

# SHARING THE W

## DEMONSTRATE, EVALUATE, DISSEMINATE. REPEAT.

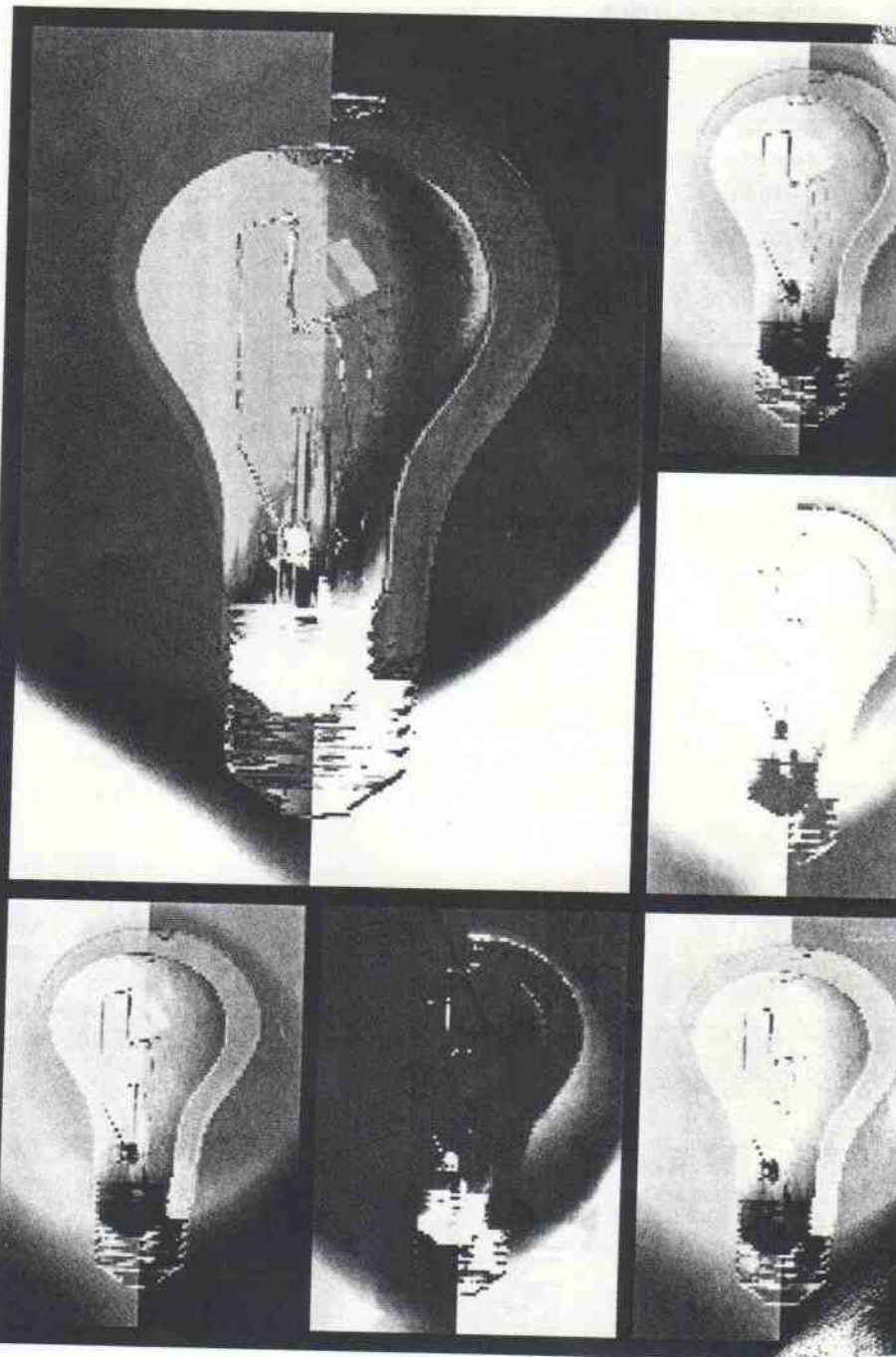
**Want to get more for your foundation's money? Learn how you and your grantees can use existing dissemination and replication strategies.**

It makes sense to look for ways to be more efficient with every grant-making dollar in tough economic times. Perhaps that explains why there's a renewed interest in promoting replication of programs that have been shown to work well, and disseminating findings from studies foundations sponsor or conduct.

