NEW ORLEANS YOUTH PROGRAM QUALITY INITIATIVE

YEAR ONE (2015-2016)

QUALITY

NOLA YOUTH PROGRAM QUALITY INITIATIVE

ASSESS ✦ PLAN ✦ IMPROVE

REFLECTION

"The YPQI isn't a high-stakes evaluation! It's an opportunity for me and my team to assess what we are doing, determine whether or not we are having the impact we want and how we want to change, and get tools and resources to help us achieve our goals. The YPQI gave me the time and space to think about what we do and why we do it!"

- Program Manager, YPQI Participant Organization

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WHY QUALITY MATTERS

Beginning in late 2014, Baptist Community Ministries began to explore a promising avenue for responding to the growing demand in New Orleans for more and better learning experiences for children and youth. The city's public education system had been dramatically retooled post-Katrina, initiatives and funding strategies incentivized parents, providers, and staff to improve quality in early childhood programs, and targeted improvements were underway to improve the criminal justice and health care systems. However, supports to engage children and youth in learning opportunities beyond the school day had received relatively little organized attention for several years, leaving program providers and parents to do the best they could with available resources.

Research and evaluation data consistently shows that high quality youth programs are more likely to lead to positive developmental outcomes for children and youth.[1] Part of this research also served to identify the components of program quality as well as the necessary supports for programs to attain the highest level of quality possible in order to maximize youth outcomes. As BCM's strategic goals were shaped in 2014-15 from its years of grant making in K-12 education and afterschool learning, it developed a goal around launching a pilot demonstration project that would engage the New Orleans' youth provider community in designing strategies for quality improvement that also aligned with *Collective Impact*[2], an area of investment BCM had increasingly made post-Katrina through strategic endeavors.

This report describes the design and implementation of an ongoing youth program quality improvement (YPQI) initiative for the period of January 2015 through August 2016, emphasizing the values, goals and outcomes of the pilot. It is based on a review of documents created during the planning and implementation of the pilot, interviews with key staff, consultants, and YPQI pilot organization staff, and experiences participating in YPQI meetings, trainings, and events over this twenty month period.

REFLECTION

"The **Youth Work Methods** trainings -- specifically those which focused on encouraging, developing spaces for, and incorporating youth voice in the 'higher' levels of engagement -- were the most helpful. Role-playing and having the time to reflect upon different tools and strategies shed some insight on how they could be implemented in my specific organizational setting."

-Program Manager, YPQI Participant Organization

SETTING THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS:
JANUARY – AUGUST 2015

With the ultimate goal of establishing a robust and sustainable youth program quality improvement (YPQI) system that raises the quality of out-of-school time (OST) programming and produces better outcomes for New Orleans' children and youth, BCM staff and consultants embarked on a process of designing a pilot project to test an approach to building quality. The process was based on foundational values of diverse stakeholder engagement, continuous learning, and creating sustainable structures that would have life beyond the pilot demonstration. In addition, all elements of the work focused on building a system to support better outcomes for children and youth. A system, which is defined here as a set of interconnected people, ideas and organizations working towards common goals, will increase the likelihood of reaching those positive outcomes.

RESEARCH: LOCAL LANDSCAPE AND NATIONAL PRACTICES

Identifying the characteristics of New Orleans' landscape that could support success was of paramount importance to getting started. Four factors were identified as key challenges and opportunities to achieving a sustainable YPQI system:

» LACK OF A CENTRALIZED OST SYSTEM

In many communities around the country, a significant proportion of children participate in out-of-school (OST) programming offered by nationally affiliated providers such as Boys and Girls Clubs or YMCAs. Those communities also rely on a youth development intermediary organization to support high quality programming. New Orleans, however, has a more disparate "system" and lacks a clear leader, backbone or administrative entity to support the sector. At the same time, several promising efforts have been underway to provide opportunities for collective OST system-level action. These include YouthShift's citywide agenda for children and youth, the EMPLOY collaborative, a collective impact initiative focused on Opportunity Youth, the Laureus' Foundation's sports-based youth development collaborative, the growth of the New Orleans Recreation Development Commission as a central actor in the OST sector, the emergence of a stronger Children and Youth Planning Board, and the City's NOLA for Life initiative.

» INCREASING ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN OST

The public education landscape has changed dramatically since New Orleans began its recovery from the flooding associated with Hurricane Katrina. The state takeover of a majority of public schools fed the growth of charter schools, led to longer schools days in all public schools (and in some cases longer school years), and some charter management organizations assumed responsibility for providing OST or afterschool programs. This movement towards school management of OST programs was fueled in part by schools' increasing access to federal funding through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers. Regardless, New Orleans schools continue to partner in a policy environment that predominantly incentivizes reaching student achievement goals. At the same time, schools are faced with increasing pressures from parents as well as community concerns to give more attention to social emotional learning and school climate, as well as the provision of afterschool and summer programming that had historically been the realm of community based organizations. These pressures compliment schools' efforts to manage their own OST programming even as they continue to partner with community-based OST providers. The result—higher accountability for both operators to achieve quality and results.

