



Working Smarter in Community Development
Learning Guide 3-1

Measure Your Progress: Program, Organization, Neighborhood

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Our learning guides offer questions, exercises, and other tools to help you apply ideas in the briefs and other items on our website to your own work. Most of the items identified here, with the exception of “Further reading,” are available on the website; just follow the links. While the text refers to “your community” or organization, you may substitute “client” or “target” community or project as well.

Overview and scope. A growing body of resources, many of them available free online, can help you apply the tools of evaluation and performance management to your work. As such, this third learning guide in our series is brief, focused on the pitfalls we’ve discovered.

The resources below are under four headings: general, program-level, organization-level, and neighborhood-level. Following the resource list are questions and exercises to help you apply the ideas.

Resources:

General:

1. NeighborWorks America, “[Community Development Evaluation](#): Story Map and Legend,” (June 2006). A terrific overview of three related but distinct aims for measuring progress, as well as leading tools available for pursuing those aims: (a) capacity assessment; (b) organizational performance; and (c) community outcomes and impact.
2. Community Toolbox, “[Evaluating the Initiative](#),” University of Kansas: Author.



Measuring program-level progress:

3. Susan Philliber, "[The Virtue of Specificity in Theory of Change Evaluation](#)," in *New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives*, vol.2, New York: Aspen Roundtable.

Measuring organization-level progress

4. "[Performance Management: Basic Concepts](#)."
5. Glickman and Servon, "[More than Bricks and Sticks](#): Five Components of Community Development Corporation Capacity," *Housing Policy Debate* (1998).
6. "[Performance Evaluation: Success Stories](#)," Center for Nonprofit Management.

Further reading (not online):

7. Robert Kaplan and David Norton, *The Strategy-Focused Organization*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press (2000). From the inventors of the widely used and respected "balanced scorecard" for assessing organizational performance, this book details how you can link strategy to different dimensions of organizational excellence and use measurement to make better decisions. See, in particular, chs. 1, 3, and 5.

Measuring neighborhood-level progress

8. Briggs-1, "Stocks, Flows, and Dreams: Shaping and Measuring Neighborhood Change in Community Development," *Working Smarter in Community Development*, Knowledge in Action Brief 07-2 (2007). [On this website](#).
9. Howell Baum, "How Should We Measure Community Initiatives?" *Journal of the American Planning Association* (2001). [On this website](#).

Further reading:

10. Robert Granger, "[Establishing Causality in Evaluations of Community Change Initiatives](#)," in *New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives*, vol.2, New York: Aspen Roundtable.

Questions to consider and discuss:

1. *General*: The NeighborWorks tool offers a three-part approach: capacity assessment, performance assessment, and outcome evaluation. Why are those distinctions important, according to the tool, and what challenges confront each one? In which area(s) have you and your collaborators invested most or least so far and why? How



might participating in the NeighborWorks “Success Measures” program be useful in your efforts?

2. *Program-level*: In what ways can program managers get “stuck on process,” according to Philliber? How can managers, not just evaluators, use theory of change approaches? (See more on them in Learning Guide 2-1: Shape Your Strategy).
3. *Organizational*: What measures and mechanisms for measuring do you have in place in your organization? Since performance *measurement* is mainly an input for performance *management*, how do you manage toward your targets? Which of the “components of community development corporation capacity” are you working to build in your organization, and how are you measuring progress?
4. *Neighborhood-level*: How do you currently approach (a) the tracking of neighborhood change and (b) the tracking of efforts to shape that change (analogous to the “implementation study” model in Briggs-1)? What is the strongest case you can make that your efforts have contributed to neighborhood change (the “impact study” model)? What challenges identified by Baum have you faced so far in the effort to get agreement on what’s worth measuring? What targets for “opportunistic” measurement strategies (as Baum calls them) do you see?

Exercise (putting the ideas to work):

1. Use a *program-level* theory of change useful for your community development strategies to identify priorities for assessing that program and making “midcourse corrections” as needed.
2. Develop or sharpen a plan for capacity assessment and performance management consistent with your *organizational* strategy (see Learning Guide 2-1: Shape Your Strategy). Identify the capacity needed simply to implement that plan.
3. Outline a wish list of *neighborhood* change tracking, implementation studies, and impact studies you would put in place—to more fully understand your neighborhood context and the impact of your community development work, that is—if resources (time, money, expertise, etc.) were unlimited. Get advice on the list from planners, grantmakers, researchers, or other resources. Which of the items on that list are most urgent in terms of *improving* your work? How about for *making the case* for your work to stakeholders inside and outside the neighborhood? (These two questions may lead to different subsets of the main wish list.) Which elements, if any, can you pursue with the resources already at hand? Where can you find resources to support additional elements?