



BECOME

*Transforming Our Reality*

# THE COMMUNITY EVALUATION INNOVATION LAB (CEIL)



*Community Evaluation as a Tool for  
Community Transformation*

2026



# What's AHEAD

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# Acknowledgments

***The Community Evaluation Innovation Lab (CEIL)*** would not have been possible without the partnership, generosity, wisdom, time, and heart work of so many individuals and organizations. This initiative was born from a collective vision and brought to life through the commitment of people who believed that communities can become exceptional evaluators and leaders of research and change. We are deeply grateful to each of you.

**Warren Chapman** helped spark the conversations between Drs. Stafford Hood and Dominica McBride beginning in 2019 that ultimately led to the conceptualization of CEIL. His ability to connect ideas, people, and possibilities helped transform an emerging vision into a concrete reality.

**Dr. Scott Christian**, former Director of CEIL, poured tremendous thought and heart into this initiative. He helped write the original proposals, led participant recruitment, co-developed the curriculum, facilitated learning sessions, coached participants, and helped document the story of CEIL. His contributions have left a lasting imprint on this work, and he will forever be part of the CEIL legacy.

**Dr. Larry Washington** helped co-lead the program, contributed to the evaluation of CEIL's process and outcomes, and co-authored this report. His leadership, insight, and commitment to culturally responsive evaluation strengthened both the CEIL experience and the lessons captured here.





# Acknowledgments

*Continued*

**Casey Solomon-Filer**, Community Advocate and Co-Creator at BECOME, played an integral role in developing the curriculum, teaching sessions, supporting participants, and helping cultivate the relationships and learning environment that made CEIL possible. Her steady presence, care, and commitment strengthened this work in countless ways.

**Dr. Pamela Frasier-Anderson** and **EvalCRE** helped transform CEIL from an idea into a living reality through their partnership in curriculum development and program implementation. Beyond the program itself, Pamela's technological innovation through EvalCRE has created an enduring space where culturally responsive evaluators can continue learning, connecting, and advancing the field together. In doing so, she has helped ensure that the relationships and learning cultivated through CEIL will continue long after the formal program has ended.

**Dr. Miranda Yates**, Senior Program Officer at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, was an extraordinary thought and heart partner throughout this journey. Our monthly conversations became spaces of shared learning, reflection, and growth. We have been deeply edified and fortified by her presence, wisdom, generosity, and steadfast support.

Support for this report was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

# *Special* **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**



*Dr. Stafford Hood*

Finally, we offer our deepest gratitude and special acknowledgement to the late **Dr. Stafford Hood**, whose vision, scholarship, generosity, and unwavering commitment to Culturally Responsive Evaluation made this work possible. Dr. Hood not only co-created CEIL but also mentored Dr. Dominica McBride and countless others in the principles and practice of Culturally Responsive Evaluation. His belief that communities possess the wisdom, expertise, and right to lead inquiry continues to shape this work and the field more broadly. His legacy lives on through CEIL, through every community evaluator who carries this work forward, and through each of us who had the privilege of learning from him.



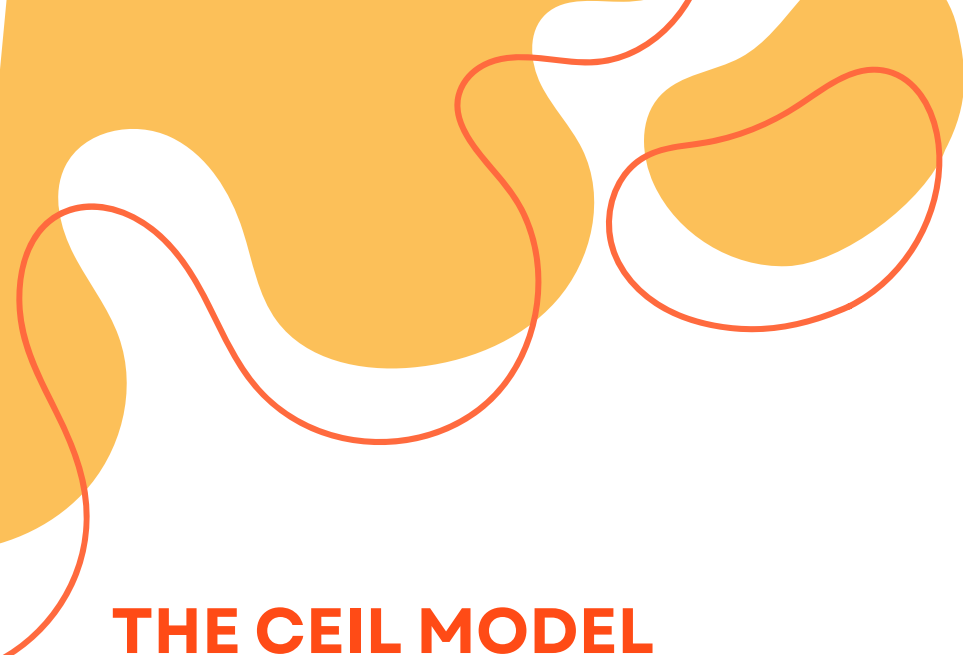
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Community Evaluation Innovation Lab (CEIL) was created to explore a powerful question: what becomes possible when communities do more than participate in evaluation and instead own it, lead it, and use it to shape their own futures? Developed by BECOME in partnership with the Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment (CREA) and supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, CEIL emerged from a shared belief that evaluation can go beyond measuring programs. When grounded in community wisdom, cultural responsiveness, and authentic practice, evaluation can become a pathway for leadership development, community capacity building, and transformation.

This report documents the four-year journey of CEIL, including how it was imagined, designed, implemented, refined, and understood through the experiences of Community Evaluators. The story begins in Auburn Gresham, a Chicago South Side neighborhood rich in history, culture, civic leadership, and resident wisdom. Auburn Gresham provided the place-based context in which CEIL could take root because it already held many of the conditions that support community transformation: active resident leadership, strong organizations, faith communities, local businesses, and relationships built through years of community-led work.

CEIL grew out of BECOME's Culturally Responsive Community Transformation (CRCT) framework, which supports communities in building relationships, identifying priorities, co-creating solutions, implementing community-led innovations, and learning continuously from experience. Within CRCT, evaluation is woven throughout the work as a practice of asking meaningful questions, gathering community knowledge, interpreting what is learned, and using those insights to guide collective action. CEIL extended this approach by preparing community members to become Community Evaluators capable of conducting rigorous, culturally responsive evaluation while remaining rooted in the communities they live in or serve.





## THE CEIL MODEL

Over four years, CEIL evolved from an idea into a tested model for developing Community Evaluators. The model integrates four program components: Training Workshops, Community-Based Practice, Professional Development, and Community Evaluation Mini-Grants. Together, these components created a learning environment where participants could build evaluation knowledge, apply new skills in authentic community settings, connect to professional networks, and lead real evaluation projects with community organizations.

The training curriculum followed the natural progression of an evaluation. Community Evaluators began by understanding community context, history, assets, systems, and positionality. They then learned how to understand programs and stakeholders, develop evaluation questions, design data collection tools, conduct interviews and focus groups, complete observations, analyze qualitative and quantitative data, engage in collective sensemaking, and communicate findings in ways that could support learning and action. This sequence allowed participants to experience evaluation as both a technical process and a relational, culturally responsive practice grounded in community priorities.

CEIL's design was strengthened by seven core practices that emerged through implementation: community-centered learning, authentic evaluation practice, mentorship and coaching, reflection and collective learning, community of practice, professional engagement, and integration into community transformation. These practices reinforced one another throughout the learning journey. Participants moved between workshops, community settings, evaluation projects, professional convenings, and reflective dialogue, continually deepening their capacity to learn, lead, and contribute.



## KEY FINDINGS

**1. Community Evaluators developed strong evaluation competencies.** Participants strengthened skills across the full evaluation cycle, including stakeholder engagement, evaluation design, data collection, facilitation, observation, qualitative and quantitative analysis, sensemaking, reporting, and translating findings into recommendations. They also deepened related capacities such as communication, systems thinking, critical reflection, adaptive learning, and collaborative problem-solving. By the conclusion of the initiative, Community Evaluators had contributed to every stage of the evaluation process while demonstrating the ability to conduct culturally responsive evaluation in partnership with community organizations.

**2. Evaluation became a pathway for leadership development.** Community Evaluators described growth that extended beyond technical evaluation skills. Through facilitating conversations, interpreting community experiences, presenting findings, and supporting organizational learning, participants gained confidence, expanded their professional identities, and discovered new ways to contribute in their organizations and communities. Many carried CEIL learning into education, public health, community psychology, organizational development, early childhood, correctional education, and community-based work. Evaluation became a practice through which leadership was exercised and strengthened.

**3. CEIL fostered a community of practice.** The cohort experience became an essential part of the learning environment. Community Evaluators learned alongside one another, reflected together, interpreted findings collectively, and built relationships grounded in trust, shared purpose, and mutual support. These relationships strengthened learning during the initiative and created opportunities for continued connection through professional conferences, scholarly work, BECOME initiatives, EvalCRE, and ongoing evaluation practice.





## KEY FINDINGS

### *Continued*

**4. Community Evaluators strengthened organizations and community transformation efforts.** Through Mini-Grants and other applied evaluation opportunities, Community Evaluators partnered with local organizations to develop evaluation plans, gather and interpret data, and identify recommendations for improvement. Their work supported organizational learning, strengthened BECOME's CRCT practice, and contributed to community-led planning and reflection in Auburn Gresham. While CEIL was not designed to measure long-term community-level outcomes attributable solely to the initiative, the evidence suggests that Community Evaluators contributed to the learning, decision-making, and capacity-building processes that support transformation over time.