» LIMITED AND MIXED EXPERIENCE WITH PROGRAM QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Multiple youth program quality improvement efforts have been undertaken in New Orleans' OST sector during the last fifteen years, but with limited success and no sustainability. These experiences often left the OST provider community with varying levels of knowledge about what it would take to have a truly robust quality improvement system as well as reactions varying from mistrust to excitement. Concerns included fears that a quality system would only focus on contract compliance, not assess the most important features of the work, and providers getting an assessment or grade that is used to defund programs rather than to support their improvement.

» BUILDING ON YOUTHSHIFT

A key opportunity for building a youth program quality system was the ability to leverage the work of YouthShift, a citywide initiative to create a collective agenda for children. YouthShift's work in 2014-2015 identified program quality as fundamental to promoting positive youth development and resulted in a recommendation about program quality included in the YouthShift report, *A Call for Connection: Bridging the Divide for New Orleans Children & Youth*.[3] The report called for the formation of action teams to focus on its five recommendations; one recommendation spoke specifically to the need for coordinating, expanding, and sustaining efforts to define, measure and support quality in programs and services for New Orleans' children and youth.

NATIONAL PRACTICES

Research into successful YPQI systems pointed to a set of stakeholders, components, and activities required to promote the successful adoption and implementation of quality standards for OST youth programming community-wide as well as the supports to help local organizations reach those standards.[4] BCM reviewed several national models for assessing out-of-school time program quality as well as national efforts to systematize the use of tools, processes, and supports in local communities.[5]

Essential stakeholders include public and private funders, program providers who regularly work with young people, and technical assistance providers and trainers who can assist providers in assessing and improving their programs. In addition, a vast majority of successful YPQI systems rely on a strong "backbone" or intermediary organization that serves as convener, advocate, educator, assessor, coordinator and technical assistance provider.

CORE COMPONENTS REQUIRED TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL YPQI SYSTEM ARE:

- » A common set of agreed-upon quality standards
- » A reliable assessment tool that measures programs against those standards and supports program quality improvement planning
- » Professional development, technical assistance and training opportunities that are aligned with quality standards and assist provider staff in improving program quality. Often, professional development is incentivized through credentials tied to promotion, compensation and licensure.

PRIMARY ACTIVITIES FOR LAUNCHING A SUCCESSFUL YPQI SYSTEM INCLUDE:

- » Establishing public will for the development of the YPQI system
- » Engaging a range of stakeholders in creating a common definition of quality, metrics and accountability
- » Piloting a YPQI demonstration with a small group of providers and trainers/assessors
- » Creating incentives for broader participation in the YPQI system
- » Setting in motion activities targeting the adoption of the broader YPQI system initiative

EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS:

The most compelling data on YPQI effectiveness came from a 2012 study on the David P. Weikart Center's[6] youth program quality intervention. Researchers found that the YPQI:

- » Improves program quality
- » Works across challenging staffing conditions
- » Works across different types of afterschool systems and policies
- » Is shown to be a sustainable, cost-effective, lower stakes model for continuous improvement[7]

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING

Helping diverse stakeholders increase their knowledge and comfort with program quality tools and strategies was a critical goal for designing and implementing the first year pilot . To that end, BCM staff hosted a public and private funders breakfast and convened two meetings with local stakeholders to talk about the potential for creating a youth program quality system in New Orleans. Attendees included representatives from 21st Century Community Learning Center grantees, BCM grantees, sports and arts-based youth development organizations, the Louisiana statewide network for afterschool, the New Orleans Recreation Department, EMPLOY/data-sharing collaborative partners, members of the Children and Youth Planning Board as well as local foundations.

In addition, local leaders were connected to learning opportunities such as the Ready by 21 National Meeting and Weikart Center workshops on YPQI systems. BCM and the Campbell Foundation provided funds to send a team of New Orleans nonprofit and city leaders to these events in spring 2015 where they were introduced to the YPQI system and established a diverse cohort of people committed to carrying out the design and piloting of an initiative. A debriefing meeting after the conference highlighted participants' commitment to the ideals of a systematic youth program quality intervention that supported continuous improvement and learning.

DESIGN TEAM AND OUTREACH

BCM staff invited a range of people to help them explore options for improving program quality, including representatives from youth program providers, schools, funders, city government and intermediary organizations. From those exploratory conversations evolved a Design Team of twelve people who met several times as part of the initial planning phase and now meets monthly as a YPQI advisory working group. During the summer of 2015, members of the Design Team visited Austin, TX and Seattle, WA — two cities with long histories of developing YPQI systems. There, they met with local leaders - intermediaries, providers, funders, and other partners in those YPQI systems were instrumental in helping the Design Team think through all elements of an effective approach that could be tested in New Orleans.

