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Where not-for-profits go for help

This resource is part of [Data Projects from Go to Whoa!](#) – a guide produced by Our Community's [Innovation Lab](#).

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## Five ways to ensure that your data project has the support it needs

Before you start a data project, it's important to set (and agree on) realistic expectations and goals about what your organisation wants to achieve. Part of that process is ensuring you have the internal support you need to ensure the success of your project. Make sure that your organisation is ready by using our five-point checklist.

### **1. A senior leader is aware and supportive of the project**

You may already have built a case for your organisation to become more data driven and obtained in-principle support from senior leadership. However, it's a good idea to make sure that this support extends to your first (or latest) data project. Clearly communicate your goals & expectations for the project and check that they're in alignment with the goals & expectations of the leadership team. Have high-level end goals agreed upon and in place from the beginning. This will allow you to work more efficiently and effectively, as you'll be working within clearly defined perimeters.

### **2. A team member has responsibility for the project as part of their role**

Appoint a project lead to be responsible for the project. This might be someone in your organisation who already identifies as a data champion and is eager to work with data. The term 'data champion' refers to a person who's taken it on themselves to encourage data-driven practices. If you don't have an established data champion, think about who might be interested in learning more about data. It might be you! Once you've got that person on board, invest time in building their skills, starting with the first data project.

### **3. There is time available to work on the project**

The best intentions don't count for much if you don't have the resources you need to achieve your project goals. Time is valuable and can be hard to find. Consider the time commitment needed from the project lead, subject matter experts and other supporting roles. What is most realistic and practical? Define and communicate clear guidelines for how much time per day, week or month will be allocated to working on the project.

Because time is so precious, we suggest that you start small and aim to complete a project end-to-end before setting more ambitious targets. This way you are more likely to produce something useful sooner and learn along the way.

### **4. There is interest and enthusiasm for the project**

Ideally, there is already strong interest across your organisation in the insights that might be gleaned from your data project, whether it's about your beneficiaries, your operations, or some other aspect of your work. If not, it may be that some members of the team don't fully understand the benefits that can come from exploring your organisation's data. Consider sending them along to one of our [introductory tutorials](#) to learn more, or show them some examples of other data projects that have been conducted in the social sector. Stay up to date with examples of social sector data projects by regularly visiting the [One-stop links shop](#) on the Innovation Lab website. The page will be updated as we learn about more projects.

### **5. The organisation is open to taking action based on the data project's findings**

As with any project, there's a risk that the results of all your hard work will be filed away to gather dust. Ensure the decision-making members of your organisation understand that simply 'doing' a data project is not enough. Your project brief (more on that in Step 5 of [Data Projects from Go to Whoa!](#)) might include suggestions about post-project actions based on expected outputs. Agree to revisit the project brief once the project is complete to review those recommendations, act upon them and consider any additional ones. You want the results of the project to be useful and to result in some momentum once the project is complete.

### **Why data projects need senior leaders on board: Rohan's story**

Rohan was hired to help a not-for-profit legal service review the data being collected from beneficiaries across a number of programs. His role was funded by a grant. Rohan kept coming up against roadblocks from team members and management. In one meeting, he was told that management didn't view the data project (and by extension, his role) as a priority and that the only reason they were conducting the review was that the board required it. Rohan felt frustrated and despondent. He suspected that the program manager had no appetite to change existing survey questions and tools and perceived the reporting process as a burden. As a result, Rohan didn't feel confident that the organisation would learn from any insights gained from the project or take any follow-up action. Ultimately, he resigned mid-project and the organisation kept employing the same outdated processes it'd been using for ten years.

### **Why data projects need senior leaders on board: Nayal's story**

Nayal was hired to help a not-for-profit legal service review the data being collected from beneficiaries across a number of programs. Her role was funded by a grant. Management was supportive and assigned team members who understood & were enthusiastic about the project's aims to assist. Regular meetings with management left Nayal feeling motivated and supported to meet the goals she had been hired to achieve. The program manager was open to changing existing survey questions and tools, and considered that the work involved in adjusting reporting processes was important. The whole organisation, including management, was keen to learn from the project's insights and take follow-up action where possible. Nayal completed the project within the predicted timeframe and moved on to assist another organisation. Before leaving, she connected the legal service with another data analyst looking for part-time work to help the organisation to become more data-driven and to develop a data strategy.