

Design Studio for Community Solutions: Evaluation Report

May 15, 2024

Submitted by: Elizabeth K. Anthony, PhD, Associate Professor

Introduction to Evaluation

The Design Studio for Community Solutions (DSCS) sought to evaluate their suite of programs to (a) highlight impact, (b) uncover areas for growth, and (c) start documenting evidence that could lead to the development and documentation of best practices.

The evaluation uncovered:

- 1) Best practices and processes for community engagement
- 2) Data demonstrating the impact of the initiative for the community, and
- 3) Areas of growth/unmet need

This evaluation report summarizes the qualitative (interviews and focus groups) and quantitative data (surveys) gathered over the course of the year. Specifically, the evaluation team created quantitative surveys that were administered at the beginning of the program year to youth and parents participating in the programs. In early spring 2024, the evaluation team conducted 6 individual qualitative interviews and 2 focus groups to more effectively understand the impact of the DSCS initiatives.

Survey Data Summary

Surveys were developed and administered for each of the DSCS program offerings: 1) Youth Leadership, 2) Financial Literacy, 3) Western School for Technology and Science, and 4) ASU classes.

Youth Leadership Survey Results

The Youth Leadership Program is a student-led program that seeks to develop leadership and community advocacy in young people.

Based on the survey responses from 14 youth participants in the Youth Leadership Program, it is clear that the program has had a significant impact on their personal growth, community engagement, and aspirations for the future.

What They've Learned: Participants highlighted learning valuable skills such as communication, teamwork, community awareness, and confidence building. One participant noted:

"What I have learned from being in youth leadership is how to communicate/develop ideas with other people to make something creative/new or to fix an issue."

Another emphasized:

"The determination of wanting change can be so powerful and to never give up and change really can happen if you are determined."

Interests and Goals: Many participants expressed interest in pursuing community projects, particularly the mural project, and are eager to continue contributing to their neighborhoods. One participant stated:

"I love how we're working on a mural to help show more of what Maryvale is about and I would love to do anything that involves working together to form/develop something that will help/support our city/neighborhood and its people."

Impact on Relationships: The program has strengthened relationships, both within the program itself and with family and friends. Participants feel more confident, social, and connected to their communities as a result of their involvement. One participant shared:

"As far as relationships go, I feel that I have made a lot of new wonderful friends and love working with them, so much!"

Leadership Style: Participants leaned towards a transformational leadership style, where leaders seek to inspire and motivate their team through shared vision and charisma. One participant described their leadership approach, saying:

"Yes, 100% because working in the internship has exposed me to new ways I can interact with people."

Satisfaction and Value: Overall, participants are highly satisfied with the program, finding it valuable in terms of personal growth, leadership development, and community engagement. One participant expressed:

"I feel incredibly happy and honored to be a part of this experience."

Application to Real Life: Participants have applied their learnings to real-life situations, such as college applications, community involvement, and communication skills in school and presentations. One participant noted:

"I learned what canvassing is, another word in my vocabulary."

Community Engagement: All participants feel equipped to be more actively involved in their communities due to their participation in the program. One participant confidently stated:

"Yes, 100%."

Challenges and Suggestions: While some encountered challenges, such as time constraints or initial nervousness, most overcame them with support from peers and mentors. Suggestions for improvement include incorporating more personal projects and activities. One participant suggested:

"More personal projects to expand our skills as leaders and engage different ideas."

Final Thoughts: Overall, participants expressed gratitude for the program, highlighting the supportive environment, valuable lessons, and meaningful connections formed. They look forward to continuing their involvement and making a positive impact in their communities.

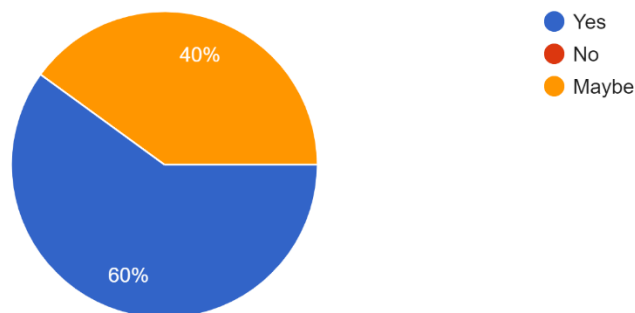
Financial Literacy

The financial literacy program is designed to increase financial knowledge and skills in adults.

Participants were asked a number of questions about their overall relationship to their finances. Overall, financial literacy participants felt confident in their financial knowledge and ability to complete taxes. When asked about future opportunities, 60% indicated they would be interested in attending a free tax event. Saving and investing was the clear top subject participants would like to learn about, with budgeting and data management/reduction coming in a close second.

