United Way Funding Partner Data Usage Report
University of Maine Center on Aging
February 2018

PART I: Agency Data Capacity Survey Results

Key Findings:

- An on-line survey was distributed to United Way of Eastern Maine (UWEM) funding partners to better understand how these agencies collect and manage data, as well as their experiences communicating and working with UWEM. Response data was collected from thirty-three funding partner agencies.

- The majority of respondents reported high satisfaction levels regarding their agency's relationship with UWEM, with 69% reporting "very satisfied." Additionally, over half of the respondents felt they had adequate time to complete project reporting, given grant funding size.

- Responses to questions regarding the clarity of UWEM reporting requirements and the accuracy and helpfulness of the UWEM logic model were mixed. While about half of the respondents indicated that reporting requirements were clear, a third neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Similarly, about half of respondents agreed that the logic model is helpful in program evaluation, but almost 45% of respondents found the logic model neither helpful nor unhelpful.

- Respondents reported having experience with input, output, and outcome reporting, and using a range of tools to capture data measures. The most commonly used tool was agency forms created by the organization (88.9%). About a third of represented agencies also indicated using established tracking tools from their respective fields, and just over another third use forms created by an outside funder. These outside funder forms are most commonly used in tracking outcomes (55%).

- The most common barrier that agencies reported facing in collecting and using program data was staff time (66%). This could be related to the fact that 33% of participants reported staff training as a barrier, and 30.3% reported a lack of unified data requirements across funders. Between training staff on data management and the requirement of multiple data collection strategies for different funders, the lack of staff time was a clear barrier. Despite these barriers, all respondents were at least somewhat confident in their agency's capacity to manage work-related data effectively.

- A majority of participants indicated that they used more than one data tracking tool. Responses were split between the three options of desktop software not specifically designed for agencies, electronic software packages that are designed for agencies, and paper records and files, with 55%-70% of respondents reporting use of each option.

- All respondents reported that they are receiving the right frequency of communication from UWEM. A significant majority of respondents also indicated that they are interested in receiving information from UWEM regarding upcoming funding opportunities (87.9%), funding opportunities from other outside funders (78.8%), professional development opportunities (75.8%), and impact reports regarding different agencies' impact in the community (63.6%).

- The majority of respondents (65.5%) indicated that their agency does participate in a regular formal needs assessment, and about half would be interested in a shared needs assessment process. However, just over 40% of respondents didn't know if they would be interested in participating in a shared needs assessment process. This could indicate that more education is needed around the costs and benefits of engaging in needs assessments processes.

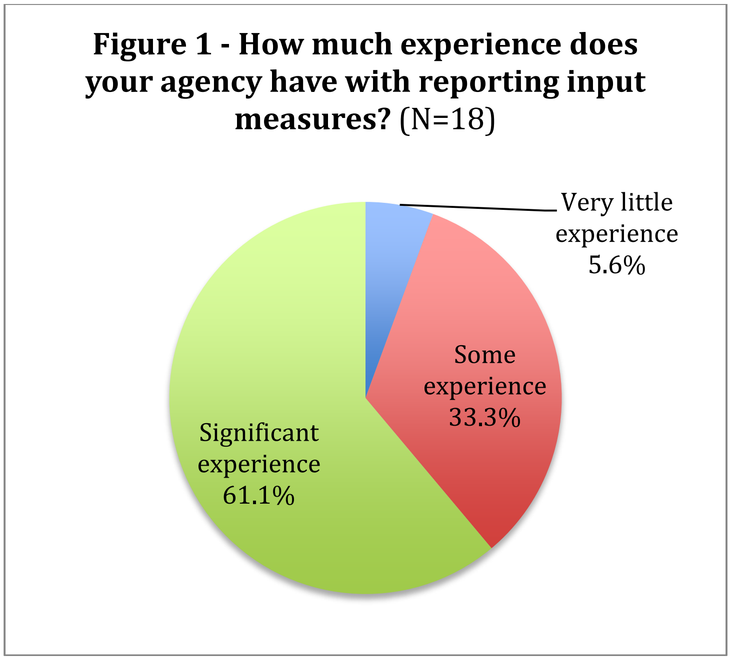
Background and Methodology

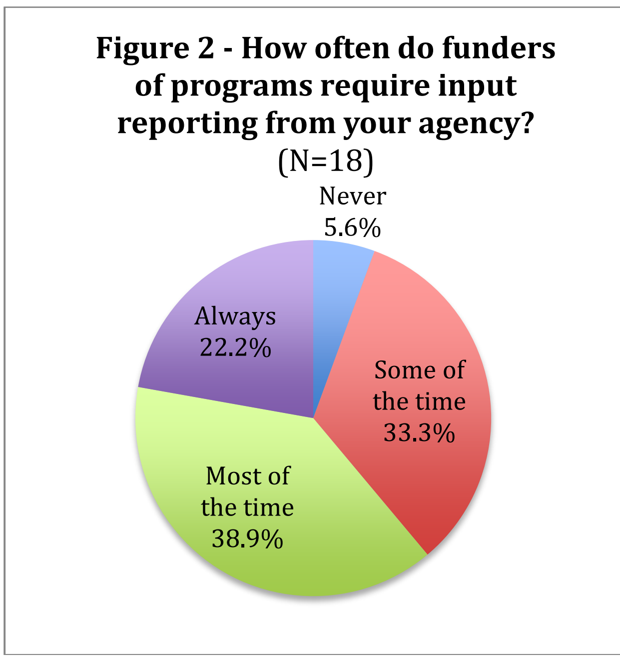
The second half of the survey, regarding Data Collection and Management and Working and Communicating with the United Way, was sent to more UWEM funding partners as a stand-alone survey than the original full version survey which included specific questions about input, output, and outcome data management. This and the following sections of the survey results are representative of a larger number of respondents. The overall survey response rate was 30% for the data presented in this report.

