Donor Data Migration

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About the Authors

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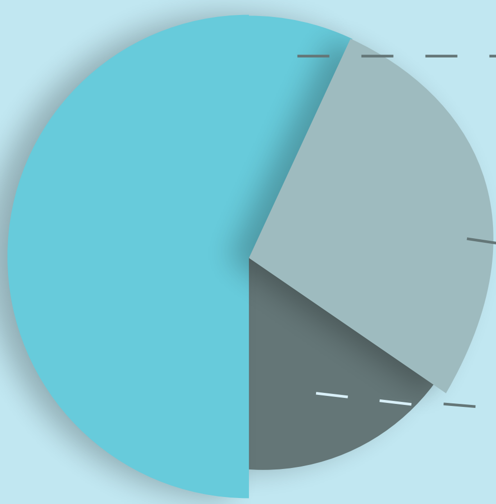
Congratulations!

If you are reading this eBook, odds are you are planning a donor data migration project involving a new system to help with your fundraising, like a CRM* or multi-channel marketing system. That new CRM system represents your future, and planning for the future is always exciting!

This book is intended to help nonprofit organizations understand and prepare for the process of a donor data migration. There are many potential CRM and donor management systems, and it is not the intention of this book to be a how-to guide to each and every one of them.



In a recent, informal poll, we found that:

61% of responding nonprofits place responsibility for data management and data quality with fundraising or marketing staff.

Only 27% utilized data base administrators or other technical staff.

And the remaining 12% relied on outside consultants or they weren't sure who was responsible.

The picture painted by this polling is reflective of one of the great challenges faced by the nonprofit sector: technology needs are long, but skilled technology resources are short. With this book, we hope to address an underserved industry need.

* Let's not split hairs over key definitions.

"CRM" refers to Consumer Relationship Management, or to Constituent Relationship Management, depending on your preference. In this book, we will use terms such as "consumer", "donor" and "constituent" interchangeably.

Rule #1:

If new technology systems present challenges to most of us, then the data that dwell within them can be down right intimidating. “Big data’ even more so. Couple data with a complex project to manage and we can be overwhelmed rather quickly.

So what’s the best way to avoid becoming overwhelmed?

After all, we have a donor data migration project to get to.

For starters, let’s stay focused on this simple ‘Rule #1’ :

Your new CRM represents your fundraising future, not your reporting past.

This principle will guide us through what often seems like a dark, confusing world of data. It will help us to set priorities and make difficult decisions.

Setting a few more ground rules:

Remembering Rule #1 - that your new CRM is for your fundraising future – the approach to managing your new CRM and the data it will hold becomes much clearer. For example, you will be able to set some important data migration project ground rules. Let’s use these:

- CRM database configuration choices are made to support your fundraising strategies and goals, not your reporting past.
- Your data migration project budget and schedule need to address all of the legacy data that you NEED, not all of the legacy data that you HAVE. “Need” is defined by what you will use.
- Don’t let 20% of your legacy data turn into 80% of your donor data migration project costs.
- Once you complete your donor data migration, you will need to define better data management and enrichment practices to ensure your future fundraising success.

Rule #1 Continued:

Remember, **we are data miners.**

Let's always keep in mind that fundraising requires data mining … of YOUR donor database(s). The goal of your donor data migration project is to maximize the quality of your donor data in your new CRM system in order to achieve higher goals within the organization, such as raising more money and improving donor relationships long term.

Do you want to mine data from a garbage dump or a gold mine?

The answer, of course, is a gold mine. Let's start planning our donor data migration.

We have a data migration plan to create, a team to assemble, data standards to investigate, and critical steps to discuss. Lots to do. But, before we jump into those details, it is important to grasp the big picture. Understanding where we have to go will help us plan and execute the journey. It will also reduce the number of surprises awaiting us when we get to our destination.

What does a donor data migration process look like?

Data migration* refers to the process of transferring data between data storage types, such as databases. Perhaps the most common data migration task undertaken by nonprofit organizations involves the migration of donor data from one CRM system to another.

Keep in mind that all data migrations require planning and involve risk. Data is being moved, manipulated, interpreted.

But what does that process really look like?

