

Leveraging Program Evaluation for Cross-Organizational Collaboration and Decision-Making

WestEd Evaluation Team: Andrew Grillo-Hill, Joshua Valcarcel, Kimberly Nguyen, Rasha Elsayed, Karen Melchior

November 2025



Agenda

N3 Program Overview

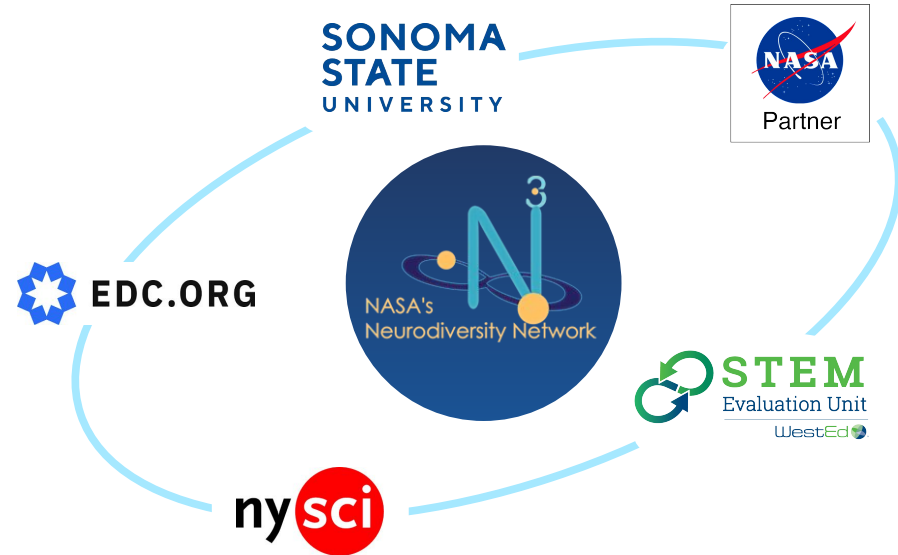
Program evaluators as a key partner

The evaluation debrief process

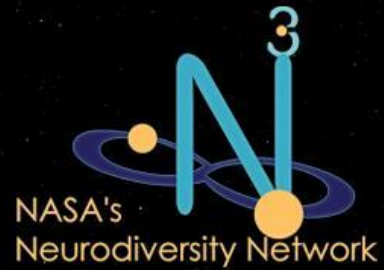
Breakout – Application to your context

Collective insights

Debrief



What is *NASA's Neurodiversity Network (N3)*?

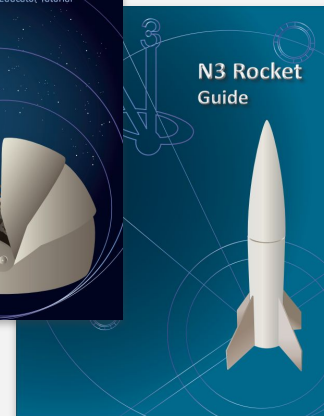
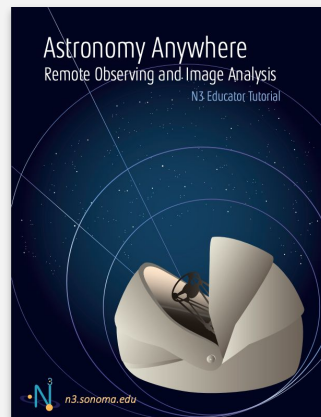


- Five-year program
- Main goal is to provide a pathway to NASA participation and STEM employment for neurodiverse learners
- Program aims to:
 - 1) redesign NASA resources with significant input from autistic learners and
 - 2) offers a internship program for autistic high school students

N3 Codesign Projects

Initial NASA resources targeted for co-development:

- 2021** Photometry activities on AfH were developed as part of NASA's Universe of Learning in an informal learning pathway that starts with image analysis using MicroObservatory
- 2022** Model rocketry and payload development program for URM community college students
- 2023** Heliophysics activities that include building a sun spotter and getting ready to observe eclipses in 2023 (annular) and 2024 (total) or partials
- 2025** All three units were released to the public on the N3 website



What is the co-redevelopment process?



