

EVALUATION TEACHING CASE

Evaluation of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's Preschool for California's Children Grantmaking Program

By Susan Parker
Clear Thinking Communications

September 2011



Teaching Evaluation Using the Case Method

[From: Patton, M. Q. & Patrizi, P. (2005). Teaching evaluation using the case method. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass. pp. 5-14.]

“[Traditional] evaluation training...relies mainly on traditional didactic teaching in the classroom to ground students in the scientific approaches that are the cornerstone of the field. But methods are only the beginning of what [students] need to understand in order to succeed. Once students have mastered the basics of evaluation options, designs, and methods, the challenge of professional practice becomes matching actual evaluation design and processes to the nature of the situation, as well as hearing and mediating the opposing opinions that often surface.

In mature professions like law, medicine, and business, case teaching has become fundamental to professional development. Once one has learned the basic knowledge of a field, higher-level applications require judgment, astute situational analysis, critical thinking, and often creativity. Professional practice does not lend itself to rules and formulas. Decisions are seldom routine. Each new client, patient, or customer presents a new challenge. How does one teach professionals to do situational analysis and exercise astute judgment? The answer from these established professions is the case method.”

“Cases take us beyond the reality of the individual and plunge the learner into a plot with multiple perspectives, strong disagreements, and avid articulation of fully plausible yet fully divergent views. Just as in real life, learners hear from others who may have conflicting opinions, but unlike reality, learners can step out of vested interests, remove blinders that can hinder learning, and experiment with new skills and approaches in a secure environment.”

Best teaching case practices include:

- The core decision points throughout the case should have enough tension (and enough factual information and context leading up to them) that you could reasonably argue competing perspectives about the decisions made. In other words, the case should not just be a narrative about what worked or did not work. There must be clear moments where decisions could have gone different ways. Choices have different benefits and costs.
- The author's voice should be neutral, with no "drawing of conclusions." The tension between the choices at the decision points can, for example, be presented through direct quotes of the participants. The case itself does not do any diagnosing or give commentary on the success or failure of a particular decision, nor does it frame or summarize the questions for discussion.
- The facilitator should be able to ask questions like: "What is the main tension at play here?" "What do you think about the way the group decided to proceed?" "What are the practical implications of the decision for grantees?" "What did they give up by going that route?" "What else could they have done and at what cost/to what benefit?"

Background on the Case

This teaching case was written for evaluators and funders. The case focuses on a real-world evaluation supported by a private foundation that used a *strategic learning* approach to evaluation. Strategic learning means using evaluation to help organizations or groups learn in real-time and adapt their strategies to the changing circumstances around them. It means integrating evaluation and evaluative thinking into strategic decision making and bringing timely data to the table for reflection and use. It means making evaluation a part of the intervention—embedding it so that it influences the process.

Evaluation focused on strategic learning is different from more traditional evaluation approaches in some important ways. For example, it is fundamentally different from *summative* evaluation, which judges the overall merit or worth of an effort for the purpose of concluding whether that effort should be continued or discontinued.¹ As Michael Patton says, summative evaluation is not even possible with emergent strategies because they will not “hold still long enough for summative review.”² Strategic learning is also different from *formative* evaluation, which focuses on improving a program or effort, often so that a later summative evaluation can be done. While strategic learning certainly aims to help strategies improve or move in a positive direction, in reality the “right” direction is not always known. Strategic learning means helping strategies adapt based on what information is known or can be collected at the time. It does not necessarily mean making judgments that what was done before was ineffective. Finally, strategic learning is different from evaluation focused on *accountability*, which aims to ensure that efforts are doing what they said they would do and that resources are being managed well. Strategic learning has a much broader purpose that goes well beyond oversight and compliance.

Specifically, this case focuses on the *evaluation of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation’s Preschool for California’s Children grantmaking program. It is intended to promote a critical analysis of the evaluation and its evolving interaction with the grantmaking program and strategy, rather than an analysis of the grantmaking strategy itself.* The case chronicles the evaluation’s nine-year evolution, and identifies key points at which it switched course because methods were not working, or because the Foundation’s strategy shifted. It highlights several questions/challenges, all of which are relevant to strategic learning approaches, such as:

- How to ensure the evaluation is useful to multiple audiences (board, funder, grantees)
- How to “embed” the evaluator in a reasonable way while maintaining role boundaries
- How to manage often competing learning versus accountability needs
- How to time data collection so it is “just in time” but also reliable and credible
- How to get information that does not just verify what program officers already know.

¹ Scriven, M. (1991). *Evaluation thesaurus*. 4th edition. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

² Patton, M.Q. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. p. 118.

TEACHING GUIDELINES AND QUESTIONS

These questions and teaching points are intended to be suggestive of possible discussion questions to be used during the teaching case's facilitation. This list is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive. They are lead questions that require probing, elaboration, and discussion during the teaching case process.

Case Teaching Questions	Evaluation Points to Elicit During Questioning
<p>1. Evaluation Design: Why did evaluators choose a strategic learning approach to evaluation? What were the factors that led them to conclude that this was the best design choice? What might have been other alternatives? What conditions are critical for a strategic learning approach to work? What does it take to determine a client's (i.e., foundation's or nonprofit's) readiness and capacity for a strategic learning evaluation?</p>	<p>The Packard Foundation's preschool grantmaking strategy included advocacy and had a policy change goal. As a ten-year initiative, it was clear at the start that the strategy would evolve in response to changing political and economic conditions in California. The evaluators chose a strategic learning approach because they felt it would be of great <i>use</i> to the Foundation given these emergent and changing conditions. They also felt that the Foundation's culture and overall orientation to evaluation provided a promising context for a strategic learning approach. The case allows for a discussion about the conditions under which less traditional evaluation approaches like strategic learning are (or are not) a good fit. It allows for insights about the conditions that are essential for a strategic learning approach to succeed.</p>
<p>2. Users and Uses: Can an evaluation focused on strategic learning and informing the decisions of a specific group of individuals be useful to multiple audiences at once (board, funder, grantees)? What does it take to design and manage evaluations that serve the simultaneous purpose of supporting both strategic learning <i>and</i> accountability for outcomes?</p>	<p>Evaluations often have multiple audiences, including boards, program officers, and grantees. With any evaluation, it can be challenging to meet the needs and intended uses of all audiences simultaneously. With strategic learning, where the focus is on integrating evaluative information into the decision making process for a specific set of evaluation users, this can be a particular challenge. Here, the evaluators focused on the Packard Foundation's program team as their primary audience. As a result, the evaluation's findings were seen as less useful for grantees. This choice of a primary user audience also created challenges when it came time to report to the Trustees. The case offers an opportunity to discuss if and how an evaluation focused on strategic learning can manage the differing information needs and uses of different audiences.</p>
<p>3. Evaluator Role: What is the role of the evaluator with a strategic learning approach to evaluation? How is this role different from traditional evaluation? What does this imply for evaluator objectivity? What should appropriate boundaries be with strategic learning?</p>	<p>With a strategic learning approach, evaluators are embedded and use a collaborative and participatory evaluation process. This approach is different from traditional evaluation in which the evaluator remains deliberately separate. "Evaluators become part of a team whose members collaborate to conceptualize, design and test new approaches in a long-term, ongoing process of continuous improvement, adaptation, and intentional change. The evaluator's primary function in the team is to elucidate team discussions with evaluative questions, data and logic, and to facilitate data-based assessments and decision making in the unfolding and developmental processes of innovation."³ This "learning partner" role helps evaluators stay on top of potential strategy shifts and allows them to facilitate reflection and feedback. The evaluators here were clear from the start that they wanted to help Packard succeed in its goal of achieving universal preschool in California. They were integrated and part of the program team. This case allows for a discussion about evaluator role boundaries, what those boundaries are traditionally, and whether and how they should be interpreted differently with a strategic learning approach.</p>

³ Patton, M. Q. (2006). Evaluation for the way we work. *The Nonprofit Quarterly*, 28-33.

Case Teaching Questions	Evaluation Points to Elicit During Questioning
<p>4. Flexibility and Timing: How can evaluators simultaneously meet demands for flexibility and quick timing while also maintaining data collection quality and rigor? What are the implications for evaluation contracts and resources with strategic learning approaches?</p>	<p>With a strategic learning approach, timing is everything. To ensure that evaluation is used, evaluators who aim to support real-time learning and decision making must deliver the right data at the right time. They must be <i>flexible</i>—willing to adjust their data collection plans according to how the environment or strategy is shifting; and <i>timely</i>—providing data and facilitating learning at the <u>right</u> time to inform strategic decisions. Evaluators who support strategic learning often must have the capacity to work <i>rapidly</i>—quick to design, implement, and analyze data; and <i>responsively</i>—able to provide useful and trustworthy strategy-level data when the need arises. All of the data and intelligence needs of an evolving strategy cannot be anticipated at the outset of a social change effort, and many arise at a moment’s notice. Fast-moving policy environments, for example, often present unexpected windows of opportunity or quick and unexpected changes in momentum. This case offers the opportunity to discuss issues around the communication structure, resource investments, and other practical concerns that are needed to make a strategic learning evaluation work for both evaluators and funders.</p>
<p>5. Learning: What does it mean for a strategic learning evaluation to be successful? How do we know when strategic learning has occurred? What structure and processes are important to ensure such learning occurs? What is the evaluator’s responsibility in the learning process?</p>	<p>While the quality of data collection and design is crucial, the ultimate criterion for the success of a strategic learning approach is the extent to which the client <i>uses</i> the information generated through data collection and reflection to answer strategy-related questions. Evaluation for strategic learning is necessarily utilization-focused, and is therefore committed to <i>actionable</i> data. However, evaluators supporting strategic learning cannot assume that learning necessarily happens simply because data are available, even when data are actionable and timely. To help support use, evaluators must collect and then frame data in a way that clarifies its connection to strategy and tactics, surfacing its implications. Evaluators must also build in <i>intentional</i> learning and reflection processes so that its users—the strategic decision makers—become <i>sense</i>makers, too, interpreting the meaning of data and uncovering the implications together. This case allows for a discussion about how the evaluators attempted to foster learning and use of data, and how the Foundation responded. In some cases, the Foundation chose to go in a different direction than the evaluation data suggested. Does this mean that strategic learning did not occur?</p>

TEACHING CASE

Evaluation of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's Preschool for California's Children Grantmaking Program

by Susan Parker
Clear Thinking Communications

Introduction

This case tells the story of how external evaluators and program staff at the David and Lucile Packard Foundation took a risk on a nontraditional approach to evaluation. Called “real-time evaluation” or “developmental evaluation,” this approach aims to promote *strategic learning* by providing regular, timely information about how a strategy is unfolding, which organizations then use to inform future work and make course corrections.

