

# **Making Evaluation Work: Tool and Tips for More Effective Grantmaking**

**Presented by Mark Kramer and Eva Nico, FSG  
with Trustees Stuart Davidson and Kent McGuire**

*February 2, 2010*

*2:00-3:00 PM EST*

**In partnership with the**



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# Agenda

**2:00 – 2:05**

**Welcome & Introductions**

*Mark Kramer, FSG*

**2:05 – 2:15**

**Making Evaluation Work: Tools and Tips for Engaging Trustees on Evaluation**

*Mark Kramer*

**2:15 – 2:35**

**A Conversation with Trustees Kent McGuire and Stuart Davidson**

*With Eva Nico, FSG*

**2:35 – 2:40**

**Recommendations for Solutions**

*Eva Nico*

**2:40 – 3:00**

**Audience Q & A**

*Moderated by Eva Nico*

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# Introductions



**Mark Kramer** is the Founder and a Managing Director of FSG, Senior Fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and the founder and initial Board Chair (2000-2004) of the Center for Effective Philanthropy.



**Eva Nico** is a Director at FSG, with particular experience in strategic planning and evaluation for grantmakers working in the health arena and for community foundations advancing place-based strategies. Prior to joining FSG, Eva was a management consultant with McKinsey & Company and a Rhodes Scholar with a PhD in Physics from Oxford University.



**Stuart Davidson** is a managing partner of Labrador Ventures, an early stage technology-focused venture capital fund. He serves on the boards of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, Acumen Fund, and REDF (formerly The Roberts Enterprise Development Fund). He is a trustee of the Woodcock Foundation and a member of the investment committee of the Skoll Foundation.



**C. Kent McGuire, PhD.** serves as the Dean of the College of Education at Temple University. Previously, he was a senior vice president at the MDRC. Dr. McGuire serves on numerous boards including the Institute for Education Leadership; The New Teacher Project; Girard College; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and the Wachovia Regional Foundation. Dr. McGuire also served in the Clinton administration as Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, and as the education program officer for the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Eli Lilly Endowment.

## Trustees Know Evaluation Matters

- **Trustees care deeply about impact**
  - Understanding results is part of their fiduciary duty
  - As foundations strive to improve performance, advance accountability and share knowledge, their desire for evaluation grows
- **Trustees wish that current approaches generated more useful information**
  - Too often, foundation evaluation practices don't align with trustee needs
- **Trustees believe there are ways to improve how we determine the effectiveness of social investments**
  - Many are already using practical and effective approaches today

***With funding from the James Irvine Foundation, FSG interviewed dozens of foundation trustees, CEOs and evaluation experts for this research***

## Challenges in Engaging Trustees in Evaluation

- **Differing views within the Board on the purpose of evaluation**
  - Grantee accountability
  - Getting credit for a job well done
  - Testing a theory of change
  - Evaluating program staff
- **Disagreement over what evaluation data should look like**
  - Rigorous third party studies
  - Participatory reports
  - Quantitative analysis
  - Focused on the results of the foundation's own funding
- **Uncertainty about how evaluation results should be used**
  - Shifting foundation resources
  - Influencing other funders
- **Lack of time in board meetings**
  - Too busy reviewing the current grant docket and investment performance
- **Poor formatting of reports**
  - Too lengthy
  - Ambiguous conclusions
  - No relevance to immediate decisions

## What Trustees Want From Evaluation

- ***Evaluation should be practical and focused on learning***
  - The most useful evaluations are those that are forward looking and tied to upcoming decisions
  - Real-time reports to allow for midcourse corrections and organizational learning
  - Insights that other foundations across the field can run with for a ripple effect
- ***Give me a clear, big picture — with numbers***
  - Many trustees expect the same analytical rigor they know from business and academia
  - Trustees need evaluation data on program strategy or foundation performance, not just individual grants
  - Social impact may be difficult to describe with quantitative data, but this is no excuse not to measure
- ***It's more about results than recognition***
  - Getting credit is nice, but it shouldn't be the reason for doing evaluation
  - Most trustees want to know whether the foundation's efforts have contributed to reaching its goals
- ***We want the truth, even if it is uncomfortable***
  - Trustees, staff members and CEOs all find it painful to face and disclose disappointing results
  - Evaluators also hesitate to share negative findings candidly with their clients
  - Though these conflicts of interest often go unspoken, they are real, and they threaten the existence and utility of evaluation

## Reaching Agreement on Critical Issues

- **Purpose: Why should we evaluate?**

- Agreeing on purpose is the most important first step in setting an effective evaluation strategy