**5. CEIL contributed to the broader evaluation field.** Participants presented at the Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment International Conference, contributed to scholarly writing, participated in evaluation networks, and brought community perspectives into professional conversations about evaluation, equity, and community leadership. CEIL demonstrated that community-generated knowledge belongs within the evaluation field and that community members can be recognized not only as participants in evaluation, but as evaluators, knowledge producers, and leaders.



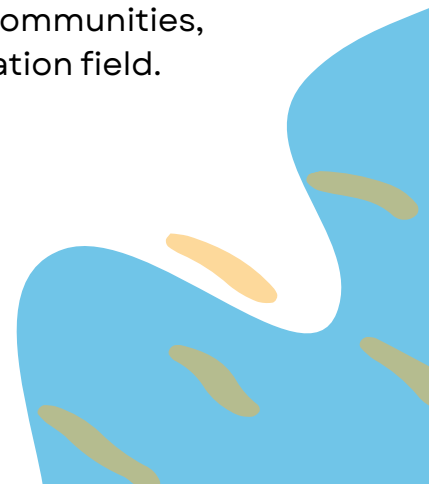


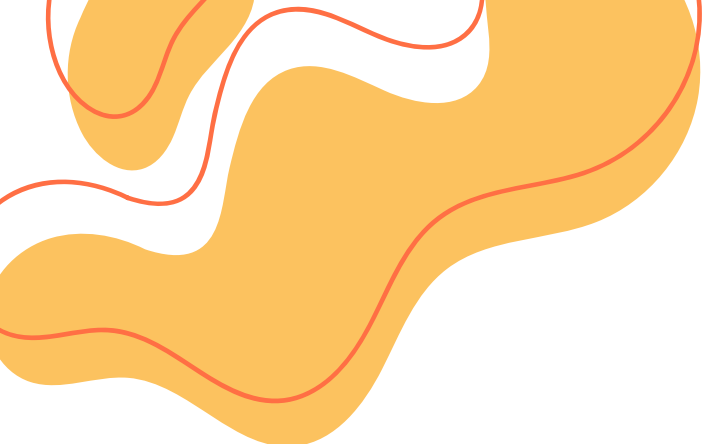
## WHAT CEIL TEACHES US

The central insight of this report is that community-owned evaluation can strengthen far more than evaluation practice. It can build the capacities communities need to shape their own futures. CEIL began with the hypothesis that when communities own and lead evaluation, community transformation is more likely to occur and more likely to reflect community priorities. The findings invite an expanded understanding of that hypothesis: community-owned evaluation contributes to transformation not only through the knowledge it produces, but through the process of developing people, relationships, organizations, and collective capacity.

Four major insights emerged. First, community evaluation becomes community capacity when residents and community partners learn to ask questions, generate knowledge, interpret experiences, and use findings for action. Second, community evaluation becomes leadership development when participants grow in confidence, facilitation, communication, and professional identity through the practice of evaluation. Third, community evaluation becomes learning infrastructure when communities develop ongoing processes for reflection, adaptation, and shared decision-making. Fourth, community evaluation becomes a transformation strategy when it strengthens the people, relationships, organizations, and knowledge systems that make community-led change possible.

These insights reposition evaluation as more than an external service, accountability requirement, or one-time assessment. In the CEIL experience, evaluation became something communities could cultivate from within and use as an ongoing resource for learning, leadership, and action. This shift has implications for communities, community organizations, universities, philanthropy, and the evaluation field.





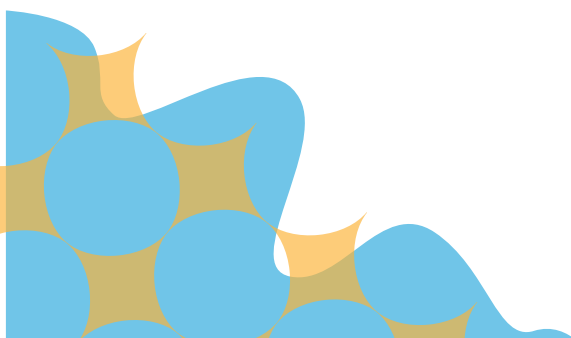
## IMPLICATIONS AND INVITATION

For communities, CEIL offers an invitation to claim evaluation as a tool for self-determination. Communities possess deep wisdom about their histories, strengths, challenges, aspirations, and possibilities. Community-owned evaluation creates opportunities for residents to generate knowledge about their own experiences and use that knowledge to shape decisions about their future.

For community organizations, CEIL offers a framework for integrating evaluation into ongoing learning and transformation rather than treating it solely as an external requirement. Investing in Community Evaluators can strengthen organizational decision-making, support continuous improvement, and deepen alignment with community priorities.

For universities, CEIL demonstrates the value of learning partnerships in which communities are recognized as co-educators, co-researchers, and co-creators of knowledge. Community members bring expertise that cannot be learned solely in classrooms, and their leadership can strengthen how evaluation is taught, practiced, and advanced.

For philanthropy, CEIL highlights the importance of investing not only in evaluations, but in communities' long-term capacity to lead evaluation themselves. Developing Community Evaluators is an investment in leadership, knowledge infrastructure, organizational learning, and the conditions that support lasting community transformation.





# PART I

*The Story*

## THE QUESTION THAT STARTED IT ALL

Every community deserves the opportunity to shape its own future. Doing so requires vision, commitment, and hope. It also requires meaningful ways to understand community strengths, challenges, aspirations, and progress toward the future residents want to create together.

Evaluation is a powerful tool for generating these insights. Yet it is rarely used at the scale of an entire community or led by the people who know the community best. Community members have long shared their experiences through interviews, surveys, focus groups, observations, and countless other forms of participation in evaluations conducted by organizations, institutions, researchers, and funders. Their knowledge has helped improve programs, inform policy, and guide important decisions.

Too often, however, the knowledge generated through these processes does not remain with the community or contribute to its own capacity to learn, lead, and shape change. As a result, communities may inform evaluation without gaining greater ownership of the knowledge, leadership of the process, or influence over the direction of their own transformation.

**At BECOME, we are often driven by the question of...**

*What might become possible if communities played an even greater role in evaluation?*



# THE QUESTION THAT STARTED IT ALL

## *Continued*

What if they owned it, led it, and used it to better understand themselves, strengthen local leadership, and shape the future they wanted to create?

Those questions became the foundation of the Community Evaluation Innovation Lab (CEIL).

Our driving hypothesis was that when communities own and lead the evaluation in their own communities, community transformation is more likely to occur and more likely to reflect community priorities.

CEIL was designed to build community evaluation capacity by preparing residents to become Community Evaluators, individuals capable of conducting rigorous, culturally responsive evaluation while remaining deeply rooted in the communities they lived in or served.

This report documents that journey.

It tells the story of how CEIL was imagined, developed, implemented, and refined. It presents evidence of what happened when community members became evaluators and explores the implications of those findings for communities, researchers, institutions, philanthropy, and the future of evaluation.

As we reflected on four years of learning, one realization became increasingly clear: community ownership of evaluation can strengthen a community's ability to shape its own future.

The journey also expanded our understanding of how that transformation occurs. The process of learning and practicing community evaluation became a source of leadership development, relationship building, organizational learning, and increased community capacity. Evaluation generated knowledge while simultaneously strengthening the people, relationships, and organizations responsible for creating lasting change.

Throughout this report, we invite you to look beyond the curriculum, activities, and findings. Those are important, and they deserve to be documented. The deeper story is about people learning together, communities generating their own knowledge, and evaluation becoming a pathway through which communities strengthen their capacity to realize the futures they envision.

## A VISION FOR COMMUNITY-OWNED EVALUATION

The Community Evaluation Innovation Lab (CEIL) was born from a shared vision held by BECOME and the Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment (CREA): that communities should have the opportunity not only to participate in evaluation, but to own it, lead it, and use it to shape their own futures.

At BECOME, our vision is one of thriving, self-determined communities.

We envision communities where people of all ages aspire to and achieve their dreams. Neighbors know, trust, and care for one another. Those who have been neglected or excluded are welcomed, supported, and embraced. Families have the social, economic, natural, and cultural resources they need to flourish. Community members lead with love, draw upon resilient relationships, and work together to strengthen the wellbeing of the whole community. People tap into their wholeness and power to grow, transform, and become their fullest selves.

Realizing this vision requires going beyond effective programs or strong organizations to communities leading, making informed decisions, and shaping the future they want to create.

Evaluation is one of the tools that makes this possible.

When communities are able to gather knowledge, understand their strengths and challenges, reflect on what they are learning, and use that learning to guide action, evaluation moves beyond measuring outcomes. It becomes a tool for thriving communities and a resource for community-led transformation.

# A VISION FOR COMMUNITY-OWNED EVALUATION

## *Continued*

This vision was strengthened through the leadership of the late Dr. Stafford Hood and CREA.

For decades, Dr. Hood challenged the evaluation field to recognize culture, context, history, and lived experience as central to meaningful evaluation. Through culturally responsive evaluation, he demonstrated that communities possess knowledge and expertise that are essential to understanding programs, systems, and social change. His work expanded who is recognized as an expert and helped redefine evaluation as a collaborative process grounded in relationships, equity, and shared learning.

Together, these two visions naturally converged.

BECOME sought to strengthen communities' capacity to shape their own futures. CREA sought to strengthen evaluation practice that is grounded in communities' priorities and lived experience.

This vision imagined Community Evaluators as leaders, facilitators, learners, bridge builders, and partners in community transformation. It envisioned communities with the capacity to generate knowledge about themselves, make meaning together, and use evaluation as an ongoing practice of learning, leadership, and collective action.

CEIL was designed as a workforce development initiative that develops Community Evaluators while strengthening the communities they serve. By investing in community members as evaluators, leaders, and changemakers, CEIL builds communities' capacity to understand themselves, make informed decisions, and shape the future they envision.