There are many steps. These are the steps we think of most frequently when we diagram a data migration project.

01 Planning

02 Analysis

03 Mapping

04 Configure New Database

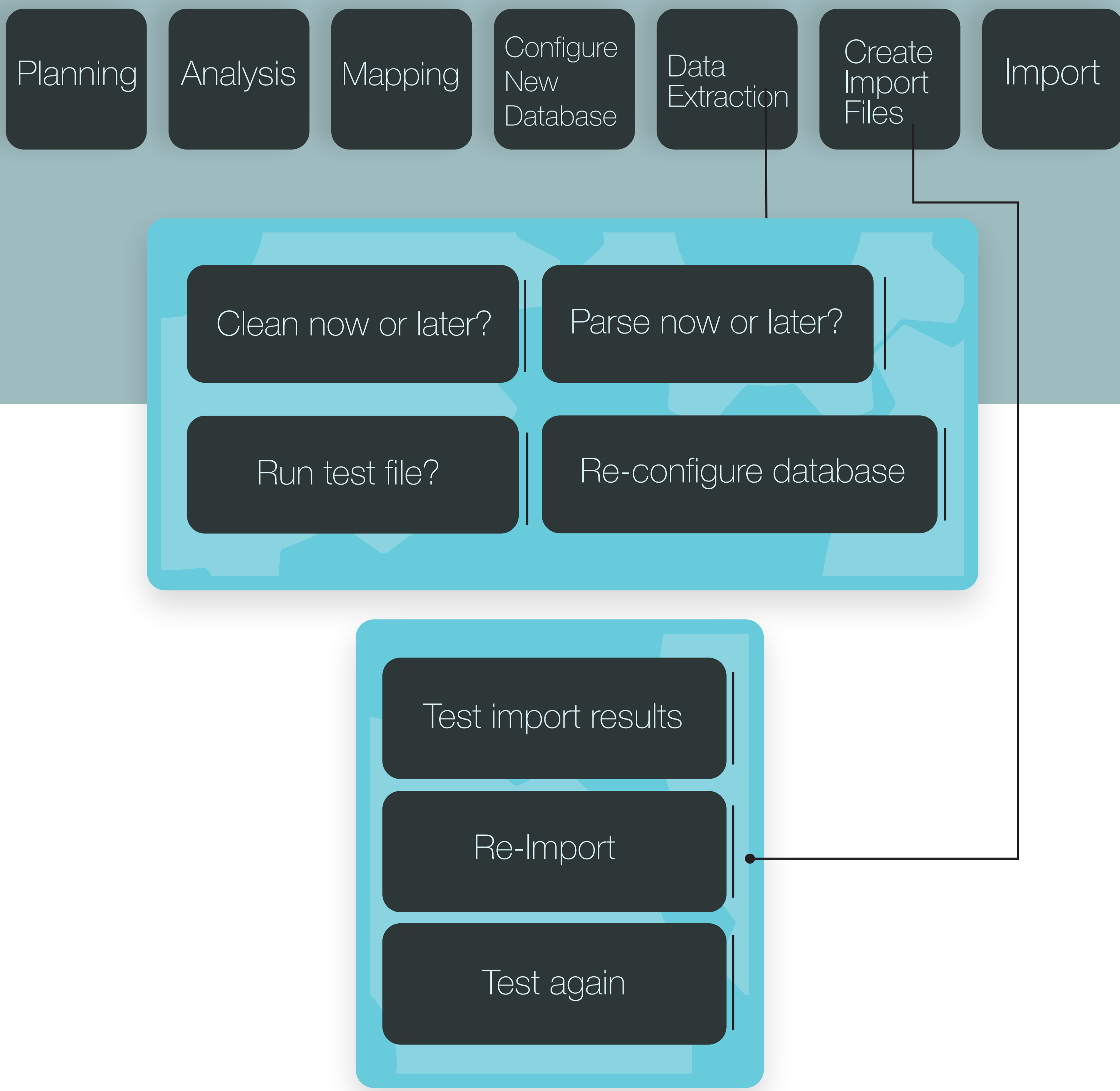
05 Data Extraction

06 Create Import Files

07 Import

* The terms ‘data migration’ and ‘data conversion’ are often used interchangeably by professionals in the nonprofit industry. They are not synonyms. ‘Data conversion’ refers to the process of changing data from one format to another. Many events can require a data conversion, only one of which is a data migration to a new data storage system. For a list of data-related technical terms, here is a helpful reference guide: Donor Data Management Dictionary at http://3rdsectorlabs.com/resources/donor-data-management-dictionary/

If we explore the process more fully, however, we should be prepared for a number of additional steps, and some important decisions along the way.



