

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND RESEARCH PRACTICES IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION-FOCUSED PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATIONS

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mother who passed away when I was just eleven years old. You cherished learning and you always encouraged me, even at an early age, to pursue education to the highest level. Thank you for everything you did for me during your short time on earth. I would also like to dedicate this work to my wife, Nana, and two children, Maddie and Frankie. I spent countless hours away from you to work on this and I always promised you that I would finish this one day. I hope this inspires you and teaches you the valuable lesson to never ever to give up in life. There is always light at the end of the tunnel.

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PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND RESEARCH PRACTICES IN HIGHER  
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Performance measurement and research are key components of the operations of philanthropic organizations (both grant-making [GM] and grant-seeking [GS] organizations) —particularly those in the higher education subsector. Both conventionally and historically, performance measurement and research practices have been portrayed as rational tools that philanthropic organizations undertake to get the needed data or information to make evidence-based decisions.

In this dissertation, I investigate, identify, and explain, beyond rational choice, the other possible motives that may drive higher education-focused philanthropic organizations to engage in performance measurement and research practices as well as the ways they use the information gained from these practices. In other words, I answer the research questions: why do philanthropic organizations (both grant-making and grant-seeking organizations) engage in performance measurement and research practices? How do they use information from these practices?

This dissertation employs a content analysis methodology to explore whether other theories may provide plausible explanations as to why higher education-focused philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement and research practices. Some of the other theories upon which I draw to help explain why and how philanthropic organizations (GMs and GSs) use performance measurement and research practices are: organizational learning theory, principal agency theory, institutional theory, resource

dependency theory, stewardship theory and culturally responsive, equitable and inclusive practices and outcomes theory (CREI).

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEA	American Evaluation Association
GPRA	Government Performance and Results Act
MOOCs	Massive Online Open Courses
US	United States
GM	Grant-making Organization
GS	Grant-seeking Organization
PM	Performance Measurement

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

Performance measurement and research are key components of the operations of philanthropic organizations—particularly those in the higher education subsector. Despite the relevance and use of performance measurement and research in the nonprofit sector as two distinct but related organizational practices (see Carman, 2011; LeRoux & Wright, 2010; Morley et al., 2001), there is currently very little available empirical work that investigates, jointly, why and how organizations within the nonprofit sector use these two organizational practices in the modern era. The purpose of this study is, therefore, to explore why higher education-focused philanthropic organizations (i.e., organizations that donate or in other ways aid higher education institutions) undertake performance measurement and research practices, as well as how they use the information and data gained from these practices.

In this first chapter of the dissertation, I present an overview of both performance measurement and research as two distinct organizational practices by highlighting the key historical events that shaped their relevance in the nonprofit sector. The problem statement, which indicates the key context for the study, is also presented in this chapter, along with a presentation of the rationale for studying these organizational practices for higher education-focused philanthropic organizations. I present the purpose of the study, its theoretical construct, significance, and related research questions, and an overview of the nature of the study as a whole. I end the chapter with an overview of how Chapters Two through Five of this dissertation are organized and presented.

## **Performance Measurement as an Organizational Practice**

The term “performance measurement” is defined as the systematic assessment of the design, implementation, and worth of a program, cluster of programs, or goals of an organization (Mertens, 2010; Newcomer, 1997). Only recently has performance measurement become a central component of the operations of nonprofit organizations (Hammack, 2006; LeRoux & Wright, 2010). In the early years of American charity, less thought was given to engaging in performance measurement, as accountability was not expected by members of the communities who financially supported nonprofit work (Friedman & McGarvie, 2003; Hammack, 2006; LeRoux & Wright, 2010). In most cases, nonprofits were trusted by their benefactors because social values and priorities were mainly homogenous (Hammack, 2006). As the nonprofit sector grew and became more professionalized, however, nonprofit organizations themselves began to broaden their range of stakeholders, which resulted in performance measurement becoming increasingly relevant for these organizations to foster and maintain public trust (Friedman & McGarvie, 2003; Hammack, 2006; LeRoux & Wright, 2010).

Nonprofit stakeholders are increasingly interested in knowing how well the nonprofits they support are doing (Carman, 2011). This interest means that nonprofits now increasingly rely on performance measurement tools, such as grant monitoring and reporting requirements, to meet the external pressure for accountability (Alexander et al., 2010; Benjamin, 2013; Hammack, 2006; Lee & Clerkin, 2017a, 2017b; LeRoux & Wright, 2010; Mitchell, 2014). Some nonprofits also engage in performance measurement practices for reasons beyond meeting public accountability requirements—such as to gain legitimacy (Carman, 2011; Frumkin & Galaskiewicz, 2004; Hafsi &

Thomas, 2005; Scott et al., 2007; Suchman, 1995). Conventionally, performance measurement has been “seen as a rational tool that nonprofit organizations employ to gather information to make improvements in their organizational and programmatic activities” (Carman, 2011, p. 1). I sought in this study, therefore, to determine whether the view that performance measurement is a rational tool is empirically based and, if so, to what degree this view might vary according to nonprofit subsector.

Carman (2011) previously indicated that human service-based nonprofits do not necessarily see performance measurement as only a rational tool but as a tool to foster other factors such as legitimacy and trust. Little is currently known, however, about how philanthropic organizations in other subsectors (e.g., those aimed at helping higher education institutions and causes) view the role of performance measurement in their operations. Understanding the role of performance measurement in the operations of higher education-focused philanthropic organizations is important because: (a) philanthropy is a critical source of support for colleges and universities and these philanthropic organizations are among the major sources of philanthropic giving to the colleges and universities; and (b) a significant share of philanthropic organizations, particularly those operating within the higher education subsector, tend to engage in some kind of formalized performance measurement practices due to the multifaceted nature and complexity of the social problems they address (Friedman & McGarvie, 2003).

### **Research as an Organizational Practice**

While research—particularly that related to understanding recipient needs in relation to donor aid—is an important function in the operations of any philanthropic organization, the practice of research has not always been implemented in these

institutions (Friedman & McGarvie, 2003). The term “research” can be defined as the process of systematic inquiry or review that is designed to document, collect, analyze, interpret, and use data (Mertens, 2010). The demand for and use of research by organizations within the nonprofit sector has increased dramatically in the modern era when compared to the early years of American charity (Friedman & McGarvie, 2003). In these noted early years, philanthropists engaged in acts of personal benevolence, placing a premium on the relationship between donor and recipient (Friedman & McGarvie, 2003). The emphasis on personal relationships meant that philanthropists did not have to engage in rigorous research in order to understand the needs of recipients (i.e., the individuals or groups that benefited from their generosity). Benefactors could, instead, simply ask recipients in a conversation or even anticipate the needs of the less fortunate because of the personal relationship that existed between them. As this personal benevolence shifted into a more impersonal and institutional form—namely strategic giving designed to create social impact—the use of research became more prominent (Friedman & McGarvie, 2003).

Influenced by social science and emerging management practices, the newer scientific philanthropy that emerged in the early 1900s emphasized businesslike methods, efficiency, centralized decision-making, and the broad application of funds to social groups in order to achieve social objectives (Friedman & McGarvie, 2003; Zunz, 2012). The shift from direct personal benevolence to social impact meant that philanthropists now had to rely on using research as a rational tool to inform and guide their work to most effectively address root causes of social problems, particularly with regard to the



development, formulation, and implementation of philanthropic strategies (Friedman & McGarvie, 2003).

As the distance between donor and recipient widened, research became the avenue by which donors could learn more about recipients without necessarily relying on personal contact (Friedman & McGarvie, 2003). The focus on addressing root causes meant that philanthropists had to, in addition to general aid, fund research to better understand the complexity of the problems that they sought to address. Philanthropists also had to engage in their own research to identify worthwhile organizations and civic associations to fund, while recipients, in turn, became sophisticated both in the act of fundraising and in their reliance on research to better understand the preferences and values of donors. The use of research as a more impersonal, evidence-based approach to investigate social problems and gather facts and statistics increased exponentially over the decades, as the nonprofit sector became more professionalized, larger in size, and increased its range of stakeholders (Friedman & McGarvie, 2003; LeRoux & Wright, 2010; Morley et al., 2001).

Currently, some higher education-focused organizations (both in terms of Grant Makers [GMs] – those that give out grants to other organizations- and Grant Seekers [GSs]) – those that receive grants- engage in some form of formalized research and use information from this organizational practice in a variety of ways. Similar to performance measurement, the conventional wisdom is that research is only a rational tool that philanthropic organizations use to gather information in order to make evidence-based decisions (Stoecker, 2007). To date, however, there is little empirical basis to support this claim. In this study I, therefore, aim to determine whether philanthropic organizations

engage in research practices for purposes beyond gathering information to make evidence-based decisions, such as to gain legitimacy.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite the rise in relevance and use of performance measurement and research in the nonprofit sector as two distinct but related organizational practices (see Carman, 2007; LeRoux & Wright, 2010; Morley et al., 2001), there is little known empirical work that investigates, jointly, why and how organizations within the sector use these two practices in the modern era. Several studies have examined the purpose, approach, and use of performance measurement as an organizational practice in the nonprofit sector, primarily within human service-based nonprofits (e.g., Behn, 2003; Carman, 2007; Newcomer et al., 2004). The existing literature has been mostly focused on why nonprofit organizations conduct performance measurement without treating research (both synthesis and new knowledge creation) that is not geared toward assessing organizational or program-based performance as a separate concept or organizational practice (e.g., Alexander et al., 2010; Hennes, 2017). Research and performance measurement have mostly been conflated as a single organizational practice in past studies. Separating research and performance measurement as two organizational practices in this study is, thus, important because that is the standard practice among philanthropic organizations—particularly those in the higher education subsector (Katz, 2012; McClure et al., 2017). Some organizations even hire different personnel to manage each practice, requiring different skillsets for each type of role. The problem studied in this current work, thus, involves an exploration into why higher education-focused philanthropic organizations

undertake performance measurement and research practices, as well as how they use the data gained from these practices.

Furthermore, this dissertation is extending the research of Carman and other researchers (e.g., Cooper, 2014; Cooper & Levin, 2013; Stoecker, 2007; Weiss, 1979, 1998) by exploring multiple geographical locations, multiple organizational representatives, different types of philanthropic organizations--those that give out grants as part of their operations (grantmaking [GM]) and those that receive grants (grant-seeking [GS])--and a different sector. First, the literature is mainly limited to exploring one geographical area—one state—and one nonprofit subsector (Carman, 2011; Stoecker, 2007). For example, one focused mainly on a small sample of human service organizations located in one state, which meant that the researcher could not “gauge the extent to which variability can be associated with political or environmental forces, such as state funding programs, budgetary and fiscal pressures, state regulations and state politics” (Carman, 2011, p. 367). While focusing on one state is not necessarily a methodological flaw—focusing on one state could, in actuality, help limit or minimize variability of the larger political environment—in the case of this particular topic this limitation affected the possibility of unravelling more generalizable themes and patterns of organizational behavior beyond that state (Carman, 2011).

There were also limitations with the scope of the data collection regarding the existing literature. Of particular note was how researchers in the existing literature gathered data through personal interviews with people in executive leadership positions who managed and oversaw performance measurement activities of their respective organizations (Carman, 2011). Such participant inclusion left out the voices and

perceptions of other key stakeholders, such as frontline program managers. This data collection approach also increased the possibility of what Carman (2011) described as “ecological fallacy and having one person’s judgement serve as a proxy for the entire organization” (p. 367). To address this limitation, I interviewed multiple representatives from the organization when possible- an executive and a frontline staff for each organization.

To ensure that a more comprehensive understanding of nonprofit performance measurement and research practices within philanthropic organizations in the higher education subsector is gained, I opted, in this study, to build on and extend the existing literature by addressing the limitations (as identified earlier in this section). The current work, therefore, is used to address an important gap in the literature, as I attempted to bifurcate research and performance measurement as two distinct organizational practices.

I aimed, in this study, to identify overarching thematic differences in the reasons for and uses of these practices between GM and GS organizations within the higher education subsector. Making comparisons across organizational types are crucial because the reasons and use of performance measurement and research by organizations within the nonprofit sector may be influenced by diverse factors that vary by organization type, such as the size of the organization (measured by the overall budget and number of paid full-time staff), relative position of the organization over others (i.e., power dynamics), goals of the organization, and ease of availability of financial resources (Carman, 2011). For example, a small GS nonprofit organization with a direct service approach may have completely different motives and uses for performance measurement and research

compared to large GM organizations that focus on creating large-scale systems change (e.g., the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation).

In this study, I gathered and triangulated data from both executives who oversee performance measurement and research and frontline evaluation and research staff who work directly to implement performance measurement and research practices in these organizations. Engaging these two noted stakeholders as opposed to only one ensured that I was able to more fully and accurately capture the perceptions of executives who tend to set the strategic vision as well as the frontline staff who directly implement the strategic vision of the executives. Though not perfect, this methodological adjustment and approach may reduce what Carman (2011) described as the “risk of ecological fallacy”(p. 367) and the possibility of equating one person’s perceptions and experiences to the collective and shared views of the entire organization.

### **Why the Higher Education Subsector?**

Unlike past studies that mainly focused on the social and human services subsectors, this dissertation examined why philanthropic organizations (GMs and GSs) within the higher education subsector conduct performance measurement and research. I focused the study on the higher education subsector for a variety of reasons. First, philanthropy plays a crucial role in the US higher education subsector when compared to other nonprofit subsectors (McClure et al., 2017). Hall (2006) emphasized philanthropy’s unique role in the US higher education sector by writing that donation by individuals and foundations could be deemed the single most relevant force in the emergence of modern universities in US.

Colleges and universities have, in addition, relied for a long time on philanthropic organizations (GMs and GSs) to meet diverse institutional needs. For example, in 2015, universities and colleges received \$40.3 billion in private donations—the highest amount since the Council for Aid to Education started keeping track in 1957 (Council for Aid, 2015). While it is not surprising that most of the literature has focused more on philanthropic giving (McClure et al., 2017) than the organizational behavior and approaches of the philanthropic organizations that support colleges and universities, it is still necessary to shed light on such behavior. In this study, therefore, I focused on the organizational behavior of higher education-based philanthropic organizations as it relates to research and performance measurement practices.

Second, I focused this dissertation on the higher education subsector because research and performance measurement are key components of the nature of the work of philanthropic organizations in this subsector (Hafsi & Thomas, 2005; McClure et al., 2017). Most of the social problems that philanthropic organizations attempt to address within the higher education subsector are multifaceted in nature, which means that these philanthropic organizations have to invest in research and program evaluations to better understand issues before they implement action plans (Ebrahim, 2019; Jääskeläinen & Sillanpää, 2013; Katz, 2012). Then, even after implementing action plans, philanthropic organizations still have to conduct developmental evaluations to identify the changes needed along the way. These social problems have been termed “wicked” by Rittel and Webber (1973), who indicate that such problems have numerous causes, are difficult to describe, and do not have the right answer.

Higher education-based philanthropic organizations, therefore, have no choice than to engage in systems change work to address these social problems, leading them to rely on research and performance measurement as key organizational practices (Ebrahim, 2019; McClure et al., 2017). Examples of some of these “wicked problems” include declining postsecondary enrollment and completion rates as well as lack of career readiness among marginalized groups of people (Anheier et al., 2017; Rittel & Webber, 1973). Higher education-focused philanthropic organizations’ high reliance on research and performance measurement as key practices to deal with “wicked problems” begs the question of whether there are other organizational motivators for engaging in research and performance measurement. I aimed to address this query in the current study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore why higher education-based philanthropic organizations undertake performance measurement and research practices, as well as how they use the information gained from these practices. I also sought, through this study, to identify overarching thematic differences in the reasons for and uses of these practices between GM and GS organizations within the higher education subsector.

### **Theoretical Construct**

Both conventionally and historically, performance measurement and research have been portrayed as rational tools that philanthropic organizations undertake to gather information to make improvements in their organizational and programmatic activities (Carman, 2011; Dunn, 1981). Similar to what Carman (2011) found in an analysis of human service nonprofits use of performance measurement, I argue in this dissertation

that other organizational theories beyond rational choice theory could provide additional vital and crucial explanations of why GS and GM organizations engage in performance measurement and research practices and how they use data from these two practices.

Some of the other theories upon which I draw to help explain why and how philanthropic organizations (GMs and GSs) use performance measurement and research practices are: agency theory, institutional theory, resource dependency theory, stakeholder theory, and stewardship theory. These theories make significantly different assumptions about how organizations function, and how organizational actors within the nonprofit sector behave compared to the assumptions behind rational choice theory (Carman, 2011). For example, other scholars have outlined alternative views to the conventional argument that performance measurement is a rational tool, such as how performance measurement can also be a vital accountability tool (e.g., Benjamin, 2008; Carman, 2011; Ebrahim, 2005; Kim, 2005). In this dissertation, therefore, I investigate, identify, and explain, beyond rational choice, the other possible motives that may drive philanthropic organizations within the higher education subsector to conduct performance measurement and research practices as well as the ways they use the information gained from these practices.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study may contribute to the extant knowledge of organizational motivators for engaging in performance measurement and research practices in the higher education subsector. The implicit assumption has always been that such organizations undertake these practices to gather information to either enhance or improve their organizational and programmatic practices (i.e., that research and performance measurements are



rational and technical tools), yet other factors beyond “rationality”—such as legitimacy—play key roles in why these organizations make investment in these practices.

I present a unique opportunity to explore in another subsector the other possible organizational motivators for engaging in these practices. It may be that I may reinforce the dominant narrative that these practices are rational and technical tools. Alternatively, the findings may pave the way for an alternative discourse that other factors beyond rational choice could explain the use of these tools within organizations. I discuss the eventual outcome in the final chapter of this dissertation.

There are implications from the study for practice. Specifically, by understanding why philanthropic organizations undertake research and performance measurement, this study’s findings may shed light on the behavior of philanthropic organizations and, thereby, help in identifying effective strategies and techniques that encourage nonprofit organizations to better use performance measurement and research practices. Understanding the reasons or organizational motives for engaging in these practices could also help philanthropic organizations better plan, budget, design, and implement such organizational practices in more efficient ways.

There could also be policy implications related to this study. By better understanding the reason for conducting research and performance measurement practices, GM organizations, in particular, may be better informed about the value of either allowing or not allowing grantees to allocate grant resources for performance measurement and research practices. Thus, understanding the motives for engaging in these practices could help GM organizations better formulate funding guidelines and requirements for the GS organizations they support. In addition, the study findings may

help organizations that use these practices to assess their research and performance measurement strategies relative to their intended goals. For example, GM organizations that engage in large-scale systems change work allocate significant shares of their budget to research with the goal that information from the studies will inform key stakeholders to take policy action on related research topics (Hennes, 2017; Stoecker, 2007).

Understanding the other reasons and uses of research beyond rational choice may help these GM organizations to reevaluate their assumptions and the theories of change that lie behind their use of research as a purely rational and technical tool.

### **Research Questions**

I seek to answer three primary questions:

1. Why do higher education-focused philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement?
2. Why do higher education-focused philanthropic organizations engage in research?
3. How do higher education-focused philanthropic organizations use the information gained from their research and performance measurement practices?

In addition to these three main questions, I investigate an additional secondary question, namely “What reported differences, if any, exist in the reason and uses of these practices between higher education-focused GS and GM organizations?”

### **Nature of the Study**

I conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews with executives and frontline staff responsible for overseeing performance measurement and research practices in

philanthropic organizations operating within the higher education subsector in order to understand their reasons or motives (“the why”) for conducting these practices as well as how these organizations use the data gained from these practices. A purposive sampling approach was employed to select philanthropic organizations that are located across the United States. From each organization, I interviewed at least one executive and one frontline staff member, wherever possible. Unlike past studies, participating organizations spanned across the United States and were either GM or GS organizations that operate within the higher education subsector or environment.

Although the focus of the study was specifically on the United States of America, some of the philanthropic organizations have international reach. It is possible, then, that some of the philanthropic organizations may not be considered “niche organizations” (i.e., organizations that specialize exclusively in one sector). For example, the largest foundation in the United States, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, focuses on both health and education. I used the membership lists of the GMs for Education as well as the Council on Foundation as sampling tools for the GMs and membership lists of the National Council for Nonprofits coupled with subsector-specific associations, such as the National College Access Network, as sampling tools for participating GS organizations.

Data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software. By employing a set of predetermined codes based on the theories that support this study, I conducted directed content analysis to ascertain the frequency and extent to which the organizational motivators align with the preestablished theoretically-based codes (i.e., motivators). I also added new codes that emerged from the study to the preestablished codes that were employed from the beginning during this

analysis process. This approach made it possible to generate unexpected findings as well as subsector-specific findings that may not necessarily align with findings from past studies.

### **Chapter Outline**

This first chapter included a presentation of the rationale for studying why higher education-focused philanthropic organizations undertake performance measurement and research practices, as well as how they use the information gained from these practices. The chapter also presented the four research questions (three main and one secondary) that guided this study, along with a definition of the problem and significance of the study.

Chapter Two offers an overview of the extant literature relevant to this study. In this chapter, I address rational choice theory, agency theory, stewardship theory, stakeholder theory, institutional theory, and resource dependency theory. The second chapter also includes a presentation of the existing literature on performance measurement and research as two related, but different, organizational practices.

Chapter Three details the study design and method of analyzing the data for this study (i.e., directed content analysis). As part of the third chapter, I also present the study paradigm (i.e., the researcher's view of the world), the role of the researcher, and an overview of my recruitment decisions and the study participants. The chapter ends with a description of the procedures and instruments used to collect data and address data analysis.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the directed content analysis of the aforementioned interviews as well as the review of supporting documents.

Chapter Five includes a summary of the study, discussions on the themes and implications of the study, and conclusions.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of the Literature

This chapter presents information on relevant literature directly related to the topic under study, namely performance measurement and research practices in higher education-based philanthropic organizations. I present a brief history of the role of philanthropic organizations in the US higher education subsector. I show how contested the definition of performance measurement is without placing too much emphasis on the “how to” of performance measurement. I briefly present the common types of performance measurement practices in philanthropic organizations (since the focus of this research is on “the why” and not “the what”). I discuss the exogenous factors (i.e., factors outside the locus of control of philanthropic organizations) that have contributed to the rise of performance measurement in the nonprofit sector.

I define “research” as an organizational practice and broadly describe the types of research that take place in the philanthropic organizational setting. It should be noted that this discussion is held without focusing on the “methods and paradigms” of research that philanthropic organizations can employ. I present an historical tour of the formation of the nonprofit sector and make the case that several historical events have contributed to the relevance and use of research as a key approach or tool within the sector—especially with regard to the push for scientific philanthropy and the professionalization of the field. I discuss ways in which performance measurement differs from research, as the two are related but distinct organizational practices. I present theories that explain why philanthropic organizations engage in these practices. Next, I draw from the various organizational theories to present the theoretical framework for this study, which is

similar to what Carman (2011) used in a seminal work on human service-based nonprofits.

### **Higher Education and the Role of Philanthropic Organizations**

The historical contributions, character and the extent of the influence of philanthropy in the development and growth of the US higher education sector should not be underestimated. Rather, the value, traditions, forces, and events that led to the formation of the American higher education sector suggest that philanthropy was a central driver for the development of American higher education (Hammack, 2006; Hornickel, 2012; Walton, 2019). Sears' *Philanthropy in the History of American Higher Education* that was published as a "Bulletin" by the United States Bureau of Education described philanthropy as clearly the mother of the early colleges that were established in America. If we define philanthropy as all gifts except those from State (Thelin & Trollinger, 2014), then there is ample evidence to suggest that philanthropy played a large role in directing the growth of higher learning in America. For example, historical records from Sears' *Bulletin* (p.17) indicate philanthropy's role in higher education by showcasing the important donation by John Harvard in 1636:

Whatever the "moiety" of Harvard's estate was, it was a princely sum in the year 1638 for a college with one or two teachers and a half dozen students. This was the first great gift to education in America, and it is worthy of note that it was not tied up with conditions which might make it useless to the Harvard College of the future.

This philanthropic gesture was relevant as it set the precedence for other philanthropic support to higher education as well as the development of a fundraising culture in American higher education (Burlingame, 2014). Therefore, the early to mid-1800 saw an increased giving in private donations to support higher education, mainly to the private institutions (Thelin & Trollinger, 2014).

Philanthropic organizations that specifically aid higher education (i.e., higher education-focused philanthropic organizations) hold quite a significant place within the broader nonprofit sector and most importantly the contemporary growth of the US higher education system, but they mainly emerged in the early twentieth century as the primary philanthropic vehicle of the industrial entrepreneurs within America's capitalist class such as the Ford Foundation and Carnegie Foundation (Bachetti & Ehrlich, 2007; Walton, 2019). These philanthropic organizations supported large scale initiatives, mainly innovative and research-based efforts designed to provide new information that could challenge old ways of doing things (Arnove & Pinede, 2007). Besides these capitalists that created foundations, there were also corporations that also started making philanthropic investments in higher education in the form of corporate giving or through their separate foundations. Some of these corporations worked directly in the higher education subsector or others worked in different subsectors but still saw the higher education subsector as an important industry, worthy of social investment. According to responses to the annual Voluntary Support of Education survey, CASE (2021) estimates that colleges and universities in the US raised \$49.5 billion during the 2020 academic fiscal year, a slight decline from the \$49.6 billion raised the year before. Of the \$49.5 billion raised in 2020, corporations provided \$6.63 billion (13.4%), Foundations provided \$16.44 billion (33.2%), other organizations (mainly donor advised funds [DAF]) provided \$6.74 billion (13.6%), and individuals provided about \$19.69 billion (39.7%) (CASE, 2021).



## **What Have Been the Roles of Philanthropic Organizations in the Higher Education Sector?**

### **Complementary**

Philanthropic organizations have diverse roles within the higher education subsector. First, philanthropic organizations can play the complementary role to public sector provision of higher education, where such organizations focus on helping underserved populations of students gain access to postsecondary education (Anheier et al., 2017, p. 155). In this role, higher education-based philanthropic organizations can focus specifically on infusing private funds to support non-systemic solutions (i.e., direct service programs or initiatives) without disrupting the higher education status quo.

