

Center *for*
Public Service

Nonprofit Capacity Building Through Program Evaluation: The Nonprofit Institute Professional Program Evaluation Program

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Oregon Health Authority

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Submitted by
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Executive Summary

Oregon Health Authority (OHA) partnered with the Nonprofit Institute at Portland State University (NPI) to deliver content related to receiving a professional certificate in program evaluation. A total of 14 individuals were accepted from the nonprofit organizations who work in the areas related to human services, health care, and public health. The program held 8 online synchronous sessions during January-May 2023 where course content was delivered and group work was completed. In between sessions, participants had access to a learning mentor who had a total of 26 meetings with participants.

To complete the program, participants were required to finalize an evaluation report or plan. Of the initial cohort, 10 participants completed 10 projects. 40% completed full reports with findings and 60% created robust evaluation plans to be implemented in upcoming months. The focus of the participants evaluation reports and plans were on:

- 1) evaluating the client experience,
- 2) measuring program effectiveness,
- 3) measuring program impact; and
- 4) enhancing partnerships

These projects functioned as a capacity building exercise for nonprofit organizations. Participants reported the following learning outcomes from the Program Evaluation Certificate Program:

- 1) developed practical and implementable skills
- 2) gained peer-to-peer knowledge
- 3) attained holistic, context-based evaluative thinking

They also reported personal benefits of gaining a sense of empowerment and increased familiarity with the program evaluation process.

Moving forward, capitalizing on the continuing partnership between NPI and OHA, NPI has identified the following actions to further enhance its program impact on the participants and to expand the impact on human services, health care, and public health industry:

- spend more time upfront helping participants select a program to evaluate
- provide more interaction when possible (in lieu of lecture)
- offer in-person opportunities
- continue to outreach to organizations that serve rural communities in Oregon

Project Overview

Many nonprofit organizations, particularly those who work in the human services and health care arena have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As the 2022 Cohort of the NPI Program Evaluation Certificate Program participants identified, as a result of COVID-19 They have made significant changes in the way they offer services and manage operations. Moving forward, it is important for nonprofit organizations to keep monitoring and rigorously evaluating their program impact,, both at the system-level and organizational level, to stay resilient in their future operations.

Oregon Health Authority (OHA), as part of their effort to develop program delivery capacity among the nonprofit organizations whose work have impact on public health, contracted Portland State University's Nonprofit Institute (NPI) within the Center for Public Service (CPS) at the Hatfield School of Government and provided funding to subsidize tuition support to organizations to attend the Nonprofit Institute's *Professional Certificate in Nonprofit Program Evaluation* program ("the NPI Program"). NPI Program participants who were interested in having an active role in community preparedness received a fee waiver of \$1,500 per person, thanks to OHA's funding. OHA's intent is to support the nonprofit organizations who work in community preparedness to develop their long-term capacity to deliver effective programs by building skills and knowledge in program evaluation.

The NPI Program aimed to develop nonprofit organizations' program evaluation capacity, while assisting them in developing and implementing evaluations plans to enhance their level of community preparedness. While receiving instructional guidance on program evaluation, participants received assistance from NPI staff in developing and implementing their evaluation plans.

The NPI Program duration was approximately 9 months and occurred between October 2022~June 2023, including the outreach phase to recruit participants (October~December 2022), and the program delivery phase (January~June 2023).. Deliverables for the NPI project to OHA included: (1) evaluation plan/report from the participating nonprofit organization, (2) NPI's summary report on the Nonprofit Program Evaluation Professional Certificate program, and (3) presentation to OHA.

NPI Program Description

1. NPI Program Overview

Program evaluation can offer nonprofit organizations insights into their work, ideas on how to improve and strengthen programs and practices, and opportunities to engage meaningfully with key collaborators and parties. The Nonprofit Institute's *Professional Certificate in Nonprofit Program Evaluation* program (NPI Program) guides participants through a holistic process of

program evaluation, from beginning to end. Participants were delivered a curriculum that described the importance and value of program evaluation, how to engage key collaborators and parties to design and conduct an evaluation; how to design, prepare, and carry out an evaluation plan; and how to report and use findings. Participants' learning was synthesized through the design and/or execution of an evaluation plan for a relevant program within their respective organization, which was a program deliverable presented to the cohort to finalize the project, complete the program and 'graduate'.

