

# Use Data to Monitor Progress and Tell Your Agency Story

May 2024

## About the Series

The **BestPractices4Data** series focuses on sharing innovations and best practices for grantees, from grantees.

In 2023, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) convened listening sessions with grantees and government project officers to learn about strategies that grantees use to optimize data collection processes. Produced by the SAMHSA Center for Financing Reform and Innovation (CFRI) contract, the series of issue briefs aims to improve efficiency in the use of grant funds by providing opportunities for grantees to learn from each other. The briefs identify best practices that help reduce costs associated with resource-intensive trial and error attempts typical of new grantees who are trying to figure out the best ways to collect data.

All SAMHSA grantees are required to collect data as a condition of their funding. Grantees sometimes refer to these as Government Performance Results Act (GPRA), National Outcome Measures (NOMs), client-level data, participant-level data, program-level data, or progress reports. The **BestPractices4Data** series brings together innovative and best practices that grantees use to address the most common and complex challenges associated with grant-required data collection activities.

Grantees can determine their data collection requirements by reading their grant's Notice of Award (NOA).

The process of collecting grant-required data, reporting data into SAMHSA's Performance Accountability and Reporting System (SPARS), and tracking clients for follow-up interviews can be frustrating for some grantees, especially if the data do not appear to directly benefit the grantee's organization or clinical care. Many grantees find that they benefit from learning about ways to use their data effectively, and tell their agency story with data. Below are some grantee best practices for using data to measure progress and report on successes.

## Best Practices



Aggregate data to identify demographic changes in service populations, the impact of new services, and disparities



Use client-level, sometimes referred to as participant-level, data to support individual recovery



Develop a logic model to identify how data can help you track progress



Use data to demonstrate your successes

This issue brief considers the common challenges identified by SAMHSA grantees. It highlights innovative and practical ways that grantees address these challenges.

## Using Data to Improve Services and Quality of Care

### Aggregate Data to Identify Demographic Changes in Service Populations

Some grantees look at the aggregate data over time of all their clients together. For example, a grantee who conducted outreach activities to older adults needing services was able to see enrollment changes over time by looking at the demographic variables collected from clients served by their program. These findings helped the organization demonstrate their effectiveness at reaching older adult populations.

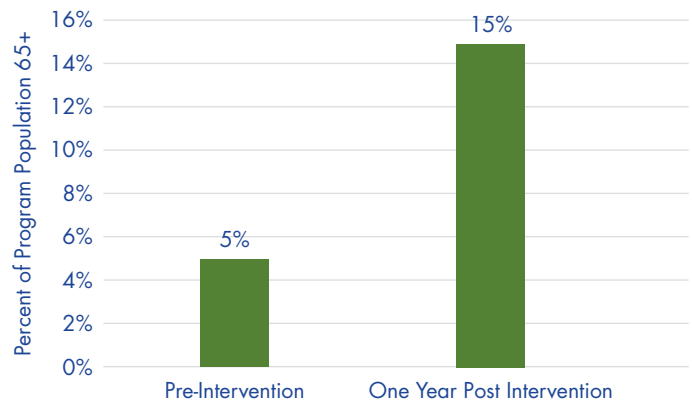
### Aggregate Data to Identify the Impact of New Services and to Identify Disparities

Grant-required data can also be used to determine whether specific service programs are changing and improving their client’s symptoms. For example, a SAMHSA grantee identified a need for employment services for individuals with substance use disorders. To address this need, the organization implemented a recovery-focused supported employment program. Using a question from a grant-required data collection tool asking whether the respondent is currently employed, the grantee assessed aggregate client data at baseline and follow-up to help service providers assess the success of their intervention and adjust how they were addressing the needs of women who did not have as much success based on the data.

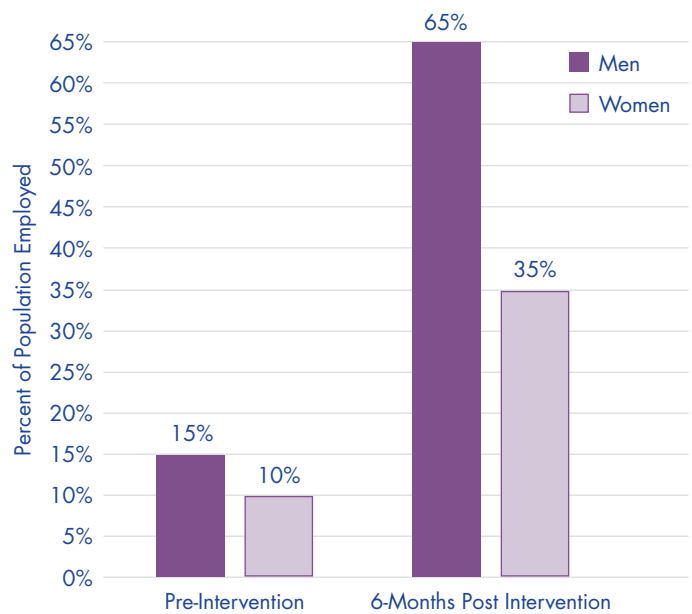
### Use Client-Level Data to Support Individual Recovery

Some grantees want to see whether their programs change client behaviors, symptoms, or circumstances. These grantees see the importance of collecting follow-up client data. For example, one grantee reported collecting a grant-required data question about mental health functioning at 6-month intervals even after their grant requirements were met. The mental health functioning scale asked clients, “In the last 30 days, have you felt ... Nervous? Hopeless? ...” Scores ranged from 0 to 7. The grantee regularly shares the data with their clients to support their recovery goals.

