

Report on a Session  
At the 52nd Annual  
Conference of the  
Council on Foundations

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May 1, 2001

**ACCOUNTABILITY,  
COMMUNITY,  
AND  
PHILANTHROPIC  
PRACTICE**

*Kettering  
Foundation*

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The Kettering Foundation is an operating foundation that conducts research on democratic political practices and develops frameworks for citizens to use in acting on public problems. The objective of the foundation's research is to learn how democracy can work better. The foundation welcomes partnerships with other institutions and individuals who are working on political concerns. Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants.

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This report is an adaptation of a remarkable conversation that took place at the Council on Foundations 52nd Annual Conference. The theme of the conference was “Preserving the Public Trust,” and accountability was a central concern throughout its sessions. On the morning of Tuesday May 2, grantmakers packed into a room and entered into conversation with leaders in the fields of philanthropy and community-building over the meaning and significance of accountability in contemporary philanthropy, the practices that aim to ensure accountability, and the challenges of trying to be accountable to entire communities.

The session was moderated by Marvin Cohen of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, and its opening speakers were Anna Faith Jones, former president of the Boston Foundation, Ricardo Millet of the Woods Charitable Fund, and Richard C. Harwood of the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation.

Participants spoke about “the struggle between doing what is right and doing what is expected,” in trying to serve “a variety of constituencies,” with often-conflicting interests. They argued that “preserving the public trust” entails increasing efforts to make the communities they serve, partners in the conception, planning, and evaluation processes involved in funding foundation projects. But many were still troubled by expectations from competing constituencies, the lack of “shared candid, sometimes painful, lessons” with one another, and the conventional “game-playing” that prevents open communication between foundations and the communities they help support.

As Marvin Cohen observed near the end of the session, “we are clearly exploring a notion of accountability that suggests entering into a different kind of relationship with community. And while some of us are doing that, we are all learning along the way...”

  
John Dedrick

# The Panel

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## Marvin Cohen, Moderator

Assistant Vice President of Donor-Advised Programs, Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago

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## Anna Faith Jones

President Emeritus of the Boston Foundation, honored during the conference with the distinguished Grantmaker of the Year award

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## Ricardo Millet

President of the Woods Charitable Fund and former director of evaluation for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

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## Richard C. Harwood

President of the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation and frequent commentator on national radio and television

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## Marvin Cohen

Let me begin our conversation by suggesting that the issue of accountability immediately suggests the idea of fiduciary responsibility. Accountability has financial implications. And this is an enduring theme in the conversation about accountability. Early in the work of the Council on Foundations, accountability came to mean transparency. So there was an emphasis on publishing reports. More recently, accountability has been more closely associated with efficiency and effectiveness. The movement to focus on outcomes reflects this notion of accountability. Now, we are increasingly talking about accountability to our various constituencies and to the public. So we are talking about entering into relationships with communities. But what does all this really mean for foundations?

## Anna Faith Jones

Accountability is not just evaluation. It starts with the design of your program. I speak from the experience of the community foundation, where we work in the same community all the time. So pretty much everything we do is very transparent; there's no place to hide. Our grantees are talking to each other all the time. And because we are a public charity, we feel very strongly this responsibility for being accountable to the community.

Let me give you an example of how we came to understand that accountability really starts with the design of the program. I came to foundation work at the time when the federal government was still funding these massive poverty programs, although they were just coming to an end. You may remember that those programs were built around particular problems for which we provided the remedial services.

We worked very much as a catalyst helping community organizations bring these financial resources into their communities and adapt them to their needs. And what we were looking at, by way of evaluation, was how many people were being served, and how many were coming out and moving along in ways that the program had specified. It seemed fairly simple.

Then, when all that money was gone, it was amazing to hear from the community agencies that they were facing disaster. They pleaded with us to help them replace this money. That was just ridiculous from our point of view. There was no way we could even begin to fill those gaping holes. And how would we choose whose needs to meet?

