The Madison Initiative
DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION REPORT

By the Center for Evaluation Innovation

August 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Center for Evaluation Innovation (CEI) has been conducting a developmental evaluation of the Hewlett Foundation's Madison Initiative during its initial three-year phase of experimentation, learning, and field building. **This internal report offers our findings about the Madison Initiative's developments to date and its future directions.**

The main takeaways from the evaluation are below. The table on the next two pages summarizes our more detailed findings alongside the data and learning they were based on and the implications they raise for the Madison team. The full report then follows.

We recommend that the Madison team:

1. **Support causal "triggers" that are needed to ignite change and ultimately achieve the Initiative's goal.** Currently, grantmaking primarily is focused on building *the infrastructure* needed to support changes in Congressional functioning (e.g., building Member relationships, skills, and know-how), and not enough on the *catalysts that will prompt change* at the institutional level (e.g., carrots and sticks that shift institutional dynamics and change Member incentives). The team should develop theories of change in its priority grantmaking areas that will prompt ideas about missing causal triggers and more clearly articulate how grantmaking will combine to achieve the goal.

2. **Add activities that will help the whole (Initiative) to become greater than the sum of its parts (individual grants).** The team should focus more on activities that will support the change process in the long-term and help the grantees to further coordinate and amplify their reform efforts. Specifically, more network development, field building, leadership development, and communications strategies are recommended.

3. **Investigate additional vantage points beyond U.S. and Congress-focused political science to better understand the problems being addressed and solutions for addressing them.** These could include, but are not limited to, different *disciplinary perspectives* (e.g., sociology to understand how group norms develop and shift); *comparative perspectives* (e.g., experiences of other democracies and global trends); *perspectives emerging from cutting-edge and innovative grantees*; and *perspectives on the margins of current grantmaking priorities* (e.g., bottom-up—in addition to elite-focused—approaches that help to shift Member incentives and institutional dynamics).

SUMMARY OF DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION FINDINGS

1. How did the **goal evolve?**

Findings/Developments	Learning They Were Based On	Implications
a. The Initiative's goal changed to helping Congress *cope with* polarization, rather than addressing it directly.	Polarization is the result of deep-seated historical and cultural forces. The feasibility of private foundation funding affecting these larger trends directly is low.	• Additional causal triggers may still be needed to achieve the revised goal. • Clarity on what can be achieved in the next 3-5 years is recommended.
b. The Initiative's goal changed from supporting compromise, deliberation, and negotiation in Congress in ways that work for "most Americans" to ways that work for "more Americans".	Public approval for Congress does not top 50 percent even when productive compromise is happening.	• As public approval of Congress is a measure of the Initiative's success, getting clearer about how the strategy will move public approval is needed.

2. What deeper insights were gained into the nature of the **problem?**

a. The team stopped believing *institutional commitment* could be strengthened to the point at which it will act as a sufficient counterbalance to *party commitment*.	Institutional commitment is a force that is no longer sufficient to counterbalance party commitment on its own, particularly given the contest for control of Congress and lack of incentives for Members to act as institutionalists.	• Other counterbalancing forces, e.g., Members' connection with their diverse constituencies, need to be identified and harnessed to incentivize Members and counterbalance party loyalty.
b. While remaining committed to transparency and welcoming challenges to its thinking, the team has moved beyond the systems map in how they are thinking and communicating about the problem.	A reliance on political science research and Congressional insider points of view may have inadvertently locked the team into a conception of the problem and solutions that emphasize funding existing players to do existing things.	• Taking advantage of a wider variety of vantage points and diverse inputs could reveal innovative solutions. • Spread bets as part of the strategy should continue to support potential breakthrough thinking.
c. The interaction between the Executive branch and Congress needs better representation in the diagnosis of the problem and the strategy.	Congress and the Executive branch are in a vicious cycle. Agency staff have growing contempt for Congress, while Congress is frustrated with a nonresponsive and overreaching Executive.	• Additional interventions may be needed to disrupt the negative loop between Congress and the Executive branch.

3. What have we learned about **what does and doesn't work?**

a. Current investments in individual Members and staff are unlikely to trigger institution-wide behavior change and norms.	While bipartisan relationship building and oversight programs show promise in improving behavior for individual participants, they are not yet sufficiently scaled to make an institutional difference.	• Programmatic investments in supporting Members and staff may need adjusting in order to maximize their ROI and knock-on effects. • Program evaluation is needed in this area.
b. The team has turned to focusing more on bilateral and other measured approaches to funder engagement than multilateral collaboration.	After much effort, the team learned that multilateral funder engagement in the democracy reform arena had multiple points of friction that have been challenging to overcome.	• As funder collaboration and recruitment were cited as important strategies for scaling and catalyzing system-level change, other approaches to scaling impact may be needed.

4. What are emergent elements of what could become a broader **intervention?**

Developments	Learning They Were Based On	Implications
a. The team's efforts to add value to the work beyond individual grantmaking have been well received and are in further demand.	Grantee feedback has made clear that they are open to, and even hungry for, the Foundation to do more "amplification" work that 1) promotes successes and elevates values, and 2) supports further collaboration that builds groundwork for more of a movement.	The team should explore ways to amplify grantee impact, including: • Communications and messaging highlighting desired Congressional behavior. • Incentives for more movement-level collaboration.
b. The Initiative's strategic focus has narrowed to five lines of grantmaking.	After taking a spread bet approach, the lines of work that have emerged represent what the team considers investments with the best line of sight to the goal and possibilities that can "set the conditions" for long-term success.	• Further strategy/theory of change work within the prioritized lines of grantmaking will help to clarify expected shorter-term impacts and how scale might be achieved.

5. How has the **capacity** of the Madison team or grantees been strengthened**?**

a. The team has proactively built opportunities for grantee interaction with the potential for collective grantee effects.	There is lack of a recognized field identity with respect to the goal of improving Congressional functioning. Grantees approach the work in different ways and through different disciplines, meaning their paths do not often cross. Many Madison grantees did not know one another when the Initiative started.	• Beyond grantee-to-grantee collaboration, field building or network weaving tactics may add value in strengthening the informal "field".
b. The team is changing its grantmaking strategy to provide a much higher percentage of general operating support grants (GOS) to a smaller number of grantees.	For the first two years, the median grant size was \$200,000 and average grant term was 20 months. Half the grants were restricted. This approach undermines organizational strength and sustainability and prevents grantees from being adaptive and opportunistic.	• The shift to a higher percentage of larger and longer term general support grants will require that the team use a different approach to its "influencing" work.

DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION FINDINGS

In May 2014, the Center for Evaluation Innovation (CEI) began a developmental evaluation of the Hewlett Foundation's Madison Initiative during its initial three-year phase of experimentation, learning, and field building. Our role has been to act as a "critical friend" to the Madison team, asking tough evaluative questions, uncovering assumptions, and collecting and interpreting data to inform strategic decisions as the team has tested the waters and explored a variety of opportunities.

In its early strategy proposal, the Madison team articulated three questions to answer by the end of the Initiative's first phase:

- Are there solutions and approaches that we believe could make a difference?
- Is there ample grantee capacity, or can we help build it to purpose these ideas?
- Are there funding partners we can work with to make it happen?[1]

We have contributed to the team's learning and responses to these questions, which are detailed in the team's strategy memo to the board. We also have explored and tested the team's core assumptions about the problem of Congressional dysfunction and potential solutions for addressing it. As a developmental evaluation, our work has not aimed to draw definitive conclusions abut the effectiveness or impact of either individual grants or Initiative as a whole (as a summative evaluation would).

Typically, evaluation reports at a critical end-of-phase juncture like this focus on the extent to which a foundation's strategy or initiative has been accountable for achieving its intended results. Did it produce the outcomes it said it would?

The concept of "accountability" in a developmental evaluation context has a slightly different meaning, particularly for long-term complex initiatives where the strategy and expectations about results are still emerging. In this context, developmental evaluation promotes accountability by bringing robust data into a smart learning process. It helps actors to get a better understanding of problems and solutions, and helps to identify the signals that indicate if things are on a positive trajectory. **As such, it is data and documentation about what has been learned and how a foundation and grantees have "developed" or adapted in response to that learning that demonstrates accountability for results.**

Given this definition of accountability and our role with the Madison team over the last two-and-a-half years, this **internal report offers our reflections about the Madison Initiative's developments to date and its future directions.** Its purpose is to inform—and to push—the team's thinking as the Initiative moves forward. It is organized around five types of strategy developments that we have been tracking:

1. Evolution of the **goal**
2. Deeper insights into the nature of the **problem**
3. Working conclusions about **what does and doesn't work**

[1] More details about the purpose, design, guiding questions, and limitations of our evaluation are available here. The questions and methods have evolved over time to match the team's emerging learning needs.

4. Emergent elements of what could become a broader **intervention**
5. Strengthened **capacity** of the Madison team or grantees

Within each section, we present findings that cover several main points:

- What has been learned during the Madison Initiative's initial phase
- What the Foundation and others have done in response to this learning
- What this learning implies for the Initiative's future.

