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## The Nonprofit Nerd (June 2019)

The Nonprofit Institute at Portland State University

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# THE NONPROFIT NERD

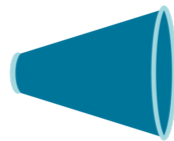
Research you can use.

## This month's topic is evaluation with immigrant communities

For years, immigration and immigrant communities have been at the center of a national and international conversation about nationhood, global dynamics, and human rights. Despite the enormity of this complex conversation, the below interview with Nelda Reyes, principal at AB Cultural Drivers, highlights the possibilities evaluators and researchers have working with these populations.

We hope that through reading this edition, our readers feel prepared to "be of service," as Nelda puts it, when researching or evaluating with diverse and multi-dimensional immigrant communities.

*Let the resources and insights we share in The Nonprofit Nerd inspire you to get your nerd on and find innovative ways to make research and data work for you and your nonprofit!*



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The Nonprofit Institute is partnering with [WVDO](#) for the popular Professional Certificate in Nonprofit Program Evaluation. Info Sessions coming up in July and August. Stay tuned for details!

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## NERDS AT WORK

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Sharing her expertise on culturally-responsive evaluation with immigrant communities is Nelda Reyes, Principal at AB Cultural Drivers.

You can read more about [Nelda Reyes' approach and her consulting agency AB Cultural Drivers](#) by perusing their website and reading some of [their case studies](#).

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**Tell us about the mission and purpose of your consulting agency AB Cultural Drivers.**

The vision [is to] be able to advocate for programs, resources, materials that would advance the communities that we work for ... through the tool of research and evaluation.

*We're using the tool of research and evaluation as a vehicle for social justice and advocacy for the needs of diverse communities in our country and region.*

**Please expand a bit on the tool of research & evaluation and how that advances communities.**

Let's talk about evaluation for example. We usually come in or our work is needed when we are developing programs, when we are prototyping programs, or when we are reporting on the impact [of] the program .... In that sense it actually becomes something that can [assist in] developing a program. [Something] that can support them to actually design a program that actually respond[s] to the needs of the community.

*Our commitment is really getting to know these communities well. Being able through tools of that evaluation or any other kind of research, to find the best way to listen to these communities, and to understand what they need.*

I feel it's part of advocacy because there is this part that is often left out, which is the strengths of the community, what they already come with, the resilience that they have. The cultural, the social assets they bring are very important to highlight in order to develop something for them. There is still a tendency to see this as a service to them, but it shouldn't be a service from a perspective of knowing better, or denying, or not recognizing the values that these communities have.

**You specialize in evaluation with organizations that are culturally-specific for Latinx communities. What is unique about these organizations/communities and what is unique about evaluating culturally-specific programs?**

.... I've been around the state [to] many many places and obviously my initial instinct was always to look for

those that would identify or that I would identify with them.

*In the course of doing the work, I have also grown in that sense, as a person and as a professional, and I've noticed given my own background, which is very diverse, and by doing this work that I started to make more personal connections to other communities.*

Just to give you an idea: part of my maternal side is Lebanese (or Middle Eastern) but also West African, and my father's side is Spanish but also Native from Mexico .... I had the privilege to live with a great great grandmother, so at some point there were five generations of us alive and that allowed me to be in contact with these buckets of cultural background .... Coming here to the U.S. 14 years ago, [I] started doing this work and I [made] immediate connections with the Latino/Latinx community. I built a lot of the knowledge around that. I then recognized that I was feeling connected to other communities.

I'm particularly interested going into the future, and actually tracking down and doing more work trying to support other organizations along their journey. Immigrants and refugees coming to this country usually have different "touching points" of service. And the experience and resources they get along the way, I think, can greatly influence their future possibilities for thriving. What we're doing is supporting those that are serving [these communities] locally... [with]in the state, to serve them better, which is great.

*But, throughout the years of this work, I've realized that there is also a systemic change that needs to happen in our field of work and institutions ...*

There's all this work that needs to happen, but these people have a story and a life, they have everything that they need to deal with. And I'm using evaluation in this tactical way to support their life while they're here. What I'm studying right now is how can I use these tools that I have to actually support them to better arrive to the country. What can I do to actually do some work and support the organizations that support them before getting to the country? What can we do?

.... Maybe starting to understand and work with organizations that have that alignment and the vision that I have. [The organizations] that catch these people, these communities, or serve these communities before [coming to this country], and in that way being able to support their journey. In that sense, a little bit of right now is that excitement and that understanding of that journey, the path they follow, and the international forces that are at play. And then how those forces interact with U.S. national forces in a way to influence how they come, how they're received, how they go through the path of adapting to the new society, and what could be done to support them before.

