EFOD

Evaluation Principles

Volume II

Forward

"This system was not created to benefit us, it was only created to extract from our labor and from the resources that we created, to feed them back into a system that upholds and maintains White supremacy...We're reclaiming these systems and structures in our own embodiment, in a much more liberated way of thinking that lends into autonomy, resiliency, sharing, cooperation, and collective accountability amongst our people."

— Camryn Smith, Communities in Partnership

Evaluation can be a fraught topic for many EFOD organizations. At best, traditional evaluation approaches set up organizations to access stable sources of funding. But more often, they encourage funder surveillance, advance prescriptive and limited definitions of impact, and focus overwhelmingly on quantifiable outcomes - all within rigid grant schedules, on top of that. Well-resourced organizations that advance conventional approaches to food-based community development are also better positioned to satisfy the demands of traditional evaluation strategies. As a result, funding remains concentrated in projects that are able to demonstrate straightforward quantifiable outcomes such as sales, job creation, or financial scalability, for example, but are not community-led or owned. Organizations that are neither rooted within nor representative of local communities also contribute to the same forms of displacement and disinvestment they uncritically seek to remedy.

The social changes driven by EFOD organizations move at the speed of trust, and consequently unfold on a longer time frame than what is captured by traditional approaches to learning and measurement. Many EFOD organizations already engage in rigorous evaluation activities that demonstrate straightforward, easily discernible impacts, yet some of the most powerful changes EFOD organizations achieve are intangible - from a sense of belonging, to pride of place - and are often knowable only through long-lasting relationships with local community members. And while all EFOD projects build wealth and assets through food, they are also connected to organizing struggles for racial justice, affordable housing, land restoration, and worker dignity, among other aligned movements. EFOD's political roots stem from a long history of place-based power building across the U.S. As such, understanding EFOD projects solely within the framework of food justice captures an important but ultimately small fragment of the bigger picture. EFOD, put simply, is embedded in a larger project of dismantling White supremacy and extractive capitalism. Its movement goals originate in the food system but extend far beyond it, building radically innovative pathways to economic, cultural, and environmental resilience.

EFOD organizations bring a wealth of lived experience, and thereby better capacity, to determine how to direct resources to communities that have been systematically excluded from White-led spaces of influence and decision-making. Rather than demand a seat at the same tables that have long excluded Black, Indigenous and People of Color leaders, the EFOD Collaborative is creating more liberated decision making tables to seize control of assets and redistribute resources back to disinvested communities. The EFOD Evaluation Principles are yet another example of the democratic governance that characterizes this movement. These principles were not only developed to facilitate deeper collective learning among the collaborative, but also to push funders to model the robust evaluation strategies already in practice at many EFOD organizations.

Introduction

Equitable food-oriented development (EFOD) is both a development strategy and a growing movement using food and agriculture as a pathway to increased economic opportunity and better community health outcomes, prioritizing community-driven and -owned solutions to deepen power and agency in historically marginalized communities.[1]

In partnership with Equal Measure, the EFOD Collaborative has identified evaluation principles for EFOD-specific work. These principles draw attention to the unique purposes, audiences, approaches and methods relevant to the evaluation of EFOD work. They provide a tool for internal evaluation activities led by EFOD organizations and for external interactions with funders, as well as other partners and stakeholders. Similar to how the EFOD field emerged in response to inequities and power imbalances in local food systems and community development projects, these principles have been brought forth to reclaim ownership of data collection activities amid a context that privileges funder priorities and evaluation interests over nonprofit needs and aspirations.[2] They are conceived to support EFOD's mission to advance equitable development in local communities.

The principles intend to provide guidance for decisions and actions, grounding future evaluation projects led by the Collaborative, such as the identification of evaluation metrics. Through group reflection and collective sensemaking, engagement with the principles has the potential to build the capacity of EFOD practitioners to learn from each other, collaborate, and raise capital to support their respective projects and the broader national movement.

This document has two primary sections:

1

Evaluation Principles for EFOD: The principles are organized into three areas: A) Purpose for evaluation, B) Audience for evaluation, and C) Relevant approaches and methods for evaluation. They derive from many conversations among EFOD practitioners as well as interviews, a focus group, and document review conducted by Equal Measure.[3]

2

Strategic Considerations for Future Evaluation Work: Suggested next steps for the EFOD Collaborative following the development of principles include refining and adopting the principles, further articulating how EFOD leads to change, and utilizing appropriate measurement, learning, and evaluation approaches and methods to amplify the work.

