FOUNDATION STRATEGIES *for*

Influencing Education Policy

A SEMINAR FOR EDUCATION GRANTMAKERS

JUNE 1 - 4, 2005

HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

We thank the Lumina Foundation for Education and the Annie E. Casey Foundation for their support in underwriting costs for Grantmakers for Education's 2005 Institute, including this report summarizing key findings from the meeting. We acknowledge that the conclusions presented here do not necessarily reflect the opinions of these organizations.

We also are grateful to Anne Mackinnon for her expert assistance in writing this report.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Other Resources

Grantmakers for Education recommends the following sources for more information on foundation-supported advocacy and public policy development:

Advocacy Funding: The Philanthropy of Changing Minds. Published by GrantCraft, a project of the Ford Foundation (2005). Available at **www.grantcraft.org**.

Reflections on Public Policy Grantmaking, by Ruth Holton. Published by the California Wellness Foundation (2002). Available at **www.tcwf.org**.

Leading Boldly: Adaptive Leadership for Foundations, by Ronald A. Heifetz, John V. Kania, and Robert R. Kramer. Stanford Social Innovation Review (Winter 2004). Available at **www.ssireview.com**.

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grantmakers for education

Introduction

No education grantmaker can afford to ignore public policy. Local, state and federal policies shape the context in which we work by establishing education standards, allocating resources and setting priorities for people working in education systems. Whether to expand pre-kindergarten programs to expectations for schools under the No Child Left Behind Act to the amount of college aid provided by the Higher Education Act are all decisions with big implications for education systems. Just as important, public resources to address a need often dwarf philanthropy's contributions.

Increasingly, foundations are choosing to engage in public policy debates as a way of leveraging their investments and increasing their impact in advancing improvements community-wide, statewide or nationally. For foundations, influencing public policy decisions can happen in different ways: funding policy research and dissemination, building public will, supporting advocacy and educating lawmakers about key policy issues.

For its 2005 Education Grantmakers Institute, Grantmakers for Education organized "Foundation Strategies for Influencing Education Policy." The 2005 institute was organized in collaboration with the Communications Network and the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Held every two years on a university campus, GFE's institute is designed as a one-of-a-kind learning opportunity for funders to sharpen their practice in an intimate learning environment. It features leading-edge thinking from academia and the field, case study analyses, action planning and peer-to-peer discussions.

The 2005 institute considered key strategic issues for grantmakers working to influence education policy, including:

- **The legal limits and opportunities for foundation engagement in public policy.** What are the legal parameters that govern how foundations can engage in policy change? How can foundations use the law to achieve their objectives?
- **Philanthropic approaches for influencing public policy.** Foundations can influence policy from a variety of entry points. What are the tradeoffs between different kinds of approaches and the relative risks and returns of each? How can a foundation determine the appropriate strategy given its resources and objectives?
- **Issue framing and messaging.** Policy battles are often carried out in the media. How does the framing of an issue affect public opinion and policy responses? How can foundations and their grantees create an effective "frame" for their education policy goals and craft messages that build public will to support change?
- **Setting expectations and measuring success.** What are appropriate goals for a foundation's policy interventions, and how can foundations measure their success in the short and long terms? How can foundation staff help their boards to determine realistic expectations for the outcomes—and requirements—of this work?

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Programmatically, the grantmakers who attended the seminar work across the range of educational systems and services, from school readiness through college access, with objectives in areas as diverse as school finance, after-school programming, small schools, charter schools, disparities in student achievement, access to postsecondary education, teacher training and leadership development. Some attendees brought considerable experience in education policy, including as policymakers; others were exploring adding public will-building efforts to their agendas.

Why are education grantmakers interested in public policy formation and advocacy? Here's a sample of the questions they raised in advance of the seminar:

- "The public often follows the issue with the most media coverage. How do you build and sustain public will over the long term? How do you balance shorter-term objectives with long-term ones and still keep the attention of the public?"
- "We have a growing number of successful school-level models for high school transformation. How can these models be taken to scale, and what role can policy play in shaping those efforts?"
- "When does moving too quickly and aggressively on education policy result in undermining good schools? For example, the move in high schools to exit exams is often blamed for the increase in high school dropouts."
- "How should we go about developing a core set of performance measures or metrics that track whether the investments we make are contributing to the policy changes we support?"
- "What tactics are most effective in changing policymakers' opinions and creating policy action? How do we use publications or policy papers to inform policymakers and influence their views?"

How can policies formulated by government agencies and bodies enhance or accelerate funders' programmatic investments? And, more practically, how can funders influence those policies most effectively and strategically?

- "Is the key policy leverage point at the federal/national level, or at the state level? In what ways should the No Child Left Behind Act change the way I approach my policy work?"
- "What commonalities can attract urban, suburban and rural voices to a unified vision of educational accountability? Since state legislators base their votes on local opinions, what can we do to connect advocates in the urban ring to the suburbs, exurbs and small towns?"
- "What is the role of research in policy development and change?"
- "What are other foundations working on? Why do they think those changes are important? If there's a consensus among funders about what the big priorities in education really are, do we need to have a policy agenda, as well?"

In other words, how can policies formulated by government agencies and bodies enhance or accelerate funders' programmatic investments? And, more practically, how can funders influence those policies most effectively and strategically?

Where education policies matter

This partial list of the policy interests of grantmakers attending the June 2005 seminar shows how diverse and wide ranging the field of education policy really is.

SECTOR	POLICY INTERESTS FOR GRANTMAKERS
Federal government	- Funding for education research - Head Start regulations - No Child Left Behind school accountability provisions - Which college and community college students qualify for scholarships
State government	- Access to early education and services - The cost of college and community college - Course and graduation requirements in K-12 schools - Funding equity and investment in education - High school graduation initiatives - Teacher compensation - School administrator education and certification - School choice initiatives, including charters and vouchers - Teacher education and certification
Districts and localities	- Access to early education and services - After-school programming and standards - Closing achievement gaps among groups of students - Family and student engagement - Governance, management and labor relations - Replicating successful innovations - Small schools and other alternatives to traditional schools - Technology in education
Public colleges and universities	- Admission to post-secondary education, especially for low-income and minority students - Teacher education
Advocacy groups and think tanks	- Don't make policies, but conduct research on policy decisions and options and advocate for certain ideas or funding decisions

PART 1

Why engage in policy change?

Many foundations see that public policies have a strong influence on their programmatic work. In the seminar's opening sessions, participants examined two contrasting foundation-led efforts to improve the quality of American high schools by shaping (or reshaping) public policies and attitudes toward secondary education.

The first case study examined by institute participants, drawn from the early decades of the 20th century, vividly illustrated the power of persistently engaging influential groups and adapting to changing political and cultural conditions. The second case, from contemporary experience, showed how one foundation is attempting to blend program innovation and policy development to support its vision of change. Both examples prompted questions and some vigorous debate among the seminar group.