If we held a free tax-preparation event, would you be interested in attending?

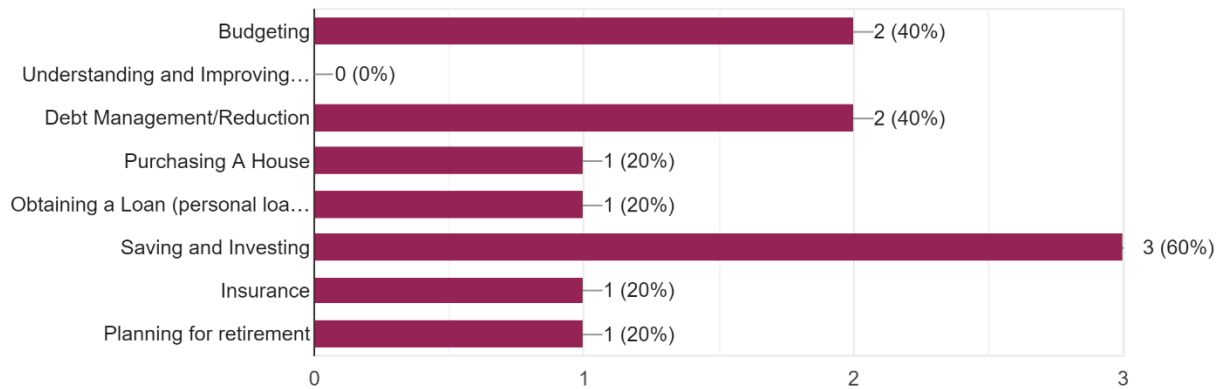
5 responses



Because this was the first year obtaining survey data, we cannot say how much of the program is directly related to knowledge attainment. However, it is significant that participants express confidence and competence with financial resources.

When it comes to finances, I would like to learn more about... (check all that apply)

5 responses



Western School for Technology and Science

Parent/caregiver and student participants were interviewed about their relationship to the school and school services. Overall, parents/caregivers reported feeling connected to the school. Specifically, 100% of the caregivers report feeling welcome at the school, know how to use the school's communication system and know how to monitor grades. Most of the parents know who to talk to if their student needs extra support and how to check attendance. One-hundred percent of the parents felt that teachers care about their students, whereas most of the parents felt the administrators care about their students.

One-hundred percent of the parents felt their student's education is important and they feel like a partner in their child's education. Overall, parents felt their students had good friends at school. There was more disagreement about whether the parent felt the student was in a safe environment, with almost half of the parents indicating "sometimes" and one parent indicating "my kids often say this school gets lockdowns." As far as their own educational attainment, 100% of the parents had a high school degree or GED. Slightly more than half of the parents reported currently being employed. A number of parents indicated it was difficult to make ends meet each month.

As part of the survey, parents were able to select from a range of services they might be interested in receiving, ranging from after school programming, college planning, immigration information, English as a second language and cultural and spiritual services. College planning and financial planning were the most commonly selected, although some parents were interested in most of the options.

ASU Classes

A brief survey assessing the students' knowledge of community-based organizations, Maryvale, the Design Studio and university-community partnerships was created for the ASU class taught by Allison Mullady. This survey will be administered in the future when the appropriate courses are offered.

Community Champions

DSCS currently employs 2 community champions. The [community champions](#) are individuals who come from Maryvale and aspire to give back to their community. This summary examines the common themes discussed by both champions.

Both interviewees share a deep connection with their community and express a passion for their work as community champions. One interviewee highlighted their upbringing in the Maryvale neighborhood and their desire to use art as a means of giving back and promoting positive change. They express a vision of using art to address trauma and engage young people in nature-based activities. Their ultimate goal is to establish their own art studio in Maryvale. They emphasized the importance of embodying art and fostering a sense of community ownership.

On the other hand, the second interviewee emphasized the enjoyment and fulfillment they derive from their role as a community champion. They focus on the positive relationships they've built within the community, particularly with youth and parents. Their goals included seeing tangible progress in community projects, such as murals, and increasing participation from community members, especially children. They expressed satisfaction with the collaboration and communication within their team.

One direct quote that summarizes the first interviewee's perspective is: "I want the young people to embody the painting, not just make a painting." This illustrates their focus on immersive community engagement through art.

From the second interviewee, a succinct summary can be encapsulated with: "Working with a team with the same vision and purpose is amazing! Communication is really good." This highlights their satisfaction with teamwork and effective communication.

Overall, both interviewees conveyed a strong commitment to community building through their roles as champions, albeit with slightly different emphases and approaches.

