Collaboration between Grant-Making Organizations, Evaluators, And Program Staff Related to Standardized Evaluation Requirements

Kristin M. Everett
Western Michigan University, kristin.everett@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations

Part of the Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/202

This Dissertation-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
COLLABORATION BETWEEN GRANT-MAKING ORGANIZATIONS, EVALUATORS, AND PROGRAM STAFF RELATED TO STANDARDIZED EVALUATION REQUIREMENTS

by

Kristin M. Everett

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Educational Leadership, Research and Technology Western Michigan University December 2013

Doctoral Committee:

Jessaca Spybrook, Ph.D., Chair
Chris Coryn, Ph.D.
Teresa Behrens, Ph.D.
COLLABORATION BETWEEN GRANT-MAKING ORGANIZATIONS, EVALUATORS, AND PROGRAM STAFF RELATED TO STANDARDIZED EVALUATION REQUIREMENTS

Kristin M. Everett, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2013

Nonprofit organizations have received funding from grant-making organizations and foundations for many years. These funds have been used to support programs developed by the nonprofit organization. Over the years, two critical developments have occurred between grant-making organizations and nonprofit organizations related to evaluation and collaboration. First, grant-making organizations and nonprofit organizations are combining funds and resources to collaborate on projects. Second, program evaluation has become an essential piece of many grant-funded projects.

Historically, nonprofit organizations receiving funding from multiple sources were required to implement multiple monitoring and evaluation plans and write a report for each funder. These reports use staff time and grant resources. When multiple grant-making organizations fund the same program, one evaluation report could be developed to meet the needs of all funders, which would reduce reporting burdens.

In this study I investigate a consortium of funders, program staff, and evaluators who worked together to create common evaluation requirements. I adopt a case study methodology using observations, interviews, and document review to determine (a) the
processes used to develop the common evaluation expectations, and (b) the 
organizational contextual factors which influenced the collaboration.

The findings suggest the essential components of the process whereby the group 
established the evaluation requirements include (a) regular discussion and a trusting 
relationship among partnering organizations, (b) the presence of an involved evaluator 
from the onset of the program, and (c) common understanding of evaluation. The 
findings also suggest the organizational contextual factors influencing the collaboration 
are buy-in from stakeholders, the staff leading the project, the mission statements of the 
organizations, leadership, the power dynamic, the responsiveness of the project to the 
community, funding, the timeline, and the diversity of the funders.

The findings suggest a successful evaluation collaboration requires a significant 
commitment from the partnering organizations in time, staffing, and funds. 
Additionally, the partnering organizations should confirm (a) the community and 
stakeholders are interested in the program, (b) adequate funding is available, and (c) an 
external evaluator joins the collaboration from the beginning. These findings can assist 
philanthropic and nonprofit organizations and evaluators in developing common 
evaluation requirements and reports for funder collaboratives.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This document would not be possible without the support of many people in my life. I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Jessaca Spybrook, Dr. Chris Coryn, and Dr. Teresa Behrens. All three have been invaluable resources in methodology and subject matter questions. Dr. Spybrook has been a great support and mentor throughout this process. Dr. Brooks Applegate, Dr. Patricia Reeves, and Dr. Gary Miron have also influenced me through courses and taught me much about research and evaluation.

I would also like to thank my mentor Dr. Mark Jenness, the former director of SAMPI (Science and Mathematics Program Improvement) and researcher emeritus at Western Michigan University. His enthusiasm and dedication to program evaluation, especially in education, sparked my interest in evaluation and started me down this path. He is a great teacher and evaluator, who taught me the importance of knowing your audience and making your work practical.

I would also like to thank SAMPI staff, past and present, for their support and encouragement during this process: Cynthia Halderson, Delores Huber, Ninah Miller, Bob Ruhf, Crystal Stein, Mary Anne Sydlik, and Steve Winquist. I was very lucky to work with such a great group of people who cared so much about me and my work.
Acknowledgments—Continued

My former colleagues, Donna Hamilton, Amy Oliver, and Kathy Surd, also influenced me as they see the great value of evaluation. Because of them, I know that practitioners find evaluation work useful and important.

I would also like to thank Wendy Tackett for her invaluable assistance in the dissertation and research process. She has been a great help to me in so many ways.

My classmates and friends, especially Geoff Whitehurst, Tammy Russell, and Kelly Robertson, have been a great support over many hours of coursework and dissertation research and writing. Monica Lininger has been my number one cheerleader throughout graduate school. I honestly do not think this would be completed without her. I owe much to her.

I would also like to thank my family, in-laws, and friends for their support. The childcare and meals provided by my mom and mother-in-law were invaluable. I will not miss answering my dad’s favorite question, “How’s your paper coming?” I would like to thank my children, Emma and Rich. I am so glad I completed this when you were young and you won’t have any memory of it!

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Chip, who has been my rock and support. He has sacrificed for our family so that I could complete this degree. I am so grateful for his selflessness and love.

Kristin M. Everett
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................ ii

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................. xii

LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................... xiii

CHAPTER

I. THE PROBLEM ............................................................................................................... 1

Background of the Problem .............................................................................................. 1

Statement of the Problem .................................................................................................. 5

Issues Around Evaluation and Collaborative Funding .................................................... 5

Advantages of Developing Standardized Evaluation Measures in Collaborative Funding Projects .......................................................... 8

Developing Common Evaluation Measures .................................................................. 9

Purpose of the Study .......................................................................................................... 11

Research Questions/Propositions ...................................................................................... 12

Importance of the Study ................................................................................................... 14

Scope of the Study ............................................................................................................. 14

Terms ................................................................................................................................ 15

Outline of Dissertation ...................................................................................................... 16

II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE ................................................................... 18

The Nonprofit Sector ......................................................................................................... 18
Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER

Nonprofit Organizations ................................. 19
Foundations................................................................ 19
Categorizing Foundations ........................................ 20
Financial Impact of Foundations ................................ 22
Roles of Foundations ................................................ 23
Collaboration Among Organizations ........................... 24
Models of Collaboration ............................................ 25
Advantages to Collaboration in the Nonprofit Sector........... 29
  Efficiency ................................................................ 30
  Stability ................................................................ 31
  Finding Solutions to Problems .................................. 31
  Risk Taking ............................................................ 33
  Ownership ............................................................. 34
  Improved Communication ........................................ 35
Barriers to Collaboration ............................................ 36
  Diversity .............................................................. 36
  Accountability ........................................................ 37
  Lack of Professional Standards ................................. 38
  Communication ...................................................... 38
  Resources ............................................................. 38
TABLE OF CONTENTS—Continued

CHAPTER

Governance ............................................................................................................. 39
Failure of Collaborations ....................................................................................... 39
Critical Factors for Successful Collaboration ...................................................... 40
Recent Funder Collaboration Efforts ....................................................................... 41
The Role of Nonprofits in the Funder Collaborative .............................................. 42
Progress of Evaluation and Foundations ............................................................... 42
Evaluation in Foundations Today .......................................................................... 44
Evaluation Reports .................................................................................................. 46
Issues in Reporting .................................................................................................. 47
Evaluation Within the Context of Foundation Collaboration ............................... 48
Lessons Learned from Foundation Collaboration Around Evaluation .............. 49
Common Evaluation Requirements Today .............................................................. 51
Advantages of Common Evaluation Requirements .............................................. 53
Reasons for Not Having Common Evaluation Expectations .............................. 55
Conclusions ............................................................................................................ 56

III. METHODOLOGY .............................................................................................. 57
Design ....................................................................................................................... 57
Propositions ............................................................................................................. 58
Unit of Analysis ....................................................................................................... 59
Sampling ................................................................................................................... 60
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic Document Review</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Observation</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic Document Review</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Observation</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic Document Review</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Observation</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection and Recording</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic Document Review</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Observation</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Processing and Analysis</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing the Data</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion in the Data</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding the Data</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents—Continued</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER**

Rival Propositions .................................................................................................................. 70

Limitations .............................................................................................................................. 70

Ensuring the Quality of the Research ..................................................................................... 71

Summary .................................................................................................................................. 72

IV. RESULTS ............................................................................................................................. 74

Interviewee Characteristics ....................................................................................................... 74

School District Performance ..................................................................................................... 76

History of the Program ............................................................................................................. 77

Program Overview .................................................................................................................... 79

Chronology ............................................................................................................................... 84

Logic Model .............................................................................................................................. 86

First Year of Implementation .................................................................................................... 87

Progression of the Evaluation Plan .......................................................................................... 88

Common Evaluation Expectations Resulting from the Collaboration................................. 92

Linking the Data to the Propositions ....................................................................................... 96

Proposition 1: The Common Evaluation Requirements Came About
Because of the Collaboration Among the Organizations......................................................... 97

Proposition 2: The Funders Developed Common Evaluation
Requirements Because They Provide a Mutual Benefit
to the Grantees and Funders ................................................................................................... 100

Who Developed the Common Evaluation Requirements? ............................................. 100
CHAPTER

Why Were Common Evaluation Expectations Developed? .................. 102

Proposition 3: Common Evaluation Requirements Benefit the Grantee by Reducing the Burden of Collecting and Reporting Data ...................... 106

Proposition 4: Common Evaluation Requirements Benefit the Funders by Allowing the Partners to Collect Common Data, Therefore Allowing Analysis of Data Across Funders ........................................ 108

Proposition 5: The Funders Developed Common Evaluation Requirements by Having Open, Regular Dialogue, Keeping the Goals of the Project in Mind, Showing Results During the Pilot Year of the Grants, and Having Additional Funding Available for Subsequent Years ......................... 109

Logistics/Process .................................................................................. 109

Relationships .......................................................................................... 115

Keeping the Goals of the Project in Mind ............................................. 120

Showing Results During the Pilot Year of the Grant ............................. 120

Additional Funding Available for Subsequent Years ............................ 121

Proposition 6: The Context the Organizations Operate Within (Their Mission Statements, Staffing Levels, Funding Levels, etc.) Influenced the Collaboration ................................................ 122

Buy-in From Stakeholders ..................................................................... 122

Staff in the Room ................................................................................... 125

Mission Statements ............................................................................... 126

Leadership .............................................................................................. 126

Power Dynamic ...................................................................................... 127

Responsiveness to the Community ....................................................... 128
Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER

Funding .......................................................................................................................... 129
Timeline/Length of the Grant ....................................................................................... 129
Diverse Group of Funders ......................................................................................... 130
Time to Commit/Flexibility of Job ........................................................................... 131
Accountability to Boards/Community ....................................................................... 131
History of Collaboration in Community ................................................................... 132
Rival Explanations ...................................................................................................... 132
Summary ....................................................................................................................... 134

V. CONCLUSIONS ...................................................................................................... 137
Summary ....................................................................................................................... 137
Conclusions and Recommendations .......................................................................... 140

Proposition 1: The Common Evaluation Requirements Came About
Because of the Collaboration Among the Organizations, and
Proposition 2: The Funders Developed Common Evaluation
Requirements Because They Provide a Mutual Benefit to
the Grantees and Funders .......................................................................................... 140

Proposition 3: Common Evaluation Requirements Benefit the
Grantee by Reducing the Burden of Collecting and
Reporting Data ......................................................................................................... 143

Proposition 4: Common Evaluation Requirements Benefit the
Funders by Allowing the Partners to Collect Common Data,
Therefore Allowing Analysis of Data Across Funders ........................................... 145
Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER

Proposition 5: The Funders Developed Common Evaluation Requirements by Having Open, Regular Dialogue, Keeping the Goals of the Project in Mind, Showing Results During the Pilot Year of the Grants, and Having Additional Funding Available for Subsequent Years ......................................................... 146

Proposition 6: The Context the Organizations Operate Within (Their Mission Statements, Staffing Levels, Funding Levels, etc.) Influenced the Collaboration .......................................................... 148

Future Research ............................................................................................................. 151

Concluding Remarks .................................................................................................... 153

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 154

APPENDICES

A. Semi-structured Interview Protocol ...................................................................... 160

B. Document Review Form ......................................................................................... 162

C. Email Sent to Funders’ Group Members ................................................................. 164

D. Checklist Prior to Document Review ...................................................................... 166

E. Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval ......................... 168
# LIST OF TABLES

1. Case Study Tactics for Four Design Test ............................................................ 72
2. Funder Representatives Percentage of Time Spent on ECC Project .................. 75
3. ECC Chronology .................................................................................................. 84
4. Defined Outcomes .............................................................................................. 94
5. Purposes of the Common Evaluation Requirements ........................................ 98
6. Components of the Process Used to Develop Common Evaluation
   Expectations ......................................................................................................... 110
7. Relationship Factors Identified as Necessary to Developing Common
   Evaluation Measures ............................................................................................ 116
8. Organizational Contextual Factors Influencing the Collaboration .................... 123
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Foundation subgroups categorized by sources of funding................................. 21
2. Models of collaboration .................................................................................. 26
3. Dimensions of association by accountability and organization....................... 29
4. Logic model of the collaboration process ...................................................... 87
CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Background of the Problem

Nonprofit organizations have received funding from grant-making organizations and foundations for many years. These funds have been used to support programs developed by the nonprofit organization. However, over the years, two critical developments have occurred between grant-making organizations and nonprofit organizations related to evaluation and collaboration.

1. Program evaluation has become an essential piece of many grant-funded projects. Many funders are requiring some type of evaluation of the program the funds are used for.

2. Grant-making organizations and nonprofit organizations are combining funds and resources to collaborate on projects. Combining funds and resources has allowed for programs to have more impact in communities.

These developments have impacted evaluation in foundations, grant-making organizations, and nonprofit organizations.

Evaluation is a powerful tool within a grant-making organization and has been used for many years. Evaluation is defined as determining the value, merit, or worth of something, such as a program or a product (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004).
Kehrer (1993a) outlines seven reasons why a grant-making organization should use evaluation:

- To be accountable to a public trust
- To assist grantees to improve
- To improve a foundation’s grantmaking
- To assess the quality or impact of funded programs
- To plan and implement new programs
- To disseminate innovative programs
- To increase the state of knowledge

Many of the above reasons can be reduced to one of the most basic tenets of evaluation: evaluation is used to make decisions. In fact, most funders describe the purpose of evaluation in their work is to support decision making (Kramer, Graves, Hirschhorn, & Fiske, 2007; Patrizi & McMullan, 1998).

Decisions are made throughout the funding process. Foundations fund grantees through an evaluative process that usually includes an application, background information about the grantees, and goals and objectives for the requested funding. Often times the grantees are non-profit organizations, defined by Hansmann (1980, cited in Steinberg & Powell, 2006) as “one that is precluded, by external regulation or its own governance structure, from distributing its financial surplus to those who control the use of organizational assets” (p. 1).

The findings from evaluations can also be used to make decisions at the completion of a grant. For example, the findings may help an organization decide whether it needs to modify or improve programs to better serve its constituents. Evaluation also can help decision makers determine whether a program should continue
to receive funding or cease to exist. Findings from an evaluation also can inform policy, impacting people at local, state, and national levels.

Foundations are exploring additional uses of evaluation, such as to improve strategic planning and implementation; in public policy planning, development, and analysis; in development of best practices and models in the field; to identify new areas for foundation initiatives; to respond to the foundation board’s requests for evidence of effectiveness; and in tracking progress towards goals (Kramer et al., 2007; Patrizi & McMullan, 1998). Evaluation is proving to be a critical piece of the funding process.

In addition to the uses of evaluation, the scope of evaluation is also evolving and becoming larger. For example, in the past it was common for the funder to ask the nonprofit organization to monitor the program. Grant monitoring is “the tracking of grant progress through regular interim reports and a final report from the grantee, the reviewing of these reports by responsible foundation staff, and the communications between foundation staff and the grantee” (Kehrer, 1993b, p. 21). The reports may also provide the foundation with information about the grantee’s success in reaching measurable objectives. Often, this information is reported as counts of objects and entities, such as number of people served and number of programs offered. Monitoring progress is shared with the funding agency at regular intervals throughout the grant, and a final report is submitted at the conclusion of the grant. Monitoring can also assist the foundation in identifying any changes in program objectives or implementation through regular reports or communication with the grantee (Kehrer, 1993b).
More recently, funders have started asking nonprofit organizations to evaluate their programs, in addition to monitoring them. Program monitoring and evaluation are a time-consuming process for organizations. In 2011, grantees reported spending a median of 8 hours on monitoring and reporting and 5 hours of evaluation (TCC Group & Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2011). In a different 2011 survey of 23,000 grantees, the average grantee spent 20 hours on monitoring, reporting, and evaluation (Buteau & Chu, 2011). This is an increase from 2008, when grantees reported they spent approximately 5 hours on evaluation (TCC Group, 2011).

Besides evaluation, another trend in philanthropy is collaboration among grant-making organizations. Historically, nonprofit organizations would apply for funding from grant-making organizations and foundations, the funders would review and evaluate the applications, and then they would provide funding to the nonprofit organizations that met certain criteria. In some scenarios, funders would ask nonprofit organizations to collaborate with other nonprofit, private, or government organizations as a condition of funding. More recently, grant-making organizations and foundations have begun to collaborate with each other. These organizations are beginning to combine resources, including funds, to create more comprehensive, successful, and cost-effective programs.

Another type of collaboration, called collective impact, brings together organizations from different social sectors to collaborate to solve a societal problem. The premise around collective impact is that no one organization can create a large-scale, lasting change. By bringing together the skills and knowledge of multiple organizations, the partnering organizations have a greater possibility of success. Collective impact
initiatives are being funded by philanthropic, nonprofit, and governmental organizations around the country.

When funders collaborate, they agree on a common issue they would like to work on and fund. The combined funding comes in many forms: for some funder groups, the funders combine funds (as opposed to keeping grants from each organization separate) and use a collective “pot” to fund the programs. More often, however, funders retain some independence with their funding. Each funder creates separate streams of grant funding from their organization especially for that collaborative project. The nonprofit organization that receives the award gets different streams of funds from each organization, but with the goal of all of the funds being used towards the same project.

The number of nonprofit organizations funded in one project can vary; in some many cases, the funders are all funding one nonprofit organization and that one nonprofit organization has to “answer” to all funders. In other collaborative cases, the funders are each funding different nonprofit organizations which are also working toward the common goals of the collective project.

**Statement of the Problem**

**Issues Around Evaluation and Collaborative Funding**

The recent collaborations around grants present several challenges related to evaluation. First, evaluation is much more difficult and time-consuming for evaluators and program staff evaluating a collaborative grant project than a grant project from a single funder (Brock, Buteau, & Herring, 2012; Buteau & Buchanan, 2011; Buteau &
Chu, 2011; Kramer, Parkhurst, & Vaidyanathan, 2009; TCC Group, 2011). One reason for this is that multiple evaluation reports must be completed (one for each funder). It is a common requirement for funders that nonprofit organizations complete an annual report funding (Buteau & Chu, 2011; Carman, 2009; Kramer et al., 2007; Patrizi & McMullan, 1998). The reports can vary from simple, one-page reports asking about the number of people served, to more complex reports requiring evaluation consultants and expertise. A lack of time, personnel, and the appropriate expertise to complete these reports is common. In collaborative grant work, these problems are multiplied by the number of funders in the project.

Another challenge in evaluating collaborative grants is that grant-making organizations and foundations have different fiscal year calendars they operate on. Each grant-making organization has a different timetable for their grants, including deadlines for the application, the interim and final reports, when funding decisions are made, and the length of the grant. These differences in timetables can be problematic for the nonprofit organization. For example, end-of-the-year reports for each funder are usually not the same report and might not be due during the same month. The nonprofit organization program staff needs to keep track of the type of information each funder asks for in its report, as well as track the information for the fiscal year of that individual grant. Because the fiscal years do not line up, the program staff needs to be extremely organized and forward thinking. However, many nonprofit organizations do not have the human resources to devote to evaluation in general. With collaborative funding, program staff at the nonprofit organization could spend the majority of their time keeping track of
and completing reporting requirements. As collaborative funding becomes more common, funders and nonprofit organizations need to work together to determine the best ways to utilize human and financial resources.

Another issue with collaborative funding is the lack of standardized measures. Each funder has different measures. The measures they request from grantees are usually a result of the mission of the organizations and the desires of the board of directors. Many funders have their own standardized midpoint, final, and/or financial reports all grantees must complete. In some cases, additional questions may be specifically tailored to the grant subject matter. However, they are rarely the same. For example, in an education grant, one funder’s report may ask about number of students who started and finished the program below grade level, at grade level, and above grade level. Another funder’s report may ask about changes in standardized test scores, or the social-economic or racial background of the students served. Although a case may be made for the importance and usefulness of these questions, the nonprofit organization has to spend time tracking this information and completing the reports. In addition, the actual report templates also often differ across grant-making organizations. In a study of nonprofit organizations receiving grant funding, it was found that only 18% of grantees felt they received adequate funding in the grant for staff time to complete the required report (TCC Group, 2011).

Another issue of collaborative funding is the organizational contexts each nonprofit organization must navigate. Funders and their boards are interested in the outcomes of their investments; they want to know: what is the impact of the funding? The boards’ interest will be based on the mission of the organization. The more funders
involved in the project, the more boards and differing interests the nonprofit organization has to answer to.

**Advantages of Developing Standardized Evaluation Measures in Collaborative Funding Projects**

Developing common evaluation requirements in a collaboratively grant-funded project creates benefits for the nonprofit organization and funders and may be advantageous to the overall collaboration. Some of the advantages found in the literature (Hanleybrown, Kania, & Kramer; 2012; Kania & Kramer, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) of creating common evaluation expectations are:

- creates a common language for all the stakeholders,
- delivers a consistent message to stakeholders,
- creates the ability to more easily measure progress toward common goals,
- encourages cooperative problem solving,
- ensures that the partners align efforts,
- clarifies the types of activities necessary to meet the stated goals,
- allows for accountability among partners,
- allows for the opportunity to learn from each other’s successes and failures and,
- gives the participants opportunities to learn about evaluation.

In addition to those already mentioned, another potential advantage of shared requirements is that it may allow the evaluation to look beyond one narrow view of the project. Instead of receiving a snapshot about one aspect of the program, related to what they are most interested in, funders can look across the program and examine the effect of other aspects of the program. For example, in a non-collaborative project related to early childhood education, a funder with a mission around early childhood education may ask evaluation questions related only to education. However, in a collaborative project, another funder interested in racial equity contributes resources, and therefore has interest
in the results and successes of the project around racial equity. Because of the missions of the two funding organizations, the evaluation includes evaluation questions related to education and racial equity. As a result of the collaboration, the funders gain additional evaluative information about the program, as opposed to if only one funder was collecting information. This additional information may allow the funding organizations to collect data they may not have otherwise.

Another potential benefit to creating standardized measures is the sharing of data. Collaborative evaluation allows for the sharing of information across funders. All of the funders involved in the program are able to have access to the same information and measures. The funders see the same picture about the program. The data quality may also increase. Because resources are combined, more data or higher quality data may be able to be collected about the program. These data could include information about a larger geographic region, more information about the outcomes and outputs, or more precise measures related to the goals of program.

