Using Data for Operations and Planning: Now and in the Future

## NCHV Conference - June 1st, 2023

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About the Center:

"The Mission of the New England Center and Home for Veterans (NECHV) is to equip Veterans who are facing or at-risk of homelessness with the tools for economic self-sufficiency and to provide them a path to achieve successful and dignified independent living."

- Located in downtown Boston since 1989
- Offers Transitional and Permanent housing with extensive on-site wrap-around services including housing search, medical/behavioral health care, substance use treatment, clinical case management, employment services, legal services, and group activities
- Regional grantee for SSVF, HVRP, GPD, and VA Health Care for Homeless Veterans programs
- Maintains a footprint across Eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island through community-based programming
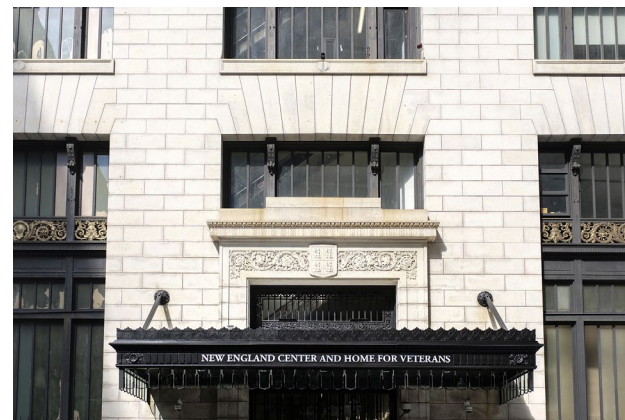
In the last 12 months, NECHV…

- served 898 unique Veterans across 22 programs (60% age 55+)
- provided Transitional and Low Threshold housing to 403 unique Veterans (89% had a disabling condition), with a median nightly census of 138
- placed 169 unique Veterans into permanent housing despite operating in the country's second most expensive housing market
- prevented homelessness for 88 unique Veterans
- delivered intensive employment services to 122 unique Veterans, of whom 42 were placed into jobs with an average hourly wage of $19.18
- was the permanent residence for 110 unique Veterans

Data 5/1/2022 – 4/30/2023

Why invest in data infrastructure?

Gives you power to confidently tell a story about your organization's impact

Helps stakeholders make data informed decisions (not "data driven")

Improves ability to be proactive rather than reactive

Creates efficiency and ownership for frontline staff and Veterans

Prepares for the future – funders and donors increasingly interested in tracking outputs and outcomes

Facilitates ongoing monitoring and quality improvement

Organizational data culture

Data as a Burden   vs.   Data as an Opportunity

Data as a Burden	Data as an Opportunity
• Data seen as a necessary evil (culture starts at the top) • Bare minimum data collected (e.g. no customization) • Overreliance on funder report backs • Significant redundancy/overlap in systems and data collection • Insufficient staff ownership and knowledge of data quality • Lacking in-house technical expertise • Paper files persist	• Data strengthens organization's ability to serve Veterans and inform decisions • Data are consulted and cited by many stakeholders, including leadership and development • Program impact is tracked in real time, answers at fingertips • Staff provided tools and resources to ensure highest possible data quality • Dedicated data staff • "Electronic first" approach

Disclaimer:
The following content is not an endorsement or recommendation for any specific product. Each organization requires a tailor-made approach to systems development, which is outside the purview of this presentation.

NECHV's data infrastructure

- 46 custom forms/assessments across 35 programs
- Integrated HMIS data collection and reporting
- Historical data dating back to 2014 (65,000 total forms for 4,098 clients)
- Ability to de-duplicate
- 20+ dynamic custom reports
  - performance dashboards
  - data quality and reminder reports
- 70 end users
- 2 database administrators
- 2 test environments

