

Data Walk

Nothing will kill the energy and engagement of a meeting faster than a presentation of statistics and data. Many people lose track and it is hard for people to engage or apply what they are hearing. A data walk is a way to review, analyze, and make shared meaning of data in a far more inclusive and engaging way.

Curate Data Simply and Graphically:

Create a pool of data that will ground the group on the problem you are working on. It is great to blend both official data sets from government agencies or research institutions (content expertise) with quotes from intended beneficiaries, those with lived experience, or other stakeholders (context expertise). Data is information about people's lives and survey data and quotes from community members is helpful. The key is to share it simply and powerfully in ways that do not require academic knowledge or comprehension of insider jargon. Your goal is not an evaluation report, but shared meaning about what is happening and what people are thinking on the ground. You do not need to have all available data, but a set that tells a story and grounds a common understanding to support shared meaning about the issue you are working on, the community you are working in, and the people who live there. Depending on size of group, you can post the same set of data slides (8½"x11" or larger for each slide) on more than one wall to break up the group.

Be clear about the results for your meeting. The data should ground participants in a shared understanding, and create a common starting point for planning. The process itself can build community through conversations and community building.

Gallery Walk: (in pairs or triads, diverse individuals who don't know each other well)

People walk in pairs or triads with 5 questions on a handout they are asked to answer together:

- What data point did you find most urgent?
- What data point did you find most hopeful?
- What data point did you find most surprising?
- What data point do you want to know more about, to go deeper on?
- What data or information is missing from this analysis?

Table Conversations/Consensus (At tables of 6-8)

Groups then join others at tables. Each table seeks to build consensus around answers to each question.

Report Back/Group Consensus

Gather the consensus answers around each question and look for if there is some larger consensus or differences in the group to pull out and discuss more.

If your goal is to narrow the list and establish priorities, there are different processes you can use:

- Name apparent consensus and see if audience agrees with priorities (this works if report backs name the same things at most tables)
- Dot voting (give each person 2-3 dots to place on priority issues);
- Proposal-based decision making (propose a set of priorities that the group seems to have coalesced around, ask for thumbs up – approve, down-disapprove, or sideways-not sure; those whose thumbs are sideways or down can offer amendments for what would bring thumbs up that the group can vote on).

It is also OK not to reach consensus if that does not impede your goal. You can acknowledge that there are differences in views going forward and name those explicitly.

Implications

It helps to introduce concepts like mental models and the ladder of inference to recognize that through our individual experience we tend to select data, interpret data, and make assumptions in ways that may be biased and different from each other. Based on that understanding and the data we reviewed and came to common understanding on, we can ask:

- Does the data question any assumptions we've made about the problem, our work, or our strategies?
- Are there changes we should consider to how we are organized or to our strategies based on our analysis of the data?
- What else should we explore or learn in order to continuously improve our work?