

Considerations for Building Data Dashboards

Creating a data dashboard requires a lot of hard work. Many have tried it and found that it doesn't produce the results they were looking for, is not used or useful in the ways they had hoped, or that it was duplicative of data they could already easily access. Before creating a new data dashboard, we recommend reading the following non-exhaustive list of important considerations that help guide your work.

- **Goals:** Creating and sharing your goals for the data dashboard are crucial for recruiting and aligning stakeholders and shaping your development, promotional, and management strategy. They should be identified before any work begins.
 - *What information do I want the dashboard to present?*
 - *What do I want dashboard users to be able to do with the information?*
 - *What are the outcomes that I envision the dashboard having a short or long-term impact on?*
- **Values:** Your values are your north star; identifying them at the outset will help you organize the work, recruit partners, hire the right staff, make tough decisions, and understand priorities. Some questions to help you describe your values include:
 - *Do I want the dashboard's data to be consistently updated and maintained?*
 - *What are my standards for rigor in the data presented on the Dashboard?*
 - *Do I want the dashboard to be accessible? What does accessibility mean to me?*
- **Audience:** Defining the dashboard's audience is critical in helping you narrow down the information you want the dashboard to present, how the dashboard will present that information, and how you will promote the dashboard to relevant audiences once its launched.
 - *Who is your intended audience?*
 - *What is their capacity for understanding and using data?*
 - *What is the best way to reach them with the information provided on the dashboard?*
- **Budget:** Developing, managing, and updating good data dashboards is costly.
 - *What is my budget for developing the dashboard, including but not limited to, staff, data collection and/or data set purchases, web development, user research, branding and promotion, analytic software, etc.?*

- *What is my budget for managing the dashboard after it's launched, including but not limited to data updates, feature updates, bug fixes, etc.?*
- **Staff Capacity:** Developing and managing data dashboards can require extensive staff time and expertise.
 - *Will you need to contract for any of the web development or analytic work or can the work be completed in-house?*
 - *Will these staff be part-time, full-time employees, or interns?*
 - *How much staff time will be dedicated to developing and managing the dashboard?*
 - *Does your staff have the analytic expertise necessary for carrying out the analyses you hope to present on your dashboard?*
 - *What coding languages are your staff proficient in?*
 - *If staff turns over, will you be able to back fill roles focused on managing the data dashboard?*
- **Priority:** Any organization or department has many competing priorities; it is important to understand where the data dashboard falls onto your priority list, in order to level set the amount of work and effort that can be provided to develop and maintain it. If the dashboard is lower on your organization's priority list, that might dictate the level of detail and complexity of your platform.
 - *What are the current priorities of my team, department, or organization?*
 - *Where does developing and maintaining the dashboard fall on my priority list?*
 - *Is there leadership buy-in for the dashboard? If so, to what extent?*
 - *What is the biggest threat to the successful development of the dashboard?*
- **Scope:** Understanding the scope of your dashboard is key before you start developing it. Don't be afraid to start small and develop best practices.
 - *How many metrics do you want your dashboard to include?*
 - *Do you want to cover many topic areas or dive deep into one topic? (e.g. A housing-related dashboard)*
 - *Would it be worth starting with a pilot dashboard to test your workflow and theories?*
 - *Will the dashboard be hosted online or on a closed server/system?*
 - *Who needs to be brought on as a partner to help you develop the dashboard?*
- **Alternative Options:** Building useful and effective data dashboards is a big commitment, of both time and resources. Before embarking on this endeavor, it is important to consider how your proposed dashboard compares to other publicly available datasets and dashboards. Perhaps something else exists that you could use or link to, that satisfies your needs. Leveraging existing information is also a lower-cost way for you to pilot your workflows and develop data capacity that you can then apply in the future should you still want to build a dashboard of your own.