SHIFTING
THE
EVALUATION
PARADIGM:

THE EQUITABLE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK™

ABOUT
EEI

The Equitable Evaluation Initiative (EEI) believes that evaluation has the ability to contribute to equity and that it must embrace definitions of rigor and validity that reflect the complexity of the work in which many are engaged. We are imagining what might be possible if evaluation were conceptualized, implemented and utilized in a manner in which equity is core and validity reflects 21st-century contexts and identities.

The Equitable Evaluation Framework™ (EEF) is co-crafted and co-led by partners in philanthropy, evaluation and nonprofits, and it facilitates ways to engage institutions and individuals to support adoption of three Equitable Evaluation Principles. We are undertaking this work through hosting collaboratories, consulting to advance fieldwide learning, developing and curating resources, and strategically partnering with others in the field whose missions align with ours.

This publication was conceptualized during the early stages of the five-year EEI. It was intended to be a peek at the beliefs, thoughts and experiences of those who first responded to the invitation extended by EEI and felt compelled by the EEF. Conversations during the fall of 2019 with EEI partners (i.e., investment, field and practice partners) serve as the basis for the content. The brief was written in the spring of 2020. Since then much has been revealed and some things have changed. There is an eagerness to know more and understand how, and it is exactly that tendency toward a tactical and technical response that EEI challenges. EEI continues to evolve as it is an endeavor grounded in relationships, shared and differing experiences and values, and intention. To learn more about the evolution and engage in the ongoing dialogue, visit the EEI website.

ABOUT
GEO

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations is a community of funders committed to transforming philanthropic culture and practice by connecting members to the resources and relationships needed to support thriving nonprofits and communities. We envision courageous grantmakers working in service of nonprofits and communities to create a just, connected and inclusive society where we can all thrive. With more than 6,000 grantmakers who belong to philanthropic organizations of all sizes and types across the globe, we work to lift up the grantmaking practices that matter most to nonprofits and that truly improve philanthropic practice.

Since 1997, GEO has provided opportunities for grantmakers to come together to share knowledge and inspire each other to act. We recognize that being in community with other grantmakers, learning alongside our peers, is what helps us achieve the changes we want to make. Knowing better is not enough to do better — we know it takes more than knowledge to change. It takes intentional attention to culture, change management and learning alongside others.

Working with our members, we design conferences focused on exploring the latest challenges, foster peer connections and learning through member networks, and craft publications that frame key issues and highlight examples from across the field. Through these means, GEO creates the forum for grantmakers to hear from and absorb actionable information and insights from experts across the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors. Together, we are learning more about what works and applying our knowledge and resources to improve our communities.

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SHIFTING THE PARADIGM TAKES INTENTION, ATTENTION AND PRACTICE.

Introduction

This publication provides an overview of the impetus for the Equitable Evaluation Framework™ (EEF) and attempts to document early moments and first steps of engagement with U.S. philanthropic institutions — most often their research, evaluation and learning staff — whom we refer to as *foundation partners* throughout this publication. The themes shared in this publication surfaced through conversations with a group of foundation staff who have been part of the Equitable Evaluation Project, now referred to as the Equitable Evaluation Initiative (EEI), since 2017 as advisors, investment partners[1] and/or practice partners.[2] These are not case studies but insights and peeks behind the curtains of six foundation practice partners. It is our hope that, in reading their experiences, you will find something that resonates, be it a point of view, a mindset or a similar opportunity in your place of work.

The transformation to equitable evaluation will not happen overnight, as the EEF challenges our concepts of knowledge, evidence and truth in profound ways.

But as your colleagues share here, once you understand and see how narrowly these constructs have been defined, it cannot be unseen. The only option is to be, think and do evaluative work differently. In keeping with the EEI intention to shift the evaluation paradigm, this publication does not read in a linear fashion, nor does it follow "traditional" evaluation report form and flow. If we are to get someplace new and different, we must embrace new ways of reflecting what we are hearing, gleaning and sharing from those who are in the work. As you read along, notice commonalities in experience, perspective and positioning among the stories, and also consider the ways in which this conversation pushes your own thinking about how evaluative practice can serve its highest aim in U.S. philanthropy.

As we write this, we are thinking about the curious — those who, in their role within institutional philanthropy, are exploring ways in which white-dominant culture influences what we do and what we believe.

They are thinking about how this influence manifests in all foundation operations and are wondering how others began to think about this reality in the context of evaluation practice. We went back and forth on naming names. We recognize the tendency to be either too specific or too general when telling stories about or from within institutional philanthropy. Because this work is

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[1] *Investment partners* are those who provide financial resources to EEI.
[2] *Practice partners* are those actively engaged in moving toward adoption of the EEF.

both individual and organizational, we opted to keep names. We think it is important to understand who, with all their identities, took the early steps and were willing to share their experiences.

Last, this is not a primer. While we reference concepts essential to the EEF, one must do the work to truly understand them. One might ask, what does it mean to "do the work"? There is a strong tendency for folks to be more aware of and reactive to how we think we should be engaging in evaluative practice based on how others are doing the work or how the work of evaluation has always been done. It is highly intellectualized and decontextualized. In the practice of the EEF, the work begins by acknowledging our own complicities in and contributions to the current paradigm, and accepting that we are the tool for change. The "work" begins with you, right now, where you are. Shifting the evaluation paradigm takes intentionality, discipline and practice. With that in mind, approach this publication with a learning mindset and open heart, and identify the ideas, perspectives and opportunities that resonate and compel you to pursue more practices aligned with the EEF at your organization.

The Equitable Evaluation Initiative Emerges

In the spring of 2017, a small group of research, evaluation, learning and strategy folks working in the philanthropic sector (at the Center for Evaluation Innovation, the Institute for Foundation and Donor Learning, the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy and the Luminare Group) began a conversation about how the current context might create an opportunity to interrogate the existing evaluation paradigm to explore whether and how it serves the philanthropic sector in the 21st century.[3] In the years preceding this conversation, diversity and inclusion had been brought to the forefront through the efforts of the D5 Coalition, the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy and funders such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, among others.[4] Although grantmaking practices were being reimagined through these lenses, evaluative practice remained largely untouched.

As depicted in Figure 1, philanthropic practice has started to more intentionally integrate equity into program, governance, operations and investment decisions. Most organizations, however, have not integrated equity into their evaluation practices, which are an integral component of strategy and learning. EEI offers funders and other actors in the philanthropic ecosystem the ability to envision and operationalize evaluation practices that are consistent with values and outcomes related to equity.

The EEF also helps practitioners challenge cultural norms that continue to promote preferences for a singular type of truth, knowing and evidence, which often reinforces an existing narrative.

