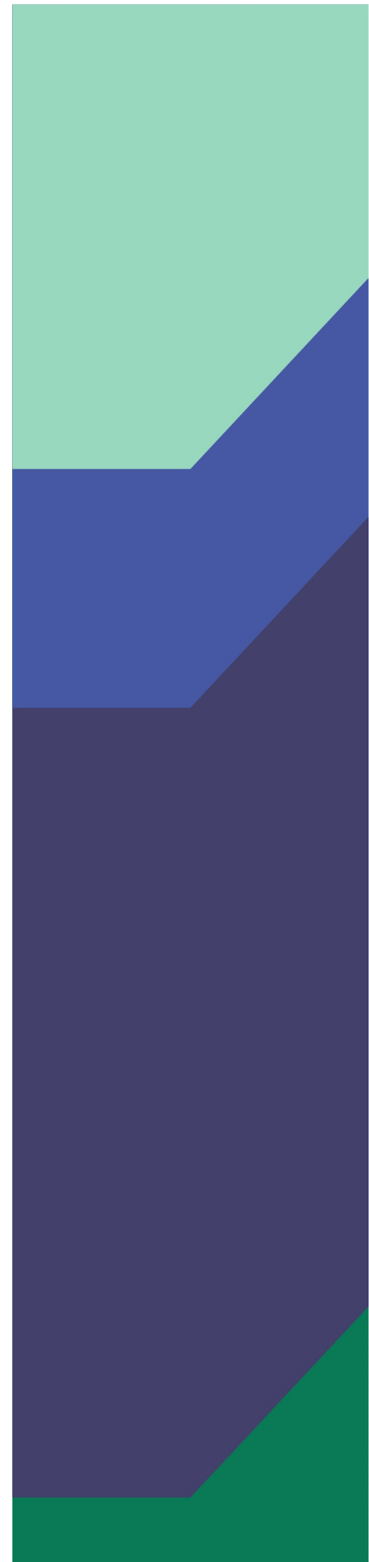


2019 Learning Collective Evaluation

Report prepared for
The Colorado Springs Health
Foundation
March 26, 2020





Introduction

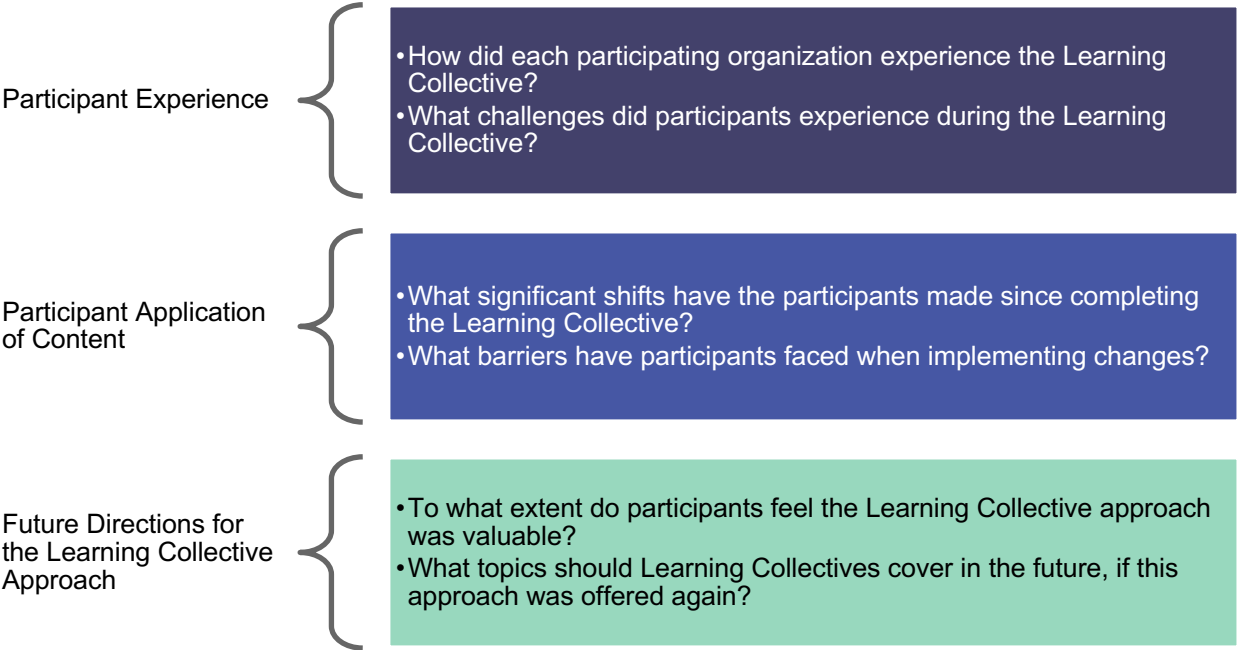
In 2019, the Colorado Springs Health Foundation hosted a pilot Learning Collective, facilitated by Vantage Evaluation, that brought together a group of 10 organizations¹ to learn and increase their impact in the Pikes Peak Region. These organizations ranged in size, mission, service delivery area and tax status. The Learning Collective focused on building organizations' knowledge of the theory and practice of learning culture, specifically what it is, why it is important, and how it can make a difference in an organization's work. The specific topics covered during the Learning Collective included:

1. Using evidence to inform strategy and programming
2. Creating opportunities for learning and reflection
3. Establishing processes and procedures to support a culture of learning; and
4. Building staff and volunteer engagement in a learning culture

The Learning Collective took place from August through December 2019 and required approximately 84 hours of commitment per organization. Participating organizations committed to:

- Two people (at least one senior-level staff member) from each organization attending two half-day and three full-day sessions plus completing homework in-between sessions
- The Executive Director participating in the first and last half-day session plus a separate 2-hour role-specific session
- The Development Director (or whomever fills that role) participating in the first and last half-day sessions plus a separate 2-hour role-specific session.

This evaluation sought to answer three broad learning questions about the Learning Collective:



¹ The 10 participating organizations were: Care & Share, Catamount Institute, Community Health Partnership, Early Connections Learning Center, Fostering Hope Foundation, Hillside Connection, National Alliance on Mental Health, Pikes Peak United Way, Springs Rescue Mission and Teller County Department of Human Services.

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Key Findings

Participant Experience

During the 2019 Learning Collective, participants developed new skills and strengthened relationships with their internal colleagues.

Participants valued content that was practical and relevant to their organizations, such as the Theory of Change and data collection sessions. Other positive contributing aspects of participants' experience included the length of and time in-between the sessions, the facilitators, and the resources provided.

“I think that both groups [CSHF and Vantage facilitators] need to hear that it [the Learning Collective] was a very valuable experience for us. It gave us some time and almost the excuse to get away and really think things through on how we'd like to see things move forward for our organization.”

Participant application of concepts

Participants improved their internal communication and transparency, building systematic procedures to talk about data.

Participants developed language that supported their communication internally. Some participants even started having weekly meetings where they shared their learnings, which helped staff align their goals and needs.

Participant suggestions for future Learning Collectives

Participants found the Learning Collective valuable and would recommend it to other organizations.

If CSHF offered future Learning Collectives, participants would want them to focus on the following topics:

- Data analysis and reporting
- Systems thinking, theory, and mapping
- How to find and build new partnerships
- How to manage difficult employees



Evaluation Findings

Participants applied to build new skills or upon the request of their leadership or development staff

In 2019, ten organizations applied for and were accepted into the inaugural CSHF Learning Collective, eight organizations completed the interviews. Of these organizations, most said they applied to the Learning Collective to:

- build or strengthen their skills related to learning and evaluation or
- respond to a request from their CEO or development team

Skill-building: Organizations shared that they first applied because they wanted to build skills that supported their ability to make strategic decisions about programming, fundraising, and development. For example, one organization shared that they need to get better at using data and thinking about data to support their work and they do not have a lot of internal capacity for evaluation. This organization went on to say that they want to be stewards of their grant funding by being data-driven and thoughtful about their work. Because they are a nonprofit, they owe everything to their donors and the community to demonstrate impact and steward their funding really well. The participant went on to say that the Learning Collective was offered during a convenient time for their organization because their organization is growing and could benefit from the support of a learning culture:

“I think it just seems like a great opportunity at this time for us to kind of take a step back and figure out how to do that [strategic growth] better. Like how to operate in a space where we’re making decisions that maybe we’ve never made before, and where we’re going to be a little bit uncomfortable, and just learning how to do that and deal with the consequences.”

