# Asset Support Center (ASC)

# Brief: Outcomes Based Evaluation for Asset Building Programs

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## Executive Summary

Since its founding in the 1990s, the asset-building movement has broadened from a focus on individual development accounts (IDAs) encouraging low-income households to save to a continuum of wealth-building strategies for low-income households. The continuum of asset-building programs includes access to financial education and services, savings tools, affordable investment opportunities for homeownership and small business development, and asset-protection strategies. The growth in asset-building programs has been accompanied by the emergence of multiple indicators, tools and systems that are used to evaluate the impact of those programs. As such, the asset-building field lacks consistent ways to measure and communicate the impact of its work around improving a household's financial security over time.

**Background**

This brief was created in response to interest from local community-based organizations, intermediaries and foundations to understand better how to measure the impact of asset-building programs appropriately and effectively. It examines leading projects and systems, as well as promising practices, related to outcomes-based evaluation in the asset-building field. It also provides recommendations to help asset-building programs plan and implement an outcomes-based evaluation process. The brief is designed to help organizations and coalitions involved in asset building in the San Francisco Bay Area develop effective client tracking and outcomes-based evaluation systems based on successful local and national practices and available resources.

**Promising Practices Underway in the Field**

The research uncovered seven systems for outcomes-based evaluation that are currently being used in the asset-building field nationally. Additionally, research found two national projects in progress that are intended to enhance outcomes-based evaluation efforts in the asset-building field by establishing standardized indicators and/or tools. Lacking a standardized approach for outcomes-based evaluation in the asset-building field, community-based organizations and coalitions have begun developing their own outcomes-based evaluation processes. These processes include custom tools, targeted indicators or adaptation of available data management systems. Promising practices being implemented by specific programs include:

- *Comprehensive surveys* used at EARN, a community-based organization in San Francisco, to measure financial and non-financial information as proxies for long-term outcomes related to financial self-sufficiency at intake and annually for three years.

- A *data dictionary* of performance indicators for six financial categories within the data management system used by The Financial Clinic, a community-based organization in New York City, for outcomes-based evaluation.

- O*ff-the-shelf data management system customized* by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) for its Center for Working Families sites, which bundle a range of asset-building and economic-support services in one location, for standardized outcomes-based evaluation across sites.

- *Indicators of success* established by the Seattle-King County Asset-Building Collaborative for its three core projects.

- *Longitudinal cross-site data research* conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation on the Making Connections initiative, which connects economic opportunities, social networks and household supports in targeted communities across the country, at two points in time to analyze the impact of the initiative's strategies over time.

- *Standard financial stability measures* developed by the United Way of the Bay Area for its outcomes-based evaluation strategy that will be used at seven prosperity hubs, which offer a one-stop source of asset-building services, in the Bay Area.

**Lessons Learned for the Field**

Culled from the documentation of specific program practices, interviews with leaders in the asset-building field and a review of relevant outcomes-based evaluation papers, a set of lessons learned about outcomes-based evaluation in the asset-building field was identified. These lessons learned include:

- *Combining electronic administrative data (client demographics and service provision) with qualitative and quantitative data sources*, such as surveys, assessments, interviews and focus groups to robustly track and analyze clients' financial situations over time.

- *Conducting longitudinal studies* that collect and analyze data related to service provision over several years.

- *Automating data collection* to lower administrative costs and increase operational efficiencies of organization.

- *Developing a limited set of indicators* and tools based on what is most important for a program to measure.

- *Securing a user-friendly data management system* after a program has identified its limited set of indicators to ensure that the system will be able to perform the program's desired outcomes-based evaluations.

- *Committing* ample time, effort and money to outcomes-based evaluation.

**Recommendations for Starting an Outcomes-based Evaluation Process**
There are three key recommendations to help asset-building programs begin an outcomes-based evaluation process:

- *Choose the top four to six indicators* that would best show how the program is achieving its mission for increasing the financial security of local households.

- Once indicators have been selected, *test different systems* and select the one that best meets the program's needs.

- Once system has been chosen, *allocate adequate staff time and resources to set up the system*, including training users and customizing as needed.

## 1.0 Introduction

While the United States has a long history of asset-building policies that encourage families to save and invest, recent research shows that these longstanding policies have disproportionately helped wealthier households. Emerging research on the importance of asset ownership in building wealth and other factors[1] in the 1990s prompted elected officials, nonprofit executives, foundation leaders, academics and others to begin looking at innovative strategies and more equitable federal policies to enable low-income families to save and invest. The ensuing shifts in policies and strategies laid the foundation for the national asset-building movement. Initially the movement was focused on individual development accounts (IDAs), matched savings accounts that encourage low-income individuals to save. The success of IDAs led to the development of a broader continuum of wealth-building opportunities for low-income families, including access to financial education and services, savings tools, affordable investment opportunities and asset-protection strategies.

Outcomes-based evaluation looks at impacts, benefits and changes to clients as a result of programmatic efforts during and/or after participation in a program. Outcomes-based evaluation can examine these changes in the short-, immediate- and long-term. Since 2000, a relatively limited number of outcomes-based evaluations have been conducted in the asset-building field, with the majority of them focusing on saving, asset and knowledge outcomes related to financial education and/or IDA account participation.

As the number of asset-building programs have proliferated over the last decade, so too have the indicators, tools and systems used to evaluate the impact of those programs. Organizations across the asset-building field currently collect and use data differently, yet there is widespread interest – from local community-based organizations to national intermediaries and foundations – in measuring the impact of various asset-building programs effectively and appropriately.

