

Let's Discuss Evaluation

A Facilitator's Guide

2_a

WHAT'S OUR TAKE ON EVALUATION?

Any foundation's board of trustees is likely to include a spectrum of perspectives on what evaluation is and should be. It's good to get these viewpoints out — to identify areas of consensus and disagreement as well as open questions. Trustees can start the process by completing the self-assessment tool included in this kit.

This facilitator's guide is a companion to *Let's Discuss Evaluation: A Framework for Trustee Conversations*. Use these tools to plan and lead a fruitful dialogue about evaluation.

PREPARE FOR THE DISCUSSION

- Offer these pre-reads: *What's the Difference? How Foundation Trustees View Evaluation* and *Snapshots: How Foundation Trustees Use Evaluation*. Consider additional excerpts or case examples in *From Insight to Action: New Directions in Foundation Evaluation*, available at www.fsg-impact.org/actions/item/177
- Administer *Let's Consider Evaluation*, the self-assessment tool for trustees. Tally responses by question and highlight both areas of agreement and disagreement in the responses received. Compare your trustees' responses to the field perspectives described in the *Let's Discuss Evaluation Framework*. Make copies of the assessment results to distribute at the meeting, along with the framework tool.
- Decide how to direct your discussion. You may not be able to probe every aspect of evaluation in the time allotted with your trustees. Given what you know about this group and about your organization's needs, narrow down possible discussion topics in order to 1) further areas of agreement, 2) hash out areas where self-assessment responses differed the most or 3) focus on just one key aspect of evaluation (i.e., Why should we evaluate? How should we use evaluation? or How much should we invest in evaluation?) and save the rest for a follow-up discussion.
- Make printouts of *Let's Make Evaluation Work* to use as a reference and handout for the final segment of the discussion.
- Reserve 60 to 90 minutes of board time for discussion.
- Arrange for a flipchart notepad or marker board to capture thoughts. Designate writing space for each of the key aspects of evaluation listed below.
- Early on in the session, work to surface opposing points of view on evaluation issues. Later, identify common ground and build alignment on areas of consensus.
- Conclude by agreeing on at least one concrete step that your foundation will take to use evaluation more effectively — even if that step is just inviting in a speaker or appointing a committee to deliberate further. This is the start of a process that may evolve over several years.

STATE THE AGENDA

1. START THE CONVERSATION

Following welcome comments (which may involve both the CEO and board chair), help create a comfortable atmosphere for discussion and break the ice by starting with a sharing of individual perspectives. For example:

Thank you all for taking time to review the pre-readings and complete the self-assessment questionnaire. As you have moved through this process, did anything surprise you? What one thought would you like to share regarding the potential to use evaluation differently at our foundation?

2. REVIEW SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Provide an overview and summary of trustee self-assessment results — highlighting areas of agreement and divergent viewpoints that surfaced. Invite the group to comment on these areas of initial agreement and disagreement. Following some general conversation in this regard, lead the group through more focused dialogue around key aspects of evaluation addressed in the self-assessment.

3. DISCUSS KEY ASPECTS OF EVALUATION

Use questions from *Let's Discuss Evaluation: A Framework for Trustee Conversations* to lead the bulk of the meeting discussion. Other important resources for this conversation include results of your trustees' self-assessment and *Let's Make Evaluation Work*, a planning tool that helps trustees identify the most appropriate ways to navigate around barriers to evaluation.

4. IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES AND NEXT STEPS

Encourage participants to get ideas from the examples and samples provided, but to adapt them to suit your foundation. Be prepared to outline some potentially actionable options based on the discussion.

What's needed to make changes we discussed?

- *Agreement to adopt specific changes*
- *Additional research/discussion required*

What's our process?

- *Staff prepares options for board to review*
- *Committee of board members appointed to deliberate further*

What's our timeline for next steps?

To learn more, please visit www.fsg-impact.org/ideas/item/trustee_evaluation_tools.html

©2009 THE JAMES IRVINE FOUNDATION AND FSG SOCIAL IMPACT ADVISORS. THIS DOCUMENT MAY BE REPRINTED OR PHOTOCOPIED FOR FREE DISTRIBUTION, WITH ATTRIBUTION TO ITS CREATORS.