

Basics of Result-Based Accountability

Source: *Trying Hard is Not Good Enough* by Mark Friedman

What is RBA?

Results-Based Accountability (RBA) is a disciplined way of thinking and taking action to improve the lives of children, youth, families, adults and the community as a whole. It is a simple, common sense framework that everyone can understand and uses a data-driven decision-making process. RBA has been adopted by organizations across the globe to solve large community issues and to improve the performance of programs or services with a step-by-step process called “Turn the Curve” thinking.

Definitions

- Result: a condition of well-being for a population (children, adults, families, and communities)
- Indicator: a population-level measure that helps quantify the achievement of a result
- Strategy: a collection of actions that has a reasonable chance of contributing to improved result
- Performance Measure: a measure of how well a program, agency, or service system is working.
 - Quantity of Service: How much did we do?
 - Quality of Service: How well did we do it?
 - Quantity & Quality of Effect: Is anyone better off?

Developing a Results-Based Strategy

1. Define Population, specifically and in geographic boundary
2. What result do we want for this population?
3. From our experience, how would we know this result is being met?
4. What indicators tell us that we are achieving the result for the population?
5. What is the baseline and trend for the indicator(s)?
6. What is the story behind the curve? What do we think are the causes of the baseline and trend (positive and negative causes/factors affecting the curve)?
7. What data, information, and research do we need to gather about causes/factors?
8. What works in addressing those causes/factors (what is our evidence base)?
9. What strategies will move the causes/factors? Do they have reach, scale, validity, success probability, community fit, and capacity to move the highest-leverage factors and result?
10. Whose aligned actions implementing the strategies will be enough to move the result?

Proving Contribution

- It is extremely rare that one program by itself can turn a curve at a population level. Chaos and complexity theory teaches us that precise cause and effect relationships in complex environments are impossible to know.
- You can demonstrate contribution if you pursued aligned strategies that had a credible chance (reach, scale, validity, etc) of making a difference, and it had a timely relationship to a turn in the curve. The contribution is even greater if the change in result runs counter to trends or comparable benchmarks for the rest of the city, county, state, nation or comparable populations/communities.
- Instead of proving causality (or placing blame), we demonstrate circumstantial evidence that we contributed to change in a meaningful way.

Why does United Way Fox Cities have interest in RBA?

On our journey to set goals for population-level improvements, a framework called Results-Based Accountability, or RBA, was introduced to United Way Fox Cities (UWFC) by coalitions that are utilizing the model. UWFC believes that RBA will help take the development of our community-level goals further by providing guidance and structure for building out strategies and designing measures to track the performance of the activities within those strategies. In this way, programs will have greater opportunity to reflect on aspects of their services that could be enhanced or expanded in ways that will significantly contribute to the community-level goals. While individual programs can only serve a limited number of people, aligning activities with a focus on a population-level result can encourage community-based human services agencies to work more synergistically and intentionally toward a known goal. By approaching UWFC's investment process in this way, our partner agencies will ultimately touch a critical mass of people and UWFC will be able to tell a story about how these programs are creating improvements in the quality of life experienced by the community as a whole.

Additional Resources and Web Links

- General information, tools, and success stories
 - o <http://raguide.org/>
- Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, site links to downloadable materials
 - o <http://resultsaccountability.com/>
- United Way of Central Iowa uses RBA (featured on a software company's site)
 - o <https://clearimpact.com/scorecard/case-studies/united-way-central-iowa/>
- Turning the Curve <https://clearimpact.com/results-based-accountability/turn-the-curve-thinking/>
- Video: How RBA is different from other frameworks...
 - o <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdaLRAQFjHg>
- Video: How can a program prove impact on a community?
 - o <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xya2NF99vFk>