**Developing Common Evaluation Measures**

In order to try to resolve the issues related to the reporting and evaluation of collaborative projects, the funders, grantees, and, if available, evaluators should come together before the work of the grant begins. Through conversation and research, the funders, grantees, and evaluators can determine outputs and outcomes that would be appropriate for the project and meet the needs of each group and standardized measures for the project. Because each organization has different interests and reporting needs, determining common measures is not an easy task. The collaborative group must be
sensitive to the needs of each organization, the requests and requirements from each board of directors, internal organizational timelines, political forces at play, and unspoken power issues that may result from differences in the amount of funding each organization was able to expend.

Creating a collaborative grant structure and program and then developing common measures are relatively recent additions to the philanthropic landscape. The benefits for developing the common measures are numerous. Unfortunately, the obstacles involved, including lack of time, lack of evaluation knowledge, politics, and differing missions of the funders, make the creation of standardized measures and evaluation reports a difficult task.

Despite the obstacles, a group of funders and grantees in southwest Michigan have been working on collaborative project since 2010. In 2010, a local school district wrote a grant to the Michigan Department of Education with the goal of improving early childhood education. The grant was accepted; however, because of lack of funding, the funds were never awarded.

The superintendent of the school district then approached a private family foundation about funding the grant idea. The private foundation thought the idea was worthy of funding but felt it would benefit the project and the community to have additional funding for the project, in addition to what the foundation was able to provide. The private foundation approached a large national foundation with local headquarters about collaboratively funding the grant. The national foundation agreed to fund the project. The two foundations were also able to get another grant-making organization to
fund the project. In total, three grant-making organizations came together to fund the project. The project is called Early Childhood Connections (ECC).

As part of their evaluation of the project, the three funders, in concert with the nonprofit organization and the evaluators, developed some standardized measures and common evaluation expectations around the grant.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how grant-making organizations collaborate to develop evaluation requirements for grantees. The study will look at the three grant-making organizations, one nonprofit organization, and an external evaluator in the early childhood collaborative grant described above. This study will specifically look at how and why the funder collaboratively developed common evaluation expectations and standardized measures, what those resulting measures were, and the organizational contextual factors affecting the collaboration.

The results of this study will be used to inform funders, grantees, and evaluators working in collaborations of ways to develop standardized measures, streamline reporting requirements, and other best practices. The results of the study will provide information regarding how different types of grant-making organizations collaborate with each other in the development of evaluation requirements. The findings from this study will be important to foundations and other philanthropic organizations to cultivate a greater understanding of collaboration among grant-making foundations with respect to evaluation.
Research Questions/Propositions

I adopt a case study approach and hence use propositions to guide the study. Propositions are helpful in a case study because they guide the scope of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Yin (2009) stated, “Each proposition directs attention to something that should be examined within the scope of the study” (p. 28). Propositions are developed from the literature, personal experience, theories, and/or generalizations based on data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The researcher can identify several propositions to guide the study, but each must have a focus and purpose (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The propositions are then used to “guide the data collection and discussion” (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Propositions are similar to hypotheses in experimental studies in that they both are educated guesses about the outcome(s) of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The research questions focus on collaboration and evaluation. The first research question is: How did grant-making foundations and funders develop common evaluation requirements for the program? The propositions associated with this research question are:

- The common evaluation requirements came about because of the collaboration between the organizations.
- The funders developed common evaluation requirements by having open, regular dialogue, keeping the goals of the project in mind, showing results during the pilot year of the grants, and having additional funding available for subsequent years.
The second research question is: Why did grant-making foundations and funders develop common evaluation requirements for the program? The propositions associated with this research question are:

- The funders developed common evaluation requirements because they provide a mutual benefit to the grantees and funders.
- Common evaluation requirements benefit the grantee by reducing the burden of collecting and reporting data.
- Common evaluation requirements benefit the funders by allowing the partners to collect common data, therefore allowing analysis of data across funders.

The third research question asks, what was the outcome of the collaboration around evaluation? Specifically, what were the common evaluation expectations that resulted from the collaboration? There are no propositions related to this question.

The last research question looks at the organizational characteristics surrounding the evaluation collaboration. The contexts these organizations work in may be very specific to the community, geographic region, mission of the organization, funding structure, personnel, leadership, board makeup, etc. By investigating the organizational contextual factors, it may be possible to determine what factors of the collaboration can be replicated, which are site specific, and which may have attributed to any perceived success of the collaboration. This information will be helpful for funders, foundations, nonprofit organizations, or evaluators who are looking to replicate this type of funder collaborative in their own area. The proposition for this research question is:

- The context the organizations operate within (their mission statements, staffing levels, funding levels, etc.) influenced the collaboration.
Importance of the Study

In this climate of financial conservatism, nonprofits are being asked to do more with less. A natural consequence of nonprofit organizations working together is for funders to also collaborate. Although nonprofit organizations have been asked to work together for many years, funder collaboratives are a fairly new phenomenon. Comprehensive studies of national funder collaboratives are not available, but in 2005, researchers identified approximately three dozen funder collaboratives in the United States, involving a few hundred foundations and a few hundred million dollars in assets (Hopkins, 2005). Represented on this list are some of the largest and most recognizable collaborations at the time. More recently, collective impact programs, a type of collaboration among funders, grantees, and other organizations, have become prominent in philanthropy. Collective impact researchers have studied the lack of and necessity of standardized measures in these collaborations. The recent interest and research on collaborative projects, collective impact, and standardized evaluation measurement and reports shows the timeliness and importance of this research.

Scope of the Study

This study looks at the experiences of developing standardized measures and common evaluation expectations for one group of funders, the program they fund, and the evaluators working on the project. The early childhood project was completing its first year of operation during this study and many of the standardized measures and evaluation issues had been tackled within the previous 12 months.
Three sources of data were used to answer the research questions and propositions: interviews, a systematic document review, and direct observation. Interviews were completed with 12 people associated with the program. These 12 people make up the funders’ group. The interviews took place with program staff, key staff from each funding organization, the external evaluator, and an external facilitator. The interviewees represented their organization at a majority of the funders’ group meetings and were the liaisons between their organization and the funders’ group.

The second source of data came from a systematic document review. The systematic document review used external and internal documents released from the funders, program staff, and evaluators. These documents were used to answer the research questions and the propositions and triangulate data obtained from the interviews.

The third source of data came from meeting observations. Only one meeting was scheduled during the scope of this research. The observation notes and data collected from the meeting between the funders, program staff, and external evaluator was also included in the data analysis.

**Terms**

This document will discuss evaluation in foundations and grant-making organizations. Although both organizations distribute funds, foundation and grant-making organizations are not equivalent terms. A foundation is a grant-making organization but a grant-making organization is not necessarily a foundation. For example, the United Way is a grant-making organization but it is not a foundation.
The terms *common evaluation requirement* or *standardized evaluation requirement* are used synonymously throughout the document. These refer to the measurements, outputs, and outcomes the collaborating organizations agreed upon when evaluating the program. They are common or standardized because all of the organizations agreed to them. Many of the common evaluation requirements were reported in the external evaluator’s evaluation reports. However, the common evaluation requirements alone are not a report. Each funder had an additional report they required, in addition to the common evaluation expectations and the resulting evaluator’s report.

**Outline of Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The current chapter outlined the problem, the need for the study, and the research questions. Chapter II contains a review of the literature related to nonprofit organizations and foundations, collaboration, and evaluation. Specifically, the literature review details the nonprofit sector, nonprofit organizations and foundations, ways to categorize foundations, the financial impact of foundations, and roles of foundations within the social sector. Second, the literature review delves into collaboration, outlining advantages and barriers to collaboration, as well as why collaborations fail. Critical factors of collaboration from the literature are shared. Third, the literature review looks at evaluation and foundations, including the history of evaluation in foundations, evaluation in foundations today, and resulting evaluation reports. Finally, the literature review reviews evaluation within the context of evaluation collaboration, including lessons learned from evaluation within foundations,
common evaluation requirements today, advantages of common evaluation requirements, and reasons collaborations do not have common evaluation requirements.

Chapter III presents the methodology used to determine (a) how and why common evaluation requirements were created for the collaborative being studied, (b) the resulting common evaluation measures, and (c) the contextual factors of the program. Included in this chapter are the objectives of the study, the study’s research questions, the study design, and the procedure, sampling, data collection and analysis for interviews with the funders’ group members, a systematic document review, and direct observation.

Chapter IV presents the results of the study.

Chapter V synthesizes all the preceding chapters and presents conclusions of the study. The implications from this research are discussed. Finally, suggestions for further research are shared.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The Nonprofit Sector

To understand grant-making organizations and foundations, it is beneficial to first define the sector in which they exist. Currently, the modern western civilization can be divided into three spheres: the public or state sphere, the economic sphere, and the civil society or private sphere (Prewitt, 2006b). The nonprofit sector exists in the civil society sphere. The nonprofit sector is defined as “those entities that are organized for public purposes, are self-governed, and do not distribute surplus revenues as profits” (Boris & Steuerle, 2006, p. 66). There are three main types of organizations within the nonprofit sector: (a) organizations that serve members, such as religious organizations or service clubs (Frumkin, 2002); (b) voluntary associations, which receive considerable gifts, volunteer time, or money (Steinberg & Powell, 2006); and (c) organizations that serve the public, such as social service agencies and arts and environmental organizations (Frumkin, 2002). By definition, a nonprofit organization is any organization “precluded, by external regulation or its own governance structure, from distributing its financial surplus to those who control the use of organizational assets” (Steinburg & Powell, 2006, p. 1).
Nonprofit Organizations

Defining nonprofit organizations can be confusing, however, because conversationally, nonprofit organizations are often thought of as only charities or aid organizations. However, legally, nonprofit organizations include organizations such as grant-making foundations, religious institutions, day care centers, hospice services, homeless shelters, family counselors, private colleges, and hospitals (Steinberg & Powell, 2006). In this document, nonprofit organizations (NPOs) refers to any organization that does not earn money for shareholders.

Foundations

A foundation is a specific type of nonprofit organization, under the umbrella of organizations with a 501(c) tax designation. The 501(c) tax designation is assigned to organizations with a nonprofit status; the organization does not earn money for shareholders but instead reinvests profits back into the organization. Grant-making foundations are a more specific type of foundation within this group. They distribute monetary awards to organizations, with almost all foundations sharing a common purpose of making the world a better place, through such means as reducing war, hunger, illness, etc., or increasing the arts, music, health care, etc. (Prewitt, 2006b). Grant-making foundations give financial awards to other organizations, which use the awards to implement programs.

Grant-making foundations in the U.S. date back to colonial times. These early foundations were modeled after European foundations, which were trusts or endowments
to particular organizations. Modern grant-making foundations began in the late 19th century and were highly influenced by Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller. Today, motivation for establishing foundations varies and includes stewardship, charitable impulses, tax avoidance, vanity, business interests, and guilt (Prewitt, 2006b, p. 363). Whatever the motivation for starting a foundation, foundations have become a major aspect of the philanthropic sector in the United States. Their presence has contributed to society in many ways (Slater, Constantine, & Braverman, 2004).

In addition to grant-making foundations, there also exists another type of foundation—operating foundations. Operating foundations manage their own programs, which are carried out by their own staff (Prewitt, 2006b). Examples of operating foundations in the United States are the Getty Foundation, which operates the Getty Museum, and the Howard Hughes Foundations, which funds medical laboratories (Prewitt, 2006b).

In this document, the term *foundation* refers to grant-making foundations, unless otherwise specified.

**Categorizing Foundations**

Within the sphere of “foundations” exist various subgroups. Foundations are most often categorized in two ways: by their main sources of funding or by their legal definitions. When classifying foundations by their primary funding sources, they can be divided into two categories: private foundations and public foundations (Collins, 2008). Private foundations received their main source of funding from a family, an individual, or a corporation. Private foundations can be further broken down into two subgroups:
independent (or family foundations) and corporate foundations (Collins, 2008). Within the category of public foundations are community foundations, which receive funding from various sources, including private foundations, and other public foundations (Collins, 2008, Frumkin, 2002). Figure 1 displays the breakdown of nonprofit sector.

**Figure 1.** Foundation subgroups categorized by sources of funding. (Adapted from Collins, 2008)

Figure 1 shows the foundation subgroups categorized by sources of funding. Another common way of categorizing foundations is by their legal differences. Categorizing foundations by their legal differences creates only four subgroups: independent grant-making foundations (approximately 90% of foundations), corporate
foundations (4% of foundations), operating foundations (3% of foundations), and community foundations (1% of foundations) (Prewitt, 2006b). Grantees usually do not differentiate between the types of grant-making foundations and will often solicit funding from all sources (Prewitt, 2006b).

**Financial Impact of Foundations**

Many foundations exist in the United States and they are responsible for billions of dollars of donations and charitable giving. Approximately 76,000 foundations are in the United States (Foundation Center, 2011) and they represent a major source of funding for charitable organizations. In 2010, foundations in the United States were responsible for $45.7 billion in estimated giving to charitable organizations (Foundation Center, 2011).

Nationally, foundations receive billions of dollars in donations each year. The Foundation Center (2011) estimates the total amount of charitable gifts to foundations were $40.9 billion and total assets for foundations in 2011 were $618.1 billion.

The number of grant-making foundations continues to expand dramatically. Between 1975 and 2000, the number of grant-making foundations doubled (Prewitt, 2006b). In 2009, over 76,000 grant-making foundations existed in the United States (Foundation Center, 2011). Contemporary foundations range in staff size, geographic location, and type and amount of assets. Today, grant-making foundations are said to have many purposes: help the poor and less fortunate; redistribute wealth; lead innovations in arts, sciences, research, and social policy; create social change; and be more cost-effective than the public sector (Heydemann & Toepler; 2006, Prewitt, 2006a,
2006b). With so many foundations responsible for so much money, the need to evaluate their funding efforts has become critical.

**Roles of Foundations**

Foundations have many roles in philanthropy and in society. Traditionally, the purpose of charitable giving was to provide for those in need. Many foundations believe their role is to change society and have a positive effect on the people and communities they serve.

Foundations hold many advantages that make them stand at the forefront of social change. Because of their tax designation, they have certain advantages that public and private organizations lack. Public organizations must answer to the taxpayers; private foundations must answer to their shareholders. Public organizations are bound by high levels of transparency and the watchful eyes of taxpayers and legislators. Private organizations are under pressure to show strong financial performance. Because foundations have their own funds, foundations have more flexibility than their public and private counterparts.

Some foundations have had important impacts on the field. Slater et al. (2004) note that because of foundations:

Modes of practice have been permanently changed; intellectual directions in the sciences and the arts have been nurtured and flourished; universities, research centers, and other institutions have been strengthened or built from the ground up. (p. xxxvii)

Because of the inherent differences and roles of foundation and grantee (one gives away money and one receives it), the power dynamic and relationship between
foundation and grantee is sensitive. It is crucial that foundations spend time building a relationship with grantees. Building a relationship with grantees can help them feel supported. Conversely, the relationship between funder and grantee can also put pressure on the grantee to modify their program or their priorities to fit the mission of the funder (Buteau, Buchanan, & Chu, 2010).

Collaboration Among Organizations

It has become more common for foundations and nonprofit organizations to collaborate on grant-funded projects. Collaboration is defined as bringing together two or more stakeholders (agencies, groups, or organizations) at the local, state, or national level, to achieve some common purpose of systems change toward a mutually agreed upon goal (Backer & Norman, 1998, 2000; Yang, Foster-Fishman, Collins, & Ahn, 2012). There is not a single template to define what collaboration looks like. The collaboration may be permanent or temporary. It may be informal or formal, which may involve legal agreements. The collaboration could be narrow or broad in scope. Collaboration does involve the organizations sharing goals, activities, responsibilities, and resources (Backer, 2003). Collaborations are usually voluntary, at least in principle. However, because of requirements of funders or leaders, organizations may find themselves into forced collaborations (Backer, 2003). Collaborations are often facilitated and grown through regular meetings of the member groups (Backer, 2003).

Outside the nonprofit sector, organizations often collaborate with each other. In the business sector, corporations merge with other companies, combining resources in the hopes of better meeting their mission of earning a profit. On a smaller scale, trade
associations and business improvement districts are another example of organizations working together toward a common mission (Hopkins, 2005). In the governmental sector, government agencies often coordinate systems (Hopkins, 2005). Community collaborations are prominent in the public health sector (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1993, Collie-Akers et al., 2007; Watson-Thompson, Fawcett, & Schultz, 2008; Yin et al., 1997). Researchers have studied the collaboration in the mental health field, the business sector, and within small groups in education (Frey, Lohmeier, Lee, & Tollefson, 2006; Todeva & Knoke, 2005).

Compared to many other sectors, the idea of collaboration is only emerging in the nonprofit sector (Hopkins, 2005). Hopkins (2005), stated, “The discussion of funder collaboration is a new phenomenon, tentative at best” (p. 1). Nonprofit organizations have not fully embraced collaboration either, perhaps because funders have not led the way (Hopkins, 2005). This has caused the entire sector to move very slowly, in regard to collaboration (Hopkins, 2005).

Models of Collaboration

Researchers have developed various ways to describe collaboration among organizations. The collaboration models are organized from the most simple to the most complex (Cross, Dickmann, Newman-Gonchar, & Fagan, 2009; Gajda, 2004).

Backer (2003) listed collaboration as one type of relationship, out of seven possible, for organizations to come together. These relationships are set apart by the degree of formality (or informality) in the groups, and the degree of accountability among participating groups (mutual accountability vs. separate accountability). Likewise,
Todeva and Knoke (2005) argued the dimensions that classify collaborations are based on increasing integration and increasing formalization. Figure 2 shows Backer’s continuum.

Other researchers have developed models of collaborations that focus on stages through which the project moves (Bailey & Koney, 2000; Gajda, 2004; Hogue, 1993; Peterson, 1991). Although the number of stages differ, these models agree that the lowest level is little or no collaboration and the highest level is full collaboration. The models differ around the number of stages and the definitions of the stages. Frey et al. (2006) synthesized some of the more prevalent models of collaboration into one figure, shown in Figure 2. Frey’s model uses the same terms across models, but includes model-specific terminology, when necessary. The last model included in a seven-stage model, which includes the lowest level, coexistence. This is included for those organizations that exist together but do not collaborate in any way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coexistence</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Cooperation</th>
<th>Coordination</th>
<th>Coalition</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Coadunation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peterson Model (1991)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Levels of Community Linkage Model (Hogue, 1993)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Networking”</td>
<td>“Cooperating”</td>
<td>“Partnering”</td>
<td>“Merging”</td>
<td>“Unifying”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Levels of Integration Model (Gajda, 2004)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Seven Stage Model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2. Models of collaboration. (Frey, Lohmeier, Lee, & Tollefson, 2006)*
Peterson’s 1991 model showed three types of interaction between organizations or agencies: cooperation, coordination, and collaboration (Frey et al., 2006). The differences of each category are based on the degree of independence between the organizations. Hogue’s (1993) model shows five levels of community linkage: networking, cooperation or alliance, coordination or partnership, coalition, and collaboration (Frey et al., 2006). The differences in these categories are based on the purpose, how decisions are made, and the type of leadership present (Frey et al., 2006). Bailey and Koney’s (2000) model is similar. This model has four steps: cooperation, coordination, collaboration, and coadunation (meaning “having grown together”). This model ends with complete unification (coadunation). The model put forth by Gajda (2004) consists of five ordered steps: networking, cooperation, partnering, merging, and unifying. These steps have unique purposes, tasks, strategies, and require different types of leadership, decision making, and communication (Frey et al., 2006).

Another way organizations work together is through a process called collective impact. Five conditions have been identified to determine if organizations are using a collective impact model: a common agenda, shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and the presence of a backbone organization (Hanleybrown et al., 2012; Kania & Kramer, 2011). Collective impact looks to make systemic change and operates under the theory that change requires multiple organizations from a larger system to be involved in a project. Collective impact projects have three preconditions present: an influential champion, adequate financial resources, and urgency for change (Hanleybrown et al., 2012). Additionally, collective impact
includes the presence of government and corporate organizations as partners (Hanleybrown et al., 2012).

The labels and associated definitions are important for organizations working together. One organization may think they are working in a partnership (a term often interchanged with collaboration), while another organization sees it as a coalition, which is less structured than a collaboration and usually focused on policy change and is more grassroots driven (Backer, 2003). These different labels also bring about different types of relationships. Depending on the type of association among organizations, there may be various standards for financial disclosure, board participation, and joint evaluation. Knowing the type of association that the organization is agreeing to is an important part of the process. Failure of the mutual efforts of the project may be a result of the involved parties not knowing what their role actually is (Backer, 2003). Figure 3 shows Backer’s (2003) dimensions of association between organizations based on the formality and accountability of the organizations.

Unfortunately, the literature does not consistently use the distinct terms. In the field, collaboration, network, alliance, association, council, task force, partnership, consortium, and coalition are just a few interchangeable terms (Backer, 2003; Gajda, 2004). In one study, Backer, Howard, and Koone (2000) noted 11 different terms were used by 17 grantees to describe the collaboration process among the 17 organizations involved. In this document, collaboration will be used to describe nonprofit organizations and funders working together to create change.
Advantages to Collaboration in the Nonprofit Sector

The time for collaboration in the nonprofit sector has arrived (Backer, 2003; Hopkins, 2005; Baker, 2011). Nonprofit organizations are now being asked to collaborate with other nonprofits. The reasons for these collaborations are generally to

1. leverage resources and share financial risks,
2. increase impact,
3. cut costs,
4. coordinate strategy,
5. increase organizational visibility,
6. network,
7. build the overall capacity of the partnering organizations to deliver services or otherwise respond to community need,
8. exercise more political muscle,
9. utilize staff expertise and time over a wider area, and
10. diversify funding streams, which may make the initiative more sustainable.

(Backer, 2003; Hays, Hays, DeVille, & Mulhall, 2000; Hopkins, 2005)

Collaboration among nonprofit organizations and funders has many advantages. In this section, I discuss the advantages of collaboration most prominent in the literature (efficiency, stability finding solutions to problems, risk taking, ownership, and improved collaboration).
Efficiency

Efficiency is one of the greatest advantages of funder collaboration. In the recent economic downturn, funders are now more interested in doing more with less (Hanleybrown et al., 2012). There can be greater value when a group of funders come together and pool funds. By pooling funds, smaller funders and foundations are able to have access to resources, such as consultants, expanded planning time, or research, that they may not have had otherwise (Hopkins, 2005). Pooling funds also allows funders to support activities they may not have previously spent time on, such as more publicity, developments of surveys or better training of volunteers (Hopkins, 2005). In turn, these activities may allow the program to reach more participants than it would have without these additional activities.

Shared staff is another advantage of funder collaboration around efficiency. Sharing staff reduces duplication, merges staff expertise, and reduces costs (Gadja, 2004; Hopkins, 2005).

Funder collaboration may result in a reduction of duplication of programs (Cross, et al., 2009). Communities may have areas of need, like health care, that have substantial funding while other areas, like the arts, may not have enough funding. Funder collaboration can help to even out the surplus of funding in one area with the shortages in another area (Hopkins, 2005). An example of this is the Los Angeles Arts Funders. Every known arts funders in the county was surveyed about the size and purpose of their grants. When the surveys were collected, the funders had a clear picture, for the first time, about
what types of programs were being supported. They were able to use this information to decide future funding (Hopkins, 2005).

