Collaboration Case Note

OGP Evaluation

March 2020

Transparency and Accountability Initiative (TAI) seeks to foster collaboration between two or more members around our shared strategic priorities. Collaboration case notes document and asses the utility of such initiatives from the funder perspective.

What Problem(s) Were We Addressing?

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a platform that brings together government and civil society actors "to promote accountable, responsive and inclusive governance." Demonstrating OGP's impact is challenging as its work spans diverse contexts and much of its contribution as a behind-the-scenes convener and facilitator is intangible. To address this evidence challenge, TAI members William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (Hewlett), Open Society Foundations (OSF), and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) are co-funding a developmental evaluation (DE) approach to generate rigorous evidence about the OGP platform and policy reform strategies and results.

Specific learning needs and key questions are still being developed and refined, and respondents had differing perceptions of the problem being addressed, with one non-funder stakeholder commenting that, "we continue to navigate what the purpose of the evaluation is." This points to a second, unanticipated problem: how to effectively and efficiently apply the relatively new DE approach across diverse funder institutional contexts to generate systematic evidence.

Who Collaborated and How?

As a collaboration initiated and led by TAI members without (initial) direct influence from the TAI Secretariat, the OGP evaluation process is unique. Hewlett, OSF and DFID participate in this collaboration along with several non-TAI members, including two independent technical experts, OGP representatives and representatives of Oxford Policy Management (OPM), the consulting firm chosen to conduct the evaluation. The TAI Secretariat is involved in organizing, facilitating, and following up on quarterly coordination calls for the evalu-
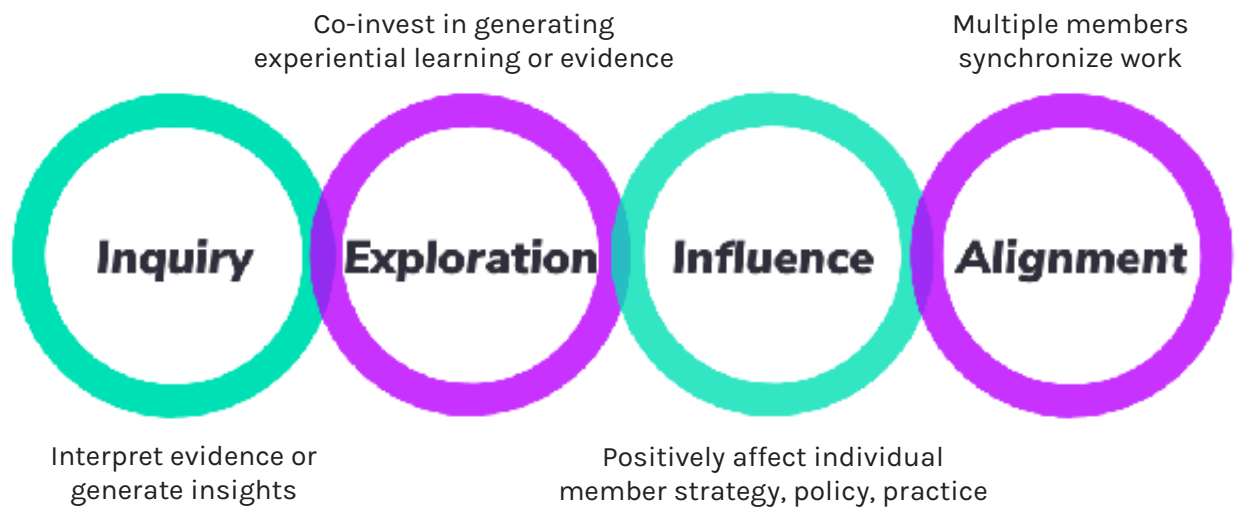
ation's steering committee (ESC). Individual members hold some bilateral calls and in-person meetings.

The composition and governance structure of the ESC are designed to mitigate perceived and actual risks of conflicts of interest related to the DE approach, which involves participation by and interaction between the evaluator and evaluand, and the funders and grantee. Funders of the evaluation and the two technical experts have the right to a vote, while all others participate as non-voting observers.

> "Even though not everyone was as involved with TAI, the group naturally arrived at the conclusion [that they would be the best one to ensure neutrality], which says something positive about TAI."
>
> — *Funder stakeholder*

What Type of Collaboration Was It?

TAI classifies its collaboration as fitting into four categories: exploration, inquiry, alignment, and influence. The OGP evaluation collaboration straddles the alignment category, in which "two or more TAI members synchronize strategic direction or other grant making work," and the exploration category, in which "two or more TAI members co-invest in generating new knowledge or evidence."

