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Research questions for:

**The Ford-Foundation's
Innovations in Government Programs:
Documentation, Evaluation, and Dissemination**

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The following lays out some thoughts on how one might move toward a common documentary agenda for the Innovations in Government (IIG) program. The suggestions address the question of how the Foundation and its IIG partners in the various countries can better learn lessons from the award-winning programs, and in a way that promotes the dissemination of this understanding. My observations are based on some exposure to the IIG programs,[1] on my experience in carrying out evaluation of better-performing public-sector programs, and with teaching graduate students both at MIT and in the field about how to do this kind of evaluation.

In what follows, I describe certain hurdles that face the learning of lessons from successful programs, and how they make difficult the learning of the proper lessons from such experiences. Scattered through these observations are suggestions as to how to structure evaluation questions so as to get over these hurdles. In addition, and as will become obvious below, the IIG award process itself introduces some difficulties for lesson-learning from these cases. In general, my drawing attention to the particular effect of the award process amounts to a cautionary word about evaluating these particular programs, rather than a criticism of the award process itself. In

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[1] When undertaking the PSJ mission-defining exercise through Mary McClymont's office last summer, I read some program materials on IIG and have had a few discussions with Michael Lipsky about some of its aspects. I attended one of the award workshops at the JFK school a few years ago, involving presentations by a Philippine mayor and two engineers from Belo Horizonte on a solid-waste program--and discussed the Belo Horizonte program at some length with the two engineers afterward. I have read the materials (particularly Farah *et al. 1997*) of the Fundacão Getúlio Vargas (FGV), which developed and administers the Brazil program, and one of the case studies coming out of it by Jacobi and Teixeira (1997), also on the Belo Horizonte case noted above. I also had a highly informative and stimulating long discussion about the Brazil IIG program with Peter Spink of FGV this past January in Rio. A few years ago, I spent a day in the Northeast Brazilian town of Quixadá, one of the award-winning *municípios* in Brazil's IIG program, visiting with the Mayor and Secretary of Social Action just before they won the prize for these particular programs; I subsequently had some extended conversations with them (in Fortaleza and in Cambridge) about their program after their party lost the subsequent election.

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a few instances, however, it might be prudent to modify the award process itself somewhat, so as to capture some significant innovations--or parts of them--that may now fall outside its net.

1. Not looking backward

One of the most important things to be learned from the study of innovative programs, especially if one is concerned about dissemination, is their origins and the source of the inspiration for them. Though this may seem obvious, a good part of the sequence that leads up to successful public programs is frequently not captured by evaluation research because it lies in a period that precedes the reign of the current government (or program or agency manager). In that previous period, the now-current principals in the program either were not involved, or they were involved but from somewhere else institutionally--another government agency, or outside government completely. This other context in which they were embedded is often key to understanding the sequence that leads to success--for example, the networks that were part of this other involvement, the experimentation that went on there, the mistakes that were made, and so on.

When researchers interview the principal actors in currently successful programs, the latter tend to not refer to these earlier periods. Or they vigorously dismiss the previous times as inconsequential, and the actors as wrong-headed, corrupt, or incompetent. Part of this is a genuine failure to appreciate the significance of the sequences, learnings, and momentums of that early period. Another part is political. Many of these actors have come to their position of leadership in these programs as a result of elections and/or a cascading change in the management of public agencies, which often reaches down through the second, third, and fourth levels of an agency's hierarchy. They see themselves and their program as totally different in character from the preceding government, when "nothing happened."

A final part of this blindness to the past has to do with the human spirit. Dedicated professionals, bureaucrats, managers, and politicians see their actions as important, as having an effect--at least, when they are associated with success. Such actors will not tend to attribute their successes to complex factors, events and institutions beyond their control, or learning by others from past mistakes. There are few unintended consequences or unnoticed successes in their stories. Some ways of getting around this problem in evaluation work are suggested in Section 4.

All this is not to say that innovative new leaders and managers actually wipe the slate clean when they take over, in order to create programs untainted by the name of their predecessors. Clever leaders often succeed in inventing "new" successes out of old programs, giving them new twists and a new name while, in many cases, improving them substantially. Such re-namings are not to be dismissed. To the contrary, they are worthy subjects of evaluation precisely because there is a longer history in these programs than would, at first blush, appear to be the case. Evaluators have to be particularly watchful in these cases, however, since part of the political marketing of the success story will involve an explicit denial of prior history.

