



# Community-wide Data Initiative Listening Session Summary Report

**August, 2018**



The Institute for  
Urban Policy Research  
at The University of Texas at Dallas

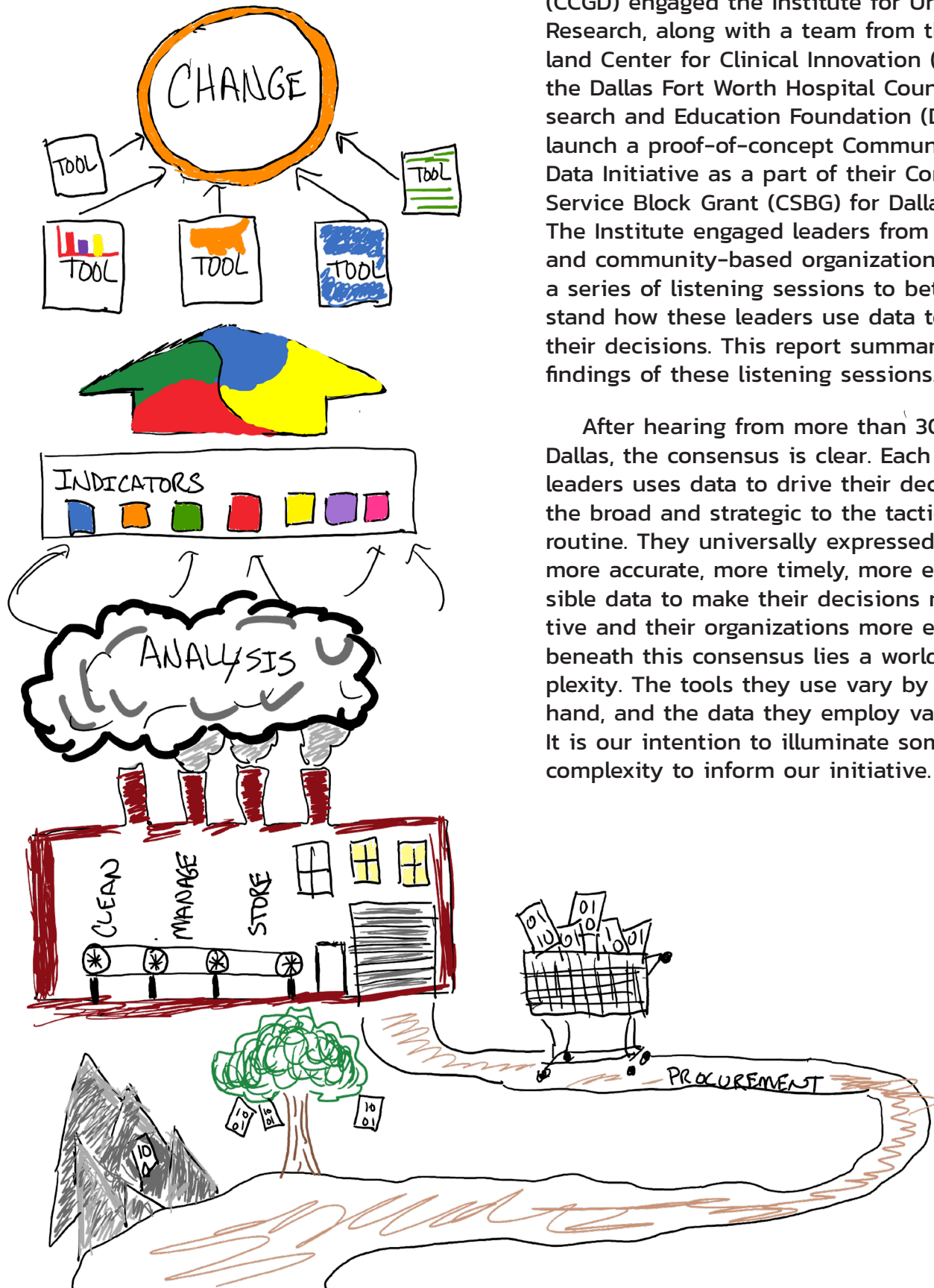




# Introduction

The Community Council of Greater Dallas (CCGD) engaged the Institute for Urban Policy Research, along with a team from the Parkland Center for Clinical Innovation (PCCI) and the Dallas Fort Worth Hospital Council Research and Education Foundation (DFWHCF) to launch a proof-of-concept Community-wide Data Initiative as a part of their Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) for Dallas County. The Institute engaged leaders from government and community-based organizations (CBOs) in a series of listening sessions to better understand how these leaders use data to inform their decisions. This report summarizes the findings of these listening sessions.

After hearing from more than 30 CBOs in Dallas, the consensus is clear. Each of these leaders uses data to drive their decisions, from the broad and strategic to the tactical and routine. They universally expressed a need for more accurate, more timely, more easily accessible data to make their decisions more effective and their organizations more efficient. But beneath this consensus lies a world of complexity. The tools they use vary by the task at hand, and the data they employ varies as well. It is our intention to illuminate some of that complexity to inform our initiative.



# Process and Methodology

The listening session is an adaptation of focus group qualitative research methodology. In general, a focus group is a tool that seeks insight not just from what participants say, but also the interaction between them (Kitzinger, 1995). Kitzinger suggests that focus groups “help researchers tap into the many different forms of communication that people use in day to day interaction, including jokes, anecdotes, teasing, and arguing. Gaining access to such variety of communication is useful because people’s knowledge and attitudes are not entirely encapsulated in reasoned responses to direct questions” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299).

## Scheduling and Sampling

The Institute worked with CCGD to schedule ten listening sessions in Dallas County. We designed the schedule to include morning, lunch, and afternoon sessions, as well as geographic coverage throughout the county. Table 1 provides the list of listening sessions and their attendance. In addition to eight in-person listening sessions, we convened two virtual meetings. These sessions made use of a web conferencing system to accommodate those who could not get away from the office. One was planned in the morning and the other in the afternoon.

Each focus group was audio recorded, and a detailed note taker recorded major findings. Our transcription team performed verbatim, time-stamped transcriptions, and we coded these transcripts using the qualitative research software nVivo.

