Charlotte Regional Data Trust

The Data Trust uses integrated administrative data to increase the community's capacity for data-informed decision-making and foster university research that supports the community and deepens understanding of complex community issues.
Who: Charlotte Regional Data Trust
Where: Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, NC
Management Model: Non-profit
Domains: Health, Child Welfare and Adult Protection, Early Childhood, Education, Legal Systems and Law Enforcement, Economic Security and Jobs, Homelessness and Housing, Other State and Local Data, Community-Based Organization

The Charlotte Regional Data Trust (the Data Trust) uses integrated administrative data to increase the community's capacity for data-informed decision-making. By linking data across agencies, sectors, and programs, their integrated data system allows a variety of constituencies to understand challenges and opportunities beyond typical service silos. The Data Trust is governed by a board of directors, the Data and Research Oversight Committee (DAROC), and the newly formed Community Data Advisory Committee (CDAC). These oversight committees allow data to be governed by those who collect, own, or are represented in the data.

Since the Data Trust was founded, DAROC has served as the foundation of its governance process, and is composed of both long-standing and newly added data partners, including dedicated organizations (such as Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services, and Community Support Services), individuals from the community, and proud data nerds in and outside of agencies. DAROC members are also building participatory data governance practices in their organizations (for example, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Homeless Youth Action Board). These partnerships help the Data Trust inform and strengthen existing governance processes, including collaboration with CDAC.

In 2021, the Data Trust made the formal decision to create a governance structure that centers community voice. Since that time, the Data Trust has been planning the vision and structure for CDAC with a small team: two CDAC co-chairs, two Data Trust staff, and a facilitator. This design process has been informed by their two decades of governance experience and lessons learned from data sharing over time.

The Data Trust believes that it should be governed by those who own the data and those who are in the data because solutions come from those who are closest to the issue. By increasing community voice, the Data Trust aims to further trust, develop better research questions, and inform more meaningful change.

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Through building, operating, and expanding their participatory governance model, the Data Trust relies on the expertise of three core groups:

1. the co-chairs of the CDAC planning group: a faculty member from a local University, and a community neighborhood association leader;
2. DAROC members, who have provided key insights on data governance efforts since the Data Trust was founded
3. the Mecklenburg County Equity in Practice Learning Community (EiPLC) team, who came together around a local violence prevention effort. The EiPLC team is made up of members from the Data Trust, Mecklenburg County Criminal Justice Services, and the City of Charlotte. This group helped inform power sharing within Data Trust structures, including the application process and pay structure for CDAC.

Given the collaborative nature of this work, it is critical not to attempt to do it alone, but to partner with and rely upon many different communities for support and guidance.

This is part of a series of case studies that expand on work written for AISP's Toolkit for Centering Racial Equity Throughout Data Integration Version 2.0. The original Toolkit, released in 2020, catalyzed the formation of the Equity in Practice Learning Community (EiPLC), a cohort-based technical assistance initiative to put the Toolkit into practice in ten sites. The updated Toolkit is the result of a year-long Participatory Action Research (PAR) Project, and learnings from EiPLC cohorts.

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