The emphasis is on *renewed* because the idea of increasing the impact of grantmaking dollars in these ways is as old as philanthropy itself. Members of the Communications Network in Philanthropy have been "spreading the word about spreading the word" since the late 1970s. It's ten years now since the W.K. Kellogg Foundation published *Increasing the Impact*, a review of communica-

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**BY THOMAS E. BACKER  
AND STEVE L. KOON**



# HEALTH OF IDEAS

## MAKE KNOWN WHAT YOU KNOW

**Foundations have an opportunity to make the most out of their research on societies' problems by communicating what they've learned.**

### ESSAY

Six years ago Congressman Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) met with a small group of foundation leaders based in New York City. Deploing what he called the "band-aid approach," he challenged foundations to go after the solid facts that can illuminate social problems and stimulate the debate necessary to improve the human condition.

He emphasized, however, that generating new knowledge is not enough, that knowledge must be communicated to those who can use it—to policymakers and the public alike. Without such information, political leaders face decisions on issues they barely comprehend; special interest groups press forward, without understanding the complexities; and the public watches, cautious and confused.

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**BY MARGARET E.  
MAHONEY**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY NOAH DAN

## ESSAY

### MAKE KNOWN WHAT YOU KNOW

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Foundations, he pointed out, are free from the political constraints that bind government and can focus on getting objective data that will be useful to all sides, not only documenting issues but seeking solutions, weighing their worth, and then telling what is effective and what is not.

In the pragmatic field of business, communicating results is considered as important as research and development. For every successful new product, there is a carefully crafted strategy for making the product known to a desired audience. In engineering and bioscience, results emerging from the laboratory are routinely shared through the media, professional meetings and journals, and increasingly through new technologies.

Yet in fields such as education, health care, and social welfare, work on how to achieve effective reforms is not so routinely reported—and when it is, the likelihood is that not all the right audiences are reached. The problem seems to be both that those who perform and those who finance the work do not see clearly enough how vital it is to be creative about disseminating what is learned—beyond professional outlets and obvious interest groups.

#### **Beyond Fact Gathering**

To spur discussion of unsolved problems, facts must be generated that reveal the severity of the problem and illustrate successful attempts to address it. When a solution becomes available, people—often a great many people—have to be persuaded that the solution is in their best interest.

Perhaps communication to the public could be improved if foundations and their grantees could agree on the following guiding principles:

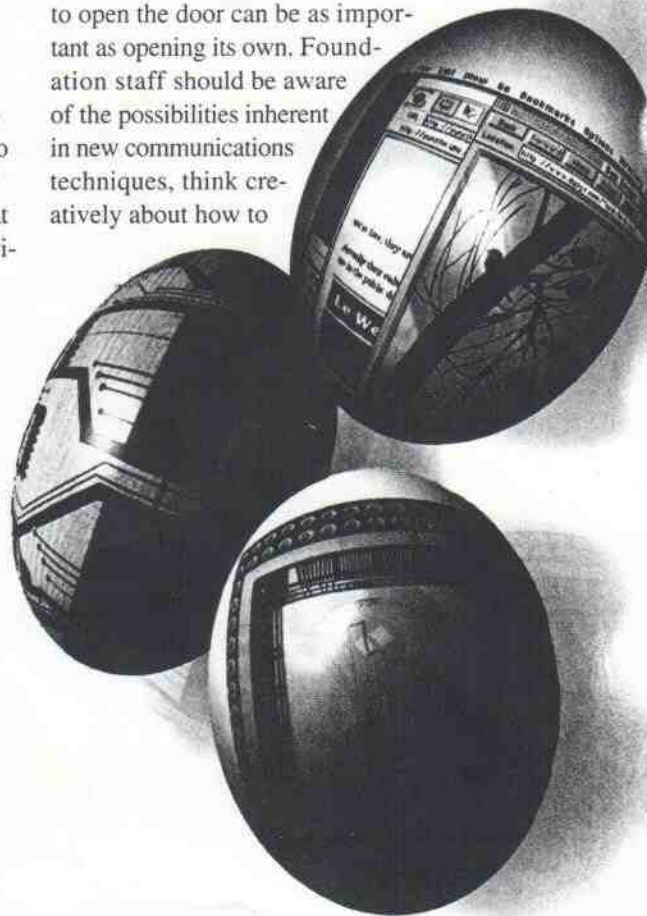
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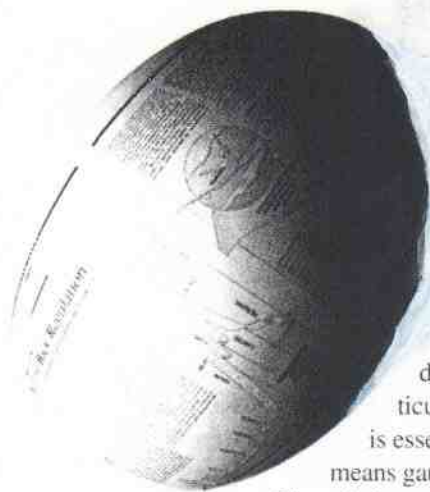
*Margaret E. Mahoney just stepped down as president of the Commonwealth Fund in New York City after 14 years in the position. Currently she's heading an initiative on child development for the fund.*

