research included a number of approaches common in a qualitative study—document review, interviews with various stakeholders, and observations. The documents were drawn from the foundation’s website, as well as from records and reports that foundation personnel provided. I analyzed documents from the outside evaluation firms participating in the initiative. Interviews played a key role in the data collection process. Email correspondence between the executive director and various participants and stakeholders also yielded important information, especially correspondence about plans for the initiative, and the Foundation included me on nearly all the correspondence they sent to the participating evaluators.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the foundation’s executive director, the leader of the evaluation initiative, all of the program officers, one Foundation board member, and all participating evaluators. By interviewing various categories of stakeholders, I gathered different perspectives and understandings of the case, allowing my interpretations to take on nuance (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). Some interviews were conducted face to face and others were done on the telephone. I recorded and transcribed all the interviews, and stored both recordings and transcripts in my

database. Because the research questions required the description and analysis of a newly established initiative as well as the motivations that led to it, interviews with the planners and participants yielded critical perspectives. While interviews can be subject to bias and poor recall, in this case the questions explored events and processes that took place in the recent past or that were ongoing. By interviewing a number of people involved in the initiative in both similar and different roles, I was able to address issues of bias. I also addressed bias by the use of other sources of data, including documents and observations.

Prior to conducting the interviews I developed related but customized interview protocols for each category of stakeholder in the initiative. Because many of the questions were related to the special initiative and experiences working with this particular Foundation, it was not possible to pilot the questions. It was impossible to find people with relevant or parallel knowledge who could participate in mock interviews. Following each interview, though, I made adjustments in the wording and sequence of the questions.

Finally, I observed gatherings of the evaluation initiative, taking extensive field notes to describe the activities I observed, including direct quotations from participants and writing observer's comments throughout the process. These observations allowed for documenting the process, for describing the roles of various participants, and for examining the emerging relationships among them.

To strengthen the construct validity and reliability of my evidence, I followed three principles enumerated by Stake (1995). The first, spelled out above, was to use multiple sources of evidence. By triangulating data sources about the same phenomenon I

was able to develop what Yin (2009) calls “converging lines of inquiry” (p. 115), where corroborating evidence from multiple sources made findings and conclusions more accurate.

The second principle involved organizing all of my raw data into a case study database (Stake, 1995) or case record (Patton, 2002). Theoretically, other researchers could examine my data, and determine for themselves if the evidence supports the analyses and conclusions. The database included my notes from interviews, observations, and document analyses, interview transcripts, and copies of documents from the foundation and the external evaluators. The notes were recorded electronically on my private laptop computer, to which no one else had access, and all files were backed up to the cloud.

Thirdly, I maintained a chain of evidence (Stake, 1995) that would enable the reader of the case to follow the way in which I moved along a path from the case study questions to the case study protocol to the specific sources of evidence, to the database to the conclusions in my dissertation. This work was supported by a log with my reflections, my questions, problems that arose, and a running record of my emergent learning and interpretations (Merriam, 2009).

### **Approach to Data Analysis**

The hallmark of case study, according to Cronbach’s definition, is the constant comparative method. This inductive approach aims to find patterns in the data by comparing each piece of data to another to identify similarities and differences, then

clustering of data based on their similarities along different dimensions, naming the dimensions or themes, and examining the patterns in relationship to one another (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). I began data analysis simultaneous to the beginning of data collection, allowing me both to refine the ongoing data collection and focus the analytic process continually. One strategy I used was the writing of memos throughout the process with notes on emerging patterns, insights, hunches and questions. Throughout the analysis, I developed a coding scheme to classify all the data, keeping track of codes in a code book. I coded the interview transcripts, web documents and field notes from observations. To support the work I used the qualitative data analysis software QSR NVIVO. These steps allowed me to identify patterns and themes related to the questions of interest, and others that emerged during the phase of data gathering and analysis. I checked coding to avoid drift in definitions, thus enhancing reliability.

Ultimately, the process included the interpretation of the data in order to make sense of them, to elucidate meaning (Patton, 2002). After gathering the data I wrote the story of the case. Then I moved into analyzing the data, interpreting them, and using them to answer the research questions. To add rigor and to improve the credibility and to increase confidence in my interpretations, I considered “alternative themes, divergent patterns and rival explanations (Patton, 2002, p. 553).” My goal was to develop extrapolations of the findings, with possible applications to other contexts beyond the case I studied.

## **Researcher Subjectivity**

All researchers, whether conducting qualitative or quantitative studies, are subjective and their subjectivity inheres throughout the entire research process, beginning with the identification of a subject to study (Peshkin, 1988). Peshkin (1988) defines subjectivity as “persuasions that stem from the circumstances of one’s class, statuses, and values interacting with the particulars of one’s object of investigation” (p. 17). Many researchers are unaware of their own subjectivity. Being aware of their subjectivity, though, enables researchers to use their particular perspectives to understand subjects differently from others and to make distinctive contributions to their fields of study.

In a qualitative study the researcher can identify her subjectivities or “subjective I’s” through a process of self-analysis and anticipation prior to field work and through careful self-monitoring during field work, analysis, and interpretation. The process requires reflecting on one’s background, motivations, values, and perspectives relative to the subject of study; attending to positive and negative feelings as one thinks about and engages in the study; keeping track of the circumstances under which they occur; and looking for and identifying patterns. This process is what Peshkin calls “managing one’s subjectivity” (p. 20). By managing or taming subjectivity through awareness, the researcher can “possibly escape the thwarting biases that subjectivity engenders, while attaining the singular perspective its special persuasions promise” (p. 21). I included a place in my field notes for keeping track of times and the circumstances when I experienced “the warm and the cool spots, the emergence of positive and negative feelings” and paid attention to “the experiences I [wanted] more of or [wanted] to avoid,

and when I [felt] moved to act in roles beyond those necessary to fulfill my research needs” (Peshkin, 1988, p.18).

Before I began the data collection I identified a number of “subjective I’s” that were likely to emerge for me in this particular case study, delineated how they brought me to an interest in the case, and considered the ways they might influence my research. I considered these experiences and my documentation of them as data for analysis. My subjective I’s were: Evaluator-I; Jewish Educator-I; Former Grantee-I.

Jewish Educator-I. My initial graduate training and the work I have done for nearly thirty years are in the field of Jewish education. Because it is a relatively small field, I know many of its leading players and institutions intimately. Its challenges and issues have shaped my professional choices and my day-to-day activities. The mission of the Jim Joseph Foundation is to foster compelling, effective Jewish learning experiences for young Jews, with a vision of more young Jews engaging in ongoing Jewish learning and choosing to live vibrant Jewish lives. They invest in what they see as promising Jewish educational initiatives (“Mission, Vision & Values,” n.d.). In fact, I have been employed by organizations the foundation funds and was supervised on one of my recent contracts by the person who has among his responsibilities the managing of a grant from the foundation. Because of my “Jewish Educator-I,” my interest in the work the Jim Joseph Foundation funds is substantial. I have contacts and colleagues among the people and organizations the foundation funds, I read regularly in the professional literature about the projects they support, and I have an interest in the outcomes of the initiatives they undertake. I found my Jewish Educator-I to be salient during fieldwork; it influenced

my understanding of the subtleties of the projects the Foundation has funded and evaluated, and influenced the kinds of questions I asked.

Former Grantee-I. While I have never been involved in a project directly funded by this foundation, my consulting work is funded by Jewish community and private foundations. I have been involved in writing proposals to foundations, conducting evaluation to fulfill requirements of foundations, and I have experienced the frustrations of poor communication and other challenges typical of the relationships between funders and grantees described in Chapter 2. This subjective-I required me to pay close attention to the perspectives of the foundation, and to raise questions in the data collection that reflected concerns of grantees.

Evaluator-I. My professional identity and experience include being an evaluator, and not just a researcher on evaluation. As such, I felt an affinity for the outside evaluators who participated in the initiative. I have even worked with more than one of the participating evaluators on other projects. My experiences probably impacted the way I read and analyzed the evaluation reports they produced, the kinds of questions I asked, and the reactions I had to their responses to questions.

Awareness of these subjectivities enabled me to manage them carefully through the processes of data collection, analysis and interpretation. My experiences as a Jewish educator, a grantee and an evaluator combined to serve as a unique lens on this case, and made the case particularly well-suited for me to study.

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

Case studies, as all research methods, come with particular limitations. Case studies depend extensively on the skills and insights of the researcher, and these skills are challenging to define and master (Stake, 2009; Yin, 2009). As a relatively new researcher, I learned as I went along, relying on my instincts and acquired knowledge and skills. My knowledge of the field of Jewish education helped me to see things that an untrained eye might not have, and my committee members provided guidance through their questions and feedback.

Case studies sometimes are threatened by an abundance of data and the need to manage, analyze and interpret all of them. This case study, too, resulted in an extensive collection of data. Prior to the start of data gathering I worried that I might not have enough data. I feared that the process was limited in scope, there were a limited number of people involved, and the timeline was fairly short. The people involved were rich data sources, as were the documents and observations of meetings. There were sufficient data to identify patterns and to develop insights.

Because this case study focused on an experimental, emergent initiative it had the potential to implode at any time. Fortunately that did not occur. Because the Foundation was uncertain and somewhat anxious about the initiative, I tried to make my research as inconspicuous as possible. While attempting to reassure the Foundation leadership that the research could benefit them and serve their interests, I sought to be unobtrusive and not add stress to the process. I learned as the process moved along that it was helpful to provide regular status reports on my research to the Foundation's executive director.

**Limitations related to particular methods of data collection.** Each of the methods of data collection, interviews, document review and observations, poses challenges. What follows is an explanation of the challenges of each method and how I addressed them.

**Interviews.** A key to successful interviews is the establishment of enough trust with respondents to get them to open up and answer honestly (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). A number of the respondents are themselves researchers and evaluators, experienced in conducting interviews and inclined to support the work of research because of their professional values. Keys to building trust were the professional interests and endeavors I shared with the participants, previous relationships with some of them, and shared social and professional networks. I had an opportunity to engage informally with all the participants during the initial convening, before I interviewed them. Edelsberg sought their agreement to have me conduct the research prior to the first meeting, and at that meeting I did a presentation about my work. These encounters were an opportunity to establish myself as a credible researcher and a trustworthy individual.

A possible limitation of interview research is bias on the part of interview subjects (Yin, 2009). I was attuned to the possibility of positive bias toward the Foundation. As in the relationship between funders and grantees, there is a power imbalance between the Foundation and the evaluators, and a measure of dependency of the evaluators on the Foundation since the Foundation grants contracts to their firms. I encouraged openness and honesty through the research process and promised confidentiality about sensitive issues.

**Document review.** Many of the documents I used for this case study were easy to access; they were available on the Foundation's website. Others were more difficult to obtain, and access to them was controlled by the Foundation. They had the authority to decide which documents to share; they shared things generously. Having trusting relationships with the Executive Assistant and program staff members helped me gain access to documents and discrete pieces of information.

**Direct observations.** As part of the case study I observed the in-person and telephone meetings of the preferred evaluators. The first took place September 30-October 1, 2013 in San Francisco at the office of the Foundation and the other dates emerged as the process moved forward. Since my availability was not a consideration for scheduling the meetings I was concerned that I would not be able to coordinate my calendar with that of the Evaluators' Consortium. The uncertainty added a measure of stress to the data collection process. In addition to the uncertainty direct observations were time-consuming and it was difficult as a single observer to capture everything that might have been relevant to the study. I used informal interviews and the meeting notes of participants to augment and validate my own observations.

Triangulating data sources and methods addressed the limitations in each of the individual methods. By collecting evidence from many sources in different ways I corroborated the same phenomenon and created a case study in which all the events and facts of the case were supported by more than one source of evidence (Yin, 2009).

### **Ethics/Protection of Subjects**

Prior to entering into an agreement with me to conduct the research, the Executive Director of the Foundation discussed the research with all the participating evaluators, the facilitator and the board to request their agreement, and presented them with two documents detailing its purposes, questions, and methods, and spelling out the particular requests for their time and participation. Each of them indicated verbal assent to the research and a willingness to participate as requested in a memorandum of understanding.

In accordance with the requirements of the Institutional Review Board of the University of MN, the records of this study were kept private. No published report or article will include information that will make it possible to identify individual participants. Research records were stored securely and only I had access to the records. Audio recordings were transferred to a password protected computer files, accessible only to me and files were erased from the recorder. Because of the nature of the research I applied for and received an exemption from the IRB.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CASE DESCRIPTION**

#### **The Jim Joseph Foundation Approach to Evaluation**

##### **Resources Spent on Evaluation**

Since its inception in 2006, the Jim Joseph Foundation has spent approximately \$9 million on evaluation. This represents 2.8% of the Foundation's total payouts. As a general rule, the Foundation spends on average approximately 5% of a program's grant amount on evaluation, with a range from 1.1%--16%. The Foundation does not currently determine evaluation budgets for grants using a rubric or by considering first the questions and type of data required to answer them. Members of the staff have acknowledged a need for clearer guidelines to determine the scope of an evaluation and its budget. Likewise, the Foundation and its board have thought about the possibilities of longitudinal evaluation and other evaluation work that extend beyond single grants, but they have not established policies or practices for this type of work.

##### **How the Approach to Evaluation Developed**

Both Foundation staff and external evaluators described the Foundation's approach to working with evaluators as "hands on" and intensive. One of the evaluators noted the extent to which JJF staff track and follow the work of the evaluators they hire.

As the Foundation got up and running, the board and Executive Director (at the time the only staff member) participated in an extensive strategic planning process guided by consultants to articulate the Foundation's mission and to establish its strategic priorities. One of the consultants encouraged the directors to include evaluation as a

central part of the Foundation’s structure and a key piece of its strategy. They agreed to do so. The board has had tactical discussions about evaluation, considering questions such as how they hire evaluators and whether or not a particular grant needs to be evaluated, and they have consistently demonstrated a commitment to evaluation since they began awarding grants.

### **Purposes of Evaluation**

**Accountability.** Evaluation serves at least four different purposes at the Jim Joseph Foundation, ranging from accountability to decision-making to learning. One purpose of evaluation for the Foundation is accountability, what Shulman called in his report to the board on evaluation “responsible stewardship of the grants awarded.” To achieve this purpose the Foundation engages in evaluation to determine the extent to which grantees have used Foundation resources to achieve targeted outcomes. Evaluation plays a related function of monitoring, in which Foundation staff members work with grantees to track progress toward project goals, examining organizational, programmatic and financial features of the grantee. These include things like the number of people served or trained and the quality of experiences provided. According to the Foundation’s website, this aspect of evaluation focuses on three questions:

- Are grant funds expended for the purposes of intended use?
- At what rate are funds expended relative to the timeline targeted for their use?
- What variances in anticipated expenditures are occurring, and are they justifiable?

As is true in many foundations, one of the purposes for evaluating grants is to support decisions about grant-making. In a summary report of the Foundation's work from 2008 to 2012, the Foundation stated that "evaluations of [several major, multi-year grants about to expire] will help to guide our decision-making process moving forward." Chip Edelsberg, referring to the summary report, wrote in a blog post in December 2013 that the Foundation uses evaluation findings as one source of learning about grantees and their work and "as a basis to help the Foundation make strategic philanthropic decisions." Among the decisions the Foundation made using input from evaluations were grant renewals to the iCenter, Jewish Student Connection, and the Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education (blog post, Edelsberg, 12/9/13).

**Learning.** Another purpose evaluation serves for the Foundation is learning, although it may be more accurate to say learnings. The learning focuses on different aspects of the work of grantees and is also intended for different audiences.

*For program improvement.* One type of learning focuses on the funded program and how to improve it. In describing his work evaluating one of the Foundation's grants, Evaluator 6 said:

The goal was that the researcher here was really kind of part of the team from the perspective of knowledge building. In other words part of the idea here was to help better understand the work that was being done in order to continue to improve it. [The Foundation was] . . . not saying we're going to cut the funding based on the results, but rather saying we want to be able to help you channel

your work in a way that makes our funding most productive. (Interview, 12/10/13)

*For strengthening the organization.* Another type of learning is about the grantee organization itself—its capacity and its fit within the overall work of the Jim Joseph Foundation. Shulman (2012), in reporting about the “state of evaluation” at the Jim Joseph Foundation, wrote, “Quality evaluation helps the Foundation understand the extent to which its grant making enables grantees to realize their missions and goals in consonance with those of the Foundation” (p.4). This kind of learning, Shulman says, allows the JJF to work with other foundations “for capacity building, scaling and related organizational sustainability” (p.4).

*For field building.* Learning from evaluation serves the broader goal of field building in Jewish education, one of the Foundation’s strategic priorities. In a blog in early 2014, Edelsberg wrote,

In the first few months of 2014, Jim Joseph Foundation grantees will share numerous evaluations and model documentations with the field. There are also several reports of field-wide import in which the Foundation has been involved in preparing that we anticipate will be released. We are excited to help disseminate these learnings, advance the conversation on effective Jewish education, and work with partners to create new Jewish learning opportunities (Edelsberg, 2014).

**Capacity building.** Another purpose the Foundation accomplishes through evaluation experiences, although it is often emergent and not planned, is what Patton

calls “process use” or capacity building among the grantees. In talking about capacity building, Edelsberg said, “We’ve been pretty scattershot with that I would say. In a couple of cases we’ve done it explicitly, but very few” (Interview, 1/2/14). In some cases evaluation has revealed a need for technical assistance, and the Foundation has supported it financially.

Describing the strengths of the Foundation’s approach to evaluation, Edelsberg said that the Foundation routinely recognizes evaluation as a valuable part of its major grants. Evaluation using independent external evaluators has enabled the Foundation to demonstrate the value of some of its major investments. While the Foundation does use evaluation for accountability purposes, the evaluators it hires do not perceive this role as onerous to grantees and contrasts its culture with that of other foundations.

### **Evaluation Processes**

**Client.** The professional and lay leadership of the Jim Joseph Foundation are the evaluation client for evaluations of the Foundation’s funded initiatives. This differs from the practices of many foundations where grantees are the evaluation client, i.e., where grantees hire an evaluator either using a designated percentage of the funds granted or providing their own resources to pay the costs of evaluation.

**Role of the board.** Foundation staff indicated that board members have backed the use of independent third-party evaluations since the Foundation’s inception. As of 2013, it has been the practice of the Foundation professionals to clarify for and with the Board the criteria for determining which board-approved grants are evaluated and the key questions for evaluations the Foundation commissions. Board members receive

evaluation reports and hear from evaluators at their meetings. They use evaluation information in their deliberations about grants to extend, renew, or terminate. Board members have raised critical questions about evaluation at the Foundation and how it is serving them, pushing the organization to explore the benefits of in-house evaluation, the possibilities of creating common measures across initiatives, and the prospects for drawing lessons that reach beyond individual programs by examining the evaluations across an entire portfolio of grants.

**Developing evaluation questions.** The Jim Joseph Foundation program staff members work collaboratively with grantees to articulate the evaluation questions (and their board considers and approves them), to develop the RFP (JJF staff take the lead), and to select the evaluator. The program officers direct the RFPs to evaluators they think are appropriate for the project and its demands, generally two or three firms. The program officer and representatives of the grantee work together to select the evaluator, but often the grantee defers to the program officer. Grantees, in most cases, are happy to follow the lead of the Foundation on which firm to hire based on their proposals. Foundation program officers believed this is a reflection of the grantees' lack of experience with evaluation, their perception of the Foundation's staff's deeper knowledge about evaluation, and an acknowledgment of the Foundation's greater experience in this domain. One program officer also attributed this deference to the power differential between the grantee and the funder.

**Role of Foundation staff.** Evaluators described the involvement of the staff in the evaluation process as highly engaged, with particularly high levels of engagement

during certain phases of the evaluation process. As the Foundation and its program staff have gained experience over time, they have become more intentional about helping grantees understand the process of evaluation and informing them about what will be involved in working with the external evaluator. While program officers reported on having grown more effective in this work with grantees, others saw it as an area in need of improvement. Program staff members also work collaboratively with the evaluator and grantee to develop formal evaluation questions and to polish the evaluation plan soon after the evaluator is selected.<sup>10</sup>

Foundation staff members provide feedback on data collection instruments. Occasionally, external evaluators turn to Foundation staff to assist with compliance from grantees in providing data in a timely manner.

**Role of the external evaluator.** All of the evaluators who have conducted evaluations of funded projects on behalf of the Foundation described a relationship in which they collaborated with grantees throughout the evaluation process. The evaluators work to develop trust with the grantees, provide technical assistance and guidance on program matters, and seek to help grantees learn from the process and the findings of their evaluations. Evaluator 3 described her efforts to support grantees and to communicate that support:

I try and communicate with the grantees that we're really there for them, and we want to help them learn, and we want to support them in the process, and the

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<sup>10</sup> Grantees submit responses to a set of general questions in their proposals to the Foundation that serve as a jumping off point for the development of the logic model and evaluation plan: What does success look like? How will you measure success? How will you use resources to accomplish your goals?

evaluation is our way of helping to give them information, to know what they're doing well, to have documentation of their outcomes, and also to learn from things that aren't going as well (Interview, 11/8/13).

Evaluators create tools for data gathering and sometimes supply tools to the grantees to enable them to collect data. In a case where the grantee struggled to provide data required for the evaluation, the evaluator provided templates for them to use; grantees reported finding it useful and recognized it would support their work beyond the life of the grant or the reporting needs of the evaluator and Foundation.

Evaluators also reported that grantees learn from the process of engaging with the evaluators in the process of evaluation. The very questions evaluators ask them and the data the evaluators request spur insights on the part of grantees. As Evaluator 4 explained,

. . . [T]hey said that just the questions that we ask them, whether we interview them or ask them to send us some data, it's just the questions themselves that trigger a lot of thinking on their part (Interview, 1/6/14).

The work evaluators do with grantees sometimes uncovers the need for technical assistance. Because many of the initiatives the Foundation funds are pilot projects, it is not surprising that needs for additional support, resources, and guidance emerge as the projects unfold. In certain cases that assistance is delivered, somewhat informally, by the evaluator. In other cases the Foundation pays for outside consulting services to address needs of the grantee. In a blog post on the Foundation's website, Edelsberg (2013) cited

an example from the Foundation's work with Yeshiva University, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Hebrew Union College when, at the recommendation of the evaluators, Noel Levitz (a college enrollment firm) helped the institutions extend their work on the recruitment of students.

**Role of grantees.** Early in the grant process, grantees are involved in the work of evaluation. They partner with Foundation program staff to create the evaluation RFP and to select the evaluator. In many cases, grantees defer to the Foundation to take the lead because of its staff's experience and expertise, and perhaps in deference to their power in the relationship. A critical step in involving grantees in the evaluation process, as mentioned above, is the process of developing the program's logic model. This process is facilitated by the external evaluator, and Foundation program staff members play an active role in it (see p. 82). The grantee also works with both the external evaluator and Foundation staff to refine the evaluation questions and the evaluation plan. One purpose of the process is to insure a common understanding among the grantee, the Foundation, and the evaluator of the proposed outcomes and strategies of the initiative.

Grantees work with the external evaluator on the collection of data. In some cases they provide data that exist in their system; in other cases evaluators provide data gathering tools for them to use. While the Foundation communicates with grantees about evaluation, grantees do not always anticipate how time-consuming evaluation can be for them and wonder if the effort is worth the investment. It takes time, according to Evaluator 3, for the grantees to come to recognize the value evaluation holds for them. She said, "They have to experience it and see the value" (Interview, 11/8/13).

**Communication.** Regular communication features prominently in the relationship between the staff of the Jim Joseph Foundation and the evaluators the Foundation engages. The Foundation prizes those evaluation firms that communicate proactively and regularly with them. Evaluators, too, appreciate access to program officers and the ability to communicate about an evaluation as it progresses. The Foundation does not, however, maintain a written protocol for communication during the evaluation process, although in some cases communication occurs in structured ways and on pre-arranged schedules.

Sometimes the evaluator initiates a communication structure with the Foundation; in some cases the Foundation takes the lead. There are differences that appear to be related to size and scope of the evaluation, the grantees, the evaluation firm, and the program officer involved. One evaluator found it valuable to have touch points with the grantee, Foundation, and advisory committee throughout the period of the evaluation. The evaluation firm scheduled quarterly phone conversations for the Foundation and the evaluator to inform one another about progress and next steps. In addition the evaluator sent a brief summary of the firm's work to the Foundation every other month. There is also spontaneous communication.

Communication serves many purposes—updating each other, providing insights about the grantee, understanding the initiative in terms of the Foundation's larger goals, providing advice. Evaluator 3 described the communication between the evaluator and the Foundation staff as having important effects on grantees, as well, enabling productive

communication with them and advancing both their relationships and the quality of the evaluation.

. . . the grantees know that [the program officer] and I talk to each other, and we update each other and so first, the conversations with them are more meaningful and less frustrating for everybody because if you don't know anything, then how can you have a meaningful conversation? And secondly there's always a sense of trust and forward moving (Interview 11/8/13).

**Logic models.** All the evaluations commissioned by the Foundation begin with the development of a logic model and theory of change for the program. External evaluators facilitate a process that includes Foundation staff members and grantees. Typically the process begins with a set of interviews by the evaluator with program stakeholders, and on the basis of the information gathered develops a first draft of the program's logic model. Then, as part of the initial in-person meeting led by the evaluator, representatives of the grantee organization, and program officer from JJF, approximately 90 minutes of a three hour meeting are devoted to an examination of the draft.<sup>11</sup> Through conversation, through questioning, through sharing ideas, the process is intended to insure alignment of all the parties on the desired outcomes of the funded work. Staff Member 5 explained the value of the working through the logic modeling process both to the Foundation and to the grantee this way:

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<sup>11</sup> There are cases in which some people participate by telephone conference.

When that's led by somebody who's done it a lot of times before and usually generated by them, it produces really rich material and it serves to get the funders on the same page with the grantees around what it is we're all trying to accomplish together—us through our financial investment and them through their implementation (Interview, 11/22/13).

The agenda for this meeting also includes setting expectations for the evaluation and work on the evaluation plan. Following this meeting, the evaluator uses input she has gathered to revise the logic model, and schedules an hour-long phone conference with representatives of the grantee and the program officer to review the revised version. Both Foundation staff members and most evaluators consider the process of developing the logic model a critical part of the Foundation's work. It creates common understandings among the Foundation staff, the grantees, and the evaluator, and contributes to the development of trusting relationships and communication. It also builds the capacity of the grantees, many of whom have not used this tool before working with the Foundation.

Logic models are not without their critics among the preferred evaluators. One evaluator bristled against the Foundation's requirement to develop logic models with the grantee on a project, explaining his concern that this approach was artificial, attempting to “portray a reality that was much too neat” (Evaluator 7, Interview, 11/26/13).

Edelsberg, too, was keenly aware of the limitations of the use of logic models, pointing out that he had heard persuasive arguments that the architecture of logic models can “lock. . . you into a certain kind of understanding, maybe even performance,” perhaps even running the risk of inhibiting grantees from making “mid-course corrections that are

going to improve the performance of the grantee and the net outcome” (Interview, 1/2/14).

**Sharing evaluation findings with grantee.** As the evaluation client, the Foundation receives and reviews the evaluation report, then provides feedback to the evaluator, prior to its being shared with the grantee. According to the evaluators, both the nature and amount of input from the Foundation staff varies by staff member and the scope of the grant. One program officer reported not providing extensive feedback on the report until after the grantee saw it, and in many cases the feedback comes more from the grantee than from the Foundation staff who point out possible misunderstandings or alternative ways to describe elements of the initiative. One of the evaluators explained that program officers were helpful in framing the meaning of the findings.

Evaluators do routinely communicate with grantees about what they are learning throughout the course of the evaluation. One evaluator reported on grantees requesting information for the purpose of learning and improving their practice.

It’s not like they need to wait for the report and just read the report. No, like, it’s a process, and in the process they can ask, “Okay, what data do you have on this? What data do you have on that?” Because they want to make decisions. . .

(Evaluator 4, Interview, 1/6/14).

Evaluators strive to make the information they report comprehensible and useful to the grantees. Recognizing the need grantees have to communicate with their stakeholders, one evaluator reported on his ongoing efforts to present evaluation findings in a way that grantees can readily communicate.

Evaluators pointed to a few cases in which grantees challenged the findings of the evaluations and the relationship between the grantee and evaluator became somewhat adversarial. In cases such as these, the Foundation staff member mediated between the evaluator and the grantee, supporting the evaluator in communicating with the grantee and dealing with the response of the grantee to the evaluator's analysis.

**Relationships between Foundation staff and external evaluators.** Several of the evaluators in the Consortium described the working relationship they have with the Foundation as a partnership. Among other benefits one evaluator characterized the partnership as deep, productive, and constructive, facilitating high quality data collection. Some evaluation firms are surprised by the level of engagement of the Foundation in the evaluation process. The Foundation has not necessarily communicated this to evaluators new to working with them, and one of the elements of a perceived good fit of an evaluator is their understanding and support of the Foundation's practice of high engagement and its expectation of frequent communication.

### **Evaluation Use**

Both the Foundation and their grantees use evaluation instrumentally—the insights and recommendations included in final reports. In addition, both groups engage in process use—changes that occur among individuals or organizations as a result of learning from their participation in the evaluation (Patton, 1997).

At the Foundation level, results of evaluations contribute to decisions about both termination and renewal of specific grants, as well as awarding of grants to organizations that have previously received funding for related initiatives. Evaluation results, when

reported to the board, serve as a guide to understanding the extent to and ways in which their investments accomplished what they expected them to. Program staff members report on their use of evaluation findings to understand the kind of things that work in the field, both in terms of program practice and in terms of measurement. They use these insights in their ongoing work as program officers—in exploring ideas with prospective grantees, in vetting new proposals, in working with other funders, and in exploring the Foundation’s strategy with colleagues at JJF. The Foundation also uses its evaluation work in their field-building efforts. Through conversations with other funders, publications in the Jewish press, presentations at conferences, and postings on the JJF website, the Foundation shares what it learns from the evaluations of its grantees.

Given that most JJF grants are multi-year grants, ongoing formative evaluation has enabled grantees, in cooperation with Foundation staff members, to revisit their logic models, to adjust their outcomes and activities, and to use these to adapt the work supported by the grant. Evaluation in the early years of a grant has also uncovered the need for technical assistance and has supported decisions by the Foundation to provide the funds for it.

Grantees use evaluation findings to improve their practice beyond the length of the grant, sometimes refining their model. One set of grantees revamped its approach to student recruitment following work the evaluator recommended and the Foundation supported. Positive findings make their way into grantees’ publicity and grant proposals to other funders. Foundation staff members are clear, though, that they see grantees as experts who make their own decisions about how to use the information they get from

evaluators. One said, “. . . [T]he Foundation is not going to be a dictator in what the grantees do. That’s not our role. We’re going to bring as much information as we can, and they’re going to choose whether they utilize it or not” (Staff Member 1, Interview, 11/13/13). Another referred to the nature of the relationship between the Foundation and its grantees and the role of trust: “. . . [W]e’re trusting them . . . to draw on the information resources and move forward in the best way possible” (Staff Member 3, 11/13/13). Foundation staff also reported on grantees’ learning about metrics of success and how to incorporate the measurement of progress into their own programming as a result of having worked with an external evaluator; these are examples of evaluation capacity building.

