

# Funding for Impact: How to Design Strategic Grantmaking Programs

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Historically, philanthropic foundations have rarely had to justify the use of their funds as long as they were being directed to the public good. Recently, however, public and private funders have been held to a higher standard of impact, both by regulators and the general public. In response, funders are increasingly attempting to demonstrate the impact of their grantmaking.

Summative evaluations are helpful in showing what happened as a result of grantmaking, but all too often the findings do not influence future funding—the program is over, and the donor has moved on to new issues or strategies. The most significant way to increase the effectiveness of a foundation's grantmaking is to focus on the first steps in the process: grants program design.

Though most funders spend considerable time thinking about the issues they hope to address, they spend inadequate time up front thinking through the impact they would like to have with their grantmaking and how to allocate their resources to achieve their goals.



Starting a new philanthropic program is both exciting and daunting. There are so many social problems to be addressed, and so many possible ways of addressing them, that the strategic choices can be overwhelming. For funders reviewing and revising existing programs, there are generally more parameters and more knowledge about what has—and what hasn't—worked well. Whether reshaping an existing program or developing a new program, funders are faced with a similar set of questions, including: What criteria can be used to determine which issue is most pressing? How can you know which grantmaking approach best lends itself to a particular issue? How do you find those elusive "leverage points" funders always seem to be talking about?

Building on TCC Group's twenty-six years of experience in strategic philanthropy, this briefing paper is intended to assist grantmakers designing new grants programs, as well as those rethinking existing programs, as they develop a focused funding strategy. The paper provides a logical process to help guide you through the many questions raised when

designing grant programs. To be clear, designing a grant program is undeniably complex and requires time and thoughtfulness; there is no single "right way" to develop a strong program. However, by following a series of thoughtful steps, covering the critical questions and including the appropriate people, you increase the likelihood that you will develop an effective program.

### A Shift Toward Strategic Grantmaking

Several key trends have greatly influenced the field of philanthropy in the past decade. First, the huge growth in the philanthropic sector has made it a more significant part of the economy. In 2004, the roughly 66,000 grantmaking foundations in the U.S. gave a record \$32.4 billion, reversing several years of philanthropic decline. As such, the sector is increasingly being held to higher standards of effectiveness. Second, as Enron and other accounting scandals in the early half of this decade shook the public's confidence in the private sector, they also brought increased scrutiny of the philanthropic arena. Allegations of disproportionate administrative costs being counted as part of a foundation's annual payout, along with excessive compensation for executives at some foundations, created a public outcry for greater accountability for the charitable dollars entrusted to foundation officers. A third major influence on philanthropy is the increasingly difficult funding environment in which nonprofits are operating. Declines in government support of nonprofit organizations, coupled with an increase in the number of nonprofits, have led to increasing competition for private dollars. Faced with a constant demand for their support, many funders are trying to be more strategic with how they use their resources and are paying more attention to performance outcomes of their grantees. As a result of these trends, many grantmakers feel they must demonstrate that their programs are producing valuable results and that they are getting the "bang for the buck" out of their investments.

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Another outcome of these developments is that we are seeing more grantmakers engaging in increasingly complex funding initiatives and developing programs with broad social-change objectives. These initiatives often are funded collaboratively, spread across multiple sites, involve many grantees, and last for long periods of time, thus making it more difficult to identify results. Most important, they are aimed at achieving long-term change rather than immediate results, making it even more difficult to assess the impact of an initiative.

With the growing expectations for performance and the complexity of grantmaking initiatives, funders are paying more attention to the development of their grantmaking programs. More and more, funders have come to realize that it is difficult to evaluate the impact of their philanthropic efforts if they have not clearly articulated their funding strategy and goals at the outset. A rigorous program design process enables funders to achieve the most impact with their limited resources. Evaluation can then inform them of the efficacy of their approach by feeding back into the planning process and helping funders understand what has worked and what hasn't, so that they can apply that knowledge as they refine grant-making programs.

