Possible goals for visualizing data

1) To raise awareness of a problem or an issue

Sometimes your target audience might not know or understand an issue or problem. The right visualization can help people quickly digest data and raise their awareness of an issue.

2) To achieve a policy change

In order to achieve a policy change, you must be able to quickly and convincingly make your case that a problem exists, and that a policy change is the best solution. Raw numbers are often not enough to make a compelling argument for policy makers, who have to juggle many priorities. Creating a convincing data visualization is often the best way to do this. Personal stories and other qualitative data can be especially impactful.

3) To achieve a behavior change

In public health, data is often shared as a strategy to prevent people from engaging in an unhealthy behavior or to encourage them to engage in a healthy behavior. (For example, nutrition labels provide data intended to help consumers make healthy choices.) A word of caution: most of the time, knowledge is not sufficient to achieve behavior change. Sharing data must be part of a comprehensive strategy.

4) To grow membership in your group

Creating change is often a community effort. Finding a creative way to share data about an issue or about your organization could be one way to help increase community involvement in your work.

5) To change social norms

People often overestimate the rate of unhealthy behaviors such as underage drinking, making these behaviors seem more normal than they actually are. By reporting data about the real rates, you might be able to change the perceptions of your target audience and the social norms about that behavior. Visualization can be a great way to get your point across.

6) To convince granters or individuals to fund you

Funders are increasingly expecting grantees to use data to demonstrate that their programs address needs that exist in the community, and that their programs are effective in changing health outcomes. Creating a visualization can help you stand out from the crowd and make the case that your program is the right one to fund.

7) To inspire activism

Sharing data in a compelling way can be a useful too in inspiring people to take action on an issue. Sharing stories and other qualitative data can be especially effective ways to inspire people.

8) To understand or learn something from your data

Often, programs are looking at data internally in order to answer questions like 'what needs exist?', 'how successful are we?', 'who are we serving? (or not serving?)' Even though the data won't necessarily be reported outside of your organization, it can still be helpful to create a visualization so that you look at your data in new way. For example, a map of your data might help you see a pattern that might not otherwise be apparent.

Your Ideas: