Tools for Integrating an Equity Lens

THE QUESTION ROAD MAP

Data is a powerful tool for highlighting disparities and developing an action plan to address disparities. However, using data – from designing a research question to getting to action – can be challenging. Perhaps even more importantly, data can be interpreted or “spun” in multiple ways, creating very different stories. This "Question Road Map", adapted from: National Partnership for Action. "What Do the Numbers and Text Really Mean: Using Data to End Health Disparities and Strengthen Communities", is designed to help groups understand how to bring an equity lens to the process of creating effective, data-driven strategies. It is a set of six questions to ask as you walk through the process. Although the road map is laid out as a linear process, it is important to note that the path is not always a straight line. Sometimes you will end up with more questions than answers and will have to go back a few steps.


Are you interested in more tips and tools for taking an equity lens?
Spark Policy Institute’s (www.sparkpolicy.com) interactive Tools for Integrating an Equity Lens is available at www.sparkpolicy.com/tools/equity. Please share your stories about integrating equity into your planning process, share your tools, and access tools and ideas from other organizations.

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Here are the questions in more detail, along with examples of how the questions can be applied:

1. Look at data for a specific population, a particular issue, a specific time frame, or all of the above. This is the beginning of formulating your research question! For example: What percentage of Latino adults in my community has diabetes compared to other groups?

2. What is the disparity compared to which other populations? Does it vary with time? Geography? This step helps situate your research question in the broader picture and refine your research question. For example: What is the prevalence of diabetes among Latino adults in my community compared to the state? The US? Is this a trend across years? These questions can help refine your research question to: During the past 3-5 years, what are the social determinants of health that contribute to higher rates of diabetes among Latino adults in my community?

3. Most frequently discussed in the context of health, social determinants (the economic and social conditions in which people are born, live, work, etc.) are the external and systemic, rather than individual, factors that affect outcomes, such as health. These factors are parts of the puzzle you will need to tell the whole story. For example: You may discover the Latino adults in your community tend to live in areas with high concentrations of poverty, low food access, and low “walkability” limiting opportunities for exercise.

4. What part of the story is still missing? Do you have all the data you need to tell a complete and accurate picture? You can check by asking yourself: “Can I answer the research question with the data I have?” And “Can I tell someone else the full story and answer their questions?” Think about where you can go to access secondary data or what you need to do to collect data yourself. Quantitative and qualitative data is important to collect – numbers will only tell part of the story! – as is information on community assets. Building on the example above, you may want to think about: What kinds of food are people able to access? Where do people go to access care and what are their experiences with the services? What community assets can you build on to address the high rates of diabetes?

5. This is where you combine the quantitative and qualitative data you have collected so you can present an accurate picture of the disparities in your community. The story should describe the challenges and the assets, looking at patterns, trends, and anything that may affect the accuracy or reliability of the data and your story. As an example: What are the patterns of diabetes rates and data on the social determinants of health for your community and other communities?

6. After you have developed a research question and gathered data to tell the story, the next step is working to develop a strategy to deal with the issues in the story. When considering a strategy, think about whether there is: capacity, will, and readiness to address the issue, and that the strategy is culturally appropriate. For example: after considering the data, you may want to address the issue of access to preventative care – what are cultural practices you could incorporate to promote health eating and physical activity?

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