## The Program Design Process

A quick review of the literature shows that there are a number of "models" for designing grantmaking programs. We analyzed a number of these models and found that, for the most part, they shared some common elements or steps that seem to define effective grantmaking, as shown in the exhibit to the right. The steps are as follows:

1. Identify the issue
2. Articulate assumptions
3. Scan the field
4. Take stock of your internal capacity
5. Validate your assumptions
6. Implement, evaluate, and plan again

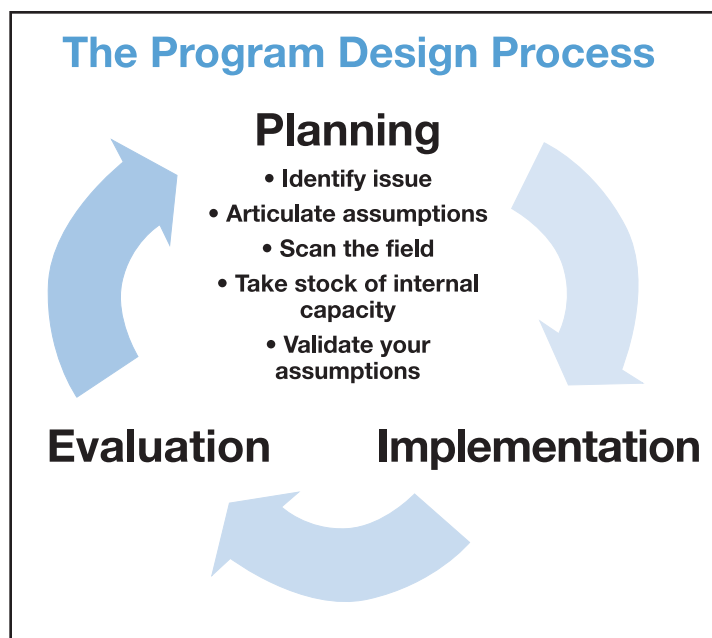
This sixth step is not part of the design process but completes the feedback loop that allows grantmakers to constantly improve their work.

These steps probably appear quite intuitive and simple. Indeed, you probably engage in at least some of them already. You may scan the field informally on an ongoing basis, conduct an internal review as part of the strategic planning process, or just intuitively factor lessons learned from previous experiences into your funding strategy.

From our experience, however, many funders do not approach program planning holistically. Rather, they ask a few select questions to validate their hypotheses, but do not sufficiently assess the complexities of the issue they are addressing.

By conducting these activities as part of a more structured process, you will develop a stronger grants program that is more reflective of the needs of your constituents, best practices in the field, your internal values and capacities, and the external environment.

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## Step 1: Identify the Issue



The first step to designing a program is to identify the problem you are attempting to solve. Often, the issue you choose to focus on is based on internal criteria. These may include a founding philanthropist's stated legacy at a private foundation; a corporate philosophy and alignment with business goals at a corporate foundation; a public mandate; an existing grants program; or the shared values of foundation managers. These parameters may range from the broad outlines of intent to a specific identification of a subject area. For example, after witnessing underemployment and language barriers facing Asian newcomers in their home state of Vermont, the **Freeman Foundation** trustees were specific in their interest in creating economic opportunities nationally for Asian refugees and immigrants. The foundation's task was to determine how best to create those opportunities. For the trustees of the **Wachovia Foundation**, whose broad mission is to "build strong and vibrant communities, improve the quality of life, and make a positive difference where we work and live," identifying the programmatic issues on which to focus in order to achieve that goal was a more significant challenge. Is improving the quality of life best achieved through medical

research or cultural participation efforts, education, or land conservation? Based on its previous grantmaking experience and general knowledge of the education field, the foundation had some preliminary ideas about what worked and was interested in the idea of increasing student achievement by improving teachers' performance. Within that broad framework, the foundation asked us, as consultants, to help it develop a more focused grants program.

Initially, you may articulate your foundation's interests broadly, such as an interest in homelessness or land conservation, or your foundation may be very specific about its focus. In either case, you can then use the program design process described below to further refine the parameters, understand potential outcomes, and set goals.