Leveraging the power of data
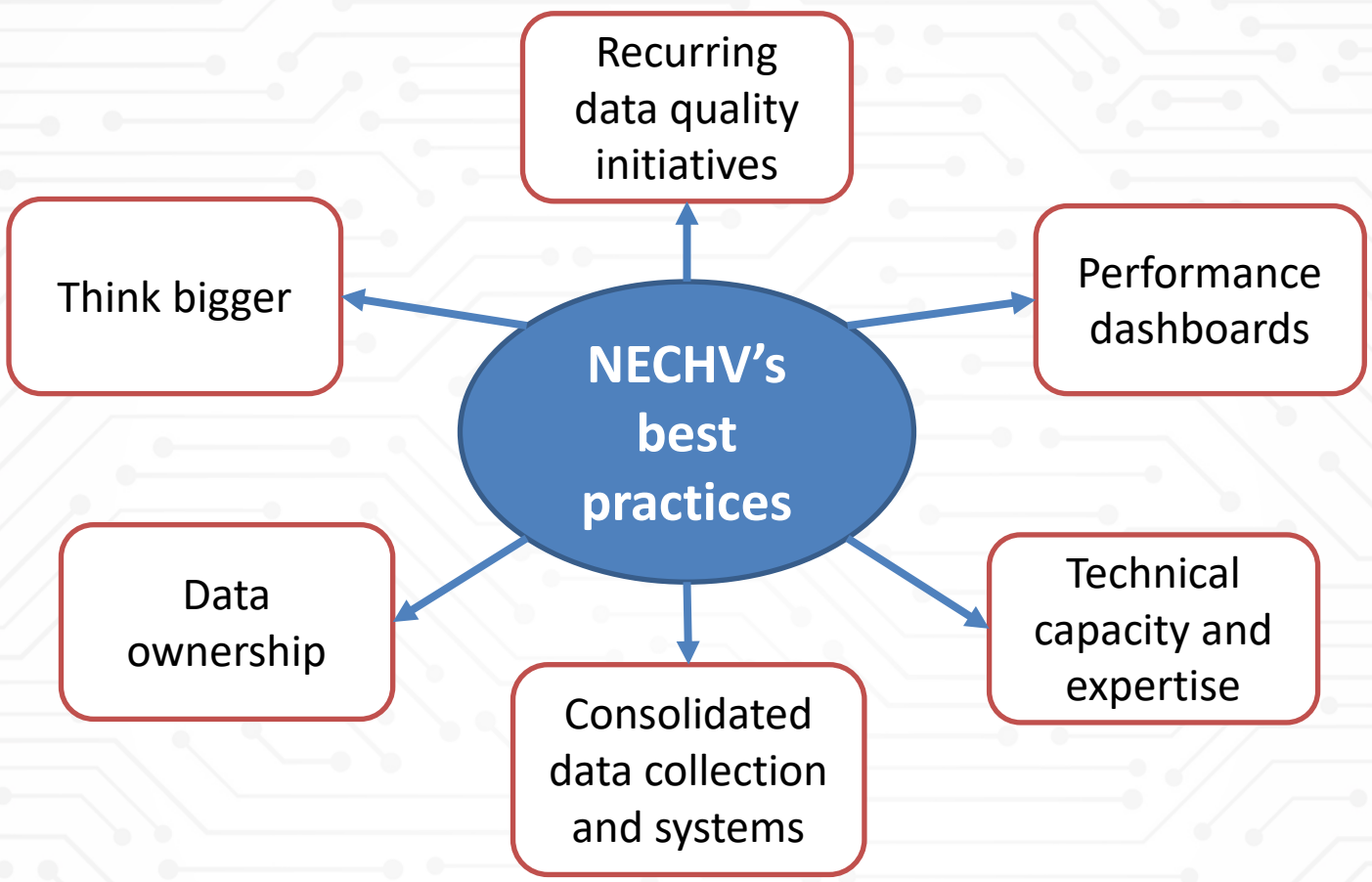
Leveraging the power of data

Recurring data quality initiatives

- Weekly or monthly data meetings with program leadership
    - Identify themes for improvement
    - Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA)
    - Feedback mechanism
- Weekly HMIS data pull and quality checks
    - Fix errors as they happen (be proactive, reduce stress)
    - Ability to access and query HMIS data from many sources (e.g. custom reports, standard reports, data warehouse, VA monthly report)

Leveraging the power of data

Performance dashboards

- Tracks outputs/outcomes in an easily digestible format
  - Include funder deliverables and internal goals (not always the same)
- Increases buy-in
  - Staff can see how their work translates into results (data entry isn't futile)
- Requires minimal manual manipulation
  - Collecting data in a unified database facilitates automation

Leveraging the power of data

Technical capacity and expertise

- Looks different for every organization depending on size, scope, system, financials, etc.
- Requires investment (time and money)
    - Do benefits outweigh costs?
    - Will having a better grasp of data help maintain or attract funding?
- Allows program staff to focus on providing services rather than crunching numbers (generally different skillsets)
- NECHV's data transformation has taken approximately 5 years (iterative process)

Leveraging the power of data

Consolidated data collection and systems

- Requires significant effort, but pays off
- More efficient for all stakeholders
  - Saves staff time, reduces need to train in multiple systems
  - Better for Veterans (less redundancy, less trauma)
- If consolidated system is organization-wide, facilitates care coordination and collaboration
  - E.g. HVRP team can see work done by SSVF team

