youthCONNECT
in the national capital region

youthCONNECT: A (Net)Work In Progress

A Case Study for Developing a Shared-Outcomes Framework

A joint initiative of

College Summit • KIPP DC • Latin American Youth Center

Metro TeenAIDS • Urban Alliance • Venture Philanthropy Partners • Year Up NCR

vpp investing in social change
venture philanthropy partners

Overview

The youthCONNECT Network[1] is a pioneering initiative and partnership of Venture Philanthropy Partners (VPP), which combines federal funding, philanthropic resources, and the experience of six of the highest performing nonprofit service providers to improve education, employment, and healthy behavior outcomes for low-income and at-risk youth, ages 14-24, in the National Capital Region (NCR). The six Network partners are College Summit, KIPP DC, Latin American Youth Center (LAYC), Metro TeenAIDS (MTA), Urban Alliance and Year Up NCR.

Clearly understanding the need for aligned and coordinated action to solve the most intractable and complex problems affecting young people today, VPP launched youthCONNECT by challenging these nonprofits, all of whom have very different missions, to collaborate to deliver a range of services to a targeted group of at-risk youth, helping them transition successfully to productive, self-sufficient adulthood. Partners in the Network are striving to coordinate closely to serve more youth better than they could alone. The Network members will evaluate these efforts individually and collectively to increase the body of knowledge and evidence on what works.

VPP's theory of collaboration as a vehicle for meaningful change achieved important validation in 2010 when it received a multimillion dollar commitment for youthCONNECT from the federal government's Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National Community Service (CNCS) and one of the Obama Administration's signature innovation initiatives.

A key component of youthCONNECT has been the development of a shared framework for monitoring outcomes. This case study describes the collaborative process and resulting *Common Outcomes Framework* developed by the youthCONNECT Network. (Figure 1, page 13) The framework was developed to provide a shared basis for understanding the indicators and outcomes that will determine the success of the youthCONNECT Network.

This case study also describes the challenges associated with forming the Network, steps taken to forge the common framework, and key lessons learned along the way. Although this is very much a work-in-progress, we believe the work completed is already yielding ideas and information that will inform similar collaborative efforts.

This document is the first in what we anticipate will be a series of reports charting the development of the youthCONNECT Network, as well as sharing lessons learned and recommendations for the field. This document is the product of youthCONNECT's Evaluation and Common Measures Workgroup (ECOM), comprised of the youthCONNECT network partner

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[1] We will refer interchangeably to youthCONNECT and the Network.

organizations' staff members most involved in performance management and program evaluation activities, along with representatives from VPP and Child Trends.

youthCONNECT Network Partners

College Summit, is part of a national nonprofit that demonstrably increases college enrollment rates by building capacity within school districts to guide students through the college preparation and application process. College Summit realized their efforts needed to begin much earlier in some schools, so they developed a new model, "Launch," to reach students in grades 9 through 11.

KIPP DC, part of KIPP's national movement, is a network of open-enrollment, college-preparatory public schools that provides a world of opportunities to students from underserved communities in the nation's capital. Though KIPP DC has had tremendous academic success with its students, data showed that even high-performing students were struggling to transition to and complete college. KIPP Through College (KTC) was created to ensure that every KIPP DC alumni has the tools and supports needed to successfully attain a college degree and live a life filled with opportunity.

Latin American Youth Center: provides culturally competent services to some of the most disconnected youth in the NCR. Data showed LAYC that it needed a more unified approach to youth with multiple risk factors, so it developed an intensive new model for "reconnecting" youth—Promotores. Promotores actively encourages youth to participate in a broad set of LAYC programs and remains with each young person over the long term.

Metro TeenAIDS has a comprehensive approach to improving adolescent health in DC and promotes responsible decision-making among youth. MTA has a strong focus on advocacy, and in 2007, they helped create Health Education Standards in DC public schools, which were extended into charter schools in 2010. MTA is working with school administrators and teachers to increase teacher comfort, knowledge and skills in teaching sexual health.

Urban Alliance prepares high school students from under-resourced neighborhoods in DC and Baltimore for the world of work and a life of self-sufficiency through a 10-month paid internship, mentoring and professional development training. One hundred percent of UA's 2009 class graduated from high school, compared with 82% of their classmates. Ninety-three percent of these students enrolled in post-secondary education, compared with 29% of their peers, and overall, UA's participants have a 56% college graduation rate, compared to 8% of their peers.

Year Up NCR, part of a national organization, is a one-year intensive training program that provides youth with technical and professional skills, college credits, an education stipend, and corporate internships. Lack of health insurance to facilitate access to health care can affect the health of workers as well as the health of workers' families, which leads to missed work days and lower productivity. Year Up believes it can increase retention rates and student results if it provides access to health care and health education.

