Candidate: Nakia S. Baylis
For the degree of: Doctor of Philosophy
Department: Educational Leadership, Research and Technology
Title: Improving Evaluation in Nonprofit Organizations: A Study of How Evaluation Requests for Proposals Are Developed, Responded To, and Fulfilled

Committee: Dr. Gary Miron, Chair
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10 a.m. to noon
4402 Sangren Hall

It is often necessary for nonprofit organizations to formulate a Request for Proposal (RFP) to procure essential contracted services. This is most common when seeking the services of an external evaluator. Since most NPOs do not have internal evaluation staff, developing an appropriate RFP can be quite challenging. With limited literature and resources to guide nonprofit organizations on how to prepare RFPs, the process for procuring qualified evaluators can be even more daunting. This lack of resources and support can lead to insufficient or incomplete RFPs, subsequently narrowing the pool of qualified potential bidders and reducing the extent to which the outcomes envisioned in RFPs are fulfilled. Funding agencies regularly cite accountability and sustainability as two key features for nonprofit organizations that are linked to their capacity to have a positive impact on communities or target populations. The ability of nonprofit organizations to recruit, select, and oversee contracted evaluators is closely connected to both accountability and sustainability. This study explores how nonprofit organizations navigate through the RFP process.

Three stages of the process were investigated: (1) RFP development, (2) RFP response, and (3) RFP fulfillment. An exploratory study using a mixed-methods design was
used to better understand how RFPs are developed and fulfilled. The study also describes the relevant attributes of nonprofit organizations and of the staff responsible for overseeing evaluations, as well as the interactions between these organizations and the evaluation consultants they hire. The findings indicate that training in RFP development and a general understanding of evaluation leads to intended outcomes around fulfillment. Training is particularly important for small nonprofit organizations with limited time, staff, and budgets. The obstacles and challenges faced by these NPOs ultimately impact what can be learned from an evaluation. However, technical assistance from sponsor organizations can help nonprofit organizations overcome these challenges and will presumably increase community impact around funding goals. Training workshops, dissemination of tools, and coaching of staff in nonprofit organizations by a professional evaluator can potentially improve how often and how well RFPs are fulfilled.