2015 DESIGN TEAM & 2015-2016 YPQI WORKING GROUP

TODD BATTISTE UNITED WAY OF SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA
MARTI DUMAS YPQI ASSESSOR/COACH AND TRAINER
NICOLE JOLLY COWEN INSTITUTE, TULANE UNIVERSITY
SARA MASSEY COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS OF GNO
RICKIE NUTIK YOUNG AUDIENCES OF LOUISIANA
ECHO OLANDER KIDSMART
BOB PAYNE NEW ORLEANS COLLEGE PREP

JENNIFER ROBERTS BAPTIST COMMUNITY MINISTRIES
JAMIE SCHMILL LAUREUS SPORT FOR GOOD FOUNDATION
HAMILTON SIMONS-JONES YPQI NETWORK LEAD AND ASSESSOR/COACH
PAM STEVENS YPQI COACHES FACILITATOR
ERIKA WRIGHT CITY OF NEW ORLEANS / J.P. MORGAN CHASE & CO.
STEWART YOUNG RECONCILE NEW ORLEANS (CAFE RECONCILE)

REFLECTION

"The site visits to Austin and Seattle were key to understanding of how the many moving parts of a youth program quality system might work or not work in New Orleans. Seattle was especially impressive because they've been able to sustain quality approaches for decades, have public funding that is used to support quality, and have a strong intermediary to manage and coordinate the work across the city. One major takeaway from Austin was the importance of having key nonprofit and public leadership engaged across systems that focus on young people—education, community based organizations, and funders such as United Way."

- NOLA-YPQI Design Team Member

DESIGNING AN EFFECTIVE YPQI FOR NEW ORLEANS
SEPTEMBER 2015 – AUGUST 2016

The research and planning phase led to several key decisions that shaped the design for a NOLA-YPQI pilot.

1 BCM committed to launching a pilot initiative with a maximum of 15 organizations. Over the ten month partnership, these organizations would learn how to assess their programming and receive data, resources, and supports to help build their awareness, understanding and skills of quality programming. BCM and the Design Team selected the Weikart Center's YPQI approach as the one best suited for New Orleans context. The range of tools and technical assistance available, their widespread adoption across different youth settings and communities as well as the research evidence were major factors in this decision. The Weikart model defines instructional quality as a set of professional practices that increase participating youth's access to positive developmental experiences. The PQA, Weikart's research-validated program quality assessment tool, assesses program quality features and helps programs create customized action plans to enhance their program. The PQA focuses on key areas of quality at the point where staff and youth interact: a safe and supportive environment, youth/adult and peer interactions, and youth engagement. The PQA helps staff to objectively identify program strengths and gaps, and is linked to training modules that help address self-identified areas for improvement. The PQA was developed for programs serving youth in grades four through twelve and has been used with more than 4,000 program sites across 41 states.[8]

2 The Design Team recommended several priorities for programs to be included in the first YPQI cohort based on local context and opportunity. They sought organizations with programs that:

- » Served children and youth in grades 4-12 and opportunity youth
- » Had strong connections to schools
- » Represented a diversity of program settings, content focus areas, types, sizes and neighborhoods
- » Had stable finances and staffing to help facilitate their capacity to participate in the pilot

3 In conjunction with BCM staff, the Design Team identified five key goals for the pilot:

- » Increase the availability of high-quality programs serving children and youth in New Orleans
- » Assist participating programs in developing a culture of continuous program improvement
- » Learn about the supports programs need – and how best to provide those supports – to improve the quality of their programming
- » Demonstrate that the NOLA-YPQI can assist a diverse group of programs in improving the quality of their programming
- » Inform the building of a sustainable Quality Improvement System (QIS) that improves outcomes for young people across the city by improving the quality of the programs with which they engage

4 In partnership with the Weikart Center and the Design Team, BCM consultants targeted a September 2015 launch date for the pilot and began the work to recruit and select pilot organizations and develop the activities that would support their participation (e.g., orientation, kick off events, training).

IMPLEMENTING THE FIRST YEAR YPQI PILOT
SELECTING PILOT ORGANIZATIONS

Program selection was a two-step process. BCM first hosted an information meeting at the United Way for all organizations interested in learning more about the YPQI pilot. Ninety-eight organizations sent staff to hear about the overall goals for program quality improvement, criteria for participation, and timeline for activities. The second step involved organizations submitting applications for review by members of the YPQI Design Team and BCM staff.

