

Agency Experiences with OUTCOME MEASUREMENT

**Survey
Findings**



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United Way
of America

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Introduction

As of January 2000, 400 United Ways across the country were asking programs they fund to identify and measure their outcomes—the benefits or changes the programs want participants to experience as a result of their services. United Ways are not alone. Many state and local government agencies, foundations, managed care systems, and accrediting bodies have added outcome measurement to the list of performance and accountability measures they require of nonprofit organizations within their sphere.

Outcome measurement—the regular, systematic tracking of the extent to which program participants experience the benefits or changes intended—is not easy. It requires a fundamental shift in thinking, takes time and resources, and often means diverting staff time away from providing services to participants. The methodology, while not experimental research, still requires careful design and implementation to produce meaningful data. In addition, some outcomes are harder to identify, harder to measure, and take longer to measure than others.

While there definitely are challenges, outcome measurement produces rewards for programs that implement it carefully and use it as a management tool. Because of its focus on results, the feedback it provides, and the data it produces, outcome measurement offers two primary benefits for programs: It helps them increase the effectiveness of their services and communicate the value of what they do.

Anecdotal information from many different types of programs reveals a variety of uses programs make of outcome information and a number of benefits they gain from it. This report represents a more systematic effort to determine the extent to which programs have profited from outcome measurement, as well as to identify barriers to both measurement and use of the results.

About This Study

The survey of program directors whose findings are reported here was conducted by James Bell Associates (JBA) of Arlington, Virginia. JBA is the evaluation contractor for United Way of America's National Learning Project on Using Program Outcome Findings to Create Measurable Change. The National Learning Project is a 3-year effort, funded in part by a grant from the Lilly Endowment, to learn how United Ways can use program outcome findings to improve funded programs and initiatives, the United Way itself, and the community.

To assist with the survey, six United Ways involved in the National Learning Project identified all agencies they fund that are engaged in outcome measurement—a total of 391 agencies. To reduce the burden for agencies that operate more than one United Way-funded program, JBA used a random-selection procedure to designate one program per agency to be the focus of the survey. Thus, JBA surveyed 391 programs, each operated by a different agency.

In August 1999, JBA mailed confidential surveys to those agencies. The survey asked directors of the designated programs for their assessment of both positive and negative aspects of measuring program outcomes, as well as their experiences with using the findings to benefit the program. A total of 298 responses were returned, for an overall response rate of 76.2 percent.

This survey was made possible by the cooperation of the United Ways involved. They are:

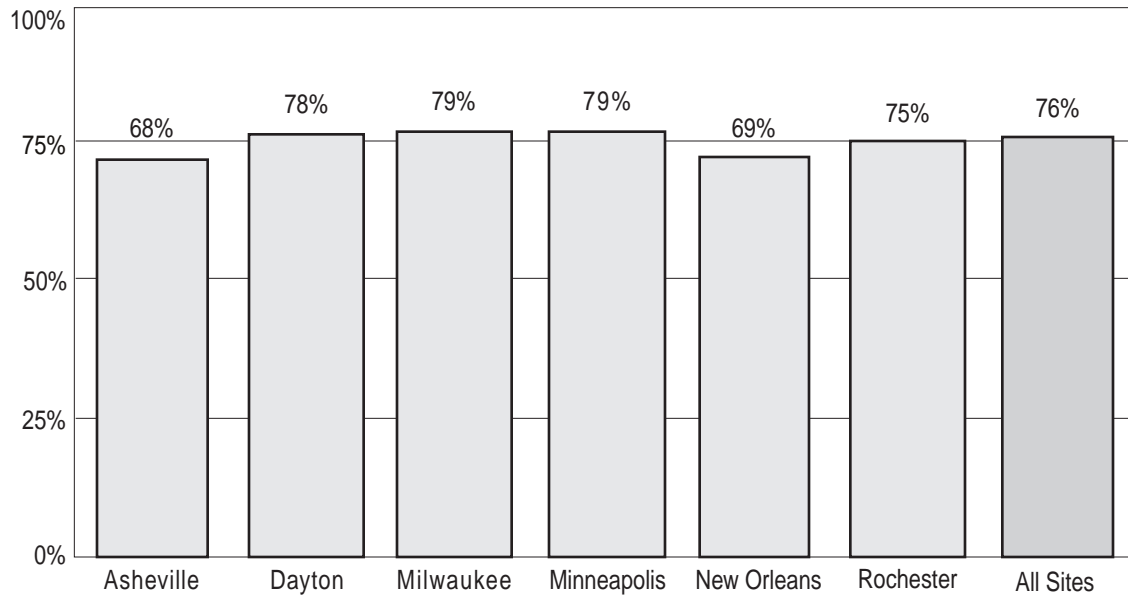
- *United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County*
Asheville, North Carolina
David Bailey, President & CEO
Ann Von Brock, National Learning Project Representative
- *United Way of the Greater Dayton Area*
Dayton, Ohio
Craig Chancellor, President
Kristina Moster, National Learning Project Representative
- *United Way of Greater Milwaukee*
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Susan Dragisic, President
Kathleen Pritchard, National Learning Project Representative
- *United Way of Minneapolis Area*
Minneapolis, Minnesota
James Colville, President
Elizabeth Peterson, National Learning Project Representative
- *United Way for the Greater New Orleans Area*
New Orleans, Louisiana
Gary Ostroske, President
Beth Lee Terry, National Learning Project Representative
- *United Way of Greater Rochester*
Rochester, New York
Joseph Calabrese, Executive Director
Katherine Lewis, National Learning Project Representative

