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We are delighted to be able to make this case study available to you to help you make your mentoring program a success. This publication was funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools under contract with EMT Associates, Inc. Although this publication has not yet been officially released by the U.S. Department of Education, we have been authorized to make it available on the Web at this time to solicit your feedback.

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Sincerely,

Judy Strother Taylor
Project Director



U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Resource Center



By Christina Borbely, Ph.D.

Linking Evaluation to Sustainability: The KISmet Project

Introduction

Sustaining mentoring services overtime is fundamental to achieving positive long-term outcomes for youth. Thus, both mentoring providers and funders are traditionally interested in achieving long-term commitments to mentees, schools, and communities.

Therefore, funders often invest in programs that have a proven track record of achieving outcomes and the ability to secure diverse funding sources. While broadening a traditional evaluation focus on “accountability and reporting requirements” requires effort, it is usually a worthwhile endeavor to actively integrate evaluation activities into long-term planning and sustainability efforts.

Traditionally, evaluation is aimed at demonstrating program effectiveness and sustainability is designed to secure financial resources to support the longevity and/or expansion of a program. Often these functions operate under different departments or are perceived as separate responsibilities. Though distinct functions, a program’s ability to make the connection between evaluation and sustainability may lead to greater overall success and longevity.

In it’s most limited capacity, evaluation is only used to meet funding requirements; however, mentoring providers are becoming more savvy in using data to drive program improvement efforts and to market program successes and achievements. The capacity to design and implement a program evaluation that will address multiple purposes

requires foresight and planning. Whether relying on internal resources or contracting with an external evaluator, evaluation has the potential to be conducted with an eye toward sustainability and potential funding sources.

Linking evaluation to sustainability efforts optimizes program resources. Research on successfully sustained community-based programs for children, youth and families found that accountability through evaluation was a common trait.

Telling your program story through evaluation allows you to:

- retain or increase funding
- engage collaborators – partners, volunteers, advocates, policymakers.
- recruit and retain talented staff
- attract new participants or schools
- share innovations and successes with similar programs.

Studies examining characteristics of successfully sustained programs serving children and families determined that evaluation was used for the following purposes (in order of most common use)^c:

- to assess program effectiveness
- program modification
- program planning
- reports to collaborators and funders
- documentation for grant proposals

- market to community
- market to potential funders
- support program replication

The current case study provides insight on methods that promote the use of evaluation results in order to enhance program sustainability. It profiles the advantages of a well-defined and systematic approach to developing a program evaluation process informed by and providing information to sustainability strategies.

Program Description

The Kids in School Meeting Their Match Program (KISmet) of Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Bay Area (BBBS of the Bay Area) is a school-based mentoring program serving high risk schools in San Mateo and Santa Clara County, California.

KISmet conducts ongoing program evaluation at all of its school sites. One-to-one mentoring occurs in varying forms of an extracurricular or after school activity depending on the location. In the 2006 outcome findings^e, KISmet participation was associated with a variety of positive impacts:

- More than 122 one-to-one school-based mentor matches established since inception. 58% of matches made in the first year were sustained in the second year.
- Based on grade point average (GPA), 40% of mentees improved academic performance while participating in KISmet.
- 60% of KISmet students improved their standardized test score in English/Language Arts during participation; 60% improved their standardized test Math score.

^e Change over time compares data from 2005-2006 academic year to the previous year. Results are based on San Mateo County KISmet sites only.

- Over 70% of teachers reported that KISmet students demonstrated improved academic performance.
- 16% of KISmet mentored students decreased unexcused absences;
- Almost 70% of mentored students received no discipline referrals in 2005-2006.

The KISmet path toward success has included ongoing refinement of the program design and service delivery. Strategic decision-making related to program improvement relies on the findings from process and outcome evaluation reports. For example, this data-driven approach has resulted in staffing changes. Preliminary evaluation findings indicated the demand for mentoring services exceeded capacity to identify mentors. Staff time was reorganized to allocate additional hours to mentor recruitment-specific tasks. This has enabled KISmet to continually increase the number of mentees, “Littles”, matched to mentors, “Bigs”, over the last three years.

The capacity of evaluation to support data-driven decisions is not limited to program improvement. The KISmet team consistently seeks opportunities to leverage the evaluation process for the benefit of their mentoring program. What do they stand to gain from making the extra effort? KISmet will sustain services at its school sites as a result of successful fund development efforts. What methods secured this success?

Linking KISmet Evaluation & Sustainability

- Customized evaluation summaries for each KISmet site in order that schools may leverage the evidence of success in their fund development efforts.
- Expanding KISmet services and sites according to the trajectory of proven success outlined by the program evaluation findings.
- Integration of program-specific data in all grant proposals.
- Use of KISmet data to establish target outcomes in other programs or sites.

