

Using Data in the Decision-Making Process

How did data guide the UHI campaigns?
How did the campaigns collect and analyze
the data they needed? In what ways was data
used as a political and communications tool?

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About the Urban Health Initiative

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) established the Urban Health Initiative (UHI) in 1995 to determine whether a concerted, collaborative effort can bring about region-wide improvements in multiple measures of youth health and safety. Five campaigns comprise the UHI:

- Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign
- Mayor's Time (Detroit)
- Safe Passages (Oakland)
- Philadelphia Safe and Sound
- Youth Matters (Richmond)

UHI campaigns work to implement proven strategies at such a large scale that citywide statistics will improve significantly. To do that, UHI campaigns must be change agents to secure systemic policy and fiscal changes necessary to get strategies to that scale. The UHI was designed to be non-prescriptive, allowing communities to craft implementation plans based on local conditions without assumptions, mandates or imperatives set forward by RWJF, which made a ten-year funding commitment.

The National Program Office (NPO) based in Seattle provides guidance, technical assistance and oversight to the local UHI campaigns in a number of areas including research, management, systems change and communications. The NPO also helps campaigns attract and develop the local leaders essential to bring about and sustain change in their cities. Former Seattle Mayor Charles Royer is national program director.

About the UHI's Lessons Learned Project

The UHI campaigns and NPO have learned many lessons with regard to developing change agent organizations, and securing and sustaining change in large cities. The NPO is working to catalogue these lessons so they can be put to use by the campaigns in the final years of the UHI, and so they can benefit future change agent organizations and their funders. Several topics have been covered. All papers can be found on the UHI's website, www.urbanhealth.org. More topics will be covered in the coming months.

All papers should be considered works in progress. The UHI is not yet complete, and many individuals who have been heavily involved with the UHI have yet to be interviewed. As new or different insights are gathered on a topic, the papers will be redrafted and reprinted.

Anyone who has comments, suggestions or questions about the UHI Lessons Learned Project or individual topics, can contact Jerry VanderWood, UHI Director of Communications, at 206-616-3692 or jerryvw@u.washington.edu.

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By Jerry VanderWood¹

“It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories instead of theories to suit facts.”

-Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

As if taking Sir Doyle’s cue, UHI sites use data to guide their own decisions, such as strategy selection. They gather and share data with others, enabling systems reform beyond the sites’ own goals and strategies. They track the progress of the implementation of their strategies to allow for analyses of the strategies’ impacts. And they’ve set examples, followed by some, of letting outcome data rather than process measures or traditional relationships determine where investments should be made.

For all the benefits of leading a data-driven process, UHI sites also learned some hard lessons: being data-driven is a bear. In some cases the numbers don’t exist, or they’re not in a usable form, or they’re hidden under layers of bureaucracy, or people won’t share them due to turf or other issues. In every case, UHI sites didn’t have the expertise early on to gather and analyze data, and the NPO didn’t provide the right kind of help and training.

For the UHI as a whole, the point when data really became the driver of decisions came much later in the life of the initiative than it should have. The first couple of years of implementation – which followed two years dedicated to planning – were characterized by confusion regarding mission and general wheel-spinning, due in part to the fact that data was not being used extensively to guide decisions.

The denominator exercise

“How many youth could you reach each year using this new approach?” The question, asked of a UHI city competing for implementation funds in 1996, was innocent enough. But it led to a whole series of difficult questions about which strategies would have the most impact and whether the resources (funds, facilities, volunteers, etc.) necessary to implement them existed or could be found. Those questions could only be answered through the acquisition and analysis of hard data, a process that was to become known as the denominator exercise.

Through the denominator exercise, UHI cities gained information vital to determining which best-practice health and safety strategies likely could reach scale, the level needed to change city- or region-wide statistics. Generally, each proposed strategy is tested by identifying the numerator (how many youth can be reasonably expected to be affected by the strategy) and the denominator (how many youth are affected by the problem), which is the basis for a projection of change in the area-wide statistics. The projected change is then considered in light of the cost (funds, facilities, volunteers, etc.) of pursuing the strategy. (See *Sidebar 1 on page 11, “The Denominator Exercise in Practice”* for more information on the mechanics of the exercise.)

The genesis of the denominator exercise can be traced to The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Paul Jellinek, former RWJF vice president and one of the creators of the UHI, inspired its development by asking the sites, “If you do what you say you do, will it make a

difference?” Initially, site leaders could not provide an adequate response, and Cindy Curreri, deputy director of the National Program Office, created the denominator exercise as a tool to get at the answer. Site leaders would later refer to the completion of the denominator exercise as a turning point in the initiative, the moment at which the mission became clearer, and all subsequent decisions about strategies and tactics were easier to make.