So we decided to go out and ask the people who were most affected by the problems and by the withdrawal of this money, how they felt about it. What were their priorities? How did they see their needs? And it was an eye-opening experience. People had not been particularly satisfied with those programs. They were too prescriptive. They brought professionals into their communities who didn't live there, who delivered these programs according to preset guidelines. The people didn't have anything to say about them. Nobody asked them who were to be the beneficiaries of a given program or whether it was anything like what they wanted. They told us that they needed resources, but that they also wanted to have something to say about how they would be deployed in the community.

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We started off with a survey that told us who in our community was poor, but we also asked them what their needs were. And what was mind-blowing was that their priorities were the same as yours and mine. Exactly the same. They wanted jobs, housing for their families, education for their children and training for themselves, health care that was acceptable and affordable, and the hope of finding a place in a community that cared about them.

We realized that all of our grantmaking over these years had been focused on need. And those with the severest need got the most money. So we decided to proceed in a different direction — building on what people identified as their strengths and assets, and giving them more capacity to do what it was that they wanted to do.

I feel that designing programs like that is the first step in accountability. In the first place, you are responding to your community. As some of our programs came to an end, and organizations we had been funding asked what we were going to do for them now, it occurred to us that our client was the community and the people in the community, rather than the organizations themselves. What we had to do was to move that money around, in as thoughtful a way as possible, to benefit the people in the community.

We're in the people business, and what we're trying to accomplish is not going to happen overnight. We understand we have to stick with this for something like 18 to 20 years. It's like raising a child. When the kid's ten and he isn't producing, you don't say, "Well, get out. I'm not going to house you anymore. I'm not going to provide you any more money." You shift gears, you talk to someone to figure out how to meet this kid's needs. And as the children grow up and they go through different periods, their needs shift and change.

So this was the paradigm that enabled us to come to a whole new way of approaching accountability. Yes, we ask agencies how they spent the money; we want them to tell us that. But we realize, in working at the issues that really have to do with human lives, people learn as they go along, and the program may shift or change. And that funds must be redirected accordingly.

We realize, too, that we need to get back to the people who are participating in this program to get some sense of how they feel about what's happened to them. Do they feel more capable of addressing their issues? Do they feel more capable of finding leaders in their own communities who can help them organize around the issues that are meaningful to them, and to raise the resources to go on with these programs.

So our goal now is to leave in the community some enhanced capacity of the people who are going to be continuing to struggle with these issues. And it doesn't just have to do with how our money was used, and how many people or particular specified problems were effectively addressed.

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# Ricardo Millet

I absolutely agree. The pressure for accountability, I think, is coming from different directions, and philanthropies are trying to respond to all of them. One of the most dominant pressure points on boards is the notion that they must document and articulate to the public the value added of their grant investments. And that, in turn, places a lot of pressure on the evaluation.

There's another group trying to respond to this pressure for accountability from a slightly different vantage point. Some of you are in this room. You are program officers of foundations who are trying to supply your boards with the kind of evidence that they need to respond to the public. But program officers, I think, have a different slant on the kind of information they need to respond to this pressure. More often than not, they're carrying a multiple portfolio of grants and they need a different kind of information from evaluation to help them manage and monitor the portfolio a little more efficiently.

There's a third set of people who need to respond to the accountability pressure. These are the folks involved in community-based foundations, especially the grantees who, in my experience, get short shrift from the philanthropies. The boards are looking for results from their investments — while the communities that actually have people on the ground who could generate results are not getting the capacity-building tools that would enable them to do so.

This is the irony. Foundations don't produce results on the ground; it's the grantees who produce results on the ground. If you could draw a picture of the kind of investments the foundations are making in response to the pressure for accountability, I would wager that less than 10 percent of the total investment goes to capacity-building, while the rest is invested in programs that have the potential for showing tangible results.

