Summer Learning Program Evaluation Guide

A comprehensive evaluation plan is critical to summer program quality and sustainability, and will provide you with a 360-degree view to identify program strengths as well as opportunities to improve in future summers. Research recommends that you "plan to administer pre- and post-tests, observe instructors, collect staff views about the summer program, and share evaluation data after the summer ends to improve the program over time and to reinforce community stakeholders' commitment to retaining the summer program." (RAND, 2018) Our deep experience suggests that youth attendance and engagement; program quality; youth achievement, social and emotional learning, and well-being; family satisfaction and engagement; and teacher satisfaction and development are all important indicators of a program's success.

Use this guide to support you in creating evaluation plans that are aligned to research and evidence in order to understand your impact, reflect on quality, identify program strengths and challenges, and develop processes for continuous improvement and long-term sustainability.

Research recommends that you "plan to administer pre- and post-tests, observe instructors, collect staff views about the summer program, and share evaluation data after the summer ends to improve the program over time and to reinforce community stakeholders' commitment to retaining the summer program." (RAND, 2018)[1]

1) Schwartz, Heather L., Jennifer Sloan McCombs, Catherine H. Augustine, and Jennifer T. Leschitz, Getting to Work on Summer Learning: Recommended Practices for Success, 2nd Ed., Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-366-1-WF, 2018. As of June 09, 2021: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR366-1.html

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Attendance & Retention

Why are attendance and retention important?

- High and consistent attendance ensures you are able to maintain the staff you have hired over the course of your program – you may need to let staff go if attendance rates drop.
- You have better and more accurate data, outcomes, and an understanding of your impact when young people complete the entire program.
- Most importantly, you can't have an impact on young people if they don't show up.

Developing your Attendance & Retention Plan

Pre-Program

- Set attendance and retention goals (these will be related to your overall enrollment goals).
  - *Suggested Benchmarks – 80% average daily attendance & 80% retention rate*
- Identify an attendance system and develop attendance collection processes and procedures.
- Develop attendance incentives for young people over the course of the program to encourage high retention.
- Ensure staff are aware of attendance expectations and procedures and families/caregivers are aware of attendance expectations during the enrollment process.
- Develop family communication plans and procedures for absent young people.
- Create a waitlist of young people who can be enrolled if/when others drop off or don't attend.

During-Program

- Track daily attendance and contact families/caregivers regarding any absences.
- Provide incentives and celebrate high attendance.
- Implement highly engaging instruction, activities, and experiences.
- Cultivate a positive climate and a fun and safe environment for learning.

Post-Program

- Calculate average daily attendance and retention rates.
- Conduct a debrief to identify successes and challenges that may have affected attendance and retention.

Key Considerations

- How are you making youth, families, and caregivers aware of attendance expectations during the summer program?
- What are key messages and information you will share to encourage high attendance and retention?
- What are your transportation plans and policies to ensure that young people can get to the program in a safe and timely manner?
- Are you able to provide incentives to young people and their families to encourage high attendance?
- How are you equipping staff with messaging and strategies to create a positive and welcoming environment for learning so that young people want to attend daily?
- How are you providing engaging and dynamic experiences for young people to cultivate intrinsic motivation to attend the program?
- How are you accounting for/accommodating any vacations during the summer program?
- Are there any holidays or community events that may disrupt the program and impact attendance rates?
- How will you identify children who are no longer attending the program and should be considered as "withdrawn" or no longer attending?

Research has shown that young people "needed to attend at least 20 days over the course of the summer program to experience academic benefits. In addition to offering enrichment activities, accurate recruitment materials and incentives can help maintain good attendance." (RAND, 2018)

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Measuring Academic Growth

Why do we assess?

- Provide staff with key data at the beginning of the program to differentiate instruction and activities.
- Monitor progress of young people and adapt activities and pacing in real-time.
- Measure impact and determine overall growth in academic skills at the close of the program.

Developing your Assessment Plan

Pre-Program

- Secure any data-sharing agreements required with schools, districts, partners, etc.
- Develop pre- and post-testing schedule and plan.
- Go over testing expectations with instructional staff.
- Ensure any/all technology needed is functional and/or testing materials are prepared and ready to distribute.
- Provide any necessary staff professional development for implementing testing, monitoring, use of testing technology, and interpretation of data reports.

During-Program

During Testing (pre/post):

- Print/provide usernames and passwords (if needed) and/or distribute testing materials.
- Oversee all testing.
- Track test completion.

After Testing:

- Create, print, and review relevant reports/data with classroom teachers.
- Dispose/shred any student data at the end of the program.

Make-Up or Late Testing:

- Manage process to test newly enrolled students (after Day 1).
- Manage make-up testing for absent scholars or incomplete tests.

Post-Program

- Reconcile pre- and post-test matching.
- Calculate academic growth over the course of the program.
- Report data to key stakeholders.