In the same breath, though, they curse the denominator exercise as seemingly simple, but time consuming and complex in practice. A necessary evil, and one that should have come much sooner in the planning process, is the consensus take on the denominator exercise.

“Data was not part of the planning process at Safe and Sound originally, and time was wasted. Later, we did the denominator exercise, and we thought we were going to die doing it. But that’s how we are now considering the Children’s Investment Strategy, the dollars and numbers, in determining how to fund after-school programs and other youth development opportunities. It’s all based on the denominator exercise, how much money is needed, and how many kids will be served.”

-Marsha Zibalese Crawford, Temple University and consultant to Philadelphia Safe and Sound

The denominator exercise gave numerical precision to what would otherwise have been ambitious but vague statements of goals and strategies. For example, rather than simply saying that they want to reduce youth homicide by increasing youth participation in after-school activities, Philadelphia Safe and Sound has the goal of reducing youth homicides by 50 percent by, among other things, increasing the number of kids in after-school activities by 96,000.

Completing the exercise caused the sites to reevaluate their strategies. It was a reality check because it put the spotlight on practical limitations (money, facilities, other limitations), peculiar to each strategy and each city, that would make it likely that certain strategies would not get to scale.

“After the denominator exercise, we changed the way we looked at the home visitor model. We knew we couldn’t initially leverage the resources needed to take this to scale, but we could help the existing home visitor programs build their capacity so that when resources were available, they would have the infrastructure needed for expansion.”

- Lisa Specter, former Deputy Director, Youth Matters

The denominator exercise also changed the mindset of site leaders. The overriding mission of the UHI is to improve statistics across the entire city or metropolitan area. The site’s strategies, therefore, have to be funded and implemented at a level sufficient to reach this scale. And, to achieve the policy changes and obtain the funding necessary to implement the strategies at such an extraordinary scale, sites have to pursue systemic change. To do that, sites have to be change agents – meaning they have to be run as campaigns.

It was the denominator exercise that helped the sites see themselves as change agents, and not as service providers or funders. At that point, it became much clearer, if not perfectly clear, to site leaders what to do next. The need for even more data, for communications, for coalition building became more obvious, as they are in political campaigns.

“We developed the denominator exercise as a way for people, in very concrete terms, to figure out how many kids you would have to reach in order to change the statistics as a whole for whatever problem you wanted to go after. And you suddenly realized, like in Baltimore where you had to get 50,000 kids in after-school activities in order to impact citywide statistics, that this was completely different from what they had been thinking initially or from what they had done before. In the past it was more a matter of whether you could get a couple hundred kids into services – and here we were talking 50,000 kids! It dawned on people that we don’t have nearly enough money in our grant to reach that many and we’d have to tap the big dollars. And it took years for people to understand that.”

-Paul Jellinek, former Vice President, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

With the change agent mindset in place, sites scrutinized the existing skills of their staff and the roles that had been played by their boards, and changes were made. For example, some boards – Detroit’s, for example – were overhauled to include those whose systems would be impacted and/or those who could influence them. And, having an expert in data gathering and analysis on an ongoing basis either on staff or as a consultant was recognized as vital.

“You need someone who understands data. Someone who understands trend analyses, and someone who understands when populations shift how it impacts your outcomes. Someone who understands what it means to do a proportionate comparison. As trends change, as numbers go up when you expect them to go down, that person can say, ‘Wait a minute, technically they did go down and it looks this way because that happened.’ It makes a big difference having someone who knows whom to call, and is able to ask the right questions, because data people speak an entirely different language. My data person must translate it to me so that it is understandable and I can explain it!”

-Gren e Dudley, Executive Director, Mayor’s Time

Data as systems change

Generally as an outgrowth of the sites’ determination to use data in their decision-making processes, UHI sites have provided their cities with data tools and products that are improving the decision-making of city agencies and other major institutions.

A case in point is Philadelphia Safe and Sound. Among the products developed by Safe and Sound are:

- **Report Card.** The annual Report Card is the most comprehensive and exhaustive study of children’s health and safety indicators ever undertaken in the City of Philadelphia. It charts and tracks the well being of children and youth, using 26 key indicators that objectively measure progress toward five desired results. Indicators relate to a range of health, safety and educational issues, from infant mortality to college entrance examination scores.
- **Children’s Budget.** This document annually measures and analyzes all government spending for children and youth in Philadelphia. It allows comparison between government spending decisions and the areas of need (as depicted in the *Report Card*).

