

# Maximizing Performance: Aligning an Existing Data System with Strategic Goals and Outcomes

## YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

QUOTES COURTESY DARRIN MCCALL • DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS  
AND JEFFREY MIKA • DATA ADMINISTRATOR

**Youth Empowerment Project (YEP)** is the most comprehensive and established organization working with underserved, court-involved, and out-of-school youth in New Orleans, Louisiana. Exact Change Strategies (ECS) guided the organization through a process of re-envisioning their performance management framework and rebuilding their data system. What started as a short-term project to meet a funder’s reporting requirements grew into a lasting collaboration as leaders and staff at YEP realized the value of articulating their goals, aligning their systems, and accurately tracking their impacts on the lives of the youth they serve.

YEP is a 501(c)(3) community-based nonprofit organization that was founded in 2004 to support youth returning to the Greater New Orleans area from correctional facilities around the state. In 2006, YEP’s mission evolved as additional community needs arose in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Currently, YEP operates 11 programs and serves around 1,000 clients annually with 37 full-time staff in 6 locations across the New Orleans region. The organization offers a range of programs aimed at providing young people with the support, skills and opportunities needed to reduce the likelihood of becoming involved in the justice system as well as succeed in their communities after justice system involvement.



**YEP engages underserved young people through community-based education, mentoring, and employment readiness programs to help them develop skills and strengthen ties to family and community. At its core, YEP works to empower youth and improve their lives.**

*“I found them to be real, people that we could talk to. I could tell right off the bat they knew their stuff.”*

### Programs and services focus on the following:

- Youth advocacy and community-based case management
- Out-of-school enrichment
- Adult basic education and literacy
- Work readiness
- Post-secondary and employment transition ▶

*“The ECS team was so excited about the work. It was refreshing to know that after years of working with the ETO database and sticking with it through updates, if they’re still this excited, it must be true that this software does have positive impact on the way organizations collect information, provide services, and hopefully change people’s lives.”*

*“I love that they’re easy to talk to and easy to work with. They’re flexible. They know what they’re doing – both with navigating software and communicating effectively software developers.”*

### **Drafting the Vision**

YEP’s Data Team had a clear understanding of the community’s needs and were proud of their organization’s responsive and multidimensional approach to youth services. ECS worked closely with Darrin McCall and Jeff Mika, YEP’s Director of Programs and Data Administrator respectively. Together, Darrin and Jeff make up the core of YEP’s Data Team and lead much of the work related to program quality and measurement at the organization.

As they began to work with ECS to rebuild their Efforts to Outcomes® (ETO) system in Touchpoints, they were called upon to articulate their vision and strategies more clearly and concisely than ever. These conversations were practical as well as inspirational. Not only was YEP laying the groundwork for a customized and enhanced performance management system, they were actualizing their vision and focusing squarely on tracking progress toward the youth, program, and community outcomes they hoped to achieve.

The Discovery Process was iterative and highly collaborative. It could not be rushed. ECS spent time meeting with YEP’s Data Team and really listening to what they had to say about their organization and its work. ECS learned about the unique dynamics in the communities

YEP serves and the day-to-day realities faced by staff in the field in order to offer suggestions and guidance on the performance management framework. Over time, ECS and YEP’s Data Team built a strong and respectful relationship with one another, and this allowed YEP to take ownership of the decisions they’d made about the system and its framework. Without dominating the process, ECS was able to help YEP organize their thoughts and put a finer point their specific vision and goals ▶