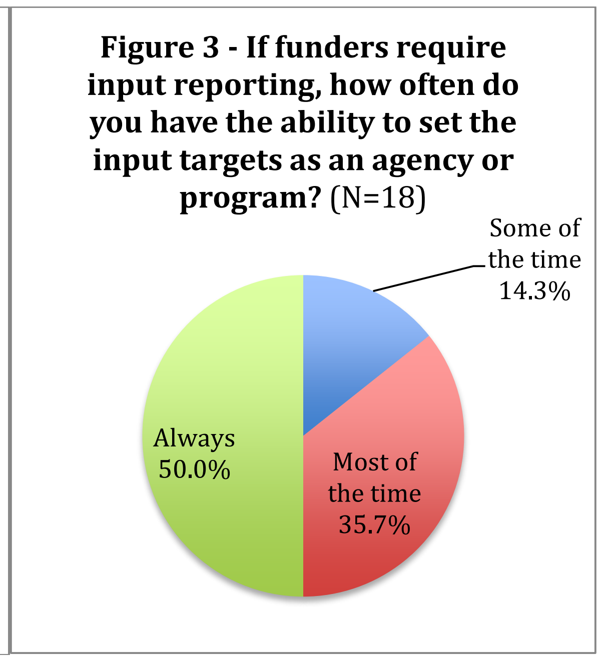
Survey Results

Tracking Input Data

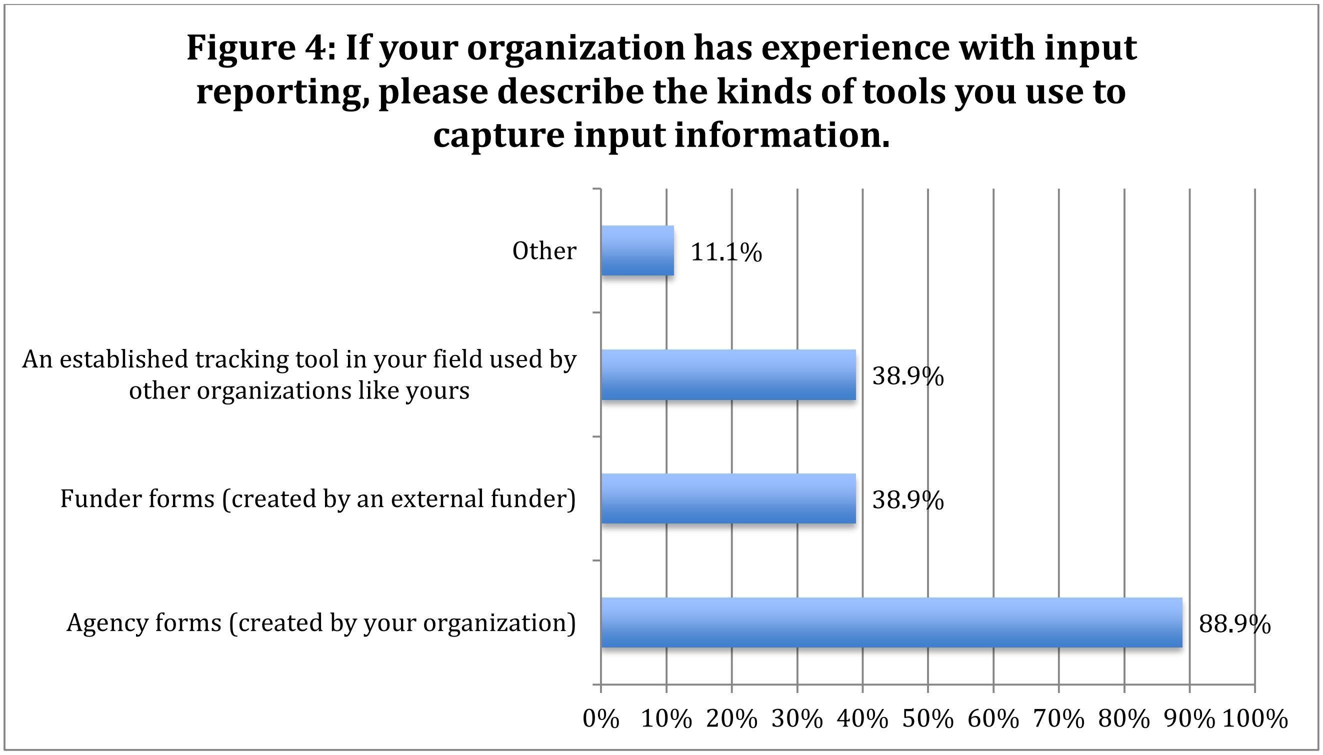
Among respondents indicating experience tracking input data, the majority of UWEM funding partners have significant experience reporting input measures, with an additional one-third of respondents sharing that they have some experience (Figure 1). Over half of the participating agencies are generally required to report input measure by their program funders, although one-third are only sometimes required to report these measures (Figure 2). All respondents are able to set agency-specific input targets at least some of the time, with 85.5% able to set these targets most to all of the time (Figure 3).





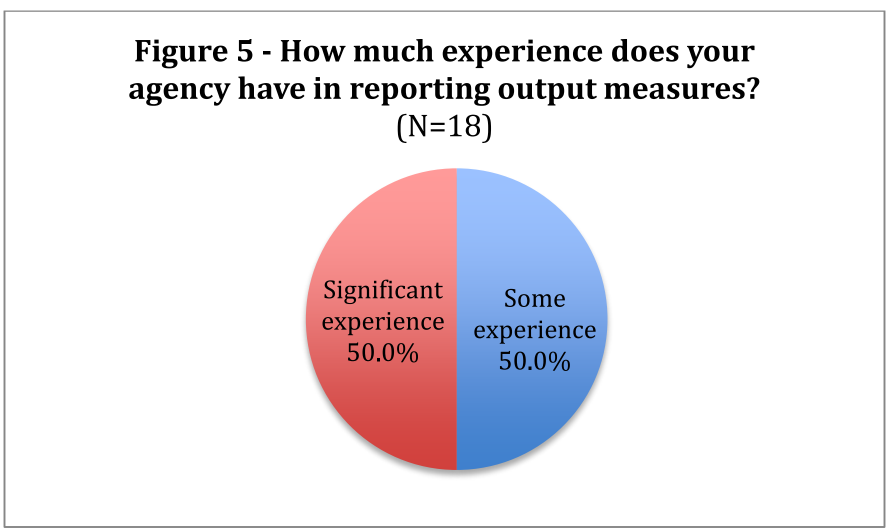


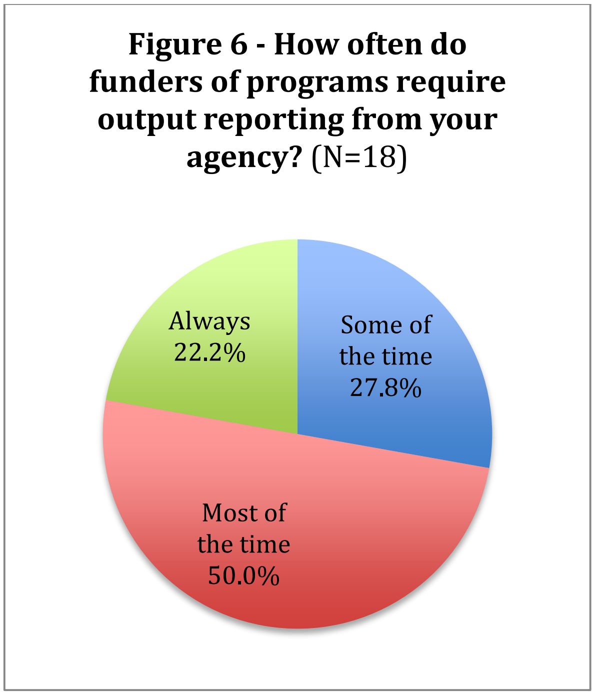
Agencies reported using multiple tools to capture input measures, with the most common tool being agency forms created by the organization (Figure 4). About one-third of respondents use an established tracking tool used by other organizations in their field, and just over a third use funder forms created by an external funder (Figure 4). Other tracking tools by a minority of responding agencies include custom database, and MS Office products.