This type of evaluation relies heavily on skills that are often not required of evaluators and program officers. To be successful, a specific organizational culture must also be present. The evaluators had tried this approach at another foundation and experienced several challenges. While they had faith in this newer evaluation approach, they were also wary from their earlier experience.

Packard program officers, meanwhile, had mixed experiences with evaluation. Some were unconvinced that evaluations were useful. The Packard Board of Trustees, while open to employing a new approach to evaluation, also had more traditional evaluation questions about long-term impacts. What's more, the context was challenging—the Packard Foundation had recently suffered a devastating loss of assets and needed to make large cuts in its grantmaking programs.

During this time, Packard made a major investment in a strategy to ensure that all three- and four-year-olds in California would have access to preschool within 10 years. The preschool grantmaking program was among the largest and most audacious programs that Packard had ever funded. Hand in hand with this bold strategy, Packard contracted for an evaluation approach that had potential but was yet to be fully tested.

The Beginning

In March 2002, Lois Salisbury came to work at the David and Lucile Packard Foundation at one of the most difficult periods in the Foundation's nearly 40-year history. Packard had hired Salisbury to head its Children, Families, and Communities program, one of six grantmaking program areas.

Salisbury, who had worked for 20 years as a class action civil rights litigator and later led Children Now, California's largest child advocacy organization in the state, is at heart an advocate, a fighter and a risk taker. She was taking a calculated risk coming to Packard.

A family-led foundation that was built on the success of Hewlett-Packard, the Foundation's assets were largely tied to the company's stock. In the dot-com bust and other shakeups in the early 2000s, the Foundation's assets tumbled from \$13 billion in 2000 to \$5.8 billion just one year later.⁴

As the Foundation looked to places to cut its grantmaking, the Children, Families, and Communities program took one of the hardest hits. Grants in Salisbury's program were slashed an average of 76 percent in 2002 (compared to 2001). Salisbury had to find a way to make an impact with a much smaller grantmaking budget than the program had in earlier years.

"The charge I was given was to bring focus and leadership at a time of needed restructuring because of a change in assets," Salisbury said.

A Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal Emerges

Salisbury is a big believer in focus. From her experience as a litigator and advocate, it makes sense to choose one or two big goals, adopt a long-term view and take big risks. "I was inspired by the work of [author] Jim Collins and setting big, hairy, audacious goals," she said.⁵

Salisbury and her team's big, hairy, audacious goal became achieving voluntary, high-quality preschool for all three- and four-year-olds in California by 2013. If achieved, the goal would benefit more than one million children each year.

Salisbury bet a big percentage of her program's funds on this one goal. She had consolidated the Children, Families, and Communities program from 12 subprograms to just three. If approved by Packard's Board of Trustees, more than 50 percent of the Children, Families and Communities' annual budget would be devoted to preschool grantmaking over the next 10 years.

Salisbury liked the preschool goal because it was compelling, it was backed by strong evidence on the effect of quality preschool on children's educational future, parents and others instantly grasped the importance of preschool, and she thought it was winnable. Salisbury also liked the specificity of achieving universal preschool for all three- and four-year-olds. It was a goal that people could grasp and get behind.

"We thought it was a key part of the early childhood agenda that could be lifted up and moved," she said. "If you only talk about early childhood in a broad sense, people don't understand it."

Preschool was also a compelling strategic focus for Packard's CFC Program. Research shows that preschool can be a powerful lever for improving children's lives, yet California lagged behind the rest of the nation in providing preschool to its youngsters. By adopting a preschool focus, the Foundation could build on its historic commitment to early childhood issues, while strengthening the children's advocacy field in California as a whole.

⁴ Williams, R. (2003). Riding the roller coaster at Packard. *Foundation News & Commentary*, 44(4).

⁵ Salisbury is referring to the book: Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great*. New York: Harper Business.

The Political Climate Holds Promise

While Salisbury believed the case was strong for universal preschool, it was not yet on California’s policy agenda or part of the public debate. At its core, the success of Packard’s strategy would depend on state-level policy change.⁶ Policy-oriented grants would focus on activities that were appropriate for a private foundation to fund, including policy development, nonpartisan research and analysis, coalition building, and other non-lobbying activities. However, policy change was not the grantmaking program’s only goal. Packard also aimed to expand the capacity and improve the quality of California’s preschool system by supporting county- and school district-based preschool programs, some already planned and others anticipated.

Salisbury was a close watcher of California’s political climate, and she saw opportunities that the Packard Foundation could build on. While the economic and political picture did not yet favor a state-level policy change, Salisbury believed that an opening could exist in the next three to five years. In a few years, California would have a new governor and, because of term limits, many new legislators who could be educated about the need for universal preschool. Leaders in Los Angeles had made universal preschool a priority, supported by a local initiative with \$100 million in funding. Other states were considering universal preschool and could serve as an example to California.

In addition, actor and advocate Rob Reiner had successfully led a ballot initiative—Proposition 10—that used a tax on cigarettes for early childhood investments. He was laying the groundwork for another ballot initiative that, if passed, would fund universal preschool through taxes on higher-income individuals. Reiner was also an important ally because he headed the First Five California Children & Families Commission, which was created to oversee funding for early childhood issues from the tobacco tax. First Five was also putting major dollars into increasing access to high-quality preschool statewide.

Packard Trustees Sign Off

The goal of universal preschool resonated with Packard’s Board of Trustees. Early childhood investments had been a cornerstone of the Packard Foundation’s grantmaking for years. It was a passion of the Packard family, especially Lucile Packard, and key trustees including Lew Platt, a board member who succeeded David Packard as the CEO of Hewlett-Packard as well as Packard president Richard Schlosberg.

With Salisbury and her team’s groundwork and the backing of key Packard leaders, in March 2003 the Packard Foundation’s Board of Trustees approved the new preschool grantmaking program. The initial dollar commitment was \$9 million in 2003, with the expectation that similar amounts would be invested over the next 10 years.⁷

To reach its goal of achieving universal access to high-quality preschool for all California three- and four-year-olds, the program had three main components designed to work together to build support and demand for state-level policy changes:

⁶ The Packard Foundation does not fund attempts to influence specific legislation or ballot measures.

⁷ Though there were no guarantees, as the Packard Foundation makes annual grants rather than multi-year commitments.

(1) *Leadership and Engagement (advocacy)*: Engage a broad coalition of organizations and constituencies (education, business, early childhood, and the Latino community) to support high-quality preschool in California. As part of this effort, Packard created Preschool California, an advocacy hub, to coordinate the overall effort.

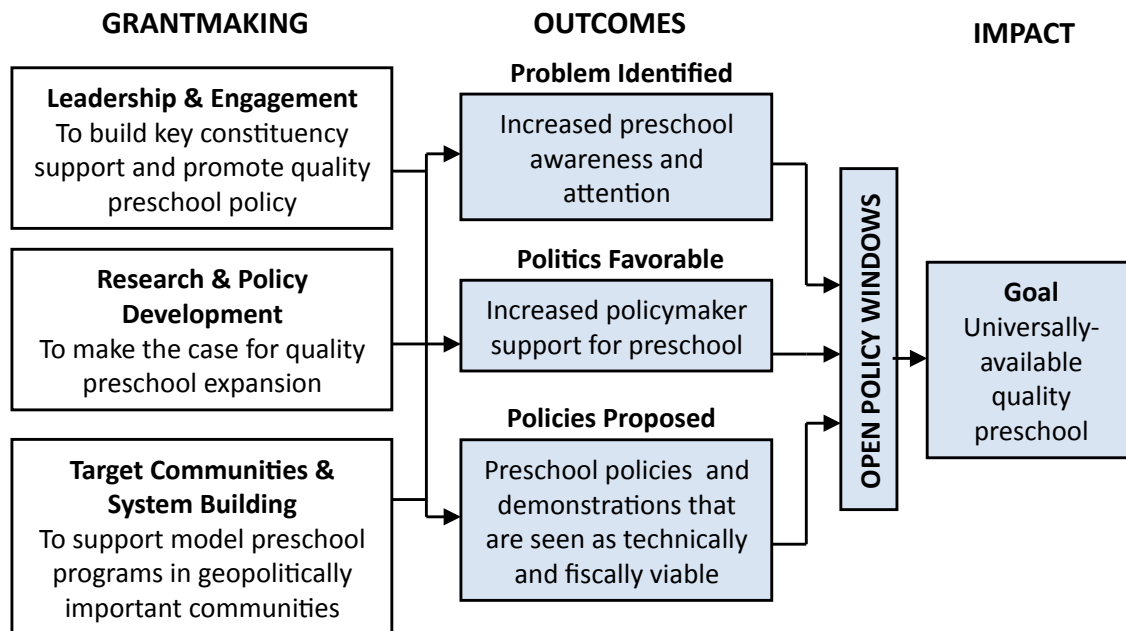
“Preschool needed to be more important in key constituencies than it was,” Salisbury said. “Politically, it [didn’t have enough support]; this issue was not going to move. We needed to identify to key constituents that were going to own it.”

