

Measuring What Matters

Turning Services
Into Outcomes

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Measuring What Matters: Turning Services Into Outcomes

In DV/SA and anti-trafficking work, services are happening every day. Housing may be coordinated. Referrals could be made. Support is provided.

When it comes time to report on that work, direct service providers are asked to show change. This is where many organizations feel the tension. How do they make the connection between the work they are doing and the outcomes they are expected to demonstrate?

The Growing Focus on Outcomes

Funding in this space has evolved. It's no longer enough to show what services were provided. Increasingly, funders are asking organizations to demonstrate impact:

- How many individuals achieved stable housing?
- How many secured employment?
- How many engaged in long-term services?

These are important questions. They reflect a desire to understand whether the work is making a difference. However, they also introduce new challenges, especially in a field where progress is not always linear or easily measurable.

The Gap Between Services and Outcomes

Most organizations are already doing the work that leads to outcomes. They are supporting survivors through complex, long-term journeys. They are coordinating services, building trust, and helping individuals move toward stability.

However, translating that work into measurable outcomes is not always straightforward, because services happen in moments and outcomes develop over time. Connecting the two requires more than documentation. It requires intentional structure.

When Metrics Don't Match Reality

Many outcome frameworks are built around clear, defined endpoints: housed, employed, completed program, etc. But the reality of this work is more nuanced. A survivor may:

- Secure housing and then need to relocate
- Begin employment and then face new barriers
- Engage in services intermittently over time

This is a normal, expected part of survivor psychology due to exposure to the cycle

of abuse. If we only measure final outcomes, we risk missing the progress that happens along the way. And if we rely on rigid definitions, we may unintentionally oversimplify the work.

Real-World Progress Looks Different

In practice, progress might look like:

- Returning after a period of disengagement
- Maintaining temporary housing
- Attending multiple appointments
- Rebuilding trust with a service provider

These steps are part of the path toward long-term stability, but they don't always fit neatly into traditional outcome categories.

The Challenge of Tracking What Matters

Many organizations face a practical challenge: Even when they know what matters, they don't have an easy way to track it. Information may be spread across case notes, spreadsheets, or different systems. Connections between services and outcomes may not be clearly documented.

Over time, this makes it harder to:

- Report accurately
- Demonstrate impact
- Advocate for continued funding

While the outcomes are there, they may not be fully visible.

Rethinking How We Measure Impact

Measuring outcomes, especially in anti-trafficking work, requires a shift in perspective. Rather than just capturing final results, it requires understanding the relationship between services and progress over time. That means:

- Tracking services in a structured way
- Connecting those services to *evolving* outcomes
- Allowing for *non-linear* progress
- Recognizing *incremental* change

It also means building systems that support this as part of the work itself.

Recognizing the Importance of Data Storytelling

As expectations around outcomes continue to grow, organizations are being asked to tell a more complete story of their impact: not just what was done but what changed and why it matters.

At Vela, we believe that story should already exist within the work. It shouldn't require additional effort to uncover. When services, progress, and outcomes are connected, data becomes more than a reporting requirement. It becomes a way to clearly and confidently show the impact of the work.

Funders don't just need numbers. They need context. They need to understand how services lead to stability, how progress unfolds over time, and how lives are meaningfully changed. That's what data storytelling makes possible.

In a field where progress is often gradual and non-linear, being able to tell that story (clearly and accurately) matters.

We Support Your Work

Vela was designed to help organizations capture the complexity of this work without losing sight of the people behind the data.

Our goal-setting module helps advocates document survivor-defined goals and track progress over time, creating space for outcomes that reflect each survivor's priorities rather than a one-size-fits-all definition of success. As goals evolve, organizations can continue documenting progress, changes, and the services that support that journey.

Because Vela keeps information connected over time, organizations can also see a more complete picture of a survivor's experience. Services, activities, goals, and outcomes don't have to live in separate spreadsheets or disconnected records. They can become part of an ongoing story that recognizes progress may pause, shift, or take a different direction along the way.

And when it is time to report on that work, our one-click reporting helps turn the information teams are already

documenting into meaningful insights without adding another major administrative burden. Organizations can more easily demonstrate services provided, identify patterns, and communicate the impact of their work to funders, leadership, boards, and community partners.

Our goal is to make the data already being gathered more useful to advocates, to organizations, and ultimately to the communities they serve.

Be Part of Shaping the Technology You Use

Your organization's needs continue to evolve, and Vela is designed to evolve alongside you. If there are ways we could better support your data collection and reporting needs, we welcome your feedback. Your insight helps shape a system grounded in the realities of survivor services.

New to Vela?

Vela was built to help organizations document the work, recognize the progress, and tell a more complete story of impact.

If you are exploring a more thoughtful approach to data collection and reporting, we'd love to show you how Vela could support your mission.

Book a demo with a member of our team.

Want to learn new ways to simplify your work or explore features you may not be using yet? Visit veladirect.com or reach out to our team. We're always here to help.



Developed with input from advocates at every stage, Vela by Element 74 is a trauma-informed case management and reporting platform built specifically for domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking organizations.

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