



The State of Nonprofit Data

NOVEMBER 2012

An NTEN Report Prepared by **idealware**

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Executive Summary

In April 2012 NTEN and Idealware conducted a survey of nonprofits about their relationships with data, and what we found was a large dichotomy—either they were doing a lot with their metrics or not much at all.

Too often barriers keep nonprofits from collecting and integrating important data into their daily work. The barriers are familiar to those who work in and with nonprofits: not enough staff or time to collect or analyze this data; not knowing what data to collect or how to make use of it; competing demands or conflicting reporting requirements; money or technology limitations.

Most nonprofits are tracking financial and operations data and using it to make decisions about budgeting or programs. Less than two-thirds of nonprofits track outreach data used for marketing, communications and fundraising programs, and fewer still find that data to be useful for decision-making. A similar percentage measure program metrics, and only about half track outcome data for their clients. The least-tracked data, according to our survey, were external data related to a nonprofit's mission.

Organizations with larger budgets, as well as human services and health nonprofits, were more likely to be tracking and using data than other survey respondents.

There were, however, significant barriers for many organizations. The four most commonly cited were as follows:

- Issues related to collecting and working with data (27 percent of responses).
- Lack of expertise (24 percent of responses)
- Issues of time and prioritization (22 percent of responses).
- Challenges with technology (23 percent).

In addition, external demands and stakeholders—including funders; local, state and federal governments; donors; clients; and community groups—also hinder an organization's ability to make strategic use of data they have collected.

How nonprofits are currently using data does not necessarily reflect how they would like to use it.

99% of respondents track some sort of metrics

89% track financial data and find it useful for making decisions

50% are tracking data about outcomes of clients/constituents

41% are tracking external data about their issue area

39% use donor data to make budgeting decisions

26% use donor data to make program decisions

Introduction

Data offers nonprofits a means of measuring their progress toward their missions, but also a way of improving that progress. And when their missions are collectively effecting change in the world, their progress is important. Without data, it is impossible to measure financial and operational health, identify problems and measure organizational impact. What data metrics are nonprofits collecting and tracking, and how are they using that data to make decisions?

NTEN set out to measure the state of data among nonprofits and learn just how organizations are using these metrics to grow and succeed. In April 2012, we worked with Idealware to conduct a survey of nonprofits to learn more about what data metrics nonprofits are collecting and tracking and how that data is used to make decisions. In total, 398 people from nonprofits representing 17 states responded to the survey. This means our sample should be considered somewhat indicative of nonprofit trends, but not a representative sample of nonprofits nationwide.

At the conclusion of the survey, we conducted six one-hour-long telephone focus groups with individuals from nonprofits, consulting firms that work with nonprofits, and foundations—a total of 38 people. These discussions focused on the core metrics that nonprofits should track, what they were successfully tracking, barriers to success, and the role of foundations in this area. For more information on our methodology, see Appendix A.

The information we gathered from the survey and focus groups paints a picture about the state of data among nonprofit organizations. This report provides a comprehensive review of these results, including:

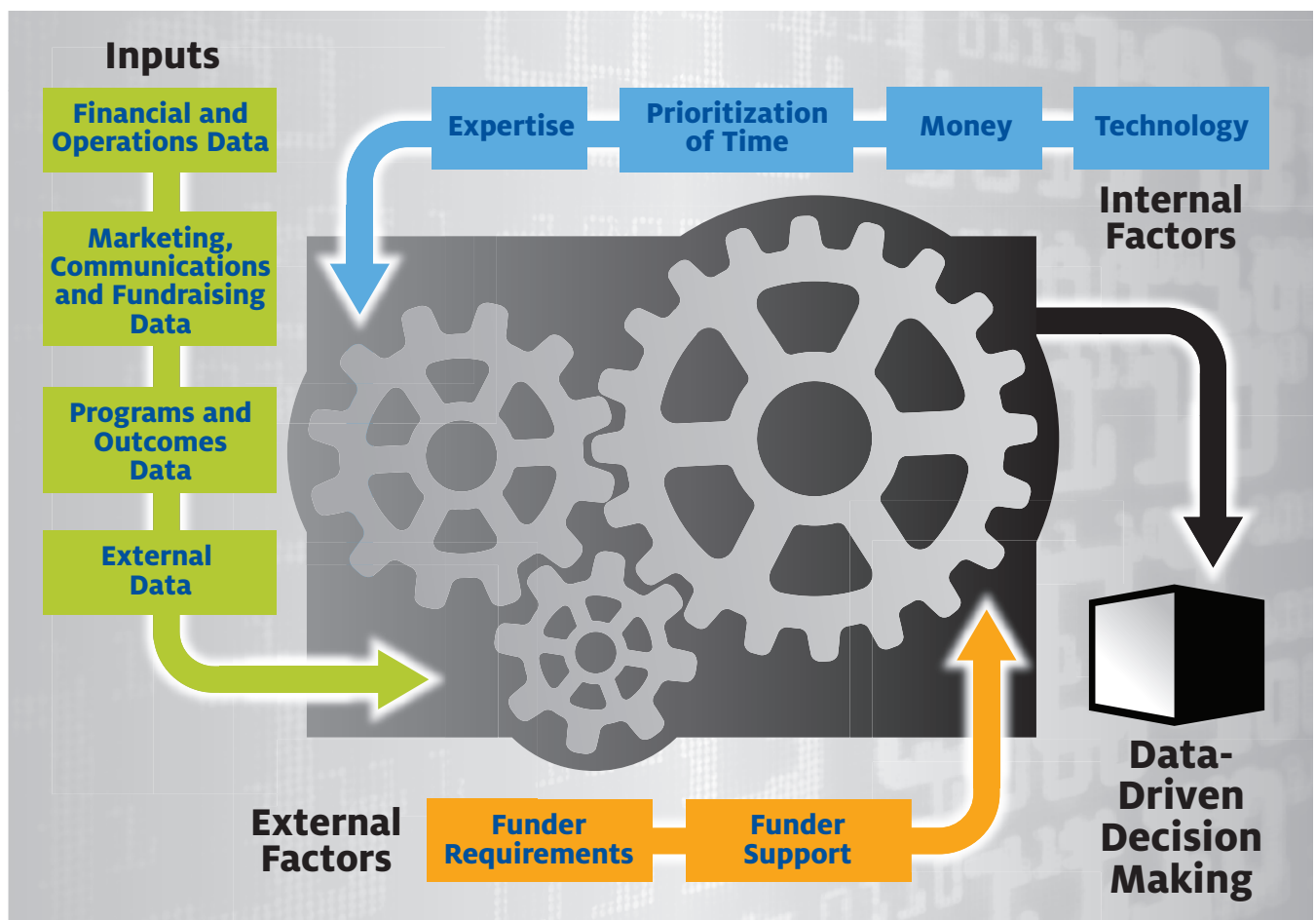
- The types of data nonprofits are tracking, and whether they find this data to be useful for decision making.
- How data collection and analysis differs by type of organization and budget.
- The internal forces and barriers that affect the collection and use of data in nonprofits.
- How external forces impact nonprofit data use.
- Recommendations to improve the ability of nonprofits to collect important data and use it to make strategic decisions.

What we found was a large dichotomy in nonprofits' use of data—either they were doing a lot with their metrics or not much at all. We also discovered that individuals have very different frames of reference when it comes to understanding exactly what data is. Many focus group participants came to the table with pre-existing narrow definitions of what we mean when we say “data.”

There's a huge range of data and metrics that can all play a role in optimizing organizations and the work they do. However, too often barriers keep nonprofits from collecting and integrating these metrics into their daily work. The barriers are familiar to those who work in and with nonprofits—not enough staff or time to collect or analyze this data; not knowing what data to collect or how to make use of it; competing demands or conflicting reporting requirements; money or technology limitations.

We find it helpful to think of the process by which nonprofits use data as akin to a complicated machine: data is collected and fed into one end, massaged and affected by the internal and external factors that shape decision-making at a nonprofit, and then pushed out the other end as data-driven decisions. This metaphor, of course, overly simplifies complex organizational dynamics—even in an ideal case, it’s not likely that staff can automatically crank out decisions based on data. But it’s a useful mental model in understanding some of the factors at work. For instance, in our survey and focus groups, we found that when the process runs well, the internal and external forces provide context and expertise that make the decisions valuable and strategic. However, we found too many cases where those forces were barriers that did not result in useful output from the machine, or even actively prevented it. In a number of cases, the processes—the machine itself—were not strategically designed and thus no amount of data input could help to create better decisions.

The Data Machine



A well-functioning nonprofit data decision-making process provides numerous possibilities for nonprofits to optimize their programs and grow. Even small organizations can use data such as feedback, surveys and self-assessments to measure their impact and determine what is working well and what needs to be addressed. As a representative from an educational organization said in one of our focus group sessions, “The more adept we have gotten at proving what our children do, it’s blown our hair back—we didn’t know we were that good.”

What Data Are Nonprofits Using?

- Nearly all nonprofits track some sort of metrics.
- A much lower percentage use the data they collect to make strategy or program decisions.
- The vast majority of nonprofits track finance and operations data while only about two-thirds track marketing, communications and program data.

In our survey we found that all but three of the 398 participating nonprofits said they are tracking some sort of data. These metrics run the gamut from financial and operations data to marketing, communications and fundraising performance, program effectiveness, and client outcomes. Some nonprofits even acquire and track external data about their clients or issue areas.

By far, the most commonly tracked data is related to finance and operations. For the most part nonprofits are using metrics in this area to help with decision-making about budgets and programs. Many also track communications and fundraising data—primarily the size of their mailing lists and the number of new donors—but far fewer use these metrics to make budget or program decisions. Programmatic metrics fall somewhere in between. More nonprofits than not are tracking this kind of data, and most of those tracking it are also using it for decision-making.

This section looks more deeply at the types of data tracked by nonprofits, and how those organizations are using those metrics.

Financial and Internal Operations Data

It should come as no surprise that the majority of the nonprofits who responded to our survey—89 percent—not only track financial actuals, but find them to be useful metrics. The vast majority of respondents also said they deem this information “critical” or “very useful” for budgeting, while nearly three-quarters said such information was “critical” or “very useful” for program and services decisions.

Data tracked by respondents includes such typical financial metrics as expenses, income and cash-on-hand, as well as operations metrics such as volunteer hours and staff training.