The *Children's Budget* presents spending data by funding source, the purpose of the spending and by the type of services being provided. It provides comparisons of spending for children over time.

- ***Integrated Data Information Systems (IDIS)***. This involves integrating the data systems of social service agencies with those of the School District, Police Department and other relevant city agencies over time. When fully implemented, it will allow greater data and information exchange among city agencies and social workers to foster better coordination and effectiveness in providing Philadelphia citizens of all ages with appropriate, seamless and comprehensive services.
- ***Geographic Information Systems (GIS)***. Safe and Sound works with social service agencies to analyze social indicator and resource data spatially across the physical geography of the City of Philadelphia. This mapping can provide guidance with regard to what areas of the city need the most attention in discreet service areas and where services are located. GIS includes housing, health, crime, early childhood, and other relevant indicators along with public and private resources such as libraries, schools, out of school programs, police and fire departments, health centers and more.
- ***Performance-Based Contracting***. Safe and Sound, working in partnership with the City of Philadelphia Quality Management Division, is developing a Performance-Based Contracting system to judge the performance of private service providers based upon the demonstration of measurable changes in client outcomes, rather than just the number of people served. This initiative, when completed, will radically change the public systems of delivering human services, and will help to ensure that client needs are addressed in an effective and efficient manner.

These data products are helping to guide the city's decision making with regard to human services. For example, the decision on where to locate the city's new 11 Beacon programs was informed by Safe and Sound's GIS. Another example involves the city's alarming rise in STDs among teens that was underscored by the Report Card. The result was a partnership between the Departments of Health and Recreation to offer free screening tests for sexually transmitted diseases.

Each UHI site has created some data product or otherwise has gathered data and made it useful to others. (For example, see Sidebar 2 on page 12, "*Baltimore City Data Collaborative helps city make sound investments for kids.*") Often what makes this possible is that UHI sites can provide a neutral table at which holders of data are comfortable sharing information.

"Other efforts set up to do just these sorts of data work have failed. Maybe you end up better if you have a real need for the information than if a funding agent says, 'We'll fund you to put together a data collaborative.'"

-Cindy Curreri, National Program Deputy Director

Benchmarks, outcomes and process data

UHI sites are required to track and report to the NPO outcome data as well as process data. This reporting requirement now takes the form of "Getting to Scale Reports" that the sites must update and send to the NPO every six months. These reports include the outcome data (benchmark and current) and process data (generally meaning numbers of kids/families

reached by a strategy and the dollars invested in it) as well as descriptions of the legal and policy changes needed to bring program strategies to scale.

Having valid process numbers helps show The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and other funders the impact of their investments, and answers the question, “Did you do what you said you would do?” Also, having valid process numbers is the only way that a correlation between strategies and outcomes could be shown, even if cause-and-effect proof is elusive. These numbers keep everyone focused on the fact that only through systems change can this scale be reached.

Although finding the appropriate piece of outcome data is often, but certainly not always, straightforward, tracking the numbers of kids reached by a strategy, and the benchmark to compare it to, has proven to be difficult in many cases. There are many examples within the UHI of sites creating data systems and providing the necessary technical assistance to providers to facilitate their participation.

Difficulties with process numbers are particularly acute with regard to after-school programming, the most common strategy among the UHI sites. Basic matters such as knowing how many kids (without double counting) are attending after-school programs can be difficult, but even less so than such questions as what “dosage” of after-school programming has what effect. After-school providers don’t always keep counts, and even if they do, there may be no entity that aggregates and manages the counts.

One notable approach to this problem is being taken by Detroit’s Mayor’s Time in cooperation with the State of Michigan’s 21st Century Learning Centers Program. The two are combining their efforts to create an on-line data system that will track and document youth participation in after-school activities, and allow for the analysis of the relationship between participation and outcomes. Among the participating partners are Detroit Public Schools, which will track and report attendance, test data and code of conduct violations; a hundred after-school providers, which will gather and provide the information about their programs and attendees; Wayne County’s Juvenile Assessment Center, which will report on kids in the juvenile justice system; and Michigan State University, which will analyze the data and evaluate the effort.

“We’ll be able to take all those elements regarding dosage and type of program, and compare them to outcomes. How many hours of participation correlates to improvements in outcomes? If kids’ test scores are going up, do greater or smaller levels of increase correspond with certain dosages of after-school participation? Ultimately, those are the types of questions that we will be able to speak to with greater confidence.”

