TOOLS

Evaluation for Models and Adaptive Initiatives

Heather Britt, M.A.; and Julia Coffman, M.S., Center for Evaluation Innovation

Key Points

- Although there has been a growing emphasis on use of experimental designs in evaluation, there is also increasing agreement that evaluation designs should be situation specific.
- The nature of the program is one of the key factors to consider in evaluation design.
- Two types of programs – models, which provide replicable or semi-standardized solutions, adaptive initiatives, which are flexible programming strategies used to address problems that require unique, context-based solutions – require different evaluation designs.
- Evaluation of models requires understanding the stage of development of the model program, with summative evaluation done only when the model is fully developed.
- Adaptive initiatives require consideration of both the timing and scale of the initiative in determining the appropriate evaluation design.

During these lean economic times, foundations remain committed to evaluation as a supportive tool for achieving impact (Ross, 2009). Within the philanthropic community and elsewhere, however, there has been some debate about evaluation design, including which methods return the most rigorous, credible, and useful evidence about impact. Recently, agreement is growing around the idea that the strongest evaluation designs are situation specific. According to Buteau (2010), "any design should

be selected because it is the best way to answer a particular question, and the question to be answered should be directly related to the stage of the organization or program being tested."

In addition to the purpose of the evaluation and the stage of the program, the nature of the program under consideration is key for determining appropriate evaluation approaches. As Rogers (2012, p. 5) notes, situational appropriateness "means choosing methods that suit the purpose of the evaluation, the types of evaluation questions being asked, the availability of resources, and the nature of the intervention – in particular whether it is standardized or adaptive, and whether interventions work pretty much the same everywhere and for everyone or are greatly affected by context." In this article we concentrate on how the nature of the intervention affects evaluation design. We outline a framework for selecting evaluation approaches for two types of grantmaking programs used to achieve far-reaching impact: models and adaptive initiatives.

Models and Adaptive Initiatives: Two Powerful Engines for Social Change

Two important approaches for promoting social change underlie much of a foundation's grantmaking. Models provide replicable or semi-standardized solutions for problems that can be addressed using similar methods and procedures. In contrast, adaptive initiatives are flexible programming strategies used to address problems that require unique, context-based solutions.

Models are packaged systems of activities and services that work together to produce impacts for individuals or communities. Before they are scaled, models usually go through a rigorous evaluation to prove that they are effective. Scaling then involves launching a program in other sites while continuing to test its effectiveness. That process may allow programs to be adapted for different contexts or populations, but adaptations generally do not venture too far from the original model.

No replicable best-practice solutions have yet been found for many of today's most pressing social and environmental challenges. These intractable problems are often characterized by multiple causes and involve many actors operating on numerous levels. To address such problems, foundations have adopted more flexible programming approaches and launched initiatives that continually adapt and evolve to achieve impact. In this article, we use the term adaptive initiatives to describe endeavors that monitor, respond to, and catalyze changes in dynamic operating environments. Unlike models, adaptive initiatives involve a process of continual discovery and adaptation, rather than the implementation of a predetermined plan. Thus a single adaptive initiative, such as an advocacy campaign, may contribute to systemwide impact through strategic deployment rather than through increased scale.

Both models and adaptive initiatives can be effective engines for social change, and most foundations fund both approaches. Social entrepreneurs and change agents use both approaches in their work, especially when working toward large-scale change. In addition, many organizations working with models partner with organizations that use adaptive initiatives in order to maximize overall impact.

Evaluation can be a powerful tool for making strategic decisions about both models and adaptive initiatives. Evaluation can help to distinguish true models from promising projects that are not yet ready or appropriate for scale-up; it can also help to ensure a model achieves the

desired results across many contexts. Similarly, evaluation can ensure that adaptive initiatives continue to interact effectively and dynamically within evolving contexts or environments.

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Using evaluation effectively for both models and adaptive initiatives helps to ensure that individual grants and projects add up to relevant and effective change at the initiative or portfolio level.

However, effective evaluation approaches for models and adaptive initiatives are different. Evaluation is not a one-size-fits-all undertaking. Results measurement, documentation, and learning take different forms for models and adaptive initiatives because of fundamental differences between the two social change approaches. The greatest of these differences is rooted in the fact that models stay the same, while adaptive initiatives are always changing.