Consultants in our focus group were quick to point out the different things financial and operations data can show organizations. For example, it can help them take actions that minimize overhead or show the effectiveness of management or the composition and health of an organization’s board of directors. It can also help management make staffing decisions by measuring turnover, technical expertise of staff, as well as staff, volunteer and partner resources. In addition, this data can serve as a crisis indicator by tracking days of



cash on hand, accounts receivable, cash flow and participants per program, and can help an organization make quick decisions about whether to borrow money.

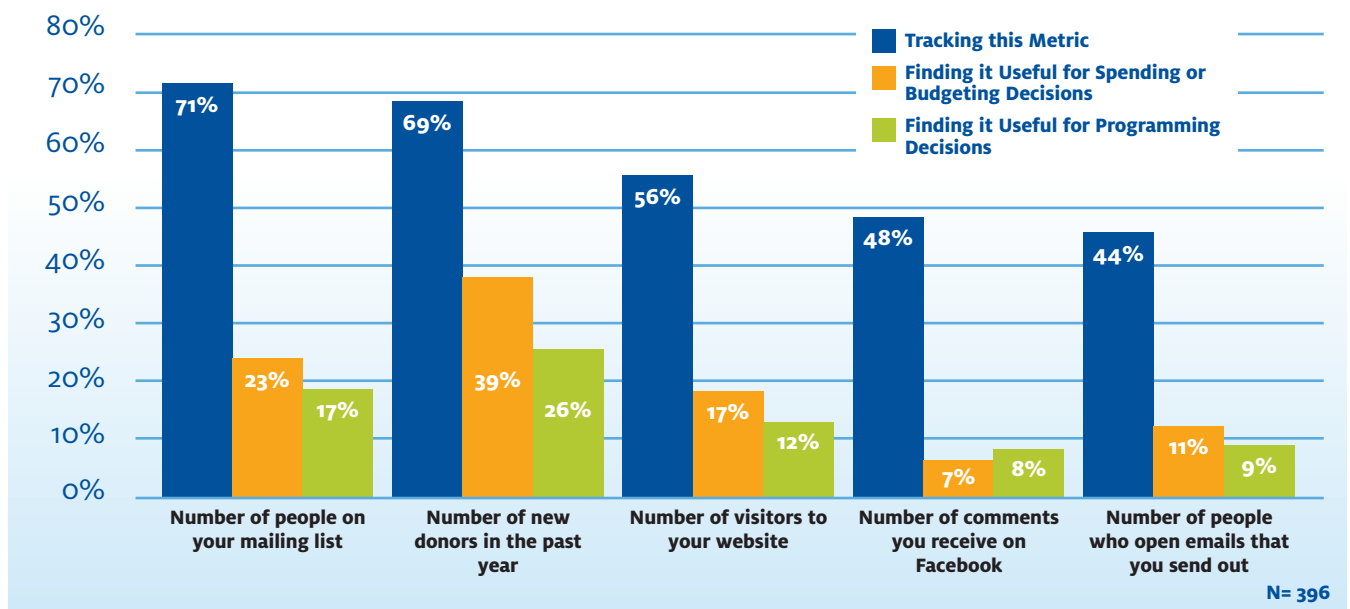
For example, one focus group participant from a youth services nonprofit noted that his organization uses equipment utilization and member retention data to help measure operational efficiency. An executive director at a domestic violence prevention organization reported that her nonprofit monitors volunteer hours to understand how many hours they can expect at different times of the year.

“I rely heavily on the data so I can produce reports that show the value of each office,” said another executive director, helping her organization make decisions as to the viability of an office when a lease is up, for example, as well as to judge whether or not to invest more resources into a service or community.

The 11 percent of nonprofits surveyed that don’t track these metrics primarily feel that they’re not able to do so—44 percent of those respondents report that they do not have the technology to do so, while 41 percent report they lack the time and/or money.

Marketing, Communications and Fundraising Data

While many nonprofits are tracking various type of marketing, communications and fundraising data—what we refer to as “outreach” data—our survey indicated a surprisingly low number are actually using that data to make decisions.



Among this outreach data, metrics related to fundraising performance—such as the number of new people added to an organization’s mailing list or the number of new donors—are tracked by more than two-thirds of respondents, but far fewer use these numbers to inform budgeting or program decisions. Only 39 percent of respondents use the number of new donors to make budget decisions and 26 percent use this data to make program decisions, and fewer than one quarter of the respondents use the number of people on the mailing list to make budget or program decisions. Only about half of the organizations surveyed are tracking other marketing and communications metrics, such as the number of website visitors, Facebook comments and email opens, and fewer than 20 percent use those types of data for budget or program decision-making.

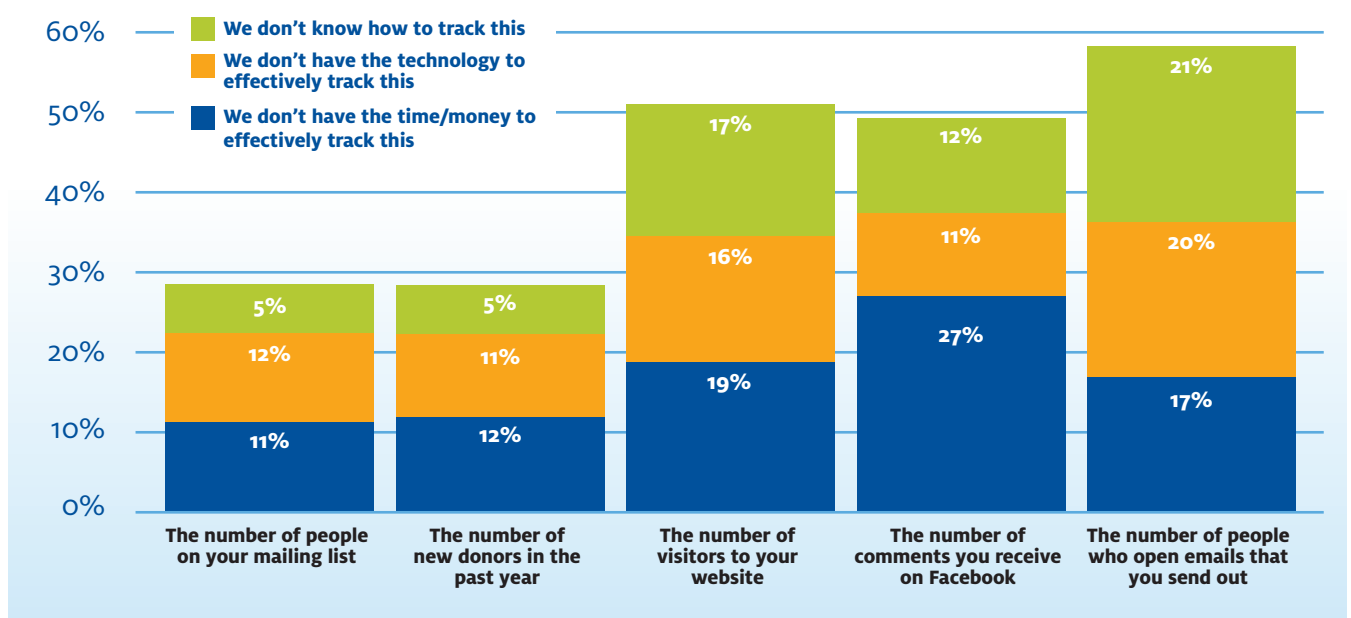
If organizations that are tracking outreach metrics are not finding it useful for budgeting or program purposes, what are they using it for? Participants in our focus groups mentioned the usefulness of these kinds of metrics in tracking the success of marketing and fundraising campaigns, but if this kind of tracking never filters up to impact budget decisions, does that reduce their value? Or are nonprofits tracking these numbers because, as we heard in our focus groups, they feel they are “supposed” to? As one participant, a consultant, noted, there may be an “over-interest” in easily trackable communications benchmarks, but not as much knowledge as to how to actually use these metrics to make decisions.

Fundraisers and marketers have the most specific use for this data. They use data to measure which constituents respond to particular channels of communication and then adjust their tactics to maximize response; some track the costs of acquisition mailings against revenue raised from those mailings to determine whether a campaign is cost-effective.

One nonprofit fundraiser gave the example that her organization had a very good response to its mailed newsletter one year, and is using that data to decide whether to do more newsletters or to redesign a different document to try to achieve a similar result.

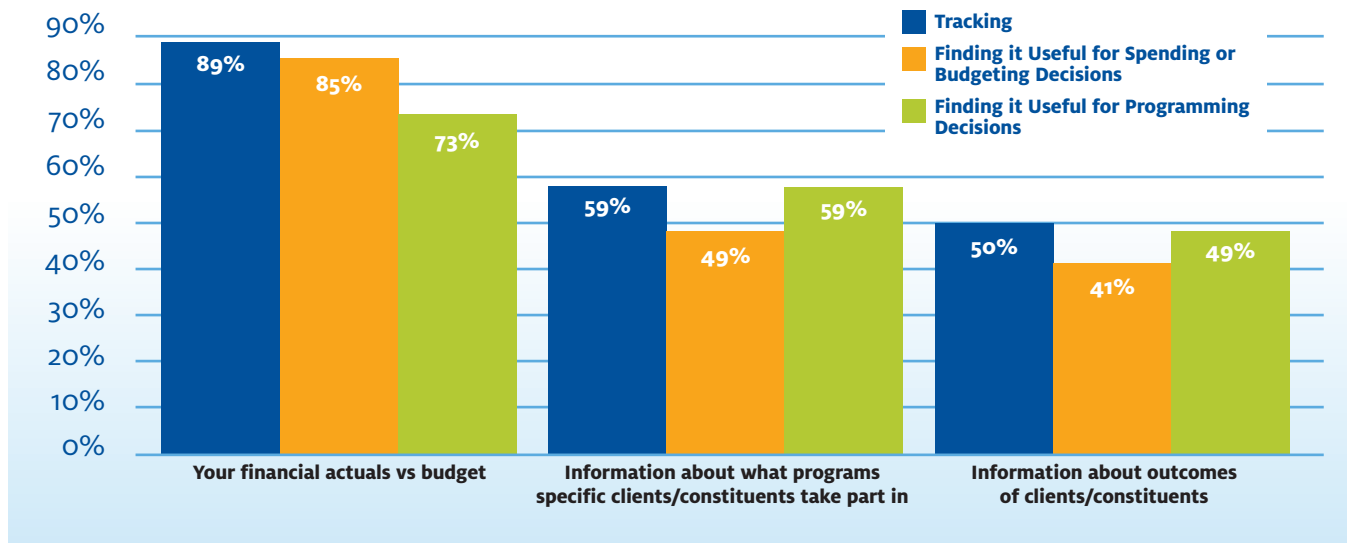
Yet one foundation officer we spoke with noted that most of the nonprofits she deals with don’t have systems in place to understand the key metrics that could help them understand the effectiveness of their fundraising strategy, such as donor retention, average gift and cost per donor.