Background

Collaboration and partnerships – whether across programs, agencies and/or sectors – is not a new idea within the field of human services.

Collaboration efforts can be as simple as shared training or as complex as a pooled funding arrangement. At the core of every such effort is the conviction that collaboration ultimately allows participants to better meet the needs of their target populations. By reducing duplication and streamlining action, resources can be used more efficiently with those in need receiving services more comprehensively.

Currently, there is no established or generally accepted method for building or maintaining effective collaborations.

Collaborative partnerships are probably most well-established in the arena of public health[2], but they have increasingly been established in other human services arenas by communities, counties and states, where there is growing evidence that comprehensive and sustained partnerships can make a difference, not only in how people work together, but in achieving measurable outcomes for children and families.[3]

Not all work lends itself to a collaborative approach. For example, some nonprofits offer services so specialized that meaningful collaboration may not be possible. But in general, breaking down the silos between organizations serving similar populations enables nonprofits to operate more effectively and to tackle complex issues in a more holistic way.

So what types of partnerships are most effective for serving youth and their families? And do the benefits really justify the additional effort that goes along with collaboration? It's nearly impossible to make those types of judgments when a collaborative effort, no matter how well-intentioned, lacks clearly articulated goals and outcomes that can be measured.

The benefits of establishing measurable outcomes are clear. Not only do they lead to greater accountability on the part of all involved, they help participants move beyond simply documenting *efforts*, towards demonstrating *results*. In setting outcome goals, the members of the collaborative must clearly articulate what results they value most. This process not only helps to guide the collaboration itself, but can potentially galvanize broad public support in ways that jargon-laden concepts often fail to do. Finally, a shared outcomes framework reflects

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[2] Pittman, M. A. (2010). Multisectoral lessons from Healthy Communities. Preventing Chronic Disease, 7(6), http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2010/nov/10/10_0085.htm

[3] Needle-Moving Community Collaboratives: A Promising Approach to Addressing America's Biggest Challenges. Willa Seldon, Michele Jolin, Paul Schmitz (The Bridgespan Group, 2012).The report is at: http://www.bridgespan.org/Publications-and-Tools/Revitalizing-Communities/Community-Collaboratives/Needle-Moving-Community-Collaborative-s-A-Promisin.aspx

a conviction that the toughest societal problems cannot be solved by any single funder, program, or agency, but require the collective efforts from stakeholders across all sectors. That is the guiding principle behind the youthCONNECT Network.

youthCONNECT and the quest for measurable outcomes

youthCONNECT is different from other collaboratives in that it is essentially a created—rather than self-organized—network. Four of its member organizations were selected by VPP from its roster of existing investment partners, while the remaining two were chosen through an open competition.

From the very beginning there was broad consensus among the six youthCONNECT partners that establishing measurable outcomes would be integral to the creation and development of the Network. Not only are clear, measurable outcomes one component of a successful network, but the Network partners wanted to ensure this effort was a good use of their limited time and resources.

The Network partners have many similarities and differences in their affiliation, mission, service-delivery model, population served, and time/scope of program, as described in the chart below.

For example as depicted in the chart below, half of the six partners--College Summit-NCR, KIPP-DC, and Year-Up-NCR--are local chapters of national organizations, while the other half--Latin American Youth Center (LAYC), Metro Teen AIDS (MTA) and Urban Alliance operate only in Washington DC and the surrounding suburbs.

College Summit and KIPP-DC are focused on helping kids of varying ages become educationally ready for college; Urban Alliance, and Year Up are about preparing older youth for the workforce; LAYC and MTA provide social services to at-risk youth, the former from a broad menu, and the latter specifically around health education, and HIV/AIDS prevention.

While all six organizations serve "at-risk" youth, LAYC and Year Up focus explicitly on youth assessed as having the highest risk levels, whereas the other programs target either a broader band of low-income students (MTA), or those whose academic records show at least the potential for managing challenging classroom- or workplace-based experiences (College Summit, KIPP, Urban Alliance, Year Up).

LAYC and KIPP are multi-year programs serving youth as they progress from middle to high school, and on to college or post-high school work experience, while Urban Alliance and Year Up typically enroll participants for just a single year. College Summit's model varies by school, and services can be delivered in the range of a MTA's program is limited to a ten-week course.

Urban Alliance and Year Up both use an intensive, five-days-per-week model of internships-plus-workshops. KIPP and LAYC each use a model of contact frequency that can range from daily to monthly, according to youths' needs. College Summit requires a minimum of 30 minutes of contact per week, although frequency varies by school. MTA delivers its 10 sessions least weekly, but sometimes in a more compressed schedule.

