

Working toward Collaborative Learning: Evaluation of the Ford Foundation's Metropolitan Opportunity Unit Strategy

November 29, 2012

By Patricia Patrizi and Susan Parker

Preface

This case study tells the story of the formation and early implementation of a unit-wide strategy at the Ford Foundation and the role that a collaborative evaluation plays in it. This case provides background for a discussion on learning from strategy that will take place on December 11, 2012 at the Evaluation Roundtable. The discussion will include the Program Director from the Ford Foundation and the evaluation team from Success Measures.

Introduction

A new era of program strategy at the Ford Foundation

After Luis Ubiñas, a former McKinsey executive, became President of the Ford Foundation in 2008, the entire Foundation engaged in an extensive period of strategy development and decision making that produced a new configuration of program strategies. Prior to Ubiñas' arrival, strategy at Ford resided in the hands of individual program officers and by most accounts varied substantially from officer to officer.

As described in a 2012 *Stanford Social Innovation Review*¹ article, Ubiñas aimed to establish a results-oriented culture at the Foundation. Soon after his arrival, Ubiñas set in motion an executive-led program review emphasizing "clearly defined strategy and approach with explicit and achievable objectives that can be documented and evaluated." He states in the article that establishing such a culture begins with asking five questions:

- 1. Does the initiative or field office have a clearly defined strategy and approach with explicit and achievable objectives that can be documented and evaluated?*
- 2. Can additional funding for a defined period deepen or hasten desired results over time in an initiative or office?*
- 3. Are the funds currently allocated being deployed strategically? Have peripheral activities been eliminated?*

¹ Luis Ubinas, "[A Focus on Culture: How the Ford Foundation is engaging its global staff in building a shared culture of results](#)", *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Summer, 2012.

4. To what extent has the initiative team successfully engaged other partners, including other foundations, businesses, and government?

5. Is the initiative team strategically using the foundation's non-grant resources—intellectual, convening, and communications—to pursue the initiative's goals?

A new strategy: from neighborhoods to regions

With the arrival of the new president, the Foundation's Economic Opportunity and Assets program emerged as four units² that Pablo Farias, Vice President of the program sees as "driving access to economic opportunity and asset accumulation." According to Farias, one of these units, the Metropolitan Opportunity Unit (Unit) reflects the Foundation's desire to address "the ways that metropolitan regions shape the opportunities available to low income families for access to good quality jobs and services, and for development of their assets, particularly quality housing."

While new, this strategy builds on lessons from decades of Foundation investment to improve opportunities for poor people in cities; principally through efforts to revitalize neighborhoods and produce quality, affordable housing. According to George "Mac" McCarthy, Director of the Unit, this strategy moment allowed staff to re-focus their efforts from the neighborhood to the regional or metropolitan level where "most of system changes could be made." With more application of a systems lens, the Unit could address problems that were inextricably linked such as housing, transportation and jobs. McCarthy also wanted to break down "silos" among organizations that have the same overall goals but rarely work together, including those that focus on community organizing, civil rights and community development.

In May 2010, the Ford Foundation announced a \$200 million, five-year program in nine metropolitan areas³ "to help transform the way cities, suburbs and surrounding communities grow and plan for the future."⁴ The strategy is implemented through three initiatives that are to work together to achieve Unit outcomes through a systems approach.

McCarthy describes the initiatives as:

- **Expanding Access to Quality Housing**, through strategies that expand tenure and finance alternatives and build better systems that deliver and finance affordable homes at scale;⁵

² These thematic units, as they are called are: Quality Employment, Financial Assets, Metropolitan Opportunity and Natural Resources.

³ Those areas are: Atlanta; Boston; Brownsville, Texas (Lower Rio Grande Valley); Denver, Detroit; Minneapolis-St. Paul; New Orleans, San Diego and San Francisco.

⁴ Helping America's Metropolitan Regions Build Prosperity and Expand Opportunity: Press Release, May 10, 2010.

⁵ Tenure refers to the length of time that a homeowner needs to stay in a home to qualify for a particular financial product or mortgage to begin to gain equity in the property.

- **Promoting Metropolitan Land-Use Innovation**, through innovative land use strategies, inclusive community planning, and new regional systems to accelerate re-use of vacant and abandoned property;
- **Connecting People to Opportunity** by supporting more integrated and inclusive economic development policies that lead to an increased supply of affordable housing in opportunity-rich areas or proximate to public transit, greater job opportunities for low-income workers, and smarter public investment that results in better regional economic performance.

