



How to ensure your software meets Social Finance Fund requirements

Overview

Organizations participating in the Social Finance Fund (wholesalers, social finance intermediaries (SFIs), and social purpose organizations) are required to collect specific impact data and ensure it is stored in software that is aligned with the Common Impact Data Standard.

To meet the requirements outlined by the Social Finance Fund, you can:

- 1. Encourage the software you are currently using to align with the Data Standard.**
- 2. Encourage a software you are interested in using to align with the Data Standard.**
3. Start using software that is already aligned with the Data Standard.
4. Use a data utility that is aligned with the Data Standard.

Common Approach will work with each organization to assist with determining which option is best. This document is relevant to organizations proceeding with options **1** or **2**.

For organizations who do not yet have a software and are proceeding with options **3** or **4**, we can help you too! You can start by reviewing the currently aligned software on our [website](#). "[A guide for social finance intermediaries who need new software](#)" may be a useful resource for some organizations.

Context:

Common Approach has partnered with Realize Capital Partners to support the co-creation of the impact measurement approach of the Government of Canada's Social Finance Fund (SFF) alongside Fonds de Finance Sociale – Cap Finance and Boann Social Impact.

Over the next ten years, Common Approach will support SFF participants in implementing the Common Impact Data Standard so it is easier to measure and share the impact of their work in this program. Common Approach's Data Standard is one of several SFF initiatives to support impact measurement and management practices within the social finance market.

Is software required?

The Social Finance Fund (SFF) requires that specific information be shared through software or a data utility aligned with the Common Impact Data Standard to avoid duplication of reporting and facilitate impact data sharing between stakeholders (including social purpose organizations, social finance intermediaries, and wholesalers). More information about the SFF's impact data requirements [can be found here](#).

By requiring alignment with the Data Standard, the SFF is ensuring that impact data can be easily shared between stakeholders without requiring uniform metrics and avoiding the need for repetitive, onerous reporting. The goal is to save you time and effort over the coming years.

With the Common Impact Data Standard, each organization uses their own preferred software. This ensures that each organization uses software that works best for them rather than using what their funder is using.

We are excited to support the software you are using or planning to use through the process of aligning with the Data Standard. Asking your software to align will ensure you meet Social Finance Fund data requirements and support your impact measurement practices beyond the SFF.

How to help my software to begin the process of aligning with the Common Impact Data Standard

If you are currently using a software you like but it isn't [aligned with the Data Standard*](#), we are eager to help!

Common Approach provides support to any relevant software (for impact measurement or any other activities such as project management, customer relationship management, financial performance management, etc.) interested in aligning with the Common Impact Data Standard.



All we need from you is an introduction—connecting us to your point of contact via email or even simply letting us know the name of the software. We've provided a sample email to get you started! (See [the Appendix](#).)

Alternatively, [you can send us a note](#) with the name and contact information of the software you'd like to see aligned. We will reach out to begin the conversation.

If you are renegotiating your user agreement, you have an opportunity to support the alignment process even further by incorporating Common Impact Data Standard alignment into your contractual agreements.

If your organization has its own custom solution, we can still help with the alignment process! To start, we just need an introduction to your development team or systems administrator.

How does the software alignment process work once you have connected Common Approach with the software you'd like to see aligned?

- The Common Approach team will meet with the software team and provide them with details about how to align with the Common Impact Data Standard.
- Common Approach will share alignment resources and support materials with the software.
- Common Approach will provide the software with up to six paid hours of development time. Overall, the alignment process typically takes three to six months.



Please be sure to mention to your contact at your software that you will need to be using an aligned software to meet SFF requirements. This helps softwares to know this is something their users are interested in!

