Shellie Reid:

Welcome to our session on the LSNTAP Data and Evaluation Toolkit. We've left five minutes at the end of the session for questions. Please use the chat for any questions you have for the presenters, and we will get to as many as we can at the end. The information for applying for CLE is posted on the Permanent Commission website. An email will go out after the conference about the CLE. There will be an online form for each day. A code will be read during the session, which you will need to report on your CLE form. You must attend the whole session and must complete and submit the online form within a week of the conference. You also will need to know your attorney registration numbers. We also have quite a few questions for you, our audience. We'd love to hear more about how you use data in your organization, so when we ask those questions, feel free to type your responses in the chat. Now let's meet our panelists.

Caitlin McTiernan:

Thanks Shellie. And hi everyone. Welcome. My name is Caitlin McTiernan. I'm a Senior Consultant with Just-Tech and before I was a data analyst at the New York Legal Assistance Group. I am a long time attendee of this conference and really excited to be with you today. Ellen?

Ellen Samuel:

Yes, hi everybody, I'm Ellen Samuel. I am the director of Consulting at Just-Tech. In my past, I was a staff attorney at Prairie State Legal Services in northern Illinois and then became a supervising attorney of the telephone intake service. There we used all kinds of interesting data that we got from our case management system and our phone system to try to make decisions about who we can help and what staffing decisions we needed. Holly?

Holly Stevens:

Hi everyone. I'm Holly Stevens. I'm the Chief Data Officer at the Legal Services Corporation and prior to joining LSC I led a data team doing evaluation and data collection at Children's Law Center, a legal aid organization in DC and helped other organizations as a consultant prior to that do better data collection in both civil legal aid and public defense work. So happy to be here.

Shellie Reid:

And I am Shellie Reid. I'm manager of the Legal Services National Technology Assistance Project, fondly known as LSNTAP. It's much easier to say. And our mission is to empower the legal aid community to improve their client services and build capacity through the use of technology. One of the ways we do this is by providing resources such as the Toolkit we'll be discussing today. How would you describe your current understanding of data analysis, audience?

Ellen Samuel:

We're going to have a poll, Greg, and if you check out the chat, you can see, I believe you can see the answers popping up there.

Shellie Reid:

Perfect. While those are continuing to come in, Caitlin, what is the purpose of the Toolkit?

Caitlin McTiernan:

Great, thanks Shellie. Thanks folks for filling out the poll. We wanted to start off by just getting a sense of who's in the room and who's coming into this discussion - who's brand new/beginner and or who's a long-term expert with data analysis. The great thing is this Data and Evaluation Toolkit is hopefully made for all of you no matter where you're at in your data analysis background or experience. Our hope with this Toolkit was to create a concrete set of actions that people can go in and understand no matter what point you're at in the data analysis process, you can have some ideas and tangible action items to come out of it.

Overall, this Toolkit is presenting a framework for how to engage with data analysis. It walks through the different phases of a basic data analysis project, and it'll introduce key terminology that you'll hear throughout. It's tied in with a lot of field specific examples, so it's designed specifically for the legal aid community. You hear a lot about intake dates or cases versus clients. It's grounded with a lot of examples that are based in this community. Like I said, there's a little bit of something for everyone here. I will say in general, the Toolkit is designed for those who are beginners or maybe a bit rusty and trying to get back up to speed with data analysis, but for those in the room who are moderate/strong background, it can also provide different ways to approach these conversations with those who are less familiar with data analysis.

One thing it's not that I want to make really clear of - it's not going to walk you through the specifics of how to conduct technical analysis techniques. There's a lot of great resources. The Toolkit references some of those that I'd encourage you to check out, but that's not really the focus of this Toolkit. It's really to just give the legal aid community, build out a common understanding of data analysis work and how those projects happen and the terminology that you'll need to have familiarity with to be able to engage in that kind of work. Ellen, I'll turn it over to you to talk a little bit more about the structure of the Toolkit.