The approach is meant to “integrate affordable housing, transportation and land-use policies to foster greater access to economic opportunities for all residents of metropolitan areas and to promote more equitable economic growth.”

In addition, the Unit’s work reflects a set of values related to equity and inclusion that guide their investments and influence the outcomes chosen. These values include:

- The belief that social and economic exclusion of large portions of local populations imposes significant costs on all citizens and diminishes regional economic performance;
- An understanding that philanthropic resources should not substitute for public expenditures;
- The view that making metropolitan regions equitable, sustainable, and prosperous will require coordinated effort across the public, private, and civic sectors;
- A commitment to participatory planning that engages citizens in informing and making the decisions that shape the places in which they live and work; and,
- A commitment to transparency and accountability of both the public and private sectors.

It is important to note that the scale of the strategy is substantial with the Foundation providing support to anywhere from three to twelve grantees in each of the nine metropolitan areas where the Unit works. Ford also supports approximately 60 national grantees that help to facilitate the work in the regions, provide research, and give assistance to grow effective models. While the Foundation has supported some of these organizations for years, others are new grantees.

The need to inform strategy, foundation leadership and grantees

According to Farias, a central premise of Ford’s new approach was that initiatives would define the core unit of strategy development, results tracking and resource allocation. At the same time, initiatives were “expected to address complex challenges of social change linked to the Foundation’s social justice mission and not be limited to narrow interventions. This required an approach based on formulating a theory of change to define the outcomes expected and the role of different strategies in a social change

process. It also required developing a monitoring framework based on clusters of initiative activities, capable of integrating multiple sources of information and of evolving over time.”

As the leader of the Metropolitan Opportunity Unit, McCarthy knew that he needed to be able to demonstrate progress.⁶ “We need evidence to show impact,” he said. “If we don’t have ammunition to make a case then I can’t bring resources to the space.” McCarthy and his team provide this evidence on a yearly basis to address the question: how do we know that we are making progress? He said he wants to be able “to provide tangible evidence that we are making real progress toward achieving our long-term objectives.” McCarthy goes on to say that while “the evidence needs to be observable, verifiable, and linked directly to the logic model that we have adopted to drive our impact, the results we report could be quantitative or qualitative.”

Rather than a traditional evaluation, McCarthy wanted an evaluation that would provide ongoing feedback to help inform the Unit’s strategy, assist grantees in doing their work, and offer information for learning to both program officers and to the organizations carrying out this work.⁷ As a well-versed consumer and an evaluator in his own right, he speculated: “if we look at evaluation as some external thing that we do, then it won’t be used by the field. If the people who are actually going to use it were engaged in processing and learning—then it would be better.” To do this, McCarthy reached out to Success Measures,⁸ a social enterprise⁹ that specializes in participatory, outcome-focused evaluations “to help us develop a more formal evaluation of our work.”

McCarthy and his colleagues wanted an evaluation to provide “real-time feedback” that could contribute to making adjustments in the program’s strategy and more effective use of resources. “I

⁶ Elaborating on Foundation expectations, Farias states: “A first step in this process was to define the core elements of an initiative and establish a framework for tracking their development, including defining goals and objectives, a theory of change, a monitoring and evaluation framework, resource needs and partnerships. This process established an annual cycle of reporting of emerging results as a tool to promote learning and adjustment of strategy, and to inform resource allocation decisions. This annual cycle of monitoring activities was expected to be complemented by periodic evaluations designed to fit the trajectory, approach and evidence needs of each initiative.”

⁷ McCarthy speaks with some authority on this subject, having been an evaluator of congressionally sponsored programs. Prior to joining the Ford Foundation in 2000, he worked as a senior research associate at the Center for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and was a professor of economics at Bard College. As a program officer at Ford, he sponsored numerous evaluations that were fairly traditional in design, method and execution.

⁸ Success Measures was formed in 1997 as a collaboration of community development practitioners, national nonprofit organizations, researchers and funders in the community development field. It has supported 350 community-based organizations and 28 of their funding and intermediary partners to evaluate a range of strategies and programs. In addition, Success Measures has trained more than 900 community development professionals to conduct evaluations using its methods and tools. In 2004, NeighborWorks America acquired Success Measures. The social enterprise now also serves NeighborWorks’ network of 240 community-based nonprofits as well as other organizations.

