

Telling Our Story With Data

A Guide for and by the Tribes of New Mexico





Telling Our Story With Data

We have written this guide for the tribes of New Mexico to help take the “fear” and uncertainty out of using data and to make the process fun. Using data is essential when planning new programs or when trying to access funding to strengthen and improve community services. It has been our experience that when funding resources become scarce the Tribes must become strong competitors in order to acquire resources to accomplish goals. This means that it is essential to make a strong statement about community needs. The best way to do this is by using a variety of data sources when collecting needs assessment and evaluation data to tell our story.

Data comes in many forms:

- ◆ Stories and personal experiences from community stakeholders;
- ◆ Federal (Indian Health Service –IHS and Bureau of Indian Affairs –BIA) and state reports and surveys;
- ◆ State, county, city and tribal information from various community service providers, including, hospitals, mental health centers, courts, Office of the Medical Investigators and Law Enforcement agencies, to name a few;
- ◆ Local community needs assessment surveys;
- ◆ Data can be qualitative or quantitative:

Quantitative:

Surveys
Epidemiological data
Arrest counts
Test scores
Checklists / observations

Qualitative:

Focus Groups
Interviews
Questionnaires
Pictures
Video

Many funding sources now expect proposal developers to show how you know that the problem you claim to have in your community is really a problem. Let’s say, for example, that you are asking for funding for a Methamphetamine Prevention program. If you were to combine the stories of families struggling with a “meth” problem, with numbers of hospitalizations or deaths due to meth use and abuse and numbers of arrests and convictions of dealers of meth in your community, this combination of information presents a strong argument of need.

We hope that this guide will inform you about:

- ◆ Basic guidelines for data collection in tribal communities;
- ◆ Conducting a community needs assessment or evaluation; and
- ◆ Formatting data for a community audience.

Basic Guidelines for Data Collection in Tribal Communities

Consider the following guidelines when working in tribal communities. These guidelines are recommendations to help establish and maintain a collaborative working relationship with tribes. They come from a place of respect, courtesy and from a desire for a productive and communicative working relationship.

Community Liaison

Anyone collecting data in tribal communities should have a community liaison to help them with the process. The process for each community is different.

The Community liaison must:

- ◆ have contacts in tribal government, school district, and with the tribal administrator. The tribal administrator may be a constant while tribal government may change annually;
- ◆ know protocols and steps to follow to gain information. Your liaison must know how to address Tribal leadership. For example, at Laguna when you go before the council and governor you are expected to stand while talking to them;
- ◆ have knowledge of feast days, tribal celebrations, and scheduled/unscheduled community "doings" (e.g. funerals, or other community activities);
- ◆ be a guide for cultural etiquette in order to avoid incidents;
- ◆ build a working relationship with various departments. Having liaisons in each department is essential to understanding various protocols and acquiring data. Some of these agencies and organizations or departments include: IHS, Community Health Representatives (CHR), Behavioral Health Services, Tribal Behavioral Health Services, public school districts (schools funded through NM Public Education Department), BIA law enforcement, education, and social services.

Give Detailed Information to Tribal Leaders

It is important to be able to describe use of data to Tribal leaders, council members and officials, as well as, the reasons for data collection, how data will be collected, how will it be used, and who will have access to data. Make sure to cover the:

- ◆ Confidentiality of sources;
 - Individuals
 - Community
- ◆ Benefits to community;
 - Accessibility of data including presentation of results to community.
 - Printed report of results that can be used by tribal programs to increase resources and identify needs.
- ◆ Acknowledge past misuses of data and lack of trust as a result of history.



Conducting a Community Needs Assessment or Evaluation

1. Identify the purpose for the assessment / evaluation

- ◆ Needs assessment and evaluation are two sides of the same coin. Often the data collected for a needs assessment can be used later to compare to data acquired after a program was implemented.
- ◆ The main purpose for most needs assessments is to identify problems, issues, and concerns. Assessments also may describe resources, gaps in resources and capacity.
- ◆ Evaluations usually document the process by which a program is implemented and outcomes that the program is designed to change. Usually these problems were identified in the needs assessment.
- ◆ Evaluations usually document outcomes to: 1) be accountable to the funding sources; 2) identify accomplishments; and 3) identify program areas in need of improvement.

2. Follow Tribal protocol

- ◆ Contact the Tribal Administrator to find out the process for getting permission to conduct an assessment.
- ◆ Be prepared to explain what kind of information you plan to collect and how the data will be used.
- ◆ Ask for a memo or letter of introduction to give to the tribal agencies. This memo should say that Tribal leadership is aware of and supports the needs assessment process. The letter might also ask Tribal employees and organizations to cooperate fully and to be supportive of the process.
- ◆ Provide the Tribal leadership with examples of the type of document and / or materials that will be developed through the needs assessment (e.g. an executive summary from a completed assessment, a strategic plan summary based on a completed assessment).
- ◆ Ask the tribe how they would like the data back.

3. Identify sources for data and key contacts to collect the data

- ◆ Pull together a core group with members who are knowledgeable about programs and services on and surrounding the reservation.
- ◆ Brainstorm a list of potential data sources. Some obvious places to begin are Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) law enforcement, social services, and education and Indian Health Service (IHS).
- ◆ Set up a timeline and designate folks to collect reports, records, and other types of archival data.

4. Decide on methods for collecting the data

- ◆ Focus groups and interviews can be used to generate a core set of items for surveys and questionnaires.
- ◆ Consider the English language proficiency of the group you are planning to survey. Sometimes more reliable data is collected from interviews using the Native language.

5. Analyze and summarize the information

- ◆ Look for patterns in the data.
- ◆ Identify and prioritize needs when the same finding is identified in more than one source and from more than one method.





Formatting Data for a Community Audience

1. Identify your purpose for using the data

Using the data is always linked to a specific purpose. Work with your community group to identify what the purpose is:

- Improving the program;
- Determining program effectiveness;
- Reporting to the funding source;
- Identifying new needs, gaps in resources, capacity to deliver services.

2. Identify your audience

Everyone's time is valuable and so making your point quickly is always a benefit. Audiences may require specific kinds of formatting. For example policy makers usually don't have time for more than one page documents. Elders may need to have the findings translated into their native language. Youth may require examples that are meaningful to them.

3. Identify what type of data you have

All data provides answers about what, who, when, where, why and how. Data comes in two forms, qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative data rely on numbers, math and statistics. Qualitative data rely on words, pictures, observations, but can also be summarized with statistics. Data sources include:

- Education –BIA Day Schools, charter schools, public and private schools;
- Law enforcement –BIA, Tribal, Local police, County Sheriffs, State Police, FBI;
- Health-Indian Health Service, State Health Clinics, HMOs, Social and Behavioral Health.

4. Final formatting guidelines

Short is better than long, bullets are better than paragraphs and a picture is worth a thousand words.

- Keep it one page in length.
 - Use concise, non-technical language.
 - Provide a summary and a longer report with references and a description of how you collected the data.
 - Check all facts for accuracy.
 - Use pictures, graphs and charts.
 - Link the examples and data to the current, community issues.
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This Guide was developed by the Tribal Data Collection Work Group with support and funding from:

- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- NM Human Services Department
- NM/DOH Office of Substance Abuse Prevention
- Value Options
- University of New Mexico, Health Sciences Center, Department of Psychiatry, Center for Rural & Community Behavioral Health

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