

BETTER DATA, BETTER DECISIONS, BETTER PHILANTHROPY:

The Plan for CEP 2011 – 2014





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THE PLAN FOR CEP 2011–2014 IN BRIEF

This Plan builds on CEP’s strengths — sustaining and strengthening ongoing work while also laying out bold, new initiatives for improving foundation effectiveness. We have seen CEP’s work meaningfully influence foundation practice over the past nine years: in some cases, that influence has been dramatic. But we believe that most foundations have a long way yet to go before they are maximizing their effectiveness.

We seek a future in which foundations operate, to a much greater degree than they do today, in a manner that is consistent with what we believe is required for effectiveness. In order to do all we can to contribute to this future, CEP will need to grow so that the knowledge and insight we develop can have the most possible influence on the practice of philanthropy.

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The initiatives outlined in this Plan capitalize on CEP’s core strengths of data development and analysis while also tapping into technological changes occurring within philanthropy and our society. During the Plan period, CEP will undertake a variety of initiatives, including:

- a new study on foundation performance assessment practices, to understand changes since CEP’s initial research on the topic nearly a decade ago;
- more rapid data-gathering and release of frequent research publications to influence practice;
- development of new data on foundation strategy that will be made available to groups and networks of funders working toward the same goals in order to increase their effectiveness;
- creation of an online dashboard for displaying results of CEP assessment tools, allowing

THE PLAN FOR CEP: 2011 – 2014 KEY INITIATIVES

RESEARCH

- A study on overall foundation performance assessment
- Research that explores our newest comparative datasets, including staff and donor perceptions
- Research connecting perceptual datasets to understand how they relate
- Research exploring the connection between perceptual measures and measures of impact
- A study examining the successes and failures of funder collaboratives

ASSESSMENT TOOLS

- Partnership with Monitor Institute to scale the Strategy Landscape Tool
- Development of an online dashboard
- Expansion of the YouthTruth/ Beneficiary Perception Report work to serve more funders
- Experimentation with the potential to gather feedback that is closer to “real time”

PROGRAMMING, COMMUNICATIONS, AND DEVELOPMENT

- Creation of greater online and offline community among tool users
- Continued repurposing of insights from our research
- New efforts to promote our cause
- Increased use of new media

for greater interactivity between CEP tool subscribers and their data;

- establishment of a stronger community of users of our assessment tools — facilitating the exchange of information and practices through technology and in-person meetings.

CEP will need to continue to grow both its earned revenue and contributed revenue during 2011–2014 to undertake these initiatives — as well as the other ones we describe in this Plan. This Plan envisions continued improvement in the economics of the tools as well as a modest growth in board designated reserves to ensure CEP’s long-term stability and financial health.



FOUNDATION EFFECTIVENESS

At the 100th anniversary of the big foundation, as marked by the establishment of the Carnegie Corporation in 1911, the moral imperative for foundations to maximize their effectiveness and impact is as strong as it has ever been. The list of daunting social problems is familiar and hardly needs to be repeated here — from persistent inequality of opportunity to environmental degradation and destruction that imperils our present and future quality of life. While we need to be sober about the fact that institutional philanthropy pales in scale relative to total giving — and is downright diminutive relative to government spending or the scale of the challenges we face — we also must recognize that there is tremendous opportunity for foundations to contribute to progress against our toughest social problems.

Indeed, the past century of philanthropy is rich with examples of foundations contributing to powerfully positive social change — taking advantage of the unique opportunity foundations have to address issues other actors in our society can't — or won't. The examples are many and are both familiar, such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's efforts

We focus on foundations because of our belief in the unique role they can play in addressing challenges and because of our perception that too little attention has been paid to the distinctive challenges of improving foundation effectiveness.

to stem the use of tobacco in the United States, and lesser known, such as the Stuart Foundation's work to improve life outcomes for foster youth in California. But there is also a sense, given the many examples of foundation ineffectiveness and the significance of our society's challenges, that we need foundations to step up their game.

That sense is borne out by the data. Our research indicates that, today, many of even the largest foundations in this country do not have in place all the elements that we believe are required to maximize effectiveness:

- clear goals
- coherent strategies to achieve those goals
- disciplined implementation of those strategies
- relevant performance indicators to assess progress¹

Given this, the question for the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) is:

What are we best positioned to do to contribute most effectively to a future in which many more foundations exemplify these characteristics than do today?

While it is surely the case that government agencies, corporations, and operating nonprofit organizations are all falling short of their potential when it comes to maximizing their effectiveness, our focus at CEP is on foundations and other grantmaking institutions that function similarly to foundations. We focus on foundations because of our belief in the unique role they can play in addressing challenges and because of our perception that too little attention has been paid to the distinctive challenges of improving foundation effectiveness.²

¹ See *Essentials of Foundation Strategy*, 2009.

² Buchanan, Phil. "The Foundation Effectiveness Imperative." *CEP at 5: Comparative Data Enabling Higher Performing Foundations*. September 14, 2008.

UPDATED MISSION, VISION, AND LOGIC MODEL

CEP's strategy is to develop data and insight – delivered through our research publications, tools, and programming and communications – that lead foundations to change their practice in ways that are consistent with what we believe to be required for foundation effectiveness.

MISSION

To provide data and create insight so philanthropic funders can better define, assess, and improve their effectiveness – and, as a result, their intended impact.

VISION

We seek a world in which pressing social needs are more effectively addressed. We believe improved performance of philanthropic funders can have a profoundly positive effect on nonprofit organizations and the people and communities they serve.

CEP seeks to contribute to the achievement of this vision through the data – primarily comparative data – we develop and draw on in our research, assessment tools, and programming and communications. This data helps funders understand how they can improve their performance and provides insight on key elements of foundation effectiveness. We recognize that many other institutions and organizations dedicated to improved funder effectiveness must also play a role for the vision we seek to become a reality – and we

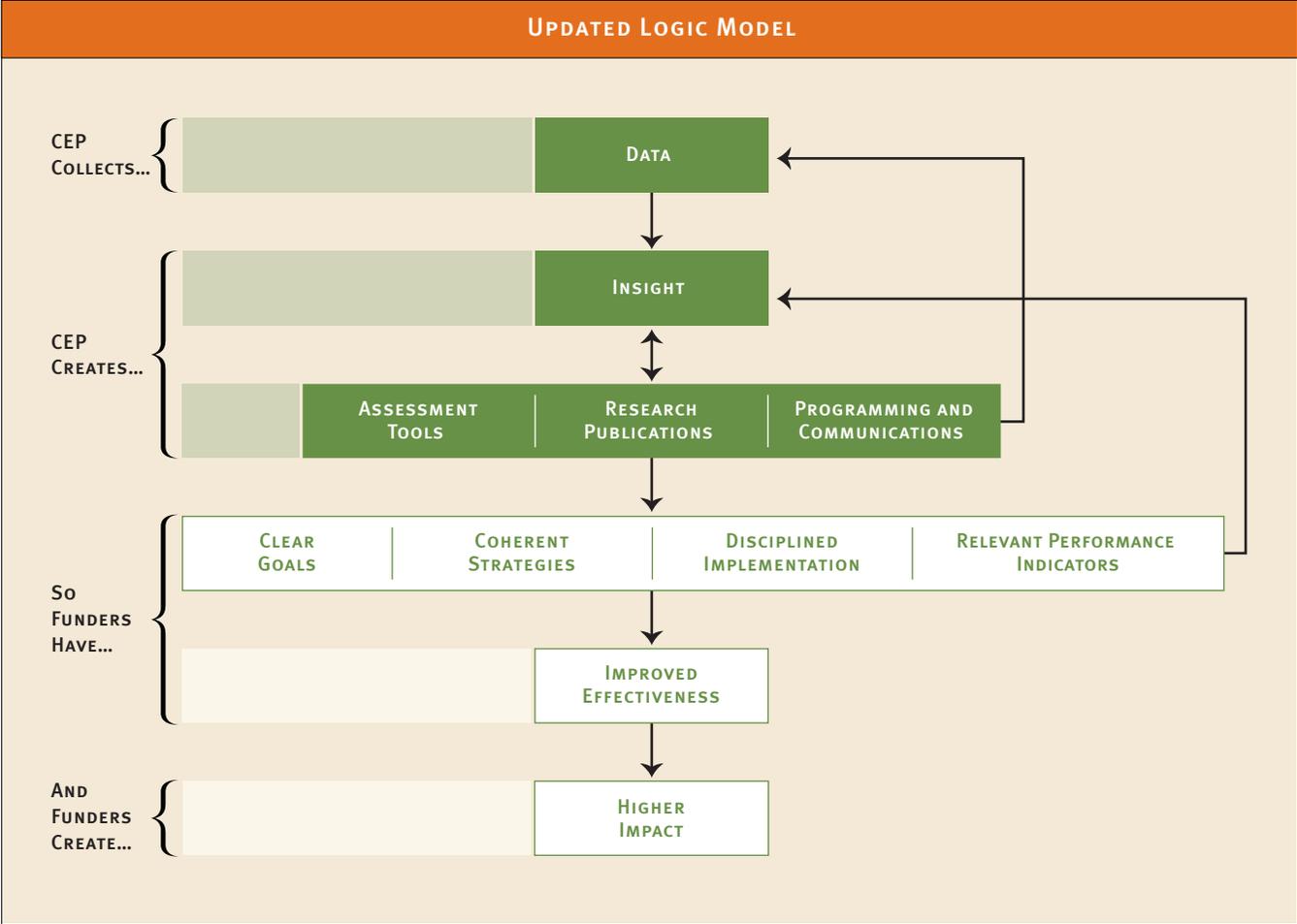
seek partnerships with these organizations when they will help us to better achieve our shared goals.

