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| **Using Evaluation Data with a Health Equity Lens** | Text, logo  Description automatically generated |

What if there was a way to know *when*, *where* and even *how* your project should take its next steps toward achieving policy goals and improving health equity in your community?

Actually, there is a way! If done properly, your background research and evaluation results are like your project’s own crystal ball to provide clues for how to proceed. Here are some common ways to use evaluation findings, based on the evaluation activity type.

## Focus Groups

Focus groups are a great way for a project to learn about why people feel the way they do about something. The semi-structured discussion format of a focus group allows facilitators to probe the sentiments, rationale or conditions of a population or an issue. The qualitative data can: guide project strategies for entering or working with a particular community or population; identify how best to frame an issue or argument; find points of connection or shared interest; identify the most successful methods; or learn why something did not work and how to improve it.

## Key Informant Interviews (KII)

Semi-structured conversations with knowledgeable insiders are a crucial means of educating project staff about the background, concerns, and priorities for their community or campaign. Most often, KIIs are done with policymakers or their staff in order to help a project identify points of view, anticipate facilitators and barriers to adopting or implementing a policy, and devise effective tactics. Other key stakeholders can be good informants too, depending on the goal of the interview. For example, thought leaders from local churches, cultural groups, or community agencies can help identify who the area’s powerful players are or how best to approach or collaborate with specific populations. Interviewing a sample of shop owners can provide information about retailer practices and reactions to incentives to stop selling tobacco products. This data can be used internally by the project to inform subsequent moves.

## Observations

Observations can be used to document the scope of a problem, confirm that a policy is being implemented properly, or measure change over time (when more than one wave of observations is conducted). Comparisons between locations, entity characteristics (e.g., kinds of retailers), or types of interventions or policy provisions enable projects to see where the problem is more serious or which strategy is most effective and where to prioritize efforts. Observations may also identify unintentional consequences—positive or negative—which may further widen health equity and social justice gaps. Results can be shared with stakeholders and decisionmakers to illustrate the need for action.

## Policy Record Reviews

Research on the related policies and decision maker backgrounds is an important activity to do early in your work. These types of information in policy record reviews can help uncover the personal interests, allies, policy stances and priorities of elected officials from their bios, voting records, and meeting minutes which can be used to identify and persuade undecided votes. The data can identify the makeup and extent of social characteristics in census population data to pinpoint the scope of a problem and attempt to reduce inequities. Such background research can be used to document the number and location of entities like industrial polluters, tobacco retailers, parks, schools, cessation services, etc. from public lists in order to assess the density and/or proximity of certain sites or services in a neighborhood or jurisdiction. This data can be overlaid in GIS onto maps of social characteristics to detect social inequities, which can be used to educate decision makers and prioritize in which neighborhoods your project should provide more education, mobilization outreach, and assistance.

## Public Opinion Surveys

When surveys are representative of the population of interest (e.g., residents in a specific voting district, multi-unit housing tenants, etc.), the findings can help projects and coalitions understand community knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of a topic (like the harms of flavored tobacco products). Data can indicate whether a population is ready to mobilize around a campaign or whether they need more education or persuasion. Evidence of public support can be used to leverage power over elected officials to take desired action. Lack of adequate public support may indicate that the project needs more compelling proof or better messaging about the problem and its effects on the community. This could signal the necessity for more community education or a shift in focus to a different community altogether.

## Other – GIS Mapping

GIS mapping can be used to identify social and health disparities by comparing the occurrence of certain conditions with the physical location of specific populations or neighborhoods. For example, it can show which neighborhoods experience lower income levels, tobacco usage, health problems, or people living in multi-family housing. It can be used to determine the density and proximity of tobacco retailers to youth-oriented sites like schools, youth centers, or parks. With this data, you can make a compelling case to community members and decision makers that neighborhoods are being unfairly targeted or are suffering from problems inequitably. Findings then can become tools for education, recruitment, mobilization, resource allocation, and policy solutions!

## Other – Consumer/Material Testing

Testing the appeal and “stickiness” of newly developed advertisements, educational materials, and presentations helps ensure that key messages are understood, remembered, and resonate with those you want to reach. Instead of assuming that one size fits all, it’s important to proactively assess how those materials work with different priority populations. Surveys, interviews, or group discussion data can help fine-tune project materials so that they are as effective as possible in conveying your message and educating, persuading, and mobilizing people to support your efforts. This process makes room for you to include the perspectives and voices of those who are all too often underrepresented or discounted. Without checking whether materials ring true with populations of interest, you could unintentionally perpetuate the very health inequities you are trying to address.