

## PropelNext

helps promising

youth-serving

organizations

transform

the futures of

disadvantaged

young people.

Focusing on using

data to learn

and improve,

PropelNext's

grantees develop

the mastery to

turn their program

visions into reality.



## Results on the Ground

PropelNext engaged Harder+Company Community Research in 2016 to assess the progress of the initiative's grantees, and the early results are encouraging. Since 2012, PropelNext has worked with 30 nonprofits, and 13 from the first cohort completed the three-year program in 2015 (named "PropelNext Alumni 2015"). PropelNext is now nearly two years into working with a second cohort of 15 grantees, all located in California (named "PropelNext California 2018," the year they will graduate).

**Harder+Company's full reports on the Alumni 2015 and California 2018 cohorts are available on the [PropelNext website](#).**

An initial assessment by the evaluation team suggests that two years post-PropelNext, most Alumni 2015 grantees are strengthening the quality of their programs and, with growing revenues, are also expanding services to reach more youth. Early results from the California 2018 cohort suggest a similar trajectory of development. In most instances, PropelNext's emphasis on creating a

data-driven learning culture has taken root and is flourishing.

This summary outlines five gains that PropelNext Alumni 2015 grantees have made since completing the program, as well as the initial progress that current PropelNext California 2018 grantees are making in the same areas.

- **PROGRAM QUALITY IS DEEPENING.** PropelNext grantees are strengthening their programs and focusing on serving young people more effectively. For example, all 12 Alumni 2015 grantees that participated in the study, guided by data, are able to reach their target populations more precisely and are delivering appropriate program components and dosage more strategically. Maintaining program fidelity is always a challenge, so better data helps organizations improve programs quickly and operate them with fidelity. Many alumni have expanded services while maintaining and even strengthening quality.

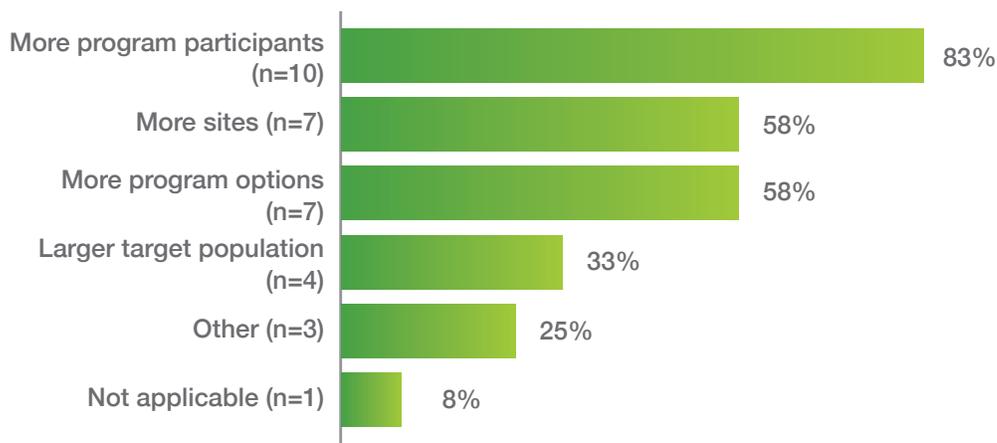
**How it works:** The process of developing a theory of change is one of the first steps in PropelNext. In this phase, grantees draw on the latest evidence, think more analytically about the design and implementation of their program models, and identify the kinds of data they need to become more strategic and intentional. One-on-one coaching is also an essential ingredient for transforming learning into practice.

**One alumnus said the theory of change “helps us understand what’s important and what we need to really pay attention to versus traveling down rabbit holes or getting caught up in white noise.”**

Although it is early, we are seeing California 2018 grantees adopt similar approaches to program quality and implementation. As the report indicates, these organizations are making tough but critical decisions about their programs’ target populations, activities and outcomes. These grantees are also investing time and resources to bolster their staffs and execute at this higher level.

