All in Favor: USING DATA IN ADVOCACY WORK

A politician loves a photo-op with students who are thriving in an after-school program in his district. What does his staff love?

A fact sheet left behind after the photo shoot that contains data explaining how out-of-school time (OST) fits into the legislator's agenda. Complete, accurate information is the backbone of all advocacy efforts. It bolsters your case to public and private funders, particularly in times of scarce resources. It helps push policy changes and garner public support for programs. Data can also inform your marketing to youngsters and parents, leading to higher enrollment. Here are a few ways to use information in advocacy.

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This is one of **six tip sheets** on using data to improve access to high-quality after-school and summer programs. The tip sheets are meant for staff members of city agencies, mayors' offices, "intermediary" groups, program providers and youth advocates.

Tip #1: Connect to city initiatives.

Every mayor sets priorities, such as decreasing the dropout rate or improving job opportunities for teens. Using data to show the impact that youth participation in OST programs has on those goals can justify continual investments in OST and build public interest in supporting your work. In Grand Rapids, Mich., Our Community's Children, the city-school district partnership that oversees school-based OST programs, wanted to evaluate the impact of after-school programs on local juvenile crime. In a project involving the police department and the partnership, local university researchers analyzed data to see if there was an association between OST participation and diminished crime. Their findings showed that while after-school hours are prime-time for juvenile offenses, OST program participants were not involved. In addition, juvenile offenses dropped by 25 percent at a time when the community increased the number of after-school programs. "We use this data at legislative breakfasts, and it really resonates," says Lynn Heemstra, executive director of Our Community's Children. (See the tip sheet on data-sharing strategies.[1])

Tip #2: Use market research to perfect your message.

Surveys and focus groups with parents, children and teens can help shape your recruiting efforts. If a survey shows that transportation is a key concern for parents, for instance, your marketing materials should explain how kids will be transported to and from the after-school program. New York City's Department of Youth and Community Development, which funds more than 500 after-school programs, learned from market research that parents associated the word "free" with lower quality. As a result, it revamped its materials to describe programs as being "city-funded" or "at no cost to you."

Tip #3: Encourage friendly competition.

Nothing gets the attention of a mayor like data that show his city lags behind its counterparts across the state or country. Gather data from cities with comparable demographic and economic conditions that have made a greater investment in OST. While advocating for a charter change related to the governance of the New Orleans recreation department – a major supplier of OST programs in the city – the local OST system coordinator used data to show that Baton Rouge spends almost four times more on recreation and park services. "It allowed us to exploit the competitiveness

between the two cities," says Gina Warner, executive director of the Partnership for Youth Development. "I think this comparative data played a huge role in the charter amendment passing with 74 percent of voters supporting it."

Tip #4: Help providers help themselves.

Systemwide data collection requires the cooperation of program providers. To encourage them to work with you, make sure they know how accurate, reliable data can aid them in their own advocacy work. In Louisville, where the school district and nonprofit OST providers share data, one community-based organization used the information to show a potential funder how well its participants do in school. It won the grant. "When you ask a CBO if they have a good program, 99 percent will say yes and tell you about little Joe who came for six years and went off to Harvard," says Darrell Aniton, director of Louisville's Office of Youth Development. By documenting a correlation between OST participation and desirable school behaviors, providers give themselves a powerful addition to anecdotes and can say, for example, "that independent data shows that 85 percent of our kids have better attendance, better academic scores and fewer suspensions than other kids."

Tip #5: Repurpose data from other projects.

"We try to squeeze the juice from the orange and pour it into multiple cups," says Sanjiv Rao, executive director of the New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN). Exhibit A: NYSAN worked with three public agencies to map[2] publicly funded after-school sites across New York State. The map reflects more than 1,500 program sites and nearly $300 million in public investments. The objective was to understand the distribution of programs so the agencies could target resources better and shape "request for proposal" applications, so they yielded the most telling information. But NYSAN did much more with the data. It shared the results with OST providers, so they could use it to advocate for their region's needs – and show how they could fill them – in their grant applications. It disseminated the findings to local after-school leaders who used the information to gain support from elected officials. NYSAN also used the data to develop regional snapshots that it hopes reviewers at public agencies will refer to when considering funding proposals. (See the tip sheet on mapping needs and supply.[3])

For further reading, please visit: www.wallacefoundation.org

Tip #6: Know your audience.

Data that make you stand up and cheer may be interpreted differently by others who aren't in the OST trenches. A few years ago, the Children's Commission in Jacksonville, Fla., told city council members that after-school participants had school attendance rates that were two percentage points higher than those of other children and standardized test scores that were three percentage points higher. Linda Lanier, the commission's executive director, thought these were excellent results, given that OST programs serve children facing the biggest challenges at school. One city council member, a chief financial officer at a local business, was less impressed. "He said, 'You're kidding. We paid this much and only got two percent?'" recalls Lanier. He was looking at the results from a business perspective, she explains, and didn't understand that they were actually great gains. Once Lanier put the figures in context, he became one of the commission's biggest fans.

Further Reading

Collecting and Using Information to Strengthen Citywide Out-of-School Time Systems, National League of Cities, 2011
http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/collecting-and-using-data/Documents/collecting-and-using-information-to-strengthen-citywide-ost-systems.pdf

Municipal Leadership for Afterschool: Citywide Approaches Spreading Across the Country, National League of Cities, 2011
http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/coordinating-after-school-resources/Documents/Municipal-Leadership-for-Afterschool.pdf

Hours of Opportunity, Volume 2: The Power of Data to Improve After-School Programs Citywide, RAND Corporation, 2010
http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/key-research/Documents/Hours-of-Opportunity-2-Power-Data-After-School.pdf

Strengthening Partnerships and Building Public Will for Out-of-School Time Programs, National League of Cities, 2010.
http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/coordinating-after-school-resources/Documents/Strengthening-Partnerships-Building-Public-Will-Out-of-School-Time.pdf

Endnotes

1 http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/collecting-and-using-data/Documents/Fair-Share-Data-Sharing-Strategies-that-Work.pdf
2 http://batchgeo.com/map/7864a679cc4a85b36f38168380bbe59f
3 http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/collecting-and-using-data/Documents/X-Marks-the-Spot-Using-Data-to-Map-Needs-and-Supply.pdf

Other Tip Sheets in the Series:

Introduction • From Good to Great: Using Data to Assess and Improve Quality • Made to Measure: Using Data to Improve Accountability • 'X' Marks the Spot: Using Data to Map Needs and Supply • Fair Share: Data-Sharing Strategies That Work

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