# Book Review—*Measure, Use, Improve! Data Use in Out-of-School Time*

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## Abstract

Measure, Use, Improve! Data Use in Out-of-School Time *offers out-of-school time (OST) professionals practical lessons and approaches to measurement and data use. Editors Christina A. Russell and Corey Newhouse assembled notable contributors who offer conversant perspectives on evaluation systems within diverse OST organizations. Its 4 thematic sections address issues and provide action-oriented solutions from OST programs, evaluation intermediaries, and funders. Key discussions across chapters include (a) moving forward using data to inform continuous quality improvement, (b) supporting youth development professionals, (c) ensuring equity and inclusion in the evaluation process, and (d) recognizing what it takes to move forward.*

Key words: *out-of-school time, evaluation, continuous quality improvement, youth voice, staff development*

*Measure, Use, Improve!* (Russell & Newhouse, 2021) provides youth development professionals (YDP), administrators, evaluators, and researchers practical lessons and approaches to data measurement and use. It is organized into four thematic sections covering issues and action-oriented solutions from out-of-school time (OST) programs, evaluation intermediaries, and funders. The *Introduction* and the *Epilogue* define and conclude the key discussions across chapters: (a) moving forward using data to inform continuous quality improvement, (b) supporting youth development professionals, (c) ensuring equity and inclusion in the evaluation process, and (d) recognizing what it takes to move forward.

*Part I: Setting the Stage: The Value of Measurement and Evaluation* provides several steps for designing and planning for OST evaluation. Evaluation is a learning process with multiple steps

and requires various inputs. Recognizing that the word evaluation may invoke fear and anxiety, the authors suggest positive approaches to thinking, planning, and engaging in the process at the site, organizational, or network level. Table 1 outlines key content in each chapter.

## Table 1: Key Content in the Value of Measurement

| Chapters | Key content |
|---|---|
| **Part I: Setting the Stage: The Value of Measurement and Evaluation** | |
| 1. Taking Stock: Investing in Measuring Our Work in Out-of-School Time, *Regino Chávez* | • An OST evaluator's personal view of how evaluation serves multiple purposes with a focus on moving from fear and anxiety to evaluation curiosity |
| 2. What's Your Why? Matching Evaluation Approach to Organizational Need, *Jason Spector* | • Consideration of OST organizational capacity for an outcome-based evaluation plan<br>• Exploration of a 5-year internal evaluation process from After-School-All-Stars |
| 3. Using Data for Learning: A Funder's Perspective, *Rebecca M. Goldberg, Ashleigh L. Halverstadt, and Alex C. Hooker* | • Discussion of open and honest conversations among stakeholders to realistically set evaluation priorities<br>• Insights from case studies for building trusting, transparent relationships between OST and funders |

The evaluation design involves defining youth and stakeholders' program outcomes, outlining specific achievable objectives, and considering barriers to achieving outcomes. Continuous quality improvement (CQI) regularly addresses practices and how they make, or do not make, the program better, with a focus on improving the lives of youth. Evaluation takes time, and the authors suggest that the plan be multi-year and inclusive of staff, administrators, and stakeholders to ease the evaluation process, making it routine, and creating an environment of evaluative curiosity.

Reconciling organizational needs with funders' expectations may initially appear challenging. However, funders and administrators are shifting their visions to support embedded evaluation for CQI. Trust between OST administrators and funders is key to advancing discussions on funding alignment, assessing internal capacity for multi-faceted evaluation planning, and being up-front about evaluation priorities.

*Part II: Building Blocks for Evaluation* covers making data and tools meaningful to OST programs, selecting the right data system, being inclusive of cultural contexts and perspectives, allowing local ownership of data, and effectively employing youth participatory evaluation. YDP or practitioners (staff, managers, administrators) must be intentionally prepared to deliver high-quality, equitable, and culturally relevant programs. Strategies and tools to make data meaningful are presented starting with a discussion on using a program logic model and theory of change. Coupling a well-crafted logic model with a theory of change may clarify the evaluation path. A look at data systems for small to middle-sized programs addresses the current system's ability versus what is needed and how uneven "tech-spertise" among staff plays into ongoing evaluation. Solutions and practical tips are offered such as stay mission focused, skip procrastination and shame zones, and allocate resources and staff to be effective. Table 2 outlines key content in each chapter.

