Results from Using Evaluative Processes in Foundations: Challenges and Solutions
EXERCISE 1: McCormick Foundation as a learning organization

Directions: Read through the entire list of characteristics of learning organizations. Then place an **S** on the line by up to 3 characteristics that you think are current STRENGTHS of McCormick Foundation, in supporting organizational learning and a **W** by up to 3 characteristics you think are significant WEAKNESSES of McCormick Foundation as a learning organization. You may also write in your own ideas about strengths and weaknesses regarding learning. The characteristics are organized by domain. You may distribute your votes across domains or concentrate them in one or more areas depending on your own experiences.

Characteristics of Learning Organizations

	W	S	
CULTURE	___	___	Rewards experimentation
	___	___	Supports learning from mistakes
	___	___	Values asking questions
	___	___	Supports open discussion and critical feedback
	___	___	Encourages collective reflection
	___	___	Views information as common property
	___	___	Promotes cooperation over competition
	___	___	Builds and maintains trust
	___	___	Promotes big picture perspective among individuals
	___	___	Holds individuals accountable for organizational outcomes
	___	___	Demands periodic reassessment of organizational goals
STRUCTURE	___	___	Provides training in and opportunities to use evaluation
	___	___	Invests in knowledge management
	___	___	Has effective channels for flow of learning between levels
	___	___	Rewards staff and grantees for basing action on information
	___	___	Has explicit learning goals
PRACTICE	___	___	Focuses on intellectual capital
	___	___	Uses environmental scanning for lessons learned
	___	___	Defines and responds to information needs
	___	___	Makes assumptions explicit
	___	___	Integrates new information with old
	___	___	Routinely gathers and discusses data
LEADERSHIP	___	___	Models learning
	___	___	Builds shared vision
	___	___	Surfaces differences
	___	___	Discusses the "undiscussable"
	___	___	Balances risk taking with security

Directions: Read through the entire list of barriers that can hamper organizational learning. Then place a check mark by **up to 3** that you think are the most significant challenges to McCormick Foundation in capturing and using organizational learning. Focus on those barriers that you believe removing could have significant benefit to organizational effectiveness. You may distribute your three votes for most significant challenges across the cells or concentrate them in a just one or a few depending on your own assessment of the most important barriers.

Level 1: Foundation-wide

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

____Absence of external accountability

____Pressure to "get the money out the door"

____Disruptive effect of asset level fluctuations

____"Sacred cow" funding priorities

____Inflexible information and reporting systems

____Ambiguous organizational mandate of evaluation unit—responsibility without authority

CULTURAL CHALLENGES

____A philosophy that philanthropy is the same as sponsoring "good works"

____Assumption that foundations are already learning organizations

____Predisposition to "spread the dollars around"

____Failure to connect risk-taking with learning

____Tension between tackling the complex, "messy" problems and the desire to show results

____Disincentives to raising board expectations for evaluation

____Board naïveté about change and evaluation processes

Level 2: Program area

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

____Grant making in "silos" and program officers as "solo practitioners"

____Competition among program areas for finite funds

____Either very high or very low staff turnover

____Top down mandates for evaluation with the money to come from program budgets

____Inadequate attention to program theory, including failure to build learning goals into initiative design

____Staff performance evaluation decoupled from assessment of grantee performance

____Grantee funding renewal disconnected from evaluation results

CULTURAL CHALLENGES

____Program staff as "advocates" in their fields

____Perceived gaps between substantive expertise and evaluative expertise between program and evaluation staff

____Unrealistic expectations for social change displayed in RFPs

____"Protected grantees"

Level 3: Grantees

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

___Lack of grantee capacity, incentives, or resources to "do evaluation"

CULTURAL CHALLENGES

___Fear of jeopardizing future funding support
___Focus on evaluation use for external judgment versus internal learning
___Overly ambitious proposals
___Grantee reluctance to criticize foundation strategic approach

Adapted from: Challenges to the Role of Evaluation in Supporting Organizational Learning in Foundations
William E. Bickel, University of Pittsburgh Learning Research and Development Center
Ricardo Millett, W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Catherine Awsumb Nelson, Evaluation Consultant
Council on Foundations, 2002