Using Project Outcome with Business Development and Job Skills Programs to Deepen Partnerships, Improve Services, and Increase Library Championship

For eight months, Pima County Public Library (PCPL) has been using Project Outcome surveys to assess the workshops, classes, trainings, and drop-in sessions they provide in the areas of business development, job skills, and digital literacy.

Data-Driven Decision-Making Leads to Deepened Business Development Partnership, Increased Efficiency in Service Provision, and Increased Access and Impact among Community Members

Based on survey results, PCPL has added components to business development services, changed how they offer services, and, in one case, decided to eliminate a service. One program manager explained, “It’s not just a matter of measuring attendees, but in measuring the effectiveness, or the immediate impact that it has on patrons that attend these workshops. Some of these workshops… were well-attended, but the feedback was such that we no longer offer [them]. It’s a matter of making sure that it’s not just getting people in the door, but that people feel like it’s worth their time, and it’s something that they can use. That when they leave… they’re in a position where they feel they’re more comfortable with whatever the topic was.”
Survey data has also led to changes in how the library works with its partners. As a project coordinator explained, “What Project Outcome has helped us do is be more strategic in how we use… partnerships.” One example involved a drop-in service for adults interested in starting a small business. Through the Project Outcome surveys, the library learned that patrons wanted a more structured learning opportunity in addition to one-on-one help. Library leadership approached an existing nonprofit partner, SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives), and, together, PCPL and SCORE decided library staff would teach content from the first of five SCORE foundational business workshops during the library’s drop-in hours. As a result, more community members are now accessing a continuum of services that match their evolving needs.

PCPL and SCORE co-market their respective business development learning opportunities; SCORE regularly refers people to the library, where they get the foundational training and access to a wide array of business development resources; and the library regularly refers people to SCORE when they are ready for mentoring on more advanced business development topics. In this way, the collaboration has helped SCORE with the problem of people going to them for a first appointment and never coming back, which helps SCORE “keep our volunteer mentors happy—otherwise they won’t want to do this stuff, because we do it for free… Our mentors like nice, meaty business problems, that they work with people who are enthusiastic.”

In this mutually beneficial collaboration, SCORE provides the library with materials, coaching, and occasional in-person support, and the library frees up SCORE mentors to provide higher-level training to patrons who have an increased level of readiness for it. Each partner is doing what they do best—maximizing the efficiency, accessibility, and impact of the services they provide. A vice president at SCORE explained, “What I've heard from people… is that [first session is] incredibly important for them… in a couple of ways. For the people that… decide that they are going to go out and build a new business, it gives them an understanding of the questions they need to answer and an understanding of the process that they can potentially use to gain those answers, and to develop their business plan. And then equally important on the other side… is that they go to that meeting and they decided ‘Wow, that's not going to be nearly as easy as I expected.’ Or the risks are going to be a lot greater… They might have to use their personal resources and are not willing to do that, and they decide not to create a business. And that's just as valuable… Because the worst thing you can do is send somebody down the road on a path that they’re going to fail and potentially eat up all their personal resources in the process.”

Sharing Evidence of Business Services and Job Skills Program Impact Leads to Increased Championship of the Library and a Deepened Job Skills and Economic Development Partnership

Pima County’s Economic Development Plan includes PCPL’s contribution to “human infrastructure” through support of workforce development and small business creation and growth. In their quarterly updates to the county, as well as their recent annual report, PCPL included evidence of outcomes and anecdotes provided through Project Outcome surveys.

One library leader believes these data points contributed to “the County Manager and varied department heads… seeing the library’s got it going on… The library does know what they’re doing…” which, in turn, led the County Administrator to refer the Pima County One-Stop Career Center to the library when the One-Stop asked the County for additional money. The library leader explained, “The County Administrator said to them, ‘Well, are you doing any of that cool stuff like that’s happening at the library? If you’re not, maybe you need to be partnering with them in order to figure out how to make this work, and then I’ll consider giving you some money.’ So right there, just the fact that we’re able to inform all of this reporting, and that the administrator is aware of it, now departmentally, we are interacting better.”
The result is a new collaborative effort between the One-Stop and PCPL to provide youth with work experience, as well as college and career readiness programming. One-Stop youth participate in Teen 365 programming at the library, which helps teens develop skills, connections, and opportunities to create a successful and happy adulthood. The year-round program addresses all aspects of teen development, from academic goals to social and personal interests, and, combined with the One-Stop’s efforts to provide employability skills training, helps create pathways to college, career, and entrepreneurship. A manager at the One-Stop shared, “We complement each other. They have strengths, and we have our strengths. We are highly connected with industry, with business, with folks that are actually making hiring decisions... The library has identified a strength that we are looking at piggy-backing on: technology. Youth today use LinkedIn, social media, they use technology to communicate effectively, and a lot of the employers are doing the same thing. We here at the county are still behind the eight-ball as far as... utilizing social media, technology, videos, YouTube. We are utilizing [the library’s] strengths.”

## Factors That Supported Successful Use of Project Outcome

Strong leadership and an existing appreciation of the importance of measuring library impact played a big role in PCPL’s success using Project Outcome. One leader got buy-in from another leader who “started talking about it, now our administrators see the value in it. And because of that, because we continually pitched, ‘Hey, we need to do this. Look: it’s just demonstrating how great... our library is, but also the ease of use. You’re able to just do this within the context of what you do every day already.’” Getting key support from administrators was partly due to being good spokespersons for the importance of measuring outcomes, and partly due to demonstrating the utility of outcome measurement by showing them the results of one of the surveys: “I think the reason that [the administrators] saw the value [of using Project Outcome] is because I just used it... We collected the data, and then I ran one of the reports. And that’s all it took, was for them to see how great that report looked, and the information that we got from it, and they were there.”

## What’s Next?

PCPL is currently building staff capacity to scale up use of Project Outcome throughout the system. They are conducting a training on Project Outcome with library program instructors who are spread across their 26 branches so they can begin to measure impacts across a broader range of programs and services, and so the trained instructors can serve as point people for other staff at each branch. Library leaders spoke about the importance of starting small: “If we would have rolled it out everywhere with every program, the amount of data that we would have collected in that short time would have been very difficult to synthesize and [it would have been difficult to] figure out how best to use and implement changes. So now that we have our working model that’s scalable, we’re taking this forward, moving throughout the system.”