THE MASTERCARD FOUNDATION

RESEARCH AND
EVALUATION POLICY

MAY 2015

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PURPOSE

The MasterCard Foundation was established with a clear vision: to provide economically disadvantaged people with the opportunity to learn and prosper. Together with visionary partners, our programs advance financial inclusion, economic opportunities for the poor and secondary and tertiary education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Many of these programs impact young people.

The purpose of research, evaluation and learning at The MasterCard Foundation is to strengthen programs and policies that improve the lives of people living in poverty. We believe in the catalytic, lasting impact that smart research and evaluation can have in identifying and enabling pathways out of poverty.

The Research and Evaluation Policy articulates the Foundation's approach, provides guidance and sets expectations for Foundation staff, researchers, evaluators and partners. They are responsible for implementing this Policy in any research and evaluation activities we commission or implement.

This Policy was developed in consultation with senior leaders, staff, partners and global experts. It adheres to the Canada Revenue Agency's Policy Statement on Research as a Charitable Activity.[1] This Policy will be reviewed yearly and revised as needed based on ongoing feedback and any regulatory changes.

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION WORK TOGETHER TO CATALYZE LEARNING AND FILL PRIORITIZED KNOWLEDGE GAPS

While there are varying definitions of research, evaluation and learning, at The MasterCard Foundation they are generally used in the following ways: Research at the Foundation is a systematic investigation focused on producing new knowledge that is applicable to programs and broadly advances our areas of work. Evaluation is a systematic process to learn from programs, promote accountability, understand and improve effectiveness, further decision-making and contribute knowledge to the wider fields of practice. Learning is a continuous process of reflection, incorporating evidence from research and evaluation as well as experience and tacit knowledge. A learning culture's true value is revealed when new knowledge results in programmatic or policy action and impact.

APPROACH

Research and evaluation are central to the Foundation's work. Together they underpin an integrated learning approach that allows for evidence-informed decisions and amplified impact.

The Foundation funds research and evaluation to further our charitable purpose and programming goals. Our learning is strategic, intentional and advances our core mission and areas of work. The Foundation is committed to engaged, joint learning with partners and stakeholders so that we continuously improve our work and find innovative solutions that advance our mission and vision.

At the Foundation, research, evaluation and learning activities follow two objectives:

- To generate high quality, trustworthy knowledge for program learning, accountability and decision-making.

- To strengthen the evidence base needed to improve programs and policies in our areas of work.

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1. CPS-029, April 30, 2009: http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/chrts-gvng/chrts/plcy/cps/rsrch-eng.html

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CORE PRINCIPLES

Three core principles and related themes must be carefully considered and explicitly addressed when designing, approving and implementing any research and evaluation activities commissioned by the Foundation and its implementing partners. This helps ensure that research and evaluation activities align with the Foundation's core values, intentions and quality expectations.

1. RESEARCH AND EVALUATION IS STRATEGIC AND APPLIED FOR IMPACT.

Strategic: Research and evaluation responds to specific knowledge needs that are directly linked to programming goals and learning agendas. Directly aligning research and evaluation with programming helps ensure relevance. The purpose and audience must be clearly articulated. Any research and evaluation effort must be cost-effective and result in new knowledge, ensuring no redundancy with past or present knowledge-generation efforts.

Applied: Research and evaluation is designed and communicated for uptake and impact. Findings should add value to our areas of work by supporting evidence-informed decision-making. This requires ongoing communication and engagement with stakeholders. Research findings should be made available and shared widely to advance learning and public knowledge. These efforts must be built into the design phase and reflect the diversity of intended audiences and uses.

2. METHODS ARE ETHICAL, RIGOROUS AND ADAPTED TO LEARNING QUESTIONS AND CONTEXT.

Ethical: Research and evaluation reflect high ethical standards, rooted in the Foundation's fundamental respect for human dignity. All individuals engaged in efforts funded by the Foundation must embrace the key ethical principles of cultural sensitivity and respect for the dignity, privacy and agency of individuals. Every effort must be made to optimize the involvement of, and benefits to, participants and communities. Considerations must also include child protection, gender equity and sensitivity, informed consent and the avoidance of any real or perceived conflict of interest.

Rigorous: Methodological rigour generates high quality, trustworthy knowledge and new insights through innovative approaches. Rigour in this context means data collection, analysis and reporting that is systematic and verifiable.

Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, in an integrated manner and at multiple levels, fosters richness

of understanding. Sound methodological approaches are critical to building a reliable evidence base. The Foundation encourages methodological innovation and creativity, particularly those which empower participants and harness the power of technology, to generate compelling insights and new ways of thinking.

Adapted: Selection of methods is driven by the ability to respond to specific learning questions and context. Methods and approaches must aim to generate reliable, useful evidence in response to learning questions and should be informed by purpose and audience. They must also be appropriately tailored to specific programming goals, contexts and participants.

3. THE FOUNDATION AND ITS PARTNERS COLLABORATE TO LISTEN DEEPLY, ELEVATE VOICES AND LEVERAGE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE.