Stability

Funder collaboration may help programs sustain for a longer term. Grant-funded programs often end when the grant is over, which is usually between 2 and 5 years (Hopkins, 2005; Rog & Knickman, 2004). Funder collaboratives allows for a collective pool of money to be available for the program, even as funders come and go. This gives greater stability to the program and allows the nonprofit to bypass spending resources on program fundraising, and, instead, concentrate on programmatic work (Gajda, 2004; Hopkins, 2005). Having a set group of funders relieves one foundation from shouldering the primary financial burden. When one foundation funds a program, they eventually have to step back from the project and look for other funders to continue the work. Finding additional funders can be a very difficult process. Through funder collaboration, the funders are already in line and may be more willing to take on additional roles.

Finding Solutions to Problems

The types of social problems foundations are attempting to minimize today are often so complex it would be difficult for one organization alone to find a solution. Issues such as high school graduation rates, neighborhood improvement efforts, and early childhood education require systemic efforts to change and improve outcomes. These types of issues require knowledge from multiple fields, diverse funding streams, and varied interventions. Foundations often focus their mission on a few particular areas of
interest, such as health, education, or children. Collaborating with other funders can increase the knowledge base by attracting other organizations with diverse areas of expertise (Hopkins, 2005; Kania & Kramer, 2011).

For example, in one Los Angeles neighborhood, a foundation collaboration came together to support an initiative around substance abuse addiction in the neighborhood. The root causes of addiction were identified as economic marginalization, low educational attainment, inadequate social services, and nuisance properties. Interventions were designed to target all four causes of addiction. Instead of one foundation minimally funding all four interventions or concentrating efforts on only one or two of the interventions, the funding from the collaboration was able to target all four root causes and finance all of the interventions at once. The result was measurable change in the residents and results of what worked and what did not (Hopkins, 2005).

Foundations also have the opportunity to be on the forefront of social change (Hopkins, 2005). Because foundations operate with less restricting governmental and other external accountability, they are better positioned to respond quickly and creatively to social problems. However, foundations working alone are often stymied by their entrenchment in tradition, endowments, and their own mission statement (Hopkins, 2005). Funder collaboratives offer the opportunity for a group of foundations to make an impact on a social problem. Often, when a group of foundations come together, the issue is no longer seen as the concern of one funder, but as an issue that needs to be addressed. Thus, a funder collaborative brings more power to make change.
Risk Taking

Foundations are generally risk adverse. Unlike the business world, where increased risk may mean increased profits, no such motivator exists in philanthropy. In fact, the opposite may be true. Increased risk may mean reducing funds from a successful program to fund something without a proven track record. It may be more advantageous to the mission of the foundation to fund the status quo, where the outcome may be more easily determined.

The way foundations are organized and funded also reduces the ability to take risks. Corporate foundations may be risk adverse in order to protect the image of the parent company. Family and private foundations usually have a history of tradition and legacy, and may want to keep these intact by funding the safer projects.

Risk taking among funder collaboratives lessens the onus on one foundation. The responsibility and resulting failures (if any) are distributed among all the funders. For example, in 1992, banks in Los Angeles were neglecting specific populations and areas of the city. The banks complained the risk was too high: historically, bank branches did not perform well in those areas. As a result, the corporate foundations of almost 40 banks formed a collaborative with the City of Los Angeles. Although one bank might identify it as too risky to open a branch in these underrepresented areas, as a group they could share the risk of opening in the market. The collaboration created a nonprofit organization, which served the residents of these areas, providing educational workshops and programs (Hopkins, 2005).
Collaborations also affect the amount of risk taken by the group. Because a collaborative is composed of individuals representing organizations, the actual risk taken by the group is a result of the individuals attending the meetings and making the decisions. Different people have different levels of experience, judgment, and permission granted by their organization to make decisions. This mix of factors also affects the amount of risk taken (Hopkins, 2005). If the individuals at the table feel they do not have the authority to make risky decisions, this may affect the amount of risk that is taken. In one situation, when program officers replaced foundation presidents at the meetings, the meetings were stalled. The program officers felt they did not have the authority to make decisions, so more time was spent on people voicing concerns or worries than making decisions (Hopkins, 2005).

Conversely, individuals who feel empowered by their organization may end up taking more risks than the organizations would normally because foundations are generally risk averse. Many funder collaboratives find they can take risks more easily because decisions are made by an individual who has the freedom and, oftentimes, direction, to think creatively (Hopkins, 2005).

Ownership

Foundations involved in collaborative efforts may feel more ownership towards a program than if they were funding the program individually. In a collaboration, the resulting program is an outcome from the work of all of the funders’ efforts. Because of this, they may see themselves as sponsors, fully invested, not just as individual donors (Hopkins, 2005).
Improved Communication

To those on the outside, it seems that foundations are slow about making decisions about grants and sharing reports. Working in a collaboration gives foundations opportunities to improve communication and develop new ways of sharing information. A funder may participate in a collaboration that develops new ways of communicating with other funders and grantees; the foundation can take this information back to the organization and implement some of the new ideas within its own system (Hopkins, 2005).

A collaboration offers the opportunity for funders, grantees, and other organizations to pool existing knowledge. The collaborative can come together as a group and share what has worked, what has not, information about the community, and other notes. This allows the collaborative to better coordinate and improve their grant making (Hopkins, 2005).

These group conversations can also serve as educational experiences for smaller or less established funders or nonprofit. By pooling the knowledge of all participating organizations, those with less experience can benefit from the experiences of the bigger, more veteran organizations.

Another benefit of a collaboration is the ability to share any research findings or duties. Many large social service projects often begin with research to inform the strategy. The research may include a literature review, surveys of stakeholders, or focus groups. This research is often expensive and time-consuming. A funder collaborative is able to share these costs and all benefit from the results of the research (Hopkins, 2005).
Additionally, the resulting research and learning from it places all the funders on equal footing (Hopkins, 2005). The funders can then use this information to inform next steps, such as a mission statement, program planning, policy changes, a common agenda, etc. The shared knowledge base helps make all of this possible (Hopkins, 2005).

Funder collaboratives can also improve communication with the public. For example, a collaboration about the importance of a father in a child’s life among the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Danforth Foundation, Kansas City Community Foundation, and the Mott Foundation led to high profile stories on national newspapers and television networks (Hopkins, 2005). Sharing information with the public is expensive and a funder collaborative offers a way to share the costs.

**Barriers to Collaboration**

Barriers to collaboration among foundations exist. Those barriers include diversity, accountability, a lack of professional standards, communication, developing a shared vision/measures, resolving conflicts, resources, and governance (Connor, Kadel-Taras, & Vinokur-Kaplan, 1999; Hopkins, 2005). In this section, I discuss each of the potential barriers.

**Diversity**

The diversity of philanthropic organizations makes collaboration difficult (Hopkins, 2005). Many types of funding structures, like family foundations, civic groups, and trade associations, exist, which all have different ways of deciding how money is spent (Hopkins, 2005).
Not only do funders differ, but the contexts that funders work, vary widely. Funders work with organizations and institutions that all have different ways of operating, differing sizes, and diverse missions. This requires funders to cut across the issues and look for commonalities for collaboration. This method detracts from the individuality of nonprofit organizations, which, for many funders, is a major attraction (Hopkins, 2005).

When collaborations are made up of smaller regional foundations and larger national foundations, tension may arise. The larger foundations may have a better idea of the national picture and may be able to access resources and models from other large foundations. As a result, the smaller foundations, lacking the national reach, may feel trivial or insignificant in the collaboration. Instead of embracing the differences between the large and small organizations and the strengths each brings, they may become critical of each other (Hopkins, 2005).

**Accountability**

Besides the issues with diversity, funders must also work within a context that often lacks accountability (Hopkins, 2005). Private foundations do not have to bend to the external pressures of taxpayers, shareholders, or other market demands (Hopkins, 2005). This essentially insulates private foundations from the powers that force for-profit organizations into more cost-saving measures (Hopkins, 2005).
Lack of Professional Standards

Another barrier to collaboration is the lack of professional standards in the philanthropic field (Hopkins, 2005). Unlike medicine or law, which have very stringent professional standards, no similar standards occur in philanthropy. The absence of these standards means the field does not have a common set of measures for evaluation and improvement (Hopkins, 2005). Grantees are at a disadvantage without these common standards; they have no other way to learn about how to function with funders except through trial and error and secondhand experiences (Hopkins, 2005).

Communication

Communication is essential in collaboration. In some collaborations, funders and grantees may be more reluctant to voice their opinions (Hopkins, 2005). Differences in perceived power between funders and grantees, trust issues, and difficult personalities may all make communication more difficult.

Resources

Funder collaboratives often come under scrutiny because of the costs associated with setting up and maintaining the collaboration (Hopkins, 2005). The dissenters say the resources should flow directly to the nonprofits and their missions, instead of funding another level of bureaucracy (Hopkins, 2005).

Additionally, the flow of resources may be uncomfortable for some funders in a collaborative. For example, some collaboratives may hire consultants as part of their
work. After seeing the consultant’s bill, smaller foundations, not used to such a large expense, may get agitated that those dollars were not spent on direct expenses. Larger foundations, used to those types of expenses, may become annoyed at the frugality of the smaller foundations (Hopkins, 2005).

**Governance**

Governance is the process in which funding decisions are established and made (Hopkins, 2005). In a funding collaborative, each funder brings in a different idea of how funding decisions are made. When working with other funders, foundations must have open communication about how the project should move forward. For many collaboratives, this requires a consensus type vote. This type of governance may be awkward or new to foundations, which usually work individually and are used to holding the power in funder/grantee relationship. This structure may also be uncomfortable for some funders that may have contributed substantially more funding to the project than the other foundations.

Conversely, in some funder collaboratives, the smaller funders defer to the larger funder(s). This may also cause problems, if the larger funder wants all of the funders to have an equal say in the process.

**Failure of Collaborations**

Collaborations among foundation often fail (Backer, 2003). In many cases, the collaboration may end, even if the work is still needed. Common reasons for failure of collaborations are territory and rivalry issues, negative public response because of
previously failed collaborations, lack of action by the collaboration, and collaborations that are too large and not carefully managed (Backer, 2003). Hopkins (2005) suggests that fear of failure and lack of action because of possible failures could hold back advancements in collaboration more than actual failure.

**Critical Factors for Successful Collaboration**

A review of 133 studies of existing collaborations in various fields identified 19 factors in six areas that are essential for collaboration to take place (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). Subsequent studies (Backer, 2003; Hays et al., 2000) have supported the importance of these factors in a collaboration. The characteristics essential to a collaboration are:

- **Environmental Characteristics**
  - History of collaboration or cooperation in the community
  - Partnership entity seen as a leader in the community
  - Political/social climate is favorable

- **Membership Characteristics**
  - Mutual respect, understanding, and trust among the members
  - Appropriate cross-section of members
  - Members see collaboration as in their self-interest
  - Ability to compromise

- **Process/Structure Characteristics**
  - Members share a stake in both process and outcome
  - Multiple layers of decision making
  - Flexibility
  - Clear roles and policy guidelines are developed
  - Adaptability

- **Communication Characteristics**
  - Open and frequent communication
  - Established informal and formal communication links
Purpose Characteristics
- Concrete, attainable goals and objectives
- Shared vision
- Unique purpose

Resource Characteristics
- Sufficient funds
- A skilled convener

The presence or absence of these factors can determine the success of the collaboration.

**Recent Funder Collaboration Efforts**

Finding comprehensive surveys or lists of collaborative grant work happening in the United States is difficult. More prevalent are reports and articles with examples of collaborative work. Hanleybrown et al. (2012) identified collective impact initiatives that have reported “substantial progress” in their area of need. Some of their examples were Opportunity Chicago, a program that matched 6,000 public housing residents with jobs, and Memphis Fast Forward, which created more than 14,000 new jobs.

In 2005, researchers identified approximately three dozen funder collaboratives in the United States, involving a few hundred foundations and a few hundred million dollars in assets (Hopkins, 2005). Although the list is not comprehensive, it does represent some of the largest and most recognizable collaborations at the time. With the Foundation Center (2011) reporting the existence of over 76,000 foundations with over $618 billion in assets, the identified funder collaboratives by Hopkins represent a very small percentage of actual foundation funding.
The Role of Nonprofits in the Funder Collaborative

Although most collaboratives include only the funders at the table, some collaborations are beginning to include nonprofit organizations (Hopkins, 2005). Including the organizations that will provide the services is essential. Hopkins (2005) said:

If they are to be a credible force for social change, foundations cannot make decisions or set strategies without some accountability to local constituencies, or without strategically constructing strategies on existing work. The inevitable conclusion is that if philanthropic support is to make a difference, its uses need to be determined not on the donor end, but on the constituency end. (p. 56)

Including multiple stakeholders in the collaboration increases the ownership of the program, provides a greater division of labor, and increases the perspective and knowledge base of the collaboration (Hopkins, 2005).

Progress of Evaluation and Foundations

Grant-making foundations have continued to grow and develop. One of the more significant times of growth and change for grant-making foundations began in the late 1960s. The Tax Reform Act (TRA) of 1969 changed the way foundations were accountable to the public. This sweeping reform, put in place by Congress, required foundations to be more accountable. Frumkin (1999) cited the TRA as the impetus for foundations to increase their accessibility to the public and to professionalize their organizations and the field. He said, “Government regulation was the direct trigger to the paradigm shift that occurred throughout organized philanthropy starting in the 1970’s” (Frumkin, 1999, p. 70).
In the aftermath of the TRA, the Council of Foundations, a national association of grant-making foundations, appointed a task force to draft the *Recommended Principles and Practices for Effective Grant Making*. This document, consisting of 11 principles, served as a guide for all grant-making foundations. The principles can be clustered into three broad categories: (a) setting objectives, appointing a board of directors, and putting in place a process to review and decide grant applications; (b) accountability and accessibility, including open communication with the public; and (c) evaluation and other ways to improve foundation performance.

Prior to the TRA, foundations had not been held accountable for their actions or funds. In 1970, Fredrick Bolman of the Esso Education Foundation stated,

> Public and private distrust of foundations may arise in part because these tax-favored organizations neither police themselves nor visibly exert themselves for renewal of purpose and performance. The professions—law, medicine, architecture, teaching, and the like—all have established minimum standards. Not so group philanthropy, despite a half-century of existence. (Frumkin, 1999, p. 79)

The TRA and the *Recommended Principles and Practices for Effective Grant Making* were the first national directive for grant-making foundations related to accountability and evaluation. In response to the TRA, the Council of Foundations urged its members to publish annual reports, in an effort to be more open and accessible. By 1975, 72% of the Council’s membership (275 organizations), were producing annual reports (Frumkin, 1999, p. 77). This was the first step in reporting and evaluation in foundations.

Over 40 years have passed since the TRA and the subsequent *Recommended Principles and Practices for Effective Grant Making*, which, among other things, insisted
grant-making foundations strive for accessibility, accountability, and evaluation. Even after 40 years, foundations recognize the need for evaluation.

**Evaluation in Foundations Today**

Foundations are now using evaluation internally and externally. Internally, foundations use evaluation to gauge their own progress (Coffman, Beer, Patrizi, & Thompson, 2013; Kramer et al., 2007; Patrizi & McMullan, 1998). Foundations look at their involvement in the cycle of planning, implementation, and measurement of grants, as well as the experience of the grantees (Kramer et al., 2007).

Kramer et al. (2007) identified six roles of the foundation when evaluating grantees. These roles help foundations focus on their role in the foundation/grantee evaluation relationship. The six roles are: (a) bringing grantees together to learn from each other; (b) giving advice and technical assistance to improve program design, management, or implementation; (c) recognizing new issues or ways for the foundation to provide support; (d) reporting on changes in context that may affect the original plan of the grantee; (e) offering information that can be used by outside constituents and other stakeholders, such as legislators, funders, or other nonprofits; and (f) improving the funders internal processes. These roles are ways for foundations to use evaluative practices with their grantees.

Evaluation is being used by more foundations than ever before (Coffman et al., 2013; Kramer et al., 2007; Patrizi & McMullan, 1998; TCC Group, 2011). Most recently, research conducted in 2012 with 31 foundations showed 50% of foundations had increased their evaluation budget since 2009 (Coffman et al., 2013). Similarly, in 2011, a
national survey of staffed grant-making foundations was conducted by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, a national coalition of grant makers, and the TCC Group, a consulting firm. Results from this national survey showed an increase in evaluation among grant-making foundations, when results were compared to a 2003 survey (TCC Group, 2011). In 2003, 48% of responding grant-making foundations reported evaluating the results of their grant making (TCC Group, 2011). This increased to 50% in 2008 and 70% in 2011. Evaluation among funders is on the rise, which will impact the staff, funding, and other resources of grantees (TCC Group, 2011).

The increased attention to evaluation is also described in a 2009 report of a survey of 31 foundation leaders (Geisz, 2010). Foundation leaders reported their organizations spent more time on evaluative activities in 2009 than they did 5 years earlier (Geisz, 2010). These findings are echoed from interviews conducted with foundation evaluators, who also reported their focus on evaluation had increased over the previous 5 years (Patrizi & McMullan, 1998).

The use of evaluation within a foundation can be a powerful tool. Most funders describe the purpose of evaluation is to support decision making (Kramer et al., 2007; Patrizi & McMullan, 1998). These decisions are made during all steps of the funding process. Foundations fund grantees through an evaluative process that usually includes an application, background information about the grantees, and goals and objectives for the requested funding. The grantees are also required to conduct an evaluation of the study. At the completion of the grant, findings from evaluations can help an organization decide whether it needs to modify or improve programs to better serve its constituents.
Evaluation also can help decision makers determine whether a program should continue to receive funding or cease to exist. Findings from an evaluation also can inform policy, impacting people at local, state, and national levels. Foundations are exploring additional uses of evaluation, such as improving strategic planning and implementation; for public policy planning, development, and analysis; development of best practices and models in the field; identifying new areas for foundation initiatives; to respond to the foundation board’s requests for evidence of effectiveness; and tracking progress toward goals (Kramer et al., 2007; Patrizi & McMullan, 1998). The primary source used to make these decisions is the evaluation report, a requirement of the majority of all grants disbursed by foundations (Carman, 2009).

**Evaluation Reports**

Most foundations require some sort of evaluation report from the grant recipients as a condition of funding (Buteau & Chu, 2011; Carman, 2009; Kramer et al., 2007; Patrizi & McMullan, 1998). These reports may be completed during and/or at the end of the funding period. However, the reporting requirements vary (Brock et al., 2012). In some cases it is simply a financial audit report, whereas in other cases it may include data related to program descriptions, expenses, number of people served, number of services provided, and any other narrative information. Some funders may ask for a more simple report, to allow grantees to concentrate their time on their missions, while other funders may require more rigorous, time-intensive evaluation (Buteau & Chu, 2011).
Issues in Reporting

The fact that the reporting requirements for evaluation reports are not consistent is problematic primarily because there is limited funding dedicated in the grant to report writing and it takes a significant amount of time to complete the reports. Only a small percentage of grants provide enough overhead to cover grantee time writing the reports (TCC Group, 2011). In 2011, only 18% of grantees responding to a national survey reported they had adequate funding in the grant to cover staff time to complete the report. This percentage is down slightly from 2008, when 20% of the respondents to the survey felt they had adequate funding to complete the report (TCC Group, 2011).

In addition, grantees are spending more time complying with evaluation and administrative grant requirements than they did 5 years previous (Buteau & Chu, 2011, TCC Group, 2011). In 2011, grantees reported spending a median of 8 hours on monitoring and reporting and 5 hours of evaluation (TCC Group, 2011). In a different 2011 survey of 23,000 grantees, the average grantee spent 20 hours on monitoring, reporting, and evaluation (Buteau & Chu, 2011). Grantees and foundation are mixed about how helpful evaluation reports are to their program or organization (Buteau & Chu, 2011; Kramer et al., 2007). Most grantees do not think current reporting and evaluation practices are useful to improve their programs (Buteau & Chu, 2011). Those grantees who felt the reporting and evaluation process was the most helpful reported they had a strong relationship with the funder (Buteau & Chu, 2011). They were often the recipient of larger grants, discussed their evaluation report or had regular meetings with the funder, and spent more time on the report (Buteau & Chu, 2011; Kramer et al., 2007).
**Evaluation Within the Context of Foundation Collaboration**

The role of evaluation in collaborative work is to gather systematic information about how the collaboration did or did not contribute to systemic change (Backer, 2003). This information can help the funders in their current collaborative work as well as future work (Backer, 2003; Carlson et al., 2011; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). However, many organizations participating in collaborative work report that developing shared measures is one of the most difficult aspects of the partnership (Hanleybrown et al., 2012; Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Common evaluation expectations or shared measures are one way funders can collect data to look at the successes and challenges of the program (Backer, 2003; Carlson et al., 2011; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Common evaluation expectations or shared measures are a set of measurements agreed upon by the collaborating organizations (Hanleybrown et al., 2012). These measures are used to “monitor performance, track progress toward goals, and learn what is or is not working” (Hanleybrown et al., 2012, p. 5).

Although difficult to develop, the literature establishes the importance of common evaluation expectations. Hanleybrown et al. (2012) called common evaluation expectations “essential” (p. 5). Likewise, Carlson et al. (2011) said measurement and evaluation of short- and longer-term goals is critical in programs with multiple collaborators.

Developing common evaluation expectations should occur from the onset of the program. Hanleybrown et al. (2012) study collective impact programs, a type of
collaboration. They promote the importance of creating a framework in the collective impact programs. The framework guides the work of the partnering organizations. One essential piece of the framework should be the evaluation approach for the program. They have identified that laying the evaluation out from the very beginning can help collaborations be more successful (Hanleybrown et al., 2012).

Creating common measures takes time. Hanleybrown et al. (2012) say the first phase of the collective impact process, where organizations come together to understand the problem and collect baseline data, can last between 6 months to 2 years. Organizations involved in collaboration and, subsequently, developing shared measures need to be realistic about the timeline.

**Lessons Learned from Foundation Collaboration Around Evaluation**

After interviewing nearly 100 foundation leaders and foundation evaluators, Kramer et al. (2007) identified the following lessons learned from foundation collaboration around evaluation.

One theme that emerged was the importance of grantees taking the lead with the evaluation. In many instances, the grantee waited for the foundation to take the lead; however, the grantee was more knowledgeable about available and appropriate measures and data. Kramer et al. (2007) found that, in other cases, the grantees expended large amounts of effort to obtain measures the funder insisted on, when, in retrospect, simpler or more readily available measures would have sufficed. This would have saved the grantee time, money, and staffing resources used to collect the required data.
Kramer et al. (2007) felt the best response was to allow grantees to lead the evaluation conversations around the type of data to be collected, as well as lead in designing the evaluation. Their research found “the most accurate, consistent, and efficient performance metrics we came across . . . were frequently developed by grantees” (p. 40). One interviewee concurred: “There is tremendous value in a collaborative approach between grantmakers and those that will be evaluated. The challenge is that it is much more labor-intensive—funders and evaluators can be much more efficient just telling grantees what to measure” (Kramer et al., 2007, p. 40).

