



EXPANDING
the Bench
An initiative by CHANGEMATRIX

2021 Year in Review ≡

Deepening Our Collective Understanding of CREE



Who We Are

[Expanding the Bench® \(ETB\)](#) is an initiative committed to diversifying the evaluation ecosystem and elevating [culturally responsive and equitable evaluation \(CREE\)](#).

Who We Support

Those who are invested in progressing an equitable evaluation ecosystem that prioritizes justice.

Tanisha T. Woodson, PhD
LEEAD Scholar, Cohort 3
ETB Advisory Team Member

Along with the rest of the world, the ETB team had to think differently about how we approached our work over the past year. Despite the unpredictability of 2021, we adapted by leaning into our core values of community-building and creativity. We found ways to foster connection and learning even in challenging times and developed new virtual gathering spaces for the ETB Community. What resulted was a year full of adaptation and innovation.

We designed new funding strategies to support ETB's sustainability, amplified our focus on racial justice, achieved key benchmarks, launched exciting new program opportunities and — most importantly — made great strides in deepening the field's collective understanding of CREE. We are thrilled to present our 2021 Year in Review and share the progress made within the initiative's core elements of People, Practice, and Field.

People

People are central to ETB's mission. The initiative actively works to increase visibility, uplift, and center the work of racially and ethnically diverse Evaluators who have been historically, and/or presently, underrepresented and/or marginalized and who are practicing CREE. ETB creates opportunities for relationship- and community-building and active engagement within the evaluation ecosystem.



Ama Atiedu, MS
LEEAD Mentor, Cohort 3

LEEAD Program

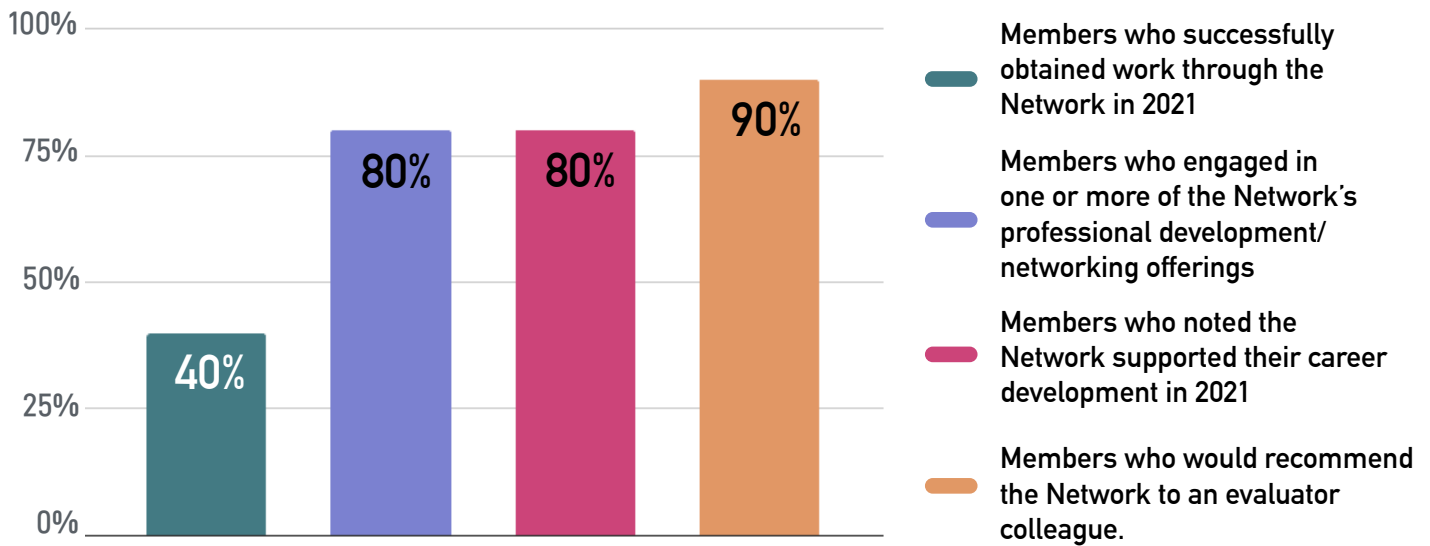
ETB's [Leaders in Equitable Evaluation and Diversity \(LEEAD\) Program](#) is an evaluation training program designed to develop a pathway for diverse leaders in CREE who will advance the field of evaluation. Since it began in the fall of 2015, over 50 Scholars have completed the LEEAD Program. In 2021, ETB welcomed 13 new LEEAD Scholars into [Cohort 4](#). Over the next 15 months, these Scholars will connect with their [LEEAD Mentors](#) and complete CREE-centered course work through American University. The Scholars will then implement their CREE knowledge in a real-world context through a [Practicum Site](#) placement tackling issues such as racial justice.