**Dissemination of findings: Posting evaluation reports.** The Jim Joseph Foundation posts final evaluation reports for nearly all its funded initiatives on the Foundation’s website. At the current time there are links to approximately 30 reports. The value of transparency and the commitment to field building led to the decision to post the reports. Edelsberg, in consultation with the professional team, determines which reports go on the website. Prior to posting a report, the Foundation gets permission from the grantee. Under certain circumstances the Foundation decides not to post evaluation reports—e.g., where an evaluation does not add new learning to the field, if it is impossible to de-identify people in a report, or if the grantee objects to a posting. The first situation has occurred with initiatives in later stages or iterations where an earlier evaluation produced the learning and the later evaluation added nothing new. It is not

clear if, in these cases, the reports reflected negatively on the program and if that was a consideration for not posting the report.

### **Changes over Time**

Through reflection on their experiences with evaluators and evaluation over the years the staff and board of the Foundation refined their ideas about evaluation personnel. Foundation staff acknowledged that they made some mistakes with evaluators, either hiring the wrong firm or working with the wrong people in those firms. Staff members identified different types of problems among evaluators: lack of emotional intelligence for the work with grantees, inability to “speak the grantees’ language,” deficient skills for facilitating meetings, and ineffective delivery of evaluation results. Program officers reported on the challenge of receiving sloppy reports that failed to achieve a useful balance of details and big ideas.

**Staff evaluator.** For a little less than a year, from the late June, 2009, through late February, 2010, the Foundation brought on a person with training in evaluation to serve in the role of evaluation manager. She worked with program officers to coordinate evaluations by participating in conversations about evaluation with external evaluators and Foundation staff members. The Foundation hoped she would provide continuity across the evaluation activities they sponsored. Edelsberg believed the Foundation made a mistake in creating the position. It was not realistic to expect a single individual, one whose position in the organization was not at the level of senior management, to bring adequate expertise and sophistication to do the work effectively. To have found a person

capable of meeting those demands would have required a more senior person. The Foundation leadership was not prepared to bring in that type of person given the size of their staff and the expectation that a person at that level would want to build an in-house evaluation infrastructure or department, another possibility the Foundation did not want to consider.

Shulman, too, advised against having an in-house evaluator. He saw value in the perspective that comes of being separate from the grantee or funder. Both have the tendency to look for success, even unconsciously. He believed in the need to distribute responsibility for evaluation more broadly among the staff, something that would be less likely to happen in the presence of an evaluation staff member. In addition, the use of multiple of evaluators would allow the Foundation to draw from the expertise of many individual evaluators and evaluation firms—their skills, experiences, knowledge across numerous bodies of research literature and relevant theory. As Shulman said,

. . . [O]ne of the great virtues of a really good evaluator is they're evaluating a lot of different programs at the same time. They're likely to be reading a different literature. They are part of a broader family of evaluators and so they bring to bear sources of knowledge. All evaluation, like all research, is comparative, whether you've got a control group or not. That's how you make sense of the world . . . analogically, and therefore . . . [another] advantage of the external evaluator is they bring to bear a network of other connections, relationships, and sources of understanding in making sense of what's happening in this project (Interview, 12/31/13).

**Working with scholars.** Two or three times early in the Foundation's history, they engaged University faculty members to conduct evaluations. The Foundation encountered difficulties in working with these academics. The Foundation discovered that they were not interested in or skilled at working with grantees. Furthermore, they wanted to pursue their own research interests and these interests did not align with the evaluation needs of the Foundation and the grantees. The Foundation changed course and began to work exclusively with research/evaluation firms.

### **Evaluators' Consortium**

#### **Background/History**

**Hiring Shulman to write report.** Given the resources the Jim Joseph Foundation was spending on evaluation and the desire to understand what learning evaluation was yielding, in March of 2012 the board of the Foundation commissioned Lee Shulman, President Emeritus of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education Emeritus at Stanford University, to conduct a study of its evaluation work. Prior to this work Shulman was involved with two other initiatives of the Foundation: the establishment of the Jim Joseph Chair in Jewish Education at Stanford and the leadership of CASJE, the Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> CASJE is a network of scholars, practitioners, funders, and evaluators working together to advance the culture and quality of research in Jewish education. Its mission is to expand the evidence base in the field of Jewish education through applied research for the purposes of improving and advancing practice. According to its website, CASJE pursues this mission by coordinating efforts of a diverse range of researchers and leaders in the field of Jewish education to support coherent programs of applied research on

Shulman agreed to conduct a review of the Foundation's approach to evaluation and the quality of the work as long as the focus of the work was not technical or methodological. Rather, he thought he was better suited to do a broad exploration of the evaluations conducted on behalf of the Foundation, the current state of affairs in doing evaluation, and future possibilities for the Foundation's evaluation work.

In light of the Foundation's stated purposes for and uses of evaluation,<sup>13</sup> Shulman set out to answer several questions in the report:

1. Which JJF grants require external evaluation? On what basis should that decision be made?
2. If external evaluations are deemed necessary, which kinds of evaluations should there be? How should evaluators be selected?
3. Should there be meta-evaluations whose purpose is to arrive at usable knowledge about Jewish education that comes from looking across and integrating the review of multiple programs?

**Shulman's continuum of evaluation.** The report was submitted in October, 2012 and presented to the board at its December meeting that year. In response to the

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high priority problems in the field. The organization advocates for funds to support such research; coordinates RFP processes that contain criteria that meet its research and capacity building expectations; coordinates and selects research teams; develops and supports training programs that enhance the skill levels of Jewish education researchers and evaluators; and provides opportunities for graduate students to gain more training in research methodologies. CASJE is funded by the Jim Joseph, AVI CHAI, and Mandell L. and Madeleine H. Berman Foundations.

<sup>13</sup> These purposes are discussed above on pp. 83-86. The purposes, briefly stated are (1) to exercise grant stewardship and monitor the extent to which grants achieved proposed outcomes; (2) to determine the extent to which grants supports grantees in accomplishing their mission and goals; (3) to document successes and challenges in order to bring other funders to the table for capacity building, scaling, and organizational sustainability; and (4) to communicate lessons learned to the field of Jewish education.

first two questions, Shulman developed a continuum of evaluation in which he distinguished four types of evaluations: Compliance or Process Evaluation (Type 1), Outcomes or Testing Evaluation (Type 2), Proof of Concept or Comprehensive Evaluation (Type 3), and Integrative or Cluster Evaluation (Type 4). Spelling out the differences among the types, Shulman articulated the questions each type should address, the focus of the evaluation and its methods, and the conditions calling for each one.

Table 2 summarizes each of the evaluation types. Type 1 is relatively simple, focuses on accountability for use of grant funding from the Foundation, and provides descriptions of the program and its processes. This is framed as evaluation that can be carried out by Foundation and grantee staff, without needing an external evaluator. Type 2 evaluation applies to innovative and demonstration programs with the potential for scaling, addresses outcomes, and involves an external evaluator. Type 3 evaluation includes elements of a Type 2 evaluation and adds the exploration of a larger context beyond the program itself for which it yields lessons and usable knowledge. It, too, requires an external evaluator. Type 4 evaluation integrates learning across previously conducted Type 2 and 3 evaluations and also requires an external evaluator.

Table 2. Shulman Types of Evaluation for the Jim Joseph Foundation

Type	Question Addressed	Nature of Evaluation Focus and Methods	Conditions Calling for This Type of Evaluation
Type 1: Compliance or Process Evaluation	Did the grantee do what they committed to do with grant funds?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring for compliance and fidelity</li> <li>• Consideration of fiscal and program commitments</li> <li>• Descriptions of intervention</li> <li>• Informed by focus groups, interviews with key stakeholders and evaluator observations</li> <li>• Capturing of program processes</li> <li>• External evaluator not required. Can be completed by JJF and grantee staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Size of grant is small</li> <li>• The history of the organization or initiative is such that little new information is likely to be gained through evaluation</li> <li>• The grantee has a well-developed in-house evaluation capacity that can be trusted to answer even some questions of the Type 2 and Type 3 variety as needed</li> <li>• The project is similar to another project that is already undertaking a Type 2 or Type 3 evaluation so little new “useable knowledge” will be developed by a separate evaluation</li> </ul>
Type 2: Outcomes or Testing Evaluation	What evidence is there that the program had the specific results it sought?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examination of programmatic outcomes, specifically the extent to which it achieved targeted results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program is innovative, potential to learn from documenting the effort itself as well as the consequences</li> <li>• Program is a demonstration project to test the</li> </ul>

Type	Question Addressed	Nature of Evaluation Focus and Methods	Conditions Calling for This Type of Evaluation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examination of the efficacy of the grantee’s organizational strategy for achieving those outcomes</li> <li>• Quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods</li> <li>• Conducted by external evaluator</li> </ul>	<p>feasibility of a concept or “big idea.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project is a starting point for later “scaling up” or is itself an attempt to move from small to larger scale</li> <li>• The evaluation will either develop or employ instruments—surveys, interview schedules, observation scales, tests of student learning, attitudes or activities and the like-- where the calibration and validation of those instruments is valuable for current and future work</li> <li>• The project involves a population of clients or service providers about whom more needs to be known since future projects will also work with this population Also, collecting more and better data on this population using known methods/instruments can provide baselines for future work.</li> </ul>
Type 3: Proof of Concept/	To what extent did the program have more general, longer lasting and larger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examination programmatic outcomes and the efficacy of the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest in the utility of a broad generalizable idea or proof of concept, not just a single program</li> </ul>

Type	Question Addressed	Nature of Evaluation Focus and Methods	Conditions Calling for This Type of Evaluation
Comprehensive Evaluation	scale consequences for and impacts upon the engagement and lives of participants?	<p>grantee’s organizational strategy for achieving those outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempts to describe conditions or clients where the program was most successful and those where it was weaker</li> <li>• Difficult to lay down hard and fast rules its distinctive features</li> <li>• Conducted by external evaluator(s)</li> <li>• Beyond data collection, involves interim and follow-up consultations, periodic seminars and collaborative “think tanks” in order to generate usable lessons for the field</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project shows promise of yielding new useable knowledge for the Foundation, for the category of service-provider that the grantee represents, for the world of philanthropy in Jewish education and for the world of Jewish education <i>writ large</i>.</li> <li>• Project is very large</li> </ul>
Type 4: Integrative or	What can be learned from comparing findings across	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examination of outcomes achieved in multiple grants that</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions arise about which Foundation staff and advisors believe analysis across previously</li> </ul>

Type	Question Addressed	Nature of Evaluation Focus and Methods	Conditions Calling for This Type of Evaluation
Cluster Evaluation	several programs evaluated according the Types 2 or 3?	<p>share common purposes and goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies which classes of interventions are working, for whom, and why</li> <li>• Contributes knowledge to the field</li> <li>• Suggests other possible future cluster evaluations</li> <li>• Could be conducted by visiting scholars and/or "fellows" from institutions that are supported by JJF funds</li> </ul>	<p>conducted Level 2 and 3 evaluations (of different programs, parallel programs at different sites or in different years) might yield answers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluations have already been conducted</li> <li>• There are related projects funded by sister foundations or funding agencies with evaluations that can be included in the analysis</li> </ul>

As he delved into the work on evaluation, Shulman discovered that he was bringing to bear the values and vision that lay behind CASJE. He wondered not only about how the Foundation could continue to commission high quality evaluations, but how their evaluations could contribute to the building of knowledge for the field of Jewish education, the “kind of durable evidence and usable knowledge that CASJE was designed to nurture” (Interview, December 31, 2013). He also saw a moral dimension to the Foundation’s work in evaluation, saying that not to share the work of evaluations being conducted in the field or having knowledge hidden away is wasteful and even sinful. His moral argument also grew out of a belief in the status of the Jim Joseph Foundation, writing that “this Foundation has emerged as the single most important grant-making institution in the world of Jewish education” (Shulman, 2012, p.2). With power and importance come the responsibilities of leadership. As Shulman wrote in the report,

When you are the most important organization in your field, the responsibility to be particularly mindful regarding the impact and quality of your work and the conditions under which outcomes are accomplished becomes ever more important. Moreover, it becomes even more important for the evaluations you commission of your programs to be treated with *trust* by the leaders of Jewish education, both professional and lay (pp.2-3).

Commenting on the relationship between research and evaluation, Shulman downplayed the differences, especially with regard to their ultimate purposes: Both ought to produce usable knowledge. In an interview Shulman said,

The older I get and the longer I stay in the world of education, the less I see much of a difference between research and evaluation. My, you know. . . I grew up with a distinction between decision-oriented and conclusion-oriented research that Cronbach and Suppes wrote about in the first publication of the National Academy of Education. And the longer I'm around, the more I am persuaded that to be called educational research and not social science research more broadly, the goal of research ought to be to produce usable knowledge. That, if anything, the greatest flaw of most educational research is that it didn't care about producing usable knowledge, just knowledge. And the greatest flaw of program evaluation was that it so narrowly construed its mission as evaluating *this particular* project or initiative, that it lost sight of the fact that the goal is to provide knowledge to guide that and future efforts in the same domain. And so in that sense they really converged . . . (Interview, 12/31/13).

At the same time Shulman differentiated between usable knowledge and generalizability, arguing that generalizability is not what distinguishes research from evaluation. He claimed that most social science research, and even research in the sciences, is not generalizable.

I think the biggest claim that's made . . . is that the purpose of conclusion-oriented research or *real* research is generalizability and that is never a goal for program evaluation. And I join my betters like the late Lee Cronbach and Jerry Kagan and others in saying in my own writings that most social science research is not generalizable. It has almost always failed to be generalized. In fact a lot of biological and medical research turns out not to be generalizable and it's kind of a

fraud. And we have to recognize that almost every experiment and even broad scale survey that's done is really a case study of something that happened in some place that you've studied. And so that's not a distinction between evaluation and research (Interview. 12/31/13).

**Shulman's recommendations.** Regardless of the type of evaluation being done, Shulman advocated deep involvement of Foundation staff members in every evaluation. His report addressed the Foundation's budget for evaluation, and he recommended maintaining the current level of funding for evaluation—an average evaluation budget of 8-10% of the amount of the grant. Another recommendation was the distribution or publication of evaluation findings and called for convening practitioners, lay leaders, and scholars at conferences to explore strategies for increasing the use of evaluation findings. Shulman also promoted the use of evaluation data and lessons as a focus for communication between the staff and board of the Foundation.

**Recommendation for a new model for evaluation: A consortium.** Regarding the human resources required for evaluation, Shulman explicitly recommended against the creation of an evaluation professional or department in the Foundation. Instead, he proposed a different model for conducting evaluation at the Jim Joseph Foundation. At its core was the potential to create a knowledge base for the field of Jewish education, built through the purposeful formation of a cadre of evaluators working as a professional learning community of sorts. He imagined a network of evaluators who talked to one another, reviewed each other's work, conducted projects jointly, “a small . . . group of people who were designated as essentially the extended family of usable knowledge producers for the Foundation ” (Shulman, 2012, p.8). Shulman, with the involvement

and backing of executive leadership of the Foundation, pitched this concept of a consortium of evaluators as a way for the Foundation to fulfill its responsibilities as a leader in Jewish educational philanthropy to produce usable, aggregated knowledge for the field.

**Preferred evaluators.** Shulman added to the recommendations that the Foundation identify a small group of evaluation firms with which to work exclusively, noting that working with the same evaluators consistently would strengthen the work of the professional staff of the Foundation. As “preferred evaluation providers” with whom the Foundation would work consistently, these evaluators would be external insiders who would understand the Foundation’s questions and could make connections between and among evaluations.

To provide a wide range of perspectives and areas of expertise, Shulman suggested that the four or five firms selected be capable of complementary kinds of work. In his report Shulman laid out criteria for selecting evaluation firms and even included suggestions for particular firms that both fit the criteria and complemented one another. In perhaps the most radical of his suggestions, Shulman called for a group that would work collaboratively on elements of the evaluation and knowledge building efforts for the Foundation (e.g., instrument and data sharing, integrating and synthesizing data) while also competing with one another for Foundation evaluation contracts.

**Criteria for “preferred” evaluators.** The criteria for these firms that Shulman spelled out, having developed them with executive staff and a representative of the board, were:

- Distinctive strengths (e.g., deep knowledge of the American Jewish community, survey design, quantitative analysis)
- Experience relevant to the funded work of the Foundation
- Adequate staffing for projects
- Willingness and ability to contract additional expertise when needed
- Geographical proximity to the Foundation and/or funded programs
- Efficient and effective project management skills and track record
- Ability to translate data into usable knowledge supported by deep understanding of the practice of Jewish education
- Ability to work effectively with grantees and Foundation staff
- Ability to communicate clearly to lay people

Shulman acknowledged that it would be ill-advised to use these criteria in too mechanical a way, either when using them to select firms for the consortium or for deciding among bids from firms for a contract. Rather, he intended them as helpful guidelines.

### **Launching the Evaluators' Consortium<sup>14</sup>**

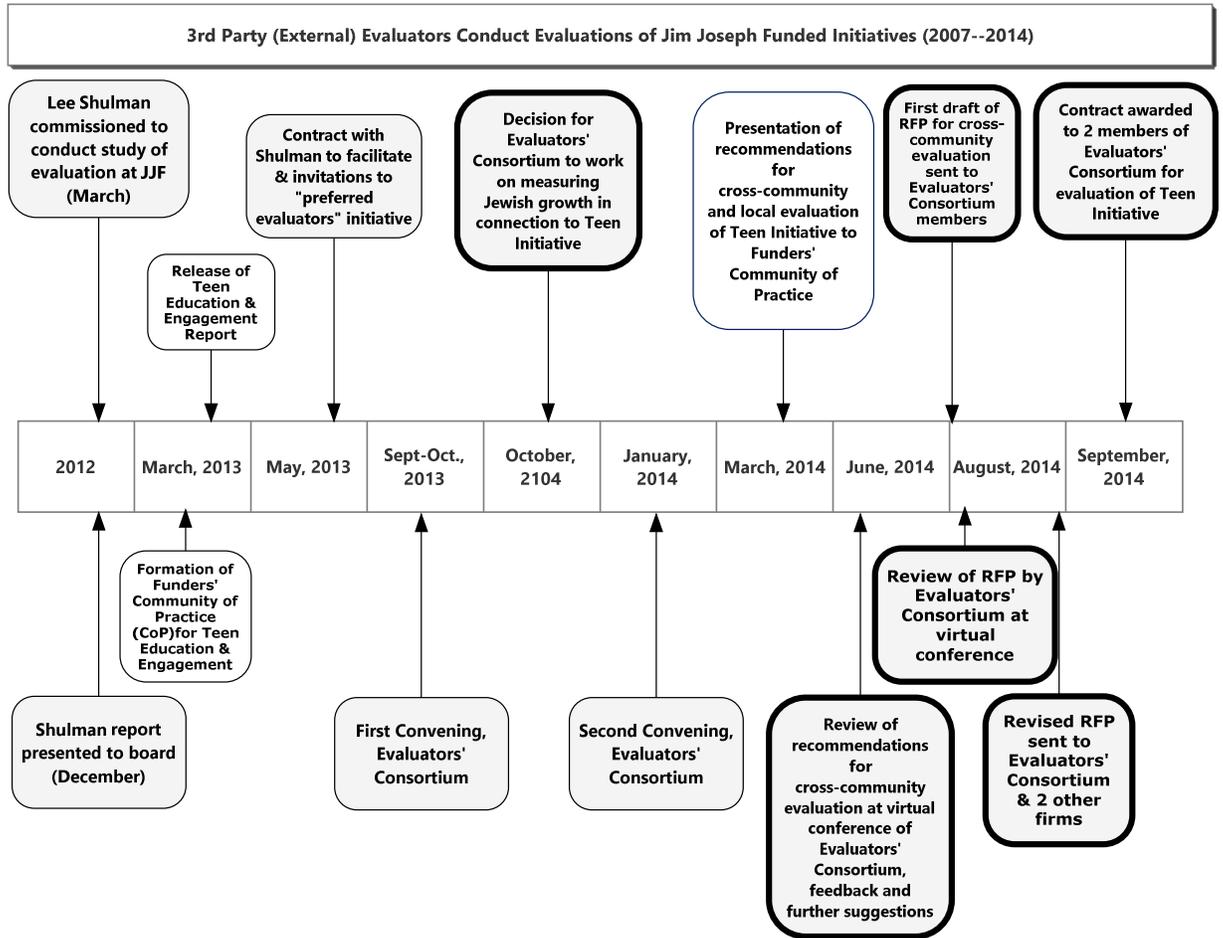
**Board approval.** Shulman's report on evaluation was presented to the Foundation's board at its meeting in December of 2012. Following the Board's discussion of the report, the Board charged staff to move forward with implementation of the recommendation to establish a consortium of "preferred evaluators." In consultation with Shulman and using the criteria he formulated for selecting members of the group, the staff identified four firms to invite.

**Facilitation.** Prior to convening the group, Edelsberg sought board approval to contract with Lee Shulman to serve as facilitator of the gatherings with the evaluators and Foundation staff. His role would be to help craft the agenda for the convenings and

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<sup>14</sup> A timeline laying key events of the Evaluators' Consortium and the evaluation of the Teen Initiative can be found in Figure 9.

to lead them. In communicating to the Board of Directors about the implementation of the “Preferred Evaluators” Initiative, Edelsberg described it as part of the “next phase in its growth as a major funder of Jewish education” (Memo, April 4, 2013). In particular, Edelsberg identified three areas of impact for the new evaluation initiative: internal learning for the Foundation, contributing to the learning and performance of Foundation grantees, and generating knowledge to help build the field of Jewish education and philanthropy. He also mentioned the potential for the preferred evaluators group, led by Professor Shulman, to address interests of the board’s such as conducting cluster evaluations and deriving lessons learned by examining evaluations already completed for the Foundation’s grants.



*Figure 9.* Timeline of Evaluators' Consortium and Teen Initiative. Shaded boxes depict events of the Evaluators' Consortium. Unshaded boxes depict events from the Teen Initiative. Shaded boxes with dark borders show where the two initiatives came together.

**Scheduling.** After getting the board’s approval to enter into an agreement with Lee Shulman on May 7, 2013 to serve as facilitator, Edelsberg hoped to launch the initiative with a convening in the summer of 2013. It proved to be difficult to coordinate the schedules of the representatives of the four firms. He thought they had two different summer dates, and both fell through (Personal conversation, July, 15, 2013). Edelsberg was committed to having all the evaluators present for the first gathering, especially given the experimental nature of the endeavor. Edelsberg rejected the possibility of using Skype or another form of technology to enable participation, identifying that sort of communication as an additional and unnecessary variable in the experiment. “It won’t be the same meeting if not everyone is there,” Edelsberg said.

**Selected firms.** Based on the Foundation’s experience with evaluation firms in the past, the Foundation’s staff leadership selected four evaluation firms to invite to participate in the new initiative. The Foundation had worked with all four of the firms over time and on either multiple or complex projects. One of the firms included in the group did consulting and project leadership with the Jim Joseph Foundation, but had not conducted any evaluations—in spite of having responded to a number of RFP’s. Two of the firms had worked exclusively within the Jewish community. Two of the firms had worked with Jewish communal projects, but the majority of their work was with the larger community. One firm was an international consulting firm that did social science research and evaluation. Three of the firms had offices in the Bay Area. Edelsberg contacted each of the firms by telephone to ask them to be part of the venture.

**Communication about the Initiative.** In discussing the possibility of my studying the initiative as part of my dissertation research, Edelsberg asked a question

that expressed his uncertainty about the initiative's future. He asked, "What will happen to your dissertation if this falls through?" In presenting the initiative to the selected evaluators, in phone conversations, in written communications, and in presentations at the first convening, Edelsberg called the initiative "an experiment." The letter of invitation opened with these words: "The Jim Joseph Foundation is prepared to embark on an experimental approach to its program of evaluation." The Foundation leadership positioned the preferred evaluators' initiative as a risk, filled with both potential and uncertainty.

Communication about the initiative focused on its two features, with changing emphasis in different settings and audiences. One was the "preferred" aspect of the initiative. The Foundation explained to the evaluators that their selection for this group meant their firm was now in a privileged, though not exclusive or permanent, relationship with the Foundation: "By "preferred," we mean that the Foundation will first consider this small group of evaluators as the likely contractor for major Foundation grant evaluations. In some instances, we could come directly to you without going through an RFP process" (Letter, May, 2013). In the letter of invitation to evaluators the first item on the list of ways the initiative would enhance the Foundation's evaluation was "establish a more efficient process for selecting a qualified evaluator for major Foundation grants."

The other element was the Foundation's desire to improve its practice of evaluation. Bringing together a group of skilled, intelligent, accomplished evaluators had the potential to advance the work of the Foundation and its grantees, and in so doing to contribute to field building in Jewish education and Jewish philanthropy.

## **Perceived Value of the Initiative: Foundation Perspective**

**Value to the Foundation.** The staff of the Foundation saw many benefits to the creation of a “stable” of preferred evaluators. Members of the program staff had experience working with numerous evaluators and evaluation firms since the Foundation’s inception. They recognized that some were much more suitable to the Foundation than others—and not simply because of their professionalism or competence. Much of what constituted a good fit had to do with the evaluators’ approach to conducting their work, with particular attention to how the evaluators interacted with the Foundation and addressed its needs and how they developed relationships with grantees. Because these evaluators had worked with the Foundation over time, they would have a keener understanding of the Foundation’s culture and expectations. They had developed familiarity and trust in both directions. The history and past experience would also add efficiency to the process of working together. When engaging in new projects, there would be far less start up time and energy required of program officers for getting to know the evaluator and establishing an approach to working together. One program officer explained the advantages of working with someone who already understood the Foundation:

[When you work with someone you don’t know] . . . you just end up spending a lot of time explaining to them who we are and how we work and what matters to us. And having worked with [a particular firm] a couple of times now, it’s like really nice that, you know, I don’t have to re-explain to them the stuff, I don’t have explain to them all the stuff I explained last time. . . So there’s definitely a learning curve up which evaluators have to climb, and the ones who’ve worked

with us before are already part way up that learning curve so it's more efficient for us and for them (Interview, Staff Member 5, 11/22/13).

Furthermore, the Foundation could avoid the costly mistake of hiring an evaluator who did not work out. And, having seen their work processes and products before, program officers knew what they will get from these evaluators.

Some staff members hoped that the initiative would contribute to improving the Foundation's approach to evaluation by creating a forum in which the evaluators could give feedback to the Foundation on how it does its work—things like streamlining RFPs and getting better data. They also hoped the initiative would be an opportunity for learning about evaluation for the program staff. Because program officers have responsibility for working as the liaisons between the evaluators and the grantees, they needed to develop their understanding of evaluation, a field in which most have limited formal training.

Another hope of the program staff for the initiative was to use it to think more broadly about the work of the Foundation's grantees. They talked about the prospect of examining data across initiatives in an effort to understand the contribution of the Foundation's funding beyond the accomplishments of any single program. They also mentioned the possibility of considering longitudinal research, very little of which has been done in the field of Jewish education.

The bringing together of multiple evaluation firms and evaluators also held promise for Foundation staff. The idea of a consortium, in which people with varying backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives had the potential for keeping discourse of the Foundation from "getting caught in an echo chamber," as one of the program officers

described things. They also imagined a synergy that could develop through a meeting of minds, leading to creative ideas not likely to emerge from the thinking of a single individual or organization.

**To the evaluators.** From the perspective of the Foundation, participating evaluators stood to benefit from the initiative in a number of ways. One was professional development, calling the initiative an “opportunity for shared learning and improvement in grant evaluation practice” (Letter of Invitation to Preferred Evaluators, May, 2013). Beyond learning, Edelsberg hoped to create a learning community among the evaluators based on the cultivation of trust among them. He acknowledged at the first convening that the development of trust requires time and shared experiences. Another was the potential for business development. By participating in this venture, the evaluators would deepen relationships with the Foundation and affirm their status as “preferred” by the Foundation when evaluation projects arose.<sup>15</sup>

### **Evaluator Perspectives on the Initiative**

**Value to the evaluators.** The invited evaluators identified a range of reasons for deciding to participate in the initiative. Their own articulation of the benefits elaborated on those outlined by the Foundation, and they added others.

Most of the evaluators saw the initiative as an opportunity for intellectual stimulation and professional development. The gatherings would provide a chance to learn and grow. In particular, a number of evaluators mentioned the significance of interacting with other evaluators and Foundation personnel, highly intelligent people who shared their interests and experiences. One said, “To be able to meet and talk in depth with a group of people who really want to go deep on what does it mean to evaluate the

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<sup>15</sup>Evaluators would still need to compete with one another for contracts from the Foundation.

concept of Jewishness, for me it's great. It's a real . . . opportunity" (Interview, Evaluator 6, 12/10/13).

Another evaluator saw the Consortium as a way to fulfill his responsibility to the field, and a way of demonstrating his respect to the Foundation. He said, "These are people who are influential in the field that I do [sic]. I also like them, respect them, so I try to give them as much time as I could. They could be talking about raising roses in northern Scotland and they said they would like me to come so I go, okay, I don't know much about it but I'll sit and I'll talk" (Evaluator 7, Interview, 11/26/13). The evaluators also saw the possibility of sharpening their future collaboration with Foundation staff as a result of developing shared language and concepts in the deliberations, of developing understandings that could be brought to bear on future projects.

The evaluators were drawn in, in addition, by the potential business that their participation could generate. As one evaluator remarked in an interview, "When a major Foundation that is investing serious resources in program evaluation and applied study says, 'We'd like you to be a part of a group that we're calling preferred evaluators, we're not exactly sure what it means,' . . . it's pretty hard to say no" (Interview, Evaluator 2, 11/7/13). In addition to the possibility of getting contracts with the Jim Joseph Foundation itself, being associated with the Foundation was perceived to have a halo effect and to raise the status of the evaluators with other potential clients. Given the reputation and influence of the Jim Joseph Foundation in the field of Jewish education, their endorsement as a "preferred evaluator" conveys a special status to the evaluators and their firms, especially the smaller ones. Some evaluators felt honored to be involved

with a foundation that values field building and is serious about itself and the work it does.

Most saw their participation as helping or supporting the Foundation in its work. In explaining their decisions to participate, evaluators mentioned a sense of responsibility to the Foundation. One said, “One wants to be a good citizen with folks who obviously have been important supporters of our work” (Interview, Evaluator 2, 11/7/13). A request from Edelsberg was of particular importance for several of the evaluators. As one remarked, “I feel loyalty to Chip. And if this is something that’s important and he needs, I’m going to try to help him” (Interview, Evaluator 5, 12/16/13).

**Concerns of the evaluators about participation.** While the evaluators sought to be “good citizens,” several noted a concern about the possible limits of their participation. The Foundation chose not to compensate participants financially for their time. Several evaluators said they were willing and eager to participate, but that at a certain point, the time required might cross the line of what they could manage or give. This was a particular concern before the second convening, when a particular focus and specific goals were still emerging. One evaluator said, “. . . [A]t some point you ask yourself, what might I be doing instead? And look it was worthwhile, but if we were to meet 2 or 3 times and not feel that we’re actually moving forward, those concerns will start to become acute” (Interview, Evaluator 1, 10/29/13).

A related concern, perhaps one that even generated the concern about time commitment, grew out of the emergent nature of the initiative. As one evaluator said a few weeks after the first convening,

I think what that first meeting underlined for me is that the Foundation still needs

to really get clear what it's hoping to achieve. I think they entered into this in the spirit of 'Let's see what happens.' I think they may need to be more prescriptive about or pro-active in setting a direction for what could happen (Interview, Evaluator 1, 10/29/13).