A second lesson learned from the interviews was the importance of deciding on a limited number of simple measures (Kramer et al., 2007). This can be a very difficult task, especially when funders are bringing together varying agendas, boards, and priorities. As the collaborative work progresses, oftentimes the organizations involved end up reducing the numbers of measures they require. They end up with those measures that are most readily available and meaningful, which they discover as the work develops.

A third lesson is the importance of developing the evaluation report. Because collaborations may not have the technical expertise to develop an evaluation plan and subsequent report, evaluation reporting may be left as an afterthought (Carlson et al., 2011). If the report is left as one of the last pieces of the collaboration, there may be a missed opportunity to learn more about the successes and failures of the program (Carlson et al., 2011).
A fourth finding is the importance of using common measures to look across grantees. Using simple, common measures for grantees also allows a funder to look across the set of grantees. They are able to get a better picture of what is happening in some common areas of interest.

Common Evaluation Requirements Today

The difference in reporting formats and measures is not surprising given the lack of collaboration among foundation leaders on this topic. Buteau and Buchanan (2011) conducted a national survey of foundations and found that only 26% of foundations said they are using “coordinated measurement systems with other funders.” Ten percent (10%) indicated they considered using a coordinated measurement system but decided against it (Buteau & Buchanan, 2011). These numbers show that some foundations are familiar with and have considered using common metrics for evaluation, but decided against it.

These results showing of lack of standardized measures are echoed by NPOs. In a national survey of 177 nonprofit leaders, almost half of the respondents (48%) reported there is little consistency in the types of information foundations ask from them (Brock et al., 2012). This is important because 75% of the NPOs in the same study have more than four different foundation funders. Additionally, half of the respondents have more than eight funders (Brock et al., 2012). Because they receive funding from multiple sources, they are required to complete multiple evaluation requirements, draining personnel time and other resources (Kramer et al., 2009).
Developing common evaluation expectations requires specific types of leadership and characteristics of the participating organizations. Hanleybrown et al. (2012) found strong leadership, adequate funding, and staffing from the lead organization were necessary to develop common measures in the collaboration. The ongoing staffing was needed to review the data as well as provide training and facilitation (Hanleybrown, et al., 2012).

One example shows the development of common evaluation requirements led by the grantee, instead of the funders. College Summit, a nonprofit organization that works with schools in disadvantaged communities, began reporting a monthly, internal Balance Scorecard, based on performance data they had collected (Kramer et al., 2007). The Scorecard was shared with College Summit’s Board of Directors and major funders on a quarterly basis, used to organize the internal management meetings, track progress against the strategic plan, and compare the performance of school systems (Kramer et al., 2007). College Summit was able to persuade its 10 largest funders to accept the Scorecard instead of separate evaluations. College Summit’s CEO reports this acceptance has reduced the amount of time needed to obtain and manage the reports to funders. Funders are able to see current and up-to-date information, instead of waiting for an annual report to be released. This reporting structure also allows College Summit to spend more time on their mission. Another benefit of this reporting is that the participating schools can see how they are performing as compared to the other schools, which encourages the schools to improve (Kramer et al., 2007).
Kramer et al. (2007) also revealed two instances of entire fields developing and using standardized measures. One project, Success Measures, spent 5 years to develop a program that allows community development organizations to track data using the same metrics. The metrics, in the areas of affordable housing, economic development, and community building, were developed by over 300 researchers, organizations, and practitioners and tested by over 50 community-based organizations. The resulting Success Measures system is a fee-based Internet-based program, where subscribers have access to data collection instruments and reports based on their data. The program is customizable and allows for funders or grantees to enter additional indicators. Funders appreciated the access to grantee performance, without the cost associated with an evaluator (Kramer et al., 2007).

Advantages of Common Evaluation Requirements

There are several reasons why creating common evaluation requirements may be advantageous to the nonprofit sector. Coordinating measurement and evaluation among foundations may help reduce the reporting burden felt by nonprofit organizations that receive funding from multiple foundations. Common evaluation requirements could reduce the number of hours spent on monitoring and evaluation. Coordinating measurements may also allow foundations to examine trends in the data across many foundations, giving a clearer picture of impact.

Nonprofit leaders have weighed in on the idea of creating common evaluation requirements. In a national survey of nonprofit leaders, respondents felt funders should “consider whether, and how, they (funders) will use all of the information they ask from
grantees, ask grantees what information they are already collecting for their funders or for their own organization’s use” (Buteau & Buchanan, 2011). Likewise, interviews of nonprofit leaders revealed instances of grantees coming together to develop standardized measures for their fields. These measures are now being used by funders and grantees to track progress (Kramer et al., 2007).

Creating common evaluation requirements for funders in a geographic area may also cut down on burden of monitoring and reporting by nonprofit organizations that receive funding from multiple foundations around a common mission. The U.S. Department of Education and the National Science Foundation have developed principles for evaluation collaboration between the two organizations. One of the reasons given for this collaboration was to gather common data points to reduce the burden of reporting within the field (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Creating standard measures could allow nonprofit organizations the ability to have more focus on their mission (Brock et al., 2012). An anonymous NPO leader said, “If foundations can come to an understanding and develop standardized measures of success, the nonprofit community can focus on the actions that will lead to success” (Brock et al., 2012).

Creating common evaluation expectations may also be advantageous to the overall collaboration. Some of the advantages to creating common evaluation expectations include that it creates a common language for all the stakeholders, delivers a consistent message to stakeholders, has the ability to more easily measure progress toward common goals, encourages cooperative problem solving, ensures that the partners
align efforts, clarifies the types of activities necessary to meet the stated goals, allows for accountability among partners, provides the opportunity to learn from each other’s successes and failures, and gives the participants opportunities to learn about evaluation, with the ultimate outcome of possibly improving the participants’ own evaluative capabilities and understanding (Hanleybrown et al., 2012; Kania & Kramer, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Increasing data quality is another benefit to developing standardized evaluation measures. Because resources are combined, more data or higher quality data may be able to be collected about the program. These data could include information about a larger geographic region, more information about the outcomes and outputs, or more precise measures related to the goals of program. Web-based systems have made it easier for organizations to collect data in a timelier and less expensive manner. Web-based systems are starting be used for standardized measurement systems. They are being used to collect data and look at progress across a field, and for organizations to learn from each other (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

**Reasons for Not Having Common Evaluation Expectations**

Of the five essential conditions identified for successful “collective impact” to occur, Kania and Kramer (2011) hypothesized shared measurement systems are the most important but the most difficult to achieve.

Many reasons have been theorized as to why funders do not work together to create common evaluation expectations. Some ideas postulated include fear of the participating organizations of being judged as underachieving, diverse or differing
priorities among stakeholders, and/or lack of resources and knowledge to develop common evaluation expectations (Hanleybrown et al., 2012). Creating standardized measures also requires an investment of time and resources, which some organizations may be reluctant to fund. Additionally, technical knowledge is necessary for stakeholders to share information and measure outcomes and impacts (Carlson et al., 2011). The organizations may not have the technical knowledge necessary to develop the needed measures. These reasons make it difficult for funders and other organizations to come to agreement on common evaluation expectations.

Funder collaboratives, especially those that result in shared measures, require a shift in how funders see their role (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Funders no longer are solitary organizations, funding a nonprofit organization that has a good idea. Instead, funders must see themselves as a partner in building and sustaining the process and the shared measurement process.

Conclusions

The collaborative process is relatively new in the philanthropic field. Although there are many advantages to collaboration, it can be difficult to implement, for a variety of reasons. Clear communication and shared vision are essential components in collaboration.

When collaborating around shared measures and evaluation reports, it becomes even more essential that the partners have good communication. In many partnerships, developing shared measures is one of the most difficult pieces of the collaborative effort.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the methodological approach used to study the collaboration among grant-making organizations, program staff, and evaluators is presented. The dissertation research questions are as follows:

1. How did grant-making foundations and funders develop common evaluation requirements for the program?
2. Why did grant-making foundations and funders develop common evaluation requirements for the program?
3. What were the common evaluation expectations that resulted from the collaboration?
4. What are the organizational contextual factors influencing the evaluation collaboration of the program?

Design

The research design of this study uses an explanatory and single case study approach. The case study method was used because of the explanatory nature of the research questions, the focus on contemporary events, and the lack of control over events by the researcher (Yin, 2009). This study was also a single case study approach. The “unique or extreme” aspect of this study, bringing multiple funders and grantees together to discuss evaluation, makes a single case study appropriate (Baxter & Jack, 2008).
Propositions

Propositions are helpful in a case study because they guide the scope of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Yin (2009) stated, “Each proposition directs attention to something that should be examined within the scope of the study” (p. 28). Propositions are developed from the literature, personal experience, theories, and/or generalizations based on data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Propositions are similar to hypotheses in experimental studies in that they both are educated guesses about the outcome(s) of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The propositions for this case study were developed based on a review of the literature. They are:

1. The common evaluation requirements came about because of the collaboration among the organizations.
2. The funders developed common evaluation requirements because they provide a mutual benefit to the grantees and funders.
3. Common evaluation requirements benefit the grantee by reducing the burden of collecting and reporting data.
4. Common evaluation requirements benefit the funders by allowing the partners to collect common data, therefore allowing analysis of data across funders.
5. The funders developed common evaluation requirements by having open, regular dialogue, keeping the goals of the project in mind, showing results during the pilot year of the grants, and having additional funding available for subsequent years.
6. The context the organizations operate within (their mission statements, staffing levels, funding levels, etc.) influenced the collaboration.

**Unit of Analysis**

It is critical to define the unit of analysis to focus the study (Yin, 2009). For this case, the unit analysis is a group of 12 people who form the Funders’ Group. These people represent the three funders, the grantees/program staff, and the evaluators in the project. This group was identified to study through a colleague who was familiar with the program and the evaluation work they had completed. The time boundaries for the case are November 2011, when the Funders’ Group started meeting, to April 2013.

Data were collected in three ways: (a) semi-structured interviews with the Funders’ Group members, (b) systematic document review, and (c) direct observation. The purpose of the interviews was to learn about Funders’ Group members’ experiences related to the research questions. The interviews also gave the opportunity to ask further questions. The purpose of the systematic document review was to verify and corroborate information gathered through interviews and other methods of data collection. The purpose of the direct observation was to gather data firsthand, in the natural setting of the case.

Initially I proposed to include observations of Funder meetings occurring between January 14, 2013 and April 30, 2013. The meetings were supposed to occur every 4 to 8 weeks, depending on the schedules of the participants. However, because the project staff was developing and writing a grant proposal to extend funding, the Funders’ Group did not schedule any open meetings during this time period. They scheduled closed door
meetings, open to project staff only. I attended one open meeting prior to this time period (January 5, 2013), and observations from this meeting are included in the findings.

The sampling plan, instrumentation, procedure, data collection process, and data analysis procedures for the semi-structured interviews, the systematic document review, and direct observation are described below.

**Sampling**

**Semi-structured Interviews**

Purposeful sampling was used to conduct the semi-structured interviews. Individuals and the site were selected because they can inform an understanding of the research problem and the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2007). Twelve participants were identified by one of the Funders’ Group members. These participants had participated in the meeting since they began, they were currently active in the meetings, and they had provided substantial contributions to the collaboration, especially around evaluation. The 12 people included representatives from the three funding agencies, including the program officer and the executive director of one of the foundations; representatives from the organizations that received the grants, including the project manager and other administrative staff; external and internal evaluators; and an external facilitator. The external facilitator’s role was to develop meeting agendas, facilitate the Funders’ Group meetings, and help resolve any differences within the group.

The contact information for these 12 participants was given to me by the member of the Funders’ Group. All 12 people were contacted via email to participate in the study.
All of the 12 participants responded to the email. Eleven of the respondents agreed to participate in the interview. One participant declined to be interviewed because he/she felt his/her participation in the project was too brief (saying he/she participated in only two or three meetings) and felt he/she was no longer part of the Funders’ Group. That person was not interviewed.

After conducting one interview, the interviewee suggested an additional person should be contacted to participate in an interview. The suggested person was no longer active in the Funders’ Group meetings but was instrumental in starting the project. This additional person was contacted and agreed to be interviewed. This person had worked with the grantee. In all, 12 people were interviewed—11 from the initial list and one additional person.

**Systematic Document Review**

When developing the research plan, I identified possible documents for review along with one member of the Funders’ Group. The documents included those that might be available to the researcher and the group may be willing to release for review.

After reviewing the available documents and consulting with the other members in the group, the Funders’ Group member released 21 documents to me. The documents included:

- A logic model
- Racial equity plan
- Meeting minutes
- Meeting agendas
- List of desired outcomes developed by the Funders’ Group and evaluators
- Evaluation report from external evaluator
- GIS maps
• Eco maps
• Parent skills assessment summary
• HighScope survey summary
• HighScope implementation interviews summary
• Community member interview summary
• Home visit and playgroup interviews summary
• One funder’s mission statement around racial equity

The following external documents were procured from the organizational staff and websites.

• The mission statements of the organizations
• Blank evaluation reports given to grantees from the funders

As part of the document review, a total of 24 documents was systematically reviewed.

**Direct Observation**

The original plan was to attend all of the Funders’ Group meetings held between January 14, 2013 and April 30, 2013, which was estimated to be between two to four meetings. However, because of other program obligations, the Funders’ Group did not schedule any open meetings during this time frame. I attended one meeting prior to this time frame, which is included in this analysis.

**Instrumentation**

**Semi-structured Interviews**

A semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) was developed based on the literature review, research questions, and the propositions. The interview protocol was designed to probe into issues related to the research questions. The purpose of the
interviews was twofold: to ask the Funders’ Group participants about their interpretation of events related to the research questions, and to determine the role of each organization and individual. The research questions were used as the basis of the interview questions.

The interview protocol consisted of 14 open-ended questions. The semi-structured interview protocol allowed flexibility in the interview. New questions could be posed based on the responses of the interviewee.

**Systematic Document Review**

A standardized data collection form was used to record the information related to the documents. Each document was coded to assist in the document review. For each document, the type of document, the date of the document (if available), the document code, and the title of the document were recorded. Any information concerning how and/or why the grant-making foundations and funders developed common evaluation expectations, what the common evaluation expectations were that were developed, and any organizational contextual factors that may have influenced the evaluation collaboration was also recorded. Specific codes were developed for these items because these items related to the research questions. Additional notes, such as outcomes becoming more developed as dates progressed, were also recorded. A copy of the systematic document review form is available in Appendix B.
Direct Observation

Data were recorded through field notes. Included in the notes were attendance, date, and general topics discussed. The field notes were written and stored in a Microsoft Word document.

Procedure

Semi-structured Interviews

As part of the study, each participant was asked to participate in a minimum of one interview, lasting approximately 1 hour. Each member of the Funders’ Group was contacted to participate via email. The emails were sent out following an introductory email from one member of the Funders’ Group. The introductory email from the Funder’s Group member said that I was a WMU Ph.D. student interested in the work of the group and would be contacting all of the Funders’ Group members to participate in an interview. The email also gave my name and contact information.

Within a few hours of the introductory email sent to the Funders’ Group members, I sent another email to the group members, introducing myself and giving background information about the project. The email also included a list of possible dates and times to participate in an interview. The emails were sent with a date to respond included in the email. A copy of the email sent to the Funders’ Group members is in Appendix C.

All of the group members responded within one week of the initial email. After the interviewees responded to the email and replied with a date, time, and location for the
interview, I sent a confirmation via email. Included in the confirmation email were the chosen date, time, and location for the interview and the list of interview questions. The interviewees were prompted to think about their responses ahead of time, using the interview questions as a guide.

All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in a comfortable place determined by the interviewee, such as his/her office or a coffee shop. All of the interviews were audio recorded and notes were also taken during the interview. Approval was not needed through the Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board because it was determined the research was analyzing an organizational process.

**Systematic Document Review**

The documents were received as .doc, .pdf., and .xls files via email from a Funders’ Group member. A checklist was developed to determine if the documents related to the four research questions of the study. The checklist is available in Appendix D. If I determined the document related to at least one of the research questions, I reviewed it. In some cases, it was not clear what the purpose of the document had been. In those cases, one of the Funders’ Group members was contacted for additional background information about the documents. The Funders’ Group member was able to give the context for the document. All of the documents received were included in the document review.
Direct Observation

During the meeting I attended, I acted as an observer. Other than introducing myself at the beginning of the meeting, I did not participate in the meeting. The meeting participants were seated around a long, rectangular table and I was asked to sit with them at the table. I took notes related to the research questions and the general meeting agenda.

Data Collection and Recording

Semi-structured Interviews

The interviews were audio recorded. I also took notes during the interviews. As data were analyzed, I contacted the interviewees if additional information or clarification was needed. Of the 12 interviewees, 8 were contacted after their initial interview to provide additional information. All 8 people responded to the request for additional information.

Systematic Document Review

Once the documents had been reviewed, any information pertinent to the four research questions was recorded on the document review data collection form. The document review form is available in Appendix B.

Direct Observation

During the meeting, field notes were recorded. The notes include the date, location, and participants of the meetings, as well as general topics discussed. While
observing the meeting, I also took notes on evidence that relates to the research questions. This method is recommended by Yin. Yin (2009) breaks questions in the case study protocol into five levels. Level 1 is the questions a researcher asks specific interviewees; Level 2 is questions asked of the individual case (the research questions); Levels 3 through 5 are questions that are even more broad, including questions related to the literature base and policy. Yin (2009) suggests that when collecting case study evidence, the researcher should always be thinking about Level 2 questions (Yin, 2009). Notes during the meeting were taken around the Level 2 questions.

Data Processing and Analysis

Data processing and analysis followed the phases outlined by Marshall and Rossman (2006) and Creswell (2007): organizing the data, immersion in the data, coding the data, and making a detailed description of the case.

Organizing the Data

The data were organized using MAXqda 11 software. MAXqda 11 is a qualitative data analysis program, which allows the researcher to develop and assign code systems to qualitative texts. The interview transcriptions, the data collection forms from the systematic document review, and the notes taken during the meeting observation were all entered into MAXqda.
**Immersion in the Data**

After the data was entered, I read and reread the data. This method follows Marshall and Rossman’s (2006) recommendation that reading and rereading the data forces the researcher to become familiar with the data, the people, and the events represented therein.

**Coding the Data**

Codes were developed for different aspects of the case and the propositions, based on the recommendations of Creswell (2007) and Yin (2009). Codes were developed to represent the context and description of the case and the theme analysis of the case. Each piece of data was coded for characteristics related to the research questions and propositions, as well as emerging themes not related to the research questions. Specifically, codes were created for how and why common evaluation expectations were developed, the resulting common evaluation expectations, and the organizational contextual factors that influenced the collaboration. These codes were consistent across the data sources.

**Data Analysis**

Yin (2009) stated that multiple analytic strategies can be used for case study research. In this research, categorical aggregation and pattern matching were the analytic strategies used.
Categorical aggregation is one of the forms of data analysis Stake (2005) advocates for in case study research. Categorical aggregation consists of looking for a group of occurrences in the data to find relevant meaning. In this research, categories were created around the core phenomenon (i.e., how the ECC Funders developed common evaluation requirements).

Pattern matching was another data analysis tool used. In pattern matching, an empirically based pattern is compared to a predicted pattern (Yin, 2009). If the patterns coincide, this type of analysis strengthens internal validity (Yin, 2009). For example, the data collected around the propositions were matched to the predicted pattern stated in the propositions. The propositions predicted an overall pattern of outcomes related to the evaluation collaboration. If the results of the data analysis are as predicted in the propositions, solid conclusions can be drawn about the effects of evaluation around collaboration. If the data analysis does not show the same pattern as predicted, the proposition would be questioned.

A “zigzag” process was used during the data collection and analysis stages. Strauss and Corbin (1990) developed a “zigzag” process for data collection and analysis. In that process, analysis begins while the data are being collected. The zigzag process continues: as data are gathered from interviews, document review, and observation, the data are analyzed, then more data are collected through follow-up interviews and document review (as available), and the resulting data are analyzed. This iterative process increases the confidence of the findings as the propositions and rival propositions are reviewed and accepted or rejected (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Data were analyzed and
additional data collected until a set of constructs was confirmed that could be associated with the propositions and could offer an explanation for how the propositions operate within the context of evaluation collaboration.

**Rival Propositions**

Exploring any rival propositions lets the researcher determine if there are any alternate explanations to the findings (Yin, 2009). Possible rival explanations for the collaboration of the Funders’ Group are that something else has been influencing the collaboration of the funders group, such as state or national policies, additional participants, grantees, funders, or other people or organizations. These rival explanations were used during data analysis.

**Limitations**

In this research, the limitations were around the observations and the time the events took place. The original research plan called for direct observation of all of the Funders’ Group meetings falling within a 4-month period. Previously, the Funders’ Group had met approximately once a month. When the research was in the planning stage, it was estimated the Funders’ Group would hold two to four meetings during the 4-month span of the research, in which direct observation would take place. However, the Funders’ Groups’ attention was diverted from evaluation-focused activities to other pressing needs. The group continued to meet; however, the meetings were not open to outside audiences. Therefore, I was able to attend only one of the Funders’ Group meetings.
The other limitation of this research is related to the time the evaluation-related work took place. All of the evaluation work had taken place in the previous 6 to 18 months of the interviews. Because of the retrospective aspect of the research, the data are dependent on the memories of the interviewees. As time passes, memories become clouded and events are forgotten. The document review, especially of the meeting minutes and evaluation reports, was used to triangulate the data around dates and activities, which may have been forgotten by interviewees.

**Ensuring the Quality of the Research**

Baxter and Jack (2008) outlined basic requirements to ensure the overall study’s quality. The researcher must ensure

1. The research question is clear, the question is substantiated, and propositions are provided;
2. The design is appropriate for the question;
3. Purposeful sampling that is appropriate has been used;
4. Data are systematically collected and managed; and
5. Data are analyzed correctly.

Yin (2009) specified four tests that should be used to determine the quality of case study research (Table 1). The four tests, the tactics that should be used for the test, and the phase in which the tactic occurs are outlined below. The tactics for these tests was used during this research.
Table 1

*Case Study Tactics for Four Design Tests*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tests</th>
<th>Case study tactic</th>
<th>Phase of research in which the tactic occurs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Specific tactics used in the current study are italicized)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Construct validity</strong></td>
<td>Use multiple sources of evidence (<em>used interviews, systematic document review, direct observation</em>)</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Establish chain of evidence (steps researcher took to draw conclusions, from the research question, to the protocol, to the sources, to the database to the report) (<em>done throughout</em>)</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have key informants review draft case study report (<em>reviewed by a member of the ECC Funders’ Group</em>)</td>
<td>Composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal validity</strong></td>
<td>• Explanation building (<em>analyze the data by building an explanation about the case</em>) (<em>in Chapter IV</em>)</td>
<td>Data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Address rival explanations (<em>in Chapter IV</em>)</td>
<td>Data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use logic models (<em>in Chapter IV</em>)</td>
<td>Data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External validity</strong></td>
<td>• Use theory in single case studies (<em>used literature review to develop propositions</em>)</td>
<td>Research design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reliability</strong></td>
<td>• Use case study protocol (<em>in Chapter III</em>)</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop case study database (<em>used MAXqda 11 software</em>)</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Yin, 2009)

**Summary**

This chapter presented the methodological approaches used in this dissertation research. Three methodological approaches were used in this study: (a) interviews with
members of the Funders’ Group, (b) a systematic review of documents developed and used by the Funders’ Group related to evaluation, and (c) direct observation of a Funders’ Group meeting. This chapter also discussed the limitations of the research, which were the lack of open funders’ group meetings and the retrospective nature of the research. The remaining two chapters will present the results and the conclusion of the study.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

The chapter begins with a summary of the characteristics of interviewees. Next is an overview of the Early Childhood Connections (ECC) program, a chronology of events, and a logic model related to the program development and evaluation. Then I present how the ECC Funders’ Group came into existence and how and why the group developed common evaluation expectations. This is followed by the results of research questions and associated propositions using the analysis of the semi-structured interviews, systematic document review, and direct observation data. Findings related to the six propositions are presented. Finally, a summary of the key findings is presented.