⁹ A social enterprise is a revenue-generating business that aims to achieve social, cultural, community, economic or environmental outcomes.

don't really believe that these deep quantitative evaluations are of assistance in philanthropic work," McCarthy said. "More often than not, they are used to justify how you spent your money but they are not useful in advancing your work. They don't provide you with timely feedback to make real-time adjustments in strategy to make your work more productive, particularly the kind of work that is intended to create social change."

"We recognize that any impacts on a metropolitan region will happen over a long time horizon," said Amy Kenyon, Program Manager of the Unit. "We wanted to create an evaluation that would help us learn along the way. We wanted to learn how these tools were being adopted in different metropolitan regions. Are grantees having success in creating those policies to develop a more equitable region? What are some of the things we didn't think about or unintended consequences?"

According to Maggie Grieve, Director of Success Measures, the Unit made a strategic decision to work this way. "By fully engaging grantees, the Unit sought a more complete analysis of the dynamics in the regions they are supporting and evolve their understanding of the organizational strategies, public policies and development investments that are stimulated and leveraged by the Foundation's grant making," Grieve said.

Implementing a Collaborative Evaluation

In this process Success Measures is working with six¹⁰ of the Unit's nine metropolitan regions. The goal is to pilot and improve the approach and soon expand it to all nine regions. The major elements of this collaborative evaluation include the following:

- Helping Foundation staff articulate their theory of change, solicit grantee input and continue to refine it as needed over time;
- Developing a trust-worthy framework to represent the meaning "of place" for each metro, built upon rich data and information from multiple sources;
- Developing and implementing participatory processes to enlist grantee and program staff input and provide feedback throughout;
- Synthesizing and sharing information and documenting progress and learning throughout.

¹⁰ The following regions are part of the evaluation: Boston, Denver, Detroit, Minneapolis-St. Paul, New Orleans and San Francisco.

Helping articulate, inform and refine a theory of change

Success Measures first role was to help Unit staff develop and articulate the theory of change that could support the Unit work as a whole. McCarthy, recalling the work with Success Measures, said that the work began with a “deconstruction and reconstruction of our own early theory of change.”

The work produced a theory of change graphic (see Appendix 1) that outlines: the Foundation’s Initiatives through which funding flows; the major approaches supported; interim indicators; and medium and long-term outcomes as well as overall Unit outcomes. The Unit outcomes associated with the strategy are:

- Stronger regional economic performance resulting from equitable and inclusive strategies;
- Empowered and engaged low-income residents who shape decisions related to housing, transit and land use in their communities and regions;
- Reduction of spatial inequality and racial justice inequalities that underpin it so that low-income people can build long-term assets and use them as a pathway out of poverty.

When asked about the ambitious nature of the Unit outcomes, Jessica Anders, Research and Evaluation Manager at Success Measures, explains that these outcomes serve as a “net to capture the activities and directions of different places.” She goes on to say that the Unit “does not expect attribution of outcome progress at this level; rather it operates under the assumption that their investments in the work of grantees *contributes* to progress on outcomes. More specific goals and outcomes are incorporated within each initiative.”

McCarthy offers the following examples:

- Quality Housing: increased supply of permanently affordable housing in a metro area;
- Land Use: significant reduction in the volume of vacant and abandoned property;
- Connecting People: a significant increase in the number of affordable transit accessible homes.

There were many inputs to the theory of change and it was characterized by Anders as being highly “emergent.” She describes that strategy as “neither a one-point-in-time enterprise, nor one that reflects the work of the Foundation alone. The strategy is a convergence of the opportunities in a Metro, the Unit’s funding interest and where their investment can make a difference.”

The Unit also aims to fund activities responsive to the context of each region, thereby taking advantage of the unique opportunities and challenges in each place. For example, Detroit and New Orleans have

given priority to vacant properties strategies because of the importance of that issue in those settings. Ford has helped both cities leverage national grantee expertise to assist with building local vacant property campaigns and establishing local land bank authorities.¹¹ In the Bay Area, where vacant property is not the prevailing concern, grantees have embraced a strong policy and legal (fair housing) strategy to take advantage of statewide policy opportunities. In this case, Bay Area grantees have parlayed the opportunity that a climate change bill (SB375) affords them to advocate for linking housing and transportation policies in ways that are advantageous to poor people.

