

**NFOCUS SOFTWARE**

**The Evaluative Learning Project**

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**The Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust and  
Valley of the Sun United Way**

**Evaluative Learning Project: Afterschool Provider Pilot**

**Serving Youth in Maricopa County**

**July 11, 2007**

## **What is Evaluative Learning?**

Evaluative learning is an ongoing, collaboratively designed, and stakeholder-led evaluation process that has the primary purpose of serving organizational learning by analyzing the entire logic model.

Evaluative learning focuses on capacity building, strengthens programs, and organizational planning through a collaborative process. There are key stakeholders that participate in the evaluative learning process and provide feedback to one another. Evaluative learning, an ongoing process for nonprofit organizations, provides a solid learning background for their processes, programs, guidelines, and funding support.

## **The Evaluative Learning Project: Afterschool Provider Pilot**

The Evaluative Learning Project: Afterschool Provider Pilot stemmed from a conversation between the officers of The Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust (Piper Trust) and the leadership at nFocus Software™. The Piper Trust wanted to explore the idea of funders supplying technology to nonprofits to track, and evaluate data more efficiently for their afterschool programs.

**Goal:** The project goal is to use evaluation and technology as the cornerstone of organizational learning and capacity building to improve the impact of afterschool programs and services for youth in Maricopa County, Arizona.

The Piper Trust's officers and administrative trustees believe nonprofit organizations should evaluate their programs to measure the effectiveness of their services. The evaluative learning process should serve as continuous feedback to help them improve their services, design quality programs, and create a strong impact in the communities they serve.

The leadership at The Piper Trust approached Valley of the Sun United Way (VSUW) to collaborate with them in the Afterschool Pilot Project, believing that including another funder would expand the reach of the project. Since VSUW recently implemented a more evaluative and accountability structure for the organizations they serve, the pilot project fit nicely with VSUW's goals to measure the effectiveness of their programs.

### **Strategy**

There are three components to the Afterschool Pilot Project. Please be aware that some of the steps within these components have occurred, while others are proceeding.

### **Components**

Technology, Evaluation, Learning Community

### **Technology**

The Piper Trust officers and staff at VSUW wanted a technology component that placed minimal burden on the organization and their staff. nFocus Software™ was selected as the technology provider. KidTrax®, an nFocus Software module was identified as the tool for data collection. KidTrax® is a comprehensive youth and membership tracking system that utilizes: ID cards, scanning technology, data entry, and reporting systems. KidTrax offers improved data integrity and streamlined operations, which allow organizations to track progress, analyze trends, and forecast program performance. Both partners conducted a survey of the afterschool providers to assess the technology needs of organizations to implement KidTrax. Once the assessments were completed, The Administrative Trustees of the Piper Trust decided to fund the cost to implement KidTrax for the nonprofit organizations that would be involved in the pilot project.

## **Evaluation**

Both partners wanted to provide the resources necessary to develop an evaluation process. A reputable consulting firm serves as their consulting services for the pilot project.

The leadership of The Piper Trust, VSUW, nFocus Software, and evaluation consultants identified six major steps to set up the project plan:

1. Identify participating afterschool providers.
2. Develop a common theory of change and program logic model.
3. Develop evaluation questions and measures.
4. Develop data collection tools.
5. Develop data analysis framework.

In conjunction with the evaluation project plan, the KidTrax application will provide:

- Program Data: The kinds of programs in which youth are involved.
- Demographic Data: Demographic characteristics of the areas where youth live and afterschool program experience.
- Predisposition Data: Understand how youth affects the program data. This helps to identify which youth groups benefit most from certain programs.
- Program Quality Data: Review how effective these programs are and to what extent can the organization refine or redesign their programs to better serve their youth population.

## **Learning Community**

One of the most important aspects of the project, if not THE most important is the learning community component. Nonprofit agencies will be supplied with technology and all the

resources to design the evaluative learning pilot project, but they will also have a platform to discuss their lessons learned. The funding partners, technology collaborators, and participating nonprofit agencies will meet on a regular basis to discuss their current programming, share knowledge, and enhance their youth programs. This learning community will be a safe and open forum to discuss freely what is doing well and what may need improvement as a quality program design develops.

### **Where are they now?**

The Evaluative Learning Project: Afterschool Provider Pilot participants would like to see how using this type of technology to track their data would benefit small and large youth-serving organizations in their respective communities. In building a common set of evaluative measurements, several nonprofit agencies serving afterschool programs were chosen. The participating nonprofit agencies serve large and small youth audience and have different levels of sophistication. This will demonstrate the difference in impact of evaluative technology on their programs and services.

The leadership of The Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, Valley of the Sun United Way, nFocus Software™, and eight nonprofit afterschool provider agencies have met periodically to implement steps and share experiences. Some of the nonprofit agencies did not have the luxury of using technology to evaluate their programs in the past, and as with any new project, some aspects of the project are complex. Change for some of these organizations has been difficult, but the purpose of the project has been well received. The open forum in which they share their lessons learned is valued. Only time will tell how evaluative learning and technology will have an impact on their services. Both partners hope these nonprofits comprehend the benefits of capacity building, technology, and evaluation data will improve the quality of services they provide in the communities and the lives they serve.