Measuring Progress & Success

A practical guide to defining outcomes, selecting meaningful measures, and building data over time

your Washington

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

About This Guide

This guide provides tools, templates, and best practices to help teams **measure progress** in ways that are meaningful, equitable, and actionable. It is designed for program staff and managers who want to understand whether their work is making a difference—and how to show it.

The examples and worksheets are based on real state agency work and can be adapted to fit different programs and contexts.

This guide is intended to be a practical reference, not a presentation. You can use it during planning, facilitation, or reflection. Each section builds on the previous one, helping teams move from defining success to selecting measures and strengthening data over time.

> How to Use This Guide
> Each major step in this guide includes a short explanation followed by an **accompanying worksheet** to help you apply the concepts to your own work. The worksheets are designed to be used in order, but you can also use individual exercises as needed. You may complete them on your own, with a team, or as part of a facilitated session.

If you find that something here doesn't quite fit your needs or situation, that's okay. Reach out to **Your Washington** at your@gov.wa.gov, we may have other tools or can help you customize these to better suit your team.

Here's what's included in this guide:

- Measurement Foundations
- Defining Success: What Does "Better Off" Look Like?
- From Outcomes to Research Questions
- Drafting Performance Measures (RBA Quadrants)
- Evaluating & Prioritizing Measures (with an Equity Pause)
- Planning Next Steps & Your Data Collection Plan

Look for these icons for helpful tips and tricks throughout this guide

MEASUREMENT READINESS CHECKLIST

Before You Begin

Measuring progress can be a powerful tool for learning, improvement, and accountability—but only when there is a clear plan for how the information will be used. Before selecting measures or building dashboards, it's important to pause and confirm the purpose behind the data.

Good measurement supports decision-making: it helps teams understand what's working, where change is needed, and what actions to take next. When data is collected without a clear plan for use, it can create unnecessary work, contribute to data fatigue, and erode trust with staff and the communities you serve.

Readiness means having both **clarity** (a shared understanding of why you're measuring and how the data will be used) and **capacity** (the time, tools, and support needed to act on what you learn). If these are not yet in place, it may be better to pause and refine your approach before moving forward.

Thoughtful preparation helps ensure that measurement efforts are meaningful, respectful, and worth the time invested by everyone involved.

Before moving forward, take time to reflect on the following questions:

Why are we measuring progress?
- [ ] What do we hope to learn or understand better?

What decisions will this data inform?
- [ ] How will the information shape priorities, improvements, or resource allocation?

What can we act on?
- [ ] Are we measuring things we have the ability or authority to influence?

Who will use the results, and how?
- [ ] Will this data be used by program staff, managers, leadership, or partners?

How will we communicate back what we learn?
- [ ] How will we close the loop with staff, partners, or participants who contributed their time and input?

MEASUREMENT FOUNDATIONS

Step 1: Start with Purpose

Good measurement starts with purpose, not metrics.

