



LEEAD Program: Evaluation Brief

2020-2021



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This brief draws from follow-up survey results with LEEAD Alumni from Cohorts 1, 2, and 3.
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Overview of the LEEAD Program

Leaders in Equitable Evaluation and Diversity (LEEAD) is a program of Expanding the Bench® (ETB), a Change Matrix initiative. It works as an evaluation training program that provides a pathway for leaders in culturally responsive and equitable evaluation (CREE) to advance the field by centering equity in their work. The program was created because evaluation-supporting systems (i.e., philanthropy, higher education, government, and the broader field) perpetuate assumptions and lead to community harm when they do not use a CREE lens. LEEAD supports talented, early and mid-career professionals (Scholars) from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds with advanced degrees¹ who aspire to become leaders in the field of evaluation and drive change toward racial and social justice. The Scholars represent individuals with three-to-seven years of experience in research, evaluation, or both.

LEEAD is a 15 month program designed to expand participating Scholars' knowledge of CREE through three components as part of the learning and professional development approach: 1) completion of a rigorous CREE-focused curriculum; 2) pairing a Scholar with an experienced evaluator who serves as a Mentor; and 3) an opportunity to apply CREE knowledge to an evaluation project during a practicum experience at an evaluation firm, foundation, think tank, university, or nonprofit organization. Since the Program began in the fall of 2015, 50 Scholars (figure 1) have completed the LEEAD Program². Every LEEAD cohort is composed of Scholars from a variety of backgrounds, representing multiple interests with unique perspectives, creating a robust community.

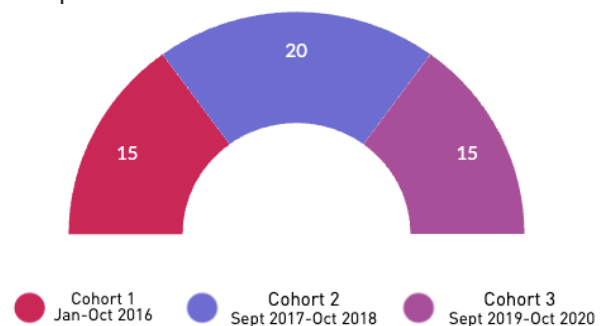


Figure 1: Scholars by Cohort

1 The original educational requirements for LEEAD were changed during the fourth cohort (2021-22) of Scholars, admitting professionals with master's level degrees in addition to doctoral degrees
2 The fourth cohort of Scholars (2021-22) is in the process of completing the program at the time of this report

