

HOW TO COUNT YOUR WORK

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--a presentation to the 2013 ServeMontana Symposium--

The General Plan

1. Introductions
2. Data, generally speaking
3. Bringing order out of chaos
4. Using data effectively
5. Conclusion

KIDS COUNT

- Funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the KIDS COUNT network has offices in 53 states and territories.
- Montana KIDS COUNT has three main focus areas:
 - Monitoring child wellbeing;
 - Publishing annual data book with state- and county-level information; and
 - Promoting decision-making guided by data.

WHY IS DATA IMPORTANT?

- **Define needs**
- **Set and prioritize goals**
- **Guide decision making**
- **Evaluate progress**
- **Meet accountability requirements**
- **Increase efficiency and transparency**

USING GOOD DATA...

...promotes trust

...promotes evidence-based decision-making

...helps creating better outcomes

USING BAD DATA...

**...causes loss of trust, influence and
reputation**

...leads to misguided policy

**...but, can also serve as catalyst for
better data**

ON A RELATED NOTE:

Shallow Internet research

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- **WHAT** is being measured?
- **HOW** is the data collected?
- **WHO** collects the data?

WHAT EXACTLY IS BEING MEASURED?

- Number or percentage or other rate
- Who's the population?
- Positive or negative measure?
- Cross-sectional vs. longitudinal?

HOW IS THE INFORMATION COLLECTED?

Primary Data

- User data
- Direct observation
- Survey results
- Interviews

Secondary Data

- Databases
- Internet, TV, radio
- Magazines, newspapers, research journals

WHO COLLECTS THE INFORMATION?

**Know the source, and your source's
source--secondary data ultimately has a
primary source.**

CRITERIA FOR RELIABLE DATA

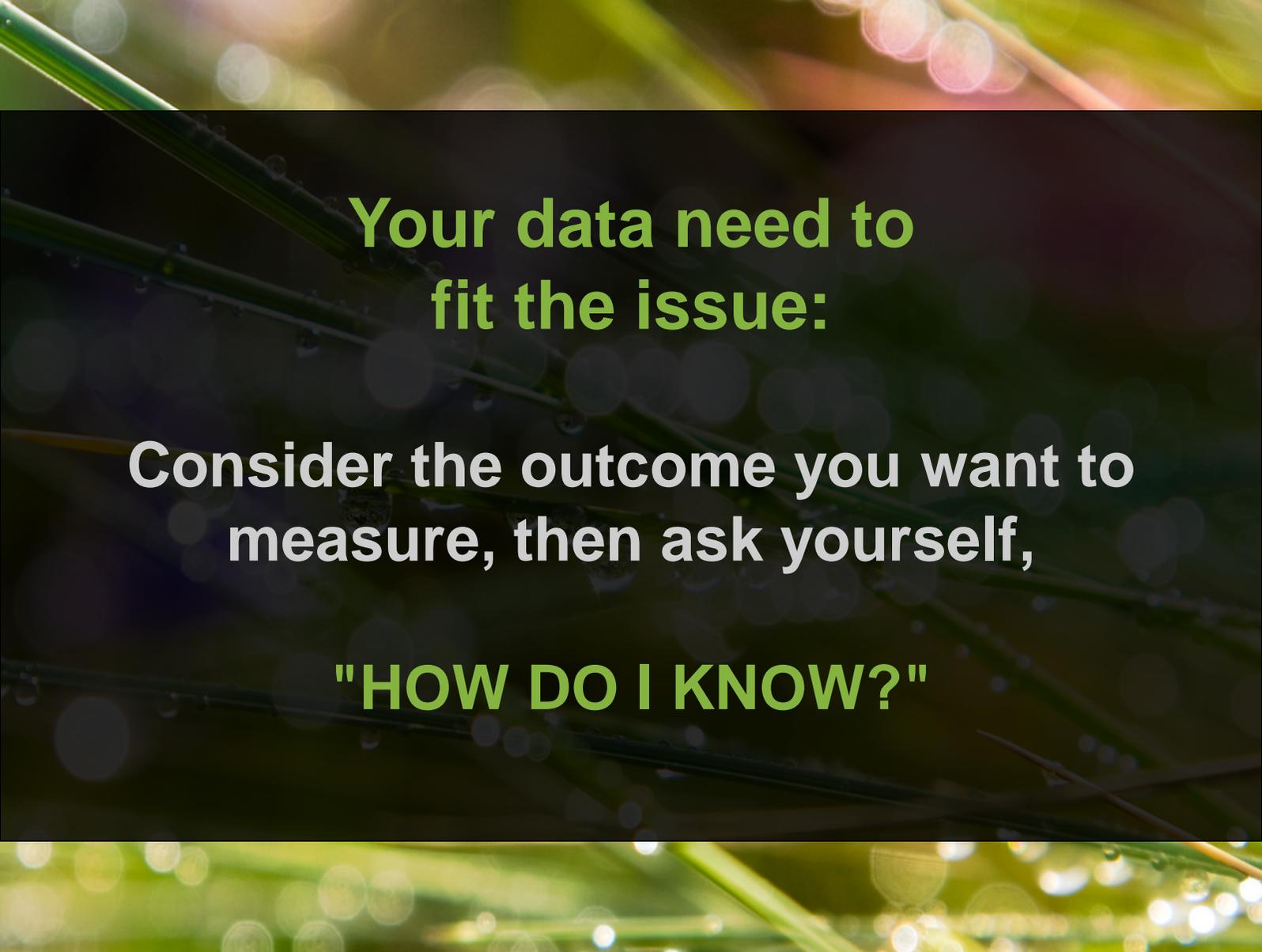
- **Centralized, consistent source**
- **State and regional breakdowns**
- **Validity**
- **Periodic collection**
- **Sensitivity**
- **Culturally competent**