Applicants had to meet specific criteria for selection that was developed by the Design Team to ensure they had the capacity for implementation and the greatest likelihood of impact and sustainability. Organizations had to be classified as a 501(c) (3) public charity or a 170(c) (1) government instrumentality by the IRS and have operated for at least three years. They had to provide services to at least 25 children and youth, ages 8-24, for at least three hours per week on a consistent basis for at least ten months per year in Orleans Parish and have at least three paid staff responsible for program implementation. Additional qualifiers included an intentional program design grounded in the principles of positive youth development and prior experience with data collection. Organizations also had to designate one of their programs on which to focus the assessment. Forty-four organizations submitted an application.
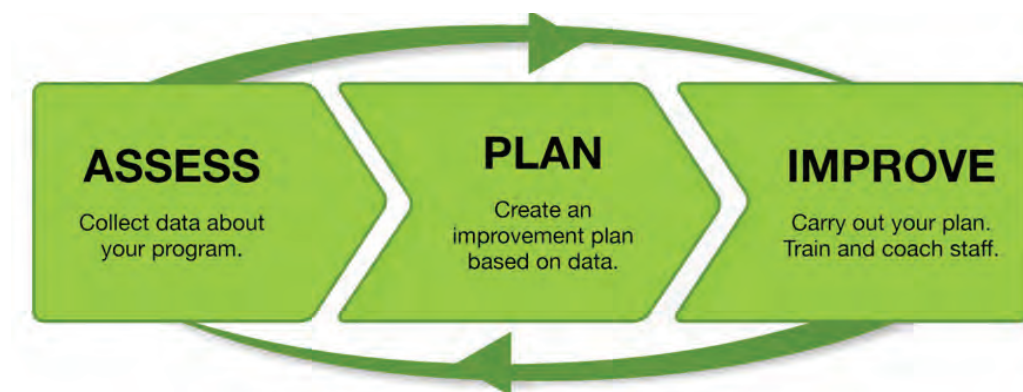
As planned, 15 organizations were selected to participate in the NOLA-YPQI pilot — they included A's and Aces, College Track, Communities in Schools, Dancing Grounds, DiscoveryFEST, FirstLine Schools, Girls on the Run, LA Green Corps, Liberty's Kitchen, Sci High, Reconcile New Orleans, VAYLA, Young Audiences, Youth Empowerment Project, and Youth Run NOLA. For the ten month pilot period, each organization received a grant of $5,000 along with technical assistance and training from BCM consultants and the Weikart Center, including:

- » Participation in a peer learning community focused on youth program quality improvement
- » Completion of a program quality self-assessment and external assessment
- » Professional development and training in youth development best practices and managing continuous program quality improvement
- » Support for program quality goal setting and implementation
- » Onsite coaching and technical assistance
- » Technical assistance to support organizational capacity building in areas that complement program quality

All of the pilot organizations had the full commitment of their Executive Directors to support full participation of staff in the above activities. Each organization named a lead staff person to participate in all activities and organize participation of other staff. In addition, each organization agreed to enter data from its assessments and improvement plans into the online scores reporter data system managed by the Weikart Center.

ASSEMBLING THE PILOT ACTIVITIES

Weikart's YPQI approach is premised on the belief that it is a youth worker's job to set up an environment for youth in which needs are met and learning is encouraged—to create a space in which youth can thrive. At the heart of the Weikart model is a continuous improvement approach utilizing the PQA tool that marries quality assessment, team-based improvement, planning with data, improved program practices, instructional coaching for staff, and targeted staff training to build skills. The Weikart approach capitalizes on three major stages of work within an organization – assessing the program activity, using data to plan for improvement, and ongoing support and activities to meet improvement goals.

ASSESS Collect data about your program.

PLAN Create an improvement plan based on data.

IMPROVE Carry out your plan. Train and coach staff.

COMPONENTS OF THE NOLA-YPQI

KICK-OFF EVENT

Once organizations were notified of their acceptance in the pilot, a kick-off meeting was held to create networking opportunities across the programs and to help orient all the participants to the activities planned for the next several months. This also gave the program participants a chance to meet the Assessors/Coaches who would be working with them during the pilot.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ASSESSMENTS

At the core of the improvement process is the capacity of organizations to assess their own practices, use that information to plan improvements, and tap available resources to carry out those plans. Assessments consider programmatic practices in four areas: Safe Environment; Supportive Environment; Peer Interaction; and Youth Engagement. Organizations learned more about the assess-plan-improve process at the *PQA Basics* training held at the beginning of the pilot period.

In the NOLA-YPQI pilot, organizations also received an assessment completed by a trained external assessor certified by the Weikart Center. Internal and external assessments were completed in the fall 2015 and spring 2016. The assessment results were tabulated by the Weikart Center and each organization received a report on its results. Weikart also produced an overall report for all programs participating in the New Orleans' pilot that would allow for identifying common needs and trends across the cohort.

YOUTH WORK MANAGEMENT TRAININGS

The management trainings focus on establishing management practices to support program quality. Pilot organizations sent staff to the *PQA Basics* training, *Planning with Data*, a training for teams to learn how to use their assessment data to develop their improvement plans; and *Quality Instructional Coaching*, a training for program supervisors to learn an observation-reflection technique to coach staff on strategies to improve instructional quality.