- Grenae Dudley, Executive Director, Mayor’s Time

Evaluation and quality control

UHI sites work with local evaluators to establish mechanisms to gauge the effectiveness of certain strategies.

One of these examples involves Richmond’s Youth Matters, which teamed with Virginia Commonwealth University’s Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory to develop a data gathering system for Youth Matters’ in-school tutoring strategy. The system includes “dosage”

reports from tutors, customized pre- and post-tests for the kids being tutored, report card data from the schools, and qualitative data such as teacher surveys. The system went far beyond simply counting heads; it allowed for an evaluation for how well the strategy was working to improve kids' reading abilities. (For another example of a UHI site's evaluation approach, see Sidebar 3 on page 13, "Evaluating after-school programs: Philadelphia Safe and Sound's evaluators take novel approach.")

UHI sites have also worked to maintain or improve the quality of the services as they simultaneously seek to expand them. This involves putting an emphasis on outcomes, rather than numbers of kids served, which in many cases is a new approach. This also involves creating standards that must be met before providers can receive funding and, in many cases, securing the technical assistance that may be necessary for providers to meet those standards. An example is Baltimore's After-School Strategy, developed by the Safe and Sound Campaign. In addition to mobilizing funds for it, components of this strategy include:

- Establishing research-based standards for after-school programming (based in part on the National School Age Childcare Alliance Standards);
- Retooling the Family League of Baltimore City, a quasi-governmental authority, as the entity responsible for allocating funds, monitoring program performance and ensuring accountability of after-school programs.
- Evaluating results and using data to drive strategy decisions and support program expansion, via the Baltimore City Data Collaborative.
- Creating a training and capacity center, called The After School Institute.

Some city leaders have credited UHI sites' emphasis on outcomes as an example that is being emulated by others in the expending of public dollars.

"I think that there's been a spin-off effect of pushing the outcome results mentality into other program areas. Nobody's willing to give up anything, but it has started to change the mindset, I think, of some people. So that's a real benefit where the initiative is not only working for itself and its values, but has created a different approach for attacking problems that is more along the lines of hard results, hard outcomes, versus process."

-George Musgrove, former Assistant City Manager, Oakland,
and former Safe Passages Board member

Data as communications and political strategy

The resources the sites' expend to gather and package data have additional benefits. They make the sites, and therefore their change agent role, all the more valuable to their cities and their bureaucracies. Many consider the successful effort the sites have made – to standardize data from multiple jurisdictions, address confidentiality issues, overcome "turf" issues, make data user friendly, create functional data collaboratives, and tie data directly to decision-making – as not unlike pulling the proverbial sword out of the stone.

Data work is not just an aid to human services planning; it can be an invaluable part of communications and political campaigns. By highlighting where the needs are, where the dollars go, and making this information widely available, Philadelphia's Report Card

and Children's Budget help add community pressure to bring the two – needs and dollars – into better alignment. An opening for Safe and Sound was created – the media and community spotlight shone on the Report Card data and agency directors felt the pressure to “do something.” Safe and Sound exploited the opening and offered their strategies, such as the home visitor strategy known as the “Olds model”, as part of the solution. The agency directors then had a response to the question of what they were going to do.

Data, and in particular “data shock” such as Youth Matters’ finding that more than half of Richmond’s babies are born to single moms, can grab (but not necessarily sustain) people’s attention, which also creates an opening to deliver other messages and suggest solutions.

At least one campaign, Richmond’s Youth Matters, used data to help form alliances among communities that thought they did not have much in common.

“Once we got into the data and analysis, we found out in fact that our maturing urban counties did indeed have these problems and if they didn’t address them at the front end, in a few years they were going to be in the same boat the city is in. When we started throwing out the statistics that 39 percent of our third graders weren’t reading at grade level and it wasn’t just the city but the outlying jurisdictions – that caught people off guard and generated a lot of conversation and attention. I don’t think many people will point to Youth Matters and say thank goodness they did what they did and help these outlying jurisdictions take a hard look at themselves. But if someone said pick a couple of the most significant accomplishments, that is one of them.”

-Jim Dunn, President, Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce,
lead agency for Youth Matters

Data, particularly early data from the implementation of a strategy, can give confidence to policymakers, funders, community leaders and strategic partners that change can be made. This makes it easier to secure policy and funding changes and to attract new strategic partners. It also gives political leaders and others credible ways to show progress.

“When we implemented the Youth Violence Reduction Partnership, we knew we needed some ‘low hanging fruit.’ We knew we had to show impact early. We’re working with different social systems including social services, faith-based institutions and law enforcement, and this early data helped them understand that if they did business differently, if they redirected some resources, they would all achieve their missions. That data was so powerful in having them think, ‘Could it be applied to other services?’”