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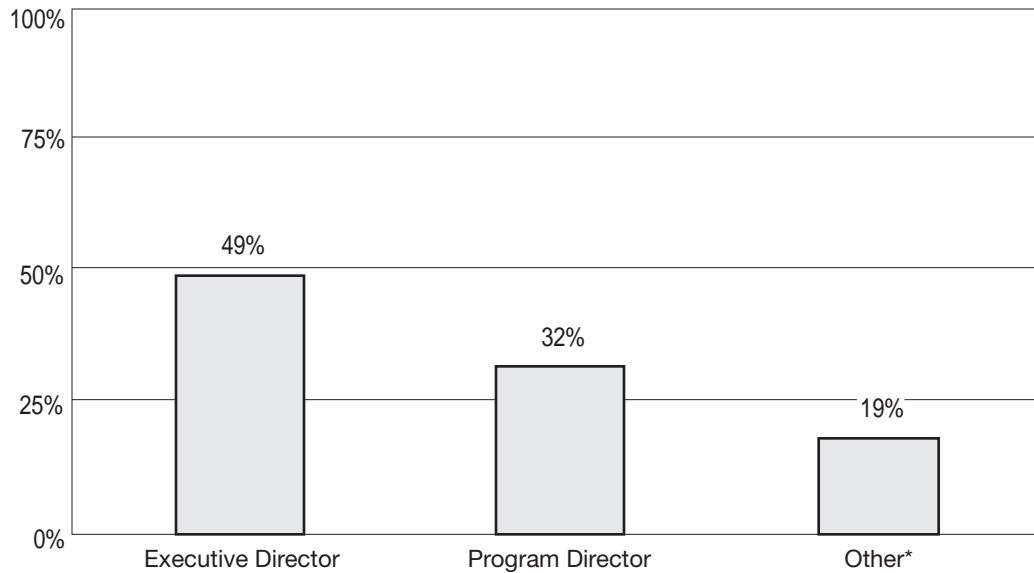
Figure A
Response Rate by Site



Agencies surveyed:	19	36	80	135	51	69	391
Agencies responding:	13	28	63	107	35	52	298

The number of agencies surveyed at each site varied because of local differences in the number of United Way funded agencies and the extent of agency participation in United Way program outcome measurement initiatives. Response rates by surveyed agencies were similar across National Learning Project sites, ranging from 68 to 79 percent.

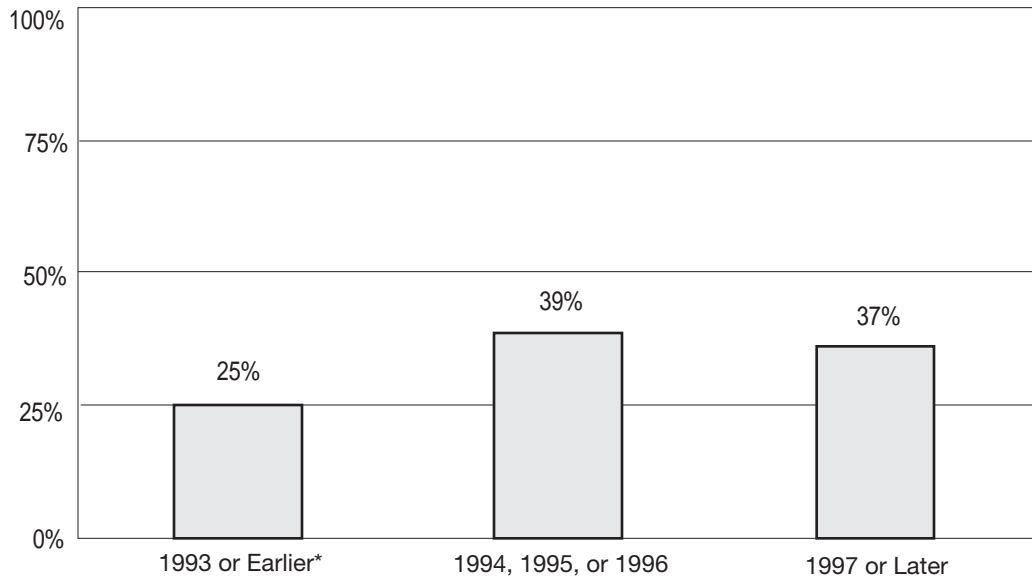
Figure B
Position/Title of Questionnaire Respondents



**“Other” was typically Vice President or another executive position such as Director of Planning.
Source: Program Director Questionnaire, Question 1, UWA NLP Evaluation, James Bell Associates, 11/99.
295 responses, 3 non-responses.