YOUTH WORK METHODS TRAININGS

Ten youth work methods trainings, developed by the Weikart center to help build skills in the basic elements of positive youth development, were available to YPQI participants. The trainings correspond to four areas of practice measured in the YPQA and reflected in the Pyramid of Program Quality below. A local consultant was trained to deliver these trainings and United Way of Southeast Louisiana generously provided the training space at no cost.

THE PYRAMID OF YOUTH PROGRAM QUALITY

YPQI TRAININGS & WORKSHOPS

MANAGEMENT:
PQA BASICS
PLANNING WITH DATA
QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

METHODS:
INTRODUCTION TO THE ACTIVE-PARTICIPATORY APPROACH
ACTIVE LEARNING
ASK-LISTEN-ENCOURAGE
BUILDING COMMUNITY
COOPERATIVE LEARNING
HOMEWORK HELP
PLANNING AND REFLECTION
REFRAMING CONFLICT
STRUCTURE AND CLEAR LIMITS
YOUTH VOICE

COACHING

The coaching process was designed to provide additional supports to pilot organizations that could focus on individualized support to staff and leadership, interpreting assessment data, training, and identifying additional materials or training for the organization. Five local consultants were contracted to provide coaching as well as conduct external assessments for individual sites. Coaches were selected based on their coaching experience, enthusiasm for continuous improvement processes, and ability to pass the Weikart Center's External Assessor reliability training exam. Each coach was assigned three to five organizations in the pilot.

> **REFLECTION**
>
> New Orleans' approach to coaching was like no other city, according to the Weikart Center staff. External Assessors were also trained as coaches, creating a new YPQI staffing role - the YPQI External Assessor Coach (EAC). Each EAC could not only assess quality practices, but then help their organizations develop improvement plans, provide technical knowledge on how to meet goals, and provide individualized training. EACs also had their own community of practice where they could learn from one another and strategize on logistics, techniques, and content needs.

IMPROVEMENT PLANS

Once self and external assessment results were shared with the organizations, each YPQI lead staff person worked with their colleagues and coaches to develop a plan to address areas for improvement. These improvement plans typically identified two or three big goals for work during the pilot. It was typical for a team of staff from the pilot organization to participate in training to learn about techniques for meeting their goals, apply those techniques over a period of time, and then assess their progress. Many of the organizations set and met goals around collaborative work across leadership and staff as well as increasing youth engagement in program design and decision making.

CORE CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TOOL (CCAT)

An addition to the program quality work was a voluntary "mini-pilot" whereby organizations could choose to conduct a self-assessment of their business practices using a tool called the "Core Capacity Assessment Tool" developed by TCC Group. Eight of the pilot organizations opted to complete the assessment. The CCAT provides organizations with an analysis of four core capacities crucial for organizational success:

» **Adaptive Capacity:** the ability of a nonprofit organization to monitor, assess and respond to and create internal and external changes.

» **Leadership Capacity:** the ability of all organizational leaders to create and sustain the vision, inspire, model, prioritize, make decisions, provide direction and innovate, all in an effort to achieve the organizational mission.

» **Management Capacity:** the ability of a nonprofit organization to ensure the effective and efficient use of organizational resources.

» **Technical Capacity:** the ability of a nonprofit organization to implement all of the key organizational and programmatic functions.

» **Organizational Culture:** capturing an organization's unique history, language, organizational structure, and set of values and beliefs. These cultural elements foster staff unity and provide opportunities to re-energize staff.[9]

Once organizations completed this assessment, TCC provided a webinar to help organizations understand their scores on this tool. Individualized reports gave suggestions for strategies to build capacities within each organization. Since financial planning and management was identified as a key issue for several organizations, BCM partnered with the Greater New Orleans Organizational Effectiveness team to provide a specialized training in this area for the pilot organizations.

EVALUATION OF PILOT

The Weikart Center played multiple roles during the first year pilot, including delivering training directly to pilot participants throughout the year, training and certifying assessors, training local trainers for Methods workshops, and collecting and analyzing data from pilot organizations. In addition to collecting the assessment scores, Weikart used surveys to gain insights into the perspectives of staff involved in the YPQI process.

NOLA-YPQI PILOT OUTPUTS
BY THE NUMBERS

15 ORGANIZATIONS

that collectively serve **2,580** CHILDREN AND YOUTH each week,

with organizational annual OPERATING BUDGETS between **50K** and **36M**

with **3** to **50** years experience working with young people

committed to improving PROGRAM QUALITY!

146 PROGRAM STAFF participated in **37** workshops led by the Weikart Center or locally certified trainers, completing **2,352** PERSON HOURS of YPQI training.