Purpose of This Brief

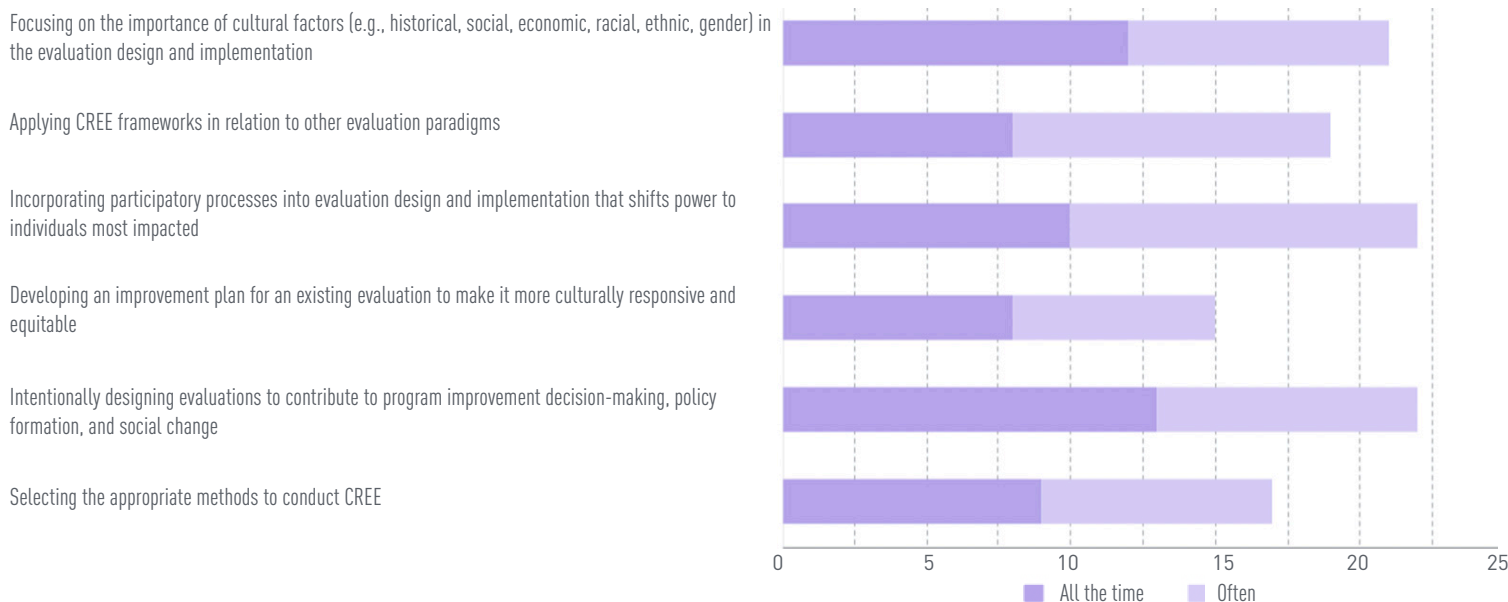
The ETB Team conducts annual surveys with **LEEAD Alumni** and believes in sharing evaluation results as we learn from them. The findings are based on analysis of 2022 survey data collected from LEEAD Alumni across Cohorts 1–3. The survey, receiving a response rate of 50% (n=25), sought to understand how the program 1) impacted the Alumni's careers, 2) in what ways Alumni are applying CREE skills in evaluation, and 3) the ways that they have established lasting relationships and collaborations with fellow Alumni. This brief also highlights what Alumni think is needed to drive positive change in the evaluation field and the support ETB can provide to further those goals.

Findings

LEEAD Alumni are applying CREE in evaluations and experiencing career growth

As a result of the LEEAD Program, Alumni have enhanced their ability to incorporate CREE concepts and practices into their work. Since completing the LEEAD program, the majority of respondents sought additional opportunities to advance their expertise in CREE — or other equity-focused evaluation frameworks — and incorporated CREE approaches in their work (figure 2). Alumni show continued ability to apply the skills obtained in the LEEAD Program to both address systems barriers and generate improvements to program evaluation design and implementation, like transforming current policies and processes into more culturally responsive and equitable ones.

Figure 2: LEEAD Alumni Integrate CREE Principles Into Evaluation Work



The LEEAD Program also contributed to successful career advancements in the field of evaluation.

Many respondents (n=19) felt that their professional career had been positively impacted by their participation in the LEEAD Program and obtained or continue to hold a position (contract or salaried) in the field of evaluation (n=18). Some Alumni have been able to advance their current career trajectory in program evaluation because of LEEAD, and others pivoted to confidently explore new job opportunities focused on advancing racial, social, and health equity.

“Because of my training in CREE through LEEAD, I was able to promote myself as a content area expert in this area, which resulted in a new position at a new organization that focuses on bringing CREE skills to projects and advancing racial and health equity. I was also able to connect my new job to ETB, and we now have a LEEAD Mentor on staff and are serving as a practicum site.”

— Cohort 2 Scholar



I have published a book on culturally responsive focus groups and currently serve on evaluation teams that study or implement CREE principles.

— Cohort 2 Scholar



Alumni reported being awarded CREE-focused evaluation contracts independently, outside of their LEEAD connections — Alumni were more likely to have pursued or responded to CREE-related evaluation funding opportunities or requests for proposals (RFPs). Respondents also noted being able to pursue opportunities that advanced both their career and the awareness of CREE in the field including submitting content like posters and presenting on CREE-related topics at evaluation conferences or authoring published products like articles, books, and evaluation frameworks focused on CREE.