The program was delivered in an online synchronous format using the Zoom platform. Participants met for eight full-day sessions from January-May 2023. These sessions offered instruction related to the components of a project evaluation report and utilized the textbook, *Step by Step Guide to Evaluation* by W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Subjects covered included: how to create a logic model and measurement framework; develop evaluation questions; collect and analyze data; and report findings to different 'stakeholders'. Throughout the program duration, participants were given access to a NPI Program Mentor who offered personalized learning coaching and support to the specific needs of each project.

2. Schedule and Key Content

Each session occurred for six hours on select Saturdays from 9am-3pm Pacific Time. All sessions were delivered remotely through Zoom. (See table 1 below for more details.)

Session	Date	Key Content	Instructors and Mentors
1	1/21	Overview, standards, definitions, approaches	Nishishiba, Odeh
2	1/28	Program theory, logic model, preparing for evaluation project, 'stakeholder' engagement, organizational capacity assessment	Nishishiba, Odeh
3	2/11	Evaluation questions, evaluation design, IRB, Budget	Nishishiba, Odeh
4	2/25	Data collection	Girard, Odeh
5	3/11	Data analysis	Girard, Odeh
6	4/8	Data analysis workshop, data visualization	Girard, Odeh
7	5/6	Findings, final report, communication strategies, culture of evaluation	Nishishiba, Girard, Odeh

8	5/20	Presentation and graduation	Nishishiba, Girard, Odeh
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Table1: Session schedule and key content

3. Mentor Sessions

Participants in the program had access to a designated learning mentor for coaching and instructional support between sessions as they worked to complete their evaluation plan, implement the evaluation project, and finalize their reports. Throughout the program, participants were encouraged to meet individually or in small groups with the learning mentor, and to engage with the course instructors and their fellow participants for guidance and brainstorming.

A total of 26 individual mentor sessions were conducted during the program duration. During the mentor sessions, participants were given the opportunity to discuss the context of their project in more detail. These sessions supported participants to clarify concepts discussed in class while allowing them the space to process their specific needs, such as developing evaluation questions or survey tools. This element is particularly important because the iterative process of evaluation is underscored in this program. This means that throughout the duration, participants were at different points in their process as they returned to previous sections for further development due to learning new information. As participants learned new information in the sessions, the originally planned evaluation topic often changed and required “pivoting” to a new way of thinking about the plan or report. The learning mentor assisted in this by giving participants the opportunity to individually process their project with expert guidance.

4. Participant Recruitment and Profile

1) Participant Recruitment

The recruitment of the program participants was conducted through outreach to program alumni, newsletter recipients, and those who joined the interest list. Advertisements were posted on LinkedIn and personal emails were sent to public-health related nonprofit organizations who were identified as likely to qualify and benefit from the program. Information on the fee waiver option was emphasized and targeted toward organizations who worked with historically marginalized and therefore vulnerable populations such as those who serve refugees, houseless individuals, people of color, and survivors of domestic violence.

The NPI received 14 applications for the 2023 cohort. Of the accepted applicants, 10 work for organizations with locations in the State of Oregon and 4 were working for organizations that have an international reach that includes Oregon. Of the initial 14 accepted applicants, 10 completed the certificate program.

2) Participants' Organizational Profile

The participants came from varied backgrounds and organizations. The list of organizations represented by the participants is available in *Appendix A. Participants' Organizational Affiliation and Project Description*. These organizations identified their main area of work in the following 6 categories: (1) Public Health, 2) Environmental Sustainability, 3) Homelessness, 4) Education, 5) Refugee Support, and 6) Wildlife Services. In many cases, the nonprofits had overlapping services in more than one category. Since the evaluation process is iterative and ongoing, organizations engaged in program evaluation need to make a long term commitment to implement and sustain the process.

Due to OHA's support, two organizations who previously worked with NPI continued their ongoing commitment for program evaluation and sent new employees to the NPI program as part of their evaluative capacity-building efforts. Each organization had experienced changes to process and service delivery as the result of COVID-19. The breakdown of the participants' organization type of work is shown in Appendix A. Participants' Organizational Affiliation and Project Description.