Such a complementary role could also relate to organizations that supplement state and federal funding to higher education institutions, such as by providing scholarship funds for students (Council for Aid, 2015; McClure et al., 2017). Carnegie (cited in Sealander, 2003) referred to this approach as “retail” or “transactional” philanthropy because it is not transformational on a systems level, but functions rather on a more individual or familial level. For example, a scholarship opportunity may allow a low-income, first-generation college student to pursue his/her education and, as result, may prove to be their family’s means or escape from abject poverty. This non-systemic approach to philanthropy could also provide higher education institutions with the necessary resources to fund small-scale, direct service student access and success programs designed to enhance and aid students in their academic and social experiences in postsecondary education (Anheier et al., 2017).

## **Innovative**

The second role that philanthropic organizations play within the higher education subsector is to support or promote innovation in the form of systemic changes that challenge the status quo, and which can lead to new models of higher education (Prewitt, 1999). In these instances, such organizations focus not only on treating the symptoms (i.e., transactional philanthropy) but function as catalysts to assist higher education institutions to reinvent themselves as more efficient, low-cost, high-quality models. In this sense, then, higher education-focused philanthropic organizations act as change agents and innovators.

The innovation role, especially, highlights the need for performance measurement and indicates issues or challenges related thereto, as innovation, by default, means uncertainty and risk-taking actions (Anheier, 2014; Gates & Hill, 1995). In particular, such risk is generally the result of such philanthropic organizations engaging in experimentation in their pursuit of practices and policies aimed at challenging the status quo. The performance measurement-related challenges, in turn, tend to stem from how philanthropic organizations may fail in the short-term, but that those short-term failures could ultimately lead to future success (Anheier & Leat, 2018).

One-way, in particular, philanthropic organizations have attempted to reduce risk and uncertainty as they engage in systems change has been by relying on research and performance measurement practices (Lindblom, 1959; McClure et al., 2017; Sealander, 2003). Through such organizational practices (i.e., research and performance measurement), higher education-based philanthropic organizations are generally better able to engage in the experimentation of innovative, cost-effective, higher education

models through small-scale pilot projects (Demillo, 2015). These pilot projects can then be scaled at the systems level when they demonstrate results.

An example of one such cost-effective program is Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs; DeMillo, 2015). These innovative models, once tested and proven reliable, have shown to significantly reduce the cost of higher education because they tend to have low fixed cost—although, the start-up cost for designing the software program can be expensive. In some cases, higher education-based philanthropic organizations bear start-up costs for innovation by funding social entrepreneurs or software companies to generate online models, provided that empirical research findings indicate that the relevant innovative models are viable options to traditional higher education institutions. Such philanthropic organizations also tend to mobilize support and create awareness for low-cost online programs (i.e., those that have been tested through empirical research) that are already in existence, such as the respective Western Governors College and University of New Hampshire.

A further way in which philanthropic organizations have created systems change is to engage in direct public policy advocacy through a combination of forums, research, and use of performance measurement practices (Lumina Foundation, 2021). In such cases, GM organizations tend to fund research while GSs conduct the research and program evaluations regarding innovative higher education models and then inform policymakers (i.e., at the institutional, state, and federal levels) on their findings (Orosz, 2002). These “policymaker briefings” tend to take place in special forums, with the goal of challenging relevant stakeholders to carefully think about their assumptions, biases, and decision-making processes when making key funding-appropriation decisions and

formulating policies that could impact the broader realities of higher education. Higher education-based philanthropic organizations generally use these briefings, forums, research, and program evaluation publications as rational and technical tools to lead policymakers toward making improvements and enhancements in programmatic and policy activities.

### **What is Performance Measurement?**

The definition of performance measurement is generally contested. For example, Mertens (2010, p.51) defined performance measurement as a “selective exercise that attempts to systematically and objectively assess progress towards and the achievement of outcomes”. Mertens (2010) argued that performance measurement is not a one-time event but rather an ongoing exercise involving assessment of differing scope and depth conducted at several points in time in response to evolving needs for performance measurement goals and learning during the effort to achieve an outcome.

In contrast to the Mertens (2010) definition, Hadley and Mitchell (1995) emphasize and define performance measurement as “applied inquiry carried out to make or support decisions regarding one or more service programs or organizational goals” (p. 48), while Shadish et al. (1991) advocated for a much more expansive definition in terms of the purposes for which performance measurements are undertaken. Part of Shadish’s definition includes the “use of feasible practices to construct knowledge of the value of the evaluand (what is being evaluated) that can be used to address the problems to which the evaluand is relevant” (cited in Mertens, 2010, p. 51). Shadish’s focus on the purpose of performance measurement emphasized the rational choice perspective associated with performance measurement.

The part of the definition that emphasizes the “purpose” of performance measurement has been thoroughly discussed and questioned in the literature (Mertens, 2010). The argument in relation to this part (purpose) of the definition has been that sometimes performance measurements are conducted, but the findings are not used to make significant decisions. This argument, thus, questions the implicit assumption and conventional view that performance measurement is a rational tool (Carman, 2011). The argument also raises the possibility that there could be other organizational motivators for engaging in performance measurement beyond rational choice.

Patton (2008) demonstrated the resource dependency argument associated with performance measurement. This author argued that while performance measurement can be employed to reduce uncertainty about decisions that have to be made, many other factors also influence program decisions. Some of these factors include the availability of resources and/or the political climate.

Regardless of the various perspectives used for defining performance measurement, in this dissertation I operationalize and define performance measurement in accordance with the definition put forward by Mertens (2010), namely that performance measurement is an applied inquiry process for collecting and synthesizing evidence that culminates in conclusions about the state of affairs, value, merit, worth, significance, or quality of a program, policy, or organization. To ensure that there is consistency in the flow of language within this discussion with regard to the term, I further define or clarify the terms “merit” and “worth”. First, merit is defined as the absolute or relative quality of something—either overall or in regard to a particular criterion (Davidson, 2005). Second, worth is understood to relate to an outcome of an

evaluation and refers to the value of what is being evaluated in a particular context as opposed to the intrinsic value of what is being evaluated (i.e., merit; Fournier, 2005). Thus, performance measurement is the systematic assessment of the design, implementation, and worth of a program or cluster of programs, or mission of an organization (Mertens, 2010; Newcomer, 1997).

### **Performance Measurement as Presented Within the Philanthropic Organizational Setting**

The concept of performance measurement is multifaceted and multidimensional (Foster, 1998; Glassman & Spahn, 2012; Jääskeläinen & Sillanpää, 2013; Sowa et al., 2004). According to the existing literature, the concept of performance measurement within the philanthropic organizational setting can manifest in four main dimensions: (a) financial performance, (b) stakeholder performance, (c) market performance, and (d) mission performance (Sinervo, 2017). These dimensions manifest in different ways for GM versus GS organizations. Financial performance measurement can, for example, manifest as donations raised per year and/or private and public grants received per year for GS organizations; while it can manifest in the form of endowment growth and meeting annual federally required payout, depending on the GM organization type (Guo & Brown, 2006).

Stakeholder performance measurement can entail identifying and engaging the right mix of external partners that can help an organization achieve its mission (Sinervo, 2017). Identifying the right mix of strategic partners is, therefore, central to both GM and GS organizations. GS organizations may, however, place more emphasis on different kinds of partners compared to GM organizations. Conversely, GS organizations may

prioritize their stakeholder identification based on factors such as donor loyalty and volunteer satisfaction. This difference is due to resource acquisition being a central focus for the survival of GS organizations, as they cannot pursue their organizational goals without the needed financial and human resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

One of the central measures of such organization's stakeholder performance is, therefore, their ability to mobilize and engage its stakeholders (Backer et al., 2004) in a way that would allow it to acquire needed resources in order to survive (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) or even thrive while they pursue the organizational mission. GS organizations within the higher education subsector, thus, tend to have sophisticated stakeholder engagement approaches to raise funds (Sargeant & Jay, 2010). For example, in some cases, such organizations may hire full-time development staff to write grant proposals to GM organizations, wealthy individuals, and/or corporations that align with their goals.

Conversely, GM organizations operating within the higher education subsector may focus less on monetary factors when dealing with stakeholders but may be more interested in addressing or acquiring non-monetary factors that are strategically aligned with achieving their organizational goals (Frumkin, 2019). Some such factors would relate to engaging policymakers and administrators who can be influential in their systems change agenda. For example, GM organizations within the higher education subsector tend to create sophisticated stakeholder engagement strategies that bring together the right mix of policy and institutional leaders on specific issues, depending on the agenda that they are interested in pursuing (Orosz, 2002).

Philanthropic organizations tend to engage their key stakeholders in the form of conventions and/or forums by orientating these leaders with research and action-oriented information that outlines the social problems as well as the challenges that these social problems create for society (Weiss & Bucuvalas, 1980). Such organizations are likely to particularly highlight these problems and associated challenges in relation to marginalized groups of people in society and to then suggest action plans that could be taken to ameliorate these issues. To assess stakeholder performance, then, these GM organizations administer surveys to the stakeholders that they engage to assess their satisfaction on their participation in the conventions and meetings that they organize (Lumina Foundation, 2021). In some cases, GM organizations administer both pre- and post-surveys to assess knowledge acquired as a result of their engagement with these stakeholders. Though these are proxy measures, these stakeholders are able to offer output-based information to the philanthropic organizations as they attempt to assess the usefulness of their stakeholder strategies (Frumkin, 2019; Herman & Renz, 2002; Sinervo, 2017). Such input can lead to these philanthropic organizations to correct their strategies, based on real-time feedback from their relevant stakeholders.

Market performance could present in different ways whether the organization is GS or GM (Morley et al., 2001; Newcomer et al., 2004). For GS organizations in the higher education subsector, particularly those that engage in direct service programs to students (e.g., mentoring and other college access activities), market performance can manifest as ensuring service quality or other factors around marketing products or service (i.e., which can facilitate trust among stakeholders; Sargeant & Jay, 2010). Depending on the specific theory of change of the program, certain metrics can be developed to capture



the quality of service that the organizations provide for students, as well as the awareness of the students about the availability of both the services and their quality that they receive (Frumkin, 2010; Sargeant & Jay, 2010).

For the GM organizations, market performance can manifest in the form of brand reputation (Gormley & Balla, 2004; Sargeant & Jay, 2010). One example of this would how external partners view the organization's behavior relative to its core principles and organizational goals (Orosz, 2002). GM and GS organizations enjoy special tax benefits as a result of their nonprofit status—so they tend to be particularly careful about signaling to the public that they legitimately deserve the benefits that they receive.

The final, and possibly most important factor is that of an organization's performance relative to its mission (Willems et al., 2014). Although the idea of pluralism allows philanthropic organizations to hold to their own version of the “public good,” one thing that unites all philanthropic organizations is that they have an organizational mission that guides their work (Payton & Moody, 2008). In most cases, however, these missions are written in vague and idealistic language that makes it difficult to measure, which can ultimately mean that all nonprofits are judged on their progress *toward* their missions rather than their *accomplishment* thereof (Anheier & Leat, 2018). Accordingly, nonprofits tend to center or build their organizational and programmatic goals around social missions (Franklin, 2002; Payton & Moody, 2013; Willems et al., 2014).

In most cases, it is this social mission that gives nonprofits the legitimacy and permission to benefit from the tax exemptions and access other benefits associated with their status (Frumkin, 2019; Willems et al., 2014). Assessing performance toward these organizations' missions is central and, arguably, vital to affirming the legitimacy of both

GS and GM philanthropic organizations. The argument could even be made that those other three dimensions of organizational performance (i.e., financial, market, and stakeholder) should contribute to supporting the accomplishment of mission performance.

In such instances, the relevant organization's mission would need to set and define its organizational goals (Franklin, 2002). Performance measurement systems are, thus, necessary resources to aid organizations to capture, track, and record the various dimensions of their performance measurement(s), while attempting to achieve the organizational mission (Epstein et al., 2009). It should be noted that the type and scope of the performance measurement system may vary, depending on a variety of factors, such as the size of the organization, the organization type, and the organization's goals (Carman, 2011). For example, a GM organization with a national goal may have to create a system that would allow it to capture interim and final reports from the network of GS organizations that it supports. Conversely, a GS organization with a direct service approach may be able to simply create a system that allows it to capture data directly from its beneficiaries in order to assess the overall impact of its program. Ultimately, the level of sophistication of the performance measurement system should be determined based on the infrastructure that is needed to capture the data required to allow the organization to track progress towards its most important goals.

### **What Exogenous Factors Contribute to the Rise in Relevance of Performance Measurement?**

Since my focus with this dissertation is to explain why philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement and research practices, it is important to isolate the reasons that led to the rise of these practices that are beyond the control of

these philanthropic organizations. In this way, I may be better able to identify the actual reasons why these organizations engage in these practices. This section, therefore, outlines key exogenous factors and events that led to the growth of performance measurement in the nonprofit field.

### **Public Policy as a Catalyst for the Relevance of Performance Measurement**

Although the three-failure sector theory offers a theoretical demarcation that exists between nonprofit, governmental, and for-profit sectors, in practice, the lines between the three sectors are blurring (Guo & Acar, 2005; Kettl, 1993; Powell & Steinberg, 2006). These inter-sectoral relationships mean that what happens in one sector can affect the other, and it is in this inter-sectoral relationship that LeRoux and Wright (2010) connected the normalization of performance measurement in the nonprofit sector to the management reform that promoted accountability and resulted in governance of the sector the early 1990. This reform was so comprehensive that it cut across all levels of government, even to the extent that it affected government contractors, including nonprofit organizations. As part of the reforms, the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993 was enacted, which required federal agencies to set quantifiable goals, identify metrics, and measure progress toward those goals (Kautz et al., 1997). The GPRA thus, began the promotion of accountability, performance measurement, and evaluation practices throughout both state and local governments. More importantly for this study, the GPRA also extended these practices to the nonprofit sector through public-private partnerships that existed from federally funded programs (Ebrahim, 2019; Frederickson & Frederickson, 2006; LeRoux & Wright, 2010).

## **Restoration of Public Confidence and Trust**

Another contributing factor that increased concerns for accountability within the nonprofit sector was the rise in financial fraud and corruption within the sector (Ebrahim, 2019; LeRoux & Wright, 2010). As more incidents of corruption and the misuse of funds occurred, the public's confidence and trust in the sector began to wane. For example, Aramony, who led the United Way of America from 1970 to 1992, spent 6 years in a federal prison after being convicted in 1995 on 23 felony charges, including conspiracy, fraud, and filing false tax returns (Shapiro, 2011). Revelations that Aramony used United Way of America funds to pay for extramarital affairs further embarrassed one of the nation's most respected charities. Aramony's actions moved scores of charitable organizations to review their business practices, mainly because stakeholders were calling for more accountability. The review of these organizations' business practices led to the adoption of diverse changes, including performance measurement practices. For the nonprofit world, as well as to some extent their donors, the adoption of performance measurement practices was a mechanism to restore public confidence and trust in the nonprofit sector (Carman, 2011; LeRoux & Wright, 2010).

### **Isomorphism Stemming from Self-Imposed Pressure from National-Level Nonprofit Association Groups**

In the mid-1990s, in a number of national-level nonprofit organizations, particularly industry-support groups, began to advocate for outcome and impact measurement while also developing tools for nonprofit managers (Lee & Clerkin, 2017a; Morley et al., 2001). Among the most visible proponents was the United Way of America, which was one of the first national agencies to ask members of its network to

distinguish between outputs and outcomes (United Way of America, 1996). This request was further supported by a series of resources designed to assist agencies in outcome measurement. The organization's rationale for doing so was mainly two-fold: (a) to see if programs really make a difference in the lives of people, and (b) to help programs improve services (United Way of America, 1996). Other organizations have similarly created frameworks and tools to support the cause of performance measurement in the nonprofit sector, such as the American Evaluation Association and Urban Institute (Ebrahim, 2019).

### **Unpacking Research as an Organizational Practice**

Research is a process of systematic inquiry that is designed to collect, analyze, interpret, and use data (Mertens, 2010). There are two broad categories of research, namely applied research and basic research. Applied research is designed and oriented toward social action, and may likely prove useful to educators, institutional leaders, policymakers, and other practitioners. In contrast, basic research is designed not to have immediate application in a social setting. Basic research is not the focus in this dissertation, despite its potential to contribute to social transformation (Mertens, 2010). The reason for this exclusion is because most nonprofit organizations tend to engage in research to apply the knowledge gained toward social action.

Another important distinction is the bifurcation of applied research into two important categories for the purposes of this current study, namely (a) research synthesis, and (b) new knowledge generation. Research synthesis takes the form of reviewing, analyzing, and integrating existing literature on a specific topic to provide actionable steps and insights into the specific topic or issue (Mertens, 2010). Mertens (2010) noted,

however, that “new knowledge generation” is an applied research approach that leads to the development or creation of knowledge that can have an immediate application within a social setting. The main difference between “research synthesis” and “new knowledge generation” is the word “new,” with research synthesis not involving the creation of “new” knowledge as it simply entails the syntheses and analyses of existing knowledge in order to provide actionable insights into a topic.

### **Exogenous Factors that Led to the Relevance of Research in the Field**

One of the major premises in this dissertation is that the use of research by philanthropic organizations increased as the nonprofit sector became more formalized and professionalized, grew larger in size, and served more diverse stakeholders (Friedman & McGarvie, 2003; LeRoux & Wright, 2010). In this subsection, I show, from an historical perspective, how research became a central component of nonprofits’ operations. While I present a historical tour of events that contributed to the relevance of research as a tool in the field, this account is not exhaustive. I briefly highlight the era of scientific philanthropy and then discuss the impact of the formalization of the nonprofit sector in terms of this practice.

#### **Scientific Philanthropy**

Between the Civil War and the beginning of the new century, America burst onto the world stage as a major industrial and economic power (Sealand, 2003). America’s economic growth stemmed from its emphasis on research and science. These developments led to an increase in the number of extremely rich people, as Sealand (2003) noted,

The number of millionaires in the country catapulted from a hundred in the late 1870s to more than forty thousand by 1916. Remarkable, too, were the size of some of the fortunes the post war industrial boom had created. At least twenty men were millionaires many times over. (p. 218)

Importantly, these wealthy individuals embraced the idea of scientific philanthropy, and heirs played a role in this practice's continuation (Sealander, 2003).

The most influential scientific philanthropists of the early 20th century tended to be self-made men who created their own initial fortunes. Sealander (2003) further indicates,

They re-thought the purpose of giving itself: philanthropy to them should seek causes and cures. It should find a remedy for a disease, rather than build a hospital to treat a victim. Addressing root causes of societal problems were their hallmark. (p. 221)

This meant that these philanthropists funded research to inform their philanthropic actions.

In 1954, The Internal Revenue Code designated Sections 501(c)3 and 501(c)4 to “nonstock corporations and trusts formed for charitable, educational, religious, and civic purposes which are exempt from taxation and to which donors can make tax-deductible contributions” (Hall, 2006, p. 32). The formalization of the nonprofit sector and the subsequent tax exempt benefits that came from the Internal Revenue Code led to accountability issues for donors and philanthropic organizations (Frumkin, 2010). The accountability issues were due, partly, as a result of the donor deduction that donors receive for giving to a nonprofit, as well as the tax exemptions that philanthropic organizations receive from their nonprofit status. These issues also related to the significant power that donors and philanthropic organizations gain through philanthropy to use philanthropic resources to influence and enact political and social agendas in society.

The introduction of tax deduction and exemption status contributed to the definition and development of the nonprofit sector in US because it intensified the sector's political connection with the governmental sector (Friedman & McGarvie, 2003). As Friedman and McGarvie (2003) note, "In the past, when national associations, foundations, think tanks, and other philanthropically supported entities sought to influence government, they generally did so as outsiders" (p. 370). Due to tax exemption and deductibility benefits, these associations became intrinsic parts of the organizational field of public decision-making. As this process occurred, these organizations began using a variety of tools, particularly research, to influence public decision-making (Friedman & McGarvie, 2003). Research became a rational tool, then, whereby nonprofits could gather information to influence policymakers. The use of research is particularly attractive as a tool because it allows organizations to diffuse their ideas into the public decision-making process without not stressing significantly about breaking any lobbying laws or prohibitions from the law.

The growth of the US nonprofit sector continued throughout the 1960s into the 2000s, and nonprofits functioned as the ideal channels for marginalized groups to promote their push for more rights in society (Fox, 2001; Friedman & McGarvie, 2003). The relevance of research as a tool for the nonprofit sector to influence policy changes intensified as the nonprofit sector grew larger, more professionalized, and intricately connected to the government sector. Research became one of the tools that facilitated the blurring between the nonprofit and governmental sectors as it became a rational tool that nonprofits could use to inform policymakers about policy changes that are needed to help



them advance toward their respective organizational goals as well as their converging collective interests (Guo & Acar, 2005; Kettl, 1993; LeRoux & Wright, 2010).

Beyond shaping policies and politics, philanthropic organizations use “research to engage with problems at even higher levels of abstraction” (Frumkin, 2010, p. 8). These organizations can support the production of new ideas and paradigms, which can, in turn, reorient entire fields and lead to important breakthroughs in basic knowledge. Funding of basic research, along with basic theory building, in fields as diverse as higher education can lead to new ways of understanding problems and seeing the world. If these new perspectives are able to penetrate the field broadly, they can usher in major changes that could have lasting effects not only on the further production of ideas, but on the ways in which practitioners do their work (Frumkin, 2010).

### **What We Know about How Nonprofits Use Research Information**

The power of information and rhetorical framing to influence both the public and decision-makers in setting policy agendas and building political will for action has been highlighted in a number of rational decision-making studies (e.g., Weiss & Bucuvalas, 1980). Rationalism is the underlying reason that advocacy organizations, particularly think tanks, produce research and analysis of policy research to educate policymakers directly or influence them indirectly by informing the public. Empirical research has, further, suggested a more limited role of research in policy influence, with the theories of incrementalism (Lindblom, 1959) and bounded rationality and satisficing (Simon, 1965) underscoring the suboptimal role of research in policy development and adoption (Gen & Wright, 2018). In other words, research does not influence policy as much because policymakers tend to breakdown the decision-making process into small steps instead of

making one huge leap towards solving a problem - and they also seek to make a decision that will be good enough rather than the best possible decision.

One major work on how nonprofits utilize research, conducted by Stoecker in 2007, pertained to research practices of nonprofits in an urban center. This study went beyond the higher education subsector to shed light on nonprofit research utilization through a survey of 80 nonprofits from different subsectors across Toledo, Ohio. This survey focused specially on these organizations' research needs and practices. The Stoecker (2007) study found that nonprofits collect data on a wide variety of topics, but do not use much of the data that they collect, and do not collect much data that could be useful for other groups, particularly neighborhood organizations. The average nonprofit in the survey was further found to consist of five employees and four volunteers who, together, spend approximately 56 hours per week collecting, managing, and reporting on data. Nearly half of the organizations were found to have no staff or volunteers with formal research training. The remaining organizations reported having only one or two people with formal research training. More than half of the surveyed nonprofits indicated a need for training on how to conduct evaluations, how to use data management software, how to conduct research, and how to find funding.

Aside from the Stoecker (2007) study, little is currently known about the research practices of nonprofit organizations. Before Stoecker's study, the broad area of nonprofit research practice was almost uncharted, with only one published case study by Dattalo (1998) aimed at building nonprofit research capacity. The area that was and continues to be the most commonly investigated is, instead, the connection between research and social policymaking (e.g., Appleton, 2003; Fox, 2001). Nonprofits in such studies who

are engaged in policy work were found to need to learn about and engage in policy research methods to have any hope of impacting social policy. Nonprofit management experts such as Letts et al. (1999) and Bryson (1995) emphasized the importance of research for effective nonprofit mission accomplishment.

From the GMs' perspective, being able to judge what constitutes promising and important research is difficult, as most funders are not that deeply enmeshed in the disciplinary debates across the field (Frumkin, 2010). GMs are mainly principals relying on the agents (GSs) who have a more detailed understanding of the field and who are better able to be "on-the-ground" and directly impact social change. For this reason, funders often ask other researchers to referee or review the research proposals or applications submitted by research grant applicants (Frumkin, 2010).

The support for research can and often does connect with politics (Frumkin, 2010). Philanthropic organizations that fund or conduct policy research can have a tremendous impact when their research is successful and gains significant traction, as ideas from nonprofits can filter through the research into the public realm and then subsequently into politics. By funding or conducting research efforts aimed at shaping both public and elite opinions, philanthropic organizations can achieve substantial influence. Informing policy debates in areas ranging from federal and state aid to quality assurance of postsecondary education and training can turn modest philanthropic investments into major interventions in public life. For this reason,

...many philanthropic organizations see "idea philanthropy" as a far more potent tool for effectuating broad change than the incremental improvement of small segments of the service delivery system or program implementation efforts. The challenge of creating new and powerful ideas depends not only on being right, but also on ensuring that the ideas gain

currency and infiltrate the public process [with research backing the ideas]. (Frumkin, 2010, p. 67)

### **Difference between Research and Performance Measurement**

Given the definitions of research and performance measurement, there seems to be much overlap between research and performance measurement. Scholars have, however, documented major differences between these concepts (e.g., Mertens, 2009; Patton, 2014). These scholars (e.g., Cohen et al., 2008; Patton, 2014) have argued that what separates performance measurement from research is its political inherency or characteristic. For example, in performance measurement, politics and science are inherently intertwined. Performance measurements are conducted on the merit and worth of programs in the public or organizational domain, which are themselves responses to prioritized individual and community needs that have resulted from political decisions. Philanthropic organizations who tend to have significant power and political leverage, then, decide what programs or activities need to be evaluated and shape the process either directly or indirectly with the resources they provide to fund the program evaluations. To ensure transparency in the process, these philanthropic organizations tend to work with independent firms to conduct the evaluation. Although the funders do not directly conduct the performance measurement, they still wield influence and control over the third-party evaluators in the form of signed contracts, revenue, and legitimacy.

Third party-evaluators also yield political influence over the performance measurement process (Dunn, 1981; Fox, 2001). In particular, these parties have the ability to decide the approach to undertake and the criteria for making the judgment about the worth and merit of the program or activity that they are asked to evaluate. Although evaluators are required, under the guiding principles of the American Evaluation

Association (AEA, 2006), to make objective assessments of the progress or performance of project or a cluster of projects, they still have to make some value judgment based on data related to the progress (i.e., implementation evaluation) or outcomes of the program(s) (i.e., summative evaluation). This requirement means that these parties have the ability to decide societal and/or organizational priorities (Mertens, 2009).

