| Resource type | Example | Date created | 2017 | Last reviewed | 2022 |

Resource series   Designing donor MEL systems and practices

Project   Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Toolkit for Grantmakers and Grantees

▌ DEFINE what is to be evaluated
▌ FRAME the boundaries for an evaluation

Terms of reference for baseline strategy evaluation of the Fiscal Governance Program 2018–22 strategy

Overview

The Fiscal Governance Program (FGP) seeks a consultant(s) to conduct an evidence-based, highly consultative and participatory baseline evaluation of our new strategy. This formative evaluation will inform and improve our understanding of context dynamics, baseline data collection, evidence related to our focal areas, our grantmaking practices (funding, convening, technical assistance, and other program activities), and the composition of our grantmaking activities. Its scope should also include a reflection of past plans' performance and provide recommended adjustments to improve the strategy's evaluability to enable more effective monitoring, evaluation, and learning. FGP is heavily biased towards evaluations that prioritize organizational learning and the collection of useable, actionable data.

This baseline evaluation will be Phase I of a three-part process over the course of the four-year strategy cycle. The full process will also include a mid-point review (Phase II) and an endline evaluation (Phase III).

Strategy background

The mission of FGP is to promote greater openness, accountability, and equity in the fiscal and economic systems of countries where OSF works. Specifically, we work to address how corruption, plutocracy, and populism can undermine public finance management and economic policy-making in ways that hurt society's poorest and most vulnerable.

In 2017, FGP designed an updated four-year strategy (2018–22), acknowledging major global shifts preceding the last few years including a retrenchment in commitments from once supportive countries to the global governance institutions central to achieving progress on financial transparency, accountability and anti-corruption, amid a growing intolerance for grand

corruption and a related surge in anti-corruption social movements (e.g. Brazil, South Africa, Romania).

To respond to these shifts, and build off of our previous experience, FGP's 2018–22 strategy commitment to support partners that work to:

- Increase the transparency of government finances and economic policy-making

- Promote fiscally responsible, equity-focused policies on government taxation, expenditure, and investment

- Identify and seek accountability for instances of financial corruption, waste, and mismanagement, as well as support legal and institutional reforms that aim to reduce corruption

Our focal areas of work include: natural resource governance, equitable and accountable fiscal systems, anticorruption, and trade governance (see below). We have further identified interest in better understanding and testing solutions around data use for accountability, enhancing the impact of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), strengthening civil society resilience in the context of closing civic space, and enhancing the research and learning capacity and skill of actors in this space (see Appendix I for more information).

This evaluation should review the composition of our portfolios, grants, and other activities using the three overarching objectives above, including a retrospective look at the deliberate pivots made in the recent strategy and the work we will continue to build on from our previous strategy. It should also collect baseline data on the high-level strategy and portfolio goals.

The landscape: Since our last strategy, the rise of nationalist agendas in the U.S. and Europe has coincided with a retrenchment in commitments to global governance institutions central to achieving progress on financial transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption. An aggressive U.S. domestic deregulation has already claimed an important legislative and regulatory victory for the natural resource revenue transparency movement—Dodd-Frank section 1504—as its first victim.

Globally we have seen a growing intolerance for grand corruption and a related surge in anti-corruption social movements, which offers new sources of hope in some chronically misgoverned contexts, but also risks undermining faith in democratic institutions if not answered by more transformational reforms. The most recent commodity price crash has dramatically affected the finances of resource-rich countries in a variety of ways—new austerity measures across the board, in some cases more repressive government tactics to quell dissent, and elsewhere, more openness to external pressure for reform.   More open, participatory, and inclusive economic governance is increasingly recognized as a global norm, however major outliers remain, with trade governance being one of the most prominent. Negotiations of several recent major plurilateral agreements in the US and Europe have raised significant concerns

about excessive secrecy and outsized corporate influence in negotiating and enforcing agreements with huge consequences for democracy and social policy.

