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THE CAPACITY COLLECTIVE

Creating Data Feedback Loops with Community and Staff

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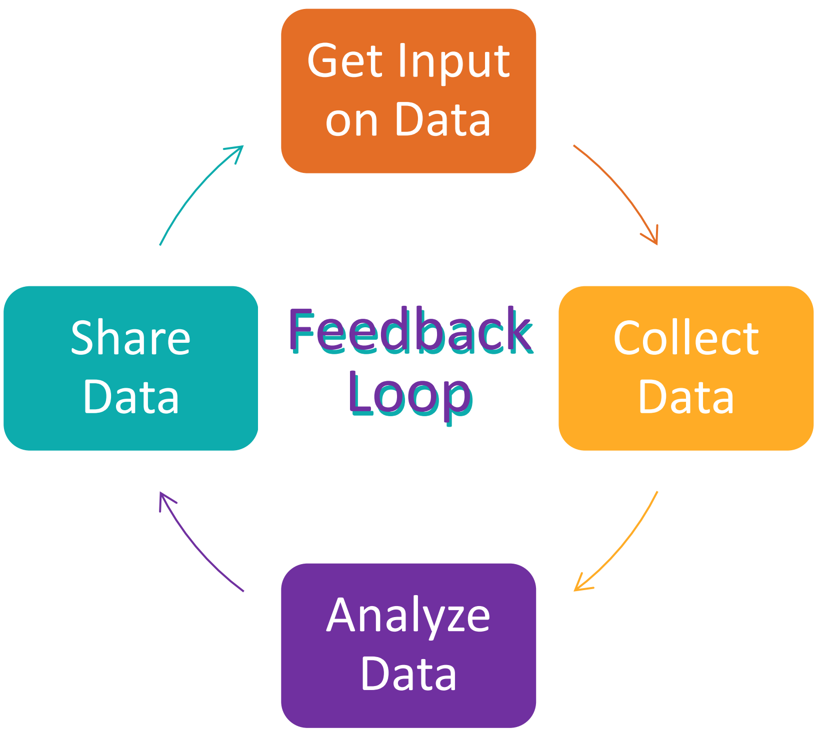
Purpose: Data is supposed to be a reflection of real lives and experiences and is therefore dynamic. Data should be shared out with your Board of Directors, development, legislators, community partners and so forth. It should also be shared with two other very important audiences: your clients (it is, after all, their stories you are collecting) and the staff who are collecting and inputting the data. Sharing the data with clients and staff and soliciting their input/feedback on your data processes and findings shows your clients that you honor their stories and shows your staff how they are making a difference, which is a great motivator. It also shows both audiences they are part of something bigger, which is great for keeping community and staff invested in your programs. This process of regularly sharing data with clients and staff, and soliciting their input, is what we call *Feedback Loops*.



What is a Feedback Loop?

A cycle where your data (including the collection methods and the reasons for why the data is being collected) is shared with your clients and the staff that collect data with them.

Share the data regularly and invite regular input on both the data itself and the collection processes.

Incorporate feedback into your data collection methods and processes, and the cycle starts again.

Staff and clients should both be involved in every step of the decision making when it comes to your data processes. *See our **Building Teams for Decision Making & Change** emPower Tool on building equitable data teams.*

Sharing Data with Staff

For staff, feedback loops should be easily accessible, such as on live dashboards (see our ***Turning Data Into Dashboards*** emPower Tool) so they can see how they are doing, and how the data they collect is being used.

Sharing Data with Clients

For clients, feedback loops should be built into your communications with them. This could be in newsletters, annual reports, marketing materials, community events, your banquet, etc. Gather input about the ways they would like to access the data—perhaps clients prefer infographics on social media vs. an email newsletter they may not read.

Gathering Input from Staff

Staff are key to program effectiveness and data quality. Through relationships, staff are well-positioned to observe and understand what is going on in communities and seeing the direct and indirect impacts of programs. Staff input can also support evaluating organizational values, program goals, and staff satisfaction. See our ***What About Staff? Including Staff Voices for Program Improvement*** emPower Tool.

Gathering Input from Clients

Be sure to use data collection methods that are appropriate for the communities you serve. Consider using methods other than surveys, like storytelling or focus groups. (see our ***Beyond Numbers—Collecting Qualitative Data*** emPower Tools).

Data is a Toolbox – Use it For Good!

	Sharing Data with Staff	Sharing Data with Clients
Demonstrate	Share data that shows staff how their clients are doing, and how all of the clients in the program are doing. Don't just tell your staff they are making a difference—show them using data they collected. Demonstrate your confidence in your staff by soliciting their input into your data practices, and what the results mean.	*Show* clients your program is worth them investing their time and energy. Use data to demonstrate that you honor the voices and lived experiences of the communities you serve—you are not just extracting data from them, you are sharing their stories back to them in a way that respects their trust in you.
Celebrate	Collect and share success stories with staff! Be sure to include stories from all staff so they can feel invested in collecting and sharing those stories. Don't forget the *microsuccesses*—those small steps along the way to bigger milestones, like a client's self-advocacy with their boss, or making a scary call on their own.	Collect and share success stories with clients! Show them what is possible, possibly motivating them to stay in the program when times get tough. Make sure community is involved in how you define "success" as a program, and let people share their successes in their own words to show you respect their voice.
Advocate	Gather data from staff not just about the services you're providing, and the clients you are serving, but also about their experiences on the job. Ask what is working, and what isn't. Share what you learn with the staff, and advocate for their needs using the data.	Shape your data practices around your goals—if you want to advocate for legislative change, collect data that will speak to legislators. Include clients in making those goals, and in shaping your advocacy efforts. Use client data to advocate with funders—perhaps the way funders ask for demographic data erases lived experience. Use data to demonstrate that gap!
Innovate	Listen to your staff, and regularly solicit their ideas for your data, and for making programmatic changes. When your staff are working with clients, they are well-positioned to assess and predict clients' evolving needs. Your staff are a wealth of information, and their ideas should be respected accordingly.	Don't just let the data sit there—look for patterns and trends so you can see needs as they are emerging. When you share the data with clients, ask for their input on how the data can inform programmatic changes. Current and former clients can be a great source of innovative ideas!

Make the Data Accessible

Not everyone will have the same experience with data (that includes staff and clients). Consider using data visualizations, which—done well—can be more easily understood than tables of numbers. See our ***Data Visualization*** emPower Tools for ideas.

Use plain, straightforward, non-technical language.

Disaggregate the data (i.e. breaking down findings by race, gender or employment status) so people can identify where they fit in with the big picture of the program.

When you share data, solicit insights into what the results mean to staff/clients as part of that program.

Center Community in Your Data

Community needs and experiences should be at the center of your data practices. Clients entrust their stories with you—they should have agency in how those stories are used.

Use data practices that are culturally responsive.

Solicit input and be transparent about what you are collecting, why you are collecting it, how it will be stored, and all the ways it will be used.

If not answering a question means a client cannot receive services, share that information up front.

See our ***Centering Community in Your Data*** emPower Tool for more ideas.