ASSOCIATION
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The Ultimate Guide to Data Governance for Associations

How to Build a Plan for Your Organization

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What is *Data Governance?*

Data governance is a cross-functional management activity that, at its core, recognizes data as an enterprise asset which is used to achieve strategic and operational goals. Data governance is also one of the most talked about, yet elusive, elements in the data management space.

Quite simply, data governance is a core process built to manage the issues and risks related to association data.

Despite there being multiple definitions of the term out there, we know this it true since, if there were no issues nor risks, we wouldn't have to worry about managing our data at all.

We know that governance is mission-critical in achieving an association's desired data management goals. However, initializing and maintaining a successful data governance program can be challenging for many associations. Having a data governance program will position your association for success.

Associations looking to develop a data governance program will need to form a team, define the governance process, identify priorities, create a policy, and then develop a sustainable plan.

Let's get started by looking at the issues and risks that threaten our data and how to begin the data governance journey.
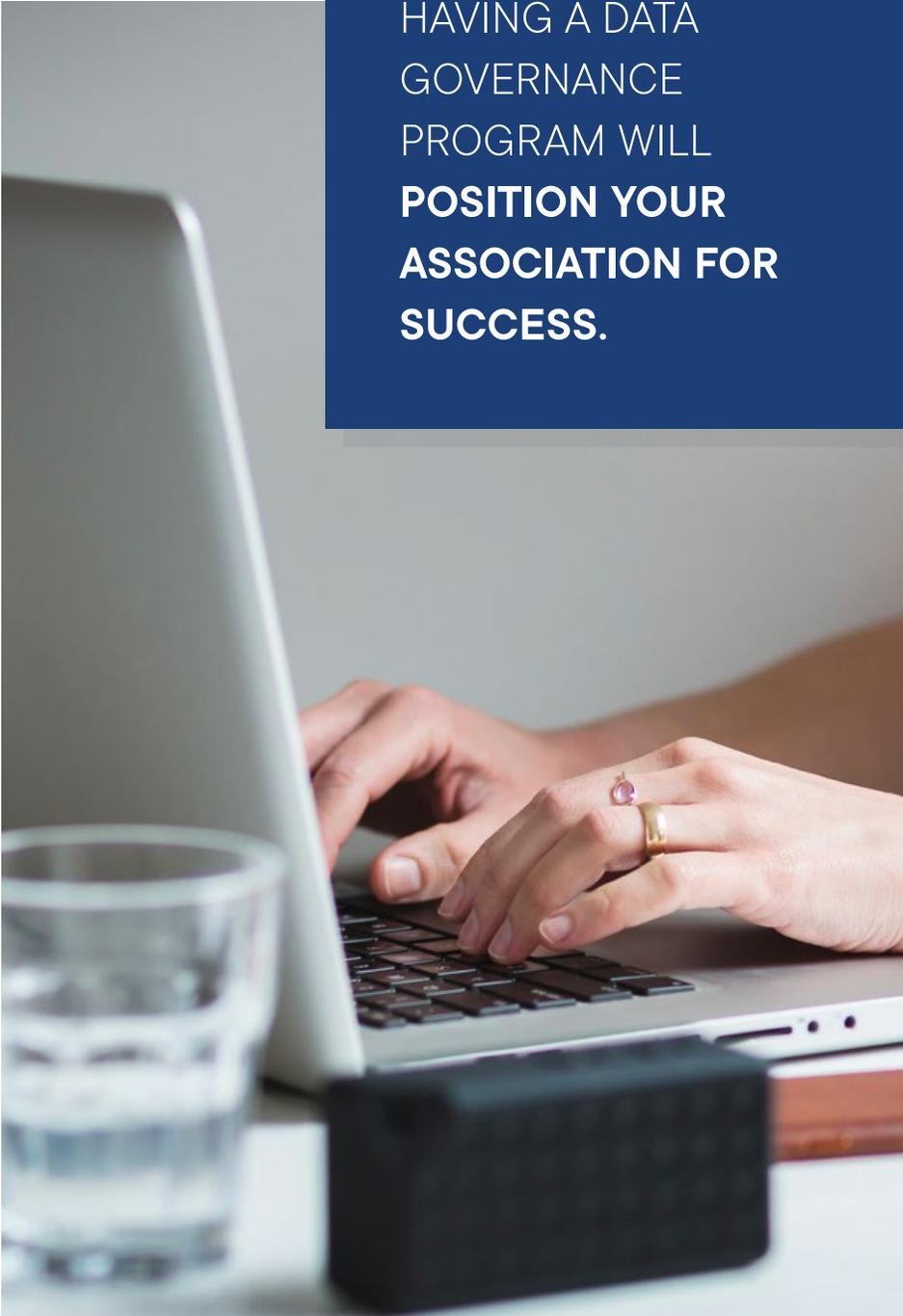
HAVING A DATA GOVERNANCE PROGRAM WILL **POSITION YOUR ASSOCIATION FOR SUCCESS.**