Technology continues to represent a double-edged sword—offering new opportunities for real-time civic oversight, the ability to crowdsource more inclusive voices in public policy, and the potential for public scandals to rapidly gain momentum and reach political tipping points, while also providing new avenues for abuse and misuse of personal information, bringing the importance of privacy protections and civil liberties in an age of big data and automated decision-making into sharp relief. More broadly, the global trend towards closing civic space is posing new and growing challenges for partners in the field in more historically open contexts.

This evaluation should analyze and interrogate our assumptions about and corresponding approach to shifts in the global landscape and the operating environments of our grantees.

Our place in the field: Given our small US-based team, our approach will continue to rely heavily on large grants to international NGOs with the capacity to work globally and locally at scale in our respective fields of work. In this strategy cycle, we will also place greater emphasis on strengthening collaboration with OSF regional and national teams to implement local programs in strategic countries, while keeping a strong focus on transnational governance concerns that our global nature and bird's eye view position us well to address.

This evaluation should review and interrogate assumptions about our strengths and assets (the extent to which these are true) and our corresponding grantmaking strategy (the extent to which our strengths and assets are being best leveraged).

Our context at OSF: Open Society Foundations gives individual programs lots of room and flexibility for grantmaking and activities. Even with this flexibility, there are several partnerships and long-term commitments that OSF, as an institution, has prioritized across programs. The Fiscal Governance Program acts as the lead on several of these institutional partnerships and grants, which have found homes in our portfolios of work (though not always the most natural ones). These, in addition to a few evergreen commitments made from our program to particular organizations or coalitions, are our 'sacred cows'. As we try to adapt to new circumstances and realities, we also acknowledge that we will remain committed to these longstanding institutional and programmatic partners.

This evaluation should help us reflect on the goals of these longstanding commitments, understand their role in our portfolios and strategy, and help us to establish metrics within the MEL framework for long-term assessment of these partnerships.

Theory of change

The Fiscal Governance Program views the theory of change as a critical part of our transformation efforts. While still evolving our practice, we use theories of change at the strategy and portfolio levels to articulate the specific changes we want to see in the world. We started our theory of change process by identifying the problem(s) to be solved, discussing the

context surrounding the issue, and thinking about what and who would need to be involved to solve the problem. Our corresponding impacts (ultimate goal) and outcomes (preconditions to ultimate goal) are our current understanding of the roadmap between where the issue stands now and where we aim for it to be. We anticipate coming back to our theories of change regularly to review what we've learned, incorporate new research and evidence, and interrogate our assumptions and strategies. We are in the process of both refining these theories of change and building an indicator framework to accompany them.

At the strategy level, our three overarching goals are:

- Demonstrable increase in inclusive and responsive government approaches to economic and fiscal policy-making

- Demonstrable increase in relevant parties being held accountable for decisions and behavior related to the management of public finances and resources

- Demonstrable increase in equity-enhancing fiscal and economic policies

We also have a fourth cross-cutting goal aimed at the most direct impact of our grantmaking:

- Improved organizational health and capacity of our grantees

In addition to these overarching goals, each of our portfolios has a set of ultimate outcomes.

This evaluation should comprehensively review and interrogate our assumptions and causal linkages for the theories of change, build the intersection points of our strategy theory of change with portfolio-level ones, identify linkage points for our learning agenda questions (see MEL Plan) and other research initiatives, and recommend adjustments to the accompanying indicators and MEL framework.

FGP's monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan

The 2018–22 strategy period carries with it a bold vision for our monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) efforts. Crucial to driving forward progress and improved methods in fiscal governance is connecting the dots across siloed approaches, taking stock of knowledge already available to the field, and rigorously testing innovations and promising practices. Observing impact from the lens of a single grantee limits the visibility of actions and activities that are likely driving change, but the fiscal governance program is well-placed to help harness the power of collective knowledge and fund key aspects of missing evidence. We further benefit from Open Society Foundation's patience for long-term and systemic change to guide our aspirations and approach to questions of impact and change.

