

## **What Every Geek Needs to Know: Finding Useful Data**

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## **Presenting and Finding Data: An Overview**

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## Using Data: What Are Your Goals?

- Inform policymakers, the media, and community leaders.
- Identify areas of potential concern or success in order to inform policy debates or planning processes.
- Illustrate the magnitude of a problem; provide context and magnitude to a problem.

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## How Can You Use Data?

### DO:

- Tell a story
- Identify impacts
- Highlight trends and make comparisons

### DON'T:

- Include data for data's sake

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## **Using Data: Frame Your Questions**

- What question are you trying to answer?
- Who are you interested in (what is your unit of observation)?
- What area or community are you interested in?

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## **How Can You Use Data Effectively?**

- Accessible to a range of audiences
- Attractive presentation
- Accurate
- Timely
- Widely disseminated

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## **Know Your Data**

- Where did your data come from?
- How timely is your data?
- Are there any known problems with your data?

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## **Limits on Data Availability**

- Data is often hard to get for small areas
- Some basic data just doesn't exist
- Some data is not published annually
- Lag time between survey and published results

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## Presenting Your Data

- Compare apples to apples and oranges to oranges
- Make data accessible
  - Break up text with tables and charts
  - Table versus chart; line chart versus bar chart
  - Break up numbers with comparisons such as “one out of four”
- Link data to stories
- Cite your source

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## Data “Trick” #1: How Do I Adjust for Inflation?

- **Figure out what your base year will be.** For example, if you want current dollars, you would use 2005-06 as your base.
- **Get your data.** For example, what is a 1979 dollar worth today?
- **Look up the Consumer Price Index (CPI).** The Department of Finance website lists the CPI for California, the US, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, by fiscal year and calendar year.
  - Department of Finance at [http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/FS\\_DATA/LatestEconData/FS\\_Price.htm](http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/FS_DATA/LatestEconData/FS_Price.htm)

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## Inflation-Adjusting, Continued

• **Divide the base year CPI by the CPI for the year of your original data.** For example, divide the 2005-06 California CPI (203.5) by the 1979-80 California CPI (77.5), which gives you 2.63.

• **Multiply that number by your original data.** In other words, multiply 2.63 by \$1.00.

• **A 1979 dollar is worth \$2.63 today.**

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## Data "Trick" #2: How Do I Calculate Percentage Change?

- "(new - old)/old"
- **Example: How much has K-12 education changed as a share of General Fund spending since 1980-81?**
  - 1980-81: 35.3%
  - 2005-06 proposed: 41.9%
  - $(41.9 - 35.3) / 35.3 = 18.6969$
  - K-12 education has increased by 18.7% as a share of General Fund spending.

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## Where Do I Find: Population Data?

- **National:**
  - US Census Bureau at <http://www.census.gov/popest/estimates.php>
  - American Community Survey at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>
- **California:** Department of Finance, Demographic Research Unit at <http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/DEMOGRAP/Druhpar.htm>

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## Where Do I Find: Housing Data?

- **Homeownership by State:** US Census Bureau at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing.html>
  - Also includes affordability, vacancy, and construction data
- **Housing Units (and Population) by County:** Department of Finance at <http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/DEMOGRAP/E-5text.htm>
- **Home Prices:** California Association of Realtors at <http://www.car.org/>

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## Where Do I Find: Local-Level Data?

- **City level:**
  - American Community Survey
  - National League of Cities:  
<http://www.nlc.org/home/>
- **Metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs)**, which include one or more counties:
  - US Census
  - American Community Survey
  - Department of Finance

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## Where Do I Find: Employment Data?

- **National:** US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics at <http://www.bls.gov/>
- **California:** Employment Development Department, Labor Market Information Division at <http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/>

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## Where Do I Find: State Tax Data?

- **Franchise Tax Board** at <http://www.ftb.ca.gov/>
- **Board of Equalization** at <http://www.boe.ca.gov/>
- **Tax Expenditure Reports:**
  - Department of Finance at [http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/FS\\_DATA/Fs\\_home.htm](http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/FS_DATA/Fs_home.htm)
  - Legislative Analyst's Office at [http://www.lao.ca.gov/1999/tax\\_expenditure\\_299/tep\\_299\\_contents.html](http://www.lao.ca.gov/1999/tax_expenditure_299/tep_299_contents.html)

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## Where Do I Find: State Budget Data?

- **Budget documents:**
  - Department of Finance at [http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/BUD\\_DOCS/bud\\_link.htm](http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/BUD_DOCS/bud_link.htm)
- **Analyses:**
  - Legislative Analyst's Office at <http://www.lao.ca.gov/>
  - California Budget Project at <http://www.cbp.org/statebud.htm>

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