As you get stuck in the day-to-day hustle and bustle of your work, it becomes all too easy to lose sight of the ways you can shift your practices to reach your big picture goals. Benchmarking allows you to gain a higher-level view that can inform realistic goals, while providing a framework to shift practices in meaningful ways. This kind of knowledge is power—power to expand your most successful practices and address the ones that are causing you to underperform. To embrace benchmarking as a tool to improve your work, keep these steps in mind:

Stay focused on the macro level.
Short-term reporting is important for you to regularly aggregate data, but making strategic decisions based on small fluctuations in your data can lead to shortsighted outcomes. By reviewing your performance year over year, you can take a step back and identify true trends in your performance over time. Remember that the objective of benchmarking is to improve your performance long-term, not to make immediate changes to your current practices. Look to resources like our Charitable Giving Report, offering year-over-year giving trends from the largest data set in the social good community, to gain an understanding of the macro landscape as well as your specific subsector’s performance, so you can compare your own organization’s trend lines.

Work inclusively to identify shared benchmarking goals across your organization.
Bringing all key organizational areas to the table to begin your benchmarking conversations is critical. Set a meeting to discuss benchmarking and include leaders from development, finance, programs, IT and all other areas within your organization. By including all areas, you gain a holistic view of the shared
goals across your organization, get buy-in from all areas to share metrics, and work together to benchmark your organization’s overall performance in the areas that really matter. When you are working toward goals that are truly critical to achieving your mission, you can keep the important players on board throughout the process. Read npEXPERTS: Building a Culture of Philanthropy for more tips on bringing your organization together.

Stick with a common set of metrics.
Your goal will inform which specific metrics you track over time, but it is important to keep these consistent year over year. Remember to keep a high-level context and use metrics that will reflect your true performance toward the organizational goals identified. Ensure that these metrics can be regularly and uniformly collected to easily compare the trends across long spans of time. You can also look to similar organizations in your field for ideas on which key metrics to track—using a common set will allow you to share information and benchmark across organizations as well. Our Analytics Toolkit offers tips on the types of data and analytics best practices that will help you collect the information you need to know.

Listen to your data and let it guide you.
Benchmarking is only valuable if you are willing to listen to what your data is telling you. Be ready to accept that the areas that don’t measure up may not always be those you suspected. Changing your strategy based upon benchmarking results must be an organization-wide commitment, and leadership plays a key role. Educate all teams on why data collection and benchmarking matter, so they can support the journey from where they sit, whether that be as a database administrator building the right reports or the chief development officer keeping an eye on the wider trends. For firsthand wisdom on letting your data guide you, check out “Let Go of Your Fear: Anyone Can Be Data-Driven.”

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About the Blackbaud Institute
The Blackbaud Institute drives research and insight to accelerate the impact of the social good community. It convenes expert partners from across the philanthropic sector to foster diverse perspectives, collective thinking, and collaborative solutions to the world’s greatest challenges. Using the most comprehensive data set in the social good community, the Blackbaud Institute and its partners conduct research, uncover strategic insight, and share results broadly, all in order to drive effective philanthropy at every stage, from fundraising to outcomes. Knowledge is powering the future of social good, and the Blackbaud Institute is an engine of that progress. Learn more, sign up for our newsletter, explore our knowledge base of social good best practices and trends, see the latest quarterly statistics on giving, and check out our most recent resources at www.blackbaudinstitute.com.