

How to Build Your Data Maturity Action Plan (Tools + Checklists)



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The Data Journey Isn't a Straight Line

Becoming data-driven is a priority for most credit unions today and the reasons are clear. According to consulting firm McKinsey, data-driven organizations are 23 times more likely to acquire customers, six times as likely to retain customers, and 19 times as likely to be profitable.

The data says ... use your data!

To serve today's digital-first members, most credit unions don't need convincing about why to become data-led – but how is another story. The data maturity journey isn't straightforward, and most credit unions are surprised to discover there isn't a sequential series of steps or "right way" to move forward on the journey.

In fact, thinking about the data journey as a single defined path might just be what's holding you back.

Data Maturity: A Journey with No Final Destination

Even the phrase "data maturity journey" can be a misnomer if it leads someone to believe it starts at "point A" and ends at "point B." This makes for a nice, neat visual – but in our experience, reality is much different. And, that's a good thing! Here's why.

Data-driven organizations are
23 times more likely to acquire customers,
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1. It can be overwhelming to feel a long list of steps must be taken before your credit union can even begin to use more sophisticated data analytics.
2. Every credit union is different. Even within the same credit union, data needs will be multidimensional and dynamic across the organization. As needs and goals differ, there simply won't be a template process that works universally.
3. A linear journey implies a final destination: once you reach it, you're done. Not only is this unrealistic, it can actually be detrimental. Market forces, financial conditions, trends, and behaviors are always changing. There is no set point at which all data potential has been achieved.
4. A linear path is process-based and not outcome-based. The best path for each credit union will be unique and determined by identifying goals – not working through a set series of steps and hoping you end in the right spot.
5. And last, but certainly not least, becoming data-driven isn't solely a technological shift – it's a cultural one. Being successful requires moving away from making decisions based on "gut feelings" or experience and toward new data-guided actions.

The process of becoming data-driven is less of a straight line, and more of a "choose your own adventure." Perhaps the better analogy moves from path to puzzle, where each credit union puts together the pieces of their own evolving picture.

Three Key Takeaways

- 1 **Start thinking about data as one of your chief business assets.** By communicating about it in this way, you can begin to align the entire credit union around a data-centric vision, and establish the necessary supporting processes.
- 2 **Your unique data maturity journey can be guided by the specific use cases that will address your most pressing goals or challenges.** You can start with a single project and build from there.
- 3 **Becoming “data-driven” is a mindset and not a destination.** It's a long-term undertaking that requires cultural change, but credit unions that make the commitment will discover an ongoing stream of opportunities to reap the rewards.

“ The data maturity journey isn't straightforward, and most credit unions are surprised to discover there isn't a sequential series of steps or “right way” to move forward on the journey. ”

The Four Data Pillars

Where your credit union's data journey begins depends upon your objectives. Following are descriptions of the four data pillars you will encounter along the way, and sample objectives to help identify which data pillars are priorities for your credit union.

There are no hard-and-fast rules about approaching the data pillars in a certain order.

Data Management

Data management is a framework of data disciplines that organize a credit union's data to maximize value. It creates a foundation to ensure data is accurate, up-to-date, and accessible.

This pillar is a natural starting point for credit unions that are beginning to define their data strategy, but it plays a fundamental role in every stage of the journey.

Sample objectives:

- Our credit union wants to break down silos and centralize our data.
- Our credit union needs an architecture in place to store and integrate the use of data organization-wide.
- Our credit union wants to improve data quality to obtain the best insights.



Descriptive Analytics

Descriptive analytics makes use of large amounts of historical data, providing insights into what has happened by aggregating information and summarizing the findings. It is a place to start for credit unions interested in monitoring performance and trends by tracking KPIs and other metrics.

Sample objectives:

- Our credit union wants to more deeply understand our members through data such as: acquisition channels, product usage, lifetime value, or channel preference by persona.
- Our credit union wants to understand how frequently certain events occur.
- Our credit union wants to monitor and benchmark metrics such as product performance, deposits, loan growth, or how we compare to peers.



Predictive Analytics

Predictive analytics makes predictions about the future to enable proactive decisions. Algorithms are used to identify historical trends and accurately anticipate what might happen in the future. Predictive analytics can allow credit unions to automate decision-making processes, saving time and freeing up resources that can be put to better use elsewhere.