Because the executive director also functions as the program director at many agencies, the relatively higher incidence of executive director respondents is not surprising.

Figure C
**First Year This Program Began
Implementing Program Outcome Measurement**

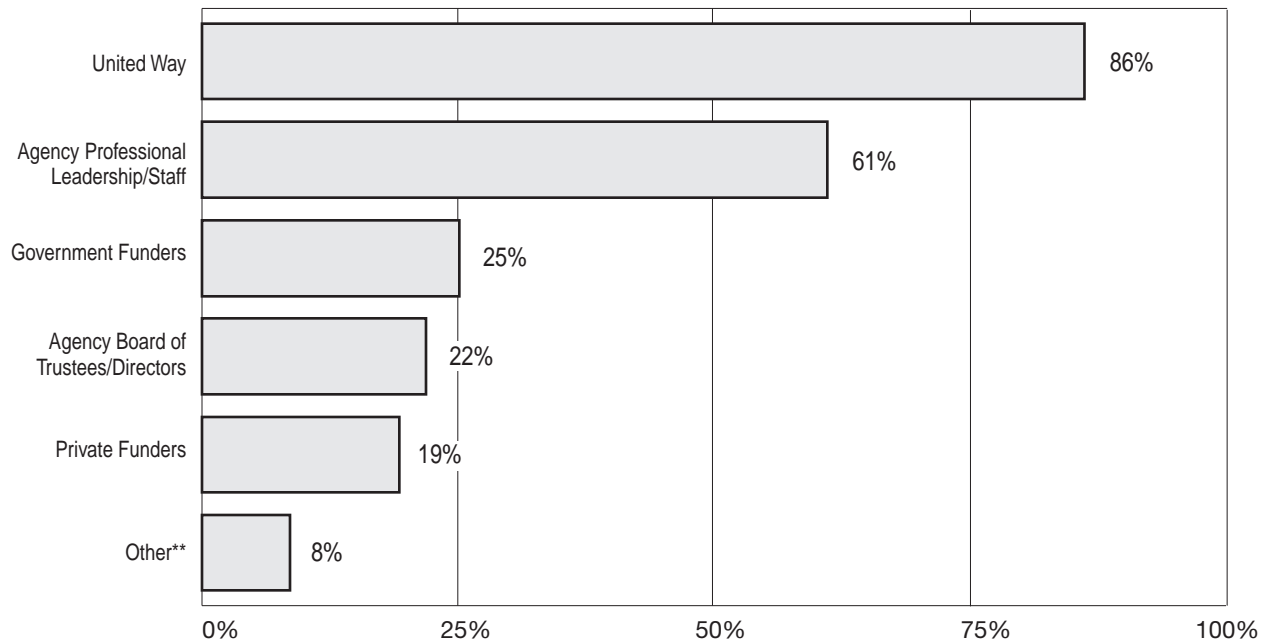


* Earliest year reported was 1956.

Source: Program Director Questionnaire, Question 2, UWA NLP Evaluation, James Bell Associates, 11/99.
271 responses, 27 non-responses.

Three-quarters of the outcome measurement initiatives began in 1994 or later.

Figure D
**Parties That Prompted Implementation of
 Program Outcome Measurement***



* Many respondents indicated more than one response choice, so sum of percentages exceeds 100%.

** "Other" was typically a council or commission for accreditation or a licensing requirement.

Source: Program Director Questionnaire, Question 3, UWA NLP Evaluation, James Bell Associates, 11/99.