- Knowledge must be moved out if debate is to move forward.
- The audience needs to be broad to initiate interest and discussion.
- Real communication depends on the audience both receiving information and having the opportunity to exchange views.
- Information needs to be easily accessible in formats and through outlets suitable to all audience segments.
- Communications technology can potentially increase the ability to engage a variety of audiences.
- Communications is not an art form restricted to specialists.

North Carolina storyteller Donald Davis tells of how a sign, “communicating doors,” in a hotel suite once triggered an analogy for a basic lesson in communication. The occupants of both rooms must choose to open their doors before people in the rooms can communicate. Success in getting both doors to open, and stay open, promotes successful communication.

For a foundation, getting the audience to open the door can be as important as opening its own. Foundation staff should be aware of the possibilities inherent in new communications techniques, think creatively about how to





use them, and encourage grantees to do the same. Here, most of us are barely scratching the surface. Understanding particular audiences

is essential—and that means gauging their level of knowledge and addressing

the preconceptions they bring to an issue.

Responsible communication also requires that foundations ensure the integrity of what goes out. The Commonwealth Fund in New York City does this through an internal system of monitoring grants and through external evaluations of the work it supports. Grants monitoring has evolved into a crucial element in the management of Commonwealth-supported projects, and is seen as an opportunity to follow work in progress, consider further support, and identify strategies for communicating results.

Increasingly, the Commonwealth Fund is also aware of a need to share program outcomes with other foundations. Peer-to-peer exchange makes grantmaking more effective.

Foundations could share in some of the following ways:

- Learning from one another what does and doesn't work best.
- Sharing knowledge about talent and capacity, particularly in geographic or program areas that are new to a foundation.
- Providing information on and inviting participation in the development of new projects.
- Collaborating in the development of new and expensive information networks in areas of mutual interest.

Successful interaction discourages the "not invented here" syndrome that restricts the ability of foundations to work together in making positive and measurable contributions to society. It can lead to creative collaborations and improve

the possibilities for effecting the transfer of knowledge. In today's world, it is no longer just a laudable goal, but a necessary one, to work together and share what we learn, with the hope of speeding up the innovation so badly needed worldwide. This idea was expressed well in the headline of a recent *New York Times* article about a multinational company perceiving its need for ties with other companies: "The idea of the one-man band is tired: it is time to strike alliances."

Maintaining foundations' tradition of furthering positive change is becoming more difficult. Society seems more complex, the problems more difficult to decipher. Financial restraints mean government is no longer as active an agent in change as it once was. These facts argue for the

need to think afresh—and generate persuasive evidence to propose solutions to societal problems.

Foundations must learn to navigate the information highway if they are to make the most of their resources and realize their potential for advancing the common good. Advertising our wares is not the point. It is a matter of better fulfilling our public role by providing information that may help guide decisions that advance the well-being of our country.

