Measuring the Impact of Corporate Social Investments
Research Working Group Project Brief

What is a Research Working Group?
A Research Working Group (RWG) is a collaborative project that convenes peer companies together in a rapid deep dive and targeted focus on a compelling business issue. When firms across industries with similar concerns come together and are guided by subject matter experts, there is a rich transfer of ideas and knowledge. The result is a comprehensive report designed to shape a platform for enterprise-wide action and impact.

The Conference Board’s team of in-house researchers, partnerships with leading organizations, and deep commitment to our members make us uniquely positioned to produce high quality, innovative research.

Research Proposal
In recent years, Conference Board member companies have been working to evaluate the impact of their corporate social investments. Corporate grant makers find themselves in need of consistent data collection, accurate benchmarking, and measurement standardization. They express frustration that they often find themselves responding to a structure proposed by an outside organization, rather than part of a partnership to develop a useful measurement system. Combining TCB’s research skills and our members’ practical insights, we are launching a new Research Working Group to address this need.

As part of its Initiative on Corporate Philanthropy, The Conference Board is convening a Research Working Group on Measuring the Impact of Corporate Social Investments. This group will examine the existing approaches and define a “better mousetrap” from a dedicated brain-trust of philanthropy professionals assembled to focus on practical needs and potential solutions.

While there is no “silver bullet” for measuring social impact, there are several promising approaches. Some of these focus on defining “what counts” and on straight-forward measurement of outputs and impacts of grants. Others are aimed at tracking and reporting the social performance of investments and generating financial returns. A few even seek to quantify the bottom-line business value of corporate social investing. Any solution will require the recognition that the era of Big Data is upon us and measurement systems must keep up.

This Working Group will benefit a wide variety of companies that want to seize an opportunity to define their work and standards. We will move beyond one-size-fits-all prescriptions, and engage in internal dialogue and facilitated conversations with leading players in the measurement field to co-create new thought-leadership, frameworks, and plans for action and implementation.

We will address the following questions:
• How can having additional data improve the social investing function, both internally and externally? Should it impact investment decisions?
• What should be measured? Everything? Only investments meeting certain financial criteria? Investments at a portfolio level? Groupings of grants for pre-identified social impacts?
• Which of the existing measurement approaches can offer helpful direction in different situations? How can selecting a for-profit or NGO partner provide useful benchmarking information? What is the importance and responsibility of the partners in the impact measurement process?
• What level of reporting is right for an individual organization? How can it help communicate their mission and giving approach?

The Conference Board’s initiative on Corporate Philanthropy has helped streamline other aspects in this field such as combining the CECP and TCB surveys, establishing the first annual China Philanthropy report and is working to establish an open network of global volunteering partners. Our unique position as a non-profit and non-advocacy organization positions us well to partner with corporate social funders, foundations and grant makers to help determine a new approach to measuring the impact of corporate social investments.

Format & Takeaways
Launching June 27-28, 2013 in New York, this Working Group will last about 6 months. The group will meet 3 times in-person to review promising practices and challenges in a confidential, hands-on environment. There will be intervening virtual meetings and small group teleconferences to further the group’s collaboration. The participants typically dedicate 2-4 hours a month to the project, outside of the in-person meetings. The RWG will result in a comprehensive report comprising detailed findings, conclusions, and recommendations for action.

Each company is invited to send two participants, and substitutes are welcome to attend meetings, if needed. While any professional from Corporate Philanthropy field is welcome to attend, this group is especially geared toward those staff members determining the metrics of corporate giving initiatives, and can be someone at any level of the organization. This is also an excellent developmental opportunity for emerging leaders in this field.

RWG Participation Contribution: $17,500 per company covers all meetings, materials, access to all research and reports. There is a courtesy contribution of $15,000 for those companies that have membership in one of our three related Councils: Contributions Councils I and II and Global Social Investing. This fee enables two executives to participate from each company, but does not include travel & hotel to in-person meetings. This RWG is only open to member companies of The Conference Board.

To join or for further information, please contact Irene Sobol, Manager of Research Working Groups: irene.sobol@conference-board.org or 212-339-0408.

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