Digging Into Data: Data Collection and Analysis at a Small Nonprofit

Anthony J. Oliver

Completed as a partial requirement of

Peabody College's Leadership and Learning in Organizations Program

Acknowledgments

To my wife Jessica - Thank you for your unwavering love and support. When I started this program, we had just had AJ, our first addition to the family. Words cannot express how much you do for me and our family, and I do not know if I would have made it through this program without you.

To my parents - Thank you said for setting the foundation years ago and pushing the importance of education for me and my siblings.

To my siblings - Thank you for setting the tone. It is not always easy being the younger brother of such talented individuals. I appreciate your guidance, support, and unconditional love.

To my cohort members - The past three years have been a wonderful ride. I never thought that I could have so many trusted colleagues and friends from so far away.

To my children AJ and Katherine - one of the greatest feelings I have ever experienced is the joy in your eyes when I come home from a long day's work. It inspires me to want to do great things. I hope one day I can do something for you that returns that favor.

With Love,
Anthony

Contents

Executive Summary

Better Basics provides literacy intervention and enrichment programs for students in the Birmingham Metropolitan area. Founded over 25 years ago, the organization has grown to support over 20,000 students annually. This quality improvement project examined the data collection process at Better Basics to determine how to design interventions to support the organization's mission and vision. The theoretical framework for this study, the Quality Implementation Framework (QIF), helped to inform essential understandings of Better Basics process for collecting data and provided the background for the interview protocol and research questions. The research questions addressed are:

1. What is the purpose of data collection at Better Basics and how does data collection relate to the organization's mission?
2. What are the different roles and processes for data collection in the organization?
3. How does the organization assess the data collection process and make adjustments when necessary?

After conducting a review of the organization's website and program descriptions and conducting interviews with Better Basics staff, four distinct findings emerged:

Finding 1: Better Basics Employees connect their roles in the data collection process to the organization's mission, vision, and success.
Finding 2: Participant's understanding of the entire data collection process varies based on their role in the organization.
Finding 3: Better Basics assesses and adjusts its data collection process based on program and staff needs.
Finding 4: Participants identified financial capacity as a barrier to the organization's ability to make adjustments to the data collection process.

Based on the findings, three recommendations were presented to Better Basics:

Recommendation 1: Create and share an organizational data collection logic model that includes the role of all stakeholders in the data collection process.
Recommendation 2: Develop a Training Repository for Program Staff
Recommendation 3: Expand the organization's volunteer and/or service-learning network to assist with data entry and compilation.

The findings and connected recommendations are aligned with the Quality Implementation Framework and indicate the importance of continuous evaluation of the data collections process at Better Basics. Continued evaluation of the process, aligned with a research-based framework, can support the organization's continual success.

Introduction

Better Basics is a 501c3 non-profit organization in Birmingham, AL with a mission to make a positive difference in the lives of children and their families by advancing reading and mathematical literacy through enrichment and intervention programs. The organization provides several reading and math intervention and enrichment programs throughout Central Alabama. During the 2018-2019 school year, the organization served over 23,000 students and 36 central Alabama schools while also donating over 47,000 books to students, families, and schools in need. Better Basics offers many different programs to its stakeholders and relies on a volunteer force of over 1000 people to successfully implement its programs.

Much like other organizations, Better Basics collects data from various levels of stakeholders to gain more knowledge about the impact of its program. The organization has several stakeholders, including over 900 volunteers, 14 staff members, 20 board members, and 23,000 students and families served. With a small staff serving a large population, Better Basics has the challenge of figuring out the best way to collect and disseminate data, which is important because the data collected helps the organization track its success. The organization wants to examine the implementation of its current data collection system. They want to better use their data to share the organization's story and impact with all stakeholders. This quality improvement project uses a theoretical framework to analyze Better Basics data collection process, discover findings, and provide recommendations for improvement.

Organizational Context

Better Basics was founded over 25 years ago by John Glasser. Mr. Glasser believed that poverty and literacy were directly correlated. Today, the organization's focus is providing literacy interventions, tutoring, and enrichment programs to students across Central Alabama with a mission to "empower our community's youth, helping children learn to read, comprehend, retain, and ultimately learn." The works towards its mission by providing 10 distinct programs:

- **30 A Day** - 30 A Day provides both individual and small group reading services during the summer months at community partner sites.
- **Academic Tutoring** - The Academic Tutoring program provides one-on-one tutoring to students in a variety of reading and language arts foundations related to literacy.
- **Dolly Parton's Imagination Library** - Dolly Parton's Imagination Library delivers free books to preschool-aged children in low-income neighborhoods to promote early childhood literacy.
- **Hope 21st Century Community Learning Centers** - Hope 21st Century Community Learning Centers provide educational and enriching afterschool experiences for children in three Fairfield elementary schools and Fairfield High School.
- **Mathematics Intervention** - Certified teachers deliver quality, small-group math instruction to students in second and third grade who function below grade level.
- **Reading Intervention and Reading Mentors** - Our state-certified Reading Intervention teachers deliver small-group, reading instruction to students functioning below grade level.
- **Summer Brain Gain** - Children from partner sites receive direct reading and mathematics instruction from certified teachers who deliver an interdisciplinary curriculum, which incorporates STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) lessons.
- **Book Nook** - Better Basics places and dedicates Book Nooks in economically challenged areas of the metro-Birmingham area to serve communities with access to free books and encourage reading.
- **Community-Wide Read-Alouds** - Community-Wide Read-Alouds are synchronized reading events that elevate the importance of reading with children.
- **Habitat for Humanity** - Better Basics partners with Habitat for Humanity to provide books in houses completed by Habitat for Humanity which children will occupy.

Like all 501c3 organizations, the organization is led by its board of directors, which is comprised of a group of 20 individuals diverse in race, employment, and skillsets. The board is responsible for ensuring the success of the organization via oversight, fiscal management, and philanthropic support. In addition to the board of directors, the Better Basics also has a junior board, which is a group of young professionals who support the organization's mission by raising awareness and funding to support programming.

To meet its mission and implement this wide array of programs, Better Basics relies on a staff of fourteen employees, including the executive director, three directors, and nine coordinators, and one financial manager. The three directors are each responsible for overseeing one of the following areas: development and communications, programs, and HOPE 21st Century Community Learning Centers. The coordinators are split into two groups, programming, and operations. The 7 coordinators on the programming team are responsible for overseeing the organization's programs, while the two operations coordinators oversee the office and grants process for Better Basics. While the staff works to organize, implement, and assess programming, a critical part of the organization's model is the reliance on volunteers for program implementation. During the 2020-2021 school year, over 900 volunteers committed their time to support the organization's mission.

