KLA

4 Steps to Turn Your Data Into a Story

Stories are remembered up to 22 times more than facts alone.
This guidebook outlines in 4 simple steps - complete with examples and practice exercises - how you can effectively tell your story with data whether it is for a presentation, your website, social media pages, signage at an outreach event, or a brochure or flyer that you are sending out to the community.

Data.

Stories.

Impact.

① *Set the Stage*

Provide Simple Explanations & Avoid Technical Jargon

Why is this Important?

- Sometimes we are too close to our work, and we forget that others might not be as knowledgeable about the topic.
- Technical jargon will only confuse people and make them lose interest.

How to Do It

- Focus on WHY your community members should care about this information. Remember: they don't know all the details that you do, so try to see it from their point of view.
- Make an emotional connection by relating the data to what people care about most and how it could impact them personally.

Resources

Not sure how to communicate at a 6th grade level? Check out these example sites:
- US EPA's WaterSense for Kids - https://www3.epa.gov/watersense/kids
- EnergyStar's Kids - https://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=kids.kids_index

PRACTICE EXERCISE

1. Identify what it is you are trying to share with your community: a new project, an example of success, etc. List all the ways this could impact people in the community -- their families, neighborhoods, jobs, commutes, etc.

2. Write out a short description of your project or success. Replace all acronyms and complicated terms with simple language.

EXAMPLE TEXT:
WHY WE CARE ABOUT RECYCLING

When trash (solid waste), is collected on your street it is brought to a landfill. As trash breaks down (decomposes) in landfills it generates methane, a very strong greenhouse gas. Greenhouse gas pollution causes the atmosphere to warm, creating disruptions in the climate that result in extreme weather events that lead to flooding. Additionally, any item that is disposed of loses the opportunity to be reused in some way, causing more resources to be wasted in the creation of the same item. The community benefits from recycling through reducing pollution from landfill waste and growing the economy through the sale of recycled products.

Know Your Audience

Grab and Keep Their Attention with Images, Icons, and Infographics

Why is this Important?

- 50% of adults in the US cannot read a book that is written at an 8th grade level, and 14% are illiterate.
- For many of our community members, English is not their first language. But you need to engage them and get their input to truly understand the full needs of your community.
- You can connect with these groups and others far easier through the consistent use of **logos, icons, and images** – especially **symbols that are universal** (i.e. water drop for water).
- Even with educated, English-speakers you have limited time to engage your audience (studies show people spend an average of 3-5 seconds scanning a website before moving/clicking on). Other stats show that we process visuals 60,000 times faster in the brain than text.

How to Do It

- As the saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words." Wherever you include data points, try to pair them with images, build them into an **infographic** or use **equivalencies** that put the data into perspective - i.e. the new water conservation program will save the equivalent of 20 Olympic-size swimming pools each day.
- Even putting a standard data point as text overlay on an image can help people take notice and understand (like the example below).
- Icons are a great way to showcase different functions within a community. On the right, are some examples developed for the City of San Antonio, TX's Sustainability Plan project. These icons are seen throughout the plan and Sustainability Dashboard for consistency.
- If you have the resources, **invest in photography** from your community and consider using **short videos** (shot on a smart phone is fine).

Green Buildings & Infrastructure

Solid Waste Resources

Energy

The average commercial building wastes 30% of its energy. **Simple, low-cost steps could slash that by 10%.**

Know Your Audience

Grab and Keep Their Attention with Images, Icons, and Infographics

Resources

There are lots of online resources available now to help you develop logos, icons, and infographics. Here are a few that I use:

- Logos- www.logotournament.com (hundreds of graphic designers around the globe compete to design a logo for your organization, department, program, etc.)
- Infographics- (www.canva.com, www.piktocharts.com)
- The trash-related infographic below is a template pulled right off Canva for free. This could be used completely as is, but the site will let you add your own logo, colors, and other design elements.

