

IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING FRAMEWORK



WHY DO WE ENGAGE IN IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING?

The Irvine Foundation's singular goal is a California where all low-income workers have the power to advance economically. Impact Assessment and Learning (IA&L) helps the staff and board advance this goal in three ways:



Guiding our strategy and grantmaking

It helps us decide where we invest and how, what the impact of our investments is, and when we need to shift to make sure that we are most effectively and equitably using our resources and talents.



Supporting us in being accountable and transparent

It 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.



Enhancing our field impact

We share what we learn, successes and challenges, with the fields and sectors in which we work, especially our nonprofit, public sector, and philanthropic colleagues. We do so with the intent of informing their work and augmenting our impact (e.g., through co-funding, model replication, and scaling). We also use what we learn from others to guide our efforts and enhance our impact.

We define **IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING** as the processes we use to measure our progress and impact in meeting our goals. We collect a variety of quantitative and qualitative information through different methods including pre-grant due diligence, grant monitoring, grantee site visits, grantee-funder convenings, targeted research, evaluation, community listening sessions, and grantee perception surveys. We regularly synthesize and reflect on the information we gather to inform decisions about our work and consider adjustments that will enhance our impact.

WHY AN IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING FRAMEWORK?

We developed the IA&L Framework to ensure that Irvine staff and board are clear about our approach to impact assessment and learning. This includes: (1) how we are holding ourselves accountable to assess our progress and impact against our portfolio goals and outcomes, and (2) how we will learn and apply that learning to inform decisions about our strategy on an ongoing basis.

This necessitates our engagement in two critical practices. First, strategy, and impact assessment and learning, must regularly inform each other. Strategy needs to inform how we assess our progress and learn. Conversely, what we learn from assessing our progress needs to inform our strategy.



The second practice involves assessment activities feeding into an ongoing cycle of learning, reflecting, and adapting to facilitate continuous improvement. Staff are most deeply involved in this practice and to different extents collaboratively engage with grantees. In our learning approaches, we always aim to enhance grantees' effectiveness in reaching their goals in addition to informing our own efforts. In addition, the board and staff leadership periodically engage in learning in ways that build on this practice by staff.



HOW ARE WE EVOLVING OUR IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING APPROACH?

Our IA&L Framework is influenced by best practices in evaluation and learning and builds on our own experiences. We continually evolve our approach to best serve our grantmaking initiatives, our goals and the goals we share with grantees and partners, to ensure impact assessment and learning is closely integrated with strategy, and to ensure equity is infused into all our evaluation and learning work. We are focused on growing and evolving our IA&L efforts in the following ways:

- Developing and implementing IA&L plans for all new initiatives within the first year of launch
- Less emphasis on measuring past impact and greater emphasis on forward-looking information that informs the work of the Foundation and grantees
- Greater engagement of staff, leadership, the board, and grantees in continuous improvement processes
- Broadening and strengthening our listening and feedback practices with grantees and the communities we serve



WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE FOR IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING?

The Foundation board, staff leadership, staff, and grantees all have a role in being accountable for impact assessment and learning.

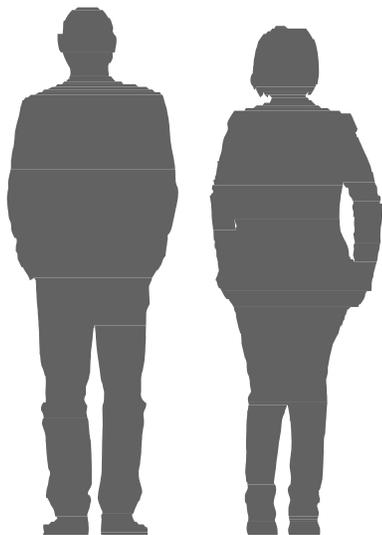
ACCOUNTABILITY

The **Board** has a significant accountability role, asking 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.

Staff Leadership is accountable to ensure that the organizational culture supports and encourages learning and continuous improvement, and that impact assessment and learning is integrated with strategy and adequately resourced and prioritized.

Staff are accountable to learn from initiative implementation, make adjustments that increase the odds of success, and ensure that staff leadership and the board have the information they need for their accountability role.