The first case was presented by Harvard Graduate School of Education professor Robert Schwartz, who tracked the decades-long campaign of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to promote a rigorous high school curriculum based on common academic standards. The foundation's primary and ultimately successful strategy, pursued almost from the time of its founding in 1905, was to push for the introduction of a single, standardized test to guide college admissions—a test that would replace a system of essay exams administered by the College Board on behalf of its member colleges.

As Schwartz explained, foundation president Henry Pritchett used "both money and power" to promote the shift to standardized exams: he cultivated powerful alliances, especially among university presidents; commissioned long-term research on students' college success; and made careful use of the findings to overcome opponents across the political spectrum.

The Carnegie Foundation changed its own tactics as public secondary education expanded, but it remained throughout an influential voice among an inner circle of policy insiders. Eventually, the foundation capitalized on developments related to World War II—including the U.S. Navy's interest in using multiple-choice tests to screen high school students across the country for technical jobs—to engineer the creation of the Educational Testing Service in 1947, along with the adoption of the Scholastic Aptitude Test as the nation's single college admissions test.

In the next session, Harvard Business School professor Stacey Childress led a case study discussion of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's evolving high school reform strategy. The case traced the thinking behind the foundation's 2002 decision to invest heavily in the creation of small high schools—a strategy that placed the foundation in a series of partnerships with local intermediary organizations and urban school districts. Childress then debriefed Gates senior policy officer Stephanie Sanford and colleagues about the foundation's new, equal emphasis on policy change and advocacy to advance improvements in U.S. high schools.

> You can't make change with program money alone. Savvy policy development and engagement with a broader public are also essential.

Sanford explained that the foundation has come to understand that, despite its massive investments in school creation and related programming, it can't "make change with program money alone." Savvy policy development and engagement with a broader public are also essential. Policy changes and different or new public invest-

ments can create the "enabling environment" for higher-performing schools and districts.

Still, she noted, the relationship between program and policy has often been uneasy, even within the foundation. While the "program side" is eager to innovate and therefore willing to "go ahead of hard data" with intentionally provocative strategies, the "policy side" prefers a more cautious approach, one calculated to achieve visible success and win public support.

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To accommodate both sides, the foundation has sought to focus on "proof points" to show that proposals can work in real school systems and to commission high-quality research on its own work, explained Sanford.

In terms of advocacy, she noted, Gates has created geographic teams that work with local constituencies for changes that are "close to the models." For example, after supporting the creation of an early college high school, the foundation sought to ensure that state policymakers know how regulations and funding streams needed to be changed to allow the approach to be replicated. As another example, the foundation has helped the National Governors Association work with states to adapt proven strategies for redesigning high schools and raising graduation rates to local conditions and realities.

In the discussions that followed, seminar participants drew out several lessons.

For some participants, the Carnegie example was a "cautionary tale" about the dangers of too relentless a focus on a desired outcome—to the point, some ventured, of abusing a foundation's influence. One grantmaker noted that the foundation had apparently "rolled over the plural voices of experts" who opposed the introduction of a single, standardized test.

Others pointed out that it seems clear in retrospect that the Carnegie strategy actually contributed to some of the problems that concern school reformers most about today's educational system. However, one participant reflected that foundations now are subject to a far higher level of scrutiny than Carnegie encountered in its first 40 years: "Who was watching?" he asked. "Not a lot of people. There are a lot more folks looking in on what we do today."

On the value of research designed to test the effectiveness of an intervention and foster its wider adoption, the participants again disagreed. "Research on what actually works has limited value," said one. "The question is: what appeals?"

Another made a similar point: "Policymakers aren't interested in research. If you want policy impact, don't overthink it. Go to leaders who know you and understand your model." But a grantmaker with a background in state government found that statement "insulting:" "There are plenty of people [in government] who care about what actually works for kids," she argued. "They're interested in outcomes, and they want to know what the research shows."

Another thread in the discussion dealt with the question of branding and name recognition. Several participants noted a connection between the prominence of the Carnegie and Gates foundations and their ability to command the attention of policymakers. One mentioned the advantage to Gates of having a "great messenger" in its founder: "Bill Gates is the right person to make the case for the importance of 21st century skills." A widely recognized name, idea or

model is also helpful. "We still talk about the 'Carnegie unit.' It's a brand," said one participant. "Gates has done a good job of branding the idea of the small school," said another. "People get it."

Several grantmakers raised concerns about the importance of local context in school reform and the challenge of trying to shape local attitudes. "We've got to keep in mind," observed a program officer from a national foundation, "that the policy argument is going to be different in different places." "I agree," said another, "and that's why we need to encourage common definitions of what's important."

Encouraging common definitions isn't easy. "There's not much research on how to shape public opinion," said one participant. "We did a parent survey, and it came back showing that parents think kids don't need college. What do we do with that?"

Another theme that emerged repeatedly was risk—specifically, the risk a foundation incurs when it gets involved in public policy advocacy. The seminar participants argued heatedly over what exactly a foundation puts at risk by venturing into the policy arena, with many arguing that foundations should be innovators and risk-takers. Pointing to the consequences of Carnegie's work on standardized testing, one participant expressed the view that the real risk is of "just being wrong."

But the risk that excited most concern among the seminar participants was the risk of controversy and public hostility. It's crucial, they agreed, to understand and adhere to legal limits on lobbying activities. But even if you do, said one, a foundation that actively urges policy change can get "slammed" by negative public opinion and accused of meddling from the outside. Maybe so, argued others, but taking such risks is an obligation that foundations ought to be willing to shoulder.

For case materials on the two foundation initiatives discussed, see:

"The Carnegie Foundation and the Standardized Testing Movement," prepared by Robert Schwartz, Harvard Graduate School of Education (May 2005). The case is adapted from three sources: Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *Private Power for the Public Good: A History of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*, Wesleyan University Press, 1983; Nicholas Lehmann, *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999; and Arthur G. Powell, *Lessons from Privilege: The American Prep School Tradition*, Harvard University Press, 1996.

Available in the GFE Knowledge Center at **www.edfunders.org** (search by title).

"The Gates Foundation and Small High Schools," prepared by Stig Leschly. Harvard Business School Publishing, 2002.

Available at **www.hbsp.harvard.edu**.

PART 2

Tools and skills *for* education advocacy

Foundations that choose to take an active role in advocating policy change need to do so with eyes open and toolboxes fully stocked. The work requires a sophisticated understanding of the legal constraints on foundation lobbying and a working knowledge of strategic communications and the techniques of political or advocacy campaigns. It's also essential to enter the work with a full awareness that it may provoke controversy. The seminar took up each of these topics in presentations and discussions.

