

SUMMARY REPORT OF VNR EVALUATION ACTIVITIES 2014 - 2015***Program Overview***

Launched in 2007, VNR provides capacity-building services to the 4,600 nonprofit organizations in the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles. It is based at California State University Northridge and operates in partnership with MEND.

VNR's services are offered to Valley nonprofits of all sizes, their staffs and boards: a website with many information resources (including more than 500 free downloadable publications), a geo-map with fully searchable data on all Valley nonprofits (VNR Platform), a learning community (has offered more than 150 educational workshops), technical assistance (much of it focused on strategic planning), the annual MENDING Poverty conference 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 for the period covered by this evaluation are in the *VNR Business Plan 2014-2016*.

VNR also includes several special initiatives:

- (1) a *Glendale Initiative* for nonprofits in that city, which to date has conducted a Glendale Nonprofit Day in 2010, several educational workshops, and a City of Glendale-funded capacity building program (carried out by VNR and Flintridge Center);
- (2) a *Latino Initiative* which has presented a number of learning events, like a leadership development seminar for young Latinas;
- (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 in July 2012 introduced Burbank nonprofits to foundations, and several educational workshops have since been presented) and
- (4) a *Children Youth and Family Nonprofit Initiative*, which has convened a half-dozen learning events for CYF nonprofits in the Valley, and is co-organized by VNR with Child Development Institute and CSUN's Center for Community Health and Well-Being.

In addition, VNR received a three-year grant from Weingart Foundation to create and run the *Northeast Valley Nonprofit Network*, which provided training and technical assistance on philanthropic fundraising to a cohort of 12 nonprofits in the Northeast sector of the Valley (evaluation findings for its third year are presented below). VNR also is exploring a Canoga Park Initiative, and has conducted two events there so far.

VNR is one of 15 Los Angeles region Management Support Organizations participating in a Capacity Builders Network, which provides contextual input to evaluation activities. And VNR recently participated in an initiative operated by Special Services for Groups and supported by California Community Foundation, aimed at 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 long-standing work in program evaluation by the Human Interaction Research Institute, the original organizer of VNR (going back to national studies conducted in the 1960s), including projects focused on evaluation of nonprofit capacity building (e.g., a 2010 study for Kellogg Foundation of foundation-sponsored capacity building evaluation methods). Because personnel and financial resources for evaluation are extremely modest (no VNR grant has ever included funds earmarked for evaluation), 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 2014-2015 has six main activities:

1 - *post-event surveys* of participants' overall reactions to VNR workshops for 2014-2015, and compilation of statistics on *frequency of workshop participation 2007-2015*.

2 - *overall evaluation of NEVNN project outcomes for year 3*.

3 - *participation in Capacity Builders Network*, to provide contextual input to the evaluation through comparisons with other MSOs in Southern California.

4 - *analysis of VNR's technical assistance consultations and information & referral activities for 2014-2015*.

5 - analysis of *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, with a limited amount of data gathered for the VNR Platform as well.

VNR's Theory of Change

Valley Nonprofit Resources operates as a capacity-building organization under a three-component theory of change: (1) significant impact is most likely by concentrating limited resources on small and medium-sized nonprofits in the San Fernando Valley, which in turn affects both VNR's business model (mostly no-cost or very low-cost services) and the types of services offered; (2) significant impact is most likely when education is supplemented by follow-up technical assistance (the VNR "workshop plus" model), whenever there are resources to do so, with this TA offered by the same experts who conduct the workshop; and (3) significant impact is most likely when services are offered in the larger context of an effort to bring together the Valley nonprofit community, through VNR's special initiatives and other activities (this requires its own independent resource allocation - it cannot be done under a pure fee-for-service model focused only on individual nonprofits).

Evaluation Results

Results based on analysis of data gathered through these evaluation activities follow.

1a. Workshop Evaluation 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, or in which the workshop is focused on brainstorming without a specific educational component, are not included in these VNR evaluation activities.

A summary follows of responses from survey responses for 23 workshops given in 2014-2015. Workshop sizes ranged from 10 to 57 participants, with the typical workshop size about 27.

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

Definitely 63%
For the most part 31%
Somewhat, but less than I hoped 6%
No 0%

How would you rate the workshop speakers?

Excellent 77%
Good 21%
Fair 2%
Poor 0%

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

Excellent 59%
Good 33%
Fair 8%
Poor 0%

In all, 92% of participants rated workshop content as excellent or good, and 94% got most or all of what they wanted from the event, with 98% rating workshop speakers as excellent or good. As in the previous evaluations, participants want more of everything that VNR workshops have to offer - more handouts (in particular, participants want print versions of all PowerPoints), more active strategies for participant involvement with speakers (e.g., case studies), and more opportunities for participants to network with others present.

