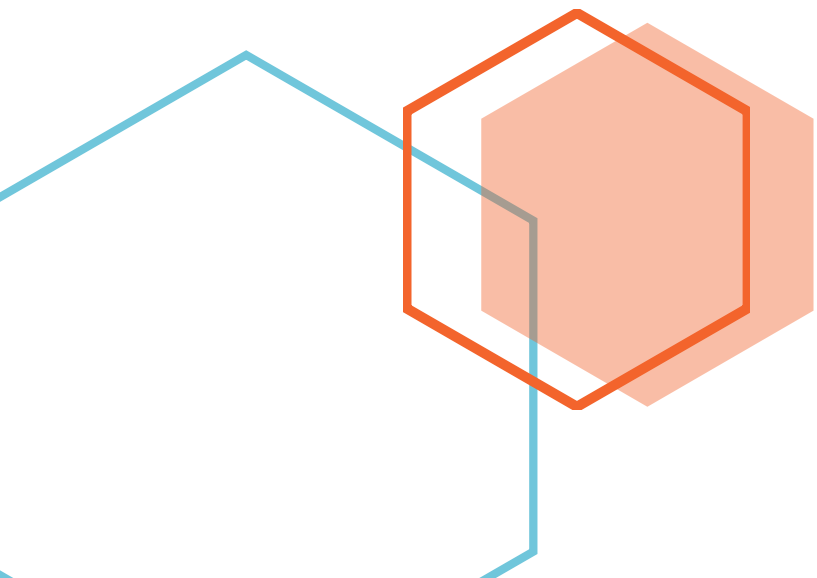




Engaging Stakeholders in Program Decision Making

**A toolkit for engaging stakeholders in data-
driven decision making**

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Why this toolkit?

This toolkit was designed to help organizations, groups, and project teams to make data-driven decisions. The impetus for this was through my work with the California 4-H program. I was involved in several evaluation and research projects and recognized a need for getting the results back into the hands of the program stakeholders in a more digestible format than a traditional report so that they could improve their programs based on the findings. In some cases, my lack of deep knowledge about a local program also limited my interpretation of results, particularly qualitative data. But not everyone is interested, or has the skill set, to understand data.

In order to help programs use the data they collected to improve their programs, to make *data-driven decisions*, we started using “data parties”. Data parties include a series of activities that help programs review data and information and then make informed decisions about their programs. Data parties can be used to review data from a needs assessment, evaluation, or research study or any other source, and to make decisions about your program.

This toolkit includes background information on data parties and how to implement one of your own. Templates, examples, and presentations about data parties can be downloaded from: https://bit.ly/data_party



This toolkit was developed in order to share the lessons learned and experiences from data parties held with the 4-H program at the University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources. This toolkit (and the data parties) would not have been possible without the contributions of the following staff and volunteers from California 4-H:

Marianne Bird
California 4-H Camping Advisory
Committee
JoLynn Miller
Russell Hill

and of course, our data party participants around the country.

“We discussed it [our camp's data] with our county management board and with our camp staff. It gave our camp greater importance to board members who don't value camp. We looked at things we needed to focus on when planning our camp.”

-Data party participant

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Staff reviewing evaluation results at a data party. Photo credit: Marianne Bird

What is a Data Party?

Data parties are a form of participatory evaluation that focuses on data analysis, review, and interpretation^{1,2}. This toolkit focuses heavily on the interpretation of data, though there are some suggestions for activities that cover data analysis.



Staff hosting a data party. Photo credit: JoLynn Miller

A “data party” is a gathering of stakeholders that engages in a series of activities and discussions that help them make decisions and action plans for a program. It is a unique way to bring together all the people invested in your program. Maybe it includes volunteers, your Board of Supervisors, county staff, or even youth. Each stakeholder has a different view on your program and has a voice to be heard. Data parties give everyone a chance to speak that voice and share back with the program their experience.^{3,4}

Data parties can also be used to help interpret data.

Perhaps you collected evaluation data on a program; a data party can be an opportunity to interpret that data not only with those familiar with research and evaluation, but those who helped plan and implement the program, or who took part in the program.

A great example of this is camps. Several camps use a post-program survey to learn about their campers’ experience. Having a data party allows the camp staff, adult and teens, learn how campers and teens felt about their camp experience. Camp staff can learn what may need to change for next year to help campers and teen staff have an even better experience.

