CONNECT Program

Fall 2019 Project Cohort Report

The CONNECT Program aims to increase data, measurement and evaluation capacity within Central Texas community organizations through the use of an online platform. It matches organizations' projects with graduate students at the University of Texas at Austin looking for applied and practical experience in the social sector.

This cohort was CONNECT's largest and consisted of its most diverse set of projects and participating organizations and graduate students. Organizations of varying budget sizes and years of establishment, working in over 8 mission areas, submitted projects spanning the categories of measurement strategy, data collection, evaluation tool development, data analysis and advanced analytics. The pool of participating graduate students consisted of both masters and doctoral candidates from five different schools and colleges across UT. For a closer look at the challenges addressed and deliverables produced during this cohort, visit our project library.

23 community organizations

59 interested students

28 matches made

27 projects

87% match rate*

59 deliverables produced

$48,700 net worth**

4 returning organizations

100% organization satisfaction

"Throughout this experience, our CONNECT fellow consistently left me feeling confident in the project. The deliverables exceeded my expectations. The timing was perfect and without a doubt, our evaluation and impact analysis system took a big leap forward."

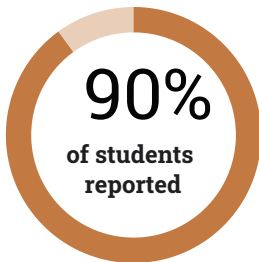Christy Muse, Director of Strategic Alliances, Shield Ranch Foundation

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* number of matches made divided by number of match possibilities
** a total of $48,700 was issued in the form of fellowships to participating students

Lessons Learned:

This cohort's large size and project diversity highlighted the need to increase the efficiency of our project scoping process. It also allowed us to test a major assumption developed during previous cohorts - the benefit of scoping a project broadly with suggested deliverables vs. narrowly with predetermined deliverables. Just as we had seen in previous cohorts, projects with narrowly defined scopes almost always involved a pivot from their predefined deliverables. These projects were still highly successful; however, the time invested toward producing the predefined deliverables could have likely been used more effectively. Looking ahead to future cohorts, most projects will be scoped broadly with suggested deliverables. We believe that this will lead to the development of even more actionable project outcomes that address the deeper issues organizations are facing around data, evaluation, and measurement.

"Our CONNECT experience confirmed a lot of conventional agency knowledge in a concrete, data-informed way. It was essential work needed to bring attention to serious capacity concerns to large agency stakeholders."

Kaylee Lawrence,
Performance Measures
Manager, CIS

90%
of students
reported

their CONNECT experience as equaling, exceeding, or far exceeding their expectations

82%
of organizations
reported

their CONNECT experience as very or extremely useful

91%
of organizations
reported

the time and resources required of them during their CONNECT experience as about right

"I credit this program with me reaching my ideal graduation date and gaining valuable consulting skills and experience."

Meghan McKellar,
CONNECT Fellow

Increasing Doctoral Student Involvement

- PhD candidates applying
- PhD candidates matched