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# A Bottom-Up Approach to Data Leadership: Quality Assurance Design in Social Services

By Chris Hess

When an organization chooses to become data driven, it must realign its workforce, corporate culture and interpretation of its mission in support of the change. Employees must learn new databases and time management skills, and eventually generate data-based results. They also must reorient their beliefs about their work product and learn to see the organization's mission differently.

Transformational managers must choose whether to dictate these changes to workers or involve them in the data program design. Top-down approaches may be more efficient under time pressures and more realistic in high-turnover workforces. Yet they could backfire if they send staff for the exits. Bottom-up approaches can generate buy-in from talented employees as the process simultaneously builds their leadership, innovation and ownership for their work product.

Satellite Affordable Housing Associates (SAHA) implemented two data-driven quality assurance (QA) programs for social services to low-income populations—a top-down approach in 2013 and a bottom-up one in 2016. A nonprofit housing developer, SAHA provides affordable homes with social services to 2,600 senior residents and 600

Anticipating turnover risk, SAHA provided a six-month retraining and adjustment period for staff to understand the program's rationale and standards and to prioritize regular data entry in their schedules. Management hosted group and individual retraining sessions and provided QA reports for information only as real-world practice. Following this period, staff received quarterly QA reports and every employee, including the department director, had a data goal for his or her annual performance evaluation. Service coordinators had data goals at the building level, managers had them for the team under their supervision and the director had a department-wide benchmark.

Service coordinators began to dedicate time to entering data daily, but the data also delivered measurable efficiencies in their work. Staff knew which seniors required the most attention due to hospitalizations, unresolved referrals, frailty or time since the last contact. The QA program increased service engagement from 90.6 percent in 2012 to 99.5 percent of residents in 2017; median resident contacts per month increased by 32 percent. Through this period, SAHA retained nearly all 30


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The PA Times, journal of the American Society for Public Administration, published this article on SAHA's strategy for data-driven service coordination. Chris Hess, SAHA's Director of Resident Services, used SAHA's data-driven quality assurance program to advise agencies on how data helps us support the independence of seniors and families.

 [A Bottom-Up Approach to Data Leadership.pdf](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

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