

Hosting Community Meetings Around Commons Data

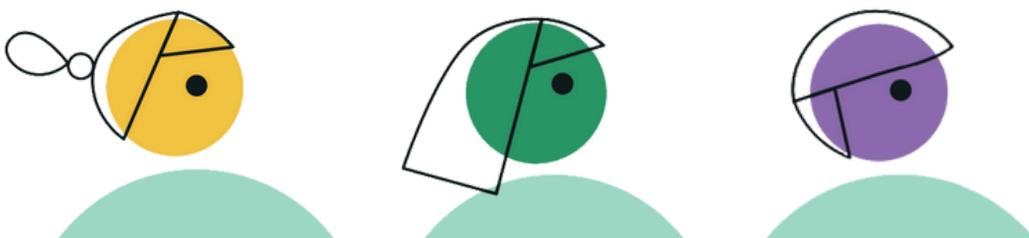


Introduction

The criminal justice system impacts every community, yet understanding its data can be challenging. This community toolkit provides best practices for organizing and facilitating community meetings centered around criminal justice data from Measures for Justice's Commons dashboard. By fostering informed dialogue and inspiring action, these meetings can be a catalyst for positive change in your community.

Pre-Meeting Preparation

The success of any community meeting starts with thorough preparation. This section outlines crucial steps to take **before your meeting** to make sure you're prepared to lead a productive discussion. From familiarizing yourself with the Commons dashboard to identifying key stakeholders, the following checklist can lay the foundation for an impactful meeting.



Pre-meeting checklist:

- Establish clear goals and objectives for your meeting.
- Thoroughly review the Commons dashboard.
- Identify key trends, disparities, and areas of concern relevant to your community.
- Determine if a demonstration or walk-through of Commons is needed.
- Prepare relevant hand-outs for attendees (screenshots or data summaries).
- Plan to discuss limitations of the data and potential alternative interpretations.
- Identify community leaders and stakeholders to invite. Be sure to invite a diverse group of community members such as:
 - Local law enforcement representatives
 - Community leaders and activists
 - Residents from various neighborhoods
 - School officials and teachers
 - Legal professionals (public defenders, prosecutors)
 - Social workers and mental health professionals
- If possible, share the Commons link and encourage community members to visit Commons before the meeting to explore the data themselves.
- Secure a meeting location.
 - Choose a neutral, accessible location (e.g. community center, library).
 - Confirm that adequate seating and A/V equipment are available.
- Create an agenda to share with attendees.
 - Sample Agenda:
 - Introduction and ground rules (15 minutes)
 - Data presentation (30 minutes)
 - Small group discussions (15 minutes)
 - Large group sharing and dialogue (30 minutes)
 - Action planning (20 minutes)
 - Closing remarks and next steps (10 minutes)



Facilitating Dialogue

Effective facilitation is key to a productive community meeting.

This section offers strategies for setting the right tone, encouraging participation, and navigating potentially sensitive discussions. By employing these techniques, you can create an inclusive atmosphere where all voices are heard and diverse perspectives are valued.

Setting the Tone

- Begin with a clear statement of purpose and expectations.
- Establish ground rules for respectful dialogue (e.g., active listening, using "I" statements).
- Encourage questions and clarifications throughout the presentation.
- Regularly summarize key points and emerging themes.

Encourage Participation

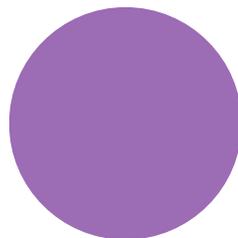
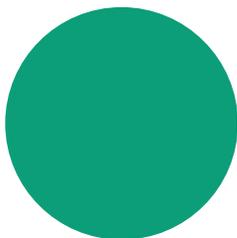
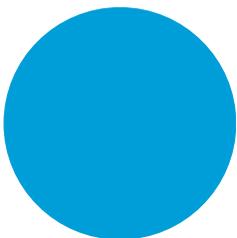
- Be aware of power dynamics and ensure marginalized voices are heard.
- Use open-ended questions to prompt discussion. For example:
 - "What surprises you about this data?"
 - "How do these numbers align with or differ from your experiences?"
 - "What factors might contribute to these trends?"
- Encourage attendees to share personal stories that relate to the data.
- Actively invite input from quieter participants.
- Use techniques like round-robin sharing or anonymous suggestion boxes for sensitive topics.
- Use a parking lot to document topics for future meetings.

Addressing Sensitive Topics

Discussions about criminal justice data can often lead to heated debates. It's important to anticipate conflict and identify potential points of contention (e.g., racial disparities in arrest, police use of force, community-police relations).

Here are some strategies for managing conflict around sensitive topics:

- Remind community members to focus on systemic issues rather than individual blame.
- Recognize tension as a natural part of discussing challenging topics.
- Use "time-outs" if discussions become too heated, allowing for brief reflection periods.
- Reframe confrontational statements into questions or shared concerns.
- Encourage participants to seek common ground and shared goals.
- If needed, use breakout groups to address specific conflicts before returning to the larger group.



Action Planning

Turning insights into action is a crucial outcome of community meetings. This section outlines a structured approach to identifying priorities, developing concrete steps, and establishing accountability. By following these guidelines, you can help your community move from discussion to creating meaningful change in the criminal justice system.

Identify Priorities

- Before closing your meeting, guide the group in selecting 2-3 key issues or questions revealed by the data.
- Facilitate a brainstorming session on potential solutions or improvements.

Develop Concrete Next Steps

- For each priority, help the group define:
 - Short-term actions (next 30 days)
 - Medium-term goals (3-6 months)
 - Long-term objectives (1 year+)
 - Assign roles and responsibilities for follow-up actions.

Establish Accountability

- Create a timeline for action items.
- Plan follow-up meetings or check-ins.
- Discuss how progress will be measured and shared with the broader community.

Call to Action

The true impact of a community meeting extends far beyond the event itself. This section provides strategies for encouraging ongoing engagement and commitment from community members.

Individual Commitments

- Ask each participant to share one specific action they will take based on the meeting's discussions.
- Provide resources for further education or involvement (e.g., local organizations, advocacy groups).

Collective Next Steps

- Outline plans for future meetings or working groups.
- Have attendees complete a meeting survey to learn how to improve future meetings.
- Discuss how to share the meeting's outcomes with the wider community.
- Identify community partners to host future meetings focused on data shared in Commons.
- Consider creating a community task force or advisory board to work with local officials on implementing changes.

Ongoing Engagement

- Set up a system for sharing regular updates on the Commons dashboard data.
- Offer free data literacy training. Contact Measures for Justice for resources.
- Encourage participants to stay informed and involved in local criminal justice issues.
- Discuss ways to broaden community participation in future discussions and initiatives.

Conclusion

By following these guidelines, you can create a productive and respectful environment for community members to engage with your local criminal justice data. Remember that this is an ongoing process – sustained dialogue and action are needed to create meaningful change in the criminal justice system. Together, your community can move toward more equitable and transparent justice practices.



Have questions about hosting a community meeting around Commons data? Or want to share a success story from your community? Join us in the All In Network! We'd love to hear from you.

