FSG REIMAGINING SOCIAL CHANGE

What Makes Evaluating Complexity Different?

WEBINAR | MARCH 11, 2015

Panelists

Hallie Preskill,
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Moderator

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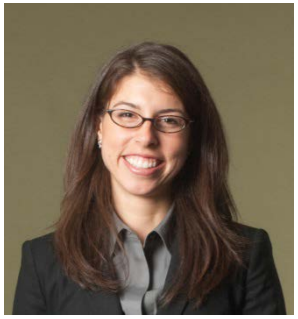

Katelyn Mack,
FSG

We hope you enjoy today's presentation

Make the presentation full screen
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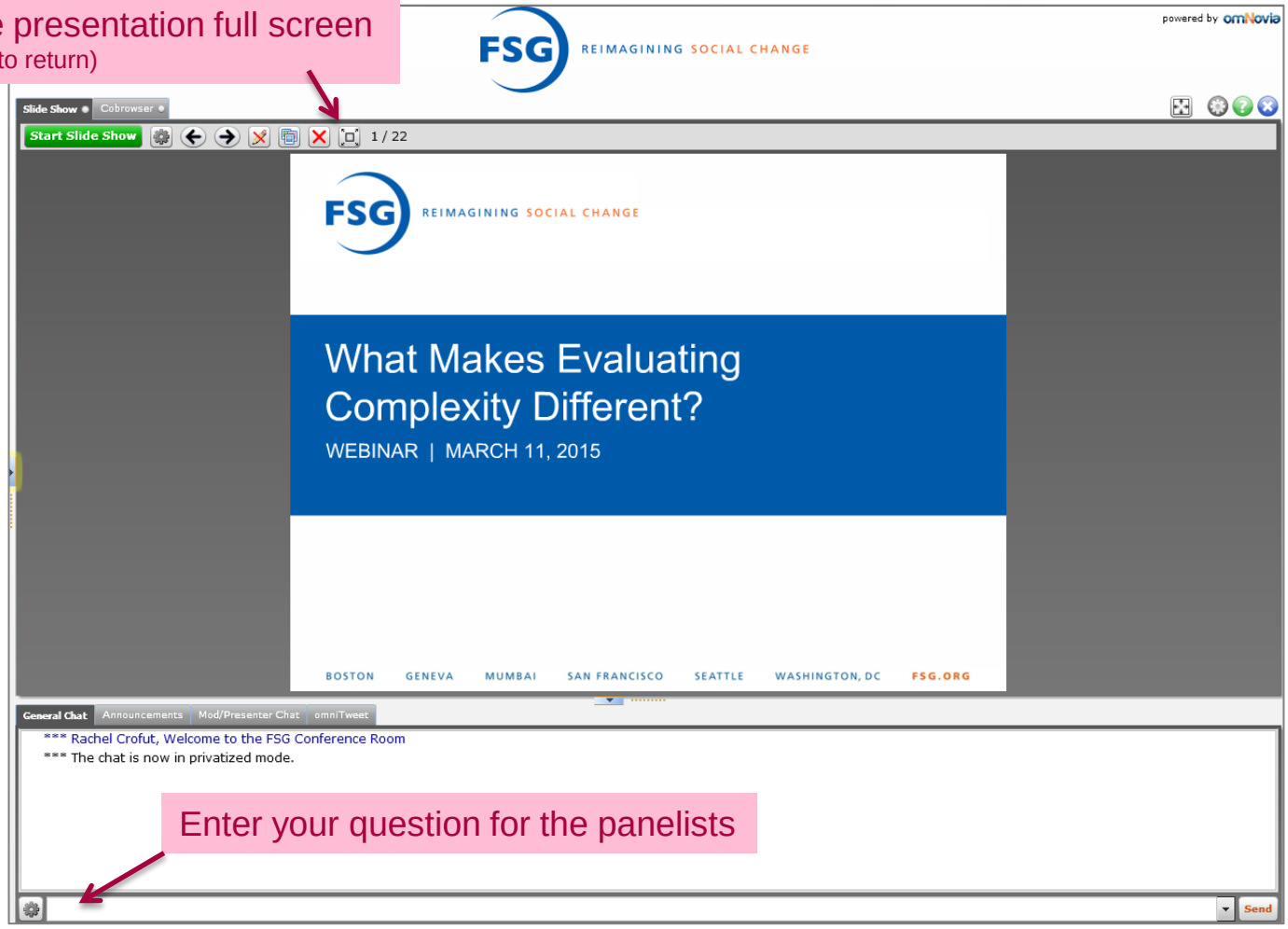

