The Nonprofit Nerd (January 2019)

The Nonprofit Institute at Portland State University

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Starting Fall term 2019, Government offers the Certificate in Tribal Relations. This program is designed to provide training in partnerships with tribal communities. It includes practice considerations for working with Native communities. And, if your agency engages in research with individuals experiencing inequities often tied to systemic racism.

For perspectives on education, “Weaving the Web” with Native youth offers an array of perspectives from experts. The certificate can expand your experiences in research with Native or Indigenous communities. Culturally-responsive evaluation can be a powerful tool to bring those four quadrants into alignment, into balance, and hopefully it’s a harmony.

In your experience, how does historical and ongoing trauma impact program evaluation and/or research? And, if your community engages in research, what types of data or information do you gather regularly on programs? What methods of data and analysis do you use? What’s the shifting environment and is the program keeping up with the needs of the community?

We've done some good writing on this issue. We define resiliency as a balance across that four-quadrant circle. Resiliency is not a linear process. Looking for one thing that brings about resilience when in fact it’s not the case. We've seen that if we engage in research that is rooted in research that we did 30 years ago, we can bring back to current issues. In the late 1980s, we conducted an exploratory study in Oregon, Washington and Idaho and identified that there weren't any services for Native American children and families. They were experiencing mental health challenges, severe emotional disturbances, and no place to get any services or help. In the late 1990s, there was an initiative to develop the infrastructure of the organization and you can think of that as everything you can put on paper. The body of knowledge can be quite rich. What we’ve found is that by using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) framework, you're going to be using information that's relevant to what's important to your community. Building that capacity is so important, because nothing in that circle can change without everything being impacted. But, if you can build that capacity, you can see that there is a measurable outcome. Again, every project is unique. What the people value and what's important to them, it's much easier to reflect their thinking than your thinking when it comes to evaluation when an IRB is not needed or not appropriate in that situation. What we find is that by using a CBPR perspective. Research that takes information and doesn’t bring back value to the community is a misuse of research. And, if we do both original research as well as program evaluation, what we’re able to do is to bring that back to the community and have that community contribute to the research. What we’ve found is that that’s a much more powerful tool.

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