

Views from the Field:

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- 1. In recent years, the out-of-school-time field has seen an increased push toward outcomes-based programming. What makes professional development and continuous program improvement (in this brief, defined as: training, monitoring, coaching and data analysis) especially important in today's out-of-school-time environment?**

“The current focus on outcomes-based programming has changed the nature of professional development in the field. Increasingly, programs are working to improve a wider variety of educational and developmental outcomes for young people. As programs clarify the outcomes they want kids to achieve, it is important that these outcomes align with the skills and competencies of staff. For example, a program with a goal of improving reading achievement needs staff members with specialized training and experience in order to accomplish this. Staff members who receive high-quality, specialized training are much better able to plan and implement programs that have an impact on student outcomes.

In addition to generalized knowledge about how to implement engaging programs and work with young people, front-line staff members often need deeper, specialized content knowledge in fields like technology, the arts or literacy to be most successful in their roles. At the same time, program managers and leaders need a broader set of skills related to organizational development that include financial management, resource development, sustainability planning, program evaluation and professional development. As the field grows and accountability increases, continuous program improvement becomes both more imperative and more challenging.”

- 2. What are the most important things for policymakers and funders to understand about continuous program improvement in afterschool? Feel free to include some examples of best practices in professional development (provided for whom? implemented by whom?).**

“One of the most critical things for policymakers and funders to understand is how to make strategic investments in professional development that result in meaningful, longer-term organizational change and improvement. Given high rates of turnover among program staff in the field, it is critically important to view professional development as an ongoing process. In addition to supporting one-time professional development “events,” there needs to be more focus on initiating and sustaining longer-term organizational change processes that have a lasting impact on the culture and results of organizations. Funders should invest in targeted efforts to improve the skills of senior leadership and managers of out-of-school-time organizations in the

area of enhancing staff performance. In our experience, many policies and investments have a three to five year lifespan before they end or change dramatically. Yet, it often takes close to this amount of time for organizations to successfully implement change efforts. In some cases, policies and investments end at the precise moment when they are most critical to ensuring lasting change.

The most successful professional development efforts are those that provide ongoing, job-embedded mentoring and training that help staff members understand and execute the mission and objectives of an organization. Each staff member's professional development goals are inextricably linked to broader organizational objectives and performance measures. In many communities, intermediary organizations play an important role in ensuring that professional development is delivered at-scale and at-quality for a wide variety of organizations. Funders and policymakers should invest in these organizations as a means of achieving system-wide impact on the quality of professional development related to out-of-school time programs. The emergence of various programs that provide degrees, certificates and credentials in out-of-school time programming, suggests a growing consensus about the skills, knowledge and training necessary to be successful in the field. Ultimately, funders and policymakers should view professional development as a means of improving the quality of out-of-school-time program service delivery. The relative success of such efforts should be measured in terms of the impact they have on organizational performance.”

3. In your experience, are the current investments in professional development sufficient to meet the desired programmatic outcomes? What policies could better support the increased need for professional development (local, statewide, national)?

“Based on our experience working with summer learning programs, current investments in professional development are not sufficient to meet desired programmatic outcomes. In many cases, program planning and staff development for summer programs happens too close to the beginning of the actual program to have sufficient impact on the quality of programming. In large part, this is a function of funding and policy decisions regarding summer programs that do not typically happen until the end of the regular school year. In addition, given the dramatic expansion of direct service hours with young people that takes place over the summer, many organizations are not able to include enough staff development time into their daily schedules during the summer months. Therefore, the seasonal nature of summer programming creates several significant barriers to investments in professional development. In addition, many current investments are geared toward short-term, one-shot trainings as opposed to sustained coaching and staff development.

There are several proven strategies and approaches that policymakers and providers can use to ensure that investments in professional development are sufficient to meet the desired outcomes for summer learning programs. First, policymakers should view the continuous improvement of summer programming as a year-round enterprise and provide funding early enough to ensure adequate time for planning and staff development. At the local level, providers should take advantage of the unique strengths and assets that are available for professional development only

during the summer months. Summers represent an ideal time for training new teachers, developing partnerships with colleges and universities, and mentoring potential new program staff members.

Public and private funders can also play an important role in creating professional development and networking opportunities for their grantees. Funders and policymakers should direct resources specifically to professional development and networking. There should be rigorous evaluation of such set asides to gauge their impact on program outcomes. If funders and policymakers are expecting particular results connected to professional development, they should explain this in RFPs and provide training for grantees on how to measure progress against those outcomes.”