LEGAL CONSTRAINTS ON FOUNDATION ADVOCACY

Abby Levine, an attorney with Alliance for Justice, explained the relevant laws on lobbying that apply to private foundations and the legal constraints on foundation advocacy. (The legal requirements for community foundations and "public" foundations are somewhat less restrictive.) A few points deserve special attention:

- For private foundations, partisan political activity is prohibited, and so is lobbying. Yet foundations are allowed to fund advocacy activities by other nonprofit organizations that do not meet the strict definition of lobbying.
- Moreover, foundations are allowed to support grantee organizations that engage in lobbying, so long as their grants are not earmarked specifically for lobbying and comply with a few other guidelines. Thus, many funders choose to fund nonprofits to advocate with the public and policymakers on issues in which they have an interest.
- Direct lobbying of elected officials by foundation staff or trustees is forbidden by federal law. But grantmakers are entitled to work with government officials, respond to requests for information, and be in touch with legislators, so long as they follow some common sense rules. In addition, foundation representatives are allowed to provide invited testimony to legislative committees, subject to certain rules.
- Grassroots lobbying by foundations is also forbidden, but communicating with the public is allowed. In other words, foundations can mount or fund campaigns that educate the public about important issues, so long as a campaign does not take a view on a specific piece of legislation (or ballot measure) or include a direct "call to action," such as a suggestion to phone legislators to urge them to vote a certain way.
- Allowable types of foundation issue advocacy—in other words, activities led or implemented by foundation staff or trustees rather than grantees—include research, public education, litigation, convening meetings of nonprofits and funders, and building grantees' ability to advocate. It's also worth noting that most school boards are "special purpose boards," not legislative bodies, and that communicating with their members is therefore not considered lobbying activity.
- Another important exception to the anti-lobbying rule is this: Once a piece of legislation has been passed, foundations are allowed to advise on the development of regulations by which it will be implemented.

The law generally allows far more latitude than many grantmakers realize.

Overall, Levine stressed the importance of getting legal advice when in doubt, although she also emphasized that the law generally allows far more latitude than many grantmakers realize.

Following Levine's presentation, the seminar participants raised a number of specific questions about situations they and their foundations have encountered. Several sought clarification about personal contacts with government officials. In general, Levine responded, it comes down to "whether you're asking an offi-

cial to influence a bill over which they actually have some influence. Meeting with a governor and asking her to veto a bill is lobbying; talking to her about regulatory changes or other executive branch policies and plans probably isn't."

Another strand of discussion concerned the rules for attending meetings with legislators and responding to their requests for advice. "Our foundation is in a small state," explained one grantmaker. "People know each other, and they know we've developed some expertise in education. If someone in the legislature wants our advice, can we be invited in?" Not necessarily, Levine answered: "There is no 'He asked me first' exception."

She encouraged the seminar participants to think through a standard response to such requests, something along the lines of "I'm sorry. We're a private foundation, and we're not allowed to express an opinion on that issue." Another grantmaker suggested referring public officials to grantees "who probably know as much as you do or more and aren't subject to the same restrictions."

On the other hand, foundations that conduct nonpartisan research and analysis are entitled to draw conclusions and disseminate their findings to legislators. The key, said Levine, is that "you need to be impartial in presenting the information and you need to distribute it widely—not just to people in one party or who basically agree with you."

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A few grantmakers had questions about supporting or giving grants to organizations whose websites communicate strong positions on legislative questions and policy issues. Levine explained that federal law lacks clarity on internet communications but that a few rules of thumb have emerged. She cited, for example, the so-called one-click rule, which holds that funders are not thought to be responsible for linked material that is more than one click away from a grantee's homepage.

THE COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN

Jennifer Hahn, a communications specialist with Douglas Gould and Company, led the group in a two-part discussion about developing messages and effective advocacy campaigns. Throughout the sessions, she drew on examples from her own work with foundation and nonprofit clients, including her long-time involvement with the New York Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit challenging the adequacy of state education funding, especially for schools in New York City, and a 2003 project to test public attitudes regarding the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation.

For the latter project, Hahn's company was charged with helping a group of clients figure out how to talk about NCLB in ways that would increase support for public education and help advocates use NCLB as a lever for generating additional resources for schools. In addition, the firm probed for evidence that the public might be receptive to amending or restructuring NCLB in ways its clients viewed as making the law's school accountability provisions more constructive and workable for schools.

Hahn's presentation on effective messages and the discussion that followed yielded some overarching lessons:

- A good message is
  - True
  - Believable
  - Supported by facts
  - Spoken by the right person
  - Action-oriented
  - About "you"
  - Repeated
  - Framed to win
  - Emotional, or connected to people's core values

- The most effective spokespeople on education issues are teachers (unless they are talking about their own salaries), parents, local business people (not outsiders), and advocates and experts.
- How a message is framed can determine its ability to generate the desired response. In their testing about NCLB-related issues, for example, Hahn and her colleagues uncovered four basic "mindsets" about public education and then tested which of these four frames would be the best way of talking about NCLB to increase support for public education.
- Start by referring to big ideas, then move toward specific issues. People tend to think about social problems and policy change at three levels: (1) big ideas, such as justice, community, family, equality or opportunity; (2) issue types, such as women's rights, education, children's issues or work; (3) specific issues, such as school finance, high-stakes testing, daycare or minimum wage. Advocates often operate at the third level, while the public operates at the first.

In the second part of the session, Hahn and the seminar participants looked at the mechanics of a full-fledged advocacy campaign. Specifically, Hahn outlined ten readiness criteria that foundations should consider when deciding whether or not to support an advocacy campaign or launch one themselves. *(See sidebar, page 14.)*

As they discussed the campaign checklist, the seminar participants added ideas, lessons and a few questions from their own experiences. In many cases, they pointed to issues and situations specific to education advocacy.

One grantmaker, for example, said that he has commissioned scholarly research on low-income students' access to higher education but finds it "extremely difficult to get academics to stay on message" when he needs their voices for a campaign. Another noted that she pays close attention to the school calendar when planning activities for local media, parents or educators. Another talked about scanning for kindergarten teachers who could be strong spokespeople for a citywide early education campaign: "We used public officials and business leaders, but we realized that we needed someone closer to the kids."

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Foundations and the Law: Online Resources

The following organizations provide a wide range of detailed, current information about foundation and nonprofit advocacy on their websites and via email alerts:

Alliance for Justice
www.allianceforjustice.org
Technical assistance, guides, newsletters and advisories on foundation-supported advocacy

Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest
www.clpi.org
Online tutorial and other information on nonprofit and foundation lobbying and advocacy

OMB Watch
www.ombwatch.org
Information and email alerts on the advocacy rights of nonprofits

For a detailed handbook on legal guidelines governing foundation advocacy, see the Alliance for Justice's 2004 publication, *Investing in Change: A Funder's Guide to Supporting Advocacy*. The guide may be ordered from www.allianceforjustice.org.

Launching an Advocacy Campaign: A Readiness Checklist

Adapted from a presentation by Jennifer Hahn, Douglas Gould and Company

An advocacy campaign costs real money. Before you decide to support a grantee's campaign or run one yourself, be sure to review this checklist.

AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN REQUIRES:

1. **A campaign strategy and management, including:**
   - **Leadership.** Someone has to run the campaign, call the shots and make strategic adjustments over time. This can be an executive director, campaign manager or deputized "special projects" coordinator.
   - **Message development.** The campaign needs a message platform with supporting talking points that are used consistently and repetitively.
   - **Policy targets.** These should describe the levers the campaign seeks to move: budgetary, governance-related, legislative, administrative or regulatory.
   - **Strategy.** The strategy should be written and distributed to key actors.
   - **Campaign personnel.** Public information officers and other staff are needed. If this isn't practical, local volunteers can be pressed into service. Skilled volunteer coordinators are invaluable.
2. **A targeted list of stakeholders,** organized in a database that allows for regular contact.
3. **Well-trained spokespeople,** representing a diversity of stakeholders and prepared with the tools they need to succeed: fact sheets, media kits, prepared remarks, answers to FAQs and leave-behind materials.
4. **Tactics for communicating with each stakeholder group,** such as web-based interactions, public engagement meetings, a designated speakers bureau and mailings.
5. **Public education activities** to build awareness and visibility.
6. **A timetable for action.**
7. **Systems for producing materials to brand and promote the campaign,** including a logo to be used on all materials, a general campaign brochure, information for policymakers and stakeholders, a media kit and signage (banners, podium signs and outdoor ads).
8. **A data-gathering system** to collect key facts and figures and disseminate them selectively to policymakers, stakeholders and the media.
9. **A steady stream of information,** to be sent out regularly to the media. Regular press releases and media pitching are important. Reacting to the media cycle should not be allowed to take the campaign off track.
10. **A detailed budget and staffing plan,** addressing each component.

For more detail, see "Strategies & Messages Framing Public Education" and "Designing Effective Advocacy Campaigns," both presentations by Jennifer Hahn. Available in the GFE Knowledge Center at **www.edfunders.org** (search by title).

Several participants compared notes on collaborations between national and community or other geographically focused foundations. "Why don't national foundations work with us more on advocacy?" asked a program officer from a community foundation. "Legally, we have more latitude than they do, plus we can do local fundraising. We've got great databases and fantastic connections with locally credible and influential people."

A grantmaker from a national foundation agreed but noted that community foundations sometimes get leery about rocking the boat: "We've worked with them in one state. We've found that they're willing to do power plays behind the scenes, but they won't necessarily go public."

Coordinating a local strategy with a national campaign can also be difficult, according to a grantmaker whose foundation works in a single state: "Early childhood education is a national priority, but how does our statewide drive interact with a national campaign? It's hard to get the timing right."

A few people shared warnings about messaging. "Don't go overboard with the branding idea," cautioned one. "If it's overdone, it can make everything seem trite." Another urged careful attention to the order in which policy priorities are listed: "Always put 'Change the funding formula' last," he said. "In education, that's the third rail."

MANAGING OPPOSITION AND CONTROVERSY

Turning up the heat raises the risk of opposition and public controversy, a reality that the seminar treated in two sessions. In a lunchtime conversation, Boston Foundation president Paul Grogan told the story of his foundation's efforts to expand a category of experimental public schools known as "pilot schools," a process that involved managing the opposition of the local teachers union.

In addition, the seminar participants discussed their own experiences with controversy in a forum moderated by William McKersie, associate dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a former grantmaker with the Joyce and Cleveland foundations.

Grogan began his talk by describing his own extensive experience in education and community development and by setting the political scene. Boston's traditional power bases—business, the Catholic Church and the Irish political machine—have been "crumbling" in recent decades, he explained, producing a leadership vacuum in which a strong mayoralty has been able to drive needed change. Named president of the Boston Foundation in 2001, Grogan received an explicit mandate from his board to raise the foundation's visibility and make it a more effective lever for civic improvement.

> Turning up the heat raises the risk of opposition and public controversy.

Grogan believed that improving schools should be a priority for the foundation and began to look for opportunities to make a difference.

He learned that the city had already established a small number of "pilot schools," public schools that operate with more flexibility and autonomy than conventional schools. According to the school district, pilot schools were intended as a way for the school district and teachers union to work collaboratively and to "experiment" with innovative ideas in quality instruction and demonstrate replicable practices. Existing public schools can convert to pilot status by a vote of two-thirds of the faculty.

The "pilot school" mechanism had been established under a 1994 agreement between the school system and the teachers union as a counter to Massachusetts law allowing for charter schools, although it had seen little use. If the Boston Foundation offered planning grants, Grogan reasoned, perhaps more schools would opt to become "pilots."

The mayor was in favor of the move. The teachers union, initially suspicious, relented and offered its support. The foundation announced a

program of planning grants and, although the amounts were small, was flooded with applications. Thirteen schools received planning grants, 10 of which took conversion to a faculty vote. Of those, five faculties approved conversion by the required two-thirds majority, of which four received the final required approval from the union president (per the terms of the school district/teacher union agreement).

In 2004, trouble began when the union president refused to approve the conversion of the fifth school, and the process stalled. In April 2005, the union issued a press release proposing that the number of pilot schools be frozen and that a new type of school, "discovery schools," take their place. The "discovery schools" would share many of the characteristics of pilot schools but would use a strict policy on overtime pay.

> It's good to be criticized. There's almost always fierce resistance to necessary change.

Grogan saw the union's proposal as a cynical attempt to derail serious reform. He took his objections to the mayor, then went to the press. Despite the complexity of the situation, the *Boston Globe* quickly ran several stories and editorials. The city school system and the union continue to negotiate, but Grogan believes that the foundation's involvement has shed needed light onto a murky situation that would otherwise have defaulted to no pilot schools being opened.

Asked to share lessons about navigating effectively through education policy battles, Grogan listed several:

- Look for levers for change through deep engagement with people in the public sector. In particular, build relationships with people with very tough jobs: they need company, and they're eager to see their work pay off in real improvements.
- Cultivate the press. Make sure they understand the story as you go, so they see the significance of unexpected events.
- Take risks—but make sure your board is with you.
- Try to hire staff who are comfortable with working under pressure in high-profile situations, then figure out how to make them glad they're working with you.
- Keep track of how you're perceived by conducting grantee surveys, monitoring contributions and, most of all, talking to a lot of people.
- Remember that it's good to be criticized. There's almost always fierce resistance to necessary change.
- Don't underestimate your influence. Foundations have more clout and credibility than they know.

