



BUILDING EVIDENCE TO ADVANCE EQUITY



THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

SEPTEMBER 2024

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private philanthropy that creates a brighter future for the nation's children and youth by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at www.aecf.org.

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INTRODUCTION

For more than three decades, the Texas nonprofit organization Con Mi MADRE (Mothers and Daughters Raising Expectations) had been helping Latina girls succeed in high school and college, devoting its resources to working with girls and their mothers in a unique model that is culturally connected to the community it serves. The staff saw signs of success daily and over time. They wanted to collect data to measure that success. However, to do so would cost more money and require additional training and technical assistance, neither of which the organization had.

That began to change in 2016 when the Annie E. Casey Foundation launched a new funding strategy and invited Con Mi MADRE to join. Casey-funded advisers worked hand in hand with leaders at Con Mi MADRE and other nonprofits selected for their shared desire to build evidence to demonstrate their effectiveness.

The strategy eventually was called Building Evidence to Advance Equity. By 2023, the network of grantees encompassed 16 nonprofit organizations that strive to build evidence, improve their practices, learn from one another and better serve their communities.

“When we started with Casey, there were a lot of things we thought we were doing well, but we realized we weren’t,” said Alicia Guerrero, Con Mi MADRE’s director of data, evaluation and impact. “We had to determine the best way to measure impact. What data do we need to collect? Having someone with experience to help guide us to answer those questions was extremely valuable.” (Read more about Con Mi MADRE and three other grantee organizations beginning on page 13.)

Programs like Con Mi MADRE that have a deep cultural connection with their communities can build strong relationships and incorporate relevant practices, leading to more in-depth engagement and, ultimately, better outcomes for families of color.

The Foundation offers this overview to inspire other funders and nonprofit organizations that can benefit from the lessons learned while building evidence to advance equity for young people of color and their communities. The Foundation encourages other funders to support promising, innovative, culturally responsive practices such as those developed by the organizations in this network.

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Members of the Building Evidence to Advance Equity network convened in Austin, Texas, in 2023. Leaders from E4 Youth, based in Austin, co-hosted the convening with the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

By investing in the Building Evidence to Advance Equity network grantees, the Foundation hopes to:

- help culturally responsive programs expand and better serve young people and their families across the United States;
- encourage greater investment in community-based nonprofit organizations serving youth and communities of color and using culturally responsive approaches; and
- increase the evidence base for culturally responsive programs across diverse ethnic and racial communities.

PARTICIPANTS IN THE BUILDING EVIDENCE TO ADVANCE EQUITY NETWORK

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Center for Behavioral Design and Social Justice (Project Evident) ■ Con Mi MADRE ■ Dolores Huerta Foundation ■ E4 Youth ■ Fathers, Families, & Healthy Communities ■ Future Foundation ■ L.O.V.E. Mentoring ■ Latin American Youth Center | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Latinos In Action ■ Pace Center for Girls ■ Peer Health Exchange ■ Student U ■ The Beautiful Project ■ The Lighthouse Black Girls Project ■ Urban Alliance Foundation ■ Village of Wisdom |
|--|--|

WHAT ALL YOUTH NEED TO THRIVE

Good schools.

Safe and vibrant neighborhoods.

Stable families.

Children thrive when they have this kind of support. Yet children of color tend to have less access than their peers to resources that support well-being and upward mobility.

Community-based programs are essential to expanding this access to meet the needs of youth, who are mostly children of color.¹

These nonprofit programs benefit from having leaders and staff who share a deep cultural connection with participants. Through that deep connection, leaders can build trust, tailor approaches, engage participants and create programs that respond to their needs.

Ultimately, this cultural connection, coupled with skill and commitment, advances equity, leads to better outcomes for youth of color and their families, and creates opportunities for all children and youth to thrive.

Yet as things stand, there are two overarching challenges.

First, a relatively small percentage of nonprofit organizations are led by people of color. According to a recent Urban Institute report about nonprofit organizations, about 1 in 5 executive directors and 1 in 5 board chairs are people of color.² The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that people of color make up fewer than 3 in 10 of those employed in the



nonprofit sector overall.³ There is a smaller share of people of color in the nonprofit sector compared to the government or commercial sectors.

On top of that, nonprofits serving — and led by — people of color face significant challenges, many of which have been exacerbated by increased need since the COVID-19 pandemic began.⁴ Many of these nonprofits operate on razor-thin margins and have few assets and connected networks, surveys and studies have found.^{5,6}

Many nonprofit leaders have had to change their operations and programming in the wake of the pandemic, and most report long-term sustainability as a top concern.⁷ These challenges underscore the imperative for more financial support — including from philanthropy — and especially for greater investment to support operations and program development to meet the increased demand⁸ and shifting landscape⁹ for nonprofit services.