Clearly these variations pose both challenges and opportunities for the Network.

youthCONNECT Network Partner Organization and Program Characteristics						
	College Summit-NCR (Launch)	KIPP DC (KIPP Through College)	Latin American Youth Center (Promotor Pathway)	Metro TeenAIDS (Make Proud Choices)	Urban Alliance	Year Up -NCR
National or Local Organization	National	National	Local	Local	Local	National
Primary Mission Focus	Education	Education	Education, workforce, and social services	Health education and HIV/AIDS prevention	Workforce development	Workforce development
Duration	Varies by school (quarter; semester; school year; multi-year)	End of middle school through 6 years after high school graduation, if enrolled in college, 2 years if not enrolled	2-6 years (through age 24)	10 weeks (10 sessions)	10 months (including six-week unpaid training) + continued support at a less intensive level for alumni	12 months
Frequency	Varies by school (daily/weekly/ bi-weekly/ -- advisory period, elective course or shared course)	Varies by participant need (from several hours daily to monthly contact)	Varies by participant need (from several hours daily to bi-monthly contact)	Varies by school (daily sessions; bi-weekly sessions; weekly sessions; more than 10 sessions in short classes)	School year: work 12 hours per week (3 hours per day/ four days a week) workshop 90 minutes every Friday; Summer: 8 weeks, 32 hours@work M-Th; Friday 10-3 workshop	Core program is 5 days a week (internship; education; workshop)
Participant Age/Grade	14-18	13-21	16-24	14-18	HS Seniors	17-24
Participant Risk Level	Schools with 30% + eligible for free/reduced lunch; students fall in middle range of	Low income; medium academic risk; average GPA of 2.36	Disconnected; high score on risk assessment	Low income students	Low income; "C" average students	Low to moderate income; medium-high score on risk assessment

achievement					

youthCONNECT: A (Net)Work In Progress

In this stage of the Network's evolution, many important questions related to purpose, scope (both conceptual and geographic within the region), and roles are still being clarified and remain a topic of discussion and debate by the Network partners. These issues are typical of many networks at similar stages in their development. Questions include:

- What is the Network's added value? What benefits does it create for its members that justify the considerable investment of time and energy required to participate? Is the whole indeed greater than the sum of the parts?
- By what process should decisions be made? Should VPP (as the leader and funder of the Network) have the ultimate decision-making power or does that rest with the Network members?
- What commitments of time and other resources on the part of the six organizations are at stake in these decisions?
- Given that youthCONNECT was created through the SIF funding mechanism of VPP, what does that mean in terms of authority, accountability, and perhaps most importantly, the perceived value of the effort?
- To whom do Network members hold themselves ultimately accountable? To the participants in their respective programs, VPP, the SIF, to each other, or to children and youth in the region in general?
- What, if any, authority does the Network have to allocate resources, change programs' policies or practices, or advocate within the wider community?

Developing the Framework

From May to December 2011, youthCONNECT's Evaluation and Common Measures Workgroup (ECOM) met at least once a month to forge what would become known as the *Common Outcomes Framework*.   ECOM meetings were attended by the organizations' staff members most involved in performance management and program evaluation activities, along with representatives from VPP and Child Trends, the organization charged with conducting an

implementation evaluation of the Network's operations while also monitoring the evolution and progress of the framework.

Here are some of the key steps taken during the process of developing the framework and making the Network operational.

- *Adopting a shared language.* Recognizing that differences in terminology could unnecessarily complicate work that is already sufficiently complicated, the ECOM's first step was to establish a common language. Terms such as "outcomes," "results," "goals," "outputs," "benchmarks," "indicators," "metrics," "milestones," "measures," and others, are used, sometimes interchangeably but rarely consistently, to refer to a number of distinct concepts. Child Trends facilitated a discussion on terminology with four questions (final answers in parenthesis):
    - What do we call the desired condition for the population we wish to serve? (Outcome)
    - What do we call data quantifying the degree to which we are reaching our desired condition? (Indicator)
    - What do we call data used to quantify progress in the interim? (Short-term indicator)
    - What is the population to whom we want the Network to be accountable? The programs' directors? VPP? The youth collectively served by the programs? (Broader community of disadvantaged youth in the National Capital Region.)

    ECOM's discussion and decisions on terminology were informed by participants' familiarity with the work of United Way[4] which, through its logic-model framework, has helped to systematize some of these language terminology differences.

- *Selecting shared outcomes and indicators.* ECOM developed the following vision statement to reflect a shared understanding of what the Network members sought to achieve through the collaborative:
    - Youth in the National Capital Region achieve success in the personal, social, academic, and work-related transition to adulthood. (Note: Healthy behaviors was added as an outcome later in the process.)