Collaboration involves instructors from 5 schools in the Bay Area that work with Autistic youth during summer programs or in other out-of-school times.

Internship Program Details

- Summer interns complete at least 100 hours of work between June 1 and September 1 each year.
- Mentors meet with interns weekly.
- All internships are completed virtually.
- Interns are paid a \$1,000 stipend.
- All interns are paired with a Subject Matter Expert (SME) from NASA's Science Mission Directorate with expertise in at least one of the following areas:

Astrobiology, Astrophysics, Earth and Environmental Science, Heliophysics and Planetary Science, Space Instrumentation

“

I'd like to say thank you to the N3 program. This was an amazing opportunity and I have already recommended it to other folks that I know with neurodiverse kids that might be interested. Just the skills that [intern] was able to learn, the long-term relationship with their mentor, a deliverable at the end, and the fact that they got paid to do it!

”

– Parent/guardian of intern



Evaluation

WestEd is the external evaluator for N3
Our purpose is to ensure N3 meets its goals



Increase neurodiverse learners'

- STEM interest and confidence.
- interest in NASA-related careers.



Increase NASA subject matter experts' experience
in working with neurodiverse individuals

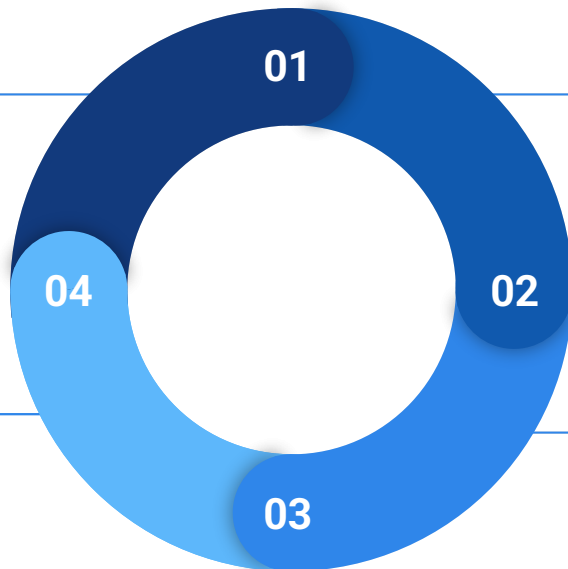
What we do (simplified)

1. Listen and learn

Evaluators attend trainings, conferences, and read books and other resources.

4. Share findings and recommendations

Evaluators meet with N3 staff to review findings. The program uses these findings to improve the program.



2. Surveys and interviews to gather information from participants

To measure if N3 meets its project goals.

3. Analyze the Data

The evaluation data is analyzed. Evaluators make notes about modifications to instruments for next year and summarize what was learned.

Evaluators as Facilitators of Cross-Organizational Communication

Engage program partners in shared project leadership

- Intentional and actionable evaluation tools and practices
- Facilitating the structured dialogue between program partners,

Build capacity and foster trust between project partners

- Providing findings from the evaluation in a format that empowers program partners to make informed decisions, and
- Documenting the partnership's decision-making

N3 Evaluation Debrief Feedback Form

N3 Evaluation Debrief Feedback Form

Instructions for use:

The form below will be used by the evaluation team to determine how the provided formative feedback is being leveraged by project leaders. The purpose of the evaluation recommendations/findings are to help refine and focus the materials and professional development experiences the program offers, as well as provide summative information on how neurodiverse learners engage with the materials and internship program, how SMEs are prepared to work with neurodiverse learners, how informal educators are prepared to use NASA resources with neurodiverse learners, and what short-and long-term benefits neurodiverse learners, SMEs, and informal educators gain from the program.

To use, please fill in the columns for "PI Response" and "Action Taken" for each evaluation recommendation/finding. Please note that not all recommendations/findings will require an action and that column can be left blank if no action was taken. The evaluation team will 1) send this template along with each evaluation memo to document how the PI has leveraged evaluation findings to make changes and 2) schedule a debrief meeting with PI (and up to one additional project team member) 4-6 weeks later to discuss what actions have been, or will be, taken to utilize formative feedback, as requested by funder.