To prepare this report, we reviewed a range of inputs that included both CEI-led data collection and learning processes and data generated through other internal and external sources.[2]

Key Sources for the Report

<table>
<tr><th>CEI Data Collection and Processes</th><th>Other Internal and External Sources</th></tr>
<tr><td>
• Summer 2014 strategy "pressure test" with 17 experts
• 2014 systems map development and 2015 refresh
• Summer 2015 Madison Initiative grantee survey (80% response rate)
• 2015-16 cluster assessments:
  ○ Bipartisan relationship building
  ○ Campaign finance data
  ○ Oversight (in process)
• Monthly strategy meeting notes
• Ongoing log of developments
• Quarterly evaluation summit notes
</td><td>
• Annual Madison team strategy and budget memos
  ○ 2013
  ○ 2014
  ○ 2015
  ○ 2016
• 2014 Colaboratory notes and reflections
• 2016 grantee convening notes
• 2016 grantee convening team reflections
• The Foundation Center democracy funding database
• Center for Effective Philanthropy 2015 grantee perception report
• 2016 Madison Initiative feedback memo – Dr. Hahrie Han
• Research literature (as cited)
</td></tr>
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As part of this review, we developed a log of Initiative-related developments identified in the documentation, a process that resulted in a 10-page spreadsheet. Clearly, this is a "learning Initiative" that has adapted many times over the last three years in response to numerous inputs and opportunities for learning.

> **Rather than chronicle all of the considerable learning and developments that have occurred since the Initiative's inception, we have chosen here to exercise our role as a critical friend to the team, selecting findings about developments that we think raise tough but important strategic questions for the future.**

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[2] Many of our data collection methods have relied on expert opinion (including grantees) and secondary sources. While we have aimed to ensure diverse perspectives are represented, we often gathered others' interpretations or analyses, which can introduce potential bias. Further, many of the team's evaluation and learning questions were at a level where answering them *conclusively* would require rigorous and resource-intensive research. As a result, the findings in this report should be treated as provisional findings drawing on the best available data rather than as definitive conclusions.

FINDINGS RELATED TO THE FIVE DEVELOPMENTS

1. Evolution of the goal.

Strategy goals are statements about what a foundation ultimately hopes to achieve within a certain (often long-term) timeframe. While goals should be ambitious, they also should be clear, realistic, and measurable in order to effectively guide an initiative's grantmaking.

The table below identifies the Madison Initiative's goal, focus, and priorities as expressed in the team's earliest and most recent strategy memos.

Changes in Madison Initiative Goal, Focus, and Priorities

	December 2013	June 2016
GOAL	"To help create conditions that make it possible for the representative institutions of the federal government to address problems in ways that most Americans will accept over time."	"To help create the conditions in which Congress and its members can deliberate, negotiate, and compromise in ways that work for more Americans.
FOCUS	"We plan to focus on addressing polarization in Congress, where its effects are most prominently on display…"	"[We do] not presume to go all the way down to the root causes of the problems we are seeking to address but rather to ameliorate some of their prominent symptoms and by-products…These efforts can thus help Congress and the broader political system cope with polarization."
PRIIORITIES	1. Restoring governing institutions that foster pragmatism and the spirit of compromise. • Reforming legislative rules, norms, and processes • Supporting bipartisan dialogue and problem solving • Strengthening central tendencies in party coalitions 2. Fostering campaigns and elections that set the stage for problem solving. • Campaign finance reform • Districting reform • Primary election and ballot reform 3. Enhancing citizen engagement to encourage participation and improve representation. • Improving voter access • Mobilizing independent and moderate voters • Supporting next-generation civic organizations 4. Promoting media and information that serve to depolarize and educate citizens. • Depolarizing media • Improving coverage of reform issues • Reimagining civics	1. Building bipartisan relationships among policymakers 2. Strengthening Congress as an institution 3. Improving campaign finance 4. Making elections more representative 5. Shoring up media coverage of Congress and its members

Shifting the goal and focus from affecting polarization to helping the institution cope with it is more realistic, but it changes expectations about what the Initiative can achieve.

In recognition that private foundation solutions cannot reverse the deep-seated historical and cultural forces driving polarization on their own, in mid-2014 the Madison Initiative's focus importantly shifted from "taking on the inherently political problem of polarization"[3] to creating conditions where Members of Congress can deliberate, negotiate and compromise in spite of polarization.[4] In other words, rather than affecting polarization, the focus shifted to helping Congress cope with it.

This shift occurred in response to feedback from both external experts and grantees. CEI's pressure test of the Madison Initiative strategy in summer 2014 revealed that, "Experts agreed that the Foundation's latest iteration of its overall goal as *improving the ability of Congress to function in spite of polarization* was a better and more feasible choice than aiming to address polarization itself."[5]

The shift in the Initiative's stated goal and priorities changed expectations about what is possible with Hewlett Foundation funding. As the table above comparing goal statements shows, the Foundation revised its position further, specifying that it is not attempting to address the root causes of polarization, but rather *aims to ameliorate some of its prominent symptoms and by-products.* According to the more narrowed set of priorities the Foundation has selected, amelioration aims include fostering bipartisan relationships, increasing Congressional capacity, improving campaign finance, making elections more representative, and shoring up media coverage of Congress. These are changes that "set the stage" for Congressional recovery "*if and when broader historical and cultural trends that have polarized our politics change*."

Implications

To be achieved, the Madison Initiative goal requires a complex "causal package." This means that multiple causes must work *together* in order to produce a change. Each cause on its own is necessary, but not sufficient.[6]

Especially with ambitious long-term goals that require complex solutions, interventions or initiatives should be designed with an assessment of the full causal package thought to be necessary to achieve the desired change. The complication, of course, is that all causes perceived as necessary may not be

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[3] Kramer, D., & Stid., D. (2013, December 6). *Analysis of proposed Democratic Process Initiative*.
[4] Madison Initiative Team (2016, June 2). *Update on our work to date and plans for a renewal of the Initiative.*
[5] Center for Evaluation Innovation (2014, August 6). *Pressure test memo* (p.6).
[6] Mayne, J. (2012). *Making causal claims*. Institutional Learning and Change (ILAC) Brief 26.
http://betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/ILAC_Brief26_Making%20causal%20claims_2.pdf

under one funder or organization's control, and that many different (and unpredictable) combinations of causes could potentially lead to the desired change.[7]

While the Foundation cannot predict or produce the exact package of causes that will together improve Congressional functioning, it is helpful to consider three types of causal factors that need to be included in any causal package:

- *ground preparing*: puts the conditions or infrastructure in place for a change
- *triggering*: starts the causal chain
- *sustaining*: supports change along the way.

Some causal factors needed to achieve the Initiative's goal currently are missing. Madison Initiative grantmaking primarily is focused on producing ground preparing or sustaining causal factors (e.g., ideas/research, relationships, know-how, available data). This means that triggers needed to ignite change and achieve the Initiative's goal in ways that can be measured by the proposed vital signs,[8] either are missing from the mix (e.g., carrots and sticks that shift dynamics and change incentives) or are outside of the Foundation's control (e.g., one party dominating Congress and reducing the battle for electoral control).

We think, however, the team should explore where and how it can add causal triggers to the Foundation's investment mix. We do not think the team can know with any certainty the exact causal package that may be required. Different scenarios may require different mixes, and some factors will remain outside of private foundation control. But we think the portfolio currently may be weighted too heavily toward ground preparing factors, and that there may be additional opportunities for catalyzing change that could add value above and beyond the five priority areas. Thoughts on possible causal factors to add—including triggers—are featured elsewhere in this report.

We also recommend getting clearer about what the Foundation does expect to achieve with its grantmaking, particularly in the next three to five years. What, more specifically, are the conditions that the Madison team is helping to create, or the negative feedback loops it hopes to interrupt, so that Congress and its members can deliberate, negotiate, and compromise? Future evaluation efforts can assist with the specification of interim outcomes that are more closely connected to the causal factors the Foundation has put in play (see also our later finding about where theories of change might be developed). This process may help to uncover ideas on where investments in additional causal factors might make a difference.

Finally, **we suggest that the team consider the practical challenge of rallying potential partners to join efforts and commit resources to a goal that some may feel is overly modest and uninspiring.** Staff

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[7] This concept is reflected in the Madison team's statement in the June 2, 2016 memo (p.14) that "We do not believe that any one intervention will be dispositive. But in aggregate, over time, they can have a beneficial cumulative effect."

[8] Vital sign indicators about the health of Congress include: ideological polarization; Congressional work schedule; use of committee process and regular order; openness of floor debate; bipartisanship; legislative productivity; and public support of Congress as an institution.

reflected that at the 2016 grantee convening, “several [participants] pointed out that a goal statement with ‘negotation and compromise’ at its core can come across as thin gruel, especially in the current environment where it can readily conjure up images of horse trading among self-interested elites in Washington.”[9] We suspect that the further tempering of the goal to *creating the conditions* for negotiation and compromise will, as the team has noted, further deepen the communications and will-building challenge.

The reduced target of “more Americans” instead of “most” and de-emphasis on the role of citizen engagement raises questions about the connection between the strategy and the public.