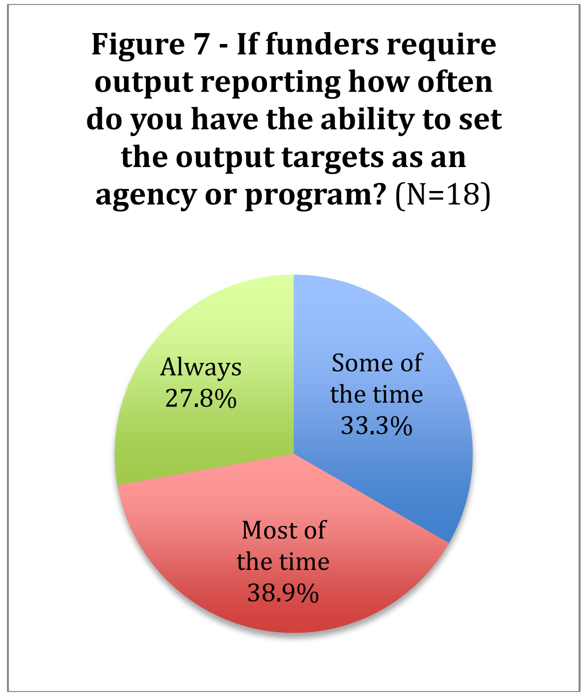


Tracking Output Data

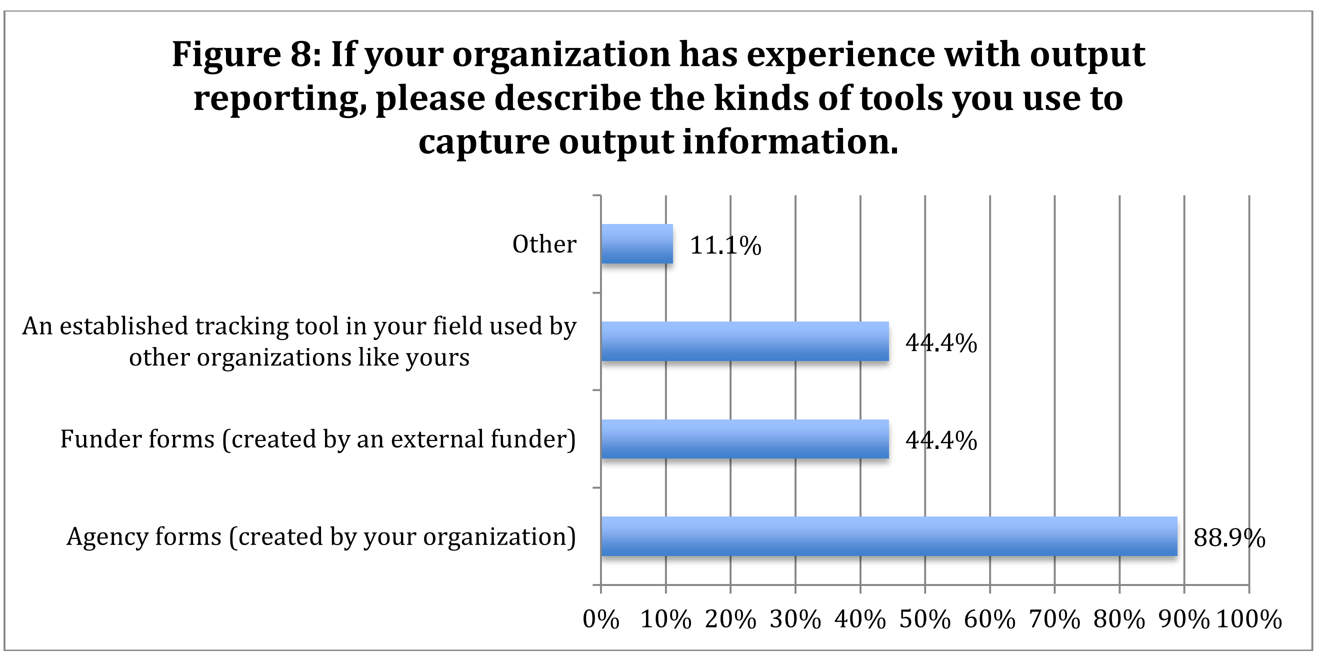
All funding partners participating in this survey have some experience tracking output data, with half having significant experience (Figure 5). All respondents have some output reporting requirements from program funders, while the majority of respondents are regularly required to report output measures (72.2%) (Figure 6). Agencies reported being mostly able to set their own output targets, with one-third of respondents reporting that they are only sometimes able to set their own output targets (Figure 7).







The tools used by agencies to capture output measures are very similar to those used to capture input measures. The vast majority (88.9%) use their own forms, one-third use an established tracking tool in their field, and slightly more agencies use externally created funder forms to track output than input measures (44.4% versus 38.9%, respectively) (Figure 8). "Other" tools reported by respondents were custom database tools.



Tracking Outcome Data

Respondents all had some experience tracking outcome measures, with half reporting significant experience (Figure 9). The vast majority of agencies (83.3%) reported that most to all of the time program funders require them to report outcome measures (Figure 10). Over half of respondents indicated that they mostly or always have the ability to set their own outcome measures, and the remaining 38.9% indicated that they are sometimes able to set their own outcome measures (Figure 11).

Figure 9 - How much experience does your agency have in reporting outcome measures? (N=18)

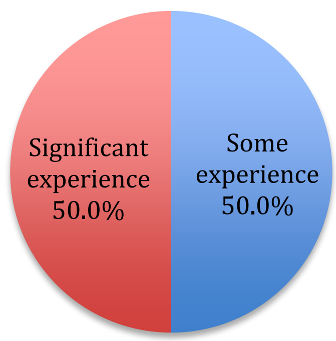


Figure 10 - How often do funders of programs require outcome reporting from your agency? (N=18)

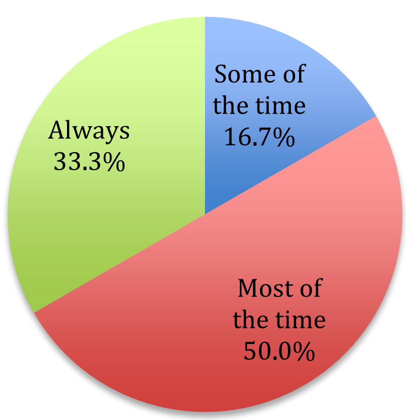
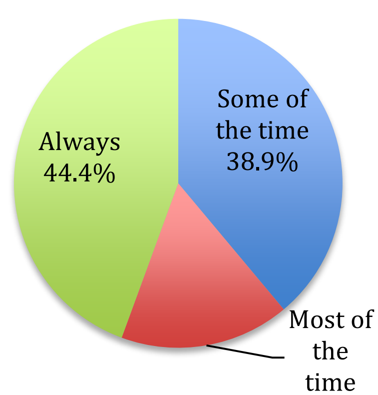
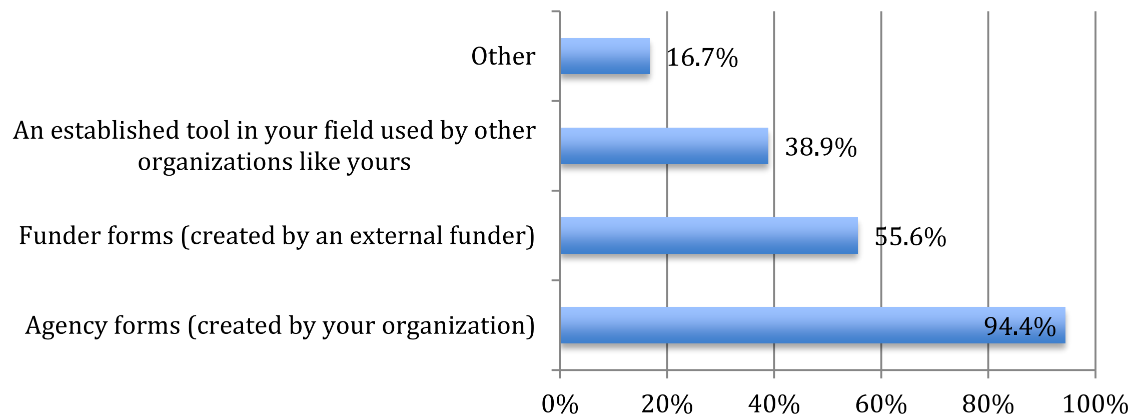


Figure 11 - If funders require outcome reporting, how often do you have the ability to set the outcome targets as an agency or program? (N=18)