The staff works with a variety of stakeholders to implement programming, including but not limited to students, families, schools and school systems, housing authorities, and funders. With such a diverse group of stakeholders, it is imperative that the data the organization collects is relevant to the organization's mission, accurately details progress, and can be compiled, disaggregated, and presented to several different audiences. This project will provide Better Basics with a framework to implement a comprehensive data collection process that positions the organization to communicate its progress to all stakeholders (Better Basics, 2021).

Area of Inquiry

This project aims to better understand how Better Basics collects, disaggregates, and reacts to data as an organization. Specifically, we look to ascertain the roles, responsibilities, and processes of the implementation of the entire data collection process. Nonprofit effectiveness is dependent on an organization's ability to execute its mission with a combination of management, governance, and a consistent focus on achieving its desired results. For an organization to achieve its desired results, there has to be a clear understanding of how to effectively measure those results. For this reason, data collection and analysis are integral to a nonprofit's success (Connoly & York, 2002).

Better Basics collects several different types of data, including demographics, academic achievement, and program participation data. The organization also collects data on its large volunteer workforce. All of these data points are used to tell the organization's success story and report progress to various stakeholder groups, including schools, partner organizations, and funders. The chart below outlines the types of data the organization collects and where results are reported to.

Data Collection at Better Basics	
Types of Data Collected	Where are Results Reported
Demographics Math and Reading Growth Progress towards Math and Reading Standards Program Participation Volunteer Services Book Distribution Parent Participation	United Way 21st Century Learning Philanthropic and Individuals Supporters Schools and School System Partners General Public

In the last two years, the data collection process at Better Basics has evolved. Before 2019, the organization collected most of its data by hand on paper forms, which would be turned into the Administrative and Development Coordinator for compilation. After the data was aggregated it would then be transferred to various forms, some of which were digital, for reporting to partner organizations, such as the United Way or 21st Century. This process has now been modified, and Better Basics uses Google Sheets to collect data. Teachers and program staff members enter the data relevant to their program on individual Google Sheets, For the next step in the process, the Administrative and Development Coordinator compiles the information into a single spreadsheet. The data from this spreadsheet is then used to report to the organization's partners.

Better Basics trains all of its teachers and staff on the data collection process. When the organization first transitioned to digital data collection, in-person training sessions were held to teach teachers how to use Google Sheets. The in-person training sessions allowed the administrative staff to provide hands-on training to teachers and assist them with any challenges that came up. Due to the limitations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the

organization has shifted to online training via Zoom. Additionally, Better Basics was gifted Chromebooks and computers for teacher use.

The pandemic has shifted the way students learn. According to the US Census Bureau, almost 93% of students nationwide reported they were learning virtually (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). For Better Basics to continue to serve students in this ever-changing society, it is imperative that the systems and processes they use to evaluate student and program success, including the data collection and reporting systems, are efficient, effective, and up-to-date. If not, Better Basics faces the risk of falling behind or being replaced by other programs.

Research clearly shows that the quality of implementation has a huge impact on program outcomes. The implementation science field has been growing over the past few decades, and researchers are working to more clearly define what implementation science is and how it impacts program outcomes (Douglas, Cambel, & Hinckley, 2015; Olswang & Prelock, 2015). An implementation consists of the processes and activities that an organization puts in place to achieve the desired outcome. Implementation science researchers examine the various types of activities and the conditions that impact program implementation. For example, implementation scientists may examine organizational structure before, during, and after an intervention to determine how structure accelerates or hinders the intervention's progress (Douglas, Cambel, & Hinckley, 2015; Fixsen, Naoon, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). Researchers have worked to determine what types of interventions work under certain conditions and examined which techniques are best to engage stakeholders while developing an intervention (Cabassa, 2016).

For an organization to change any of its current practices, the organization must first take a deep look at the current system in place. The organization must also establish a sense of urgency that helps stakeholders understand why change is necessary. Once urgency is established the team must be built to create the vision for change, communicate that vision, and put the structures in place to see that vision come to fruition (Meyers, Durlak, & Wandersman, 2012).

Literature Review

To better understand the organization's problem of practice, I researched three key areas relevant to Better Basics' problem of practice: implementation science, nonprofit organizational effectiveness, and effective data collection. Implementation science and effective data collection were used for their relevance to the processes and procedures the organization uses to collect data, and research on non-profit management provides a lens into how nonprofit organizations are organized, structured, and operated. The research in these areas provided background and context to support the project recommendations found later in this paper.

Implementation Science

Implementation science is the study of factors that attribute to the success or failure of a program, process, or organization. Most popular for its use in the medical field, implementation science has also been used in social science fields, such as education and social work (Cabassa, 2016) (Olswang & Prelock, 2015). The main purpose of implementation science is to develop a connection between research and practice. Specifically, the field looks at what we already know from research and compares it to what we do in the field, categorizing events, strategies, and structures that have an impact on effectiveness (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

Prior implementation science researcher specific to nonprofit organizations is limited. However, there is a body of research related to change management processes in the nonprofit organization. Similar to implementation science, change management research breaks the process of change into a sequence of steps that outline what the organization must do for successful change (Rosenbaum, More, & Steane, 2017) (Douglas, Cambel, & Hinckley, 2015) (Metz & Easterling, 2016).

Qualitative in nature, the literature reviewed for this paper categorizes and summarizes the experiences of human service fields, such as social work, medicine, and education. Each of these fields is designed to provide a necessary service to a population. Better Basics' organizational philosophy explicitly connects the effects of illiteracy on poverty (Better Basics, 2021). Given the nature of the organization's work, the implementation science literature provides relevancy to Better Basics by providing clear structures to examine the organization's strategies and structures. Specifically, from the review of the implementation science literature emerged the framework used to assess the data collection process at Better Basics. The Quality Implementation Framework (QIF) was developed in 2012 as a synthesis of 25 implementation frameworks, many of which were used in educational and social service fields. A 4 stage framework with 39 probing questions, the QIF is used to assess the condition of a program or organization (Meyers, Durlak, & Wandersman, 2012), and the framework's background in educational and social service organizations aligns with the organizational structure, mission, and vision of Better Basics.