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1   To learn more about EFOD, see Equitable Food-Oriented Development: Building Community Power and Equitable Food-Oriented Development: The Origin Story.
2   INCITE! (Ed.). (2007). The revolution will not be funded: Beyond the non-profit industrial complex. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
3   See Appendix A: Methodology & Data Sources for more information.

Three appendices follow these two sections: Appendix A: Methodology & Data Sources, Appendix B: EFOD Criteria, and Appendix C: Literature Review Synthesis & References. The literature review synthesis situates the principles in a historical context about the recent evolution of evaluation in the social sector. Three key takeaways from the literature review and qualitative analysis informed the development of the principles:

1. **Evaluation should be very purposeful, supporting capacity building, learning, and use by EFOD organizations.** Evaluation serves EFOD best when it supports organizational learning and capacity building, the improvement of program and systems change efforts, and strategic communications. Evaluation activities should be designed to track progress over multiple phases of a project, mirroring the long-term orientation of EFOD's systems change focus.

2. **Evaluation should be designed to serve the interests and needs of the EFOD organization and community members.** Evaluation activities should be driven by the EFOD organization, in consultation with funders and stakeholders, supporting the mission of the organization and community members. Evaluation design should reflect that the organization and community are the primary users and consumers of evaluation.

3. **Approaches and methods that are most relevant and appropriate for evaluation in EFOD work reflect recent developments and trends in evaluation practice that support capacity building, learning, and use by EFOD organizations.** EFOD is well-aligned with newer and emergent approaches in evaluation, such as equitable evaluation, utilization-focused evaluation, and developmental evaluation, which intend to support capacity building, expand what is considered evidence and validity, and promote evaluative thinking and learning with an eye toward equity and power building within black indigenous people of color (BIPOC) communities. [3]

"…We actually asked the clients to define what things they wanted to get out of this food-as-medicine project. They were then able to set some group goals, but more importantly, they were able to set individual goals and those individual goals became the metrics…That really became what we reported back to the funder and actually, much to our surprise, the funder saw the value in that. And it wasn't just, we still had to give some numbers such as the number of people that participated, et cetera, but the funder really, I think, fully understood the importance of people setting those goals according to their understanding of the issues for themselves…"
- Lucette Mercer, Green Rural Redevelopment Organization

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[3]   See Appendix C for brief explanations of evaluation approaches that are highly relevant to EFOD.

Evaluation Principles for Equitable Food-Oriented Development

This section presents overarching and operating principles for the use of evaluation in EFOD work. Three overarching principles address 1) the purpose of evaluation, 2) the audience for evaluation, and 3) relevant evaluation approaches and methods. Several operating principles within each overarching principle provide specific guidance on how to design and implement evaluation activities in the context of EFOD work. The table below identifies operating principles for EFOD organizations with corresponding principles for funders. Our approach to structuring the principles draws from the work of Patton (2017) on principles-focused evaluation. Patton's "GUIDE" model recommends that principles be guiding, useful, inspiring, developmental, and evaluable.[4]

What should drive an EFOD organization to collect information? How can practitioners convey the value of prioritizing community-directed work through measurement, learning, and evaluation activities?
These principles draw from perspectives grounded in localized, community-driven efforts and in advancing a national movement. They are intended to ground future evaluation work, serving as a guiding post. They are a working list and can evolve as understanding and thinking change over time, aligning with the evolutionary and developmental qualities of EFOD work.

A few key assumptions undergird the adoption and application of these principles by EFOD projects: **1) Use of a systems lens and working on local systems change,** suggesting that the community is the unit of change and that complex factors could diminish the ability to fully attribute specific activities toward a particular change;[5] **2) Internal capacity and resources to lead evaluation activities,** since the principles promote organizational and community ownership of measurement, learning, and evaluation activities. **3) Adherence to EFOD criteria** (See Appendix B), signaling that the principles are relevant to the project or organization as an EFOD-specific body of work.