**Table 2. Key Content in Building Blocks for Evaluation**

| Chapter | Key content |
|---|---|
| **Part II: Building Blocks for Evaluation** | |
| 4. Demystifying Data: Strategies and Tools for Making Data More Meaningful in OST Programs, *Hannah L. Lantos, Zakia Redd, Brandon Stratford, and Aasha Joshi* | • Selection of correct tools and strategies for organizational implementation of meaningful and fruitful evaluation plan<br>• Two-part narrative covers (a) understanding data and what data to collect and (b) using a performance management cycle to promote effective use of data |
| 5. Navigating Data Systems Selection: Tools to Ease the Journey, *Betsy Block* | • Data collection systems for small to mid-size programs<br>• Four challenges and solutions for using data-informed approaches including goal achievement, crafting a theory of change, and ongoing change |
| 6. What, So What, Now What: A Game-Winning Plan for Capacity Building, *Tasha Johnson and Aasha Joshi* | • YMCA's competency-based approach for capacity building<br>• Use of framework (*What?, So What?, Now What?*) supports positive program implementation, staff and volunteer allocation, and resource use |

**Table 2. (continued)**

| Chapter | Key content |
|---|---|
| **Part II: Building Blocks for Evaluation** | |
| 7. From Quantity to Quality: Lessons Learned From an Ongoing Statewide Initiative, *Kim Firth Leonard, Celeste Janssen, and Belle Cantor* | • Oregon's K-12 Student Success: Out-of-School Time Initiative for middle school youth strategy for organizational learning and continuous quality improvement <br> • Conversation on student success, learning across the organization, and moving from quantity to quality of programming from Oregon Community Foundation and Institute for Youth Success at Education Northwest |
| 8. Putting Data to Work for Young People: Bridging Practice and Research Through Continuous Improvement, *Jessica Donner, Anamarie Auger Whitaker, Ann Durham, and Lisa Gomi Hui* | • Every Hour Counts' efforts to measure local capacity needs and ability to collect and analyze data to drive improvement <br> • Securing stakeholders commitment to program outcomes and building an environment of data-driven program improvement |
| 9. Youth Participation in Evaluation: Lessons From the Past, Opportunities for the Future, *Joseph Luesse and Kim Sabo Flores* | • Description and implementation strategies of Youth Participatory Evaluation tool |

The YMCA of the USA's *Character Development Learning Institute* (Chapter 6) builds practitioners' knowledge and application of positive youth development elements, thus ultimately enhancing the youth experience. Comparable organizations can adapt the Y's approach to professional development. In addition to well-trained YDP, OST can benefit from using practitioners as coaches. Keeping program quality as the central theme, a train-the-trainer model delivered by Oregon's intermediary trains YDP coaches to build local capacity. Through this model, trained YDP, evaluators, and funders are positioned to converse with stakeholders, accept feedback, and make changes.

The intermediary organization's role is to continuously improve the caliber of OST thus ensuring access for youth to high-quality programs, especially youth from limited-resourced families and communities. In Chapter 8, Every Hour Counts, a coalition of OST intermediary organizations,

describes how its data measurement framework supports Boston After School & Beyond and Providence After School Alliance in program self-assessment (Yoo et al., 2019). Every Hour Counts offers 10 recommendations for effective data selection, collection, and management.

Youth Participatory Evaluation (YPE) includes young people in evaluation practices of planning, data collection, analysis, and community reporting (Chapter 9).  YPE helps young people build thinking, leadership, and communication skills while expanding their social capital. The process of using YPE to improve programs and direct positive community change are discussed including organizational buy-in, planning for YPE, recruiting and involving youth, and preparing staff to engage youth as colleagues.

*Part III: Developing Systems of Evaluative Thinking* examines the use of CQI by OST intermediaries to build YDP's evaluative thinking skills. Evaluative thinking and strategies are described, along with case studies from several intermediaries, followed by recommendations to implement data-informed CQI. Notably, intentionally gathering youth feedback is an effective aspect of CQI. Table 3 outlines key content in each chapter.

