RSCF Grantmaking Impact Assessment 2017-18
Executive Summary – January 2019

Introduction
This executive summary shares highlights from a first reflection on RSCF’s grantmaking impact. It is designed to help staff and board members consider what’s working, as well as areas of improvement.

RSCF has developed a suite of rigorous qualitative and quantitative grantmaking evaluation tools, each tailored to assess different elements of the foundation’s logic model. This report represents a synthesis of findings from a first set of detailed evaluation reports using these evaluation tools, namely:

- Quantitative Analysis of 2018 RSCF Grantee CHAT (Check-in Analysis Tool) conversations.
- Two Grantee Convening Survey Reports (of RSCF’s fall 2017 and fall 2018 grantee convenings).

What Impact Assessment of RSCF’s Grantmaking Revealed

1. RSCF is authentically building trust with grantees
2. RSCF funding is having the impact its logic model intended – on individual grantees and across its portfolio of grantees in key organizational areas
3. RSCF grantee convenings have built relationships, connections and community – including toward shared learning and a greater sense of hope and energy for the work

Summary findings, including suggested areas of improvement, follow.

1. RSCF is authentically building trust with grantees

In the CHATs (RSCF’s annual conversations with grantees which replace site visits and written reports), grantees spoke openly on a range of topics. It wasn’t just what grantees said, but the way in which they interacted with RSCF staff that reflected a candidness only possible with a significant level of trust.

Words used by grantees to describe RSCF’s people and practices included thoughtful, honest, genuine, and trusting, to name a few. They indicated RSCF has a high level of responsiveness, approaches the work from a learning perspective, and leaves it to grantees to do their work and do it right. One example: grantees noted RSCF’s efforts to involve them in refining the foundation’s assessment practice as evidence of “wanting to be trust-based and wanting to learn.” That process, which engaged a team of grantees alongside RSCF’s evaluators in early 2018 to design and test the current instruments, was, in one grantee’s words, a way of showing, “you really are following through and trying to walk the talk.”

Evidence of trust building wasn’t just here and there in quotes. A rigorous qualitative analysis of the CHATs showed solid evidence of trust building in action across the CHAT interactions. The conversations themselves

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**Grantees on RSCF’s Trust Based Approach (from the CHATs)**

You take our calls, you answer our emails. You answer them thoughtfully. [laughter] I’m sorry the bar is that low, but [laughter] that’s tremendous.

I really do genuinely take what you guys say around wanting to be trust-based and wanting to learn.

The project fund driven mentality is bullshit, because everybody can just pull a project out and make it right. Let the organization do their work and report their work in many ways that I feel like we get far more honest feedback. In many ways the compliance is stronger, because there is, to use your word, trust.
demonstrated trust-based philanthropy consistent with The Whitman Institute’s Principles of Trust-Based Philanthropy, which RSCF has adopted.¹

2. RSCF funding is having the impact its logic model intended – on individual grantees and across its portfolio of grantees in key organizational areas

RSCF grantees aren’t required to tell the foundation up front how they expect to use its money. Nor do they produce traditional reports toward intended grant objectives. However, both the FFIS survey and CHAT analysis revealed ways grantees used RSCF funding to improve their organizations.

The FFIS showed grantees tended to invest RSCF funding in one or more of the five following areas: 1) program quality, 2) workplace culture and managing personnel, 3) experimentation, learning, and adaptation, 4) mission/financial alignment, and 5) equity and inclusion. Workplace Culture and Managing Personnel was the most common area of investment.

In terms of impact the FFIS showed:

- On average, 45% of grantees increased their capacity in the areas where they invested RSCF funds.
- Impacts at the individual organizational level were most seen from grantee investments in Staff Development. Specifically, 78.3% of grantees investing in staff development showed improvements when comparing the state of staff development before and after investing RSCF funds in this work.
- On average, after investing RSCF funds, the percent of grantees that reported the highest possible level of capacity went up by 30 percentage points.

Findings from the CHATs corroborated the FFIS findings. Across the CHATs, grantees revealed how trusting them to apply funding where they most see fit not only supports greater self-determination but smarter investments. Consistently, grantees said RSCF grant funding allowed them to invest in both strategic and responsive ways, take risks, make plans, deploy staff more effectively, and build long-term infrastructure as needed.

3. RSCF grantee convenings have built relationships, connections and community – including toward shared learning and a greater sense of hope and energy for the work

Participants generally agreed that RSCF’s gatherings helped build relationships, connectedness, and community. Participants responded very positively to the facilitation at both retreats, using words like exceptional, loving, kind, responsive, flexible, and fun to describe it.

While peer learning and sharing was considered useful by the majority of participants at the first retreat, participants in the second provided concrete evidence of the value of peer learning that took place. They also overwhelmingly felt that the second retreat helped them feel a greater sense of hope, inspiration, and energy for the work (something participants in the first retreat didn’t express strongly).

More participants in the second retreat (which focused on shared learning, and building connections, relationships and community) felt that the convening met its stated objectives than participants at the first retreat. This make sense, since the first retreat was RSCF’s first foray into bringing grantees together. In the second retreat, RSCF sowed seeds for a potential learning community and grantees responded positively to this direction, agreeing on four shared areas for group learning and a shared method for communication (Slack) to keep in touch between gatherings.

**Grantees on RSCF Convenings (from the Convening Surveys)**

*I am not a longtime professional leadership development field leader. So as someone sort of new and sort of not even particularly…I actually kind of loved it. And there was, for me personally, there was just a range of people in the room, people I never even knew, didn’t even understand what their organizations did, and then people I had known for a long time. So there was a really sweet spot of intimacy and complete new relationships.*

*This was a great retreat, honestly the best I have been to in a long time. I have hope, feel restored and supported. I can’t wait to continue to share and grow with this group! Thank you for creating this!*

**Suggested Areas of Improvement and Next Steps**

Rigorous evaluation using both quantitative and qualitative methods has already shown proof of RSCF’s grantmaking concept: its flexible funding, grantee convenings, and overall trust-based approach is viewed as positive and impactful by grantees.

That said, a variety of areas of improvement are worthy of consideration, including:

- Consistently revisiting evaluation protocols and methods
- Communicating more clearly with grantees why and what RSCF is evaluating
- Digging deeper into areas where findings show the least and greatest impact
- Considering the extent to be public about its findings
- Making sure RSCF’s core values are consistently embodied in its practices

As RSCF’s grantmaking evolves, so too should its overall evaluation approach. In coming years, evaluation should emphasize more the longer-term impacts of the logic model, such as how RSCF funding helps build the field of strong nonprofit leadership development organizations, and encourages other funders to take trust-based approaches.

RSCF’s evaluation team should also help ensure the foundation’s evaluation efforts embody the “best of” philanthropy evaluation practices. More and more foundations are recognizing the importance of not just asking grantees for data, but also sharing findings with grantees – even engaging them in the analyzing and sense making elements of evaluation. Done thoughtfully, this can become an additional way of building trust with grantees.