ONTARIO NONPROFIT NETWORK

A FRAMEWORK FOR NONPROFIT DATA STRATEGIES

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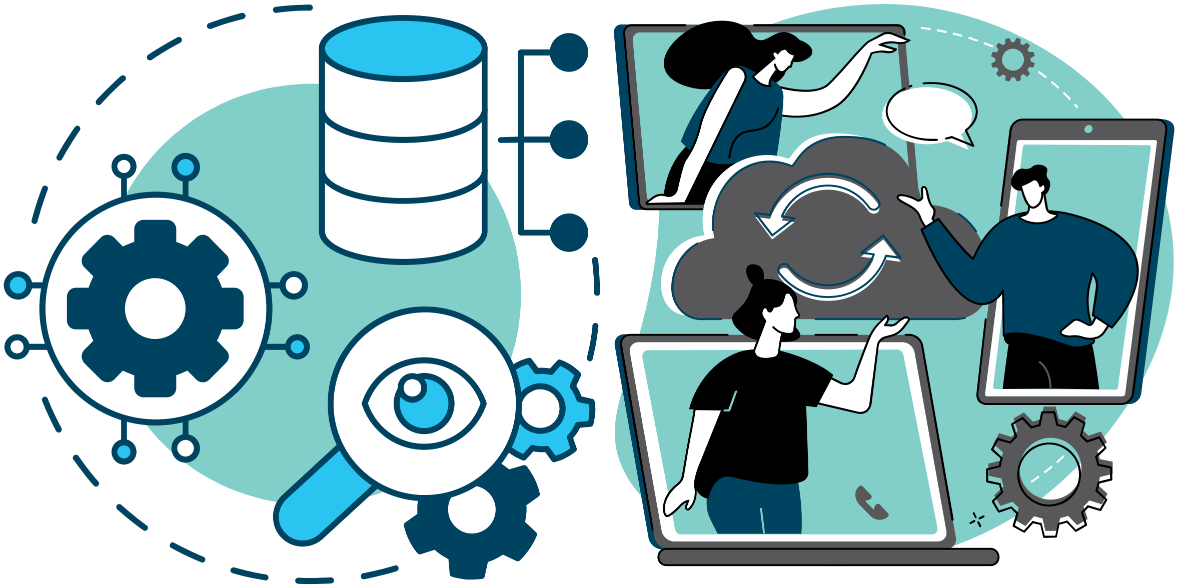

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We extend a special thank you to all the nonprofits and data champions - across Canada and globally - who shared their data journeys, challenges, project findings, and general wisdom on various data topics. Your honesty, efforts, and generosity were inspirational, and we hope you find your data experiences and narratives reflected throughout this report.

ABOUT

This report is the culmination of ONN's two-year Data, Evidence-use, and Learning (DEAL) project, which grew out of ONN's 2015 paper with Powered by Data (PBD), "Towards a Data Strategy for the Ontario Nonprofit Sector".

Bolstered by ONN's three-year evaluation project and PBD's Data Policy Coalition, the goal of the DEAL project was to ensure that the data and knowledge of Ontario's nonprofit sector are ethically used, and appropriately leveraged to support learning and evidence-informed decision-making.

The project's objectives are to:

- Foster a strategic, ethical, and equity or rights-based approach to data collection, analysis, use, sharing, and ownership in the sector.
- Bring nonprofit voices to policy and legislative development processes related to administrative data, open data, and data privacy.
- Advocate for up-to-date and comprehensive data and research on the sector.
- Demonstrate to Ontario nonprofits, and their funder or donors the value of investing in more sophisticated data systems, and their capacity in the sector.
- Contribute to a more cohesive identity and self-awareness of Ontario's nonprofit sector by demonstrating the value of shared data systems that encompass the subsectors (arts, sports, faith groups, social services, etc.) and the geography of Ontario.
- Inform and learn from related initiatives with the federal government and federal-provincial networks.

The key activities that supported the objectives over the last two years include:

- Ongoing engagement and regular convenings with non-government funders (public and private foundations), nonprofit organizations, networks and umbrella organizations, on various data topics.
- Hosting special data socialization events, such as Data Day and sessions at various nonprofit conferences.
- Active participation in various webinars, workshops, and conferences.
- Resource development such as the What's The Deal e-newsletter, Data Hub on the Resource Centre, Data Glossary, Decent Work and Data Equity Primer, and Data 101s.
- Establishing connections with and learning from other jurisdictions and stakeholders building data strategies.
- Leadership in cross-sectoral, Canada-wide data committees and working groups.

The DEAL project was stewarded by a steering committee of the following organizations:

- Ajah
- Network for the Advancement of Black Communities (NABC)
- Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC)
- Ontario Trillium Foundation
- Peacebuilders International
- Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC-Hamilton)

Additional information about the project principles can be found in the Appendix.

REPORT OVERVIEW

The report provides an overview of the complexities, challenges, and opportunities on how the nonprofit sector - bolstered by investment and support from other stakeholders - can make the best use of its data, to develop better outcomes for communities across Ontario. The intention is to encourage nonprofit leaders to advocate for data practices and standards that are meaningful to their work.

There are two major forms of data referenced in this report: data generated in or by nonprofits themselves, either individually or as a collective and data generated about the nonprofit sector, usually through researchers, academics, or government agencies. It does not delve into specific types of data, such as evaluation data and performance metrics or measurements, which lend themselves to additional study and exploration.

This report is intended for both individual nonprofit organizations and nonprofit collectives that would like to create a data strategy that reflects their needs. Often, nonprofit organizations work together in a number of formal and informal partnerships and collaborations.

These collective entities may include:

- Nonprofits who work together in a specific **geographic area,** such as provincial, regional, municipal, or neighbourhood groups.
- Nonprofits who work together to meet the needs of a **specific population**, such as children or youth, homeless or under-housed persons, and immigrants or newcomers.
- Nonprofits who work together on a **particular issue**, such as climate change or environmental issues, civic engagement, or poverty reduction.
- Nonprofits who work together in a **specific subsector,** such as arts or culture, sports or recreation, or social housing.

The report outlines foundational elements and five major pillars that are key to successful data strategies. It also offers concrete next steps for individuals, as well as networks and umbrella nonprofit organizations to help build the pillars into their data strategies. These pillars - governance, equity, privacy, standards, and capacity - are components that have contributed to the positive implementation of similar strategies in other Canadian provinces and international jurisdictions. The pillars contribute to developing data principles, and building a data culture within the nonprofit sector.

The report is divided into four sections:

- Part A - provides the reader with an understanding of the nonprofit sector’s current data landscape.
- Part B and C - introduces the framework, and elaborates on its key components.
- Part D - offers recommendations for various stakeholders to support framework development and adoption.

This report can be used by nonprofit organizations and collectives who are curious about data and would like to explore its applications to their work. It is also intended for government and non-governmental funders, policymakers, academics, and researchers who are interested and invested in supporting the nonprofit sector as an equal and vital partner in the data ecosystem.

TWO KEY LEARNINGS

1 **Over the past two years, the first key learning for ONN is that the nonprofit sector in Ontario does not lend itself to a singular data strategy.** Because of our sector's diversity, uniqueness, and differing data capacities, nonprofits and nonprofit collectives need to be supported and resourced to build their own data strategies. The shift in focus from sector-wide to individual organizations or collectives allows the nonprofit sector to construct data strategies that are meaningful to their work.

Nonprofit collectives are essential to developing, leading, and supporting data strategies. They often have a deep understanding of their membership and can engage their members in thinking about their data. Some may already have shared data systems or agreements in place. These collaborative initiatives demonstrate the value of using a data strategy to organize data work that is already happening.

Many of these collectives also specialize in advocacy, public policy, or research work, and may already serve as data repositories or institutions for their members.

These “data intermediaries" must be entrusted and resourced to develop specific data strategies that recognize the unique data realities, needs and language of the subsector or locality. They may also help nonprofits without capacity collect or utilize various sources of data.

As a data intermediary, collectives can strengthen their work, functioning as data stewards, collecting and disseminating data, and analyzing and using data for policy or advocacy. They could accurately depict (and meet) the subsector’s data needs. By aggregating data from their membership, nonprofit networks and umbrella organizations can develop data-driven narratives and advocate for better decision-making.