5. Program Participant Evaluation Project Themes

Each participant identified a project to work on during the program with the goal, at minimum, to develop a realistic evaluation plan, and/or to conduct an evaluation and submit an evaluation report. For each session, participants worked on components of the evaluation plan and integrated them as elements into their *final evaluation plan and/or report*. (Final evaluation plan or report submitted by the program participants is available [here](#) in a separate online folder.¹)

The program recognized that each of the projects that participants chose was at a different stage of readiness for evaluation. Some were at an early stage where the data collection for evaluation needed to be designed and implemented, while others were at the stage where the data were already collected and ready for the analysis. The program is structured to work with and support each of the participants and set a realistic goal in identifying the final product for the certificate. Also, participants who were from the same organization had the opportunity to choose to work on a project together or separately. This added capacity to the organization as it cultivated a shared understanding of program evaluation processes and gave space to colleagues to dedicate time specifically to discussing program evaluation options for their organization.

Of the 10 completed projects, 40% of projects were an evaluation report that presented findings related to the organization, and 60% of projects were evaluation plans that presented a robust framework for how the organization will proceed in their evaluative efforts. Participants chose whether to complete a report or plan based on evaluation scope, data availability, and feasibility related to the time needed to complete a full evaluation. Many evaluation plans were created to

¹https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1acy-c2LumXCbYPHHF45loU6MpSqU_Fe6

begin at the beginning of the new fiscal year, school year, or client cohort cycle, depending on the specific organization's processes.

Appendix A. Participants' Organizational Affiliation and Project Description, has a full list of the evaluation topics participants selected. These topics fall broadly under the capacity-building themes of (1) evaluating the client experience, (2) measuring program effectiveness, (3) measuring program impact, and 4) enhancing partnerships. These themes emerged as participants advanced through the course content and considered their organizational needs related to community preparedness. These themes are not mutually exclusive and many projects incorporate more than one.

1) Evaluating the Client Experience

Nonprofit organizations serve vulnerable populations. Because of this, many participants saw the need to evaluate the client experience with their organization. Projects that looked at this sought to understand how houseless individuals and refugees access medical services; and how refugees are engaged in the needs assessment process.

2) Measuring Program Effectiveness

Participants who were concerned about program effectiveness sought to understand how well their programs were aligning with the goals of the organization. Examples of projects related to this include evaluation of how effective different revenue structures are, understanding the effectiveness of training programs on participants, and understanding how effective current models are at supporting the needs of houseless individuals.

3) Measuring Program Impact

Those concerned with measuring program impact centered evaluation projects on understanding what impact, if any, their organization has on their clientele. These differ from "measuring program effectiveness" in that they are not measuring impact against a specific programmatic goal. Examples of projects under this theme include evaluating the long term impact of student support on program alumni, understanding the impact of wildlife conflict training programs, and understanding the impact of a rapid re-housing program.

4) Enhancing Partnerships

Evaluations meant to enhance partnerships are concerned with developing better relationships with peer organizations and funders. One participant evaluated what components a data dashboard would need to contain in order to foster clear communication between organizations. Another participant from a technical assistance organization sought to discern how they can work with their funder organization to carry out proper evaluation of the agencies they work with and not duplicate efforts.

NPI's Impact on Organizational Capacity Building and Participant Learning

The NPI Program provided the structure and tools to enhance program evaluation capacities among nonprofit organizations. NPI Program participants strengthened their skills to plan and implement program evaluation, an essential tool to support informed decision-making for program and service delivery improvements. Participants and the nonprofit organizations who received fee assistance through OHA to participate in the NPI program are at the forefront of service provision that directly or indirectly impact public health outcomes. Building their capacity to integrate evaluation for more effective programming will eventually lead to improved public health outcomes.

The assessment of the NPI Program's impact and capacity building of the participating nonprofit organizations were conducted by analyzing participants' materials including (1) application statements, (2) post-course feedback and reflections from end-of-program survey responses, (3) course assignments, (4) final project presentation materials, and (5) evaluation plans and/or reports to identify learning outcomes, increased capacity, and program impact. The participants final presentations are available [here](#)², and the evaluation and/or reports are available [here](#) in a separate online folders³.

