



# IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING FRAMEWORK 2.0

July 2023



Dear colleagues and friends,

I am pleased to share our revised Impact Assessment and Learning (IA&L) Framework, which articulates our approach to learning and impact assessment, its importance, and what it looks like in practice.

Five years ago, we developed this framework to ensure a common understanding of IA&L at Irvine among the board, staff, grantees, and external partners. We have updated it to respond to:

- *The call for funders to make fundamental changes in how they work with grantees to shift power, advance equity, and center trust*
- *Our own learning and experiences about IA&L (for more information see [Making a House a Home](#): Reflections on One Foundation's Evaluation and Learning Journey), as well as those of our colleagues and best practices in the field*
- *Our evolution as an organization*

We are living in a moment with greater opening, support, and momentum to take long overdue actions to advance equity. Our updated framework is more explicit about the ways evaluation and learning can help advance equity, including centering grantees in all aspects of IA&L and using more participatory approaches for evaluation and learning, grantmaking, and strategy development.

In response to the numerous internal changes at Irvine, we have updated the description on IA&L's relationship to different parts of the organization and how it is integrated into our practices. We make clear that everyone has a role in IA&L, to ensure we are effectively addressing equity and striving for fair and just outcomes for all in our engagement in learning and evaluation. This goes beyond the IA&L team and includes the board and leadership, which play a critical role given their governance responsibilities, as well as grantmaking and operations staff.

As we continue our IA&L journey, I remain honored to do so with my Irvine colleagues, our grantee and external evaluation partners, and so many others. I hope that we take bold steps together, willing to take the more challenging path if it means greater equity for all communities across California. I expect to continue to learn, reflect, and adjust and be changed as a result, and as always, welcome input on our approach and practices.

With gratefulness and humility,

**Kim Ammann Howard**  
*Director of Impact Assessment and Learning*

# WHY DOES IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING MATTER?

## IRVINE'S VALUES

### Partnership

We collaborate with leaders across sectors for greater collective impact.

### Empathy

We intently listen to others to better understand who we serve and how.

### Curiosity

We are eager to learn and explore new things to make better decisions.

### Nimbleness

We are flexible and ready to adapt to new ideas and ways of working.

### Accountability

We hold ourselves responsible for achieving results for the people of California.

### Equity

We work for justice and fairness as the norm for all Californians.

### Transparency

We create trust by sharing information in a candid and timely manner.

Irvine's singular goal is a California where all low-income workers have the power to advance economically. Given that four out of five low-income workers in California are people of color, achieving our goal requires us to understand and address barriers to economic opportunity that disproportionately affect these communities. Impact Assessment and Learning (IA&L) supports the achievement of our North Star by:



### Informing our strategy and grantmaking

IA&L helps us decide where we invest and how, what the impact of our investments is, and when we need to shift to most equitably and optimally meet the needs of those we serve.



### Supporting us in being accountable and transparent

IA&L positions us to share, internally and externally, what we are doing and why, as well as what we are learning and how we are applying that learning. It ensures we are holding ourselves accountable to making progress and impact against our goals and outcomes.