Not every nonprofit has the basic infrastructure in place to even track the seemingly easily collectable data points, however. Among the one-third of nonprofits not tracking these metrics, many reported that they did not have the technology to track these relatively straightforward numbers. For example, nearly a third cited not having the technology or knowledge to track email opens as their reason for not measuring this particular metric.



Tracking Programs and Outcomes

Tracking program and outcome-related data should be the bread-and-butter for nonprofits because it's one of the best ways to articulate what they are delivering and the extent to which they are delivering on their mission. However, fewer than two-thirds of survey respondents said they were measuring information about programs in which their clients or constituents take part, and just half reported tracking information about client or constituent outcomes.



The ones who are tracking this information find it useful for making decisions about programs, and most of them find it useful for budgeting purposes as well.

As the focus groups showed, the range of programmatic data that nonprofits track runs the gamut of complexity. Many were tracking simple counts—number of cases per social worker, attendance data, client demographics and geography—while others were tracking metrics to analyze the financial success of their programs, such as reimbursement rates on unit of services, profitability by product or service line, cost per unit of service, program expense compared to total expense, and how much time people spend serving programs.

When it comes to tracking the actual impact of their programs, we heard many possibilities for looking at the direct effect of programs—for instance, client satisfaction surveys, number of repeat clients, client recidivism, and the percent of issues resolved for clients, all of which can help to inform nonprofits' operations. Many of the organizations in our focus groups wanted to move beyond this level to look at their actual impact in the community, but were struggling to do so.

While many nonprofits look at metrics that would actually measure the long term outcomes of their work as the “holy grail” of data-based decision-making, it's unclear that this level of measurement is practical or even possible for many nonprofits. Many orgs need to either rely on metrics which are indirect measures of long term impact—like the number of repeat clients, client satisfaction, or percent of client issues resolved—or invest in expensive, long-term longitudinal research. For instance, one of the nonprofits in our focus group was interested in measuring to what degree they were improving high school students' success in school by engaging them in creative writing. To directly measure a high-level impact like this, however, one would need years of high quality data summarizing success in school (grades and attendance, for example) and, ideally, a control group with very similar demographics and attributes. This kind of data would be difficult to get from schools, and the research design, data tracking and analysis would be time-consuming and expensive.

It is likely that much of this data collection is driven by funder or government requirements—at least initially. As one fundraiser who participated in our focus groups pointed out, “Grants and contracts were requiring some of that data and that was our initial impetus, but now we have theories that if we do this service in a certain way it will have X effect. We want to make sure that’s the case.”

Not surprisingly, organizations that prioritize measuring program success are more likely to be collecting this data. More than 75% of those with a defined plan for measuring the success of programs were collecting data about programs and outcomes compared to only half of those without a plan.

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How nonprofits are currently using data does not necessarily reflect how they would like to use it. Individuals who participated in our focus groups indicated that they want to move beyond collecting data and start using those metrics to make strategic decisions. They want to get away from, as one consultant put it, the “anecdote as evidence” model.

“We have tons of anecdotal information about how we change lives,” explained a focus group participant. “Now we’re asking how we measure our effectiveness.” She and her board are looking for the types of data they need to measure in order to demonstrate how they are making change in their community and having an impact on the people they serve.

For some nonprofits, this is a natural evolution. They go from reporting what is required of them (whether by the government or funders) to identifying and tracking metrics that support strategic planning to determining from the outset what data will support potential new programs.

However, data collection does not necessarily translate into strategic decision-making. Another organization in our focus group noted that they collect a certain amount of data related to goals and objectives in their strategic plan, and different data every month in aggregate to send to the state Department of Education. They would like to determine more strategically which pieces of data are needed to make certain decisions—not only to identify the problems, but to make sure they have the right things in place to solve them.

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More than three-quarters of those that

Case Study: **All In on Data: Committed to the Cause**

A large metropolitan organization is so dedicated to data that it has created a full-time performance improvement analysis team. The team’s goal is twofold: to measure operational efficiency—what we’re calling organizational and program health—and to measure outcomes, which involves larger questions that seem harder to quantify. For example: How are the organization’s afterschool programs helping kids be stronger leaders? How many people in the metro area have met their fitness goals and lowered significant risk factors thanks to the health centers? How is this organization making its city a better place to live?

One of the analysts notes that client retention is a critical metric, and that he measures this faithfully to see how committed his organization’s members are from year to year. He looks specifically for tools and measures that are both sensitive to change and reliable and valid indicators of those changes. He’s got organizational buy-in from the CEO, who’s a convert to the power of data, but he’s also had great success getting everyone in the organization on board with more serious data collection by pointing out that this isn’t about numbers—it’s about people. He’s convinced his colleagues that this data analysis will help individuals.

External Data

Among the types of data we asked about in the survey, external data was the least-tracked, with only 41 percent of respondents. Among those who do track external data, nearly 60 percent said they find it useful for budgeting and program decisions. Overall, roughly one-third of survey respondents found this data to be useful.

Certain types of organizations were more likely to track external data, particularly employment, environmental and housing nonprofits.

Most examples of external data we heard in our focus group were used in tracking program outcomes. For instance, a staffer at one Texas-based nonprofit noted that her organization imported state data about her clients into its own database to help measure how effectively it was keeping clients out of nursing homes, and to triage eligible individuals to see who was in greatest need of services.

Perhaps one reason more nonprofits don't use external data is that it can be more difficult to get than some of the other data discussed in this report. "There's not always within the organization a desire to evaluate the capabilities of evaluation," one consultant told us, "but the biggest piece can be getting the data that's outside of the organization to determine your effectiveness in terms of outcomes and outputs...to know if the services you're providing are actually fixing what you're trying to fix."

For example, focus group participants noted that privacy and legal issues make it difficult to connect their data with data from other organizations. For instance, although it may be desirable to track whether your afterschool program has had an impact on school attendance, it can be difficult to get that data from a school system. Some nonprofits have worked out arrangements where they can receive data about their participants in aggregate—one of the organizations in our focus group had worked out a partnership with a local university that already had data-sharing agreements in place to help skirt some of the privacy and legal issues nonprofits face in trying to get personal data. However, it may not be immediately obvious with whom an organization can partner in order to get this data.

Case Study: Using Data to Sway the Governor

A director of a public policy watchdog group wishes he had a better way of assessing the impact of his organization on people's lives. The nonprofit has won some high-profile policy victories and is able to get helpful external data from state agencies surrounding the issues with which it is concerned. The group is doing its best to put a more personal face on its work—for example, how many new citizens were helped through a recent immigration reform law.

His organization has also partnered with several others to measure health coverage for kids in its state. It provides individual legal representation and was able to measure outcomes of how many people benefited from some sort of coverage and how many medical bills have been forgiven. They learned that many were not enrolled either in CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program) or Medicaid, which helped spur public support for increased benefits. Ultimately the governor of the state agreed to enroll more children in the programs.

What's next? The director is experimenting with Salesforce.com's Nonprofit Starter Pack—which offers up to 10 free licenses for nonprofits—as his organization's CRM tool. His organization has grown quickly, and he's concerned with making sure that all his donors feel appreciated and loyal. He hopes using technology to harness his fundraising data can help him meet this goal.

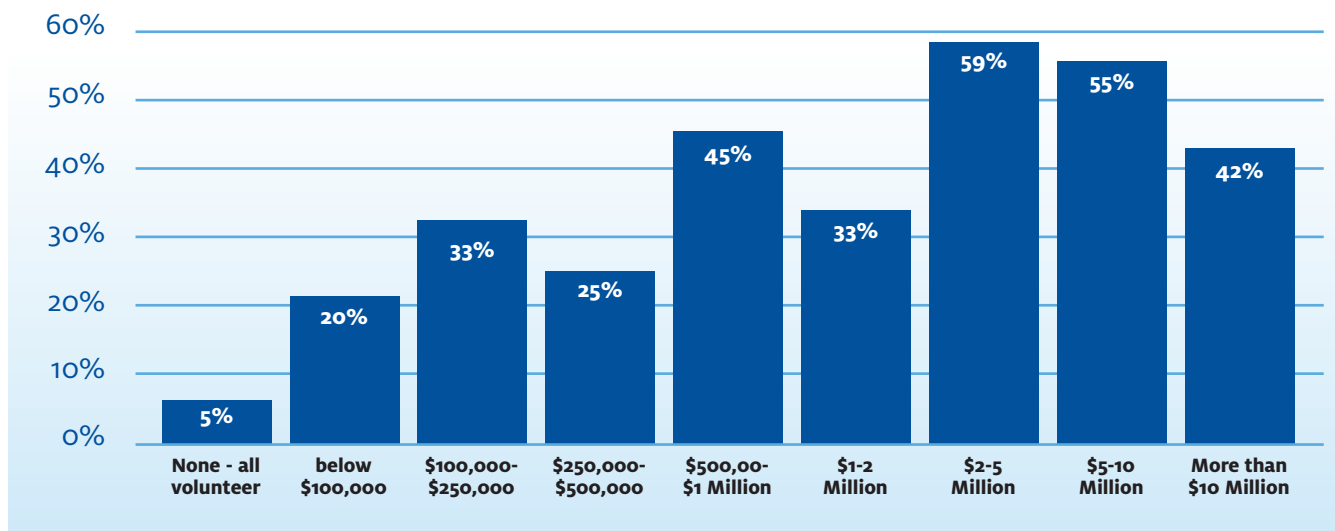
How Does this Differ by Type of Organization?

- Organizations with the largest budgets are more likely to be tracking and using data for strategic purposes.
- Human services and health organization are more likely to have a plan for measuring success.

The organizations that responded to our survey represented a diverse range of issues and sizes. They spanned more than 15 issue areas, with budgets that ranged from zero to over \$10 million. The greatest number of responses were from human services and education organizations.