A 1997 report from the Kettering Foundation, prepared by Richard C. Harwood and the Harwood Institute, documents some aspects of this short-shrifting of community-based capacity-building. The report, called *Squaring Realities*, revealed that many philanthropic organizations face two realities that are often in conflict with each other.

First, there are the board desires to capture the voice and to tap into the many perspectives that community-based organizations can offer to mine the nuggets of knowledge and wisdom to be found in the daily, on-the-ground work that community organizations need to do.

The dominant reality, however, is that shrinking philanthropic dollars and high competition for less and less dollars is a trend that requires foundations to make difficult decisions about getting hard evidence-based outcome data to report the results of their grant investments.

So there's a tendency to want to capture what I think is a true source of inspiration and knowledge about how to deal with the increasingly complex problems society faces. At the same time, foundations are pressured to respond to John Q. Public who wants to see immediate and tangible results. As a consequence, foundations place a lower priority on

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long-term engagement and partnering with communities to come up with long-term solutions that can really provide genuine evidence and results. This is a dilemma.

We want to balance this picture. Ultimately, accountability to the public will be proven counterfeit if philanthropic investment does not improve the capacity of grantees to become more legitimate players in designing programs that they know will work in their communities. And we need to be able to document and disseminate these findings so that they can be reference sources for funders, policymakers, and those academics who pretend they know what's going on.

One of the more current studies of nonprofit capacity-building and philanthropy was conducted recently for the Knight Foundation by Tom Backer. He says that the mission-driven nature of nonprofits makes performance measures difficult. Poor, incomplete information, limited training opportunities, and infrequent sharing of best practices all mean that the skill base of nonprofits is underdeveloped on both the supply and demand side.

Nonprofits and communities need to be more actively involved in setting the agenda for capacity-building and evaluating its outcomes. Capacity-building programs provide opportunities for funders, nonprofit organizations, and communities to partner in a genuine sharing of power. And it's only when this happens that I believe both philanthropies and communities can really respond to the call for accountability.

## Richard C. Harwood

After hearing Anna and Ricardo talk, let me try these four points. I'd like to talk about rhythms, progress versus success, time, and legacy. I'll come back to them in a minute. But first, it seems to me that when people talk about accountability they often mean, "How am I going to hold someone else accountable?" I think it means something else: How are we, those of us in this room, going to account for ourselves in our thinking and in our practice?

It is one thing to hold someone else accountable; it is yet another thing to look in the mirror and to figure out whether we are accounting for ourselves. It seems to me that what we're talking about, in many respects, is the notion of change. We're all in the business of change. How do we bring about change? How do we catalyze change? How do we build capacity for change? And the idea of dealing with change brings me to my four phrases or words.

The first, rhythms, goes back to something Anna said. It seems to me as I've worked in communities, that what we often do — not just foundations, but all of us — is this: We descend upon a community, drop a program in, give it three years, and decide that change ought to come about. And when it doesn't come about, we're disappointed, and we slap the grantee on the hand. This is a parody of sorts, but I think it happens every day.

What we have been discovering as we work in different communities across the country is that there are stages of community life. And that unless we understand what stage a

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community or a neighborhood is in, it is very difficult to figure out the strategic investment that will allow that community to catalyze itself to move forward and build capacity.

Let me give you a quick rundown of five stages you may all recognize from your work in communities.

We call the first stage the waiting place. It's the notion that you have a strong inkling that something is off, but you can't articulate it. You don't quite know what it is. "God, we've got some problems and I wish someone would do something about them," is the quintessential waiting-place comment.

The second stage is what we call impasse, where two paradigms are butting heads — an old way and a new way. And this is where the narrative in a community or a society begins to shift. Here you start to hear people say, "Enough is enough. We can't go on like this anymore." And there are certain things you need to do to help a community move past that.

