7-2019

The Nonprofit Nerd (July 2019)

The Nonprofit Institute at Portland State University

THE NONPROFIT NERD

Research you can use.

This month's topic is learning program evaluation

This month we are excited to share the perspective and experience of a recent certificate recipient from The Nonprofit Institute's Professional Certificate in Nonprofit Program Evaluation, a partnership with WVDO.

We celebrate the accomplishments of this year's cohort, including our interviewee Barrett Ebright Karnes, for completing the Professional Certificate in Nonprofit Program Evaluation. This year's participants explored a wide range of questions and circumstances related to program evaluation and their organizations. Thanks to the diversity of the nonprofit sector represented in the cohort, we saw how program evaluation applied across many different service domains—such as arts, tourism, youth development and education, employment, health, and housing. In this issue, we garner some wisdom collected from doing program evaluation, with some attention to housing programs.

Many of us doing evaluation with our own organizations for the first time often encounter high expectations that can quickly become overwhelming. An important thing to remember when doing evaluations is that starting small is perfectly okay. Even small steps (or efforts) to evaluate your program can lead the way to valuable insights about programs. Also, there is always plenty of learning through evaluation. For all evaluators, from novice to expert, learning from others doing evaluation is critical for continuous growth. Email us at npi@pdx.edu with your own learning experience or if you would like to share your insights in a *Nonprofit Nerd* interview.

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!

Time is running out to take advantage of the early bird discount for The Nonprofit Institute's Professional Certificate in Nonprofit Program Evaluation, **a partnership with** WVDO. Apply by July 31 **and catch this deal before it's too late.**

Get a sneak peek of the program's personalized instruction and mentorship. We are offering two opportunities to learn more in-person about the Professional Certificate in Nonprofit Program Evaluation:

Info Session 1
Wednesday, July 24 from 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.
PSU Urban Center, Room 710 (7th Floor)
506 SW Mill Street, Portland, Oregon 97201

Info Session 2
Wednesday, August 14 from 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.
PSU Urban Center, Room 710 (7th Floor)
506 SW Mill Street, Portland, Oregon 97201

RSVP encouraged, but not required. **Excited to see you there!**

Apply Today!

NERDS AT WORK

This month we feature an interview with Barrett Ebright Karnes who recently received the Professional Certificate in Nonprofit Program Evaluation from the 2018-2019 cohort. Barrett has experience in nonprofit and government housing agencies and shares her insights on completing a program evaluation and learning with The Nonprofit Institute.

Please tell us about your current role and your role as an evaluator. What was the purpose of the evaluation?

I currently work at City of Portland's Housing Bureau as a Housing Program Coordinator and have worked there for about two and a half years.

Prior to working at the Housing Bureau, I worked at REACH CDC for eight years, first as a program coordinator and later as a program manager for their community builders home repair program for seniors. For this class, I decided to volunteer with REACH to complete an evaluation with them in a program area—youth financial education—that was new to me and that I was interested to learn more about. I was hoping to build on past training and my professional experience with more informal evaluation projects.

Congratulations on finishing the Professional Certificate in Nonprofit Program Evaluation this spring! Now that you've been through NPI's training, what would you tell others who are thinking about doing an evaluation in their organizations? Is it worth the time? Why or why not?

The Nonprofit Program Evaluation Certificate Program is definitely worth the time.

From my nonprofit experience, many organizations unfortunately don't often have the resources to hire an external evaluator. This program helps increase internal capacity of nonprofit organizations to be able to complete program evaluation themselves and sparks curiosity within program staff to ask questions and examine program outcomes using a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) lens.

What motivated you to join the program or want to learn about doing evaluations?

I have always enjoyed the informal program evaluation projects (I love logic models!) that I have participated in as a grant writer and program manager at nonprofits, and wanted to gain professional skills in this area. I was particularly interested in this program because of the DEI focus. I was also excited about the opportunity to learn about a new program area (youth financial education) while partnering with former colleagues to help them look at ways to increase access to programming for diverse youth residents.

You dug into some really interesting evaluation questions for your own organization this year. Did anything surprise you along the way? Any "aha!" moments?

I think the biggest "aha!" moment was related to organizational learning that occurred through the evaluation process.

This project gave the program staff time and space to ask questions, explore new ideas, and learn new skills that they can use for further evaluation.

For your evaluation, you collaborated with other staff at the organization for your data collection. How did you prepare staff for data collection? What did you learn from this process?

We designed the surveys and interview questions together, and I provided them with an interview guide. In

addition, we translated the surveys to the languages spoken by the residents and hired an interpreter for one of the interviews.

What challenges did you experience with your evaluation project and what did you learn from it?

The residents we had hoped to survey and interview proved to be harder to engage than we had originally thought they would be. We learned that for future evaluation it's important to budget more time for data collection.

In addition, we learned it worked well having a staff person residents knew and trusted reach out to them one-on-one to get their participation.

What advice would you give to others who are new to doing program evaluation?

Spend quality time upfront determining your research questions and the source of data you'll need to answer them. There are so many questions your stakeholders will want you to answer and it's important to keep the questions focused and realistic based on the timeline for the project.

Determine ahead of time the path to gathering the data needed to answer your research questions, the resources it will require, and set a realistic timeline for data collection.

What's next for you? How do you plan on using your evaluation skills in the future? What are some tools or lessons that you are taking away from the Professional Certificate in Nonprofit Program Evaluation?

As a program coordinator for a local government agency I will use the skills I gained through this program to evaluate programs from a funder perspective. I also hope to share key program evaluation learnings with my colleagues and the nonprofits we fund—especially the focus on evaluation using a DEI lens.

Know someone you'd like to see featured in the Nonprofit Nerd? Tell us who and why!

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Housing programs have many well-developed evaluation practices, including several handy toolkits. For both housing and non-housing programs, these resources can provide helpful insights in determining how to approach evaluating your own unique programs.

Government agencies offer a few evaluation guides and toolkits, including:

- HUD's Housing First Assessment tool for Continuum of Care services and providers
- USAID offers an evaluation toolkit designed for USAID members that offers templates and procedures for evaluation
- SAMHSA provides evaluation guidelines as part of their Permanent Supportive Housing model, as well as offering evaluation guides for their other evidence-based practice
- Several government agencies and funders are proposing housing and health models and programs, and the National Institutes of Health offer some evaluation tools and tips for health programs

One toolkit often referenced by governmental agencies is the Rapid Re-Housing Performance Evaluation and Improvement Toolkit developed by the National Alliance to End Homelessness. This toolkit is comprehensive and provides some guidance on identifying benchmarks.

There are a multitude of example evaluations on housing programs. The What Works for Health website offers tools and guidance on health and housing program evaluation. The Beyond Shelter program offers an insightful example of a Housing First evaluation, and health and housing is also highlighted in this report from the Urban Institute. And, the Learning Together report speaks generally to demonstrating community impact through evaluation.

Know someone or something you'd like to see featured in the Nonprofit Nerd? Tell us who, what and why!

INSTITUTE NEWS

Learn more about PSU's Master's degree in Nonprofit Leadership.

Interested in deepening your expertise in program evaluation? Apply today to NPI and WVDO's Professional Certificate in Nonprofit Program Evaluation.

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