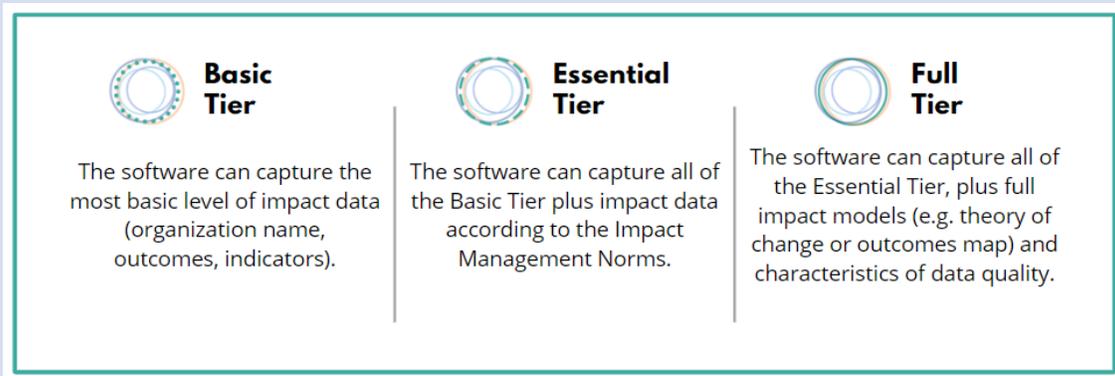
*** What is an aligned software?**

An aligned software is software that has the Common Impact Data Standard embedded into its database structure. This allows organizations to use the standard without needing to become data scientists!

In order for a software to be considered aligned, it must:

- ...be aligned to a specific tier of the Data Standard, meaning it is able to capture, record, and report on the fields identified within that tier.

- Which specific data fields and relationships are required depends on the tier of alignment. These data fields include indicators, outcomes, etc. and the complex relationships between them.
- The three tiers of alignment for software vary in the complexity of impact data they can record.
- It's important to ensure the software you choose can record impact data at the level of complexity required by your organization.



Learn more about the alignment tiers [on the Common Approach website](#).

- ...be able to **export** your impact measurement data in JSON-LD format and, for software used by investors, be working towards being able to **import** other organizations' impact measurement data by 2025.
 - Why does exporting come first? Social purpose organizations only need to **export** data. Until they are doing so, there will be no data for investors, funders and other stakeholders to **import**.
 - What is JSON-LD? JSON-LD is a standardized, platform-independent way of representing the data. A JSON-LD file contains all the metadata and relationships between the impact data objects. It helps combine, compare and aggregate complex, multidimensional and interconnected data. Think of it as a whole graph database in a text file.

The purpose of the Common Impact Data Standard is to make impact data **interoperable**, meaning it can be shared with another system or software. When impact data and the relationships between the data are structured consistently, different impact measurement softwares and tools can understand each other. This allows an investee to send impact data that has metrics associated with the outcomes, another investee to send similar but different metrics related to a similar outcome, and the investor's software to have a place to store all of that information in an analytically useful way.

What do I do while my software is in the process of alignment?

While your software is in the process of aligning with the Data Standard, you can continue regular use of your software. If you are currently tracking impact measurement in the software, we anticipate little to no changes required on the interface. Most of the changes will be made in the back end to accommodate larger tasks such as importing and exporting. You likely won't even notice.

Once my software is aligned, how do I ensure my data in the software meets SFF requirements?

Congratulations on aligning your software with the Common Impact Data Standard! You will now be able to meet the Social Finance Fund requirements.

We know that getting it right takes time, but Common Approach will be there to help iron out any wrinkles. We will work with you and your software vendor to ensure that your impact data is being accurately tracked in the platform. We'll also make sure you can import and export as needed so that collecting data and reporting to your wholesaler go smoothly.



We want your organization to have the ability to track, manage, and aggregate your impact data for years to come! There are numerous benefits to implementing a strong framework and technology into your impact measurement practices.

Alignment to the Common Impact Data Standard is a great way to ensure the longevity of your impact measurement and data management. Using aligned software will allow greater flexibility and analysis of your impact data.

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APPENDIX

Sample text: Introducing us to your software provider

TO: Key contact at your software provider OR the admin or developer of your in-house solution

CC: info@commonapproach.org

Subject line: Inquiry about the Common Impact Data Standard in [software name]

Hello [name of software point of contact],

As a recipient of investment through the [Government of Canada's Social Finance Fund](#), we're required to adopt the [Common Impact Data Standard](#).

Our organization would like to be able to manage all our data in one place.

To ensure your software is as useful a tool as possible, we hope you will consider aligning it with the Common Impact Data Standard. Common Approach provides support and resources for the alignment process. We would like to propose a meeting with your team and Common Approach to discuss alignment specifics and explore collaboration.

It's worth noting that Common Approach has been selected to support the impact measurement approach for the Social Finance Fund, with plans to work with at least 70 other investors and 1,500 social purpose organizations in the next five years to align their systems with the Common Impact Data Standard.

Thank you for your time. We look forward to the potential alignment of [software name] with the Common Impact Data Standard, which will benefit not only our organization but the broader social finance ecosystem.

Best regards,

[sign off]