MACC

Supporting Service Providers throughout the Twin Cities Area

The Metropolitan Alliance of Connected Communities (MACC) is a nonprofit network of nearly 60 human service organizations in the Twin Cities metropolitan area of Minnesota. MACC provides quality, affordable, shared administrative services, and connects their members to resources, knowledge, and capacity building so they can navigate typical challenges faced by human service organizations. Members represent a rich and diverse spectrum of human services, including food shelves, housing organizations, youth organizations, and much more.

MACC provides consulting; advocacy; data services; infrastructure services such as IT, HR, finance; and insurance billing for member agencies. MACC leverages the connections across its membership to act as a vehicle for collective action and strengthen the collective voice of nonprofit human service organizations in Minnesota.

This network is held together not just through administration, but through personal relationships. MACC understands that organizations are made of people, and people are more than names and numbers on a page. MACC staff act as an extension of their members' teams, connecting personally with staff to get to know the unique needs of each organization, and share knowledge across member organizations.

For MACC's Data Services team, Data Consultants are the primary point of contact for members' own data administrators, creating a team framework that members can rely on to ask data questions, get advice, and delegate database changes needed for programming. If a member's data administration leaves their organization, they can rely on MACC's Data Consultant to help train-in their replacement and help fill in knowledge gaps, helping to create continuity for the member and sustainability for decision making and advancement at the organization. Member data administrators also form MACC's Data Network, a cohort of member data administrators who meet monthly to wrestle through data strategies, share best practices and co-create models of data governance for nonprofits that are shared across the network.

New organizations are onboarded over the course of 6–18 months, depending on the size of the member organization, their growth capacity, their preparedness, etc. MACC tailors its approach to onboarding, meeting organizations where they are, learning their unique strengths and challenges, and customizing their support to best fit the member's needs.

With ClientTrack, they can create a flexible onboarding pipeline that prioritizes member need, allowing MACC to serve as the engine that drives community care coordination.

"Our mission is to make collaboration real. We leverage the collective wisdom and power of our network of human service nonprofits to develop new structures and solutions in order to solve complex problems and build a more equitable society."

MACC MISSION STATEMENT

"We see ourselves as a catalyst, the fibers that connect our members to each other. We're constantly putting our heads together and trying to understand our collective challenges."

ALICIA RANNEY
Vice President of Data and Evaluation Services

KEY PERSONNEL

ALICIA RANNEY
Vice President of Data and Evaluation Services

Alicia has been with MACC since 2012. Alicia provides department direction on new projects, supports team development, new member inquiries and member capacity building on program evaluation and organizational learning. She has a background in Social Work, social justice. Prior to MACC, she worked in program development, evaluation, and leadership development in human services.

ADAM COWING
Director of Data Services

Adam joined MACC in 2013. In his role, Adam consults with a roster of MACC's larger members. He also supports team development and leads MACC's integration projects with ClientTrack and other databases. Adam was a key collaborator for helping to build MACC's Data Quality framework and was a lead facilitator for the MACC Data Network for many years. His background in database development and nonprofits gives him a unique perspective to help drive member success.

MACC: A History

The Metropolitan Alliance of Connected Communities formed in 1999, as a collaboration between settlement house organizations in Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN. During that time, the organization found itself in the middle of a massive shift in government funding for nonprofit human services. Nonprofits were grappling with a massive shortfall of resources and a divestment in funding full operating costs of human services.

In the face of collective challenges, leaders challenged themselves to think differently about how they could share resources, encourage strategic alignments among their staff and programs, and explore getting scale in the marketplace together. As a result of their trust-building and courageous exploration, they were able to begin to build an organizational structure that united them. This included creating a shared HR staff, finance and accounting staff, and investing in an Executive Director. With this infrastructure, they began to address the issue of what nonprofits needed to survive in this spartan environment. In 2007, this operating alliance became a legally recognized 501c3 called MACC Commonwealth.

At the time, most organizations were still recording data on paper. In addition to being very time-intensive, this put the data at risk for being misplaced or taken out of the organization.

This also created an environment where data was siloed even within an organization. Clients would need to submit separate intakes for every program and each program kept separate data records. Developing an organization database has high costs. There is the cost of the database itself, the hours to develop it with a contractor, costs of training staff, and migrating information from other data sources. There are also the costs of maintenance. If a database is not flexible, adaptable and able to grow with the organization, it very quickly goes out of date.

Traditionally, an organization would independently invest in a database and carry all the costs and risks involved in each decision along the way. The organization would bear the risk of critical knowledge loss due to common staff turnover and the cost of lost time to hire and train new staff.