**Concerns about the goals.** Among the participating evaluators a concern arose about the possibility and soundness of one of the emerging goals of the initiative—to create a core set of definitions and measures of Jewish identity. Given the complexity and dynamism of the field, is it really feasible to develop such things? And if it is doable, is it desirable? The evaluator commended the effort and certainly saw its value within the work of the Jim Joseph Foundation. He had some qualms, though, about the creation of a standard set of measures of Jewish identity for the field, of over-centralizing or institutionalizing something that might be better served through fluidity and varied approaches.

### **Name of the Initiative**

Shulman's report had used both the terms "preferred evaluators" and "evaluation consortium." In the early stages of planning for and launching the initiative, Edelsberg referred to the project as "The Preferred Evaluators' Initiative." Throughout the spring, summer and fall of 2013, communication between the Foundation staff and the board, the invitation to the evaluators to join the initiative, correspondence from the Foundation to the evaluators about the convenings, and the agenda for the first convening used this terminology. At the first convening Edelsberg addressed what the Foundation meant by "preferred." In mid-December an email mentioned the upcoming "Preferred Evaluators' Convening." Beginning in late December, though, the language used by Foundation staff

shifted, first using “Evaluator Consortium” and later referring consistently to the initiative as the “Evaluators’ Consortium.” References to “Preferred Evaluators” or the “Preferred Evaluators Initiative” disappeared from the Foundation’s communication. The change was a conscious one. Members of the board had advocated that the Foundation abandon the use of the name “Preferred Evaluators,” noting that such a designation could either directly indicate or suggest exclusive relationships between the Foundations and these firms for their evaluation contracts. The Foundation did not intend such a commitment to the firms and did not want to use a name that might imply that kind of relationship.

### **The First Convening**

*“What we are going to try to do here, in the grandest scheme of things, is to create continuing success for one another.”* Chip Edelsberg at the first gathering of the Evaluators’ Consortium, September 30, 2013.

**Coming together.** From a photo hanging over the long conference table in the Foundation board room, a silver-haired man wearing a baseball cap and sunglasses seemed to peer at evaluators from four firms, the professional leaders and staff of the Foundation, a renowned educator, and this doctoral student to the first gathering of the Preferred Evaluators’ Initiative on September 30, 2013. While Jim Joseph, founder and namesake of the Foundation, died in 2003, his photograph in the board room signaled the purposes and values to which the Foundation is dedicated. Members of the Foundation staff also welcomed participants as they arrived.

The first convening kicked off in the late afternoon with formal introductions. Prior to the official start, many participants greeted each other warmly with hand-shakes and hugs. Some introduced themselves to one another. With the exception of Edelsberg and Edwards, none of the participants knew everyone else prior to this convening. As

people began to sit down, a few hesitated since there were no name cards on the table.

Edwards requested that the evaluators sit at one end and the staff at the other. In addition to the six evaluators present in the room, one joined the group by way of video-conference using the monitor mounted to the wall at one end of the conference table.

The meeting opened with words of welcome and an exercise in which participants shared “a tidbit from their past which others would not know about them.” Some stories stirred laughter, others led to banter among members of the group. This was the first activity designed to support the building of trusting relationships, something Edelsberg identified as central to the initiative and to the work of the Foundation in general. In his opening remarks to the group following the ice-breaker, Edelsberg talked about the challenges involved in this new initiative, with particular emphasis on trust or lack thereof. He referred to his commitment to “relational philanthropy,” in which trust is a “fundamental ingredient.” Relational philanthropy, according to Edelsberg, “invites disclosure and *requires* personal and professional humility.”

**Preferred Evaluators as an experimental initiative.** Edelsberg’s opening remarks also underscored the experimental nature of the initiative and the risk that it might not accomplish its outcome of helping the Foundation conduct better evaluation, defined by Edelsberg as evaluation that is more informative, robust and useful. In the context of the Foundation’s dedication to evaluation for the purposes of learning, measuring goals, staying on mission and achieving impact, though, the Foundation saw this initiative as worth the risk. From Edelsberg’s perspective, the gatherings were an opportunity with the potential to strengthen the work of each individual through the thinking and deliberation of the collective.

**Evaluator presentations and interactions.** Prior to the gathering, Edelsberg, Edwards, and Shulman requested that the evaluators from each firm plan a 45-minute presentation on an exemplary evaluation they had done, to make the full evaluation report available to the group, and to submit in advance an executive summary of the evaluation to be distributed before the meeting. Following Shulman's direction, the Foundation defined exemplary as an evaluation whose design, sampling, and other components met the standards of good evaluation; used instruments and methods for generating data that could be, at least to some extent, combined with data from other studies; and findings useful to the program staff, Foundation staff, and others working in the same field. They encouraged the evaluators to engage colleagues in discussion about key issues in the evaluation during the presentations. Initially the request was to consider surprises and lessons learned from the evaluation that could be useful in the future, as well as elements of the evaluation that might be replicated in other contexts. The Foundation later circulated a list of possible questions to address in the presentations, and evaluators were free to select the ones they wanted to focus on. These presentations spanned the two days of the gathering, one the first day and three the second.

One evaluator wanted to use the allotted time to get input from these new colleagues on emerging plans for the evaluation of the second round of the initiative under consideration. She provided some background information on the program and on the first evaluation. Participants asked questions about things like site visits, inter-rater reliability, self-reporting and meta-analysis—most of which analyzed and critiqued the approaches used in the first round of the evaluation. Nods and laughter acknowledged shared experiences like needing to include survey questions from a third-party in one's

instrument. The evaluators commented about issues that arise in conducting evaluations: identifying the critical elements of an intervention, changes in the treatment while the evaluation is underway, pressure to report results in a particular way and feasibility considerations related to cost. The group did not directly address her initial request—to get input on the second evaluation for the initiative.

Another evaluator approached the task by presenting an overview of a multi-year evaluation, explaining the steps taken to date and the plans for the remaining steps. The evaluator reflected on matters related to survey development, tools the firm created for the grantee, technical assistance that was provided based on needs uncovered during the evaluation, and the firm's experience working with the grantee and with the funder. Following the presentation one of evaluators initiated discussion about the role of the evaluator—including issues of technical assistance, capacity-building, consulting and coaching, and the evaluator's relationship with the Foundation. The conversation also moved to working with and evaluating intermediary organizations that receive funding to support the work of others in the field.

Another evaluator presented his work on a completed evaluation, focusing on communicating about research and evaluation such that the results can be useful to the grantee and to the field. He also took time to explain the initiative and the history of its evaluation. He laid out an analytic framework he developed for working with the data, and focused on his efforts to create tools for effective communication using the logic model and the final report. The group followed up with comments on frameworks and the use of perspectives, theories, and frameworks from outside the world of Jewish education to shed light on the field.

One firm presented an ongoing evaluation, outlining the initiative, the scope of the evaluation, and the conceptual framework developed by the program providers and used for the evaluation. Among the challenges they shared were differences between pre and post survey response rates, the measurement of change over a short period of time, and the politics among partners in the program with different interests and concerns. A discussion ensued about measurement issues like effect size and meta-analyses, response rates and the tracking individual respondents vs. groups over time. The conversation took a turn into evaluation scopes and determining what's warranted for various programs.

**Dinner.** A dinner was held at the end of the first day; only the evaluators were invited to stay along with the facilitator, the Executive Director, and the associate director. The program officers were not invited to the dinner and neither was I. The idea was to provide an opportunity for the evaluators to get to know one another in a more informal context and to develop relationships among them. Dinner was served in the board room where the day's meeting had taken place.

**Emerging issues.** Over the course of the two days, a number of issues emerged from discussions of the cases and the topics raised by the Foundation staff, in particular the conversation based on the list the staff presented of "productive evaluation practices" (See Table 3). This list, divided into three categories, was compiled by the staff at a meeting held prior to the convening. Edelsberg commented that the list was in development and that the Foundation would add to it on the basis of conversations with this group. He mentioned a desire to frame some of the practices in terms of Jewish values. The discussion of these issues served as an opportunity to reflect on the

convening itself, on the evaluators’ work with the Foundation, and to suggest areas for the group’s work in the future. They included:

- Issues of practice/methods (use of self-reports, timing of data collection, challenge of measuring outcomes over a short time frame, working with small sample sizes, comparing across studies, conducting meta-analyses, availability/creation of validated measures, use of incentives, site visits)
- Issues of role of evaluators (re: consulting and technical assistance), evaluators as educators
- Evaluating programs vs. seeing the bigger picture of institutions
- Role of intermediary organizations
- Evaluation of pilots and the implications for developing instruments, drawing conclusions.
- Site visits
- Use of perspectives, tools, knowledge from outside the field of Jewish education, theories, frameworks, putting the work of the program into a larger context
- Translating, communicating findings, who are the audiences, how can the work be presented in a way that is useful to the stakeholders?
- Matters in the Jewish world and Israel—e.g., Birthright and getting data from them
- Issues for the Foundation to explore vis-a-vis evaluation: budgeting for evaluation driven by goals for learning and the kind of data desired for that learning, rather than simply using a percentage of the size of the grant
- What does it mean for evaluators to partner with the Foundation for the sake of field-building? Foundation needs to communicate its expectations of evaluators, the degree to which they expect to be involved/engaged in the evaluation process. To what extent should this be reflected in the RFP process?

*Table 3.* Productive evaluation practices. Created by JJF staff and presented by Chip Edelsberg during the first convening of the Evaluators’ Consortium.

For Evaluator	For Foundation	For Grantee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top quality project management and communication</li> <li>• Excellent presentation of findings, executive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set clear expectations</li> <li>• Prepare grantee to understand and buy-in to evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devoted staff –fully cooperative and good relationship with evaluators</li> <li>• Fully invested in</li> </ul>

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <p>summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent writing</li> <li>• Timeliness of reports</li> <li>• Expertise in evaluation methodology and knowledge of space</li> <li>• Able to use content knowledge to enrich report</li> <li>• Midyear and final report with new/surprising information and actionable findings</li> <li>• Contextualize findings beyond the grant or Jewish world</li> <li>• Good depth of staff</li> <li>• Willing to get and responsive to feedback</li> <li>• Good/professional relationship with grantee</li> <li>• Understand reporting relationship with Foundation and grantee</li> <li>• Knows and understands evaluation's audience</li> <li>• Sensitive to the limits of the evaluation tools used to judge grantee</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with other funders, who were aligned regarding evaluation questions</li> <li>• Regular and open communication – routine and consistent</li> <li>• No second guessing on monitoring → focusing on outcomes</li> <li>• Provide critical feedback on evaluation in a timely fashion → allowing for course correction</li> <li>• Bring knowledge of grant and grantee to the relationship with the evaluator</li> <li>• Long view, not settling, willingness to pay top dollar (proportional to grant)</li> <li>• Allocate appropriate time and resources for evaluation</li> </ul> | <p>learning from evaluators as well as producing evidence of success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open to learning</li> <li>• Responsive to Foundation and evaluator's feedback</li> <li>• Availability of key people and compile requested information in a timely fashion</li> <li>• Open to conversation, observation, document review</li> <li>• Reflect on practice and make changes based findings</li> </ul> |
|--|--|---|

performance

- Do what they say they will do

**Interpersonal dynamics.** When Edelsberg addressed possible pitfalls in the initiative in his opening remarks, he acknowledged that these had already come up in phone conversations with the evaluators in the process of launching the initiative. Positioning, posturing and unwillingness to share were the possible issues related to interpersonal dynamics. In an interview following the convening, one of the evaluators noticed positioning during the first few minutes of the proceedings, explaining that “everyone in the room wants, quite frankly, they want contracts with the Foundation.” In his opinion this disappeared quickly; his read of the comments by participants was that people “just got down to work” (Interview, Evaluator 5, 12/16/13). Another evaluator reported disappointment that the group did not address the questions she had during her presentation. Instead the comments and questions addressed the things they found interesting and that were of significance to the Foundation. During breaks, participants mingled and chatted with one another—evaluators talked to one another and to Foundation staff members.

**Considering the future work of the Preferred Evaluators’ Consortium.** With approximately an hour remaining on the second day of the convening, Edelsberg raised the question about the group’s agenda for the future. He offered several possibilities that had emerged from work with the board over the last two years. These included cluster evaluations or meta-analyses of previously conducted evaluations, the utility of emerging

databases, and measuring Jewish identity development. He also invited the participants to suggest topics of interest to them, ones that would contribute to improving the evaluation work of the Foundation for its own sake, for its grantees, and for the field at large. He specifically encouraged the program staff to participate in the discussion. In addition, he asked evaluators to consider what focus would make it worth the evaluators' time to remain involved.

Program officers and Foundation leaders, evaluators, and the facilitator threw out suggestions for the future work of the group along with questions and considerations of process issues. The themes that emerged were about doing work that crossed grants, work that transcended any single program, where evaluators could think collectively about how to measure particular outcomes. Others proposed working on longitudinal research, effective ways of presenting data, and developing shared research/evaluation questions. Edelsberg returned to the issue of Jewish identity formation, and a conversation developed about the need to define it, to develop indicators for it, to pull already-developed behavioral measures from work done by these evaluators and others. Shulman suggested a number of possible strategies for working on Jewish identity—evaluators presenting cases and what they learned or found problematic; looking together at some aspect of Jewish identity across evaluations; and collaboratively designing evaluations for upcoming related grants.

One of the program officers informed the group about the work the Foundation was engaged in with local communities across the country on teen engagement and education and suggested that this might be a fruitful area for collaborative planning of evaluation. The meeting ended without making any decisions. Edelsberg thanked

everyone for their commitment and participation and talked about a next meeting of the group in either January or February of 2014.

**Outcomes.** All participants agreed that the first convening did not produce concrete outcomes—no documents were created; no agreements were reached. It was an introductory meeting. From the perspective of the Foundation staff, in particular, the process itself was a product; it was the beginning of the building of relationships and the exploration of the possibilities for doing work together in the future. Listening to the conversations that took place confirmed for the staff that they had chosen participating evaluators well. One staff member said,

It was very much an introductory meeting so I'm not sure what we accomplished other than to start to create this group into a cohort, to build the relationship and together to decide what's possible. And I think the right people are in the room (Interview, Staff Member 2, 11/13/13).

A few of the staff members did express concern, however, that without more concrete outcomes in future meetings it might be hard to sustain participation from the evaluators.

**Evaluator learning from the convening.** The evaluators reported on things they found valuable in the convening. The convening was an opportunity to hear directly about the approaches, methods and experiences of others who do work similar to theirs, something that seems to be a rarity for many practitioners. Most of these practitioners do not exchange ideas with colleagues from other firms on a regular basis.

During one presentation an evaluator talked about a situation in which their firm needed to include questions on a survey required by one of the partner organizations in

the initiative. The evaluator admitted that there were more items that they would have liked, and they would have framed the questions differently. As the evaluator spoke, the other evaluators around the table laughed and nodded their heads in recognition of this kind of experience. In reflecting on the convening one evaluator found that listening to others was a validation of her experience. “. . . [W]e’re all sort of swimming in the same water here and it’s challenging for many of the same reasons. That’s helpful, that’s a good sort of reality check” (Interview, Evaluator 2, 11/7/13). Others mentioned the value of hearing different perspectives and seeing different styles of both conducting and reporting the work. One mentioned the significance of a conversation about the line between consulting or technical assistance and evaluation, and the ways in which evaluators can, and perhaps should, do more than evaluate the organizations and programs they are studying.

About two months after the convening, one program officer offered evidence that the conversations had had an impact on the evaluators. During exchanges with evaluators of Foundation-funded programs, the evaluators used concepts and referred to issues that arose during the convening.

**Staff learning from the convening.** The program staff appreciated the quality of the evaluators’ participating in the initiative along with their diverse talents. They valued the opportunity to observe and get to know evaluators with whom they did not have personal relationships or shared working experience, especially given the likelihood that they would have the need to work together on future endeavors.

**Evaluator concerns.** In interviews with participating evaluators after the first convening they shared a number of concerns about the initiative.

*Ambiguity of outcomes.* Following the convening one concern of several of the evaluators was the vagueness of the outcomes for this and future gatherings. All were willing to see what happened following this convening and moving into the second one. More than one spoke of the need for the Foundation to clarify what it wanted to achieve through the initiative. As one evaluator said, “I think they entered into this in the spirit of ‘let’s see what happens.’ I think they may need to be more prescriptive or pro-active in setting a direction for what could happen” (Interview, Evaluator 1, 10/29/13).

In reflecting on the convening several weeks after it happened, many of the evaluators and program staff perceived a need for the group to produce some sort of concrete product from the work together. One staff member said that even if the goals were not yet clear, he thought that “the evaluators themselves are going to have to see something tangible coming out of this in order to stay connected in this way” (Interview, Staff Member 1, 11/13/13). Program officers shared this concern.

Shulman was far less concerned about the ambiguity. For him, the idea of a consortium of evaluators seemed intuitively like a good, though untested, idea. He was not only comfortable with an emergent process, he embraced it, having operated in similar ways in his research career. Referring to the Evaluators’ Consortium he said,

It is almost a loosely formulated hypothesis and I have to say, like much of the research I’ve done over the many years of my career, it only became clear what we were doing as we got into it. I mean it just seemed intuitively like a good place to start, but if you asked me five years later when the work had crystallized did you anticipate that it would go in this direction, the answer was almost always no.

And I think that . . . [the leadership] understood full well that research informs itself and so do approaches to practice (Interview 12/31/13).

***Staff participation.*** In Edelsberg's opening remarks as well as in the letter of invitation he sent to the evaluators, he mentioned the hope for Foundation staff to learn from the proceedings of the Consortium. During the bulk of the two day convening the program officers spoke quite infrequently relative to the evaluators, facilitator, and Foundation leaders. For the evaluators this was a bit surprising, and even disappointing. They expressed concern about the possibility of true learning occurring without more active engagement. One remarked, "There was too much 'you're the experts we're gonna sit and listen.' And that needs to change" (Interview, Evaluator 6, 12/10/13). Several wondered if these staff members had been asked to hold back and were complying with that request. One said,

They seemed very much more in a listening mode and not feeling like it was their conversation. So it was a little bit odd that there are some of us having a conversation and some who are just sort of observing. I guess in a way I would have liked for them to have been able to participate more, to ask questions of us more. I'm not sure if they felt that was their role or felt comfortable doing that. But I think for real learning . . . I want us to be able to address what questions they have (Interview, Evaluator 3, 12/10/13).

Another thought they had simply not been given guidelines about the nature of their participation and therefore held back. On the morning of the second day, Edelsberg did encourage the team of program officers to contribute, saying that they had a lot to offer.

One program officer explained in an interview that while they had been encouraged by Edelsberg ahead of time to participate actively in the deliberations, something happened once the meetings started. She said, “it was really important to hear what they all had to say . . . it would be great to chime in but that seemed like less of a priority than making sure that they all had a chance to talk” (Interview, Staff Member 4, 11/13/13). She explained further that this was an opportunity to learn about and from evaluators, many of whom the program officers had not had previous contact with before the convening.

Shulman had a different perspective on the participation of the staff in the first convening. He saw the participation of the program officers beginning with the meeting of the evaluators and extending beyond this gathering into their regular staff meetings where they reflected on the convenings, made sense of what they heard, and integrated their learning into the ongoing work of the Foundation. What the evaluators themselves saw was only part of the process for the program officers.

***Timeline and time demands.*** During the convening evaluators raised questions about the proposed timeline for the initiative. How much time, and what length of time might be required to develop the trusting relationships, to develop social and intellectual capital? Another asked about the indicators of completion of the work or its success. Given the experimental and emergent nature of the undertaking, Edelsberg could not give definitive answers to these questions, but said he hoped to have greater clarity by the spring of 2014. Several of the program officers, too, expressed concern about the amount of time that would be required of the evaluators. Recognizing the busy and demanding schedules the evaluators maintain, they wanted to make sure that the initiative felt

worthwhile to the evaluators, as well. Otherwise, they feared, they might not want to continue their participation.

**Moving Forward.** At the end of the first day of the first convening, Edelsberg said that the group would discuss the agenda for the future and the structure of the group’s work together. Things did not develop as anticipated. The group did talk about a number of possible directions and at the end of the convening Edelsberg announced that the Foundation staff, along with Lee Shulman, would take the things they’d heard, think about them, and decide how to proceed.

One idea had particular traction with the staff as they debriefed the convening—addressing ways to measure Jewish identity. According to one staff member this option was compelling because of how central it is to the work the Foundation funds, and something the Foundation hopes to impact through its grant making. It would enable the Foundation to define outcomes more clearly and to measure their success, and would benefit others working in the field of Jewish education. While many organizations and programs talked about the importance of building Jewish identity, there was not much clarity about what Jewish identity is or how to measure it. She said, “If we could come up with a common understanding of Jewish growth and development and identity . . . we’d make a huge contribution to the field” (Interview, Staff Member 2, 11/13/13).<sup>16</sup>

### **Between Convenings**

**Proposal to the group.** A month after the first convening, Edelsberg sent an email (dated October 31, 2013) to the members of the Consortium proposing a convening in January, a topic for consideration, and the possibility of inviting guest scholars to join

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<sup>16</sup> The distinctions among Jewish identity, Jewish development and Jewish growth are not made here. Jewish identity has increasingly becoming a fraught term in the field of Jewish education, with recent challenges to its value to describe or prescribe educational goals or outcomes (136-139).

the conversation. In consultation with the professional staff of the Foundation and Lee Shulman, he proposed

Can we develop a limited set of measurable indicators that can be used as outcome measures of “Jewishness” (also sometimes referred to as Jewish identity, connectedness, commitment) across organizational/institutional initiatives, programs and projects? These should be measures, indicators or self-descriptions that are amenable to change over time, that can vary in response to situational changes, and probably combine accounts of different kinds of engagement, reports of personal attitudes, values and aspirations, structured scales or open-ended assessments.

In keeping with the aim of involving the evaluators in the process of setting the agenda for the group’s work, Edelsberg invited feedback from them about the topic, the way it was framed, its value for the work of the group, the merit of including additional scholars in the discussion in general, and the suggested scholars in particular. The Foundation set up a Google doc to encourage the sharing of responses to these questions with the entire group with a request that everyone respond by November 11. He also invited private conversations with him for anyone with questions.

**Responses of the evaluators.** Representatives of each of the four firms responded to the question in the Google doc. All four considered the topic worthy of their work together with the Foundation, although one raised the concern about how ambitious, long-term, and difficult it was. All agreed that the involvement of experts would be valuable and were comfortable with the possible experts Edelsberg suggested. While all felt that the framing was appropriate, one wanted to narrow the focus, another wanted to

expand it, and another requested that it be open to refinement as the process unfolded.

**Communication.** From the time of this email until the second convening on January 22-23, 2014, Edelsberg and Edwards emailed the evaluators ten times. The communications combined updates on the logistics for the meetings with content on the topic of the convening. A mid-December message included a list of questions to guide the discussion and selected texts from recent discourse on the problematic nature of Jewish identity from the academics planning to hold a conference on the topic in March, 2014. A late December email communicated the names of the experts invited to share memoranda on Jewish identity and to participate in the January gathering. The agenda was sent in early January, listing tools each firm would present from their own experiences of measuring identity.

**The developing agenda.** During the weeks leading up to the meeting, the pacing of the items on the agenda shifted, and Shulman sent out a memo to the evaluators to explain the changes, the thinking behind them, and the goals for the gathering. The first day, as originally planned, would feature presentations by scholars Anne Colby and Ari Kelman on the development of adolescent and young adult identity and Jewishness and a discussion of the memorandum by the scholar Bethamie Horowitz. Foundation program staff would introduce the Jim Joseph Community-based Teen Initiative, including context for the grants, the basis on which the draft measures of success were developed, and the vision of grant implementation.

On the second day, to allow more time to work on a plan for designing evaluations of the Teen Initiative, Shulman proposed reducing each firm's presentation to 30-40 minutes instead of an hour. The afternoon, he wrote, would focus on moving

toward the two goals of the convenings of this group of evaluators: (a) a common understanding of the concepts we intend to document and measure in our evaluations; an agreement on a small subset of variables and instruments that will be built into all JJF evaluations in this area (adapted for variations in age group, setting, and idioms) and (b) an evolving sense of the designed variations among evaluators in their approaches to such measurement and documentation to maximize what could be learned from the portfolio of evaluations in addition to their contributions at the individual level. The latter referred to the presentations the evaluators would do about their own work measuring Jewish growth. While there would certainly be variations among the evaluators due to differences among them and the fact that they had not worked together previously; designing variations could only happen prospectively.

As Shulman framed it, the purpose of the second convening would be to develop a commonly held understanding of the varieties of Jewishness that could then be used to create measures and ways of documenting changes in them for teens participating in programs funded by the Jim Joseph Foundation. Shulman acknowledged the illusive nature of the concept “Jewish identity” and the difficulty of defining it irrefutably or as a single, unitary idea. He aimed instead for something he called a “generic envelope,” a collection of ideas within certain boundaries that allow for the exploration of Jewishness and its measurement. A generic envelope of Jewish identity would provide a convenient way of talking about identity without committing to a single definition. This envelope, explained Shulman, would consist of (1) attitudes and behaviors connected to variations in Jewish identity, (2) a variety of instruments that different evaluators and communities could use as they see fit, and (3) a set of shared ideas and a few measures that all

evaluations could include. The concepts, unique measures, and shared measures had the promise, said Shulman, to support evaluations that “can achieve levels of aggregated understanding that will be a model for philanthropically-supported programs.”

**The agenda in context.** The conversation about Jewish identity came at a crossroads in the discourse among researchers in Jewish education. In December, following the release of the Pew Research Center’s study of American Jews on October 1, 2013 (Lugo & Cooperman, 2013), Jon Levisohn of Brandeis University and Ari Kelman of Stanford University announced a small conference for March, 2014 to address the topic, “Rethinking Jewish Identity and Education.”<sup>17</sup> They acknowledged two phenomena in tension with one another in American Jewish life. On the one hand, the Jewish community has invested billions of dollars and made central to educational policy the issue of Jewish identity and a drive to stop its attenuation or even its disappearance. On the other hand, the community has used the term broadly, but without agreed-upon indicators or definitions. Usage of the term has not reflected the increasingly complex and varied approaches to Jewish living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They called for a rethinking of the assumption that Jewish identity building be a primary goal of Jewish education endeavors (Levisohn, 2013). The conference, bringing together scholars, educators, and policy makers was to focus on the following questions:

- What does it mean to learn to inhabit or embody an identity or identities? What do we know about the ways that contemporary Jews do so?

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<sup>17</sup> The Pew Study, called *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, addressed topics such as population estimates, demographic characteristics, Jewish identity, religious beliefs and practices, intermarriage, connections with Israel, and social and political views. As the largest study of Jews in the United States in over a decade, the study attracted wide-spread attention in the Jewish community. Its focus on the differences among Jews who identified as “Jews of no religion” and other who identified by religion, Jews of various denominations, and in-married and inter-married Jews stimulated responses by lay and professional leaders. Questions about its methods and conclusions spread through academic and popular Jewish media, rabbinic sermons, and policy forums.

- Where does the language of “Jewish identity” come from, when, and why? What work does it do for those who use it? What kind of educational efforts does it promote, and what does it inhibit?
- To the extent that the construct of “Jewish identity” no longer satisfies us, what alternatives are available – especially in conceptualizing the desirable outcomes of Jewish education? (Mandel Center for Jewish Education, Brandeis University)

The conference on Jewish identity and the Jim Joseph Foundation Teen Initiative’s concern with Jewish identity both reflected a trend in the field of Jewish education as a whole with considering and clarifying outcomes. Both of them reflected the larger culture’s questions about and concerns with outcomes in education, as well as the Jewish community’s ongoing considerations of its own future. While a few individuals were involved in both the conference planning and the Teen Initiative, one was not grounded in the other.

### **The Second Convening**

**Coming together.** In mid-afternoon of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, 2014, six evaluators, five program staff members, two Foundation professional leaders, and one facilitator gathered again in the board meeting at the Jim Joseph Foundation offices in San Francisco. One evaluator joined the group by telephone. Joining the group this time were Anne Colby and Ari Kelman of Stanford University.

When Chip Edelsberg called the meeting to order, he talked about two things. As he had done at the first gathering, he characterized the undertaking of the Evaluators’ Consortium as risky and stated that the Foundation was not risk averse. He made brief mention of the purpose of the meeting—to develop a better sense of what the concept of

Jewish identity is. He also acknowledged the context for the work on Jewish identity—a multi-year, multi-city initiative on Teen Education and Engagement, noting that he had spoken to the Community of Practice<sup>18</sup> about the current work of the Evaluators’ Consortium on Jewish identity and about the Foundation’s need for deeper understanding of it before moving into the project with the CoP.

Reflecting the correspondence about Jewish identity in the weeks leading up to the January convening, Shulman set the agenda for the meeting. He explained that the work of the two days would involve “framing and naming,” that is, developing language to talk about Jewish identity or some alternative to that concept. He acknowledged that everyone around the table had regularly used the language of Jewish identity; its widespread and frequent use made it more difficult to pin down. Shulman called this his “second law,” explaining that

. . . the more central or pivotal a concept is in any field, the more elusive it is, the harder to wrap your head around it. It’s carrying so much weight, doing so much work. And it may mean different things depending on the path you take to it.

Shulman encouraged the group to make strange the familiar concept of Jewish identity during the deliberations in order to see it in new ways.

**Presentations by guest scholars.** Kelman and Colby delivered presentations on the memos they had prepared and distributed in advance of the gathering, each allowing for questions from the group.

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<sup>18</sup> The Community of Practice (CoP) consists of representatives of local Jewish communities across the country working collaboratively with the Jim Joseph Foundation to launch initiatives on teen education at the local level.

**Kelman.** Kelman encouraged the group to consider identity as something imparted or ascribed to individuals and the merit of examining the ways that and extent to which programs mobilize participants' sense of Jewishness. He also criticized a deficit model of Jewishness in which program planners seek to fill people with something they are missing through their participation in a program. Following Kelman's presentation the evaluators raised clarifying questions to understand his ideas about the evaluation of programs rather than individuals, exploring his claim that evaluation could explore how and why certain programs are more effective than others in engaging the Jewishness of participants. Participants commented about what Jewishness is, about the characterization of Jews in Jewish educational discourse as "at risk" or deficient, and about interventions and defining outcomes.

**Colby.** In contrast to Kelman's sociological perspective, Colby brought a psychological perspective to the deliberations. She introduced the concept of centrality to one's sense of self in thinking about identity. How central is Jewishness, in this context, to an individual? She explored the idea of meaning or meanings of Jewishness to individuals and the role of exploration or thoughtful reflection; salience, the intensity or power of characteristics; and commitment, a sense of solidarity with or responsibility toward Jewish institutions or groups.

The evaluators raised a number of questions to clarify their understanding of the presentations of both Colby and Kelman, challenged some of their claims, and offered ideas about how these concepts might be applied in the field. Edelsberg asked whether it would be possible, since nothing like this exists in the field, to develop a typology that describes the meaning of Jewishness to teens across a range of possibilities. Given the

variations within and across communities, it would be useful to the Foundation to have something that had alternatives built into it.