Response to leadership requests: Some participants also applied because their leadership was interested in participating either to improve communication and alignment among internal staff or internal staff capacity to complete evaluation activities. *“She [our CEO] was trying to bring our agency together so to speak and try to figure out exactly what the employee’s interests were and how everyone saw everything.”* Another organization was approached its fundraising team initially, but upon reflection, the staff decided the Learning Collective provided a good opportunity for them to take a step back from day-to-day activities and focus on evaluation and learning:

“When our fundraising team approached us about the opportunity, it was an opportunity to stop and pause and reflect, which oftentimes we don’t have that chance to stop and evaluate our ways of doing our work. So, the opportunity to do that in a facilitated environment, along with other organizations with similar and different challenges, was a learning opportunity we couldn’t pass up.”

Fewer organizations also said they applied because they:

- Were concerned about the social welfare of the communities they serve and wanted to improve their ability to serve them: *“Part of the role of [our organization] in the community is to continually listen and to continually learn about the issues in the community...By going through the learning collective and learning from others within our community, [we] learn how to better*



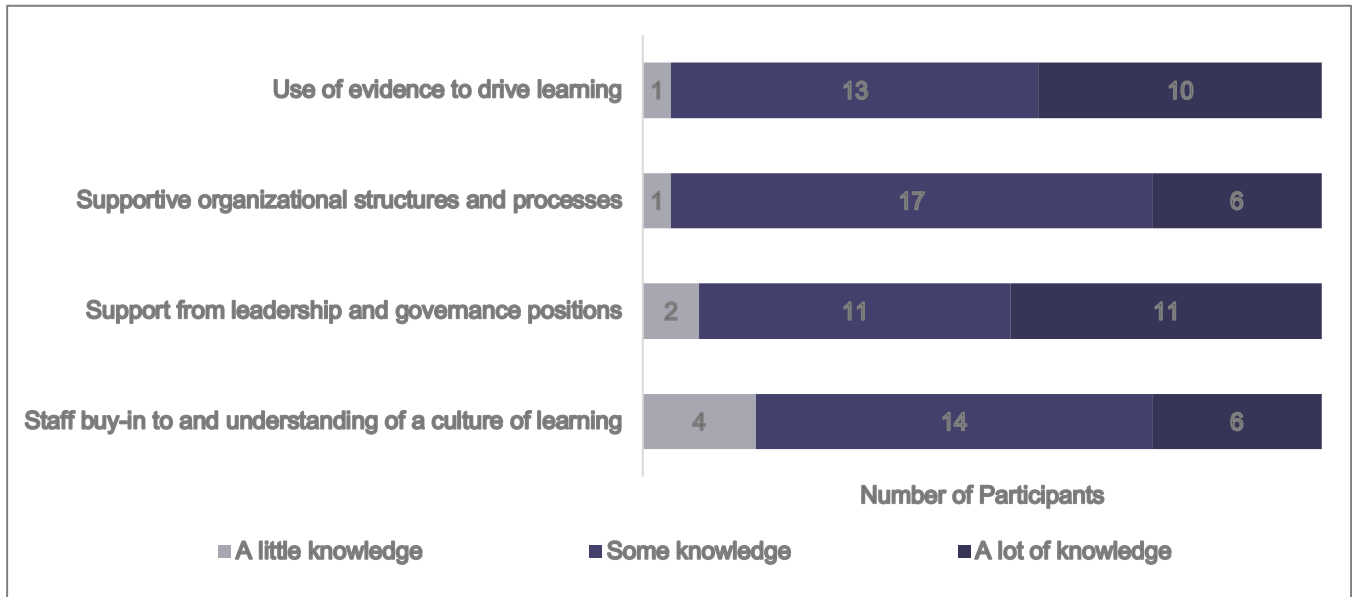
gather information from the community and be able to implement that within a planning process too.”

- Are naturally curious and love learning
- Know CSHF’s reputation and were motivated to participate in anything that they suggest.

What was the participant experience in the Learning Collective?




Overall, participants found the Learning Collective a valuable experience that taught or improved skills related to building a learning culture within their organization. Participants found valuable the sessions that focused on practical skills they could apply to improve their programming valuable as well as the dedicated time to focus on learning with their colleagues. When asked if the Learning Collective was a good approach for skill-building and relationship building/collaboration, participants said it was good for skill-building, but not the best approach for developing new relationships/collaborations with external partners. As shown in the figure below, participants gained at least some knowledge in each of the four domains of a learning culture. Most participants (at least 10) said they gained a lot of knowledge in the use of evidence to drive learning and having support for learning from people in leadership and governance positions at the nonprofit, including executive directors, board members, and managers.


