July 2025

Measuring What Matters

A City-Focused Guide to Health Data & Changemaking

City Health DASHBOARD

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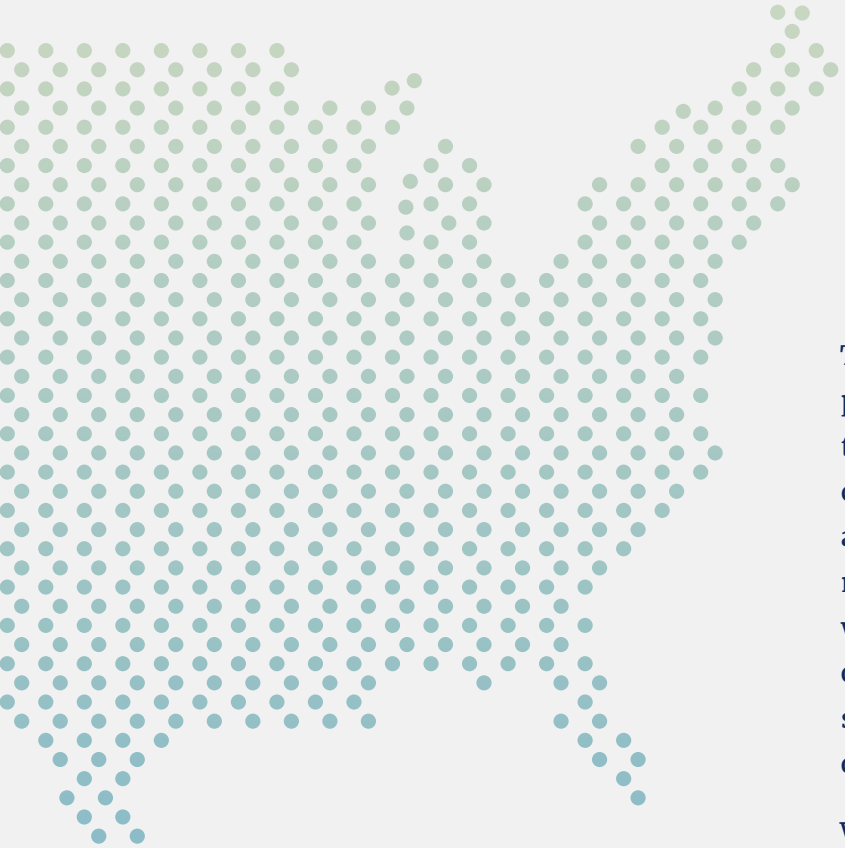
Overview

What gets *measured* gets *acted on.*



CityHealthDashboard.com

What gets measured gets acted on. That phrase has never been more important—especially at the local level.

There are all kinds of actions, policy debates, and program shifts happening nationally, but in cities, towns, and hamlets across America, getting a clear handle on precisely what is taking place has become more critical than ever. To get that understanding, you need data that are accurate and easy to understand and use.

This data playbook is designed to do just that: provide a step-by-step guide to help you identify the metrics that are most important to your community. This is not an academic exercise; it is about accessing the information that you need to make the change your community is looking for—what we call "impact data." Such data are uniquely organized for your particular locale around the specific issues you want to address, with the goal of supporting concrete improvements in health.

We are the NYU Grossman School of Medicine's City Health Dashboard team, and we have been designing, storing, tabulating, and disseminating health data and metrics for the past ten years.

Our data work is centered around the City Health Dashboard (www.cityhealthdashboard.com), a free online resource providing city and neighborhood-level data on health (such as diabetes and life expectancy) and conditions that affect health (such as park access and rent burden). The Dashboard's easy-to-use and feature-rich website displays 44 metrics through interactive maps, tables, and charts, helping over 1,200 U.S. cities focus their efforts on improving the well-being of residents, neighborhood by neighborhood.

Our work has a particular focus on cities and anchors health data in place—in the cities and neighborhoods that shape the health of the people who call them home. The reality is that high blood pressure rates or access to green space may be dramatically different on the west side of town compared to the east side. Our dashboards also allow for apples-to-apples comparisons; you can compare measures (like walkability or smoking rates) in two locales with similar demographics and populations, like Philadelphia and Cleveland, or make any other comparison you can think of in almost any city in America.

Our eight-member data team gathers, analyzes, and updates all this information on the Dashboard—on the map—for you. We've done and continue to do the challenging work of taking national datasets and accurately extending them down to the city and neighborhood level. This is sometimes not precise enough for what an individual city might need. Some react to that limitation by exploring the creation of a new data dashboard—something that is tailored to a city's particular circumstances and priorities and also includes locally collected data sources. One of the reasons we wrote this guide was to address this need. Building on the extensive experience we've gained doing this work over the years, we want to help you unlock your own data and use it to develop impact data in your community.