### Broadening understanding of what it takes to realize change

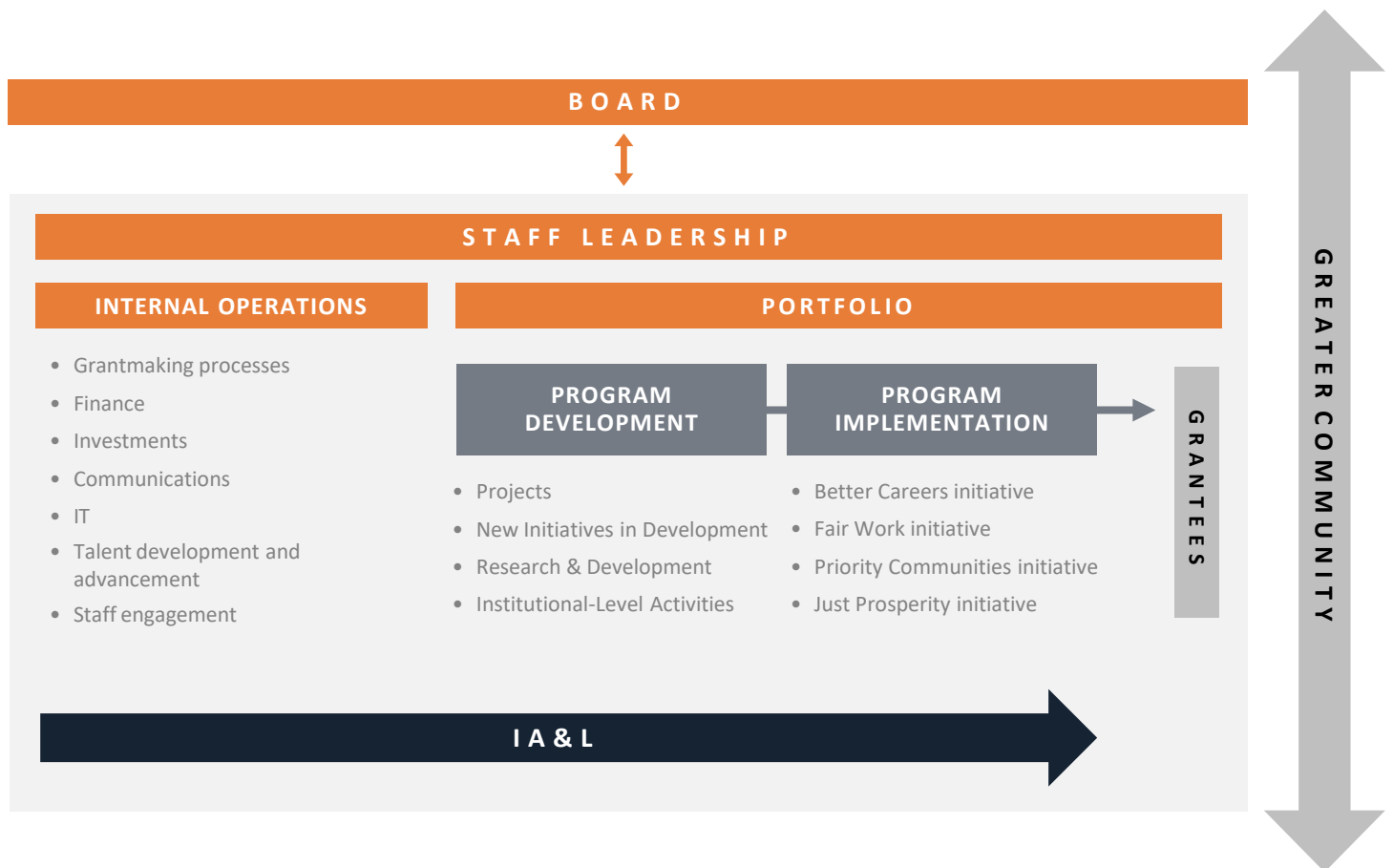
IA&L deepens our understanding of what is needed to achieve systemic change with and for low-income workers in California. We share what we learn, successes and challenges, with our nonprofit, public sector, and philanthropic partners. We do so with the intent of informing our work together.

Throughout our work, we are guided by Irvine's values and commitment to address systemic and structural barriers to economic opportunity based on race, as well as the principles recommended by the [Equitable Evaluation Initiative](#).

## WHERE DOES IA&L FIT INTO IRVINE'S ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE?

As shown below, IA&L is embedded as an organizational support within Irvine, under the ultimate direction of our Board of Directors. The IA&L team supports evaluation and learning across the Foundation with the board, staff leadership, internal operations, and the grantmaking portfolio. Our greatest focus is the grantmaking portfolio and the evaluation and learning needs of Irvine's initiatives, with a growing focus on learning across the portfolio.

As an internal support mechanism, IA&L strives to respond to the needs of multiple stakeholders, including our grantees. We also aim to engage in learning that is in service of our greater community, and which adds to our understanding of how best to approach impact assessment and learning in the field of philanthropy.



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## WHO ARE KEY IA&L STAKEHOLDERS AND WHAT IS THEIR ROLE?

Our team is accountable for ensuring that IA&L is well-planned, executed, and supports the information needs of the board, staff leadership, staff, and grantees. In doing so, IA&L team members play a variety of roles in providing:

- **Technical expertise** for evaluation, research, and learning design, methods, & execution, overall and specifically to grantmaking initiatives (see [page 12](#)).
- **Strategic learning** in the articulation of hypotheses and assumptions, the development and implementation of learning agendas, and processes that ensure learning informs strategic feedback loops and decision making.
- **Curation and convening support** to facilitate sharing of expertise, knowledge, and resources.
- **Project leadership and management** for time-defined workgroups or projects.
- **Field-building opportunities** to share what we learn and support knowledge building and efforts that strengthen the field.