1. How NPI Supports Community Preparedness

Participants who received financial support for this program were asked to provide information on how NPI has supported their community preparedness efforts. The following insights were offered:

1) Identifies "Gaps" in Current Disaster-Related Processes

Participants who looked at their current evaluation processes reported that they were able to look more closely at how their organization interacted with clients during the COVID-19 pandemic. This helped identify areas where clients may need more support or education during future disasters.

2) Uncovers Effectiveness of Disaster-Related Changes

It's common that nonprofit organizations changed operations in a multitude of ways during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants reported that NPI gave them the opportunity to study the impact of those changes on their organization. For example, a participant was able to use evaluation tools to report on how their organization supported displaced clients. Another participant noted that their organization continues

²https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cQammoN4Hhfij_oO7ANh4dJ6MMW-3uWm/view?usp=share_link

³https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1acy-c2LumXCbYPHf45loU6MpSqU_Fe6

to make adjustments to their processes based on evaluations related to how well they responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In general, NPI contributed to community preparedness by facilitating a learning environment that encouraged participants to think proactively about disaster response. Throughout the program sessions, individuals remarked that this empowered them to look retrospectively at past processes while also planning how to adjust now to mitigate issues in the future.

2. Participants' Expectations and Learning Outcomes for the NPI Program

1) Participants' Expectations

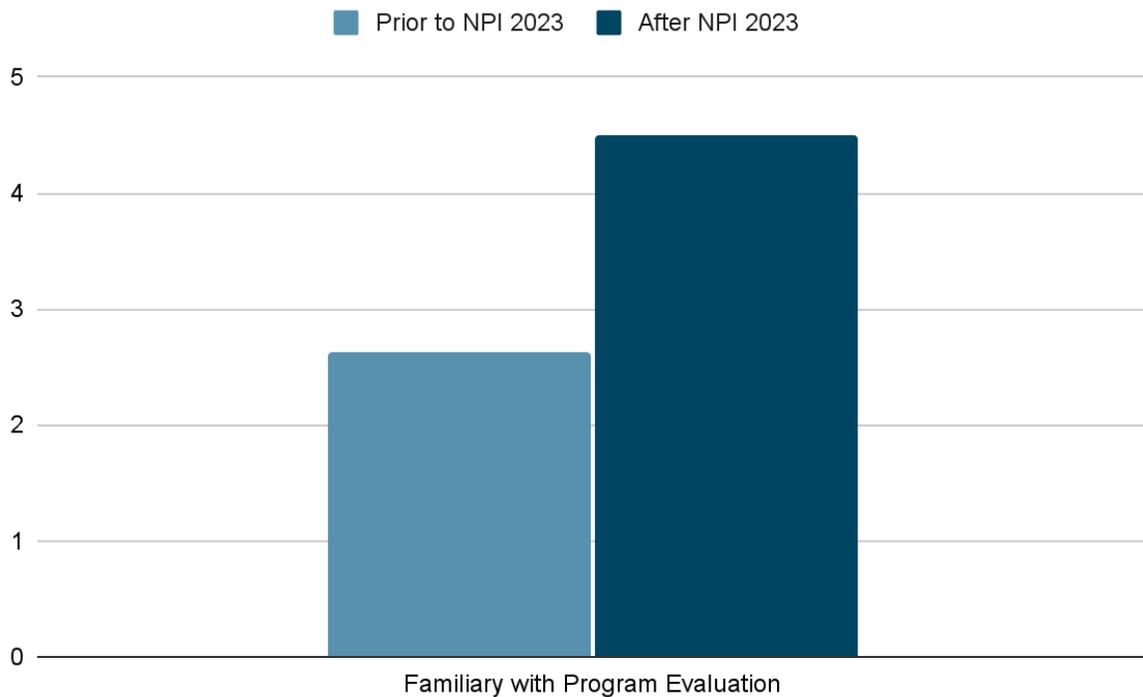
NPI Program participants were asked to provide their learning goals in their statement of interest in their application materials. The following were the main learning goals that the participants noted:

- Building capacity for the organization and those served by the organization
- Measuring impact on clients Post-COVID
- Aligning evaluation efforts with the expressed needs of the community
- Scanning the current organizational and community landscape
- Understanding if changes are resulting in better outcomes

The promotion of equity was an area of focus for many of the participants. Those who have evaluation processes in place already were concerned about the effectiveness of existing tools in reaching and supporting historically marginalized populations.

