

SUMMARY REPORT OF VNR EVALUATION ACTIVITIES 2007-2009***Program Overview***

Launched in 2007, VNR offers capacity-building services to the more than 4,000 nonprofit organizations in the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles. It is operated through a partnership of Human Interaction Research Institute (HIRI; lead agency and fiscal agent), California State University Northridge and MEND.

In its first three years of operation, VNR developed a multi-faceted information and service program for Valley nonprofits of all sizes, their staffs and boards - including a website, learning community (offering more than 35 educational workshops), a special "Staying Alive" initiative focused on nonprofit challenges of the recession, technical assistance, the annual MENDING Poverty conference (third edition will be June 16, 2010) and other activities designed to give a community voice to Valley nonprofits, and information and referral services. A 19-person Advisory Committee provides guidance to VNR staff and partner organizations, and serves as VNR's policy council. Grants from local and national foundations, local businesses, and a private donor support VNR's activities. More details are in the *VNR Business Plan 2010-2011*.

Evaluation Overview

VNR was designed to include an evaluation component, both to estimate the program's impact and to improve it over time. The evaluation component builds on HIRI's long-standing work in program evaluation (going back to national studies conducted in the 1960s) and more recent projects focused on evaluation of nonprofit capacity building (including a 2010 study for Kellogg Foundation of foundation-sponsored capacity building evaluation methods). Because personnel and financial resources for evaluation are very modest, VNR's activities are low-cost and many of them involve gathering informal, "soft" data that nonetheless can be useful in meeting evaluation objectives.

VNR's evaluation component has six main activities:

- 1 - *post-event surveys* of participants' overall reactions to VNR workshops and other learning events
- 2 - *pre- and post-tests* of participants' learning and skill development, targeted to VNR's two MultiFamily Group capacity building projects with Valley mental health agencies (both of which included a series of educational workshops)
- 3 - *critical incident reports* on specific outcomes from VNR workshops and technical assistance consultations
- 4 - *informal data* gathered through post-event interaction with participants in VNR learning events
- 5 - *rosters* summarizing basic operations for VNR's workshops and community events, information & referral activities and technical assistance consultations
- 6 - *website statistics* gathered automatically by Google Analytics and through a pop-up website user satisfaction survey

1 - Post-Event Surveys

Using a standardized four-item form, deliberately kept very brief to minimize response burden on the busy participants in VNR workshops, input is gathered at the end of these events on overall participant reactions and suggestions for future activities. Workshops co-offered with other organizations usually are not included in VNR evaluation activities. A summary of average responses from workshop evaluations conducted to date follows.

Overall, did you get what you wanted to from this workshop?

Definitely	54%
For the most part	38%
Somewhat, but less than I hoped	8%
No	0%

How would you rate the workshop speakers?

Excellent	63%
Good	33%
Fair	4%
Poor	0%

How would you rate the workshop content, including handout materials?

Excellent	56%
Good	41%
Fair	3%
Poor	0%

Overall, more than 90% of participants thought the these workshops provided good, relevant content and speakers. A number of suggestions for improvement also were made, including different formats for support materials, and strategies for increasing speaker attention to the immediate challenges participants will face in implementing workshop content. These suggestions are being incorporated into the structure for future events.

End-of-conference surveys also were completed by participants in the 2008 and 2009 MENDING Poverty conferences. For instance, the 2009 conference evaluations showed that 98% of participants rated the conference "outstanding" or "very good," and 80% thought it was "highly relevant" to their organization's work. More detailed results were reported separately by MEND, which gathered and analyzed the evaluation data.

2 - Pre-and Post-Tests

A pre- and post- survey form was used to gather information from participants in the capacity-building activities undertaken as part of VNR's Raising the Bar project (capacity-building for large and small nonprofit mental health agencies in the Valley, to increase their ability to adopt an evidence-based program for involving families in mental health services for adults) and Latino MultiFamily Group project (capacity-building for large mental health agencies, to increase their ability to implement a Spanish-language, culturally-adapted version of the same program with transition-age adolescents).

Among participants in the four large mental health agencies for RTB, increases in knowledge were as follows:

Level of self-rated knowledge about MFG:

57% Very Low/Low before training; to 82% High and 17% Very High after training

Level of self-rated knowledge about the components of MFG after training:
 100% High or Very High for "Joining Session"
 95% High or Very High for "Getting to Know One Another"
 63% High or Very High for "Living With a Mental Illness"
 52% High or Very High for the MFG Problem Solving Approach

Among the four smaller agencies, increases in knowledge were as follows:

Level of self-rated knowledge about MFG:
 average of 70% Very Low/Low before, to an average of 80% High/Very High after training

Level of self-rated knowledge about the components of MFG after training:
 52% High or Very High for "Joining Session"
 44% High or Very High for "Getting to Know One Another"
 21% High or Very High for "Living With a Mental Illness"
 35% High or Very High for the MFG Problem Solving Approach

Training sessions also were conducted with the large agencies to increase their capacity to implement evidence-based programs in psychopharmacology. A total of 19 staff psychiatrists participated. They then completed a questionnaire to assess the success of the training, and to make possible the award of Continuing Medical Education credits (one of the motivations for psychiatrists to participate was the award of CEUs). The majority of the psychiatrists participating in the psychopharmacology EBP training scored at least 80% correct responses on the post-training test. This performance level was required to receive Continuing Medical Education credits for this course, thus constituting a successful training offering.

