We live in a time when information is so easy to access. Newspapers, online news sources, and social media are a constant stream of data—like numbers, charts, and graphs. Because of many barriers—like internet access, education, income, and race—more resources are needed to protect people. (See PublicSource’s report here: publicsource.org while-black-americans-are-disproportionately-dying-of-covid-19-allegheny-county-and-in-local-black-racial-data/) Having this data will allow us to develop strategies to reduce the number of harmful racial disparities as a result of COVID-19. This data will allow us to see the number of people who are affected by COVID-19 and how to make decisions that are better informed. The data will also assist us in making informed decisions about how we respond to crises or even how to make public transportation decisions. Decisions about schools, health care, and human service funding are impacted by data. In the 2020 Decennial Census, U.S. Census collects data from all of us to determine the number of seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives and is also used to distribute hundreds of billions of dollars in federal funds to local communities.

As important to data literacy, according to Mr. Monk, is knowing how to use data to better inform your questions and how to better understand the sources of data.

Data literacy is important because decisions are made every day based on collected information. These decisions affect everyone. Government officials make policy decisions based on data—like where to allocate budget dollars, how to respond to crises or even how to make public transportation decisions. Decisions about schools, health care, and human service funding are impacted by data. For example, the 2020 Decennial Census U.S. Census collects data from all of us to determine the number of seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives and is also used to distribute hundreds of billions of dollars in federal funds to local communities.

Also important to data literacy, according to Ms. Monk, is knowing that data is not neutral. This means that humans make decisions about data collection—defining the terms by which data is characterized, how to analyze it and how the data is visualized. “There are decisions baked into how data is collected—or what data is not collected—and displayed through the whole life cycle of a data set.”

Data literacy helps boost transparency, economic development, civic engagement and advocacy. But for others, seeing the constant stream of COVID-19 information is easy to un-“It involves knowing how to use data to better inform your questions and how to better understand the sources of data.”

The Data Center also holds monthly office hours that are open to the public and inclusive, offered in several branches including East Liberty and Knoxville. The Data Center’s office hours are located in the PublicSource office in Pittsburgh, PA.

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