

# The Relationship Between Evaluation Quality and Use: A Foundation's Perspective

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# CHCF: Who We Are and What We Do



- The California HealthCare Foundation (CHCF) is a private, nonprofit foundation, created in 1996 when Blue Cross of California converted from nonprofit to for-profit
- CHCF works as a catalyst to fulfill the promise of better health care for all Californians.
- We support ideas and innovations that improve quality, increase efficiency, and lower the costs of care.

## Introduction

- Foundations can provide significant input into how evaluation quality is defined
- Two cases explore the relationship between evaluation quality and a number of issues
  - Methodological rigor
  - Grantee engagement
  - Program quality
  - Innovation
  - Evaluation use

# **CASE 1: Program for Elders in Managed Care (PEMC)**



## Project Background

- PEMC was authorized in 1997 to improve care for high-risk seniors and frail elders in managed care plans
- CHCF invested \$15 million over five years to support multiple demonstration sites in California
- Most provided frail seniors with case management, while some targeted patients with specific conditions
- All hoped to achieve improvements in health outcomes and reduce costs

## Evaluation approach

- Evaluation was considered an integral piece of the project
- Each grant included funds for an evaluation to track key outcomes
- Grantees were encouraged to use randomized designs
- CHCF also commissioned an overarching evaluation to synthesize findings

(Gold et al., 2005a & 2005b)

## Evaluation results

- PEMC was an ambitious program and addressed an important need
- Demonstrations did not result in statistically significant improvements in measured outcomes
- A number of factors were cited
  - Unrealistic goals given the timeframe of the project
  - Challenges and delays with implementation
  - Difficulty in targeting the right patients
  - Instability in organizations participating in the project and in the external environment

(Gold et al., 2005a & 2005b)



## In retrospect...

- Evaluation approach was not appropriate for the demonstrations given their stage of development



- Formative evaluation approach and rapid-cycle feedback may have been more helpful
- Focus on methodological rigor distracted the project from other aspects of evaluation quality

(Gold et al., 2005a)



## In retrospect...

- Evaluation quality and program quality are interdependent
- Applying overly rigorous evaluation methods to nascent interventions may stifle innovation (McKinsey&Company, 2010).





# **CASE 2: Evaluating an Organization-wide Quality Improvement Project**

## Project Background

- In 2009, CHCF received a proposal from a community health center to support an organization-wide initiative to increase quality and efficiency, and reduce waste.
- The projects and its result would be of interest to other community clinics
- CHCF wanted to include an external evaluation to gather lessons from this clinic's experience

## Evaluation approach

- Did not want evaluation to present an undue burden on grantee
- Information produced by the evaluation should also be useful for the grantee
- Grantee input and participation in the evaluation was prioritized

## Evaluation approach



- CHCF wrote request for proposals (RFP) for evaluator in partnership with grantee
- Built planning phase into project
- Both CHCF and the grantee reviewed the proposals
- Selection of the evaluator was a joint decision

## Results of grantee engagement

- Participation of high-level staff in all day, in-person meeting



- Staff came up with list of 38 potential evaluation questions
- Grantee willing to cover cost of collecting additional data that was not anticipated in the original budget

## Ongoing challenges

- Establishing a sufficient budget can be challenging when evaluation questions have not been established
- Important for CHCF to maintain involvement in evaluation



# Implications for funders



## Implications for funders

- Evaluation use provides a constructive framework for defining evaluation quality
- Foundations, grantees, and evaluators share responsibility for evaluation quality

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Thank you!

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