For the two mental health agencies participating in the Latino MFG capacity-building project, results were as follows for level of self-rated knowledge:

	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>
Very low	27%	0%
Low	27%	0%
Medium	36%	56%
High	9%	44%
Very high	0%	0%

Evaluation data concerning participant suggestions for how these capacity-building interventions could be improved, and for how they had impact on agency clients and families, are presented in separate evaluation reports to the funders of the RTB and Latino MFG projects.

3 - Critical Incident Reports

Evaluation activities on VNR also identified actual changes in program and policy that had occurred in nonprofits receiving training and technical assistance from VNR:

6 nonprofits undertook implementation of the evidence-based family involvement program for adults (Hillview MHC, San Fernando MHC, San Fernando Valley CMHC, Sylmar Health & Rehabilitation Center, Child & Family Guidance Center and The Help Group)

2 nonprofits made a policy decision to implement, but were not able to complete the implementation within the project period (West Valley MHC, Verdugo MHC)

2 nonprofits undertook implementation of the evidence-based family involvement program in Spanish/culturally adapted, for adolescents (San Fernando MHC, San Fernando Valley CMHC)

3 nonprofits requested and received ongoing technical assistance from Executive Services Corps of Southern California (they are not named because ESCSC keeps their identities confidential)

6 nonprofits received capacity-building grants from ASPCA or PETCO Foundation as a result of their participation in VNR's workshop for animal welfare agencies (Actors and Others for Animals, Evidence of Love Animal Care, Friends of Long Beach Animals, Heaven on Earth Society for Animals, Bark Avenue Foundation and Stray Cat Alliance - not all of these are located in the San Fernando Valley because of the expanded invitation list for this VNR event)

5 nonprofits completed strategic plans to guide their operations and fundraising for the next 2-3 years (Glendale Healthy Communities Coalition, Comprehensive Community Health Centers, Valley Interfaith Council, National Alliance for Mental Illness - Valley Affiliate, The Children's Project). More than **50** Valley-based nonprofits are in turn influenced directly by these strategic plans, because they are member organizations of GHCC and VIC.

A more formal evaluation system for technical assistance consultations provided by VNR now is being devised and will be used retrospectively for all completed or in-process TAs. For instance, TA recipients such as Havok Theatre and The Children's Project have made significant changes in their fundraising and operations as a result of the TA received.

4 - Informal Data

In addition to the end-of-workshop surveys, participants in VNR workshops were queried during breaks and after the workshops about what changes they intended to make as a result of their participation in these learning events. While many replies were received, they were not formally documented and so are very informal measures of VNR impact. More than 700 people participated in these events altogether.

5 - Rosters

A computer-based roster with basic operations data is maintained for each of the following major categories of VNR activity and outcome: Workshops/Community Events, Technical Assistance Consultations and Information & Referral Activities. The roster for the more than 30 I&R activities conducted to date includes some outcome data as well - specific information resources provided (sometimes including actual document copies) and/or people or organizations the requestor has been referred to.

6 - Website Statistics

The VNR website has had 7,000 visits to date, with an average of 366 per month, as mentioned; the visitors who've filled out the online survey (response rate has been very low, typical for a survey of this sort) have been satisfied with the service

Overall Evaluation Results and Evaluation Shortfalls

It is clear from these simple, straightforward data that VNR has had both educational and policy/program impact on the recipients of its services - nonprofits in the San Fernando Valley, plus funders, intermediary organizations and funders. Input has been obtained that has helped shape the development of future events, including follow-up workshops conducted for affordable housing nonprofits, animal welfare nonprofits, and arts organizations.

Among the main shortfalls and developmental needs for VNR's evaluation component:

1 - Because VNR technical assistance consultations are only recently starting to reach conclusions or transition into second phases, until recently it would not have been practical to obtain data on actual changes occurring as a result of these TAs. Now that is changing, and VNR has started developing a critical incident system for this purpose. Some TA recipients, such

as those requesting strategic planning TA (of which there will likely be many more recipients in 2010 and beyond), already have a concrete outcome to report.

2 - Very "soft data" about participant judgments, immediate levels of knowledge acquired, etc. are main sources of evaluative input, and while not ideal, these do provide both concrete suggestions for improvement and some impressionistic results about overall incomes.

3 - The least amount of data have been collected so far about policy change. However, VNR has interacted with numerous local policymakers, especially in connection with the MENDING Poverty Conferences (co-sponsored by LA County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky and LA City Councilmember Richard Alarcon - Mr Alarcon also was a principal speaker at the 2008 conference, and will speak again at the 2010 conference). Staff of a number of local legislators have participated in VNR events, such as the Latino Convening held in September 2009 and the Town Hall Meeting held in December 2009.

It has proved more challenging to conduct the policy workshops planned as part of VNR's "Policy Voice" component, because of the schedules of the policymakers - these plans are still in process. Using the good relationships and initial plans developed with legislative staff, e.g., Maggie Estrada of Councilmember Alarcon's office, Lori Wheeler of Supervisor Yaroslavsky's office, and John Bwarie of LA City Councilmember Greig Smith's office), policy workshop activities will be pursued further in 2010.

Future Evaluation Plans

All six categories of VNR evaluative activity will continue in 2010-2011. The new system described above for gathering more critical incidents of change will be implemented, so as to obtain more specific input on program and policy change outcomes from technical assistance consultations. A question will be added to the workshop evaluation survey asking for one example of something learned at the workshop that the participant expects to implement in their nonprofit. Data from policy change activities will be gathered as these activities unfold. And a new category of activity - large-scale systems change - will be developed and the first activities within it will be measured.

Another evaluation report will be prepared at the end of the next funding period, 2010-2011. Additional evaluative input will be prepared for funders of specific VNR programs such as the evaluation of Flintridge Operating Foundation capacity-building efforts.