This shared vision became the foundation for the journey described throughout this report.



# THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT

## AUBURN GRESHAM: THE PLACE

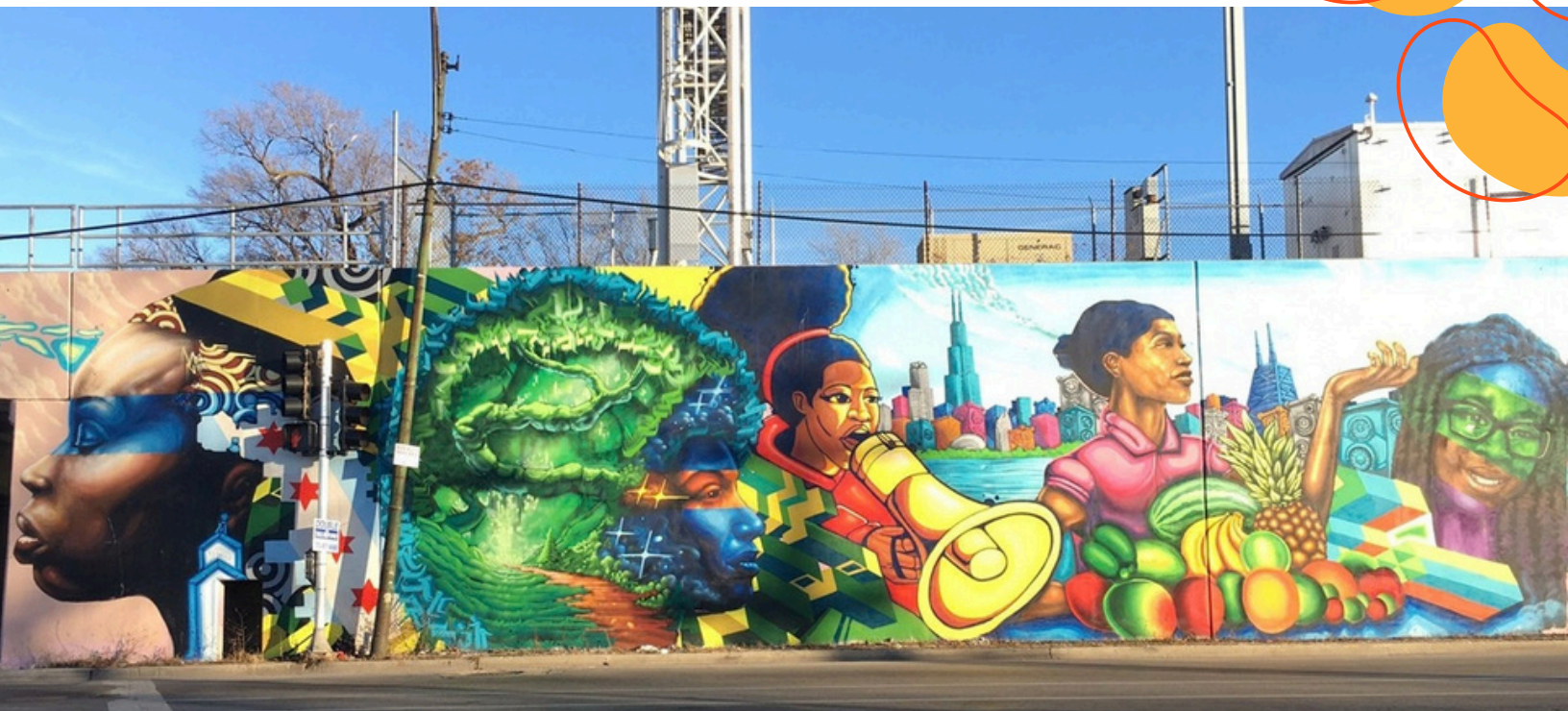
Ideas are always shaped by place.

While CEIL could have been developed in many communities, Auburn Gresham offered a unique environment in which the vision of CEIL could take root. The neighborhood already possessed many of the conditions that support community transformation: strong resident leadership, active community organizations, faith communities, local businesses, deep relationships, and a long history of dedicated residents.

Located on Chicago's South Side, Auburn Gresham is a vibrant neighborhood rich in history, culture, and civic engagement. Like many historically underinvested communities, it has experienced decades of structural inequities related to housing, economic opportunity, neighborhood investment, health, education, and public safety. These inequities have shaped community conditions while never defining the community itself.

# AUBURN GRESHAM: THE PLACE

*Continued*



BECOME has been working in Auburn Gresham for over decade. Throughout BECOME's partnership with the neighborhood, another story consistently emerged.

Residents possessed deep knowledge of their community and a clear vision for what they wanted their neighborhood to become. Time and again, they demonstrated that when meaningful opportunities existed to shape decisions, they led with creativity, commitment, and care.

The neighborhood also held deep personal significance.

Auburn Gresham is the birthplace of BECOME's community transformation work and the childhood home of Dr. Stafford Hood. For both organizations, the community was not only a project site, but it was also home, relationship, history, and possibility.

These qualities made Auburn Gresham an ideal place to explore a new way of thinking about community evaluation.

# CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION (CRCT): THE TRANSFORMATION CONTEXT



By the time CEIL began, BECOME had spent nearly a decade partnering with residents, organizations, schools, churches, and neighborhood leaders. This work led to the development of our Culturally Responsive Community Transformation (CRCT) framework.

CRCT is BECOME's approach to community-led transformation. It supports communities in building relationships, developing a shared understanding of their strengths and aspirations, identifying community priorities, co-creating solutions and systems through Innovation Groups, implementing those solutions, and continually learning from their experiences. Throughout the process, residents are leaders, decision-makers, and co-creators of the systems and structures that shape community life.

Within CRCT, evaluation is woven throughout the work.



## **CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION (CRCT): THE TRANSFORMATION CONTEXT**

*Continued*

As communities build relationships, test new ideas, implement solutions, and reflect on their progress, they continually gather information, interpret what they are learning, and use those insights to strengthen future action. Evaluation becomes an ongoing practice of learning, adaptation, and shared decision-making in service of community-led transformation.

This work created the conditions in which CEIL could emerge.

Rather than learning evaluation through hypothetical case studies alone, Community Evaluators learned within authentic community transformation efforts already taking place in Auburn Gresham.

By the time CEIL began, BECOME had spent nearly a decade partnering with residents, organizations, schools, churches, and neighborhood leaders. This work led to the development of our Culturally Responsive Community Transformation (CRCT) framework.



## A PARTNERSHIP BUILT ON SHARED PURPOSE

No single organization could have created CEIL alone.

The initiative emerged through the alignment of organizations that brought complementary strengths and a shared commitment to expanding community leadership in evaluation.

**BECOME** contributed its experience in community transformation, grassroots leadership, and systems change. For more than a decade, BECOME had partnered with communities to strengthen resident leadership, facilitate community-driven planning, conduct culturally responsive research and evaluation, and co-create solutions that reflect community priorities.



**BECOME**

*Transforming Our Reality*

**CREA**

*Center for*

**Culturally Responsive  
Evaluation & Assessment**

***The Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment (CREA)***, housed within the College of Education at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, contributed decades of leadership in culturally responsive evaluation. Under the visionary leadership of the late, great Dr. Stafford Hood, CREA helped shape the curriculum, learning

philosophy, and evaluation framework that became the intellectual foundation of CEIL. Together, BECOME and CREA demonstrated how community practice and academic scholarship can strengthen one another.



## A PARTNERSHIP BUILT ON SHARED PURPOSE

*Continued*

**The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation** made this innovation possible through its willingness to invest in an emergent model. Beyond financial support, RWJF served as a genuine learning partner throughout the initiative. Regular opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and shared learning allowed the model to evolve while remaining grounded in both community experience and broader questions about equity, health, and systems change.



Residents, community organizations, and Community Evaluators completed the partnership.

Their questions, insights, feedback, experiences, and leadership continuously refined the curriculum, influenced facilitation, strengthened the evaluation process, and ultimately determined what CEIL became.

## DESIGNING THE COMMUNITY EVALUATION INNOVATION LAB

With the vision established, the partnerships in place, and Auburn Gresham providing the community context, the next challenge was translating the vision into a model for developing Community Evaluators.

From the beginning, CEIL was designed to prepare community members to lead culturally responsive evaluation embedded in, and in partnership with, their communities. At the same time, the initiative strived to strengthen community leadership by equipping residents to generate knowledge, facilitate learning, and contribute to community transformation.

### PROGRAM COMPONENTS

As the program evolved through team design, implementation, and continuous feedback from Community Evaluators, four integrated components emerged as the foundation of the CEIL Model: **Training Workshops, Community-Based Practice, Professional Development, and Community Evaluation Mini-Grants**. Together, these components created a learning environment that connected evaluation knowledge with authentic community practice.

#### COMPONENT

#### PURPOSE

##### Training Workshops

Build foundational knowledge and evaluation skills through a structured curriculum.

##### Community-Based Practice

Apply evaluation skills within ongoing community transformation efforts.

##### Professional Development

Connect Community Evaluators to the broader evaluation field through scholarship, presentations, and professional networks.

##### Community Evaluation Mini-Grants

Lead real evaluations for community organizations with mentorship and coaching.

## TRAINING WORKSHOPS

The workshop curriculum was intentionally organized to mirror the natural progression of an evaluation, allowing Community Evaluators to build knowledge and skills in the same sequence they would later apply them in practice. Each phase built upon the previous one, moving from understanding community context to using evaluation findings to strengthen community transformation.

### ***PHASE I***

#### **Understanding the Context.**

The learning journey began by building a shared understanding of the community, the organization, and the broader context in which evaluation would occur.