Nonprofit Organizational Effectiveness

The literature on nonprofit organizational effectiveness is vast and inconclusive. Researchers have developed several models to measure organizational effectiveness, including models that

measure the impact of board effectiveness, financial stability, and programmatic impact (Balser & McClusky, 2005) (Liket & Maas, 2013). Other models have looked at organization capacity, which are the inputs, and results, which are the outputs, to determine whether a nonprofit organization is effective. Many nonprofit organizations create their structure to determine their effectiveness by setting internal goals and tracking progress towards them (Sowa, Coleman Selden, & Sandford, 204). In many cases, the determination of organizational effectiveness is based upon either self-reporting, via the organization, its governing board, or public perception, which is heavily dependent on the organizational structure, the community they serve, and the organization's ability to positively market its work (Herman & Renz, 2004).

The literature also includes several studies that have been used to create frameworks for nonprofit organizational effectiveness. Liket and Maas (2013) synthesized over 30 years of both empirical and conceptual indicators of organizational effectiveness. After a literature review of over 52 peer-reviewed articles, the researchers used a multi-step method, including conducting expert groups, a three-step test interview, and an analysis results pilot, to create a list of 26 determinants that can be predictive of nonprofit organizational effectiveness. Originally tested with 83 health-related nonprofit organizations, Liket and Mass' set of determinants focuses on three pillars of non-profit management, transparency, organization, and program, and within these three pillars, some themes and criteria can be used to measure organizational effectiveness. Although the researchers focused on health-related nonprofits, the pillars, themes, and criteria ascertained can be transferred to an education-focused nonprofit, such as Better Basics. For instance, the final set of determinants lists the availability of a strategic plan, the creation of SMART GOALS, and evidence-based activity design as criteria of a successful nonprofit. These criteria can be adapted to any nonprofit organization (Liket & Maas, 2013).

Given the vastness of models and frameworks for nonprofit organizational effectiveness, it was imperative to research models that can be used across contexts. As a direct service provider who uses teachers and volunteers, Better Basics has created an operational model that calls for theories and practices that are both aligned to education and service organizations. The literature described is transferable to the interventions recommended later in this paper. Additionally, the research described provides communication standards applicable to various organization stakeholders, including staff, partners, funders, and volunteers, which are integral to nonprofit organizational success (Studer & von Schnurbein, 2013) (Lecy, Schmitz, & Swedlund, June 2012).

Data Collection

Data collection, governance, and analysis are key components to organizational success regardless of field. Nonprofit organizations, including Better Basics, are increasingly interacting with governmental agencies, including municipalities, federal organizations, and schools. Given the sometimes stringent reporting standards of these partnerships, nonprofit organizations must engage in data collection practices that are transparent and consistent while communicating progress (Lecy, Schmitz, & Swedlund, June 2012) (Wagner, March 2013).

Over time the data collection process has changed for many organizations. Initially done with paper and pencil and analyzed by creating handmade documents and tables, data collection in some organizations has transformed into a digital process (Willcox, Gallagher, Boden-Albala, & Bakken, 2012) (Couper, 2011). Included in this process are metrics and safeguards to ensure organizations are gathering data from various stakeholder groups, including those that have not traditionally been included in the process. Because of the limited access to appropriate technology or training, organizations must use various modes of data collection to ensure the data collected is representative of all stakeholder groups (Delgado & Estrada, 1993).

Even with the influx of technology in society, the data collection process for nonprofit organizations that work with governmental agencies has specific challenges. At the forefront of these challenges is the ability of governmental agencies to share data with nonprofit partners. Even with appropriate and legal memorandums of understanding, some governmental agencies struggle with sharing data with nonprofits, and nonprofits sometimes have trouble determining the impact of their services (Balser & McClusky, 2005) (Lecy, Schmitz, & Swedlund, June 2012). For instance, it is difficult for an organization that provides direct academic services for students, such as Better Basics, to determine whether their services had a positive or negative effect on student achievement when most of the teaching and learning occurs during the traditional school day.

Much of the available data collection literature reviewed was focused on the processes, procedures, and analysis of data in the educational and medical fields. Research in the medical field has been used to improve clinical research, program effectiveness, and data collections practices while education research has been used to attempt to determine the best ways for teachers, school leaders, and administrative personnel to use data to improve school climate, culture, and student achievement. In both fields, much attention a major focus has been to use data to identify and rectify discrepancies between subgroups, including discrepancies in performance and care for different races, ethnicities, and classes. (Willcox, Gallagher, Boden-Albala, & Bakken, 2012) (Moss, February 2012).

The literature on data collection directly relates to this study's problem of practice by practices, procedures, and challenges that may be similar to Better Basics' experiences. Specifically, the research on data sharing, technology implementation, and using data to improve teaching and learning correlate with the organization's structures, processes, and programming. More importantly, they provide a foundation for the recommended interventions later in the section.

Putting it All Together: The literature Review's Connection to the Conceptual Framework

The literature on implementation science, nonprofit organizational effectiveness, and data collection connects directly with the work that Better Basics is doing to serve students, families, schools, and communities. For this project, we needed to identify a conceptual framework that had the flexibility to address all three of these ideas within the organization's context while providing clear structures for the recommended interventions. During our review of implementation science, we reviewed the Quality Implementation Framework (QIF), which is transferrable to multiple fields and sciences. More importantly, the framework provided

