



The Colorado Health Foundation™



The Learning and Evaluation Department at The Colorado Health Foundation

When you hear the phrase “learning and evaluation,” what comes to mind? For some, it might evoke fears of uninvited judgment and possibly reduced funding. We acknowledge that many communities have experienced evaluation as extractive and, in some cases, even harmful. Too often, evaluation has been used for accountability and compliance by those in power. At The Colorado Health Foundation, we strive to address power imbalances and view evaluation as an imperfect but important tool for learning.

The [Learning and Evaluation Department](#) ensures that the Foundation’s learning and evaluation work is designed and implemented in service of, and as a contributor to, health equity and racial justice. The [Equitable Evaluation Initiative](#) and [Framework](#) have supported our thinking and growth over the past 6 years. Since 2018, we have intentionally shifted our internal learning and evaluation practices to reflect more equitable ways of fulfilling our core functions:

- Providing strategic support
- Assessing our impact
- Creating learning opportunities

These three functions allow [our team](#) to continually improve our grantmaking efforts as well as hold ourselves accountable to communities across Colorado.

In each of the Foundation’s [10 priority areas](#), the Learning and Evaluation team is a key strategic partner. We partner with our program staff to identify the evidence and mental models that are guiding our thinking and approaches. We discuss what success would look like and the strategic approach that will best get us there. Only after providing monetary and non-monetary supports do we begin to evaluate the

impact of our investments. The goal of assessing progress and impact is to learn whether we need to adjust our thinking or tactics to get us closer to what we previously identified as success. This type of learning requires intentional structures and practices embedded into the regular routines of the Foundation; these practices explicitly help us incorporate what we are learning into decisions about how to improve the work.

Learning is a collaborative practice that takes place within all departments, amongst all Foundation staff and with our partners in the field. Our learning practices seek to decenter the Foundation and pay attention to the broader dynamics in which our work takes place. Our team strives to create learning that is meaningful and actionable. We combine real-time learning that informs decisions we make today, with assessments of progress towards the larger outcomes we seek for tomorrow. As stewards of the learning process, our team synthesizes information we need for now and stores knowledge we need for later.

The Learning and Evaluation department continually reflects on our own practice of evaluation so that we can be better learning partners. This includes broadening our ideas of success, experimenting with novel forms of data collection that honor different forms of knowledge, minimizing burden associated with evaluation activities, and sharing learning with our funded partners and the larger philanthropic field. For example, on our website, you can read [a new case study](#) that describes how we've partnered with [OMNI Institute](#) to embed equity into an evaluation of grants made through our funding opportunity for [equitable outdoor spaces](#). You can also learn more about our department, and read more case studies, [here](#).

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