Table 1. Attendee Count by Location

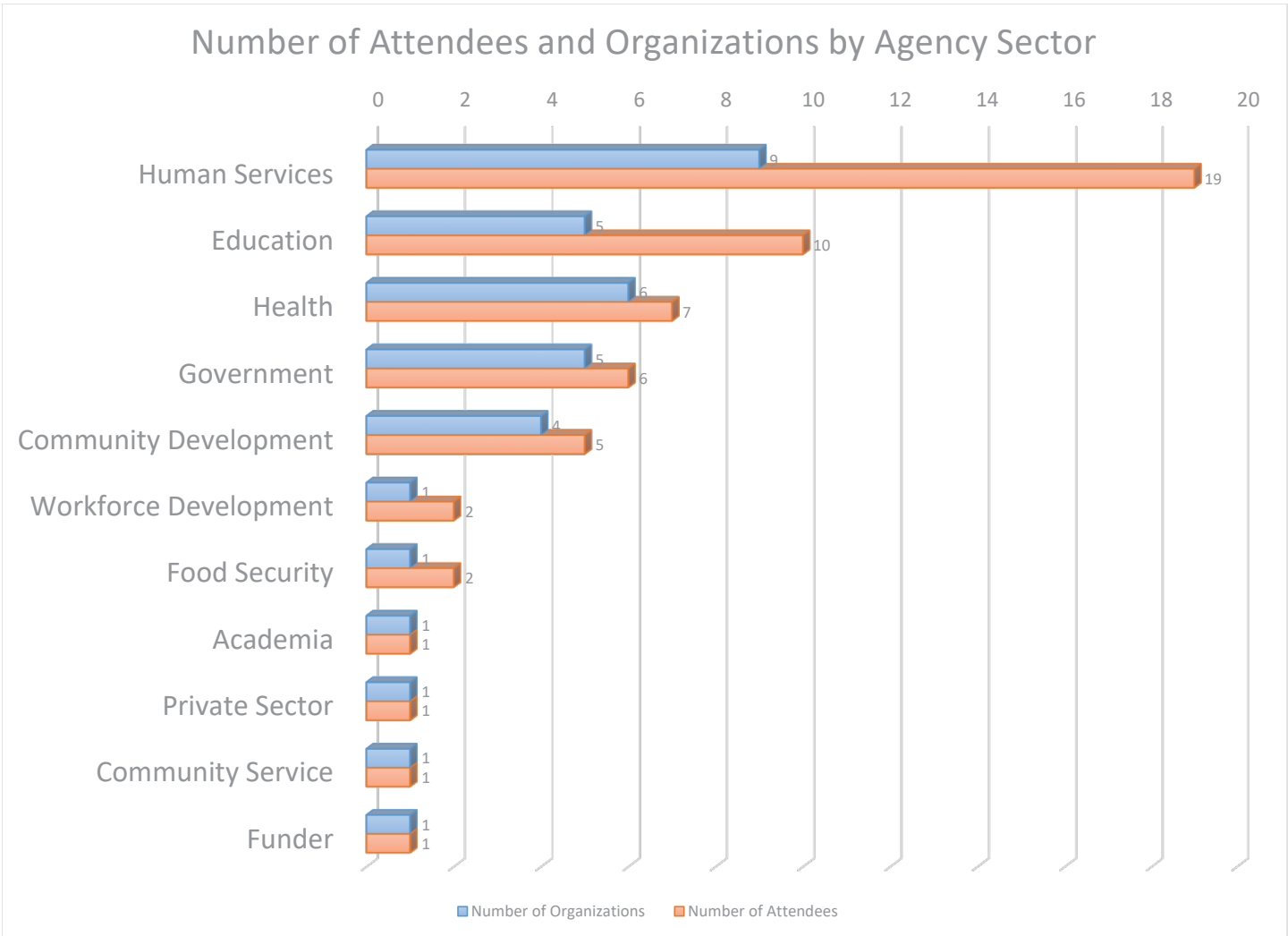
Location	Attendees
City Square Opportunity Center	19
Duncanville	3
Lancaster	0
Mesquite	2
North Oak Cliff	5
United Way	14
UT Dallas	2
West Dallas	5
Virtual Listening Session 1	0
Virtual Listening Session 2	5

The non-random sample design for this series of listening sessions was purposive and opportunistic. CCGD invited recipients of funding from its CSBG and other programs to participate in the listening session, as well as general members of the CBO and government communities.

## Demographic Assessment

In all, 55 persons attended the listening sessions, representing 37 organizations. Table 2 depicts the breakdown of participants by race/ethnicity and gender. At the margin, 36% of participants were male and 64% were female. By race and ethnicity, 60% of respondents were white, 30% were African American, and 10% were Hispanic. A plurality of participants were white females (40%), followed by white males and black females (20% each). Of the eight in-person listening sessions scheduled, only one had no attendees.

Figure 1 depicts the breakdown of attendees and organizations by agency sector. Human services organizations occupied the largest segment of participating organizations, with 19 employees representing nine organizations. Healthcare and education represented the next largest groups, with healthcare having seven attendees representing six organizations, and education having ten attendees representing



**Figure 1. Number of Attendees by Agency Sector**  
 five organizations. While human services, education, and healthcare were heavily represented, there was at least partial participation from remaining sectors as well.

**Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Listening Session Participants**

	Male	Female	Total
<b>White</b>	20%	40%	60%
<b>Black</b>	10%	20%	30%
<b>Asian</b>	0%	0%	0%
<b>Other</b>	0%	0%	0%
<b>Hispanic</b>	6%	4%	10%
<b>Total</b>	36%	64%	

# Key Findings

The listening sessions sought answers to several research questions.

- In what types of decisions do government and CBOs employ data and information?
- What types of data and information do they use, and what types do they feel they lack?
- What tools and functions would they find helpful in embracing a data-driven decision-making strategy?
- What concerns do CBOs and government have regarding the use of data?
- What areas of capacity building will be most useful to these organizations?

## Types of Decisions and Applications

Figure 2 depicts the prevalence of decisions and types of application that participants thought would be informed better by data. The business processes identified by participants can be broken into two major categories: organizational administration and program administration. Organizational administration includes those business processes that relate to the operation of the organization as a whole, while programmatically themed focused more on the operation of individual programs. At the margin, participants cited programmatically themed uses at a slightly higher rate than organizationally themed applications.

