

HOW TO: DEVELOP LESSONS LEARNED

A key component of your final report is the “Learn” section, where you will share a small number of lessons learned using one of three prompts.¹

Because the primary purpose of the metrics (outputs and outcomes) is to drive reflection and ground insights they are often a great place to start when thinking about lessons learned at the end of your grant. However, other sources of learning should also be considered when completing this section.

Quality lessons learned are an important outcome for every grant, and a significant part of how we continue to improve our work at the Foundation. In addition, at the end of each year we create a report identifying key themes from these lessons and share it with the broader non-profit community.

If you have any questions about how to complete this section, please contact your program officer.

EXAMPLE

COMMON MISTAKE	MISTAKE EXAMPLES
Looking for the silver lining	“Even though we only had four workshops instead of the six we planned for, it was successful because the people in attendance were deeply engaged.”
Being too general	“Communication is key in doing this work.”
Lacking actionability	“Because of the national political climate, we found that it was much harder to complete our work. Things will have to change before we can be successful.”

STRONG LESSONS LEARNED

Headlined—

A statement that quickly summarizes what the lesson is about.

Candid—

Many of the strongest lessons come out of challenges, obstacles, and failures, so it’s critical to include lessons related to these alongside successes.

Specific—

Avoid generalities (e.g. “effective communication is important” or “relationships matter”) and get into the specifics of what actually happened, what that means, what specific insights were drawn, and what that means for your work moving forward.

Actionable—

Most lessons should end with a focus on action. This may either be a shift that has already taken place or a proposed change that will occur in the near future.

SAMPLE LESSON

Building relationships requires regular communications with key partner organizations.

One of the most significant challenges we faced in meeting our goals was a lack of strong partnerships with other organizations in the community.

We did not spend the necessary time up front having conversations, building relationships, or gathering feedback and this led to both confusion and pushback from key organizations in the community after we began to implement our plan.

Moving forward, we plan to hold monthly community dialogues and develop an online survey tool to provide opportunities for organizations to be engaged and provide ongoing feedback.

¹The three “Learn” prompts to choose from are: 1. What are the 2-3 key lessons you are taking away from this work and how will you apply them moving forward? 2. If you could do this grant again, what 2-3 things would you do the same or differently? 3. What 2-3 pieces of advice would you give to another organization doing similar work?