- **MORE YOUTH ARE BENEFITING FROM SERVICES.** As a result of having a deeper understanding of their program models, alumni believe they are better equipped to pursue strategic opportunities and expand their programs with confidence in their quality. Ten of the 12 Alumni 2015 grantees have increased the number of youth they serve since completing PropelNext’s three-year program, and seven organizations have expanded to new sites to reach more youth.

### How alumni have expanded programming since completing PropelNext (n=12)



**How it works:** Grantees apply the PropelNext approach to programs and planning throughout their organizations, enabling them to expand programs, improve program quality and infuse a learning culture into their programming.

Though anecdotal, the California 2018 grantees have shared examples of how they are collaborating in new ways, as a result of PropelNext, to extend their impact. For example, one grantee is training others in its innovative coaching model in order to better serve youth, and helping three fellow grantees in California implement its approach.

- **REVENUES ARE GROWING.** The organizational and programmatic improvements PropelNext grantees are implementing have resulted in increased financial resources. Ten of 12 Alumni 2015 grantees have increased their total revenue through new and expanded partnerships with funders, with seven having increased it by up to 25 percent and the remainder growing revenues even further.

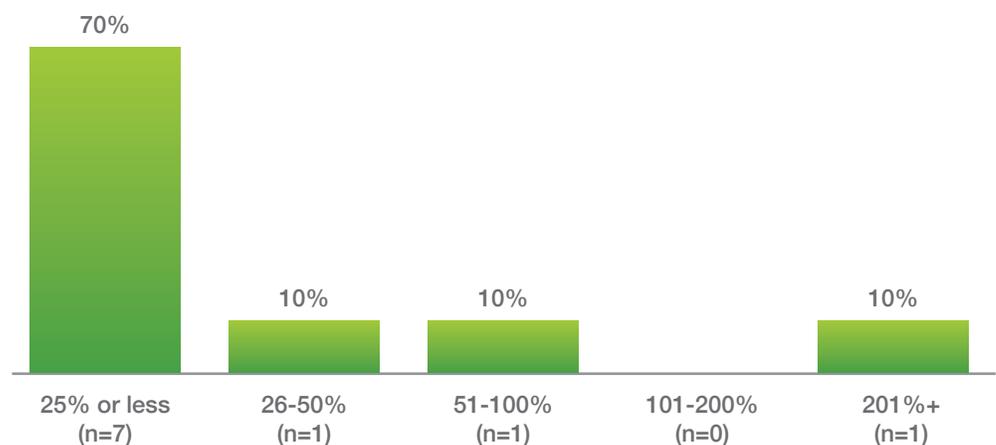
**“Our PropelNext experience contributed significantly to our ability to expand into a new community... from a standpoint of feeling confident that we could continue to deliver services and not undermine quality or impact.”**

**“We’re consistently asking ourselves, ‘Is this the right data? Is this giving us the information we need to answer these questions?’ Those were questions we weren’t asking before.”**

**How it works:** Nearly all grantees say that participating in PropelNext brought more clarity to their work, and as a result they have better information and are better able to tell their stories. Armed with robust data, grantees are educating their funders about how they are deepening their approach and doing business differently. The process requires a long-term perspective because it takes time to acquire the new skills that translate into greater resources.

While it is too early to tell whether the California 2018 grantees will see a similar trend, new opportunities have arisen as a result of PropelNext. For example, two grantees in the California 2018 group partnered with a nonprofit from the Alumni 2015 cohort to win the release of \$1 million in previously unused funds for transitional age youth in San Francisco.

### How alumni have grown revenues since completing PropelNext (n=10)



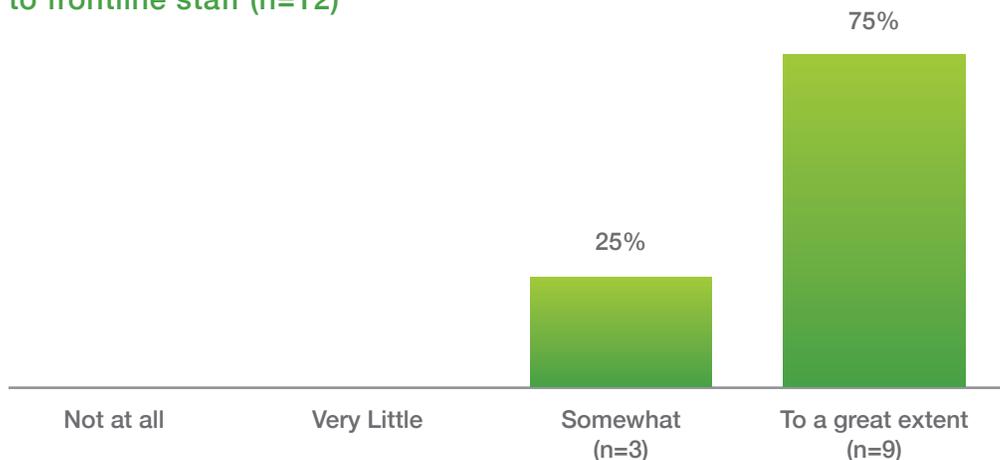
- **DECISIONS ARE BEING GUIDED BY DATA.** PropelNext grantees have embraced the importance of building and integrating learning and evaluation teams into their operations. Only 42 percent of Alumni 2015 grantees did this before PropelNext. In addition, many Alumni 2015 grantees have expanded these teams and elevated key learning and evaluation staff members to their executive teams. They now have more capacity to collect and use data continually to guide program improvement.

**How it works:** Through PropelNext, grantees receive flexible funding that allows them to add staff capacity, upgrade performance management systems, and engage coaches to help them learn how to use these tools effectively – funding that is generally unavailable to nonprofits at their stage of development. Alumni 2015 grantees describe coaching as one of the most valuable resources they gained through PropelNext.

All the California 2018 grantees are also investing in new capacity in this area such as staff and data systems, though the report on California PropelNext 2018 notes more time will be needed to determine the extent to which these nonprofits are putting these concepts into practice.

- **CULTURES OF LEARNING AND INQUIRY ARE INSTITUTIONALIZED ACROSS ORGANIZATIONS.** PropelNext has catalyzed a culture of learning and inquiry across all levels of staff. Alumni 2015 grantees have restructured staffing and meetings to facilitate learning. In addition, these nonprofits are now hiring and training staff differently, with a greater clarity of purpose, and explaining upfront their expectations and the data-driven learning culture they are building.

**Alumni CEOs say a culture of inquiry has taken hold from leadership to frontline staff (n=12)**



**“The biggest aha for me was really about what capacity it takes,” one executive director reflected. “I don’t just mean the number of people or the types of positions, but who it takes to do this and do it well.”**

**How it works:** PropelNext training and coaching infuse new knowledge, thinking and practices into organizations. Grantees are learning to identify and apply research and evidence to program design and implementation. All staff use data to make programmatic decisions rather than relying on hunches or intuition. Grantees are investing more time in developing senior staff and are redesigning compensation and selection criteria for frontline hires.

Even just one year into the program, leaders of the California 2018 grantees are seeing the influence on their cultures as well. They hear frontline staff ask thoughtful questions, “talk about programmatic decisions based on data and not just ‘hunches,’” focusing on impact instead of only counting inputs.

## Conclusion

**PROPELNEXT GRANTEES ARE RECEIVING GREATER RECOGNITION AS LEADERS IN THEIR FIELDS.** Having the right data and a better understanding of what drives their results, PropelNext grantees from both groups – Alumni 2015 and California 2018 – are more adept at sharing lessons and stories with colleagues and the sector.

Some CEOs of PropelNext Alumni 2015 grantees have been invited to speaking engagements and to contribute to affinity groups; others have led learning and evaluation discussions as part of collaborative and community partnership initiatives.

We believe the organizations PropelNext serves represent the next wave of social sector leadership and innovation. Harder+Company will continue its evaluation of both cohorts in the coming year. We look forward to sharing with you what we learn when the next set of reports is completed.