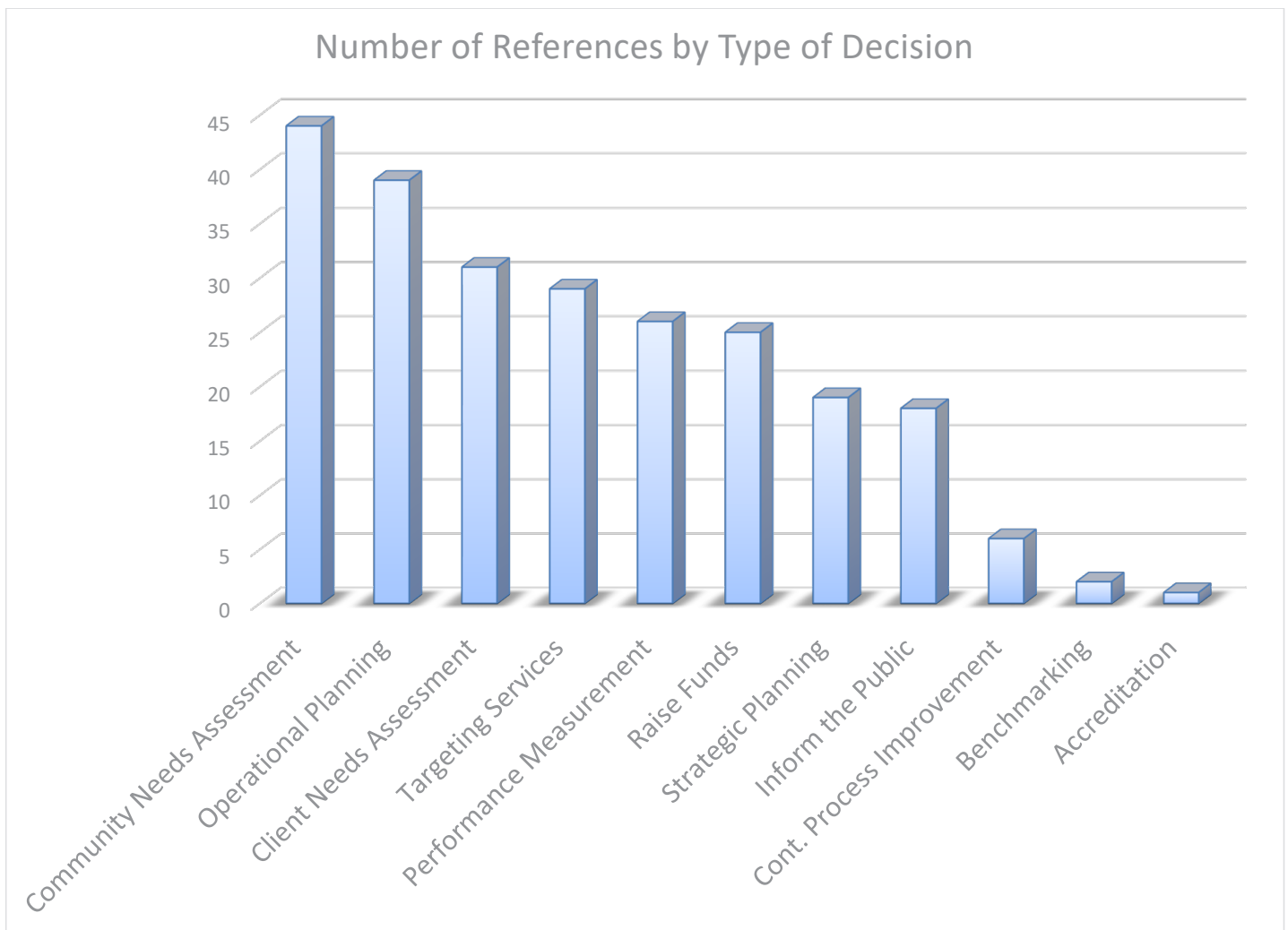


Figure 2. Number of References by Type of Decision

Community needs assessment was the most frequently cited application of data. Here, participants mentioned the utility of data for better understanding the holistic needs of the community they serve. Participants felt that one value of data was to help them look beyond the horizons of their program, and instead see the “bigger picture.” With this information they suggested they would be better equipped to identify synergies and alignments with other organizations serving the community, thus amplifying their effectiveness and reducing costs.

While community needs assessment is classified as an organizational function, it also benefits programmatic decision making. The second-most cited usage was operational planning, which looks to plan day-to-day operations that most effectively carry out an organization’s mission. Comments around operational planning focused on more tactical decision making, particularly as it related to the addition of services or changes to target populations. Participants saw great value in driving these decisions with extensive data about the community they served, but knew that they lacked convenient access to the data they most needed.

In a similar vein, targeting services referred to a specific tactical decision about geographic choices. Here participants cited the need for data that helps them make month-to-month or quarter-to-quarter decisions about when and where their services are needed, and how those services might best be delivered.

Lastly, participants mentioned client needs assessments as an area where data may be useful. Different from the more macro concept of a community needs assessment, this functionality looked more at assessing client need through the contextual information that can be learned of his or her community.

Following these planning-related applications was performance measurement. In this category, participants identified the need for community-level data to help measure their community-level outcomes – those outcomes

that affect the broad geography they serve. For instance, an organization working to increase registrations under the Affordable Care Act may cite a community-level result as the percentage of residents in the service area who are uninsured.

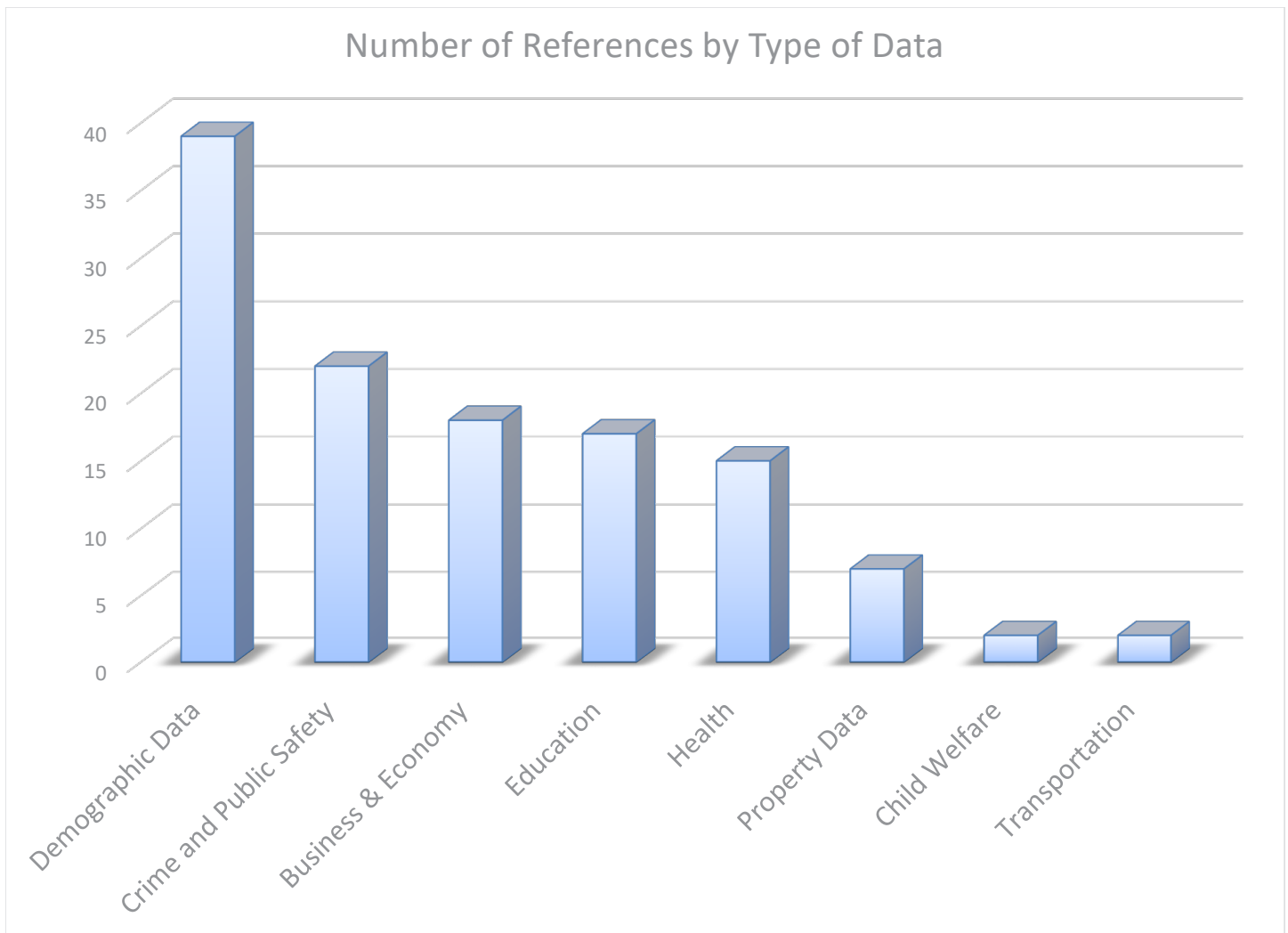
Fundraising was also mentioned frequently. Here, respondents focused on the value of data in motivating both philanthropic and grants-based funding sources, both by demonstrating the needs of the community they serve and by documenting their organization’s effectiveness.

Finally, we see strategic planning. Here, organizations expressed a desire to make more informed decisions about the future of their organizations and their programs. Comments around this function noted the necessity of data-driven strategic planning due to the increasing pace of change in the communities they are serving.

The last of the high prevalence business processes was informing the public. Organizations expressed the need for data that helps both inform and motivate a variety of public audiences. Some thought, perhaps, that data would be useful in combating public apathy, especially when it is due to a lack of awareness. A second audience the respondents identified was legislators and policy-makers. Participants saw a need for data that helped advocate for strong anti-poverty policy positions.

## Types of Data

To help categorize the types of data that participants found useful, we employed a taxonomy of community data first developed by colleagues at the Urban Institute (Guernsey & Pettit, 2007). This taxonomy classifies data according to subject and results in an aggregation of datasets that are likely to coexist in single source agencies or organizations. Figure 3 presents the categories of data mentioned by respondents in descending order of prevalence. We used a k-medians cluster algorithm to sort



**Figure 3. Number of References by Type of Data**  
 data into three categories: tier one, tier two, and tier three.

## Tier One Data

The most prominent data, by far, was demographic data. Demographic data is the sole occupant of the tier one list. Respondents were most interested in population and cultural characteristics and sought data at smaller geographies than are readily accessible by the lay user. Respondents requested data at the census block group or tract level but also reported that census geographies rarely fully represent the communities they serve. Many who raised interest in demographic data were interested in population trends over time. While these trends may include simple things like counts of people, respondents were more interested in subtle demographic shifts that impact service delivery. An example application of

demographic data might be the changing proportion of households who do not speak English and its impact on the language abilities required of non-profits who serve them.

## Tier Two Data

The second most prevalent data categories, each roughly equal in representation, were crime and public safety data, business and economic data, education data, and health data. These data sources represent primarily secondary data (that data collected by government agencies for administrative purposes) and represent a mix of transactional (e.g., crime counts, occupancy permits, etc.) and non-transactional data.

Most common among the tier two data was crime and public safety, with respondents seeking information on reported crimes. Re-



spondents were also interested in understanding arrest data, releases from prison to the community (prisoner reentry), and bail and other court decisions.

Respondents interested in the business and economy data were seeking information about economic development and community revitalization. The presence or absence of local retail opportunities, the prevalence of jobs, average wages, and other such data were critical to these types of interests.

Respondents interested in education data were not only seeking data on local school performance but general education patterns and trends in the population as well. Queries in this area were around certifications or qualifications for specific occupations, issues with school performance and the achievement gap, and the like.

Also prominent among the tier-two responses was health data. Here, participants were most interested in data related to the prevalence and incidence of chronic or preventable conditions, or to adverse medical financial situations. For example, respondents wanted the ability to map and explore trends in diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic conditions, or the ability to see geographies that are home to high concentrations of uninsured populations.

## Tier Three Data

The third tier of data includes those items that were less requested, but still useful for meeting community needs: property data, child welfare data, and transportation data. Respondents expressed interest in property data for its use in community revitalization, housing, and economic development. While respondents identified a good amount of transactional (e.g., that reported by the appraisal district), additional data on the current state of properties (particularly condition of housing stock) could be useful in areas of home repair and revitalization.

### **Tier One Data**

Demographic Data

### **Tier Two Data**

Crime and Public Safety

Business and Economy

Education

Health

### **Tier Three Data**

Property Information

Child Welfare

Transportation

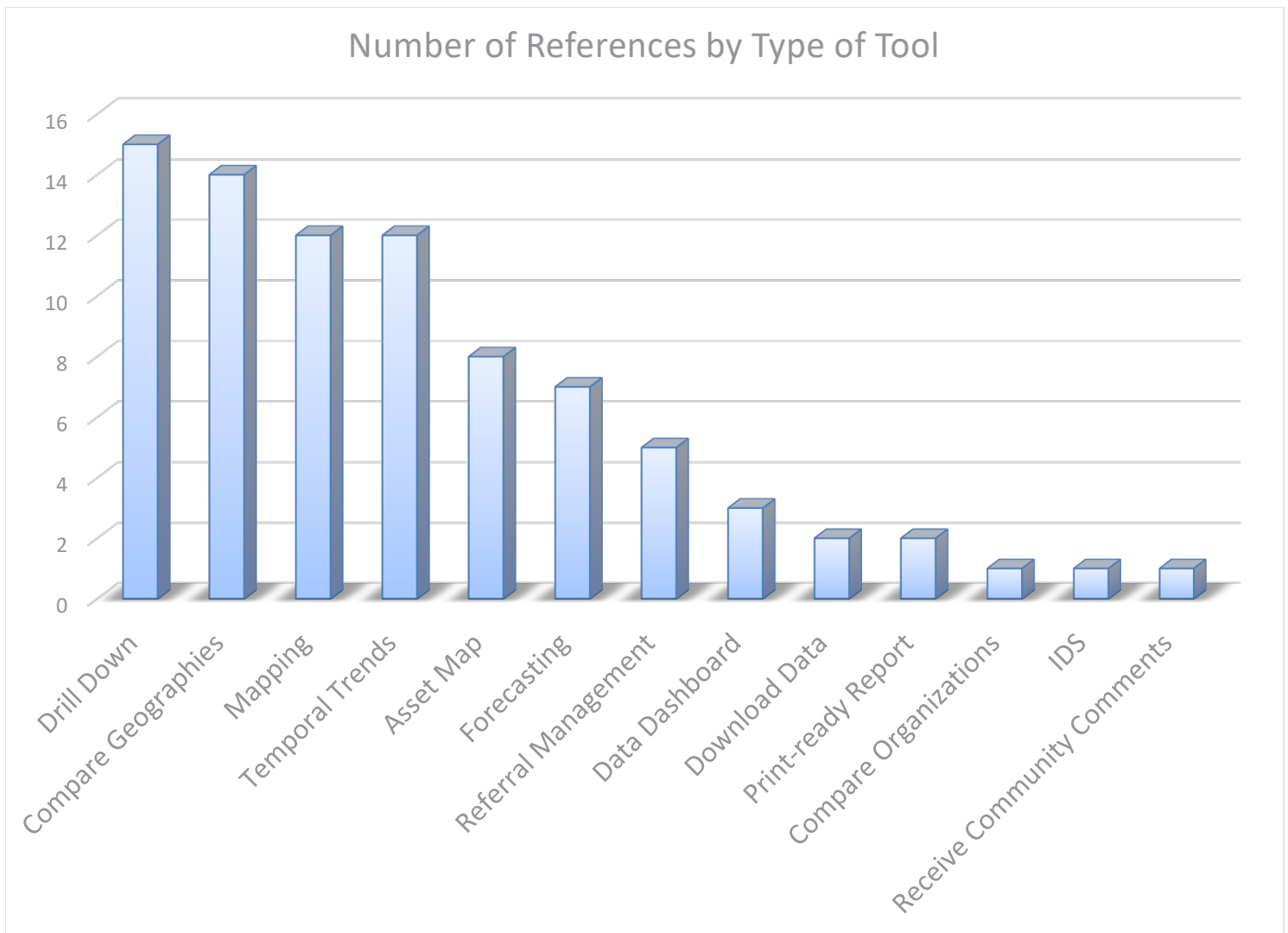
The third tier of data also includes two categories with minimal representation: child welfare and transportation. Interest in child welfare data was limited and focused mainly on patterns and trends in child abuse and maltreatment for strategic planning. Interest in transportation data was also sparse, primarily focusing on the prevalence of different modes of transportation to work.

## Tools and Functions

As essential as the types of applications and decisions and types of data are the tools and functionalities desired by the CBOs. How do CBOs envision interacting with data to make better decisions? Figure 4 presents the types of functionality desired by participants ranked by the prevalence of coding. Using a k-medians clustering algorithm, we sorted the identified features into three tiers.

### Tier One Tools

The first tier, representing the tools and functions with the highest demand, includes drill down, temporal trends, mapping, and comparing geographies. Participants expressed a desire to segment the data or drill down, by various demographic characteristics. As an example, a user looking at school performance for a feeder pattern may wish to drill down and explore variations among campuses (geographic segmentation). They may also want to



**Figure 4. Number of References by Type of Tool**  
drill down and explore variation by race or age (demographic segmentation).

Participants were interested in the ability to compare geographies (e.g., neighborhoods or ZIP codes) on some set of indicators. For instance, the system might let the user know that their target neighborhood ranks fifth on some phenomenon in the city, county, or state. Temporal trends refer to the ability to chart patterns over time for a given indicator or indicators. Likewise, mapping refers to the ability to display the data on a map at varying levels of geographic aggregation (e.g., ZIP code, census block group, and the like.). Additional functionality in these areas might include the ability to locate other geographies with similar temporal trends or similar geographic patterns.

## Tier Two Tools

The second tier of functionality might be labeled “nice to have, but not vital.” Asset mapping, which differs from geographic mapping, refers to the ability to identify community-based resources to meet the needs of residents. While not necessarily a geographic map, the asset mapping process does consider geography. The functionality here might focus on finding the nearest substance abuse or financial literacy program for a client in need.

Forecasting was also of great interest, with participants desiring the ability to project and predict various indicators of demographics of economic issues, with an eye on identifying future areas of need.

Participants were also interested in a referral management functionality, which we will address shortly in the section on integrations.

## Tier Three Tools

Finally, the third tier of functionality includes data dashboards, downloading data, printer-friendly reports, comparison of organizations, integrated data systems, and receiving community comments. We will deal with the integrated data systems functionality in the note on integration. Data dashboard functionality will allow users to identify specific indicators and geographies of interest, then build live data pages that present this information, refreshing automatically when the data is updated.

Comparing organizations was expressed by a few users who were interested in benchmarking functionality. Conceptually this would function as an industry benchmarking report (e.g., the average employment service provider found a client a job in 20 days). A similarly small number of respondents expressed interest in the system as a tool to solicit and engage community response around issues of importance to the community.

### **Tier One Functionality**

Drill Down

Compare Geographies

Mapping

Temporal Trends

### **Tier Two Functionality**

Asset Mapping

Forecasting

Referral Management

### **Tier Three Functionality**

Data Dashboard

Download Data

Print-Ready Reports

Compare Organizations

Integrated Data Systems

Receive Community Comments

## A Note on Integration

The ability to integrate the CWDI with participants' data systems surfaced in the discussion of types of data as well as functionality. Participants were interested in their client data as a source, and functionality interests included such things as referral management and integrations. The prevalence of these comments across multiple domains suggests that the CWDI team should give serious thought to the opportunity for users to integrate their data and information into the system. For instance, some systems allow the user to upload his or her data to be displayed on a data map. Opportunities for the data served by the CWDI to be included in other case management systems should be explored.

## Exploring the Intersections of Data, Functionality, and Application

After examining the intersection of types of data, types of functionality, and types of application, we identified significant variation in the tools and data requested for each type of application.

### Data by Application

Figure 5 depicts the distribution of types of data by types of application or decision. The figure describes significant interest in business and economic data, particularly for fundraising, but also for operational planning and targeting services. Health data was sought most for use in strategic planning and community needs assessment, followed by client needs-assessment and performance measurement.

### Data by Functionality

Figure 6 depicts the intersection between the types of tools or functionality desired and the types of data of interest. Forecasting was of most importance for business and economic data as well as property data. Critical here was

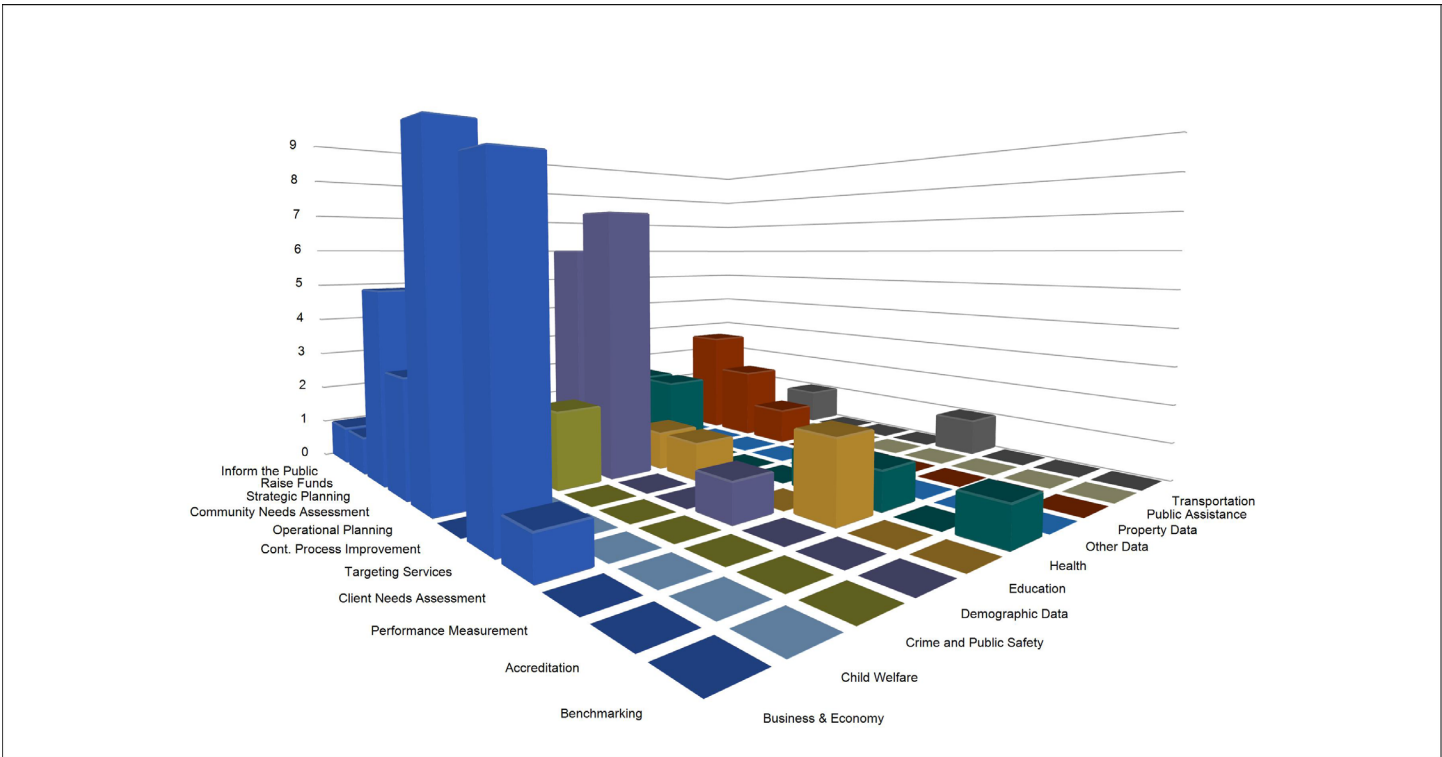


Figure 5. Data by Application

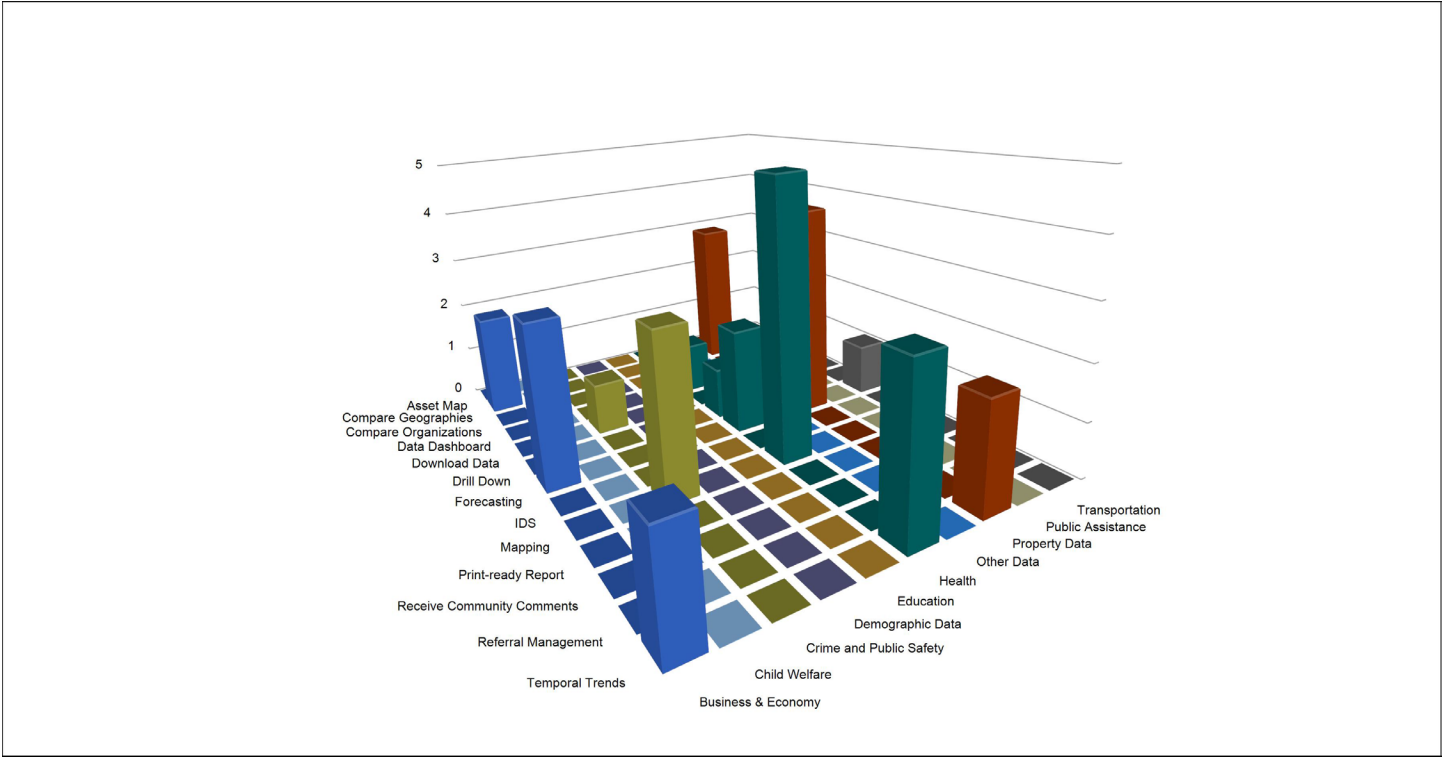


Figure 6. Data by Functionality

an interest in predicting growth for communities. Both of these data types also featured heavily in systems that compared or ranked geographies. Likewise, these two data types, with the addition of health data featured heavily in the desire to track trends over time.

Crime data, health data, and transportation data were the most frequently cited data in which users were interested in mapping. Crime and public safety data were only mentioned in conjunction with mapping as a tool or technology.

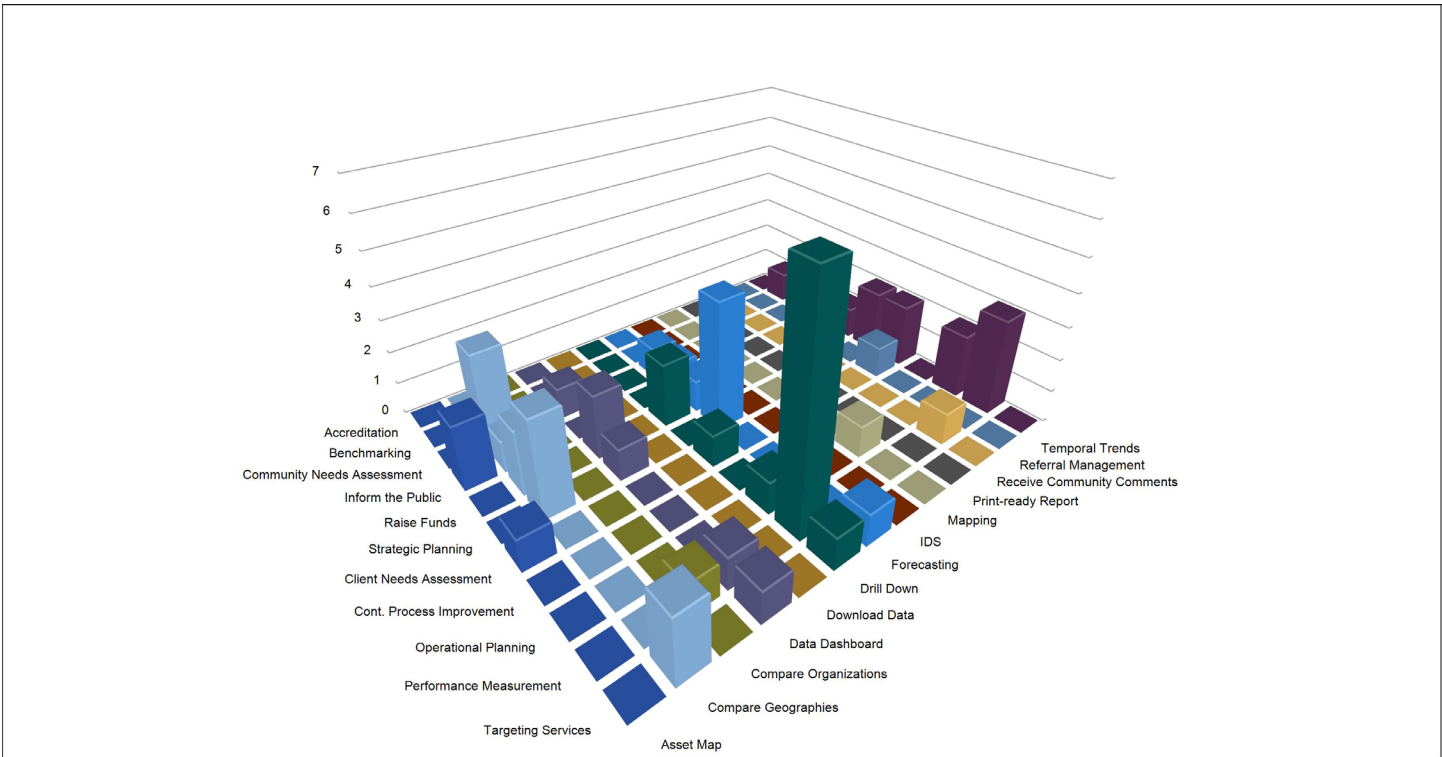


Figure 7. Application by Functionality  
**Application by Functionality**

Figure 7 depicts the intersection of types of tools and functionality with types of applications or decisions in the CBO community. For fundraising, users sought tools that provided a data dashboard and comparisons of geographies. Users were also interested in drill-down functionality for this application.

Performance measurement relied heavily on drill down functionality, as well as data dashboarding and trends in data over time. Temporal patterns featured in almost all of the functional tasks that participants identified.

Forecasting was found particularly useful for strategic planning purposes, as agencies were attempting to find the best places and opportunities to invest their resources. Comparing geographies also featured heavily in strategic planning.

### Capacity Building Opportunities

Throughout the course of the listening sessions, we identified several opportunities

for capacity building among the CBO and government representatives. Broadly, they may be situated in three key areas. The first focuses on the collection and management of data within the organization. Participants expressed a desire to ensure that they were collecting the right data from participants in their programs. They also wanted more information on how to better organize and manage the data they collect.

Secondly, respondents were interested in learning more about capitalizing on their existing data. They wondered if they were taking full advantage of the power of their data, especially when considering it in the context of secondary, community-level data.

Finally, a non-trivial portion of respondents indicated they were working with research partners. Typically these partners were university parties who were collecting data from the organization’s participants for use in a scientific study. Participants expressed a desire for the tools and processes that help them manage their research partner relationships and ensure that the partnership is mutually beneficial.

## Areas of Concern

Respondents indicated several areas of concern. We highlight below those that bear particular importance for the CWDI project.

First, respondents indicated concerns over the recency of data, lamenting, in particular, the time it takes for demographic, education, and health data to be available. The CWDI team should focus, where possible, on securing data directly from providers rather than waiting for it to pass through a clearinghouse system.

Respondents also expressed a sense of being on their own to find data. Similarly, they remarked that they did not know what was available, and suggested that often they are using less than adequate data because of this shortfall. The CWDI team should ensure that appropriate aids are available to help shepherd novice users to the correct data. These aids may include an extensive data dictionary or wiki but might also consider some artificial intelligence or machine learning functionality that helps users find the data that best captures what they are trying to measure.

They expressed similar concern with being able to find the right geographic unit. For many who work in neighborhoods, current census

geography does not adequately encapsulate their communities, and can then present a false understanding of prevailing conditions. The CWDI team should be sensitive to the importance of geographic unit during the beta testing process to identify if additional interpolation solutions may be required.

Finally, respondents expressed concern over “using the data for good.” In other words, they were concerned that poor visualizations and interpretation of the data might result in adverse impact on the communities they serve. The CWDI team should explore the integration of interpretive assistance and visualization strategies to minimize this impact.

Additional concerns expressed by respondents are identified in the box below.

### **Additional Areas of Concern**

A Desire More Integration of Systems

Accuracy of Secondary Data

Finding a Balance Between Individual Data and Community Data

Balancing Competing Data Initiatives

Disappearing Data

Consistency in Documentation and Curation

Keeping Reference Lists Updated

Mismatch Between Served and Unserved Population Needs

Maintaining Privacy of Client Data and Security of Systems

Serving the Non-English Speaking Population

Survey Fatigue

## References

- Guernsey, E. H., & Pettit, K. L. S. (2007). NNIP data inventory 2007: A picture of local data collection across the country. (). Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from [https://www.urban.org/research/publication/nnip-data-inventory-2007-picture-local-data-collection-across-country/view/full\\_report](https://www.urban.org/research/publication/nnip-data-inventory-2007-picture-local-data-collection-across-country/view/full_report)
- Kitzinger, J. (1995). Qualitative research: Introducing focus groups. *Bmj*, 311(7000), 299–302. doi:10.1136/bmj.311.7000.299



Welcome and thank you for being here today. The purpose of this gathering is to get your thoughts around the way your organization uses data to plan for and successfully deliver services to your community. Specifically, we want to understand what you think will best help you plan and deliver effective community service. Once we understand what you need, we will begin designing a proof of concept tool to help you in your efforts. You have a much better understanding of what it takes to serve those in need in your community. That is why we are talking with you.

Let me introduce myself. I am \_\_\_\_\_ and I will be the moderator in today's discussion. The format we are using is a listening session. This is just a conversation that focuses on specific questions in a safe and confidential environment. I will guide the conversation by asking questions that each of you can respond to. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Just be honest. If you wish, you can also respond to each other's comments, like you would in an ordinary conversation. It is my job to make sure that everyone here gets to participate and that we stay on track.

\_\_\_\_\_ is here to record and summarize your comments, and I'll ask the rest of our team to introduce themselves. [Motion for Introductions]

Before we get started, I want to let you know two things. First, the information we learn today will be compiled into a final report. That report will include a summary of your comments and some recommendations. It will be shared with the project team, funders, and our sponsor—the Community Council. Secondly, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. This conversation today is anonymous and confidential. "Anonymous" means that we will not be using your names and you will not be identified as an individual in our report of this project. "Confidential" means that what we say in this room should not be repeated outside of this room. Obviously, I cannot control what you do when you leave, but I ask each of you to respect each other's privacy and not tell anyone what was said by others here today. Although we hope everyone here honors this confidentiality, please remember that what you say here today could be repeated by another member of the group. So please, do not say anything that you absolutely need to keep private. As you can see [Motion to Recorder], we will be recording this conversation. The recording will only be used to make sure our notes are correct and will not be heard by anyone outside of this project.

Just a few final notes. You'll find food and beverages in the back of the room. [Motion to Food]. Please feel free to get up and move around as you need to. Also, restrooms are located \_\_\_\_\_. Feel free to come and go as you need to.

## Introductions

Let's begin with introductions. [Ask the participants to provide their name, their organization and job title, and an interesting fact about their summer or their organization]

## Activity 1

In this activity, participants will be asked to move about the room, gathering at either the yes or no signs in response to a series of questions.

1. My organization has a data strategy.
2. My organization has a data manager.
3. My organization uses a computer system to track user or client data.
4. My organization uses data to make decisions
5. My organization uses more than just our own data to make decisions (e.g., Unemployment, Health, School Data, etc.).
6. My organization doesn't have all the data they needs to make good decisions.

## Activity 2

In this activity, participants will be asked to identify the types of systems they use for tracking data by making a bar chart with post-it notes.

## Discussion Question 1

Tell us a bit about how you currently use data to carry out your mission?

Potential Probes:

- How/where do you access this data?
- Do you receive help or assistance from some other organization?
- How often is this data updated?

## Discussion Question 2

What data or information do you think is missing? What would help you plan or deliver services more effectively?

Potential Probes:

- Is that something you can get easily?
- How would that help you change or adjust to changing conditions?

## Discussion Question 3

What types of tools do you think would make data easier for you to use or access? (Note: list types of tools, such as maps, calculators, outcomes reports, baselines, etc.)

## Closing

Thank you for your time with us today. Are there any last questions or additional information you would like to provide? [Pause for Questions].

That's the end of our time together today. Please make sure you've provided your information on the contact form if you'd like to stay in touch.



# FOCUS GROUP

## Note-Taking



The Institute for  
Urban Policy Research  
at The University of Texas  
at Dallas

**Note taking is the primary responsibility of the assigned note-taker.**

**Clarity and consistency are important.** Anticipate that others will use your notes days or weeks later when memory has faded.

### **Before the event, determine:**

1. *How thorough should the notes be?* Is the moderator expecting near verbatim notes? What are cues from the moderator about important information to capture?
2. *What demographic information should be recorded about participants?*
3. *Should note taker record the seating arrangement?*
4. *Should the note taker track who said specific quotes?* At minimum, note taker should flag if the same participant states an opinion multiple times to avoid over-emphasizing the view during analysis.
5. *How, if at all, should the note taker communicate with the moderator during the session?*

### **Notes contain 6 main types of information**

1. *Quotes* – These are the well-said sentences or phrases that illustrate an important point of view because they are enlightening or eloquently expressed. Place name or initials of speaker as well as the current time next to quote as you will most likely not be able to write the quote in its entirety. The addition of initials will make it easier to find the statement in the tape recording.
2. *Non-verbal cues from participants* – Head nodding, laughter, discomfort, pauses. Remember during analysis that non-verbal cues can mean different things in different cultures. Make note of non-verbal cues but don't make assumptions about what they mean.
3. *Wording and timing of probes* – Note language that the moderator uses as well. At what point in the questioning did the moderator ask a probe? Helps determine unaided responses and possible differences in how a question was asked.
4. *Key points and themes for each question* – These will likely be identified by several different participants. Or sometimes they are said only once, but in such a manner that deserves attention.
5. *Follow-up questions that could be asked* – The moderator is busy directing the discussion and may miss the importance of a particular follow-up. Make notes as necessary.

## FOCUS GROUP Note-taking Summary

### Event Information

Date of Focus Group	
Location of Focus Group	
Number of Participants	
Category of Group	
Moderator Name	
Asst. Moderator Name	
Time Started	
Time Completed	

### Participant Information

	Male	Female
White / Caucasian		
Black / African American		
Hispanic or Latino		
Asian		
Other		

## Responses to Questions / Activities

### A1. Interactive Exercises

Brief Summary/Key Points	Notable Quotes

Q1. Tell us a bit about how you currently use data to carry out your mission?

Potential Probes:

- How/where do you access this data?
- Do you receive help or assistance from some other organization?
- How often is this data updated?

Brief Summary/Key Points	Notable Quotes

Q2. What data or information do you think is missing? What would help you plan or deliver services more effectively?

Potential Probes:

- Is that something you can get easily?
- How would that help you change or adjust to changing conditions?

Brief Summary/Key Points	Notable Quotes

Q3. What types of tools do you think would make data easier for you to use or access? (Note: list types of tools, such as maps, calculators, outcomes reports, baselines, etc.)

Brief Summary/Key Points	Notable Quotes





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