Performance measurement is, thus, intrinsically connected with political power and decision-making about either or both societal and organizational priorities.

Trochim (2009) argued that performance measurement is unique, due to the organizational and political context in which it is conducted. Thus, such measurement requires skills in management, group processes, and political maneuvering that are not always needed when conducting research. Philanthropic organizations also engage in performance measurement to help them make value judgments and assess their progress relative to their set goals. These goals tend to present some political context that is naturally not present when engaging in research, even within the organizational setting.

Mathison (2011) indicated that performance measurement is separate from research because of its historical emergence. Specifically, the author noted that, in the 1960s, performance measurement was used as a mechanism to examine valuing as a component of systematic inquiry and the ensuing development of methodological approaches that focus on stakeholder input. The practice was also used for defining criteria such as the AEA's (2006) *Guiding Principles for Evaluators*. At its core, then, performance measurement is about making a value judgment on a program or activity based on a preestablished set of criteria, while research is about gathering information in order to understand a program or phenomenon.

Other scholars have taken further divergent views when distinguishing research from performance measurement. For example, Patton (2014) separated research from program or cluster level evaluation, as per the description in Table 1.

Table 1. *Distinction Between Research and Performance Measurement (Patton, 2014)*

<b>Research</b>	<b>Program Level or Cluster Evaluation</b>
Purpose is to test theory and produce generalizable findings.	Purpose is to determine the effectiveness of a specific program or model.
Questions originate with scholars in a discipline.	Questions originate with key stakeholders and primary intended users of evaluation findings.
Quality and importance judged by peer review in a discipline.	Quality and importance judged by those who will use the findings to take action and make decisions
Ultimate test of value is contribution to knowledge.	Ultimate test of value is usefulness to improve effectiveness.

### **Organizational Motivators for Implementing Performance Measurement and Research Practices**

Organizational theories could provide vital explanations for why GS and GM organizations engage in performance measurement and research practices as well as how they use data gathered from these two practices. In this section, I draw from existing literature on organizational theory to explain why philanthropic organizations (GMs and GSs) engage in performance measurement and research practices. The specific theories that I outline in this section are rational choice, organizational learning, principal agency theory, stewardship theory, resource dependency theory, and institutional theory. I also use culturally responsive, equitable and inclusive practices and outcomes theory (CREI).

#### **Rational Choice Theory**

A major theme across organizational theory literature is the idea that organizations engage in performance measurement and research in order to gather objective-based information to make good decisions (Ammons, 2002; Gormley & Balla, 2004; Havens, 1981; Head, 2008; Lohmann, 1999; March, 1994; March & Simon, 1958;

Scott, 1992). This conventional view is based on the rational choice theory, which relays the simple and practical idea that individuals and organizations most likely weigh the positives and negatives of all the possible choices they can pursue before choosing the best one(s) that maximize their self-interest (Dunn, 1981). In order for organizations to weigh the positives and negatives, they need adequate information to help them engage in this mental or organizational calculus (Dunn, 1981; Kornov & Thissen, 2000). Rational choice theory, therefore, argues that organizations tend to conduct performance measurement and research because the practices provide a conducive mechanism to gather the needed information to help choose the best path of action among a set of different options that will most likely maximize the possibility of reaching their organizational goals (Lindblom, 1959; March & Simon, 1958; Weiss & Bucuvalas, 1980).

The rational perspective for conducting research and performance measurement dominates both the field and the literature because it aligns with popular concept of strategic philanthropy (Frumkin, 2010; Newcomer et al., 2004). Strategic philanthropy calls for clear organizational goals with outlined metrics to help an organization gauge its progress toward its organizational goals (Frumkin, 2010). This approach also calls for the use of for-profit management strategies in the nonprofit sector to ensure that organizations develop performance measurement systems to gather information along the way in order to make course corrections that could increase the probability of organizational goal attainment. As a result, this approach has led to the development and growth of diverse performance measurement tools in the philanthropic field, along with the professionalization of the field of evaluation (American Evaluation Association,

2010; Carman, 2011). Strategic philanthropic organizations have, furthermore, either built their own internal capacity to undertake performance measurement and research practices in-house or contracted the work to external firms in order to gather the needed information to make decisions.

Rational choice arguments for conducting performance measurement and research can equally be used by GM or GS organizations within the higher education subsector. There may, however, be differences in how these practices are implemented according to the type of organization. In general, it is accepted that both GMs and GSs employ research and performance measurement practices to help gather information to make rational choices. There could, however, be differences in how these types of philanthropic organizations use research and performance measurement when considering the various types of research and performance measurement available.

Based on rational choice theory, GMs are most likely to simply undertake performance measurement and research practices to provide them with the needed data to make informed decisions. This means that the various components of their performance measurement strategy (i.e., financial performance, stakeholder performance, market performance, and mission performance) as well as the various types of research practices (i.e., synthesis and new knowledge creation) tend to be designed and implemented to achieve the primary goal of providing the needed information to make evidence-based decisions. Such an intentional and specific focus for performance measurement and research requires that organizations engage in these practices to collect the right information needed to make informed decisions.



Performance measurement requires nonprofit organizations to be explicit and transparent about the needed performance measurement information, based on their strategies and goals (Ebrahim, 2019). They also have to address a common issue surrounding performance measurement, which relates to the issue of having multiple stakeholders to please (Ebrahim, 2019; Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Kearns, 1996; Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001; Najam, 1996; Oster, 1995). As organizations tend to have diverse stakeholders, it is challenging when developing performance measurement systems if they want to please all stakeholders. Without a major prioritization of which stakeholders truly matter, organizations can easily collect information do not necessarily help them in making evidence-based decisions. As the rational perspective calls for evidence-based decision-making using collected data, under this perspective, then, organizations have to do the practical work of identifying what major data points are needed, so that they can develop systems and processes that help them reach their goals.

### **Organizational Learning Theory**

Another important evolution of the existing literature is the addition of learning as a standalone reason or motivation of why higher education-focused philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement and research practices. This new category is essential because of the numerous assumptions that are embedded in the rational choice theory of decision making. A central assumption behind the rational choice argument is the belief that the provision of better performance measurement and research data or information will contribute or inform a more rational decision. However, virtually all empirical research shows that decision-making processes in practice often do not follow such a rational procedure, even in cases where significant efforts are made to

improve rationality (Breheny & Hooper, 1985; Brewer, 1973; March, 1987, 1988, 1994; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Lindblom, 1959; Scott, 1987; Simon & March, 1958).

Kornov and Thissen (2000) have documented diverse reasons why this logic of consequences does not necessarily happen. They argue that other characteristics of real decision-making process hinder this assumption including “cognitive limitations, behavioral or organizational biases, ambiguity and variability of preferences and norms, distribution of decision-making over actors and in time, and most importantly the notion of decision-making as a process of learning and negotiation between multiple actors” (Korniv & Thissen, 2000, p. 192). It is this final characteristic- the idea that decision making is a process that entails learning, sometimes even unlearning or relearning, which becomes the basis for engaging in performance measurement and research, so that the organizational actors or even external stakeholders can have the needed information to engage in the process of learning.

The concept of learning also ties in with the literature on organizational learning (OL). The literature defines organizational learning as the process of transferring learning within an organization (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). In general, the literature outlines four different types of knowledge that exist and grow within an organization. They divide them up into communities of learning--namely individuals, group, organizational and inter-organizational (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). In other words, philanthropic organizations will engage in performance measurement and research practices in support of leaning and transformation of knowledge within and across “learning communities” into organizational and field knowledge. The introduction of the field is essential for philanthropic organizations as they are interested in ensuring the transfer of knowledge

from the organization to key stakeholders, such as federal and state policymakers, institutional leaders, employers, and others, that are needed to help them advance their social mission. The organization also learns from the external stakeholders--so they can transform their internal policies and practices as well.

Performance measurement and research practices could be considered part of the systematic approaches that philanthropic organizations rely on to gain the ability for systematic learning. Such approaches can be found in the organization learning literature (Crossan et al., 1999; Schneider et al., 2002). The concept of OL calls for reflections on strategies and actions of individual and organizational behavior, understanding of organizational environments, and improved decision making (Yang, 2007).

Although there are diverse OL theories and frameworks available, researchers have emphasized the act and process of knowledge creation as an important OL component (Cheng et al., 2014; Loermans, 2002; Real et al., 2014). According to the knowledge creation theory, which views organizational learning as a dynamic development of knowledge processes concerning tacit and explicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is visualized as the kind of knowledge that can be codified, articulated, and communicated using symbols or language while tacit knowledge contains both technical skills and mental models which profoundly shape how we perceive the world around us (Nonaka, 1991, p. 89). Based on this theory, performance measurement and research fall under the explicit forms of knowledge that shape the processes and behaviors of organizations. According to this theory, the creation of organizational knowledge is seen as a spiral that entails four phases (Nonaka, 1991; Nonaka & Konno, 1998): 1) namely socialization, which is the sharing of tacit knowledge among individuals, 2)

externalization, which requires the expression of tacit knowledge and its translation into comprehensible forms that can be understood by others, 3) combination, which is when explicit knowledge is transformed into more complex and explicit knowledge by recombining, sorting or categorizing bodies of explicit knowledge from external sources and then the dissemination of knowledge among the members of organization, and finally, 4) internalization which is the conversion of explicit knowledge into the organization's tacit knowledge. This happens when staff members identify and gather relevant explicit knowledge to extend their tacit knowledge (Nonaka & Konno, 1998, p. 45).

The literature also points to diverse approaches to fostering organizational learning using research (Remondino & Brescaiani, 2011) and performance measurements (Birk et al., 2002) data. In terms of research, the literature posits that organizations use research results to advance and support systematic problem troubleshooting and solving (Remondino & Brescaiani, 2011). Organizations can also employ research findings or knowledge as a basis for experimentation within the organization (Remondino & Brescaiani, 2011; West & Lansiti, 2003). To ensure better consumption and utilization of research, groups of research can be analyzed and synthesized outlining actionable findings (Hoegl & Schulze, 2005). Organizations can foster experimentation through the use of explicit knowledge provided from the research, which will end up encouraging internalization of the knowledge by staff as well (Hoegl & Schulze, 2005). The research findings can also enhance externalization, if newly developed knowledge and ideas are transferred into research reports. In a nutshell, research projects should be an opportunity

to challenge assumptions behind programs and reevaluate ways to solve problems (West & Iansiti, 2003).

### **Principal Agency Theory**

Scholars cite accountability as another reason for why organizations conduct performance measurement (Ebrahim, 2005, 2019; Van Slyke, 2007). Accountability becomes a crucial factor, especially when inter-organizational relationships exist where the parties involved have different interests while still sharing an overall partnership objective. In such a situation, the principal—normally the organization that benefits from the accomplishment of the objectives of the partnership—has a vested interest in ensuring that the agent, who acts on behalf of the principal, adheres to the rules of engagement. This means that the principal bears the administrative cost related to monitoring the relationship (Carman, 2011).

Similar to rational choice theory, principal agency theory makes a number of assumptions about the principal-agent relationship. First, the theory assumes that “individuals pursue their self-interest, are boundedly rational, and risk averse and that they would make every effort to mislead, obfuscate, and confuse’ others” (Williamson, 1989, p. 139). Second, the theory acknowledges the possibility of goal conflict, information asymmetry, and outcome uncertainty, which can arise in the principal-agent relationship (Barney & Hesterly, 1999; Eisenhardt, 1989). Goal conflicts tend to arise when the interests and preferences of the agent do not equate with the principal’s interests and preferences (Brown & Potoski, 2003; Waterman & Meier, 1998), Information asymmetry, in turn, mostly arises when the agent has more information than the principal—mainly about their ability as well as capacity to effectively do the work (Kettl,

1993). Outcome uncertainty means that many factors (i.e., both exogenous and endogenous) can impact the results of a relationship between the agent and the principal (Carman, 2011).

The practical implications for the assumptions underpinning agency theory are also diverse. First, agents (GSs) would likely convey an overestimated organizational capacity and abilities to principals (GMs) with the sole goal of influencing GMs to award a grant or contract to them (Eisenhardt, 1989). This phenomenon is described as “adverse selection.” Second, there is the possibility that GSs (agents) would not put in their maximum efforts when they receive the grant, due to the information asymmetry that exist between them and the GM (principal). This second phenomenon has mostly been described as a “moral hazard” (Chubb, 1985; Milgrom & Roberts, 1992; Nicholson-Crotty, 2004). As a means of minimizing the probability of these two phenomena (i.e., adverse selection and moral hazard) occurring, GMs tend to include and prioritize monitoring and oversight activities into their grants and contract-relationships with GSs (Brown & Potoski, 2003; Gates & Hill, 1995).

Agency theory offers a unique perspective into why GSs and GMs engage in performance measurement and research. For GSs, agency theory predicts that these parties are most likely to engage in performance measurement or research simply to satisfy the GMs’ intentional and proactive strategy to monitor and measure the social outputs and outcomes of their investments. Alternatively, GMs may use research to gauge the expertise or knowledge of the GS organization around the social problem at hand. Thus, a GS might engage in performance measurement mainly because its GM asked it to engage in this activity. This would mean that GSs would use research as a means to

satisfy their funder's requirements to better position them to maintain a grant or contract that they already have, or to obtain future grants or contracts.

For GMs, performance measurement or research is not an inward-looking activity (Orosz, 2002). Rather, it is purely an outward-looking activity that offers GMs the mechanism to ensure that the GS organizations with whom they partner, either through grants or contracts, meet their end of agreement by minimizing the possibilities of moral hazard and adverse selection. Performance measurement, in essence then, tends to be a transaction cost that GMs incur as part of their annual grant or contract payout requirements, which allow them to quantify and monitor the outputs and social outcomes of their philanthropic actions (Van Slyke, 2007). GMs cannot claim attribution for these results, as several confounding factors contribute thereto. They can realistically, however, claim contribution to the accomplishment of these outputs and social outcomes.

GMs, furthermore, tend to engage in research, based on the agency theory, as an outward-looking transaction cost that is necessary to address moral hazard and adverse selection (van Slyke, 2007). For example, some GMs fund small and short-term research projects (either synthesis or new knowledge creation) to help them gain a better sense of the capabilities of the GS (i.e., minimize adverse selection) and to ensure the GS is trustworthy before making significant and large-scale multi-year grants to the grantee. In this way, the initial research grant acts as a mechanism to address the information asymmetry that exist between the principal and agent.

### **Stewardship Theory**

Unlike agency theory that assumes that the agent would try to take advantage of the principal, stewardship theory assumes that nonprofits are naturally trustworthy and

primarily exist to promote a sense of solidarity in society by providing public goods (Caers et al., 2006; Dicke, 2002). In other words, the relationship between principals and agents are not adversarial, but one based on reciprocity, mutual trust and respect, and shared social goals. According to stewardship theory, GMs conduct performance measurement as a way to help them better serve their associated GS organizations, other stakeholders, and the public in general. GMs are also more likely to share their findings with GSs and other stakeholders as a way to foster public trust and solidarity.

Likewise, GSs engage in performance measurement because it can help them better serve their funders, other stakeholders, and the general public (Caers et al., 2006; Dicke, 2002). In this way, they are better able to share performance measurement information with funders and the general public. Such sharing, in turn, builds public trust and solidarity (Bundt, 2000).

In terms of research, the stewardship theory argues that both GMs and GSs operate on the basis of trust; hence, they are more likely conduct research (both synthesis and new knowledge creation) as a means to maintain and foster stakeholder and public trust (Bundt, 2000). This practice also enables them to establish a sense of solidarity around the field in general through the specific topics that are covered by research. With trust being an accepted part of these organizations' interactions, research is designed to maintain this asset and, in areas where it is absent, research can be used to foster trust through actionable information sharing.

### **Resource Dependency Theory**

Another important theory that can be employed to explain why philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement and research is resource dependency



theory. This theory makes diverse assumptions about the behavior of organizations (Froelich, 1999; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). First, the theory argues that organizations need to acquire resources from their external environment to survive (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Second, it asserts that organizations are embedded in their external environment, which means that organizational behaviors are byproducts of a combination of internal (i.e., organizational) and external (i.e., environmental) factors (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Third, as a survival strategy, organizations can adapt themselves to the environment as well as modify the environment to suits their needs (Carman, 2011; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In resource dependency theory, then, the primary argument is that an organization has an interactive relationship with its external environment—which also contains other, different organizations—which leads to either symbiotic or commensalistic relationships between the various organizations in the environment in order for the needed resources to survive (Donaldson, 1995).

Due to the finite number of resources within any environment, and each organization need for some of the same resources to survive, philanthropic organizations—particularly GS organizations—may intentionally employ strategies and tactics to effectively manage the existing relationships between various organizations operating within the environment (Guo & Acar, 2005). These organizations will do so in order to reduce uncertainty and to ensure that they acquire the needed resources to ensure survival. Specific strategies that these organizations might employ include forming collaborations with other organizations, particularly those with access to needed resources, diversifying their streams of income to reduce uncertainty (Froelich, 1999), and engaging in policy advocacy for their organizations.

Based on resource dependency theory, GS organizations are most likely to engage in performance measurement and research as a way to aid them in reducing uncertainty within the environment and to secure needed resources—financial or otherwise (Froelich, 1999; Hafsi & Thomas, 2005). For example, GSs may conduct performance measurement to signal their organizational achievements to funders, with the goal of encouraging these funders to give more or new funding to support their causes (Behn, 2003). Another possibility is that GS organizations would conduct research practices, in particular, to signal and identify organizational needs and gaps in the field (i.e., social needs) that require attention.

It should be noted that even though these organizations may use research to signal social needs, their main agenda would generally be to promote and position themselves as having the right expertise and skills to help address these social problems (Fox, 2001; Friedman & McGarvie, 2003). For example, GS organizations could easily undertake a synthesis of existing literature to identify gaps where new knowledge creation research is needed as well as areas where implementation-based programs or projects are required in order to address pressing social needs. Armed with this information, these organizations could then pursue other funders to, perhaps, form a collaborative or joint funding partnership as a means to address the noted issues (Guo & Acar, 2005; Sargeant & Jay, 2010).

GMs, alternatively, may not require financial resources to survive; yet would still need other forms of resources in their environment (e.g., political capital or policy-related resources) in order to achieve their organizational goals (Hammack, 2006; Head, 2008; Orosz, 2002). These organizational level goals tend to be ambitious, nationally based, and

reliant on large-scale systems change (Lindblom, 1959; McClure et al., 2017). As a result, individual funders cannot achieve their goals on their own (Caers et al., 2006; Nicholson-Crotty, 2004).

The pluralistic function of philanthropy means, however, that funders can still individually pursue their own visions of “the public good,” which could result in a political struggle in the environment, as they all try to employ different strategies to influence one another to their own advantage (Donaldson, 1995). Further issues may arise if funders attempt to reduce uncertainty by modifying the entire environment to suit their own organizational needs or goals. Based on resource dependency theory, GMs could strategically engage in performance measurement or research practices as a way to help them acquire necessary resources (i.e., political capital or policy-related resources), as they work with policymakers (i.e., institutional, state, and/or federal), employers, community-based organization leaders, and others to promote their organizational agenda within the field.

### **Institutional Theory**

A further reason for why philanthropic organizations may undertake performance measurement and research revolves around issues of legitimacy (Frumkin & Galaskiewics, 2004; Hafsi & Thomas, 2005; Suchman, 1995). Suchman (1995) indicated that the literature on organizational legitimacy tends to fall into two groups. The first relates to strategic approaches to legitimacy, which Suchman argued can be deemed “operational resources” that organizations purposively extract (often competitively) from their cultural environments. Organizations tend to use these resources in pursuit of their organizational goals. The second relates to the institutional approach to legitimacy

(DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1991). Per this approach, it is argued that external institutions exert pressure from the environment that can induce organizations to adopt organizational structures and processes in order to be seen as legitimate or successful. Depending on circumstances, the source of the external pressure can be from laws, regulation, or rules (i.e., coercive pressure), or they could be associated with professional or industry values/norms (i.e., normative pressure; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). A third pressure could be from copying or mimicking behavior that is a result of organizational response to uncertainty (i.e., mimetic pressure).

According to the institutional perspective on legitimacy, it is possible to assume that philanthropic organizations are likely to conduct performance measurement due to coercive, normative, or mimetic pressures resulting from the external environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Such pressure could come from funders (especially for GS organizations), accreditation processes, national associations, or other outside requests depending on an organizations' external affiliations (Donaldson & Davis, 1991; Suchman, 1995). Engaging in performance measurement and research would, thus, signal organizational quality to the external field, as the field would be able to see the organization as abiding by a perceived industry standard (Behn, 2003; Orosz, 2002). The institutional perspective does not, however, consider either the managerial agency and manager-stakeholder conflict, which implies that a manager's decisions are often constructed by the same belief systems that determine audience reactions (Suchman, 1995).

## **To Promote Culturally Responsive, Equitable and Inclusive Practices and Outcomes (CREI)**

Another important evolution in the existing literature that this dissertation points out is that organizations can engage in performance measurement and research practices to foster the promotion of culturally response, equitable and inclusive practices and outcomes. One of the major assumptions behind culturally responsive practices is the idea that culture is an integral part of the context of performance measurement and research practices, which goes beyond the program under study or community, but it also includes the methodologies and methods employed to conduct performance measurement or research (Obamehinti, 2010; SenGupta et al., 2004). Senese (2005) and SenGupta et al. (2004) make it clear that the contextual and cultural factors go beyond demographic data of communities and programs under study – but are inclusive of the “diversity in values and the less vocalized issues of power, class and gender that continue to shape our societies” (Chouinard & Cram, 2019, p. 1). Intersectionality is central to understanding contextual factors in a group or community. Others have even written about how culturally responsive practices addresses intersecting identities and experiences, including language as there are many marginalized communities that face issues of linguisticism (Ghanbarpour et al., 2020).

Different authors use slightly different terms in the literature. Some have referred to culturally responsive as “culturally competent, culturally consistent, culturally sensitive, tribally driven, transformative, culturally anchored, indigenous, values based, multicultural, or cross cultural” (Chouinard & Cram, 2019, p. 2). It is important to note that though these terms are linked, they all have their unique histories and, ideological

underpinnings and geographic focus (Hood et al., 2015). The main connecting thread is the strong understanding and belief that cultural context is relevant when conducting performance measurement and research. Furthermore, the literature also conveys the point that culturally responsive approaches are grounded in broad philosophical ideas of equity, democracy, inclusion, and diversity (Chouinard & Cram, 2019). Culture is defined as the “cumulative body of learned and shared behavior, values, customs, and beliefs common to a particular group or society” (Frierson et al., 2002, p. 63). Responsive means to “attend substantially and politically to issues of culture in performance measurement” (Hood, 2001, p. 32). Therefore, culturally responsive practices in performance measurement considers the culture of the program it is assessing as well as the needs and cultural parameters of the program beneficiaries (Hood & Hall, 2004).

According to the literature, the most recent development is the shift from the term cultural competence to culturally responsive, which recognizes the move from the cultural competence of evaluators and researchers to the actual practices that they employ to engage in performance measurement and research (Chouinard & Cram, 2019; Frierson, Hood & Hughes, 2002; Hood et al., 2015; Hopson, 2009; SunGupta et al., 2004).

According to Chouinard and Cram (2019), culturally responsive approaches are centered on the idea of empowerment and social inclusion with the focus on the needs and cultural context of the program’s participants and their broader community. In other words, culture is central to assessing the work and value of the program or cluster of programs.

The literature on CREI has documented that there remain gaps in our knowledge base as it relates to how to conduct and implement culturally responsive approaches to performance measurement in communities that have traditionally been underserved,

underrepresented, or marginalized (Chouinard & Cousins, 2007; Hood et al., 2016). Within the higher education sector, these underrepresented groups could include students who may be low-income, veterans, undocumented, first generation, students of color, and/or others (Hoffman & Toutants, 2018). For decades, philanthropic organizations have pushed for the enrollment, success, and completion of postsecondary education and training for marginalized students who have continued to lag behind compared to other students due to the unique challenges and barriers they face. According to the CREI theory, philanthropic organizations will engage in performance measurement and research practices in order to better understand these challenges and work to enact policies and practices that would increase postsecondary enrollment, success, and attainment for these students, thereby closing equity gaps in postsecondary education and training.

### **Summary**

Rational choice theory asserts that philanthropic organizations are likely to simply undertake performance measurement and research practices as a way to provide them with the needed data to make informed decisions that could help them reach their organizational goals. This means that the various components of their performance measurement strategy (i.e., stakeholder performance, mission performance, financial performance, and market performance), as well as the various types of research practices (i.e., synthesis and new knowledge creation), could be designed and implemented to achieve the primary goal of gathering and providing necessary information to make evidence-based decisions. By making informed decisions, then, the organization is better able to move closer to accomplishing its organizational goals and targets.

Organizational learning theory, on the hand, will make the case that philanthropic organizations will engage in performance measurement and research practices in order to provide the needed information for staff to learn, reflect and then use the learning to make continuous improvement within the organization. It also argues that staff will learn from the field as well as share their learnings with the field as well.

Agency theory, in turn, makes a different assumption about why philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement and research. Specifically, promoters of this theory examine the outward focus organizations and consider external factors in the larger environment of the organization, such as the inter-organizational relationships that exist between GSs and GMs. Performance measurement and research, per this theory, then, operate as accountability tools to address the information asymmetry that may exist between the principal (GM) and the agent (GS).

Unlike agency theory, stewardship theory argues that the relationship between the principal and agent is based on reciprocity, mutual trust and respect, and shared social goals. Performance measurement and research tend, therefore, to be used to foster public trust and solidarity; thereby helping philanthropic organizations (both GMs and GSs) to better serve their stakeholders and the public in general. Of further note, resource dependency theory asserts that philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement and research because these practices could help them secure resources and decrease uncertainty.

According to institutional perspective on legitimacy, external pressures from organizations' environment(s) may influence their internal operations. Under this theory, it is possible to expect philanthropic organizations to conduct performance measurement



due to coercive, normative, mimetic pressures resulting from the external environment (i.e., from funders, accreditation process, national associations, and so forth). Per this theory, then, the practice of engaging in performance measurement and research would signal organizational quality to the external field by promoting the organization as abiding by a perceived industry standard.