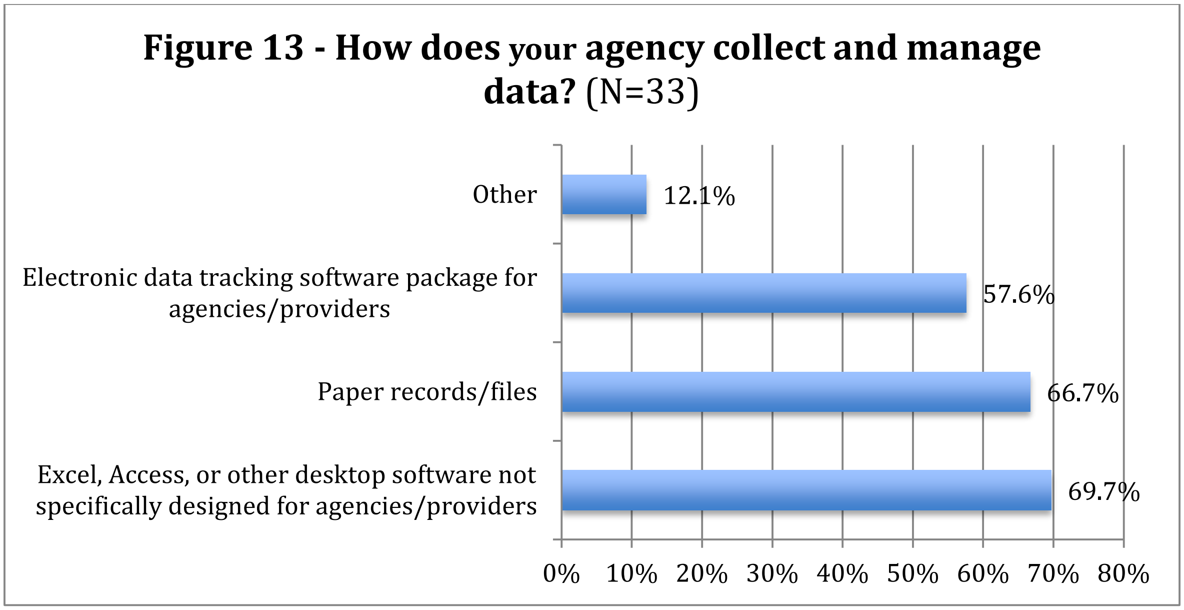
Many of the UWEM funding partners surveyed use multiple tools for outcome reporting. Almost all of the respondents reported using their own agency forms to track outcome information, and over half reported additional use of externally created funder forms (Figure 12). One-third use an established tool used in their field (Figure 12). A slightly higher percentage use other tools for outcome measures than for input or output measures, such as counting by hand, a custom database, and survey tools (Figure 12).

Figure 12: If your organization has experience with outcome reporting, please describe the kinds of tools you use to capture outcome information.



Data Collection and Management

When asked how their agency collects and manages data, respondents were fairly split across three management strategies, indicating that the majority use more than one. Close to 70% of respondents reported using desktop software not specifically designed for agencies/providers, a paper records/filing system, or some combination of the two, and almost 60% use an electronic data tracking software package for agencies/providers (Figure 13). A small number of respondents also reported using other collection and management tools, such as HMIS and survey tools.



In terms of barriers to collecting and using program data, the majority of agencies (66.7%) cited staff time as a barrier, and one-third cited staff training and expertise as a barrier (Figure 14). Other significant barriers in data collection and use for participants include costs and/or limitations of existing data tools, and a lack of unified data requirements across funders (Figure 14). Despite these barriers, about two-thirds of UWEM funding partner respondents expressed that they were "confident" or "very confident" in their agency's capacity to manage data effectively, and zero respondents felt "no confidence" in their agency's capacity for data management (Figure 15).

Data Collection and Management Tools

A variety of data collection and management tools were noted by respondents. The most common responses were the use of paper and Microsoft Office tools in addition to sector-specific tools. Responses included:

- "Access, EHR, Excel, Graphs, Evolutions, etc."
- "MS products - Excel and Access"
- "Excel spreadsheets primarily"
- "Paper records, Excel and Annual Satisfaction Survey."
- "Survey data entered into established internal and purchased databases."
- "Count by hand as there is no other way to track it"
- "Currently there is no single software program that we use to track our work. The programs used are typically mandated by the State. Recently all the Community Action Agencies entered into a contract with a software provider that has a program that incorporates most of the programs a CAP provides. We will begin using this program this coming spring but full implementation will likely take several years."
- "Pre and post tests, intake interviews, ongoing, periodic questionnaires."
- "Desktop software packages customized on the project"
- "In house generated spreadsheets"
- "LACES (industry software) & Excel"

- “SAMS Harmony Data tracking.”
- “The data tracking software we use is called SAMS Harmony.”
- “We use a combination of HMIS; Excel spreadsheets and some paper forms to keep track of various numbers.”
- “HMIS data base”
- “We use the homeless management information system (HMIS) as well as agency documents.”
- “We rely on the state of ME HMIS system for tracking homeless numbers and impact; internal spreadsheets and custom software for food pantry and soup kitchen and a database program for donor and volunteer tracking.”
- “We use three different evaluation tools. One is standardized nationally, the other two we have been using for 15 years (developed by the University of Maine, and we have found our results to be consistent (reliable) and a true reflection of what we observe (valid.)”
- “We use a total of 26 different databases to track agency data. Many of these are mandated by funding source. In addition, we have programs that utilize databases that were created at the agency. Paper files are also used, but are typically entered into an electronic format.”

Barriers to Collecting Data
Barriers noted by agencies include the use of third party sources (such as volunteers and external agencies), and the use of qualitative data or alternative forms of information that are based in hard data. Responses provided include:

- “Agencies reporting to us are frequently ‘forgetting’ to supply requested data”
- “Much of our work is based on collective impact coordination which is not based in data. The information is mainly qualitative.”
- “Some funders require use of specific databases for data collection. As a result, data is siloed.”
- “Staff time: Annually we do a major data collection push with our volunteers. To do this more often takes significant resources and isn't possible.”
- “We rely on volunteers to provide data to us.”

Figure 14 -What barriers do you face at your agency to collecting and using program data? (N=33)