*Horowitz.* After a break the group addressed the third memo, this one by Bethamie Horowitz (2014) who could not be present at the meeting. Shulman asked the group for their responses to the piece. The conversation focused on the distinction Horowitz made between identity ascribed or Jewishness (How Jewish are you?) vs. identity as self-understanding or the individual's Jewish self (How are you Jewish? What does being Jewish mean to you?). In the context of evaluation, Horowitz suggested that programs could be seen as an encounter between an individual and a "particular Jewish configuration (p. 3)," where the Jewishness of the program is a resource for that individual to consider using in the building of his/her Jewish self. The task in evaluation, according to Horowitz, is to "keep tabs on both the Jewishness embodied in the program and the individual's experience of it and how these interact." She addressed processes by which the Jewish self emerges (developing familiarity and competence; reflecting; and inspiration) and proposed the importance of the concept of agency.

Following a break a conversation ensued among the scholars and evaluators about program outcomes, the absence of a shared sense across programs of what a good or desired Jewish outcome is, and about variations among funders about what they consider worthy outcomes. Program providers might have norms they aspire to for their participants, but are not transparent about them. According to Kelman, this leads to conflicts between funders, program providers, and participants. His comments opened up a discussion about the tension between a program aspiring to certain ethno-centric behavioral norms for participants (e.g., increased participation in Jewish ritual practices,

improved literacy with Jewish texts, increased donations to Jewish causes) and the open society and multi-culturalism that the majority of Jews in America embrace. In addition to an expansive dialogue about the complexities involved in the undertaking of measuring Jewish growth or change, a variety of suggestions emerged. These included exploring a theory of impact that links centrality of something in one's identity, one's motivations, and one's behavioral changes; documenting changes in participants whether or not the changes were intended by the program; and longitudinal studies. As this part of the convening concluded, many ideas and points of view were proposed and considered; there were no conclusions or decisions drawn.

**Presentation on the Jim Joseph Foundation Teen Initiative.** Shulman and Edelsberg steered the group from the theoretical conversation to the concrete context that had inspired that conversation—the Initiative on Jewish Teen Education and Engagement. Program officers Josh Miller and Jon Marker then made the final presentation of the day, just prior to dinner. Using a Prezi presentation the staff members explained the Foundation's strategy for supporting teen education and engagement across the country in light of the Foundation's larger mission and strategic goals. The strategy has several components:

- Fostering innovation in local communities
- Working with community-based partners
- Co-investing with local funders
- Evaluating locally and across initiatives
- Encouraging the adaptation of effective new models

**Background on the initiative.** The strategy grew out of reflection by the staff and board on the JJF-sponsored study, *Effective Strategies for Educating and Engaging Jewish Teens* in March, 2013. A series of blog posts in the Jewish press reacting to the

report encouraged the Foundation and the broader field of Jewish education to reconsider its approach to working with teens given the finding that nearly 80% of Jewish teens do not participate in the experiences available to them in their communities (Miller, 2014).

*Funder's community of practice.* To implement the new strategy, the Foundation initiated a Community of Practice (CoP) consisting of representatives of local funders in Jewish communities across the United States and facilitated by Olive Grove Consulting. They also put into place a national incubator, run by the Jewish Education Project in New York under the leadership of David Bryfman, to support the work of the local communities and to facilitate learning and collaboration among the communities and the Foundation.

The CoP grew out of the notion among the board and staff of the Foundation that change in the realm of teen education would happen at the local level and that, while the Foundation could bring financial and intellectual resources to work on teen education, it needed local funding partners. JJF committed to convening local funders interested in joining them in the work on teen education, creating shared measures of success with the local funders, considering grant requests for co-funding initiatives at the local level, developing an incubator organization to support local efforts and to facilitate collaborative work within and across communities, engaging a facilitator to lead monthly phone calls and twice yearly convenings, and contracting with an evaluator to develop recommendations on conducting evaluations within and across communities.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The Foundation engaged one of the members of the Evaluators' Consortium, then called the "Preferred Evaluators" to do this work.

The initiative and co-investment strategy were intended to promote the development of innovative, high quality Jewish learning experiences, to reach thousands of teens that can be sustained by the local communities and adapted by other communities. Over a ten year period the Foundation and local funders estimated they would invest up to \$70 million (Jim Joseph Foundation, 2014). According to program officer Josh Miller (2014), the teen education collaborative initiative was the first time that JJF had worked with other funders on this large a scale.<sup>20</sup> The Foundation worked with local communities in the Community of Practice to help them prepare proposals for co-funding.

***Shared measures of success.*** Together the CoP developed and committed to five shared measures of success for a five to seven year period of work. The shared measures of success, shown in a more fully developed form in Figure 10, are:

1. Increase the number of teens engaged in Jewish learning/engagement during their high school years, reaching 40% of Jewish teens in the community by 2020
2. Involve teens from diverse Jewish backgrounds
3. Achieve measurable Jewish growth based on a shared set of metrics in areas such as knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, connections to peers and Jewish people as indicators of their future Jewish involvement through experiences provided in the community
4. Build models that are financial sustainable
5. Elevate the priority of Jewish teen education and engagement for local community leaders and parents

***Reactions to the initiative.*** One of the evaluators made note of the differences between the complexity of the issues about Jewish identity the evaluators had discussed

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<sup>20</sup> As of July, 2014, the foundation had awarded matching grants to the Jewish communities of Boston (local partner, Combined Jewish Philanthropies), Denver (local partner, Rose Foundation) and New York (local partner, UJA-Federation of New York). Other participating funders in the Community of Practice are the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, the North Peninsula Regional Impact Committee of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, a coalition of Chicago-based funders, a coalition of funders from San Diego, the Marcus Foundation from Atlanta, and two partnering foundations from Cincinnati (JJF, 2014).

early in the convening and the measures of success for the Teen Initiative. The evaluator pointed out the absence of members of the CoP at this convening and wondered how the ideas being addressed by each group separately might be integrated. A program officer acknowledged that the conversation among the evaluators introduced new considerations, new concepts, and new terminology to the discourse and that this might necessitate some changes to the CoP's decisions on measurement and evaluation. Another program officer pointed out that the CoP did go to the Foundation for guidance on shared metrics.

Edelsberg turned again to the importance of field building for the Foundation and its determination to create and adopt common measures that can be used across diverse communities and types of programs and what it might mean to “move the needle” during a teen's high school experience. Foundation staff asked the evaluators to think about constructs, about gathering baseline data, and about common measures that could cross both communities and programs. A conversation ensued among the evaluators and the guest scholars. Issues arose such as effect sizes, defining expectations and success, documenting implementation, and the quality of the local initiatives. The time came for dinner, and the day's activities were called to a close. As was the case in the first convening in the fall, the staff was notably quiet. One member did not speak at all. Two others made only a comment or two throughout the deliberations. The evaluators, facilitator, Foundation leadership, guest scholars and this researcher stayed on to eat dinner together.

### **Shared Measures of Success**

*Working together as a collaborative partnership of national and regional funders interested in Jewish teen education, we seek to accomplish the following objectives over a five to seven year period:*

- 1. Dramatically increase the number of teens in targeted geographic areas engaged in Jewish learning during their high school years.** In most Jewish communities, the number of teens who are involved in programming for Jewish teens ranges between 10% and 25% of the local Jewish teen population. Through targeted investment in select Jewish communities, we seek to fund strategies that, by the end 2020, will enable communities to influence the Jewish learning and growth of 40% of their Jewish teens during their high school years.
- 2. Involve Jewish teens who come from diverse Jewish backgrounds.** Most of the teens who currently opt into Jewish involvement have previous Jewish experience from their families, schooling, summer camp, youth group and/or travel to Israel. This funder collaborative seeks to co-invest in strategies that will influence the Jewish learning and growth of teens from a range of backgrounds--those who have not had previous Jewish experiences as well as those who have.
- 3. Provide Jewish teens with experiences that will contribute to their Jewish learning and growth during their high school years.** The field of Jewish social science is becoming increasingly sophisticated at measuring the development of young Jews' knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs as indicators for future Jewish involvement. Specifically, this funder collaborative seeks to co-invest in strategies that will:
  - Empower Jewish teens to develop a sense of what being Jewish means to them, why it is important to them, and its relevancy to their everyday lives.
  - Increase Jewish teens' skills and involvement in personal and Jewish communal life such as Shabbat, Jewish holidays, life-cycle events, Israel and cultural activities, volunteer service, and ongoing learning and discussion on Jewish topics.
  - Deepen Jewish teens' connections to their Jewish peers, Jewish adult role models, the Jewish community, and Israel.
  - Increase Jewish teens' interest in continuing to learn, explore and be involved with Jewish life during their college years and beyond.
- 4. Build models for Jewish teen education that are financially sustainability.** This funder collaborative seeks to co-invest in initiatives whose financial plans demonstrate how fundraising or fee-based revenue will be generated as the income from initial startup investments decreases over a five to seven year period. We anticipate that as programs become established, alternative revenue sources might include: fees from participants, fees from partners, individual fundraising, and a diversified portfolio of foundation grants and/or federation grants. Startup investments will provide appropriate resources to fund the personnel required to develop such revenue streams.
- 5. Establish Jewish teen education and engagement as a priority for local Jewish community leaders and parents.** Appreciating that any new initiatives will only be as strong as the systems that support them, this funder collaborative seeks to influence not only Jewish teens but also the adults who seek to support them. Through our engagement with local communities and the initiatives we fund, we will broaden Jewish communal awareness about the importance of the teen years as a time for identity development, better inform local lay leaders, professional leaders, and parents about strategies to effectively educate and engage teens, and strengthen the networks of institutions that serve Jewish teens.

*Figure 10.* Shared Measures of Success Developed by the Funders Community of Practice for the Teen Initiative.

**Presentations by the evaluators on measuring Jewish growth.** On the morning of the second day, Edelsberg noted that he had checked in with each of the evaluators at the end of the day before to find out if the discourse had been helpful. Each of them had said yes. The second day was slated to feature presentations by each of the evaluation firms about an approach it had used to measuring “Jewishness” or “Jewish identity.”

***Evaluation Firm A.*** One evaluator presented a framework his firm developed for examining an individual’s interest in Judaism and a trajectory of growth over the course of a program. The framework accounted for the change in an individual relative to that person’s self-assessed starting point in several categories.

After some questions and comments from the group, Edelsberg asked what was applicable from the framework to the Teen Initiative. Suggestions included using a similar approach to develop an estimate of variance, enabling evaluators to answer the questions: “Who are those most likely to be influenced by the programs?” and “What methods work best with them?” Another suggestion was for this group of evaluators to develop a similar framework to flesh out measures of Jewish belonging. Someone pointed out the difference between the participants and nature of the program for which this framework was developed (used to measure change in Jewish educators in training through a particular program) and the local initiatives for teens (where some of the intended experiences could barely be classified as programs), while still affirming the value of a framework that would capture change over time.

***Evaluation Firm B.*** Another evaluator presented work on measures used and challenges encountered across a number of evaluations of JJF-funded programs. She addressed issues related to using both existing measures and measures customized to the

program and its theory. Her presentation and responses to questions emphasized the need for sensitivity to the needs, feelings, and concerns of the program staff. She also pointed out the need to consider dosage, variations across program implementation in different sites, and the integration of other data with data collected by the evaluator.

***Evaluation Firm C.*** Staff from the third firm presented work they are doing on a multi-site, longitudinal study in which the unit of analysis is the family. The project involved analysis of extensive amounts of qualitative data collected through interviews and use of a control group and, together with sociological theory, has resulted in a set of analytic codes and concepts that they have been able to apply in other settings, as well.

***Evaluation Firm D.*** The last firm presented on measuring a sense of connectedness, the sense of belonging to a group. It was about social identity, something that develops side by side with personal identity. It can be seen as both a moderator and as an intermediate outcome.

**Issues related to evaluating the Teen Initiative.** Over the course of the presentations, issues arose that were not necessarily connected to the presentations themselves but to the larger issues of evaluating the Teen Initiative. These focused on three general subjects—measurement, definitions of Jewish growth, and outcomes—and included:

- Measurement:
  - The value and challenges of tracking attendance or participation rates as a measure
  - Different levels of engagement and the appropriate measures for different levels
  - The role of parents in measuring change in teens
  - The value/validity/reliability of self-reports for measuring outcomes
  - The possible role of social network analysis as a tool

- Timeline: The fact that it takes time for outcomes to develop and the measurement timeline is too short to capture their accomplishment
- The capturing of a teen’s total experience across multiple programs rather than only within individual programs
- Definitions of Jewish growth:
  - Definitions of Jewish growth that are neither too broad (and thus hard to measure) nor too narrow (and thus underestimate program impact)
  - The extent to which connectedness is an intrinsic goal or a means to other desired outcomes
  - The extent to which a grand conceptual scheme of Jewish growth would be accepted by JJF grantees beyond the Teen Initiative, as well as others who do not work with the Foundation
  - The absence of explicit theories in the work the Foundation has done
- Outcomes:
  - Difficulty for funders and program providers in specifying what they really want their program to accomplish for participants
  - The timeline for measuring meaningful outcomes
  - The range of things that evaluations address in addition to some measure of Jewishness or change/growth

**Moving forward in evaluating the Teen Initiative.** In the final conversation of the convening, Shulman asked the group to think about the potential contributions of this group of evaluators, whether the group meets again or not, and those staff of the Jim Joseph Foundation on the issues of defining and measuring Jewish growth and the processes and experiences that foster it. Members of the Foundation staff believed that among the members of the CoP, a unified framework for measuring Jewish growth would be welcomed, especially if accompanied by support and assistance in using it to think about and plan their local initiatives. Edelsberg reminded the evaluators of the need for the Foundation to engage the CoP in discussions of this issue, and to consult, as well, with the staff of the incubator.

When someone raised a question about whether such a framework was intended for all JJF grantees or just those involved in the Teen Initiative, the conversation turned to

the value of piloting something or doing the work incrementally. Participants wondered about what would be involved in bringing in other grantees and the willingness they would have to explore and use a new conceptual framework. The conversation returned, though, to the immediate needs of the Teen Initiative—determining what type of baseline data is needed and how it would be gathered. That begged numerous other questions like who would develop the conceptual framework for measuring Jewish growth and how, capturing the outcomes for individuals as well as the nature and quality of the experiences the communities offer, what capacity there was in the local communities for collecting data, the availability of existing data that could be used, and balancing local needs and interests with those of the Foundation and the initiative as a whole. One evaluator reminded the group of the importance of creating a conceptual frame that included minimal jargon so that it would make sense and be compelling to local stakeholders.

Responding to the questions about process, Edelsberg reiterated one of the purposes of the convenings of the Evaluators' Consortium—to support learning for the staff of the Foundation. In that spirit, he saw a value in having the staff reflect on the deliberations and decide on next steps. Shulman, recognizing that many of the upcoming evaluations for the Foundation would be conducted by this group of evaluators, advocated that the members of the Consortium work collaboratively to set the conceptual framework. He again acknowledged the uniqueness of such an arrangement. "I don't know of other situations where individual entrepreneurial evaluators are part of a community of practice where they work together," Shulman said. Some conversation ensued about the possibility of creating a data base in which to put data from studies

using agreed upon constructs and metrics for Jewish growth, one that would be accessible to this group of evaluators and others for research purposes. Another evaluator raised the possibility that more than one evaluation firm from this group work collaboratively on the evaluation of the Teen Initiative. Edelsberg affirmed the value of collaboration and the Foundation's interest in it, saying, "If one of the outcomes of this kind of conversation is to take the risk to do a collaborative effort for this kind of evaluation, the board would be really pleased." They would not, however, exert any pressure on the firms to engage in evaluation work collaboratively.

**Reflections on the convening.** During reflections by Foundation staff members on the two-day convening, they acknowledged the learning of new language, seeing previous evaluations of Foundation grants in new ways, and the opportunity to see the work of the Foundation as part of a larger world of education and Jewish education. Edelsberg concluded with words of thanks, returning to several of the themes he focused on throughout the initiative: the centrality of learning for the Foundation and its staff and the contribution of the evaluators' deliberations to the learning of the staff, the development of trusting relationships between the Foundation and the evaluators and of the evaluators with one another, and the Foundation's recognition of its responsibility for leadership and field building.

### **Evaluating the Teen Initiative: A Case within a Case**

**Background on the Initiative:** The Foundation's thinking and planning for a Teen Initiative and the evaluation of such an initiative began independent of its work with the Evaluators' Consortium. New work in the sphere of teen education and engagement grew out of research it supported on teens that resulted in the report by Informing Change

and Rosov Consulting called *Effective Strategies for Educating and Engaging Jewish Teens* and the reactions across the country to that report. The current state of affairs in Jewish life in the United States, in which approximately 80% of Jewish teens do not participate in Jewish educational opportunities in their communities, together with the Foundation's mission to "foster compelling, effective Jewish learning experiences for young Jews" and its strategic priority to "increase the numbers of youth and young adults (ages 13-30) who are engaged in relevant, meaningful Jewish learning and creating and sustaining Jewish peer networks" moved the board of the Foundation to take action (JJF website). Jim Joseph Foundation grants would match up to 50% of local funding in up to ten communities for the purpose of significantly increasing the number of teens involved in Jewish learning during high school. The board committed to a ten year venture, projecting investments totaling approximately \$41 over the first five years and a range of \$62-70 million total over the ten year period.<sup>21</sup>

**Developing partnerships.** The initiative was based on two assumptions: that change occurs locally, and that to succeed locally the Foundation would need to partner with local funders. In February, 2013, just prior to the release of the report, the Foundation convened a Community of Practice (CoP) of local and national funders to consider the report's findings and implications and to begin planning local initiatives. The initial membership of the CoP consisted of local funders in the field of Jewish teen education who had served on an advisory committee for the *Effective Strategies* research, constituted by the Foundation and active during the research and preparation of the

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<sup>21</sup> As of December, 2014, projections were for the local communities to provide approximately \$36.6 million and the Jim Joseph Foundation approximately \$33.7 million over ten years. In some cases local communities will be funding more than 50% of their initiatives. The Foundation will fund particular elements of the national initiative without matching from the local communities, including part of the budget for a cross-community evaluation (J. Miller, personal communication, December 2, 2014).

report. In addition the Foundation engaged Olive Grove Consulting to facilitate the work of the collaborative and the Jewish Education Project, led by David Bryfman, in New York to serve as an incubator to support the work at the local level and to facilitate cross-community collaboration. Bryfman had also served on the advisory committee as one of the experts on Jewish teen education (Miller, personal communication, December 4, 2014).

In addition, Foundation staff went to communities with which they had previously worked and with which they anticipated collaborating, and attempted to gauge their interest in ongoing conversation and partnership. They also held informational sessions, some at the Jewish Funders' Network and some online, and extended invitations to various communities to join the collaboration. Energy for the work was also generated in the media of the Jewish philanthropic community. Following the release of the report funders, practitioners, and experts in teen development and education shared their reactions and recommendations in a series of blog posts in *eJewish Philanthropy*, a leading electronic publication in the field of Jewish communal work and education.

The CoP held monthly conference calls throughout the spring of 2013 and decided to hold its first face-to-face meeting in November, 2013 in San Francisco. Over a six month period, additional funders from local communities joined the CoP following conversations about the project with Foundation staff members. As they entered the CoP they joined the next phone call. Membership in the CoP waxed and waned a bit before stabilizing after the gathering in California.

Local communities, even before they got a commitment of funding from the Foundation, made several commitments: to engaging in local planning efforts involving

lay leaders, professionals, and teens to strengthen existing offerings for teens and to develop new ones; to develop coalitions of other local funders to invest in the work, to create groups of program providers to implement plans, and to share their experiences and learning with the CoP. Over the summer of 2013, the Foundation communicated with the local funders in the CoP to ascertain the expected timelines in their communities to launch pilot initiatives. By October of 2013 the JJF board reviewed concept papers from Boston and Denver.

At its meeting in June, 2014, the JJF board made a final decision to cap the number of communities in the CoP to ten, the current number in the collaboration, after considering the possibility of expanding the group. Other communities and funders had expressed interested in joining the initiative but the board decided that ten communities would be enough for advancing their strategy. They did, however, express a desire in finding ways to engage other communities who might want to learn from the work the CoP communities were doing.

**Early work on evaluating the Teen Initiative.** Even before the official establishment of the Community of Practice, Edelsberg had had conversations with local funders in which he explored the possibility of co-funded teen engagement work. Several of the local funders had served on the advisory committee for the research on teens. The Foundation was committed to evaluating the work and to contributing to knowledge in the field about teen education and engagement. In talking about evaluation with them, Edelsberg understood that they would not tolerate JJF's control of the evaluation of their work; they would expect, at least at the local level, to manage evaluation efforts. They wanted to use measures appropriate for their local contexts identified using their

understanding of local conditions and, in many cases, engaging good evaluators with whom they had pre-existing relationships. It was important to Edelsberg and the board to find a way to do evaluation that honored local funders and communities while at the same time insisting on high quality evaluation at both the local and national levels. Local funders demonstrated their commitment to evaluation, as well, through their participation in the development of a set of shared measures of success for the initiative (Figure 10). Work on these measures began shortly before the release of the *Effective Strategies* report. JJF Program Officer Josh Miller wrote the first draft and took input from funders who came to be core members of the Community of Practice. Advisers to the *Effective Strategies* research effort helped to refine and edit the document. Over several months following the report's release the document was refined with input from other funders as they became part of the CoP. The document, especially in the early stages of developing the CoP, indicated the initiative's priorities to potential participants (Miller, personal correspondence, December 23, 2014).

According to Miller (2014), evaluation work was not planned to begin with the early work with the CoP, but the group encouraged that evaluation be addressed at the earliest possible stages. In October, 2013 the Foundation engaged the firm Informing Change to document the work of the CoP and to develop an evaluation framework for the overall initiative, including recommendations for how the initiative ought to be evaluated.

**Bringing in the Evaluators' Consortium.** At the same time the work of the CoP was launching, the Foundation was also establishing the Evaluators' Consortium. By the end of the second day of the first gathering of the Evaluators' Consortium, the idea arose that the work of the Consortium might serve some of the needs of evaluating the Teen

Initiative. Over the months leading to the January convening, the staff of the Foundation, along with Shulman and with the agreement of the evaluators, decided that the Evaluators' Consortium would focus on issues related to the measurement of Jewish growth or identity in general, with consideration of the specific context of the Teen Initiative.

At the end of the first day of the second convening in January, 2014, the program officers working on the Teen Initiative provided background to the evaluators about the work—its history and development, the participating communities, and the timeline for awarding grants to communities. During the presentation Edelsberg raised the question the Foundation wanted help on from the evaluators: “Is it possible to adopt a set of common measures that can be used across diverse communities and programs?” They wondered if and how one uses the same metrics to measure the impact of a teen trip to Israel vs. participation in a teen program design lab, for example. The staff raised questions such as

- What is our construct?
- How do we find a baseline?
- What and how do we measure?
- What do we not measure?

A challenge raised by one of the evaluators was the absence of the Community of Practice from the deliberation. If the Foundation wanted the CoP involved in decision making about evaluation and if some of that decision making had already begun, what would it mean to integrate the thinking and the work of the Evaluators' Consortium? In light of the conversations earlier in the convening with the scholars, both Foundation staff and evaluators acknowledged the potential need for reconsidering things that had already been done in the CoP about evaluation and the distance between the complex theoretical

discussions at the Consortium convening and the concrete needs of the local communities. The Consortium members wondered about the process of documenting implementation and collecting baseline data. Even if these were done as part of the national evaluation managed by the Foundation, the local communities would need to be involved.

The evaluators began to raise a number of practical concerns, related both to content and approach for planning and conducting evaluation of the Teen Initiative. One wondered about the process for building a structure to coordinate local and national efforts that enabled local communities to do evaluation that was meaningful to them and adequately coordinated with the other communities to provide information about the big picture. Another wondered about the capacity at the local level to collect baseline data, once it became clear what the baseline data should be. Others asked about how the ideological framework—including definitions and measures of Jewish growth or identity and program features that support them—would be developed and who would do the work.

The program officers working on the initiative speculated that the communities would be open to the conceptual framework for measuring Jewish growth the Consortium had been discussing, would want assistance applying it, and could use it to hone their proposals if they had not yet developed them. They also asserted that the communities would understand the value and be willing to participate in gathering baseline demographic data, and would appreciate help in figuring out how to get it. Everyone acknowledged the challenges of the timeline; a few communities would be launching

their initiatives within a year's time, and the framework and measures might take longer than that to develop.

There was a brief conversation about the possibility of convening the Evaluators' Consortium again to work on measures or having individual firms work on drafts to present back to the Foundation or to the group, of having more than one of the Consortium members attempt to do something collaboratively, or having the Foundation staff work on something on which the evaluators would provide feedback. Edelsberg shared his concern about the possibility of taking unfair advantage of the evaluators, wanting to treat them and their time respectfully.

### **Connecting the work of the Evaluators' Consortium and the Funders**

**Community of Practice.** Following the Evaluators' Consortium convening in January 2014, the staff of the Foundation recognized the need to bring the funders' collaborative into the conversation about measuring Jewish growth, and about the ideas and issues that the evaluators and scholars had just explored. Foundation staff asked Bryfman if he and his staff had the capacity to work on developing outcomes for Jewish growth in teens that could be used across communities in the Teen Initiative. They hoped Bryfman could present drafts that the CoP would react to, push back on, and make suggestions for improving. Bryfman committed to leading the CoP through a process to grapple with potential outcomes, and to preparing a proposed scope of work for creating a set of measurable outcomes to use across communities. The Foundation briefed Bryfman on the conversations from the Evaluators' Consortium and shared the scholars' papers with him.

In mid-March, prior to the meeting of the Community of Practice, Edelsberg updated the evaluators about the Foundation's thinking and next steps for both the CoP

and the Evaluators' Consortium. The agenda for the CoP included a presentation and discussion led by the project incubator's director, David Bryfman of the Jewish Education Project, on the measure of success related to "providing Jewish teens with experiences that will contribute to their Jewish learning and growth during their high school years."<sup>22</sup> Edelsberg invited the evaluators to respond to Bryfman's document if they desired to do so and informed the evaluators that the Foundation staff would then review and refine the document and return it to the evaluators for their review.

**Bringing Evaluation to the CoP.** The Foundation communicated continually with the Community of Practice about the centrality of evaluation to the initiative on Teen Education and Engagement. Edelsberg reiterated this theme with the Community of Practice at the start of their face-to-face meeting in March, 2014 saying, "Evaluation is an indispensable part of our work." He talked about the Foundation's expectation that an evaluation plan be included in each community's co-funding proposal. He committed the Foundation's assistance in drafting the evaluation plan and in selecting an evaluator. Beyond the evaluation that would happen at the local level, the Foundation was interested in conducting some sort of cross-community evaluation. Similar messages had been communicated in prior meetings and in conversations with local funders.

Edelsberg emphasized the desire for collaboration with local communities in conducting more discrete elements of the evaluation. He talked about working together with them to identify discrete outcomes to be measured in all participating communities.

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<sup>22</sup> The four specific areas related to this measure of success were: (1) empower teen to develop a sense of what being Jewish means to them, why it is important to them, and its relevancy in their everyday life; (2) increase Jewish teens' skills and involvement in personal and Jewish communal life such as Shabbat, Jewish holidays, life-cycle events, Israel and cultural activities, volunteer service, and ongoing learning and discussion on Jewish topics; (3) deepen Jewish teens' connections to their Jewish peers, Jewish adult role models, the Jewish community and Israel; and (4) increase Jewish teens' interest in continuing to learn, explore, and be involved with Jewish life during their college years and beyond.

He promised not to impose pre-conceived outcomes on the group and committed that the Foundation would communicate regularly about these matters saying, “We will be in constant contact with you so there won’t be any surprises on the evaluation front.” Sandy Edwards, Associate Director of the Jim Joseph Foundation and a key staff person for the Teen Initiative, spoke to the group about the Evaluators’ Consortium and their critical role in working with the Foundation to understand and measure the growth of Jewish teens. She, Edelsberg, and other staff reminded the group of the complex and emergent nature of the work and the confidence the Foundation has in both its funding partners and the evaluators. The work of capturing what happens at both the local and national levels was not yet established, and the Foundation staff expressed their hope to work in such a way with the first few funded communities that all the others in the CoP and the Foundation, too, could learn and improve as things moved forward. As Edelsberg explained, “At the national level we want a virtuous cycle for information to flow to everyone so learning can go on, because that’s how we view the evaluation effort.”

*Exploring outcome measures of Jewish growth.* In the agenda for the convening, the objectives included one related to evaluation, to “significantly advance our understanding and approach for evaluating our Shared Indicators of Success, at both a customized community level and a cross-community level.” During the first half of the first full day of meetings, Bryfman and his colleagues used small group discussions and activities to lead the group through a process to consider the meaning of Jewish identity and to examine potential outcome measures for Jewish identity, engagement, and growth. The discourse on Jewish identity was based on a paper Bryfman and his team prepared and distributed in advance of the meeting. It incorporated material from the memoranda

of Colby, Kelman, and Horowitz and presented recommendations for conducting further research for constructing measures of teens' Jewish growth. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions, to explore their own values and ideas about what Jewish growth meant to them, and what aspects of such growth they valued. The group wrestled with questions about the process of developing outcomes and the constituent groups that needed to be involved—teens, parents, program providers, funders. For Bryfman, a key outcome of the discussion was getting the members of the CoP involved in early stages of the work in order to understand the issues and to appreciate the outcomes that would eventually get developed.<sup>23</sup>

*Exploring recommendations for evaluating the Teen Initiative.* During the second half of the day, Ellen Irie, principal of the firm Informing Change, presented a set of seven draft recommendations that focused on initiative strategies and logic models, gathering information to track teen participation and demographics, and approaches to evaluating at the local and cross-community levels. She underscored the word “draft” and reminded the group that these recommendations were a first step in an iterative process of creating an approach to evaluation of the initiative. One thing she pointed out to the group early in the presentation was the language of “cross-community” as opposed to “national” in describing the part of the evaluation that would be managed by the Jim Joseph Foundation. By cross-community she intended to capture the intention that this

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<sup>23</sup> The Foundation staff and board awarded a contract to the Teen Initiative Incubator, under the leadership of Bryfman and the Jewish Education Project, to create the outcomes and measures of teen growth. Three other funders expressed interest and were recruited by JJF program officer Josh Miller to join JJF in the funding of this part of the initiative. Representatives of those foundations joined an advisory committee that is working with Bryfman's team. The group hopes that the measures will eventually be used by their grantees in other initiatives.

part of the evaluation would look across work done at the local level, respecting the local nature of both the initiatives and the evaluations.

Informing Change recommended the development of three sets of metrics to be used at both the community and cross-community levels: one for measuring an individual's Jewish learning and growth, a set of teen participant metrics to capture how teens participate in Jewish life, and a set to assess community capacity to sustain focus on teens. The recommendations for cross-community evaluation included (1) a community demographic study of teens examining over time the number of teens and the ways in which they are engaged and (2) an annual cross-community evaluation to aggregate progress over time. This evaluation would use illustrations from different communities, but would not compare communities to one another. It would also include an assessment of the Incubator. Another recommendation affirmed the value of conducting community-based, community-led local evaluations to assess local progress toward targeted outcomes and to inform ongoing program improvement. Finally, Irie recommended the establishment of a process for sharing cross-community learning on related strategies through the Community of Practice. The proposal reflected the elements of the conversation that took place at the second gathering of the Evaluators' Consortium in January.