In the discussion that followed, the seminar participants exchanged views on managing and even capitalizing on the public controversy that can result when a foundation challenges the status quo directly or through the work of its grantees. Said one, "We're in the business of school reform. If we do our jobs right, powerless kids will win and some powerful adults will lose. We have to be ready for that."

Another participant, citing his foundation's up-and-down relationship with local government, noted that concerns about risk are sometimes overblown: "We worked with them, we sued them, and we worked with them again a year later. They were mad at us, but they got over it."

Still, participants agreed, it is tremendously important for a foundation to be strategic in the public arena. Before filing the suit, for example, the grantmaker whose foundation sued its local government gave city officials a day's notice, thus preventing them from feeling "completely blindsided." The foundation's purpose, he reminded the seminar, was not to attack them personally: "We actually want them to solve the problem."

Others talked about dividing up roles among foundations: "Local funders sometimes have to take more moderate positions," said one, "while national funders can do more finger pointing." One grantmaker, a veteran of many advocacy battles, argued that "pooling dollars is a safer way to do advocacy than going it alone. But you have to agree up-front that no foundation is going to take credit for anything." Another stressed the importance of working closely with grantees and treating them as partners in an advocacy campaign.

A grantmaker from a large, national foundation emphasized, however, that the legal constraints on foundation lobbying pose legal risks for foundations bold enough to challenge powerful political forces. At a minimum, government officials can ask for an audit—a process that consumes considerable time and resources. Plus, he added, a foundation's "reputation as a fair arbiter" may be compromised by supporting grantees who are willing to use confrontational tactics.

"One of our grantees called for demonstrations on the steps of the state capitol," he recalled. "Some people weren't comfortable with that, but we realized we had to let them be themselves."

Several participants commented in closing that they often feel constrained by the aversion of their foundations' executive leadership and board members to any sort of public controversy. "I've seen people walk the plank [when a foundation's leadership grew worried about the criticism it was receiving]," said one. "This is real."

Don't underestimate your influence. Foundations have more clout and credibility than they know.

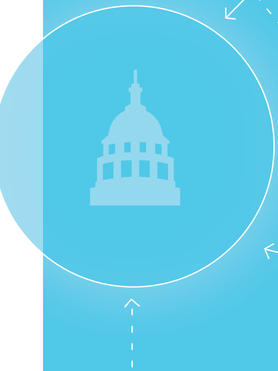
In response, one grantmaker described an activity she coordinated for her board: "We were about to release a report that was very critical of a state agency, and we knew it would be controversial. We organized a point-counterpoint for the board meeting, so they could see what the issues were. I think it helped."

Yet another admitted that she and her colleagues often worry that the board will be angry when they learn that the foundation is being criticized, only to find them unfazed: "The controversy we deal with is kid's stuff compared with what some of them have gone through in business."

PART 3

Philanthropy *and* the political process

In a session led by Richard Elmore, professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the seminar participants delved into the world of coalition politics where education reforms are frequently advanced. Elmore presented a case on Early Education for All, a campaign to create a statewide system of early childhood education in Massachusetts, in which the Caroline and Sigmund Schott Foundation and its related public charity arm, the Schott Center for Public and Early Education, played key roles. The presentation and follow-up discussion examined possible roles for philanthropy and drew implications for foundations' engagement in the policy arena.



The case study presented to institute participants traced the history of the Early Education for All campaign from its beginnings in 1998 at a meeting between Greg Jobin-Leeds, president of the Schott Foundation, and a dynamic local leader, Margaret Blood. Blood had earlier succeeded in pulling together an unlikely coalition of advocates, civic leaders and business people who had worked together to pass legislation to provide health insurance to all children in Massachusetts. Now she was interested in leading the charge for universal preschool.

The foundation had a strong and established interest in early education, and its leaders had seen that their ability to work directly on behalf of legislative change was limited by their status as a private foundation. (Indeed, the creation of a related public charity by the foundation's donors at about this time was intended to address this problem precisely. As Jobin-Leeds is quoted as saying in the case materials, "It was obvious [that we should create the Schott Center] when our grantees came to us and asked us to do something we couldn't do. They said, 'Would you hold a meeting so we can figure out our legislative strategy?' At times, we wanted to be able to have that flexibility.")

Jobin-Leeds agreed to provide seed money for a campaign, which was launched under Blood's leadership in the summer of 2000. In the early days, the foundation also offered crucial logistical support, helping find the first office space for the campaign and handling its money for about a year until Blood created an independent nonprofit organization.

The struggle to define the relative roles of the foundation and the campaign soon began. The foundation was committed to providing ongoing support, yet Jobin-Leeds also pressed Blood to widen the network of supporters. Early in the campaign, for example, she asked him for funding for an opinion polling project and was surprised when he offered only a third of what she needed. She was forced to go out and do additional fundraising—a task she resented but which she later acknowledged was "the right thing because it forced us to get funders early."

As the case illustrates, personal and political tensions built and subsided repeatedly throughout the process, with each side bristling at perceived slights and missteps by the other. In retrospect, both parties attribute their struggle to the maturation process each was experiencing.

And in the long run, they won. Significant portions of "An Act Establishing Early Education for All" were passed by the state legislature in April 2004, and a statewide commissioner of the new Department of Early Education and Care was appointed a year later. Additional portions have been filed for consideration in 2005-06 with powerful, bipartisan support.

The Iron Triangle describes the strong, closed relationship in American public policy formation between legislatures, the executive branch and interest groups. How can philanthropy help hold people together during a political transaction?

In leading the discussion of the case, Elmore employed the political science concept of the "iron triangle"—the strong, closed relationship in American public policy formation between legislatures, the executive branch and interest

groups—to map the influence of advocacy networks and philanthropy on the policymaking process. *(See illustration, page 21.)* "Where does philanthropy fit?" Elmore asked the seminar participants. "And how can philanthropy help hold people together during a political transaction?"

In this case, the participants noted, the foundation and the campaign stayed together because of their common interest in change—an interest they pursued more effectively once they had agreed on some boundaries. Plus, working together helped each side pursue other interests.

What Greg Jobin-Leeds and the foundation needed were public identification with an issue they cared about and a win. What Margaret Blood and the campaign needed were a win—plus support, freedom and authority. With those interests secure, they were able to work together to reframe the definition of the early education problem in Massachusetts, assemble a coalition of funders and supporters, and achieve a landmark legislative change.

In their discussion, the participants admired the skill and resourcefulness with which Blood had led the campaign and noted how difficult it is to find a nonprofit leader of her caliber. "To do a job like that," said one, "you need to be intensely ambitious and have developed a full array of skills." Grantmakers, they agreed, need to be tolerant of personal characteristics that advance the effort, even if those characteristics sometimes rub them the wrong way.

Grantmakers need to be tolerant of grantees' characteristics that advance the effort, even if those characteristics sometimes rub them the wrong way.