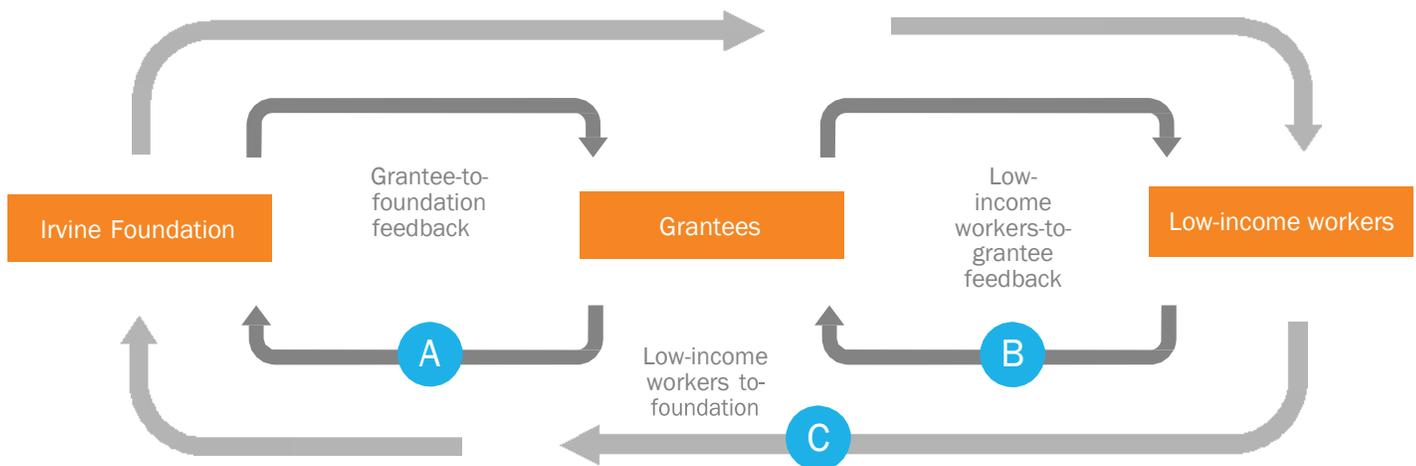
Grantees are accountable for laying out a plan of work and reporting on implementation, impact, and what they are learning (e.g., grant proposals and reporting). We also ask grantees to be part of collective learning efforts with us.



HOW DO WE INCORPORATE FEEDBACK FROM GRANTEES AND THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE INTO OUR WORK?

We are accountable to the people we ultimately seek to serve: [California workers who live on low incomes, often in poverty](#). As a result, we are committed to broadening and strengthening our 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.

This takes place many ways, including feedback loops with (A) [grantees](#) through grantee perception surveys, engagement in strategy development, and grantee gatherings. We also support our grantees in their own feedback loops with (B) [those they serve](#) through our participation in the Fund for Shared Insight, support of Listen for Good grants, and other efforts. Lastly, we seek feedback directly from (C) [Californians living on low incomes](#) through listening efforts (e.g., [Community Listening Sessions](#), [PPIC Statewide Survey](#), [IFTF California Worker Voices report](#), etc.).



WHAT PRINCIPLES GUIDE IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING?

The following principles guide our IA&L efforts — both our approach and partnerships. While these principles are relevant to IA&L efforts across the Foundation, they most frequently apply to our work within initiatives. These principles have been informed by discussions with the Irvine board, staff, and grantees, and align with best practices from the field.

OUR APPROACH

- We are clear about the **purpose and audience** for the specific IA&L activity.
- We **cultivate a learning culture** that supports innovation, experimentation, reflection, flexibility, and adaptation.
- We use **multiple data collection methods** and gather information from diverse perspectives (e.g., grantees, partners, the communities we and our grantees serve, other key stakeholders). This allows us to learn about our own work, the relevant work of others, and the broader context that influences our impact.
- We prioritize gathering information that helps **identify when adjustments need to be made** in real time. This includes seeking to understand not only what's happening, but why — the factors that are facilitating or impeding progress.
- We **share what we learn** with others, including grantees, partners, the field, and the communities we serve.