On the internal side of the ledger, McCarthy gives Success Measures substantial credit for pushing for more internal integration and reckoning. Seeing the need and opportunity to move away from Ford's past of individual program officer strategies, McCarthy saw an opportunity to forge more linkages not just in the field but within the Unit. Anders describes the theory of change process as serving as a "reflection and focusing point" for the Unit. As new staff joined the team with new skills and perspectives, the theory of change went through many iterations reflecting the evolution of the team. Through this process, Success Measures worked with staff to integrate new ideas and approaches in meaningful ways, usually by asking "how and why" it would advance the theory of change.

McCarthy found this work to be "crucial" in helping staff think through and articulate their goals and how to achieve them. "Without the evaluation we wouldn't have gotten as far as we had in getting it coherent and fixing it and improving it," he said. "Success Measures did this by grilling us constantly. As they presented it back to us, it wasn't as coherent as we thought."

Grantee input from the outset was central to this effort. "We wanted to test our theory of change in participation with our grantees in the field," said Jerry Maldonado, program officer at the Metropolitan Opportunity Unit. "We felt it was important to engage our grantees on the ground to help us think through that and create an active feedback loop so that the data we gather could be fed back to the grantees."

Developing a framework to define place and evaluate progress

Success Measures was tasked to put together the metropolitan context for each city, which included defining a set of indicators that relate to change across the Unit's three initiative areas (housing, transportation and land use). Anders explains the work in this way: "Grantees told us that to tell their story, we needed to understand their place. The indicators selected were contextual in nature and help

¹¹ Vacant properties are a concern for individuals in neighborhoods because they are often safety concerns. From a market perspective, vacant properties lower property values. Vacant property campaigns seek to bring together sufficient data and mapping to develop a strategy to manage the properties to address both the neighborhood and market concerns. Given the global financial crisis, these must be a blend of short-, medium- and long-term strategies. Through a land bank, cities (or a separate non-profit agency) can acquire, manage and when able, sell the properties for development.

describe the place/context for the work. These are different than indicators being collected over time to evaluate the ongoing work.”

Success Measures takes the issue of context quite seriously using a broad swath of information to accurately portray the work in each metropolitan area and engaging in extensive review processes to assure that the data and its interpretation feels authentic to the participants. Secondary data are complemented by qualitative information that depicts the socio-political environment and key policies that the Unit and its grantees have targeted as affecting their ability “to have real impact,” Anders said.

Anders emphasizes that grantees want the evaluation to help build understanding “of what it is like to do the work in their region.” This meant that Success Measures would need to make data tell a complex story that inter-relates such things as “racial segregation, proximity of affordable housing to job centers and to transit.” It requires them to develop a “deeper understanding of the socio-political environment, both in terms of existing policies that support or hinder the work and also historical issues or current realities that temper this work in a manner particular to the region,” she said. Success Measures also conducts periodic key informant interviews, site visits and surveys with grantees to give them an opportunity to describe their projects and reflect on their work.

Due to the depth and complexity of the knowledge needed for this kind of work as well as having to assure that the information is reliable and will be interpreted in context, Success Measures works with others, including:

- National research grantees that provide secondary data (e.g., data on race/ethnic diversity, unemployment, median household income, poverty and housing tenure), and map key indicators.
- Local data partners in each metropolitan region, recommended by grantees, which serve in a range of capacities but function primarily to develop a shared understanding of context that can factor into the analysis of evaluative information. The data partners collect and analyze relevant secondary data— such as on housing and racial segregation and describe local laws, regulations and civic engagement and other factors. Beyond their ability to collect and analyze the information, local data partners must be trusted by the community. Success Measures subcontracts with the local data partners.