2 **The second major learning is that the nonprofit sector needs to own its data, and establish its data practices and policies to fully participate in the data ecosystem.** By establishing ownership of the data that the sector holds, it can then begin the process of building reciprocal relationships with other stakeholders in the data ecosystem, such as government, funders, and research or academic institutions.

In the current state, nonprofit organizations often do not have any ownership or control over the data that they collect. Historically, nonprofits have produced and provided data, but have seldom created and managed their own relationships with other members of the ecosystem. For example, organizations often do not negotiate data sharing with funders or government agencies. Instead, funders and government agencies set the terms and create the standards around data collection and use as part of their funding agreements.

Nonprofits often do not specify what data needs to be collected, how often, or determine its relevance to their work.

As individual nonprofits and nonprofit collectives increase their data skills and use, expand their data projects, and explore how to use data more intentionally, it will require a fundamental shift in the sector's identity from data providers to data owners. With adequate policies and practices that are grounded in strong data principles, the nonprofit sector could emerge as a true data leader.

SECTOR SNAPSHOT

CHILD & YOUTH PLANNING TABLE IN WATERLOO

Waterloo Region's Child and Youth Planning Table (CYPT) is a community-wide partnership that includes over 800 service providers, researchers, planning bodies, and funders serving children, youth, and families in Waterloo Region, as well as over 300 young people. In 2019, CYPT aligned its goals and measurement framework with UNICEF Canada's Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being and launched a pilot of the Youth Impact Survey (YIS), focusing on the role that belonging plays in wellbeing.

Young people are intentionally engaged throughout the survey design and sense-making process, ensuring that the data is relevant and can be used to push for change. The project reflects a successful combination of investing in data tools, mindful data collection, and joint analysis.

PART A: THE BASICS

How are we defining “data”?

Numbers, narratives, dance, art - all of it is data. The definition of data is nebulous in the nonprofit sector. Adding to the confusion, data is used interchangeably with “information”, “knowledge”, and “metrics”. At its core, data is a collection of facts where data points are individual factoids. Data becomes information once it has been collected, organized, and translated into usable formats. Nonprofits, like most industries, interact with data in all forms but not all of it is necessarily information. Collected data is not always organized and utilized by the organization to support its operations or work.

Data can be either qualitative (descriptive such as “happy”) or quantitative (numerical such as a percentage). While there is increasing pressure for nonprofits to collect and organize quantitative data, often as metrics, qualitative data is just as important. Qualitative data is particularly important to communities who value sharing history and knowledge through oral traditions, dance or ceremony, and other methodologies.

Using both qualitative and quantitative data yields more robust, nuanced analysis. While all data are valid, its relevance is linked to other factors such as how it was collected, who collected it, for what purpose, how it is being used, and how it is being handled.

Data life cycle refers to the full process of how data “lives” in an organization. It is referred to as a cycle because lessons learned from one step can help support the following step.

While there are many models, most data lifecycle models include the following key steps:

Planning/Generation/Acquisition: given how much data is around us, organizations must decide what data needs to be collected or obtained and for what purpose. Clarity during this stage can help organize the remaining steps.

Build/Pre-collection: this step requires the organization to decide how it will go about obtaining and organizing its data. It may require creating new tools (such as surveys or forms) or accessing existing databases.

Collection: organizations must now put their plan into action by collecting the required data. There may be additional steps in collecting data, such as entering the data into a system or organizing it by a set variable.

Preparation/Processing: once the data has been collected, it may require additional steps before it can be used such as anonymization (removing unique identifiers) or encryption.

Storage: data is rarely collected and immediately used and discarded. Most organizations need or will want to hold the data for some length of time. This may require online or offline storage solutions.

Analysis: this is the fun part! The collected data will now be used to answer questions set during the planning and preparation stages of the life cycle. It can provide powerful insights for the organization, its programs and services, and/or the people they serve. Some data projects also may choose to visualize the data using various creative methods, allowing them to share their data and its analysis more broadly.

Inform/Interpretation: this step requires the organization (and perhaps other key stakeholders) to make sense of the data and decide how it will be used. Implications of the data may lead to changes in programs, services, or internal operations.

Archival/Deletion: this final step requires the organization to consider how long it will hold the data as per privacy legislation (especially the “raw” or unfiltered data that may still have personal information), and when and how it will delete it or how it will safely hold it for future use.

RESOURCES

- Data Lifecycle Toolkit by Policywise
- Data Glossary by ONN

Data matters to all nonprofits

With more data being collected and available than ever before, Ontario's nonprofits are eager to use data as a tool to bring diverse stakeholders together in tackling complex systemic issues such as community health and wellbeing, food insecurity and climate change. As a critical part of our social fabric, nonprofits provide vital insights for and about the communities in which they work, individually and collectively.

Data both collected by and on the sector gives the nonprofit sector a way to understand and address systemic challenges, such as:

- Changes to the sector's realities, characterized by decreasing revenues, increasing demands for programs and services, and shifting labour force needs (such as ONN's State of the Sector surveys, Charity Insights Canada Project, and Vital Signs reports);
- Calls to address white supremacy and patriarchy in the nonprofit sector, among other parts of society;
- Calls to actively decolonize the nonprofit sector (including charitable foundations) and come to terms with nonprofits' role in reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, such as supporting Land Back initiatives, relinquishing control over programming that could be delivered by Indigenous nonprofits, and working to reduce competitive processes.

Individual nonprofits can also use data to make strategic decisions, measure progress, and advocate for change, such as:

- Providing insight around their fundraising, communications, and outreach efforts;
- Modifying existing programs and services to better serve changing demographic communities;
- Understanding how working conditions are impacting their staff;
- Linking their work with community partners and stakeholders;
- Bolstering a compelling case for increased investments for underserved priorities.

Having and being able to use our own data can better support nonprofit advocacy. Our data can help us advocate for better working conditions, strengthen social finance and community wealth building efforts, and ensure the protection and care of underserved populations.

SECTOR SNAPSHOT

During the early 2000s, Indigenous Peoples made up a little over 1 per cent of Hamilton's total population. However, Indigenous social-service agencies estimated that 20 per cent of the city's homeless population was Indigenous, recommending that the city allocate twenty percent of its homelessness funding to this community. While the city initially voted to approve this allocation, they received feedback from an independent consultant that the allocation percentage was not based on "reliable data." In this case, the Social Planning & Research Council of Hamilton was able to use data from findings in the 2011 Our Health Counts Hamilton to highlight that 13 per cent of the 790 Indigenous survey respondents reported being under-housed. This data helped secure the initial 20 per cent allocation of funds to Indigenous-specific housing and social initiatives.

[Source: https://www.tvo.org/article/why-a-lack-of-data-on-urban-indigenous-people-could-be-harmful]