In the following pages, we provide guidance to support your data journey through:

Problem Definition — **step one, perhaps the most important, is to concretely articulate your policy goals**

Identifying Data Metrics — **carefully choosing the right data points to track, and ensuring you have the resources to do so**

Dashboard Construction — **for the more ambitious, we provide advice about aligning multiple metrics in one, public-facing dashboard**

Project Planning — **as with all initiatives, data work requires clear and succinct project plans and objectives**

Narrative — **once all the data work has begun, it is critical to frame the numbers with context and a story that allows others to grasp the importance of your work**

We were inspired to write this playbook by our recently completed Data Challenge initiative that brought together 10 cities that had applied to work with us and was supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. All of these cities are part of the Invest Health network, a cross-sector national initiative whose goal is to provide learning opportunities, small grants, and peer exchanges to spur innovative strategies for advancing health and equity in higher-need neighborhoods. These cities have worked for five to seven years on building cross-sectoral teams and partnerships that have been effectively able to leverage private and public investment in helping to tackle their community's biggest health, well-being, and opportunity challenges.

We met in person and remotely dozens of times over a two-year period, and we saw directly how best to incorporate health data into local program planning, stakeholder development, community outreach and engagement, organizational transformation, and more, and you will see examples from the Data Challenge cities throughout the playbook. The Data Challenge taught us a lot about how locales can most effectively translate existing data into impact data, and this guide is in many respects an outgrowth of that effort.

These city teams had a strong foundation that created the optimal conditions for pursuing successful long-term, complex, data-driven projects that convened numerous and diverse stakeholders, and it is important to note that for city users eager to do a similar sort of local changemaking. These impact initiatives take time, effort, trust, and resilience, but they are possible.

Now, we turn to the real work of gathering and using impact data—the data that will serve as the scaffolding to continue to advance positive change in your communities.

The City Health Dashboard's 10 Data Challenge Grantees

- *Buffalo, NY*
- *Eau Claire, WI*
- *Hartford, CT*
- *Jackson, TN*
- *Missoula, MT*
- *New Britain, CT*
- *Providence, RI*
- *Roanoke, VA*
- *Roseville, CA*
- *Savannah, GA*

Problem Definition

Before beginning any data work, you must clearly define what it is you are aiming to accomplish—what is the problem you are seeking to address?

While it may seem obvious, problem definition is probably the most important component of using data to address health challenges, yet too often, it is brushed aside under pressure to act fast and move directly to solutions.

Put simply, problem definition bridges the difference between what is and what ought to be. As our colleague Beth Noveck says in her book *Solving Public Problems*, "If we are honest, we do not define problems rigorously, preferring instead to jump to the solution. Many are excited by creating a new project, founding a nonprofit, creating a website, launching a program. When we fail to define the problem adequately, we end up developing solutions that do not work."

Based on Noveck's book,[1] we have produced the following set of suggestions for problem definition in your community—all of which should be a prerequisite for data analysis.

The problem should be defined narrowly enough to be solvable

Many problems are too broad, and setting out to tackle them as a whole runs the risk of wasting time and resources. Issues like climate change and poverty are so big they can be overwhelming. Identifying more doable, first-round policy and program ideas requires time and discipline. But such well-defined challenges have a greater chance of success and can be leveraged to then take on the next issue.

Think Differently

When setting out to develop a solution, you often feel you already know the problem well. You are steeped in it, living it day-to-day, and confronting the challenges head-on in your work. This may mean you are familiar with the problem, but it also signals that you might benefit from additional perspectives. All problems benefit from multiple perspectives and vantage points.

One of the surest ways to gain perspective is to hear different voices. If you are looking at an issue you are trying to solve from a government vantage point, ask community members what they think and vice versa. If you are tackling an issue of park cleanliness, ask sanitation workers, children who play in the park, environmental scientists, and others who may touch the issue.

It can also be helpful to reframe the problem. This can mean turning a problem on its head. Take the issue of food deserts—dense urban areas with little access to fresh foods. Rather than focusing solely on those that are in poor health, look at who is eating well and how. It could be that most residents who are eating a proper diet have a free bus pass, so the immediate problem at hand is access to affordable transportation.

[1] This section on Problem Definition borrows from our colleague, Beth Simone Noveck's book, *Solving Public Problems: A Practical Guide to Fix Our Government and Change Our World.* Noveck has also adapted the book into a twelve-part course to train participants in the skills needed to become more innovative and effective changemakers.

You can read about the course here: https://solvingpublicproblems.org/

NOVECK, B. S. (2021). Solving Public Problems: A Practical Guide to Fix Our Government and Change Our World. Yale University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1pdrqx3

Define Root Causes

All too often in problem definition, we do not do the investigative work needed to understand why something harmful is happening in the first place, a.k.a. the "root causes" of the problem. Homelessness on its surface is a problem of individuals being unhoused, but depending on the jurisdiction, the root cause may be mostly attributable to housing affordability, lack of mental health services, lack of substance abuse services, and/or many other factors.

In a similar vein, it is important to understand the problem upstream. In other words, ask not how to fix the issue as defined, but how to prevent it from arising in the first place. It is easier to prevent someone from falling into a river than to fish them out once they have fallen in.

One way to guide your root-cause research is to continually ask "why" questions. Think of it the way a young child does. If someone is homeless, ask "why?" If they cannot afford their apartment, then why? If they cannot afford the rent because they were laid off from their job, then why? If they did not receive notice of unemployment insurance, then again, why? And on and on.