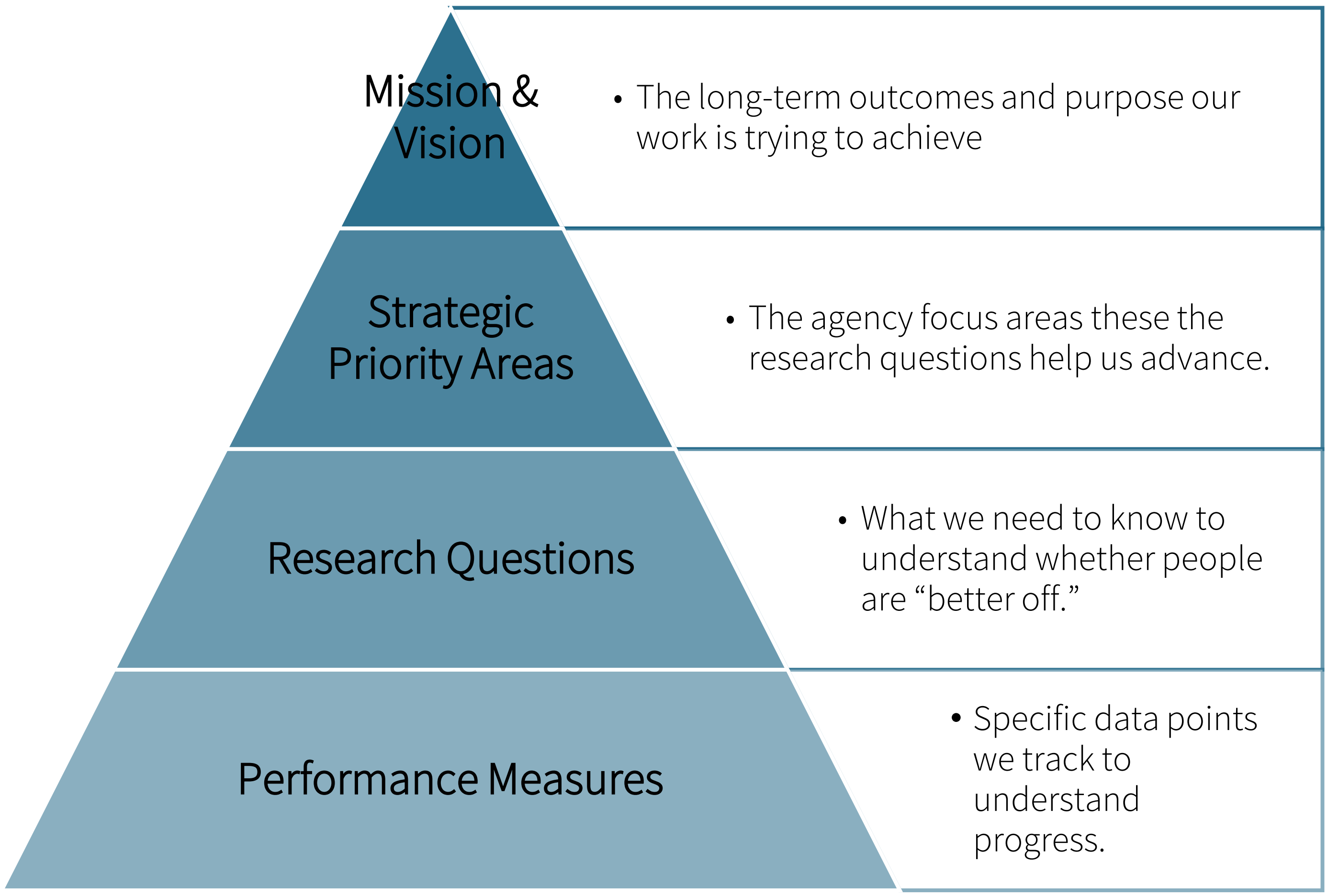
Measures should:

• Answer real questions

• Inform decisions

• Support learning and improvement

When we talk about measuring progress, it can be easy to jump straight to numbers, dashboards, or reports. But meaningful measurement starts with a bigger question: **what are we trying to achieve, and how will we know if we're getting there?** Without that clarity, data can quickly become disconnected from purpose.



1 WORKSHEET: WHAT DOES “BETTER OFF” LOOK LIKE?

Directions

This exercise helps you define what success looks like from the perspective of the people your program serves. It is similar to an empathy map, but instead of focusing on current experiences, it asks you to imagine **the outcomes if your program worked extremely well**.

Before jumping to metrics or data, use this worksheet to describe how participants would be *better off*—emotionally, behaviorally, and in their overall experience.

How to use this worksheet:

Start by identifying **who** you are focusing on (e.g., participants, volunteers, youth, partners). Work through each section of the worksheet, imagining that the program is operating at its best.

In each box, describe what would change for participants if the program were truly successful:

- How would they feel?
- What would they experience or observe?
- What barriers would be reduced?
- What would they say or do differently?
- What skills, confidence, or connections would they gain?

Focus on outcomes and experiences—not activities or outputs.

When you’ve completed the boxes, summarize your thinking by writing **2–3 short “better off” outcome statements** at the bottom of the worksheet.

These statements will be used in the next step to develop research questions and performance measures.

> Describe success the way participants would talk about it, not the way a report would. **If you wouldn’t hear someone say it out loud, it may be too abstract.**

WHAT DOES BETTER OFF LOOK LIKE?

Prompt: If your program works *extremely* well, how are participants better off?

Think & Feel → Better-Off Emotions
What positive emotions signal they are better off?

See → Better-Off Experiences
What would they observe that reinforces belonging, access, or trust?

Hear → Better-Off Influences
How would community voices reinforce that the experience is working?