American approval of the job Congress is doing is extremely low and has been for some time. The latest Gallup poll (June 2016) had it at 16 percent. [10] An analysis of Congressional approval polling from multiple sources shows that approval has not topped 20 percent since 2010, and has risen above 50 percent only four times in the last 40 years—1985, 1987, 2001, and 2002.[11]

In response to this information, the Madison team determined that the original goal of helping to create the conditions for Congress to deliberate, negotiate, and compromise in ways that work for *most Americans* was unrealistic. The team recognized that even when there has been productive deliberation, negotiation, and compromise in Congress on major pieces of legislation, or when Congress is exercising its oversight responsibility in productive ways, institutional approval levels have remained in the 30 to 45 percent range. While this is far above where it is today, it suggests getting approval above 50 percent is unrealistic.[12] As a result, the team changed the goal language from *most Americans to more Americans*.

While the language has shifted, *public approval for Congress as an institution* is one of the vital signs that the team has proposed tracking against the Initiative’s long-term goal. In fact, the latest strategy memo says that it is “the indicator that best tracks the ultimate outcome we seek."[13] Moving this indicator in a meaningful way is a critical measure of the Initiative’s success.

While remaining committed to improving public support of Congress in a measureable way, the Madison team now views the role of citizens and civic engagement (one of the three areas in the systems map) much differently than it did at the Initiative’s start. The team has become less optimistic about the possibilities for shaping dynamics in this area, and sees it as having a more distant line of sight to the Initiative goal.

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[9] Madison Initiative Team (2016, July). *Reflections on participant feedback.*
[10] Gallup. *Congress and the public*. http://www.gallup.com/poll/1600/congress-public.aspx
[11] Gerrity, J. (2014, December). Understanding Congressional approval: Public opinion from 1974-2014. In *The Evolving Congress* from the Congressional Research Service, pp. 189-216.
[12] Gerrity, J. (2014, December).
[13] Madison Initiative Team (2016, June 2) p.20.

In the early systems mapping work, the team began with the assumption that increasing electoral participation, both who votes and how many people turn out, would create incentives for Members and candidates to behave in a less partisan manner. Almost immediately,[14] however, the team started re-thinking how citizens and citizen engagement affect Member behavior:

- Recognizing that many others have been working on civic education and voter engagement and getting only marginal returns.[15]
- Looking more at the role of citizens through the lens of "politics as organized combat," mediated through interest groups and IPDs.[16]
- Gaining more clarity about how sufficient public trust in Members and Congress as an institution is required in order for Members to have the latitude they need to negotiate and compromise.[17]

In the Initiative's first phase, the team has invested just over $3 million in pilot programs that approach citizen engagement from a variety of angles. However, these experiences have revealed no clear way to scale the work at a sufficient scope or level to affect the larger goal.

In cutting back on its civic engagement investments, however, the Initiative is now missing an accountability link between Members and the people they represent, leaving some important questions about how increasing deliberation, negotiation, and compromise among Members will result in increased support from *more Americans*.

Implications

Given the importance of ultimately increasing public support for Congress, we recommend the team get clearer about how the strategy will make Congress function "in ways that work for more Americans." While the team believes, based on historical precedent, that if Congress is reaching workable compromises then approval ratings will rise, additional factors that are affecting approval ratings may need to be considered. We see at least two avenues to consider.

First, we recommend thinking more about the full range of drivers that lead to low approval ratings and what can be done about them. For example, reasons include:

- Dissatisfaction with productivity—the strategy is addressing this through bipartisan relationship building and institutional capacity building, for example, but there is not yet an approach for making this work more visible to a larger public.
- Americans do not know what is actually happening in Congress or what their elected officials are doing—the strategy is addressing this by shoring up media, but current investments are small.

[14] Center for Evaluation Innovation (2014, August 6). *Pressure test memo* (p.6).
[15] Partly because of the resources required to have a return sizable enough to make any real difference, and partly because investing in this space presumes rational choice in a time that is characterized by increasing affective polarization and a more emotional rather than rational process.
[16] Bawn, K., Cohen, M., Karol, D. Masket, S., Noel, H., & Zaller J (2013). A theory of political parties: Groups, demands, and nominations in American politics. *Perspectives on Politics, 10*(3), 571-597.
[17] Team meeting boxnote (2015, March 10).

- Some Americans see deliberation, negotiation, and compromise as "haggling, bickering, and arguing" and symptomatic of Congressional dysfunction rather than the legislative process at work[18]—the strategy is addressing this in the ways cited above, but broader public understanding of the legislative process will continue to be a challenge.
- Distrust and bias against the institution itself and politicians—the strategy is addressing this indirectly through grants to improve Congressional functioning, which may lead to more public trust.[19]
- Discontent with policy decisions that people do not experience as representative of their interests or as having a positive impact on their lives—the strategy intentionally is not addressing substantive policy issues, and realistic pathways to increase Member responsiveness to constituent interests have yet to be found.

Some of these factors cannot be solved with private foundation dollars. Where they can, however, we recommend thinking more about how the strategies ultimately can connect to and help move public support. These questions are relevant:

- Do some efforts need to be further scaled in order to make a difference (e.g., shoring up media)? Could new efforts be added (e.g., addressing distrust against the institution)?
- Where is the accountability mechanism that links Member behavior to constituent interests in the team's evolved conceptualization of the problem? Are there innovative approaches to organizing new configurations of constituencies that shift the patterns of interests currently driving polarization?
- How will this presidential election season affect the dynamics of the relationship between citizens and their new Congress?

Second, some (e.g., other democracy funders) believe that creating the conditions in which Congress and its members can deliberate, negotiate, and compromise is not a compelling enough goal to move public support for Congress, and that efforts should be more in service of aligning Congressional actions to reflect the interests of a broader range of constituencies than those that currently have influence. While the Madison Initiative does have some grants focused on this issue,[20] we recommend the team make more explicit how its approach to improving Congressional functioning productively strengthens accountability between Members and the constituencies they represent.

[18] Gerrity, J. (2014, December). p. 209.
[19] For example, Bipartisan Policy Center, The Federalist Society, R Street Institute, New America Foundation, Project on Government Oversight, Legislative Effectiveness Project.
[20] For example, Congressional Management Foundation, Voice of the People, Texas Tribune.

2. Deeper insights into the nature of the problem.

Because the team no longer sees institutional commitment as a sufficient counterbalance against party commitment, exploring other potentially counterbalancing forces may open up further thinking about the problem.

The 2014 systems mapping process that focused on the dynamics at play in Congress clarified the team's thinking about *institutional commitment* as a weakened force that currently is being swamped by *party commitment*.

Commitment to the spirit and purpose of the institution of Congress requires Members to build bipartisan relationships, make use of committee structures and regular order that support cross-party deliberation, and invest in institutional capacity for negotiation and compromise. However, in the context of tight competition for control, where either party may find itself with a majority sufficient to advance its policy preferences after the next election, the parties gain little from negotiation and compromise. Instead, both parties have incentives to delegate power to party leadership to control the agenda and party brand through symbolic message voting that highlights the distinctions between the parties (a concept called party "teamsmanship").[21] As this kind of *party commitment* grows, driving even greater coherence within and divergence between the parties in a vicious cycle, *institutional commitment* and the relationships, processes, and supports needed to support it are overwhelmed by Members' commitment to party.

The team posited a future in which institutional commitment among Members could be strengthened so that it would act as an effective counterbalance to party commitment (see the figure on the next page).

As the narrative that accompanied the initial 2014 systems map noted: "The ability of Congress to address problems in ways that work for most Americans requires a balance between inevitable party conflict and a commitment to the institution's primary role in our constitutional system, such that real differences can be represented in Congress without completely blocking the necessary negotiation and compromise."[22]

External partner feedback on the initial map, however, triggered doubt about the likelihood that the institutional loop can be strengthened enough from within to act as a counterbalance. Over the last two years, through evaluation, scholarship, and further conversations in the field, the team increasingly has come to see institutional commitment as a force that is no longer as present, powerful, or

[21] Lee, F. (2009). *Beyond ideology: Politics, principles and partisanship in the U.S. Senate*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

