Social Solutions

MAPPING YOUR
DATA JOURNEY

The Social Solutions Maturity Model

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HIGH PERFORMING?

Our Maturity Model includes four stages: **Committed**, **Counting Outputs**, **Measuring Outcomes**, and **Managing Outcomes**.

What does it mean to be high performing? For organizations in the nonprofit and public sectors, the answer to that question may differ, depending on specific priorities, verticals, and funding requirements. However, there is a common factor that supports high performance across all organizations – data.

Data is the key to high performance. It shows who your organization is helping and how it's helping them. Along with that, your data gives insight into what's working for your organization and how you can improve on that for the future. How you gather, interpret, and report on data is just as important as the data itself. But, not every organization's data-management process looks the same. To help organizations identify their level of data sophistication, we created a set of standards and stages we call the Social Solutions Maturity Model.

Our Maturity Model includes four stages: **Committed**, **Counting Outputs**, **Measuring Outcomes**, and **Managing Outcomes**. The level your organization is on can make a world of difference on the type of service you're able to provide. And, on top of that, the way your organization uses data can lead to more funding opportunities, more effective service delivery, and the ability to create an even larger impact on your community.

1 **COMMITTED**

2 **COUNTING OUTPUTS**

3 **MEASURING OUTCOMES**

4 **MANAGING OUTCOMES**

MAPPING OUT YOUR DATA JOURNEY

Think of your journey to high performance like you're taking a trip to a new place. Because this is a new route, you'll have to rely on directions to get to your destination.

Before smart phones and GPS units, you had to rely on a physical map. Typically, you would plot a course and check every so often to make sure you were still on the right path. However, if there were unforeseen obstacles on your established route, like road work, you had to pull over, take out your map, and rethink your route. This inevitably delayed you from reaching your destination.

Once you upgraded to GPS, that pain point immediately resolved. But, GPS units aren't fool proof. Some GPS units aren't equipped with the technology to see obstacles ahead and need to take time to recalibrate,

which could leave you stranded. Now, in the age of smart phones and navigation applications, technology is advanced enough to detect any bumps in the road and can course correct for you.

Like going on a road trip, your use of data and technology is a journey that you'll need guidance through. The tools you have at your disposal have the ability to significantly aid your journey. That's where the Maturity Model comes in. It tells you where you are on your data journey, how advanced your use of technology is, and what you can do to get to the next level so you can optimize your data usage. It also recognizes your strengths and limitations, meets you where you are, and helps you master your current stage.
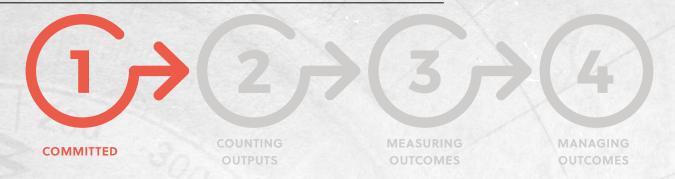

As you're reading through this eBook, it's important to understand the following industry terms:

Outputs: The individual data points your organization collects. These can range from beds slept in to attendees of a session you offered. Outputs are important because they highlight the specific interactions you and your team have with your clients.

Outcomes: The qualitative and quantitative conclusions that can be gained from the outputs you have collected, specifically if they measure a change. You'll see these figures in the form of percentages, like 80% reduction in recidivism, or 45% increase in preventive healthcare screenings. These figures are gained directly from the data you collect.

Impact: The overall change and influence your organization is having on your clients and the community as a whole. This figure is backed by the outcomes you've reported on. Think of impact in terms of what your outcomes mean on a broader scale. For example, if your organization has reduced recidivism in your community, that means that your organization has successfully reintroduced people back to their families, stabilized their lives, and given them hope to continue on the right path in the future.

COMMITTED

1 COMMITTED → **2** COUNTING OUTPUTS → **3** MEASURING OUTCOMES → **4** MANAGING OUTCOMES

> "Data is often scattered and inconsistent, making it difficult to track how a client is interacting with services."

When your organization is at the Committed stage, it's full of passion. Your organization opened its doors to solve a problem that is prevalent in your community, and it's dedicated to making sustainable change.

However, passion alone can't help you move up the maturity scale. When an organization, even a well-planned one, starts out, it's hard to understand the full impact it has on the community.