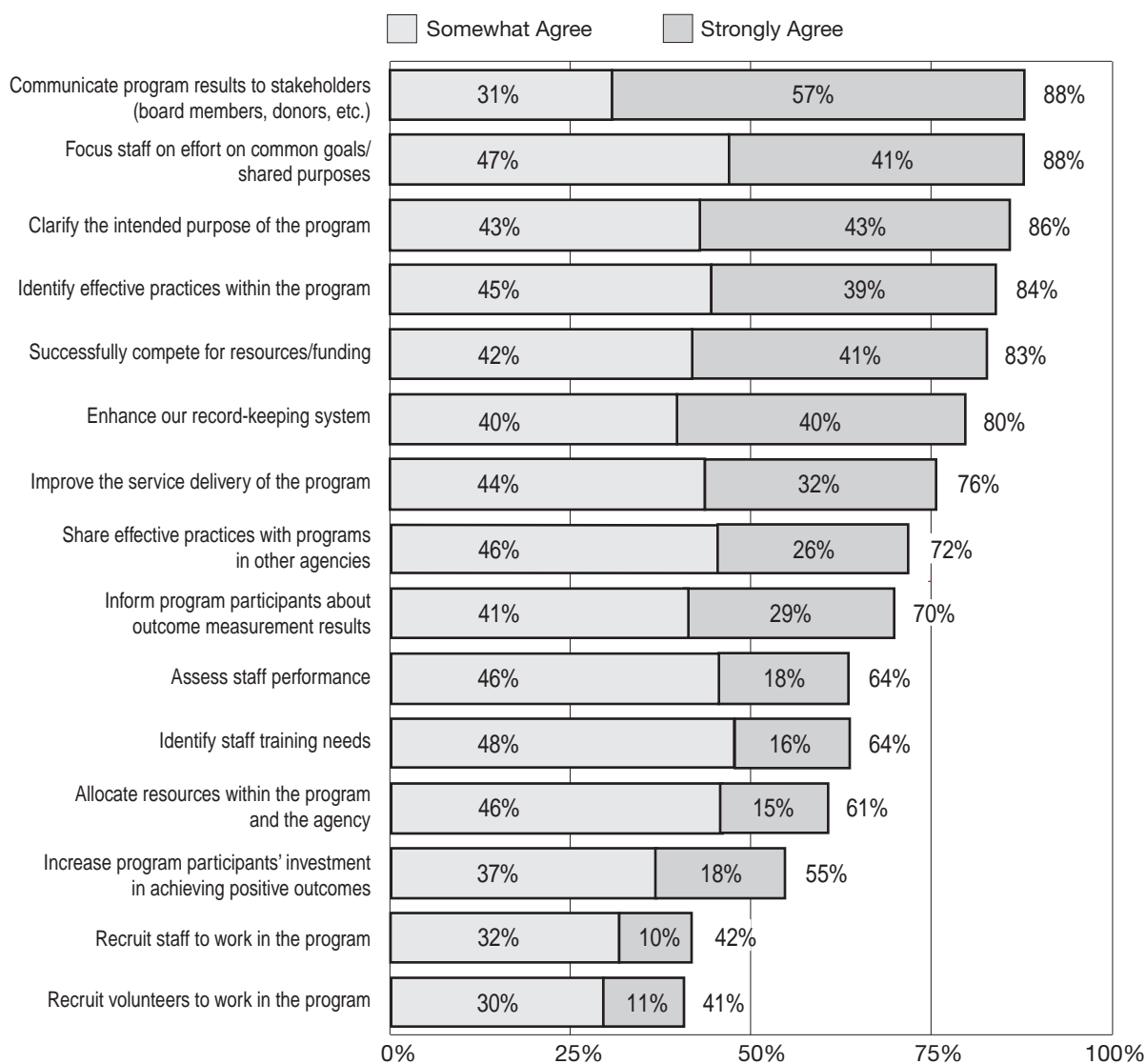
The base for calculating percentage excludes "No Basis to Judge/Not Applicable" responses.

294 responses, 4 non-responses.

More than four-fifths of respondents indicated that United Way had prompted implementation of program outcome measurement, and three-fifths attributed impetus to sources internal to the agency (i.e., professional leadership and/or staff). Many respondents reported that prompting had come from more than one party.

Figure E

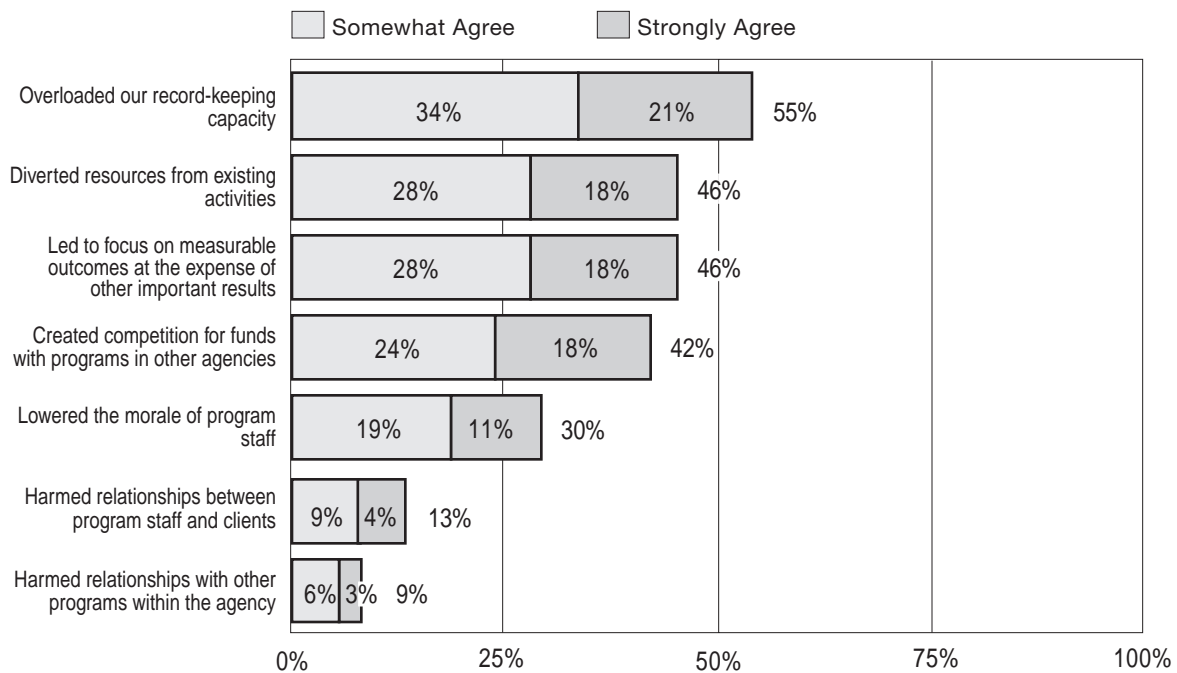
Implementing Program Outcome Measurement Has Helped Us To . . .



