

Canon 2 Recommended Practices and Training

- 1) Accept that there are limits to how well data can describe people—people with complex thoughts, needs, and emotions; people with physical or psychological challenges that may not be well understood; or people who, through no fault of their own, live in circumstances that are unhealthy, unsafe, or unstable.
- 2) Be especially careful about making personal or professional judgments about people based solely on data. Be particularly alert to data that may be flawed, narrow in scope, or otherwise of limited applicability.
 - a. Just because data can be used to answer a question or inform an opinion does not mean that the information is entirely accurate, reliable, and unbiased.
 - b. Be very cautious about using data for purposes other than their original intent. Be sure that doing so does not violate individuals' right to privacy or any agreements of anonymity that you or your agency has made. Aggregations of data may be published if personally identifiable information has not been disclosed.
 - c. Effective, data-driven decisionmaking draws from multiple sets of data that support the same interpretation. Do not draw from a single source, if at all possible, and look at data from multiple sources over time to see if the findings are consistent.
- 3) Be willing to challenge commonly held assumptions and prejudices related to descriptive data.
 - a. For example, do not equate disability status with decreased intellectual aptitude or potential. In some cases, disability status reflects variation in learning styles rather than academic capacity, and some students with disabilities do not show differences in their ability to function in a school or life setting. In other instances, accommodations may permit students with disabilities to function at high academic levels.
 - b. Do not automatically equate school success with life success. Academic success is important, especially within the context of the education system, but people can find happiness, prosperity, and success in life without being the highest achiever in school.
- 4) Train data handlers to understand the limitations of data as a tool for describing individuals and categories of people by age, gender, racial/ethnic group, language of origin, job type, and other categories. Customize training efforts by job type as appropriate for communicating concepts and translating instruction into practice. Lead a discussion in which you ask if anyone has ever been treated unfairly because of data in a school or work record. Alternately, lead a discussion in which participants are asked to describe a situation in which outcomes showed the data about them to be poor predictors of success. Another activity is to provide participants with a scenario and ask them to fill in the missing parts. For example, prepare a short hypothetical resume that shows a break of several years in work history, or a string of jobs lasting no more than a year, and ask “applicants” to explain these to a job interviewer. See if the “off the record” information changes the interviewer’s opinion of the applicant’s credentials.