The EEI was co-created with a group of foundation partners and launched in 2018. Designed as a five-year initiative, by 2023 it aims to build an integrated and sustainable field of practitioners whose evaluation practice is grounded in the EEF. The EEF takes into account equity as both means and end (see Figure 2, page 9) as defined by Change Elemental[5] and the World Health Organization.[6] The EEF invites practitioners to reimagine the
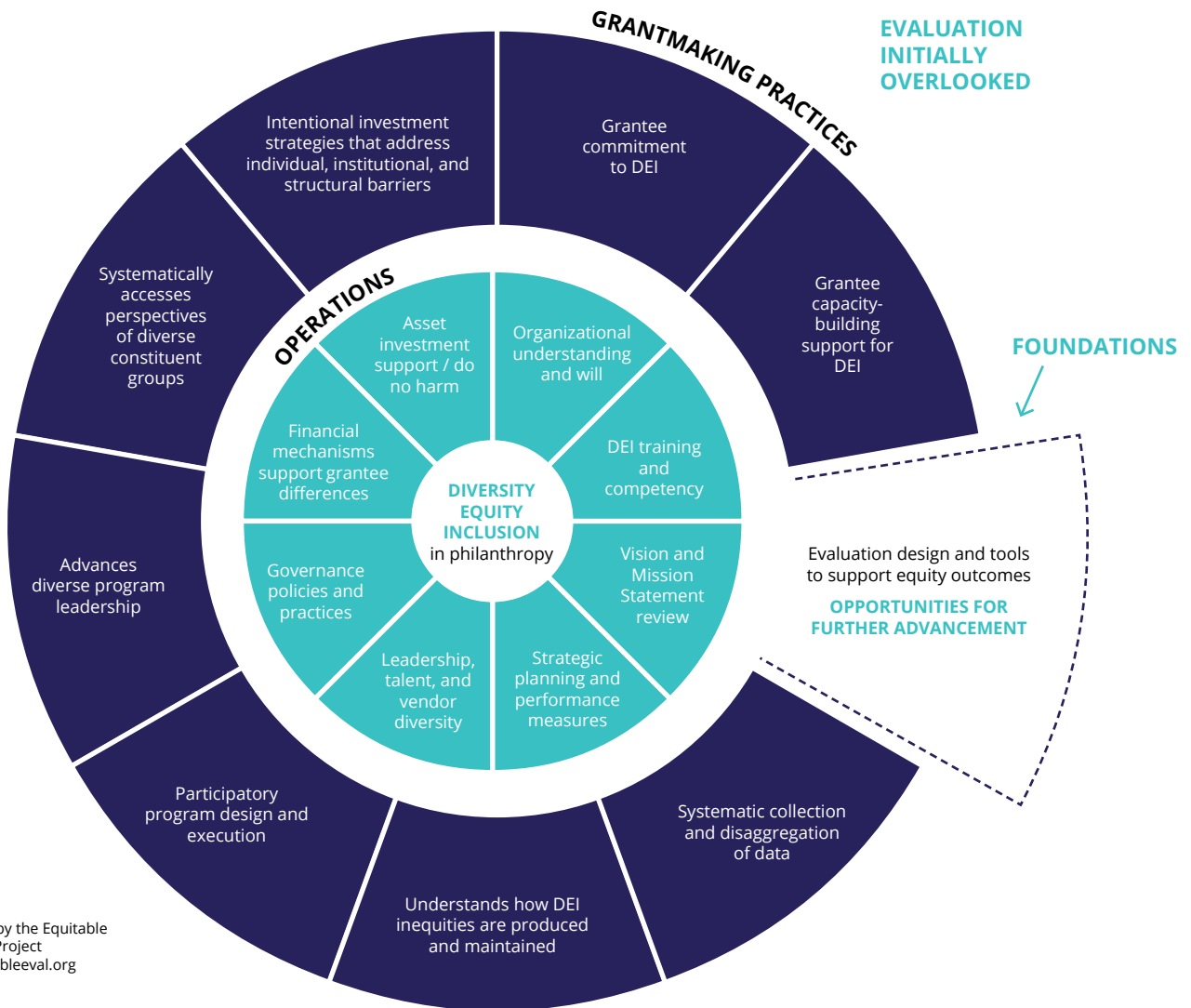
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[3] Jara Dean-Coffey, "What's Race Got to Do with It? Equity and Philanthropic Evaluation Practice," *American Journal of Evaluation* 39, no. 4 (2018): 527-542. Available at https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1098214018778533.

[4] Scott Nielsen and Helen Huang, "Diversity, Inclusion, and the Nonprofit Sector," *National Civic Review* 98, no. 3 (2009): 3-69, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/15427811/2009/98/3; Dean-Coffey, "What's Race Got to Do with It?"

[5] Change Elemental. "Deep Equity." Accessed March 2020. https://changeelemental.org/offerings/deep-equity/.

[6] World Health Organization. "Equity." Accessed March 2020. https://www.who.int/healthsystems/topics/equity/en/#:~:text=Equity%20is%20the%20absence%20of,economically%2C%20demographically%2C%20or%20geographically.

Figure 1: Integrating Equity: An Overview of Current Philanthropic Practice

Developed by the Equitable
Evaluation Project
www.equitableeval.org
May 2017

purpose and practice of evaluation to reflect the values and intentions that drive foundations and nonprofits and to embrace 21st-century definitions of validity, rigor and complexity. The engagement of foundations as self-identified practice partners and co-creators of this work is intentional.

Foundation initiatives and philanthropic support organizations, such as Justice Funders, the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, the Philanthropic Initiative for Race Equity, and CHANGE Philanthropy and its partners, have been talking about and pushing for equity for decades. They, along with individual voices such as Patti Patrizi,[7] Phil Buchanan,[8] Dana Kawaoka-

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[7] Patti Patrizi et al., "Eyes Wide Open: Learning as Strategy under Conditions of Complexity and Uncertainty," *The Foundation Review* 5, no. 3 (2013). Available at https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1170.

[8] Paul G. Putman, "Book Review: Giving Done Right: Effective Philanthropy and Making Every Dollar Count," *The Foundation Review* 11, no. 2 (2019). Available at https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1472.

Figure 2: Equity Working Definitions

MEANS	ENDS
Deep equity means **working** toward **outcomes in ways that model dignity, justice, and love without re-creating harm in our structures, strategies and working relationships.**	Equity is the **absence of avoidable or remediable differences** among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically, or geographically.
ChangeElemental (formerly MAG)	World Health Organization

Figure 3: Evaluation and Equity Ecosystem

We believe these component parts must become an integrated ecosystem if we are to get someplace new and equitable.
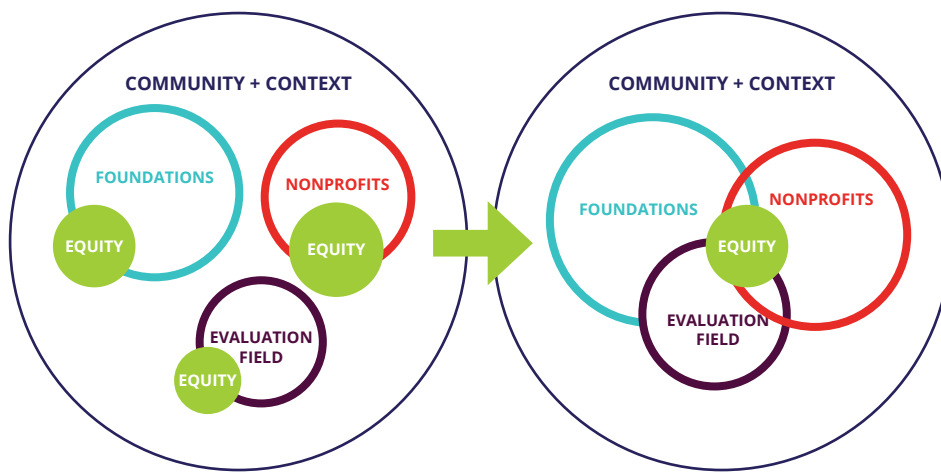
Chen[9] and Edgar Villanueva,[10] among other champions, are shifting the philanthropic ethos. They invite philanthropy to consider more deeply the narratives used to justify how foundations approach their work. To accelerate and deepen this collective energy, EEI posits that the component parts must become an integrated ecosystem (see Figure 3) in order to allow for and create new and emerging ways of evaluative practice that supports individuals, teams and organizations, and is reflected in behaviors and systems.

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[9] Dana Kawaoka-Chen. "Invitation to Liberate Philanthropy: *Kodomo No Tame Ni* (For the Sake of Our Children)." Justice Funders, April 9, 2018. https://medium.com/justice-funders/invitation-to-liberate-philanthropy-kodomo-no-tame-ni-for-the-sake-of-our-children-27d02fcc0dca.

[10] Edgar Villanueva, *Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2018).

THE PRACTICE OF EQUITABLE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK™ IS ONE OF CONTINUAL LEARNING, SHARING AND CREATING.

The Equitable Evaluation Framework™

The Equitable Evaluation Framework™ is not a method, model or specific approach. There are no checklists, tool kits or sets of instructions. As a reflective and reflexive practice, EEF invites evaluation practitioners to consider beliefs, assumptions and preconceptions, and constantly recalibrate as they engage in their work. The practice of EEF is one of continual learning, sharing and creating. There is no preferred way to engage in the practice; it forces us to recognize culture, context and power in our evaluative work and to make explicit the ways in which we are tending to each.