    Next, following some vigorous discussion and "word-smithing," two common outcomes evolved:

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[4] *Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach.* 170 pp., 1996. United Way of America, Alexandria, VA.

- o   Youth attain a post-secondary credential or retain gainful employment.
- o   Youth sustain healthy behaviors.

The first outcome had been identified in the initial proposal in reference to "disconnected" youth.[5] The second was felt to be an essential element of a successful transition to adulthood.

The selection of these outcomes was informed both by the SIF proposal, (http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/sif_venture_philanthropy_application_materials.pdf) and from taking an inventory of the kinds of outcomes the six programs were already tracking as part of their operations (see Table 2). Similarly, ECOM's selection of indicators began with a review of indicators currently collected by its member organizations, as well as those used in related projects, both in the NCR and elsewhere in the US.

Out of this review came the following indicators and interim indicators:

- **OUTCOME: Youth attain a post-secondary credential or retain gainful employment.**
  Indicators:
    - o   Percent of students with a high school diploma or GED
    - o   Percent of students who enroll in college or another post-secondary program
    - o   Percent of students who enroll in college or another post-secondary program for a second year

  Interim indicators:
    - o   Percent of students absent from school/program on 10 or more days per year
    - o   Percent of students "on-track" for grade level (as indicated, for example, by credits accumulated, or required courses completed)
    - o   Percent of students with a completed FAFSA
    - o   Percent of students with a completed college application
    - o   Percent of students with a completed college readiness plan
    - o   Percent of students with a completed career readiness plan
    - o   Percent of students with specified hard/soft job skills
    - o   Percent of students with work experience

- **OUTCOME: Youth sustain healthy behaviors.**
  Indicators:

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[5] Here, we use the term "disconnected" to refer to youth who are not in school and not employed. We recognize that there are a number of ways the term has been used in the youth development literature, some of which define it with greater specificity—for example, in terms of risk duration, income, stage of the life-course, and potential support from spouse or partner.

- o Percent of youth with positive adult relationships
- o Percent of youth avoiding negative peer relationships
- o Percent of youth avoiding physical fighting, cigarettes, alcohol, and other drugs
- o Percent of sexually active youth practicing safe sex (i.e., consistently using contraception or protection)

Interim indicators:
- o Percent of youth with appropriate attitudes toward unprotected sex

- Child Trends proposed conceptualizing the indicators (including the interim indicators) as being arrayed on a developmental timeline, to illustrate the idea that, while some of the indicators (e.g., school absence) can reasonably be measured in middle school, others (e.g., percent of students with a completed college application) do not become relevant until later years. (See Common Outcomes Framework at Figure 1). In the next stage of work we tried to identify specific measures that could be used to collect data on the indicators. Child Trends assembled lists of measures previously used in or proposed for national surveys of youth. Most measures emerged from programs' existing data collection for performance management and reporting, while others were developed to add to new or existing surveys administered to program participants (see Table 3, Appendix, for the complete list of measures).

Two of the indicators—*job readiness skills* and *appropriate attitudes toward unprotected sex*—presented particular challenges. These challenges arose partly from a lack of clear consensus in these fields as to which measures are most important, and partly from unique characteristics of the youthCONNECT programs that would be using them.

