



## STRATEGIC DATA PROJECT

# STRATEGIC USE OF DATA RUBRIC Self Assessment Guide

*SDP developed the Strategic Use of Data Rubric to provide direction and support to education organizations in their efforts to transform their use of data. The rubric establishes a common language and framework to more clearly illustrate what effective data use at the system level can look like.*

*This self-assessment tool has been developed to facilitate an interactive use of the rubric's content. It can be employed flexibly in different venues such as formal reviews of organizational data practices, cross-functional meetings, trainings and workshops, and system-wide performance evaluations.*





## PROGRAMS AND MAJOR INITIATIVES

## Organizational Strategy

To what extent does the organization use a strategic plan to organize program and initiative priorities?

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Does the organization have a strategic plan? Does it provide direction for major initiatives and programs?
- Is there a strategy for each program and initiative that is directly connected to overall strategy?
- How well does the organization understand all of its programs and initiatives? Is the number of programs and initiatives manageable?

BASIC	EXEMPLARY
No strategic plan; or if strategic plan exists, fails to inform major initiatives.	Strategic plan informs all major initiatives.
Major initiatives/programs frequently generated, crisis-driven and uncoordinated with strategy.	Major initiatives aligned tightly with strategy; alignment understood well by agency.
Limited understanding of current initiatives. No complete list of initiatives in one place.	Deep understanding of current efforts. New projects not authorized without assessing current initiatives.
No effort to avoid duplication across programs. No effort to eliminate or rationalize old initiatives.	Limited number of major initiatives. No duplication across programs.

## Goal-Setting

To what extent does the organization use data and analysis to set goals for programs and major initiatives?

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Does the strategic plan (if it exists) have clear goals and targets that define successful outcomes? Are the goals achievable, but also challenging?
- Does each program, initiative, and work process have its own set of measurable goals and targets? Do they cascade down from the strategic plan?
- To what extent are the targets used to guide program implementation and outcomes?
- Are data and analysis used to establish and review goals and targets?

BASIC	EXEMPLARY
Major initiatives are introduced without outcome or implementation goals.	Major initiatives introduced with goals, targets, timelines, responsibilities, and dependencies; all aligned with the strategic plan.
Targets and goals non-existent.	Targets and goals exist, are both challenging and realistic and have been established from trend data, research, and predictive analytics.
Targets and goals are not well connected to implementation, operational outputs, or outcomes.	Targets and goals are always directly connected to implementation, operations, outputs, and outcomes.
No monitoring of progress.	Monitoring of progress includes review of implementation, measurement of outcomes, and use of predictive analytics to anticipate progress and adjust tactics.

## PROGRAMS AND MAJOR INITIATIVES

## Access and Use of Program Data

To what extent are data available and utilized to manage programs and inform decision-making?

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Are program data stored in a central database? Are most relevant program data available and accessible? Does this data accurately capture all of the relevant aspects of program/initiative operations?
- Are data collected about the program before it begins operations?
- Are student-level data considered for decision making about scaling, continuing, or determining relative importance of the program? Are student-level data rigorously analyzed to understand the value of the program and drive decision-making about program operations?

BASIC	EXEMPLARY
Program data (e.g., school, classroom, student-level information) not housed centrally; some data not housed at all.	Majority of program data is reliable and housed centrally.
No baseline (pre-program) data available.	Baseline (pre-program) data consistently collected before program start.
Little analysis of student data to determine program adoption decisions and program priorities.	Rigorous, comparative analyses and predictive analytics drive program adoption decisions and program priorities.

## Program Management and Monitoring with Data

To what extent are data used to understand, manage, and monitor current program operations?

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Are programs and initiatives actively monitored? Are there formal tools used to manage progress on goals and timelines?
- Does the program consider information from national-level research to influence its design and operations?
- Does the program consider results from programs previously implemented at the organization? Are these results derived from rigorous evaluation methods?
- Are similar programs considered alongside each other, comparing their relative value for students?