Ellen Samuel:

Just so you all know, we do have a link to the Toolkit in the CLE material so that you can look through it. There's also a PDF version and it is available on LSNTAP's website along with a lot of other very interesting Toolkits that can help you with your practice. Caitlin did a great job of talking about the goals and the purpose. The Toolkit is structured to walk you through how a data analysis project works. The diagram here walks you through the cycle of a data project starting with the darker color blue - defining the analysis, collecting data, cleaning data, analyzing learning and report, and then maybe starting over depending on what you found.

The Toolkit stresses that you really need to start with a key question. What is the object? What are you trying to find? And it's really important that you think about this carefully before you start your analysis. You want to make sure that you are actually looking for something that's going to be helpful to your practice and that you're really thinking carefully about what this project is going to be. Put it in writing, think about it carefully, really define the question or the questions that you want to answer. Who wants the answer why? Who is asking for this information? Because the way that you collect the data and the way that you analyze it and the way you think about it can be affected by who is the person who wants to answer or the group. Why do you need this answer? Those are things you want to think about carefully. These are going to shape the goals and the methods and how you present your analysis at the end.

The next step is that you are going to collect data; this is the meat of the project. You want to make sure that you are looking for accurate and relevant data in order to answer your key question. The Toolkit walks through how to implement some sound collection practices in order to gather the data that you need for the analysis. Then your next step is going to be preparing and cleaning the data. This is really important. We get a lot of really messy data. Especially if we are asking people free text answers about where they live or asking them information where we don't have preselected answers. It can get messy, and you may not be able to analyze it carefully without really looking through the data and combing through it, making sure that it is clean and ready to be analyzed. That will make it just much easier for your analysis and for visualizing the data.

Then your next step is going to be analyzing the data and we are going to talk a little bit more later about maybe you might want to find volunteers, people who are really knowledgeable about data analysis in order to do this step if you don't have someone available in your organization. There are a number of techniques that are available to analyze data and really having somebody who understands that will be very helpful to make sure that you're getting what you need out of the data that you have.

Again, then the last step is going to be presenting and learning or reporting on your data. You want to make sure you close that loop, you have the data that you've gathered, it is clean, you've analyzed it. Who are you going to present this to? Is it going to be upper management in your firm? Is it going to be the community? Is it going to be a funder to try to convince them to fund an initiative that really needs to be done? And then really importantly, you may have found new questions, or you may have realized that you weren't collecting exactly the right data. That's why the diagram is in a circle, so you want to then refine that and then you may need to do the whole cycle again. That is how the life cycle of the data analysis project goes and how we walk through it in the Toolkit.

Going over the contents here, this is just a description of what we walk through. Just a general overview of data analysis projects and then again going through these steps, walking through carefully how to define your analysis, how to collect your data, how to prepare and analyze the data, presenting and learning from the data. We're going to talk about a few of these other things throughout the course of our talk today. Building a strong data culture, that's what we are really going to focus on. How do you convince your staff and maybe your administrators that this is really important and how to really make data a focus and make sure that everybody is on board in the organization. Then we end up with some data analysis projects examples that you can review to really walk you through how this works in real life. Okay, so I think Holly, can you tell us a little bit more about introducing us to data culture and how we can do that in our firms?

Holly Stevens:

Sure. Hi everyone. I'm going to chat a little bit about culture and then ask some questions of the panel and we hope that you'll engage via the chat as well, but I think one of the things that sits above everything that we've been talking about in this project and the model that was on the previous pages is organizational culture and a commitment to collecting data and using data to make decisions both at a day-to-day practice level in your cases and at this more strategic practice level. How are you using resources, how are you deciding which kinds of cases to take? Things like that. Data of course can guide those and inform those decisions and it's a commitment to do this. It's a journey. For every step you take I think then there's a step back sometimes and three steps forward and it's an ongoing practice and commitment to moving your organization forward.