Youth Leadership Focus Groups

The focus group interviews were conducted on April 16, 2024 at Western School of Science and Technology and revealed the multifaceted impact of the youth leadership program and mural project on the participating students

Engaging in diverse activities such as art, reading, and community involvement brought them joy and fulfillment. Within the program, their roles varied, from volunteering to leading community meetings and brainstorming sessions. One participant emphasized the hands-on nature of the program, highlighting their active involvement in decision-making processes, such as selecting artists for the mural project. This involvement not only enhanced their community skills but also fostered creativity and improved communication abilities, including fluency in English.

The mural project served as a platform for personal growth, as students felt more comfortable collaborating with city officials and tackling challenges as a group. Despite facing obstacles like busy schedules, their strong bond and support system within the group helped them overcome difficulties. Through the project, students developed a newfound connection to their community, with one participant expressing a shift from detachment to genuine care and understanding for their neighborhood.

This young person described the transformative process eloquently:

“I was originally detached from my community... But as a leader now I care about my community and understand it. It’s part of my identity. I really care about and understand my community.” - Youth Leadership Participant, ASU DSCS at Watts College

The program's emphasis on teamwork and leadership not only boosted confidence but also opened up new opportunities, such as summer employment and internships. Participants noted the program's uniqueness in its supportive environment, blending art and leadership to beautify their community. Creating the mural together was a particularly rewarding experience, offering tangible evidence of their efforts and progress.

Unexpected discoveries included members of the community being willing to engage and the rich history of their neighborhood, adding depth to their understanding of Maryvale. Looking ahead, students were eager to apply their newfound skills and insights, particularly in unveiling the mural and navigating the complexities of community-city collaboration. The program not only empowered these young leaders but also instilled in them a sense of responsibility and pride in shaping their community's future.

Community Partner Interviews

Individual interviews with 4 community partners were conducted in January and February 2024. Across the interviews, there was a consistent theme of high satisfaction and effective collaboration with [One Square Mile](#). This satisfaction is underscored by direct quotes such as, "The partnership is very high quality. No concerns at all," and "Very satisfied. One of the main reasons I am satisfied is that they go above and beyond all the time." This indicates a strong sense of trust and reliability in the partnerships.



Effective communication emerged as a cornerstone of these collaborations, with interviewees noting responsiveness and clarity in their interactions. One interviewee expressed this sentiment by stating, "Communication is great. I'm pretty good with communication and they are responsive." This highlights the importance of clear channels of communication in fostering successful partnerships.

Additionally, a shared vision and common goals between One Square Mile and the partner organizations are evident. The alignment of objectives is emphasized in quotes like, "100% serving the same community in ways that are culturally appropriate for our population." This alignment suggests a cohesive approach to addressing community needs and challenges.

Despite the differences in the specific focus areas of the partnerships, such as providing [volleyball classes](#) or dropout prevention efforts, all interviews emphasize the positive impact of the collaborations on their respective communities. This indicates that while the initiatives may vary, the overarching goal of community betterment remains consistent.

In summary, the partnerships with One Square Mile are characterized by high levels of satisfaction, effective communication, alignment of goals, and a shared commitment to community welfare. These elements form the foundation for successful collaborations that contribute positively to the communities they serve.

Summary and Implications for Future Evaluation

Overall, the evaluation findings support the effectiveness of the community collaborations and the individual services. Key stakeholders shared a common perspective of dedication to the community and communication from the DSCS staff. Both students and adults expressed satisfaction with the DSCS services and knowledge and skills gained from the programs.

Data Supported Best Practices Include:

1. Constant communication is essential for effective program implementation.
2. Building trust and rapport is critical and is not a step in the process of implementation that can be sped up or skipped.
3. While the programs are currently at the request of the community, some community members would like to know more from Design Studio for Community Solutions about what Watts College and ASU can offer. The community still has considerable unmet needs.
4. Having staff members (Community Champions) who are from the community, whenever possible, is a huge asset to implementation.

Recommendations Include:

1. Continuous quantitative data collection.

The evaluation team created the framework for a continuous quantitative evaluation program. This summer, the team can adapt the current survey for the specific needs of the programs and prepare for implementation in the fall. Prior evaluation experience suggests the community will become more familiar and comfortable with data collection over time and the quality of the data will improve.

2. Periodic qualitative data collection.

While annual evaluation data is critical, it is important to also conduct periodic interviews to assess progress toward individual program goals.

3. Continuous updating of data summary spreadsheet (summary of outputs and outcomes) to keep current.

The spreadsheet can be useful in evaluation reports and new grant applications.