Participants gained at least **some knowledge** of each culture of learning characteristic:



During the interviews, participants elaborated on the aspects of the learning Collective that positively contributed to their experience and skill development. Almost all of the participants interviewed said that the content covered was practical and relevant to their organization, which supported their ability to think about their work from a different perspective and to develop the skills necessary to implement organizational changes to improve their learning culture.



Factors positively contributing to experience	What the participants said
 <p>Practical content</p>	<p>Participants found the sessions on Theory of Change and data collection valuable because these sessions either allowed participants to take a step back and focus on the big picture for the organization or to better understand how to identify poor questions and construct quality questions that will answer their learning goals.</p> <p><i>“When I do grant writing, I always tie in [our] mission statement, and occasionally the vision statement, but these big picture hopes and dreams--pieces of the vision statement--always felt a little bit abstract for me. To have an opportunity to look at that statement to help us guide our decision-making really helped me understand that the vision statement isn't separate from the day-to-day work that we do.”</i></p> <p>One participant appreciated how the content built on itself over time. The session on Theory of Change focused their work and after each session they left feeling like they could take immediate action.</p>
 <p>Relevant content</p>	<p>Participants also found the session regarding Theory of Change, data collection, and evaluation questions relevant to their work because they were directly related to what their organization needed at the time of the Learning Collective. For example, one organization appreciated the different methods covered, especially the qualitative methods, because they tend to be quantitative.</p> <p><i>“Going over the learning questions, the theory of change, and ...trying to pick some solutions to make positive change--that's part of the methods that...seem to really be relevant to what we're doing.”</i></p>
 <p>Content that challenged assumptions and biases</p>	<p>Participants felt the Learning Collective challenged their thought processes and the lenses through which they approach their work. Specifically, participants found sessions valuable that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • helped them identify and address their assumptions and biases that might influence the development of their Theories of Change and questions. • challenged them to address workplace issues related to learning and evaluation. <p>Participants said the theoretical content encouraged them to think more</p>

Factors positively contributing to experience	What the participants said
	holistically about what a learning culture means and who should be involved in creating it within their organization. For example, one participant shared a story about how they learned to identify assumptive survey or interview questions and how they revise those types of questions now:
 <p>In-class handouts, Google Drive, and book</p>	Participants valued the handouts and the Google Drive. Resources and PowerPoints available during sessions helped participants to learn the material because they could take notes on what was important to them rather than scrambling to take notes and have references to come back to after each session

In addition to the valuable content aspects of the Learning Collective, several structural aspects were also valuable to enhancing the participant experience, including the:

- **Facilitators** - participants appreciated that they (1) set clear goals and defined activities for each session and (2) were attentive and kept the participants' engaged throughout the Learning Collective.²
- **Length of sessions and overall collective** - participants found the length of each session and the time in-between each session reasonable
- **Invitation for two people from each organization to participate** - participants said this allowed for dedicated and productive group work during the Learning Collective.
- **Facility** - participants thought the facility was nice and they enjoyed being able to walk around during their breaks.

Challenges during the Learning Collective

Participants faced multiple challenges during the Learning Collective that influenced their level of engagement or satisfaction. Resoundingly, participants struggled with the variety of organizations in the room and the type of content presented. Organizations felt uncomfortable sharing their experiences with the group because of the differences among organizations in size, budget, content area, and/or skill level. For example, at times, some organizations had prior knowledge and experience with concepts and did not find the material engaging enough. However, one participant felt the diversity in organizations' experiences was informative because it challenged their thought process and existing procedures.

“The diversity allowed you to see the same issue of data collection from 12 different perspectives and realizing in some organizations it's really easy to obtain data, and in other organizations it's nearly impossible. Sometimes in a big environment amongst so many organizations, it challenged my thoughts around how we would do it [collect data].”

Other challenges that influenced participant experience included:

² One participant talked about the first session where the participants claimed the energy of the facilitators was low.

- Competing job priorities
- Having only two all-staff sessions that included the CEO. Participants found challenging because the staff and CEO spoke different languages when coming back together
- Too little time to apply learnings during the session
- Inviting a senior-level and program-level staff to participate felt too prescriptive given the variety of organizations in the room.