A NEW FUNDING STRATEGY EMERGES

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, in its mission to build a brighter future for children, youth and families, has long focused on identifying and supporting programs that share a commitment to using evidence to develop culturally responsive approaches, measure progress and demonstrate benefits to participants.

In 2016, Casey identified several nonprofits that were doing important work but needed resources to collect and build evidence to measure their results, refine their work or bring it to scale.

Casey's Evidence-Based Practice Group helped these organizations develop tools such as logic models, theories of change and implementation fidelity strategies. Some of this work was featured in a 2017 Casey report, *Considering Culture*, which highlighted the need for nonprofits and agencies that serve youth to develop data and use evidence to better serve young people of color.

This new report builds on what the 16 members of the Building Evidence to Advance Equity

network have learned and accomplished since the 2017 report.

The grantees in the network have:

- developed evidence-based systems and shared their experiences with other nonprofits;
- used technical assistance to strengthen data collection and assess their practices; and
- reported that building evidence for their work has improved their programming and allowed them to reach more participants.

José Enriquez, founder of Latinos in Action, one of the earliest organizations to join the network, said Casey's support has helped guide his Salt Lake City-based nonprofit's expansion.

"Casey gave us the discipline we needed to focus on the most important aspects of our mission and do them really well," Enriquez said. (Read more about Latinos in Action on page 15.)

"Casey gave us the discipline we needed to focus on the most important aspects of our mission and do them really well."

**— José Enriquez, founder,
Latinos in Action**



The Foundation’s investment approach embraces certain key principles, including the need to support a flexible and iterative process for each grantee to think deeply about program design, ensuring that people of color are involved at every stage.

This report focuses on Casey’s investment of more than \$4 million between 2016 and 2022 in this diverse set of grantees to support their efforts to build evidence. Specifically, the funding has helped grantees to:

- articulate a thoughtful theory of change and logic model about their program;
- collect and analyze disaggregated data about the results of their program;
- ensure they deliver the core components of their program consistently and with fidelity;
- adapt their program to serve new populations; and
- replicate or expand services to new contexts.

The Foundation’s investment approach embraces certain key principles, including the need to support a flexible and iterative process for each grantee to think deeply about program design, ensuring that people of color are involved at every stage. The grantees collect meaningful data and use evidence to refine their program models.



A Latinos in Action participant tutors younger students.

STRENGTHENING PROGRAMS SERVING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Casey aims to build trust with grantee partners by offering a mix of direct funding and technical assistance tailored to each partner's needs in building evidence for their work.

Over the years, grantees chosen for this network have shared the desire to more accurately and concisely describe how they operate and why they provide the services they do. A concise description ensures that employees, participants, funders and other partners all understand the organization's mission, philosophy and theory of change.

Additionally, network grantees have benefited from a range of tools, such as data collection systems to track services more closely and outcome data to assess the difference they make.

The organizations in the network build and use different types of evidence. For example, [The Beautiful Project](#), an arts collective of Black women in Durham, N.C., began using informal focus groups to gather valuable feedback about its workshops.

Another grantee, [Village of Wisdom](#), promotes academic equity and culturally affirming learning environments for Black children. Village of Wisdom leaders considered their evidence and results and adjusted their strategy so that families could take a more active role in driving research and tool development.

CUSTOMIZED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Participating grantees have varying experiences using systematic evidence to improve their programming, so Casey has funded technical assistance providers who develop plans for each grantee to improve internal assessments, strengthen data collection and maintain program fidelity. Technical assistance has been offered by James Bell Associates, Ideas to Impact, Catchafire, J-PAL of North America and the Raben Group.

“We work with organizations to articulate their goals, services and accomplishments. We reflect that back to them through an evaluation lens, strengthening their internal capacity to identify their core service components, collect and use data, and share successes.”

— Allison Meisch, associate director, James Bell Associates

James Bell Associates uses a framework developed for the [Permanency Innovations Initiative \(PII\)](#) to inform its approach.¹⁰ The goal of the framework, part of a five-year, \$100 million federal initiative, is to increase the number of evidence-supported programs in the child welfare field. The framework lays out a series of stages that organizations should move through to improve their use of evidence and strengthen their programming.

As other needs emerged through intensive technical assistance, the Foundation offered network grantees additional help to build capacity for evaluation planning, culturally responsive program design and storytelling about how the programs were building evidence. For example, Casey dedicated a portion of its funding to dissemination and communications planning. This dedicated funding resulted in 10 grantees creating two-page profiles that describe how they built evidence and what they accomplished in their programs. (See online appendix: <https://www.aecf.org/resources/building-evidence-to-advance-equity>.)