SOME DATA LIMITATIONS:

- **Not measuring what you're working to change**
- **Lack of regional breakdowns**
- **Gaps**

OK, we have good data...

**...BUT HOW DO WE USE IT
EFFECTIVELY?**



**Your data need to
fit the issue:**

**Consider the outcome you want to
measure, then ask yourself,**

"HOW DO I KNOW?"

INDICATORS:

An indicator is a keystone piece of data that is used to measure, or *quantify*, changes in an outcome.

KEYS TO GOOD INDICATORS

1. COMMUNICATION POWER

Does a broad range of audiences “get it”?

2. PROXY POWER

Does the indicator represent the result, and does it respond to policy changes?

3. DATA POWER

Do you have quality data on a timely basis?

EXAMPLE 1: Adequate prenatal care as indicator of healthy births.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Communication Power? | NO |
| 2. Proxy Power? | NO |
| 3. Data Power? | YES |

EXAMPLE 2: Rate of low-birthweight babies as indicator of healthy births.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Communication Power? | YES |
| 2. Proxy Power? | YES |
| 3. Data Power? | YES |

TYPICAL USE OF DATA:

- **Begin with alarming statistics;**
- **Add supportive evidence for the claims;**
- **Add charts, graphs, tables and additional data; and**
- **Include some recommendations at the end of document.**

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS:

- Why is it important?
- How did this happen?
- Who is responsible?
- What is the solution?

Additionally:

People use general categories to organize and process specific information they receive.

How they think about new information depends not on the actual information, but on how they are able to process it based on what they already know.

NUMBERS ALONE ARE NOT ENOUGH

- **Data alone cannot accomplish a shift—start by introducing universal values like equality or frugality;**
- **Too much data is overwhelming, giving the impression of hopelessness; and**
- **Too much data on a problem gives an impression of inevitability.**

CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT

START



1. Values "Why does it matter?"
(fairness, opportunity, frugality, inter-dependence, etc.)

2. Issue Categories "What is this about?"
(education, child development, global warming, etc.)

3. Specific Policy Issues "What will help?"
(Head Start eligibility, EITC, rural economic development zones, etc.)

FINISH

“The American Education Foundation recognizes that our nation’s future success depends on its ability to advance the common good for all Americans, maximizing our talents and advancing our skills to prepare for the challenges that our nation will face in the future. As the largest educational philanthropy in the country, we pursue policies that benefit our entire society, such as providing excellent schools, adequate educational resources, and quality educational experiences for our children.”

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

1. SOCIAL MATH:

Explain complex data and large numbers so that people can easily understand and remember it by creating visual pictures in their heads.

(Concept developed by Berkeley Media Studies Group and the Advocacy Institute)

Without Social Math:

"Lack of health insurance coverage is a pressing issue and the number of uninsured people in Arizona is at an all-time high, with nearly 1,072,000 people lacking public or private health insurance in 2006. The state ranks 6th among all states for the highest percentage of people with no health insurance. During the period from 2004 to 2005, the U.S. Census reported that 18% of Arizonans lacked health insurance, compared to 15.1% for the U.S. population."

With Social Math:

"If Arizona's highways were in the same shape as our health care system, every five miles you drove, you'd come to a pothole a mile long. We've got to repair the health care infrastructure, just like we do other parts of our state."



Another example:

“Two years ago in Nigeria, an AK 47 could be had in exchange for two cows. Now the price is down to one cow. And in the Sudan, you can get an AK 47 for a chicken.”

(Marie Griesgraber, Oxfam America)

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

2. SIMPLIFYING MODELS:

Introduces a new, user-friendly conceptual picture that guides and organizes reasoning about a topic.