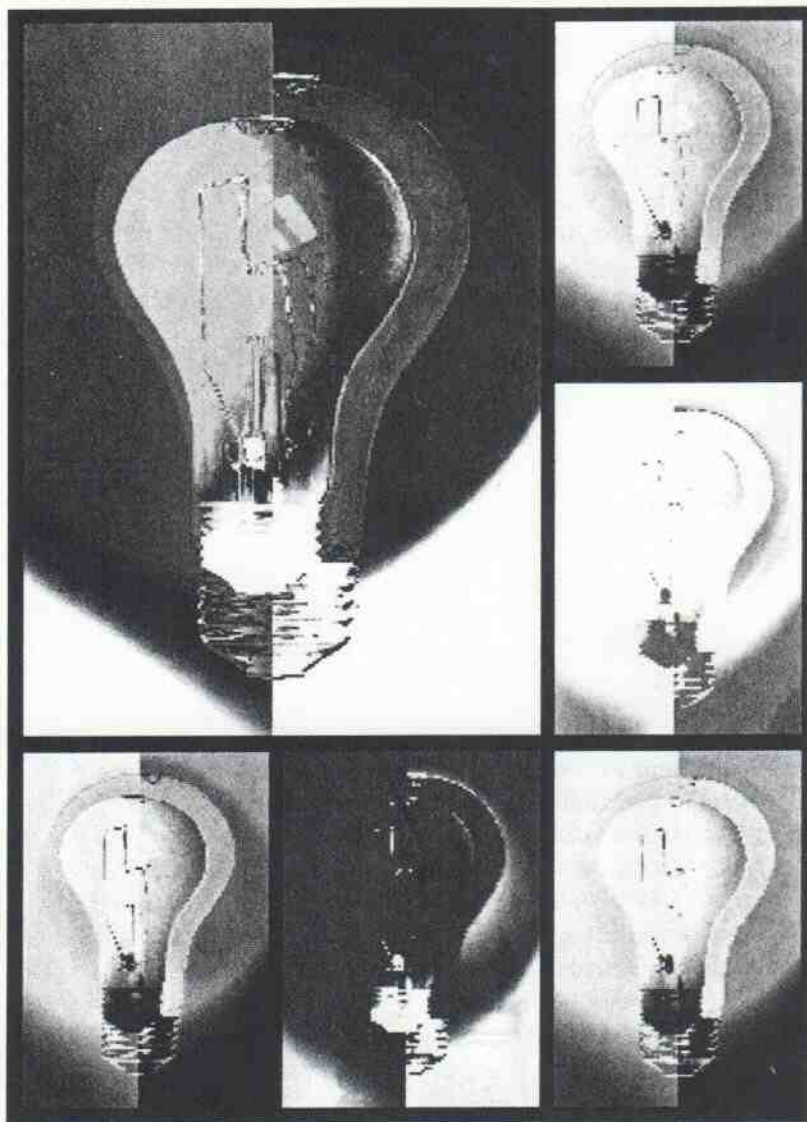
The message from Charles Rangel rang clear six years ago. It still rings clear today. Foundations have a special vantage point and a special role—although that role is not universally well understood. As foundations become more skillful at communicating with the public, with policy-makers, and with one another, their usefulness to society will be more widely appreciated. ■

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*Essay is a feature open to anyone whose ideas, proposals or opinions, no matter how controversial, are based on a reasonable knowledge of the philanthropic/nonprofit sector and may, in the judgment of the editors, generate thought and debate that can lead to constructive action. The ideas expressed in Essay do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or the Council on Foundations.*

# SHARING THE WEALTH OF IDEAS

## DEMONSTRATE, EVALUATE, DISSEMINATE. REPEAT.



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tion approaches, yet the book's main point—"if a funded activity helps people in one community, why not share it with others facing similar problems?"—still holds up today. As Victoria Weisfeld and Frank Karel of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation wrote at the beginning of their chapter: "A foundation-supported program whose lessons are never detailed and communicated, whose successes are never duplicated,

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*Thomas E. Backer, Ph.D., is president of the Human Interaction Research Institute in Los Angeles. Steve L. Koon is dissemination specialist at the Ewing M. Kauffman Foundation in Kansas City, Missouri.*

whose failures are never published as a cautionary tale—is this program's impact as equivocal as the unwitnessed crashing of the philosopher's tree?"