“The program profiles authentically tell organizations’ stories while incorporating evaluation strengths and evidence they’ve built by being involved in this portfolio,” said Allison Meisch, associate director at James Bell Associates.

The technical assistance team helped each grantee incorporate evidence into its program development and plan for replication or expansion. The team suggested strategies and helped some grantee partners refine their program models, expand their reach, prepare for evaluation and improve performance measurement.



Program leaders Angela Glymph (Peer Health Exchange), Claudia Espinosa (L.O.V.E. Mentoring) and Anthony Barrows (The Center for Behavioral Design and Social Justice) learn from and support one another at the network’s 2023 convening in Austin.

“The staff at L.O.V.E. were able to revise the questions on their data collection instrument to more explicitly inquire about ethnic ancestry, feelings of belonging or experiences with discrimination and include young people in building the response categories for a few questions,” said Kristine Andrews, Ideas to Impact co-founder and principal. “These actions will allow them to disaggregate their data by ethnicity and tell a richer, more nuanced story. They are centering youth by having them co-create the survey instrument, and they are intentionally striving to disrupt inequities by asking questions about when youth have felt excluded or discriminated against.”

The technical assistance providers helped the grantees in multiple ways, including support for:

Strengthening the collection and monitoring of program data, a key need for many of the organizations. Having the right data is essential for staff and leaders to track results and plan for changes and expansion. The technical assistance team worked with many of the participating organizations to identify their core components and then determine what data and information were needed to measure their progress. With that key information identified, the organizations could stop collecting inessential data, which freed up resources. Having the right system to collect essential data and assess performance has given participating organizations confidence to reach out to additional funders that share their philosophy.

Developing tools to assess program fidelity. Without these fidelity tools, program quality can vary significantly, disrupting progress for participants. Con Mi MADRE successfully used fidelity tools to sharpen program quality and create protocols for organizing outside-of-school events.

Adapting without compromising the program's essential components. Fathers, Families, & Healthy Communities in Chicago looked carefully at the data about the men whom the program served. Staff found many were older than they had anticipated and realized the organization's stated focus on serving young fathers didn't fully describe the age range of participants. The organization reconsidered the language and approach used to recruit men from a wider age range to participate, while maintaining its basic service strategy.

Creating a concisely written program profile. Easy-to-understand program summaries, which capture each organization's mission, programming structure and accomplishments, are critical for building partnerships and raising funds. The process of distilling the work of a complex organization into a concise two-page overview requires its leaders to carefully identify program elements and metrics that capture the organization's mission and goals. Many of the organizations developed a statement called a theory of change, which is a tool that also helps them firmly define performance indicators.

Preparing for a formal evaluation. Through this evidence-building strategy, a long-term goal for some organizations is to prepare for an external impact evaluation, often a key requirement for organizations to secure additional funding sources and to take their work to a greater scale. An important result of this approach is that grantees understand how to measure the progress of their program before any evaluation begins.

All 16 grantees in this network have refined or completed a theory of change or logic model for their program, and 13 have developed new data collection or fidelity tools.

Grantees have effectively used technical assistance to foster an organizational culture focused on continuous learning and program improvement.

Over time, organizations understand how to measure progress internally, and this support will help prepare interested organizations for outside evaluations.

All 16 grantees from this portfolio have refined or completed a theory of change or logic model for their program, and 13 have developed new data collection or fidelity tools.

Three of the grantees (Pace Center for Girls, Latin American Youth Center and Urban Alliance) have undergone an external impact evaluation, with support from additional funders. Future Foundation completed an external summative evaluation, Latinos in Action is conducting a process evaluation and Con Mi MADRE is pursuing certification as an evidence-based program.

CREATING SPACE FOR NONPROFIT LEADERS TO COLLABORATE AND THINK STRATEGICALLY

Participating leaders have appreciated the opportunities to step away from the other daily demands of running an organization to strategize and think holistically.

Grantee-led annual convenings bring together dozens of people — grantee leaders, technical assistance

providers and representatives of other foundations — to foster rich peer learning and networking. The grantees drive the content for each convening and lead the peer- and group-learning sessions.

Topics presented by grantees have included “Constituent Engagement,” “From Building Evidence to Systems Change” and “The 3 M’s of Scaling: Measuring, Messaging and Mission.”

Technical assistance providers have led sessions on “Culturally Responsive Program Design and Evaluation,” as well as using evidence to take programs to a greater scale.

