

***SUMMARY REPORT OF VNR EVALUATION ACTIVITIES 2016 - 2018******Program Overview***

Launched in 2007, VNR provides capacity-building services to the more than 5,300 nonprofit organizations in the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles. It is based at California State University Northridge and operates collaboratively with MEND.

VNR's services are offered to Valley nonprofits of all sizes, and to their staffs 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 (VNR Platform), (c) a learning community (more than 240 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 1,200 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, 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 2017-2018*.

VNR also includes several special initiatives:

- (1) a *Glendale Initiative* for nonprofits in that city;
- (2) a *Burbank Initiative* for nonprofits in that city;
- (3) *Canoga Park and Reseda Initiatives* in these neighborhoods, the latter including participation in the Reseda Community Network;
- (4) *Northeast Valley Neighborhood Health Coalition*, co-founded with at Hillview Mental Health Center and now operated by the Center;
- (5) *Gratitude Express*, an online training course on appreciative fundraising, using Zoom video technology (offered twice in 2018); and
- (6) the *VNR Uncertainty Initiative*, a year-long effort concluding its first phase in Summer 2019, aimed at helping Valley nonprofits handle the increased uncertainty in their environments.

During the period covered by this report, VNR completed *cohort projects* to help selected nonprofits enhance their success with individual giving, focused on youth development nonprofits (supported by a Dwight Stuart Youth Fund grant) and arts nonprofits (funded by a grant from Ahmanson Foundation). And it completed a two-year project funded by UniHealth Foundation, which developed and implemented in service agency settings a program for involving families of adult Latinos with Type II diabetes in symptom management for their relative.

Also during this reporting period, VNR brought to a successful close the *Transition Roundtable*, which held quarterly informal meetings over four years of five CEOs of larger child welfare nonprofits in the Valley, all of whom are in various stages of planning for retirement. All meeting content was confidential so no evaluation data were gathered. Finally, in 2018 VNR launched a *Health and Human Service Executive Directors Roundtable*, which meets quarterly and provides a platform for nonprofit leaders to share problems and opportunities in a confidential environment. Evaluation data for these meetings are included in the overall workshop evaluation dataset. In general, the Roundtable meetings have been successful as seen by participants, and now are held in a larger room to accommodate the increased number of participants.

VNR is one of 15 Los Angeles region Management Support Organizations participating in a Capacity Builders Network, which provides contextual input to evaluation activities.

### ***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 informal, "soft" data that nonetheless can be useful in meeting evaluation objectives.

VNR's evaluation component for 2016-2018 has seven main activities:

*1 - post-event surveys of participants' overall reactions to VNR workshops for 2016-2018, and compilation of statistics on frequency of workshop participation 2007-2018.*

*2 - evaluation of cohort projects funded by Dwight Stuart Youth Fund, Ahmanson Foundation and UniHealth Foundation (described above, with results presented in separate reports).*

*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 2016-2018.*

*5 - analysis of rosters summarizing basic operations for VNR's learning events.*

*6 - website and VNR Platform statistics gathered automatically by Google Analytics, and a limited amount of data gathered on VNR's Facebook page.*

*7 - evaluation of outcomes from two offerings of VNR's Gratitude Express online learning program.*

### ***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 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 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 28 workshops given in 2016-2018. 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 68%

For the most part 26%

Somewhat, but less than I hoped 5%

No 1%

*2 - How would you rate the workshop speakers?*

Excellent 77%

Good 21%

Fair 2%

Poor 0%

*3 - How would you rate the workshop's content, including handout materials?*

Excellent 70%

Good 27%

Fair 2%

Poor 1%

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. 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, 2018. A total of 2,627 people have participated in VNR workshops during that time, broken out as follows:

- 1 Workshop – 1183
- 2 Workshops – 217
- 3 Workshops – 68
- 4 Workshops – 31
- 5 Workshops – 21
- 6 Workshops – 15
- 7 Workshops – 11
- 8 Workshops – 5
- 9 Workshops – 5
- 10 Workshops – 1
- 11 Workshops – 2
- 12 Workshops – 4
- 15 Workshops – 4
- 16 Workshops – 1
- 18 Workshops – 2
- 20 Workshops – 2
- 23 Workshops – 1
- 28 Workshops – 1
- 29 Workshops – 1
- 31 Workshops – 1

These statistics do not include participants in the Raising the Bar and Latino MFG project workshops, or in events hosted by other organizations, such as 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**

As mentioned, VNR completed cohort projects to help selected nonprofits enhance their success with individual giving, focused on youth development nonprofits (supported by a Dwight Stuart Youth Fund grant) and arts nonprofits (funded by a grant from Ahmanson Foundation). Evaluation data on these two projects are presented in final reports to the funders. A final report also is being written that presents evaluation data on a two-year project funded by UniHealth Foundation, which helped Valley nonprofits learn about and implement the MFG-D, a multi-family education program for encouraging family support for adult Latinos with Type II diabetes. Results for all three projects indicated success in developing and offering the intervention with the identified target audiences. There also were a number of challenges for the Type II diabetes project - it was difficult both to recruit nonprofits to participate in the project, and to keep individual participants involved in the intervention until its multiple sessions were completed.