- o *Job readiness measure.* The majority of Network members favored a set of job readiness self-report items that had been used by LAYC in their workforce investment program and found to be effective. However, for a program like Urban Alliance, whose primary focus is developing the job readiness of its participants, there are ceiling effects with little variability for these measures at program completion. Further, the Network members decided it was important to exclude full-time student participants from those surveyed, because they do not have employment as an immediate goal.[6]
- o *Safe-sex measure.* In choosing measures of appropriate attitudes toward unprotected sex, there were multiple dimensions to consider: factual knowledge,
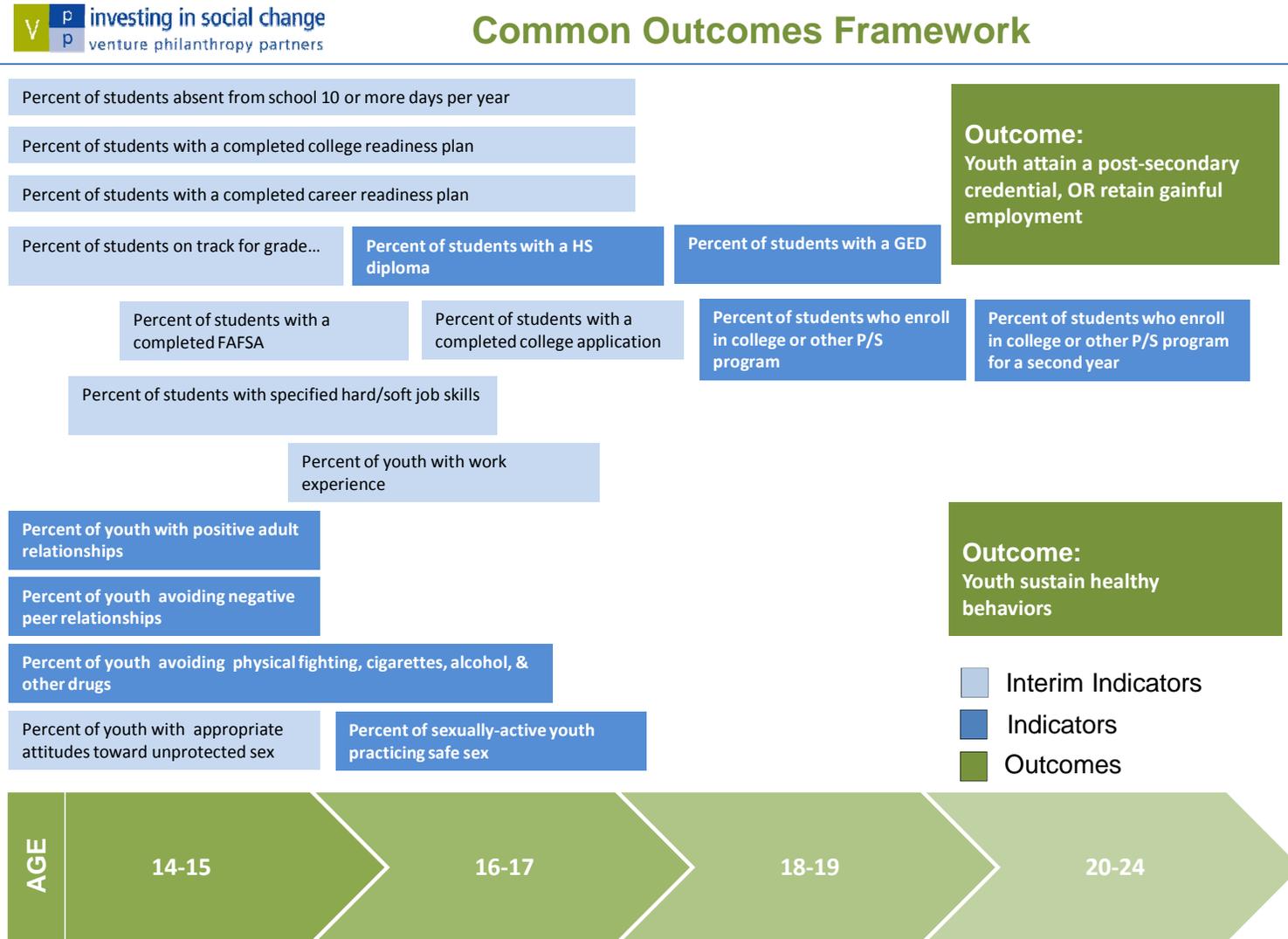
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[6] Part-time employment can be compatible with success in school, and for many students necessary to finance their education. However, these jobs are likely to be subordinate to the education goal.

but also attitudes, confidence, and the degree to which participants were thinking about the impact their actions could have on their future, since engaging in risky sexual behavior could jeopardize the achievement of important life-goals, such as gaining further education or building a career. The group also weighed considerations of survey administration, knowing that youth would be likely to complete such surveys only if they were kept to a reasonable length.

- *Timing and frequency of measurement.* ECOM participants struggled with the timing and frequency of data collection for the indicators, and whether targets for indicator improvement were appropriate. ECOM decided that, at a minimum, indicator data on participants would be collected at program entry and exit. For some programs, this might be an interval of several years, whereas for others it could be as short as six weeks. It was agreed that, at least for purposes of the outcomes evaluation, these pre- and post- data would not be linked at the individual level, but rather reported in aggregate. There was additionally some discussion of what might be appropriate levels of improvement between the two measurement time-points. For example, given that participants in many of the programs vary considerably in their initially assessed levels of risk, should the highest-risk participants be expected to see the same amount of improvement as those with the lowest risk?

Figure 1.

Common Outcomes Framework

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Percent of students absent from school 10 or more days per year

Percent of students with a completed college readiness plan

Percent of students with a completed career readiness plan

Percent of students on track for grade...

