

Using Data to Show Impact

**“An outcome is not what you do,
but what changes for the people or groups you serve.”¹**

More than ever before, youth programs need to demonstrate their results. Foundations, donors, government officials and other civic leaders want to know – in specific measurable terms – the positive impact youth organizations have on the children and youth who are being served.

One powerful way to show impact is to evaluate the program’s outcomes. This outcomes information allows you to:

- Prove that you are positively impacting the youth you serve
- Show that individuals or communities are improving or changing due to your program
- Celebrate your success
- Raise money for your program
- Raise awareness for your program, and
- Discover opportunities to revise or improve program practices.

When asked about outcomes, many programs stop short at explaining what they did (outputs) and fail to tell about the change their program created (outcomes). Evaluating a program’s outcomes does not have to be intimidating; a full quantitative program evaluation is not necessary

to simply start talking about outcomes. Consider these two descriptions of a fictional program, TutorTime. One description lacks information on program outcomes, while the other is strengthened with outcome data.

TutorTime’s Mission

TutorTime has a mission of increasing post-high school opportunities for students who are at risk of not graduating by pairing them with local business professionals. The business professionals tutor students in key subject areas and connect them with local businesses so that students are eligible for and knowledgeable about their post-high school opportunities.



¹ Dawn Smart (2003-2006) National Resource Center: Compassion Capital Fund. <http://www.cfbest.org/outcomemeasurements/measuressimplified.htm>

The number of kids served is an output (what you did), not an outcome (what changed due to your program).

Sample Statement Without Outcome Data

Over the past year TutorTime served 21 students who were at-risk of failing to graduate high school; the program also engaged 17 volunteer business professionals. Our biggest outcome was being able to serve more than twice as many youth as last year (21 compared to 10). In fact, this year almost all of our TutorTime students graduated on time, and a few who did not graduate last year came back this year and finished as fifth-year seniors.

Did not explain why graduation matters to the program's mission (increasing post-high school opportunities).

"A few", "some", and "almost all" are never specific enough.

Missed opportunity to compare your success to what occurs without your program.

After completing the program, Tutortime students have more post-high school opportunities because the business professionals tutored them and introduced them to possible work settings.

Tutoring and introducing students to work settings are both program activities (outputs), not outcomes. An outcome must prove that the program's mission has been fulfilled.

Outputs

Sample Statement Including Outcome Data

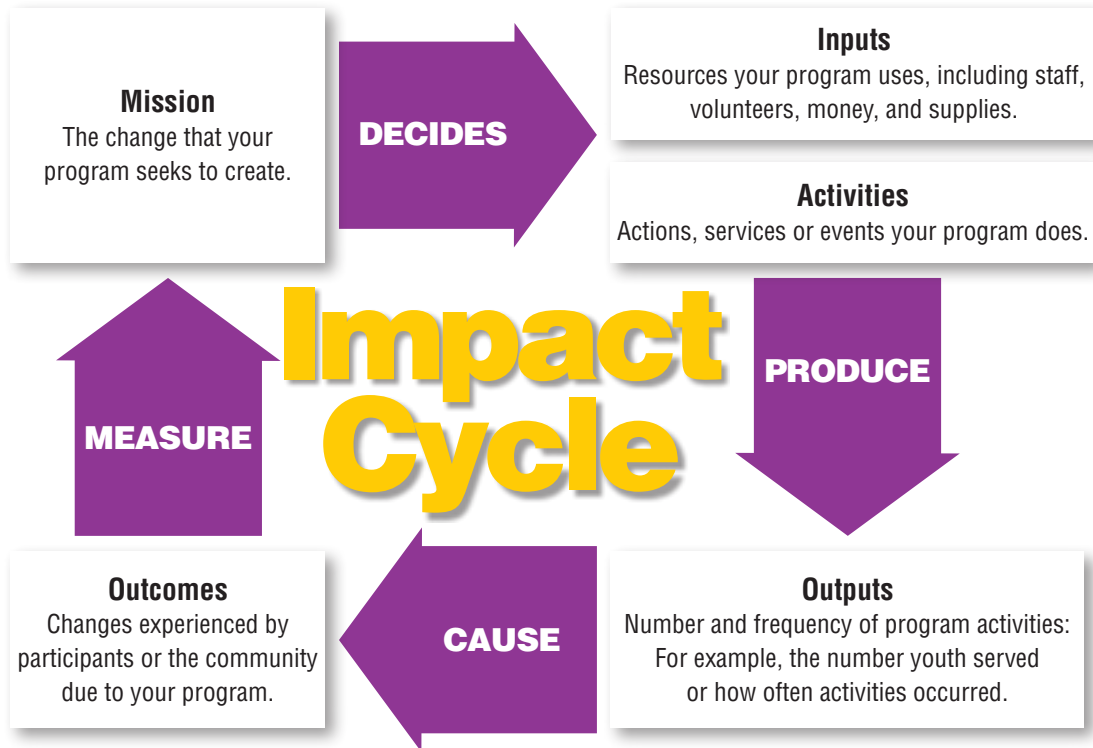
Over the past year TutorTime has doubled the number of students served, from 10 to 21 students. The program also engaged 17 volunteer business professionals. Twice a week we held after school tutoring sessions that lasted 2 hours and once a month the business professionals introduced students to their colleagues or to possible future work settings.