*Data Extraction may occur earlier in the process than step 5.

Sometimes most thorough way to analyze the data is to export it first.

Reviewing the data migration process, questions start popping up.

Questions like …

- How many iterations of test data will you need to go through?
- When do you clean your data?
- What is parsing?
- How will we validate the results?
- What goes into the archive?

That's good. Keep writing them down – you'll need answers to all of them.

Remember the goal of project? We stated it earlier.

The goal of your donor data migration project is to **maximize** the quality of your donor data in your new CRM system in order to achieve higher goals within the organization, such as raising more money and improving donor relationships long term.

That is the measure of success when we get to the end of the data migration project, no matter whether it is a 6-step or 15-step process.

Chapter 3: Building a team

Now that we are reminded of our destination and have a pretty good sense of what the journey will look like...
How are we going to get there?

Answer: with a team. A good team. A team you assemble.

You will need representatives who fill the following roles and/or represent each stakeholder team or department. One person may fill more than one role.

1. **CRM management** – day-to-day responsibility for the new system, your DBA or database administrator

2. **Fundraising** – responsible for generating organizational revenue from the data, the business expert with the most at risk with your donor data migration

3. **Communications / Marketing** (if separate from Fundraising) – responsible for generating outbound communications and generating new leads for the organization to contact

4. **Technology** – responsible for systems support, integrations, backup and security, possibly even data quality

5. **Consultant** – to fill one or more of the above roles, and/or to complete one or more tasks in the project plan