Discovering these "banished" histories is not difficult, and is particularly important because it will uncover important lessons of the story. Also, the current embodiment of the program may represent significant improvements over its antecedents--lessons that also need to be learned.

2. Evaluators and the present

The blockage about the past tends to be reinforced by evaluators, who view programs in their *current* forms as the basic unit of analysis--as a kind of freeze frame. This is not surprising, given that it is a complex enough chore to understand how a program works currently.

Many of the lessons to be learned for replication lie buried in a successful program's past. The current look of a successful program will be different for various reasons. Some of the program's parts may have not worked well, and were dropped or radically modified through what is often a healthy process of learning from mistakes. Or, frequently, the mediocre pieces have *not* been dropped; they still constitute part of the present picture, lying unnoticed in the shadows cast by the glow of the successful part of the program. The danger of this glow for would-be replicators is that the "model" is taken to be *everything* that a program did, including the mediocre pieces; conversely, the model may not really be what it seems and, if relieved of its less impressive parts, may indeed be simpler and better than it seems (more on this below.) Or, finally, the program's current configuration is different from the earlier period in that only one or a few pieces of the current program existed then.

The success of the Belo Horizonte street-recyclers program (Jacobi and Teixeira 1997), for example, shows it to be less the story of an innovative public program than of a long sequence of

events involving a successful social movement *outside* government, its merging with a left political party, its first-time contesting of municipal elections, and its capturing of the municipal government (it lost the election subsequent to winning the IIG prize).

Another significant development along the way also stood outside the program itself and occurred partly before the new government's coming to power: the successful mobilization of the population against the then mayor's plan to open up bidding to select a private company to manage the collection and sorting of recyclable material. (This would have effectively removed this income-earning activity from the hands of informal recyclers.)   When the candidate of this social movement won, the city then successfully pushed for a law stipulating that the contract should go to cooperatives of existing recyclers and other workers. All this was embedded in a strong social and political commitment to distinct consultative *processes* with workers and the poor.

In this light, the actual details of the program seem almost trivial. Does this mean that one would have to replicate those same politics prior to mounting a successful street-recyclers program? Those interested in using such cases for didactic purposes, of course, cannot afford to take "yes" for an answer to this question, even though the answer to it is not clear. But learning this pre-program history will certainly contribute toward drawing a lesson that will be more helpful than describing a simple replication of the program's current parts.

Those in the JFK audience at the inspiring presentation by the two engineers from Belo Horizonte, with its impressive video accompaniment, would have had no clue that these two women had a long history of passionate involvement in the formation of the Brazilian Workers' Party preceding their coming to the new municipal government, in addition to their being accomplished engineers. Maybe it is just as well that would-be replicators would have left the Kennedy School not knowing this history and hence thinking that it was within reach to mount a program with the same characteristics. But these are questions that need to be explored in evaluation research, and should be built in it.

3. Early achievers

Some of the IIG programs seem to award innovations rather early in their successful career. The Brazil program, for example, accepts nominations for programs that are as young as one year old. This may create an unintended bias against long-maturing innovations and more sustained programs, particularly those that are better able to endure through changes in government or agency management. The bias works through the nature of the selection process--the kinds of nominations it attracts, and the way it fits into the electoral cycle. The nomination of early successes raises two additional questions about evaluation, the learning of lessons, and the eligibility criteria.

First, many successes are not sustained--partly, but not always, because of changes in government. Just as significant, the activities of most programs look substantially different after the fifth or sixth year than after the first or second year. This is because startup activities are different than those that come after, and because problems are encountered along the way that cause partial failures, changes, and lessons learned.

Second, the eligibility of early successes for the IIG program attracts potential applicants to the award program as a "marketing" tool for election campaigns--given the period of roughly four years between elections in most countries. In itself, this is good, not bad: that governments want to perform well for electoral purposes is good for citizens and for those within government who are fighting lonely battles for reform. In describing the Brazilian IIG program, in fact, the FGV noted positively the relation of the program to the electoral cycle (Farah *et al*. 1997).