Participants explored BECOME's history and values, Community Actualization, Culturally Responsive Community Transformation (CRCT), the history and assets of Auburn Gresham, historical and contextual analysis, and their own positionality as evaluators. This foundation emphasized that meaningful evaluation begins with understanding people, place, history, relationships, and oneself.

### ***PHASE II***

#### **Understanding Programs and Evaluation.**

With this foundation established, Community Evaluators learned how evaluators develop an understanding of the initiatives they are evaluating before determining how to study them. Through meetings with BECOME leadership, participation in Innovation Groups, stakeholder engagement, Appreciative Inquiry, and Culturally Responsive Evaluation, participants developed a deeper understanding of program goals, community priorities, and the relationships that shape evaluation.

### ***PHASE III***

**Designing the Evaluation.** Participants then learned how evaluations are designed collaboratively. They developed evaluation questions, designed interview guides and surveys, created observation protocols, pilot tested instruments, and refined data collection tools through feedback and practice. Throughout this process, Community Evaluators contributed their own ideas and perspectives, helping strengthen the tools that would later be used in the field.

### ***PHASE IV***

#### **Conducting the Evaluation.**

The next phase focused on implementation. Community Evaluators applied their learning by conducting interviews and focus groups, administering retrospective pre-post surveys, completing observations, reviewing pilot data, and participating in community data collection. These experiences prepared participants to carry out evaluations within authentic community settings.

## TRAINING WORKSHOPS *Continued*

Phase 5: Making Sense of the Data. Community Evaluators then learned how to organize, analyze, and interpret both qualitative and quantitative data. Through qualitative coding, survey analysis, collective sensemaking, theme development, and synthesis of findings, participants explored how evaluation data can generate meaningful insights and inform recommendations for action.

Phase 6: Using Evaluation for Learning and Improvement. The curriculum concluded by emphasizing that evaluation is most valuable when it informs future action. Community Evaluators prepared reports, shared findings with BECOME and CRCT leadership, contributed to observation protocols, and developed recommendations that strengthened ongoing implementation. Participants experienced evaluation as an ongoing process of learning, reflection, and continuous improvement.

## COMMUNITY-BASED PRACTICE

Community-based practice provided opportunities for Community Evaluators to apply their learning within BECOME's Culturally Responsive Community Transformation initiative in Auburn Gresham.

The Community Evaluators were invited into the CRCT processes and Innovation Group sessions to be participant evaluators. They facilitated community dialogues to define priorities that arose through interviews and focus groups and helped to define the framing and next steps for innovation and action. Two of the evaluators went on to participate in one or more Innovation Group sessions and they collectively developed and implemented data collection tools for CRCT and presented findings for refining the transformation efforts.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CEIL was intentionally designed to connect Community Evaluators with the broader evaluation profession.

Participants engaged in, led, and shared their work with practitioners and scholars across the country through:

- Conference proposal writing and submission
- Presenting at an international evaluation conference
- Contributed to scholarly writing
- Professional evaluation networks

These opportunities expanded professional networks while demonstrating that community-generated knowledge has an important place within the broader evaluation field.

## COMMUNITY EVALUATION MINI-GRANTS

One of CEIL's signature learning opportunities was the Community Evaluation Mini-Grant Program.

Community Evaluators went through an application process to receive mini-grant funding for community-based evaluation projects. In partnership with local organizations, they developed evaluation proposals, scopes of work, project budgets, and timelines addressing questions identified by the organizations themselves. Partner organizations also developed and signed a memorandum of understanding outlining the expectations for the work. BECOME awarded four mini-grants ranging from \$4,000 to \$5,000. Supported by ongoing mentorship from CEIL facilitators, Community Evaluators developed evaluation tools, collected and analyzed data, interpreted findings, prepared recommendations, and produced reports or briefs. They also presented their findings to organizational partners and their fellow Community Evaluators.

## THE LEARNING JOURNEY

Learning through these different modes was an ongoing journey. Community Evaluators moved between workshops and community settings, applying new concepts, reflecting on their experiences, asking questions, refining their practice, and returning to the community with deeper understanding. Faculty, community leaders, organizational partners, and fellow Community Evaluators all became part of the learning environment, creating opportunities for dialogue, mentorship, shared reflection, and collective problem-solving.

As the initiative progressed, Community Evaluators increasingly learned from one another. They interpreted findings together, exchanged ideas across projects, celebrated successes, and worked through challenges as a cohort. The relationships they developed became an important part of the learning process and reflected the collaborative values at the heart of culturally responsive evaluation.

The CEIL team also approached the initiative as an ongoing learning process. Feedback from Community Evaluators, organizational partners, and facilitators continually informed refinements to the curriculum, learning activities, coaching, and evaluation tools. The model itself evolved alongside the people participating in it.

By the conclusion of the pilot, Community Evaluators had participated in hundreds of hours of learning, community engagement, evaluation practice, dialogue, reflection, and professional development. These experiences created the foundation for the growth explored in the next section of this report.



# PART II

*Growing Community  
Evaluation Capacity*

# MEET THE COMMUNITY EVALUATORS

**CHRISSY JONES**

is an Auburn Gresham resident, mother of three, educator, and founder of Neighborly Connect, a nonprofit created to serve the spirit of the community by helping residents build stronger connections within themselves and with one another. Her experience includes teaching and advising high school students, developing after-school programs, supporting an early learning center, and participating in neighborhood organizations.

**PRISCILIA SOSSAH**

is a community-engaged researcher and evaluator committed to centering the experiences of Black communities. Her interests include mental health, culturally responsive programming, youth development, and using research and evaluation to support communities.

**SCOTT NOBLE**

is a community leader whose work is shaped by his lived experiences growing up in Englewood and Auburn Gresham and navigating incarceration, substance use, and mental and physical health challenges. After receiving support during a difficult period in his life, Scott committed himself to giving back and offering hope to others experiencing similar challenges.

# MEET THE COMMUNITY EVALUATORS

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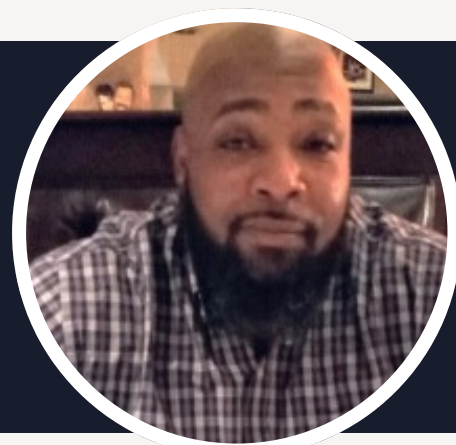


## **DR. SHANYA GREY**

is a community psychologist and evaluator with a commitment to community-centered research and learning. Her work brings evaluation into neighborhood spaces and supports communities in using data and shared knowledge to strengthen local initiatives.

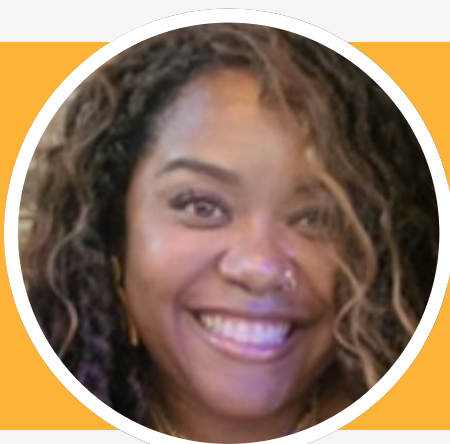
## **RAPHAEL JACKSON**

is a community evaluator who was introduced to evaluation while incarcerated and came to understand it as a tool for challenging harmful policies, practices, and systems. His work is grounded in the belief that communities should be able to name the issues affecting them and use data, lived experience, and their own expertise to pursue solutions.



## **FAKELIA GUYTON**

is an experienced early childhood educator, administrator, community psychologist, and consultant with more than two decades of service. Her work supports collective wellness, empowerment, collaboration, racial equity, and social justice, particularly within early childhood systems and community settings.



# MEET THE COMMUNITY EVALUATORS

*Continued*

## **CRYSTAL WASH**

is a program evaluator with experience supporting government agencies, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and higher education initiatives. Her work brings together research, data analysis, education, and collaboration with stakeholders to strengthen programs and improve outcomes.



## **DR. CHANEL PHILLIPS**

is a community psychologist, culturally responsive evaluator, nonprofit leader, and longtime community servant. Her professional and community work has focused on supporting individual and community wellness, strengthening organizations, and improving the quality of life for residents across Chicago.



# Growing Leaders Through Community Evaluation

The Community Evaluation Innovation Lab was designed to strengthen community evaluation capacity. Throughout the initiative, the Community Evaluators developed knowledge and skills in culturally responsive evaluation while engaging in meaningful evaluation work alongside residents, organizations, and community partners.

As the journey unfolded, another pattern emerged.

Community Evaluators described growth that expanded past evaluation practice. They developed greater confidence in their abilities, strengthened their leadership, expanded their professional identities, and discovered new ways to contribute within their organizations and communities. Moving beyond professional skills, evaluation became a pathway for personal growth, leadership development, and community engagement.

The findings in this chapter reflect the ways Community Evaluators grew throughout the CEIL experience.

