

# Engaging in a Data Walk: A Prerequisite for Action

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A data walk creates an intentional conversation among and between results leaders who have a shared commitment towards a population level result. The physical act of walking with other leaders around a room set up with relevant data on the wall—in contrast to just sitting and looking at the data on a handout—promotes more authentic conversations about the current circumstances and the work to be done. The group walks and talks in pairs and trios, exploring, discussing, and reacting to the data. That animated dialogue will form the foundation for the decisions made during that and subsequent meetings, including strategies to be taken, programs to be implemented, and targets and timelines to evoke urgency and accountability. Depending on the robustness of the data, the data walk usually lasts between 15-30 minutes.

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## I. Set up the Space for the Walk

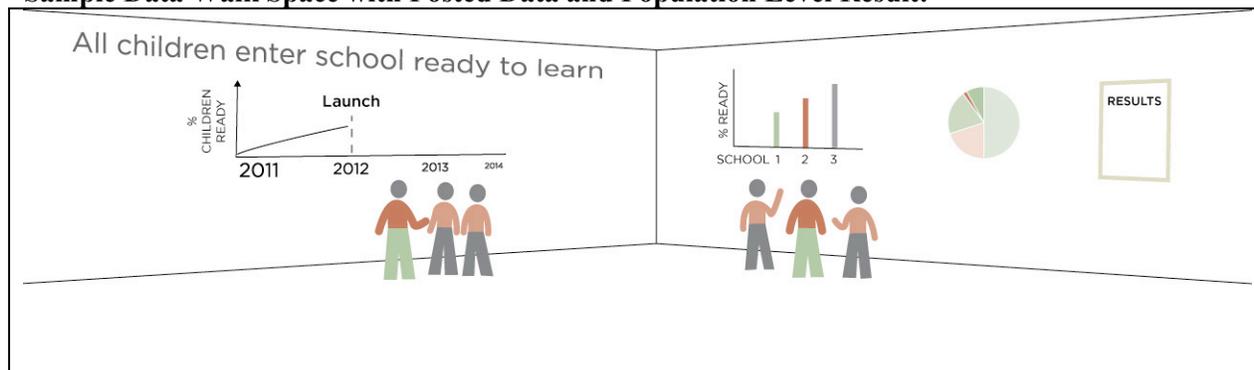
The set-up of the room in which the leaders engage in the data walk is important to the walk's success. Print the data on poster-size paper for easy viewing, and display it on either easels or adhered to the wall. Space the posters at intervals that allow walkers to stop in small groups in front of each poster without crowding those at the next poster. In addition, the data can be grouped by category, i.e., national, local, issue-oriented, etc.

### 11. Select the Data to Display

Always include a banner near the center of the data walk that displays the population level result the group is working to achieve. "All children enter school ready to learn," for example, is the population level result in the sample data walk pictured below. For other data to display, consider including:

1. Population level data, disaggregated by race, gender, geography, etc., to illuminate possible disparities and the possible impact of interventions;
2. Indicator data, reflected as a baseline and trend line;
3. Additional disaggregated socio-economic data, if available, such as, education, employment, health, and community data; and
4. Other data that will inform the conversation about the work.

### Sample Data Walk Space with Posted Data and Population Level Result:



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## III. Frame the Conversation using a Data Walk Guide

Provide a helpful frame for the conversations about the data by developing some guiding questions in either a handout given to participants or on posters placed at the start of the walk. These questions are designed to allow results leaders to explore the current condition of well being for people in their

community as well as explore why things may be the way they are. They may also allow the leaders to experience the data from their own lived or work experience and from the systems they represent.

Consider these items as you develop your guiding questions:

- Who are the participants in the walk? What sectors do they represent, what contributions can they make towards the result, and what potential conflicts or different points of view might they have on the current circumstances?
- Try to illuminate the perspectives of the multiple stakeholders who are impacted by the results work.
- Highlight the multiple contributing factors to the current situation.

**For the population level result in the sample above, “All children enter school ready to learn,” some illustrative guiding questions are:**

- What is the current state of school-readiness in this community? Who is doing well and who isn't? Why?
- How does this compare to other communities?
- What do you notice about the connections between school readiness and:
  - a. Race/ethnicity, age, gender, and/or language?
  - b. Demographics of the footprint?
  - c. Rates of formal and informal care?
- Was there specific data that you found interesting or compelling and, if so, why?
- What data is missing? What additional information would help you better understand school readiness in this community? From what sectors?
- What works to support school readiness? What, from your experience, is important to support school readiness for all children?

### **III. Ignite the Conversation**

As the results leaders enter the room, invite them to get settled and then find a partner(s) from a different agency, unit, or organization and engage in the data walk. Offer the leaders the data walk handout or point them to the posted guide, and give them large post-its on which they can write comments, observations, and/or questions and stick directly on the associated data poster. Encourage them to reflect with their partners on what they see and what data is missing. Missing data can evolve into a data development agenda for the leaders to create.

During the walk, notice who is talking to whom, any differing points of view, or places where participants are aligned. These observations will inform you in the next step in the process – debriefing the data walk conversation.

### **IV. Debrief the Conversation**

Once the data walk is finished, invite the leaders to come back and have a conversation with their tablemates about the data. This allows the leaders to integrate the experience and hear from voices other than their partner(s) in the walk. This small-group conversation serves as a springboard for the next large group conversation. Sometimes the larger group also needs to discuss the data, or they may be ready to move on to the next conversation on strategy, accountability, or any other topic that moves their results work forward and aligns with the meeting agenda.