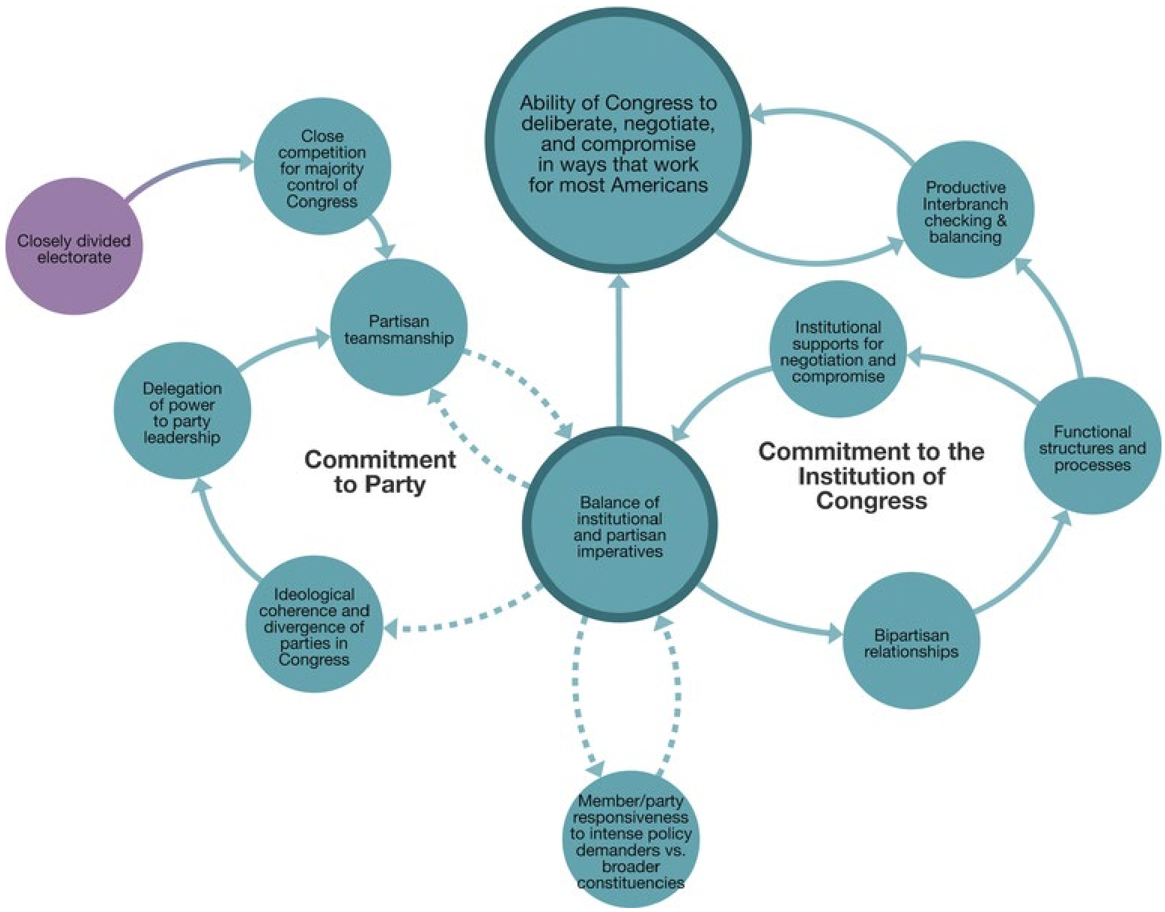
[22] Hewlett Foundation Madison Initiative systems map. https://www.kumu.io/hewlettfoundation/hewlett-foundation-madison-initiative

achievable (at least at a level sufficient to act as a counterbalance).[23] Not only are incentives lacking for Members to be institutionalists, there may be negative incentives given that a notable portion of Americans want Congress, and the federal government generally, to do as little as possible.

While not stopping the team from focusing directly on Congress as an institution, this realization has opened up thinking about where other potentially counterbalancing forces might come from.

Balancing Loops of Party and Institutional Commitment

(excerpt from the systems map)



__Implications__

Alongside institutional commitment, we recommend exploring other factors that motivate individual Member behavior and may prove to be effective counterbalances to party commitment. As the team has begun to do, continuing to think about the possibilities in terms of the various roles Members serve seems a useful approach.

[23] Stid, D. (2015, November 20). Email in preparation for the December 2015 evaluation summit. "Is it still reasonable to assume that the institutionalist loop can offset the partisan loop? Do we need to represent the need for (and current dearth of) institutionalists or “procedural entrepreneurs”?

- *Elected representatives with constituents*
  In a May 2015 meeting with the Democracy Fund to review their map on Congress and Public Trust,[24] the Madison team came to recognize that the role of constituents in influencing their elected representatives had been underdeveloped in the initial Madison Initiative systems map. While the team had acknowledged the role and influence of IPDs writ large, they began to think more about Members' personal agency and desire to be responsive to constituents, which potentially can counterbalance their incentives to respond to nationalized IPDs. They also reflected on Members' roles in shaping constituents' understanding about whether and how Congress operates. Since then, the team has begun exploring and pursuing some opportunities to strengthen the connection between Members and their constituencies.[25] We recommend continuing to explore opportunities to further strengthen this connection.

- *Legislative office holders with a job to do*
  The team also has recognized the growing job dissatisfaction Members are experiencing in a low-functioning Congress. This may be leading to some "procedural entrepreneurism" and a willingness to step outside the bounds of strict party loyalty. In response, the team is looking at increasing grantmaking to capacity-building grantees and coalitions of advocates, researchers, and journalists that can support this entrepreneurism.[26] We think this direction is worthwhile, particularly if grantees work together on a procedural reform agenda.

- *Individuals with their own identities and values*
  The current unconventional presidential election season hints at perhaps another emerging counterbalance to party loyalty. The electorate energy that has fueled both the Republican and Democratic 2016 presidential primaries is less about ideology and more about tribalism—the tribe of "insiders" who have benefited from the system as it is, and the tribe of "outsiders" who perceive themselves (or champion those who perceive themselves) as left out, disempowered, and dismissed by the current system. Will constituent pressures mount for Members to act in ways that represent their insider/outsider leanings more than their party affiliation? As we already see strange bedfellows in Sanders supporters defecting and refusing to support the Democratic Party's candidate, what impact might that have on conditions for negotiation and compromise within the institution?

[24] See the map at http://www.democracyfund.org/congressmap
[25] Specifically, through grantees like the Congressional Management Foundation and Voice of the People, as well as pending field experiments with David Broockman at Stanford University.
[26] Madison Initiative Team (2016, June 2). *Update on our work to date and plans for a renewal of the Initiative* (pp. 7-8).

While the team's view on the problem has been informed by a deep understanding of political science research and theory, drawing on and supporting a broader range of perspectives may uncover some breakthrough thinking and innovative bets.

The early developmental evaluation process in 2014 used systems mapping as an approach for thinking through possibilities for change in the complex and uncertain democracy reform environment. The process helped to reveal—both internally and to external partners—the Foundation's point of view about how cause-and-effect relationships are entangled and mutually reinforcing, and what solutions might be needed to interrupt vicious cycles or reinforce virtuous loops in our system of representative democracy. Much of what informed the team's thinking at this stage came from political science research and theory, as well as a great deal of consultation with Congressional experts and scholars (e.g., academic advisory group, January 2014 workshop with political scientists, long-time "insider" groups working with Congress).

While grounding the strategy in the best political science research available and the views of Congressional "insiders" makes good sense, we wonder if this might have inadvertently have locked the team into a conception of the problem and possible solutions that has emphasized funding existing players to do existing things.

During the December 2015 evaluation summit, the team reflected on the map and suggested it may have served its purpose and is now playing a counterproductive role in cementing certain assumptions and encouraging incremental investments rather than supporting breakthrough thinking. As such, the team decided not to update the map, but rather to describe learning and planned adaptations in narrative form while continuing to get critical feedback on the team's thinking and strategy.[27]

Implications

The Madison team takes time regularly (monthly strategy meetings) to reflect on what is happening with the Initiative and to test the team's thinking about the system. The team also periodically reflects on what is happening in the nation and the world that could have implications for future investments.[28] We recommend continuing this learning practice and regularly asking questions like "How do we know what we know?" and "Who might think differently about this assumption?"

We also recommend the team look for opportunities to support unconventional ideas and potential breakthrough thinking. After just three years, the Initiative has not yet settled into a refined strategy that just needs time to play out. This next phase is an opportunity to join the Foundation's new narrower strategic focus with select spread bets that continue to test new ideas.

[27] See Madison Initiative Team (2016, June 2).
[28] For example, Madison Initiative Team and CEI (2016, March 24). *Reflections on the current moment in America*.

We recommend that the team, leveraging the systems map and other reflective and scenario planning processes, continue to look for orthodoxies about how the system works that could be challenged, and selectively invest in finding and supporting potential game-changers to challenge them. This approach is consistent with the team's assertion that it cannot just look to past versions of Congressional dynamics for answers about how the institution should look and act in the future. Questions to consider include:

- Which areas in the system appear most fruitful and ripe for big, game-changing ideas? Which areas, if shaken up, could have the biggest impact on the goal?
- What are assumed constraints on "how things work" that, if smartly challenged, could lead to breakthrough ideas and strategy?
- Because leaders matter, who has the potential for big, game-changing ideas?
- Which grantees have capacity to push big ideas forward, if identified? What other players, not on our radar, are testing innovative approaches in the U.S. or globally?

Finally, we recommend taking a broader view that diversifies inputs and thinking partners who approach the problem from other vantage points. This includes:

- Drawing on other disciplinary perspectives beyond U.S.-focused political science, such as comparative politics, social psychology, institutional sociology, and behavior change theory.
- Considering more carefully the global political economy and how trends in globalization and immigration, for example, are affecting democratic institutions.
- Being open to and tracking interesting experiments and insights emerging from the network of partners at the cutting edge, even when the work might not fit into the Initiative's current priorities.