Best Practices and Strategies

KISmet was a new mentoring program for the historically community-based BBBS agency. The initial implementation occurred at three San Mateo County school campuses; a year later, an additional three sites were established in neighboring Santa Clara County. By the third year, the San Mateo KISmet expanded to a fourth school. The preparation and initiation of school-based mentoring was well thought-out. Consequently, the agency was able to adapt the program to accommodate individual school cultures and demands for service. The KISmet team applied both innovative and proven principles of evaluation and sustainability theory and strategy

#1 Investing in the Right Relationships

A successful relationship with the program evaluation team is essential. The KISmet program has been evaluated by the same external evaluator since inception. In fact, the evaluator developed the evaluation plan for the project proposal.

The consistency of the relationship, however, is not as crucial as the quality of the communication and participation in the process. The KISmet management and staff team conducts regular planning sessions with the evaluator. There is ongoing and open discussion. The evaluator communicates with the KISmet project director and the staff site managers and recruiters in order to get input and perspective on implementation of the evaluation plan. In turn, the KISmet staff inform the evaluator about priority outcome areas and potential audiences for results. Investing the time and interest in the evaluation process, rather than merely outsourcing the task, results in a customized and meaningful product.

The successful relationship with the evaluator also entails a partnership with the schools.

Building trust and rapport with the schools takes time and effort. The KISmet team is respectful of and responsive to circumstances at each school campus. Program site managers develop connections to teachers, aides, administrative staff and principals. The KISmet team also supports regular communication between the evaluator and the school. Making introductions and coordinating opportunities for these two parties to meet has many benefits. For instance, a strong relationship between the evaluator and the school translates to access to data in school records.

Investing in the right relationships allows KISmet to flourish. The positive relationship with schools results in appropriate referrals, shared resources, and momentum to continue the program. While building and maintaining these relationships demands attention and action on the part of the KISmet team, the result is a solid foundation of support and partnerships in which program sustainability takes root.

#2 Using the Right Data for the Occasion

Program evaluation can produce an array of information. Process or formative evaluation provides insight into the effectiveness of program implementation. Findings reflect how the program operates and may be used to understand how to improve service delivery. Outcome or summative evaluation produces empirical evidence of program impact. Results from this type of evaluation demonstrate progress toward or achievement of program goals –proof that mentoring programs benefit participants.

KISmet combines process and outcome evaluation in order to generate findings relevant to their needs. A one-page snapshot of key findings provides a simple and concise way to market program success. It should highlight impressive outcomes from the agency's evaluation process.

Systematic monitoring of KISmet matches, mentoring activities, recruitment efforts, and school site functioning provides a detailed account of how the program manifests itself under various circumstances. KISmet uses this data to inform school partners about program progress at their site. This not only promotes the support of the school administrators, but allows them in turn to share the information with their key stakeholders.

Quantitative evidence of KISmet's impact on students is also in high demand. This data, along with process evaluation data, is provided to each school in a site-specific summary report. This exceeds the required evaluation to funders. Using the data for this purpose, however, is a worthwhile investment. It is a contribution to the partnership between KISmet and the partnering school site, thus increasing the likelihood that service delivery can be sustained over time.

In addition to using evaluation data to strengthen existing partnerships, KISmet relies on data to make a case to potential funders and new partners.

What is the right data for this occasion?

When it comes to school-based mentoring, “we can talk about developmental assets, like increased confidence, but what funders really want to hear about are the tangible impacts – attendance rates and test scores!”

According to Dawn Kruger, executive director of BBBS of the Bay Area, being able to share these results is critical to getting and keeping the attention of school district administrators and funders.

Some data are easier to gather than others. The findings that play a high profile in fund development or other sustainability efforts warrant attention. (Of course, this is not to say that data used in funder required reporting or program improvement is not a priority). The KISmet team:

- Tracking data. Though tedious at times, this a valuable use of resources. KISmet has thorough records on Big and Little personal information, matches, frequency, duration, and primary activities for participation.
- Communicates with school staff to determine convenient times to be present at administrative offices in order to access student files.
- Compensates school staff for time spent compiling student record information.

While any data may be used to the advantage of a mentoring program, the right data for a given context is a powerful tool.

#3 Making Decisions Based on Evidence

Program sustainability typically refers to the capacity to continue service delivery over a period of time. This encompasses fund development strategies to financially support program infrastructure and direct services, as well as securing appropriate staff and material resources needed for operation. In addition to maintaining service delivery, sustainability may translate to expansion of services, either through increase of services at a given site or implementation at new sites. A hallmark of successfully sustained programs is a calculated approach. Program evaluation is part of the formula.

For KISmet, program evaluation results are used to determine a viable scope of service delivery. “It tells us what we can successfully take on.” The capacity to serve increasing numbers of students is based on data and

this translates to an informed program expansion. Data-driven decision making increases likelihood of success more so than intuition or hope-based approaches. KISmet is currently using program participation rates and results to forecast viable expansion within existing sites and to new sites. The number of matches at the original six school campuses has grown steadily, and comfortably, over the past three years. KISmet also implemented services at a new school site. This decision was the result of careful analysis of program resources' capacity to support increased demands. It is imperative to program longevity that expansion is not at the expense of positive impacts. To date, the seven KISmet site are continuing to benefit participants.