(2) *Research and Policy Development*: Fund California-specific research that focused on: the benefits of high-quality preschool programs for K-12; cost and financing; preschool teacher training, compensation, and retention; and baseline data on California’s preschool system. Grantees could then use this research to support policy development and advocacy.

“We were convinced that the research existed but it was not California specific enough to persuade California audiences,” Salisbury said. “We needed a compelling research case.”

(3) *Target Communities and System Building*: Increase the supply and quality of preschool in California. As part of this effort, Packard would seed local preschool systems in key, politically important California communities that could show the difference that quality preschool makes to children. These projects would not only serve children but would be a way to engage business and political leaders who could see real-life examples of this work.

Preschool for California’s Children Strategy



A Different Kind of Evaluation is Proposed

“Before the ink was dry” on Packard’s approval of the preschool subprogram, Salisbury met Heather Weiss, the executive director of the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP), which works with foundations, nonprofits and policymakers to develop and evaluate strategies to promote the well being of children, youth, families and their communities.

Salisbury told Weiss about the new Packard strategy. Weiss told Salisbury that she needed to think about how to evaluate the work.

Salisbury recalls, “When I got to know Heather, evaluation was frankly new to me. I had some experience with evaluation in advocacy when I headed Children Now but I had not been in philanthropy before...I had operated in a rough and tumble world where there were winners and losers. We didn’t need evaluators to tell us whether a case won or lost. A traditional approach to evaluation I thought would be a waste of money. It would tell us in five or ten years what you did. Meanwhile, something has happened that affects your strategy now.”

Weiss told Salisbury about another approach to evaluation, which could give Packard “real time” feedback on its strategy that the Foundation could use, in conjunction with other information, to inform decisions at the strategy level and make course corrections if necessary. Called variously “real-time evaluation” or “developmental evaluation,” these approaches share something in common—an emphasis on promoting strategic learning.

Strategic learning is the use of data and insights from a variety of information-gathering approaches—such as evaluation, situation analysis, and systematic reflection—to inform decision making about strategy. Strategic learning occurs when organizations or groups integrate data and evaluative thinking into their work and then adapt their strategies in response to what they learn. Strategic learning makes intelligence-gathering and evaluation a part of a strategy’s development and implementation—embedding it so that it influences the process.

Evaluation focused on strategic learning is just one approach to evaluation and is not suited for every program or every foundation, Weiss made clear. It is also an approach that Weiss and colleague Julia Coffman believed in, had already had some challenging experiences in testing out, and wanted to try again—under the right circumstances.

From 1997 to 2002, the HFRP team had the opportunity to test this new approach when the W.K. Kellogg Foundation asked them to evaluate its Devolution Initiative, which it funded to learn about the implications of devolving major responsibilities for welfare reform and health care policy from the federal level to the states, and to mobilize advocates to respond as the implications unfolded.

The evaluation had multiple components, which included providing timely, continuous feedback to Kellogg about how the initiative was—or was not—working.

While Kellogg was an early pioneer in trying out the real-time evaluation approach, and Weiss and Coffman and their team were able to test several of their ideas—and could point to some successes—for a variety of reasons and circumstances the experience as a whole was difficult.⁸

“As I think about [my initial conversation with Lois], I had just come off the experience with Kellogg,” Weiss said. “We had learned a lot. This was a good opportunity for us to step back and ask, ‘what are the conditions necessary for this to work?’”

⁸ See also: Sherwood, K.E. (2010). The W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Devolution Initiative: An experiment in evaluating strategy. In P.A. Patrizi, & M.Q. Patton (Eds.), *Evaluating Strategy. New Directions for Evaluation*, 128, 69-86.

The Conditions for Strategic Learning are Examined

Among those conditions was that the foundation must be an organization committed to ongoing learning, Weiss said. People have to be willing and supported in speaking up, be encouraged to offer “discrepant” information and have the ability to try new things and fail without being punished. Much of her thinking was informed by Harvard Business School professor David Garvin’s work on building learning organizations.⁹

While Weiss had worked with Packard in the past and had a strong feeling that it was the learning organization required for this type of evaluation, she needed to make sure before agreeing to do an evaluation on the preschool subprogram. Weiss and Coffman flew out to Packard. They wanted to see firsthand how Salisbury and her team worked together.

“I can still remember Lois and her team all sitting around the table and we had this really interesting discussion where we laid out our approach,” Weiss said. “[Julia and I] tried to glean from this team whether the conditions necessary for us to succeed were there.”

“Lois looked for ideas from others and was open to hearing alternative opinions,” Weiss continued. “I also had the sense that Lois was flexible. She is a risk taker, she has a strong strategy and theory of change but it is not set in stone. I had the sense that if the data didn’t point in the way she wanted to go that she would make changes. I thought ‘this is a team that can use and learn from this approach.’ And, we will have fun doing this work. It will be an exciting journey to try and accomplish something important.”

Coffman added, “The reason we thought it would work in this case is because Packard is very much a learning-oriented group. They talk strategy every single day. They were constantly thinking about what they need to be doing differently. It was an opportunity to build evaluation into that process as one thing that informed their future.”

At the same time, while there was a good deal of confidence that the conditions were right, according to Coffman there was still a lot of uncertainty about the precise conditions needed for a strategic learning approach to work.

“It worked in this case,” she said. “But I still have questions about what really has to be in place at the start in terms of organizational context and culture for this to have a solid chance of working, and what may not be there right away but you can create as you go. We went on instinct and our previous experiences. It was a gamble in some ways—for us and for Packard.”

Evaluators Try to Strike a Balance with Different Users’ Needs

Meanwhile, Packard Foundation leadership was coming off its own uncomfortable experience with evaluation. An evaluation director with a more traditional and academic approach to evaluation had recently left after only a short time on the job. It was a mismatch almost from the start. The experience, among others, left Packard program staff uncertain and a bit wary about the role and usefulness of evaluation.

⁹ For example, see Garvin, D. (1993). Building a learning organization. *Harvard Business Review*, 71(4), 78-92.

“From my perspective, I was skeptical about the utility of evaluation,” said Kathy Reich, who was a program officer on the preschool grantmaking at the time. “I came from an advocacy background and I’m used to making quick decisions with the information on hand. I was a new grantmaker. I didn’t appreciate evaluation. There was skepticism about evaluation that was widely—though not universally—shared at the Children, Families and Communities program.”

Still, Reich remembers a strong message from the Board for the need to evaluate this large and risky investment.

“We had not made a ten-year commitment to a goal before. The dollar commitment we made was not the usual practice. The Foundation was coming off a significant period of contraction. The message was pretty clear to us, ‘listen, if you are going to make this kind of commitment and invest this kind of money you better have an evaluation.’”

As Salisbury and her team began to work with Weiss and Coffman and their team to craft an evaluation approach, the interests of Packard’s Board of Trustees were never far from their mind. While the Board supported the preschool subprogram and understood that its policy advocacy approach would likely entail a different kind of evaluation, it included some business executives, many of who were scientists and engineers. They brought the mindset of expecting results based on rigorous, controlled experiments.

Evaluators tried to balance the need to provide Trustees with more traditional “outcome” results while also giving Packard program staff ongoing feedback about how the strategy was unfolding. Rather than choosing one approach over another, they decided they could do both.

“I promised both learning and accountability,” said Coffman, who has managed the evaluation from the start. “This is a common dilemma for foundations and for evaluators. Foundations buy the learning approach but ultimately have to report to their board members who almost always ask the impact and accountability question. I convinced myself that we would collect information that would be equally compelling to both the program staff and the Trustees.”

“But these were two different groups that had different purposes in mind for the evaluation,” Coffman continued. “We didn’t address that discrepancy early on and we should have, although I’m not clear how that would have been negotiated. Ultimately I’m not sure we adequately met the goal of an evaluation that was focused simultaneously on learning and accountability. We got through it but we didn’t solve it.”

Weiss has another perspective: “There is a tension [between an accountability evaluation and a strategic learning evaluation]. It’s a tension you have to manage. For me, it’s not an either or. Sometimes you have to do one or another. Sometimes it’s important to do both. As a funder, I would want to try and have as much of both as possible. I would want to know ‘Am I getting closer to the goal?’ I don’t want to know after I tried and failed.”

The dilemma—or at least the tension—described by the evaluators raises a larger question: can an evaluation simultaneously pursue the dual purpose of both learning and accountability? If it does, then do evaluators end up doing two different evaluations under one umbrella? Coffman asked.

A related issue is the intended users for an evaluation focused on strategic learning. In this case, HFRP said that they would have three user groups—the Foundation, the Trustees, and the grantees.

“The problem was that we couldn’t just pass on our reports that were written for the Foundation staff to the grantees and expect them to find value,” Coffman said. “They weren’t targeted to them. For me, I am still struggling with the question of who are the appropriate intended users with an evaluation like this, and can you serve more than one simultaneously?”

Concerns about Cost Emerge (Dollars and Time)

While Reich and her colleagues believed that the HFRP evaluators’ approach to strategic learning made sense, she thought it would bring its own set of challenges. One was cost.

At \$300,000 to \$350,000 a year, it was among Packard’s more expensive evaluations. When asked about the key challenges of this approach, Salisbury, Reich and Jeff Sunshine, another Packard program officer who joined in 2007, all said, among other things: “It’s expensive.”

Reich said, “If we look at what was spent on the Preschool budget [for evaluation] compared to other grantmaking programs at the Foundation, it was relatively high—one of the highest. You always wonder if the outcomes justify the expense. It’s always a bit of a nagging concern. We are spending a lot of money that is primarily benefiting us and a couple of grantees.”

