

Advancing Performance, Meeting Practical Needs



GARY COMER YOUTH CENTER

QUOTES COURTESY AYOKA NOELLE MOTA SAMUELS • CENTER DIRECTOR

Gary Comer Youth Center in Chicago, Illinois reaches over 1,700 youth each year with a wide array of programs designed to provide enrichment, education, and employment readiness. The Center’s leaders were interested in finding a better system to track attendance, membership, and program-based data as well as in a tool that would position their staff to be able to report back to funders and other key stakeholders more readily. With over 300 youth and 30 program staff in and out of the Center each day, they needed a user-friendly system and to be able to hit the ground running with its launch. Exact Change Strategies (ECS) was able to partner with Center leaders to build a custom data system that met their goals and expectations – and take it a step further by helping them envision and design an overarching Performance Management Framework to carry all aspects of their work forward.

“We really grew to trust ECS. Our first impression was that they really know what they are doing! It was extremely helpful to have them walk through this project with us. They hear what you’re trying to do and help you figure out how to build a system that gets you what you want.”



Gary Comer Youth Center opened in 2006 in the Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side and has been recognized by The White House as a model of innovation. They are an Exelon Stay in School Site and receive other funding from United Way, City of Chicago, and Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Gary Comer Youth Center is dedicated to helping youth pursue their passions in a safe and supportive environment that prepares them for college and a future career. Located on a large education campus, the Center provides programming 7 days a week for youth in 3rd grade all the way through college graduation in the following areas:

- Leadership and social development
- Academic support and college preparation
- College support and success through UtmostU
- Teen employment
- Visual and performing arts
- Media and technology
- Urban agriculture and culinary arts
- Sports, fitness, and recreation

The Center also offers *Uplift* adult programming and events aimed at parents, caregivers, older adults, and other local community residents. They were looking for a custom Efforts to Outcomes® (ETO) system to help them coordinate and track all of their program and administrative efforts. ►

“The [Performance Management] Frameworks are great! We use them all the time. Also, setting us up in ETO with custom reports have proven to be greatly beneficial.”

Building the Plane While Flying It

ECS worked with Center Director Ayoka Samuels and others on her team to build a streamlined ETO system. Prior to that, the Center was using one data system for attendance, one for membership, and standalone spreadsheets to meet grant and other reporting requirements. These processes were not only inefficient and tedious, they did not allow Center leaders and staff to assess their progress toward their larger program goals and mission in a systematic manner.

While designing and building the complete system, ECS was also able to prioritize the Center’s immediate needs so that programs could operate smoothly and collect critical data. Typically, ECS starts by leading its customers through a Discovery process to help them identify their performance and programmatic goals so that these are reflected in the final data system. While this project did include Discovery, the Center also needed ECS to delve right into content building so that the attendance, enrollment, and membership monitoring portions of the ETO platform could be launched quickly. “We were building the plane while flying it,” Ms. Samuels said, “but we did go back to finishing the Framework.” ECS was able to stay flexible and responsive to the organization.

During the Discovery process, Center leaders became excited about the Performance Management Framework as they saw its potential to capture information on key organizational goals and data points. This was information that the Center had always wanted to capture, but didn’t have the tools or methods to do so consistently and strategically. By the end of this phase of the project, the Center had a framework that could meet their daily practical needs as well as measure progress toward a larger vision for the youth and families that they serve. The Framework served as the foundation for building their ETO data system, including the custom reporting options that ECS was able to include. ▶



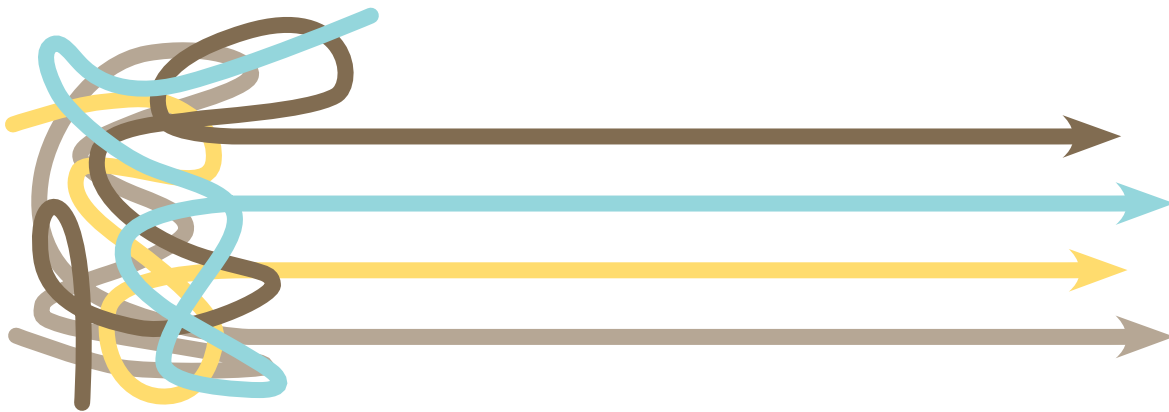
“I think that this work is extremely important and that all nonprofits should have a performance management system like this.”