Finally, according to the theory on CREI, philanthropic organizations will engage in performance measurement and research practices to better understand the cultural and other contextual factors that inhibit marginalized groups of students from enrolling, persisting, and completing postsecondary education and training programs- so they can advocate for policies and practices that would better serve these students, thereby increasing their attainment rates.

Table 2 summarizes why organizations engage in Research and Performance Measurement based on the theories discussed in this dissertation and the literature.

Table 2. *Summary of Why Organizations Undertake Research and Performance Measurement According to Theory*

Theory	Why?
Rational Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide needed data to make best decisions for organization's goals</li> </ul>
Organizational learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide the information needed for the organization to continuously improve</li> </ul>
Principal Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide accountability</li> </ul>
Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To foster reciprocity, mutual trust, and respect</li> </ul>
Institutional Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide legitimacy of the organization's efforts</li> </ul>
Resource Dependency Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To secure resources</li> </ul>
Organizational Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To further innovation and discovery</li> </ul>
CREI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand the needs of marginalized groups</li> </ul>

In the next chapter, I present the research methods and approach used for this current study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

In this third chapter, I present the research approach and methodology used for the current study. Specifically, I offer an overview of the research design, the basis for selecting a qualitative approach (paradigm), the role of the researcher, the type of qualitative method employed for the study, and the reasons for selecting this qualitative method. I also note the sampling procedures and study participants, methods of data collection, and the data analysis procedure. I present the quality indicators or factors that I considered for ensuring the reliability, credibility, and trustworthiness of this study.

### **Overview of the Research Design**

The purpose of this study is to explore why philanthropic organizations within the higher education subsector undertake performance measurement and research practices, as well as how they use the information gained from these practices. This study addressed four limitations to prior research, namely (a) lumping research and performance measurement together as a single organizational practice, (b) using only the views of nonprofit executives as a proxy for shared organizational views, (c) focusing on one geographical area or a single state, and (d) focusing on only one nonprofit subsector. I established three primary research questions to guide the investigation:

1. Why do higher education-focused philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement?
2. Why do higher education-focused philanthropic organizations engage in research?

3. How do higher education-focused philanthropic organizations use the information gained from their research and performance measurement practices?

I use a qualitative content analysis study to conduct semi-structured, open-ended interviews with both executives and frontline staff, who oversee performance measurement and research practices, in philanthropic organizations operating within the higher education subsector. I specifically sought to understand their reasons or motives (i.e., “the why”) for conducting these practices and how they use the data that they gain from these practices. I attempted to interview at least one executive and one frontline staff member from each philanthropic organizations; however, the final number of interviews was dependent on when I reached data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). A purposive sampling approach was employed to select, at most, 15 philanthropic organizations located across US.

I transcribed and analyzed data from the interviews using appropriate qualitative data analysis software (Otter for transcription and Nvivo for data analysis). By employing a set of predetermined codes based on organizational theories (e.g., rational choice, organizational learning, principal agency theory, stewardship theory, resource dependency theory, and institutional theory) that support this study, I conduct directed content analysis. This analysis approach helped me to ascertain the frequency and extent to which organizational motivators aligned with the preestablished, theoretically based codes I had included (i.e., decision-making, learning, accountability, trust, secure resources, legitimacy and CREI).

### **Basis for Selecting the Constructivist (Paradigm) for this Study**

The paradigm that guided this research was the constructivist view. Although I recognized that many changes have occurred in the status of research paradigms over the years, to the extent that they are now blurring and blending (Lincoln et al., 2011), the fundamental assumption behind constructivism paradigm aligns with the scope of this specific research endeavor. Specifically, constructivism assumes that “reality is not absolute, but is socially constructed and that multiple realities exist that are time and context dependent” (Mertens, 2010, p. 226). It is the various reasons why higher education focused philanthropic organizations engage in research and performance measurement practices that I seek to understand, from the perspectives of executives and frontline staff who oversee performance measurement and research.

The constructivist view suggests that the reasons for performance measurement may vary by nonprofit subsector due to varying contexts. I selected, therefore, a qualitative method to assist those operating in the field to gain a better understanding of the constructions and meanings held by executives and frontline staff, specifically within the higher education-focused philanthropic context. Such insights could better inform why these organizations undertake performance measurement and research practices.

This constructivist approach allowed me to gather data from executives of higher education-focused philanthropic organizations, add a vital and new concept (i.e., research practices) and explore these questions in another subsector. By following this path, it was possible for me to provide future opportunities for cross subsector comparisons regarding the reasons why organizations engage in these practices.

## **Positionality**

There is a vital practice in qualitative research that encourages a researcher to reflect and outline their background and stance on a variety of issues that could directly or indirectly impact aspects of their study (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). This reflective practice is crucial, as, particularly in qualitative research, a researcher tends to personally collect data and undertake data analysis (Creswell, 2007). The researcher becomes, thus, the primary instrument for collecting, coding, and analyzing data in order to unravel emerging themes, concepts, and worthwhile patterns. The overconcentration of power and responsibilities on the researcher when conducting qualitative research increases the likelihood for researcher bias, which could negatively impact the study as a whole. I outline and acknowledge my relevant background, which could have influenced this current study.

I have significant experience working for higher education-focused philanthropic organizations. I worked as a frontline staff member on measurement and evaluation at a GM philanthropic organization based in Indiana for 2 years before I was promoted to the position of manager. My duties included overseeing evaluation activities designed to monitor and assess the outcomes of grants awarded to promote college access and success in the higher education and training subsector. After approximately 5 years in the role, I left the organization and joined another GM organization within the higher education subsector. This organization is also located in Indiana, and I served in the program development, overseeing grants designed to promote competency-based approaches or models in higher education. After 2 years in that role, I transitioned into a frontline role where I became responsible for overseeing research undertaken within the

organization. My duties in this role included synthesizing research and evidence as well as commissioning new research to inform the organization and broader field on efforts designed to increase postsecondary completion rates of Americans. I am currently in this role.

My past and current professional experience with regard to working at higher education-focused philanthropic organizations could create diverse unintended effects. First, my current role, as a frontline staffer of research activities in a philanthropic organization could have either positively or negatively influenced the interviews. My role has allowed me to gain a wide network of colleagues who oversee evaluation and research activities in other higher education-focused philanthropic organizations. This made it easier for me to recruit participants for the study. There was, however, a possibility that these participants would not be as forthcoming during the interviews, as they may have seen me as someone who works at a competitor organization with different organizational goals and strategies. To lower this risk, I reassured them before we started the interview that I was conducting the interview in my capacity as a doctoral candidate, and I was not there to gather information for my employer.

Second, my extensive experience in the field could also have impacted the design and implementation of the interviews, as well as the findings from the study. My experience could, in particular, have adversely affected the research project because through my work in leading such endeavors, I have already formulated some opinions about why organizations engage in evaluation and research. I had to, therefore, be mindful that I did not influence the interview process and/or data analysis phases with my pre-conceived opinions. These practical experiences could, however, also have enriched

the research, as they offered me insights in addition to the literature review that I completed that led to asking good questions and being better able to identify key emerging themes. I employed “bracketing” (Cho & Trent, 2006; Creswell, 2007) to confirm that my experiences did not interfere in the data analysis process. Bracketing is a method employed in qualitative research to lower the potential effects of preconception on the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). This was an important process for me as I have significant experience in this space, and it was important that I made sure I did not influence the research process with my pre-conceived notions.

Third, my current role as a frontline staff member involved in research, and not as an executive, could have had dual and opposite effects on the recruitment and interview processes. I could have, firstly, had some challenges in recruiting executives at other organizations who oversee evaluation and research, since they may not have necessarily seen me as their peer or colleague. Warren (1988) noted that many times the role of the researcher is assigned by the respondents in terms of what they see as his/her “proper place” in the social order. Several of these executives could also revert to their frontline staff to manage the interview on their behalf, which would have made it very difficult for me to implement my methodological strategy of interviewing at least one executive and one frontline staff member.

Assuming, secondly, that I was able to overcome the hurdle of recruitment, the executive may have proved more receptive to me and may, as a result, have been more forthcoming during the interviews than had another executive from a competitor organization been interviewing them. They were also more likely to see themselves as mentors during the interviewing process as a result of my current role as a frontline

staffer (i.e., as opposed to an executive). The power imbalance could, thus, have worked to my advantage, as the interviewed executives could see me as being less threatening to them in comparison to an executive from another organization.

### **Type of Qualitative Method in this Study**

The method of inquiry for this dissertation was content analysis. This type of qualitative method is used to construct and interpret meaning from the content of text data (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989). There are three distinct approaches to content analysis, namely conventional, directed, and summative. All three approaches require a similar analytical process of seven classic steps:

1. Formulating the research;
2. Selecting the sample to be analyzed;
3. Defining the categories to be applied;
4. Outlining the coding process and coder training;
5. Implementing the coding process;
6. Determining trustworthiness; and
7. Analyzing the results of the coding process (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989).

The major differences among the three approaches can, however, be found in relation to their coding schemes, origins of codes, and threats to trustworthiness (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989).

I used the directed content analysis approach to analyze data from transcribed interviews that were conducted with executives and frontline staff of higher education-focused philanthropic organizations. I chose this approach as I believed it would be the best in helping me to better understand why these organizations conduct research and performance measurement. I based this belief on how, according to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), directed content analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as the basis for the initial coding, which can help to better frame the investigation and analysis



process as a whole. In the case of this current study, I used existing organizational theories (see Chapter Two) as well as the findings by Carman (2011) as the basis for identifying the initial codes for this study's analysis process.

### **Reasons for Selecting Directed Content Analysis**

I selected the directed content analysis approach for two main reasons. First, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) have indicated that the epistemological focus of this approach lies in explaining behaviors that occur within social interactions, as it is rooted in the social sciences. The focus of directed content analysis, thus, aligns perfectly with the goal of this study, namely to explain the behaviors of philanthropic organization as they relate to why these organizations undertake performance measurement and research. Second, the overarching goal of directed content analysis is to strengthen existing theories that are insufficient in diverse ways such as: (a) lacking important concepts; or (b) the relevance of the concepts and relationships having not been corroborated for the context under study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It made sense to use the directed content analysis approach, as I aimed to add a new concept (i.e., research), which had not been included in the past literature, and then test the concepts in a new context (i.e., the higher education subsector).

### **Sampling Procedure and Study Participants**

I gathered data from personal interviews with both executives and frontline staff from philanthropic organizations who operate in the higher education subsector (i.e., organizations that help to fund and generally resource and assist higher education institutes) across the US. I focused on two kinds of higher education-based philanthropic organizations, with 40% of the organizations representing GS organizations that are not

institutions of higher education themselves but rather function as intermediaries that work between GM organizations and institutions of higher education. The remaining 60% represented GM organizations that directly support the work of intermediaries (i.e., GS organizations) to increase the completion of outcomes of higher education institutions (Fusch & Ness, 2015). By making this distinction in organization type, I was better able to study why higher education-based philanthropic (GM and GS) organizations engage in performance measurement and research practices.

It should be noted that the philanthropic organizations were selected based on a purposive sampling procedure that used some of the following criteria: (a) organizational type (GM or GS); b) whether the organization uses research or performance measurement; (c) organizational size; (d) age; (e) organizational focus; (f) organizational approach (either direct service or systems change or both); (g) affiliation; (h) reputation; (i) subsector in which it operates; and (j) size of budget. I used a purposive sampling approach to help identify a sample that represented philanthropic organizations, including, but not limited to: (a) small, community-based GS organizations with a small number of paid staff; (b) large, national-based GS organization with a significant number of paid staff; (c) large-scale, nationally-focused GM organization; (d) organizations that are affiliated with national or state associations; and (e) those with no affiliation. The purposive sampling approach allowed me to identify philanthropic organizations where research and performance measurement practices are strongly represented. I also considered organizations that only implement one of the practices.

I used different channels to recruit GM and GS philanthropic organizations for the study. For the GS organizations, I used the membership list of the Council on Foundation

to identify GMs that operate within the higher education subsector. I used the membership list of the GMs for Education as well as the GMs for Effective Organizations' list to share recruitment materials. In addition to these avenues, I asked my colleagues in the field to recruit philanthropic organizations for the study by letting them share recruitment materials via email. For the GS organizations, I used the membership list of the National Council of Nonprofits as well as subsector-specific membership associations such as the National College Access Network to recruit relevant organizations for the study.

For every organization that met the selection criteria and agreed to participate in the study, I aimed to interview both the executive who oversees research and evaluation as well as one frontline staff member who works on research and evaluation at the given organization. By engaging both types of stakeholders (i.e., executives and frontline staff), I was able to ensure that a more full and accurate understanding of the perceptions of executives who tend to set the strategic vision, and the frontline staff who directly implement the strategic vision of the executives, was gained. In order to ensure that power dynamics did not play a significant role in the answers that the frontline staff provided, I conducted the interview types separately at each organization (i.e., one interview with a frontline staff member and another, separate, interview with the relevant executive). I also stressed to the frontline staff members that their responses during the interviews would not be shared with their respective executives.

This sampling approach did help to reduce the possibility of equating one person's experiences to the collective and/or shared views of the entire organization. I was able to triangulate data gained from both the frontline staff member and executive

from the same organization. The interview protocol (Appendix D) and questions were the same for both participant types, which provided additional information that could contribute to the existing literature. I also considered differences in the answers of the executives and frontline staff as part of my analysis process.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

In this study, I employed two main methods for collecting data, namely interviews and document or record reviews. This section presents detailed information on the two main approaches for data collection.

#### **Intensive Interviews**

I conducted a total of 25 semi-structured interviews with one executive and one frontline staff member from each of the philanthropic organizations that met the selection criteria described previously and who agreed to participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews were used as they allow discussions of preplanned areas or topics as well as the flexibility to respond and explore, in detail, additional topics or areas that emerge during the interviews (Weiss, 1995). The interviews were conducted based on a semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol (Appendix D). Specific topics that the interview protocol captured included: (a) descriptive data about the philanthropic organization and the various programs and/or services the organization offers; (b) frequency, depth, and breadth of the organization's performance measurement activities; (c) the rationale for why the organization conducts performance measurement; (d) how the organization uses performance measurement data; (e) challenges associated with conducting performance measurement; and (f) resources needed to do more performance

measurement activities. I captured data related to research activities by substituting the word “research” in place of “performance measurement” for categories (b) through (f).

I conducted the interviews between July 20th and November 20th, 2020. Prior to the interviews, I held an introductory meeting via telephone or Zoom to share the purpose, discuss confidentiality issues, and gain assurance that each participant wanted to participate in the study. After acquiring their permission, I scheduled a virtual interview at the respondent’s convenience, ideally within the timeframe indicated previously.

I conducted virtual interviews due to health concerns surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. I, therefore, scheduled 60 minutes long calls over Skype or Zoom. Face-to-face interviews were my preferred channel for gathering data, as it is relatively easier to build rapport with interviewees and read their body language when you can see and interact with them directly (Creswell, 2007). I ultimately conducted all the interviews virtually because the participants were all over the country as this is a national study and the interviews occurred at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature. The sequence of the questions during the interviews varied, however, from interviewee to interviewee, based on the responses they gave. I did still make sure to ask all the interviewees the same core questions.

I began the interviews by asking the respective interviewees to talk about the philanthropic organization for which they work, its services and programs, and the organizational goals they pursue. I extrapolated from their responses key descriptive information about the philanthropic organizations (See Appendix A for full description), such as the number of paid full-time staff, budget size, funding sources, streams of

income, GM activities (if applicable), key organizational practices, and programs and services they provide and to whom. Depending on how the conversations went and the responses I got, I could ask additional questions such as, “What performance measurement activities do you undertake to assess the program, cluster of programs, or at the organizational level?” or other appropriate follow-up questions. Such questions would ensure that I fully understood the various forms of performance measurement data that the included organizations collect, how these are collected, who is responsible for data collection, and how these data collection approaches are funded.

I followed-up more for clarity and then transitioned to ask the interviewee to tell me “Why you conduct these performance measurement practices and how they use the results /data from these practices?” To ensure that I did not confuse the interviewee, I first collected data related to performance measurement practices and then transitioned to the next phase of the interview, where I repeated the entire interview protocol but with “performance measurement” being substituted by “research”. This “second round” of questioning was aimed at collecting the needed data to answer the second component of the project, namely why the studied organizations engage in research practices and how they use the information gained from this practice. I also employed the practice of member-checking with each of the interviewees during the interview process as a means to validate my comprehension and understanding of the interview data. There are instances where I rephrased what I heard back to them to make sure I was categorizing their reasons accurately.

## **Document and Record Review**

I aimed to, in addition to the interviews, use any supplemental documents and records that the interviewees provided to inform the study and better understand why they engage in performance measurement and research practices as well as how they use the information gained from these practices. However, I gained such data directly from only two interviewees. Therefore, I employed some creative ways to add document and record analysis such as visiting the websites of organizations, downloading performance measurement and research reports from their websites and the websites of their partners, and looking for descriptive information on organizations from other public sources such as GuideStar and Inside Philanthropy. I kept an inventory of the relevant documents and records and employed content analysis as the analytical method. I also used data from the obtained records and documents as additional avenues to validate my interview-related findings when appropriate.

## **Data Analysis**

Unlike typical quantitative research that reserves data analysis to the end of the study, data analysis in qualitative study tends to be ongoing (Patton, 2002; Wolcott, 2001). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007) provided a step-by-step description of data analysis strategies for qualitative research. These authors did, however, recognize that in practice data analysis can overlap with data collection, especially when using directed content analysis. Data analysis in qualitative study involves three key features: (a) examining underlining meanings of data, (b) reducing data to abstract concepts, and 3) summarizing data (Krippendorff, 2013). Based on these features, I implemented multiple interpretations of data, was flexible as I investigated and looked for leads and answers in

the data and was mindful that language is used to express multiple realities. I, thus, provide a step-by-step description of how I used the directed qualitative content data analytic strategy in this dissertation.

First, I transcribed the data from the interviews, verbatim, using appropriate software. I then engaged in the process of data reduction, which is the process of summarizing and coding the data (i.e., assigning a label to excerpts of data that conceptually “hang together”; Mertens, 2010). From there, I engaged in the three main stages of data analysis in directed content analysis, namely (a) initial coding, (b) focused coding, and (c) theoretical coding (Kyngas & Vanhanen, 1999).

The initial coding phase was designed to assign labels to the significant portions of the data. At this stage, I actively engaged with the data by: (a) looking for implicit and explicit meanings, (b) questioning assumptions behind interviewee statements; and (c) pondering over the implications of the statements (Kyngas & Vanhanen, 1999). I, thereafter, coded individual words, lines, portions of the data (using gerunds as codes), and incidents that were relevant to the research questions. Where necessary, I also prioritized and engaged in a line-by-line coding process of the entire data for the initial coding phase to ensure that I did not miss any useful information or concepts.

As the goal of directed content analysis is to validate or extend, conceptually, a theoretical framework or theory, I used existing organizational theories to identify the initial codes, per recommendations made by Potter and Levine-Dotterstein (1999). Other scholars have termed the use of existing theory to identify initial codes as the “deductive category application” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2000; Potter & Levine-



Dotterstein, 1999). I then developed operational definitions for each code or category based on the theory.

In the next phase, I engaged in focused coding, which is designed to select relevant or dominant codes and determine their connection with other codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2013). Through the focused coding phase, I tested the initial codes (i.e., theoretically based predetermined codes) against the broader extensive body of data in order to determine how resilient the codes were in the bigger picture that emerged from the analysis. Specifically, I reevaluate the initial codes generated by questioning their practical meaning or empirical properties as well as the assumptions associated with them. Based on the findings, I selected the relevant codes and generated categories by grouping the remaining codes around the dominant codes. Any text that could not be assigned with the initial predetermined codes were given new codes.

The final stage was designed to create connections between the predetermined categories and the newly emerged categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). At this stage of the data analysis, my goal was to connect and integrate the categories that emerged at the focused stage with the theoretically-based predetermined codes in order to form an analytical framework. I then used this framework to explain why philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement and research as well as how they use the data that they gain from these practices.

### **Considerations of Credibility, Reliability, Trustworthiness**

Recognizing that quality indicators for qualitative research are reliant on the research approach and purpose of the study, I effectively documented, in the process of “memoing,” how the research was conducted. I also noted how the data was collected,

the steps associated with data analysis and interpretation process, as well as my thought process as a researcher (Creswell, 2007). This section outlines specific steps that were taken to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of this study.

First, I documented and became aware of my influences as a researcher. In recognizing that I have significant experiences within the higher education subsector through my work with several philanthropic organizations and that these experiences could impact the study, I thoroughly reflected on these experiences and outlined them even before engaging in the data collection process. The reflective experiences allowed me to be more fully aware of my beliefs, biases, and influences that could impact the study. The reflective exercise also, and importantly, heightened my awareness about the issues at hand, which enabled me to bracket these influences in ways that could help me ensure that my biases did not adversely impact the study. A further result of this practice was that I could engage in the data collection and analysis processes conducted in this study with an open mind by ensuring that my experiences in the field did not influence how I undertook the interview, how I analyzed and interpreted the data, or the conclusions that I drew therefrom.

Second, I ensured credibility in the data collection process by using member-checks during the interview process. Member-checking is an interactive process between the researcher, the researched, and the collected data that is designed to ensure a higher level of accuracy and consensus by revisiting the facts, experiences, and responses that have been collected and interpreted (Cho & Trent, 2006). I, thus, asked follow-up questions and shared my memos with some of the members whom I interviewed in order to ensure that my understanding and the meaning of their responses to my questions

aligned with their own meanings. This aided me in gathering better data that accurately reflected the opinions and views of the frontline staff and executives about why their organizations engage in performance measurement and research practices.

Third, I used data triangulation when collecting data for the study. One of this study's major contributions to the prior literature is in how I designed the research. To ensure that I gained voices from more than one person per organization and, thereby, increase the internal validity of the findings, I attempted to, as far as possible, interview an executive as well as one frontline staff member who oversaw performance measurement and research practices within their given organizations. This practice allowed me to check information—primarily factual data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989)—explore rival explanations, and determine convergence (or non-convergence) of the data gathered from multiple sources (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The practice also helped me to improve the validity associated with my research-based claims (Freeman et al., 2004).

In summary, I employed the constructivist approach to interview an executive and a frontline staff who oversees performance measurement and research practices in higher education-focused philanthropic organizations. After collecting information from semi-structured interviews, I employed directed content analyses to identify the reasons why these philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement and research practices. In the next section, I present findings from directed content analyses of the transcribed interview data as well as the confirmatory analyses of the document and records.

## CHAPTER FOUR

In this fourth chapter, I present the results of this study, which seeks to understand why philanthropic organizations (both GM and GS organizations) engage in performance measurement and research practices and how they use information from these practices. I provide an overview of the interviews conducted, outlining descriptive statistics of study participants as well as the organizations they represent. I also provide an overview of the documents and records reviewed and how they were used in these analyses. I discuss the coding scheme of my analysis and indicate the relative prevalence of the codes in the raw data. I then present the overall results of the reasons given by interviewees on why they engage in either performance measurement or research practices. I also present overall results of why they engage in performance measurement or research practices broken down at the organizational level for the participating organizations while doing a confirmatory analysis for these results using data from other sources. Afterwards, I present disaggregated results on why higher-education-focused philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement, presenting data at the interviewee level and the organizational level. I also engage in a confirmatory analysis at the organizational level by employing other data sources. After this, I investigate if there are any differences in the reasons for engaging in performance measurement by type of organization (GM vs. GS) and type of staff (GM executive, GM frontline staff, GS executive, GS frontline staff).

Subsequently, I present disaggregated results on why higher education-focused philanthropic organizations engage in research, presenting data at the interviewee level, organizational level, type of organization, and type of staff. I did a confirmatory analysis

for the organizational level results using other data sources. Finally, I present findings on how philanthropic organizations use data from these two practices.

### **Overview of Interviews**

I present the findings of my analysis of 25 semi-structured interviews that I conducted over a 6-month period. The interviews were conducted with executives and frontline staff members (non-executives) who oversee performance measurement and/or research practices within philanthropic organizations (both GM and GS organizations) that are not institutions of higher education but focus on advancing higher education-related issues in the US. Not all of the organizations that were involved in the study had both an executive and a frontline staff member participating in the interviews, which is why the final number was smaller than the initially anticipated 30 (i.e., two participants from 15 organizations). I was able to include 15 philanthropic organizations. A review of the data indicates the interviews were conducted with nine (9) GM organizations and six (6) GS organizations.

Out of the nine GM organizations that participated in the study, 33% (3) allowed the researcher to interview only an executive who oversees performance measurement and/or research practices within the organization. The other 67% (6) allowed the researcher to interview both an executive and a frontline staff member who oversee performance measurement and/or research practices within the organization. Out of the six GS organizations that participated in the study, 67% (4) of the organizations allowed the researcher to interview both an executive and a frontline staff member who oversee performance measurement and research practices within the organization. The remaining 33% (2) of the six GS organizations allowed only an executive to participate in the

interview. Table 3 details this breakdown in raw numbers as well as their respective percentages in brackets.

Table 3. *Breakdown of Participating Organizations* (n=15)

<b>Organizations</b>	<b>Type n (%)</b>	
	<b>GM</b>	<b>GS</b>
Participating (Total =15)	9 (60%)	6 (40%)
Interviewed		
Both Executives and Frontline Staff	6 (67%)	4 (67%)
Executives Only	3 (33%)	2 (33%)
Frontline Staff Only	-	-

### **Data Compiled from the Interviews**

The interviews were conducted separately with the executive and frontline staff for each organization. This enabled me to have two perspectives from within the same organization to gain a more holistic view of the topic under investigation. Those organizations that opted to allow only the executive or frontline staff member to participate provided a singular perspective to the interview questions. The interview instrument for the semi-structured interviews can be found in Appendix D.

At the end of each interview, the study participant was asked to submit records or documents that shed more light on the topic to me via email at a later time of their convenience. Only two of the study participants, however, submitted any additional documents or records. Therefore, I employed some creative ways to add more document analysis such as visiting the websites of organizations, downloading performance measurement and research reports from their websites and the websites of their partners, and looking for descriptive information on organizations from other public sources such as GuideStar and Inside Philanthropy. Appendix B describes and summarizes the documents and records that were employed for each organization.