While EEF does not prescribe a specific approach or method, there are some guideposts to assist practitioners. In 2017, EEI released the Equitable Evaluation Framing Paper, which provides three principles and a working set of orthodoxies. Figure 4 presents the three Equitable Evaluation Principles, which ground our evolving thinking and doing in evaluation practice.

Figure 4: Equitable Evaluation Framework™ Principles

PRINCIPLES

Evaluation and evaluative work should be in service of equity:

• Production, consumption and management of evaluation and evaluative work should hold at its core a responsibility to advance progress toward equity.

Evaluative work should be designed and implemented commensurate with the values underlying equity work:

• Multiculturally valid.
• Oriented toward participant ownership.

Evaluative work can and should answer critical questions about the:

• Ways in which historical and structural decisions have contributed to the condition to be addressed.
• Effect on strategy of the underlying systemic drivers of inequity.
• Ways in which cultural context is tangled up in both the structural conditions and the change initiative itself.

Emerging Principles, Spring 2018

As the field explores what it means to be about and for equity, we must all consider how our assets and efforts align. Given the origins of evaluation practice, this includes examining and rethinking how knowledge and evidence are generated. We should also contemplate the ways in which we assign value and merit, and consider whether these practices might inadvertently be at odds with diverse perspectives and expertise, also reinforcing inequities.

As the original EEI partners reflected on the dominant norms in U.S. philanthropic evaluation practice, they surfaced a set of orthodoxies — tightly held beliefs — that seemed to be held in common by many in the foundation ecosystem.[11] The often-unstated orthodoxies, illustrated in Figure 5, are widespread across the field. These orthodoxies are standard operating procedures at most foundations and are presented as best-practice, commonsense approaches that maintain high standards for evaluation. Foundations, their nonprofit partners and evaluators have shaped the orthodoxies around evaluation; the effects "act like a drag on equity efforts, and in some cases, reinforce inequities."[12] Examining these orthodoxies makes them explicit and allows practitioners to acknowledge how the field of evaluation has been shaped and the effect that unspoken norms can have on equity efforts.

Figure 5: Orthodoxies

ORTHODOXIES TO BE CHALLENGED (Foundation – emerging 2018)			
The foundation defines what success looks like.	Grantees and strategies are the evaluand, but not the foundation.	The foundation is the primary user of evaluation.	Evaluations should provide generalizable lessons.
Evaluators should be selected based on credentials that reflect traditional notions of expertise.	Evaluators are the experts and final arbiters; grantees are the beneficiaries.	Credible evidence comes from quantitative data and experimental research.	Evaluators are objective.
Evaluation funding primarily goes to data collection, analysis and reporting.	Time frames / short-term outcomes as indicators of good stewardship.	Evaluation in service of foundation brand.	Trust / relationships come from doing the work but are not the starting point.

The EEF is a conceptual structure specific to evaluation practice that requires intention and attention to challenging the orthodoxies and aligning with the principles. Kimberly Spring, director of research and evaluation at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, shared that she and her team view the EEF not as a specific evaluation method but as a way of approaching evaluation that can be applied to any method. The foundation's practice of EEF supports its ability to challenge cultural norms and inequities as a part of its ongoing efforts to shift evaluative practice.

Intentionally pursuing the EEF allows the field to reimagine the purpose and practice of evaluation in order to reflect the values that drive philanthropy and embrace 21st-century definitions of validity and complexity. It requires slowing down enough to be thoughtful and present. It requires us to be transparent and explicit about our choices in ways that may feel uncomfortable.

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[11] The Monitor Institute brought the term *orthodoxies* into the philanthropic sector's thinking on evaluation through a large-scale project to redesign grantmaker evaluation to improve its use. The institute defines *orthodoxies* as "deeply held beliefs about 'how things are done' that often go unstated and unquestioned. You can find them everywhere — in the mind of an individual, the protocols of an organization, even the best practices of an entire industry." Monitor Institute, "Flipping Orthodoxies: Questioning Ingrained Assumptions in Your Work." 2014. Available at http://monitorinstitute.com/communityphilanthropy/site/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/FlippingOrthodoxies.pdf.

[12] Center for Evaluation Innovation, Institute for Foundation and Donor Learning, Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy, and Luminare Group, "Equitable Evaluation Framing Paper." Equitable Evaluation Initiative, 2017. Available at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RBWoWVduMvh4S68qdmPLN3WPEyPWQwOS/view.

In practice, putting the EEF into action may look like having conversations with peers or leadership; examining and exploring the principles and orthodoxies at a team meeting; committing to doing better each day; getting clear about how and why you define equity and what that means for your work; or infusing the Equitable Evaluation Principles in your requests for proposals, requests for quotations, processes and evaluation of proposals. All foundations and their partners are invited to embrace the Equitable Evaluation Principles and discover how this shifts their evaluation practice. As Sarah Smith, director of learning and evaluation at the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation, reflected, "If you are looking for an Equitable Evaluation Framework tool, you are the tool."

Expanding Definitions of Validity and Rigor

Recognizing that foundations are thinking about how to place equity at the center of their work, the EEF challenges white-dominant culture evaluation norms that preference one type of truth, knowing and evidence. It is possible to prioritize high-quality design and methods of evaluation that are both valuable to the end user and in service of strategy. Doing so has implications for ways of knowing, data analysis and sense making. It means that we must get comfortable with pushing back on cultural norms of evaluation and embrace definitions of validity and rigor that acknowledge multiplicities, different truths and complexity.

Figure 6: Evolving and Contextualizing Validity

EVOLVING AND CONTEXTUALIZING VALIDITY
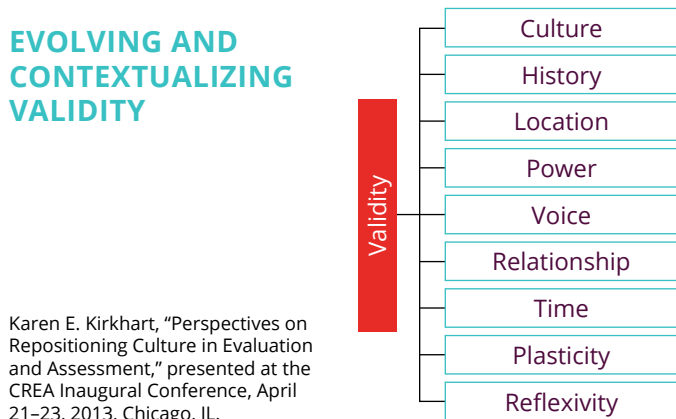
Karen E. Kirkhart, "Perspectives on Repositioning Culture in Evaluation and Assessment," presented at the CREA Inaugural Conference, April 21–23, 2013, Chicago, IL.

Validity

- Culture
- History
- Location
- Power
- Voice
- Relationship
- Time
- Plasticity
- Reflexivity

Let's take *validity* (see Figure 6). Historically, the concept of validity has been rooted in white-dominant culture with a strong preference for quantitative expressions of what is determined to be true and real. It is narrowly defined through one cultural lens. We need to consider what we are not knowing or seeing by not addressing at least a subset of these elements as we design evaluations, determine our samples, and engage in analyzing and making sense of findings:

- **History** — This is the past of place, people, program (or other evaluand) and evaluation's role. It includes knowledge of cultural heritages and traditions, including their evolution over time.

- **Location** — This is the recognition of multiple cultural intersections at individual, organizational and systems levels, including the cultural contexts and affiliations of evaluators and evaluand.

- **Power** — This is the understanding of how privilege is attached to some cultural signifiers and prejudice to others. It involves paying attention to equity and social justice, and avoiding perpetuating discrimination, disparity or condescension.

- **Voice** — This addresses whose perspectives are amplified and whose are silenced. It maps inclusion and exclusion or marginalization, and includes use of language, jargon and communicative strategies.

- **Relationship** — This speaks to the connections among the evaluation, evaluand and community, including relating evaluation to place, time and universe. It means maintaining accountability to community with respect and responsibility.

- **Time** — This includes calling attention to rhythm, pace and scheduling, in the time both preceding and following evaluation. It requires directing attention to longer impacts and implications — positive or negative.

- **Plasticity** — This speaks to the ability to be molded, receive new information, reorganize and change in response to new experiences, and evolve new ideas. It applies to both evaluators and their designs, process and products.