Taken together, root-cause research requires an assessment of traditional research, coupled with a grounded understanding of what is happening in the community you are focused on. The end result should be a concrete set of explanations as to why a specific problem is occurring or recurring.

Putting it All Together

Problem definition is a clear statement of a problem that can be acted on. It should answer (a) what the problem is, (b) when and where it occurs, (c) whom it affects, (d) why it occurs (the root causes), and (e) why it matters.

Data Sources & Analysis

The following worksheets are presented in this section:

Increase your *data capacity.*

Public administrators and community leaders understand the power and potential of data but, for a variety of reasons, have often experienced challenges operationalizing and turning this information into a strategy that can be used to improve outcomes and organizational efficiency.

To assist, we began generating project worksheets in support of the ten Data Challenge cities as they sought to integrate data throughout their projects.

These worksheets support city changemakers through the process of tackling a problem using data. Created based on cities' needs, these worksheets aim to support public administrators in increasing their data capacity, improving data-grounded decision-making, and taking actions guided by data, including data from the Dashboard.

Identifying the Right Data

Once you clearly articulate your problem, the real data work begins by identifying the right metrics. You need to assess what data points best describe the community or population of interest and describe the scope of the problem you are trying to address with your intervention. You might also want to think about mapping those data points to reveal geographic patterns that will make it easier for you to take action on the data and direct your resources toward the highest-need communities or neighborhoods.

If, for example, you are trying to improve broadband connection rates in your city, particularly for low-income households, some data points that might prove useful would be:

- The percentage of households with high-speed broadband internet connection at the city level and census tract or neighborhood level
- The median household income at the census tract or neighborhood level
- The percentage of households < 100% of federal poverty level at the city level and census tract or neighborhood level
- The names of internet service providers operating throughout the city
- The average cost for a high-speed broadband internet plan in the city

Getting the Data

Once you identify the metrics that align with your problem definition, you will need to find data sources. In other words, just because you have identified the data does NOT necessarily mean you can get it. You will also need the required access, funds, staff, and time.

There might be one dataset that provides all of the data you need, but more likely you will need to identify multiple sources to gather the information you are looking for—and it still might not be completely exhaustive! You will also have to determine whether you, your staff, or your organization have the capacity to access, analyze, understand, and use the data. Accurately assessing your strengths and limitations is just as important as accessing the data. In doing so, you are better able to anticipate obstacles before they occur and develop proactive solutions to overcome them. For example, if you determine that your team's dataset-purchasing budget is minimal, you should only explore low-cost or freely accessible datasets. Or if you determine that demographic data including age, race and ethnicity, or sex are crucial for your program's reporting requirements, identifying datasets that include that level of granularity is necessary.

This process can be tricky, so the rest of this section contains a few different exercises to help you tackle it step-by-step.

Providence

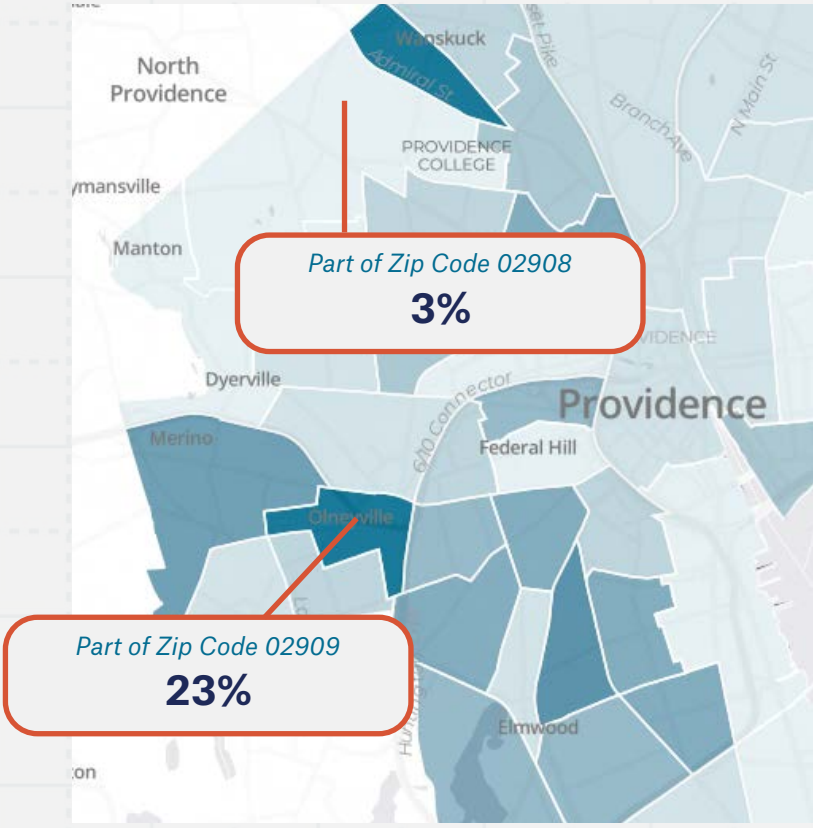
Data Organization is a Distinct Part of the Work

Early in the Data Challenge, the Providence, Rhode Island team found out how hard it would be to obtain all the data they needed to track health, equity, and well-being in the two under-resourced ZIP codes, the Department of Health designated as a Health Equity Zone (HEZ). The team was part of a larger initiative whose goal was to have a holistic set of data to guide public health efforts in the HEZ.

