

## **Marine Conservation Initiative evaluation summary**

In March 2016, we engaged Abt Associates to conduct an external evaluation of our Marine Conservation Initiative, with three main goals in mind:

1. Objectively assessing the initiative's strategies and sub-strategies with respect to the desired outcomes for the work;
2. Recommending adjustments in tactics, timing and funding for the strategies;
3. Capturing lessons and best practices in program design and implementation for the foundation, as well as the fields of philanthropy and marine conservation.

In the context of that third goal, this summary presents the lessons and best practices that should be most informative to those broader fields. The summary also points to the actions the initiative took following the evaluation and in response to its findings.

## **Background**

The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation launched the Marine Conservation Initiative in July 2005 to support work toward “healthy marine ecosystems in North America that support sustainable use.” Initially authorized for 10.5 years (2005-2016) and \$146 million, the initiative set out to reduce overfishing and habitat degradation in North America through the alignment of conservation outcomes, and economic and social incentives.

To achieve these goals, the initiative had awarded \$253 million in grants to 135 organizations by the time of the evaluation. Grantmaking had focused on two main strategies:

- Ocean planning. Supporting the development of science-based “ocean planning,” which achieves conservation results by spatially dividing the marine environment into a variety of compatible, holistically-planned and sited uses, in order to account for and mitigate ecosystem stressors. (This strategy has also been called “marine spatial planning” and “area-based management.” These differences in lexicon do not represent conceptual or practical differences in the strategy itself.)
- Reforming fisheries management. Aligning economic incentives with conservation outcomes, developing and taking up conservation-oriented technologies and practices, and promoting scientifically sound, total allowable catch limits that account for ecosystem considerations, in order to manage fisheries more sustainably. A key component of this strategy supported “catch shares” to improve efficiency and promote conservation by guaranteeing fishermen a share of the total allowable catch.

## **Evaluation methodology**

This 2016 evaluation built on findings and lessons captured through a 2009 external evaluation, conducted by the same lead evaluator. Because the initiative was evaluated in 2009, the

information base for the latter exercise was drawn primarily from program documentation and grant activities conducted between 2010 and the present.

The methodology for the evaluation was developed to obtain both qualitative and quantitative information. The methodological approach included several activities, from archival research and analysis of project files, to a literature review of key marine conservation publications and reports since 2009, a survey of all grantees via a web-based instrument, interviews with initiative staff, interviews and site visits with selected grantees and their implementing partners, and interviews with experts on marine conservation.

During the analytical integration phase of Abt's analysis, they examined the entirety of information provided through their archival research, grantee survey, grantee and expert interviews, and site visits. Throughout the research and analysis process, the Abt evaluation team worked closely with a panel of marine conservation experts, which provided critical input on research methods, reacted to preliminary observations, reviewed the durability rubric, and reviewed drafts of preliminary and final evaluation reports.

## **Major findings**

The initiative's targeted interventions indicate instances of positive change in conservation dynamics. To the evaluation team, this represented "a major achievement, worthy of the Moore Foundation's investment" in the initiative. The grantmaking was deemed successful in this regard through what the evaluators considered thoughtful, dedicated support for policymaking, research, capacity-building and coordination of multiple partners and stakeholders in specific geographic regions, as well as at a national scale in the United States and Canada. The evaluation determined that, without the initiative, the New England and West Coast groundfish fisheries might have remained collapsed, and ocean planning in North America might have remained only an untested concept in the scientific and policy literature, without implementation anywhere in U.S. or Canadian waters. At the same time, several lines of evidence support the evaluation findings as well as marine conservation staff assertions that ocean planning is not yet consistently the "norm" or default model of marine resource management in the United States or Canada.

Abt also concluded that the Marine Conservation Initiative shows that philanthropy can alter the policy landscape within a major arena of natural resource management. The evaluators found that the initiative had supported the development of organizations, institutional capacity and leaders capable of operating within and influencing the direction of a new policy regime.

More granular results from the initiative's investments in ocean planning and reforming fisheries management include:

- The development of institutional capacity and innovations (e.g., community quota funds, sector associations, permit banks, risk pools, regional planning bodies, data portals) necessary to support industry and other participant uptake and compliance with new policy and planning frameworks;
- Scientific research that provides enhanced tools for marine managers (e.g., Ocean Health Index, Ocean Tipping Points, bio-economic models of fisheries management options);
- Enhanced leadership, stakeholder engagement and communities of practice (e.g., First Nations' leadership of ocean planning in British Columbia, the establishment of a

progressive voice among commercial fisherman in New England, and a self-organizing and self-sustaining community of practice centered on ocean planning);

- The development and establishment of major policy frameworks (e.g., catch-share systems, implementation of the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act, U.S. National Ocean Policy and several potentially bellwether state and regional ocean plans) – while understanding that *implementation* of policy is a multi-step process that plays out over extended periods of time, sometimes decades, and may require “patient capital.”

## **Informing a renewed commitment to oceans**

In August 2017, the foundation [renewed its commitment to marine conservation](#) with a seven-year, \$152 million plan to focus on the waters of the North American Arctic, British Columbia and U.S. West Coast. Consistent with the initiative’s scope since inception, work will focus on two of the most solvable threats to our oceans: habitat degradation and overfishing.

Shaped in part by an affirmation of the efficacy of activities evaluated by Abt and supported through the initiative’s grantmaking—for research, capacity-building, policymaking and coordination of partners in geographic regions and at the national scale—the recommitted Marine Conservation Initiative aims by 2024 to achieve protection of important marine habitats and sustainable management of fisheries in high-priority North American ocean geographies (the North American Arctic, British Columbia and the U.S. West Coast), supported by enabling conditions needed to achieve these outcomes.

Consistent with the foundation’s approach to philanthropy, we will continue to manage these strategies adaptively, responding to exogenous factors and measuring progress through set indicators we have established for intermediate results and initiative outcomes. Understanding that evidence and rigorous inquiry are key to gaining valuable perspective, to adapting and learning, and to achieving the outcomes we seek, we will continue to conduct regular reviews of this work, including independent assessments and comprehensive strategy reviews.