

[KERRY E. VACHTA, PhD](#)
[Evaluation & Education Associate](#)
[Carleton College, Science Education Resource Center \(SERC\)](#)

CAREER SUMMARY

Specializing in systems change and program evaluation; adaptive planning and learning; community-based and participatory research and evaluation; and strategic thought partnership, I have spent my career honing and applying the skills needed to support community-based, non-profit, educational, and philanthropic organizations in their pursuit of equity-centered, community-driven change - primarily around environment, food, and health. I help my partners create a shared vision and goals, develop a plan to achieve them, and apply data gathered through systematic, typically multi-level/multi-method, evaluation to assess how well the plan is working and the intended and unintended impacts of their efforts as they unfold. Through strategic thought partnership, we apply the resulting learning to make evidence-based adjustments that better align practice and process with desired outcomes to, ultimately, achieve success.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

[Evaluation & Education Associate, Carleton College Science Education Resource Center \(SERC\)](#) (October 2021 - present). At SERC, I design evaluation plans and tools, develop research and evaluation proposals, cultivate relationships with partners and funders, and collaborate with SERC colleagues on the execution of funded projects. As a member of the evaluation team, I provide evaluation, learning, and evidence-based strategic adaptation support for partners, primarily affiliated with higher education, who are working on vital science education, research, and translation activities addressing climate, agricultural and food systems, and equitable access to diverse educational and career pathways.

[Founder and Executive Director, Rogue Scholar, LLC and Just Research, LLC](#). Through these consulting firms, I put the skills I developed during my 30 year-long academic and evaluation consulting career (e.g. systems change, organizational and program evaluation; participatory and community-based research; strategic and adaptive planning and learning; thought partnership; grant development and management, etc.) to work with governmental, philanthropic, non-profit, and community-based organizations. Just Research provides these services on a sliding scale for community-based and smaller non-profit organizations pursuing social justice and equity - especially health-, food-, land-, and environmental justice.

[Data & Evaluation Specialist - COVID Crisis Counseling Program Team, Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains](#). Provided internal evaluation and learning support for the FEMA-funded Crisis Counseling Program team as they worked to help individuals, families, organizations, and communities in the Denver area and Western Slope through the COVID19 pandemic. Also conducted a statewide study of the quality of life of crisis counseling service providers and team members for the Colorado Spirit statewide Covid Crisis Response program.

[Senior Researcher, Spark Policy Institute](#). In this role, I helped to secure and direct evaluation, organizational consulting, and systems change projects. This included writing proposals, designing research and evaluation plans, tools, and protocols, and supervising an interdisciplinary team of researchers, project managers, and other support staff through all aspects of projects designed to help clients create, implement, and assess typically community-based/participatory, multi-level and cross-sector strategies to effect systems change around complex problems including generating deliverables for internal/client, funder, and public

audiences. I served as Spark's team lead on the national BUILD Health Challenge evaluation team and Lead Evaluator of the Missouri Foundation for Health's Infant Mortality Reduction Initiative.

[Principle Investigator/Project Director of the Detroit Child Health Incubator Research Project \(CHIRP\)](#). CHIRP was a \$4.4 million, NIFA-funded 6-year participatory action research partnership with Detroit community-based organizations addressing child health and well-being "through a food justice lens." Authored grant. Designed financial and data management tools allowing community partners to manage their own grant resources while maintaining compliance with research protocols, federal and university regulations. Facilitated flow of funding, resources and information between partners, the university and the funder. Designed and oversaw implementation of all research and evaluation activities. Generated reporting to partners, funder, and academic audiences. CHIRP was launched at Oakland University and relocated to Michigan State. My appointments included:

Extension Specialist: Participatory Research in Environment and Community Health.
Michigan State University Extension Health and Nutrition Institute.

Research Associate Professor, Oakland University, Rochester, MI.

[Director, Evaluation Research Unit, Center for Urban Studies, Office of the Provost, Wayne State University](#). Detroit, MI. Established contracts and grants sufficient to support the unit with an average annual budget ~ \$450k. Designed and served as Lead Evaluator for more than 25 projects. Hired, trained, and supervised team of project managers (typically doctoral students), undergraduate research assistants, and support staff. Conducted and/or supervised data collection, statistical and qualitative analysis, and reporting to clients and funders.

[Director, Evaluation Services, Private sector grant writing and evaluation firm](#). Developed evaluation plans for grant proposals. Developed evaluation protocols and measures, analyzed data, generated reports for federal funders (typically US Dept. of Education) and clients. Served as lead evaluator for select projects/clients. Recruited, contracted and managed sub-contractors. Established evaluation and professional guidelines for sub-contractors. Managed departmental budget.

[Director for Community-Based Research, Center for Community Action and Research. The Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg](#). Created and implemented CBR program linking graduate students with CB/PAR and related opportunities in service to CBOs in Harrisburg and Middletown, PA. Led development of training and manual for other faculty interested in adopting CB/PAR and service learning and directory of community partners interested in hosting students.

[Assistant Professor, Environment, Community & Social Change, The Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg](#). Designed/delivered courses in Community Psychology, Action Research, Environmental and Urban Sociology, Race & Ethnicity, and intersectional Women's Studies. Departmental and Campus service.