Meera Mani, another program officer in the Children, Families and Communities program, however, disagreed. “We are making something like a \$7.5 million investment a year and we’re spending \$300,000 on evaluation. That’s not a huge investment for the depth of this evaluation. I’m someone who really believes in good evaluation and continuous improvement. To some extent this is a formative and a summative evaluation in one. That is a tough balance to reach.”

For their part, the evaluators say that real-time requires real resources. “Real-time evaluation is not a process that can be done when the evaluation is tightly budgeted and resourced,” Weiss said. “Evaluators need to have sufficient resources to be flexible and responsive. We’ve found that sufficient resources are necessary to avoid being overly ‘contract bound’ and to avoid the kind of nickel-and-dime that can erode relationships and products.”

Coffman added, “An evaluator using this approach has to be flexible. Plans can change. You cannot predict when the foundation will need something. If they need something, they need it fast. It’s almost like you need to have an evaluator on a retainer.”

Dollars for the evaluation are not the only costs required for strategic learning to work.

Foundation staff must put in time and attention, collaborating closely with evaluators on the design of the evaluation as well as reacting to data, learning from it, and applying it as appropriate.

“This is a more labor intensive approach [for program officers] than traditional evaluation,” Reich said. “You have more day to day interaction with the evaluators and you need to engage with the results. It’s a significant investment of our thought and time....The Board also has to engage in a deeper level than they are used to in order to make an evaluation like this a success.”

Gale Berkowitz, the director of evaluation at Packard at the time, added, “It requires a lot from the program staff. They have to know what they want and articulate it. It requires time and attention from them to talk to the evaluators.”

“This was not a simple decision for Packard,” according to Coffman. “They had a high maintenance grantmaking strategy that was expected to change and evolve over time. They had to be highly engaged with their grantees. At the same time, we were asking them to be highly engaged with us. There are only so many hours in the day, and they had to decide where to put that time.”

PHASE 1: Evaluation Begins; Ballot Initiative Filed Sooner Than Expected

The evaluation got underway in 2004. HFRP designed the evaluation to address four main questions. These questions appear at right, along with the data collection methods used to answer them during the course of the evaluation. Because advocacy and policy change efforts are not easily assessed using traditional program evaluation techniques, the evaluation was methodologically innovative and included new methods developed specifically for this evaluation (bellwether methodology, policymaker ratings, champion tracking). *(These new methods are described later in the case.)*

The evaluators began with some fairly traditional activities. They worked with Packard staff to refine the logic model for the program and created a plan that identified numerous indicators of progress, called “critical indicators.”

Evaluation Questions and Methods

Questions	Methods
1) Have preschool <u>awareness</u> and <u>political will</u> increased?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grantee Reporting • Bellwether interviews • Media tracking • Policymaker ratings • Speech tracking • Champion tracking
2) Have state preschool <u>policies</u> on access or quality changed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grantee Reporting • Policy tracking
3) Have preschool <u>access</u> or <u>quality</u> improved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External data source tracking
4) What is the likelihood for <u>future policy progress</u> on preschool?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bellwether interviews

Unlike most evaluations, however, which typically produce lengthy annual reports or summative reports, from the start HFRP evaluators planned to produce short “learning reports” about every six months. These reports, which would draw on a variety of data that evaluators were collecting, would provide a synthesis of findings and lessons learned. The reports were designed to provide practical information that the Foundation staff and Trustees could use in shaping its strategy for the preschool subprogram. The reports would also be sent to preschool grantees.

Evaluators would follow up these learning reports with learning meetings in which they met with program staff to discuss the findings and implications of those reports. The evaluators developed the agenda for these meetings and facilitated them.

A Key Ally Comes to Packard

In 2005, about a year after the evaluation got underway, the Packard Foundation hired Gale Berkowitz as its new evaluation director. Berkowitz was eager to find new ways that evaluation could be useful to program staff at Packard.

“One of the things I was trying to achieve at Packard was to have evaluation seen as a strategic tool and not just an accountability function,” Berkowitz said. “Here, the preschool evaluation was trying to do just that. Staff seemed pretty engaged with the evaluators. They were making use of the information they got and they seemed comfortable discarding information if it wasn’t useful.”

Berkowitz soon became a strong advocate within Packard of the HFRP evaluation team’s work and approach. She also helped prepare the ground for program officers to work with evaluators in the new ways required by this approach to evaluation—work that was critical, Reich said.

“We were lucky to have Gale Berkowitz,” Reich said. “She did a lot of training for senior foundation staff on how real-time evaluation works and how to manage it. If you are going to manage something as complex as strategic evaluation, you do need some training. Gale brought in not just Julia, but also Michael Quinn Patton to discuss the difference between traditional evaluation and real time or developmental evaluation. My training was all around randomized controlled trials. I had a real stereotype and perhaps skepticism about its utility in the real world. Gale helped us [see the potential value of real-time evaluation] through holding a series of senior staff meetings. She developed a learning team. She helped sow the seeds to look at evaluation in a different way.”

Berkowitz helped the evaluators as well, Weiss said. “She challenged us by raising good questions about how [this approach] was working,” Weiss said. “At one meeting, she convened all of Packard’s evaluators to talk about evaluation and start cross program and cross evaluation conversations and she featured our evaluation. At that meeting, she also had each of the teams go off with their evaluators and talk candidly about how the evaluation was working. Lois laid out some things that she wished we had done differently. Gale created some space for challenges and honest feedback.”

A Grantee Reporting Innovation Hits Some Bumps

Among the first innovations that the evaluators tried was developing a grantee reporting form. The Packard Foundation places a premium on reducing grantee burden, and that was an explicit evaluation goal. But as at other foundations, Packard grantees had to fill out annual reports for the foundation and were often also expected to provide information in separate reports for external evaluators. As a way of reducing work for the grantees, Packard and HFRP decided to develop a grantee reporting form that would fulfill both roles.

“It was an innovation at the time,” Coffman said. “We wanted to bring the grantee annual report together with the reporting requirements for the evaluation. We wanted to make the information more relevant to decision making in the Foundation. For example, the report used to come in after each one-year grant was completed. This meant that information in those reports could not be used to inform decisions about the next grant. To remedy this, the decision was made to have the reports come in at nine months into 12-month grants so program officers could use them in developing

future grants. The grantee report would then come to us and we would use the information [for our evaluation.]”

Packard staff, grantees, and evaluators devoted a large amount of time in 2004 and 2005 to develop a single reporting form. The eventual report asked grantees to fill out detailed information describing their activities and outputs as well evidence that they had achieved outcomes. As it turned out, in spite of good intentions to streamline the reporting process, the report was extremely time consuming for the grantees to complete. In addition, the evaluators found that aggregating the data in a meaningful way once it was received was more difficult than anticipated. Outcomes like increased collaboration or political will are much less easier to standardize and aggregate than outcomes like number of children served, for example.

“Early on, the grantee forms had us report every time preschool was mentioned,” said Catherine Atkin, president of grantee Preschool California. “We ended up amassing a lot of information. Our feedback was ‘we are giving you a lot of data points but this is not helping us.’”

For all that work, the evaluators gained less useful information than intended. What’s more, because Packard program officers are in regular contact with their grantees, the one report that the evaluators did that summarized the grantee’s work did not tell the Packard staff significantly more about their grantees than the staff already knew, Coffman said.

The Foundation Says: “Tell Me Something I Don’t Know ”

“We submitted our report [compiling the grantee information] to Packard,” Coffman said. “After the team at Packard read it, we had a meeting with them to discuss it. We sat down and Lois started out the meeting. In her characteristically direct and frank way, she said, ‘so, thank you for this, it’s thorough and nicely packaged. But honestly, it doesn’t tell me anything I wasn’t aware of from my own experiences and observations. What I really want is for the evaluation to tell me something that I *don’t know* already,’” Coffman recalled.

“The grantee reporting data was not compelling,” Coffman added. “The report didn’t tell them enough about strategy. It just told them what the grantees had been doing, which they felt they already knew. It didn’t help for us to sum it up.”

Eventually, when Meera Mani took over the role of directing the preschool subprogram from Kathy Reich, Mani worked with Coffman to revise the report to a much simpler form. They did, however, retain the nine-month timeline, as program officers found that timing to be more useful than if reports came in after grants were completed.

“The feedback we were getting from the grantees was that the reporting was onerous,” Mani said. “We were getting binders that were two and a half inches thick and that included agendas for every meeting they attended. Julia and I decided to streamline the grantee reports. The interim reports are now no more than five pages and final reports no more than ten pages. The grantees really have to distill what they have achieved.”

Atkin added, “We have moved to a report that is more streamlined and reflective. It’s more valuable to us to spend time thinking about the work we did versus spending a bunch of time gathering lots of data.”

The grantee reporting form experience was a wakeup call that led to a significant shift in the evaluation, Coffman said.

“It was a big turning point for me,” she said. “If the purpose of evaluation is for strategic learning then we should be focused on capturing information that the foundation is not capturing. We [eventually] stopped collecting data from grantees. It is extremely nontraditional that evaluators don’t collect data from grantees. Instead, we decided that we would collect data from audiences that Packard wasn’t already systematically tracking. We determined that’s where we could add the most strategic learning value.”

“For me, that is a key point of strategic learning,” Coffman continued. “We should be focusing on questions that other people aren’t answering. Packard was much less interested in having us validate what they already knew.”

More “Ah Ha” Moments are Desired

If a goal of this evaluation was to provide insights or data that Packard program staff and grantees didn’t already know, for some Foundation staff, the evaluators sometimes fell short in meeting it.

“A lot of times if you talk to the program team after they get the evaluation reports, they say that there are no big ‘aha moments’, or ‘we had no idea’ moments,” Berkowitz said. “That’s something our program people always want from evaluations—they want to be surprised, they want to find out something they didn’t know. The [Children, Families and Communities] program has more or less accepted that. What they get from an external report is validity and credibility rather than just relying on their own intuitions.”