Although our work is about measuring results, providing useful data, and improving performance, our ultimate goal is improving lives. We believe this can only be achieved through a powerful combination of dispassionate analysis and passionate commitment to creating a better society.

STRATEGY AND LOGIC MODEL

Simply put, CEP's strategy is to develop data and insight – delivered through our research publications, tools, and programming and communications – that lead foundations to change their practice in ways that are consistent with what is required for foundation effectiveness. The comparative datasets we have created, and the insights we glean from them, can spur reflection that leads foundations to clarify their goals, develop new and better strategies, improve their implementation of those strategies, and gauge progress using relevant performance indicators. Increasingly, we have evidence to suggest that this is happening. We seek, through the *Plan for CEP 2011 – 2014*, to build on that momentum.

Our strategy obviously exists in a larger context, in which technological changes have made data more accessible and opportunities to provide and collect feedback more abundant. CEP's unique strengths lie in the rigor of our work and the value and depth of our comparative data. This Plan seeks to build on these attributes, such that CEP's resources continue to be seen as so trustworthy that leaders can confidently act on what they learn. We believe that the proliferation of data – much of it unreliable – will only heighten the value of CEP's efforts because of our reputation for rigor and integrity. At the same time, we are capitalizing on technological changes and undertaking new ways to collect data, to play it back, to build community, and to improve efficiencies.



BACKGROUND ON THE PLANNING PROCESS

As CEP approaches its 10th anniversary, we have completed a comprehensive planning process designed to identify key priorities for the next four years. The planning process was launched in September 2009, just past the midway point in implementing *The Plan for CEP 2008–2010*. It was clear to us by that point that we had made good progress against that plan – successfully executing most of our major programmatic initiatives and improving the organization’s financial position. In a mid-plan assessment to the board of directors, we said:

CEP is in a strong position as of August 2009, particularly given the difficult economic environment. Projected revenues are virtually on budget and 18 percent higher than in 2008. ... More importantly, we continue to see our work making a difference, as foundations use our research and tools to make changes and improve. Participation in CEP assessment tools and use of CEP research to shape practice is now common ... among the largest foundations in the country. We have executed well against The Plan for CEP 2008–2010 and have either completed or are well into most of the work it describes. In fact, we are beginning to think about initiatives beyond the Plan’s time horizon.

In addition, we had gathered data to suggest that our work was shaping foundation practice – giving us reason to feel positively about the organization’s increasing influence.³ Still, we felt it important to revisit basic assumptions and undertook, as a result, a far-reaching planning process.

Our planning process began with a September 2009 board of directors meeting and an all-staff discussion that same month. On the basis of those discussions, we identified the following questions as key:

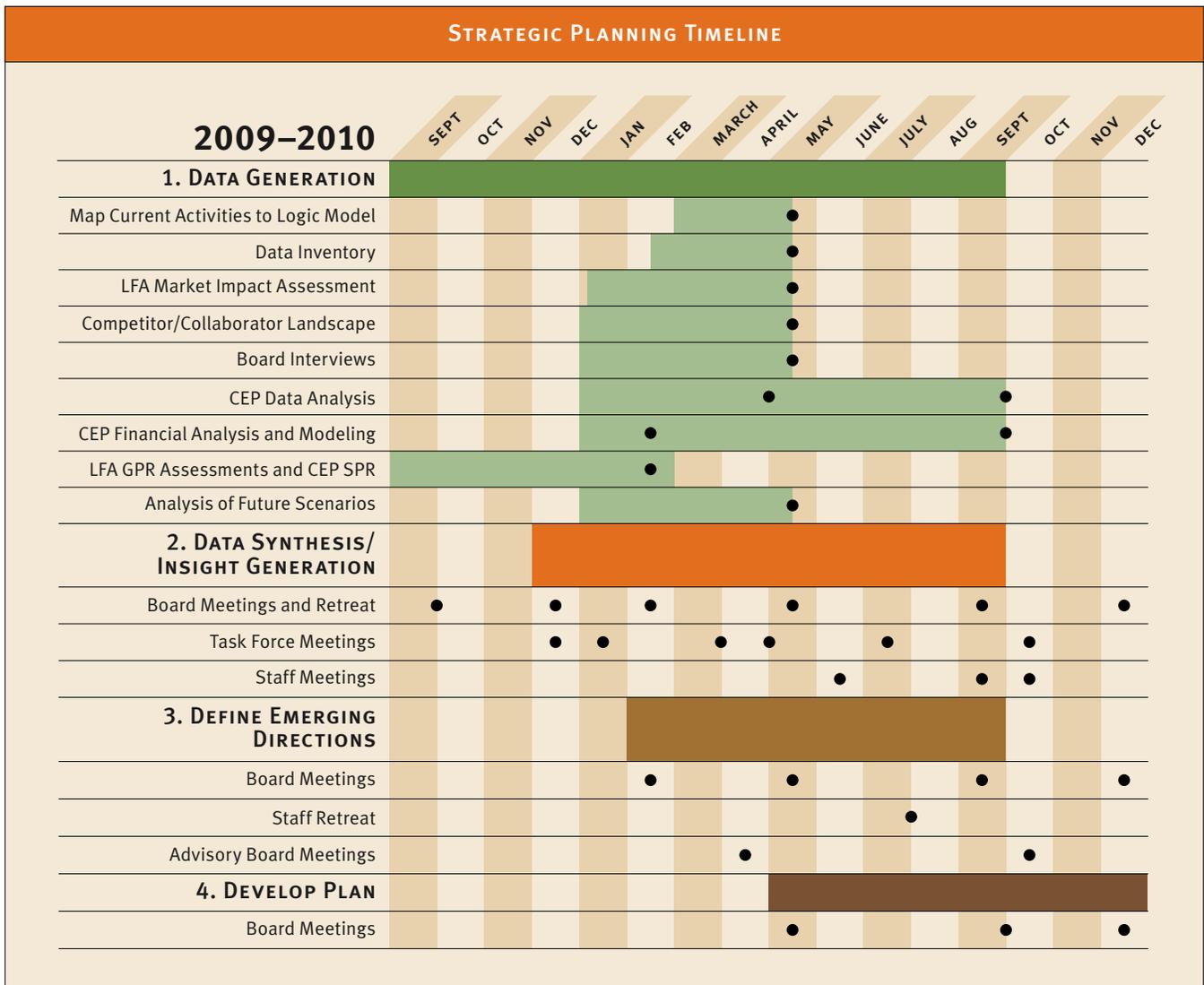
- What do we know about the degree to which foundations are moving in the direction

outlined in our logic model – and how CEP has contributed?

- What does this tell us about the relative priority of current activities in each of CEP’s areas of work – research, tools, and programming and communications?
- What are the potential new activities we should undertake?
- What is the revenue model that can support these activities?
- How is CEP positioned and how might we be affected by – or take advantage of – trends inside and outside the sector?

We then identified nine data-gathering activities to help answer these questions and inform our planning process. (See Appendix A: Data-Gathering Activities) The planning process was coordinated and led by the president and senior staff of CEP and overseen by an *ad hoc* Strategic Planning Task Force of the Board of Directors appointed by Board Chair Stephen Heintz. That task force was chaired by Nadya Shmavonian, and its other members were Mike Bailin, Christine James Brown, Jim Knickman, and Kathy Merchant. The full board of directors engaged both in meetings and retreats and in individual discussions with staff: the other members of the board during this period were Alexa Cortes Culwell, Crystal Hayling, Patricia Kozu, and Ricardo Millett. CEP staff were engaged throughout the process, contributing ideas and analyses both within their teams and during all-staff planning meetings. The senior staff, in particular, spent considerable time and energy on the planning process: Phil Buchanan, President; Kevin Bolduc, Vice-President – Assessment Tools; Ellie Buteau, Vice

³ LFA Group, “Findings from the Center for Effective Philanthropy’s Market and Impact Assessment.” November 2007.