Developing and implementing collaborative processes

One of the most challenging aspects of an evaluation like this is to develop effective ways to ensure active cycles of information sharing and reflection and to do so without overburdening those involved. With trial and error, Success Measures arrived at the following approach:

- **Ford Foundation staff:** Monthly calls with staff and the Director to reflect on the evaluation and learning from the field. The evaluators also have at least weekly calls with the Unit’s program manager, Amy Kenyon and are in frequent contact with staff through emails. Every two to three months Success Measures meets in-person with staff. The frequency of these meeting increased over time as McCarthy recognized that he needed more timely feedback than the every six month meetings that were originally planned. The frequency of these meetings, however, is tempered by the reality of staff schedules and their actual need for knowledge in light of their own frequent contact with the metros.
- **Metro Grantees:** Success Measures established evaluation advisory groups in each region consisting of representatives from each grantee organization. These groups have bi-monthly phone calls to discuss progress and challenges in the region, their own work and review evaluation products. In these phone calls, grantees provide updates on their work and relationships among the organizations—whether or not they are talking and connecting with another. The extent of contact is driven not just by data collection needs but to ensure an ongoing rapport with grantees to facilitate openness about challenges. The high touch nature of this work is driven in part by McCarthy’s sensitivity to the importance of building trust with grantees as staff recognizes that “all data are political,” and need to be analyzed in proper context. At the same time, the Foundation and Success Measures recognize the need to keep the demand on grantee time manageable.
- **Peer convening within each region:** Success Measures began its work with peer meetings and will continue these in the metro areas over time. The purpose of these meetings will be to review evaluation results, identify key opportunities, and assess areas of progress and challenges. The meetings are seen as an opportunity for program officers to talk with grantees about shifts in their strategies and views of the region.

Synthesizing and sharing information and documenting learning

It is no simple task to study, assess or learn from system change. The evaluation must lift its sights beyond grant by grant evaluation and attempt to capture the complex interactions that characterize regions and the relevant actors within them. The evaluation must also keep the Foundation strategy in focus—both the overall strategy and with specific initiatives in mind.

Currently, the written products associated with this work include:

- **A one-time initial profile of each metropolitan area:** This is a comprehensive portrait of each metropolitan region. The profile surfaces particular challenges that set the stage for work—socio-demographic, economic, opportunity based—and those related to policy and decision making including government structures, roles of agencies and planning bodies. The profiles were done

using the Unit’s framework of equity and inclusion, which means that issues such as racial segregation and other inequities are part of the analysis. The profile describes assets and core grantee directions and objectives. The last part of the report, “Analysis and Learning” provides progress status on substantive milestones achieved and challenges identified by the grantees in the region. The purpose of this product is to create an accurate representation of place. Grantees and Foundation staff were given two weeks to review the document. With few exceptions, grantees took advantage of this opportunity to nuance language and analysis and to ensure that challenges, opportunities and historical influences were appropriately weighed.

- **An annual Metropolitan Evaluation Summary:** This is a brief evaluative report on progress within each region based on the initial profile, updated annually. It was developed to provide information to the Foundation based on analysis of grantees’ updates, key informant interviews, site visits and bi-monthly evaluation call information to provide an evaluative analysis of grantees’ collective progress.
- **Periodic evaluative reports to the Unit:** As part of the early formative phase of the evaluation, Success Measures provides interim evaluation reports via in-person presentations to facilitate discussions among Foundation staff regarding their evolution, approaches, progress and challenges on outcomes, suggestions for improvement and extensive profiles on each metro.
- **Annual program officer summaries:** During the interviews and data collection, grantee concerns emerged that were inappropriate for a public report shared among grantees, but important to be shared with the Unit. Originally formulated as a formal report (6-10 pages), this has now become a shorter “memo” to program officers for each of their assigned metro areas.

With some experience behind them in this work, Success Measures and the Foundation are working to arrive at the right approach, sorting through how much information is needed for the different purposes of different stakeholders and do so in a timely and effective way.

How is this Approach Working?

This is a challenging enterprise. While it is clear that the work has yielded direct and observable benefit to Foundation staff and to grantees it requires time and resources and must regularly juggle the perspectives of multiple participants with different needs and expectations. And these needs and expectations change over time as well.

Clear wins have emerged in some areas. Those wins are:

The evaluation’s effort to help the Unit articulate their theory of change with the benefit of feedback and continuing input from grantees improved the strategy. Specific elements of strategy came forward that were missing. “One of the things that we always said was important but was not included as explicitly as it could be [in the theory of change] was base building and community organizing as a

foundation for change for low-income people to determine their fate in this,” said Lisa Davis, program officer in the Metropolitan Opportunity Unit. In its most recent round of grants Ford put more money into advocacy and coalition building in its regions and into national organizing networks that work on these issues. McCarthy noted that the Unit is using information from Success Measures, coupled with staff members’ own observations and interactions in the field, to modify strategies and make them more specific to each region.

