

MARCH 2022

# TEXAS EVALUATION NETWORK QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

## OUR MISSION:

The Texas Evaluation Network (TEN) is a voluntary, statewide organization serving the multidisciplinary interests and needs of evaluation and other allied professionals.

### The work of TEN is focused in three areas:

1. Promote and advocating evaluation and building evaluation capacity;
2. Provide professional development opportunities for Texas evaluators; and
3. Establish a venue for networking and the exchange of theoretical, methodological, and practical knowledge related to the field of evaluation.

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The Texas Evaluation Network is a formal affiliate of the American Evaluation Association. Our members' interest and skills vary greatly as the organization prides itself on geographic and interest diversity. This is best on display at TEN's evaluation institute hosted annually and through regular webinars.

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# FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Greetings from TEN!

I am looking forward to the next few months. The Board of Directors is contracting with Viable Insights to develop a strategic plan by July 2022. As a member of TEN, you will be invited to participate in the process. Our goal for the strategic planning development process is that it will be an inclusive and shared decision-making process.

More exciting news is that TEN will offer a double Power Hour in April and May! I hope you join us for both these events, scheduled for April 28, 2022, and May 5, 2022. With a micro-and macro-level focus, experts will share strategies to include diversity, equity and inclusion in evaluation practices. The TEN Power Hours provide a platform to network with evaluators across Texas and to learn more about current evaluation trends. These events always generate valuable discussions on evaluation.

Within the next few weeks, we will invite nominations for the TEN Board of Directors. You are welcome to nominate yourself or someone else. Serving on the Board is a wonderful opportunity to share your knowledge and experience.

Many of you reached out to the TEN Board of Directors to serve on committees. We appreciate your time and service to the organization! As always, we have to increase membership. Please share this newsletter and the link to TEN's website with your networks.

Emmerentie Oliphant, Ph.D. (Social Work)  
Texas Evaluation Network, President



## The Newsletter Special Edition: Professional Pause with Abbey Godley

This Newsletter Special Edition: Professional Pause features Abbey Godley. Abbey Godley, M.Ed. is the Assistant Dean for Student Programs at Rice University and a new member of TEN. She offered to write a section for the TEN newsletter highlighting evaluators in Texas. This contribution is hopefully the first of many from Abbey.

Abbey interviewed Cindy Alvarado, who was the Evaluation & Impact Program Officer at The Simmons Foundation. This local private foundation makes grants to nonprofits in the Greater Houston area, working towards creating a more just community where all people have an equitable chance to succeed. Cindy is currently enjoying her role as a Community Engagement Associate at JPMorgan Chase & Co. If you would like to contact Cindy Alvarado, please email her at [cindy.alvarado@jpmchase.com](mailto:cindy.alvarado@jpmchase.com).

**Godley:** Describe your current role? What does a typical day look like?

**Alvarado:** My work consists of two roles: program officer and data and evaluation. I have found that it's been extremely useful to be in both of these spaces because it allows me to be grounded in the fact that there is more to the data than numbers and targets; there are stories to be told, and I can ground the data in the larger context of the nonprofits' work and the communities we are prioritizing.

As a program officer, I support aligned nonprofit organizations from outreach to support beyond the check:

1. Seek out diverse leaders and grassroots organizations through active community presence
2. Learn how best to support organizations, financially and otherwise
3. Regularly solicit feedback on Foundation performance and partnership

As an evaluation and impact officer, I ensure the Foundation is on track to achieve established metrics and goals for social justice:

1. Track progress on foundation metrics, commitments, and approaches (e.g., Trust-based philanthropy, funding diverse groups, funding intersectional work)
2. Conduct portfolio evaluation on quarterly basis to identify gaps in what we fund and who we fund
3. Contribute to field knowledge by fulfilling external data requests from partner organizations
4. Facilitate learning convenings with grant partners involved in special initiatives

## Professional Pause Continued

**Godley:** How did you get into evaluation as a career?

**Alvarado:** I was very fortunate to have the flexibility at my current Foundation to craft my role into this dual role of program officer and evaluation. Prior to this, I was at another foundation and that is where I started learning more about philanthropy as a sector and understanding the difference between 'what we fund' and 'how we fund' and how both of those are essential to consider in our work. What we fund relates to issue areas and the type of work foundations support; how we fund relates to the process and approaches we take, such as offering unrestricted multi-year funding and implementing a trust-based approach to our relationships with grant partners. When we only look at 'what we fund', we might be funding an organization doing amazing work in the community, but if we are only offering one-year programmatic grants that require quarterly reports, then the organization will not be in a position to plan further out than a year as they get stuck in the apply->report->re-apply grantmaking cycle, and time spent on reporting will be time they will not be spending serving people in the community. Thus, we are limiting the potential impact the organization could be having. However, when we focus on how we fund, that same organization would now be receiving a multi-year general operating grant that allows them to work on their sustainability and long-term planning and to spend more time on the real work as opposed to paperwork. What I bring to the table is an ability to evaluate what we fund and how we fund with an embedded equity lens.

**Godley:** In your experience, how have you seen the field of evaluation develop or change since you started working?

**Alvarado:** The approach I take to evaluation in philanthropy is different from how the sector is used to doing so. Evaluation officers typically have focused on program evaluation as a way to scale up what works or on strategy evaluation to ensure the Foundation is moving the needle on important issues. However, for the reasons I mentioned above, we are missing an important chunk of the work. I believe the role of philanthropy is to support the work happening on the ground and to embrace a spirit of partnership and a customer service mindset of 'how can we support you?'. As we work toward social change and social justice, there is a recognition that our work cannot be done in silos or individually; no one organization can take credit for the change we are creating. So what is within our control that we can evaluate ourselves on and hold ourselves accountable to? The way we show up in community, how we fund, and where the money is going. As a sector, I have seen increased momentum around equity and the 'how we fund' piece, especially this year with the current pandemic and movement for racial justice, but there remains a lot of work to be done. In terms of accountability, the sector could be doing more in self-accountability.