Outcomes

In order to be eligible for post-high school opportunities such as the military, community colleges, and many entry-level jobs, students must first graduate high school. Last year, 92% of TutorTime seniors graduated on time (in four years), and another 5% are on track to graduate just one year later. Students in our program are 16% more likely than their similarly at-risk peers to graduate on time. TutorTime graduates also are knowledgeable about their post-high school options; 9 in 10 students reported having two or more of the following opportunities upon graduating from high school: having a job lined up, being accepted into a two or four year college, being accepted into a trade or vocational school, or being eligible to enlist in the military.

Decide – Collect – Analyze – Report

The first step in using outcomes to show program success and evaluating your impact is to determine which information will best tell your program's story. Some organizations find a simple logic model to be helpful in thinking about program outcomes and determining which types of information to collect.



There are a variety of different ways to collect information on your programs. No matter which way you choose, start simple; find out what works within your current program structure and begin from there. Be careful not to overlook the information you already have. A few sources for collecting information include:

- Existing records, such as report cards, test results, or attendance records
- Existing statistics such as crime, poverty, or unemployment rates
- Enrollment or exit forms
- Participant or parent surveys
- Pre- and post-tests of participants
- Interviews of participants or community members
- Focus group discussions

Top Six Tips for Using Outcomes More Effectively

After collecting the necessary information, the next steps are to analyze and report it. Because an abundance of data may get confusing, report only the most important data to show what your program has done (outputs) and how it's changed those you serve (outcomes). Here are some tips to help along the way:

1. Focus on your program's mission. Every outcome your program seeks to achieve should tie directly to the program's mission. Outcomes prove that a program has succeeded in doing what its mission promises.

For example, TutorTime's outcome results show that program graduates have changed from potential high school dropouts to potential employees, college students, or members of the military. With participants having a greater number of post-high school opportunities; the program's mission is being fulfilled.

² The terms goal or objective may be used in place of mission when speaking about a program.

2. Collect information about both program activities (outputs) and program impact (outcomes). There are two basic types of data that will help show your program’s success: activities data (outputs) and impact data (outcomes). Use both types of information to show what your program did and how well it worked. Here are examples of the two types of data:

Activities (outputs)	Impact (outcomes)
Number of children served	Participant increased skill, knowledge, score or opportunity
Types of classes held	Participant improved behavior or ability
Amount of items distributed	Community decreased need or problem

3. Remember the phrase “so that.” Being clear about outcomes means talking about why you did each program activity.

For example, “We did *output* so that *outcome*”

Outputs

TutorTime has business professionals tutor students in key subject areas and connect them with local businesses

Outcomes

so that students are eligible for and knowledgeable about their post-high school opportunities.

4. Compare youth in your program to others who should have similar outcomes. To help show that your program impacted the individuals you served, compare individuals in your program with a similar population that has not benefitted from your services.

For example: TutorTime students are 16% more likely to graduate on time than other students in the same school with similar risk factors.

5. Put someone in charge of evaluating your program’s outcomes. If no one is specifically assigned the task of collecting and reporting the outcomes information, it will likely not get collected in time for fundraising or report writing.

6. Consider talking to an expert. There are many accessible resources to help you develop and report your program outcomes.

- Try searching the Internet for sample evaluation plans or logic models. Additional program evaluation information can be found at:

The Kellogg Foundation website: <http://www.wkkf.org/knowledge-center/resources/2010/W-K-Kellogg-Foundation-Evaluation-Handbook.aspx>,

The Free Management Library: http://www.managementhelp.org/np_progs/np_mod/org_frm.htm or,

The Supporting Evaluation and Research Capacity Hub: <https://cyfernetsearch.org/>

- Contact a local university to see if students are available to set up outcomes measurement plan for your organization through coursework or an internship. A few departments that commonly host this type of student opportunity include business, nonprofit management, social work, social sciences, and education.
- Hire a consultant to work one-on-one with your organization to create an outcome-based evaluation model.

IYI Resources

Have a quick question or want to bounce an idea around? Contact IYI's free Youth Service Help Line, and get the answers you need: 1-877-IYI-TIPS or www.iyi.org/help-line.

Need one-on-one assistance with planning, evaluating, or expanding your organization? Benefit from IYI's Consulting Services and receive professional help at affordable hourly rates – discounted far below market value. Browse project examples at www.iyi.org/consulting-services.

For long-term coaching or large-scale projects, IYI's Custom Solutions offers assistance at market rates. Contact customsolutions@iyi.org to begin crafting a project that is custom designed to meet your need.

Want in-depth information on evaluation? Check out the free resources at IYI's Virginia Beall Ball Library: www.iyi.org/library. We will mail you the library materials and include a postage paid return envelope.

The latest data is at your fingertips with IYI's Data Center: www.iyi.org/data. Search statistics and gather data to improve your program planning and grant writing. Or, request customized data at: www.iyi.org/datarequest.

Get the most comprehensive overview of children's well-being in Indiana. Visit www.iyi.org/databook to access the 2010 Kids Count in Indiana Data Book.



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