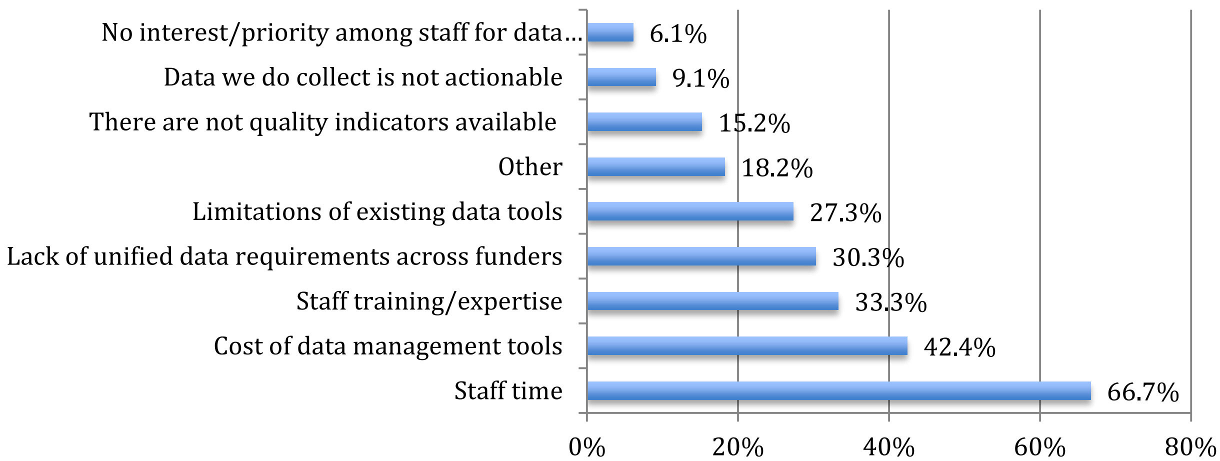
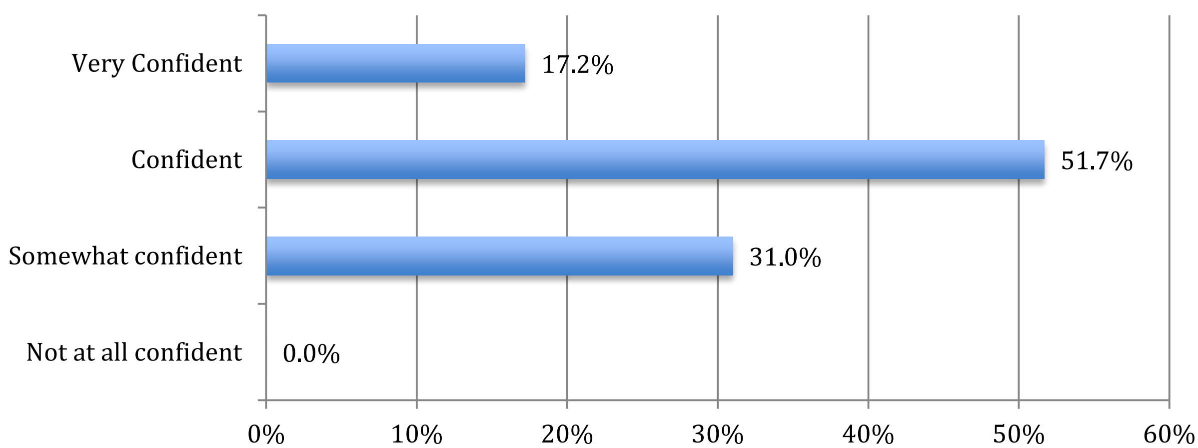
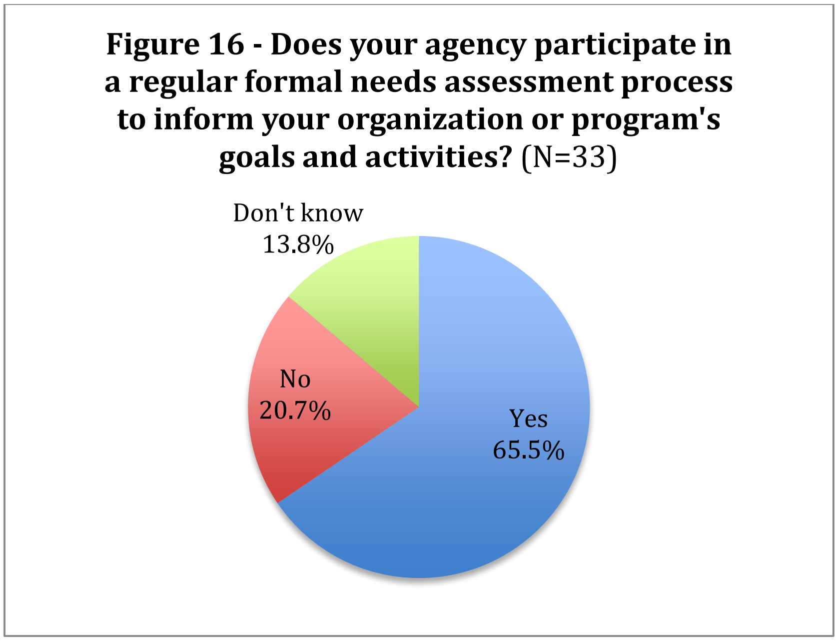
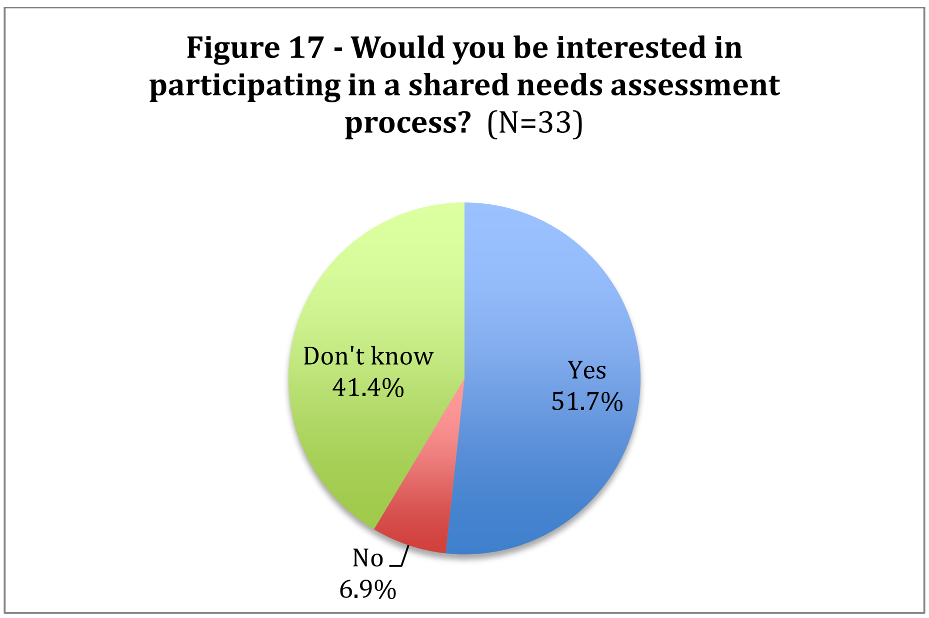


Figure 15 - How confident are you that your agency has the capacity necessary to manage data and information about its work effectively? (N=33)



While almost two-thirds of respondents do participate in a regular, formal needs assessment process to inform organizational goals and activities, a little over one-third of participating agencies either don't participate in regular needs assessment or the individuals taking the survey didn't know (Figure 16). When asked if they would be interested in participating in a shared needs assessment process, just over half of participants said they were interested, and the majority of the remaining respondents did not know if they would be interested in a shared needs assessment process (Figure 17).