Interviewee Characteristics

The Funders’ Group was composed of 12 key people; all were interviewed. The interviewees belonged to four types of organizations: (a) funders, (b) program staff, (c) evaluators, and (d) external facilitators. In all, five people representing the three funders were interviewed. Three people from one funder were interviewed; they represented the Executive Vice President, the Director of Community Impact, and the Associate Director of Community Impact. One person from each of the remaining two funders was interviewed. One interviewee was the Executive Director of the smallest funder. She was the only full-time staff person at the organization and, therefore, was the only person available to work on the project. The other interviewee was the Director of
Local Programming from a national foundation, who had been involved in the project since the onset. Table 2 shows the approximate percentage of their job each interviewee reported was spent on the project.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Percentage of Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Executive Vice President</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Director of Community Impact</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Associate Director of Community Impact</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Executive Director</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five people representing the ECC program staff were interviewed. Their roles were: (a) the program coordinator/director, (b) the assistant superintendent of a local intermediate school district, (c) the director of early childhood services of the intermediate school district, (d) the early childhood director of a local school district, and (e) a former superintendent of a local school district, who had since retired.

One external evaluator and one external facilitator were also interviewed. The external evaluator had been a part of the project since its inception; the external facilitator joined the Funders’ Group during the past year, approximately 2 years after the project began.
School District Performance

Battle Creek is a city in South Central Michigan. Four public school districts fall within Battle Creek city limits: Battle Creek, Lakeview, Harper Creek, and Pennfield. Although the ECC program serves four school districts, 75% of the ECC services go to Battle Creek and Lakeview Public Schools. Battle Creek Public Schools serves over 5,000 elementary through high school aged children, and Lakeview serves close to 4,000 students (Great Schools, n.d.-a).

Many of the students ECC provides services to come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Low economic status, race, ethnicity, and/or lack of proficiency with the English language have been shown to be risk factors to student success. Battle Creek Public Schools and Lakeview Public Schools work with students with these risk factors (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.-b).

The state standardized test results of both districts demonstrate the need to help students succeed academically. All Michigan students in grades 3-8 complete standardized tests in math and reading. The results of the Battle Creek Public Schools 2012-2013 school year tests show the district scored below the state average on both tests in all grades (Great Schools, n.d.-a). Lakeview results were a bit better, ranging from slightly above to slightly below the state average for the tests (Great Schools, n.d.-b).

Another measure of student success is Adequately Year Progress (AYP), which measures the yearly change in student achievement. Battle Creek Public Schools had not met Adequate Yearly Progress in reading or mathematics since the 2008-2009 school
year. Although Lakeview had met AYP since 2008 to 2011, the district failed to meet it in the 2011-2012 school year (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.-a).

**History of the Program**

Battle Creek is home to many grant-making organizations and nonprofit organizations. Some of the major funders in the city are the Battle Creek Community Foundation, the Guido A. and Elizabeth H. Binda Foundation, the Miller Foundation, the United Way of the Battle Creek and Kalamazoo Region, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Battle Creek area grant-making organizations have a history of funding educational programs. Many funders have specific interest in early childhood. Three funders came together to fund the Early Childhood Connections project: the Binda Foundation, the United Way of the Battle Creek and Kalamazoo Region, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The concept of ECC was born out of the need to help students from an early age. ECC began through the vision of a local school superintendent. In 2009, the superintendent wrote a grant to the Michigan Department of Education to start the program as part of the Project ReImagine grant. Project ReImagine was a competitive grant program administered by the Michigan Department of Education. The purpose of the Project ReImagine program was to improve student learning and achievement. One of the intended outcomes of the program was to develop preschool and early transition programs for children (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.-c).

At the time local school districts and other educational organizations were asked to submit proposals for Project ReImagine, the Michigan Department of Education had
not fully secured funding for the possible projects. In order to fund the ReImagine projects, Michigan had to be accepted in the federal grant program called Race to the Top. Race to the Top was a competitive grant program among all of the states, and Michigan was never awarded Race to the Top funds. Although the ECC grant was recognized for awarding by the Michigan Department of Education, the State of Michigan never received Race to the Top funds. Therefore, the Project ReImagine funding was never awarded and the ECC project was put on hold.

After the state funding fell through, the superintendent networked with area superintendents, school districts, and other educational entities about their interest in pursuing alternative funding. The local school districts still had significant interest in the project. Therefore, the superintendent approached the Binda Foundation, a local family foundation, about funding the program. The Binda Foundation thought the idea was worthy of funding but felt it would benefit the project and the community to have additional funding for the project, in addition to what the foundation was able to provide. The superintendent approached two additional grant-making organizations, the United Way (UW) and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) about collaboratively funding the grant. In June 2010, the Binda Foundation invited the CEOs and directors of the United Way and WKKF to a board meeting. At this time, the Binda Foundation shared the vision of the ECC project. Having three funders at a board meeting to discuss collaboration was a first for the Binda Foundation. Both the UW and the WKKF agreed to participate in and fund the project. In total, three grant-making organizations came together to fund the project.
During this time, the superintendent retired from her position and became the executive director of the Battle Creek Educators’ Task Force (ETF). ETF is a 501(c)(3) organization comprised of representatives from local school districts. Their mission is to collaborate with school districts, public and private organizations, and the local government to develop programming that benefits local children. Once ECC was created, ETF managed ECC.

**Program Overview**

ECC is a free program provided to families in Battle Creek, Michigan. The program aims to improve the educational outcomes of all children in the Battle Creek area, starting at birth, by focusing on the pre-kindergarten learning experiences. Early Childhood Connections works to create a system-wide change for families and young children. Three pillars of the program work directly with families and children together to achieve this goal: Welcome Baby Baskets, home visits with family coaches, and toddler playgroups. Another essential part of the program is training for early childhood teachers.

One of the hallmarks of the program is the family coaches. The coaches are trained in early childhood interventions and provide encouragement and education to parents and caregivers. The coaches support families through interactions with families while giving Welcome Baby Baskets and conducting home visits and toddler playgroups.

Welcome Baby Baskets connect new parents to the ECC program. Through a referral program with area OBGYNs, local hospitals, and other medical agencies, pregnant women are given an ECC referral card to complete with their contact information. An ECC staff member calls the mother as soon as they receive the referral
card and explains the Welcome Baby Basket program. Referral cards are also given to women at area hospitals after they give birth. Some women have been referred multiple times. During the first 2 years of the program, approximately 1,600 births were recorded in Battle Creek. ECC received 1,405 referrals of individual women during those 2 years. Approximately 87% of the women who gave birth in Battle Creek during the first 2 years of the program were contacted by ECC.

After the baby is born, one to two coaches or a coach and a community volunteer visits the new mother at her home. They bring a Welcome Baby Basket which is a laundry basket filled with items for the mother and baby. Included in the basket are (a) a handmade quilt, (b) a card with developmental activities related to the quilt, (c) a bottle of laundry detergent, (d) diapers, (e) baby wipes, (f) a digital thermometer, (g) a board book, (h) a baby sleeper, and (i) resource guides for the family. The resource guides provide the parents information about community organizations that support child health, education, and economic stability. During the half-hour visit, the coaches use the items in the Welcome Baby Basket to talk about baby care and safety, such as the importance of putting the child on his or her back to sleep, appropriate developmental activities for an infant, how to read a thermometer, and instances when a doctor should be called. The coach, with the parent’s consent, also signs the child up for Imagination Library, a national program that sends the child a free book each month.

At the end of the visit, the coach describes the next step in the ECC program, the home visit, and tells the caregiver they will be calling in 2 to 3 weeks about scheduling a
home visit. The coach also invites the caregiver to attend a playgroup with his or her child.

The first home visit, called an intake, takes place 30 to 45 days after the baby is born and lasts approximately 90 minutes. The caregiver completes a program application that asks for contact information, includes photography release forms, etc. The caregiver completes the initial Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). The ASQ is a developmental screening tool used to identify developmental delays in children. The caregiver also completes a literacy survey and answers additional questions about their hopes for their child’s educational future.

Future home visits last approximately 60-75 minutes. If the child is showing average development, the coach will visit once a month. If the child exhibits developmental delays or the caregivers are struggling with childcare or other issues, the coaches may visit once a week or twice a month. Most coaches have 25 families in their caseload. Of those 25, they meet with approximately five families every other week, one family each week, and the remaining families, once a month.

The home visits look different based on the age of the child and the family. During the home visits, the coaches share activities with the family based on the results of the child’s ASQ. For example, if it shows the child is having difficulty crawling, the coach will show the family different activities to promote crawling. Non-native English speaking families often request the coach read a story aloud, so the caregiver has an opportunity to hear the English words. The coaches also work to reinforce the bond between the parent and child, by saying things like, “Notice how the baby turns her head
towards you when you speak.” In addition to the home visits, families are invited to attend weekly playgroups.

Weekly playgroups occur at various community centers, elementary schools, and churches around Battle Creek. In the 2012-2013 school year, 10 playgroups were held each week at eight different locations throughout the city. More locations are being added each year. The playgroups are free and children ages birth to 5, along with their caregivers, are welcome. Bilingual playgroups (both Spanish and Burmese) are also available.

The purpose of the playgroups is to give parents and other caregivers the opportunity to socialize with other parents and learn parenting skills. Caregivers and children attend the playgroup together; it is not a drop-off childcare service. The family coaches facilitate the playgroups. They provide age and developmentally appropriate activities for the attendees.

Playgroups not only provide the families with developmentally appropriate activities; they also introduce families to community resources. By holding the playgroups in elementary schools, participants become familiar with their local school and meet the principal and other staff. During the 2012-2013 school year, a grant from a local bank gave funding for the playgroups to engage community organizations. ECC contracted with a music center to provide a music class for parent and child, a museum to provide science activities, and with a zoo to provide weekly naturalist programs. The community organizations provide the content experts and facilities, and ECC connects families by providing the opportunity to attend, as well as providing transportation and
translation services. By introducing the families to these community resources, the program aims to help develop lasting relationships between the families and the community organizations.

The goal of the ECC program is to create a continuum of support for families. The program begins with regular visits at their home from a coach, then moves to caregivers taking the child to a playgroup. Support and learning opportunities are offered at all ages: home visits for children birth to 2; playgroups for children ages 2 to 4; and preschool for 3 and 4 year olds.

ECC has impacted many children and families in the Battle Creek area. In the 2012 evaluation report, it was reported that 1,100 referrals to the program had been made for new or expectant mothers. Of those, 76% received a Welcome Baby Basket. Additionally, 237 children had participated in home visits and 360 children participated in playgroups. Because of the home visits provided by the program, 83 families have been referred to additional services (Tackett & Pasatta, 2012).

Besides the direct work with children and families, ECC has also worked to train daycare and preschool staff. Area teachers were trained to use developmentally appropriate activities through the HighScope model. HighScope is an education foundation that develops curricula and assessment materials and provides professional development to teachers, administrators, and other educators. In 2012, 40 teachers participated in HighScope training and are implementing new curriculum in their daycare center or preschool classroom (Tackett & Pasatta, 2012). The training also gave educators resources to improve team planning and student large-group time.
Chronology

A chronology of the ECC program was developed (Table 3). A major benefit of case study research is the ability to trace events over time (Yin, 2009). Arranging the events in chronological order has both important descriptive and analytic purposes (Yin, 2009). By developing the chronology, it is possible to determine the cause and effect of certain events, to get a better sense of the amount of time required to complete tasks, and to get an overall picture of events involved in this type of collaboration. The chronology was based on data from the interviews, document review, and direct observation.

Table 3

ECC Chronology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 2009</td>
<td>ReImagine Grant recognized for awarding by the Michigan Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2010</td>
<td>Michigan Department of Education does not receive Race to the Top grant, so ReImagine funding cannot be allocated to local districts who were chosen for awarding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2010</td>
<td>Approach Binda Foundation about funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2010</td>
<td>W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the United Way attend Binda Foundation board meeting about the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2010</td>
<td>Submit W.K. Kellogg Foundation grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1, 2010</td>
<td>Project start date—full implementation does not begin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1, 2010</td>
<td>External evaluator is hired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2010</td>
<td>Hire project coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1, 2011</td>
<td>Project coordinator’s start date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February–June 2011</td>
<td>Hiring/training of staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>First four family coaches hired</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>Three-day training for coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2011</td>
<td>Full implementation of project starts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2011</td>
<td>Parents as Teachers training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2011</td>
<td>Preschool coach hired to work with childcare providers and centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2011</td>
<td>Three-year-old preschool scholarship program began</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 11, 2011</td>
<td>Year 1 Evaluation Report submitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2011</td>
<td>Two family coaches hired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2012</td>
<td>First ECC Funders’ Group Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2012</td>
<td>External evaluator starts attending ECC Funders’ Group meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 15, 2012</td>
<td>Evaluation subgroup meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 30, 2012</td>
<td>ECC Funders’ Group meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June–August 2012</td>
<td>Project logic model developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 13, 2012</td>
<td>Evaluation subgroup meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 3, 2012</td>
<td>Evaluation subgroup meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 23, 2012</td>
<td>Evaluation subgroup meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July–August 2012</td>
<td>Evaluator works on evaluation plan, logic model, and shares with group via email for feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 9, 2012</td>
<td>ECC Funders’ Group meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1, 2012</td>
<td>Developer of program leaves Educators Task Force and is no longer involved in ECC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 10, 2012</td>
<td>ECC Funders’ Group meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2012</td>
<td>First external facilitator relieved of duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2012</td>
<td>Year 2 Evaluation Report submitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 7, 2013</td>
<td>ECC Funders’ Group meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2013</td>
<td>Three-year grant submitted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Logic Model

A logic model was developed to visualize the collaboration process (Figure 4). The Inputs on the left side of the figure are the resources needed for the collaboration. The Activities column shows the collaborative actions around evaluation. In the Outputs column are the activities and products resulting from the inputs and the activities. The Outcomes column shows the results of the inputs, activities, and outputs.

The logic model is a way to present a complex process (collaborating to develop common evaluation expectations) in a cause and effect manner. The inputs lead to the activities, which lead to the outputs and the eventual outcomes. The logic model also aids in the consideration of rival hypotheses. If other inputs or activities were identified that were not part of the propositions, they could be identified as a rival hypothesis affecting the process.

Developing the logic model was a tactic to test internal validity. By presenting the process in a cause and effect manner as part of the data analysis, it is possible to see if the collaboration occurred because of the inputs or if there were other possible causes.
First Year of Implementation

October 2010 was the official ECC project start date. However, a project coordinator had yet to be hired, so the project did not begin full implementation.

An external evaluator was hired beginning in October 2010. The external evaluator was hired by Calhoun Intermediate School District, which served as the fiscal agent of the grant. The external evaluator was hired based on an application through a Request for Proposals process.

Early Childhood Connections was originally managed by the Battle Creek Educators’ Task Force (ETF), a nonprofit organization comprised of representatives from the local school districts, the intermediate school district, parochial and private schools, and the community college. The superintendent who had originally developed the Project
ReImagine grant had retired from the position of superintendent. After her retirement, she became the executive director of the Educators’ Task Force. Through the role, she managed Early Childhood Connections.

After the funders came together, Early Childhood Connections began to take shape. In December 2010 a project coordinator was hired. The project coordinator started in February 2011. From February to June 2011, the hiring and training of staff of staff took place. During this time, the first four family coaches were hired and completed a 3-day training. In July 2011, the full implementation of the project started. This included a Parents as Teachers training and hiring a preschool coach to work with childcare providers and daycare centers. In September 2011, the 3-year old preschool scholarship program started. The Year 1 evaluation report was submitted by the external evaluator in October 2011.

**Progression of the Evaluation Plan**

As 2011 came to a close and 2012 began, the funders and program staff realized that ECC was performing beyond everyone’s expectations. The ETF executive director said, “We blew every prediction out of the water. Back then, we thought if we got two hundred families the first year it would be a great year. We made over fifteen hundred [referrals] . . . it was unbelievable.”

At this point, the funders were “really excited” about the program and the possibilities it held for the local children and the community. However, the rapid success of the ECC program caused some frustration and confusions. It was not clear to all the funders and the program staff about what was going on in the program and the necessary
next steps. A meeting was requested to bring the funders and the program staff together, so everyone could “hammer through questions and concerns at the same table, so that everyone would get the same answer.” One interviewee recalled it was more dire circumstances that brought everyone together. “People quickly began to see that this thing [the program] could die because everybody wanted to go different places. They realized that if we didn’t start fleshing it out and working together and how we were going to measure it, it was going to die.”

In March 2012, the funders and the program staff came together to discuss the project. One interviewee recalls, “We had no expectations that there would be any continued meetings. At the end of that one [the March 2012 meeting], there was so much excitement, then [the funders said,] “Let’s do four a year.”

In April 2012, the funders came together again. For this second meeting they invited the external evaluator to attend. At that meeting, it was decided there needed to be more focus on the evaluation of the project. An evaluation subgroup was formed.

The first evaluation subgroup meeting took place in May 2012. At the first meeting 12 people, representing the funders, the program staff, and the evaluators were present. As the meetings continued throughout the year, the number of people attending the subgroup meetings was around six or seven, again representing the funders, the program staff, and the evaluators.

The first meeting focused on evaluation and tasks related to evaluation of the project. The committee discussed defining outcomes, outputs, and success; what type of data can and should be tracked; the pros and cons of using available databases; other
ways to show impact data besides reports, such as maps; developing a logic model; available resources related to early childhood and evaluation and effective ways to share those resources in the group.

They investigated how to record data and the possibility of utilizing a database already in use by the local intermediate school district. They discussed the Early Childhood Connections Data Dashboard. The data dashboard is a tool used to report descriptive data about the program to stakeholders. Data about demographics, Welcome Baby Baskets, home visits, and toddler playgroups are included in the Dashboard. They also discussed developing maps showing the areas of highest need and how the program is reaching those areas, through toddler playgroups, Welcome Baby Baskets, and home visits.

The major goals of the subgroup were to come back to the full committee with recommendations on shared measures, a logic model, and an evaluation plan. This was a time-intensive process requiring much thought and expertise. The group would meet and talk through the operationalization of each measure, what was feasible, and what could be collected within the time frame.

The basis for the conversations stemmed from a template one of the funders developed to evaluate their projects. The template was not in use at the foundation; the ECC group was piloting the template. The template aimed to look at the outcomes of a project across an entire community. Because of this, measures of education, health, and financial stability were taken into account. The template was very general, however, so the subcommittee went through all of the outcomes on the template and used the ones
they felt the ECC project was most likely to impact. Once those outcomes were chosen, the committee worked to further define them and put measures and timelines to them.

As the group looked at the outcomes on the template, they also kept in mind what type of data they were already collecting and what data were easily available. Having the program staff represented in the subcommittee helped with that task. The committee also made comments on the template and shared them with the developer of the template to help the funder revise their document.

The outcomes listed on the original template were revised as a result of the subcommittee’s work. Some new outcomes were added and some original outcomes were not used, either because they were not pertinent to the project or because data could not be collected. Because the template was developed by only one funder and based on the work and needs of that organization, the subgroup also had to make sure the other two funders’ needs were met. The subgroup had to adapt the template and make sure everyone agreed on it. They also had to agree the data that were collected could benefit all of the funders.

After each evaluation subgroup meeting, the external evaluator took the notes from the meeting and updated the measures based on the subgroup’s conversations. Between meetings, the external evaluator would also contact the other group members to ask questions. These conversations and the revised document led to the development of shared measures and, eventually, the evaluation plan. The committee members felt the conversations that led to the final document were very important to have; they helped the
After the group came to consensus, the evaluation plan and logic model were shared with the larger Funders’ Group. The larger group gave feedback on the draft document, then the subcommittee finalized the document based on their comments. The final document was approved in August 2012.

ECC requires significant financial backing from the three grant-making organizations. Because of the financial investment, as well as the funders’ interest in improving the program as needed, the funders were attentive to the evaluation of the program. All three of the funding organizations already had evaluation reports and processes in place for their other independent grants. These evaluations varied in length, required level of detail and data, and time period. Sometimes the evaluation reports contradicted each other. However, because of the collaborative nature of ECC, a different type of evaluation was required.

**Common Evaluation Expectations Resulting from the Collaboration**

There was not a clear consensus on the common evaluation expectations that were developed. Some of the interviewees were not able to identify any of the common evaluation expectations; some interviewees responded with some measures, but felt that the Funders’ Group had not come to a final consensus on evaluation measures. As the program evolved and changed, they felt the measures of success also changed.

The document review of the logic model and evaluation report revealed common measures. Some of the common measures developed were:
• Defining “vulnerable”—based on single parent household, poverty, and minority status

• Defining geographic area served by the program

• Number of children served

• Number and location of Welcome Baby Baskets delivered

• Number and location of home visits

• Number and location of toddler playgroups

• Number of preschool scholarships

• Number served through Imagination Library

• Number of people obtaining a car seat

• Number of referrals to the program

• Number of teachers who have gone through HighScope training

• Percentage of the general population being reached

• Family ethnicity

• Pre/post survey results from participants in the HighScope training

• Results from the Program Quality Assessment (PQA)—Participant knowledge about factors related to teaching young children, like problem solving approach to conflict, adult/child interaction strategies, and parent involvement, physical environment, adult-child interactions, staff relationships, children’s attitudes and behaviors, and parent’s attitudes and behaviors

• Results from the ASQ

• Results from the parenting skills assessment

• Extent of HighScope implementation

• Extent of trained teachers sharing knowledge with others

• Changes in behavior of teachers, students, and parents’ attitudes/behaviors as observed by administrators
Another set of outcomes was also developed by the subgroup, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

**Defined Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Successes Outcomes</th>
<th>Parent Child Bonding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More (%) vulnerable parents knowledgeable about early childhood development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More (%) vulnerable parents practicing effective parenting behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stronger, healthier parent/child attachment bonds.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stable and Safe Homes**

- More (%) vulnerable children attending school (pre K) regularly.

**Succeeding Younger Children**

- More (%) vulnerable children demonstrating a positive educational trajectory.
- More (%) vulnerable children meeting all whole-child developmental benchmarks.