Example Infographics
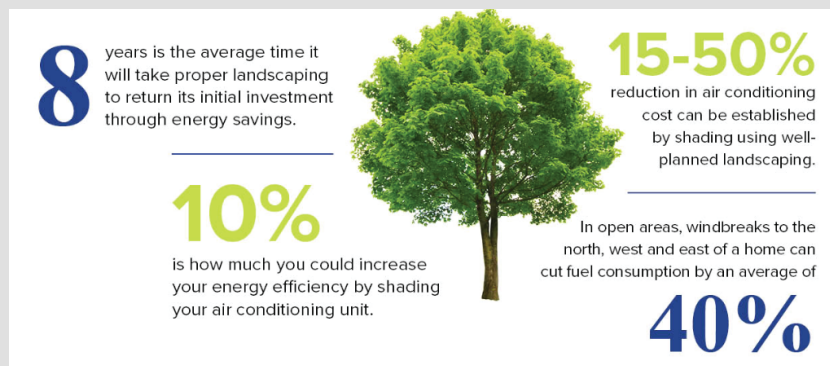
(3) *Provide Context*

Compare Your Data to National or State Averages and Goals

Why is this Important?

- Data can only tell an effective story when we provide context and comparisons. A single data point on its own tells us very little.

How to Do It

- Make sure you have more than one year of data and, where possible, add data from other communities or the state or national average as a comparison point.
- Include how that data point relates to a goal you have set for that metric.

Resources

- The STAR Community Rating is a rating system that provides a framework for sustainable communities based on hundreds of data points within eight different goal areas. More than 60 local governments have completed the STAR assessment process. See their data at www.StarCommunities.org.

PRACTICE EXERCISE

1. What metrics would help tell your success story?

2. Is data available for that metric?

3. Have you established goals for that metric?

4. Is this metric something that is tracked at a local, regional, state, or national level?

5. Are there national or state averages for this metric that you can compare to?

6. Do other local governments have goals for this metric?

Example of Applying Context and Comparison to Data

OKAY	**GOOD**	✓ **GREAT**	☆ **BONUS**
Our recycling rate is 42%.	Our recycling rate this year is 42%, up from 37% three years ago.	Our recycling rate this year is 42%, up from 37% three years ago -- and ahead of the US national average of 34%.	Our recycling rate this year is 42%, up from 27% three years ago -- and ahead of the US national average of 34%. We're making solid progress toward our goal of 50% by 2020.
provides data, but no context or comparison	provides data, and self-comparison, no context	provides data, self-comparison, and context	provides data, self-comparison, context, and progress report

4 *Invite the Community to be Part of the Solution*

Include Calls to Action

Why is this Important?

- If you are going through the effort of pulling data together to demonstrate progress and be transparent with your community, why not invite them to be part of your success story while you have their attention?
- Stories can be empowering. Use that connection as the spark for them to take an action step.
- Personal stories and gossip can make up more than 60% of our conversations. Use stories to get your community talking about your work.

How to Do It

- Identify **easy actions** for your community members to take that might help improve your outcomes. Sticking with the recycling example, you could ask them to try composting or provide them additional guidance on what can be recycled and challenge them to improve their own recycling rates.
- **Facilitate that action** by providing links to resources, simple DIY tips, ways they can share it with friends and families and information about how their action will contribute to the collective goal.
- Studies show that people are more likely to take an action if they have made a pledge or commitment or if they see neighbors and peers doing it, and that "gamification" works so try to build in quizzes or an element of competition and peer pressure.

Resources

- Start with your local resources, but there are many regional and national resources that can help your constituents be part of the action whether through actual program participation – such as volunteering for Keep America Beautiful www.kab.org/volunteer - or by offering simple tips like how to successfully compost in the backyard.

PRACTICE EXERCISE

1. Are there small actions your community members can take to help reach your goal or improve a particular metric? List them out.

2. What programs are available for your community members to participate in that would help you reach your goal or improve this metric? List them out and provide links.

KLA Storytelling Framework

From cave paintings to Facebook, storytelling is the oldest and most effective form of communication. You have mounds of data at your fingertips, but more importantly you have a treasure trove of stories to tell. This 4-step storytelling framework turns your data into stories through which you can share your successes with the community and elected officials, track progress on your metrics and goals and engage your community members in a meaningful way.

INVITE THE COMMUNITY TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

Include Calls to Action

4

TURN YOUR DATA INTO A STORY

1

SET THE STAGE

Provide Simple Explanations & Avoid Technical Jargon

3

PROVIDE CONTEXT

Compare Your Data to National or State Averages and Goals

2

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Grab and Keep Their Attention with Images, Icons, and Infographics

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Get more storytelling, community engagement, and other resources at:

KLA

KLASustainability.com

Twitter and LinkedIn @TheKimLundgren

SAS TALK

podcast on iTunes and Sound Cloud at sastalkwithkim.com