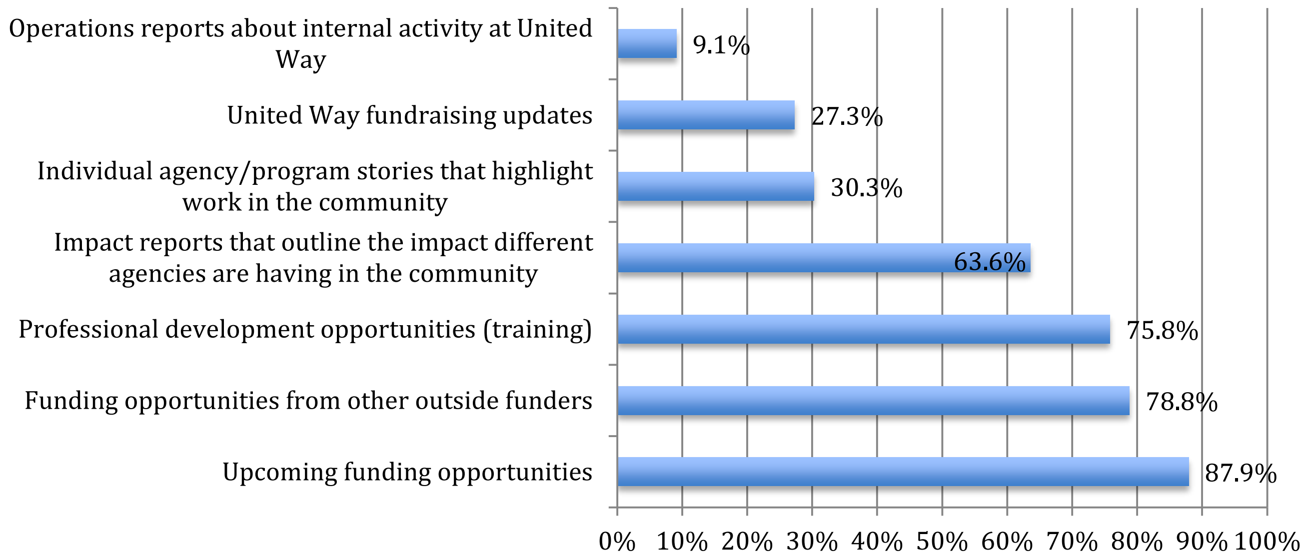




Working and Communicating with the United Way

UWEM funding partner survey respondents expressed unanimously that they were receiving "just enough" communication from UWEM (100% of responses). Out of seven possible kinds of information that UWEM could share with partner agencies, participants showed the most interest in learning about upcoming funding opportunities from UWEM and from other outside funders, with over 75% of respondents choosing those options (Figure 18). Additionally, about 75% of participants were interested in learning about professional development opportunities, and almost two-thirds wanted to receive impact reports outlining the impact that different agencies have in communities (Figure 18).

Figure 18 -What kinds of information would be helpful for the United Way to share with you as a grantee or partner agency? (N=33)



Suggestions for Maximizing Communication Between Agencies and UWEM:

- "Lead with answering the question: 'What's in it for me?' * brevity * correct dates/info the first time to avoid multiple emails"
- "No, I find them very easy to communicate with."
- "None. The relationship is functional, professional, and respectful."

Over half of UWEM funding partner survey participants expressed that they find the time required to complete project reporting to be reasonable, given the size of grant funding received from UWEM (Figure 19). However, a little over a third of respondents either didn't agree or disagree, or felt that there was not enough time to complete project reporting. This could be related to the fact that while over half of respondents feel that UWEM reporting requirements are easy to understand, almost 45% of respondents either didn't agree or disagree, or found reporting requirements difficult to understand (Figure 20).

Figure 19 - Given the size of the grant funding we received from United Way, the time required to complete the project reporting was reasonable. (N=33)

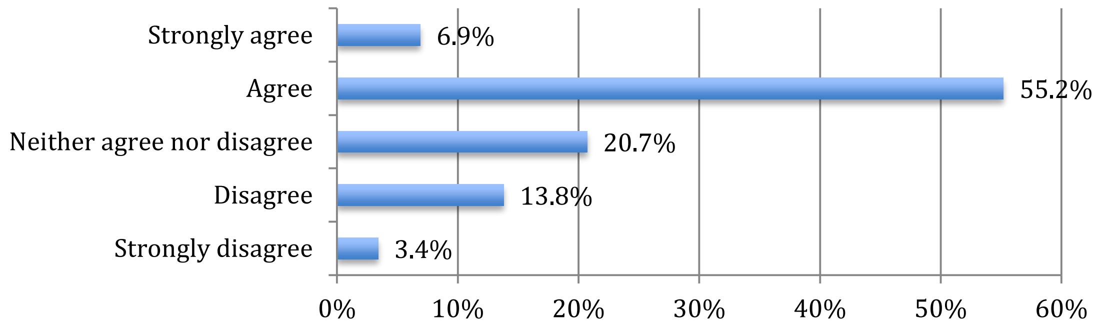
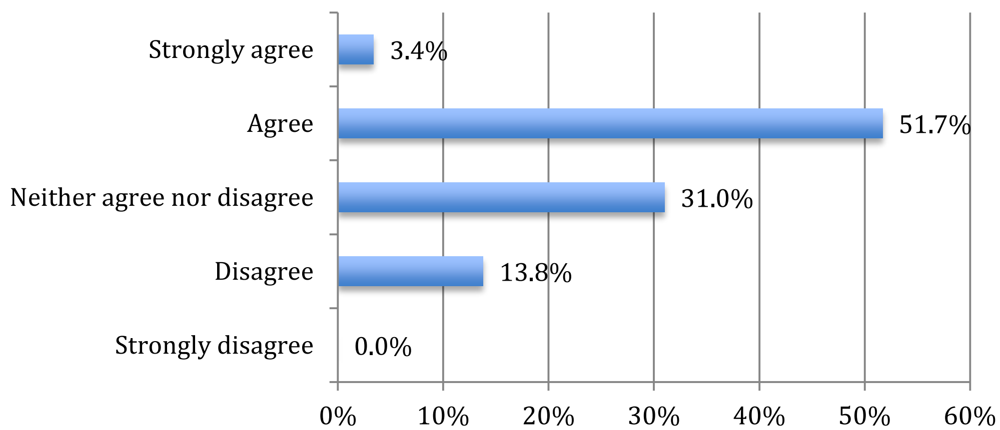
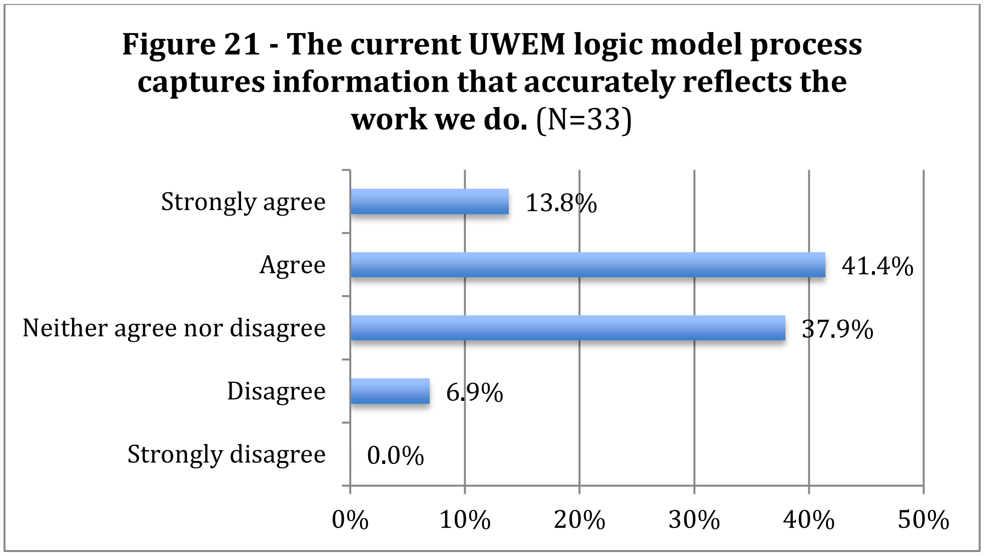


Figure 20 - The current UWEM reporting requirements are clear and easy to understand. (N=33)



In response to questions about the accuracy and helpfulness of the current UWEM logic model, just over half of respondents agreed that it accurately captures information about the work their agencies do (Figure 21), and similarly, just over half of respondents find the logic model helpful in clarifying and evaluating their own project model (Figure 22). Slightly fewer than half of the respondents did not find the model particularly helpful, and a similar number of respondents found the model “neither helpful nor unhelpful.”



