



MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: September 17, 2018
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TO: Library Board
FROM: Carol Nelson, Director, Planning & Communications
SUBJECT: Project Outcome for Evaluation: Update

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the strategic initiative Project Outcome for Evaluation. It shares pilot results, next steps and recommendations for rollout.

PURPOSE

This report is for information.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Library Board receive the report for information.

POLICY

Project Outcome for Evaluation is initiative 8.2 in the Vancouver Public Library Strategic Plan, VPL 2020, supporting the Organization Strength outcome and Value & Impact goal.

BACKGROUND

In VPL 2020, initiative 8.2 is described as “Plan and implement Project Outcome, a toolkit that focuses on measuring the outcomes of programs and services that public libraries have in common. Project Outcome provides customizable surveys and data measurement and analysis tools to measure the impact of programs such as workforce preparation, childhood literacy, and adult language learning.” VPL identified this tool as valuable due to the intended ease of use, as well as the benefit of being able to benchmark results with other library systems in North America.

As Project Outcome material describes:

Measuring outcomes helps libraries answer the question, “What good did we do?” An outcome is a specific benefit that results from a library program or service. Outcomes can be quantitative or qualitative, and are often expressed as changes that individuals perceive in themselves. Project Outcome helps libraries measure four key patron outcomes—**knowledge, confidence, application, and awareness**—in seven key library service areas.”

Due to interest in this approach among InterLINK libraries, VPL expanded the initiative to participate in a working group with other InterLINK libraries in early 2017, which would include investigating the potential for an InterLINK-wide approach. The other libraries participating in the working group were Surrey, North Vancouver District and Whistler.

The working group chose to test Project Outcome on a common program, infant storytime. The pilot supported InterLINK’s strategic goal of “increasing the awareness of the impact of public libraries.”

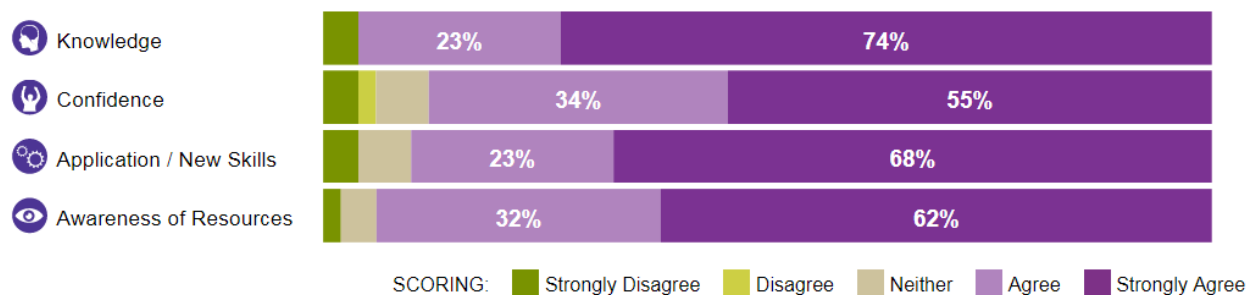
DISCUSSION

The VPL project team selected two Babytime programs offered from September to December 2017 and deployed two surveys with each group of participants. The first survey was administered manually on the last day of the program to measure initial impacts, while the follow-up survey was emailed three months following program completion to assess long-term impacts including potential changes in behaviour.

Number of participating parents/caregivers:	75
Number of responses to initial survey:	53 (75% response rate)
Number of responses to follow-up survey:	13 (17% response rate)

From the initial survey:

- 97% learned something they can share with their children (knowledge);
- 89% felt more confident helping their children learn (confidence);
- 91% intended to spend more time interacting with their children (application of new skills);
- 94% were more aware of library resources and services (awareness of resources).








From the follow-up survey:

- Participants learned new ways to do the following with their child(ren): sing (100%), play (46%), read (38%) and talk (31%);
- 92% spend more time doing what they learned with their children;
- 100% used what they learned to do something new or different with their child(ren);
- 77% used additional library resources;
- 85% have a better understanding of the value of doing the activities they learned with their child(ren).

Since Project Outcome gives the ability to benchmark with other libraries in Canada, staff are able to compare VPL's results with other participating Canadian libraries. Results at VPL were similar to those of other Canadian libraries, with two exceptions:

- **Higher applied knowledge.** Three months following the program, 100% of VPL's participants reported that they had applied the knowledge gained vs. 91% for other Canadian libraries.
- **Lower applied awareness of library resources.** Three months following the program, 77% of VPL's participants reported using additional library resources vs. 90% for other Canadian libraries.

	 Early Childhood Literacy Topic Averages		As a
	Library	National	
 Change in Behavior	92%	92%	
 Applied Knowledge	100%	92%	
 Applied Awareness of Library Resources	77%	90%	
 Perceived Value	85%	88%	

result of the survey findings, Children & Teen Services has taken a more active approach to promoting library resources during Babytime, bringing additional copies of program materials and highlighting upcoming library programs of interest.

In addition to the survey findings, the following comments were gathered from participants, adding valuable insights:

I had not known English songs and rhymes for kids, but now I know <most> of them and love them all. We have a great time at the library and at home singing and dancing with these songs. I feel very positive about it.

I think my little girl (6 months now) developed a love for books and reading ever since we started regularly coming to babytime. Before, she wasn't that interested in books, but now she really loves them and would listen attentively when I read to her at home.

Conclusion

Overall, VPL and the other InterLINK pilot libraries were satisfied with Project Outcome as a tool for evaluating program outcomes. Project Outcome provides features that are useful, relevant and user-friendly, and it delivers measurable outcomes-based results.

Staff also identified some challenges with Project Outcome:

- As participant feedback is subjective, responses may lead to a positive bias in results.
- The follow-up survey, delivered by email, receives a lower response, potentially affecting the reliability of the results.
- The process of gathering participants' contact information and consent in compliance with privacy requirements adds to staff time and capacity.
- Standardized questionnaires are limited to certain topic areas and are in English only.

Next Steps

The project team will expand the use of Project Outcome to include programs focused on digital literacy and job-related skills such as those offered by the Skilled Immigrant Info Centre. These topic areas allow for results to be compared with other BC and Canadian libraries. Children and Teen Services will continue to test Project Outcome on a range of youth-focused programs.

VPL will continue to deploy a “test and learn” approach recognizing that results and experiences can vary widely between different programs, and the team aims to learn from the successes and challenges faced. Guidelines, best practices and workflows developed during the pilot will be leveraged for the additional programs, including specific procedures for the handling of personal information to meet compliance requirements.

While outcomes-based evaluation is an important goal for VPL, it does not replace other forms of evaluation such as measuring satisfaction or identifying opportunities for improvement. All have a role to play in engaging patrons and developing a deeper understanding of their needs. In addition, staff will remain open to exploring complementary techniques of outcomes-based evaluation, including qualitative approaches, that may prove fruitful and address some of the challenges outlined above.

As for the InterLINK pilot, the working group has recommended that library directors consider more formal Project Outcome training for the benefit of the InterLINK system (funding requirements to be determined), and the group is planning to propose a presentation on the use of Project Outcome at the 2019 BC Library Association Conference.

FINAL REMARKS

Outcomes-based evaluation is a strategic priority for VPL and InterLINK. Improving awareness of the impact of library programs and services connects what we do to the ultimate goal of improving patrons’ lives. It also allows funders to see the value of services they enable.

Project Outcome is a practical toolkit that enables impact evaluation, and the VPL project team recommends it for VPL’s own use and for that of other public libraries.