2) Participants' Learning Outcomes

In the Final Feedback Survey, participants were asked to rank their familiarity with program evaluation prior to entering the program on a scale of 1-5. The average score of participants prior to the program was 2.62 out of 5.



Participants were then asked to self-report their knowledge of program evaluation upon completion. The average score of participants upon completion was 4.5 out of 5 (+1.88).

Those who have completed the program were also asked to report how NPI contributed to their learning. These outcomes fall broadly under the following themes:

- a. Practical and implementable skills
- b. Peer-to-peer knowledge
- c. Holistic, context-based evaluative thinking

a. Practical and implementable skills

“This is one of the most practical, hands-on courses I have ever been a part of. The course structure is immediately helpful for both your organization and professional growth...It is structured in a manner that strikes a balance between being accessible, immensely useful, and supportive.”

The participants in this course are working professionals in the nonprofit sector. They come to the program with a range of professional and academic backgrounds. NPI places emphasis on delivering program evaluation curriculum in a way that participants can understand and apply to their organization. Participants with prior evaluation experience and education remarked that instructors in this program added to their knowledge by incorporating practical

considerations of the evaluation process within the curriculum. Others reported that they were able to directly apply tools gained in program sessions to projects in their organization. Some have reported that it has already impacted their evaluative processes.

b. Peer-to-peer knowledge

“Actually reporting out/doing the presentation was the hardest and best part of the class...”

Many participants in the program report that they are the primary employee responsible for conducting evaluations in their organization. One benefit participants identified was the fact that the program gave them ability to discuss evaluation with other nonprofit professionals. The structure of the course helped create a community of practice and prevented them from feeling being isolated that sometimes evaluators experience. Many activities throughout the program sessions are designed to facilitate peer-to-peer information sharing where they were encouraged to solicit and give feedback on assorted components of their evaluation project. This also prepares participants by equipping them with opportunities to discuss and explain their evaluation project prior to presenting it in work-related settings. This contributes to organizational capacity by giving participants access to new ideas and initiatives.

c. Holistic, context-based evaluative thinking

“It was really helpful in improving my understanding of evaluation in a holistic way, and provided best models/practices to change organizational processes and culture around evaluation.”

A primary component of this program is based on teaching participants different types of evaluation; and how choices made during each phase of the process impact overall results. Participants reported that this enhanced their thinking by giving them a holistic, “big picture” view of the evaluation process. It was also noted that this approach gave them the opportunity to consider the context surrounding the evaluation they’d like to perform—such as the scope, organizational capacity, and resource availability. This context, one participant noted, helps evaluators “right size” their evaluation project to their organization. This helps reduce inefficiencies in the evaluation process.

3. Participant Feedback

Participants were solicited to give their feedback on the overall program structure; and to give insight as to how they will be carrying out their evaluative thinking in the future. The following reflects themes of what they provided.

1) Benefits of the Program

Participants reported the following benefits of the NPI program structure:

- Assignments built on each other toward the final project
- Sessions were interactive
- The pacing/schedule of sessions
- Content was delivered in terms of how it can be applied

2) Participants' Next Steps

When asked how likely they are to apply the skills learned in the program upon completion on a scale of 1-5, 87.5% of respondents marked "5". Participants were asked to elaborate on what they will be doing in the immediate future. The following plans were identified:

- Transitioning to evaluation-centered careers
- Implementation of organization-wide evaluation processes
- Refining current evaluation processes
- Building a nonprofit organization that serves refugees

3) Suggestions for Improvement

Participants provided some feedback for the NPI Program's future improvements in the end-of-program survey. Their suggestions included the following:

- Spend more time upfront helping participants select a program to evaluate
- Provide more interaction when possible (in lieu of lecture)
- Offer in-person opportunities

Conclusion

In partnership with the Oregon Health Authority, the Nonprofit Institute at Portland State University delivered program evaluation training that aims to support capacity building of the nonprofit organizations. A total of 10 individuals representing 10 organizations completed the NPI program. Participants were individually empowered by gaining more confidence in their

ability to perform program evaluation. As the participants worked on organization-specific evaluation projects while attending the NPI program, they contributed in enhancing the capacity of the nonprofit organizations they worked for. In their evaluation projects, the participants studied the direct and latent impacts of disasters (e.g. COVID-19) on their organizations' respective programs. The participants assessed the effectiveness of their organizations' COVID-19 responses and evaluated changing processes. Key focuses of their evaluation projects included: (1) evaluating the client experience, (2) measuring program effectiveness, (3) measuring program impact, and (4) enhancing partnerships. Through their engagement in the program evaluation process the participants developed new understandings of their respective organization, and fostered collaborative relationships with their program partners.