Salisbury added, “I wish we could find from an evaluation more of what you don’t know. There were not a lot of surprises. I don’t know what to say about how one fixes that. It’s where this evaluation, as most evaluations, falls down.”

Coffman acknowledges that staying on top of new strategy developments and figuring out how and when to add value without being involved in every strategy-related conversation that happens at the Foundation can be challenging.

“Making sure we are always relevant and our data are always fresh is really hard unless this one evaluation is the only thing you are focused on or doing,” she said. “And most evaluators don’t have that kind of luxury to focus on one evaluation at a time; it’s not a viable business model. But this is not like other approaches to evaluation where you can go and come back and expect that most things haven’t changed much. If you’re not paying attention, or if you’re not quick enough, especially if advocacy is involved, then you are behind and what you are doing to inform the strategy is bound to be less relevant.”

Added Arron Jiron, who joined Packard’s Children, Families and Communities program in 2006, “A big challenge for the Harvard evaluators is how they get inside the head of program officers. We have a lot of rich conversations in the Foundation around strategy. That is often hard to get at for the evaluators. It also hard for us to know when to pull the evaluators in. It tends to be more ad hoc, or when we think about it.”

The Bellwether Methodology Emerges as a Response to an Early Strategy Challenge

The evaluators had another early opportunity to show how their approach to strategic learning could provide timely, critical information to Packard about its strategy.

A hallmark of a strategic learning approach to evaluation is for evaluators to be nimble and responsive as the landscape changes in which funders and grantees are trying to make an impact. A case in point is the bellwether methodology—an early innovation of the evaluation and an example of the collaborative work possible between evaluators and foundation staff.

As the Packard strategy was getting underway, Rob Reiner had set the wheels in motion for a ballot initiative that, if passed, would fund voluntary full-year preschool for all California four-year-olds, provided mostly by local school districts.

Salisbury was not happy with the prospect of a ballot initiative being filed anytime soon. She felt that it was happening too quickly—not enough groundwork had been laid to put this initiative in front of voters. Packard staff had developed a detailed logic model outlining the steps they foresaw that needed to happen before California would adopt universal preschool. Few of them were in place. As a foundation official, however, there was nothing Salisbury could do to influence the ballot’s timing.

The ballot initiative also gave rise to a larger issue. Packard staff needed to find a way to gauge whether the importance of universal preschool was breaking through with influential leaders in California—a group Salisbury dubbed “bellwethers.”¹⁰

“Whether [universal preschool] was going to be addressed through a ballot initiative, a legal strategy, or a local effort, we needed to know whether this issue was moving,” Salisbury said.

Packard did not have a way to find out that information. So the staff turned to the HFRP evaluators to figure out how to get it. Working together, Packard staff and the evaluators developed a new tool to gauge the level of support for universal preschool by interviewing 40 influential leaders or “bellwethers” in California. These structured interviews were unique in that half of the bellwethers were individuals who were not expected to have any prior background or knowledge on the preschool issue (therefore if they did know the issue, it was probably because of advocacy efforts). In addition, bellwethers did not know in advance that the interview would focus on preschool.

¹⁰ “Bellwethers” refer to leaders or “influentials” in California, whose positions require that they track state-level issues and politics. Bellwethers were *not* funded by the Packard Foundation and could provide a key external perspective on the progress and status of efforts to promote a universal preschool policy.

In June 2005, Reiner filed the Preschool for All ballot initiative (Proposition 82). It would be financed by a 1.7 percent tax on individual incomes higher than \$400,000 or couples earning more than \$800,000.

When Reiner announced the ballot initiative, the Harvard evaluators had already begun the bellwether interviews. They had not yet, however, conducted interviews with a key subsection of the group—policymakers. Those interviews, coincidentally, took place around the height of optimism about the ballot’s chances for success, which had implications for the eventual findings.

“The ballot initiative’s timing affected [the bellwether interviews],” Coffman said. “When we originally planned them, the idea was that they would provide more of a baseline. All of a sudden, in the middle of our interviews, there was a lot of press and a lot happening in the background that wasn’t related to Packard’s grantmaking. As a result, our earlier interviews took place in a very different context than our later ones. The ballot initiative was announced and then opposition ramped up. In order for our data to be useful, it had to be carefully timed. We missed some opportunities because we didn’t time it quite right. Some of that we couldn’t have predicted, but some of it we probably should have.”

In keeping with their promise of offering “real-time evaluation,” one month after completing the bellwether interviews—in August 2005—the evaluators prepared the first of their “learning reports,” which was on their bellwether survey findings. A week later, they held their first learning meeting to discuss the findings and implications for Packard’s strategy.

Among the key findings of the bellwether report:

- Some 88% of the bellwethers said they were familiar or very familiar with the issue of universal preschool.
- More than half of the bellwethers supported adopting a universal preschool policy now or in the near future and only a small percentage (13%) was clearly opposed.
- Bellwethers identified Packard grantees and the Packard Foundation as the main advocates for universal preschool in California, findings that supported the organizational investments made by the Packard team, particularly for high-profile grantees such as Preschool California and Children Now.
- Bellwethers *did not* cite business or Latinos as key advocates for universal preschool—two groups that the preschool initiative had specifically targeted to serve as leaders. In addition, bellwethers did not see the preschool issue as one with a strong grassroots movement.
- Bellwethers raised a number of concerns about the specifics of a universal preschool policy, primarily related to the cost and California’s capacity and readiness to implement it.

The Ballot Initiative is Defeated

Not long after the evaluators completed the bellwether report, opposition to the ballot initiative mobilized and leaders carried out a fierce attack on the initiative and on Reiner himself. In June 2006 voters overwhelmingly rejected Proposition 82 with 60.9% opposed and 39.1% in favor.

Salisbury does not attribute specific change in Packard strategy to information gained from the bellwether interviews. Because of its timing, the bellwether interviews provided cause for optimism that the ballot initiative could pass. She said the results of the ballot initiative did make staff think about whether they could control the timing of the bellwether interviews more.

On the grantee side, Preschool California's Atkins remembered that the bellwether report caused some anxiety. "It was early on in our work and I remember Julia presenting this to the grantees," she said. "I remember people were getting upset. You can't talk to a few business people in California and make generalizations about whether the business community supported preschool. It was a tension to the extent that people were feeling that [the report's findings] could be a reflection of whether they were doing a good job as a grantee. We have grappled with this. Over time, Packard has taken steps to be careful about how you disseminate this kind of information to grantees."

Coffman said that her work on the bellwether methodology helped her begin to make a shift in her thinking about timing and the importance of context.

"Even though our proposal used all the right language about learning, I think it was still kind of traditional in some ways, especially in the beginning," she said. "To achieve strategic learning you have to design evaluation around the other person's timeline, not your own. You also have to consider what is happening or what is likely to happen in the broader context. I set up the evaluation with traditional reporting timelines—we're going to do this report in March and this report in June. That didn't map on to when they needed certain information."

Still, Reich remembers the bellwether report as a key moment when she began to see the utility of the evaluation to her daily work. "The bellwether report was enormously informative," she said. "It gave us candid feedback on how preschool was perceived by important policymakers and leaders in the state. We got feedback that we were not getting traction among business leaders and Latino leaders. It confirmed some gut feelings that we were not hitting our mark." The findings also helped prompt "significant changes to our grant making to Latino leaders and businesses."

Jiron said it was also helpful to learn that Preschool California and other Packard grantees were recognized as leaders on the preschool issue. "It's a data point when you have a grantee that says 'we're going to target the audience of grass tops' and then you talk to the grass tops and they mention two or three of our leading children advocates. It's a proximate indication that we are headed in the right direction."

"Real-Time" Evaluation can be an Elusive Goal

Reflecting on the overall evaluation, several participants said that providing "real-time" evaluation that program staff can use to inform strategy can be difficult to do in practice. The bellwether report is a case in point. According to Salisbury, "One of the challenges [in this approach to evaluation] was timing. In a field where there was so much rapid change and decisions being made not within our tapestry, could the evaluators give us feedback that was timely?"

"The real time stuff sounds better on paper," Sunshine said. "Reports don't come in on time, they're late, or they capture a static moment. They were interesting but they did not help tweak strategy."

We thought they would help with midcourse corrections. They did not. For me, real-time evaluation is my daily or weekly picking up the phone and talking to grantees. The reports I got from the evaluators were interesting in confirming what I was seeing but not in making corrections.”

He added, “I do think real-time evaluation is possible. I don’t think this evaluation necessarily cracked it. We got too laden down with too many pieces. It gave us a glimmer that rather than looking back, how do we look forward. And that was helpful.”

Reich said, “The notion of real time is always a challenge. I’m not sure how real time we have succeeded in this evaluation. We have been more successful in putting in meaningful systems for tracking policy and advocacy.”

PHASE 2: After Failure of Ballot, Strategy Shifts Focus

The defeat of Proposition 82 marked another turning point for the Packard work and the evaluation. From almost the start of the preschool subprogram, much of Preschool California and other key grantees’ focus had been on generating preschool supporters among California voters, with a special emphasis on key constituencies.

“When the ballot initiative failed, everyone had to regroup,” Salisbury said. “It was a bad defeat at the ballot box... Mounting another ballot measure was highly unlikely after such a strong defeat. The only arena that had any possibility to move forward was either at the local level or the state legislature.”