OUR PARTNERSHIPS

- We collaborate with our grantees and other partners to design and implement IA&L efforts in order to:
 - Ensure that IA&L is **reflective of the needs and priorities** of grantees and the field
 - **Level or balance the power dynamic** between Irvine as the funder and grantees to foster strong and candid relationships
 - **Use a diversity, equity, and inclusion approach** with all our partnerships
 - **Increase our individual and collective capacity** to gather and use data in the process
- We 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.
- We seek to avoid processes that are burdensome for staff, grantees, and the communities we seek to serve. Where possible, we **build on existing efforts** (e.g., data grantees already collect) and **streamline efforts** (e.g., use information grantees provide to other funders).



HOW DO WE FOCUS OUR IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING EFFORTS?

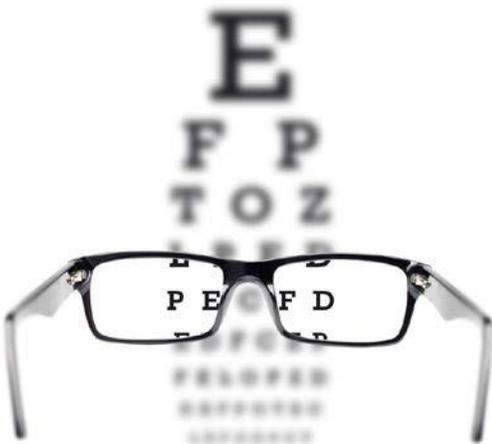
We need to make decisions about when, where, and how to spend finite resources and staff time; this is especially the case when we make decisions about external evaluations. The following factors help us more effectively focus these efforts:

Life cycle of an initiative. Information needs will vary and be heightened at key points of an initiative, such as when decisions need to be made to continue or exit an initiative, to renew or augment specific grants, or to increase resources for scaling. We prioritize using resources for evaluations that can inform critical decision points.

Capacity. We consider the capacity of grantees and our partners to gather, use, and report data. We seek to take advantage of contexts in which quality data exists, while also recognizing that some situations may require strategic investments in capacity to yield evaluative information.

Standard of proof. We recognize that not all data are created equal. Some types of evaluation yield rigorous assessment of the impact of program models while others favor rapid feedback that can inform more adaptive initiatives. We prioritize evaluation approaches that are appropriate to the nature of specific interventions, their stage of development, and evidence of effectiveness from similar efforts.