## Developing Evaluation Competencies

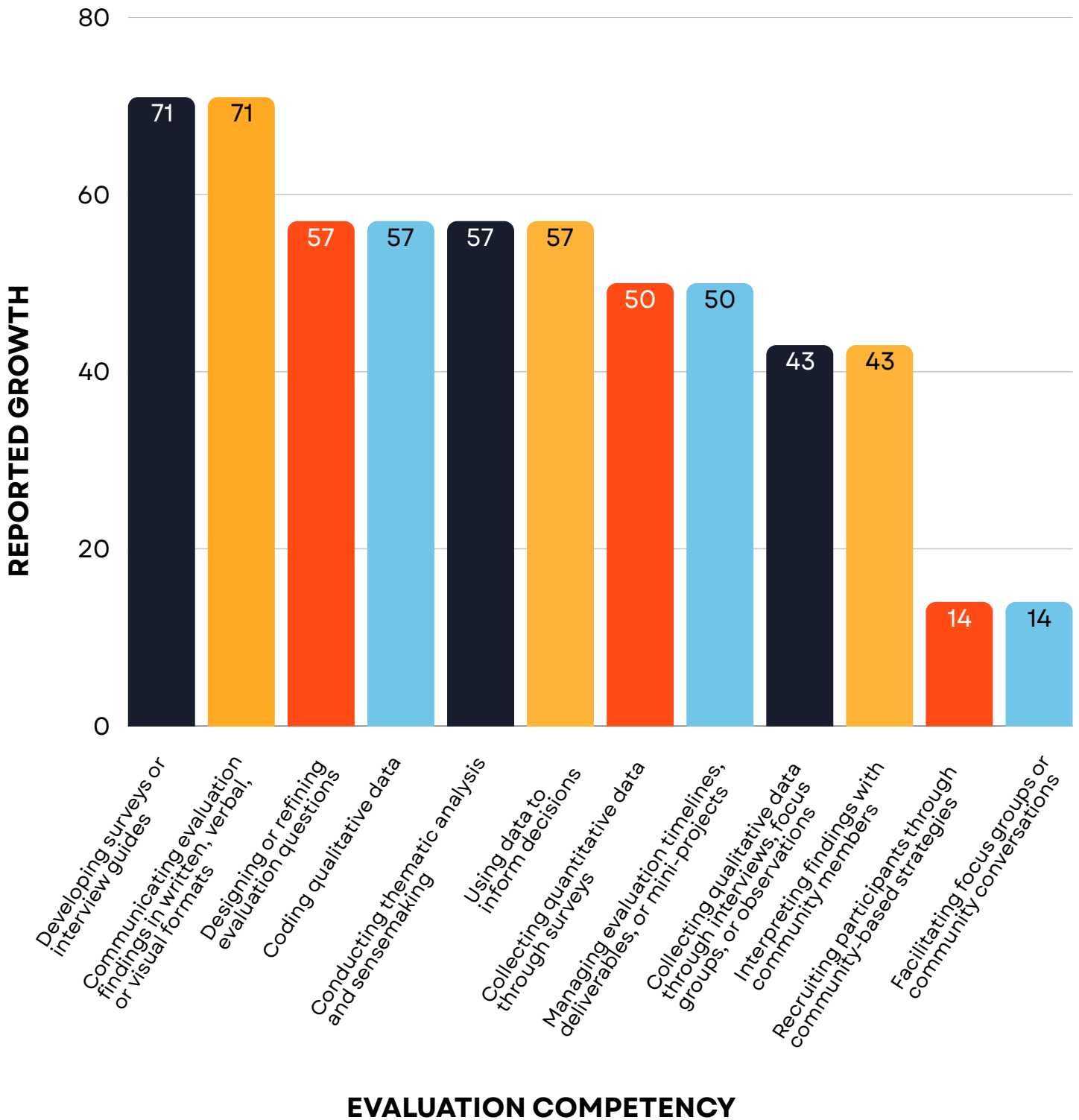
Community Evaluators strengthened competencies across every phase of the evaluation process.

### **Their growth included the ability to:**

- understand community history, context, systems, and assets
- engage stakeholders and develop culturally responsive evaluation questions
- design evaluation plans and data collection strategies
- facilitate interviews, focus groups, and community conversations
- collect qualitative and quantitative data
- conduct structured observations
- analyze and interpret findings through individual and collective sensemaking
- communicate evaluation findings to community and organizational audiences
- translate findings into recommendations that informed learning and action

Alongside these technical competencies, Community Evaluators strengthened facilitation, communication, systems thinking, stakeholder engagement, critical reflection, adaptive learning, and collaborative problem-solving. By the conclusion of the initiative, participants had contributed to every stage of the evaluation process while demonstrating the ability to conduct culturally responsive evaluation in partnership with community organizations.

These competencies became the foundation upon which broader leadership growth emerged.



The percentages shown represent the percentage of Community Evaluators whose self-rating for each evaluation skill increased from the beginning to the end of CEIL. Seven participants completed both assessments. Because some participants already rated themselves highly at the beginning of CEIL, a lower percentage showing an increase does not necessarily indicate lower skill in that area.

# Growing Confidence as Evaluators

One of the clearest themes throughout participant reflections was growing confidence.

As Community Evaluators gained experience facilitating conversations, interpreting findings, and communicating recommendations, many described increased confidence in their ability to contribute to evaluation and decision-making within their organizations and communities.

Several participants reflected on seeing themselves differently. They increasingly recognized that their lived experience, relationships, and community knowledge were valuable sources of expertise that strengthened evaluation. As they developed technical knowledge alongside these existing strengths, Community Evaluators grew more confident contributing their perspectives, asking important questions, and helping others make meaning from community experiences.

This growing confidence became an important foundation for leadership throughout the remainder of the initiative.



***"I now see myself as an evaluator."***

*— Raphael Jackson*

## Expanding Leadership

Leadership developed through participation in evaluation itself.

Community Evaluators facilitated discussions, supported organizational partners, helped interpret findings, presented recommendations, and contributed to community learning throughout the initiative. These experiences created opportunities to exercise leadership through listening, facilitation, collaboration, critical thinking, and shared decision-making.

Participants also described applying what they learned expanded past CEIL. Many incorporated evaluation into their existing professional roles, accepted new leadership responsibilities, facilitated evaluation within their own organizations, or pursued new opportunities to support community learning and organizational improvement.

# Expanding Leadership

## Continued

Leadership was expressed in many ways.

For some, it meant facilitating community conversations.

For others, it meant strengthening organizational decision-making, mentoring colleagues, supporting research partnerships, or bringing culturally responsive evaluation into new professional settings. One example is Priscilia, who developed a youth data collection toolkit designed to center the experiences and perspectives of young people in Auburn Gresham. Since its development, the toolkit has been tested and implemented by multiple youth-serving organizations in Auburn Gresham, extending its use beyond the original CEIL project and providing a practical resource for gathering youth-centered community data.

The findings suggest that evaluation became one avenue through which Community Evaluators exercised leadership in service of their communities and organizations.



***“Just because I have experience doesn’t mean that I don’t need practice because things are ever evolving... The resources and exercises [from CEIL] helped strengthen my skills. As I build up my evaluation team, they will also help me explain what evaluation is and how to perform these evaluation duties. It’s the gift that keeps on giving.”***

*— Dr. Chanel Phillips*

# Expanding Professional Identity



Community Evaluators also described important shifts in how they viewed themselves professionally.

Throughout the initiative, participants engaged with professional evaluation networks, pursued graduate education, and continued applying culturally responsive evaluation in diverse professional settings. Raphael Jackson, for example, carried CEIL learning into correctional education, where he is using developmental evaluation to help restructure a prison education program, build an incarcerated evaluator

committee, and prepare students to participate in evaluation and program improvement. He also credited CEIL with strengthening his confidence as an evaluator and influencing his decision to pursue a PhD. Chrissy Jones similarly described carrying CEIL into her continued education and her growing interest in public policy, particularly through a stronger commitment to using data, history, culture, and community knowledge to inform decision-making. These experiences expanded opportunities for continued learning while strengthening participants' identities as evaluators, practitioners, and professionals.

Many Community Evaluators continued using evaluation in education, public health, community psychology, law, organizational development, early childhood, correctional education, and community-based organizations. Others pursued new educational pathways or expanded evaluation capacity within their own organizations.

These examples suggest that the influence of CEIL continued well beyond the formal initiative as Community Evaluators carried culturally responsive evaluation into new contexts and professional roles.



# Discovering New Possibilities

One of the most meaningful outcomes of CEIL was the sense of possibility participants described throughout the journey.

Evaluation became a way of engaging more deeply with community, contributing to organizational learning, supporting collective decision-making, and imagining new professional and community leadership opportunities.

Community Evaluators increasingly saw themselves as people capable of generating knowledge, facilitating learning, and helping communities understand and shape their own futures.

For many, CEIL became part of their ongoing professional and leadership journey.



***“I have searched for spaces and platforms where I could [find] fellowship with like-minded people dedicated to uplifting the voices and experiences of those that have struggled with that challenge. Participating [in BECOME’s Community Evaluation Innovation Lab] has given me a glimpse into not just the individuals in a neighborhood, but a collective of community members fighting towards articulation.”***

*— Raphael Jackson*

As participants learned together, practiced together, and supported one another throughout the initiative, they also built enduring relationships grounded in trust, shared purpose, and mutual learning.

Over time, these relationships evolved into a vibrant community of practice that continued after the formal initiative concluded.

The next chapter explores what Community Evaluators built together and the role those relationships played in CEIL's lasting impact.

## Growing a Community of Practice

While Community Evaluators grew as evaluators and leaders, they also learned alongside one another. Throughout the CEIL experience, participants engaged in dialogue, collaborated on evaluation activities, reflected together, and collectively interpreted community experiences. These shared experiences created opportunities for Community Evaluators to learn from one another while strengthening their evaluation practice.



The findings suggest that relationships became an important part of the CEIL experience and contributed to the learning environment throughout the initiative.

## Relationships as a Learning Environment



Learning in CEIL was intentionally collaborative and grounded in relationships.

Each workshop began with a human-centered check-in that invited participants to connect as people before engaging as evaluators. Throughout the initiative, Community Evaluators worked together during workshops, Innovation Group meetings, collective sensemaking sessions, community-based evaluation activities, and

reflective dialogue. These experiences created opportunities to ask questions together, examine multiple perspectives, and develop a shared understanding of what they were learning.

