

Education White Paper

Evaluating the Effectiveness of 21st Century Community Learning Centers by Using Impact Measurement and Tracking Software

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Abstract

This white paper explores how States can most effectively utilize funds for gathering and reporting performance data for 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) programs. This objective is accomplished by first identifying the shortcomings of the current data gathering and reporting processes and second, by proposing the use of a data management solution called KidTrax. KidTrax software automates data collection and data transfer and is used nationwide by more than 2,500 entities to measure the impact and effectiveness of non-profit organizations that serve youth.

Automating Data Management

21st CCLC evaluators have two primary functions. The first is to perform site visits to observe program directors and students, the second is to gather and analyze the attendance and performance data recorded by each center. Site visits will continue to play an important role in the evaluation process however, the costly and repetitive manual tasks of gathering, entering, verifying and transferring data can and should be automated. Automations will result in saving dollars that can be allocated to program quality improvement.

Many 21st CCLC's record attendance and performance data either on paper, in Microsoft Excel or Word or some combination of the three. In order to analyze the data, evaluators must first gather the data, in all of its disparate forms and input it into one central information system. This process of gathering and entering the data can take hundreds of hours to accomplish depending on the number of centers in each state and the variation of the recording methods. Once the evaluator has gathered and entered the data, it must then be reformatted and re-entered into the National *Annual Performance Report* (APR) information system. Some states may also require the data to be entered into a separate state information system as well. This manual data entry process is costly and time consuming and must continually be repeated each year for each center.

A more efficient and effective means of data management is to enter the data only once at the center level and then automatically and seamlessly transfer the data to the evaluator, and the National APR system. KidTrax software can provide these capabilities. Youth attending 21st CCLC programs would be issued KidTrax identification cards which they would swipe through a scanner each time they attend the program. The

KidTrax system would then read the information stored on the card and automatically record their name, time of visit, and other information. This information would then be immediately stored in a database and would be made accessible to the program director, the state appointed evaluator, and any other party to whom the state chose to grant access. Once the information was analyzed, it could be sent directly to the national APR system. Over time, this simple automation of data entry and data transmission can result in saving thousands of hours and hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Ensuring Data Integrity

A second problem resulting from current data gathering and analysis processes is the inability to verify the accuracy and integrity of the data. Since the quality of the data analysis depends upon the quality of the original data, it is crucial that the accuracy of the data be verifiable. In many states, 21st CCLC data verification is difficult or impossible because of the lack of audit controls and data management tools. Without controls the data are left susceptible to human error or intentional manipulation. Furthermore, without controls, federal evaluations of the states' administration of 21st CCLC funds will be more difficult to pass.

For example, as an evaluator gathers data from multiple centers he/she must sift through hundreds or thousands of paper and electronic records and somehow attempt to ascertain whether the data was accurately recorded. This is extremely difficult because each center may employ different data definitions and data recording processes; even within a given center different employees may record data differently. To use a hypothetical example, if a certain individual comes to a 21st CCLC event class for 5

minutes, one employee may not count that as attendance, whereas another employee might. Because there are little or no control measures or audit procedures, and because of the high degree of variation amongst the reporting formats and data definitions, data verification cannot be accomplished with an acceptable degree of confidence.

When an individual enters and leaves a 21st CCLC class, he/she scans his/her identification card with the KidTrax scanner, which records the time and date the individual entered and left the center. This recorded time stamp remains attached to the individual's record and serves to verify the authenticity of the data and reduces the potential for individual data interpretation, human error or falsification. Additionally, the evaluator is able to monitor the data as often as he/she would like from his/her own place of business since the data can be immediately viewed as soon as a card is swiped through the scanner. This potential for constant monitoring also improves the evaluator's ability to verify the accuracy and integrity of the data. Finally, all 21st CCLC's utilizing KidTrax would be subject to the same automated data recording process, which eliminates the inaccuracies caused by the variations in individual interpretation.

Obtaining a Holistic View of Youth Development

The benefits of using KidTrax software are not limited to the improvement of 21st CCLC programs. In fact, benefits increase exponentially as KidTrax is employed in an ever increasing number of community based programs. For instance, Louisville Kentucky has already implemented KidTrax in 25 non-profit organizations including Boys & Girls Clubs, Salvation Army Youth Centers and the Urban League as well as in the school district's database. With immediate access multiple sources of data,

government officials are now able to determine which programs are best meeting the needs of the youth. Since youth often attend the activities of more than one program, the combination of data from each program provides a more holistic view of the youth's activities. For example, to better assist youth who live in communities with high rates of juvenile crime and drug abuse, KidTrax can show which programs are attended by youth from those neighborhoods. Once these programs are identified, additional curriculum and funding can be added as appropriate.

Cost/Benefit Analysis

As this white paper has already shown, the benefits of using KidTrax software include:

1. Automating Data Management
2. Ensuring Data Integrity
3. Obtaining a Holistic View of Youth Development

Any one of these three benefits taken alone could provide sufficient evidence for the deployment of KidTrax in 21st CCLCs. The chart below highlights the cost savings of using KidTrax to automate data gathering, entry, verification and transfer versus the manual performance of these tasks. The numbers displayed show the total aggregated costs for each center over 3, 5 and 10 years.

COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS KidTrax data management compared with manual data management	Total 3 year cost (<i>per center</i>)	Total 5 year cost (<i>per center</i>)	Total 10 year cost (<i>per center</i>)
Evaluations using manual data entry, verification, and transfer ¹	\$7,500	\$12,500	\$25,000
Evaluations using KidTrax ²	\$3,597	\$4,495	\$6,740
% cost savings realized with KidTrax	52%	64%	73%

Manual data management results in costs that recur on a yearly basis whereas the purchase of KidTrax is a one-time cost, therefore, the accumulated cost savings of purchasing KidTrax increases over time. This cost savings translates into allocating more funds to improve the program’s effectiveness and, as mentioned in the preceding paragraph, this cost/benefit analysis focuses on only one aspect of the benefits provided by KidTrax.

Conclusion

This white paper has shown how States can more effectively utilize funds allocated to gathering and reporting performance data for 21st Century Community Learning Centers. By using KidTrax states can automate data gathering, entry, verification and transfer processes, ensure data integrity, consistency and accuracy, and reveal a complete picture of multiple activities in which youth are involved. This directly benefits the youth, states, cities and communities. The KidTrax solution is a cost efficient and effective means for measuring the impact of 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

¹ Data are derived using the following information: on average each state receives \$600,000 for testing and evaluation. This paper conservatively assumes 10% of these funds, or \$60,000 is spent on manual data entry, verification and transfer amongst the evaluator and national information systems. Spread amongst approximately 24 centers per state, the average per year cost is \$2,500 per center.

² Data are derived assuming a purchase of the KidTrax Web Multi-user license with additional yearly costs of web hosting and support.