President – Research; Alyse d’Amico, Vice President – Programming, Communications, and Development; Paul Heggarty, Vice President – Finance and Administration; and Valerie Threlfall, Director of the West Coast Office and YouthTruth. Lowell Weiss of Cascade Philanthropy Advisors, who served as a consultant to CEP, also contributed significantly: he conducted board interviews to inform the *Plan*, facilitated board discussions, and contributed to the writing and editing of the working definition of foundation effectiveness contained in the *Plan*.

By May 2010, data-gathering activities were largely complete and the Board of Directors met for a two-day retreat at Pocantico to review CEP’s logic model, interpret the data we had gathered, reflect on the answers to the key planning questions listed above,

and consider implications for CEP’s future. The full staff met in June for a similar discussion. Each of CEP’s vice presidents was then asked to propose plans for their areas, highlighting key activities to continue, cease, and begin in order to drive the kind of change in foundation practice envisioned in our logic model. At a staff retreat in July, the full staff reacted to these plans for each functional area. The staff also considered questions related to CEP’s work culture – and what culture would be required to undertake the work we envisioned. At a senior staff retreat in August, we worked to further define the set of key initiatives proposed here.

The board of directors considered a draft of this Plan at its September meeting. Staff did not ask for approval of the Plan at this meeting, but instead

looked to the board to provide feedback on how to strengthen it. We then invited members of our 34-member advisory board as well as our major operating support funders to provide feedback on the draft during a series of three conference calls held in October and November as well as

one-on-one calls and email exchanges. In total, 20 individuals outside of CEP's board of directors and staff provided feedback on the Plan in this way. This Plan, which the board of directors approved in December 2010, reflects the ideas and thinking of dozens of people.

A WORKING DEFINITION OF FOUNDATION EFFECTIVENESS

We believe foundation effectiveness — and impact — require all of these mutually reinforcing basic elements:

1. CLEAR GOALS

- Specific and achievable
- Driven by heartfelt concern
- Clearly communicated and well-understood at all levels of the foundation and by key external audiences, especially grantees
- Approved and monitored by the board

2. COHERENT STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE THOSE GOALS

- Based on an analysis of the problem or issue, the social/historical context in which the problem or issue exists, the capacity of organizations working to address the problem or issue, costs and benefits of alternate strategies, and the potential pace of change
- Informed by input from organizations and individuals closest to the problem
- Rooted in a well-conceived theory of how the foundation's efforts can lead to the desired change, why it is the best option, and, when possible, evidence that the strategy has worked elsewhere
- Grounded in knowledge of what others are doing to address the problem and how the strategy relates to those other efforts
- Aligned with foundation staff and board capabilities
- Clearly communicated and well understood at all levels of the foundation and by key external audiences
- Revised, as appropriate, based on what is learned through the monitoring of relevant performance indicators

3. DISCIPLINED IMPLEMENTATION OF THOSE STRATEGIES

- Driven by strong executive leadership that inspires the highest levels of performance and is committed to continuous improvement informed by data over time
- Managed and staffed by people with capabilities matched to the chosen strategies, which requires careful attention to professional credentials/experience as well as racial and cultural backgrounds
- Built on clear expectations, appropriate resources and support, solid processes, and constructive feedback for staff and board
- Rooted in intentional efforts to build high-quality relationships with those the foundation chooses as its primary agents of change (often, but not exclusively, grantees)
- Mindful of what other actors are doing and open to opportunities for collaboration

4. RELEVANT PERFORMANCE INDICATORS TO ASSESS PROGRESS

- Help leadership assess progress relative to goals and strategies
- Enable leadership to assess the organization's overall performance — and to compare performance with that of peer funders, whenever possible
- Help leadership learn from their implementation of strategies and improve these strategies over time based on an understanding of what works
- Facilitate the assessment of performance of grantees and support grantees' efforts to assess themselves
- Help assess the performance of the board, CEO, and staff members — to motivate them and improve their performance

CEP'S WORK CULTURE

CEP's work culture is distinctive and, we believe, has been crucial to our success. On our website, we describe our culture in this way:

We value a passionate commitment to improving the performance of the world's philanthropic funders. We have a deep belief in the power of data and analysis to improve decision making. We believe that successful employees want to make the world a better place and are motivated to seize opportunities to do so.

We believe that committed individuals will grow and develop in an environment in which they are trained, mentored, and supported. We value hard work and productivity but also recognize the importance of maintaining a work-life balance.

We believe each employee has a strong sense of ownership for the work that they do and for the work of CEP as a whole. Strengths of CEP's work culture are entrepreneurialism, accountability, teamwork, collegiality, diversity, and mutual respect.

At our 2010 retreat, staff discussed the culture, and the conversation largely reaffirmed the description above. Staff used words and phrases such as "rigorous," "precise," "committed to learning and improvement," "driven," "passionate," and "open and honest" to describe CEP's culture.

We pay constant attention to preserving and evolving our culture and ensuring that CEP continues to be an outstanding place to work in which employees thrive and achieve their full potential.



RESULTS

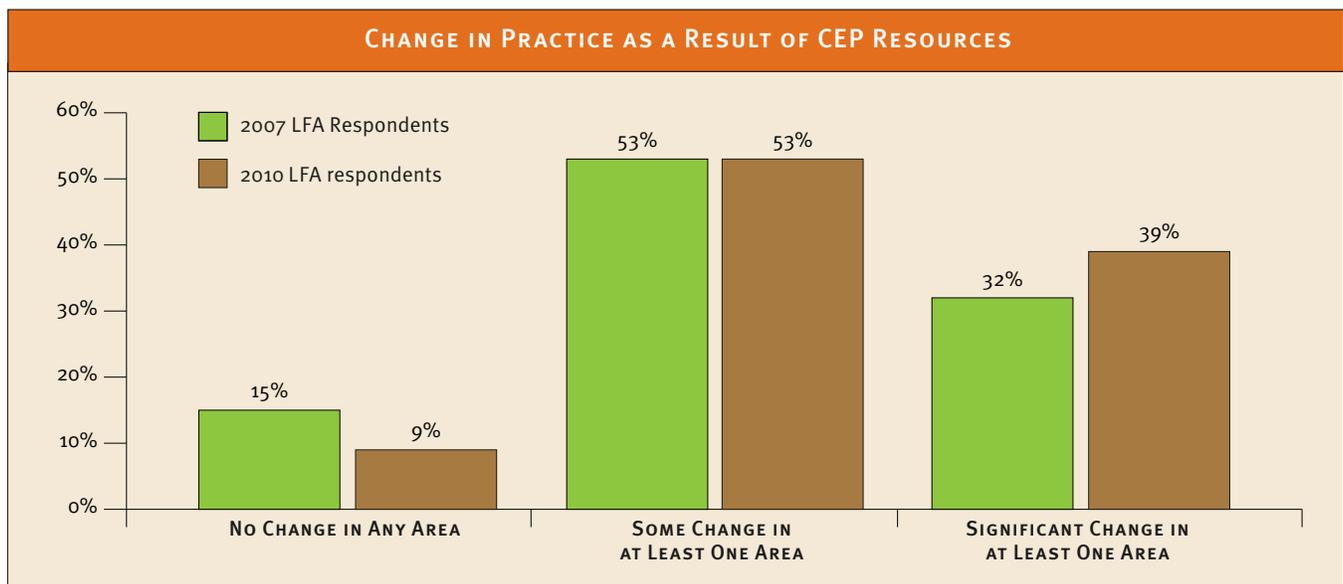
Our data-gathering activities over the past year confirmed that CEP's influence on foundations' practice has been substantial. The market and impact assessment conducted by LFA demonstrates that more than 90 percent of responding foundations report making changes as result of CEP resources: research reports, assessment tools, or programming initiatives.⁴ Those who had used CEP's tools were significantly more likely than those who had not to report changes on key dimensions of effectiveness: goals, strategy, and performance indicators.⁵

In addition, LFA's annual survey of users of our most widely adopted assessment tool, the Grantee Perception Report (GPR), shows significant changes being made by users in response to their GPRs, from communications with grantees to grantmaking processes to provision of assistance to grantees "beyond the check."^{6, 7} This data has helped us put into perspective the changes we had witnessed our-

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selves at foundations where the GPR has served as a catalyst for major organizational change.