MACC organizations took a step back and collaborated to really understand what strengthening their data strategy would really take- their approach to evaluation, the people resources they'd need, and the infrastructure they'd need. Through this process, they landed on an important conclusion: MACC could be the vehicle to house and support a centralized database. This would allow member organizations to digitize and automate laborious manual data intake, maintain a secure data model for each organization, allow for quicker implementations, and allow MACC to identify trends and shared needs across organizations.

> It isn't just data entry. There's a person behind every piece of information our members work with every day.
>
> **ALICIA RANNEY**

MACC needed a database that was ...

SCALABLE

EASY TO IMPLEMENT

ABLE TO PROVIDE DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY

To accomplish this, the database needed to be scalable in its design and hosting to be able to accommodate new requirements and additional members as the network grew. It also needed to be able to meet the needs of an incredibly diverse set of human service programs and services across the network.

Of course, taking such a step had great risks. MACC was still a small collection of nonprofits in a time of particularly limited resources. A database of the sort the MACC network required was expensive, and they needed assurance that their investment would pay off.

In 2007, MACC searched for solutions that fit their needs and conducted an RFP process that included database solutions from across North America- through that robust and collaborative process, they explored ClientTrack as an option. ClientTrack provided everything they were looking for: organizations were able to digitize and integrate past data, going from paper records and Excel spreadsheets to a single, shared database. One of the most important factors in the decision centered around ClientTrack's security model. The flexible, role-based model allowed

MACC to structure data access around the roles and workgroups of each individual member organization.

ClientTrack provided the scalability needed to bring new organizations on board, and the flexibility to meet the unique and diverse needs of each new member—the ability to add new forms, workflows, roles, and other structures to accommodate the wide range of MACC organizations.

There were bumps along the road. Two of the four original organizations dropped out, but by 2010, two more organizations were added. By the end of 2012, another four organizations joined. By the end of 2013, six more new members joined. From then until 2018, an average of four organizations joined each year. Then the growth rate slowed to a more steady and sustainable rate of one or two organizations per year from 2020 to present. Today, MACC's Data Services has 40 member subscribers, MACC Membership is close to 60 members strong, and the network supports nonprofit human services organizations throughout the Twin Cities and the greater metropolitan area.

Challenges and Successes

1 ClientTrack: Case Management

With a centralized case management system, MACC is able to limit duplicative work and reduce the burden on both case managers and the people they serve. Having one point of truth simplifies the work significantly: a case manager can open a client's file and see immediately every program they're enrolled in, access all case notes pertaining to them, and see all recent assessments. This not only reduces the chances of repeated data entry, but also saves the client from having to retell their story over and over again.

2 ClientTrack: Flexibility and Reporting

While MACC's organizations overlap in many sectors (food, housing, youth, etc.), they are not carbon copies of their work. Nonprofits have the unique opportunity to innovate and meet cultural needs of the communities they belong to, and their database should offer them unique features to meet those needs. Additionally, each organization also has its own set of funders, government contracts, and invested parties that require a unique set of compliance requirements. With so many differing needs and requirements, ClientTrack's flexibility across workflows, workgroups, and reporting made it possible to leverage a single platform to meet a wide and diverse variety of vary unique organizational needs.

Challenges and Successes ···

ClientTrack: Flexibility and Reporting (continued)

One major strength of ClientTrack for MACC is its workflows. With the variety of core workflows for intake, program enrollment, and more, MACC is able to "plug and play" different workflow steps to help manage processes across all (over 600) of its programs across all member organizations. Rather than develop a new workflow for each, one could mix and match existing workflow steps, giving MACC the agility and efficiency necessary to meet the data collection needs of its members.

> Members have given us complicated Excel spreadsheets and hand tallied notes that they have used to painstakingly enter and tally up information across multiple client impact areas. We are able to support them to leverage a Data Explorer report that pulls all the same information in a fraction of the time.
>
> **ADAM COWING**

Another major strength is Data Explorer. Beyond the standard reports for each vertical, Data Explorer allows authorized users to drag and drop the data they want to look up in the database without requiring strong knowledge of SQL or data science. Data Explorer makes it possible for organizations to run ad hoc reports without extensive training, and most importantly, without compromising the privacy and security of any other member organization. The data of all organizations is stored in ClientTrack, but can be partitioned so that only members of a given organization can query that organization's data. MACC is proud to share with members that all data going into ClientTrack can come out for reporting.

> In some cases, members have tearfully told us that we took what had been a 20-hour process and made it happen in less than five minutes.
>
> **ALICIA RANNEY**

With these tools, MACC was able to provide critical support to member organizations, help them transition from paper records to digital, and create a "Reporting Season Survival Guide" to help organizations through the challenges that come with required reporting to a variety of stakeholders, including government agencies.