While IA&L team members spend more time than other key stakeholder groups on impact assessment and learning, **everyone plays a critical role in being accountable for impact assessment and learning**. This is briefly described below and in greater detail later in the framework.

**The board** asks hard questions about what success looks like, ensuring we are most effectively using resources and providing strategic advice, guidance, and decision making based on what we learn to hold the Foundation accountable to our North Star and addressing equity.

**Grantees** lay out a plan of work and report on implementation, impact, and what they are learning (e.g., grant proposals and reporting). We also ask grantees to be part of collective learning efforts with us, including identifying priority learning questions, participating in data collection and sense-making, and deriving implications from what we have learned.

**Staff** seek to learn from the implementation of the portfolio, best support grantees in their work, make adjustments to enhance impact and address equity, and ensure that staff leadership and the board have the information they need for their accountability roles.

**Staff leadership** ensures that our organizational culture supports and encourages learning and continuous improvement that addresses equity and enhances impact, and that evaluation is integrated with strategy and adequately resourced and prioritized.


## WHAT PRINCIPLES GUIDE IA&L?

Our IA&L work is guided by a set of principles informed by discussions with board, staff, grantees, evaluation consultants, and a review of best practices from the field. These principles guide both our approach to impact assessment and learning and our related partnerships.

We have recently updated these principles to be explicit about how we strive to ensure our practices effectively represent and serve low-income workers throughout California. We do so because **we believe that evaluation and learning needs to be in service of and contribute to advancing equity**. These changes have been informed by:

- Irvine Foundation’s commitment to intentionally address systemic and structural barriers to economic opportunity that are based on race.
- The work of the Equitable Evaluation Initiative, which aims to ensure evaluation practices dismantle, rather than reinforce or exacerbate, the inequities they seek to address.

We recognize that some of these principles are more aspirational than others and will take hard work and time to live into.

	We believe that...	IA&L strives to...	We are working with our partners to...
	<b>Grantees and their communities are integral to defining success</b> and that impact assessment and learning should be guided by the needs and objectives of community stakeholders.	Ensure that resources (time, forums, and people), are intentionally devoted to <b>engaging grantees and their communities in meaning-making, listening, feedback, and strategic planning.</b>	<b>Clarify the purpose and audience</b> for specific IA&L activities to ensure our goals, learning questions, and measurement efforts further the work and reflect a <b>collective understanding of progress.</b>
	<b>Stakeholders should be empowered</b> and not just engaged.	Facilitate <b>co-ownership</b> over evaluation design, implementation, contextualization, and the sharing of results.	Prioritize <b>accessibility and inclusivity</b> , including use of asset-based language and making findings available in accessible forms and formats in a variety of venues.

## WHAT PRINCIPLES GUIDE IA&L? (cont.)

	We believe that...	IA&L strives to...	We are working with our partners to...
	<b>Evaluation should uphold the dignity of all stakeholders</b> , that lived experience is expertise, and grantees are trusted experts in their field as sources of knowledge and learning.	Apply <b>culturally responsive approaches</b> to evaluation that support principles and values held by our partners and their communities.	Gather information from <b>diverse perspectives</b> (e.g., grantees, other external partners, the communities our grantees serve), in a variety of ways (e.g., group conversations, visiting communities, confidential surveys).
	<b>Evaluation should interrogate historical, cultural, and systemic drivers of inequity</b> and acknowledge and address power dynamics.	Support evaluations that examine Irvine’s role in supporting efforts that <b>address root, systemic causes</b> for persistent problems and <b>field-building</b> to advance equity in evaluation and learning.	Design evaluations that rely on <b>various types of evidence</b> , including lived experience of grantee partners and the communities they serve, to understand behavioral, historical, and contextual factors.
	<b>Social and systems change takes time</b> and meaningful impact shows up in a variety of ways.	Prioritize gathering information that helps <b>identify when adjustments need to be made</b> in real time. This includes understanding not only what’s happening, but why — the factors that are facilitating or impeding progress.	Ensure <b>assessment timelines</b> reflect grantee needs in addition to those of the foundation, and allow for trust-building, meaningful engagement, and reasonable expectations for what can be assessed when.
	<b>The Foundation</b> – as much as any partner, project, or strategy – <b>is a subject of evaluation</b> .	Support the <b>examination of how Foundation efforts help, or hinder</b> , strategic impact and its achievement of equitable outcomes.	<b>Cultivate a learning culture</b> where mistakes are part of the learning process and where we “learn forward” from grantees and other partners for greater impact and equity.
	<b>The Foundation must balance the costs and benefits of information gathering</b> in response to the information needs of multiple stakeholder groups (both internal and external).	Account for the <b>full cost of evaluation and learning</b> and make every effort to ensure that our grantee ask is commensurate with the amount and type of resources we provide and the usefulness of the information to be collected.	Avoid processes that are burdensome for staff, grantees, and the communities we seek to serve. Where possible, we <b>build on existing efforts</b> (e.g., data grantees already collect) and <b>streamline efforts</b> (e.g., use information grantees provide to other funders).