Although this change is self-reported, the variation we see in both LFA studies suggests that respondents



4 LFA Group, "Findings from the Center for Effective Philanthropy 2010 Market and Impact Assessment." May 2010: 16.

5 LFA Group, "Findings from the Center for Effective Philanthropy 2010 Market and Impact Assessment." May 2010: 27.

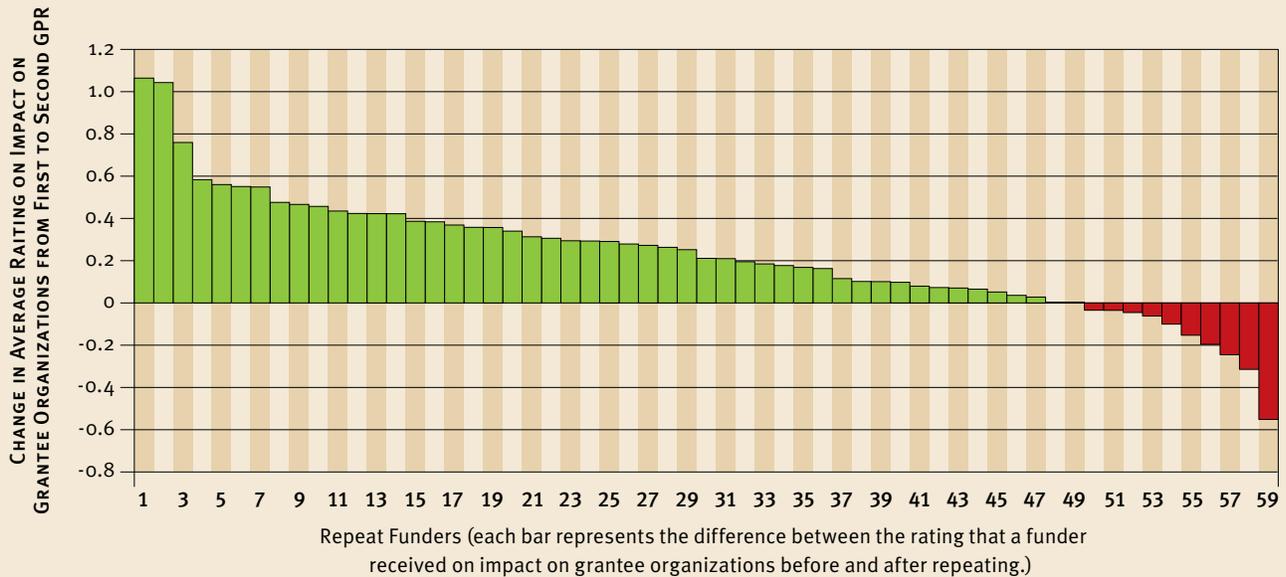
6 LFA Group, "Key Findings from the Grantee Perception Report (GPR) Subscriber Assessment." December 2009: 10–14.

7 All our reports from LFA are publicly available — in their entirety — on our website because of our belief that anyone should be able to access relevant data about our impact and to debate and discuss whether our results merit the charitable resources our organization uses.

PROPORTION OF GPR USERS REPORTING CHANGE IN AT LEAST ONE AREA OF FUNCTIONING AS A RESULT OF THE GPR



DIFFERENCE IN AVERAGE RATING BETWEEN SECOND AND FIRST TIME SUBSCRIBERS ON IMPACT ON GRANTEE ORGANIZATIONS



were discerning in their reflections on their work and the changes they have made. CEP's case studies, for example, are rated lower for their influence on practice than our research reports. Still, self-reporting has its limitations. To get beyond self-reporting, we sought to understand whether we could see foundations changing in ways that grantees were experiencing as positive. To that end, we have

analyzed the changes in results for the more than 50 foundations that have repeated the GPR process.

Here, we see statistically meaningful change and improvement on a number of key questions between the foundations' first and second GPRs. We are nearing completion of this work and will share our findings broadly in 2011.

As a result of our own analyses and the work we have commissioned from LFA, we have arrived at several conclusions about CEP's influence to date.

We have:

- increasing evidence that foundations are changing in ways that are consistent with our logic model;
- data indicating that foundation leaders are pointing to CEP as a catalyst for that change;
- data indicating that grantees of foundations that have repeated the GPR are having a different – and more positive – experience. (While we can't and won't claim a causal connection here, this finding is, at the very least, an encouraging one.)

Taken together, the above is affirming of CEP's efforts over the past nine years and suggests that our Plan should both preserve and build on what is working while also seeking new opportunities for positive influence.



AUDIENCE

In CEP's first several years, our primary focus was on the largest institutional funders in the United States – the largest 100 private and community foundations. Today, the audience for our work is much broader than it was in those early years:

- While the focus of our data collection in our **research** tends to be foundations with at least \$5 million in grantmaking annually and some staff, the audience for our research findings includes foundations of virtually all sizes as well as individual donors (and those considering establishing a foundation) who find utility in, for example, our research on strategy or type of grant support.
- Over the past several years, we have significantly broadened the audience for our **assessment** tools as a result of deliberate intentions outlined in *The Plan for CEP 2008–2010*. (See sidebar: A Broader Group of Tool Users.) In our assessment tools work, we have engaged with client foundations with grantmaking budgets as small as a \$1–2 million annually, though we see our primary audience as those with \$5 million or more in grantmaking budgets. The roughly 950 U.S. foundations that make \$5 million or more in grants annually collectively are responsible for the majority of total U.S. foundation giving.

We have carefully considered whether to further broaden our definition of our primary market for our assessment tools to yet smaller grantmakers and have decided not to pursue this in the upcoming Plan. We believe those funders with at least a few staff and \$5 million or more in grantmaking represent the right primary market for our tools. Furthermore, any efforts to create a lower-priced “light” version of our tools would require compromises in quality and our approach to analyses that we are unwilling to make. With our current focus in assessment tool work, we can potentially influence



A BROADER GROUP OF TOOL USERS

Under *The Plan for CEP 2008–2010*, we sought to broaden the market for our assessment tools to regrants. During that Plan period, we have begun to work with more of these institutions, including the Energy Foundation, Susan G. Komen for the Cure, and United Way of Massachusetts Bay. We continue to see these major institutional non-foundation grantmakers as an important market for our assessment tools.

Also under *The Plan for CEP 2008–2010*, we sought to expand our reach internationally — targeting for our assessment tool work in particular countries such as England and Canada, in which the foundation form closely mirrors that of foundations in the United States (therefore making our work applicable). To date, we have provided assessment tools to 10 foundations whose main offices are outside the United States, including four in England, four in Canada, one in Ireland, and one in Israel.

The group of more than 200 foundations that have used our assessment tools includes 32 community foundations and 13 corporate foundations.



well over half of foundation giving in the United States.

- In our **programming and communications** efforts, we seek to reach a very wide audience that includes the many staff and donors affiliated with small foundations that attend speaking engagements we conduct at regional associations across the country. In addition, our communications efforts via our blog, website, and social media are attracting an audience that includes nonprofit leaders, scholars, students, and interested members of the public: These individuals are not our primary focus, but we are pleased that they are

finding utility in our work. Our bi-annual conference, however, is more targeted – toward leadership of foundations with \$5 million or more in grantmaking.

It is important to recognize that, despite CEP's success, there remains a high number of foundations within our audience as we have defined it that have chosen not to engage CEP's work. The adoption of our assessment tools, for example, within the target audience we have defined, is only slightly more than 14 percent. We hope that the increased resources for our research and programming communications functions contemplated in this Plan will help us to drive that number significantly higher.

2011—2014: KEY INITIATIVES

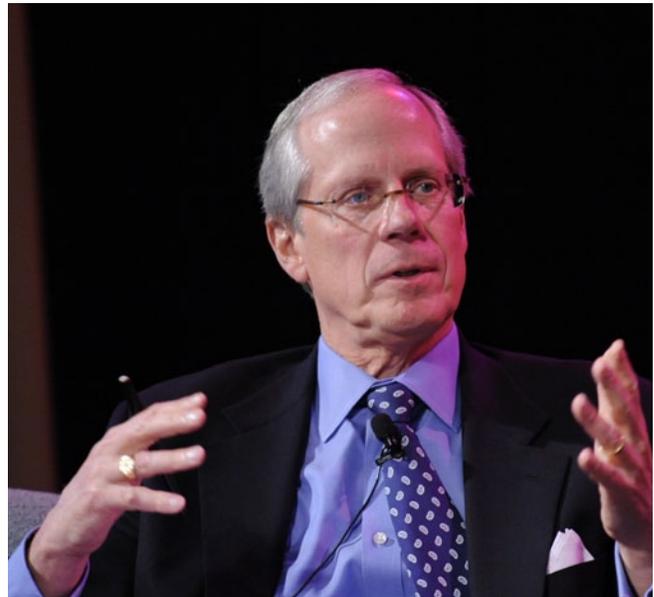
AMBITIOUS NEW INITIATIVES... AND “PIERCING CLARITY” ABOUT WHAT WE CHOOSE NOT TO DO

CEP’s future builds on its past and on the innovation and creativity that have made us successful to date. We have increasing evidence that our work is having a positive effect on foundation practices, so we are eager to continue — and strengthen — what is working. But we also propose to launch several new, resource-intensive initiatives because of our belief that we must continue to innovate in pursuit of greater foundation effectiveness.