In the Toolkit and in our conversation, we're going to talk about a couple components of a strong data culture and building that data culture - an ongoing commitment and then the practices that align the organization. Using that data, how do you make sure that you have data available to use in the decisions and how do you maintain that data and is it useful? Is it actionable data? And then three, do you have the staffing and the resources, the human resources, the technical resources to collect and use data. I want to kind of pivot back to the ongoing commitment. One thing that I've always thought about is I built a data team and tried to build a strong organizational culture and legal aid, which is the small moments. How are we routinely building in data into practices? This is not a big thing. If we do it once a year, if we look at an annual report or we share the end of the year, big statistics or sometimes just a number of people helped and things that we're doing that doesn't demonstrate our organizational commitment.

What are the small moments that we can figure out and build upon? And some of those are at staff meetings, at program meetings, at small department meetings that you're just sharing back information. How many intakes, how long do those intakes take, where are the hangups in our intake process? What are our eviction cases looking like? What are our guardianship cases look like? Small little nuggets to show the staff that you're looking at the information that they're taking so much time to enter your case management system. These don't have to be complicated reports. Sometimes the most basic information is the most compelling just to show people to describe the work that you're doing.

Other things that I think are really important are thinking about that commitment when you hire and when you're doing interviewing, when you're talking about activities during your interviews and trying to ask people about specific ways that they like to work. I think you want to demonstrate that you care about data collection and using data really shows that this is an organization that tries to be informed and continuously learn. And that takes time, and it takes a little bit of effort during interviews and things, but I think then you find people who really engaged and invested in the continuous improvement, the willingness to engage in this dialogue with yourself of reflective thinking, how can we do better? And frankly to enter data into your case management system.

The second thing that we talked about was just practices to align the organization so that it is maintaining relevant and useful data. Something that I think happens a lot of places is we put a lot of information into a system and it's scary if nobody ever pulls it out or looks at it, pulls those reports. As a researcher and evaluator, there's nothing scarier than thinking someone has two years of data that they've never looked at, because you'll find things that you want to improve upon if you're using the data, and so really thinking about those practices, how do you build in those ongoing reports? Dashboards, just a fun buzzword in the world right now, but what do you have available? How are you using that data? What kind of monitoring reports are you looking at, so you know if people are entering the data when you think that they are?

So those kinds of practices. It's not fun, it's not sexy, but it is something interesting to think about what are the practices. How are we doing this? It's like going to the gym, what is this? How are we flexing this muscle on a week to week, day-to-day basis?

And then three, the commitment to staffing. None of us in this group and on this panel are going to talk about the ability to do data analysis or build a data culture without an investment in staffing. I want to be careful though that means something appropriate for your organization and your organizational size. It doesn't mean you need a data scientist and a data engineer and huge amount of staff. It does mean that you need to cultivate skills in different people. It might be only in Excel, it might be something more sophisticated, but how are you investing and planning for the future in that staffing? We're going to ask another poll here I think about how you would rate your organization's current data culture. Where do you think you fall? It's anonymous too, so you don't have to worry about us knowing where you are.

Ellen Samuel:

We're not going to get you in trouble.

Holly Stevens:

No emails later everyone. As we wait for things in the poll to come in. I think I'll just bounce back to Caitlin and Ellen. What steps have you guys in your organization seen your organization take or try to take yourself? Caitlin, as you tried to do some of this and your organization, how did you try to build that commitment to using data?

Caitlin McTiernan:

Great question, Holly. I think frequency was one big effort and you touched on this as well, just making sure it was clear that the use of data wasn't a one-time effort, that there was this ongoing regular need. I think just being creative about how we could showcase the results of the data that we're collecting. A lot of the times the data needs are driven by reporting and what funders are specifying, and we were first trying to branch out of that and show how this can be helpful to you as an attorney on a day-to-day basis or how you can have a better picture of your caseload or your team's work. I think putting it in newsletters, bringing it up a slide at staff meetings, just having this regular pattern and space to dedicate to data helped to demonstrate the commitment to collecting and to utilizing it was more than just for one particular effort at a given time.

Holly Stevens:

Thanks Caitlin. Ellen, you have any thoughts?