Reporting:

UWEM Logic Model and Reporting:
Comments on the UWEM logic model showed mixed results. The respondents who felt the most positive about the logic model had reached out to UWEM with questions and were satisfied with their response, while other respondents were unfamiliar with the model or found it unhelpful.

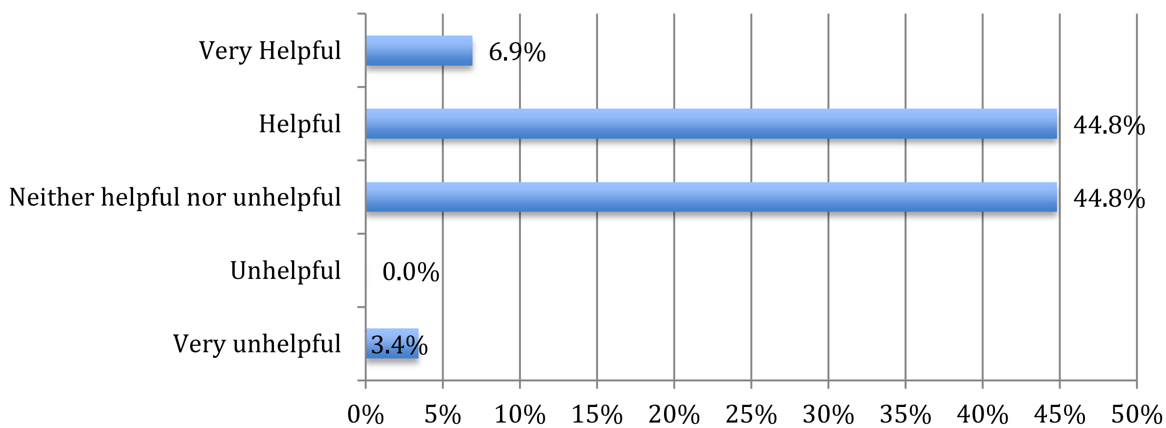
1. Lack of familiarity with the process or new to the grant:
   - "In our grant application we itemized outcomes rather than submitting a logic model, so the specific questions about the use and effectiveness of the logic model do not apply in this situation. We also have not done any reporting yet but will in January-so the question about reporting is not possible to respond to in this survey. Perhaps building in a check-off for new grantees would be helpful?"
   - "We're early in the grant reporting stages with this project. Building the logic model in the proposal was helpful but time consuming. I'm concerned reporting will also be very time consuming, but we're not there yet."
   - "This is our first grant with United Way and we have not yet completed the reporting process, therefore it is difficult to answer that set of questions. We also did not have to complete a logic model in our grant application, so that set of questions does not apply in this case. It might be nice to have a check-off for that circumstance as well."

2. Do not use the logic model or did not find it helpful:
   - "We do not use the logic models for the funding we receive."
   - "The logic model is not logical at all."

3. Were confused by the logic model but received UWEM staff support:
   - "We received funding from UWEM for the first time. It is important to our agency. The demands of the grant application are not unusual. The logic model is a bit confusing, but your staff was very willing to explain it and help."

- “We get a small amount of money from UW so having to do two reports a year, one of which is presenting all the data (logic model) is a lot of work but we feel it is very important to have the UW supporting us and we are grateful for it.”
- “Our main critique is the amount of time it takes to complete the UWEM application and reports. It's significantly more than other grant makers.”

Figure 22 - How helpful do you find the UWEM logic model in clarifying and evaluating your program model? (N=33)



Finally, participants were asked to share their overall satisfaction with their relationship with UWEM. The vast majority of respondents were very satisfied, although 10% of respondents reported feeling “very unsatisfied” with the relationship, representing three participants.

What is your overall satisfaction with your relationship with UWEM?

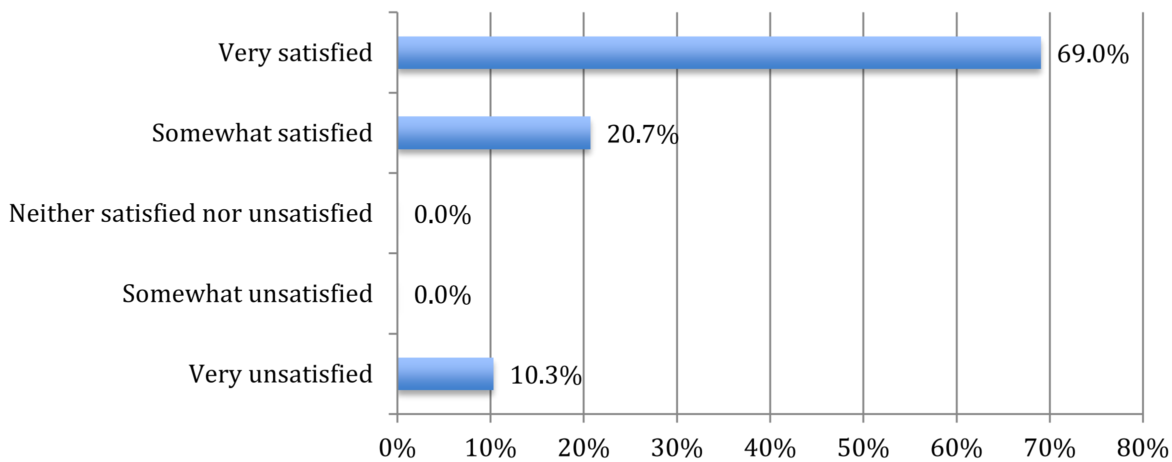
1. High satisfaction with grant:
   - “First time recipient. Pleased to try a new approach to improving the lives of clients. Pleased that the grant is for two years, giving us time to work out kinks and refine the program.”
   - “We appreciate the funding you have provided us throughout the years and our partnership.”

2. High satisfaction with UWEM team/communication:
   - “I have appreciated the communication that we have had, and feel confident that if I need any additional information or support my needs will be immediately addressed.”
   - “Our agency is new to the United Way family. We enjoyed participating in the United Way orientation and had fun during the meeting. Thanks for the games and bringing fun into our time together. We look forward to sharing our story with your team but are unaware of the reporting requirements.”
   - “United Way staff is always receptive and helpful when we have questions etc.”
   - “United Way stays connected with our agency offering referrals and training when needed.”

- “UWEM is a wonderful partner. They communicate clearly and share relevant community information. We find them to be compassionate, accountable, and approachable.”
- “I think that United Way does an incredible job bringing our community together and enhancing the quality of life in our region. We are most fortunate to have such a strong, focused team working on behalf of our citizens.”

3. Suggestions for improvement and other comments:
   - “I don't believe we do a great deal of projects with UWEM except once or twice a year when they are doing their fundraising.”
   - “Offers to promote our agency has yet to happen.”
   - “We have a wonderful working relationship with the current staff at UWEM.”
   - “UWEM territory is huge. Helping people in such a large area to connect with services and one another is a great challenge. I wonder if a focus on reducing the "digital divide" - working with schools, libraries, businesses, including Google - might be a way to uplift those in need through community sharing.”
   - “Thank you for all that you do!”
   - “Thank you for the opportunity to partner with United Way.”

Figure 23 - What is your overall satisfaction with your relationship with the United Way of Eastern Maine? (N=33)



What do you feel is the biggest challenge in communicating the impact of your organization or program(s) to funders?

Common challenges in communicating agency or programming impact to funders included the qualitative nature of client need/agency work, the time it takes to collect qualitative data, and lack of visibility and competition among agencies for funding:

- “Due to acquiring almost all our funding from the same source, the client's needs are often not an important factor to the funding source, rates are established, frozen, decreasing for the same need/work, etc.”