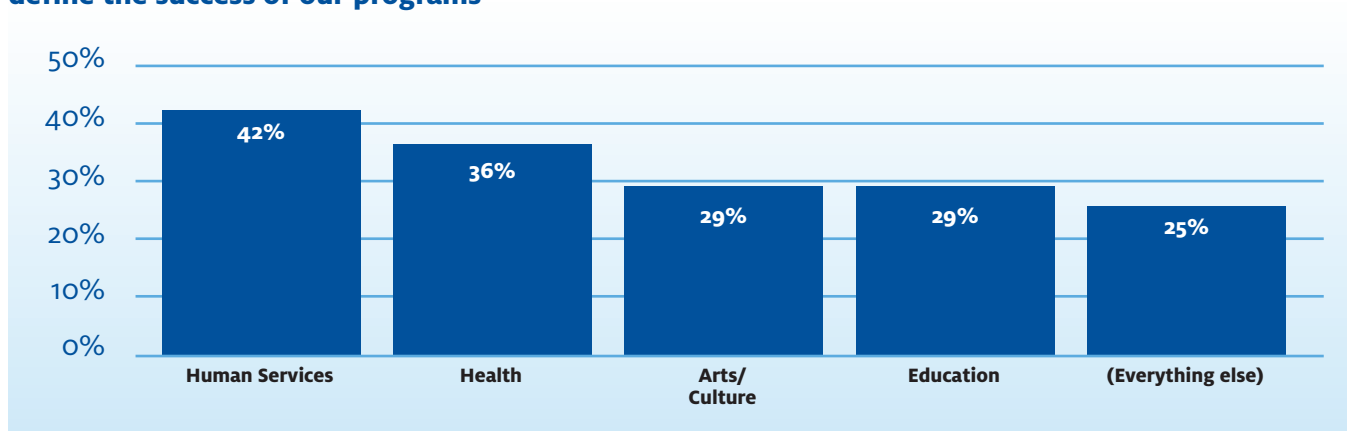
While there was not a direct correlation between the size of an organization and the degree to which they used data to make decisions, in general, larger organizations were more likely to be tracking metrics to evaluate progress toward a defined strategic plan, to have a defined plan for how they use data to determine the success of programs, and have a defined plan for how they use data to measure their organization's health.

We track specific metrics to evaluate our process towards a defined strategic plan (% who agree)

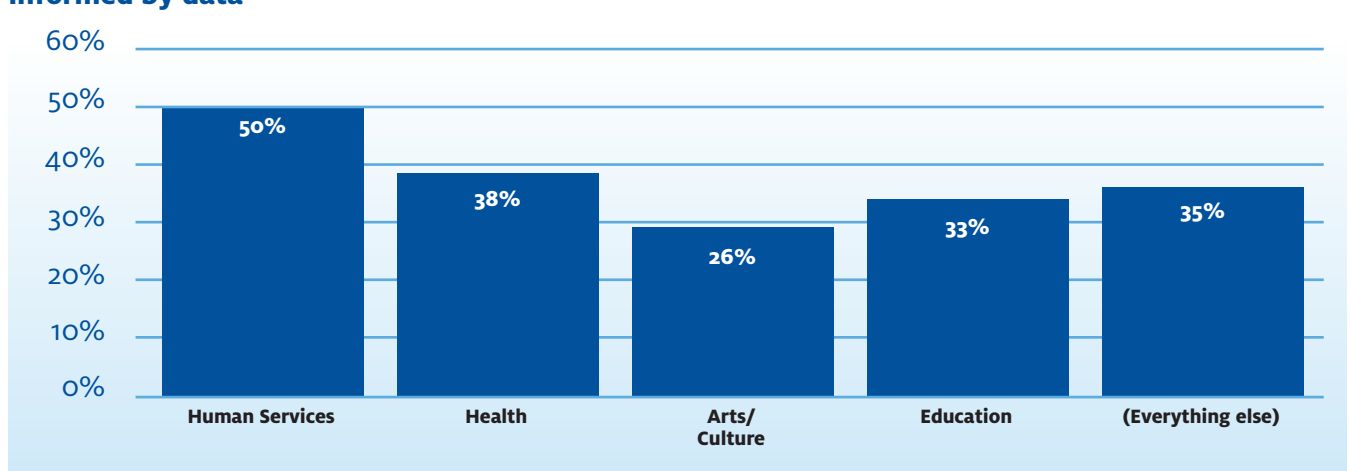


Among the different issue areas, human services and health organizations were more likely to have defined plans for how data would be used to measure the success of their programs. Some of this is partly driven by state government reporting or data-collection requirements, but could also be related to the fact that the delivery of these programs and services is more measurement-oriented than the work of an arts and culture organization, for example.

We have a defined plan for how data will be used to define the success of our programs



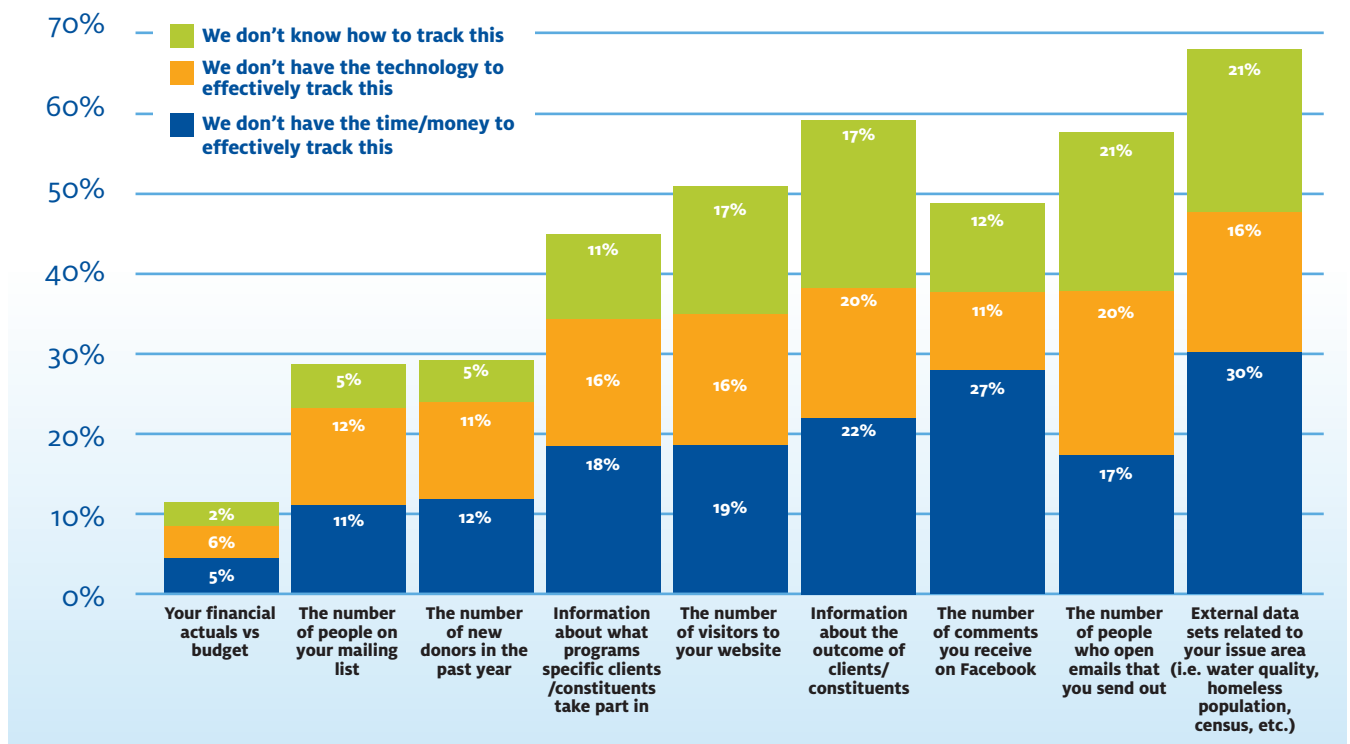
Our decision-making processes are generally informed by data



What Are the Internal Factors?

- The ability to collect and understand data and the time it takes for these activities are the biggest internal barriers to nonprofit organizations' use of data for strategic decision making.
- Money and technology were cited less often as primary barriers, but still play roles.

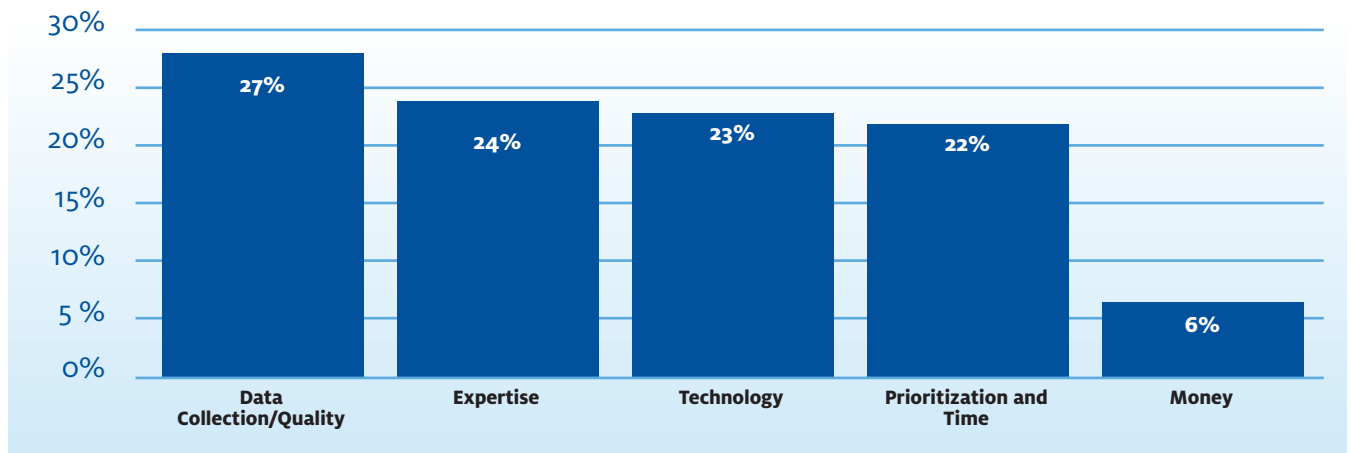
The fact remains that a lot of organizations are not tracking data or using it to make strategic decisions. In many cases, this is not because they don't want to be data-driven, but rather because of a variety of internal barriers that make tracking and using data a challenge they find difficult to surmount.



To find out more about those barriers, we asked respondents several questions to help us identify the biggest challenges to collecting and/or using data for their organization. The first two asked about specific challenges related to making decisions about programs and decisions about marketing and communications. The third was an open text question that asked respondents to name the biggest challenge they face in collecting and/or using data. We then followed up on specific challenges cited in the survey during our focus group sessions with nonprofits, consultants and funders.