Grantees in the Building Evidence to Advance Equity network are trusted messengers who can deliver reliable information and feedback to one another. During the convenings and in surveys afterward, grantee partners have mentioned that they appreciated learning from — and along with — other program developers who were people of color.

“It’s been wonderful having a safe space to learn and help others. Before this, I was never given a space to learn,” said Alicia Guerrero, director of data, evaluation and impact at Con Mi MADRE. “We’re at a point where Con Mi MADRE has a sense of agency. There’s a sense of experience and expertise that we feel, and I’ve been able to give feedback to other organizations in our network. Being on the other side of that conversation is awesome.”

SPOTLIGHT: PEER HEALTH EXCHANGE

Peer Health Exchange, a national youth health-equity nonprofit organization founded two decades ago, has been a Casey grantee since 2018. Casey has supported training to help Peer Health Exchange use technology to improve and adapt its program design, including development of its virtual health education program and evaluation of its direct-to-youth health solutions.

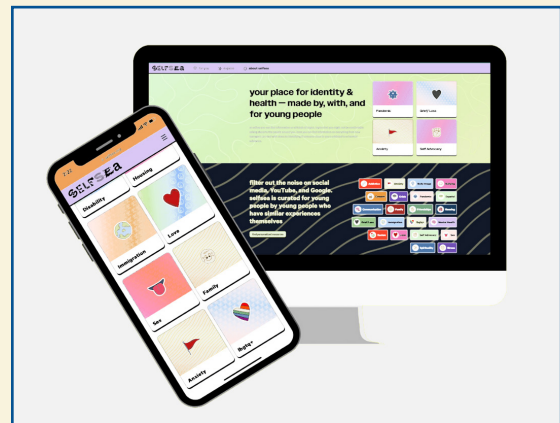
Like many nonprofits, Peer Health Exchange had to reimagine its work when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. The organization had been providing in-school health instruction to more than 20,000 high school students nationwide. When schools closed in March 2020, Peer Health Exchange adapted.

“The pandemic really pushed us to rethink how we connect to young people. Schools were closed, so we weren’t reaching them the way we had been,” said Angela Glymph, chief executive officer at Peer Health Exchange.

The organization turned to its experts — the young people they serve — to help determine how to stay in touch with youth. The young advisers were clear: We need information delivered digitally. Peer Health Exchange quickly embraced TikTok and began producing videos with young people delivering health-related messages.

Peer Health Exchange also began exploring a long-term digital solution, with young people involved at every stage. Its Youth Design Group brought together eight high school students from across the country who were trained in trauma-informed health design. These students helped imagine and build a digital prototype.

Peer Health Exchange launched its “selfsea” digital app in 2021 to provide health resources and information for youth, with a focus on people of color and young people in the LGBTQIA+ community. The name of the app was coined by a young person: “self” underscores each young person’s identity and “sea” refers to the sea’s calming effects and the concept of being seen.



Peer Health Exchange launched its selfsea digital app in 2021.

The app's content provides information about mental health, sexual health, addiction, social-emotional well-being and other issues. The platform dramatically increased Peer Health Exchange's reach, and selfsea now has more than 525,000 users accessing content on its web and mobile versions.

According to a survey, 76% of users reported that selfsea helped them to feel less alone. Peer Health Exchange's TikTok videos have received more than 11 million views, and 72% of young TikTok users surveyed reported that the videos increased their health knowledge.

True to its commitment to be guided by young people, Peer Health Exchange brought in youth to help evaluate selfsea. The organization trained young people in basic evaluation activities, and the young people helped identify measures to gauge the app's effectiveness. More broadly, the organization is planning to embark on an evaluation to fully assess selfsea's impact.

"We're seeing promise from the early data we collected. But it's really time for us to test out our assumptions more robustly," Glymph said. "We want to really understand the impact of our work."

A challenge will be finding the right evaluation approach and partner to measure the impact of Peer Health Exchange's expanding digital programming. The annual grantee convening provided a space for Peer Health Exchange leaders to connect with Casey program officers and technical assistance providers to support the organization's next steps.

"This is a newer space, especially when talking about digital outreach and youth health. Very few of us are doing this," Glymph said. "There isn't much known about the effectiveness of these digital approaches."



"We're seeing promise from the early data we collected. But it's really time for us to test out our assumptions more robustly. We want to really understand the impact of our work."

**— Angela Glymph, CEO,
Peer Health Exchange**

SPOTLIGHT: LATINOS IN ACTION

José Enriquez, born in El Salvador and raised in East Los Angeles, went on to earn a doctorate in educational leadership and administration from Brigham Young University. He launched **Latinos in Action** (LIA) in 2001 to create opportunities for other young Latinos to thrive. Today, LIA helps Latino students build academic, service and leadership abilities, with the goal of completing a college education.