- **Method: How should we evaluate?**

- Being clear about what kinds of data “count” as evaluation is essential to productive discussions
- Unless evaluation information is actually used in making decisions, staff and grantees will only provide perfunctory reporting
- It is important to surface trustee attitudes about evaluation uses in advance of confronting an actual decision

- **Cost: How much should we invest in evaluation?**

- It’s satisfying to see as much money as possible go to grants — evaluation costs can be seen as unnecessary overhead
- If evaluation data enables the staff and board to direct grant funds more effectively, and helps other funders or grantees become more effective, the costs are well justified
- Conversely, commissioning expensive studies that never influence future decisions is ill advised

***FSG developed a survey and discussion guide to help you to engage trustees on these evaluation questions***

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**Conversations with Stuart Davidson and C. Kent McGuire,**  
*Followed by questions, moderated by Eva Nico and Mark Kramer, FSG*



*Stuart Davidson*  
*Managing Partner, Labrador Ventures*



*C. Kent McGuire*  
*Dean of the College of Education, Temple University*



*Eva Nico*



*Mark Kramer*

## What Keeps Evaluation from Working? Steps to Consider for Handling Common Issues

### There Isn't Enough Time to Discuss Evaluation Results

- ❑ **Set aside one board meeting** or retreat per year to reflect on strategy and evaluation results
- ❑ **Free up time** by using a consent agenda to approve more routine grants in advance and decreasing grant-approval time during the meeting
- ❑ **Form a board subcommittee** to delve more deeply into evaluation results and report back a summary of key findings at full board meetings
- ❑ **Redefine the board's role:** Instead of making decisions on all grants, focus the board on major funding commitments and program strategy

## What Keeps Evaluation from Working? Ideas to Consider for Handling Common Issues

### Evaluation Results Are Not Actionable

- ❑ **Plan for evaluation before you approve a grant.** Engage board members early on in specifying the intended outcomes and agreeing on the evaluation process to ensure that their questions are answered by the evaluation
- ❑ **Anticipate key decision points.** Match the timing of evaluation information to board decisions. Will evaluation data be known before the grant is up for renewal?
- ❑ **Cultivate a pragmatic attitude toward data collection.** Discuss which kinds of information would be “reliable enough” to support a decision
- ❑ **Create a learning agenda.** Identify what you need to learn to test your assumptions and how the data will be collected and analyzed to get the answers

## What Keeps Evaluation from Working? Ideas to Consider for Handling Common Issues

### Information Isn't Presented in a Helpful Format

- ❑ **Distill evaluation results** into a short summary that highlights the most relevant findings in jargon-free language
- ❑ **Invite the evaluator and the program officer to the board meeting** and encourage a dialogue between them
- ❑ **Layer information** by providing brief summaries or dashboards for all trustees, and more in-depth analysis for those that want it
- ❑ **Repackage data** by hiring communications experts to summarize and interpret evaluation results for different audiences such as trustees, other funders, or the media
- ❑ **Hire expert narrators** such as storytellers or journalists to gather evaluation information and present it in a compelling manner

# Questions?

*Moderated by Eva Nico, FSG*



*Stuart Davidson  
Managing Partner, Labrador  
Ventures*



*Mark Kramer*



*C. Kent McGuire  
Dean of the College of Education,  
Temple University*



*Eva Nico*

# The Trustee Evaluation Toolkit Materials



## **Resources: Learn about evaluation practices**

### **What's the Difference?** *How Foundation Trustees View Evaluation*

Highlights of key findings from interviews about evaluation with dozens of foundation trustees, CEOs and evaluation experts.



### **Snapshots** *How Foundation Trustees Use Evaluation*

Brief case studies that show how foundation trustees are successfully employing different types of evaluation for a variety of purposes.



## **Tools: Examine your evaluation process**

**Let's Consider Evaluation** *A Self-Assessment Tool for Foundation Trustees.* Complete this simple survey to capture trustee points of view on evaluation purpose, method and cost at your foundation.



### **Let's Discuss Evaluation** *A Framework for Trustee Conversations and A Facilitator's Guide*

Generate dialogue on evaluation and compare trustee points of view with research findings from the field. A companion piece helps the facilitator plan and lead the discussion.



### **Let's Make Evaluation Work** *A Planning Guide for Foundation Trustees*

Unravel common evaluation issues and identify strategies others have used that might work for your foundation. Create a custom action plan for improving performance through evaluation.

***These are available for free download at [www.fsg-impact.org](http://www.fsg-impact.org),  
please see “Ideas” → “Evaluation”***

**Thank you for joining us!**

For access to resources and tools featured in this webcast, go to [www.fsg-impact.org](http://www.fsg-impact.org)

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