[Director, Environmental Programs and Offerings, Antioch College](#). Designed environmental studies curriculum and courses to meet the needs of students in 2 sponsoring divisions: one focusing on policy and economics, the other on social movements and humanities. Recruited cross-listed offerings from other university faculty. Chaired senior thesis committees. Served on multiple campus committees. See teaching dossier (available upon request if not attached) for program content.

[Project Manager, Urban Resources Initiative, Michigan State University Department of Forestry \(URI/MSU\)](#). Built community partnerships to design, implement, and evaluate participatory community redevelopment projects and their impacts on the participating communities and CBOs -

including their use of the projects to facilitate strategic planning and leadership skills and to address equity and land-justice. (Profiled in the US Environmental Protection Agency's 1995 report, Sustainability in Action: Profiles of Community Initiatives Across the United States, highlighting the nation's most promising contributions to urban sustainability. Available at: <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951d015292091;view=1up;seq=3> profile #162.)

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Forestry: Michigan State University. Fall 1999 (with concentrations in Urban, Community and Environmental Studies). Dissertation: *Participatory Development and Organizational Empowerment: Community Forestry in Detroit*.

M.A., Ecological/Community Psychology: Michigan State University. 1993. Master's Project: *Using the Cognitive Social Learning Variables to Predict Participation in the Environmental Movement*.

B.A., Psychology: University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. 1987. B.A., Sociology: University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign 1987.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Minnesota Evaluation Association

American Evaluation Association and select Topical Interest Groups (TIGs), including: STEM Education and Training; Systems in Evaluation; Environmental Program Evaluation; Mixed Methods Evaluation; Organizational Learning and Evaluation Capacity Building; and Collaborative, Participatory & Empowerment Evaluation.

SELECTED RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PROJECTS and KEY ELEMENTS

Current or Recent SERC Projects

(SERC evaluation team members collaborate across many projects. Those on which I serve in a leadership role are listed below.)

External Evaluation of the Large-scale CoPe: Megalopolitan Coastal Transformation Hub (MACH): Improving the Understanding and Governance of Co-Evolving Hazards, Development, and Coastal Processes. PI: Robert Kopp, Rutgers University (Developmental evaluation; social network analysis; broader impacts, workforce development, and graduate studio implementation evaluations.)

Keck Geology Consortium. PIs: Karl Wirth, Macalester College & Cameron Davidson, Carleton College. (Provide methodological and statistical consulting, analysis, and reporting.)

NSF-funded S-STEM programs with partners at the College of Dubuque and Morningside University. PIs: Kelly Grussendorf, College of Dubuque. Anni Moore, Morningside University (Implementation and student outcome assessment including impacts on STEM identity, confidence, and persistence.)

Rutgers FAME (Food, Agriculture, and Marine Ecosystems) STEM Learning Program. PI:

James Simon, Rutgers University. Formative and Impact Evaluation (Process and outcome evaluation looking at impact on student and near-peer mentor STEM engagement, identity, confidence, and persistence and on participating scientists.)

Previous Evaluation Leadership

Foundation/Agency Evaluation Projects and Grants

Missouri Foundation for Health, Infant Mortality Reduction Initiative Evaluation. Project Lead. Spring 2019 - July 2020.

BUILD Health Challenge. Initiative level evaluation team, Spring 2019- Feb 2020. (Cohort 2.0 Evaluation Lead.)

Kresge Foundation: Detroit Food Justice Task Force 2010 - 2011.

Ford Foundation: Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion: Community Recognition, Reconciliation and Renewal Project 2008 - 2011.

United Way of Southeast Michigan: Resource Investment Sub-Committee, Developing an Awardee Self- Evaluation Tool. 2010.

Skillman Foundation: Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion: Building Inclusive Communities in Southwest Detroit 2009 - 2010.

Skillman Foundation Good Schools: Making the Grade Initiative, Detroit, MI 2006 - 2008.

Completed Major Grant

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Childhood Obesity Prevention Program Child Health Incubator Research Project (CHIRP). Grant co-author, Principal Investigator/Project Director. Project Budget: \$4.4 million. Evaluation research budget: \$950,000. 2011 - 2017.

Other Federal Grants

USDA Small Business Innovation Research, Detroit Civic Agriculture Network: 2010.

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, Biotechnology Instruction for High School Science Teachers WSU Center of Environmental Health Sciences, Detroit, MI: 2010 - 2011.

National Science Foundation (NSF). Broadening Participation in Computing Information Management and Systems Engineering, Wayne State University Department of Computer Science, Detroit, MI: 2006 - 2010.

National Institute of General Medical Sciences of the National Institutes of Health. Wayne State University Initiative for Maximizing Student Diversity, Detroit, MI: 2006.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Providence/St. Johns, Detroit, MI: 2006 2007.

State Grants

Martin L. King, Jr.-Cesar Chavez-Rosa Parks (KCP). Initiative for Select Student Support Services Wayne State University Pathways to Nursing, Detroit, MI: 2006.

