

CASE STUDY

Arab-American Family Support Center leverages high-quality data to accelerate their purpose, doubling their impact in just two years



Bonterra Program Management's (formerly Social Solutions) data management helps the New York nonprofit organization accelerate its research, funding, and outreach programs even in the midst of a global pandemic.

The Arab-American Family Support Center (AAFSC) is a nonprofit, non-sectarian organization established in 1994 that provides culturally and linguistically competent, trauma-informed, multigenerational social services to immigrants and refugees. Their suite of wraparound services is categorized into four priorities: Prevent, Get Ready, Promote and Communicate. Each of these programs addresses different, yet interconnected issues, facing disproportionately impacted individuals and families.

CUSTOMER

Arab-American Family Support Center

SECTOR

Refugee and immigrant services, family self sufficiency, education and youth development

PRODUCT

Case Management [Enterprise]

The **Prevent** program is the largest offering and is usually the first touchpoint for families. Its mission is to prevent child abuse and domestic and gender-based violence through providing individual and family counseling, crisis intervention, problem resolution related to cross-cultural conflict or misunderstanding, and anti-violence programming.

The **Get Ready** program prepares immigrant and refugee families in New York to learn, work, succeed, volunteer, give back, and lead productive lives in their new communities through English reading and writing programs, civic engagement classes, caregiver-child bonding classes, and peer-to-peer social engagement groups.

The **Promote** services focus on mental and physical wellbeing, healthy relationships, and all forms of community wellness using AAFSC's culturally and linguistically competent, trauma-informed model.

The **Communicate** program works to amplify the voices of marginalized and underresourced communities by advocating for socially-just policies, and communicating their needs to partners and policymakers.

Every one of AAFSC's initiatives is structured in a way that empowers immigrants and refugees with the right tools that they need to successfully acclimate to the world around them and become active participants in their communities. The suite of services is fluid and interlinked—often, the families that seek AAFSC's services have needs that extend beyond just one category of support. For instance, someone that needs assistance enrolling in health insurance may also seek ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes or housing support services. This theme of connectivity and accessibility is integral to the greater mission of AAFSC, especially when it comes to the way it works with data.

Challenges

During AAFSC's early years, most of its data management tools were siloed and data collection lacked consistency. This hindered proactive communication and impact reporting strategy, which affected its efficiency and growth potential.

WHY DATA MATTERED

Data is the lifeblood of organizations like AAFSC; it enables the tracking of program outcomes, organizational stability, program participation, engagement and many other metrics critical to long-term growth. Access to high-quality data is also key to communicating an organization's impact to stakeholders, funders, policymakers, the community as a whole and even building internal pride within the organization. Knowing exactly what programs are impacting who, when, where, why and how is an invaluable resource.

DATA ENTRY AND CONSISTENCY

While all of AAFSC's programs are designed to work in unison, the unique factors of each priority required data to be collected, entered and managed in different ways. For example, programs involving child welfare were highly regulated, while its outreach programs used varying types of forms. As a result, there was the sheer burden of data entry and data consistency that needed to be addressed. Additionally, some programs that AAFSC worked with had their own way of capturing and storing data, such as funder-mandated databases or patient portals specific to a certain partner or agency. Unfortunately, this meant that AAFSC didn't "own" the data that was logged or stored in these third-party systems. In order to complete certain tasks and ensure data readiness, caseworkers had to make sure that every piece of information made its way to a unified platform, a process that was often time-consuming for AAFSC's caseworkers.



LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Recently, AAFSC upgraded to the Bonterra Program Management's Case Management [Enterprise] solution to restructure its approach to data management and reporting. Starting with the end in mind, AAFSC set out on a path to impart a data-first culture across every facet of the organization. They hired a data management professional and built a dedicated staff of intake coordinators. They began using Case Management [Enterprise] to improve data consistency and alignment, using straightforward and streamlined forms with required fields and implemented the first nine standardized evaluations that all programs could use to tailor services. They focused on

standardizing participant data across programs, implementing templates so all programs could use the same toolkit to grow their culture of data. With their priorities aligned and the right tools in place, AAFSC began chipping away at this huge digital overhaul and elevating its data capabilities over the next two years.

AAFSC successfully laid the groundwork by aggregating all of its data into one unified place. They reached a point where its data was consistent and accurate, and have continued to climb toward a new level of data maturity, accelerating the organization to what it is today.

Solutions

Utilizing Case Management [Enterprise], AAFSC developed systems efficiencies that enabled them to monitor program metrics and effectively manage large amounts of data that would inform and expand their initiatives, even amid a global pandemic. The organization focused on improving the efficiency, visibility, accessibility, adaptability, and scalability of its data to achieve greater outcomes, impact more at-risk families, and appeal to more funders in order to sustain future growth.