concepts, theories, and questions used to develop our research questions and interview protocols. The graphic below illustrates the literature review's connection with the conceptual framework. Data collection at Better Basics is multistep processing involving several stakeholders. In nonprofit management, it is not uncommon for stakeholders to be volunteers or partners in the community. The QIF is a tool to measure the success of a process, program, or program, and it was developed through a study of many frameworks that were used in nonprofit settings. For this project, the framework will use implementation science to analyze a process (data collection) at a nonprofit organization (Better Basics).
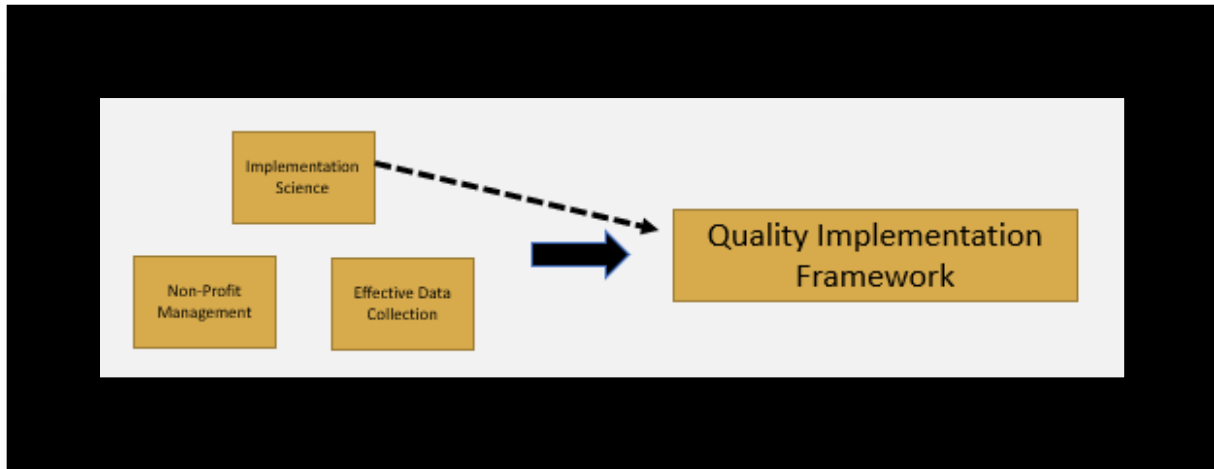

Figure 1:Literature Review's Connection to Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is the Quality Implementation Framework (QIF), which was derived from a study of 25 implementation frameworks. Many of the frameworks examined were focused on community programs and/or children and adolescents. The Quality Implementation Framework is a 14 step process that outlines what an organization has to do to successfully implement a program or initiatives. The 14 steps have been broken into 4 phases to assess the implementation of a program.

In Phase 1, Initial Considerations Regarding the Host Setting, the organization lays the groundwork for implementation. This includes conducting a needs assessment to determine what is needed and if stakeholders are ready for the implementation. The phase also includes eliciting buy-in from stakeholders and building individual and organizational capacity. This phase of the framework is designed to test the organization's readiness and connectedness to the program. Many of the questions included in this section gauge stakeholders' understanding of the program.

In Phase 2, Creating a Structure for Implementation, the organization ensuring the structures are in place for effective implementation. During this phase, organizations must create teams for implementation and develop a clear implementation plan. The second phase of the QIF framework looks at how the program and stakeholders are organized to achieve the desired results. It takes a deep dive into the roles, processes, and responsibilities of different stakeholders.

Phase 3, Ongoing Structure Once Implementation Begins, requires the organization to provide coaching for staff, evaluate the processes used during the implementation, and gather feedback on progress. The third phase addresses the organization's capacity to support stakeholders while making the appropriate programmatic adjustments.

 Phase 4, Improving Future Actions, is dedicated to learning from experience. At this time, information on the implementation's successes and challenges is gathered and adjustments are made for future improvement.

Each of the four phases contains a list of strategies that can be used to improve program implementation. For instance, if an organization wants to assess how they are doing in Phase I, they could work to see if they have conducted the correct assessments before implementing the intervention or if they had gained the right amount of support from stakeholders. In addition to these strategies, the framework includes questions that an organization can ask themselves to gauge the strength of their intervention. In Phase 4, an organization would want to ascertain what lessons have been learned from the intervention or how they can share their successes or failures with others (Meyers, Durlak, & Wandersman, 2012).

Meyers, Durlak, and Wandersman developed a list of 39 questions that can be used to assess a program's implementation quality. Each one of these questions is aligned to a specific part of the framework. For instance, the third question in the framework is "What problems or conditions will the innovation address (i.e., the need for the innovation)?', which is aligned with

Phase 1: Initial Considerations Regarding Host Setting. During this phase, the organization must elicit buy-in from stakeholders and determine the need for an intervention. In an organizational review, this question would be asked to employees to see if they had a conceptual understanding of the need of the process of the program being assessed.

The interview protocols, which are explained in the project design section of this paper, consisted of selected questions derived from the QIF list of questions. For instance, the first question of the QIF framework is, "why are we doing this?" Participant answers to this question will help us answer the first research question, which attempts to define the purpose of data collection at Better Basics. Each of the phases of the QIF framework contains questions that will provide context to answer each one of the project's research questions.

The QIF framework provides an outline for how an organization is implementing its current data collection system. The 14 steps of the framework provide us with an understanding of what successful organizations do during process implementation. Specifically, we were able to learn more about Better Basics' data collection process, compare the organization's actions to the 14 steps of the framework, and develop some potential interventions.
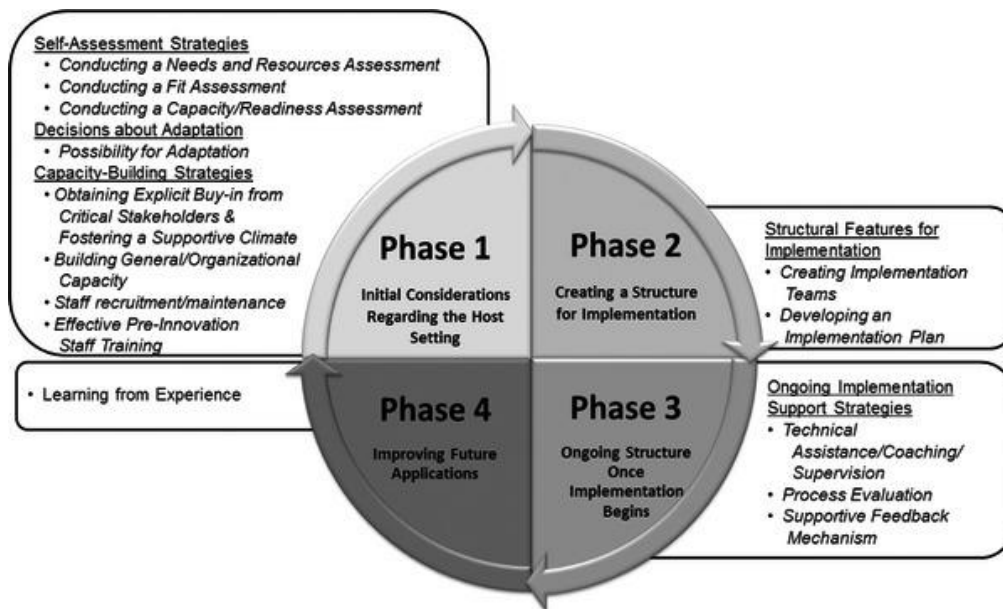

Figure 2: Quality Implementation Framework

Research Questions

The purpose of this project was to use the four key components to assess Better Basics data collection system and provide recommendations for a program intervention. The key research questions are:

1. What is the purpose of data collection at Better Basics and how does data collection relate to the organization's mission?