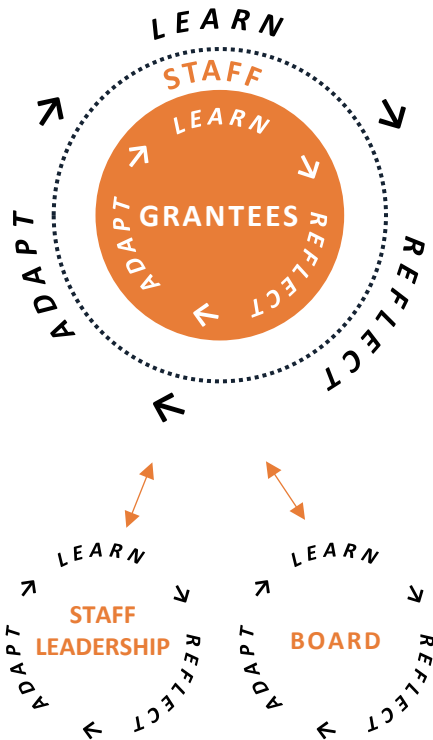
## WHAT PRACTICES ARE CRITICAL TO IA&L?

Three practices are critical to IA&L. First, **strategy and impact assessment and learning must regularly inform each other**. Strategy needs to inform how we assess our progress and learn, and what we learn from assessing our progress needs to inform our strategy.



The second practice involves assessment activities as part of an **ongoing cycle of learning, reflecting, and adapting to facilitate continuous improvement**.

Within the Foundation, staff are most deeply involved in this practice. They commission and use external evaluation and learning to inform and improve their own work. In their centering of grantee voice, staff integrate the learning needs of grantees in both the design, implementation, and meaning-making of evaluation and learning efforts. Evaluation and learning should align in this way with grantee goals, and the goals of the communities with whom they partner. Irvine's board and staff leadership engage in learning in ways that build on these practices and play an important role in their support of IA&L and in enhancing equity and impact.



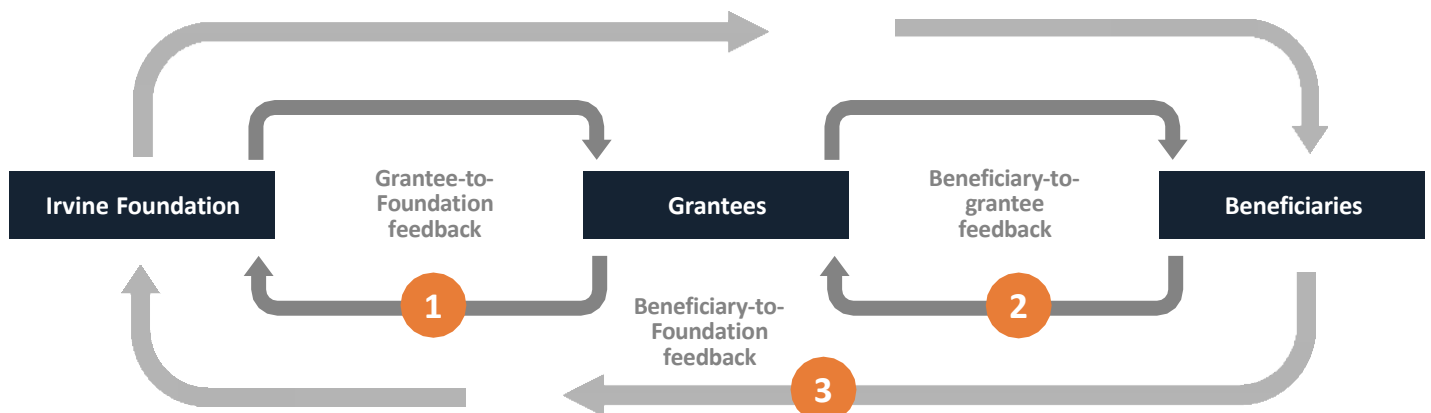
## WHAT PRACTICES ARE CRITICAL TO IA&L?