- "Qualitative nature of the information that we have historically been collecting rather than hard data. Our organization does not have staff capacity to consistently operate "programs" that are data-centered in the traditional sense."
- "The clients change year to year. I wish we were able to get more long-term impact to share."
- "Translating progress / improvements/ growth into numbers"
- "Funded want stories and we collect data. Stories can be very time consuming to collect."
- "Participating agencies/volunteers/clients not responding to surveys"
- "Visibility. Trying to get the word out about what we do. Not having the money to do the publicity we need. There are so many organizations vying for funding."
- "With so many nonprofits competing for the same resources, the challenge is being heard.

Discussion and Limitations

- It is important to note that a limitation of this survey is that it did not engage a significant portion of funding partners. The results represent only a portion of funding partners (30%) and thus may not accurately reflect all funding partner perspectives.

- It is clear that the majority of UWEM funding partners are generally satisfied with their experience with UWEM. Even if some may find the logic model confusing, many shared that UWEM staff are supportive, friendly, and helpful, making working with UWEM a positive experience. Many funding partners also thanked UWEM for their work, showing that there is an understanding and appreciation of the larger vision of UWEM.

- Agencies cited some major challenges that affect both ability to collect and measure data, and in getting the word out to funders about their organization and programs. These challenges center around a general lack of resources that leaves agencies with limited staff time for training and data management, and a sense of competition with other agencies for the same funding opportunities. Additionally, for some agencies, different funders require different kinds or formats for reporting, making streamlining the data collection and management processes very difficult if possible at all.

- Another challenge that some agencies discussed is the qualitative nature of their data. This can make collection and measurement more difficult and time consuming. Having to translate that qualitative data into something more quantitative creates barriers to funding and/or program development.

- Despite these challenges, the majority of agencies do feel that their staff are competent in data management in all three input, output, and outcome measures. There is a plethora of tools used by these agencies to meet management and reporting needs. A significant number of respondents indicated that they are interested in being involved with a shared needs assessment process with other agencies, opening the door to increased communication among agencies and between agencies and UWEM.

PART 2: Funding Partner Logic Model Review

Logic Model Review Summary

The following summary was developed based on a review of existing United Way grantee logic models which outline activities, program-level outcomes, broader community outcomes, outputs and indicators and information on data sources. The review was conducted with the following goals: 1) Assess grantee capacity for measuring impact of their work; and 2) Identify recommendations for strengthening the use of logic models as an evaluation tool.

Summary of Findings

The majority of indicators reviewed within the logic models fall into the “output” category (roughly two-thirds) followed by outcomes (roughly a third). A smaller group of grantees had indicators that included a mix of both outcomes and outputs in their indicator language. Overall, the indicators selected are appropriate for short-term interventions and measurement frames (approximately 1 year). Output units of measurement, as currently documented, vary from agency to agency. One agency may report a given output in pounds of produce and another tracking people who complete a training. This presents a challenge for generalizing impact across grantees.

Data sources noted in the logic models included a mix of client report, third party observation (for example, teacher observation or staff observation), and assessment data collected via survey. The data source information provided within the logic model documents makes it difficult to identify specific instruments being used to collect data. For example, many logic models list “survey” as a data source but it is not clear if the actual questions on the survey are from established measures or are developed by the agency staff.

Based on the logic model review, it is clear that grantee agencies have the resources and expertise to complete the logic model exercise and track client self-report or staff observation data. There is little standardization across agencies with regard to the indicators used and indicators are as varied and diverse as the agencies and programs themselves. In addition, indicators tend to be tailored to the program-level outcomes as opposed to broader or system-level outcomes. Standardizing outcomes and outputs would help to quantify broader impact across the United Way service area.

Most output indicators focus on client access to and receipt of services along with program completion. These indicators include the number of clients who complete training sessions, number of clients who participate in services, as well as the development of tangible materials as a result of UWay-funded activities. Indicators generally fall into the following categories:

- Number and/or percentage of clients who have increased access to services or supports
- Number and/or percentage of clients who have completed a program
- Number and/or percentage of clients who directly receive services or assistance
- Number and/or percentage of clients who attend a given event or training
- Number of hours of service or training provided
- Number of educational materials developed

The outcome indicators appear to fall into broader categories such as change in knowledge, change in behaviors, and personal changes (emotion/psychological conditions/health/physical abilities/self-efficacy). In this respect, indicators could be further standardized into these broader categories:

- Number and/or percentage of clients who report or otherwise demonstrate an increase in knowledge
- Number and/or percentage of clients who report or otherwise demonstrate behavior changes that will lead to improved health or quality of life.
- Number and/or percentage of clients who report or otherwise demonstrate the use of training/new knowledge in their lives.
- Number and/or percentage of clients who report improved health or quality of life.
- Number and/or percentage of clients who demonstrate improvements in meeting basic needs.

Recommendations

Based on the review undertaken, the information provided within each UWay logic model provides a valuable snapshot into how grantees are thinking about their work and its resulting impacts. Overall, the information provided in the logic model allows both UWay and grantee program staff to assess the breadth of grantmaking and impact which is likely valuable for program planning and communications purposes. However, without some additional standardization of measures across grantees, the ability to make broader statements of impact is limited.

The logic model review uncovered both capacity and challenges with regard to measuring and documenting impact among United Way grantees. As such, it is recommended that United Way work with its grantees to strengthen data collection, tracking and reporting by assisting in standardizing the outputs and outcomes data collected by grantees. The outputs and outcomes listed above could be used as part of that standardization. It is clear that grantees have the capacity for basic surveying, observation, and service provision tracking and are able to select measures with meaning to them at the program level. However, standardizing this data and the logic model reporting format would allow United Way to understand and articulate broader service-region impacts.

If standard outputs and outcomes are used to track impact, it is recommended that grantees be given the opportunity to select relevant outputs and outcomes from a list of standard items in addition to providing a brief summary of how they are conceptualizing a given impact. For example, if a nutrition program grantee selected to track the number of clients reporting improved ability to meet basic needs, they should document somewhere on the logic model that their definition of meeting basic needs is measured by a reduction in food insecurity. In addition, allowing grantees to continue to select their unit designation (i.e. people, pounds of food, trainees, materials developed, etc.) for each target set within the logic model would help to clarify the logic models for program staff. It is also recommended that additional training be provided on output, activities, and outcome language as some partnering agencies use output and outcome language interchangeably. This may be due in part to a lack of a standardized time frame for the logic models. In some instances, an output can be considered an outcome over the course of a shorter period of time. Most of the logic models reviewed demonstrated this distinction though not all. If this training component were available for new staff or just those who need it, it may help with consistency of measures from year to year.

Crossover Recommendations (where both survey and logic model finding converge):

A number of respondents felt confused about the logic model, or had previously and then had a positive experience reaching out to UWEM for support. Thus, initial training or even access to an online training on using the logic model may be helpful, for those agencies/individuals who may not have time or feel comfortable reaching out to UWEM for additional support or explanation of logic models.

Similarly, since a significant portion of respondents found the logic model neither helpful or unhelpful to their agency's ability to track data measures, UWEM could work with agencies to develop meaning for new standardized language for data measures that are also helpful to the agency, not just for reporting.

Since staff time is a barrier noted in the survey findings, allowing agencies to select standardized outcomes but more customized measures would give staff the ability to repurpose existing data reported to other funders while allowing UWEM to create consistency across programs.

It is possible that a shared needs assessment process would also help to clarify potentially useful categories for more standard data tracking language, that would be both relevant and helpful for the agencies themselves and provide more clarity for UWEM.