Collective sensemaking became an important part of the evaluation process. Community Evaluators interpreted findings together, identified themes, explored differing perspectives, considered the credibility of the data, and discussed the implications of the findings for organizations and the broader community.

# Relationships as a Learning Environment

## Continued

As the cohort evolved, so did the relationships among participants. That growth was visible beyond the formal training space. During breaks, Fakelia Guyton and Chrissy Jones could often be seen planning sharing meals, getting to know one another's close family members, and building what became a genuine sisterhood. Community Evaluators learned from one another's experiences, challenged one another's thinking, celebrated successes, and supported one another through unfamiliar aspects of the evaluation process. Mentorship from facilitators and community partners further strengthened this collaborative learning environment.

Participant reflections suggest that these relationships became one of CEIL's greatest strengths. Many described the value of learning within a supportive cohort, hearing diverse perspectives, and engaging in thoughtful dialogue throughout the evaluation process. Together, these experiences fostered a learning environment built on trust, curiosity, and shared growth.



***“Those are the experiences that really stand to me is us coming together as strangers in a church basement, really coming together, building community, learning together, breaking bread together. Those are some of the most memorable experiences for me.”***

— Fakelia Guyton

## Connections Beyond the Cohort

Participants presented together at professional conferences, contributed to scholarly work, participated in BECOME initiatives, and continued applying culturally responsive evaluation within their organizations and professional settings. The development of EvalCRE also created opportunities for Community Evaluators to remain connected and continue learning with others engaged in culturally responsive evaluation.



***“I do plan to use it in my work going forward... I do tend to take this with me wherever I go, whether it's corporate, federal. I think it's important and it's something that I do plan to stand on.”***

— Chrissy Jones



## ***EvaICRE***

CEIL partnered with Kandaki Tech, LLC., which hosts the EvalCRE, an online learning community conceived by the late Dr. Stafford Hood and Dr. Pamela Frazier-Anderson. Designed for practitioners, community leaders, and organizations seeking to strengthen their evaluation practice, EvalCRE provides a space to learn, apply, reflect, and grow in culturally responsive evaluation alongside others committed to community-centered practice.

CEIL was one of the first initiatives where Dr. Frazier-Anderson implemented and piloted EvalCRE. Throughout the initiative, Community Evaluators engaged with EvalCRE's learning experiences while providing insights, feedback, and practical lessons from implementation in Auburn Gresham. Those experiences informed EvalCRE's evolution. In this way, CEIL not only prepared Community Evaluators but also helped strengthen the tools and approaches that continue to advance culturally responsive evaluation.



These examples suggest that CEIL contributed to relationships and professional connections that extended beyond the formal training period. While the long-term nature of these relationships was not the primary focus of this evaluation, the continued collaborations documented throughout the initiative indicate that the cohort experience created opportunities for ongoing learning and professional engagement and sustainability.

# A Community of Practice

Throughout the initiative, Community Evaluators learned with one another while contributing their own experiences, perspectives, and expertise to the collective learning process.



***“Being a hands-on learner who liked to learn in community... working in groups was extremely helpful as well.”***

*— Shanya Grey*

The evidence suggests that CEIL created opportunities for shared learning, collaboration, and professional connection among Community Evaluators.

These characteristics align with what is commonly described as a community of practice, a group of people who strengthen their knowledge through community building, ongoing learning, shared experiences, and collective problem-solving. Throughout CEIL, Community Evaluators developed evaluation practice together while contributing to one another's growth as evaluators and professionals.

The growth of Community Evaluators extended past individual development and relationships within the cohort. As participants brought culturally responsive evaluation into their organizations, professional networks, and community initiatives, the influence of CEIL expanded in new ways.



***“I was really accepted for the whole of my being while also encouraged to share my being with everyone else in the room because that's a different perspective that could be helpful in the evaluation process... When I realized that, oh, we're all kind of learning at the same time here, it made me feel like I had even more of a space, but it also just helped me feel a lot more confident moving forward.”***

*— Priscillia Sossah*

# Where They Are Now and How CEIL Contributed

**Chrissy Jones** was admitted to a Master's in Civic Analytics program and is pursuing admission into a joint Master's and Juris Doctor program. Her continued academic journey brings together evaluation, data, policy, and law in pursuit of more equitable decision making.

**Priscilia Sossah** is pursuing graduate studies in Community Psychology, where her research centers Black experiences and currently explores how Black women's literature can deepen understandings of mental health and inform culturally responsive mental health programming. She also applies her evaluation skills through her work with the University's Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning. Priscilia credits CEIL with developing skills she has used professionally and introducing her to Community Psychology and evaluation, which helped guide her decision about what to study in graduate school.

**Scott Noble** founded Unity Network Community, a nonprofit providing street outreach, harm reduction, housing navigation, mental health and substance use support, mentorship, and referrals. The relationships built through CEIL provided peer learning and technical support that helped Scott navigate the process of establishing his nonprofit. He also credits his return to Auburn Gresham through CEIL with reinforcing the power of community voices and providing a blueprint for community empowerment.

**Dr. Shanya Grey** earned her Ph.D. in Community Psychology and developed an evaluation process for her neighborhood's annual Juneteenth Family Festival. Through CEIL, Shanya applied lessons from database searching and data collection tool development to her own research while exchanging recruitment strategies, resources, and knowledge with fellow evaluators.

**Raphael Jackson** credits CEIL with inspiring his decision to pursue a Ph.D. in Community Psychology. He is also developing an incarcerated evaluator committee that is creating a Culturally Responsive Theory-Driven Evaluation and pursuing opportunities in policy research and community evaluation. Raphael has carried CEIL's emphasis on cultural responsiveness, relationship building, and collaborative learning into his efforts to develop an evaluation community of his own.

# Where They Are Now and How CEIL Contributed

## *Continued*

**Fakelia Guyton** is pursuing her Ph.D. in Community Psychology while serving as a Chicago United for Equity Fellow. In these roles, she applies community-centered approaches to racial justice, early childhood, and systems change. CEIL strengthened her research practice through additional experience with research methods, databases, and data collection, along with opportunities to learn beside other community-centered researchers and evaluators.

**Crystal Wash** is working with Dr. Pamela Frazier-Anderson as a co-author of a textbook chapter examining the development of ACESAS-2 and the future of culturally responsive evaluation. This opportunity extends her involvement in CEIL into scholarship that contributes to the broader evaluation field.

**Dr. Chanel Phillips** is serving as the Visiting Senior Evaluator for a multimillion-dollar, five-year federal initiative and is building an evaluator committee within her organization. She has also remained connected to the broader evaluation community as a guest presenter for The EvalCRE Community. CEIL gave Dr. Phillips opportunities to revisit and strengthen existing evaluation competencies while mentoring emerging evaluators, particularly African American and Black American evaluators, a professional commitment she continues to carry forward.

The next chapter explores how Community Evaluators contributed to organizational learning, the broader field of evaluation, and ongoing community transformation.

# *RIPPLES BEYOND CEIL*

## **GROWING ORGANIZATIONS, THE FIELD, AND COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION**

CEIL's influence did not end with the Community Evaluators. As participants brought their learning into organizations, communities, and professional spaces, the initiative strengthened evaluation practice, informed BECOME's community transformation work, and contributed to the continued evolution of culturally responsive evaluation. These ripple effects demonstrate that investing in Community Evaluators can also strengthen organizations, communities, and the broader evaluation field.

## **STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONS**

Throughout the initiative, Community Evaluators partnered with community organizations to conduct evaluations addressing questions identified by organizations and community members.

Through the Community Evaluation Mini-Grant Program and other applied evaluation opportunities, Community Evaluators collaborated with organizational partners to develop evaluation plans, collect and interpret data, communicate findings, and identify opportunities for learning and improvement. One example is Dr. Shanya Grey's work with Fakelia Guyton to evaluate the Juneteenth Family Festival. Together, they developed a survey, collected feedback from nearly 100 participants, analyzed quantitative and qualitative data, and translated the findings into recommendations for future festivals, including improvements related to food vending and event logistics. These partnerships supported organizational and community learning while providing authentic opportunities for Community Evaluators to apply culturally responsive evaluation in practice.

# STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONS

## *Continued*

Community Evaluators also described incorporating culturally responsive evaluation into their own organizations following CEIL. For example, Raphael Jackson shared that he was applying developmental evaluation to restructure an educational program in a correctional setting, including preparing students to collect and use data to support ongoing program improvement. Dr. Chanel Phillips described using CEIL resources to strengthen her current evaluation work and support the development of an evaluation unit within her organization, including training staff who did not have traditional evaluation backgrounds. These examples show how evaluators carried CEIL learning into their professional settings to strengthen planning, build evaluation capacity, support learning, and inform organizational decision-making.

Taken together, these findings suggest that Community Evaluators expanded evaluation capacity within the organizations where they worked while introducing culturally responsive approaches to organizational learning and continuous improvement.

# STRENGTHENING BECOME'S COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION PRACTICE

CEIL was intentionally integrated into BECOME's broader CRCT work, allowing Community Evaluators to contribute to ongoing community transformation efforts while strengthening their evaluation practice.

Community Evaluators engagement and evaluation of CRCT strengthened the integration of evaluation throughout BECOME's community transformation work while creating additional opportunities for resident leadership and shared learning.

Through their evaluation, CEIL strengthened BECOME's organizational practice. Community Evaluators contributed to facilitation, encouraged greater intentionality around evaluation, supported longer-term thinking about community processes and outcomes, and generated data that strengthened BECOME's ability to communicate impact, attract resources, and support the long-term sustainability of community-driven work. Community Evaluators also provided ongoing feedback that informed the continued refinement of BECOME's community transformation approach.

Community Evaluators became valuable contributors to BECOME's community transformation work while strengthening our organization's capacity to integrate community-owned evaluation into practice.