Certain themes arose time and again: data collection, prioritization and time, expertise, and money. In our open comment field asking survey participants about their biggest challenge in collecting or using data, the four most commonly cited were issues related to collecting and the quality of data (27 percent of responses), expertise (24 percent), issues of time and prioritization (22 percent), and challenges with technology (23 percent). Only 6 percent, interestingly, directly mentioned money as a key challenge. The lines that divide these challenges are somewhat blurry, of course, in that they all are interrelated—for example, data collection problems could also be technology problems or related to lack of expertise, or potentially could be solved with more time or money.

The following section explores these challenges in greater detail.

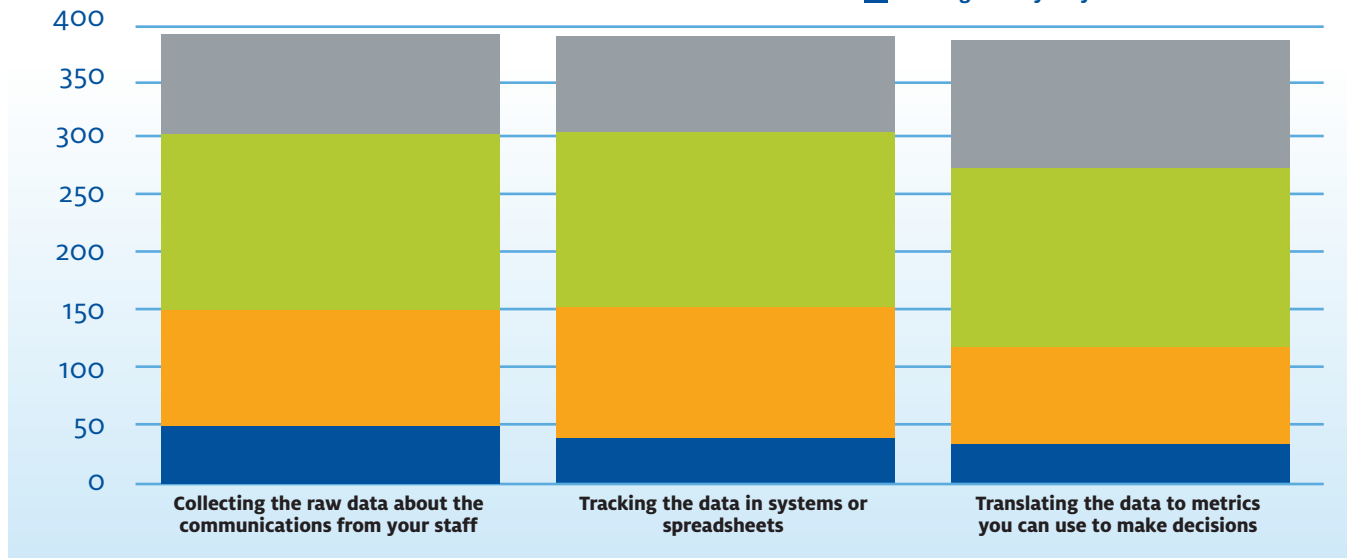


Data Collection

The ability to collect and work with data is a barrier reported by many nonprofits. In the course of the survey, we asked specific questions about organizations' abilities to collect data on programs and on marketing and communications. While slightly more than half of survey respondents felt confident in their ability to collect program data, nearly two-thirds of people surveyed find it difficult to collect data about marketing and communications.

When it comes to making decisions about marketing and communications, how challenging are the following tasks?

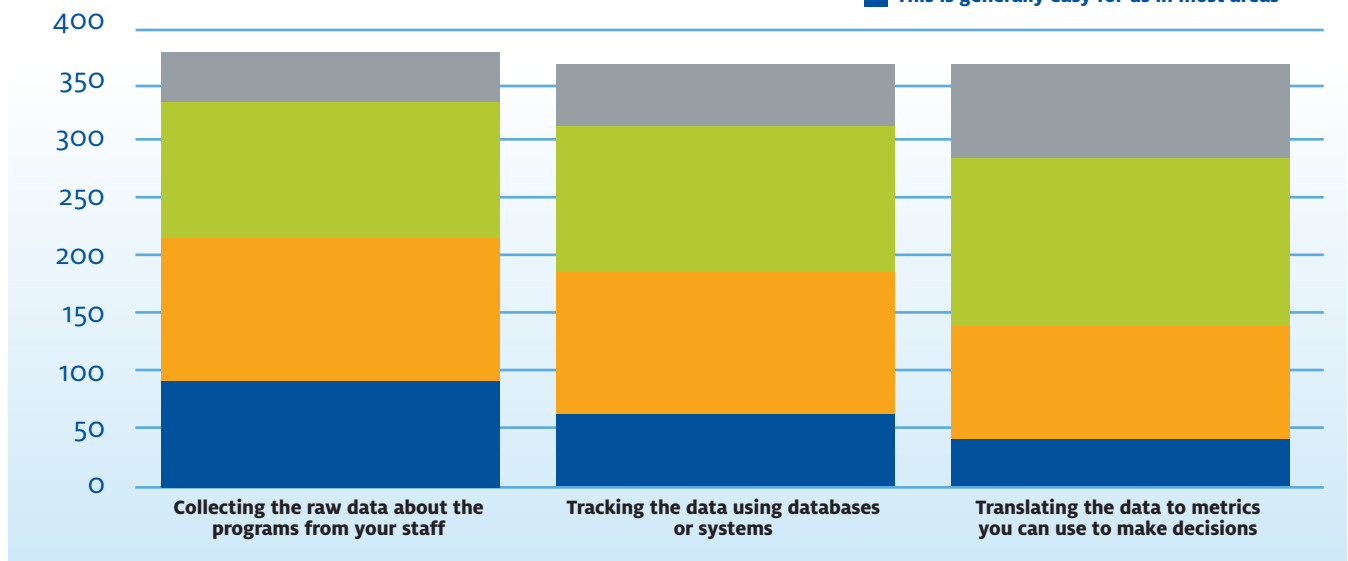
- We often find this extremely difficult
- We often struggle with this
- This takes effort but we've got it mostly down
- This is generally easy for us in most areas



Among those individuals who found it difficult to collect the raw data about communications from their systems, nearly 40 percent reported that either they didn't have the technology to track or did not know how to track the number of people who open their emails, and about one-third did not have the technology or did not know how to track the number of visitors to their websites.

When it comes to making decisions about programs, how challenging are the following tasks?

- We often find this extremely difficult
- We often struggle with this
- This takes effort but we've got it mostly down
- This is generally easy for us in most areas



Likewise, among those individuals who found it difficult to collect raw data about programs, one third cited that they lack the technology or knowledge to track information on either program participation or client outcomes.

Organizational budget size plays a large factor in this inability to collect data. More than two-thirds of the organizations with difficulties collecting either program or communications data had budgets under \$1 million, and more than half had budgets under \$500,000.

For some, the problem is that they just don't have the necessary tools. One-third of respondents who reported "technology" as a primary difficulty mentioned that they did not currently have a database or other suitable software for recording, tracking and reporting on data. Additionally, 11 percent of respondents mentioned that their existing database was old or out-of-date.

Prioritization and Time

A number of the difficulties organizations experienced in collecting and interpreting data may be related to the ability of staff to prioritize and make time for measurement. While only 3 percent of survey respondents mentioned "priorities" as the biggest data challenge they faced, 21 percent reported that making time for data-based activities was their biggest challenge. Focus group participants, particularly the consultants and foundations, felt that both of these issues came down to a matter of prioritization. They gave us the sense that their organizations

Case Study: Improving Measurement From the Top Down

"We may possibly be asking for a lot of information that we don't look at or use," admitted one foundation grants manager, confirming the suspicions of quite a few nonprofit staffers who are overwhelmed by the reporting requirements of their nonprofits. She noted that she really wants to see data about a program or set of activities that is valid, meaningful and reliable, not qualitative narratives that indicate in a general way that a grant succeeded.

She acknowledges, though, that foundations contribute to the problem by providing fuzzy reporting instructions.

"The data that we get is a symptom of the form that we designed," she said.

perceived the time it took to collect and analyze metrics fell under the category of overhead, which took away from time spent delivering programs and services.

“Ninety percent of grantees are so understaffed and overextended in their efforts to simply do the program,” noted a foundation executive director in a focus group. “They talk about evaluative thinking, but every drop of ‘blood, sweat, and dollars’ goes to the *doing*, instead of what they think of as the separate track of *thinking*. If they need to see 17 clients in an hour and they have an extra 15 minutes, they’ll see an eighteenth client.”

The implication of this statement is that, by over-extending or over-emphasizing program-delivery capacity, organizations may be neglecting opportunities to identify ways it can save money or improve capacity. As a couple of consultants said in our focus groups, it’s hard to get people to prioritize the measurement piece, but nonprofits need someone who is thinking about this on a day-to-day basis. One way to do this is to make it part of a nonprofit’s program work, by aligning data collection to the organization’s process for program delivery.

Often, data collection and analysis is conducted as a standalone project. “These measurement projects often come in as projects,” a consultant told us. “They’re free-standing projects, they were asked for by a funder or a prospective major donor or a new leadership staffer or a board member, so it’s a standalone project that isn’t baked into the organization’s normal work. So the organization spends a ton of time trying to collect this data and get it into the system and make it useful, by which time the need may have disappeared.” She advised organizations try to adjust their workflows to make it part of the ordinary course of a work day so that someone on the team can spend five minutes a day on it rather than cramming it into an entire day at the end of the quarter.

For nonprofits with fewer staff and smaller budgets, there are many priorities and only so many hours in the day. If there’s no clear delineation of measurement duties in people’s job responsibilities, one nonprofit staffer said, figuring out who’s going to carve the time out of which job description to do this is a real challenge. Some nonprofits spread the responsibilities across multiple staffers, a solution with its own set of challenges. “For us it’s a part of everyone’s job,” a staffer for a human services nonprofit explained in the focus group. “Things might move faster and be more precise if we could hire a performance measurement person.”

Case Study: **Learning to Track Data to Fight Domestic Violence**

One leader of a domestic violence prevention organization has prioritized smart data collection and evaluation. She oversees multiple locations, all of which are networked so that staffers at different sites can share data and have all their information at their fingertips, even if they’re working at another site. The sharing has proved quite helpful, and she uses the data to measure each location’s effectiveness.

This director still struggles with how best to collect data. To capture information about programs, her organization surveys clients at the time of intervention, which she feels leads to inaccurate information because it’s collected during a time of crisis. For that reason, she’s considering changing this process. She worries, too, about the ethics of keeping a “control group” to measure how effective certain programs are against the current model—shouldn’t everyone benefit from new models?

