

SUMMARY REPORT OF VNR EVALUATION ACTIVITIES 2010- 2011***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.

VNR has developed a multi-faceted information and service program for Valley nonprofits of all sizes, their staffs and boards - including a website with many information resources (including more than 200 free downloadable publications), a learning community (offering more than 80 educational workshops to date), technical assistance (much of it focused on strategic planning), the annual MENDING Poverty conference (fifth edition will be June 13, 2012) and other activities designed to give a community voice to Valley nonprofits, and information and referral services. A 19-person Advisory Committee chaired by long-time Valley leader Joy Picus provides guidance to the program. 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*.

VNR also includes three special initiatives: (1) a *Glendale Initiative* for nonprofits in that city, which to date has conducted a Glendale Nonprofit Day in 2010 and a City of Glendale-funded capacity building program - carried out by VNR and Flintridge Center; (2) a *Latino Initiative* which has presented events like a leadership development seminar for young Latinas held in December 2011; and (3) a *Burbank Initiative* which started with Burbank Nonprofit Day in January 2012, attended by more than 100 people including the Mayor and City Council President (a follow-up event introducing Burbank nonprofits to foundations is being planned). And VNR received a two-year special grant from Weingart Foundation to run the Northeast Valley Nonprofit Network, which provides training and technical assistance on fundraising to a cohort of 12 nonprofits in the Northeast sector of the Valley.

VNR is one of a dozen Los Angeles region Management Support Organizations participating in a Capacity Builders Network, and also is part of a learning community with the other two geographically-focused MSOs - located in Pasadena and Long Beach. And VNR participates in an evaluation initiative operated by Special Services for Groups and supported by the California Community Foundation, helping to increase the evaluation capacity of local MSOs.

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 for 2010-2011 has six main activities:

1 - *post-event surveys* of participants' overall reactions to VNR workshops and other learning events

2 - *data on pilot group outcomes and on pre- and post-tests* of participants' learning and skill development, targeted to VNR's Latino MultiFamily Group capacity building project with Valley mental health agencies (which included educational workshops for nonprofit staff)

3 - *follow-up evaluation* of outcomes from VNR's technical assistance consultations on strategic planning for nonprofit organizations

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

1a. VNR 2010-2011 Workshop Evaluations

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 follows of responses from 15 workshops given in 2010-2011. Workshop sizes ranged from 4 to more than 100 participants, with the typical workshop size about 15.

(Not all sections total 100% because some people did not answer every question in the survey)

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

Definitely 46%

For the most part 38%

Somewhat, but less than I hoped 12%

No 2%

How would you rate the workshop speakers?

Excellent 66%

Good 31%

Fair 3%

Poor 0%

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

Excellent 53%

Good 37%

Fair 7%

Poor 0%

In all, 93% of participants rated the workshop content as excellent or good, and 86% got most or all of what they wanted from it, with 97% rating workshop speakers as excellent or good. Generally, participants want more of everything that VNR workshops have to offer - more handouts (current ones are excellent, participants say), longer duration, more case studies and

detailed examples (particularly for the financially-oriented workshops), and more time for give and take between participants.

Participants also suggested some possible improvements that could be made: (1) for some speakers, being clearer in the definition of terms and in their examples, and staying more squarely on topic, (2) using more outreach strategies to get more participants, (3) more in-depth interaction and discussion instead of broad topic coverage, and (4) specifying in advance whether attendees should be more or less experienced on a given topic in order to benefit from the workshop. Participants would like the opportunity to introduce themselves (this is done in many workshops), and to be able to contact each other after the event (participant lists are shared for some workshops already).

Specific topics on which future workshops are desired include finance/ budgeting, marketing, branding and preparing for an audit. Participants also asked for more coverage of social media in general, and specifically want events focused on how to communicate about a nonprofit's services using social networks.

Other suggested topics for future workshops include: workforce planning, improving organizational communication, managing stress, avoiding staff burnout, dealing with office conflict, handling staff development, approaches to employee feedback, staff motivation, use of volunteers (involving corporate volunteers, volunteer risk management), grant writing resources and tools, strategic planning, program evaluation and board development.

Most participants were satisfied with the physical aspects of the workshops, but there were a few suggestions for setting up rooms in a more thoughtful way, such as locating the speaker away from the door to the room so that there would be no distraction as people left to use the restroom, etc.

1b. NEVNN Learning Event Evaluations

In 2011 VNR received a two-year grant from the Weingart Foundation to provide technical assistance and training to a cohort of 12 nonprofits in the Northeast San Fernando Valley, focused on building their capacity to seek and receive funding support from foundations, corporations and individual donors. After an intensive selection process including an initial learning event, the 12 nonprofits were selected, and the cohort has since been provided both individualized TA (which will be evaluated in the future) and a series of learning events. The individualized TA is ongoing, and will be evaluated in 2013 when the project ends.

Evaluation summaries follow, prepared from post-event evaluation surveys for the first three learning events (the last two events occurred in 2012, and so will be evaluated in the next round of VNR evaluation activities).

