Information Mapping for Databases

Database mapping is a way to identify the basic structure of your database. It is like creating a blueprint or a floor plan of your database. It will help you identify from whom you want to gather information and what data you need to collect. This information will help you or a consultant understand what information you need and the best fields that will help you capture that information in your database.

1) Consider your organization and your work

It is often easiest for us to think about our organization or work in pieces or areas of work. You are likely to have ways you already divide up your work and organization but some examples include areas like:

Communications, Administration, Membership, Campaigns, Fundraising, Research and Analysis

These areas of work provide a convenient way to think about the information you need in your database to support your work.

2) Defining who and what you need to know-creating the map

Once you have divided you work into clear pieces, the next task is to understand who/what it is important to know about and then to determine what information you need to know.

It is easiest for some to take each work area one by one asking the following questions:

- Who/what is it important for you to track? (Who are your main audiences/institutional partners/important constituents? What issues do you need to research/analyze?)
- What do you need to know about them to best accomplish your work?

Example: So considering an area of work such as communications, you may identify media contacts as a key tracking category. You may then decide that you need some specific information about your media contacts such as contact information (name, address, phone number, etc . . .) preferred contact method (fax, mail, etc…), beat, issues areas, past articles, etc…

You will want to take each work area and determine your main tracking category (or people/things to track) and then identify the information you need to know about each. When you are finished you will have a long list of categories and the information you want to track about each.

3) Prioritize the map

Based on your capacity and your organizational priorities, you will need to prioritize your tracking categories and information you need to know about each. Focus on categories and information that are most important to your work and are possible to collect information about. Get agreement from a range of staff and leaders. If you have too many tracking categories and too much information about each, it will be hard to maintain and can end up getting disorganized quickly.

4) Use the map to shape your database

Give this mapping work to the staff or consultant working on your database. It will be very useful to them as they work to develop or revise your database. It will ensure your database reflects what is important for you to know. It will allow them to create specific fields in your database that reflect what you need to know about whom. It will also help you add new sections and fields to your database as you determine new needs.