All major data analyses were conducted after the interviews were transcribed. I went through the transcribed data and coded the content based on the theoretically identified categories or codes. Although the focus was on using primarily the preestablished nodes for coding, additional codes emerged from the data and the evolved literature, such as the codes on “in service of culturally responsive, equitable and inclusive practices and outcomes (CREI)”, “to spur and support responsible discovery and innovation” and “to foster organizational learning.” These additional codes allowed me to explore some unexpected and divergent findings within this study.

The data from the documents and records were not used in the content analyses as only two organization gave the researcher documents and records. The researcher had to creatively gather additional documents and records for the other participating organization, which meant that some of the participating organizations had more documents and records than others. This uneven distribution of document and records made it unreliable to do a rigorous comparative content analysis. Therefore, the researcher used the documents and records as a basis for triangulating data - and as a mechanism for confirming and refuting the results from the content analysis on the transcribed interview data.

### **Relative Prevalence of Theoretically Established Codes in the Raw Data**

I used organizational theories to identify codes that reflect or align with the different assumptions associated with each of the theories. For example, rational choice was coded as “inform and make evidence-based decisions;” agency theory was coded as “satisfy external stakeholder need for information;” resource dependency theory was coded as “reduce uncertainty and secure resources;” institutional theory was coded as

“gain legitimacy from external stakeholders;” and stewardship theory was coded as “ensure trust and service quality.” A new code was also added, namely “in service of CREI,” to test whether philanthropic organizations engage in research and performance measurement activities to advance culturally responsive, equitable and inclusive (CREI) attainment of higher education and training credentials. Other new codes that I included are “to support and spur responsible innovation and discovery” and “to foster organizational learning”. These new codes emerged from how the literature has evolved over time as well as from conversations with study participants and align with recent social movements to heighten and bring awareness to inequities that exist in society. Table 4, below, outlines the various codes along with their respective theories.

Table 4. *Codes for Various Organizational Theories*

<b>Organizational Theory</b>	<b>Assigned Code</b>
Rational Choice	Inform and make evidence-based decisions
Agency Theory	Satisfy external stakeholder need for information
Resource Dependency Theory	Reduce uncertainty and secure resources
Institutional Theory	Gain legitimacy from external stakeholders
Stewardship Theory	Ensure trust and service quality
Culturally Responsive Equitable and Inclusive (CREI)	In service of CREI
Innovation and Discovery	Spur and support innovation and discovery
Organizational Learning	Foster organizational learning

### **Overall Results**

According to the transcribed interview data and consistent with past research, rational choice is the predominant rationale for why philanthropic organizations engage in either performance measurement or research practices (88% alluded to this; see Table 5 below). Furthermore, this study also finds that almost a quarter of the sample (24%) mentions organizational learning as the reason for engaging in either research or performance measurement.



Table 5. *Interviewees Reasons for Why They Engage in Either Performance Measurement or Research*

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>% of Interviewees Who Mentioned</b>
Rational Choice	88% (22)
Organizational Learning	24% (6)
Resource Dependency Theory	12% (3)
Stewardship Theory	12% (3)
Principal Agency Theory	8% (2)
Institutional Theory	4% (1)
Innovation and Discovery	4% (1)
In service of CREI	4% (1)

Furthermore, the results were broken down at the organizational level to understand the reasons for engaging in performance measurement or research practices. In the aggregate, there is overwhelming evidence that rational choice predominates as the rationale for engaging in performance measurement (67%) or research at the organizational level (93%). Organizational learning is the second dominant rationale for engaging in performance measurement at the organizational level (33%)– but it is not a driving factor when it comes to engaging in research (see Table 6 for information).

Table 6. *Reasons for Engaging in Performance Measurement (PM) or Research at the Organizational Level*

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Percentage of Organizations Engaging in...</b>	
	<b>PM</b>	<b>Research</b>
Rational Choice	67% (10)	93% (14)
Organizational Learning	33% (5)	-
Principal Agency Theory	6.7% (1)	6.7% (1)
Institutional Theory	-	6.7% (1)
Resource Dependency Theory	20% (3)	-
Stewardship Theory	20% (3)	6.7% (1)
Innovation and Discovery	6.7% (1)	-
In service of CREI	6.7% (1)	6.7% (1)

To minimize the issue of ecological fallacy, the researcher employed available records and documents to engage in a confirmatory analysis for the organizational level analyses above. The researcher visited the websites of the participating organizations to review available performance measurement reports, research reports and general

language on the websites. Furthermore, the researcher reviewed the reports of the two organizations that submitted follow up materials after the interview. Upon review of the materials, there were ample evidence to substantiate the predominance of rational choice as the main driver of performance measurement and research practices. For example, some of the organizations have statements on their websites such as “research informs everything we do”, “research drives our work,” or “research drives our work.” The majority, if not all of them, had diverse research and evaluation reports listed on their websites with a follow-up message or connecting messages somewhere that alluded to the point that these reports were helping inform their work.

Also, there were statements and evidence to suggest that organizational learning also drives performance measurement at the organizational level. In terms of organizational learning, those organizations that employed this as their basis describe “learning” as an ongoing process that helps them to understand their contexts. For example, one organization stated that “we often need to learn- and unlearn- in real-time so that we can act with the urgency that our strategies demand. .... we seek to understand deeply the context in which work is happening.....”

However, there were two reasons that were not predominant in the transcribed interview data -but were visible on their websites as well as the evaluation and research reports. Those factors were “in service of CREI,” and “innovation and discovery.” Although only one (6.7%) percent stated this in the interviews, there were ample evidence on the websites to indicate that these are drivers of their performance measurement and research practices. Some stated how they engage in research and performance measurement to advance “equitable process and outcomes in the

communities they serve.” Another organization stated that their work is designed to advance “evidence-based innovation.” This discrepancy in results validates the need for multiple perspectives from different sources in understanding organizational behavior.

### **Research Question 1: Why Do Higher-Education Focused Philanthropic Organizations Engage in Performance Measurement?**

According to the transcribed interview data and consistent with past research, rational choice is the most predominant theory that explains why philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement (40% of interviewees alluded to this; see table 7 below). This theory makes the case that organizational actors will engage in performance measurement to gather the needed data to make evidence-based decisions. For example, 1 of the 10 interviewees who indicated rational choice as the basis for engaging in performance measurement demonstrated this by saying:

“We will always feel that the more data you know, the more accurate decisions you can make. And so we think it will help our decision-making process to make more accurate and appropriate decisions. And for collecting performance measurement data, it will allow us to see where we are weak, and where we will strengthen our ability to achieve our goals.”

The emphasis was on the organizational need for more data, which the organization can then use to make more informed decisions. The quote also highlights the “improvement” component of rational choice, which relates to the idea that organizations use data to better understand their weaknesses and strengths. Once they gain such understanding, they can make intentional moves to enhance or improve the areas where they are weak.

However, this study also finds that organizational learning is the second most predominant factor that drives performance measurement (20% of the interviewees indicated this; see table 7 below). Organizational learning is closely linked with rational choice – but where they differ is that organizational learning could be a precursor to

making decision. The complication is that in some instances evidence-based information is not necessarily used to make decisions because of factors such as cultural differences, no one knowing who is making the decision, issues arising from cognitive dissonance, and most importantly the notion of decision-making as a process of learning and negotiation between multiple actors (Korniv & Thissen, 2000, p. 192). It is this final characteristic- the idea that decision making is a process that entails learning, sometimes even unlearning or relearning, which becomes the basis for engaging in performance measurement, so that the organizational actors or even external stakeholders can have the needed information to engage in the process of learning. For example, one of the interviewees demonstrated their interest in employing performance measurement activities as an avenue of creating a learning culture by saying:

“So, we want to *learn* about what works, we want to *learn* about what doesn't work and *why*. Another sort of something that flows out of performance measurement is really encouraging our grantees to *think more* strategically about the *answer to that very question about why are you doing what you are doing and to what end?* And helping *them think* about how they can align their performance measures with their theory of change, is what they are doing as effective and efficient as it could be? And helping *them to better understand* the impact they are having”

The quote above demonstrates the organization's rooted commitment to learning and reflection as precursors to facilitating continuous improvement. It shows the dynamic process of knowledge processes and how knowledge is transferred within organizations to encourage and foster learning among organizational actors. There is also an external component to organizational learning that the quote demonstrates, which is that the interviewee is looking to transfer knowledge not only to the employees – but also to their external stakeholders (grantees).

Table 7. *Interviewees Reasons for Engaging in Performance Measurement*

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>% of Interviewees Who Mentioned This Reason</b>
Rational Choice	40% (10)
Organizational Learning	20% (5)
Resource Dependency Theory	12% (3)
Stewardship Theory	12% (3)
Principal Agency Theory	4% (1)
Innovation and Discovery	4% (1)
In service of CREI	4% (1)
Institutional Theory	-

Table 7 above also indicates that the interviewees found principal agency, resource dependency theory, stewardship theory, innovation and discovery and in service of CREI as alternative explanations of why they engage in performance measurement- but none of these factors were high enough in the content analyses to rise to the top.

Rational choice and organizational learning theories remained the predominant theories when the data was analyzed at the organizational level. 60% (9) of the participating organizations mentioned rational choice as the basis for engaging in performance measurement while 26.7% (4) of the participating organizations mentioned organizational learning as the predominant rationale for engaging in performance measurement (see table 8 below).

Table 8. *Percentage of Organizations That Mentioned Reason for Engaging in Performance Measurement*

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>% of Organizations That Mentioned This Reason From Interview Data</b>
Rational Choice	60% (9)
Organizational Learning	26.7% (4)
Stewardship Theory	20% (3)
Resource Dependency Theory	13.3% (2)
Principal Agency Theory	6.7% (1)
Innovation and Discovery	6.7% (1)
In service of CREI	6.7% (1)
Institutional Theory	-

In order to minimize ecological fallacy, the researcher employed the documents and records to investigate, confirm and capture nuances that were not reflected in the transcribed interview data. Specifically, the researcher used the documents and records provided by the two organizations as well as visiting the websites of these organizations and reviewing available reports and text on the websites. Based on the review (see table 9 below), there was ample evidence on the websites and documents to confirm the predominance of rational choice and organizational learning as the factors that drive performance measurement. Although principal agency theory, resource dependency theory, and stewardship theory came up as alternative explanations in the transcribed data, there were no evidence on the websites and available reports to support this assertion. However, there were ample evidence on the websites to support “in service of CREI” and “innovation and discovery” as alternative explanations of why these organizations engage in performance measurement. The evidence the researcher observed in support of CREI and innovation and discovery were consistent with the assessment at the overall results section of this document.

*Table 9. Confirmatory Analyses Using Other Data Sources for the Organizational Level*

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>% of organizations that mentioned reason from the interview data</b>	<b>Confirmatory analysis using websites, documents found on websites</b>
Rational Choice	60% (9)	There was ample evidence to support all 9 organizations
Organizational Learning	26.7% (4)	Ample evidence to support these 4 organizations
Stewardship Theory	20% (3)	No evidence
Resource Dependency Theory	13.3% (2)	No evidence
Principal Agency Theory	6.7% (1)	No evidence
Innovation and Discovery	6.7% (1)	Some form of evidence
In service of CREI	6.7% (1)	Ample evidence
Institutional Theory	-	-

Rational choice was still the predominant theory for explaining why philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement when the data was broken down by

organization type (GM vs. GS). A third (33.3%) of the GM interviewees mentioned that they engage in performance measurement due to rational choice while 50% of the GS interviewees mentioned that they engage in performance measurement due to rational choice. However, organizational learning drives the performance measurement practices of GM organizations (33.3%) more than the GS organizations (10%) (see table 10 below). This is not surprising as the GM organizations are more removed from the actual work – so they are more reliant on organizational learning to understand the context and intricacies of the work as they are not on the ground. They use performance measurement activities as the basis to learn or even unlearn and to support their own internal planning activities. There are instances where GM organizations will organize learning meetings or convenings to create the space to delve deeper into findings from program or cluster evaluation studies. Most of these program or cluster evaluations are conducted by GS organizations, making GM organizations heavily dependent on GS organizations in terms of data for performance measurement activities.

Table 10. *Reasons for Engaging in Performance Measurement By Type of Organization*

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>GM Interviewees (n=15)</b>	<b>GS Interviewees (n=10)</b>
Rational Choice	33.3% (5)	50% (5)
Organizational Learning	33.3% (5)	10% (1)
Resource Dependency Theory	13.3% (2)	10% (1)
Stewardship Theory	13.3% (2)	10% (1)
Principal Agency Theory	6.7% (1)	-
Innovation and Discovery	-	10% (1)
In service of CREI	-	10% (1)
Institutional Theory	-	-

Rational choice and organizational learning theories were still relevant when the data was disaggregated by type of staff- but other theories also emerged as compelling alternative explanations of why philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement. For example, rational choice was the most predominant rationale for

engaging in performance measurement when I asked GM frontline staff (50%) and GS executives (66.7%) – but organizational learning was the most predominant reason when I asked GM executives (33.3%) even more predominant than rational choice (22.2%) (see table 11 below). The relevance of organizational learning for GM executives even reinforced the earlier assessment that was made that GM organizations value organizational learning more because they are more removed from the work. This is even more true for the GM executive who may not necessarily participate in grantee check-in calls and rely on the frontline GM staff for updates and progress report. In this case, organizational learning will even be more of a priority for the GM executive relative to the GM frontline staff. Likewise, it was not surprising that the GS executive also indicated that they value organizational learning, since their position as executives may inadvertently remove them from the “weeds”- so they would also have to rely on the frontline staff to learn more about the work even though their organizations have more proximity to the work than GM organizations.

*Table 11. Reasons for Engaging in Performance Measurement by Staff*

Reasons	GM		GS	
	Executive (n=9)	Frontline Staff (n=6)	Executive (n=6)	Frontline Staff (n=4)
Rational Choice	22.2% (2)	50% (3)	66.7% (4)	25% (1)
Organizational Learning	33.3% (3)	33.3% (2)	16.7% (1)	-
Principal Agency Theory	11.1% (1)	-	-	-
Resource Dependency Theory	11.1% (1)	16.6% (1)	-	25% (1)
Stewardship Theory	22.2% (2)	-	-	25% (1)
Innovation and Discovery	-	-	-	25% (1)
In service of CREI	-	-	16.7% (1)	-
Institutional Theory	-	-	-	-

## **Research Question 2: Why Do Higher-Education Focused Philanthropic**

### **Organizations Engage in Research?**

According to the transcribed interview data and consistent with past research, rational choice is the most predominant theory that explains why philanthropic



organizations engage in research (84% of interviewees mentioned this; see Table 12 below). This theory makes the case that organizational actors will engage in research to gather the needed data to make evidence-based decisions. For example, several interviewees highlighted this function of research by demonstrating that their organizations engage in research practices to gather information to make evidence-based decisions. Specifically, one of these participants stated:

“To do this promising practice research is an asset, it gives us knowledge. [We do research] because of data and information and knowledge that we can use then to be clear about where we think there are gaps in the labor market or gaps in strategies or programs that we could use ourselves to drive our mission and our strategy when we go to the marketplace to try to sell so I’ve tried to encourage the organization over time to use it [research] for own development purpose.”

This interviewee, thus, highlights the instrumental value of research to identify gaps, mainly in labor market areas, and how their organization can use that information to devise solutions to move their agenda forward. This participant also emphasized how their organization can use research as a tool to gather market intelligence in order to gain necessary information to craft products and services that better meet those needs. Another interviewee also stated that their organization uses research to gather evidence-based information to inform decision beyond the confines of the organization itself. This participant specifically highlighted reaching external stakeholders such as policymakers and practitioners and stated:

“We do research to influence practice. We want our stakeholders to implement evidence-base practices and policies in our research and I think we’ve seen some of that. You know I think with our embedding certification research, we see changes in the folks we’ve touched in the grant, and how they are thinking about moving ahead with practices related to embedding industry certifications in their bachelor’s degree program. So, the word we are using is to sort of actively influence folks who would directly use the research results. The main idea we try to influence is to write the publication to get other stakeholders like

“policymakers interested in, and I think you know about the other pieces we introduced is to signal to them that we have successfully finished these projects and that we again have the capacity to do the work, we have the knowledge to the work, we gave a successful track record.”

In the presented quote, the interviewee describes the “influencing” power of research--the ability to package evidence-based information in ways that are designed to inform and elicit a change in behavior in policymakers (e.g., institutional, state, or federal), practitioners, and others in terms of how they do their work. By eliciting such change, such stakeholders may be better able to support a specific agenda. This finding supports the rational choice perspective with regard to research use.

*Table 12. Reasons for Engaging in Research as Indicated by the Interviewees*

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>% of Interviewees Who Mentioned this Reason</b>
Rational Choice	84% (21)
In service of CREI	4% (1)
Stewardship Theory	4% (1)
Principal Agency Theory	4% (1)
Institutional Theory	4% (1)
Organizational Learning	-
Innovation and Discovery	-
Resource Dependency Theory	-

According to the Table 12 above, principal agency theory, institutional theory, stewardship theory and “in service of CREI” provided alternative explanations of why philanthropic organizations engage in research- but none of these factors were dominant in the content analysis to rise to the top.

Rational choice was still the predominant theory when the data was analyzed at the organizational level. Nearly 87% of the participating organizations mentioned rational choice as the basis for engaging in research (See table 13 below).

Table 13. *Reasons for Engaging in Research at the Organizational Level*

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>% of organizations that mentioned this reason from interview data</b>
Rational Choice	86.7% (13)
In service of CREI	6.7% (1)
Stewardship Theory	6.7% (1)
Principal Agency Theory	6.7% (1)
Institutional Theory	6.7% (1)
Resource Dependency Theory	-
Innovation and Discovery	-
Organizational Learning	-

In order to minimize ecological fallacy, the researcher employed the documents and records to investigate, confirm and capture nuances that were not reflected in the transcribed interview data. Specifically, the researcher used the documents and records provided by the two organizations as well as visiting the websites of these organizations and reviewing available reports and text on the websites. Based on the review (see table 14 below), there is ample evidence on the websites and documents to confirm the predominance of rational choice as the major driver of research practices in 86.7% of the organization. Another factor that did not show up in the content analyses of the transcribed interview as driving research - but was visible on the website was organizational learning theory. Although principal agency, institutional agency and stewardship theory provided alternative explanations of why philanthropic organizations engage in research, there were no additional evidence from the document and record reviews to confirm these alternative factors. However, there were ample evidence to support the “in service of CREI” as a driver of research practices in philanthropic organizations. There were several references on the websites and the reports to suggest that CREI is a major factor in the design and development of research. The evidence is consistent with the evidence presented in the overall results section of this report.

Furthermore, some of the organizations stated that CREI is a lens that guide all their work, meaning CREI cuts across all their work and can coexist with other reasons or perspectives at any given time.

Table 14. *Confirmatory Analyses on Reasons for Engaging in Research at the Organizational Level*

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>% of organizations that mentioned this reason from interview data</b>	<b>Confirmatory Analyses</b>
Rational Choice	86.7% (13)	Ample evidence to support this claim
In service of CREI	6.7% (1)	Ample evidence to support this claim
Principal Agency Theory	6.7% (1)	No evidence to support
Institutional Theory	6.7% (1)	No evidence to support
Stewardship Theory	6.7% (1)	No evidence to support
Innovation and Discovery	-	No evidence to support
Organizational Learning	-	Evidence to the contrary (some organizations use research to support organizational learning)
Resource Dependency Theory	-	No evidence to support

Rational choice remained the predominant theory when the data was disaggregated by organizational type. According to the transcribed interview data, 100% of the GM interviewees mentioned rational choice as the major rationale for engaging in research while 60% of the GS interviewees mentioned that rational choice drives their research practice (see table 15 below). For example, based on the content analysis of the transcribed interview data, it was found that an overwhelming number of GM interviewees indicated that they engage in research practices primarily as a means to gather data to make informed decisions. All fifteen of the GM interviewees resonated with the rational choice perspective as the reason for engaging in research practices. This response was also found to be true for both types of research (i.e., synthesis of existing research, and primary research designed to address new research question). For example, one GM interviewee indicated:

“I think the piece that I just said was almost entirely the primary research, which we do, which we do, in some ways we, yeah, we do some and that

is both like field value and internal value. I'd say we do a lot of synthesis research that is almost purely internal value right now that we have talked about, potentially, like future states, where we are externalizing, our evidence bases, at least with our intermediary partners. So some big things is we have a partner that helps support the evidence base. That's the literature reviews, both one time and most frequently updated for things where there's a lot of new research coming out. You know, there's a class of things that we might ask a more academic partner to do is sort of a one time date, particularly as we are starting a new body of work. So if there's a new funding area and we want to make sure we get the basis to step into that area, then we will engage in research, mainly the synthesis research."

This GM interviewee's statement supports the rational choice perspective with regard to engaging in research. Specifically, the quote seems to reveal that the organization undertakes both synthesis and primary research in order to gather evidence to inform decision-making. The executive also highlights some of the internal and external uses of research by GM organizations. While synthesis research can be used for external purposes, per the previously presented quote, the executive also stressed how GM organizations use this type of research as tool to better understand focus areas or issues before they start major investments.

Unlike the GM organizations, there were variations in the responses of the GS organizations when answering the question about why their organizations engage in research practices. According to the content analysis of the transcribed data, 60% (six) of the GS organizations interviewees indicated that their respective organizations engage in research practices to gather information in order to make evidence-based decisions. These responses resonate with the rational choice perspective. For example, one GS interviewee stated:

"For research, it is about helping inform decision-making that customers or partners are doing. And so, whether it's looking at information about their own context or looking at comparable information with others, we can uncover storylines we can sort of see patterns to inform decisions making."

The central point of designing and conducting research to inform decision-making was, thus, found to be central to the responses of this GS interviewee. Another point that was highlighted was the ability to weave the research findings into simple and relatable stories of which readers can make sense and, in turn, take the needed actionable steps. This point further reinforces the instrumental idea that research is a tool to inform decision-making and action.

*Table 15. Reasons for Engaging in Research by Type of Organization*

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>GM Interviewees (n=15)</b>	<b>GS Interviewees (n=10)</b>
Rational Choice	100% (15)	60% (6)
Organizational Learning	-	-
Principal Agency Theory	-	10% (1%)
Institutional Theory	-	10% (1%)
Resource Dependency Theory	-	-
Stewardship Theory	-	10% (1)
Innovation and Discovery	-	-
In service of CREI	-	10% (1)

Although the GS interviewees mentioned principal agency, institutional theory, stewardship theory and CREI as other factors that drive research, the content analyses of transcribed interview data and the document and records analyses only shed light on CREI as the most compelling alternative explanation of why GS organizations engage in research. Accordingly, one GS interviewee demonstrated how CREI support their work to advance equitable and inclusive outcomes in postsecondary education and training attainment across diverse marginalized groups such as students of color, first-generation students, low-income students, veterans, immigrants, adults, and others by saying:

“You know, so if our goal is to decrease equity gaps and then we need to deal with issues that are impacting the most vulnerable students, and the students that tend to be most underserved. I mean, the reality is that what we know is that as much as we are proud of the work that’s happened in our 11 years of existence, when we realized that a lot of students in a lot of institutions got left behind. And many of those are the ones that are where most of these equity gaps exist. You know, and so to me it’s kind of part of that journey, you know you’re recognizing what still needs to be done,

you know, but you can't do it the same way that you did 10 years ago. So research is being used as tool to really understand these equity issues, gaps and how we can address these racial gaps.”

Per this quote, research is used by this organization as a central tool to understand equity issues and gaps, as well as to determine the best strategies that can be employed to address those gaps. The executive also indicated that addressing equity gaps is the mission of the organization. They, therefore, rely on research as an avenue to work towards accomplishing this mission.

The results did not change meaningfully when we disaggregated by type of staff as rational choice is still dominant with 100% of the GM executives and frontline staff selecting this reason while 66.7% of GS executives and 50% of the GS frontline staff selecting this reason as the rationale for engaging in research (see table 16 below).

*Table 16. Reasons for Engaging in Research by Staff*

Reasons	GM		GS	
	Executive (n=9)	Frontline Staff (n=6)	Executive (n=6)	Frontline Staff (n=4)
Rational Choice	100% (9)	100% (6)	66.7% (4)	50% (2)
Organizational Learning	-	-	-	-
Principal Agency Theory	-	-	-	25% (1)
Institutional Theory	-	-	16.7% (1)	-
Resource Dependency Theory	-	-	-	-
Stewardship Theory	-	-	-	25% (1)
Innovation and Discovery	-	-	-	-
In service of CREI	-	-	16.7% (1)	-

**Research Question 3: How are They Using Information from These Practices?**

According to the transcribed data, there are three major ways higher education-focused philanthropic organizations use information from performance measurement and research practices. Based on the review of the transcribed data, the three categories are: 1.) internal use; 2.) external use; and 3.) dual use (both internal and external use). Internal use is when the information is used mainly by internal stakeholders of the organization such as frontline staff, executives, and board members. These internal uses include – but

limited to strategy development, fostering internal learning, policy developments, revising internal policies and practices, and others. For example, one participant demonstrated the internal use of data from these practices by saying:

“Basically [we] just look at the data to [understand] who are we serving? What have we learned? how are we serving students? What are we doing? We use this to just have a discussion like storytelling about what are we seeing in this portfolio? We will ultimately take that and create a narrative that goes to our board of directors twice a year- so they will have a sense of what is happening in a school area or portfolio.

This specific example demonstrated how information from these practices are mined and used to create a narrative to help the board of directors fulfill their fiduciary duties. In most instances, using the information to present a cohesive story to the board helps them to get the needed understanding to approve annual budgets and strategic plans of the organizations.

Frontline staff and executives also use information from these practices in a variety of ways, mostly in more detailed fashion than the board of directors. Another participant also demonstrated how staff members use information from these practices to support their work by saying:

“But what was really interesting the first time we went through this was that we could see in our student support school, part of our strategic plan is to support returning adults. And when we really looked at the data, we were seeing that there was actually very few grantees reporting on fairly small numbers of people, 25 and older, that were being impacted by our brands. And so, it led to a really interesting question and conversation. Who is reporting on this and who is not because maybe they are showing up somewhere else? Or are returning adults showing up in our other goal areas.....And so it was just really interesting because a lot of the times you have a hunch about those kinds of things or think you could be doing better but to just have a number to discuss at the staff level is really nice.”