Enter your question for the panelists

Today's slides will be available after the presentation on ***fsg.org***

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Webinar agenda

1 About complexity and evaluation

2 Example: Challenge Scholars

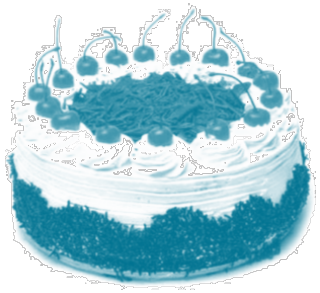
3 Example: Building Healthy Communities

Thinking about complexity

Consider an initiative or program you are supporting and ask:

- Are there many components or parts?
- Is the issue you're working on related to other issues or problems?
- Is the context continuously changing (e.g., culture, economy, politics, demographics)?
- Are relationships important to success?
- Do things change just as you've thought you've gotten a handle on them?
- Is there a straight path from implementation to outcomes – are the outcomes predictable?
- Is it taking place in multiple locations?
- Are many individuals and organizations involved? Across different sectors? Are there different definitions of success?
- Are all the outcomes known or knowable?

What we mean by “complexity”



Complex situations are characterized by **high uncertainty** and **high social conflict**…the outcomes of interventions aimed at solving problems under conditions of complexity are **unpredictable**. So many factors and variables are interacting, many of then **not only unknown but unknowable**, that there can be no recipe for success.

Michael Q. Patton, 2011, p.90

We act differently to address complex problems

Complex systems are:

- Nonlinear, always changing
- Unpredictable, never static
- Uncontrollable
- Highly connected and interdependent
- Emergent

Addressing complex problems requires:

- Pattern recognition
- Working with paradoxes
- Acting & learning at the same time
- Unique, evolving solutions
- Connections and relationships

Evaluations of complex initiatives, or within complex environments should:

1. Be **adaptive, flexible, and iterative**
2. **Describe the whole system**, including components and connections
3. **Strengthen feedback loops** and improve access to information
4. Pay attention to **context** and changes as they occur
5. Look for effective **principles of practice in action**
6. Identify **points of energy and influence**, momentum, and power
7. Focus on the nature of **relationships and interdependencies** within the system
8. Explain the **non-linear and multi-directional** relationships between the initiative and its **outcomes**
9. Watch for **patterns**, both one-off and repeating

Important to remember…

Complexity is a source of **innovation** and **adaptability** supported by **diversity** and **distributed problem solving**

We need to be more skilled at **expecting**, **seeing**, and **responding** to surprise…

Brenda Zimmerman, June 2014

Example: Challenge Scholars

Cris Kutzli,
Grand Rapids
Community
Foundation

Srik Gopal,
FSG

CHALLENGE SCHOLARS

Every dream begins with a challenge.

About the Challenge Scholars initiative

Challenge Scholars…

- Aims to increase the number of first generation, low-income students that **successfully complete a degree or high quality credential**
- Is a **partnership** between the Grand Rapids Community Foundation and Grand Rapids Public Schools, with many other stakeholders engaged
- Offers a scholarship upon graduating, as well as early supports:
  - Physical/behavioral health; human services
  - Instructional/academic support
  - College and career pathways
  - Family engagement