## Step 2: Articulate Assumptions

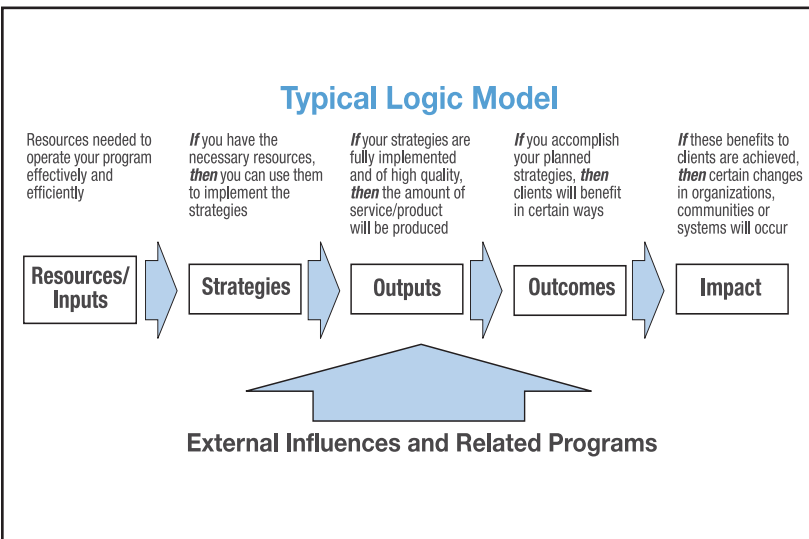


The second step is to articulate your assumptions about how the problem can be addressed with available resources. Using existing knowledge of the issue, the activities of others in the field, previous grantmaking experience, and a sense of your own capabilities, you can develop

a rough idea of how your support can address the problem and achieve desired results.

One of the most effective ways of expressing these concepts is to create a logic model depicting connections between strategies and anticipated outcomes. In very basic terms, logic models specify the desired outcomes of a program, the steps in

### Typical Logic Model



the process necessary to achieve the outcomes, and the resources necessary to implement those steps successfully. Though many organizations have created different models and use different terminology, the essential structure of all logic models is the same.

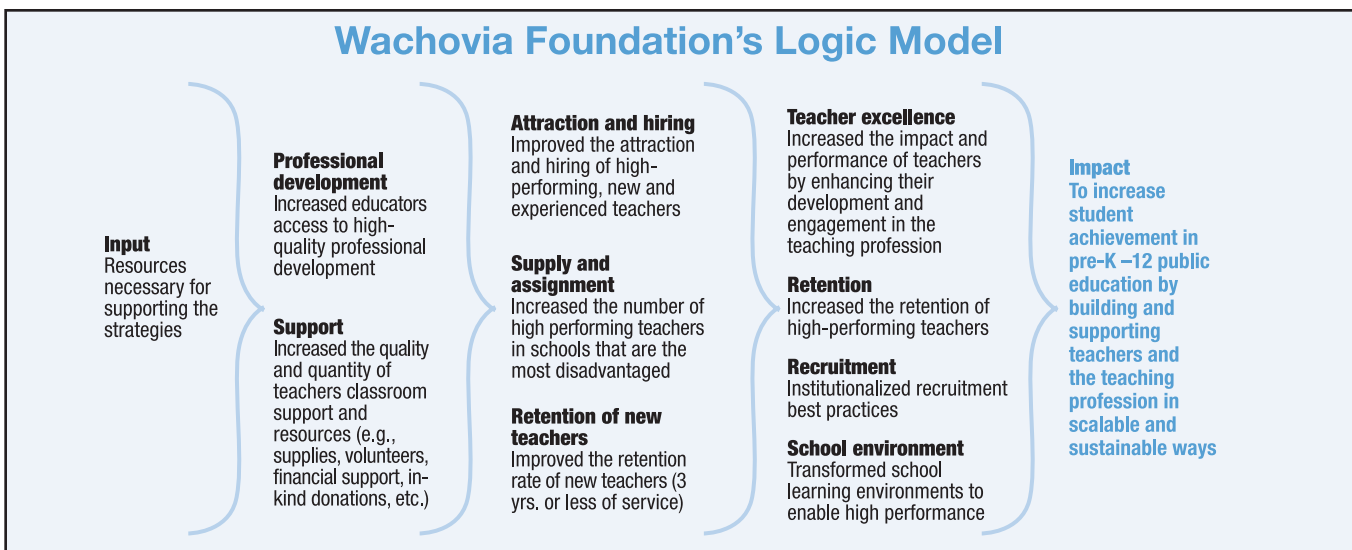
The use of logic models for evaluating grant programs has become pervasive in philanthropy, and funders are increasingly requiring grantees to articulate their work in a logic-model format. However, using logic models to guide the design of a grants program is far less common. By articulating the assumed causal connections as part of the program design process—*before* you allocate resources—you can use the information gathered during the design process to validate your assumptions and adjust the model accordingly. Thus, the logic model is transformed from a purely evaluative tool into a planning tool as well.