As for external data, she’d love to be able to see how many “protection from abuse” orders were filed in the county, and of those, how many her organization helped enact. She wants to be able to capture a percentage for how many of these cases out of the total have been handled by her nonprofit.

Another focus group participant said that at her organization, they make sure everyone who is involved knows how to collect data and access it so they can avoid the problems that arise when one person becomes the keeper, and the data is not accessible or collected properly or efficiently.

For some nonprofits, this is not as easy as it sounds. Nonprofit staffers tend to have a natural inclination that aligns them more toward working with people than working with numbers. During more pragmatic data planning, like a build-the-database meeting, “We’re finding executive directors want to be a part of that from their perspective,” a consultant told us. “Many times in the past, they would just say, ‘I don’t do that kind of work. I’m on the conceptual level.’”

Another focus group participant pointed out, “People who tend to be attracted to the nonprofit sector care about the individuals. Numbers are very scary to put on individuals.”

The fear runs a little deeper than that at some organizations—a participant working for a human services nonprofit brought up that she thinks there is resistance to what the numbers will show because people think they will get into trouble if the numbers don’t come out the way they think they should come out. As she points out, that is a barrier to getting people to dive into more difficult questions.

Time is particularly challenging. A whopping 61 percent of those who reported “resources” as a primary difficulty in collecting or using data mentioned time as the biggest challenge. Regardless of what an organization measures, it takes time and effort that would otherwise be devoted to a different project. “Once an organization has a dashboard, whatever those metrics are, and they start measuring whether it’s annually, or daily, or monthly...people forget about the time that needs to be dedicated toward analyzing data or interpreting the data, or toward making decisions, or toward communication,” a focus group participant said.

Expertise

Lack of knowledge is frequently cited as a barrier to collecting and working with data—24 percent of those who provided an answer to the free-text survey question about challenges cited issues with understanding what they should do with data, understanding the data itself, or defining metrics.

“Be it a nonprofit or a foundation, we find it to be a fairly mixed bag,” a focus group participant said. “It is the rare case today that you find an organization that doesn’t have interest in evaluation, but the reality is that most of them, even some of them that are high-performing in some aspects, they just lack the in-house expertise to really do evaluation and learning and improvement well. And I don’t think it’s an issue of tools so much as it is general starving and underfunding of a lot of nonprofit sector work.”

Consultants and foundations with whom we spoke noted that nonprofits have a lot of data but haven’t defined their goals enough to use it for decision making. In fact, more than 67 percent of survey respondents reported difficulties translating marketing and communications data into usable metrics for decision-making and nearly 60 percent said they had similar difficulties with program data.

There is a perception that you need specialized staff to do data analysis, but as we discussed previously, some nonprofits are distributing the duties across the organization. Staff that aren’t as comfortable with data analysis also have problems knowing where to start, and as such, get overwhelmed by the amount of data it’s possible to collect and measure. This is not to say that everyone on staff is able to play the role of data analyst. In fact, as one consultant pointed out, your best staff members might not be the best measurers.

Organizations that lack expertise in working with data have very real concerns about the quality of data and analysis they do get, primarily around the issues of consistency in data quality among individuals with varying levels of expertise. This is a particular concern for organizations that rely on volunteers for data entry. One nonprofit staffer shared her challenges with consistency in input and measurement, noting that they have a lot of volunteers with various levels of computer experience and savvy and this makes it difficult for her to have confidence that the data is good enough to use for decision-making.

This is also a challenge when a nonprofit is growing. Another focus group participant shared with us that as his staff grew from two to eight people, he saw a problem with consistency in the use of their system and now feels the need to be managing how people enter the data.

Technology

Twenty-three percent of those who reported a challenge said that technology was one of their biggest issues when it comes to tracking data, and 33 percent of those mentioned specifically that they felt they needed a better database to help while 15 percent cited issues using the databases (often, several of them) they had in an organized way to get the information they needed. Other issues include system ease-of-use, and out-of-date technologies.

Often, the same organizations that under-invest in planning for the strategic metrics that could help the organization also under-invest in the technologies that could help them track them. Both are seen, in the words of a foundation executive, “as taking away from program delivery rather than being part of it. It’s stealing the money away from the doing of the program.”

This perception is a shame, because technology can in fact be a substantial help in integrating data collection into the everyday staff process. As several consultants in our focus group noted, understanding the process of front-line staff and then designing data systems that help them gather data in a natural way that helps them with the data they need can be a critical step in creating a data-based decision making culture.

Case Study: State-Imposed Data Requirements Become an Imposition

A homeless services nonprofit struggling to collect accurate and useful data in the face of limited resources currently uses a state-mandated database to keep track of clients, and Quicken for finances, but doesn't have any software to track metrics about communications, volunteers or useful donation information. The org recently enrolled in a database to track grants, but the staffer we spoke with doesn't find it particularly useful.

She reported that her organization still needs to track specific data points like client income, services needed and demographics to be compliant with regulations, and for grant seeking and reporting, but uses the state-mandated database since the organization doesn't see the value in multiple points of entry for the same data. The staff is facing more pressure from the federal government—for whom they provide services—to implement more rigorous data collection and evaluation policies. Now they're looking to partner organizations for help and trying to come up with ways that the state database could be helpful to measure their own organizational health. But lack of time, money and staff training are all impediments to the organization's progress when it comes to gathering useful data.

Money

No discussion of nonprofit barriers would be complete without delving into the role that money—or the lack of it—plays. Interestingly, we found from both the survey and focus groups that money is a factor, but far from the only reason people aren't measuring. In fact, only 17 percent of those who reported "resources" as a primary difficulty reported money as the biggest challenge.

What we do know is that organizations with more money are more likely to have defined plans in place and to be measuring data toward those plans. Money also can be put toward other issues to, for instance, overcome technology challenges and hire additional staff to overcome time constraints.

"A big problem for me is the cost of good data systems," explained an administrator of early childhood education programs.

Another focus group participant, an executive director of a rural community organization, noted, "Clearly, money provides time in the form of more people to do the work."

However, a blast of money from a funder isn't necessarily a help in the long run—not only is it hard to get funding for things like evaluation and technology, as they're not always perceived as directly applicable to services, but it also needs to be sustainable over the long term to support the ongoing effort.

Case Study:

Healthy Appetite for Data Leads to Improvements

A local Meals on Wheels program uses data in a variety of ways, and even has a database manager on staff to work with client data required for state reporting. This lets staff access profiles, demographics, health issues and mental health issues, and identify the population segment that is close to needing a nursing home.

In addition, staff can measure how long a program has helped keep clients from needing a nursing home. Since there's a waitlist for services, staff use data to help triage people eligible for the program by using tests such as the "mini nutritional assessment" to identify who is in most urgent need of their service. Having all of this data in the database ultimately helps the organization assess the long-term health of clients.

The development director is interested in measuring communications data to evaluate organizational health, too. She noticed that the nonprofit had a very good response to the mailed newsletter one year, which brought in a lot of donations, and is looking at that data to decide whether it's the physical newsletter that's compelling or whether her e-newsletters could be redesigned to achieve similar results. She's tried to measure email metrics, like open rate and click-through, to see if particular approaches are more effective.

As enthusiastic as she is about data, though, she still gets frustrated when her funders make impossible demands. She's happy they're interested in the data, but noted that "the difficult part is when funders have their own measure and they want a variety of nonprofits that they fund to fit their work into their measure. I appreciate it more when foundations say, "What are your goals? What do you measure? And how are your results?... instead of only fitting it into the funder's mold."

How Do Funders Fit In?

- Nonprofits often find compliance with the number and diverse range of funder reporting requirements overwhelming.
- These reporting requirements can be very beneficial, in that they also are often the impetus that spurs a nonprofit to begin tracking and analyzing data in the first place.
- However, this “data regime” imposed on nonprofits takes away ownership and, often, their ability to see the big picture of what they are measuring.

Internal barriers are not the only factors that weigh on a nonprofit’s ability to track and analyze data—organizations are also subject to external demands and stakeholders, including foundations, local, state and federal governments, donors, clients and community groups.

Funder Support

Funders and government agencies are the biggest external forces that affect data collection and analysis. In recent years, many of these organizations have devoted more attention to specific metrics and outcomes measures, creating a positive force to encourage data-based decision-making. A number of the nonprofits in our focus groups were spurred to develop a data collection and analysis strategy based on funder requirements, but have since found it very useful for their own purposes. “Grants and contracts were requiring some of that data and that was our initial impetus [for measurement],” said one focus group participant, “but now we have theories that if we do this service in a certain way we are going to have X effect.”

Funder Reporting Requirements

The reporting demands placed on nonprofits related to financial support and government regulations can be overwhelming, however. One focus group participant whose organization administers education programs for low income children said they collect data on “basically everything,” using several different databases. In addition, they collect data on program information reports for the federal government—all required data. She says the “overwhelmingness” of it all is exhausting, and that because the data is all piecemeal she doesn’t get the big picture of what the organization is measuring.

In addition to the pressures resulting from reporting requirement for multiple funders, foundations often ask for a number of things—a request often driven by concerns about the validity and reliability of data nonprofits provide them. A program officer at a foundation pointed out that organizations of all sizes have real challenges articulating the changes they want to make and showing the progress that they’re making.

As one consultant noted, this is a mixed bag—while asking people to measure their work is good, requiring them to measure it 50 different ways is problematic. The issue is one of volume and degree.

Nonprofits supported by multiple funders are often subject to separate reporting requirements spanning a variety of databases and tools. In a focus group, a specialist for a poverty relief foundation pointed out that it’s easier for smaller agencies because the larger the group, and the more diverse the funders, the more difficult to report back.

Nonprofits were also frustrated by the “one size fits all” reporting approach taken by some funders and government agencies who require the same broad swath of data reporting to a variety of different program efforts. In addition, many government agencies and foundations require grantees and program participants to use their proprietary tools for data collection, which often don’t match up with the tools the nonprofits are using.

When many funders impose what one consultant referred to as a “data regime” on organizations from the outside in, there’s a danger of taking away the organization’s ownership over the data they need for their own purposes. Because funder reporting requirements sometimes have the effect of encouraging nonprofits to think short-term and focus on responding to specific requests, it can remove them a step from the strategic knowledge they need to run their own programs better.

In some cases, as one executive director pointed out, organizations try to ensure the data will show their programs as effective, to put them in the best possible position for future funding. This further muddies the waters when it comes to making decisions with the data – both the funder and the organization themselves may believe a program is effective simply because the metrics tracked were designed to show it as effective, regardless of the actual outcome.

