

Expected and better futures



Playing out these different trends, both individually and in combination, allows us to begin to anticipate what the future might look like for monitoring, evaluation, and learning. As we talked with field leaders and experts across multiple disciplines, two very different outlooks became apparent for monitoring, evaluation, and learning:

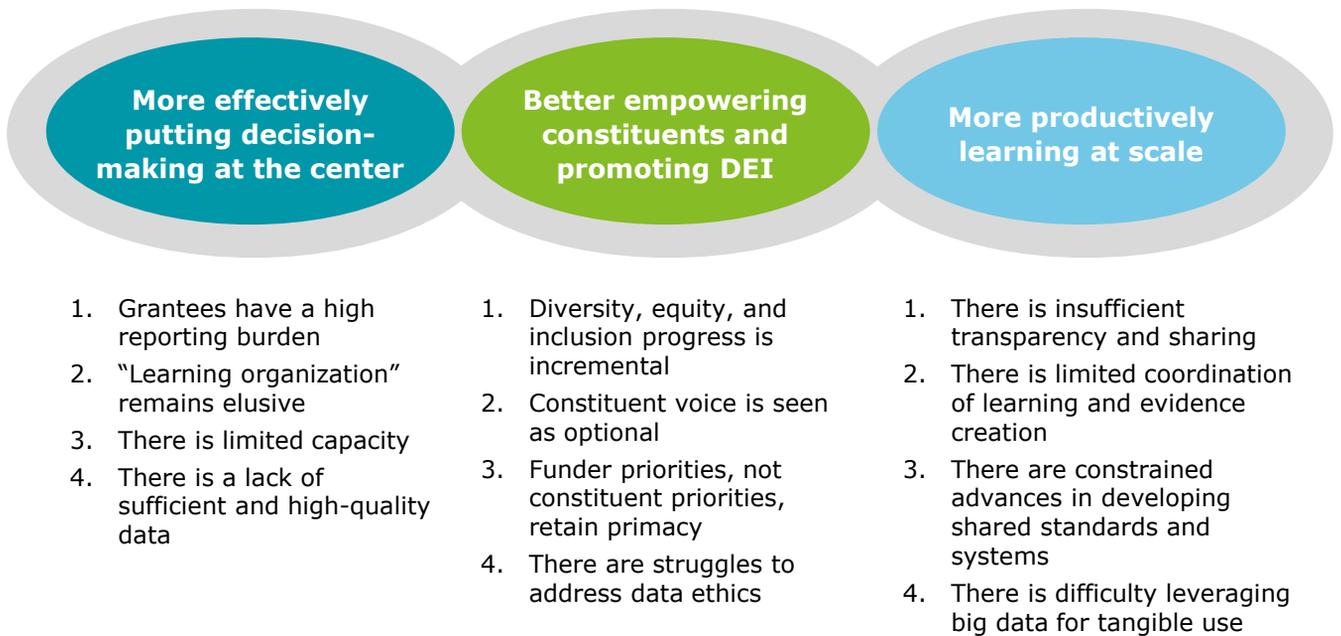
- There was a clear **expected future**—the default view of what most people anticipate if they simply project forward current trends and behaviors, without any interventions
- But people also saw a more promising, **better future** that they hope the field can realize, which will require organizations to change current behavior and make targeted interventions in the larger system

It is important to note that these futures are not intended to be predictions, and complete agreement isn't necessary for every particular aspect within them. Instead, the concept of the expected and better futures provides a way to enter into a productive conversation about what our hopes are for monitoring, evaluation, and learning; where we'd like to be; and what concrete steps we believe are needed to increase the chances of achieving a better future, rather than the expected one.

