

A Practical Framework for Values-Based Leadership and Learning

For foundation leaders interested in moving values from aspiration to practice, our experience suggests six transferable principles:

- 1 Treat values as testable hypotheses**
Values should not be assumed—they should be examined. Asking how values are experienced by grantees and partners creates space for learning, not defensiveness.
- 2 Evaluate *how you work*, not only *what you fund***
Impact evaluation often focuses on program outcomes. A values-based approach also examines relationships, decision-making processes, and power dynamics as critical dimensions of effectiveness.
- 3 Invite feedback beyond your “success stories”**
Including grantees who did not receive follow-on funding strengthened the credibility of our findings and surfaced insights we might otherwise have missed.
- 4 Involve your grantees as partners in evaluation**
The communities you work with most closely can offer valuable perspective not only on outcomes, but on the evaluation process itself and the interpretation of results. Treating grantees as partners in learning deepens both trust and insight.
- 5 Use trust, inclusion, and integrity as measurable constructs**
Concepts like authenticity, benevolence, and stakeholder visibility can be rigorously assessed using social-science methods. Naming them explicitly signals that they matter.
- 6 Commit to learning before accountability**
Values-based evaluation is most productive when framed as an opportunity for reflection and improvement, not as a compliance exercise. Learning creates the conditions for meaningful accountability over time.

Taken together, these practices can help organizations align leadership, learning, and evaluation around a shared values framework, strengthening trust with grantees while improving organizational effectiveness.