This brief examines leading projects and systems, promising practices and lessons learned related to outcomes-based evaluation in the asset-building field. It is designed to inform the work of asset-building programs in the San Francisco Bay Area and help them develop appropriate and effective tracking and evaluation systems based on successful practices locally and nationally. The paper is a product of the Bay Area Asset Support Center (ASC), a capacity-building effort of San Francisco foundations working in partnership with the asset-building field.[2] ASC provides technical assistance to advance local initiatives, convenes practitioners to share promising practices and has created an online database of strategies underway across the region.

[1] These factors included an increasingly complex financial services marketplace, changing demographics, compelling consumer issues, the emergence of predatory lending, and welfare reform.
[2] For information on ASC, go to www.assetpolicy.org/asc.

## 2.0 Leading Outcomes-based Evaluation Projects and Systems in the Asset-building Field

Since 2000, a handful of automated systems for outcome-based evaluation have been developed for or are being used in the asset-building field nationally. Most of these systems combine outcomes-based evaluation with customer relationship management (CRM)[3] and/or service delivery integration (benefits enrollment or bank account services)[4]. More recently, a couple of national projects are underway to enhance outcome-based evaluation efforts in the asset-building field by establishing standardized indicators and/or tools. The projects and systems are described and compared below.

### 2.1 National projects and systems[5]

*Asset Indicators Project, Annie E. Casey Foundation*[6]
The Annie E. Casey Foundation, together with the National League of Cities, has been working to identify the data that best describes a family's financial security. Over the past 24 months, a small group of researchers and practitioners have considered the categories that comprise a holistic view of a family's ability to meet expenses, build wealth and move up the economic ladder. The categories are: income, net worth, credit score, alternative/predatory financial services and financial safety net. Recently, Michael Collins, University of Wisconsin, Madison, reviewed relevant literature, conducted key informant interviews and prepared a draft report to identify suitable indicators for each category.

The data will help test the efficacy of various interventions, including under which circumstances they are most effective as families move along the "path" to financial security. Initially, the data will be collected by partner organizations that are already collecting some or all of these pieces of household information. Over time, Casey will test which measures are the most important in assessing financial security and the precision with which each must be collected in order to streamline the list into the fewest number possible.

*AssetPlatform.org, The Aspen Institute's Economic Opportunities Program*[7]
In the process of being developed by The Aspen Institute's Economic Opportunities Program (EOP), Assetplatform.org is a new tool for asset development programs. Assetplatform.org is an online platform designed to provide practical tools and resources for asset-building programs,

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[3] Customer relationship management (CRM) consists of the processes a company uses to track and organize its contacts with its current and prospective customers. CRM software is used to support these processes. Information about customers and customer interactions can be entered, stored and accessed by different employees. Typical CRM goals are to improve services provided to customers, and to use customer contact information for targeted marketing. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Customer_relationship_management).
[4] Service delivery integration occurs when a business system for integrated product delivery is set up to operate more efficiently and cost effectively with less administrative burdens for practitioners and clients. "Integration is characterized by features such as common intake and 'seamless' service delivery, where the client may receive a range of services from different programs without repeated registration procedures, waiting periods or other administrative barriers." (www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/coordination_FR.pdf)
[5] Projects and systems are listed in alphabetical order.
[6] www.aecf.org
[7] www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/economic-opportunities

and, in turn, their clients. Proposed resources include the ability to purchase credit scores at a reduced price, assessment tools to develop budgets and savings plans and stored value cards for clients to better manage their finances. The goals of the platform are to help organizations expand their offerings, improve service quality, increase efficiency in operations and deepen impact through programmatic tools, interactive training and other supports. The service delivery integration components of the platform can help programs track individual client outcomes related to credit scores, spending behaviors and savings at a minimum. The platform is being created "by the field for the field" with integrated real-time feedback mechanisms that will enable continuous improvement, ensuring that it is working for both member organizations and end-users. Assetplatform.org is expected to have a limited release in June 2009, and open to the general public in January 2010.

*ETO (Efforts to Outcomes), Social Solutions*[8]
Founded in 2000 by human services professionals, ETO provides performance management software and services for the human services sector. The web-based system captures data through a variety of sources, including form submissions (assessments or demographic intakes), swipe cards, batch uploads, data imports, and via web services, and generates reports to monitor and measure impact. ETO software also supports information access via data export and through the use of web services. To supplement and enhance the software, users have access to a set of best practices, including samples of outcomes, use cases, analysis methods and report samples.

*BEN (Benefits Enrollment Network) and SavingsPoint, Nets to Ladders*[9]
In February 2002, Onesta Labs was created to modify Microsoft's CRM application. Two years later, the Benefits Enrollment Network (BEN), the first web-based software for human service benefits assistance, was created. BEN is a benefit screening tool designed to help improve information about and access to key state and federal benefits, like tax credits, nutritional benefits, free and low-cost health insurance, child care subsidies and energy assistance. In 2005, Nets to Ladders (N2L) was formed to serve as the service provider for BEN and a parent company to Onesta Labs. In 2006, N2L created SavingsPoint[10], an automated bank account service, as a companion tool to BEN's benefit enrollment capabilities. Using BEN's automated benefits enrollment and savings tools (via SavingsPoint), organizations gain the ability to easily and quickly screen clients for eligibility, conduct case management, open bank accounts and more. The software's service delivery integration features facilitate the documentation of individual and aggregate client outcomes related to income, savings, public benefits enrollment and account opening. To supplement the software, N2L provides a comprehensive range of support services to member agencies, including consulting, training, field support, technical user support and administration.