The problem of the political appeal of winning awards for programs that fit within the electoral cycle is of a different nature: namely, the implicit incentive contained in the eligiblity criteria, working together with the electoral context, to nominate *new* programs, and the matching *dis*incentive to nominate programs of longer buildup and duration. (Actually, the FGV notes [*op. cit.*] that this bias was expected to result in a severe dropoff in the second round of nominations, one year after the first, because they were solicited shortly less than one year after elections [as opposed to the first round of nominations, held three-four years after elections]; but the number of applications was as strong in the second round as in the first, reflecting projects that clearly would have had to be started in the previous administration or before that.)

The young-program bias has an additional dimension. It is not merely that programs that should be ongoing may not sustain themselves through a change of government. More insidiously, new governors and mayors are usually faced with a variety of possible initiatives to choose from--

some new, some ongoing--as one of the "trademarks" of their administration. From among these possible new initiatives, that is, they often choose to support those that will "fit" within their mandate: programs that can be up and running quickly, and that can deliver conspicuous results just before the next election. (As one governor told me, with respect to infrastructure projects, "I spend the first year raising the financing, the second year setting up the project and pushing everyone mercilessly so that, by the end of the third year, I have clear results to campaign on by the next time around"). To achieve the end of showing strong results within an electoral mandate, finally, governors and mayors will often place their favored initiatives "outside the bureaucracy." This does not augur well, sometimes, for the continuation of these programs after the mandate of their backers ends.

Short-term programs are not necessarily inferior to more sustained ones. Some programs accomplish their goals within short time periods, or have self-sustaining features after they are established, even if they are neglected or fall under mediocre leadership. But a good part of sustained improvement in governance does not fit in this short-term category, and hence the award programs may be missing this particular side of things.
How can this unintended disincentive be addressed, without losing the basic character of the IIG program? Sections 4 and 5 below suggest some possible approaches.

4. Links outward and upward

Even when talking about the present, key actors in successful programs tend not to mention instances of critical support they received through links to other actors--another level of government, an outside supportive institution like a research institute or university, a professional association or other formal or informal network. This is not to mention significant changes in national legislation and rules that affect the division of fiscal and implementing responsibilities between local and supra-local levels of government.

These links and supports are often not noticed. They are taken for granted, partly because they can be inconspicuous, longstanding, and not necessarily of great magnitude financially or institutionally. Their importance can inhere in their strategic impact on a particular program at the margin. They may have helped local managers and staff to learn how to do something new, or provided help in working out problems. Although the dismissive portrayals of supra-local

institutions may be accurate in some average sense, blindness to these links and supports contributes to misreadings of the lessons to be learned from any particular case.

A common example of such blindness relates to local or regional offices of a central-government agency or semi-autonomous government institutions. Stories of sustained success in local governance often include these local or regional outposts among the cast of key actors--the regional office of a preventive-health program, agricultural extension service, national training program, or of a ministry of labor or agrarian reform.

From the vantage point of the ministry or other central unit, ironically, these supra-local pieces of local-government success stories, *also* do not receive much notice: they often represent small pieces of the activity of a large institution, perhaps in one of its remoter outposts. In addition, the local or regional office's having played an important role in a local story may reflect uncharacteristically innovative behavior, different and better than the standard of that particular agency. So if the local or regional office of a central agency is considered at all in the story, it is dismissed as an exception to the rule of that agency's behavior, with little to be learned. As a result, these experiences are not cumulated and examined for the lessons they can teach about improving the performance of *supra*-local institutions, let alone local government itself. In the meantime, central governments continue to look outside their borders and to the industrialized world for imported models of *central*-government reform.

The point is not that the IIG program misses this link to the supra-local. Rather, the program--with its local-eye study of innovations--provides an excellent opportunity for uncovering and disseminating grounded lessons about how to reform *central* and other supra-local institutions of government. This opportunity could be easily exploited in the documentation and evaluation of the awarded programs, and in the eligibility criteria.

What causes those who chronicle and analyze evaluations to miss the links to outside actors? First, that piece of the story often goes unnoted in the local telling of events precisely because it is outside local control. Second, key actors in successful local programs often hold stereotypically negative views of these helping institutions, especially if they are powerful. Often with good reason, they describe them as domineering, rigid, unhelpful, sluggish, useless--even though their particular experience with them in this program may have represented the exception to this rule.

