

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

US Philanthropy Investments in Administrative Data: Research and Interview Report

Administrative data, or data collected by public agencies as part of providing services, presents unique and often untapped opportunities for those funding and working in the social sector. Integrating administrative data sets across agencies can improve social sector policies and programs and increase access to services.

Administrative data is usually housed in information data systems (IDS), technology-based data systems that legally allow for personally identifiable or non-identifiable information from various agencies to be shared and combined. Once integrated and accessible, administrative data is generally used for two main purposes:

1. Research that analyzes which programs and services are more closely tied with outcomes in order to scale, replicate, or improve them.
2. Real-time case management and service delivery using identifiable data to determine eligibility and target specific supports.

Many U.S.-based foundations and philanthropic organizations invest in administrative data. However, not every foundation invests in the same way or for the same purpose. The Heising-Simons Foundation funded VIVA Strategy + Communications to conduct a landscape analysis of how foundations across the United States have supported the integration of administrative data and led to improved social sector outcomes, particularly related to education.

Five foundations were interviewed. Their approaches to investing in administrative data include:

- Seeding and incubating administrative data pilots and data labs for research and/or case management purposes.
- Sustaining the infrastructure and operations of existing administrative data efforts.
- Building capacity of the field through initiatives and convenings.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. *Administrative data is about system building.* Data governance, partnerships, and creating a culture of collaboration must precede technology investments. They are time intensive but important.
2. *Planning and capacity building are critical and require significant time and resources.* System readiness needs to be evaluated up front. Agency staff may not have the ability or capacity to build the infrastructure, so investments in staff and/or technology may be needed.
3. *Focused goals ensure that success can be meaningfully tracked.* Clear goals for improving child and family outcomes are key to staying on track during the long system-building process. Plus, visible “wins” can further the field by demonstrating the impact of administrative data on outcomes.
4. *Using data integration for case management presents unique challenges and exciting opportunities.* Data accuracy is very important since the data informs interventions. Service providers must be appropriately trained in how to use the data to connect children to services. But, successful data integration for case management has greatly increased students’ and families’ access to services and supports.

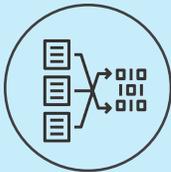
BENEFITS AND SUCCESSES OF ADMINISTRATIVE DATA INTEGRATION

Broadly, the foundations reported significant and exciting results from their investments in administrative data:

- **Proof of concept.** Investments have proven that it is possible to integrate data while still protecting privacy. Furthermore, foundations have seen significant cost efficiency by using data for evaluation purposes as opposed to funding randomized controlled trials.
- **Strong relationships.** Foundations have been able to “stay close to the decision makers” by building relationships with public agency leaders. Integration efforts have also led to strong partnerships between agencies that have positive impacts in communities.
- **Education connections.** Administrative data has clearly shown the relationships between human services involvement and education outcomes, and helped to identify opportunities to improve those outcomes.

EDUCATION SUCCESSES

A few of the education-focused outcomes achieved through foundations’ investments in administrative data include:



Utilizing integrated data to identify factors that negatively impact student success, such as frequently changing school districts, suspension programs, and alternative schools, and using those findings to change policies and improve programs.



Helping foster children achieve school success by giving child welfare staff access to education data to help with enrollment and credit transfers, identify support needs, and work with school staff on attendance or discipline issues.



Evaluating how housing instability impacts disciplinary problems and targeting interventions and extra supports to students experiencing housing problems.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTMENT

All foundation interviewees agreed that there are many administrative data opportunities that are ripe for investment across the United States. Foundations have been supporting the integration of administrative data at state and county levels for years, but there is still much more work to be done. There are countless opportunities to invest independently, in addition to building on existing work and collaborating on new initiatives.

Foundations also mentioned the need for further investments in:

- **Education-focused data integration.** All foundations spoke to significant educational outcomes that have been achieved due to administrative data efforts and noted the tremendous opportunity in this sector.
- **Family engagement.** Engaging families and communities in the effort can ensure that target populations are helping to inform data integration and its uses.
- **Harnessing technological advancements.** Technology is always changing, so there are ongoing opportunities to improve existing tools and platforms, as well as build new ones, to allow for easier access and utilization of data.
- **Communications strategies and collateral.** Several foundations noted that privacy concerns were barriers, but that often these concerns were cultural rather than legal. Including communications as part of investments could help change the cost-benefit conversation around administrative data and shift agencies’ views on data-sharing risks.