[8] www.socialsolutions.com
[9] Nets to Ladder (N2L)'s mission is to strengthen today's human service safety nets, so that organizations can lift more low- and moderate-income (LMI) citizens above their social and financial challenges — and help them climb the ladders of self-sufficiency toward more rewarding futures (www.netstoladders.com).
[10] SavingsPoint is an asset-building service available via the Internet to the desktops of tax preparers who complete tax returns for low- and moderate-income workers. Using the service's simple and high-speed functionality, tax preparers can open new bank accounts and, in concert with the IRS's tax-splitting option, assign portions of the tax return for direct deposit into the new account(s) without the need for banking personnel onsite.

*Outcome Tracker, VistaShare*[11]

VistaShare was formed in 2001 by a board chair of an agency in a microenterprise network to address the need to track client services and outcomes over multiple locations and agencies. It designed Outcome Tracker, web-based software solutions that allow multiple nonprofit locations to share data. The system's flexibility allows users to track each client from intake to services to outcomes. Outcome Tracker offers a suite of modules, including one for IDAs, which are used by economic development, community development and social service organizations and networks to manage clients and outcomes. To supplement the software, VistaShare provides a variety of support services to users, including implementation services (needs assessment, configuration, training and data conversion) and ongoing support (online resources and email support).

*Outcomes Tracker*[12]*, PICCO-SHAIO Publishing*

Outcomes Tracker is a desktop data analysis software package for social service agencies. The Windows-based software is sold by PICCO-SHAIO publishing, a small independent publishing company in Auburn, California, dedicated to improving America's child and family service system. This software is centered around a screening form created in Placer County, California, that provides a comprehensive profile of a client. The indicators included on the intake form are safety, health, home environment, work/school participation, financial self-sufficiency and compliance. The screening form is intended to be administered to clients at multiple points in time, including at intake and at regularly scheduled intervals depending on service delivery. The screening form is then used to produce a series of tables and charts that show changes in clients over time. Limited user support is provided through an online discussion forum.

*Salesforce Nonprofit Edition, Salesforce.com Foundation*

The Salesforce.com Foundation was created by Salesforce.com, the worldwide leader in on-demand CRM services, to apply the core strengths of Salesforce.com to nonprofits. Salesforce Nonprofit Edition is an easy-to-use, Web-based CRM solution to help social change organizations achieve their mission. More than 4,000 nonprofits worldwide use Salesforce for constituent relationship management, fundraising efforts, volunteer opportunities, program delivery and recruitment. The Salesforce.com platform (force.com) and applications (salesforce) can address a range of organizational needs, from simple contact management to sophisticated social-impact monitoring to program operations, and the system can be easily and quickly customized for specific organizational needs. To supplement the system, the Salesforce.com Foundation offers free, on-demand training, discounted training opportunities, best practices workshops, user groups, additional applications and other online resources.

*Success Measures® at NeighborWorks® America*[13]

Success Measures® at NeighborWorks® America is an innovative, participatory outcome evaluation approach that engages community stakeholders in the evaluation process and equips them with the tools they need to document outcomes and measure impact. First offered to the community development field in 2005 by NeighborWorks® America after more than seven years

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[11] www.vistashare.com

[12] outcomestracker.com. This is a different software than Outcome Tracker, the one listed above with a similar name.

[13] www.successmeasures.org/SMDS/AboutSmds.aspx

of development and testing, the Success Measures Data System (SMDS) is a user-friendly, web-based evaluation tool and associated package of outcomes-based evaluation training and technical assistance services. The system includes a set of 50 standard indicators and 115 data collection instruments and tabulates, aggregates and stores the resulting primary level data and allows organizations to contribute to building a national data resource on affordable housing, community building and economic development outcomes for individuals, families, organizations and communities. Begun in 2007, Success Measures®, in partnership with CFED and NeighborWorks® America's National Homeownership Programs, is currently leading a 20-month collaborative effort to develop and field test a set of indicators and data collection tools for financial education, asset development and asset preservation programs. The effort is being guided by an advisory working group representing a variety of perspective from the financial services, asset-building, homeownership counseling, financial education, research and government sectors.

The purpose of the Success Measures®-led effort is to develop indicators and data collection tools for community-based practitioners to use in evaluating program level outcomes from a continuum of products and services focused on increasing financial knowledge and building and protecting assets. In addition to the core set of tools, three additional sets for youth (14-25), Native American communities and U.S.-Mexico border communities are being created in response to practitioners' requests for culturally relevant evaluation tools. A qualitative field test of the tools by 20 organizations across the country, including the Mission Asset Fund in the Bay Area, will be complete in June 2009. Tools will be made available by early 2010 through the SMDS and a publication.