Challenges and Successes ·······························

3 Community Building

Long term collaborative relationships are not easy and, without adequate care, can fall apart. For member organizations taking the risk of a different model like MACC can be intimidating. For the collaborative to work, it needs to bring together organizations with different needs and priorities, and uplift shared challenges they can tackle together while balancing many diverse points of view. MACC has succeeded in bringing together a coalition of dozens.

For MACC, the first success worth noting is that we exist.

ALICIA RANNEY

One of MACC's strengths is in the community it fosters, both in supporting members and in providing a forum for collaboration. Working together, members help each other and overcome feelings of isolation and lack of support. "Our data network provides a cohort and collective identity as human service organizations. They know that with MACC, they're not in it alone," says Alicia Ranney.

With this community, MACC facilitates collaborative brainstorming. Members can share their solutions to problems they face, so the practitioner experience of the group can benefit everyone. Together, they can identify best practices, crowdsourcing their best ideas and enriching the entire member alliance.

4 Data Justice

MACC Data Services began with just four organizations; by 2015, there were 22 members. While MACC's Data Team grew with its membership and ClientTrack evolved to meet new member needs, over these early years shared challenges persisted: staff capacity and resources, data quality concerns, and challenges with meeting funders' every shift in compliance requirements. MACC sought to address these issues through improved processes and user training. The Data Network collaboratively helped to create a Data Quality tool outlining four pillars for high quality data to support member decision making on how to tackle common data quality challenges. Things improved, but as time went on, it became clear that only so much could be resolved through training and process improvements. Tensions around data collection and reporting persisted, and contradictions emerged between what funders and stakeholders demanded of member organizations and what members could actually collect about their programs.

To find a more effective path forward and resolve these contradictions, the MACC data team and the member Data Network drew inspiration from other national and international thought leaders and adopted a human services approach to uplift data justice.

WHAT IS DATA JUSTICE

Data justice is about building equity into all aspects of our data practices. It's a framework for promoting data practices that uphold truth, learning, consent, and accountability. Data justice weighs the benefits and harms of our practices, so that data is entirely in service of the individuals and communities they represent.

Challenges and Successes ·······································

Data Justice (Continued)

MACC began to ask questions about their data: Whose data is this? Who bears responsibility for asking these questions? Why are these questions being asked—are they serving any useful purpose? "When we started asking," says Adam, "we started hearing answers like, 'Well, this is the way it's always been done,' or, 'You know, we don't really know.'"

MACC began to implement a data justice-centered approach, and in 2021 built a data justice working group among interested member organizations. Together, they established two core assumptions:

1 **Data have costs.** Every piece of data you collect costs something. Some of those costs are borne by the participant, some are borne by staff, some are borne by the data administrator. But somebody has to pay.

For example, a survivor of domestic violence must relive their traumatic experiences when they share them with case workers; the case worker also experiences an emotional burden with capturing that data. That experience impacts trust building, and costs the survivor and staff time and resources.

2 **Data should be useful.** Data must serve a specific use that will further the mission of the organization and the interests of the participants.

For example, if there are questions put to a survivor of domestic violence about their experiences that do not serve any useful purpose, there is no need to incur the cost of the question.

With this foundation, the data justice cohort began to interrogate data collection practices, sort out useful or required data from junk data, and stratify data collection by cost from cheapest to most expensive. Based on these findings, MACC and its members can assess their data collection practices to provide a better experience, alleviate burdens for clients and case workers, reduce unnecessary administrative overhead, and ensure that the data collected is worth collecting.

Next Steps for MACC

What does the future hold for MACC? Their primary goals are to continue to uplift data justice, increase client access to their own data and support member organizations in better communications with their clients:

THINKING WITH PORTALS

A key feature MACC hopes to roll out with Eccovia is an expanded ClientTrack portal functionality, where different organizations can have unique portals that allow clients to be able to access their own information and self-manage their own information.

THIRD-PARTY INTEGRATIONS

Additionally, MACC is participating in a pilot program for ClientTrack's integration with Twilio. With this third-party integration, case managers will be able to leverage ClientTrack-Twilio integration to be communicate directly with clients to more quickly meet needs. In addition MACC hopes this expanded feature set will also allow member organizations to send mass texts about critical information and resources available in the community, and also text links that allow clients an opportunity to share direct feedback about program quality via surveys.

To learn more about the incredible work MACC is accomplishing for its members, check out their website at **macc-mn.org**. And if you'd like to learn more about the ClientTrack platform and how it can help your organization better serve the people in your community, reach out to us at **sales@eccovia.com** to schedule a demo.