Say & Do → Better-Off Behaviors
What actions show that the program makes a real impact?

Pains → Reduced Barriers
What pains would meaningfully reduce if the program succeeds?

Gains → Increased Benefits
What skills, connections, or opportunities would increase?

Better-Off Summary Statements: *Based on everything above, write 2–3 short "Better Off" outcome statements.*

DISCOVER 1

WHAT DOES BETTER OFF LOOK LIKE? (EXAMPLE)

Prompt: If your program works *extremely* well, how are participants better off?

Think & Feel → Better-Off Emotions

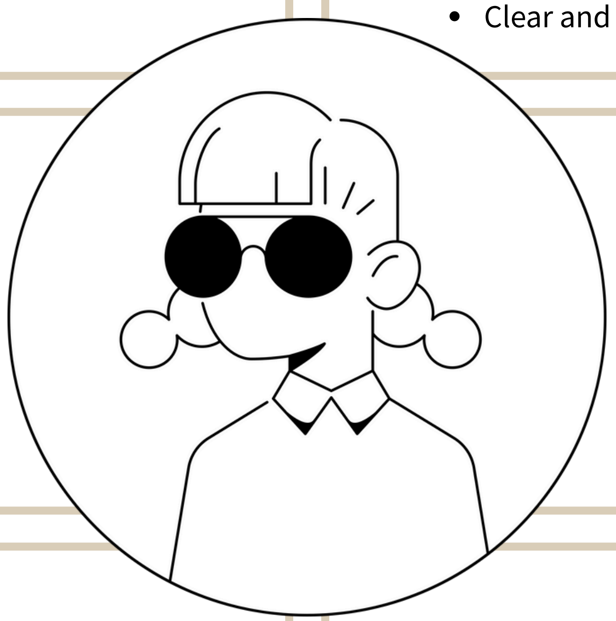
What positive emotions signal they are better off?

- Feeling welcomed
- Feeling respected
- Feeling confident
- Feeling connected to nature / land / community

See → Better-Off Experiences

What would they observe that reinforces belonging, access, or trust?

- Accessible spaces
- Representation in staff/volunteers
- Partnerships with community
- Clear and inclusive signage



Hear → Better-Off Influences

How would community voices reinforce that the experience is working?

- Encouragement to participate
- Positive stories from others
- Trusted partners recommending the program

Say & Do → Better-Off Behaviors

What actions show that the program makes a real impact?

- Returning for a second event
- Taking a stewardship action
- Inviting others to participate
- Expressing trust or positive feedback
- Engaging with partners or volunteers

Pains → Reduced Barriers

What pains would meaningfully reduce if the program succeeds?

- Less confusion or uncertainty
- Reduced fear of not belonging
- Fewer access or transportation barriers
- Less mistrust of government

Gains → Increased Benefits

What skills, connections, or opportunities would increase?

- Increased stewardship skills
- More confidence in outdoor activities
- Stronger trust in WDFW
- Closer connection to nature or community

Better-Off Summary Statements: *Based on everything above, write 2–3 short "Better Off" outcome statements.*

- Tribal partners feel heard and valued in decision-making processes.
- Participants leave feeling more connected to nature, wildlife, and their community.
- Families feel empowered to spend more time outdoors together.
- Volunteers stay involved and take on new roles or responsibilities.

Step 2: Develop Research Questions

Before you start thinking about performance measures or data, begin by developing research questions—clear statements of what you want to learn and why it matters. These questions guide your entire measurement effort, from deciding what to track to interpreting what the data tells you.

Start with Purpose. Ask Yourself:

- What decisions do we need to make?
- What do we need to understand to make them well?
- What do we think we already know – and what do we still need to learn?

Focus on the Human Experience.

- Needs – What do people need or expect?
- Pain points – What's frustrating, confusing, or creating barriers?
- Behaviors – What are people doing, or not doing?
- Perceptions – How do people feel about the process, service, or organization?

Align with Your Audience

Refer to your '*What does "better off" look like*?' exercise -- Who are you learning from?

- What do they experience that you don't?
- What language do they use?
- Are there cultural, social, or accessibility factors to consider?

Your Research Questions Should Help You Understand:

- What you're doing well (so you can keep doing it)
- Where you can grow (so you can improve with confidence)
- What your customers want and need (so your efforts are targeted and meaningful)
- How you'll know you're succeeding (so you can track progress and communicate wins)

Strong research questions look for **change**, not just opinions.