In this article, we promote the use of evaluation

TABLE 1 Differences Between Models and Adaptive Initiatives

	Models	Adaptive initiatives
The problem is caused by…	a few identifiable factors.	many entangled factors some of which have likely not been identified.
The program context is characterized by …	repeatable pattern(s) of cause and effect that are similar across contexts.	dynamic and unpredictable changes that differ across contexts.
The program delivers a solution that is …	replicable.	unique and adaptive.
Implementers apply …	identified best practices.	emergent practices.
The program achieves impact through …	scale-up.	continuous improvement achieved through adaptation to unique contexts.
Evaluation …	defines, tests, and proves scalable models.	supports ongoing adaptation and continuous improvement.

for unlocking the power of both models and adaptive initiatives. Our aim is to help grant-makers understand the critical distinctions between models and adaptive initiatives, whether these represent individual grants or broader initiatives, and to identify how evaluation can be used to learn about and assess impacts at different stages of development. We do not set out to teach evaluation skills or techniques, but to empower grantmakers to strengthen the models and adaptive initiatives in their portfolios through informed, strategic choices about the kinds of evaluation that should be funded.

A Closer Look at Models and Adaptive Initiatives

To understand why different types of evaluations are needed for models and adaptive initiatives, it helps to understand the differences between these two implementation strategies (see Table 1). Of course, labeling all programs as either models or adaptive initiatives is an oversimplification. The world of philanthropy is populated with a diversity of programming. Some programs are created to address a localized problem or specific context, and are not appropriate for scale-up or adaptation. We chose to focus on this dual categorization to highlight two important relationships: the fit between social problems and grantmaking approaches and the fit between grantmaking approaches and evaluation. We discuss the first of these relationships below,

while the remainder of this article deals with the second relationship.

Models

Models are effective when a project or systematized approach that works well in one place is also expected to work well in other locations. Three factors help to identify a model.

First, models provide replicable solutions to social problems. A model approach is a good choice when the cause of a problem can be clearly identified. When causal factors interact in repeatable ways to produce a specific problem, a replicable solution can be identified and used to address the problem in more than one context or setting. Models can be an efficient approach because resources are not wasted reinventing the wheel.

Second, models are designed to be scaled up. Models are intended to be shared and applied at many locations to achieve impact. This approach is not always appropriate; not all successful projects are suitable for scale-up, and many factors prevent the replication of a successful project. For example, the original implementing organization may not have the capacity to manage the model on a large scale or there may be too few organizations capable of adopting and implementing the model. The costs of delivering a successful project may exceed the resources

Box 1 Models

Models
• Provide replicable solutions to problems
• Are designed with the intent of scale-up
• Have been tested and proven to be effective

Box 2 Adaptive Initiatives

Adaptive Initiatives
• Provide unique solutions to problems
• Continuously evolve to respond to and catalyze changes in their context
• Measure results and dynamic fit to context to remain effective

available for expansion or there may be a limited number of contexts appropriate for replication. A defining hallmark of a model is how effectively and efficiently it can be replicated.

Third, a model must be proven effective before it can be scaled. It does not make sense to invest in disseminating an idea or project without being convinced that it will work. A model must be proven effective and scalable. Until then, it is a promising project, pilot, or potential model. Rigorous evidence about impact is needed to support the transition of a promising project to a model that can be scaled up. Fortunately, the process of development and scale-up includes several opportunities for testing the effectiveness of a potential model.

Adaptive Initiatives

When models cannot be counted on to work in the same way across contexts and populations, adaptive initiatives are essential. Adaptive initiatives work well where contexts or conditions are continuously changing, which requires that each situation have its own tailored and evolving solution. Grantmakers often turn to adaptive initiatives when faced with complex problems that have causes so entangled and dynamically changing that a replicable solution will not work. The solution required must be unique to the context and continue to adapt as needed. Successful adaptive initiatives tackle messy problems with emergent practices that respond to continually changing conditions. They exist in a continuous state of creative invention to "produce

and reproduce structures that are capable of dealing better with changes in the environment" (Williams & Hummelbrunner, 2011, p. 25).

Adaptive initiatives are distinct from program improvements. According to Gamble, many projects undergo improvements "along the way to a clearly defined goal," but for an adaptive initiative "both the path and the destination are evolving" (2008, p. 15). Adaptive initiatives thrive at times when previously successful programs begin to falter, established best practices no longer bring about the same results, or systems are undergoing major shifts. At such times, the generally accepted understanding of problems and causes are often reshuffled, and funders and implementers seek new ideas, new solutions, and new ways of seeing and describing the situation. Simple tweaks are not enough; a new worldview and different way of working is required.

Since predictability is low, adaptive initiatives are inspired by a vision rather than designed to achieve clear, specific, and measurable goals. Rather than depending on known best practices, the success of these initiatives is contingent on their ability to gather information from multiple perspectives in the programming context, review that information efficiently, and steer the project strategically.

Fitting Grantmaking Approaches to Social Problems

Addressing social problems with appropriate grantmaking approaches is something strategic

grantmakers already know and practice: They recognize an opportunity for models when they detect repeatable patterns of cause and effect at the core of the social problem to be solved or fund adaptive initiatives or adaptive programs when the best path to social change must be discovered along the way.

