
MAKING MEANING OF DATA

Libraries today have no shortage of data. They have new and growing streams of information about usage and activity. The challenge is how to make sense of that in the context of Public Knowledge and a Turned-Outward stance. This tool is designed to jumpstart that process.

WHY WOULD YOU USE THIS TOOL:

This tool is for libraries that are trying to Turn Outward. You are making strides on Community Conversations and thinking about how to use Public Knowledge. You are also looking at lots of data reports. You are looking for ways to understand your data as connected to Turning Outward. This tool is an invitation for you to use internal conversations to connect your data collection efforts to your Turning Outward perspectives.

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LIBRARIES USING THIS TOOL:

- You have been oriented to the Turning Outward practices of the Harwood Institute.
- You have conducted Community Conversations and created a Public Knowledge summary.
- You have a basic knowledge of Public Capital Factors before beginning the discussion. (See summary, page 70.)
- You use data to track different elements of the library programs and services.
- You want to connect the expert knowledge embedded in data about the library with the Public Knowledge you gained from the community.

MAKING MEANING OF DATA

GOAL:

- Connect data and metrics to Public Knowledge and Public Capital Factors to create alignment in practices.

The steps in this tool are designed to help you see your expert knowledge data through the lens of Public Knowledge. Doing so could lead you:

- to think about your data differently.
- to consider new data that you may want to track.
- to change your approach to measurement altogether.

STEPS

- 1 Use an internal team meeting. Include the team that has been working on Turning Outward activities. Also be sure to include staff with strong knowledge of data and indicators systems.
 - *Note: This is a two-hour discussion. It can be held in one long meeting or two one-hour meetings. If you divide it into two, be sure to schedule them within two weeks of each other so as not to lose momentum from the first discussion.*
- 2 Have a selected data report and latest Public Knowledge summary available for everyone.
 - *Pick either a data report that you look at all the time or one that you already think may connect to Turning Outward efforts.*
- 3 Have a copy of the Public Capital Factors and any previous work you have done with the Turning Outward tools available.
- 4 Plan two hours using the following discussion guide.
- 5 Schedule a follow-up discussion after team members agree to tackle new questions.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. As we consider our Turning Outward efforts, let's remind ourselves which Public Capital Factors we are working on and which we think are most at issue in the community?

- *Chart factors and mark any priorities.*

2. Now looking at the data report you selected and our Public Knowledge summary, complete the review worksheet individually.

- *If necessary, take a few minutes to orient the team to the data they are seeing if it isn't something they are familiar with.*
- *Remind everyone to slow down and think. They should take the time to ponder and consider. (10 minutes)*
 - *Our experience is this is where groups fall short. Taking this amount of time feels like a luxury. But it's essential.*
 - *Keep the room quiet and support everyone doing some concentrated work.*

3. Share and record answers from the individual work. (See full worksheet on page 84.)

Here's What: When you look at the data report, what strikes you? (Don't rush, Do ponder).	So What: What are your interpretations or meaning of the data?	Now What: What are possible implications for each idea you listed?	Public Knowledge: In what way does this connect with our Public Knowledge?	Public Capital: How could this be connected to a Public Capital factor? Which?

DISCUSSION GUIDE

4. When we look at what we see (columns 1-3 on worksheet):

- What do we see in common?
- How does what others see change our views?
- What seems to be the most salient or strongest thread in the thinking?
- What new questions does it generate?

5. How does our data connect to the Public Knowledge? In particular, trend data — how does it fit with what we learned about the community and the library through Community Conversations (column 4)?

- *Consider aspirations and conditions that people are thinking about. How does your data connect, if it does?*
- What does it say about how you are addressing conditions that need to change?
- How is your programing connected to issues people care the most about?

If dividing the discussion into two meetings, break here. Ask everyone to think about this question:

- *If we make progress on Public Capital, where might we look for evidence — either in our data or elsewhere?*

Explanatory note: The final questions are all designed to be exploratory. The conversation may well move in several different directions. It is OK if the answer sometimes is “No,” “None” or “Don’t Know.” At this point, you are innovating. Try out hypotheses and agree to experiment and come back together.

6. Given the Public Capital Factors and what we are seeing in both the data and our Public Knowledge summary, what data might we expect to see change if we made progress on Public Capital Factors? Why?

DISCUSSION GUIDE

7. What data do we wish we had? What can we ask our team to work on?

- *If you are struggling with connections to Public Knowledge or Public Capital, what data could we get that might illuminate what the community cares about?*

8. What other evidence do we have that can inform this discussion — even if it isn't in the form of numbers?

- *Evidence might be stories, anecdotes, online comments and/or word of mouth.*
- *What pressures are we feeling from external events and priorities that affect our data?*

9. What strategies can we use to connect Public Knowledge gathering to our data-tracking?

10. What do we need to think about next?

11. Who is taking the next steps and when are we revisiting this discussion?

PUSH FURTHER:

If you feel like you have made some progress in connecting some basic data, consider some additional questions:

- What indicators show a commitment to and trust in the library? How can we test our answers through our community narrative or through additional community engagement?
- What indicators can help us measure if the library is relevant to the community?
- How can we innovate on metrics and evaluation? What can we build and share with the field?

DATA AND PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE CONVERSATION WORKSHEET

Public Capital Factor(s) we are working on:
(maximum of 3)

Here's What: When you look at the data report, what strikes you? (Don't rush, Do ponder).	So What: What are your interpretations or meaning of the data?	Now What: What are possible implications for each idea you listed?	Public Knowledge: In what way does this connect with our Public Knowledge?	Public Capital: How could this be connected to a Public Capital factor? Which?
Ex. Increase in new library card sign-ups last month on weekends.	Ex. The bad weather brought people to the library.	Ex. We should have simple easy-to-use outreach strategies ready to go when the weather changes.	Ex. The community keeps saying we need better connections in the community.	Ex. As a social gathering place, we need to strengthen and grow the participation in the library.

What are your initial conclusions reflecting on your lists?