



Learning Beyond



SUMMER OUT OF SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS

Created by the ALSC Summer-Out of School Time Task Force

SUMMER IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Contributor: Liz McChesney, Senior Advisor in Youth Services, Chicago, IL

Even before COVID-19, as libraries have settled into the 21st century, there has been a new focus on critical out-of-school-time learning and skill attainment for youth. Coupled with the imperative work to build equity and close gaps for our communities, libraries must rethink how and why programs are offered. As America grapples with racial inequities, and the learning gaps created by loss of opportunity and access, this is the time to find new solutions for the children who need us most.

The foundation of this work was laid by the Institute of Museum and Library Service (IMLS), which early in the 21st century suggested the blurring of a line for, “and how we learn. Furthermore, the IMLS called out the fact that the lines between formal and informal learning were blending in this new century. The IMLS (2009) indicates that library users expect library staff to act as “partners to enhance the learning systems across a community.” Dubbed “21st century skills,” the IMLS called out the “4 C’s” of successful 21st century learning: Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, and Critical Thinking. Building a successful program around the “4 C’s” requires us to find new ways to design, create, implement, and evaluate learning.

Summer provides children with an opportune time to take advantage of interest-driven and project-based learning. Children can build on their school-year learning with access to experiential learning in the form of arts-based programs, STEM programs, and programs that are active and engage youth. In fact, research indicates that active learning programs accelerate critical thinking and engagement with content. Active learning deepens critical thinking and concentration skills: all necessary for success in the 21st century.

Building on the success of traditional summer reading programs and expanding these programs to include experiential and hands-on learning is essential for 21st century youth. Libraries can

- 4 STEM/STEAM LEARNING IS FUN!** When youth are having fun, they are more relaxed and willing to take risks, more willing to participate, and are more likely to retain what they learn. Relaxed brains provide greater neuroplasticity, allowing us to learn and retain new knowledge. Make STEM/STEAM learning a fun way to engage multiple learning styles and encourage youth to work together effectively while not being judged or tested.
- 5 STEM/STEAM IS AN EQUITY ISSUE.** It is well documented that children from historically excluded communities are traditionally left out of the STEM/STEAM pipeline. This means that millions of US youth do not have the same access to the tools, learning, and skills to be successful in a rapidly changing work environment. Intentionally positioning STEM/STEAM programming to meet communities of color and those in poverty helps to build equity. Additionally, STEM/STEAM programming opens access to library programming for those with learning styles not drawn to 20th century learning.

CASE STUDY

In 2012, Chicago Public Library (CPL) undertook a massive overhaul of the Summer Reading Program after holding focus groups of family members and with children across the city. STEAM learning and academic success were goals for family members across the diverse city, and by adding STEAM learning and art/maker activities to the program, CPL increased academic gains and stopped the summer slide in participating youth as documented through rigorous research with the Chicago Public Schools and the University of Chicago. This was deftly accomplished by partnering with Chicago's preeminent science museum, the Museum of

RESOURCES

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As defined by American Library Association (2021), equity means that we create “deliberate and intentional efforts to create service delivery models that will make sure that community members have the resources they need.” True equity work means that not everyone needs the same things, and we are duty bound to provide what we can, in a reflective way, to those who need us most. This means broadening summer reading to widen access to a variety of learning styles and moving outside our library to build a program with those who are marginalized and left outside of traditional library service.

TAKING IT DEEPER

During summer learning, libraries offer learning experiences, reading challenges, and resources to help stop the summer slide, or the learning loss that accumulates over the summertime for children in poverty and those historically excluded. But the one-size-fits-all themes and programming, required reading lists, or competitive challenges that pervade our summer learning models perpetuate normative ideologies, marginalize particular students, and even leave frustrated readers and learners behind.

An equitable summer learning program requires a shift in mindset, and a focus on providing resources and support to all learners.

learning disabilities, celebrates and incorporates diverse stories and inclusive experiences, and ultimately shares power with the youth we serve. Effective summer learning in libraries delivers more than a prescribed reading list because it builds on youth experience and culture to make learning relevant, contextual, and essential. For libraries to provide equitable summer learning experiences, we must also reach into our communities in new ways that allow us to serve children who may not have access to programs in our buildings.