As we have worked to discuss and debate new initiatives, we have sought to remain mindful of Jim Collins’ words at CEP’s 2009 conference in Los Angeles:

Disciplined action begins with piercing clarity about what you choose to not do. In a world awash with opportunity for contribution, it’s what we choose to not do — because there is so much to do. ... The true signature of mediocrity is chronic inconsistency. We live in an era of change, where we bandy the word change all about, but we bandy it about in a very undisciplined way. The question how the world is changing is an entirely different question than how we want to change the world. Which is an entirely different question than how should we change in order to accomplish that.

While our sights should be high, we also need to be realistic about the role CEP plays in influencing foundations to improve their effectiveness and, ultimately, to have more impact. There are many other important organizations working with foundations that largely share our conception of what it means for foundations to be effective, such as GEO and Bridgespan, to name just two. Our thinking about what we should pursue has been informed by our analysis of the landscape of other organizations working on issues of foundation effectiveness. We have, during the course of this planning process, considered many possible initiatives that we concluded were not right for us. Reasons include our sense that others were better



We have increasing evidence that our work is having a positive effect on foundation practices, so we are eager to continue — and strengthen — what is working.

positioned to carry out the work, that it doesn’t align well with our core capabilities, or that the initiative would be unlikely to produce significant change in foundation performance in the ways envisaged in our logic model.

Perhaps the potential activity that has been most intensely debated by the staff and board over the nine years since CEP received initial funding is the opportunity to take on a more consultative role with respect to foundation goal- and strategy-setting. We have concluded that this work is done well today by other organizations, and that there is no reason to believe CEP would be able to do that work better. Moreover, we fear that undertaking certain kinds of consulting work would make it more challenging for us to preserve our reputation for independence and integrity in our assessment tool and research work.

That said, after the planning period contemplated here, we may in the future wish to consider taking on a more consultative role than we have in the past. One example would be consulting focused on helping foundations in the establishment of the right performance measures and performance measurement systems. We view this as potentially complementary to our other efforts – and something that is not a current focus of other organizations. However, we are not proposing to move in that direction at this point.

Another area we have explored but decided not to pursue for the time being is stepped-up training and education offerings for CEOs, other senior leaders, or program officers. Among the specific ideas considered during the planning process was a focus on professional development for program officers, building on the relevant research and insights we have developed through our work. We have concluded, however, that the planning and delivery of professional education offerings is better left to others. We will work instead to ensure the knowledge we develop is tapped into by those administering such programs.

Consulting and training are just two examples among many of initiatives we have considered, but decided not to pursue. CEP’s culture is one that is focused on continuous improvement and innovation, and we find regular opportunities to generate creative ideas for improving foundation effectiveness. We then test those ideas and ultimately choose the ones we believe are most promising and that we are particularly well positioned to act on.

We also have concluded that some of what we have been doing under *The Plan for CEP 2008–2010* isn’t working well enough to justify continued investment. For example, in Research, we will cease conducting case studies like the ones we have produced over the past several years because the LFA survey data suggests that they are less influential than our other publications. In Tools, we will cease offering the Comparative Board Report (CBR): Although we know CBR results have been extremely

important to a small number of foundations, the demand has been too limited – and the economics too poor – to justify continuing it. Finally, in Programming and Communications, we will cease producing reports on our conference and printed annual reports, instead finding alternative ways to capture and disseminate the information these publications convey.

So, while there is much we have consciously chosen not to do, this Plan also includes a number of important, ambitious new initiatives in each area of CEP’s work. We believe these initiatives align well with CEP’s strengths and give us the best chance of influencing foundation practice in ways that are consistent with our logic model.

Rigorous research is at the core of what CEP does, and data on how CEP is viewed suggest that our research influences changes in practice at foundations.

RESEARCH INITIATIVES

CEP’s approach to research has changed dramatically since the beginning of the last planning process. We have restructured to create a separate, dedicated research team, and we finally fully staffed that group in October 2009. Since then we have released three research publications and made significant progress on a number of projects, with results due out in the coming months. Our plans for research seek to build on this momentum.

Rigorous research is at the core of what CEP does, and data on how CEP is viewed suggest that our research influences changes in practice at foundations. Data also indicate that our rigorous approach to analysis, as well as our comparative data, are seen to be key distinctive strengths of CEP.⁸ By providing rigorous analysis about topics relevant to foundation goals, strategies, strategy

⁸ LFA Group, “Findings from the Center for Effective Philanthropy 2010 Market and Impact Assessment.” May 2010: 13.

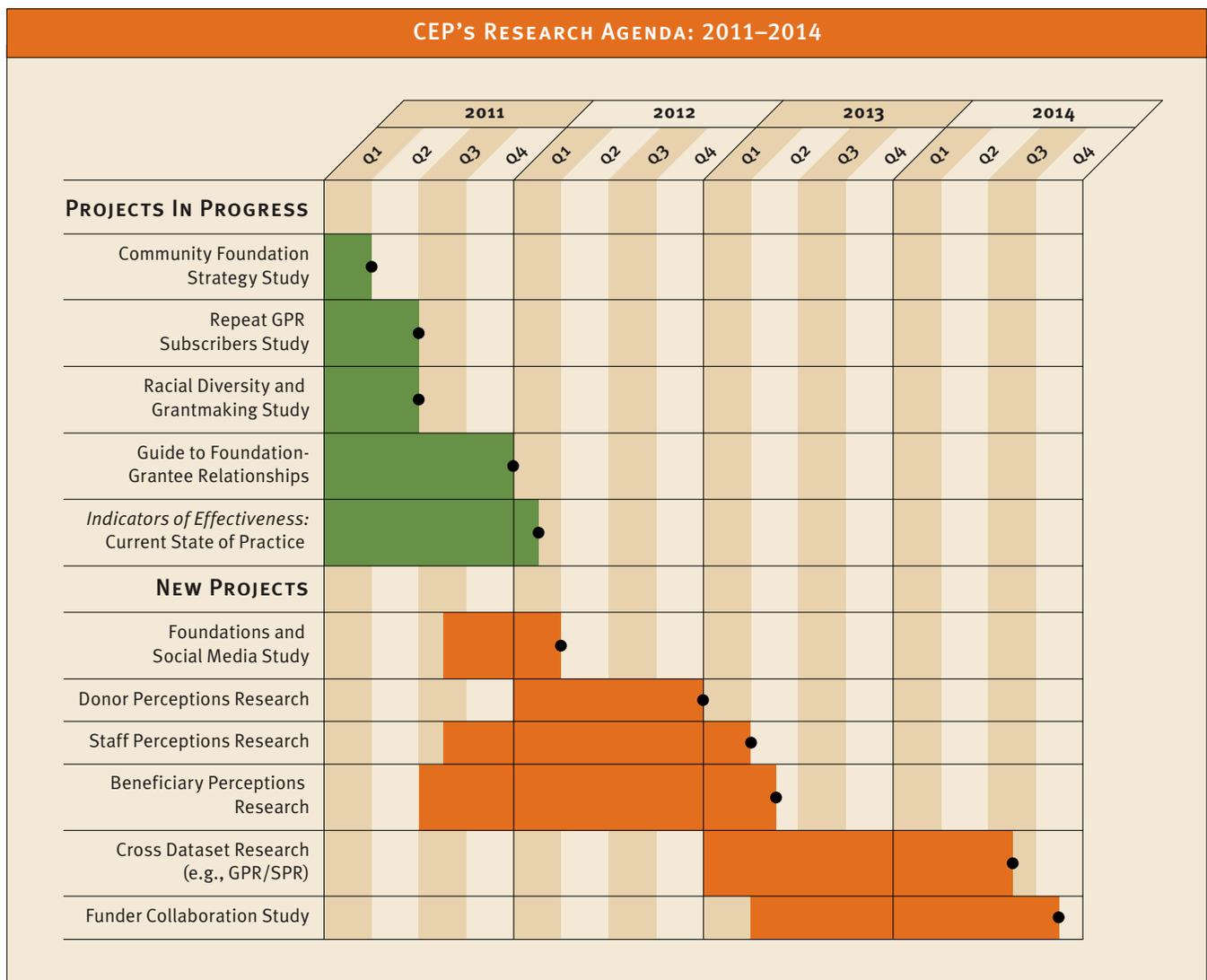
implementation, and performance indicators, our research helps funders to become more effective.