Participants suggested a few improvements in the workshop format, though generally they were pleased with the two-hour duration, and the structure with plenty of time for participant discussion. When possible, participants would like to have learning materials sent to them by e-mail in advance, and post-workshop e-mails sent with supplemental items that speakers mention during the workshops. Several participants suggested that workshop faculty and the facilitator (the VNR Executive Director) could provide somewhat greater structure during the discussion sessions, to limit diversion from the topic at hand or excessive "air time" for one or two participants.

Topics suggested for future workshops included board development, nonprofit collaboration, children's arts services, how to frame evaluation activities (especially important since evaluation resources are so limited in most grantmaking), insurance needs for nonprofits, and leadership development for personnel other than the Executive Director. These topics all will be considered for 2016-2018.

1b. Overall Statistics on Educational Workshops

From the beginning, VNR has kept statistics on participation in its educational workshops. Following are cumulative statistics for VNR workshop attendees from VNR's inception through December 31, 2015. A total of 2,136 people have participated in VNR workshops, broken out as follows:

1 Workshop - 1,009
2 Workshops - 185
3 Workshops - 55
4 Workshops - 24

5 Workshops - 18
6 Workshops - 15
7 Workshops - 4
8 Workshops - 3
9 Workshops - 2
10 Workshops - 1
11 Workshops - 5
12 Workshops - 2
14 Workshops - 1
15 Workshops - 2
16 Workshops - 1
17 Workshops - 2
20 Workshops - 1
21 Workshops - 1
22 Workshops - 1

These statistics do not include participants in the Raising the Bar and Latino MFG project workshops, or in workshops hosted by other organizations, such as the annual MENDING Poverty conference (which VNR co-hosts but for which MEND does the evaluation data-gathering - VNR prepares a separate evaluation summary each year).

2. NEVNN Project Evaluation - Year 3

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 was provided both individualized TA (which will be evaluated in the future) and a series of learning events. All learning events were evaluated, and a telephone interview study with the 12 participating nonprofits was conducted in 2013 when the original project period ended, emphasizing the TA component. Evaluation results for 2012-2013 are presented in the previous VNR evaluation report.

In 2014 VNR received funding for a third and final year of NEVNN. The findings below address the process and outcomes for this third year of operation (called NEVNN II), which concentrated on three learning objectives: (1) *Public Relations and Innovative Fundraising*, to help nonprofits identify and implement PR strategies to increase visibility with individual donors and corporate funders, and (2) *Human Resource Development*, to help nonprofits address staffing issues that affect their overall wellbeing and ability to raise funds; and (3) *Capacity Building in Fundraising and Overall Sustainability*, focused mainly on challenges already identified by the participating nonprofits.

Two significant changes occurred that affected implementation of objectives set forth in the original project proposal: (a) Weingart was able to offer only \$25,000 in support, not the \$75,000 requested in the original proposal, so project activities were scaled back accordingly; and (b) one of the 12 original nonprofits, Total Family Support Clinic, ceased operations, and was replaced informally by Hillview Mental Health Center in Pacoima, which also hosted several of the project events during the third year. VNR itself also underwent significant change, moving its operations and fiscal management to California State University Northridge in Summer 2014. All activities of the NEVNN II grant were completed in May 2014, with the exception of one final event conducted in September (see description below).

The 11 remaining nonprofits in the original cohort were approached by VNR in late 2013, and all enthusiastically agreed to participate in the NEVNN continuation, making a NEVNN II cohort

of 12 nonprofits again with Hillview. In March and April 2014, two workshops were conducted for this cohort:

**Public Relations and Innovative Fundraising*, led by former public relations executive and nonprofit management consultant David Berkus (this session also included an orientation to the new phase of NEVNN activity)

** Human Resource Development*, led by former human resources executive and nonprofit management consultant John McLaughlin

A concluding workshop was held in September 2014, both to celebrate the completion of the project and to offer additional presentations by Berkus and McLaughlin on public relations (video and other media-based strategies) and human resources (the role of performance reviews in nonprofit management).

