Making Data Meaningful to Advance Program Equity

Lessons Learned from Minnesota's DATA Grant Project

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How do you assess the impact of your program(s)?

a) We do in house assessments or evaluations

b) We hire an external evaluator

c) We review program data

d) We ask program partners to provide feedback

e) We ask participants to provide feedback

f) Other

Agenda

1. Context on Minnesota SNAP E&T and the DATA grant

2. Assessment activities

3. Activity: equity self-assessment

4. Turning assessment findings into equity goals

5. Key projects:

   • Community voice activity

   • Support services assessment

   • Metrics dashboard

6. What's next, learnings, and suggestions

7. Q&A

About this project

- Three-year project funded by an FNS DATA grant

- A partnership between DCYF, SJI, and Third Sector (first year)

- **Goal: improve MN SNAP E&T program quality, equity, and data**

Minnesota SNAP E&T and the DATA grant

SNAP E&T in Minnesota

- County-administered

- Voluntary

- Complex

- Moved from focus on program growth to making program impactful and equitable

SNAP E&T General Process Flow
Counties, Primary and Secondary Providers
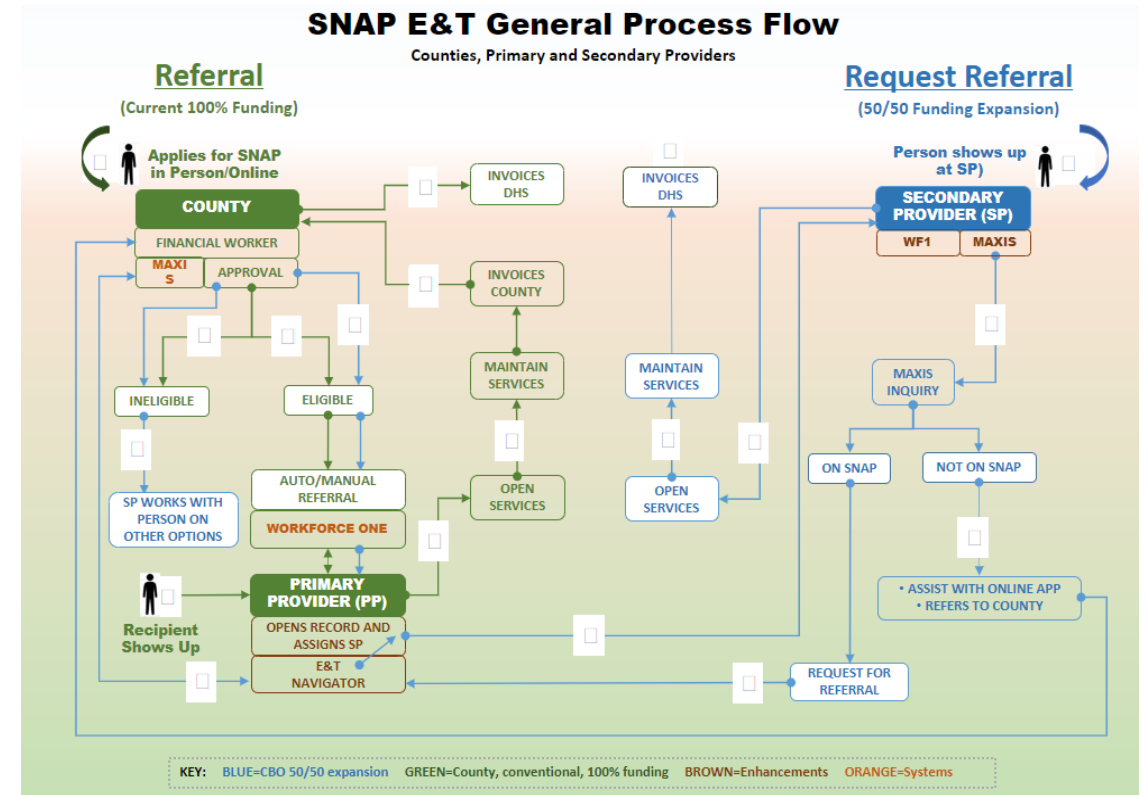
Our DATA grant project roadmap

DATA Grant project roadmap

1. Assessment

2. Review of assessment findings

3. Development of equity goals

4. Key projects:
- Community voice activity
- Support services assessment
- Metrics dashboard

Step 1: Assessment

Assessment activities

Quantitative analysis

Data landscape

Equity self-assessment

Program staff interviews

SNAP E&T participant interviews

SNAP recipient survey

Key findings

- Disaggregated data showed no significant disparities in participation and completion rates

- There was clear opportunity to:

  - **Increase eligible participants** being served through SNAP E&T

  - Make it easier to **ask and answer equity questions using data**

  - **Enhance how support services are provided** to participants

Quantitative analysis: who is/is not being served

SNAP Eligibility vs SNAP E&T Participation by Race

SNAP Recipients Count vs SNAP E&T Providers - Q1 2022
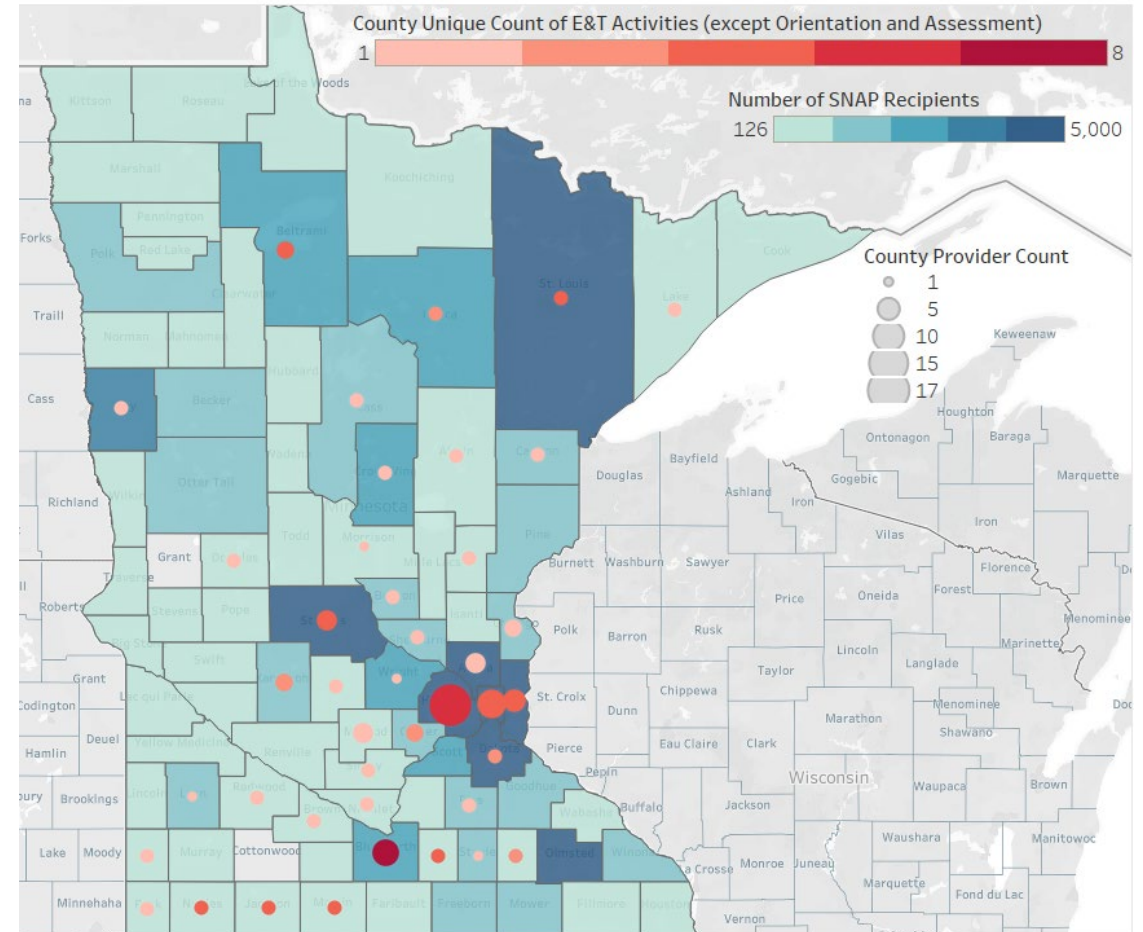
Program staff voices: pulling the right data