Source: Program Director Questionnaire 4, UWA NLP Evaluation, James Bell Associates, 11/99. The base for calculating percentage excludes "No Basis to Judge/Not Applicable" responses. 298 responses.

Respondents agreed that implementing program outcome measurement was helpful, particularly in the areas of communicating program results (88%), focusing staff effort on common goals and purposes (88%), clarifying the purpose of the program (86%), identifying effective practices (84%), and successfully competing for resources/funding (83%). In addition, there was agreement on its helpfulness in enhancing record-keeping systems (80%), and improving the service delivery of the program (76%).

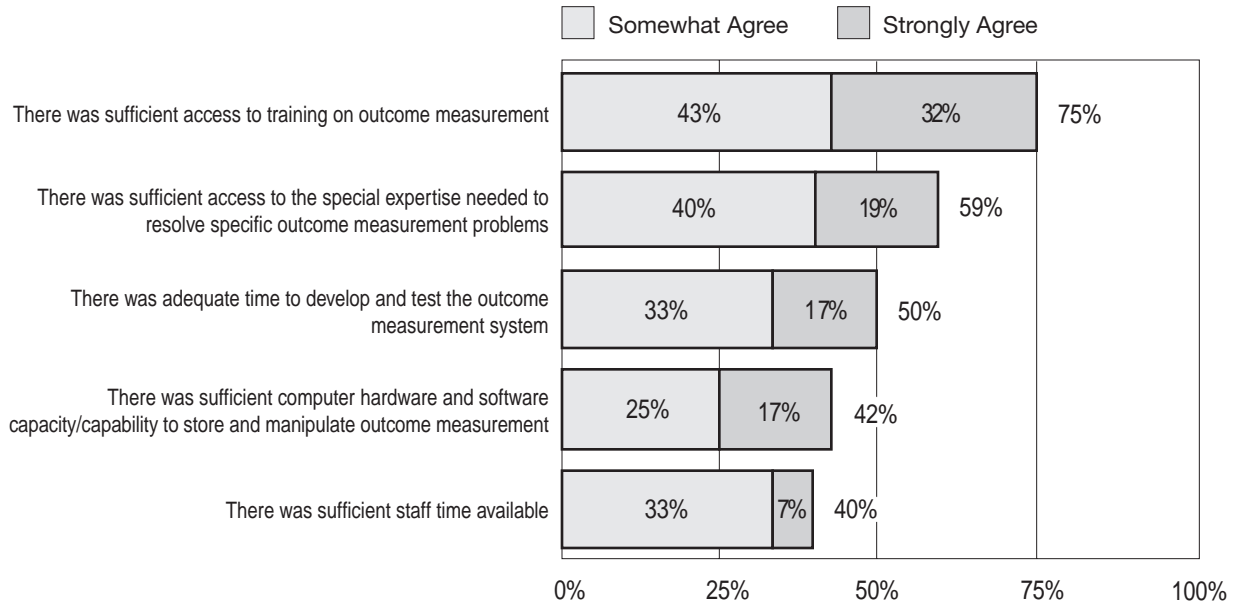
Figure F
Implementing Program Outcome Measurement Has . . .



Source: Program Director Questionnaire, Question 5, UWA NLP Evaluation, James Bell Associates, 11/99. The base for calculating percentages excludes "No Basis to Judge/Not Applicable" responses. 298 responses.

With regard to the negative effects of implementing program outcome measurement, more than half of the respondents agreed that implementing program outcome measurement had overloaded their record-keeping capacity (55%). Respondents were somewhat likely to report that implementing program outcome measurement caused resources to be diverted from existing activities (46%), led to a focus on measurable outcomes at the expense of other important results (46%), and created competition for funds with programs in other agencies (42%). Respondents were less likely to agree that implementing program outcome measurement lowered the morale of program staff (30%).