Key Considerations

- Does the test require specific hardware or software to implement? Is any and all needed equipment functional and ready to use?
- Can testing take place in classrooms, or do students need to be brought to a specific location (e.g. media lab)?
- Who is responsible for compiling and distributing testing materials/information to staff?
- How long does the test take to implement? What is the plan for students who end testing early?
- What is the plan for any young people who arrive late or are enrolled after Week 1 testing?
- Who do you need to share final data with at the close of the program? What is your process for disseminating information to key stakeholders (e.g. school leaders, funders, families/caregivers)?
- How are you ensuring confidentiality and privacy throughout the assessment process?

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Stakeholder Surveys

Why collect feedback from multiple stakeholders?

- Provides feedback on program implementation from multiple perspectives and viewpoints.
- Strengthens relationships and investment with key stakeholders by collecting and responding to feedback.
- Provides you with critical information to inform summer program continuous improvement.
- Measures impact of non-academic programming, such as social and emotional learning and enrichment as well as program satisfaction and engagement.

Developing Stakeholder Surveys

Pre-Program

- Identify which stakeholder groups you will survey. *Recommend – young people, staff, and families/ caregivers.*
- Create survey frameworks and identify the data/ information you want to collect from each stakeholder group.
- Determine which groups to implement pre- and post-surveys or which groups to conduct retrospective post-surveys.
- Develop a plan for survey dissemination and collection as well as staff roles, responsibilities, and expectations in this process.
- Set benchmarks for survey completion. *Recommend – aim for survey completion from 50% or more of your stakeholder.*

During-Program

- Discuss the importance of survey collection with stakeholder groups and encourage high completion rates.
- Create time and space in schedules to implement pre- and post-surveys, as needed.
- Create time and space in schedules to implement retrospective surveys during the last week of program.
- Provide incentives for survey completion, if possible.
- Monitor survey completion.

Post-Program

- Analyze survey data.
- Identify trends within and across stakeholder groups.
- Identify successes and opportunities to improve the program based on stakeholder feedback.

Key Considerations

- How will you collect survey information from key stakeholders? Which methods (paper-based, web-based, mobile platform) will encourage the highest completion rate for each stakeholder group?
- For Pre-K and early elementary youth, will they need support in order to complete surveys? Will you only survey older youth who can complete the questions on their own?
- Who will be responsible for creating surveys? Sharing surveys? Collecting surveys? Analyzing responses?
- Can you provide incentives to encourage high completion rates across stakeholder groups?

"I like to do hard things like math that will help my brain grow"

- Program Participant

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Quality & Continuous Improvement

Why focus on quality and continuous improvement?

- Provides critical information to strengthen the program and best support young people in meaningful, equitable, and inclusive learning experiences.
- Allows for continued and strengthened investment from key stakeholders and supports longevity, sustainability, and opportunities to grow programming and reach more young people.
- Strengthens relationships and creates deeper buy-in from young people, staff, and families/caregivers by asking for and responding to feedback.

> "Bottom-line, quality summer and afterschool opportunities have the evidence base to be deployed to help improve student learning and performance on a variety of factors critical to student success."[2]

Developing Quality & Continuous Improvement Processes

Pre-Program

- Identify/develop quality and success metrics (e.g. 80% ADA).
- Engage multiple stakeholders/perspectives and review current research/evidence to inform what success looks like for your program.
  - Develop a Logic Model to demonstrate the relationship between activities, resources, outputs, outcomes, and desired impact of your program.
  - Create plans and processes to collect and analyze key metrics:
    - ✓ Identify tools and systems that are currently available as well as those needed.
    - ✓ Establish staff roles and responsibilities related to data collection, analysis, and reporting.
    - ✓ Determine what data needs to be reported out, to whom, and in what form.
  - Develop a plan to collect data throughout program implementation to respond in real-time as well as have a larger debrief at the close of program.

During-Program

- Collect quality and data metrics over the course of program implementation.
  - ✓ Engage in pre- and post-testing as well as on-going formative assessments during instruction/activities.
  - ✓ Provide progress reports to families/caregivers.
  - ✓ Conduct regular instructional/activity observations and provide development feedback to staff.
  - ✓ Track daily attendance and maintain enrollment goals.
  - ✓ Implement stakeholder surveys and encourage high completion rates (implement incentives, if possible).
- Share data and reports with staff, as needed.
- Adjust/respond to data in real-time and capitalize on opportunities to strengthen quality over the course of program implementation.

2) Peterson, T.K. and Vandell, D.L. (2021) The Evidence Base for Summer Enrichment and Comprehensive Afterschool Opportunities. Washington, DC: Collaborative Communications.