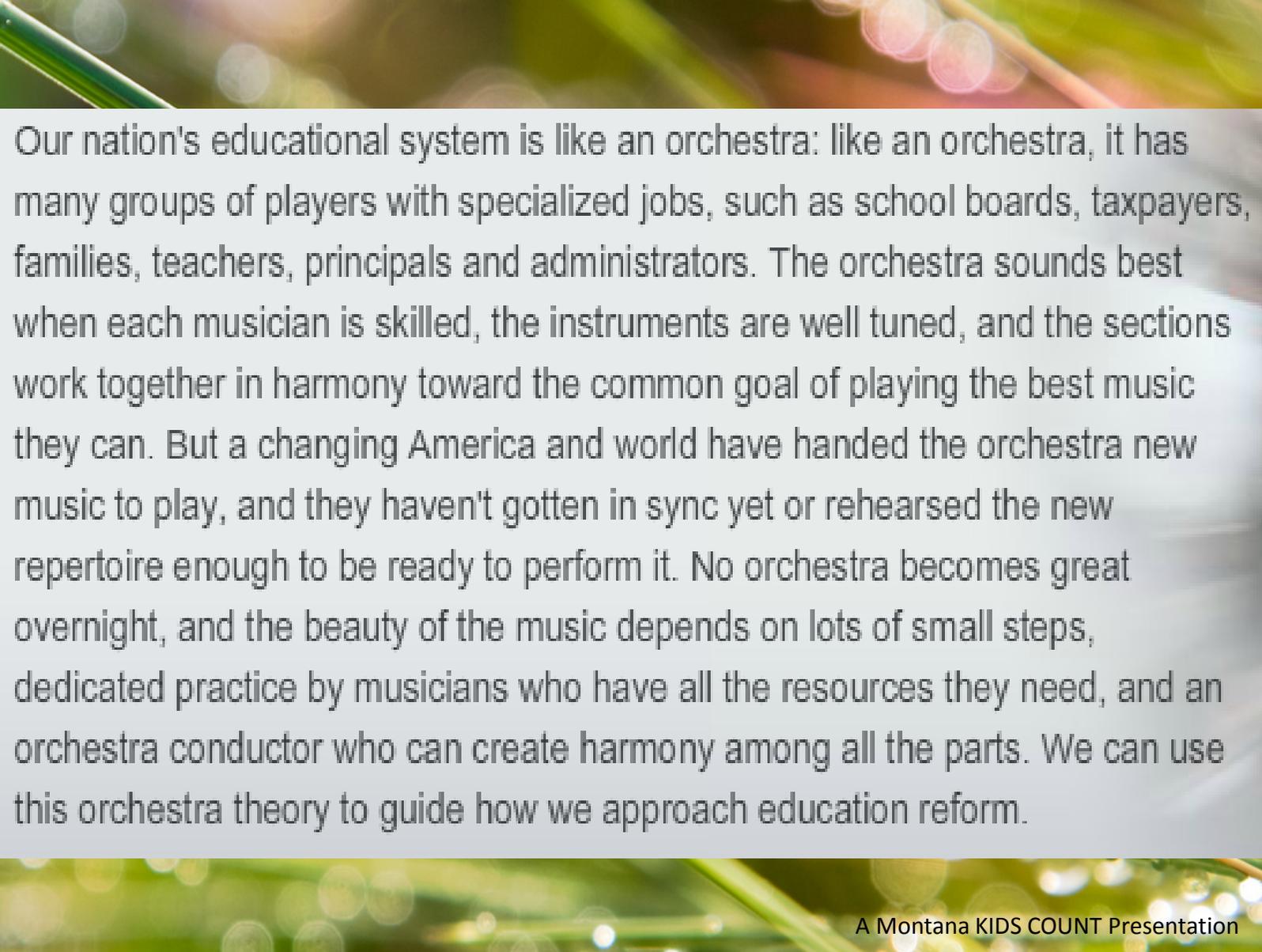
EXAMPLE: the heart as a pump

Another Example:

American high schools fail to graduate one out of every three of their students. It's as if an overnight mail services failed to deliver a third of its packages on time. Would that company stay in business?

(Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation)





Our nation's educational system is like an orchestra: like an orchestra, it has many groups of players with specialized jobs, such as school boards, taxpayers, families, teachers, principals and administrators. The orchestra sounds best when each musician is skilled, the instruments are well tuned, and the sections work together in harmony toward the common goal of playing the best music they can. But a changing America and world have handed the orchestra new music to play, and they haven't gotten in sync yet or rehearsed the new repertoire enough to be ready to perform it. No orchestra becomes great overnight, and the beauty of the music depends on lots of small steps, dedicated practice by musicians who have all the resources they need, and an orchestra conductor who can create harmony among all the parts. We can use this orchestra theory to guide how we approach education reform.

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

3. CAUSAL CHAINS

Addresses issues with understanding.



ELEMENTS OF A CAUSAL CHAIN?

INITIAL FACTOR



MEDIATING FACTOR



**FINAL
CONSEQUENCE**

HOW IT WORKS:

Health care costs and increases in property values are putting both out of reach of many people once considered middle income.



HOW IT WORKS:

Middle-income people are struggling economically

INITIAL FACTOR

because of increases in health care and housing costs,

MEDIATING FACTOR

which weakens the economic vitality of local communities.

FINAL CONSEQUENCE

INTEGRITY IN DATA USE

***“There are three kinds of lies:
lies, damned lies, and statistics.”***

Benjamin Disraeli, British PM 1874-1880

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