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Advancing Evidence.
Improving Lives.

Strengthening Nonprofit Voice: Advocacy, Data, and Impact

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Treshonda Rutledge, Ph.D.
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Meet the Presenters



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Presenter Bios

Dr. Dominique Bradley

Dominique Bradley, Ph.D., PMP, is a Principal Researcher at the American Institutes for Research (AIR). She serves as Partnership co-Lead and technical assistance development lead for the Community Schools - Southern Partnership for Advancement, Research and Knowledge (CS-SPARK). Bradley also leads evaluations and translational research projects for community school initiatives across the country. Bradley has contributed to knowledge in the field of community schools by developing theories of key components of implementation to support shared vision, collective leadership, and robust and meaningful evaluation for continuous improvement. Bradley has over 18 years experience in education research and project management. Her areas of expertise are in community schools implementation evaluations, qualitative research methods, improvement science methods, developing and supporting networked improvement communities, supporting and evaluating research-practice partnerships, and teacher retention, preparation and support. Bradley holds a Bachelors in Sociology from Southern Oregon University and a Masters in Sociology and PhD in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Dr. Treshonda Rutledge

Treshonda Rutledge, Ph.D. is a Technical Assistance Consultant at the American Institutes for Research (AIR). As a project director, researcher, coach, and technical assistance provider, Dr. Rutledge partners with schools, districts, state agencies, community schools, and nonprofit organizations to strengthen outcomes through data-informed decision making, continuous improvement, strategic planning, and capacity-building. She leads and supports initiatives focused on translating research into practice, building cross-sector partnerships, analyzing qualitative and quantitative data, and helping organizations use evidence to identify needs, monitor progress, and implement sustainable improvement efforts. Her work spans education, STEM, attendance and engagement, community partnerships, and systems change, with a particular focus on supporting organizations serving historically marginalized and underserved communities

Ms. Christine Koerner

Ms. Christine Koerner is a Technical Assistance Consultant at AIR. Her work focuses on providing implementation-focused technical assistance, systemic approaches to continuous improvement, data collection and analysis support, and evidence-based guidance to coordinators, educators, school leaders, and community partners engaged in education initiatives at the school, district, state, and national levels. Ms. Koerner contributes to applied research and implementation that examine how math, STEM, English language arts, and community school education initiatives operate in real-world settings. A significant component of Koerner's role involves hands-on technical assistance to support data collection and analysis and continuous improvement efforts to help partners navigate complex initiatives and use data to inform decision-making.

Dr. Emily Mortimer

Dr. Emily Mortimer is a researcher and technical assistance provider at the American Institutes for Research (AIR), where she supports communities and education partners in translating research into practical, locally responsive strategies. Her work focuses on community schools, out-of-school time learning, family and community engagement, and cross-sector partnerships that strengthen opportunities for young people. Emily brings more than 20 years of experience across education, STEM learning, nonprofit leadership, research, and community-based initiatives. She holds a Ph.D. in Education and is particularly interested in qualitative research, implementation, and understanding how communities build sustainable systems for learning and engagement.

Why Use Stories?