The interaction between Congress and the executive branch is a dynamic that needs more attention.

As early as CEI's pressure test in summer 2014, experts were calling out the relationship between Congress and the other branches of government as missing from Hewlett's conceptualization of the problem. Congress and the executive branch are caught in a particularly vicious cycle. Agency staff have growing contempt for a Congress that conducts low-quality point-scoring oversight, and Congress increasingly is frustrated with an overreaching and nonresponsive executive.[29] Research also confirms that both parties engage in higher rates of partisan political theater aimed at the executive in a divided government when the opposing party holds the presidency.[30]

By January 2015, the Madison team was acknowledging the need to incorporate into their thinking and grantmaking the role of presidential leadership in fostering constructive compromise or accelerating

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[29] Partnership for Public Service (2015). *Government disservice: Overcoming Washington dysfunction to improve Congressional stewardship of the executive branch*. Author: Washington, DC.

[30] Lee, F. (2013). Presidents and party teams: The politics of debt limits and executive oversight, 2001-2013. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, *43*(4), 775-791.

polarization through gridlock-driven unilateral action.[31] To date, the team's investments in the intersection between Congress and the executive branch have focused on budget process reform and improvements in Congressional oversight.

We question whether investments in this relationship are sufficient given the importance of this dynamic as a negative reinforcing loop that accelerates partisan tit-for-tat. Improving patterns of cross-branch interaction likely requires both new processes (e.g., oversight practices and the budget process) and new forms of engagement on key policy priorities. A deeper understanding of drivers on both sides of this equation seems critical.

This presidential election season has highlighted the importance of accounting for this dynamic within the team's strategy. Many of our cluster assessment interviewees have suggested that dissatisfaction with both parties' candidates, as well as fears from both parties about the lack of policy knowledge and measured decision-making that might characterize a Trump presidency, either could exacerbate the problem or motivate Congress to reassert its role as the first branch.

Implications

We recommend the team look for additional opportunities or interventions to disrupt this negative feedback loop. Thinking about this relationship from both the Congressional and executive branch perspective and the incentives or disincentives for negotiation and compromise, as well as scenario planning for different political outcomes, are recommended.

3. Working conclusions about what does and doesn't work.

While interventions to build the skills, knowledge, and behavior of individual Members and staff are critical to slowing Congressional dysfunction and preserving institutional capacity, current programs are unlikely to trigger change in institution-wide norms and interactions.

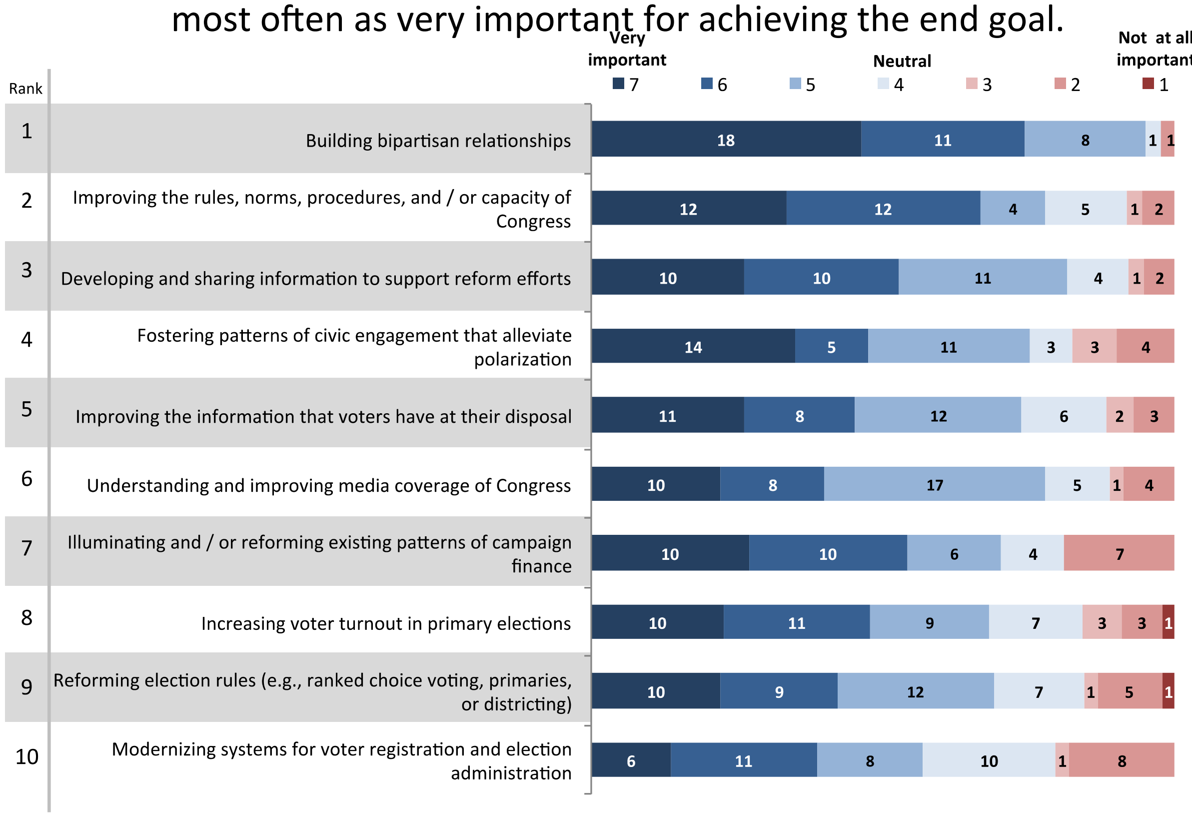
Summer 2014 pressure test interviews explored experts' perceptions of polarization and Congressional dysfunction drivers; leverage points for change; and the places where private foundations and nonprofits might gain near-term traction. They revealed general agreement that *institutional norms and practices* are a significant driver of Congressional dysfunction. Experts also said these norms and practices are more susceptible to nonprofit intervention than most other drivers, and that interventions in this area could bear some fruit within three to five years. Interviewees also identified *interpersonal relationships* as a necessary (though insufficient) focus.

[31] Stid, D. (2015, January 15). *Here we go again*. http://www.hewlett.org/blog/posts/here-we-go-again

Likewise, the 2014 grantee survey revealed that *bipartisan relationship building* and *improving the rules, norms, procedures and/or capacity of Congress* ranked highest compared to other grantmaking areas in terms of their importance to achieving the Initiative's goal (see the figure below).[32] Combined with insights uncovered during systems mapping, this feedback influenced the team to invest a higher portion of its total funds on direct line-of-sight interventions that affect the skills, knowledge, and behavior of Members or staff.

Our 2015 cluster assessment of bipartisan relationship building (BRB) programs partially affirmed this development. We found a weak but statistically significant relationship between participation in grantee

Building partisan relationships and improving the norms, procedures, and/or capacity of Congress were identified most often as very important for achieving the end goal.



programs and bipartisan behavior. Other researchers later demonstrated a further link between bipartisan behavior and legislative effectiveness.[33]

Programs focused on improving Congressional oversight do not yet have similar data linking participation to improved oversight practices. But preliminary cluster assessment findings suggest that

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[32] Grantees were asked to rate how important each cluster—*excluding their own*—is to the goal of improving the ability of Congress to deliberate, negotiate, and compromise. These are relative rankings; all areas received an "important" rating by at least half of the respondents.

[33] Volden, C., & Wiseman, A.E. (2016, July). *Are bipartisan lawmakers more effective?* University of Virginia and Vanderbilt University.

direct capacity building on oversight can help to backstop the further deterioration of this Congressional responsibility. Provisionally, we can conclude that programs like these either are inspiring some changes in attitudes, skills, and behavior or are providing space and opportunities for Members and staff already predisposed to pragmatic problem solving.

However, both the BRB and oversight cluster assessments revealed doubt about whether direct investments in the institution will materialize in any observable improvements in <u>overall</u> patterns of Congressional functioning without simultaneous changes in larger structural incentives. Grantees, scholars, Members, and staff we have interviewed generally view these interventions as insufficient to outweigh the external forces driving dysfunction, such as election and fundraising advantages gained by political point scoring and the lack of Member time for activities beyond fundraising.

While existing investments may improve the skills and attitudes of program participants, it is questionable whether participants can then put new skills and attitudes into practice in the institution *with enough consistency or at a sufficient scale* to influence others or to set new norms. Given the ever-shrinking time to do the "real work" of Congress, Members and staff will prioritize activities with high political return (e.g., gotcha oversight, public posturing against the other party, symbolic party-line voting). Finally, most anticipate that the pressures preventing Members and staff from participating in external programming will to continue to squeeze them (e.g., available time in Washington, fundraising demands, shortage of Congressional staff, pressure from leadership). This could reduce the positive effects of these programs over time.

To use the causal package concept again, experts view investments in these areas as necessary and ground preparing, but triggers that can lead to noticeable institution-level change are missing. This insight is reflected in the team's tempering of its outcome expectations as discussed above.