**Table 1: Comparison of Leading Outcomes-based Evaluation Projects and Systems**[14]

| Program | Overview | Features | Typical Users | Supporters | Cost | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Type: Indicator Projects***[15] | | | | | | |
| Asset Indicators Project, Annie E. Casey Foundation | Short list of indicators to measure a household's financial stability | **Indicators**<br>• Income<br>• Net worth<br>• Credit score<br>• Use of alternative/predatory financial services<br>• Financial safety net (liquid savings and insurance) | Annie E. Casey grantees | Annie E. Casey | N/A | In development |
| Success Measures® at NeighborWorks® America | New set of indicators and data collection tools to evaluate outcomes related to financial education, asset development and asset preservation programs,[16] with integrated web-based evaluation system | **Indicators**<br>• Individual, family and household financial status<br>o Income and expenses<br>o Net worth<br>o Asset cushion<br>o Communally held assets<br>o Homeowner asset preservation<br>• Individual, family and household financial attitudes and behavior<br>o Savings and investing<br>o Consumption and spending<br>o Credit behavior<br>o Response to financial change<br>• Individual, family and household non-financial characteristics | Community-based organizations, intermediaries and foundations | 14 foundations and intermediaries, including the F.B. Heron Foundation, Walter and Elise Haas Fund, Citi Foundation, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond – Community Affairs and NeighborWorks® America | • Free field testing for 12 months during development<br>• $5,000/year for enhanced subscription, which enables data to be aggregated from multiple sites<br>• $7,500 for training and technical assistance | |

[14] While challenging to compare projects and systems with divergent goals (e.g., standardizing indicators vs. improving service delivery vs. managing data), the table includes the leading outcomes-based evaluation tools being used in or developed for the asset-building field. The table presents a typology for these projects and systems and provides details to show variances and intersections of features, supporters and typical users across them.

[15] Annie E. Casey has participated in the advisory working group for Success Measures®, and in turn, Success Measures® has participated in Annie E. Casey's advisory group. This intentional sharing of information in key developmental stages was designed to ensure that these complementary efforts would have maximum benefit to the field.

[16] These new indicators and tools supplement a more general set covering affordable housing, economic development and community building programs.

| Program | Overview | Features | Typical Users | Supporters | Cost | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | o Education and training<br>o Sense of well being<br>o Family/household dynamics<br>o Social networking<br>• Community assets<br>o Economic development<br>o Availability of services<br>o Housing and homeownership<br>o Social capital<br>**Tools**<br>• Worksheets<br>• Survey questionnaires<br>• Secondary data sources<br>• Key informant interviews<br>• Web-based data system to manage data and evaluation process | | | | |
| ***Type: Service Delivery Platforms*** | | | | | | |
| Assetplatform.org, The Aspen Institute's EOP | Web-based platform for asset-building tools and resources | **Service delivery integration and tools**<br>• Credit score at reduced price<br>• Assessment tools to develop budgets and savings plans<br>• Stored value cards for clients to manage finances better | Organizations with asset-building programs | Center for the Study of Social Policy, CCA Global Partners, Community Financial Resources, Credit Builders Alliance, D2D Fund, Living Cities, National Community Tax Coalition, National Credit Union Foundation, NeighborWorks America, NYC Office of Financial Empowerment, One Economy, San Antonio Department of Community | | In development – limited release in June 2009 and open to general public in January 2010 |

| Program | Overview | Features | Typical Users | Supporters | Cost | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Initiatives and The Access Project | | |
| BEN and SavingsPoint, Nets to Ladders | Web-based software platform for automated benefits enrollment and bank account service | **Service delivery integration**<br>• Automated benefits enrollment<br>• Automated savings tools<br>• Eligibility screening<br>• Case management | • Human services organizations<br>• Community-based organizations serving the working poor<br>• Tax sites | United Way | | |
| ***Type: Data Management Systems*** | | | | | | |
| ETO, Social Solutions | Web-based performance management system and services for CRM and outcomes-based evaluation | **Reporting capabilities**<br>• Trends<br>• Participant attendance<br>• Demographic data analysis<br>• Analysis of assessment results<br>• Referral management<br>• Comprehensive history of participant information<br>• Multi-funder reporting obligations<br>**Point-of-service functionality**<br>• To-do lists<br>• Task reminders<br>• Alerts<br>• Search/query<br>**Best practices repository**<br>• Samples of outcomes<br>• Use cases<br>• Analysis methods<br>• Report samples<br>**Data capture**<br>• Intake demographics<br>• Assessment data<br>• Referral data<br>• Attendance data<br>• Case notes<br>• Client history | Human services agencies, including<br>• At-risk youth<br>• after-school programs<br>• Aging<br>• Workforce development<br>• Mental health services<br>• Mentor and volunteer management<br>• Disability services<br>• Family services<br>• Charter schools<br>• Homeless services<br>• Legal services<br>• Grants management<br>• Technical assistance and | Annie E. Casey | **For organizations with dedicated site administrators**<br>• Standard implementation: pricing depends on size and complexity of organization<br>• Premium implementation: additional $7,500<br>• Add-on support services available<br>**For organizations without dedicated site administrators**<br>• $10,000-$20,000/year (in addition to ETO software user license fees) | |