42%

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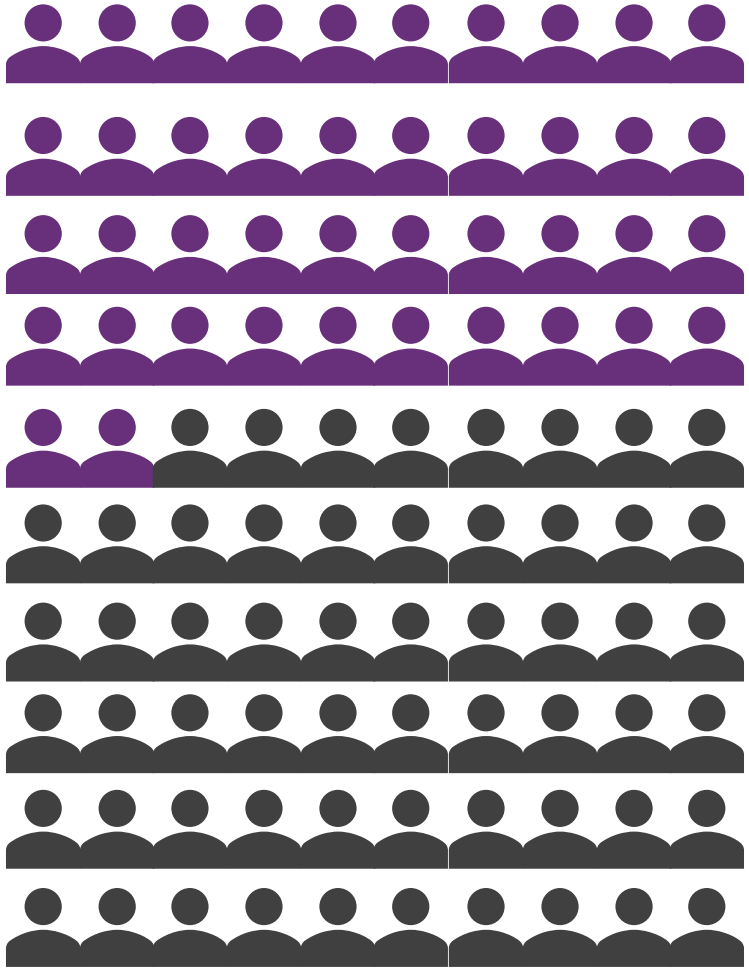

Why Use Stories?

42%

Of families attended at least one school event.

Why Use Stories?



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Of families attended at least one school event.

Why Use Stories?

"Narrative can **help people connect** to each other and each other's purpose in new ways, and can **play to the heart, not just the head**."

Jennifer Splansky Juster, 2017

The Path To Telling Your Data Story



Define your audience and goals

- Who needs this?
- What do they care about?
- What do you hope they do with this story?

Identify the core message

- Key takeaways (No more than 2-3)

Craft your story

- Use the core structure to tell a human story.

Choose the format

- How will you deliver the story? (e.g., video, social media, email blast)

Tailor the delivery

- Adjust language, length, and detail to match your audience and format.

What Makes a Data Story Strong

A strong data story starts with a goal: are you hoping to advocate for continued program sustainability, inform your partners, or create buy-in?

From there, data stories are compelling when they are:

- Grounded in data
- Intentional
- Cohesive
- Simple and detailed “enough”
- Rich and digestible
- Tailored to the audience