An expected future

Across multiple convenings and conversations, we heard consistent themes about an expected future for monitoring, evaluation, and learning in the social sector. There was widespread concern that key barriers to putting decision-making at the center; empowering constituents and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion; and learning at scale would remain unresolved. Specific concerns include:

An expected future



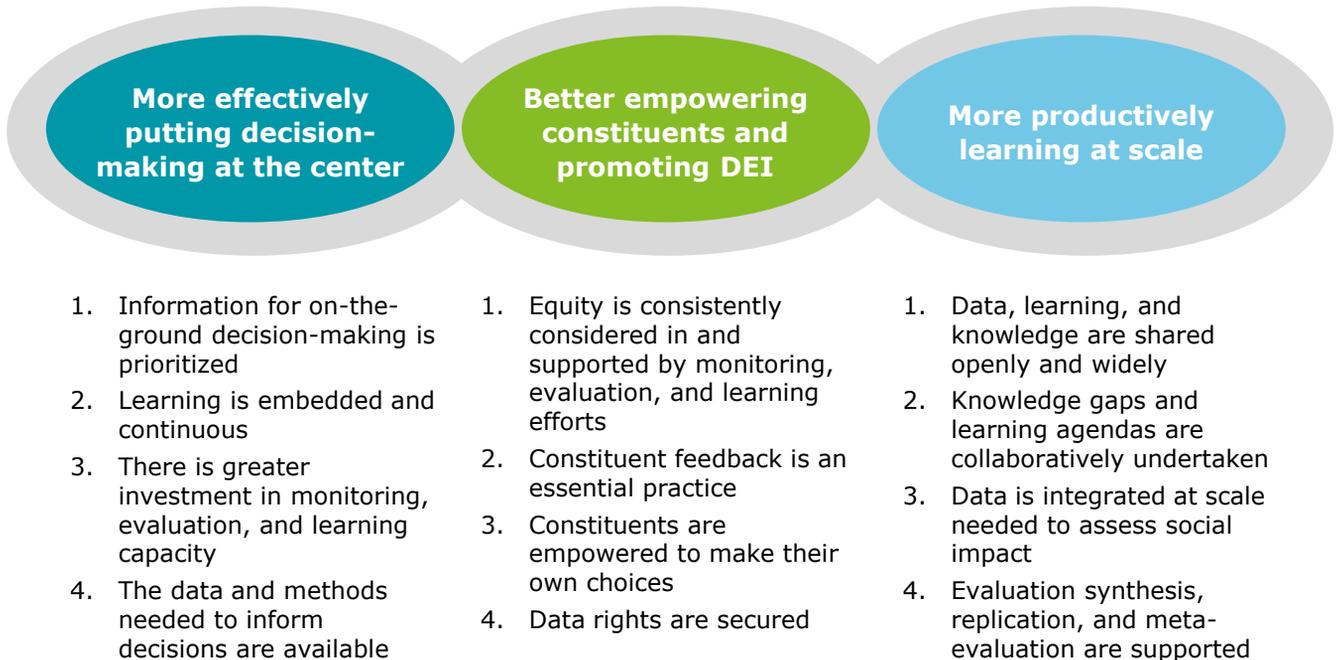
While many experts believe that an expected future will involve incremental progress, the most prominent sentiment we heard around an expected future was one of doubt that we would make substantial advances towards embracing the Three Characteristics of a better future.

Despite common aspirations in these areas, It was clear that obstacles to transformative progress remain. Specifically, the need to invest in the capacity of grantees, prioritize constituent needs, and create incentives to embrace sharing and experimentation were identified as high priority obstacles that need to be overcome.

A better future

In a better future, people imagined that the Three Characteristics would become defining pillars of monitoring, evaluation, and learning in the social sector, and felt the field would embrace key elements of each characteristic.

A better future



In a better future, people imagined that the Three Characteristics would become institutionalized at the core of monitoring, evaluation, and learning. While there remains healthy debate on certain topics—for example, the extent to which we should pursue common metrics and shared systems—we heard considerable consensus around what the key elements of a better future would look like.

The elements listed for each characteristic capture the areas of broad agreement. For example, there was widespread support that “continuous learning and improvement” should be the adopted philosophy within the field. We also heard that shorter cycles of strategic planning, implementation, and measurement would promote more learning opportunities for foundation and grantee staff, which could improve subsequent cycles of decision-making. There was also widespread agreement that the collection of constituent feedback should become essential practice, with a strong underlying focus on equity.

In the next section, we define these key elements of a better future in greater detail.

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