"[…] you can go through report training, and you can learn how the reports work. **But if you don't know what to query for and how that process works, you won't get the right information.**"

Program staff voices: equity analyses

"We're very focused on racial disparity reduction…and so **it's really hard to disaggregate data and see outcomes for different**…**populations** without doing a lot of manual playing with [the data]… **it's not easy**…when we're looking at, you know, big numbers or big lists."
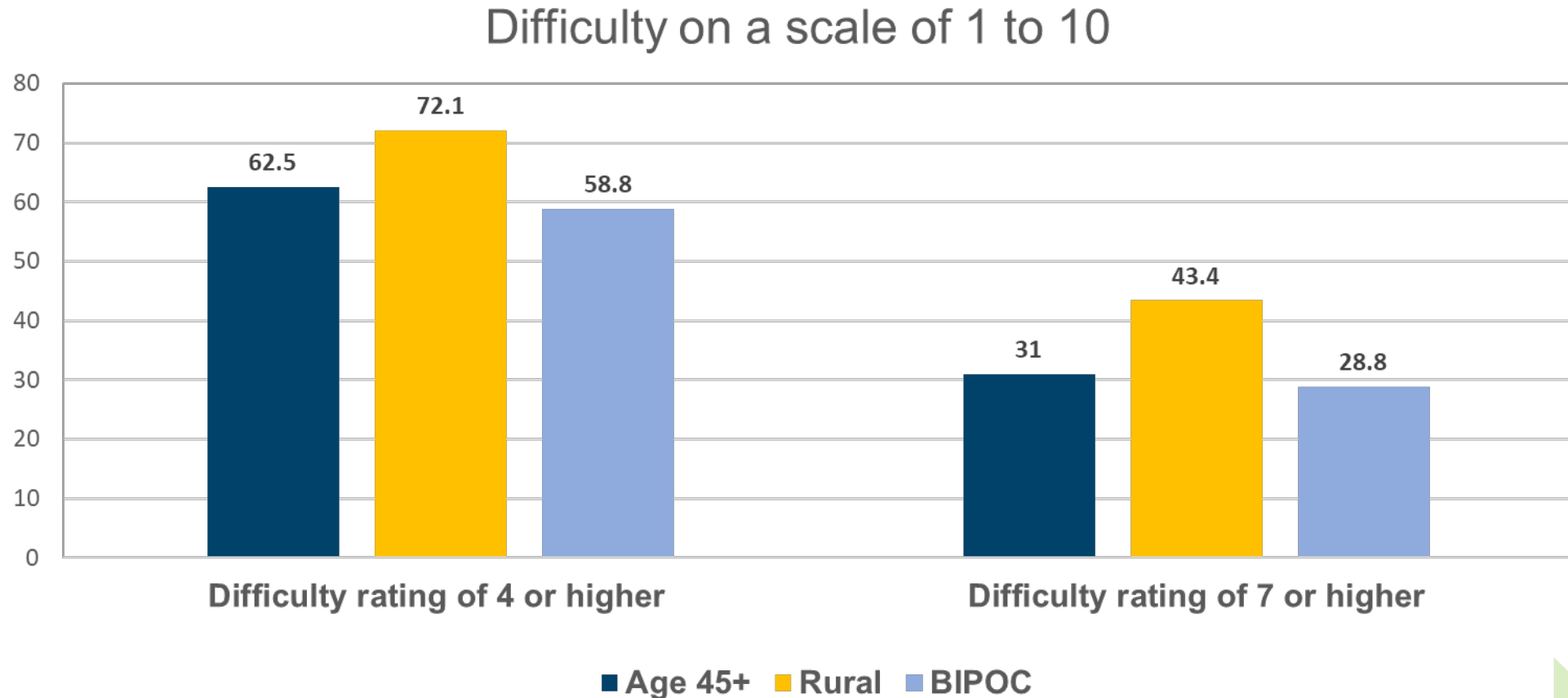
Survey of SNAP recipients: demand for E&T?

Yes ✓

40-55% said they were interested in:

- Job search support/relevant job search activities
- Education or training for a desired job

Survey of SNAP recipients: participation barriers

Q: How difficult would it be to participate in an employment & training program?

Difficulty on a scale of 1 to 10

	Difficulty rating of 4 or higher	Difficulty rating of 7 or higher
Age 45+	62.5	31
Rural	72.1	43.4
BIPOC	58.8	28.8

Legend: ■ Age 45+ ■ Rural ■ BIPOC

Participant voices: need for support services

"If you live **50 miles** from [a training center] and one vehicle doesn't work and the other has the engine light on, **how can a person make it?**"

Program equity self assessment

Equity Self-Assessment (adapted for SNAP E&T at the state level)

Adapted from Michigan State University's *Equity Organizational Self-Assessment* (ABLeChange Project)

Note: Sections highlighted in peach are those that we can likely impact through creating equity goals, strategies to meet goals, and a way to track progress (phase 3, project 1). Note: More sections may be impacted; the content of the equity goals will determine which ones.

Influence Equity

On my team…	Not at all	Starting to Make Progress	Making Good Progress	Fully in Place
a. We engage adults experiencing inequities in helping to **select our program's priorities** (e.g., related to which outcomes and inequities are targeted in our efforts).	x			
b. We engage adults experiencing inequities in **making decisions about how to design** our programs and strategies.	x			
c. We **provide feedback** to adults experiencing inequities about how their input was used within our team's decision-making.	x			
d. Our services, supports, or opportunities are **designed to meet the stated needs and preferences** of adults experiencing inequities.			x	

Access Equity

On my team…	Not at all	Starting to Make Progress	Making Good Progress	Fully in Place
a. **We work with partners and stakeholders to establish clear and simple outreach/information and referral processes** so that all eligible individuals can quickly learn about, understand the benefits		x		

Self-assessment adapted from Michigan State University's *Equity Organizational Self-Assessment* (ABLeChange Project)

Over to you

- Review and respond to the equity self-assessment questions

- What do you do well? Where are there areas of opportunity?