Collaborate: Engagement of relevant partners, participants and stakeholders builds ownership, shared learning and collective action. Expanded networks and alliances with partner organizations' clients and program participants, young people, universities, governments, donors, civil society and other stakeholders can enable more systematic use of knowledge in addressing national, regional and global priorities. Working together at multiple levels strengthens the shared value and collective impact of research and evaluation activities.

Listen deeply, elevate voices: Participatory approaches elevate the views of economically disadvantaged people to enhance the programs and policies that affect them. One of the far-reaching effects of poverty can be the exclusion of poor people from articulating their abilities, interests and perspectives to decision-makers at all levels. Research and evaluation efforts should be inclusive and give voice to a multiplicity of perspectives, including those of less powerful or excluded populations. These efforts should also find dynamic ways to ensure the voices of people living in poverty are heard and acted upon.

Leverage local knowledge: African-based institutions are engaged in research, evaluation and learning, in partnership with global centres, and knowledge is returned to communities and institutions. Activities supporting evidence-informed decisions should be shaped by local contexts and capacities, while drawing upon global knowledge and expertise. This includes leveraging existing expertise, building capacity to generate and use data locally and having clear plans for returning knowledge back into local communities, institutions and systems.

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IMPLEMENTATION

> The successful implementation of this Policy requires that the core principles are well understood and communicated internally and with partners. Foundation staff and partners have a shared responsibility to carefully consider and explicitly address the principles in any research or evaluation activity. All Foundation staff, researchers, evaluators and partners are responsible for ensuring that the principles and practices articulated in this Policy are met.

The Research, Evaluation and Learning team at the Foundation is responsible for assessing, approving and providing technical assistance and quality assurance for all research and evaluation commissioned, funded or undertaken by the Foundation. The Research, Evaluation and Learning team will work closely with program staff and partners to ensure that any research or evaluation that is funded by the Foundation is relevant and applied for the purposes of advancing evidence-informed decision-making and addressing knowledge gaps.

The Foundation's Program staff contributes to the design and management of research and evaluation related to their specific programming partnerships and learning priorities. We are collectively responsible for ensuring that evidence is communicated and disseminated internally to support decision-making at all levels.

The Foundation's Senior Management is responsible for ensuring that evidence generated by research and evaluation is used in strategic decision-making. Senior Management also ensures that research and evaluation activities comply with the Canada Revenue Agency's requirements and the Foundation's charitable objects.

All strategies and major programs related to research and evaluation, particularly for larger initiatives, are subject to approval from the Foundation's senior leadership and Board of Directors.

A Research and Evaluation Advisory Group consisting of external experts is engaged, when required, to provide overall strategic guidance, independent validation and quality assurance on select research and evaluation activities. External bodies, including institutional review boards, are also engaged as needed to ensure high ethical and technical standards are adhered to for major research and evaluation initiatives.

Researchers, evaluators and implementing partners are responsible for carrying out their work in adherence with this Policy and maintaining frequent and regular communication with the Foundation throughout the course of their work.

Detailed tools and guidelines are available upon request to assist in the implementation of this Policy.

More information on research and evaluation at the Foundation, ethical considerations and the strategic role of communications are provided in the Appendices of this Policy. For further information regarding The MasterCard Foundation's Policy and approaches to research, evaluation and learning, please contact knowledge@mastercardfdn.org.

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APPENDIX I: RESEARCH AND EVALUATION AT THE MASTERCARD FOUNDATION

RESEARCH

When designed well and guided by strong principles and practices, research is a powerful tool to guide programming decisions and contribute to global knowledge for action and impact.

The Foundation prioritizes research that is clearly aligned with our charitable purpose and has the potential to catalyze meaningful change in the lives of economically disadvantaged clients and young people.

All research undertaken, commissioned or funded by the Foundation must align with the core principles and practices outlined in this Policy, as well as comply with the Canada Revenue Agency's Policy Statement on Research as a Charitable Activity.[2]

Foundation-funded research also leverages the knowledge of our partner research institutions and implementing agencies, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, and reinforces their capacity to generate and deploy the results of research in conjunction with local knowledge users.

Research aims to accomplish knowledge objectives related to program strategies, theories of change and learning agendas. This includes:

- Advancing learning within a particular project partnership or initiative to generate greater understanding of key issues, improve strategies and maximize impact.

- Building evidence around a wider programming area or theme to inform the design and implementation of new program strategies and investments, as well as replication or scaling of existing initiatives.

- Responding to knowledge gaps in key sectors and areas of work, to improve the Foundation's programming and contribute to the wider field.

EVALUATION

Evaluation at the Foundation is undertaken for the dual goals of learning and accountability. As such, evaluation strengthens the Foundation and our programming partners as learning organizations, and promotes more effective interventions.

Given the diversity of our programs, evaluation does not take a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, we seek to meet the specific needs of the Foundation, our program partners and stakeholders through evaluation approaches that are relevant and timely. All evaluations respond to learning questions that are tailored to each program and project, guided by Theories of Change and learning agendas as well as global evaluation standards and criteria.[3]

Evaluations are designed with input and consultation from program stakeholders, including Foundation staff, partner organizations and other relevant audiences. Decisions as to what is being evaluated, and how, will be guided by the core principles set out in this Policy.