Co-invest in generating experiential learning or evidence

Multiple members synchronize work

Inquiry   Exploration   Influence   Alignment

Interpret evidence or generate insights

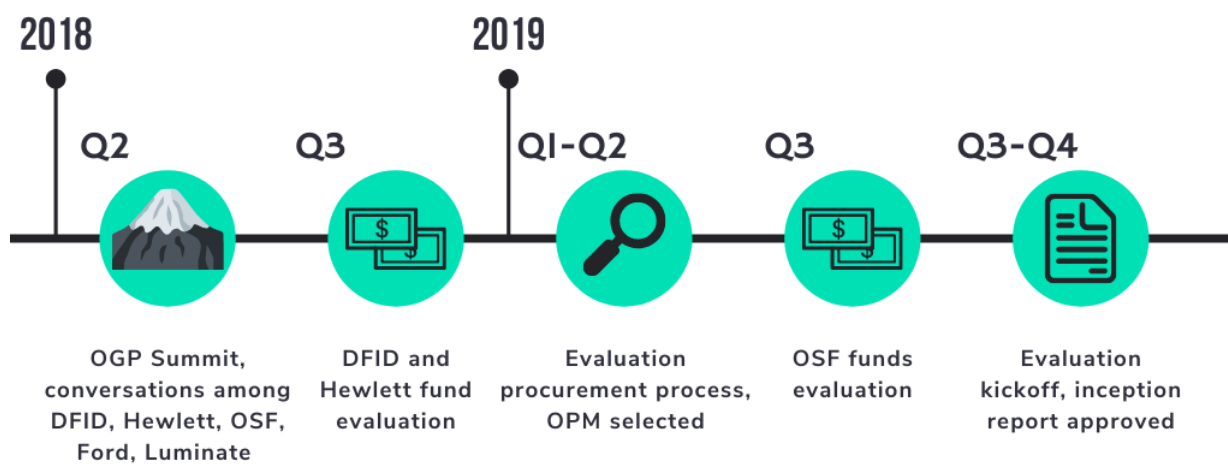Positively affect individual member strategy, policy, practice

How Did the Collaboration Evolve?

When DFID proposed a robustly funded evaluation as part of their grant to OGP, it attracted the interest of other TAI members funding OGP's programming, including Hewlett, OSF, the Ford Foundation and Luminate. The five discussed the costs and benefits of pooling funds, but also shared an interest in demonstrating funder solidarity through a joint evaluation of what drives open government reform and implementation of commitments to the OGP platform.

> "All three donors and OGP should be commended for their "risk appetite" - developmental evaluation is something new for all of us. It's a good chunk of money to throw at [such] a forward-looking thing [since] we don't know what we're going to get and there is a lot of uncertainty…"
>
> - *Non-funder stakeholder*

Several respondents commented that the donors also sought to reduce the reporting burden on OGP and create efficiencies through a common evaluation. While all five funders participated on calls about the evaluation scope, Hewlett and DFID contributed funds first and invited the others to join when and if they desired. OSF's funding timeline delayed their financial commitment until the early post-award inception phase, which reopened some previously discussed topics and decisions taken in the ESC.

2018 — **2019**

Q2	Q3	Q1-Q2	Q3	Q3-Q4
OGP Summit, conversations among DFID, Hewlett, OSF, Ford, Luminate	DFID and Hewlett fund evaluation	Evaluation procurement process, OPM selected	OSF funds evaluation	Evaluation kickoff, inception report approved

What Have We Achieved?

In terms of the OGP evaluation itself, the collaboration has resulted in:

- Terms of Reference jointly developed by DFID, Hewlett and OSF, with OGP and TAI input.
- An evaluator selected by DFID and Hewlett, with OSF and OGP input.
- A coordination mechanism in the form of a steering committee, the ESC.
- An inception report approved by DFID, Hewlett and OSF.

All respondents agreed that the achievement of jointly funding such a substantial evaluation is significant. The fact that three very different donors have pooled $1.35 million for a global evaluation and have agreement on a final inception report is, in itself, a result. As one funder stakeholder noted, "the extent to which we were drawn in in a meaningful way [is] really impressive, since it would have been easier for [each organization] to just do their own evaluation."

The openness of all three donors to trying a new evaluation approach is also an achievement. The fact that OGP itself has a seat at the table and can participate in the formative design of its own evaluation is novel for some of the actors involved.