How we followed up on assessment findings

Setting goals to advance equity

Goals

Improve access for key populations

Incorporate community/ participant voices

Improve equitable distribution of supports

Develop and diffuse data and equity practices

Implementing goals: what we've done

1. Community engagement session

Goal: incorporate community/participant voices

Targets:

1. Do one community engagement session in 2024

2. Make at least 2 program and/or policy changes or enhancements based on participant feedback

Participant involvement exists on a spectrum

Participants providing one-way feedback

Participants involved in two-way engagement

Participants as partners

Participants as leaders

Greater potential for equity
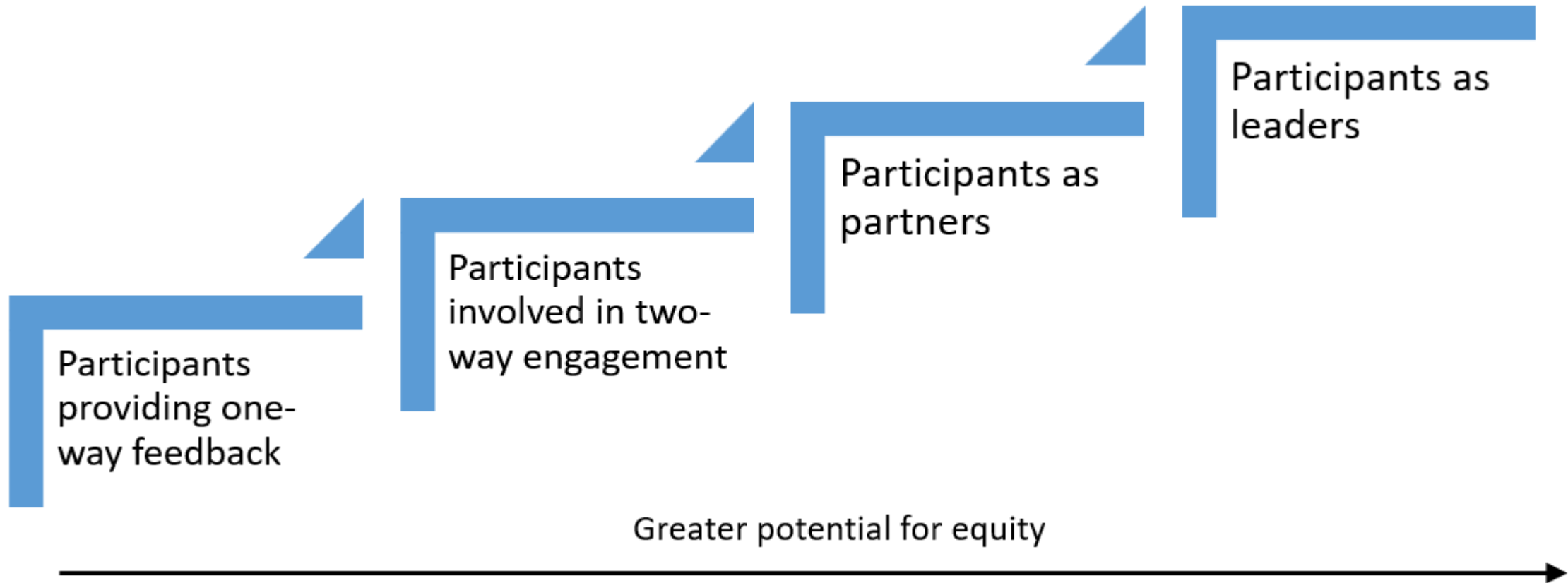
Engagement level examples

Participants providing one-way feedback	Participants involved in two-way engagement	Participants as partners (co-creators, co-leaders)	Participants as leaders
• Surveys • Questionnaires	• Focus groups/group activities • Interviews • Informal conversations • Advisory board or workgroup	Participants have **ongoing, regular participation** in shaping program policy, design, and delivery, and are **involved in decision making**	Participants have **the resources and authority to make decisions** regarding program policy, design, and delivery in ways that align with their priorities and values
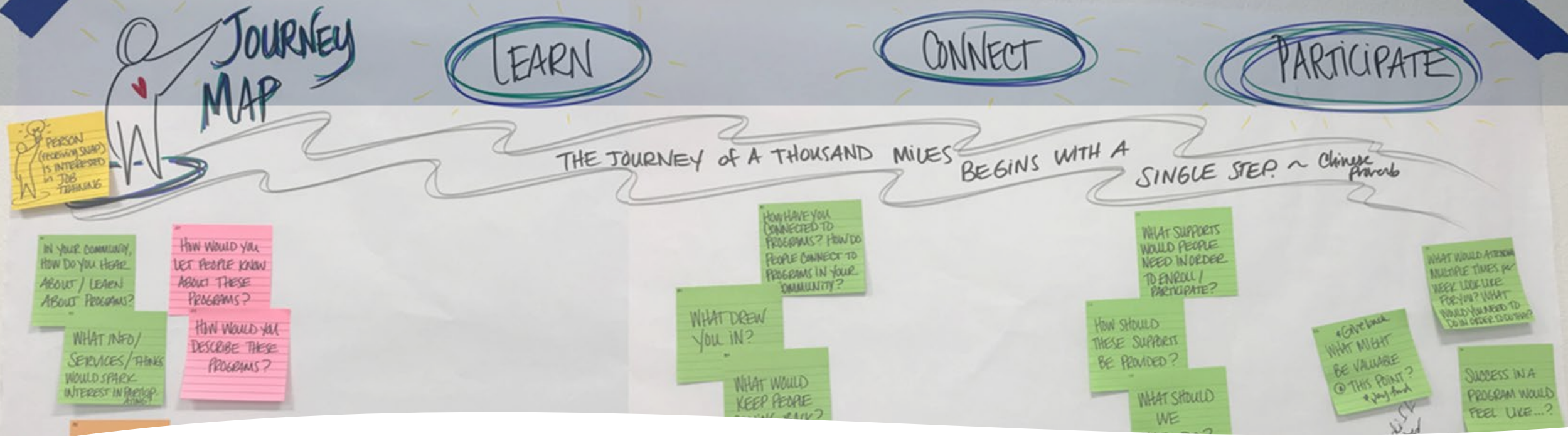
Community engagement session

- Held at local library in Minneapolis (urban location)
- 25+ participants
- 2 employment & training provider partners
- Learnings and follow up actions were shared with participants/the community
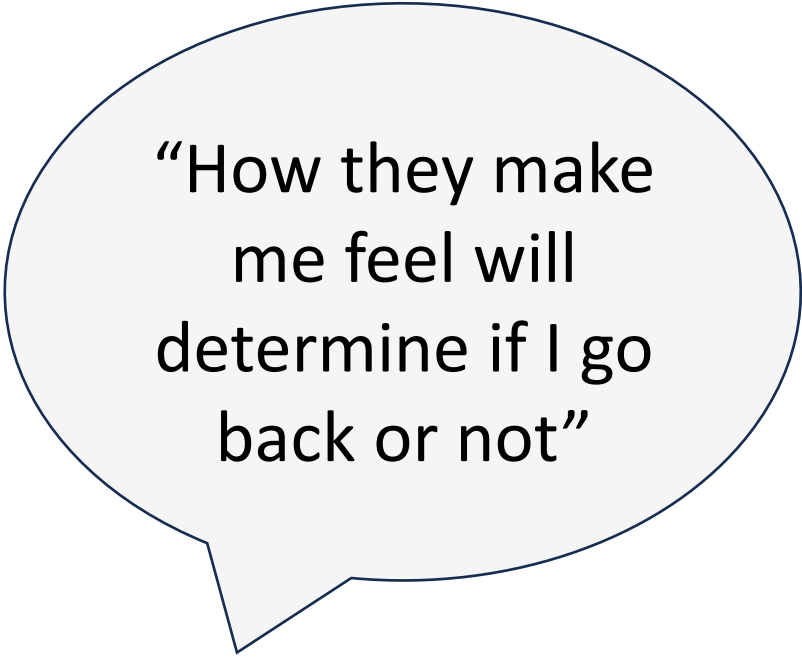
What we heard: success

- Getting a paycheck

- Financial assistance

- Educated for a job (meeting qualifications)

- Gaining a certification

- Graduating

- Better resume skills

- Getting a job

- More job experience

- Get a new career with higher pay

- Having support

- Feeling accomplished

- Having the opportunity to give back (aka: "pay it forward")

- I would feel confident, accomplished, successful, important, like "a million bucks"

What we learned

- We need to **communicate more intentionally** and effectively about the program and its benefits

  - Many participants had not heard of the program
  - Tap into **trusted messengers** and sources of information

- Program should be **simple**, **speedy**, **clear**, and offer transportation and childcare support

- **Interactions matter**…a lot!