FIVE THINGS TO KNOW

There are many ways inequity affects our patrons. The Glossary of Education Reform (2016) outlines several ways inequity can affect children, which we can apply to summer learning:

- 1 SOCIETAL (IN)EQUITY.** How does implicit bias affect how children and teens are treated by staff at your library? What can you do to make sure you are welcoming to all people?
- 2 SOCIOECONOMIC (IN)EQUITY.** How are children with limited financial resources affected by fines, fees, or program costs at your summer learning program? What can you do to remove financial barriers so children can participate fully?
- 3 CULTURAL (IN)EQUITY.** Are children seeing themselves reflected in the books and programs your summer learning program offers? Are you willing to leave “classics” or problematic best-sellers behind to create an inclusive program and collection to celebrate your

5 INSTRUCTIONAL (IN)EQUITY. Is your summer learning program really for everyone or just the youth who already excel at reading? Moving from summer reading to learning opens the doors to children who may not enjoy reading, and inclusive practices ensure that diverse learners feel welcome to participate.

CASE STUDY

In 2018, Pennsylvania libraries made a shift from their traditional themed summer reading program to a more inclusive and equitable model called Summer Quest. This new program's design was a deliberate effort to reach children most at risk for the summer slide.

Summer Quest broadened the focus from reading to include a variety of learning experiences to better accommodate different learning styles and interests. Reading logs that focused solely on tracking books, pages, or time spent reading were transformed into learning logs that included STEM activities,

RESOURCES

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FIVE THINGS TO KNOW

1 KNOW YOUR COMMUNITY. Be involved in outside groups, participate in events, and do outreach to really get to know your community.

2 THROW ASSUMPTIONS OUT THE WINDOW. Do not presume to know what your community needs.

3 WELCOME STAKEHOLDERS TO THE TABLE. Involve local stakeholders in the designing of your program. Stakeholders are just as invested in the success of your

program as you are. So, reach out to your community, build relationships, and work together to create a program that meets the needs of your community.

Co-designing with these community stakeholders meant that the team were often challenged on their presumptions about the local community. Additionally, valuable insight was given on facets of the community that the team knew little about. There were some significant “aha moments.” For instance, at one point, the early childhood resource liaison flat out said that there are many families that will NEVER come to the library because of lack of trust and economic stressors; it is, and will, be a priority to these families. To reach these families, the library would need to partner with trusted community organizations to reach them where they are. Input like this was invaluable to the group and resulted in a stronger, more responsive

WORKING TOGETHER/ PARTNERSHIPS

Contributor: Robin Howe, King County (WA) Library System

There are many ways libraries come together in partnerships, and we know partnerships help us succeed. Building relationships between patrons and the library is crucial to helping all parties thrive and grow. By providing services and activities to children when out of school, the library positions itself as a primary provider of literacy materials and enriching activities while preventing learning loss with long-term consequences.

Any relationship formed between libraries and organizations serving families must benefit both

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CASE STUDY

Where do kids congregate in the summer? Camp! In 2013, the King County (WA) Library System joined YMCA summer camp programs across Greater Seattle to lend reading materials to school-aged youth once a week. This is one type of partnership, called a service provider partnership, and it allows the library to reach children they may not normally see through the doors of the library. To keep kids (and their counselors) connected to the libraries and the summer reading/learning program, it takes a few eager librarians with a van, a range of high-interest books in waterproof totes, some picnic tables, and a covered area. Children choose their own materials, comparing their favorites with title suggestions from librarians. Of benefit for counselors: KCLS librarians curate themed backpacks of materials used throughout the week to support camp curriculum. This effort to “reach beyond the building” cultivates young readers, engages and supports teens and children, provides personalized assistance, and connects with culturally diverse populations during extended out-of-school time.