LEEAD Alumni are using CREE for self-reflection and organizational learning

As a result of their CREE learning, Alumni have addressed personal biases and considered ways in which their lived experiences have, and continue to, influence their evaluation design and implementation. Some Alumni described re-examining their evaluation methodologies, reflecting on whether their past work has simply included racially and ethnically diverse participants or truly represented the voices and realities of those communities. Others noted revamping their frameworks and tools to incorporate CREE into every step of their evaluations.

LEEAD Alumni have taken their learnings back to their organizations and promoted organizational learning and shifts in culture.



LEEAD provided space for growth and encouraged a reexamination of self and my evaluation practice. It provided practical strategies that helped me to critically examine existing evaluation approaches, catalyzed a reimagining of more authentic and intentional evaluation methods, and provided a network of some of the brightest evaluation researchers, practitioners, and leaders [with whom] I have ever had the pleasure of crossing paths. My participation in LEEAD was not a destination, but the beginning of [a] journey toward my continued practical contributions to a more culturally responsive and equitable society.

— Cohort 3 Scholar



Alumni reported improvement in their ability to educate colleagues and peers on culturally responsive practices when presenting on equity in evaluation in the workplace. In their open-ended responses, 30% (n=7) of respondents indicated leading efforts to incorporate CREE principles into evaluation processes at the organizational level. One Alum described implementing an organizational procedure to “*state our commitment to equitable evaluation practices [in RFQs] and ask potential contractors to discuss how they integrate CREE into their evaluation designs.*” Another Alum stated that they provided a company-wide training on equitable engagement. Alumni have taken what they have learned through the LEEAD Program and become leaders and fierce advocates in the workplace, providing tools, knowledge-sharing, and CREE-informed recommendations for improvement.



I have successfully advocated for: slowing down the pace of an engagement, extending the duration of an engagement, changing community member compensation structure, and integrating community input at key points along the evaluation.

— Cohort 3 Scholar



LEEAD has helped Alumni build a professional network

One of the main goals of the LEEAD Program is to foster lasting relationships and connections between Scholars, Mentors, and Practicum Site partners. Sixty percent (n=15) of Alumni (figure 3) strongly felt that LEEAD succeeded in cultivating a community.

Figure 3: LEEAD Alumni Reporting a Sense of Community

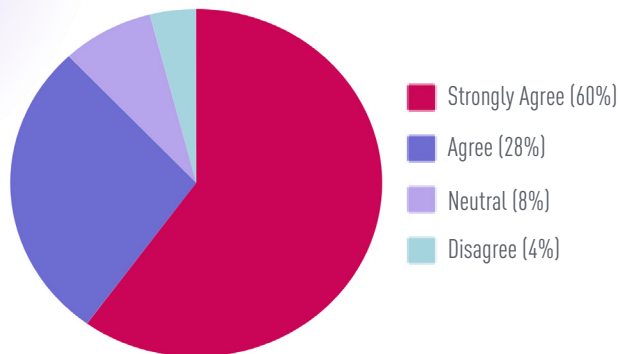
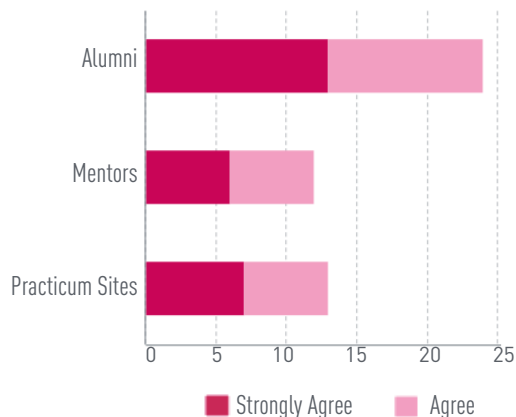


Figure 4: Alumni Continuing Their LEEAD Connections



Connections (figure 4) with other Scholars enable Alumni to feel continuous support beyond the program's end. The vast majority of the Alumni (96%) indicate that they still keep in touch with their fellow Alums. Over 25% of the Alumni stated that they have collaborated with another Scholar on an RFP, publication, or presentation. Half of the Alumni also agree or strongly agree that they stay in touch with their LEEAD Mentors (n=12) and with their Practicum Sites (n=17).