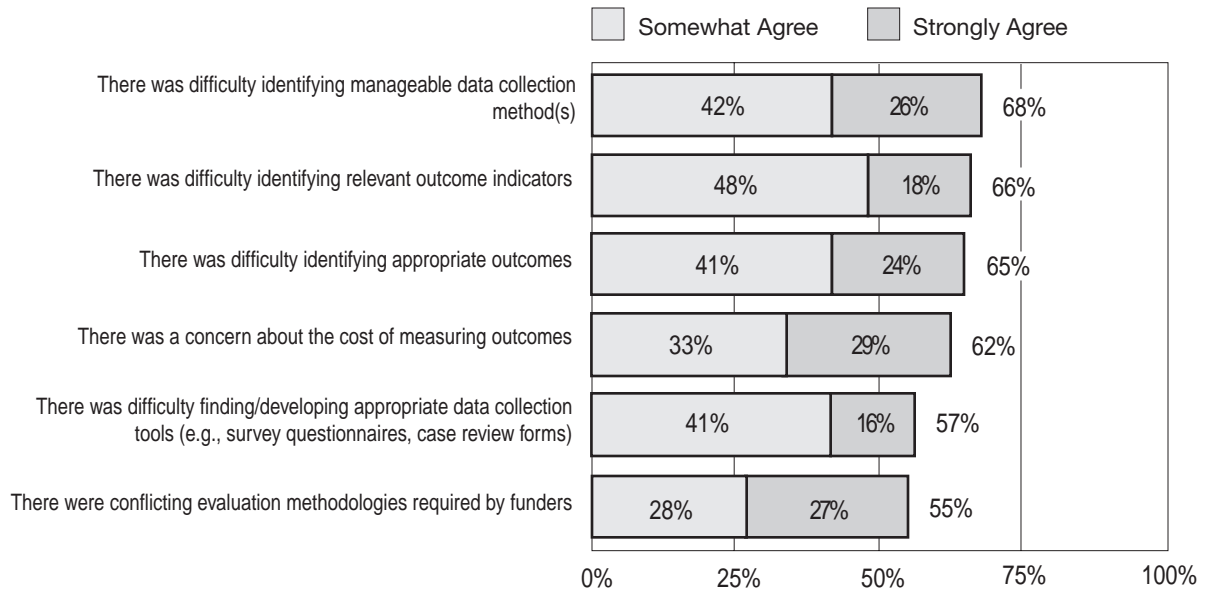
Figure G-1
Presence of Supports for Measuring Program Outcomes



Source: Program Director Questionnaire, Question 6, UWA NLP Evaluation, James Bell Associates, 11/99. The base for calculating percentages excludes "No Basis to Judge/Not Applicable" responses. 297 responses, 1 non-response.

A majority of respondents agreed that there had been sufficient access to training on outcome measurement (75%) and to special expertise to solve specific problems (59%). However, in other areas (e.g., computer hardware and software and staff time), responses indicated that resources were insufficient or inadequate for a majority of programs.

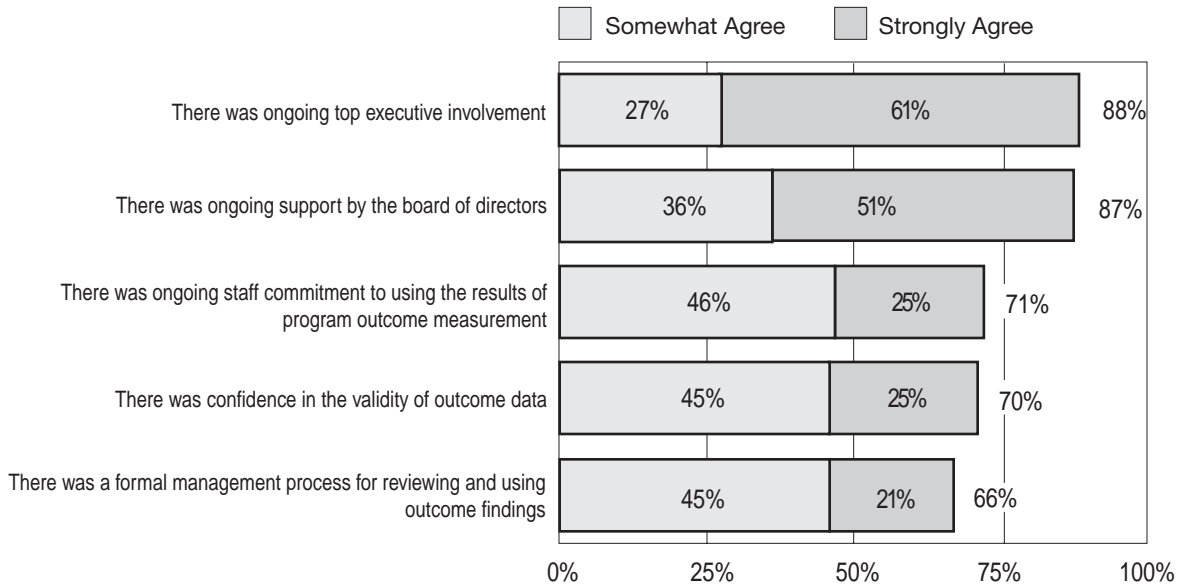
Figure G-2
Presence of Barriers to Measuring Program Outcomes



Source: Program Director Questionnaire, Question 6, UWA NLP Evaluation, James Bell Associates, 11/99. The base for calculating percentages excludes "No Basis to Judge/Not Applicable" responses. 297 responses, 1 non-response.

