

The DIP's Data-Informed Self-Assessment Tool

As seen in MANP's blog post [3 simple ways to be data-informed!](#)*

*(*Ok. Being data-informed might not actually be that simple, but we like the catchy title!)*

When we, the [Data Innovation Project](#), sit down to meet with organizations in a data clinic or at the start of a contract, 90% of the time our conversation comes back to the larger organizational framework within which a "data issue" is being addressed. For example, when if a nonprofit "We Love Mainers" asks us to develop a data dashboard and through our meeting we learn the organization is still working with Excel 1985, our conversation shifts to the organization's capacity to effectively and efficiently store data before even considering a data dashboard. The larger framework and culture of an organization is key to the success of any efforts to be data-informed.

But, what is being "data-informed" anyway?

As we discuss in our workshop [Set the Foundation to be a Data-Informed Organization](#) an organization that is data-informed uses data to guide decisions with the goal of generating questions, making changes and improving outcomes. This can be contrasted against a data-driven organization in which data are the primary driver for decision making.

What does that really mean on the ground?

Adapting Teresa Derrick-Mills' work on continuous quality improvement, we identified three building blocks that are present in organizations that are data-informed: clarity, capacity and culture.

Clarity: The most effective way to develop a meaningful data-related effort is to ground it in your theory of change and logic model. Data-informed organizations can articulate how being data-informed aligns with the mission, vision and goals of their work. Most often, this clarity and alignment comes from leadership who has made a commitment to being data-informed. This means leadership:

- includes staff and key stakeholders as meaningfully engaged partners,
- shares data-related responsibilities, and
- communicates clear expectations for data stewardship across all levels of the organization.

Capacity: Data-informed organizations have the analytic capacity, resources and investments in professional development to move their (clearly articulated) ideas forward. (This is when we break the

news to We Love Mainers that they have to invest in a more recent version of Excel.). Yes, sometimes this requires money. But, more often than not there is a “data geek” within your organization, a millennial who knows all the hacks and tricks in that free version of Excel, and partners like MANP who highlight free and low cost opportunities for Maine non-profits to invest in staff professional development. Start small and dedicate some real time to this. (No really, actually put it on your calendar and stick to it.)

Culture: With these two other pieces in place, data-informed organizations support a culture of learning through data, which includes questioning results, celebrating successes, and sometimes recognizing the program you’ve been talking up for years isn’t having the outcomes you expected. Importantly, data are never used punitively to punish or shame staff or programs, but rather are used as a way to learn about how to do better. This continuous culture of learning ensures you actually use the valuable data you are putting time into collecting to inform decision making. Again, start small and dedicate time to this. Try taking just 15 minutes to look at data in your staff meeting. Be curious and ask questions.

So, where is your organization on the path the being data-informed?

Time for a group activity! Bring our Data-Informed Self-Assessment to your next staff meeting.

Take 5 minutes for people to individually complete and score the assessment. Then, facilitate a conversation about your findings. Here are some guiding questions to get you started:

1. Where did you score the highest? Why? What contributes to that score?
2. Where did you score the lowest? Why? What contributes to that score?
3. What specific areas would you like to address? What are some steps you can take to address that area?
4. What can the organization as a whole do to better support data-informed efforts?

Want to increase that score? We’ve got you covered.

We hope you find this post and tool helpful. Please visit us at www.datainnovationproject.org, check out our [resources](#) and [data clinic](#) offerings and sign up to attend one of our [workshops](#) (they will definitely help add points to your total score!).

Data-Informed Self-Assessment

This short assessment is intended to help you identify the extent to which your organizational culture supports being data-informed. For each statement, circle the number that corresponds with how present it is in your organization.

Not present
Emerging
Present
Exemplary

Purpose

Organization has a mission and vision to guide initiatives, programs and activities.	0	1	2	3
Organization has goals that clearly relate to mission and vision.	0	1	2	3
Organization has a Theory of Change that connects activities to desired results.	0	1	2	3

Leadership

Leadership serves as role model(s) for data use.	0	1	2	3
Leadership distributes data responsibilities to staff at all levels.	0	1	2	3
Leadership motivates staff to use data.	0	1	2	3
Leadership clearly communicates expectations around data use.	0	1	2	3

Analytic Capacity

Organization collects quality data (observations, information, and numbers).	0	1	2	3
Organization uses efficient technology for data collection, storage, and analysis.	0	1	2	3
Staff know how to analyze and make meaning from the data.	0	1	2	3
Staff know how to use the information to improve the quality of their work.	0	1	2	3

Resources and Professional Development

Organization makes resources available to support and sustain technology.	0	1	2	3
Leadership devotes time to data-use efforts.	0	1	2	3
Staff time is allocated to support data-use efforts.	0	1	2	3
Organization supports professional development to increase data-use abilities.	0	1	2	3

Organizational Culture of Learning

Organization creates a safe space to discuss and interpret data, even poor results.	0	1	2	3
Organization emphasizes learning together.	0	1	2	3
Staff and stakeholders are involved in making sense of data.	0	1	2	3
Staff and stakeholders are involved in focusing improvement efforts.	0	1	2	3

Data Used for On-going Improvement

Organization has set targets that relate to its goals.	0	1	2	3
Organization collects data consistently and routinely.	0	1	2	3
Organization has routine process of reviewing data and identifying improvements.	0	1	2	3
Progress towards goals, performance objectives and improvements are monitored.	0	1	2	3

Now, calculate your score!

How many 0s? _____ x 0 = + _____

How many 1s? _____ x 1 = + _____

How many 2s? _____ x 2 = + _____

How many 3s? _____ x 3 = + _____

Total Score: _____

How are you doing?

Scoring Guide

0 - 22: Haven't left the station

23 - 34: On your way

35 - 57: Getting there

58 - 69: Arrived