

DATA AMBASSADOR SERIES WORKSHOP TOOLKIT



Becoming a Data Ambassador



Navigate the
suburban Cook
County Health Atlas



Learn basics of health
equity and population
health



Apply and explain
population health data
in real-world settings



UNIVERSITY OF
ILLINOIS CHICAGO



Cook County DEPT. of
Public Health
A division of Cook County Health

BUILDING
HEALTHIER
COMMUNITIES

Table of Contents

Section 1. Introduction to the Toolkit

Purpose and Goals2

How to Use This Toolkit Effectively3

Section 2. Trainer Role Overview

Introduction4

Responsibilities and Expectations4

The Power of Peer Learning and Storytelling5

Section 3. Training Program Framework

Overview and Learning Objectives6

Section 4. Training Modules

Module 1: Introduction to Health Equity & Population Health Data7

Module 2: Navigating the Cook County Health Atlas7

Module 3: Data Interpretation and Application8

Module 4: Becoming a Data Ambassador8

Section 5. Facilitator Support

Introduction9

Qualities of a Good Facilitator10

Tips for Leading Discussions11

Responding to Challenging Questions12

Accessibility and Inclusion Guidelines12

Section 6. Training Tools and Resources

Module Slide Decks13

Case Study Activities13

Cook County Health Atlas User Guide13

Training Videos13

Data Dictionary13

Pre and Post Training Assessments14

Module Toolkits14

Cook County Health Atlas Newsletter14

Co-Design Resources15

Section 7. Frequently Asked Questions

Data Ambassadors Program16-17

Cook County Health Atlas17-18

Introduction to the Toolkit

Purpose of the Data Ambassador Program and Program Goals

The Cook County Department of Public Health's (CCDPH) Data Ambassador Program (DAP) is a public health workforce development initiative that bridges the expertise of community-based organizations (CBOs) and public health epidemiologists to disseminate health data and improve the Cook County Health Atlas while also increasing the use of population health data by community partners.

The goal of the Data Ambassador program is to empower CBOs and other community partners with the knowledge and skills to access, interpret, and apply population health data using the Cook County Health Atlas, with a strong emphasis on health equity and data-informed decision-making.

CCDPH thanks the co-design team participants who contributed to the development of the Data Ambassador Training curriculum. Their insight and recommendations led to the formulation of this implementation toolkit. We recognize the following organizations for their role in ensuring the program was tailored to the interests and needs of CCDPH's community partners:

- Access Community Health Network
- Age Options
- Asian Health Coalition
- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Black Alphabet
- Chicago Recovery Alliance
- Girls on the Run Chicago
- Housing Forward
- NAMI Chicago
- Proactive Community Services (PCS)
- Pillars Community Health
- Respond Now
- Stonebridge Healthy Community Outreach Initiative
- TCA Health
- West 40



Navigate the suburban Cook County Health Atlas



Learn basics of health equity and population health



Apply and explain population health data in real-world settings

What does a Data Ambassador do?

Data Ambassadors participate in and conduct training sessions focused on specific areas of the Cook County Health Atlas and local population health data. This is achieved by:

- Understanding how to navigate the Cook County Health Atlas
- Practicing data interpretation and application
- Hosting community, organizational discussions, training, and info sessions
- Understanding and promoting health equity and population health
- Serving as a liaison between CCDPH and community partners
- Raising awareness about the Cook County Health Atlas among local networks
- Sharing how communities are using data to make change
- Participating in an ongoing feedback loop to assist in program improvement, planning, and advocacy

Becoming a Data Ambassador is an essential part of the public health workforce, furthering the public health vision to ensure every person, regardless of sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or immigration status, has the opportunity to achieve optimal health status. Data Ambassadors will equip users with a foundational understanding of how to utilize health data to support the health of communities, while also familiarizing ourselves with the disparities that we observe within our own lives and communities.

The purpose of the DAP toolkit is to equip CBO staff, community leaders, and others with the foundational literacy skills and knowledge to promote informed decision-making using local health data and Cook County Health Atlas. Development of the DAP utilized a train-the-trainer approach and codesign method with local community partners to build a grassroots network of community data leaders.

How to Use This Toolkit Effectively

This toolkit will be useful for individuals who have completed the formal Data Ambassador Training program, as well as for those interested in replicating a Data Ambassador Training Program or Cook County Health Atlas training within their own organizations. This toolkit includes instructional materials and exercises for individuals to complete a self-taught version of the Data Ambassadors Training Program and apply what they've learned within their own organizations and communities.

Intended Audience:

- Community advocates and organizers
- Community-based organizations
- Librarians
- Public health professionals
- Students and educators

Trainer Role Overview

Introduction

In order to successfully implement the Data Ambassador Program, a person who has completed the training will be well-equipped to teach their colleagues at their representative organizations. If you are designated as a “trainer,” this toolkit will equip you with both the content and the core traits of a trainer and Health Atlas subject matter expert. Keep in mind that implementing the DAP is a shared effort - not your sole responsibility. Within our internal teams, facilitation roles are divided across modules, and we encourage trainers to take a similar collaborative approach within their organizations.

Responsibilities and Expectations

Data Ambassador Trainers will be responsible for:

- Facilitating suburban Cook County Health Atlas training by utilizing the Data Ambassador Program (DAP) curriculum.
- Demonstrating to others how to use the Atlas tools, interface, and functionality. Facilitators will be acknowledged as the “experts” to teach others how to maximize their use of the Health Atlas.
- Sharing their expertise and providing real-life examples on how they used the Health Atlas in their roles and responsibilities.
- Collaborating with CCDPH and UIC PHAME staff to improve the Health Atlas and the Data Ambassadors Program while also gaining additional assistance as they implement DAP training in their respective environments.



Peer Learning and Storytelling

Peer Learning and Storytelling are deeply interconnected components of the Data Ambassador Program. Peer learning provides a collaborative environment where ambassadors can exchange insights, ask questions, and problem-solve together, building confidence in using and interpreting atlas data. Storytelling transforms those insights into narratives that resonate beyond the data itself, connecting numbers to lived experiences and local realities. Together, these approaches ensure that data doesn't remain abstract but becomes a shared tool for understanding and action. Within the DAP, combining peer learning and storytelling fosters a culture of collective growth, empathy, and advocacy, empowering ambassadors to translate data into meaningful stories that drive equity-focused change across Cook County.

Peer Learning involves colleagues of similar positions learning from one another through collaboration and discussion, with the goal of enhancing their understanding and skill set in a particular topic.

Storytelling is the ability to communicate insights from data using narratives and visualizations. Public Health's reliance on data enables us to identify disparities, allocate resources effectively, develop policies, and advocate for communities and populations that are most affected. Storytelling will enable you to advocate for equity in a compelling and engaging way, garnering support for your initiative or goals. As a Data Ambassador, community members, partners, and providers will be able to utilize Cook County Health Atlas data to foster data storytelling in oral or written communication, thereby expanding or improving the reach of an organization's target audience. Data storytelling is an active skill to work upon, so there is no expectation that you will become an expert after this training.

For examples of data storytelling in action, please refer to our case study activities, available in [Module 3](#).

For additional information regarding the power of data storytelling through data visualizations, please visit the resources below:

[Data Visualizations, Charts, and Graphs](#) - Harvard University

[Data Storytelling: How to Effectively Tell a Story with Data](#) - Harvard University

[Data storytelling: How to tell a great story with data](#) - ThoughtSpot

[Examples of Data Storytelling - Insights and visualizations](#) - World Health Organization

[Making data mean more through storytelling](#) - Ben Wellington, TEDxBroadway

Training Program Framework

Overview and Learning Objectives

The Data Ambassadors Program is designed to build the capacity of community members, organizations, and advocates to effectively use data in advancing health equity. Through four interactive modules, participants will gain foundational knowledge of health equity concepts, develop practical skills in navigating and interpreting population health data, and learn how to translate data insights into actionable stories that drive community change. Each module builds upon the last, starting with an introduction to health equity and population health data, followed by a guided exploration of the Cook County Health Atlas, applied exercises in data interpretation, and culminating in the development of participants' own data-driven narratives as they become Data Ambassadors.

By the end of the training, participants will be able to:

- Understand the role of population health data in public health decision-making and stakeholder engagement.
- Navigate the Cook County Health Atlas efficiently.
- Interpret data visualizations and apply a health equity lens.
- Utilize data for grant writing, program planning, and advocacy
- Train others to use the Atlas effectively.



Training Modules

This section details each of the four training modules. These include learning objectives, materials needed, activities, and discussion topics that promote an interactive, shared learning experience. Please see section seven below for slides, case studies, and video recordings that accompany each module.

Module 1: Introduction to Health Equity & Population Health Data

Time Required: 60 Minutes

Objectives:

- Define Health Equity & its relationship to Epidemiology
- Define the role of community in achieving health equity
- Use examples of population health data to understand health patterns
- Understand how data informs decision-making in community health

Materials:

- Access to cookcountyhealthatlas.org

Activities/Exercise

- Case Study: Using Cook County Health Atlas Data to Identify or Measure an Issue in Community

Discussion:

- How data informs decision-making in community health
- Identifying health conditions that affect your community using the Cook County Health Atlas
- Conceptualize strategies that use data to inform the decision-making process in your organization

Module 2: Navigating the Cook County Health Atlas

Time Required: 60 Minutes

Objectives:

- Describe the purpose and contents of the Cook County Health Atlas
- Use the health atlas functionality and search tools to explore the health indicators
- Create and interpret custom maps and tables
- Evaluate the strengths, limitations, and applications of the Cook County Health Atlas

Materials:

- Computers with internet access
- Access to cookcountyhealthatlas.org

Activities/Exercise:

- Live demo of the [Atlas](#)
- Core content navigation
- Applied examples

Discussion:

- Challenges and opportunities using the Atlas

Training Modules

Module 3: Data Interpretation and Application

Time Required: 60 Minutes

Objectives:

- Learn how to interpret counts and rates on the health atlas
- Identify health disparities amongst racial/ethnic group
- Be able to understand and interpret the purpose of scatter plots
- Engage in applied case studies

Materials:

- Data Interpretation Reference Sheet
- DAP-Lib Case Study Exercise

Activities/Exercise:

- Participants analyze sample datasets related to local health disparities
- Using data for program planning and advocacy

Discussion:

- Utilizing the Cook County Health Atlas with knowledge of website navigation and data interpretation for applied work

Module 4: Becoming a Data Ambassador

Time Required: 60 Minutes

Objectives:

- Familiarize yourself with data storytelling concepts
- Be able to apply the G.A.M.E framework
- Learn about the benefits of Health Atlas workspaces

Materials:

- G.A.M.E. Framework Exercise
- Access to the Health Atlas Workspace form

Activities/Exercise:

- Goal, Audience, Message, and Engagement (GAME) Exercise

Discussion:

- Applying lessons from Modules 1-3 to help participants decide how they will frame their own stories

Facilitator Support

Introduction

To promote engaging and thoughtful discussion, it is important for those facilitating the Data Ambassadors training to actively involve colleagues in both the content and activities. Public health is fundamentally about addressing systemic barriers that impact community well-being. Data serves as a critical tool in that effort, helping us uncover disparities, inform action, and advocate for meaningful change. Therefore, we aim to equip facilitators with the strategies and resources needed to strengthen or expand programming and outreach within their organizations.

Facilitators should also recognize that participants will come with varying levels of public health knowledge and experience. Creating an inclusive learning environment means valuing all perspectives and adapting facilitation to engage everyone. Finally, we don't expect facilitators to have all the answers or solutions to every public health challenge; the goal is to build knowledge, confidence, and practical skills that contribute to healthier, more equitable communities.



Qualities of a Good Facilitator

An effective DAP facilitator demonstrates strong communication skills, empathy, and adaptability. They foster a welcoming and inclusive environment where participants feel comfortable engaging with public health data, regardless of prior experience, and are empowered to share their perspectives. They model curiosity, humility, and continuous learning, recognizing that every participant brings valuable knowledge to the table.