-Naomi Post, former Executive Director, Philadelphia Safe and Sound

Data: The truth is out there (it’s just hard to find)

*“To write it, it took three months; to conceive it, three minutes;
to collect the data in it– all my life.”*

-F. Scott Fitzgerald on This Side of Paradise

Maybe it only seems that way, but the staff of UHI sites spend all of their lives collecting data, too. Too often data gathering becomes a necessary but monumental and time-

consuming effort. “Surely,” says the naive one, uninitiated in the world of public health and community development, “this important piece of information is readily available in someone’s desk drawer.”

Jaded (make that experienced) professionals scoff, knowing that it’s rarely that easy. Often, multiple jurisdictions are involved in collecting data, and each reports it differently. Or, some agencies are hesitant to release data due to confidentiality or other concerns. Or, some are hesitant to release data if they think the data could be used to make them look bad.

Staff from UHI sites who have spent a great deal of time and energy mining data have some suggestions regarding the gathering and analyzing of data that is not readily available.

Being on the inside helps a great deal. While each type of lead agency, or site sponsor, involved in the UHI has its own strengths and weaknesses, the government model seems to facilitate data collection and analysis. Philadelphia Safe and Sound was originally housed within the city government, and even after becoming a separate 501(c)(3) it retained a very close relationship with the city. Staff indicate that, because of this, the city government sources of the data did not perceive them skeptically; they were more willing to share data because they had more trust that the information would not be used against them.

In addition, this insider position may have other advantages. Staff have access to data without having to wait until it’s publicly available. And, they may have an easier time getting a fuller explanation of things such as anomalies in the data from the individuals (colleagues) who collect the data.

Another advantage of being part of, or very closely associated with, the city’s administration is that, if push comes to shove, the mayor or other official can order the release of data. When Detroit’s The Youth Connection evolved into Mayor’s Time in cooperation with new Mayor Kwami Kilpatrick, staff found they had greater access to data because they could make the request from “the mayor’s office.”

This insider champion seems particularly necessary when seeking data from the school system. Most school systems are not usually accountable to the mayor and otherwise are less susceptible to public pressure. They can be monoliths, with a single entry point: the superintendent. Youth Matters has struggled with getting data from the Richmond school district because its superintendent has not agreed to make Youth Matters’ strategies a high priority. Meanwhile, Safe Passages has had success with school data, as Oakland Unified School District superintendents have been active board members.

No matter whether collecting data as an insider or outsider, building relationships with the keepers of the data is vital. These sources will be more likely to share and explain the data if they have an understanding of how it will be used and why, if their expertise on the context behind the data is sought, and if they have an opportunity to see, and comment on, the final data product. Often the request for data involves a mutually beneficial trade – the data product and data reporting streams developed by the UHI site makes the data more valuable and useable to all, including the data sources themselves.

We pulled together a data policy group and they first met with us and said, ‘we’ve done this before, it’s not going to work, you don’t know what you’re doing.’ We kept calling them, and I think it was the respect we were showing them – we knew they were more knowledgeable than we were. We gained their trust, we said we’re going to

do this, we're going to try to make it work, and we're going to give you back the data. We have the data policy group meetings now, people keep coming back, and they bring new people."

-Marsha Zibalese-Crawford, Temple University and consultant to Philadelphia Safe and Sound

Some caveats

Some have raised the point that too much emphasis on data can be a detriment, and that resources spent on ever more precise process numbers are resources that might be spent on programs. Change agents need to calibrate this, to assure that data efforts, on balance, lead to more and higher quality programs.

Also, although it is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be noted that new technology will continue to impact efforts to gather and analyze data. New technologies are making data maps and other tools more accessible to all and easier to use.

