MAKING IT COUNT:
ACHIEVING, MEASURING, AND REPORTING RESULTS WITH DATA

TIP SHEET

NADO Research Foundation

MAKING IT COUNT: ACHIEVING, MEASURING, AND REPORTING RESULTS WITH DATA

This tip sheet offers a framework for EDD practitioners to use data to improve organizational practices and offers additional resources and scenarios for using this framework to improve teamwork in the office, tell the region's story, and secure more funding for regional projects.

Through grant administration and compliance with Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy requirements, EDD practitioners have determined what economic development metrics are important for their communities and how these metrics have changed over time. The updated CEDS Content Guidelines from the U.S. Economic Development Administration continue to remain valuable for EDD practitioners embarking on a 5-year CEDS update or working with stakeholders on an annual CEDS review. For the CEDS to be impactful and drive regional economic development, it must be rooted in accurate and actionable data to effectively set goals, establish benchmarks, and track progress.

This resource is offered through the Economic Development District Community of Practice (EDD CoP), managed by the NADO Research Foundation to build the capacity of the national network of EDDs. To learn more, visit: www.nado.org/EDDCoP. The EDD CoP is made possible through an award from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce (ED22HDQ3070106). The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations in this resource are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Economic Development Administration or the U.S. Department of Commerce.

EDD CoP
Economic Development District
Community of Practice

THE 3-D PROCESS: DISCOVERY, DIAGNOSIS, DECISION-MAKING

There are many different tools and techniques available to analyze data. The 3-D method is one way to determine how data can best be used to solve a problem or answer a question. You can used the "3-D" process as a memory aid when determining what data sources best address the question at hand.

Step 1: Discovery

- *Identify the problem and come up with questions:* Natural curiosity in the face of a problem is a great guide to developing a line of inquiry to help solve it. There are no stupid questions.
- *Consider information that will help you understand the problem and answer questions:* There are many sources and all sorts of things measured and recorded as public data. Consider exactly what information will help you understand your problem and answer questions.
    - Orient your problem/questions in space: Identify the relevant geographic scope for which you need information.
    - Orient your problem/questions in time: Do you need to understand past trends, the current situation, and/or future scenarios? Is there a hard stop deadline you must meet?
    - Orient your problem/questions to available sources of data: Is the data you need available and accessible? Are there paywalls or barriers to access that you can overcome?
- *Determine whether you have the data you need to answer your questions:* If the information you want is not available, be prepared to transform your question and approach problem solving from another angle.

Step 2: Diagnosis

- *Evaluate the quality of the data:* Garbage in, garbage out. Don’t waste time evaluating bad data. You control the methodology for data you gather through your own recordkeeping. Data sets created through outside professional research should contain “Metadata” that describes attributes of the data. Consider your own recordkeeping methods, and use metadata for other data sets to evaluate:
    - How was the data collected? Understanding research methodology can help you determine whether a data set will provide the quality of information you need.
    - Is there bias inherent in the methodology? Is the sample population likely to be representative of the whole applicable population?
    - What is the error rate and what was the response rate? Is the sample size large enough that the data is meaningful about the population you’re considering?
    - Are the metrics and sources relevant? Reconsider the plan you made in Step One and ensure that the data is relevant to the space and time you need to understand. If it’s your own data, be honest about whether recordkeeping has been consistent. For outside data, consider the source and your level of trust in the entity that collected and reported the data.

THE 3-D PROCESS: DISCOVERY, DIAGNOSIS, DECISION-MAKING

- *Consider the dynamics at play and relationship between metrics:* Interrogate your data by evaluating metrics according to other factors. For example:
    - Time: How do the metrics change over time? Is the change exponential or linear?
        - *Example*: Population growth may fluctuate between positive and negative trends. Noting dates when population changes were positive or negative, and how quickly change happened, can clue you into periods of time worth investigating to understand how circumstances in the community at that time may have affected population change.
    - Space: How do the metrics you're looking at change across the geographic area you're considering?
        - *Example*: Your region's average median income may not indicate economic stress, but breaking data down geographically may reveal that some counties or even census tracts have lower average income than adjacent areas.
    - Correlation: Do you see similar patterns in different metrics that would be worth investigating in more detail?
        - *Example*: When average household incomes increase at nearly the same rate as average home values, population growth rates remain steady; when income increases more slowly than home values do, population growth rates stall or turn negative.

Step 3: Decision-Making

- *Did you answer the questions from Step 1?* If you did, inventory the information. If you didn't, keep working through Step 2 until you are satisfied that you have answered your questions.

- *With the answers from Steps 1-2 you can start to implement:* You may have all the information you need to make a final decision at this point, or you may simply be embarking on a process that will provide new information and require continued evaluation and decision-making. Whatever your current situation, rest assured regional development organizations are all always somewhere on the 3-D cycle.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Data Sources:

Argonne's National Economic Research and Resilience Center tools: NERRC data tools, including the National Economic Resilience Data Explorer (NERDE) and Economic Development Capacity Index (EDCI), combine the scientific power of the lab with community data, empowering communities to quantify local capacities and build resilience to disasters. For more information on how to effectively use this the EDCI, follow this one-pager resource. The NADO Research Foundation conducted a webinar training on how practitioners can best use Argonne Laboratory's NERDE and EDCI tools to push regional economic resilience forward in their regions: NADO - Webinar: Argonne National Laboratory's NERDE and EDCI Tools

StatsAmerica: Actionable data for economic developers to use in site requests, development metrics, grant writing, and strategic planning.

Census Bureau Curated Datasets: Discover issue-specific data recommended by government experts and test-driven by teams working to solve the nation's biggest challenges.

Headwaters Economics Tools: Free, easy-to-use analysis tools to help users better understand socioeconomic data and trends for their communities, counties, states, or regions.

Guidance for interpreting and evaluating data:

Performance Metrics Matter: This NADO resource offers guidance for considering metrics applicable to your region's strategic planning process and ongoing performance evaluation.

Redefining Economic Development Performance Indicators for a Field in Transition: This Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness (CREC) resource offers a set of metrics beyond jobs and investment tallies to capture broader benefits of economic development initiatives.

Making it Count: Metrics for High Performing EDOs: This International Economic Development Council research project offers a comprehensive, easy-to-use "menu" of economic development metrics that regional organizations can choose from based on their mission, functions, and resources along with a guidebook on performance measurement.

SCENARIOS: THE 3-D PROCESS IN ACTION

1. Improve Teamwork in the Office

Scenario: In your Community and Economic Development Office, three different grant-funded staff are working on transportation mobility, hazard mitigation planning, economic development, and state zoning ordinance compliance projects. They are all reaching out to local government staff in your region to complete surveys, attend meetings, read information, etc. The local government staff members have limited time and aren't as responsive as the regional staff need them to be.

Solution: Keep a common, daily record of all staff communication, and regularly evaluate how frequently or infrequently communities have received communication from the office – recordkeeping should be integrated into the workflow of communication, not adding to the communications burden. Meet regularly to coordinate and schedule calls and meetings so that each outreach effort to a community covers every project's communication needs. Follow the advice outlined above in Step 2 when collecting and organizing data. The communication record and calendar will serve not only to ensure consistent communication across the region, but also creates a basis for network analysis that can help with quick and easy generation of progress and activity reports for grant reporting, stakeholder reports, and board communication.

2. Tell Your Story

Scenario: Your CEDS Committee is meeting in anticipation of a 5-year plan update, and everyone is eager to get through the discussion and return to their respective offices. You want to engage the committee in the CEDS process so that as they return to work on their individual community goals, all CEDS stakeholders know how they are contributing to and benefitting from regional initiatives as well. You also want the community members in your region generally to enjoy a sense of progress, as they see the work of the regional leaders on the CEDS committee adding up to real results toward shared goals and objectives.

Solution: As you develop your CEDS Evaluation Framework, determine metrics that you will share and a timeline for updating the CEDS Committee and the community about progress. Within the CEDS Strategy Committee, meet on a consistent schedule to evaluate progress and determine whether to adjust tactics. To share the effort with the wider community, partner with local news outlets, communities with newsletters, etc. Start a communication campaign to educate the community about the CEDS development and implementation process, the reason you are tracking specific metrics, and what the committee's goals are. Read about North Central Pennsylvania RPDC's Data Dashboard here, a great example of an RDO making data public and available to stakeholders. Additionally, it is important to celebrate your wins as they come. Public service can often be a thankless job and recognizing and rewarding achievement when it comes can create a spirit of success throughout the implementation stage.

SCENARIOS: THE 3-D PROCESS IN ACTION

3. Get More Money

Scenario: As funding opportunities arise, your organization is anxious to receive grants and concerned about spending time on unsuccessful applications. Without a grant writer on staff, it's hard to find time to sift through and identify appropriate funding opportunities, let alone apply for them. Seeking funding for projects may come down to relationships regional organization staff members have with local elected officials and not necessarily reflect strategic investment priorities across the region.

Solution: By tracking CEDS evaluation metrics consistently, you not only have at hand the data necessary to determine whether a funding opportunity applies to your regional circumstances, but also can determine which strategic objectives requiring investment are worth prioritizing as opportunities come available. Different data sources can be used to narrow which opportunities an organization is eligible and competitive for, and staff should know which data can be helpful in inspiring different partners to get behind a proposal. The more knowledge at hand, the more likely it is your organization will be positioned to quickly and confidently respond to funding opportunities which may come up quickly and not be available for long. By developing and sharing metrics with CEDS stakeholders, your organization is also positioned to quickly bring partners together for collaborative funding opportunities.