The evaluation has shed light on how important roles and dynamics were playing out in the field.

“One of the things that has become obvious in the last several months is we had underestimated the importance of HUD’s [Department of Housing and Urban Development] commitment to enforcing fair housing regulation and how fundamental that could be in changing the way that we get to one of the outcomes—how to build affordable housing,” McCarthy said. “We thought the only tool was inclusionary zoning. We ended up dramatically shifting our orientation. We shifted our priorities in grantmaking strategies to make sure it fostered this. It was Success Measures hearing about it, telling us and it bubbling up to our consciousness.”

The process of developing the evaluation and selecting measures has pushed discussion between grantees and Foundation staff about the underlying meaning and relevance of the measures considered.

“The process of getting an agreement on relevant indicators and how the data are collected and shared has been the most useful and different aspect of this evaluation,” Maldonado said. “Grantees will tell us, ‘no, these set of indicators are not useful to us.’ There is a whole negotiating process about how data is collected, who analyzes it and who interprets it that has been really illuminating. Success Measures worked with us and grantees to come to a common agreement. It allows us to come to a more rooted common understanding of what is the most useful type of data for advancing our work. That on the ground perspective in place-based work is critically important.”

The participatory processes of the evaluation have served to advance common vision among grantees.

For the Foundation’s vision to be successful, people and organizations must work together in new ways or perhaps for the first time ever. That is, housing, job creation and transit-oriented organizations need to see how their efforts connect and can build on each other. Staff point out that these grantees must think about regional solutions, not just neighborhood ones as many have in the past. In some regions, this may mean working without any kind of regional structure for inter-organizational conversations or for processing the kind of information produced by evaluation. McCarthy and others see that the participatory processes of evaluation are helping people from these different worlds come together to begin to understand these connections.

Illustrating this point, Anders refers to the Metro profiles as important to forging vision not just through their content but in the process of review and agreement. “Collecting the data in the Metro Profile is one piece of the work,” she said. “And there is no doubt that the value of putting it together is important. However, putting on paper a shared analysis among grantees—some of whom are direct

partners and sometimes have very different ideas about how to get the work done—is a triumph. Because grantees were asked to comment on the profile, and they all did substantively, it is a story that they all agree is true and is told in their words.”

The reports have become an important way of communicating about what the Unit is doing—to those inside the Foundation and to others. “The most mundane way that the data is used is to report what we are doing,” McCarthy said. “I have to do that routinely to talk about progress, headlines, and what we can feature on the website. We need constant content to source into what we are doing.”

Clear challenges are part of this work as well. Among those challenges are:

Conveying the purpose and use of the evaluation runs up against traditional ideas about what constitutes “a real” evaluation. Ford staff face the challenge of explaining the purpose and promise of a collaborative evaluation to their bosses. “It runs counter to the culture of what everyone expects of evaluations,” McCarthy said. “You have to be pretty fluent in talking about this, especially to Foundation leaders and trustees. You have to explain that they are not going to get an old-style tidy little report like the ones I used to submit to Congress.” And while grantee participation in the evaluation is high, they are not always clear about how it will inform the Foundation.

The participants have different ideas about what they want. One staff person asked: “what tools do we need to use every day to make better grants? I don’t know if we have gotten to that yet.” McCarthy expressed the hope that many benefits would emerge from the evaluation—including genuine participation, strategic analyses, documentation of the work and evaluative information about the progress of the Metros. Grantees want something that captures what it means to work in their region and that accurately represents their work. A clear consensus is that everyone in the Unit and at Success Measures involved with the work want grantees to get a lot of value out of the endeavor. As one person said, “I know that we are taking some of the grantees’ time and we want to deliver something of value and I’m not sure we’re there yet.” Ford and Success Measures continue to look for ways to give grantees tools to help them convey their work to policymakers and others.

Information needs change over time. “What we thought we needed a year ago is different from what we think we need now and is likely to be different in five years when we look back on this,” Anders said. Making this comment as part of broader discussion about the work of program staff and the expertise that they bring to the strategy, Anders discussed the challenge of providing information that can inform program officers who are already extremely well informed. “And it doesn’t, nor should it, as they are on-the-ground practitioners.” But she notes, that few others in the Foundation share that level of knowledge, and “few will remember the specifics of what was done or why, five years out.” Finally, the evaluation must contend with the constant flow of new information and Ford’s changing understanding about the Unit’s work.