***Exploring logistics and funding.*** The Foundation staff explained their role with evaluation at the cross-community level. JJF would develop the RFP and decide whom to ask to respond to the RFP. They anticipated involving members of the CoP to work with them to select the firm to carry out the evaluation, an approach consistent with the Foundation's process with grantees on selecting evaluators. The Foundation's expectation

was that the local evaluators would cooperate with the cross-community evaluator. In terms of funding, the Foundation staff reminded the CoP of their agreement to allocate 5% of philanthropic dollars (the amount JJF was being asked to match) to cover costs of the incubator and 10% toward evaluation. At the outset the JJF board laid out these expectations without having determined the exact percentages of the evaluation budgets that would be used for local vs. cross-community funding.<sup>24</sup>

CoP participants raised questions about a number of issues: the extent of independence of the local evaluations, handling potential conflicts between local and cross community work, the development of shared definitions, the use of common measures at the local level, the number of different consultants each community would be working with, community capacity to do some of the recommended work, the place of qualitative vs. quantitative assessment, coordinating and aligning the work at the local and cross-community levels, the reactions of the program grantees to the work required of them related to evaluation, helping communities understand the value of evaluation, and the varying timelines of the communities. While there were questions and concerns, the group affirmed its commitment to and excitement about the role evaluation could play in the Teen Initiative.

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<sup>24</sup> At the JJF board meeting in September, 2014, the board decided that 1% of the local budgets (leaving 9% for each community's local evaluation) seemed like an appropriate amount to ask of the local communities to support the national evaluation work. By this time they knew the costs of the cross-community evaluation, having received the response to the evaluation RFP. While the total dollar amount drawn from 1% of each community's budget would not cover all the costs of the cross-community evaluation, the amount covered a large portion of the costs and gave members of the CoP a significant measure of ownership of the evaluation. The board allocated the additional dollars to cover the balance of the costs. Those communities whose co-funding proposals had already been accepted were informed and accepted the arrangement without objection. As new proposals are funded, the Foundation will communicate in advance the expectation that 1% of the budget support the cross-community evaluation and 9% support the local evaluation.

**Plans for developing outcome measures.** Developing a set of outcome measures was beyond the original scope of work of the Incubator of the Teen Initiative.

Recognizing a need for outcome measures and needing someone to take this project on, the Foundation asked the Jewish Education Project, under Bryfman's leadership and based on its expertise in Jewish teen education, to draft a proposal for the work. In May, 2014, Bryfman submitted it, and the JJF forwarded it to the Evaluators' Consortium for their feedback with comments from Bryfman and his colleagues, as well as from Foundation staff, about elements of the plan that required additional thought or discussion.

***Proposal of the Incubator/Jewish Education Project.*** Asserting that traditional measures no longer work for contemporary teens, they proposed designing a new set of measures and a mechanism to measure outcomes of the initiative's interventions. The scope of work addressed the measurement of specific outcomes of specific interventions on Jewish teens, rather than the larger question of determining what constitutes Jewish identity and growth for Jewish teens today. The logic was that the questions about Jewish identity and growth would take longer to resolve than the timeframe for the initiative. From an epistemological perspective, too, they reasoned that the work on outcomes could inform the construction of theories of identity. They also laid out guidelines for the outcomes—that they fit within current practices of teens and not their practices years in the future (e.g., endogamy); that they reflect a world of choice and an appreciation of the relationship with the particularism of Judaism and universal values and practices; and that they reflect the voices of youth, not only of program professionals.

The work proposed would be conducted in several phases and would engage multiple stakeholders and experts in the world of Jewish teen education and engagement. The phases included scanning the literature on Jewish identity; scanning a broader literature on youth development, engagement, and education; interviews with a group of scholars and practitioners in the area of Jewish identity;<sup>25</sup> expert convenings to get feedback on the emerging research and for guidance on further research and implementation;<sup>26</sup> a set of focus groups with teens across three cities to hear from them about how they themselves understand their Jewish selves and Jewish lives; development of outcome measures and a survey instrument for measuring them based on the research throughout the process; testing the survey; and revising the survey.

***Role of the Evaluators' Consortium.*** David Bryfman, staff member of the Jewish Education Project and director of the Incubator for the Teen Initiative, proposed that the Evaluators' Consortium be involved in an expert convening during the third phase of the process to help develop or to review preliminary measures, although separate from a gathering of experts and stakeholders brought together for developing preliminary measures. The proposal did not make clear how the two gatherings would differ from one another. The other area proposed for the Consortium's involvement was in the analysis of data from the pilot survey and its redesign based on that analysis. In addition to these touch points for the Evaluators' Consortium as a group, the Jewish Education Project suggested the possibility of involving individuals from some of the firms in other phases of the work.

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<sup>25</sup> The proposal suggested assembling the group collaboratively with the Foundation, with input from members of the CoP.

<sup>26</sup> They proposed two convenings—one with experts and stakeholders to develop preliminary measures and one with the Evaluators' Consortium to get its feedback. It is not clear why the two groups would meet separately.

In reacting to the proposal, members of the Jim Joseph Foundation team saw other possible tasks for the Consortium and expressed an interest in their reactions to the question about getting input from parents on the development of teen outcomes and developing a framework for selecting teens for the focus groups. Anticipating that the cross-community evaluator would be selected during the work of developing common measures, the Foundation staff recommended that that person or team be included in the process as soon as they were hired and that they potentially play a significant role in guiding and supporting the work of the Jewish Education Project. Regarding the development of the survey instrument to measure the outcomes, the Foundation staff recommended that the cross-community evaluators take on that responsibility.

**Bringing the Evaluators' Consortium back into the conversation.** In May, the Foundation updated the members of the Consortium about the latest developments with the Teen Initiative<sup>27</sup> and invited them to a Google Hangout to discuss Informing Change's Evaluation Strategy Recommendations and the Jewish Education Project's proposed scope of work for developing common outcome measures for teens. The virtual meeting took place on June 10, 2014. Not all the evaluators in the Consortium were present, but each of the firms was represented by at least one person. Lee Shulman and members of the JJF staff participated.

*Reactions of the evaluators to evaluation recommendations.* Feedback from the Evaluators' Consortium to the recommendations for evaluating the Teen Initiative ranged from technical questions to philosophical ones. Evaluators raised questions about the need to have the same evaluator doing cross-community impact work and the

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<sup>27</sup> A significant update was the anticipated decision at the following week's board meeting to approve grants to Denver and New York. In fact, the board approved those grants at its meeting in early June.

demographic study. They also probed to understand the Foundation's priorities regarding the purpose of the evaluation.<sup>28</sup> They explored questions like sample size and testing the psychometric properties of instruments, as well as the possibility and desirability of attributing growth in Jewish identity to funded initiatives. Political and process issues came up, too; the group explored the complexities of working with many funders, boards, program providers, community leaders, and local evaluators and needing to juggle their interests and concerns. The factor of time arose as a theme of questions and comments—the fact that one community had already begun its work and two others were close behind, the concern that the desired impact might take longer to detect than stakeholders have patience to wait for, the need to examine both short- and long-term effects, or at least to find indicators that might predict longer-term effects. Another area of concern was the balance between local and national interests and how both might be served efficiently and respectfully.

*Ideas about developing common measures of teen growth.* In the discussion of developing common measures of teen growth, the conversation also ranged from the pragmatic to the philosophical. Was the purpose of the work on measures primarily to assess the impact of the interventions on teens? Or was it to understand more deeply what Jewish life looks like for teens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What would it require to accomplish both of those? Given the differences across participating communities about what constitutes success, how could they settle on a manageable and useful number of things to measure? What criteria would determine the selection of those measures?

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<sup>28</sup> To what extent did the Foundation want to accomplish each of the following and which was paramount: (1) to demonstrate that money was invested wisely (accountability/summative evaluation); (2) to help programs make good decisions and improve (formative evaluation); (3) to develop a canon of good practice supported by research (field-building, research)?

Toward the end of the meeting, Shulman and members of the Foundation staff reflected on the work of the Evaluators' Consortium and their hopes for its future. Shulman contended that the meeting validated one of the assumptions upon which the Evaluators' Consortium was built—that “this group of folks is collectively smarter than any one of us alone.” He continued to see value in having the group work collaboratively to think about big questions, to go out and do work as individual firms, and to bring data to the collective for further exploration and deeper understanding. Edelsberg, recognizing the business interests of the evaluators, assured the group that he had continually endorsed the Evaluators' Consortium in the Community of Practice and had recommended the firms for evaluation work at the local level. “At a minimum,” he said, “given all the time you've given, I want to give you that assurance. We are promoting the benefits we've had from working with you.” Other Foundation staff members commented about the excitement in the Community of Practice to coordinate the local and cross-community evaluations and to get guidance and resources on evaluation from the Jim Joseph Foundation. One acknowledged that the expressed desire of a group of funders to work collectively is an unusual occurrence in the world of Jewish philanthropy. Shulman suggested that the Foundation convene the communities periodically for the purpose of sharing data and stimulating thinking as a way of strengthening the broader goals of the initiative. The next steps in the process would be for staff to debrief this meeting of the Evaluators' Consortium and to develop a draft of the RFP for their review.

For the few days immediately following the Google Hangout an email exchange took place between two of the evaluators who had been on the call. It focused on the possibility of establishing indicators of the vitality of Jewish teen life at the communal

level and collecting data about them using tools beyond surveys. A follow-up thank you from Edelsberg and Edwards to the Evaluators' Consortium encouraged additional online dialogue, but after the first few emails, the exchange ceased.

**The Request for Proposals.** The next round of engagement with the Evaluators' Consortium began with an email from Edelsberg in mid-July. He updated the group on the forthcoming RFP for the Community-Based Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Initiative's Cross Community Evaluation. By that point the staff and board sub-committee had reviewed the document, and Edelsberg planned to share it with the evaluators the following week for their feedback. The Foundation intended to send out the formal RFP during the first week of August.

*Activities included in the RFP.* Edelsberg's email outlined the three activities the RFP would include. One of these grew out of the Shared Measures of Success and had two pieces:

A. Work with the funder collaborative to develop a set of common metrics and measurement tools tied to (1) teen participation and (2) assessment of community capacity to sustain the work of the local initiatives beyond the seed funding period.

B. Work with the Jewish Education Project to develop a set of common metrics and measurement tools to assess individual teens' Jewish learning and growth.

Another involved the aggregation and analysis of data from the local evaluations. A third activity, intended to complement findings from the aggregate analyses and beyond the scope of the local evaluations, was to develop and implement strategies to estimate the size of the teen population in participating communities, the percentage of

those teens involved in Jewish learning experiences, and to compare the responses about Jewish learning and growth of teens involved in local initiatives with those not involved.

***Plans to explore the RFP with members of the Consortium.*** In consultation with Shulman, Edelsberg proposed a Google Hangout for early August to focus on the third activity. Its purpose would be to identify potential strategies for doing the work, to inform the crafting of proposals for those firms planning to submit them, and to enlighten the Foundation staff about possible ways that work could be done.

On August 1, five days before the Hangout, Edwards sent the draft RFP to the Evaluators' Consortium. The agenda for the meeting arrived the day before and included time for questions about and feedback on the RFP; a discussion of creative and cost-effective strategies for answering questions about the numbers of Jewish teens in participating communities, the percentage participating in Jewish learning experiences, and the comparison of their Jewish growth compared to teens not participating; and the future of the Consortium.

***Details of the RFP.*** The RFP called for a four-year engagement for evaluation services beginning in October, 2014. It provided background on the initiative, estimated spending on the project over its projected duration, assumptions underlying the strategy, definitions of the terms *education* and *engagement*, an explanation of the incubator, the local communities involved, and the timeline for bringing in additional communities. A full-page graphic overview provided a summary of the participants in the initiative and their relationship to one another (Appendix D).

***Purposes and type of evaluation.*** The purposes and type of evaluation were spelled out in its goal statement: “to evaluate the collective efforts of the overall

initiative’s progress towards achieving the goals outlined in the Shared Measures of Success, and to provide timely input and feedback to help maximize the success of this ambitious endeavor.” The evaluation would have both formative and summative elements, the summative for accountability through examining goal attainment and the formative for improvement. The evaluation questions (See Table 4) for the study addressed two areas of inquiry: the work of the local communities, and the work taking place at the national level to support that of the local communities. The former would likely use data and findings from the local evaluations, as well as additional information collected by the cross-community evaluator. The latter would likely be based on interviews and observations of key stakeholders. The second evaluation question pointed to another purpose the Foundation hoped to accomplish with the evaluation—contributing lessons to the larger field of Jewish education.

*Table 4. Evaluation Questions for the Cross-Community Evaluation*

Area of Inquiry #1: Focus on Work in Local Communities
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How and to what extent are the community-based Jewish teen education and engagement initiatives collectively achieving the goals outlined in the Shared Measures of Success?</li> <li>2. What best practices and learnings emerging from the work of these initiatives (both anticipated and unanticipated) can be applied across the communities and to other Jewish education and engagement settings?</li> <li>3. How does variability across communities influence the design, implementation and outcomes of the local community-based Jewish teen education initiatives?</li> </ol>
Area of Inquiry #2: Focus on National Support to Local Initiatives and Collaboration
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. What changes, if any, should the National Incubator for Community-Based Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Initiatives consider to improve its</li> </ol>

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effectiveness in serving the initiatives' efforts to achieve their goals?

5. What changes, if any, should the Community of Practice for Jewish Teen Education Funders consider to improve the effectiveness of the funder collaborative?
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*Key activities of the evaluation.* The proposal went on to outline key activities for the cross-community evaluator, including those mentioned in Edelsberg's email and adding the provision of advice to funders, consultants, and local evaluators. Advice could focus on aligning the timing and content of local evaluations and facilitating ongoing shared learning among funders, consultants, local evaluators, and lead implementers. Deliverables would include an evaluation plan; a set of common metrics and measurement tools to be used in local evaluations built on the Shared Measures of Success and the research of the Jewish Education Project; annual presentations to funders and consultants with recommendations for improving their effectiveness; written reports in the second and fourth years with aggregate analyses and documentation of the national efforts to support collaboration; facilitation of shared learning sessions with funders and consultants (4 sessions), lead implementers (2 sessions), and local evaluators (1 session); and ongoing one-on-one consultation with funders, consultants, and local evaluators.

The RFP spelled out audiences for the evaluation, an advisory team responsible for providing oversight to the evaluation, guidelines for the proposals, the skills and competencies required of the cross-community evaluators, a deadline for proposals of August 29, and an anticipated decision date of September 26, 2014. No budget was stipulated by the Foundation.

No mention was made of the Evaluators' Consortium in the RFP. Particular elements of the proposal raised the question of whether firms beyond the four in the Consortium would be asked or allowed to submit a proposal. The guidelines for proposals asked for, among other things, biographies of the project director and key team members, a list of previous relevant clients and a concise description of work performed, and work samples comparable in scope and purpose, presumably information already familiar to the Jim Joseph Foundation for the evaluators in the Consortium. It is possible that the Foundation wanted that information to share with others involved in selecting the firm who would not be as familiar with the members of the Evaluators' Consortium.

***Meeting to discuss the RFP.*** On August 6 the Evaluators' Consortium convened again via Google Hangout. Because of the challenges of finding a convenient time quickly, the Foundation chose a slot during which at least one member of each firm could participate. Shulman and Foundation leadership and Teen Initiative program officers attended. After acknowledging the difficult situation in Israel over the summer, Edwards provided an update on the Teen Initiative. Three local communities (Boston, Denver, and New York) had received matching funds from the Foundation and were at different points regarding their local evaluations. Denver had engaged Informing Change, Boston was crafting its RFP and planned to issue it within weeks, and New York was developing its timeline for evaluation. As Edelsberg mentioned in July to this group, the Foundation had been promoting the members of the Evaluation Consortium to the local communities. The JJF folks anticipated that because of limited capacity at the local level, each of the communities was likely to send its RFPs to two or three firms. These could include others beyond the four firms in the Consortium, and the communities would select the firm they

believe to be the best fit for the work at the local level. Through a couple of clarifying questions, the Foundation staff affirmed the possibility and perhaps advantage of a firm's serving as both the cross-community evaluator and as a local evaluator. Nothing would preclude that from happening, and because of the close working relationship that would be required between the local and cross-community evaluators, it could support the alignment of the national and local work.

Edwards acknowledged that sharing the RFP with potential evaluators in advance of its release for questions and feedback was a first-time experience for the Foundation. She expressed the Foundation's gratitude to the evaluators for sharing their expertise. The Foundation planned to incorporate what they learn into the final draft of the RFP, scheduled for distribution within the week. Evaluators pointed to the need to clarify the responsibilities and working relationship between the cross-community evaluator and the staff of the Jewish Education Project on the development of common metrics and measurement tools, as well as expectations for advising or consulting with funders and local evaluators. Edelsberg, chuckling, admitted that this was an area new to the Foundation and that any input from the evaluators about working in relationships like this would be helpful. One idea that came up was to have some sort of an advisory committee for the cross-community evaluation to perform the function of liaison among various groups involved. It was clear that in an operation that already had many layers and relationships, it was important not to make things even bigger or more complicated. The Foundation had been thinking about advisory committees for the local evaluations, and such a group could play a role similar to the one the Evaluators' Consortium had played

for the Foundation in thinking about the cross-community evaluation. Another possibility would be for the Evaluators' Consortium as a whole to serve in an advisory role.

One of the evaluators with experience conducting evaluations for the federal government recommended the separation of the roles of evaluation and technical advising that were merged in the role of the cross-community evaluator in the RFP. She also suggested that the cross-community evaluator be empowered to develop standards and templates for data collection and reporting that local evaluators would use in order to streamline the process of aggregating data. Given the timelines at the local level, this approach might not be possible or advisable. The communities were aware, however, of the expectation that they use certain common questions in their local evaluations. Their buy-in would be strengthened through playing a role in the development of the measures and tools, the process which the Jewish Education Project and the cross-community evaluator would lead—with the roles and relationship between them still to be clarified further.

Two of the evaluators shared ideas about methods for estimating the number of teens in each community and whether they could use existing data from those communities and others across the country to create a statistical model. These data could potentially be used to see change over time on particular indicators of engagement within a single community, to compare communities within the initiative, and to compare initiative communities to others. The point was raised, too, that it would be possible to gather a significant amount of valuable information (e.g., which practices and programs are working and for whom?) without knowing population totals, which might be very

difficult to determine. Some of the funders, though, might push to have this kind of information.

In concluding the meeting, Edelsberg expressed his plan to send the RFP out to all four of the firms in the Consortium and his hopes to convene the Evaluators' Consortium again in the fall and to bring representatives of the four firms along with Shulman to meet with the Foundation's directors. Beyond the fact that the work was groundbreaking, he expressed his belief that these steps could advance the work of the Foundation and build the field by influencing practice and spreading new, effective approaches. He called the conversation with the evaluators "mind-expanding," acknowledged again the uncertainty the venture of the Evaluators' Consortium has involved to date, and thanked the participants. ". . . [W]e're just frankly indebted to you. And it's a risk-taking thing. And you've all done it with pretty damn close to abandon, and I'm genuinely proud. Thank you."

**Revised RFP.** On August 11, 2014, the Foundation emailed to the four firms in the Evaluators' Consortium the final draft of the RFP for the Cross-Community Evaluation of the Community Based Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Initiative. In addition, JJF sent the proposal to two other national research/evaluation organizations. The Foundation requested that firms interested in submitting a proposal inform them by August 15, and submit the proposal by August 29. The final version of the RFP contained a number of changes from the draft, all of which reflected the feedback from the evaluators who participated in the Google Hangout the previous week.

The Foundation clarified and developed the role and responsibilities of the cross-community evaluator in working with The Jewish Education Project on the development

of shared outcomes, indicators and measurement tools. The final version spelled out the purpose of developing shared measures: “to help align local evaluation efforts and the cross-community evaluation.” Further, it delineated activities for the cross-community evaluator for each of the Jewish Education Project’s proposed stages of work in developing the common metrics and measurement tools, based on a relationship of shared responsibility. These activities included reviewing the compilation of literature; reviewing and providing input on an initial draft of Jewish learning and growth outcomes; reviewing and providing input on a facilitation guide for teen focus groups; observing selected focus groups; working with Bryfman and the Jewish Education Project team to summarize and present findings on research about what it means to be a Jewish teen today; sharing responsibility for finalizing a document of outcomes and indicators; and taking the lead in creating and piloting survey and interview questions that align with the outcomes and indicators.

In response to the question members of the Evaluation Consortium raised about providing ongoing advice to funders, consultants, and local evaluators, the final version of the RFP described anticipated work to include defining the relationship between the cross community evaluator and key participants in the initiative, sharing research knowledge with them, setting the standards for data reporting, and helping to support the use of shared measurement tools. A related task, newly established in the final draft, was the preparation of a master timeline to include all the local evaluations.

The final RFP presented a more fully developed version of the Cross Community Evaluation Advisory Team and its function. The newly formulated team would add two to three members from the funders’ collaborative to the original four members

representing the Foundation staff, the Jewish Education Project, and the national consultant. Its role, now articulated in the document, would be “to guide the evaluation design and implementation to ensure that the work is consistent with the goals and meets the information needs of key stakeholders.” The cross community evaluator would have responsibility for convening the team at key times throughout the evaluation process. In addition to the advisory team, two members of the Foundation staff would make up an “Evaluation Core Team.” They would be the main contacts for the cross community evaluator, providing oversight and guidance, input on meeting agendas, and doing advanced reviews of drafts of written documents.

**Hiring evaluators for the Teen Initiative.** By mid-September the Jim Joseph Foundation awarded a four year contract in an amount of just over a million dollars for the cross community evaluation of the Teen Initiative to a collaborative team made up of two members of the Evaluators’ Consortium—American Institutes of Research (AIR) and Rosov Consulting. The plans also included a consulting role for Steven M. Cohen, another member of the Consortium (Edelsberg, personal communication, September 18, 2014). Echoing the criterion for inclusion in the Consortium that firms bring distinctive strengths to evaluation work, the cover letter of the proposal asserted that the proposed national evaluation team would use their collective expertise in “Jewish identity, Jewish education, research methods, synthesizing and reporting on research and evaluation studies, and supporting communities of practice (AIR, August 29, 2014).

**Project budget.** The approved budget exceeded the budget guidelines in the RFP by over \$250,000. Schneider and Rosov, Co-Principal Investigators for the evaluation, explained that the evaluation constitutes three inter-locking projects—the impact study

based on collection and analysis of data across communities, development & use of measures of Jewish growth and identity in teens, and coordinating and supporting the many parties engaged in the initiative nationwide (Schneider & Rosov, August 29, 2014). In their calculation of the number of hours required to carry out all three strands of the evaluation effectively, the evaluators concluded that more time was needed than the RFP allowed. They recommended that the Foundation fund the evaluation at a higher rate in order to cover the entire scope of the project for the greatest benefit to all parties involved.

### **The End of Round One**

The awarding of the contract to a national team of evaluators came just two weeks before the anniversary of the Evaluators' Consortium first meeting at the Jim Joseph Foundation offices in San Francisco on September 30, 2013. Starting as an experiment whose outcomes were loosely defined, the members of the Consortium met one another, shared their work on evaluation, and guided the staff of the Foundation in their thinking about Jewish growth and how to measure it. Over the course of the year, members of the Consortium developed relationships with one another sufficient for three of the four firms to establish a national evaluation team to which the Foundation awarded a contract for one of its most ambitious initiatives for engaging and educating teens in collaboration with funders across North America. The engagement of the fourth firm by one of the local communities guaranteed that members of all four firms will work together in the four years ahead. Another meeting of the Evaluators' Consortium is scheduled for March, 2015.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings in this chapter derive from analyses of interviews with Jim Joseph Foundation staff and board members, interviews of participants in the Evaluators' Consortium, observations of telephone meetings and in-person convenings, and public and private documents. The chapter examines the story of the Evaluators' Consortium in its larger context: the Jim Joseph Foundation's approach to the practice and use of evaluation. It frames both the general approach and the particular initiative in light of the literature on foundations and evaluation.

#### **Evaluation Practices of the Jim Joseph Foundation and the Literature on Evaluation Practice in Foundations**

The Jim Joseph Foundation in its practice and use of evaluation appears to be bucking trends in the larger foundation community in the United States. Even before putting the unique Evaluators' Consortium into place, the Foundation's approach to evaluation was and continues to be distinctive in the foundation sector.

#### **Board Commitment to Evaluation**

Like other foundations, the Jim Joseph Foundation espouses the need for evaluation and the information evaluation yields. From the Foundation's inception, the board committed to including evaluation as an ongoing part of the work it funded. The consultants who guided the Foundation in establishing itself advocated for the need for evaluation and explained its value. Dennis Barrie, one of the consultants and then VP of Policy Research at SRI, explained to the Foundation that evaluation is a tool "to enable the Foundation to learn, measure goals, stay on mission, realize vision and achieve impact" (quoted by Edelsberg, opening remarks to Evaluators' Consortium, September

30, 2013). By 2006 evaluation was becoming more widely established as a value in the foundation sector. Unlike more established foundations, the new foundation's practices could reflect the zeitgeist and did not need to overcome established habits or practices that hindered the support of evaluation.

The board of the Foundation has raised questions about the amount of money they are spending on evaluation and wants to know that there is learning from evaluation. While demanding to understand the value of evaluation to their work, the board continues to support spending on evaluation. Since the Foundation's inception they have invested nearly \$9 million in evaluation, representing 2.8% of granted dollars.

### **Evaluation and Goals**

One of the reasons foundations have difficulty with evaluation is that they often lack clarity about their own goals (Ostrower, 2004; Patrizi & Thompson, 2010). The Jim Joseph Foundation's clarity about its goals may be related to its commitment to evaluation. The Foundation has a clear set of strategic priorities<sup>29</sup> and all of their grants align with one of these three strategic directions. The website displays theories of change and logic models for each of the strategic directions. JJF biannual reports exhibit quantitative data reflecting the numbers of educators trained and the numbers of youth and young adults served in sponsored initiatives for each of their strategies (Jim Joseph Foundation, 2014). The board's desire to understand more about evaluation and goal attainment is reflected in its commissioning of Lee Shulman's report on evaluation. One of the proposals that emerged from Shulman's report is to examine learning across Foundation grants, an effort that could further such understanding. The Foundation's

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<sup>29</sup> The strategic priorities of the Foundation are (1) to increase the number and quality of Jewish Educators; (2) to expand effective Jewish learning for youth and young adults; and (3) to build a strong field of Jewish Education.

support of development of common measures of Jewish growth through the Teen Initiative is another effort to clarify the goals of the Foundation and its grantees and to conduct effective evaluations.

### **Leadership and Staff Commitment to Evaluation**

The literature on evaluation in foundations has uncovered ambivalence about evaluation among foundation leaders. Patrizi and Sedway (2006) discovered that many leaders do not see evaluation as part of the foundation's core business of making grants. At the Jim Joseph Foundation, program officers and professional leaders perceive the Foundation's work on evaluation as central to their own work. They are involved in creating RFP's for evaluations and work with grantees and evaluators to establish evaluation questions and evaluation plans. They engage with the evaluator and grantee in developing program theories of change and logic models. They serve as liaisons between evaluators and grantees. The practice of giving large multi-year grants may also enable the staff members of the Foundation to devote more time to evaluation.

**The personal factor.** The nature of the program staff's involvement in evaluation calls to mind Michael Quinn Patton's *personal factor*. Patton (2008), in the revised version of his classic work on utilization-focused evaluation, defines the personal factor as "the presence of an identifiable individual or group of people who personally care about the evaluation and the findings it generates" (p. 66). According to Patton, the key element determining impact of evaluation is the personal factor. The Jim Joseph Foundation, by distributing responsibility for evaluation to all program personnel, embeds the personal factor into its structure. In their weekly meetings with Executive

Director, Chip Edelsberg, program officers report on what they are learning from the grants they oversee. One source of learning is the evaluation of the grants.

The learning from evaluation not only influences the program officers' work with the particular project; it also influences their thinking on other grants. Edelsberg's regular communication with evaluators and with the staff about evaluation reflect Patton's personal factor, as well. As one evaluator said,

It's really rare to have the Executive Director of a foundation himself engaged in so many conversations with us and the grantees in person. So his level of involvement and the fact that he's always in the loop and knows what's going on, and the frequency in (sic) which [the program officer] updates him and seeks his advice—it's just amazing. (Evaluator 4 interview, 1/6/14)

Other efforts by Edelsberg are indicators of the personal factor at work. The messages he communicates internally and externally about evaluation, his support for funding evaluation, his collaboration on a report by Shulman to review and improve the Foundation's work on evaluation, his interest in reading about and then participating in a doctoral study about evaluation at the Foundation, and the commitment to the practice and use of evaluation at the Jim Joseph Foundation point to an evaluation champion in the organization.

**The interpersonal factor.** Recent evaluation literature identifies a concept related to the personal factor, one that also helps to deepen understanding of the Foundation's practice of evaluation—the *interpersonal factor*. According to King and Stevahn (2013), the interpersonal factor involves two practices for evaluators: “(a) interact[ing] with people constructively throughout framing and implementing of evaluation studies and (b)

creat[ing] activities and conditions conducive to positive interactions among evaluation participants” (p. 6). The interpersonal factor addresses the buy-in of participants in the evaluation and the planning and management of interpersonal dynamics over its course.

In reflecting on the capacities of evaluators the Foundation holds in esteem, members of the staff included the ability to work sensitively and effectively with both grantees and with the Foundation staff. One program officer described the work by an evaluator in one of the firms in the Evaluators’ Consortium in helping develop a theory of change and logic model with a grantee that had no prior experience doing so. She explained that the evaluator was able both to get the participants to contribute to a useful product and to use impressive “people skills.” The evaluator helped “tease out the different elements [of the theory of change] and get what they needed done but also without in a threatening way with the grantee which I think is a really an art not a science” (Interview, Staff Member 4, 11/13/13).

Staff members described the work another evaluation firm did to facilitate conversation and even collaboration among grantees from different institutions who were part of the same funded initiative. Reviewing his work with a member of the Consortium, a program officer exclaimed, “The first time I worked on a project with them and understood what it meant to work with an evaluator at the level or standard at which they operate, for me was like wow, this is what it can be like to have somebody really good who really guides the process and really listens and is really responsive” (Interview, Staff Member 5, 11/22/13). Evaluators plan and manage their work with grantees and program officers. To succeed according to the standards of the Foundation, they must communicate regularly with their contacts in the Foundation and with the

grantees. During the evaluation process it is this communication that helps Foundation staff, as one program officer explained, “to understand how [the program] is working and what the successes are and what the challenges are” (Interview, Staff Member 3, 11/13/13). The three-party structure for evaluation thus extends the functioning of the interpersonal factor.

Foundation staff provided examples in which evaluators’ inability to understand and work with grantees or their insensitivity to needs of the Foundation led to poor experiences and to shifting evaluators or evaluation firms. In one case the contracted evaluation firm agreed to switch the lead evaluator on a project. According to the program officer, a significant part of the problem was that the original evaluator was “not. . . able to speak the grantees’ language. . . [or bring] the right level of . . . emotional intelligence to the conversation” (Interview, Staff Member 4, 11/13/13).

