WORKSHEET

What Are Data?

This worksheet is a companion to the *What Are Data? Action Learning Guide.* Consider the worksheet a place to track your progress through the guide and to reflect on your own community's experience with the topic.

The worksheet will take you through the sections of the Action Learning Guide:

What Are Data? ➡ **Where Can I Find Data?** ➡ **Making Sense of Data**

What Are Data?

Data can help answer a question, explain, or describe a characteristics of a population, or tell a story. Put simply, data are pieces of information that help us understand the world in which we live.

Data have many uses:

You might use data to:

- Define a problem and its magnitude.
- Understand community conditions and determine if they promote or discourage good health.
- Prioritize what actions to take.
- Start conversations with elected officials.
- Advocate for policy change.
- Complete tasks, such as:
  - Conducting a community needs assessment,
  - Applying for grants,
  - Evaluating interventions or programs, or
  - Creating or refining maps or graphics to explain what is happening in your community.

Reflection and Discussion

On your own or with others, take a few minutes to discuss or journal individually responses to these questions.

What questions do you have about the health of your community?	**How could you use data to answer those questions?**

Types of Data

Quantitative data are described using numbers and statistics. It answers questions like:

- How much?
- How many?
- How likely?

Qualitative data include descriptions, viewpoints, and explanations. It can help to identify and explain:

- Strenghts,
- Needs, or
- Gaps between groups within your community.

Types of quantitative data include:

- Counts
- Proportions (percentages)
- Rates

Types of qualitative data include:

- Descriptions
- Viewpoints
- Explanations

Where Can I Find Data?

There are two key types of data you can use answer your questions—existing data and data you collect.

Existing Data (i.e., secondary data):

- Gathered by someone else.
- Commonly found through national, state, and local agencies and organizations.
- Often publicly available through a range of sources.

Your Own Data (i.e., primary data):

- May provide more detailed data since you have control over which questions you ask.
- Can help to tell a more complete story.
- Can include observations and reviews of documents (e.g., print literature or records).
- Often gathered through surveys, interviews, and focus groups.
- Provides an opportunity for community participation. Consider engaging community members to help generate questions and design your study.

Featured Resource: Listening to the Community

We often refer communities to the Listening to the Community: A Guide to Primary Data Collection tool when they are thinking about collecting primary data. It's a deep resource that offers guidance on when and how to use interviews, focus groups, community surveys, community forums, and observation.

Quick Resource Exploration:

Take a few minutes to get to know the Listening to the Community resource:

1. Click this link to open the PDF (a new browser window will open).
2. Scroll to *Selecting the Best Approach* on page 3 of the document.
3. Review the brief overview of each method.

Which methods have you used to collect data in your community?	**Which methods do you want to learn more about?**

4. Click on a method from the list on page 3 to explore more about the method.

What key questions are addressed?

Featured Resource: Find More Data

The Find More Data resource on the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps website can link you to some important national- and state-level secondary data sources to consider.

Quick Resource Exploration:

Take a few minutes to get to know the Find More Data resource:

1. Click this link to open Find More Data (a new browser window will open).
2. Scroll down the page to National Data Sources.

How many sources are included?

3. Scroll back up to State-Specific Data Sources and click on your state.
4. Review the list of data sources.

How many sources provide data broken down by demographics (e.g., age, sex, race/ethnicity)?	**How many sources provide data for sub-county geographic units (e.g., cities, zip codes, or school districts)?**

Reflection and Discussion

Think back to your review of the Listening to the Community resource and the Find More Data section.

Which data collection methods could be useful for your work?	Which existing data sources could be useful for your own work?

Making Sense of Data

Once you find one or more sources of data, the next step is to begin to make sense of the data. There are many sources of data. We point to our main data tool at County Health Rankings, the county snapshot, to help you start learning how to find and make sense of already existing data.

Find Your County Health Rankings Snapshot

1. Go to Explore Health Rankings at www.countyhealthrankings.org (a new browser window will open).
2. Enter your state or county name under Find County Rankings.
3. Select your county. This brings you to the County Health Rankings snapshot for the current year.

Get to Know Your County Health Rankings Snapshot

Snapshot Feature	Location in Snapshot
Measure Names	In the left most column
County Value	These are your county's data for each measure. We report values for the 35 measures we use to calculate ranks and more additional measures.
Error Margin	This is a fancy way to talk about how much certainty we have in each measure estimate. These should be interpreted as "we are 95% confident that the true value for the county lies between XX and YY."
Top U.S. Performers	For many Rankings measures, we have displayed the value for which only 10% of counties in the country are doing better, i.e., the 90th percentile or 10th percentile, depending on whether the measure is framed positively (e.g., high school graduation) or negatively (e.g., adult smoking).
State Values	Each county's corresponding state values are included for comparison.

Rank	For each ranked county, there are eight ranks listed in the snapshot:
	
	■ Health outcomes,
	■ Health factors
	■ One each for the two types of health outcomes:
	  ● Length of life
	  ● Quality of life
	■ One for each of the factors themselves:
	  ● Health behaviors,
	  ● Clinical care,
	  ● Social and economic, and
	  ● The physical environment.

Additional Measures	You'll notice grey boxes that contain plus signs. Each of these grey boxes can be expanded to reveal additional health measures and data for your county.

Look to Your Ranks to Understand the Big Picture of Health in Your County

To understand the health of your community broadly, start by finding the Health Outcome and Health Factor ranks.

How healthy is your county (note you'll see the total number of counties ranked for your state in the rank column header)?	Is this what you expected?	Why?

Examine Your Data to Understand Your Ranks

Next, examine the data to find some context for your county's ranks. A good way to begin is to compare your county's value to the state or Top U.S. Performers.

Identify two measures where your county seems to be performing particularly well.	Identify two measures where your county has room to improve.
1.	1.
2.	2.

Notice that the different types of quantitative data you reviewed in Section 2.1 are displayed in the snapshot.

Find a measure that uses each of the following types of data:

Types of Quantitative Data	County Health Rankings Snapshot
Percentage	
Rate	
Mean	
Median	

Dig Deeper into Your Data

Scroll to **Children in Poverty** under Social & Economic Factors.

- Click on the value for your county.
  - Can you see the data broken down by race/ethnicity for your county?
  - How does Children in Poverty vary by race/ethnicity in your county?

- Now click on the measure name to explore the measure details.
  - What type of data are used for this measure?
  - What is the data source?

Reflection and Discussion

What about your County Health Rankings snapshot surprised you?	**What questions does your snapshot raise for you about what's impacting health in your community?**