The quote above also shows that staff members also use information from these practices to understand and deliberate about the work. Although the boundary between internal use



and external use can be very thin, evidence from the transcribed data indicated that not all data from these practices get used by external stakeholders. One staff affirmed this view by saying:

“We look at it at the staff level and figure out what the story is and use information to report and what we are learning to the board .....**I’m not sure if we will use this externally in any way.** There are grants with like evaluations associated with them. There are grants that do get external exposure, including evaluations and research. But this is separate from this [internal] process.”

In this quote, the participant was outlining the demarcation that exists between the kinds of information that are used within the philanthropic organization and the ones that are designed to be shared outside with key stakeholders. In most cases, the information that come out from research and performance measurement activities that are conducted by internal staff members of GM organizations tend to be designed for mainly internal use - and are rarely showcased for use by external stakeholders. GM organizations tend to rely on external consultants or GS organizations with subject matter expertise to curate and conduct research and performance evaluation analyses that are designed for external use.

External use is when external stakeholders of the philanthropic organization use the information to support or advance their work. These external stakeholders can be employers, associations leaders, state and federal policymakers, funders (if we are refereeing to GSs), institutional leaders, faculty, higher education associations, union leaders, industry association leaders, community-based organization leaders, and others.

One of the participants epitomized this by saying:

“Part of our efforts is around communication. And so being able to take these complex ideas and make them plain spoken[language], and then share them with a larger broader community is part of our work. And so when we think about the individuals that we are trying to touch you know it could be policy leaders, it could be system leaders, it could be the federal government. You know it can be institutional players and

practitioners such as faculty members, deans, provost. We've done a lot of national reports and national publications with those individuals in mind.”

This quote outlines how philanthropic organizations tailor information from these practices to external stakeholders. It also emphasizes the relevance of factoring in strategic communication as an essential component of designing and operationalizing research and performance measurement activities.

Dual use is when both internal and external stakeholders of the philanthropic organization use information from research and performance measurement practices to support or advance their work. This is the most practical and common way that philanthropic organizations use information from research and performance measurement practices. There were several instances where virtually all participants alluded to the point that their organization uses some form information from the research or performance measurement practice to satisfy both internal and external stakeholders. For example, one participant demonstrated this by saying:

“So, the research that we support I think to some extent is to support our own internal conversations, maybe with our board, you know, just making sure that we're learning about trends in the field. I would say, especially the research that we support in our grant-making is really intended for more external purposes that are tailored for grantees to take to it and run with it. We, you know, might distribute it through our own newsletters and social media and things like that, but that's really, I mean, if we're supporting research through a grant that's really primarily for external purposes. “

This quote shows how information from these organizational practices can be used by internal stakeholders (board) as well as external stakeholders.

An important point to consider is that I mostly did not address the differences in how GM use information compared to GS organization in the above analyses because of diverse reasons. First, GS organizations rely, partly, on the grants from GM

organizations. Second, most of the GM organizations in this study were found to rely on the GS organizations with regard to on-the-ground systems change work and activities. Such reliance means that much of the research and the external facing performance measurement projects (i.e., program evaluations and cluster evaluation of signature initiatives) that GM organizations engage in are primarily conducted by GS organizations for both GM organizations and the broader field, as they employ subject matter experts as staff members. Thus, GM organizations fund projects and provide grant management support while the GS organizations conduct the actual research and external facing performance measurement activities, such as program evaluations and large-scale cluster evaluations.

While the GM organizations overwhelmingly stated that the research synthesis that they engage in in-house are mainly for internal use, the GS organizations alluded to the point that they conduct research synthesis for a variety of reasons, and they can have both internal and external uses as they are several instances where they have to conduct literature reviews or scans as a precursor to a primary research project. They also indicated that they regularly engage in standalone and external facing research synthesis projects designed to shed light on specific topics for the consumption of key external stakeholders such as institutional, state and federal policymakers, employers, and funders.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Summary, Interpretation and Context of Results, Strengths and Limitations, Future Directions and Conclusion**

In this section of the dissertation, I present a summary of the study's purpose, research methodologies, and results. I also provide interpretation and context of results, detailing the study's general implications, and implications for theory. The chapter concludes with the limitations and strengths of the study, future directions, and big picture implications.

#### **Overview of the Study Purpose and Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to investigate why philanthropic organizations that are not institutions of higher education, but which focus on advancing higher education-related issues, undertake performance measurement and research practices, as well as how these organizations use the information gleaned from these practices. In order to understand the organizational motivators for engaging in these practices, I conducted semi-structured interviews with executives and frontline staff who oversee performance measurement and research practices in their respective organizations. A purposive sampling approach was employed to select participating organizations (both GM and GS) located across America. For each participating organization, I interviewed, as far as possible, one executive and one frontline staff member.

In contrast to past studies, participating organizations in this study spanned across America, and were either GM or GS organizations that operate within the higher education subsector. Although the focus of the study was specifically on American-based organizations, some of the philanthropic organizations that participated in the study have

international reach and are not considered “niche organizations” (i.e., organizations that specialize exclusively in one sector). For example, the largest foundation in America, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, focuses on both health and education. I focused my interviews, however, solely on the higher education programs of such broader organizations.

As noted in the previous chapter, data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using an appropriate qualitative data analysis software. By employing a set of predetermined codes based on the theories that supported this study, I was able to conduct directed content analysis to ascertain the extent to which the organizational motivators highlighted in this study align with the preestablished theoretically based codes (i.e., motivators). Aside from using theoretically generated codes, I also added new codes that emerged from the literature and participants’ responses. This approach allowed me to generate unexpected findings as well as subsector-specific findings that may not necessarily align with findings from past research.

### **Overview of the Study**

Conventionally, performance measurement and research practices have been portrayed as rational tools that philanthropic organizations undertake to gather information to make improvements in their organizational and programmatic activities (Carman, 2011; Dunn, 1981). This assertion has, however, not been tested in terms of organizations that operate within the higher education nonprofit subsector to advance issues related to increasing the attainment of postsecondary education and training credentials. In this study, I opted to refer to these forms of philanthropic organizations as higher education-based philanthropic organizations. In this dissertation, I argued that

other organizational theories could provide additional and vital explanations of why GS and GM higher education-focused philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement and research practices, as well as how they use the data from these two practices.

The other theories upon which I drew to help explain why and how higher education-focused philanthropic organizations (GMs and GSs) use performance measurement and research practices were: agency theory, institutional theory, resource dependency theory, stakeholder theory, and stewardship theory. These theories “make significantly and fundamentally different assumptions about how organizations function, and how organizational managers within the nonprofit sector behave compared to the assumptions behind rational choice theory” (Carman, 2011, p. 1). It should be noted that this dissertation extends the existing literature as I address the questions in a different nonprofit subsector, capture the views of both executives and frontline staff, and demarcate performance measurement and research as two related but distinct organizational practices.

The study sought to address three main questions. Below the researcher provides a summary of the results for the three questions, outlining how the results integrate to provide a holistic understanding of the why and how philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement and research practices.

## Summary of Results

### **Research Question 1: Why do Higher-Education Focused Philanthropic Organizations Engage in Performance Measurement?**

According to the transcribed data, rational choice is the most dominant theory (40% of the interviewees said so), followed by organizational learning (20% of the interviewees said so) when it comes to why philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement. These two factors dominated regardless of how the data was disaggregated. Principal agency, institutional theory, resource dependency theory, stewardship theory, innovation and discovery and CREI, though they did not rise to the top in the content analyses, provided alternative explanations of why philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement. It is important to reiterate that the document and record review, however, indicated additional evidence to suggest that innovation and discovery as well as CREI are important factors for explaining why philanthropic organizations, particularly GM organizations, engage in performance measurement. The discrepancy between the transcribed data and document and records review suggests the value in soliciting multiple perspectives from different sources to better understand organizational behavior.

There are some differences across organizational type and type of staff. Among others, rational choice is more predominant for GS organization (50% of interviewees said so) than GM organization (33% said so). Conversely, organizational learning is more predominant for GM organization (33.3%) than GS organizations (10%). Interestingly, both GM executives (33%) and GM frontline staff (33%) equally see organizational learning as the reason for engaging in performance measurement. However, a higher

proportion of the GM frontline staff (50%) see rational choice as the reason for engaging in performance measurement than GM executives (22%). Furthermore, a higher proportion of GS executives (67%) see rational choice as the reason for engaging in performance measurement than the GS frontline staff (25%).

### **Interpretation and context of results for research question # 1**

It is not surprising that rational choice is the predominant theory (regardless of how you cut and slice the data) as this is consistent with past research (Carman, 2011; Cooper & Levin, 2013; Cooper, 2014; Weiss, 1979, 1998) and most important, these organizations regularly need evidence-based information to initiate systems change (i.e., changes in policies and practices). However, the predominance of organizational learning as the second most mentioned reason why philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement was a major contribution to the existing literature.

Organizational learning was introduced into the mix because there are diverse factors that inhibit organizational actors from always making rational decisions when given data (Breheny & Hooper, 1985; Brewer, 1973; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Lindblom, 1959; March, 1987, 1988, 1994; Scott, 1987; Simon & March, 1958). These limitations suggest that there is a precursor or step that precedes making decisions, which can be described as the act of learning (Korniv & Thissen, 2000). Organizational actors may not automatically make decisions when presented with data- but they may need to sit with the data, internalize and even familiarize others with the data. This learning process allows them to digest information, learn, reflect, or maybe, even unlearn old ways of doing things before they use the information to support continuous improvement. It is through this reflection that they make sense of the information.



Another important point is that organizational learning as a theory aligns better with the kinds of performance measurements that GM organizations undertake than the GS organizations. GM organizations are more removed from the actual projects than the GS organizations. Grant-makers rely on the GS organizations to do most of the “groundwork”- so it makes sense for grant-makers to conduct performance measurement on these programs to learn more about the strengths and weakness of these programs and then use this information to foster a learning culture within their organizations.

Although they are more removed from the “groundwork”, program officers of these GM organizations would still have to make funding recommendations to their executives, meaning they would need these performance measurement reports (mainly the program evaluations and cluster evaluation reports) of these funded initiatives to learn about how these programs are faring and even socialize other colleagues and executives about how these initiatives are performing. These could be done in the form of learning sessions and other structured and unstructured avenues for learning within the organization. This also explains why both GM executives and GM frontline staff equally see organizational learning as the reason for engaging in performance measurement practices.

Another point is that although innovation, discovery, and CREI did not rise to the top in the content analyses of the transcribed interview data, they showed up as predominant reasons why philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement in the additional analyses using documents and records. This reinforces the methodological approach to address ecological fallacy (Carman, 2011). It also reinforces the need to solicit multiple perspectives from different sources to better understand

organizational behavior. Consequently, it also reinforces the idea that at any given point in time, philanthropic organizations can have multiple motivations or perspectives that drive their performance measurement activities as the data analyses yielded at least seven different motivations that are driving why these participating philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement practices.

## **Research Question 2: Why Do Higher-Education Focused Philanthropic Organizations Engage in Research?**

According to the content analyses of the transcribed interview data, there is overwhelming evidence that rational choice is the dominant theory that explains why philanthropic organizations engage in research practices. This is true from interviewees, all types of organizations (GM vs. GS), and all staff members (executives and frontline staff). However, GM organizations discussed rational choice as the only reason why they engage in research while GS organizations provided other factors beyond rational choice such as principal agency, institutional theory, stewardship theory, and CREI as possible and alternative explanation as why philanthropic organizations engage in research. Furthermore, the GM executives and frontline staff equally see rational choice as driving their research (100% each) while 66.7% of the GS executives vs. 50% of GS frontline staff see rational choice as driving their research practice. The rest of the GS executives are distributed over institutional theory and CREI while the rest of the GS frontline are distributed over principal agency and stewardship theory.

A review of the available documents and records supported and confirmed the dominance of the rational choice perspective – but there is also evidence, particularly on the websites of these participating organizations, to suggest that innovation and discovery

and CREI could explain why philanthropic organizations engage in research. Again, this discrepancy in the transcribed data suggest the need for soliciting multiple perspectives from different sources to better understand organizational behavior.

### **Interpretation and context of results for Research Question 2**

It is not surprising that rational choice is the predominant theory (regardless of how you cut and slice the data) that explains why philanthropic organizations engage in research as the finding is consistent with past studies in other contexts (Appleton, 2003; Bucuvalas, 1980; Fox, 2001; Weiss & Stoecker, 2007). These organizations are trying to solve complex social problems and would need to gather data to make evidence-based decisions, therefore making rational choice the dominant theory. However, it is a little surprising that none of them mentioned organizational learning as driving their research practices as there could be opportunities for them to learn more about the “wicked” social problems that they try to address through the research they undertake or fund (Webber & Rittel, 1973). This is especially true for GM organizations as they are mostly removed from the problem and would need to rely on research to understand the work better. Similar to performance measurement practice, the analyses on why philanthropic organizations engage in research practice also validated the approach to minimize ecological fallacy by soliciting perspectives from diverse sources. Although innovation and discovery did not show up in the transcribed interview data and CREI did not rise to the top of the content analyses of the transcribed data, a review of the organization’s websites indicated ample evidence to suggest that these factors can provide alternative and plausible explanation of why philanthropic organizations engage in research practices.

### **Questions 3: How are Philanthropic Organizations Using Information from Performance Measurement and Research Practices?**

I sought to categorize and integrate the findings by developing a framework to better understand how these organizations use information from the two organizational practices (performance measurement and research). Other scholars have documented various uses of information from these practices. Most of the literature has focused more on the use of evaluation (mainly summative and formative program evaluations) than on use of information from research. A quick review of the literature indicates that evaluation utilization can also be categorized into four groups: 1.) Instrumental use, where evaluation findings are employed to directly affect decision-making and influence changes in the program under study; 2.) Conceptual use, where findings influence thinking about issues in general without any immediate new decisions being made about the program (Larsen,1980; Owen & Rogers, 1999; Rossi & Freeman, 1985; Weiss, 1999); 3.) Political or symbolic use, which involves justification of decisions already made about a program (Johnson, 1988; Patton, 1997); and 4.) Process use, which refers to how organizations are impacted as a result of participating in an evaluation such as changes in thoughts that could result in changes in organizational culture and behavior (Preskill & Caracelli, 1996).

Owen (2006) provided a comprehensive overview of evaluation findings and utilization -and found that most of the empirical studies on utilization of evaluation findings have focused on instrumental use and very few studies have attempted to measure conceptual use. Another important gap that exists is that these studies miss the organizational context when it comes to evaluation utilization. Carman (2011) addressed

the organizational context issue by employing the instrumental view to create a framework about how nonprofits (mainly GS organizations) use evaluation findings. Carman argued that these organizations can either use data from evaluation as a leverage tool (i.e., gain legitimacy from external stakeholders and needed resources) or as an accountability tool.

I attempted to extend the existing literature by focusing on the organizational setting/context in which performance measurement (looking beyond program evaluation to include other forms (i.e., organizational level performance and strategy level performance)) is situated, arguing that their uses will be predominantly determined by whether they are GM or GS organization. I also added research as a separate -but related organizational practice. Although Cousins and Leithwood (1986) and Hudson-Mabbs (1993) have identified seven organizational factors that affect utilization (commitment, information needs, competing information, personal characteristics, decision-making climate, political climate, and financial climate), I stayed away from these characteristics in my analysis while making the case that the type of organization (GM or GS) determines how information from performance measurement and research are used. By basing or grounding performance measurement and research use on organizational type, I was able to capture the interactive nature of the variables that shape the organizational motivations for engaging in performance measurement and research as well as outlining how they differ for GM and GS organization.

Therefore, a review of the identified organizational motivators (employed in the study) indicated that these organizational motivators for engaging in performance measurement and research practices can be classified into three broad categories: 1.)

internal use; 2.) external use; and 3.) dual use (both internal and external use). The basis for making the classification is dependent on the type of philanthropic organization under consideration. If we use GM philanthropic organizations as the basis for making the categorizations, then we would have a different make-up of the categories than if we use GS organizations as the reference point. For example, the accountability function of performance measurement for GM organizations under principal agency has an external use function- but one can also make the argument that there could be an internal pull for accountability from the board of directors, making it also an internal function for GM organization. For this example, I classify accountability as having a dual role (both internal and external use) when it comes to GM organizations. Below are tables that outline the uses of performance measurement and research information for GM and GS organization, respectively, as depicted by the study findings for the various organizational motivators.

Table 17. *Uses of Performance Measurement Information for GMs*

Motivating Factors	Use	Description and Examples
Rational Choice (Inform and make evidence-based decisions)	Internal and external uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Internal Use:</b> Most of their grant-level performance activities are internal facing (with exception of the correspondence they have to share with grantees).</li> <li>• <b>Internal Use:</b> Inform strategy formulation by sharing performance measurement reports (i.e., program evaluation report and cluster evaluation reports designed by GS to staff for internalization and socialization of findings)</li> <li>• <b>External Use:</b> Use PM (mainly funded public facing reports) to share stories about their work to policymakers (state and federal), industry leaders, employers and institutional leaders.</li> </ul>
Organizational Learning (foster a learning culture)	Internal and external uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Internal Use:</b> Internal staff learn and reflect on externally- generated program evaluation reports, cluster evaluation reports and other forms of written reports.</li> <li>• <b>Internal Use:</b> Internal staff engage in learning sessions on specific topics that pertain to strategy formulation, internal policies and practices.</li> <li>• <b>External Use:</b> When appropriate staff share accrued learning (explicit knowledge) with external stakeholders (i.e., blogs, webinars, podcast, etc.)</li> </ul>
Agency Theory (Accountability)	External use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>External Use:</b> Program officers monitor grantee performance through check-in calls and review of progress report. Program officers review grant-level reports and make assessments and recommendations in the grant management software while following up with grantees.</li> </ul>
Resource Dependency (reduce uncertainty and secure resources)	Internal use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Internal Use:</b> Use PM to decide how best to allocate resources/budgets to make sure they are efficiently and effectively using their resources to address social problems</li> </ul>
Stewardship (foster trust and solidarity)	External use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>External Use:</b> Use program evaluation reports and other formal reports to build solidarity and public trust</li> </ul>

Data compiled from interviews as well as document and record reviews

Overall, Table 17 shows how GM philanthropic organizations use performance measurement data. Under the rational choice perspective, GM organizations mainly use performance measurement data/information acquired from in-house activities mostly within the organization to inform board level and executive level decision making as well as improvements in organizational policies and practices. They do, however, share with the field findings from the program evaluations and cluster evaluations that they fund other external organizations or contractors to undertake. Those evaluation findings are

shared with key stakeholders to inform evidence-based policy and practice solutions in the field.

Aside from the rational perspective, they also use performance measurement data internally to foster organizational learning among employees and board of directors. They also share some performance measurement data externally to foster learning and reflection on the part of key external stakeholders. Interestingly, the external sharing of performance measurement data by staff is a way for them to repackage and share what they are learning with the field in the form of blogs or Op-Eds on specific topics or issues. There is also evidence that organizations use data externally to ensure accountability on the part of the grantees that they fund. Furthermore, GM’s use data internally to decide how best to allocate resources/budgets to make sure they are efficiently and effectively using their resources to address social problems. Lastly, GMs use performance measurement data/reports externally to build relationships and foster public trust in the solutions they advocate for.

Table 18. *Uses of Research Information by GMs*

<b>Motivating factors</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Description and examples</b>
Rational Choice	Internal and external uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Internal Use:</b> GMs may conduct research synthesis to inform board level conversations; uses research to inform internal discussions and strategy formulation by staff and executives, use funded primary research conducted by external players to inform strategy formulation and theory of change development.</li> <li>• <b>External Use:</b> Use research data (mainly funded public facing reports) to share stories about their work to policymakers (state and federal), industry leaders, employers and institutional leaders in the form of blogs, podcast, videos, website display, etc...</li> </ul>

Data compiled from interviews as well as document and record reviews

### **Uses of Research by GM**

As shown in Table 18, GMs indicated that they engage in research from the perspective of rational choice, which is to build evidence to inform policy and practice.



Based on this assertion that means they have an internal and external use for research data/information. The internal use mainly revolves around conducting synthesis research to inform strategy formulation and conversations with board members, executives, staff, and other relevant partners.

Table 19. *Uses of Performance Measurement Information by GSs*

<b>Motivating factors</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Description and examples</b>
Rational Choice	Both Internal and external uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Internal Use only:</b> Organizational level Performance measures informs internal policies and practices; organization may share organizational level measures with board members to inform decision-making at the board or executive level within the organization.</li> <li>• <b>External use:</b> Funded program level performance measurement (i.e., program evaluations) and funded cluster level performance measurement (i.e., cluster evaluation) are normally intended for external stakeholders (i.e., funders, policymakers, employers, etc.)</li> </ul>
OL	Both Internal and External Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Internal Use:</b> Internal staff learn and reflect on externally- funded program evaluation reports, cluster evaluation reports and other forms of written reports.</li> <li>• <b>Internal Use:</b> Internal staff engage in learning sessions on specific topics that pertain to strategy formulation, internal policies and practices.</li> <li>• <b>External Use:</b> When appropriate staff share accrued learning (explicit knowledge) with external stakeholders (i.e., blogs, webinars, podcast, etc.)</li> </ul>
Resource dependency	External use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>External use:</b> Conduct small- and large-scale program evaluations for external stakeholders to reduce uncertainty and secure needed resources. Provide technical assistance if needed.</li> </ul>
Trust	External use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>External use:</b> Conduct research synthesis and primary research to foster public trust (i.e., building relationship with funders and key stakeholders (researchers, policymakers, employers, etc.)</li> </ul>
Innovation and Discovery	External use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>External use:</b> Reduce risk by piloting projects and conducting evaluations (summative and formative) to assess efficacy before scaling up</li> </ul>
CREI	External use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>External Use:</b> Grantee conducts culturally responsive- evaluation to identify gaps in attainment for marginalized populations and use information to call for changes in policy and practice that address gaps.</li> </ul>

Data compiled from interviews as well as document and record reviews

Based on Table 19, GS organizations that conduct performance measurement under the rational choice perspective uses data from performance measurement internally to devise strategy as well as externally to inform key stakeholders through diverse forums such as webinars, congressional hearing, convenings, and other avenues. In most cases,

they share findings from the largescale evaluations that they conducted through the funding of the GM organizations. According to organizational learning theory, they also use performance measurement data externally and internally, similar to what the rational choice prescribes but with an emphasis on learning. However, the other remaining theories dictate more of an external use of performance measurement data for the GS organization such as using the data to build trust with stakeholders, using performance measurement as a mechanism to test models first before scaling up and engaging in culturally responsive evaluations to address equity gaps in postsecondary education and training attainment.

Table 20. *Uses of Research Information by GSs*

<b>Motivating factors</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Description and examples</b>
Rational Choice	Internal and external uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Internal Use:</b> Grantee conducts research synthesis to inform large scale primary research; uses research to inform internal discussions and strategy formulation, use primary research conducted by external players to inform strategy formulation.</li> <li>• <b>External Use:</b> Use Research data to share stories about the work to policymakers (state and federal), employers and institutional leaders.</li> </ul>
Accountability	Internal use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Internal use:</b> Grantees provide progress report to GM organization about projects. They are agents while GMs are principals.</li> </ul>
Legitimacy	External use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>External use:</b> Grantee may use research to gain legitimacy externally. May even conduct research synthesis first as a way of demonstrating expertise before requesting for large scale projects. May partner with other reputable researchers to conduct joint projects.</li> </ul>
Trust	External use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>External use:</b> Grantee conducts research synthesis and primary research to foster public trust (i.e., building relationship with funders and etc.)</li> </ul>
CREI	External use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>External Use:</b> Grantee conducts research to identify gaps in attainment for marginalized populations and use information to call for changes in policy and practice that address gaps.</li> </ul>

Data compiled from interviews as well as document and record reviews

Table 20 outlines the uses for research data for GS organizations. Under the rational choice theory, they have the typical internal and external instrumental uses to inform internal and external stakeholders, respectively. However, they have an internal use under principal agency theory as they are accountable to the funders and need to

demonstrate their progress on funded research projects to other GM organizations. The other three uses are mainly external as they use research data to 1) signal their legitimacy to the field, 2) build public trust, and 3) employ culturally responsive research to showcase unique experiences of marginalized communities and how best to increase attainment among them.

### **Strengths**

The study has diverse strengths. First, the study provides insights about why higher education-focused philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement and research, an area that has not been well researched. This means that this research could pave the way for more studies to be conducted in this area. In addition, the study solicited feedback and perspectives from both frontline staff and executive from the same organization when possible. This methodological approach allowed the researcher to get a dual-perspective for the organizations that provided an executive and a frontline staff, allowing the researcher not to equate the views of the organization to only one person's perceptions. Furthermore, the study employed both interview and document and record review analysis, allowing for data triangulation in the study and the reduction of ecological fallacy.

### **Limitations**

The study had a relatively good number of participants- but I was still unable to secure a frontline staff and an executive for each of the participating organizations. This meant I did not get a dual perspective for each participating organization. It also explains why I had 25 interviews even though I had 15 participating organizations. My inability to recruit an executive and frontline staff for each organization meant that there were some

instances where I had to equate the perceptions of one staff to the entire organization. However, the strategy to include document and record data in the analysis enabled the analysis to be rich in diverse perspectives. The lack of two representatives from each organization in this current study also creates an opportunity for further inquiry. For example, researchers may expand the sample size to ensure that they have more and equal representation across the various types of participants for a similar study.

I also relied on interview data and document and record data as the primary data sources for analysis in this study. As noted in Chapter Three, at the end of each interview, I requested that interviewees share additional documents that could shed more light on what was presented in the interviews. Only two of the interviewees, however, followed up with any additional information or documents after the interviews. Therefore, I had to look for creative ways to add additional document and record data, so I visited websites of organizations and used other public records such as Guidestar and Chronicles of Philanthropy.

Of further note is that while I did attempt to classify the reasons for why philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement and research practices for each interviewee under one theoretical perspective, there were instances where multiple perspectives still emerged. This multiplicity made the classifications less mutually exclusive. Despite such overlaps, I still attempted to assign one theory based on what I ascertained to be the dominant theory that best aligned with the participants' expressed views. There could, therefore, be instances where my own bias may have impacted the determination of the dominant theory that aligned with the participant responses. This also raises the possibility of another way of explaining why philanthropic

organizations engage in performance measurement and research practices, which can be classified as the multiple perspective rationale. There is opportunity for future research to be conducted to further examine the viability of this multiple perspective approach.

