



Managing by Data

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Public Catalyst built its Managing by Data practice based on the everyday challenges encountered by child-serving system stakeholders. System leaders are looking for tools and supports to improve outcomes for children and families. Public Catalyst specializes in helping systems transform aspirations and ideas into results. With more than two decades of individual and collective experience, the Public Catalyst staff have developed tools that help agencies move from planning into implementation. Public Catalyst's Managing by Data approach recognizes the power that data – quantitative and qualitative – can have as a tool for positive change.

Over the past decade, child welfare and juvenile justice systems have recognized the need to build data capacity in-house to better understand their work. Some agencies have invested in developing quantitative and qualitative data collection systems, supported by the federal government, and encouraged by advocates and other stakeholders. Other agencies are just getting started. But whether an agency is relatively new to this process, has abundant capacity to collect data, or is somewhere in-between, one consistent theme is the struggle to understand what data is needed and how to use it when it is available.

In our experience, there is not a one-size fits all solution that helps agencies bridge the gap between the data they have 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
- Data Fellows

Capacity Building

Not all agencies have existing data systems or they may have basic data systems that do not yet meet their needs. Public Catalyst 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.

Case Study Example: Two small agencies, P and S, developed case practice models reflecting their community values and best practice. They also secured resources to move from paper-based systems to their first databases. But they were unsure of how to design a database, build reports, and implement review processes to support their case practice values. Public Catalyst staff met with leadership and staff; shared best practices in database, reporting and review design and

implementation; and helped coach each agency to design and develop systems that would work for them.

Targeted Problem-Solving and 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.

Case Study Example: After a highly publicized tragedy, Agency Y found itself with low staff morale, high turnover, and a staggering investigations backlog. Public Catalyst staff interviewed key CPS staff and leadership; reviewed the CPS data; and mapped the existing business process. Public Catalyst then partnered with leadership to build a specialized high impact team to address the backlog; developed measures and set weekly targets; and coached the team in person and remotely until the backlog was resolved. Public Catalyst staff completed the engagement by helping leadership understand its options for adjusting the CPS business process and avoiding investigations backlogs in 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, or are interested in the potential for their own implementation of a Data Fellows program. An Engagement and Readiness Assessment (ERA) can be a good fit. As part of an ERA, Public Catalyst staff:

- Interview agency leadership and key stakeholders, including field leadership, quantitative, qualitative and/or CQI staff, to identify agency priorities and assess existing capacity
- Map existing data resources and accessibility
- Review the existing practice model (if available) or other key case practice policies
- Review strategic policy documents, annual reports and key management reports
- Produce a confidential ERA report for agency leadership exploring readiness, applying research-based assessment and change management frameworks, with options for next steps

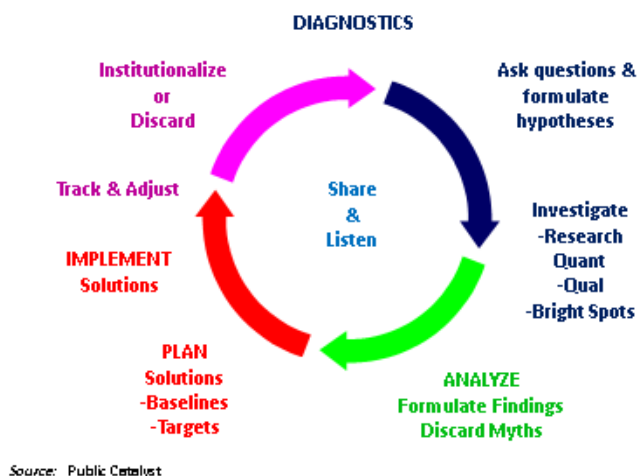
Data Fellows

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).

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.

The federal funding of the pilot initiative in New Jersey was designed to assess whether Data Fellows could be a successful strategy to grow continuous quality improvement capacity in an agency. If successful, the pilot was also designed to produce tools and lessons that could be applied in other jurisdictions. An independent evaluation of the pilot cited strong results, with the Fellows’ demonstrating on-going application of the skills well beyond the implementation period. The evaluation also included two short case studies of Fellows’ work, demonstrating the potential this initiative can have to support improved outcomes.

