CASE STUDY / PROGRAM EVALUATION

Connecting program objectives to evidence people can use

A measurement framework, data model and reporting workflow for Common Compass.

FOR	Nonprofits and program evaluators
CLIENT	Common Compass, an Ontario registered charity
ROLE	Research advisor through Data For Good, Summer 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A common measurement framework made program evidence clearer and easier to use

THE SITUATION

Surveys had grown complex across 16 program modules and three audiences, with no formal data model behind them, so insight was hard to reach. Facilitators sometimes saw results at the same moment as the schools they were debriefing. Analysis depended on R skills the organization did not have.

THE RESPONSE

Audited program objectives and learning outcomes, defined the constructs to measure, mapped them to survey items, and built a common core with tailored modules. Designed the analytical data model and automated results emails and debrief slides.

THE VALUE

A traceable link from program intent to evidence, a repeatable reporting workflow that staff run themselves, and an analytical foundation for broader evaluation and funding conversations.

The central contribution: rigorous measurement design connected to the moments when people need evidence.

BACKGROUND

One organization, several audiences

Common Compass partners with schools and youth organizations to strengthen young people's social-emotional wellbeing and mental health, and to help communities promote belonging and inclusion. Mental health and education professionals tailor workshops, training and retreats to each community.

The engagement was delivered as a volunteer research advisor through Data For Good, which pairs data professionals with Canadian nonprofits. Common Compass identified measurement design as the largest part of the work.

Audience	Modules	Measures
Students	6	Audience-appropriate wording
Parents and caregivers	6	Audience-appropriate wording
Educators and staff	4	Audience-appropriate wording

Breadth of programming required evidence that stayed relevant to each audience while supporting one consistent organizational story.

Module counts reflect the reviewed evaluation model, not the full current service catalogue.

THE CHALLENGE

Complex surveys without a data model made insight hard to reach

MEASUREMENT

Questions without a clear purpose or a structure behind them

Survey content varied across programs and question quality was mixed. With no formal data model linking responses to programs, audiences, sessions and constructs, results could not be compared across programs or explained consistently, and staff struggled to connect findings to objectives for funding reviews.

ACCESS

Results that arrived late and depended on one skill set

Preparing results took substantial effort, and analysis in R depended on programming skills the organization did not have on staff. Delays meant facilitators sometimes encountered findings at the same time as schools, with little chance to interpret them and prepare for the conversation.

The task: create coherent measures, give every response its context, and make the evidence accessible throughout the reporting process.

Every survey item needed a reason to be there

01	→	02	→	03	→	04
Program objective		**Learning outcome**		**Construct**		**Survey item**
Support constructive responses to conflict		Recognize how to calm down when upset		Emotional self-regulation		“When I feel angry or upset, I know how to calm myself down.”

An audit of program objectives and learning outcomes identified the changes worth measuring. An outcomes-based framework, informed by program logic models, translated these into constructs and survey items. The model records what each item measures, why it belongs and when to ask it. Wording reviews addressed clarity and audience suitability, with overlapping items flagged.

Staff can trace any question back to the outcome it evaluates.

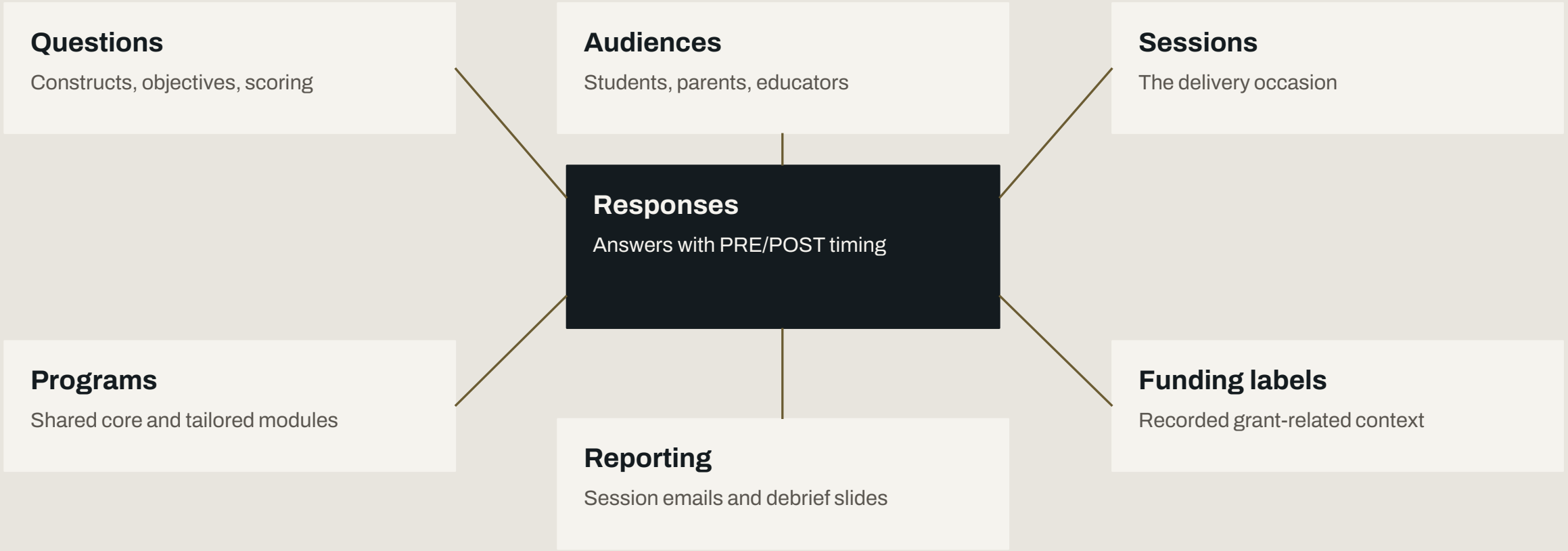
Shared measures connected the portfolio while tailored modules kept relevance

Measurement layer	Students	Parents and caregivers	Educators and staff
Common core	Connection, support awareness, intention to apply learning	Connection, support awareness, intention to apply learning	Connection, support awareness, intention to apply learning
Shared topic measures	Resilience, across selected programs	Emotional influence, across selected programs	Emotional influence, across selected programs
Tailored modules	Academic achievement, leadership, mental health	Stress, social media, bullying	DEI, relationships, trauma-informed teaching

One five-point agreement scale and consistent scoring give every module the same analytical structure. Audience-appropriate wording and PRE/POST placement keep questions relevant and purposeful.