**Connected Families**

- More (%) vulnerable families enrolling children on time in quality education settings.

**Empowered Families**

- More (%) vulnerable parents advocate for their children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place-Based Outcomes</th>
<th>Authentic Family Voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong family partnerships—Authentic family involvement and decision-making within informal care and early education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Learning and Innovation**

- Shared learning—Critical organizations and funders gather and analyze data to learn from prior efforts and identify future activities.
- Integrated child data systems—Information linked across health, home, childcare, preschool, and school.
- Effective use of disaggregated data—Schools, administrators, teachers, and Pre-K teachers using disaggregated data to adjust practices and policies and use progress monitoring that support a whole child approach.

**Ready Community**

- Public will and community support for goals—More (%) community members (including business sector and community based organizations) understand and want vulnerable children to have quality early education experiences.
Measurements for these outcomes were as follows:

- Number of organizations using the Common Application
- Number and type of connections with current partners
- Number and type of connections with new partners
- Annual social network analysis and/or eco-mapping
- Pre-/post-survey related to HighScope training assessing understanding and implementation of strategies
- Child care coach observations of implementation of HighScope
- TQRIS scores, including Program Quality Assessment (PQA), of early childhood settings
- Number and demographics of children enrolled in quality early childhood settings
- Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) scores
- HighScope Child Observation Record (COR) scores
- Home visitor observations
- Preschool observations
- Ask Calhoun survey
- Number of ECC-funder meetings
- Minutes from ECC-funder meetings
- Progress of integration and use of Common Application, Early Childhood Data System, and Data Director
- Number of professional development opportunities on early childhood data use
- MLPP scores
- EDI/TECCS data
- Number and type of donations of time and resources for early childhood programs
- Number and type of connections with current partners
- Number and type of connections with new partners
- Annual social network analysis and/or eco-mapping

The data show a number of outcomes and measures were developed and decided on by the subgroup as common evaluation measures and expectations for the project.

**Linking the Data to the Propositions**

Six propositions were developed for this study after a review of the literature. The purpose of the propositions is to guide the case study researcher as to where look for evidence (Yin, 2009). Because of the amount of data collected in a qualitative case study, the propositions guide and frame the data collection. The following propositions were developed for this study:

1. The common evaluation requirements came about because of the collaboration among the organizations.
2. The funders developed common evaluation requirements because they provide a mutual benefit to the grantees and funders.
3. Common evaluation requirements benefit the grantee by reducing the burden of collecting and reporting data.
4. Common evaluation requirements benefit the funders by allowing the partners to collect common data, therefore allowing analysis of data across funders.
5. The funders developed common evaluation requirements by having open, regular dialogue, keeping the goals of the project in mind, showing results
during the pilot year of the grants, and having additional funding available for subsequent years.

6. The context the organizations operate within (their mission statements, staffing levels, funding levels, etc.) influenced the collaboration.

**Proposition 1: The Common Evaluation Requirements Came About Because of the Collaboration Among the Organizations**

Of all of the data collection methods, the interviews were the source for the most information as to why the common evaluation measurements were developed. The document review and observations were also included to triangulate the data, as appropriate.

One of the interview questions asked to all interviewees was, “Why did the Funders’ Group develop common evaluation requirements for the grantees for the program?” In response to this question, the interviewees identified many purposes of the common evaluation requirements. The purposes articulated by the interviewees for developing the evaluation requirements were coded and 10 major themes emerged. The themes, in order from most to least cited, are provided in Table 5. Following each purpose is the number of times this purpose was given in all the interview responses. Some interviewees identified more than one reason, which is why the sum of the responses is greater than 12.
### Table 5

**Purposes of the Common Evaluation Requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gives an opportunity to improve outcomes as the program progresses</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To develop a common language/vocabulary among partners</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To be more effective in the work of the project</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. To see the common goals of all partners</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To develop one report for all three funders</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. To simplify communication</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Because the funders want to work together</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Because the amount of funding was a substantial investment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. To create a meaningful evaluation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. To think creatively</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proposition 1 surmises the common evaluation requirements came about because of the collaboration among the organizations. Four of the reasons identified by the Funders’ Group are directly related to the collaboration: Purpose 2 (To develop a common language/vocabulary among partners); Purpose 4 (To see the common goals of all partners); Purpose 5 (To develop one report for all funders); and Purpose 7 (Because the funders want to work together). These items also have some of the highest number of responses: 6 responses for Purpose 2; 4 responses for Purpose 4; 3 responses for Purpose 5; and 3 responses for Purpose 7.
One of the items, Purpose 6 (To simplify communication) is indirectly related to the collaboration. Communication is an essential piece of any project and would be required whether or not the collaboration existed. However, the interviewees that mentioned this purpose were speaking to the idea that, because of the collaboration, there were more organizations involved than there would be in a more typical grant-funded project, so it became imperative that communication was clear for all parties.

The remaining reasons for developing common evaluation requirements are related to the purpose of program evaluation (to determine the merit or worth of a program), or related to high-quality program management and evaluation practice. The five remaining reasons are: Purpose 1 (Gives an opportunity to improve outcomes as the program progresses); Purpose 3 (To be more effective in the work of the project); Purpose 8 (Because the amount of funding was a substantial investment); Purpose 9 (To create a meaningful evaluation); and Purpose 10 (To think creatively). The three last reasons (Purpose 8, 9, and 10) were identified by only one or two respondents. These were the least identified reasons why common evaluation expectations were developed.

In all, 5 of the 10 reasons identified by the Funders’ Group as to why they developed common evaluation requirements were a direct result of the collaboration. The common evaluation requirements were developed because of the collaboration, as well as because it was identified as best practice for the program and evaluation.
Proposition 2: The Funders Developed Common Evaluation Requirements Because They Provide a Mutual Benefit to the Grantees and Funders

The interviewees and document review provided substantial information about this proposition. The data from the interviews and document review were triangulated to develop the response to the proposition.

Who Developed the Common Evaluation Requirements?

The interviewees revealed an immediate misconception related to this proposition; the funders were not solely responsible for the common evaluation requirements. Instead, the interviewees described the process of developing the common evaluation requirements as an iterative process between a subgroup of the Funders’ Group. The subgroup was made up of approximately six people from the Funders’ Group. These six people represented the evaluators, the program staff, and one funder. The subgroup came together approximately four or five times during the first year of implementation of the project, once a month, to develop the evaluation plan, a logic model, and the common evaluation requirements. They would discuss data that were available, the types of data they would like to collect, and the feasibility of data collection. They also discussed and developed a logic model of the program. It was estimated by the interviewees involved in the subgroup that the subgroup spent between 12 to 15 hours meeting as a subgroup, and the evaluator spent an additional 25 to 30 hours developing the documents and logic models related to the subgroup’s discussions. Much of the evaluator’s work was done after the subgroup meetings would take place. For example, while working on the logic model, the evaluator would synthesize the
comments from the subgroup’s meetings, work them into the logic model, and email the subgroup an updated version of the logic model based on their conversation. Some of the discussion took place via email, not just during face-to-face meetings.

After each meeting, the external evaluator would use the subgroup’s discussion comments to create or update documents to reflect the group’s most recent thinking. These documents would be shared with the entire Funders’ Group and discussed during their monthly meetings. One interviewee described the process like this:

[The process was] a lot of discussion back and forth. Oftentimes, it was just . . . conversation and throwing some stuff out there, “Does this make sense? Do you think you could collect this information?” “Yes, we can collect this information,” from the program. “No, we can’t,” from the funders. We had those conversations with the program staff in the room most of the time. They weren’t . . . special funder conversations.

When the subgroup reported back to the entire Funders’ Group, the conversation was not directed or dominated by any one organization. Each organization brought different strengths to the group, and those strengths were honored by the entire Funders’ Group. One interviewee recalled,

Some of the funders in the room brought a level of expert knowledge to the table, really around systems and around this type of work, especially in the early childhood stage, as well as some of the best practice ideas, and so did some of the program leadership. But then it was more fairly collective sitting down and saying, “Okay, so everybody’s got some ideas coming to the table, and now let’s talk about that and what makes the most sense. And then let’s test it and see if it doesn’t make sense. And if it doesn’t then let’s come back to the table and develop what does.”

Although the funders did not solely develop the evaluation requirements, it was clear from the interviews that the interests of the funders guided the process. The funders had to report back to their organization’s board of directors as to the impact their funding
was having. Some boards were expecting specific types of information to be reported back to them, which the funders made clear to the Funders’ Group. These organizational requirements shaped the common evaluation requirements. One funder described it this way:

What we need, in terms of making grants, or what we’re accountable for to our trustees [is to answer the questions] “So what are you doing with the money, and is it having an impact?” So what difference is the investment making? . . . that’s the type of information I need back. So what have been the outcomes? Not just the outputs. It’s great to know that . . . you gave out three hundred Welcome Home Baby Baskets. Great, but beyond that, how is the program having an impact on the community?

The funders’ board requirements shaped the common evaluation requirements.

The staff of the funders sitting at the Funders’ Group meetings not only represented their organization, but also their organization’s board of directors.

**Why Were Common Evaluation Expectations Developed?**

The second part of the proposition gets at why the common evaluation expectations were developed and assumes the reason was because they provided mutual benefit to the funders and the program. None of the interviewees talked about any mutual benefits to the organizations in the Funders’ Group. Some interviewees discussed the benefit from the point of view of the grantee or the funder, but the interviewees did not discuss any mutual benefits.

The benefits of and reasons behind the common evaluation expectations were discussed in length during the interviews. Interviewees were asked why the Funders’ Group developed common evaluation expectations. The most common reason the
interviewees gave as to why they developed standardized evaluation requirements was they provided more opportunities to improve outcomes as the program progressed.

Learning about the program as it progressed and having the ability to make changes along the way was seen as a major benefit of developing the common evaluation expectations. The funders, especially, appreciated having data and information as the program progressed. One interviewee said the common evaluation expectations embedded the knowledge and makes it more than just a program doing good things, but it makes it very focused on learning. What are we learning along the way that’s working or maybe not working? There can be recalibration and there can be innovation. It creates a better understanding of what the community conditions are, how the work is either positively or isn’t impacting in a good direction, and how can that the innovation and the learning be applied so the process moves forward.

Because many of the standardized evaluation requirements were shared as monthly “Dashboards” to the Funders’ Group, at each monthly meeting the Funders’ Group got a consistent snapshot of how the program was progressing. The Dashboards included outcome measures that the group had previously determined they all had a common interest in, such as number of people served. The monthly Dashboards reported the same data each month, except when the group decided there was another important data point that should be collected, resulting in more outcome measures being added.

The monthly Dashboards and resulting conversations kept the outputs of the program in focus and constant for the participants of the Funders’ Group meetings. Because of this, they were able to “course correct” much more quickly than if they were given this information at the midpoint or end of the program. Interviewees commented they appreciated the monthly updates and the opportunity to review consistent data on a
regular basis and make program changes, when necessary. When asked why the group
developed common evaluation expectations, one interviewee responded,

I think for consistency’s sake. And I think [common evaluation expectations] will lend themselves to making better decisions in the future, because of that consistency. With consistent data, you can determine what the needs are, what the weaknesses of the program we’re providing, to be able to make change if necessary.

The data collected in this study revealed additional reasons why common
evaluation requirements were developed. The second most common reason interviewees
gave as to why they developed common evaluation requirements was so that the funders,
program staff, evaluators, and facilitator could all share a common language and
vocabulary. Although no one explicitly stated that a common vocabulary among the
Funders’ Group was a shared benefit of the common evaluation expectations, feelings
similar to this were shared in the interviews. One interviewee said, “What we found was
we need to be using that same language, and I think that’s quite often what would get us
into trouble. We all thought that we were speaking the same language but we weren’t
speaking the same language.”

One of the interviewees specified the importance of sharing common vocabulary
around evaluation and said,

I think that, as a community . . . what we found was something that was universal
that we don’t speak the same language when it comes to evaluation. When you
say “goal,” what does “goal” mean? When you say “objective,” what is
“objective”? When you say “activity,” what is “activity”?

Another interviewee said, “Maybe we [the funders] are part of the problem. If
we’re all asking all these different questions, how are we expecting to understand what’s
going on? So let’s get on the same page.” The same interviewee went on to reiterate the
importance of having all of the funders understand what is going on in the program and with the data by saying, “You guys [the funders] are all using the same data but interpreting it differently. You need to have some commonality.”

Creating common evaluation requirements not only allowed the participants to agree on standardized measures, but also opened the door to have conversations around evaluation and measurement. Coming from different content areas (philanthropy, education, and evaluation) meant that words held different connotations and meanings. One interviewee felt all of the conversations around evaluation resulted in the evaluators teaching the funders and program staff a class on evaluation. They learned about the basics of evaluation, including logic models, the difference between outcomes and outputs, and data collection and reporting. Because all of the partners were coming into the program with a different level of evaluation knowledge, they appreciated the time the evaluators took to discuss evaluation and “get everyone on the same page.” It was easier for the program staff to report back to the funders because they spoke a common language.

Another benefit of common evaluation expectations, as identified in the data, was that standardizing the evaluation expectations made the group more efficient in their work. The common language made the Funders’ Group meetings more efficient, as they did not have to spend time discussing definitions of outcomes or other evaluation-related objectives and could, instead, move the conversation forward.

The common evaluation expectations also allowed the group to see their common goals. One interviewee said common evaluation expectations
eliminates confusion on the part of those that are providing the services. They
don’t have to say, “Okay, so what hoops do I need to jump through?” They
recognize that we’re all in some way, shape, or form, looking for the same type of
results, the same type of information to be passed along, captured. At least it
creates a sense of consistency within the funders, yes, but certainly between the
program providers and the funders as well if we’re all on the same page.

The common evaluation expectations made the funders feel like they were no
longer doing the work of the program in isolation. They were able to come back to their
boards and refer to the program and funders as “we,” instead of “I.” Funders also said
that it was beneficial to their boards knowing that the other funders’ boards were also
seeing the same data.

**Proposition 3: Common Evaluation Requirements Benefit the Grantee
by Reducing the Burden of Collecting and Reporting Data**

Most foundations or grant-making foundations require an evaluation report as a
condition of funding (Buteau & Chu, 2011; Carman, 2009; Kramer et al., 2007; Patrizi &
McMullan, 1998). One goal of common evaluation requirements is to reduce the data
collection and reporting burden on program staff. The interview responses suggest that
developing standardized measures would allow for the program staff to be more efficient
and effective in their work.

Although the Funders’ Group had developed common evaluation measures, they
had not come to consensus on a common year-end evaluation report. Each funder was
still asking the program staff to complete their own organization’s evaluation report. The
funders each have different fiscal years, meaning that the year-end evaluation reports
were due at different points in the calendar year. The differing timelines created
additional work for the program staff.
One issue described by the program staff was the least detailed report was due first and the most detailed report was due last in the calendar year. The program staff felt this created a problem because if the most detailed report was due first, then they could use the answers they wrote in the detailed report in the less rigorous reports. They could “pick and choose” the data from the rigorous report which matched the questions in the other two reports. Because the least detailed report was due first, they were constantly writing reports to build up to the most detailed report.

An additional burden identified by the program staff was that each report asked different questions. Therefore, the program staff could not use information from one report to the next. And, even if the reports asked common questions, such as how many people were served, because the reports were on different timelines, the report answers could not be used from one report to the next. For example, if one report was due in April, the number of people served would be different than for the report due in October.

In conclusion, the interviewees revealed that they realized that having three different evaluation reports and set of outcome measures created more work for the program staff. The program staff also commented on the amount of work that was required to keep up with all of the different reports. The program staff was hopeful that the next step would be one report that all of the funders’ boards would accept. A common report would be a better use of the program staff’s time.
Proposition 4: Common Evaluation Requirements Benefit the Funders by Allowing the Partners to Collect Common Data, Therefore Allowing Analysis of Data Across Funders

Data were analyzed by the external evaluator for the ECC Funders’ Group. Funder and program staff interviewees talked about the data analysis in terms of reports. To the interviewees, “analysis of data across funders” consisted of the ECC Funders’ Group receiving a monthly Dashboard or other evaluation reports, like the year-end reports. The Dashboard reports would show data like the number of families served, the number of Welcome Baby Baskets delivered, and the geographic regions of the program. The year-end report contained more detailed data analysis, including:

- social network analysis;
- an eco map which “evaluates the design and implementation of collaborative efforts” (Tackett & Passatta, 2012);
- various maps analyzing data such as the locations of the Welcome Baby Basket deliveries vs. the Playgroup Locations;
- data about the 3-year-old preschool scholarship program, such as number of applications received, number of scholarship recipients by race;
- results of a pre-survey of HighScope training participants;
- interviews about the implementation of the HighScope training;
- interviews with community members about their perceptions of early childhood education in the Battle Creek area;
- home visit and playgroup interviews.

This proposition talks about one of the possible outcomes of common evaluation measures: the ability to collect common data and analyze the data across funders. For the ECC Funders’ Group, the analysis of data, displayed in the Dashboards and evaluation
reports, was used to show the success and setbacks of the program. They felt the data showed the effect the funding and resulting program had on the community. The funders were pleased to have data to submit to their boards that showed the funding was successfully benefitting the community. The funders were also pleased that the boards of the directors in the other grant-making organizations were looking at the same information.

**Proposition 5: The Funders Developed Common Evaluation Requirements by Having Open, Regular Dialogue, Keeping the Goals of the Project in Mind, Showing Results During the Pilot Year of the Grants, and Having Additional Funding Available for Subsequent Years**

Two of the interview questions directly asked the interviewees about the process used to develop common evaluation expectations: “How did the Funders’ Group develop common evaluation requirements for the program?” and “Describe the process the Funders’ Group went through to come to those common evaluation requirements.”

The responses can be divided into two main categories: comments about the logistics or process, and comments about the relationships that were built or cultivated. I discuss each category below.

**Logistics/Process**

The comments about the process gave insight to the components necessary to develop common evaluation measures. These responses were steps to the process that could potentially be replicated by another group. These comments were identified as the steps the Funders’ Group took to successfully come to common evaluation measures.
Table 6 shows the necessary components of the process to develop common evaluation expectations identified by the interviewees.

Table 6

*Components of the Process Used to Develop Common Evaluation Expectations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Discussion</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Introduced by funders</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Evaluator asking questions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Everyone educated about data collection/evaluation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Ask questions openly</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Timeline</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Introduced by program</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Developed concurrently with the program</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Understand what is being collected and why</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Outside facilitator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The process the group underwent to develop the common evaluation measures and the corresponding components identified by the interviewees can be grouped into five main categories: (1) communication, (2) evaluator’s presence, (3) evaluation education and understanding, (4) origin of the evaluation measures, and (5) timing.

**Communication.** The most common response as to how the evaluation measures were developed was through discussion and communication. This response is consistent with Proposition 5 and the collaboration literature. Items 1 (Discussion) and 3 (Evaluator asking questions) in Table 6 are related to communication among the partners.
Interviewees reported the evaluation expectations were developed over many meetings and many discussions.

Regular discussion and meetings among the Funders’ Group members was seen as a key ingredient in developing common evaluation expectations. Interviewees described the discussion as having “a lot of dialogue back and forth,” “bringing ideas to the table,” a “roundtable of conversations,” and “a lot of meetings.” Having regularly scheduled meetings was also important. At the beginning of the project, the group met monthly; as the project progressed, they met quarterly. Coordinating the schedules of 10 very busy, upper-level management staff was no easy feat. However, the Funders’ Group say they were able to consistently meet because they knew this program and the resulting data were important to their organizations and the community.

Evaluator’s presence. Having the evaluator at the table at the onset of the project was a valuable resource for many of the respondents. Note that the evaluator was hired the same date the project officially began. They felt that her presence from the beginning helped to bring evaluation to the forefront of their discussions. The external evaluator truly was a part of the program for the very beginning, which may have contributed to the evaluation’s success. The interviewees also described the importance of having the evaluators continue to be involved through the project. The evaluator’s presence was consistent throughout the project, which, they felt, has positively benefited the group and the evaluation expectations.

It was not just the presence of the evaluator, but the ability of the evaluator to ask probing questions related to the program and outcome/output measures that made a
difference for the interviewees. One interviewee describe the communication with the evaluator like this:

    The evaluators that we have as a part of this project really help to co-develop the conversation between the funders, the programming staff, as well as the evaluator to say, consistently, “Is what we’re measuring more than just outputs?” Is it truly getting towards outcomes, and, again, what are some of those leading indicators that ultimately lead to what our goals are at the end?

**Evaluation education and understanding.** Another factor necessary in developing the evaluation expectations was the Funders’ Group needed to have evaluation education and understanding. This was represented in Items 4 (Everyone educated about data collection/evaluation) and 9 (Understand what is being collected and why) in Table 6.

    One interviewee described the initial evaluation knowledge of the group as “mediocre,” although the interview data indicated that the program staff were less comfortable with evaluation than the funders. The program staff, who were educational professionals, had less experience with evaluation; the funders, however, were accustomed to evaluation because of their grant-making experience.

    Examples of the program staff’s uneasiness with evaluation are indicated in their interview comments. One educator responded, “We’re coming out of an era where ‘Feel good’ was about all that you got: ‘Oh, I think this is going really well.’ So bringing people up to speed. . . . We can collect a lot of numbers, but what do those numbers mean? That takes a while.”

    Another educator said,

    I think it was not . . . realistic that funders . . . are expecting evaluations from people that don’t know anything about evaluation. And, so there’s that disconnect
in between. If you’re trained in early childhood, you’re not trained in outcomes. You’re good at working with families and kids, but you don’t know the other. I’m not saying it’s right. I’m just saying that that’s the reality. A good question to ask [the funders is] if any of this changed some of their practices. If it gave them a little bit of a reality check, that the people on the ground didn’t have the skills to be able to do this job well.

Another important theme about data relating to the development of the common evaluation expectations was the need to understand what is being collected and why. For some of the educators in the group, knowing what was being collected and why was the first step to understanding the evaluation process. Understanding this part of the evaluation process required having a clear understanding of the types of data that were needed and/or available from each organization. The conversations around data were an important part of the evaluation education process.

**Origins of evaluation requirements.** When asked how the evaluation requirements were developed, some of the interviewees talked about the origin of the evaluation requirements. They discussed which organizations they felt either led the discussions around evaluation or brought up their measures as a starting point for the discussion. Interesting, there was not consensus on which organizations led the evaluation discussions. As Table 6 shows, eight of the respondents felt it was the funders that led the discussions around evaluation (Item 2), while three respondents felt it was the program staff (Item 7). Two respondents felt the evaluation expectations were developed concurrently with the program (Item 8), and one respondent felt it was the presence of an external facilitator that helped the process (Item 10).

The respondents who said the evaluation discussions originated with the funders gave examples of the funders need for certain information to report back to their board of
trustees, or using pre-existing evaluation reports. As discussed above, the funders have certain requirements their board of directors are looking for, so those requirements often drove the evaluation conversations.

The respondents who felt the evaluation discussion originated with the program described it as, the programming staff approaching the Funders’ Group and saying, “This is what we’re measuring. What do you think of this, funders?”