Looking ahead to what Schott and Blood should do next, the seminar participants worried about how the legislation would be translated into action. "How do they provide services to poor kids, who need it the most, and still deliver quality?" asked a grantmaker who researched a similar system for her state. "If it's a universal system, does everyone get a cut?" Said another, "When the regulations and budget get written, all the deals they thought they had are up for grabs."

"Implementation," Elmore responded, "is politics by other means."

For materials discussed, see:

"Changing State Policy: The Early Education for All Campaign," prepared by Anand Vaishnan under the supervision of Robert Schwartz, Harvard Graduate School of Education (May 2005).

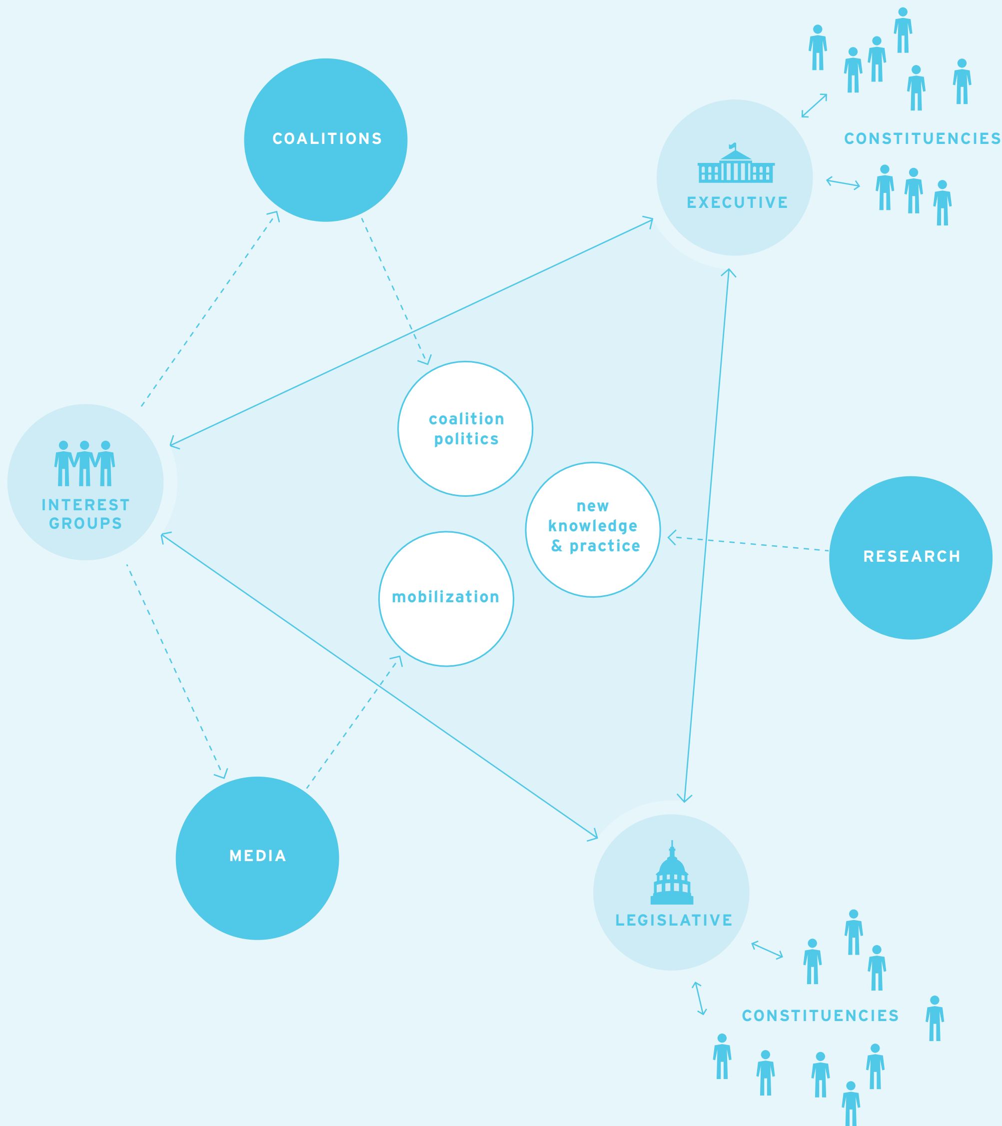
"Political Strategy and Philanthropy," a presentation by Richard F. Elmore.

Both available in the GFE Knowledge Center at **www.edfunders.org** (search by title).

The Iron Triangle

Adapted from a presentation by Richard Elmore, Harvard Graduate School of Education

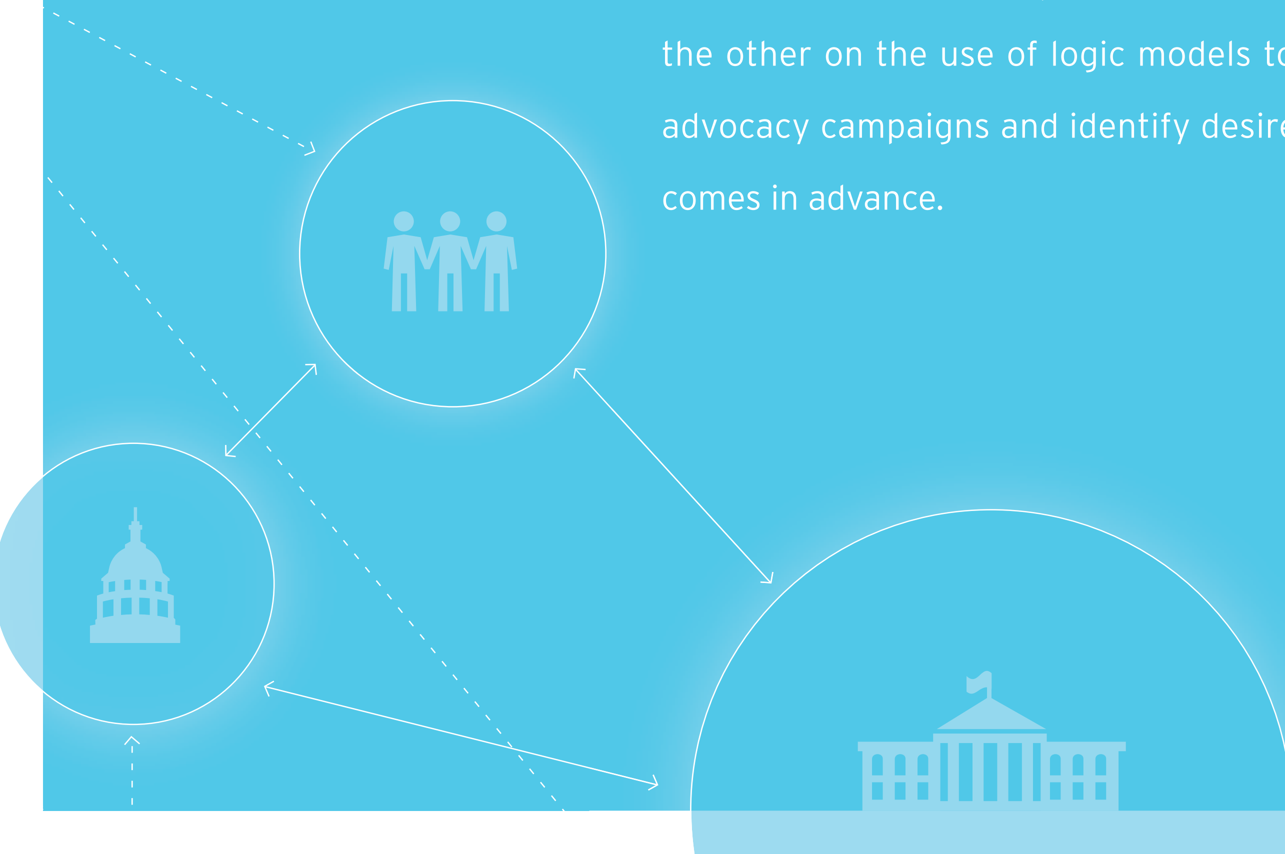
Through coalitions, the media and research, philanthropy and advocacy networks influence the policymaking process.