Central and other supra-local government entities are typically the object of these dismissive comments, with local actors often using the language of David (the local actors) vs. Goliath (the center) to tell their story as a victory over central authority. Universities represent another variation on this theme--seen as out of touch, excessively wedded to out-of-date textbooks and inappropriate approaches, and simply uninterested. Formal and informal professional and personal networks, though not necessarily subject to this kind of vilification, are similarly ignored.

Just as much a challenge for evaluation research, the outside institutions that contributed to local successes may themselves be unaware of or uninterested in the impact they have had in these cases: they see what they did as only an insignificant piece in their large realm of activity, or do not perceive it at all. In either case, these crucial links and supports do not draw attention to themselves as worthy of study, and evaluators therefore tend to miss them.

For all these reasons, and because the unit of analysis in many evaluations is "the program," key lessons to be learned from these stories, having to do with what was happening *outside* the program, are lost. Conversely, when the program is replicated in places where those supports do not exist, it may mysteriously falter; or when the supports are removed, the program may suddenly fall from grace--therefore not surviving, for example, a change in administration. Finally, and most significantly, strengthening the supports from and links to outside institutions will sometimes represent an easier and more fruitful way to facilitate replication of local innovations than encouraging replications of "the program" itself.

The following section suggests a set of evaluation questions that would help ferret out some of these supra-local and other outside contributions to local innovations. In addition, the IIG programs might want to specify a parallel set of eligibility criteria for the awards. These would be directed toward government agencies at higher levels of government or to other supra-local institutions (federations of business, professional associations, public-sector worker federations) that think they deserve some credit for a handful of innovations successfully undertaken by some local governments.

To do this, of course, would seem to fly in the face of the point of the program--to award good *local* governance. It would also fly in the face of the local-eye view of what has happened, with its dismissiveness concerning supra-local and other outside actors. But this one-sided view is exactly what needs to be corrected by evaluation. Precisely because these kinds of supra-local

supports are key to improvements in local governance, and because they are rather difficult to perceive for the reasons noted above, then the suggested modification of eligibility criteria and the list of questions proposed in Section 5 below might help bring them to light.

The point of this section is not that the IIG program misses the link to the *supra*-local and other outside actors. Rather, that program--with its local entry point to the recognition and understanding of innovations--provides an excellent opportunity for uncovering and disseminating grounded lessons about how to reform or reinforce *central* and other supra-local institutions of government. This opportunity could be easily exploited in the documentation and evaluation of the awarded programs, and in the criteria of eligibility for nomination.

5. Asking the questions

There are two approaches to overcoming some of the problems of interpretation noted in the last four sections. One involves the kinds of questions asked for documentation and evaluation, and the other involves modifying the criteria for eligibility for IIG prizes. The following types of questions will elicit information that will help reveal the links to supra-local institutions and other outside help, and to important parts of the program's history:

(1) How is the program different from the way it was before? Why does it no longer do X, an activity of its early years? Why does it do Y only now, and not before? Where did you get the idea to do X? How did you know how to do Y? Had you ever done it before? Who knew how to do it? Where did he or she learn this? Where did you get managers and staff to work in this program who had the skills and the experience to know what to do? Though these questions are direct and simple, the answers to them will require a chain of follow-up questions to get to the bottom of the story. The questioner also needs to recognize the clues, the doors opened for further questioning, that lie in casual asides and dismissive mentions.

The answers to these questions will reveal another aspect of such successes: the fluidity of movement in the public sector between agencies, and of movement back and forth of professionals between the public, private, and political sectors. As a result of this fluidity, new mayors, governors, and agency managers can often quickly acquire experienced staff people from other places in the public sector--either through seconding or, less formally, by constituting inter-

agency committees with considerable authority; or, they can easily bring in outside experts as consultants or as political appointees. The contribution of this fluidity to the success of local innovations--and particularly the quick early successes--tends to remain unnoticed because of its seeming relationship to "instability" in government programs.

With respect to filling in the gaps of history and supra-local connections by modifying the eligibility criteria for IIG awards, two obvious suggestions come to mind, in addition to that proposed earlier. One is to modify the criteria, or even introduce a parallel category of awards, so as to give special consideration to innovations that: (1) build on past experience started in previous administrations, (2) reflect long stories of incremental reform, including many struggles, victories, and learnings from mistakes along the way; and/or (3) involve, in part, a process of interaction with other governments at the same level or at higher levels--and with other non-government or semi-autonomous institutions like universities, training institutes, research institutes, professional associations, etc.