Our MEL work will call on a key set of values to guide the types of activities and evidence we pursue. Through our MEL work, we will support and prioritize research, learning, and evaluation which:

- Humbly acknowledges the role of FGP vis-a-vis grantees and other stakeholders

- Utilizes participatory methodologies and techniques and spotlights underrepresented voices

- Responds to a clear demand and answers real questions practitioners and policymakers face

- Appropriately understands and adapts itself to context and power dynamics

- Prioritizes knowledge building, creation, and sharing

- Acknowledges the value and role of failure in iterating interventions and policies

- Considers, builds off, or leverages existing knowledge and work

Currently, our internal MEL systems lack formalization and specificity and fail to easily provide us with information and analysis to promote better decision-making and planning. We aim to lay out a roadmap to address these gaps and tailor our approach to data collection and analysis to best meet the program's needs. Currently, we have theories of change for the strategy and portfolio levels, a continuously evolving draft set of indicators, and a set of learning questions, but plan to build a more comprehensive and integrated framework. Leveraging our strategic advantages, the main objectives of our MEL practices will be to improve ourselves as grantmakers, foster a greater and deeper understanding of the fields and contexts in which we work, and humbly (and yet rigorously) assess progress towards our goals and the goals identified by our grantees. Thus, our **MEL system will have three levels of focus**: (1) *The work of FGP*-utilizing the tools directly available to OSF, (2) *The work of our grantees*-concentrating on the goals and outcomes most relevant to FGP, and (3) *Broad landscape changes* or shifts to the fields in which we operate. Our primary MEL focus should always be to improve our capacity for good grantmaking and intentional organization building (level 1) but staying connected with the evolution of the field and the work of our grantees (levels 2 and 3) will help us redesign and strategize what mix of activities and interventions we should pursue.

To create a clear and focused mandate for learning on a set of issues most strategically and operationally relevant to FGP, we have chosen to adopt **a learning agenda**.[1] In our case, we are committing to deeply explore three specific questions regularly and rigorously over the course of this strategy cycle. We have also identified a fourth question we hope to explore in partnership with other OSF programs and/or members of the Transparency and Accountability Initiative donor collaborative.

The adopted questions can flexibly accommodate a range of levels of inquiry and methods but collectively allow for conclusions to be drawn. While we are unlikely to find 'explicit' answers to the questions we've laid out, at the end of this four-year period we expect to have made

---

[1] *Learning Agenda- a defined set of key questions, which, when answered, can optimize our impact and effectiveness as a program, as well as enhance and refine our understanding of the contexts in which we operate.*

substantial progress on each of them. We expect the questions to be integrated across portfolios and embedded in many aspects of our grantmaking.

This evaluation should assess the extent to which the FGP MEL framework can provide data of the right quality and quantity to guide the implementation of our strategy, collect baseline data against high-level strategy and portfolio indicators, and provide clear recommendations for adjustments to the framework and implementation plan.

Timeline and purpose strategy evaluation phases

Phase I (baseline)

Timing: Q4 2017 – Q1 2018

Purpose: Formative evaluation; Establish baseline for key metrics, review and analyze theory of change assumptions and portfolio composition, propose adjustments to the strategy that will make it more assessable over time, and make recommendations to the MEL plan, framework, and indicators.

Phase II (midline)

Timing: Q4 2019 – Q1 2020

Purpose: Formative evaluation; Review strategy implementation and progress towards goals, establish and analyze midterm data for key metrics, rapid review of MEL plan implementation, and highlight key shifts to global landscape impacting our work and the work of our grantees.

Phase III (endline)

Timing: Q1 – Q2 2023

Purpose: Summative evaluation; Evaluate FGP's implementation of its strategy and progress towards goals, including tracing FGP-specific impacts; establish and analyze endline data for key metrics using comparative analysis from baseline and midline evaluations, and assess key shifts to the context, political realities, and evidence for the fields in which FGP operates.

Questions to be answered

- How comprehensively does our existing strategy, portfolios, and grantee mix address the goals we have articulated? Have we planned to appropriately recognize and apply the overlapping and intersecting work across portfolios?