Individualized technical assistance consultations were conducted by Berkus with Heroes of Life and Wildlife Learning Center, and by McLaughlin with Wildlife Learning Center, at the nonprofits' request. Individualized TA also was provided during this third year of the project by VNR Executive Director Thomas E. Backer, PhD to each of the 12 NEVNN II nonprofits:

ABC Learn – assistance in developing “Circle of Solutions” program for fundraising in the community

Casa Esperanza – assistance in developing an enhanced fundraising plan for the organization

Comision Femenil - consultation on identifying a potential fiscal sponsor for the organization (CF has since had its nonprofit status reinstated, so a fiscal sponsor is not now needed; the organization now is concentrating on fundraising with individual donors, drawing on training and TA provided by the NEVNN project)

El Centro de Amistad – consultation with staff and with the Board of Directors on a planned capital campaign, on refinements in ECDA's strategic plan (which VNR had previously helped with), and on development of a more formal overall fundraising plan

Fair Housing Council of SFV - consultation on fundraising and on possible additions to the organization's Board from Bank of the West's executive ranks (facilitated by Executive Vice President George Stanfield)

Guide Dogs of America – consultation on a possible capital campaign for a visitor and education center, including a referral to capital campaign consultant Jan McElwee (GDA already has recruited most of the funding needed)

Heroes of Life – consultation on a 2014 new edition of HOL's Strategic Plan (VNR had previously helped create this Plan, and worked with staff and board on the new edition)

Hillview MHC - development of the Northeast Valley Health Neighborhood Coalition, led by Hillview (a number of meetings of this Coalition have now been held, with active participation by VNR), which is currently developing an online referral directory for health and behavioral health nonprofits in the Northeast Valley, as well as exploring integrated service models for this sub-region

Mission Community Hospital-San Fernando Campus – consultation on the transition of this organization to independent status, and on possible training for Board members of the new nonprofit (this transition is on hold due to legal requirements from the Hospital, and when

completed the new San Fernando Community Health Center will request TA on strategic planning and board development from VNR)

Pacoima Beautiful – consultation on a 2014 new edition of PB's Strategic Plan (VNR had previously helped create this Plan), and input on three proposals for funding

Valley Care Community Consortium – consultation on setting up an individual donor base as part of an expanded fundraising plan for VCCC (further consultation will be requested from VNR after VCCC's new Executive Director is fully on board)

Wildlife Learning Center – consultation on a capital campaign, including providing VNR financial support for an initial consultation by capital campaign consultant Jan McElwee (who has continued to assist WLC as a volunteer); consultation on development of a reality TV show based on WLC

During the third project year, two of the 12 organizations in the NEVNN II cohort (VCCC, Pacoima Beautiful) received second grants from Weingart Foundation. Several others are planning to apply or re-apply for Weingart funding. Many others in the cohort applied for other philanthropic funding, and moved towards more intensive activity to approach higher-end individual donors, based on the training and TA provided by NEVNN.

Post-workshop evaluation surveys showed positive reactions to the two educational workshops described above. Evaluation telephone interviews were conducted in May 2014 to obtain more detailed input about impact of the above activities:

*Overall, NEVNN II nonprofit leaders reported they learned a great deal from both workshops and from the TA they received. Also, they reported valuing the opportunity to learn from each other during the workshops, and had suggestions for other topics they would like to see covered.

*Examples of topics desired for future workshops included: (a) setting up and operating in the Northeast Valley a "clearinghouse" for funding opportunities and information – partly to encourage partnerships among nonprofits in the region in applying for funding; (b) strategies for approaching high-end donors; (c) strategies for volunteer management; (d) creating and running an effective capital campaign; and (e) program evaluation strategies, including how to use evaluation data when applying for support from foundations or other funders.

*In their evaluation interviews and on the post-workshop surveys, participants reported a number of specific learnings they planned to apply in their organizations, such as: (a) the use of written waivers with volunteers; (b) principles for legally and effectively hiring personnel, including development personnel; (c) development of funding and operational partnerships with other nonprofits in the community; (d) how to write effective press releases; (e) how to effectively place job ads; (f) maternity leave legalities; (g) updating a website to make it a more effective public relations and fundraising tool; (h) use of social media for PR and fundraising; and (i) creating a proper employee handbook, starting with "boilerplate" available on the internet.

Just to give one example, Guide Dogs of America reported considerable benefit from the PR workshop because they learned how to use social media to promote their annual fundraising event (a motorcycle ride). GDA set up a Facebook page for it, and contacted other organizations to publicize the event through their ongoing social media operations. As a result, they had the biggest turnout in GDA history – so much so that they had to move the venue to a Harley-Davidson dealership in Santa Clarita, which further increased visibility of the event.

