Using Data for Improvement

Using data to improve social and emotional learning is an essential tool in supporting youths' meaningful growth.

This section includes tools and templates to help staff gather and use data for improvement. This is different from formal, high-stakes outcome assessment or program evaluation. This section includes creating a data dashboard by using reflective activities to measure change over time, having youth assess and provide feedback to the adults that support them in learning social and emotional skills, and a checklist to help select SEL outcome measurement tools.

Emoji Data Dashboard

Use the Emoji Reflection activity (under Creating the Learning Environment) to track changes over time by creating a data dashboard. At the individual level, the Emoji Reflection activity is a tool for personal growth. At the program-level, it is well-suited for youth-directed measurement and continuous improvement. There are no-tech and low-tech options for creating a data dashboard.

Why This Matters

- Youth are often the subject of evaluation, but don't get a voice in making meaning of the data. When youth are empowered to be at the center of measurement and meaning-making, programs give them voice and influence about how data is used.
- Tracking how youth perceive their SEL development gives program staff important insights into how staff actions influence youth outcomes.
- The Emoji Reflection activity is a powerful reflection tool AND easily provides program-level data with minimal administrative work.

Getting Started

- Pick whether you are going to use the No-Tech Dashboard or the Low-Tech Excel Dashboard. The No-Tech Dashboard is ideal for 10 or fewer youth. The Low-Tech Excel Dashboard is ideal for groups with more than 10 youth or for programs that want to compare data across groups, reflection prompts, or program cycles.
- Materials and time vary depending on group size and type of dashboard.

How To Do It

No-Tech Dashboard

1) Ideal for groups with 10 or fewer youth. If you have a group larger than 10, break them into smaller groups to track their Emoji responses.
2) Start tracking group responses after you have been using the Emoji reflection for at least 3 weeks.
3) Create a large poster or wall space for each group that can accommodate an enlarged version of the dashboard template. Be prepared to keep this poster for the duration of the project (or at least the weeks that you plan to use the Emoji reflection).
4) Invite youth to transfer their individual Emoji responses from the previous weeks to the group dashboard. Have youth draw in their Emoji or pre-draw Emoji and have youth color in their response.
5) Update the dashboard at least every other week. A dashboard is only useful if it is responsive and accurate.
6) Gather the group of youth and staff together every 3-4 weeks to discuss the data.

Low-Tech Excel Dashboard

1) Ideal for groups with more than 10 youth or for programs that want to compare data across groups, reflection prompts, or program cycles.
2) Download the Excel-based template (available online).
3) Watch the interactive tutorial (available online) for step-by-step instructions.

For each type of dashboard, display the poster graph or the Excel graph so that everyone can look at the group data, and make sure that everyone has their individual Emoji reflection available. Use the following conversation starters to discuss the dashboard:

- For each week, quickly identify as a group which Emoji got the most and fewest responses.
- Which weeks did your response match up with the most frequent response on the group graph?

Emoji Data Dashboard

- What stands out to you about the group graph?
- Do any of the weeks surprise you?
- What was happening in the project/program/group each week?
- Why do you think so many people chose X response for this particular week?
- What changes should we consider based on this information?
- How do we define “success” for this particular skill (or anchor statement)? Is there a “best” emoji response? (Staff—this is a good opportunity to introduce the idea that “success” might be about getting better at reflecting or building awareness, rather than answering in a specific way.)

Take It Further

- Continue the conversation with your staff team. Reflect on staff actions, programmatic choices, and youth dynamics. Are there any youth that need additional support? Is there anything that staff should modify in order to better support youths’ social and emotional growth, as they are reporting it? If you decide to make changes, note the specific change and date on your dashboard or in program notes. After a few weeks evaluate if those changes had the desired effect.
- Once you’ve finished the cycle of using Emoji Reflection, share the story of how youth used reflective measurement to track change over time and make programmatic improvements.

Staff Support Card

Have youth use this tool to assess and provide feedback to the adults that support them in learning social and emotional skills. It should be used at multiple points in time to track progress. This is intended as a low-stakes way to inform and strengthen staff practices, not a high-stakes evaluation.

Why This Matters

- Staff play an important role in enhancing the social and emotional learning of youth in their program. Feedback from youth can provide valuable information that staff can use to improve their practice.

Getting Started

- Materials: Copies of the Staff Support Card
- Time: 15 minutes to complete card, 30-60 minutes for staff discussion
- This tool can be used either in reference to an individual staff member or to a group of staff as a whole. Be sure to decide this before using the support card and communicate this to youth.
- Youth should complete the Staff Support Card 2-4 times a year (e.g., once a semester).
- Choose a specific period of time that youth should consider when completing the Staff Support Card (e.g., think back to the last week).
- Be sure to communicate the intent of the Staff Support Card and how the information will be used with the staff who are going to be the focus of youth feedback.