In the case of the **Wachovia Foundation**, we conducted an in-depth scan of the education field by conducting extensive secondary research, interviewing key external stakeholders and experts in the education field, holding discussions with education funders, and conducting a study of similarly focused corporate funders. We analyzed programs and strategies that had been successful, as well as those that hadn't; looked for gaps in the field, where

few public or private dollars seemed to be supporting promising practices; and examined possible opportunities for partnerships and collaborations. We also analyzed the internal capacity of the foundation to determine what human, financial, and capital resources were available. We then engaged internal stakeholders in the process of refining the initial logic model to reflect our evolving understanding of the field.

Based on what we had learned in the internal and external assessments, we developed two logic models depicting two different scenarios that **Wachovia** could employ to achieve its aim: "To increase student achievement in pre-K–12 public education by building and supporting teachers and the teaching profession." The first scenario focused on comprehensive systemic change at the school, school district, and community levels and necessitated a narrower geographic focus. The second scenario emphasized increasing academic achievement by improving the performance and capacities of teachers within the classroom. After discussing these scenarios, the foundation decided that it preferred the broader geographic reach, increased flexibility, more immediate impact, and the more individual focus of the second scenario. It also thought it would be more feasible and manageable given its capacity and resources. From there, we created a more focused logic model.

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*NOTE: TCC completed the iterative process of developing a logic model with further research defining the details of the model. In July 2005, TCC completed the pilot year evaluation of the Wachovia Teachers and Teaching Initiative (TTI). As a result of the pilot year evaluation findings, TCC has further refined the model to now assess the three-year TTI grantmaking cycle (2005-2008).*

### Step 3: Scan the Field



A critical step in the process is a comprehensive scan of the environment to assess needs and identify gaps. Whether designing a new grantmaking program or refocusing an existing program, one of the most important aspects of program planning is to take stock of the social, political, and economic context—where it is currently, as well as where it may be heading. *The goal of the scan is to identify areas or strategies where your additional resources can have significant impact.* This may mean identifying an issue or region that is currently receiving inadequate philanthropic support, or it may mean discovering possible partners. It could also mean recognizing promising emergent strategies, as well as learning about those that have been less successful in the past.

Scanning enables you to better understand the underlying causes of a particular issue, how change occurs in a particular environment, and what solutions may be appropriate for a specific context. Grants are never made in a vacuum; the funding environment, be it a local neighborhood or the national arena, is in constant flux. In any given field, there are numerous players who influence how an issue is defined and addressed, including non-governmental organizations, policymakers, advocates, funders, business leaders, government agencies, scholars, and the people ultimately affected by the issue. The effectiveness of any one funder depends on how these other elements are performing. Often, you can have a significant impact if you influence one or two key players. Scanning helps you determine where these pressure points are and how you can affect them. Scanning also allows you to test your assumptions and to discover opportunities and successful strategies you may not have anticipated.

## Methods for Scanning

### Secondary Research

Review academic literature, journal and newspaper articles, and research produced by other grantmakers and grantseekers. If the issue is highly localized, local or community papers and newsletters from local community organizations are often informative. The Internet is also a rich source of secondary information.

### Discussions

In addition to speaking with grantees and other grantmakers, you may want to talk to academic experts, community leaders, advocates, policy-makers and other government officials to get a broader perspective on the issue and what's being done to address it. Talking to a diverse range of stakeholders may also provide new ideas for partnerships and collaborations.

