



# TOOL | HOSTING A DATA WALK

TIME REQUIRED: 75-90 minutes

A Data Walk is a powerful process for engaging diverse stakeholders in a shared sense-making process around data. Created by The Urban Institute, Data Walks are an interactive way of sharing data and research with stakeholders.

## USING THIS TOOL WILL HELP YOU:

- Build knowledge and data capacity
- Engage and empower residents
- Encourage dialogue and mutual understanding with diverse perspectives
- Affirm the lived experience of context experts

## OVERVIEW

A Data Walk Process focuses on data sharing as the platform for multi-sector collaboration. During a Data Walk, community residents, service providers and other stakeholders review data presentations in small groups, interpret what the data means, and collaborate to use their respective knowledge and expertise to advance community change. It's a process that can be used whether or not the stakeholders have been involved in your initiative from the beginning.

## THE TOOL

An effective Data Walk takes time and requires careful planning with consideration. These include:

1. **Be Clear About Your Goals** – It's important to be clear about why you are hosting a data walk and what you want to learn from it.
2. **Who Needs to Participate?** – To encourage rich dialogue and foster shared understanding Data Walks work best when there are a diverse mix of people/perspectives. Including community residents is particularly valuable.

3. **Establishing Shared Agreements** – To “set the stage” for the Data Walk it is important that participants understand the goals of the process; a bit about how the data was chosen; and, how the insights they share will be used.
4. **Your Venue** – An ideal venue to host your Data Walk is somewhat dependent on the number of data points you are choosing to feature (ideally no more than 4-6 data points). Each data point is set up as its own “station” that includes large posters of the data and 1-3 dialogue questions that used clear, simple language. Each station should be far enough apart that the small groups visiting each station can hear one another speak.
5. **Choosing the Data to Profile** – The intent of a Data Walk is not to offer a comprehensive overview of ALL available data – but rather to profile a small number of data points that are most pertinent, are likely to generate rich dialogue and are helpful in fostering a more nuanced understanding of priority issues. It is also important to offer State and/or National comparators for each piece of local data if possible as this helps to create more context.
6. **Determine Data Dialogue Questions** – Each “data station” also includes 2 or 3 discussion questions written in simple language. The first question is often aimed at generating people’s initial reactions (both positive and negative). At least one question should also invite further reflection and exploration.

## PRINCIPLES FOR USING THIS TOOL

Below are 5 principles to ensure your Data Walk is well-facilitated:

1. **Ensure Diversity in the Small Dialogue Groups** – To ensure rich dialogue, and foster connections across sectors, it is important for facilitators to ensure that each small dialogue group has a good mix of different perspectives. Small groups should ideally be between 8-10 participants to balance diversity with offering all a chance to speak at each station.
2. **Keep Visits to Each Data Station Brief** – Visits to each data station should be approximately 5-10 minutes in length. This ensures enough time for dialogue and sense-making but decreases the likelihood groups will move too quickly to finding “solutions.”
3. **Use Comparator Data at Each Data Station** – Comparable State and/or national data should be used to help provide context for each local data-point being presented.
4. **Encourage Small Groups to Capture Initial Thoughts and Insights**– Post-it notes at each station can be used to capture and share participants’ initial insights from each small group

5. **Include Time for Reflection and Action Planning** – After visiting each Data Walk Station, small groups should have a chance to reflect together about the entire experience and consider opportunities for action, which can then be shared with the whole group.

## THE TOOL IN PRACTICE

Rockford Illinois used the data walk process to create deeper, shared understanding of the issue of 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade reading success in order to build a common agenda – across multiple sectors – to achieve this key educational milestone. The Data Walk held during a recent Rockford community meeting proved to be a valuable opportunity to spark learning and understanding across diverse perspectives.

At each data station the information sparked rich conversations and generated insights as a variety of different perspectives were shared. This in turn allowed all participants to experience first-hand the value of working together across a diversity of perspectives.

## DIVING DEEPER

To learn more about Data Walks:

- Download [\*Data Walks: An Innovative Way to Share Data with Communities\*](#) by The Urban Institute
- Read the Tamarack's Case Study: [Rockford's Data Walk On 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading](#)

“ We have seen Data Walks spur dialogue between community stakeholders who used data as the anchor to ground conversations around solving neighborhood problems.”

- The Urban Institute

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