The Providence team had done all the hard work of organizing constituents, clarifying goals, and even identifying the types of data needed to advance their work. But the process of naming the exact metrics they would track was a discrete process that took substantial resources. Working hand-in-hand with community members and other partner organizations, the team identified 16 indicators to track. These data points were what the team needed, but, as is common with many data efforts, the metrics were not available from the same source. Instead, the team would need to track information down from 13 different sources, including both national and locally collected data.

To retrieve everything, the team entered the nuts-and-bolts phase of data organization. They created and shared a comprehensive spreadsheet that organized each indicator into different categories (e.g., Housing, Health, Education, Quality Work, Power, Climate Resilience); defined the indicator in plain language; assessed whether the data were available and for what years; provided the name of the data source and the data source link; documented, on a high, medium, low scale, the analytic rigor of the data source, how widely understood the indicator was by the greater community, its policy relevance, and its connection to equity; and provided potential actions that could be taken with the data (e.g., "Demand comprehensive lead testing and remediation in vulnerable communities"). The spreadsheet also broke down which indicators would be of greatest use to each organizational partner so that people's time and resources could be leveraged most effectively.

Uninsured in Providence, RI



Source: City Health Dashboard: Data from American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau., 2022

Check the City Health Dashboard First

When assessing data sources, your first move should be to see if the metrics—or similar ones—are already on the Dashboard. We may have done the work for you!

Data presented on the City Health Dashboard are drawn from multiple national datasets that adhere to rigorous standards of data collection and analysis, including ones assembled by the U.S. Census Bureau, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. There is a deep well of information available on the Dashboard, and while it may not have everything you need, it is a solid jumping-off point for finding population-level statistics on dozens of measures of health and health equity for over 1,200 U.S. cities. These data points translate community context into numbers—and are provided at no cost.

The Interactive City Health Dashboard Explorer Worksheet familiarizes users with the site by guiding them through its different features and posing questions that encourage thinking about how to use Dashboard data for local initiatives.

Data in Decision-Making

To help you further clarify how you identify and work with data, we developed the following **Data Decision-Making** and **Data Decision Tree Worksheets** to walk you through critically thinking about potential data sources and assessing whether the data source meets your needs and goals. These worksheets also require you to align the data sources you've identified with your values and current financial and analytic capacities.

CityHealthDashboard.com

Considerations for Building a Data Dashboard

Those with ambitions of knitting together a range of metrics may want to consider building their own data dashboard. Such dashboards are one way to present all of your data in one place or platform. They can be aesthetically appealing, interactive, and visualize data in ways that are easy to grasp for people who do not consider themselves "data experts." Dashboards are also adept at turning dense information into actionable insights that city leaders can use to focus efforts and shape strategy. Dashboards function as a data "one-stop" that highlights connections between different topic areas that could be overlooked if everything was accessed from different locations.

All of these virtues aside, we want to stress that creating a new dashboard **IS NOT** necessary for integrating data into your workflows, program design, or implementation planning. Every organization or team has the capacity to take the steps to become more data-driven and transform their organization's culture around decision-making without building a dashboard.

In fact, we have observed many reasons for not building a dashboard, including limited data capacity and the financial demands and buy-in required to maintain it over time. This section highlights important items to consider based on our team's experience developing and managing data dashboards.

We have built on our experience in this field to develop a **Guide Worksheet** for organizations seeking to build a dashboard of their own. Its purpose is to help users identify their goals and values, define their audience, understand their budget and staff's expertise, and be clear about their competing priorities ***before*** embarking on the intensive effort of developing a new data dashboard, regardless of its size or scope. The worksheet asks the user to examine their organizational or departmental data capacity and bandwidth to determine if building a dashboard is the best decision and to consider whether other alternative data sources or metrics exist that can meet their goals and be a better use of scarce resources.

We also want to highlight another free resource, the Community Toolkit, available from the SDOH & Place Project, that can help city governments, community and civic organizations increase their capacity for working with SDOH data and make the process of building web applications to display that data easier and more accessible.

Data in Action:

Project Planning and Narrative Development

The following worksheets are presented in this section:

Let's put your *data* to *work.*

If you have followed this playbook to this section—you have done a lot! You have accurately defined your problem, identified data points to measure, allocated resources effectively, identified datasets that provide the right information at the level of detail necessary, and aligned data with your values and capacity.

Now you have to start putting the data to work—actually use it. That could mean a number of things depending on your organization or team's needs: presenting data at a community meeting, reallocating funds to high-need areas, or engaging local business leaders around a new initiative. All are examples of "putting the data to work," and that's just barely scratching the surface of what's possible!

The goal of this final section is to help you do this right, so your data do not idle in a vacuum and your work has the maximum potential for impact. It focuses on two action steps: project management and narrative building.

Data Project Planning Worksheet

The **Project Planning Worksheet** helps cities assess their organizational and community assets, identify opportunities for partnerships and community engagement, set goals, and identify data resources and gaps. This document should be used at the start of a project or program to help you understand the environment in which you will be working, document strengths and opportunity areas, anticipate potential obstacles, and begin project-managing your deliverables.

Roseville

The Power of Planning and Partnership

The Roseville, California Data Challenge team began as a cross-sector collaboration between city and county government, a communications agency, and a nonprofit organization. The team set a two-pronged goal: to use neighborhood-level data to identify disparities in job opportunities and to directly engage residents—particularly youth—in shaping the solutions.

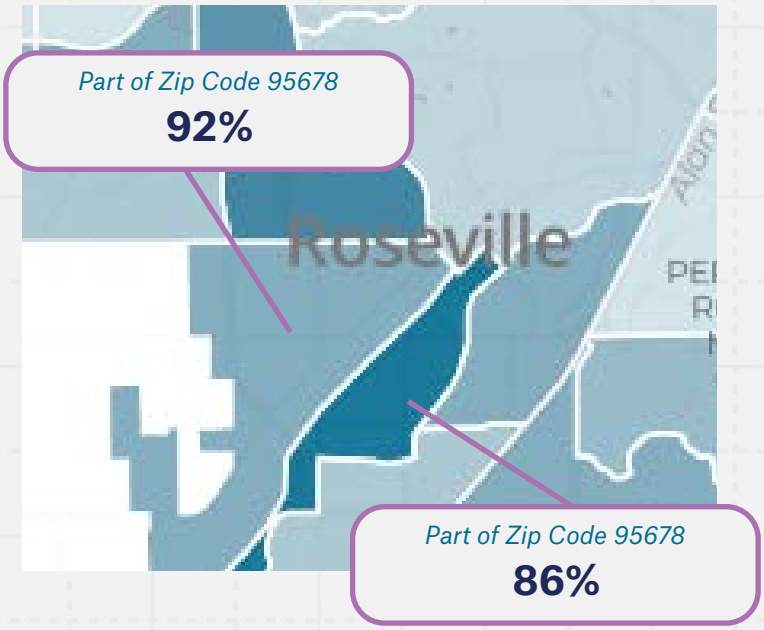
The team initially turned to the City Health Dashboard, analyzing indicators such as High School Completion, Income Inequality, and Unemployment. The data illuminated significant disparities across three of Roseville's priority neighborhoods, reinforcing the need to focus investments and programmatic efforts in these areas.

Using the **Project Planning Worksheet,** the team recognized a gap in stakeholder engagement. To move from data to action, they needed buy-in from institutions with the power to influence job pathways, namely, the community college system, the local business sector, and job-training agencies. Acknowledging this, they convened a targeted stakeholder breakfast and invited Sierra College and key business leaders to hear the data story and devise a shared strategy for workforce development.

This inclusive approach was a turning point. By leveraging neighborhood-level data to tell a compelling narrative, the team galvanized new partners and strengthened their value proposition. The core cross-sector team was expanded to include representation from these additional sectors. This broader coalition led to successful funding from a regional transportation agency that supports job readiness and resident engagement programs. These investments in collaboration and funding will create new pathways for young adults to access relevant training, support, and employment opportunities, aligning economic well-being with community health outcomes.

Roseville's experience underscores the power of local data, thoughtful project planning, and multi-sector stakeholder engagement in creating tangible improvements in community opportunity and well-being.

High School Completion in Roseville, CA



Source: City Health Dashboard: Data from American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau., 2022

The Importance of Narrative

As an impact data project, we have learned a lot working directly with cities, including the importance of narrative. You simply must be able to tell a story with your data; it cannot be left to shine on its own. This does not mean being partisan, biased, or embellishing. It means providing the context required for users to understand exactly what the data tell us.

People connect best with stories and narratives that ground data in human experiences and provide context for complex issues. Too many data reports, dashboards, and/or databases, provide no narrative to explain why a particular data point is important or what it should or should not be able to tell an audience. A number or series of numbers alone cannot communicate the complexity of the data and the community issues surrounding it. Narrative provides concrete examples of who is being impacted within the data, when, where, and how the data came to be, and what can be done to create positive change where needed.

Taken together, a data narrative provides the following:

ACCESSIBILITY Narrative makes complex data digestible by surfacing key takeaways. It accommodates for the fact that most folks reviewing your data are not number crunchers but do want to know what your data say.

HUMAN CONNECTION Narrative connects audiences to human experiences. People simply must see themselves in the data to have a sense of it.

CONTEXT Narrative provides context for data and helps avoid misinterpretation.

Generating narrative around data takes a lot of practice. We learned about this by collaborating with Julie Steensen, who led DataKC in Kansas City, Missouri and is now principal of Porchlight Insights. As Julie told us, it is important to understand the types of narratives that can be created to enhance data reporting.

Narratives that make data more engaging focus on:

PEOPLE Profile real people who are impacted by these data. Think about what their lives are like and how the data can portray this.

