

Who Benefits the Most from the Todo Promotores Clearinghouse?

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Background: The need for well-trained staffers

In recent years, local nonprofit community-based health providers who serve Latino populations have increasingly turned to promotores, or community lay health workers, to facilitate their service provision. Promotores work in a variety of capacities at nonprofits: as front-line service providers who supply basic services and as health educators who give valuable information on important health topics. The rationale is that promotores' lay status as community members allows them to connect with Latinos in culturally competent and sensitive ways, thereby creating trustworthy relationships between nonprofit providers and Latinos. These relationships can help overcome Latinos' mistrust of the mainstream medical system and reduce other barriers to care.

But many nonprofits can find promotores programming a daunting task. Nonprofits need sufficient organizational and financial resources to run promotores programs, an understanding of contemporary community needs and how promotores may address those needs, and the momentum to sustain their promotores programming. Underscoring these factors is the prominent need for a well-trained staff, whether that pertains to executive and program leaders, who must understand the benefits and costs of promotores programming, or promotores themselves, who must be adept at working in front-line positions in Latino communities. The widespread use of unpaid volunteers as front-line staffers, a phenomenon common in community health worker programs, can complicate labor retention efforts and staffing continuity.

Until quite recently, the challenge for health service nonprofits that want to execute promotores programming has been the relative lack of scientifically informed and systematic skills-building

mechanisms that help create a well-trained and capable workforce. The dearth of training programs leads to the constant reinvention of labor development throughout the nonprofit health service community, a situation that raises labor costs and organizational inefficiencies and can diminish program effectiveness and outcomes. However, a new program, entitled the Todo Promotores Clearinghouse (TPC), aims to fill this labor training and skills-building void.

Funded by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, a part of the National Institutes of Health, TPC is a web-based, multifaceted program that was developed with input from experts in the nonprofit service provision, Latino health, and promotores fields. TPC contains a curriculum of 25 lessons for users to learn about the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of promotores programs; videos of nonprofit leaders and front-line staffers sharing their experiences and lessons learned in promotores provision; and several case studies, developed and submitted to TPC by nonprofit leaders, of promotores program challenges and solutions. The TPC website is connected to multiple social media platforms that seek commentary and submissions from front-line promotores on their experiences and other timely topics. Taken together, TPC attempts to be a beginning-to-end program to build the capacity of staffers at Latino health nonprofits to effectively run promotores programs.

TPC was developed on the dual premise that although executive directors, program leaders, and front-line promotores have varied responsibilities to make promotores programs work, there are cross-cutting factors that affect all nonprofit staffers. These factors include the knowledge to formulate, implement, and understand the impact of their nonprofit's promotores program; their attitudes

toward the program; and their confidence, or self-efficacy, that they may effectively execute the program. These factors – significant knowledge, positive attitudes, and high self-efficacy – are the characteristics of a well-trained staff. In this brief, we assess, among a sample of nonprofit staffers, including executive directors, program directors, and front-line promotores at Latino-serving nonprofit health organizations, the extent to which TPC increases knowledge and positive attitudes about promotores programming and perceived self-efficacy to administer a promotores program at their nonprofits. Further, we explore how capable they appear to be to conduct promotores programming after exposure to TPC. Using this approach, we create a series of profiles of nonprofit staffers who appear to benefit most from their exposure to TPC.

Methods

To conduct this assessment, we recruited staffers at nonprofits in multiple states in the U.S. into a pretest/posttest, two-group study in the summer of 2017. The staffers in the study were at nonprofits that either use promotores or not; among nonprofits that do use promotores programs, we included those that pay their promotores, rely on volunteers, or use a dual approach. We assigned the staffers randomly to an experimental group or a control group. We exposed staffers in the experimental group to TPC and asked them to take the 25 courses and explore all other facets of the TPC website. Staffers in the control group received no exposure to TPC. Staffers in both groups took online surveys at two points, namely, before the experimental group staffers received the TPC exposure and after the experimental group staffers received the TPC exposure.

The study included 109 nonprofit staffers. After cleaning and processing the survey data, we included 99 staffers in the data analysis, excluding 10 participants because of missing data or other data irregularities. Of the 99 participants, 48 were in the treatment group and 51 were in the control group. Because we take a particular look in this brief at who benefits the most from TPC, thereby necessitating their exposure to TPC, we limit our analysis in this brief to the 48 staffers in the treatment group. [Table 1](#) provides the sample's characteristics, including individual factors, such as age, gender, and years of experience, and organizational factors about their nonprofits.

The primary dependent variable in the study is the effectiveness of TPC to increase the capability of staffers to conduct promotores programming. We use three categories of measures to calculate TPC's effectiveness: knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy. To examine knowledge, we asked each staffer 20 questions about promotores programming on topics in the TPC courses. For attitudes, we asked questions on promotores program implementation, program relevance, the importance of promotores programming, and the effectiveness

of promotores in meeting the health needs of the community. To assess self-efficacy, we asked questions that aimed to test staffers' beliefs in their ability to formulate, implement, and evaluate promotores programs at their nonprofit. We created composite scores, ranging from zero to 100, for knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy for each staffer and related them bivariate to individual and organizational factors to create profiles of whom TPC benefits the most.