2. What are the different roles and processes for data collection in the organization?

3. How does the organization assess the data collection process and make adjustments when necessary?

Each of the three research questions connects explicitly to one of the four phases of the Quality Implementation Framework. The figure below outlines these connections:

Aligned Research Question	Phase	Focus
What is the purpose of data collection at Better Basics and how does data collection relate to the organization's mission?	Phase 1: Initial Considerations Involving the Host Setting	Organizational readiness and connectedness to the program
What are the different roles and processes for data collection in the organization?	Phase 2: Creating Structure for Implementation	Structures, processes, and roles of the organization
How does the organization assess the data collection process and make adjustments when necessary?	Phase 3: Ongoing Structure Once Implementation Begins	Coaching, support, and feedback related to the program
	Phase 4: Improving Future Actions	Lessons learned and future improvements currently in place

Project Design

Collected Data

To better understand data efforts at Better Basics, we interviewed staff members. 7 of the organization's 13 full-time staff members participated in interviews, including members of the executive, program, and operations teams. For anonymity's sake given the organization's small size, responses from the interviews were kept confidential. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and transcribed to grammatical errors caused by the platform's text-to-speech feature. Participant interviews were conducted over two weeks with each interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. The interview recordings and corresponding transcripts were saved for future analysis.

I conducted a qualitative analysis of the transcript data. Using thematic analysis procedures, the researcher reviewed the transcribed transcripts multiple times. Each review of the transcript served a distinct purpose. The first review was to ensure the researcher developed a clear understanding of the participant's response. During the second review cycle, the researcher developed codes for the responses, and during the third and final review, the codes were reviewed to ensure appropriate classification and accuracy.

Participant Recruitment

After an initial meeting and approval from the host site's Executive Director, participants were recruited via email to participate in the study. The email was sent out to the organization's program, operational, and executive staff. Seven members of the organization's staff participated in the interview process.

Interview Protocol

The questions of the interview protocol were developed using the Quality Implementation Framework, which is derived from a comprehensive study of 25 implementation frameworks, many of which were community and/or educational. The researchers and creators of the framework, Meyers, Durlak, and Wandersman, developed a list of 39 questions that can be used to assess a program's implementation quality (2012). From this list of 39 questions, 14 were adapted to create the interview protocol.

Research Question Alignment

Each research question had a minimum of 1 major question, which was followed by 4 to 5 follow-up questions. Before each interview, the purpose of the study was explained before participants granted consent. The chart below illustrates the connection between each research question, the Quality Implementation Framework, and the question's purpose.
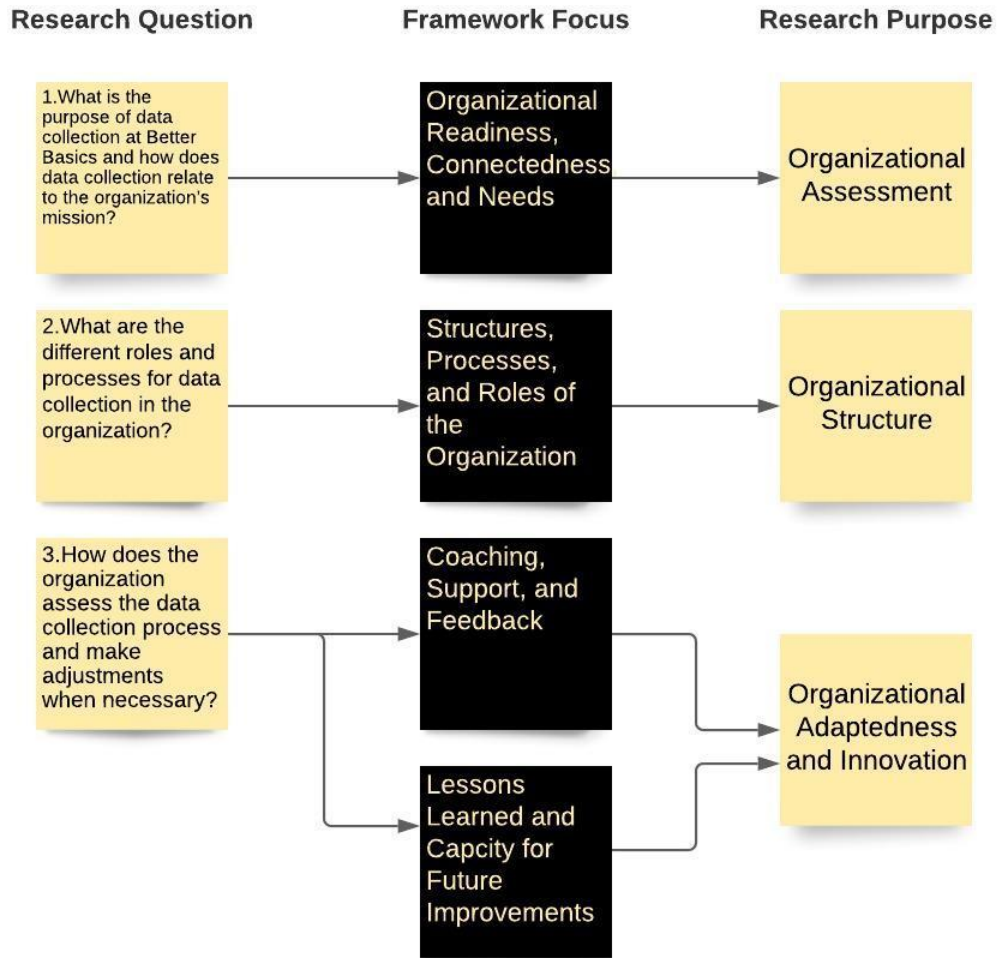
Research Question	Framework Focus	Research Purpose

Research Question

1. What is the purpose of data collection at Better Basics and how does data collection relate to the organization's mission?