Data is often scattered and inconsistent, making it difficult to track how a client is interacting with services. As a result, service delivery can be more reactive than proactive, as well as inefficient.

Along with that, when data collection is inconsistent, it can be difficult to have enough data to create important reports to send out to potential funders during the grant application process. According to a recent study, 88% of funders want to see program outcomes data.

These common challenges, when viewed together, can be discouraging. But, being in this stage of the Maturity Model isn't a bad thing – it's actually great. Most, if not all, organizations are in this stage at some point in their development. Every organization needs to start somewhere and recognizing that you are passionate about what you're doing, but not quite at the stage to start tracking your data, is the perfect jumping-off point for growth.

This can't all happen overnight. It's up to you, your organization's leadership, and your stakeholders to sit down together and develop a comprehensive plan that can help you get your new data initiative off of the ground. As you're having these talks, remember - the more you record and collect information, the better your chances are of gaining more funding and getting to the next level in the Maturity Model.

Tips for Getting to the Next Stage

- Channel your passion to bolster your mission
- Start recording your interactions and build your data-collection process
- Research and implement a centralized data-collection system (that has a built-in validation feature!) to store your information
- Focus your attention on developing efficiencies you can implement into your operations

COUNTING OUTPUTS

"Now that you've formalized your data-collection process, it's time to measure the data you're collecting and make use of it."

The next stage in the Maturity Model is considered the formal first step in an organization's journey to becoming data driven. You're now confidently collecting and tracking important outputs that can help you gain insight into how your clients are interacting with your services and your outputs have given your organization access to important funding dollars, which helps you deliver more service.

Now that you've formalized your data-collection process, it's time to measure the data you're collecting and make use of it. But, at this stage of the Maturity Model, there can be gaps in your data, making it hard to find the insights that are present in your outputs. And that can cause significant setbacks when you're trying to find the deeper meaning of your service delivery.

It's not uncommon for your data-collection process to be less than perfect at this stage and there are naturally going to be data points that will be missed. These data gaps likely result from a lack of visibility into your service delivery and the overarching impact it is having on your clients. Those data points can, unfortunately, be the difference between counting your outputs and transforming them into outcomes.

Another pain point that comes with this stage of the Model lies with your funders. It's no secret that funders are essential to your service delivery, but with their funds comes additional reporting requirements. These reporting requirements can be very demanding, especially if your organization has just gotten the hang of tracking data within your system. An added pressure to this process is the potential inability to get the accurate, real-time reports that your funders need so they can see how your organization is using their funds.

Performance measurements should be determined by yourself, your leadership, and your stakeholders so everyone is on the same page, and you can get a sense of what your organization needs to do to get to the next level and increase its chances of not only gaining funding, but diversifying it.

Tips for Getting to the Next Stage

- Sit down with your leadership and define program success
- Look at your outputs and assess them to see how service delivery has changed over time
- Focus on quality performance measures that show progress over time
- Remember that change is key - you don't want your service delivery to stay stagnant, you want your services to improve as you are delivering them

MEASURING OUTCOMES

1 → **2** → **3** → **4**

COMMITTED **COUNTING OUTPUTS** **MEASURING OUTCOMES** **MANAGING OUTCOMES**

Once your organization has mastered counting and measuring outputs, the next step is to start measuring the outcomes that can be drawn from them. At this stage in the Maturity Model, it's time for organizations to look at the data they're tracking and find out what the long-term effects of their service delivery are.

Identifying program outcomes is the key to securing pervasive, diversified funding. So, finding those trends in your outputs and understanding how those trends show the positive change your organization is making over time is vitally important.

Take this time to reflect on your outcomes and look back in time to see where your organization started, where it is now, and how the outcomes you've measured show your progress as an organization. This review of outcomes achievement is a crucial skill to have when you're on a journey to high performance.

While your organization is at this stage, however, it may be difficult to have a holistic view of your services. Even though you can view the data you've collected from your programs and service delivery, it can still be difficult to have an end-to-end view of everything that's going on. That is mainly due to issues with data quality and data integrity.

Data integrity is vital to your operations, but it can be hard to maintain at a high level. As soon as one bad data point goes into your system, the problem can snowball into a large hurdle that can stop you in your tracks.

But, the biggest pain point that is present in this stage is the inability to make proactive, data-driven decisions and, as a result, organizations are still in a state of reactivity. You've just scratched the surface of measuring outcomes. It takes a lot of time and dedication to look at your outcomes and draw overarching conclusions from them. Moreover, it's difficult to gauge change in the community when you are just starting to gauge change in your organization.