RESOURCES

Association for Library Service to Children. 2019. Imagine Building Partnerships Checklist." <https://www.ala.org/alsc/sites/>

EVALUATING SUCCESS

Contributor: Denise Lyons, Deputy Director of Statewide Development, South Carolina State Library

For years, libraries have collected statistics and counted what is commonly called “outputs” or things like people walking through the door, directional questions, computer sessions, book checkouts, and children at storytimes. But these numbers on their own hold little meaning. Stakeholders want to know “So what?” and to be accountable; we need to know this as well. Getting away from door counts and program participant numbers is challenging. While outputs may still be required and still shared in annual reports, there is a power to owning outcomes in your programs, and there is a space where counts (outputs) and impact (outcomes) can live together. Your summer learning program is the perfect way to combine the statistics of who participated with the kind of evaluation that tells the story about the true impact your program had on your community’s youth.

TAKING IT DEEPER

Libraries are learning the importance of asking “So what?” as they move through the program-planning process because ultimately the result (benefit) can better justify the library’s investment. Because resources are limited, it is no longer enough to simply count what goes in or out but to learn about the ultimate benefit these inputs and outputs have had on the patrons, which is called the outcome.

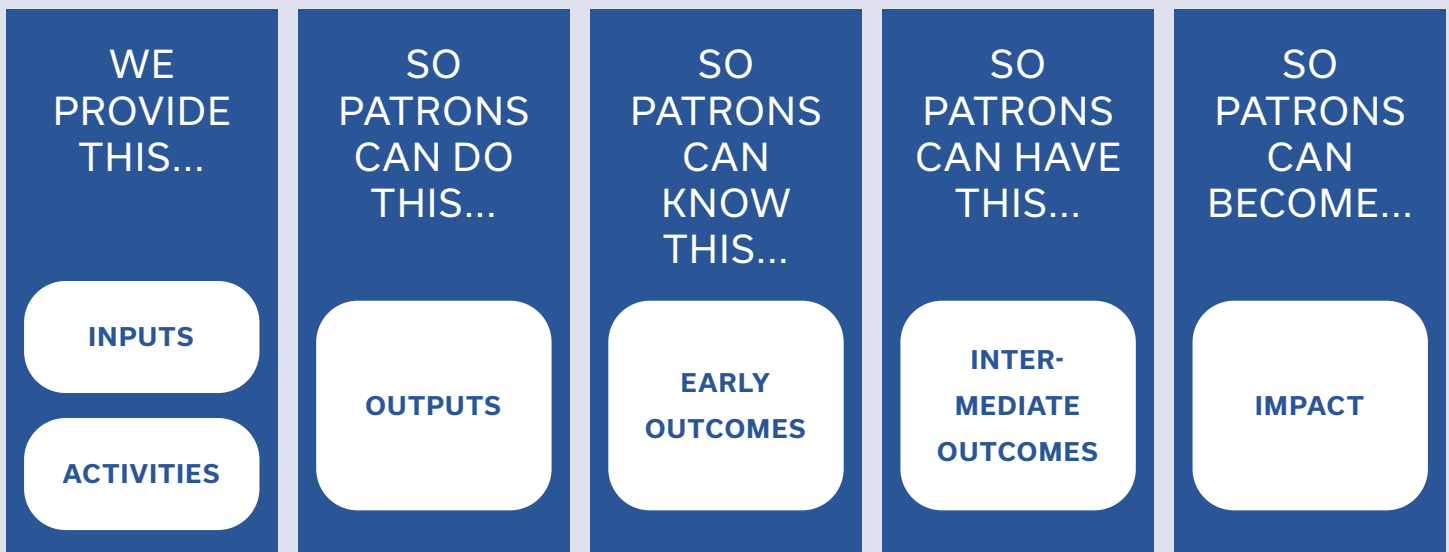
The IMLS defines outcomes as benefits to people: specifically, achievements or changes in skill, knowledge, attitude, behavior, condition, or life status for program participants. The expectation is that all funded projects should demonstrate outcome goals, which is commonly achieved through using outcome-based evaluation, or “OBE.” OBE is a systematic way of assessing the

extent to which a program has achieved its intended result. The results can help to communicate the true value of the work. Did participants report the desired change after the implementation of the program? What are the short- or long-term results reported by participants? The acts of reviewing inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impact are all part of evaluation and can help you determine if your program has met your strategic goals.