The Salt Lake City-based organization embraces the use of evidence to guide its work and ensure program quality. A critical tool has been LIA's theory of change, developed with support from Building Evidence advisers. The document highlights the outcomes LIA seeks — for example, that “all LIA students perceive themselves as leaders and develop leadership skills.” The theory of change describes the path to achieve those outcomes and provides information and data that will demonstrate that the organization is doing what it says it's doing.

An accompanying logic model goes deeper, outlining the program's structure, detailing service-learning requirements, describing a leadership development strategy and identifying curriculum details to support students academically and prepare them for college and careers.



Latinos in Action students gather for a post-hurricane neighborhood and beach cleanup for a Florida community.

The sharp focus on defining programmatic essentials and how to measure them has helped Latinos in Action grow significantly — from 169 schools in 2017 to 361 in 15 states in 2023.

“To create this theory of change, we had to really dig deep to think about what LIA is,” Enriquez said. “Then we had to really understand the logic model, where we wanted to go and how we would measure it.”

The process of developing a theory of change led to the organization adopting four essential traits to instill in young people — personal assets, excellence in education, service and leadership.

“Casey’s assistance helped us identify the four essentials and helped us create fidelity tools to make sure everyone is running the essentials the same,” Enriquez said. Boot camps, training sessions and national gatherings help ensure staff across the country maintain program fidelity and uniformity from site to site.

The sharp focus on defining programmatic essentials and how to measure them has helped LIA grow significantly — from 169 schools in 2017 to 361 schools in 15 states in 2023.

LIA recently explored expanding into elementary schools to reach Latino students at a younger age.

“We looked at our logic model and our theory of change as we thought about elementary expansion,” Enriquez said. “We didn’t want to drift away from our mission, but we felt expanding would help strengthen the pipeline of young people into our program.” Convinced the expansion conformed to LIA’s mission and essentials, a pilot program has launched in 14 elementary schools in two locations.

For LIA, the next step is to undertake a randomized controlled trial to more fully evaluate its impact and then make the case for program expansion.



Latinos in Action youth participate in tutoring, gardening and community gatherings.

SPOTLIGHT: FUTURE FOUNDATION



Future Foundation began its work in Atlanta more than 20 years ago, inspired by the experiences of two talented siblings. High school track star Qaadirah Abdur-Rahim and her brother, Shareef Abdur-Rahim, a basketball star, both attended the University of California, Berkeley, on athletic scholarships. Both quickly realized that their public school education in Atlanta’s South Side hadn’t prepared them for college academics, and they vowed to do something one day to help younger children coming up behind them.

The opportunity to do so came when Shareef Abdur-Rahim became a professional basketball player. He committed \$250,000 to start an after-school program to support the academic development of youth, with Qaadirah Abdur-Rahim serving as executive director.



Today, Future Foundation is creating opportunities for academic achievement for young people caught in a cycle of generational poverty, exposing them to new experiences and helping them build the skills they need to succeed in college and in the workplace.

The organization provides a range of programming for students and their families, including after-school and summer programs for students in grades 6–12 at six schools. Programming focuses not just on academic support but also on such crucial areas as social and emotional support, college and career prep, financial literacy and parent engagement. The overall goal is to prepare the students to graduate from high school. Of the student participants tracked by Future Foundation, 100% graduate, compared to 86% of their peers.



The Casey Foundation has supported Future Foundation for several years. Early support allowed the organization to develop a theory of change, which it used to consolidate and sharpen services.

Future Foundation students working on writing skills and touring Clark Atlanta University and Morris Brown College.

“We’d like our students to think more critically, so we’re sharing the evaluation information with them. Their success means a lot, not just to them and their families but to our communities.”

**—Ronnelle V. Smith,
CEO, Future Foundation**



In recent years, Future Foundation has focused on quality improvement, creating fidelity tools for teachers to use and metrics to hold program managers accountable. The organization has also improved its data tracking for metrics such as student attendance and individual student action plans.

It’s all part of emphasizing a culture focused on results and accountability. As a new nonprofit CEO transitioning from the corporate sector, Ronnelle V. Smith used the organization’s evaluation findings and internal assessment tools to sustain and strengthen programming amid the organization’s transition in leadership and recalibration of board governance.

“We want to make sure our program managers and directors fully understand the criteria for evaluating our programs and the metrics and milestones to chart where we’re going,” said Smith. “We want everyone in the enterprise, from the janitor to the CEO, from security officers to bus drivers, to understand what the standard is for success and how we measure it.”

