

Calls to action

Better empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion

To get to a better future in which equity is integral to monitoring, evaluation, and learning, and we consistently engage constituents in ongoing and systematic feedback that provides choice and agency, we need to actively chart a new path. The following are some high-priority hypotheses about how to get to the better future.

1 Equity is consistently considered in and supported by MEL efforts

Without explicit efforts to integrate equity into everything we do, we are unlikely to make the transformative changes that our field leaders and experts across multiple disciplines identified as part of a better future. For monitoring, evaluation and learning efforts, we've heard multiple ideas to try:



Developing asset-based resources: Many actors use data with a deficit-frame, focusing entirely on challenges communities face rather than also including strengths and resources they have to draw upon. By focusing solely on deficits, funders can often overlook real assets that can be used to help solve critical community challenges. What if we developed best practice resources and a toolkit for asset-based monitoring, evaluation, and learning, including for the creation of relevant data?



Developing standards for cultural competence and equity-focused evaluation: While the AEA has guiding principles for cultural competence, there aren't clear standards for evaluators to demonstrate evidence of cultural competence during the selection process. What could it look like if clear evidence of proficiency were a standard part of evaluator selection? Could a third party develop a cultural competence examination and issue certification to evaluators?

2 Constituent feedback is an essential practice

How can we get to a better future where collecting constituent feedback is an expected, systematic, and ongoing practice for nonprofits and foundations? The following calls to action are just the beginning in broadening and deepening practice:



Creating tools to help organizations systematically collect feedback: There is some momentum to empower constituent feedback but the practice of collecting constituent insight still appears to be elusive to many organizations. Could a group of organizations create a "constituent insight toolkit" that provides a quick overview of the range of available options and resources to enable quick and easy implementation?



Measuring and tracking the integration of constituent insight to help hold organizations accountable for its use: Could the field develop a way of measuring the incorporation of constituent voice to enable donors to make funding decisions based on the use of constituent voice and to enable organizations to benchmark against themselves and others for improvement? Could a group of organizations in an issue area agree to prioritize these benchmarks in funding decisions, with assistance for implementation?

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3 Constituents are empowered to make their own choices

To get to a better future in which constituents have agency in defining their needs and assessing the success of interventions, there are a range of approaches we could try:



Providing the infrastructure for constituent decision-making: Some resource allocation and other initiative decisions could be made by constituents themselves if the infrastructure existed to enable them to provide their votes. What if funders supported an initiative to model what real constituent-informed decision-making would look like and how it would operate?



Connecting constituents with each other: Constituents can be an important source of information and assistance for each other. What if one or more organizations scale platforms and/or develop resource guidelines to enable organizations to promote sharing and connection between constituents?



Identifying interventions where cash transfers are a meaningful counterfactual: What if we developed an analysis of issues and types of interventions where cash transfers could be a viable counterfactual, to promote calls to action to determine if specific interventions outperformed cash transfers? This would both shift the paradigm to one that presumes constituent agency and knowledge and create a useful experimental comparison.

4 Data rights are secured

Without assurance that we can adequately safeguard the privacy and security of constituents' data, we won't make true progress across many of the elements of the characteristics of a better future. We can try multiple paths to make real progress:



Using data stewards: There are particular concerns about the development of open and integrated data systems with the data of vulnerable populations. Could funders support the establishment of data stewards for key data systems who would make informed decisions to ensure the integrity of the data use?



Developing common tools and technologies: Nonprofits often don't have the resources to adequately ensure that their constituent and other data is safe and protected. What if one or more funders supported the development of a shared software for nonprofits to install add-ons for privacy, security, etc., or the development of shared digital services?



Compensating constituents for their data: Constituents are not directly compensated when their data is used. Are there certain data, issues, or populations where compensating constituents would be productive? What if funders compensated constituents for their data financially or through other means, or otherwise treated it as a real asset belonging to the constituents?

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