



# What's the Difference?

*How Foundation Trustees View Evaluation*

# Trustees Know

## EVALUATION MATTERS

Trustees care deeply about impact. Understanding results is part of their fiduciary duty. As foundations strive to improve performance, advance accountability and share knowledge, their desire for evaluation — reliable data on organizational effectiveness — grows.

### **EVALUATION ISN'T MEETING OUR NEEDS.**

Trustees wish that current approaches generated more useful information. In too many cases, foundation evaluation practices don't align with trustee needs.

### **IT CAN WORK BETTER.**

Trustees across the United States believe there are ways to improve how we determine the effectiveness of social investments. Many are already using proven, practical approaches today.

*FSG Social Impact Advisors, with funding from The James Irvine Foundation, interviewed dozens of foundation trustees, CEOs and evaluation experts to uncover critical issues and exciting ideas related to evaluation. This document shares highlights from these interviews.*

*See Page 6 to learn about the complete Evaluation Kit for Trustees.*

# What Trustees Say

## ABOUT EVALUATION

### I'M HERE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Trustees are personally and passionately motivated to make a difference. While some hold a perspective that “if the grant sounds good, we’ve done our job,” the vast majority feel a weighty responsibility to themselves, their staff and their communities. They want to learn from past results to ensure that foundation resources are being used to achieve the greatest possible effect.

**If something isn't working, we need to know it. We need to know that we're not wasting money.**

Mariam Noland, Trustee  
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

### EVALUATION IS PART OF OUR JOB.

Trustees take their fiduciary duties very seriously. And, they see evaluation as an important part of fulfilling these duties. They feel that spending foundation assets wisely is just as essential as investing and managing them wisely.

**There is a fiduciary responsibility that boards play, and evaluation should inform the judgments of trustees about the reach and impacts of the foundation's work.**

Dr. Kent McGuire, Trustee  
Wachovia Regional Foundation and California HealthCare Foundation

### WHEN IT COMES TO EVALUATION, OUR ACTIONS DON'T ALWAYS MATCH OUR CONVICTIONS.

While trustees say evaluation is important, many admit that it gets lost in the shuffle as they press onward with projects. Those interviewed say it would help to set clearer, more concrete goals and strategies that build in evaluation from the start. They say evaluation deserves more time, attention and resources than it currently receives.

**It's so interesting and exciting to keep working on what's in front of us... it's tough to make yourself stop and look back.**

William Getty, Trustee and CEO  
Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation

### MANY EVALUATION APPROACHES DON'T DO THE JOB.

The way foundations pursue evaluation often doesn't meet trustee needs. Conducted by academics and social scientists, many evaluations result in long reports where key insights are buried and lost to busy trustees from the worlds of business, politics and nonprofit leadership. Some are summarized so briefly that their meaning is diluted. Some evaluation findings are purely retrospective and do not inform future grantmaking decisions. They often come too late — after the next round of grants is already out the door. Poorly aimed, packaged and timed reports chip away at the usefulness of evaluation, leading some trustees to view the practice as an excessive administrative cost.

**The field is filled with evaluation reports that are unused, in part because their implications are not adequately translated to practice.**

Fay Twersky, Director of Impact Planning & Improvement  
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

# What Trustees Want

## FROM EVALUATION

### THE TRUTH CAN BE UNCOMFORTABLE.

Trustees, staff members and CEOs are all personally invested in foundation projects and programs. They want them to succeed, and because reputations and legacies factor into this desire, they sometimes find it painful to face and disclose grim results. Evaluators who are hired by foundations also hesitate to share negative findings candidly with their clients. Though these conflicts of interest often go unspoken, they are real, and they threaten the existence and utility of evaluation.

