



Measure4Change Performance Measurement Playbook

*Brett Theodos, Mary Winkler, Peter Tatian, Sara McTarnaghan, Leiha Edmonds,
Somala Diby, Patrick Spauster, and Ananya Hariharan*

Contents

- Contents.....2
- Culture.....5**
- Organizational Commitment.....5
- Racial Equity Approaches7
- Building Blocks 10**
- Logic Models and Theories of Change 10
- Indicators 12
- Target Setting..... 14
- Data Collection..... 16**
- Qualitative Data..... 16
- Surveys..... 19
- Administrative and Secondary Data..... 21
- Client Feedback Loops and Engagement..... 23
- Data Management..... 26**
- Data Management Processes..... 26
- Data Systems..... 28
- Data Quality Assurance 31
- Data Privacy..... 33
- Data Analysis and Communication..... 35**
- Data Analysis and Storytelling..... 35
- Dashboards and Data Visualization..... 37
- From Performance Measurement to Evaluation 39

The Measure4Change Playbook is designed to help nonprofit organizations increase their performance measurement capacity. Doing so allows nonprofits to better engage their clients in decisionmaking, cultivate an organizational culture that values accountability, and strive for equity and inclusion within their organizations and for their clientele.

Who should use the playbook?

Nonprofit staff who oversee or work on performance measurement, data collection and analysis, evaluation, learning, and other related duties. We refer to these staff members as monitoring and evaluation (M&E) staff. Not all these steps can be taken by M&E staff alone. Organizational leaders should be familiar with these processes, too, and support M&E staff in making the organizational changes needed.

How should you use the playbook?

The Measure4Change Playbook is not a roadmap to becoming a data-driven or learning organization. Rather, it describes key milestones in your organization's performance measurement processes and suggests actions you can take to support your journey. Feel free to pick and choose "plays" that work for your organization or identify actions for a wish list that you can implement in the future.

How the playbook is organized

The playbook is structured into 16 topics grouped into 5 areas that serve as the foundation for performance measurement in nonprofits. Each topic is anchored around a discrete set of performance measurement processes and actions (e.g., logic modeling) that represent key milestones in developing organizational capacity. We have organized the processes and actions for each topic into "plays" using the following framework.

- **Lay the groundwork:** actions to take before you develop a specific performance measurement process
- **Develop:** actions to take as you develop the process
- **Vet:** actions to ensure that your process will be effective and sustainable and that others in your organization will support it
- **Use and share:** actions to implement the process
- **Review:** actions to ensure the process remains useful and up to date

About

The Urban Institute and the World Bank Group lead the [Measure4Change initiative](#) to increase the performance measurement capacity of nonprofits in the Washington, DC, area.

This playbook was funded by the World Bank Group and the Citi Foundation. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at urban.org/fundingprinciples.

We also thank the nonprofit members of our community of practice; they continually motivate us to develop relevant and accessible content to better serve nonprofits. From these organizations, we have gained invaluable knowledge and insight into nonprofit performance measurement. In particular, we want to thank Andrea Scallon and Holly Stevens for developing content that inspired the playbook. We also thank the Measure4Change Advisory Council for their guidance on this product and Laura Belazis, Isaac Castillo, Kristin Lucero-Golden, Holly Stevens, and Tiffani Truss for their close review and edits.

Measure4Change also thanks Urban Institute experts for lending their expertise to our curriculum and community of practice: Doug Murray, Jon Schwabish, Leah Hendey, Molly Scott, Sarah Gillespie, and Tim Triplett.

Funding for developing the ideas in this playbook came from the World Bank Group, Citi Foundation, and Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Culture

This section shares key processes and milestones that will help your organization build a data-driven culture and integrate racial equity approaches.

Organizational Commitment

Building a high-capacity learning culture takes work and the dedication of time and resources. Staff members from leadership to frontline workers need to understand the value and use of data to establish the required institutional “buy-in.” Collecting data to comply with funders’ requirements for tracking participants does not equate to an organizational culture of performance measurement. Achieving a learning culture requires that staff understand how data are collected and analyzed and how that analysis informs program refinement and strategy, supporting your organization’s long-term outcomes for the clients you serve. Organizational culture looks different for every nonprofit, but this section shares key processes and milestones that help build a data-driven culture.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- Assess your current staff capacity for managing data and learning activities. Map which staff hold responsibilities for data stewardship, performance measurement, and learning activities, and identify any gaps.
- Consider dedicated staff positions for data stewardship, performance measurement, and learning activities. With limited capacity, create a plan to identify which staff hold each of these responsibilities.
- Design a management structure where at least one of these staff members reports directly to senior leadership.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities around data and performance measurement for staff members who do not work on monitoring and evaluation.
- Work with human resource staff to include appropriate performance measurement functions in job descriptions and performance reviews for all staff.
- Create a consistent vocabulary around your organization’s use of data so that all staff share understanding of performance measurement concepts and terms.

DEVELOP

- ❑ Develop training and identify professional development opportunities for staff who may have limited data literacy.
- ❑ Develop an organization-wide dashboard or system for monitoring performance. Tailor the format, data visualization techniques, and level of detail to the needs of various audiences (e.g., leadership, staff, other stakeholders).
- ❑ Market yourself (as a monitoring and evaluation staff person) internally as a resource for training, and use training opportunities to demonstrate for staff how data systems and reporting may enhance their own work. This may involve extra work to become available and approachable to staff who are not familiar with you.

VET

- ❑ Identify champions and change agents in your organization. These are individuals or groups that act as your allies in your mission to build a data-driven culture. Champions and change agents can help you translate the vision and value of being a data-driven organization to their peers, senior leadership, and board members.
- ❑ Address staff members' resistance or fears around increased data collection. Have you explained why you are collecting data? Do staff see how the data you collect lead to beneficial program change or increased funding? Are staff given training and compensation if asked to increase their workload to include more intensive data work?
- ❑ Facilitate routine engagement with data among staff, senior leaders, and board members to gain their support. They ultimately enforce how data are collected and used to make organizational decisions. For example, you might take the following actions:
 - Lead a data retreat with staff and board members.
 - Dedicate time at regular departmental, all-staff, executive, and board meetings to discuss performance measurement and continuous improvement. Use tools like data dashboards to help facilitate those discussions and share data across all departments as necessary.
 - Identify data “champions” across departments to advocate for data across the organization; meet with champions regularly

USE AND SHARE

- ❑ Model how your organization can use data for decisionmaking. For example, spotlight data in meetings, share success stories, and use data to inform decisions at the executive level.
- ❑ Train all levels of staff in how to use your data system to execute their jobs.
- ❑ Connect staff with other data literacy professional development opportunities.
- ❑ Share resources and training opportunities that your colleagues can leverage for professional development.

REVIEW

- ❑ Review data-use processes at least annually with each program lead and senior leadership and revise as needed.

