

## Tips for Generating Themes from Community Engagement Data

Themes are meaningful patterns that may emerge from your coded data. The following steps can help you generate, refine, and interpret themes.



### Step 1: Group your codes to create an initial set of themes

After coding data, organize codes into meaningful clusters. This could be done using a graphic organizer or data filters within qualitative coding software or with another research template. Grouping helps you see which codes tend to appear together and whether the grouping represents a distinct or significant theme.

### Step 2: Refine, collapse, expand, and interrogate your themes

After developing an initial list of themes, determine whether the list represents the variety of participants' thoughts and experiences from the data and whether any themes should be added or removed. Some questions you can ask include:

- Is there enough data to support this theme?
- Can any themes be combined?
- Do any themes seem too broad and need to be broken into separate themes?
- How do the themes fit together?
- Are there any themes missing?

### Step 3: Develop a definition for each theme

Consider how each theme relates to your research questions. This goes beyond just paraphrasing the data and identifying what is interesting from themes and why. Themes should have concise titles and be describable in a few sentences.

### Step 4: Write up findings

Provide a concise, coherent, and interesting account of the story the data tell, within and across themes. Provide evidence of these themes with illustrative quotes while providing a narrative that tells the larger story. Relate your narrative back to the research questions, highlighting any assumptions made, relevant data limitations, and implications of the findings.

### Step 5: Validate your narrative

Always share findings with the community representatives who contributed. If possible, have them review and provide feedback on your interpretations to ensure the narrative accurately reflects what was expressed during the engagement session. Partners should feel their contributions are truly represented.

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