



YOUTH TRANSITION ACTION TEAM INITIATIVE

Evaluation and Data Collection Suggestions and Examples Content Conference Call Notes September 14 and October 5, 2005

Leveraging Community Resources to Ensure Successful Transitions for Foster Youth

The Youth Transition Action Team Initiative hosted two content conference calls about successful strategies related to evaluation and data collection used to measure the effectiveness of foster youth transition programs, as well as to measure the success of systems building work. The calls featured facilitated conversations with several panelists who discussed evaluation and data collection elements and methodologies and who shared the strategies from two initiatives, one government sponsored and another foundation supported. In addition, participants were invited to share strategies they use, including data elements and collection methods, or to raise challenges they face in implementing requirements regarding evaluation and data collection. The calls were facilitated by Steve Trippe, President and Executive Director of New Ways to Work. For more information about New Ways and YTAT, please visit www.newwaystowork.org.

Suggestions for Developing an Evaluation and Data Collection Program

Presenter: Dr. Mikala Rahn

Dr. Rahn is president of Public Works Inc., which conducts program evaluation and helps organizations improve accountability by measuring the effectiveness of delivery systems. For more information about Public Works, Inc., please visit www.publicworksinc.org or email Dr. Rahn at mrahn@publicworksinc.org.

Based on her experience working with many programs and agencies, Dr. Rahn discussed six steps for establishing an evaluation and data collection plan:

- 1. Develop Outcomes/Objectives/Results.** Get partners together and identify the broad outcomes you wish to measure. However, get through that fast, and then identify data measurements for each outcome so that you operationalize outcomes. You ask, "Where am I going to find this data?" and this points you in a direction that will make identifying these outcomes easier.
- 2. Establish a data definition of an outcome and make distinctions between long term and short term outcomes.** Data definition needs to be linked to a data source. Ask how will I operationalize (the tracking of outcomes)? In the process, you will separate out long term and short term definitions. A short term step might be completing an Independent Living Program (ILP) where a long term outcome might be earning a living wage over a given period of time. The outcomes have to be something you can actually put a measure to. Short term outcomes often feel unsatisfying while a long term outcome may seem too hard to measure, so you are looking for a balance.

- 3. Define your target population.** In some situations you may be focused on a local population or on just the particular target population. In other situations, especially in large urban or regional settings, you may be using a regional or systems approach. In either case, you need to know the difference between case management and systems evaluation. Ideally they fit together. Systems data already exist. Schools, economic indicators, department of public services data, census data can all be used for systems evaluations. You will have to decide what ways to use case management versus evaluation and how agencies are going to share the information cross systems.
- 4. Identify data collection methods.** You want the data collection to overlap with case management system in some way, and you want to use electronic sources wherever possible. There is so much more cumulative data available now than there ever used to be. You can use outside data services for education and other systems. As for case management data, it can be very difficult to share case management information, but now there are more agreements, MOUs, etc. to support confidential information sharing. Whatever combination of sources you use, ask what the electronic and paper files will look like.
- 5. Ask who will analyze and what the time frame is.** The answer comes down to time and money and how credible you want the data to be. Will you use an outside source or internal? It depends on sources of funding and what the data will be used for.
- 6. Use data to improve your programs.** You can use them to answer questions ranging from “How are you bringing partners and outside stakeholders in?” to “How are you reporting on your analysis? Is it for foundations or for outside marketing? Identify your audience.”

Working with Government-Determined Outcomes: Improving Transition Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities Project (ITOP)

Presenter: Donna DeWeerd

Donna DeWeerd is a private consultant working with the Improving Transition Options for Youth with Disability Project (ITOP), a pilot project being funded through the California Workforce Investment Board with monies from the US. Department of Labor's [DOL] Office of Disability Employment Policy. Ms. DeWeerd helped the ITOP initiative participants design and implement their data collection and evaluation system. She continues to serve as the project evaluator through the California Institute on Human Services, Sonoma State University. For more information about ITOP, please visit www.improvingyouthtransitions.org/ or contact Ms. DeWeerd at ddeweerd@co.napa.ca.us.

Donna DeWeerd shared the ITOP outcomes, data collection, and evaluation design:

ITOP had outcomes determined by the funding source (the US Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy). The funding was then distributed to sites, based on defined outcomes. The evaluation outcomes for systems change involved determining the following things:

Objective 1: What are the sites doing in terms of recruitment and enrollment?
(by reviewing case files)

Objective 2: What kind of discovery they are engaged in?