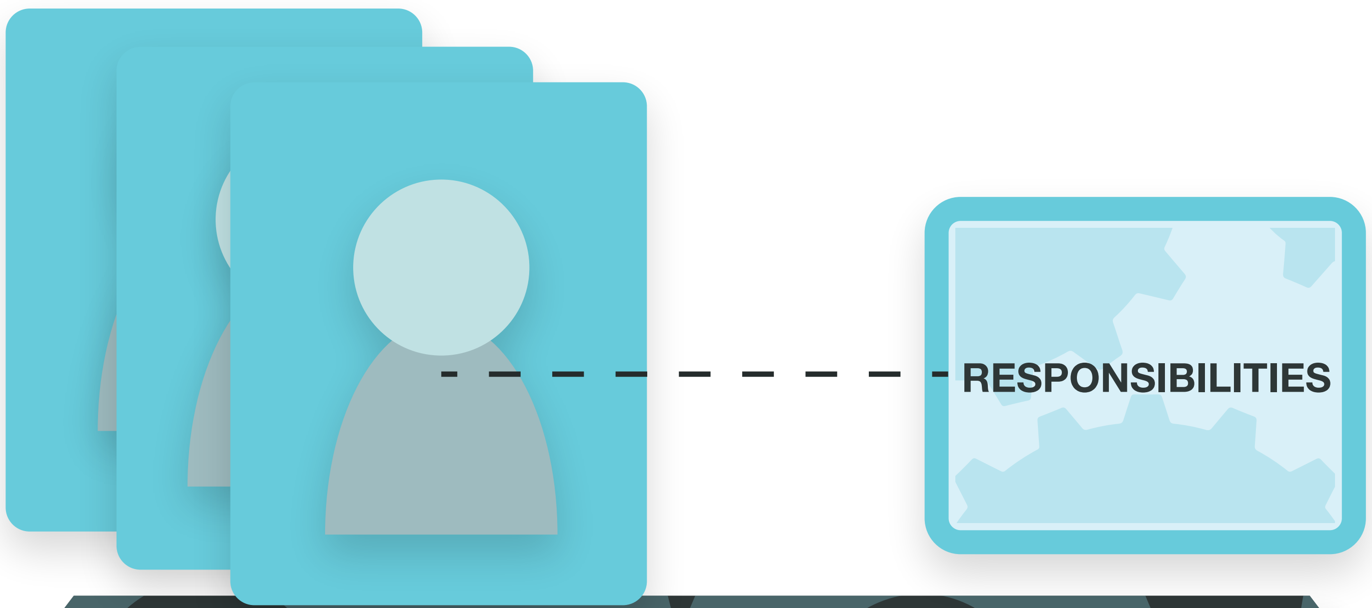
6. **CRM software vendor**

7. **CRM management, technology or fundraising teams** – responsible for data validations post migration (this could be filled by the CRM management or Technology teams)

8. **Project management** – responsible for keeping the project on task and on budget

9. **Technical lead** – responsible for executing the data migration

This last last role is the most important. It represents an individual (smaller projects) or a team (larger ones). It can be filled by the nonprofit organization, the CRM vendor, or a consultant.



After you assemble your team, make sure that **responsibilities** are clearly assigned. In particular, who "owns" each step in your plan.

Responsibilities are important, but can too easily be overlooked.

- First, you need to make sure you have every step in your plan covered.
- Second, and just as important, you will need to put together a budget for the project.

If you have consultants and software vendors involved, you need to know which tasks your organization will support from internal resources and which ones you will have to pay for.

We will revisit budgeting in Chapter 6. For now, it's time to move on to building your plan.

The first responsibility of the Technical Lead for your donor data migration project is to:

Build the plan

Stakeholders on the Migration Team will review and contribute, but the Tech Lead owns it. Make sure your team signs off on the plan **before** you start the project.

Plans will vary from one data migration project to the next.

Steps may be re-ordered, or even completed concurrently. Be prepared to be flexible. Data is complicated.

Extracting and analyzing data can be like peeling layers of an onion – you aren't always sure what you will find, and sometimes it makes you cry.

In Chapter 2, we reviewed the steps of a data migration process. You will need that perspective to help you construct your plan. It is also helpful to work from one or more checklists … to make sure you aren't overlooking something important.

Bookmark this online resource, an example of a data migration checklist, broken down into two phases, Pre-migration and Migration:

http://3rdsectorlabs.com/resources/data-migration-checklist/

Pre-migration planning in 6 steps

01

Team

Establish a migration management team. Include key stakeholders (ex. marketing, fundraising, leadership). In particular, include the person(s) responsible for configuration management of the new system, if this is not the same person(s) managing the data migration.

02

Plan

Document your plan and include a flexible schedule. Identify the tough decisions upfront and address them. For example, how much data cleaning is required with your migration, and when should that cleaning occur? Do you have legacy fields that need to be parsed (i.e., separated into more than one data field)? Look to your data governance policies for help.

03

Establish security protocols

Make sure everyone understands the ground rules. Create new login credentials for third parties working with your systems. Who can access the data, where can it be stored, and what flexibility does a consultant or CRM vendor have in working with your data?

Pre-migration planning continued

04

Prioritize

Prioritize the reasons why you are migrating. For example, if you are moving to a new CRM system in order to support expanded fundraising campaigns, then focus on the features and benefits of working with new data in the new system over the stress of trying cram more of your poorly formatted or incomplete legacy data from your old system.

05

Standards

Define the standards for a successful migration. Most importantly, determine what data should and should not be migrated. For example, in a CRM data migration, do you want to migrate a record that has not been edited in 5 years? Another example, how will you handle file attachments?

06

Write a test plan

Develop a test plan to determine if you are meeting the standards for success. Do not wait until after the migration has been attempted to figure out how you will measure success. Larger data migrations usually benefit from independent validation resources, including software – if you need them, line them up now.

With your team identified and plan in hand, now...

Build your budget

Most organizations are not trying to assign costs to internal resources, which is fine. Focus on external costs, such as consultants, software, maybe some miscellaneous costs. Then line item out a budget.

Other budget-related issues may affect your project as well. It's a good time to identify them. For example, do you have agreements in place with third parties? Do you need a project collaboration platform? Will you need to incorporate meeting or travel expenses?

Tasks that often get overlooked when putting together the project budget include:

- Ad hoc data queries after the initial analysis is completed
- Data cleaning
- Data parsing (i.e. when a single legacy data field needs to be split into two or more fields in the new CRM)
- Data extraction from the legacy system
- Building the import files for loading into the new system
- Multiple rounds of testing and re-loads of updated import files
- Archiving old backups and/or data not migrated

Note: Time = money. Remember that pearl of wisdom. When it comes to your budget, be flexible. You can't finalize your project schedule until you've completed a thorough data analysis. If the analysis turns up enough unexpected problems, then expect your schedule to be lengthened and your budget to go up.

Data governance*

Data governance represents the standards and policies continuously applied to your data assets. In the case of a data migration project, there are many questions that you won't be able to answer without referring to a set of standards.

At this point, your reaction might something like this:

"What? We have no data governance policies? Where do we get those?"

The answer is that you have to stop the data migration work long enough to get a basic set of standards in place. If you don't, your migration project will stall each time you face a tough decision about whether to keep or purge certain sets of data. They are a necessary part of good organizational management. As for the task at hand, the next two pages feature a quick list of data governance policies to consider.

Another wonderful resource...

Independent Sector has a great reference page with a wide range of nonprofit and philanthropic standards:
https://www.independentsector.org/compendium_of_standards#online

*A set of rules or policies that encompass the people, processes and technologies required to create and maintain higher quality data assets for an organization. Data governance goals resulting from higher data quality include: higher revenues and greater profitability, better compliance with third party standards, decreased risk of regulatory violations, improved data and organizational security, and improved decision making.

Data governance policies to consider

Purpose:

State the purposes for your data; there can be several. For example, one purpose might be to support digital marketing campaigns. If less than 10% of your donor data includes email addresses, but digital marketing is a top priority, then you have a challenge to address.

Responsibility:

Who is responsible for maintaining data quality? What are this person's required skill sets?

Definitions:

What defines a "complete" record? How many donor data fields do you need to create proper donor segmentation groups and carry out your planned fundraising campaigns?

Processes:

Who manages manual data inputs? Are these resources paid or volunteers? Are they trained?

Hygiene and enrichment:

How frequently will your organization clean data? Update and enrich data? How will your organization enrich donor records – organically through communications, through website activities, through purchased lists and data brokers?

Data governance policies to consider

Storage:

How long do you retain old records? Lapsed donors? Unrealized prospects?

Backup and recovery:

Where is your data backed up? Is it with the same vendor that provides your CRM or donor database? How often do you test data recovery?

Security:

Who has access to the data? Remember: donor data (often) = personal information

Third party compliance:

What third party standards apply to your organization? PCI compliance? HIPAA? Other?

Systems integration:

Do you have multiple systems sharing or exchanging data? If so, do you have the workflows diagramed and priorities established in case of system conflicts?

You understand the process. You've got your plan.
Polices are in place. Team assembled. Budget, check.
You are ready to start.

Good luck!

Now it's week one, and by the first or second meeting, questions begin popping up. That's okay. In fact, it is expected. That is why you have a documented plan, data governance policies, process docs, etc.

Let's look at some common questions you may encounter.

Question:
How many years of donor data do we migrate?

Answer:
The data hoarder in all of us wants to keep data "just in case" we need it, or to run those cool reports that show 10 years of trends. Stop and ask yourself this: when was the last time you went into your CRM and studied donors or gifts older than three years? The answer is probably "I can't remember". There's your answer. Three. Archive that retired data. It's your peace of mind. And if you just can't bring yourself to purge data from the three year mark, draw a hard line at five.

Rule #1 reminder:
Your new CRM is your fundraising future, not your reporting past.

Question:
Do we import lapsed donors?

Answer:
This is a fundraising or communications problem, not a data problem. At the risk of answering a question with a question, when was the last time you reached out specifically to lapsed donors – donors who have not given in the past two years? If you haven't, then we recommend the following. Segment your lapsed donors and plan an outreach strategy … a mini-campaign. Allow two communications over the next two months. Create all new messaging inviting their interest in your mission – and we are stressing "new", because whatever messaging they have been receiving isn't working. Anybody responding to this campaign goes into your new CRM. Anybody who doesn't stays in the archive.

