Made to Measure:
USING DATA TO IMPROVE ACCOUNTABILITY

The annual application to receive funding to run an out-of-school time (OST) program for After School Matters, a Chicago nonprofit that supports a network of teen programs, came with a big change in the 2011-2012 school year.

Returning providers, for the first time, would undergo an examination of their past performance and compliance data. Only organizations that met at least minimum requirements would move to the second round of After School Matters' review. After-school providers aren't the only ones on the hook to deliver results these days. Intermediaries also must answer to demanding boards, private and public funders and the community. Government agencies that fund programs must prove their value to legislators, taxpayers and others. Consider these tips when monitoring systemwide performance.

The Wallace Foundation

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: Track participation data.

OST systems typically monitor enrollment, attendance and "dosage".

- **Enrollment** indicates interest in your programs. If enrollment is low, you'll need to collect more data, through surveys and interviews with kids and parents, to find out why.

- **Attendance** tells you if a program is engaging kids and if barriers to participation have been adequately addressed. Declining attendance can be an early warning of potential problems with program quality and warrants follow-up with the provider. Several systems track average daily attendance (ADA), which is the average number of participants per day of service at a site. ADA requirements depend on various factors, such as whether a program serves elementary or middle-school students. But generally speaking, OST funders expect programs to maintain an ADA that's at least 75 percent of their projected enrollment. Don't assume providers know how to calculate ADA. When San Francisco's Department of Children, Youth & Their Families started requiring providers to track ADA in 2007, less than one-third knew what it was, says data and evaluation manager Laura Moyé. With ongoing education, including instructions in the agency's "request for proposal," or RFP, on how to calculate ADA in the agency's application, Moyé says about two-thirds of providers now understand how it's computed. (The instructions appear on page 11 of the RFP.[1])

- **Dosage** tracks how many times the same child attends an OST program. Programs with a high ADA may have rolling enrollment, which can mask drop-off problems. Dosage data tell you if it's the same kids coming day after day, month after month (the result you want), or whether many different kids are churning through the programs, that is, enrolling but attending only briefly or sporadically (the result you don't want). Research shows that after-school programs have the greatest impact on youths who are regulars, but what defines regular is up for debate. Several benchmarks have been suggested, such as 30, 60 or 100 days of attendance over the course of a school year. New York City's Depart-

ment of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) tracks attendance by rate of participation and requires that elementary-school students attend at least 80 percent of all available hours during the school year. That works out to be about 144 three-hour days. Middle-schoolers are expected to attend at least 75 percent of the time. DYCD sends mid-year reports to all providers so they can see if they're on target. Those that don't meet their target by year's end can forfeit as much as 20 percent of their funding.

Tip #2: Hold programs accountable for participating in quality assessments.

The key here is to get providers to take part in assessments, not to insist that they get a high score. That requirement could lead some providers to exaggerate the quality of their work, especially if the assessment is tied to funding. The point, in these early days of OST system-building, is to allow providers to familiarize themselves with the basics of quality that the assessments define to let them see how their offerings stack up – and then make the necessary adjustments. Indeed, in some cases the assessments are intended to be used by the providers themselves, not by outside evaluators. New York, for instance, requires that programs receiving federal 21st Century Community Learning Center funds use the state's after-school network's self-assessment tool twice a year.

Tip #3: Tap school data to measure student gains.

Some OST systems that share data with the school district expect participation in OST programs to lead to certain academic benefits. In Jacksonville, Fla., for instance, the Children's Commission sets academic objectives for both school- and community-based programs it funds. Regular participants in school-based programs are expected to outperform non-participants in school attendance, promotion rates and test scores. For community-based programs, the expectation is that 85 percent of regular participants will miss fewer than 21 days of school and be promoted to the next grade. The Children's Commission produces an internal report every year that has one-page snapshots[2] of each funded program, including demographics of its participants and data that show whether it has met its objectives. Those

that don't are put on notice and the commission helps them develop an improvement plan. (See the tip sheets on data-sharing strategies.[3])

Tip #4: Get buy-in from providers.

According to cities that have OST data-tracking systems, data quality improves when providers have a sense of ownership over the information. Show them how to use the data to improve programs, assess participation patterns, report to their boards and assist in fundraising efforts. Share examples of providers that have done so, and offer training on the system so they can generate reports themselves. Give them time to adjust to the new accountability measures as well. New York City's DYCD did not impose financial penalties until a full year after implementing its tracking system.

Tip #5: Monitor data entry.