“I really enjoyed the gallery walk and listening to the Ah-Ha moments as people processed the information. The discussions were rich as the different people in my group saw where change could help their [programs] become a rich and safe experience for youth. I think a data party is a useful tool in helping professionals design an exemplary experience.”

-Data party participant

¹Franz, N. K. (2013). The data party: Involving stakeholders in meaningful data analysis. *Journal of Extension*, 51(1), Article 1IAW2. Available at <https://www.joe.org/joe/2013february/iw2.php>

²Franz, N. K. (2018). Data parties I have known: Lessons learned and best practices for success. *Journal of Extension*, 56(4), Article 4TOT2. Available at <https://www.joe.org/joe/2018august/tt2.php>

³Bird, M., & Lewis, K. (2021). Data parties engage 4-H volunteers in data interpretation, strengthening camp programs and evaluation process. *California Agriculture*, 75 (1), 14-19. Available at <http://calag.ucanr.edu/archive/?article=ca.2021a0005>

⁴Lewis, K. M., Ewers, T., Bird, M., & Wilkins, T. (2019). Engage stakeholders in program evaluation: Throw them a party! *Journal of Extension*, 57 (4). Article 4IAW5. Available at <https://joe.org/joe/2019august/iw5.php>

Why should I have a data party?

Having a data party may help you see the program from someone else's perspective and help you better understand the data. Data parties give voice to all your program stakeholders and can also help them understand the importance of data. Data parties are also a fun way to share results of any sort of evaluation or research study. After all, *who doesn't love a party?*



Engage stakeholders in a meaningful way



Helps stakeholders understand importance and role of evaluation



Helps stakeholders make sense of the evaluation data and summaries



Helps stakeholders use that data to make relevant changes to their Program



Allowed for program discussions and sharing of ideas

"We received valuable feedback from not just the data, but from dialogue with other 4-H camp program leaders. It helps to keep us focused on what will make our camp program the best it can be."-Data party participant

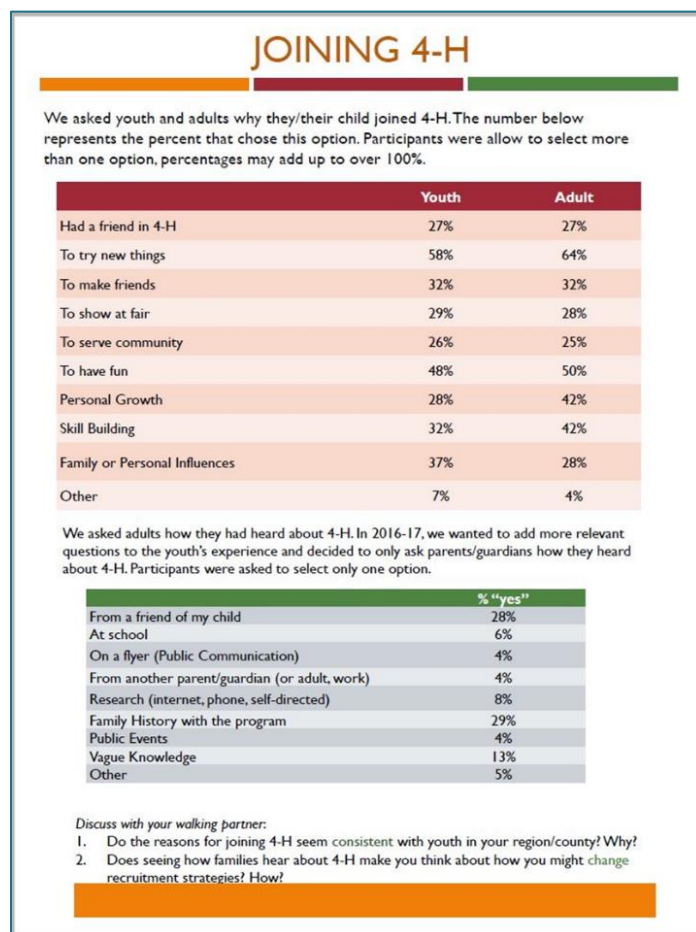
Tip: If the name "data party" doesn't work for you or your participants, change the name! Call it something that is meaningful to you and your stakeholders.

Sample Activities

The Gallery Walk

A gallery walk is a great way to show off results. Findings from a particular question or set of questions can be presented on a large poster with questions to prompt discussion among the participants. See the sample here. Below are instructions on how to do a gallery walk.

