

## Benchmarking Success

### EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

The Dare Mighty Things process to identify and adapt best practices is a proven means of replicating success. It applies to the transfer of processes and procedures among existing programs, as well as the ability to quickly launch new programs with reduced risk and higher probability of achieving successful outcomes.

### BENCHMARKING SUCCESS

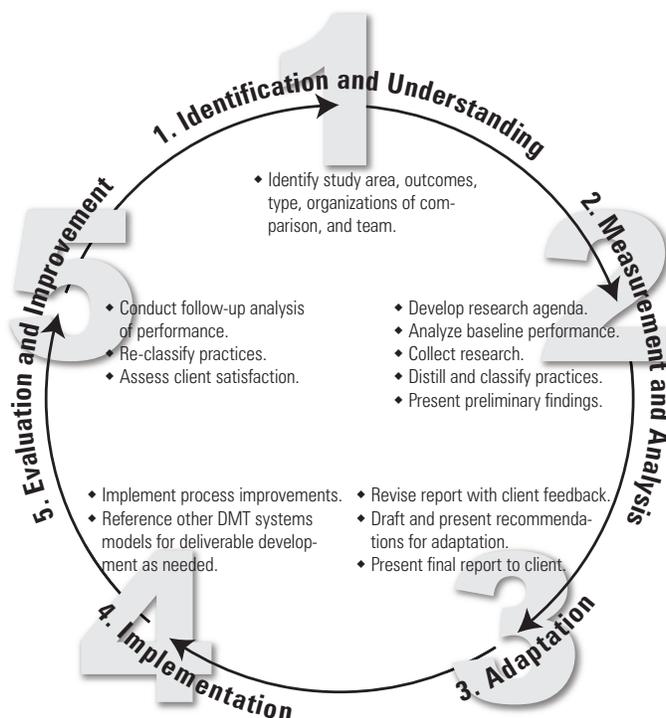
- ✓ Identify
- ✓ Capture
- ✓ Distill
- ✓ Relate
- ✓ Transfer
- ✓ Implement

### BENCHMARKING APPROACH

Benchmarking allows organizations to determine how to make improvements or adopt best practices, usually with the aim of increasing one or more aspects of performance. The “high tide” of exemplary performance, when captured and shared through replicable processes and procedures, “raises all ships.” The process and major actions shown in the figure below has evolved over time based on our experience working with the government and nonprofit programs. The key outcomes and phases in the process are summarized below:

#### Phase 1: Identification and Understanding.

*Key outcome:* an actionable plan that is specifically tailored to help the program, organization, or network improve performance and achieve important outcomes.



#### Phase 2: Measurement and Analysis.

*Key outcome:* a report that highlights the process being benchmarked, the study methodology, and the best practices and promising innovations unearthed. Each report will distill practices into actionable items.

#### Phase 3: Adaptation.

*Key outcome:* a charter or actionable plan for incorporating the study practices into the program or organizational culture, including step-by-step procedures and timelines, when appropriate.

#### Phase 4: Implementation.

*Key outcome:* implement the plan identified in the previous phase. The plan may include technical assistance, training courses, workshops, resources for a community of practice website, etc.

#### Phase 5: Evaluation and Improvement.

*Key outcome:* evaluation and validation for practices, ability to re-classify practices and distill new best practices based on new program results.

Benchmarking provides a higher return on investment for new programs since it leverages the experience of others. The essential elements are objective data collection, systematic analysis, effective distillation of knowledge and experiences, and a wide range of avenues for distributing best practices and promising innovations to others. Distribution can be through electronic communities of practice, workshops and conferences, webinars, and blended learning through on-line and classroom training.

## **EXAMPLES OF BENCHMARKING IN ACTION**

### **InnerChange**

InnerChange is a nationally acclaimed, faith-based, volunteer-driven prison program to reduce recidivism that was successfully tested in Texas and Iowa, and through application of proven best practices, has been replicated in various countries around the world. DMT was tasked with leading the venture and was hired to explore potential sites; develop a comprehensive plan; build donor support; create a viable model; develop operational materials and deliver training sessions; hire staff; and manage the program during the start-up phase. Results indicated considerable progress toward serving the incarcerated population as a result of the program, and demonstrated that faith-based partnerships between government and the church are possible and effective.

### **National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program**

Youth ChalleNGe is a seventeen month program targeting high school dropouts in twenty-six states. Over 100,000 youth have successfully completed the five month residential phase and year long mentoring-based, post-residential phase of the program. In 1994, DMT developed a mentor training curriculum for the Post-Residential Phase of the ChalleNGe program. This project quickly became the foundation for a new mentoring model based on evidence-based programs, a consistent set of national standards, operational materials, and mentor and mentee training. This mentoring program is the recipient of two national awards and is recognized as the second largest mentoring program in the nation. Among other outcomes, a study released in 2009 by the research group MDRC revealed that ChalleNGe graduates are much more likely than the control group to have a GED or diploma (25% higher) and to be working or attending college (6% higher).

### **Mentoring Children of Prisoners**

DMT led the Mentoring Children of Prisoners (MCP) Technical Assistance Center (TAC), providing intensive training and technical assistance to MCP grantees nationwide. When DMT became the MCP TAC, grantees were struggling to meet their match goals. The MCP TAC hit the ground running by immediately assessing grantees' needs and provided expert training and TA based on best practices in mentoring and serving families impacted by incarceration. DMT created a community of grantees through national conferences, workshops, e-publications, and individualized TA consultations. Grantees flourished and the number of matches grew dramatically. In September 2005, when DMT was awarded the TA contract, grantees had made less than 14,000 matches since the initiative began. Three years later, the program exceeded the president's goal of 100,000 matches in 2008.

### **Compassionate Capital Fund and Intermediary Organizations**

DMT's support of the White House Office for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives reflects another recent example of our effectiveness in spreading best practices. In 2008, at the request of the White House and Department of Health and Human Services, DMT identified successful organizations and their practices, planned and facilitated a summit, and developed a guidebook, Breakthrough Performance: Ten Emerging Practices of Leading Intermediaries. The guidebook has been distributed through government and nonprofit organizations. Intermediary organizations exposed to these practices and supported by the DMT National Resource Center under the Compassion Capital Fund are producing measurable results. An independent study by Abt Associates reported in early 2007 that the intermediaries were crucial to the success of capacity building. Among the results: 50% started new programs; 67% increased capacity to seek and diversify funding; 74% served more clients; 79% improved financial stability; 88% improved client outcomes; and 90% improved services.