I am committed to disrupting and dismantling white supremacy and other tools of oppression, and the LEEAD program would provide me with additional training and resources that support my commitment to anti-racism and systems transformation that leads to the liberation of all oppressed people.

LEEAD Cohort 4 Scholar

In fact, 100% of Scholars identify as belonging to one or more of the following racial/ethnic groups: Black or African American; Hispanic and/or Latinx; Middle Eastern; and Native American or Alaska Native. In an effort to be more equitable and inclusive, we have expanded eligibility requirements for Cohort 4 to include master's degree-level Scholars. Cohort 4 includes seven Scholars with master's-level degrees and six with doctoral degrees. The LEEAD program is geographically diverse as well, with Scholars located across eight states. Additionally, Scholars have said that the inclusion of varied perspectives within the program to be a key factor in its innovation.

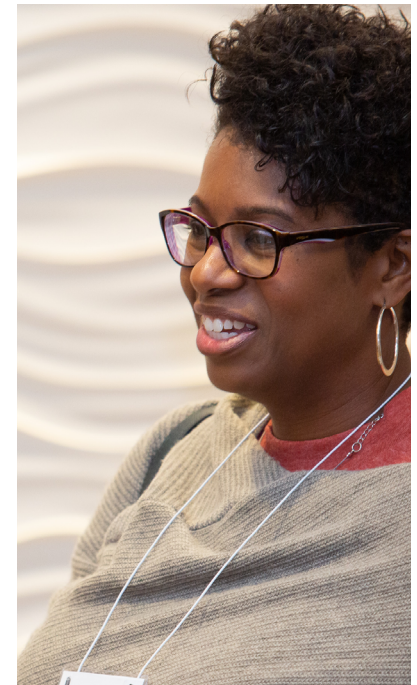
ACE Evaluation Network Annual Survey Highlights



ACE Evaluation Network

Relationship-building is a strong value of the ETB initiative and is central to the [Advancing Culturally-responsive and Equitable \(ACE\) Evaluation Network](#)'s purpose to connect CREE Evaluators with one another, Funders of Evaluation, and evaluation partners. The Network comprises a community of racially and ethnically diverse evaluators who have advanced experience in, and a strong commitment to, CREE. Upon joining, Members access unique networking, professional development, and funding opportunities that support the growth and development of their evaluation portfolios.

Annually, the ETB team evaluates the experience of ACE Evaluation Network Members in an effort to enhance ETB's ability to meet our mission. The figure above includes highlights from the ACE Evaluation Network Member annual survey.