Percent of students with a HS diploma

Percent of students with a GED

Outcome:
Youth attain a post-secondary credential, OR retain gainful employment

Percent of students with a completed FAFSA

Percent of students with a completed college application

Percent of students who enroll in college or other P/S program

Percent of students who enroll in college or other P/S program for a second year

Percent of students with specified hard/soft job skills

Percent of youth with work experience

Percent of youth with positive adult relationships

Percent of youth avoiding negative peer relationships

Percent of youth avoiding physical fighting, cigarettes, alcohol, & other drugs

Percent of youth with appropriate attitudes toward unprotected sex

Percent of sexually-active youth practicing safe sex

Outcome:
Youth sustain healthy behaviors

Interim Indicators

Indicators

Outcomes

AGE

14-15

16-17

18-19

20-24

All these agreements notwithstanding, variations still remain in ECOM's common outcomes framework, although these may be addressed in the future. Examples include:

- Not all six organizations will be able to collect data on all the indicators—even those which are primary. This is because some programs will only touch the lives of participating youth for a limited period of time, and thus will have no means for following up on participants once they exit.
- Not all the programs use the same instruments for data collection.
- Programs differ in the extent to which they have adopted a measurement culture. Many of the common indicators already double as performance measures for the program. For other programs, the common indicators have relevance primarily as part of the evaluations ongoing under the SIF. This will impact data collection and analysis.

Lessons Learned

This is not easy work and some may look at what youthCONNECT has accomplished over seven months and see more process than results. From the very beginning we recognized that to be effective, this process would require vigorous discussion and debate, and frequent check-ins with other stakeholders. All would have to be willing to relinquish some degree of organizational autonomy, recognizing that the power of this shared vision would be achievable only through collective efforts.

We consider the following to be key lessons that we have learned in our progress:

- *Get clarity around language.* Without adopting a common terminology at the outset of the work, group members would have been constantly talking past each other, or achieving apparent progress only to see that fall apart when differences in understanding were revealed.
- *Spend time building relationships:* We believe the progress made to date has been helped along by the efforts made at the very beginning to build relationships of trust among Network members who had not previously known one another, an effort that was strongly supported by VPP. During the first year, ECOM members spent time getting to know each other and developing a working relationship, and was able to move forward with mutual understanding that the process would only be effective if it resulted in demonstrable progress towards the goals and mission of each organization. Participants came to appreciate having the opportunity to regularly engage in dialogue with their peers in ways that helped to spark creativity and sharpen their thinking. And they welcomed having a forum where the atmosphere of trust enabled them to freely share ideas, challenges, and best practices, particularly in the areas of measurement and data collection.

- *Accommodate program model diversity.* Another important element in ECOM's ability to move forward was its willingness to embrace the differences among its partners. Beyond a shared focus on vulnerable youth, the six youthCONNECT organizations have, on the surface, little in common with one another. Through this process, group members discovered numerous points of agreement, while deciding on areas where they would have to agree to disagree. The group did not let failure to achieve consensus on every point stop it from achieving progress on many others.

- *The importance of data.* There are few organizations today that have not been affected, at least to some degree, by the push to become data-driven. Over the course of ECOM's work, we have identified *four distinct purposes* served by data collection.
  1. It provides the means to test our outcomes framework. For example, is progress on the interim indicators indeed related to change on the longer-term indicators?
  2. It helps to strengthen performance management by showing where program improvement efforts should be maintained or strengthened.
  3. It forms the basis for the common measures used in each program's external evaluation.
  4. Common data elements can be used to simulate the effects of the Network *in toto*, as well as the potential impact a significantly scaled-up youthCONNECT could have on the region.

Still, programs vary widely in their capacity to collect and use data for effective performance management. The issues range from collecting insufficient data and collecting too much of the wrong kind of data, to having poor controls on data quality, to being unable to integrate data across multiple systems that serve the same participants[7], to budget and staffing constraints.

A further issue for many programs is their limited capacity to collect data on participants once they have left the program. This is particularly pertinent for youthCONNECT because the outcomes it is most concerned with—post-secondary education or training, sustainable employment, and healthy behaviors—will not be realized, in most cases, until years later. Having interim indicators is therefore essential to measure change in the shorter term.

Another issue that looms large for youthCONNECT is the need for programs to access data from secondary schools. For a number of reasons, schools have been reluctant to enter into data-sharing agreements despite the fact that they share many, if not all, of the same goals as youthCONNECT. Still another data challenge for these programs is determining the most appropriate intervals for collecting participant data.

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[7] Within youthCONNECT, we have not attempted to resolve the data issues posed by participants in any of the six Network programs who may be served by more than one of the programs. This is because the numbers are very small. We hope to resolve this issue at some point in the future.

With assistance from VPP, Child Trends, and their own evaluators, the youthCONNECT partners are moving toward an improved data-collection infrastructure that includes the common measures, as well as ones unique to each program.