Two of the respondents felt the evaluation measures were developed simultaneously with the project and there was not a push from any one organization and one felt that the presence of an external facilitator helped the process. The external facilitator was able to help push the group to think differently or work through times of conflict or difficulty.

**Timeline.** The last thematic category related to the process of developing common evaluation expectations has to do with the timeline of the project. Knowing there was a long-term commitment from the funders aided in developing the common evaluation expectations. Because of the long-term commitment, the Funders’ Group could build long-term relationships among the partnering organizations. One respondent tried to quantify the time to develop the common evaluation expectations and thought it had taken between 12 and 18 months.

Many of the respondents felt that the development of common evaluation expectations was an ongoing process and the group had not completed the task. One person said,
In about another year, you could probably come back and get more of a concrete response . . . this is how we see the pathway being laid out, and these are the benchmarks that we’re hoping to see happen as it relates to this program’s work.

Part of the issue related to the ongoing nature of developing the common evaluation expectations, is that the program is still evolving, both for the funders and the program staff. The group is still developing their shared strategy around the program as a whole. As the program is further developed, the common evaluation requirements continue to be developed.

**Relationships**

The comments about the relationships among the group members are more site-specific and could be more difficult to replicate. This was a sentiment echoed by the interviewees; many felt part of the success of the group came from the particular personalities of the people around the table and the cultures of the organizations they represented. Replicating the relationships developed among the partners would be more difficult in a different situation.

The comments about the *relationships* that were built or cultivated are another important component of developing common evaluation expectation. Table 7 shows the relationship factors that were identified by the participants as a necessary aspect in developing the common evaluation measures.
Table 7

*Relationship Factors Identified as Necessary to Developing Common Evaluation Measures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships Factors</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Trust</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Leadership</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Reducing fear and anxiety</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Open discussion</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trust.** Over half of the respondents identified trust as one of the components necessary when developing common evaluation expectations. One respondent felt that before the group could move forward, “we had to start trusting one another.”

Trust was a theme that impacted many facets of the program. The funders who are working together have to trust each other. One funder described it as trusting that all funders “saw things from the same perspective.” Because of the differences of size, mission, and funding levels, the funders were not on equal fields. Coming together and working towards a common goal, with their differences, required a new level of trust in other organizations the funders usually did not have to deal with.

The funders also had to trust the program staff. The funders trusted the program staff’s experience and knowledge about the program and their ability to use best practices. One funder said,

I think in the space where you have the evaluators, and you have those providing program services in the room with your funders, there has to be trust there in order for there to be a richness and a consistency of open dialogue, that you don’t have to hide things. As matter of fact, you probably shouldn’t. We want this to be a process that is as much about learning as anything else, so we as funders don’t
come in heavy-handed and, certainly, dictate “This is what needs to go on,” and all the sudden just create unrealistic expectations that aren’t necessarily consistent amongst all of us as funders. But certainly say, “Look, what we want to do as best as we possibly can is continue to work with you in the actual ongoing development of this program,” which includes all aspects, but the only way we can do that is if we’re all saying the same thing. I think that trust is a big factor.

The program staff had to trust the funders and their commitment to the project, especially when the conversations became tense. The program staff had to trust the funders would not back out if the situations became difficult, that the funders were willing and able to support the program staff through any rough patches. One staff person from the educational organization described the trust like this:

[The partnership needed a] long-term commitment and relationship with whoever your provider is and whoever is your service delivery agent. Because it’s going to get uncomfortable, and, if the person delivering the service gets scared that their funder is going to pull out, if they hear something they don’t want to hear, they’re not going to tell the truth, so there needs to be that reassurance that it’s going to be okay. “We’re in this for the long haul.” So there needs to be some really strong, solid norms within that room. It can’t be political. It’s got to be really strong relationships.

One example of distrust that came up in the data was when people discussed the project or made decisions in settings outside of the Funders’ Group meetings. These activities were seen as a way to break trust. One interviewee described it as people having a “hidden agenda.” In the early stages of the project, group members would hear from colleagues about things that were going on in the project without their knowledge or decisions were made without all partners consent. This practice was disconcerting to the group and was able to be stopped early on in the project through dialogue and staff changes.
**Open discussion.** Having regular, open discussions was one of the ways the group participants were able to learn to trust each other. This included having all of the discussions happen at the Funders’ Group meetings and not having a smaller faction meet and discuss without the large group. Open discussion also meant that the differences among the funders, especially around the size of their grants, were brought to the forefront and discussed. The funders made it clear the different grant amounts did not dictate who led the group or the discussion; however, this fact needed to be explicitly stated and practiced.

One of the funders describe the open discussion among the group like this:

There has been really significant value in the fact that all the people sitting around the table have relationships that are fairly positive and trusted with each other, so people can speak fairly openly. They can talk out loud and work through a scenario. We have those kind of relationships that allow for that to happen. We couldn’t just plant this somewhere in the community and hope that this would work. It’s all about the relationships first and foremost.

**Leadership.** Leadership was another important theme in the data. The leadership of the group changed from the beginning of the project to the time the interviews took place. The reassignment and retirement of staff changed the dynamics of the group and overall leadership. Because these changes took place during the project, the interviewees were able to reflect on the differences in leadership and the impact that each type of leader had on the group as a whole. One interviewee said, “You know I think it’s so important to . . . realize how leadership plays such a role. Leaders can be transparent or leaders can be very manipulative, and they will affect how people work together, like it or not.”
The interviewees identified different people as leaders, as well as different styles of leadership in the project. Some interviewees identified the external facilitator as a leader, in that she would develop meeting agendas, aid in scheduling meetings, and push the group to think differently. Some of the interviewees thought the funders would be the leaders, but learned that the funders did not want to “run the show” and would put the impetus back on the group. The most common answer about the type of leadership in the group was “shared leadership.” Most of the interviewees did not identify one person or group as a leader. They felt the group, as a whole, held the leadership positions.

**Reducing fear and anxiety.** Reducing fear and anxiety in the group was identified as an important aspect of developing common evaluation measures. This was done through discussion and building of trust. When staff changes occurred in some of the participating organizations and some members left the Funders’ Group, some interviewees also reported feeling less anxiety during the meetings. The interviewees felt some of the participants dominated meetings, which made the other participants angry. However, the change of staff seemed to relieve some of that tension. One funder reported,

> Sometimes personalities, sometimes organizational leadership, positional leadership can create dysfunction in a big collaborative, and we’ve tried really hard. In fact, we’ve had to say it a few times and say, “Now, remember why we’re here. We’re here for the kids in this community.” And so our personality differences or our conflicts that we have organization to organization have to be resolved quickly, so we can focus on the intent.
Keeping the Goals of the Project in Mind

One of the phrases in the Proposition states, “The funders developed common evaluation requirements by . . . keeping the goals of the project in mind.” Thinking about the end goals of the project was one of the least mentioned items in the interviews and the document review. The goals of the project were mentioned once by an interviewee when asked about the process the group went through to develop the common evaluation expectations and mentioned again by different people when asked about the critical pieces and the facilitating factors of the evaluation collaboration.

The meeting notes from the document review showed that two of the questions discussed at a meeting in May 2012, which was a year and half after the program was launched, were related to the goals of the project. The group discussed, “What is ‘our’ program?” and “What are the overall collective impact related outcomes?”

Showing Results During the Pilot Year of the Grant

The propositions purports, “The funders developed common evaluation requirements by . . . showing results during the pilot year of the grant.” The interviewees did not talk about showing results during the pilot years. Instead, they were more focused on collecting meaningful data to share with their boards. The interviewees talked about the importance of results when discussing the factors necessary for the collaboration to be sustained. Five of the 12 interviewees specifically said that the program would need to show performance to continue. One interviewee said that in order for the collaboration to continue, it would require
first and foremost, success . . . [To] really be able to see tangible evidence. What the success is, what the impact is. Because I think if people can really see this is actually getting towards [the goal] and driving towards the ultimate outcomes that, by default, really keeps people motivated to stay together and stay connected.

Showing performance or success was also an important aspect of keeping people motivated. Other interviewees also talked about the importance of success as a motivator. One described it was “small wins” for the group and “experiencing success together.” One said, “Identifying small wins makes them [the Funders’ Group] feel like they have a chance.” In conclusion, recognizing success was not identified as clearly by interviewees as a way to develop common evaluation expectations, but instead was a way to continue the collaboration and keep the group motivated.

**Additional Funding Available for Subsequent Years**

The last phrase in Proposition states, “The funders developed common evaluation requirements by . . . having additional funding available for subsequent years.” Interestingly, the funding issue never came up as a part of the development of common evaluation expectations. The interviewees talked about the importance of funding as a requirement for the collaboration to be sustained and as a facilitating factor of the collaboration. The funding was seen as an integral piece of the collaboration but not for the evaluation measures.
Proposition 6: The Context the Organizations Operate Within
(Their Mission Statements, Staffing Levels, Funding Levels, etc.) Influenced the Collaboration

The ability to replicate successful programs is often a goal of funders. If the program proves to be successful in one community, then maybe it could be developed and shared with others. However, there are often contextual factors that make it challenging to duplicate the program from one community to the next. Those factors include the mission statements of the organizations running the program, staffing, funding, and leadership. This proposition assumes the contextual factors influenced the collaboration.

The interviews and document review revealed more information about this proposition. One of the interview questions asked, “What are the organizational contextual factors influencing the evaluation collaboration of the program?” Table 8 shows the themes resulting from this question.

Buy-in From Stakeholders

The buy-in from the stakeholders was reported as a contextual factor contributing to the success of the program mentioned by 10 of the interviewees. The stakeholders identified by the interviewees were the recipients of the services/the community, the participating school districts, and the funders.
Many of the interviewees felt the program partners, funders, and community were overwhelmingly supportive of this program, which they deemed unusual. The program partnered with local school districts; it was reported in the interviews that the school districts supported the program by releasing program staff involved in ECC for meetings, events, and activities. Additionally, the staff assigned to the program were dedicated, well regarded employees. The interviewees felt that finding the same caliber of staff with similar flexibility would be difficult to replicate.

Some of the interviewees felt the buy-in from the community was a contextual factor. One said,
I think you’ve got to understand really the rhythm of really where your community is. Is your community a place of readiness for something like this? If you’re in a community where it’s pretty closed off and people don’t connect, it’s hard to do a family visiting program. If people are like, “Yeah, we don’t want that. We don’t want people in our homes.”

Another said, “The community sees if the program is targeted and intentional. They recognize that. They respond to it through their connection to it, their involvement with it, participation.” Another interviewee said that the program was successful because the community was willing to embrace it. One interviewee said, “It’s one thing for your evaluator to say that it’s successful, but I think it’s another thing for the community as a whole to really see and be able to reflect what it is that they’re experiencing.”

The community was not the only stakeholder that bought into the program. It was essential that the participating school districts and the funders also agreed to the program. This was identified as a contextual factor contributing to the perceived success. The participating school district superintendents were willing to release teachers for professional development and for those teachers to pilot new classroom practices as a result of the professional development. It was felt by one interviewee, that if either superintendent left his/her position, it could create problems in the project, because the current superintendents are so enthusiastic about ECC.

The commitment of the funders was also identified as a contextual factoring influencing the success of the program. Funders showed their commitment by providing funds, personnel, and time to the project. The funders reiterated their commitment to the partnership and the program by signing a Memo of Understanding that binds the partnership for a 5-year period.
Another contextual factor influencing the project was the bringing together of all the necessary pieces at the right time. Many of the interviewees felt that the conditions were right for this program to take place. Comments like, “a perfect storm,” and “the universe at work” iterated the feeling by interviewees that the ECC program was successful because of the contextual factors. It was reported that work in the early childhood community over previous years, the commitment of the funders to early childhood education, and the staff involved in the project made the project take off. Many felt this was a contextual factor based on the community and the time in the community’s history this was initiated and would be difficult to replicate in other communities.

Staff in the Room

Eight of the interviewees felt that specific staff working in the Funders’ Group was a contextual factor influencing the project ECC. Certain people were felt to have an overall positive or negative effect on the project. Their presence or absence could change the feeling in the room. It was felt that the people in the room make a difference in the project.

It was also important that the person attending the Funders’ Group meeting had authority from their organization to make decisions. Because the attendees could make decisions about resources, budgets, etc., without having to ask a supervisor, the Funders’ Group was able to make quick decisions and move the project forward. This freedom was seen as an integral part of the program.
Mission Statements

Seven of the interviewees identified organizational mission statements as a contextual factor influencing the partnership. The partnering organizations focused on improving early childhood education, the lives of vulnerable children, and supporting efforts to eliminate racial disparities and inequities. Sharing common missions led to consistency across the funders. It was also imperative to the funders they “stay true to the mission of the organization.”

Leadership

Seven of the interviewees felt leadership was a key contextual factor in the partnership. “Leadership” seemed to have many different meanings to the interviewees. It was not clear from the interviews what type of leadership is required to make a program like this successful. It is clear that staff participating in this type of collaboration need to have personal characteristics befitting a leader.

Some interviewees talked about the need for each person in the Funders’ Group to be his/her own leader at the Funders’ Group meetings and at his/her organization. The people sitting at the table had to be leaders who can make the project happen and know where it needs to go.

Some interviewees gave general characteristics of leaders. It was felt that people in the Funders’ Group exhibited some or all of these characteristics. The general characteristics of leaders were people who (a) were “strong thinkers” and able to make
decisions, (b) had the right connections, (c) could smooth any barriers among people, and (d) could build bridges between organizations that had difficulty working together.

Transition of leadership was another common theme. One interviewee felt that keeping consistent leadership was imperative for the life of the project. Another interviewee felt that changing leadership brought new insight to the project and gave it new life.

One idea that came up repeatedly in the interviews was that of an “influential champion.” This person is the one who “gets things going and has all the right connections.” This person needs to be “a go-getter” and the project needs to be his or her passion. The influential champion is something that is Hanleybrown et al. (2012) said is one of the preconditions necessary for collective impact to take place.

These ideas were reiterated in the findings from this study. Through the interviews, two people were identified as influential champions for this project: the superintendent who originally developed the program and the executive director of one of the funding agencies. It was felt that if or when these people leave the project, the project would be at a crossroads.

**Power Dynamic**

Another contextual factor influencing the partnership identified by five interviewees was the power dynamic at the funder table. One funder had contributed substantially more funding to the program than the other two. Because of this funding, the program was able to exist. The interviewees made it very clear if the funder was to
leave, the program would end, or at least look very different. Because of this, there was a vulnerability of the partners.

The larger funder made it very clear to the partners they did not want to drive the program. However, no matter how many times they relayed that message, the individuals delivering the program still felt very vulnerable because of the amount of money that is associated with it. One interviewee described it as how a child wants to please his or her parent but does not want to get in trouble.

This silly analogy is in my head. You know you have done something wrong and your mom says, “Tell me truth,” and you don’t really want to tell the truth because you know you’re going to get in trouble, but if you lie you’re going to get in more trouble. You want do the right thing, but how? It’s just this kind of that tension there. How honest can you really be? And you say be honest with you, but do you really mean it? And what happens if I am? So there’s that particular issue there.

**Responsiveness to the Community**

Four interviewees identified the program’s responsiveness to the community as a contextual factor impacting the program. The ECC program worked to create a program that fit the community’s needs based on research. Interviews were conducted by the external evaluator’s staff to determine what the county residents’ desires were for the community and early childhood education. Interviews with parents and caregivers also took place during home visits. The purpose of those interviews was to learn more about the effects of the home visits and how they could be improved. The results of these interviews were shared with the ECC Funders’ Group members.
Funding

Funding was a contextual factor mentioned by four of the interviewees. Having adequate funding to implement the program was important for the collaboration to take place. The large amount of funding was also identified as a reason for the evaluation collaboration started. Because so much money was invested in the program, it was important that a comprehensive evaluation took place. Finally, the funding also impacted the power dynamic, as discussed above.

Timeline/Length of the Grant

The length of the grant was also a contextual factor identified by five interviewees. They felt the longer-term commitment of the funders was unusual. However, this longer-term commitment meant the program had to be thoughtful about what they do, the data they collect, and what they accomplish. One interviewee described the timeline as “preferential treatment,” which meant the collaboration “is going have to step up and make sure the investment is worthwhile.”

The chronology reveals additional findings related to time not readily seen in the other data sources. For example, although the project officially started on October 1, 2010, the project coordinator was not hired until December 2010. Hiring the project coordinator later means the full implementation of the grant funds did not start until July 2011. Just because the funds were available on October 1 does not mean the project was ready to start. Time to plan and hire the right people was necessary.
The chronology shows the time commitment required of the Funders’ Group meetings. The people attending the Funders’ Group meetings are key people in their organizations. Their jobs require multiple obligations, the Funders’ Group just being one. It was also clear an important aspect of the people attending the Funders’ Group meetings was they were able to make decisions on site, without having to return to the organization to ask permission. Staff who have this type of independence are usually higher-level staff members. Attempting to get higher-level staff together from multiple organizations can be problematic. The ability to get all of these people together for regular meetings was attributed to the success of the evaluation collaboration.

The chronology shows the time commitment of the evaluation subgroup meetings. These meetings went above and beyond the commitment of the Funders’ Group meetings. This time commitment is important to note for organizations interested in replicating this type of work.

**Diverse Group of Funders**

The diverse group of funders was also seen as a contextual factor to the program by three people. The funders were a large foundation, a small family foundation, and a mid-sized grant-making organization. It was challenging at times to coordinate the three organizations. The evaluation requirements were different for all three funders, as well as access to their board of directors. Some processes, such as making changes in budgets, were easier to complete in smaller organizations. However, it was felt the diverse group of funders led to flexibility and adaptability. It allowed for more funds to the program
because of the larger funder and more access to the board of director’s from the smaller funder.

**Time to Commit/Flexibility of Job**

A contextual factor was the flexibility of the staff participating in the funders’ group in order to allocate time for the project. This factor was mentioned by three people in the interviews. In the pilot phase of a large project, like ECC, dedicated time for conversations between funders and the program staff must be available. If the program staff has questions, they need someone to turn to, on a fairly regular basis. One interviewee felt that because of her supervisor’s support of the work, she was able to dedicate more time to the project than originally projected. If the interviewee did not have the support and resulting flexibility, then she would not be able to work on the project as much as was necessary.

**Accountability to Boards/Community**

A contextual factor of working with foundations and other grant-making organizations is the staff in these organizations are accountable to boards and the community that donates to the organization. This factor was mentioned by three people in the interviews. One said,

We don’t have a personal checkbook, so even if we think [the program] is doing good work, and we like [the program] a lot, that doesn’t mean that we can write you a check and you can do whatever you want with it. Because other people are going to say, “So you used our money for what purpose? Is it really doing what you said it would?” We are accountable to the community. The community gives us money. The community makes decisions about where to invest it, and then it’s our responsibility to make sure we’re being good stewards of those dollars. We
don’t want to waste money. It’s the same thing at [larger funders]. They have a board and have to report at meetings. They are constantly being asked, “What are these dollars doing and how is it making a difference?” So they are asking the program the same questions as they’re being asked.

Another interviewee said the program and evaluation comes back to the board of directors.

I think from the organizational perspective it does start with those you’re accountable to. The investment does start with your board. In terms of what is it that your board is really requiring, as a funder, to really come back with as being evidence of the return on that investment.

**History of Collaboration in Community**

There was a history of organizations in the community working together. This factor was identified by three people in the interviews. A program called “Great Start Collaborative” had been built five or so years previously. This was a program around early childhood education where different organizations and funders worked together. So the funders had working together in some ways, although not to the extent of the current program. The funders were familiar with each other and had a base level of knowledge of each other. This led to some initial trust of each organization.

**Rival Explanations**

An important part of interpreting findings is to identify and address rival explanations for any claims or conclusions (Yin, 2009). Reviewing and exploring the rival explanations is a way to look at alternate explanations of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). During the design phase of the research, some rival explanations were anticipated. Possible rival explanations for the collaboration of the ECC Funders’ Group
are “commingled rivals,” which means “other interventions and the target intervention both contributed” (Yin, 2009). This could be in the form of state or national policies, or other programs at work. Another type of rival, is the “super rival,” described as “a force larger than but including the intervention accounts for the results” (Yin, 2009). This could be in the form of participants, grantees, funders, or other people or organizations. Other rival explanations are based on the “craft” rivals that are the basis of all social science research (Yin, 2009). Those rival explanations are the null hypothesis (the evaluation collaboration is the result of a chance circumstance only), threats to validity, and investigator bias. Data from the document review, interviewees, and meeting observation were used to examine these rival explanations.

State and national policies around early childhood education may have initially influenced the ECC program. Because the program was born out of a grant written to the MDE, which was applying for a federal grant to fund the awardees, the influence of the initial context cannot be ignored. The Project ReImagine grant application specifically requested “preschool or other programs implemented . . . to prepare all young children for school and all schools for young children” (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.(c), p. 2). However, the early childhood portion of the initial grant was only one core outcome out of six total in the grant application. Because the grant was not funded by federal flow through dollars administered by the Michigan Department of Education, the program did not have to work within the constraints of the state or federal grant dollars. The project no longer had to focus on the six core outcomes in the original proposal.
The other possible explanation for the ECC evaluation collaboration was there was already a culture of collaboration among the grant-making organizations in the city, so this program was an extension of a pre-existing collaboration. However, the data clearly show that, although there was a culture of collaboration, this project was the first instance of three major funders coming together to fund a large program. The presence of two of the grant-making organizations at the third organization’s board meeting was a first. The interview data suggest that the culture of collaboration aided in evaluation, but was not the sole cause.

The data were also clear that the collaboration was not the result of chance circumstances (the null hypothesis). The data reveal the number of meetings, people, and time invested that was required for the collaboration to be successful.

During the planning phase of the research, the threats to validity (Chapter III, Table 1) were examined and the tactics used to deal with the tests were shown. Those tactics were employed during the research design, data collection, data analysis, and composition portions of the research to minimize the threats.

Because the research of the project was retrospective, researcher bias was minimized. Data were triangulated and additional information was requested to clarify any questions. Besides the influences described in this document, no outside influences were identified by any interviewees, through the document review or the observation.

Summary

The results of this study suggest collaborating evaluation efforts between funders and grantees is an intricate process. It is time-consuming and expensive. It requires
building relationships and trust with other organizations. It does not have to be led by any one organization, either a funder or grantee. Instead, it can be a process shaped by the needs of the funders and the availability of data of the grantee.

Common evaluation expectations can benefit both the funder and the grantee. However, the process to develop those expectations can test the relationships among organizations. The staff involved in this type of collaboration is key. Characteristics of leaders, both within the participating organizations and within the overall collaboration, also may lead to successful collaborations.

Common evaluation measurements may reduce the burden of collecting data. However, even after collaborating on evaluation expectations, the program and funders in this research have still not agreed on a common report. The program staff and evaluator still have to complete reports for each funder, using valuable staff time. This is an important finding, because this group has been working together for 3 years and specifically working on common evaluation expectations for over 1 year, but still has not come to common ground on a report. Board requirements from each organization play a role in this finding.

Although common evaluation expectations could allow for the analysis of data across all funders, this was not a common response among interviewees. The interviewees were more interested in having common data to share with their boards. They felt it was powerful to have data—the same data the other funders were sharing.