If you have selected your new CRM, however, for its donor retention management tools (e.g. Bloomerang!), then bring over the lapsed donors in your migration. You still need to execute the mini-campaign referenced above. But be disciplined enough to purge the non-respondents from your new CRM system.

Question:
What about data we can't or don't import?

Answer:
Every data migration we've worked on ends up with data that can't be imported. Usually the process of running import tests leads to additional iterations on the proposed data structure in the new CRM as you wrestle with limitations of the data extracted from the old CRM.

It is more important that the new donor database meets your future fundraising needs, than it supports 100% of your legacy data. Remember these ground rules from Chapter 1:

You are migrating all the data that you NEED, not all the data that you HAVE … and "need" is defined as "what you will use"

Don't let 20% of your legacy data turn into 80% of your donor data migration costs For data that you 'retire', export it into a usable format, like an Access database for Excel spreadsheet, so you can refer to it later if needed.

Question:
When should our data be cleaned, before or after the data migration?

Answer:
The rule of thumb is to clean after data extraction from the legacy system, before creating your import files for the new CRM. This way you are only bringing clean data into the new database.

Pre-import: apply data governance, normalize, purge bad records, de-dupe
Post-import: append, parse

But there can be exceptions to the rule. For example, we dealt with migrations where records were co-mingled between multiple organizations. Due to time constraints for implementation of the new CRM, all members of the Migration Team agreed to bring over a larger data set, to be purged and pared back at a later date.

Reminder: know your data. Be sure you have completed a thorough data analysis and revised your plan before jumping too far into the donor data migration process.

Question:
We have a couple of ad hoc text fields holding lots of notes in our legacy database – what do we do about them?

Answer:
This is our parsing problem that we mentioned in the Checklist in Chapter 4. Text fields are notorious in older CRMs and Access databases. With an insufficient data structure to support a growing charity, the easy short-cut to data management was to store more information in an ad hoc field – birth dates, family data, alma mater, notes from a meeting, etc. First, export this data into a spreadsheet and review it.

Do you in fact have meaningful data? If so, import it into the new CRM, into a notes or text field. Once your data migration is completed, then go back to this ad hoc data and analyze it. In some cases, you have unmanageable garbage, but you can only realize it once you've gone through the discipline of a thorough data migration. In some cases, though, you have useful information that needs to be re-populated into your CRM. Parse and import the data into two or more new fields in your CRM database.

Parsing tasks are good post-migration projects, needing their own analysis, plan and budget. You will need a parsing tool – did you know that you can do simple parsing using Microsoft Excel?

Question:

We keep arguing over how much data to purge and not migrate. Can't we just bring it all over to the new CRM database and decide later?

Answer:

No, no … and no!

You are stuck on one or more data governance policies that you don't want to follow. Work through the problem. Make a decision. Archiving a copy of your data at the end of the project will be your peace of mind, should you later realize that you left something out of the migration.

Remember: not making a decision is still a decision … and usually a bad one.

Question:
We are three months into our data migration project and we just figured out that some data fields won't translate to the new CRM. What do we do now? Pick a new CRM?

Answer:
Don't panic. This is not uncommon. You don't need a new CRM.

This situation usually occurs after you've completed the data map from the old to new CRM database, and initial testing is underway. The ah-ha occurs when you realize that some fields in the new CRM aren't interpreting data the same way that you expected they would. What now?

- Stop the imports
- Check your test files – perhaps the problem lies within the file, not the CRM database configuration. If not, proceed to the next step.
- Identify data gaps and mistakes
- Re-map … warning, this can be tedious
- Re-configure the new CRM database
- Create new test files
- Then re-run your test imports

Is the real issue that the old database is suffering from bad data management practices that the new system won't tolerate? As we mentioned before, you new CRM represents your fundraising future. Worst case, you archive the trouble-some data and revisit it later. Based on our experience, if you can't figure a way for the new CRM to accommodate the data, you probably don't need that old data but are trying to hang onto it for the wrong reasons.

Question:
Do we need a data consultant to support or execute our CRM migration? Or can we rely on our new CRM vendor?

