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## STEPS' Program Evaluation Capacity-Building Program

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## **STEPS' Program Evaluation Capacity- Building Program**



**SEPTEMBER 2016**



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The College of Public Affairs and Community Service (CPACS) was created in 1973 to ensure that the university was responsive to the critical social needs of our community and state. The College was given the mission not only to provide educational programs of the highest caliber to prepare students for leadership in public service, but also to reach out to the community to help solve public problems.

The College has become a national leader among similar colleges, with nine programs ranked in the top 25 in the nation. Our faculty ranks are among the finest in their disciplines. Faculty, staff, and students are integral to the community and state because of our applied research, service learning, and community partnerships. We take our duty seriously to help address social needs and craft solutions to local, state, and national problems. For more information, visit our website: [cpacs.unomaha.edu](http://cpacs.unomaha.edu)

## CPACS Urban Research Awards

Part of the mission of the College of Public Affairs and Community Service (CPACS) is to conduct research, especially as it relates to concerns of our local and statewide constituencies. CPACS has always had an urban mission, and one way that mission is served is to perform applied research relevant to urban society in general, and the Omaha metropolitan area and other Nebraska urban communities in particular. Beginning in 2014, the CPACS Dean provided funding for projects with high relevance to current urban issues, with the potential to apply the findings to practice in Nebraska, Iowa and beyond.



# STEPs' Program Evaluation Capacity-Building Program

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## SUMMARY

The STEPs' Program Evaluation Capacity-Building Program arose from previous research we conducted in the Omaha community with small nonprofit organizations. To meet the needs of the smaller nonprofits, STEPs utilized Urban Research Grant funding to offer one set of three free program evaluation training sessions. Combined with a previous set in late 2015, 47 individuals from 36 organizations attended the two cohorts of program evaluation training sessions. Organizations who had a staff member attend all three training sessions were then invited to apply for individual consultations to assist with program evaluation needs. The Urban Research Grant allowed us to offer free consulting from a STEPs staff member to six of these organizations.

## PROGRAM EVALUATION TRAINING SESSIONS

Attendees of the training sessions were invited to fill out evaluations following each session. Evaluations from the first and second cohort showed that 100% of attendees either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" the training was helpful, the content was organized and easy to follow, and they would be able to apply the knowledge they learned. For both cohorts, the great majority of attendees "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that adequate time was provided for discussion and/or questions, while a very small number of respondents expressed a desire for increased discussion time.

Based on evaluations, the content delivered during the program evaluation capacity-building trainings was received enthusiastically, deemed as very relevant, and highly appreciated by the attendees. The following comment was received on one of the evaluations at the end of the first cohort:

"I appreciate all of you for giving us this opportunity, this has been an experience that I cherish and will

enjoy putting all my new found skills to use. I pray God cover all of you and give an extra measure of love, grace, favor, and mercy through the holiday season and as you move into 2016. Thank you..."

In the commentary from the evaluations, attendees expressed feelings of deep gratitude for providing additional assistance to community organizations with limited resources, allotting time to focus on program evaluation efforts, and offering follow-up services to hold the organizations accountable and provide more individualized help.

## CONSULTING SERVICES

Organizations who completed all three sessions of the program evaluation capacity-building trainings were eligible to apply for individual consulting with STEPs staff members. Each consultation consisted of up to five two-hour meetings with a focus on the program evaluation efforts of the organization's choice.

We received evaluation forms from five of the six organizations that participated in the consulting services. Responses were overwhelmingly positive, and showed that 100% of those who completed the evaluations strongly agreed that 1) they were satisfied with the results of the consultation and felt they had benefited; 2) they would recommend STEPs to other nonprofits for evaluation needs; and 3) their consultant was knowledgeable, responsive, organized, listened well, and communicated effectively. (From our perspective, consulting with the sixth organization also went very well.) In the commentary, most recipients of consulting services talked about how they were able to better implement program evaluation with the help of more tailored assistance from their consultant, how they had increased their knowledge of program evaluation, and how they had implemented a plan and had clear and definitive next steps to continue the work independently. In follow-up commentary from one of the recipients of consulting services,

the organization reported benefiting from receiving consulting services in several ways. Three months following their last consult appointment, the organization reported a 41% increase in response rate for their client satisfaction surveys. In addition, the consulting service assisted with improving therapeutic processes by streamlining client case documentation, and finding an appropriate and validated outcome measurement tool. All changes were enthusiastically embraced by staff including a staff member who is typically resistant to change.

We provided follow-up options for those organizations who were not eligible or felt they were not ready to apply for consulting services. We gave everyone who attended the training sessions an application for a service-learning partnership in a graduate-level program evaluation course. We also gave everyone the ability to participate in a program evaluation capacity-building group that would meet on a monthly basis to network and resource together, as well as to serve as a reminder to devote time and effort to program evaluation.

## IMPACT

Previous research and firsthand experience from participants in the program evaluation capacity-building program have shown that program evaluation efforts are not only necessary to make informed decisions about programming, but they are also often required to report to funders. Much of the funding that nonprofits receive is contingent upon being able to show that an organization is providing the services it promises to and is meeting its stated outcomes. As evidenced by the stated need and apparent demand for free program evaluation assistance, this is an area where nonprofits tend to struggle due to resource constraints, staff knowledge and/or ability, and very limited time to devote to evaluation efforts. Findings from the evaluations show that the program participants were thrilled to receive basic evaluation training at no charge to their organization.

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Proposals to present on this program evaluation capacity-building effort with small nonprofits have been accepted and presentations will be made to the annual conference of the American Evaluation Association in October, 2016 in Atlanta, Georgia, as well as the Engagement Scholarship Consortium in October, 2016 in Omaha, Nebraska.







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