- **Reflexivity** — This is particular to one's own person, one's own work and how the principles of evaluation manifest in self and work. It necessitates self-scrutiny and reflective practice.

EEF practitioners must also be transparent about the framing of validity and careful to evolve it as something that considers the intersectional identities that make up the array of experiences and perspectives that exist in humankind. How disciplined and explicit are we being about the dimensions of validity most important to answer a question or evaluate an endeavor? Who decides those parameters? What should we say and not say about the "validity" of our findings if we have not specifically attended to all or some of the above intentionally? These kinds of questions can help us surface our implicit assumptions and expand our understanding of validity.

Attention to any one of these, let alone multiples, often bumps up against current orthodoxies in foundation evaluation practice. Partners revealed to us that they did not systematically consider validity with this degree of

complexity. That being said, they recognized that discussions and decisions around which of these elements might be most important to strive for were significant and would likely enhance the quality and relevance of the findings for the foundation, nonprofits and communities. Several foundation partners also noted that they thought talking about validity with their boards or trustees might be an entry point to diversify and expand the types of knowledge and expertise needed to truly understand issues, define strategy and understand progress toward impact.

Now let's explore *rigor*, along with *validity* a term often used by funders and evaluators to promote a particular methodological mindset that favors experimental design regardless of the intervention, work, culture, community or context. As with *validity*, if we consider multiple components of rigor, as Preskill and Lynn proposed, our process, practice and findings might be more useful, regardless of our values and intentions.[13] Given the consistent themes from benchmarking studies of foundation evaluation practice[14] as well as general commentary from critical friends of philanthropy and evaluation, the field should expand its definition of *rigor* to include the following:

1. **Quality of the thinking** — the extent to which the evaluation's design and implementation engages in deep analysis that focuses on patterns, themes and values (drawing on systems thinking[15]); looks for outliers that offer different perspectives; seeks alternative explanations and interpretations; and is grounded in the research and literature

2. **Credibility and legitimacy of the claims** — the extent to which the data are trustworthy, including the level of confidence in the findings;[16] the transferability of findings to other contexts; the consistency and repeatability of the findings; and the extent to which the findings are shaped by respondents, rather than evaluator bias, motivation or interests

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[13] Hallie Preskill and Jewlya Lynn, "Rethinking Rigor: Increasing Credibility and Use." Presented at American Evaluation Association annual conference, November 9-14, 2015, Chicago.

[14] Center for Effective Philanthropy and Center for Evaluation Innovation, "Benchmarking Foundation Evaluation Practices." 2016. Available at https://cep.org/portfolio/benchmarking-foundation-evaluation-practices/.

[15] Rob Abercrombie, Ellen Harries, and Rachel Wharton, *Systems Change: A Guide to What It Is and How to Do It* (London: New Philanthropy Capital, 2015). Available at https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/systems-change-a-guide-to-what-it-is-and-how-to-do-it/.

[16] Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (New York: Sage Publications, 1985).

3. Cultural responsiveness and context — the extent to which the evaluation questions, methods and analysis respect and reflect stakeholders' values and context,[17] their definitions of success, their experiences and perceptions, and their insights about what is happening

4. Quality and value of the learning process — the extent to which the learning process engages the people who most need the information, in a way that allows for reflection, dialogue, testing assumptions and asking new questions,[18] directly contributing to making decisions that help improve the process and outcomes

A NEW DEFINITION OF RIGOR

Quality of the thinking — drawing on systems thinking

Credibility and legitimacy of the claims — extent to which the data are trustworthy, including the level of confidence in the findings

Cultural responsiveness and context — methods and analysis that respect and reflect stakeholders' values and context

Quality and value of the learning process — reflection, dialogue, testing assumptions and asking new questions

Preskill and Lynn, "Rethinking Rigor."

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[17] U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *Practical Strategies for Culturally Competent Evaluation* (Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). Available at http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/docs/cultural_competence_guide.pdf.

[18] Judy O'Neil, "Book Review: *Evaluative Inquiry for Learning in Organizations*, by H. Preskill and R.T. Torres," *Human Resource Development Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (2000): 325-328. Available at https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/1532-1096%28200023%2911%3A3%3C325%3A%3AAID-HRDQ9%3E3.0.CO%3B2-9.

THE ENTRY POINT FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH THE EQUITABLE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK™ VARIES AMONG FOUNDATION PARTNERS.

Translating the Equitable Evaluation Framework™ into Practice

In the fall of 2019, EEI partners engaged in conversations and offered early insights as they reflected on their experience with equitable evaluation practices. From those conversations, a set of ideas emerged around how to put this framework into practice. These partners surfaced important considerations around entry points, readiness indicators, innovation and tolerance for the unknown, engaging in difficult conversations, embracing complexity, mindset shifts, and tensions and sticking points as they translated the EEF into practice.

Entry Points

The entry point for engagement with the EEF varies among foundation partners. For many, strategy revisions and organizational shifts in focus and priorities presented the opportunity to realign evaluation, strategy and learning to support the mission and vision of the organization. The right organizational conditions and explicit executive leadership support are critical for any change management effort.[19]

For instance, in 2017 The Colorado Health Foundation went through a strategy refresh and introduced a set of three cornerstones, one of which articulated the intent to center all the foundation's work around equity. The shift in focus opened the door for the learning and evaluation team, led by Kelci Price, senior director of learning and evaluation, to explore what might be possible. The team began to explore the lenses they brought to their work and to challenge the assumptions that had informed previous evaluation.

Price realized "there was an opportunity to engage consultants across Colorado who are interested in exploring what might be possible if evaluation were conceptualized, implemented and utilized in a manner that promotes equity in their own practice to learn alongside other evaluators as part of a collective learning process." In partnership, The Colorado Health Foundation and The Colorado Trust launched the Colorado Collaboratory on Equitable Evaluation, a community of practice for evaluators in Colorado to explore what it means to advance the Equitable Evaluation Principles.

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[19] Gartner. "Managing Organizational Change." Accessed March 2020. https://www.gartner.com/en/insights/change-management; John Kotter, *Accelerate: Building Strategic Agility for a Faster-Moving World* (Brighton, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2014).

Ten years ago, the Missouri Foundation for Health decided it wanted to achieve long-term, large-scale change and realized it would need to think and act differently. According to Kristy Klein Davis, chief strategy officer, the foundation has evolved from grantmaker to changemaker. The foundation recognized that it can be more effective in working toward its mission when it looks for ways to change the systems and structures that allow inequitable health outcomes to persist. Part of this shift included the creation of the role of chief strategy officer within the foundation to chart the direction for the foundation. Klein Davis took the opportunity to move beyond a traditional evaluation approach that, she believed, would be a disservice to the programmatic work.

For other EEF foundation partners, the entry point to practices that align with the EEF happens as a result of a new initiative or deeper engagement in efforts to shift evaluation to align with grantmaking initiatives. In 2018, the Vancouver Foundation was preparing to launch a youth engagement initiative called LEVEL. LEVEL works alongside an advisory committee of youth and adult allies to address racial inequity by investing in the leadership capacity of indigenous and racialized immigrant and refugee youth. This initiative, centered around youth and race equity, provided an inroad to applying the EEF. As the foundation advances the framework, its learning has implications and opportunities for application in other current initiatives and will inform the strategy and implementation of new programs.

Similarly, The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative[20] was at a reflection point. Staff were thinking about the next 10-year investment and recognizing that their evaluative work to date had sought to be developmental, locally driven and responsive. As they moved to think about narrative change and power building, the introduction of the EEF provided an opportunity to think about evaluation that would serve those aims.

Ultimately, foundations can engage in practicing the EEF from any starting point, including a retrospective review of completed projects to inform new initiatives. The Annie E. Casey Foundation asked one of its evaluation partners, WestEd Justice & Prevention Research Center (which had completed four projects with the foundation in two years), to reflect on several recent projects and apply the EEF. The brief provided by WestEd offered several ideas about where the Equitable Evaluation Principles could be applied.[21] The existing relationship between WestEd and the Casey Foundation provided WestEd with an understanding of the culture and context of the foundation to inform these recommendations. The foundation looks for opportunities such as this one to engage its evaluation partners in continual discussion about how research could be designed and implemented to promote equity and be reflective of the Equitable Evaluation Principles.