PART 4

Planning *and* evaluating education policy initiatives

Advocacy resists most types of formal evaluation, yet funders often want something more reliable than anecdote to indicate that their work is achieving influence. The seminar took up the difficult topic of evaluating policy initiatives in two sessions, one on the evaluation of the New Standards Project in the 1990s and the other on the use of logic models to chart advocacy campaigns and identify desired outcomes in advance.



The New Standards Project was not primarily an advocacy effort, but its designers intended that it would precipitate several profound changes in educational practice and policy—and thus it serves as a useful case to examine how grant-funded efforts can influence public policies and funding streams.

New Standards was an ambitious and complex program supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation from 1992 through 1997. Its explicit objective was to create a new performance assessment system for elementary and secondary education in the United States, based on a comprehensive set of content and performance standards that the project would develop in collaboration with teachers and school districts.

The seminar session began with a quick overview of the initiative, presented by four of its principal figures:

- Robert Schwartz, who served as program officer at The Pew Trusts;
- Patricia Patrizi, who headed the trusts' evaluation unit;
- Richard Elmore, one of the project's two external evaluators; and
- Lauren Resnick, co-director of the project's activities at the University of Pittsburgh, who joined the session by teleconference.

Elmore explained that New Standards was an "attempt to reframe the entire debate about testing and standards in the U.S. The plan was to get Americans used to the idea of a common way of assessing students and to drive assessment toward broad, multiple-method approaches." Further, he noted, "at the time, textbook publishers set the standards in this country. New Standards tried to institute a more bottom-up model" by placing teachers on the drafting teams.

Partly because evidence of the program's impact on student outcomes would be long in coming, the foundations chose to evaluate the process itself on an ongoing basis in what Patrizi called "an early experiment in reflective practice." The foundations formed an evaluation steering committee, which included outside evaluators, members of their own evaluation units, program staff and grantees. The committee met regularly to manage the process, delve for insights that could be used to refine the program plan, and search for evidence of impact.

Set expectations for the impact of large-scale reform proposals more on the realities of the political system, and the capacities of the project leaders to adapt to these realities.

In his final report, Elmore outlined some of what the committee observed:

> Part of the learning emerged from confronting the myriad administrative and political relationships entailed in making the project work—for example, learning that states don't necessarily reform assessment by adopting new assessment packages wholesale, or that standards developed by professional associations aren't necessarily useful as a basis for developing new forms of assessment.
>
> And part of the learning grew out of responding to shifts in the complex

> political environment around standards-based reform in the U.S.—for example, learning that states and localities don't see performance-based examinations and multiple-choice, norm-referenced examinations necessarily as mutually exclusive alternatives.

Later in the same report, Elmore distilled a lesson for grantmakers regarding program innovation and policy change:

> The first major lesson for foundations, then, is to set their expectations for the impact of large-scale reform proposals more on the realities of the political system, and the capacities of the project leaders to adapt to these realities. . . . The central issue for foundations is not whether the ideas embodied in the rhetoric are politically and institutionally feasible at the outset, but whether those in charge of large-scale projects are capable of managing the kind of adaptations that are required when ambitious ideas confront the political and institutional realities of the American educational system.

In discussion, the seminar participants asked for more detail about the evaluation protocol and how it fostered dialogue between policy and practice perspectives in a complex environment. Patrizi responded by outlining a set of guiding

Guiding Questions for Evaluating a Complex Initiative

Developed by Patricia Patrizi, based on the work of Donald Schon

1. A strategy is bound to rest on broad goals and assumptions (stated or not) and to contain components or "pieces" or sub-programs whose execution is intended to lead to the achievement of the strategic goals. What are the main "pieces?"
2. What leads you to believe these are the right pieces? Why do you believe these are the right pieces? What would be the likely alternative way to go about the strategy?
3. What priorities have you given to the various piece of your strategy, and why are some more important than others?
4. One needs to distinguish between the strategy as espoused or planned, and the strategy as actually carried out. Do the pieces of your strategy exist in the field as portrayed in your plan, and what do we know about how they perform in the field?
5. What do we know about the scale needed to address the problem? Is the effort designed at a threshold level such that "effects" will not be drowned out by the noise around it?
6. Similarly, related to the quality of the work, is it good enough in its execution to have the effects as planned?
7. What amount of relationship is needed among the parts to enable the strategy to function as a whole?
8. What is the relationship, intended or actual, between the foundation's strategic interventions and initiatives undertaken by others in the field?
9. What are the likely scenarios for the unfolding of the strategy? Imagine how the change will occur: What are the ways that your programs (in conjunction with the actions of other institutions) will lead to the outcomes envisioned?
10. What indicators will you observe to monitor whether things are going well or whether course corrections are needed? Given the complexity of the initiative, what level and type of oversight is needed to guide it properly?

questions, originally developed by evaluation steering committee member Donald Schon, which informed the New Standards evaluation. *(See sidebar, page 24.)*

Patrizi explained that the evaluation committee's emphasis on constant, collective learning helped them look beyond the difficult but not necessarily very informative task of tracking and measuring outcomes: "We could have done nothing but track system buy-in, and that would have kept us busy for the whole six years," she said. Instead, the evaluators were able to focus more clearly on strategy, or understanding why activities were working or not within the specific, complex environments of the project's multiple sites."

In the final session, James Honan, lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, walked the seminar participants through the process of developing a logic model. A logic model, he explained, is basically "a series of if-then propositions that begins with your planned work and ends with your intended results," moving from resources or inputs through activities, outputs and outcomes until ultimately specifying desired long-term impact.