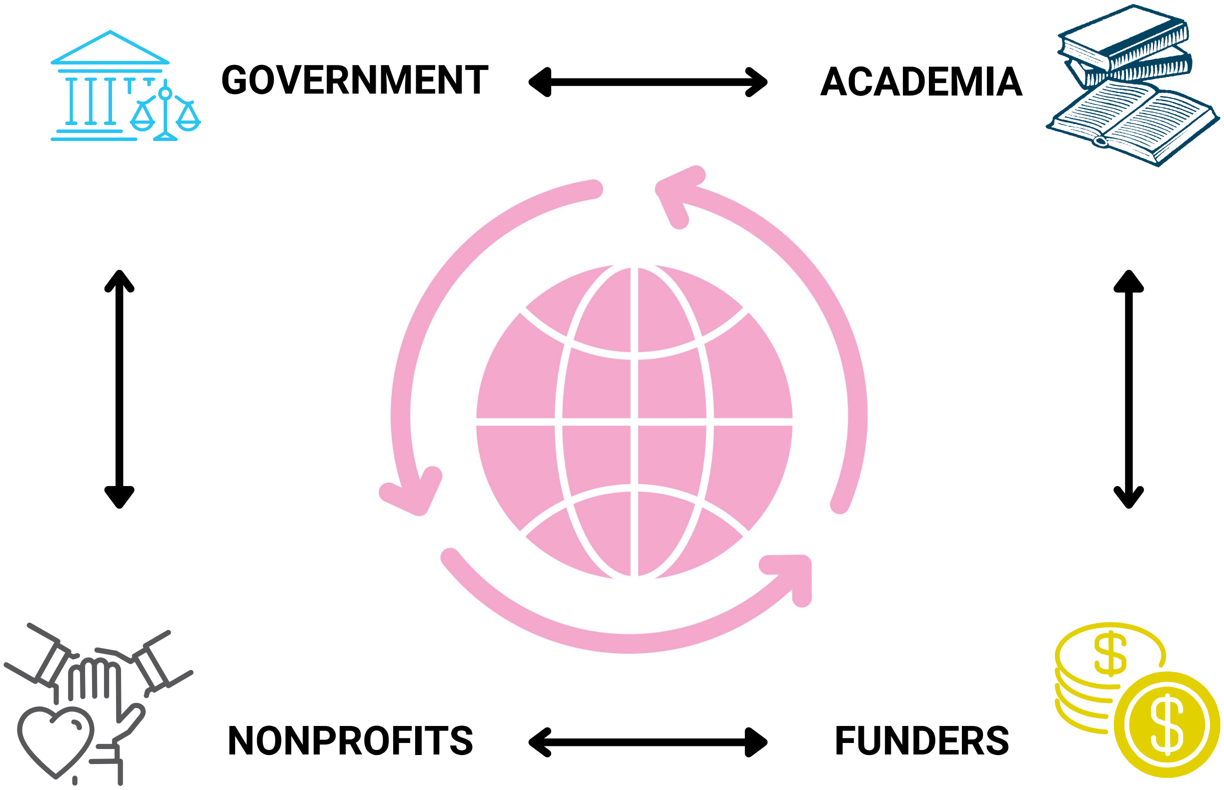
While there is a lot of data work happening within our sector, the data being collected is not often well utilized, is rarely reflected back to organizations themselves, and almost never shared with the people and communities that have contributed to the data collection.

Without further consideration of the data lifecycle, nonprofits are stuck in a process of data gathering without adequate training, resources, and without translating that data into usable information. With mounting pressures on nonprofits to provide data one way or another, and most commonly as a funding or donation requirement, nonprofits struggle with how best to use their data.

Nonprofit organizations as part of the data ecosystem

Data on or generated by nonprofits is part of a larger ecosystem with other key stakeholders, mainly academia or researchers, non-government funders (ie. foundations, charities, or donors), and governments. The ecosystem is only healthy when each member is aware of the others, can provide continual input and feedback, and is understood as equal and important contributors. In some instances, the stakeholders are interdependent on each other.

For example, academia and researchers produce reports and papers that influence thinking about evaluation and evidence while non-government funders may work in concert with government (and nonprofits) to highlight needs and trends. Conversely, individual stakeholders in the ecosystem may operate in silos, contributing to overlapping or redundant data collection. The lack of coordination between the stakeholders adds to the scarcity of useful information on the nonprofit sector and its overall impact.



Lending to the complexity, individual players within the ecosystem vary in data capacity, awareness, and readiness, which can in turn impact their ability to understand or participate in the ecosystem itself. For example, larger, more established nonprofits or funders may have greater resources and ability to collect, analyze, and share data, while smaller organizations or community-based foundations may not have the staff or funds to engage in more critical data work.

Data work is not always easy; for many organizations, it can be time consuming, expensive, technically difficult and stressful. It requires funds, human resources, and technical expertise that may be difficult to procure.

Data is not shared equitably across the ecosystem. In particular, nonprofits' relationships with both government and non-governmental funders, government as regulators, and research and academia are often unilateral, with nonprofits providing information and rarely receiving it back.

Within the data ecosystem, the various players have different power dynamics, both real and perceived. Most funders often set the criteria for data collection as part of the transactional relationship between themselves and their grantees. This mindset - data as justification for funding or data as a byproduct of reporting - can present a significant barrier to nonprofits in connecting data to their work and incorporating it into their strategic planning and thinking. The nonprofit relationship to data too often mirrors the mindset of funders and other stakeholders. Data remains important, of course, but primarily because it has monetary value and not because it can be a critical organizational and learning tool.

Increasingly nonprofits are working with tech and data consultants to help them assess their data needs and build their data infrastructure. These consultants can serve as intermediaries between nonprofits and bigger tech companies, filling in for the lack of time, resources, and staff capacity. For some nonprofits, this partnership allows them to focus on their work, while the consultant works with staff and stakeholders to complete various data projects.

The relationship between consultants and nonprofits works best when there is mutual value alignment and respect for each other's expertise, and the consultant can work with the nonprofit and community to offer actionable solutions. If the consultant does not understand the nonprofit context, the organization can spend valuable time, staff resources, and funding on technological and database solutions that do not fit its needs.

Complexities of data in the nonprofit sector

It is difficult to really know how much data is held by nonprofits or the quality of this data. Organizations too often collect data without being critical, mindful or organized.

Without a sector-wide data maturity assessment, it is hard to quantify the nonprofit sector's data use and capacity. Our work over the past two years confirms that **data use and practice** is uneven across the sector and varies widely between individual organizations. Nonprofits can be classified into various categories by different factors, including their size, populations served, subsector, and geography.

All of these categories lend to individual nonprofit identities, and create their relationships with data. Across these categories, however, individual nonprofit organizations and collectives face several **similar overlapping barriers to collecting and using data**.

These include:

- Little to limited knowledge and capacity to collect and analyze their own data.
- Not enough data collection or data collection that is meaningless and/or has limited utility.
- Conflicting or onerous reporting or partnership requirements which guide data collection and analysis.
- Scattered and disorganized organizational data.
- Financial constraints or technology limitations.
- Inability to access data once it has been collected and shared with funders.
- Lack of control over external data use.
- Disconnection between the data collected and collective impact of nonprofit work, and/or between collected organizational data and internal operations

PART B: FOUNDATIONS OF A DATA STRATEGY FOR NONPROFITS

Data work should be aligned with an organization's mission and mandate

ONN has always sought to better understand how data can be used as an organizational tool that can help nonprofits tell our stories and make sense of our world. Throughout our exploration, we have learned that **data is most meaningful to organizations when it is connected to their work and incorporated into their strategic planning and operations**.

An organization's data work should be aligned with its values and culture. The shift from data as a byproduct of transactional relationships with stakeholders to data as a critical organizational tool is only possible if the mindset of all members of the data ecosystem also shift in support of this transition.

Nonprofit organizations can invest time and resources into understanding the data they hold and how they hold it. Regardless of size, subsector, or geographic location, nonprofit organizations can take time to consider their data collection and use. Nonprofits can display leadership in asking questions and holding honest conversations with employees, volunteers, community members, and funders about their data.

These stakeholders can help nonprofits determine and deepen their relationship to data by:
- Clarifying what data the nonprofit already has or knows.
- Helping the nonprofit decide what key questions they may have about their work or impact.
- Identifying which methodologies, partners, and funders will help them find and track their answers.

As data available to the sector increases, so does the onus of finding meaning, insight, lessons, and cautionary tales applicable to our sector's work. When the nonprofit sector does not translate data into information, it loses the opportunities to identify and mobilize on current trends or issues and to anticipate and tackle future problems. The importance of data translation only increases as nonprofit organizations grapple with future technologies (e.g. automation), economic and social uncertainties (e.g. affordability crisis and polarized communities) and increased demands on our data systems (e.g. sudden inflow of clients).

Data principles

Data principles are value statements that help an organization form their thinking on their data strategy. They can be drawn from the organization's mission, vision, and values.

Several considerations may be made to help develop these principles, including:

- Organizational values
- Organizational culture
- Data maturity
- Risk tolerance

Data principles usually address how a nonprofit will use their data, build trust and transparency within their data work, and take responsibility for their data. Data principles vary widely between organizations and subsectors; there is no one-size-fits-all approach to developing organizational data principles. These principles are important to develop as a grounding exercise that speaks to organizational intent, goals, and aspirations and can be very practical. They can serve to connect organizational data work to communities served, promote justice and equity goals, or ensure that confidentiality and privacy are strictly maintained. These principles do not have to be long or complicated. Ideally, they would reflect organizational language and relate directly to the organization's data goals and objectives.

The principles can, in turn, inform data policies and practices. For example, if an organization creates a principle on ensuring data transparency, they may want to create policies on disclosure, use and sharing of data and open access. The efficacy of the data principles is reliant on all members of the organization or network, including staff, volunteers, and board members, understanding and using the principles throughout their data work.