PLACE Zero in on precisely where the data are gathered from—down to the smallest possible geographic level—and consider the factors contributing to a shift in outcomes in that place.

HISTORY Clarify the historic or current context for variances in the data between groups or geographies.

PROGRESS Be clear about how the data describe progress toward goals or desired outcomes.

COMPARISONS Often data make more sense when described in relation to something else: think, "How does this data look for peers or compared to best practice?".

You can select one or a few of the above-mentioned approaches to develop your data narrative. But we want to stress how important it is to test out your narrative before publishing or broadcasting publicly. You can do this with colleagues or friends; just be sure to try out your narrative many times and refine it based on diverse audiences' reactions.

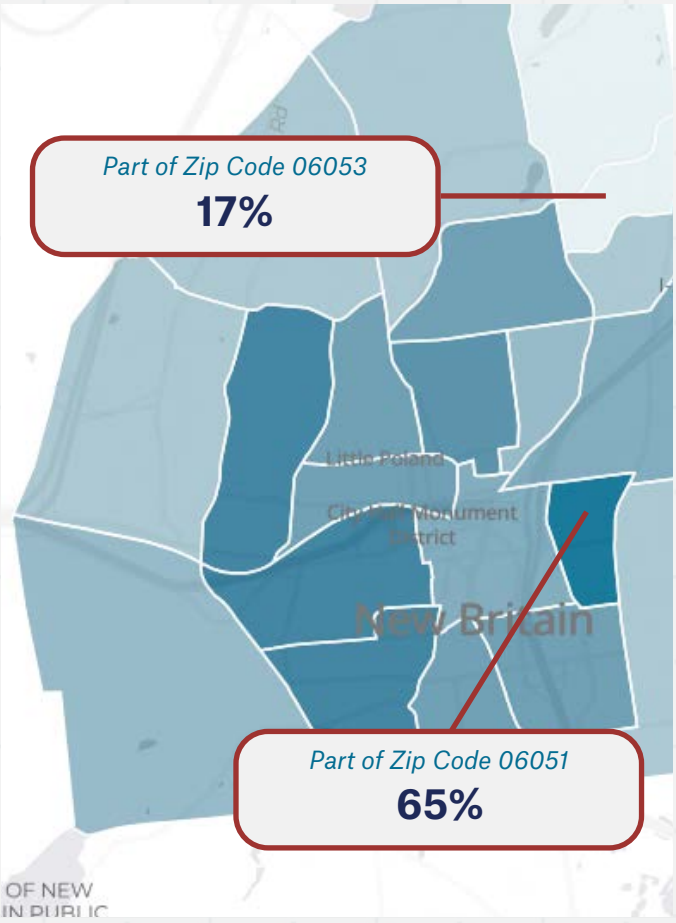
Remember, you are aiming for simplicity and clarity. Narrative is a powerful vehicle for your hard work with data; let's do it well.

New Britain

The Importance of Knowing Your Audience

Every audience consumes information differently. This was a lesson we learned when working with the city of New Britain, Connecticut, in our Data Challenge. The YWCA was the lead organization on this effort, and they were focused on raising lead awareness among young people.

Housing with Potential Lead Risk in New Britain, CT



Source: City Health Dashboard: Data from American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau., 2022

To do this, the YWCA team used the Dashboard to pinpoint which neighborhoods in New Britain had more housing with a potentially elevated lead risk. Using these data and accompanying visuals, they presented their findings at town halls and a Board of Health meeting. These efforts effectively communicated the urgency of the lead challenge to city officials. However, when the YWCA team presented the same information, with the same graphics, in the same format to local residents—particularly adolescents—there was little engagement or response. They needed to change the narrative! They decided to adapt their messaging, using more age-appropriate language and visuals when talking with kids and teens. They focused on a social media outreach campaign and teaching basics such as handwashing to educate and motivate people to care about lead, since it was not something that was originally on their radar. Additionally, they met the community where they were, which meant participating in community-focused events, such as a community baby shower.

They also integrated Dashboard maps on Housing with Potential Lead Risk into a Photovoice project on housing conditions that was better able to engage community members and connect the data to real-world issues that residents care about. The community's engagement in their Photovoice project also spurred greater participation in a survey the YWCA developed to understand lead awareness across the city.

Worksheets

To easily download and print these worksheets, you can visit *www.cityhealthdashboard.com/measuring-what-matters-a-city-focused-guide-to-health-data*

DATA EXPLORER WORKSHEET

The City Health Dashboard is an online resource to provide city and neighborhood-level data on health and the conditions that affect health, such as housing affordability and access to nutritious foods. The Dashboard helps cities across the United States target their efforts to improve the well-being of residents, neighborhood by neighborhood. This worksheet will get you started exploring the Dashboard and using the data for local action.

1 - EXPLORING THE DATA

We provide a variety of ways to explore, compare, and visualize measures for your city and all of the underlying data. Start at www.cityhealthdashboard.com, enter your city, and take a moment to get acquainted with the data available for your city, starting with the City Overview.