| Program | Overview | Features | Typical Users | Supporters | Cost | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | consulting | | | |
| Outcome Tracker, VistaShare | Web-based performance management system for CRM and outcomes-based evaluation | **Data capture**<br>• Client intake data<br>• Client programs<br>• Client outcomes<br>**CRM functionality**<br>• Case management<br>• Referrals<br>• One-to-one services<br>• Training and other group services<br>• Unlimited fields and notes for each service<br>• Follow-up tasks for staff<br>**Reporting capabilities**<br>• Ability to report on any data<br>• Standard reports, including outcome changes over time<br>• Custom reports<br>• Ability to import data from a spreadsheet and export data to Excel<br>• Any data field queries<br>• Cross-tab analysis<br>**Administrative functions**<br>• Flexible options for assigning security and permissions to users<br>**Outcome Viewer for networks**<br>• Unlimited agencies under one "umbrella" agency<br>• Aggregate reporting across the network<br>• Secure data by agency<br>• Administrative control by agency or by network<br>• User rights to one or more agencies<br>• Common data definitions used by all network users<br>• Ability for agencies to add custom | Stand-alone agencies and nonprofit networks, including:<br>**Community economic development**<br>• Microenterprise<br>• Women's business centers<br>• Community development<br>• Youth enterprise development<br>• Asset building and IDA accounts<br>**Social services**<br>• Family resource centers<br>• Cancer support centers<br>• Counseling centers<br>• Housing and homeless services<br>• Mediation centers<br>• Refugee services<br>• Senior citizen services<br>• Women's leadership development | Aspen Institute (MicroTest reporting project), Small Business Administration (SBA) | • Pricing consists of an initial setup fee, covering the licensing, initial assessment, user training and organizational support, and a monthly subscription, including product enhancements, support and data hosting/ backup/ security<br>• Additional services are available as needed, including onsite and remote training, consulting services, custom report writing and custom data conversion services<br>• Special enterprise-level pricing available for network purchasers of Outcome Viewer | |

| **Program** | **Overview** | **Features** | **Typical Users** | **Supporters** | **Cost** | **Comments** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | data for their use only | | | | |
| Outcomes Tracker | Desktop data analysis software for specific set of indicators | **Indicators**<br>• Safety<br>• Health<br>• Home environment<br>• Work/school participation<br>• Financial self-sufficiency<br>• Compliance | Social service agencies | | $99 per copy, with site licensing available for larger agencies | |
| Salesforce Nonprofit Edition, Salesforce.com Foundation | On-demand, Web-based CRM system | **Data capture**<br>• Unlimited tabs and applications<br>• 500 custom fields per object + 2,000 custom objects<br>**CRM functionality**<br>• Centralized constituency management, including donors, clients, volunteers and board members<br>• Automatic workflow triggers<br>**Reporting capabilities**<br>• Standardized templates for queries (which can still be personalized)<br>• Instant dashboards and reports to analyze and understand constituent behaviors<br>**Administrative functions**<br>• Controlled access to sensitive data through user hierarchies to protect confidential information | 4,000+ nonprofits, including hundreds of educational institutions | | • Free for up to 10 donated licenses; 80% discount on additional licenses and services<br>• Fully functional, 30-day trial account available | |

## 3.0 Promising Practices in Outcomes-based Evaluation in the Asset-building Field

In the absence of a standardized approach for outcomes-based evaluation in the asset-building field, community-based organizations and coalitions in the asset-building field have forged ahead with their own outcomes-based evaluation processes – developing unique tools, identifying specialized indicators and/or customizing available data management systems. Below are brief descriptions for select organizations and coalitions that have developed promising practices for outcomes-based evaluation in the asset-building field.

### 3.1 Descriptions of models for community-based organizations

*EARN[17]: longitudinal surveys*
Based in San Francisco, EARN offers money management training, access to financial services and IDAs to low-wage workers in the Bay Area. In 2008, EARN worked with a consultant to enhance outcomes evaluation efforts for its asset-building programs. EARN had previously developed a proprietary data management system in-house, to maintain clients' intake and IDA data. While valuable, objective and accessible, the data provide a limited picture of a client's condition. To supplement basic intake and account data, EARN created a comprehensive survey to measure more financial information and non-financial factors that serve as proxies for longer-term outcomes related to economic self-sufficiency. The survey includes basic demographics, a list of current savings, investments and debt, and questions about financial knowledge and attitudes. The survey is administered to clients systematically at intake and then every 12 months on the monthly anniversary of intake for at least three years to provide self-reported financial information. The data from each survey is stored, resulting in four periods of analysis to track changes from intake through the last survey as a means to gauge the impact of services over time. Each survey is linked to EARN records, including which services the client participated in each year and account balances. EARN estimates that it costs 10-20% of one FTE to run reports on waves of clients, tabulate results, mail reminders and process emails or phone calls from clients.

*The Financial Clinic[18]: data dictionary*
The Financial Clinic helps low-income people in New York City achieve economic security through legal and advocacy services, full-spectrum financial "tune-ups," financial coaching and action plans, year-round tax advice and preparation services and connection to community-based financial products and services. The Financial Clinic uses ETO software for outcomes evaluation of its services and has developed a data dictionary that details performance dimensions for six financial categories within the system. The dimensions include inputs (the resources that go into a program or service), milestones (the interim indicators that capture progress towards an outcome), outcomes (positive changes in condition, behavior, attitude or status of an individual served by the clinic) and impacts (cumulative effect that accrues from the achievement of outcomes for individuals. The financial categories are goals, assets, banking, credit, debt and taxes.

[17] www.sfearn.org
[18] www.thefinancialclinic.org

*Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Centers for Working Families (CWF)*[19]*: ETO software*

Pioneered by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and now supported by other major funders like LISC, the Center for Working Families is an innovative approach to help low-income families reach financial stability and move up the economic ladder. The CWF model bundles access to a full range of economic supports – employment placement and career improvement, financial education and coaching and public benefits access – in one location. Currently, LISC has centers in Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Milwaukee and Oakland. In order to determine the success of CWF clients, customized ETO software is used to measure the types and quality of service a client received and how successful a client is in achieving economic stability outcomes, such as employment placement and tenure, education placement, receipt of income supports and credit score improvements. Data tracking is conducted in a way where service provision (i.e. efforts) and outcomes are followed over a period of years to measure progress over time via initial and periodic assessments of clients' financial profiles and balance sheets.