We have solicited research ideas from many sources over the past two years, including at a 2009 advisory board meeting devoted to the topic. We have reviewed the list of ideas generated there as well as internally in light of our logic model and identified several high-priority initiatives.

A number of research initiatives are currently underway, based on the priorities of *The Plan for 2008–2010*, which we will complete. We are not seeking to specify here all the research initiatives we will undertake between 2011 and 2014: We will, of course, continue to be opportunistic and responsive to the discussions and debates of the day.

But we are highlighting in this plan several new, significant initiatives that we believe are particularly important.

- Foundation performance assessment. The goal of a study on overall foundation performance assessment is to examine foundation performance assessment practices, how they have changed since the study we conducted on this topic in 2001–2002, and to update the framework for overall foundation performance assessment we proposed in our 2002 report, *Indicators of Effectiveness*. We believe this will be important in highlighting any progress that has been made on this dimension and/or illustrating the need for significant, continued progress. We believe that, today, too few



foundations have a clear approach to assessing their overall performance, and our work to document that, and to highlight the “bright spots,” can lead to positive change.

- Exploring our newest comparative datasets for broad insight. We believe that we have the potential to uncover groundbreaking insights by analyzing our newer comparative datasets as they reach a threshold of scale. Our highest priorities are our staff survey data, which we have yet to analyze for a research publication, and our community foundation donor survey data, which is still not sufficiently broad but which we believe will be soon. The potential to affect foundation effectiveness is significant

for both efforts: our analysis of staff survey data, for example, can lead to insights about staff’s implementation of strategy; our analysis of donor survey data will explore how community foundations unlock greater donor motivation, potentially leading to improved strategies for community foundations in the area of donor development.

- Connecting different perceptual datasets. To date, we have explored our perceptual datasets independently. We now possess enough data to begin to explore connections among datasets – examining, for example, how staff perceptions relate to grantee experiences. We believe that this will lead to new insights about which levers

HOW TOOLS, RESEARCH, AND PROGRAMMING WORK TOGETHER: AN EXAMPLE

CEP’s research on assistance beyond the grant is a good example of the way tools, research, and programming reinforce and complement each other. Our interest in this topic was sparked by our delivery of GPRs to foundations that often learned that they were not providing as much assistance beyond the grant as they had thought. We defined a research plan to look at the provision of assistance beyond the grant.

We began with an analysis of our grantee survey dataset that sought to identify patterns in the provision of assistance beyond the grant, and to see whether certain patterns correlated with more positive grantee perceptions on dimensions such as impact on the grantee organization or sustainability of organizations. We supplemented that data with a survey of foundation CEOs and program officers that sought to identify how foundation CEOs and program officers think about the provision of assistance beyond the grant.

We released *More than Money* in November 2008, after significant vetting internally and with external advisors. It has since been downloaded 4,000 times, and we have made more than a dozen presentations at national and regional conferences. We featured this research at our West Coast office launch parties in Los Angeles and San Francisco in fall 2008. A session at our conference in L.A. in 2009 featured Ellie Buteau presenting the findings and two of the three foundations that we profiled in the report as exemplars — Wallace and Winter Park — describing their approaches. An op-ed sharing findings

from *More than Money* was published in *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, and the report was featured in articles in *The Chronicle*, *Independent Sector’s Memo to Members*, the Aspen Institute’s *Philanthropy Letter*, and *Tactical Philanthropy*. We have received word from a number of funders praising the report and detailing its utility. For example, Ruth Jones, executive director of Social Venture Partners International, wrote in an email, “It’s sometimes tough communicating with new partners and donors about why real capacity building is a comprehensive, long-term process and a partnership between the two organizations — not an ad hoc, cherry-picking approach. CEP’s report is a great way to reinforce the message; in fact, I am using it in a planning meeting with a new group later next month! I’ve set it as part of the preparatory reading!”

We then modified the GPR’s presentation of results for individual foundations to allow subscribers to understand what proportion of their assistance beyond the grant falls into the patterns that our research has shown to be most effective. The GPR has been strengthened as a result of the research, and the results foundations receive are now more likely to prompt constructive change.

This project exemplifies how CEP works. The comparative dataset that was developed through foundations commissioning our tool was mined for its findings as well as to identify exemplars we could profile to bring life to our research. That research was shared through programming and various communication outlets. And it came full circle as we retooled the section of the GPR related to assistance beyond the grant to allow foundations to benchmark their practices against those we had determined to be most effective.

are most useful for foundation leaders to pull — for example, “to change grantee perceptions on dimension X, I need to change staff perceptions on dimension Y” — thereby improving their efforts to implement their chosen strategies.

- Exploring the connections between perceptual measures and measures of impact. We will begin this undertaking by analyzing our YouthTruth beneficiary data to explore the connections between student perceptual measures and student outcomes. A deeper understanding of these linkages allows foundation leaders to fund efforts that relate to what our analyses show to be the most powerful levers for impact.
- Examining the successes and failures of funder collaboratives. We see increased interest in the question of how funders work together toward common goals and in understanding the key elements of successful efforts. We will develop a research plan that may include utilizing data collected via the Strategy Landscape Tool (see page 22) to explore these issues.

In addition to these projects, we will undertake new initiatives related to the way we collect data and deliver research. Specific efforts will include:

- Publication of more frequent, brief pieces on timely topics, such as our June 2010 piece on how grantees experienced funders’ response to the economic downturn, *A Time of Need*.
- Development of a grantee “panel” for quick-hit surveys of grantees on issues of interest to foundations generally and perhaps other “panels” — of CEOs, for example, or program officers.

ASSESSMENT TOOL INITIATIVES

A significant emphasis of the assessment tools team during the planning period will necessarily be on improving what is already ongoing — for example, making process improvements to drive better economic contribution of the tools. Much of what we are doing in the assessment tools area — such as the Grantee Perception Report (GPR) and Staff Perception Report (SPR) — is working well. These efforts are leading to improved practice for tool



We have reached an agreement with Monitor Institute on a partnership in which we will deliver the Strategy Landscape Tool, which provides information on funding by strategy within particular areas to groups of funders with shared goals. We believe it has tremendous potential to improve decision making and strategy development at foundations by raising their awareness of what others are doing — and how various efforts might connect.

users and generating datasets that our research team can analyze in order to disseminate results broadly to inform foundation leaders. But other efforts, such as the Comparative Board Report — for which demand appears limited and the economics are poor (in 2009, the delivery of just four CBRs led to a loss for this tool of \$22,000) — have been less successful and therefore should cease.

We will devote significant resources to building our most promising new tools, such as the Donor Perception Report for community foundations, launched just last year. That tool is at a crucial juncture because we are on the verge of having a meaningful comparative dataset — at which point it will become significantly more useful.

There will also be several key new assessment tool initiatives that we will undertake to complement our ongoing efforts.

- Partnership with Monitor Institute to scale its Strategy Landscape Tool. We have reached an agreement with Monitor Institute on a partnership in which we will deliver the Strategy Landscape Tool, which provides information on funding by strategy within particular areas to groups of funders with shared goals. We believe it has tremendous potential to improve decision making and strategy development at

foundations by raising their awareness of what others are doing — and how various efforts might connect. This tool facilitates the efforts of funders to work collaboratively in networks, allowing them to better understand who is doing what — and how their own efforts best fit into that landscape. Over time, we will work to add to this tool the ability to share outcome data for particular strategies.

- Development of an online dashboard that would allow tool users to manipulate their results — seeing, for example, how their results would look relative to different cohorts and choosing different segmentations of the data. We believe this new format will increase the utility of our tools, particularly when they are used together, and that tool users will increasingly expect more interactive experiences with the data we provide. We will begin to develop a prototype of what an online display of tool results might look like — and pilot it with tool users. We believe this kind of dashboard has significant potential and that, eventually, we may be able to include both CEP data and internally generated foundation data in one, integrated dashboard. While this remains an inchoate concept at this point we will devote significant energy during 2011 to developing the idea further and better understanding its costs as well as its revenue potential.
- Expansion of our YouthTruth/Beneficiary Perception Report work to serve more funders, in addition to Gates, to fully test the concept of providing feedback from intended beneficiaries to funders. The effort is designed to demonstrate the power of gathering rigorously collected, comparative feedback from those who should matter most: the people whose lives a funder seeks to improve. We have surveyed students in nearly 100 schools over the past two years and provided useful data to schools and intermediaries. We recently presented results to program staff at the Gates Foundation and continue to believe that rigorously collected beneficiary perceptions can be an important source of performance data for funders, leading to better strategy and strategy

implementation. To test this, however, we need additional funders using the data, and we are working to expand their numbers.