The table below details the operating principles for both EFOD organizations and funders within the three overarching principles. The principles are rooted in the following purpose statement:

EFOD organizations and their local stakeholders are situated in ongoing journeys to address inequities in access, capital, and structures in ways that build community assets, pride, and power by and with historically marginalized communities. Measurement, learning, and evaluation efforts support the journeys by building autonomy, expanding pluralistic ways of knowing, and creating shared narratives reflective of the cultures and priorities of communities.

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4   See Appendix A for more information about the GUIDE model described in Patton, M. Q. (2017). Principles-focused evaluation. New York: Guilford Press.
5   Stachowiak, S., Gienapp, A. & Kalra, N. (2020). Not Always Movements: Multiple Approaches to Advance Large-Scale Social Change. Available at https://www.orsimpact.com/directory/Not-Always-Movements.htm.

A. Purpose for evaluation

Overarching principle: Support capacity-building, learning, and use.

For EFOD Organizations	For Funders
1. Identify learning priorities and questions focused on program and system improvement.	1. Support evaluation activities that help EFOD organizations to address salient learning priorities and questions.
2. Conduct evaluations that increase organizational capacity to implement effective programming and system change efforts, contributing to organizational mission.	2. Fund evaluations that increase organizational capacity to implement effective programming and system change efforts, contributing to organizational mission.
3. Conduct evaluations that capture the complexity of long-term system change efforts, including progress against precursors, such as relationship- and trust-building.	3. Enable EFOD organizations to track progress against short-term, intermediate, and long-term changes stemming from organizational work and partnership activities.
4. Integrate evaluation as a complementary or additive component of organizational work.	4. Prevent distractive evaluation activities that are not complementary and additive to organizational work.
5. Focus on the holistic impact of the organization on the surrounding community and local systems.	5. Focus on the overall impact of the organization rather than individual components.
6. Use data to document and amplify local needs as well as community-led solutions related to food-oriented development.	6. Fund evaluation projects that enable EFOD organizations to collect data that they can use to strengthen their external communication efforts.

B. Audience for evaluation

Overarching principle: Serve the interests and needs of the EFOD organization and community participants.

For EFOD Organizations	For Funders
1. Include the perspectives of both EFOD practitioners and community participants in the design and implementation of evaluation activities.	1. Create space for EFOD practitioners to lead evaluation design based on their knowledge and experience about meaningful measures of progress.
2. Use evaluation to support the mission of the EFOD organization and expressed needs from community participants.	2. Engage in participatory grantmaking strategies.
3. Engage with other organizations around the use of evaluation to inform each other's practice and build partnerships.	3. Encourage peer learning and knowledge sharing across EFOD organizations to support evaluation capacity building.
4. Elevate black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) organizations and communities and advance racial equity.	4. Adopt equitable evaluation mindsets and practices, shifting power from the white majority to BIPOC people.

C. Relevant approaches and methods for evaluation

Overarching principle: Reflect recent developments in evaluation practice that expand definitions of evidence, ways of knowing, and the voices of marginalized communities.

For EFOD Organizations	For Funders
1. Apply elements of one or more of the following specific evaluation approaches to appropriately address the complexity of EFOD work and to support capacity building, learning, and use: Formative, developmental, utilization-focused, principles-focused, system change, equitable, participatory, and empowerment.	1. Support the use of the following specific evaluation approaches to appropriately address the complexity of EFOD work and to support capacity building, learning, and use: Formative, developmental, utilization-focused, principles-focused, system change, equitable, participatory, and empowerment.
2. Integrate mutually reinforcing qualitative and quantitative methods into evaluation designs.	2. Encourage the use of mixed methods in evaluation designs.
3. Take on evaluation activities that are commensurate with the programmatic and/or systems change project.	3. Reduce burden on EFOD organizations by only requiring data or evidence that is essential to tracking progress against meaningful outcomes, and by collaborating with other EFOD-supportive funders to streamline evaluation requests.
4. Focus on the community as the ultimate level of change, while working on individual, interpersonal, and/or organizational level changes as precursors to longer term change.	4. Encourage the identification of what constitutes the "community" as the ultimate level of change as well as individual, interpersonal, and/or organizational level changes that may be precursors to longer term change.
5. Emphasize contribution rather than attribution of a particular set of activities toward a given change in the context of a complex systems change process.	5. Appreciate contribution and not just attribution of work done by practitioners, community members, and others toward systems change.
6. Listen to and collect individual stories from practitioners and community participants that describe organizational impact.	6. Support the use of anecdotes and personal stories as evidence of progress against meaningful outcomes.
7. Articulate the phases of the project, from nascency to maturity.	7. Encourage the articulation of the phases of the project, from nascency to maturity.
8. Collect real-time data and adapt programmatic and system change efforts based on input and feedback from practitioners and community participants.	8. Support rapid feedback mechanisms intended to improve organizational work and partnership activities.