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[20] A 10-year, $1 billion comprehensive community initiative to advance statewide policy, change the narrative and transform 14 of California's communities devastated by health inequities, launched in 2010.
[21] WestEd Justice & Prevention Research Center, "Reflections on Applying Principles of Equitable Evaluation." 2019. Available at https://www.aecf.org/resources/reflections-on-applying-principles-of-equitable-evaluation/.

Kimberly Spring, the foundation's director of research and evaluation, offered the understanding that regardless of one's methodological choice, there are different ways of bringing equity into evaluative work. These include but are not limited to considering and prioritizing the diversity of the evaluation team; creating equity-focused questions; aggregating or disaggregating data by sociodemographic characteristics; analyzing data to identify where there are differences in outcomes, as well as examining systemic and structural factors that may be underlying causes for those differences; and bringing in community or other stakeholders to shape the evaluation, participate in interpretation of the findings and have access to the results.

Readiness Indications

Foundation partners practicing the EEF are engaged in the opportunity to shift their evaluative practice and recognize a need to assess readiness for change — willingness, ability and facilitative conditions — among individuals, teams and organizations. With that, they acknowledge there is a spectrum of capacity and readiness for change; they appreciate the fluidity required to engage in the continual evolution of process, understanding and adoption.

Regardless of one's methodological choice, there are different ways of bringing equity into evaluative work.

Anna Cruz, managing director of strategic learning, research and evaluation at The Kresge Foundation, shared the need for constant onboarding to the EEF as staff change. She acknowledged the need to continually onboard folks to the EEF and to be comfortable accepting varying levels of experience and engagement. This will be particularly important as she and others lean deeper into practice by engaging in internal and external conversation on the Equitable Evaluation Principles.

That said, there is also a conversation about the readiness of a team to engage in practice of the EEF. In conversations with partners, we noted emerging insights into indications of readiness. Practitioners need to feel comfortable stepping into an emergent field where we are learning, trying new things and understanding complexity. Simultaneously, we must release the need to oversimplify as we unpack systems, policies and practices, as well as examine individual behaviors and inner workings of the mind. This is not a light endeavor, and some people and organizations may not be ready to do this work at this time.

Innovation and Tolerance for the Unknown

Individuals who are committed to the EEF are willing to test new ideas, tolerate discomfort and persevere when colleagues are ready to throw in the towel.

Innovation requires assessing one's potential for growth, one's willingness to challenge the status quo, and one's ability to imagine new ways of being and doing. Willingness is key to exercise one's influence and agency, to commit to curiosity, to push conversations, to reshape culture and normative behavior, and to realign resources.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's research and evaluation team has been involved in ongoing discussions, both at its regular meetings and during two retreats, to explore how to deepen equity in its work. Its members have expanded their understanding of the Equitable Evaluation Principles and the larger landscape of EEI, and gained greater insight into contextual and communication considerations to advance the EEF within the foundation. The team has articulated a vision, developed and piloted a resource that they use to strengthen equity practices in specific evaluation projects, and pursued internal capacity-building opportunities and action steps to actualize equitable evaluation. It has also begun to have conversations with foundation colleagues about these efforts, establishing common ground to work together to embed equity more intentionally across the foundation's work.

The EEF is not a method or model but a conceptual framing for the practice of evaluation. Foundation partners share the struggle to build their personal and organizational tolerance for releasing current evaluation practices that are deeply rooted in theory and protocols. This is necessary, though, to move toward practicing evaluation aligned with the Equitable Evaluation Principles. It also provides space to shape existing or create new models and methods that are grounded in the work and in this time. Even thinking about evaluation in this new way is challenging to cultural norms.

Engaging in Difficult Conversations

At The California Endowment, Hanh Cao Yu, chief learning officer, shared that the board of directors recently adopted racial equity as an explicit focus. As she and her team think about the next 10 years of Building Healthy Communities, she anticipates many conversations about what it means to live and work in white-dominant culture,[22] where white supremacy permeates everything. It is difficult to have conversations, regardless of race or ethnicity, that examine practice and how it has unintentionally perpetuated cultural norms that place white-dominant thinking at the center. The words, as well as the conversations, make people nervous and sometimes frightened. However, the tensions and discomfort that surface during these difficult conversations signify a place of possibility and transformation. As the assumptions, lenses and biases we bring to the practice of evaluation as individuals are unearthed, we realize that members of our team are not aligned. Through reflection and inquiry, sitting in discomfort and allowing curiosity and further inquiry — these conversations support the naming and

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[22]   Showing Up for Racial Justice, "The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture." 2001. Available at https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html.

breaking down of white-dominant norms and invite other opportunities to be, to think and to do the practice of evaluation differently.

Nonetheless, it is important to engage in these conversations to understand the deeply embedded dynamics of dominant culture. Yu also pointed out that a focus on racial equity cannot be done without an intersectional lens. The challenge of applying an intersectional lens is in determining what experiences, circumstances, attributes or demographics become the focus in the work. There are inherent limitations due to factors such as time, staff, scope, scale and accessibility. It is important to be transparent about the limitations of evaluation and how these limitations inform and provide contextual considerations for interpreting the data.

Embracing Complexity

The work of many foundations and their partners has shifted or expanded its focus from individual interventions to efforts to affect systems, structures, communities and public policies. This is about more than adding up single experiences and progress toward outcomes; it also puts us collectively in places and spaces where much less is known or predictable.

Figure 7: The Cynefin Framework

COMPLEX
Unknown unknowns
Probe—Sense—Respond
Emergent Practice

COMPLICATED
Known unknowns
Sense—Analyze—Respond
Good Practice

CHAOTIC
Unknowable unknowns
Act—Sense—Respond
Novel Practice

OBVIOUS
Known knowns
Sense—Categorize—Respond
Good Practice

The origins of evaluation are rooted more in the obvious and complicated than in the complex and chaotic (see Figure 7). There are both real and perceived challenges and discomfort when we move from making decisions that are obvious and complicated to making decisions that are complex and chaotic.[23] As a consequence, we tend to shy away from that which we cannot easily conceptualize and, in doing so, are likely missing the fuller and deeper pictures. Yet if we move from our current frame, which tends toward control, certainty and concreteness, we may find that different evaluation practices actually make the perceived chaos seem more ordered. By expanding these definitions, we begin to move from a single axis to an intersectional framework that helps us better understand the complexity of individuals and communities.

Kimberly Spring of the Annie E. Casey Foundation underscored the importance of balancing these opportunities to ensure that adoption of the EEF is not framed as being in opposition to rigor. Rather, the EEF provides an opportunity to strengthen rigor in evaluation practices. She acknowledged that a core part of her work is to address and prevent this oppositional thinking: "We are pushing back on the notion that evaluators or research and learning staff should be seen as *the* experts." Approaching evaluation with the EEF means recognizing, respecting and learning from the expertise of everyone at the table, particularly the individuals and communities of color that historically have been excluded. Spring said she continues to reorient staff toward understanding that the work of evaluation is strengthened and becomes more rigorous when we apply equitable evaluation practices.

Mindset Shifts

Practitioners of the EEF identify three key shifts in mindset that have emerged as they work toward a new evaluation paradigm that places equity at the center and embraces complexity and multicultural validity.

1. From Doing to Being

One of the underlying norms of white-dominant culture in organizations is that productivity, be it doing something or producing something, is the most critical part of the work. In evaluation, this mindset shows up when the act of data collection is seen as the core act, with little attention given to the why, for whom, and to what end, beyond what is articulated in the evaluation orthodoxies (see Figure 5 on page 12). Much is unsaid and uninterrogated, and thus evaluation continues to be done as it has always been done. Practitioners of the EEF indicated that they used a daily "reset" to show up differently, with consistent and persistent intention and attention to shift away from *doing* as the starting point and instead focus on *being*.

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[23] David J. Snowden and Mary Boone, "A Leader's Framework for Decision Making," *Harvard Business Review*, December 2007. Available at https://hbr.org/2007/11/a-leaders-framework-for-decision-making.