Ellen Samuel:

I would say getting the higher ups on board and making it a consistent messaging that this is important and why it's important to our organization to have this data. You have so many reporting obligations, and so you just to make sure that you have good data and the better your systems are to collect that data, the easier it's going to be. To not have that crunch at the end of the year, at the end of the cycle where you're like, "Ah, I have to get this in." Really making it a commitment from the top down. We're going to focus on good information and like Caitlin said, this is how we're going to help more people. This is how we're going to make ourselves more effective if we see that we're reaching the wrong places or not. In my example, in the middle of the pandemic, we realized we had created a whole housing line because we anticipated there would be a million evictions, but there weren't.

We weren't getting those calls in because there was a moratorium on evictions that went on forever and ever and ever, we used our data to see, "Oh well there's actually been an uptick in domestic violence cases." People calling us maybe because they're stuck at home, or they don't have a safe space to go to work. We realized that we had that data, we could review it and then change our staffing and change how we were providing services so that we were actually meeting the client need that was available instead of what we thought. We had a hypothesis, we were wrong, and we could change what we were doing based on that information.

Holly Stevens:

That's such a good example of being able to react in real time and learn. I think a lot of organizations were able to do some of that during the pandemic, really see change quickly that sometimes it's impossible in non-pandemic times, when change happens more slowly. That's such a great example.

One of the other things that we wanted to talk about were roadblocks, and of course we could start with funding, we could talk about so many other things, but I think one thing that I encountered pretty often, and it wasn't even during the post pandemic and pandemic days, is just turnover, staffing turnover. I think that because it's an ongoing process and commitment; you can sometimes lose some of your biggest champions and the people who were really talking about those examples, like Ellen said, you really thought you made strides or you had an incredible data person, whoever that may be and if they leave making sure that the organization, what are you going to do? I think that's the truest test of your culture is when some of those champions leave, how are you making sure that it's built into every level so it's sustainable? And that's just an incredible challenge.

I think particularly right now people are having turnover and hiring challenges, so I just want to flag that's something that I think if you build into that interview process or into your mission of your organization, that this is our values. This is something that's woven into our culture is that we care about using data and that we're trying to learn an ongoing learn. I want to make sure that data becomes a shorthand, but it's not data for the sake of data. It's data to learn, to do better by our clients for the organization to use the resources. Data for the sake of data is only interesting to the fun data people and not to anyone else, so really want to think about actionable data here. Something that there's always a fun reaction to is that the activities and work that you can do to encourage staff participation and buy-in for collecting data. I'm wondering, Caitlin, how did you encourage and try to build buy-in of the staff, the attorneys on your team when you were in your previous role?

Caitlin McTiernan:

It could certainly be a big ask. Any data collection is going to be time, it's going to be resources and energy, require money to build that, and so I think it's certainly just having that awareness alone is a really important baseline to start with. Take adding a field to an intake – the data collection process is maybe fast to set up, but then that's time that every person who's going through that intake has to consider.

I'd say one thing to help encourage buy-in was just having processes for making those kinds of data collection changes to not necessarily be just throwing new fields or new values into ongoing data collection and processes without thought behind it. Both towards how this information is going to be used, but also what kind of training, what kind of instructions would it be helpful to embed? How do we make it easier for those doing the data collection? How do we make it as easy as possible? How do we make sure that there's a common understanding of what's being collected so that staff aren't taking extra mental energy or it's not causing any confusion that we could help address when folks are filling in the data that we were looking for?

Trying to think of other buy-in examples. This one's an old one, not me, but I've heard it in passing and thought it was always fun. For folks that did a great job of entering in all the data, they met whatever expectations were set by the organization, at an annual party, they got gold stars with their name decorated around their room so you could go and find your name and celebrate it. It's not any big cost, it's just a really small effort, but it still encouraged folks. It was a positive reinforcement. If you're able to meet these expectations and to help get engaged in the data process, then we're going to celebrate that, and we're going to recognize that's work and effort that you put into this as well.

Holly Stevens:

Ellen, do you have any thoughts?