- Several posters are placed around the room, and participants walk around the “gallery” to review and discuss each poster.
- Break participants into small groups (2-3 people). If you have a people from different counties or programs, or both youth and adults, be sure to get people to mix up so that they are not only with familiar faces.
- Encourage participants to talk to each poster and to review the findings, then discuss the prompt questions at the bottom of each poster.
- After giving participants time to look at the posters, bring the large group back together to discuss their overall thoughts, and any questions or concerns you may have that you’d like their thoughts on. Perhaps there was a finding that confused you and you’d like some input, or if participants were talking about similar topics at a poster, it might be worth discussing during the large-group session.



Sample Poster

- Need help creating the poster? Use the template ([“Data Party Poster Template”](#)) in this toolkit.

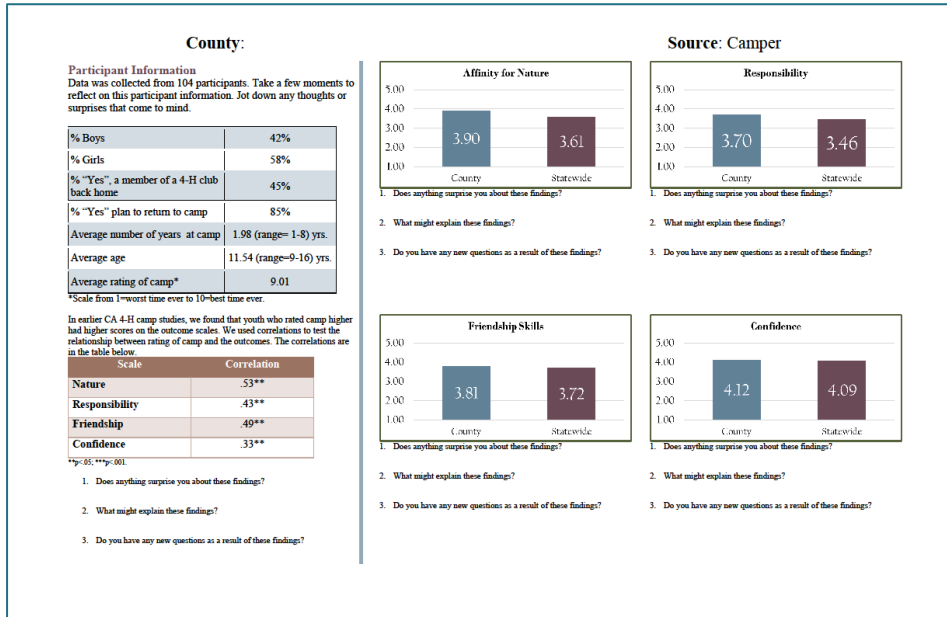
Tip: Give participants post-it notes and pens to jot down thoughts and questions for each poster. Before you bring back the large group, gather the post-it notes and take a moment to see if there are any you’d like to discuss all together.

A variation of this would be the “wandering flipchart”: have findings posted and ask for people write recommendations on flipchart paper by the poster, then move onto the next poster.

If you need participants to review results in a certain order, make sure to plan for that and provide instruction.

Data Placemats

Data placemats are a way to summarize data (maybe a certain question or set of questions) for individual think-time or small-group discussions. This activity involves giving participants time to review and reflect on the data shared, and to respond to prompt questions that are included. This can be done individually or in small groups. See the example placemat below.



Sample Placemat

Include "prompt questions" to facilitate discussion of the findings. Don't know what to ask? Check out the "[Sample Prompt Questions](#)" in the templates folder.

After giving participants time to review the data, the large group can be brought back together for a discussion of what participants thought about the data, their responses to the prompt questions, and/or any other thoughts and questions that arose during the individual/small group time.

If you have group-specific findings (like by county or by program) you can use placemats to make a placemat that is specific to that group. For example, at the data parties for the camp evaluation, the gallery walk posters summarize data from across the state. The data placemats are made for each county.

Tip: Leave white space for participants to take notes.

If you want to have participants see only pieces of the placemat at a time, use post-it notes to cover different sections of the placemat. Instruct participants to "peel and reveal" the post-it notes only when you are ready for them to look at that section.