An example of some facilitation skills that may be used while implementing the DAP can be found below.



Active Listening:

A good facilitator pays close attention to what participants are saying, both verbally and nonverbally, and can accurately reflect back their understanding.



Encouraging Curiosity:

Invite participants to explore data with an open mind and connect it to their lived or professional contexts.



Problem Solving:

They are skilled at guiding groups through problem-solving processes, helping them identify issues, brainstorm solutions, translate data findings into meaningful community insights or actions, and implement them.



Participative Style:

They encourage all participants to engage and contribute, adapting their approach to different comfort levels and learning styles.



Clear Communication:

They communicate clearly and concisely, ensuring everyone understands the goals, instructions, and key takeaways.



Adaptability:

They are able to adjust their approach and activities as needed, based on the group's dynamics and progress.



Openness:

They are open to new ideas and perspectives, creating a safe space for sharing.



Approachability:

They are approachable and accessible to participants before, during, and after sessions.



Authenticity:

They are genuine and genuine in their interactions with participants.



Social Intelligence:

Read group dynamics and use them to build rapport, manage discussions, and keep energy positive and collaborative.

Tips for Leading Discussions

As a DAP facilitator, your role is to guide exploration rather than lecture. The goal is to help participants connect data to action by prompting reflection, encouraging dialogue, and supporting mutual learning.

Be a facilitator, not a lecturer.

Your role is to guide the conversation and encourage group members to participate, not to provide all the answers. Encourage discussion by asking participants to share how data might relate to their communities or work.

Encourage broad participation.

Use eye contact to invite quieter members into the conversation, or explicitly ask for input from those who haven't spoken yet. To prevent one person from dominating, remind the group of ground rules about participation and confidentiality.

Ask open-ended questions.

This encourages deeper thought and discussion. Instead of a "yes" or "no" question, try asking, "What patterns do you notice in this data?" or "How might this information guide community decision-making?"

Create ground rules.

Establish and get agreement on expectations at the start of the session. These can include guidelines on respecting one another, using "I" statements, and keeping discussions confidential.

Provide structure.

Set a clear topic for the discussion and give participants an outline of the session. Be prepared to summarize key points if the conversation starts to wander.



Responding to Challenging Questions

DAP facilitators may encounter tough questions about data accuracy, limitations, or equity implications. These moments offer valuable teaching opportunities if handled thoughtfully.

Stay calm and listen.

Take a breath and remain composed. Thank the person for their question, which acknowledges their engagement and sets a positive tone.

Validate the question.

Show empathy by repeating or rephrasing the question to confirm your understanding. This also buys you time to formulate your response.

Acknowledge when you don't know.

It is better to admit you don't know the answer than to bluff. You can offer to find the information and follow up later.

Use a "parking lot" for off-topic questions.

A "parking lot" is a designated space (like a whiteboard) to write down questions that are relevant but outside the scope of the current discussion. This allows you to address the question later without derailing the session.

Reframe with probing questions.

If a question seems vague or has a hidden agenda, ask for clarification to ensure a clear understanding. For example, "Can you tell me what's behind you asking that?"

Accessibility and Inclusion Guidelines

Equity is at the heart of the DAP. Facilitators should intentionally design and deliver sessions that are inclusive, culturally responsive, and accessible to all participants.

Use clear, simple language.

Avoid jargon or define technical terms when discussing data concepts.

Promote participation.

Provide multiple ways for participants to contribute, verbally or through text, to accommodate different communication styles.

Encourage participants and facilitators to share their pronouns.

This can be accomplished during introductions or, in virtual settings, listed alongside screennames.

Encourage diverse voices.

Actively guide discussions to ensure all perspectives are represented and valued.

Training Tools and Resources

This section provides links to key materials to support the delivery of the Data Ambassadors Program (DAP). Each resource is designed to help facilitators and participants navigate the Cook County Health Atlas, apply data through interactive learning, and assess training outcomes. Use the links below to access slide decks, case studies, videos, and supporting documents that enhance engagement and ensure consistent program implementation.