The third stage is what we call catalytic. It's where you have pockets of change starting to emerge, but the urge to act is not broad based. If you go into a community in the catalytic stage and you walk on the streets, most people will tell you things are the way they were in the impasse stage. But if you look hard enough you can begin to see pockets of change — what we call pebbles dropping into the lake. That starts the change, and as the pebbles drop, ripples fan out and soon envelop one another. It is in the enveloping process that norms and values and new ways of doing things get shared and passed along.

The next stage is growth, where you have the sort of public capital to move things forward, and this leads to the final stage where changes are sustained and renewed.

Much of our one-size-fits-all work actually defies the realities of stages. So many times, our programs seek to violate the rhythm and the stage that a community or an organization or a group is in. What we've found is that each stage calls for different strategic interventions to help a community catalyze itself and move forward and build capacity.

My second point — progress and success — concerns itself with a different conception of what it means to move forward. What we find repeatedly in all sorts of institutions is that their conception of moving forward is one of success. It's the American way. Either we've hit our mark or we haven't, and our mark has to be the full fruition of our work. None of us works that way, and no communities ever work that way.

What I think we need to be thinking about more is our aspiration — not our dream or our vision, but what we hope to achieve. But where are the milestones of progress that will help us understand whether or not we are moving toward that goal?

And let me say that the milestones are not program-driven. One quick example. We're in a lot of communities now where one of our milestones is not the number of programs that a nonprofit is doing, it's whether or not a community is developing what we call self-trust and hope. Because without self-trust and hope in a community, people won't step out of their homes to start doing things. That's our key milestone. It's a notion of progress you can measure. But you need very different tools to understand how to do that.

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Third, if you're going to think about rhythms, and if you're going to think about progress versus success, it seems to me that you have to think about time differently. Perhaps you are wearing a digital watch. Our society is in a digital-watch mentality. We see the numbers and that's all we see. But there's a dimension of time in which we have to allow things to unfold. And much like a farmer who works the land, you will not see fruition of the work you do in a community for many years. The question is: Do you have a dimension of time in your mind that will allow you to engage in that kind of work, or is time going to be measured by two- and three-year grant cycles, after which everyone has to come begging for renewal?

The fourth point, and I think one of the more important ones, is the notion of legacy. We don't talk about that often, or when we do, it's often just a rhetorical device.

We often convince ourselves that we are the first ones to think about the problems we set out to help solve. And we think that we'll be able to achieve what we have to achieve in three years. But that defies two very important truths about life. One is that, unless you're Adam and Eve, there are always people who came before you. And there is always someone who will come after you.

So the question is one of legacy. Do we have the humility and the courage to understand that our work sits at a point in time? That we connect to things that came before us, and that we build capacities and foundations for people who come after us? We are not here simply to solve the world's problems; we are here to be part of a larger process that will go on, we hope, long after us.

If you can imagine your work in that way, all of a sudden you start to think about investment and evaluation in fundamentally different ways. So let me stop with just reiterating that I think accountability is a nice term we often borrow from the business community. But in our community work, it seems to me, that what's at issue also is how we account for our own thinking and our own practices in what we do.

*Conference participants covered a wide range of subjects in grappling with the issue of accountability — interchangeably posing questions and suggesting answers. Following is a sampling of what spurred spirited discussion between the panel and other participants.*

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## Paul Foerster

There are significant differences between the real needs of a community, as for example evidenced by quantitative indicators, and the perceived needs as felt by prospective grantees and other stakeholders. How should a foundation attempt to overcome this dilemma and balance reality and perceptions?

## Anna Faith Jones

I don't think you can get at real need just through numbers. We have found that much of the data involves negative indices about who is unemployed, who is dropping out of school, how many babies die, and so forth. These things are important for many agencies to know. But actually talking to people is just as important in measuring success.

We found a very thoughtful woman in the mayor's office who came up with something she called indicators of progress and sustainability — positive indicators. What are the things that make a community work as it should, and how do you measure those? Why shouldn't you, as a grantmaker, give resources so that you strengthen what's needed rather than trying to reduce the negative things?

