DATA SWEET SPOT

WHY USE QUANTITATIVE DATA?

In society, we are often told that the American Dream is possible if only we will work hard enough, long enough, fierce enough to overcome the obstacles in front of us. That any failure to live up to the American Dream is the result of personal failure: We didn't work hard enough; we didn't take enough risks; we didn't seize the opportunities we'd been given. While choices can play a part in our life outcomes, the story is never that simple.

For example, at the beginning of the Great Depression, there was no way of knowing the impact on the country. No data existed to know who was out of work and who wasn't. Economists debated how bad it might be, and how long it would last (most thought the depression would only last a few months, not years).

Without knowing the full scope of the problem, individuals who were unable to find work were blamed for their own personal failings. They didn't want to work enough. They were lazy. They just wanted a handout from other people.

We know now that individual failings were not to blame for the inability of people to find a job. Once statisticians started counting the people who wanted to work but couldn't find a job, they realized unemployment was a national epidemic in the 1930s (that would last 10 years). It turned out 15 million people were out of work during the Great Depression.

Using quantitative data allows us to put individual circumstances into a larger context.

LIMITATIONS OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

While quantitative data can play an important role in contextualizing the individual experience in the context of a larger society, it can also be reductionistic.

1 Quantitative data can gloss over the variation in experiences, even across a specific group.

2 Quantitative data can be used to define a community in ways that do not match the ways the community wants to represent itself.

DATA SWEET SPOT

While we recognize the importance of quantitative data, we take a broad view of data. Instead of focusing on statistics, we work the data sweet spot.

In the Community Voice process, we collect three different types of data. Each one provides us with different but fundamental insights to a community's current challenges and opportunities.

Lived Experience

One-to-One's, Interviews

Tells us what is important to a community today.

Historical and Political Context

Old Newspapers, Written and Oral Histories, Museums, Library Archives, etc.

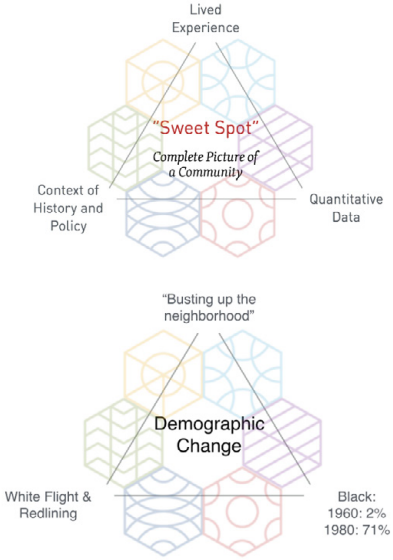
Tells us what happened in a particular place and time, and why.

Quantitative Data

Survey Responses and Census Data

Tells us what is happening now. Tells us about the size and scope of the issue at the neighborhood, census tract, district, city, and state level

Data Sweet Spot and Example for Demographic Change in the 1960s–'80s



ACADEMIC RESEARCH

During the Connect and Craft stage, we also draw on academic research to help us narrow the issues and come up with equitable solutions. Community Voice looks to academic research and professional publications to understand the factors which affect and are affected by a particular issue.

Our data analysts study what we call "upstream" and "downstream" factors for each issue.

While choices can play a part in our life outcomes, the story is never that simple.

UPSTREAM FACTORS

These are high-level macro factors that effect micro factors down the road.

Reading on Grade-Level in 3rd Grade

An upstream factor to dropping out of high school is reading on grade-level by third grade.

Bachelor's Degree

An upstream factor to earning potential is getting a bachelor's degree.

DOWNSTREAM FACTORS

These are direct micro factors that have been caused by previous macro factors.

Dropping Out of High School

An downstream factor to reading on grade-level by third grade is dropping out of high school.

Earning Potential

A downstream factor to getting a bachelor's degree is earning potential.

SUPPORTING RESEARCH

A study from the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that a student who can't read on gade level by the time they reach the third grade is 4× less likely to graduate by age 19 than a child who reads proficiently by that time.[1]

Millenial college graduates ages 25 to 32 who are working full time earn more annually about $17,500 more than employed young adults holding only a high school diploma.[2]

For more social data indicators, check out Thriving Cities Group's Indicator Explorer. The Indicator Explorer is a unique online data discernment tool that connects people with the social data indicators they need to measure what social metrics matter most based on validated evidence of what works best for making communities thrive. It enables users to discern how their issue is connected to other issues across the human ecology and what experts think are the most important short-term outcomes around which to build strategies for a user's desired long-term impact.

[1] *gradelevelreading.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/EarlyWarningConfirmed.pdf*
[2] *pewsocialtrends.org/2014/02/11/the-rising-cost-of-not-going-to-college*