**Foundation boards and staff often experience a conspiracy of graciousness.**

Eugene Cochrane, President  
The Duke Endowment

### EVALUATION SHOULD BE PRACTICAL AND FOCUSED ON LEARNING.

While some trustees critique today's evaluations as ill-timed and unfocused, others see potential. They envision a new type of evaluation: It's forward looking and directly tied to upcoming decisions. It's multifaceted and pragmatic in practice. It reports back in real time to allow for midcourse corrections. It feeds organizational learning and offers insights that other foundations across the field can run with for a progress-accelerating ripple effect.

**You don't wait until a project is complete to see what you're getting.**

Lise Yasui, Trustee  
William Penn Foundation

### GIVE ME A CLEAR, BIG PICTURE — WITH NUMBERS.

Many trustees are strategists. They have experienced analytical rigor in business and academia, and they know it helps them make tough calls on when to hold on and when to get out. But it's a mistake to mire them in details. To make informed decisions, trustees need salient facts about large investments, most often at the program strategy or foundation level and less often about individual grants. They also want information on relevant external trends. Stories are good for conveying emotion and context, but for many trustees, numbers paint a more telling picture. Social impact may be difficult to describe with quantitative data, but according to trustees, this is no excuse not to measure.

**The board wants high-level findings, and information on the rigor of the evaluation. They look at it from 30,000 feet... in their role as strategists.**

Risa Lavizzo-Mourey,  
Trustee and CEO  
Robert Wood Johnson  
Foundation

### IT'S MORE ABOUT RESULTS THAN RECOGNITION.

Getting credit for a job well done is nice, but it shouldn't be the reason for doing evaluation. Most trustees want evaluations to tell them whether the foundation's efforts have contributed to the goals they set out to achieve. Some observed that no one organization has the resources to make *the* difference, so it's more important to focus on the progress being made than on whether the change can be attributed to their foundation's intervention.

**Our board is realistic, and the trustees know that in some areas we will never be able to attribute success solely to our contribution.**

Christy Pichel, President,  
Stuart Foundation

# What Trustees Want

## FROM EVALUATION

{continued}

### HELP ME CHAMPION EVALUATION.

When trustees have accurate expectations for what's achievable (and what's not) through evaluation, they can help drive demand for it and hold foundations accountable for results. Trustees can help make evaluation a worthwhile endeavor by:

- Asking questions early on about program design, goals and milestones, and how the evaluation will measure success
- Expecting staff to use data in shaping plans and guiding implementation
- Making time at board meetings to discuss the results of past grants and the implications for the future
- Using evaluation results to inform judgments about resource allocations and strategic decisions
- Being efficient about information requests: asking for only the data they'll use and taking advantage of information other funders have already gleaned from grantees

**The trustees want to learn about the type of grants they should be making, and how effective our investments are. They want to know the impact of what we're doing and see tangible, bottom-line outcomes.**

Dr. James Knickman, CEO  
New York State Health  
Foundation

# What Do You Say

## ABOUT EVALUATION?

Is your foundation's use of evaluation relevant to your decision making?  
Are your board conversations about evaluation productive?  
Is it time to take time to improve evaluation?

### EVALUATION KIT FOR TRUSTEES

#### RESOURCES: LEARN ABOUT EVALUATION PRACTICES



#### **What's the Difference?**

*How Foundation Trustees View Evaluation*

Get highlights of key findings from interviews about evaluation with dozens of foundation trustees, CEOs and evaluation experts.



#### **Snapshots**

*How Foundation Trustees Use Evaluation*

Explore brief case studies that show how foundation trustees are successfully employing different types of evaluation for a variety of purposes.

#### TOOLS: EXAMINE YOUR EVALUATION PROCESS



#### **Let's Consider Evaluation**

*A Self-Assessment Tool for Foundation Trustees*

Complete this simple survey to capture trustee points of view on evaluation purpose, method and cost at your foundation.



#### **Let's Discuss Evaluation**

*A Framework for Trustee Conversations and A Facilitator's Guide*

Generate dialogue on evaluation and compare trustee points of view with research findings from the field. A companion piece helps the facilitator plan and lead the discussion.