RESOURCES

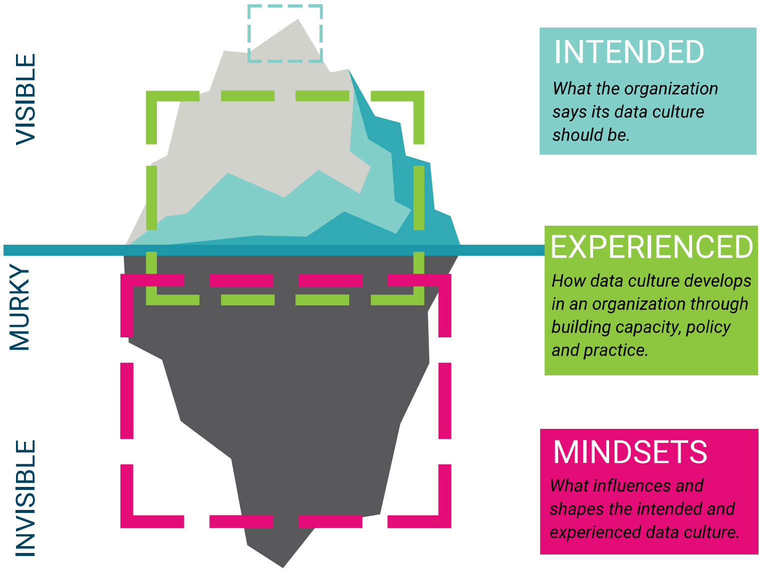
The data principles used to guide our DEAL project are in Appendix I. Additional examples include:

- World Health Organization Data Principles
- Statistics Canada video on Data Ethics
- Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres Research Principles

Data culture and practice

Many nonprofit organizations do not have a “data culture”, where data is embedded into the mission, mandate, operations, and identity of an organization. Building a data culture and embedding its practice will require both support from other members of the ecosystem and an attitudinal shift for everyone in an organization to come to similar understandings around data. Non-governmental funders, government agencies, and researcher/academia can support nonprofit organizations through resourcing, tool development, and sharing practices in recognition of the sector as a core member of the ecosystem.

In most organizations, data use is predominantly assigned to senior management and core operations staff, such as executive directors, program directors, and financial or human resources managers, or specialized staff in research or evaluation. While frontline staff, including programming and administrative staff are often required to collect and input data, they often do not participate in sensemaking or analysis. The disconnect between staff collecting data and those building or supporting a data strategy can widen the data gap and capacity within the organization.



INTENDED
What the organization says its data culture should be.

EXPERIENCED
How data culture develops in an organization through building capacity, policy and practice.

MINDSETS
What influences and shapes the intended and experienced data culture.

What is “data harm”?

As organizations and networks are working on developing their data culture, principles, and overall strategy, they must carefully consider data harm. According to the Data Justice Lab, data harm is defined as “the adverse effects caused by uses of data that may impair, injure, or set back a person, entity or society’s interests”, noting that this definition is not set and will be further defined as data practices evolve. Understanding the concept of data harm is crucial to any development of a data strategy.

At first glance, the statement “only 10 percent of Lilliputians prefer baseball over basketball” may give the reader the impression that Lilliputians do not care for baseball by using words like “only” and figures such as “10 per cent”. However, the same statement is missing critical context. We don’t know the population of Lilliput or when, how, and who gathered this data. These pieces of information may change our understanding of the statement; if Lilliput’s population is 1,000, and 100 people like baseball, then 10 per cent is not a small number. Similarly, if the data was only collected at basketball games or arenas, the statement is biased and not indicative of the entire population.

If Lilliput’s City Council was using this data to justify banning baseball or developing more basketball courts, then the data has been used to take away something that a portion of the population enjoys and may even negatively impact baseball players and venues.

While this example is made-up, it shows the power of data, particularly in creating policies and in decision-making. Without the proper policies and practices to safeguard data so that it cannot be misconstrued or taken out of context, data can cause harm and be detrimental to community well-being. The nonprofit sector is not immune to data mishandling and misuse.

Data misuse occurs whenever collected data is not used for its intended purpose. These can be unintentional (such as accidental data breaches of people's personal information) to intentional (such as a volunteer deliberately accessing client files for personal use). Incidents like these can contribute to a loss of trust and can disrupt future investment, progress, and community use of data.

Universal application of data standards and frameworks without recognizing unique community characteristics can also be problematic. For example, one concern we heard from nonprofits in the arts was that the use of data collection methodologies such as intake forms that required clients to respond to invasive or traumatic questions to qualify for services. These forms may use outdated language, or ask clients to recount traumatic information or information that is difficult to access without considering how different populations may respond to the question itself. A question about immigration status, for instance, may be easier to answer for someone with citizenship status and may be very complicated to answer for someone who is undocumented. Thus, data misuse and harm is on a spectrum; what works for (or harms) one community (or population) may either work or harm another community to differing degrees.

PART C: PILLARS OF A DATA STRATEGY

Once there is internal agreement on creating data principles and supporting data culture and practices, an organization or nonprofit collective will need to consider the framework's pillars to actualize its data strategy. These pillars are closely interconnected and are designed to help with the construction of a strategy tailored to specific data needs or to better understand available data. Each pillar includes next steps for action.

Pillar one: Governance

Establishing data governance is key to keeping an organization's or subsector's data usable, accessible and protected. It clarifies who is responsible for data in an organization or collective and requires nonprofits to establish practices or policies for every stage of the data lifecycle. It considers the organizational relationship to data, sets principles or values aligned to the organization's mission and mandate, and distributes data-related responsibilities to appropriate staff or volunteers. **Governance is the central pillar of any data strategy.**

Data governance also functions as a support pillar for the other pillars of a data strategy. It can include operational tasks such as data coordination and relevance, privacy and security, and upholding data standards and quality assurance.

Effective data governance plans require input and commitment from every level of the organization and their key stakeholders. Similar to other strategic work, developing a data governance plan requires time, resources, and possibly changes to an organization's existing data policies (such as their confidentiality or privacy policy) and practices (such as data entry). It may also require shifts in organizational thinking, attitudes, or behaviours to operationalize data governance. Nonprofits may want to hire consultants, undergo staff training, or think of creative ways to include other stakeholders in the process.

Developing a data governance plan is part of an iterative process of experimentation and learning. Nonprofit organizations and/or collectives may have to return to the drawing board to modify elements of their governance plans, consider what worked and why, and document what changes were needed for improvement. Shifts in the plan may also be related to broader organizational or technological shifts. However, change should be viewed as an invitation for pause and not a cause for concern.

There are many examples of data governance, including frameworks developed by Black, Indigenous and racialized communities.

These frameworks vary greatly from the more standard frameworks which are often focused on operationalizing, standardizing, and optimizing data use. Data governance frameworks from Black, Indigenous and racialized communities often promote a more holistic understanding of data, based in community empowerment, engagement and joint decision making. Even if individual organizations are not explicitly working with or collecting data from these communities, understanding community self-determination and data protection can be of great value to its framework.

SECTOR SNAPSHOT

BLACK HEALTH EQUITY FRAMEWORK (EGAP)

Race-based data, if collected and used responsibly, can be a powerful tool in understanding and dismantling systemic and structural racism. During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, communities across the province of Ontario advocated for race-based data collection, leading to a provincial mandate in acknowledgement that certain communities were disproportionately at higher risks of infection, and faced significantly worse health and financial outcomes. The continual data collection on Black communities also led to concerns on data governance, control, access, and ownership.

The Black Health Equity Working Group, made up of Black health sector leaders and health equity experts, began meeting early during the COVID-19 pandemic to address these concerns. Their EGAP (Engagement, Governance, Access, and Protection) Framework envisions the Black community taking collective ownership of their health data. It presents a starting point for the collection, management, analysis, and use of race-based data.

RESOURCES

- Data Governance Toolkit
- BC First Nations Data Governance Initiative
- Indigenous Knowledges and Data Governance Protocol. Toronto: Indigenous Innovation Initiative.