### Gathering and Convening

Conferences and professional meetings on the issue are often a good source of information about current trends in the field. Community meetings or public events or actions offer an opportunity to hear how those most affected perceive the issues.

### Surveys

A written or oral survey can be an efficient way to gather information from a range of sources. Standardized surveys also allow you to compare answers from different respondents, which may illuminate different problem definitions and strategic responses.

### Network Mapping

Network mapping is a tool to measure the strength of networks of individuals and institutions. By asking key individuals about their relationships with others, you can develop a visual map detailing the strength and direction of these connections. By clarifying the nature of the relationships, you can target resources to "pressure points"—the most influential organizations or individuals.

Source: Grantcraft. "Scanning the Landscape." *The Ford Foundation*, 2002.



There are a number of topics funders often address during a scan. These include:

### **Population**

Who are you most concerned with, and what are the characteristics of that population?

### **Community needs**

What are the most pressing needs of the constituents you are concerned about? Is your problem/issue the most relevant? Are there other higher priority needs that are going unmet?

### **Context**

What are current political, social, and economic trends and how are they impacting the issue/community? And, if so, how? Are they likely to change in the near future?

### **Key players**

Who are the key organizations and individuals in the field? What are their relationships to one another?

### **Strategies**

What strategies have been tried to address the problem? Which have worked, which have been less successful, and why? Who are the players?

Scans also take into account the philanthropic landscape, such as:

### **Other funders in the field**

Who else is funding in your field of interest? What are they funding, and what are their funding strategies? Are there potential partners?

### **Successful strategies**

What funding approaches in this field seem to be most or least successful, and why? What models might be good ones for replication?

### **Gaps**

What issues or strategies seem to be receiving less philanthropic support, and why? What impact might supporting these issues have on the field?

Scanning can be as time- and labor-intensive as you want; as with any assessment, you

have to determine the degree of rigor appropriate to your needs. On one end of the spectrum, you can engage in a few conversations with grantees and other funders. At the other end, you can fund extensive research to determine how political, social, demographic, or economic trends will affect an issue.

The case of the **Freeman Foundation's Asian Immigrant and Refugee Economic and Education Opportunity Program** is a good example of a funder using an analysis of social and demographic trends to inform its grantmaking program. The Freeman Foundation retained TCC Group in 1998 to help design a philanthropic program to provide economic opportunities for Asian immigrants and refugees. Our first step was to prepare an assessment of the needs of recent Asian immigrants and refugees in the United States. We conducted over 60 interviews with private and government funders, representatives from national voluntary refugee resettlement agencies, and staff at service organizations. We combined this with census and other data to chart trends in arrivals among Asian ethnic groups, the types of existing government support available to help them on their arrival, and the gaps in these services.

With a clearer sense of the obstacles to economic security for recent Asian immigrants and refugees and the gaps in available services, the foundation decided to expand its support beyond the English instruction it had been providing to include other forms of employment training and social services. To identify communities where these comprehensive programs would be viable and where there was great need, we conducted a second round of research. We created community profiles documenting immigration trends, economic challenges, and service provider networks. The foundation then identified four communities for a pilot program.

During the course of the program, the foundation continued to scan the field. As the foundation learned more about the population and successful models through its grantmaking and ongoing research, it expanded the program to additional sites. By 2002, the

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program included 21 grantees at locales ranging from Seattle, Washington, to LaCrosse, Wisconsin. In 2004, due to the decline in refugee arrivals, the foundation decided not to support any new grantees; the program currently includes 12 grantees, some completing their sixth year of project operations.

While the process for developing the program was not highly formalized, the foundation entered into planning with a clear idea of what it wanted to do and where to do it. External analysis was essential in developing the initial program and then refining it over time; as the needs of the population changed, the foundation's grantmaking was able to respond, first by expanding the program and then by contracting it.

This case demonstrates that close attention to external factors greatly increases the likelihood that the issue you've identified is relevant to your target population and that the solutions and strategies selected are appropriate to the current context.