  - Participants emphasized the importance of how staff make them feel

"How they make me feel will determine if I go back or not"

How we followed up: sensemaking

Email to event participants

Review of feedback received

Meeting with providers and stakeholders

Review of policies and process

Community engagement session: successes and challenges

- **Longer than anticipated** process

  - Multiple pivots

- **Up front planning** was critical

- Important to **engage community partners**

  - Established relationships are particularly valuable

- **Future** feedback opportunities
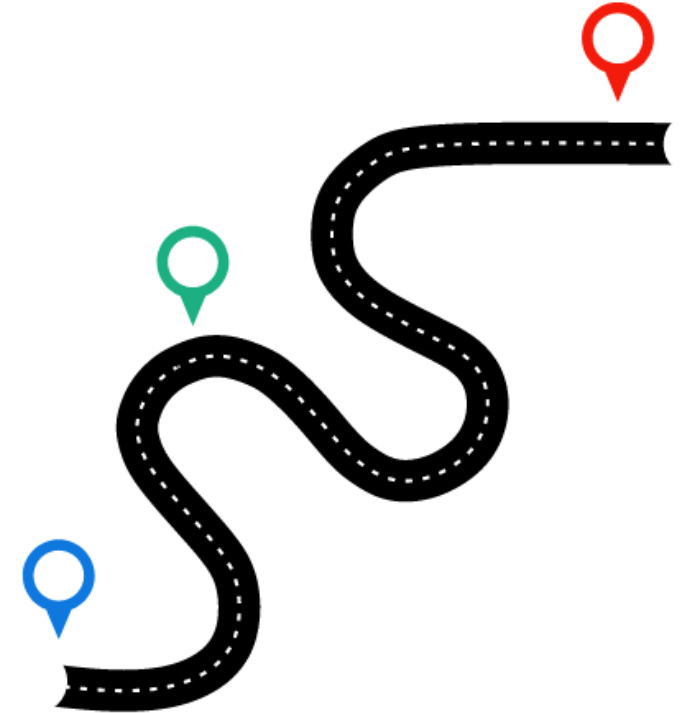
2. Support services assessment

Goal: improve equitable distribution of supports

Targets:

1. Conduct an assessment of support services in 2024

2. Make enhancements to support services policy and/or distribution in 2025

Key questions

- What is the current state of support services delivery?

- What are the practices of providers; what challenges are there?

- What do participants need, and are support services meeting those needs?

➢ **What changes could the state make, or what guidance could they give, to enhance support services distribution?**
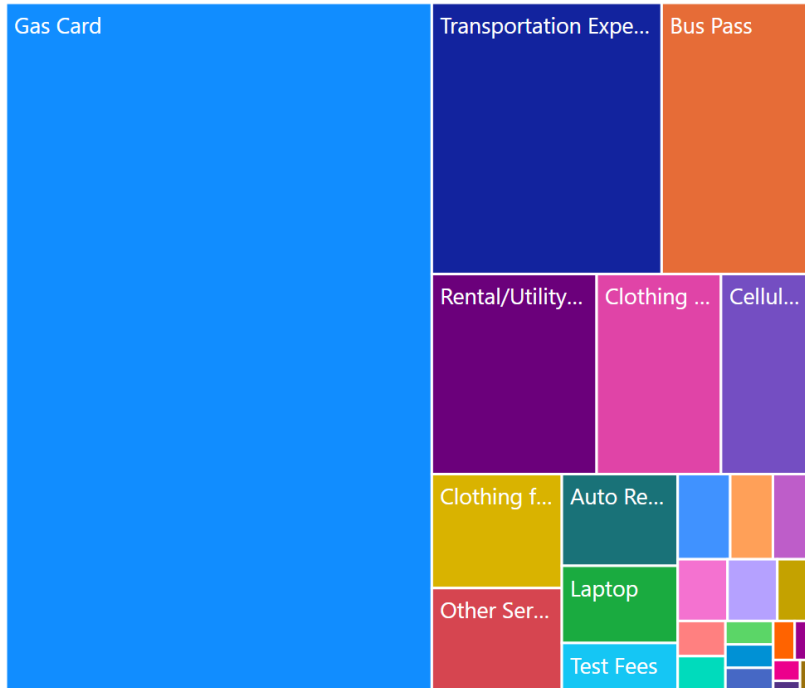
Support services assessment: overview

Project components:

- Program data and policy review

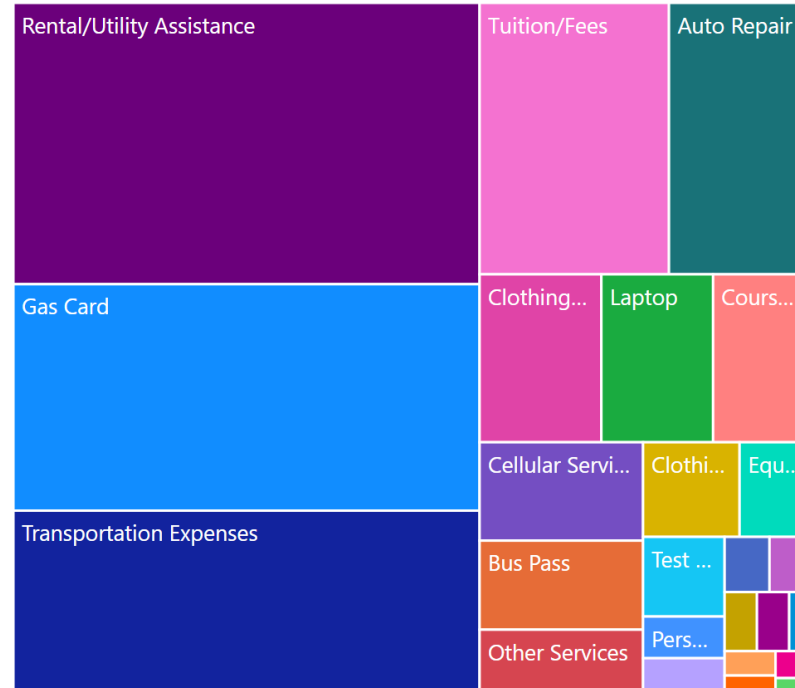- Provider questionnaire

- Provider interviews

- Participant survey
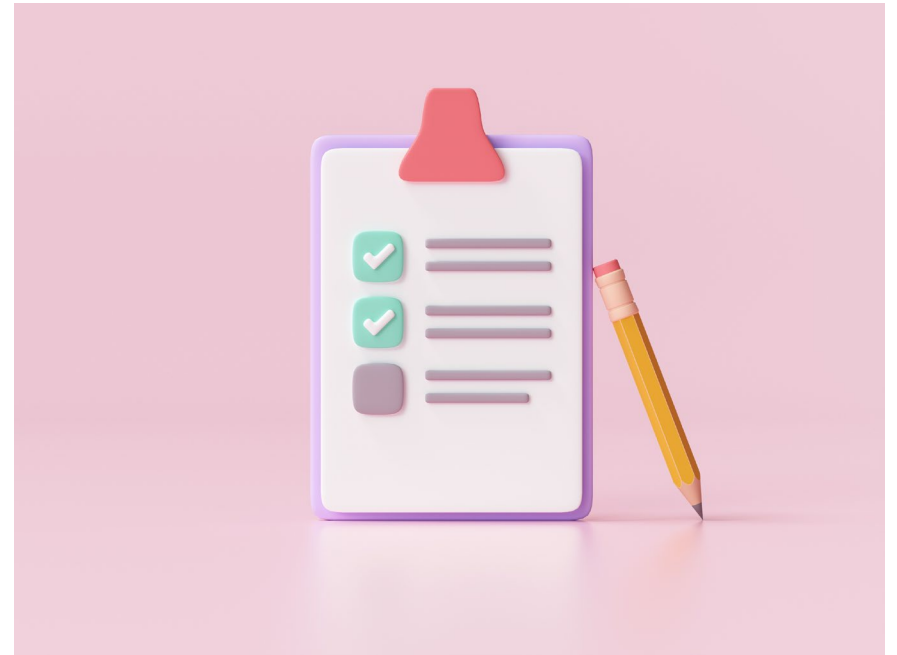
Context: support service data 2024[1]

Count of Support Service_Type by Support Service_Type

Sum of Actual Amount by Support Service_Type

Agency: All

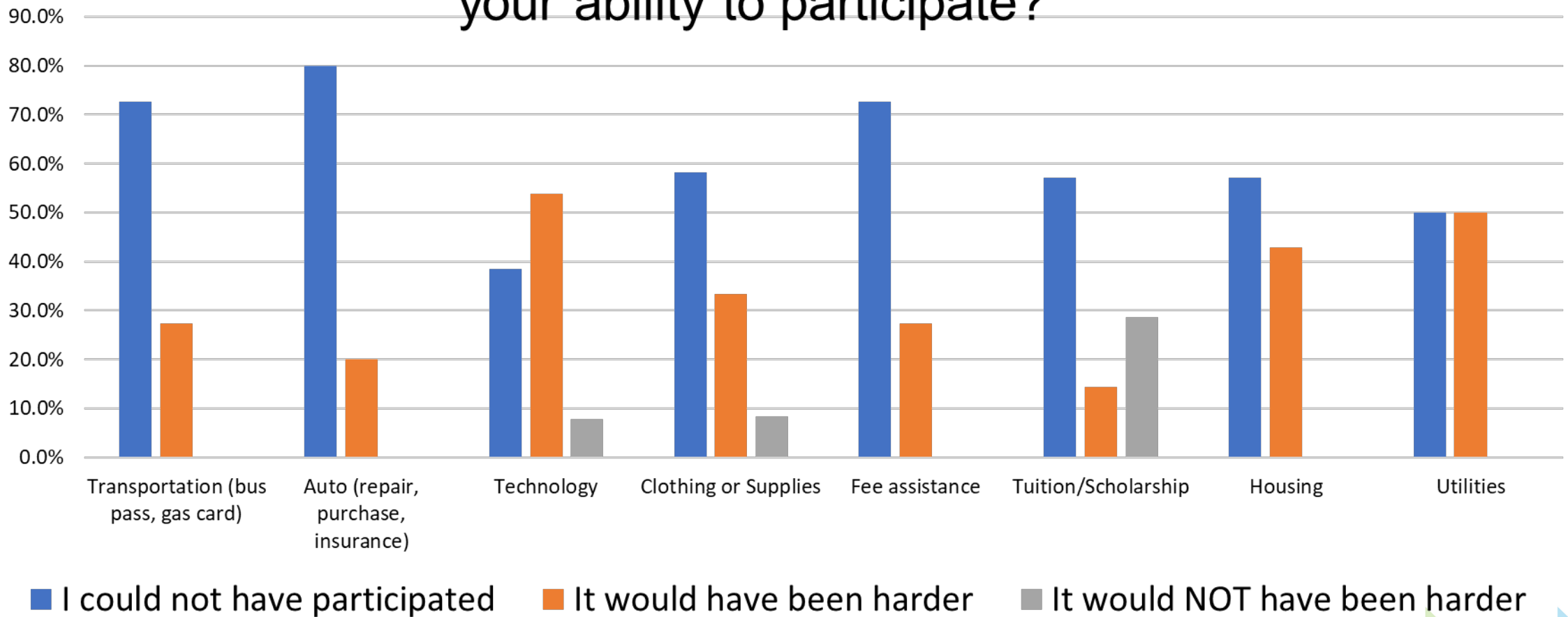| 1978	1606	556	34.62%
Count of supports	Distinct count caseload	Distinct count of individuals receiving suppoorts	Percent receiving support

1. As of 9/3/2024 when the data was pulled. FFY2024 ends at the end of September

Impact of support services on participation

Q: How did the support you received impact your ability to participate?

Quotes

"The interview clothes they gave me helped me be able to go… in proper business attire which I did not have and could not afford before."

"The biggest thing is how much this has helped me financially. Getting the grant to be able to go to school without worrying about how I could afford to do this."

"Without there help I would have been homeless 100% I'm so thankful!!"

Supports helpful but inconsistent

- **13.3% said they did not receive any supports** or only listed SNAP benefits

- Participants wrote in wanting additional help with **auto assistance, housing, transportation, and other supports**