Ellen Samuel:

I think one of the encouragement parts is really making sure that people understand the language of data and educating. Lawyers are not necessarily trained in this, or understand it, and just like we have to translate legal concepts from legalese to our clients, we also may need the data people to translate for us and make us understand why this is important. Just remembering that we may speak different languages when it comes to the details of these processes, but that we can continue to educate. Yes, I think rewarding whatever way you can reward people for doing what's helpful for the organization, I think is a great idea. Like Caitlin said, it doesn't have to be expensive. If it can be a shout-out on your SharePoint site or congrats to this team for securing this grant because they had such great data, that kind of thing, it can be helpful.

Holly Stevens:

Great. I think a couple things from what both of you said is clarity of expectations too. I don't know if anyone's read the checklist manifesto, but I'm a fan of a good checklist, especially as you have new staff, there's always a lot of things that you got to check. Clarity of expectations, so there isn't more work and more brain space of remembering what I'm supposed to do. A lot of good case management systems, you can set things up so that you can ensure that it's not hard work to figure out what you're supposed to be checking and which boxes isn't what am I supposed to be filling out. But there's a lot of different components and I like this rewarding.

One other thing that I think is always fun to try are data walks and data parties where you're really giving back that data in a fun and engaging way. Again, take some time and effort, but I do think there's a lot from how your organization can benefit from using data and from not just in those decisions, but also makes you very competitive for other grant applications and awards and things like that. The Toolkit gives a number of ideas and we're here to chat about others and I'm happy to share about data walks and data parties at any time. Let's pivot now to improving the quality, but we can return to this in our conversation and in the Q&A as well.

Caitlin McTiernan:

Thanks Holly. I think a lot of what we were just talking about is going to connect to the quality of the data. Are you being intentional about what you're asking or the way that you are structuring questions? But I would guess many of us on this call have been involved in reporting and you get to the end of the year or the quarter or what have you, and realize, "Oh no, this is not good. There's a lot of missing data." Or folks are filling in information in different ways, or they weren't being clear with their responses, and so then you or someone on your team might be spending time going back and searching, looking through case files or talking, following up with people and figuring out how do we fill this in?

Part of what we wanted to highlight today as a component to data culture is building in practices that help reduce those circumstances. How do you set up ongoing data cleaning efforts or routine reviews? How do you structure this data collection in a way that hopefully saves you some time at the end - it helps make it easier to process the results once you're done? A couple of examples that we highlight in the Toolkit include just having standard monthly, or quarterly, or maybe weekly, depending on your needs, distributions go out flagging new cases that have missing data that's important to have, or cases that haven't been updated in a while that maybe need to be closed, or cases that were closed that are missing data. Just having some ongoing frequent review built into your ongoing operations so that way you don't -- hopefully can avoid ending up with not catching these problems until you're further down the road. It's one aspect of helping to make sure you have quality data.

Another thing is making sure that the questions that you're asking are representative of the populations that are being surveyed. The Toolkit in many ways is a consolidation and a reference guide to different data resources, so you can explore topics beyond what we cover on the Toolkit in more detail. One of those is data equity, so the Toolkit will point to a lot of great resources that you can look at to explore different ways you can structure, let's say gender or race fields or how you can be more intentional and take a data equity lens to your data collection processes. Just making sure that it's not just is your data getting complete, but are you capturing responses in a way that represent the population that you're collecting from accurately and also in alignment with whatever other reporting or funder needs that you have. A couple of different components there with data quality.

I believe we have another poll and we're curious to hear from you if your organization is engaging in any of those kinds of routine data cleaning practices. I think we're just asking about the frequency there. Also feel free if anybody wants to highlight something you think your organization's doing well when it comes to data cleaning or any different practices you have, feel free to put it in the chat. I'll try to read them out as they come. It'd be great if you can fill out the poll. I think we're waiting for it to launch.

Ellen Samuel:

Greg. We have a poll. There we go.

Caitlin McTiernan:

Great.

Ellen Samuel:

We could have added in “Don't know,” right?

Caitlin McTiernan:

Yeah.

Ellen Samuel:

People probably don't know. Okay, interesting-

Caitlin McTiernan:

-Yeah.