EFFICIENCY

AAFSC began by implementing data migration and importing processes that improved data readiness for its staff. This translated to better client service and more efficient planning processes, such as tailoring client programs to fit individual needs. No longer burdened with data entry, AAFSC staff could access the data they needed from a single location without logging into several different systems. This unified approach has given team members valuable time back to spend with participants and further community outreach.

“In a lot of ways, we’ve met and exceeded those roadmap goals and have been able to develop our capacities to use data even further than what that initial scope of work was really focused on.”

— Maia Dillane | Director,
resource development & impact
evaluation at Arab-American
Family Support Center

VISIBILITY

The organization utilized data beyond participants served. They now can monitor, display, and analyze data that enables them to:

- **Plot risks and trends that help them identify areas of focus for program expansion.**
- **Know why and how certain participants excel more than others to inform future programming.**
- **Create milestones and assessments to track outcomes that inform future programming.**
- **Demonstrate outputs as well as outcomes to funders.**
- **Inform and influence policymakers.**
- **Have greater confidence when setting goals.**



ACCESSIBILITY

AAFSC's staff speak 32 different languages, and Case Management [Enterprise] allows them to seamlessly meet the needs of those non-English speaking participants. The solution also meets the needs of clients in many geographical locations. AAFSC was able to pivot quickly at the beginning of COVID-19 and lean into technology to deliver remote services, even seeing increased participation in some areas. They used technology to better assess their clients' changing needs and adapted services in real time to increase access to mental health and food security services.



ADAPTABILITY

Working with Case Management [Enterprise] allowed the nonprofit to expand the quantity and quality of data collected. This data equipped them with information they needed on current intensity of services, number of contacts with a case manager, number of referrals, and much more. All of that data provided further insight into the current needs of the community and allowed them to adapt and provide greater impact.

SCALABILITY

Guaranteeing quality while expanding was also important to AAFSC. It wasn't just about growth, its impact remained the top priority, and Case Management [Enterprise] gave the nonprofit the foresight it needed to make decisions that would play out well in the long term.

Impact

In the past five years, AAFSC has increased its program capacity by 67%. AAFSC recently celebrated the key milestone of their ability to serve 10,000 immigrant and refugee community members. They have been able to increase funding and their staff capacity to provide more services to each of these new participants.

Their impact goes beyond the sheer quantity of participants. The organization has successfully developed systems and efficiencies that have enabled them to internally monitor data and effectively manage and utilize that information within their programs.

PROGRAM EXPANSION

Since 2019, AAFSC has expanded many of its programs, most notably its **Prevent** service. In partnership with New York City, AAFSC doubled the number of people reached. The growth of the Prevent service triggered a ripple effect throughout the rest of the organization, paving the way for the addition of new competencies and internal teams that then led to increased capacity to support staff and support the greater data-culture push itself.

Additionally, AAFSC expanded their community outreach efforts, taking a larger focus on connecting with new individuals to share information and resources that help them thrive—such as digital literacy programs, resources for disproportionately impacted communities like the Emergency Rental Assistance Program and the Excluded Workers Fund, and promoting access to information from government agencies surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine.



Expanded evaluation practices

WENT FROM 0 TO 9

evaluation practices formalized over two years, enabling sophisticated data and analysis to demonstrate program impact.

Over two years, the number of data points has grown

FROM 22 TO 59 in 2020,

with 66 data points anticipated in 2021. Data points demonstrate the variety and intensity of services that inform strategic planning and illustrate the impact of services.

67% INCREASE in the number of participants served since 2019.



INCREASED ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Serving more people, growing its internal staff, and stepping up to the increased community demand is one element of their growth story, but AAFSC is also able to articulate this growth in a much better way through leveraging its data. Internal communications have been streamlined so that staff is tracking towards the same goals because they can see data relating to the consolidated organization on dashboards. Data helps stakeholders, funders, and policymakers see the impact of their support to AAFSC and the community.

MAKE A VIRTUAL IMPACT

With attendance and demographic information in hand, AAFSC was able to conduct a more enhanced analysis of outcomes that led to better tailoring of its remote programming approach in a way that best served its participants. Consistently gathering real-time information from its clients as they transitioned to virtual life allowed the organization to identify gaps early so that they could adapt quickly and keep engagement levels steady. Soon after the programs adjusted their service delivery styles in light of public safety guidelines, their attendance numbers bounced back to what they were pre-pandemic, and the peer-engagement outcomes were surprisingly positive, despite the circumstances.

