

Health Justice Community of Practice



Data Across Sectors for Health

Data Across Sectors for Health (DASH) is a national initiative that elevates models, principles, and practices that support data ecosystems to achieve health equity. It is co-led by the [Illinois Public Health Institute](#) and the [Michigan Public Health Institute](#) and funded by the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#).

For ten years, DASH has supported data sharing initiatives around the country that inform policy changes and address

systemic barriers to health. This support comes through funding, networking opportunities with peers and mentors, technical assistance, and, launching in late 2025, the DASH Knowledge Base, a publicly accessible online database of resources related to the field of multisector data sharing. To date, DASH has directly funded over 200 projects nationwide and provided technical assistance and resources to many others.

The Health Justice Community of Practice Program

Data can be a crucial tool for narrative change, yet merely having data on health disparities, or using data to address social needs, will not necessarily change dominant narratives about why disparities or social needs exist, or provide direction on what to do about them. Rather, community data must be collected, interpreted, and shared thoughtfully and purposefully—as part of a strategic case—to effectively build the broad coalitions of people, organizations, and institutions needed for the long haul to achieve health equity. Crucially, community members and sectors represented in the data must be part of decision-making in data-driven initiatives.

That was the goal of DASH's Health Justice Community of Practice funding program: to develop data-informed narrative change strategy to build understanding and broad public will to address barriers to thriving communities where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their healthiest lives. Three awardee organizations learned about how their communities can collect, work to understand, and purposefully share data that supports long-term systems change needed to achieve community aspirations.

All awardees had health equity projects in progress and a readiness to strengthen the skills and strategies needed to build public and political will for urgent community health goals. They also shared challenges within their communities with political divisiveness based on mental models and terms like “equity.” The Health Justice Community of

Practice ran from late 2024 through the end of the summer of 2025.

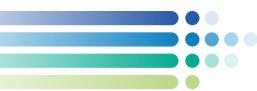
Throughout the program, awardees received coaching from TheCaseMade consultancy on how to bridge diverse viewpoints and build collaboration to make a strategic case for building a shared vision for community thriving. As an outcome of this technical support, each awardee put the CaseMaking curriculum into practice and developed a Case Guide, a digital presentation deck they could use with decision-makers and other potential partners to engage them in their work.

TheCaseMade

TheCaseMade is a coaching consultancy with a mission to transform communities by helping community leaders powerfully build the public's will to solve the tough issues that determine our future, like climate change, health, and housing.

The Strategic CaseMaking™ approach, based on 30 years of social science and community movement building practice, strengthens organizations' call-to-action, brings new champions forward, and aligns community and regional partners around systems change strategy.

Following are brief profiles of the Community of Practice awardees and the work they did within the program.



The HAND UP Project Tallahassee, FL

The HAND UP Project is committed to empowering underserved communities in the Tallahassee area through advocacy, education, and direct support measures.

Their work focuses on dismantling systemic barriers to equity—particularly those affecting health outcomes—by amplifying community voice, connecting residents to resources, and advancing policy solutions that create long-term change. Access is not just about opening the door—it's about redesigning the room so everyone can belong, contribute, and thrive.

The HAND UP team believes that when they facilitate dialogues that link issues such as housing, food access, and transportation to health outcomes, they can help potential partners see such challenges as solvable with coordinated action.

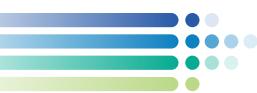
Additionally, HAND UP understands that resources in their communities to support health and well-being already exist, albeit in silos. The goal, therefore, isn't to create new services and resources. Rather, HAND UP advocates for a strategic assessment of what is already available—whether it's government grants, local nonprofits, or volunteer energy—and weaving these assets into a cohesive system of support. While silos create the illusion of scarcity, collaborations can illuminate the abundance already in place.

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Working Together

To earn the buy-in of funders, potential partner organizations, and the community, HAND UP needed to make a strong strategic case. Through the Health Justice Community of Practice, HAND UP received targeted coaching in narrative building, strategic framing, and coalition engagement. This coaching strengthened their ability to connect the lived experiences of marginalized communities to broader conversations about health equity while engaging partners across sectors, ultimately ensuring that a diversity of voices were present in their work.

The CaseMade's coaching also taught the HAND UP team the importance of adaptive leadership, a concept that involves leading with solutions rather than problems, while emphasizing the importance of collaborative work and shared responsibility. As the HAND UP team emphasized, "everyone benefits when we work together," which requires that project collaborators "listen to every voice from every neighborhood with no exception." Ultimately, this approach requires a mindset shift where leadership is distributed and every team member is empowered to identify opportunities, call out challenges, and drive initiatives forward.



United Way of the Lakelands

Greenwood, SC

The United Way of the Lakelands (UWL) connects the people, resources, and organizations of Greenwood, Abbeville, McCormick, and Saluda counties in South Carolina to create lasting change and build a better future for all.