**You say it's not so much working with a specific community, but it's illuminating the journey as a whole and how to make the journey smoother. Is looking at these larger social problems and looking for solutions bigger than research and evaluation?**

Yes, so there's a service, or [that's] how I call it. It's like building to understand what the journey is and my commitment is a service to these communities—knowing what is the best way that we can help them and support them as they go through this journey. And with that recognition then using this tool that I have, as a professional, to support that. The commitment is [supporting] them, and the commitment is to the people who serve them.

*Through the tool that I have as a professional I can help illuminate the people who are serving them, so then they can be more successful, and they can be more impactful...*

There is this beautiful and enormous care and true love to people that I think all of these organizations, all of these professionals, and executive directors have. What is happening is that we are failing to understand each other. We're failing for these organizations to understand each other. It's not a lack of love. I see that as not a lack of interest usually (although it happens, and we're still dealing with a lot of issues there). But you know there is an enormous amount of love, intention, and really desire for people to be thriving, healthy, and happy here.

*I think some of the kind of missing things is actually being able to understand others' experiences and our own. [I] totally see evaluation and research as a very valuable tool to do that, to support*

*communication, to be a bridge and bridging understanding.*

And then my work as a researcher and evaluator is bringing this information.... I have to be super mindful about how I present this information and then how I bridge, so that knowledge [or] that understanding can be broadened and it can illuminate the services that they provide. That's how I see my work.

**What kind of learning would you recommend to other people interested in immigrant communities? What are some resources you have used to inform or guide your work?**

... One thing I would recommend is community service. And by that, [I mean] the bigger definition of philanthropy, which is give—give time, give expertise, or give money. And, if you're particularly interested in one community, do that for them, and this will take you to where this community is through a service door. Come with the idea of learning and make an offering, which is what you are doing by donating your time, or volunteering, or giving money.

*Give an offering and then enter through the door with your eyes and everything willing to learn. Not to teach, to learn....*

If you're in a position already of service—where you're already in a nonprofit or you are a grantmaker, or you are in government, or in office—and you're being paid for it, [then] the offering and the way you approach coming in is your own way. [It's] very important to understand that it doesn't [entirely] matter if you represent government, or philanthropy, or nonprofit. The one who is dipping your feet is you, and you need to know why you're there, how you are getting into that community, and how you're relating to that community ....

I say: Why are you here? Why are you putting your energy here? What are the values? What is the vision? What is the passion that you have to be here? And all of those can differ enormously from one person to another. You're presenting yourself [and] who you are to these communities. If you're not completely authentic [or] if you don't come with humility, people [can] read that [and] they would know you're there to check a box, because you need to check a box .... That's not the way to build real trust. Through being authentic, through being mindful of how to enter yourself as a person, then you can build some trust to actually being able to work with a community.

*.... You cannot jump the step of building trust to actually having an authentic relationship, and being able to do the kind of work that we do with the community.*

Those are two very important things. And I think connected to that is building the capabilities of people who are doing research and evaluation in a personal and professional way, so that authenticity and mindfulness is there. Some way to support each other for this to be at a higher level so we can do better work within these communities.

*Know someone you'd like to see featured in the Nonprofit Nerd? [Tell us](#) who and why!*



## RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

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There are a myriad of approaches and philosophies for evaluating and researching with immigrant communities. If you work with Latino/a/x communities, it's possible that you work with immigrant communities. We recommend checking out [the American Evaluation Association \(AEA\) Latino/a resources](#) for some helpful content and case examples on working with these diverse communities. The AEA also offers the [Latinx Responsive Evaluation Discourse Topical Interest Group \(TIG\)](#) that offers potential networking opportunities with other evaluators.

There are plenty of examples of evaluations conducted with immigrant communities:

- For a local example, [Oregon State and 4-H published this report](#) on a culturally-responsive Latino outreach program.
- [The Canadian government publishes evaluation reports](#) associated with their immigrant/refugee programs that are comprehensive and informative.
- This [published article reports on an evaluation](#) conducted for the Houston School District for a program with new immigrants.

We also found some additional references that may help evaluators working with immigrant communities learn from others, including a [Migrant Education Program Evaluation Toolkit](#). Finally, for those interested in networking with other evaluators across the work, the [International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation](#) has some great information and resources.



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