



Disseminating Results with a Community Focus

This tool is part of Mathematica's suite of measurement and evaluation (M&E) tools, which provides a road map for generating timely and actionable evidence about what works for whom, and in what context. The tools were designed to promote rapid innovation and scaling of promising solutions (such as programs, practices, or products). The Disseminating Results with a Community Focus tool is used in Step 4 of the M&E process.



Learn more about the M&E process and other tools here:

<https://www.mathematica.org/features/advancing-educational-equity>

Who should use this guide to disseminating results with a community focus?

This tool is designed for organizations planning to measure the implementation or outcomes of their programs, products, or practices. The tool could be used by the organization's program leads or other staff, or by an external research partner, technical assistance provider, or consultant.

What is this guide to disseminating results with a community focus?

This tool offers strategies for integrating community perspectives when disseminating research (Step 4 of the M&E process). It outlines key steps for co-interpretation—or collaborating with community members to interpret data—along with strategies for sharing findings that are accessible to and reach communities. The tips and techniques here can be adapted to fit different evaluation goals and contexts, and teams should continually examine, refine, and expand on these approaches through their collaborations. When teams share actionable findings in responsive and accessible ways with the communities the research is designed to serve, it helps produce results that are more just, valid, and useful for everyone involved (Schnarch, 2004).

This tool is designed to be used with the [Guide to Equitably Co-Interpreting Data with Community Collaborators](#) and the [Engaging Communities as Research Collaborators](#) tool to help teams conduct research more equitably.

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Disseminating Results with a Community Focus

Overview

Organizations and their research partners often use measurement and evaluation (M&E) to develop, refine, and evaluate programs, products, or practices that focus on specific communities. Yet those people and communities—the people the data are collected from, those whom the research is designed to help—often cannot access the data and findings about themselves (Schubotz, 2019; Krueger & King, 1998). A conversation about research that does not include community members is a conversation missing key voices, and there is a risk that research will happen “to” communities and not “with” them (Chicago Beyond, 2019; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). Without incorporating community voices, organizations are at risk of disseminating findings that reinforce deficit narratives, biases, or long-standing structural inequities that ultimately harm communities (Gonzalez et al., 2022).

By expanding the focus of dissemination to include community members—in educational settings, students, teachers, administrators, and parents—organizations can disseminate findings that are more accessible, meaningful, and relevant to the people whom the research is ultimately meant to serve. Collaborating with communities to co-design dissemination approaches and frame research findings in actionable and responsive ways also increases the chances of the research being used, leading to more effective, practical, and sustainable programs and policies and, ultimately, better outcomes for students.

Co-interpreting results with community and action in mind



Co-interpretation means collaborating with the community members who contributed to M&E activities to interpret the data. Co-interpretation leads to a deeper understanding of how programs, practices, and policies can achieve community goals, and shifts power so research is conducted “for” rather than “on” communities.

Communities have a greater sense of ownership over research and data produced by a participatory process, making it more likely they will use the findings (Schnarch, 2004). Researchers and organizations that practice co-interpretation disrupt the historical exploitation of the people being studied by focusing on actionable results for the community.

Community engagement strategy	Recommended actions for organizations and researchers
Analyze and interpret data with community members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to the Guide to Equitably Co-Interpreting Data with Community Collaborators before, during, and after analysis for ideas about ways to include community members in making sense of results. • Prepare to co-interpret data by defining roles and addressing power imbalances between researchers and community members; this includes determining who leads meetings, offers suggestions, and makes key decisions. • Share data or preliminary analyses in advance of meetings using clear visuals and familiar metrics. Provide guidance on how to interpret charts, graphs and other data; explain unfamiliar terms and data points. • Be clear about the context the evaluation was conducted in and any assumptions or methodologies that could influence results or their interpretation. Answer the questions of whom the results apply to and under what circumstances. • Give community members the time and space to reflect on results individually and in group settings; create space for alternate interpretations.

Community engagement strategy	Recommended actions for organizations and researchers
Identify actionable next steps based on results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize community members' input in identifying which results are most meaningful, what implications they have for the community in focus, and what actions could or should be taken to support community goals. • Determine which evaluation questions are still unanswered. • Identify the impact that societal, political, or economic factors have on results and feasibility of next steps.

Source: Summary of key steps from the [Guide to Equitably Co-Interpreting Data with Community Collaborators](#).

Making findings accessible to community members



Communities cannot use evaluation results if they cannot access them, do not understand them, or are unsure how to apply them (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Communities will benefit when researchers and organizations pay attention to the dissemination cues and needs of those they intend to serve.

Community engagement strategy	Actions for organizations and researchers
Use equitable language and visualizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the American Psychological Association guidelines on using person-first or identity-first language to honor and explain identities in the way the individual would want them explained. • Use asset-based language that focuses on the strengths that communities bring (such as their skills, interests, and achievements); avoid deficit-based language (such as “at risk,” “vulnerable,” or “low-achieving”) or framing (such as defining a community in terms of high crime or unemployment rates). • Use language that directs negative outcomes toward systems and environments rather than individuals or groups. For example, say “The intervention did not improve scores” instead of saying “Students performed poorly.” • Use the Urban Institute’s guide to data visualization to review all materials to ensure they are accessible, do not reinforce stereotypes, and promote equity.
Use accessible language and presentation approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use language that is clear, concise, and avoids jargon. • Carefully consider how to frame the design, methods, and findings so they are easy for the audience to understand. Keep text concise and formatting simple.

Promoting community-focused dissemination and outreach



To increase the impact of their findings, researchers and organizations must include communities as a key audience in dissemination strategies, transparently communicate findings and next steps, and share data to minimize the burden that multiple data collection efforts place on communities (Gaddy & Scott, 2020).

Community engagement strategy	Actions for organizations and researchers
Ensure findings reach community members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess with community members the kind of products that would be most useful to the community, such as summaries of key takeaways on local or social media, infographics, dashboards, or presentations.• Provide executive summaries or briefs that are tailored to the interests of community members and include descriptions of societal, political, and economic factors that contribute to the inequities the research was designed to address.• Co-develop a dissemination plan with community members that balances the task of sharing findings with researchers and communities.• Hold data walks or data parties or use data placemats as platforms to share findings and identify next steps in an accessible and collaborative way.
Incorporate the community's response to dissemination materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Co-write sections of the report, or co-present findings with community members.• Ask for formal and informal feedback through meetings and conversations, surveys, and online comments.• Have community members share their experience with conducting the evaluation, why they chose to be involved, and why the findings matter to them.• Follow up with individual community members for more detail on specific recommendations; involve those individuals in implementing their suggestions.• Outline changes to dissemination plans or materials to ensure community feedback has been integrated and share revised materials for additional feedback.• Be transparent about any recommendations from community members that were not reflected in revisions and the rationale for those decisions.

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