What's clearly changed since those words were written is the expectation that the federal government will pick up successful model programs and roll out large-scale replication. Some foundations are now playing leading roles in funding the replication of programs they've tested themselves, such as the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (supporting the Homebuilders family preservation program), the Pew Charitable Trusts and others (funding the STEP program for disadvantaged youth). Federal support for information dissemination also has decreased, so foundations wanting to spread the word about useful results from grantmaking have to take leadership roles here, too.

In the 1990s, though, it's more realistic to expect that collaborative funding from a number of sources will be needed—and that, in turn, calls for more and better efforts to share information. (See "Make Known What You Know," p. 29.) It also calls for creative and strategic approaches to dissemination and replication; sometimes blending foundation communication, public policy and evaluation activities.

The kind of information that's ripe for dissemination in many cases is found in grant reports or studies that are read only by a handful of people before being shelved. To counter that tendency, the Ford Foundation, for example, publishes a quarterly newsletter that describes results from funded programs in a half dozen articles in each issue. Its 25,000 readers include grantees, foundations, government libraries, press, staff, consultants and individuals around the world. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation regularly offers funding to grantees for the purpose of disseminating project results themselves.

Meanwhile, interest continues to grow: a national conference in September 1993 on replication strategies for foundations, funded by the Charles Stewart Mott and David and Lucile Packard foundations and convened by the California Association of Nonprofits, brought together 75 funders, academics and nonprofit leaders in Washington, D.C. That same year Pew and other foundations sponsored the creation of Replication and Program Services, a nonprofit agency that

offers technical assistance on replication. There is international activity as well—the Soros Foundations are promoting replication of the American Head Start program in Eastern Europe.

The stories of three foundations and how they carry out their commitment to disseminating findings strategically to those who can make good use of them illustrate ways to move from concept to action. These approaches are based in behavioral and management sciences research and are aimed at working through the usual resistances and anxieties felt by potential adopters.

### Setting Up A Dissemination Function

The Ewing M. Kauffman Foundation of Kansas City focuses on youth development and entrepreneurial leadership. It is an operating foundation, but it is moving toward more emphasis on grant-

making. Over the last three years, the foundation has explored methods for promoting dissemination of programs it developed as well as methods for including dissemination and utilization activities in its grantmaking program.

Exploration took the form of a strategic planning study on dissemination and utilization, with the goal of determining whether these methods could contribute to the foundation's mission to research and identify the unfulfilled needs of society and develop, implement and/or fund breakthrough solutions that have a lasting impact. A staff task force organized this effort, concluding with two "think-tank" style conferences on the subject.

The task force's report to the foundation's board of directors led to some policy decisions. A dissemination specialist was recruited from within the foundation to head up the new program, housed within Kauffman's communications office. The foundation has identified dissemination as one of its five "basic tools of the trade," along with demonstration, evaluation, advocacy and capacity building. And recently the foundation hired a full-time public affairs associate, who will concentrate on building bridges between national leaders interested in public policy on youth development and entrepreneurial education.

### Build It In at the Beginning

Only three years old, the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation is a small corporate foundation that funds innovative service programs for young people with disabilities. The foundation's use of dissemination begins in the grant application guidelines, which describe its importance to potential grantees. Technical assistance on dissemination is offered to applicants, and plans for it are given careful consideration by foundation staff and board members during proposal review. Supplemental dissemination grants may be offered to spread the word on worthwhile innovations coming from completed projects. For example, Mitsubishi awarded a grant to Partners for Youth with Disabilities in Boston for a program to help youth develop social and vocational skills through mentorships with adults with similar disabilities. This was followed by a grant to assist in replicating the program at other sites. Another grant awarded to the Special Education Technol-

### Coming to the Table Around Going to Scale

Since fall 1993 a small working group has been studying the "right size" for a nonprofit enterprise that has demonstrated success in meeting its goals.

It came together under the leadership of Rockefeller Foundation President Peter Goldmark and Outward Bound President Allen Grossman, concentrating on foundations' need to identify which programs should be supported for "scaling up," and nonprofits' need to know when it is prudent to participate in such efforts.