Answer:
It depends.

You may need a data consultant unless you have in-house resources with strong data management skills. Your CRM vendor may also have the capability to migrate your data from your old provider.

Bottom line - you need experienced professionals who will:
-Extract your legacy data
-Clean, normalize and purge records
-Create import files for the new CRM
-Create post-migration backups and archives

We have made reference to this several times in this eBook, but the point is important enough to warrant a brief chapter.

Backups and archives

One of the most difficult steps for any nonprofit in a donor data migration project is the last step. The end. Parting ways with the old and fully immersing the fundraising and communications teams in the new.

One worry above all others worries you:

"What if we forgot some data that we needed?"

If you stick to Rule #1, that your new CRM represents your fundraising future, and if you are careful not to let 10% or 20% of our data cause project cost/time overruns, then when you reach the end of your data migration project, you've got legacy data that did not migrate.

What do you do with it?

Every data migration project needs to close with creating backups and archives. Not backups of the legacy CRM – you don't need to keep that around. Just the data. Export a full copy of your database into an easy to use database like Microsoft Access. If the data files are small enough and relatively light in terms of the number of fields, you can use Microsoft Excel. Also, create a separate copy of the records that you chose not to import. Odds are, if you have questions about whether or not you left something important behind, you'll want to zero in on that data first. Having created a copy of the "did not migrate" file(s) will save a lot of time, rather than combing through a full copy of the data.

We understand that your project has been longer than you wanted and everybody wants to move on to other tasks. But be disciplined – take the time to backup and archive – it is your peace of mind.

Congratulations!

Your migration is complete.

Furthermore, you cleaned up your data along the way. Your shiny new CRM is in the hands of the fundraising team and communication teams. Now what?

Well, to be honest, you have a problem. It's your data. It's just been cleaned, we know, but it's degrading … faster than you think. What's going on, and what should you do about it?

> Our data scientists will tell it like it is:
> "If your data isn't getting better, it's getting worse."

Data degradation refers to the worsening of data quality over time.
It is unavoidable.

Why?

Because there are so many unavoidable, negative influences acting on your data … especially donor data. Donors...consumers... experience data changes frequently. Changes in jobs, address, family status, life events, interests and so much more.

The good news is that there is plenty you can do.

All organizations - for-profit, not-for-profit, government – need to take charge of data quality. There are only three necessary ingredients for taking charge:

- responsibility
- budget
- schedule

Now that you have a new CRM system with a newly populated donor database, do the following:

01 Assign responsibility for maintaining data quality, and determine how you will measure this. Make sure you have at least one backup resource.

02 Create a budget for data management. Data is one of THE MOST important assets that your organization owns. Your donor relationships are defined by the data stored in that CRM database. Your organization only knows its donors THROUGH that data. Data management is worth the investment.

03 Put data quality management tasks onto a schedule. And separate that schedule from fundraising and communication tasks. We can't stress this point enough. Do not clean, update, append, merge or manage your donor data simply in response to an upcoming mailer or worse, in response to problems. Manage your data proactively, on its own schedule, so that it is ready to be used every time you need it.

04 You fight data degradation by practicing good data management. It's not hard, but too few organizations commitment the necessary resources to do it properly.

Be a leader when it comes to data management.

We set out to help you understand and manage the process of donor data migrations. Your donor database is one of your most important assets. You mine it every time you communicate and fundraise. With your new CRM, freshly populated from a successful donor data migration, you should be mining in a gold mine, not a garbage dump.

Please share this eBook with anyone inside or outside of your organization who has questions about donor data, CRM systems, and migrations.

And feel free to contact us with your questions and comments.

Thank you!

Other Resources:

If you need help with a data migration project - or have questions about your broader nonprofit data management needs - you can reach Third Sector Labs at info@thirdsectorlabs.com, visit their website at:

www.thirdsectorlabs.com

or follow them on Twitter at @3rdsectorlabs.

If you are in the market for a new donor database - or are looking into a fundraising CRM for the first time - you can reach Bloomerang at info@bloomerang.co, visit their website at:

www.bloomerang.co

or follow them on Twitter at @BloomerangTech.