

The Value of Measuring Outcomes

Emily Plagman

project | **OUTCOME**
MEASURING THE TRUE IMPACT
OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

PLA
Public Library Association
a division of the American Library Association

Emily Plagman from PLA’s Project Outcome talks about why it’s important to measure library outcomes.

Demonstrating Library Value

- Times have changed
- Intuition is not enough
- Attendance counts are not enough
- Anecdotes are not enough

Libraries need more data & evidence to demonstrate their value

For years, libraries have gauged success through their patrons' stories. And the core metric has been how often they came back for more. But, as you know, times have changed, and so have libraries. Intuition, anecdotes, and attendance counts are no longer enough.

To demonstrate their value in the community, libraries need more DATA & EVIDENCE.

Demonstrating Library Value

Needs Assessment



WHAT DOES OUR COMMUNITY NEED

Patron Satisfaction



WHAT SHOULD WE DO BETTER

Outputs



HOW MUCH DID WE DO

Outcomes



WHAT GOOD DID WE DO

Of course, measuring outcomes doesn't mean you stop doing other types of evaluation. There are many data pieces that help demonstrate your library's value.

- Needs assessments help answer - What Does Our Community Need?
- Patron satisfaction surveys help answer - What Should We Do Better?
- Outputs help answer - How Much Did We Do?

Adding outcome data to your evaluation will help you answer the key question - What good did we do?

What is an Outcome?

Specific benefit from a library program/service

Can be quantitative or qualitative

Expressed as changes that individuals perceive

Answers the question:



WHAT GOOD DID WE DO

So what do we mean by outcomes? PLA defines outcomes as a specific benefit a patron receives from a library program or service. They can be quantitative or qualitative and are expressed as **change that individuals perceive** in themselves.

Measuring the Good You Do

Learning what changes/effects/impacts your programs are having in/on...

- ✓ Knowledge
- ✓ Skills
- ✓ Attitudes
- ✓ Opinions
- ✓ Behaviors
- ✓ Actions
- ✓ Status



An outcome is a way to determine the extent to which a program achieved its intended results. By measuring outcomes, you're learning what changes/effects/or impacts your programs are having.

- So did the program positively impact the lives of the patrons?
- Did it make a difference?
- How are the lives of the patrons better as result?

Measuring the Good You Do

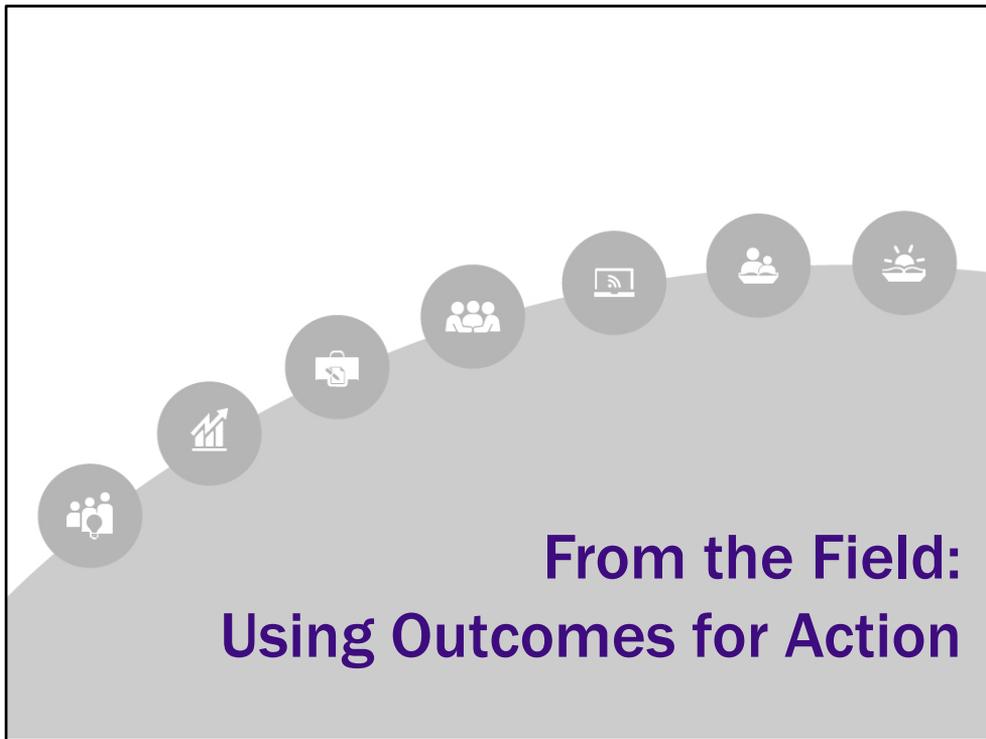
Supercharged Storytime Outcome Data



- Improve Programs
- Communicating Value
- Creating Partnerships
- Funding
- Strategic Planning

