Chicago Benchmarking Collaborative Case Study

Overview

CHRISTOPHER HOUSE

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The Chicago Benchmarking Collaborative (CBC), launched in 2009, is an alliance of five education and human service agencies that collectively work with low-income individuals throughout some of Chicago's most underserved neighborhoods. Christopher House is the Collaborative's Project Manager. The CBC's goal is to increase impact on low-income children and families through the sharing of data and effective practices.

Greater transparency and insights:
By sharing data-driven best practices and strategies, partners can learn from their peers and make improvements that increase impact

Streamlined reporting:
Centralized, interactive dashboards reduce the amount of time spent producing query reports, and enable staff to conduct in-depth data analysis

Cost savings:
New partners joining the collaborative benefit from a fully designed case management system and reporting platform, rather than building one themselves

"We wanted a more streamlined process for data collection and easy to navigate pages for data entry, so that we could produce cross-agency reports on a set of common outcomes and outcome indicators that partners use for comparative insights. We now have a shared platform with interactive dashboards that are a huge timesaver, and that allow partners to drill down on specific data points within those outcome results."

– Traci Stanley, Director of Quality Assurance, Christopher House, and Project Manager, CBC

The CBC identifies three key triggers of success in establishing their data collaborative. First, partners that see the value each member brings to the collaborative and share a common vision to increase their impact by making data-informed program improvements that will be more likely to deliver on outcomes. Second, leadership holds the most important role in sponsoring change to organizational culture to become data-informed. They communicate the vision and expectations to staff, establish a sense of urgency for the work, and make resource commitments to ensure change happens successfully. Lastly, there is a need for accurate data and a software platform to effectively evaluate programs and for learning groups to discuss how to improve based on data.

Situation

Need for a streamlined process for data collection

For some partners, depending on which software platform they had in place, data collection wasn't user friendly. The process for inputting data often involved multiple pages and navigation challenges. By streamlining the process, partners would be able to spend more time analyzing data and making comparative insights.

Desire to improve data quality and empower individual partners

Higher quality data would lead to more valuable analysis and insights that could be used to inform plans for data-driven improvements. With better quality data, organizations would also be able to learn from other partners, and implement strategies and practices in their own programs.

"We are now in a position to help new partners get up and running, and support them as we expand the Collaborative. The more partners we recruit, the bigger the data set that we have to benchmark with, which is exciting."

– Traci Stanley, Director of Quality Assurance, Christopher House, and Project Manager, CBC

Goal to reduce the amount of manual work required to aggregate data

Reports that detailed numbers and percentages were easy to create, but data visuals had to be created outside of the CBC's software by copying and pasting information into PowerPoint. This manual process was cumbersome, time-consuming, and introduced room for human error.

Solution

After the CBC decided to replace its existing solution, the organization issued an RFI to understand the functionality, capabilities, and pricing of four vendors. The information provided by the vendors was then used to complete a comparative analysis, which was supplemented by input from peer agencies.

The desire to have one shared platform that everybody could access ultimately led the CBC to select Salesforce and Exponent Case Management (ECM) from Exponent Partners. "The combination of the Salesforce platform and ECM would enable us to create dashboards and data visuals for our outcome results," explained Traci. "We would gain the ability to easily aggregate those outcome results by different demographic types and results for students in specific neighbourhoods."

The discovery process with Exponent Partners involved a deep dive into the organization's requirements, including the target population, assessments being tracked, and day-to-day activities of different functional roles.

"The discovery process was very thorough and captured our collective needs, some of which were in alignment, whereas others were agency-specific," explained Traci. From there, Exponent Partners went through the design phase, where collaboration with the CBC enabled them to solidify details about what would get built and for which programs. According to Traci, "We went from having many different programs, each capturing a few participants, in our previous system to fewer, larger program buckets that capture more participants."

Results

Simpler data capture

When doing an intake, partners using ECM now have the ability to capture all intake information and demographics in one place, providing a complete picture of a family. With the intake process being more efficient, staff time is saved and can be used to analyze data, look for trends, and determine ways to use the data to increase the CBC's impact.

Streamlined reporting

The Collaborative can create detailed reports and data visuals in one place, using ECM and Einstein Analytics. "Einstein Analytics will take some of the mystery away from program staff who, in the past, have been looking at aggregate data reports that may show they're not doing well in a certain area, but they can't drill down to see which kids are struggling," explained Traci. Partners have a greater ability to drill down on the de-identified data and access information for their own agency related to a specific program. "Having that information is crucial because each partner can individualize their approach in a program based on how specific kids are doing." Partners also gain the ability to aggregate results in more meaningful reports to meet their unique needs.

Enhanced ability to consolidate multiple databases and ensure data integrity

Staff can now upload data from non-ECM users onto the Einstein Analytics shared platform and incorporate that data into dashboard reports for the Collaborative. The ability to be solution-agnostic when it comes to data sharing makes it easier for the Collaborative to recruit new partners. Data integrity is also better as manual work related to the creation of charts and visuals has been eliminated.

💲 Increased cost savings and cost efficiencies

New partners benefit from design and configuration savings, and, if they choose to adopt ECM, they will also benefit from a fully designed case management system and reporting platform, which can be configured to meet the needs of their individual programs. Cost savings will also be achieved with Einstein Analytics, which will allow Christopher House to build dashboards for multiple organizations that can then login and access their outcome reports. Cost efficiencies have been achieved as Exponent Partners can configure multiple systems in an uninterrupted period of time as a single project, rather than as separate, standalone projects.

✓ Established effective practices

The Collaborative uses the data to inform decisions related to the establishment of program practices and strategies. For example, rather than working in silos, members can now examine data, hold group discussions to explore what contributed to those results, and then determine best practices that can be shared and implemented by partners to increase impact on children, youth, and families.

Improved quality of services

Thanks to programmatic changes or professional development that is instituted based on data, the Collaborative is seeing better outcome results and an increase in the overall quality of the program, which ultimately benefits students and families.

Increased transparency and insights

By using a standardized set of measures, partners have access to valuable benchmark data, and can easily see how their program results stack up against those of other partners. The sharing of data, best practices and strategies is a game-changer when compared to partners' past attempts to benchmark against their own data from the previous year.

The CBC is launching a newly published guide, which is titled **Increasing Mission Impact through Collaborative Learning**, and serves as a toolkit for the nonprofit sector with strategies and best practices the CBC has learned over the past 10 years. For more information about the CBC or to purchase a copy of the guide, visit **www.christopherhouse.org/cbc/**.