Models and adaptive initiatives work together. Large-scale change frequently requires an approach that combines models and adaptive initiatives. A single portfolio of grants or initiatives typically includes a mix of models and adaptive initiatives contributing toward common systemwide changes or goals. For example, the Ford Foundation has used both approaches to further the work of its program for sexual and reproductive health in Egypt, as described in Box 3.

> *The process of taking a model to scale can be thought of as having four stages. Ideally, models proceed through each stage in sequence.*

Changes in the social programming context may necessitate changes in programming approach. A model may enter a phase requiring adaptation of its core components, and an adaptive initiative may morph into a replicable model.

A model becomes an adaptive initiative. When a well-researched and tested model begins to fail or the mix of core standardized and flexible elements does not appear to be producing results across settings, the model may need to evolve. Indeed, if a model must enter a new phase of discovery and development in order to continue working, that model has become an adaptive initiative.

An adaptive initiative becomes a model. Innovations are examples of adaptive initiatives that evolve into models. Bernholz describes innovations as "good ideas that become widely

adopted" (2011, p. 3). Many innovators are out to solve persistent and wickedly complex problems that affect large numbers of people. We contend that innovation covers distinct phases (creative development and replication) that are often carried out through quite different program types – adaptive initiatives and models. Innovators engage in adaptive initiatives to discover new ways of thinking about or doing something. If they discover something that works, they want to bring it to scale. Once replication becomes the driving factor, an innovation enters Stage 1 of model development.

The remainder of this article focuses on the fit between the two different grantmaking approaches and their evaluations. What evaluation approaches should be used when working with models? What evaluation approaches work best with adaptive initiatives?

Evaluation for Models
Four Stages of Model Development and Scale-Up
The process of taking a model to scale can be thought of as having four stages. Ideally, models proceed through each stage in sequence (see Figure 1). Data collection and evaluation play a role at each stage (McDonald, 2009).

Stage 1: Define the model. This first stage involves a determination of whether a project is sufficiently promising to develop into a model and later scale. Early assessments may be based on expert judgment and participant feedback, rather than on evidence gathered through rigorous evaluation research. The goal at this stage is to determine which parts of the project are essential to success and which can accommodate flexibility.

Stage 2: Test the model in its original setting. This stage determines whether the project can achieve its intended results under ideal circumstances, and whether it is worthy of definition as a true model. It is crucial that the project be implemented (and evaluated) with the features and in the context that are considered optimal for success.

Box 3 Improving Sexual and Reproductive Health Initiatives in Egypt Using Models and Adaptive Initiatives

Improving Sexual and Reproductive Health Initiatives in Egypt Using Models and Adaptive Initiatives

The Ford Foundation's strategy for improving sexual and reproductive health education for youth in Egypt includes funding for model development and scale-up. Sexuality and reproductive health are not covered in Egypt's public schools, and because discussion of these topics is largely taboo, youth do not have reliable access to accurate information. To remedy this, the Ford Foundation funded leading organizations that specialize in youth health issues and services to develop and pilot curricula tailored to specific youth populations. Each model curriculum provides accurate, age-appropriate information that is delivered in youth-friendly settings. The intent is to test each model curriculum rigorously to ensure effectiveness, and then to disseminate the curricula to health care providers and organizations that can incorporate them into their work and reach large numbers of Egyptian youth.

Ford's sexuality and reproductive health strategy for youth in Egypt also includes funding for adaptive initiatives. A complex web of social, economic, and cultural factors inhibit access to information about sexuality and reproductive health and restrain youth from making healthy choices. Scaling up sexuality and reproductive health education through non-governmental organizations alone will not bring about sustainable change at the national level. Thus, the Ford Foundation supports advocacy and networking to promote an environment conducive to providing sexual and reproductive health education for youth. Because no predetermined best practice will bring about comprehensive cultural and institutional change in this area, the Foundation and core grantees monitor the political and social context to identify and act on opportunities to influence educational policy and social norms. Some grantees reach out to social leaders such as religious figures, teachers, and school administrators, who have the power to influence public opinion and youth. Others liaise with governmental ministries that can influence policy and practice. Still others work with health care providers. In each case, the approach is tailored to the specific audience and adapts to ongoing changes in the institutions and the broader society.

Ford's grant making positions both models and adaptive initiatives as complements. The Ford Foundation promotes models and adaptive initiatives as complementary approaches to achieve comprehensive changes at scale: Ford funds organizations to develop and disseminate model curricula, and also promotes networking and advocacy that contribute to a policy environment under which youth have improved access to sexual and reproductive health services and information. The two approaches also complement each other at a grass-roots level: youth workers who promote the development and provision of sexual and reproductive education contribute to the drafting of policy recommendations and advocacy strategies. In turn, a clearer understanding of the limitations and opportunities in the government's official position helps educators identify partners who are willing to adopt curricula and select sites for educating youth.