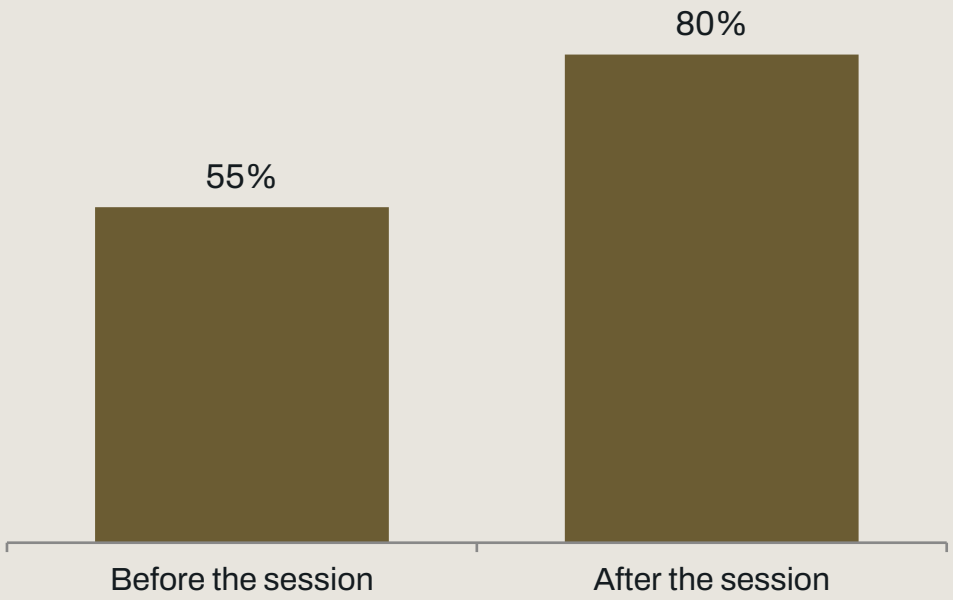
ACTION 03 / DATA MODEL

The data model gave every response its context



Conceptual map of the analytical database, built in a structured workbook. Every item-level response is linked to its question, program, audience and session, with funding labels for recorded assignments.

Percentage-based indicators gave staff a shared language for results



+25 percentage points

Illustrative values, not Common Compass findings.

Top-box reports the most positive response category; top-two-box combines the two most positive, such as Agree and Strongly agree. Reverse scoring keeps positive outcomes aligned across items.

PRE and POST percentages appear with percentage-point differences, eligible sample sizes and statistical test status. Participant comments sit alongside for context.

A consistent language for outcomes, with the detail needed for responsible interpretation.

PRE and POST responses are independent samples, so differences describe change in the group, not the effect of the session on individuals.

Facilitators now see results before the school does

BEFORE

Responses analysed in R by whoever could run it, assembled into reports by hand. Facilitators and schools often saw the findings together.

AFTER

01 Collect feedback

PRE and POST responses gathered for the session.

→

02 Generate results

Staff trigger the workflow; a results email goes to the facilitator.

→

03 Review and prepare

Facilitator and program leads read generated slides and participant comments, and edits before sharing.

→

04 School debrief

A prepared presentation and a discussion of what the findings mean.

The review step is deliberate. Reporting supports preparation as well as communication, and the workflow preserves any edits made to a completed deck.

ACTION 06 / AUTOMATION

Routine reporting runs in tools the organization already owned

What the workflow does	What it replaced
Calculates top-box and top-two-box indicators, differences, sample sizes and test status for each session	R scripts that only an analyst could run
Sends a results email to the facilitator when staff trigger it	Manual assembly and distribution of results
Generates an editable school presentation with question results and participant comments	Hand-built decks for every debrief
Stores every response in a structured analytical database	Disconnected survey exports

Built in Google Workspace with Apps Script, so staff operate it without writing code. Documented definitions and analysis guidance came with the handover; more advanced evaluation can build on the same foundation when needed.

RESULT

A stronger connection between program intent, evidence and action

Original challenge	Delivered capability
Complex surveys with no data model behind them	One analytical database with every response linked to its context
Uneven survey content and unclear purpose	Defined constructs and items connected to program objectives
Results difficult to interpret across programs	Shared measures and consistent percentage-based reporting
High administration and dependence on R skills	Routine analysis, facilitator emails and slide generation in a staff workflow
Little time for facilitator preparation	Review of findings before school sharing
Weak connection to funding questions	Results linked to programs and recorded funding labels

A coherent measurement framework, supported by tools that help people use the evidence.

RESULT / EXPERTISE

A durable foundation supports the next evaluation question.

I build the measurement and reporting infrastructure that turns feedback into evidence, in tools the organization can run itself.

Evaluation architecture	Design the data model behind a multi-program evaluation.
Measurement design	Connect common and tailored measures to program objectives.
Reporting automation	Put routine analysis and reporting in the hands of staff.

Discuss your project kenjfield@gmail.com

ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY

Illustrative values on the reporting slide are not Common Compass findings.