“The ballot initiative posed a significant challenge for us and for our grantees,” Reich added. “How should we engage with it? How should we respond to it? And then it lost and it lost big. We were really at a major strategic inflection point. How could we continue this work when the issue was so thoroughly trounced at the polls? It led to a year or so of soul searching. Our grantees had invested so much in a ballot focus strategy and the legislative strategy had been basically ignored. They had few relationships with legislators and no relationships with the Governor. If you were going to switch to an incremental legislative approach with the preschool, there was just none. We didn’t have metrics from standard policy tracking and the bellwether to tell us how we were doing legislatively.”

As the Packard team re-grouped, there was less for the evaluators to do. “They were trying to figure out what they were going to do different,” Coffman said. “We did much less. Sometimes [with this approach] there are periods when nothing happens and sometimes there are periods when a ton is going on. If there is not an opportunity for learning, there is no reason to collect data.”

This ebb and flow in the evaluation work raised a larger question for Coffman. What should evaluators do during periods when strategy is changing or uncertain or not fully formed? “If the strategy is not yet in place to track and learn from, then what should we be doing?” Coffman asked. “What is our role?”

The Foundation Looks for an “Early Warning System”

The ballot initiative’s overwhelming defeat came as a surprise to many. Berkowitz said that period of reflection after the ballot initiative’s defeat also led Packard staff to think about ways to get a stronger read on the political context and gain a consensus of what was happening in the landscape.

“It was influenced by the ballot initiative failing,” she said. “Can we have a better early warning system? What would that take?”

The grantees weren’t necessarily that early warning system. Was there a way to understand where legislators and decision makers stood on issues?”

The bellwether interviews provided helpful information from influential leaders in California. But they didn’t give Packard or its grantees a read on the people who now held the key to success in achieving universal preschool—state legislators and local officials.

Salisbury and Packard staff were well aware of legislator “report cards” on specific issues, but as Salisbury said, “In my experience, they were one trick ponies. I didn’t think they had legs.”

To help Packard get the information they were seeking, HFRP began working closely with Preschool California staff to develop a policymaker rating tool that would assist Preschool California staff in doing their job more effectively.

Coffman remembers an early conference call with Packard and Preschool California staff about developing a policymaker tracking system.

“The staff from Preschool California said ‘this could be really burdensome, this could be a nightmare for us. Please involve us in developing something that could be helpful for us.’ They were worried that we would come up with something that wouldn’t be relevant,” Coffman said.

According to Atkin, Preschool California staff did not want the policymaker ratings to push them to change their approach in ways that were not appropriate, based on their strategy and experience.

“I said, ‘please don’t have us measure something that not only takes time but more important, creates incentives for us to do work in ways that don’t make sense because we have to be measured on it,’” she said. “We don’t want to measure people who we are not trying to effect. For example, we don’t want to have to meet with a mayor if the mayor is not going to affect preschool.”

As HFRP, Packard Foundation staff, and Preschool California staff worked to develop the policymaker rating method the goal was two-fold: 1) gather meaningful data on policymaker support while also 2) making sure that the approach would not add unnecessary grantee data collection burden. In their conversations, Preschool California outlined the process that they had to undertake already to keep track of legislators’ stance on universal preschool. With that information, and in close consultation with Preschool California, HFRP designed a process to make the tracking that Preschool California already did more systematic and comprehensive.

A New Policymaker Rating Tool Allows a “Thoughtful Conversation”

HFRP developed a policymaker rating tool that had Preschool California assess California policymakers' support for preschool (all 120 state legislators and a set of defined local policymaker preschool program target counties) on three scales that ranked policymakers on: (1) their support for preschool, (2) their influence in moving preschool policy, and (3) Preschool California's confidence that the first two ratings were accurate and reliable.

Starting in 2007, Preschool California has done these ratings once a year.

"I'm a real fan of this tool," Salisbury said. "It's a more nuanced tool [than report cards]. You can see what policymakers did in their districts, whether they wrote op-eds, or went to visit a local preschool center or spoke about preschool at the Rotary or Chamber of Commerce. It has a much more textured quality of the activities that lawmakers are engaged in."

Preschool California staff, meanwhile, can use the ratings to see where they need to do more work with specific lawmakers, Salisbury said. For example, Preschool California might want to work more closely with lawmakers rated as highly influential to get them to write op-eds in support of preschool, or bring them in to see a high-quality preschool program. "The ratings became a work plan for Preschool California," Salisbury said. "It upped their game."

Sunshine said that the policymaker ratings "enabled Preschool California to have a thoughtful conversation on how they were going to focus on to educate on preschool. It enabled them to develop a list of who are friends, allies and foes and how to amass votes and support."

Atkins said that policymaker ratings were especially valuable in noting changes over time in support from legislators. "It didn't make us change strategy," she said. "It showed us where we could have lost ground with people or where we were making progress. The policymaker rating helped us see where we were going to have to be more intentional."

Atkin also noted that the policymaker ratings were just one tool that advocates used in gauging support for preschool. They also relied on their years of experience working with legislators and a certain amount of "gut instinct" on where lawmakers stood.

Policymaker Ratings Raise Transparency Questions

Policymaker ratings were never made public and Packard did not want the outside world to know that they were doing these ratings or for legislators to try and influence them. As a result, the annual analyses of the ratings have only been shared with the Foundation (in aggregate), and with Preschool California. They have not been shared with other grantees.

Reich, who in 2009 moved to the Organizational Effectiveness and Philanthropy Program at the Foundation where a key value in her job is promoting transparency in philanthropy, said, "I'm not comfortable that we were not entirely transparent on this evaluation."

"It created unease," Sunshine added, "Preschool California has this information. Should they be sharing this with other people? How should we be using this and whose hands should it be in?"

Challenges Surface in Developing Another New Tool

Packard's shift in focus after the ballot initiative defeat brought up a dilemma for the evaluation. In addition to focusing on the state legislature, Packard wanted to put more emphasis on cultivating support in key communities. The evaluators did not have a tool to collect information on the effectiveness of that work.

Evaluators struggled for a long time with what to collect in Packard's target communities that would have strategic value. They tried and then scrapped a number of options that failed to meet the Foundation's learning needs.

"The bigger challenge [than the policymaker ratings] was with Packard's strategic shift after the ballot when they focused more on communities," Coffman said. "We had to figure out how to capture what was happening in the communities...their local strategy was a little uncertain at the time. They were focused in how to better develop champions in key constituencies such as businesses and K-12. It took a while to figure out how exactly that was going to happen, and how we could add value."

Eventually, in 2009, the evaluators began developing a "champion tracking" tool, similar to the policymaker tool. But the tool took a long time to develop, went through much iteration and at times, did not receive much attention as other priorities took precedence. The tool did not hit the field until in 2010. Evaluators are still collecting data.

"We were too late in the champion tracking," Mani said. "It took a while to get it out there. Just as we were on top of the policymaker rating if we had done the same with the champion ratings on businesses we may have had better results in engaging the business community. The policymaker ratings drove Preschool California to be so targeted in its work. I wish we had that with the champion ratings. We really believe that we can't move the needle if we don't have the business community engaged."

The Foundation, grantees, and evaluators remained convinced, however, that champion tracking could be a useful process. As a result, they worked together to revise the method to be a more useful planning and evaluation tool for grantees. "Just because it does not work the first time, doesn't mean you should abandon it," Coffman said. "Champions were still an integral part of the strategy, and we needed to find a way to capture progress on champion development. Strategic learning often involves this type of trial and error. The trick is to follow it up with continuous improvement."

The Midcourse Review Creates Anxiety

In 2008, Children, Families and Communities program staff had to begin preparing for a midcourse review of the preschool program before Packard's Board of Trustees. Midcourse reviews of programs by Packard's Trustees are rigorous, according to several program staff. During the midcourse review, the Board decides whether a program should continue and if so, whether it should in its current form or take another approach.

“Oh God,” Sunshine said, remembering that time. “The midcourse review is a very big deal at Packard. We take extra care and attention to make sure that we make cogent presentations to the Board that hit the mark. We have rigorous reviews and rehearsals of our presentations. It’s an intensive process.”

“There was a lot of anxiety on [Packard’s] part around the midcourse review,” Coffman said. “They weren’t exactly sure how the Board was going to react to the fact they had made progress but hadn’t any big wins [on universal preschool].”

“There was some anxiety on our part too,” Coffman added. “We had to turn what we had been doing in getting information back to the [Children, Families, and Communities] team to information that would be useful and relevant to the Board. Sometimes that wasn’t a completely great fit.”

To prepare a report for a Board that wanted more outcome data, Coffman drew on the data she had collected already, but HFRP had to collect additional data as well.

“Some of information we presented to the Board wasn’t data we had collected for the evaluation,” Coffman said. **“The Board was asking impact questions, like ‘are kids better off?’ or ‘how has the quality of preschool changed in California?’ Our evaluation was not designed to answer those questions** and we weren’t sure Packard could or really should answer those questions. They wanted data on long-term impacts that hinged on earlier changes in the policy arena. We were trying to collect information to inform advocacy strategy to get to those policy changes, not long-term impact. It was a bit of a dilemma. Ultimately we reported data from external sources that addressed those questions, even though the questions were not directly relevant to where Packard’s strategy was at the time.”

This was also a point when the decision not to collect data from Packard grantees was a disadvantage, as Salisbury and her team felt that the Trustees would want to know grantee perspectives on Packard’s role and strategy and those data were missing. Consequently, right before the midcourse report was written, HFRP added a set of qualitative interviews with grantees and other preschool “insiders” to collect that data.

The Second Bellwether Report Shows Progress, Clarifies Focus

As part of getting ready for the midcourse review, HFRP wrote a report on the latest round of bellwether interviews conducted in 2008. Reich had been prepared for the possibility that the preschool program might not continue because of the lack of major wins to point to. At first glance, the evaluation report bolstered her feeling that issue of universal preschool in California had not made much headway. Reich remembers feeling downcast after she read the report.