Impacts and New Insights

Just two months out from full implementation of their new system, the Center is seeing visible impacts and a renewed sense of confidence in their work. They now know that their program data is both timely and accurate, something that also helps with fundraising and strategic oversight. A year ago, Center staff were managing program enrollment and grant reporting manually, sometimes by hand. Now, instead of compiling data from a variety of sources, staff of all levels have one place to turn to when entering or retrieving data. The membership team relies on the system to track membership dues, how their members use the Center, and more. The grants team can create up-to-date reports quickly and easily in order to be more effective in securing funding and interfacing with funders. Front line staff can manage program enrollment and review attendance in their classes. Finally, Center leadership can readily view a snapshot of programming and performance indicators.

The Center learned many lessons along the way when working with ECS. They learned the value of performance management and how important it is to have buy in from all levels of an organization – from top leadership down – when designing and implementing ▶

“In terms of evaluation, [the system] is great. It lets you know if you’re doing a good job or not. If you are, how can you duplicate or recreate that? Or if you’re not, why not? You can pinpoint your efforts and use your resources wisely to get the results you want to see.”



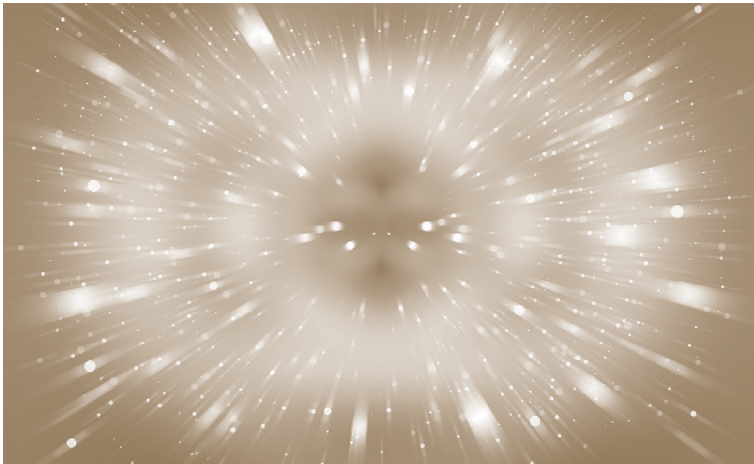
“The ETO system was a blank canvas and we didn’t know how to begin, so it was really helpful to have a consultant helping us frame what we wanted it to be. At first, we were novices. We had to take things slowly. The ECS team was patient and would explain things as many times as we needed them to.”

“ECS is a thoughtful and goal-driven firm. You are sure to set up a reliable pathway to achieve your goals with their consultation and expertise.”

Key Figures and Statistics About Gary Comer Youth Center

- **450** teens and young adults employed annually with Gary Comer Youth Center
- **1,700** youth served annually
- A member/partner in over **20** community collaborations
- **98%** high school graduation rate
- **90%** college acceptance rate
- Over **200** youth are served a healthy hot meal daily
- An average of **30,000** pounds of food is grown annually from the GCYC gardens; **75%** of the produce is distributed into the community focusing on the areas deemed nationally as food deserts.

a Performance Management Framework and system. They learned that a patient and knowledgeable partner such as ECS is key when entering unknown territory, a partner who can support them as needed and teach them best practices on how to use and maximize the system on their own into the future. Finally, they learned that there are ways to clearly see the impact their hard work and limited resources are having, something that is invaluable and will support them in years to come. ●



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SPECIAL THANKS to Ayoka Samuels, A. J. Vanderpool, and everyone at Gary Comer Youth Center

CONTACT

Exact Change Strategies • contact@exactchangestrategies.com
512-693-9339 • www.exactchangestrategies.com