How To Use It

1) When you first introduce the Staff Support Card, explain that the purpose is for youth to provide feedback to staff so that staff can improve their work with youth.
2) Go through each statement with youth and make sure you have a common understanding of each statement. Ask youth for an example of what each statement would look like (e.g., What does it look like when staff show you respect?)
3) After responses from youth have been collected, convene your staff group to discuss the results. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:
   - What was most surprising to you about the responses?
   - What practical steps can staff take to improve?
   - What kind of professional development or training might help us improve?

   If collecting information over time:
   - How does the current feedback compare to previous feedback?
   - What changes have been made since the last Staff Support Card?

Take It Further

- After using the Staff Support Card several times, have a check-in conversation with youth. Discuss the results of the Staff Support Card and what the staff is working on. Let youth know that their input was considered and even incorporated.
- Turn it into an online survey.

Tool: Staff Support Card

Think about ______________________ (name or group of staff) in the last ________________ (week, month)…

		USUALLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY
WAYS I AM	Staff respect me	○	○	○
	Staff make sure everyone feels included	○	○	○
	Staff encourage me to share my perspective	○	○	○
	Give an example:			
WAYS OF FEELING	Staff help me when I feel frustrated or upset	○	○	○
	Staff handle their own emotions well	○	○	○
	Staff check-in with me about how I feel	○	○	○
	Give an example:			
WAYS OF RELATING	Staff encourage us to work together	○	○	○
	Staff help us resolve conflict	○	○	○
	Staff give us a chance to play special roles	○	○	○
	Give an example:			
WAYS OF DOING	Staff challenge me to try hard and do my best	○	○	○
	I can ask staff for help	○	○	○
	Staff will support me if I try and fail	○	○	○
	Give an example:			

Sticky Note Survey

This is a simple activity that serves to combine reflection and measurement by asking participants to rate themselves on a particular skill at the beginning and end of a session.

Why This Matters

- Visual displays of data help groups identify trends.
- Feedback helps staff know whether they are on track.
- This activity is to be used at the beginning and end of direct SEL instruction to assess effectiveness.

Getting Started

- Materials: sticky notes (2 colors – pre and post); 4 response cards (8.5 x11 sheets) that say strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree; tape; and a few feet of wall space.
- Time: 5 minutes at the beginning and 5 minutes at the end of an activity
- Set up: somewhere in the room, tape the response cards on the wall, evenly spaced in a line over a few feet.

How To Do It

1) Choose a social and emotional skill that you are working on today, like conflict resolution or emotion management.
2) Write a goal statement about learning or practicing that skill, as it's unrealistic to expect that youth would change their overall feelings or behavior significantly in one session. It's much more realistic that they might learn some new strategies for resolving conflict with a teammate, for example.
3) Be sure your outcome statement can be answered with the response categories strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. For example, "I know strategies to control my temper," or "I have skills to resolve conflict with others." Above the response cards, place the outcome statement (write on board or tape to the wall).
4) As young people arrive, invite them to grab a sticky note and respond to the statement by placing their sticky note along the strongly agree to strongly disagree continuum for how they would rate themselves at the moment. They do not need to write their name on the sticky note. Once everyone has placed their sticky note, proceed with your activity.
5) At the end of the session, pass out another set of sticky notes (in a different color than the pre-question).
6) Tell participants that you are interested in both reflecting on what happened today, and measuring the effectiveness of today's activity.
7) Ask them to write down one idea that relates to the outcome statement. For example, depending on the focus of the activity, they might write down one strategy they learned to control their temper, or one thing they plan to work on to be a better teammate. Or, ask them to write down why their sticky note is in the same of different spot than earlier. Then have youth go place their post-sticky notes on the wall below the pre-sticky notes. Allow 5 minutes for this.
8) Now you have a dashboard—real time information that you can use. Take a look at the line:
   - What do you notice? Where was there a change from pre to post?
   - Why is this happening?
   - How could we use this information?

Take It Further

- Consider using the sticky note survey activity at different times throughout your program rather than at the beginning and end of a session.

SEL Assessment Decision-Making Checklist

Use this checklist to evaluate formal social and emotional learning assessment tools. The checklist will help you evaluate practical, logistical, and technical considerations for each tool that you are considering.

Why This Matters

- The best assessment tool for your program is the one that aligns with your goals and is practical to use.
- The checklist is designed to raise awareness of considerations that may be important in your decision-making process.