Yes, numbers can be important. But they are not enough unless you can find out how real people relate to them. You have to involve them in telling you what would be progress for them. If you don't know whether what you have done is positively affecting people's lives and their sense of themselves, you will not know whether you're making real progress.

## Ricardo Millet

I want to challenge the notion that somehow real needs, as revealed by quantitative surveys and other kinds of methodologies used by social science practitioners, are somehow more legitimate than perceived needs. I would argue that there are some blind sides to the convention of data collection by conventional social science that need to be challenged also.

And similarly, I think that identifying needs by asking people what they think must also become more rigorous. I don't want to throw out the baby with the bath water, by saying that conventional surveys don't yield legitimate proof, and that perception leads to more legitimate truth. No. Both methods need correction.

A lot of the methodologies that we assume to be quantitative make assumptions about those numbers that ought to make you question the results. I genuinely believe that unless our evaluation practices and social science research practices include a lot more interaction with people, the numbers and the results are going to be continually questioned, and they're going to miss the mark.

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## Richard C. Harwood

It seems to me that this conversation is in part about what it means to know something. And yes, we can know things through quantitative means, but I don't think we can know the whole picture. Let me just give you one very quick example.

A survey person would tell you that when two numbers contradict one another in a survey, you often throw them out, because you can't tell what they mean. But if you were doing what Anna and Ricardo have suggested, which is to engage people in a conversation, you might understand that those aren't contradictions, that actually people hold two competing views simultaneously, as we all do.

Lodged within those competing views might be ambivalence, not indifference. I think when we're evaluating, our goals should be to search for understanding and knowing, not to search for numbers that we can then defend.

## Gary Nelson

I'd be interested in your reactions to a different type of accountability. And that is the obligation I feel to my colleagues to share the very candid, sometimes painful lessons learned from our investments and grants. Would you care to comment on that type of accountability?

## Anna Faith Jones

Well, I think that's exactly what this conference is all about. And the best sessions try to pull out those issues. The reason we are talking about accountability here today is because this is on everyone's mind. To keep this conference useful to us, so that we are accountable to one another, we need to be sure that the kinds of sessions about issues that we want shared and discussed get on this docket.

## Ricardo Millet

This point is one we in the Grantmakers Evaluation Network have been trying to deal with for a long time. The major sin of foundations, I think, is not developing a system where they can deposit their evaluation reports on a number of things that we seem to be tackling every day.

We should not be trying to address social problems in a vacuum. Yet, if you try to find out from any foundation what their experience has been in dealing with problem X, they don't usually have a very systematic way of knowing that themselves. So, they may address many of their investments as if they're doing it all over again. And until we can develop a

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system and overcome the anxiety of what it might reflect on us, we'll never be in a position to build a body of knowledge that can provide a grounded theory about what works, when, and why. And that's not only true of foundations. Again, I come back to community organizations. They need to find a way to more systematically document and share the successes and failures of their experience. And to make them public.

We have to be like lawyers, I think. Evaluation is never going to yield bulletproof truth. It can only lead to a deposit, a series of plausible better practices that seem to work. And it is important to make this deposit available to us to reference as we begin to design new programs, try to avoid mistakes, or enhance the successes of previous attempts.

## Marvin Cohen

Some of our colleagues, I think, are already doing this and doing it quite well. I've spent a lot of time in my philanthropic career being concerned about youth development and child welfare. And surely the Casey Foundation has been very active in those fields.

No one, I think, would seriously question whether Casey has tried to take on some of the major issues in our country. They have made spectacular mistakes, and also done some things quite well. And interestingly they have been willing to broadcast their errors. They come to conferences and it's mea culpa. They have publications and they say "here's what we learned," and we all learn from that.

So the question is: Can we be doing more of that?