It is important to be transparent about the limitations of evaluation and how these limitations inform and provide contextual considerations for interpreting the data.

Being in practice with the EEF requires dialogue. Evaluators can create opportunities before, during and at the conclusion of the evaluation process for open conversations between team members and with program staff, grant partners and constituents. Practicing the EEF also requires understanding the assumptions that have been made by individuals on the evaluation team, program staff and grant partners. It is also necessary to examine the underlying theory, lenses and frames for how those assumptions came into practice, and to challenge whether they remain relevant and appropriate. Being explicit about the power dynamics inherent in grantmaking and its history, and then shifting thinking on who is the expert or holds expertise, is a tall order; it means moving the work of evaluation from transactional to relational.

Building relationships with program staff, grant partners and constituents is a centering theme among EEF partners. The opportunity to stay in relationship with all stakeholders allows the time needed to build an evaluation model that is inclusive and responsive, and meets the needs of all parties. Being in relationship with nonprofit partners provides a space for self-awareness and shared insight, experimentation and inquiry into why certain decisions are made.

The doing mindset becomes transactional when we move forward with evaluation activities and behaviors that incentivize practitioners to get the most information possible from nonprofit partners with the least interaction possible. While the intent may be to reduce the burden placed on grant partners, the end result does not align with the stated intentions.

Once people realize the shortcomings of the doing mindset, its habits — engaging in a set of default activities designed to achieve a set of goals — can be released. Once old habits are released and reexamined, there is space and energy to create new ways of being in practice that lead to different inquiries, activities, tools and relationships.

Often there is a quick jump to a doing mindset in foundation's evaluation work, which often leads to doing something *to others*. The internal relationships between, on the one hand, evaluation, learning and research staff, and on the other, program and strategy staff is critical. They affect the way evaluation is shaped and expressed, whether that is through the focus of the evaluation, the evaluation process itself, the evaluator or the use of the evaluation findings across internal and external stakeholders. Until the "internal house" is in order, those practicing the EEF, along with their evaluation partners, could do unintended harm to communities. Adopting a being mindset for practice of the Equitable Evaluation Principles requires time to build new internal norms and new relationships. The EEF provides a new starting place for conversations among various players

within foundations about the purpose of evaluation as it relates to the organization's mission or even a specific program, portfolio or initiative.

A being versus a doing mindset is akin to the "restraint/action paradox" that Sonja Blignaut[24] identified; complex systems and situations require of leadership the agility and adaptability to balance the risks between taking action (doing) and practicing restraint (being). While the practice of restraint seems contradictory to getting the work of evaluation done, it allows time for reflection and reflexivity. This shifts the why of evaluative work and offers opportunities to consider how it might be done differently. While EEF partners admit that being, in practice, is uncomfortable and less familiar than doing, the experience of being in the unknown allows emergence. In a fast-paced, "busy is best" environment shaped by the characteristics of white supremacy culture,[25] taking time to be intentional in meaningful ways can appear radical.

The Kresge Foundation centers the intent of its evaluative work around being in service of equity, with a focus on staying in the process and practicing

24   Sonja Blignaut. "Navigate Complexity: The Three Habits of Mind." January 4, 2020. https://medium.com/@son-jablignaut/navigate-complexity-three-habits-of-mind-86c07803078a.
25   Showing Up for Racial Justice. "The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture."

restraint so that the organization does not move to tools and implementation too quickly. Chera Reid, inaugural director of strategic learning, research and evaluation (now director of the evaluation roundtable at the Center for Evaluation Innovation) and Anna Cruz, strategic learning and evaluation officer (now managing director) agreed that applying the EEF has provided an opportunity to pause and consider how foundations and their learning and evaluation staff can work together toward shared aspirations.

Creating a bridge between staff across the foundation and the work allows staff to engage during the design and planning phase of an engagement. The collaboration encourages staff to share their collective thinking and allows them to explicitly name assumptions and push back on them to gain clarity and transparency. This approach positions evaluative work in service of the mission, both as a part of strategy and as a means to assess progress toward mission — reflecting the possibility of a "both/and" approach.

Kelci Price, senior director of learning and evaluation at The Colorado Health Foundation, described being in practice as a way of allowing things to be emergent across the board. This means taking time to discuss and understand what questions evaluation staff were or weren't asking, and to explore equity as a strategy in and of itself in terms of who holds the decision-making power about framing the issues and crafting the solutions. Price also said she focuses on being intentional about deepening the team's practice around the EEF, so that they don't stop at the idea that the EEF is only about measuring equity or inequity and then closing the gap between two metrics. The foundation is interested in pushing questions that allow staff to answer whether they are paying attention to the people they should be paying attention to and who has influence over the decisions that are made.

"Building relationships takes time and attention that is not often built into our evaluation frameworks," Kim Leonard, senior research officer at the <u>Oregon Community Foundation</u>, believes. "Putting relationships at the forefront allows the foundation to develop evaluations that create mutual interest and benefit; helps us understand and reflect the complexity of the individuals and groups; and keeps everyone informed, engaged, and invested."

Through the evaluation of The Colorado Trust's Health Equity Advocacy strategy, evaluation and program staff are seeking ways to be in good relationship with grantees by actively considering how power manifests through the evaluation asks. As well, they are seeking ways in which information from grant reports can be used for grantee learning rather than funder accountability only.

Leonard, senior research officer, shared that the experience of being in practice of the EEF means moving away from the transactional and into the relational with grantmaking colleagues, grant partners and constituents. "Building

relationships takes time and attention that is not often built into our evaluation frameworks," Leonard believes. "Putting relationships at the forefront allows the foundation to develop evaluations that create mutual interest and benefit; helps us understand and reflect the complexity of the individuals and groups; and keeps everyone informed, engaged and invested."

Leonard and her teammates said everything feels different when they shift the inherent power dynamics and include in their work nonprofit partners and their constituents who hold expertise in the community. Leonard acknowledged that it takes time to engage partners in evaluation strategy, design, implementation, analysis and dissemination. But she also sees how shifting power increases the value and quality of the work.

The practice of quick and efficient data collection to support funder accountability is a prime example of transactional evaluation models that reinforce current evaluation practice orthodoxies. Moving from the transactional into a relational model considers the needs, opportunities and learning that can be of service to nonprofit partners and their constituents, as well as the funder. A relational approach, in which funders are mindful of nonprofit needs and of intentionally building relationships, generates trust and improves the quality of the experience for all.

2. From Scarcity to Abundance

As many partners approached and deepened their engagement with the EEF, they started to realize that there is often a scarcity mindset around the availability and use of resources, especially related to evaluative work. When we identify explicit or implicit messages that there is limited staff, time or money to do evaluation in a new way, we can take the opportunity to have a conversation about the underlying assumptions. We have heard from some foundation partners that a shift away from an organizational norm or culture of scarcity or limitation of resources (staff, time, money) in the face of a perceived limitless pool of need is challenging to navigate. The opportunity to interrogate scarcity as a strategy for inquiry regarding resource allocation for evaluation is imperative.[26]

Findings from the Center for Evaluation Innovation's "Benchmarking Foundation Evaluation Practices 2020" report reinforce the reality that more investment does not yield more relevant and accessible evaluative information across foundations.[27] Scarcity is fear-based thinking that stops us from asking questions and challenging assumptions, and shuts down our openness to what is possible.[28] Starting with what is possible and then moving toward leveraging

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[26] Ted Schrecker, "Interrogating Scarcity: How to Think about 'Resource-Scarce Settings.'" *Health Policy and Planning* 28, no. 4 (2013): 400-409. Available at https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22899597/.

[27] Center for Evaluation Innovation, "Benchmarking Foundation Evaluation Practices 2020." 2020. Available at https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publication/cei_benchmarking2020/.

[28] Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

resources to support, develop and uplift an emerging practice creates the environment and conditions for change.

When Chera Reid stepped into her new role at The Kresge Foundation in the fall of 2015, she considered the needs of the organization and her ability to leverage resources to support and contribute to those needs. Acknowledging that she was aware of a scarcity discourse and culture among colleagues in the sector, she was determined to set a course that would shift the intention and attention regarding the resources available. Reid focused on the ways that strategy, evaluation and learning come together to advance grantmaking goals. By operating in the space of what is possible, she believes the foundation makes a real, meaningful contribution in alignment with its mission, values and program strategies.