MEASURING OUTCOMES

It's important to get your team and stakeholders excited about the data you're collecting, making sure to drive home why it's important and how it leads to outcomes. Then, it will be easier for your team members to champion your data alongside you. It will also be easier to conduct internal evaluations.
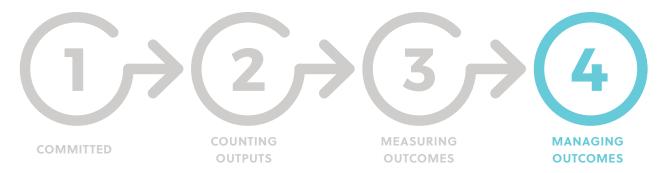
Self-evaluation is a common practice for organizations performing at a high level. Your organization should start implementing this strategy into your day-to-day operations and make it a top priority. Once you do that, you will have the tools you need to go to the next, and final, stage of the Maturity Model.

Tips for Getting to the Next Stage

- Infuse data and outcomes management into everyday functions at all levels of the organization
- Ensure your data management system is configured in a way that meets reporting requirements, individual needs, and outcomes measures
- Utilize robust reporting focused on ongoing evaluation of data

MANAGING OUTCOMES

1	2	3	4
COMMITTED	**COUNTING OUTPUTS**	**MEASURING OUTCOMES**	**MANAGING OUTCOMES**

The last stage of the Maturity Model is the level that all organizations strive for. It's the hardest stage to get to, but once you reach it, you'll actually have the tools and data agility to achieve high performance.

At this stage, you have mastered using data to make informed, real-time decisions for your service delivery. Your organization is data agile, meaning that if something isn't working, you can easily use data to course correct and change what needs to be fixed quickly. Along with that, you've reached a level of high performance that allows you to continuously ensure that your organization is using your resources in the best way possible to drive towards your desired outcomes.

No matter where you are on the scale you are still in danger of having incomplete or inaccurate data. You are likely utilizing case management software to collect and report on your data, but you still need to be hyper-vigilant when it comes to data integrity. It's important to make sure that your system has functionality in place that can reduce data errors.

Another pain point that can be seen at this level of the Model is having inefficient processes in place at your organization. Even though you are at a higher level of performance, there can still be programs or processes that aren't completely in line with your goals. It happens to even the top performing organizations, and you and your leadership need to be actively looking to locate and resolve any process that can stand between your organization and high performance.

> "It's important to make sure that your system has functionality in place that can reduce data errors."

MANAGING OUTCOMES

How to Continuously Evolve at This Stage

- Configure your data collection system in a way that meets program needs and outcomes measures
- Take inventory of your program data and ensure it aligns with over-arching goals
- Continuously evaluate your programs and services and use your data to understand the impact you've created across your organization
- Report on your data to measure and manage the progress you've made over time

It's important to use reporting as a tool to see where you started and as a lens to see where you can go in the future. Continue to strive for a higher level of data agility and use your reporting structure as the foundation.

"Continue to strive for a higher level of data agility and use your reporting structure as the foundation."

Finding Your Way to High Performance

The Maturity Model is a journey you take to becoming a data-driven, high-performing organization

But, unlike other journeys, this one doesn't necessarily have a destination. You will never get to a point where you will be finished exploring new ways to use data to optimize your operations. Your technology should continuously be evolving your organization to one that can perform even better year over year.

So, where does your organization lie on the Maturity Model? It's important to recognize where your organization is on the scale so you know how you can continue on your journey. Once you know where you are, you can start your data journey and strive for high performance. With the Maturity Model and data as your guides, you'll be able to prove that what your organization is doing makes a positive difference on your clients, and that you are impacting your community for the better.

The way your organization uses data can lead to more funding opportunities, more effective service delivery, and the ability to create an even larger impact on your community

Social Solutions

Social Solutions is the leading provider of outcomes management software for human services, workforce, and education programs. Across the globe, Social Solutions' software, Efforts to Outcomes (ETO®) and Apricot Software®, is the leader in equipping thousands of organizations with the tools needed to transform the lives of children, adults, and families by making data useful to staff at all levels, from case managers to executive leadership.

To learn more about Social Solutions, please visit www.socialsolutions.com.