Stage 3: Apply and test the model in new settings. This stage assesses whether a model can achieve its objectives outside of the ideal Stage 2 context. It establishes whether a model "works" in more than one setting, or in real-world settings with all of their complications.

Stage 4: Scale up and continue to test and adapt. The fourth stage aims to demonstrate the model's impact when implemented among larger populations and across many contexts. This stage also examines the contextual factors that can influence the intervention's impact in different settings. Data collected in this stage provide feedback to help refine the model or to develop guidelines that ensure it operates as intended across contexts.

Figure 1 Four Stages of Model Development and Scale-up

Four Stages of Model Development and Scale-Up
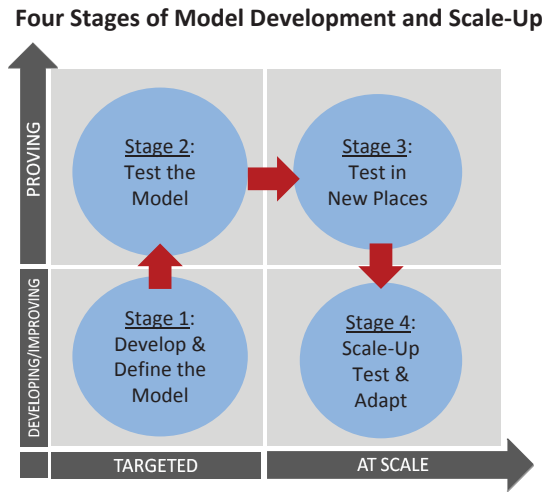
The Role of Evaluation at Each Stage of Model Development and Scale-Up

Throughout the four stages of model development, grantmakers want to learn more than just whether a model is a good idea. They want to know how it works, with whom it works, where and under what conditions it works, and how it can be scaled and sustained.

Evaluation plays an important role at all four stages in model development and scale-up. Knowing where a model is in the development and scale-up process enables grantmakers to identify, at each stage, the appropriate evaluation questions, the evidence needed, and the ways in which evaluation findings will be used.

Figure 2 outlines two questions that summarize the purpose of evaluation at each stage. Each of these questions can be broken down into more specific questions.

How can these evaluation questions be answered? There are two main types of evaluation for models:

- Formative evaluation is measurement for the purpose of program development and improvement.
- Summative evaluation is measurement for the purpose of determining program effectiveness or impact.

Both formative and summative are useful forms of evaluation for model development and scaling. Which type is most appropriate depends on where the model is in its development: "Both formative and summative evaluations are essential because decisions are needed during the developmental stages of a [model] to improve and strengthen it, and again, when it has stabilized, to judge its final worth or determine its future" (Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997, p.15).

*Stage 1: Formative evaluation to define the model.* At this stage, evaluation helps determine whether a project is sufficiently promising to develop and scale, as well as which parts of the intervention can accommodate flexibility and which are not negotiable. Formative evaluation is best suited to answer the following questions:

- What are the core elements of the potential model?
- Is the project showing early results?
- Is the project suitable for scale-up?

Stage 2: Summative evaluation to test the model in its original setting. Stage 2 determines whether the model can achieve its intended results under ideal circumstances. To determine whether the model is ready to be replicated in new settings in Stage 3, it is important to have credible evidence of its effectiveness in its original setting.

Figure 2 Evaluation at Each Stage of Model Development and Scale-up
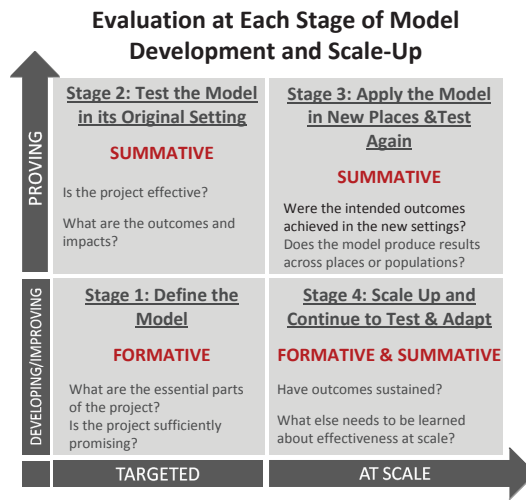
Evaluation at Each Stage of Model Development and Scale-Up

Summative evaluation is best suited to answer the following questions:

- Were the intended outcomes achieved? (e.g., Did participants change in expected ways?)
- Were any unintended outcomes observed?