Racial Equity Approaches

To continuously improve nonprofits' services and support staff, many organizations are increasingly interested in adopting racial equity and inclusion (REI) approaches while also becoming more data driven. By measuring the impacts of systemic racism to inform systems change, internally auditing unconscious bias to improve both staff members' and clients' experiences, and developing metrics to measure interventions that combat structural racism, nonprofits can connect REI and performance measurement to collectively inform the decisionmaking and strategies that impact an organization's mission. While other sections of the playbook help you imbue your organization's REI lens specifically in survey design or indicator development, this section focuses on foundational principles.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- ❑ Identify opportunities to engage leadership and build internal processes around REI that can also help your organization improve its measurement and evaluation work.
 - Seize the opportunity presented by major milestones such as strategic process implementation or data system overhauls.
 - Meet with leadership and boards, give presentations, and bring in external speakers to build excitement and belief that investing in REI is critical to your organization's mission (if REI is not already a part of your organization's thinking).
 - Seek out training and professional development opportunities for monitoring and evaluation staff related to racial equity in data and nonprofit services.
- ❑ Assess existing infrastructure and reporting practices.
 - How does REI show up in your suite of performance measurement tools (e.g., logic models, surveys, data dashboards)?
 - Are there opportunities to easily improve outdated or racialized language used in surveys or to frame long-term outcomes to explicitly identify racial equity goals?
 - Should you reexamine reporting practices to identify updates that will improve data quality?
 - Assess the demographics and lived experiences of your staff. Do you have a diverse, inclusive staff? Who is not represented among your staff? How might this affect your work?
- ❑ Consider seeking diverse opinions about how REI can inform measurement and evaluation practices and vice versa. Democratizing performance measurement brings more ideas to the table.
 - Offer clients and nonmanagement staff leadership opportunities, as well as opportunities to participate in developing more equitable outcomes or improving intake forms.
 - Emphasize continuous improvement to give the staff the space to provide feedback and critiques on current practices and offer new ideas for incorporating REI and antiracist practice into all parts of measurement and evaluation.
 - Search for opportunities to have conversations with funders or management about improving metrics to reflect your organization's REI lens.

DEVELOP

- ❑ Expand data analysis to include disaggregation for variant outcomes; race and place are key areas to examine.
- ❑ Create processes to evaluate and mitigate racialized collection bias.
 - Review surveys, intake forms, and questionnaire language and update data collection tools to reflect your REI lens.
 - Review client assessment tools administered by staff and identify areas for subjective assessment. Modify assessment framing when possible. Bring in experts to hold unconscious bias training for staff. Promote accountability by tracking how staff assess clients, disaggregating data by race, gender, or other relevant variables to detect bias.
 - Invite clients' feedback on data collection tools through interviews or focus groups. Create opportunities for clients to review data collection tools and offer insights on whether language could be improved to be more respectful.
- ❑ Add secondary data about the community you serve to dashboards to situate program data in context or to inform program improvements that will help you meet larger needs that program data might not pick up.
- ❑ Create additional research questions or hypotheses about how structural racism affects clients and begin data collection and analysis to better understand the issues.
- ❑ Expand partnerships beyond a program. That is, work with your referral network or other organizations in your sector to recognize shared challenges and collective solutions to the structural racism issues that affect your work (e.g., limited affordable housing, lack of living-wage jobs, need for child care).
- ❑ Consider creating organization-wide metrics that track how you influence and improve systems-level issues. Improvements could include partnerships across your city or service sector (e.g., food access) that promote changing policy or municipal practices; client testimony; and data sharing with advocate partners to help illuminate issues clients face, such as limited public transportation or punitive arrears practices.

VET

- ❑ Continue to engage with clients about improving the data collection process, and build your feedback loop process as detailed in the [Client Feedback Loops and Engagement section](#).
- ❑ Pilot new data collection tools or dashboards with staff and request feedback.
- ❑ Meet with community partners or similar organizations to discuss data alignment or ideas to better elevate REI in your organization's measurement and evaluation.
- ❑ Bring in consultants, if appropriate, to assess areas of performance measurement that can be improved and to provide guidance on updating documents.

USE AND SHARE

- Build off your pilot work by redesigning data collection tools or dashboards to incorporate staff feedback and expand to more programs.
- Analyze and discuss disaggregated data with staff and share their new insights with leadership.
- Update and share outreach material to reflect program improvements that incorporate REI.
- Be ambitious. Insights from your organization's service work can feed into advocacy work to address structural inequality. Share your aggregate data with organizations working to improve policies that impact clients.

REVIEW

- Continue to update programming based on REI data and new analysis.
- Offer yourself (as a monitoring and evaluation staff person) as a resource for your organization or teams when they are expanding their REI work.
- Continue working with partners to share data and measure your organization's contribution to addressing structural racism at the city or neighborhood level.
- Keep the conversation going with funders to inform how REI metrics can improve program performance and support goals for both clients and the organization.

Building Blocks

These tools help nonprofits identify what they are interested in measuring and how to track these indicators.

Logic Models and Theories of Change

A logic model is a tool that helps convey a program or project in a brief visual format. A theory of change articulates the underlying beliefs and assumptions that guide a program's or organization's strategy. Both tools can set the foundation for shared language, belief, and processes for program improvement, establish organizational priorities, and help manage resources. Programmatic mappings can guide an organization through its components, from inputs to outputs and outcomes. The process can help staff better understand their roles in accomplishing outcomes, improve implementation and management, and succinctly inform outside audiences about how your organization works and what your program is working toward. Organizations can develop a logic model, a theory of change, or both, and there are other formats and tools for mapping organizational activities and goals as well. To simplify the text below, we use the language of "logic models," but the steps work regardless of the tool.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- Identify your audiences (such as program staff, senior leaders, and board members) and brainstorm methods to engage them in logic model development.
- Take stock of your organization's oral and documented history of logic model development. Identify what already exists and how the organization uses it.
- Consider which programs need a logic model. Not all programs require their own logic models but create logic models for programs or groups of programs of sufficient size, scale, relevance, and continuity.
- Look for example logic models from other nonprofits in your sector and beyond. Logic models with similar outcomes may be particularly useful.
- Ground assumptions in research evidence about what works.

DEVELOP

- Involve program staff, senior leaders, and/or board members in logic model development.
- Start with outcomes for each logic model and then work backward to outputs, activities, and inputs. Ensure that the connection between inputs, activities, and outputs makes sense.
- Write your logic model so it is understandable to a broad audience. Wherever possible, avoid program-specific jargon, acronyms only your organization will know, and subjective terms (e.g., adequate, sufficient, appropriate).
- Tailor logic model formats and level of detail to relevant internal and external audiences. Consider alternative visualization approaches like layering or infographics.

- ❑ Map links between each logic model component (activities → outputs → outcomes) as well as links from each component to your metrics and indicators.
- ❑ Involve communications colleagues in graphic design to make your final logic model distinctive and attractive.

VET

- ❑ Review logic models with program staff, organizational leadership (including board members), and clients.
- ❑ Convey to reviewers that building the logic model is a means to an end—of reflecting on program activities and their intended effects—not an end in itself.

USE AND SHARE

- ❑ Ensure all staff review and have access to logic models and that logic models are part of staff onboarding procedures.
- ❑ Post logic models to your organization's website.
- ❑ Don't let your logic models collect dust on your shelf. Refer to logic models in program data review meetings to ensure alignment with logic model and data collection practices.

REVIEW

- ❑ Review logic models annually with each program lead and revise as needed.
- ❑ Review with senior leadership, the board, and clients as needed, but at least every other year.

Indicators

Although a logic model helps identify what your organization is interested in measuring, it does not specify how to track those items. Monitoring and evaluation staff will need to develop indicators—a way to measure what you care about, usually expressed as a number, a percentage, or a rate—for all inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Output indicators track your program’s progress on various services or activities. Outcome indicators track your program’s successes or achievements. Some outcomes are easy to measure, others are not (e.g., graduation rates versus well-being). There are often multiple possible indicators for a single outcome. Sometimes you must settle for an indicator that best represents the outcome; these are sometimes called proxy indicators.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- ❑ Review logic models, and update if needed.
- ❑ Create an inventory of data currently collected by each program and flag which data are collected to satisfy funding and compliance requirements. Document characteristics about the data, including the following:
 - Who collects each dataset or indicator?
 - What are the sources of the data? (Where does the data come from?)
 - How often are the data collected, and when was the most recent time the data were collected?
 - Who enters each dataset or indicator?
 - Where are the data stored?
 - Which data are sensitive or confidential? Are use or disclosure of the data restricted by local, federal, or organizational requirements?
- ❑ Identify the gaps between the data you collect and the data you need to operationalize your logic models. Are there components of your logic models for which you don’t collect data?
- ❑ Identify unnecessary data collection. Are there datasets that you routinely collect out of habit but you don’t analyze or use? If so, cut indicators as necessary.
- ❑ Map out existing reporting methods (e.g., funder reports, internal quarterly or annual reports to program managers, senior leadership, or board members). Examine how useful these reports are and how easy they are to generate and to understand.
- ❑ Examine indicators used by peer organizations and in the field. Take advantage of resources that offer commonly tested indicators such as the [Outcome Indicators Project](#) and [Success Measures](#).

