SOCIAL CHANGE consulting

Data drives virtually every aspect of a nonprofit organization. From program impact, to income growth, to volunteer engagement, data is a vital part of management and evaluation. Determining the steps necessary to improve the effectiveness of data collection while adhering to limited time and budget resources can be challenging.

Evaluate data input

Understanding and improving the data points that come into your organization is a critical first step to improving database effectiveness. From where are you gathering information? How is this information collected? Why is it collected in that matter? For many small and mid-sized nonprofits, there are often missed opportunities to capture more meaningful data. Learning the opportunities to increase data capture from supporters, potential volunteers, or program implementation and evaluating the importance of this information, will help ensure you can allocate resources more efficiently.

Connecting data output to your goals

An effective data management system allows your organization to pull data that will benefit your ongoing work. Data and analytics cannot be managed independently. When establishing best practices for your database, connecting your outputs to organizational goals allows you to ensure that you are on track and measuring the impact necessary for sustained success.

Determine the information that is mandatory

Once your organization has figured out the different ways that data enters your database and the future outputs you have, establish the data points that are mandatory and the data points that are helpful, but not necessary. Most nonprofit organizations have limited resources available for data management, making it crucial to determine the information that is 'must-have' versus 'would-like-to-have'. For example, does your organization need to know the number of people that attended a support group conference call or the exact people that called in and their demographic information? For some organizations, this specified level of detail is necessary for grants, while others need to track simpler data.

Define terms and actions

How many people are using your database? Do they define key fields the same way? It is important to work with all staff and volunteers that are using a database to establish a comprehensive and cohesive guide to different fields, terminology, and general practices. Having demographic information on the community members that your organization serves may be helpful for grants and annual reports, but it is hollow data if staff are using fields in different ways.

Capture the preferred method of communication

Quality data is critical to ensure that high-level relationship management takes place. An under-utilized tool for many small nonprofits is utilizing space in your database to capture an individual's preferred method of communication. This might be information that an individual's primary relationship manager already knows, but capturing it in a database helps in case anther staff member of volunteer needs to contact your constituent. Having a place to record if a constituent always wants a phone call or lives in their email inbox will benefit the relationship manager and the organization in the short and long term.

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