Stage 3: Summative evaluation to test the model in new settings. Once the model is replicated in new settings, it must be tested again to determine whether its success can be repeated outside of the original setting. In addition, the fidelity of its replication must be assessed: Were the core elements identified in Stage 1 applied faithfully in the new contexts? Summative evaluation is best suited to answer the following questions:

- Were the intended outcomes achieved in the new settings?
- Were there differences in outcomes across settings or across populations served?

Stage 4: Formative and summative evaluation to continue testing and adapting at scale. During the scale-up process, evaluation should be both summative and formative. Summative evaluation should measure outcomes at scale and formative evaluation should support the scale-up process. For example, formative evaluation should examine the contextual factors that may influence the model's impact in different settings. These data can provide feedback to help refine the

model or develop guidelines to ensure it operates as intended across contexts. Formative and summative evaluation are suited to answer the following questions:

- Are outcomes maintained as the model goes to scale?
- What implementation problems or challenges arise during scale-up and how can they be addressed?
- What kinds of capacities and resources are needed to support the model's scale-up?

Evaluation for Adaptive Initiatives

Recognizing that difficult problems often require transformative solutions, many foundations and nonprofits are adopting dynamic approaches that think big and aim high. The result is increased investments in strategies that are often complicated, with multiple causal paths or ways of achieving outcomes, and complex – emergent, with specific goals and activities that develop while the strategy is being implemented (Rogers, 2005).

Moving from concrete and predictable programming to strategies that apply new ideas and evolve over time is not easy and requires a substantial shift in thinking and culture. Social innovators have vision, but do not always have a clear or proven path for achieving their vision.

They know generally where they want to end up, but they may not know the most efficient way to get there, nor exactly how long it will take to arrive. Those who take adaptive, innovative approaches must be willing to take risks and accept failure. They must be willing to live with uncertainty and acknowledge that their plans, no matter how well laid out, will likely shift as the circumstances around them evolve. And finally, they must accept that traditional ways of thinking about and doing evaluation are no longer a good fit for the approaches they are taking.

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Four Types of Adaptive Initiatives

Adaptive initiatives differ on how long they and their program context last. For example, an adaptive initiative may be required in response to a crisis or critical event such as a tsunami, a regime change, the implementation of a new judicial ruling, or a sudden increase or decrease in funding to address a particular social problem. Such adaptive initiatives are generally time-bound: Once the effects of the critical event abate and a new arrangement takes shape, the adaptive initiative may evolve into standard programming, a new model, or be phased out. Alternatively, an adaptive initiative may operate in a persistently complex programming context that requires continual adaptation. Initiatives that advocate for change to address a long-term problem or operate in the context of an ongoing conflict are examples of continuously evolving initiatives.

Adaptive initiatives also differ in scale. Like models, adaptive initiatives can be implemented in a targeted manner in a single setting or at a larger scale. Adaptive initiatives implemented in multiple contexts or across a system require solutions that are specific to each context or location. The need for context-specific approaches is what distinguishes an adaptive initiative from a model at scale.

These two dimensions – time and scale – can be used to define four distinct types of adaptive initiatives (see Figure 3).

Type 1: Rapid response in a single setting. These adaptive initiatives are used to respond rapidly in the face of a major change or crisis. Rapid response adaptive initiatives are often imbued with a sense of urgency and their implementers are focused on what is happening in the here and now. Events on the ground happen quickly and an adaptive initiative may undergo short cycles of experimentation and iteration to respond to feedback. If the system recovers quickly and establishes a new stable pattern, the adaptive initiative will phase out or evolve into another form of programming, possibly a model. If the system continues to be dynamic and unstable, the adaptive initiative may become a targeted continuous adaptation.

A localized emergency response program is an example of a Type 1 rapid response. In June 2006 the simmering conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in the south of Lebanon erupted into open shelling, displacing families on both sides of the border. A significant proportion of Lebanon's four million citizens fled the south and congregated mainly in the capital, Beirut. Local and international emergency programs focused on providing shelter and basic supplies and services to the internally displaced persons (IDPs). When a ceasefire was negotiated, the majority of IDPs returned to their homes within 48 hours. Emergency response programs shifted to community-based rehabilitation projects, some of which closed out within a year as the political situation restabilized and residents were allowed to remain in their homes and communities.