[**6.1 Slide Decks**](#)

Slide decks for each module are available on the CCDPH DAP website, along with corresponding recordings. These decks serve as reference materials for recent DAP participants and provide a foundation for organizations interested in adapting or implementing the DAP within their own settings.

[**6.2 Case Study Activities**](#)

Case study activities are featured in Module 3: Data Interpretation and Application. Developed by the CCDPH and UIC PHAME teams, these activities enable participants to explore the Cook County Health Atlas, interpret data, and practice data storytelling within a hands-on learning experience.

[**6.3 Cook County Health Atlas User Guide**](#)

The Cook County Health Atlas User Guide serves as a How-To Guide for navigating or using the Cook County Health Atlas. Whether you're a new user or need clarification on specific features, this guide provides clear instructions and support.

[**6.4 Training Videos**](#)

Navigating the Cook County Health Atlas can be challenging for new users. To support learning, How-To videos are available in the Video Tutorial Gallery within the Atlas User Guide. These short tutorials guide users through navigation, data interpretation, and storytelling techniques to enhance their confidence and proficiency.

[**6.5 Data Dictionary**](#)

The Data Dictionary functions as a master reference for all indicators available on the Cook County Health Atlas. It outlines each indicator's layers (e.g., municipality, ZIP code), stratifications (e.g., race, sex, age), and the time periods for which data are available. This resource is particularly useful for community partners seeking to explore additional indicators or gain a deeper understanding of the Atlas's data structure. It can also support users conducting more advanced analyses by identifying multiple indicators available at comparable geographic or demographic levels.

6.6 Pre and Post Surveys

Evaluation is an essential component of public health intervention planning. The evaluation of the Data Ambassador Program helps us answer important questions such as:

- Was the program relevant to organizational needs?
- How effectively was it implemented?
- Did it achieve its intended goals and outcomes?

Therefore, evaluation will help plan future decision-making while also driving continuous improvement of the program itself and the organization as a whole. The CCDPH and UIC PHAME teams used pre- and post-surveys to measure participants' learning, engagement, and satisfaction. Links to all survey instruments are included below:

Module 1

- [Pre](#)
- [Post](#)

Modules 2 and 3

- [Pre](#)
- [Post](#)
- [Post DAP Participant Survey](#)

6.7 Module Toolkits

As outlined in Section 4, each module has its own detailed toolkit that guides facilitators through the module's content, activities, and discussion prompts. Links to each toolkit are provided below:

- [Module 1](#)
- [Module 2](#)
- [Module 3](#)
- [Module 4](#)

6.7.1 Sign up for the [Chicago Health Atlas Newsletter](#) here!

The Chicago Health Atlas newsletter offers regular updates and insights on the latest features and data available through the Chicago Health Atlas. While it is a separate platform from the Cook County Health Atlas, subscribing to the newsletter provides valuable guidance on navigating population health data, exploring new functionalities, and applying best practices that are often transferable across both Atlases. This resource is especially useful for staying informed on data updates, learning tips for effective data interpretation, and enhancing your ability to leverage health data for community-focused analysis and decision-making.

6.8 Co-Design Resources

The DAP was developed through a co-design process, ensuring that the voices, experiences, and priorities of community members were at the center of every stage of development. Co-design is a collaborative approach that values shared decision-making, equitable participation, and the belief that those most impacted by programs should help shape them.

Using a co-design approach enhances the DAP by making the training more relevant, accessible, and responsive to the community's real needs. The following resources provide guidance on engaging community partners thoughtfully, understanding the principles of co-design, and using practical tools to support collaborative planning and facilitation.

