How to pick the data to use for the data walk

* Depends on mission/vision of your coalition – how broad or narrow topic(s) of choice may be
* Young vs. established coalition (are priorities already established)
* General guidelines: data should be population-level (not agency-specific), collected regularly (yearly or every two years), and specific to your geographic region (a mix of local, county, state, and national is most useful and allows for comparison)
* Search for existing reports done by experts in the field. This is a highly effective and efficient way to achieve the next point, which is…
* Provide a broad selection of charts that slice the data a variety of ways, representing all sides of the issue (without giving too much data, which isn’t a fixed amount; know your coalition/audience)

Which data do we share with the coalition or with the community? (how to prevent your own mental models and/or personal agenda from acting as a filter to determine what data you put in front of the coalition)

* Name and frame your biases – verbalize them (to yourself or to others)
* Having done this, you are better able to consciously avoid spinning a story with data that matches your own agenda; convene a group to make final selections of graphs so you can watch out for biases
* Again, existing reports from experts in the field or credible agencies are helpful here because they tend to paint with a broad brush using all the available data on a particular issue

Ethics in data – two aspects to consider…

* In presenting data, give some context (Dorothy’s example of substance use rates in tribal vs. suburban communities – important to acknowledge the historical trauma and cultural significance of certain substances, e.g., tobacco, for tribal peoples). Recall triangulation and qualitative methods…
* In collecting/reporting, do your homework to understand who collected the data and how (this is often described in the report itself), and use existing reports where some context is provided and methodology can be trusted

For the “missing data” and lingering questions after the data walk (we can always use more data!)

* Get creative on sources of quantitative and qualitative data to verify assumptions and/or conclusions
* Look to the peer-reviewed literature to see what is known about the issue and the related variables (e.g., large body of research around sleep and mental health already but our local data was very striking on its own, which led us to include this as an “off-the-wall” idea)
* If possible, do some data analysis (e.g., cross-tabulation) in-house to look for relationships at the local level. Capacity may be an issue, but community partners – especially large corporations with dedicated data staff – may be willing to provide in-kind support.

Also note:

An indicator is a proxy measure for the result you are hoping to achieve. Some groups have indicators that are more observations (e.g., young people use heroin more and old people use prescription pills).

It’s important to have an indicator that represents the full geography impacted by your work and is collected regularly so that you can track progress and try different things if not moving the needle…