# CONTRIBUTING TO THE EVALUATION FIELD

Community Evaluators extended their learning beyond CEIL by engaging with the broader evaluation community.

Participants presented at the Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment International Conference, contributed to scholarly writing, participated in evaluation networks, and continued learning alongside practitioners and scholars engaged in culturally responsive evaluation. These opportunities expanded the visibility of community-owned evaluation while bringing community perspectives into professional conversations about evaluation, equity, and community leadership.

## CONTRIBUTING TO COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

CEIL was developed within BECOME's broader community transformation work in Auburn Gresham, creating opportunities for Community Evaluators to contribute to community-led planning, innovation, implementation, and evaluation.

Community Evaluators supported organizations and community partners in gathering and interpreting community knowledge, facilitating collective sensemaking, and using findings to inform future action. Their participation strengthened opportunities for residents, organizations, and other stakeholders to learn together and reflect on community priorities through evaluation.

The evaluation was not designed to measure long-term community-level outcomes attributable solely to CEIL. However, the findings suggest that Community Evaluators contributed to the learning, reflection, and decision-making processes that support community transformation over time.

These findings align with CEIL's original hypothesis that community ownership of evaluation can strengthen community transformation by increasing communities' ability to understand themselves, generate meaningful knowledge, and shape action around their own priorities.

Across the four years of CEIL, Community Evaluators strengthened their evaluation practice, grew as leaders, built enduring relationships, and extended their learning into organizations, professional networks, and community transformation efforts. Together, these findings suggest that community-owned evaluation influenced far more than individual learning. The experiences of Community Evaluators generated ripple effects that reached organizations, informed practice, contributed to the broader field of evaluation, and supported ongoing community transformation.

The final section of this report reflects on what these findings teach us about community-owned evaluation and presents the model that emerged through the CEIL journey.



# PART III

## *The Model*

# WHAT WE LEARNED

## COMMUNITY EVALUATION AS COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

**CEIL began with a hypothesis:**

*If communities own and lead the evaluation of their own communities, community transformation is more likely to happen in the directions communities want and need.*

This hypothesis emerged from BECOME's community transformation work and from a recognition that communities are too often the subjects of research rather than owners of the knowledge that shapes decisions affecting their lives.

Over four years, CEIL provided an opportunity to explore this hypothesis in practice.

Throughout this report, we documented the experiences of Community Evaluators, their growth as evaluators and leaders, the relationships they built, and the ways their work extended into organizations, professional networks, and community transformation efforts. Together, these findings invite a broader way of thinking about the role of evaluation in community change.

As we reflected on the evidence, one realization became increasingly clear. The contribution of CEIL extends beyond developing Community Evaluators. It suggests that community-owned evaluation can become a strategy for building the very capacities communities need to shape their own futures.

The insights that follow represent our interpretation of the evidence presented throughout this report. Together, they describe how our understanding of community-owned evaluation evolved through the CEIL journey.

## **INSIGHT 1: COMMUNITY EVALUATION BECOMES COMMUNITY CAPACITY**

One of the clearest insights from CEIL is that community-owned evaluation builds community capacity.

Community capacity is often understood in terms of organizations, funding, or programs. The findings from CEIL suggest that it also grows through a community's ability to ask meaningful questions, generate knowledge, interpret its own experiences, facilitate dialogue, and make informed decisions together.

As Community Evaluators strengthened their evaluation practice, communities also gained greater capacity to understand themselves. Residents became increasingly able to gather information, facilitate conversations, interpret findings, and contribute to decisions grounded in community knowledge.

This represents an important shift in how we think about evaluation.

Evaluation can go beyond a service communities receive and become a capacity communities cultivate from within.

## **INSIGHT 2: COMMUNITY EVALUATION BECOMES LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

The findings also suggest that evaluation can become a meaningful pathway for developing community leadership.

Throughout CEIL, Community Evaluators strengthened technical competencies while also growing in confidence, facilitation, communication, systems thinking, and professional identity. Many expanded leadership within their organizations, pursued new professional opportunities, and applied culturally responsive evaluation in new settings.

These outcomes emerged through the process of asking questions, listening deeply, facilitating conversations, interpreting community experiences, and helping others make meaning from shared knowledge.

Evaluation became a practice through which leadership developed.

This insight expands the role evaluation can play within community development. Evaluation not only supports leaders; it can also cultivate them.

## **INSIGHT 3: COMMUNITY EVALUATION BECOMES COMMUNITY LEARNING INFRASTRUCTURE**

CEIL also expanded our understanding of what evaluation can contribute to communities over time.

Evaluation is often associated with measuring outcomes, demonstrating accountability, or informing future decisions. Those functions remain important.

The findings from CEIL suggest that evaluation can also become part of a community's learning infrastructure.

Throughout the initiative, Community Evaluators engaged residents, organizations, and one another in asking questions, gathering information, interpreting findings, and reflecting on future action. These activities strengthened opportunities for collective learning and created processes communities could continue using beyond a single evaluation.

Seen in this way, evaluation becomes an enduring community resource that supports learning, reflection, adaptation, shared decision-making, and continuous improvement.

## **INSIGHT 4: COMMUNITY EVALUATION BECOMES A COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY**

Perhaps the most significant insight from CEIL is that community-owned evaluation contributes to community transformation not only through the knowledge it produces, but through the process itself.

Throughout this report, we described how Community Evaluators strengthened leadership, built relationships, supported organizations, facilitated dialogue, and participated in collective sensemaking. Together, these experiences strengthened communities' ability to understand themselves, identify priorities, make decisions, and take collective action.

Taken together, the findings suggest that evaluation can become an active part of community transformation.

# INSIGHT 4: COMMUNITY EVALUATION BECOMES A COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

*Continued*

It strengthens the people who lead change. It strengthens the relationships that sustain change. It strengthens the organizations that support change. And it strengthens communities' ability to generate and use knowledge in service of their own priorities.

The original hypothesis proposed that community ownership of evaluation could contribute to community transformation.

The CEIL journey invites us to extend that understanding.

*While community-owned evaluation can help communities understand transformation, it can also help communities build the leadership, relationships, knowledge, and collective capacity that make transformation possible.*

## LOOKING AHEAD

CEIL was an invitation to explore what becomes possible when communities are trusted to generate knowledge about themselves and use that knowledge to shape their own futures.

The CEIL model is one example of what can emerge when philanthropy, community organizations, scholars, and residents work together around a shared commitment to community ownership and learning.

We hope the experiences shared throughout this report encourage others to continue exploring, adapting, and strengthening community-owned evaluation in ways that honor the wisdom already present within communities.

The future of evaluation needs to not rest solely in developing better methods. It needs also rest expand who has the opportunity to ask the questions, interpret the answers, and shape what comes next.

# THE CEIL MODEL

## A FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNITY EVALUATORS

Over four years, the CEIL evolved from an idea into a tested model for developing Community Evaluators.

Grounded in theory and proven by practice, the model was shaped through implementation, participant feedback, ongoing evaluation, partnership, and continuous refinement. Community Evaluators, community organizations, BECOME, Dr. Stafford Hood and CREA, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation each contributed to its evolution. As the initiative unfolded, the curriculum, learning experiences, mentorship, and field experiences were continually strengthened in response to what participants and partners were learning together.

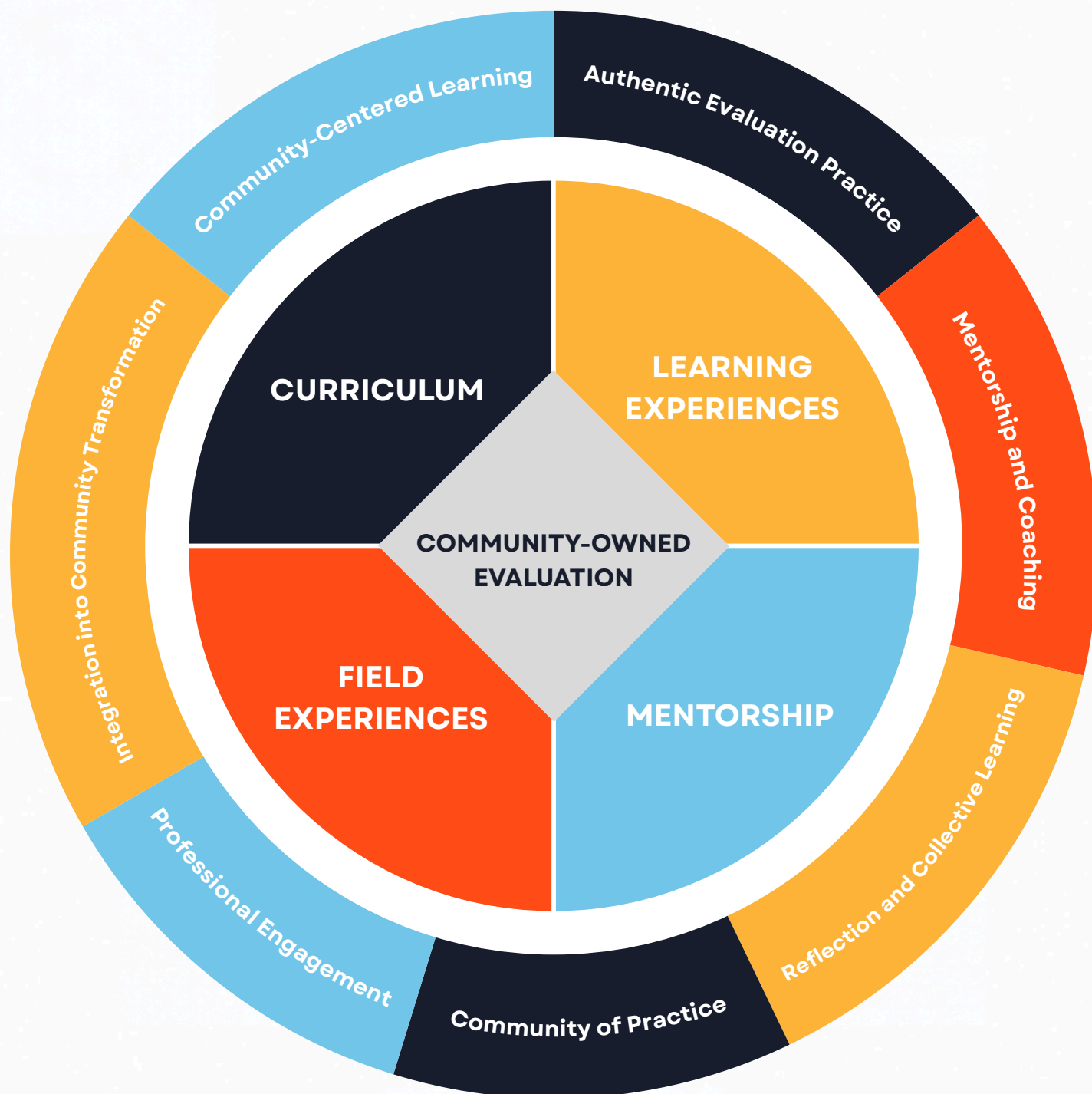
At its core, the CEIL Model is built on the premise that:

*Community-owned evaluation strengthens community transformation by developing the people, relationships, knowledge, and organizational capacity communities need to shape their own futures.*

While the model includes four concrete program elements, it integrates seven principles and practices that together support the development of Community Evaluators.

Rather than functioning as a sequence of isolated activities, these practices reinforce one another throughout the learning journey. Participants continually move between learning, practice, reflection, and application while remaining grounded in authentic community work.

**FIGURE 11.1: The CEIL Framework**



Community-owned evaluation strengthens community transformation by developing the people, relationships, knowledge, and organizational capacity communities need to shape their own futures.

# COMMUNITY-CENTERED LEARNING

Learning begins with community.

Participants develop a foundation in culturally responsive evaluation while exploring community history, culture, systems, assets, structural conditions, and the broader context in which evaluation occurs. Community wisdom and lived experience are recognized as essential sources of knowledge that strengthen evaluation practice.

## AUTHENTIC EVALUATION PRACTICE

Community Evaluators strengthen their practice through real evaluation experiences. In addition to classroom exercises, participants conduct interviews, facilitate focus groups, engage in observations, participate in collective sensemaking, analyze data, prepare reports, and share findings while partnering with community organizations engaged in ongoing community transformation efforts.

Practice becomes the primary vehicle for learning.

## MENTORSHIP AND COACHING

Mentorship is embedded throughout the learning experience.

Facilitators, experienced evaluators, community leaders, and peers provide coaching, encouragement, technical guidance, and opportunities for reflection throughout each stage of the evaluation process.

Mentorship supports both evaluation competence and leadership development.

## REFLECTION AND COLLECTIVE LEARNING

Reflection is intentionally woven throughout the model.

Community Evaluators regularly examine their experiences, question assumptions, interpret findings together, and connect evaluation practice to community transformation.

Reflection strengthens learning while continually improving both individual practice and the model itself.

# COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Learning must go beyond the individual.

Community Evaluators learn alongside one another, exchange perspectives, solve problems collaboratively, and build relationships that support continued learning beyond the formal training experience.

The community itself becomes an important source of knowledge, encouragement, and professional growth.

# PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

The CEIL Model intentionally connects Community Evaluators to the broader evaluation profession.

Conference presentations, scholarly writing, professional learning opportunities, and evaluation networks allow participants to contribute community perspectives while continuing to strengthen their own evaluation practice.

# INTEGRATION INTO COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

Evaluation is integrated into ongoing community transformation work.

Community Evaluators apply their learning within authentic community initiatives, allowing evaluation to become part of how communities learn, innovate, make decisions, and strengthen their collective work over time.

# THE CEIL THEORY OF TRANSFORMATION

As Community Evaluators strengthen their evaluation practice, they also develop leadership, confidence, relationships, facilitation skills, and professional identity. These individual changes contribute to stronger organizations, greater community learning, and increased community capacity to generate and use knowledge. Together, these capacities strengthen communities' ability to make informed decisions and advance community transformation.

FIGURE 11.2: CEIL Theory of Transformation



## AN EVOLVING MODEL

The CEIL Model represents an important milestone but not a final destination.

Like the communities it is designed to serve, the model will continue to evolve through implementation, partnership, reflection, and learning in various contexts. As additional organizations, universities, and communities implement CEIL, new insights will strengthen both the curriculum and the model while remaining grounded in the principles that shaped its development.

The following chapter explores what this continued evolution could mean for philanthropy, universities, community organizations, and the broader evaluation field.

# *THE INVITATION*

## CONTINUING THE JOURNEY OF COMMUNITY-OWNED EVALUATION

Over four years, community members became Community Evaluators. Organizations strengthened their evaluation practice. New relationships emerged. Leadership grew. Community knowledge expanded. Together, these experiences deepened our understanding of what community-owned evaluation can become and how it can contribute to community transformation.

This work is only beginning. The future of community-owned evaluation will be further shaped by the communities, organizations, institutions, and partners who choose to continue this journey together.

We extend that invitation here.

## AN INVITATION TO COMMUNITIES

Communities possess extraordinary wisdom about their own histories, strengths, aspirations, and possibilities.

We invite communities to recognize evaluation as something they can own, lead, and use in service of their own priorities.

Community-owned evaluation creates opportunities for residents to ask meaningful questions, generate knowledge, interpret findings together, and use that knowledge to shape decisions about their future.

Every community deserves the opportunity to build this capacity from within.

# AN INVITATION TO COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Community organizations play a vital role in creating the conditions for community-owned evaluation to flourish.

We invite organizations to invest in developing Community Evaluators alongside the programs and initiatives they already lead.

Rather than viewing evaluation solely as an external requirement or accountability process, organizations can integrate it into ongoing learning, innovation, and community transformation.

The CEIL Model offers one tested framework for doing so.

We hope organizations will partner with us to implement the model while thoughtfully adapting the learning experience to reflect the unique strengths and priorities of their communities.

# AN INVITATION TO UNIVERSITIES

Universities have an important opportunity to expand how evaluation is taught, practiced, and advanced.

We invite universities to deepen partnerships with communities as co-educators, co-researchers, and co-creators of knowledge.

Community members bring expertise that cannot be learned solely in classrooms. When universities and communities learn alongside one another, evaluation becomes richer, more relevant, and more responsive to the communities it seeks to serve.

Together, we can prepare the next generation of evaluators while strengthening community leadership and advancing culturally responsive evaluation.

# AN INVITATION TO PHILANTHROPY

Philanthropy helped make CEIL possible.

The willingness of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to invest in an emerging idea created space to explore what community-owned evaluation could become.

We invite philanthropy to continue investing not only in evaluations, but in communities' long-term capacity to lead evaluation themselves.

Developing Community Evaluators is an investment that expands past any single project or grant. It strengthens local leadership, organizational learning, community capacity, and the infrastructure communities need to continue learning and transforming long after a particular initiative has ended.

Supporting Community Evaluators means investing in communities' ability to generate knowledge, make informed decisions, and shape their own futures.

# AN INVITATION TO THE EVALUATION FIELD

The evaluation field continues to evolve.

CEIL contributes one example of what becomes possible when community wisdom, culturally responsive evaluation, authentic practice, and shared leadership come together.

We invite evaluators to continue expanding who is recognized as an evaluator, how evaluation is practiced, and what evaluation is ultimately intended to accomplish. Our hope is that the field continues creating opportunities for communities to own, lead, and benefit from evaluation in ways that reflect their own cultures, strengths, and aspirations.

# CONTINUING TO LEARN TOGETHER

Like every meaningful community transformation effort, CEIL remains a work in progress.

The model will continue to evolve through new partnerships, new communities, and new learning. We look forward to continuing this journey alongside organizations, universities, funders, and communities who believe that evaluation can be a catalyst for community leadership and transformation.

# A FINAL REFLECTION

Community-owned evaluation not only strengthens evaluation, but also develops Community Evaluators. It strengthens leadership. It deepens relationships. It expands community capacity. It supports organizational learning. In doing so, it contributes to community transformation.

This report documents one part of that journey. We hope many more chapters will be written by communities across the country and around the world.

In short, community transformation happens when communities are trusted, supported, and equipped to shape their own futures.

*Our hope is that one day every community has the opportunity to develop Community Evaluators who help their communities learn, lead, and shape the future they envision. When communities own evaluation, they build the knowledge and capacity to shape their own futures.*

For any questions or inquiries, please contact [info@becomecenter.org](mailto:info@becomecenter.org).

# Appendix A

## CEIL Recruitment Flyer (Sample)



**BECOME**  
*Transforming Our Reality*

**As a Community Evaluator You Will**

- Learn about and use community feedback to make community-driven change.
- Receive a monthly stipend and an opportunity to earn a Community Evaluator Certificate.

**BECOME works with people and organizations to help them realize their vision of a thriving community**

**Visit [www.becomecenter.org](http://www.becomecenter.org) to learn more about BECOME.**

**For Frequently Asked Questions, please scan the QR code.**

**You are invited to make a difference!**

**Your Ideas, Questions and Experiences Matter**



**If you are a resident who is interested in making positive changes in Auburn Gresham then consider partnering with BECOME!**

### **Commitments to Join**

- 20-25 hours per month with a blend of face to face and virtual meetings
- A desire to contribute to the betterment of Auburn Gresham
- Must be at least 18 years of age to apply

**Contact Larry Washington at [lwashington@becomecenter.org](mailto:lwashington@becomecenter.org) to apply today.**