Future Foundation makes a point of sharing data about the program with the community and the schools in which it delivers services.

“We’d like our students to think more critically, so we’re sharing the evaluation information with them. Their success means a lot, not just to them and their families but to our communities. We want to tell their story,” said Smith.

SPOTLIGHT: CON MI MADRE

Con Mi MADRE (Mothers and Daughters Raising Expectations) originally launched as a program of the Junior League of Austin in 1992, a response to data showing that a Latina girl in Texas had less than a 1% chance of completing college. The organization focuses on young Latinas and their mothers, beginning when the daughter enters sixth grade and continuing through college — with a goal of increasing college attendance and completion.

Con Mi MADRE helps the girls and their families learn about college and financial aid; provides social and emotional support; encourages the girls to set goals and advocate for themselves; and provides a support network to help the girls and families maintain their focus on education. Con Mi MADRE serves as many as 600 families a year in Austin and Fort Worth. Of those, 85% are Latina, 75% have low incomes and slightly more than half have daughters who will be the first in their families to attend college.

Until becoming a Casey grantee in 2016, the organization lacked resources to make data and evaluation a priority. Through the Foundation, it received funding and hands-on support to focus on building evidence to strengthen its work.

The partnership with Casey led to:

- the development of fidelity tools to ensure programs are offered consistently;
- the exploration and update of evaluative tools to ensure they are culturally responsive and participant centered; and
- the creation of a logic model, which shows how the program will help girls finish high school and attend college and is a tool the organization uses repeatedly to assess its work.



Girls and their mothers attend the Con Mi MADRE college and career fair.

As a result of its assessment efforts, the organization established protocols for organizing outside-of-school events for girls or families. That included ensuring RSVP materials are sent out in a timely manner, having an efficient sign-in process and giving families clear directions.

Plans for a formative evaluation were put on hold when the pandemic hit in 2020, but Con Mi MADRE leaders hope to be ready for an impact evaluation within the next few years.

“This focus on evidence has an impact on the organizational team by motivating leadership and staff to deliver the services in a learning environment, which brings our organization together,” said Johanna Moya-Fábregas, executive director of Con Mi MADRE. “When you’re not just showing up to provide a service, but instead you have the opportunity to come together as a team to think about why we do what we do, it’s very valuable. You’re stimulating and challenging people to deliver more. That creates a very positive learning environment.”

Building a culture of continuous learning and program improvement means many of the evaluation tools created are living documents that change in an iterative process based on new conditions and data insights. Now, Con Mi MADRE is discussing the creation of an expanded logic model that focuses on two generations — daughters and mothers.

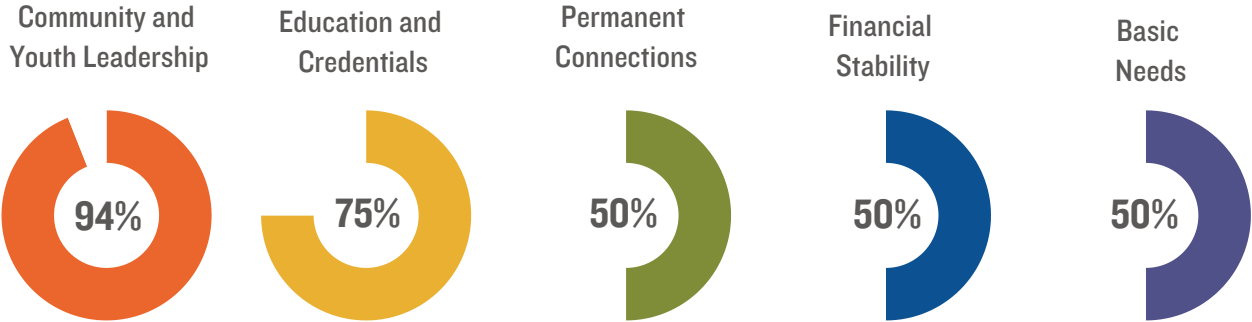
“The dual-generation framework includes the mother along the way. Including them in that dual-generation framework allows the team to visualize how their work comes into play with that mission,” said Alicia Guerrero, director of data, evaluation and impact at Con Mi MADRE.

Building a culture of continuous learning and program improvement means many of the evaluation tools created are living documents that change in an iterative process based on new conditions and data insights.