The interpersonal factor is evident, also, among Foundation staff members in their roles in the evaluation process. Program officers are involved in helping grantees, many of whom have limited experience in evaluation, understand its purposes and benefits. One program officer explained that he developed insight through experience about the kind of guidance he should provide about evaluation to support grantees:

It’s really useful from the beginning of a project to help people understand the full expectations of what the arc of the process is going to be, what’s the prize at the end, how you’re going to be able to use it, what you’re going to want to do when you get that final report. (Interview, Staff Member 5, 11/22/13)

Program officers manage the development of the RFP, and they participate in interviewing and selecting the evaluator. One program officer explained the importance

of engaging the grantees in the hiring of evaluators in order to begin the building of trust between them. Program officers communicate with evaluators throughout the process, providing guidance and insuring that the firm is working according to the expectations of the Foundation and that the process is going well. Program officers described this aspect of their work as challenging and complicated.

### **Foundation as Evaluation Client**

A noteworthy difference between the Jim Joseph Foundation and other foundations in their approach to the evaluation of funded programs is that the board and staff of the Foundation are the evaluation client. In most foundation-funded programs in which evaluation is conducted, grantees are responsible for doing their own evaluation or hiring external evaluators to do the work. Many foundations stipulate a percentage of the grant they expect to be spent on evaluation. By relieving the grantee of the responsibility of paying for evaluation out of the grant, the Foundation lessens the probability that grantees will see evaluation as a resource drain and potentially resent the amount of money being spent on it.

This level of involvement by the staff of the Foundation in the evaluation process jettisons problems other foundations encounter when they require their nonprofit grantees to conduct evaluation. Recent research has demonstrated that foundations often have an unrealistic idea about the kind and extent of assessment possible by nonprofits, especially given their limited financial resources and evaluation skills and knowledge (Brock, Buteau, & Herring, 2012). As evaluation clients, program officers at JJF work with grantees to shape the Request for Proposals for the grant's evaluation and to select the evaluator. The program officers play a role in early stages of the evaluation process,

working alongside the grantee to develop a program theory and logic model. Program officers generally communicate with the evaluator on a regular basis while the evaluation is conducted, providing feedback on instruments and troubleshooting. Program officers are the first to see the evaluation reports when they are complete. By working alongside the grantee and external evaluator, program officers have a more realistic idea about what grantees know about evaluation and know they can rely on the external evaluator for various evaluation needs.

It is possible that the three-way partnership exacerbates the power imbalance between the grantee and the Foundation. Even though the Foundation and the grantee partner to create the RFP and select an evaluator, in most cases the Foundation staff takes the lead. Grantees typically have less experience with evaluation, and some defer to the Foundation on account of their experience. That deference may also reflect the power differential the grantees perceive. According to one evaluator, grantees are sometimes more uneasy about the relationship with the Foundation than in situations where the grantee contracts with the evaluator directly, with more concern on the part of the grantees about the possibility that they will lose funding on the basis of weak findings about their program in the evaluation. The fact that evaluators submit their reports to the staff of the Foundation for feedback before sharing them with the grantee is an indicator of unequal roles in the partnership.

Another challenging aspect of the three-way partnership is the time demands it places on the program staff of the Foundation. The responsibilities for evaluation on the part of the program officers contribute to an already heavy load for this small staff. The type of management the program staff does takes the Foundation in a direction it does not

want to head, and which the Executive Director says they are not equipped to do—becoming an operating foundation.

### **Transparency**

The literature on foundations and evaluation points to the fact that the majority of foundations, even ones that collect data about their work and require evaluations of their grantees, do not share broadly the lessons they learn from their work (Glasspockets, 2014). The Jim Joseph Foundation, while not listed on the Glasspockets' website, has made a practice of sharing on its website the majority of the evaluation reports it commissions. The Foundation, in its strategic priorities, is committed to building the field of Jewish education. The sharing of evaluation reports is one way in which the Foundation contributes its learning to the field of Jewish education at large.

The commitment to knowledge sharing is unusual and has the potential to create tension with grantees, especially in cases where the evaluation yields “bad news” on a project. The Foundation needs to walk a fine line between being open and transparent about the work it supports and maintaining trusting relationships with the grantees. In cases where grantees might feel embarrassed, the Foundation sometimes withholds the report from the website. There may, however, be differences in perspective between the grantee and the Foundation about what qualifies as embarrassing or uncomfortable. One evaluator pointed to a case in which a grantee went along with the Foundation's desire to share a report. Had the grantee been left to make the decision, they would not have shared it.

## **Cultural Fit with Evaluators**

Patrizi and Sedway (2006) describe a challenge in the foundation sector in which the style and approach of evaluators do not align with the style and culture of foundations. While the Jim Joseph Foundation has experienced this trend, they have also taken steps to circumvent it. The program officers and staff leadership at the Jim Joseph Foundation described the phenomenon of evaluator misalignment in their work with individuals, firms, and academic researchers. Problems included the evaluators' discomfort with the level of engagement of the Foundation staff with evaluation, their failure to understand the Foundation's expectation for regular communication, the quality of reports, and their difficulty working interpersonally with the grantees. In several instances the Foundation terminated their involvement with particular evaluators either in the middle of a contract or after it ended because the "fit" with the Foundation was not right.

Developing good working relationships with evaluators that produce both high-quality evaluation processes and useful results requires a significant investment of time and effort on the part of the program officers. In many cases their investments have paid off, leading to outstanding experiences with evaluators who produce work of great value to the Foundation. It is not surprising, therefore, that the staff embraced the idea of working with a group of "preferred evaluators," an arrangement that would save time, assure a cultural fit, and generate work that meets the Foundation's standards.

## **A Commitment to and a Culture of Learning**

The regard for evaluation at the Jim Joseph Foundation is related to the Foundation's regard for learning. Its mission, to foster compelling, effective Jewish

learning experiences among young Jews, is about learning. One of its four core values is “the importance of Jewish learning.” All three strategic priorities are linked to learning: to increase the number and quality of Jewish educators; to expand effective Jewish learning for youth and young adults; and to build a strong field of Jewish education. The Foundation’s resources are granted in order to support education and knowledge building.

Beyond the focus on education in its grant-making, though, the Foundation’s organizational culture both expects and prizes learning. The staff studies Jewish texts together with a local teacher.<sup>30</sup> The decision to allow a doctoral student to study an experimental evaluation initiative (Evaluators’ Consortium) was another reflection of the Foundation’s commitment to inquiry and learning.

**Chief Learning Officer.** Edelsberg demonstrates a fierce commitment to learning himself and demonstrates that commitment in public by sharing insights he has derived from his reading of literature on education, the social sciences, and philanthropy. He sets the expectation for the staff, grantees, and evaluators to be engaged in learning and sharing their learning with the public. In weekly meetings between the Executive Director and each of the program officers, Edelsberg asks them to report to him on what is happening in the portfolio of grants they manage, and, as Edelsberg said, “What’s most interesting to both of us is what they’re learning” (Interview, 1/2/14). Members of the Foundation staff learn from grantees and their initiatives through the ongoing contact they have and the relationships they build over time (Edelsberg, 2013). In closing the second convening of the Evaluators’ Consortium, Edelsberg said, “There’s an expectation

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<sup>30</sup> The communal study of texts is a central feature of Jewish religious life. The practice has migrated into secular settings, and is now a common element of Jewish culture more broadly. It is common for staff members in Jewish institutions to study together to enrich their Jewish knowledge. Sometimes the “text” used is an historic Jewish text (a selection from the Bible or Talmud, for example) but in secular settings the text might be an article on philosophy of education or demographic trends.

that people here will learn continuously and enhance their grantmaking skills with the hope that the cumulative effect of the individual learning can help accomplish philanthropic sophistication.”

**Learning from evaluation.** The process and results of evaluation are a source of significant learning at the Foundation. Program officers provided examples of applying learning from evaluations to their work with potential grantees on proposals to the Foundation. Having learned, one program officer said, that longer-term, intensive professional development is more effective than episodic training in improving educators’ practice or that one-on-one mentoring is effective for the improvement of practice among day school teachers, he has encouraged others to consider those models for their programs. He has rejected inquiries from organizations that do not incorporate these practices.

Another evaluation yielded learning about the effectiveness of peer-to-peer engagement and its value as an alternative or complement to group experiential learning. That insight from the evaluation of a JJF-funded program for Hillel has had an impact on the Foundation’s work with other grantees. Staff Member 5 said,

We learned that in our Hillel evaluation and we have pursued that strategy with other grantees. We now have a portfolio of grantees of that are doing relationship-based engagement or peer to peer engagement based on exactly what we learned from our work with Hillel, and frankly what I think others learned from the evaluation we published of Hillel. (Interview, 11/22/13)

Other staff member cited examples of working with evaluators and grantees to use findings from evaluation for program improvement. Evaluation, though, is only one source of learning.

**Potential for growth.** Staff members acknowledged that there is room for growth in learning from evaluation. Another program officer reported that the Foundation could do much better at extracting lessons and applying them across the organization in other contexts, perhaps by reviewing the evaluations as a full staff team. Board members also raised questions about the possibility of learning across programs and evaluations the Foundation had supported. Shulman identified opportunities for expanding both the kind of learning the Foundation could do from its evaluation work and its sharing of that learning with the broader fields of Jewish education and philanthropy. In describing the report he did for the Foundation, Shulman said,

. . . [H]ow could they ratchet up the quality and direction of those evaluations so the evaluation studies that were done were not only of the highest quality in asking how well individual programs had worked, for whom and under what circumstances, but do so in a way that would produce the kind of durable evidence and usable knowledge? (Interview 12/31/13)

The Evaluators' Consortium was an effort to expand learning through evaluation.

### **A Sense of Responsibility and Leadership**

The culture of learning is entwined with the Foundation's sense of its position in the field of Jewish education and responsibilities for leadership derived from that position. Based on assets and amount of annual giving, the Jim Joseph Foundation is the largest private supporter of Jewish education in the United States. While it is a young

foundation, established in 2006, its level of activity and the magnitude of its giving have brought its work to the attention of the Jewish world. The staff and board, while wanting to give deference to the humility of their benefactor, also recognize a responsibility to take a leadership role in the field by providing usable knowledge for others from the work they have supported. One of their strategic priorities is building the field of Jewish education. Thought leaders in the Jewish community such as Lee Shulman and Steven Cohen have encouraged them to extend their reach and involvement in the area of field building.

*Sharing learning as leadership practice.* The Jim Joseph Foundation demonstrates its commitment to field building and leadership by disseminating learning to a wider public. The Foundation's program staff shares its learning through publishing reflections on practice on the Foundation's website and publication in the electronic news source, *eJewish Philanthropy*.<sup>31</sup> In this forum and in interviews, members of the staff and evaluators have pointed to Edelsberg as the driving force behind this approach. Departing staff member Adene Sachs (2012) quipped in a blogpost about Edelsberg's attitude toward learning: "Given how much my boss, Chip Edelsberg, values learning in public, he asked me to write a reflective piece that should perhaps have been titled Confessions of Jim Joseph Foundation Employee Number 4." She went on to distill a set of operating assumptions that responded to the question: What have we learned that guides our thinking about the future? Ten months into the Teen Initiative the lead program officer for the grant, Josh Miller (2014), published a piece in *eJewish*

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<sup>31</sup> *eJewish Philanthropy* describes itself as electronic bulletin board and an instant publishing channel. Its purpose is to highlight news in the world of Jewish philanthropy, to distribute thought pieces on issues facing the community, and to share information on strategies for managing and promoting nonprofit organizations.

*Philanthropy* about the Teen Initiative, highlighting the insights the Foundation had developed from their work. These included the need to customize the initiative around the local community's needs, the importance of trust, the value of involving stakeholders, and the time it takes for effective collaboration. The leadership of the Foundation hopes that by sharing the work of grantees and the learning derived from their work, they may influence other funders to support these organizations and others doing similar work.

### **Evaluation and Decision Making**

A common challenge in foundations is using evaluation results for decision making. Stumbling blocks include differences between evaluation timelines and cycles of grantmaking (Patrizi & Sedway, 2006; Patrizi & Thompson, 2010). In contrast to this phenomenon, the Jim Joseph Foundation board has made several funding decisions based on evaluation findings. In one case, the Foundation decided to fund a second iteration of an initiative because of the evaluation of the first round. In another case, the board defunded a program because, as the staff member explained, "The project was not yielding the kind of outcomes or wasn't having the kind of outcomes that we had anticipated and that were part of the proposal" (Interview, Staff Member 2, 11/13/13).

### **Relationships with Grantees**

A key to effective evaluation practice in the foundation sector is the relationship between funders and grantees (Tierney & Fleishman, 2011). A number of studies point to the role of a shared definition of success or goals that are strategically aligned as a factor in positive relationships (Bolduc, Buchanan, & Huang, 2004; Buteau, Buchanan, & Chu, 2010; Kimball & Koppell, 2011; Tierney & Fleishman, 2011). The process of JJF staff and grantees' working together with an external evaluator to create a theory of change

and logic model of foundation-funded initiatives support the development of shared definitions of success between the Foundation and grantees. These efforts to foster productive relationships are consistent with the interpersonal factor.

**Shared goals and productive working relationships.** Tierney and Fleishman (2011) conceptualize the grantee-funder relationship as a matrix using the element of shared goals along with productive working relationships. The four kinds of connections between funders and grantees in their matrix, depicted in Figure 11, are: Train Wreck (opposing goals, dysfunctional relationships); Amiable Association (opposing goals and a productive working relationship); Forced March (shared goals, dysfunctional relationship), and Partnership (shared goals, productive working relationship). It was beyond the scope of this research to inquire of grantees about working relationships. Edelsberg reported on some of the results from the Foundation's first use of the Center for Effective Philanthropy's Grantee Perception Report, conducted for the Foundation in 2010. The Jim Joseph Foundation's grantees had one of the highest response rates and most favorable set of responses in the history of the instrument's use by the Center for Effective Philanthropy.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The Foundation recently engaged CEP to do a new round of data collection and reporting about grantee perceptions. These results were not available to me.

Shared Goals	High	Forced March	Partnership
	Low	Train Wreck	Amiable Association
		Low	High
		Productive relationship	

*Figure 11.* Conceptualization of the donor-grantee relationship (Tierney & Fleishman, 2011, p. 188).

**Perspectives of program officers and evaluators.** Comments by program officers and evaluators, though, indicated that working relationships between Foundation staff and grantees are generally perceived as productive. The program officers and grantees collaborate in selecting the project evaluator. One evaluator reported on interviewing grantees about their experiences with the Foundation and said that those grantees found JJF staff accessible and helpful. The Foundation leadership and staff espouse respect for grantees. One program officer in talking about the use of evaluation said, “Our philosophy is our grantees already know a lot; they’re the experts at doing their work” (Interview, Staff Member 3, 11/13/13).

**Predictors of strong relationships.** Foundation research has demonstrated that certain factors predict strong relationships between funder and grantee, including understanding of funded organizations’ goals and strategies, understanding the field, and initiating and having appropriate frequency of contact (Buteau, Buchanan, & Chu, 2010). Many of these factors are present at the Jim Joseph Foundation. Because the Foundation

gives large grants, it gives to a limited number of grantees, giving program officers fewer relationships to develop and allowing more time for each one. As Edelsberg explained,

For the lion's share of the foundation's philanthropy, we're dealing with a relatively limited number of grantees, so we do this radical thing. We talk with them. We open a conversation with them. We continue a conversation with them. We bring them into contact with the evaluators and sit with them with the evaluators. That's how it works. (Interview, 1/2/14)

One evaluator testified to Edelsberg's knowledge of the field and its organizations saying,

He's intimately knowledgeable about what they're doing. . . And maybe it's because they have such a clear policy focus and such a clear intellectual focus it's easy for him to grasp everything that's going on, but he's obviously incredibly knowledgeable about the field. He knows . . . people every place in the field. (Interview, Evaluator 5, 12/16/13)

**Relational philanthropy.** Edelsberg has both written and spoken to groups about the Foundation's aspiration to do "relational philanthropy," which he distinguishes from transactional grantmaking. A transactional approach, the common approach among foundation funders, involves letters of inquiry, proposals from nonprofits, consideration of proposals by staff and board, awarding of grants, grant payments and written reporting by grantees. Notwithstanding the accomplishments of this approach, Edelsberg finds it can hamper effectiveness. He writes, "It tends to perpetuate a counterproductive funder/grantee power imbalance, mitigates against long-term investment in worthy projects, and deprives the field of crucial lessons learned"

(2012, p.2). Drawing on the work of Skloot and others, Edelsberg explains relational philanthropy as an approach founded on trust, mutually agreed-upon goals, and shared responsibility; focused on learning and knowledge-building through the integration of multiple perspectives; and characterized by active listening, networking, and sharing information, candor, and sincerity (Edelsberg, 2012).

These data suggest, at least from the perspective of the Foundation staff and evaluators, that relationships between JJF and their grantees are what Tierney and Fleishman consider partnerships. Additional data from grantees and more information about specific grantees, initiatives, and program officers would be necessary to draw that conclusion definitively.

### **The Evaluators' Consortium**

The Evaluators' Consortium began as an experiment, something Edelsberg labeled "a risk" the Foundation was taking. He did not know whether it would work, or even what "working" might look like. Almost a year to the day after the Consortium met for the first time, the Foundation awarded a four year contract for just over \$1 million to a collaborative of two of the four participating firms and one individual scholar-evaluator who had participated in the Consortium. What factors enabled this experiment to happen and to produce such an outcome?

### **The Personal and Interpersonal Factors**

The personal and interpersonal factors appear in the evaluation literature in the context of the planning, implementation, and use of evaluation studies (King & Stevahn, 2013; Patton, 2008). To date these constructs have been used to analyze evaluators and their conducting of evaluations. The use of the constructs in the context of an evaluation

initiative designed to support, strengthen, and move forward a foundation's evaluation practice extends their application in the field of evaluation. In the data collected in the case study of the Evaluators' Consortium, there is a strong presence of both factors, and each one contributes to understanding the initiative and what it has accomplished thus far. Absent these factors it may have been impossible to establish such a model.

**The Personal Factor.** In its original context, the personal factor refers to an evaluation champion, someone who cares deeply about an evaluation and its findings, and whose personal commitment to the evaluation increases the likelihood of the evaluation's effect on an organization (Patton, 2008). As Patton writes, "[W]here such a person or group was present, evaluations were used; where the personal factor was absent, there was a correspondingly marked absence of evaluation impact" (p. 66). Data from the case study on the Evaluators' Consortium indicate that the personal factor was critical in both launching and developing the work of the Consortium.

***Edelsberg and the personal factor.*** The idea for the Evaluators' Consortium emerged from the report on evaluation at the Jim Joseph Foundation produced by Lee Shulman in October, 2012. The report included a number of recommendations and possible directions in which the Foundation might move to enhance its practice and use of evaluation. Not all of the recommendations could be addressed at once; this one was the greatest departure from conventional evaluation practice in this Foundation or any other. Edelsberg advocated for the Consortium before the board and got their approval to launch the experiment. Getting their approval meant moving the board in a direction they had not gone before with evaluation. At the first convening Edelsberg referred to the meeting as a "watershed event." By establishing the Consortium, the "Foundation ha[d]

taken a step beyond its practice of giving competitively bid, independent, third party evaluations.”

Edelsberg demonstrated a commitment to the initiative while at the same time worrying about whether it could actually be implemented. There were logistical challenges. In a telephone conversation in April, 2013, he reported that they hoped to launch the initiative by the end of May. When that timeline did not work, they tried twice to find dates over the summer for the first gathering. Because they wanted to have all the evaluators present, they had to delay the start of the initiative until the end of September. Edelsberg also recognized some of the potential pitfalls of bringing together a group like this. Enumerating them publically at the first convening—positioning, posturing, unwillingness to share, unrealistic demands on time for meetings, and preparation—he also said that he had discussed them beforehand with each of the evaluators. In responding to a question from one of the evaluators about the time horizon for “this experiment,” Edelsberg admitted, “I have a good deal of professional anxiety about this. It’s experimental.” At both the first and second convenings he talked about the venture’s risky nature. On a number of occasions, in the process of arranging to study the Consortium for this dissertation, Edelsberg asked me what I would do about my research if the initiative fell apart.

Edelsberg also saw in the Consortium the potential for great benefit to the Foundation. Through this initiative he hoped to establish a more efficient practice for hiring evaluators, to explore the possibility of doing cluster evaluations, to consider meta-analysis of existing evaluations of Foundation grants, and to improve the Foundation’s overall approach to evaluation (Letter of invitation to evaluators, 2013). At the first

gathering Edelsberg reiterated these and added the hopes for building relationships and for supporting deeper thinking about and learning from evaluation—for the Foundation as an organization and for the members of its professional staff.

Edelsberg had support in moving the Evaluators' Consortium forward. Sandy Edwards, the Foundation's Associate Director, played an ongoing role in thinking about and planning for it. Without Edelsberg's drive to make it happen, though, his championing of the initiative, it is unlikely it would have come to fruition.

**The Interpersonal Factor.** When King and Stevahn (2013) outline the components of the interpersonal factor, they do so in the context of individual evaluation studies. The interpersonal factor focuses on an evaluator's ability to work with people to frame and implement the evaluation process and to structure activities and facilitate interactions among evaluation participants. In their words the interpersonal factor is about "buy-in among participants and a valid evaluation process" (p.6). In the development and implementation of the Evaluators' Consortium both Edelsberg and Shulman demonstrated the interpersonal factor.

***The first component: Constructive interactions throughout the framing and implementation of the process.*** In the spring of 2013, before the Jim Joseph Foundation sent a formal letter to the "preferred evaluators" inviting them to participate in the Consortium, Edelsberg engaged in conversation with each of the evaluators. He talked to some in person and some by phone. In these conversations and in a letter he sent to them in May, Edelsberg made a case to them for the value of participating in the initiative. Doing so was made more challenging by the fact that he could not offer to compensate them for their time. Neither could he, in those months prior to the launch, provide

definitive information about the timeline of the initiative, the specific demands it would place on the evaluators, or its outcomes. And while he could offer a special status for the evaluators as “preferred,” that status involved no guarantees or commitments for contracts with the Foundation. Edelsberg explained to the evaluators that their participation was an opportunity for business development, for deepening relationships with the Foundation, and for learning and improving evaluation practice. He also promised that he and Shulman would communicate with them to solicit their input on the agendas for the gatherings. All four firms that were invited to participate in the Evaluators’ Consortium accepted the invitation. One evaluator, when asked why he decided to participate in the initiative, remarked, “I like Chip. I like working with him. . . . I feel loyalty to Chip and if this is something that’s important and he needs I’m going to try to help him” (Interview, Evaluator 5, 12/16/13).

*Goals.* At the first gathering of the Evaluators’ Consortium, the precise goals and outcomes for the initiative had not yet been determined. The Foundation had broad goals in mind for the Consortium, but not specific ones. As a way of demonstrating respect for the evaluators and engaging them in the initiative, Edelsberg invited them to participate in shaping its goals. As an experimental initiative, having emergent goals seemed fitting. Ironically, this approach to goal setting may have worked at cross-purposes with fostering relationships and interdependence. In interviews with the evaluators after the first convening some of them talked about their hope for greater clarity on goals and their discomfort with not knowing how long the process would take.

*During the initiative.* Cultivating relationships with the evaluators continued throughout the year and was evident during the face-to-face gatherings of the group and

in the communication that occurred in between. At the first convening Edelsberg's opening remarks focused on trust, the importance of candor and sincerity, and the need for humility in relational philanthropy in general and in the work of the Evaluators' Consortium in particular.

Following the first convening, Edelsberg spoke to the evaluators and reported getting a range of responses from them. Their honesty demonstrated a fairly significant amount of trust. As Edelsberg described it the reactions were "positive but mixed. A sense of, from some, elation, like, 'Wow! This is so incredibly cool that we're doing this!' to others saying, 'Well, I hope I'm going to get the contract for the teen education/engagement [initiative].'" He noted, as well, that all the participants planned to return for the second convening.

Edelsberg communicated regularly with the evaluators by email in the months in between gatherings.<sup>33</sup> He also encouraged the participants to communicate with him if they had questions or concerns. One series of emails, initiated by Edelsberg on October 31, 2013, asked the evaluators to respond to proposed plans for the second gathering. Edelsberg sought their feedback on the topic, on the possibility of including experts on the topic to participate, and on the particular experts who might be invited. The Foundation set up a Google doc to allow the evaluators to submit their ideas.

After the second convening Edelsberg kept the evaluators in the Consortium apprised of the developments in the Teen Initiative and the Funders' Community of Practice. Prior to the March face-to-face meeting of the Funders' Community of

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<sup>33</sup> Edelsberg spends considerable time tending to relationships. He calls and meets with scholars, board members, evaluators and other consultants. Sometimes these meetings are related to specific projects that are in progress, but they are not always related to particular projects. This cultivation of relationships is not unique to the work on the Consortium.

Practice, Edelsberg shared a document with the evaluators prepared by the leader of the incubator on measuring Jewish growth in teens, invited their responses, and promised to incorporate their feedback into it. In May, about a month and a half after the meeting of the CoP, Edelsberg shared two documents with the Consortium—Informing Change’s recommendations for evaluating the Teen Initiative and Bryfman’s proposal for developing outcome measures for Jewish growth in teens— and invited the evaluators to a Google Hangout to discuss them. Edelsberg tended to cultivating relationships by reminding the evaluators that he was promoting them to the local communities for their evaluation work. The follow-up to the call, in which suggestions and concerns from the Hangout were incorporated into the development of the cross-community evaluation RFP, were further evidence of respecting these evaluators and their work. Likewise, the Foundation made changes to the RFP after inviting and receiving feedback from the evaluators in another Google Hangout in August.

Before and during the first year of the Evaluators’ Consortium, Edelsberg demonstrated the first component of the interpersonal factor. His regular telephone and email communication with the evaluators and the opportunities he provided for feedback and input on the process were efforts to create positive interactions throughout the framing and implementation of the initiative.

***The second component: Creating activities and conditions conducive to positive interactions.*** One of the goals of the initiative was to cultivate relationships among the evaluators and between the evaluators and the Foundation while working to improve the Foundation’s evaluation practice. The Foundation leadership communicated this message in written correspondence and in addressing the group face to face. Prior to the first

convening of the Consortium in the fall of 2013, some of the evaluators knew each other and had crossed paths professionally. None of the evaluators knew all of the others.

While two of the firms had collaborated on a project for the Foundation, none had worked together on an evaluation before—for the Jim Joseph Foundation or otherwise.

Shulman, Edelsberg, and Edwards worked together on planning the schedule of activities for the convenings of the Evaluators' Consortium, many of which were designed to build relationships among the evaluators. At the beginning of the first convening on September 30, 2013, there was a structured period for personal sharing so people could get to know each other better. At both convenings each firm made a presentation to showcase its work, to demonstrate its approaches, and to pose questions to the group. There were unstructured breaks throughout both of the days of each convening, and each day included a catered meal. At meals there was no formal work agenda, and during breaks and meals the evaluators had opportunities to talk to one another and to Foundation staff members.

All of the evaluators participated continually throughout the conversations at the convenings. After an initial presentation by one evaluator, Shulman (the facilitator) and the other evaluators asked questions about both the programs and the evaluations and offered feedback and critiques of the methodologies used in the evaluation studies presented. In nearly all the presentations and the discussions that followed them at both convenings, the members of the staff were quiet; for the most part they listened and did not speak. The presentations, along with the questions and responses, provided opportunities for self-disclosure and for participants—at least the evaluators—to become more familiar with one another.

It is not clear that the mode of discourse cultivated trusting relationships. The discussion resembled a university graduate seminar or academic conference, characterized by scholarly repartee. Some participants seemed to have no reservations about speaking or expressing their opinions; they seemed accustomed to this type of exchange. Others, like the program officers, appeared hesitant to participate. It is likely that there were differing degrees of comfort with the style of the conversation. One participant expressed privately some discomfort about the criticism others offered, especially because that evaluator had specifically asked for a different kind of input from these new colleagues. As facilitator, Shulman may have assumed a level of trust or comfort that was not present for everyone or may not have considered the possibility that some would be uneasy with the approach. The use of a protocol to structure participation or more trust-building experiences may have supported a higher level of comfort for more participants and may have led to wider participation. Beyond the initial ice-breaker, it may also have been useful to include more activities devoted to relationship building throughout the process. On the other hand, because these were high level professionals who were already conscious of the amount of time they were devoting the initiative, doing activities such as these might have been perceived as too touchy-feely or unnecessary or bothersome.

Developing relationships among this group was complicated by the fact that the evaluators compete for work in the same field, both with the Jim Joseph Foundation and with other funders working in the realm of Jewish education. It would have been unsurprising for the evaluators to act guarded or to withhold certain kinds of information or comments. Another factor complicating the development of relationships between

evaluators and the Foundation was pointed out by Edelsberg at the end of the first convening. While the Foundation staff hoped to foster relationships with the evaluators through the Consortium, they did not want those relationships to jeopardize the outside perspective that third-party evaluators bring to the evaluation program of the Foundation. He said, “We don’t want to be so cozy with the evaluators that you don’t give us hard enough information.”

Toward the end of the second day of the first convening, one of the evaluators made a comment that indicated the emergence of relationships and trust among the evaluators. She said that as she considers her work in the near future, “I’m thinking about who I’m going to call when.” The comment was met with the hearty laughter of shared sentiment from the group. Even if the activities and conditions did not go as far as they might have to promote positive interactions, Shulman, Edelsberg, and Edwards demonstrated this element of the interpersonal factor to a significant extent.

### **Beyond the Personal and Interpersonal Factors**

Other forces beyond the personal and interpersonal factors help to explain what enabled the Evaluators’ Consortium to coalesce and make progress. These include leadership, the interests of the evaluators, the Foundation’s culture of learning, and evaluation capacity building.

**Leadership.** The personal and interpersonal factors, constructs used in the field of evaluation, point to a related factor that played a powerful role in the establishment and advancement of the Evaluators’ Consortium: leadership. Leadership by Edelsberg and Shulman, and in a quieter way by Edwards, made an unlikely initiative come to life and succeed. They were willing and able to carry out a risky venture and to establish a path

where none existed. Envisioning the initiative, sharing the vision with others and developing support for it, cultivating relationships with the evaluators, implementing the process, getting others to persist through a process without clarity about goals were critical adaptive<sup>34</sup> leadership tasks they carried out (Heifitz & Linsky, 2002). They worked synergistically, creating a dynamic force that drew on their individual strengths and contributions, and exceeded what any one of them alone could have accomplished.

**Interests of the Evaluators.** As described above, the evaluators had their own reasons for agreeing to join the Consortium. Nearly all of them, when interviewed, were attracted by the opportunity to learn and grow professionally through the interactions with colleagues. They concurred with Edelsberg's assertion that their engagement in this way with the Foundation represented an opportunity for business development. Being among the Jim Joseph Foundation's preferred evaluators did not automatically promise them work with the Foundation, but it certainly increased the chances of it. The face to face gatherings were a departure, for some, from work that is normally solitary.

**The Culture of Learning.** The Evaluators' Consortium reflected values and principles already present in the Foundation's culture, especially its commitment to learning. Edelsberg, in framing the work of the Consortium at the beginning of its second convening, talked about his desire to bring people with different backgrounds together so both they and the Foundation staff could learn. He said, "Part of the agenda of these convenings is learning for the [Jim Joseph] team. We want them all to be involved." Shulman also referred regularly to the value of learning embedded in the initiative, both for the program staff and for the evaluators. He looked at the collection of evaluators as

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<sup>34</sup> Heifitz and Linsky (2002) differentiate between technical and adaptive challenges. Technical challenges have known solutions. Adaptive challenges "are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures" (p. 13).

an example of “distributed expertise” where learning happens because a group of people with different skills and knowledge talk together. His belief was that when each person brings a different kind of expertise to bear on a problem, the insights of the group exceed what any individual’s expertise could have produced.

