

Member Spotlight

Within the past year, the philanthropic field has been intrigued by the concept of scaling effective nonprofits—whether it is through program expansion or replication or taking a networked approach to growing impact. From the White House Office of Social Innovation to small community foundations, various approaches to scale have been adopted to increase impact and alleviate our society’s most pressing problems.

The W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation’s mission demonstrates their commitment to building the internal capacity and external impact of its grantees, saying they “seek to work with great leaders doing promising work that has the potential for advancing the knowledge and practice in our grantmaking fields.” To have a greater reach and influence in their respective communities, both the foundation and their grantees recognized the need to understand what it takes to become scalable.

For the third consecutive year, the foundation gathered its education grantees for a one-day session to discuss challenges, compare lessons and develop strategies for strengthening their organizations. The November 2010 convening focused on using evaluation to improve programs and increase impact with 20 education leaders from the foundation’s four grantmaking cities, San Francisco, Boston, Chicago and New York. The participants discussed the link between impact and scale, the value of formative evaluation and the role of a theory of change.

The meeting’s agenda was designed to address a few key questions posed by the grantees: what are ways to overcome the real barriers of measuring impact? How can organizations sort through the challenges of attribution and contribution in complex environments, such as schools? Are there other ways to measure impact, aside from students’ standardized tests? These questions, while education-related, still successfully capture the struggles from the grantee perspective.

To share what was learned, the foundation compiled the questions, discussions and experiences of the grantees into a convening report. This report, “Building to Scale: Best Practices for Using Evaluation to Improve Programs and Increase Impact,” provides ideas and advice that can help nonprofit organizations as they work to quantify their impact, the success of their programs and the reach of their services. Key findings of the report include how to determine if evaluation is effective for an organization; advice on how to use data to make organizational change; and how to create a theory of change that has a reasonable “cause and effect” formula.

Since the report primarily gives the grantee perspective, grantmakers can learn from the challenges of scale and how to work with their grantees to achieve the greatest results. “Building to Scale” can be downloaded on the foundation’s [Web site](#).