Shortly after sending their report Coffman and Weiss flew out to Packard, as they had been doing regularly since the evaluation began in 2004, to discuss the findings with the Packard staff. “I was down in the dumps before the meeting,” Reich remembers. “But Julia and Heather began providing more qualitative information about what they heard in the interviews, particularly compared to the first bellwether report. They said ‘something is changing, particularly in the legislature. We think it’s a more fertile climate for preschool.’ That advice came at a critical time. It

put to bed whether we should continue. From that meeting forward, we were invested in continuing.”

Evaluators Play a Role that Raises Larger Questions about Boundaries

The Preschool team started their preparation for the December 2008 Board of Trustees meeting in early 2008. Over several months, they discussed and debated, often with Coffman present, what made most sense to do to recalibrate Packard’s preschool program.

By this time, HFRP had worked closely with the Packard staff for four years. “They knew the preschool program as well as anyone,” Salisbury said. “As HFRP helped to prepare for the midcourse review, they brought a depth of knowledge rare for evaluators who might just ‘parachute in.’”

The HFRP evaluators “understood the strengths and weaknesses of where the issues sat. They had an ear for the dynamics. They knew the story and could pick up the threads that otherwise just might pass you by,” Salisbury said.

This illustrates a larger point about the skills needed for this approach to evaluation.

“This isn’t for the newcomer to evaluate,” Berkowitz said. “To do this well, evaluators have to come in with a full tool box of tools, experience and people skills. There is a lot of emotional intelligence involved.”

Jiron added, “Evaluators who do this have to be excellent writers. They have to be very clear in explaining often complicated ideas. We’ve seen other evaluators that are ponderous—classically academic. You also want an evaluator who knows how to ask really good questions to get a clear understanding of how you are thinking of strategy and can see where the holes are. You want evaluators who have several methodologies at their disposal. Evaluators tend to lean toward a specific style of evaluation. It would be nice to have folks who can draw from a number of different ways of evaluating. They can’t rely on a single methodology.”

Packard staff said that the evaluators’ contribution to the midcourse review is one of the strongest examples of how this approach to evaluation can help in strategic learning. Some also said that the work brought up a larger issue on the role that an evaluator plays in this approach to evaluation. Reich and Coffman remember a sometimes arduous process in getting the midterm evaluation report to strike the “right tone” for the Board.

“I really pushed Julia to give the Board more strategic advice,” Reich said. “I said ‘don’t be afraid to do it.’ It brings up the question of at what point is an evaluator an evaluator and at what point do you use them as a strategic advisor? It doesn’t happen with every evaluator and it doesn’t happen overnight. By the time Julia found herself in that role [of strategic advisor], she had been evaluating this program for four years. Her role as strategic advisor evolved. We trusted her data and opinions.”

For her part, Coffman recalls Reich’s advice: “The [Packard team] felt like the Board is sick of hearing ‘this program is great’ at these midcourse reviews. They want to know what is not working, what needs to be different. Kathy pushed us to more to say to the Trustees.”

Sunshine said, however, that he sensed a tension in the HFRP evaluators at times in straddling the roles of producing traditional, outcome data and helping with strategic learning.

“We want them to have a point of view and opinion,” he said. “It was hard. They saw themselves as evaluators. We would ask ‘what do you think?’ They were ambivalent about it. We didn’t hire them to do that. They were so good that they didn’t want to taint their work. But we have come to rely on their expertise and intelligence. They did it. [But] you could feel their ambivalence. I don’t think you can do both.”

Playing the role of an embedded strategic advisor raises some questions about the boundaries of evaluators using this approach.

Reich said, “If evaluators hope to see their results help with strategic learning they need to be willing to see their clients less as clients and a bit more as partners. In evaluation for strategic learning, everyone has skin in the game. It puts evaluators in a more nebulous, less objective role. For people with rigorous evaluation training that can be an uncomfortable place to be.”

Weiss and Coffman both say that rather than serving in the traditional role of standing outside as an impartial and distant evaluator, they were clear from the start that they wanted to help Packard succeed in its goal of achieving universal preschool in California.

“A lot of evaluators have a real problem with that kind of role.” Coffman notes. “[In this approach], you have to be integrated and be part of the program team. When we started this evaluation, we said ‘we believe in universal PreK, we want you to succeed and we want to help you succeed.’”

“This is something I would say with enormous respect and gratitude,” Salisbury said. “The Harvard evaluators are the dream team. I think there is a question for all of us when you work this closely with evaluators. Does it compromise the evaluation? No one could have more integrity than our evaluators. [But] we all like each other. We are in love with this strategy and we feel like we’ve landed on something really big here. I don’t know what to do with that.”

Evaluation Informs the Direction of the Preschool Program

HFRP’s September 2008 midterm report to the Packard Board said that the Preschool program had made considerable progress toward reaching its goal of achieving universal preschool access, and recommended specific strategy adjustments to increase the chances to make more progress.

Among the areas of progress cited in the HFRP report were:

- The number of preschool legislative champions had nearly doubled. Many of these champions were influential, such as Senate President pro Tempore Darrell Steinberg.
- State education spending on three- and four-year-olds had increased every year since 2003 with funding growing by \$217 million.
- In 2008, the legislature passed three important bills that Packard grantees informed. All were low-cost changes to improve the preschool system’s quality and efficiency.

- Packard target communities were implementing some of the highest quality preschool programs in the state.

Among the areas for improvement cited in the HFRP report were:

- Business champions were lacking. Few high-profile business champions had emerged.
- Divisions in the early care and education community needed to be addressed. When preschool is prioritized, many are concerned that infants and toddlers are being left behind.
- Targeted community investments could link more effectively with state-level leadership to push for policy progress.
- Preschool access had not increased substantially and would not without a major state-level policy change.
- California fell short on preschool quality. 2008 Rand research, sponsored by Packard, found that preschool quality across the state was lacking and there was substantial room for improving preschool quality for all children.
- The budget climate had reduced chances for near-term preschool investments. Almost three-fourths of 2008 bellwethers thought preschool increases were not likely in 3 years.
- Support for a universal preschool policy had decreased. Only half of the 2008 bellwethers said they wanted a universal policy.

The HFRP report concluded by recommending that the Packard Foundation adjust its 2013 universal goal to a more targeted goal that focused on reaching children in California who need preschool the most.

Several Packard staff said that HFRP’s midcourse evaluation report informed the direction of the preschool program. “The HFRP involvement came at a very pivotal time and really helped inform our thinking around the midcourse review. We ended up making a dramatic change,” Reich said. “We are not going to be about universal preschool. We would be about low-income kids first.”

In the long run, the CFC team felt that high-quality preschool for all three- and four-year-olds remained one of the best ways, if not the best way, to ensure that all of California’s children entered kindergarten prepared to succeed in school and in life. The midcourse review did not lead staff to rethink this core belief. Rather, staff advocated for retaining high-quality universal preschool as a long-term aspirational goal.

However, as HFRP’s data indicated, the prospects did not look good for attaining universal preschool by 2013. The state budget outlook—and for that matter, the federal budget outlook—was bleak until at least 2011 and likely beyond. Perhaps even more importantly, the appetite for a universal program simply was not yet strong enough, either among policymakers or the public. The policy picture was brighter, however, for targeted preschool expansions and quality improvements that still fit with the longer-term aspiration goal but were more realistic in the existing timeframe.

Given these political and fiscal realities, staff recommended narrowing the 2013 goal for the preschool subprogram as follows: *The Packard Foundation Preschool for California’s Children*

program aims to ensure that all 3- and 4-year olds in California have access to high-quality preschool. By the end of 2013, our goal is to achieve high-quality, publicly funded preschool for the children who need it most. Packard Trustees approved the revised target.

PHASE 3: Transitional Kindergarten Bill Passed; Strategy Shifts Again

When Packard staff refreshed their strategy, they contemplated four potential avenues for promoting the preschool agenda: (1) state legislative reforms, (2) new federal funding for early learning, (3) a ballot initiative on school financing that would include preschool, or (4) more local preschool expansion. Of these options, the Foundation saw legislators (along with local champions) as the most likely avenue to achieve broader preschool access. But with a \$25 billion state deficit, the chances of major legislation passing anytime soon seemed unlikely.

One legislative reform contemplated at the time, however, seemed to hold promise: transitional kindergarten. California has been one of only four states in which children who are still four can enter kindergarten (the cutoff date is turning five by December 2 of the year entering kindergarten). Educators and advocates have long argued that four-year-olds often lack the maturity and social and early reading and math skills they need to succeed in kindergarten. For many years, California legislators and policymakers had attempted to change the kindergarten entry date with no success.

However, in the summer of 2008, Packard grantees again introduced the idea. They began to craft a proposal that would create “transitional” kindergarten so that the 120,000 four-year-olds eligible for kindergarten (those born between September and December) would instead receive a year of kindergarten preparation. The start date would also change so eventually all children would be five when they entered kindergarten.

The proposal would not cost any more money right away. In the beginning, existing funding for children with fall birthdays would be redirected to transitional kindergarten and would employ existing teachers and classroom facilities. The \$700 million required for the cohort’s extra year in school would not come due until the thirteenth year, when the kids graduated from high school.

“One of the biggest opportunities to achieve our goal sat in K-12,” Salisbury said. “In our 2008 memo to the Board we said, ‘how can we achieve our modified goal?’ One way was to offer four-year-olds an extra year of kindergarten.”

As this proposal began to gain momentum, Packard staff and grantees continued to lay the groundwork for local and statewide policy change. Packard had begun to consider adopting a broader birth through 3rd grade focus in its preschool grant making. While a focus solely on preschool had the advantage of being a clear goal people could rally around, it also, at times, ended up leaving out the early childhood advocates who worked from birth to five, and the K-12 community—both key advocates for achieving broader preschool access.