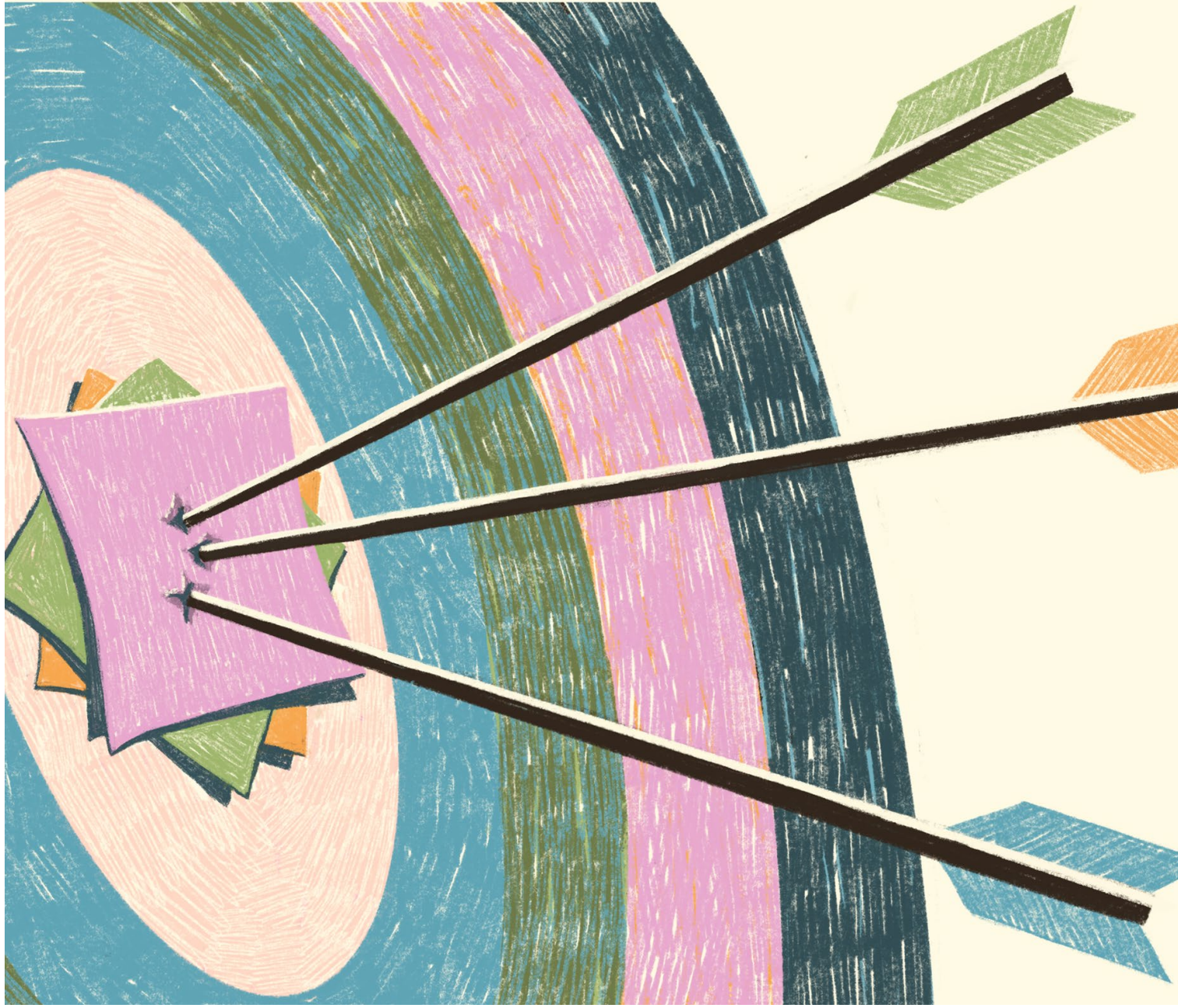


Step 1: Identify your goals

After sharing your data story, what is your desired result?

- Awareness?
- Further Dissemination?
- Funding or other Support?
- Scaling efforts?
- Community pride?

How will you know sharing your data story worked?



What could you include in your data story?

Goals	What the data story might emphasize
To Share Progress?	• Movement over time • Accomplishments • Milestones • Patterns • Next Steps
To Increase Knowledge?	• Context of community schools and your initiative • Positive patterns/trends • Connections to audience • A clear “What does this tell us?”
To Develop Investment?	• Why the issue matters • Connection to audience priorities • Evidence of need/opportunity • A clear invitation or next step



Step 2: Identify Your Audience

- Who most needs to hear this story and why?
- What do they already care about?
- What decisions, actions or understanding do you want to influence?

One Story, Different Audiences

Your value stays consistent. The emphasis changes by audience.

Families: access, trust, and lived experience

Partners: coordination and outcomes

Funders: need, evidence, feasibility, and return on investment



Start with the Decision

Before choosing data, name the response you want from your audience.

Understand: See why this issue matters.

Believe: Trust that our approach can work.

Act: Fund, partner, refer, advocate, or participate.

Map Your Audience Ecosystem

Primary Audience: can make the decision

Secondary Audience: shapes the decision

Beneficiary Audience: experiences the impact

Champion: can carry the story credibly



Prioritize, Don’t Try to Reach Everyone

Choose the audience that is both important and actionable for this story.

