

Proving What Works

Evaluation tools for resource-constrained ministries

Monday, October 26, 2026 · 2:30–3:20 PM CT · Virtual

Session goal: Connect governance and fundraising priorities directly to outcomes you can measure and report, using practical, low-cost tools that show donors and boards what is really working.

Angela A. Johnson, PhD, MBA

Angela A. Johnson, PhD, MBA, is Executive Director of Alliance for Greater Works, and continues to lead W3 as Founder and CEO. Angela holds a B.A.S. from Dallas Baptist University, a Certificate in Nonprofit Leadership from Southern Methodist University/Center for Nonprofit Management, an MBA, an M.A. in Women Studies, and a PhD in Multicultural Women and Gender Studies from Texas Woman's University.

ajohnson@alliancetx.org · 214-460-4851
allianceforgreaterworks.org

Nora E. Douglas, PhD

Nora E. Douglas, PhD, Founder and CEO of Systems Thought Partners, has worked in continuous quality improvement and measurement for more than 20 years with state agencies, nonprofits, public school districts, and public universities. Nora holds a BA in Sociology from The University of Texas at Arlington and an MA and PhD in Sociology from The University of Texas at Austin.

nora@systemsthoughtpartners.com · 214-557-3584
systemsthoughtpartners.com

Part 1 · Govern for impact

Fiduciary duties through an impact lens

Duty	What it means	The impact question for your board
Care	Act with the diligence and prudence of an informed, reasonable person.	Do we know whether our programs work before we approve the budget for them?
Loyalty	Put the organization's interests ahead of personal or outside interests.	Are we funding what serves the mission, or protecting a favorite program?
Obedience	Keep the organization true to its mission, governing documents, and the law.	Are we delivering what the mission promises and what restricted gifts were given for?

Specific obligations vary by state. Churches should also review denominational polity and bylaws.

Who does what: noses in, fingers out

The board governs	Staff manage
Sets mission-level priorities in the strategic plan	Designs programs that serve those priorities
Approves a short list of outcome measures	Builds the logic model and indicators
Funds evaluation in the budget, even modestly	Collects, cleans, and analyzes data
Asks questions and uses data in decisions	Reports progress in a consistent format
Evaluates the executive leader against results	Improves programs based on what they learn

The golden thread: plan backward, report forward

Mission → Strategic priority → Program → Outcome → Indicator → Report and donor story. Pick any line in your budget and trace it across. If a link is missing, the board is approving activity, not impact.

Mission	Strengthen families in our neighborhood in the name of Christ
Board priority (2026–2029)	Reduce food insecurity among families we serve
Program	Weekly food pantry plus one-on-one help applying for SNAP benefits
Outcome goal	Families we serve are more food secure
Indicator	70% of returning households report fewer days without enough food after 6 months, measured on intake and 6-month follow-up surveys
Report and donor story	Quarterly dashboard line for the board; one family's story (with permission) plus the percentage in the year-end donor letter

The board's role in fundraising and stewardship

- **Give first.** Aim for 100% board giving at a level meaningful to each member.
- **Open doors.** Introduce the ministry to people, churches, and funders in your networks.
- **Thank with results.** In Penelope Burk's donor research, 93% of donors said a thank-you call from a board member would make them likely to give again, and 84% said they would likely give more.
- **Report the return.** Share outcomes at annual meetings and in funder conversations. BoardSource has found that boards that understand programs perform better at fundraising.

A one-page board impact dashboard

Choose 5–7 measures, use the same format every quarter, and show the target beside each actual: one or two outcome indicators, a key output, donor retention, board giving participation, and one financial health measure (such as months of operating cash). Then ask: **Are we on track against our target? What are we learning? What do we need to decide or change?**

Why it matters now: Americans gave a record \$617.2 billion in 2025, but religion's share has fallen to 23% (from 62% in 1984). Only about 43% of donors gave again the next year, and donor counts fell 3.6% in 2025. Showing results is how ministries keep donor trust.

Part 2 · Measure what matters

Logic model guide

A logic model is a systematic, visual way to show how your resources, activities, and expected changes connect. It keeps staff and board working toward the same goals and strengthens the case for investment.