## **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 totaled 93 from 2016-2018. A number of these consultations are longer term and will continue into 2019 (and beyond - VNR has some nonprofit clients for number of years) . As in previous years, the most frequent topic for these TA consultations was strategic planning.

In 2016-2018, VNR responded to 17 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.

## **5. 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 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 2016-2018 the average number of visits monthly was 407, and the time on site averaged 1 minute 16 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 2016-2018 the average number of visits monthly was 93, and the time on site averaged 1 minute and 30 seconds.

Facebook total views for February 2016-December 2018 were 208, with an average monthly total of 9. VNR has a very limited presence on Facebook, although the page is updated monthly.

## **7. Gratitude Express**

The Gratitude Express online course was developed jointly by VNR and Janet Levine Consulting, which received a contract from VNR for a pilot test with six nonprofit leaders representing three local nonprofits. The four-month pilot offering was a great success, with excellent evaluation survey results, including specific examples of changes made in fundraising strategy as a result of course participation (e.g., one nonprofit has launched its first planned giving program; another for the first time approached long-time donors to ask for increases in giving). Both the content and the Zoom interactive video platform used for the course were praised highly. Participants also interacted with each other independently on topics related to the course, as well as having lively online telephone sessions with the course instructor. The course concluded in March 2018. A second offering of Gratitude Express with six nonprofit leaders representing three local nonprofits was successfully completed in Fall 2018.

In the first offering, 100% of participants got what they wanted from the course ("definitely" or "for the most part") and found the material presented "very useful" or "useful." In the second offering, 83% of participants responded in that way. The Zoom sessions were generally found to be useful, though several participants in the second offering reported they were not able to successfully connect with Zoom and so had to participate by phone (this may have accounted for the somewhat lower satisfaction levels with the second offering). Participants in both offerings found the follow-up telephone calls with the consultant to be particularly helpful.

### ***Summary of Evaluation Results and Evaluation Shortfalls***

As concluded from VNR's previous evaluation reports (2007-2009, 2010-2011, 2012-2013 and 2014-2015), 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.

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

- participants always are happy to have practical materials - forms, background papers, descriptions of best practices - either as handouts or as items e-mailed to them after the workshop
- more networking opportunities would be valuable for nonprofit leaders to meet each other before and after
- more strategies and success examples of social media as fundraising and community outreach tools are desired by many nonprofits, particularly smaller ones that depend on social media because it is cost-effective
- sometimes educational workshop speakers are not focused on the issues that are of most concern to small nonprofits, and VNR needs to educate speakers about their needs
- several workshops had mechanical issues with PPTs - VNR needs to work with speakers to test the technology in advance
- some speaker PPTs were not well-formatted (e.g., the type font used was too small for the audience to see when projected)
- more time in educational events for knowledge sharing among participants would be of value (peer to peer networking is of significant interest to Valley nonprofits)
- educational events with larger numbers of participants might use breakout sessions to promote more interaction among participants
- web attendance in addition to live attendance should be arranged in future workshops
- leadership development for executive directors, senior staff and Board members is an ongoing topic of interest to Valley nonprofits, particularly smaller ones that have difficulty providing orientation and training on their own, and recruiting Board members
- fundraising is a perennial topic of interest for Valley nonprofits, including how development relates to other elements of nonprofit operations, such as communications, community outreach, use of volunteers, etc.
- a 2018 workshop on how to interact with local elected officials was found to be of value by its participants, and various dimensions of this topic would be desirable for future events
- the Uncertainty Initiative has provided useful TA and learning events to help nonprofits handle uncertainty, and think about how to do so more strategically across various topical areas

### ***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 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.

Evaluation of the Uncertainty Initiative is still underway as of this writing, because the Initiative's first phase continues actively through Summer 2019.

In 2019 VNR will conduct an evaluation of the long-term impact of VNR workshops, both through further analysis of the data reported here, and through interviews with participants who have attended 10 or more VNR workshops. This small-scale evaluation is funded by a budget allocation on a current grant from Kaiser Permanente.

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