UWL's primary objective is to create an environment that allows young children and their families to thrive and achieve their full potential. This commitment is manifested through a strategic direction that emphasizes sustainable engagement with families, encourages leadership and

active involvement, and establishes a vital connection between healthcare and community health.

All of these efforts are geared towards improving policies that benefit families and promoting early childhood development within the Lakelands region.

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Adaptive Language

The Health Justice Community of Practice gave UWL the framework, skills and tools to develop a strong case for support around improving chronic illness outcomes in Greenwood's Uptown neighborhoods. Through the process, they examined local data, engaged community members, and identified the systemic barriers driving poor health outcomes such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity.

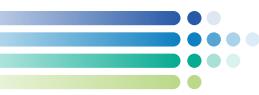
In their Case Guide, UWL translates these insights into a compelling narrative that highlights the challenges and demonstrates the community's readiness and capacity for change.

A shift in mindset for the United Way team occurred when they recognized the importance of aligning health investments with broader economic development interests. By reframing health initiatives as essential components of workforce development, housing, and local business growth, they found a way to strategize to build broader coalitions and secure necessary resources. This shift has helped them garner support from businesses and local government entities that are invested in economic growth.

While the United Way Lakelands team had always held great value in the perspectives of its various constituents, the Health Justice Community of Practice gave them space to work with how their messaging might adapt to the different language and narratives embraced by different community partners to resonate with them even more deeply.

The coaching helped them emphasize the importance of active listening when talking with community partners. Rather than relying on technical, sometimes alienating terms, they became more intentional with using language that builds stronger relationships.

UWL also worked in the Community of Practice with how and when to translate data into stories that evoke emotion and personal relevance. For instance, when speaking to local government officials, the team emphasized the economic implications and long-term sustainability of the project, but with community members or family groups, the team focused on how proposed changes would enhance everyday life.



VIA LINK

New Orleans, LA

VIA LINK in New Orleans, LA, has served as a trusted hub for information, crisis support, and coordinated service delivery for over 50 years.

The organization operates 24/7 crisis hotlines, including the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and specialized lines for youth, disaster response, and other urgent needs.

They also manage both a 211, a statewide information and referral service that connects people to thousands of health and social service resources, and multiple Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) across Louisiana, which support regional Continuums of Care and local governments in improving service delivery and data-informed decision making.

Their Louisiana Data Collaborative is a statewide network that brings together nonprofits, funders, and public agencies to share best practices, align data collection standards, and strengthen collaboration across regions. A cornerstone of this effort is the data literacy training series, which is designed to help nonprofits and service providers understand how to collect, analyze, and use data to tell their stories and drive measurable impact, as well as their data governance template, which they are developing to help organizations establish clear policies for data management, privacy, and security.

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Rooted in Opportunity

VIA LINK is working to build a coalition across broad sectors, meaning their messaging must resonate with diverse partners statewide. The team has found that collaborating between regions in Louisiana can be akin to bridging different worlds, making outreach, trust-building, and authentic connection keys to success.

As part of the Health Justice Community of Practice program, VIA LINK received coaching from TheCaseMade consultancy to strengthen its storytelling approach to data, making insights more relatable, actionable, and inspiring. This training helped turn numbers into narratives that drive change and invite collaboration among nonprofits.

One powerful example of this is Big Impact Louisiana, a video series developed by VIA LINK to engage the public in understanding and using data for social change. The series showcases nonprofit leaders, data stories, and community voices from across the region, highlighting innovation, collaboration, and solutions to complex social issues. Through this initiative, VIA LINK applies asset

framing, focusing on strengths and opportunities rather than deficits and barriers.

CaseMaking helped the VIA LINK team reframe Louisiana's nonprofit landscape from one of challenge to one of opportunity. The team shared: "We've been conditioned to act separately, to compete with each other for too little money, and to use the data we gather to confirm our failures rather than blaze a path to our shared success."

For example, housing stability and affordability remain vexing issues for many communities. But by focusing on the assets and strengths of community members, the message can shift from "People lose their homes in this community" to "Together, we can work toward affordable housing." This framing transforms the narrative from one of loss to one of collective possibility, illustrating VIA LINK's broader philosophy of empowerment, data-informed action, and shared progress.



Conclusion

Each awardee in DASH's Health Justice Community of Practice is working to create systems of care and support through coalition-building in their respective regions that ensure that all residents have the opportunity to thrive.

All of the organizations participating in the Health Justice Community of Practice emphasized how the CaseMaking approach has taught them to lead with solutions, rather than problems; work collaboratively with their communities; and adapt their language and framing to ensure that they highlight commonalities—rather than differences—with their potential partners.

As TheCaseMade materials state,

Building long-term support for the systems changes that will better connect resources is a team sport. To win, we need to play our positions well, design smart plays together, practice them a lot, and adjust them as we shift among the players, coaches, fans, and bystanders we are activating on our behalf. We also need to pivot around tough opposition. That requires an intentional strategy.

After participating in the Health Justice Community of Practice program, the three awarded organizations came away with notable skills developing and implementing intentional strategies to build coalitions around the goal of better health outcomes.