Importantly, we do see some dissenting views that suggest programming *can* engender a sense of institutional commitment that will inspire Members and staff to work differently. Some believe the personal leadership of individual Members can re-shape normative behavior within the institution.[34] A few programs (e.g., Millennial Action Project and Aspen Rodel Fellows) aim explicitly to cultivate this kind of leadership and ask program participants to consider how they can have a larger impact. Most of our cluster assessment interviewees could identify some Members and staff who already are oriented this way and may benefit from more support and thinking about how to pull their efforts together.

[34] The team also took this position during the December 2015 systems map review.

Implications

We recommend the team try to increase the return-on-investment from programmatic investments in individual Members and staff. Pairing these interventions with a more intentional strategy to amplify and spread these program effects might result in greater return. This includes doing more to identify, cultivate, and support Congressional leaders to work on changing norms.

The team already has begun to think about how programs can be tweaked to maximize participation—by linking Members' political interests in substantive policy areas to program content, or by helping Members see how bipartisan cooperation and effective oversight can work to their political advantage (more on this below). Still, it is unclear how much program innovation is taking place to increase the impact or ripple effect of these programs. The April 2016 meeting of BRB grantees to discuss cluster assessment findings did not result in any new hypotheses about how to do this.

Specifically, we recommend the team consider:

- Are grantees and the Foundation doing enough to clarify the value proposition of these programs to busy Members and staff, and to ensure that they are equipping Members and staff to apply their learning and use their new relationships after participating?
- Are grantees supporting Members to play a leadership role in shaping constituents' expectations for their elected representatives' behavior?
- How can grantees prepare for the increasing competition for Member and staff time?

In addition, future program evaluation efforts are needed in this area. They should focus on better understanding whether, how, and under what conditions the legislative and oversight behaviors of program participants change, and whether there are significant differences in outcomes by program or among Members and staff with different characteristics. This could help the team and grantees to improve programming and focus resources on the highest impact approaches.

Differences in core values, ideology, priorities, and/or theories of change among funders have made collaboration tougher than anticipated, but not necessarily less important.

A core hypothesis during the Initiative's first phase was that the Foundation must attract funders of different types to make progress toward its goal. As the original strategy memo stated: "[A] major element of our work, particularly in the early stages, will be to recruit philanthropic allies and bring new resources into the field. This should, in fact, be a critical benchmark of success in the first few years…In addition, we want to engage a broader set of national foundations in democratic process reform and enlist support from state and local foundations and high–net worth individuals…."[35]

[35] Kramer, D., & Stid., D. (2013, December 6) p.12.

A second hypothesis was that many funders' policy work (including Hewlett's) was exacerbating polarization and partisanship rather than alleviating it. This resulted in a "neglected and underfunded middle ground…. Organizations (and ideas) that straddle left and right—that seek to build bridges or that identify with a side but appreciate the need to work productively with opponents—do not attract the kind of support given to more aggressively conservative or progressive groups."

Together, these two hypotheses put other funders squarely in the target of Hewlett's theory of influence. The team's assumption appeared to be that without changing the current polarizing behavior of funders and recruiting more democracy reform resources at all levels, the foundation would not be able to build enough momentum in such a large and intractable system of systems.

Although we have not focused our evaluation efforts on questions about funder collaboration, we have tracked the team's reflections on their collaborative efforts. We also have received feedback from grantees on this topic through the 2015 grantee survey.

The Madison team has made, and often led, a number of attempts to build multilateral funder engagement. These include:

- Participation in a group of 15 democracy funders that has met several times over two years (three meetings with both CEOs and program leaders; another five with just program leaders).
- An ongoing partnership with six funders to build a Foundation Center clearinghouse of U.S. democracy-related funding.
- Attempts to foster "diffuse reciprocity" by supporting other funder projects that are off-strategy to the Madison Initiative in the hopes that others will reciprocate.

While bearing some fruit, these efforts also have highlighted points of friction that almost always plague funder collaboration:[36]

- Differences in goals, strategies, values, and ideology that result in different criteria for choosing solutions to prioritize and in whom and what to invest
- Operational or interpersonal challenges (e.g., different decision processes, styles, and timelines)
- A tendency to work on lower-common-denominator projects where agreement can be reached more easily
- A labor-intensive process that requires much effort to learn one another's perspectives and values, develop a shared analysis of the problem and potential solutions, and find real opportunities to do something together.

Our own informal encounters with other democracy funders support the challenges involved. They suggest that more staunchly progressive funders continue to interpret the Madison Initiative as one or more of the following:

[36] These are the same points of friction that plague nonprofits' and advocates' efforts to build coalitions, shared reform agendas, and movements for change.

- Overly "nostalgic" for an unrecoverable past that also is undesirable for the populations they care about
- Lacking concern for how elites are held accountable to non-elite constituencies or how elite decision-making behaviors affect those constituencies
- Too likely to empower conservative opponents to the substantive policy outcomes they seek.

Although we do not have enough professional contact with conservative foundations to know how they might be interpreting the Initiative, they also likely have their own values-based concerns.

After spending a great deal of time and resources on fostering funder collaboration in the Initiative's first phase, the Madison team has decided to take a more measured approach regarding what it thinks is possible with collective funder action. The team has determined that bilateral funder engagement is a better use of staff time than multilateral engagement, and has focused on funders that make larger grants. Funder-to-funder interaction primarily has taken the form of program staff relationships with funders whose work and values already overlap with the Madison Initiative or who share the same interests in specific projects or grantees. As the latest strategy memo noted, this has resulted in "reciprocal relationships with roughly 20 foundations across the left, right, and center of the political spectrum with whom we compare notes on issues and organizations, jointly fund grantees, and/or undertake projects together with some regularity."[37]

The team's openness, reciprocity, and commitment to these bilateral relationships appears to be working well. They are productive relationships, resulting in high quality thought partnership, a better understanding of the landscape, and some jointly hosted grantee and partner meetings that have received positive reviews.

Our cluster assessment interviews revealed, however, that grantees and others still worry about the dearth of funders focused on the Madison Initiative's goal of bridging the partisan divide and on the health and capacity of Congress. This seems notable, as funder collaboration and recruitment were cited as important strategies for scaling Hewlett's work and catalyzing larger system-level changes.

<u>Implications</u>

We recommend the Madison team continue to examine its hypotheses about the role of other funders in achieving its goal. Given the team's more measured approach to funder collaboration based on its experiences to date, what other approaches are there for scaling influence and impact? What is a productive response to field-level concerns about the pool of funding available to complement the Initiative's goal? If the most viable way to build funder alignment is to start by working on narrow, concrete, bounded projects, then a challenge going forward will be to figure out how to expand beyond the few funders who already are in agreement and aligned with Hewlett's interests. Are there any different ways of working with funders that are more firmly planted on one end of the ideological spectrum, or that invest in democracy reform from a different values orientation or change?

[37] Madison Initiative Team (2016, June 2) p.3.

We also recommend the team explore how lessons from its experiences trying to collaborate with other funders might be applied to help grantees collaborate or align. As the most recent strategy memo recognizes, "If foundations cannot find a way to work and get things done together in the face of disagreements over ultimate goals, how can we expect our elected representatives—accountable to much more demanding constituencies—to negotiate and compromise?"[38] If the team is responsive to grantees' suggestions about more collaboration and coordination (described more below), what insights has it gained about how to help grantees deal with different values orientations (pragmatists versus idealists), priorities, "maturity" of strategies, and even basic operational differences?

4. Emergent elements of what could become a broader intervention.

Interventions showing promise within their narrower goals may need more purposeful "amplification" or scaling strategies to spur larger institutional changes.

So far, the Madison team has used tactics beyond grantmaking to add value to the work that is occurring at the individual grantee level. Primarily this has focused on convening and fostering collaboration among grantees. Since the Initiative's inception, the Foundation has:

- Hosted two large convenings of 90 people each, with many other funders participating and more than 50 grantee organizations at each
- Organized recurring bimonthly meeting of bipartisan relationship building grantees in collaboration with the Democracy Fund.

In addition, collaborative efforts among grantees have emerged through connections facilitated by the team or self-organized in the form of co-hosted events or programmatic partnerships. Only one year after the Initiative launched, the 2015 grantee survey revealed that almost two-thirds of grantee respondents had formed new collaborations as a result of their involvement with the Madison Initiative; 63 specific new collaborations were specified. Other examples include several grantees collaborating on the topic of political realism; others who have held joint events and formed a legislative capacity working group;[39] still others who have joined together on programmatic oversight activities;[40] and a set of grantees working together on campaign finance data.[41]

Cluster assessments, the grantee survey, and feedback from partner convenings and grantee meetings, however, show that many are open to—and even hungry for—the Foundation to do more

[38] Madison Initiative Team (2016, June 2) p.4.

[39] An October 27, 2015 briefing on Capitol Hill featured participants from National Affairs, R Street Institute, Washington Monthly, New America Foundation, and Brookings Institution. R Street Institution and New America Foundation have formed the working group.

[40] Specifically, the Project on Government Oversight, Levin Center, and Lugar Center.