Summary points

1. Data needs to be used in decision-making throughout the planning phase. Staff must have experience in using data in decision-making, know where to get it and how to organize it in analytical processes.
2. Change agents need to conduct scale analysis, to inform the identification of problems and selection of strategies. This data work should reveal targets for numbers of kids/families that need to be served by the particular strategy in order to improve statistics across the entire city or metropolitan area, as well as the dollars necessary to implement the strategy at this scale. This work may also reveal barriers to implementing the strategy at scale that would lead to a reconsideration of the strategy.
3. These numbers can help change agents see and organize themselves as such, as they identify and make clear that systemic changes are necessary to reach scale.
4. The denominator exercise developed by the UHI is a method for generating these numbers.
5. Ongoing data work includes establishing and tracking outcome data, and tracking process numbers (e.g., number of kids served). Often, data reporting systems have to be created from scratch, and relationships with data sources have to be cultivated. A data expert, either on staff or under contract, should be a key member of the leadership team.
6. Creating data products can be a valuable service provided to a city by a change agent, helping to institutionalize its role. Data products can also facilitate systems change by, for example, showing gaps between needs and services.
7. Many of the data systems and products created by many UHI sites have or will be institutionalized within their cities and will be legacies of the UHI.
8. Data is a valuable component of a communications or political strategy. For example, it can get people's attention and raise awareness that a problem exists; it can build bridges between communities by showing they share common problems; and it can give political leaders credible ways to show progress.
9. Being located within government, or being closely associated with government, may ease problems associated with gathering and analyzing data from government sources.

SIDEBAR I:
THE DENOMINATOR EXERCISE IN PRACTICE

The following is an example of a method to identify the number of youth/families that must be reached and the resources needed to change the overall statistics for an area. We did not develop a simple formula, because the most important thing about the denominator exercise is that it introduces a new way of thinking and a different way to frame issues. It is a problem-solving method rather than a mathematical exercise. There are at least three or four ways to do it and the method will vary depending on the strategy one is testing.

Through analysis of existing data, the leaders of the city identify youth violence as a major threat to the health and safety of the city's children. Again using existing data, they identify the nature and extent of the violence. Using best practice research and evaluations, they next identify potential programmatic approaches that have been proven to work. But to develop a successful strategic plan, they also need to know what outcome they are likely to achieve with each approach and quantify what it will take to improve the statistics.

Let us assume that the group selects mentoring as one potential programmatic effort. In working through a denominator exercise, the group's thinking might proceed like this:

- The number of youth in city: 220,000 (from census data)
- The number of youth involved in violent acts (denominator): 20,000 (from police/court data)
- The number of violent youth likely to be attracted to a mentoring program (best practice says 60%): 12,000
- The proportion of youth involved in effective mentoring programs likely to succeed in avoiding violence: (best practice research says 20%)
- The number of youth likely to avoid violent activities if mentored successfully (numerator, 20% of 12,000): 2,400
- Therefore, if all interested violent kids were provided mentoring, the number of youth involved in violence could be reduced by 2,400 over 20,000, or 12%
- The number of mentors needed for 12,000 youth: 6,000 (from best practice research).

Armed with these statistics, the group of leaders must consider a number of practical questions such as, is it reasonable to assume that it will be possible to attract and train 6,000 mentors? Perhaps local mentoring programs have found it difficult to find and retain 200. How long will the police department need to screen 6,000 mentors? Is it possible to locate 3,000 places convenient to and safe for both mentors and children to meet? They might also consider whether the data suggest that if they introduce some kind of targeting of certain youth or certain geographic areas, they can get a similar result with fewer mentors.

The answers might persuade the leadership group to either discard the strategy, or downsize it to 400 mentors and 800 kids. Now the forecast of the number of youth likely to avoid violence through this strategy is reduced to 20% of 800, or 160 kids. The group will have to decide if the likely outcome is worth the cost of training, materials, transportation, etc., or if other strategies will provide a better return on their investment. And if they include mentoring at the reduced level, they will have to devise additional programmatic approaches to the problem to get to scale (meaning to move the overall statistics for the city).

To illustrate the potential size of this kind of effort, the number of children/parents involved in UHI sites ranges from 400 in an OLDS program to 96,000 in after-school programs.

To complete the exercise, the leaders must determine the cost of such a strategy. Using evaluative information on other successful programs and local costs for a coordinator's salary and benefits, recruiting, screening and training mentors and renting space, providing transportation and materials is \$380 per child or \$304,000 per year. This is a modest sum and should not be too difficult to secure. But if the level of participation at scale had proven possible, the cost would be \$4,560,000, which would require some research into likely funding sources. Since the city leaders are unlikely to secure new funding sources, they must seek to move that money from current uses that do not represent best practice or are of less priority than reducing violence.

Having completed the exercise for one programmatic approach, the leadership must now apply the same thinking and produce the same information for other approaches in order to demonstrate that they can significantly change the overall violence statistics.

To illustrate the potential challenge of this kind of effort, the amounts of money to be redirected in UHI sites range from \$50,000 for a violence prevention curriculum to \$150 million for after-school programming.