Figure 3 Four Types of Adaptive Initiatives

Four Types of Adaptive Initiatives
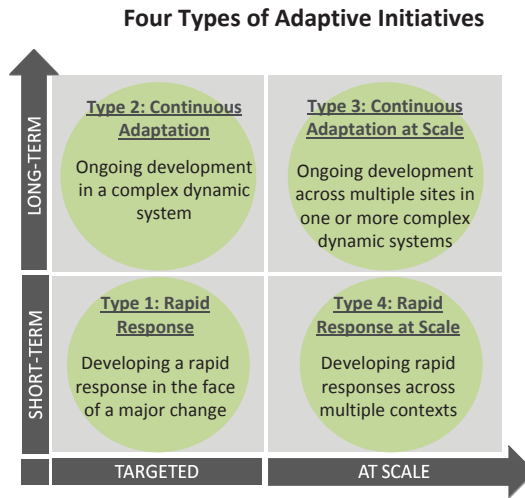
Type 2: Targeted continuous adaptation in a single setting. These adaptive initiatives feature ongoing development in a complex dynamic system. In complex systems, many of the characteristics of a rapid response situation continue to persist. Intertwined factors continue to operate in unpredictable ways. Even the pace of change is variable, and the timeline of continuous adaptation reflects this. Sometimes, shifts occur rapidly; at other times changes may unfold over years. Successful innovators operating in such environments recognize that "no fixed model is expected – or even desirable, appropriate or possible" (Patton, 2011, p. 195). Instead, they continue to read and respond to their environment. They may also have the opportunity of looking back in time to review the process of change then and now.

Bioeconomy Africa's Women Wood Carriers Project combines service provision with advocacy to provide a wide range of health and livelihood benefits for a marginalized group of women in Ethiopia. The project uses monitoring and evaluation to discern new needs and opportunities and to adapt accordingly. For example, training the women in reproductive health prompted new demands for services. Initial advocacy efforts succeeded in winning government support for construction of a

health center. When an unreliable supply chain continued to block access to reproductive health supplies, the project shifted strategies to develop an in-house service-delivery mechanism (Schlangen, 2012).

Type 3: Continuous adaptation at scale. These adaptive initiatives involve ongoing development across multiple sites in one or more complex dynamic systems. Continuous adaptation at scale can be the most challenging type of adaptive initiative to manage. Not only must the initiative be sustained across time (then and now), it must respond strategically across multiple sites (here and there). An example of adaptation is the International Planned Parenthood Federation, which "adopted advocacy as one of the five pillars of its 2005-2015 strategic framework, along with four other service-focused priorities. … Every member association leverages its direct service provision to engage in advocacy, depending upon its capacity and political context" (Schlangen, 2012, p. 8). The federation sustains a global effort toward its advocacy goals, with an emphasis on processes that promote national leadership and ownership of the sexual and reproductive health agenda.

Type 4: Rapid response at scale. These adaptive initiatives develop rapid responses across

multiple contexts. Innovators responding to a disrupting event whose effects are felt across multiple contexts are focused on what is happening now, but they are also managing strategic adaptation at scale (here and there). For example, a large-scale disaster-recovery program may work to rebuild multiple communities, but find that the communities require substantially different approaches to providing shelter, addressing health needs, and restoring livelihoods. Rapid responses at scale reflect context-specific realities, but are also positioned to recognize and take into account higher-level forces and patterns. They may evolve into continuous adaptations at scale (Type 3), give rise to a number of regular programs or models, or be phased out as the effects of the critical event recede.

Two main evaluation approaches are appropriate for adaptive initiatives: developmental and goal-free. These approaches represent more recent developments in the evaluation field and were pioneered to deal with the kinds of dynamic and unpredictable contexts in which adaptive initiatives unfold.

The Role of Evaluation for the Four Types of Adaptive Initiatives

All adaptive initiatives are emergent and dynamic regardless of whether they are rapid response or continuously adapting, targeted or at scale. Adaptive initiatives, in contrast to models, operate without strict adherence to predetermined goals and implementation guidelines. The way forward is not known, so a good deal of experimentation is required. Failure is as valuable as success for the lessons it provides.

During the life of an adaptive initiative,

grantmakers want to distinguish between dead ends and promising leads. As with models, when an adaptive initiative works, they want to know how it works, with whom it works, and where and under what conditions it works. They want to know whether they should keep innovating or whether they have found a solution that will provide ongoing results without adaptation. Evaluation can play an important role in answering these questions.

Evaluation has a different purpose for each of the four types of adaptive initiatives. Understanding the different types of adaptive initiatives helps identify which evaluation questions are relevant, what evidence is needed, how findings will be used, and what evaluation approaches to use.

The emergent nature of adaptive initiatives presents a challenge to formative and summative evaluation in the way that they are traditionally practiced (Patton, 2011). Formative and summative evaluations are better suited to models because they typically focus on measuring a program's progress toward predetermined goals and objectives. Since adaptive initiatives do not seek predetermined objectives through the application of best practices, these evaluation approaches evaluation are a poor fit for adaptive initiatives. Further, timeliness is of the essence for adaptive initiatives, especially for rapid-response adaptive initiatives. Many formative and summative evaluation methods and designs require significant investments of time and are not well-suited to providing findings in real time.

Two main evaluation approaches are appropriate for adaptive initiatives: developmental and goal-free. These approaches represent more recent developments in the evaluation field and were pioneered to deal with the kinds of dynamic and unpredictable contexts in which adaptive initiatives unfold.