Ellen Samuel:

Weekly. Wow.

Caitlin McTiernan:

I don't know, if the people are doing this weekly, if they want to share anything in the chat, because that sounds like you've got a great structure going on.

Ellen Samuel:

The weekly people tell us more. Is that for any particular area or all of your data and who are you?

Caitlin McTiernan:

We’ll give you a second to fill, to put in chat, if you feel like sharing. I can also talk about one other aspect to data quality, one other example. You want to make sure when you're adding new fields and you're making changes that there's also a common understanding of what you're collecting. That's something I’m speaking from experience on. In a few different situations, working with a couple of different groups now, we've tried to take the data as is and run an analysis over different case breakdowns and seeing service levels, outcomes, things like that. When you're looking at it, the data actually might look good. There's selections and all of it, there's no missing data. You're getting the responses you'd expect.

But what we found when we dove in was that those who were filling out the data had very different understandings of what some of these data points meant, so you could take something like the level of service that was provided on the case and you have maybe brief service and extensive service. And so that might mean something very clearly to one person and something completely different to someone else. Both are correct in different ways, but it means that it's harder to draw parallels and comparisons when you're looking at the data in aggregate because they're operating off of two different sets of assumptions. That's where having trainings or having maybe the data walks and having conversations just to make sure that there's a clear understanding of definitions and how to approach different questions. I'll turn it actually... Oh, Ellen? Yes.

Ellen Samuel:

I was just going to say one of the times that data cleaning comes up for us in our jobs is when moving of case management systems. That's a huge, huge, time-consuming process because the systems are set up differently and you might have added in all these little questions throughout the years that you didn't take out that you probably should have or the fields might be different in the different systems. It can be overwhelming but really, really emphasizes the point that it is important to make sure that you are collecting these things purposefully and carefully and intentionally and cleaning them and disposing of data. I'm really interested in privacy and making sure that we're protecting our client's information. If you are supposed to be disposing of your client's data, make sure that you're doing that right on the schedule that you have agreed to do or you are required to by your state. Don't wait until you're moving case management systems, is my point, to make sure you have a handle on your data because it's just a massive undertaking.

Caitlin McTiernan:

Holly, any examples that you've seen that have worked well when it comes to helping to ensure high data quality at organizations?

Holly Stevens:

I think you guys touched upon it. I think we're really just talking about using it often. I think we have some people in this room that we should be learning from it seems -- that have very strong data culture and are using the data very often. I think there's probably just as many organizations who … legal aid organizations collect a lot of data, right? There's not just all of the fields and things, but then the notes and the data that we want to pull from various kind of case plans and things like that. I think just looking at your data often is the most basic way and then engaging in those processes and setting up a system. I'm not sure there's anything revolutionary about data cleaning that I can share other than do it often and consistently.

Caitlin McTiernan:

Very good. Thanks, Holly. Improve data cleaning habits.

Ellen Samuel:

Like flossing, right?

Caitlin McTiernan:

Yeah.

Ellen Samuel:

Make sure you're doing it.

Caitlin McTiernan:

Great. Well, I think I'll turn it over then to Ellen to round this out for the data culture discussion on staffing, and how do we get folks to do some of these data cleaning processes and also the data analysis that comes after?

Ellen Samuel:

How do we? Somebody just said it's a huge budgetary issue. Yeah, for sure.

James Carey is here. Thank you for calling yourself out in the chat from the Civil Justice Data Commons. James was talking about data earlier and it made me think of ways that we can partner with other organizations who do have the funding, especially academic organizations. We heard the talk earlier with all the professors in the clinics; there are academic programs that may be available to help us with this for free or fairly cheaply. They've got to train their people, and so really thinking outside the box, how do you staff this? Maybe you can't afford a full-time data person. Maybe you need to have somebody part-time, maybe you have somebody not ideal, but maybe you have somebody already on staff who has this background and who knows what they're talking about and can help with that.