AND THEY ALSO COMPLETED

82 PROGRAM QUALITY ASSESSMENTS

44 PROGRAM SELF ASSESSMENTS

38 EXTERNAL ASSESSMENTS by a certified external assessor

8 ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY ASSESSMENTS
using the Core Capacity Assessment Tool

43 GOALS for program quality improvement developed by participating organizations

96 PERSON HOURS of financial leadership training completed by Executive Directors, Board Members and financial leaders to improve their ability to sustain quality programming.

PLUS, AN ADDITIONAL

18 PEOPLE certified as external assessors.

4 PEOPLE certified as Youth Work Methods Trainers

1 PERSON certified as Youth Work Management Trainer

1 PERSON certified in Coaching for Continuous Improvement

TO HELP GROW THE NOLA-YPQI AND EXPAND TO NEW PARTNERS IN THE FUTURE!

TRANSLATING INTO BETTER OUTCOMES

33% increase in average scores in **"Reframing Conflict",** an item on the YPQA scale that measures effective staff practice in turning conflict situations among their participants into opportunities for growth (e.g. staff encourages youth to examine the relationship between their actions and consequences.) This was identified as a priority area for several participating programs.

40% increase in average scores in **"Youth Planning",** an item on the YPQA scale that measures effective staff practices in providing opportunities for youth to make plans (e.g., how to spend their time, how to do a task).

31% increase in average scores in **"Youth Choice",** an item on the YPQA scale that measures effective staff practices in providing opportunities for youth to make choices based on their interests in the program.

17% increase in average scores in **"Youth Engagement",** a domain in the PQA that measures the program and staff's engagement of young people in their program planning and the facilitation of young people making their own choices and reflecting on their activities. This domain is crucial for programs as many researchers have identified youth engagement as a powerful learning practice. This was identified as a priority for improvement by the majority of participating programs.

REFLECTION

The most valuable thing I've discovered through this experience is a sense of the voice my students carry during our classes together and giving them a chance to make choices, decisions and to express while feeling like they are being heard.

-Program Staff, YPQI Participant Organization

EXAMPLES OF IMPROVEMENT GOALS + OUTCOMES

» College Track New Orleans developed and hosted two professional development sessions that focused on increasing student engagement.

» Café Reconcile set a goal to enhance the facilitation skills for all of their program staff to help them incorporate more student choice in their programming.

» The Youth Run NOLA's leadership team implemented a process to jointly review the past season, completing a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, and utilizing this to plan for the upcoming season.

THE NOLA-YPQI EXPERIENCE

ASSESS Collect data about your program.

PLAN Create an improvement plan based on data.

IMPROVE Carry out your plan. Train and improve staff.

SEP ● NOLA-YPQI Kickoff
SEP ● Meet with My Coach Each Month
SEP ● Youth Program Quality Assessment (PQA) Basics Training
OCT ● Conduct My Organization's Program Self-Assessment
OCT ● YPQA External Assessor Reliability Training
OCT ● Youth Work Methods Training: Safe Environment - Structure and Clear Limits
OCT ● Online Scores Reporter Training
OCT ● External Assessment #1
OCT ● Youth Work Methods Training: Introduction to the Active Participatory Approach
NOV ● Youth Work Methods Training: Engagement - Youth Voice
NOV ● Youth Work Methods Training: Supportive Environment - Active Learning
NOV ● Deadline for Entering Assessment Data into Scores Reporter
NOV ● Youth Work Methods Training: Supportive Environment - Ask Listen Encourage
NOV ● Complete My Core Capacity Assessment Tool (CCAT)
DEC ● Planning with Data Workshop
DEC ● Improvement Planning Workshop
DEC ● Improvement Planning Check-in Meeting with Other YPQI Sites and EACs
DEC ● Deadline for Entering Improvement Plan into Scores Reporter
JAN ● Youth Work Methods Training: Interaction - Building Community
JAN ● Quality Instructional Coaching Workshop
JAN ● Youth Work Methods Training: Supportive Environment - Reframing Conflict
FEB ● Youth Work Methods Training: Supportive Environment - Homework Help
MAR ● Youth Work Methods Training: Interaction - Cooperative Learning
MAR ● Self and External Assessment #2
MAR ● Attend Financial Management Training with BCM and GNOF
MAR ● Youth Work Methods Training: Engagement - Youth Voice
APR ● Youth Work Methods Training: Engagement - Planning & Reflection
MAY ● NOLA-YPQI Closing Session

A SUCCESSFUL FIRST YEAR PILOT

The Weikart Center produced an evaluation detailing the performance and overall findings for the quality improvement system as well as a recommendation memo that detailed future strategies to continue strengthening the quality work in New Orleans. In New Orleans, they found:

» Fidelity to the YPQI model and customer satisfaction were high: 100% of staff & managers said YPQI was a good use of their time.

» Programs focused their improvement goals around the areas they identified as having the lowest capacities.

» One-third of organizations developed improvement goals to improve the opportunities for youth in their programs to act as group facilitators and mentors.

» Substantial growth (scores averaging 30% or higher) in three areas-- reframing conflict, youth planning and youth choice.