2. What are the different roles and processes for data collection in the organization?

3. How does the organization assess the data collection process and make adjustments when necessary?

Framework Focus

Organizational Readiness, Connectedness and Needs

Structures, Processes, and Roles of the Organization

Coaching, Support, and Feedback

Lessons Learned and Capcity for Future Improvements

Research Purpose

Organizational Assessment

Organizational Structure

Organizational Adaptedness and Innovation

Figure 3: Research Questions, Framework, and Research Purpose

Findings

Research Question 1: What is the purpose of data collection at Better Basics and how does data collection relate to the organization's mission?

Finding 1: Better Basics Employees connect their roles in the data collection process to the organization's mission vision and success.

During the interview process, 6 of the 7 participants referred to the organization's need to assess student progress in their programs. As one program director said, "You need to have data collection to you know if you're making a difference. So, you have to have something to see where they start, and then you have something to see whether they improved and that is the mission, moving children forward, you know, and helping them to be successful." Other staff members also echoed this same sentiment by connecting their roles in the data collection process to the organization's larger goals.

Participants in programmatic roles described the specific data collection processes of their programs while also speaking to the organization's need for accurate data reporting for reporting purposes. One of the program directors described the process for collecting student testing data. "Well, first off it means we are to test the children. That is part of our data that we use. So, whenever a child is coming into a program or leaving, we are going to do a pretest and posttest so we can show growth. But also, we collect data such as their demographics, you know age and race."

However, participants who directly compile and report results to external stakeholders connected the organization's data collection process to financial stability. "We collect data for ten different programs so not all data is the same. We collect data to report to our funders, grant organizations, school boards, our Executive Board, the United Way, stakeholders, the Federal Government, the State Department of Education, volunteers, the community, and the general public. We need the data to show growth or decline, attendance, completed in our programs."

In 56% of the frameworks used to create the Quality Implementation Framework, organizations were required to have a collective understanding of why they were doing the work, including the organization's priorities and values (Meyers, Durlak, & Wandersman, 2012). The collective understanding and common theme emerging from interviews with Better Basics employees was the need for data collection to assess, track, and report student and program growth. Although employees had minor differences in how they explained the purpose of the data collection process, growth was mentioned by 5 of the 7 participants. Participant understanding of the data collection process aligns with the organization's goal to "make a positive difference in the lives of children and their families by advancing reading and mathematical literacy through enrichment and intervention programs" (Better Basics, 2021).

Finding 2: Participants' understanding of the entire data collection process varies based on their role in the organization.

Participant responses to questions about the roles and processes at Better Basics were correlated with their position in the organization. Every one of the 3 administrative personnel interviewed was able to articulate the data collection process from beginning to end. An administrator described the data collection process in detail.

> Each program coordinator, manager, grant writer, or director collects and inputs data on her program. Our intervention teachers also input their demographics, student attendance, and test scores into the spreadsheets. Data is collected from school personnel, our intervention teachers, volunteers, after school personnel, principals, other partners (The YMCA, summer camp locations). Data is collected throughout the programs and stored in the respective files/folders for each program on our Better Basics Data File on the Server. Data is reviewed (at various benchmark periods) for accuracy, completeness, and what is needed to be collected, adjusted, addressed, or corrected

> - Better Basics Administrator

Better Basics Data Collection Process

Data collected at the program level	Data is collected from partners	Data is compiled and checked for accuracy	Data is reported to external stakeholders

The graphic above is a visual representation of the process as the administrator described it. 2 of the 3 participants working on the program implementation side of the organization specifically described their programs when asked about the organization's data collection process. As one program director explains it, "I do all sorts of tests. (In reading,) they are reading a list of words and get gradually harder and harder, so we are able to see where they are. At the end of the program, once we are through with all of their lessons (hopefully, they will get to 20) we will do a posttest. So, we have some sort of comparison."

A critical component of the Quality Implementation Framework is an organization's ability to specify the roles, processes, and responsibilities of individual team members while identifying who has organizational responsibility for the implementation (Meyers, Durlak, & Wandersman, 2012). The detailed description provided by the administrator clearly outlines the roles, and processes of the data collection process at Better Basics and provides evidence of a

comprehensive process for the organization to collect, analyze, and disseminate data. However, the programmatic employee's explanation of the process was not as exhaustive and focused primarily on what was happening within their program or department.

Finding 3: Better Basics assesses and adjusts its data collection systems based program and staff support needs.

In 2019, Better Basics began its transition from paper data collection to a completely digital version. At the time, the organization's scale made the switch to a digital data collection system necessary. The organization's leadership also believed a more effective data collection system would improve their ability to report results to stakeholders. The decision to switch was met with some resistance at first. However, everyone has adjusted within the last year. An administrator explains, "we begin using Google Sheets a couple of years ago. At first, some of our folks, mainly the retired teachers, were hesitant to change because they are not as familiar with the technology, but COVID changed all of that for everyone. Some folks still struggle, but everyone is working on it now."

Phase 4 of the Quality Implementation Frameworks focuses on the organization's ability to identify current challenges and learn from prior experiences. An organization's ability to reflect and learn from an intervention is an indicator of the success of future interventions (Meyers, Durlak, & Wandersman, 2012). This phase of the implementation is about how the organization learns from its experiences by specifically looking at the program that is in place, assessing its components, and adjusting when needed. Better Basics examined its data collection process and adjusted the system. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization was forced to make another adjustment by offering all its data collection training online, and in less than two years, Better Basics had transitioned from a paper-based to digital data collection system.

Finding 4: Participants identified financial capacity as a barrier to the organization's ability to make adjustments to the data collection process.

Like many nonprofit organizations, Better Basics is reliant on grant funding to operate its programs, and much of this funding has to reapply yearly. To receive funding, the organization must have data that documents its results, and participants responded that additional funding would allow the organization to develop a more comprehensive data collection system. During the interview process, several participants, without prompting, identified financial capacity as a barrier to the organization's ability to implement a new data collection system. In administrator explains the financial challenges of being a nonprofit organization, "we need to develop our