Replication, marketing, dissemination, quality control, research and development, management and leadership all play a role in this process.

Members of the working group now serve as advisors to a two-year project supported by several foundations, quartered at The Philanthropic Initiative in Boston (Bill Ryan, project director, 617/722-0303). This project will study similar activities in the private sector, such as franchising, and will develop a set of case studies.

## What Do You Mean By That?

The words *dissemination* and *replication* mean different things to different people. For example, the terms "technology transfer" and "knowledge utilization" are often used interchangeably with dissemination. To scientists, replication means to reproduce or duplicate precisely—to clone. When referring to nonprofit programs, though, those words are not synonymous, as it's understood that model programs will be adapted to fit new environments. How much adaptation should be encouraged is controversial, since too much alteration might reduce a program's effectiveness.

For the purpose of this article, dissemination is used to mean systematic efforts to promote wider spread of information about innovations—not just programs, but research findings or new technologies as well. The aim is not to get the information out, but to get innovations *used*. This may require technical assistance as well to overcome psychological or financial barriers to change. And replication, as used here, refers to strategies by which successful programs are transferred from their original settings into new ones.

ogy Resource Center at Boston's Emmanuel College includes dissemination of the project's results through a national computer bulletin board.

Mitsubishi Executive Director Rayna Aylward considers her experience an example of what can be done even with limited grantmaking (about \$500,000 per year) and a small staff of just two people. Says Aylward, "We were somewhat apprehensive that grantees would groan about the extra effort involved in the dissemination requirement. But the feedback we've received—and more important, the interconnecting that is taking place among some of the organizations—has been hugely encouraging."

### Promoting Best Practices

The Better Homes Fund is a six-year-old public charity concerned with services to homeless families and children. It was created by the editor of *Better Homes and Gardens*, and Harvard psychiatrist Ellen Bassuk, who is now the fund's president. The foundation combines \$1 million in

annual grantmaking to homeless service programs with research, evaluation and technical assistance activities. It has created a range of approaches both to fundraising and to dissemination of service applications and model programs.

The fund designs and develops training products that incorporate the best of what is known about services for homeless families. Then, to promote replication of service programs that have the most potential for impact, it markets these products nationwide. For example, the fund offers to service providers a 15-module multimedia technical assistance package, with a supplemental manual on program design.

The fund makes good use of its relationship with *Better Homes and Gardens*, which has a world circulation of 8 million and a readership of more than 34 million. Regular magazine articles describe and illustrate the fund's latest efforts, and ask for contributions (the fund is not a corporate foundation and does not receive financial support from the magazine). ■

## RESOURCES

Several nonprofit organizations, such as Replication and Program Services in Philadelphia (215/568-0399), Innovation Network in Washington, D.C. (202/728-0727), and the Human Interaction Research Institute in Los Angeles (310/479-3028) offer dissemination and replication technical assistance to government, nonprofits and foundations. Below is a sampling of publications on the topic.

*Toward Lasting Impact: Dissemination and Utilization Strategies for Philan-*

*thropy*, by Thomas E. Backer. Ewing M. Kauffman Foundation, Kansas City. To be published Summer 1995. An overview for foundation staff, based on the latest behavioral science research, of approaches to dissemination and utilization.

*Building from Strength: Replication as a Strategy for Expanding Social Programs That Work*. Replication and Program Services, Philadelphia. 1993. A detailed review of eight programs, with research on what makes for successful replication.

One finding: a champion is essential.

*Effective Strategies for Increasing Social Program Replication/Adaptation*, National Association of Social Workers, Washington, D.C. 1993. A review of the literature and summary of a NASW "Strengthening Families Through International Innovations Transfer" seminar.

"Knowledge Utilization Activities of Foundations Supporting Health Research and Demonstrations," by Thomas E. Backer and Julie Shaperman, Human Interac-

tion Research Institute, Los Angeles. 1993. Article in *Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, Utilization*, Vol. 14(2), pages 59-67. Reports on a study of dissemination activities of ten foundations.

*Replication: Sowing Seeds of Hope*, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Flint, Michigan. 1990. A special section of the foundation's 1990 annual report identifies conditions conducive to replication, and reviews four variations: cookie-cutter, adaptive, concept dissemination and networking.