Activity 1.1: Defining a Data Problem Within an Organization

Objectives:
- Learn how to address a challenge at your organization by defining a problem that you can use data to solve.
- Understand how to think through the problem, what types of data may already be available to you, and how you can collect new data to address that problem.
- Think critically about how to ask the right questions, collect the right data, and how that data can inform the decisions you make at your organization.

Total anticipated time: 35 mins

Materials Needed:
- Pens/pencils

Introduction:

A key piece of using data for decision-making is learning how to describe how you would like to use your data as evidence, and what questions you would like to answer with your data. This begins with being able to define a problem or need your organization wants to address.

Defining a problem or challenge that you wish to solve using data can help you allocate time and resources while you maximize your project returns. With a clearly defined problem, you can build your own capacity to collect only the data that you need to answer your own questions.

This approach can help identify the key challenge you are trying to address, and discover what data already exist relating to the challenge. It will push you to think specifically about how better measurement or more complete information can help solve the problem. Perhaps you will realize additional decisions that need to be made, or ways you can more efficiently come to decisions.

As you complete the activity, you should ask yourself what data you already have relating to the problem. You should also think where you might find existing data from previous projects in the same problem area.

Before you begin, think critically about an issue, challenge, or problem you have in your organization. Then, work through the process provided on the next page (20 minutes).

Participant Guide: Problem Definition

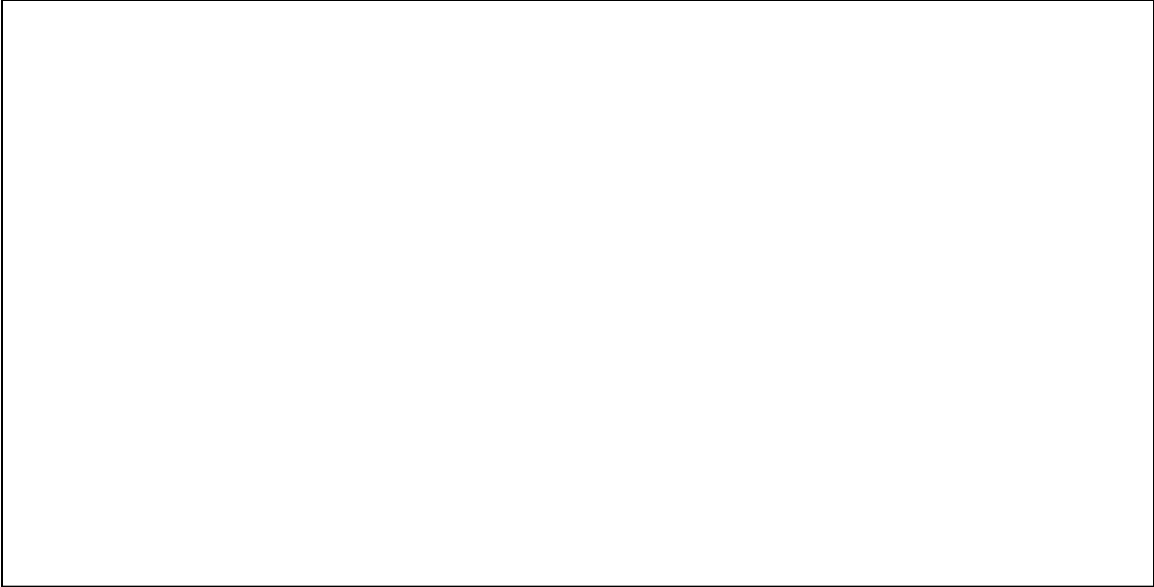**Directions: Use this guide to help you think through a key issue you are trying to address, the factors that contribute to that issue, the people it**

