

Sara K. Guenther, PhD

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About

Highly organized and personable research and evaluation professional who enjoys turning data into insights. Demonstrated success initiating projects, creating structure for systematic studies, and supporting evidence-based practice. Experience organizing teams and workshops to build capacity. Earned a Montana Master Naturalist certificate in 2025.

Professional Experience

Evaluation Scientist

2026-present

Montana State University, Social Data Collection and Analysis Services

- Support researchers, educators, and program leaders by delivering program evaluation services, including needs assessment, planning and design, end-to-end formative and summative evaluations, and longitudinal research.

Program Evaluation Specialist (2 year contract)

2023-2025

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of Chief Financial Officer

- Led and supported program evaluation efforts for the Chief Economist and Director of Social Science. Delivered insights to leadership via reports, memos, and presentations.
- Suggested improvements to internal workflows and updated project templates.
- Recognized with a Star Award for my initiative and contributions to the team.
- Projects I led:
 - Evaluated the role of NOAA technical assistance in supporting eligible applicants for \$300 million in transformative habitat restoration funding, resulting in actionable recommendations for reaching underserved and tribal communities.
 - Evaluated the performance of an automated fish identification tool to inform integration of AI in data processing workflow for fish stock assessment, demonstrating 400 employee hours saved for higher-level tasks.

Data Scientist (1 year contract)

2022-2023

US General Services Administration, Evaluation Division

- Built and coordinated partnerships across departments and agencies, including with the US Office of Personnel Management, resulting in 5 new projects for the team.
- Reviewed methodologies and designs to support the team's high standard of work.
- Coordinated end-to-end evaluations for 3 federal programs through careful design, data analysis, data visualization, reporting and presentation to generate and communicate critical information to leadership about program impact and efficacy.

Director of Research (fully remote team)

2021-2022

CivicPulse, non-profit survey firm

- Managed a large portfolio of academic, nonprofit, and private sector clients conducting survey research on emerging policy issues, including in public health, coordinating multiple projects at various stages from first point of contact to data delivery.
- Central point of contact for clients; recognized and addressed obstacles early to ensure surveys ran smoothly.

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- Supervised Digital and Media Content Lead, offering support for setting outreach objectives and meeting deadlines by identifying and addressing barriers.
- Worked closely with the Director of Operations and the Managing Director to optimize workflow in a start-up environment.

Research Scientist

2018-2021

Montana State University, Political Science and Public Administration

- Co-PI for \$102K research award from the National Science Foundation.
- Developed strategies for mitigating emergence of zoonotic disease by designing visual and storytelling interventions to communicate public health risks.
- Tested the interventions and quantified impact on public opinion and behavior through large (n=3000+) multi-wave survey experiments, resulting in peer-reviewed publication.
- Worked with a cross-disciplinary team to secure a \$3 million Department of Homeland Security research award to improve resiliency of critical computing infrastructure.
- Taught Research Methods course to Political Science undergraduates.

Staff Research Associate

2008-2013

Scripps Institution of Oceanography, Whale Acoustics Lab

- Monitored marine mammal populations by conducting acoustic and visual surveys and analyzing corresponding data to support US Navy compliance with federal law.
- Coordinated 4 annual workshops to support regional networking, collaboration, and skill-building for 100+ marine researchers and stakeholders.
- Managed goal-setting and supported task completion for 5 undergraduate interns.

Skills and Tools

Data Collection (Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey, Google Forms)

Data Management & Analysis (R Statistical Package, Tableau, Stata, NVivo, Github)

Project Management (Trello, Asana, Google Smartsheet)

Collaboration & Communication (Slack, Microsoft 365, Google Workspace, Zoom, Convene)

Design & Web (Squarespace, Canva)

Education

Ph.D. Political Science

University of California San Diego

2013-2018

B.A. International Studies

University of California San Diego

2004-2008

Service and Leadership

Board of Directors

Ecology Project International, Missoula, MT

2024-present