Some of the nominations attracted by such modified criteria, of course, might not differ that much from the old ones, in that the programs' backers will, cleverly, now describe them differently--as having a longer history that stretches back into prior administrations. But that is exactly what is needed, at least in terms of providing the appropriate documentation material for the learning of lessons.

6. Attracting the wrong interpretation

Programs known to be successful pose particular problems for evaluators because the common understanding of what the program does and why it works is often incorrect. The "lessons" for replication may also be wrong, therefore, or at least incomplete. This means that part of the task of serious evaluation is first to ascertain exactly what is happening, independently of the current actors' descriptions of the program, as well as of its admirers. Several factors account for this vulnerability to misreadings of success.

6a. The template effect.   Evaluation researchers and other interpreters of government performance often place a pre-formed explanatory template on any particular case, based on

current vogues in thinking about what works--privatization, charging for services, performance contracting, demand-driven,, responsiveness to citizen-customers, decentralization, participation, public-private partnerships, civil society, etc. Successful programs in particular, by their very visibility, attract these "template" interpretations, which are consistent with the currently prevailing wisdoms about what causes good and bad government. The interpretations may be correct but incomplete, correct but irrelevant, or just plain wrong.

An interesting example of a template interpretation relates to the Grameen Bank (GB) in Bangladesh. Not only has it been alluded to for many years as an "NGO" success (it actually is a bank, not an NGO, with substantial support from and regulation by Bangladesh's Central Bank). But it has been viewed an example of shifting the costly burden of administrative decisionmaking and monitoring of small loans to small peer groups of borrowers themselves. Much attention has been focused on these groups, the fact that they are mainly women, and their place in and effect on the community. The groups are also seen as a flourishing of civic associationalism, credited to the action of the GB in organizing them.

It is not that this reading is necessarily wrong. But until a recent article by Jain (1996) in *World Development*, most GB admirers would have had no way of knowing that the bank was a remarkably large and classic Weberian bureaucracy, with 11,000 employees--and that its success could be attributed to its operating in a highly centralized, as well as decentralized, way. With so much attention focused on the community and its groups outside the GB, few researchers were drawn to exploring the secret of this unusual success of a large, government-size bureaucracy in a country considered to be an institutional basket case.

What about the classic problems of such bureaucracies, whose analysis has been the central theme of the last decade's political-science and economics literature--rent-seeking, slacking on the job, avoiding going out of the office and into villages? How were these and many other such problems that plague large bureaucracies avoided? This is where evaluation attention on the Grameen Bank should also have been focused.

The template effect explains this strange incompleteness. Namely, Grameen Bank *seemed* to fit the prevailing wisdom about "NGOs" caring more for the poor, operating more flexibly, and involving "the community" in their programs. And Weberian bureaucracies were certainly no longer in style in the development and public-sector reform literatures, let alone those with such large field staffs, highly regimented and thoroughly socialized to their task by management.

6b. The glow effect.   A second reason for misinterpretation of successful programs is related to the "glow" effect referred to above. Most successful programs are good at some things, but not others. The success of the part easily slips, in people's eyes, into the success of the whole. Also, since successful programs are seen as few and far between, evaluators are captivated by the challenge of explaining the success, rather than first establishing whether and where it exists. For the same reason, those who would explore the darker side of a successful program tend to be seen as, or feel like, spoilers.

But these only partial successes of well-performing programs constitute perfect laboratories for evaluation research. For example, why, under the same roof with the same cast of characters, did one part of the program work better than the other? Why, similarly, did the same program work well in one neighborhood and not the other? Why was one local office of the program better than another?

Forcing these good/bad contrasts to surface takes some doing. Key actors in such programs often will not volunteer that one part of them is less successful. But they will reveal the same information at the end of a path that starts with the question, "what are the most successful parts of your program?", or "in what neighborhoods does your program operate most successfully?" The answer to these questions must then be followed with, "why are those parts more successful than the others?"

6c. Causal explanations adrift. The third and final reason that successful programs pose particular challenges to evaluators, and for devising lessons learned, is that an early pronouncement of success takes on a life of its own, losing its moorings in the program itself and existing independently of what the program does or does not do--as in the Grameen Bank example above. Evaluators become somewhat blinded by the glow of this free-floating aura of success, and the causal explanations attached to it. This cuts off the learning of important lessons for dissemination.

