The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Evaluation Fellowship Program

Increasing diversity in the evaluation field through training, mentoring, and professional development

SUMMARY

From March 2008 through February 2013 the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Evaluation Fellowship Program aimed to increase the presence and influence of underrepresented groups in the evaluation field, including minorities, first-generation college graduates, people from low-income communities, and others. The program provided fellowships to four cohorts of people from these groups, in two tracks (Emerging Professionals and Retooling Professionals), allowing them to obtain skills and training to become program evaluators and effective culturally responsive evaluation consumers.

OMG Center for Collaborative Learning served as the administrative site. Gerri Spilka, MA, MArch, MLP, executive director of OMG, and Rodney Hopson, PhD, Hillman Distinguished Professor, Department of Foundations and Leadership at Duquesne University, co-directed the program.

Key Results

- Over four years the Evaluation Fellowship Program selected and trained 32 fellows: 16 Emerging Professionals and 16 Retooling Professionals.

- Most alumni (28 of 32) have remained engaged in the evaluation field.

- As a result of participation in the Evaluation Fellowship Program, several placement sites have implemented initiatives to improve their organizational climate and policies regarding underrepresented staff and to increase learning about culturally responsive evaluation within their organizations.

- Emerging Fellows advanced their key evaluation skills from a "novice" skill level at the beginning of the fellowship to a slightly above “proficient” level at fellowship completion.

- Retooling Fellows showed greatest growth in areas related to the oversight and application of culturally responsive evaluation.
Funding

RWJF supported the RWJF Evaluation Fellowship Program with a grant$ of $1,994,417 between March 1, 2008, and February 28, 2013, to OMG Center for Collaborative Learning.

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation provided a one-year, $96,000 grant (starting February 2009) to cover salary and benefits of one Emerging Fellow.

CONTEXT

High-quality evaluations depend on having diverse perspectives, which allow authentic and effective interpretation of social patterns in public health, social services, communities, and organizations.

Despite increased demands for accountability and evaluation in foundations, nonprofits, and government, the field of evaluation is increasingly becoming less diverse in part due to the lack of evaluation training and placement opportunities for graduates of traditional master's and doctoral level programs. As a result, there is a need to build professional and advanced training for people of color and other underrepresented groups, particularly at the master's and doctorate levels and among those professionals already practicing in a variety of settings.

RWJF’s Interest in This Area

RWJF's Human Capital Portfolio seeks out people whose work can improve health and health care and provides them with support to help them realize their promise. A core component of the portfolio supports efforts to promote diversity and cultural sensitivity at all levels of the health and health care workforce. Several key programs illustrate that commitment:

- Harold Amos Medical Faculty Development Program is the 2004 expansion of RWJF’s Minority Medical Faculty Development Program (MMFDP), which strove to increase the number of underrepresented minorities on medical faculties. The MMFDP selected its first cohort of eight physicians in 1983.

Since then, the scope of the program has grown to include those in clinical investigation, health services research, and dental research. More than 200 scholars have completed all four years of the program. Of these, more than 80 percent are still in academic medicine. In 2012 the program expanded further to include dental medicine. See Program Results Report.

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1 Grant ID# 62571.
New Connections: Increasing Diversity of RWJF Programming seeks to expand the diversity of perspectives that inform RWJF program strategy by introducing new researchers and evaluators to the Foundation. Recognizing that talented researchers and evaluators from historically underrepresented communities can often be professionally isolated in their early- or mid-careers and therefore overlooked for funding, RWJF senior program staff created New Connections in 2005 to foster new relationships between them and RWJF. The program offers research funding as well as career development and mentoring. The first cohort of scholars was funded in 2006; the program runs through September 2015. See Program Results Report.

The RWJF Center for Health Policy at the University of New Mexico and the RWJF Center for Health Policy at Meharry Medical College were created in 2007 and 2009, respectively, to increase the number and diversity of PhD graduates with formal training in the fields of sociology, political science, and economics who engage in health policy, health services, and health disparities research.

THE PROJECT

RWJF launched the RWJF Evaluation Fellowship Program in March 2008 to “address the issue of lack of diversity in the evaluation field by increasing the presence and influence of underrepresented groups,” said former RWJF Assistant Vice President Debra Joy Perez, PhD, MA, MPA.²

OMG Center for Collaborative Learning served as the administrative site for the Evaluation Fellowship Program. Spilka and Hopson co-directed the program, with Spilka leading the program’s track for Retooling Professionals and Hopson leading the program’s track for Emerging Professionals.

A national advisory committee of individuals representing philanthropy, evaluation graduate programs, evaluators, and former placement sites and fellows played an integral role in recruiting placement sites, reviewing fellowship applications, and raising awareness of the program and its goals. See Appendix for a list of advisory committee members as of program completion.

How the Fellowship Program Worked

The Evaluation Fellowship Program was open to people from historically disadvantaged and underrepresented communities, including ethnic and racial minorities, those from low-income communities, first-generation college graduates, and others underrepresented in the evaluation field.

²Perez left RWJF in August 2013 to join the Annie E. Casey Foundation as Vice President of Knowledge Support.
The program offered one-year, full-time fellowships on two tracks:

- The *Emerging Professionals* track was designed for individuals who had graduated from a master’s or doctoral degree program within the three years before application and who had limited professional experience and training in evaluation. Emerging Fellows were placed for a year in organizations with expertise and capacity in research and evaluation and were assigned to work with projects already underway.

  The placement site provided the fellow with a competitive salary and benefits; the Evaluation Fellowship Program awarded $10,000 to each organization to help offset the salary and benefits.

  Fellows attended four program-led training workshops during the year, including one held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Evaluation Association. The intensive workshops covered culturally responsive evaluation approaches and methodology and complemented the placement experience.

  An employee of the host organization with experience in evaluation mentored the fellow, and a placement supervisor provided ongoing guidance and direction.

  Co-Director Hopson describes the range of program activities for Emerging Professionals: "We were placing them over the course of the year, following up with them and their supervisors, giving training to their supervisors, making site visits, bringing those Fellows for seasonal trainings, encouraging them to build products and develop their skills and networks."

- The *Retooling Professionals* track offered an opportunity for midcareer, nonprofit professionals to obtain evaluation skills and training primarily to increase their organization’s ability to use evidenced-based data for culturally responsive programmatic decision-making. For some, it provided the chance to become internal evaluators in their own organizations.

  Retooling Fellows received about 75 hours of program-led training in three workshops during the year and ongoing technical assistance as they undertook and completed a modest internal evaluation project at their organization. Their staff colleagues were the clients. The program assigned a coach to each Retooling Professional who was an evaluation professional outside of the fellow’s organization.

  The organizations each received a $5,000 award to offset costs, and the fellow received a travel stipend.

  Co-Director Spilka summarizes the focus of activities for Retooling Professionals: "It was an introduction to evaluation," she said, "and at a time when evaluation is increasingly being taken up in the social sector."

Participants in both tracks received training (through readings and guest lectures) in applying a culturally responsive lens to real evaluation projects taking place in diverse communities.
Fellows attended workshops on evaluation skills, including survey development and analysis, interviewing, and document review. Program staff presented a total of 23 workshops (12 for Emerging Fellows and 11 for Retooling Fellows) and provided more than 400 hours of mentorship.

**Fellows Describe Their Experiences**

Both Emerging and Retooling Fellows reported a range of experiences and learning:

- Emerging Fellow Jill Jim: “I reviewed literature, wrote reports, facilitated and took notes at focus groups, developed surveys, made presentations and performed other evaluation activities.”

- Emerging Fellow Katrina Ellis: “I refined many evaluation skills that I first learned about in my coursework: evaluation planning, implementation, working with stakeholders, managing data collection, report writing. I also learned a lot about the politics involved when conducting evaluations—organizational politics, government politics—things that aren’t explained in a textbook.”

- Retooling Fellow Eloisa Patterson: “I have always had an interest in research/program evaluation. As a graduate student, I had participated in several internships, but had not had the opportunity to put it into practice in the work setting. [During my fellowship] I evaluated the health outcomes of People Helping People clients who participated in case management. The results of the study have been used to acquire funding and for direct trainings for case managers. There has also been a renewed interest in increasing the organization’s capacity to conduct program evaluation.”

- Retooling Fellow Sofia Oviedo: “I conducted an internal program evaluation of Global Kids’ Power of Citizenry Leadership Program. I gained valuable training on how to conduct a culturally relevant internal evaluation and had the opportunity to develop a theory of change, identify evaluation questions, analyze program data and design new evaluation tools. I also wrote an evaluation report that detailed the findings and outlined a long-term plan designed to help the organization achieve its outcome measurement goals.”

**RESULTS**

**Program Results**

- **Project directors reported that over four years the Evaluation Fellowship Program selected and trained 32 fellows: 16 Emerging Professionals and 16 Retooling Professionals.**

  — The four cohorts of Emerging Professionals were placed in evaluation positions in philanthropic organizations, independent evaluation and research firms, and
government research organizations. Placement examples included: Decision Information Resources (Houston), National Cancer Institute (Bethesda, Md.), and OMG Center for Collaborative Learning (Philadelphia). See the Evaluation Fellowship website for profiles of **Emerging Fellows**.

- The three cohorts of Retooling Professionals came from organizations across the country and from public health, older adult services, education, and legal services. Host organizations included: Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Miami, City Harvest (New York), and People Helping People (Solvang, Calif.). See the Evaluation Fellowship website for profiles of **Retooling Fellows**.

- **The fellows were enthusiastic about the real and practical value of their experience to their careers.** For example:

  In a video launched in July 2013 two Emerging Fellows offered the following perspectives:

  - Krystal Tomlin noted that her master’s program in public health at the University of Florida included only a bit of evaluation: “It was just enough to catch my attention and to have me interested, but I just didn’t know how to tap into that. The fellowship offered me that opportunity. Without that, I don’t think I would ever have had the experience to that extent…. Being introduced to the culturally responsive evaluation perspective … has been enormous.”

  - Jose Reyes: “… the experience, the skills, some of the things I gained in the fellowship … trickle down into some of the things I do in my position now [as research analyst with Special Service for Groups]. … I ask questions in terms of inclusivity, which stems from CRE [culturally responsive evaluation]—How are we including those individuals in the process? I always look back to that experience from the fellowship and try to include as much as possible.”

  In the summer of 2013, one Emerging Fellow was asked to comment on the value of her experience:

  - Denise Herrera, now an evaluation associate at RWJF, said, “This postdoctoral opportunity accelerated and boosted my career above and beyond what I ever expected. Networking with and being mentored by some of the most seasoned players in this field has been a true gift that keeps on giving. Much of what we do as evaluators involves relationship building—and this fellowship program enabled me to further develop and cultivate my professional and personal networks throughout the United States.

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3 Special Service for Groups is a Los Angeles-based nonprofit organization that provides community-based solutions to social and economic issues facing individuals with greatest need.
• Many fellows were especially grateful for the opportunity to develop a network of others in the field to draw upon:
  
  — Emerging Fellow Katrina Ellis said that the best aspect of the program was getting to know people in the field. “I didn't know much about evaluation before the fellowship program. I now have a network of people who are doing evaluation work.”
  
  — Retooling Fellow Eloisa Patterson agreed that collaborating with program mentors and other fellows was the best aspect of the program. “I felt that the mentors did a great job creating a learning environment where I felt safe to propose ideas and make a contribution.”
  
  — Said Retooling Fellow Sofia Oviedo, “The best aspect of the program has been having the opportunity to meet and work with other professionals who are also working toward the same goal of assessing and improving organizational and programmatic effectiveness.”
  
• Project directors reported that most alumni (28 of 32) have remained engaged in the evaluation field. For example:
  
  — Three Emerging Fellows work in government research at the Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality, the National Cancer Institute, and the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases.
  
  — Two Retooling Fellows direct evaluation work in their organizations.
  
  — Two Emerging Fellows and one Retooling Fellow went on to pursue doctoral degrees in evaluation-related fields.
  
  — One fellow has an active role in the Multi-Ethnic Issues in Evaluation topical interest group of the American Evaluation Association.
  
In interviews in 2011, fellows discussed their interest in continuing to work in evaluation:
  
  — Emerging Fellow Jill Jim, working as a consultant to the Navajo Area Indian Health Service in Arizona, said, “The fellowship has supported my career interests in program evaluation. I expect to stay in the evaluation field as long as I can.”
  
  — Emerging Fellow Katrina Ellis, in a doctoral program in public health, noted “I am especially interested in working with communities of color and plan to incorporate evaluation in my career moving forward.”
  
  — Retooling Fellow Sofia Oviedo was “still working for Global Kids as the director of development and communications but will be heavily involved in conducting evaluation activities for the organization.”
On an alumni survey administered by the program in July 2012, program alumni reported that:

- Six months to two years after completing the program most were using what they had learned in the program.
- Among career development components of the program, the alumni were most interested in evaluation methodological training and mentoring.
- They were able to develop meaningful professional connections through program participation. One alumnus stated: “The network of young and seasoned professionals has helped me obtain my current work after the fellowship. I think professional relationships are essential to moving forward after that experience.”

As a result of their participation in the Evaluation Fellowship Program, several placement sites have implemented initiatives to improve their organizational climate and policies regarding underrepresented staff and to increase organizational learning about culturally responsive evaluation.

Placement supervisors noted that the knowledge and experience fellows take from the program will be useful in whatever capacity they work in the future.

- “Whether they work as evaluators or in another capacity such as a program manager, they will know what to expect from evaluation,” said Edith Gozali-Lee, PhD, research scientist at Wilder Research.
- “Any time you are providing targeted training to a specific group of people and they go into a field, you are spreading the knowledge,” said Sylvia Epps, PhD, senior researcher at Decision Information Resources in Houston. “The fellows are exposed to different kinds of work in different parts of the country and they will take that experience with them, regardless of what career they end up in.”

Communications Results

- Project staff developed a website, http://www.rwjf-evaluationfellows.org/, as a vehicle for attracting potential fellows and placement sites, communicating with current fellows and sites, and providing information about the program to the larger evaluation field. Project staff also established virtual workspaces via the online collaboration platform Huddle. Through these, staff could host discussion threads and share documents with the fellows.
- Project staff developed a curriculum to train future evaluators in the principles of culturally responsive evaluation (not available online).
- Wabei Siyolwe from Global Posse Productions, Inc. (an independent film producer), working with project staff, wrote, directed, produced, and filmed Evaluation with a Diversity Lens, a video about the Evaluation Fellowship
Program. The video, in three parts, is available for viewing on the Evaluation Fellowship website.

- OMG created "RWJF Evaluation Fellowship Program: A Video Conversation Series." This set of videos, launched in July 2013, features conversations with graduates and leaders of the program. The videos are available for viewing online.

- Former fellows and project staff presented at each annual meeting of the American Evaluation Association during the four years of the program, at the 2013 Annual Conference of the Society for Social Work and Research, and at the Inaugural Conference of the Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in April 2013. The theme of these presentations was how the program effectively trained diverse fellows and helped shape organizational attitudes toward cultural diversity.

THE EVALUATION AND ITS FINDINGS

In 2011, staff from Social Policy Research Associates conducted an evaluation of the Evaluation Fellowship Program under a subcontract.

Methodology

Evaluators employed several data collection methods for the evaluation. They:

- Reviewed background documents (applicant proposals, training agendas, etc).

- Surveyed 31 individuals through online surveys of eight Emerging Fellows, 10 Retooling Fellows, five mentors of Emerging Fellows, and five supervisors and three coaches of Retooling Fellows.

- Conducted interviews with three project leaders (from OMG, Duquesne, and RWJF), four national advisory committee members, five Emerging Fellows, six Retooling Fellows, and two mentors of Emerging Fellows, for a total of 20.

Findings

Evaluators described program outcomes for Emerging Fellows in a report to OMG:

- **Emerging Fellows advanced their key evaluation skills from a "novice" skill level at the beginning of the fellowship to a slightly above “proficient” level at fellowship completion.** The Emerging Fellows demonstrated the greatest growth in areas related to developing a “big picture understanding of the evaluation field, evaluation design, and the theoretical underpinnings of culturally responsive evaluation,” according to the evaluators. These included:

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4 Social Policy Research Associates is a research, evaluation, and technical assistance firm located in Oakland, Calif.
— Understanding the purpose and use of evaluation in nonprofit, philanthropic, and educational settings

— Understanding the role of culture in evaluation

— Understanding participatory and democratic evaluation

— Defining evaluation questions and outcomes, determining methods and data analysis plans, and writing accurate and valid reports

— Understanding the purpose and use of evaluation plans

— Understanding culturally responsive evaluation and its implications.

- **Emerging Fellows showed lower levels of growth in skills associated with the implementation of culturally responsive evaluation concepts, such as assessing hard to reach populations, observing culturally and linguistically diverse participants, and collecting data in a culturally responsive way.** In interviews, Emerging Fellows reported limited opportunities to apply their understanding of culturally responsive evaluation at their placement organization, thus leaving them without a strong sense of what the concept looks like in practice.

- **Individual outcomes for Emerging Fellows varied substantially based on the particular placement, with those at evaluation firms afforded more opportunities to design and conduct evaluations.**

- **The Emerging Fellows’ influence on the awareness and use of culturally responsive evaluation by their placement organizations was mixed.** Emerging Fellows tended to be junior staff members who could raise awareness but were not able to integrate culturally responsive evaluation into the practices of the organization.

Evaluators described program outcomes for Retooling Fellows in the same report to OMG:

- **Retooling Fellows tended to enter the program with a higher level of understanding and exposure to evaluation than did the Emerging Fellows and, thus, often felt that the fellowship built upon their existing skill set.** They began with entry-level evaluation skills and completed with a “proficient” evaluation skill set. In some areas the fellows demonstrated mastery by fellowship completion.

- **In contrast to the Emerging Fellows, Retooling Fellows showed greatest growth in areas related to the oversight and application of culturally responsive evaluation, such as developing an evaluation model, planning and designing culturally responsive needs assessment, and defining the evaluation’s purpose to stakeholders.**
• Retooling Fellows benefitted greatly from participation in the program, yet the outcomes they achieved were influenced by:
  
  — A lack of opportunities for peer networking and support. Some fellows described a feeling of isolation and noted a dearth of mentoring within their organization.

  — The challenge of balancing the fellowship requirements with their existing work responsibilities, especially given the increased workload many experienced as a result of the economic demands of the national recession.

• The majority of host organizations for the Retooling Fellowship deepened their capacity for culturally responsive evaluation as a result of the fellowship. The fellowship raised the profile of evaluation within the organizations, and the fellows’ evaluation projects made concrete contributions.

CONCLUSIONS

Project leaders agreed that a wider, long-term impact of the Evaluation Fellowship Program will require much more time as well as continued and broad support.

• “While there is an immediate impact of having these 32 fellows in the field, it is really the extent to which we utilize this work for the future,” said Co-Director Hopson. “The concept of an evaluation fellowship could use much, much more support—10-year, 15-year support—and then talk about impact. We’re trying to build a field and trying to support other larger professional associations and other training.”

• “There is still underrepresentation in the evaluation world and it’s going to take a decade of skill building and pipelines and developing partnerships with universities as well,” said Co-Director Spilka. “Pipeline programs are really important, but we need bigger conversations as institutions of practice about how we are advancing culturally responsive evaluation and looking at our own diversity and diverse practices internally. You can’t just talk the talk, you have to walk it as well. We need more leadership of color in our firms and practices. There is a lot of room to do more.”

• “The biggest accomplishment was raising the visibility of the issue, which is the lack of diversity among evaluators, and the need for folks who do evaluation to reflect the populations of programs in communities of color,” said Perez. “You can’t, obviously, say you’ve impacted an entire field with 32 people. But there was a level of consciousness-raising that did impact the field in a positive way.”

CHALLENGES, LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Challenges

Despite overall positive experience, the Evaluation Fellowship Program posed challenges for program directors, fellows, and placement sites alike.
**Challenges for the Program**

Recruiting, selecting, and matching fellows and placement sites were all challenging in several ways:

**Recruiting Fellows**

- **Limiting eligibility to applicants who have been raised in the United States.** The selection objective of the Evaluation Fellowship Program was to identify individuals with personal experience being socioeconomically disadvantaged in the U.S. and from groups that have been historically underrepresented in the evaluation field. However, the program received a number of applications from foreign born- and raised- graduate students of color who did not have this kind of life experience, and may, in fact, have come from privileged backgrounds in their native countries. “They are not the populations who could work in these communities and do not have a lot of the context,” said program Co-Director Spilka.

- **Identifying qualified candidates among eligible applicants.** Opinions were mixed about whether a large enough and strong enough pool of candidates exists among eligible (U.S.-born from underrepresented backgrounds and communities) applicants. “Finding candidates from traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds who have the needed skills and preparation requires a nuanced effort,” said program Co-Director Hopson. Some groups (e.g., Native Americans) are smaller and less connected to the field, and it can be harder to recruit from these groups.

- **Ensuring a good “fit” between fellow and placement site.** For the Emerging Fellows component, program directors found that it could be a challenge to place the right fellow at the right site. “You want a sufficient number of agencies and a sufficient number of fellows and then to match them in a way that supports a win-win for everyone,” said Hopson. “When you get it right, everyone is happy. But when you don’t, you really don’t have room for it not to work.”

  Candidates were screened by program staff and directors, who then offered agencies a choice of two fellows from the finalists. “Maybe we should have given them a larger set of people to choose from,” Hopson reflected, “for example, 15 to choose from that they would rank. We probably made it more difficult than it needed to be.”

- **Fitting the placement with the fellow’s personal circumstances.** Sometimes the right placement for a candidate required geographic relocation and not everyone could relocate, due to family issues. “We had a few women with children,” said Spilka. “One did relocate, but another could not.”

**Recruiting Placement Sites**

- **Engaging placement sites in a faltering economy.** Finding enough appropriate placement sites was challenging throughout the program, particularly in the difficult economy of 2008–2012. To host an Emerging Fellow, a placement site had to be able
to fund the fellow’s salary and benefits for a year and allocate staff time for mentoring and training the fellow, who likely was not as skilled as a more seasoned professional. This could be difficult to impossible for an organization that was solving budget problems by cutting staff.

The economy also had an impact on the potential for attracting Retooling Fellows, as organizations with reduced staff often could not afford the time a fellow needed for training and fellowship-related project work.

- **Convincing organizations of the value added by the fellowship.** A number of organizations, including some larger evaluation firms, declined the opportunity to host a fellow, saying that “their business model wouldn’t allow it and that we had to really convince them of the value added,” said Spilka. Some organizations also stated that they already hired a diverse workforce and did not need the fellowship for that purpose. “It was really disappointing,” she said.

### Challenges for Fellows

- **Emerging Fellows** working in small organizations with arduous work schedules at times struggled to meet fellowship expectations that were “sometimes demanding and overwhelming,” according to Placement Supervisor Epps. “It wasn’t always possible to give the fellow the time needed to work on the fellowship project, since there was no one else to handle her other work.”

- **Retooling Fellows** were juggling other job responsibilities while striving to meet fellowship project and training requirements. “It was a challenge to help them find the time to work on their fellowship project,” said Spilka.

- Retooling Fellow Eloisa Patterson noted that “some fellows had difficulty taking time off work” for the training sessions. Yet she would have liked to have more days for training. “I felt so rushed to get the information,” she said. “And I don’t consider myself a slow learner.”

### Challenges for Placement Sites

- Placement sites had to strike a balance between providing the fellows with what they needed to expand their skills and knowledge and ensuring that they became experienced enough in the specific areas in which the organization needed their help. Particularly in a small, client-driven organization, the specific types of projects or tasks that would meet the fellow’s needs may not have been available during the fellowship year.

- Sometimes the fellows’ lack of professional experience made it hard to integrate them into the placement organization, observed Spilka from the vantage point of a host organization. (OMG hosted several fellows itself over the course of the program.) “You had to take it as largely a learning experience for them,” she said. “The value
added to the organizations sometimes was dubious. You had to be open to that. In other cases, they were super.”

- The application of culturally responsive evaluation was a challenge in some sites, according to Hopson. “We’re telling the fellows that they are going to change the evaluation world and they are coming up against institutional, cultural, ideological, geographic, and economic issues that challenge how people think about race and diversity. Sometimes I think they were really wondering the extent to which, as messengers of culturally responsive evaluation, they could find a way to engineer this in the context of a larger institutional culture.”

**Lessons for Improving Fellow Selection**

1. **Emphasize maturity as a selection criterion for evaluation fellows.** Fellows must have a level of maturity, so that their expectations for the fellowship are realistic. Ideally, says Spilka, “Look for people who have a couple years’ work experience and are not right out of graduate school.” Placement Supervisor Gozali-Lee noted that after the first year, the program was able to select more mature candidates and, with more fellows, the fellows were better able to connect with one another and with the program.

2. **When creating a program aimed at attracting individuals from historically underrepresented groups, be clear about the requirement that applicants have been raised in the United States.** Otherwise, a program may attract foreign-born students of color who came to the U.S. as adults, and often are from a privileged background.

**Lessons for Enhancing the Fellowship Experience**

3. **Ensure that fellows receive adequate and appropriate support.** This includes both the coaching and mentoring offered by program staff and also the organizational support system at their placement or home organizations.

4. **Ensure that fellows have the experiences needed to build their skills as culturally responsive evaluators.** The fellowship experience varied quite a bit across placement sites. “If some fellows do not get the experience and variety they need to meet the [culturally responsive evaluation] mission of the fellowship, then they basically just have 12 months of promised employment,” said Placement Supervisor Epps.

**Lesson for Selecting Host Organizations**

5. **Address organizational capacity for culturally responsive evaluation when engaging host organizations.** “We must think more broadly than just building individual capacity. It is incredibly important to focus on organizational capacity, which is much more complex to address, but critical to promoting diversity in the field,” according to national advisory committee member Christina A. Christie, PhD.
Recommendations for a Future Fellowship Program

6. **Re-frame the program focus from its identity as a pipeline program to one that also recognizes the development of the host organizations.** This emphasis will help host organizations understand the benefits to them in terms of exploring their own skills relative to race and culture in evaluation. (Co-Director/Spilka)

7. **Identify host organizations early in the program.** Then, allot sufficient time for recruitment and for nurturing the relationship with the organizations over time. (Co-Director/Spilka)

8. **Establish more intentional site management of the placements, with more oversight and more variety in the placements.** This would better serve the sustainability of a fellowship program as well as help to change organizational culture. (Former RWJF Assistant Vice President/Perez)

9. **Examine the ways in which the fellowship model works in different settings.** Fellowships might differ depending on whether the setting is a government agency, a not-for-profit agency, a for-profit organization, a university research center, or a philanthropic organization. Consider developing variations of the model—building on the same core—that “would help fellows flourish a bit better, based on the type of model where they are working.” (Co-Director/Hopson)

10. **Engage in more in-depth discussions with the Emerging Fellowship host organizations to understand what the program is doing for them in both the short- and the long-term.** This understanding would benefit future relationships. (Co-Director/Hopson)

11. **Expand the Emerging Fellowship to two years and provide increased financial support to the host organizations, if possible.** A fair amount of effort is required of these agencies, while the value added by the fellows can be somewhat marginal, especially during the first six months. (Co-Director/Spilka)

12. **Reduce the Retooling Fellowship to six months and add more cohorts.** Ensure that the fellows’ evaluation projects are small enough and narrow enough to be doable in that time frame. “You can have a bigger bang for the buck in a shorter period of time.” (Co-Director/Spilka)

13. **Position the Retooling Fellow organizationally between the executive director and the evaluator.** This team approach would be “an ideal way to get the senior people more invested in the program.” (Co-Director/Spilka)

14. **Identify champions for the continued inclusion of diversity in evaluation practice.** “There are some champions out there who can make it happen. It means bringing this talent together. Some are university professors; some are with different agencies and institutions. Some of our graduates are now placed in important organizations and they have made themselves champions.” (Co-Director/Hopson)
15. **Build an alumni network that continues support for the graduates of the fellowships and connects them with alumni of other fellowship programs.** “This is an area where RWJF can play an incredible role. This is quite critical—in a vacuum these programs absolutely do very little.” (Co-Director/Hopson)

**AFTERWARD**

The Evaluation Fellowship Program ended in February 2013 with the completion of the last cohorts of fellows.

Although the program has ended, RWJF’s former Assistant Vice President Perez emphasizes, “There is still a need to diversify evaluation. At RWJF we struggle every day in our evaluation planning to identify people who have a relevant, lived experience in the area of evaluation, particularly in a vulnerable population. So the nurturing and mentoring of evaluators from historically underrepresented groups is still a critical need and a huge gap.”

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APPENDIX

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(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

Report


Communications or Promotions

www.rwjf-evaluationfellows.org, a website designed to attract potential fellows and placement sites, communicate with current fellows and sites, and provide information about the program to the larger evaluation field. Includes profiles of fellows. Launched 2009.

Evaluation with a Diversity Lens, a video about the Evaluation Fellowship Program. Written, directed, produced, and filmed by Wabei Siyolwe, Global Posse Productions, Inc. Available for viewing on the Evaluation Fellowship website.

RWJF Evaluation Fellowship Program: A Video Conversation Series, a video featuring conversations with graduates and leaders of the program. Available for viewing online.