Conclusion

Those who have studied collaborative cross-sector efforts to move the dial on indicators show a remarkable degree of consensus in their analysis of what characteristics make for successful partnerships. Thus, in a review of the healthy cities and communities movement, Pittman[8] identified the following:

- Clearly defined vision (predicated on measurable goals, evidence-based strategies, and shared accountability);
- Disciplined focus on a small number of goals;
- Approach that addresses multiple aspects of the issue through multiple stakeholders;
- Support for the infrastructure, including data, to implement successfully; and
- Intervention that lasts long enough to create sustainable change.

In their own review of cross-sector coordination efforts, Kania and Kramer[9] posited "five conditions of collective success":

- Common agenda;
- Shared measurement system;
- Mutually reinforcing activities;
- Continuous communication; and
- One or more "backbone" support organizations.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy, working with Vermont's state human services and education agencies in the 1990s[10], suggested that successful regional public-private partnerships
- Take responsibility for a broad set of outcomes;
- Operate according to a clear set of service-delivery principles;
- Have legitimacy and credibility to represent local residents and communities;

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[8] Pittman, M. A. (2010). Multisectoral lessons from Healthy Communities. Preventing Chronic Disease, 7(6), http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2010/nov/10_0085.htm

[9] Kania & Kramer, op. cit.

[10] David Murphey, Child Trends, personal notes (undated).

- Have authority to influence the allocation of dollars and staff; and
- Maintain accountability for the outcomes—to the public, and to their major partners.

Against these yardsticks, youthCONNECT, particularly through the work of ECOM, made admirable strides in its first year, although much remains to be done.

We should not under- (or over-) estimate the value of strategic alignment around common outcomes and associated measures. Under the best of circumstances, programs have limited capacity to invest in performance management systems, and those are often designed to meet the reporting requirements of specific funders. For program managers to consider a framework of measures that cuts across their individual programs is thus a significant development—one that acknowledges that the goals they share are not achievable without harnessing their collective effort.

Less well developed are shared principles of service-delivery and/or reinforcing activities, and the important issues of legitimacy, credibility, and authority. Given the disparate nature of the six programs that make up youthCONNECT, it is not surprising that alignment along lines of activities, or the principles that guide those activities, only received brief discussion within its first year of existence. However, this would be a logical next step for the organizations to consider and the Network partners are already actively considering combining their services in a particular place focused on a specific cohort of youth.

More challenging, perhaps, are issues concerning the role of the Network vis-à-vis the populations served by the programs and its authority to enact substantive policy change. These topics have already entered ECOM conversations, but are far from being resolved.

We believe youthCONNECT offers a model for what can be achieved through collaboration. Scaled up, there is the potential to create a much larger regional network that could include dozens of organizations committed to outcomes that will positively impact our target audience of at-risk youth.

While we know there is still much to be done, we are pleased with the accomplishments of ECOM to date and believe our experiences can make a valuable contribution to the growing knowledge base in the field of youth development.

The continuing work of the youthCONNECT ECOM group will focus on performance management activities for each of the youthCONNECT partners and across the Network, and on operationalizing the Common Outcomes Framework for Network-wide and program-specific reporting. Through the work going forward, data will be used to inform and strengthen programming as well as to measure the collective impact of the Network.

We look forward to documenting subsequent stages of this work, particularly as youthCONNECT moves forward with collecting data on the framework and uses that information to identify opportunities to improve performance at both Network and individual program levels.

Appendix

Table 1

youthCONNECT Program Activities						
	College Summit-NCR (Launch)	KIPP Through College	LAYC Promotor Pathway	Metro Teen AIDS	Urban Alliance	Year Up-NCR
Employment						
Internships		●			●	●
Help with job-seeking		●	●		●	●
Resume-building		●			●	●
Career planning	●	●	●		●	●
Work readiness skills			●		●	●
Education						
College access training/preparation	●	●	●		●	●
FAFSA/financial aid support	●	●	●		●	●
High school preparation		●				
Financial literacy		●			●	●
High school or college credits	●			●	●	●
Technology, writing courses						●
High school/GED completion	●	●	●			
Health						
Sexual risk behavior/pregnancy prevention			●	●		●
Substance abuse prevention			●	●		●

Violence/crime prevention			●			
Health promotion			●		●	●

Table 2

youthCONNECT Partners: Common Measures Collected						
	College Summit-NCR (Launch)	KIPP Through College	LAYC Promotor Pathway	Metro Teen AIDS	Urban Alliance	Year Up-NCR
Education						
Student absenteeism		●	●	●	●	●
On-track for grade						
High school diploma or GED		●	●		●[a]	●
Completed college readiness plan	●	●			●	●
Completed college application	●	●			●	●
Completed FAFSA	●	●			●	●
Enrolled in college or post-secondary program	●	●	●		●	●
Enrolled in second year of college or post-secondary program	●	●	●		●	●
Employment						
Soft job skills			●		●	●
Completed career readiness plan	●	●			●	●
Work experience		●	●		●	●
Health						
Positive adult relationships	●	●	●	●	●	●
Avoiding negative peer relationships			●	●		●
Avoiding violence and substance			●	●		●

abuse						
Appropriate attitudes toward sex			●	●		●
Sexually active youth practicing safe sex			●	●		●