Your Boards, hit up your Boards. You may have someone there who could help or has connections to be able to affordably assist your organization with collecting the data. I'd love for you to put in the chat - do you have a data person? How do you afford that person or is it a part-time person? Do you have volunteers who help you out? Are you working with outside organizations like a clinic or a department at a university or a college near you? I also liked how James was talking earlier about frictionless tech. Let's use the technology we have available to us to make this easier, more effective, more affordable, which often requires understanding the technology, but then also thinking carefully about how you're structuring your technology and how you're collecting the information so that analysis and presentation is easier.

And Colleen, just thank you for putting in the chat. We have the 2023 Civil Legal Aid Technology Survey, which is going to come out I think on Thursday, I hear. It should be sent out to all of the legal aid -- oh, it's out. Okay. Thank you, Colleen. It should be sent out to all of the legal aid organizations in New York and we ask for your participation in that. That will be talking about the technology you use so the courts and LSC can collect the information to understand how you're using your technology and use that data to help more clients. Caitlin or Holly, any other thoughts about how we can leverage our networks and use our staff to collect data?

Holly Stevens:

I feel like this is my soapbox moment that I always talk about in every panel that I'm in on data. I think one thing that we … budget constraints are real in legal aid. We don't have enough resources to serve all of the people that come through your doors and come to intake and things like that. However, no one would ever ask you to do your work or run your organization without accounting assistance or technology folks. I think we need to rethink how we think about data people and how we build them into budgets. It's not a grant funded position, it's an “optional position”. Even the ability to use technology in all the ways requires that ongoing commitment, that ongoing tweaking and helping staff use the things that we can set up and use better tools.

But we do have to think about how to build this in and how to talk about the importance of the data collection and the ways that it can improve helping you serve more people, of course, but nobody wants to hear just that, but helping you improve the outcomes of the people that you already serve and the ways that it'll help us tell better stories about the people that we serve and things like that. Build it in to your program expenses. It's not extra, it's not optional. It's part of doing good organizational operations. I think that funders are starting to realize that and recognize that and there's not as much pushback as there was a long decade ago. If there is pushback, I would talk with them about the ways that it actually builds your capacity to do good work and serve the communities that you serve.

I think we could all do better about giving you all the talking points and thinking more about that. LSC, I know, is working to think about how we can help build the capacity of organizations and help build some funding streams and things like that to help people get data people. What are good data people? What kind of skills do they need in a legal aid organization and how can LSC work with our grantees and the legal aid community to do some of that? I think too many times we rely on contract folks or people who can only serve the organization for a short term period of time, or you have funding and then you lose them and that really hinders our ability to move forward as a field and access to justice. Anything that we can do to help that and move that forward, we're here for it.

Ellen Samuel:

And again, that commitment comes from the top down. Really, we need to make sure that this is a really important continual conversation you're having.

Holly Stevens:

Yeah.

Ellen Samuel:

Go ahead Caitlin.

Caitlin McTiernan:

I was going to say I completely agree with Holly, and I think there might be creative ways to identify individuals to support somebody that you could bring into that position and different data projects will have different needs. Maybe you're trying to analyze something that's all stored in text and written forms and you need someone to enter that data in. That might be something that you could get an intern or a local volunteer to come in for. There might be members of the community who might have expertise in data analysis and could provide guidance to somebody who's scaling up or to help out on a one-off project or you might be able to bring on someone, you might be able to have a position that's shared amongst organizations. There's different ways that you can approach it to help you get across the finish line in terms of being able to do these types of projects.

But I think to Holly's point, right, we really as a community would benefit from looking at having a data-focused role as key to ongoing operations and to helping build out our operations and support for the community. I think all the creativity in the world aside that, that's a clear need.

Holly Stevens:

Caitlin, just to chime in, I think that's so right. I think there's no group to mentor folks who are just the one person at their organization and so one thing that I feel pretty strongly about is also building some kind of community. I know I felt often when I started in at a legal aid organization, I was just me and figuring out and had to relearn things. I talked to folks on the ground at various conferences and they're having to learn the same thing, and so I think we can do better and so we're trying to build a community of data people. I'm going to throw a link to a signup sheet. I know we started this at ITC and we're just talking to some folks to think about what that should look like. What are people interested in discussing and how can we share knowledge with the group of data people? So to the extent that any of you on this call want to participate or send your data person our way. We're agnostic about titles of what that data person. We'll take all data people.