When the leaders have looked over the potential for each of the suggested programmatic approaches, selected those with the greatest promise and amassed them into a strategy, or more likely several strategies, the denominator exercise is done. The leaders can now answer the question **"What will you do?"** Next a strategic systems change plan must be developed which will answer the question, **"How will you do it?"** This document identifies the needed policy changes, action steps, schedules, and responsibility assignments and measurable milestones for each programmatic approach. And lastly there needs to be a systematic reporting system, at least semi-annually, which measures process data to answer the question **"Did you do what you said you would do?"** and, after several years, begins to measure outcome data and answers the question, **"What difference did it make?"**

SIDEBAR 2:
BALTIMORE CITY DATA COLLABORATIVE
HELPS CITY MAKE SOUND INVESTMENTS FOR KIDS

(published August 2003)

When the Family League of Baltimore received a grant in 2002 to reduce truancy, juvenile delinquency and teen substance abuse, it needed to know where to target the money. "We knew there wasn't enough money for a citywide effort," says Executive Director Janis Parks. "So we needed information that would help us target the program to the neighborhoods with the greatest need."

That information was provided by the Baltimore City Data Collaborative (BCDC), an effort begun seven years ago whose mission is to "provide an accurate and timely analysis of the well-being of Baltimore's children, youth, and families at citywide and neighborhood levels to inform policy and planning decisions and monitor the city's progress in improving outcomes."

Parks' example is just one of many that indicate how data analyzed and disseminated by the BCDC inform the decision-making process of funders and policymakers. Parks can readily

cite other examples. “Head Start in Baltimore relied on the BCDC to help it understand where the kids and families in Baltimore are,” she says. “They used the data to locate good spots for additional centers.”

Since 1998, the BCDC has been a part of the Family League, a quasi-public, non-profit organization that focuses attention and resources on improving the well being of children and families by engaging communities and encouraging public and private partnerships.

Baltimore’s Safe and Sound Campaign spearheaded the creation of the BCDC in 1996 with a two-year grant from the Charles Crane Family Foundation. “The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation challenged us to improve outcomes for kids,” says Martha Holleman, a senior policy advisor at Safe and Sound. “But improved outcomes compared to what? In general, existing data wasn’t complete and it didn’t include trend and comparison data for all of the conditions we were concerned about. Also, we wanted to be able to compare conditions for kids and families in neighborhoods and with the city and state, which we couldn’t do with the existing data. Plus, the data was not housed in one place, which meant it was very labor-intensive to get even the existing data.”

So the collaborative’s initial function, which remains one of its central ones, was to provide data analysis for the Safe and Sound Campaign -- initially in the selection of its strategies, such as after-school and family support, and now in evaluating and improving their effectiveness. In 1996 Safe and Sound contracted with Johns Hopkins University’s Bloomberg School of Public Health, which initiated the data gathering and analysis and provided for neighborhood mapping of the data. The BCDC later became permanently housed in the Family League, while the Bloomberg School continues to be a major consultant.

“We wanted to institutionalize the data function, and to make the data available to all so it could guide the city’s decision-making,” says Holleman. “And the Family League agreed to house the BCDC and make it permanent.” The Family League, Safe and Sound, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and various grants fund the collaborative’s operations.

The primary sources of data used by the BCDC are the Baltimore City Health Department, Baltimore City Public Schools, Baltimore Police Department, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and many others.

In addition to providing data analysis to Safe and Sound, BCDC, through its website, provides citywide summary data, community specific geo-mapped data and listings of community resources. This information is available in summarized and downloadable formats for use by local, regional and national consumers.

SIDEBAR 3:
EVALUATING AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS -- PHILADELPHIA
SAFE AND SOUND’S EVALUATORS TAKE NOVEL APPROACH

(published December 2002)

Evaluating after-school programs always has its pitfalls. What does it mean to be “high quality?” How do you measure it even if you can define it? Then there’s the self selection issue: are differences in behavior or achievement between kids who go to after-school programs and those that don’t due to the programs, or do they occur because the “better” kids choose to go to, have better access to, and/or can afford to pay for the programs?

Philadelphia Safe and Sound, with funding from the William Penn Foundation, is contracting with Public/Private Ventures to conduct the evaluation of Philadelphia's 11 recently opened Beacons programs (school-based community centers). Jean Grossman, research associate in the Office of Population Research at Princeton and senior vice president for research at Public/Private Ventures, is the principal evaluator on this project and is determined to get past those evaluation challenges and to provide data that will allow mid-course improvements to the programs.