- How thorough is our understanding of our strategic opportunities, assets, and the context surrounding our priority issue areas? To what extent are we prepared to capitalize on these?

- How clear are our strategy goals and objectives? Could they be improved to more directly articulate the impact we hope to see? Could they be improved to become more evaluable over time?

- Where and how do our 'sacred cows' and 'evergreen commitments' fit in relative to our strategy and its goals? How can we better leverage these partnerships over time? How can we better evaluate them?

- Are the theories of change credibly constructed and clearly articulated? Are the linkage points between portfolios and the portfolios to the strategy clear and actionable? Are there blind spots we haven't noticed? How can we improve our use of theories of change over time?

- What is the feasibility of our monitoring, learning, and evaluation plans and proposed approach to indicator and data collection? Does it relate sufficiently to the theories of change? Will the approach capture only data that is needed and usable? What improvements and adjustments can be made? What is the starting point (in 2018) for the selected, high-level indicators? Is our plan for the learning agenda sufficiently actionable?

Evaluation uses & users

Currently the identified use is for internal purposes only: to assess our new strategy (and make it more evaluable) and theory of change, provide expert recommendations to our MEL plans and establish baseline data. This makes the primary user group as the members of the Fiscal Governance team and our advisory board members. We also plan to publicly share information on the results of this evaluation and proactively circulate these to grantees and donors who work closely with our program.

Scope of work

We expect the selected consultant(s) to work deeply and proactively with members of the Fiscal Governance Program Team as this baseline can only serve its full value and purpose if the team fully understands and acknowledges the significance of its methods and results.

- Consultation with relevant stakeholders including members of FGP team, advisory board members, grantees, other donors, and relevant field experts

- Mixed method evaluation of FGP strategy, context analysis, theory of change, learning agenda, grantmaking practices, and planned activities

- Review and recommendations on FGP's internal MEL framework, including on the feasibility applicability of certain types of data and indicators

- Work with FGP team to vet and integrate recommendations and findings throughout the study process, including advising on the application of the study's conclusions

- Collection and preparation of baseline indicators (*note: relatively minimal collection needed, mostly will make use of FGP internal data or publicly available data sets*)

While we are currently only accepting bids for Phase I, we hope to identify a baseline partner with skills that can apply across all three phases.

Deliverables and timeline

- Inception and methodology proposal report

- Final report to include thorough analysis, reflections, and recommendations on FGP's four-year strategy, theory of change, activities (namely grants), learning agenda, and MEL framework, as well as a comprehensive methodology section

- Baseline data for key FGP indicators

- Executive summary (no more than 5–7 pages) summarizing the main findings and conclusion of the evaluation

- Public-facing blog disclosing the main findings of the evaluation

- In-person final report to FGP team

Candidate or team profile

- Demonstrated experience conducting formative or baseline evaluations of strategies, policies, initiatives, systems, or other complex and broadly defined structures

- Solid evaluation experience and expertise using both qualitative and quantitative techniques Knowledgeable on evidence and tactics related to the FGP's portfolios including transparency, accountability, anti-corruption, natural resource governance, public budgets & taxation, global trade, and/or open governance fields

- Commitment to and experience employing the FGP's core MEL values

- Pre-existing familiarity/relationships with organizations and initiatives within FGP's portfolio areas is a major plus

- Ability to work on a tight timeline, in dynamic consultation with FGP staff, and resourcefully drawing on additional outside expertise as needed to complete the work

Candidates and teams with proposals under $100,000 encouraged

We anticipate limited to no travel will be needed. Expenses to travel to OSF offices to present or work with team members (within reason) can be covered separately.

Interested candidates should send a brief cover letter describing their interest in the work, the qualifications and experience that they bring, the key questions that this TOR elicits for them, and an initial quote for undertaking the consultancy on the timeline identified. Please send all submissions to EMAIL ADDRESS no later than **November 10, 2017.**