affects, existing data related to the issue, potential sources of new data, and how to use those data to make a decision.
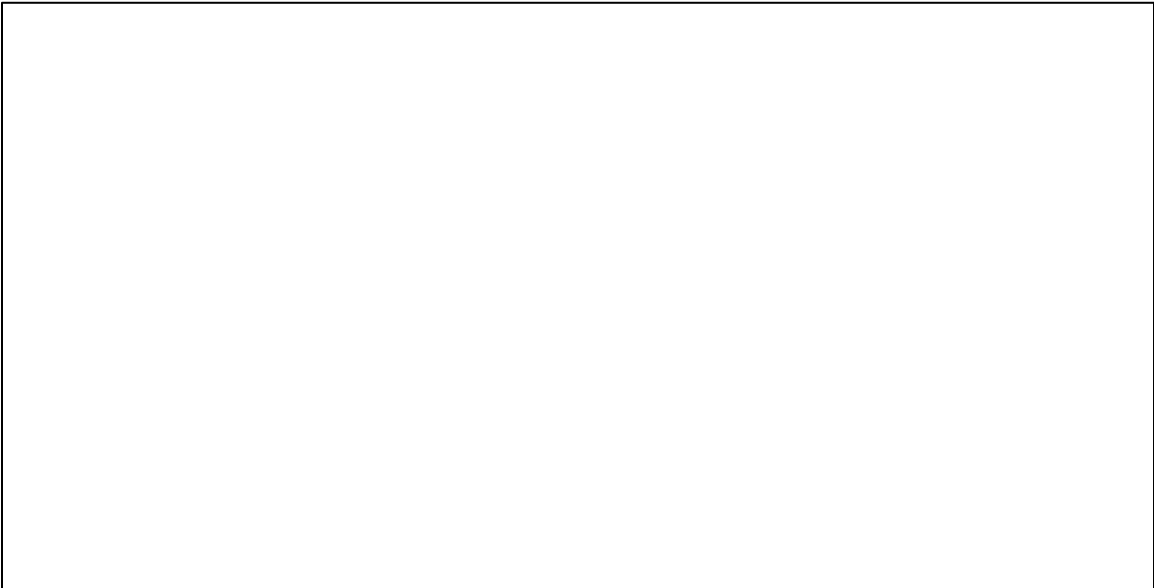
1. What is the issue, challenge, or problem you want to address? What are the decisions that need to be made to solve the issue? Why is the issue important to your organization?

2. What is preventing this issue from being solved? What is the political, social, and economic environment in which the issue is situated?
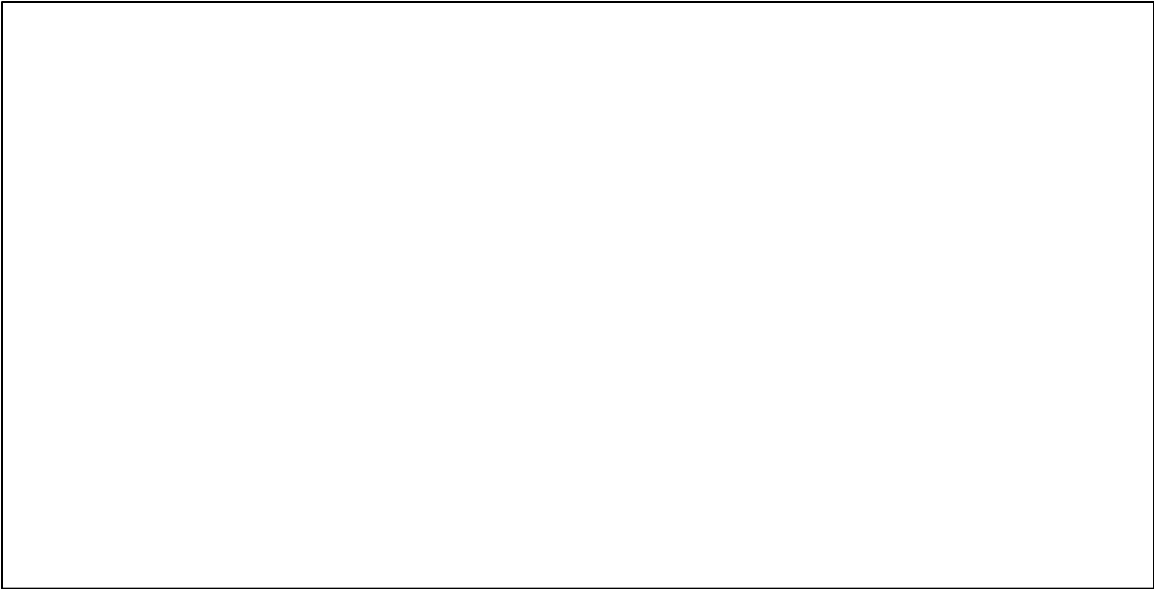
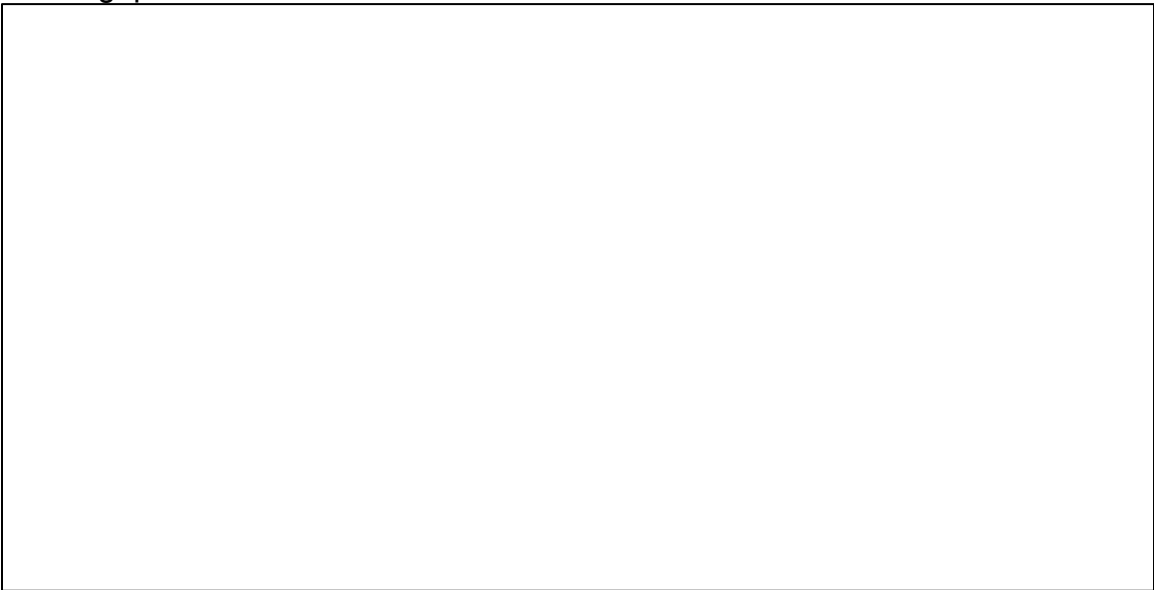3. What communities and individuals are most directly impacted?