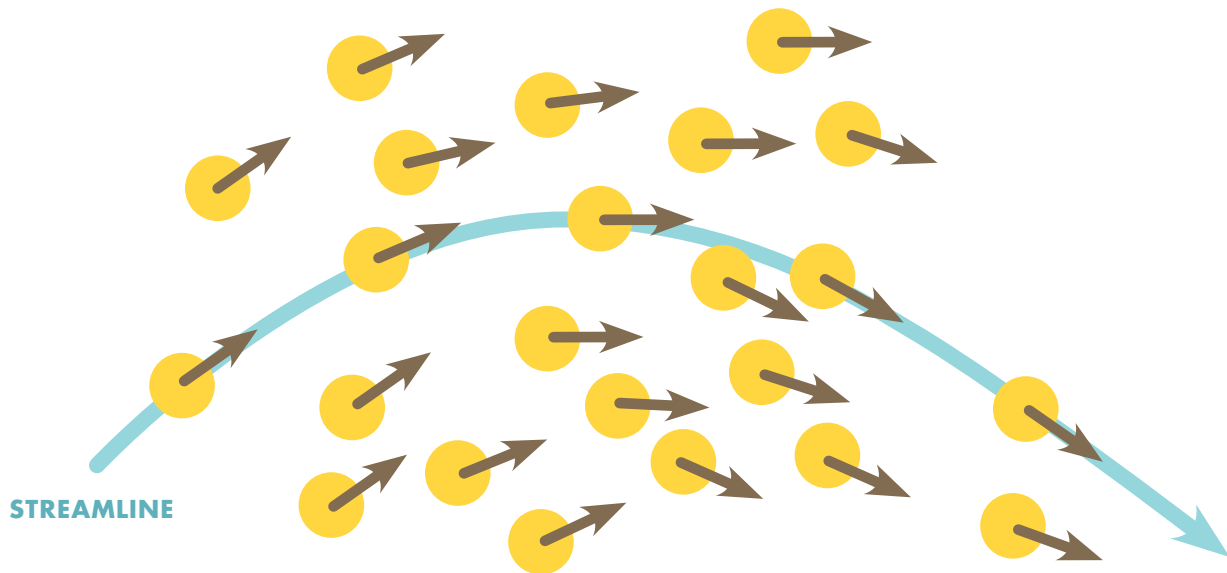
*“With the help of ECS, we could clearly articulate what we were doing, and the framework they used guided us step-by-step though the process of visioning our data system. It felt very collaborative and still like ‘our work’, which was really rewarding. They’re really responsive to our needs and what’s important to us.”*

## A New and Improved System

In the past, YEP's data collection was mainly driven by funders' requirements. They had been using ETO to collect their data for 2 years, but not as systematically as they would have liked. As a result of working with ECS, they were able to identify and begin to track outcomes intentionally that link back to their own program goals and organizational vision. YEP's logic models are clearly reflected in the enhanced performance management system and clearly reflected in the questions staff ask the youth and young adults they serve.

After several months of weekly contacts with YEP, ECS was able to complete performance management frameworks and offer support to YEP's Data Team in implementing their own system improvements. This included consulting on how to carefully roll out changes to the rest of their staff. They are now in a better position to navigate future system updates. YEP came away from the project excited about its potential and clear on the conceptual foundation behind it. ▶

*“ECS considered the reality of our situation and capacity of front line staff instead of just looking at logic models, data, and evaluation in an academic way.”*



*“Our staff know they're doing awesome work, but sometimes it's difficult to capture all of the complexity of their work in our database. Our time with ECS allowed us to be more proactive. We've built a system that works well and we can confidently present to staff.”*

*“It was wonderful to have some of those major reports done and out of the way. This is information that staff access weekly, or sometimes daily. So have them written by ECS and ready to use was great!”*

### **Early Impacts on Staff and Services**

Even in the early months of using the improved ETO system, YEP has reported a number of positive impacts of their collaboration with ECS. They now have a solid conceptual framework that grounds their work and acts as a decision-



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making lens for new programs and initiatives. They also have an in-depth knowledge of how their performance management and data collection system works. The YEP Data Team leaders know how to train other staff, which has resulted in staff buy in for the new system. They are able to identify commonalities between different programs and collect data in a way that is realistic and not overly burdensome to staff on the front lines.

Additionally, ECS lent their report writing expertise to the project as a way to support YEP’s Data Team in developing their own capacity to create reports. ECS created multiple custom reports to showcase the improved data content and reporting functions of the system. Together, ECS and YEP developed a custom “Attendance Report” and “Case Note Report.” These enable front line staff, program managers, and organizational leadership to see the benefits of the newly designed system almost immediately.

*“Now, we have a really solid conceptual framework of how our system works, something to refer back to when making decisions.”*

Finally, YEP now has a system that works well and can support the organization long into the future – as programs evolve and new staff come on board. YEP is looking forward to a continued relationship with ECS and to learning more about how they are impacting and empowering New Orleans youth and strengthening their community. ●

**SPECIAL THANKS** to  
*Darrin McCall, Jeffrey Mika,  
Tania Dall, and everyone at  
Youth Empowerment Project*

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