- **Funding may be an issue:**

  "I was told there wasn't funding to help with anything else [besides a bus or gas card]"
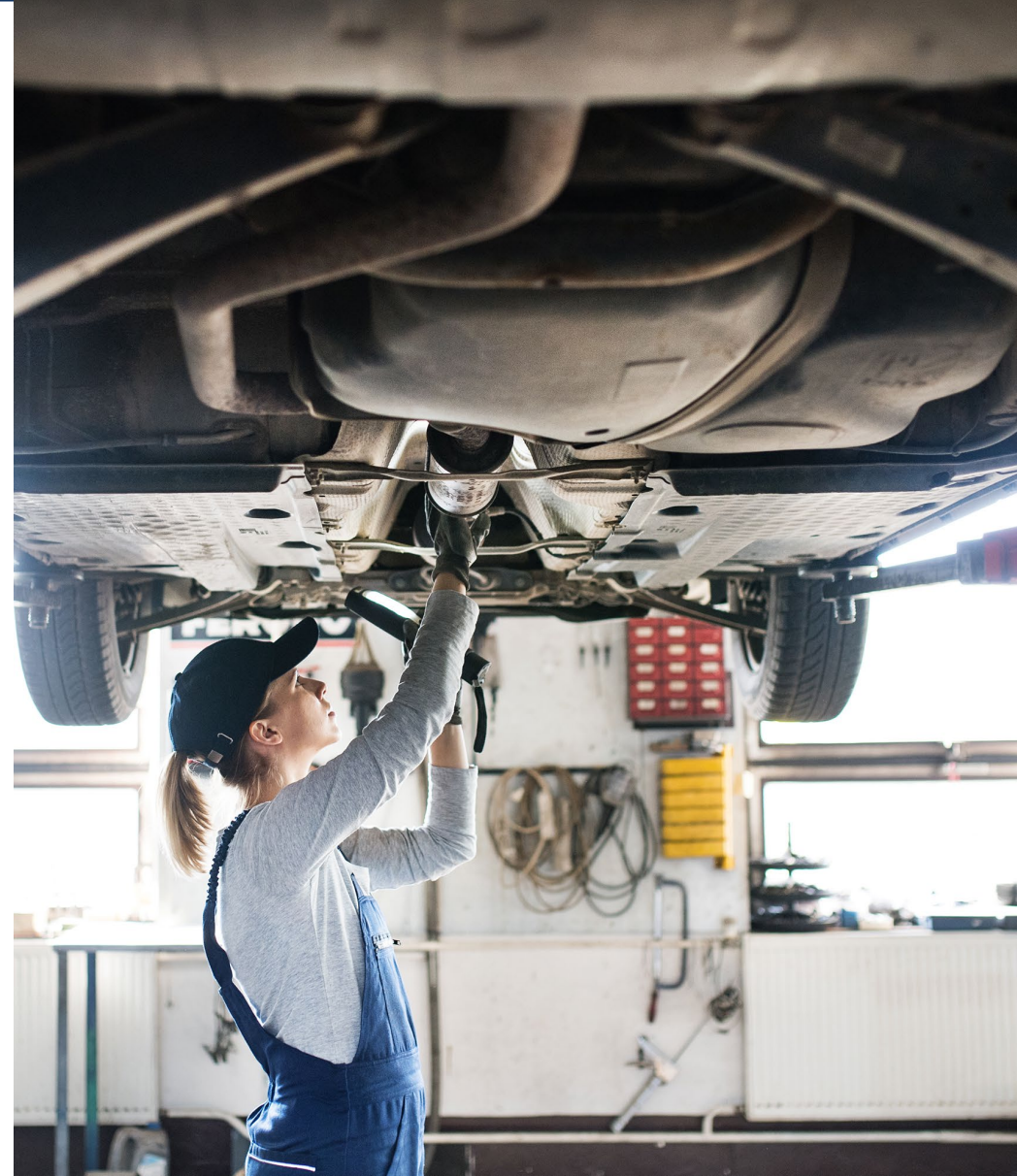
Participant story 1: when the program didn't help

Goals: Find a job, meet work requirements

What was the provider helping you do?

- *"They didn't really HELP at all"*

- *"I met with one person once..... [They] asked a bunch of questions and gave me a form...for tracking my hours spent looking for a Job which i ended up finding on my own....I would have loved to work with some one on maybe my resume or something..."*

Support Services: N/A- I have not received any supports

- *"Car assistance was talked about as something that would be a huge help to us as our car doesn't work but they never followed through."*

Any other suggestions?

- *"Yes follow through with people."*

Participant story 2: how the program helped

Goals: find a job, learn a new skill, switch to a new career field

- *"I was able to obtain employment, but still occasionally check in with the…people who I was working with."*

What the provider was helping her do:

- *"I was able to attend the Office Admin and had help to apply for…SNAP benefits…I was part of the Dislocated Workers Program…I was able to get 3 certificates by attending virtual classes through [a college]…"*

Support services received: transportation, laptop for virtual classes, clothing for interviews

Also received assistance with a mortgage payment (not reimbursable)

- *"I was able to get one mortgage payment paid for right when my unemployment insurance was running out the next month."*

Importance of case management:

- *"It encouraged me and they helped me financially …They built me up when the job search was discouraging and took longer than I expected…"*

Provider 2 met need in a variety of ways – an ideal that doesn't always happen

What worked in this case:

✓ Participant was **co-enrolled** in a program

✓ She received a **variety of allowable SNAP E&T supports** meeting multiple needs

✓ She received help with a mortgage payment. This was not reimbursable under SNAP E&T but was **paid for with other funding**

✓ She had a good experience with staff and felt supported

Challenges and opportunities

- Some providers were serving participants entirely through SNAP E&T (**not co-enrolled**), greatly impacting support services

- Many had **funding restraints** and internal policies that limited support types and amounts

- Some found the guidance or process unclear and **did not reimburse all supports** they could

- ➤ Opportunity to **use reimbursements more intentionally** to cover disallowed costs and address additional needs
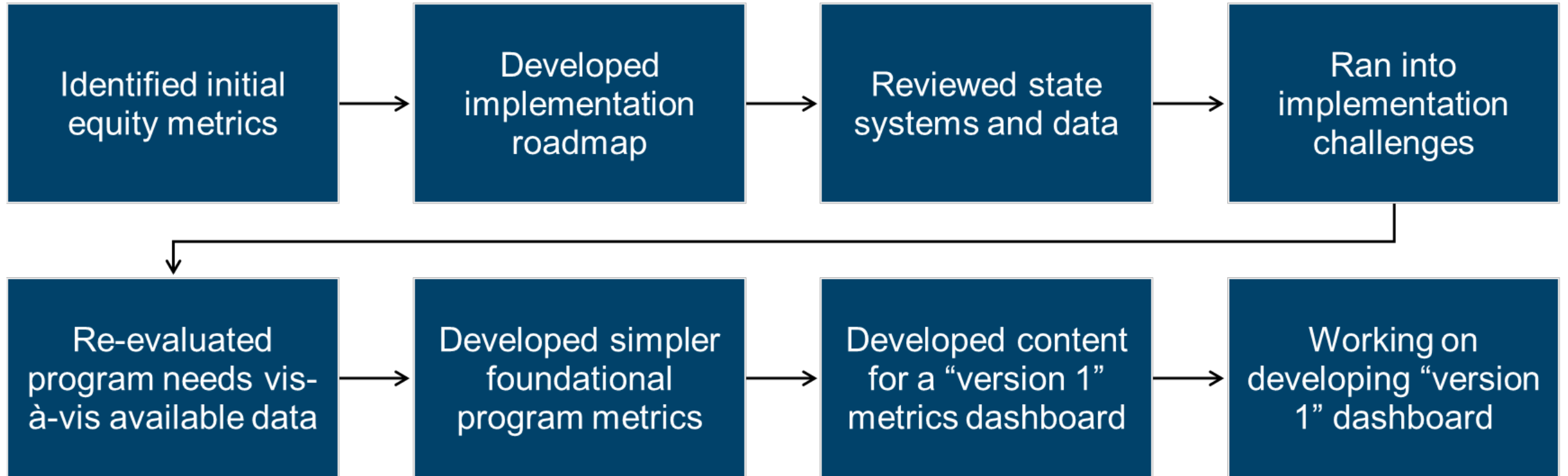
3. Metrics dashboard