Supercharged Storytime outcomes that capture how much caregivers are learning new techniques to help their children learn is great data to use to meet for library advocacy goals:

- A key outcome of learning gained by patrons can be used to tell your library story to your board or friends group... "90% of participants that responded to the library survey said they learned something they can share with their children."
- You know that the library could expand its reach or strengthen community-level literacy goals through partnerships or with new funding streams. Measuring outcomes gives you data to help reinforce your message to stakeholders about how important Supercharged Storytimes are to the attendees.



Many libraries have made effective use of the data gathered with Project Outcome tools.

Program Improvements

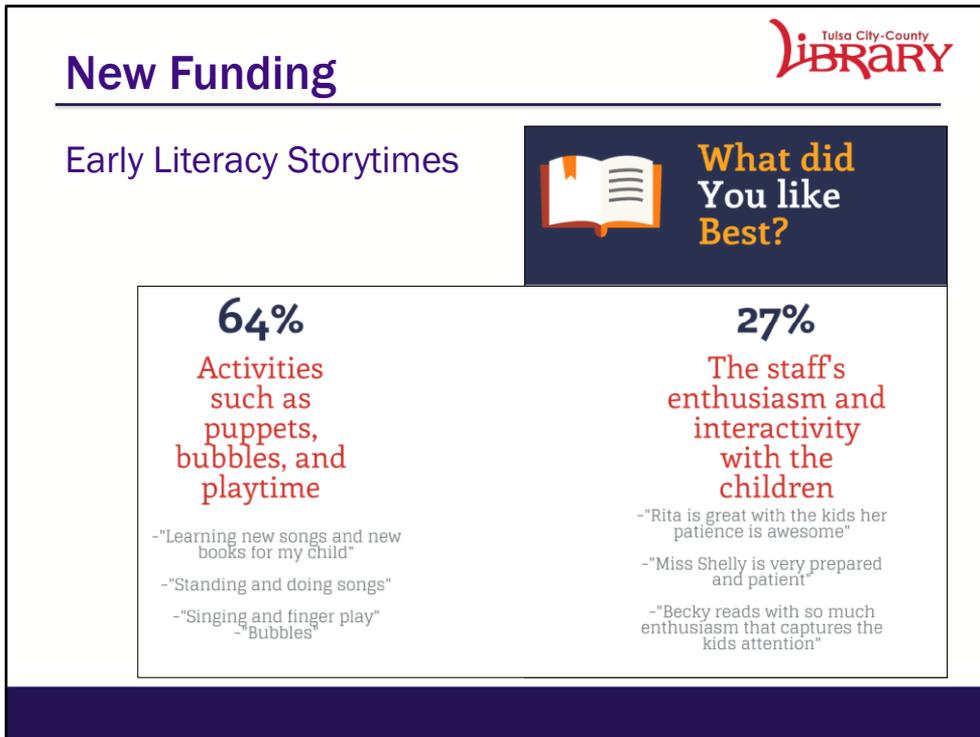
Douglas County Libraries

- Singing Storytime Survey Activity
- Results: Pitch was too low
- Fix: Raise the pitch
- Cost: \$0



Douglas County Libraries learned from surveying patrons of their Singing Storytime that the songs were sung in a pitch that was too low for the children. Simple no-cost fix –they raised the pitch.

Using outcomes to improve programming means more patrons reporting satisfaction and appreciation of library programs.



The Tulsa City-County Library used Project Outcome surveys to make programming decisions.

They measured their Storytime programs across several branches. Only one of the branches had designated playtime & toys for after Storytime.

To share their results, the library created an infographic that highlighted trends in the open ended comments.

The results showed that patrons liked and referenced the post-Storytime toys & playtime almost as much as the program itself.

As a result - The library was able to use its Friends of the Library group to fund toys for the other branches so they could provide the same post-Storytime activities.