Objective 3: How are the intermediary organizations in the ITOP project ensuring that youth with disabilities received transition services? (The services were aligned with the All Youth – One System Elements Framework.)

The outcomes defined for youth were improvement in education and improvement in literacy/numeracy gains.

Collection of Data: A data collection system was developed specifically for the project. ITOP uses a shared data base and reports quarterly to the Office of Disability Employment at the US Department of Labor. They shaped the database around the objectives and made sure that the reporting identified pre- and post- completion, which was part of the evaluation strategy. Another evaluation element was to disseminate questionnaires to stakeholders before they implemented the project. A post-project questionnaire will identify the overall effectiveness of the work.

Interim data collection and information will be used to inform public policy.

To read more, please visit [ITOP's Intermediary Projects Evaluation Plan Narrative](http://www.nww.org/initiatives/ytat/events/ITOPeval.doc) (<http://www.nww.org/initiatives/ytat/events/ITOPeval.doc>) & [ITOP Evaluation Survey](http://www.nww.org/initiatives/ytat/events/ITOPcombo.doc) (<http://www.nww.org/initiatives/ytat/events/ITOPcombo.doc>).

Developing a System for Tracking Outcomes of Emancipating Foster Youth: California Connected by 25

Presenter: Professor Amy Catlin D'Andrade

Professor D'Andrade is an assistant professor in the School of Social Work, San Jose State University (SJSU). Prior to joining the SJSU faculty, she worked as a doctoral student researcher at the Child Welfare Research Center of the Center for Social Services Research (CSSR) in the U.C. Berkeley School of Social Work. While at CSSR, she worked on a program evaluation of California Connected by 25. For more information about California Connected by 25, please visit <http://www.hewlett.org/Archives/Publications/connectedBy25.htm> or contact Professor D'Andrade at adandrade@casa.sjsu.edu.

Professor D'Andrade described the program evaluation effort for California Connected by 25:

Project Background: California Connected by 25 is a foundation-supported initiative. The foundations worked with five California Counties, conducting a needs assessment for their transition services, and asked what they would do with funding to support youth age 14-24. The initiative is designed to enhance services for current and emancipated foster youth. The foundations asked that CSSR function as evaluation consultants to determine whether the influx of resources would make a difference in the funded counties. They also asked CSSR to support the counties in identifying how they evaluate their programs. In addition, they wanted to link Connected by 25 to other efforts and support the continued use of tools after they left the initiative.

CSSR wanted to help counties assess themselves rather than doing it for them, in order that the evaluation systems would remain in place. The first step was to identify the outcomes counties wanted to see for youth. CSSR is currently midway through that process.

CSSR encountered some challenges. Any evaluation system needs to allow agencies to summarize how youth are doing. The problem was that many agencies didn't have an electronic system that enables them to do this. Furthermore, in the state data system for child welfare, CWS/CMS, relevant elements for emancipating foster youth (high school completion, employment, permanent connections, etc.) aren't captured. As a result, the counties were using a frustrating patchwork system to capture outcomes, or weren't tracking these outcomes at all. They wanted a data system that would help them run their Independent Living Programs, but most service-oriented data systems don't help them track outcomes.

CSSR began looking at alternative data collection sources that will support identifying this information: a service-oriented database that identifies services and that also measures outcomes of interest. A data base system developed in Sacramento seems to do a good job tracking services, and also captures the outcomes of interest. CSSR will be working on the data base to modify to track outcomes and provide reports. At the end of the initiative, the hope is to have a system that can be used in other communities.

Tips that Emerged during the Caller Participation Period

After the three panelists completed their presentations, facilitator Steve Trippe invited call participants to share questions, challenges, and successful strategies. The following ideas emerged during this part of the call, and were offered by the panelists or by participants:

1. Develop Good Relationships with People in Charge of Data

Establish a good working relationship with the person in charge of data in whatever system you want to access data from. It's the relationship you establish over time that gives you the best access to data. It's not necessarily the person who is the named data manager. You need to ask around to find out who works with the data regularly. Mikala Rahn said, "There's always the big honcho who protects data. Often we spend too much time with the honchos rather than with the programmers who know how to run the data."

Often the honchos haven't touched the data for years. "Tell me about your programmers. Who are they? Can they come to a meeting?"

