

SUMMARY REPORT OF VNR EVALUATION ACTIVITIES 2019 - 2022

Program Overview

Launched in 2007, VNR provides capacity-building services to the more than 4,300 nonprofit organizations in the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles. It is based at California State University Northridge.

VNR's services are offered to Valley nonprofits of all sizes, and to their staff and boards. Services include (a) a website filled with information resources (including more than 600 free downloadable publications), (b) a geo-map with fully searchable database of all Valley nonprofits and grantmaking foundations (the VNR Platform), (c) a learning community (more than 450 educational events given to date), (d) technical assistance to individual nonprofits, (e) activities designed to give a community voice to Valley nonprofits (such as convenings done in partnership with local elected officials), and (f) information and referral services. A monthly eBlast about VNR's activities is sent to nearly 1,800 people. A 19-person Advisory Committee chaired by long-time Valley leader Joy Picus provides guidance to the program. Grants from local and national foundations, corporations, and a private donor support VNR's activities. More details for the period covered by this evaluation are in the *VNR Business Plan 2021-2022*.

Evaluation Overview

VNR was designed to include an evaluation component, both to estimate the center'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 research study for Kellogg Foundation of foundation-sponsored capacity building evaluation methods). Because personnel and financial resources for evaluation are extremely modest (only one VNR grant has ever included funds earmarked for evaluation), VNR's activities are low-cost and many of them involve gathering "soft" data that nonetheless can be useful in meeting evaluation objectives.

VNR's evaluation component for 2019-2022 has five main activities:

1. post-event surveys of participants' reactions to VNR workshops for 2019-2022
2. additional evaluation data collected on VNR workshops and technical assistance for VNR's Uncertainty and Leadership Initiatives, both cohort projects, for which separate reports to funders have been prepared
3. a comprehensive evaluation report on activities of the VNR Recovery Initiative, which is available on the VNR website, along with a report on pilot DEI/antiracism activities, which were part of the Recovery Initiative – both included cohorts of participating nonprofits

4. basic statistics on VNR workshops, technical assistance and information & referral activities, summarized in Excel documents
5. VNR website and VNR Platform statistics gathered automatically by Google Analytics, and data gathered on VNR's Facebook, Linked In and YouTube activities

VNR's Theory of Change

Valley Nonprofit Resources operates as a capacity-building program 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 need for third-party funding support) 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 frequently 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 the five 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 after 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 28 workshops given in 2019-2022 (these data exclude the VRI workshops, reported separately). Workshop sizes ranged from 3 to 41 participants, with the typical workshop size about 18.\

1. Overall, did you get what you wanted to from this workshop?
Definitely or For the Most Part 94%
2. How would you rate the workshop speakers?
Excellent or Good 88%
3. How would you rate the workshop's content, including handout materials?
Excellent or Good 96%

Participants offered a number of suggestions about both future topics for the workshops and for modifications in their structure, which are being taken into account in planning for future offerings.

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, 2020. A total of 3,089 people participated in VNR workshops during that time, broken out as follows:

- 1 Workshop – 1,278
- 2 Workshops – 247
- 3 Workshops – 70
- 4 Workshops – 341
- 5 Workshops – 26
- 6 Workshops – 17
- 7 Workshops – 11
- 8 Workshops – 5
- 9 Workshops – 5
- 10 Workshops – 7
- 11 Workshops – 1
- 12 Workshops – 4
- 13 Workshops - 1
- 15 Workshops – 5
- 16 Workshops – 2
- 18 Workshops – 4
- 20 Workshops – 3
- 23 Workshops – 2
- 28 Workshops – 1
- 29 Workshops – 1
- 39 Workshops – 1
- 50 Workshops - 1

Due to limited staff resources and activities re-formatted because of the pandemic, participation data were not collected in 2021 or 2022.

These statistics do not include participants in the Raising the Bar, Latino T2DM MFG Project and Latino MFG project workshops, or in events hosted by other organizations, such as the January 2019 Shift Happens conference on disaster preparedness, which VNR co-hosted with The Valley Economic Alliance. Including these events would add hundreds more participants to the above count.

2. . Cohort Projects

VNR's Uncertainty, Leadership and Recovery Initiatives all included cohorts of nonprofits served with technical assistance. TA outcomes are included in the separate reports prepared for the funders of these Initiatives – the Recovery Initiative report is on the VNR website. The nonprofits in each cohort participated in VNR workshops on the topics of the Initiative, as well as receiving focused TA. Evaluation results were generally quite positive, though some challenges – such as fitting in the TA activity in the busy schedules of the cohort nonprofit staff – were noted.

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

VNR's technical assistance consultations totaled 67 from 2019-2022. A number of these consultations are longer term and will continue into 2023 (and beyond - VNR has some nonprofit clients for 10 years or more). As in previous years, the most frequent topics for these TA consultations were strategic planning or fundraising.

In 2019-2022, VNR responded to 50 requests for information and referral services. Many informal requests were made at VNR workshops and other events, but these were not included in this tally. The number of I&R requests has declined over the years of VNR's operations, and it is speculated that the availability of Google and other search services, plus VNR's own online website resources and VNR Platform, all have helped meet some of the ongoing need.

4. Rosters

A spreadsheet with basic operational 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 monthly. These rosters were analyzed both to report the statistics in activity 3 and for overall understanding of VNR's work.

5. Web Statistics

Monthly reports are compiled from Google Analytics about the visitors who come to the VNR website. These reports show that in 2022 the website had a total of 9,707 pageviews and 7,222 unique views, with an average time on page of 59 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 in September 2015. These reports show that in 2022 the Platform had a total of 2,526 pageviews and 2,191 unique pageviews with an average time on page of 1 minute.

For VNR's Facebook page in 2022 (1/1/22-11/30/22) the total number of engagements was 4, the number of impressions 105, and the number of followers 233. For LinkedIn the number of engagements 1/1/22-11/30/22 was 15, the number of impressions 197, the number of followers 106, the number of pageviews 80 and the number of unique visitors 44. VNR also has its own YouTube Channel, which in 2022 included a VNR overview video, two workshop recordings, and seven invitations to workshops embedded in eBlasts. The total number of views for 2022 was 245.

Summary of Evaluation Results and Evaluation Shortfalls

As concluded from VNR's previous evaluation reports (2007-2009, 2010-2011, 2012-2013, 2014-2015 and 2016-2018), 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 as mentioned VNR funder support specific to evaluation has been extremely limited, these methods have been used because that's all the available resources will support.

Participants in VNR workshops continue to respond most enthusiastically to topics focused on some aspect of fundraising, or on use of social media or other technology-oriented presentations. VNR's presence on social media is limited, and the use of the VNR Platform has been less than optimal. Plans are being made to do further marketing of the Platform in 2023, especially since it has recently been loaded with more recent data on both foundations and nonprofits in the Valley, and it has been upgraded in its search capacities as well.

An in-person workshop conducted outdoors at Child Development Institute in March 2022 was extremely well-received – the first in-person event since March 2020. VNR will continue to do both workshops and technical assistance consultations virtually, with occasional exceptions as circumstances make possible. Participants find value in the opportunity to interact online with other participants, as well as with the speakers.

Future Evaluation Plans

Going forward, 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 the setting of priorities 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.

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