There are important limitations to this study. Most notably, the low number of staffers in the treatment group limits our data analysis to bivariate techniques, meaning that the findings are simply associative. What is more, the limited treatment group sample substantially restricts the generalizability of this study. Still, our approach to assessing the impact of TPC as a skills-building tool and its emphasis on whom TPC may most benefit provides illuminating preliminary findings.

Findings

We show the significant correlations between nonprofit staffers' exposure to TPC and the composite measures in [Table 2](#). The following key findings emerge:

Staffers who work at grassroots nonprofits tend to benefit more from TPC than staffers at more “professionalized” and larger, but not necessarily older, nonprofits.

Indeed, staffers at nonprofits with fewer promotores on staff and those nonprofits that focus on select and often singular service outreach areas demonstrated greater knowledge about promotores programming after their exposure to TPC. Similarly, staffers at nonprofits that relied more heavily on volunteers to provide promotores services showed the biggest gains in knowledge from pretest to posttest. TPC also tends to benefit staffers at grassroots nonprofits with respect to changes in attitudes and self-efficacy. Staffers at nonprofits that use more voluntary promotores tended to show the biggest positive attitude changes and gains in self-efficacy about promotores programming. TPC also positively benefits the self-efficacy of staffers at nonprofits with relatively few promotores.

TPC tends to benefit front-line staffers at nonprofits more than their managers and directors.

In fact, attitudes and self-efficacy about promotores programming negatively relate to being in management positions, a surprising finding because one may suspect that upper management would feel more positively about promotores programming and their ability to execute it than front-line staffers. Instead, perhaps because of their frequent

and proximate exposure to clients, front-line staffers exited the TPC program with better feelings about promotores service provision than managers and directors.

The impact of TPC relates to a staffer's tenure at their nonprofit, but in complex and cross-cutting ways.

On one hand, those who have spent more time on staff at their nonprofit benefit more from TPC than staffers with fewer years of tenure. Indeed, the effectiveness of TPC in building knowledge and self-efficacy positively relates to a staffer's time spent at his or her nonprofit. However, this relationship cuts in the opposite direction for attitudes. In fact, time in one's position and time on staff negatively relate to attitudes about promotores programming, particularly after staffers' exposure to TPC. This apparent contradiction likely relates to the interesting phenomenon of people acquiring skills and the belief that they can execute those skills while simultaneously viewing the issues surrounding those skills less favorably. In the case of TPC, some longer-tenured nonprofit staffers emerged more knowledgeable and efficacious about promotores programming than shorter-tenured staffers, but they also felt less positive about promotores service provision.

TPC engenders younger nonprofit staffers with more positive attitudes than older staffers.

This relationship is particularly strong when focusing on nonprofits with fewer paid promotores and smaller promotores staffs. At these types of nonprofits, young staffers are overwhelmingly positive about promotores programming. However, young staffers show insignificantly more knowledge and self-efficacy about promotores programming than older staffers, meaning that TPC's effectiveness as a skills-building tool appears to be relatively similar across nonprofit staffers' age groups.

Implications

This brief's underlying hypothesis is that, regardless of their individual characteristics or the types of organizations for which they work, staffers will benefit from TPC equally. That theoretical premise proved unconfirmed in practice as our findings show that different staffers benefit from TPC in varied ways. While many types of staffers experienced gains in knowledge, positive attitudes, and self-efficacy around executing promotores programs, the biggest beneficiaries of TPC are front-line staffers at small, grassroots organizations. With respect to attitudes as the primary focus, TPC significantly impacts younger staffers.

There are two possible explanations for the differential benefits of TPC. First, because staffers in the study self-administered their use of TPC, some experienced TPC's coursework and videos more extensively, whether in time spent on them or the attention given to them, than others. Such differential "dose" may have produced greater knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy change from pretest to posttest and more capacity to conduct promotores programming at the conclusion of the study. In other words, a portion of the differential benefits of TPC can be explained by the self-determined process of exposure.

Second, we suspect that some staffers were primed to benefit more from the TPC content than others because of their orientation to nonprofit service provision. For example, researchers have written extensively about the altruistic tendencies of new workers who flow into the nonprofit sector, particularly at the local, community-based level (Mason, 1996; Onyx and Maclean, 1996; Twombly, 2008). Therefore, it is unsurprising that younger staffers in the study would show more positive attitude increases than older workers. In a related sense, promotores outreach can be intensive, hands-on work, and like all professions with this interpersonal service component, burnout, also referred to as compassion fatigue, is a potential risk. Because findings from this study suggest those with more experience in promotores programming tend to have less positive attitudes, future research that explores burnout among promotores may be warranted.

In the end, for a nonprofit community-based health service organization that serves Latinos at the local level, a qualified and well-trained staff is paramount for the successful execution of promotores programming. Our findings suggest that short-term exposure to TPC produces some knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy gains for a vast array of nonprofit staffers, but it benefits strongly and positively front-line staffers at small, grassroots organizations, the very types of nonprofits that often struggle with sustainable organizational resources and staff retention issues that reduce their effectiveness. Therefore, despite their typical resource constraints, these organizations can derive substantial "bang for their buck" by using TPC as a skills-building tool for staffers who seem primed to benefit from it.

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