## Professional Pause Continued

**Alvarado:** For example, at my Foundation, we are committed to regular disaggregated grant-making data analyses of:

1. Percentage of funding for multi-year grants
2. Percentage of funding for general operating support
3. Median length of relationship with grant partners
4. Percentage of funding by size of organizational budget
5. Percentage of funding for organizations led by and for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and/or gender expansive individuals

Data is power, and I believe our communities deserve to have access to this data so that they can make their own informed assessments of philanthropy and advocate for change. We have some great organizations that are focused on evaluating the philanthropic sector and where the money is going, such as the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy and Funders for LGBTQ Issues. The stats are grim: only 1% of Foundation giving goes to immigrants/refugees and .28% goes to LGBTQ+ issues. We need more foundations to embrace this approach to evaluation that requires us to hold up a mirror to ourselves and ask ourselves the hard questions.

**Godley:** What advice would you give to a student entering the evaluation field, for you specifically, philanthropic evaluation?

**Alvarado:** More foundations are starting to add evaluation and learning staff to their teams. The learning function is especially desirable as foundations seek to be adaptable and responsive to community needs. From my perspective having worked exclusively at small foundations, I would add that facilitation and communications are both good skillsets to have; oftentimes, a lean staff means you wear many hats. In my case, I facilitate grant partner convenings, analyze data, and share out learnings via written and graphic mediums. I come to this work with a social justice lens and so I think it's important for those interested in evaluation as a career to remember that data is powerful and also data is not neutral. That is our lever for change. What data we choose to collect, how we collect it, how we analyze the data, and how we frame the learnings and share the data back with the community can help us more effectively advocate for change. I would highly recommend you check out the Equitable Evaluation Initiative for more information and resources. There is a lot of room for growth in philanthropy, and I challenge you to use your skillsets in a way that centers the communities most directly impacted by the problems we seek to solve.

## SAVE THE DATES: 2022 TEN Power Hour Series

TEN's 2022 Power Hours will provide an opportunity for TEN members to discuss current topics or issues related to evaluation.

Please join us!



**April 28, 2022, 12:00-1:00 pm CST**

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion in Evaluation, [RSVP HERE](#)



**May 5, 2022, 12:00-1:00 pm CST**

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion in Evaluation, [RSVP HERE](#)



**July 27, 2022, 12:00-1:00 pm CST**

Working with Funders, [RSVP HERE](#)



**September 20, 2022, 12:00-1:00 pm CST**

Developmental Evaluation, [RSVP HERE](#)



**Attention New & Emerging Evaluators**

**[DC Consortium Student Conference on Evaluation & Policy](#)**

**April 1, 2022, 12:00-7:00 pm EDT, held over Zoom, FREE**



Co-Sponsored by WE this year, the DC Consortium Student Conference on Evaluation and Policy (DCSCEP) is a graduate student-organized, one-day evaluation conference for the Washington DC region. Registration is now open and our theme is "Adapting Evaluation to Change". Kylie Hutchinson will join us as a keynote speaker. The goal of DCSCEP is to provide graduate and other post-secondary students in the fields of evaluation and policy an opportunity to present original research and network with professionals and faculty in those fields. More information about the conference can be found on our [website](#).

## CHECK IT OUT: EVALUATION RESOURCES



### **Candid: Measure Results**

Collection of suggested readings and thousands of actual evaluations are available for download.

[Click here to explore](#)

### **Pell Institute Evaluation Examples**

Links to several evaluations related to outreach programs for at risk students and higher education.

[Click here to explore](#)

### **U.S. Government Accountability Office Program Evaluation: Key Terms and Concepts**

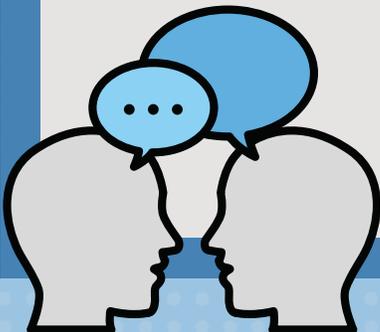
This glossary highlights different types of evaluations for answering questions about program performance, as well as relevant issues to ensure study quality.

[Click here to explore](#)

## HAVE SOMETHING TO SHARE FOR THE NEXT NEWSLETTER?

**We want to hear from YOU! Please share evaluation-related resources with us to consider including in an upcoming TEN newsletter.**

**Email us at [texasevaluationnetwork@gmail.com](mailto:texasevaluationnetwork@gmail.com) with recommendations on books, podcasts, articles, or other resources.**



# Meet Your Newsletter Team

The TEN Membership Committee develops TEN's quarterly newsletter.



**Fanni Farago, MA**, is a new TEN member, a new & emerging evaluator, & a third-year Sociology Doctoral Student at George Mason University. She works as a Research Assistant at the Institute for Immigration Research (IIR). She recently relocated to Houston and joined TEN to connect with local evaluators.

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**Holly Heisler, MPH, MBA**, is the Corresponding Secretary on the TEN Board of Directors. She is a Senior Associate in the Research, Analysis, and Evaluation (RAE) Division at Contracting Resources Group, Inc., a federal management consulting firm.

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**Kim Trevino, MA**, is the Student Representative on the TEN Board of Directors. She is a Research Assistant at the Center of Community Research and Development at Baylor University.