The data from the Weikart evaluation confirmed the observations and impressions related by various participants and stakeholders as they looked back at the experiences of the first year YPQI pilot. Pilot organizations themselves noted changes in their program practices that went beyond the program targeted for the assessment process but also in the ways that they planned, organized and delivered their other programs. Those most closely engaged in the YPQI pilot as well as outside observers knowledgeable about program quality systems commented routinely on the thoughtful, comprehensive approach to the pilot's planning, design and implementation. The value of learning was identified as essential from the very beginning discussions even before the pilot started; in other words, listening to experiences and making modifications along the way would be crucial to success.

One example came from implementing the methods trainings. Initially, the plan for training included a set schedule of different topics, with each organization deciding which of the trainings to attend. Pilot participants realized a few things early on in the trainings and told the YPQI leadership. For example, certain training topics seemed more critical than others (e.g. *reframing conflict* needed to be offered more frequently) and the time of trainings wasn't always conducive to send entire teams. The YPQI leadership responded to this feedback by scheduling Saturday trainings, adding time at the end of each training for pilot staff to plan, and adding more sessions on the critical topics.

Taking the most comprehensive approach possible given the constraints of time and resources was also identified as a key factor for the first year's success. The New Orleans pilot was fortunate to have a funder who saw the big picture and was willing to experiment with a multi-faceted, rather than a sequential, approach. Weaving together assessment with training and coaching enabled organizations to more fully attend to their improvement goals.

Lastly, while the pilot's requirements meant that not all organizations were eligible to participate in the initial pilot, the advisory working group and BCM staff continued to seek out other partners to solicit input and share the lessons of the pilot. After the external assessor training, BCM paired organizations who had not successfully applied to the pilot with staff at pilot organizations who had been trained and certified in the model — those trained got to practice their new skills and organizations who were not selected for the full pilot were able to receive feedback about their program quality. A promising partnership with the City's recreation department also allowed more stakeholders to take advantage of the benefits of YPQI and proved to be a potential recruitment strategy for future pilot activities.

ADAPTING THE YPQI

The New Orleans Recreation Development-Commission (NORD-C) is the largest provider of youth programs in the city. Working with its 51 community partners to deliver services in the summer, NORD-C reaches 4,000 children and youth. Because the time frame for summer programs was less than one-third of that required of the YPQI pilot sites, the full complement of YPQI activities did not fit within this schedule. Funding from Entergy Corporation and in conjunction with the BCM trained Assessor/Coach consultants made it possible to create a modified program quality approach for these summer programs. Staff attended an orientation about program quality, external assessments were completed, and five youth work methods trainings were delivered. For the second year pilot, the head of NORD-C programming has joined the YPQI design team, a "mini" planning with data workshop will be held this October, and discussions are ongoing about youth program quality approaches for NORD-C's 2017 planning.

SECOND YEAR PILOT MODEL ADAPTATION

At the end of the first pilot year, the Weikart Center outlined a set of recommendations for the YPQI advisory board. These included adjusting the model to meet demand for expansion while retaining high levels of support; strengthening professional learning communities; communicating the strengths of the quality improvement to date; and continuing to build alignment between the quality improvement work and YouthShift. These lessons gleaned from year one along with ongoing discussions with the working group and partners have been used to modify the schedule and offerings in the following ways:

❶ EXPAND ELIGIBILITY

The first year selection criteria purposely focused on organizations with a certain level of experience and size. This seemed important given the "testing" that would occur over the first year to get a better handle on the key ingredients leading to a program quality improvement system. To continue the pilot demonstration for the second year, the criteria would be expanded to encourage smaller size organizations with less operational history and to increase the diversity of settings, program focus, and populations served.

❷ START EARLIER

The timeframe for second year activities allowed more time for site application and selection, more lead time between acceptance into the pilot and the start of activities, and a better defined set of expectations and responsibilities for the coaches.

❸ PRIORITIZE YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

While pilot organizations saw some movement in how they involved young people in their programs, this remains an area of great interest across the pilots. The Reframing Conflict methods training was identified as one learning opportunity to involve youth in more of the program quality work. Program staff are also interested in including youth in the assessment process, including the potential to train young people as assessors.

❹ CREATE MORE CONNECTIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

In interviews with YPQI team leads and in other settings for discussion, staff are interested in more intentional professional learning communities across organizations. Ideas range from meeting with people in similar positions (e.g., YPQI program leads, Executive Directors of small nonprofits) to creating time-limited working groups focused on specific change agendas such as youth engagement.

❺ INCREASE AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF YPQI

Increased communication products have been developed to share the pilot structures and lessons with a broader audience. These include a recently released YPQI video as well as this report.[10]

❻ DIVERSIFY LEADERSHIP

To diversify support for the next stage of the pilot and future system-building efforts, additional stakeholders have been added to the working group (e.g., consultant to the Hilton Foundation, NORD-C program director, service provider, and charter school director).

