Outcome Measurement Starter Kit

What to measure, how to define it, and how to collect it without collecting identities

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The problem this solves
Most organizations know they should measure outcomes and get stuck on two questions: which ones, and how to collect the data without creating a privacy problem. This kit answers both. The privacy approach here is the one we build into our own platform, and you can use it whether or not you ever work with us.

Step 1. Choose measures you can actually collect

A good outcome measure is specific, collectable with the staff you have, and meaningful to a funder. Three or four strong measures beat twelve aspirational ones.

Program type	Starter outcome measures
Workforce and employment	Employed at 30, 90, and 180 days. Wage at placement. Retention with the same employer.
Housing and homelessness	Housed at exit. Still housed at 6 and 12 months. Returns to homelessness.
Reentry and justice	Employment at 90 days. Stable housing at 6 months. Return to custody at 6 and 12 months.
Youth and mentoring	School attendance change. Grade progression. Sustained match length. Self reported connectedness.
Food security	Household food security scale change. Consistency of access over time.
Behavioral health and recovery	Treatment engagement at 30 days. Retention at 90 days. Self reported functioning change.
Family services	Reunification or contact maintained. Caregiver reported stability. Service plan completion.

Step 2. Write each measure so two people would count it the same way

An ambiguous measure produces numbers you cannot defend. Every measure needs four elements.

Element	Example
The exact question	Are you currently employed for pay, including part time?
Who is counted	Everyone who completed the cohort, including those we later lost contact with
When it is collected	90 days after cohort completion, within a 14 day window
How a non response is treated	Counted in the denominator as not employed, and the response rate is reported

That last element is where most reported numbers quietly break. If you drop non responders from the denominator, your percentage rises and your credibility falls the moment a funder asks.

Step 3. Collect without collecting identities

You need to know that the person who took the intake survey is the same person who took the 90 day follow up. You do not need their name in your working data to know that. Assign each participant a code at intake and key everything to the code.

> **How the split works**
> At intake, record identifying information in one place that only your own staff can open. Assign a code, for example P-1047. Every working record, every survey response, every analysis, and every report uses the code and nothing else. Your team can look up who P-1047 is when they need to serve that person. Nobody else can. Your deliverables and funder reports never contain a name.

This matters beyond good practice. Organizations serving survivors of domestic violence, people in substance use treatment, and patients under HIPAA carry legal confidentiality obligations that coded data helps you meet. It also means a subpoena or a breach cannot expose what you never stored alongside the working data.

Step 4. Report honestly

- Label measured results as measured, and label professional judgment as judgment. Do not blend them.
- Report the denominator and the response rate alongside every percentage.
- Name what did not work. A report with no weaknesses reads as marketing, and experienced funders discount it.
- Never estimate a number and present it as measured. If you do not have it, say you do not have it yet.

Build your measurement plan

Measure 1, exact question, who is counted, when collected

Measure 2

Measure 3