BASIC	EXEMPLARY
No monitoring of program operations.	Formal monitoring of programs against goals, targets, and timelines. Examination of different scenarios that may alter program to increase impact, lower cost, or respond to change.
Unaware of relevant research.	Relevant research used to drive further internal research that informs and evaluates after pertinent information collected.
No attention on results from prior programs.	High attention on results that use data from prior programs and were evaluated with rigor and explicit pre-established criteria.
Similar programs not compared in terms of value to student outcomes.	Similar programs compared in terms of impact and cost-effectiveness.

## PROGRAMS AND MAJOR INITIATIVES

## Evaluation and Decision Making

To what extent does the organization evaluate the outcomes of its programs and major initiatives?

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Are programs/initiatives regularly evaluated?
- Are evaluation plans established before or after programs begin?  
Do evaluations use rigorous research methods?
- Are the results of evaluations used to adapt programs or influence decisions about expansion or termination?
- Are decisions primarily driven by external factors and personal beliefs or are they driven by the results of outcome evaluations?

BASIC	EXEMPLARY
No evaluation plans exist.	Evaluation plans exist for all major initiatives, and are explicit (with strong designs, including randomization) to determine initiatives' impact and next steps.
Outcome evaluation not considered in decisions to continue, expand, or terminate programs.	Outcome evaluations always influence closure or expansion decisions, including standard use of sunset clauses to allow program expansion to be periodically evaluated.
Decisions based on prior beliefs and assumptions rather than evaluation results.	Decisions always based on and driven by evaluation results.
Closure decisions made erratically due to politics, shifting priorities, or immediate resource needs (i.e., budget crises).	Closure decisions always based on results of evaluations; results generally immune to external influence.

## PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

## Target and Goal Setting

To what extent does the organization use data and analysis to set goals for system-level performance management?

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Does the organization have a clear set of goals used to set targets for successful performance? Are goals measurable and established through data analysis?
- Does each area of the organization (schools, districts, departments, central, and overall) have a consistent set of goals? Do these goals connect and cascade from the top to the unit level?
- To what extent do organizational stakeholders participate in the target-setting process?
- Is the target-setting process clear, consistent and meaningful to all organizational stakeholders?

BASIC	EXEMPLARY
Few, if any, targets exist for schools/districts, departments, or organization as a whole. Targets that exist not established through data analysis.	A limited number of targets exist and are S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Bound) targets set across schools/districts, departments, or organization.
Targets not consistent and even contradictory across levels (i.e., all schools or districts required to raise achievement by 2 points per year while agency target is 5 points per year).	Targets consistent throughout levels of organization and function in cascading manner. A "balanced scorecard" is used to set targets (i.e., targets incorporate a diverse set of measures that may include student achievement, finance, operations, and human capital data).
Organizational stakeholders do not participate in target-setting process. Targets not presented to staff or leadership in agency.	Organizational stakeholders participate in target-setting process with robust fact base. Meeting targets considered critical by staff and leadership.
Target-setting process arbitrary, and unclear or unknown to most organizational stakeholders (executive, departmental, district, or school-level leaders).	Target-setting process clear and consistent across the organization.

## Quality and Access to Organizational Data

To what extent are the organization's data and systems able to manage operations and track performance?

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Where does relevant data live? Is some data stored separately from other data? Is there a logical reason or does this create inefficiencies?
- Is necessary data available? To all relevant end-users? In real-time? At deep levels of granularity?
- Are relevant data accurate and reliable?
- When data are used for analysis or reporting, do end users obtain the same results?

BASIC	EXEMPLARY
Data not housed centrally; some data not housed at all; often reside mostly on paper or "rogue" spreadsheets.	Data is reliable and majority is collected, stored, and reported via central database.
Appropriate data generally not available.	Appropriate data always available in real time, at multiple levels, and with ability to "cut" data multiple ways using appropriate tools to manipulate data.
Data is generally inaccessible or accessible only through a complex process.	Data is consistently accessible to most internal users and to relevant external users.
Available data often inaccurate and inconsistent data from different sources provides different answers for same question.	Available data are predominantly accurate and provide multiple users consistent answers for same question.

## PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

## Performance Data for Measurement and Monitoring

To what extent does the organization use outcomes to measure and monitor organizational performance?

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Does the organization have a set of expected outcomes used for performance management?  
Are these expectations clearly understood?
- Is performance reviewed consistently and regularly?
- To what extent are data used to measure performance? Is the data relevant and specific enough to accurately represent outcomes? To what extent are performance targets generated through rigorous analysis?
- Is progress regularly monitored? Can leaders determine how and why they are on/off track?
- Are there systems for rewards and consequences for meeting or missing outcome targets? To what extent does accountability factor into management decisions?

BASIC	EXEMPLARY
No clear set of expectations or measurable outcomes used for the performance evaluations that occur.	Evaluations of performance based on clearly defined expectations and measurable outcomes from student achievement, human capital, budget, and operational data.
No performance management targets exist to monitor school, district, and/or department progress towards goal(s).	Performance management targets exist and are based on rigorous analysis.
No formal review process.	Reviews of school, district, and/or departmental progress towards goal(s) conducted regularly and consistently.
If performance is monitored, the process is unclear.	Target monitoring clear; includes root cause analysis and action planning informed by sophisticated data analysis.
Little to no accountability systems in place.	Accountability systems form the basis of all management decisions, and have active participation by senior leadership. Review of progress includes action planning for interdepartmental and department/school/district dependencies.

## PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

## Accountability and Decision Making

To what extent is performance management used to inform decision-making and hold organizational members accountable for results?

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Are external stakeholders informed about the performance management process? To what extent are they involved in ensuring that performance information is relevant for decision-making?
- Is performance management information available to the public in a way that is meaningful for all relevant stakeholders (public, community, parents, board members)?
- Is performance used to drive decision and policy making by organizational leaders?

BASIC	EXEMPLARY
External stakeholders (public, community, parents, board members) have little understanding of what performance management processes exist.	External stakeholders provide support with collecting, reporting, and ensuring relevance of performance management information and are well-informed about information's relevance.
No performance outcome information made public.	All appropriate performance outcome information is public and digestible.
Performance management information is not used to inform policy decisions.	Performance management information is used for decision-making across all levels of the organization and continuously engages senior leadership.

## RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND BUDGETING

## Financial Planning and Strategy

To what extent does the organization employ a strategic approach to budget and financial planning?

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Are budgeting or financial planning processes independent of or informed by an overall organizational strategy?
- Does the organization have a multi-year or an annual budgeting process?
- To what extent does the organization perform long-term financial planning? Does this planning consider different financial scenarios for the organization?

BASIC	EXEMPLARY
Financial planning not connected to strategy.	Financial planning process has clear, public priorities aligned to agency's education strategy.
Yearly budget planning process based mostly on external timelines and previous year expenditures.	Budget planning process multi-year, driven by strategy.
Little to no long-term financial planning or resource alignment.	Long-term financial planning considers multiple revenue scenarios with clear action plans (i.e., what's added or cut) for each scenario. Resource allocation based on educational strategy.

## Processes for Budgeting and Spending Review

To what extent are the organization's budget and resource allocations driven by a clear and structured process?

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Are program costs considered before programs are funded? Is there a formal process to prioritize the relative value of initiatives and determine funding levels?
- Does spending get reviewed consistently and regularly? To what extent are rigorous analysis used to review spending?
- To what extent do organizational stakeholders participate in the budgeting process?
- To what extent are the budgeting process implications understood across the organization?

BASIC	EXEMPLARY
Program and policies enacted without consideration of costs or resource availability.	Formal budgeting process ranks initiatives in terms of relative importance.
There is no regular review process for spending.	Spending is periodically reviewed using departmental budgets with sophisticated financial analyses (e.g., zero-based budgeting or activity-based costing techniques).
Budget process involves only a few central office leaders.	Budget includes open communication of information between central offices and schools/departments.
Budget process understood only by a few central office leaders.	Budget process understood by central office and all schools/departments.

## RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND BUDGETING

## Use and Analysis of Financial Data

To what extent does the organization use data and analysis to review and adjust budget allocations?

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Are budget requests and changes aligned to overall organizational strategy?
- Are budget requests submitted with a robust set of evidence?
- Is the return on the investment considered to evaluate funding requests and budget changes?
- Is the budget stable across time? To what extent can it be responsive to changes in financial conditions?

BASIC	EXEMPLARY
Line item additions and subtractions made ad hoc without fact base or reference to agency strategy.	Line item additions aligned to strategy and considered together, not individually.
Budget requests made without evidence-based justification.	Budget requests required and made with robust, evidence-based justifications.
No attempts made to generate impact estimates for budget cuts or additions.	Relative "return on investment" of requests considered and used to prioritize funding.
Budget allocations inconsistent and inflexible. Small resource changes cause crises in the system.	Overall funding strategy consistent and stable, but also flexible enough to rapidly respond to resource changes.

## Accountability and Decision-Making

To what extent does the organization consider data-driven outcomes to inform decision-making?

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Are departments responsible for managing their expenditures?  
To what extent does accountability for outcomes factor into the level of expenditures?
- Are program or department outcomes reviewed alongside expenditures? To what extent are these results used to drive budgeting decisions made by organizational leaders?
- To what extent are rigorous analysis and formal processes used to decide budget and resource allocation?
- Are there a clear set of criteria used to evaluate budget requests?  
Are these made available to relevant stakeholders (public, community, parents, board members)?

BASIC	EXEMPLARY
Departments not held accountable for expenditures or outcomes.	Departments and or schools held accountable for both expenditures and outcomes; clear connections are made between the two.
Financial reviews and reviews of departmental outcomes are not linked.	Financial reviews are always linked to departmental outcomes and directly impact budgeting decisions made by both department heads and senior leadership.
Budget allocations determined through political pressure or personal relationships.	Budget allocations and required resources determined through fact-based analysis to allocate resources for programs and departments. Required resources explicitly budgeted and appropriately resourced via formal process.
No public criteria to evaluate budget requests.	Clear public criteria to evaluate budget requests.

## ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

To complete the self-assessment, consider the guiding questions associated with each category, and use the ends of the rating scale, “Basic” and “Exemplary” as guideposts to situate your organization. Then, select one of the four rating columns that best represents your organization’s data use in this area.

			BASIC	EMERGING	STRONG	EXEMPLARY
PROGRAMS AND MAJOR INITIATIVES	Organizational Strategy	To what extent does the organization use a strategic plan to organize program and initiative priorities?				
	Goal-Setting	To what extent does the organization use data and analysis to set goals for programs and major initiatives?				
	Access and Use of Program Data	To what extent are data available and utilized to manage programs and inform decision-making?				
	Program Management and Monitoring with Data	To what extent are data used to understand, manage, and monitor current program operations?				
	Evaluation and Decision Making	To what extent does the organization evaluate the outcomes of its programs and major initiatives?				
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT	Target and Goal Setting	To what extent does the organization use data and analysis to set goals for system-level performance management?				
	Quality and Access to Organizational Data	To what extent are the organization’s data and systems able to manage operations and track performance?				
	Performance Data for Measurement and Monitoring	To what extent does the organization use outcomes to measure and monitor organizational performance?				
	Accountability and Decision-Making	To what extent is performance management used to inform decision-making and hold organizational members accountable for results?				

## ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

			BASIC	EMERGING	STRONG	EXEMPLARY
RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND BUDGETING	Financial Planning and Strategy	To what extent does the organization employ a strategic approach to budget and financial planning?				
	Processes for Budgeting and Spending Review	To what extent are the organization's budget and resource allocations driven by a clear and structured process?				
	Use and Analysis of Financial Data	To what extent does the organization use data and analysis to review and adjust budget allocations?				
	Accountability and Decision Making	To what extent does the organization consider data-driven outcomes to inform decision-making?				