3. From Fixed to Growth

EEF partners understand that equitable evaluation is not an endgame or destination but rather a continual growth process that requires the work to expand as it unfolds. Thus, the shift from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset becomes essential.[29] In a fixed mindset, evaluation practitioners believe their abilities, intelligence, training and experience support the normalized culture of expertise and knowing. The fixed evaluation mindset also supports use of methods, tools and processes that go unchallenged and unexamined. In a growth mindset, evaluation practitioners are learners, explicit about what they know and don't know, transparent about what is included and excluded, and forthright about what they are learning in the complex and multifaceted context of individuals and communities.

At the Missouri Foundation for Health, part of the conversation about impact must also elevate the complexity of the work. Kristy Klein Davis and her team are focused on how to strike a balance between evaluative work and the foundation's strategic approach, based on what they are learning. The contexts of situations and circumstances are critical to understanding that inequities exist and are deeply entrenched. If the desire is to have the foundation look good, then there is a tendency to cover up the stuff that is messy.

"It takes commitment to share what you are learning, even if it does not place you in a favorable light, because this is how we learn, adapt, shift and do better. It is uncomfortable but important," Klein Davis reflected on shifting from a fixed to a growth mindset. "We are taking a retrospective approach to some long-term investments and learning how to look at the data from different angles. We are thinking about how we share these findings, who are the audiences who would be interested, and who could learn and grow from this. Strategy, evaluation and learning is an iterative process that requires us to continually grow, learn and think about how this is in service of the community."

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[29]   Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Random House, 2008).

The role of expert and who is considered to have expertise interplays with the fixed versus growth mindset and foundation orthodoxies. Evaluators, whether foundation staff or evaluation consultants, are often seen as experts, while nonprofits and their constituents are seen as learners. This view limits the rigor and validity of the evaluative work, minimizes the complexity of community and social systems, and downplays the people who live and thrive in these environments. A growth mindset encourages learning, tests new ideas, embraces failure as a learning moment and allows the ease of being both a learner and an expert.

The Vancouver Foundation's investment in LEVEL provided an opportunity for the foundation to learn alongside its nonprofit partners. In April 2019, the foundation released an internal call for staff to submit proposals that would then be funded by the foundation. This internal process was designed to mirror the foundation's external process, allowing staff to engage in professional development, reflect on their work and share with other staff what they were learning. Trilby Smith, former director of learning and evaluation at the foundation, said the program was a way for the foundation to practice "learning in plain sight." Recognizing that they are a part of a philanthropic ecosystem, foundation staff felt it was

important that they wrestle with discomfort and complexity to better understand the opportunity and barriers they face in addressing or reproducing inequities by the nature of their practices and processes, which often reflect common orthodoxies. Rarely do foundations experience their own processes in an effort to understand grant partner and constituent experiences of evaluation. This internal process allowed Vancouver Foundation staff to reflect, refine and do further inquiry with their grant partners to advance their evaluation practices. As they moved from experts to learners, foundation staff made the shift from a fixed to a growth mindset.

Kimberly Spring at the Annie E. Casey Foundation admitted that engaging in the practice of the EEF has increased the level of work her team does, in both quality and complexity. The more they infuse equity into their evaluation work, the more time is required of them to be engaged in the project. As Spring and her team reflected on the findings of the retrospective study of several of their projects, they recognized that realizing the insights from their evaluation partner, WestEd, would have required intention and time to engage in the practice of the EEF. Moving forward, they are working with greater intention to set aside the time and resources needed for this work. Spring acknowledged that the way in which her team allocates time and resources to support equitable practices can make a considerable shift in aligning stated values and intent with actionable efforts.

Tensions and Sticking Points

In the spirit of rejecting "either/or" thinking, we must first acknowledge that we operate within a set of explicit and implicit parameters that either privilege or marginalize. Some of these parameters are relatively fixed, while others are less so. Although they are not breaking points, they tend to cause emotional, cognitive, relational or financial strain that requires deft navigation.

As with any change endeavor, the human element is a critical factor. As individuals are challenged to grow and get comfortable with being uncomfortable, emotions, values, beliefs and relational power can feel entwined with the desired change. Resistance, frustration and confusion regarding the circumstances that lead to the desired change can derail efforts. The individual human experience impacts the collective change experience and can, if allowed to go unexamined, stymie the change initiative.

Exercising Vulnerability and Risk

Vulnerability and risk are part of stepping into an emerging field. There are no directions, checklists or maps — without a concrete formula, discomfort is certain to be part of the experience of the practice. Hanh Cao Yu of The California Endowment said, "It's a vulnerable time as we figure out how our values and principles shape how we think and do evaluation and learning, and are tied to one another. It requires The California Endowment to be honest

about what we don't know, where we need to learn more, especially given that our partners in the communities are the experts in this work. The California Endowment is prioritizing and privileging their voices, making sure that they're at the forefront of the evaluation work."

In Vancouver, the LEVEL project includes a learning community of grantees and foundation staff that focuses on inquiry. Smith noted that "working in this way asks foundation staff and grantees to be vulnerable enough to develop deep, authentic relationships with one another." Together they are identifying what is and isn't working, and co-creating solutions.

Vulnerability resonates with many EEF partners. As Felisa Gonzales of The Colorado Trust shared, "This work can be difficult. There are some hard questions with answers that are not so clear. It requires comfort with ambiguity and experimentation." She believes practice of the EEF has the power to destigmatize evaluation, which is commonly viewed as taking time away from the real work. Properly implemented, it has the potential to get people excited about evaluation and its power.

Many foundation partners agree that stepping into the unknown and charting new ways to be in evaluative practice triggers many responses and reactions. These might include fear and shame for not knowing how to do practice differently; guilt about one's role in and responsibility for perpetuating orthodoxies that do not serve partners in the work; and fear of the risk of daring to approach the work of evaluation, strategy and learning in ways that challenge evaluation's history, underpinnings and organizational traditions. As Brené Brown noted in her research on leadership, "innovation and creativity are not possible without vulnerability."[30] EEF foundation partners have found the pathways identified in Brown's work helpful as they work toward remaining vulnerable and advancing the EEF with compassion, empathy, mindfulness and awareness for self and others.

Engaging in Purposeful Dialogue

Willingness to stay in conversation and continue to clarify individual, team, department and organizational values is critical to advancing the EEF. Foundation partners are recognizing the role that race and racism have played and continue to play in the conceptualization and practice of evaluation. To be aligned with and make progress toward equity, evaluation practice must evolve.

Hanh Cao Yu, chief learning officer at The California Endowment, said that for her, practicing the EEF starts with considering what equity means to her and then involves having discussions about what it means to her team to center equity in their work. Yu shared, "My team is very diverse and mostly women of color. We've done a lot of work individually and collectively around what it means to

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[30] Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead* (New York: Random House, 2018).

SHIFTING THE EVALUATION PARADIGM:

carry around the root cause analysis of inequality. That's the starting point for us around the principle of centering equity." And, she said, "As a Vietnamese refugee, I bring a lot of my background and my full self into my work, in terms of my purpose and value and what it means to be a refugee in this country and having experienced what I have. I'm very open about that." She said she believes this level of vulnerability is needed at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels to build trust and connection among her team members and with their partners. This level of authenticity and openness provides a safe space to rethink evaluative work and be comfortable with not knowing the outcome.

Defining Equity

Defining *equity* can be fraught with tension as foundation partners grapple with

As with any change endeavor, the human element is a critical factor. As individuals are challenged to grow and get comfortable with being uncomfortable, emotions, values, beliefs and relational power can feel entwined with the desired change.

being in service to all versus being in service to populations most impacted by disparities imposed by structures, systems, policies and practices designed to create inequities. Foundations must grapple with the reality that the financial resources they have at their disposal have directly benefited from these disparities. Generally, foundation partners acknowledge that their definitions of equity are incomplete and are assumed to be centered on racial equity, even when that frame is not explicitly stated.