Tackling Challenges – Managing by Data *The Learning & Improvement Cycle*



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; contract staff who need to identify the best use of resources; 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 design is what McKinsey, in its meta-analysis of research on successful change management, refers to as the “field and forum” approach. Their meta-analysis found that after six months, adults retain only 10% of traditional didactic training but they retain 100% of learning if coaching, classroom, and daily practice are integrated. To that end, Data Fellows weaves together several different elements. There is classroom learning – highly interactive – which incorporates the sponsoring agency’s case practice values, practice priorities, and “live” data (data that is current and in use, with

the curricula updated in real time as the data evolves). There are coaching sessions – utilizing a team approach – in which the participants do hands on data collection and analysis to diagnose challenges and construct solutions. Finally, there is a project element which is woven through classroom, coaching and office-based work which grounds all of the learning in a current, high priority case practice area, selected by leadership.

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.

The sponsoring agency provides a range of support. In addition to resourcing the two facilitators per cohort, the agency identifies an agency project coordinator to take the lead on local implementation. They also appoint a leadership liaison (who may or may not be the project coordinator), someone positioned within the agency with decision-making authority and with a strong relationship with the members of the leadership team. In addition, the Fellows need a resource lead, a staff member with the technical expertise to access the data needed by the Fellows and trouble-shoot technical challenges. Note that none of these three roles is full-time but each role will have to protect time to meet the Fellows' needs. Finally, the Fellows need access to live data and sufficient hardware and software capacity to ensure they can engage in analysis at the local level and complete the program exercises.

During the federal pilot, Public Catalyst developed a template for the program and curricula that can be adapted to each new site. Sufficient planning time must be set aside in advance of implementation to allow for the meetings and data review necessary to support the adaptation of the curriculum. Interested agencies should allow a minimum of a three month ramp up period for the project lead and facilitators to meet with leadership, adapt the curriculum, announce the initiative, disseminate information about participation, secure and review applications, and select participants. Because the workload associated with Fellows is significant, the program developers recommend that participation be voluntary but that applicants secure nomination by their immediate supervisor and manager to ensure the applicant is positioned for full participation.

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.

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.

In the big picture, the goal for Fellows is to help an agency achieve real and measurable change, change with a positive impact for the children and families that agency services. Examples include:

- Utilization of census data to identify changing population demographics to inform contract development, resource investment and service needs
- Significant improvements in investigation timeliness
- Transformation of screening practices
- Identification of successful investigation strategies, including effective triage and service interventions that prevent re-referrals
- Analysis of the drivers for youth remaining in placement beyond 36 months
- Improvements in rates of parent-child visitation

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

Public Catalyst & Managing by Data

Public Catalyst serves a national client base. Public Catalyst staff have worked with a wide range of systems and stakeholders - child welfare, juvenile justice and education leadership, chief executive staff, judges, line staff and advocates in New York, New Jersey, Washington DC, Oklahoma, Michigan, Louisiana and elsewhere.

Molly Armstrong leads Public Catalyst's Managing by Data practice partnering with system leaders, managers and staff to diagnose system challenges, identify bright spots, and customize solutions that bring measurable improvements for children, families and staff. Molly combines her love for operations and implementation with a facility for helping system stakeholders learn to use quantitative and qualitative data to tackle and resolve system challenges. She designed and led the federally funded Managing by Data initiative. She has facilitated a group of system leaders in New York City examining the connection between school discipline and juvenile and criminal justice involvement. Molly supported child welfare and juvenile justice system reforms in a wide range of jurisdictions from New York City to Louisiana. She authored the baseline Family Court Improvement Study for New York State and also wrote *Adolescent Pathways*, which mapped the intersections between the child welfare, juvenile justice and mental health systems in New York City. She designed and implemented Project Confirm, an innovation which addressed the over-detention of foster youth in New York City. Molly has a B.A. from Yale; a law degree from New York University; and an LLM from Georgetown. She is also a graduate of Harvard's executive program on performance measurement.

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