Sample objectives:

- Our credit union wants to proactively offer members the next most relevant product or service for their financial needs.
- Our credit union wants to target the member segments likely to embrace a new product or service.
- Our credit union wants to know which members are most likely to leave our credit union in order to find ways to effectively re-engage them.



Prescriptive Analytics

Prescriptive analytics helps choose the best course of future action by advising on possible outcomes. Based on the data and scenarios analyzed, prescriptive analytics recommends specific actions and strategies by employing advanced analytical techniques.

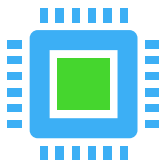
Sample objectives:

- Our credit union wants to understand the impact of product decisions, such as examining credit line increase scenarios.
- Our credit union wants to understand which member re-engagement strategies are likely to be most effective.
- Our credit union wants to proactively prepare for the impact of various economic conditions, such as rising interest rates or unemployment levels.

Six Challenges to Becoming Data-Driven

94% of companies say data and analytics are important to the growth of their company and digital transformation.

So then, why isn't every credit union – or company, for that matter – data-driven? Often, the same challenges get in the way – and they have little to do with technology. Here are six of the most common obstacles.



The common challenges to becoming data-driven have little to do with technology.

Data is not an organizational priority.

A strong desire to achieve your goals won't be enough if there's isn't buy-in from leadership. In fact, this is one of the most important factors for data-led decision-making.



Leaders need to demonstrate how they place data at the heart of what the organization is trying to achieve every day.



- Microsoft, *The role of leadership in a successful data-driven culture*

Without credit union leadership and key decision-makers in every department acting as champions, it will be difficult to convince the rest of the organization of data's importance – and even more difficult to inspire them to adopt new data-oriented processes that may be needed to succeed.

There isn't a data culture.

Most credit unions are accustomed to gathering opinions or deferring to senior leadership when it comes to making key decisions. But, if your goal is to put data at the center of decision-making, the culture at your credit union has to reflect it. The ultimate "decider" is whether a decision makes sense based on the available data.

Highly data-driven organizations are **three times** more likely to report significant improvements in decision-making compared to those who rely less on data.

This means data must be readily accessible, accurate, and actionable. This often requires cultural change that makes data central to operations and helps everyone understand their roles as data stewards.

There is no clear data strategy in place.

Collecting as much data as possible isn't the ultimate goal – it's knowing which data to collect and what to do with it. A credit union must first be clear on what it wants to achieve with its data, and it must be closely aligned with overall business objectives.



Building a data strategy is essential for organizations to stay relevant, competitive, and innovative amidst constant change.



- Amazon Web Services

An articulated data strategy identifies a goal, which data is important, how data should be collected, what metrics should be measured, and how success will be defined.

There are data silos.

Fragmented data is common, and happens when data is accumulated across different sources, departments, and channels and can't be integrated. Every data silo is left to define "its own truth" and there is no cohesive big picture of what's really happening. Data silos lead to confusion. Who's really right?

39% of organizations that identify as being highly data-driven had more than 50 data silos. - 451 Research

Standardization and consistency improves data integrity, makes sharing information across the organization easier, and determining the best course of action simpler and clearer.

Bad data is getting in the way.

There are many reasons why a credit union experiences data quality issues – incomplete, incorrect, inconsistent, duplicate, and stale data are just a few.

The cost of bad data is very real. Not only is there a bottom-line effect on revenue, but the compounding effects lead to poorer-quality data analytics, which lead to poorer-quality decisions ... which ultimately come back to hurt the bottom line.

According to research and consulting firm Gartner, poor data quality costs organizations an average **\$12.9 million**. - Gartner

Address the root causes of bad data. Instead of fixing mistakes every time you see them – find out why they are happening in the first place.

There is a lack of training.

Most credit union staff have little or no training in data science. It's a discipline that requires specialized skills, and it can be difficult to master for someone trying to add them onto a mountain of other responsibilities.

It's common to see credit unions invest heavily in technology and tools that they don't have the knowledge to use effectively. Whether data specialists are brought in-house or help is sought from outside experts, it is important to have support from technicians skilled in data management, statistical models, data analysis, visualization, and data security.