Shellie Reid:

Everyone's invited. Then I think it's time to open up for questions, so it might be a good idea to go back and into the chat and we had some questions on talking about the walks and data parties, I believe.

Holly Stevens:

Well, I love a good data walk or good data party. A data walk is something that a lot of community-based organizations do. It typically involves community members, not just your staff. It can of course be done with just staff, but it's always great and to the point of a different question is to engage your community as much as possible. This can be done at a staff meeting, at an event, at something, a community training, things like that.

Back in the day, when we weren't just virtual or hybrid (I think hybrid data walks are a thing, but you have to really think about the ways that you're presenting them), let's imagine a room, you have different posters of a data finding and you have different groups that you form at the beginning and walk through and engage with the data on a data walk as if you're touring or going just through a walk through the community outside. We did this in DC a couple times at a community organization, at a community center, and it was inside and outside and you walked through and had a different construction of each group to engage with the data and ask questions, throw it up there on a post-it or engage in a chat like this as you're going through different breakout rooms.

It gives not only the data people or the researchers or the people who are working in the data, you always want to report back what those conversations said to the extent that's interesting or important to you, but I think it's important because everyone has a different lens that they're coming to the data with. They have interesting questions and you're interrogating that data. The data is not objective. The things that we're collecting, we're choosing to collect, the ways that we collect them is a choice. The menu selections are choices and they're biased in all the ways that humans and decision making is biased. I think that the ways that people engage, you always learn something, often you learn how you could have done things better and I think it's just a really engaging and important process. Particularly when you can involve the community, but often when you involve people outside of your practice area. If this month's internal staffing data walk was around housing, you might get really interesting questions from people who are not primarily housing attorneys. There's just really interesting new perspectives that come up.

Data parties are a similar engaging activity where you focus on a topic. If we're thinking about data cleaning or if we are thinking about evaluation criteria, if we are thinking about outcomes, there are many activities that have been developed to engage people and teach them around data literacy or an evaluation literacy. There's one that's particularly fun and a good intro data literacy tactic about assessing cookies. One, you get to eat lots of cookies, which is always fun at any kind of party, but what criteria are you assessing them on? How are your criteria? What is your inner rate of reliability? There are a lot of conversations that you can have about technical terms, breaking them down to a non-technical audience while you think about something that's not as difficult to talk about as improving your individual case, your legal representation, which sometimes feels a little challenging to start off with. People get defensive; it's work, they put their heart and soul into it.

And so Christine to that, that's right. We did several of these [data parties] and we did it as an onboarding activity for folks to start learning about what are the criteria and how do we select outcomes and things. We talked about these various evaluation components, and we would do the cookie one as an onboarding activity with all new staff and pull in old staff, existing staff at that time. I'm happy to share some other activities. Most of them involve some kind of food because people love food and then they will talk to you about all of the things, but there are other data literacy tasks that I think can be turned into data party activities and it continues to build that data culture as well.

I think one of - Ellen, and you noted this before. - I think one of the most important skills that a data person can have is translating the technical work that they're doing to a non-technical audience. It's the most valuable skill a researcher or a data person can have, I think especially when you're working with community organizations and community members. I think that these data parties and data walks allow you to take down these complex topics and are often very technical, even when you're talking about data analysis that Caitlin goes through in the guide, in the Toolkit, about how to do these things. You can break down some of those topics and have a different conversation.

Shellie Reid:

And unfortunately, we're at time and I really would've liked to get into the question on how using, you know, thinking of clients as data points, and that is a legacy of white supremacy culture. That may be something that we'll have to do a training on in the future, but thank you everyone for joining us today. I invite you to reach out to each of us. I've put everyone's email in the chat and it's also on the screen. Thank you for stopping in today and enjoy the rest of the conference.