

Project Impact (PI)

Our Purpose

Developing the capacity of nonprofits and public agencies to prove and to improve their impact.

The Need

The nonprofit and public sectors are robust and expansive. Lives are being touched every day. Communities are being transformed. But our collective capacity *to prove* and *to improve* our impact is underdeveloped. We need greater capability throughout our sector for doing clear, deep, and meaningful evaluation.

To grow our evaluation capacity, we will convene a 6-month project to create fresh evaluation strategies, push forward new evaluation possibilities, and use evaluation to shape program renovations and innovations.

Core Elements of the Project

Project impact will do the following:

- Convene a cadre of high-capacity **AmeriCorps leaders** in a collegial learning community.
- Deliver three **graduate-level** training days.
- Provide **instructional webinars** to augment the training days.
- Provide monthly sessions of **individual coaching** for each participating organization.
- Design and execute customized **evaluation strategies** or **inquiry design strategies** for the participating teams.
- Produce both **quantitative** and **qualitative** findings to demonstrate impact and to improve impact, or to identify important insights to inform design features of new programs.
- Build an **“innovation kitchen”** for exemplars including an online library as a resource for others.

A signature program or a primary area of impact will be chosen for each team. Through the course of the project, evaluation strategies will be developed and piloted to collect data, determine findings, communicate impact, and produce data-informed program experiments and innovations. Through the process, the teams will grow the capability to design and implement further evaluations on their own.

Participants

A minimum of 2 and maximum of 5 from *each organization* will comprise each of the teams. We request that *at least* one person can influence organizational direction and understands priorities and culture. Participating programs (and particularly those with few staff) may also choose to invite AmeriCorps members to participate in this project. This project will build the leadership skills of the next generation of nonprofit and public sector leaders by engaging AmeriCorps members as part of evaluation teams. AmeriCorps members will build their understanding of impact evaluation while developing as leaders

who employ evaluative thinking and understand how to deepen program impact from the outset of their careers.

Achievements

At the completion of the project, each participating organization will have conducted a rigorous mixed-method outcome evaluation that will put them at the CNCS preliminary evidence level and have an evaluation report articulating qualitative and quantitative findings and strategies for program improvement. They will also have the tools developed to support ongoing evaluation including an evaluation plan, a qualitative interview protocol and a quantitative questionnaire.

Design Rationale

Project Impact is designed not only to produce credible findings about impact, but to build durable habits of evaluation within participating organizations. We believe that capacity is developed over time and through iteration. It requires both instruction and practice – training in some of the leading techniques of research accompanied by ongoing applications and practice. The best evaluation strategies are iterative, and so we will design and test strategies, and then return to design further. We recognize the power of partnership, the enrichment of cross-pollination of ideas among like-minded organizations, the durable impact of a learning community, and the potential inspiration for a sector when exemplars are developed and elevated. These are the ingredients that make Project Impact to cause lasting change.

Facilitation Team

The Dialogues in Action team brings decades of experience in evaluation design and implementation and a deep understanding of national service to leading Project Impact. Dr. Steve Patty, the founder and principal consultant, taught research at both undergraduate and graduate levels in higher education, including research design for doctoral students at the University of Monaco. He has trained hundreds of managers in one of North America's largest nonprofits, the YMCA of the USA, consulted and developed evaluations for multiple foundations, including the Lilly Endowment Inc., presented for numerous statewide nonprofit association conferences, and has dedicated the past decade to bringing effective evaluation practices to nonprofits. He has led cohorts of AmeriCorps programs in California, Iowa, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington in this evaluation methodology to maximize the impact of federal AmeriCorps funding.

Associate Consultant, Jessamyn Luiz, has worked to build the capacity and sustainability of AmeriCorps programs and public agencies for nearly two decades. She started her career in national service with the national AmeriCorps program Jumpstart as site manager in 1998 and continued as regional program director and executive director in the West and Midwest through 2005. She became the AmeriCorps Program Officer for Oregon Volunteers in 2012 where she partnered with Dr. Patty to provide SIP to nine Oregon and seven Serve Washington subgrantees. In between her work in national service, Jessamyn led the turnaround efforts of defunded Head Start programs as Managing Director with Acelero Learning, Inc. and served as the Director of Education for the Pueblo of Tesuque tribal government in New Mexico. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Organizational Development & Change at Fielding Graduate University.

Project Description

CONTENT	WHO PARTICIPATES?	WHEN?
Module 1 – Defining Intended Impact (in person) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to project and guiding models • Mini-dive interviews • Key ideas of direct effect 	Full evaluation teams	January 26 9:00 AM-4:00 PM
Module 2 – Articulating “Theory of Change” (via webinar) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naming the strategy for impact • Identifying the core principles of change 	Evaluation Team Leaders (team members optional)	February 9 9:00-10:00 AM
Module 3 & 4 – Qualitative Launch (in person) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intro to guiding models and qualitative evaluation • Review of intended impact and theory of change • Developing a protocol • Holding an in-depth interview • Collecting data • Analyzing data • Sampling strategies • Logistics of qualitative data management 	Full evaluation teams	March 1 9:00 AM-4:00 PM
Module 5 – Designing Quantitative Instruments (via webinar) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying E3 data • Techniques to writing items • Structuring a questionnaire • Sampling and response rates • Loading and deploying an instrument 	Evaluation Team Leaders (team members optional)	April 5 9:00-10:00 AM
Module 6 & 7 – Thematics and Applications (in person) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme mapping • Translating themes to findings • Driving to program adjustments and experiments • Developing communiques of the findings 	Full evaluation teams	May 17* 9:00 AM-4:00 PM
Module 8 – Building Habits of Evaluation (via webinar)	Evaluation Team Leaders (team members optional)	June 7 9:00-10:00 AM
Showcase – Presentation of Findings and Program Development	Evaluation Team Leaders (team members optional)*	TBD

* If possible, we'd love to have AmeriCorps members participate in or lead these presentations as part of their leadership development!

Time Investment

Activity	Evaluation Team Leader	Evaluation Team
Training & Follow-up Discussions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 full-day in-person training opportunities in Portland • 3 training webinars; 1 hour each • Individual coaching (via conference call and/or email exchange; ½ hour each) to follow up on webinars and support you with implementing training content in your program's evaluation 	21 hours 3 hours 3 hours	14 hours
Evaluation Team Meetings and Protocol Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with your program's evaluation team (1-1.5 hours/meeting; 4-5 meetings) • Preparation for and follow-up from meetings (.5-1 hour/meeting) 	4-7.5 hours 2-5 hours	4-7.5 hours
Interviewing and Analyzing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the time spent by your evaluation team to conduct the interviews, write notes and do an initial analysis of the data. This will vary greatly based on the number of questions in your qualitative evaluation protocol and type of interviewees (e.g. children and youth may be shorter and less in-depth than adults). It also depends on the number of interviews you will have each evaluation team member conducting. • This typically takes 1.5 hours per interview. 	5-15 hours	5-15 hours
Presenting and Reporting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing a presentation for your colleagues and stakeholders • Writing evaluation report 	3-4 hours	1-2 hours
Ongoing Planning and Program Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is time your program will take to use the findings from your evaluation to learn as an organization, develop your internal leadership capability and continuously improve! We hope you will invest a lot of time here, but this is at your discretion. 	As much time as you can commit to get the most learning and growth out of this for your program!	
TOTAL	42 - 55.5+ hours over 6 months	30 - 43.5+ hours over 6 months

Tools Needed to Participate

- Computer
- Headset or earbuds with microphone (or a telephone near your computer)
- Webcam