

from inquiry to insight



How i2i Institute helps The McKnight Foundation use evaluation for continuous learning



The McKnight Foundation's Collaborative Crop Research Program (CCRP) invests in collaborative systems research and knowledge sharing that strengthen the capacities of smallholder farmers, research institutes and development organizations in Africa and South America. The vision of the CCRP is to ensure that all people have access to nutritious food that is locally and sustainably produced.

Strengthening technical as well as human capacity, the CCRP promotes cross-sector collaboration, farmer agency, and innovative solutions that arise from the complex and varied environments in which small farmers produce and market their goods. The CCRP's approach focuses on agroecological intensification and is guided by a firm commitment to place-based grantmaking.

CCRP-funded projects and initiatives have gained the attention of partners such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which implement CCRP technologies and practices on a large scale. CCRP's support for individuals and organizations at the local and national level has helped influence agriculture policy and catalyze institutional change.

i2i Institute was tasked with creating a mechanism through which The McKnight Foundation's CCRP team could evaluate impact and incorporate learning into program-wide planning. In close collaboration with team members, i2i Institute developed and is implementing the **Integrated Monitoring, Evaluation, and Planning** process. Through IMEP, teams across multiple continents can collect and analyze data to identify the immediate and longer-term impact of their work, both directly and as a ripple effect on other sectors. The iterative process brings M&E into the planning stages and promotes continuous learning from all stakeholders, from community members to academics to government officials.

Since 2008, i2i has worked with the CCRP to:

- design regional and program-level theories of change and M&E plans
- establish a taxonomy to analyze localized and systemic impacts
- develop a program-wide database of quantitative and qualitative data
- systematize data collection and interpretation by multi-disciplinary teams
- produce instructional materials and provide training for regional staff
- facilitate on-going data collection and regional-level evaluation
- conduct program-level evaluation
- prepare a proposal for funding from the Gates Foundation

"The uniqueness of IMEP goes beyond just visualizing quantitative data. It helps teams understand the implications of results and map out change. It impresses me as a process that is cutting new ground."

Jeff Ehlers, Program Officer, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

As a result, the CCRP has:

- integrated evaluation into planning processes and communication
- strengthened its effectiveness as a learning organization
- identified key issues that will inform its future grantmaking strategy
- promoted leadership and supported professional development
- increased its influence among major institutional stakeholders
- received a \$50 million grant from the Gates Foundation

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