"The farther out you get," Honan noted, "the harder it is to ascribe causality—or even to know if anything actually happened." Still, he added, logic models are being used by people in many sectors, since "we all want to know if our work is having an impact."

The institute program closed with a discussion of logic models—or theories of change—because they can provide a helpful way for funders investing in policy change or advocacy efforts to think deeply about how resources link to results. A logic model makes explicit the assumptions about how a foundation's resources—including its money but also other assets it brings to the table—are being mobilized and why they will lead to the desired result or change.

Referring back to their earlier discussion of the New Standards Project, several participants raised questions about the applicability of logic models. "It seems overly linear for policy work," objected one. "Policy change requires constant juggling of many factors. How can we reconcile the logic model with the juggling?" Or, as another grantmaker asked, "How can you factor in the messiness of the political system?"

A logic model makes explicit the assumptions about how a foundation's resources are being mobilized and why they will lead to the desired result or change.

Several people responded by arguing that a logic model might be helpful precisely because policy change is messy and hard to track. "No single organization is responsible for policy impact," said one participant, "so it's important to try to identify your hoped-for contribution to the impact you're after."

"New Standards didn't have any of the impact we believed it would," Robert Schwartz reflected, "but other impacts did emerge, such as teacher knowledge and behavior," which the foundation might have tracked if it had anticipated them in a logic model.

Another grantmaker pointed out that constructing a logic model might prompt a foundation to be more disciplined about "documenting where you start and tracking benchmarks." One suggested thinking through—and perhaps even mapping—the potential contributions of other actors, including state or local officials. "Yes," agreed

James Honan's presentation and the small-group activity used rubrics from the *W. K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide*, published in 2004 as part of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's Evaluation Toolkit.

The guide is available at www.wkkf.org.

another, "but you need to remember that policy-makers' logic models are different from yours. The impact they're after is to get reelected."

In the final hour, the seminar participants broke into small groups and constructed general logic models for policy initiatives in four areas: school-to-college transitions, early childhood education, high school reform and public support for education. Honan advised each group to begin by asking, "What are our intended results?" and "What are the key elements of our work?" working backward through the following categories:

After reporting back, they reviewed the process together. Most of all, they realized that the process would force planners to be specific about how change happens and why participants would be interested enough to get involved. "Why would two-year colleges want to be part of our efforts to reform high schools?" asked one group, "What's the win for them?"

The early childhood group wondered how a campaign could bridge the cultural gap between the most committed advocates and the business community. The groups also found themselves separating the things foundation money can buy—research, meetings, technical assistance—from other equally important intangibles such as political will, visibility and local pride.

Closing the session, Schwartz noted that the small groups' work showed that developing a logic model forces planners to examine their assumptions at every stage, which is essential to managing and measuring the messy work of policy change.

GFE Funders' Forum

Using information for policy change:
The only reason to do evaluation (in this context)

As a follow-up to the 2005 institute, Grantmakers for Education hosted a week-long "Funders' Forum" on its online Knowledge Center to probe more deeply the question of how foundations might evaluate policy-change and advocacy campaigns. GFE invited institute faculty member and evaluation expert Patricia Patrizi to moderate a discussion and field questions about what funders should measure and how.

Patrizi's opening "remarks" at the online forum are excerpted below. Visit the GFE Knowledge Center at www.edfunders.org (search for "Patrizi Forum") for a complete copy of her remarks and to see the conversation between Patrizi and GFE members.

As a career-long evaluator, I'd like to put forward a heretical proposition: Policy change should be evaluated only when there is a reason to evaluate.

After we conduct campaigns to change public opinion, it is natural for funders to want to know whether public opinion has actually changed. However, we can never know if foundation actions lead to a policy result. After all, this is politics, and too much happens "behind the scenes."

Thus, foundations should give up the ship in hoping for *attributable* change in the field of policy change efforts. Policy change always requires many actors and many actions. No one actor is ever fully or solely responsible in this work. And, from a legal point of view, that is how it should be for foundations.

From my vantage point, the most important reason to evaluate policy change efforts is to see if you are on the right track. Evaluations' role within any political context should be to inform the change process.

My position is analogous to how one might consider "evaluating" an election for public office. The campaign has a strategy, which in evaluation jargon might be called a theory of change. We would expect the campaign to commission polls and track the positions of key actors and constituencies. As information comes in from these sources, we would not expect the campaign to stick feverishly to a strategy that doesn't seem to be working. We'd expect corrections. This makes sense. Campaigns need data for decision making in real time—not afterward, when the work is finished.

These are the same considerations for foundations supporting advocacy efforts to create policy change. The questions that foundations should help answer relate to the effectiveness of the policy change strategy as it *unfolds*, so that decision makers can make good choices in the middle of the action and adjust the strategy as necessary.

The questions that drive policy-change "evaluation" should be the same ones that drive a strategy or campaign over time:

- What is the nature of the opposition?
- What does early feedback say about how strategies are being received?
- What would we look for as an indication that things are going in the right—or wrong—direction?
- What do the polls tell us? What do the experts tell us?

In this context, the most important role of a foundation is to insist on good information and to insist that it is used. The key is to remember that the primary user is the advocate and that the foundation is second.

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PRINCIPLES FOR

Effective Education Grantmaking

principle no. 1

Discipline and Focus

In education, where public dollars dwarf private investments, a funder has greater impact when grantmaking is carefully planned and targeted.

principle no. 2

Knowledge

Information, ideas and advice from diverse sources, as well as openness to criticism and feedback, can help a funder make wise choices.

principle no. 3

Resources Linked to Results

A logic-driven "theory of change" helps a grantmaker think clearly about how specific actions will lead to desired outcomes, thus linking resources with results.

principle no. 4

Effective Grantees

A grantmaker is effective only when its grantees are effective. Especially in education, schools and systems lack capacity and grantees (both inside and outside the system) may require deeper support.

principle no. 5

Engaged Partners

A funder succeeds by actively engaging its partners—the individuals, institutions and communities connected with an issue—to ensure "ownership" of education problems and their solutions.

principle no. 6

Leverage, Influence and Collaboration

The depth and range of problems in education make it difficult to achieve meaningful change in isolation or by funding programs without changing public policies or opinions. A grantmaker is more effective when working with others to mobilize and deploy as many resources as possible in order to advance solutions.

principle no. 7

Persistence

The most important problems in education are often the most complex and intractable, and will take time to solve.

principle no. 8

Innovation and Constant Learning

Even while acting on the best available information—as in Principle #2—a grantmaker can create new knowledge about ways to promote educational success. Tracking outcomes, understanding costs and identifying what works—and what doesn't—are essential to helping grantmakers and their partners achieve results.

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