The 5 Ps of
Data Governance

A good data governance program includes a cross-functional team (people), a defined process, a firm set of priorities, an adherence policy, and a plan to execute and monitor those procedures.

Without the 5 Ps of data governance, there is an inconsistent application of validation and business rules, which leads to inefficiencies and data quality issues. There are long-term impacts as well. Ultimately, poor quality data can lead to a decrease in the trust level of the data in the system, which in turn can lead to the abandonment of the system by business users.

The good news is a data disaster like this can all be avoided in **5 steps:**

1. Find Your People	2. Define the Process	3. Identify Priorities	4. Create a Policy	5. Create a Plan

01
Find Your People

The formation of a data governance team puts in place a consistent set of people who all own the data together. This team is made up of people from across the association, each of whom understand different applications of the data and can work together to make sure data availability, collection, usability, integrity, and security are consistent across the organization.

Roles on the data governance team are as follows:

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee takes a high-level approach to data governance, ensuring that the data is ultimately being protected and used to inform strategic and operational goals.

Management Committee

This committee manages the day-to-day adherence of the data governance plan. It is comprised of the **following three roles:**

IT Steward

Manages the data from an IT perspective. This role most likely also will be responsible for the actual creation of the database. It's up to this individual to design a centralized database that is user-friendly, reliable, effective, and optimized.

Process Manager

Oversees the data governance process. This individual plays an instrumental role in maintaining the data integrity and ensuring everyone is following data management best practices.

Business Steward

This individual is a data analyst and will have a data-guided mindset and a curious nature for understanding what the data is trying to convey. Besides having an analytical skill set, it's also best for this individual to have strong relationship skills because she or he will be working with various members on the leadership team to communicate what the data is saying and provide recommendations on what to do.

02

Define the Process

Since data governance is a core process built to manage the issues and risks related to association data, then we need to know what the issues, opportunities, and risks involved are to define that process.

At the simplest level, an issue is something that is impacting your association right now whereas, a risk is something that might impact you in the future.

Having a flat tire on your car is an issue. Your car will not function well and you can't drive it safely until that issue is resolved. Even when your vehicle is fully functional, there is a slight chance that you might have a car accident. To mitigate this risk, you pay for car insurance.

Not every issue and risk needs to be addressed. My car door has a dent. This is an issue but I can decide to live with the annoyance. Likewise, there is a risk that someone might break into my car. I have the option of installing a security alarm but might choose against it due to the cost and accept that I will live with that risk.

There are well established best practices for managing risk that we can borrow from project management, but when it comes to data governance, we find it effective to focus on the **following triad:**

KNOW
Your Data

MAXIMIZE
Data Value

PROTECT
Your Data
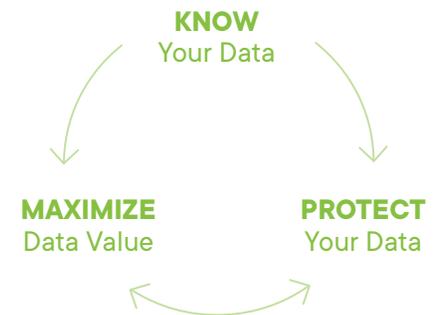
Know Your Data

It is very difficult to manage something if we don't have a clear understanding of what we have. Before an association can effectively govern its data, it needs to understand what data it has. This is important because it is very difficult to protect our data and to manage the value if we don't have a clear view of what data we own, what it means, and the scope of any related risks.