2. Strategies for Attaining Educational Progress and Outcomes Data from Schools

There is nothing more valuable than transcripts and grades for measuring impacts on school-aged youth.

If you are providing services to the schools system, (even if you don't receive resources from the schools), a good strategy is to create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the schools providing access to district data to evaluate and measure your program's impact. Your leverage is that you are helping them with their work.

Always get a student ID number (part of your agreements with schools through MOUs or contracts). California Standards Tests (CSTs) are fine to use for evaluation over time. The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) is big on every school's agenda right now. All federal funding streams are looking at the exam and other High Stakes tests as indicators of school success. Pass rates are critical.

The US Department of Labor's Common Measures has identified performance data that has redefined acceptable, positive graduation outcomes and certifications which has huge implications for programs funded through the WIA system.

Examine and consider using test results and measures already being used in the K-12 system rather than simply adding another skills test.

3. Be Aware of Federal and State Data Collection Changes and Requirements

US DOL'S Common Measures are in place in the workforce system effective July 1, 2005 (for collection purposes only). On July 1, 2006 they will guide all performance based contracting in the WIA system. There are some positive wrinkles in the common measures Definitions. For example, in the past, if you enrolled a young person in a WIA-funded program and they were placed out of county, it would count as a negative outcome for the program. Now programs are able to place these young people in a category called "planned gap in service" where they do not have a negative impact on the program. Common Measures represent a significant change in the WIA evaluation system that programs need to pay attention to.

Materials

The panelists and the staff of New Ways to Work offer these valuable links:

[Child Welfare Services \(CWS/CMS\) Reports](http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/)

(<http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/>)

[National Collaborative on Workforce Development-Career Planning Assessment Guide](http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources_&_Publications/assessment.html)

(http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources_&_Publications/assessment.html)

[Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment, Transition Framework, and Roadmap to Learning](http://www.caseylifeskills.org/)

(<http://www.caseylifeskills.org/>)

[Outcomes for Transitioning Youth](http://www.nww.org/initiatives/ytat/events/OUTCOMESDRAFT2_general%20version.doc)

([http://www.nww.org/initiatives/ytat/events/OUTCOMESDRAFT2_general version.doc](http://www.nww.org/initiatives/ytat/events/OUTCOMESDRAFT2_general%20version.doc))

[Foster Care Evaluation and Outcomes](http://www.nww.org/initiatives/ytat/events/New_Ways_foster.doc)

(http://www.nww.org/initiatives/ytat/events/New_Ways_foster.doc)

[LA County DCFS Youth Survey](http://www.ilponline.org/survey/login.asp)

(<http://www.ilponline.org/survey/login.asp>)

NOTE: After clicking on the link to the LA County DCFS Youth Survey, enter the following information in the windows: User ID = test. Password = test, in order to view/print the survey.

Please, Please, do not click the 'Submit' button at the end of the survey. They do not want to capture artificial data.

Next Steps for YTAT

Join The YTAT Evaluation Workgroup!

As a follow up to this series of content calls on evaluation and data collection, the YTAT Evaluation Workgroup is being formed. The workgroup will initially provide an opportunity for people involved with collecting data – particularly as related to cross-system evaluation – to share ideas, promising practices, challenges, and strategies. The group will also help inform system measures across the YTAT communities.

The YTAT Evaluation Workgroup will meet via conference call. The first meeting will be held on December 13, 2005 from 10 am to 11 am, PST. During the first meeting, the group will decide what issues the group would like to address, how to best work together and how frequently to meet.

Call in to the New Ways Conference Bridge promptly at 10am
707-824-8013

Please RSVP by December 2 by contacting Krista Bollum at kbollum@nww.org or (707) 824-4000 ext. 23. We will then send out a confirmation and any materials to you.

Please join us as we work together to enhance the data collection and evaluation strategies. Help to shape this important part of the YTAT initiative and get support for your county's efforts.

Additional content conference calls are being planned for every other month

The next content conference call will be on the subject of *Workforce Development Programs Serving Foster Youth*. It will be held on January 4, 2006 from 10-11am PST. To register for the call, please contact Krista at kbollum@nww.org or (707) 824-4000 ext. 23.

New Ways to Work facilitators, along with the YTAT site leads, will be planning content calls on other topics. Information about these calls will be sent via email when it is available.

For more information about the YTAT initiative, please contact Chris Castillo, YTAT Project Manager, at ccastillo@nww.org or (707) 824-4000 ext. 28.