own (system). Right now, we are just doing it with (Google) sheet. I am sure some things are better out there, but then again, you know it is back to we are nonprofit, and we cannot you know purchase a $10,000 data collection platform. '' Another administrator explains it, saying, "We need adequate funding, trained personnel, and time to implement changes." The need for funding was mentioned by all three of the administrators who participated in interviews, and their ability to reflect and recognize barriers are integral pieces of the organization's ability to improve the data collection system.
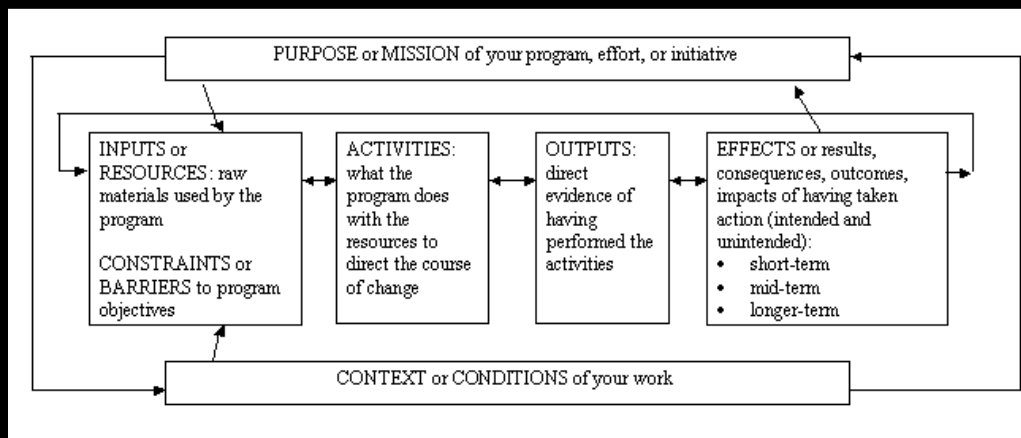
A critical component of Phase 4 of the Quality Improvement process is for the organization to reflect on the innovation and learn how to improve future interventions. During this reflection phase, organizations must recognize barriers for success to design a successful intervention (Meyers, Durlak, & Wandersman, 2012). As Better Basics employees thought about the implementation of their current data system, they were able to identify financial capacity as an area of growth for the organization.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Create and share a logic model that includes the role of all stakeholders in the data collection process.

In Liket and Maas' analysis of nonprofit organizational effectiveness, having a logic model with assumptions, activities, and outcomes is a strong predictor of organizational success (2013). At Better Basics, the logic model may also provide clarity on the roles, processes, and procedures for collecting data while also connecting the details of the work to the organization's mission and vision. Finding 2 showed that participants had varying levels of the organization's data collection system based on their role. The logic model provides the organization with an opportunity to ensure common language is being used when stakeholders talk about the data collection process.

Logic models present visual images of how an initiative is supposed to work from beginning to end. Grounded in the mission and vision of the organization and initiative, the logic model should include the following: the purpose of initiative, inputs, resources, activities, outputs, and effects, both long and short term. Commonly referred to as a theory of change, the logic model becomes a living representation and road map for what success would look like for every individual involved in the project (Kansas, 2021).

Recommendation 2: Develop a Training Repository for Program Staff

Phase 3 of the Quality Implementation Framework reviews ongoing strategies for implementation and support. A major component of the phase is the technical assistance, coaching, and supervision. During this phase, organizations must assess their training and assistance models while providing additional resources and support for those who need them (Meyers, Durlak, & Wandersman, 2012).

At Better Basics, program directors and administrative staff provide training and ongoing assistance for every employee who will be required to collect or maintain data. However, the COVID 19 pandemic forced the organization to transition to online training for staff members and has uniquely positioned the organization to shift its training method. Traditionally, when teachers need additional assistance with data collection or input, the program staff provide one-on-one assistance for them, and sometimes the program team corrects themselves.

 By an online meeting platform, such as Zoom or Cisco WebEx, Better Basics can provide training for employees at any time of the day. Not only does this provide nonstop access to the training materials, but it also frees up time for program directors and managers to focus on other aspects of their work while providing a safe space for employees who may be hesitant to come forward and ask for help. The anticipated result would be for the administrative staff to spend less time correcting data collection errors and more time using the data collected to assess program effectiveness and communicate with stakeholders. Additionally, an online repository provides a space for the organization to assess the changes in their training over time.

Recommendation 3: Expand the organization's volunteer and/or service-learning network to assist with data entry and compilation.

It is estimated that approximately 80% of charitable organizations use volunteers to carry out their missions. For volunteer contributions and management to work, organizations must provide dedicated staff to train, supervise and support volunteers (The Urban Institute, 2004). Better Basics is already deeply involved in the volunteer community. In 2020 alone, the organization worked with over 900 volunteers to implement its 10 programs. The organization may benefit by expanding or reallocating volunteers to the organization's data management team. With administrative personnel and volunteer coordinators already in place, the organization is primed to shift these efforts. One major challenge that may arise from using volunteers in the data collection process is the possibility of sharing confidential information. To alleviate this concern, Better Basics could train and certify volunteers on confidentiality. This is a common practice of other nonprofits, such as Big Brother, Big Sister, Inc., and the YWCA.

Another option for this work is to partner with colleges and universities to provide service-learning experiences, which are practical experiences that prepare students for professional work after college. Service-learning benefits both the student and the organization being served. Some potential benefits of service-learning for students are:

1. Students can incorporate their practical learning with their academic studies.
2. Some students may find the practical experience more educational than their classroom studies.
3. Students will have exposure to new experiences, skills, and people.

The organization may benefit from service-learning by:

1. Engaging with a trained workforce at a reduced rate.
2. Screening future employees through extended, real work experiences.
3. Connecting with individuals outside of their traditional stakeholder groups.

(Peters, McHugh, & Sendall, 2006)

For Better Basics, both opportunities provide an avenue for a cost-effective, skilled workforce that may transition to more permanent commitments for the organization. During the interview process, it was determined that financial capacity is a barrier for the organization to implement an updated data collection system. By using volunteers and/or service learners, Better Basics can improve its data collection system without losing financial capacity.

Discussion

This Quality Improvement Project was This quality improvement project sought to examine the data collection process at Better Basics, a nonprofit agency providing reading intervention and enrichment services to students in Central Alabama. The theoretical framework for this study, the Quality Implementation Framework (QIF), helped to inform essential understandings of Better Basics process for collecting data and provided the background for the interview protocol and research questions. To compare the organization's work to the research questions, staff members were interviewed. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to ascertain themes throughout and develop findings and recommendations. Below is a synopsis of the key components of the project:

Research Questions

1. What is the purpose of data collection at Better Basics and how does data collection relate to the organization's mission?
2. What are the different roles and processes for data collection in the organization?
3. How does the organization assess the data collection process and make adjustments when necessary?