During the first phase of NEVNN, most of the 12 nonprofits sought assistance from VNR in developing a Strategic Plan, and several of them, as noted above, asked to revise that Plan as part of their NEVNN II activities. The Plan, a number of participants noted, is just a beginning – the real value is in taking a more strategic orientation to all aspects of the nonprofit's operation, including fundraising and specifically efforts to seek funds from foundations. Discussion about how to do this well continued throughout the NEVNN II year, and results have influenced VNR's overall operations.

At least one of the 12 organizations concentrated on a sub-region-wide systems change activity as part of their participation in NEVNN II. The Northeast Valley Health Neighborhood Coalition, already described above, has included more than 40 local nonprofits in its activities so far, and is advised by the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health. The Coalition was jointly created by Hillview Mental Health Center, which has operated in Pacoima for more than 60 years, and VNR. As mentioned, its current focus is on creating an online referral system for local health and behavioral health organizations, and exploring integrated health approaches – both are a necessity as the Affordable Care Act is implemented.

3. Capacity Builders Network

The Capacity Builders Network brings together 15 Management Support Organizations (MSOs) from throughout Southern California for quarterly meetings. As a CBN Member VNR participates in these meetings. The meetings provide opportunities to share best practices, and to hear from funders and experts on various topics.

4. Analysis of VNR's Technical Assistance Consultations and I&R Activities

VNR's technical assistance consultations increased significantly from 36 in 2012-2013 to 53 in 2014-2015. A number of these consultations are longer term and will continue into 2016. As in previous years, the most frequent topic for these TA consultations was strategic planning.

In 2014-2015, VNR responded to 45 requests for information and referral services, the same number as for 2012-2013. The most frequent topic was how to start a nonprofit organization - this came up so frequently that VNR now has prepared an informal publication on this subject which is available on the VNR website, and which includes referral to local educational resources as well as links to websites.

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. The rosters are updated weekly. These rosters were analyzed both to report the statistics in activity 4 and for overall understanding of VNR's work.

6. Website Statistics

Monthly reports are compiled from Google Analytics about the visitors who come to the VNR website. These reports show that in 2015 the average number of visits monthly was 581, and the time on site averaged 49 seconds. There is an online evaluation form website users can fill out, but it is seldom used. The website is updated monthly.

Monthly reports also are compiled from Google Analytics about the visitors who come to the VNR Platform website (accessible through the main VNR website), which was launched at the end of September, 2015. These reports show that in 2015 the average number of visits monthly was 39, and the time on site averaged 6 minutes and 36 seconds.

Summary of Evaluation Results and Evaluation Shortfalls

As concluded from the previous evaluation reports (2007-2009, 2010-2011 and 2012-2013), the data presented above indicates that VNR is successfully providing a range of services that are valued by nonprofit staff and boards in the San Fernando Valley. The results summarized here include some specific outcome data, as well as process data such as valuing of educational workshops through brief surveys given at workshop conclusion. Since VNR funder support specific to evaluation has been extremely limited - the evaluation strategy of simple and small-scale because that's all the available resources will support.

Suggestions based upon the 2014-2015 evaluation data which can be used to guide VNR's operations in the next project period 2016-2018 include:

1 - VNR will make more workshop materials and information available online, both before and after its learning events, and in response to field generated requests, such as was done with the "how to start a nonprofit" topic.

2 - Workshops will be created on topics suggested in this evaluation report.

3 - VNR will explore how more educational events and more direct intervention could be provided regarding collaboration among nonprofits in the San Fernando Valley (and about collaborations between nonprofits and funders). This might include efforts to create subject-focused collaborations, as well as to utilize more creatively existing collaboratives such as the Children/Youth/Family, Glendale, Burbank and Latino Initiatives. A Canoga Park Initiative is under consideration (with several activities already conducted, as discussed above); it would involve collaboration between VNR and CSUN's Institute for Community Health and Well-Being, along with the Canoga Park-based Child Development Institute.

4 - VNR will continue to explore formatting and scheduling options, and to encourage more peer networking as a part of its educational events.

VNR will continue to make its evaluation design and results (including this report) publicly available, through a section on the VNR website.

Future Evaluation Plans

In 2016-2018, the same main activities of VNR's evaluation component will be continued. VNR will continue to refine its simply-stated theory of change, which guides priority for the use of resources. And possible ties to evaluation resources through VNR's presence on the California State University Northridge campus also will be appraised. VNR has developed a 2016-2018 Business Plan, outlining its overall planning, program, resource development and evaluation strategy for its next years on the CSUN campus.

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