- [Beyond Sticky Notes](#) - A resource and training platform dedicated to co-design and co-creation. Their website offers practical tools, guidance, and training on authentic co-design, enabling organizations to collaborate meaningfully with communities through shared decision-making and equitable participation. If you're new to the co-design process, start here!
- [Including people with lived experience \(PWLE\)](#), in program design and evaluation ensures that the perspectives of those most affected by health and social issues are at the center of the process. Throughout the DAP co-design process, we intentionally partnered with individuals and organizations who could bring these perspectives forward, helping ensure that the program is relevant, equitable, and grounded in real community insight. Check out the link above to learn more!
- Additionally, consider using the [Co-design Planning Tool](#) from Miroverse. This template provides a practical tool to guide you through the co-design process and establish the necessary conditions for creating an inclusive, engaging, and effective co-design experience.
- [The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#) is a resource that introduces a spectrum of community engagement, illustrating how organizations can move beyond tokenistic involvement toward genuine community ownership of decision-making. It provides a clear framework for understanding and assessing levels of community engagement, guiding facilitators to design training and activities that encourage participants to move toward genuine collaboration, shared decision-making, and community ownership.

Frequently Asked Questions

Data Ambassadors Program

What is the Data Ambassadors Program (DAP)?

The Data Ambassadors Program equips community members, public health professionals, and organizational partners with the knowledge and tools to explore and use data from the Cook County Health Atlas. The program focuses on building data literacy, encouraging data-informed decision-making, and strengthening capacity to address community health priorities.

Who can participate in the DAP?

Anyone interested in learning how to utilize data to enhance community health is welcome to participate. This includes staff from community-based organizations, healthcare institutions, and government agencies, as well as public health professionals, educators, advocates, librarians, and students. No prior data analysis experience is needed.

What will participants learn?

Participants will learn how to:

- Navigate and interpret data within the Cook County Health Atlas.
- Incorporate foundational concepts of health equity, population health, and data literacy into their work.
- Identify local health trends and disparities.
- Apply data to real-world scenarios through case studies and hands-on activities.
- Communicate data findings to support programs, policies, and funding opportunities.



What's the time commitment for participants?

DAP participants will attend 3-4 virtual, in-person, or hybrid sessions (depending on the facilitating organization's capacity), spanning the following topics:

Module 1: Introduction to Health Equity & Population Health Data

Time Required: 60 Minutes

Module 2*: Navigating the Cook County Health Atlas

Time Required: 60 Minutes

Module 3*: Data Interpretation and Application

Time Required: 60 Minutes

Module 4: Becoming a Data Ambassador

Time Required: 60 Minutes

**Modules 2 and 3 were combined into one 3-hour (including breaks) hybrid session*

Who should I contact for more information or support?

For questions about the Data Ambassadors Program, technical assistance, or access to materials, please fill out the [Contact Form](#), available on the Cook County Health Atlas.

Cook County Health Atlas

What is the Cook County Health Atlas?

The Cook County Health Atlas is a public, interactive data platform that provides information on health outcomes, demographics, and social factors across suburban Cook County. It allows users to view data by municipality, census tract, ZIP code, and health districts, enabling users to visually compare communities and track changes over time.

What types of data are available on the Health Atlas?

The Health Atlas includes public health data on various topics, including chronic disease, mental health, maternal and child health, environmental conditions, access to care, and social determinants of health. Data are drawn from trusted public sources, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), and the Cook County Health Survey, among many others. Most indicators can be stratified to examine sex, race, and ethnicity

How often is the data updated?

Data sources are updated on a rolling basis as new datasets become available. Each indicator page lists its data source and most recent update date.

Can users download data from the Health Atlas?

Yes. Most datasets and visualizations can be downloaded directly from the site in various formats (CSV, Excel, or PNG). This allows users to integrate data into reports, presentations, or grant proposals.

What should I do if I find an error or have questions about a dataset?

Users can report data concerns or ask technical questions by using the "[Contact Us](#)" feature on the Cook County Health Atlas website.

How can Health Atlas data be used in practice?

Community organizations and health professionals often use Atlas data to:

- Identify health disparities or emerging trends
- Support funding proposals or program evaluations
- Inform community health assessments and planning
- Engage stakeholders with local, visualized data

How can I evaluate Health Atlas data for both Chicago and Suburban Cook County?

Currently, there is no single, unified platform that combines data for both Chicago and suburban Cook County due to differences in data reporting and collection. However, we recognize that many community partners work across these boundaries, and this integration is something our team is actively exploring.