### 3.2 Descriptions of models for coalitions

*Seattle-King County Asset-Building Collaborative (ABC): projects and indicators of success*

Initiated by the City of Seattle in 2005, the Seattle-King County ABC coordinates asset-building activities across community-based organizations and city departments to better connect families to services. The collaborative now includes 50 organizations and 25 banks and credit unions and engages in a number of activities, including the Working Benefits Project (to bring asset-building resources to low-income working people on the job site), Bank on Seattle-King County[20] (to connect "unbanked" people with mainstream financial services) and the Seattle Asset Building Initiative (to identify the most effective asset-building service delivery system for those in crisis and emerging from homelessness and those who have stabilized and reached the vulnerability phase of potentially losing public benefits). For each of these three projects, ABC has identified indicators of success. In addition, for the "Bank on" project, a working group has outlined an evaluation implementation strategy that recommends for participating financial institutions to track and report data on a quarterly basis to the Washington State Department of Financial Institutions (DFI) using a common format provided by the Bank on Seattle-King County Coordinating Committee and DFI.

*Making Connections*[21]*, The Annie E. Casey Foundation: longitudinal study of assets, debts and financial services*

Making Connections is the flagship initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Its core strategy helps children succeed based on the belief that the best way to improve outcomes for vulnerable children living in tough neighborhoods is to strengthen their families' connections to economic opportunity, positive social networks, and effective services and supports. Launched in 1999, Making Connections is a decade-long effort to demonstrate this theory in disinvested communities across the country, and in full partnership with residents, community-based

[19] *www.lisc.org /section/goals/family/cwf/*
[20] *www.everyoneiswelcome.org*
[21] www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/MakingConnections.aspx

organizations, local government, businesses, social service agencies, community foundations, and other funders. A key component of Casey's Making Connections initiative is a strong emphasis on the critical need for collecting and using reliable data, and a hard focus on achieving and sustaining measurable, concrete results. In addition, Making Connections advances a two-generation approach. Sites are working to connect parents to good jobs and asset building opportunities and to ensure that their young children benefit from better health care, quality early childhood services, and more intensive supports in the early grades. This sustained, simultaneous emphasis on families, economic opportunity, school success in early grades, and strengthening community capacity represents a significant departure from previous community change initiatives sponsored by Casey. The Making Connections sites are Denver, Des Moines, Hartford, Indianapolis, Louisville, Milwaukee, Oakland, Providence, San Antonio and Seattle. As part of a cross-site study to measure change over time, interviews with large samples of families in Making Connections neighborhoods in all 10 sites were conducted at two points in time – 2002/2003 and 2005/2006. Data was collected on key financial topics, including family net worth, financial savings, employment assets, material assets, debts and use of financial services. From the data, fact sheets were created to analyze the impact of Making Connections strategies over time.

*United Way of the Bay Area Prosperity Hub*[22]*: financial stability measurements*
The United Way of America has adopted the self-sufficiency standard and has developed a conceptual framework for investment to help build financial stability. United Way of the Bay Area (UWBA) was selected as one of the national affiliates to pilot how to achieve and measure financial stability. UWBA intends to invest in a strategy that evolved from observed best practices and challenges by building prosperity hubs that bring organizations together across sectors and fields to coordinate services for clients and support them over time. Seven prosperity hubs will be developed and supported over the next five years. These hubs will offer a one-stop source of services to help families manage debt, increase household income and build assets. Supporting this work is a technology partnership with N2L for its web-based software platform, BEN, which accelerates and improves the benefits enrollment process and facilitates entry into the mainstream financial community. Core services include benefits enrollment services using BEN software, year-round Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) services, Bank on California's[23] low-cost financial services and FamilyWize's[24] low-cost pharmaceutical plan. As part of its outcomes-based evaluation strategy, UWBA plans to measure clients' financial stability by debt outcomes (increases in credit score), income outcomes (movement toward self-sufficiency standard[25]), asset outcomes (achievement of three months of 'liquid' assets that can be converted

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[22] www.uwba.org/relief/recovery.php

[23] Bank on California is a partnership between city mayors, community groups, Bank of America and other financial institutions, the FDIC, and federal and state regulatory agencies to help Californians without checking or savings accounts open starter accounts, thus bringing California's unbanked the opportunity to gain access to lower-cost sources of credit and financial services, establish savings, build credit history and invest for the future (www.bankoncalifornia.ca.gov).

[24] FamilyWize is a nationwide community service partnership of participating United Ways, community- and faith-based organizations, county agencies, doctors, businesses and some pharmacies. Its goal is to reduce the cost of medicine for children, families and individuals with no prescription drug coverage by distributing free prescription drug discount cards (www.familywize.org).

[25] The self-sufficiency standard calculates how much money working adults need to meet their basic needs (including paying taxes) in the regular "marketplace" without subsidies of any kind, accounting for family size and composition and geographic location.

into cash for emergency crisis) and benefits enrollment outcomes (amount of public benefits received) through credit reports, Insight Center for Community Economic Development's Self-sufficiency calculator[26], BEN and bank and investment account statements.