We expect the principles to serve as both a starting place and a resource to revisit as measurement, learning, and evaluation activities continue. The principles intend to promote new approaches to learning for both EFOD practitioners and funders. The following questions are available to spur reflection and dialogue, both individually and in groups:

? Which principles resonate with you most?

? Which principles reflect your current approaches to evaluation and in what ways?

? Who should you engage around these principles and for what purpose(s)?

? Who can help you to adopt and apply these principles?

? What else might you need to enable uptake of these principles?

? What questions emerge as you review these principles?

Strategic Considerations for Future Evaluation Work

We offer the EFOD Collaborative and local EFOD organizations several considerations for the next phase of evaluation following the development of these principles.

1. Share and reflect on the evaluation principles with EFOD Collaborative members. Engage Collaborative members in reflection and discussion around the principles. Consider making refinements to the principles based on member input and feedback.

2. Refine and adopt principles sequentially. EFOD leaders and groups, including the Learning & Evaluation working group and broader EFOD Collaborative, may first consider how to adopt principles related to Area A: Purpose for Evaluation as a starting point for communicating about the role of evaluation in EFOD work. Area B: Audience stems from purpose as does Area C: Approaches/Methods. As described in the literature review synthesis, the evolving purpose of evaluation in the social sector has led to shifts in its audience and approaches/methods.

3. Establish shared meanings of key terms and concepts that undergird evaluation work. Examples of terms include "equity," "systems change," and "capacity building" – and the contextualizing of broad terms like "health, "economic development," "social capital," "civic engagement," "culture," and "environment." Even factoring in the varied contexts that EFOD work takes place in, shared definitions generated by the EFOD Collaborative could strengthen alignment among EFOD practitioners and clarity among funders about the impacts that EFOD work produces. Social change approaches, including movements, field building, place-based systems change, and network development, among others, are often conflated. While the work of the EFOD Collaborative reflects movement building (e.g., long-term, driven by BIPOC community leaders and members, seeks fundamental change in power and society), local EFOD organizations may be using other social change approaches. Each approach has its own history and theory of change, which implicates evaluation strategy.

4. Utilize relevant evaluation approaches. Lean on recent developments in evaluation to support learning, capacity building, and use in EFOD programmatic and systems change efforts, as described above. Empowerment evaluation, for example, is intended to be highly accessible to community-driven actors and promotes ownership of evaluation activities by practitioners, supporting evaluation capacity building. The EFOD Collaborative can engage members around evaluation content, peer learning, and training opportunities to build evaluative muscles among EFOD organizations.

5. Develop separate theories of change for the EFOD Collaborative and local EFOD organizations. Articulating a theory of change for the national EFOD movement could help clarify its intent as a national movement and support the development of metrics, or indicators, of progress toward specific short-term and long-term outcomes. Individual EFOD organizations may want to articulate the ways in which their activities connect to and produce outputs and outcomes. Logic models present graphical depictions of the theorized relationships among activities, outputs, and outcomes, which can be used both internally and externally to promote understanding of how the organization or project seeks change. While theories of change and logic models are conventional evaluation artifacts, when grounded in the work of practitioners and informed by collective thinking, they are classic tools given their utility and effectiveness. In addition, these tools can be contextualized and reimagined to address the cultural assets of diverse communities.

6. Highlight EFOD's contributions to broad, long-term systems change. In evaluating large-scale change efforts, it is more appropriate to seek understanding about the contribution rather than attribution of practitioners, community members, funders, and other actors toward change. Tracking attributable change may be more feasible and appropriate for local, smaller scale efforts, especially those that lean programmatically. EFOD organizations seek to address inequitable, racist, and broken systems that have persisted over multiple generations and that will require a diverse set of resources, including other types of organizations and braided funding streams, to change. Contribution as a basis for evaluation means that EFOD organizations should also measure and learn from their partnerships, political relationships, advocacy, and related work to deeply understand contribution.