Need: Who needs this information now?

Influence: Who can unlock resources or action?

Readiness: Who is likely to engage?

Access: Who can you realistically reach?

Prioritizing Audiences



As a team, identify your **top audience**.

On the worksheet, answer…

- Why do they matter?
- How important is it for this audience to hear the story now? **(Need)**
- How much ability does this audience have to help move the work forward? **(Influence)**
- How ready are they to hear and respond to the story? **(Readiness)**
- How realistically can you reach this audience? **(Access)**

Choose the Right Messenger and Channel

A strong message also needs a trusted path to the audience.

Messenger: participant, partner, leader, or evaluator

Channel: conversation, briefing, email, event, or social post

Timing: when the audience is ready to decide or act



STEP 3: Identify Your Data

- The amount of data available to you can be overwhelming. As you identify data for your story, consider:
  - What data do you have available?
  - What data show trends?
  - What data documents an outcome (a change or improvement) in addition to an output (what you have produced)?
  - What data might you need to collect to make a compelling story?



Connect Data and Audience

How does your audience connect to the data you select?

Consider:

- **What is your audience passionate about?**
- What data do they frequently use to **make decisions**?
- How do they **receive information** best?
  - Quick or brief bursts of information
  - Longer more detailed and contextual information
- Will the audience understand your data story without additional context?

What counts as data? How does it connect to your story?