More than half of respondents experienced difficulty or concern in six areas related to measuring program outcomes. Two-thirds reported difficulty with identification of manageable data collection methods (68%), identification of relevant outcome indicators (66%), and identification of appropriate outcomes (65%).

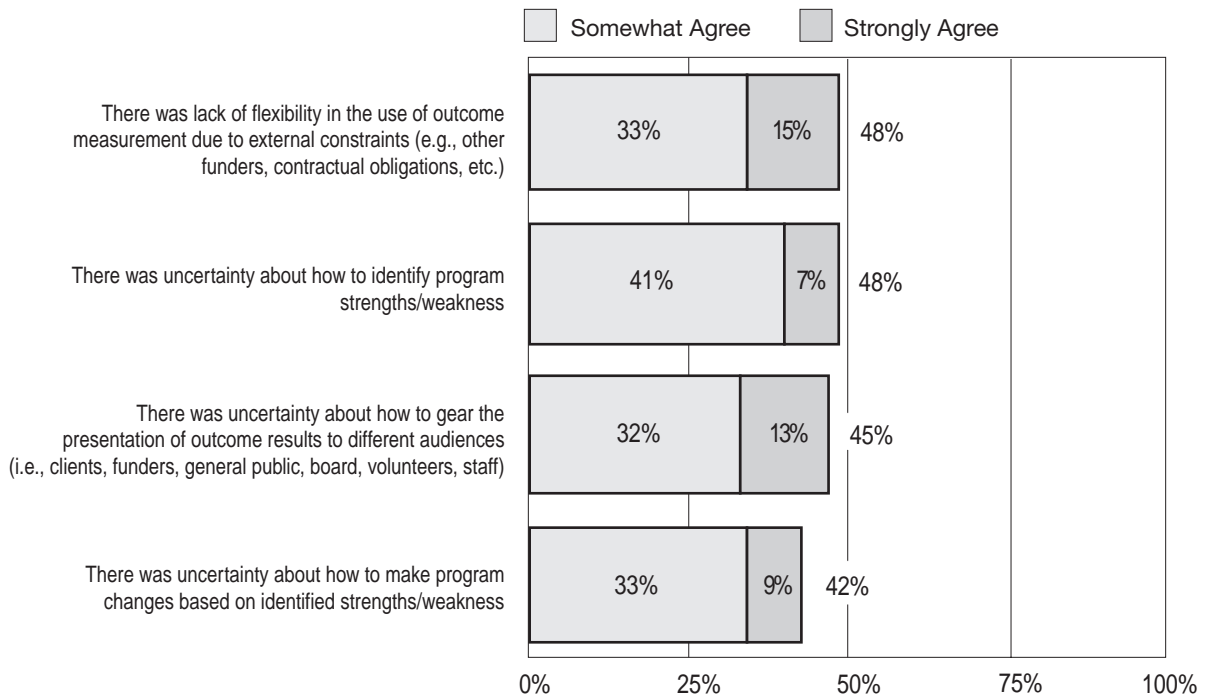
Figure H-1
Presence of Supports for Using Program Outcome Findings



Source: Program Director Questionnaire, Question 7, UWA NLP Evaluation, James Bell Associates, 11/99. The base for calculating percentages excludes "No Basis to Judge/Not Applicable" responses. 297 responses, 1 non-response.

In considering supports for using program outcome findings, the vast majority of respondents (88%) agreed there had been ongoing top executive involvement. Other areas of high agreement included ongoing support by the board of directors (87%) and confidence in the validity of outcome data (70%).

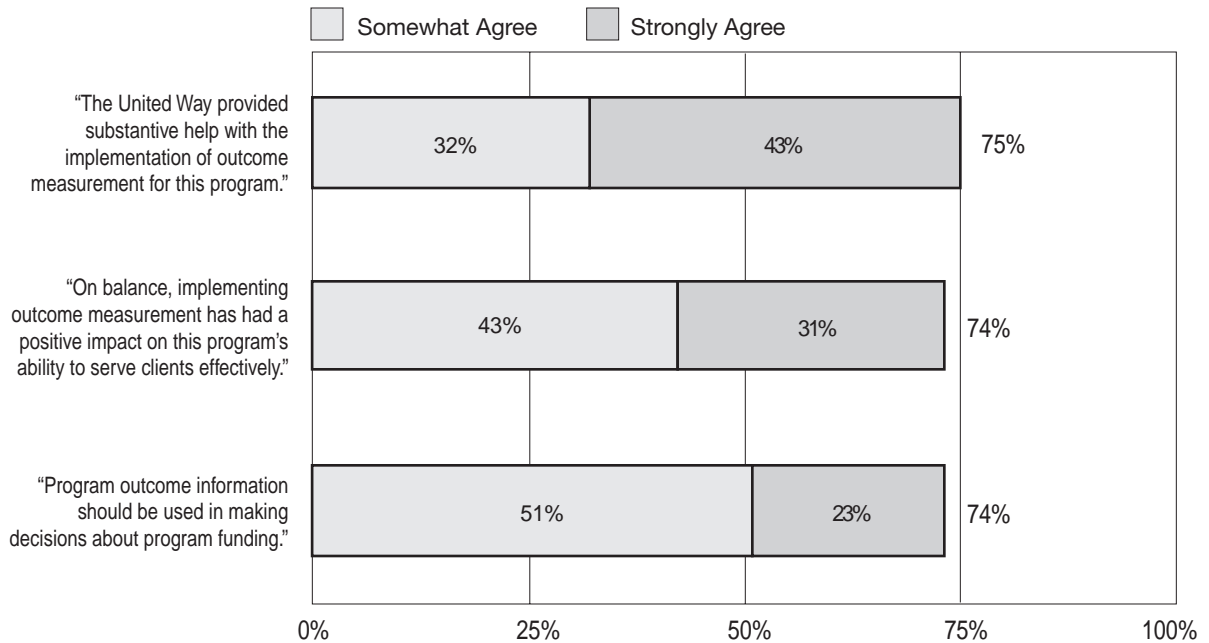
Figure H-2
Presence of Barriers to Using Program Outcome Findings