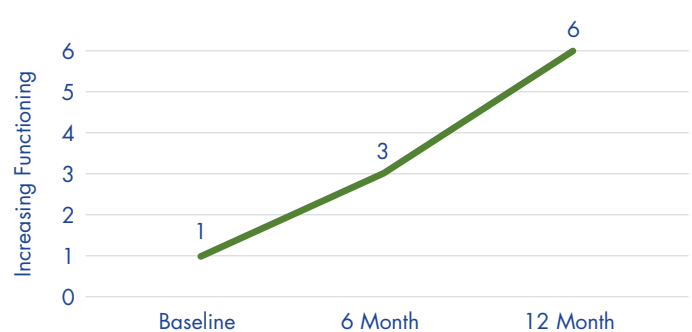
### Sample Graph Using Grantee Data to Measure Percentage of Older Adult Clients over Time\*



### Sample Graph Using Grantee Aggregated Data Looking at Employment and Gender\*



### Sample Graph Using Client Functioning Scale Data Collected by a Grantee over 12 Months\*



\*Data are for illustrative purposes only.

## Best Practices Spotlights

“Among our clients, housing insecurity is a concern. We decided that a meaningful goal would be for our program to help at least 15% of our clients establish stable housing. We set up a logic model to share our approach and bolster support from among our staff and community partners. We used the housing question from the grant-required data tool to measure change between baseline and overtime.”

–SAMHSA Grantee

“Our staff want to make a difference in their clients’ lives and in the community. I find it really empowering for our staff to see the effect of their work on clients. At the beginning of each year I ask program staff what impacts they want to measure – reduced substance use, increased employment, or less criminal justice involvement among youth. Then quarterly we look at our data as a group. We celebrate our successes and make adjustments if things aren’t working.”

–SAMHSA Grantee

## Develop a Logic Model to Identify How Data Can Help You Track Progress

Logic models are effective tools to assist in program planning, implementation, management, evaluation, and reporting. They provide a graphical depiction of the relationships between the program’s resources, activities, and intended effects.

Some SAMHSA grantees use logic models to help them track program successes. They use previously created [SMART](#) goals and use grant-required data elements as outcome indicators. For example, some SAMHSA grantees use required data collected on homelessness to identify trends in the rates of homelessness for their clients.

## Use If-Then Statements to Create Logic Models

**Inputs** Inputs are the various resources available to support the program, including, but not limited to, grant funding, staff, materials, curricula, and equipment. **If** your organization has these inputs, **then** what are the activities your organization can engage in or who are the individuals you can serve?

**Activities** are the action components of the program. For example, develop or select a curriculum, write a plan, implement a curriculum, train educators, or pull together a coalition. **If** your organization successfully uses your resources to put your planned activities into motion, **then** what would you expect to change?

**Outcomes** are the accomplishments of the program as a result of the activities taken. Outcomes catalogue agency progress and successes, and can be important in getting staff and community buy in.

## A Logic Model Usually Includes Three or More Components and is Driven by Program Goals



## Use Data to Demonstrate Your Successes

Grant-required data can help grantees better understand the characteristics of the individuals they serve. It can help measure how services are supporting clients. The data can help identify gaps, needs, and ineffective program components. Many grantees use their data to celebrate successes within their communities and to garner additional grant funding.

### Best Practices Identified by SAMHSA Grantees



#### Develop Data-Driven Narrative Stories to Help Others Understand Program Impacts

- Tailor stories to different audiences based on their interests
- Share data-driven examples to illustrate your story



#### Share Data with Interested Parties

- Set aside regular times to meet with various audiences to give them updates on what you learned from the data
- Make talking about data a routine part of organizational agendas



#### Improve Organizational Practices Based on Data

- Make changes based on what the data identifies as effective and ineffective
- Identify clients who need adjustments to their care, and monitor their outcomes over time



#### Get Others Involved

- Ask community members, clinicians, and clients what data they would like to see
- Consider adding additional programmatic questions to grant-required data, as needed

## Additional Resources

[General Services Administration: Center of Excellence's How to Tell Your Story with Data: Creating Effective Story-Telling with Data](#)

[SAMHSA Center for Financing Reform & Innovation \(CFRI\)](#)

[SAMHSA: Native Connection's Setting Goals and Developing Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound \(SMART\) Objectives](#)