Pikholz' study of a highly successful squatter upgrading program in a large black township adjacent to Johannesburg--Oukasie--is another example of such a causal explanation "adrift" from reality. The project was one of a massive program of upgrading of squatter settlements and

sites-and-services ("greenfields") projects, involving 110 such settlements. Oukasie was considered one of the most successful.

Reflective observers in and around Johannesburg and low-cost housing circles had attributed Oukasie's success (which, also, turned out be much more mixed than the story that was told) to the "peaceful" nature of that community, in stark contrast to the violence and conflict of most of the other townships with similar projects. Spending considerable time in the community, however, Pikholz found to her surprise that violence abounded in the township, at least as much as in many of the other townships. She found that the township had developed a set of mechanisms to reduce the impact of this violence on this particular program, and to arbitrate conflicts that came up within the context of the program. That realization stopped her in her tracks and turned her questioning in another direction, attempting to understand how that mechanism worked in a typically violence-ridden community, and how it had evolved. Any observer with the "peacefulness" explanation of causality in mind would not have been drawn down that path. Indeed, she might well have declared the other townships hopeless until they became less violent.

Although most successful programs are particularly vulnerable to the mistakes of interpretation noted above, antidotes are readily available. In addition to the kinds of questions suggested above (what parts worked better than others?, etc.), evaluations must turn currently popular explanations and assumptions into research *questions*: what kind of a township (Oukasie) is this, peaceful or violent? What kind of organization is this (Grameen Bank), centralized or decentralized?

Another important form of such inversion is to take presumed "causes" and turn them into "effects"--and then ask a question about what caused the cause-turned-effect. For example, many "explanations" of successful programs point to "charismatic" or "dynamic" leaders in charge of the program as the explanation for its success. But there are many programs with charismatic leaders that fail, and there are many successful programs without charismatic leaders. This leads to a question about good leadership as effect rather than cause: what was it about this particular program that drew good leadership to it? What allowed this leader to enact his vision? What institutional and political supports did he have, within and without, that made his work possible?

7. The uniqueness of success?

There is a tendency to think of successful programs as unique, and to see the task of evaluation as capturing those unique qualities for the purpose of extracting "best-practice" lessons.   In certain ways, this reduces, rather than contributes to, the possibilities of successful replication. This tendency is enhanced by the fact that some well-performing programs are noticed, or noticed first, because of excellent "marketing" by their elected leaders and managers. Far from being a disparaging comment, this speaks to the talents of these successful managers at "managing the interface," as James Q. Wilson says, between the organization and the outside environment--from which the greatest threats to organizational survival come. Hence the programs led by persons who navigate outside waters well and feel comfortable in these outside worlds--who, for example, speak English well--often receive more notice than those led by persons in more remote places or of more humble mien.

A better way to get people to relate to the story of a successful program, and to believe they can do something similar, is to show in what ways it is *like* other things, not *un*like them--to show what it shares in common with other attempts elsewhere. One wants those who listen to these accounts to think, "this is *like* something I'm already doing or have seen," even if the similarity is a loose parallel and not an exact likeness. One wants the listener to think, "this is something *I* could do," rather than, "this is too much, this is too different, this is too hard."

It is important to note that this is not an argument about which rendering--the "unique" story, or the "similar-to" story--captures the "real" truth of the story best. They are both different and valid versions of the same reality. Indeed, the "unique" story may capture the elements of the full story better, while the "similar-to" story may represent a looser accounting of the facts--organized by the logic of generic themes, rather than along a pure story line. But the "similar-to" story may be more accessible and inspiring to those who might accomplish similar things elsewhere, as well as contributing more to a body of understanding about good governance.

For every well-known successful case like those receiving IIG prizes, then, there will usually be some less conspicuous look-alikes--albeit with less externally-oriented leaders or managers, and that have drawn less or no notice. As I read the description of some of the Brazilian programs awarded by Ford's IIG program, for example, programs of a similar nature in other Brazilian cities that I knew of came to mind on more than one occasion, some of them even antedating the

awarded program. Preventive health programs are a case in point; the state of Ceará pioneered in this area, starting in 1987, but even then there were simultaneously innovative initiatives arrived at independently by other governments--both municipal and state. To point out these other variations on the theme is not to devalue the more noticed version, but to suggest a different approach to evaluating these cases and disseminating the results.