#### Step 4: Take Stock of Your Internal Capacity



The fourth step of the program design process is a frank and thorough internal assessment. An external scan can identify the resources necessary to achieve a desired outcome; an internal assessment tells you whether those resources are at your disposal. Depending on the resources available to you, you can then determine your appropriate role in addressing the issue: whether you will be a more passive funder or more involved with your grantees; whether you want to partner with other public or private funders; and whether you can be a leader and advocate among peers and policymakers on the issue. You need a clear understanding of your own capabilities so that you can align what is needed with what you can realistically contribute—in finances, human capital, in-kind donations, intellectual capital, and influence.



Among the questions that funders should address during internal assessments are the following:

#### Financial

What percentage of your budget are you willing and able to put toward this program? Is this amount sufficient to address the need?

#### Human assets

What are the strengths of key personnel, and how might they be used to address this issue? How much human capital (vs. financial capital) can you spend?

#### Intellectual capital

How much intellectual capital—experience in the field, access to experts, etc.—do you bring to this issue?

#### Social capital

How are you perceived by others in the field? What networks and relationships do you have that may be relevant to addressing this issue?

#### Comparative advantage

What are your "competitive advantages" when it comes to addressing this issue? Given information gathered from the scan, what are some unique strengths that you can bring to the issue?

## Step 5: Validate Your Assumptions



Throughout the internal and external assessments, the initial logic model should be reviewed and amended based on your deepening understanding of the issue and appropriate solutions. Once you are satisfied that the logic model reflects the internal and external situations, the final step is a "quality review" to ensure that the logic is sound, assumptions are accurate, and relevant influential factors are accounted for.

This typically involves bringing other stakeholders into the process. These stakeholders could be other funders, outside experts, community members, and grantseekers. Having people with varied perspectives review the theory behind the proposed grants program increases the likelihood that your resources are directed toward a pressing community need. It also builds credibility for funders in the communities in which they operate, leading to improved access to information and potential partnerships for the foundation. In the Wachovia case discussed above, we

shared the logic model with a panel of education experts in order to substantiate it. Through these additional interviews with funders and education professionals, we were able to further hone the strategy and suggest a more targeted screening process for potential grantees. The validation process also unearthed ways for Wachovia to add value to the process, such as convening grantees.