Instead of: "Do people feel welcome?"
Try: "How does participating in the program change how welcome people feel?"

2 WORKSHEET: TURN OUTCOMES INTO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Directions

This worksheet helps you turn broad "better off" outcomes into clear, actionable **research questions.** Research questions define what you want to learn and provide the foundation for selecting meaningful performance measures.

Your goal is not to write perfect or academic questions. Your goal is to write questions that are **specific enough to guide measurement and useful enough to support decision-making**.

Work through the steps below on the accompanying worksheet using one outcome at a time:

1. List your outcome (short)

Write one "better off" statement from the previous activity.
Example: *Participants feel welcomed.*

2. Identify your population

Who is this outcome about?
Be as specific as you can (e.g., youth participants, volunteers, tribal partners).

3. Name an observable sign

How would you know this outcome is happening?
What would people say, do, or report that shows it?

4. Add a timeframe or program

When or after what experience should this change occur?
(e.g., after the event, three months later, after a training)

5. Write your research question

Use one of these formats:

Extent:
To what extent do [population] [observable sign] after [program/timeframe]?

Change:
Does participation in [program] increase [observable sign] among [population] from baseline to [timeframe]?

TURN OUTCOMES INTO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. List your outcome (short)
(e.g., "Participants feel welcomed.")

2. Who is your population?
(e.g., "event attendees," "first-time youth participants," "tribal partners")

3. What is an observable sign of the outcome?
(e.g., "report feeling welcomed on post-event survey," "return for another program," "report increased trust")

4. What is your timeframe / intervention?
(e.g., "immediately after event," "3 months post-program," "after co-designed project")

5. Form your research question:

- *Format A — Extent question:* "To what extent do [population][observable sign]after [program/timeframe]?"
- *Format B — Comparison / change question:* "Does participation in [program] increase [observable sign] among [population] from baseline to [timeframe]?"

Step 3: Results-Based Accountability (RBA)

Results-Based Accountability (RBA) provides a simple, practical way to move from goals to meaningful measurement. It keeps teams focused on using data to support real decisions rather than collecting information for its own sake. Instead of tracking everything, RBA helps identify a small set of measures that answer three core questions:

- How much did we do?
- How well did we do it?
- And is anyone better off?

Together, these questions create a balanced picture of performance. They show the scale of your work, the quality of how it is delivered, and whether it is leading to meaningful improvements in people's experiences or outcomes.

RBA is especially useful in real-world settings because it does not require perfect data or complex systems. It supports teams in using the data they have, identifying what is missing, and strengthening their measurement over time. The framework also makes it easier to communicate progress, using clear questions and plain-language measures that resonate with staff, leadership, and partners.

In this guide, RBA is used to support practical learning and improvement—helping teams focus on what matters most and build better information over time.

	QUANTITY	**QUALITY**
EFFORT	How *much* did we do? (#)	How *well* did we do? (%)
EFFECT	Is anyone *better off*? (#)	Is anyone *better off*? (%)

3 WORKSHEET:
PERFORMANCE MEASURES: THE 4 QUADRANTS

Directions
This worksheet helps you organize and test your performance measures using the RBA framework. The goal is to create a balanced set of measures that show both **what you did** and **whether it made a difference**. Use your **research questions** as your guide as you work through each quadrant.

1. Start with Effort: How much did we do? (#)

In the top-left box, list **count measures** that describe the scale of your work.
These measures answer: How many people were served?, How many activities were delivered?, How much work was done?
Examples: Number of youth served, number of events held, number of volunteers trained

2. Add Effort Quality: How well did we do it? (%)

In the top-right box, list **percentage or rate measures** that describe the quality of how the work was delivered.
These measures answer: Was the service timely?, Was it respectful?, Was it accessible?
Examples: Percent of participants who felt welcomed, percent of activities delivered on time, percent of partners who felt respected

3. Move to Effect: Is anyone better off? (#)

In the bottom-left box, list **count measures** that show how many people experienced a positive change.
These measures answer: How many people improved?, How many showed the outcome we care about?
Examples: Number of participants who completed the program, number who reported feeling more confident, number who returned for another activity