Leveraging the power of data

Data ownership

- Create clear and documented data collection protocols to increase accountability
- Routine check-ins with staff around data collection and reporting
  - What could be working better? Anything we aren't collecting that we should?
  - Reduces chasm between data staff and those doing the work
- Build reports that allow staff to view their caseloads' data quality in real-time
  - Set expectation that these are run weekly
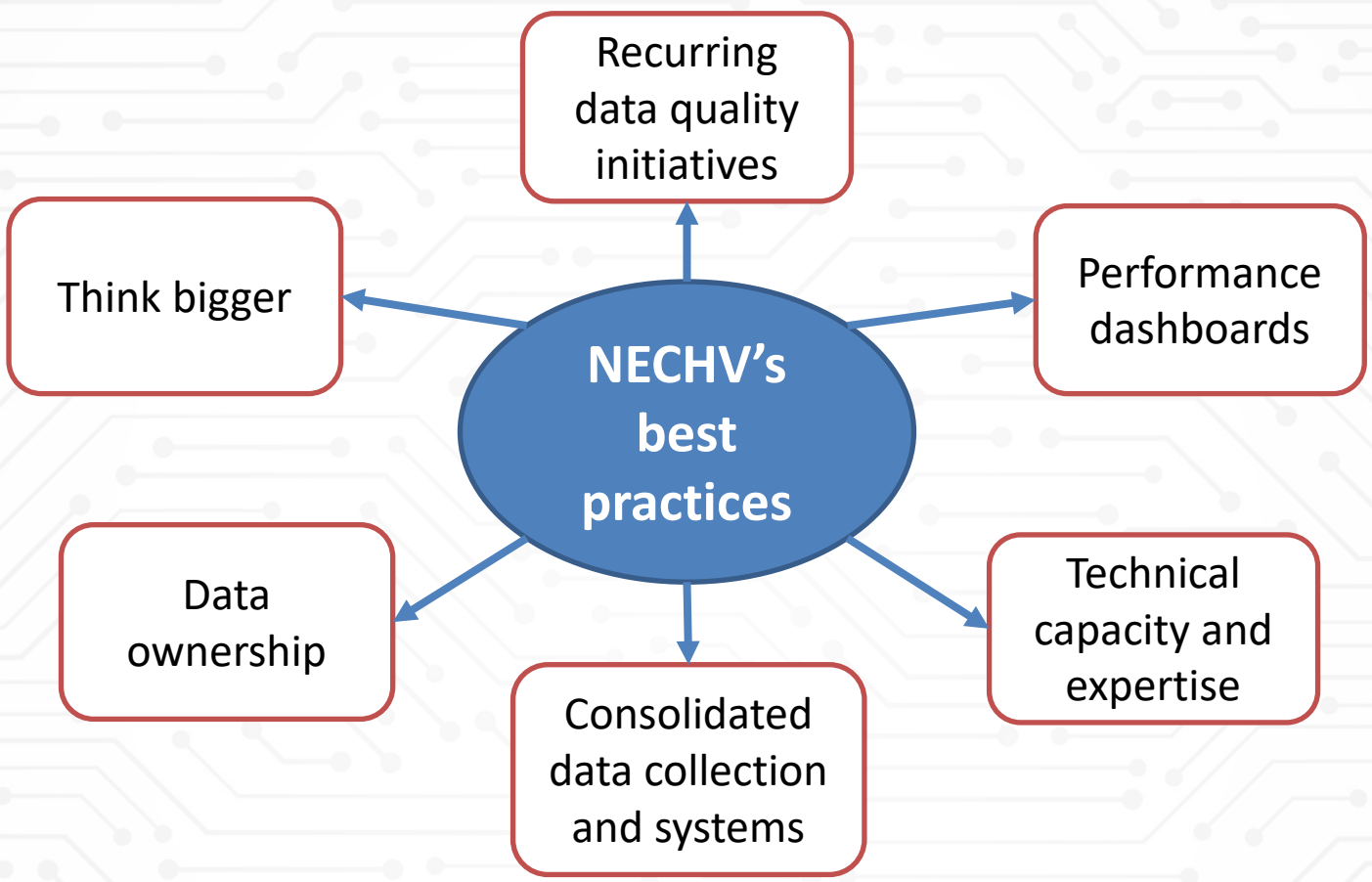 - Incorporate into supervision

Leveraging the power of data

Think bigger

- Harnessing data increases capacity to focus on the bigger picture
  - Paradigm shift: moving from crisis mode to monitoring and evaluation mode
- What else can data tell you about your Veterans and impact?
  - Equity analyses
  - Housing placement follow-ups
  - Internal Veteran satisfaction surveys
  - Return to homelessness analyses

Leveraging the power of data

- Recurring data quality initiatives
- Performance dashboards
- Think bigger
- NECHV's best practices
- Data ownership
- Consolidated data collection and systems
- Technical capacity and expertise

Data case study:
Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)