



Data Conversation Tool

How to Turn a Map into a Story

This tool is provided to you as a resource in helping you use the Data Portal. To use the tool, simply follow the step by step instructions. Each step includes guided questions to help you understand the data, have meaningful conversations and help you tell a story using data. For each step, use the questions on the left to think and talk about data. Work through and discuss each question as a group or record your answers in the box on the right.

This tool is meant as an exercise to “roll up your sleeves” as it takes some work to make data meaningful. Just remember the data does not provide all the answers. It inspires conversation and discovery.

An organization’s results are determined through webs of human commitments born in webs of human conversations - Fernando Flores

Step 1: Start with Why!	Describe why you need data right now, and how or where you might find that data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What important decisions are you considering? What answers do you need to support those decisions? • Why do you need those answers? • Who needs those answers? Who will be impacted by the answers? • How will you get your answers? <p><u>Point to Ponder</u> You don't need an advanced degree in statistics and a room full of computers to start asking data questions about your community and programs. Use what you learn to guide improvements</p>	

Step 2: Understand the Data	Describe your Data
<p><i>What is the quality of the data?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How large is the sample size? • Was the data collected using a standardized tool with proven quality attributes? • Who collected the data? • How was the data collected? • How representative is the data? • Is the data self-reported or a “direct measure”? <p><u>Point to Ponder</u></p> <p>None of us is as smart as all of us: Develop a data leadership team within your organization</p> <p>In order for data to be successfully incorporated into your organization, you need a dedicated team. A team (rather than an individual or small group) is ideally suited for this work for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporating data into the program improvement cycle takes a lot of work and requires the commitment of many individuals. • Data come from a variety of sources. It is important to have representatives with different perspectives to ensure that various sources of vital data are not overlooked. • Discussions are richer and more diverse with numerous points of view and insights. • Dissemination of information is much easier when there are multiple people who can remember and share experiences. • The effort needed to sustain continuous improvement is much easier when tasks are divided among a team of people. 	

Step 3: Interpret the Data	What are the Key Findings?
<p><i>Examine the data and consider:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the trends over time (short, medium, long term) • How much variation is in the data (are all the scores close together? What is the range?) • Seek to understand differences. Are the scores similar/dissimilar across neighbourhoods? • Are the differences important? Are they critical differences? • Have you compared apples with apples? Examine the indicator definitions and consider whether the definitions have remained consistent across time points? • Are the results consistent with what we already know? Consider other data, personal experiences, expectations and professional experience? • Are there patterns or trends appearing? • What else do you need to know? • What important points seem to “pop-out” from the data? • What seems to be surprising or unexpected or challenges your assumptions? • What inferences, explanations or conclusions can we make about the data? • Resist the urge to work on solutions during this step <p><u>Point to Ponder</u></p> <p>We live in a society that is data rich and information poor. While data are not information, translating fact to understanding means relating data to something you already know and can visualize.</p>	

Step 4: Match the Data to the Messages	What are the Key Messages?
<p><i>Develop your key messages based on the key findings from Step 3</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careful to not create cause and effect statements or grandiose claims unless the data warrants • Be concise and specific - describe only what you see in the data in front of you • Align your key findings with your own organizational goals or outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the key findings support your policy/practice? • Do the key findings call for new practices? • Do the key findings identify gaps in programs or services • Do the key findings suggest new ways that you need to measure your outcomes or collect additional data 	

Step 5: Tell the Story	So What?
<p><i>Build your story based on the key message from Step 4</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is your audience? • What is the purpose of the story? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is the goal to inform? Create awareness? Build support? Create consensus? Change behaviour? • Use the inverted pyramid. Lead with the key message that shows the importance/relevance of the story (no numbers) to catch attention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What is your Headline Message? ○ What is the key finding to support your headline message? ○ Follow with concise reports of the data to support your main message • What does this mean for our clients or programs? 	

People without information cannot act. People with information cannot help but act - Ken Blanchard

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