4. Add Effect Quality: Is anyone better off? (%)

In the bottom-right box, list **percentage or rate measures** that show how widespread the change is among the people served.
These measures answer: What share of participants experienced the outcome?, How consistently are people better off?
Examples: Percent of youth who report increased confidence, percent of partners who report stronger trust, percent of participants who took a stewardship action

PERFORMANCE MEASURES: THE 4 QUADRANTS

	QUANTITY	QUALITY
EFFORT	How much did we do? (#)	How well did we do? (%)
EFFECT	Is anyone better off? (#)	Is anyone better off? (%)

Step 4: Evaluating Performance Measures

Once you have drafted a set of performance measures across the four RBA quadrants, the next step is to step back and evaluate them. Not every measure is equally useful, and trying to track too many measures at once can dilute focus, overwhelm staff, and make it harder to see what is really happening.

This step is about moving from a long list of possible measures to a **small, powerful set** that clearly tells the story of your work and supports good decision-making. The goal is not to capture everything—it is to identify the measures that best represent what matters most.

Strong measurement systems are selective by design. A few well-chosen measures can provide more insight than dozens of disconnected data points. Prioritizing helps you focus on what is most meaningful for learning, accountability, and improvement.

As you evaluate your measures, you will look at them through three lenses:

- **How meaningful they are** in representing what you are trying to achieve
- **How clearly they communicate** to leadership, partners, and the public
- **How feasible they are** to collect and maintain

You will also pause to consider **equity**—whether your measures reflect the experiences of the people most affected by your work and whether they help reveal, rather than hide, differences in access, outcomes, or opportunity.

This process is not about finding "perfect" measures. It is about making thoughtful, transparent choices about what to track first, what to improve over time, and how to tell a clear, honest story about progress.

The worksheet on the next page will guide you through this evaluation and help you identify a focused set of priority measures that are meaningful, practical, and aligned with your goals.

Relevance Before Availability: Just because data exists doesn't mean it's the right thing to measure.
Start with what matters most, then decide how to build the data.

4

WORKSHEET: EVALUATING MEASURES

Directions

This worksheet helps you compare and prioritize the performance measures you drafted in the RBA quadrants. The goal is to identify a **small set of strong measures** that are meaningful, understandable, feasible, and equity-informed. Work across each row for one measure at a time.

1. Focusing Question

In the first column, note which RBA question this measure answers: How much did we do? How well did we do? Is anyone better off?

- *This helps ensure you have a balanced set of measures across effort and effect.*

2. Performance Measure

Write the specific measure you are evaluating.

- *Be as clear and concrete as possible (e.g., "% of youth who report feeling welcome" or "Number of tribal partners engaged").*

3. Proxy Power (Relevance)

Ask: Does this measure represent something important about the program's impact? Use this column to note: What this measure stands in for, why it is a good signal of what you care about, and whether it captures more than just activity

- *High proxy power means the measure is closely connected to real outcomes.*

4. Communication Power

Ask: Is this measure easy to explain and meaningful to leadership, partners, and the public? Use this column to describe: Whether the measure tells a clear story, if someone unfamiliar with the program would understand why it matters, how well it would work in a report, dashboard, or presentation

- *Strong communication power helps build understanding and support.*

5. Equity Impact

Ask: Does this measure help show differences across groups? Does it reflect the experiences of the communities we most want to reach? Would it help identify barriers or inequities?

- *Use this column to note whether the measure: Can be disaggregated, centers voices that are often left out, and helps guide more equitable decisions*

6. Data Exists?

Indicate whether you currently have this data or could realistically collect it. You can use simple notes such as: Yes, Partially, Not yet, Would require new tools

- *This helps distinguish between measures you can track now and those that may need a data collection plan.*

EVALUATING MEASURES

Focusing Question • How much did we do? • How well did we do? • Is anyone better off?	**Performance Measure**	**Proxy Power (Relevance)** Does this measure represent something important about the program's impact?	**Communication Power** Is this measure easy to explain and meaningful to partners, leadership, and the public?	**Equity Impact** • Does this measure help us see differences across groups, highlight barriers, or reflect the experiences of communities we most want to reach? • Will this measure help us design more equitable programs?	**Data Exists?**

Step 5: Prioritizing Performance Measures

After evaluating your measures, the next step is to decide **which ones to focus on first**. Not all measures can—or should—be tracked at the same time. Prioritizing helps you concentrate effort on the measures that are most meaningful for understanding impact and most realistic to support with data.