DEVELOP

- ❑ Develop at least one indicator for each input, activity, output, and outcome associated with each logic model component. Be sure to distinguish between output and outcome indicators and refine your logic models according to insight gained when developing indicators.
- ❑ Create indicators that account for ease of access to or availability of data sources, cost to obtain data, time frame, and reporting lags. Keep in mind that a single outcome often has multiple possible indicators. Sometimes you must settle for an indicator that best represents the outcome; these are sometimes called proxy indicators.

- ❑ Define time period, denominators, population, source, and data collection method for each indicator.
- ❑ Identify audiences for each indicator—that is, staff who need or would be helped by seeing indicator data, and use this information to determine your methods for reporting on indicators (e.g., dashboards, quarterly reports, annual reports, board meetings).
- ❑ Describe indicators in relation to data collection processes for the program. Try to use the same language that programs use to describe indicators.
- ❑ Add new indicators to your data inventory, taking care to identify which indicators satisfy contracting requirements.

VET

- ❑ Quality-check your indicators. The SMART criteria (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound) can be helpful here.
- ❑ Collect feedback on your indicators from relevant program staff and leadership, especially staff with data entry, analysis, and reporting responsibilities. Discuss with staff the potential burden and benefit of additional data collection. Ensure staff understand how data collection for their program connects to broader programmatic and organizational goals and outcomes.
- ❑ Triage your desired indicators with your reporting requirements to ensure you are collecting all the data you need, and identify areas of overlap between your performance measurement needs and reporting requirements. Review reporting requirements with development as needed.

USE AND SHARE

- ❑ Generate regular reports with relevant indicators for each audience; develop high-level messages and questions for discussion.
- ❑ Share reports and facilitate discussion about indicators during regular meetings with staff, leadership, and board members.
- ❑ Use indicator data to support program planning processes.

REVIEW

- ❑ Revisit your indicators regularly to make sure they are measuring what they are intended to measure. Ensure you have the capacity to measure all your indicators, and cut, change, or refine your indicators as your measurement priorities change.
- ❑ Update what you collect based on your logic models and feedback from staff and leadership. If data are not getting used or are unreliable, consider changes or stop collecting them. In other words, data collection is not set in stone.

Target Setting

Once monitoring and evaluation staff have developed indicators, others in the organization can join in setting targets for program success. Such target setting allows organizations to compare goals to reality, whether a target is for quarterly enrollment or annual program graduates. Tiering goals into categories such as “safe,” “stretch,” and “ideal” can provide a target range that includes more attainable and loftier goals. Writing a narrative to explain how targets were developed and listing assumptions will help later when you compare target goals to actual performance.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- ❑ Review logic models and performance indicators and update if needed. Ensure that your indicators account for every element of your logic model.
- ❑ Check whether your organization has any experience setting targets. How were previous targets set? Do you have any current targets established (e.g., in grant applications), or were targets set based on other criteria?
- ❑ Introduce the importance of target setting for continuous improvement cycles with your staff and leadership.
- ❑ Assess when target setting can and should happen in your organization’s annual timeline relative to budgeting and fundraising cycles.
- ❑ Consider the feasibility of achieving targets with an eye to available funding and the effort required each time period to achieve targets.
- ❑ Consider the factors that could affect your results, such as economic and demographic trends; community conditions; legislative or regulatory changes; and new policies, procedures, or data systems.

DEVELOP

- ❑ Set targets for input, output, and outcome indicators.
 - Review current and historical data on your program or population. Assess any bias in historical data (see [Racial Equity Approaches](#) section)
 - Review evidence from the field about targets for specific indicators.
 - Estimate future program participation.
 - Estimate results of the program. Program results may initially improve over time, but they may level off, or even decline.
 - Set targets collaboratively with program staff, leadership, and development.
- ❑ Establish an appropriate time frame for each organizational target (e.g., quarterly, semiannual, annual, biannual).

- ❑ Consider using target ranges, especially if evidence is not yet well-established. For example, you could develop safe, stretch, and ideal targets as follows:
 - Safe: We're 90 percent sure that we can achieve this target.
 - Stretch: If things go well with current resources, this is achievable.
 - Ideal: If we had everything we needed, this is where we could be.
- ❑ Write clear and concise narratives explaining target-setting evidence and assumptions.

VET

- ❑ Review targets with program staff, leadership, development, clients, the board, and others, and revise as needed.

USE AND SHARE

- ❑ Include targets along with indicators in regular reporting processes.
- ❑ Demonstrate who is responsible for various targets. Responsibility will likely include multiple teams and individuals.

REVIEW

- ❑ Work with program staff, clients, and leadership to understand why performance was different from targets and to develop a response strategy that will improve future performance. Use indicators and targets to drive annual program planning processes.
- ❑ Remember that not achieving targets does not equate to "failure." It's an opportunity to reexamine assumptions and adjust. When possible, try to document reasons targets were not met.
- ❑ Review prior evidence, assumptions, and performance. Update targets. Recognize changes in program capacity (e.g., additional staff, decreased funding).

Data Collection

This section highlights best practices and methods that nonprofits can use to collect data and feedback to improve programming.

Qualitative Data

While quantitative data can tell you a lot about your programs, they don't tell you the whole story. Qualitative methods allow you to investigate deeper, more nuanced questions about your staff, clients, programs, and organization. Monitoring and evaluation staff should be just as fluent in qualitative approaches as they are in quantitative methods. These methods include semistructured interviews, focus groups, and observations, as well as mixed qualitative and quantitative approaches.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- ❑ Understand when using qualitative methods is appropriate:
 - To provide context and insight into complexities that other data can't offer.
 - To answer “what,” “how,” and “why” questions such as these: How did program implementation vary from the original plan? What do clients like best about the services they receive? Why do families decide to participate, or not participate, in a program? What are the barriers to participation? Which families tend not to participate in a program and why?
 - To compare data, in order to support a study of similarities and differences within and across subjects, helping to answer questions such as these: Do elderly renters report experiences and perceptions similar to or different from other young adult renters? Do elderly and young adult renters report similar or different experiences and perceptions?
- ❑ Investigate what makes good qualitative research:
 - Credibility/authenticity (i.e., internal validity)
 - Transferability/fittingness (i.e., external validity)
 - Dependability/auditability (i.e., reliability)
 - Confirmability (i.e., objectivity)

DEVELOP

- ❑ Write clear research questions that can be answered with qualitative data and whose answers will provide valuable insight for serving clients.
- ❑ Decide what method of data collection works best for your team and your clients, and consider the pros and cons (e.g., time and staff needed, access to participants).
 - Interviews use open, semistructured, or structured guides that focus on those experiences and perspectives of most interest given your purpose; guides are tailored to types of respondents (e.g., adult clients, youth participants).

- Focus groups use semistructured or structured discussion guides organized around a small set of topics or themes; groups range in size and could include 10 to 15 people of similar background.
- Observations describe a setting, context, process, or behaviors of interest to a study; use a guide to focus the observations.
- Other methods can include photovoice (photos or videos to gather input from study subjects) and content analysis of materials such as reports, outreach materials, and brochures.
- ❑ Work in teams, take thorough notes, and consider recording interviews, focus groups, or observations as possible.
- ❑ Think about how to sample clients, including how many, which populations, and how they will be selected.
 - Purposive and quota nonprobability sampling is selected based on population characteristics and study objectives. It is also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling. If you run multiple programs, make sure you get a mix of clients across programs or services received.
 - Snowball sampling encourages research participants to recruit other participants. It is used when potential participants are hard to find.
 - Inclusion sampling ensures that multiple voices are included in the sample.
- ❑ Consider offering incentives to improve participation and express that you value clients' time and effort.
 - If you offer study participants an incentive, it should be of a kind or an amount to compensate for time but not to coerce participation.
 - Providing a meal or snacks is another way to recognize participants.
 - Offering child care may increase participation among people with child care responsibilities.

VET

- ❑ Review your data collection protocols and analysis plan.
 - Will respondents understand your data collection questions?
 - In your data collection protocols, do you refer to clients in ways they're familiar with or like? For example, do you call them "clients" or "customers"?
 - Could your data collection process or methods harm any participants? Consider the benefits of having an external entity (such as an institutional review board) review your proposed methods and make recommendations to eliminate or minimize the possibility of harm.
 - Are you bringing bias to your facilitation or data analysis? Are you assuming that a certain group will have certain reflections or experiences? How are you making decisions about how to analyze data? Are you using quotes that will give a more or a less favorable view of your program participants or that will reinforce stereotypes?
 - Have you developed a plan for analyzing your data? Consider your research questions and how you will use the data you collect to answer those questions.

USE AND SHARE

- Implement your data collection plan.
- Analyze your data.
 - After coding for themes in transcripts ask another staff member who attended or took notes to code a small subset of the transcripts to assess if you both found similar themes.

REVIEW

- Share findings with participants and ask for feedback to ensure your interpretations hold up under some scrutiny.

Surveys

Surveys are a powerful method for collecting client and program data beyond what is gathered routinely but can also be difficult and expensive to implement well. When creating a survey, monitoring and evaluation staff should begin by defining what the organization needs to know and who the target respondents should be. Monitoring and evaluation staff should workshop survey questions with program staff and have a survey design expert review questionnaires to make sure the data collected will provide accurate and relevant information. Before your organization launches the survey, have program staff fill out sample surveys and conduct a pretest with target respondents to catch any lingering issues. Train staff on proper survey administration and closely monitor the early survey completions. Also consider applying survey design principles to your intake forms and other client-facing data collection tools.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- Understand the different data collection methods (surveys, semistructured interviews, in-depth cognitive interviews, focus groups, program or administrative data, and secondary data) and their appropriate uses.
- Review logic models, indicators, and your data inventory to identify information gaps that a survey could address.
- Review how to integrate racial equity approaches in data collection tools.

DEVELOP

- Define what you want to know. Write out specific questions that survey data should be able to answer. Ensure the information you seek is reflected in (and justified by) your logic model and indicators framework.
- Identify who needs to respond to the survey—that is, your target population. Consider these questions:
 - How will you recruit survey respondents?
 - Are the members of this population likely to respond to a survey?
 - How will you follow up with nonrespondents or incentivize them to participate?
 - What is the minimum number of surveys you need to collect?
- Consider the trade-offs of different survey methods (e.g., telephone, mail-in, face-to-face, online text/mobile device), and select the best one for your target population.
- Write the survey, and then workshop your survey questions. Do similar, validated survey instruments already exist?
- Consider the trade-offs with question design. Will this type of question collect the information you're after? Are you looking to collect quantitative or qualitative data? Do you want open-ended or closed response options?
- Decide whether to offer respondents incentives, the amount, the structure (e.g., prize or guaranteed), and the method of delivery.

VET

- ❑ Consult with program staff, grant managers, executives, and development staff as necessary.
- ❑ Consider a few things before you decide to move forward with a survey:
 - How might you write questions on your intake forms, surveys, and other data collection tools to prevent reinforcement of negative perceptions of clients?
 - How can you reword questions to be more respectful of clients?
 - Are you asking clients to divulge sensitive information? Do you really need that information? Or will it ultimately go unused?
 - Does the literacy or numeracy level of your assessment need to be adjusted to increase accessibility?
- ❑ Review your questions and answer categories to ensure they don't commit the following common survey-design errors:
 - double-barreled questions (asking about more than one thing)
 - categories that are *not* mutually exclusive or exhaustive
 - unclear time frames for recall questions
 - wording subject to different interpretations
 - unreasonable intervals
 - use of jargon or potentially offensive language
 - questions that ask about beliefs and behaviors interchangeably
- ❑ Test your survey
 - Have an expert review your survey.
 - Test the survey with nonexperts and members of your target population. Replicate the survey procedure in addition to the questions. Conduct cognitive interviews on question navigation, response options, and navigation problems. Document how long it takes different groups to take the survey.
 - Test again if the last test required multiple changes.

USE AND SHARE

- ❑ Translate your survey into appropriate languages, and confirm that the language choice is consistent with the reading levels of the target population. After translation, test the survey again!
- ❑ Train staff as necessary to support survey administration.
- ❑ Field your survey with clients according to the method you chose.
- ❑ Track and share the progress of data collection.
- ❑ Share survey results, if appropriate, with the target population.

REVIEW

- ❑ Review survey results for nonresponse, missing data, and the time it takes to complete the survey.
- ❑ Discuss with staff what can be done to improve survey administration.
- ❑ Discuss with survey respondents how the survey can be improved.

Administrative and Secondary Data

Most nonprofits collect information about the people their programs serve. Yet, knowing more about their clients—such as their current health, education, and employment circumstances; the other services they may interact with; and the places they live—can help nonprofits see how their services fit into a larger community context and what other challenges their clients may be facing. Both national and local sources of data can shed light on these areas. Monitoring and evaluation staff should be familiar with sources of secondary and administrative data and think about how they and others in the organization can use these data to understand how they can better support clients.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- Reflect upon the populations and communities you serve, and write questions to help inform or contextualize your work. How will the answers to these questions improve your services or change your approach?
- Learn about national and local sources of administrative and secondary data relevant to your work with clients (e.g., [Urban Institute's Greater DC](#)).
- Look for examples of how these data sources or ones like them have been used by others.
- Connect with development or advocacy staff to understand how they have described and researched community trends and conditions (e.g., in grant applications) and what questions they have not been able to answer.

DEVELOP

- Write clear research questions whose answers will provide valuable insights for serving clients and that can be answered with existing administrative and secondary data.
- Search for existing research or analyses around your research question (e.g., local or federal government websites, local data intermediaries, research organizations).
- Identify data sources necessary to answer your questions and the steps needed to access those data.
- Decide whether to move forward with the research project. Will the answers to your questions help provide context or inform your work? Does your organization have the capacity and skills to take on this research?
- Obtain data that are publicly available through open data portals or public sources. Consider recency, quality, and geographic area of interest (e.g., neighborhood, ward, county, state). Consider how you will link the administrative data to your program or population of interest.

- ❑ Use the following tips to develop a compelling pitch for third-party data providers whose data are not publicly available:
 - Discover how granting your request could help the data provider fulfill its mission or solve a problem.
 - Understand the data provider’s history, priorities, and worries. Does it have reasons to say no that you should be aware of?
 - Ask colleagues or others to help you prepare for face-to-face discussions and sharpen your pitch.
 - Know your own strengths and weaknesses, and those of your organization.
 - Don’t make promises you can’t keep. Don’t misrepresent your goals or intentions.
 - Be prepared for negotiations to take time and to fail at first. Don’t become emotional or combative.
 - Consider partnering with other organizations on a collective request.
 - If the provider is unable or unwilling to share a full dataset, ask whether it can share a partial dataset (e.g., de-identified or aggregate data).
 - Prepare a data-sharing agreement as needed (see the [Data Privacy](#) section).
- ❑ Understand your data. Review descriptive statistics tables (e.g., sums, high/low values, averages, medians, frequency counts) from your data and look for unexpected or extreme values. For example, how do your data sources compare with other data for similar issues or populations?
- ❑ Analyze data and formulate answers to your initial research questions.

VET

- ❑ Share what you’ve learned with your colleagues to validate the utility of your data and analyses and to generate new ways to look at the information (e.g., to what extent data can be leveraged to support program design).
- ❑ Share what you’ve learned with external experts for technical review.

USE AND SHARE

- ❑ Share your findings as appropriate with stakeholders inside and outside of your organization.
- ❑ Share what you learned from your experience working with administrative and secondary data both inside and outside your organization (as appropriate).

REVIEW

- ❑ Consider periodically reviewing and revising your analysis as new data become available.

Client Feedback Loops and Engagement

Funders and nonprofits are coming to a consensus that their client communities should be partners in designing their own service solutions. Client feedback loops and community-engaged methods include the input, participation, and reflections of the people and communities you serve. They provide organizations a clear pathway to hear client experiences. Client feedback loops and community-engaged methods look different at each organization, but every loop should involve four steps: (1) listening to clients, (2) reflecting on feedback data with clients, (3) acting upon that feedback by making changes, and (4) communicating to clients why those changes were or were not made. Client feedback loops can take many different forms, including feedback surveys, data walks, and client advisory boards. Client engagement in monitoring and evaluation can expand learning culture; redistribute power between clients and providers; and lead to action, change, and improvement.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- Before you start the process, define the scope: Why do you want to create the feedback loop?
 - Define which clients participate: Will all clients be a part of the feedback or just clients from one particular program?
 - Engagement: How are clients involved in your data processes?
 - Methods: How does your organization involve clients?
- Before initiating a client feedback loop, your organization should assess its capacity to support and sustain a client feedback loop, from staff readiness to the quality of existing relationships with clients. Are the relationships healthy? Do clients typically feel safe providing feedback?
- Assess current feedback loops. What types of feedback do you currently collect from clients? How is this feedback used (if at all) to improve service delivery? What crucial feedback is missing? What are the relationships between clients and staff like? What barriers exist in client and staff relationships?
- Recognize that staff priorities can be different from client priorities on areas of improvement. Do you feel like you understand client priorities, or do you need to collect additional data?
- Focus on a specific part of your program or organization for which you have the time, capacity, or desire to make meaningful change based on client or staff feedback. Choose priorities that
 - can make a difference in clients' lives;
 - are actionable;
 - cannot be assessed in other, less burdensome ways; and
 - are oriented toward change.

DEVELOP

- ❑ Define priorities for feedback collection and ensure these align with client priorities.
 - Connect priorities to outcomes defined in your logic model and ensure your indicators framework includes feedback loops as a data collection method.
- ❑ Examine the context.
 - Consider existing infrastructure before attempting to build new feedback loops.
 - Acknowledge and value community expertise.
- ❑ Select feasible feedback collection methods.
 - Refer to the [Surveys](#) section for best practices. Surveys are a powerful tool for collecting individual client feedback.
 - Refer to the [Qualitative Data](#) section for best practices. For example, focus groups, semistructured interviews during which clients can provide feedback on programs or specific prompts.
 - Consider conducting [data walks](#) to allow clients and service providers to jointly review data in small groups, interpret what the data mean, and collaborate to improve policies, programs, and other factors of community change. Data walks can be a powerful tool for nonprofits who want to communicate data to clients and collect feedback in structured conversation.
 - Consider forming a client advisory board. Client advisory boards are a collective group of community members and organization representatives who share information and make decisions to improve services. Client advisory boards are most likely not the first step in engaging clients—they take time, infrastructure, community trust building, and institutional buy-in to set up.
- ❑ Set expectations
 - Prepare community members for the task at hand.
 - Make expectations for work and partnership clear.
 - Clearly define decisionmaking capacity.
 - Compensate community members for their time and expertise.
- ❑ Collect feedback from clients mindfully.
 - Create a safe space for clients to offer sensitive feedback.
 - Think about who is best to facilitate. Does that person directly work on the priority area of focus? Would clients feel comfortable discussing sensitive issues with them? For example, clients or staff may be more open talking to someone not immediately overseeing their work or program performance.
 - Set the tone—voluntary, inclusive, and without repercussions.

VET

- Review feedback plans with staff and leadership.
- Test feedback collection methods with clients.
- Assess results, and make changes if needed.

USE AND SHARE

- Communicate feedback to staff.
 - Create a safe space for staff to receive sensitive feedback.
 - Think about the time, place, format, and frequency of feedback that will be most effective for staff and most conducive to eliciting positive responses.
 - Set the tone—feedback is about improving the quality of service and results for clients, not about punishing staff.
- Incorporate feedback into decisionmaking about your program or organization.
- Communicate, publicize, and share information about changes to your program or organization. Determine how you want to communicate changes to clients, and provide clients with opportunities to be part of implementing changes.
 - Consider hosting a data walk at the end of each feedback loop. Data walks are an easy and effective way to report feedback data and program changes to clients and solicit their reflections on that data.

REVIEW

- Continue to build relationships with your clients, even when you're not formally collecting data with them. Feedback loops are about building relationships, not collecting data.
- Understand that creating client feedback loops and community engagement are iterative, not one and done. But don't ask for more feedback until you've had a chance to act on initial feedback and close the loop.
- Expect that the first changes you'll see will be to your organizational culture and your relationships:
 - Include everyone—staff, volunteers, and clients—in the process.
 - Embed client feedback loops and community engagement within your organizational strategy.
- Watch for changes in client feedback and outcomes to follow.

Data Management

To use data to improve services, organizations need strong processes in place to ensure data are accessible, standardized, timely, high-quality, and secure.

Data Management Processes

By developing a process map to visualize how data are managed across the organization, monitoring and evaluation staff can improve organizational efficiency and accuracy in data collection and analysis. A process map provides insight into how data collection operates and can be used to increase communication and shared understanding of roles and responsibilities across a team or organization. Process mapping will identify bottlenecks, repetition, and delays, leading staff to brainstorm improvements and address challenges throughout the data management process. A data process map will also be invaluable for staff making decisions about data systems and creating data privacy and security procedures.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- ❑ Take inventory of all data collection processes and systems in your organization, including who is responsible for them. Refer to your logic model and performance indicators to ensure you have captured all relevant data points. In your data inventory, identify or specify
 - all data that are tracked, including all activities, inputs, outputs, and outcomes for all programs;
 - the purpose of data collection (e.g., to generate internal or funder reports);
 - the format in which data are collected;
 - instruments used to collect data; and
 - systems used to store and organize data.
- ❑ Gather feedback from staff and leadership on what is working well and what is creating challenges. Consider the factors that contribute to challenges: Poor or obsolete systems? Lack of staff or leadership commitment? Ambiguity around roles and responsibilities? Inefficient processes? More data collection than staff can manage?

DEVELOP

- ❑ Consult with other staff to develop a data process map that will visually describe the flow of work and data across intake or enrollment, program participation, outputs or milestones, and outcomes or results. The map should identify tracked programs and activities; define participants, inputs, outputs, and outcomes; show who and what is involved in data processes; and reveal processes that can be improved or made more efficient. Consider the following guiding questions:
 - Who collects each dataset or indicator?
 - How are the data collected?
 - Who enters each dataset or indicator?
 - Where are the data stored?
 - Who can see the data? Who analyzes the data?
 - Who quality checks the data? How often are quality checks performed?
 - Who reports on or discusses each dataset or indicator?
 - Which data are sensitive or confidential? Are use or disclosure of the data restricted by local, federal, or internal organizational requirements?
 - Clarify which staff are responsible for which data responsibilities, and add to job descriptions as necessary.
 - Refer to your confidentiality and data security plans, and ensure staff understand how to handle sensitive or confidential data.

VET

- ❑ Bring all relevant staff to the table to review the full data process map—either all at once or in relevant subgroups. Facilitate conversations about your organization’s capacity to adhere to this process.
 - Are the right people assigned to the right roles?
 - Do staff have enough time to collect and enter data?
 - Are they comfortable with data collection technology?
 - Are there staff with data analysis or data management skills who could be better positioned or trained?
- ❑ Identify if training is needed to build staff confidence and skill in data management.

USE AND SHARE

- ❑ Share your process map at team meetings during discussion of data collection or other relevant topics.
- ❑ Make the data process map part of onboarding training for all new staff.

REVIEW

- ❑ Make your data process map a living document by updating roles and procedures to meet the needs of your work, grants reporting, personnel, and software as they change over time.
- ❑ Continue to provide or facilitate staff training and education on using data management software at regular intervals to ensure skills are kept current.

Data Systems

By completing a data process map, monitoring and evaluation staff may learn that they face organizational challenges stemming from the system or software used to house data. If a system inhibits an organization's ability to organize and analyze data or to measure performance, it may be time to find a new system. But with so many performance management software options available—and some funder mandates—determining which software system best suits your organization's needs can be challenging. Before picking a new system, your organizations should understand the range of options available, as well as your needs and parameters for a new or adapted system.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- ❑ Solicit feedback about what staff, funders, and leaders need in your organization's data systems. Reviewing your data process map (see the [Data Management Processes](#) section for detail) can help reveal gaps in your data systems.
- ❑ Learn about the data system solutions available and the benefits they provide. Options include manual and custom-built systems, mission-aligned systems, case management systems, more generalized customer relationship management systems, and dashboards or visualization tools. Consider guiding questions such as the following:
 - Can the system standardize data structure, entry procedures, access, and administration across the organization?
 - Can the system enhance how staff enter data? Will the system meet your organization's needs related to device compatibility, users, automated and integrated data collection features, file upload, batch changes, form design, and data security?
 - Can the system enhance how data are extracted? Does the system enable the creation of dashboards or an application programming interface (API)?
 - Can the system generate reports and data visualizations, or support data analysis or special reporting requirements? How easy is it to export data from the system?
 - Are you aware of all system costs, such as purchase and build costs (including potential consulting costs), maintenance costs, licensing costs, user and system administrator privileges, annual membership fees, and customer support and training costs? Have you budgeted for those costs? Are costs fixed, or will they grow if your program expands?
 - Does the system offer cloud software or other built-in data security features?
 - If you need to use multiple systems (e.g., because of funder requirements), can you streamline your workflows or analysis via APIs?
- ❑ Identify resources available to support your organization's decision to adapt your current system or move to a new data system.
 - What is the budget for setting up the system?
 - How will you fund ongoing maintenance? Do you have internal system administration/development capacity, or do you need to contract for these services?
 - What resources are available for staff time and development?

- ❑ Reach out to peer organizations, especially those that have gone through data systems migrations, for advice on data systems.
- ❑ Normalize the idea that a single data system will not solve all organizational challenges. Communicate that the goal is to select the data system that meets the most needs while minimizing challenges.

DEVELOP

- ❑ Establish a cross-organizational committee to guide onboarding or improvement of a data system. Ideally, the committee should include your chief operating officer and staff from the information technology, development, monitoring and evaluation teams, as well as representatives from program teams.
- ❑ Create a clear list of requirements for a new or improved data system that aligns with your needs. Similarly, identify the biggest challenges or pain points in your data system or infrastructure. Identify which historical data your organization will need to migrate into a new system and what data can exist in other formats.
- ❑ Consider whether you need a new data system or whether you can upgrade a current system to meet your requirements.
- ❑ Conduct a market scan of data system vendors and products, and compare against your list of requirements. If necessary, ask vendors to provide written price estimates and demonstrate the capabilities of their systems. Cross reference with the list of requirements you need in a data system.
- ❑ Design data system architecture, and develop a plan for how the data system will be used and implemented. Once you have decided on a solution, refer to your data process map (see the [Data Management Processes](#) section), and consider the following:
 - access, permissions, and user types
 - opportunities for workflow automation
 - data validation to improve data quality
 - units of measurement (e.g., client, family, sessions, events, program)
 - service tracking versus outcome tracking
 - built-in reporting templates or preset queries
 - level of integration across programs
 - standard fields versus program-specific fields
 - tracking of clients across programs
 - ability to export data for analysis or presentation in other software
- ❑ Update your data process map as a diagnostic and training tool for your new or upgraded data system.

VET

- Loop your organization's governing board into the data system selection and implementation process and solicit their feedback, questions, and concerns.
- Pilot test system changes with a smaller group of staff members who represent a variety of functions, especially staff with data entry responsibilities. If your organization has multiple programs, consider a pilot test with a single program.
- Correct any issues encountered during pilot testing.

USE AND SHARE

- Develop training resources such as video demonstrations and self-directed step-by-step guides that are available to all staff.
- Schedule demonstrations and formal training for all staff on the new data system. Tailor training to departments as necessary, and offer training in the future as needed.
- Roll out the new data system at full scale. Multiservice organizations may consider rolling out the system on a program-by-program basis so initial problems can be resolved before full implementation.
- Use log-in reports or other methods to track which staff are using the data system and which staff are struggling to log-in. Identify staff who could use gentle reminders to use the new data system, and offer additional training and support as necessary.
- Construct feedback loops to gauge how staff feel about the new system.

REVIEW

- Create a forum for ongoing Q&A and user feedback related to the data system. This might include a clearly identified point person for the organization, a separate "help desk" and feedback email address, a listening session series, and a "power user" in each department.
- Develop a process and a schedule for making changes to the data system after rollout.
- Create a place to catalog changes to the data system.

Data Quality Assurance

High-quality data are essential to performance management. Poor-quality data can result in wasted resources, bad decisions, and loss of credibility. But assessing the quality of your data and implementing systems to maintain high-quality data can be difficult. *Data quality* refers to the assessment of the information you have, relative to its purpose and its ability to serve that purpose. [Data quality management \(DQM\)](#) aims to maintain a high quality of information. The ultimate goal of DQM is not to create subjective notions of “high-quality” data but, rather, to increase return on investment for work that depends upon data.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- ❑ Profile your data: Data profiling is an essential process in DQM, building on data inventories and process mapping. The process includes reviewing data in detail, comparing and contrasting the data to its own metadata, running statistical models and tests to assess quality, and reporting regularly on data quality metrics.
- ❑ Make the case for DQM to your staff and leadership: Present the benefits in the language of the program and speak to stakeholders’ critical and specific program priorities. Do not focus on data quality as an end in itself but, rather, address the components necessary to achieve program goals, operational performance, and compliance in reporting.
- ❑ Identify DQM roles: A data quality management process needs leaders. Who has these responsibilities now? Who should have them? Consider giving a high-level leader responsibility for overseeing the DQM process. Staff who work with the data will also need to be involved and understand DQM.

DEVELOP

- ❑ Write data quality rules based on program goals and requirements.
- ❑ Embed quality controls into your data systems (e.g., adding data validation to data entry fields or building workflows such as escalations).
- ❑ Develop metrics and targets to measure and track data quality based on ACCIT principles (accuracy, consistency, completeness, integrity, and timeliness).
 - Accuracy: Accurate data match reality. Accuracy should be measured through source documentation or through independent confirmation techniques.
 - Consistency: Consistent data have uniform formatting and coherent values across datasets (e.g., two values pulled from separate datasets should not conflict with each other).
 - Completeness: Complete data have enough information to draw necessary conclusions.
 - Integrity: Data with integrity are transformed accurately and according to established procedures.
 - Timeliness: Timely data are available for use when needed.
- ❑ Establish an appropriate time frame for reviewing data quality (e.g., monthly, quarterly).
- ❑ Assess the quality of your data based on quality rules and metrics.

VET

- Review data quality rules, metrics, and initial quality assessment with staff and leadership. Get feedback on your process and possible sources of data errors.

USE AND SHARE

- Use data quality metrics when you meet with staff to express the importance of quality data.
- Repair your data by addressing issues uncovered during data profiling like missing, incomplete, or inaccurate data. Determine why, where, and how data defects originated.
- Incorporate data quality improvement goals into individual or program performance reviews.

REVIEW

- Standardize the process for quality assurance for your data.
- Share findings of your data quality assurance management process regularly with staff and program managers. This process could be a monthly or bimonthly check by another staff member or program managers.

Data Privacy

Strong data systems require strong privacy and protections for client data. To ensure the security of private client data, monitoring and evaluation staff need to inventory data across all programs and document the security requirements of different grants. By developing a data security plan—including a full inventory of data; a designated data security officer; an access control policy; and policies on confidentiality, passwords, and reporting data security breaches—organizations can better handle confidential data. Monitoring and evaluation staff should clearly communicate data security policies to leadership and program staff and create information for clients on how their personal data are collected, stored, and used.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- ❑ Review your data process map (see the [Data Management Processes](#) section), and update if necessary.
- ❑ Identify the staff and departments responsible for privacy and data security. The monitoring and evaluation team may have a role or support the information technology (IT) department.
- ❑ Review the necessity of collecting confidential data and personally identifiable information. Are these data required? Do they serve an important organizational need?
- ❑ Compile any existing data security regulations, policies, procedures, and protocols that are either authored by your organization or required by funders and local or federal agencies.

DEVELOP

- ❑ Create privacy information and informed consent procedures to inform clients what personal data are being collected, how such data will be used, and whether those data can be disclosed to other entities. Define procedures for documenting consent internally.
- ❑ Develop a data security plan tailored to your organization that addresses each of the following steps listed below. Throughout the plan, give examples that pertain to your organization, so that staff know how data should be treated. Your data security plan should perform the following functions:
 - Identify a data security officer and any other staff responsible for enforcing data security guidelines. Data security officers should lead the development of the data security plan.
 - Create an access control policy that defines organizational roles and level of access to information systems (e.g., system admin, group admin, user).
 - Identify all confidential, personally identifiable, and sensitive data currently being collected and the systems used to store these data. Identify data security requirements or regulations applicable to each of these data, including requirements for how long data need to be stored.
 - Identify who *needs* to have access to confidential data and formulate procedures for granting, limiting, or removing access to staff.
 - Develop a confidentiality pledge that is up to date with your organization's current data security procedures.
 - Identify procedures to keep confidential storage media and printouts secure at all times and to dispose of or scrub confidential storage media and printouts.
 - Identify appropriate delivery mechanisms for confidential data, such as secure file transfers, password-protected files, certified mail, and hand delivery.

- Select a password policy and standard that includes who (or what software) manages passwords. Consider implementing multifactor authentication, especially for staff who have elevated privileges in your systems.
- Define procedures for managing a data security breach, including mechanisms to detect and report a breach.
- Back up important data files regularly, and establish procedures for backing up or re-creating data.
- ❑ Work with IT as needed to ensure the organization has a security training plan for staff that includes awareness of threats such as phishing and responsibilities under your organization’s policies and procedures.
- ❑ Develop a template for a data-use agreement that will enable your organization to share confidential data with other entities or receive confidential data from another source. The agreement should ensure the receiving entity takes comparable steps to protect your organization’s confidential data.

VET

- ❑ Work with your IT team to review the data security plan with all staff and leadership. Ask them to point out any challenges in complying with the requirements.
- ❑ Address gaps in your data security plan by procuring secure data disposal software, hiring a data security officer (depending on the size of your organization), or contracting with a data security service or consultant.

USE AND SHARE

- ❑ Implement your data security plan, and ensure current processes conform to the plan, from defining access and controls to establishing a system for backups.
- ❑ Ensure that all staff sign appropriate confidentiality forms, all keys to file cabinets are accounted for, and staff abide by your password policy.
- ❑ Communicate your data security plan to staff, highlighting actions they may need to take to protect client data. Also, explain to staff what they should communicate to clients about why their information is being collected and how data security risks are being minimized.
- ❑ Educate users about data security risks such as phishing. Conduct simulated phishing attacks if possible.
- ❑ Promote awareness by regularly training employees and volunteers in data security procedures.

REVIEW

- ❑ Review your data security plan periodically to make sure it still aligns with your current data collection and reporting practices.
- ❑ Stay current with antivirus software updates.
- ❑ Keep security patches of servers and laptops up to date.

Data Analysis and Communication

This section reviews best practices for measurement and evaluation staff analyzing data and communicating findings to demonstrate their organization's impact.

Data Analysis and Storytelling

In a data-driven organization, all staff should be comfortable reviewing and interpreting data. Monitoring and evaluation staff should guide leadership and program staff in engaging with data and facilitate opportunities for them to create their own stories from the data. Clients can also provide their own perspectives by creating stories from an organization's data. Telling a good data story—especially one that others can understand and relate to—is critical for engaging stakeholders and using data for continuous improvement. Monitoring and evaluation staff should help people develop questions that are of interest to them, map out a process for acquiring and analyzing data to answer those questions, create appropriate stories from the data, and share these stories with others to get their input and reflections.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- Think about the following planning questions:
 - What data do you have that would be valuable for others to know about and use?
 - Who needs to understand and use these data? What is it that they need to know?
 - What experience does your audience have with data? What are the best ways for them to absorb quantitative information?
- Think about the biases you may bring to your data analysis.
 - Are you assuming that a certain group will do better or worse?
 - How are you making decisions about how to analyze data?
 - Are you cutting data that will lend itself to a more or a less favorable view of your program participants?

DEVELOP

- Invite a group of leadership, staff, or clients to review data with you and explore it in different ways. Encourage them to get comfortable with the data and create their own questions to explore.
- Describe the different types of data stories that people can tell (e.g., interaction, comparison, change, factoid, and personal stories) and discuss how they can help engage people with the data in different ways.
- Encourage the group to create their own data stories.

VET

- ❑ Interrogate your findings, and, if possible, have another staff member review your results or even analyze the data and describe their own findings as a check on your process.
- ❑ Consider whether the stories come out clearly in your data.
 - Are these the right data for your story?
 - Are important data missing from this story?
 - Are you using too much or too little data to tell the story?
 - Can someone not familiar with these data understand the story you are trying to tell?
 - Is the story meaningful to the intended audience?
 - Can you make the story better by personalizing it? How can you connect with your audience? Can you use the journey of a single participant to help communicate findings?
 - How long does it take to get to the “point” of your story? Does it take too long, and will the audience lose interest?

USE AND SHARE

- ❑ Present data stories to an audience, and get their feedback.
 - Do the stories make sense to them?
 - Which stories are the most resonant with your audience?
 - Does the audience have other story ideas? If appropriate, consider using a data walk (see the [Client Feedback Loops and Engagement](#) section) as a presentation method to give your audience more opportunity to interact with and generate their own stories from the data.
- ❑ Document your analysis process and sources of data. Could you or another staff member duplicate the work you’ve done?

REVIEW

- ❑ Reflect on your audience’s reactions to the data. Do you need to change or refine your stories? Do you need to change the data or present it differently to better tell your story?

Dashboards and Data Visualization

Charts and other visuals of your organization's data help both internal and external audiences better understand program outcomes, identify trends over time, and track progress. Dashboards within data systems can offer real-time updates to outputs and outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation staff should design visuals and dashboards that are informed by program logic models, indicators, and targets, but that are also accessible to the intended audiences. Data visuals should be a regular part of staff meetings, presentations, and reporting.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- ❑ Define the purpose of your data dashboard or visuals.
 - Are they providing operational information or data for strategic planning?
 - Will they be used to check progress or report on outcomes or impact?
 - Are they intended to initiate discussion on how programs might be changed or improved or to reprioritize work?
 - How timely are the data you are including?
- ❑ Specify the reporting time frame (e.g., monthly, quarterly, biannually, annually).
- ❑ Identify the audiences (e.g., board, senior team, program directors or managers, program staff, clients).
- ❑ Solicit ideas and feedback from staff on intended use cases for dashboards.

DEVELOP

- ❑ Build dashboard templates collaboratively with organizational stakeholders, and iteratively refine drafts.
- ❑ Build in flexibility so other departments can adapt your templates and so templates can communicate high and low levels of detail.
- ❑ Choose visualization techniques that most clearly and concisely convey the message you would like your audience to understand, such as the following:
 - Use colors and labels strategically and consistently to highlight ideas and match organization branding.
 - Focus on takeaways by highlighting the main story of the data. Use annotations and active titles to provide context and clear messaging.
 - Apply good data visualization strategies to reduce clutter and integrate graphics and text.
 - Explore drill-down or filter functionality to facilitate inquiry and exploration.
- ❑ Brainstorm ways to streamline reporting and tailor reports to relevant audiences while meeting expected deadlines. With staff from programming, leadership, communications, and development, in addition to your board, clients, and stakeholders, refine reports to include the most relevant data and improve design and data visualizations.

VET

- ❑ Encourage program staff to review draft dashboards, and assess ease of readability and comprehension.
- ❑ Practice presenting visual information, and then assess whether additional caveats or context is needed to understand the data.

USE AND SHARE

- ❑ Determine the best way to communicate dashboards to staff, such as email, program meetings, and all-staff meetings.
- ❑ Tailor communication touch points to your audience.
 - Share data with program directors and senior leadership during your periodic meetings, then encourage directors to share with their teams or staff directly during weekly check-ins.
 - Ensure performance reports are always on board meeting agendas. Focus on key measures and high-level trends and priority areas.
 - Celebrate success when you see improvements, and don't under-celebrate goals that are consistently on target.
- ❑ Ask questions to validate the data, such as the following:
 - Are you experiencing this in your work?
 - How can we respond to “priority areas” or “areas of growth” (i.e., measures for which targets are not being met)?
- ❑ Build the dashboard review process into staff onboarding.

REVIEW

- ❑ Offer yourself (as a monitoring and evaluation staff person) as a resource for teams when they review dashboards.

From Performance Measurement to Evaluation

Service organizations are often bombarded with information about performance management and evaluation, but without a framework for understanding how these activities can inform their work in different and complementary ways. Your organization should be familiar with the [performance-measurement-to-evaluation continuum framework](#) to understand how such activities can inform your work. Selecting what you need—whether that be more robust performance measurement processes or a formative evaluation—heavily depends on the questions your organization wants to answer. Evaluation activities also require substantial planning and preparation, so organizational capacity also determines whether your organization is ready to pursue an evaluation. All in all, your organization should pursue goals you have the capacity to meet in the present and set goals and aspirations for future evaluation activities.

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- ❑ Learn about the differences between performance measurement and evaluation.
 - Performance measurement tells you what a program did and how well it did it. Performance measurement is ongoing, responsive, and adaptive; uses program and outcome data; and is mostly led by program staff. Performance measurement helps you answer the following categories of questions:
 - Inputs. What staff and volunteers are involved in the program? What is the budget?
 - Activities and participation. What services are delivered? How well are services being delivered?
 - Outputs. Who is participating? How many people are participating?
 - Outcomes. What changes in knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, or conditions do we observe in participants through our program?
 - Evaluation tells you if and how a program affected the people, families, or communities it is serving—that is, whether a program is producing results. Evaluation is a more discrete activity that answers predetermined questions, often involves other data collection and research methods, and is typically led by a third-party organization.

- ❑ Learn about the different methods of evaluation, their costs and benefits, and the questions they can answer.
 - Formative evaluation is a set of research activities intended to provide information about how a program is being designed or carried out, with the objective of improving implementation and results.
 - Planning study is a type of formative evaluation that takes place during the design or planning phase to help programs clarify plans and make improvements at an early stage.
 - Implementation study is a type of formative evaluation that takes place while a program or initiative is being rolled out or is in progress. An implementation study is designed to answer questions that will help improve service delivery and results.
 - Summative evaluation is a study that assesses a program’s effectiveness in achieving results, based on the program’s logic model or theory of change. Depending on the method used, a summative evaluation may determine the program’s impact on specific outcomes. Summative evaluations can also tell you whether your program is working or if it’s making things worse. Randomized controlled trials are commonly used to conduct summative evaluations. However, other methods (such as matching techniques, difference-in-difference methods, and regression discontinuity designs) might be more appropriate for your population or context.

DEVELOP

- ❑ Continue to strengthen your performance measurement processes. Strong performance measurement practices set you up to do strong organizational learning and evaluation.
 - Root performance measurement activities in your logic model and theory of change.
 - Build performance measurement activities into your program’s or organization’s routine.
 - Involve all relevant staff in performance measurement activities.
- ❑ Consider what types of evaluation would benefit your organization and the questions you want an evaluation to answer. Reflect upon your organization’s readiness for an evaluation.
 - Who is the audience for the evaluation?
 - What types of questions do you want to ask about your program?
 - Who would lead the evaluation?
- ❑ Conduct formative evaluations at key points in a program’s development—such as during the program design phase (i.e., planning study) and at start-up or expansion (i.e., implementation study)—and at periodic intervals to assess how a program is working.
- ❑ Reflect on these additional questions if you consider pursuing a summative evaluation (or impact study).
 - Do you have a formal design or model in place? Is the design or model sound and stable?
 - Are you serving the intended population?
 - Do you have the resources needed to succeed?
 - Are you implementing the program or initiative as designed?
 - Can you produce data for an evaluation?
 - Will an evaluation yield a meaningful result for your program or initiative, or for the field?
 - If the evaluation yields no/neutral (or negative) results, is your organization prepared for the implications?

VET

- Include program staff, senior leaders, and board members in the decision to pursue an evaluation.

USE AND SHARE

- Publish reports regularly with performance data for internal and external stakeholders.
- Publish evaluation reports online.

REVIEW

- Facilitate opportunities for clients, staff, board members, and funders to reflect on performance data or evaluation results. Use this feedback, along with the results from evaluations, to shape how you design programs and processes in the future.



500 L'Enfant Plaza SW
Washington, DC 20024

www.urban.org

The nonprofit Urban Institute is a leading research organization dedicated to developing evidence-based insights that improve people's lives and strengthen communities. For 50 years, Urban has been the trusted source for rigorous analysis of complex social and economic issues; strategic advice to policymakers, philanthropists, and practitioners; and new, promising ideas that expand opportunities for all. Our work inspires effective decisions that advance fairness and enhance the well-being of people and places.

Copyright © May 2021. Urban Institute. Permission is granted for reproduction of this file, with attribution to the Urban Institute.