One uncommon approach Grossman will take to avoid the "self selection" issue is to compare not just participants, but also schools - those with and without Beacons. "If the benefits of Beacons programs on individual behavior holds up, it's possible that the academic performance of the school as a whole could improve as teachers have more time to spend on academics because they spend less time on discipline," says Grossman.

Also, Grossman and her evaluation team will dig deep to look at quality issues. They will visit schools and interview staff. "We want to find out not just what they are doing, but also their teaching philosophy and attitudes of what they think is important in how they provide their services," she says. "Then we will interview the kids to see what they are receiving. These surveys, plus the observations we conduct, will allow us to suggest what's most effective under what conditions, and what training providers may need."

To illustrate the importance of understanding how services are provided to kids versus simply knowing what services are offered, Grossman says that two programs may have similar basketball activities. In one, the adults make all the decisions, and little effort is made to enrich kids' decision-making abilities. In the other, the basketball activity is structured to allow for kids' input into decisions, and the kids are challenged and stretched in ways beyond the physical basketball skills.

"We're working to measure these 'development vitamins,' which might be the amount of adult support, connectedness among the kids, leadership opportunities given to kids, and more," says Grossman. "We have a measurement device to do this, which we will share with program directors so they know what we're looking at. This may spur them to think about - and imbed into their programs to a greater degree - things like parental involvement, youth decision-making skills and other development vitamins. We're teaching to the test."

Safe and Sound Executive Director Jo Ann Lawer says this project was designed from the beginning to provide regular feedback to Safe and Sound and the sites about its formative findings. "This is invaluable info for all of us," Lawer says. "It allows Safe and Sound to double-check its own technical assistance work and provides a common dialogue with the sites about program development issues."

The evaluators will share the survey and observation information with the program providers and with Safe and Sound. "If we get hints of promising practices, we'll share that as soon as possible, to allow for on-going improvements to the programs," Grossman says.

The following individuals have been interviewed as part of the UHI's lessons learned project. Interviews with many other individuals involved with the UHI will be held over the following year. The author wishes to thank all interviewees for their time and insights.

Freddie G. Burton, Jr., Wayne County Probate Judge; Board Chair, Mayor's Time
Dennis Chaconas, former Superintendent, Oakland Unified School District; former Board Vice Chair, Safe Passages
Denise Clayton, Deputy Director, Philadelphia Safe and Sound
Susan Crump, Vice President, United Way Services, Advisory Board Member, Youth Matters
Cindy Curreri, National Program Deputy Director, Urban Health Initiative
Grenaé Dudley, Executive Director, Mayor's Time
Jim Dunn, President and CEO, Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce (lead agency for Youth Matters)
Mike Evans, Director, Human Services, City of Richmond; Member, Advisory Board Executive Committee, Youth Matters
Hathaway Ferebee, Executive Director, Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign
Jeff Griffith, Communication's Director, Mayor's Time
Jeriel Heard, Associate Director, Mayor's Time
Linda Herzog, National Program Associate Director, Urban Health Initiative
Michael M. Howe, President, East Bay Community Foundation (lead agency for Safe Passages)
Martha Holleman, Director of Policy and Planning, Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign
Paul Jellinek, Principal, Isaacs/Jellinek; former Vice President, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Ernest Jones, President and CEO, Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation; Board Chair, Philadelphia Safe and Sound
David Kears, Director, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency; Board Chair, Safe Passages
Jon King, President and CEO, Exclusive Staffing Companies; Advisory Board Chair, Youth Matters
Jo Ann Lawer, President and CEO, Philadelphia Safe and Sound
Floyd Morris, Senior Program Officer, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
George Musgrove, former Oakland Assistant City Manager; former Board member, Safe Passages
Tony Nazzario, MIS/Data Manager, Philadelphia Safe and Sound
Mae O'Brien, Director of Institutional Advancement, Philadelphia Safe and Sound
Laura Pinkney, former Executive Director, Safe Passages
Naomi Post-Street, Consultant; UHI Fellow; former Executive Director, Philadelphia Safe and Sound
Charles Royer, National Program Director, Urban Health Initiative
Rush Russell, President, Children's Futures; former Senior Program Officer, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Lisa Specter, Executive Director, Smart Smiles, Boys and Girls Club of Greater Richmond; former Deputy Director, Youth Matters
Veronica Templeton, former Executive Director, Youth Matters
Michael Tenbusch, CEO, Think Detroit; UHI Fellow
Phil Wells, Deputy Director, Mayor's Time
Robin Wood, Deputy Director, Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign
Marsha Zibalese-Crawford, Associate Professor, Temple University; Consultant, Philadelphia Safe and Sound

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