Participant suggestions to overcome challenges

- Some organizations would have liked the length of the session shortened and offered over a longer period to allow for easier scheduling.
- Integrate role-specific training with core sessions.
- Connect the content to where the participants are starting from.
- Clearer communication about who needs/can attend the Learning Collective.
- Reconsider name to accurately reflect the content and what they would be learning.

Participants felt prepared to Implement changes within their organization following the Learning Collective

Even though all the organizations entered the Learning Collective at different stages of the process, following the Learning Collective, all participants felt prepared to implement what they learned when their organization was ready. A few participants who were not ready to implement changes directly following the learning collective would like ongoing support or additional tools to refresh their memory. One participant suggested designing one-pagers with 'how-to' information about each concept presented to help remind them of the common pitfalls to avoid when introducing these new practices.

Participants fostered new skills and stronger relationships with their colleagues, but not new relationships with peer organizations.

The Learning Collective fostered deep relationships between the two staff members of the organizations who attended but did not foster relationships between organizations. Some participants left with a better understanding of different organizations in the region, but more so, participants appreciated the time they were given to work with their colleagues to focus on evaluation and planning for their organization.

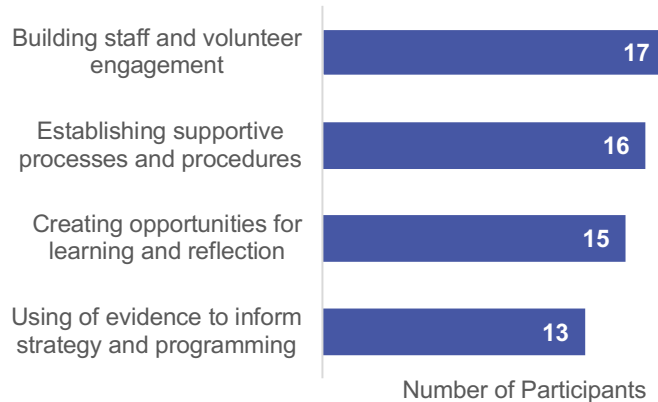
The structure of the Learning Collective might have interfered with the motivation to interact and build relationships with other participating organizations. Organizations did not participate to meet and work with other organizations, their goal was to strengthen their own processes and use that time to work with their own colleague and they wanted even more time to work together rather than split out into groups with other organizations. Thus, the Learning Collective was not structured in a manner to facilitate relationship development.




What changes have participants made within their organization because of their involvement in the Learning Collective?



Participants have shifted the way they communicate internally with each other and staff about learning and data following the learning collective. Few organizations were ready to implement tactical changes, such as revising their data collection tools, however they feel prepared to do so when they are ready. Some organizations also talked about shifts in their mindset and reflection processes when it comes to learning and how they feel less afraid to make mistakes and more empowered to view mistakes as learning opportunities. As shown in the figure to the right, most participants during the last session said they were most excited to build staff and volunteer engagement in a learning culture and establish processes and procedures to support a culture of learning following the Learning Collective.

Participants were excited to apply what they learned about each Culture of Learning characteristic in their organization.



When asked what significant shifts participants made following the Learning Collective, most said they made shifts to their communication strategies with internal staff, their comfort level with being part of and growing a learning culture, and tactical improvements to their program maps and data collection tools.

Shifts in...	What participants said
 <p>Communication</p>	<p>Most organizations implemented new or strengthened existing internal communication about learning and evaluation at their organizations. Organizations mentioned how they started ongoing meetings between departments where they talked about learning and evaluation. One organization talked about how they are using data to break down the silos among their departments.</p> <p><i>“I have only been with this organization for about seven months, and what I saw when I walked in the door, which is not uncommon, is that there were very clear silos in this organization that need un-programming...it's a very deliberate tactic for me to use this conversation around data and learning as a way of breaking down the silos, because everyone in this organization is a learner. Everyone in this organization is doing something with respect to data and thinking about impact. It was like a tactic to use with all staff to get them to talk with [one] another about a common issue.”</i></p>