Other Activities

- Have some other fun data-related items to have up on the walls or in the room such as chocolate kisses with “facts” on the bottom (printed on stickers).
- If you have open-ended questions as part of your data, having a data party is a great opportunity to have participants help you “code” the data and look for themes.
- Have an icebreaker or game with data; check out the “[Sample Crossword and Matching](#)” for ideas!
- Have a quiz or trivia game where you can give away prizes. One way to do this is if you need to do a presentation, build questions into the presentation to engage the audience.

How Do I Do It?

Use these steps to help you plan a data party

1. Think about the goal of your data party. What is it that you want to share? What do you want participants to get out of the data party? Be sure to share the purpose with your stakeholders!

Example: I want to share the results from the needs assessment completed by former, current, and potential future participants. The purpose of this assessment was to understand the needs of our community, what resources people are currently accessing, and what barriers they face to using our program. We will use these results to generate ideas for what programming needs to be developed overcoming existing barriers to accessing resources.

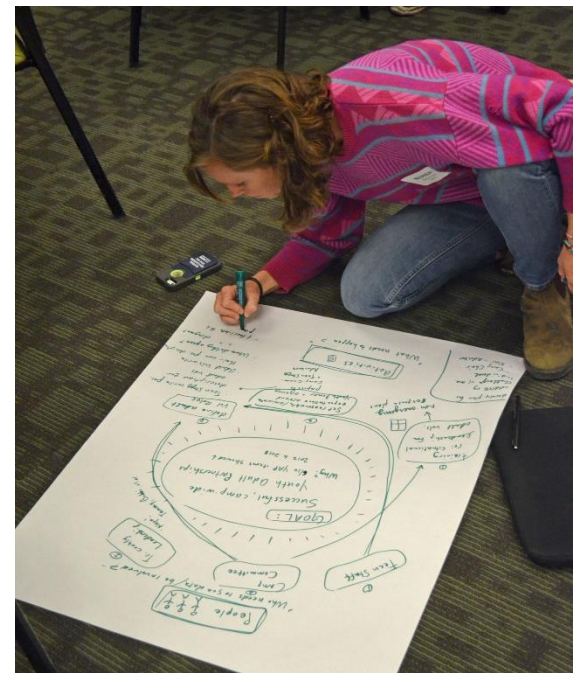
2. Who do I want to share this with? Who should be present at this party?

Example: I want to share these results with program staff as well as community members that are involved in our program development.

3. What should I share? What data needs to be presented to this group?

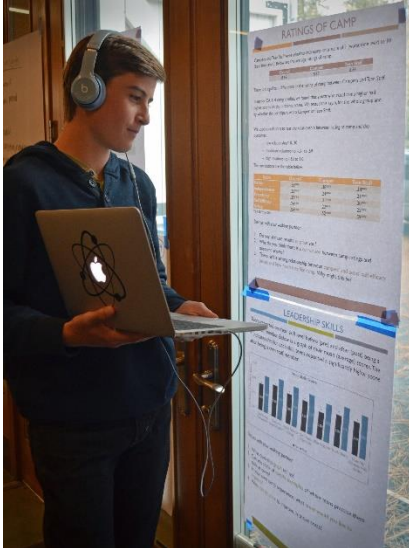
Example: I will share who took the assessment (number of people, age, gender, where they live, what programs they access), and the percent that responded “yes” or “agree” to each question. I will also share a list the barriers they gave as reasons for not using our program.

4. How should I share it? What tools will I use? Large posters? Data placemats? Other tools?



Action planning at a data party. Photo credit: Marianne Bird

Example: I will create a short report that highlights the responses to each question. I will make large posters for questions that have interesting results and to share the needs that were identified. I will use data placemats to share data around the barriers people listed.



Sharing results from a gallery walk to a virtual participant. Photo credit: Marianne Bird

5. When will the meeting be? How much time do I have?

If you are having a data party to help you write a report or make some major program plans, you will need a minimum of three hours for sufficient discussion and planning. But data parties can be flexible to fit your needs and schedule. But remember, less time means less discussion; be prepared to keep participants on topic and to move conversations to the “parking lot” or “bike rack” if you need to move on with your schedule!

6. Where will we meet?

You can meet in-person or online! Zoom is a great way to include distant participants. Zoom also has breakout rooms you can use for group discussions!

Tip: Be sure to end your data party with action planning. This could be action plans for those running the data party, the participants, or both! How will the participants use what they learned from the data party back in their program? How will you use what you learned from the participants? Use the “Action Plan Template” if you need a sheet for action planning.