MEASURING OUTCOMES VS. OUTPUTS

More visibility into its programs means AAFSC can create assessments that track the behaviors of specific groups or individuals within their programming. Those outcome metrics then lead to a more customized suite of services that are tied to a deeper impact for those served. An example of this improvement is seen in AAFSC's Young Adult Program, which helps immigrant youth navigate their bicultural identities and receive support in the areas of academic enrichment, social-emotional learning, healthy relationships, and more. Since the program is multi-faceted, AAFSC needed to target high-priority outcomes through a "[Knowledge Attitude Behavior Survey](#)" that tracked self-response on a number of issues. The information collected in these assessments and analyzed with Case Management [Enterprise] over a two year period allowed the organization to be very intentional about creating appropriate curriculum and support services that tackled the core needs of its participants.



Similarly, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization noticed an increase in requests for mental health services, as indicated on participant intake forms. As a result of those findings, the organization shifted its outreach approach to focus more intensely on mental health services and explored additional ways it could break down stigmas around seeking mental health support services in its community. Not only that, but AAFSC was able to track referrals to see how many individuals were in need of mental health counseling services and from which sources—internal programs within the organization or external programs—and could triangulate that risk as well as mental health counseling needs and mental challenges that community members were experiencing. That data enabled the organization to expand the number of clinicians and the languages they speak in order to meet the heightened need for mental support within immigrant communities. With so much data at its fingertips, AAFSC could strategically plan and adjust with confidence.

IMPROVED FUNDING

With the enhanced ability to track outputs as well as outcome, AAFSC can approach funders with significantly more data than they had before—metrics such as intensity of services, attendance rates, types of client risk, the number of clients that a particular grant would impact, and more. That has allowed AAFSC to make a better case to potential funders by answering any questions they have with ease and showcasing the organization's high-quality data capabilities upfront. Advanced access to data has also led to stronger communication of program outputs that demonstrate how additional funding would realistically translate into enhanced outputs for a certain program.

“ Data has helped us communicate with funders in a new way, enabling them to advance their buy-in to our mission and outcomes.”

**— Maia Dillane | Director,
resource development & impact
evaluation at Arab-American
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“ The efficiency of the data processed from the program side is night and day.”

— Maia Dillane | Director, resource development & impact evaluation at Arab-American Family Support Center

COMMUNITY AND POLICY

Enabled by technology and the data insights collected by AAFSC, the organization plans to deepen its impact at both the community and the policy level. They've begun by expanding initiatives outwards into the community that connects individuals and families to all the information and resources they need to remain well, which has been incredibly critical following the pandemic.

A primary example of AAFSC's increased involvement in the community is seen in the mental health space. They surveyed over 900 community members as part of a [Community Needs Assessment](#) and the feedback identified a greater need for mental health counseling—specifically, a need for support navigating mental health challenges—which is incredibly significant considering the stigmas that exist around talking about mental health counseling. In turn, AAFSC is actively creating strategic ways to help break down those stigmas and continue the conversation as community members process their pandemic experiences.

In addition, the Case Management [Enterprise] solution can track referrals and how many individuals are in need of mental health counseling services and from which sources (i.e., internal programs within its organization or external programs). From there, the AAFSC team can triangulate risk as well as mental health counseling

needs and ongoing challenges that individuals are experiencing in real-time. Those insights have enabled AAFSC to expand the number of clinicians it employs and even the languages they speak to best meet the needs of those inbound requests for services. This level of community involvement is advancing AAFSC's level of impact beyond where it was just two short years ago.

As a complement to its internal monitoring and evaluation practices, AAFSC's Research Institute is a hub for data-driven insights about immigrant and refugee communities—populations that are often rendered invisible by mainstream data collectors. They partner with academic institutions on critical research pursuits that highlight community needs and informs culturally responsive interventions. These insights inform policymakers, stakeholders, and community members, equipping them with the information they need to better advocate for the immigrant and refugee population.

In the AAFSC Research Institute's first project, the [COVID-19 Impact Report](#) outlines the manner and scale of hardship occurring while outer-borough immigrant neighborhoods were bearing the brunt of NYC's outbreak. This report led to a discussion with community leaders to create solutions on how to build a healthier New York for all populations.



Summary

Not long ago, the most critical priority for AAFSC was to gain consistency and uniformity of their data and hold all of that data in one place. Utilizing efficiencies gained through the use of the right technology, AAFSC has accomplished and exceeded this goal. Moreover, by remaining committed to its data goals across the organization, AAFSC is now able to serve more participants and demonstrate this improved impact to funders and its own staff. Today, consistent data analysis continues to inform the organization's strategic planning. Moving forward, AAFSC will build on this momentum by taking steps to advance its ability to leverage data that informs stakeholders, decision-makers, and policymakers at the community level.

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