Effective evaluation can help to identify needs, define and measure program activities, and inform program improvement. This information can and should be used to plan for the future. Becoming more skilled at measuring outcomes rather than simply just counting the activities or items can demonstrate to community stakeholders how the library is helping to achieve community goals and objectives.

So how do you measure outcomes? There are several ways, and many are simple. One way is to conduct a survey. To help libraries become more comfortable with evaluation, the Public

THEORY OF CHANGE



SOURCE: TASCHA/US IMPACT

Library Association launched Project Outcome, a free toolkit designed to help public libraries understand and share the impact of essential library services and programs by providing simple surveys and an easy-to-use process for measuring and analyzing outcomes. There are many resources and trainings (a few links are provided in the “Resources” section below) offered on outcome-based evaluation to help make your evaluation successful. The most important thing to remember is that your numbers are important, but they do not convey the impact of your library’s programs and services on your community, which ultimately may help you to apply for grants or advocate for local library support.

FIVE THINGS TO KNOW

- 1 NUMBERS ALONE WON’T TELL YOUR STORY.** It is important to continue to keep your counts (outputs) but if you want to know about changes or impact, library staff need to shift to an outcome-based evaluation.
- 2 OBE CAN HELP YOU SHARE A COMPELLING STORY TO YOUR STAKEHOLDERS.** When you are able to talk about the impact that your services have in the community, you are more likely to make a convincing case for support. Funders want to know how their investment benefitted the target audience. Service counts alone do not provide this information.
- 3 OBE CAN ANSWER QUESTIONS THAT CAN BE VERY BENEFICIAL TO YOU AND YOUR COMMUNITIES.** As you plan a summer learning program, OBE can answer questions such as “Who is being served?” and “Who is not?” If your service goals are to align your services to the needs of your community, this type of evaluation will help you be successful.
- 4 THERE ARE EASY WAYS TO CONDUCT EVALUATION.** These include surveys, focus groups, and observation with resources available from the IMLS, PLA, RIPL (the Research Institute for Public Libraries) and state libraries that can assist you.
- 5 YOUR SUMMER PROGRAMS ARE A KEY COMPONENT IN LIBRARY SERVICES.** You can use easy methods of evaluation that will help you showcase the benefit that these programs provide. Discuss outcome goals prior to launching your program so you can see

- My class learned something by using the materials in the Read, Learn, Grow box.
- The box is easy to use.
- I used the box materials in my classroom.
- I know I can request needed resources for my classroom from the library.
- I am more likely to use other library resources and services.
- I am likely to participate in another library activity or program.

They also had three open ended questions: (1) What did you like most about the boxes? (2) How does the box benefit your class? (3) What could the library do to better assist?

When it is safe to meet in person, the library will set up a few focus groups from the staff of the learning centers to see how the contents helped their teaching as well as what may need to be adjusted and why. Assessment will be done monthly so boxes could be adjusted.

Sumter County Library received a \$6,227 project grant to create RLG boxes for reaching out to the different learning centers in the Sumter community. They are currently serving more than 400 children with these outreach boxes. There are 37 boxes with 2 added for teachers to share for a common theme at HeadStart. More than 75 percent of the returned surveys indicate high positivity.

RESOURCES

REFLECTION THE MEASUREMENT TOOL OF WHY

Contributor: Sue Abrahamson, Children's Librarian, Waupaca (WI) Area Public Library

Making meaning from our experiences is considered critical to learning. Commonly referred to as “reflection,” this denotes how learners contextualize their learning and deepen their understanding. Long considered a way to “close the learning cycle,” reflection gives each participant in your summer program an important opportunity to link a new idea to failure or success. In this way, we connect a summer learner to grit, perseverance, habits of mind of good science learning, and critical 21st century skills. Building time to reflect on a book, an art or makerspace project, or a STEM activity helps to learn from mistakes, put our new learning into a context with what we already know, and talk about ways to strengthen and self-direct our future work. This is also an important way for library staff to evaluate if the experiences that have been offered youth are appropriate and if

experience by adding variants to the activity. Allowing time for “what if” thinking in library programs helps enrich the new experience. Older children may be able to utilize learning journals or visual representations to help them with the reflection process.

Waupaca Lego Robotics Camp teammates spend the last 15 minutes of each camp day discussing their frustrations and successes, making plans for the next session.