**Evaluation Capacity Building.** In the literature on program evaluation, evaluation capacity building (ECB) generally refers to the building or strengthening of a nonprofit organization’s ability to conduct quality program evaluation, and the embedding of such evaluation and its use as a regular practice in the organization (Stockdill, Bazerman, & Compton, 2002). Generally ECB occurs through the process of an evaluation (King & Stevahn, 2013). Edelsberg and Shulman aspired to build evaluation capacity through the Evaluators’ Consortium—both in the Foundation and among the participating evaluators. The ECB concept, then, sheds light on what can happen in an evaluation initiative as well as in an evaluation study. In the case of the Consortium, thinking about and planning for a particular evaluation, the Teen Initiative encouraged the building of evaluation capacity among already experienced and capable evaluators and among program staff. It also built the capacity of the Foundation’s staff and of the Foundation as an organization.

***Capacity building for the evaluators.*** In the invitation to evaluators to participate in the Evaluators’ Consortium, the purpose of building the capacity of evaluators was mentioned somewhat obliquely. The letter said the Foundation sought to enhance its investment in evaluation by having evaluators “share evaluation designs, methods, techniques, instrumentation, protocols, etc. for the purpose of contributing to one another’s best practices.” This language suggested that through this sharing the evaluators

would extend their own skills and, in so doing, improve the Foundation's capacity to strengthen its evaluation program.

Shulman believed that building the capacity of the evaluators was necessary for keeping them engaged. In an interview he said the process had to be conducted in a way . . . where the preferred evaluators themselves felt they were learning a great deal from the experience. I mean, why do we go to conferences, why do we interact with colleagues? Because we think we're learning as much as we're giving and we wanted the evaluators as well as the program staff to have the same feeling.

(Interview, 12/31/13)

When the evaluators and the staff reacted with excitement about focusing the Consortium's discourse on developing constructs and measures for evaluating Jewish growth, the potential for capacity building for the evaluators was established. The process of developing these measures collaboratively (or at least talking about possible approaches to doing so) would be a learning experience, and having the measures to use in evaluations for the Jim Joseph Foundation and for other projects would expand their capabilities as evaluators in the field of Jewish education.

The evaluators themselves recognized ways in which their participation in the Consortium built their professional capacity. They reported that it helped them understand the Foundation's evaluation needs and perspectives more deeply, as well as learning about discrete efforts the Foundation funds and some of the lessons learned from the evaluation of those programs. They took away discrete ideas for improving their work, such as effective ways of reporting data.

***Capacity building for the Foundation.*** The written invitation to the evaluators laid out the general purpose of capacity building for the Foundation: to examine ways in which the Foundation could improve its overall program of evaluation. More specific approaches to capacity building related to learning for the program officers, through their exposure to the thinking and work of the evaluators at the convenings and through debriefings and discussions of those convenings as a staff. One program officer explained that working with grantees on evaluation is an important staff responsibility, and an area where they could use support and growth; “it’s a whole other skill set,” she said (Interview, Staff Member 4, 11/13/13). From her perspective, participating in the convenings elevated the staff’s work by providing an opportunity for “hearing the way [the evaluators] talk and understanding their language.” She viewed this as a means of helping program officers be more effective in their work as liaison among the Foundation, the grantee, and the evaluators.

The very introduction into its practice of an Evaluators’ Consortium as a tool for improving evaluation practice and determining ways to manage this initiative contributed to organization development for the Foundation. Many of the practices that emerged as the initiative unfolded over the course of a year were new ways of doing business for the Foundation. Bringing evaluators together to share ideas, having them give guidance on structuring an evaluation for a complex cross-community initiative, accepting their input into an RFP, and awarding a contract for an evaluation to a collaborative group were examples of organizational learning and growth and built the Foundation’s evaluation capacity. By developing its own capacity for evaluation, the Foundation created the base

for stronger evaluation and evaluation capacity building at the national and local levels of the Teen Initiative.

Shulman spoke to the evaluators about his hope for the work of the Consortium to create Jewish educational capital. This, too, may be considered capacity building for both the Foundation and for the field. In the context of the Teen Initiative, this capital will come in the form of usable constructs and measures of Jewish growth as well as other learning that grows out of national and local evaluations.

### **Competition, Cooperation, and Coopetition**

One of the unusual and striking elements of the Evaluators' Consortium was the bringing together of representatives of evaluation firms that compete with one another for contracts in the same field (Jewish education) and from the same funder (Jim Joseph Foundation). To what extent would these sometime competitors be prepared to share trade secrets and proprietary materials, as well as to expose themselves and their work to the scrutiny of one another? What might motivate them to do so?

The plans for the Evaluators' Consortium depended on some willingness of the firms to engage with one another openly. The Foundation did not know what to anticipate about the development of relationships among the firms. Edelsberg did allow himself, though, to imagine the possibility of these groups working together beyond the confines of the Consortium's meetings. At the first convening he commented that he could envision as a possible outcome of the Consortium "two or more of the groups' collaborating on an evaluation for a foundation project." The Foundation did not necessarily expect that or think they could encourage it, but if it happened Edelsberg predicted that the board would be pleased. At the end of the first year of the initiative,

two firms and a representative of a third firm came together to procure a four-year evaluation contract worth more than one million dollars for a major new initiative of the Foundation. This collaboration among competitors calls to mind the concept of “co-opetition,” an arrangement described in the business literature.

Coopetition is the “simultaneous cooperation and competition between different individual or organizational actors” (Gnyawali, He, & Madhavan, 2008, p. I-386). It is a departure from the traditional, typical business arrangement in which firms either compete or cooperate, but do not engage in both practices at the same time. Co-opetition has been studied in various industries, and its importance is acknowledged for the technology industry in particular (Gnyawali, He, & Madhavan, 2008). There has also been some exploration of coopetition in human service delivery (Bunger et al., 2014). Companies enter into cooperative arrangements with their competitors in the business sector for a variety of reasons. These include efficiency with resources (e.g., it is too expensive for one company to develop a new product on its own), improving the quality of products, enhancing capacity over time, expanding market size, and gaining legitimacy (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Bunger, et al., 2014; Hamel, Doz, & Prahalad, 1989). A tenet of coopetition is complementing, where the value of one firm’s products, services, or resources increase the value of another firm’s products, services or resources. Some examples are hot dogs and mustard and iPods and music files (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Gnyawali, He, & Madhavan, 2008). Gnyawali, He, and Madhavan (2008) classify coopetition strategies according to the axis of the business relationship—either horizontal or vertical, depending on whether or not the two firms are on the same level in their industry (e.g., both are suppliers or buyers).

The case of the two firms that proposed to conduct the cross-community evaluation together is an example of horizontal cooperation. The evaluation called for a broad range of capabilities, and neither firm had all the skills it required. They recognized that they could create greater value for the Jim Joseph Foundation, for the Funders' Community of Practice, and for themselves by pooling their resources. In the cover letter of the evaluation proposal, they explained that a National Team would "utilize its expertise in Jewish identity; Jewish education; research methods; synthesizing and reporting on research and evaluation studies; and supporting communities of practice to address the opportunity and challenges you are undertaking with this exciting and most important project."

The structure of the collaboration between these competitors and the forces that brought it about make it different from many of the cases of the cooperation described in the research literature. The two firms had no direct connections to one another either personally or professionally prior to meeting through the Evaluators' Consortium.<sup>35</sup> The extent to which these firms identified one another as competitors before the Consortium began is not clear. Even though they competed for contracts, unlike technology companies they did not threaten to put each other out of business. The firms had ten months during which to interact and to get to know one another under the Foundation's auspices in the Consortium before they created a joint proposal for the cross-community evaluation. The collaboration arose not out of a force from the open market, but rather

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<sup>35</sup> One of the firms had never before done evaluation work in partnership with another firm. The second firm works with other firms regularly in its practice, either sub-contracting with others or entering into relationships as a sub-contractor.

from the need of a particular shared client. If they had not become acquainted with one another through the Consortium the collaboration would have been unlikely.

Having established this relationship, though, it is possible that there will be more opportunities for working together even as they continue to compete for contracts individually from the Jim Joseph Foundation and others. If this initial partnership is successful, the experience may encourage the Foundation's board to invest in other evaluation partnerships and initiatives like those recommended in Shulman's 2012 report.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter presented findings about the practice and use of evaluation at the Jim Joseph Foundation in light of the literature on evaluation in the foundation sector. It focused on both general practice and on the Evaluators' Consortium. The findings drew on data collected in interviews, observations of meetings, and document reviews.

Many of the Jim Joseph Foundation's current evaluation practices are distinctive or exemplary for the foundation sector. The Foundation is the evaluation client for the evaluations of its funded programs. Members of the program staff are engaged in nearly all stages of the evaluations of grants they manage. The staff cultivates relationships with grantees and evaluators with whom they work. The Foundation is committed to learning from evaluation, not just using it for accountability. They use evaluation for making decisions about grantmaking. The Foundation shares evaluation reports on its website.

The Evaluators' Consortium, an experimental initiative designed to improve the Foundation's practice of evaluation, was shaped by the Foundation's existing evaluation practices and organizational culture. As in the Foundation's evaluation practice, the personal and interpersonal factors supported the Consortium's success. Over the course

of a year, the initiative moved from vague goals and uncertain direction to focused goals, strengthened relationships, new evaluation practices, and collaboration among competitors. It built capacity for the Foundation staff and for participating evaluators.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### Introduction

This study was an in-depth examination of an innovative evaluation initiative implemented by the Jim Joseph Foundation called the Evaluators' Consortium. The purpose of the study was to understand a unique initiative in the foundation sector and to appreciate the factors that generated and supported it. By exploring the Evaluators' Consortium, the researcher intended to shed light on the practice and use of evaluation in the sector and to understand the potential of an innovative practice for advancing the field.

The initiative had delineated purposes from the beginning, but they were formulated in a general way. As such, it was not possible to know at the beginning what exactly the initiative would attempt to accomplish, much less what it would accomplish. The emergent nature of the initiative required close observation of the unfolding of the process, as well as openness to evolving research questions and categories of analysis. This type of flexibility is characteristic of qualitative research.

The questions the research addressed were:

- What occurs when a foundation inaugurates an innovative approach to evaluation practice?
- What factors support the introduction of innovative structures, or approaches to evaluation in a foundation context?
  - What roles do the personal and interpersonal factors play in the establishment of innovative evaluation structures or approaches?

- What role do established evaluation practices, structures and organizational culture play in the success of the innovation?
- What are the challenges and impediments to introducing innovative structures or approaches to evaluation in a foundation context?

This chapter will answer these questions by drawing on the findings of the study and the analysis of the findings, using the literature about evaluation in the foundation sector and contributing to it. It will then go on to explore implications for practice and further research. Table 5 summarizes the findings relative to each research question.

Table 5. Findings According to Research Questions

Research Question	Findings
<p>1. What occurs when a foundation inaugurates an innovative approach to evaluation practice?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The initiative had emergent goals that both served and threatened the process. They communicated a regard for participants as partners in the process. At the same time the ambiguity of goals stimulated some discomfort on the part of participants. The group galvanized when specific purposes and goals were introduced and encouraged participants to continue their commitment and engagement.</li> <li>• The initiative took the Foundation in unanticipated directions and led to new practices. These included involving evaluators in developing an approach to evaluating a major initiative, helping to develop the evaluation RFP, and introducing expert evaluators to local communities with which the Foundation partners.</li> <li>• The foundation built the capacity of its staff to think about evaluation, to be clearer about how to do evaluation, how it can serve them in their work, and how to work with evaluators and grantees in productive ways regarding evaluation.</li> <li>• The initiative strengthened the relationships between the Foundation and the evaluators by creating shared experiences and language.</li> <li>• The initiative created relationships among competitors who entered into collaboration with one another to the benefit of the Foundation and its grantees. Those relationships remain “coopetitive” since the firms continue both to compete and collaborate.</li> <li>• The work generated by the initiative ended up serving other needs the Foundation had that were not anticipated in the beginning.</li> <li>• The initiative generated outcomes that will serve both current funded initiatives,</li> </ul>

Research Question	Findings
	<p>anticipated initiatives, and future initiatives that are consistent with strategic priorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foundation staff members (and perhaps the board) were emboldened to try other approaches to evaluation they have not used before.</li> <li>• It took longer to launch the initiative than anticipated. Arranging to get all the people together at the same time was not simple.</li> <li>• The initiative extended beyond the initial time frame.</li> </ul>
<p>2. What factors support the introduction of innovative structures or approaches to evaluation in a foundation context?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What roles do the personal and interpersonal factors play in the establishment of innovative evaluation structures or approaches?</li> <li>○ What role do established evaluation practices, structures and organizational culture play in the success of the innovation?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An established commitment to evaluation by the Foundation leadership, staff, and board created an openness to try something new.</li> <li>• Program officers were already involved in the Foundation’s evaluation work and were motivated to increase their knowledge and skills.</li> <li>• The board desired to understand more deeply the value and outcomes of their investment in evaluation.</li> <li>• The professional leadership was committed to improving the Foundation’s practice and use of evaluation (personal factor).</li> <li>• The Foundation embraced the use of evaluation not just (and not primarily) for accountability, but for also for learning.</li> <li>• The Foundation had a strong learning culture.</li> <li>• The Foundation staff had strong working relationships with these evaluators (interpersonal factor).</li> <li>• The staff and evaluators (and some members of the board) were willing to experiment, take risks, and anticipate the possibility of failure.</li> <li>• The initiative had effective leadership.</li> <li>• The Executive Director cultivated relationships with the evaluators over a long</li> </ul>

Research Question	Findings
	<p>period of time, well in advance of the launch of the initiative. He was able to draw on those relationships to bring the evaluators on board (interpersonal factor). There were potential payoffs for the participating evaluators—professional development, contracts with the Foundation, creating knowledge that would serve them in their own evaluation practice.</p>
<p>3. What are the challenges and impediments to introducing innovative structures or approaches to evaluation in a foundation context?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The board was not completely clear about the rewards that come of taking this type of programmatic risk.</li> <li>• The power dynamics that typically exist between foundations and grantees also exist between foundations and the evaluators they hire. The Foundation had invested considerable amounts of money in the firms they hired to conduct evaluations. Even when the Foundation made an effort to put others on equal footing, the imbalance was present. Efforts can be made through relationship-building activities to attenuate the differences.</li> <li>• Even a powerful and well-respected Foundation with good relationships to evaluators (and other partners) found it difficult to overcome logistical problems like scheduling people’s time and travel.</li> <li>• Competing firms may have been reluctant to be open to sharing.</li> <li>• Not compensating or promising a definite reward to participants could have interfered with a willingness to join or persist in the process. As purposes and possibilities became clearer, it seemed more worthwhile to continue.</li> </ul>

## Summary of Findings

### **Inaugurating an Innovative Approach to Evaluation Practice in the Foundation**

#### **Sector**

Chip Edelsberg, the executive director of the Jim Joseph Foundation, considered the Evaluators' Consortium an experiment, a risk that the Foundation was taking. Along with Lee Shulman, who generated the idea for this endeavor in his report on evaluation for the Foundation, Edelsberg believed it had the potential to contribute to the advancement of the Foundation's evaluation practice. Still, he did not know if the invited evaluators would agree to participate, nor did he know what exactly it would accomplish.

Some of the people involved in the Consortium welcomed emergent goals or at least did not find them troubling. Shulman had no qualms about working without clarity of this kind; it was an approach he was accustomed to, and it had produced great outcomes for him in the past. He quipped that he is often uncertain about "where the work is going to go until it's much closer to where it's gotten." He trusted the ability of people he worked with to "make mid-course corrections [and] to see things we didn't see initially" (Interview, 12/31/13). Some of the evaluators were willing to go along with whatever the Foundation was doing. Several evaluators recognized this initiative as a chance for professional and business development.

Other evaluators were less than comfortable with emergent goals. Along with them came an emergent timeline. Some evaluators had concerns—especially given the fact that the Foundation was not compensating them for their time—about the amount of

time they were able to give when they had work demands and commitments to their businesses. As evaluators, some may have found the approach disconcerting for another reason. In their practices and in particular in their work for the Foundation, these evaluators were accustomed to creating theories of change and logic models with grantees, working to specify outcomes and to gathering data to determine the extent to which outcomes were achieved. The approach of this initiative turned logic models on their head. In spite of any misgivings, however, all of the evaluators who were invited to participate in the Consortium accepted Edelsberg's invitation.

There were reasons for having emergent goals. Edelsberg hoped to engage the evaluators in the process of shaping the direction of the initiative—both because he wanted to demonstrate his respect for them as partners in the process and because he recognized their capacity and wisdom for doing so. In reflecting on the first year of the Consortium, Edelsberg wondered about whether he should have, for the sake of greater understanding and buy in from the board and the evaluators, constructed a logic model for the initiative. He acknowledged, though, that it might not have been possible; he could not have imagined the outcomes of the Consortium before it got underway and even at its early stages of development.

After the first convening of the group in the fall of 2013, goals began to take shape. The Consortium started to focus its attention on creating measures of Jewish growth. The idea to do so arose from an immediate need the Foundation had. The work of the Consortium on shaping these measures had the potential to contribute to the work of

the Foundation currently and to support the work of the Foundation and these evaluators in the future.

The Foundation's immediate need was an extensive initiative on Jewish teen education and engagement, funded with local partners and run by local program providers in ten communities across the United States. As of December, 2014, projections were for the local communities to provide approximately \$36.6 million and the Jim Joseph Foundation approximately \$33.7 million over ten years. The Foundation always intended to examine and understand the outcomes of the work with teens across the different communities, but at the time of the Consortium's first gathering, they had not determined what that examination would entail.

Over the course of several months, through in-person and telephone gatherings, the Evaluators' Consortium worked with Jim Joseph Foundation staff to shape plans for a cross-community evaluation of the Teen Initiative. Having evaluators participate in conceptualizing the cross-community evaluation and working with the Foundation to clarify and sharpen the RFP for the evaluation were new practices for the Foundation. In the process of working with the Consortium on the cross-community evaluation plans, Edelsberg also regularly recommended members of the Consortium to the funding partners for their local evaluations. JJF thus introduced expert evaluators to communities around the country who might use their services to evaluate this initiative or others.

By working together through the Consortium, relationships were built and strengthened between evaluators and between evaluators and members of the Foundation

staff. With the exception of Edelsberg and Edwards, no one knew everyone else at the beginning of the initiative. Relationships were built through shared experiences, the development of language to talk about Jewish identity and growth, and the collaborative shaping of the cross-community evaluation and RFP. Relationships among members of the evaluation firms and their recognition of each other's strengths and capacity led to two firms submitting a joint proposal for the cross-community evaluation. While Edelsberg had dreamed of collaboration among evaluators as a possible outcome of the Consortium, it was not something he expected.

Among members of the Foundation staff, the Evaluators' Consortium built capacity to think about evaluation—how to do evaluation, how it can serve them in their work, and what productive work with evaluators looks like. One of the purposes of establishing the Consortium was to assemble a group of evaluators to whom the Foundation could turn more readily in their work, so-called (at the time) “preferred evaluators.” In the lead-up to the first meeting of the Consortium the staff articulated their ideas about productive evaluation practices, clarifying for themselves what they valued and expected in Foundation evaluations. While these may have been implicit in the staff's work in the past, this was the first time the staff made them explicit. The members of the staff also built or deepened their relationships with evaluators in the Consortium, having the potential for productive work together in the future. According to Edelsberg, there is greater fluidity now in working with the members of the Consortium on evaluations.

The work being done for the cross-community evaluation, including defining outcomes and measures for Jewish growth and developing instruments for gathering data on those measures, will serve other work of the Foundation in the future. With its strategic priority to expand opportunities for effective Jewish learning among youth and young adults, the Foundation is nearly always interested in measuring the Jewish growth of participants in the programs they fund. The potential outcomes, measures, and instruments being developed, tested, and used in the Teen Initiative will be available to evaluate other programs—not only that the Jim Joseph Foundation supports, but programs funded by others, as well. By contributing these outcomes, measures, and instruments the Foundation will also address another of its strategic priorities: building a strong field of Jewish education. This specific result of the Evaluators' Consortium was another unanticipated outcome of the initiative.

The Evaluators' Consortium is continuing to meet in 2015. Two face-to-face meetings are scheduled to take place in San Francisco. The Foundation appears to be emboldened to work with the Consortium on another new approach to evaluation, one that bears some similarity to the cross-community Teen Initiative evaluation—conducting evaluation that is not specific to an individual grantee or initiative.<sup>36</sup> One of the firms in the Consortium has a contract to conduct the evaluation for a local community in the Teen Initiative. Two others are currently competing for the contract in another of the local communities. Edelsberg still wonders how much he can hold the interest and attention of

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<sup>36</sup> The Foundation is considering the funding of capacity building efforts across multiple organizations that do very different kinds of work and in which capacity building would look significantly different.

the members of the Consortium. He continues to be concerned about alienating them by asking too much of them or by appearing to take unfair advantage of them.

### **Factors Supporting Innovative Evaluation Structures/Approaches in a Foundation Context**

The implementation of an unusual and risky venture, with emergent goals and an emergent timeline, promising ambiguous rewards for the participants, and no immediate compensation seems nearly unimaginable. The Evaluators' Consortium launched and succeeded. To understand how that happened, it is critical to examine the Evaluators' Consortium in the context of the Jim Joseph Foundation's broader culture and approach to evaluation. Numerous practices of the Foundation enabled or supported the establishment and outcomes of the Consortium.

From its inception the Foundation had an established commitment to evaluation on the part of Foundation leadership, staff and the board. Because of the Foundation's unusual evaluation structure in which they and not the grantees are the evaluation client, program officers played a substantial role in evaluation. They regularly worked with grantees and external evaluators throughout the planning and implementation of evaluations. Program officers were motivated to increase their knowledge and skills in the area of evaluation and were open to participating in the Evaluators' Consortium. Board members wanted to understand what their investment in evaluation was contributing to their work. The professional leadership was committed to improving the Foundation's practice and use of evaluation. The commitment to evaluation by members

of the staff is an example of Patton’s personal factor, applied in this context to the commitment to and concern about evaluation practice (Patton, 2008).

In terms of evaluation use, the Foundation embraced the use of evaluation, but not just for accountability among grantees. The staff used evaluation for learning and in some cases the board used evaluation results for decision making. The Foundation saw in the Consortium some potential for serving its strategic priority of building the field of Jewish education—even if they were not clear about the precise ways in which it might do so.

The use of evaluation for learning reflects the Foundation’s robust learning culture. The desire to learn was a driving force behind the Evaluators’ Consortium. While the outcomes of the Consortium’s work were not highly specified when the group met for the first time, Foundation staff saw the work as a chance for the Foundation to learn as an organization and for program officers to learn and grow. Several of the evaluators attributed their interest in participating to the promise it held out for learning from and with other participants.

The personal factor played an important role in realizing the Evaluators’ Consortium. Edelsberg was determined to make the initiative happen. He worked with the board to get its go-ahead and continued in spite of the lukewarm response to the initiative by some board members. He championed the initiative even though he fully understood the risks and spoke about them openly with participants. He knew that failure was a distinct possibility. Edelsberg’s leadership, in collaboration with Edwards and Shulman, was essential to the success of the Consortium.

The interpersonal factor also had a substantial role in the success of the Evaluators' Consortium. The first component of the interpersonal factor, constructive interactions throughout the framing and implementation of the process, was evident in Edelsberg's reaching out to the potential participants and convincing them to participate, requesting input from the evaluators on shaping the agenda of the Consortium, communicating regularly by telephone, in-person, and by email with the evaluators, and being transparent about the risks of the endeavor. Of course, these ways of relating to the evaluators did not begin with the establishment of the Evaluators' Consortium. Edelsberg had been tending to his relationships with these evaluators for several years.

The second component, creating activities and conditions conducive to positive interactions, was reflected in the creation of new and deeper relationships among the participating evaluators and between the evaluators and the Foundation. Those responsible for planning the meetings of the Consortium could certainly have done more or different things to build trust; nevertheless, trust developed to the point where two competing firms collaborated on a proposal to conduct the cross-community evaluation for the Teen Initiative.

The evaluators in the Consortium did stand to benefit from participating in the initiative, and that is another factor that supported its success. By joining the Foundation in this undertaking, the evaluators anticipated professional growth for themselves, strengthening their relationships to the Foundation, increasing the chances for contracts with the Foundation and their partners, and creating knowledge that would serve the

Foundation, the field, and themselves in their own evaluation practice. While not all of these were clear from the beginning, as they became more evident they increased the appeal of participation.

### **Challenges and Impediments to Innovative Evaluation Approaches/Structures in a Foundation Context**

Launching and sustaining the Consortium posed a series of challenges—some before and others throughout the initiative. Some of them were addressed explicitly and publicly. Others operated beneath the surface.

The power dynamics that typically exist between foundations and grantees also exist between foundations and the evaluators they hire. Even when a foundation makes an effort to put others on more equal footing, given the dependence of grantees and evaluators on the foundation for funding, the imbalance does not disappear entirely. As with nearly any work in the foundation context with other stakeholders, power differentials played a complex role in the Evaluators' Consortium.

During the early work of the Evaluators' Consortium, Edelsberg sought to involve the participants in setting the agenda so they felt invested in the process. Most of the evaluators saw the initiative, in whatever direction it ultimately went, as something that belonged to and primarily served the Foundation and seemed more satisfied once that agenda was clear. Edelsberg and Shulman encouraged the sharing of varying perspectives and sought frank input from the evaluators. At one point the group addressed the issue about how willing evaluators were to deliver bad news to the Foundation. The Jim Joseph

Foundation had already invested considerable amounts of money in the participating firms, and the possibility of future contracts was clear to everyone, especially as the Foundation conferred the “preferred” status to these firms. That possibility became even more concrete with the prospect of being awarded the contract for the cross-community evaluation or being recommended for the local evaluations.

The fact that the Foundation did not compensate the evaluators for their participation in the Consortium further complicated the power dynamics. It put the evaluators in the position to decide throughout the process whether or not they wanted to continue. It pushed the Foundation to be concerned about not taking unfair advantage of the evaluators and to consider what would make participation worth their time.

The Foundation demonstrated power in another way as it took on a leadership role in the process of articulating outcomes and measures of Jewish growth. The Foundation hoped this endeavor would contribute to and help build the field of Jewish education as it served the purposes of the communities involved in the Teen Initiative. By leading this process, even as they involved others in carrying it out, the Foundation ran the risk of asserting too much control, and of infringing on the autonomy of other funders, evaluators and grantees. It raised the question of how a foundation can use its power to lead and build a field without overstepping its bounds (or being perceived that way by others) or moving toward becoming an operating foundation. The practices of having outcomes available to the local communities, working with grantees to select them, and allowing grantees to develop specific strategies on how to achieve those outcomes

aligned with Kimball and Koppell's (2011) recommendations for innovation within the foundation sector where foundations are "tight on goals and loose on means" (p. 40).

In spite of the acknowledged power of the Foundation and firms' reliance on it, it was still challenging for the Foundation to bring the Evaluators' Consortium together as a group. The timeline the Foundation originally set, both the launch date and the length of time anticipated for the experiment, needed to be adjusted. Even for a powerful, respected Foundation mounting an innovative evaluation initiative and involving representatives of other organizations was difficult logistically.

Bringing together representatives of firms that compete with one another for business was a potential challenge to the success of the Evaluators' Consortium. Prior to launching the initiative, Edelsberg discussed with the evaluators the possibility that they might be reluctant to share ideas, perspectives, and approaches and of losing any competitive advantages they might have through participating. With the collaboration on the cross-community evaluation of the Teen Initiative, it appears that revealing themselves to one another created advantages rather than disadvantages for participants in the Consortium. They recognized one another's strengths and saw ways they could complement each other's capabilities.

Even in a foundation with a commitment to evaluation and a record of practicing and using it in its work, the value of a new, untested evaluation endeavor was not clear-cut. It was particularly difficult to make a case for the worth of the Evaluators' Consortium at the beginning when its goals were emergent, when its potential outcomes

were not defined, and its timeline was uncertain. It was a risk that might accomplish great things or nothing at all. The board approved the use of Foundation resources for hiring a facilitator and agreed to the use of staff time for making it happen. Because the Foundation did not compensate the evaluators for their participation, the financial investment was less than it might have been. The use of a logic model to explain the initiative to the board might have been helpful since that is a framework its members are accustomed to using. However, as discussed above, it was nearly impossible to anticipate the possible outcomes of so experimental an undertaking. Moving forward, it is possible to imagine increased interest and support of the initiative as accomplishments emerge and are presented to the board for their consideration.

## **Implications**

### **Suggestions for Practice**

This case study of the Evaluators' Consortium of the Jim Joseph Foundation has potential for use in the practice of evaluation at the Jim Joseph Foundation. As a qualitative study it may be possible to extrapolate some of the findings and to transfer them into similar contexts, enabling other foundations to use them to improve their evaluation approaches (Patton, 2002).

**For the Jim Joseph Foundation.** For the Jim Joseph Foundation, the experimental Evaluators' Consortium appears to be yielding considerable benefits to the Foundation. Building on the relationships with evaluators prior to the establishment of the Consortium and strengthened during its first year of operation, the leadership of the

Consortium would be well served to address directly some of their concerns and questions about the sustainability of the initiative:

- How long will these evaluators be willing to continue participating?
- What benefits have the evaluators experienced to date? What benefits will they need to experience to continue?
- How much ambiguity and emergence of goals can the participants tolerate?
- To what extent do the evaluators want to participate in shaping the agenda for the group's work? Is it preferable for the Foundation to set the direction?

The Foundation plans to present the work of the Consortium to the Board of Directors in the fall or winter of 2015. Because the initiative is a departure from the usual evaluation practice of the Foundation, the directors need to understand the contributions the Consortium has made to their strategic work. Presentations by Shulman, one of the participating evaluators, and a program officer could reveal different perspectives. The findings from this study could also be part of the presentation. The directors are accustomed to examining program outcomes in advance and looking at progress against those outcomes in their grantmaking activity; hearing about outcomes would speak to them. The work of the Consortium demonstrated, though, that great outcomes cannot always be specified at the beginning of a project. Such a project might be worth taking a risk on. It would be of helpful, therefore, in ascertaining future support of innovative

evaluation initiatives to make a case for the role of emergent goals in this initiative. Innovation in the realm of evaluation will be one way the Foundation can continue to serve as a leader in the world of Jewish educational philanthropy. In conducting innovative initiatives, the Foundation could consider the use of developmental evaluation to document and learn systematically about their work as it progresses.

To the extent that the Jim Joseph Foundation wants to continue to innovate in the practice of evaluation and/or to convene scholars, evaluators, grantees, and other funders for the purpose of building the field of Jewish education, they may need to reconsider their current staffing configuration or to use more outside consultants. The program officers and professional leaders manage significant workloads already, and their capacity to take on more is limited. Defining questions to address, engaging potential participants, bringing groups together, and implementing the projects they identify are demanding tasks that require time and attention. In addition, it may require decisions to designate more giving to this funding area and to consider compensating participants. It may not always be possible to draw on good will and trust or even the promise of future contracts with the Foundation.