7. Continue, but also strengthen, the ability to capture compelling stories of EFOD work in action. The EFOD Collaborative uses efod.org as one of multiple platforms to communicate about its movement building efforts and the work of local EFOD organizations and their communities. The website, along with social media engagement, can continue to be tools for illustrating what EFOD work is and how it aspires to instigate change, in local communities as well as in the broader social and philanthropic sectors. Storytelling through qualitative methods, like videos and photovoice, can contribute to strategic messaging and communication efforts while also serving as a useful learning and evaluation tool. By sharing the stories of individuals, groups, and whole communities, EFOD organizations can help track the progression of their work. They can also attract new audiences and drive partners, including funders, to their missions.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Methodology & Data Sources

Equal Measure used the following process to generate EFOD's evaluation principles. In addition to these activities, the principles are informed by several group discussions between the EFOD Learning & Evaluation Working Group and Equal Measure, between October 2020 and December 2021.

Literature review. A literature review was conducted during fall 2021 to situate EFOD measurement, learning, and evaluation within the history of evaluation and measurement in social change work. Literature review questions:

1. What is a brief history of evaluation's role in philanthropy and the nonprofit sector? How has the purpose and use of evaluation evolved? What has been the role of "power" in evaluation's evolution?
2. How can evaluation support systems change efforts?
3. What is the evaluation field's expanding definition of "data" (e.g., storytelling) and approach to data collection (e.g., methodological pluralism, equitable evaluation, etc.)?

Document review. We reviewed a small set of documents provided by the EFOD Collaborative (i.e., open-ended survey responses about practitioners' experiences with evaluation and notes from an EFOD Collaborative brainstorming session), a sample of EFOD websites, and an infographic from Mandela Partners. Document review takeaways reinforced qualitative analysis themes that informed principle development.

Focus group. During September 2021, Equal Measure facilitated a focus group of 10 EFOD leaders and allies, including four members of the EFOD Learning & Evaluation Working Group. The objectives of the focus group were to understand how EFOD organizations have used evaluation and measurement for organizational learning and to understand varied experiences with evaluation, including successes and challenges.

Practitioner interviews. Following the focus group, Equal Measure conducted two in-depth interviews with three EFOD leaders during October 2021. The interviews explored themes from the focus group and delved into specific experiences of established and emerging EFOD organizations, generating insights on the unique EFOD approach to evaluation and measurement.

ANALYSIS

Following all data collection, the Equal Measure team used analysis templates to recognize themes and generate takeaways that would inform the development of evaluation principles. Team members identified consistently emerging themes, supported with quotes from transcripts and/or associated documents. Themes and takeaways were reviewed and refined at multiple team analysis meetings and presented to EFOD Learning & Evaluation Working Group members for feedback.

Qualitative data analysis questions:

1. What values and priorities about measurement, learning, and evaluation (MLE) emerged from the data?
2. What MLE challenges and tensions have EFOD leaders faced? How have they addressed the challenges and managed the tensions?
3. What are examples of EFOD organizations making evaluation work for them?
4. What opportunities exist to make evaluation work better for EFOD organizations?

FOCUS GROUP & INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS
Focus group

1. **Daniel Ross,** Partner and CEO, DAISA Enterprises
2. **Dyane Pascal,** Founder, Conscious Capital Investment Enterprises
3. **Eddie Hill,** Co-Director, Black Food Sovereignty Coalition
4. **Haleh Zandi,** Co-Founder and Co-Director, Planting Justice
5. **Kieran Murray,** Co-Director, El Departmento de la Comida
6. **Lucette Mercer,** Deputy Director, Green Rural Redevelopment Organization
7. **Mariela Cedeño,** Principal, Orikaika Ventures
8. **Neelam Sharma,** Founder and Executive Director, Community Services Unlimited
9. **Rashida Ferdinand,** Executive Director, Sankofa Community Development Corporation
10. **Trisha Chakrabarti,** Manager, Equitable Food Oriented Development, DAISA Enterprises