IT executives see the talent shortage as the most significant adoption barrier to **64%** of emerging technologies. - Gartner

Six Best Practices of Data-Driven Credit Unions

The year 2025 is not far off, and yet that's when consulting firm McKinsey predicts that in the business world, employees will use [data to optimize nearly every aspect](#) of their work.

Some credit unions are already there. How are these forward-looking credit unions winning the day with data?

It turns out, they have a few things in common. Here are the key best practices helping them do more with data.



1. Begin With a Roadmap – or Just One Goal.

For success mastering your data, begin with the end in mind.

For some credit unions, this means establishing an organization-wide vision for transforming into a data-driven credit union and building the roadmap for systemic change.

But if this feels too overwhelming, try a bottom up approach instead. Plan and achieve one data goal at a time – and you'll forge a path for continual progress.



2. Think in “S’s”: Standard, Simple, Scalable.

If you want to boil success with data down to three key principles, keep this alliteration in mind.

Standard means establishing common processes and formats for your data so it can be accessed, processed and analyzed universally and consistently.

Simple means eliminating unnecessary charts and KPIs so key takeaways can be understood quickly and clearly.

Scalable means implementing enterprise-wide systems and creating efficient, universal processes that allow a credit union to progress in data maturity quickly.



3. Be Realistic About Needed Resources.

Credit unions that are serious about the data journey do not shy away from getting help. Outside help is not only about overcoming the obstacle of getting started, but getting started right. Without a solid foundation, every subsequent step of the journey will be much harder.

Identify where you have or can add skills in-house, and where it makes sense to engage partners.



4. Have an Internal Champion – or Three.

Success in data analytics is never a one-person show – but, having a “data champion” who coordinates among stakeholders, establishes processes, and drives progress forward can be instrumental to achieving your set goals.

In addition, there are two other key “personas” that together, can form a trinity of success:

- The “Owner,” someone at the leadership-level who sets the vision and takes ownership for the overall success.
- The “Facilitator(s),” who support staff charged with specific data tasks overcome challenges and maintain forward momentum.



5. Remove “Perfect” and “Done” From Your Vocabulary.

Another key cultural characteristic data-driven credit unions share? A willingness to get started – and keep going.

There will never be a perfect time, a perfect tool, or a perfect process. Your data will never be as complete or good as you'd like. But data-driven credit unions don't get hung up on perfection.

They optimize to get better results, and know there will never be an end point where they've achieved all they can. The data maturity curve will always extend as analytics capabilities continue advancing and market conditions change.



6. Measure Your Success.

There's only one way to objectively know if your analytics roadmap is leading you toward your goals – track and measure!

Equally as important, be prepared to iterate or pivot based on what the metrics tell you. This is where true transformation happens. Continuous small changes produce powerful forward momentum and compound into incredible results. But, the only way to know how to optimize in the right direction is to measure.

Your Data Maturity Action Plan

Because each data maturity journey is different, your priorities and goals will determine your credit union's unique road map. Take our short quiz to help identify the data efforts that will move you closer to your goals during the next six to 12 months.

Data Journey Quiz

1. Which one of the items below is your top near-term data priority (< 12 months)?
 - a. To better organize and structure our data.
 - b. To develop more detailed personas that help us better understand our member base.
 - c. To create marketing campaigns around the products our members are most likely to be interested in.
 - d. To understand and prepare for potential economic and financial changes, such as: possible recession, housing market changes, and changes in member credit card balances.

2. Which one of the following would best help you to achieve your most immediate data goals?
 - a. Creating a single source of truth for our data.
 - b. Identifying opportunities or growth areas by understanding how our key metrics compare to other credit unions in our cohort.
 - c. A better understanding of member behavioral trends such as product propensity or member attrition.
 - d. A greater brand awareness of our credit union and offerings within our community.

3. Which option below best reflects your current data pain points?
 - a. Lack of overall organization and integration of data sources.
 - b. Slow or poor reporting that doesn't reveal clear insights.
 - c. Our data is not actionable.
 - d. There is a lack of awareness of our full products and services within our member base.

4. Which of the following most accurately describes how your credit union currently uses data?
 - a. We have used data on a project basis, but don't have all data sources integrated.
 - b. We have, or are working toward, data integration and are starting to segment our member database.
 - c. We are analyzing member behaviors and are starting to, or are interested in, forecasting.
 - d. We are utilizing data to segment and target members for the marketing campaigns they are most likely to respond positively to.