4. What is currently being done, if anything, to address the problem? Who is involved?
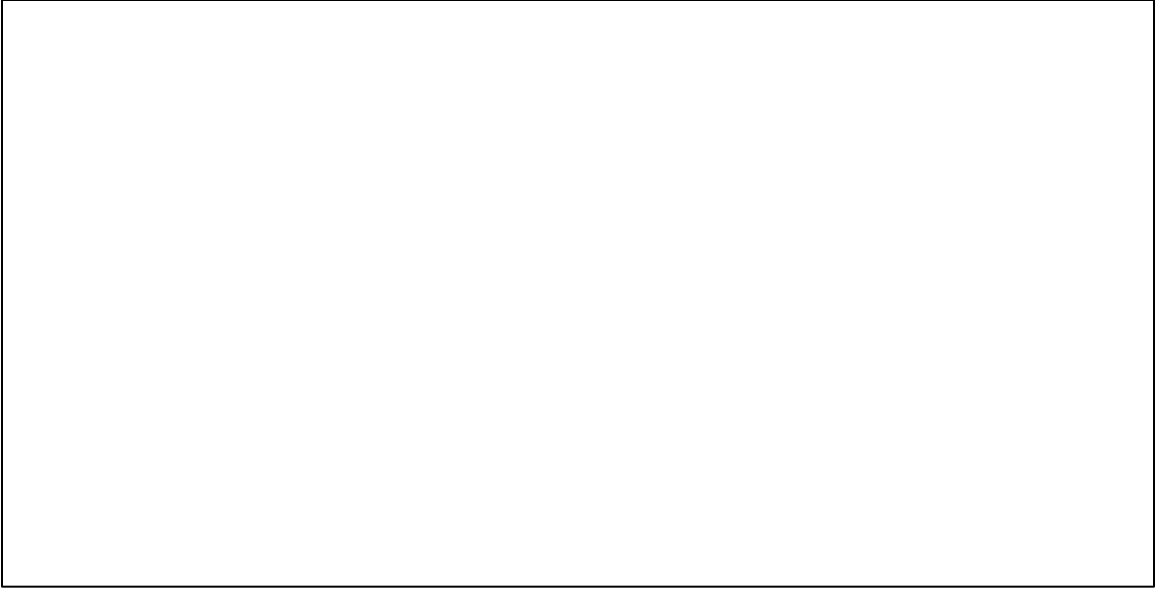
5. What data are currently available or being collected that can be used to better understand the problem?

6. How up-to-date are these data? What do they focus on? What are the gaps in the data?

7. How can you use these data to solve your problem?

Presentations and Debrief (15 minutes)

Participants can now volunteer and share what they wrote.