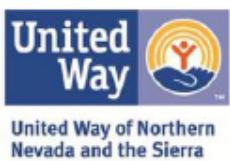


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Leadership In Evaluative Thinking Institute (LETI): A Brief Summary of a Six-Month Journey to Create a Culture of Inquiry in Eleven Northern Nevada Non-Profit Organizations

PRESENTERS



Deborah Loesch-
Griffin, Ph.D.



Jennifer
McClendon, Ph.D.



Abbie Olszewski,
Ph.D.

Deborah Loesch-Griffin, Ph.D.

Jennifer McClendon, Ph.D.

Turning Point, Incorporated

Abbie Olszewski, Ph.D.

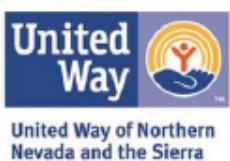
School of Medicine, University of Nevada, Reno



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We also would not have been successful in launching this first round without the courageous Cohort 1 leaders who signed up and followed through with this six-month commitment. In alphabetical order, listed here, we express deep gratitude and respect for all they do to make our communities here in Northern Nevada better places for all to live, work, and recreate.

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Taylor Zimney

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Gwen Bourne
Kenny Haack Damon

Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful
Christi Cakiroglu
Lindsey Panton

Nevada Department of
Health and Human Services
Cindy Routh Smith
DuAne Young

Northern Nevada Literacy Council
Mary Ann McCauley
Susan Robinson

Northern Nevada HOPES
Sharon Chamberlain
Stacey Rice

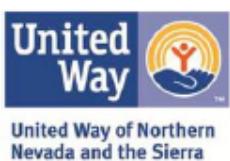
Northern Nevada RAVE Family Foundation
Elizabeth Aguir
Korine Viehweg

PACE Coalition
Laura Oslund
Larry Robb

Sierra Nevada Journeys
Sean Hill
Catherine Leon

United Way of Northern Nevada
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Lulleen Lamar
Kelsey Piechocki

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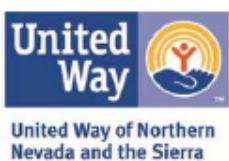


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BACKGROUND ON LETI

The Leadership in Evaluative Thinking Institute (LETI) was co-sponsored by the Community Foundation of Western Nevada (CFWN), United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra (UWNNS), and Turning Point, Inc (TPI). The workshop series evolved over a four-to-six year process. It started in 2010-11 with initial cross-sector partnerships meetings in which CFWN facilitated conversations around a collective impact initiative and funding opportunity. That led to a deeper exploration of evidence-based evaluation approaches from 2012-2014 with CFWN facilitating community presentations by local university and evaluation firms for Northern Nevada's non-profits to learn more about the capacity they would need to document the effectiveness of their programs. A final agreement was reached by those participating in these conversations

and explorations that a cross-sector leadership and evaluation capacity-building initiative would be of benefit and a sound place to start on the journey toward collective impact. When CFWN and UWNNS re-engaged Turning Point, Inc. in early 2016, each described their boards as ready and eager to support a training and capacity-building initiative.

This innovative six-month workshop series gave non-profit organizations and their boards and key stakeholders a renewed way of looking at the value in eVALUATION—for building organizational capacity and ensuring that their organizational teams stayed vision-and mission-driven while assuring their constituents and funders that they were capable of making positive change happen in their communities.

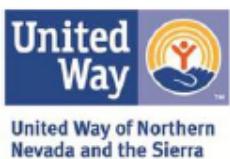
INTRODUCTION TO THE PURPOSE AND TWELVE TAKE AWAYS

The goals of LETI were three--to help non-profit administrators lead and advocate for the creation of responsive systems that:

- 1) are aligned with their organization's vision and mission;
- 2) help leaders monitor, measure, and track success across their whole organization; and
- 3) help leaders achieve results.

Key teams (2 people from each organization) from 11 northern and rural Nevada's non-profit sector participated in the Leadership in Evaluative Thinking Institute. This series of six workshops promoted a shared culture of evaluation and evidence building—what we refer to as a “Culture of Inquiry (COI)” or evaluative thinking. It also promoted peer-to-peer learning through use of a learning circle or action-learning framework. Organizations that participated in this

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opportunity received instruction, support, and coaching to strengthen and improve their organizations from the inside out. Ultimately, the LETI experience was designed to set organizations on the path to partnering with others who shared their visions and were committed to collective impact.

The workshop began in October 2016 with an opening evening session that brought all participants together for the purpose of getting to know one another both personally and professionally and beginning the relationship-building experience central to being effective leaders of evaluative thinking. This evening session was followed by the first of six full days of training and collaboration. The LETI workshop series ran through March 2017 and involved a full day of training and collaboration each month, culminating in LETI participants making presentations and reflecting on what they had learned and what could be improved the next time around.

LETI was specifically designed to transmit a defined and concrete set of skills and common understandings about how evaluation works and what benefits organizations can reap from engaging in evaluative thinking. As noted, evaluative thinking can be cultivated and shared through conversations, collaboration, and coaching within and across private and public non-profit organizations -- whether they are focused on environmental, health and human services, education, or the arts and culture. The eleven non-profits who became the first LETI cohort represented nearly all of these domains and learned that they had more in common than they had differences.

LETI aimed to help non-profit administrators lead and advocate for the creation of responsive systems aligned with their vision and mission that would help them achieve results as well as monitor, measure, and track success across their organizations. The sessions supported the eleven teams in their development of a clear understanding of the evaluative thinking skills required and the confidence to apply these skills to lead and create a culture where:

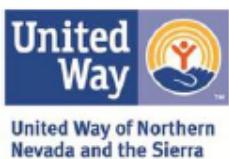
- people ask questions,
- explore alternatives,
- identify pathways to success, and
- translate those into results-based action that demonstrates their effectiveness.

These *skills* were represented as twelve “Take Aways” and are summarized below:

Participants will deeply understand:

- 1) The logic model is not simply a product but a tool that reflects an iterative process for aligning your organization’s activities and resources with its vision and mission.
- 2) Thought frameworks/conceptual maps/theories of change are powerful influences on how we organize the resources, services, and activities of our organization.
- 3) I don’t have to be a professional evaluator in order to collect or use data to inform decisions.
- 4) I know what it means to be an effective partner with an external evaluation team and a critical consumer of formal evaluation results

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- 5) I can discern the difference between outcomes of value vs. outcomes of accountability.
- 6) To achieve and demonstrate results, you have to commit to tracking your progress and success; monitoring program quality is necessary to achieving your results.
- 7) Information is to be used as a tool, not a threat: information is simply, information.
- 8) Asking questions can open up new ways of thinking and working; the point is not to find one answer but to consider new questions and think in terms of possibilities. (The What? So what? Now what? approach).
- 9) Triangulation: I should never make a decision based on only one piece of information or evidence.
- 10) My organization already has the internal resources to become a more effective organization – one of them is me.
- 11) Evaluation approaches and methods cross disciplines—no matter your mission or sector.

- 12) Collective impact begins internally before it can be effective externally.

Each of these Take Aways was addressed throughout the LETI workshop series as we provided different experiences for participants to consider the importance of each Take Away to their organizational leadership and evaluation capacity building initiatives. LETI facilitators provided:

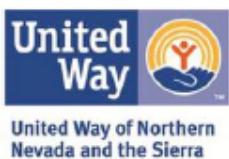
- Prompts for reflecting individually and as a group as everyone moved into deep conversations about what is possible in building each organization's evaluative thinking capacity
- Short skill-building presentations to provide tools for participants' evaluation capacity-building toolbox
- Peer-to-Peer Learning opportunities
- Experiential activities around specific evaluation topics
- Homework assignments and applied learning back at their organizations.

ORGANIZATION ACTION LEARNING PROJECTS

By December 2016, each non-profit team was assigned to one of three LETI Action Learning Circles (ALCs) and developed a plan for their organizational project—what they proposed to do to begin building the evaluation capacity of their organization through the development of a culture of inquiry. The Action Learning Circles met virtually a total of four times and involved

facilitation by one of the three workshop presenters as well as peer-to-peer consultation. The ALCs culminated with individual project summaries and a collaborative group project presentation to key stakeholders in their organizations—boards and partners—as part of the final day of the workshop series.

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Individual Projects:

Each team worked together with their respective organization's stakeholders—staff, volunteers, and board members. Some also focused on partnering with the participants in their programs and activities to learn directly from them what was most important for their success (outcomes of value) and what motivated them to participate in the organization's initiatives. All eleven teams developed project plans. Eight of the eleven teams submitted final summaries—while some continued to work on their projects past the last session. In many regards, the work all eleven organizations had begun through their individual projects was intended to continue. The sixth session was an arbitrary stopping point—a time to reflect on where they had arrived and what work would continue in their capacity-building effort.

The three ALC groups were comprised of three to four organizations each. There were obvious similarities in their starting points as leaders of evaluative thinking, which are summarized below. The individual project summaries can be accessed through the link: [LETI Action Learning Projects](#).

Of the LETI Projects:

Four focused their projects on working with staff to develop organizational and program level logic models aligned with their vision and mission.

Three focused their projects on mapping existing data within their organizations to learn whether they already had information that would be useful to tracking and

monitoring their progress and success—and identify where the gaps in information were. *Four* focused their projects on developing evaluation or business plans.

Four focused their projects on creating systems-level data collection processes and tools to identify where their programs and services were meeting needs and where they needed to strengthen or improve their efforts.

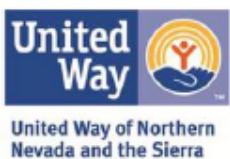
Four focused their projects on learning directly from their target population where their services and programs met needs and where there were gaps.

The ALC experience and the LETI Collaborative Process and Project:

Participants were asked to complete an online survey as part of their final assessment of the LETI experience and the Take Aways (see next section). Two open-ended questions on the closing survey asked for 1) suggestions for improving the LETI experience in the future, and 2) any additional feedback or suggestions. While many of the responses indicated that LETI was a positive experience ("I loved this class!"), the participants did offer thoughts for changes or improvements. These ideas included small changes to the curriculum and class activities ("...more time on logic models..."), and suggestions for improving the structure and process of group activities.

There were mixed feelings about the final group presentation, with one organization saying, "One of my favorite parts was the last day when we learned so much about each organization. The passion was awesome!" and another wrote "That last activity was

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confusing and not very helpful.” Some gave suggestions for improving final project, one of which was that we could place more emphasis on the individual agency projects and less on the final group presentations. “I would have liked for each organization to give a deeper, individualized snapshot of how the LETI process has impacted day-to-day operations as well as long-term goals.” Some felt that the three facilitators could have been more coherent in their messaging around the intent and structure of the final group presentations.

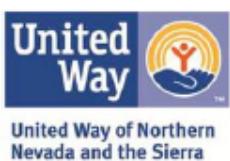
Other comments made as part of their experience with their Action Learning Circles were noted in their individual project summaries:

- We can't pinpoint one thing that was learned through the process but felt it to be helpful to get insight from outside organizations to determine if what we were trying to do was clear and focused.
- The ALC team was awesome. Wonderful opportunity to learn from each other, support growth and gain insights. The feedback and questions from other participants created a culture of inquiry—an opportunity to think outside of the box. In addition, I think we established some on-going friendships and the opportunity to expand our network. WE will stay connected!
- Discussions stimulated ideas and confirmed the assets we have to work with as we build capacity.
- Our ALC Team helped us talk through our proposed ALC design. We enjoyed working with the organizations on our team because they presented similar projects

that were unique to their own circumstances. In a way, we were able to see our project in different incarnations. We even added a few objectives to our project's design after being part of our team discussions. Working with team members also helped us to focus on what was important to us and our agency. Team members also helped us to think of simple ways we can better engage our staff throughout the project, despite the obstacle of time.

One participant's feedback from the on-line survey noted that the Institute appeared to “lose momentum” after the holidays when weather caused us to cancel a monthly session. Another participant suggested that we make the hand-outs more accessible and legible. One respondent asked for more clarity around broad concepts like “collective impact”. For the most part, LETI participants were mostly positive about the group activities, and some requested additional “hands-on practice” and “practical application.” Overall, the respondents enjoyed the group work and the Action Learning Circle experience, with one respondent suggesting we “...speed up the content of the class and allow for more time to discuss with small groups. Start ALC groups earlier. I believe the ALC group was where the majority of my learning happened.” Participants shared how much they enjoyed working with and learning from such widely disparate organizations in their ALC groups, and would have liked more time to learn about the work being done at their partner organizations and how each organization was changed as a result of LETI.

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM TAKE AWAYS

The LETI Participants reported an across-the-board increase in their perceptions that the twelve Take Aways were effectively addressed. For all but one of the 12 Take Aways—collective impact—their confidence in applying the skills and knowledge they had gained also increased. The most significant increase from the midpoint assessment (see figures 1 and 3 below) to the final

assessment (see figures 2 and 4 below) was in participants perceiving that the Take Away—“being an effective evaluation partner” was effectively addressed (a change from a mean rating of 3.0 to 4.5) and that they were confident they could apply this skill (a change from a mean rating of 2.8 to 4.3).

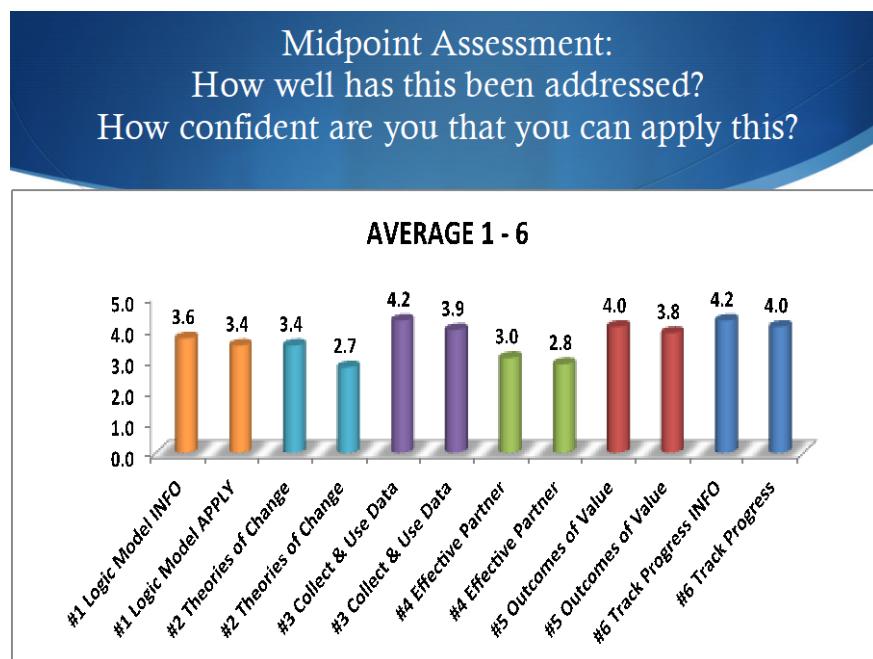
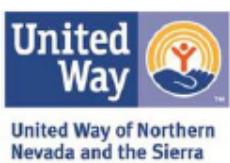


Figure 1: Midpoint Assessment Take Aways 1-6

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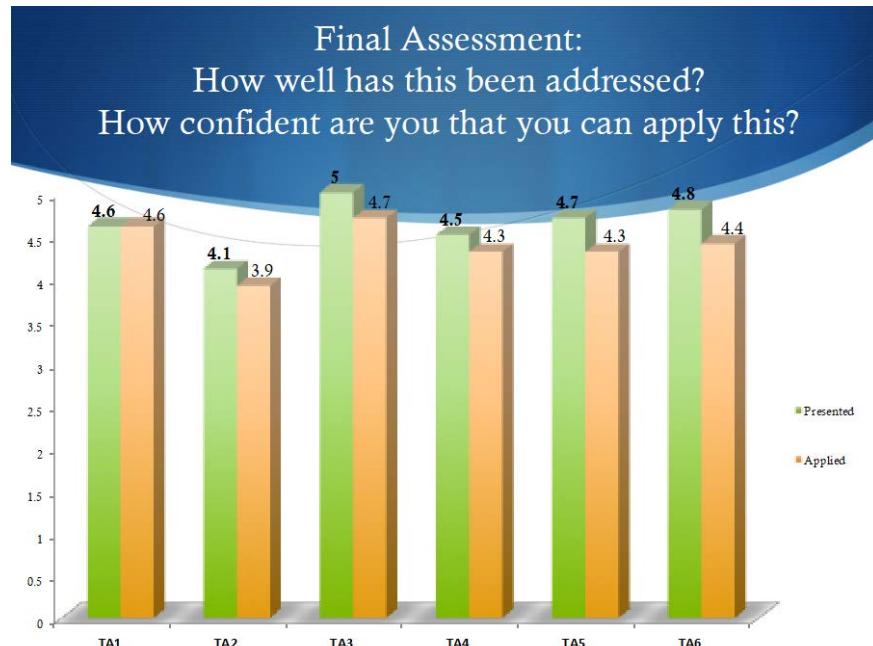


Figure 2: Final Assessment Take Aways 1-6

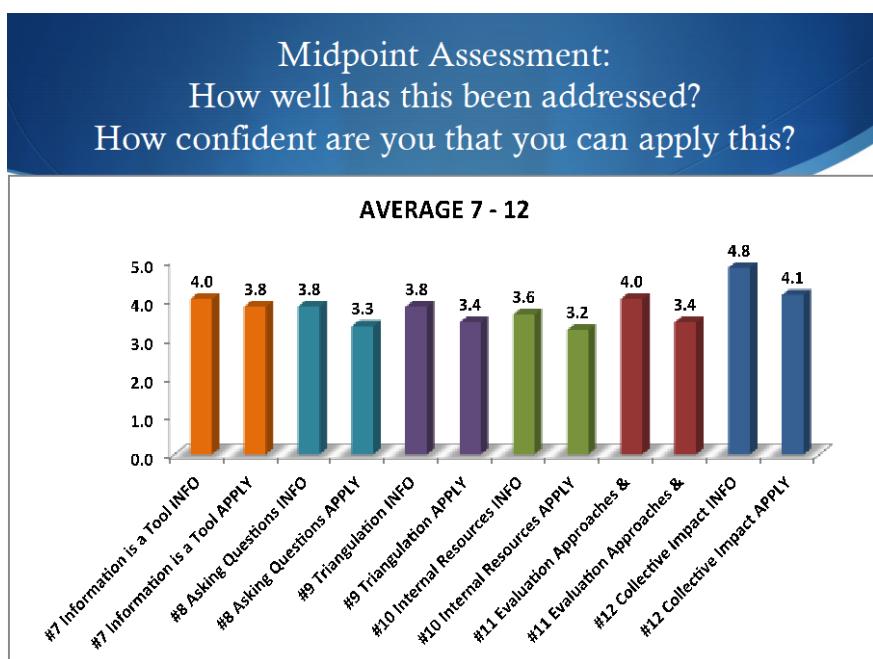


Figure 3: Midpoint Assessment Take Aways 7-12

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Final Assessment:

How well has this been addressed?

How confident are you that you can apply this?

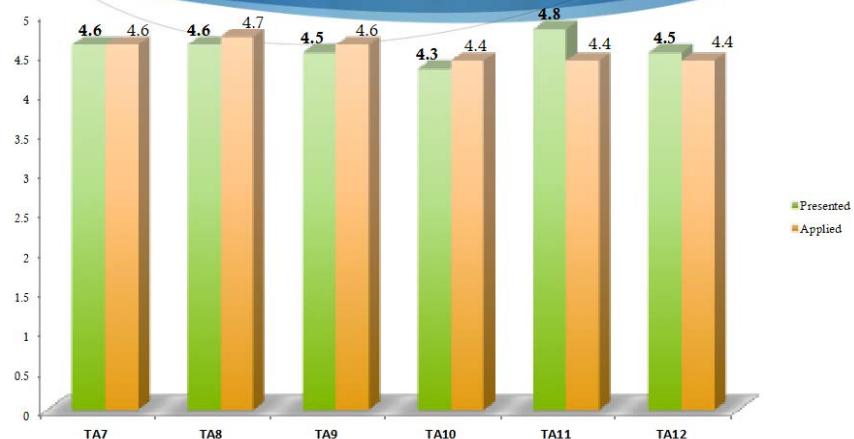
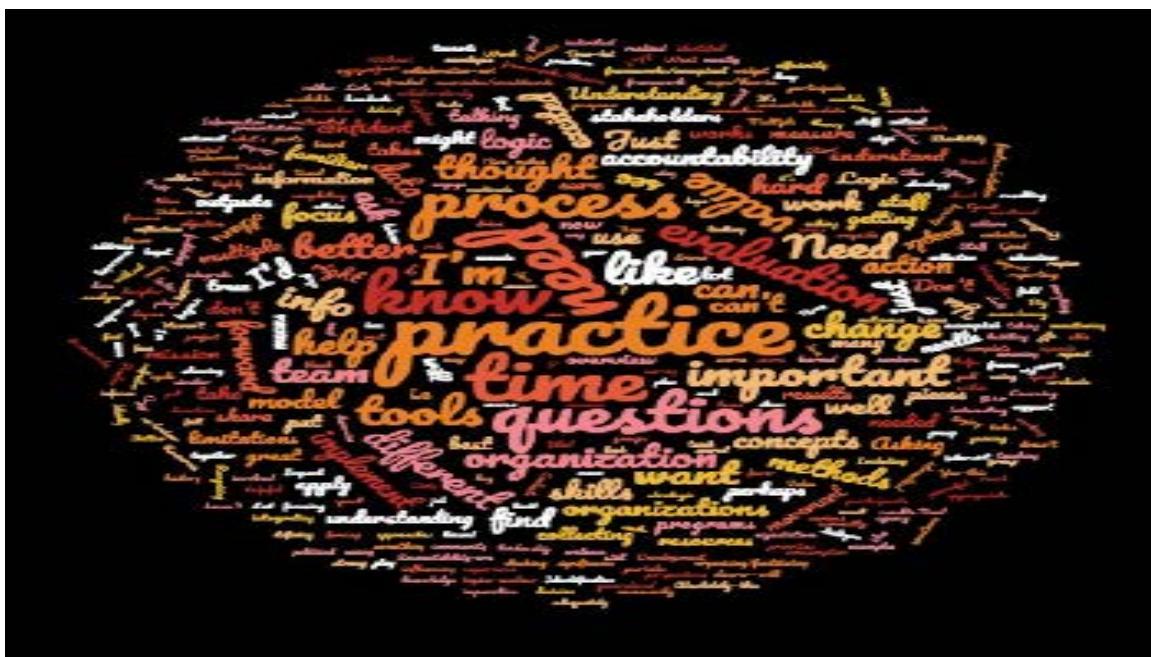
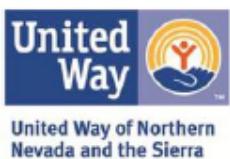


Figure 4: Final Assessment Take Aways 7-12

What LETI Participants thought about the overall experience at the mid-way point is captured in the Wordle below:



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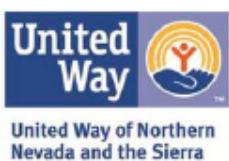
Their responses to the process of creating a culture of inquiry at the midpoint of our journey stressed the importance of “asking questions,” “practicing what they were learning on a regular basis,” and allowing the “process” of inquiry to unfold naturally so that it became embedded in the culture of their organizations. They acknowledged that for change to happen they had to carve out time, utilize the tools they had been given in an intentional manner, and support others in their organization to learn that it was more important to ask questions than to seek definitive answers prematurely. Using logic, and collecting information for accountability purposes were acknowledged as important as well.

They began to understand that to truly create a culture of inquiry, they needed to look at how their vision, mission, strategies, and programs—and who they were engaged with as constituents and partners—were aligned if they wanted to contribute to a collective impact in the communities they served. The shift in their thinking from *accountability* to funders toward a *responsibility* to their consumers and collective community change, represented a significant marker in their development as thought leaders—and leaders in evaluative thinking for their organizations and communities.

Overall, by the final assessment, the LETI participants were “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied” with the presentation of the 12

Take Aways as demonstrated by the average Likert scale ranging from 4.1 to 5.0. The participants were also “Confident” or “Very Confident” with their ability to apply their knowledge of the 12 Take Aways as demonstrated by the average Likert scale ranging from 4.3 to 4.7. It was noted that Take Away 2—collect and use data—was a 3.9, which approached the “Confident” rating. What we were seeing was that, for some of specific Take Aways, like collecting and using data and making a collective impact, the more the LETI participants learned, the more they realized that they needed to know more in order to feel confident in using these skills in their organizations and communities. We had stressed that the development and use of some evaluation methods—surveys in particular—and more formal evaluation designs, required a greater level of expertise than a six-month course in evaluative thinking would provide. However, the significant increase in their understanding and confidence around being an effective evaluation partner was an indication that when they worked hand-in-hand with a professional evaluator who could provide this expertise, they would be prepared to advocate for designs and methods and a process that would produce the results that were important to their organizations; they would be prepared to use the data in a manner that would further their vision and mission and collective impact goals.

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WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

LETI Organizations—continuing to build capacity for evaluation

The LETI participants were excited to have participated in a change process over the course of the Institute, and were asked how they might continue to support a culture of inquiry (COI) once LETI was complete. The participants suggested that partnerships were important -- working alongside other organizations with a COI, and finding champions in the community to support their efforts and let the community know about the good work being done. The group discussed the importance of keeping the COI a priority with time and resources, and maintaining expectations of curiosity and open communication among staff and leadership.

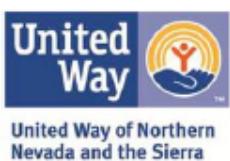
Staying connected with one another was a clear intention. LETI participants hoped to work together in the future, whether through “alumni events” or more structured learning opportunities. They want to create or become a network of support for one another, possibly getting and giving group updates to support accountability. They also expressed a desire to return to serve as a panel for the next LETI group, hoping to grow this new network of organizations committed to a culture of inquiry.

Building a LETI Network—ideas for staying connected

During the final LETI session the group was asked to consider ways that they might stay involved with one another and what would likely keep them working toward building their organization’s capacity for evaluation. The group generated ten different strategies for staying connected. These are listed in order of preference based on responses to the survey question: “How likely would you be to participate in the follow-up activities we generated during our last LETI session?” They were asked to rate each idea from 1-4, with 1 being not at all likely and 4 being very likely or “I’m in!” Eight of the ten ideas received a rating of 3.0 or higher, (range=2.83-3.50)

Idea for Networking	Mean Rating
6-month and Annual reunion event to share and update and reenergize each other at United Way and/or Virginia City.	3.50
Use Reply All (on email) to communicate with LETI Alumni	3.44
Informal get-togethers like dinners or other opportunities to share and connect.	3.28
Become a member of a LETI Alumni Association.	3.28
Participate in a LETI network through get-togethers and other structures for sharing and updating one another.	3.17

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Idea for Networking	Mean Rating
Partnering with other LETI organizations to offer new services.	3.06
Firepit at Tracy's.	3.00
Social Activity, like Laser Tag, as a reunion in 3-4 months	2.89
Post and respond to other LETI alumni on a group FaceBook page.	2.83

The most favored idea was to participate in a 6-month and annual reunion and the least favored idea was to post and respond to other LETI Alumni on a group FaceBook page.

Lessons Learned:

Throughout the LETI experience, facilitators constantly engaged the participants in reflection—a cornerstone of a culture of inquiry. The collective insights and lessons learned from both the Participants and the Facilitators' perspectives are shared as a way of considering both what value was gained from the LETI experience, and what might come next.

Participant perspectives:

On the final day, participants joined in a structured group discussion to explore their thoughts about building a “culture of inquiry” in their organizations, how they could promote a culture of inquiry in the context of their current organizational culture, and how they might continue to promote the culture of inquiry moving forward.

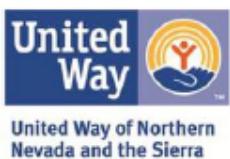
The participants viewed the culture of inquiry (COI) as “permission to question” the status quo and current practices.

Building a COI within an organization required “creating the space” for conversations and growth to happen, allowing “equal voices” from staff, leadership, and board members, and allowing for a “diversity of ideas”. LETI participants felt that building a COI would improve their overall organizational culture by infusing or supporting passion for the cause and encouraging acceptance of new or different perspectives with a flexible, team approach. They suggested that the COI would give their organizations a framework for purposeful engagement with their clients and their work, and would support good stewardship and an ethical approach to distributing resources.

The individual projects undertaken by the LETI Participants also led to some additional insights and discoveries about their work in the community and what it meant to build a culture of inquiry (COI):

- We learned the issues that are priorities for our population (homeless youth) and where we have gaps in programming and services.
- Because we did not complete the evaluation plan portion of our goals, the team helped with ways to keep this on the priority list as other important things come up (as they often do) in the nonprofit world.
- Additionally, our in-person and online team meetings allowed for the free flow of ideas and the talking out of ideas with people not as intimately connected with our organization.
- One key piece the concept of creating a

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culture of inquiry was beneficial
...it allowed us to name it and therefore have common language to address challenges, explore new programs ideas, etc.

- We are excited to be writing in our teen and Jr. RAVE sessions in our grants for the first time ever.
- Working with our staff and stakeholders, we learned that we have strong buy-in and investment for this process. People are interested in contributing their own knowledge and experience and appreciate being asked for their insight.
- We learned a number of new things, including 1) we have more data available within our organization than we realized, but it's not necessarily being used

effectively; 2) Approached in a non-threatening fashion, every member of the organization can be constructive and helpful to the process. How team members are treated is everything to the successful of team activities.

Finally, the discussion acknowledged the difficulty of changing the culture of an organization. The group acknowledged the importance of support and encouragement, both within and between organizations to support the COI. Participants suggested that leaders need to lead by example, and part of that leadership includes a willingness to fix broken systems, stay open to change, and to put effort into building relationships throughout the organization.

FACILITATOR PERSPECTIVES

The triad of facilitators, referred to themselves as a “troika”¹ because of their differing disciplinary perspectives and experiences with evaluation. These differences and their shared goals for LETI allowed them to both learn from one another and challenge each other’s thinking. This also provided an example for the participants as they saw the facilitators work side by side—asking questions, scaffolding their thinking, and expanding on their understandings and use of language—that there is no single, right way to do evaluation—but there are some clear

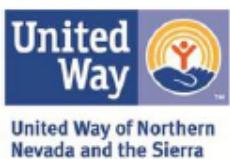
guidelines for thinking evaluatively that can support how we engage as we ask questions, reflect, and take results-focused action. Between sessions the “troika” met to reflect and rethink their approaches, and consider what was being achieved throughout the process. Their lessons learned are as follows:

- Starting with the people in the room was essential to building the level of collaboration among the group—and for allowing them to be vulnerable in a safe place—where they could ask questions,

¹ Troika is a Russian word for a team of three horses, now used to describe a group of three individuals with different

perspectives who come together for discussion and consensus.

The Leadership in Evaluative Thinking Institute has evolved from a collective effort and represents a partnership among these organizations:



United Way of Northern
Nevada and the Sierra



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
of Western Nevada

explore what else they might need to achieve success, and share both successes and failures as part of their development as leaders.

- The spirit of collaboration between and among the LETI organizations was strong and the most significant aspect of the LETI experience.
- LETI provided an initial step towards achieving collective impact—it laid the foundation for non-profits to work together and collaborate on shared projects by first developing a culture of inquiry and helping them think differently about what might be possible—both through their own organization and in partnership with others.
- An unexpected outcome was the number of partnerships that developed during the LETI experience—and led to planning for shared projects and services, even between unrelated organizations (e.g., serving and addressing the needs of youth experiencing homelessness and environmental stewardship; increasing literacy and providing respite for families with children with disabilities)

- LETI participants understood that evaluating their efforts was valuable for communicating to multiple audiences about the importance and effectiveness of their organization—communicating what matters and what makes a difference.
- LETI introduced non-profit organizations to a process and culture of inquiry, that by their own admission, was just the beginning. All organizations expressed a sustained commitment to improve their organization's culture of inquiry and progress toward the development and implementation of evaluation plans.

In summary, although there were many suggestions for small changes or improvements, the overall LETI participants' feedback on the survey suggested that they were pleased with the experience. One response summarized this well: "Overall this experience was helpful, especially for mapping out our organization's next steps. I think with some minor tweaks and restructuring, this class can meet a need in the nonprofit realm here in Northern Nevada."