Our assessment of the overall NPI program indicated that it supported the participants and their nonprofit organizations' capacity building in the area of community preparedness by empowering organizations to identify current gaps in disaster response while evaluating changes that occurred as the result of disaster. Many participants were interested in learning about social impact, equity and culturally appropriate approaches to program evaluation that prioritize community strengths. Additionally, many participants looked for a peer-to-peer experience and expected the NPI program to be an opportunity to strengthen their general skills and career growth. After participating in the program, they noted an increased sense of empowerment and confidence and an increased familiarity with program evaluation. Key takeaways and learnings included practical considerations for conducting an evaluation. After successfully completing the course, students commented that their next steps included continuing doing evaluation work, implementing evaluation plans, sharing knowledge with their team, engaging in ongoing learning, and applying to monitoring and evaluation positions. Overall, participants noted they were "very likely" to apply what they learned.

Moving forward, NPI was given feedback that instructors should focus more on helping individuals choose a program to evaluate, provide more interaction in sessions, and consider in-person options for those located in Oregon. For the continuing partnership with OHA, the NPI also proposes to consider different forms of content delivery in addition to expanding outreach to organizations that serve rural communities in Oregon.

Appendix A. Participants' Organizational Affiliation and Project Description

Name	Organization	Organization Location	Organization Type	Plan or Report	Topic
Iqra Adde	Oregon Public Health Institute	Portland, Oregon	Public Health	Plan	Financial health of OPHI (evaluating COVID-19 funding models)
An Bui	Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization	Portland, Oregon	Refugee Support	Report	Evaluation of Refugee Community Needs Assessment process
Eric Earp	Bridges to Change	Portland, Oregon	Homelessness	Report	Homelessness medical outreach changes during COVID-19
Susan Getty	Humane Society of United States	National	Wildlife Services	Plan	Impact of human-wildlife conflict educational program
Shannon Gibson	KAUST Gifted Student Program	International	Education	Plan	Final placement process of Saudi Arabian students
Trevor Kaul	Training Resources for Environmental Community	Sante Fe, New Mexico	Environmental Sustainability	Plan	What characteristics do success partnerships with organizations look like?
Kelley Pellerin	African Youth and Community Organization	Portland, Oregon	Refugee Support	Report	Impact of transportation on health care access amongst refugees
Shoshana Rybeck	Northwest Housing Alternatives	Portland, Oregon	Homelessness	Plan	Impact of rapid re-housing services
Thalea Torres	AI4All	National	Education	Plan	Impact of AI-related college pathways programs on program participants/alumni
Joy Wilcox	Sponsors. Inc.	Lane County, Oregon	Homelessness	Report	Forms of data communication with community partners/the public

Appendix B. 2023 Final Feedback Form Questions

1. Name
2. Email address
3. What worked best for you in the program?
4. What didn't work so well?
5. Overall, how did the program support your learning or improving the skills to design and/or implement a program evaluation?
6. Please indicate your level of familiarity with program **before** after the course
Not familiar at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very familiar
7. Please indicate your level of familiarity with program evaluation **after** the course
Not familiar at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very familiar
8. Now that you have completed this course, how likely are you to apply what you have learned?
Not likely at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very likely
9. Overall, would you recommend...?
 - a. Online-Only Format
 - b. In-Person Only Format
 - c. Combination of Online delivery days and In-person delivery days
 - d. Mix of people participating online and in-person (Attend anywhere)
 - e. Other...
10. What are your next steps after graduation?
11. If you received the tuition stipend, please write how this program contributed to your organization's commitment to disaster response and/or community preparedness here.
12. We would like to share your experience of the program with future applicants and program marketing. Please write your testimonial here.
13. Are there any other comments you'd like to add? Please use the space below.