5 WORKSHEET: PRIORITIZING MEASURES

Directions

Use the chart to place each performance measure based on its **proxy power** and **data power**.

1. Review your evaluated measures

Start with the measures you evaluated in the previous worksheet. Consider each measure's relevance, communication value, equity impact, and data availability.

2. Plot each measure on the chart

For each measure, decide: **How strong is its proxy power (relevance)? How strong is its data power right now?** Place the measure in the quadrant that best fits.

3. Interpret the quadrants

- High Proxy Power / High Data Power
  These are your **key priority measures**. Focus on tracking and using these now.
- High Proxy Power / Low Data Power
  Add these to your **Data Collection Plan**. They matter, but data systems or processes need strengthening.
- Low Proxy Power / High Data Power
  These may be useful for context or internal tracking but are **not strong indicators of impact**.
- Low Proxy Power / Low Data Power
  These measures are generally **low priority** and can be set aside.

4. Build your Data Collection Plan

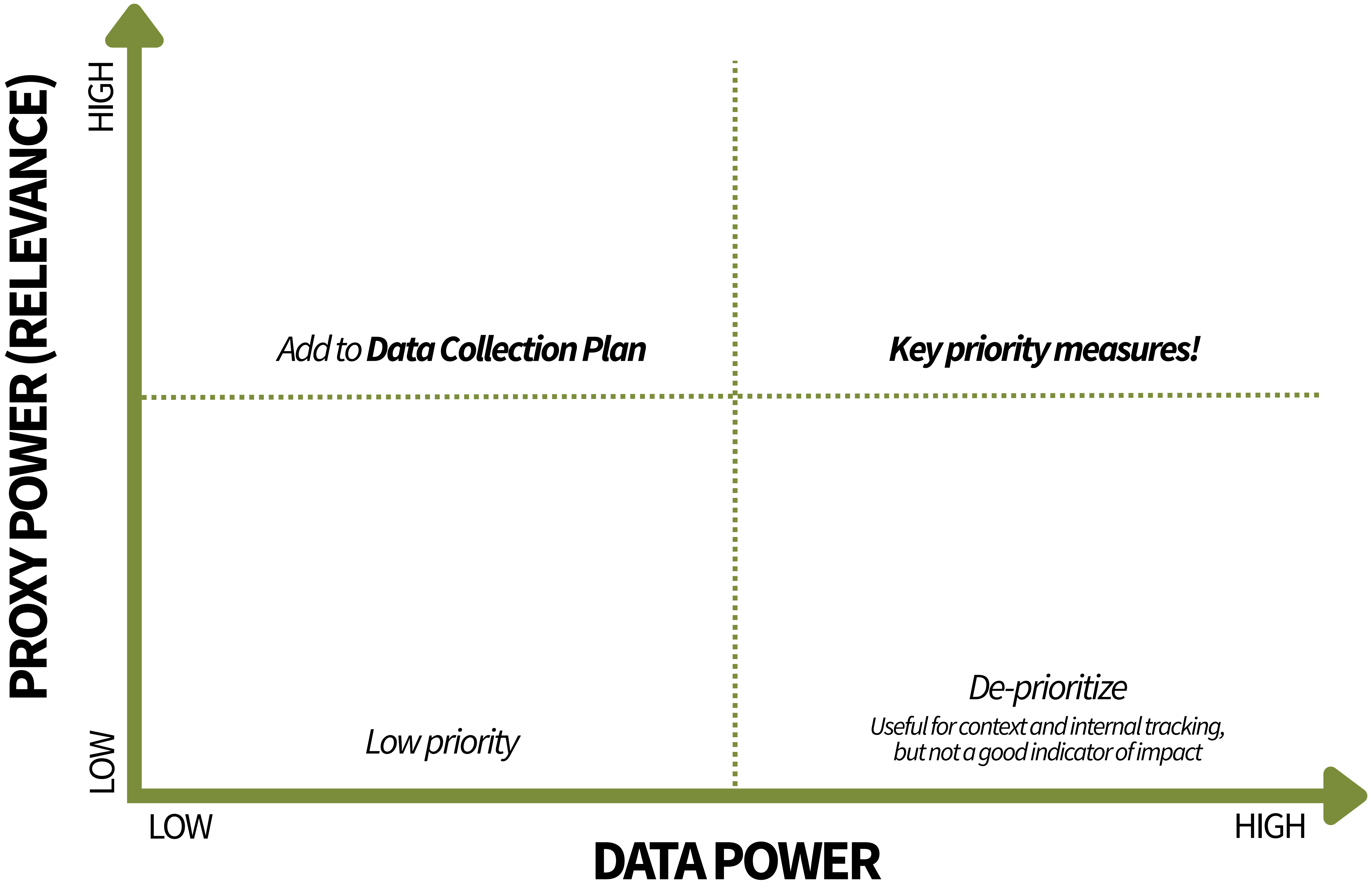
Instructions for this portion are incorporated into the next worksheet.

