ACTIVATE

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Child Trends & Chapin Hall

A Practical Tool for Building Data Collection and Data Use Capacity in Youth-Supporting Organizations

Module 4: Making Sense of Data Using Local, State, and National Comparisons



Module 4: Making Sense of Data Using Local, State, and National Comparisons

This module describes how youth-supporting organizations can use comparison data to help make sense of the data they collect.

One approach is to compare what their data tell them about the sexual and reproductive health of the youth they serve **to what is known from studies involving similar populations.** Activate's infographics on the sexual and reproductive health of youth experiencing homelessness, the justice system, the child welfare system, or disconnection from school and work can facilitate these comparisons.

Another approach is to compare what their data tell them about the sexual and reproductive health of the youth they serve **to local, state, or national benchmarks.** Making these comparisons can help youth-supporting organizations:

- Understand how the young people they serve are faring relative to their peers or other similar populations.
- Set realistic and meaningful goals for improving the sexual and reproductive health of the young people they serve.
- Demonstrate need to funders and other partners.

Whether youth-supporting organizations should compare their data to local, state, or national benchmarks depends on what they want to learn.

Sources of local data

Comparisons involving local data are a good option for youth-supporting organizations that want to know how the young people they serve are faring relative to other young people who live in the same geographic area. Local data sources may include the following:

- **County or city health/public health departments** may publish data on STI rates, teen births, or other sexual and reproductive health statistics.
- **Community health needs assessments** may include sexual and reproductive health indicators.
- **Hospital and health care systems** may publish community health reports that include statistics related to sexual and reproductive health.
- **School districts** that administer the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) may publish their results, which can also be found here.

Hypothetical Example: Using Local Data

Only 5% of the young people being served by a youth-supporting organization reported being screened for an STI in the past year. A community health assessment found that a similarly low proportion of youth across the city had been screened. The organization connects with the local public health department to discuss options for integrating screening within programs across the city that serve youth.

State data sources

Comparisons involving state-level data are a good option for youth-supporting organizations that want to know how the young people they serve are faring relative to other young people in their state. State data sources may include the following:

- **State health/public health departments** may publish data dashboards or reports on STI rates, teen pregnancy, birth outcomes, and sexual or reproductive health care service use.
- **State Title X Family Planning grantees** may publish reports that include service use and outcome data.
- States may publish their **Youth Risk Behavior Survey** results, which can also be found here.

Hypothetical Example: Using State Data

30% of the youth being served by a youth-supporting organization reported using a condom the last time they had sex. A staff person finds the "used a condom during last sexual intercourse" item on the YRBS webpage and then selects their state. According to the most recent data, 60% of the state's high school students used a condom the last time they had sex. The organization decides to implement a program that has been shown to increase condom use.

National data sources

Comparisons involving national data are a good option for youth-supporting organizations that want to know how the young people they serve are faring relative to young people across the country. The national data may be based on the entire youth population or a nationally representative sample.

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** publishes national and state data on STIs, teen births, contraceptive use, and adolescent health behaviors, data on family life, fertility, and reproductive health from the **National Survey of Family Growth**, and national, state, and school district-level YRBS data.
- **Office of Population Affairs (OPA)** publishes reports with national estimated related to family planning and Title X programs.
- **National Center for Health Statistics** publishes national data on births, fertility rates, and maternal and reproductive health outcomes.

Hypothetical Example: Using National Data

A youth-supporting organization surveyed the female youth it serves and found that 70% of contraceptive users were using a hormonal or long-acting contraceptive method. Curious how this compares to national data, a staff person goes to OPA's Title X Family Planning Annual Report summary and finds that 60% of female Title X clinic clients used a hormonal or long-acting contraceptive method.

Module Takeaways

- Youth-supporting organizations can make sense of their data by comparing what their data say about the sexual and reproductive health of youth they serve to local, state, or national benchmarks.
- Youth-supporting organizations can draw upon local, state, and national sources to make those comparisons.

Reflection Questions

- How can making comparisons to other data help your organization meet its goals?
- Which Activate infographic on the sexual and reproductive health of young people would best help your organization?
- Which type of comparison (that is, local, state, or national) are most relevant to your organization's goals?
- What contextual factors, such as differences in resources, geography, or population, should your organization consider when interpreting comparison data?
- How can you ensure that comparisons are used to support rather than unintentionally stigmatize youth?

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