



Public Catalyst is an innovative national organization that partners with child welfare, juvenile justice and human services stakeholders who want to improve outcomes for children and their families. We provide a range of services including short-term strategic analysis and crisis management; mediation and monitoring; planning and implementation support; and leadership coaching. We have led child-serving systems and successfully implemented lasting change. We are informed, highly data driven, and thoughtful in our work. Our team has a proven track record of helping clients diagnose barriers to a myriad of challenges to create effective solutions for better outcomes. We specialize in helping system stakeholders diagnose and solve challenges; design and implement new approaches that improve child, family and staff experiences; and identify bright spots in local practice which can be leveraged into system change. We focus on helping systems transform aspirations and ideas into results. In our experience, there is not a one-size fits all solution that helps agencies bridge the gap between their system challenges and their goals. But we have four approaches which can be adapted to meet the needs of most agencies: Capacity Building; Targeted Problem-Solving and Planning; Engagement and Readiness Assessment; and Data Fellows.

Capacity Building

Not all agencies have existing data or they may have basic data that do not yet meet their needs. We can work with those agencies to help them connect values to the data they need to reach their goals for the children and families they serve. We partner with them to identify, design, collect and utilize accessible and useful quantitative and qualitative information, measures and reporting.

Targeted Problem Solving & Planning

A transition in leadership or an opportunity for change can provide a window for short-term diagnostics and planning. In some instances, agencies find themselves in the midst of a crisis and need short-term, targeted support to address an immediate need or needs. Examples include: an investigations backlog; a surge in detention; a foster home deficit; an adoption process challenge; or a spike in placements or re-referrals. Whether it is transition or crisis, we bring tools and support to the table to tackle the immediate need and help diagnose and address the systemic issues to build a sound foundation for the future.

Engagement and Readiness Assessment

Some agencies are in the early stages of exploring opportunities to implement practice change either locally or system-wide. An Engagement and Readiness Assessment (ERA) can be a good fit. As part of an ERA, our staff interview agency leadership and key stakeholders, including field leadership, quantitative, qualitative and/or CQI staff, to identify agency priorities and assess existing capacity. We map existing data resources and accessibility, through the framework of the existing practice model or other key case practice policies. We also review strategic policy documents, annual reports and key management reports. The result is a confidential ERA report for agency leadership exploring readiness, applying research-based assessment and change management frameworks, with options for next steps.

Data Fellows

Data Fellows is a deep strategy designed for agencies with high levels of readiness to develop applied data analytic capacity in the field. Data Fellows works best for agencies with clear case practice models; stable leadership with an interest in and commitment to managing by data; existing data capacity; and the ability to focus and support program participants. It was developed by Public Catalyst in partnership with the State of New Jersey and the federal government through the Northeast and Caribbean Implementation Center (NCIC). The pilot was evaluated by Action Research Partners.

Data Fellows targets a common challenge for several agencies. These agencies have some significant data capacity, and they may even have the capacity to push out data and reporting to the field. But they are finding that field staff – from supervisors to high level managers – struggle with how to use that data to help them improve daily practice. For these agencies, Data Fellows can be a successful strategy to translate data into information and results.

As part of the Fellows program, participants diagnose a challenge identified for them by leadership, meet with leadership to share their findings, and then work with leadership to explore options for solutions. During the diagnostics and options development processes, Fellows learn to apply research and quantitative and qualitative tools. Fellows are also coached on teaming, chart development, and presentation skills.

Data Fellows builds on the latest research on adult learning, change management and analytics. Working with a targeted group of agency staff, the Fellows program develops their capacity to utilize data to diagnose and solve challenges in their work in the field. These staff can include managers who are trying to pinpoint avenues for improved performance for their staff; senior and line supervisors who want to help their staff improve the efficacy of their interventions; prevention, juvenile justice and behavioral health staff who want to apply evidence based findings to their work; and other stakeholders in a position to leverage learning to achieve better outcomes for children and families.

The length of the program varies depending on the needs of the sponsoring agency, as does the number of participating staff. A Fellows cohort is typically 18 to 22 staff from a wide variety of offices and/or disciplines within the agency paired with two experienced facilitators. Systems can decide on the number of cohorts which are the best fit for their needs. Fellows are selected based on interest and the opportunity their position and experience bring to leverage the learning in the program. The length of the initiative can vary between nine and 18 months, with nine to 12 months being the optimum time for intervention. Fellows are required to spend approximately three business days per month on Fellows' work.

While Fellows is designed to foster the individual development of the participants, it is oriented to support system-wide change. Therefore, a Data Fellows' program is best deployed in a system which has already committed to making change and welcomes the opportunity to invest in its staff to support that change. Fellows is also designed as a next generation leadership development initiative. It targets promising staff who are in positions to grow with the agency and utilize the skills they develop in Fellows to support the agency's long-term goals.

Like the other four approaches, Data Fellows can help agencies make concrete, data driven changes in policy and practice that improve child and family outcomes.