Monitoring complements the evaluation function, specifically by tracking project progress on an active and ongoing basis, allowing for timely adjustments and corrections. Baseline assessments are also critical for initial measurement of indicators and to facilitate the tracking of outcomes and impacts over time, setting the stage for robust evaluation later in the project.

Types of Evaluation Frequently Conducted at The MasterCard Foundation	
Mid-term Evaluation	Conducts a systematic assessment of progress towards anticipated and unanticipated outcomes, and generates learning for course corrections.
Final Evaluation	Provides a summative assessment of project results and lessons learned.
Impact Evaluation	A type of evaluation design that assesses the changes that can be attributed to a particular intervention.
Learning Partnership	Embeds robust, third-party evaluation and research into the full lifecycle of a project or program, allowing for ongoing learning and knowledge sharing.

2. CPS-029, April 30, 2009: http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/chrts-gvng/chrts/plcy/cps/rsrch-eng.html

3. Please see links to evaluation standards and OECD DAC Evaluation Criteria in Annex

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APPENDIX II: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are crucial to shaping the design of all research and evaluation endeavours. The Foundation's fundamental respect for human dignity and equity underpins our ethical approach, which all staff, partners, researchers and evaluators are expected to follow. Our ethical approach includes the following core elements:

• All research and evaluation designs, approaches and practices should demonstrate cultural sensitivity, including the recognition of differences of beliefs, manners and customs, and ensuring that integrity and honesty are exhibited in relationships with stakeholders.

• Participants in research and evaluation activities must be treated with respect and dignity. This entails robust procedures to ensure protection of privacy and sensitive information, including offering anonymity and confidentiality of individual information. Research and evaluation must not be unduly extractive, invasive or burdensome on any individual, organization or community, and instead should seek to optimize their involvement and benefit. This includes consulting with local stakeholders and proactively sharing results. Gender-sensitive approaches, with particular attention paid to vulnerable populations, must also be considered and pursued.

• Research and evaluation must practice free and informed consent, specifically ensuring that individuals are free to choose to participate or not and that no penalty or hardship shall arise from their decision.

• Any real, potential or perceived conflict of interest must be proactively disclosed and managed.

All employees of the Foundation must uphold the Employee Code of Conduct, which further details employee requirements regarding conflict of interest, confidentiality and child protection.

All researchers and evaluators working on projects funded by the Foundation and engaging with children or youth must also comply with the Foundation's Child Protection Guidelines.

The Foundation endorses Canada Revenue Agency's ethical standards for research, as set out in the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.

Potential ethical issues, including those that particularly relate to working with children, youth and other vulnerable populations, must be included and addressed in relevant plans, tools and guidelines for research and evaluation. All proposed research and evaluation at the Foundation must consider potential ethical implications of the proposed activities along with plans to mitigate these concerns. Management of research and evaluation activities must remain sensitive to ethical considerations throughout the duration of the activities, with frequent check-ins and early attention to any emergent issues.

Serious ethical concerns or violations will be reviewed by the Director of Research, Strategy and Learning, and where warranted, by appropriate internal and external bodies, including institutional review boards. Appropriate actions will be taken to address any confirmed violations of these ethical principles and codes of conduct, including changes to research design and implementation and, where warranted, removal of individuals implicated and cessation of research and evaluation activities and related funding agreements.

APPENDIX III: THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF COMMUNICATIONS

The role of communications and meaningful engagement with potential users of knowledge is central to the Foundation's applied research and evaluation approach. In line with the core principles outlined in this Policy, research and evaluation communications involves the following activities by the Foundation and its partners:

- The clear articulation of a communications and user engagement strategy, based on purpose and audience, at the outset of any research or evaluation activity to inform dissemination and use of knowledge.

- The production and dissemination of knowledge and insights from research and evaluation activities in multiple forms, including publications, presentations, policy briefs and other open knowledge products.

- Deep engagement and dialogue with key users of this knowledge, through public events, stakeholder consultations and other actions.

The wide dissemination of knowledge and meaningful engagement with potential users of knowledge is critical to achieving the Foundation's goals of strengthened programs, improved lives and amplified impact.

The Foundation's approach to intellectual property and copyright of products is guided by its commitment to knowledge sharing and wide distribution, as well as access and use of funded research. Further guidance on the Foundation's intellectual property and copyright policies and considerations is available upon request.

ANNEXES

Canada Revenue Agency's Policy Statement on Research as a Charitable Activity: CPS-029, April 30, 2009:
http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/chrts-gvng/chrts/plcy/cps/rsrch-eng.html

Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans:
http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tcps2/TCPS_2_FINAL_Web.pdf

OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance, 2010:
http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm

African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) African Evaluation Guidelines – Standards and Norms, 2007:
http://www.afrea.org/?page=EvaluationGuildline

American Evaluation Association (AEA) Guiding Principles For Evaluators, 2004:
http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=51

Lean Research Declaration, D-Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University, August 2014:
http://d-lab.mit.edu/lean-research