Defining Targeted Problems and Inequities

It is useful to spend time defining your targeted problem and population before selecting potential strategies or interventions. This worksheet walks you through the first steps in that defining process, including:

> ## 1. Identify a Shared Vision

> ## 2. Identify Possible Outcomes to Measure this Impact

> ## 3. Gather Disaggregated Data

> ## 3. Use Data to Prioritize Targeted Problems and and Inequities

1. Identify a Shared Vision

What Shared Vision Impact is your effort attempting to address? See the _Example Shared Visioning Process_ tool for a process to engage local partners in developing a Shared Vision. Write your Shared Vision Impact in the space below.

Shared Vision:

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2. Identify Possible Outcomes to Measure this Impact

Once you have developed your initial problem, it is important to look at local data to make sure this problem is responsive to the community's needs, aspirations, and priorities. To make this decision, you first need to determine how to measure your problem.

How could your Targeted Problem be measured?
Sometimes communities select a targeted problem that is not fully descriptive of what the problem looks like in their community – and as a result, difficult to measure. Take for example the problem: Babies born unhealthy.

There are a variety of ways that babies could be born unhealthy: low birth weights, illegal substances in their systems, premature. The process of looking at local data can help you identify exactly what your problem looks like in your community and what you should prioritize for change. For example, one community may discover that a large percentage of babies are born with illegal substances in their system while another community might discover a high % of babies born with low birth weights. Still another community could discover that it has problems with both of these issues.

How do you find the "right" way to measure your impact or problem? Recent research articles, evaluations, or reports can be a great way to learn about the best ways to measure and understand population-level problems in your community. Websites for research institutes, university centers, and government agencies are often good places to look for these resources.

Also ask your community partners questions like: What outcomes do you use to track (insert Shared Vision impact here).

Use the table below to identify ways your impact or problem could be measured.

Table 1

How could your Shared Vision Impact be measured?
Example: *low birth weight (under 5lb 8oz)*

3. Gather Disaggregated Data on Outcomes

After identifying potential outcomes to measure your Shared Vision impact, gather data on these outcomes to prioritize local needs and inequities to target for change.

Data on local problems can be found through a variety of different sources. For example, ask your community partners questions like: What data to you have to help us understand our (insert problem here).

Also consider the following examples as you explore data in your community.

Public Databases

Examples:
- U.S. Census
- American Community Survey
- County Health Rankings
- Map the Meal Gap
- Distressed Communities Index
- Health Indicators Warehouse
- USDA Food Environment Atlas
- Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System
- Community Health Status Indicators
- Children's Health Watch

Local Organization or Institution Databases
Examples:
- City Office
- Health Department
- Department of Public Safety

Evaluation Findings and Reports
Examples:
- Program evaluations
- Foundations reports
- Local family surveys

Data Tips

Recent. Try to find recent data, generally within the last two years. Community problems can change over time.
- Example Change in Severity Over Time: unemployment rates in almost every community immediately went up after the US housing crisis
- Example Changes in Location Over Time: drug activity sometimes moves from one neighborhood to another in a short period of time

Local. Try to find data specific to your community. Problems can look quite different across places.
- Example: Poverty levels are often centralized in urban locations compared to suburbs
- Example: A community or county's data can look very different than State-wide data.

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What is role of disaggregated data?

As you explore data on your impact or problem, look for ways to disaggregate the data to see how it is experienced differently by populations in your community. Disaggregated data can help you more fully understand local needs in your community, and identify local inequities that can be addressed by your efforts.

For example, say you want to collect data on the % of children obese at age 13. In addition to finding data about the % of all 13 year olds who are obese, you would also want to gather data on how different demographic groups of teenagers – for example, across race, income levels, location, etc. - are experiencing this problem.

As you gather local data on your impact or problem, see if this data has been disaggregated or broken out by different demographic categories. If the data has not been disaggregated, reach out to partners or sources to see if it is possible to supply the disaggregated data – often this data is available but simply not reported.

> **What demographic categories could we explore related to our problem?**
>
> See the Finding Data on Local Inequities tool for examples.

What Demographic Combinations should we explore?

It is important to remember that individuals belong to multiple groups (e.g., income, race, gender) and the largest inequities often exist within these intersections. The following table provides an example of how data on two demographic categories are compared:

EXAMPLE: Percent of Babies born with Low birthweight by mother's race and age

	13-19 years	over 20 years
African American:	17.9%	14.5%
Asian:	9.7%	8.3%
Latino/Hispanic:	12.5%	9.1%
White:	10.3%	7.4%
Native American	14.7%	8.5

Note how in the example above, the inequities in low birthweight across racial groups are even greater for mothers 12-19 years of age compared to mothers over 20. This comparison would suggest future efforts in this community could focus on African American and Native American teenage mothers.

Table 3

	Which demographic combinations should we explore related our Targeted Problem?
Combination 1	Demographic Category 1: Demographic Category 2: Demographic Category #:
Combination 2	Demographic Category 1: Demographic Category 2: Demographic Category #:
Combination #	Demographic Category 1: Demographic Category 2: Demographic Category #:

How can we summarize our disaggregated data?

Summarize your disaggregated data into an easy to use format to help stakeholders understand what the data is saying about local needs and inequities. There are many ways to summarize data. For example, the following is one Inequity Synthesis Template you can use that concisely and simply summarizes disaggregated data. See template for more instructions and examples.

ABLe Inequity Synthesis Template

4. Use Data to Prioritize Targeted Problem(s) and Inequities

What local needs and inequities do we see using this data?

As you explore data broken out by demographic group, you may see that some groups are experiencing the problem in much more severe ways than others. These differences represent inequities that can be targeted in your efforts.

If you are using the inequity synthesis template described on the previous page, stakeholders can easily look to see which demographic groups are experiencing worst outcomes compared to others. They can also look down the table columns to find groups that are experiencing the greatest inequities across *multiple* outcomes.

Consider using the following questions to help people reflect on the data:

- Which outcomes show the greatest need across groups in the community?

- Which groups are experiencing inequities related to these outcomes?

- Which groups are disproportionally disadvantaged? Which groups are more advantaged?

What problem(s) and inequities should we target for change?

You can engage multiple types of stakeholders in reviewing this data and helping to prioritize problems and inequities to target for change. For example, consider how to engage cross-sector leaders and staff, community partners, and most importantly local families and youth (particularly those experiencing inequities described in the data) in using this data to determine priorities.

Consider using the following questions to help people in selecting their priorities:

- Given the data, what outcomes should be targeted for change given local needs and inequities?

- Which groups should we prioritize in our efforts because they are experiencing the greatest inequities?

- By tackling these outcomes, to what extent will we make progress in creating a more just and equitable community?