Getting Started

- Evaluate your readiness to make use of a formal assessment tool. Read the *Assessing Social & Emotional Skills in Out-of-School Time Settings: Considerations for Practitioners* issue brief for more information.
- Use the checklist to determine your priorities (cost, time, usefulness, reporting, etc.) in selecting a tool. Not all checklist items will carry equal weight for every program.

How To Use It

1) Review the items on the checklist as you evaluate formal social and emotional learning measurement tools.
2) Take time to investigate answers to questions that are most important to your program.
3) Request sample surveys, measurement instruments, and reports of tools that you are seriously considering.
4) Make a decision based on your program priorities and measurement needs.

Take It Further

- Ask 2-3 additional staff to review the checklist in order to evaluate the measurement tools you are seriously considering. Discuss your findings and make a collaborative decision.
- Ask youth leaders to review potential evaluation tools. Include youth in the decision about which tool to use.
- Ask for input from funders and other stakeholders who are invested in your program's SEL outcomes.

Tool: SEL Assessment Decision-Making Checklist

Use this checklist to evaluate and compare formal SEL assessment tools.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS	WHY THIS MATTERS
☐ **Do the items measured by this tool align with our program goals?**	The closer the alignment between what the tool measures and your program goals, the more helpful the data will be to youth and practitioners.
☐ **Will the tool provide helpful feedback to youth and actionable data for practitioners?**	Receiving helpful feedback is an important part of developing social and emotional skills. Actionable data will help practitioners make better decisions about program design and youth interactions. Reports that only provide data in spreadsheets or complicated tables will be more difficult to use.
☐ **Does the tool align with our program's definition of success in SEL?**	There is not a universal standard of success in SEL. What counts as SEL success will vary based on the values and goals of each program. Alignment between the tool's standard of success and your program standard is important.
☐ **How accessible is the actual tool that youth or practitioners are required to complete?**	The visual design of the tool and the formatting of measurement items matters. If the tool is burdensome or confusing to complete, the quality of responses will be affected.

The bottom line: Will this tool help you improve outcomes for youth?

Only consider tools that will help your program become more effective.

Notes:

Tool: SEL Assessment Decision-Making Checklist

LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS	WHY THIS MATTERS
☐ **How much does the tool cost? (per youth/per year)**	Pricing is not standard across tools. Calculate the per youth/per year cost for each youth in order to compare differing price structures.
☐ **What are the training requirements for practitioners and associated costs?**	Training requirements vary widely and can add considerable time and money to the cost of using a tool.
☐ **How is the tool administered? How many items or questions are included?**	Some tools must be completed on a computer, others on paper. Paper-based tools increase the amount of data entry time required. The number of items on a tool will significantly impact the time and energy it takes to implement a tool.
☐ **How quickly will you get access to the data?**	Some reports can be generated immediately. Others will take weeks or even months to create. If you intend to use data for program improvement, getting quick access to data reports may be an important consideration.

The bottom line: Do you have the capacity (money + time) to meaningfully use this assessment tool?

The best measurement tool is the one that you can actually use.

Notes:

Tool: SEL Assessment Decision-Making Checklist

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS	WHY THIS MATTERS
☐ **What is the reliability score of the tool?**	Look for a tool with high reliability and administrative requirements that you can reasonably manage. Tools that have high reliability will provide more consistent results. You can find this information in a technical report or directly from the publisher.
☐ **What is the validity score of the tool?**	Validity scores indicate how accurately the tool measures the outcomes or skills it claims to measure. For example, if a tool claims to assess problem-solving skills, but only includes questions related to emotion management, this would be a red flag. You can find this information in the technical report or directly from the publisher.
☐ **Do you agree with the underlying theories that inform the assessment items?**	Consider how the tool's authors define social emotional skills. How the authors understand effective communication or healthy relationships will influence how the tool is designed and scored.

The bottom line: How valid is the tool for your context?

While a tool may have high technical scores, the data and feedback you receive will have limited usefulness if it doesn't align with your goals, values, or population. For example, if the tool you are considering was developed with a sample population that was primarily middle school youth in rural areas, it will not have high validity for your urban high school program.

Notes:

Adapted from:
Blyth, D., & Flaten, K. (2016). Assessing social and emotional skills in out-of-school time settings: considerations for practitioners. Retrieved from University of Minnesota, Extension Center for Youth Development website: http://www.extension.umn.edu/youth/research/sel/docs/issue-brief-assessing-sel-in-out-of-school-time-settings.pdf
Soland, J., Hamilton, L.S., & Stecher, B.M. Measuring 21st century competencies: guidance for educators. (2013). Asia Society and Rand Corporation. Retrieved from https://asiasociety.org/files/gcen-measuring21cskills.pdf