



## ***April Funding Tip***

### **Tip: Maximizing Revenues – Use Data to Communicate Impact to Funders**

In this era of accountability, funders are increasingly looking to support youth programs that can concretely demonstrate that their services improve the lives of children and families. To maximize the potential to generate revenue, youth programs need to collect data tied to outcomes to communicate the impact of their work. **This funding tip presents strategies that can help youth programs increase capacity to collect good outcome data, and use this data to communicate with funders about the results they achieved.**

### **What is outcome data and why is it important for youth programs?**

Outcome data is information that measures the results achieved by a program. The data can be quantitative (e.g., improved student test scores) or qualitative (e.g., testimonials from youth or parents). Good data is essential to helping youth programs internally evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and improve their services.

Program leaders should think carefully about what data they want to collect. For example, do leaders want to document satisfaction with services; the impact on staff or families, or the impact on youth attendance or personal behaviors? Equally important is that leaders plan ahead for how they will use the data, for example, to make improvements in the program, to include in funding reports or promotional materials, or to contribute to other data systems collecting information on youth. Increasingly, states and communities are developing integrated data warehouses that allow different entities to share data, thereby creating a richer data source.

Outcome data can help youth program leaders clearly articulate the impact of their work, which can improve their capacity to generate new revenues.

### **Strategies to collect data**

Youth programs can collect and analyze data by utilizing their in-house capacities and engaging external support.

#### *In-house data collection strategies*

- **Client surveys** can help youth programs collect basic outcome data. Surveys are a relatively easy and inexpensive way to collect concrete information on the strengths and weakness of a program or service.
- **Program Assessments** provide a more structured method to collect data on a program's quality. Some assessments can be conducted by program staff, as self-assessments; and other require specialized training or validation by an outside observer. Several tools provide guidance on conducting program assessments. The Forum for Youth Investment has developed a guide that highlights 10 assessment tools for youth programs available at: <http://forumfyi.org/content/measuring-youth-program-quality-guide-assessment-tools-2nd-edition>.
- **Data collection software** is available to help programs collect and organize outcome data. These software also help to generate reports for varied purposes and audiences, minimizing staff time on data entry or report development. For example, the Results Scorecard (<http://www.resultsleadership.org/scorecard/index.html>) and Efforts to Outcomes ([www.socialsolutions.com](http://www.socialsolutions.com)) are online software that help public and non-profit organizations track and analyze data.

### *Engaging external support*

- **Formal program evaluations** are required when utilizing some funding sources, particularly federal funds. Additionally, some youth-serving organizations choose to engage external evaluators to conduct formal assessments of their work. Though conducting a formal evaluation can be time consuming and more costly than conducting an evaluation on your own, these efforts may pay for themselves by helping a program improve its services and attract new funding.
- **Technical assistance providers** can support youth programs in their data collection and analysis efforts. For example, the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (<http://www.cypq.org/>) helps youth programs set meaningful improvement goals based on data and enact new practices.
- **Forming partnerships with other organizations and agencies** can allow youth programs to integrate their data collection efforts into those of larger systems. For example, youth programs can partner with schools, local universities and research institutions, or local social service agencies to share data about the youth they serve. These partnerships can greatly increase a program's capacity to collect and analyze data. For example, in the Grand Rapids region of Michigan, The Community Research Institute (CRI) gathers, analyzes, and communicates data through partnerships with local non-profit organizations to assist leaders with decision making, grant writing, and program evaluation. CRI also issues an annual community survey to obtain local data that guides non-profit leader's decision making.

### **Strategies to communicate data**

While collecting and analyzing data can help youth programs improve the quality of their services and potentially, the results achieved for youth, communicating outcome data in a powerful way can also help attract donors and funders. Programs should consider how they can use data to tell a story that will resonate with a specific audience or funder. Additionally, promising outcomes are more powerful when program leaders can articulate exactly how they are achieving those results. For example, if surveys indicate that a program reduces substance abuse among youth, leaders should communicate exactly how services or program activities are achieving this result.

Youth program leaders can communicate data through a variety of formats including:

- Program brochures or one-pager flyers
- E-blasts
- A "results" page on the program's website
- Annual reports
- Reports from formal evaluations
- Funding proposals

### **Funding data collection efforts**

Youth programs can directly access several federal funding sources that can improve their capacity to collect, analyze and communicate data. For example the federal Strengthening Communities Fund<sup>1</sup> currently supports capacity-building services for non-profit organizations, including the development of formal evaluations and assessments of program outcomes.

Additionally many large federal funding sources that typically flow through state agencies can support data collection efforts, including:

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)
- Workforce Investment Act (WIA)

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<sup>1</sup> See the funding tip that describes the Strengthening Communities Fund at: <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/NovemberFundingTip2009.pdf>.

- McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act
- Workforce Data Quality Initiative

While these funding sources are more likely to support system-wide data collection efforts in a state or locality, individual youth programs may be able to access these funds through state or local agencies. Youth programs can search for information about these and other federal funding sources at the Finance Project's Federal Funding Database ([http://www.financeproject.org/fedfund\\_search.cfm](http://www.financeproject.org/fedfund_search.cfm)).

#### **Example of this strategy in action**

The Latin American Youth Center (LAYC) is a comprehensive youth development organization in Washington, D.C. According to LAYC leaders, "Fundors are deliberately choosing to fund organizations that have tangible results." In 2005, LAYC created an in-house learning and evaluation division to collect data and conduct evaluations of its programs. LAYC uses Efforts to Outcomes, an online data collection system, and it has trained its program staff to input data directly into the system. Although leaders at LAYC acknowledge that developing this system was costly and time intensive in the beginning, they believe being able to articulate the results of their evaluations has been critical to their ability to use data to inform staff about the value of their work, make programmatic decisions, and generate funding in a difficult economy. Thus the up-front investment is contributing to their long-term sustainability.

#### **Other Resources:**

The Finance Project has an extensive body of information and resources to help leaders finance and sustain effective *programs* that support the positive development of youth, and develop *systems* that provide an infrastructure to help coordinate and guide investments in youth.

Visit The Finance Project's [Youth Programs Resource Center](#) for tools and resources on financing, and sustaining youth programs. For more information on how to [Find Federal Funding](#) see The Finance Projects online database, which highlights over 100 federal funding sources that can support youth programs.

*The Finance Project does not give grants or provide funding for projects. We provide leaders with the information, tools, advice, and training to identify financing strategies that fit their needs and to build their capacity to successfully sustain programs over time.*