❼ ALIGN WITH OTHER COLLECTIVES

BCM staff and consultants are working with pilot organizations that are also part of the EMPLOY collective impact initiative on opportunity youth to better leverage their participation in the pilot to the growing national opportunity youth network of providers, leaders, and funders.

BUILDING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The NOLA-YPQI pilot built momentum among youth service providers and other stakeholders about the potential for creating a program quality system aimed at improving outcomes for children and youth across the city. The positive results indicate the potential for even greater gains through the second phase of the pilot, which began in August 2016 and continues through the first half of 2017.

BCM continues to engage local funders as informants to the pilot and the Campbell Foundation has made an additional commitment to support the year two pilot; other funding commitments are likely but pending. However, sustainability of the work and eventual movement to a system of program quality for New Orleans will require increased financial investments from area funders. In spring 2016, BCM, United Way, JP Morgan Chase, and the Laureus Foundation invited private and public funders to a discussion about local efforts to promote program quality and highlight a national report on ways in which funders can support quality. BCM and the Kellogg Foundation are providing leadership to the Youth and Education Action Team within the Greater New Orleans Funders Network to encourage national and local funder investment in youth development systems.

An important set of discussions that will have impact on future quality improvement achievements continue through the pilot's connection to YouthShift. The YouthShift action team on program quality has elevated the conversations about who gets to determine quality and how best to provide support to community organizations with input from increasingly diverse stakeholders including young people and their families. Important steps are also underway to incubate a new intermediary (or backbone) support organization that has potential for providing ongoing technical assistance, training and advocacy to support youth program quality in the future. If the ultimate goal is to move from a pilot or test of an YPQI platform that can only involve a limited number of programs to an YPQI system that encompasses a majority of youth programs, then increasing the number of stakeholders is imperative. This also includes system partners like K-12 institutions. For example, one school from FirstLine had such a positive experience with the YPQI that the charter management organization made a commitment to utilize the program quality tools and approach throughout all of its schools. This commitment also resulted in tapping over $400,000 of 21st Century Community Learning Center funding from the state, proving that YPQI is not only impactful, but is also potentially financially sustainable. With the second year of the pilot already in operation, additional information regarding the project's growth, scale, and impact is forthcoming.

REFLECTION

"The kids are having a richer experience at programming due to the increased program quality. For instance, they have had the opportunity to take part in a service project that they were able to plan and are in the process of conducting as a result of one of the goals set for the PQA. The youth have a consistent place to have their voices heard in a creative and collaborative way outside of their school environment."

-Program Staff, YPQI Participant Organization

ENDNOTES

[1]Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., & Pachan, M.K. (2010). A meta-analysis of afterschool programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents. American Journal of Community Psychology, 16, 294.309 and Vandell, D.L., Reisner, E.R. & Pierce, K.M. (2007). Outcomes linked to high-quality after-school programs: Longitudinal findings from the study of promising afterschool programs. University of California, Irvine and Policy Studies Associates, Inc.

[2]Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2011). Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter, 36-41.

[3]YouthShift Steering Committee, A Call for Connection: Bridging the Divide for New Orleans Children & Youth (2015). www.nolayouthshift.org

[4]For a summary of research and strategies, see Grantmakers For Education's Out-of-School Time Funder Network (2016). Funders' Guide to Quality in Out-of-School Time. www.edfunders.org. Also see Browne, D. (2015) Growing Together, Learning Together, What Cities Have Discovered About Building Afterschool Systems. The Wallace Foundation. http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center

[5]For a summary of existing tools, see Yohalem, N et al. (2009) Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools, Second Edition. Washington, D.C. The Forum for Youth Investment. http://forumfyi.org/content/measuring-youth-program-qualityguide-assessement-tools-2nd-edition

[6]The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality is a subsidiary of the Forum for Youth Investment. Its mission is to advance research to validate continuous improvement with organizations serving children and youth.

[7]Smith, C., Akiva, T., et al (2012) Continuous Quality Improvement in afterschool settings: Impact findings from the Youth Program Quality Intervention Study. Washington, D.C.: The Forum for Youth Investment.

[8]For more detailed information on the YPQA, visit http://www.cypq.org/sites/cypq.org/files/publications/YPQI-TABrief1.pdf.

[9]TCC Group (2015). TCC Group's Core Capacity Assessment Tool, Report and Recommendations-NOLA-YPQI Aggregate. For more information about the TCC Group and the CCAT, go to www.tccgrp.com.

[10]NOLA YPQI video can be found online at: https://vimeo.com/163025407.

2015-2016 YPQI PARTICIPANTS AND WORKING GROUP

YPQI PILOT

YPQI WORKING GROUP

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE YPQI OR TO REQUEST ANY MATERIALS REFERRED TO IN THIS REPORT, PLEASE EMAIL YPQI@BCM.ORG

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