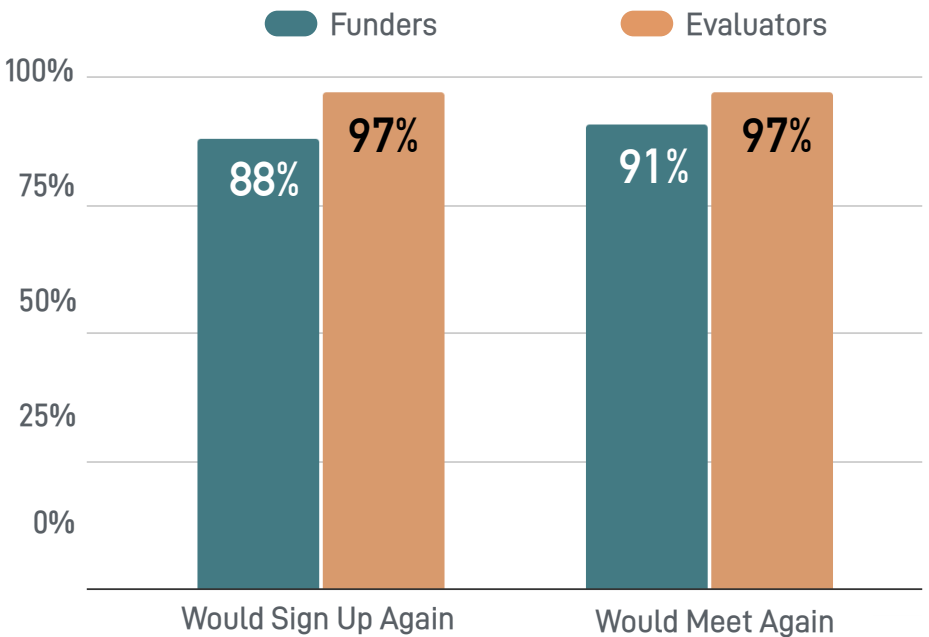
Kantahyane Murray, PhD
ETB Advisory Team Member

I feel really proud to be a member of ACE. I feel like it signals that I and other ACE members have a deep commitment to CREE. I have the 'badge' on my resume and feel like it ties me to other practitioners who are striving toward the same global goals.

ACE Evaluation Network Evaluator

Coffee Breaks

One of ETB's most successful relationship-building efforts has been [Coffee Breaks](#). These casual quarterly opportunities connect Funders of Evaluation and Evaluators from the ACE Evaluation Network in 1:1 virtual conversations. Coffee Breaks are an effective way for participants to learn more about each other, and their approach to evaluation and CREE, in a conversational and low-pressure format. As noted in the adjacent figure, consistent positive feedback from both Evaluators and Funders of Evaluation indicates the value of these meetings.



... I feel like I've become a better CREE evaluator as I've participated in the Coffee Breaks. So I really do enjoy that, but it also helps me keep a pulse on where the field is moving and what do we need to respond to as a company..."

ACE Evaluation Network Evaluator

Coffee Break Highlights

158

1:1 Coffee Break connections were made in 2021.

Practice ≡

ETB promotes CREE as the field continues to refine and deepen our collective understanding of what it is and how it can be practiced by all stakeholders in the evaluation ecosystem. 2021 marked a year of programmatic innovation, encouraging the field to broaden its equity-minded approach to evaluation and examine innovative evaluator engagement practices.



Sandra Williams, MA, PhD
LEEAD Mentor, Cohort 3

CREE Learning Series

One of ETB's primary programmatic elements was launched in 2021: the [CREE Learning Series](#). This multi-part, self-guided video teaching series deepened participants' practice and collective understanding of CREE. By partnering with CREE learning guides and subject matter experts, ETB offered new ideas and fresh perspectives on approaching CREE-focused work through guided follow-up discussions as well.

The Learning Series had 84 registrants spanning different fields and organizations from evaluation firms and foundations to academia and solo practitioners. Of the participants surveyed about their experience and how they intended to use their learnings from the Series, participants shared overwhelming positivity about the Series. Notably, participants said that they began to view evaluation through an "equity lens" and think about CREE in unique ways.

CREE Learning Series Highlights

84

Registered for the Series whose careers spanned all aspects of the evaluation ecosystem.

