

Shared Interests: Involving Youth Councils in Performance Management

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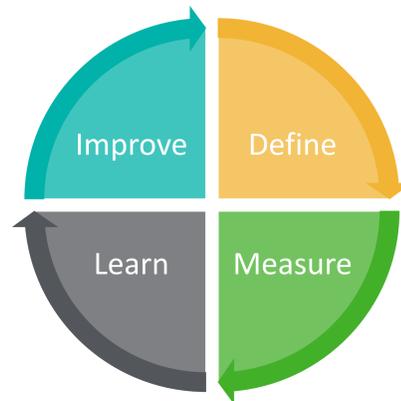


Who We Are

For over 35 years, Good Shepherd Services has provided afterschool programs for youth and families across New York City. Today, Good Shepherd is one of the largest providers of afterschools in the city, serving over 3,000 elementary and middle school students at 20 programs located in Brooklyn and the Bronx. Our programs share a commitment to providing safe, engaging and inclusive afterschool communities, rich in developmental opportunities that help youth to identify their unique talents and empower them with a sense of belonging, skill mastery and leadership.

Engaging Youth Councils in the Performance Management Cycle

Organizations that embrace measurement to learn are better poised to adapt their program practice to the ever-changing circumstances they may face. Stakeholder involvement at each stage of the performance management cycle is essential to the learning process. Afterschool program leaders and internal evaluators partnered with youth council participants at each stage of the performance management cycle: Define, Measure, Learn and Improve (Eckhart-Queenan and Forti, 2011). From helping to define what questions should be asked and to develop administration guides to assisting in the administration of surveys and review of results, the youth council participants play a vital role in the performance management process. This partnership not only strengthens the program, but also helps to develop critical thinking skills and evaluation capacity for youth participants and program staff.



By engaging youth council participants in the performance management cycle at each stage, the programs can develop a more responsive and useful process that more closely connects to the mission and work of the programs. It also provides a more complete picture of the program's impact and the participant's experience within the program. For example, when program experience surveys are developed just by internal evaluators, program leadership might dismiss negative results, claiming their population did not understand the question or the question did not relate to their program. However, when survey development includes the youth in the process, the youth can provide insight into what would be feasible questions to ask their peers as well as suggest additional indicators that the program might want to consider. Research has also shown that youth involvement in decision making has multiple benefits to both the participants and to the organization.

Continuing the Work

The next step planned is to work with program directors on how to utilize their youth councils more in program planning. Program directors have identified that they could use support on how to solicitate needed information from participants to help with planning program activities and events. We would like to further enhance the collaboration between program leadership and the youth councils.

References

- Eckhart-Queenan, J and Forti, M (2011) *Measurement as Learning: What Nonprofit CEOs, Board Members, and Philanthropists Need to Know to Keep Improving*. The Bridgespan Group
- O'Donoghue, J., Kirschner, B., & McLaughlin, M.W. (2003). *Moving youth participation forward. New Directions for Youth Development: Theory, Practice and Research, No 96.*

Acknowledgement

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Contact:

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Define

We **define** the evaluation process through program planning, which includes the development and implementation of the Afterschool Model, program worksopes and the afterschool logic model.

Youth Councils Role:

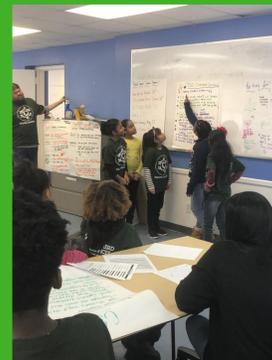
- Providing feedback on activities offered (based on data from previous survey administrations)
- Helping to identify what questions should be included in the Participant Satisfaction Surveys. We collected feedback through focus groups with individual program youth council groups.

Measure

We **measure** success through multiple data sources, such as surveys (one example is the Participant Satisfaction Surveys) and data from government funding agency (site visits, enrollment and rate of participation). We host a Youth Council Forum to teach the youth about the importance of youth voice and to train them on how to administer a survey to their peers.

Youth Councils Role:

- Developing an administration guide to the survey, including identifying how to explain survey questions to peers without influencing the responses
- Administering the actual survey to their peers
- Assisting to administer a simplified version of the survey to younger participants (Kindergarten through 2nd grade) who struggle with reading the survey



Learn

Once the data is collected, we **learn** by analyzing the available data and reviewing the results. When the results are available, we host a Youth Council Forum to teach the participants how to read the results reports and how to understand the data.

Youth Councils Role:

- Discussing in their council the results from their program to identify areas of strength and areas of concern. We have learned that the youth council participants tend to address these by looking at what the program needs to change but also looking at what the youth participants need to change as well.



Improve

We **improve** by implementing action plan steps and using data to inform our practice. The action steps identified to improve program help to **define** the program for the next year.

Youth Councils Role:

- Developing a few action steps to address survey results to recommend to their program director. These actions steps typically include actions for program planning and actions for participants to help improve program experience.

