

CORE GUIDE / 10

Dashboards & Data Use

Design decision-focused reporting views that make action easier.

START WITH A DECISION, NOT A FORM.

Ask what decision the evidence should inform before deciding what to measure.

The essential idea

A dashboard is a curated view of evidence for a particular audience and decision. It is useful when users can quickly see **what is happening, where attention is needed, and what to do next.**

WHY IT MATTERS

A dashboard should have a named audience and a limited number of core questions.

Design for decisions

A dashboard should have a named audience and a limited number of core questions.

- Start with 3-5 decisions.
- Use one chart or table per question.
- Show comparisons that reveal a pattern.
- Include a short interpretation and a next-action prompt.

Make data readable and honest

Clear design does not mean hiding uncertainty.

- Label time periods and denominators.
- Avoid decorative charts with no comparison.
- Show missing-data notes where material.
- Use consistent definitions across views.

Worked field example

A programme director needs a monthly view of implementation, participation and outcome signals across districts.

Programme question	Evidence to use	Decision it can support
Which districts need immediate support, and what evidence points to the likely issue?	Target progress, activity completion, attendance, quality checks and outcome indicator trends.	Focus field support, review data quality or adapt delivery where performance is persistently weak.

Try it in your work

- List the three decisions your audience makes most often.
- Draft a question before choosing each visual.
- Add an “action owner” or meeting agenda beside every dashboard review.

Common mistakes	A stronger habit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting every available metric on the page. • Using colour or rankings without context. • Publishing a dashboard with no review routine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a dashboard design canvas first. • Test with real users. • Retire metrics that no longer guide action.

REFLECT	
	What could your team stop collecting because it does not currently support a decision, accountability requirement or learning conversation?