The third practice focuses on **our listening and feedback practices**. This takes place within Irvine among staff, leadership, and the board, as well as with those we are accountable to — **our grantee partners and California workers who live on low incomes, often in poverty or struggling to make ends meet**.

**We remain committed to broadening and strengthening our listening and feedback practices — asking and listening, using what we hear to inform our work, and letting those we listen to know how we used what we learned.** The figure below shows the key processes in which this takes place. Examples for each feedback loop includes:

1. Gathering grantee feedback on Irvine’s role and support through grantee perception surveys, engagement in evaluation and strategy development, and grantee gatherings.
2. Supporting grantees in their own feedback loops with those they serve through our participation in the [Fund for Shared Insight](#), support of [Listen4Good grants](#), and other efforts.
3. Seeking feedback directly from Californians living on low incomes through listening efforts (e.g., Community Listening Sessions, PPIC Statewide Survey, IFTF California Worker Voices).

We also prioritize internal listening and feedback practices within Irvine, with staff, and the board (e.g., annual staff engagement and pulse check survey, periodic board assessments).



## HOW DO WE PUT IA&L INTO PRACTICE?

Impact assessment and learning takes place across Irvine — with the board, throughout the organization, and with external partners and others. Priority IA&L efforts are identified through our annual planning processes, which teams undertake and are reflected in annual learning agendas created for the board, organization, and portfolio. The table below provides relevant examples of both ongoing and more discrete, time-defined efforts that IA&L team members support in partnership with others.

Focal Area	Examples of relevant activities that IA&L supports in partnership with others
<p><b>Grantmaking Portfolio</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and implementation of evaluation and learning plans for grantmaking initiatives to assess progress and lift up key learnings for continuous improvement and strategic decision making</li> <li>• Design and facilitation of focused cross-learning activities to share learnings and make connections across bodies of work for greater impact and equity</li> <li>• Management or participation in time-defined workgroups that focus on strengthening specific practices (e.g., the Grantmaking Processes Refresh workgroup)</li> <li>• Evaluation and learning support to Program Development in conducting research, assessing ideas, building partnerships, and developing plans that innovatively advance the Foundation’s goals and grantmaking initiatives</li> </ul>
<p><b>Board</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular board engagement to facilitate learning about our grantmaking and its impact</li> <li>• Bi-monthly board learning resources to provide board members with additional context about our work</li> <li>• Periodic board self-assessment to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement</li> </ul>
<p><b>Listening &amp; Feedback</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Periodic participation in the CEP Grantee Perception survey to obtain and act on confidential grantee feedback</li> <li>• Provision of grantmaking resources to a cohort of Native-serving organizations to support their listening and learning and indirectly ours</li> <li>• Support Irvine grantees’ participation in the Listen4Good Initiative to enhance their use of high-quality feedback practices that benefit those they serve</li> </ul>



HOW DO WE PUT IA&L INTO PRACTICE?  
(cont'd)