The Foundation is aware of the amount of knowledge generated by sponsoring third-party evaluations of their grants. While the Foundation uses that knowledge for learning and decision making, they do not have a structure in place for all members of the staff to learn from each evaluation or for learning across the evaluations. The Foundation would be well-served to do both. Building in time for the staff to learn together from

every evaluation would require a commitment and possibly some reconfiguring of responsibilities or added staff. The Foundation is currently considering hiring consultants to look retrospectively at their evaluations and to draw out insights across funded initiatives. These could serve the Foundation as well as the field.

Another consideration for the Foundation is to explore additional ways to promote collaboration among their evaluators. One of the program officers suggested in an interview that he could imagine, based on the work of the Evaluators' Consortium, having the evaluators build time into their scopes of work for consulting with other evaluators for making comparisons to other initiatives, perhaps tracking how a single metric was being measured in another project. These collaborations could add capacity to the evaluators and enhance the work they do for the Foundation.

One of the outcomes of the Evaluators' Consortium was the creation of a list of productive evaluation practices for the Foundation. The staff identified desirable ways of working for themselves, their evaluators, and their grantees. Using this list, the Foundation could develop an approach for communicating with new grantees about the Foundation's approach and expectations, thus adding another level of transparency and reducing uncertainty for grantees. Further, it could be the basis for orienting new evaluators whom the Foundation contracts to conduct evaluation and might eliminate some of the tensions inherent in getting new firms to understand the Foundation's approach. By using this document to guide the process Foundation staff could accomplish

the acculturation of evaluators more efficiently and continue to bring in new talent and perspectives to their work.

The initial members of the Evaluators' Consortium were drawn from the pool of evaluators with whom the Foundation already had positive working relationships. By bringing together representatives of firms that differed in terms of size, experiences, and expertise the Foundation sought to bring a range of perspectives to their deliberations. To continue to bring new ideas and perspectives into their work, the Foundation might consider adding to or changing the membership of the Consortium and continuing to hire other evaluators and firms to conduct evaluations of their grants.

The Jim Joseph Foundation practices strategic philanthropy—they assess challenges in the life of the American Jewish community, develop approaches to addressing these challenges, provide funding to organizations that work on these challenges, and track the results of their funding. They have not, to date, evaluated their own strategy and strategic priorities. Evaluation of strategy is a developing practice in the foundation sector, and the Jim Joseph Foundation, as a foundation dedicated to the value of evaluation, ought to consider extending their evaluation investment to this practice.

**Beyond the Jim Joseph Foundation.** There are a number of matters related to the practice of evaluation that emerged from the study of the Jim Joseph Foundation's Evaluators' Consortium with potential for transfer beyond the context of the Foundation. Other foundations may be able to learn by exploring them.

When contemplating innovation in the practice of evaluation, a foundation ought to be aware of the need for emergent goals and uncertainty. Not only is it impossible to specify all possible outcomes of an innovation, attempting to define the outcomes may limit the foundation's consideration of promising courses of action. Working in an emergent way requires some faith in the process, trust in the people promoting the innovation, and some concrete promise of potential benefits. It requires a champion who is willing to take risks and to bring others along an uncharted path.

It may be counter-intuitive to bring together competitors to work together on behalf of the foundation's evaluation program. Convening competitors in a collaborative venture, though, can create capacity, build networks, and magnify potential outcomes. Careful consideration needs to be given to the conditions under which collaboration is done, who facilitates it, and what expectations are established throughout the process. Cultivating relationships is a critical step in introducing and sustaining innovation in evaluation practice.

Field building requires the contributions of people across complex systems. As such, the work of field building also requires cultivating relationships—with evaluators, grantees, and other funders. Relationships may be critical to the building of knowledge and practice.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

One of the limitations of this study is that it does not include the voices and perspectives of the Foundation's grantees. To more fully understand the context in which

the Evaluators' Consortium developed, interviews with grantees could expand the value of this research and add nuance to its findings, as well as add to a deeper understanding of the Jim Joseph Foundation's evaluation work more generally. Another type of data that would enhance learning about the Consortium is the reflection of the participating evaluators more than a year after the Consortium began. As it stands, this study includes interview data from the evaluators between the first and second convenings.

This research, along with telling the story of one foundation's innovative approach to improving its practice of evaluation, uncovered some of the factors that support evaluation innovation. The Evaluators' Consortium was one initiative. Further research is called for to identify and study other cases of evaluation innovation in the foundation sector. In addition to telling these stories, it would be useful to report on the context in which they are happening, the nature of the organizational cultures in which they are implemented, the approaches to evaluation practice more generally in those foundations, the challenges faced in implementing these innovations, and the outcomes that occur. Further research could explore the transferability to other types of foundations of both the Evaluators' Consortium as a model and the lessons derived from it. The Jim Joseph Foundation has a specific and narrow area of focus in its grantmaking. Could this model work for a foundation that operates in a larger field?

Another type of research would build on a set of case studies, comparing cases and identifying themes about what supports innovation in evaluation practice in

foundations and what it accomplishes. Using a set of case studies would make possible the creation of a typology of evaluation innovations, as well.

The study of the Evaluators' Consortium raised the question about how foundations learn from and use evaluation. There is little published material that has systematically collected and analyzed how foundations use the evaluation they or their grantees commission for the purpose of learning. What do those learning processes look like? How are they conducted? Who is responsible for them? What uses do they yield? Exploring the process of learning from evaluation could inform not only the foundation community but the field of evaluation more broadly.

### **Conclusion**

The Jim Joseph Foundation came into being during the era of strategic philanthropy in the foundation sector. During this period since the turn of the millennium, the literature on foundations has addressed questions about the definition and characteristics of strategic philanthropy, the extent to which it is actually practiced in the field, and whether or not it is an effective approach to solving social problems, especially complex ones.<sup>37</sup> A critical matter, raised in an exchange about strategic philanthropy by Bill Schambra (2013) and Paul Brest (2013), has been the role that social and natural science, and specifically empirical evidence and evaluation, can and should play in making social change.

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<sup>37</sup> Complex problems have numerous causes and effects; they are dynamic, non-linear, uncertain and unpredictable (Kania, Kramer, & Russell, 2014; Patrizi, Thompson, Coffman, & Beer, 2013).

In establishing the Evaluators' Consortium, the Foundation took on the very problem that Schambra (2013) and Brest (2013) addressed. How could the Foundation improve its practice and use of evaluation to support its other strategic concerns? Several of the factors supporting the success of the Consortium—its leadership, its emergent and flexible quality, and its use of collaboration across institutions—reflect the practices promoted in recent writing on strategic philanthropy under conditions of uncertainty and complexity (Kania et al., 2014; Patrizi et al., 2013). Of particular relevance is the assertion by Patrizi et al. (2013) about learning:

[F]oundations have important but unrealized potential to contribute value to strategy by capitalizing upon their capacities to build, support, and engage in learning. Their location in the landscape of social-change agents afford them a rare line of vision to see patterns to work across boundaries of organizations, systems, and peoples. They have the resources to import both the experience (from doers) and expertise (from researchers and experts). They can afford to experiment and try multiple solutions. And if disciplined about their own commitments and biases, they can work to counteract the kind of blind spots and confirmatory tendencies that frequently undermine organizational capacity to learn (p. 51).

At its core, the Evaluators' Consortium was an experiment devoted to learning. To the extent that the Consortium and other evaluation efforts are devoted to learning, the Jim Joseph Foundation can increase its potential to make an impact on Jewish life and

learning and on the field of Jewish education. In these complex circumstances, as Patrizi et al. say, “Learning is strategy” (p. 50).

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## **APPENDIX A: Interview Protocols**

### **Evaluators in Evaluators' Consortium, Fall, 2013**

Thanks for agreeing to talk to me today as part of the research I am doing on the practice and use of evaluation in foundations.

The purpose of this study is to understand the efforts of the JJF foundation to improve the effectiveness of its practice and use of evaluation. Of particular interest for my research are what motivates foundations to improve their evaluation practice; the approaches they use to improve evaluation practice; and the outcomes of their efforts on the foundations, their grantees, and the participating evaluators.

You received the release form. I need to reiterate that your participation is voluntary, that information you share will be kept confidential, that only I have access to the records of this conversation. There are minimal risks to participation, and you may choose not to answer any question or to stop the interview.

To help me with the analysis of the information I collect during this interview I would like to record our conversation. I'll take notes, too, but I want to be able to make sure don't want to miss anything, and to be able to go back and make sure I've got things right. Do you agree to have me record the interview?

1. It would be helpful for me to have some background information about your history with the foundation. How long have you been connected to JJF? What projects have you worked on with or for them?

2. Let's talk about the process of conducting an evaluation on behalf of the JJF.  
Think about one specific evaluation you did of a JJF funded project. How did you interact with JJF staff during the evaluation? (Probes: What worked? What was difficult?)
3. Think about that same evaluation. How did you interact with grantees of the program when you were evaluating? (What worked? What was difficult?)
4. Think about a specific evaluation you have worked on for JJF. How was working on that project similar to work on projects for other foundations?
5. Think again about that evaluation for JJF. How was working on that project with the JJF different from working on projects for other foundations?
6. What brought about the JJF preferred evaluators' initiative? Have your views on this changed since the first convening?
7. How did you decide to participate in the Preferred Evaluators Initiative?
  - a. What are the benefits to you of participating?
  - b. What concerns do you have about participating?
8. What do you think about the potential for this initiative? What could it accomplish—for the foundation? For you? For your organization? For the field?
9. Let's talk about the first gathering of the preferred evaluators on September 30 and October 1. Think about doing your presentation. What was that experience like? What did you get out of it?

10. What was it like to listen to other firms' presentations? What were some of the take-aways for you?
11. What was your experience of the JJF professional staff during the meeting?
12. What are your reactions to the plans for the second gathering?
13. The Preferred Evaluators Initiative brings together representatives of other evaluation firms. Can you think of an example of a time you worked collaboratively with another evaluation firms?
14. What were the circumstances?
15. What were the benefits of working with other evaluation firms?
16. What were the challenges of working with other evaluation firms?
17. Is there anything I didn't ask you today that you would like to talk to me about?

**Program Staff Jim Joseph Foundation, Fall, 2013**

1. Think of one of the programs you manage for JJF. What experience did you have/are you having working with the evaluation of the program? (How do you interact with grantees on evaluation? How do you interact with evaluator(s) on the evaluation? Would you say this experience is typical?)
2. Can you give me an example of when evaluation was helpful and beneficial for JJF? (What was helpful? Can you give me an example of a decision that was made based on an insight from an evaluation? Was there another way you used evaluation? What to you are the positive benefits of spending time and resources on evaluation?)

3. Can you give me an example of when evaluation was NOT helpful or beneficial for JJF? (What was difficult about it? What to you are the negative aspects of spending time and resources on evaluation?)
4. Let's look at your timeline. What were the major events you labeled? What can you tell me about them?

*I'm going to ask you to create a timeline about evaluation at JJF. First, draw a line across the paper and label ends as "when you began with JJF" and the other end as "now". Think about major events or situations that caused JJF to place more emphasis on evaluation. Place it on the timeline. Give it a label. Now please describe it to me.*

5. How COULD program evaluation be more useful to the JJF?
6. Imagine creating a job description that reflects what you actually do. What would it say about evaluation? What would you like it to say?
7. What brought about the JJF preferred evaluators' initiative?
8. What did you find interesting about the first convening? Helpful? Challenging? Surprising? Can the Preferred Evaluators Initiative benefit you personally in your work as a program officer?
9. What hopes do you have for the PEI for the foundation?
10. What thoughts do you have about the plans for the second gathering in January? Were you involved in creating the plans?

11. Are there other questions I should have asked you today? Anything else you'd like to tell me that we haven't talked about?

**Facilitator, Evaluators' Consortium, December 2013**

1. How did you first develop a relationship with the Jim Joseph Foundation? What work have you done with them over the years?
2. When was your paper, "The Foundation's Mission and the Role of Evaluation" written? What prompted it? Who was its audience?
3. In the report you say that there is a need for people in the field to trust the evaluation reports, and therefore, the reports should be viewed as "the gold standard." Can you tell me more about what you mean by the gold standard in this context?
4. The report lays out an evaluation continuum. What was the basis for this continuum? What do you think would be required to implement it? If implemented, where would it lead the foundation?
5. Type I: How do program officers and/or internal staff develop the capacity to do evaluation?
6. You say the distinction between Types II and III are fuzzy. Can you help me sharpen my understanding of the differences, perhaps through an example of each?
7. Type IV: Integrative Cluster Evaluations. Are these done ex post facto only? Or could they be planned proactively? Who would we be involved in carrying out

this type of evaluation? (One way you suggest in the report is visiting scholars).

Absent a professional in the foundation with specific responsibility for evaluation, who would coordinate or lead this type of effort?

8. The foundation wants the outside perspective that external evaluators can bring. At the same time, their commitment to relational philanthropy calls for evaluators to share responsibility for the success of the work they fund. Do you perceive a tension in these two desires? If so, how do you think that tension could/should be managed or diminished?
9. What are some of the strengths of the JJF's current approach to evaluation? Some of the challenges? How has their approach changed over time? What has contributed to these changes?
10. Your report addresses the potential of learning from the evaluations the foundation commissions—both internally and with the larger field. Have you seen JJF learn from evaluation? How do they approach learning from evaluation? How do they use what they learn?
11. You have written about the responsibility the JJF has to the field because of its size and importance and about the foundation developing and disseminating knowledge as part of that role. What role does JJF currently play in the building of the field of Jewish education? How might they move toward greater leadership and influence?

12. You've worked with a number of foundations over the years. What distinguishes JJF in its work in evaluation? How is it similar to other foundations you've encountered?
13. Let's shift and talk about the Preferred Evaluators' initiative.
14. The idea of a consortium of preferred evaluators is spelled out in your paper. How did this idea develop?
15. What were your reactions to the first convening? Did you solicit feedback? How? Any surprises at that gathering?
16. How did the plans for January develop?
17. What kind of feedback loops are built into the process? What might some indicators of success be?
18. At this point, where do you see this heading? How might you bring it to a conclusion?
19. What are the potential influences or impacts this initiative on preferred evaluators (in addition to getting contracts from the foundation)?
20. What are the potential influences or impacts on grantees of the foundation?
21. What are the potential influences or impacts on the field of Jewish education or Jewish philanthropy?
22. Chip has spoken about the initiative as being experimental and risky. How do you perceive its risks?

**Executive Director, Jim Joseph Foundation, January, 2014**

I'd like to talk today about a few topics—the foundation's approach to evaluation, the Preferred Evaluators' Initiative, and a few things related to the foundation overall.

Let's start with the foundation's approach to evaluation.

1. The foundation's approach to evaluation appears on the website. Was the content developed specifically for the website? How was the evaluation policy developed? How was it communicated before the website revamp?
2. You share many evaluation reports on the website. Prior to the revamp of the website, were reports shared? How do you decide what evaluations to share and which ones NOT to share on the website?
3. The website says that **The Jim Joseph Foundation focus on the effectiveness of its grantees is primarily an evaluation—and not a research—question.** How do you distinguish between research and evaluation questions?
4. How has the JJF approach to evaluation changed over time? Thinking about the timeline of the foundation since 2006 to the present, were there specific incidents that contributed to these changes? What were they? When was Lee's paper, "The Foundation's Mission and the Role of Evaluation" written? What prompted it?
5. Among the benefits listed on the "Overview" in the Evaluation and Research page, is:

**Foundation learning—as both a management tool and as a means for assessing if the Foundation's strategic grantmaking priorities enable grantees**

**to realize their mission and goals in ways that advance the Jim Joseph**

**Foundation mission.**

Can you unpack this statement for me? What does this learning look like? How does it happen?

6. What are some of the strengths of the JJF's approach to evaluation? Some of the challenges?
7. Can you tell me about a time when the learning from one evaluation was applied in another context? How did this come about? How would you describe/explain the foundation's approach to learning from evaluation? What is the process? Who is responsible? How is the learning used—by the foundation? With the board? By grantees? How is it shared beyond the publication of evaluation reports? How is the learning used for the examination/evaluation of the foundation's strategy?
8. Is it correct that the foundation once established a position that focused specifically on evaluation? Please tell me more about what happened—what led to its establishment/elimination, what the hopes were for the position?
9. The foundation wants the outside perspective that external evaluators can bring. At the same time, your commitment to relational philanthropy calls for evaluators to share responsibility for the success of the work you fund. Do you ever find these two things in tension? If so, how do you manage the tension?

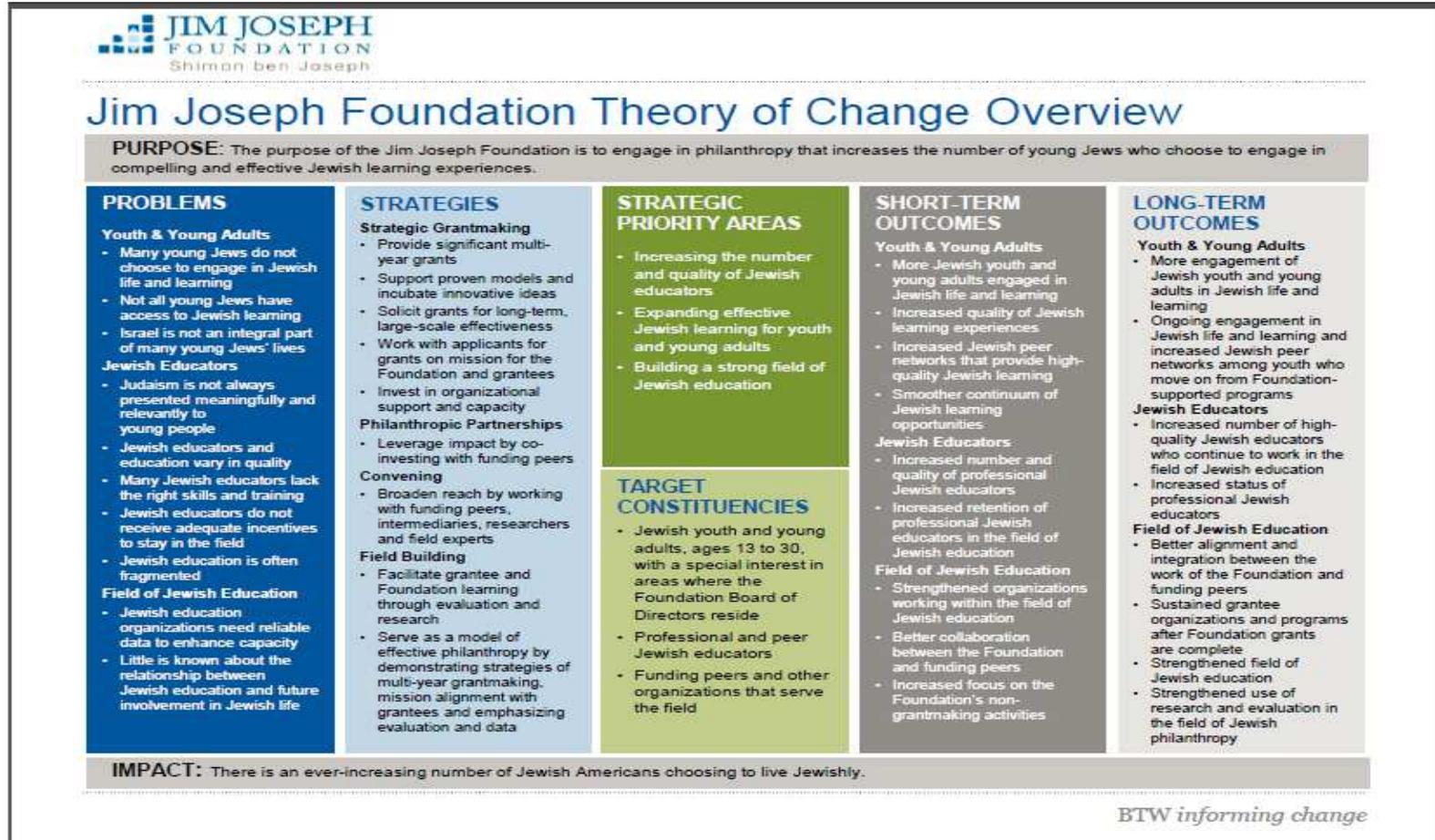
Speaking of external evaluators, let's turn now to the Preferred Evaluators' Initiative. . .

10. You're now getting ready for the second gathering. How did the plans for January develop?
11. What were your reactions to the first convening? Did you solicit feedback? How? Any surprises at that gathering?
12. Are there formal feedback loops built into the process? What might some indicators of success be? Any plans to document or evaluate the initiative?
13. At this point, where do you see this heading? How might you bring it to a conclusion?
14. You've talked to the group about some of your hopes for what the PE Initiative could achieve for the foundation? What do you hope it could achieve for the evaluators? The grantees of the foundation?
15. As I understand it, the Preferred Evaluators are not being compensated financially for their participation in the initiative. How did you come to the decision not to pay them for their time? Was it a barrier for anyone?
16. One of the foundation's strategic priorities is building the field of Jewish education. Field building involves coordinating the efforts of multiple organizations and individuals around a common goal. What is the foundation's leadership role in this kind field building? How has the role of JJF evolved as a leader in field building? What are the limits? What are the risks?

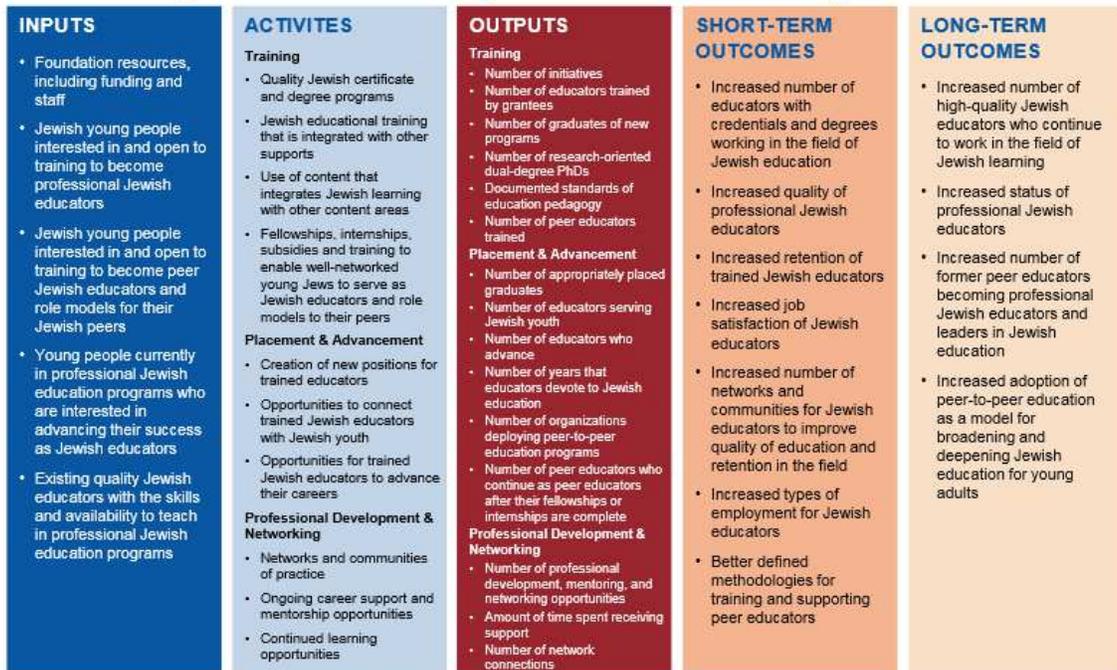
**Executive Director, Jim Joseph Foundation, January, 2015**

1. Has the Evaluators' Consortium been presented publically beyond the Funders' Collaborative? If so, in what setting?
2. What has the Evaluation Consortium contributed to the Foundation? To you as a leader? To the staff? Can you give me a concrete example?
3. How do you imagine the work of this group moving forward?
4. From the get-go you talked about this initiative as a risk. In what ways have the risks paid off? Would you do it again?
5. If you had it to do over again, would you have done anything differently?
6. What would you tell another Foundation CEO about the value of this type of initiative? Its drawbacks?

## APPENDIX B: Jim Joseph Foundation Theory of Change & Logic Models

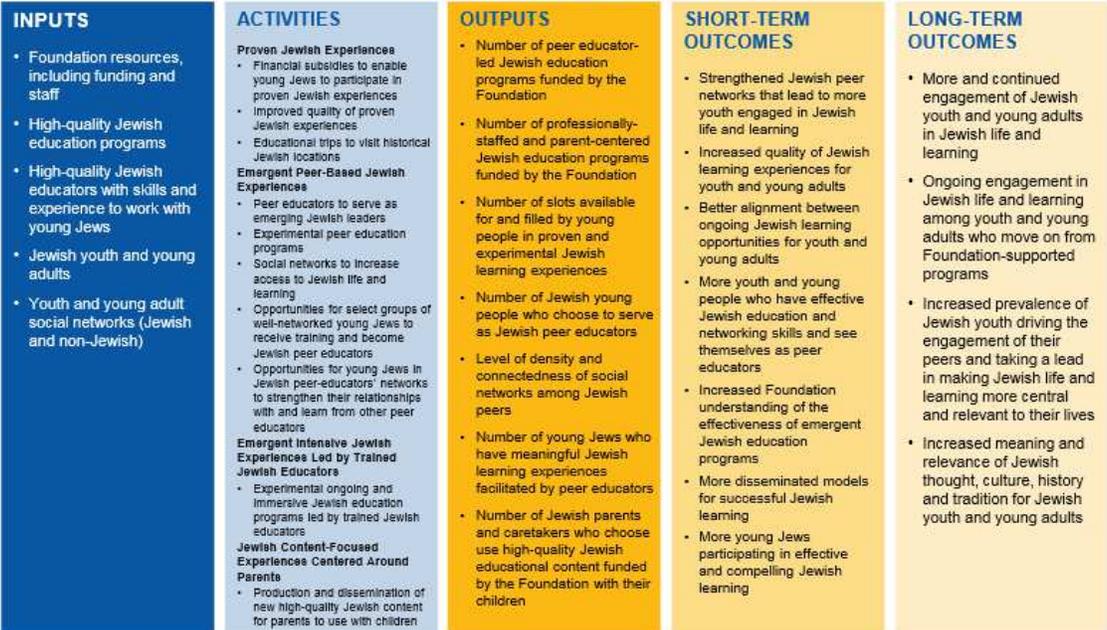


## Increasing the Number & Quality of Jewish Educators Logic Model Overview



**IMPACT:** There is a steady growth of high-quality professional and peer Jewish educators who take and are retained in positions where they can provide effective and compelling learning experiences for young Jews.

## Expanding Effective Jewish Learning for Youth & Young Adults Logic Model Overview



**IMPACT:** There is an increasing number of youth and young adults that are engaged in relevant and meaningful Jewish learning and creating and sustaining Jewish networks.

## Building a Strong Field of Jewish Education Logic Model Overview

### INPUTS

- Foundation resources, including funding and staff
- Organizations within the sub-sectors of the field of Jewish education (e.g., ECE, service-learning, Jewish camp) that are engaged in work that aligns with the Foundation's mission
- Funding partners with shared interests in advancing the field of Jewish education
- Key external stakeholders (e.g., bloggers, consultants, government, academics)
- Jewish education leaders with the knowledge, skills and networks to further the field
- A readiness among leaders to work collectively to advance the field
- Data from and on Jewish education and Jewish organizations

### ACTIVITIES

#### Development of the Field

- Intermediary organizations that build quality, capacity and reach of Jewish education sub-sectors
- Professional development, leadership training and opportunities for collaboration for Jewish education organizations
- Capacity building and field-wide training support
- Incubation of new organizations within Jewish education
- Funding that can be re-granted by intermediaries
- Collaboration between funders in Jewish education field-building

#### Data & Research

- Actionable research to advance work
- Standards of quality practice in Jewish education
- Resources and tools to serve the field

### OUTPUTS

#### Development of the Field

- Number of funding peers
- Number of dollars disseminated from funding peers
- Number of dollars re-granted by intermediary organizations
- Number of Jewish professionals who participate in professional development opportunities
- Number of organizations served by Foundation-supported intermediaries
- Number of Jewish youth participating in new Jewish learning opportunities

#### Data & Research

- Documented standards of practice
- Number of Jewish youth benefiting from the work of intermediaries
- Number of organizations adopting new standards of practice
- Number of new research studies produced by the Foundation and others

### SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

- Strengthened organizations working within the field of Jewish education
- More effective and efficient collaboration between the Foundation and funding peers, practitioners and field experts
- Development of a shared understanding of learning outcomes for Jewish youth across the field of Jewish education
- More and better access to actionable data and research describing sub-sectors of Jewish education
- Use of new tools and resources created to serve the needs of the sub-sectors of Jewish education

### LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

- Strengthened use of research and evaluation in the field of Jewish philanthropy
- Development of new and strengthened existing intermediaries to serve unmet needs of sub-sectors of the field of Jewish education
- Increased success and innovation within sub-sectors of Jewish education
- Better alignment and integration between the work of the Foundation and funding peers, practitioners and field experts
- Sustained grantee organizations and programs after Foundation grants are complete

**IMPACT:** The field of Jewish education and the organizations working within that field are better aligned and more successful in promoting Jewish life and learning for Jewish youth and young adults.

## **APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form**

### **CONSENT FORM**

#### **Strengthening the Practice of Evaluation in Foundations: A Case Study of the JJF**

You are invited to be in a research study of the practice and use of evaluation in foundations. You were selected as a possible participant because of your participation in the Preferred Evaluators' Initiative being conducted by the Jim Joseph Foundation. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Cindy Reich, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development, College of Education and Human Development, University of MN.

#### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to understand the efforts of one foundation to improve the effectiveness of their practice and use of evaluation. Of particular interest are what motivates a foundation to improve their evaluation practice, the approaches they use to improve evaluation practice, and the outcomes of their efforts on the foundation, its grantees, and the participating evaluators.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following things:

- Participate in one/two interviews with me (one at the beginning and one at the end of the experimental initiative)
- The interview(s) will take approximately 1 hour each and will be audiotaped
- Your interview(s) will be arranged at a time and place convenient to you, either in person or over the phone.

#### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

The study has several risks: First, you may be asked questions about the initiative or your work with the foundation that you are not comfortable answering. You do not need to answer any questions you are uncomfortable answering, and you will be able to stop the interview at any time if you do not wish to continue. Second, it may be possible for readers of the study to identify you as a participant in this study. Your answers to questions will be confidential and your name will only be used in the final study or any writing or articles associated with the study with your permission.

There are no direct benefits to you for your participation. The information you share will, however, add to our knowledge about the practice and use of evaluation in foundations.

**Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. No published report or article will include information that will make it possible to identify you personally. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Audio recordings will be transferred immediately to a password protected computer file, accessible only to the researcher; files will be erased from the recorder.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota or with the Jim Joseph Foundation. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is: Cindy Reich. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at 952-239-5032, [reic0086@umn.edu](mailto:reic0086@umn.edu). My advisor at the University of Minnesota is Jean A. King, PhD. She may be contacted at 612-626-1614 or [kingx004@umn.edu](mailto:kingx004@umn.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

***You may keep this Consent Information Form for your records.***