Findings

Finding 1: Better Basics Employees connect their roles in the data collection process to the

Finding 2: Participants' understanding of the entire data collection process varied based on their role in the organization.

Finding 3: Better Basics has adjusted its data collection and training process over the past two years to include the use of technology, and some of the organization's teachers and volunteers need additional support.

Finding 4: Participants identified financial capacity as a barrier to the data collection process.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Create and share an organizational data collection logic model that includes the role of all stakeholders in the data collection process.

Recommendation 2: Develop a Training Repository for Program Staff

Recommendation 3: Expand the organization's volunteer and/or service-learning network to assist with data entry and compilation.

Limitations

As a nonprofit organization, Better Basics relies heavily on its volunteer base. The Board of Directors, Junior Board, and other volunteers. The focus of this project was the involvement of full-time staff members in the organization's data collection process. The organization may benefit by assessing volunteer impact on organizational effectiveness.

References

Akinbola, K. (March 2013). A Model of Strategies Nonprofit Human Resource Management. *International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 214-240.

Balser, D., & McClusky, J. (2005). Managing Stakeholder Relationships and Nonprofit Organization Effectiveness. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 295-315.

Better Basics. (2021, 01 5). *About Us*. Retrieved from Better Basics: http://www.betterbasics.org

Cabassa, L. J. (2016, 1 13). Implementation Science: Why it matters for the future of Social Work. *Journal of Social Work Education, 52*(Sup. 1), pp. 38-50.

Coburn, C., & Turner, E. (February 2012). The Practice of Data Use: An Introduction. *American Journal of Education*, 99-111.

Connoly, P., & York, P. (2002). Evaluating Capacity Building Efforts for Nonprofit Organizations. *Od Practitioner, 34*(4), 33-39.

Couper, M. (2011). The Future Modes of Data Collection. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 889-908.

Delgado, J. L., & Estrada, L. (1993, October). Data Collection Strategies. *Public Health Reports, 108*(5), pp. 540-545.

Delgado, J., & Estrada, L. (1993). Improving Data Collection Strategies. *Public Health Reports*, 540-545.

Douglas, N., Cambel, W., & Hinckley, J. (2015, 12). Implementation Science: Buzzword or Game Changer. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 58*(6), pp. 1827-1836.

Durlak, J., & DuPre, E. (2008, March 6). Implementation Matters: A Review of Research on the Influence of Implementation on Program Outcomes and the Factors Affecting Implementation. pp. 1-24.

Fixsen, D. L., Naoon, S., Blase, K., Friedman, R., & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature.* Orlando, FL: National Implementation Research Network.

Girard, M. (2020). Helping Organizations Master Data Governance. *Centre for International Governance Innovation*, 1-8.

Gupta, S., Rous, B., & Schertz, H. (2016, May). Understanding Change and Implementation: How Leaders Can Support Inclusion. *YC Young Children*, 82-91.

Handy, F., & Brudney, J. (2007). When to Use Volunteer Labor Resources? An Organizational Analysis for Nonprofit Management. *Vrijwillige Inzet Onderzoch*, 91-100.

Herman, R., & Renz, D. (2004). Doing Things Right: Effectiveness in Local Nonprofit Organizations, A Panel Study. *Public Administration Review*, 694-704.

Jaycox, L. H., Hickman, L., Schultz, D., Barners-Proby, D., Setodji, C. M., Kofner, A., . . . Francois, T. (2012). The Data Collection Procedures. In L. H. Jaycox, L. Hickman, D. Schultz, D. Barners-Proby, C. M. Setodji, A. Kofner, . . . T. Francois, *National Evaluation of Start Promising Approaches* (pp. 29-36).

Kansas, C. f. (2021, 03 03). *Developing a Logic Model or Theory of Change*. Retrieved from Community Tool Box: https://ctb.ku.edu/en

Lecy, J., Schmitz, P., & Swedlund, H. (June 2012). Non-Governmental and Not-for-Profit Organizational Effectiveness: A Modern Synthesis. *Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 434-457.

Liket, K., & Maas, K. (2013). Nonprofit Organizational Effectiveness: Analysis of Best Practices. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 1-28.

Metz, A., & Easterling, D. (2016). Using Implementation Science to Translate Foundation Strategy. *The Foundation Review*, 116-137.

Meyers, D., Durlak, J., & Wandersman, A. (2012, December). The Quality Implementation Framework: A synthesis of the Critical Steps in the Implementation Process. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 462-480.

Moss, P. (February 2012). Exploring the Macro-Micro Dynamic in Data Use Practice. *American Journal of Education*, 223-232.

Nissan, E., Castona, M.-S., & Carrasco, I. (2012). Drivers of non-profit activity: A Cross-Country Analysis. *Small Business Economics*, 303-320.

Norris-Tirrell, D. (2014). The Changing Role of Private, Nonprofit in the Development and Delivery of Human Services in the United States. *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration*, 304-326.

Olswang, L. B., & Prelock, P. A. (2015, December). Bridging the Gap Between Research and Practice: Implementation Science. *Journal of Speech-Language and Hearing Research, 58*(6), 1818-1826.

Peters, T., McHugh, M., & Sendall, P. (2006). The Benefits of Service Learning in a Down-Turned Economy. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 131-141.

Rosenbaum, D., More, E., & Steane, P. (2017). A longitudinal qualitative case study of change in nonprofits: Suggesting a new approach to the management of change. *Journal of Management and Organizations*, 74-91.

Smith, S. (March 2021). Non Profit Organizations and Government: Implications for Policy and Practice. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 621-625.

Sowa, J., Coleman Selden, S., & Sandford, J. (204). No Longer Unmeasurable? A Multidimensional Integrated Model of Nonprofit Organizational Effectiveness. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 711-728.

Studer, S., & von Schnurbein, G. (2013). Organizational Factors Affecting Volunteers: A Literature Review on Volunteer Coordination. *Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Management*, 403-440.

The Urban Institute. (2004). *Volunteer Management: Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations.* Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

Topp, N., & Pawloski, B. (2002). Online Data Collection. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, 173-178.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *Household Pulse Survey, Week 5.* Washington D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau.

Wagner, A. (March 2013). Good Governance: A Radical and Normative Approach to Nonprofit Management. *Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Management*, 797-817.

Willcox, A., Gallagher, K., Boden-Albala, B., & Bakken, S. (2012). Research Data Collection Methods: From Paper to Tablet Computers. *Medica Care*, 68-73.