[41] Specifically, Center for Responsive Politics, New America Foundation, and Guidestar.

of this type of "amplifying" work. They want the team to: (1) promote successes and elevate values, and (2) lay the groundwork for a larger reform movement.

(1) Promote successes and elevate values.

As described above, our evaluation data point to some promising signals about the value of programs that build the knowledge, attitudes, and relationships of Members and staff. However, political incentives for bipartisan legislative behavior and productive oversight are weak, for both individual Members and parties. Observers, Members, and staff report that they are most able to apply their new knowledge, skills, and relationships to the shrinking number of politically "safe" situations where issues are not polarized already or where Member behavior is not visible to the public. These programs are necessary but not sufficient to catalyze changes in broader institutional norms or behavior.

Most grantee and external interviewees say that bigger external drivers (e.g., campaign finance reform, redistricting, election reform) are required to trigger larger scale change in Congress. But they also have pointed to a smaller change lever that could have a more immediate impact on Congressional behavior and help to build the will of Members to take leadership on bigger reforms or norms changes.

> "*Ultimately it will be necessary to create a real political force…that provides support and validation for Members that want to break from the polarized rigidity*."
>
> [Verbatim from 2015 grantee survey]

Broadcasting or amplifying success stories and exemplars of good Congressional behavior could incentivize more Members and staff to work in different ways. It also could give program participants enough political cover to use their new skills and relationships in more settings or to begin showing more leadership on changing institutional norms. For example:

- *Without a messaging strategy that promotes and rewards bipartisan interaction, Members have no reason to believe that constituents want it or that they will benefit politically from doing it.* The BRB cluster assessment revealed that Members have few political incentives for working in a bipartisan manner and often are punished for doing so by party leadership or partisan interests and media who control the narrative. Even those naturally predisposed to work in this way find it increasingly difficult and demoralizing. The barrage of negativity about the institution also demoralizes staff.

  Using a bipartisan compromise frame is risky with earned or paid media, and might backfire. However, if substantive progress is consistently and loudly framed as *pragmatic problem solving*, *serving our district*, *getting things done*, or even *making Washington work*, and touted by a range of IPDs and other influencers, Members might be more willing to work this way. Positive press and other political rewards could encourage natural leaders to lead more visibly, or entice others to join. Messaging and promotion has the added benefit of contributing to the restoration of public support for Congress (the ultimate vital sign indicator).

  Grantees also have supported this approach. Participants in the 2016 partner convening noted the "need to publicly speak out about bipartisanship and supporting the voices that reach across the [political] aisle…This portion of the discussion emphasized the opportunity the Madison Initiative has to help shift the tone and structure of conversations, as well as promote press coverage opportunities that both highlight the successes in Congress and help to strengthen representative democracy."[42] In fact, after the convening, one grantee passionate about this topic (POPVOX) collaborated with another (New America) to write a blog post titled *Congress is working. You just haven't heard about it*. and shared it with all grantees.[43]

- *Members and staff are personally competitive and will respond positively to peer recognition for quality work and pragmatic above-the-fray problem solving that improves how government functions or saves money.* The oversight cluster assessment revealed that awards and recognition within the institution might give a platform to Members and staff to take more leadership on this issue. Here too, local press coverage that highlights improvements in programs or policies that are important to districts can serve as positive fodder for Members' future campaigns and make it harder for interest groups or party leadership to punish them for productive oversight. Such coverage also could help the public to understand the distinction between unproductive and productive oversight and generate demand for the latter.

Some individual grantees are exploring the effects of positive press coverage in home districts for Members who do productive oversight or legislative work. Others are thinking about awards and recognition to help with amplification among Members' peers. But there is not yet any effort to elevate this work beyond the confines of each grantee's direct audience and to create a louder call for change. Many have asked that Hewlett and other foundations support this kind of messaging on a broader and more coordinated scale. This aligns with the team's observation about the "altitude" (above individual grants) at which they could be focusing.

(2) Support collaboration to increase impact and lay the groundwork for a larger movement.
The team's approach to creating opportunities for informal interaction and cross-pollination has increased grantee knowledge of the field, as well as awareness that they could have more impact together.

Grantees have expressed a growing desire for more purposeful collaboration. At the 2016 convening, participants began "[c]alling out the importance and potential that collaboration offers," and exploring whether "we have matured enough as a community to think about ways to collaborate and structure our work so that it would have more impact." In response to the range of good ideas presented by peers, one participant observed, 'We need to look for opportunities to work together. If we miss this opportunity, we may not be able to accomplish anything.'"[44]

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[42] Kent, A., & Sebastian, S. (2016, July 9). *The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation Madison Initiative June 2016 partner meeting* (pp. 8-10).
[43] Harris, M. (2016, July 28). Congress is working. You just haven't heard about it. http://www.newamerica.org/weekly/edition-130/congress-working-you-just-havent-heard-about-it/
[44] Kent, A., & Sebastian, S. (2016, July 9) p.7.

We hear two threads in these comments and from our cluster assessment interviews:

a) *Interest in collaboration that increases learning and program impact*. This could include within-cluster collaboration (as it has so far), or cross-cluster collaboration where, for example, a bipartisan relationship building program brings its process expertise to an election reform grantee that deeply knows the policy options on the table. Grantees may have done much of the collaboration they are likely to do without more structured peer learning and intentional strategizing, and without financial incentives or support.

b) *Interest in broader collaboration that builds a drumbeat for reform and combats cynical hyper-partisan narratives about the institution*. Some grantees, and external interviewees, have proposed joint calls to action for the next Congress and president, or other public stances that tout the Initiative's values and could occur without signatories needing to agree on specific reforms.

   It is unsurprising that there has been little uptake on grantee ideas for larger-scale joint messaging and coalition building. Many grantees have known each other only since the Madison Initiative started, and those who know each other well compete for funds and audiences. Most grantees are not experienced advocacy or movement building organizations. They are less accustomed to negotiating and collaborating with potential allies (especially those with different political leanings) to elevate a common concern and build political will before solutions are hammered out. We sense that few, if any, grantees are comfortable playing an initiating or leadership role for fear of stepping on toes.

The team's planning has begun to incorporate some of these observations. The team has worked hard to make partner convenings robust and is exploring the idea of an advocacy effort focused on promoting the institution of Congress. However, we think there may be space or even demand for Hewlett to be more assertive in encouraging and supporting collaboration among willing grantees—and perhaps non-grantees—in the Initiative's second phase.

Implications

The team should explore how to amplify the efforts of grantees and build momentum toward larger reforms that have the potential for systems-level change.

Amplification via communications and messaging should promote exemplars within home districts, among legislative colleagues, and among IPDs who are more pragmatic than partisan and are frustrated with current dysfunction. More importantly, such messaging should create the perception that there is a public/constituent demand for a different kind of Congressional behavior and problem solving, giving space and cover for increased leadership on this issue among grantees, pragmatic IPDs, and Members themselves.

Well-researched and widely disseminated messaging that helps to frame what people should expect from Congress (as opposed to offering specific reform solutions) could:

- Inspire behavior change among more individual Members as they see their peers getting rewarded for successes and have a pragmatic "making government work for you" message to link to their brands
- Create space for like-minded Members to begin identifying solutions and building political will because they can point to public demand for a new way of working (even if only perceived)
- Give party leadership some incentive to begin connecting the party brand with a well-functioning Congress, pragmatic problem solving, and good governance
- Create a larger field frame with which a broader range of democracy reform organizations could identify, including those who are not Hewlett grantees and who come at reform from different angles and leverage points.

The coming post-election period offers a unique opportunity for messaging to have an outsized effect as the mainline political elite, mainstream media, and a good portion of the electorate appear alarmed and frustrated at how the campaigns and election have unfolded. A rising tide of higher profile voices (e.g., Michael Gerson, David Brooks, Adam Gopnik, Jeb Bush) are calling for more reasoned behavior and for extolling the core principles of the institution. Interviewees hypothesized that these messages need to be reinforced and made more visible to a wider audience before the current angst has faded and Members resort to previous partisan patterns.

The team should strategize on how to move grantees from a general recognition that collaboration is important to collaborative action and experimentation on the grantee-to-grantee and "movement" level. For example, this could include providing grants to multi-grantee ideas, hosting or providing facilitative support for more moving-to-action conversations, or creating opportunities for the grantee cohort to engage with a broader range of democracy reform organizations and coalitions.

During the Initiative's second phase it is time to build light-touch provisional theories of change in select priority areas that show how the work can be scaled or amplified to have larger system effects.

The Initiative's initial three years used an approach to strategy that featured "experimentation and spreading a series of smaller bets to ascertain whether and how we can help create the conditions for success in the longer term."[45] The Madison Initiative is an emergent strategy; the initial phase has been a time for exploring various ideas and solutions rather than putting a stake in the ground on how to achieve the goal. As a result, the team has not developed a "full-blown theory of change" that typically accompanies a new initiative.[46]

[45] Kramer, D., & Stid., D. (2013, December 6) p.4.
[46] Madison Initiative Team (2016, June 2) p.2.

