FREE CHEAT SHEET

Need Statement Data Sources Cheat Sheet (Free PDF)

A table of public data sources for a grant need statement, three rules for citing a figure, and a fillable log for recording each number with its source, year and geography.

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> A need statement is only as strong as its evidence. This cheat sheet lists public places to look for data, rules for citing what you find, and a log to record each figure. If your funder names the data it wants or the sources it accepts, the funder's instructions come first.

Public data sources

Each row describes what the source's own website says it offers. Geography differs from one dataset to the next, so confirm on the site what is available for your area.

Source	What it covers	Geography level	Good for
U.S. Census Bureau, data.census.gov	Census.gov describes it as the Census Bureau's main data search platform for demographic and economic data. It includes the American Community Survey, which Census.gov says releases new estimates every year on topics such as jobs, education, veterans and housing.	You choose the geography in the search. Check which levels are offered for the table you need.	Describing who lives in your service area
CDC PLACES	CDC.gov describes it as local data for better health. It uses CDC and U.S. Census data to estimate local health measures.	County, place, census tract and ZIP Code tabulation area, according to CDC.gov	Local health estimates below the county level
CDC WONDER	The CDC WONDER site describes online databases with a query system for analyzing public health data. Topics listed include births, deaths, cancer and population estimates.	Varies by database. Check each one.	Birth, death and disease counts and rates
Bureau of Labor Statistics, bls.gov	Subjects listed on BLS.gov include unemployment, employment, pay and benefits, and inflation and prices.	BLS.gov says it offers many types of data for regions, states and local areas, including state and local unemployment rates, county employment and county wages.	Workforce and economic need

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Source	What it covers	Geography level	Good for
National Center for Education Statistics, nces.ed.gov	NCES describes itself as the federal statistical agency responsible for collecting, analyzing and reporting data on the condition of U.S. education. Its tools include a public school and district navigator and a college navigator.	Nation, state, school district and school, depending on the program	Education need and school profiles
County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, countyhealthrankings.org	The site says it offers data on what shapes health in a community, with a page on its measures, methodology and sources.	County and state, according to the site	Comparing your county with others in the state

Checked November 2026. Programs and rules change, so confirm on the official site.

Local and first-hand sources

National sources set the scene. Local and first-hand sources show the need where you work.

Category	What it can show	Where to find it
State health department dashboards	State and county health indicators	Your state health department's website
State education department dashboards	School and district enrollment, attendance and performance	Your state education department's website
Local school district reports	School-level detail and local trends	The district's website or office
Your own program data	Demand for your services: waitlists, requests, attendance, referrals	Your own records
Community surveys and listening sessions	What people affected say they need, in their own words	Collected by you, with consent

Rules for citing a figure

1. **Source.** Name the agency or organization and the dataset or report, not just "studies show".
2. **Year.** Give the year the data describes, not the year you found it. Use the most recent release available.
3. **Geography.** State the area the figure covers. Do not present a state or national figure as if it were local.

Also: compare like with like (same year, same measure), report estimates as estimates, and keep a copy or note of where each number came from.

Citation pattern: [Figure] of [who] in [geography] [measure], according to [source, dataset, year].

This example is fictional: "In Example County, 18 percent of adults reported having no regular source of care (Example State Health Survey, 2025)."

Do not use AI tools to supply statistics

AI writing tools can produce figures and citations that look real and are not. Never ask one to supply a statistic or a

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source for your need statement. Look up every number yourself at the original source and record it in the log below. An AI tool can help you organize and word evidence you have already verified.

Data log

Record every figure before it goes into a draft. If a row cannot be completed, do not use the figure.

Figure and what it measures	Source and dataset	Year	Geography	Date looked up	Checked by

Before the figures go into the proposal

- [ ] Every figure in the draft has a completed row in the log
- [ ] Each figure was read at the original source by someone on our team
- [ ] Local figures are local, and comparisons use the same year and measure
- [ ] At least one piece of evidence comes from the community or our own program
- [ ] The citation format follows the funder's instructions

> **Want help with this?** The Complete Grant Architect is a free 16-week grant writing course, and you can hire a grant writer for your next proposal. Both are at subthesis.com.

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