Philanthropic Strategy: The Big Picture

Participants learned the most from hearing the viewpoints about philanthropy from two major donors, one of whom also is a former foundation president. Donor motivations and challenges nonprofits face in approaching donors were discussed candidly, which the participants appreciated. Based on what they learned in this session, participants were anxious to get in touch with previous funders and cultivate new relationships with former and current donors. They would like more suggestions for connecting with potential funders, for presenting their nonprofit's strengths and weaknesses in ways that help donors understand them, and for using technology (such as donor management software) appropriately.

Working with Major Donors

Participants learned about how board development can contribute to donor development, and about the importance of focusing on a donor's needs - what they want to achieve by making a donation and how they want to receive feedback about the ways in which their donation is being used. As a result of this session, participants intend to work on cultivating new donor relationships and strengthening their infrastructures to do so. Suggested topics for future workshops that came out of this learning event include how to fund-raise for long-term sustainability, how other organizations have done successful fundraising for sustainability or for other purposes, management/staff/board roles in working with major donors, and creating and fostering successful/stronger donor relationships.

Working with Corporate Funders

Participants appreciated the clear instructions from the speaker about how to approach corporate funders effectively, and how corporate philanthropy relates to corporate goals that must be addressed in order for a nonprofit to win corporate support. Timing issues, such as approaching a donor when a new community campaign is being shaped and the nonprofit's work could become part of that campaign, also were discussed. These practical issues were new to many of the participants so they were particularly glad to hear about them.

1c. Overall Statistics on Educational Workshops

From the beginning VNR has kept statistics on the participation rates in educational workshops. Following are cumulative statistics for VNR workshop attendees from VNR's inception through February 28, 2012. A total of 735 people have participated in VNR workshops, broken out as follows:

- 1 Workshop - 645
- 2 Workshops - 52
- 3 Workshops - 14
- 4 Workshops - 7
- 5 Workshops - 11
- 6 Workshops - 4
- 7 Workshops - 2

These statistics do not include participants in the Raising the Bar and Latino MFG project workshops, or in the annual MENDING Poverty conference.

2. Latino MFG Project Evaluation

Evaluation of these activities - educational workshops and pilot implementations of the Latino MFG - is covered in separate reports.

3. Follow-Up Evaluation of VNR Technical Assistance Consultations on Strategic Planning

A separate evaluation report presents findings from a small-scale evaluation of VNR technical assistance consultations on strategic planning provided 2009-2010.

4. Informal Data

Spontaneous comments continue to be received about VNR's overall operations and impact, and these are overwhelmingly favorable, though sometimes suggestions for improvements are made, or comments offered for expansion of VNR's program into new areas.

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 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

Monthly reports are compiled from Google Analytics about the visitors who come to the VNR website. These reports show that in 2010 the average number of visits monthly was 487, and the time on site averaged 1:93 minutes. In 2011, the average number of visitors per month was 468 and the average time on site was 2:12. There is an online evaluation form website users can fill out, but it is seldom used. The website is continually upgraded, and the Gallery software system was added to permit easy online searching for particular downloadable documents, important now that there are more than 200 of them.

Overall Evaluation Results and Evaluation Shortfalls

VNR's evaluation component for 2010-2011 shows, as did the previous evaluation report 2007-2009, that VNR is successfully providing a range of activities that are valued by nonprofit staff and Boards in the San Fernando Valley. The focus is more on process and immediate outcomes than on impact, but since no VNR funder has specifically provided support for evaluation, this is not surprising - the evaluation strategy of simple and small-scale because that's all the available resources will support.

Nonetheless, there are a number of suggestions for future VNR activities and for some re-shaping of the activities already underway - all of which can be used to direct VNR's operations in 2012-2013. Examples include the following:

- 1- Future educational workshops can more often feature concrete, well-specified case studies, since this appears to be a learning mode valued by Valley nonprofit agency staff.
- 2 - Marketing of workshop events can feature where relevant a statement about the level of experience and sophistication with the topic participants should have in order to get maximum benefit from the workshop.
- 3 - A final learning event can be planned for the Northeast Valley Nonprofit Network which will help to foster continuity of the peer networking component of this project, and that will address strategies for helping the participating nonprofits seek resources from foundations or other donors that will be focused on long-term sustainability of the organization.
- 4 - A special evaluation survey can be sent to the small number of Valley nonprofit staff who have attended five or more VNR educational workshops, to obtain their perspectives on the structure and content of these events.
- 5 - Outreach strategies that draw on VNR's three special initiatives may also be developed, in keeping with the suggestion in this evaluation report that VNR make a more aggressive effort to draw in participants to its events.

Future Evaluation Plans

In 2012-2013, the same main activities of VNR's evaluation component will be continued. The next round also will include a survey of participants attending five or more workshops, and another small-scale evaluation of strategic planning consultations will be undertaken. The NEVNN project will conclude in March 2013, and an evaluation of its final learning events and of the technical assistance it has provided will be undertaken. Most of VNR's evaluation activities for 2010-2011 were already structured and in place when the SSG evaluation consultation to Los Angeles MSOs was provided, as mentioned above. Suggestions that emerged from that learning experience can be integrated into plans for 2012-2013.

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