There was also a growing nationwide discussion that argued for a broader approach to early childhood development, saying it made more sense to focus on the needs of children from PreK to 3rd grade. Advocates of this approach argue that children are more likely to succeed in school when

one grade builds upon the other, especially up until 3rd grade—a year in which students must read proficiently or they are unlikely to catch up and graduate from high school.

But first, Packard wanted the evaluators to test whether the PreK-3rd frame was effective with two key audiences—business leaders and the K-12 community.

Evaluators Test a New, “Rapid Response” Methodology

At the same time, the evaluators wanted test a new, “rapid response” approach that would provide Packard staff and grantees key data even more rapidly than they had in the past.

Up until this point, evaluators had worked to provide timely information to Packard on emerging issues or needs but those projects still took about six months to complete from inception of the concept to final report. Now, Packard needed information much more quickly.

“I wanted to find a way for the evaluation to continue to inform Packard and be relevant,” Coffman said. “We came up with the idea at the beginning of 2009. I said, ‘we have enough money in our budget to help you answer two strategic questions that come up. You may not know them yet. You come up with questions and we will respond in a month or two.’ The idea is that it’s rapid response. It may not be the most thorough data collection but it’s reliable enough.”

Packard’s need to test the PreK-3rd frame gave evaluators a chance to test this new rapid-response idea. Over a three-week period in early 2010, evaluators conducted 31 interviews with key informants. They produced a report to Packard on February 15, 2010, just ten days or so after completing their interviews.

“We wanted to know if this PreK-3rd framing would help attract the business community and engage K-12 and the early childhood community,” Salisbury said. “[The evaluators’] answer was serious caution bells. Business was very wary. They liked the preschool strategy. They said K-3 was a mess—don’t go there. K-12 was more receptive to this. They weren’t as hungry for this frame as we thought they’d be. Despite those warnings, we decided to go forward with the PreK-3rd grade frame.”

Added Mani, “We got a sense of where [PreK-3rd grade] resonated and where there were reactions. That was a really important. We didn’t get a clear response that said, ‘yeah, this is a great idea.’ We heard, ‘if you are in, be sure you are really in. Packard must make a meaningful commitment.’ That really helped us.”

Not long after, Packard called on the HFRP evaluators for another rapid response assessment.

Throughout the preschool grantmaking program Packard had made grants to county offices of education to help develop champions among county superintendents of education and to seed quality preschool programs. But over the course of its work, and as part of its refreshed strategy, Packard saw that to achieve its goal of securing preschool for more children, it needed to focus more efforts on gaining the support of the K-12 community.

“We saw that working with school districts might give us greater credibility in the K-12 community, which was crucial,” Jiron said. “But we had not worked with school districts before. We asked HFRP to look at foundations that had worked with school districts and synthesize the pros and cons.”

The evaluators produced a report one month later with a “sobering” assessment, Jiron remembers. “There have been a lot of good foundation initiatives that went to school districts and withered on the vine,” Jiron said. “School districts are very difficult to change, school boards and superintendents don’t stay long, and there is technocratic leadership that doesn’t want to change. There were a lot of hard lessons here that helped us think carefully about how we wanted to work with a district and what districts we wanted to work with.”

As with the report on the PreK-3rd grade strategy, the Packard team took into consideration the report’s findings, which provided cautions on working with school districts, and ultimately decided to make grants to select districts anyway. Mani said, “The evaluators said ‘be very, very careful about working with school districts. Think 20 times before doing it.’ Lois [Salisbury] said, “We considered their advice and their cautions. We decided to go ahead and work at the district level, but we are doing so with our eyes wide open. The [rapid response report] helped us in building a road map.”

Mani said, “The rapid response tools are one of the most exciting things about the evaluation. The ongoing evaluation does not lend itself to strategy refreshment because we don’t get it in a timely way. We are making decisions based on what we know from grantees. What the rapid response really did for us was help zero in on key questions that emerged that would have had importance for us for how we might invest.”

The Governor Signs Transitional Kindergarten Bill

In September 2010, after months of careful work by advocates including Preschool California as well as committed legislators, Governor Schwarzenegger signed the Kindergarten Readiness Act, which ensured that 120,000 more children each year would receive a year of “transitional kindergarten.” It was a huge win for advocates and a big step in meeting Packard’s goal of providing access to quality preschool for four-year-olds most in need.

“It’s really a way to offer high quality preschool for the four year olds,” Mani said. “And because it’s funded with the K-12 system, it’s a guaranteed and sustained funding stream. It moves us closer to our goal. Of the 120,000 children [served under this law], at least 60,000 of those children are from low-income households and are most in need of preschool.”

Added Salisbury: “It was so counterintuitive that something so significant happened in California in an environment that is so daunting.” She said that the enactment of the transitional kindergarten bill illustrates a key point about the Packard preschool strategy.

“Nothing happened in a year,” she said. “Transitional kindergarten didn’t happen in a year. It had been submitted for ten years. Our underlying strategy was about building and trying to have these pieces stronger and stronger and being more agile and ready as windows opened and closed.”

A New Stage Begins for the Packard Strategy and for the Evaluators

While Packard's goal of achieving high-quality preschool for four-year-olds who are most in need has not been completely met, the transitional kindergarten bill pushed them much closer.

That win signals another shift in Packard strategy, Mani said.

"Now we are at a different phase that is more an implementation-focused strategy," she said. We've had some policy wins. To build on those wins we have to make sure policies are well implemented. We need to make sure that this investment doesn't get wasted." This new phase of Packard's preschool program brings up new questions for the role of the evaluation.

"We need to refresh what we are tracking," Mani said. "In a ten year strategy, it molds, remolds and changes. We need to look at whether the evaluation's focus still works for us given that our emphasis is on implementation."

For the evaluators, this later stage of the Packard program raises questions about their role. "We are eight years in, with two years to go. Quite honestly, one of the things that I've struggled with is how to continue to be helpful for a strategy that is getting close to its end date," Coffman said. It raises the question of "is the strategic learning approach more important at the beginning rather than at the end?"

Mani, however, has a different perspective. "The role of the evaluator next is to make sure that the evaluation keeps pace with where we are going with implementation and the glide path to 2013," she said. "Do we have data to make sure we are on the right path? What are the recommendations for going forward?"

Conclusion

In 2004, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation took a chance on a bold goal and on a new approach to evaluation. Working in a constantly shifting political and economic environment, Packard staff, grantees and evaluators had to adjust their approaches and experiment with new methodologies. At times, the evaluation added clear value to the preschool strategy. At other times, it didn't. Throughout the work, participants had to draw on or develop new skills to meet the challenges of this demanding approach to evaluation.

Berkowitz said that the Packard Foundation is still experimenting with, and learning from, their experiences with strategic learning. Now that other subprograms and their evaluators are doing real-time evaluations, the Foundation has learned that there are many ways to approach it, and much to be learned about what to do and what not to do.

"HFRP did it one way, but that is certainly not the only way to do this work," Berkowitz said. "Packard also knows that this approach is not right for every subprogram, and it is only one of many approaches that need to be in a foundation's evaluation toolbox. Just like the HFRP evaluators, the Foundation is grappling with the question of what conditions are necessary for this approach to make sense and add value."

Timeline of Events in the Case

Packard Foundation and Key Context Actions

- [Lois Salisbury joins the Packard Foundation in March 2002.]
- Packard makes a 10-year commitment to its new preschool grantmaking program, and establishes Preschool California to provide leadership in the state.
- Packard makes 57 preschool grants in 2003 totaling \$8m.

Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) becomes Governor of California.

STRATEGY PHASE 1: Primary Focus on advocacy, communications, and statewide constituency building

- Packard makes 60 preschool grants in 2004 totaling \$9.7m.

Rob Reiner files the Preschool for All ballot initiative.

- Packard makes 53 preschool grants in 2005 totaling \$9.2m.

California voters defeat Proposition 82.

- Packard makes 43 preschool grants in 2006 totaling \$9.9m.

STRATEGY PHASE 2: New legislative advocacy focus, and a focus on building support from key constituencies in target communities

- Packard makes 47 preschool grants in 2007 totaling \$8.3m.

- Packard makes 46 preschool grants in 2008 totaling \$9.2m.

- Preschool goal revised to focus on achieving high-quality preschool for the kids who need it most (not universal).

- Midcourse Review; Trustees approve refreshed 5-year strategy.

- Packard makes 39 preschool grants in 2009 totaling \$8.1m.

STRATEGY PHASE 3: Enhanced focus on connecting PreK to K-12 connection, with PreK-3rd grade and school district grantmaking

- Packard makes 41 preschool grants in 2010 totaling \$7.7m.

- Packard decides to make grants to school districts directly.

Governor signs the Transitional Kindergarten Bill.

- Packard strategy scheduled to end.

Evaluation-Related Events

2003

- Heather Weiss (HFRP) and Lois Salisbury discuss a new approach to evaluation for the preschool strategy
- Evaluation plan developed by HFRP.
- Preschool logic model developed (by Packard w/ HFRP).

2004

- Board approves preschool evaluation plan led by Harvard Family Research Project (about \$300,000/year).

- New grantee reporting form instituted to better link grantee reporting to the evaluation.

2005

- New bellwether methodology administered.

- Grantee survey and interviews administered (first and only administration).

2006

- In response to grantee data, Lois Salisbury says: "Tell us something we don't know."

2007

- New policymaker rating method instituted.

2008

- Several community-level methods tried and abandoned,, including local bellwether interviews, local policymaker ratings, and case studies.

- "Insider" and grantee interviews conducted for midcourse review.

- Second administration of bellwether methodology.

- Midcourse Review report developed.

2009

- Grantee reporting form revised to become much simpler.

2010

- New rapid response method used to test PreK-3rd grade.

- New champion tracking method developed.

- Rapid response method used on topic of grantmaking with school districts.

2011

2013