

# Benefits and Challenges: Evaluating the Practical Impact of a Customized and Implemented “Common” Data Management System for Small- to Mid-Sized Nonprofit Organizations

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## Abstract

Data management challenges limit growth and sustainability of small-to-medium nonprofits, impacting at-risk families served. Community-university partnerships where nonprofits house data management systems (DMS) on research infrastructure is a possible solution, but design or start-up costs remain obstacles. To address this, a proof-of-concept project was completed to co-design a common non-profit DMS, based on shared data needs, that is easy to customize. DMS were launched September 2024.

**Purpose:** To evaluate benefits and challenges inherent to a common nonprofit DMS approach by interviewing nonprofit users of the systems.

**Methods.** 7 participants completed interviews. Participants were nonprofit frontline staff and leadership (Elizabeth House, Emma House, Highbanks Society) and REDCap designers (PolicyWise). Preliminary analyses focused on responses to: “Do you think this approach is a good idea?” and “Can you discuss impressions ... benefits...and challenges working on this project with this team?” Preliminary themes were identified using descriptive content analysis.

**Results.** Benefits included relationship-building and collaboration among agencies and optimal collection and storage of agency-specific data through uniquely customized shared DMS. Challenges included post-launch support and communication and pre-launch agency leadership changes.

**Implications.** The common nonprofit DMS approach shows promise over previous DMS approaches. Opportunities for improvement were identified.

**Keywords:** Nonprofit Data Management, University Hosted Nonprofit Data Management Systems, Customizable "Common" Nonprofit Data Management System

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*Dr. Kharah Ross is a Health Psychologist, with a specialization in maternal-child health and psychoneuroimmunology, or the study of the connections between psychosocial states (e.g. stress, close relationship quality) and immune activity. Her research encompasses three broad areas: (1) Close relationships and health, (2) Health disparities at the intersection of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status, and (3) Understanding normative physiological activity during pregnancy, the postpartum period and early childhood. Dr. Ross was a postdoctoral scholar at the University of California - Los Angeles in Psychology (2015-2018), and with the Preterm Birth Initiative at the University of California - San Francisco (2016-2018). She then returned to her hometown, Calgary, AB, where she was an Alberta Innovates - Health Solutions and CIHR Postdoctoral Fellow (2018-2019) at the Owerko Centre in the Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute, University of Calgary. Dr. Ross joined the Psychology program at Athabasca University in 2019.*

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