You're not Big Brother, but at the same time, you do need to make sure you're getting timely and accurate data. New York City's data technology locks out providers that have not entered attendance data within 14 days. Providers are unable to input information until they speak to their DYCD program manager to rectify the situation. DYCD staff members also compare hours of participation with the number of available programming hours—there's a problem if the former is larger than the latter. The data inform site visits, too. "If a provider is regularly late with their attendance data, we try to figure out why when we visit," says Mike Dogan, director of DYCD's OST programs. "Maybe they don't have administrative capacity or need technical assistance."

Tip #6: Give out gold stars.

The Providence Afterschool Alliance (PASA) "endorses" programs that have a written curriculum, maintain 70 percent or better of their projected enrollment and attendance (the minimum requirement is 60 percent), and score three or higher (out of five) on annual quality assessments. Endorsement brings providers a streamlined application process, a financial bonus worth up to five percent of their grant award for administrative costs, and preferential status during grant reviews. PASA invited only endorsed providers to apply for summer 2011 programs, for instance. About 25 percent of providers have been endorsed,

and former deputy director Elizabeth Devaney says it's a coveted recognition. "It's a selling point when they pitch to other funders," she adds.

Tip #7: Raise the bar higher.

Urging programs to stretch encourages continuous improvement and, in tight economic times, ensures that resources support the best programs. Every year, Chicago's After School Matters (ASM) evaluates the extent to which providers are meeting enrollment and attendance targets. If a majority are meeting or exceeding expectations, the organization then challenges all of its providers by setting a higher standard. ASM is also encouraging programs to put retention of participants ahead of filling slots. This is based on independent research showing that teens who have the highest participation rates and stick with ASM for multiple semesters have better academic outcomes than similar students who don't participate at all. The application for the 2011-2012 school year asked providers for a 20-week plan that builds on skills, rather than two 10-week programs that might have been essentially the same.

To find out which compliance and performance data ASM requires would-be return providers to submit, see page 11 of the RFP.[4]

Further reading

After-School Programs and Academic Impact: A Study of Chicago's After School Matters, Chapin Hall Center for Children, 2007
http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/publications/ChapinHallDocument(2)_0.pdf

After-School Programs for High School Students: An Evaluation of After School Matters, Northwestern University, 2011
http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/evaluations/Documents/After-School-Programs-for-High-School-Students-An-Evaluation-of-After-School-Matters.pdf

AfterZone: Outcomes for Youth Participating in Providence's After-School System, Public/Private Ventures, 2011
http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/evaluations/Documents/AfterZone-Outcomes-Youth-Participating-Providences-Citywide-After-School-System.pdf

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

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

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

Understanding and Measuring Attendance in Out-of-School Time Programs, Harvard Family Research Project, 2004
http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/publications-series/issues-and-opportunities-in-out-of-school-time-evaluation/understanding-and-measuring-attendance-in-out-of-school-time-programs

Endnotes

[1] http://www.dcyf.org/WorkArea/showcontent.aspx?id=4296

[2] http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/collecting-and-using-data/Documents/ACCOUNTABILITY-Jacksonville-snapshot.pdf

[3] http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/collecting-and-using-data/Documents/Fair-Share-Data-Sharing-Strategies-that-Work.pdf

[4] https://www.youthservices.net/web/gms/binn/asm/fy2012/rfp/rfp.pdf

Other Tip Sheets in the Series:

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

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

The Wallace Foundation is a national philanthropy that seeks to improve education and enrichment for disadvantaged children. The foundation has an unusual approach: funding projects to test innovative ideas for solving important social problems, conducting research to find out what works and what doesn't and to fill key knowledge gaps – and then communicating the results to help others.

Wallace has five major initiatives under way:

- School leadership: Strengthening education leadership to improve student achievement.
- After-school: Helping selected cities make good out-of-school time programs available to many more children.
- Audience development for the arts: Making the arts a part of many more people's lives by working with arts organizations to broaden, deepen and diversify audiences.
- Arts education: Expanding arts learning opportunities for children and teens.
- Summer and expanded learning time: Giving children more hours to devote to learning.

Wallace's work in after-school programming

Typically in the world of after-school programming, the many varied programs for youngsters and the government agencies and private organizations that fund them operate in isolation from one another. In 2003, Wallace began working in five cities to help coordinate the after-school workings of these institutions, in the hope this would lead to systems supporting better programs and increased access to them citywide. A 2010 RAND Corporation report that studied the initiative found the cities' efforts had provided "a proof of principle" that after-school systems hold promise. Wallace today is funding after-school system efforts in nine additional cities, and in a separate Chicago initiative, Wallace is trying to help after-school providers and funders overcome a little-recognized barrier to offering more and better services – weak financial management.

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