Numbers: outcomes and impact

Attendance, grades and test scores
Behavioral incidents and graduation



Stories: experiences and insights

Quotes and experiences
Observations and reflections



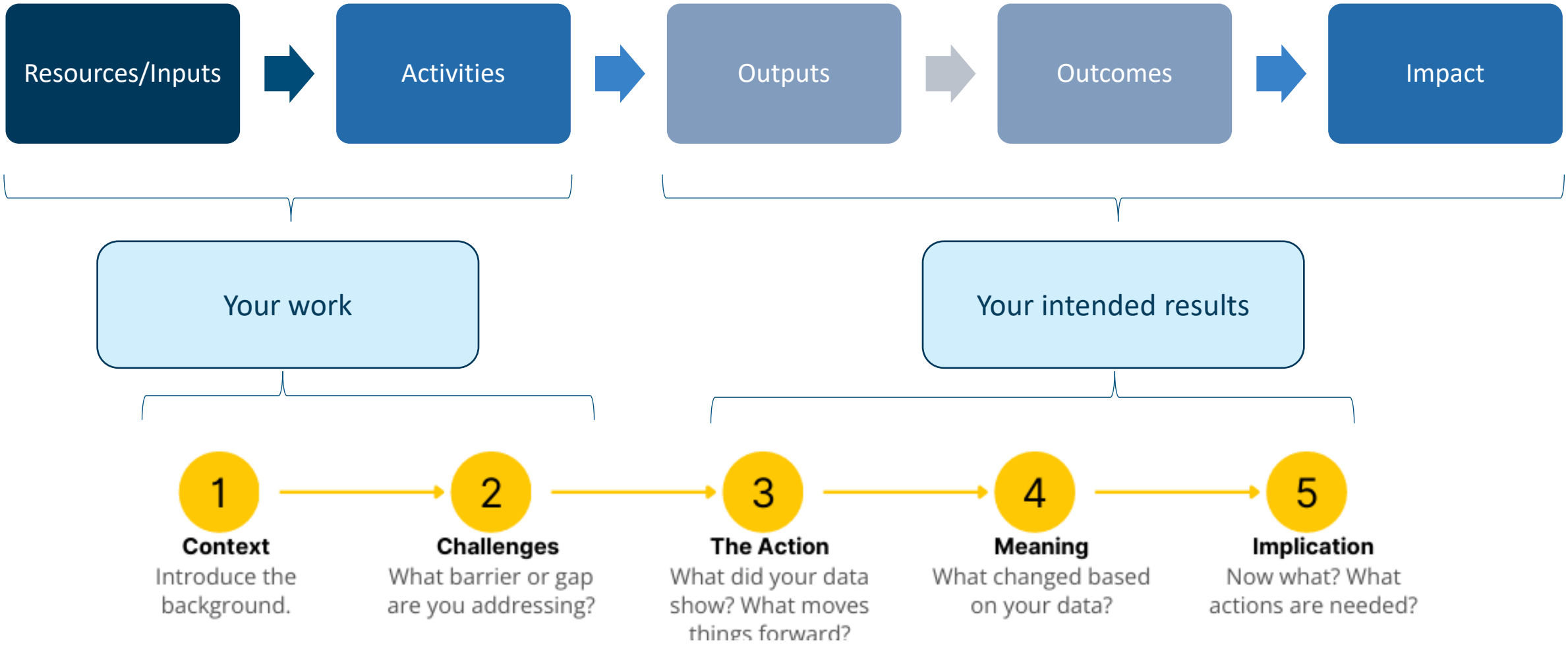
Documents and news

Policy and financial documents
News stories

Data Considerations:

- What data do you have related to the goals and applications of your data story?
- What data tells the story of your relationships and expansion of relationships?
- Does your data provide trends that make sense in the “arc” of your story?
- Does each data piece connect to each other to create a cohesive narrative?

Using Your Logic Model to Guide Your Story



Outputs vs. Outcomes

Outputs

(Results)

Tangible deliverables

Actions taken toward goal

Direct products or services

Outcomes

(Value Added)

What change you have created

Problems you are solving

The value you have created

Identifying Data

- What is an **output (product)** your team is focusing on?
- What **need** was the team responding to when it created this output?

- What is one immediate **outcome** of your work?
- What **value** does your work bring to individuals or groups?

Identify data on your worksheet that will help you capture outcomes, outputs and impact

From STORY to DATA STORY



The WHY

Ms. Dickey realized that students in her school needed exposure to careers outside of local industry (largely farming or food service).

She worked with the school principal and superintendent to partner with the local university to develop a law program for her middle school students.

The HOW

The program includes study of real court cases, mock trials, and visits to the Florida supreme court and local law department at the partner university.

The WHAT

From STORY to DATA STORY



To date 43 students have participated in the Nims Academy law program….

Output

83% of students with frequent career exposure **report staying engaged in school**, compared to 34% without career exposure.

Experiential expanded-learning programs show **positive effects on students' confidence**, **self-management**, and **interpersonal skills**.

Outcomes and impacts

From STORY to DATA STORY



The IMPACT Story

https://bit.ly/3UEZ4Xd

Selecting Data Aligned with Format

The stories that are woven from our data are exciting! They bring meaning and interest to numbers, figures, and quotes. And, if told well, they can make a lasting impact on individuals, community members, and others.



"Visualizations along with story-telling play a big part in the entire data science pipeline. These two components are what give data a 'soul'."

Meredith Wang, Data Scientist and Visual Story Teller

- What format will make the most impact and what data might align to that format?
  - Story telling? -- Qualitative
  - Fact sheets? -- Quantitative
- How does the intended audience usually access new information?
- Does your audience generally like to dig into more details and text? Or is "short and sweet" with lots of visuals preferable?
- How might your data products be translated into multiple formats for multiple platforms (e.g. print, online, social media, interactive)

What is your or your team's capacity, skill set and timeline to develop different formats for dissemination?

STEP 5: Map Your Story

Context – Identify people and setting

Challenge – Barriers and gaps you are addressing

Action – What your data shows

Meaning – What changed based on your actions

Call to Action – What you now want your listener to act on?



Step 5: Craft Your Story

A successful elevator pitch relies on a simple SUCCES principle:

- **S**imple
- **U**nexpected
- **C**oncrete
- **C**redible
- **E**motional
- **S**tory-based

NEXT STEPS

- Complete your Story Map (Step 5)
- Does your 5-sentence version keep the SUCCES principles together?



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THANK YOU!

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