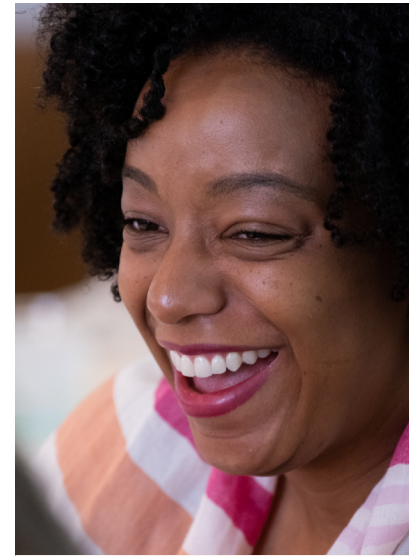
[I will] help evangelize and proselytize about the overall transition to CREE in the field of evaluation, as well [utilize the Series as] a handy and engaging reference resource for myself.

CREE Learning Series Participant

Evolving Evaluation

2021 marked the launch of [Evolving Evaluation: Journeys with Culturally Responsive and Equitable Evaluation](#). This two-year effort engages Evaluators in critical reflections of their own journeys, stories, and experiences with CREE by collecting 1:1 recorded conversations.

In November, the ETB team hosted a sense-making session on the preliminary findings of Evolving Evaluation during the American Evaluation Association’s annual conference. The session provided close to 100 attendees an opportunity to learn about this research and contribute to the analysis of the data collected to date. The findings drew out various themes about the Evaluator experience, notably that Evaluators view themselves as “facilitators of learning and change agents.”



Tanisha T. Woodson, PhD
LEEAD Scholar, Cohort 3
ETB Advisory Team Member

Because sometimes when you’re fighting the fight and trying to explain the importance of this concept of CREE to folks who might not be familiar with the field, I found ... I’m not alone — there’s a community out there fighting the same fight. And no matter how frustrated I get in this conversation, I can go back to that community. And if I need to cry, if I need to vent, whatever it is, that will be a space available for me to do that.

Evolving Evaluation Participant

Professional Development Series Highlights

25

average number of attendees per session.

78%

of survey respondents felt the series built a sense of community and provided CREE knowledge-sharing.

ETB Professional Development Series

The 2021 ETB Professional Development Series invited CREE Evaluators from the ACE Evaluation Network and the LEEAD Program to learn together, have open conversations, and network with fellow colleagues around evaluation practice and business development topics.

Every month for six months in 2021, ETB offered a virtual learning session. Each of the series’ topics were informed by feedback received through surveys with LEEAD Alumni and ACE Evaluation Network Members, and were coordinated in partnership with LEEAD Liaisons, Drs. Keneshia Bryant-Moore (Cohort 1), Chandria Jones (Cohort 2), and Kimberly Harris (Cohort 3).

Field

Cultivating a network of CREE allies within the greater evaluation ecosystem is key among ETB's goals. In 2021, we continued our thought partnership efforts inviting Funders of Evaluation and Evaluators into collaborative learning spaces.



Christine Velez, MA
ACE Evaluation Network Member
LEEAD Mentor, Cohort 3

ACE Evaluation Network Updates

The ACE Evaluation Network is a core field-building element. As a growing community hub of racially and ethnically diverse Evaluators who have experience in, and a strong commitment to, the practice of CREE, in 2021 there was a 65% increase in ACE Evaluation Network Database User sign-ups.

Users also tout the Database's relationship-building benefits, calling it a great "jumping off point" to making professional connections. Additionally, several surveyed Network members say they have recommended it to "partners and Funders" who share CREE-focused evaluation principles.

ACE Evaluation Network Highlights

91%

of ACE Evaluation Network Database Users say they would recommend it to a colleague.

65%

More ACE Evaluation Network Database User sign-ups.