- Developmental evaluation is embedded in the initiative to promote adaptation to changing circumstances. Thus, it offers real-time data and learning about innovations as they adapt and evolve in relation to their contexts or settings. Evaluators act as "critical friends" who inform decision making about

Figure 4 Evaluation for the Four Types of Adaptive initiatives

Evaluation for the Four Types of Adaptive Initiatives
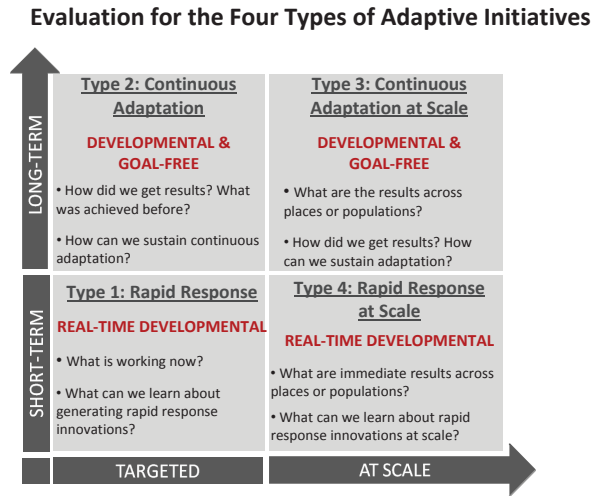
innovations as it occurs (Patton, 2011; Gamble, 2008).

- Goal-free evaluation assesses the outcomes of adaptive initiatives without reference to predetermined goals (Scriven, 1991). A number of designs and methods may be used in goal-free evaluation as long as they measure the outcomes influenced rather than limiting the inquiry to planned outcomes. The type of evaluation approaches suitable to complex evaluation contexts are characterized by "retrospective patterning" (Bob Williams, personal correspondence, September 2009). Outcome Harvesting, developed by Ricardo Wilson-Grau and colleagues, is an example of a goal-free evaluation method particularly well-suited to complex programming contexts (Wilson-Grau & Britt, 2012). In any case, enough time must have passed to allow outcomes to be visible (depending on the complexity of the system in which the adaptive initiative operates).

Developmental evaluation is appropriate for all four adaptive initiative types. Patton (2011) lists five purposes and uses for developmental evaluation, two of which – developing a rapid response and ongoing development – correspond most closely with the four types of adaptive

initiatives. In contrast, goal-free evaluation is more suitable to adaptive initiatives operating in ongoing complex systems (Types 2 and 3) because the longer timeline provides an opportunity to trace change processes that may take considerable time.

Figure 4 summarizes the evaluation purposes, approaches, and key questions for each type of adaptive initiative, each of which is explained in more detail below.

Type 1: Real-time developmental feedback for rapid-response adaptive initiatives in one setting.
Rapid-response adaptive initiatives should be informed by continuous feedback. Because of the fast-paced and changing environments within which they operate, implementers of this type of initiative place a premium on real-time data. Data must be processed quickly and efficiently to enable the initiative to adapt and remain effective. Successful innovators also keep an eye on the resources needed to support creativity and innovation. Rapid-response implementers operating in a single location need to know the following:

- What is working now? What are the immediate results?
- How are people or systems responding to the adaptive initiative?
- What can we learn from failures?

- How should the adaptive initiative look or be structured in order to be effective?
- What can we learn about generating rapid response adaptive initiatives?

> *Rapid-response adaptive initiatives should be informed by continuous feedback.*

Type 2: Developmental and goal-free evaluation for targeted continuous adaptation in one setting. Implementers of Type 2 adaptive initiatives also need access to regular feedback from their environment, but because the innovation timelines are stretched to match the change process, the pace and frequency of that feedback will vary. Type 2 implementers are also interested in looking back in time to gather information on past results and to determine how results were achieved. This retrospection is critical because, in complex systems, cause-and-effect patterns can be distinguished only with hindsight. The ability to sustain creativity over time is the hallmark of a successful continuous adaptation. Type 2 innovators need to know answers to the following questions:
- What is working now? How did we get to the results we see now?
- What results were achieved in the past?
- What can we learn about generating and sustaining continuous adaptation?

Type 3: Developmental and goal-free evaluation for continuous adaptation at scale. These adaptive initiatives involve ongoing development across multiple sites in one or more complex and dynamic systems. Continuous adaptation at scale can be the most challenging of the four types of adaptive initiatives to manage. Not only must the initiatives be sustained across time, they must be strategically responsive across multiple sites. Type 3 innovators need to know:
- What is working now? How did we get to the results we see now?

- What results were achieved in the past?
- What are the results across places or populations?
- What can we learn about generating and sustaining continuous adaptation at scale?