### **Implications of the Findings**

Performance measurement and research practices have generally been seen as rational tools that are used by organizations to gather evidence-based information to make informed decisions (Carman, 2011; Friedman & McGarvie, 2003; Stoecker, 2007). While this assertion is fairly consistent for higher education-focused philanthropic organizations, I was able to highlight, in this study, instances where some such organizations engage in these practices for other purposes. These findings raise the possibility of other uses of performance measurement and research practices beyond the rational perspective and, accordingly, means that researchers may have to further examine the assumptions behind these practices as well as the organizational strategies that could incentivize and encourage their effective and efficient use both within and outside of these types of organizations.

One major implication is the need to reexamine the old practice of quickly commissioning new primary research when funders or actors start work in new areas without necessarily reviewing, scanning, and pulling together existing research in the space first to better understand the landscape and real gaps in the knowledge base. Simply starting with a research, evaluation synthesis, or landscape review can significantly avoid duplication of work and help funders better prioritize their limited budgets.

There is overwhelming evidence that indicates that research is a rational tool. Almost all of the executives and frontline staff of the GM organizations, for example, indicated that their organizations engage in research in order to gather the necessary information to make evidence-based decisions. A significant number of executive and frontline staff of the GS organizations also supported this assertion. These findings are not surprising, as the problems that these organizations try to address are “wicked” in nature and, as such, these organizations have no other choice than to use research as a necessary first step to understand these complex and multifaceted social problems. It is only once they have done sufficient research that these organizations can then tailor implementation strategies to address these issues. Some of these organizations were also found to use research to pilot and test projects. Specifically, they used research as a mechanism to identify which policies and practices they can scale in order to achieve large-scale systems change that could result in increased national attainment of postsecondary education and training. These uses of research and performance measurement also raises another important implication, which is that there is need for philanthropic organizations to factor in technical assistance to the field, when designing and funding research and performance measurement. This added feature will help the relevant stakeholders make sense of the research as well as employ the findings to support implementation work that will lead to large scale impact for the field, especially for specific target populations that funders care the most about.

Furthermore, organizational learning was also seen as an important factor of why philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement, particularly GM organizations. This was also a major contribution of this study to the existing literature.

Therefore, the relevance of organizational learning coupled with rational choice and CREI means that philanthropic organizations must prioritize strategic communication in the work as this is needed in order for the internal and external stakeholders to make sense of the data or information from research and performance measurement and either use the information to support their learning process or make evidence-based decision. In fact, communication activities should not be an afterthought- but philanthropic organizations have to factor this into the planning process before even designing performance measurement and research activities. They also have to engage in strategic research to better understand how best to frame their messages, particularly the CREI-oriented messages, to make sure they are reaching and winning the hearts and minds of diverse audiences that are relevant to advancing their goal to support equitable postsecondary education and training outcomes.

Another implication is that there is clearly a difference in how executives and frontline staff view and use performance measurement and research practices. For example, there were instances where some executives and frontline staff of the same organizations presented divergent views and uses of performance measurement and research practices. Such differences made it clear that the approach of capturing perspectives from both executives and frontline that I adopted in this study offers a sound and worthwhile contribution to the existing literature. Through this approach, in particular, I was able to highlight the need to examine issues from both executive and frontline staff perspectives, as this could allow for a more holistic understanding of the issues and reduce ecological fallacy.

Another implication is that this study could contribute to the ongoing conversation regarding the demarcation between research and performance measurement. Scholars and practitioners, alike, have written about the blending of boundaries between research and performance measurement practice (Hennes, 2017; Kim, 2005; LeRoux & Wright, 2010; Patton, 2014). Through this study I have, however, been able to indicate that although the demarcation can be debatable, overall, the study participants, with exception of only one, did not question the demarcation between research and performance measurement practices. Both the executives and frontline staff who participated in this study asked for the definitions of research and performance measurement practices, and none had challenges in understanding the differences between these two concepts. The participants, thus, accepted the operationalized definitions for both research and performance measurement practices and admitted to them being related but different organizational practices.

### **Suggestions for Future Study**

In contrast to the Carman (2011) study, which focused on human services, I limited this study to GM and GS philanthropic organizations that are not institutions of higher education, but which focus on advancing higher education-related issues in the US. In this study, I made diverse modifications and tested these concepts in the higher education subsector. There is, thus, an opportunity to extend this study to another subsector or even explore the topic across diverse sectors within one study as a means to test the generalizability of the findings presented in this current study.

Aside from testing this study in another context, researchers could make enhancements in future studies in respect to study participants. In this study, I



interviewed executives and frontline staff of both GM and GS organizations in order to understand why they engage in research and performance measurement practices. It would be interesting for future researchers to add a third group of participants to a line of similar inquiry (e.g., adding middle managers). The inclusion of such participants could force the future researcher to accurately classify participants into executives, middle managers, and those who report to the middle managers. Engaging these three employee types could generate other interesting and viable perspectives, as these different individuals could all have diverse experiences within the same organization, simply based on the position that they occupy within the organization.

As part of this study, I primarily relied on interview data and document and record for the analysis. Future researchers may, however, wish to undertake research that employs diverse methods to address the questions posed in this current study. Other possible methods that could be added to the interview and data and record data collection process could include the use of a follow-up survey designed according to the information gathered from the interviews. Such additional data sources could allow for better triangulation and move the study from a qualitative analysis to a mixed methods study that confirm findings from the interviews and document and record analysis. This type of confirmation could strengthen the accuracy of the findings and may lead to the identification of additional codes and rationales of why philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement and research practices.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, this study investigated why philanthropic organizations that focus on advancing higher education-related issues, undertake performance measurement and

research practices, as well as how these organizations use the information gleaned from these practices. In order to understand the organizational motivators for engaging in these practices, I conducted semi-structured interviews with executives and frontline staff who oversee performance measurement and research practices in their respective organizations. I did a content analysis on the transcribed interview data and reviewed documents and records to confirm results from my initial analyses as well as to generate any additional nuances. Overall, a majority of the organizations cited rational choice and organizational learning as reasons for engaging in performance measurement while a majority of the organizations cited rational choice as the rationale for engaging in research. Other factors that were mentioned as plausible explanations of why they engage in either performance measurement or research include principal agency theory, institutional theory, resource dependency theory, stewardship theory, innovation and discovery, and CREI. A confirmatory analysis was done using documents and records review, mainly text on their website and available evaluation and research reports on their website, confirmed the dominance of rational choice and organizational learning- but it also indicated that innovation and discovery and CREI are also two crucial reasons that could explain why these philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement or research practices. The most important takeaway from this study is that in practice or in the real-world multiple perspective can explain why a particular organization engages in performance measurement or research practices at any given point in time. This is true because in some cases I noticed that several of these reasons for engaging in performance measurement or research were showing up for a particular organization as the executive, frontline staff and document and record reviews yielded divergent responses.

Furthermore, it was uncovered in the study that philanthropic organizations use information from these practices in three main ways: 1.) internal use; 2.) external use; and 3.) dual use. Although how these show up can vary by the type of organization (GM vs. GS).

## **APPENDICES**

- A- Descriptive Tables Outlining Characteristics of Participating Organizations
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## Appendix A. Descriptive Tables Outlining Characteristics of Participating Organizations

<b>Participating Organization</b>	<b>Participating Employee</b>	<b>FTEE [Total (Higher Ed.)]</b>	<b>Year Founded</b>	<b>Org. Focus</b>	<b>Org. Approach</b>	<b>Affiliations</b>	<b>Geographical Focus</b>	<b>Budget*</b>	<b>Org. Type</b>	<b>Why Engage in PM &amp; Research (R)?</b>
Participant A (GM 01)	Executive	50 (16 higher ed.)	1982	Higher ed. & other priorities	Systems change	Yes	National	1 billion	GM	PM & R: Rational Choice (RC)
Participant B (GM 01)	Executive	5 (4 higher ed.)	1999	Higher ed. only	Direct service	Yes	Regional	680,000 annually	GM	PM: Principal Agency R: RC
Participant C (GM 01)	Executive	13	1994	Higher ed. only	Systems change	Yes	National	44.7 million annually	GM	PM: Stewardship R: RC
Participant C (GM 02)	Frontline Staff	13	1994	Higher ed. only	Systems change	Yes	National	44.7 million annually	GM	PM & R: RC
Participant D (GM 01)	Executive	20 (8 higher ed.)	1948	Higher ed. & other priorities	Systems change	Yes	Regional	50 million annually	GM	PM: Stewardship R: RC
Participant D (GM 02)	Frontline Staff	20 (8 higher ed.)	1948	Higher ed. & other priorities	Systems change	Yes	Regional	50 million annually	GM	PM & R: RC
Participant F (GM 01)	Executive	1763 (Unknown higher ed.)	1991	Higher ed. & other priorities	Systems change	Yes	National	5.8 billion	GM	PM & R: RC
Participant G (GM 01)	Executive	115 (6 higher ed.)	1924	Higher ed. & other priorities	Systems change	Yes	National	110 million annually	GM	PM: Resource Dependency R: RC
Participant G (GM 02)	Frontline Staff	115 (6 higher ed.)	1924	Higher ed. & other priorities	Systems change	Yes	National	110 million annually	GM	PM: Resource Dependency R: RC
Participant H (GM 01)	Executive	10	1981	Higher ed. only	Systems change & direct service	Yes	State specific	12 million annually	GM	PM: Organizational Learning (OL) R: RC
Participant H (GM 02)	Frontline Staff	10	1981	Higher ed. only	Systems change & direct service	Yes	State specific	12 million annually	GM	PM: OL R: RC
Participant I (GM 01)	Executive	17	1967	Higher ed. only	Systems change & direct service	Yes	National	111.4 million annually	GM	PM: OL R: RC
Participant I (GM 02)	Frontline staff	17	1967	Higher ed. only	Systems change & direct service	Yes	National	111.4 million annually	GM	PM: OL R: RC
Participant J (GM 01)	Executive	3	1927	Higher ed. & other priorities**	Systems change & direct service	Yes	State specific	1.7 million annually	GM	PM: OL R: RC

<u>Participating Organization</u>	<u>Participating Employee</u>	<u>FTEE [Total (Higher Ed.)]</u>	<u>Year Founded</u>	<u>Org. Focus</u>	<u>Org. Approach</u>	<u>Affiliations</u>	<u>Geographical Focus</u>	<u>Budget*</u>	<u>Org. Type</u>	<u>Why Engage in PM &amp; Research (R)?</u>
Participant J (GM 02)	Frontline Staff	3	1927	Higher ed. & other priorities**	Systems change & direct service	Yes	State specific	1.7 million annually	GM	PM & R: RC
<b>Grant-Seeking Organizations</b>										
Participant K (GS 01)	Executive	16	1991	Higher ed.	Systems change work	Yes	National	2.1 million annually	G-S	PM & R: RC
Participant K (GS 02)	Frontline staff	16	1991	Higher ed.	Systems change work	Yes	National	2.1 million annually	G-S	PM: Resource Dependency R: RC
Participant L (GS 01)	Executive	5	2015	Higher ed.	Systems change work	Yes	National	403,821 annually	G-S	PM: RC R: Institutional
Participant L (GS 02)	Frontline Staff	5	2015	Higher ed.	Systems change work	Yes	National	403,821 annually	G-S	PM & R: Stewardship
Participant M (GS 01)	Executive	14	2009	Higher ed.	Systems change work	Yes	National	3,863,214 annually	G-S	PM & R: CREI
Participant M (GS 02)	Frontline	14	2009	Higher ed.	Systems change work	Yes	National	\$3,863,214 annually	G-S	
Participant N (GS 01)	Executive	36	1996	Higher ed. & other priorities	Systems change work	Yes	National	\$104,778,419 annually	G-S	PM & R: RC
Participant N (GS 01)	Frontline Staff	36	1996	Higher ed. & other priorities	Systems change work	Yes	National	\$104,778,419 annually	G-S	PM: I&D R: Agency
Participant O (GS 01)	Executive	100+ (23-26 higher ed.)	1948	Higher ed. & other priorities	Systems change work	Yes	National	\$829,569,118 annually	G-S	PM & R: RC
Participant O (GS 01)	Frontline Staff	100+ (23-26 higher ed.)	1948	Higher ed. & other priorities	Systems change work	Yes	National	\$829,569,118 annually	G-S	PM & R: RC
Participant P (GS 01)	Executive	5	2017	Higher ed. & other priorities	Systems change work	Yes	National	Unknown	G-S	PM: OL R: RC
<p>* Budget for grant seeking reflects their total revenue as 2019 and data came from PROPUBLICA (<a href="https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/264789471">https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/264789471</a>).</p> <p>Budget for GM organizations reflect their latest annual GM. Data captured from their individual websites.</p> <p>**Other priorities--Higher education is a very small component of its GM (through Teachers &amp; leadership development), mainly to K-12 education</p>										

<b>Participating Organization</b>	<b>Uses Research</b>	<b>Uses Performance Measurement</b>	<b>Reputation</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Org. Type</b>	<b>Large, national GM org.</b>	<b>Small, regional GM org.</b>	<b>Large, national GS org.</b>	<b>Small, national GS org.</b>
Participant A (GM 01)	Yes	Yes	Nationally recognized	\$1 billion	GM	Yes	No	No	No
Participant B (GM 01)	Yes	Yes	Regionally recognized	\$680,000 annually	GM	No	Yes	No	No
Participant C (GM 01)	Yes	Yes	Nationally recognized	\$44.7 million annually	GM	Yes	No	No	No
Participant C (GM 02)	Yes	Yes	Nationally Recognized	\$44.7 million annually	GM	Yes	No	No	No
Participant D (GM 01)	Yes	Yes	Regionally Recognized	\$50 million annually	GM	No	Yes	No	No
Participant D (GM 02)	Yes	Yes	Regionally Recognized	\$50 million annually	GM	No	Yes	No	No
Participant F (GM 01)	Yes	Yes	Nationally Recognized	\$5.8 billion	GM	Yes	No	No	No
Participant G (GM 01)	Yes	Yes	Nationally Recognized	\$110 million annually	GM	Yes	No	No	No
Participant G (GM 02)	Yes	Yes	Nationally Recognized	\$110 million annually	GM	Yes	No	No	No
Participant H (GM 01)	Yes	Yes	State specific	\$12 million annually	GM	No	Yes	No	No
Participant H (GM 02)	Yes	Yes	State specific	\$12 million annually	GM	No	Yes	No	No
Participant I (GM 01)	Yes	Yes	Nationally recognized	\$111.4 million annually	GM	Yes	No	No	No
Participant I (GM 02)	Yes	Yes	Nationally Recognized	\$111.4 mil. annually	GM	Yes	No	No	No
Participant J (GM 01)	Yes	Yes	State specific	\$1.7 million annually	GM	No	Yes	No	No
Participant J (GM 02)	Yes	Yes	State specific	\$1.7 million annually	GM	No	Yes	No	No
<b>Grant-seeking Organizations</b>									
Participant K (GS 01)	Yes	Yes	National	\$2.1 million annually	G-S	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
Participant K (GS 02)	Yes	Yes	National	\$2.1 million annually	G-S	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
Participant L (GS 01)	Yes	Yes	National	\$403,821 annually	G-S	No	No	<b>No</b>	Yes

<b>Participating Organization</b>	<b>Uses Research</b>	<b>Uses Performance Measurement</b>	<b>Reputation</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Org. Type</b>	<b>Large, national GM org.</b>	<b>Small, regional GM org.</b>	<b>Large, national GS org.</b>	<b>Small, national GS org.</b>
Participant L (GS 02)	Yes	Yes	National	\$403,821 annually	G-S	No	No	No	Yes
Participant M (GS 01)	Yes	Yes	National	\$3,863,214 annually	G-S	No	No	Yes	No
Participant M (GS 02)	Yes	Yes	National	\$3,863,214 annually	G-S	No	No	Yes	No
Participant N (GS 01)	Yes	Yes	National	\$104,778,419 annually	G-S	No	No	Yes	No
Participant N (GS 01)	Yes	Yes	National	\$104,778,419 annually	G-S	No	No	Yes	No
Participant O (GS 01)	Yes	Yes	National	\$829,569,118 annually	G-S	No	No	Yes	No
Participant O (GS 01)	Yes	Yes	National	\$829,569,118 annually	G-S	No	No	Yes	No
Participant P (GS 01)	Yes	Yes	National	Unknown	G-S	No	No	No	Yes



## Appendix B. Document and Records Reviewed

Org. #	Type	Interviewee	Provided by interviewee?	Website Text	PM Report	Research Report	Other sources
# 1	GM	Executive	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Propublica, website,990, Guidestar
# 2	GM	Executive	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Propublica, website,990, guidestar, etc
# 3	GM	Executive and frontline	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Propublica, website,990, annual reports, guidestar
# 4	GM	Executive and frontline	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Propublica, website,990, guidestar, annual reports.
# 5	GM	Executive	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Propublica, website,990, quidestar
# 6	GM	Executive	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Propublica, website,990
# 7	GM	Executive and frontline	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Propublica, website,990, guidestar
# 8	GM	Executive and frontline	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Propublica, website,990, guidestar, annual reports,
# 9	GM	Executive and frontline	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Propublica, website,990, annual reports, guidestar
# 10	GS	Executive and frontline	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Propublica, website,990, guidestar
# 11	GS	Executive and frontline	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Propublica, website,990, guidestar
# 12	GS	Executive	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Propublica, website,990, guidestar
# 13	GS	Executive and frontline	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Propublica, website,990, guidestar
# 14	GS	Executive and frontline	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Propublica, website,990
# 15	GS	Executive	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Propublica, website,990

## Appendix C. Coding Schemes with Examples

I employed diverse theories to understand why philanthropic organizations (grant-making and grant-seeking organizations) engage in performance measurement and research practices. In order to reduce the data and categorize the data under the various nodes that I had derived from existing literature, interviews as well as from how the literature has evolved, I employed the following coding scheme.

<b>Theoretical Underpinning</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
Rational Choice	Inform & make evidence-based decisions	Participants indicated that they engage in performance measurement & research practices to gather the needed data to inform evidence-based decision making.	“We will always feel that the more data you know, the more accurate decisions you can make. And so, we think it will help our decision-making process to make more accurate & appropriate decisions. And for collecting performance measurement data, it will allow us to see where we are weak, & where we will strengthen our ability to achieve our goals.”
Principal Agency Theory	Satisfy external stakeholder need for information	Participants indicated that they engage in performance measurement & research practices to be able to gather the data to satisfy external stakeholders need for information.	“We only do it informally & we do it to the extent possible. But just doing, the little that we do allows us to see what we are supporting, efforts that are working, are more students getting accepted & enrolling in college, on a year to year basis are more staying in college, on a year to year basis are more obtaining credentials, if we can look at our grantees & see that, yes, each year those numbers are going up then we know that our funding is supporting the kind of effort that we want to support. And if we did not collect data on that, & did not compare it year to year, we wouldn’t know. We might feel good about supporting good organizations—but we wouldn’t necessarily know their efforts were progressing positively.” (Participant B, Executive Perspective)
Resource Dependency Theory	Reduce uncertainty & secure resources	Participants indicated that they engage in performance measurement & research practices so they will be able to reduce uncertainty & secure needed resources for the survival of their organization	“When you run an organization that’s small & lean and, you know, really trying to be about mission, you have to come back to why, why does your organization matter in the world & if you can’t answer questions like what impact are you having, what outcomes are you getting to with this funding you’ve been getting for X number of years? And you can’t answer those questions then I think you are going to be at risk organizationally to not be around for very long.” (Participant L, Frontline Perspective)

<b>Theoretical Underpinning</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
Institutional Theory	Gain Legitimacy from external stakeholders	Participants indicated that they engage in performance measurement & research practices to gain legitimacy from external stakeholders	“Before I became the executive director of this organization, before it existed, I was involved in accrediting agencies that produce credentials. During the process, we saw what a mess the credentialing world was then. And those who thought they had quality, couldn’t even meet a national standard. So that’s the why, why [we engage in research] because we’re concerned about the lack of quality & clarity & transparency of the workforce. And that’s why it’s important to make it [do research] so that we have data to say this has to be correct.” (Participant L, Executive Perspective)
Stewardship Theory	Ensure Trust & service quality	Participants indicated that they engage in performance measurement & research to foster public trust & solidarity	“We also [engage in] performance measurement to share what’ve learned & the success of the program back with our stakeholders & our program officers & to build trust with our program officers that we can do what we set out to do as well as make them feel like there was value for working with us.” (Participant L, Frontline Perspective)
Culturally responsive equitable & Inclusive (CREI)	In service of CREI	Participants indicated that they engage in performance measurement & research in service of CREI	“Our why is about a larger ultimate social goal. So why is [to understand] the elimination of opportunity gaps, institutional performance gaps. So the structures that take place are our “why is.” We know that we need an increased number of Americans, earning degrees & credentials of purpose & value that we know leads to economic & social mobility, particularly for low-income, first-generation students, black & Latin x students. And I know I would also say that it [performance measurement] is a racial equity tool. If we are not able to track the success, you know, & the aggregate results across different populations, then we have never really hit the full story.” (Participant M, Executive Perspective)
Innovation & Discovery	Spur & support innovation & discovery	Participants indicated that they engage in performance measurement & research to spur & support responsible innovation & discovery.	I would say it’s about impact & in some cases, supporting innovation. So when there’s something new that’s being done with value, we might want to evaluate that pretty quickly. Because we want responsible innovation. Should we even bother putting more money into it & expanding it? I will give you an example, Georgia State University. The institution has an emergency grants program to put money into the hands of those who cannot afford their tuition & would have to drop out. And a lot of these emergency funds programs have been tricky because students who know about them & apply for them are the types of students who have resources & are organized to do it. And those who don’t have that knowledge or resourcefulness don’t get the money. And don’t

Theoretical Underpinning	Category	Description	Example
			get the programs, so Georgia State did something unique, which is they did it automatically. They use data, they see who needs the money, who's exhausted other sources of support, who's doing well enough in college, that there's a chance if we give them the money, they will stay. And then it just drops the money into their account. So it takes away everything else about the barriers to students getting that support. And so that's innovative, that is very promising. And so we sought funding to do a retrospective study, looking at the impact of this program. (Participant N, Frontline Perspective)
Organizational learning	Foster organizational learning	Participants indicated that they engage in performance measurement & research to foster organizational learning, where employees can use information to reflect, learn & support continuous improvement	"[To be] better. I am doing this [performance measurement] as you always need to get better at your work & again, sitting in this intermediary space, better is gonna look different depending on a client, so that demand that you are always obviously really critical [of your work]. Personally, I don't have any belief that I do a [good job] 90% of the time. So, the point of performance measurement for me is so that I can evaluate the sciences or colleges & fundamentally our students. If I don't do my job & that person is not happy, then that is not good. We want to do right, so why wouldn't I want to get better?" (Participant P, Executive Perspective)

Also, coded how the organizations use data from research and performance measurement into three broad categories: 1.) Internal uses; 2.) external use; 3.) dual use.

Category	Description	Example
Internal use	Participant indicated that they use data from the practice mainly within the organization for only internal stakeholders (employees, executives, board members, etc.)	<b><u>Example of internal PM data use by a GM organization based on resource dependency</u></b> <b><u>Internal Use:</u></b> Use PM to decide how best to allocate resources/budgets to make sure they are efficiently & effectively using their resources to address social problems
External use	Participant indicated that they use data from the practice mainly outside of the organization for only internal stakeholders (i.e., funders, other nonprofits, employers, institutional leaders, state, & federal policymakers)	<b><u>Example of external PM data use by a grant-seeking organization based on the perspective of resource dependency</u></b> <b><u>External use:</u></b> Conduct small- & large-scale program evaluations for external stakeholders to reduce uncertainty & secure needed resources. Provide technical assistance if needed.
Dual use (Internal & external use)	Participant indicated that they use data from the practice both within the organization for internal stakeholders (employees, executives, board members, etc.) as well as external stakeholders (i.e., other nonprofits, employers,	<b><u>Example of dual PM data use by a grant-seeking organization based on the perspective of Organizational Learning</u></b> <b><u>Internal Use:</u></b> Internal staff learn & reflect on externally- funded program evaluation reports, cluster evaluation reports & other forms of written reports.

Category	Description	Example
	institutional leaders, state, & federal policymakers)	<p><b><u>Internal Use:</u></b> Internal staff engage in learning sessions on specific topics that pertain to strategy formulation, internal policies &amp; practices.</p> <p><b><u>External Use:</u></b> When appropriate staff share accrued learning (explicit knowledge) with external stakeholders (i.e., blogs, webinars, podcast, etc.)</p>

## Appendix D. Qualitative Interview Guide

**Overview:** Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to speak with me today. I sincerely appreciate your willingness to participate in this interview. Before we start, I would like to provide a little background about myself, this project and answer any questions you may have. My name is Frank Swanzy Essien Jr. and I am a doctoral candidate in the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University. I am conducting an interview study to explore why higher education-based philanthropic organizations (grant-making and grant-seeking organizations) engage in performance measurement and research practices, and how they use information from these practices. I am interested in knowing about your organization's background and how that informs your organizational reasons ("the why") for engaging in performance measurement and research practices.

The study has several implications. First, it offers us a unique opportunity to explore in another subsector (other than social/human services subsector) the organizational drivers or reasons for engaging in these practices. Last, understanding the reasons or drivers for engaging in these practices will help philanthropic organizations, like yours, better plan, budget, design and implement these practices in more efficient ways.

**Confidentiality and Privacy:** I want to assure you that all information obtained today will be kept confidential and will be used only for the purposes of this project. I will not use your name or your organization's name, and I will not attribute any quotes to identifiable individuals or people. Pseudonyms will be used with any individual quotes. We also will not share what we discuss here with anyone outside of our research team. Any publications from this research will not include your name or any other unique information that could identify you. Also, if I ask you any questions that you do not want to answer, please feel free to say, "next" and I will gladly skip those questions.

**Duration of Interview:** The interview will last about 60 minutes. If you need a break at any time, please feel free to let me know.

**Informed Consent:** Please take some time to review the study's information sheet, which I shared with you online ahead of this interview for your review and consent [wait for them if they have not done so]. You may have already recorded your consent online, but I want to provide you another opportunity to take a look at it again and provide a verbal consent before we begin the interview. As a quick recap, the study's information sheet provides an overview of the purpose of the data collection process as well as your rights as a participant in this interview. Do you have any questions about the study or the information sheet? If not, do I have your verbal consent to interview you for this study?