City Overview: This page lets you see a snapshot of the city's performance across each metric, to give you an overall sense of where the city is thriving and any opportunity areas (click on the scale bar for each metric to view more details). Users can access demographic maps and tables on the Dashboard by navigating to the *Demographics Overview* and the *Demographics by Census Tract* tabs under the *City Overview* page.

Metric Detail: Choose a metric to explore. The Metric Detail page shows you how your city is doing for a particular metric. Each metric detail page looks the same and offers visual signposts to help you understand your city's data at a glance. Scroll down the page to view the map, and zoom into your city's neighborhoods or census tracts for the measure you've selected, if available. You can also save and highlight tracts on the map.

Demographic Detail: We provide data disaggregated by race/ethnicity, age, or sex (or some combination of the three) for 1/3 of our metrics, allowing you to investigate existing disparities between specific communities.

Compare Cities: Identify peer cities and compare your city's metric performance in different ways.

Compare Metrics: Explore the relationship between two metrics and examine any geographic patterns that may exist.

Take Action: Take data to action and explore our 5 categories of over 400 resources to help you drive change in your community.

2 - MAKING USE OF YOUR DATA

Of all the measures for your city, which are you doing better than average, and which need improvement? (*Hint*: look for the 'green checkmark').

Better than Average	Needs Improvement

Now, pick a metric that stands out or aligns with your local priorities, and let's walk through the data.

Selected metric:

- Does your city's metric value surprise you? Why or why not.
- Which census tracts stand out in need of improvement? What else do you know about these neighborhoods?
- If demographic breakdowns are available, what do you notice?
- How does your city compare to your identified peer cities? How can you use this information?
- Choose another metric to compare. (*Hint*: Only measures where the underlying data is at the same geography – i.e. city or census tract – can be shown together.) What relationships, if any, do you see? Do any geographic patterns exist across neighborhoods within the city?

3 - INTEGRATING DATA

Consider what you learned from your city exploration. What other questions might you want to ask or what information would help you to better understand your community's health factors?

Where might you start to find more data? Which local or county/state data sources might be most helpful?

Local Data Sources	County/State Data Sources

What additional data might you need to collect locally? (e.g., via surveys, interviews, etc.)

City Name: _____

Dataset Name: _____

Data Decision-Making Assessment Worksheet

1) Purpose

a) What are my goals? What purpose is this data serving (Ex: For us to understand our department's performance, to communicate with the community)?

b) Who is the intended audience?

c) How will the data be communicated (Ex: Used for talking points, presented in a report or on a website)?

2) Data Details:

a) What kind of data is it? (population level, patient health, spatial data, community-collected)

b) What is the data source? Can we trust it?

c) What year(s) was the data collected?

d) What is the level of granularity? (city, state, census block, census tract)

e) Is demographic data available? If so, which demographic groups?

f) What's missing?

3) Accessibility and Usage:

a) Is it free? If it isn't free, do we have the resources to purchase the dataset?

b) Does this data source require staff capacity to analyze the dataset?

c) If yes to the question above, then do we have those resources? If not, is there an external resource that we can use that does not require advanced analysis skills?

d) Will this data be shared internally or externally?

e) Will legal need to be involved (DUA)?

f) Are there any privacy concerns? If yes, how will we deal with those?

g) What are the limitations in using this dataset?