## Step 6: Implement, Evaluate, and Plan Again



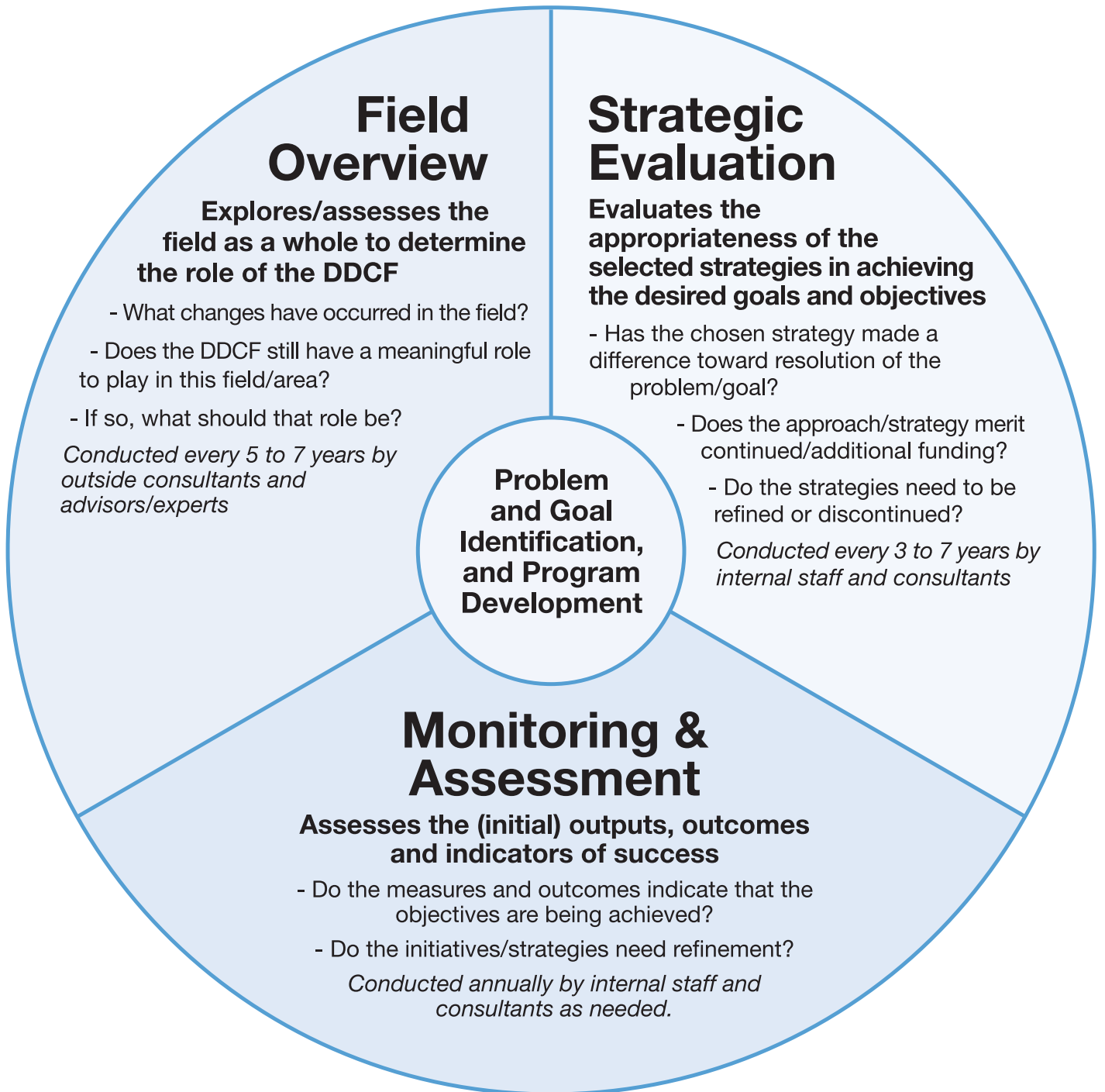
Program planning and evaluation are part of an iterative process. Careful program planning not only increases the likelihood that your grantmaking will be effective, it also makes it easier to evaluate impact by providing a conceptual framework against which to evaluate. Conversely, understanding the impact of previous grantmaking can strengthen your current program-planning efforts.

Typically, developing a logic model is the first stage of the evaluation process. However, when a model has already been developed, evaluators can simply build on it when designing their evaluation plan. Providing a clear depiction of the incremental steps toward longer-term programmatic goals allows you to develop an action plan detailing the resources, activities, and outputs required to achieve your desired outcomes. Funders then rely on these outputs and outcomes to identify appropriate indicators for measuring the program's progress. In the Wachovia example mentioned above, the logic model developed during the program planning served as the basis for the program's evaluation. Wachovia monitors grantee progress toward significant benchmarks identified in the program development process, such as teacher retention and placement. It also engages in ongoing learning to keep track of changes in the field and modifies its grantmaking as necessary.

Understanding the impact of previous grantmaking can strengthen your current program-planning efforts.



# Doris Duke Charitable Foundation Strategic Grantmaking



**The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation** is another example of the integral connection between program planning and evaluation. Established in 1993, the foundation has four funding areas: the performing arts, the environment and wildlife conservation, child-abuse prevention, and medical research. The foundation utilizes a program-planning and strategy-review process based on three interconnected evaluation processes. At the broadest level, the foundation hires outside experts to conduct a field overview every five to seven years in which it examines the external environment affecting each of its four funding areas. Every three to five years it uses outside consultants to conduct strategic evaluations, where it examines the specific funding strategies in each issue to determine how effective those strategies are in achieving its desired outcomes. Finally, foundation staff monitors grant outputs and outcomes on an ongoing basis to ensure that they are achieving their objectives. As can be seen in the diagram on the next page, the evaluation of strategies helps the foundation determine whether refinement in the program design is needed, whether the strategies appear to be achieving the desired goals, and whether continued funding is merited. The field analysis is both the starting point in the creation of new programs and a method to assess the overall value of the foundation's involvement in a particular field. The foundation then incorporates the findings in the redesign (or elimination) of programs and continues the planning-evaluation cycle.