Shifts in...	What participants said
	<p>bout how they are more transparent about their work and decisions they are making:</p> <p><i>“We’ve really worked at being more transparent with the people we work with and why we do what we do...We did the theory of change, which basically focused our work for the next year on...I think it shifted us more to that learning collective perspective.”</i></p> <p>A couple of organizations said they developed language they could use to talk to their staff, leadership, and board of directors about learning and evaluation.</p>
 <p>Tactical Changes</p>	<p>Only a couple of organizations talked about how they modified their tools following the Learning Collective:</p> <p><i>“Another thing that we’ve done is taken a second look at some of our surveys we use to evaluate some of our internal programs...we’ve been able to clean it [our survey] up based on the feedback that we’ve learned from that session.”</i></p> <p>Most organizations are not ready to implement tactical changes given where they are in the fiscal year, their internal capacity, or their organizations degree of readiness.</p>
 <p>Mindset and Reflection</p>	<p>Participants’ growth mindset improved over the course of the Learning Collective. During the Learning Collective participants started incorporating growth mindset traits into their general operating practices and sustaining these traits over time. Participants shared the following growth mindset shifts they made since completing the Learning Collective.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Started to learn from mistakes, decrease their need to be perfect, and felt comfortable asking questions without fear of getting in trouble. • Started to view their work from a new perspective: <i>“It [the Learning Collective has] given us a broader outlook on how we can look at what’s happening with our environment...Now I’m looking at things differently.”</i> • Sought opportunities to continue growth. For example, one organization shared how they applied for and were offered an opportunity to be one of seven organizations in a national cohort. • Took time to reflect before making decisions, such as thinking about why and how they are drafting data collection tools to ensure the quality of the tool: <i>“The data and the survey session was so impactful for me. Realizing that we need to pump our brakes on the surveys that we’re doing and start being reflective...”</i>

Time and resources challenged participants' ability to implement changes within their organizations.

The largest challenge to implementing changes, especially tactical changes, was time and resources. Organization staff are busy, and they are focused on many different priorities at a single time, most of which are programmatic, so unfortunately priorities related to evaluation or learning take the backseat. Organizations also talked about how they do not have financial support to implement the changes and that it will take time to align to the funders' thought processes around the importance of these learning functions to the organization and the community:

Fewer participants also mentioned additional challenges, including:

- staff and/or leadership buy-in and alignment to the learning philosophy
- limited skills to analyze the data once collected.

What suggestions did the participants have for future Learning Collectives?

Participants valued their experience, but they did experience some challenges. The wide variety of organizations that participated was distracting for some because it was difficult for participants to compare their context with others. Some participants did appreciate this variety because it allowed them to recognize that other organizations also struggle in similar ways and learn how other people address issues in their field giving them ideas for solutions.

What worked and should be continued	Suggestions for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practical and relevant content• Two facilitators• Resources and Google Drive• Commitment reminders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invite similar organizations to participate in cohort• Condense length of each session• Offer more time for practical application and practice during each session• Have one facilitator who can 'be a cheerleader' for the content• Connect the content to where the participants are starting from• Clearer messaging during the application process regarding staff assignments and content to be covered

Each organization that completed an interview said they would recommend the Learning Collective to other organizations. Some participants would like there to be minor modifications to the approach.

"I would recommend sticking with this and continuing to look for ways to bring nonprofits together and participate together around these important things that'll make them better....Do a little bit more upfront research where you're trying to find out what their [the participating organizations] pain points are and find more applicable ways to help them. I think it's a really



neat thing and I don't think too many organizations other than the [Colorado Springs] Health Foundation would be able to pull that off. I would think it's really hard to pull non-profits together, so I think it's kind of a special thing you're experimenting with, it just needs a little bit of refinement, which is probably why we're learning."

Participants suggested the following topics for future Learning Collectives:

- Data analysis and reporting
- Systems thinking, theory, and mapping
- How to find and build new partnerships
- How to manage difficult employees



Methodology

Participant Interviews

Vantage conducted 45-minute phone interviews with eight of the 2019 Learning Collective participants to capture detail on their experience, significant shifts in their behavior, attitudes, or practices related to a culture of learning, and suggestions for future Learning Collectives. Vantage thematically coded each interview using qualitative software (Dedoose).

Interview Guide

Purpose of the Interviews

- To better understand the participant experience and how each participant/organization has applied what they learned to their work.
- To better understand how to plan for future professional learning collectives and which topics

Interview Guide

Hi, my name is _____ with Vantage Evaluation. I am the evaluator for the 2019 Professional Learning Collective you completed in December. I am working with Laura, Kai, and the Colorado Springs Health Foundation to help them understand the participant experience during the PLC and how the participants have applied or are planning to apply what they learned.

Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to stop the interview at any time. All the information you share with me will remain confidential, meaning your name, organization, and any identifying characteristics will not be shared in any way. While reporting on the results from the interviews, only anonymous and/or aggregate information will be shared. Neither the information you share nor your choice of whether to participate will have any bearing on current or future grant funding.

I plan to record the interview just to make sure I'm capturing what you say accurately. But the recording will not be shared with anyone outside Vantage Evaluation. Is that ok with you?

The interview should last about 30 minutes. Do you have any questions for me before we start?

Intro Questions

- I'd like to start out learning a little bit more about you. Can you briefly tell me a little bit about your background, the work that your organization does, and how long have you personally been doing health-related work in El Paso and/or Teller counties?
- What first interested you about the Professional Learning Collective?

Participant Experience

- Looking back to your time throughout the five months of the PLC, what were the most interesting or impactful lessons that you took from the community?
- What was the most valuable aspect of the PLC?
 - For what reasons?



- Probe: Could you tell me a little more about this? [If they are really struggling to come up with something, probe around structure, content, length of session, TA/Coaching, level of detail (too high, too granular)]
- What were the most challenging aspects of the PLC?
 - For what reasons?
 - Probe: Could you tell me a little more about this? [If they are really struggling to come up with something, probe around structure, content, length of session, TA/Coaching, level of detail (too high, too granular, what didn't work)]
- [skip or confirm, if participant called this out organically] If you could change one thing about the PLC, what would it be and why?

Participant Application

- Since participating in the PLC, what has been the most significant shift or change you have experienced in your work?
 - Probe: How have your thoughts around a learning culture shifted?
 - Probe: How has your behavior shifted in how you approach your work?
 - Probe: How has your leadership style shifted?
- Since participating in the PLC, to what extent do you feel prepared to apply what you learned within your organization?
 - What support/tools/resources do you still need to help you transform the learning culture within your organization?
- What are the most important things you learned during the PLC that you want to implement within your organization?
 - For what reasons?
 - [skip or confirm if answered above] What will support you while implementing these changes?
- What challenges do you anticipate will interfere with your ability to implement what you learned within your organization?

Closing Questions [if there is time]

- Overall, to what extent was the Professional Learning Collective effective at building professional skills as well as relationships among community partners? Why?
 - Probe: Were there any other outcomes of the Learning Collective that CSHF should know about?
 - Probe: Is this approach valuable for other learning opportunities, regardless of the topic/focus?
- If CSHF were to offer another Professional Learning Collective, would you recommend it to another organization?
 - If yes, why?
 - If no, why?
- If CSHF were to offer another Professional Learning Collective in the future, what topic(s) would you be interested in learning about?
 - Probe [if struggling to come up with any]: health equity or equitable practices in general, evidence-based practices, sustainability
- Of everything we talked about today, what is the one thing the facilitators and CSHF needs to hear the most?

Wrap



Those are all of my questions for you today. Is there anything else you'd like to add that we didn't cover?

Do you have any questions for me before we go?

Thank you again for your time and sharing your perspectives!

In-the-Moment Methods

Vantage used in-the-moment data collection opportunities to focus on what participants experienced during each session and guide future facilitation. The in-the-moment strategies Vantage used included:

- **Colorscripting:** During each session, Vantage asked participants to fill out cards with how engaged they felt throughout the session. Vantage analyzed the colorscripting cards following each session to understand the types of sessions that were most engaging/least engaging as well as the times of day where participants felt most engaged.
- **Learning Wall:** At the end of sessions, Vantage facilitators prompted participants to write one thing they learned from the session, which informed deeper understanding content and created an opportunity for participants to share with each other.
- **Exit Ticket/Commitment Cards:** During each session, participants completed a card with one behavior they committed to doing as a result of what they learned during the session. Vantage collected information about their biggest takeaway as well as what they were most excited about learning during the next session.
- **Voting Card:** At the first and last session, Vantage collected voting cards measuring participant current knowledge and excitement to learn or apply each of the culture of learning characteristics.

Vantage analyzed and reported on the in-the-moment data after each session to inform continuous improvement of the content and structure of the Learning Collective.