Interviews

1. **Kieran Murray,** Co-Director, El Departmento de la Comida
2. **Maureen Silva,** Co-Executive Director, Mandela Partners
3. **Neelam Sharma,** Founder and Executive Director, Community Services Unlimited

We drew from Michael Quinn Patton's GUIDE model as we developed the evaluation principles:

- Guiding: Provides direction and informs priority setting
- Useful: Informs decision making; is interpretable, feasible, and actionable
- Inspiring: Values are explicit, motivational, and meaningful for ongoing, long-term engagement
- Developmental: Context and complexity sensitive; enduring, not time-bound
- Evaluable: Uses mixed methods, understanding that both qualitative and quantitative data will require interpretation and judgment

Qualities of Principles:

1. Provide guidance, not detailed prescription
2. Must be interpreted and applied contextually and situationally
3. Require judgment in application
4. Inform choices at forks in the road
5. Are a rudder for navigating complex dynamic systems to support adaptation

Appendix B: EFOD Criteria

EFOD Criteria

	INDICATORS OF EFOD	CONTRADICATORS OF EFOD
Equity-and justice-first	Equity & justice are part of mission, unapologetically represent a historically marginalized community, clearly working on systems change, power change & accountability in operations; ongoing commitment to teaching / inccluding larger transformation; involved in other oganzing, advocacy, or policy work - its not just about food	Language and mission is general or just development or food related (i.e. "all lives matter"); community transformation is an intention but not yet in practice
Place-based	Embedded in a community or regional network with strong community identity; prioritize culture and artistic and cultural expression; a history of work in this community; leadership has historical connection to social justice in that communty	Not connected to community; national or regional without accountability to particular community with distinct identity
Use Market-based/ business stragegies	Developing new markets and enterprises, creating real economic opportunities, sustainable	Exclusively education, policy, or awareness building; no direct service programming; soley communty gardens, no sales or marketing aspect
Community leadership development / community organizing	Board of directors and top leadership is representative of the community organization serves, often People of Color-led; work is by & for community sovereugnty, local/county planning involvement	Community served has no real power, decision-making, living-wage jobs in organization
Community ownership	Building communitymember assets, equity. Often uses alternative economic structures and decision-making processes so community members can have ownership (i.e. co-ops); representative board memebership	Outside capital, business owned by outside institutions or people; primarily job creation or training

Appendix C: Literature Review & References

This literature review presents a brief narrative on the evolution of evaluation in the social sector, including the roles that both philanthropy and evaluation have played in social change efforts. We explore recent developments in philanthropy and evaluation that are driven by goals to increase equitable outcomes in society and shift power from funders to grantees. The literature review includes a scan of primarily academic but also some practitioner-based literature, which was used to inform the development of EFOD evaluation principles (See References section below). Historically, philanthropy and evaluation have engaged in a contentious relationship with social change movements due to the power that they have wielded on the efforts of grassroots organizers. However, gradual changes are evident in philanthropic and evaluation practice, creating space for increasingly participatory, collaborative, and equitable funder-grantee relationships. The purposes, audiences, approaches, and methods for evaluation have become more relevant and meaningful to social change efforts, and EFOD organizations stand to inform and benefit from these shifts.

EVALUATION'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Evaluation migrated from the federal government and academic research institutions to the philanthropic sector.

The field of evaluation was initially leveraged primarily by the federal government and academia to inform how the government allocated taxpayer dollars and to assess the effectiveness of those investments.[1] During the last quarter of the 20th century, evaluation was transplanted to philanthropy, the institutions of which were primarily founded by "high-wealth, white male industrialists and scientists."[2] These individuals thought of evaluation as a tool for measuring outputs and costs as well as assessing efficiency and compliance. Charitable giving, including donations from individuals, foundations, and corporations, grew from $7.7 billion in 1955 to $175 billion in 1998, and the number of non-profit organizations exploded during the surge in giving. The role of foundations in shaping social movements became more prominent during the late 1960s. Philanthropists wielded power and influence that was not always welcomed by grassroots activists.[3]

> "
> *From their inception, foundations focused on research and dissemination of information designed ostensibly to ameliorate social issues.*
> - Andrea Smith, The Revolution Will Not Be Funded
> "

Early evaluation practitioners operated from a myopic view of how to measure merit, worth, and value.