**Permission to Record:** To ensure accuracy of the information I report, I would like to request your permission to make an audio recording of our discussion. I am recording this conversation to allow me to focus on this interview and minimize the distraction of note taking. The recording will allow me to check the accuracy of my findings. I want to assure you that no one outside of the research team will have access to the recording, and

the recordings will be stored on a secured, password protected server to which only the research team members have access. Recordings will be transcribed, at which point any identifying names of individuals, organizations, and locations will be removed. Transcriptions will allow me to analyze the text and no identifying information will be included with the text transcription. Transcriptions will be stored in a password protected hard drive that is only accessible by the researchers.

Do I have your permission to record this interview? [if yes, begin recording.] [If not, stop participation] Thank you for this; I am now recording.

Please know that if, at any point during this interview, you wish for me to turn off the recorder, please let me know, and I will do so. Do you have any questions before I start? If at any time you have questions, please feel free to ask.

### **Introductions & Background:**

- 1.) Let's start with some introductions. Please share your name, the name of your organization, your position at the organization and how long you've been in this role.
- 2.) Please describe for me in as little as or as great detail as you choose, the higher education-based philanthropic organization you work for and the services that the organization provides.

### **Part I: Performance Measurement**

Performance measurement is defined as the systematic assessment of the design, implementation, and worth of a program or cluster of programs or goals of an organization (Mertens, 2010; Newcomer, 1997).

- 3.) Based on the definition above, does your organization engage in performance measurement activities?
- 4.) What does your organization do to evaluate or measure the performance of these services, programs (or cluster of programs), or your organization as a whole.
- 5.) How does your organization collect data?
- 6.) Who is or was responsible for collecting the data?
- 7.) How are these data-collection efforts or activities funded?
- 8.) Why does your organization engage in these performance measurement activities?
- 9.) What are the challenges to accomplishing the stated reason above?
- 10.) Does the organization have a dedicated staff, personnel, or team that oversees performance measurement activities?
- 11.) How do they use results or data from performance measurement activities within and outside of the organization?

**Part II: Research** (This section of the interviews pertains to research activities in your organization)

Research is defined as the process of systematic inquiry that is designed to collect, analyze, interpret, and use data (Mertens, 2010).

- 12.) Based on the definition above, does your organization engage in research activities?
- 13.) What types of research data or information does your organization collect?
- 14.) How does your organization collect data?
- 15.) Who is or was responsible for collecting the data?
- 16.) How are these data-collection efforts or activities funded?
- 17.) Why does your organization engage in these performance measurement activities?
- 18.) What are the challenges to accomplishing the stated reason above?
- 19.) Does the organization have a dedicated staff, personnel, or team that oversees research activities?
- 20.) How do they use results or data from research activities within and outside of the organization?

**Request for supplemental documents and records:** I will also use supplemental documents and records that you provide me to inform the study to better understand why and how your organization engages in performance measurement and research practices. I would be grateful if you can share any relevant records and documents that you think could inform my research questions. Examples of documents and records include research reports, evaluation reports, annual reports, and interim and final grant monitoring reports. Please feel free to send any of these documents and records to me after this interview via email: [fessien@uemail.iu.edu](mailto:fessien@uemail.iu.edu).

Thank you for your time.



## **Appendix E. Study Information Sheet**

Protocol id:  
2007692885

### **INDIANA UNIVERSITY STUDY INFORMATION SHEET FOR**

#### **[Performance measurement and research in higher education-based nonprofit organizations]**

You are invited to participate in a study on the role of performance measurement and research practices in higher education-based nonprofit organizations. This form will give you information about the study to help you decide whether you want to participate. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

#### **TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY IS VOLUNTARY**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Indiana University.

#### **WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?**

The purpose of this study is to explore why grant-seeking and grant-making higher education-based nonprofit organizations undertake performance measurement and research practices, and how they use information and data from these practices.

To address these research questions, I will interview executives who oversee performance measurement and research practices at higher education based nonprofit organizations as well as frontline staff who work directly to implement performance measurement and research practices in these organizations. Engaging the two stakeholders (frontline staff and executives) will ensure that I more fully and accurately capture the perceptions of the executives who tend to set the strategic vision, and the frontline staff who directly implement the strategic vision of the executives.

You were selected as a possible participant because of your role as an executive or frontline staff with an organization chosen for this research project. The study is being conducted by Frank Swanzy Essien Jr., doctoral candidate, and Dr. Sara Konrath and Dr. Kathi Badertscher, associate professors, in the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis. It is an unfunded research project.

#### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE STUDY?**

If you agree to be in the study, you will participate in at least one private audio-recorded or video-recorded interview of approximately 60 minutes' duration.

#### **WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?**

You may feel uncomfortable answering some questions. If you feel uncomfortable, you do not need to answer the question. The other risk to you is a possible loss of confidentiality, although we will do everything possible to protect your information. Researchers will take care to safeguard confidentiality by removing identifying information. We will report the data in aggregate and that no personal identifying information will be used and that pseudonyms will be used with any individual quotes. We respect your decision about whether you will or will not participate in this research. More detailed information on confidentiality is included below. You can refuse to answer any portion of the interview or to end the interview at any time.

There are no expected direct benefits to participants. In terms of potential benefits to society, this study will help increase our knowledge about the role of performance measurement and research in higher education-based nonprofit organizations.

### **HOW WILL MY INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?**

Every effort will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Your identity will be held in confidence in reports in which the study may be published and databases in which results may be stored. Project researchers will have access to digital recordings throughout the project, which will be stored as password-protected files on dedicated storage devices that only the researchers can access. Recordings will be transcribed, at which point any identifying names of individuals, organizations, and locations will be removed. Transcriptions will allow me to analyze the text and no identifying information will be included with the text transcription. Transcriptions will be stored in a password protected hard drive that is only accessible by the researchers. Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study investigator and his/her research associates, the Indiana University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowed by law) state or federal agencies, specifically the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).

### **WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATION?**

You will receive a \$20 Amazon.com electronic gift card for taking part in this study and completing the interview. However, if you participate in the study, but for any reason you are unable to complete the interview you will be compensated with a \$10 Amazon.com gift card.

### **WHO SHOULD I CALL WITH QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS**

For questions about the study, contact the researcher Frank Swanzy Essien at [fessien@iu.edu](mailto:fessien@iu.edu) or the faculty project directors, Dr. Sara Konrath at [skonrath@iupui.edu](mailto:skonrath@iupui.edu) and Dr. Kathi Badertscher at [kbadertscher@iupui.edu](mailto:kbadertscher@iupui.edu)

For questions about your rights as a research participant or to discuss problems, complaints or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information, or offer input, contact the IU Human Subjects Office at (800) 696-2949 or by e-mail at [irb@iu.edu](mailto:irb@iu.edu).

## Appendix F. Recruitment Emails

### 1<sup>st</sup> Email recruitment

Dear XXX,

My name is Frank Swanzy Essien Jr. and I am a doctoral candidate in the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University. I am conducting an interview study to explore why higher education-based nonprofit organizations (grant-making and grant-seeking organizations) engage in performance measurement and research practices, and how they use information from these practices.

Your organization was selected because it operates within the higher education sub-sector and uses research and performance measurement to pursue your organizational mission and goals. If your organization agrees to be in the study, I would like to interview one executive and one frontline staff who are responsible for performance measurement and/or research practices in your organization. The interviews will be done separately and confidentially. I am interested in knowing from your perspective why your organization undertakes (fund or conduct) performance measurement and research and how you use information from these practices.

The interview would take about an hour of your time and be conducted online. With your permission, I would record the interview for later analysis.

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Indiana University Institutional Review Board. Participation is completely voluntary, and your information will be kept completely confidential. You can choose to participate or not, and you can end the interview at any time. If you have questions or concerns, you can contact the researcher, Frank Swanzy Essien, at [fessien@iu.edu](mailto:fessien@iu.edu) or the faculty project directors, Dr. Sara Konrath at [skonrath@iupui.edu](mailto:skonrath@iupui.edu) and Dr. Kathi Badertscher at [kbadertscher@iupui.edu](mailto:kbadertscher@iupui.edu).

As a token of our appreciation, we will provide an Amazon.com e-giftcard (\$20) after the interview is complete.

I am happy to schedule a follow-up telephone conversation with you regarding this project. Or, you can please respond back to this email with the names and contact information of individuals who might be interested, so I can follow up with them directly to schedule a phone meeting to share the purpose of the study, discuss confidentiality issues, and see if they would like to participate in the study. After getting their permission, I will interview them for up to 60 minutes.

I am looking forward to hearing back from you at your earliest convenience.

Best,

Frank Swanzy Essien Jr,  
Ph.D Candidate  
Lilly Family School of Philanthropy  
[fessien@iu.edu](mailto:fessien@iu.edu)

### **Follow up email after receiving response from 1<sup>st</sup> email**

My name is Frank Swanzy Essien Jr. and I am a doctoral student in the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at the Indiana University. I am conducting a qualitative study to explore why higher education -based philanthropic organizations (grant-making and grant-seeking organizations) engage in performance measurement and research practices and how they use information from these practices.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are either an executive or frontline staff that is responsible for performance measurement and/or research practices in a higher education-based nonprofit organization that is located in the US. We are interested to know from your perspective why the higher education-based nonprofit organization you work for undertakes (funds or conducts) performance measurement and research practices and how they use information from these practices. We would like to engage both executives and frontline staff at each of the 20 participating organizations to get their perspectives.

If you are willing to share your experiences and thoughts on this topic, do you have availability for a 60-minute phone interview? **If so, you can select a convenient time slot by clicking on this link:** <https://go.oncehub.com/FrankSwanzyEssien> (You can also send me your availability and I will confirm a time if you prefer.)

As part of this study, I will ask that you review the attached study informational sheet, which outlines the components of this study and the rights that you have as a study participant. This form needs to be reviewed by you before we begin the interview.

If you have questions or concerns, you can contact the researcher, Frank Swanzy Essien, at [fessien@iu.edu](mailto:fessien@iu.edu) or the faculty project directors, Dr. Sara Konrath at [skonrath@iupui.edu](mailto:skonrath@iupui.edu) and Dr. Kathi Badertscher at [kbadertscher@iupui.edu](mailto:kbadertscher@iupui.edu). This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). The study number for this project is: 2007692885.

Happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you so much.

Best,

Frank Swanzy Essien Jr,  
Ph.D Candidate  
Lilly Family School of Philanthropy  
[fessien@iu.edu](mailto:fessien@iu.edu)

## Appendix G. Definition of Key Terms

The study seeks to understand the motives of executives and managers with philanthropic organizations for engaging in performance measurement and research as two related but different organizational practices. To ensure consistency in meaning associated with terms and key words, the following definitions will apply to concepts and constructs:

**Research:** It is a process of systematic inquiry or review that is designed to document, collect, analyze, interpret, and use data (Mertens, 2010). There are two broad categories of research: applied research and basic research.

**Basic research** is the type of research designed not to have immediate application in a social setting (Mertens, 2010). Basic research is not the focus of this dissertation despite its potential for contribution to social transformation; this is because most nonprofit organizations tend to engage in research to apply the knowledge towards social action (Mertens, 2010).

**Applied research** is the type of research designed and oriented towards social action and may be likely useful to educators, institutional leaders, policymakers, and other practitioners. In this paper, we bifurcate applied research into two important categories: 1.) research syntheses, and 2.) new knowledge generation.

**Research synthesis** takes the form of reviewing, analyzing, and synthesizing existing literature on a specific topic to provide actionable steps and insights on the specific topic or issue.

New knowledge generation is an applied primary research that leads to development or creation of knowledge that can have an immediate application in a social setting (Mertens, 2010).

**Performance Measurement:** Performance measurement is defined as the systematic assessment or review of the design, implementation, and worth of a program or cluster of programs or goals of an organization (Mertens, 2010; Newcomer, 1997).

**Nonprofit sector:** A nonprofit sector is a collection of entities that share a number of common characteristics that earn them special privileges, such as exemption from most federal, state, and local taxes. Included are universities, research institutes, community-based organizations, business and professional associations, advocacy organizations, and many more. These organizations share five common characteristics (National Council of Nonprofits, 2019):

1.) **Organizations,** that is, they are institutionalized to some extent. Purely ad hoc, informal, and temporary gatherings of people are not considered part of the nonprofit sector, even though they may be quite important in people's lives (National Council of Nonprofits, 2019).

2.) **Private,** that is, they are institutionally separate from government, meaning they are neither part of the governmental apparatus nor governed by boards dominated by government officials, but they can however receive government financial support, even very significant government support (National Council of Nonprofits, 2019).

3.) **Nonprofit distributing**, that is, they cannot distribute any profits they might earn to their directors, managers, or other stakeholders. Nonprofits organizations may accumulate profits in a given year; that is, their revenue can exceed their expenditures. But the profits must be put back into the basic mission of the agency, not distributed to the organizations' stakeholders (National Council of Nonprofits, 2019).

4.) **Self-governing**, that is, they are fundamentally in control of their own activities. Nonprofits have their own internal process for governance and are not controlled by outside entities (National Council of Nonprofits, 2019).

5.) **Non-compulsory**, that is, participation in them is not a function of birth or required by law or official sanction. Instead, it involves some meaningful element of free choice (National Council of Nonprofits, 2019).

**Higher education subsector:** This is a complex and diverse system that is made up of:

- 1.) Dominant public sector of state universities and community colleges that educate a majority of all students.
- 2.) A varied private sector of nonprofit colleges and universities that comprise some of the world's most elite research universities, such as Harvard;
- 3.) Elite liberal arts colleges, such as Swarthmore and Williams;
- 4.) Many hundred less-selective universities and colleges, many of which are religiously oriented;
- 5.) Rapidly growing private enterprise of for-profit colleges and universities such as the Walden University and about a dozen other higher education firms that are traded on organized stock exchanges, and hundreds of other for-profit schools that are not publicly traded such as those owned by the privately held Education Management Corporation;
- 6.) Thousands of for-profit schools, once called trade schools, that offer specialized vocational training but not associate's or bachelor's degree.
- 7.) Philanthropic organizations: Outside of the higher education institutions, there are other forms of nonprofit organizations or entities (grant-seeking or GM) that provide either monetary or non-monetary support to improve conditions and increase the outcomes of higher education institutions.

**Grantmaking organizations** provide monetary support in the form of grants either directly to the higher education institution or to an intermediary organization that is engaging in efforts to increase outcomes of higher education institutions. These organizations can also provide non-monetary support such as advocacy and policy work, research, mentorship programs, direct support services to students, equipment donations, convening support and public campaign efforts to increase awareness of issues related to postsecondary education access, success and completion. Examples include foundations such as Lumina Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations.

**Grant-seeking Organizations:** Are defined in this paper as the intermediary organizations that receive grants to support efforts to improve outcomes of higher education institutions. They fall under the tax-exempt code section 501(c) and are classified by the IRS as a public charity and not a private foundation. Although institutions of higher educations can be grant-seeking organizations, we do not include as part of the grant-seeking philanthropic organizations we are studying.

**Philanthropic organizations:** In this dissertation, we use this term to refer to the organizations that are not higher education institutions but operate within the higher education subsector and provide either monetary support or non-monetary support to increase the outcomes of higher education institutions. Based on this broad definition, these include both grant-seeking organizations that are not institutions of higher education, but intermediaries that work between the grant-making organizations and the institutions of higher education as well as grant-making organizations that directly support the work of the intermediaries--grant-seeking organizations-- to increase the completion and workforce readiness outcomes of higher education institutions.

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- Zunz, O. (2012). *Philanthropy in America. A history*. Princeton University Press.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

**Frank Swanzy Essien Jr.**

### **EDUCATION:**

Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, Indianapolis, IN  
Doctor of Philosophy, July 2022

- Area: Philanthropic Studies
- Doctoral Minor: Higher Education
- Dissertation: Why do higher education-focused philanthropic organizations engage in performance measurement and research practices and how do they use information from these practices?

Indiana University School of Philanthropy, Indianapolis, IN  
Master of Arts, May 2010

- Area: Philanthropic Studies

Westminster College, Fulton, MO

- Bachelor of Arts, May 2007, Magna cum laude
- Majors: Business Administration, emphasis in Finance  
Economics
- Minor: Mathematical Science

### **WORK EXPERIENCES:**

***Strategy Officer for Research, Lumina Foundation, Indianapolis, IN, January 2018-Present***

- Work with Strategy Director to develop and implement research and evaluation strategy to inform the Foundation and the broader field.
- Manage a portfolio of research-based grants by providing strategic support to grantees and connecting them to other partners and needed resources.
- Collaborate with colleagues across the Foundation to foster the use of research and evaluation data.
- Identify prospective research-based grantees and make funding recommendations to the executive team.
- Work with grantees to identify and implement creative approaches to share research findings with key stakeholders.

***Strategy Officer, Lumina Foundation, Indianapolis, IN, May 2016-January 2018***

- Designed and led a portfolio of grants that enabled education and training providers to enhance their capacity to facilitate, validate and document learning regardless of where it occurred.
- Collaborated with colleagues across the Foundation and other external partners to plan and execute on Lumina convenings.
- Worked in partnership with Strategy Director to identify potential grantees and made funding recommendations to the executive team.

- Leveraged existing relationships and cultivated new partnerships to develop a portfolio of grants and contracts related to work-based learning.
- Researched, analyzed and synthesized information across a variety of sources and made funding recommendations to the executive team.
- Collaborated with colleagues across the Foundation to support strategy and cross portfolio alignment and integration.
- Developed and tracked metrics to assess grant performance.

***Manager, Measurement and Evaluation, USA Funds, Indianapolis, IN, July 2014-May 2016***

- Reviewed and refined proposed grant evaluation plans, findings from interim/final reports, and generated insights/lessons learned from evaluation and programmatic work.
- Designed and developed instruments/tools with the grant management team to use internally and externally to collect and maintain data.
- Contributed to grant-making strategy development and implementation by working with senior program directors to set quantifiable social goals, create metrics and develop funding priorities based on established goals.
- Administered and managed the development, review, approval and ongoing performance monitoring of USA Funds' Capacity grants.
- Led the development and implementation of evaluation criteria and metrics to assess the efficacy of USA Funds' grants and portfolio of grants.

***Access and Outreach Analyst, USA Funds, Indianapolis, IN, June 11, 2012-July 2014***

- Regularly examined data and wrote analytic reports on emerging trends that were used in real-time decision-making and strategic planning.
- Connected, analyzed and interpreted internally and externally generated data to assist in making recommendations for continuous improvement in organizational processes.
- Commissioned and provided liaison duties with external research institutions contracted to showcase USA Funds' high impact grants, such as reports on lessons learned and program evaluations.
- Designed and developed instruments/tools with the grant management team to use internally to collect and maintain data.
- Conducted library and web-based research to assist grant-making strategy formulation and evaluation.
- Assisted other team members in understanding the role and significance of data, including transforming complex quantitative and qualitative analysis into usable information.

***Graduate Assistant, USA Funds, Indianapolis, IN, August 2010-May 2012***

- Designed and developed instruments/tools with the grant management team to use internally to collect and maintain data.
- Conducted library and web-based research to assist grant-making strategy formulation and evaluation.



- Assisted others to understand the role and significance of data by transforming complex quantitative and qualitative analysis into usable information.

***Graduate Assistant***, Lumina Foundation, Indianapolis, Indiana, August 2009-May 2010

- Reviewed letters of inquiries (LOIs) from potential grantees and made recommendations to senior members of Lumina’s “Success Team”.
- Corresponded with grantees about the status of their grant applications.
- Researched and analyzed information relevant to grant-making.
- Generated and interpreted program narrative reports on team sponsored projects and grants.

***Graduate Assistant***, Student Services Office, Center on Philanthropy, August 2008-May 2009

- Assisted the Director of Student Services in designing and implementing a strategic plan to attract and retain qualified students.
- Reviewed application materials of prospective students and developed a database of student information for the admission committee.
- Posted information for prospective students online and responded to their questions.

***Marketing and Research Analyst***, Hudson River Group, New York, July 2007-June 2008

- Quantitatively measured the effectiveness of corporate marketing strategies.
- Organized and analyzed corporate data and the impact of econometric factors.
- Built and grouped client’s databases for the purpose of marketing mix modeling.

***Bill Emerson Fellow***, United Nations World Food Program, Washington D.C., summer, 2006

- Managed donor registration cycle and prepared periodic financial reports.
- Developed a database of potential funders and managed grant applications to funders.
- Researched WFP’s operations and drafted acknowledgement letters to clients and donors.
- Researched fundraising options and helped write a guideline policy handbook for community supporters of the WFP.

**HONORS:**

Indiana University Elite50, March 2015

Finalist, Indiana Intern of the Year Award, November 2010

Bill Emerson Fellow, 2006

Pi Mu Epsilon (National Mathematics Honor Society), 2006

Omicron Delta Kappa (National Leadership Honor Society), 2006

United World Colleges, Shelby Davies Scholar, 2003–2007

Jane Maughs Grant Memorial Scholar-2006

### **ACTIVITIES AND COMMUNITY SERVICE:**

Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy Alumni Board of Directors,  
Board Member, 2017 - present

Coburn Place Safe Haven, Board Member, 2020- present

Participated in the Competency-based Education Network's (C-BEN) Annual  
Conference, 2016 and 2017

Presenter, Outcome-Based Evaluation Model at the American Evaluation Association  
Conference, 2013

Member, American Evaluation Association, 2011- Present

Bill Emerson Fellowship Alumni Member

### **SKILLS:**

Proficient in Microsoft Word, MS Publisher, PowerPoint, Excel, Minitab, Grant sequel,  
Nvivo, GIFTS, FLUXX, SPSS

### **PUBLICATIONS, PAST RESEARCH PROJECTS, CURRENT PROJECTS, WRITINGS, PRESENTATIONS:**

#### **Publications/Thought Leaderships**

- It's what you know and how you apply it that matter ... not whether you sat through the class (May 7, 2019, publication on Medium)
- The time is right to ensure that all quality learning counts (October 31, 2019, publication on Medium)
- College credit where credit is due — recognizing 'prior learning' (December 11, 2019, publication on Today's Students Tomorrow's Talent Medium site)
- Industry certifications offer clear path to jobs during the COVID recovery — and beyond (November 9, 2020, publication on Today's Students Tomorrow's Talent Medium site)
- Veterans deserve help with military 'skills translation' to get college credit(December 8, 2021, publication on Today's Students Tomorrow's Talent Medium site)
- Inside the Big Confusing Credentialing Tent: A New Mission to Understand Non-Degree Credentials (with Dr. Holly Zanville, publication on The EvoLLution)

#### **Past Managed Research Projects**

- The Comeback Story: How Adults Return to School to Complete their Degree (Hadass Sheffer, Iris Palmer, Annette B. Mattei, published on JSTOR.org, 2020)
- Connecting Adults to College with Credit for Prior Learning (Iris Palmer, Sophie Nguyen, 2020)
- State of the Field: Findings From the 2020 National Survey of Postsecondary Competency-Based Education (Kelle Parsons and Jessica Mason Ph.D., 2020)
- Non- Degree Credentials Provide Value for Adults in the Labor Market (Jessa Lewis Valentine and Janelle Clay, 2020)
- Estimating the Impact of Nation's Largest Single Investment in Community Colleges: Lessons and Limitations of a Meta-Analysis of TACCCT Evaluations (Grant Blume, Elizabeth Meza, Debra Bragg and Ivy Love, 2020)

- Navigating The Journey: Encouraging Student Progress through Enhanced Support Services in TAACCCT (Ivy Love, 2021)
- New Directions for Non-Degree Credentialing Research (Kyle Albert, Steve Crawford, 2019)
- Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenges in Raising High School Graduation Rates (Team at Everyone Graduates Center at the School of Education at John Hopkins University and Civic- Mathew Atwell, Robert Balfanza, Eleanor Manspile, Vaughan Byrnes and John Bridgeland, 2020, 2021)
- Investing in the Future: Sharing Responsibility For Higher Education Attainment (With National Commission on Financing 21<sup>st</sup> century Higher education, 2016 and 2017)
- Informing Improved Recognition of Military Learning (Alexandria Walton Radford, Jessica Mason, 2021)
- Training as a Path to an Equitable Post-pandemic Recovery: Considerations Based on an Analysis of Washington State’s Short-term Training Participants and Outcomes (Lui Tesfai, 05/2021)
- Creating Pathways to College Degrees Through Apprenticeships (Lui Tesfai, 07/2019)
- Fostering Equitable Community and Economic Development through Apprenticeship (Lui Tesfai, 03/2020)
- Collaboration in Online Learning and Simulation: Lessons for Community Colleges (Iris Palmer and Ivy Love, 12/2020)

### **Current Research Projects**

- \$281,000 grant to Migration Policy Institute to provide data and promising practices that can be used to increase credential attainment of first and second-generation immigrants.
- \$722,800 grant to American Institutes for Research to support research on adult friendly educational and training models that support participation among adults of color.
- \$467,000 grant to Wheelhouse Community College Research Center to support research and analyze enrollment trends in Community Colleges.
- \$505,000 grant to George Washington Institute of Public Policy to expand, improve and manage the Non-degree Credentials Research Network (NCRN).
- \$467,000 grant to HCM Strategist to research student enrollment trends in Community Colleges

### **Selected Work-Related Writings**

- Wrote a document outlining Lumina Foundation’s approach to designing and implementing learning sessions
- Wrote and submitted funding recommendations to the executive team on diverse research projects that support student enrollment, success, and employment-aligned credentialing.

### **Selected Presentations**

- Co-presented to Lumina's executive team on our research and evaluation strategy.
- Presented to staff members of Strategic Impact on methods and approaches to designing and implementing effective learning sessions (September 2021)
- Presented to Lumina executive team members on recommendations to fund diverse research-based projects that support Lumina's strategic priorities (Several events from January 2021-2022).
- Presenter, Outcome-Based Evaluation Model at the American Evaluation Association Conference, 2013
- Speaker, 2014 and 2015 Evaluation Summary Report and Grant-making process at the National Convening of College Goal Sunday Coordinators
- Led 7 learning sessions on released research reports on a variety of higher education related topics (January 2021-December 2021)
- Presented Lumina's research and evaluation strategy to researchers and evaluators in the postsecondary education and training space (Several events from September 2021-December 2021).