> "Early on if you had asked me… about it, my fears would have been that it would be tokenistic or answering to donor agendas…But from the beginning, it was clear how sincere the effort and interest from DFID and Hewlett was."
>
> *- Funder stakeholder*

Successfully working through the transition period following OSF's onboarding as a funder and voting ESC member was considered an accomplishment by several respondents.

More than one respondent noted that regular ESC calls allow the donors to observe and learn about each other's priorities, opinions, and policies.

Was the Collaboration Useful to Members?

While this collaboration is on-going, all those interviewed agreed that the process has been useful. As one funder stakeholder noted, "we all know collaboration makes things slower, but it's better on the other side in terms of usability and applicability of the evaluation."

> "I don't think we've seen the dividends of collaboration yet but the alternative (everyone for themselves) is still worse."
>
> *- Non-funder stakeholder*

Barriers to Collaboration Use	Enablers of Collaboration Use
Differing funding timelines expanded the funder table during the inception phase, which resulted in re-opening previously concluded discussions.	Prior institutional relationships have allowed for an environment of openness, and generally one of trust.
Personnel changes at DFID contributed to uncertainty around communication lines and decision making.	TAI's role as a neutral, independent convener has been helpful in facilitating discussion and actively pushing for key decisions to be made.
A steep learning curve for most actors regarding the DE approach contributed to confusion around the type of decisions the ESC should be making..	A genuine interest in collaboration from all actors has fostered a spirit of joint responsibility for the outcome.
Different institutional cultures and experiences represented on the ESC (including foundation vs bilateral agency practices and evaluative vs programmatic co-creation processes) may inhibit active participation in discussion and debate.	Growing communication channels have led to greater ease of communication between ESC members.

Lessons Learned

Importance of consistent and empowered decision-makers for iterative evaluation approach. All respondents commented on the disruption caused by multiple changes to ESC voting members – from OSF joining later, to frequent turnover of DFID representatives. Trust built through prior working relationships helped the ESC navigate challenges related to this early on.

Many respondents also commented that ESC members should also have the authority to make real-time decisions on behalf of their institutions and avoid delay.

One respondent recommended a steering-committee led onboarding for new members, rather than relying on each institution's handover process, to help ensure everyone is on the same page.

A shared understanding of the collaboration's goal or purpose is worth revisiting during the collaboration process. As one funder stakeholder commented, "evaluation means a lot of things to a lot of people." Almost all respondents noted that differing institutional policies and priorities, as well as different individual conceptions of evaluation itself, have led to frustration and delay. Differing assessments of and strategies to solve global governance problems can also make it challenging to collectively shape and pursue evaluation questions.

> "Especially when we talk about open government, everyone agrees on a macro level, but when you get into what different parties want or prioritize, there are big differences."
>
> *- Non-funder stakeholder*

Preparing for collective decisions. A majority of respondents noted they would like to find a way to make ESC meetings more effective and efficient. Two respondents recommended that TAI facilitate as many bilateral conversations ahead of time as possible to identify dissenting opinions, prepare responses and even reach agreements before the larger group is convened. At the same time, there is a ***need for clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes*** which are adaptable to a dynamic or emergent context.

Work to maintain consensus on substantive matters without avoiding disagreement. While steering committee decisions can be made by majority, most respondents noted that the donors are reluctant to "step on each other's toes," due to the importance of culti-

> "The transaction costs of coordination are very high, but on balance...if we can continue to build our collaboration skill set around the outputs then it will have been better value for money than separate processes."
>
> *- Non-funder stakeholder*

vating and maintaining institutional relationships. This can lead to an inability or unwillingness to engage in tough negotiations or declare decisions final. Several respondents noted that this initial reluctance on the part of steering committee members to respectfully challenge each other led to a period of underlying frustration and miscommunication. At the same time, the process of having resolved these initial disagreements and ultimately coming to a consensus has been valuable.

The importance of a neutral arbiter. All respondents commented on the importance of TAI's role as independent convener, not only because of its familiarity with the donors, but also because the TAI staff person has a technical understanding of evaluation processes. TAI therefore has the "permission and mandate" to hold the group to its commitments.

Transparency and Accountability Initiative is a collaborative of leading funders of transparency, accountability and participation worldwide. It envisions a world where citizens are informed and empowered; governments are open and responsive; and collective action advances the public good. Toward this end, TAI aims to increase the collective impact of transparency and accountability interventions by strengthening grantmaking practice, learning and collaboration among its members. TAI focuses on the following thematic areas: data use for accountability, strengthening civic space, taxation and tax governance, learning for improved grantmaking.

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