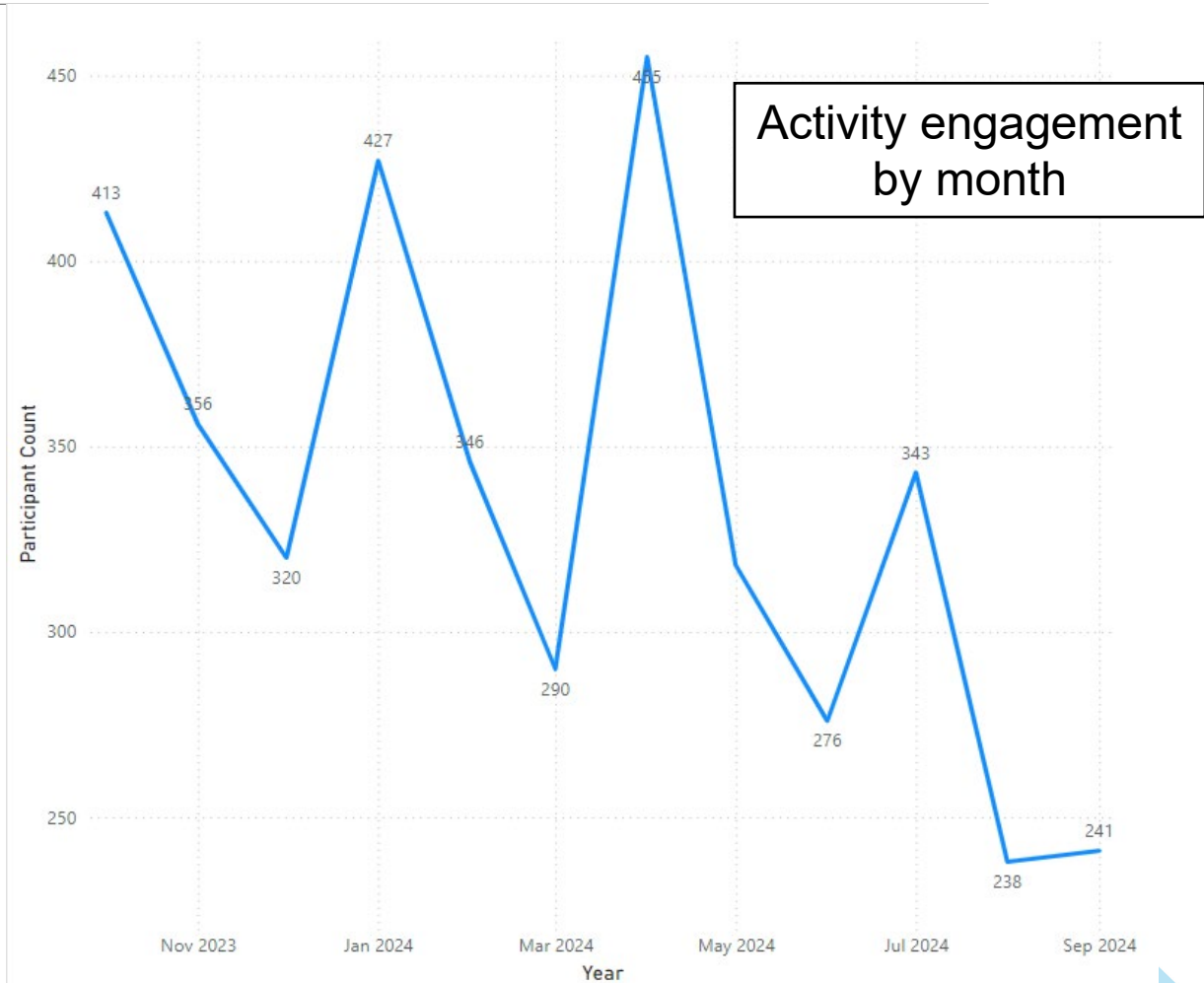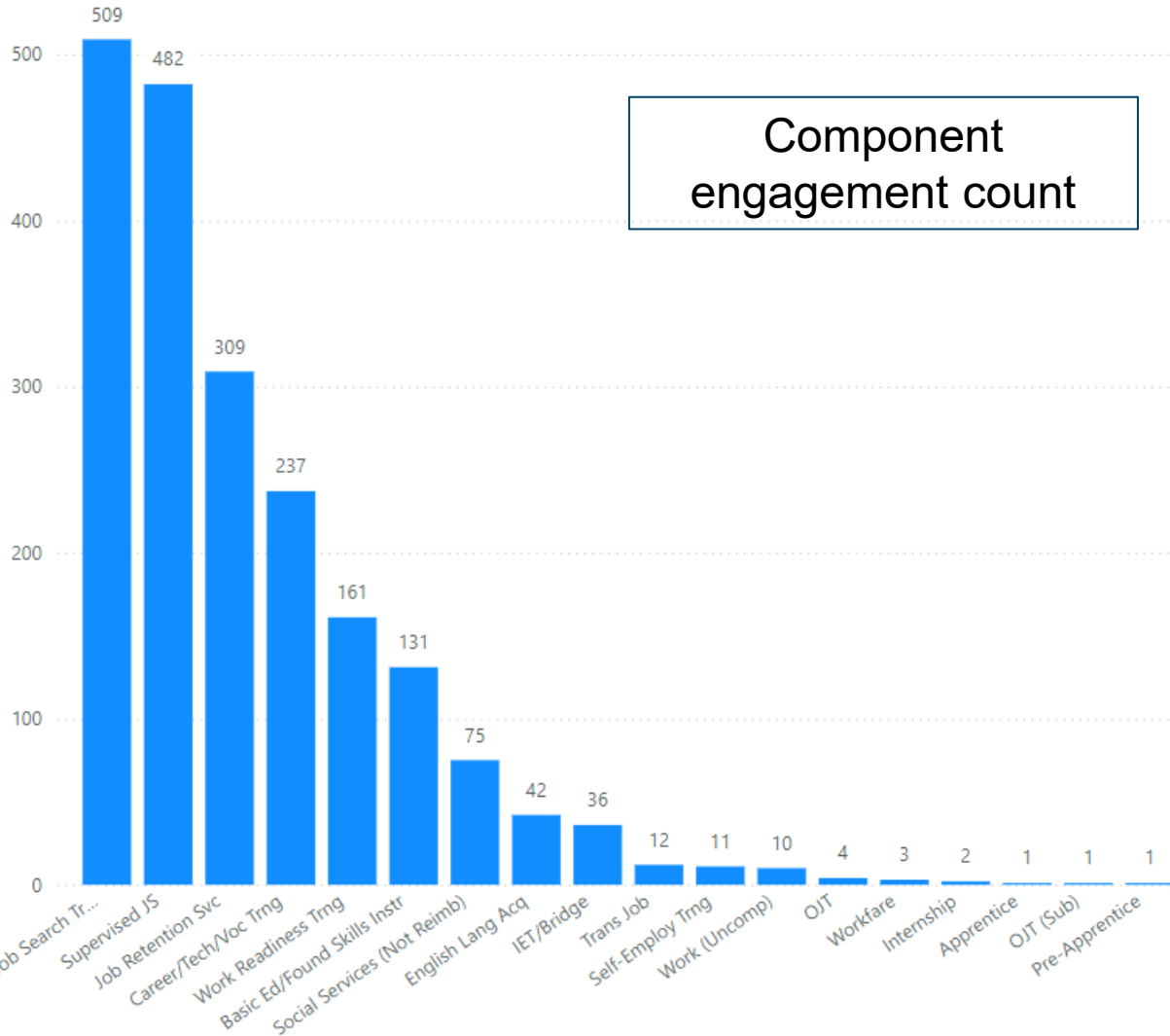# Goal: Develop and diffuse data and equity practices

Initial targets:

1. Identify metrics that would help answer program equity questions

2. Develop a metrics dashboard

Metrics dashboard development

Identified initial equity metrics → Developed implementation roadmap → Reviewed state systems and data → Ran into implementation challenges