## 4.0 Lessons Learned about Outcomes-based Evaluation for the Asset-building Field

Based on the promising practices described above, there are at least a half-dozen identifiable lessons learned related to outcomes-based evaluation in the asset-building field. The findings are the result of interviews with leaders of community-based organizations and coalitions in the asset-building field and a review of relevant outcomes-based evaluation documents. Lessons learned include:

- *Combination of data sources.* Most organizations maintain some level of administrative data regarding client demographics and service provision in an electronic format. Administrative data can easily be combined with qualitative and quantitative data sources, such as surveys, assessments, interviews and focus groups, to more robustly track and analyze clients' financial situations over time. Ideally, these data sources would be included within one platform by customizing off-the-shelf systems or building information bridges between multiple systems.

- *Longitudinal analysis.* As many outcomes will take time to achieve, it is important to collect and analyze data related to service provision and results over several years. Collecting data at regular intervals can help measure progress over time and gauge the impact of services.

- *Automation.* The more automated data collection can become, the lower the costs to the organization. While automation might require more planning, costs and set-up time on the front end, the investment can pay off over time, potentially increasing response rates and decreasing staff time.

- *Limited and targeted set of indicators and tools.* Albert Einstein once said, "Not everything that can be measured is important, and not everything important can be measured." As one of the first steps in the outcomes evaluation process, it is critical for an organization to identify what is important for them to measure and why. To the degree possible, organizations should try to narrow its list of indicators to a small set that is manageable, meaningful and (easily) measurable.

- *User-friendly data management system.* A handful of data management systems have been designed for or are being used in the asset-building field. Ideally, a system should be chosen and/or customized after the set of indicators has been identified to ensure that the system will be able to perform an organization's desired outcomes-based evaluations. Moreover, the

[26] www.insightcced.org/index.php?page=ca-sss. The Insight Center for Community Economic Development is a national research, consulting, and legal organization dedicated to building economic health in vulnerable communities.

system has to be easy for the user to enter data and run reports in order for it to be used effectively and efficiently.

- *Organizational commitment.* Outcomes-based evaluations require time, effort and money. The corresponding benefits of quantifiable outcomes include more effective programs and strategies, increased community support and funding, and greater client interest and retention, as well as information that can help advance supportive public policies. Successful evaluation efforts have broad organizational commitments, with interest from the leadership to programmatic staff to administrative staff.

## 5.0 Options and Considerations for Data Sources and Measurement Tools for Select Asset-building Outcome Indicators

The following table lists outcome indicators that are commonly used in the asset-building field by organizations and coalitions to measure the long-term impacts of work for clients individually and aggregated. The table also outlines potential data sources and measurement tools for the list of indicators and notes where sample resources exist.

**Table 2: Potential Data Sources and Measurement Tools for Select Asset-building Outcome Indicators for Clients**

| Indicator | Data Sources | Tools | Resources[27] |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Individual Client Outcomes** | | | |
| Income | • Self report<br>• Documentation (paystubs, tax returns) | • Survey<br>• Worksheet | • http://www.census.gov/acs/www/SBasics/SQuest/SQuest1.htm<br>• http://www.bls.gov/cex/ced/2006/cedhome.htm<br>• http://www.urban.org/center/anf/questionnaire.cfm<br>• http://www.census.gov/sipp/questionnaires.html<br>• http://psidonline.isr.umich.edu/data/ |
| Savings | • Self report<br>• Documentation (account statements) | • Survey<br>• Worksheet | |
| Assets | • Self report<br>• Documentation (account statements) | • Survey<br>• Worksheet | |
| Debt | • Self report<br>• Documentation (bills, credit report) | • Survey<br>• Worksheet | |
| Net worth | • Self report<br>• Documentation and calculation (account statements + bills, credit report) | • Survey<br>• Worksheet | www.bankrate.com/brm/calsystem2/calculators/networth/default.aspx |
| Economic self-sufficiency | Calculation | Online calculator | www.insightcced.org |
| Credit score | Credit report | | assetplatform.org (in development) |
| Awareness of spending habits | Self report | Survey | http://www.nefe.org/eval/ |
| Awareness of products and resources | • Self report<br>• Test | • Survey<br>• Assessment | |

[27] Sample resources are provided where known and readily available.

| **Indicator** | **Data Sources** | **Tools** | **Resources**[27] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Spending behavior to meet financial goals | • Self report<br>• Documentation (budget) | Survey | www.cccsatl.org/tools/tool.jsp?toolId=75 |
| Financial well-being | Self report | Survey | www.klontzkahler.com/online_assessment/ |
| Identification of goals | Self report | Survey | • www.msmoney.com/mm/financial_health/financial_goals/goals_step1.htm<br>• www.utextension.utk.edu/publications/pbfiles/pb1454.pdf<br>• www.balancepro.net/pdf/BALN_FinancialGoals.pdf |
| **Individual Client Outcomes: Aggregated** | | | |
| EITC take-up rate | Administrative data | | TaxWise[28] |
| Access to financial products and resources | • Self report<br>• Secondary data | Survey | |
| Enrollment in eligible public benefits | Administrative data | Benefits enrollment software | BEN |
| Enrollment in employment benefits and work supports | • Self report<br>• Documentation | | BEN |
| Graduation from public benefits | Self report | | |
| Use of budgets and financial plans | • Self report<br>• Documentation (budgets, financial plans) | | www.cccsatl.org/tools/tool.jsp?toolId=75 |
| Removal from ChexSystems | • Self report<br>• ChexSystems report | | www.consumerdebit.com/consumerinfo/us/en/chexsystems/report/index.htm |
| Use of financial non-predatory products | • Self report<br>• Documentation (account statements) | | • Savings Point<br>• www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR672/ |
| Use of financial predatory products | • Self report<br>• Documentation (receipts for financial transactions) | | |
| Account maintenance | • Self report<br>• Documentation (account statements) | | |
| Opening IDA, IRA or 401k | • Self report<br>• Administrative data<br>• Documentation (account statements) | | Savings Point |
| Movement from | • Self report | | |