Source: Program Director Questionnaire, Question 7, UWA NLP Evaluation, James Bell Associates, 11/99. The base for calculating percentages excludes "No Basis to Judge/Not Applicable" responses. 297 responses, 1 non-response.

Concerning barriers to using program outcome findings, about half of all respondents agreed that there was uncertainty or a lack of flexibility with regard to certain aspects of using program outcome measurement.

Figure I
**Summative Statements About
 Program Outcome Measurement**

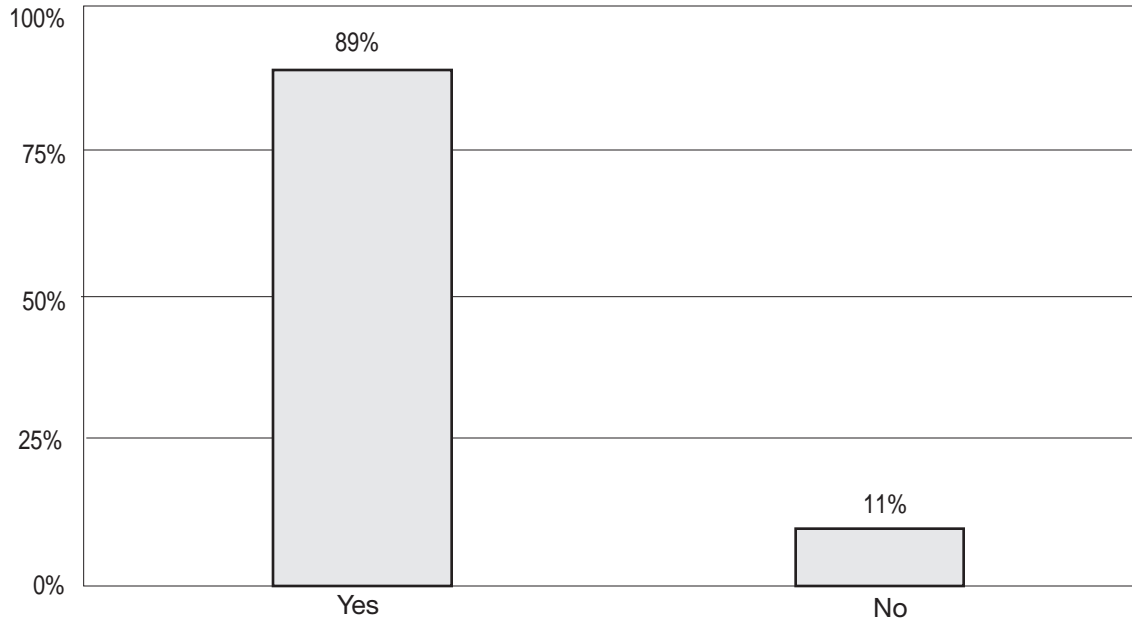


Source: Program Director Questionnaire, Questions 8, 9, 10, UWA NLP Evaluation, James Bell Associates, 11/99. The base for calculating percentages excludes "No Basis to Judge/Not Applicable" responses. 297 responses, 1 non-response.

Three-quarters of respondents agreed with summative statements about three aspects of implementing program outcome measurement.

Figure J

“Would you recommend to the director of a similar program that he/she consider implementing program outcome measurement?”



Source: Program Director Questionnaire, Question 11, UWA NLP Evaluation, James Bell Associates, 11/99. 285 responses, 13 non-responses.

Nine of every 10 respondents indicated they would recommend that other program directors consider implementing program outcome measurement.

This report and information about other
outcome measurement resources may be downloaded from
United Way of America's Outcome Measurement Resource Network at
www.unitedway.org/outcomes/

Printed copies of this report may be purchased for
\$1.00 each plus shipping and handling from
Sales Service/America, (703) 212-6300. Item Number 0196.