Type 4: Real-time developmental evaluation for rapid response at scale. Like rapid-response adaptive initiatives implemented in one setting, at scale these adaptive initiatives should be fueled by fast-paced feedback. These initiatives have an added layer of complexity, however, because they operate across multiple contexts. Type 4 change agents need to know:
- What is working now?
- What are the immediate results across places or populations?
- How are people or systems in different contexts responding to the adaptive initiative?
- What can we learn about generating rapid-response adaptive initiatives at scale?

Because adaptive initiatives are vitally linked to their dynamic environments, evaluation should also track and assess the context in which all four types of adaptive initiatives are operating. Adaptive initiatives and their contexts will evolve over time. As long as the context remains dynamic and complex, adaptive initiatives will remain the best grantmaking strategy. Once clear patterns of cause and effect emerge, adaptive initiatives can morph into programs. If these cause and effect patterns are widespread, adaptive initiatives may need to evolve into scalable models. Regarding context, innovators need to know:
- Are the dynamics of the situation still suitable for adaptive initiative?
- Does the situation continue to change unpredictably or have the dynamics settled into a pattern in which relationships of cause and effect are apparent?
- Should we keep innovating, or should we develop a program or model?

Conclusion
This article started from the now well documented and argued premise that foundation

choices about the evaluation approaches used to assess grantmaking programs should not start with decisions about which design or methods to use. Rather, design decisions should be driven by several factors that include the evaluation's users, the questions they are asking, and, as we argue here, the nature of the intervention being examined. Like Patton (2008), we advocate for methodological eclecticism based on situation-specific assessments. The focus should not be on which evaluation design is the best regardless of circumstances, but rather which design is the best fit with a careful consideration of the circumstances at hand.

The article then explores how the nature of a social problem is a critical determinant in the foundation's choice of programming approach. It suggests that foundations and social-change agents deploy two important types of programming approaches to suit the social problems they are attempting to ameliorate: models and adaptive initiatives. Models are effective in contexts with a reasonable degree of predictability. Adaptive initiatives work in contexts that are highly fluid and unpredictable.

In the same way that strategic grantmakers adjust programming to fit the social problem, evaluation approaches must suit the programming. Effective evaluation approaches for models and adaptive initiatives reflect the unique characteristics of each. Funders and social entrepreneurs wishing to use evaluation effectively should distinguish between models and adaptive initiatives in their portfolios, recognize where their models are developmentally or the types of adaptive initiatives they are funding, consider how evaluation can support their grants based on where and what they are, and identify and fund appropriate evaluation approaches using the framing and guidelines suggested here.

Effectively choosing and then supporting appropriate evaluation approaches requires, first and foremost, that foundation staff be generally aware of their evaluation options and how they fit with different grantmaking programs. This article attempts to build that awareness. But

this is just a first step for foundations that want to maximize the usefulness of their evaluation investments. The building of awareness about evaluation options and approaches must be followed by the development of a foundation's capacity to effectively support those approaches, especially if they differ across the foundation. This includes the capacity to find evaluators who have the right expertise for evaluating models or adaptive initiatives, as many evaluation firms specialize in certain approaches. It also includes an understanding of how a foundation's evaluation timing, contracting, budgeting, and reporting processes and expectations may need to be tailored accordingly (Preskill and Beer, 2012). For example, foundations need to be prepared for the fact that different evaluation approaches will yield different types of answers about results and what is being learned. Summative evaluations to test model impacts will tell funders whether the intervention worked or did not, usually after the model has ended. Developmental evaluations will tell funders what is working right now, acknowledging that the answer to that question may differ the next time it is asked and examined.

> *As long as the context remains dynamic and complex, adaptive initiatives will remain the best grantmaking strategy. Once clear patterns of cause and effect emerge, adaptive initiatives can morph into programs. If these cause and effect patterns are widespread, adaptive initiatives may need to evolve into scalable models.*

In sum, evaluation that works today may not work tomorrow. Evolution is inevitable and flexibility

is essential. Change leaders shepherd models through the phases of development and scale-up, and remain attentive to the emergent nature of adaptive initiatives. A model may enter a phase requiring adaptation, while an adaptive initiative may morph into a model. Evaluation that is attuned to the transformations in models and adaptive initiatives will continue to help fuel these two powerful engines of social change.

> *Evaluation that works today may not work tomorrow. Evolution is inevitable and flexibility is essential.*

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Heather Britt, M.A., is an independent consultant specializing in program evaluation and evaluation capacity building for development agencies and foundations. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Heather Britt, 418 South Main Street, Georgetown, TX 78626 (email: heather@heatherbritt.com).

Julia Coffman, M.S., is founder and director of the Center for Evaluation Innovation, based in Washington, D. C.