Gaby López
Funder of Evaluation

ACE Evaluation Network Annual Regathering

This year the Annual Regathering brought together dozens of ACE Evaluation Network Members, as well as evaluation partners and Funders of Evaluation, who interact with one another in the evaluation ecosystem. While attendees each brought their own skill levels with CREE to the event, all value CREE and gathered in reflection of past experiences, reconnected to recenter the intent and meaning of this work, and renewed their commitment to it.

Attending the ACE Evaluation Network Annual Regathering inspired me to continue to advocate for CREE-related work and motivate me to deepen relationships with others across the Network.

Annual Regathering Attendee

Pricing Model

In the summer of 2021, ETB created and sought feedback on a new [Pricing Model](#). This method of supporting services, either through a subscription or by purchasing a single service á la carte will provide an additional mechanism for Funders of Evaluation to tangibly and sustainably support the ETB initiative. In fact, these paid services ensure that Evaluators can enjoy all the benefits of ETB cost-free. The database remains available at no cost to all Funders of Evaluation.

Website Update

In December 2021, the ETB team launched a brand-new website. The newly streamlined site more directly provides information about the initiative. Over the course of 2022, the site will be enhanced with strict [WCAG 2.1 Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) to create a more equitable user experience.



Jennifer García, PhD, MPH
LEEAD Scholar, Cohort 3

2022 Growth Goals

Strengthen, increase, and diversify the number of Evaluators within the ACE Evaluation Network

- Refine the ACE Evaluation Network Database based on user feedback.
- Implement disability-friendly website functionality to be more equitable for all users.
- Increase the number of Evaluators in the ACE Evaluation Network Database.

Develop and promote the evolving practice of CREE

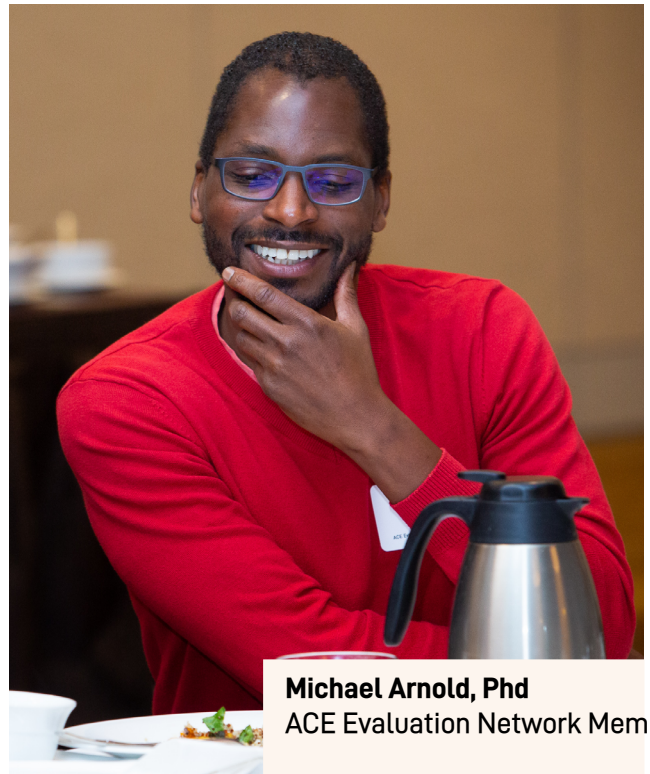
- Roll out a refined version of the CREE Learning Series in 2022.

Contribute to thought leadership in the evaluation ecosystem

- Innovate in programs like the CREE Learning Series and Evolving Evaluation.

Grow a network of allies

- Host informational sessions and webinars to meet people at all levels of CREE understanding.
- Connect with Funders of Evaluation.
- Implement, and learn from, strategies to achieve financial sustainability for ETB.



Michael Arnold, PhD
ACE Evaluation Network Member

Thank You for Your Support in 2021!

Want to learn more about ETB or how to support the initiative? Visit expandingthebench.org or contact us at team@expandingthebench.org.