The first step in data governance is to create an inventory of what data exists in the association. There are three key tools that we use to provide a centralized view of association data assets.

Business Glossary	Identify and define business terms and definitions
Data Catalog	Identify and define data sets (Member, Employee, Registrations...)
Data Dictionary	Identify and define data items

Each of these tools provides a different perspective of association data and can be as simple as an Excel document or as sophisticated as fully functional web application.

This information will become the cornerstone of data governance. All issues, risks, actions, policy rules, and other activities should be related back to an item in one of these artifacts.

The Business Glossary

The intent of the business glossary is to track and communicate the official terms and definitions commonly used by an association. Having this information consolidated and easily accessible will reduce confusion related to conflicting terminology and help create a common business language.

The business glossary can be as simple as a shared document listing the business terms and their related definitions or much more sophisticated with information related to acronyms, synonyms, hierarchies, and categories.

The Data Catalog

The objective of the data catalog is to provide a consolidated view of the data sets which exist in the association. "Data set" in this context refers to business concepts like: Member, Employee, Registration, Sale, Download, or other similar entities / activities related to the operations of the association.

A data catalog can be a simple document that lists the data sets that exist in the association with a brief description.

The Data Dictionary

The purpose of a data dictionary within the realm of data governance is to track and communicate the technical information related to the data items which are elements of data sets. These are individual data fields in a report or table.

The data dictionary should document the definition, origin, usage, and format of the data as well as the business rules which are applied. **More sophisticated dictionaries include:**

» Stewardship assignment
» Relationships to data catalog and business glossary
» Security classification
» Quality classification
» Quality metrics

We can include many details in a data dictionary. However, it must be sustainable—we want to create something we can keep up to date in the future.

Compiling all the information for the business glossary, data catalog, and data dictionary can be a significant task, and we find it helpful to first break the work into smaller, more manageable chunks and then continually expand the breadth and depth of the information collected. By focusing efforts on the data that is being published in current reports and new reports as they are being published, we can limit the initial scope to what is most important. We also recommend targeting data sets where there is a privacy risk as early as possible.

Protect Your Data

Once we have clear understanding of what data we have within our association we can determine what data needs to be protected. This typically falls into two categories of information: Private and Sensitive. For our purposes we recommend adding a third category, Strategic.

Private Information

This is information that, if release, could negatively impact an individual and result in severe financial penalties to the association.

Sensitive Information

This information, if released, could have a negative impact on the reputation or operations of the association.

Strategic Information

This information could have a negative impact on the decisions made by the association if it is not correct.

We need to identify what data needs to be protected and how. This analysis is done through a data risk assessment.

During the data risk assessment, ask the following questions:

Why are we collecting personal information?

What type of personal information are we collecting? Medical? Criminal?

Web history?

Who are the data subjects?

What are the regulations that apply to us?

What training do we provide staff who work with personal information?

To resolve these issues, we focus on improving four key areas:

1. Process improvement
2. System change
3. Training/coaching
4. Definitions/Standards/Policy

The last step of the process is to monitor the data. This is done through audits, control reports, and dashboards.

03
Identify Priorities

Defining the data governance process and performing a risk assessment will bring several data-related issues and risks to light. **These can fall into several categories, including:**

Quality	Usage
Security	Architecture
Definition	Awareness
Ownership	

The goal of data governance is to first identify the issues and risks then resolve or mitigate the ones that we believe need to be managed.

If we try to manage everything, we will accomplish nothing.

The key is that we should only manage the items that pose a real threat to the security or value of the data.

04

Create a Policy

Your data governance policy is a documentation of exactly how your data will be managed. This allows new staff to be able to understand and adopt the processes and priorities you've put in place, as well as serve as a standard for future data management policies.

