

» McAuley Institute/Success Measures Project



In addition to their SMP work, McAuley assists community-based organizations in creating housing and economic opportunities for low-income women and their families.

Committed to accountability to their constituents but frustrated by the lack of practical evaluation tools, a group of community development practitioners within the Development Leadership Network (DLN) set out to develop an effective means of evaluating their work. They teamed with the **McAuley Institute**, a national housing intermediary that has provided financing and technical assistance to over 2,100 community-based groups since 1983. The result is the Success Measures Project (SMP), an evaluation framework to identify, measure, track, report—and eventually aggregate—meaningful community-development outcomes.

“Our challenge is to get managers of organizations to internalize evaluation to see whether we’re having the impact we set out to have. We need clear measures that are respected by all of the players, including the program consumers, the organization’s management, policymakers and funders,” notes Marty Johnson, CEO of Isles, a community-development corporation in Trenton, New Jersey and a driving force behind SMP.

SMP is based on participatory evaluation where the definers of a program’s success includes its participants, an organization’s board and staff, and community residents. Within two years, 300 experienced community-development leaders adopted the evaluation framework and 44 indicators in three program areas: housing, economic development and community building. Fifty community-based organizations field tested the measures, an important reality

check that led to some design changes. The SMP guidebook lays out the evaluation process, including measures and data collection tools.

SMP starts with a benefits picture based on an organization’s mission and values. Research and evaluation are used to improve an organization’s programs, management and decision making. “SMP helped us to redirect our program strategy,” notes Jeanne Wardford, CEO of Northern Area Association in Detroit. “We were planning a focus on affordable housing. Through the SMP process, we recognized that an important priority for the community was commercial real estate development, and that a better strategy for us was to partner with a neighboring housing developer and redirect our energies on commercial real estate.”

For SMP to achieve scale, community-development practitioners must accept and embrace tangible measures that can be aggregated and communicated to stakeholders and investors. Toward that end, McAuley is introducing a significant, new web-based Success Measures Data System in 2003. It will provide a full range of tools to conduct participatory, outcome-based assessment. This technology will create a voluntary, national databank of changing conditions in neighborhoods, and integrate public information such as census data and property values, analysis and reporting technologies. McAuley will also provide technical assistance in its constructive use.

“We have much work to do, but we’re excited by the potential that the web-based system holds for collecting and pooling primary level data from the community development field,” says Maggie Grieve, manager of research and evaluation at McAuley. “Because SMP is based on organizational mission and values—that is, what experienced community leaders think is critical to measure—the system can be used by advocates and critics alike to assess effectiveness. It holds the potential to change how all actors, including policymakers and funders, think about the impact of community-based development.”

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ORGANIZATION MISSION:

To create housing and empower communities

PROJECT MISSION:

To promote practical, effective evaluations of community development

TYPE OF ORGANIZATION:

National intermediary

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE:

National

POPULATION SERVED:

Community-based organizations operating in low-income areas and their constituents; indirectly, funders and policymakers

YEAR FOUNDED:

1983; Success Measures Project: 1995

PRIMARY ACTIVITIES:

Systems development and implementation; technical assistance and training; affordable housing lending

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

JoAnn Kane;
Maggie Grieve, *Manager, Research and Development*;
Virginia Seitz, PhD,
Research Director

STAFF SIZE:

27 FTE; Success Measures Project: 3 FTE + consultants

ANNUAL BUDGET:

\$39MM; Success Measures Project: \$764M (\$18MM over three years)

CURRENT HERON SUPPORT:

\$100,000 general support grant;
\$75,000 project support for a web-based data system for the Success Measures Project