- Experimentation with the potential to gather data in a more continuous way through a pilot with funders that wish to explore this possibility. Today, there appears to be limited interest on the part of funders in feedback as well as operational data that is closer to “real time,” but we anticipate that changing in the years ahead. We want to ensure that foundation leaders get data that is as timely as possible, so they can make changes to their implementation efforts more responsively than is the case today. A successful pilot could catalyze others to participate.

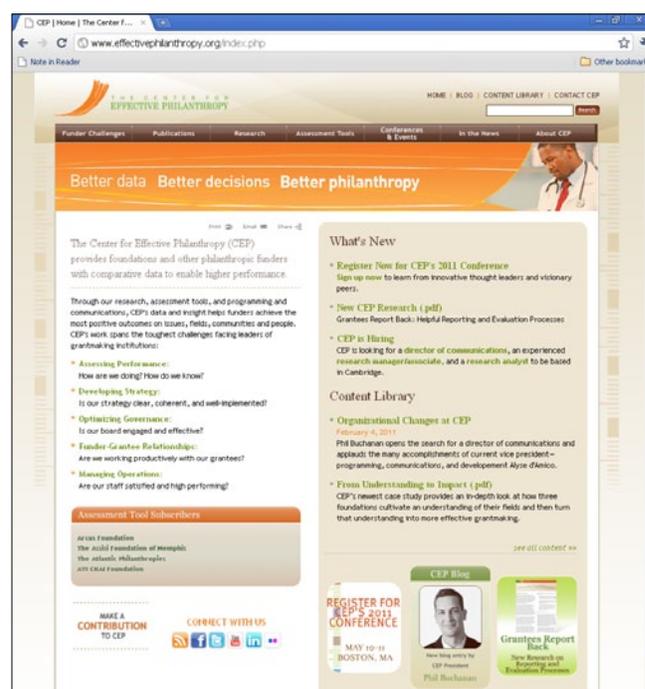
A major focus of the assessment tools team will be improving efficiency and quality through increased automation of tools production, building on the significant progress we have already made in this area. Today, our Grantee Perception Report is break-even, with a full allocation of overhead, and our Beneficiary Perception Report (YouthTruth) work makes a positive contribution to CEP’s bottom line; not all our other tools are break-even, however, and we need to move them aggressively toward that threshold. The Staff Perception Report should be break-even in 2011, for example, as should the Applicant Perception Report.

PROGRAMMING, COMMUNICATIONS, AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

No area of CEP’s work has undergone such a thorough transformation during *The Plan for CEP 2008–2010*. A redesigned website, new blog, active social media presence, higher media profile, and stepped-up programming efforts are among the changes made in the past several years. We will seek to build on this progress in the coming years through a variety of communications and programming initiatives, including:

- Creation of greater online and offline community among tool users. We want to do more to facilitate the exchange of information and a sense of belonging to an

We want to do more to facilitate the exchange of information and a sense of belonging to an important community among those who are most committed to using data to improve the effectiveness of their foundations — and we will explore ways to do so.



important community among those who are most committed to using data to improve the effectiveness of their foundations — and we will explore ways to do so. This community will allow users to exchange information with each other more easily and will offer privileged access to CEP research insights and new analyses.

- Continued repurposing of insights from our research to make them both more easily digestible and more easily found — through webinars, our “Data in Action” series, and blog posts.
- New efforts to promote our cause. We are planning to launch a more coordinated

campaign to emphasize the need for greater effectiveness and how CEP's knowledge base and tools can help – through a range of communication media.

- Increased use of new media. CEP's blog, in less than a year, has become the second most widely read blog among foundation CEOs, behind only the Huffington Post.⁹ In addition, we now have more than 750 Twitter followers – most at foundations and philanthropic infrastructure organizations – and are continuously exploring how best capitalize on new technologies to reach our target audience. We will continue to focus on this, dedicating more staff and financial resources to this effort.

On the development front, we are actively raising money for a second Funders Collaborative to provide the needed support for research, programming and communications, and development of new tools. We are in discussions with members of the current collaborative as well as new prospects.

In addition, we are continuing to seek to add new discretionary level funders who consider support for CEP akin to “dues” they pay to other organizations that they believe strengthen philanthropy.

FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Prior to 2008, we lacked an adequately staffed finance and administration team, as well as much of the necessary infrastructure to support an organization of our size. Over the past three years, we have expanded our office in Cambridge, opened an office in San Francisco, implemented a new client relationships management system, streamlined processes, and vastly improved our financial tracking and reporting functions. We will work to build on that progress during 2011–2014.

Initiatives include:

- building the human resources function and improving a variety of HR programs: recruiting, orientation, mentoring, training, professional development, career progression, performance measurement, employee relations, and compensation and benefits;
- implementing new technologies, specifically a new data management system for our comparative datasets (this is in process);
- driving better economics in the assessment tools area by improving the timeliness of reporting and reducing costs.



⁹ Foundation Center, “Are Foundation Leaders Using Social Media?” September 2010: 2.

THE ECONOMIC MODEL

To undertake the initiatives we describe, we will need to increase the size of the staff of CEP. CEP has decreased its dependence on contributed revenue, as a percentage of total revenue, during *The Plan for CEP 2008–2010*. Our goal is for earned revenue to continue to be at least 55 percent of total revenue by 2014. In addition, we will seek to build board designated reserves from their current level of 3.5 months of operating expenses to 5 months of operating expenses by 2014.

Contributed revenue covers the costs of both our research and our programming and communications functions. In addition, contributed revenue currently subsidizes our assessment tool work. That subsidy goes to support the development of new tools and efforts to bring to scale relatively young tools, such as the Donor Perception Report (DPR) — which is not yet break-even. The Grantee Perception Report (GPR), Stakeholder Assessment Report, and Beneficiary Perception Report (BPR) are break-even or better, with a full allocation of overhead. During 2011–2014, we will continue to improve the economics of the assessment tools.

It should be noted that our assessment tool team builds the datasets that our research team analyzes. So, the costs of doing the research we do would in fact be significantly higher if we had to develop those datasets from scratch. Nonetheless, over the course of the planning period, we will seek to improve the economics of the assessment tools and reduce the dependence on contributed revenue.

Our contributed revenue comes in three forms: major, multiyear commitments of general operating support from our Funders Collaborative; project support; and discretionary-level support (grants usually ranging from \$5,000 to \$50,000), mostly

from assessment tool users who value and wish to support our work. We are seeking significant commitments over the next four years from our Funders Collaborative. However, should our funding come in at lower levels, we may need to delay some of the more costly initiatives contemplated here, like the development of an online dashboard.

Our long-term aspiration is to reduce our reliance on grant support both through improved economics of our tools and through the establishment of an endowment to support CEP. We believe that CEP and its independence — perceived and actual — will be strengthened by removing the need for fundraising from the very foundations to which we are providing assessment tools (which are then frequently used publicly to demonstrate effectiveness). The establishment of an endowment would help us to accomplish that goal. While we are confident in our ability to act always with integrity and with total fidelity to the data, we believe that the dual relationships we have with funders that are both grant supporters and tool users could be used to undermine CEP's influence by those who might seek to question our work. We believe that foundations and foundation effectiveness would be best served if CEP had the kind of independence an endowment would allow. In this scenario, earned revenue would, of course, continue to provide the bulk of total revenue.

CEP has decreased its dependence on contributed revenue, as a percentage of total revenue, during The Plan for CEP 2008–2010.

MEASURING CEP'S PERFORMANCE

The assessment of CEP's performance is challenging, as we described in an essay laying out our thinking on our approach in our 2008 Annual Report.¹⁰ The ultimate assessment questions are:

- 1) To what extent has CEP's work with funders contributed to them exemplifying the characteristics we believe to be essential to effectiveness?
- 2) To what extent are grantees consequently having a different experience?
- 3) To what extent are funders that exemplify these characteristics able to more persuasively demonstrate their impact?

The first and second questions are easier to answer in the near-term than the third – and so this is where we propose to dedicate our data-tracking efforts during the coming years. Over time, we hope that the third question becomes easier to answer. As more foundations exemplify the dimensions of effectiveness, we will be able to judge whether they have a more powerful case to make for their impact.