[28] TaxWise is tax and accounting software used by tax professionals and accountants. One use is for preparing tax returns on the computer. By contractual agreement between Universal Tax Systems (now CCH) and the IRS, it is the software used at VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) sites.

| Indicator | Data Sources | Tools | Resources[27] |
|---|---|---|---|
| one product to another as income and assets increase | • Documentation (account statements) | | |
| Achievement of banking/ savings goals | • Self report<br>• Administrative data<br>• Documentation | | |
| Participation in financial education | • Self report<br>• Attendance list | | |
| Amount spent on essential financial services | • Self report<br>• Documentation | | |

As the asset-building movement has broadened in recent years from a focus on targeted strategies (such as IDAs or financial education) led by individual organizations to collaborative, comprehensive approaches that include a mix of agencies – nonprofit, public and private – offering a range of approaches to helping families achieve long-term financial security, a number of comprehensive asset-building coalitions have emerged at the state, county, city and neighborhood levels[29]. Often these coalitions have goals to help clients build assets, as well as goals to increase the capacity of local service providers or improve the local infrastructure for service delivery. The following table lists additional outcome indicators that are commonly used in the asset-building field by coalitions to measure the long-term impacts of work for service providers and the overall network. As with the table above, the table also outlines potential data sources and measurement tools for the list of indicators and notes where samples exist.

**Table 3: Potential Data Sources and Measurement Tools for Select Asset-building Outcome Indicators for Service Providers and Overall Network**

| Indicator | Data Sources | Tools | Resources |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Outcomes for Providers** | | | |
| Organizational capacity for asset-building activities | • Self report<br>• Documentation (budget, service volume) | | |
| Participation in capacity building training | • Self report<br>• Attendance list | | |
| Use of shared intake and assessment tool | • Self report | | |
| Use of online resource directory of financial counseling services and asset building | • Self report<br>• Website usage report | Google Analytics | http://www.google.com/analytics/ |
| Participation in | • Self report | | |

[29] See ASC Brief: *County Asset Building Coalitions – Promising Practices from Across the Country* by Heather McCulloch (June 2008) at www.assetpolicy.org/asc.

| Indicator | Data Sources | Tools | Resources |
|---|---|---|---|
| train-the-trainer curriculum | • Attendance list | | |
| **Network Outcomes** | | | |
| Infrastructure to support income and asset development in area | • Secondary data (volume of programs and providers) | | Success Measures will also be working on a set of indicators and tools for intermediaries to measure the impact of their work on network members |
| Adoption of online data management system | • Self report<br>• Participation list | | |
| Number of products and resources | • Administrative data | | |
| Quality of products and resources | • Key informant interviews | | |

## 6.0 Recommendations to Initiate an Outcomes-based Evaluation Process

The following recommendations are provided to help asset-building programs address challenges in developing an outcomes-based evaluation system, including choosing the right set of indicators and finding a platform that can perform multiple functions (CRM, outcomes evaluation and service integration) and be accessed across multiple sites, if applicable.

- *Narrow the list of indicators.* To begin, focus on client outcomes only, which are the easiest to track and most meaningful to supporters and clients. Within that list, identify the top four to six indicators that would best show how the program is achieving its mission of increasing the income and assets of local residents. The short list of Annie E. Casey Foundation's indicators might be a good set to consider.

- *Participate in as many free project field-testing and product trials or demos as possible*[30]. Once the program has honed in on what it wants to track and measure, try different projects and products to see how easy they are to use with the chosen indicators. Select the system that best meets the program's needs and includes other desired features (see text box).

**Desired tracking features**
- User-friendly format
- Data fields to measure performance
- Customizable fields and reports
- Service delivery integration
- Ability to monitor across the continuum of services
- Ability to assess clients' needs
- Ability to monitor across multiple sites (if applicable)

- *Allocate adequate staff time and*

[30] Not all projects and systems offer free testing, trials and demos.

*resources for system set up.* Any system is likely to require user training and some level customization to make it effective.

## 7.0 Conclusion

Currently, the asset-building field lacks consistent ways to measure the results of its efforts related to increasing a household's economic security over time. As a result asset-building programs often struggle with communicating to policymakers, funders and the public about the impact of their work and/or improving the effectiveness of their efforts. Amplified by today's environment of limited resources, practitioners, policymakers and funders are extremely interested in understanding how best to measure the impact of asset-building programs. A variety of indicators, tools and systems have been developed for and/or are being used by the asset-building field for outcomes-based evaluation. Some organizations and coalitions have begun to develop promising evaluation practices. Based on their pioneering efforts and available resources in the field, as well as literature on outcomes-based evaluation in general, there are a number of lessons learned included in this brief that can help asset-building programs in the San Francisco Bay Area develop more effective systems for measuring the results of their work.