In addition to informing program growth, KISmet relies on evaluation findings to develop new mentoring program proposals. When seeking new funding or promoting other school-based services, BBBS of the Bay Area uses KISmet outcomes to establish proposed project impacts. Rather than rely on a best guess or findings from other research, the organization is able to leverage the research from their local KISmet evaluation to establish new target outcomes. Not only does this strategic use of accountability through existing evaluation resonate with funders, but it results in feasible benchmarks of success.

The Future of KISmet

- Private funds were secured to expand services at a seventh school site during the third year of implementation.
- Funding is in place to sustain KISmet at the original program sites once federal funding ends.
- KISmet seeks additional and diverse funding sources on an ongoing basis.
- BBBS of the Bay Area references KISmet as an example of the success of mentoring programs.
- BBBS of the Bay Area uses KISmet as an example of the value of school-based mentoring.

Adopting Lessons Learned

- Assess the nature of program evaluation and fund development or sustainability efforts at your organization. Determine viable strategies for connecting the two facets of your organization given available resources.
- Schedule a planning session to review opportunities to link program evaluation to sustainability or fund development initiatives. Be sure that the agency's key players in these disciplines attend the session.
- Establish regular, ongoing meetings or systems of communication between program evaluation and program sustainability teams. At smaller-scale organizations, allot time dedicated to planning and implementing coordinated strategies across these areas.
- Become active in program evaluation processes.
- Proactively seek to use program evaluation data to "tell your story". This may mean a shift from "anecdotes" to evidence.
- Remain cognizant of and pursue opportunities to strengthen the link between program evaluation and sustainability efforts.
- Monitor what works with regard to "findings" that contribute to program longevity.

More Proven Methods of Linking Evaluation & Sustainability

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Keeping your finger on the pulse of community needs & service gaps is useful when making your case to potential funders. A well-planned needs assessment will also:

- serve as a baseline for evaluation outcomes
- be updated regularly as new data becomes available
- drive programmatic decisions

LOGIC MODELS

A visual representation of your program, a logic model maps the relationship between need, service, proposed outcomes, and indicators of success. In addition to benefiting program providers, a logic model will provide potential funders:

- a diagram of the program concept
- an illustration the process by which mentoring creates positive change
- a shared understanding of program function

STANDARDIZED AGENCY MEASURES

Agencies that use a standard set of evaluation measures across programs and over time are able to draw from a dense dataset. When communicating about evaluation results in sustainability efforts, this permits programs to:

- Make long-term statements about positive outcomes
- Report findings in a fluid narrative (rather than dividing outcomes by program, funding cycle, etc.)
- Demonstrate consistency of mentoring benefits

DRAFT

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Additional Resources

- [Evaluating Your Program: a beginner's self-evaluation workbook for mentoring programs](http://www.itincorporated.com/sew_dl.htm): This free resource, developed by [ITI](http://www.itincorporated.com), is a guide to conducting a mentoring program evaluation. The guide covers all aspects of determining the measurable outcomes, collecting and analyzing the data, and using the results in a program's marketing efforts. http://www.itincorporated.com/sew_dl.htm
- [W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook](http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub770.pdf): This handbook provides a framework for thinking about evaluation as a relevant and useful program tool. Written primarily for project directors who have direct responsibility for the ongoing evaluation of W.K. Kellogg Foundation-funded projects, it can easily be adapted for use in other settings. <http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub770.pdf>
- [Building a Sustainable Mentoring Program: A Framework for Resource Development Planning \(2006\)](http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/sustainability.pdf): This resource provides tools and planning worksheets to help your program organize and maximize its fundraising and governance. <http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/sustainability.pdf>

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Christina is a consultant at the Center for Applied Research Solutions (CARS) providing training and technical assistance to state and federally funded programs that serve youth and families. She is also a program evaluator for school and community-based programs. In addition, Christina is Director of Research and Planning at the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Placer County. Previously, Christina was a member of the research staff at Columbia University's National Center for Children and Families. Her work in the field of youth development and prevention programs has been presented at national conferences and published in academic journals. She is a mentor to youth in underserved populations. Christina received her doctoral degree in developmental psychology, with a focus on children and adolescents, from Columbia University (2004).

About Kids in School Meeting Their Match

KISmet serves students of San Mateo and Santa Clara County, California, who are at risk of adverse outcomes including academic failure, school drop out, gang affiliation, or other delinquent behavior. Their schools are located in high poverty, high crime areas. These students lack access to and opportunities for assets such as strong positive role models, meaningful engagement in school or the community. KISmet provides an opportunity to develop assets and supports each students positive development. **For more information about KISmet, contact Dawn Kruger, Executive Director, at dkruger@bbbsba.org. or 925-918-2657.**

Mentoring Resource Center

Case Study Series

The Mentoring Resource Center (MRC) has been created to provide United States Department of Education Mentoring Program grantees with training, technical assistance, publications, research, and consultation, all in an effort to help their program staff design and implement the highest quality mentoring programs. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, the MRC is a collaborative effort between EMT Associates, located in Folsom, CA, and the National Mentoring Center, located in Portland, OR.

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