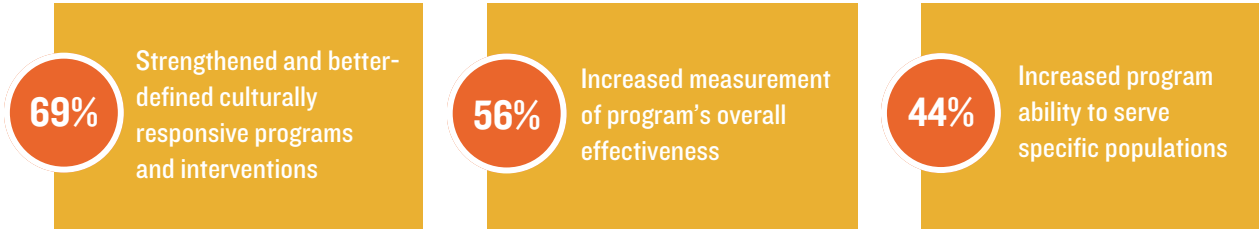
NETWORK HIGHLIGHTS

The 2023 annual survey of grantees by Casey’s Evidence-Based Practice Group shows the reach of this investment for the prior program year, 2022, when Casey’s investment in this portfolio helped 16 grantees better serve more than 87,000 children, youth and young adults. Of those served, 84% were young people of color.

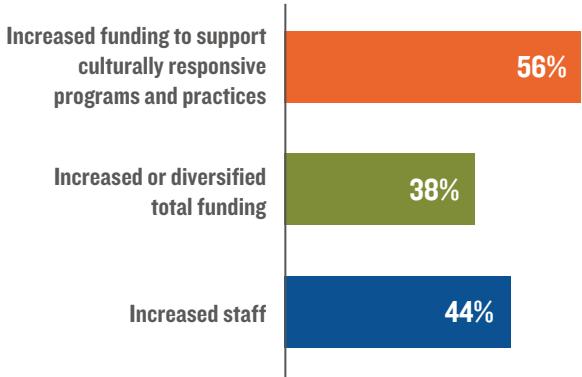
PRIORITY AREAS GRANTEES ADDRESS



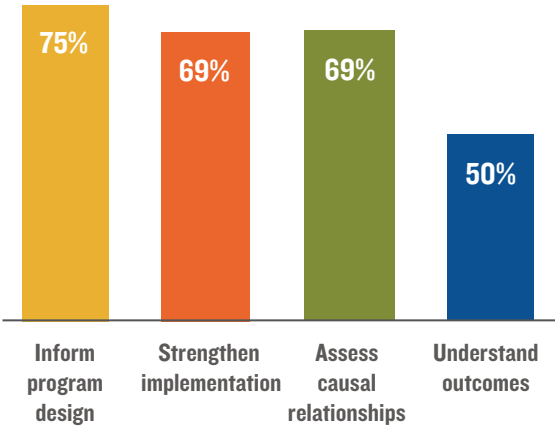
OUTCOMES REPORTED BY GRANTEES



ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES



HOW GRANTEES USE EVIDENCE



LESSONS FROM A FUNDING STRATEGY

The Casey Foundation has identified lessons from its seven-year investment in advancing the use of evidence by organizations serving young people and families of color. These lessons will allow the Foundation to sustain and improve its approach and can help other funders to plan for similar investments.

- **The initiative needs to be flexible and tailor its assistance to work with grantees of varying size, experience and capacity.** Some grantees are in the early stages and benefit from creating foundational evidence tools, such as a logic model or program overview. Others have been in operation longer, but they need help planning a complex organizational evaluation and identifying an appropriate evaluator. Even these more experienced organizations continue to explore alternative ways of using evidence and evaluation to improve, adapt or scale their programming. Having a diverse network of organizations helped the grantees learn from each other — a major benefit of this investment strategy. (See the example of Peer Health Exchange, page 13.)
- **This kind of grant making requires patience.** Organizations may need sustained support to advance their evidence-building capacity and evaluation readiness. In such cases, a multi-year funding horizon is valuable. Patient and flexible grant making may require a funder to help grantees rewind and revisit initial determinations about a theory of change or plans for an evaluation. By investing in a network of grantees, the funder might find that grantees will accelerate in pace or sharpen their vision because of their collaboration with one another.
- **Nonprofits become ready for evaluation at their own pace.** Turnover and other factors can inhibit an organization's ability to build evidence and undergo assessments in a linear path. However, through assessment tools, data collection systems and a discussion at the beginning of a grant, grantee and funder can take out the guesswork and help the organization stay on track.
- **Convenings are a valuable tool for grantees.** Leaders of the grantee organizations helped plan virtual or in-person gatherings and discussion topics, which increased engagement and ensured that information was relevant and useful to organizations with varying levels of experience.