The Challenges for Foundations

Foundations acknowledge that reporting is time-consuming and expensive, that the design of research requires skill, and that data collection is time-consuming and difficult. However, they often have their own set of stakeholders that want clear metrics as to the impact of the provided funding. Funders and government agencies want to understand impact, to see a clear and quantifiable strategic plan, and how an organization plans to measure its success, but they find that nonprofits are often not able to provide that information.

The information that they do receive comes in bits and pieces. “The universal reporting tool is called Word,” jokes one foundation chief information officer, referring to Microsoft Word document software. While program officers often find a narrative a more useful summary of the actual result than a set of metrics, the format makes it difficult to extract useful data to analyze outcomes across grantees.

Case Study: Using Data to Demonstrate Progress

One youth services program uses data to help parents of program participants become more invested in the program. Each child in the program has three objectives at any given time, so the org has started collecting data logs on each child’s objectives. Once a child masters one of his objectives, that achievement goes on his data log as “mastered.”

The organization can then bring the log to parents who haven’t been bringing their children in consistently and demonstrate the children’s progress. Such data helps convince parents of the program’s value and effectiveness. The organization’s executive director is proud of her staff’s ability to use data, to understand what it is used for and to share it with families.

“The more adept we have gotten at proving what our children do, it’s blown our hair back,” she says. “We didn’t know we were that good.”

She wants to make sure her model is replicable, and knows how expensive good data systems are—she’s eager to share her best practices with peer organizations but not sure quite how. She’s also interested in getting control of her financial data. Right now, she does her budget projections in Excel, and the process is time-consuming and arduous.

The foundations we talked to said that they feel that often the only reliable quantitative information they can get from organizations they fund is “who they are, and how many people have been touched.”

In addition, many program officers themselves are not experts at evaluating the impact of a grant. As an evaluation director for a poverty relief foundation said, “We’re trying to pull questions out of an infinite set of possible questions.” When a program officer isn’t sure what to ask, it can seem easier to ask multiple things.

Between the nonprofits’ difficulty in providing data, and the funders’ difficulty in figuring out what to ask, funders can sometimes over-engineer reporting requirements to get as much data as possible to make their own determinations later as to whether a project’s goals are being reached. As one foundation staff member said, “We may possibly be asking for a lot of information that we don’t look at or use.”

There are a number of things organizations and those who fund them can do to build a richer, more strategic approach to measuring impact, which we will discuss in our next section.

Case Study: **Funding Organizations, Encouraging Data-Tracking**

A director of evaluation for a small community foundation believes strongly that data collection and evaluation help the organizations she funds stay nimble. She recommends that organizations come up with a clear, metrics-driven strategic plan to help drive their missions and shape their work. She recognizes, though, that the competing demands of multiple funders can create unnecessary barriers for organizations.

She acknowledged that they may be measuring the same thing at three different times, spending time that could be devoted to providing services. That’s why she encourages grantees to streamline their processes and share best practices. She wants them to recognize that a lot of the information they need to measure will be universal, no matter the mission of the organization or the grant they’re reporting on.

She’s also making an effort to align requests and measurements with her peer foundations to alleviate the strain on their grantees. A group of foundations in her area have hired a consultant to find the overlap between their different reporting systems, but right now “it’s a mess,” she said, with no clear way to combine them.

And the director of evaluation still meets with resistance from her grantees when she emphasizes the importance of establishing clear internal processes around data. She notes that it’s sometimes hard to even get nonprofits to accept funding earmarked for evaluation infrastructure, as they worry that such expenditure will increase their apparent overhead expenditure and draw negative attention from government funders.

Recommendations

With all these internal barriers and external forces, how can nonprofits be both better at data collection and more strategic in their analysis? It takes a village to build this type of success. The following are recommendations for nonprofits, funders, and consultants to help organizations become more data-driven entities.

Start somewhere. “I think a piece of it is letting nonprofits know that it’s not a matter of doing all or nothing,” a consultant told us. “Starting with a little bit, starting with assessing a program—something—is better than doing nothing at all.” As discussed earlier, with all the different types of data available, many nonprofits are at a loss as to where to start. Rather than throwing your hands up in the air, consultants advise nonprofits to start small. “Pick one measure thoughtfully, measure one thing, and don’t try to measure everything,” one consultant said. She advised nonprofits to come up with success stories, look at the data and tweak what they’re already doing.

Another consultant suggests that this first effort be a discrete project with a beginning and end. Nothing builds buy-in like success; if your organization doesn’t yet have a data-driven decision-making culture, try defining one thing you’d like to improve or change, define one metric to measure it that would be useful and not too difficult to track, collect that data over time, and then use the data to help understand whether you’re making change in the organization. If staff see that this data is useful, it can start the ball rolling on collecting more metrics to support a data-focused culture.

Connect your goals to your mission to your metrics. Data is most useful when it encompasses metrics that measure whether or not you are succeeding as an organization. In order to do this, you need to come up with quantifiable goals related to what you’re trying to do and determine the best way to measure whether or not you are meeting them. One foundation officer suggests starting by asking what success looks like, and how you will know it when you see it.

Once you’ve defined success and how to measure it, you can hypothesize about ways to move toward it. The data will tell you whether you’re moving in the right direction. However, it’s critical in this model to ensure that your goals are strategic in and of themselves. As one consultant pointed out, you often get what you measure—if you’re measuring outputs that don’t actually relate substantially to organizational success, it’s easy to expend a lot of time trying to improve a metric without actually strengthening your mission or organization. One example of a good way to connect your goals to your metrics is if you have a goal of increasing volunteer involvement, setting a benchmark that you would like to meet such as the number of volunteers you need to recruit to serve a particular community. You can then hypothesize about different ways to recruit volunteers, and use data to tell you if that method worked.

Once an organization starts to dive into data, the temptation is to measure everything. However, one consultant cautioned, more is not necessarily better—and it doesn’t mean you’re necessarily measuring the right things. Another consultant agreed, noting that organizations shouldn’t just measure what they’re “supposed” to measure. That’s why it is so critical to match your metrics with your mission and goals.

Funders and government agencies can help with this as well by working with grantees to develop measurement plans that relate to the specific goals of their programs or grants, rather than requiring reporting on a broad swath of data that may or may not be useful. A small investment in refining reporting

requirements can have a big impact on grantees' ability to use funder requested data for their own purposes, and ensure time spent in gathering data for reports is valuable as opposed to simply administrative time that can't be spent on programs.

Don't start by obsessing about outcomes. When asked about methods for measuring organizational health and success, many of the organizations involved in the focus groups immediately jumped to methods for tracking program outcomes—ways to quantify the impact their organizations are having in the world. In fact, many found the concept of data-based decision-making essentially synonymous with outcomes tracking.

However, there are many different types of data that can be useful to nonprofits, and outcomes are often some of the most difficult. It may make sense to start your data strategy with other metrics that are easier to pin down, like financial, fundraising or program status. Defining an evaluation strategy to gather clear outcome metrics may well be more complicated, as you often need to first think critically about what is possible to measure and what's practical to expect from your staff. "Let go of the expectation that you're going to be able to measure exactly what you want," counseled one consultant. "Perfect is the enemy of the good."

If you're a funder, think critically about what you can expect nonprofits to be able to produce. It's reasonable to ask them to measure their own activities, but measuring their impact on a community might well be a research project that would run into the hundreds of thousands even for a trained evaluation firm. Does it make sense for them to take on a project of such scope to be able to report back for your grant?

Learn from others. There's a tendency among nonprofits to think that their circumstances are unique, but there are commonalities among many different metrics—especially for organizational health and program process. Understanding what other nonprofits do can provide valuable insight into what can work for your own organization.

Change your culture to value data. Buy-in from the top-down is critical to creating a data-driven organization. Start with your board members, one funder counseled, and convince them of the importance of asking questions like "where are we under-investing" rather than "where are we overspending."

Several of the consultants who participated in our focus groups offered advice on how to do this. One way to do this is to share a dashboard of meaningful information to get everyone familiar and engaged with the data. Another is to identify, as defined above, the data you can get without investing large amounts of resources, and make it clear that your organization prioritizes data-based decisions—often this results in measurement becoming systematized in an organic fashion. The goal here is for staff to shift their mental models of themselves, for example leading a counselor to become a data-driven counselor.

Train staff. Your staff members are the front line of data collection and analysis. Perhaps the most valuable thing you can do to build a culture that values data is to make sure your staff knows how to use your database, understands what data you are collecting, and feels like data-based decision-making can help them do their jobs.

Evaluate the existing ability of your staff for data collection and evaluation and decide if training can increase their comfort with data. Nonprofit staffers are more likely to have a stronger affinity for people or programs than for numbers, so it can be very useful to actively cultivate an appreciation, through training, for what data is good for, and how to interpret the data appropriately to understand nuances and gain

insight. Obviously, training is easier if the processes you're asking people to take on are easier to being with—make sure your systems and workflow are easy to use and integrated into the day-to-day performance of people's jobs.

Foundations can help support these efforts by developing educational programs on evaluation topics and providing funding support for capacity building in this area.

Make an investment. In general, funders are reluctant to provide money for things not directly related to services, but technology and evaluation are critical to getting funding for future projects. As one officer at a small foundation said, funders are realizing that technology and evaluation aren't optional line items—they're part of an organization's capacity building.

Organizations also need to make investments in time. In order to use data to make decisions, nonprofits need to test hypotheses, which takes time. As one consultant noted, data strategies often fall short because nonprofits don't actually take the time needed to collect and analyze it.

Tracking the right data in the right ways can help your nonprofit measure your progress toward your mission. While there are still barriers to overcome, the moment you begin to track and measure, you're already over the first one.

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About Idealware

Idealware, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, provides thoroughly researched, impartial and accessible resources about software to help nonprofits make smart software decisions. By synthesizing vast amounts of original research into credible and approachable information, Idealware helps nonprofits make the most of their time and financial resources.



Idealware specializes in combining traditional research techniques like interviews and surveys with software-selection methodologies—like detailed ratings of software tools against a rubric—to generate important new knowledge on affordable budgets. We then package our findings into approachable reports, articles, and trainings that help nonprofits make the on-the-ground decisions important to them.

About NTEN

A Community Transforming Technology Into Social Change

www.nten.org

Who We Are

A community of nonprofit professionals, we aspire to a world where nonprofit groups of all types and sizes use technology strategically and confidently to fulfill their missions. Together, the NTEN community helps members put technology to work so they can bring about the change they want to see in the world.