PUTTING THE GOVERNANCE PILLAR INTO ACTION

INDIVIDUAL ORGANIZATIONS	NONPROFIT COLLECTIVES
1. **Conduct a data audit.** This will help your organization understand all the data it is collecting, holding, and using. Some questions to consider before performing a data audit: • What is the relationship between your organization and the data it collects? • What types of data is your organization collecting? • What is the purpose of collecting this data? • Where is this data located? • Who has access to this data? • What is the condition of the data we have collected? • What is the value of the data collected? 2. **Develop common language** on how to talk about data being held by your organization. 3. **Learn from Governance Frameworks** developed by Indigenous, racialized, and other equity-deserving communities to inform yours. 4. **Communicate the data governance framework** both internally and externally. 5. Allow time for staff, volunteers, and community members to practice and **reflect on the governance model.** 6. **Develop or strengthen data policies** to reflect any updates from the governance process.	1. **Develop an engagement plan** that allows multiple methods and opportunities for membership and stakeholder buy-in and communication. 2. **Encourage learning and incorporating lessons** from other governance frameworks or models that may apply to either the membership or the population. 3. **Build consensus** on data ownership, use, storage, and deletion purposes and processes.

Pillar two: Standards

Developing, reviewing, or establishing data standards is critical to organizing, documenting, and formatting data so it can be better used and shared. It can range from simple decisions on data entry, such as using attendance to record art show attendance to more complex decisions around anonymizing a particular data set.

Data that has been collected at random intervals or is not entered consistently does not generate useful insights. Additionally, nonprofits are focused on their primary functions (eg. advocacy, programs or service delivery) as first priority, and maintaining data standards can easily fall to the wayside. Staff rarely receive training, support, or dedicated time to enter, review, and make sense of organizational data. For example, if two workers are using different formats to report critical information such as appointment date, address, or gender identity, the data could be very confusing to aggregate or sort. It would also require additional staff time and energy to clean the data so it can be used. Prioritizing data standards begins with shifting nonprofit relationships with data. Taking steps such as incorporating data literacy as an element of staff training, retention, or hiring can help organizational staff value data and ensure that they are maintaining any outlined standards.

Data standards are most effective when they are used collectively. A common first step for organizations developing or participating in data sharing agreements is to establish a clear understanding of data collection methodologies, timelines, and parameters, which are key to its success. Thinking about data standards can also force critical conversations and clarification on definitions; often subsectors may have their own acronyms, shorthand or ways of communicating. Creating a data dictionary can be a useful exercise to help the organization document its commonly established vocabulary.

Developing and applying common standards and guidelines is particularly beneficial to nonprofit collectives as it can help the network make best use of its data. For some collectives, the standards may have already been developed by funders or are coordinated with other stakeholders.

Data standards should not be onerous or so rigid that they are impractical or costly to implement. Having the same standards across organizations can help nonprofits compare similar programming, identify cost-saving or cost-effective practices, or link their data to other data sets for additional insights. Reviewing information systems, developing data infrastructure, and creating practices around data maintenance can help nonprofits produce better data. Funders and other decision makers can support and resource the creation and adoption of data standards that meet the organization’s goals and mission.

SECTOR SNAPSHOT

ONTARIO 211

Maintaining data standards can allow organizations to use their data in new ways. Ontario’s 211 is an invaluable community resource; people across the province contact 211 with a variety of personal issues and challenges. 211’s Community Navigators are trained in both collecting and consistently entering critical information on caller needs, connecting callers with a host of supports.

This user data is aggregated, anonymized, and used to generate the 211 Business Intelligence Dashboard, a powerful display of community needs, service availability gaps and barriers. Communities can use the data for service coordination, program development, and can advocate for local funding or policy changes.

PUTTING THE DATA STANDARDS PILLAR INTO ACTION

INDIVIDUAL NONPROFITS	NONPROFIT COLLECTIVES
1. Build on the Data Audit to **clarify the location, condition, and value of data** being held by the organization. Use the data audit to determine: • Where do we need to build standards? • Where are the intersections for internal or external data and what problems arise? • Where can we not find data easily when we need it (or where are you not collecting data that you do need)? 2. **Develop or clarify your data standards:** • What standards would benefit your work? • What standards have been set by funding and reporting requirements? • Are there standard examples from similar organizations or other jurisdictions that you can learn from? • Are there any standards tied to partnership or data-sharing agreements? • Does your staff/volunteers/community understand how to maintain these standards? Do you need a clarification process?	1. **Initiate data sharing agreements** between members of the collective. 2. **Create or clarify existing data standards.** 3. **Train or support training** to ensure widespread use of standards.

PUTTING THE DATA STANDARDS PILLAR INTO ACTION

INDIVIDUAL NONPROFITS	NONPROFIT COLLECTIVES
3. Once standards have been developed, review clean existing data, invest in staffing and digital resources to continue data maintenance, and have ongoing learning and training as staff and technologies change. 4. The standards and definitions must be consistently reviewed and updated for relevancy. Staff or volunteers responsible for data entry and community members impacted may need to be thoughtfully integrated as part of the development and review process.	

Pillar three: Equity

Data - its collection, use, and analysis - is neither neutral nor apolitical. Decisions on who collects it, what definitions or parameters are used, how it is reviewed or analyzed, and how it is used to inform decision-making processes are all subject to human bias and histories of systematic oppression. Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities have ample historical reasons to be wary (and even fearful) of data collection and use.

For example, data has enabled the execution of harmful social policies, such as the ‘60s Scoop, when Indigenous children were en mass forcibly separated and removed from their families. Government officials used data sources such as registries, legal involvement, and other records, to identify Indigenous families and separate their children.

Data equity is defined as principles and practices to guide data work through a lens of diversity, justice, equity, and inclusivity. Data equity recognizes that people with more privilege are often responsible for the design, collection, dissemination, and analysis of data, while people with less privilege often have limited capacity, access and control over the data being collected or how the data is then used. Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities - their needs, concerns, and voices - are often absent in data projects and strategies. Data equity can also be used in relation to data sovereignty - especially for Indigenous communities that are advocating for greater ownership, representation, and control over data pertaining to their communities, practices, and history.

Embracing data equity principles and practices are key to obtaining better data, and enabling stakeholder participation and ownership in both data collection and sensemaking. Data equity frameworks can help organizational or network data strategies be more nuanced and grounded in community knowledge, which are especially important to understand and tackle broader systemic issues, such as poverty. Practicing data equity principles will require nonprofits to create reciprocal data relationships with communities, incorporate community roles in data governance, support community-led data collection and sensemaking, and allow data to be retained (and potentially stored) within the community.

While individual nonprofits should adopt data equity practices, nonprofit collectives can be particularly impactful by communicating the need for an equity lens on individual nonprofit data, creating templates and other common resources for individual nonprofit adoption, and hosting data equity conversations with key stakeholders such as funders.

RESOURCES

- First Nations Information Governance Centre- Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) Principles:
- https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/
- Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, and Reuse of digital assets (FAIR) Principles:
- https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/
- Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, and Ethics (CARE) Principles:
- https://www.gida-global.org/care
- Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres- Utility, Self-Voicing, Access, and Inter-relationality (USAI) Research Principles:
- https://ofifc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/USAI-Research-Framework-Second-Edition.pdf
- Data for queer lives: How LGBTQ gender and sexuality identities challenge norms of demographics:
- https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2053951720933286
- We All Count- Data Equity Framework:
- https://weallcount.com/the-data-process/
- Indigenous Data Toolkit:
- https://indigenousdatatoolkit.ca/
- Principles for Advancing Equitable Data Practice (2020): https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102346/principles-for-advancing-equitable-data-practice_0.pdf

PUTTING THE EQUITY PILLAR INTO ACTION

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS	NONPROFIT COLLECTIVES
1. **Apply an equity lens to all data collected**, requested, and utilized by the organization.	1. **Develop collaborative data equity principles** with members.
2. If applicable, **include community involvement** at the onset of any program/service/policy development so they can participate in decisions around what data is being collected, what language is being used to collect sensitive data, how the data is beneficial to the community, and what are the future plans for the data.	2. **Invest in data and digital infrastructure** rooted in data equity frameworks.
3. **Be cognizant of who shows up to support your data work** or attend data-specific events: are there opportunities to incorporate more diverse voices or perspectives?	3. **Advocate for data that is rooted in community needs**, not for data collection connected to funding, and for funding throughout the data lifecycle.
4. **Incorporate informed consent** and acknowledging data limitations as basic data practices.	4. **Interrogate existing data collection methodologies** and evolve methodologies grounded in the histories or experiences of Indigenous and racialized people.
5. Think about how collected data can be **analyzed, visualized, and disseminated through an equity lens.**	5. **Form strong relationships with Black and Indigenous nonprofits** for reciprocal and transformational relationships that support their work.
6. If applicable, **collaborate on data storytelling** with community members.	6. **Support individual nonprofit capacity** by connecting organizational data work to broader systemic and racial justice work.
7. Be mindful of **how bias can show up** in organizational data work; try not to prioritize one type of data (ie quantitative) over another (qualitative).	7. **Engage in advocacy** that individual nonprofits might not have the capacity or risk tolerance to do so for disaggregated data and data equity to different levels of government that.