5. Which of the following data action items do you feel would most improve your member service?
- a. Achieving a more comprehensive view of on-line and off-line member behaviors.
 - b. Better reporting that helps us monitor and measure important KPIs and respond quickly to changes and opportunities.
 - c. Utilizing our historical data to better predict future trends, such as member attrition or credit card spending.
 - d. Targeted marketing campaigns to the members most likely to benefit from specific product offerings.
6. What describes your level of marketing personalization for email communication?
- a. We mainly send marketing emails that go to our entire membership list.
 - b. We have some segmented lists based on static criteria, such as geography or demographic characteristics.
 - c. We use dynamic member segmentation and triggered email sequences.
 - d. Nearly all of our email communications are personalized with consideration for individual member-level factors.
7. How would you describe your data culture?
- a. There is support from leadership, but data processes are not yet formally operationalized.
 - b. Data is used for specific projects or by certain departments, but not organization-wide.
 - c. Our department heads understand the value of data; we have a platform to centralize data and are generating analytics.
 - d. Data is central to our operations and we are ready to adopt more sophisticated statistical models.

Total up your answers for this section of the quiz to determine your next best steps.

- **Mostly A: Data Management**
- **Mostly B: Descriptive Analytics**
- **Mostly C: Predictive Analytics**
- **Mostly D: Prescriptive Analytics**

Questions about your quiz results? [Talk to an expert.](#)

Key Next Steps

Continuous progress in data maturity is one of the most important ways credit unions can ensure more efficient operations, optimized decision-making, and personalized member experience.

Based on your quiz results, we've provided key decisions and action items to help move you forward and achieve the best results.



Data Management

- **Assess staff and talent resources.** Determine if you will engage an outside data technology provider to help create or improve your data management framework, or if you will manage the process in-house.
- **Determine data storage needs.** Decide if you will store data using cloud-based solutions or on-premise servers. If you are currently using an on-premise data warehouse, consider if moving to the cloud would offer more data management benefits.
- **Assemble your data team.** Data management should not be the responsibility of a single department – and certainly not a single person! A collaborative, cross-functional team will help develop a common understanding of how data-decision-making crosses the credit union. A diverse team will incorporate different perspectives and help ensure the right data is available for the right purpose.



Descriptive Analytics

- **Assess data quality.** Complete, correct, and consistent data is key. Create a team to audit existing data for accuracy and completion, and implement technology tools and routines for maintaining data hygiene moving forward.
- **Automate processes.** Build workflows to generate reports quickly, automatically, and on a recurring basis. Ensure appropriate data is available to the right employees throughout the credit union.
- **Provide data education.** Without a solid understanding of data, it can be unintentionally misused. Equip staff with the knowledge that helps them use data effectively and properly, and empower them to communicate data needs.
- **Make data actionable.** Even complex data analysis should be communicated in ways that are simple and clear to understand. Build visual dashboards that make the most relevant insights available to be acted on in a timely manner.
- **Adopt a data-driven culture.** Begin to re-orient goal-setting and decision-making processes around data instead of past experiences or “gut feelings.” To bring leadership to this effort, create an inter-departmental team that can set a data vision and begin to articulate processes.



Predictive Analytics

- **Take inventory of computing power.** Generating predictive analytics requires more computing power. Additional servers and software may be required for on-prem management. Alternatively, evaluate if cloud-based software will offer better scalability and cost-efficiency.
- **Align data and business goals.** Predictive analytics are powerful and have many use cases, so it is important to focus on which information will be most pertinent for overall business goals. Common areas where credit unions look for insights are attrition rates, next best products, and future trends.
- **Create a plan of action.** What actions will you take to create maximum value for your data efforts? Outline how data insights will be used to inform processes, more effectively target members, or personalize outreach.



Prescriptive Analytics

- **Identify a key opportunity or problem.** Narrow in on a more complex opportunity or challenge where you want to understand the implications across different scenarios and optimize decision-making.
- **Assemble an inter-departmental team.** Build a cross-functional team with perspectives on different sides of the issue. As a whole, the team should have knowledge of the underlying data, a vision for how it will be used, familiarity with proper data management practices, and expertise in the needed technology tools.
- **Prepare your data.** Conduct a data inventory for the category you will focus on to review completeness, accuracy, and overall quality. Engage an auditing team to assess and transform data as necessary.
- **Determine if you have access to the right tools.** Artificial intelligence and machine learning are the driving forces behind prescriptive analytics. Make sure you have the not only the needed tools, but people with the right skills to use them effectively.