The Ceará preventive health example also illustrates how some successful programs are at least loosely linked to, and are pieces of, a larger story of the *spread* of innovation from somewhere else. In particular, the federal government in Brazil (including the process leading up to the reform of the Constitution in 1988) had been engaged in re-organizing and decentralizing public health during this period, a process that had included both carrots and sticks for municipally and state-based preventive health programs. In addition, a nationwide movement of reform-oriented public-health professionals, itself embedded in a larger social movement demanding direct elections in Brazil, provided a professional and moral context of support for local innovators in this field.

Important lessons for improving governance, then, will inhere in such larger stories. These kinds of lessons will not necessarily be captured by a study of the case, or even by adding some similar cases to the single sample, as I suggest in the following section. Though tracing the larger story may constitute a separate and larger task, it may also lead evaluation researchers back to more significant, and more broadly impacting processes and institutions, of which the analysis of any particular case represents more the accounting of effects, rather than causes.

At the least, then, it is important to understand that the focus on individual programs and local governments at certain moments, though crucial to the goals of such an award process, brings with it the tendency to view the lessons to be learned as bounded by the confines of that particular program. One needs to search for ways of going beyond those boundaries for purposes of learning, inspiration, and dissemination, without at the same time losing the distinct advantages of structuring the award program in this way. Before suggesting some ways of doing this in the following section, I close by noting a related phenomenon regarding evaluations of well-performing government programs.

Many evaluations of successful cases try to create a coherent understanding of the particular program and why it worked. The questions people ask relate to what people did and how they did it, and how the various pieces connect. They have a self-contained quality, staying within the

world of that particular program. Some of the most important questions to be asked of such cases, however, relate to how they overcame problems that are *generic* to most such programs. This means that an evaluation exercise around such a successful case should start out with an understanding of the ingredients of the many *failed* or mediocre performances of similar programs elsewhere.

This is not as great a task as it might seem, given the bias in the public administration and policy literature toward dissecting failures. In most sectors, a substantial literature of case studies exists on failure and its causes, not to mention an extensive popular wisdom on the subject. There also seems to be a remarkable consensus in the development field, as reflected in numerous case evaluations, on the cast of culprits responsible for such failures: lack of inter-agency coordination, corruption, intransigent public-sector unions, inappropriate standards insisted on by professionals (the bias toward curative over preventive health care, the bias against using paraprofessionals, etc.), excessively centralized decision-making, and so on. These culprits, though varying somewhat from one sector to another, should inform the questions asked of everyone to be interviewed on a case of success:

If inter-agency coordination characterized part of the success of this case (an example inspired by this feature in 30% of the projects nominated in the Brazil program), how can one explain such cases, given that evaluations typically point to the *failure* of inter-agency coordination as explanations for the poor performance of programs? If paraprofessionals were key to this preventive health program, then why did the usual resistance of physicians and nurses to their use not operate in this case?

Correspondingly, the commonly held assumptions about what causes success--taken from past studies or from the "template" of the day--are often not present in these stories. Indeed, one often finds lurking in the environment of these programs the very factors one is used to associating with failure--corruption, lack of coordination, etc. Again, and in order to learn correctly from these cases, a particular line of questioning is required. Given that corruption was endemic in a particular program environment, for example, what was there about it that made it less vulnerable to corruption, less attractive to rent-seekers?

8. Transcending uniqueness

One approach to breaking out of the confines of a prize-winning program for purposes of learning and dissemination is to try to match it with at least two similar cases of good performance in the same sector. With at least three cases, the more unique or idiosyncratic causal factors will move toward the background or drop out completely, and only those that hold up across the three cases will remain. The lessons drawn from such an exercise will be applicable to a broader variety of contexts.

Finding the additional cases should not be difficult. The search can be easily appended to the nomination and selection process. It can be conducted through the network of professionals that participate extensively in that process, and through universities in other parts of the country and other institutions with field staffs--such as extension services, preventive health programs, development banks, etc. The self-nomination feature of the IIG program, and the necessity of presenting one's case and articulating its strengths before a faraway board of elite questioners, must certainly result in a kind of inadvertent screening out of leaders from less sophisticated parts of the country or those who simply feel less comfortable in such settings.

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