5. Select a small set of priorities

Aim to leave this exercise with:

- ✓ A **small number of priority measures** to track now
- ✓ A clear list of measures to strengthen over time
- ✓ Shared understanding of why certain measures are not prioritized yet

PRIORITIZING MEASURES



BUILD YOUR DATA COLLECTION PLAN :

What Data Do We Have Now?
(Where does this data live? How reliable is it?)

What's Missing or Inconsistent?
(Fields, methods, frequency, tools, access, quality, etc.)

What Needs to Happen?
(Examples: Add survey item, update OTS field, add follow-up step, create partner template, define process, train staff)

Tools / Systems / Processes Required:
(OTS, VMS, SurveyMonkey, Qualtrics, shared template, standard operating procedure)

Owner / Lead Role:

Key Collaborators:

Timeline:

Priority Level:

Step 6: Build Your Data Collection Plan

Not all meaningful measures are immediately ready to be tracked. Some of the measures that matter most require new data, clearer definitions, better tools, or stronger processes. A **Data Collection Plan** helps you plan how to close that gap over time.

The purpose of the Data Collection Plan is to turn measurement gaps into **actionable next steps**. Rather than dropping important measures because data is not yet available, this process allows you to intentionally plan how to strengthen your data systems in a realistic and phased way.

A strong Data Collection Plan focuses on progress, not perfection. It helps teams align on priorities, assign ownership, and build shared understanding of what it will take to collect better data in the future.

Next Steps: Where Do We Go From Here?

Once you have completed your Data Collection Plan, the next step is to **put it into motion**. Start by identifying a small number of actions that can realistically be taken in the near term. These early steps help build momentum and demonstrate progress, even if the full measure will take time to implement.

Use the Data Collection Plan to:

- ❑ Confirm which measures you will begin tracking now and which require further development
- ❑ Align with leadership and partners on priorities and expectations
- ❑ Assign clear ownership for next steps
- ❑ Incorporate data collection work into existing planning, training, or system updates

Revisit your Data Collection Plan regularly. As programs evolve, tools improve, or new capacity becomes available, measures that were once out of reach may become feasible. <u>This is an iterative process, not a one-time exercise.</u>

Most importantly, continue to use what you learn. Even partial or imperfect data can support learning, reflection, and improvement when it is used thoughtfully. Over time, a strong Data Collection Plan helps ensure that your measurement efforts remain focused on what matters most and continue to grow alongside your work.

6

WORKSHEET: DATA COLLECTION PLAN

Directions
Use this worksheet to plan next steps for performance measures that are high priority but not yet supported by strong data.

1. Performance Measure
List the measure you want to strengthen. These are typically measures with high relevance but low or moderate data power.

2. Why It Matters
Briefly note why this measure is important.
Consider how it connects to outcomes, decision-making, equity, or strategic priorities.

3. What We Have Now
Describe any existing data, tools, or processes related to this measure.
This might include informal tracking, partial data, or inconsistent methods.

4. What's Missing
Identify what is preventing this measure from being tracked well.
Examples include: missing fields, unclear definitions, lack of tools, inconsistent collection, or limited staff capacity.

5. Steps Needed

List the concrete actions required to improve the data.

Examples include:

- Adding a survey question
- Updating a system field
- Creating a shared template
- Defining a standard process
- Training staff

6. Owner / Supports
Identify who will lead this work and who needs to be involved or consulted.

7. Timeline
Note a realistic timeframe for completing the steps.
This can be short-term, medium-term, or long-term.

DATA COLLECTION PLAN

PERFORMANCE MEASURE	WHY IT MATTERS	WHAT WE HAVE NOW	WHAT'S MISSING	STEPS NEEDED	OWNER / SUPPORTS	TIMELINE