

# Storytelling Through Data



# Introduction

Storytelling has the incredible ability to connect us, making complex information relatable and memorable. A well-told data story can influence decisions, inspire action, and foster community engagement. This toolkit is designed to help you harness that power, so you can effectively communicate insights and drive meaningful conversations in your community.

## Why Storytelling with Data Matters

Storytelling with data is important because it offers:

- **Accessibility:** A narrative around data points makes the information more accessible and memorable.
- **Credibility:** Data supports stories, adding credibility to personal experiences and observations.
- **Impact:** Effective data storytelling can lead to:
  - Policy changes
  - Meaningful societal impact
  - Data-driven decision-making



**Let's dive into a simple, four-step process for telling a story with data:**

1. Identify the story you want to tell.
2. Approach your narrative with an open mind, free from bias.
3. Gather and utilize relevant data.
4. Craft a compelling and authentic narrative.

# Step 1: Identify Your Story

## Reflect on Your Message:

- Identify what story you want to tell / What is your question that data can answer?
- Why does this question matter to you and your community?
- What can your audience gain from digging deeper into this question?
- What insights do you hope to share?



**TIP:** Don't hesitate to share your personal experiences or story. It can serve as a powerful anchor for your narrative.



## Step 2: Approach with Open Eyes

### Check Your Bias:

- Recognize that everyone has biases, including ourselves.
- Personal feelings are important when trying to relate to your audience, but be cautious about introducing a bias.
- When examining data, ask:
  - How was the data collected?
  - Is the data I'm using unbiased?
  - Am I cherry-picking data points that prove my point or considering the whole story?

### Strategies to Stay Balanced:

- Use neutral and descriptive language.
- Document your assumptions and beliefs.
- Discuss your narrative with others for broader perspectives.
- Expose yourself to information or points of view that oppose your own.
- Ensure the data you use is unbiased and reliable.
- Make sure your claims are supported by real, high-quality data.



**High-quality data** is complete, correct, current, consistent, comprehensive, and contextualized.



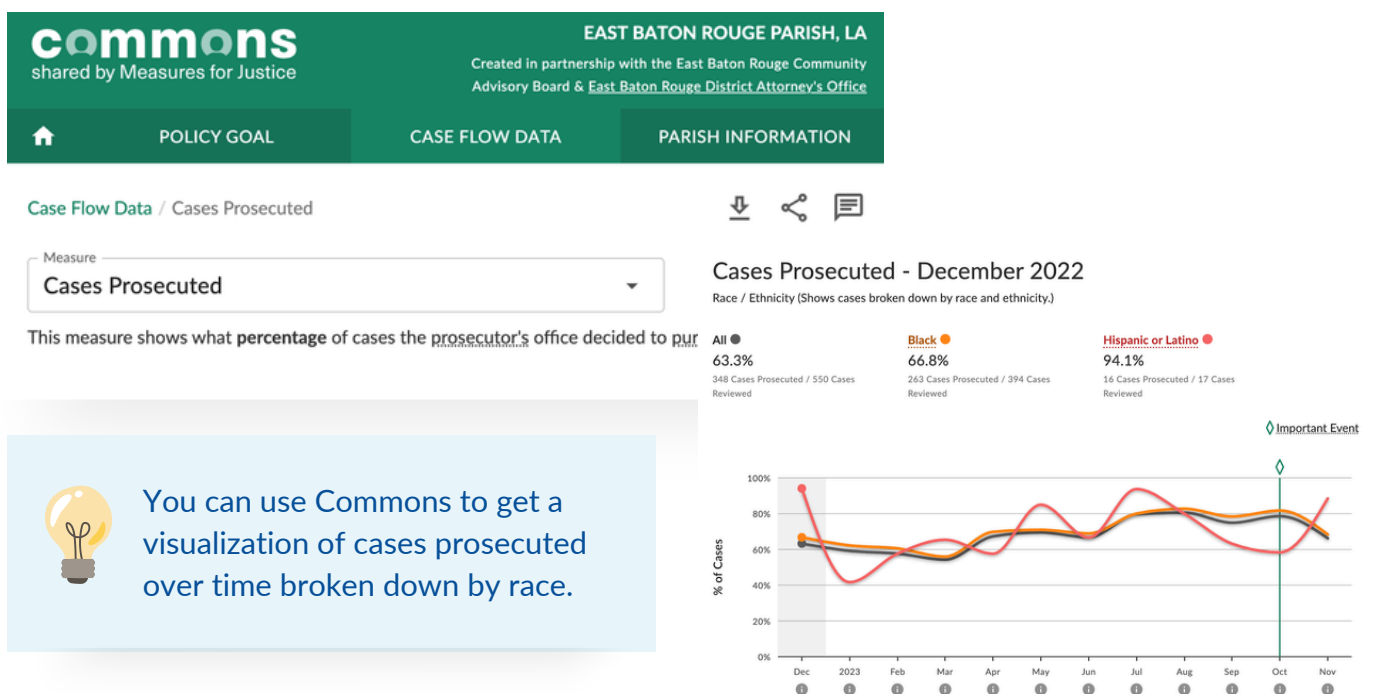
## Step 3: Access and Use Data

### Collecting Relevant Data:

- Gather statistics and data visualizations that provide context for your question.
- Tap into resources like Commons to access data and visualizations that support your story.
- Look for additional tools and resources that promote data literacy and effective communication and help interpret effective visuals.

### Example:

- If you want to discuss the experiences of Hispanic defendants in East Baton Rouge, use Commons to visualize how their prosecution rates compare over time.



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## Step 4: Crafting Your Narrative

### Know Your Audience:

- Understand your audience: Who are they, and what do they care about?
- What is their expertise?
- What are their assumptions about the subject?
- But also what are your assumptions about them?
- Once you understand the audience, your voice becomes more clear.

### Building Your Narrative:

- Outline the issue with data points and visualizations.
- Highlight the importance of your findings and suggest actions.



# What Makes a Successful Data Story?

Now that we know how to build our own story with data, let's take a look at the elements that make it successful:

- **Credibility:** Let your data speak honestly; support your claims with reliable sources.
- **Audience Awareness:** Tailor your story to resonate with your audience's values and interests.
- **Clarity:** Aim for simplicity; your message should be easy to grasp.

Classic Story Structure	Data Story Structure
Act I: Inciting Incident	Act I: Unanswered Question
Act II: Climax/Confrontation	Act II: Accessing the Data
Act III: Resolution	Act III: Findings & Takeaways

## Rhetorical Appeals:

Utilize **ethos**, **pathos**, and **logos**:

- **Ethos:** Establish credibility.
- **Pathos:** Appeal to emotions, giving the audience a reason to care.
- **Logos:** Support arguments with credible data and unbiased narrative.

## Example: Ivonne's Story



Ivonne's story from the Let's Be Clear campaign exemplifies effective data storytelling:

- She begins with a personal anecdote to emphasize a key data point: *"In 2016, female officers made up 12% of the police force."*
- Her narrative highlights the importance of increasing female representation in policing and the barriers posed by existing policies.



Follow the QR code or [click here](#) to read Ivonne's Story and see if you can identify some additional elements that make her data-backed story successful.



# Conclusion

Storytelling through data is a powerful tool that can drive policy change and foster data-driven decision-making. By mastering the art of data storytelling, communities can effectively share insights, advocate for change, and inspire action. Thank you for engaging with this toolkit, and we hope it helps you in your storytelling journey! If you'd like to deepen your understanding of how to craft compelling stories using data, connect with our engagement or research team to learn more about our data literacy module on storytelling with data.