Re-evaluated program needs vis-à-vis available data → Developed simpler foundational program metrics → Developed content for a "version 1" metrics dashboard → Working on developing "version 1" dashboard

Version 1 dashboard development

Component engagement count
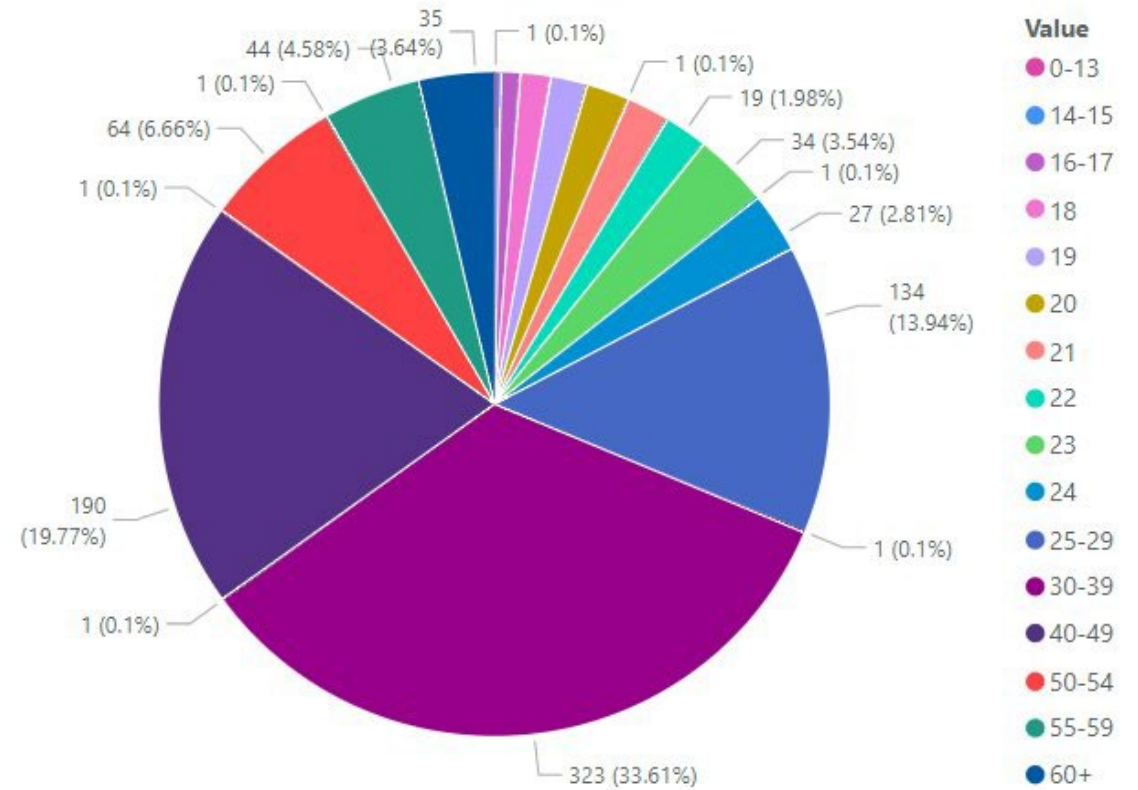
Activity engagement by month

Another example

How metrics can be disaggregated:

- Age
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Disability
- County

- Geography (urban, rural)
- Intersectional identities (e.g., race and gender)
- Work requirements

Participant breakdown by age

Value
- 0-13
- 14-15
- 16-17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60+

Example questions to be answered by qualitative data

- Are SNAP E&T services easy to access?

- Why are there ups and downs in enrollment and engagement in three-month cycles?

- To what extent do participants believe SNAP E&T services are helping them reach their goals?

- Are participants receiving the support services they need in order to participate/reach their goals?

- How do different populations answer the questions above?

Metrics dashboard: successes and challenges

- **Aspirations vs. reality**
  - Gap between **initial metrics and ability to implement** them (system limitations)
    - Existing data reports didn't talk to each other
  - Gap between initial analysis goals and ability and capacity to carry out analyses
- Need to **start smaller and simpler**
- **New goal**: start small and **build a bridge** to more robust metrics and analysis capabilities

# What's next

Next steps at the state

- Build on foundation
  - Resources at the state
  - Continue engaging providers, participants, and other stakeholders
- Community voice
- Support services
- Metrics dashboard
- Improving access for key populations

Learnings and suggestions

What would we tell others?

- **Start small**
  - Important to take a single step forward

- **Assessment work** is key
  - Understand current program landscape to ensure that you're going in the right direction

- Be intentional and **dedicate time** to engaging and centering **community and participant voices**
  - Need for the right resources/experience/support to do this work well

- **Challenges can be an opportunity** for enhanced learnings and creative solutions
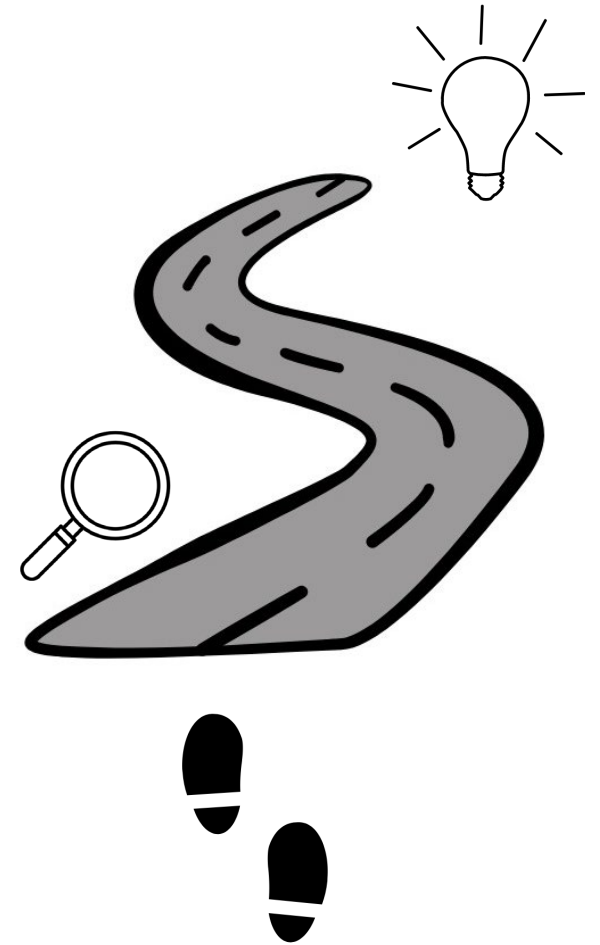
Ideas for getting started

- **Identify what you what to know or do**

  - "We'd like to make small changes to make our program more equitable"
  - "We'd like to know whether our program is meeting participants' needs"
  - "We'd like to know how our program is working for providers"

- **Assess the current state**

  - Gather data/information to help you learn what you need to know
    - Examples: program equity self-assessment, survey of providers, survey of/interviews with participants, review of available data

- **Identify gaps, questions, and potential areas of improvement**

  - Review and analyze, look for themes and/or discrepancies
    - Avoid common risks, such as cherry-picking info/data to support your own beliefs or generalizing based on a few experiences; **keep context in mind**

  - Identify changes/improvements to make and assess their impact

Questions

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DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

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