## Table 3. Key Content in Developing Systems of Evaluative Thinking

| Chapter | Key content |
|---|---|
| **Part III: Developing Systems of Evaluative Thinking** | |
| 10. Building Effective Continuous Quality Improvement Systems: The Need for Evaluative Thinking About Out-of-School Time Program Quality, *Tiffany Berry and Michelle Sloper* | • Discussion of  program quality as multi-faceted, multi-dimensional, highly variable, and challenging to achieve<br>• Strategies for building CQI through evaluative thinking |
| 11. Building Evaluative Thinking Skills and Capacity Through M3® (Making Mean with Multiple Data Sets), *Jocelyn Wiedow and Jennifer Griffin-Wiesner* | • Examples of OST intermediaries merging of data systems (YPQA, Cityspan, SAYO) to better understand and present program impacts<br>• Evaluative thinking skills and Making Meaning with Multiple Data Sets (M3®) process |
| 12. A Reservoir of Insight: Tapping Youth Feedback to Inform Continuous Learning, *Valerie Threlfall* | • Rationale and best practices for collecting youth feedback for continuous improvement |

**Table 3. (continued)**

| Chapter | Key content |
|---|---|
| **Part III: Developing Systems of Evaluative Thinking** | |
| 13. How a Frontier State Grew OST Quality From the Ground Up, *Linda Barton, Kathy Schleyer, and Ellen Gannett* | • Case study from Wyoming Afterschool Alliance on establishing key partnerships and leveraging resources<br>• Demonstration of a small organization's accomplishment of system-wide quality improvement goals |
| 14. Beyond Youth Outcomes: Thinking Outside the Logic Model, *Bryan Hall and Brenda McLaughlin* | • Relationship between school (academic focus) and out-of-school (enrichment focus)<br>• Case study from BellXcel Summer on program staff experience learning alongside youth |

*Part IV: Using Data and Evaluation to Improve Staff Capacity* addresses the professional development of and support needed for the YDP. One staff retention study strongly indicates YDP believe in their organizations and the positive impacts they have on the lives of youth (Angbah, 2018). Building staff capacity requires organizations regardless of size, to have an onboarding and retention plan embedded into the CQI scheme. CQI is greatly enhanced by YDP competencies that inform the hiring process, develop a scope and sequence for professional learning focused on skill building, and identify career trajectory for staff. Table 4 outlines key content in each chapter.

**Table 4 . Key Content in Using Data and Evaluation to Improve Staff Capacity**

| Chapter | Key content |
|---|---|
| **Part IV: Using Data and Evaluation to Improve Staff Capacity** | |
| 15. Giving Data a Voice Through Coaching: The Michigan Example, *Jamie Wu, Trevor Davies, Lorraine Thoreson and Laurie Van Egeren* | • Coupling evaluation and coaching to support data-driven CQI<br>• Pooling expertise and resources YPQI, Weikart Center of the Forum for Youth Investment; 21st CCLC; Michigan Department of Education; Michigan After-School Partnership; Michigan State University; Technical Assistance and Coaching Support System<br>• Discussion of lessons learned and recommendations for building professional capacity |
| 16. Walk the Path Together: Partnering to Advance Data Use, *Miranda Yates, Stephanie Mui, and Jennifer Nix* | • Creating a culture of learning through authentic and productive partnerships between the evaluators and the practitioners<br>• Moving from top-down driven evaluation plan to shared and collaborative approach |
| 17. Using Data Informed Practices to Support the Onboarding and Retention of Youth Development Professionals, *Jaynemarie Enyonam Angbah* | • OST staff retention through successful onboarding and ongoing professional development for frontline staff |

*Measure, Use, Improve! Data Use in Out-of-School Time* brims with lessons, practices, processes, and recommended resources. It is an ideal tool for professional development training for after-school programs and youth-serving organizations. OST intermediaries and networks could employ *Measure, Use, Improve!* to guide a system-wide evaluation process. OST administrators could create study teams focusing on relevant chapters. Even well-established youth development organizations could use selected chapters to benchmark their CQI plans. The authors have provided a rich collection of references for further reading.

# References

Angbah, J. (2018). *Bringing youth development full circle: Exploring the factors that limit educational and work-based learning opportunities for youth development professionals.*

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