In the same way children use reflection as a learning tool, librarians can utilize the same model in assessing the impact of their work. By building in intentional time for reflection in planning and implementing a library program, library staff can ensure the program matches the desired outcomes and can help measure impact for advocacy purposes. This could look as simple as a short post-program quiz: Did this program meet the desired outcome? If not, what could be done differently to achieve that goal?

FIVE THINGS TO KNOW

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learning and is an important model for how libraries can develop future online learning experiences in the summer and out-of-school time.

FIVE THINGS TO KNOW

1 VIRTUAL SUMMER LEARNING EXPANDS LEARNING OPTIONS.

Building a component of summer learning that is accessible to youth who cannot visit the library during a pandemic or otherwise broadens access that is critical to developing equity-based programming. This may require also providing kits with devices and connectivity.

2 DIGITAL LEARNING MOVES CHILDREN FROM CONSUMER TO CO-CREATOR.

Developing robust digital learning allows youth to model other digital learning strategies and should include moving the learner from consuming information to collaborating and co-creating with others. This contribution to content development is an essential part of effective digital learning and 21st century skill building.

3 DEVELOP A VIRTUAL SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAM PLAN. Define expectations and best practices for staff. Define standards that will help virtual programs contribute to learning goals of the summer learning program plan.

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4 KEEP COPYRIGHT IN MIND AS YOU PROGRAM PLAN. ALSC (n.d.) has developed an in-depth guide to navigating copyright for virtual programs in four key areas: public domain, seeking permission from copyright holders, temporary and limited permissions, and fair use factors.

5 INCLUDE PARTNERS IN THE PLAN. Partner organizations can contribute expertise to your online summer program. Reach out to planetariums, zoos, museums, etc., to see if they would be willing to contribute or share already-created virtual programs or develop something collaboratively with your library.

CASE STUDY

The COVID-19 pandemic caused libraries around the US to enter various states of closure that affected summer learning programs. Many libraries needed to convert their programs to online-only models. The following case studies show how two public library systems chose to proceed based on the circumstances each organization faced.

SALT LAKE CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Salt Lake City Public Library (SLCPL) staff who manage the summer learning program, Super Summer Challenge (SSC), convened to brainstorm how the program could function whether branches were open or closed. SLCPL had a healthy budget and two existing platforms that made it possible to convert to an all-virtual program.

Converting in-person programs was a challenge. Staff contacted performers and partners to ask if they had the equipment and/or skill to provide a filmed version of their programs. Programs were included as virtual collections in a platform that SLCPL had just launched. Many things were considered when switching to virtual programs, including how to approach copyright, filming comfortability and skill, staff/performer/partner familiarity with technologies, etc. Coordinators at SLCPL created guidelines for virtual programming, which assisted staff with best practices, filming tips, and expectations.

What worked: The SSC ran smoothly all summer. SLCPL received feedback that online summer learning was still fun and encouraged learning and exploration. In addition, virtual programs could be “attended” by patrons who previously were not able to attend live programs.

RESOURCES

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POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Contributor: Liz McChesney, Senior Advisor in Youth Services, Chicago, IL

Positive youth development is a holistic approach that engages communities to ensure youth in programs have positive outcomes that are developmentally appropriate. Youth are offered ways to be both constructive and productive and have a meaningful voice in the work that is created. The overarching concept behind this framework is services, opportunities, and programs all align to help support youth and help them reach their full potential.

TAKING IT DEEPER

Positive youth development comprises an entire system of support from school, home, and community agencies, including the public library. This system builds on the strengths of youth and recognizes risks to community youth. This approach has been deeply studied and researched and involves youth as active participants working in partnership with adults/library staff. Civic engagement and providing youth a forum for expression, creation, and solution development is critical to successful implementation.

Positive youth development includes the development of skills, opportunities, and authentic relationships with youth. This model asks us to take a prosocial (denotes behavior that is friendly and helpful) approach and promotes positive outcomes aligned to life success. While various frameworks exist to understand the components of this, the “5 C’s” of positive youth development are widely agreed upon:

n Competence: youth are able to take on tasks that build and practice skills and knowledge.

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