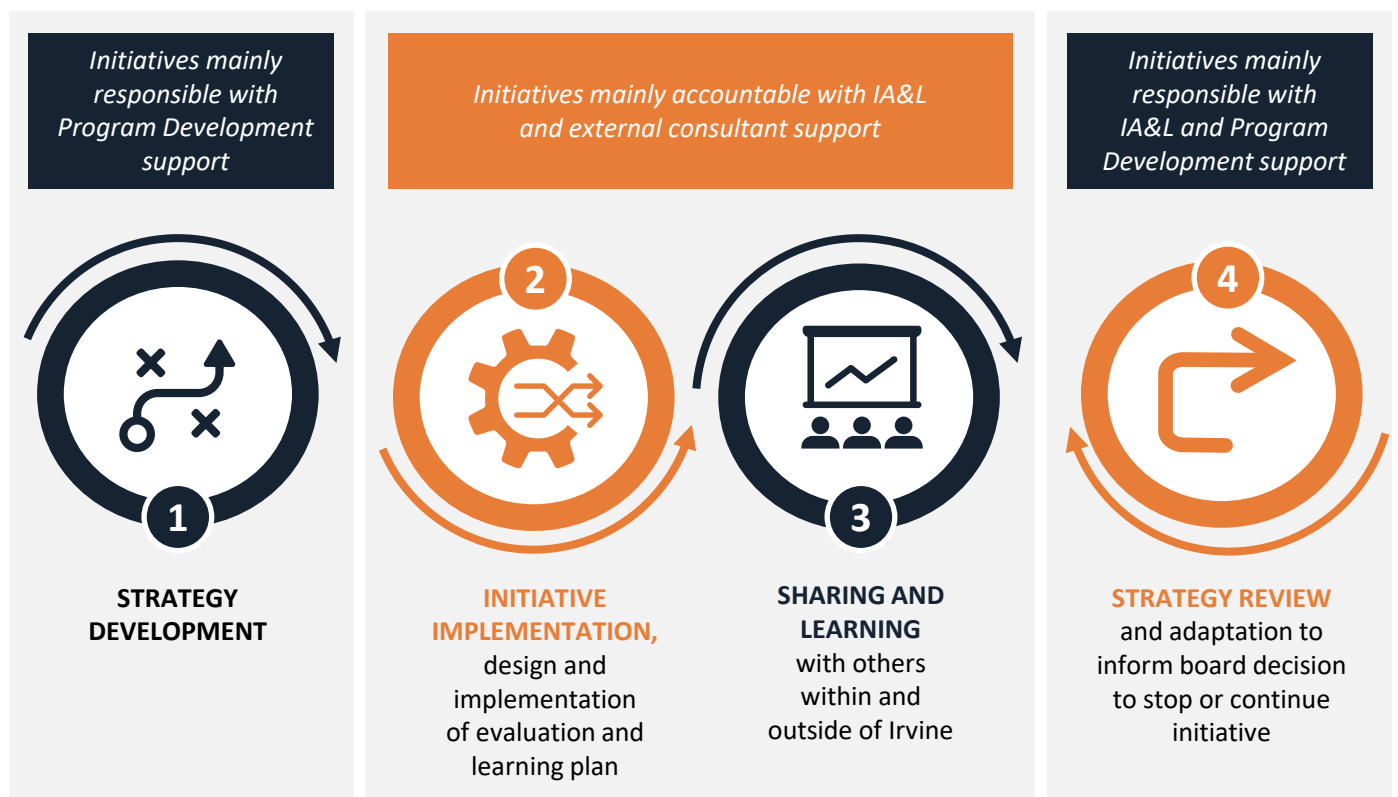
Focal Area	Examples of relevant activities that IA&L supports in partnership with others
<b>Organizational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curate and coordinate an organizational learning agenda for greater internal sharing and understanding of our work and our North Star impact</li> <li>• Regular Voices from the Community and Chat &amp; Chew sessions for staff to learn from external partners and field experts, as well as internal colleagues</li> <li>• Annual staff engagement surveys and periodic pulse check surveys to hear confidential staff feedback about organizational practices and experiences</li> <li>• Evaluation of first six months of Irvine’s Work Location Policy implementation</li> </ul>
<b>Field Building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the development of tools to help foundation evaluation and learning leaders in their roles</li> <li>• Disseminate our approach, impact, and lessons learned for the benefit of others</li> <li>• Support the efforts of the Equitable Evaluation Initiative to help the field in using evaluation as a tool to enhance equity</li> </ul>

## HOW DOES IA&L SUPPORT INITIATIVES?

Initiatives and IA&L colleagues partner closely, and with evaluation consultants and grantee partners, to develop shared learning goals, operationalize those goals, and engage in evaluation and learning activities. Key collaboration points include:

- *Developing an evaluation and learning plan for each initiative (see [Appendix A](#) for more details)*
- *Identifying evaluation consultants and managing external evaluations*
- *Applying learnings internally to inform strategy and other key decisions (e.g., grant resources)*
- *Transferring learnings to other work inside the Foundation*
- *Sharing learnings externally with grantees and other partners and key stakeholders*

How impact assessment and learning is integrated into the work of initiatives depends on its stage of development or implementation, as shown in the figure below and described in more detail in [Appendix B](#).





# APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX A: IA&L PLANS FOR INITIATIVES

How evaluation and learning activities are designed and implemented for each initiative is documented in their IA&L plan, which is developed by the end of the first year of an initiative, or during the first year after the approval of a strategic review, in cooperation with our evaluation consultants. The IA&L plan is reviewed and updated at least annually based on changing assessment and learning needs and opportunities.

### ELEMENTS OF IA&L INITIATIVE PLANS

#### **Purpose and audiences for IA&L**

#### **Multiyear initiative goals and outcomes**

#### **Assessment learning questions/hypotheses**

#### **Methods to assess progress and answer assessment and learning questions/hypotheses**

- Design/approach, including strengths and challenges
- Key relevant context
- Data collection tools and data sources
- Processes for regular data synthesis, sharing, reflection, and adaptation

#### **Key products and their use**

(e.g., for decision making, to inform the field, and to enhance grantee effectiveness)

#### **Grantee engagement**

(e.g., how grantees are involved in the IA&L design and implementation, how they will benefit from IA&L efforts)

#### **Capacity and resource needs**

- Budget
- Staffing allocations and roles (program staff, IA&L staff, consultants)
- Assessment of IA&L capacity for staff and grantees and needed supports

#### **Timeline**

## APPENDIX B: IA&L ACTIVITIES IN INITIATIVES

The below table provides some detail on the ways impact assessment and learning is integrated into the stages of initiative development, implementation, and refreshes. Initiative, IA&L, and program development teams partner to execute these activities, joined by external evaluation consultants. Given the diversity of learning needs within each initiative, IA&L and others work intently with each initiative team to identify and tailor the scope and timing for the areas below, and the corresponding roles for operationalization.

Impact Assessment and Learning Activities with Initiatives	
<b>Strategy Development</b>	Articulate key hypotheses, assumptions, goals, and strategies
	Develop impact goals, strategic learning questions, and key indicators
	Engage in ongoing strategic development, adaptation, and refinement
	Develop plans to engage community input, facilitate listening and design sessions, and integrate feedback into strategic decision making
<b>Initiative implementation, design, and implementation of evaluation and learning plan</b>	Design evaluation scope(s) of work, landscape potential evaluation and learning consultants, develop request for proposal(s), and select external evaluation partner(s)
	Develop IA&L plan for initiative
	Share key elements of initiative IA&L plan with the Program Committee
	Conduct annual initiative updates, including a mid-initiative review (mid-cycle), and preparation for strategic refreshes (towards end of cycle)
	Articulate how approaches to grantmaking align with strategic plans and objectives, understand how grant-level activities play into initiative learning agenda, and articulate how grant-level activities contribute to broader initiative progress, opportunities, and challenges
	Design and conduct a standalone evaluation that focuses on a specific content area, grantee, or group of grantees within an initiative, as relevant
	Design and implement plans for grantee engagement, data collection, sense-making, and sharing learnings through the initiative

## APPENDIX B: IA&L ACTIVITIES IN INITIATIVES (cont.)

Impact Assessment and Learning Activities with Initiatives	
<b>Initiative implementation, design and implementation of evaluation and learning plan (cont.)</b>	Engage in cross-learning with other initiatives regarding implementation tactics and strategies, ideas and innovations, and reflection and sense-making related to evaluation findings and lessons learned
	Manage work of, and relationships with, external research and evaluation partners (as specified by initiative learning agenda)
	Manage research and evaluation grants with Initiative teams
	Analyze data and summarize evidence to ground learning activities and support decision making
<b>Sharing and learning with others within and outside of Irvine</b>	Communicate and share research and evaluation findings with the board, program committee, leadership, partners, and field
	Plan and facilitate cross-Initiative sharing and learning
	Provide guidance, training materials, and opportunities to build staff capacity on relevant evaluation and learning topics, as relevant
	Support grantee capacity-building in learning and evaluation (e.g., input on evaluation, opportunities to learn more about evaluation), as relevant
	Share findings and insights from research and evaluation work (e.g., on Irvine website, in conference presentations, and in published blogs and articles)
	Bring learning from the field into the Foundation, particularly new developments in philanthropic evaluation and learning
<b>Strategy review and adaptation to inform board decision to stop or continue initiative</b>	Share and reflect on cumulative evaluation findings and incorporate into strategic refresh processes to inform the strategy for the next stage of the initiative or its conclusion