Keeping information flowing requires agreements about who needs to do what and when.

Collaborative evaluation requires participants to review and comment and delays have occurred. One staff person found the Profile to be too long—in that it is 90 pages and deep with data. Ford staff note that they “have struggled to get information back to grantees,” Kenyon said. All parties want to do better on the time it takes to review documents internally before they go out to the grantees.



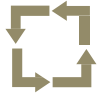



Measuring systems change isn’t easy. While the Foundation staff and evaluators have taken great pains to put into place relevant indicators that can measure change, it is still difficult to do so, particularly when seeking systemic change. “We have a huge measurement challenge,” one program officer said. “We are trying to sort through secondary data to come up with measures that are meaningful for system change. It’s really difficult. You can collect secondary data all day long and still not be able to determine whether you are achieving better access to opportunity for low-income people.”

Collaborative evaluation is seen as time and resource intensive. Since 2009 Ford has invested approximately \$1.65 million in the collaborative evaluation. Ford program staff estimate that they spend about one day a month on evaluation-related work. Kenyon, the Program Manager for the Unit, estimates that she devotes about half of her time to overseeing the evaluation work. Several officers raised concerns that the reports are too long and too time consuming to read. Maldonado sees the tradeoff as worth it. “This is a bit more time intensive process but I think that at the end of the day it allows us to have a conversation about data that adds more value to our grantmaking strategy rather than having information at the end on what worked or didn’t work,” he said.

Reflecting on this work

This highly ambitious effort demonstrates many of the features of good work in complex collaborative evaluation as well as the inherent tensions accompanying the approach. The evaluation is large and complex but no more than that of the Unit’s work in these nine metropolitan areas. The purpose of this case is to shed light on some of the challenges and what we see as core and somewhat predictable tensions in this kind of work that might not go away. At the Roundtable meeting we will interview McCarthy and the Success Measure staff to explore some of the issues related to strategic learning raised by this case.

Appendix 1: Outcome Framework | Ford Foundation Metropolitan Opportunity Unit

INITIATIVES	APPROACHES	INTERIM INDICATORS	MEDIUM TERM OUTCOMES	LONG TERM OUTCOMES	UNIT OUTCOMES
	 Capacity Building & Technical Assistance	Strengthened leaders, in organizations and cross-sector coalitions and the field who have greater expertise and access to resources.	Economic development policies are in place to ensure that public investments provide direct benefits for low income workers. Investment policy, regulation and reform serve all people & communities, especially low-income, and connect them to opportunity. Political will is built and sustained to support affordable housing in high opportunity areas accessible to transit and jobs.	Increased supply of affordable housing located in opportunity rich areas. Improved mobility and access to opportunity for low-income people. Improved economic viability of communities and stronger regional performance. Reduction in housing and transportation cost burden for low income families	Stronger regional economic performance resulting from equitable and inclusive strategies Empowered and engaged low-income residents shape decisions related to housing, transit and land use in their communities and regions. Reduction of spatial inequality and racial justice inequities that underpin it so that low-income people can build long term assets and use them as a pathway out of poverty
	 Research & Policy Analysis	Strategic research, policy development & data analysis, accompanied with effective communication that inform and change public discourse	Expanded housing tenure and finance alternatives are available to protect low-income families from undue risk through systems that deliver and finance permanently affordable homes A more accessible, safe and stable housing finance system is built to ensure more reliable and sustainable public and private resources for community development to benefit low income families and allow them to build and retain assets.	Increased supply of affordable housing that enables asset building. Improved stability and vitality of neighborhoods through effective capital strategies.	
	 Advocacy, Litigation & Communication	Models, reforms and innovations implemented in key metros and are adopted more broadly nationally	Local regulations and development practices are reformed to promote mixed use, mixed income communities. Elimination of blight drives community re-development and the resulting economic revitalization stabilizes neighborhoods. More strategic and equitable regional and local land use and development planning that includes cross-sector collaboration and effective community participation.	Communities become more economically viable and inclusive places. Implementation of equitable plans and development leads to improved economic outcomes for low-income households.	
 Stakeholder Development &	Representation & participation of key groups in decision-making				
 Collaboration					
 Program Demonstration & Scaling					

Last Updated February 2012