Partner Self-Funded Evaluations

Bradford Academy Stakeholder Evaluation, Southfield, MI 2008 - 2009, 2007 - 2008, 2006 - 2007.

Youth Development Commission (YDC) Program Evaluation, Detroit, MI: 2007 2006 YDC Board,

Administration and Fund Development Evaluation, Detroit, MI 2007.

University of Detroit Jesuit Academy. Evaluation of the Making the Grade Initiative Award- funded Project 2007.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS & REPORTS

Scholarly Publications

McDonnell, J., Heitmann, M., Iverson, E., Vachta, K. E., McNally, M., Doberneck, D. (2023). Microcredentials and Certification Pilot Program for Broadening Impact Professional Competencies. *Proceedings of ARIS Summit 2023: Research In Service to Society*.

Vachta, K. E., Kweli, M. T, Campbell, Stewart, L., Davis-Williams, P., Adjuman,H., Yakini, M., Jordan, D., Thompson-Curtis, M., Spady, L., Ademé, S. and Newsom, A. (2016). Detroit Child Health Incubator Research Project: Creating a transformational community. Poster presented at the 2016 Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB) annual conference and published in the corresponding issue of the Journal for the Society on Nutrition Education and Behavior. (Note: Similar posters reporting on progress and outcomes were presented annually and published in each annual corresponding issue of the SNEB journal, 2012-2016.)

McDonough, M. H. & Vachta, K. E. (2005). Community Empowerment and the Urban Forest. In R. G. Lee & D. R. Field *Communities and Forests: Where People Meet The Land*. Oregon State University Press: Corvallis, OR.

Cunningham, K. C. and Vachta, K. E.*(2003). Critical Currents in Community Service Learning and Community-Based Research: History, Theory and Practice. Joint issue of Journal of Applied Sociology 20(2). and Sociological Practice, 5(2), 23-41. (*Authors listed alphabetically.)

Vachta, K.E. (2002). Participatory Development and the Sustainable City. In *The Sustainable City, Proceedings of the 2002 conference, Segovia, Spain*.

Vachta, K. E. (2001). Quantitative/Qualitative or Positivist/Post-positivist: Participatory research and sociological inquiry. 72nd Annual meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association (PSA), San Francisco, CA.

Evaluation and Research Reports

(For current projects, the most recent report is listed.)

Vachta, K. E. Iverson, E. R., and Bruckner, M. Z. (2025). External Evaluation of the Megalopolitan Coastal Transformation Hub (MACH): Y4 Annual Report.

Vachta, K. E. & Iverson, E. (2025). EPIIC Cohort 3: 2025 Survey Report.

Vachta, K. E. & Bruckner, M. (2025). Advancing Few-Nexus-Based Education Through Research: Final Summative End-Of-Project Report.

Vachta, K. E. (2025). REU Site: Undergraduate Research Pathways that Broaden and Strengthen the Geosciences. Assessing Research Knowledge and Skills.

Vachta, K. E. (2024). Rutgers Fame AgTech Program Evaluation Report: Pilot Implementation.

Vachta, K. E. (2024). Improving Undergraduate Scientific Explanations: Exploring the Role of Data Literacy Skills in Scientific Reasoning. Final Evaluation Report.

Vachta, K. E. & Bruckner, M. (2024). Connecting Research, Experiences, and Application to Engagement at the University of Dubuque: 2024 Evaluation Report of the CREATE S-Stem Project.

Carlson, A., Vachta, K. E., & Iverson, E. (2024). EPIIC PI Meeting 2024: End-Of-Event Survey Summary.

Iverson, E. R. and Vachta, K. E. (2023). Bridging to Stem Excellence (BTSE): Final Research Report.

Thompson, C., O'Connell, K., Vachta, K. E., and Iverson, E. R (2023). Evaluation of the Associated Colleges of the Midwest Faculty Career Enhancement Program.

Vachta, K. E., Carlson, A., & Iverson, E. (2022). Polar Literacy: 2021-2022 Annual Evaluation Report.

Vachta, K. E. & Iverson, E. (2022). TIDeS 2021 Evaluation Summary.

Vachta, K. E. (2021). Colorado Spirit CCP Team Professional Quality of Life. (A report to CDPHE on a statewide survey exploring compassion satisfaction, burn out, and secondary trauma among COVID crisis response workers.)

Vachta, K. E. (2020). Missouri Foundation for Health. IMRI-Wide Key Learnings Summary. January - July 2020. (Cumulative report on the progress of funded partners on the Infant Mortality Reduction Initiative which sought to reduce infant mortality largely by eliminating racial disparities in maternal health and care.)

Vachta, K. E. (2019). Missouri Foundation for Health, Infant Mortality Reduction Initiative 2018 - 2019 Annual Report.

Spark Policy Institute & Equal Measure (2019). [Community Approaches to Systems Change: A Compendium of Practices, Reflections, and Findings](#)

RELATED VOLUNTEER/SERVICE

Metro Food Justice Network (2024 - present). Informal affiliation with several working groups, contributed expertise to development of network member survey.

Jefferson County Food Policy Council Member (2019 - 2021).

Racial Equity and Food Justice Sub-Committee

Board member, James and Grace Lee Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership (2004 - 2009).