Guiding evaluation questions

1. How is a **college and career culture** emerging within the schools and broader West Side community?

2. How are **parents and families** being engaged as part of Challenge Scholars?

3. How are **students** becoming more college and career ready?

4. What does exemplary **teaching and learning** look like in a college and career culture?

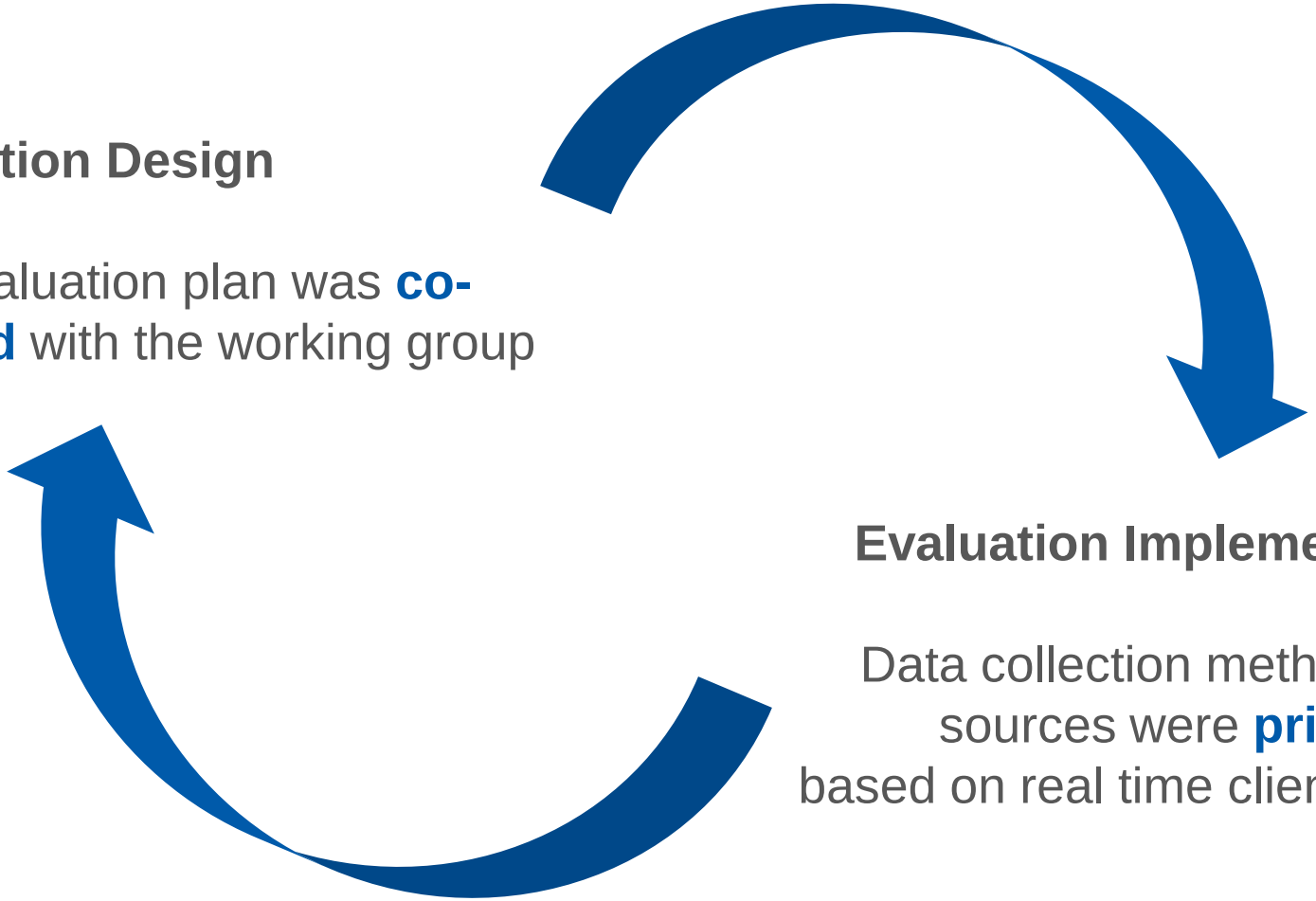
5. How are the **community, businesses, and higher education** responding to Challenge Scholars?

Be adaptive, iterative, flexible

1

Evaluation Design

The evaluation plan was **co-created** with the working group



Evaluation Implementation

Data collection methods and sources were **prioritized** based on real time client needs

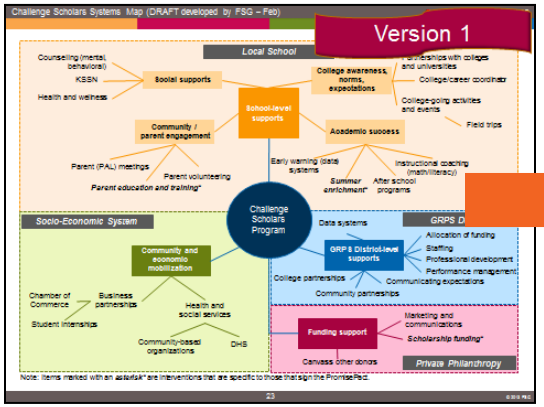
Describe the whole system, including components and connections

