

Using Data for Storytelling

- Welcome to the fourth and final video in the Data Center video series. If you haven't already be sure to check out the previous three videos as they will provide helpful information to support this video.

1. Recap

- In the past videos, we learned about the data available on the Data Center and how to navigate the Data Center to find data we need. And then we took a look at the different ways to visualize data. Now we can put all these pieces together to tell a story using data, one that we could use to advocate for our communities.

2. Using Data for Storytelling

- So let's review these thoughtful steps for using data for storytelling

3. Connect

- First, we know data and data visuals alone cannot change policy. The data need to be weaved together to tell a story. So consider the data you identified that you were interested in learning and make the connection between the data you have and story it could tell. For example, what population are you focused on? what geographic location are you focused on? And what's the timeframe of the data? For example, we reviewed child poverty by poverty level in our previous videos, so maybe I'm interested in building a story around the percent of children living in poverty over the



past ten years across Illinois. This is how we connect the data together...

4. Contextualize

- Next, we need to contextualize the data...so when we review the data, is poverty changing over time? Is it increasing or decreasing? And consider the social math, such as why are about 1 in 6 children in Illinois living in poverty? This is also where we need to think about systems, policies, and programs that have been created or not created to reduce poverty over time. In addition, we need to think about the impact living in poverty will have on child's present and future life. Children living in poverty may also be experiencing food insecurity, housing instability, and living in poverty now may impact their future health and educational outcomes. By contextualizing the data, we can start to understand the story the data are revealing...

5. Disaggregate

- The next step is even more important, we need to disaggregate the data, which means to break down the data into groups by a characteristic, such as gender, race/ethnicity, and/or age group. Building on our example, we would want to know has poverty reduced for all children at the same rate? Let's take a look...
- Continuing with our example, we know poverty for children in Illinois was 16.2% in 2020, but when we disaggregate the data, we see higher rates of poverty for



Black, Latinx, and children who identify as other races/ethnicities This is why it's extremely important to disaggregate data, when possible, which means to break down the data into groups by a characteristic, such as gender, race/ethnicity, and/or age group.

- When we disaggregate the data, we find that there are disparities, and in our example racial disparities, which means some children are living in poverty at higher rates than others. When we disaggregate data and reveal disparities, we can root our story and advocacy in equity, especially race and gender equity, and build policy solutions that address poverty for children of color, which as a result will lower the poverty rates for all children across the state. So now that we have our data disaggregated, let's look at best practices for presenting that data visually...

6. Present

- Here are a couple things to keep in mind when storytelling.
- First, avoid stigmatizing or contributing to harmful stereotypes when presenting data. You want to frame the data differences and any inequities about the system and not the people.
- Second, choose a title for your visualization that is a call to action. And you want to clearly label your chart. For example, on a bar chart you want to label your x- and y-axes. Also, when providing a chart it's important to include



a key, or legend, which will explain the different colors or shapes used in your data visualization.

- Lastly, it's important to name missing data and/or data categories that mask details of a population because data represents real people. So keeping this in mind, let's take a look of an example of this next...

7. Example of Best Practices

- Let's see these best practices in action using our previous example of poverty by race/ethnicity. I want to flag that though the Data Center provides great data visualizations, these visualizations are not always fully labeled so it's important to do it yourself.
- Now to our example, instead of the Data Center provided title, let's adjust the title to "Anti-poverty policies must center race equity to decrease poverty for Illinois' children of color." The previous title only described the data on the bar chart, but this new title provides a call to action. Our title actually uses the data in the chart, to highlight the issue, racial disparities for child poverty rates, and the title gives direction to our audience on how to create a solution that is equitable for Illinois' children of color.
- Next, we should clearly label our x and y axes. Our x-axis is the horizontal axis, and this is our independent variable or more simply this is the cause or condition we are observing. In this chart the x-axis: "Child Race/Ethnicity" categories.



- And the y-axis is the vertical axis, which is our dependent variable, or the effect. The y-axis for our chart would be: “Percent of Children Living in Poverty,” so this is the outcome of poverty based on our race/ethnicity categories.
- I also, want to flag we want to have a legend, which the Data Center provided on this bar chart already so we’re good to go there.
- Now to address missing data as a data limitation. In Illinois the Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander population is too small to report and be reliable, especially at the county-level, but we know children of this racial/ethnic identity live here, so let’s acknowledge this group and highlight this as a data limitation. In addition, Asian is a commonly used as a racial/ethnic category for American Community Survey data, where this data is from, but we know there is much diversity among our Asian community. Let’s highlight this as a data limitation and uplift the need to explore the differences in poverty among different Asian racial/ethnic groups.

8. Closing

- Applying these steps and best practices will help present your data clearly and strengthen your ability to tell your story with the data.
- Now that we’ve covered how to tell a story with data, see our “Using Data to Tell a Story” worksheet to develop your story-telling skills. You can find that worksheet linked closely to this video series.



9. Contact Information

- Thanks for joining us on this video series! Our hope is these videos support you as you become a data expert and advocate for your community. As always, we are here to provide support, please see my contact information, and thank you for your advocacy for children and families in Illinois!