Pillar four: Privacy

Data privacy focuses on how data is collected, managed, stored, and shared. It prioritizes the individual's right to their own data, and is concerned with how organizations handle and protect individual data. It applies to all data collected and held by the organization, including employee/volunteer data, donor data, and program data. Data privacy is intertwined with data equity. Historically underserved communities Communities often have concerns that their data will be used to justify further marginalization.

Their questions include:
- Who has access to their data?
- Is their data being commodified in some way?
- Are there strong digital protections and policies in place?
- Will their data be shared without their consent?
- How will their data be used?

Creating awareness on data privacy issues and enforcing policies or practices to address these concerns will help nonprofits foster trusting relationships. Without that trust, data projects are more likely to fail, be ineffective, or take longer to implement. Unfortunately, these relationships can be easily broken through data breaches, where personal information is inappropriately shared or distributed, and can leave vulnerable communities and people open to practices such as fraud.

Embedding data privacy practices requires nonprofits to shift their understanding of data privacy from an administrative or an operational task to understanding it as a fundamental obligation. When nonprofits showcase respect for an individual's information, they are more likely to collect better, more accurate information. They are also showcasing leadership by teaching individuals and communities about data consent and building a more data-savvy world.

Additionally, nonprofits often act as a flow-through system for funders and government agencies to better understand underserved populations. If the data ecosystem is not appropriately built to protect these individual rights, then it can compound harm to these communities.

Informed consent is critical to implementing data privacy policies. Informed consent processes recognize individual agency, and clear articulation of an individual’s data will be used, stored, managed, and destroyed. This helps individuals decide whether they are comfortable with sharing their data or not. An easy first step for individual nonprofits may include reviewing or developing forms, practices, and procedures to get informed consent when obtaining/collecting data. Common components of informed consent statements include clear articulation of what data is being collected, where/how long it is stored, how it is being used and contact information for further questions.

As nonprofits build collaborative data systems designed with trauma-informed practices, which focus on capturing information so underserved individuals do not have to repeatedly share their needs, they will need to carefully consider privacy as part of the inherent design. Ideally, these collaborative data systems would be designed with several built-in anonymization features and coupled with strong policies, training, and ongoing maintenance, allowing nonprofits to collect and review information without compromising individual privacy. Nonprofits could have access to data that is collectively governed, monitored, and used for both just-in-time program development and delivery and to spot potential gaps or upcoming challenges.

Individual nonprofit data strategies should include long-term data privacy, storage and protection plans. Nonprofit collectives are in unique positions to advocate for nonprofit voice and inclusion in developing and implementing provincial privacy legislation.

Currently, the lack of clarity around federal and provincial privacy legislative requirements and specific protections and exceptions for nonprofit organizations further complicates attempts to secure data. With funding and support for costs of developing proper policies and practices and implementing appropriate infrastructure, along with accessing legal and technical expertise, nonprofits would be better equipped to address data privacy issues.

RESOURCES

- Trauma-Informed: The Trauma Toolkit, Second Edition. (2013)
- Trauma Informed Resource Library.

PUTTING THE PRIVACY PILLAR INTO ACTION

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS	NONPROFIT COLLECTIVES
1. **Take stock of your current data and privacy systems** and classify your data. Some questions to consider: • What data is public? (ie. Press releases, program flyers, etc.) • What data is only for internal use with limited access (and not for public)? (ie. Salaries, budgets, etc.) • What data contains personally identifiable information? 2. **Create or review policies and practices** to align with the data your organization is holding and with the various data classifications. • Are these policies and practices consistent with the classifications you assigned your data? • Is your use and sharing consistent with the consent you obtained? • Is it necessary to be sharing this data with who you're sharing it? 3. **Create or revise sharing agreements** for all shared data to ensure it remains secure and stays within the bounds of the consent you obtained. 4. **Invest in appropriate data storage systems**, e.g. hardware, software, locked cabinets, etc. 5. **Develop data management systems** that ensure files are disposed of when required. 6. **Train employees on data security** practices. 7. Be clear about the **benefits and risks of data collection, retention, and use**.	1. **Strategize with funders** and other key stakeholders such as government agencies and data privacy consultants to ensure that network-wide data protection plans are in process. 2. **Educate nonprofits about their legal privacy obligations** as well as best practices. 3. Support member nonprofits in **developing internal infrastructure** to help individual organizations through this process. 4. Lead nonprofit organizational **learning about data fraud** and how it impacts underserved populations.

Pillar five: Capacity

Growing nonprofit data capacity allows organizations to operationalize many elements of a data strategy. By identifying and targeting gaps in data knowledge amongst employees and volunteers, nonprofits can strengthen their data work and continually align their data work to their mission and values. As a first step, growing organizational data capacity requires organizational leadership that appreciates the value of data and supports capacity building efforts.

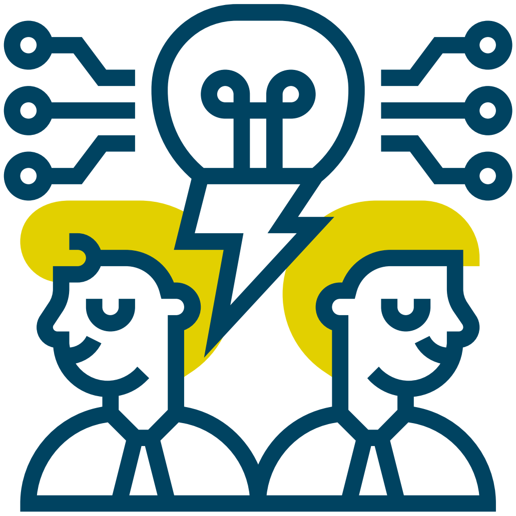
A data maturity assessment (as noted above) can help organizations better map their journey in improving their data capacity. This will support the organization in determining their data goals and incorporating this information into their organizational data strategy. It can also identify where data knowledge is held, delve into more effective and efficient data use, and highlight other potential data work.

Increased data capacity across the sector would allow the sector to be more meaningfully engaged and involved in growing discourse around data, champion digital rights, and act as data intermediaries and advocates.

Individual nonprofits and nonprofit collectives can create supportive learning environments for their employees, volunteers, and members that enable experimentation and creativity. Demystifying data, creating pathways for more accessible data, and encouraging widespread data use can contribute to increased data capacity.

Removing the onerous, often administrative burden of data and allowing staff to play, create, and share their data learnings can help staff, volunteers, and community members understand how data can support organizational growth and development. Connecting people along different stages of the data lifecycle can foster greater understanding of the data being collected and how it is being used and shared can encourage more data stories and reduce data misuse.

Nonprofit collectives can set up different Communities of Practice (organized by subsector, capacity, or topic), providing nonprofits with opportunities to share their lessons, host honest conversations about their challenges, and creatively problem solve together.



SECTOR SNAPSHOT

The Neighbourhood Group Data Champion

In 2020, three organizations Central Neighbourhood House, Neighbourhood Link Support Services and St. Stephen's Community House joined together to become The Neighbourhood Group (TNG) Community Services, a multi-service organization with 30+ locations across the City of Toronto. Merging three organizations also meant that employment services programs (and databases) between the three organizations also needed to be merged.

This was a challenge since the sites did not have the same practices around their database systems. It also presented the organization with an opportunity to review their data needs and build their internal data capacity. TNG received funding and support to hire a Data Champion, who was able to work across both employment service sites, share their knowledge and expertise, and showcase the value and importance of data to TNG's work.