[Insert Evaluation Memo Title]

Evaluation Recommendation/Finding	PI Response/Question	Action Taken*

**Not every recommendation/finding requires an action*

1. To what extent did the timing of the release of these evaluation findings support or hinder your development work, if any?
2. Do you have anything else you would like to share about your use of the evaluation findings?



How we engage with partners

1 Collect evaluation data, analyze it, and write report

2 Evaluators fill out the debrief form with findings and recommendations

3 Share evaluation report and debrief form with program partners

- Providing data in a format that empowers program partners to make informed decisions

4 Program partners process the findings and respond with reactions and next steps in the debrief form

- Facilitating dialogue between program partners

5 Evaluators schedule a meeting with relevant program partners to discuss reactions to findings and recommendations to brainstorm next steps (call to action)

- A mutually beneficial and equitable exchange of information
- Documenting decision-making for transparent communication and reporting

6 Program partners take decisive action to modify the program based on evaluation findings

- Building capacity and trust in program partners to have focused conversations

7 New iteration of program implemented and process starts over

- Interns, mentors, parents feel heard and the program experience is improved for the next cohort
- The program, overall, had more efficient, equitable, and transparent shared leadership

Examples of Y1 Findings and Respective Program Improvements

Evaluation Recommendation/Finding

Action Taken

Provide mentors with student-specific guidance, given the wide range of needs and abilities of students



“Intake meetings” with each intern, their mentor, and someone from N3. Plus bimonthly intern group & bimonthly SME meetings.

Coordinate vacation time with mentors ahead of time to avoid disruptions in communications between mentor and mentee.



Program will ask SMEs to provide a “blackout list” of dates when they are brought on board

Training on presentation skills for interns



Program will have an intern meeting specifically about presentations so all feel prepared

Examples of Y2 Findings and Respective Program Improvements

Evaluation Recommendation/Finding

Action Taken

Offer opportunities beyond the three-month internship for interns to expand their project.



Mentors are encouraged to extend collaboration efforts with interns, where applicable.

Have opportunities for interns to receive and respond to questions from the audience during showcase presentation.



Intern Showcase presentations include a Q&A section at the end of each presentation.

Support interns in becoming advocates for neurodivergent individuals by having them continue to be part of the N3 network to support future interns.



Intern alumni are now part of an email listserv and invited to attend Intern Monthly Meetings.

Examples of Y3 Findings and Respective Program Improvements

Evaluation Recommendation/Finding

Action Taken

More opportunity for interns and mentors at the beginning of the internship around relationship-building, expectations, and setting goals.



Program will add support to the 1-on-1 meetings so mentors enter intro meetings with clear expectations and student preferences for communication.

Support intern collaboration through community building during weekly meetings or extending them to include a social time with interactive activities and breakout rooms.



Program will add optional “social meetings” and a “project chat” for interns to chat about their work. Perhaps host some informal/social spaces on the Discord chat.

Consider how best to structure and communicate around the student showcases to avoid repetition, encourage questions, and promote constructive peer review and feedback.



Program will have small group practice sessions so interns have a chance to practice giving and receiving feedback.

Q&A

Any questions before we breakout into smaller groups for discussion?

Breakout Discussion Question

Evaluations can look different in different settings, but the purpose of evaluations are to assesses the effectiveness of programs, projects, or products by collecting and analyzing data, then providing feedback for improvement.

- In your work, how do you use evaluation for facilitating dialogues, building trust, and creating shared leadership in complex cross-organization partnerships?
- How can evaluators play the role of facilitators across organizations?
- What elements of the evaluation debrief form would you use in the context of your work? What would you add or remove, and why?

Additional Questions and Comments?



N3 Program:

<https://n3.sonoma.edu/>



WestEd Contact:

Andrew Grillo-Hill
Senior Evaluator
agrillo@wested.org