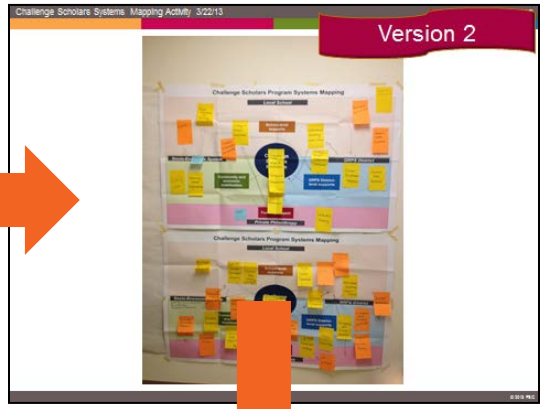
2

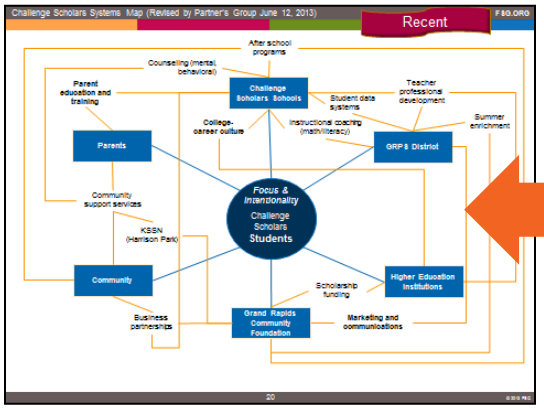
Who are the various **actors**?

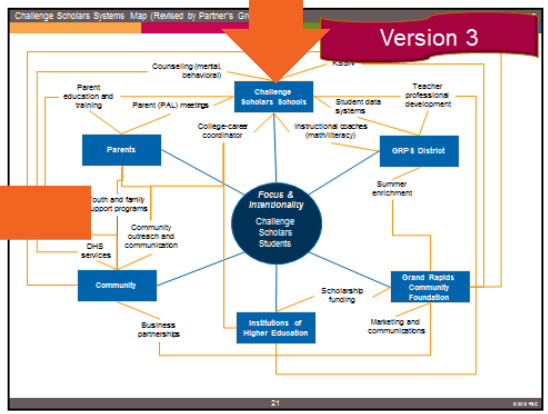
What is their **connection** to each other and to the key activities?

Systems Mapping Activity









What we learned evaluating Challenge Scholars

- **Co-create**, iterate, rinse, repeat
- Find ways to have an **“ear” to the ground**
- Build **trust** between evaluators and the program team

Example: Building Healthy Communities

Mona Jhawar, The California Endowment

Katelyn Mack, FSG

health happens here

www.calendow.org

The California Endowment (TCE) is pursuing a multi-level policy and systems change strategy

health happens here
With Prevention

health happens here
In Neighborhoods

health happens here
In Schools

Goals include:

1. Community and environmental change
2. State and local policy and systems change
3. Increased community capacity

Guiding evaluation questions

1. To what extent and in what ways are **TCE structures and processes** affecting [our] ability to effective provide oversight, management, and support? Enabling [us] to adapt and respond to [communities' needs]? Affecting alignment between Healthy Communities and Healthy California?

2. To what extent and in what ways are **Healthy Communities and Healthy California efforts aligned and working together** to proactively address a specific issue, policy, or practice related to BHC goals?

3. What factors are supporting and hindering **power building among residents and youth** to advance BHC goals of policy and systems change?

4. To what extent and in what ways are the Hubs and other collaborative structures developing **effective partnerships** and **increasing community capacity** to influence policy and systems changes?

5. What **changes are being realized** at a local and state level as a result of the BHC work?

Pay attention to context and changes as they occur

4

Sacramento BHC Youth at Gabriel Brower Rally, 2011

Santa Ana Youth and Residents at City Council Meeting

Sources: FSG. (2013) South Sacramento BHC Case Study. The California Endowment.; Santa Ana BHC.

Look for effective principles of practice in action

5

We asked and examined…

How are collaboratives in BHC communities structured in ways that contribute to policy and systems change?

Rather than…

Do local collaborative structures adhere to a certain set of criteria or requirements that TCE has laid out?

What we learned evaluating Building Healthy Communities

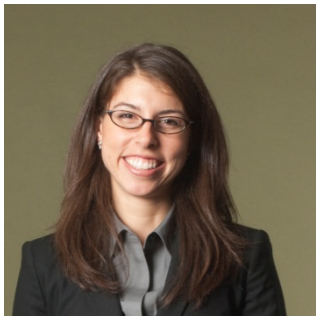
- Include **diverse voices and perspectives** in the design and implementation of the evaluation
- Take (more) **time** to analyze and test findings, looking for alternate hypotheses
- Be **proactive** in discussing and using evaluation findings

Audience Q&A

Hallie Preskill

Srik Gopal
Moderator

Katelyn Mack



Cris Kutzli

Mona Jhawar

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