



Member Spotlight

An important element of grantmaker transparency is openly sharing results and making a strong commitment to learn from an assessment's findings. Putting longstanding evaluation systems in place can give a clear sense of an organization's successes, challenges and role in its community over a span of years. This comparative data helps to derive a better understanding of what works, why it works and how to move forward, creating greater impact and allowing for continuous improvement through time.

This ongoing evaluation practice has long been accepted and implemented by The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts. Throughout its first ten years, the foundation has taken measures to evaluate and fully understand the difference they make in their region. After their first year of operation, the foundation conducted a "formative evaluation" that assessed the community's view of their grantmaking agenda and processes. This focus on "results-oriented grantmaking" guided future evaluations over the years and set the precedent to continue seeking feedback in their work. "We have consistently emphasized the value of evaluation in our grantees' work. So, it is only appropriate that we also periodically subject our work to a formal, systematic review," stated Dr. Jan Yost, president of the foundation.

With ten years of work complete, the foundation conducted an evaluation to determine if their grantmaking avenues and goals were still realistic, fit within their community and, most importantly, were making an impact. This evaluation resulted in a new report, *Evaluation Report for The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts: Analyses of Its First Ten Years of Grantmaking (2000-2010)*, which examines the foundation's avenues of grantmaking and whether each avenue contributes and complements the others in achieving the foundation's mission.

The three grantmaking avenues, Health Care and Health Promotion Synergy Initiative, Activation Fund and Board Designated, were evaluated in several ways. An explanation of each was laid out in the report, describing useful information such as highlights, key findings, unexpected outcomes and suggestions for improvement, among others. Guiding questions framed each section of the report, helping the foundation realize if a funding avenue was still necessary, innovative and useful for their grantees. The evaluation consultants who authored the report answer these questions through the report, which ultimately, leads to an understanding of how well the mission is being accomplished.

The report's findings allowed the foundation to see that their mission of improving the region's health has been achieved, especially in addressing mental health, oral health, homelessness and hunger. "The report provides the Board and staff with informed conclusions and suggestions for improvement, rather than relying on anecdotes and assumptions. We look forward to applying the knowledge gained from this report as we begin the next decade with confidence in the foundation's capacity to achieve even greater impact in the years ahead," Yost added. Access the report on the foundation's Web site, <http://www.hfcm.org/>.