Evaluation grew out of methods of scientific research, such as trying to control for certain factors, isolating the problem or solution, and identifying the appropriate dose of treatment. It placed enormous power in the hands of individual researchers and evaluators to determine study questions, develop measurement methods, frame analysis, and decide on meaning and worth.[4] Taken together, these qualities led to the randomized control trial becoming the gold standard to measure effectiveness.[5] This heavily contributed to a strong bias towards quantifiable data perceived to be especially objective. The concepts of objectivity, rigor, and validity largely dominated the early use of evaluation

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1   Hogan (2010); Dean-Coffey (2018)
2   Hall (2003)
3   INCITE! (Ed.). (2007)
4   MacDonald & Kushner (2005)
5   Dean-Coffey (2018)

in the philanthropic sector.[6] However, practitioners, funders, and evaluators began to challenge these values as they worked to elevate equity as both an operating principle and goal.

THE PURPOSE AND USE OF EVALUATION EVOLVE

The use of "equity" in philanthropy and evaluation has become prominent in recent years, shifting the tone of conversations about measurement and impact.

Many in the social sector still view foundations as "a cover for white supremacy," as foundation assets are typically a consequence of white families' generational wealth, recent capitalist ventures in industry and technology, and other means generally not accessible to members of marginalized groups in America.[7] This creates an inherent power differential between funders and grantees. However, many philanthropies have in recent years committed to advancing causes related to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion[8] and to adopting participatory grantmaking practices.

Funders have begun to take steps to cultivate relationships with grantees and build trust, which lends itself to collaborative approaches to evaluation that promote co-design and co-creation.[9] For example, funders often establish reporting requirements that push for quick turnaround on evidence of progress. Grantees are often faced with difficult tradeoff decisions such as how to invest limited evaluation resources by working to ensure that evaluation goals and outcomes align with the funder's needs and interests.

> *The pursuit of equity necessitates those who have amassed tremendous wealth and engaged in philanthropic endeavors to acknowledge and reflect upon the ways in which privilege (and thus racism) have been key contributors to that wealth.*
>
> - Jara Dean-Coffey, What's Race Got to Do With It? Equity and Philanthropic Evaluation Practice

However, a longer term outcome that is more difficult to quantify may be the most accurate and meaningful indicator of success of the project, especially in the context of systems change work. Chicago Beyond, an impact investor, is working to engage grantees as partners by building trust first, following the lead of their community partners on evaluation design and implementation, and establishing funding timelines that enable useful evaluations. Adaptability and more balanced partnership are helping to produce better evaluations and create more equitable funder-grantee relationships.[10]

The emergence of alternate approaches like equitable evaluation and culturally responsive equitable evaluation has influenced thinking about the purpose and role of evaluation. For example, principles of equitable evaluation include "Evaluation work is in service of and contributes to equity," and evaluative work should be multiculturally valid and support participant ownership.[11] Placing equity at the center means bringing evaluation to the 21st century by moving away from outdated definitions of validity and rigor and embracing the complexity of social and systems change.[12] Evaluators are taking an active role in some engagements to guide or lead funders toward equitable approaches. Borrowed from the sociology of social movements, Oppositional Consciousness, for instance, offers evaluators an

6   Ibid.
7   Zunz (2011)
8   INCITE! (Ed.) (2007)
9   Nielson & Huang (2009); Buhles (2021)
10   Chicago Beyond (2018)
11   Dean-Coffey (2018) 12 Equitable Evaluation Initiative (2021)
12   Equitable Evaluation Initiative (2022)

opportunity to incite change by defying the status quo, using evaluation as a tool to form and advance movements, and dismantle oppressive or mediocre approaches to learning.[13]

Evaluation can spur learning and capacity building by non-profit organizations and partners, strengthening their influence on systems change.