Many contextual factors were identified as an important part of the process. These factors were identified as elements influencing the collaboration that were specific to the
organizations involved. They were the buy-in from stakeholders, the people at the table, the organizational mission statements, specific elements of leadership, the power dynamic among the three funders, the program’s responsiveness to the community, communication, funding, the length of the grant, the diversity of the funders, the time staff could devote to the project, the accountability the funders had to their board of directors and the community, and the history of collaboration in the community.

The next chapter of this study will discuss these findings and their implications in further detail. The chapter will also describe areas for future research.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Summary

Nonprofit organizations have received funding from grant-making organizations and foundations for many years. Over the years, two critical developments have occurred between grant-making organizations and NPOs related to evaluation and collaboration:

1. Program evaluation has become an essential piece of many grant-funded projects. Many funders are requiring some type of evaluation of the program the funds support.

2. Grant-making organizations and NPOs are combining funds and resources to collaborate on projects.

These developments mean there may be more efficient and effective ways of conducting evaluations than the standard practice of one program conducting an evaluation and turning in an evaluation report to the funder. Instead, collaborating funders, program staff, and evaluation consultants can come together to create common evaluation requirements.

Evaluating collaborative grant work has become much more difficult and time-consuming for evaluators and program staff (Brock et al., 2012; Buteau & Buchanan, 2011; Buteau & Chu, 2011; Kramer et al., 2009; TCC Group, 2011). Creating common evaluation requirements offers the possibility of relieving some of the difficulties related
to reporting. Issues include not having enough time, personnel, or funding to complete the required report; having multiple evaluation reports to complete (one for each funder); lack of evaluation knowledge or expertise; difficulty developing appropriate measures; and political tensions.

For this study, six propositions were developed. The propositions were based on a literature review. The propositions guided the data collection and analysis. Methods of data collection for this study were interviews with key members of the ECC Funders’ Group, a systematic data review, and a direct observation of an ECC Funders’ Group meeting.

Multiple methods of data analysis were used in this study. These methods include categorical aggregation, pattern matching, and developing a chronology and a logic model. Categorical aggregation was used to find relevant meaning in the data. Pattern matching was used, in which the propositions were reviewed and an empirically based pattern was compared to a predicted pattern. A chronology following the progression of the program’s evaluation collaboration was developed. The significant dates in the program were included in the chronology. Because of the chronology, major events can be traced over time. The chronology can also help organizations interested in replicating the common evaluation expectations. It can show a “real-world” timeline for this type of project. The logic model shows the cause and effect activities in the collaboration and was used to determine any rival hypotheses.

In this study, data from interviews, a systematic document review, and direct observation were used to come to conclusions around how and why evaluation
collaboration takes place and the organizational contextual factors that play a role in the collaboration. Many of the findings from this study related to critical factors in collaboration and the advantages to creating common evaluation requirements support or align with the literature.

Creating common evaluation requirements does not necessarily come easily to organizations. Many barriers to collaboration exist and must be overcome. These barriers include diversity among organizations, communication, resources, and differences in governance. Likewise, there are also critical factors that must be present for collaboration to successfully take place. The literature suggests these factors are history of collaboration in the community, the political/social climate being favorable, a mutual trust and respect that exists among members, an appropriate cross-section of members, flexibility and adaptability, open and frequent communication, a shared vision, and sufficient funds. Through this study, it was determined the ECC Funders’ Group displayed all of these characteristics as they worked to develop common evaluation expectations.

Many advantages to creating common evaluation requirements exist. The literature suggests some of the advantages: it creates a common language for all stakeholders, delivers a consistent message to stakeholders, gives the ability for easily measuring progress toward common goals, encourages cooperative problem solving, and gives participants opportunities to learn about evaluation. The findings from this study were consistent with the literature in this regard.
Conclusions and Recommendations

The following conclusions and recommendations are developed around the initial propositions. Generalizability, especially in the form of other organizations attempting to pilot a similar program in another community, is discussed throughout. Organizations interested in replicating similar evaluation collaborations should be aware of the following factors. Because of these factors, the process may not be generalizable to other communities or organizations.

Proposition 1: The Common Evaluation Requirements Came About Because of the Collaboration Among the Organizations, and Proposition 2: The Funders Developed Common Evaluation Requirements Because They Provide a Mutual Benefit to the Grantees and Funders

The reasons for the development of common evaluation expectations that were related to collaboration as identified in this study were (a) to develop a common language and vocabulary among partners, (b) to see the common goals of all partners, (c) to develop one report for all funders, (d) because the funders wanted to work together, and (e) to simplify communication.

Interestingly, although it was stated the collaboration wanted to develop one report for all funders, a common evaluation report has not been developed. The partners agreed upon common measures and the external evaluator collected data on those measures. However, the external evaluator still completes three different evaluation reports, one for each funder. The development of common evaluation expectations has not lightened the workload of the program staff or external evaluator. The common evaluation expectations facilitated conversation among the Funders’ Group members. It
gave the members a way to discuss evaluation and measurements. It allowed the external evaluator to be able to talk to the Funders’ Group so they all “spoke the same language.” It did not, however, reduce the reporting requirements for the program staff or external evaluator. If anything, it increased their workload. The program staff and evaluator were not only completing the three required funder evaluation reports, but were also completing an additional external report based on the common measures. The recommendation is for other organizations interested in replicating this type of work; they must be clear about their end goals and the amount of work they are willing to take on.

The common evaluation requirements were also developed because the organizations felt that common evaluation expectations were related to high-quality measurement and evaluation practice. They were educated in the importance of evaluation and the resulting measures which were developed as a result. The research identified additional reasons the common evaluation expectations were developed. In this research, the reasons the common evaluation requirements were developed are (a) to be more effective in the work of the project, (b) because the amount of funding is a substantial investment, (c) to create a meaningful evaluation, and (d) to think creatively. The data from this research showed that the actions of the Funders’ Group matched with the reasons they claimed they wanted to develop common evaluation expectations.

Interestingly, these reasons were not entirely funder-focused. Although the funders benefited from the creation of standardized evaluation requirements, they were not the ones who regulated the resulting standards. In communities wanting to implement a similar program of joint funders and program staff creating common evaluation
requirements, it would be important to identify the reasons why the common evaluation expectations are of interest. If the reasons are mostly funder-directed and offer only minimal benefits for the program or program staff, the reasoning behind the standardized requirements should be revisited.

It is important to note that the major funder of ECC was in the midst of developing a standardized, statewide evaluation for its grantees, which was not related to the ECC work. This large national funder did not put pressure on the ECC Funders’ Group to use the evaluation tools developed for their other grantees. The national funder was able to work at a local level and tailor the evaluation to the specific needs of ECC.

The research also revealed insights to the evaluation process, which are important for organizations and communities interested in replication. Developing the evaluation plan and logic model was iterative, requiring many meetings and repeated discussion. At each meeting, the documents would be reviewed and discussed, and any resulting changes would be shared. This process continued until there was consensus among the subgroup and the full Funder’s Group.

The process was streamlined by developing an evaluation subcommittee. This meant the subcommittee could work on evaluation and report back to the large group. This was seen as a better use of the Funders’ Group time. Committee members with more interest in evaluation or time to commit were able to participate in the subgroup.

The entire process was facilitated by the external evaluator. The external evaluator held a critical role in the process. Her knowledge about the program and evaluation, her ability to communicate with all parties, and her dedication to the project
were important characteristics. Her expertise was seen as an essential part of the collaboration.

**Proposition 3: Common Evaluation Requirements Benefit the Grantee by Reducing the Burden of Collecting and Reporting Data**

Common evaluation requirements may benefit the grantee by reducing the burden of collecting and reporting data. In this study, although the funders had developed common evaluation expectations and an external evaluator had created an evaluation report based on those expectations, the funders were still asking the grantee to complete three separate evaluation reports (one for each funder). Each funding organization had one report required as a condition of funding. The program staff was hopeful that these reports could be merged as the program continues. However, the program staff was still spending time throughout the year to complete these reports.

This finding is important because completing evaluation reports can be a large drain on program staff time, especially if the staff’s time is not compensated in the grant. In this study, program staff spent time through the year completing each funder’s different report. The reports varied in content and required data. It is interesting to note that even in a project like this, where the Funders’ Group focused on evaluation for a significant amount of time, a common report was not developed, even after 3 years into the project.

To change a standard report for one project is not an easy task. Having the same evaluation reports within a funder allows the funder to collect the same data across all grantees. Changing the type of data collected can create problems for the funder and
make it more difficult to compare data. There are also political and organizational issues around evaluation reports. Some of these issues include reporting to a national board or organization; reporting requirements based on any types of organizational certifications, accreditations, or endorsements; or reporting requirements based on the organization’s history. A collaboration needs to know about these issues if interested in changing a funder’s evaluation report.

The recommendation is for similar collaborations to be well informed of the constraints that exist within their organizations. The partnering organizations need to know the flexibility their boards of directors might afford them. Will the board of directors accept an evaluation report that is a different format or includes data not usually reported? Can the timeline for the report be changed in any ways? What ways could the funders’ evaluation reporting process be streamlined or changed? Navigating the organizational politics takes an informed person, so it is important the best person possible is doing that type of work.

The collaboration should set realistic goals related to the evaluation requirements or the evaluation report. Is the goal of the collaboration to create a set a measures all of the funders are interested in, or is the goal something more complex, like developing an evaluation report that all the funders’ board of directors will accept in place of their standardized report? Knowing the goal of the collaboration will influence many facets of the collaboration, like the conversations and the timeline for meetings and report writing.
Proposition 4: Common Evaluation Requirements Benefit the Funders by Allowing the Partners to Collect Common Data, Therefore Allowing Analysis of Data Across Funders

The ability to analyze data across the funders was not a major outcome related to collaboration in this study. The external evaluator presented analysis of data through the monthly Dashboard and the year-end evaluation report. Although these reports were available, the study found the funders were more interested in having data they could share with their boards to show the impact of the funding. The funders liked that the data they were sharing with their board was the same the other boards were receiving.

This is an important finding, especially for external evaluators, program staff, or other consultants not familiar with foundations. They need to be aware of the situation created by working under a board of directors. The pressure of the foundation’s board of directors is powerful. Through this research, foundation staff iterated how all of their decisions were made with their accountability to their board of directors in mind.

This finding is also important for external evaluators. The evaluator must know his/her audience and the needs of the audience. What kind of data analysis will be utilized by the client? In this study, the interviewees discussed the importance of having common data as opposed to how the data was presented. There could be an explanation for this. Perhaps the external evaluator developed reports specifically tailored to the group’s needs, so in the interviews, the ECC Funders’ Group never commented on the way the data were analyzed. The data analysis was sufficient for their needs. Instead, the Funders’ Group talked about how to use that data, because it was already in a usable form.
The recommendation is for evaluators to know about the organizations they are working with. If they are working with a foundation, they should learn about the governance and policies of the foundation. When working with a client, they must learn about the needs of the client. How will the data be used? Who else will look at the data and reports? Learning about the client and the client’s situation and needs can make the evaluator’s job more well-defined.

**Proposition 5: The Funders Developed Common Evaluation Requirements by Having Open, Regular Dialogue, Keeping the Goals of the Project in Mind, Showing Results During the Pilot Year of the Grants, and Having Additional Funding Available for Subsequent Years**

The results of the data collected around this proposition are consistent with the literature. The relationships and communication among the organizations greatly impacted the collaboration. Also, logistics, such as having regular meetings, were seen as very important. Scheduling meetings with staff who have many responsibilities can be very difficult. However, the participating staff needs to have authority from their organization to make decisions independently. Finding the right staff people is an important consideration for organizations attempting to replicate this work.

Having the evaluator involved from the beginning was also important. The chronology shows the evaluator was hired before the program director. The evaluator attended every Funders’ Group meeting and the evaluation subgroup meetings. The evaluator also worked in between the evaluation subgroup meetings to develop the logic model. This is an important finding for organizations attempting to replicate this type of work. Funding for the evaluator’s work needs to be available from the beginning.
It is interesting to note that although the project officially started on October 1, 2010, the project coordinator was not hired until December 2010. Hiring the project coordinator later means the full implementation of the grant funds did not start until July 2011. Other organizations interested in replication may need to be aware the project may not fully start up until months after the funding begins. Writing in time for planning and hiring is important in this type of work.

The monthly Dashboards that were shared with the group are a significant aspect of this work. The Funders’ Group members felt the Dashboards were an invaluable way to “check in” on how the program was progressing and gave them the opportunity to course correct, if necessary. The Dashboards are a result of the common evaluation expectations. The group was able to decide on common measures they all deemed important. However, their importance is as much of a result of the regular sharing results of the outcomes measures, as they are a result of developing standardized evaluation requirements. If the group had not agreed on some shared outcomes measures they were interested in, then they may not have the monthly Dashboards, therefore not giving them the opportunity to see and discuss the data each month.

The recommendations for replication are to schedule regular meetings with all organizations represented. The staff person attending the meetings needs to consistently attend and have the authority to make decisions without checking in with someone in his or her organization. This ensures the program or meetings do not stall or slow down because someone takes the time to go back to his or her organization and ask permission.
The recommendation related to an external evaluator is to hire someone with time and resources necessary to commit to the collaboration. This means the appropriate amount of funding needs to be available. Depending on the size of the project, an evaluation center or an evaluator with additional staff support may be a more viable option. If an evaluator has staff support, the evaluator’s time can be spent on higher-level evaluation activities instead of things like data entry.

Additionally, the external evaluator should provide regular reports with program data to the collaboration. The hiring agent and/or collaborative should agree upon the types of reports and data that would be most useful to the program and the group. The evaluator should work with closely with the client to supply this information.

Including time and funds for project planning prior to implementation is also important. Hiring a project manager takes time and the hiring process needs to be realistic and reflected in the organizations’ timeline. The project manager is essential to this work, so this step should not be skipped or downplayed.

**Proposition 6: The Context the Organizations Operate Within (Their Mission Statements, Staffing Levels, Funding Levels, etc.) Influenced the Collaboration**

The Funders’ Group identified the following as significant organizational contexts their group was working within: (a) buy-in from stakeholders, (b) people at the table, (c) mission statements, (d) leadership, (e) power dynamics, (f) responsiveness to the community, (g) communication, (h) funding, (i) timeline/length of the grant, (j) diverse group of funders, (k) time to commit/flexibility of their job, (l) accountability to their boards and the community, and (m) history of collaboration in the community.
The buy-in from stakeholders was an essential piece of the collaboration around evaluation. Stakeholders from many facets of the program were supportive. The support of all of these groups helped the program succeed. The stakeholders identified in this research are the program partners, including supporting organizations to the program; the recipients of the services and the community in general; the participating school districts; and the funders. It is recommended organizations interested in replicating this type of work should examine the support they have from stakeholders. Ensuring all stakeholders back the project may help the program succeed.

The people at the table were critical to the success of the collaboration. As mentioned above, all of the staff representing the different organizations had decision-making authority. The people at the table also could work together. Because some of the staff changed in the Funders’ Group, the group was able to feel different dynamics in the group based on the people in the room. The people in the room made a difference. It is recommended that organizations wishing to replicate this work are aware of the dynamic of the staff working on the collaboration. Organizations should not be afraid to switch staff into or out of the collaboration if it seems their personality is not a good fit for the group.

Funding is a critical piece of the collaboration and evaluation. Because of the generous funding, the program could do many different types of activities, which impacted the community. Because of the community impact, the program was seen as a success. Because the program was deemed successful, the Funders’ Group wanted to meet to discuss the program and evaluation. Without the large amount of funding, the
program may have never been “successful” and the Funders’ Group may have never met. If only a small amount of funding was available, the program may have been a lower priority for the funders and they may not have been able to make time to meet. The regular meetings were very important to the Funders’ Group.

Without the funding, the partners would not be able to hold so many meetings, which were deemed instrumental to their evaluation success. Being able to meet regularly, face-to-face, facilitated the conversation. The program staff and funders knew if they had questions or concerns, they could discuss any issues at their monthly meetings. As a result of the funding, the meetings also gave an opportunity for the evaluator to update the Funder’s group. These regular updates were important check-ins for everyone.

The funding also was the key to hiring an external evaluator, another integral component to developing common evaluation requirements. Although funding was not explicitly stated as what was needed to develop the common evaluation requirements, it is obvious that without funding, the Funders’ Group would not be able to move along the same trajectory. The funding allowed the evaluator to attend each Funders’ Group meeting and all of the evaluation subgroup meetings, as well as develop the evaluation plan, logic model, monthly Dashboards, conduct substantial data collection, and write and present the resulting evaluation reports. The funding enabled the Funders’ Group to hire an experienced, well-educated, effective evaluator. The budget had to match the level of evaluation expertise required for such a large project. It is recommended those
looking to replicate this work develop a detailed, realistic budget including the costs of an active, involved, experienced external evaluator.

It is imperative to be aware of the organizational contexts this project operated in when trying to replicate this in another setting. The recommendation is that those interested in replicating this work should assess the organizational contexts they are working within. Using their own contexts and comparing them with the contexts of this project, the differences between the two projects can be determined. Once those differences are determined, solutions to the differences in context can be found.

**Future Research**

Future research could occur around many of the dimensions identified in this research. Future research could collect data as the collaboration progresses (as opposed to retrospectively). This may allow the researcher to collect more detailed data, which may lead to additional findings. This would also allow the researcher to record the chronology as it happens. In this way, more or different events may be identified as essential to the process. However, the researcher would have to be granted access from the very beginning of the project.

If a researcher was able to follow a collaboration from the very beginning and the collaboration did not work, the reasons why the collaboration failed would be important findings. Comparing and contrasting a successful collaboration to one that did not work could further identify factors necessary to develop collaboration. This type of research could also identify the types of contexts different types of collaborations can operate in.
For example, there may be differences between collaborations with large national funders versus collaborations made up entirely of small local funders.

The organizational contexts could be further studied. Possible topics could be identifying the organizational contexts that most influence collaboration around evaluation, how stakeholders influence evaluation collaboration, the effect of mission statements on evaluation collaboration, and the effects of boards and governance on evaluation collaboration. These contexts could be studied in both successful and weak collaborations.

Research around replicating this type of collaboration could be completed. A funder, organization, or evaluator could use the factors identified in this research when developing their own collaboration. What worked and what did not, as well as similarities and differences, could be researched.

Research around similarities and differences of this program to others that have successfully replicated the program could also be completed. Identifying the organizational contextual factors that exist in the replicated program could differentiate the programs further.

Because this group has yet to develop a common evaluation report to replace the funder’s required evaluation report, research around the development of a common evaluation report could be completed. This would require looking at the political forces at play within and among funders.

Additionally, further research could be completed around the similarities and differences in funders’ evaluation reports. Specifically, what common measures are the
funders asking for in their separate reports? What measures are different? Why do the organizations ask for different measures? Can one organization gain any information by changing its report to include data required in another’s report?

Concluding Remarks

Developing common evaluation expectations among funders, grantees, and external evaluators is a time-consuming, delicate process. The advantages of collaboration are well documented and significant to all participating organizations. Those wanting to work on an evaluation collaboration need to be aware of realities to this work. Being aware of the experiences of others and the successes and pitfalls they experienced will help improve these processes and navigate the murky waters.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Semi-structured Interview Protocol
Semi-structured Interview Protocol

1. How did the Funders’ group develop common evaluation requirements for the Early Childhood Connections program?
2. Why did the Funders’ group develop common evaluation requirements for the Early Childhood Connections program?
3. What were the benefits to your organization by developing common evaluation requirements?
4. What were the benefits to the program by developing common evaluation requirements?
5. What were the common evaluation expectations that resulted from the collaboration?
6. Describe the process the Funders group went through to come to those expectations.
7. What are the organizational contextual factors influencing the evaluation collaboration of the program?
8. How did the Funders’ group come into existence?
9. What were the most critical pieces of the collaboration? What pieces were necessary for the collaboration to take place?
10. What roles did the organizations take in the collaboration? Prompt: Did some take over as a leader? Was there an independent/neutral organizations that participated?
11. What would be required for the collaboration between organizations to be sustained?
12. What role did you, as an individual, play in the collaboration?
13. What strengths did each organization bring to the collaboration?
14. What were the facilitating and inhibiting factors that contributed to the collaboration?
Appendix B

Document Review Form
Document Review Form

Date of Document:

Document Code:

Name of Document:

Type of Document:

1. How did grant-making foundations and funders develop common evaluation requirements for the ECC program?

2. Why did grant-making foundations and develop common evaluation requirements for the ECC program?

3. What were the common evaluation expectations that resulted from the collaboration?

4. What are the organizational contextual factors influencing the evaluation collaboration of the ECC program?

Notes:
Appendix C

Email Sent to Funders’ Group Members
February X, 2013

Dear XXXXX,

My name is Kristin Everett. I am a PhD student at Western Michigan University. As part of my dissertation research I am interested in learning more about the collaboration between members of the ECC Funders Group, especially related to evaluation of the program.

In order to learn more about the evaluation of the program, I would like to schedule an interview to speak with you. The interview should last around an hour. I am available to meet at a location that is convenient and comfortable for you, like your office or a coffee shop.

If possible, I would like to conduct the interview during the month of March. Please let me know the three best dates and times for the interview. I am available Monday through Friday, 8 am to 8 pm.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Thanks so much for your help. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,
Kristin Everett
Appendix D

Checklist Prior to Document Review
Checklist Prior to Document Review

Date of Document:

Document Code:

Name of Document:

Type of Document:

1. How did grant-making foundations and funders develop common evaluation requirements for the program?
   - Does the document have to do with the process of developing common evaluation requirements?
   - Are there other documents related to this document that may show a change in thinking?
   - Is the document a meeting agenda or meeting notes?

2. Why did grant-making foundations and develop common evaluation requirements for the ECC program?
   - Does the document show any reasons why common evaluation requirements were created?

3. What were the common evaluation expectations that resulted from the collaboration?
   - Does the document outline any of the common evaluation requirements?
   - Is the document an evaluation report or Dashboard?

4. What are the organizational contextual factors influencing the evaluation collaboration of the ECC program?
   - Is the document related to the mission or vision of any of the organizations?
   - Is the staffing mentioned in the document?
   - Are the Board of Directors/Trustees mentioned in the document?
   - Is there information about “lens” the organization operates through?
   - Is there information about the community the project is working in?
   - Is there information about the funding of the project?
   - Is there information about the timeline of the project?
   - Is the document a single funders evaluation report?

Notes:
Appendix E

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Letter of Approval
Date: February 14, 2013

To: Jessaca Spybrook, Principal Investigator
Kristin Everett, Student Investigator

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: Approval not needed for HSIRB Project Number 13-02-35

This letter will serve as confirmation that your project “Collaboration between Grant-Making Organizations, Evaluators, and Program Staff Related to Standardized Evaluation Requirements” has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). Based on that review, the HSIRB has determined that approval is not required for you to conduct this project because you are analyzing an organizational process and not collecting personal identifiable (private) information about individuals.

Thank you for your concerns about protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects.

A copy of your protocol and a copy of this letter will be maintained in the HSIRB files.