The data governance policy should include:

1. The vision
2. Defined roles and responsibilities
3. Performance metrics
4. Data policy statements
5. Consequences of deviating from the policy

05

Create a Plan

This is where the rubber meets the road. With the policy in place, you can form a plan as to how your data governance program comes together. **Here are some planning best practices:**

Work in 3-month Blocks

There's no need to set up a year-long plan that will leave you feeling overwhelmed. Setting up an entire data governance program is no small accomplishment, and you'll probably make some changes along the way. Leave room for flexibility by working one quarter at a time.

Focus on Priorities

If you try to focus on resolving every issue, you won't be able to focus on anything at all. Instead, adhere to your priority list. After all, you've already put in the hard work of establishing the most important to-do items.

Make Incremental Changes

Having the goal of making smaller changes along the way leaves space for adjustment when it's needed. This also allows you to celebrate the milestones along the way, which will provide a morale boost to the team and allow the rest of the association to see that progress is being made.

Communicate Freely

Key to any good plan is open and honest communication, both internally (between the data governance team) and externally (between the team and the rest of the organization). This both requires and builds trust within the organization and lets all concerned parties (that means anyone who touches or depends on the data) know of any obstacles, opportunities, or outcomes.

Be open when there is concern and the team needs to act to resolve an issue. And be obvious when it's time to celebrate a milestone.

Building a
Business Plan for
Data Governance

Understanding that your data is an asset unique to your association is key to communicating and getting buy-in for its importance throughout the organization. Data governance ensures that data can be trusted, and that people are held accountable for its quality.

There are **10 steps** every association should take as it begins the data governance journey and creates a business plan for it:

1 Acknowledge Differences

Stakeholders must recognize the differences between making a business case for data governance and making one for a traditional technology project. Many of these differences revolve around the non-conventional topics of business process, change management, business benefit, and holistic impact. Understanding the differences will help shape your approach.

2 Define and Clarify

Take the time to describe what data governance is and what it means to your association. A simple definition along with several examples of successful data governance, together with an explanation of its purpose, will go a long way toward getting everyone on the same page. Fine-tuning the characterization of this term and its intent will help align your staff and advance the dialogue with business leadership. Make sure the purpose of the data governance initiative is documented.

3 Name It Correctly

What you call something can determine how people perceive and respond to it—and whether they support it. The term "data governance" makes perfect sense to many in the information management space, but may not resonate with business leaders and executives. For some, the word "data" represents a tactical responsibility of IT, while "governance" signifies bureaucracy. Neither of these invokes the sense that it is a cross-functional management activity. You may want to consider alternate terms that better reflect the overall objective and are more likely to gain acceptance, such as "information asset management."

4 Set Expectations

Identify short- and long-term expectations for the data governance program at both a business and technical level. People involved in day-to-day information management activities have very different expectations than business leadership. Examine realistic expectations that will satisfy both decision-makers and other stakeholders, such as staff and volunteer leadership.

5 Create a Value Proposition

Determine whether the value proposition for the program will be based on a single project, the association as a whole, or somewhere in between. While a specific project is important, a business case for data governance is more compelling when it addresses the impact across an entire data domain and enterprise.

6 Interview the Business

Determine whether the creation of the business case should involve one-on-one interviews with a representative from each of your association's different departments. This is where much of the business value can be found.

7 Find the Influencers

Draft a list of individuals and groups who will need to be convinced in order to secure funding and support for the data governance program. Know who to persuade and why their influence makes a difference. Never assume that people, even those involved in daily data activities, understand the benefits of the program.

8 Determine the Need for Outside Assistance

Decide whether the organization will enlist the assistance of a third party. Doing so can add value in a number of ways:

» Provide industry experience and expertise
» Overcome the common stigma of being too close to the situation
» Deliver the message to business leadership from an objective, non-partisan source

9 Define What Success Looks Like

Establish the initial success criteria for the program. The organization should know whether or not the program has been successful—you can't manage what you can't measure.

10 Develop a High-Level Project Plan

Establish an initial project plan with timelines to help identify and track activities and milestones.

SCHEDULE A CALL

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