

Evaluation & Learning Overview

Approach

Denver residents informed the areas we fund and we continuously engage with those doing the work to help us document progress and impact through our learning and evaluation activities. We have not prescribed a specific set of evaluation rules, methods, or metrics for grantees. Instead, we ask grantees to evaluate their own work in ways that are meaningful to them, to use their evaluation for learning and improving their own efforts and to share insights that can be communicated back with the Denver community to show how funding is making a difference and inform future strategy around mental health and substance misuse in Denver.



Expectations

From an evaluation standpoint, we ask grantees to:

- **Have a clear project in mind.** Although we do not require specific activities or outcomes, we do expect grantees to have clearly thought through what they plan to do and what change they hope this will achieve related to substance misuse and mental health in Denver. The proposed project should be reasonable, and the link between the activities and outcomes should be easy to understand.
- **Link evaluation measures to the goals of the foundation.** When grantees can directly measure changes in mental health and substance misuse, we ask that they do. We also recognize some projects are focused on changes in behaviors and conditions that occur before, or in conjunction with, actual mental health and substance misuse changes. We want to hear your ideas about how you plan to measure your outcomes and we will work with you to prioritize measures that can help us best show the city and its taxpayers the value of the investment.
- **Propose evaluation that matches organizational capacity and interest.** In the spirit of equity, we recognize meaningful evidence comes in all forms and organizations have varying levels of capacity to support evaluation efforts. For some grantees, rigorous quantitative methodologies will be important. For others, written narratives and photographic storytelling will make more sense. We recognize and support diverse approaches to evaluation and encourage grantees to build evaluation that will be useful, meaningful, and right-sized to their organization.
- **Commit to being a learning partner.** We want grantees to see their work with us as a partnership, and we aim to support grantees learning with us through our evaluation approach. We don't expect grants to be completely successful all the time. We do expect grantees to be willing to talk through their challenges, learn, and adapt their work to improve their outcomes. What we learn from grantees and their experiences also helps us improve our future grantmaking and grantee supports. We help create time and space for learning with grantees through our evaluation activities (explained below).

Evaluation & Learning Activities

Required

Project Frameworks

After a grant has been awarded, grantees work with their program officer and the evaluation team to finalize a project framework. This framework, which is reviewed and updated annually, documents the grant's activities, intended outcomes, and data collection/measurement strategy. It is also used to determine what information will be shared back with the Foundation for learning and accountability purposes. These frameworks are living documents, which can adapt and change as grantees implement and learn from their own evaluative work. You can find an example template on our website via this [link](#).

Learning Check Ins

Grantees will also participate in learning check ins with their assigned program officer every 3 to 6 months, depending upon the size and/or the complexity of the work. These meetings will be time to discuss progress to date and reflections about the contexts and conditions impacting grant work to help with adapting and improving the work moving forward. You can find example learning questions on our website via this [link](#).

Yearly Progress Report

At the end of each grant year, grantees also complete an impact report. In this report, grantees provide details on the reach of their grant (including demographic and geographic information for those reached if collected), submit their outcome and/or impact data agreed upon as part of their project framework, provide a budget summary, and submit their ideas about the most significant changes experienced through the grant work.

Additional

Foundation Feedback

Periodically, we may ask grantees to evaluate us and our support of their work. We want to make sure we're doing our best and grantee perspectives are key to our own learning. This will either be a short survey or a phone call, most likely with our evaluation team or a hired consultant.

Learning Cohorts

Grantees have asked for our support in building their networks and reducing siloed approaches to addressing mental health and substance misuse. We hope to use information gathered through our evaluation activities to identify groups working toward similar outcomes and/or topics of interest. We will convene these groups around opportunities to share progress and learnings with each other, and to collaboratively explore evaluation and learning questions of specific interest to them.



Resources

Emergent Learning

As a Foundation, we use and promote the principles and tools of Emergent Learning. Below are resources that explain and show examples of this approach. We'll use these tools for learning check ins and partner with you to support this type of learning in your work.

- [Emergent Learning Website](#)
- [Emergent Learning Framework](#)

Evaluation Planning

Struggling with thinking through your path and plan? Here are resources that can help you map out your ideas. A logic model or theory of change is not required but can help if you're feeling stuck on how to turn your idea into a plan of action.

- [Evaluation Planning Guide](#)
- [Logic Model Workbook](#)
- [Evaluation Toolkit](#)

Creative Evaluation Tools

We encourage data collection that will be most relevant and meaningful for your project. Below are links to some innovative resource examples that might help expand your thinking on ways to assess progress & impact.

- [Creative Evaluation Toolkit](#)
- [Storytelling Approaches](#)
- [Photovoice](#)