What We Do

NTEN connects members with one another and offers many opportunities for learning and professional development—all so you can focus on achieving your goals and meeting your mission.

How We Do It

NTEN helps members, with their diverse job functions and levels of tech comfort and expertise, share best practices, and glean insights from one another both online and off: training, research and industry analysis, regional meet-ups, our signature Nonprofit Technology Conference. As a member, you gain instant access to a supportive community that shares your passions and challenges, as well as to valuable resources for professional development.

Connect

Online Networking / www.my.nten.org

Whether you're a webmaster, marketer, executive director, fundraiser, blogger, program manager, or play another role in the nonprofit sector, connect with your peers online. Join our Affinity Groups and social networks, browse the Member Directory, post in our online forums.

Events / www.nten.org/events

NTEN's Nonprofit Technology Conference and local meet-ups bring nonprofit professionals together to share ideas and best practices. Get to know colleagues. Develop a support network. Talk shop. Vent. Congratulate. Collaborate. The possibilities are endless.

Learn

NTEN Webinars / www.nten.org/webinars

Changing the world isn't easy. NTEN members are always looking to learn more about how to use technology to further their missions. Gain a wealth of knowledge without ever leaving your desk through NTEN's extensive schedule of live webinars and archived events.

NTEN Research / www.nten.org/research

NTEN collaborates with renowned industry, academic, and nonprofit partners to conduct research on key subjects related to nonprofit technology like IT staffing and spending, salaries, social networking, and data ecosystems. Our reports and benchmarks studies offer actionable data and invaluable insider information.

Change

NTEN: Change / www.nten.org/ntenchange

NTEN: Change is a quarterly journal for nonprofit leaders. You'll find guidance on the strategic and practical considerations necessary to make the sound investments and decisions that will help your organization achieve its mission.

NTEN Connect newsletter / www.nten.org/signup

Read how NTEN members are fulfilling their missions and changing the world—and how you can too. The free monthly NTEN Connect newsletter brings you solid advice, success stories, and best practices related to technology and the nonprofit sector.

APPENDIX A: Methodology

In April 2012, NTEN worked with Idealware to conduct a survey of nonprofits to learn more about what data metrics nonprofits are collecting and tracking, and how that data is used to make decisions. Survey participants answered questions asking them what specific example metrics their organizations were tracking, how important each metric was to both financial and programmatic decisions, and what specific challenges they have had in the past with collecting, monitoring, and understanding data.

We distributed the survey nationally through 5 individual nonprofit state associations (Texas, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Connecticut). While some states had greater representation than others, all regions were represented, and we have no reason to believe the results were biased toward any particular region in any way that would affect the survey results.

The invitation to participate specified that the survey was intended for each organization's executive director. In total, 398 people responded to the survey. This means our sample should be considered somewhat indicative of nonprofit trends, but not a representative sample of nonprofits nationwide.

With the survey complete, we then conducted six hour-long telephone focus groups that included a total of 38 people. These discussions focused on the core metrics that nonprofits should track, what they were successfully tracking, barriers to success, and the role of foundations in this area. The six focus groups conducted were:

- Two discussions with nonprofit staff members who were strategically thinking about data. The majority of the participants were survey participants whose answers to the survey suggested they were thinking strategically about data, and that they were willing to talk in more detail. A few of the participants were from organizations known to Idealware to be actively using data. The first discussion group contained five people; the second contained six.
- Two discussions with consultants and staff from capacity-building organizations that help nonprofits think about technology and data collection. Idealware reached out to individuals that have discussed data issues with us before or work in a related field. Each of these discussion groups contained seven different people.
- One discussion with program officers and evaluation professionals from smaller private and community foundations. Idealware recruited three "co-hosts" that we knew to be thinking strategically about this area. Idealware and the co-hosts then recruited five more participants for this group, for a total of eight.
- One discussion with program officers and evaluation professionals from larger private foundations. Idealware recruited two "co-hosts" that we knew to be thinking strategically about this area. Idealware and the co-hosts then recruited three more participants for this group, for a total of five.

APPENDIX B: Survey Text

Thank you for participating in this survey.

NTEN and Idealware have created this survey to get an idea of what types of data nonprofits are collecting and using to make organizational decisions.

What data are we talking about? Any online or offline data you collect, from program data to email statistics to census records.

Upon completion of this survey, you will also have the opportunity to participate in a series of free webinars.

1. What best describes your organization's primary issue area?

- Animal rights/Animal welfare
- Legal
- Museum/Library
- Public/Social Benefit
- Housing
- Arts/Culture
- Education
- N/A
- Youth
- Environmental
- Employment
- Faith-Based
- Civil Rights/Advocacy
- Health
- Human Services
- International
- Other (please specify)

2. What is the approximate annual budget of your organization?

- none - all volunteer
- below \$100,000
- \$100,000 - \$250,000
- \$250,001 - \$500,000
- \$500,001 - \$1 Million
- \$1 - \$2 Million
- \$2 - \$5 Million
- \$5 - \$10 Million
- More than \$10 Million

3. In which state is your organization's headquarters?

- Alabama
- Arizona
- California
- Connecticut
- District of Columbia
- Georgia
- Idaho
- Indiana
- Kansas
- Louisiana
- Maryland
- Michigan
- Mississippi
- Montana
- Nevada
- New Jersey
- New York
- North Dakota
- Oklahoma
- Pennsylvania
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- Utah
- Virginia
- West Virginia
- Wyoming
- Alaska
- Arkansas
- Colorado
- Delaware
- Florida
- Hawaii
- Illinois
- Iowa
- Kentucky
- Maine
- Massachusetts
- Minnesota
- Missouri
- Nebraska
- New Hampshire
- New Mexico
- North Carolina
- Ohio
- Oregon
- Rhode Island
- South Dakota
- Texas
- Vermont
- Washington
- Wisconsin
- Other

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, how well do the following statements reflect how your organization uses the data it collects?

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree
We track specific metrics to evaluate our process towards a defined strategic plan					
We have a defined plan for how data will be used to define the success of our programs					
We have a defined plan for how data will be used to measure our organization's overall health					
Our decision making processes are generally informed by data					
We don't have the data that would help us make important decisions					

5. Which of the following best describes how you're tracking the following metrics

	This isn't useful for our organization	We don't know how to track this	We don't have the technology to effectively track this	We don't have the time/money to effectively track this	We are tracking this, but not rigorously	We rigorously track this
Your financial actuals vs. budget						
The number of people on your mailing list						
The number of comments you receive on Facebook						
The number of new donors in the past year						
Information about what programs specific clients/constituents take part in Information about the outcomes of clients/constituents						
External data sets related to your issue area (i.e. water quality, homeless population, census, etc.)						
The number of people who open emails that you send out						
The number of visitors to your website						

6. Of the metrics you're tracking, which have you used in the past to help make spending or budgeting decisions for your organization?

	We don't track this	Not used for this	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Critical
Your financial actuals vs. budget					
The number of people on your mailing list					
The number of comments you receive on Facebook					
The number of new donors in the past year					
Information about what programs specific clients/constituents take part in					
Information about the outcomes of clients/constituents					
External data sets related to your issue area (i.e. water quality, homeless population, census, etc.)					
The number of people who open emails that you send out					
The number of visitors to your website					

7. Of the metrics you're tracking, which have you used in the past to help make decisions about the direction of programs or services?

	We don't track this	Not used for this	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Critical
Your financial actuals vs. budget					
The number of people on your mailing list					
The number of comments you receive on Facebook					
The number of new donors in the past year					
Information about what programs specific clients/constituents take part in					
Information about the outcomes of clients/constituents					
External data sets related to your issue area (i.e. water quality, homeless population, census, etc.)					
The number of people who open emails that you send out					
The number of visitors to your website					

8. Which of the following types of external data have you used in the past?

	Never Used	Used once or twice	Sometimes use	Use all the time
Public federal government data (e.g. census, unemployment)				
Public state or local government data				
Public data about the community you serve				
Public data about potential donors (e.g. wealth screening)				
Private data shared with you by other organizations				
Are there other sources of data from outside your organization that you use?				

9. When it comes to making decisions about programs, how challenging are the following tasks?

	This is generally easy for us in most areas	This takes effort but we've got it mostly down	We often struggle with this	We often find this extremely difficult
Collecting the raw data about programs from your staff				
Tracking the data using databases or systems				
Translating the data to metrics you can use to make decisions				

10. When it comes to making decisions about marketing and communications, how challenging are the following tasks?

	This is generally easy for us in most areas	This takes effort but we've got it mostly down	We often struggle with this	We often find this extremely difficult
Collecting the raw data about communications from your systems				
Tracking the data in systems or spreadsheets				
Translating the data to metrics you can use to make decisions				

11. What is the biggest challenge for your organization, currently, when it comes to collecting and/or using data for your work?

12. As a thank-you for completing this survey, NTEN and Idealware would like to invite you to a series of free webinars on using data strategically. Would you like to be invited to participate in these webinars?

- Yes, please!
- No, thank you.

13. After this survey, we are doing additional research into what types of data nonprofits are collecting, and how that data is used. Are you willing to be contacted to participate in a focus group?

- Yes, I am willing to be contacted
- No, I do not wish to be contacted

If you answered yes to either or both of the above questions, please include your contact information below.

14. Name

15. Email

16. Organization

APPENDIX C: Survey Demographics

What is the approximate annual budget of your organization?	Total
\$1 - \$2 Million	60
\$100,000 - \$250,000	58
\$2 - \$5 Million	37
\$250,001 - \$500,000	55
\$5 - \$10 Million	31
\$500,001 - \$1 Million	58
below \$100,000	54
more than \$10 Million	24
none - all volunteer	20
Grand Total	397

What best describes your organization's primary issue area?	Total
Animal rights/Animal welfare	2
Arts/Culture	31
Civil Rights/Advocacy	6
Education	48
Employment	8
Environmental	19
Faith-Based	12
Health	39
Housing	19
Human Services	109
International	2
Legal	5
Museum/Library	20
N/A	25
Public/Social Benefit	24
Youth	17
(blank)	11
Grand Total	397

In which state is your organization's headquarters?	Total
Arkansas	1
Connecticut	41
Delaware	1
Georgia	1
Kentucky	40
Maryland	1
Mississippi	1
Montana	1
Nevada	1
New Jersey	1
New York	3
North Carolina	9
Pennsylvania	107
Tennessee	23
Texas	94
Virginia	1
Washington	69
(blank)	2
Grand Total	397