^a Diploma only

Table 3

OUTCOME: Youth Attain a Post-Secondary Credential, or Retain Gainful Employment		
	Indicators	**Data Source**
	Percent participants attaining a HS diploma or GED	Participant surveys a) *Did you receive a regular high school diploma?* (yes/no) b) *Did you receive a GED?* (yes/no) [Count if *yes* to a) or b)]	OR School/program administrative data [Count if record indicates diploma or GED]
	Percent participants enrolled in college or other post-secondary program within 6 months	Program administrative data [Count if record indicates enrollment within 6 months of program exit]	OR National Student Clearinghouse [Count if record indicates enrollment within 6 months of program exit]
	Percent participants enrolled in college or other post-secondary program for a second year	Program administrative data [Count if record indicates second-year enrollment]	OR National Student Clearinghouse [Count if comparison with previous year indicates second-year enrollment]

OUTCOME: Youth Sustain Healthy Behaviors		
	Indicators	**Data Source**
	Percent sexually active participants practicing safe sex	Participant surveys a) *Have you ever had sexual intercourse?* (yes, no) b) *The last time you had sexual intercourse, did you or your partner use a condom?* (yes, no) *The next question is about your use of effective methods of birth control. By effective methods, we mean the following:* *- Condoms* *- Birth control pills* *- The shot (Depo Provera)* *- The patch* *- The ring (NuvaRing)* *- IUD (Mirena or Paragard)* *- Implant (Implanon)* c) *In the past 3 months, have you had sexual intercourse without using an effective method of birth control, even once?* (yes, no, does not apply) [Count if *yes* to a); then, among those, count if *yes* to b) AND *no* or *does not apply* to c)]

OUTCOME: Youth Sustain Healthy Behaviors

	Indicators	Data Source
	Percent participants avoiding fighting and substance abuse	Participant surveys *During the past 12 months, how many times were you in a physical fight?* *During the past 30 days, on how many days did you smoke cigarettes?* *During the past 30 days, on how many days did you have at least one drink of alcohol?* *On how many occasions have you used marijuana or other illegal drugs during the past 30 days?* [Count if "0" or "none" to all questions]

OUTCOME: Youth Attain a Post-Secondary Credential, or Retain Gainful Employment

Interim Indicators		Data Source
Percent participants missing 10 percent of school days or more	Participant surveys a) *During the past 6 weeks, were you enrolled in school or college?* (yes, no) *If yes, please mark what type of school you were attending or enrolled in:* ___ *(1) Finishing high school* ___ *(2) GED program* ___ *(3) Vocational training program* ___ *(4) Ungraded* ___ *(5) Two-year college, community college, vocational school or junior college* ___ *(6) Four year college or university* _____ ___ *(7) Other school or program, please write in* b) *During the last 6 weeks how many whole days of school have you missed because you skipped or "cut"?* [Count if *yes* to a); then of those count if answer to b) is 10 percent or more of school days]	OR School administrative data [Count if absences constitute 10 percent or more of enrolled school days]

OUTCOME: Youth Attain a Post-Secondary Credential, or Retain Gainful Employment

	Interim Indicators	Data Source
	Percent participants on track for grade-level	School adminstrative data Suggest: GPA $\geq$ 2.0, no more than one "fail" in 9th-grade courses, on-time promotion to 10th grade [Count if yes to all]
	Percent participants completed a college readiness plan	Program administrative data [Count if record indicates completed plan]
	Percent participants completed a career readiness plan	Program administrative data [Count if record indicates completed plan]

OUTCOME: Youth Attain a Post-Secondary Credential, or Retain Gainful Employment

	Interim Indicators	Data Source	
	Percent participants with completed FAFSA	Program administrative data [Count if record indicates completed FAFSA]	OR Participant surveys
	Percent participants with work experience	Program administrative data [Count if record indicates work experience within the past 6 weeks]	a) *In the past 6 weeks have you participated in an apprenticeship, internship, or training program* ? (yes, no) b) *In the past 6 weeks, have you wanted to work for pay but been unable to find a job?* (yes, no) [Score if *yes* to a), or *no* to b)]
	Percent participants with "soft" job skills	"Job Readiness Checklist": has completed resume, sample application, and successful mock interview [Score if yes to all]	

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