

Shannon Leadership Institute evaluation

Self-assessments of program participants in 2007 report summary

Shannon Leadership Institute overview

The goal of the James P. Shannon Leadership Institute, a program of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, is to ensure a sustainable cadre of renewed, experienced, and effective leaders who are committed to service in the nonprofit sector.

The Shannon Institute offers a structured, challenging and supportive opportunity for personal and professional renewal for experienced leaders of philanthropic, civic and community service organizations. Institute participants must apply for selection and incur monetary and time commitment costs. They attend for one year, meeting monthly or quarterly for retreats and renewal experiences. Shannon Institute experiences are designed to help participants:

- Clarify the purpose of their work and the core values they want that work to exemplify;
- Identify strategies to increase their effectiveness; and
- Articulate changes needed to enhance focus, commitment, energy and satisfaction.

Evaluation overview

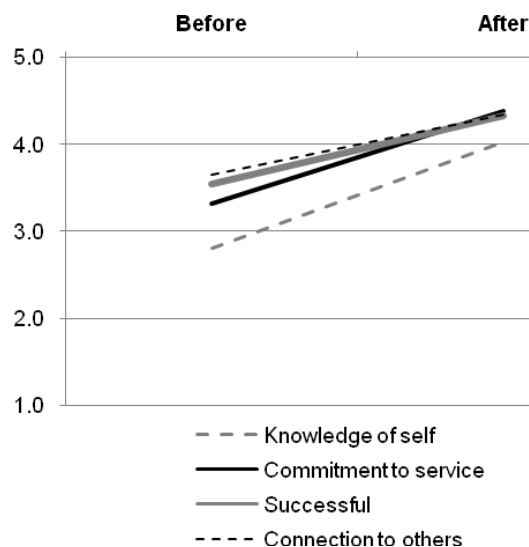
Wilder Research prepared this evaluation using self-assessments completed by Shannon Institute participants during 2007. Using a self-assessment form developed by Shannon Institute staff, participants rate where they stood before the year-long program and immediately afterwards.

This evaluation describes to what extent Shannon Institute participants report they: 1) gain knowledge and abilities as a result of their Institute experience and 2) transfer those gains to the benefit of their organizations and communities. It also compares results for participants attending monthly sessions with those attending quarterly.

Summary of findings

The 2007 participants in the Shannon Leadership Institute report sizable gains during the program. Participants seem to grow most in areas where they initially lack knowledge and abilities. They grew in the following ways (from largest to smallest): knowledge of self, commitment to service, feelings of success, and connection to others. Participants describe the program as enabling them to overcome barriers, thereby setting the stage for more vital leadership. In their own words, participants describe moving from fear and confusion to courage and vitality; from stress and ossification to self awareness and productivity; and from isolation to making meaningful connections.

Average self-ratings by theme



continued

Growth in those areas aligns with the Shannon Institute's expectations and can be attributed to the program's emphasis on strengthening leadership assets. Open-ended comments suggest that the benefits also align with participants' expectations:

- “I'm more self aware, more willing to take a risk, question my actions and understand my values, [and] able to identify my strengths and weaknesses.”
- “The values clarification was so helpful to me and really has helped shape how I want to be engaged in community service.”
- “I found myself and my purpose again. I have found a way to keep being productive. I have seen possibilities for the future that give me comfort.”
- “I have a new sense of confidence that is authentic and which I want to use to bring my best gifts to my friends, family and community. I also have a deeper love and respect for the gifts of others and want to continue to grow this.”

Some self-rated items approximately measure impact on organizations and communities. Participants expressed large gains in response to those question (i.e., about fulfilling, productive, and effective work) and offered some comments regarding external impact. However, because the self-assessment form does not directly assess organizational and community impact, the extent of such impact remains unspecified.

Results for monthly and quarterly participants are mostly similar. Higher frequency of contact offered by monthly meetings seems to contribute to slightly greater clarity about values driving their work, having meaningful connections to others, and perceived importance of service to community beyond paid work.

Suggestions for future evaluations

At present, the program collects self-assessments at the beginning of the program and at the end of the year. The end assessment also includes a retrospective pre-program self-assessment. The first pre-program self-assessment may be beneficial for learning about participants, for program planning, and as an ice breaker. However, it is not useful for an evaluation focused on results because participants tended to overestimate their levels of knowledge and abilities beforehand, scoring themselves lower retrospectively after gaining knowledge and abilities during the program.

To better capture possible impacts on organizations and communities, the self-assessment form should be revised to directly and specifically ask about them. In addition, a 12-month follow-up self-assessment could be added, exploring the extent to which these specific outcomes have been realized and if others have emerged.

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For more information

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