## Retha Clark King

My question is whether we could bring about behavioral changes by looking at the way we design collaborations. What concerns me is that as we come together to collaborate with various partners — either community organizations or other foundations — we typically point the finger at one that needs to be more accountable. Yet we are not turning the spotlight on ourselves to be more accountable as we design the partnership. And my question to you is whether you think it's appropriate for us, in the design stage, to reflect on how each partner can and should be more accountable.

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## Anna Faith Jones

I think this can be done, and we certainly need to be more open. Foundations can no longer take the position that they will come up with a silver bullet to solve this problem, taking all the glory if it works, and blaming others if it doesn't. We have begun to convene people in our community as an issue comes up. Among them are interested people, organizations, and other funding groups. We have a series of discussions to focus the issue, to figure out how we could go about it and who could pick up various pieces of it. We have found this to be very, very productive.

I think you'll find that for any issue you're trying to address, the change is incremental. The literature is virtually unanimous on that point. Occasionally, somebody on my board says, "I just don't get all these small grants. Why don't we just take \$10 million and do this research project on families and children and then put \$10 million out there to solve it once and for all?"

It's interesting that even when you read the scientific literature, you'll find that breakthroughs were made only after funding many people trying to come at the answer. And further, that the funding was doled out quite deliberately in that way.

## Richard C. Harwood

As you were talking I was thinking of four C's by way of response. The first is "convening." I think when we bring people together, we oftentimes bring them together in a forced way. And we often focus around sort of a matrix of responsibilities and tasks.

The second C would be "covenant." We need to think more about striking a covenant among those folks who are going to work together. Without the covenant about how we're going to work together, the minute any tension arises, the collaboration dissipates and dies. You've all been there.

Number three would be "culture." I've been thrown into collaborations by funders in which the cultures of the organizations simply do not mix. You have a highly entrepreneurial organization working with a slow-moving methodical organization. And you might have yet a third and fourth organization. The cultures simply don't mix well. So I think if we're going to bring folks together — and it's important that we do that — we need to bring together those whose cultures *will* mix.

The final C would be what I call the "collaboration trap," a pitfall I've seen in most collaborations: we make ourselves dependent on one another. I can't do something until you do something and until she does something over there. As soon as one of us — the weakest link — breaks, then you start pointing fingers again. At that point, it's over. I think there are times for that kind of dependency, but I think we ought to be thinking more about interdependency in collaboration, working in complementary ways. When we all say we're going to San Francisco, we're going to get there in different ways, but let's make sure we're working toward common purposes. And that usually helps collaborations move along.

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## Phil Cass

My own experience is that evaluation ends up being much more of a strategy in accomplishing some outcome than the actual measure of how close we think we got to what we were trying to accomplish. I'm curious to know what your thoughts and experiences with that are.

## Ricardo Millet

I think of evaluation as intrinsic and integral to good programming. Good evaluation is good thinking; good evaluation is good program management. And so I don't pull them apart.

I don't think we are as good as we think we are in creating the kind of programming that can be usefully evaluated, and so I'd like to suggest a better method for documenting accountability. First, you force yourself and your grantees to make explicit what they think they are doing and why they are doing it that way. What are your assumptions? Put it all down. Then, given these assumptions, tell me why you've chosen x, y, and z strategy. Put that down. In the end, you record the results of these implementation strategies and see how well it measures your original assumption.

You might find that you really didn't accomplish what you said you wanted to with these strategies. What if we could save space for grantees and program officers to say, "I tried this experiment with this set of implementation strategies, given this assumption, and guess what? It really didn't work"? I think that ought to be a legitimate, well-recognized, and valued outcome.

## Marvin Cohen

I know very few foundations that don't seek publicly to be on the cutting edge, to be innovative. God knows what the alternative is. But, essentially, we then insinuate that orientation into the dialogue we have with our grantees. So that in order to get money from us, they have to tell us how innovative they are, how creative, how cutting edge. The aspirations they often state for what they're going to do with our money are so far out of reality with anything they can measure or count. We then, create part of our own dilemmas about measuring outcomes by the way we enter into that conversation.