PUTTING THE CAPACITY PILLAR INTO ACTION

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS	NONPROFIT COLLECTIVES
1. **Assess and build your organization's data capacity:** • What data skills are missing from the organization? • What is needed to fill the gap? • Include data capacity into job descriptions and hiring practices. • Provide staff training and support. • Support learning between staff who are responsible for data, from data entry to its analysis and use to foster greater understanding of the data being collected and how it is being used and shared, encouraging more data stories and reducing data misuse. 2. **Resource a data and learning culture:** • Invest in organization-wide data literacy. • Include organizational data infrastructure (software, hardware, training) as budget lines. • Use the data your organization collects to shape the narratives you share.	1. **Support and create nonprofit data culture by:** • Research, develop, and share best practices around data. • Creating a repository of free/low-fee data skills resources such as webinars, lunch and learns, and conferences. • Investigate and highlight different models of data work so nonprofits can see the range of ways that they can collect, organize, and use data. • Engage nonprofits to learn and share learnings about data through communities of practice, mentorship, or other facilitated learning opportunities. • Advocate for greater funds to enable easy, accessible data systems that are integrated with nonprofit work.

PART D: RECOMMENDATIONS TO ACTION THE DEAL FRAMEWORK

Supporting the development of data strategies for individual nonprofits and nonprofit collectives will require engagement and commitment from all parts of the data ecosystem. While a significant portion of the work lies within both individual organizations and the sector itself, other parts of the ecosystem must work to support, enable, and foster the conditions for the strategy to thrive. This may require having open, honest conversations about data that may be difficult to have due to uneven power dynamics, past harms, and a lack of transparency.

Those who hold disproportionate power and influence within the ecosystem will need to shift their mindset and create welcoming spaces for nonprofit data leaders.

The ability to effectively implement a data strategy is tied to the relationships held between the various stakeholders; at its core, a strategy is just on paper until the players come together in reflection, inquiry, and experimentation.
The players include:

- **The nonprofit sector** as a whole, has a significant role in implementing the DEAL Framework. By leading the process, the sector has a unique opportunity to collectively build data systems that support and complement our work.
- **Funders (non-governmental and governmental)** can significantly help create the conditions for a successful execution of nonprofit data strategies. Reflecting on the power imbalances already present in both the nonprofit sector and the sector's role in the data ecosystem, this stakeholder group

plays a powerful role in supporting systemic shifts that change how organizations and networks change their relationships with data- and each other. They can serve as data intermediaries or repositories that collect and disseminate data relevant to the sector.

- **Government policymakers:** The multiple levels of government can ensure that the nonprofit sector's data at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels is ethically used and appropriately leveraged to support learning and data-driven decision-making.

The recommendations below are not exhaustive as technological advances, social, political, and economic shifts, and other factors will inevitably shape both data and technical or technology infrastructure

Nonprofit sector

1. Nonprofits need to grow their leadership and establish themselves as key players in the data ecosystem.
All members of the data ecosystem - including nonprofits - must shift their mindsets to acknowledging the sector as a critical member and partner in the ecosystem itself. As a sector, nonprofits display great innovation and thought leadership in many areas.

As we grow our leadership in various data topics, nonprofits should demand reciprocity in their relationships with other members of the ecosystem, co-developing data infrastructure that would be mutually beneficial.

2. Map existing nonprofit data initiatives - who is doing what kind of data work - to create greater access for a variety of datasets.
While the sector is engaged in various types of data work - from reorganizing internal databases to evaluation to doing complex research with various populations - there is no one tool or resource that nonprofits can go to find others either working on similar data issues or holding data. For many nonprofits, especially those that are smaller, rural, or working with historically underserved populations, finding this information can be time consuming and difficult.

An open, publicly available inventory of the different types of nonprofit data projects happening across the province, organized by various factors such as type of data work, subsector, and project timelines, can help nonprofits find the data they need. It can also them nonprofits build and share data capacity, and develop new collaborative projects. Nonprofits working on similar issues or on similar topics, may be able to connect, share learnings, borrow resources or templates developed through the project, modify methodology, and collectively advocate.

3. Assess sector data maturity to map what the sector needs to improve its data capacity.
To date, there has never been any comprehensive study or review of Ontario's nonprofit sector's data maturity, which could measure how our sector is moving towards improved data capacity. A thorough sector-wide data maturity assessment could provide information on inquiries such as whether nonprofits are using data, how they are using data, and what tools and skills are needed to support nonprofits in better using data. Inspired by the Data Orchard's 2020 report on the State of the Sector: Data Maturity for the Nonprofit Sector, an in depth review and assessment would help nonprofit collectives, funders, and policymakers pinpoint specific types of challenges and supports needed by nonprofits to advance their data knowledge and use.

4. Collect and share nonprofit best practices specific to data use to showcase different ways to work with data.
For many nonprofit data practitioners, their hard work is behind the scenes or isolated from their colleagues. Creating different opportunities to engage, collect, highlight and document different data practices, use cases, and share learnings with each other can grow data capacity. Encouraging technical assistance for real-time problem solving is also essential for immediate application and retention of data knowledge/skill. These opportunities can include convenings, community of practices, and web-based resources. It could also be a space that includes a best practices literature review from other jurisdictions, from the international community, and potentially other industries.

The key is not to create one single modality for nonprofits to collect and share information but rather multiple ways for nonprofits to access and share what is working, potential pain points, and find resources for support. Whereas there is ample information available online, nonprofit staff have repeatedly expressed a need for a “sandbox” where they can talk, learn and problem-solve together, and practice their new skills or showcase their work.

5. Implement Indigenous-led data practices or standards for non-Indigenous-led/settler-led nonprofits who work with Indigenous Peoples and communities to minimize data harm.
Historically, research on Indigenous Peoples and communities have been used to justify, entrench, or passively study social inequities and oppression. While certain strides have been made in academic circles to begin to address this power imbalance by using different mechanisms (e.g., funding guidelines, ethics review processes), these practices may not be as common in the nonprofit sector. Working with Indigenous people and communities to inform or direct data work is critical to developing meaningful partnerships and respectful relationships and in recognition of Indigenous communities as subject matter experts.

Funders (government and non-government)

1. Examine your own relationships to data and determine how those relationships shape the ecosystem's work to better support nonprofit data goals.
Some questions to consider may include: What metrics do we collect from our grantees? Why? What mechanisms have we provided nonprofits to collect metrics? How do these mechanisms contribute to organizational data culture? Does what we're asking for make sense for the nonprofit's work and learning? How might funders collaborate/coordinate around collection, use, sharing of data with the sector at a collective level to reduce administrative burden and amplify the possibility of learning for nonprofits?

2. Develop, review, and expand internal data practices with equitable data principles to map your impact on communities in a more meaningful and nuanced way.
Funders have a unique opportunity to display leadership as intermediaries and/or data stewards by adopting data equity practices. This would support organizations in learning, reviewing, and applying an equity lens to their data as well. Some data practices may include considering what data is shareable and in which formats so it is useful to the grantees.

3. Examine data practices imposed on grantees to encourage greater data literacy and establish reciprocal data relationships with grantees.
By creating buy-in and engaging their grantees, funders can change or create data practices that support organizational growth and development by:

- Working in partnership with grantees, community members, and perhaps consultants can help improve data reciprocity and encourage the creation of a data culture.

- Recognizing that the development and implementation of data practices is long, difficult, and ongoing work, grantees and other stakeholders may need to be supported and resourced in committing to this work, and in continuing their participation.
- Review data standards with grantees to ensure they are clear and applicable.
- Clarify what information nonprofit organizations need to hold for their funded programs.
- Recognize inequitable relationships and power imbalances in data-sharing partnerships and agreements. Create opportunities to address these inequities at the onset of the partnership agreement through dialogue and check-in routinely.