Column	If... then...	Guiding questions and tips
Resources	Certain resources are needed to operate your programs.	What people and expertise (human), space and supplies (physical), funding (financial), and relationships (community) do you need?
Activities	IF we have the resources, THEN we can provide these services.	What do you actually provide to participants? List direct interventions, not HR, grants management, or finance tasks.

Column	If... then...	Guiding questions and tips
Outputs	IF we implement the activities, THEN we will provide them at these levels.	What did you do, and how much? This is the “widget counting.” Leave out hiring, evaluation, data entry, CRMs.
Outcomes	IF we deliver at the desired levels, THEN participants will change.	How are participants different in knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, or status? Focus on what participants do.
Impact	IF we achieve outcomes year over year, THEN our community will look different.	If you deliver high-quality services every year, what good things happen in your community?

Columns 1–3 are internal (what the organization does). Columns 4–5 are external (how participants change).

Goals vs. indicators

Outcome goal (qualitative): a broad statement of the change you want. Example: Youth in our mentoring ministry build confidence and stay engaged in school.

Outcome indicator (quantitative): how you measure progress toward the goal. Keep your focus on the goal; metrics serve the purpose, not the other way around.

Formula: **TARGET** of **POPULATION** will reach **THRESHOLD** by **TIMELINE**, as measured by **TOOL**.

Target: the share of the population expected to change. **Threshold:** the minimum that counts as success (a score, an answer such as “agree” or “strongly agree,” or a level of attendance). **Timeline:** when you will measure.

Ministry: 75% of mentees who attend at least 10 sessions will report “agree” or “strongly agree” that they feel more confident at school by the end of the school year, on a pre-post youth survey.

Broadway Dallas: 80% of students will report a “moderate” or “large” improvement in their musical theatre skills as a result of participating in HSMTA, on the student survey administered after the awards ceremony.

Health: 75% of older adults in the Health & Wellness program will maintain or lower their blood pressure over the course of the program, as measured by weekly readings.

Process matters too

While the desired outcome is important, the process itself, with its inherent steps and choices, shapes the eventual result. Process matters to outcomes because it contributes to: consistency and repeatability, control and flexibility, learning and improvement, and motivation and engagement.

From evaluation to improvement: After-School All-Stars North Texas

With support from The Addy Foundation, ASAS North Texas and Systems Thought Partners moved through four stages: **(1)** a process and outcomes evaluation; **(2)** continuous quality improvement: linking outcomes to interventions, defining quality, setting non-negotiables, and naming the assumptions and supports staff need; **(3)** improvement sustainability: a master improvement list, training plan, accountability, and implementation logistics; and **(4)** an updated evaluation in 2026.

What funders look for: a sustainable, replicable program with clear, measurable process and outcome goals that uses data to make decisions. Talk with funders about your improvement work; it proves viability and positions them as partners. If plans change mid-year, communicate early, spell it out, and ask permission, not forgiveness.

Joint activity · From board priority to proof

Work through one program. Steps 1 and 6 are the board's bookends; steps 2–5 are the staff's build. Share your indicator in the chat.

1 Board priority <i>Which strategic plan priority does this program serve?</i>	
2 Outcome goal <i>How will participants be different? (knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, behavior, status)</i>	
3 Interventions <i>Which specific services or activities lead to that outcome, and why?</i>	
4 Indicator <i>Target ____% of (population) will reach (threshold) by (timeline), as measured by (tool).</i>	
5 Quality and support <i>What does quality look like for each intervention? What assumptions are we making about how staff deliver it? What do staff need from leadership?</i>	
6 Report and steward <i>How will the board see this (dashboard line)? How will donors hear it (story, letter, thank-you call)?</i>	

Resources

- **Logic models:** W.K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide (wkkf.issuelab.org/resource/logic-model-development-guide.html); Western Michigan University Evaluation Center, Logic Models checklist (wmich.edu)
- **Indicators:** CDC Program Evaluation, Indicators (cdc.gov/evaluation)
- **Board governance:** National Council of Nonprofits (councilofnonprofits.org); BoardSource, Leading with Intent (leadingwithintent.org)

- **Data cited:** Giving USA 2026 (Giving USA Foundation and IU Lilly Family School of Philanthropy); Fundraising Effectiveness Project Q4 2025 (AFP Foundation and GivingTuesday); P. Burk, Donor-Centered Fundraising; BoardSource, Leading with Intent (2017, 2021)