The team's most recent strategy memo, however, lays out an emerging overall theory of change about helping Congress to cope with polarization. It emphasizes disrupting negative feedback loops that exacerbate partisanship and deadlock, making cooperation easier, and preparing for a quicker recovery once larger forces shift.[47] The memo also identifies five lines of grantmaking that the team selected for future investments pending board approval (see page 3 for the list). In addition, the memo states that fewer grantees will be funded, but those organizations are likely to receive larger, longer-term, and more flexible grants.

As mentioned above, while the team is narrowing its strategic focus, it has not settled into a formal strategy in the traditional strategic philanthropy sense. We think this makes good sense; it is too early and more testing and learning is needed. But we think the team would benefit from some additional strategy work in select priority areas.

<u>**Implications**</u>

We recommend the team sketch out light-touch theories of change for its grantmaking priorities. This is likely not the right approach for all five priority areas. Some should continue to use experiments and explore opportunities to learn more about the field, test for promising approaches, and find areas where the Foundation feels it can make a difference. For example, the team does not yet have a good sense of what it wants to accomplish or what is possible in the campaign finance domain. Continued testing, experimentation, and field building are warranted.

But in other areas, the time seems right to begin articulating some of the core elements of a theory of change, including:

- *Sub-goals*: What is the impact we are really hoping to see in this area of work? What would a meaningful and measurable difference look like? What kind and scale of change would make a difference for interrupting negative feedback loops, make cooperation easier, and ready the ground for a quick recovery?

- *Hypotheses about achieving scale:* What would it take to produce change at the scale necessary to contribute meaningfully to a well functioning Congress? How might we build relationships and lay the groundwork for achieving scale? What capacities and characteristics would the field need to be able to have impact at the necessary level?

Of course, scaling or amplifying strategies might look different for each domain. Demonstrating and promoting better media models would require a different approach than cultivating motivation among more Members to engage in pragmatic problem solving, or building momentum for state-by-state election reforms.

[47] Madison Initiative Team (2016, June 2) p.7.

Created in cooperation with a handful of grantees and funding partners interested in this kind of conversation, provisional theories of change might help to:

- Identify amplification strategies
- Find more concrete and actionable ways for grantees and funders to collaborate or complement each other's work
- Identify where the team should expand the diversity of stakeholders it is engaging
- Prepare for evaluating the effectiveness of different strategies within a domain.

We recognize that much of this thinking might already be happening for individual team members, but it is not yet explicit. Making it so could help the team to think more systematically about allocating resources, including staff time.

These provisional theories of change should not be elaborate, overly precise, or caught up in a diagramming process, or else the costs will outweigh the benefits. They also should avoid charting only one way forward, which is counterproductive when working in a complex system and could cause the Foundation to narrow its work prematurely. Instead, the team could use a discussion-based approach to capture a range of hypotheses (perhaps even some competing hypotheses) and then make choices about how to focus future grants, relationship building, and "auxiliary" strategies in phase two so that hypotheses can be tested. If the team learning approach is designed for this kind of testing, the Initiative's second phase could end with clearer insights about what does and does not work.

5. Strengthened capacity of the Hewlett team or grantees.

While a formal field-building strategy may not be needed, the Initiative and its grantees may benefit from the use of network- or field-building approaches.

The finding above about adding more amplifying activities to the Madison Initiative notes that many grantees did not know one another when the Initiative began. No defined "field" of organizations existed that was connected to the Initiative's goal of addressing Congressional dysfunction.

Obviously there are organizations that have this goal as part of their mission, but they approach it in such diverse ways that many do not cross paths. In addition, as system mapping has illustrated, they work in different sub-systems connected to the goal—with Congress and Members and staff directly, on campaign and election processes, and through civic engagement approaches. In addition, the organizations represent a mix of different approaches and disciplines—researchers or academicians, think tanks, advocates, capacity builders, journalists, and others.

The lack of a recognized field identity in this space has required the Madison team to introduce grantees to one another in order to ensure interactions occur that can increase opportunities for

collective effects. As mentioned above in several places, this has happened in several ways, including large grantee convenings, small cluster convenings, and individual introductions.

Implications

While the Madison Initiative is not explicitly a field-building strategy, it may be useful to use a network- or field-building frame when thinking about possible activities that can add value. This recommendation goes hand-in-hand with the finding above about amplifying activities. But there may be other opportunities to add to and strengthen the field of grantees working on the Initiative's goal.

The box below offers seven elements that help to define and build a field.

Elements of a Field

1. **Identity**: Distinct and recognized practice that can be clearly described.
2. **Knowledge Base**: Credible evidence of results derived from research and practice.
3. **Standard Practice**: Descriptions of standard practice; common language to describe practice.
4. **Information Exchange**: Vehicles for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating knowledge
5. **Infrastructure for Collaboration**: Structures and institutions that facilitate coordinated action.
6. **Professional Development**: Structures for training; leadership development.
7. **Resources**: Adequate financial and other resources to ensure standard practice.

Adapted from Fine, M. (2001). What does field-building mean for service-learning advocates?

The Madison team already has engaged in strengthening some of these elements for organizations connected to its goal, particularly *infrastructure for collaboration* and *resources*.

We think there may be other opportunities to help strengthen this informal "field," both for existing grantees and for non-grantees that participate in the work now or might come to it later. There are at least two levels at which this could occur:

- *Specific clusters or sub-groups*.
  Again, as described above in several places, the Madison team already has convened clusters of grantees working on similar issues (e.g., BRB, budget reform, and oversight grantees). We recommended earlier that the team continue to look for opportunities to do this and to foster collaboration that goes beyond getting to know one another.

  But there may be opportunities to use other field-building approaches to help strengthen these connections that fall outside of regular grantmaking. These may include, for example, *building the knowledge base* by funding research or evaluation on a specific question of interest to all involved that could help to promote high-quality practice standards. This also could include capacity building, for example, supporting the building of a more robust data system for BRB grantees so that research within or across them could occur. It might include investing in *professional development* for emerging leaders. It might mean thinking about how to facilitate *information exchange* among organizations in non-burdensome ways.

- *Non-grantee organizations in areas outside those on which the Madison Initiative is focusing.* As mentioned above, the Madison Initiative has chosen to fund organizations mostly taking an insider and top-down approach to Congressional reform, rather than organizations working from the bottom up on improving representative democracy by better connecting elected officials and constituents. Both, however, relate to the Initiative's goal, even if they have differing lines of sight.

  Related to the finding above about strengthening the connection between Congress and the public, we wonder if there are opportunities for the team to better connect these currently disparate fields in ways that can strengthen both? This might involve, for example, things like connecting a narrative that challenges public understanding about the existence of bipartisan compromises to the messages that civic engagement groups are conveying. Our recommendation overall is that field-building approaches not be all grantee-centric, but instead acknowledge opportunities for influencing broader "fields" (including those where less investment is occurring) in ways that might serve the Initiative's goal.

Providing more general support grants for organizations aligned with the goal is better for grantees and the field, but may require some shifts in how the team interacts with grantees.

In 2015, the Madison team did an analysis that revealed a low percentage of its grants were for general operating support (GOS). In the Initiative's first two years, the median grant size was $200,000, and the average grant term was 20 months. Half of the grants were restricted. This reflects a trend in foundation funding in general, according to data the Madison team pulled from the Foundation Center's database.

The team is changing its grantmaking approach moving forward, with a smaller number of grantees and more GOS grants. As the most recent strategy memo indicates, for grants made and planned for 2016, the median grant size is $300,000, average grant term is 27 months, and only 15 percent of funding will be restricted to specific projects.[48] We think the move to increase general operating support for grantees most aligned with the Initiative's goal makes sense and will benefit field building.

__Implications__

A main benefit of GOS grants is that they help to strengthen organizations and allow them to be more adaptive and opportunistic. The use of GOS also can help to avoid the problems that arise with project-based funding for efforts that may involve legislative lobbying. Some risks have been acknowledged as

[48] Madison Initiative Team (2016, June 2) p.5.

well, particularly when organizations do other things that are less aligned with a funder's goal. As former Hewlett Foundation president Paul Brest put it, "General support is the most effective grantmaking tool when an organization's mission is essentially identical with, or contained within, the funder's goals in a field."[49] In this case, a number of Madison grantees work on other issues not directly related to democracy reform.

Like the Madison team, we think the benefits outweigh the risks, but this shift does have implications for how the team interacts with grantees. With restricted project grants, program staff do a lot of the work of negotiating with and influencing grantees upfront during proposal development. Interactions then generally take on more of a monitoring posture. With GOS grants, the approach to influence is different. Arguably, the point is to allow grantees to make their own decisions and to exercise less influence. This does not mean being hands off, however. Rather, Foundation staff spend more time having discussions with grantees (often at the CEO level) throughout the grant period.

Having a smaller number of grants to manage will matter and allow for a substantial recapture of program staff time. We recommend the team discuss how to reallocate that time most productively as it approaches its influencing work, and how it thinks more GOS grants ultimately can improve the Initiative's impact.

[49] Brest, P. (2008). *Forms of philanthropic support: The centrality of alignment*. http://www.hewlett.org/2008-annual-report/presidents-essay