Planning and Budgeting Checklists

As you prepare for the next steps, reference the following checklists to assist with planning, budgeting, and smoother implementation.

Data Management

- ☐ If you plan to engage a technology provider for data management support, identify and evaluate two to three with expertise in the credit union industry.
- ☐ Conduct a data inventory to identify sources and types of data.
- ☐ Determine which platform will be used to integrate and organize data.
- ☐ Identify legal, regulatory, or contractual rules that impact data.
- ☐ Identify who will have access to data.
- ☐ Determine how data will be shared.
- ☐ Develop a plan for data security.

Potential items to budget for data in management

- ☐ Monthly subscription for cloud computing services.
- ☐ New on-premise data storage servers.
- ☐ Additional staff members for maintaining data and servers.

Descriptive Analytics

- ☐ If you plan to engage a technology provider for descriptive analytics support, identify and evaluate two to three with expertise in the credit union industry.
- ☐ Conduct a data inventory to identify sources and types of data.
- ☐ Identify which KPIs need to generate regular reports.
- ☐ Determine what platform(s) will be used for reporting and benchmarking.
- ☐ Determine who will need access to reports and how data will be shared.
- ☐ Identify "quick win" opportunities within different business departments to drive time to value and prioritize those projects.
- ☐ Build an implementation plan and determine how progress will be communicated throughout the organization.

Potential items to budget for in descriptive analytics

- ☐ Monthly subscription for cloud computing services.
- ☐ Reporting and/or benchmarking software.
- ☐ Additional staff members to compile and disseminate reports.

Predictive Analytics

- ☐ If you plan to engage a technology provider for predictive analytics support, identify and evaluate two to three with expertise in the credit union industry.
- ☐ Determine which areas of the credit union and KPIs will benefit from forecasting (attrition, product propensity, etc.).
- ☐ Purchase needed software, servers and/or machine learning programs to generate insights.
- ☐ Determine who needs access to reports.
- ☐ Articulate a process for how the credit unions will act on insights.

Potential items to budget for in predictive analytics

- ☐ Monthly subscription for cloud computing and machine learning services.
- ☐ Additional hardware and prescriptive analytics software.
- ☐ Additional staff resources for building predictive models and interpreting results.
- ☐ Implementation budget for installing new equipment and software.

Prescriptive Analytics

- ☐ If you plan to engage a technology provider for prescriptive analytics support, identify and evaluate two to three with expertise in the credit union industry.
- ☐ Ensure analytics software or platform is capable of historical data analysis to predict future outcomes.
- ☐ Identify a prescriptive analytics project and determine where departmental collaboration is required.
- ☐ Build an implementation plan with the associated departments.

Potential items to budget for in prescriptive analytics

- ☐ Monthly subscription for cloud computing services.
- ☐ Prescriptive analytics software.
- ☐ Staff budget building prescriptive models and interpreting results.
- ☐ Implementation budget for installing new equipment and software.

Data Solutions Designed for Credit Unions

Rise Analytics is a leading provider of business analytics for credit unions, helping them meet the financial needs of today's digital member. With a comprehensive suite of cutting-edge analytics and AI and machine learning-powered solutions, the Rise Analytics team ensures credit unions increase efficiency, manage risk, and improve member experience.

Rise Analytics is solely focused on the credit union industry, ensuring our total commitment to understanding credit union business. Our company's solutions and services are dedicated to solving key challenges, uncovering new opportunities, and building credit unions' competitive advantages in the financial services space.

Our signature [Data Warehouse platform](#), which leverages a patented common data model, enables the seamless integration of data sources and is used by credit unions to find actionable insights, improve member experience, and achieve portfolio growth.

As credit unions' tech partner, Rise Analytics brings them to the next frontiers of fintech, filled with powerful tools such as artificial intelligence and machine learning.

Learn more at [RiseAnalytics.com](https://riseanalytics.com).

Planning the next step
in your data journey?

[Talk to an expert.](#)



Thank You



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