4. Strengthen data knowledge and use in the sector to support nonprofit data use.

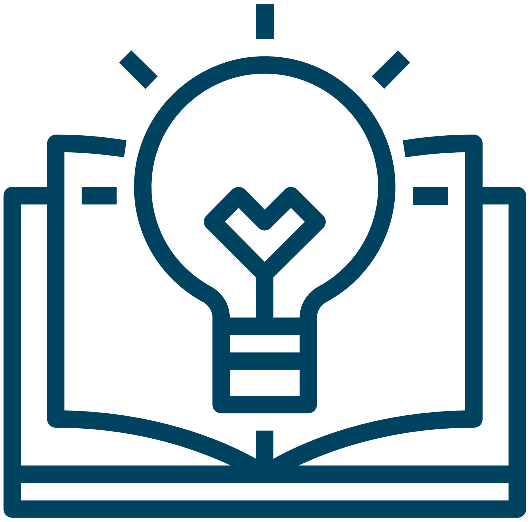
Funders often serve as a liaison between nonprofits and nonprofit collectives with academics, researchers, and other data experts, creating a unique opportunity to invest in data-minded initiatives such as:

- Data leadership, as when executive or senior leadership understand and promote the development of thoughtful data practices, the organization- as a whole- is more likely to adopt a different attitude towards data.
- Nonprofit data governance development and implementation as part of organizational development or as embedded in administrative costs.
- Toolkits/guides/templates for data principles and policies.
- Organizational learning, adoption, and utilization of data equity frameworks.
- Supports for nonprofits to access legal and technical expertise in addressing data privacy issues.
- Supporting B3 (Black-focused, Black-led, Black-serving) and I4 (Indigenous-benefiting, Indigenous-informed, Indigenous-Partnerships and Indigenous-led) organizations to act as data intermediaries.

Government policymakers

1. Ensure nonprofits are reflected in privacy legislation, regulations, and policies for the ethical use of client, community, employee, and donor personal data.

- Consultations on privacy legislation, regulation, and policy should not only include technical experts, but also organizations who hold direct relationships with stakeholders. Consultations should be open, accessible and empower advocates for the rights and data ownership of Black, Indigenous, racialized communities, and other groups affected by systemic oppression. Take into account their concerns about how data is currently used across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.
- Reduce red tape in data collection and management by harmonizing any future legal and policy frameworks with other existing frameworks and demands to which many nonprofits (particularly those that operate across Canada and/or in the healthcare field) are already subject to. This will also result in the increased usability of data.
- Consider additional safeguards for data held by public benefit nonprofits so data that is gathered for the purpose of public benefit does not get inappropriately used for private profit .



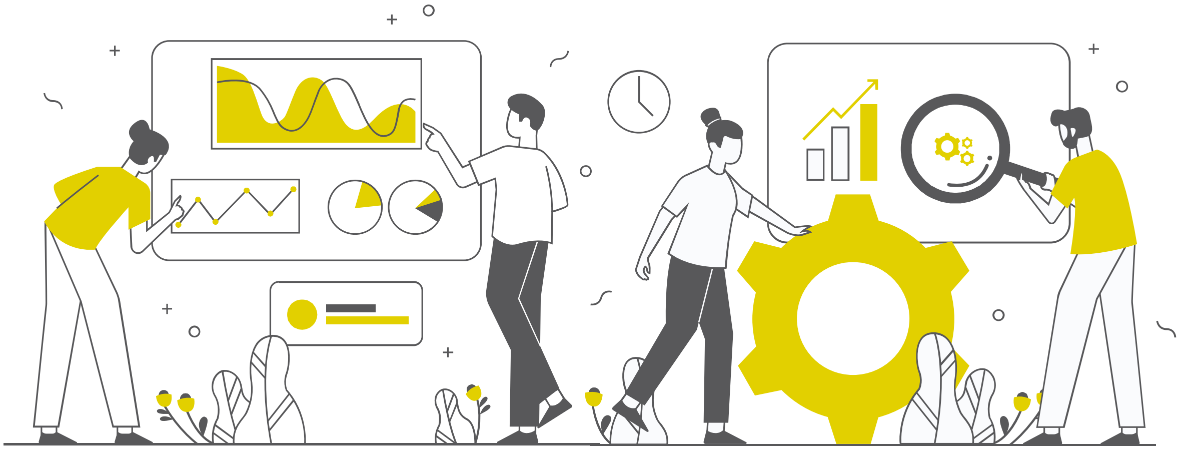
- Incorporate equity principles in the development and administration of government automated decision-making systems (e.g. Artificial Intelligence).
- Support nonprofit sector education and specific, plain-language guidance for nonprofits, similar to that provided by the BC Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

2. Advance open data and administrative data-linking for effective programs and policies.

- Work with the nonprofit sector to create a broad strategy to advance the possibilities of ethical administrative data sharing across provincially-funded programs and ministries, leveraging the information gathered by nonprofits and meeting the need for disaggregated data (by race, gender, disability, and urban/rural, for example).
- Accelerate the publishing of open data on the Open Data Portal and develop a mechanism for nonprofits and the communities they serve to prioritize data sets for release.

3. Collect and publish up-to-date and comprehensive data and research on the nonprofit sector in Ontario, such as industry data by nonprofit subsector and more detailed labour market data to enable systems planning.

4. Collect and expand use of disaggregated data across all government levels to inform better policy decisions.
Disaggregated data is vital to observe the inequitable effects of social systems, but must be collected in a way that ensures data is protected and used to not cause additional harm to vulnerable and underserved communities, particularly Indigenous and Black communities.



CONCLUSION

Ontario’s nonprofit sector is experiencing a data paradox. There is often so much data that nonprofits cannot harness it, and at the same time there is too little data that the sector can effectively use for its own growth and development. Simultaneously, the field of data science and its applications are relatively new, presenting a unique opportunity for the sector to establish leadership and influence in the data ecosystem.

By developing data strategies that consider governance, privacy, equity, standards, and capacity, embedding the strategies in data culture, and establishing data principles, the nonprofit sector can model and champion data as a key decision-making and public policy tool. However, the vision of a nonprofit sector that is engaged, resourced, and supported to utilize data is only achievable through the involvement and aid of other stakeholders in the data ecosystem.

While there is much work to be done, there is also a growing awareness that data - if used correctly and equitably - can be a powerful ally in shaping our sector’s work and creating a better future for all Ontarians.

ABOUT ONN

Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN) is the independent nonprofit network for the 58,000 nonprofits in Ontario, focused on policy, advocacy, and services to strengthen the sector as a key pillar of our society and economy. We work to create a public policy environment that allows nonprofits to thrive. We engage our network of diverse nonprofit organizations across Ontario to work together on issues affecting the sector and channel the voices of our network to government, funders, and other stakeholders.

APPENDIX 1

The DEAL initiative is rooted in the principles listed below that helped guide project activities and stakeholder engagement:

- The development of data and knowledge must be equity-focused, rights-based, democratically-governed, decentralized, and participatory.
- Knowledge development and mobilization must involve front-line practitioners and those with lived experience; they are not the exclusive purview of academic researchers; centres of excellence; evaluation, data, or information management (IM) experts -- or “experts” in general.
- The initiative must build confidence and capacity in the nonprofit sector in terms of data and IM. It must knit together better data and meaning-making, quantitative and qualitative research, statistics and ethics, asking not just, “what works?” but also, “what is really happening here?” and “how can we learn from this new knowledge to make systemic change?”
- The development of knowledge must be conducted in, by, and for the nonprofit sector, in partnership with government and communities, in the service of action toward our collective well-being.
- We are committed to both increasing the responsible and ethical use of data for good AND preventing and/or stopping misuse and harms caused through the inappropriate collection or sharing of data (“data for bad”).
- We respect Indigenous-led data sovereignty and governance priorities more broadly, including the First Nations Information Governance Centre’s Principles of OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession), the Métis Nation’s OCAS principles (Ownership, Control, Access and Stewardship) and Nation-to-Nation dialogue.
- We are committed to engaging and fostering leadership in Black-led and ethnocultural nonprofits in data governance.
- We will follow the lead of Indigenous, Black-led, and ethnocultural nonprofits in terms of developing best practices for data use as it affects communities most affected by the potential use and sharing of administrative data.
- We are mindful of, and will work to mitigate, power differentials within the nonprofit sector, including between foundations and other nonprofits, between better-resourced and under-resourced organizations, and between established and emerging nonprofits.
- Improving the state of data and knowledge in the nonprofit sector must include a role for foundations and governmental funders in working together to align data systems and practices and to learn from each other as grantors.
- The development of data and evidence in the nonprofit sector should not lead to the undervaluing of more difficult-to-measure work of health promotion and prevention, democratic engagement, policy advocacy, civil rights protection, and other intrinsically valuable activities.

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