Teen staff action planning for their camps. Photo credit: Marianne Bird

Hosting a Successful Party

Timing & Structure

- People love this opportunity to reflect. Be flexible with time; the group may need more time to review some of the data.
- Build in breaks. Reviewing data takes a lot of brain power. Give your participants time to recharge.
- Give more time for complex information.
- Give participants plenty of time to view the posters in the gallery walk. These posters tend to be very engaging and ignite rich conversation. Having plenty of time for this session makes sure that you don't cut off those conversations, but also gives participants time to review all the posters.
- see the “[Sample Agenda](#)” for ideas on timing.

Short on Time?

A data party is best done when you can devote a large amount of time to it, as much as a full-day meeting. But even if you only have an hour, you can make a data party work! Here are some tips for shortening your data party.

- Narrow your focus; don't try to cover too many topics in a short time.
- Have fewer posters to review in the gallery walk.
- No time for movement? Present information on a data placemat instead.
- Send participants background information before the meeting. Be sure to send it enough in advance to give them time to review it.
- Stay on top of off-topic conversations; be ready to gently guide conversations back to the topic at hand and write down notes for future discussion points if needed.
- **No matter how long (or short) your data party is, leave time for action planning. This is crucial to getting stuff done!**

Activities & Engagement

- If you have a lot of questions you want participants to help answer, send those questions ahead of time and bring their thoughts the day of the party.
- Have an information sheet about where the data came from as a reminder for your participants. See the “[Data Information Example](#)” for a sample.
- Create a flyer that will catch their attention and get their interest! See the “[Data Party Invite Template](#)” for a sample you can change to fit your needs. Or, incorporate a data party into an existing meeting.
- Bring party supplies (hats, balloons, streamers, candy, etc.)
- Bring SWAG! Who doesn't love free stuff?

Want to know if participants found your data party useful? Have them complete the “[Data Party Participant Questionnaire \(Evaluation\)](#)”. Evaluations have shown that participants reported deeper understanding of and buy-in to the data after participating in a data party⁵.

⁵Bird, M., & Lewis, K. (2021). Data parties engage 4-H volunteers in data interpretation, strengthening camp programs and evaluation process. *California Agriculture*, 75 (1), 14-19. Available at <http://calag.ucanr.edu/archive/?article=ca.2021a0005>

Resources

- Templates can be downloaded from: https://bit.ly/data_party
- If your participants need some more background on evaluation, here are some ideas:
 - Encourage them to complete modules on eXtension created by National 4-H around evaluation and using data to make informed decisions about the program. The modules can be accessed by looking up the "[4-H Common Measures and 4-H Lesson Study: Making Data-Driven Decisions](#)". Although these videos are specific to the 4-H program, they provide a great overview to evaluation concepts. (And as a plus, they are short and visually-appealing!)
 - Incorporate activities from "[Dabbling in the Data](#)" to help participants understand the data you are sharing with them.
- Journal articles:
 - Bird, M., & Lewis, K. (2021). Data parties engage 4-H volunteers in data interpretation, strengthening camp programs and evaluation process. *California Agriculture*, 75 (1), 14-19. Available at <http://calag.ucanr.edu/archive/?article=ca.2021a0005>
 - Lewis, K. M., Ewers, T., Bird, M., & Wilkins, T. (2019). Engage stakeholders in program evaluation: Throw them a party! *Journal of Extension*, 57 (4). Article 4IAW5. Available at <https://joe.org/joe/2019august/iw5.php>
- Data placemats:
 - https://www.slideshare.net/InnoNet_Eval/data-placemats-22200834
 - <http://comm.eval.org/viewdocument/presentation-from-eval17-1954-bri>
- Word clouds
 - <https://elearningindustry.com/the-8-best-free-word-cloud-creation-tools-for-teachers>
 - <https://aea365.org/blog/sheila-b-robinson-on-fast-free-fun-on-the-fourth-with-word-cloud-generators/>
- Blog posts and other ideas:
 - <http://aea365.org/blog/have-a-party-to-share-evaluation-results-by-kendra-lewis/>
 - <https://www.acacamps.org/news-publications/blogs/research-360/have-data-party-share-evaluation-results>
 - <https://www.pinterest.com/evaluationmaven/data-parties/>



Staff making plans for future programming.
Photo credit: Kendra Lewis