Systems change initiatives typically focus on one or more of the following areas: 1) Context, or improvement of the political environment, 2) Components, including programs and services, 3) Connections across system components, 4) Infrastructure to enable the system to work effectively, and 5) Scale, broadening and increasing access.[14] Each of these areas corresponds to a particular theory of change and sets of evaluation questions and methodologies. Evaluation can serve a systems change initiative by helping to clarify its theory of change, track progress against desired change, and elevate lessons learned about implementation efforts, including the strength of partnerships to carry out the work. It can help document and track the "process of change"[15] and the extent to which initiative leads and stakeholders are operating according to shared principles.[16] Importantly, evaluators can structure and facilitate key design, methodology, and engagement processes that include and elevate the perspectives of grantees and grassroots actors.[17]

> *Systems initiative evaluations should be tailored to their unique theories of change, assessing the outcomes and impacts connected to the parts of the system they are attempting to change.*
> - Julia Coffman, A Framework for Evaluating Systems Initiatives

Learning is incredibly important not only for non-profits but also for funders, who wield power in both providing resources for evaluation and elevating knowledge. Funders learn from the work of grantees and should take care in being flexible when grantees need to adapt, ensuring that the data they are requesting is useful beyond the foundation, and sharing what they learn—all of which supports growth in the field of systems change work.[18]

Implications for EFOD

EFOD organizations seeking to influence systems change can use evaluation to learn from their efforts and strategize around future work. Individual EFOD organizations engaging in evaluation are particularly well-positioned to share with the greater EFOD community about the progress they are seeing and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. As a collective, the EFOD Collaborative is more knowledgeable and consequently more powerful than the sum of its individual parts when members engage in evaluative thinking, planning, and implementation.

13   Neubauer & Hall (2020)
14   Coffman (2007)
15   Rayner & Bonnici (2021)
16   Patton (2018)
17   Stachowiak et al.
18   Reynolds & Abercrombie (2015)

Evaluation approaches that support capacity building, learning, and use are most appropriate for EFOD organizations.

Approaches like utilization-focused evaluation, developmental evaluation, and equitable evaluation promote learning and knowledge sharing, which help build evaluation capacity within individual EFOD organizations. Depending on the focus of what the systems change initiative is trying to achieve and its theory of change, the specific methodologies may look different.[19] Table 1 below briefly describes relevant evaluation approaches for EFOD work, many of which EFOD organizations are already leveraging. It is not an exhaustive list. These overall ways of thinking about and conducting evaluation are well-established approaches in the evaluation field, yet they continue to evolve to refine practice.

Table 1: Evaluation Approaches Highly Relevant to EFOD

Developmental evaluation	Supports highly innovative initiatives to promote learning and guide adaptation to emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments, especially for systems change initiatives.
Empowerment evaluation	Provides project stakeholders with the tools for assessing the planning, implementation, and self-evaluation of their project; aims to build the capacity of the organization to independently conduct evaluation activities.
Equitable evaluation	Uses evaluation as a tool to advance equity; encourages reflective and reflexive practices, prompting evaluation actors to recognize and make explicit the roles that culture, historical context, and power play in structural conditions and the project itself.
Formative evaluation	Informs continuous improvement in an early-stage project but may also be used mid-way through to improve or refine a project.
Participatory evaluation	Engages a wide range of stakeholders in a project--including those implementing the project, serving as partners, and intended beneficiaries-- in the design and implementation of its evaluation.
Principles-focused evaluation	Aligns with principles-based initiatives and seeks to uncover the extent to which meaningful principles have been articulated—and whether they are being adhered to and leading to desired results.
System change evaluation	Assesses changes in the conditions (e.g., policies, practices, power dynamics, mindsets) enabling inequity; acknowledges history, root causes, and interrelationships among events from the past and present.
Utilization-focused evaluation	Emphasizes utility for intended users, who are identified and engaged at the start of the evaluation and guide decisions throughout the evaluation process.

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19   Coffman (2007)

RESOURCES: EVALUATION APPROACHES

BetterEvaluation: https://www.betterevaluation.org/

Equitable Evaluation Initiative. https://www.equitableeval.org/

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EFOD
Evaluation Principles

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"The creation of EFOD is an indicator of the maturing of decades of grassroots work in the food justice movement in oppressed communities of color around the United States. The growth of EFOD is a demonstration of the flexing of muscles that have built strength swimming against the current, as they have built viable community-based initiatives and navigated the many naysayers and systemic barriers in their way. As a Collaborative of like-minded practitioners, we are activating the power of our combined strength to bring food based sustainable economic wealth to our long-neglected communities in order to build power and transform our daily realities."

- Neelam Sharma, Community Services Unlimited