4) Decision and next steps

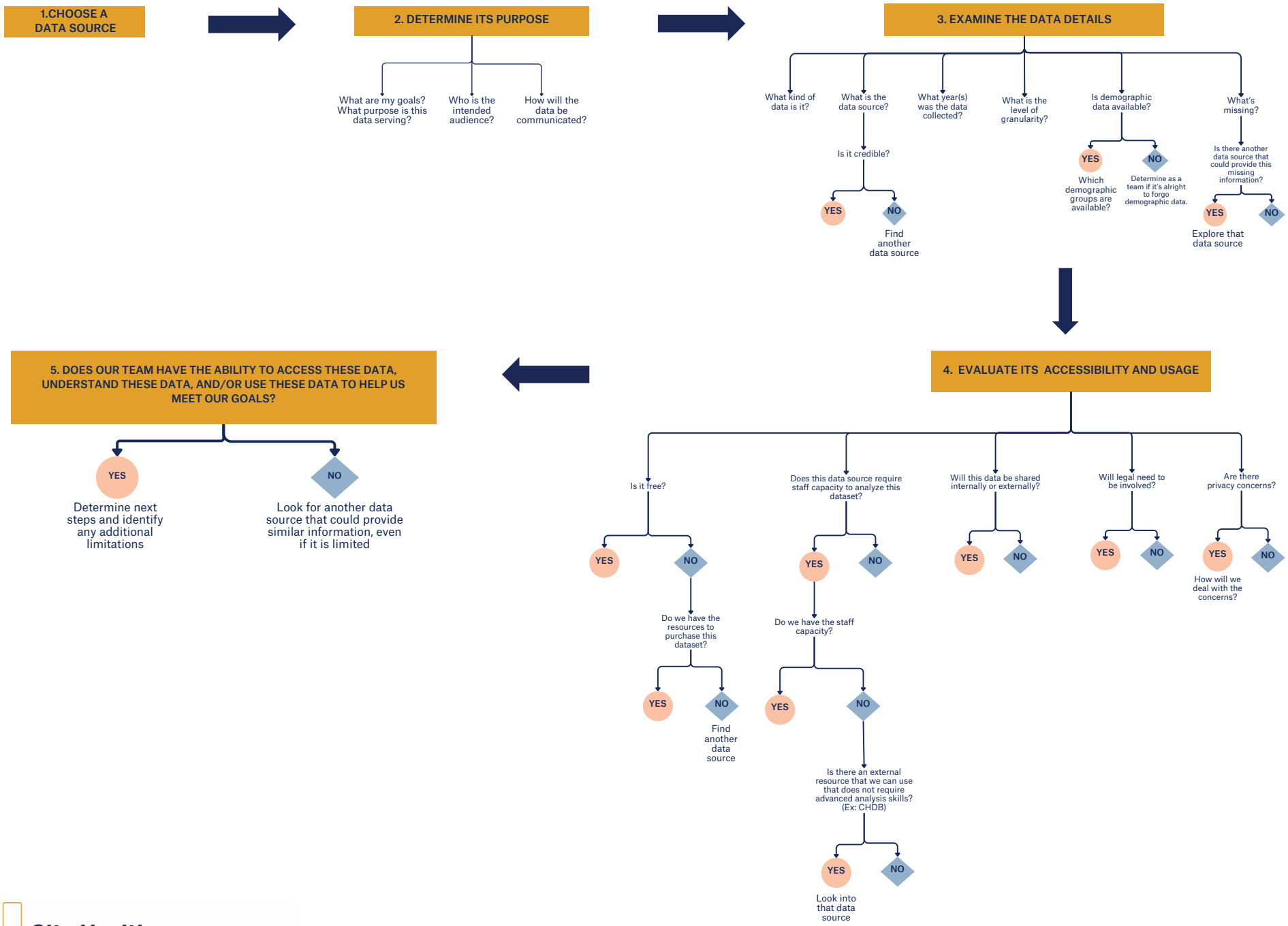
a) Given all of the above, do I have the ability to access these data, understand these data, and/or use these data to help me meet my goals?

b) If you answered 'no' to question a, then is there another data source that could provide similar information, even if it is limited?

c) What are the next steps that our team needs to take?

DATA DECISION TREE

Determine whether a specific data source meets your team's needs



City Health DASHBOARD

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?*
- **Data Management and Stewardship**:
- **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.

Purpose

Scope

Benchmarks

Data

Outcome

Actions

Team

Stakeholders

Target Audience

Resources

Constraints

Risks

City Health DASHBOARD

City

Date

Team Project Planning

About & Credits

About the City Health Dashboard

More than 80 percent of U.S. residents live in urban areas. However, historically, few measures have been available for cities to assess health, the factors that shape it, and the drivers of health equity. The City Health Dashboard provides city leaders with an array of regularly refreshed data to support health policies and equity-related decision-making.

With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the City Health Dashboard provides more than 40 measures of health and its drivers for more than 1,200 cities and towns—those with a population of 50,000 and larger and a growing set of smaller locales. Equipped with these data, local leaders have a clearer picture of the challenges facing their communities and how to address them.

About Reinvestment Fund & Invest Health

Reinvestment Fund is a mission-driven financial institution committed to making communities work for all people. We bring financial and analytical tools to partnerships that work to ensure that people in communities across the country have the opportunities they strive for: affordable places to live, access to nutritious food and health care, schools where their children can flourish, and strong, local businesses that support jobs. We use data to understand markets and how transactions can have the most powerful impact, which has consistently earned us the top Aeris rating of AAA for financial strength and four stars for impact management. Our asset and risk management systems have also earned us an AA- rating from S&P. Since our inception in 1985, Reinvestment Fund has provided over $3.2 billion in financing to strengthen neighborhoods, scale social enterprises, and build resilient communities. Learn more at reinvestment.com.

As a pioneering cross-sector national initiative led by Reinvestment Fund since 2016, Invest Health cultivated a learning network of 50 small to mid-sized U.S. cities to develop strategies to increase and leverage private and public investment and accelerate improvements in neighborhoods facing the biggest barriers to better health. Supported by RWJF, Invest Health provides small grants, peer learning exchanges, and convenings to: support development of a pipeline of financeable built environment projects, improve the community development investment systems, and prioritize community engagement, data, health and equity.

Credits

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Recommended Citation: NYU Langone Health, Department of Population Health. Measuring What Matters: A City-Focused Guide to Health Data and Changemaking. 2025.

This report would not be possible without the following contributors:

Programmatic Support: Yoomin Hwang, Jennifer Fassbender, Leah Rusenko, Jacob Kraybill

City Partners: Our ten Data Challenge City Teams - Buffalo, NY; Eau Claire, WI; Hartford, CT; Jackson, TN; Missoula, MT; New Britain, CT; Providence, RI; Roanoke, VA; Roseville, CA; Savannah, GA

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: George Hobor, PhD

Report Design: Brittney Giardina