We track a variety of indicators on a "dashboard" that is regularly reviewed by the senior staff. The dashboard, which we are continually iterating, contains the items we believe connect to our ability to achieve our goals that we are able to monitor on a frequent basis. In addition, we have periodically presented to the board results against indicators that we believe are relevant to our performance.

For 2011–2014, we propose the following measures for the board to review annually, at its February meeting.

FOUNDATION CHANGE MEASURES

These measures get closest to understanding our "impact." They allow us to understand if

foundations are operating in ways that are consistent with our working definition of effectiveness. Over time, we will also seek to document the degree to which those foundations are then able to make a more compelling case for their own impact on people, issues, and communities.

- **Proportion of funders that say that their organization is making significant change in at least one area as a result of CEP research.** This measure comes from LFA Group data and will be reported as the *CEP Market and Impact Assessment Survey* is refreshed.
- **Proportion of funders in primary audience that have used a CEP tool, proportion that have repeated use of a CEP tool, and, crucially, proportion that have made meaningful improvement upon repeating.** CEP currently defines its primary audience as the approximately 950 foundations with at least \$5 million in annual giving. It is important to track meaningful improvement across all tools.
- **Proportion of funders using an integrated set of measures to track performance.** To be assessed through our research projects.
- **Number of "GPR Plus" clients.** "GPR Plus" clients have used the GPR and at least one other assessment tool.

INFLUENCE AND VISIBILITY MEASURES

These measures relate to our influence and visibility. The logic for tracking them is that they are precursors to our ability to influence change at foundations.

- **Proportion of funders that report "CEP has an excellent reputation."** This measure comes from LFA Group data and will be reported as the *CEP Market and Impact*

¹⁰ "Better Data, Better Decisions, Better Philanthropy: The Center for Effective Philanthropy's 2008 Annual Report." The Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2009: 4–7.

Assessment Survey is refreshed.

- **Number of speaking engagements.**
Includes all speaking engagements by CEP staff in the past year.
- **Number of research publications downloads.**
Includes all research publications downloaded from CEP's website in the past year.
- **Press coverage in major media.**
This would be based on monitoring of an agreed-upon list of key media for influencing our target audience.
- **Number of citations of research in publications by others.**
Frequency of mentions of and references to CEP research in publications by academics and others writing about philanthropy.
- **Proportion of conference attendees who report that CEP's conference is as useful as or more useful than other conferences they have attended.**
Based on CEP post-conference survey.
- **Number of unique visitors to CEP's website and time on site.**
Includes all unique visitors to CEP's website in the past year.
- **Number of Twitter followers.**
Includes total unique followers from @pbuchanan_cep and @CEP_CambSanFran. CEP's Twitter followers represent a broad group including grantees, funders, media, and consultants.

ECONOMIC MEASURES

These economic measures relate to our ability to be a sustainable and viable organization.

- **Earned revenue as a proportion of total revenue.**
- **Fundraising relative to targets.**
- **Economic contribution of CEP tools.**
This is the cumulative economic contribution of all CEP tools, including fullyloaded overhead.

STAFF AND OPERATIONAL MEASURES

These measures relate to our organizational effectiveness, which we believe connects to our ability to perform on the other dimensions.

- **Average satisfaction rating of CEP staff.**
This will come from CEP's annual survey of its staff.
- **Proportion turnover in CEP staff.**
This will include turnover in the past year.
- **Perceptions of board effectiveness — Board self-perceptions as well as senior staff perceptions.**
Instrument and process are to be determined.

We are presenting baseline data to the board on as many of these dimensions as possible in February 2011, and then will track relative to that baseline during the Plan period.

RISK

CEP has, since it received initial funding in 2001, embraced risk as a necessary element of our work. In the early days, for example, we needed to survey grantees without foundations' permission in order to demonstrate the value of a comparative dataset of grantee perceptions. This action, which we believed was absolutely necessary, precipitated threats (which turned out to be empty) of legal action. Our first survey of foundation CEOs, on performance assessment practices, caused enough consternation that one major foundation CEO reached out to our funders to protest the potential "danger" of developing data on this issue.

While we have never taken risks cavalierly, we have always understood that some element of risk is necessary if we are to influence foundation practice. This Plan, too, is not without significant risks. Among the risks are that we will not be able to raise sufficient funding to undertake those initiatives that require grant support, that initiatives we believe have promise will fail to have the desired influence, or that change in practice will come slower than we hope as a result of the many forces that make change difficult. But the most significant risk to CEP is errors in data analysis or reporting that lead to inaccurate findings and undermine the credibility and authority of the organization. To date, we have been successful in guarding against errors because of our staff's commitment to diligent quality control processes and data checking. As a result, we have a reputation for data that is trustworthy and for analysis that is rigorous – as the surveys LFA has conducted for us show. We must continue to be vigilant in guarding what is, finally, our most precious resource: the integrity of our work.

Another risk to an organization like CEP, which is approaching its 10th anniversary, is that complacency sets in that leads our work to become stale and that stifles innovation and creativity. We work hard to



We must continue to be vigilant in guarding what is, finally, our most precious resource: the integrity of our work.

maintain a healthy paranoia within our staff and board about the relevance and currency of our work, and we must continue to do so. This is particularly important in an increasingly crowded landscape of firms and organizations seeking to position themselves as resources to funders. Among the important aspects of the way we work is a penchant for getting tough feedback on drafts of everything we do – including this Plan – from the smartest and most critical people we can find. While this process is often painful, it helps ensure that we stay on our toes and maintain a constant focus on how we can improve what is working while taking on the most promising new initiatives that fit our strategy.

CONCLUSION

CEP has achieved a great deal over the past nine and a half years, and the data suggests that our work is having a positive influence in ways that are consistent with our logic model and strategy. Foundations are making changes as a result of our work in large numbers, and grantees are having a different experience at foundations that use our most widely adopted tool, the Grantee Perception Report, a second time relative to their experience the first time.

The Plan for CEP 2011–2014 seeks to build on that progress, continuing and improving that which is working well while also launching several important, new initiatives. Those initiatives build on CEP’s distinctive strengths: our comparative data sets and analytic skills. They also tap into changes in our environment and seek to exploit opportunities presented by the adoption of new technologies among our audience as well as those we survey.

Clearly, there is much uncertainty in our environment, and while we have sought to lay out key initiatives here, it is important to remember that we will also seek to capitalize on opportunities when they arise to influence foundations in ways that are

consistent with our strategy. The Strategy Landscape Tool partnership with Monitor Institute is a good example of an opportunity that we could not have envisioned a year ago, but that we have chosen to seize because of its clear fit with CEP’s direction. So, while this plan seeks to be comprehensive, it cannot envision every scenario. That’s why perhaps the most important sections of this document – more than the specifics about what we propose to do – are the ones that lay out the change we seek to drive in foundations and reflect on what has and hasn’t worked as we have implemented our strategy to date. Clarity about these issues provides a decision-making framework that will guide us well, no matter what changes occur around us.

Ultimately, those of us affiliated with CEP will only consider ourselves successful when the overwhelming number of larger foundations exemplify the qualities that we believe are essential to foundation effectiveness. We have, yet, a long way to go, then, before we can declare true success.

We hope and believe that what is outlined in this Plan will move us significantly closer.

APPENDIX A: DATA GATHERING ACTIVITIES

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITY
To ground us in how what we are doing today fits with our logic model/strategy	Map current CEP activities to logic model
To inform our conversations on future research topics and ensure we are using existing datasets to their fullest capacity	Take inventory of all current datasets
To understand how CEP is viewed and experienced today (and how that has changed since 2007) and the degree to which our activities are influencing foundation behaviors in ways consistent with our logic model	Repeat of 2007 LFA “Market and Impact Assessment” survey and interviews
To understand how CEP fits into landscape of other organizations	Develop updated analysis of competitive/collaborative landscape
To support board and senior staff in ensuring we get the best thinking out of Board and in articulating Plan	Solicit Board perspectives through individual interviews, help plan and facilitate May retreat, help synthesize what we are hearing and draft Plan
To understand whether funders are changing in ways that are consistent with our logic model and whether CEP has possibly contributed to that change	Mine existing CEP data for insights on degree to which funders exemplify key characteristics in logic model and, where possible, evidence of CEP contributions to change
To ensure we are making choices that support a sustainable economic model by increasing contribution of tools	Financial analysis and modeling to understand potential future economic model — revenue mix and implications
To draw on existing data that can inform our planning efforts	Share previously commissioned assessments of aspects of CEP work – LFA annual survey of GPR users and CEP internal annual Staff Perception Report
To ensure we are operating with an eye toward future trends to maximize our relevance and impact	Analysis of trends that may influence CEP’s efforts

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