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Quality & Continuous Improvement (continued)

Post-Program

- Collect any and all final data and conduct analysis.
- Develop internal reports to share with staff and inform continuous improvement.
- Develop external reports to share with key stakeholders and support program sustainability.
- Ensure confidentiality and privacy - dispose/shred any data.
- Hold a post-program debrief with staff and school/community partners to celebrate successes and identify opportunities to improve the program in the following summer.
- Start planning for next summer!

Key Considerations

- What research/data/evidence can you use to help inform your quality and success metrics?
- How do your success and quality metrics inform your program design as well as your staffing structure, roles, and responsibilities? How are you preparing staff to meet quality expectations?
- How are you ensuring privacy and confidentiality in data collection, analysis, and reporting?
- How can you bring in multiple voices and perspectives into this process to ensure you are driving toward diverse, equitable, and inclusive outcomes?
- What existing tools, systems, and/or capacity do you have available to support in data collection and analysis? What tools, systems, and/or capacity do you need?
- Do you need outside/additional expertise or capacity in order to conduct data analysis?
- How will you share data and information internally with staff and partners?
- Who are your external stakeholders (e.g. funders)?
- What data/information do you need to provide to them?

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Post-Program Reflection Questions

Many factors influence your program results. Use the questions below to guide a reflection session with your team at the close of the program to help you identify potential influences for both positive and not so positive results. Be sure to spend time on goals that were not met, and what you might do differently next summer to improve.

Overall

- ☐ When reflecting on your summer program, what are you most proud of? Why? What were your greatest successes? Who or what contributed to these successes?
- ☐ What were some challenges you experienced? Why? What may have contributed to these challenges?
- ☐ Where are you seeing opportunities to improve or do things differently next summer? Where do you plan to invest more time and energy next summer?
- ☐ In what ways do you need to adjust your planning timeline? Budget? Other contributing factors to program successes or challenges?

Staffing

- ☐ When were educators hired? Did the site experience staff turnover?
- ☐ How experienced were educators? Did staff teach the same grade/subject in the program as during the school year?
- ☐ Did the staff reflect the diversity of the youth population?
- ☐ Was the staff familiar with youth?

Program Dosage/Schedule

- ☐ How many hours per day, days per week, weeks did the program run? Was the duration sufficient to drive results?
- ☐ Were there any holidays or other interruptions (facilities, weather, etc.) to the program?
- ☐ Did the program offer time for building community, program/instructional planning, meals, recess, family engagement, breaks, meetings, and mentoring?

Staff Training

- ☐ Did the program offer pre-program training? How many staff participated and what was the duration?
- ☐ Did you have the necessary materials/resources to conduct training?
- ☐ Did site-level facilitators have experience delivering previous trainings?
- ☐ Did staff receive instructional resources that set expectations and aid in strong instructional practice?

Curriculum & Materials Distribution

- ☐ Did curriculum/resources arrive on time for the first day?
- ☐ Did the site have access to the necessary technology for program operations?

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Post-Program Reflection Questions (continued)

Assessments

- ☐ Did the site have enough computers/devices or testing materials to pre-and post-test youth in a timely manner?
- ☐ Were computers/devices high-quality?
- ☐ Did leadership have access to and knowledge of the assessment platform or test being administered?
- ☐ Did staff receive data reports immediately after pre-testing?

Facilities

- ☐ What was the quality of the learning environments?
- ☐ Was the facility air-conditioned?
- ☐ Was the transportation provided for youth? Were there any long- or short-term issues with this transportation?
- ☐ Was there sufficient and high-quality space for all program elements such as meals, recess, learning, and other activities?

Planning & Partner Engagement

- ☐ Was the program launched in a timely manner to give adequate time for planning and implementation?
- ☐ Was the program adequately funded?
- ☐ Were community and school partners appropriately and actively engaged in planning and implementation?

Youth Population

- ☐ How was youth behavior and attendance?
- ☐ Did attendance vary on certain weeks/days?
- ☐ How were special education needs met?
- ☐ How were the needs of English Language Learners met?
- ☐ What was youth performance level in pre-test data? Were curriculum & instruction aligned to academic needs?

Leadership & Support

- ☐ Did the site receive adequate support from local program leadership?
- ☐ How was the support offered to the site by the Arly?

Learning Activities

- ☐ Were learning activities high-quality and engaging for youth?
- ☐ What was the instructional quality of the educators?
- ☐ Did educators have access to high-quality resources and materials?

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Post-Program Reflection Questions (continued)

Field Trips

- ☐ Were the field trips of high quality?
- ☐ Were youth engaged and interested in field trips?
- ☐ Did staff engage in and support youth learning during field trips?

Family Engagement

- ☐ Did the site offer family-educator conferences, meetings, or other one-on-one communications?
- ☐ Were families notified of youth progress during the program?
- ☐ Did families seem engaged and/or satisfied with the program?

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