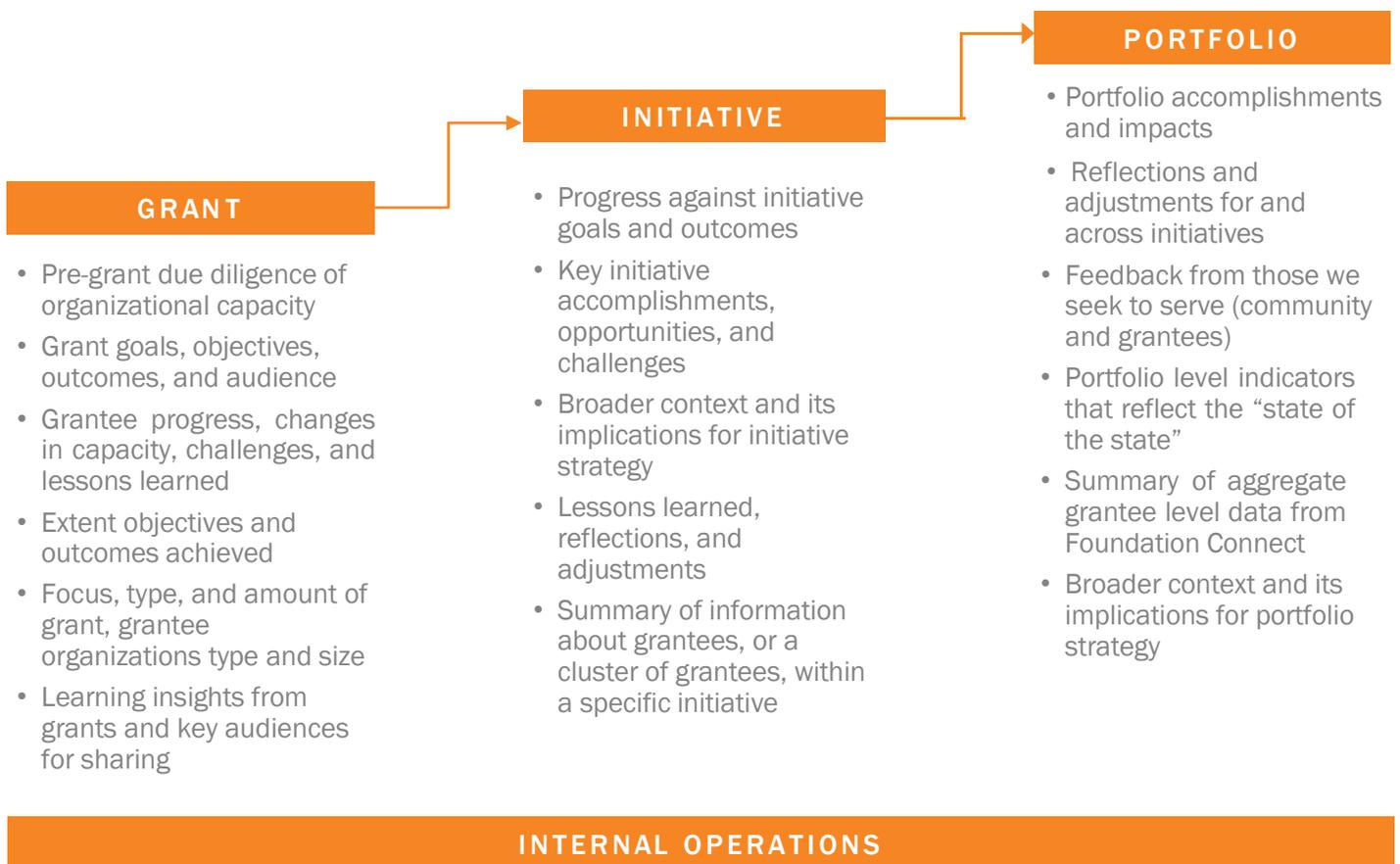
Measurability. Some things are harder to measure than others, and our efforts need to align with what can realistically be measured. For example, when assessing a career training program, discrete quantitative outcomes can be used to measure tangible impact on participants overtime (e.g., change in hourly wage and career progression). In contrast, efforts to influence systems change, such as passage of a state policy, typically rely on proxy measures (e.g., framing and frequency of related discussions) to indicate progress toward the desired outcome (e.g., policy passage).



HOW DO WE PUT IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING INTO PRACTICE?

As part of impact assessment and learning, we collect and reflect on different types of information at the grant, initiative, and portfolio levels. This information is used in a variety of ways, not only within, but across the three levels. For example, learning at the grant level informs learning at the initiative and portfolio levels (e.g., interim grant reports within a specific initiative can be reviewed to assess the extent to which outcomes are being achieved and key challenges facing grantees' progress. A similar analysis can take place across all grants within the portfolio).

We also collect and reflect on different elements of our internal operations to ensure that each one most effectively supports the implementation of our strategy and grantmaking.



Grantmaking processes • Finance • Investments • Communications • IT
Talent development and advancement • Staff engagement • Diversity, equity, and inclusion practices

WHAT DOES IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING LOOK LIKE ACROSS THE FOUNDATION?

An IA&L plan is developed within the first year an initiative is launched and is updated as the initiative evolves. The plan is reviewed at least annually, and, if needed, adjusted based on changing assessment and learning needs and opportunities.

Elements of IA&L Initiative Plans

Purpose and audience for IA&L

Multiyear goals and outcomes of the Initiative

Assessment and learning questions/hypotheses

Methods to 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

(i.e., how grantees are involved in the IA&L design and implementation and how they and their beneficiaries 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

We also pursue IA&L efforts outside of initiatives, including at the grant, portfolio, and internal operations level, as well as . This includes IA&L practices to reflect on research and development, new initiatives in development, and assessments of staff engagement and organizational and board effectiveness.

We continually learn, reflect, and adjust our IA&L efforts. We look forward to collaborating and learning alongside our colleagues as they pursue similar efforts and expect to be changed as a result. As always, we welcome input on our approach and practices as we seek for IA&L to contribute to improving the lives of Californians so everyone can receive a living wage and have opportunities to advance economically.