## A Final Word

As any funder can tell you, philanthropy is not a science. Grants are not made in controlled environments, and even the best-designed initiatives may become ineffective in the face of external changes. However, committing sufficient time and attention to the planning process increases the chances that your program will achieve your desired impact. You'll catch flaws in your logic before grants are made by articulating your assumptions

and then running them by other stakeholders. You'll be able to detect external changes that could affect your grantmaking and be better prepared to respond to them. You'll ensure that you are not biting off more than you can chew by aligning your internal capacities with your grantmaking strategies. Finally, you'll be better able to measure the impact of your efforts because you clearly stated your grantmaking goals and assumptions at the outset. This learning can then feed into the revision and refinement of your program going forward, ultimately helping you to increase the impact of your work.

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**Committing sufficient time and attention to the planning process increases the chances that your program will achieve your desired impact.**

# TCC Group

## About TCC Group

For over 26 years, TCC has provided strategic planning, program development, evaluation, and management consulting services to nonprofit organizations, foundations, corporate community involvement programs, and government agencies. During this time, the firm has developed substantive knowledge and expertise in fields as diverse as community and economic development, human services, children and family issues, education, health care, the environment, and the arts.

From offices in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, the firm works with clients nationally and, increasingly, globally. Our services include strategic planning, organizational assessment and development, feasibility studies, program evaluation and development, governance planning, restructuring and repositioning, as well as grant program design, evaluation, and facilitation.

## Grantmaking Services Include:

### Assessing Needs

Regardless of the field, the pace of change in the external environment has become more rapid and funders need to evaluate how their needs are shifting to ensure that their grants have the maximum possible impact. TCC helps grantmakers assess the needs in their interest areas by examining the state of the field, determining where the needs are greatest, and identifying gaps that are not being filled by other philanthropies.

### Devising Grantmaking Strategies

Based on an assessment of needs and consideration of the grantmaker's goals and resources, TCC will help to develop creative and results-oriented strategies and plans for awarding grants. We enable funders to make the best use of available resources by adopting a more strategic approach to grantmaking. We help grantmakers set goals, select areas of concentration, determine the types of potential grant recipients, and create budgets for operational costs and grant allocations. In addition, we help funders enhance their impact through the use of various tools such as capacity-building and communications.

### Soliciting, Reviewing, and Recommending Proposals

TCC Group often helps write a Request for Proposals (RFP), which lays out the goals for a grantmaking initiative and the kinds of organiza-

tions most suitable for funding. The RFP usually includes a potential proposal outline and application form. We talk with knowledgeable people about appropriate possible funding recipients, compile mailing lists, and distribute the RFP. Once proposals are submitted, TCC reviews them, makes a first cut, checks references, and performs all the necessary "due diligence" before making recommendations for funding.

### Managing, Monitoring, and Evaluating Grants

After the funder has awarded the grants, we help manage the grants by creating grant agreements, reviewing progress reports, meeting with grant recipients, and monitoring their activities. During or after a grant period, we can evaluate funded projects and programs on behalf of a funder in order to assess the process, identify outcomes, and determine lessons that can benefit the field and be applied to future grantmaking.

### Grants Management

TCC Group handles all administrative, programmatic, and financial work for foundations. This includes outreach to grantees and potential applicants, maintaining all permanent records, reviewing proposals and preparing summary write-ups for the Board, managing the grant- and decline-process, handling day-to-day inquiries to the foundation, developing and maintaining proposal/grants databases with historical records, bookkeeping, attending Board meetings and preparing dockets and minutes. The firm also serves as a liaison with each foundation's accountant, investment manager, lawyer, and other outside professionals as necessary.

## Our Clients

We have provided consulting services to a broad range of organizations in many fields, from the arts and community development to education and medical research.

Among our grantmaker clients are such leading foundations as The Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Freeman Foundation, and the William Penn Foundation. Yet we also have served smaller foundations such as the Brandywine Foundation in Philadelphia and the Mary J. Hutchins Foundation and Keefe, Bruyette & Woods, Inc. Family Fund in New York City. Corporate grantmaker clients include Goldman Sachs, Altria, Kraft Foods, Pfizer, and UBS PaineWebber.

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