Communicating Results

- Shared Summary Reports with Friends of the Library
- Added patron comments in Library Board reports
- Included patron comments in thank you notes to business donors



SUMMER READING



Here are some of the highlights from the 2016 Summer Reading Program:

- AFPLS registered more than 16,000 children and teens as part of the Summer Reading Program, an increase of more than 3,000 young readers over the 2015 totals.
- **Children and teens read more than 108,000 library books this summer** — a 31% increase over last year.
- AFPLS offered a record-breaking number of bilingual programs for children and teens this summer. In 2016, the library held 139 bilingual programs compared to 24 bilingual programs in 2015 and 10 in 2014.

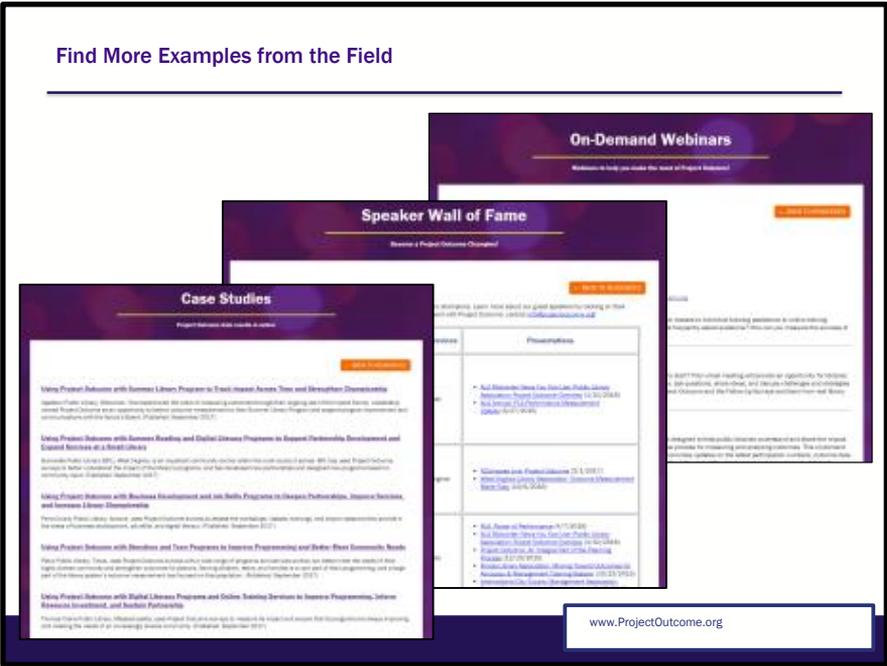
Summer may be gone, but the lessons learned have left their mark on many children and teens in our communities.



One mother from the East Atlanta Branch had this to say about her daughter's experience at the library this summer: "The Summer Reading prizes were a HUGE motivation to read. My daughter was a reluctant reader before the program. During the program I have had to stop her reading! She reads all the time! Thanks!"

afpls.org

The Atlanta-Fulton Public Library widely shared their summer reading survey results with their Friends group, Library Board, and to the businesses that donated summer reading prizes. They shared photos of the kids thanking the businesses, which the businesses really valued and shared via social media. Because of this, the library anticipates doubling their local business prize donations next summer. One parent's comment even made it into the Library Foundation Newsletter, which goes out to library donors.



You can find more examples like this under our From the Field resources on the Project outcome website, which include case studies, our speaker wall of fame, and on-demand webinars.

Benefits of Project Outcome Data

- Capturing snapshot data and real-time results
- Open-ended comments are a goldmine
- Data visualizations and ready-to-use reports provide strong advocacy tools



The Project Outcome tools help libraries quickly and easily capture snapshot data. This is not a tool for rigorous data collection and random sampling in your library. You're targeting your users and finding out what they're gaining and what else they need from the library to help support them in their learning.

The short, simple design of the surveys helps the library save time, while also increasing your response rate from patrons.

The open-ended questions of the surveys are a GOLDMINE for libraries. This is where they're gaining the most insight into their community's wants and needs.

Benefits of Project Outcome Data

- Standardization of outcome measures
 - Across time & locations
 - Variety of programs
 - Aggregate national & state comparisons



The key benefit of using Project outcome for your evaluation, is that you're using standardized outcome measures across time, multiple branches, and a variety of programs. So while your programs and audiences may be unique, by standardizing the outcomes, you're able to talk about your impact across the board.

Which then allows your results to be aggregated with state and national datasets, for comparison sake, but also to talk about impact at a national level.