- **Building trust between grantee and funder is critical to success.** Casey has made it a priority to develop relationships with grantees, listening carefully to what they say they need. Grantees have reported that the Foundation’s responsiveness to their emergent needs has strengthened the partnerships over time and ensured that grantees embrace the kind of technical assistance and support the initiative provides.
- **External factors often require adaptation.** The COVID-19 pandemic forced many nonprofits serving youth to drastically change their service models. They learned how to navigate the post-pandemic world and, often, rely on revised virtual or hybrid programming. This new reality has required funders to rethink how they support these organizations to build their use of data and evidence. (See the example of Peer Health Exchange, page 13.)
- **Expanding the definition and use of data can make youth interventions more effective and increase the supply of culturally responsive programs.** Funders should understand that data for management and strategic decision making might look different amid increasing demand for services. Nonprofits report that they face additional pressures to replicate their programs or expand their reach to new populations. Data-driven approaches have helped them to keep any program growth aligned with their mission. (See the example of Latinos in Action, page 15.)
- **Having members of the community and young people participate can help generate new culturally responsive ways to measure outcomes.** Many grantees engage youth and communities of color in collecting and making meaning of their data and defining what works for them. Based on this approach, they move away from deficit framing, which focuses on what a community lacks, to create assessment tools focused on the assets and strengths of youth and communities of color. (See the example of Village of Wisdom, page 9.)

These lessons will continue to inform the Casey Foundation’s investment strategy to meet the clear ongoing need. With the right support, nonprofits such as those highlighted in this report can develop the solutions they need to build the evidence base for culturally responsive programs.

CONCLUSION



Adrian Adkins of E4 Youth, right, speaks with Jennifer Person of Future Foundation. Adkins was one of the program’s young creatives who produced live, on-site examples of video and photo storytelling during the Austin convening.



Carl Settles (standing) leads E4 Youth, which engages creative youth in workforce development in Austin, Texas. E4 Youth served as the local host for the 2023 convening.

Youth benefit most from culturally responsive, evidence-informed practices that reflect their communities and from programs that are embedded in their neighborhoods. Organizations implementing these programs can accelerate growth, development and success when they operate in an intentionally and mutually supportive community or cohort, such as in the Building Evidence to Advance Equity network of Casey grantees.

But nonprofit organizations serving youth of color are often under-resourced and strained by the needs of their program participants and the communities they serve. Private philanthropy and public funders must step up to increase investment in emerging networks of evidence-building nonprofit organizations.

Youth benefit most from culturally responsive, evidence-informed practices that reflect their communities and from programs that are embedded in their neighborhoods.

RESOURCES

These resources will be helpful to funders and practitioners involved with organizations that want to improve their use of evidence to strengthen their work serving communities of color.

Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy, University of Pennsylvania. (2020). *A toolkit for centering racial equity throughout data integration*. www.aecf.org/resources/a-toolkit-for-centering-racial-equity-within-data-integration

Barrows, A., & Jackson-Spieker, K. (2024). *Experts by experience: How engaging people with lived experience can improve social services*. The Center for Behavioral Design and Social Justice. www.projectevident.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/CBDSJ-Experts-by-Experience-Jan2024.pdf

Child Trends. (2018). *A video series for building evidence on effective programs*. www.childtrends.org/project/video-series-building-evidence-effective-programs

Hutchful, E. (2024). *Culture is healing: Removing barriers facing providers of culturally responsive services*. Center for the Study of Social Policy. www.cssp.org/resource/culture-is-healing

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2017). *Considering culture: Building the best evidence-based practices for children of color*. www.aecf.org/resources/considering-culture

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2022). *Developing a theory of change: Practical theory of change guidance, templates and examples*. www.aecf.org/resources/theory-of-change

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2024). *Guiding questions to advance equity in evaluation and research*. www.aecf.org/resources/guiding-questions-to-advance-equity-in-evaluation-and-research

ENDNOTES

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⁶ Paarlberg, L. E., McGinnis Johnson, J., & Hannibal, B. (2019, July 17). Race and the public foundation grants marketplace: The differential effect of network status in communities of colour. *Public Management Review*, 22(10), 1443–1463. Retrieved from www.doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2019.1635192

⁷ Nonprofit Finance Fund. (2022). *2022 state of the nonprofit sector survey*. Retrieved from www.nff.org/learn/survey#results

⁸ Chalise, N., & Gutkowski, V. (2021, October 12). *Perspectives from Main Street: The impact of COVID-19 on communities and the entities serving them*. FedCommunities. Retrieved from www.fedcommunities.org/data/main-street-covid19-survey-2021/#figure8

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