#### **Let's Make Evaluation Work**

*A Planning Guide for Foundation Trustees*

Unravel common evaluation issues and identify strategies others have used that might work for your foundation. Create a custom action plan for improving performance through evaluation.

## SOURCES

The Evaluation Kit for Trustees is a project of FSG Social Impact Advisors, with funding from The James Irvine Foundation. It is based on interviews with foundation trustees, CEOs and evaluation experts from across the country, as well as findings documented in *From Insight to Action: New Directions in Foundation Evaluation*, a report on emerging approaches to evaluation in the philanthropic field produced by FSG and funded by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Irvine engaged Williams Group to develop this kit to help foundations and their trustees act upon the research findings.

**FSG Social Impact Advisors** is an international nonprofit consulting and research organization dedicated to accelerating social progress by advancing the practice of philanthropy and corporate social responsibility. ([www.fsg-impact.org](http://www.fsg-impact.org))

**The James Irvine Foundation** is a private, nonprofit grantmaking foundation dedicated to expanding opportunity for the people of California to participate in a vibrant, successful and inclusive society. ([www.irvine.org](http://www.irvine.org))

**Williams Group** helps people and organizations do better through communication. The firm plans, designs and manages strategic communications programs for a variety of nonprofit and corporate clients. ([www.wg-site.com](http://www.wg-site.com))

## ADVISORY BOARD

We would like to thank the members of this project's Advisory Board for providing their guidance and feedback.

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Ken Moore	Director of Evaluation and Technology, Trustee	Gordon E. and Betty I. Moore Foundation
Edward Pauly	Director of Research and Evaluation	Wallace Foundation
Steven Schroeder	Director	The James Irvine Foundation and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

## INTERVIEWEES

The following foundation trustees, CEOs and evaluation experts participated in interviews for this project.

### **Annie E. Casey Foundation**

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### **Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers**

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### **The California Wellness Foundation**

Gary Yates, *President and CEO, Director*

### **Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation**

William Getty, *CEO and Trustee*  
Newt Thomas, *Trustee*

### **The Duke Endowment**

Eugene Cochrane, *President*

### **Gordon E. and Betty I. Moore Foundation**

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### **Janice Wood Consulting, Inc.**

Janice Wood, *Principal and Evaluation Expert*

### **John S. and James L. Knight Foundation**

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James Crutchfield, *Trustee*  
Paul Grogan, *Trustee*  
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Alberto Ibargüen, *President and Trustee*  
Mariam Noland, *Trustee*

### **Kendall Foundation**

Ted Smith, *Executive Director*

### **National Philanthropic Trust**

Eileen Heisman, *President and CEO, Trustee*

### **NeighborWorks**

Tracey Rutnik, *Evaluation Expert*

### **New York State Health Foundation**

Jim Knickman, *President and CEO*

### **Patrizi Associates**

Patricia Patrizi, *Principal and Evaluation Expert*

**INTERVIEWEES** {continued}**The Pew Charitable Trusts**

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**The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation**

Wendy Garen, *President and CEO*  
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**Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

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**Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Inc.**

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**The Skillman Foundation**

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**Skoll Foundation**

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**Stuart Foundation**

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Christy Pichel, *President*

**Unihealth Foundation**

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**Wachovia Regional Foundation**

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**Wallace Foundation**

Edward Pauly, *Director of Research and Evaluation*

**Walter and Elise Haas Fund**

Pamela David, *Executive Director*

**William Penn Foundation**

Michael Bailin, *Director*  
Feather Houstoun, *President*  
Chris James-Brown, *Director*  
Lise Yasui, *Director*

**Woodcock Foundation**

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Phalarope Foundation)  
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To learn more, please visit [www.fsg-impact.org/ideas/item/trustee\\_evaluation\\_tools.html](http://www.fsg-impact.org/ideas/item/trustee_evaluation_tools.html)

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