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## Neil Carlson

One of the things that mainstream foundations haven't been as explicit about as they might have been, are the values that underlie their work. Unless we can get these on the table and hold a conversation between grantees and foundations around the values that we're working toward, around the kind of society that we want to live in, accountability is ultimately going to fall short. I'd like to hear your views on this.

## Ricardo Millet

I agree. If there's not that dialogue between the foundations that have the money and the grantees who are seeking that money, if we can't transcend the historic game-playing that we've been doing for a long time we're not going to get a genuine conversation. And we're not going to be able to agree on a covenant in which people feel safe to try and experiment and report success or failure so that we can really build references on documentation of what works and what does not seem to work.

## Anna Faith Jones

That [game-playing] starts early in the process. Grantees come in and ask what the Boston Foundation is funding, and I say, "You tell me what it is you want to accomplish." They kind of look at me as if to say, "What is this?" And so you dance around this tree for a long time. And I explain that if we're not funding what they're doing, I'll say so right away.

But it's very hard. You start playing the game as soon as they come in the door. So they set up the program to meet what they think you will fund. Then, of course, they're going to give you back from the evaluation what they think you wanted this program to do. And you have to work very hard to break down those notions and establish the trust.

## Marvin Cohen

Let me pose a slightly different question to our colleagues on the panel. We are clearly exploring a notion of accountability that suggests entering into a different kind of relationship with community. What's implicit in that, and what we don't talk about as frequently is the changes that have to take place within our own institutions to enter into that kind of dialogue and that kind of relationship.

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## Anna Faith Jones

There needs to be ongoing training that brings these issues up — role-playing with grantees and so forth. The fact is that in America money is power, and power gives authority. Even though you may know nothing about what they want to do, people assume you have the expertise. All because you started out with the money. And unless we train our staff to learn how to diffuse that and to get a more level playing field, we're going to continue this game.

## Ricardo Millet

If I were to mention one thing in response to that question, and I think there are many things that could be addressed, is that the game-playing not only happens between the potential grantee and the foundation, but there is a lot of game-playing within the foundation itself, between the program officer and the board. If there's one particular thing I could change, it is that program officers often play to the board's conception of what would be a worthy grant investment.

More often than not, there is a mind-set on the board about what would work and what wouldn't, and what evidence the board may need to consider this a legitimate return on their investment. Board members often do not have a sense of how long it takes to gestate a program to the point where you might reasonably be looking for results. More often than not, a program officer sells the board on results that are 10 or 15 years out there. And the investment may be in an organization that's starting off at point zero in time, for a three-year project, and we're looking for year 15 or 20 results.

There is a little bit of temerity among program officers. If we are the true professionals in that organization, we have to stand up and stop being intimidated to meet expectations that are just not real.

## Richard C. Harwood

I would just say amen to that. What it's come down to is that we all have a master narrative in our mind about how things go. Ricardo and Anna have just articulated part of the master narrative of foundations: this game-playing about the relationships within foundations and between foundations and their communities.

Everything that we do is built off that narrative, our mind-set, our assumptions about the way things work, our reflexes. My experience has been that if we're going to break out of this, we need to examine two things: (1) What is the master narrative in our organizations? and (2) What assumptions undergird that master narrative?

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For instance, one assumption might be that change comes in three years. Well, if that's your assumption, no wonder you might fund certain kinds of things and not others.

What are the reflexes that play out our assumptions on a daily or minute-by-minute basis? We should, for example, look at the conversations you have in a meeting about grants and try to unpack the conversation in terms of reflexes, assumptions, master narrative.

And before you know it, you can understand why you make the decisions you do. And then you have to decide — talking about accountability — whether or not that makes sense when you're accounting for yourself and your organization. It's a tough task.

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