Open-ended responses illuminate how instrumental the LEEAD Program was in building and expanding Alumni's professional networks. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are satisfied with the networking opportunities offered through their LEEAD experience (62%) and were able to expand their professional network through their LEEAD experience (96%).



My LEEAD Mentor was perfect! She is also a community psychologist like myself and I met her during LEEAD. We have kept in touch and she has invited me to great opportunities ... I am still working with my [Practicum] Site to publish an article ... it also increased my confidence in doing the work [with] support from all the connections I made.

— Cohort 2 Scholar



LEEAD Alumni requested support to help advance their professional development and opportunities to connect with other Alumni

LEEAD Alumni shared some additional ways that ETB can continue to support them, including:

- Professional development webinars
- Connection to funding opportunities
- Networking opportunities
- Opportunities for collaboration across cohorts

The majority of Alumni (n=17) expressed an interest in additional virtual webinars to address various topics of interest including building a consultancy business or independent evaluation firm, examples of CREE in action, and revisiting CREE principles. Most notably, Alumni requested opportunities to hear from Funders of Evaluation in a webinar space to gain insight into how to build connections and

what they are looking for when contracting with evaluators.

There is an overwhelming desire to reconnect among Alumni, whether from other cohorts, meet-and-greet sessions with new Scholars, or getting in touch with past Practicum Site partners. Alumni noted that continuing to have formal and informal spaces to connect is especially desired, including virtual happy hours and networking sessions to enquire about potential collaborations. Alumni also requested funding support to continue their evaluation endeavors or sponsorship to present at conferences, publish materials on CREE, or do both. One Alum expressed interest in having priority access to RFPs submitted to ETB.

To truly expand the bench, LEEAD Alumni suggested expanding opportunities to CREE

In open-ended responses, Alumni offered that more pathway programs like LEEAD are necessary in order to facilitate diverse evaluators entering the field and promoting CREE. Several respondents mentioned the need to start at the undergraduate level when building capacity for CREE — building a community of future evaluators from the ground up. Alumni also expressed the need for collective action to raise awareness about CREE and make it the field's standard practice, requiring more infrastructure and funder participation to change entrenched systems.

The majority of Alumni agree that there needs to be more intentional training around CREE evaluation and similar approaches, emphasizing the need to teach CREE paradigms across disciplines to redefine the status quo. They added that racially and ethnically diverse evaluators specifically need to be recognized and celebrated for their contributions to the evaluation field, with a commitment to paying diverse evaluators for CREE work at the profitable end of the pay range.





“ I believe we need to focus on evaluation as liberation. There is so much that binds us in the current structures, paradigms, and great systems-level transformative moves we can make collectively together. ETB is the space to organize according to shared values, incubate collective work and responsibility, and move the field. — Cohort 1 Scholar ”

Conclusion

LEEAD Alumni are asked for their feedback annually to understand the impact of the program on their careers. This brief contributes to the evaluation of the LEEAD Program based on surveys conducted with LEEAD Alumni in 2022 about how they are applying CREE skills, the state of their relationships with LEEAD community members, and what they feel is needed to drive the work forward.

ETB found that the LEEAD Program had a significantly positive effect on the expansion of core CREE competencies and the integration of these principles in evaluation work across various sectors. Alumni are becoming CREE champions and leaders in the field, advocating for CREE and influencing change at the organizational level. They also reported creating long-lasting relationships with fellow Alums, Mentors, and even Practicum Sites, often resulting in collaborative opportunities. Alumni appreciate the possibility of expanding on new knowledge and skills through ETB-led opportunities like professional development webinars. For many Scholars, the LEEAD Program has assisted them in finding their voice in the evaluation field, allowing them to contribute thought leadership to the field's knowledge base and advocate for continuous improvement.

“ LEEAD has solidified and validated the work that I had been doing and gave me the confidence and the framework to continue — Cohort 3 Scholar ”

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