Conversations identifying disparities by gender, sexual orientation, ability, race and socioeconomic demographics may raise tensions among foundation leaders, board members and staff. There is a reluctance to sit with the discomfort of naming and identifying the people who experience the disparities and for whom the strategies are intended. The tightrope walk is further complicated when mission statements state that all people in a specified geography are to be served by the foundation, yet the stated investment areas are not issues experienced by all members of the community. From an evaluation, program and strategy point of view, it is difficult to center the work on equity if we are unwilling to be uncomfortable and press forward with defining equity.

Some foundations fear being labeled political when identifying who in a community is negatively impacted by structures, systems, policies and programs inherently designed to create inequity. However, without these considerations, it is nearly impossible to center equity in grantmaking. "Foundation cultures often avoid being political," Hanh Cao Yu stated, saying that she would argue, "not being political is, in fact, a political stance."

Reframing Current Evaluation Discourse

Foundations should also look at strategies for reframing the current asymmetrical evaluation discourse, which imposes an imbalance in the relationship between the lived expertise of beneficiaries and the professional expertise of the evaluation practitioner. Positioning evaluators as the only experts creates and perpetuates a power imbalance that often reinforces existing power dynamics and validates the implicit underlying normative culture. Disrupting the asymmetrical evaluative discourse requires practitioners to let go of the expert role and embrace being a learner, recognizing grantees as community experts and partners in evaluation. This shift in power dynamic is significant and will require attention and intention. Healing from "evaluation trauma" will help establish trust and build partnerships in communities where evaluation may have caused harm.

Power dynamics are deeply embedded in personal, organizational and societal culture. Navigating and intentionally calling awareness to how one's position, education, culture, race, ethnicity, gender, ability, age and other identities contribute to one's personal power and authority requires diligence, care and intention. It also requires understanding that there will be challenges along the way as we untangle and dismantle systems of privilege that determine who is listened to, who is heard and whose opinion matters or is valued above those of others. Moving evaluation practices from transactional to relational is critical to building trust and partnerships that align with mission.

Building Internal Relationships

One of the important shifts taking place as foundation partners move from a transactional to a relational focus is in their relationships within their organizations, particularly with program colleagues. Many evaluation and learning staff members shared that there is often tension between them and program and strategy staff, which can translate into similar tensions in or even harm to relationships with grantees, other funding partners and the community. Evaluation staff are often brought into projects after funding has been allocated and programs launched. The Center for Evaluation Innovation found that, in 42 percent of foundations, staff responsible for evaluation were housed in a unit or department separate from program staff, and this structure was increasing in prevalence.[31] Foundation partners shared that they had begun engaging with their grantmaking and program colleagues much earlier to form a strategic partnership that benefits grantees, communities and others.

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[31] Center for Evaluation Innovation, "Benchmarking Foundation Evaluation Practices 2020."

Kim Leonard noted that the research team at the Oregon Community Foundation has always worked collaboratively, but used to be somewhat isolated from other parts of the foundation. Now, the team is a branch within the larger Community Impacts department, which also houses program, community engagement and grants management staff. This structure allows team members to think more deeply and expansively about how their work intersects with other parts of the organization. Ongoing, often informal internal conversations are helping various teams understand how they are intentionally moving the EEF forward.

Kristy Klein Davis at the Missouri Foundation for Health shared that the overall strategy of the foundation's work, which is to reduce the inequities that exist for Missourians, requires a different evaluation structure that will feed into the strategies. As a result, during the years when the foundation was acclimating to a systems change focus, the strategy and evaluation teams were in the same department. This was intentional as it recognized the interdependency between the two areas of the work. Klein Davis offered, "Anything we do in evaluation is with an eye toward our strategy and what questions we need to have answered. We recognize the complexity of the work and the issues that we work in. While a traditional kind of evaluation approach may tell us a lot of things, we can't talk about impact because that approach doesn't always elevate the complexity of that work being done." She added, "There has been a shift within the organization during my tenure to recognize and appreciate the value of evaluation, which really elevates that complexity."

EQUITABLE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK™ REQUIRES THE ABILITY TO INFLUENCE CONVERSATIONS THAT SHIFT CULTURE AND PRACTICE, AND IMPACT RESOURCE ALLOCATION.

Conclusion

Conversations have been taking place across foundation partner organizations to shift the ways in which strategy, research, evaluation and learning staff engage with each other in the formulation of new initiatives and to explore the capacity to stretch and imagine what might be possible. Aligning values and using agency and influence to champion engagement in the EEF requires the ability to influence conversations that shift culture and practice, and impact resource allocation. These efforts support the decisions and subsequent actions required to make change and step into the unknown. They also necessitate being open to trial, error and trying again, and understanding that resistance is part of the growth and learning process.

Figure 8: The Equitable Evaluation Framework™ Theory of Change
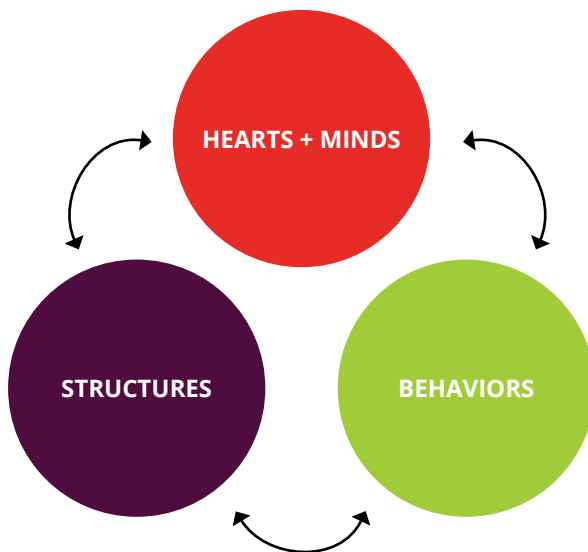
Wheel of
Change for
Transformation,
Robert Gass

One year into its field-building initiative, several of EEI's foundation partners are moving through the EEF theory of change (see Figure 8). As the partners engage with EEF, the first step is to shift hearts and minds as they make the case to place evaluation and evaluative work in service of equity, reframe and expand validity, and embrace complexity. As the base of support for equitable evaluation grows, organizations prepare for transformation by testing new processes and behaviors that are commensurate with the EEF's values. Many are integrating explicit adoption of the principles into their statements of mission, values, vision and guiding principles. EEF principles are showing up

in requests for proposals, requests for quotations and proposal evaluation metrics. Foundations are making their commitment explicit in their internal and external communications.

As the initiative moves into its second year, EEI will further support the development of the field by providing opportunities and space to deepen and advance engagement and adoption, to connect with and learn from peers, and to cultivate and co-create this emerging practice. As a field, we will further explore the shifts in mindset, changes in practice and recalibration of structures and systems that continue to emerge so that we can learn from and continue to support one another. While all are still in the early phases of application, we are on a path of exploration and discovery of what is possible when we shift the paradigm.

EEI continues to engage foundation partners to co-create a cadre of supports that provide a flexible and interchangeable scaffold to meet individuals, teams and organizations where they are. We will continue to encourage reflection, commitment and strategic conversations within foundation partners' spheres of influence to shift the current paradigm and envision what might be possible. As the stories and reflections offered in this publication illustrate, equitable evaluation practitioners are engaged in the subtle reshaping of existing organizational paradigms. Each has found an avenue by which to embark on this intrapreneurial endeavor to reimagine what is possible and encourage change.

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- The California Endowment
- The Colorado Health Foundation
- The Colorado Trust
- The David and Lucile Packard Foundation
- The Kresge Foundation
- Missouri Foundation for Health
- Oregon Community Foundation
- Vancouver Foundation
- Walton Family Foundation

EEI Investment Partners
- The California Endowment
- Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
- The David and Lucile Packard Foundation
- Ford Foundation
- The James Irvine Foundation
- John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
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- Fund for Shared Insight
- John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
- Kaiser Permanente
- The Kresge Foundation
- Robert Sterling Clark Foundation
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Rockefeller Brothers Fund
- S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation
- Surdna Foundation
- Weingart Foundation
- The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation