

# Activity 10.9: Dealing with Data Gaps

## TIPS FOR TRAINERS

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### Suggested Use

Use after the part of your presentation that covers dealing with data gaps, to enable participants to apply what they have learned. Dealing with data gaps is one of the key topics covered near the end of the PowerPoint slides on *Using Data in Decision Making*.



### Time

About 1 hour:

- 5 minutes to explain the assignment
- 20-25 minutes for work in pairs
- 30 minutes for discussion
- 5 minutes for sum up



### Materials

- Handout For Participants: Dealing with Data Gaps
- Dealing with Data Gaps Worksheet



### Knowledge or Skill Development

Additional familiarity with the types of data and sources that are frequently used by PC/PBs, and skills in finding alternative data to support decision making, when faced with data limitations and gaps.

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## Activity Steps

1. Review the situation provided in the Handout for Participants, and revise it as needed to make it appropriate for your PC/PB. For example, use the name of the appropriate committee, make the timing realistic based on your PC/PB's annual calendar, and make references to actual data sources as accurate as possible.
2. Ask participants to work in pairs with someone sitting near them. If participants have very different levels of experience in data-based planning and decision making, consider asking participants to work with someone with a different level of experience, so you are pairing more and less experienced participants.
3. Pass out the Handout for Participants and review the instructions.
4. Tell participants that they may make additional assumptions about the situation, as long as those assumptions fit your PC/PB.

5. Give participants 20 minutes to complete the Dealing with Data Gaps Worksheet. Check in with the group a few minutes before time is up to see how they are doing; allow an extra few minutes if participants seem to need it.
6. Bring the group together and ask for a volunteer to summarize any additional assumptions they made (Question 1 on the Worksheet) and describe the data gaps (Question 2).
7. Now ask another pair to report its suggestions for an immediate approach to the situation (Question 3). After that pair presents its suggestions, ask other pairs if they have different suggestions.
8. Ask another pair to present its approach to additional analysis (Question 4), and again ask other pairs if they have ideas or suggestions to add.
9. Finally ask yet another pair to present its approach for collecting or obtaining additional data (Question 5), and ask other pairs if they have anything to add.
10. Ask the full group what lessons this activity provides regarding how the PC/PB can deal with data gaps (Question 6).
11. Summarize key points from the discussions.



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## HANDOUT FOR PARTICIPANTS

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### Instructions

1. Work with one other person, ideally someone with a different level of data experience.
2. Review the situation below and complete the Dealing with Data Gaps Worksheet, which asks you to provide three “levels” of strategies for dealing with the identified data gaps, including:
  - a. Immediate actions, or within the next few days, without new data gathering or new data analysis
  - b. Additional analysis of existing data, perhaps needs assessment data or another type of already available data
  - c. Collecting or requesting new or additional data for use in the future
3. Be prepared to share your suggestions with the full group.

### The Situation

The PSRA Committee is meeting to review EMA/TGA program expenditures. It is mid-October, when the PC/PB typically carries out its second and last regularly scheduled review and reallocations process. Rapid reallocation rules, which require less PC/PB involvement, must be used starting in November. Normally the committee receives a monthly report from the recipient on allocated, contracted, and expended funds by service category, and an oral report on identified reasons for significant over- or under-spending.

However, a combination of unusual events occurred, including the sudden illness of the key staff member responsible for fiscal monitoring, and problems with the recipient’s computerized fiscal management system. As a result, the last financial report received by the PC/PB was the May report, which provided incomplete data since some subrecipient contracts were still in process, and some subrecipients had not begun to submit invoices for this program year. A new report provides year-to-date expenditures through September, but monthly reports are not available. A newly hired recipient staff member is at the meeting to present this report.

Expenditure data indicate that for most service categories, spending is close to the 50% of contracted funds that would be expected after six months. Overall spending is at 47%. However, spending for two service categories is not as expected:

- Oral Health is seriously underspent, at 34% expended.
- Food Bank/Home-Delivered Meals is significantly overspent, at 87% expended; Home-delivered Meals are on target, but Food Bank spending is far above projections.

When asked to explain these variances, the recipient staff member says she has not had time to review the latest quarterly narrative report in detail, but a service brief indicated that Food Bank/Home-Delivered Meals subrecipients have reported very high demand for monthly food baskets throughout the summer, and Oral Health providers have reported lower costs per patient than projected.

The recipient representative emphasizes the importance of having the committee make recommendations for reallocations to the Executive Committee at its meeting in a week, so that the PC/PB can approve reallocations at its meeting in less than 2 weeks. This will give the recipient time to make the necessary contract adjustments, and gives subrecipients time to spend the reallocated funds.

The committee chair opens the floor for questions and discussion. The following suggestions, concerns, and questions are raised:

- A recommendation that funds be transferred from Oral Health to Food Bank/Home-Delivered Meals to permit Food Bank spending at the current monthly level for the next six months.
- Concern that the PC/PB does not have a waiver of the requirement that 75% of funds be spent on core medical-related services, and the reallocation recommended above would increase support services funding to more than 25% of program funds – the recipient representative says this would increase such funding to 27.5%.
- A comment that perhaps demand for Oral Health services is down because of the heavy expenditures on that service category last year; perhaps people need only lower-cost preventive care, examinations, and cleaning.
- A question about whether the underspending might be due to the availability of other low-cost or free dental care – the area dental school reopened its clinic in April and now provides a lot of free care.
- A question about what changes in community need or a reduction in other food bank alternatives might have caused the increased demand for food.
- A question about whether expenditures in the past year or two have shown seasonal over- or under-spending in these service areas in past years – the recipient staff member present unfortunately does not know, because she has only been on staff for six weeks.
- A suggestion that the Needs Assessment Committee may have some additional information on these issues in its recently completed PLWH and provider surveys – unfortunately, no one from that committee is present, and findings are still being analyzed.



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### WORKSHEET

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1. What, if any, additional assumptions did you make?
2. What are the important data gaps here—what data and information are missing, that you would like to have?
3. What immediate steps could your committee take to help deal with these data gaps—what should it do in the meeting or in the next few days? Why is this a good idea?
4. How should you try to address the data gap through additional analysis of existing data? What data and sources should be used, and why?
5. How should the PC/PB collect or obtain additional data to provide more information for use in the future—through needs assessment activities or other direct data gathering or perhaps through process or reporting changes made by the recipient?
6. What, if any, lessons does this situation provide for your PC/PB?