"Data are just summaries of thousands of stories—tell a few of those stories to help make the data meaningful."

-Dan Heath

What's Your Story?

Using communications to make your projects stronger

April 2023

RESULTS
FOR AMERICA

Stretch Your Brain

1. Pick one slip of paper from the "Product" bowl and two slips from the "Audience" bowl.

2. Think about the different ways your selected audiences could use your selected product.

3. List as many uses as you can!

TIP: Think about what makes the product *valuable* to that specific audience.

> Ex: Hairbrush (product)
>
> animal shelter volunteer (audience): relax a hyper dog
>
> florist (audience): get dirt from stems

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Communications Belongs on Your Resume

Show value

Demonstrate commitment

Build trust

Secure executive buy-in

Engage residents

Grow the evidence-based movement

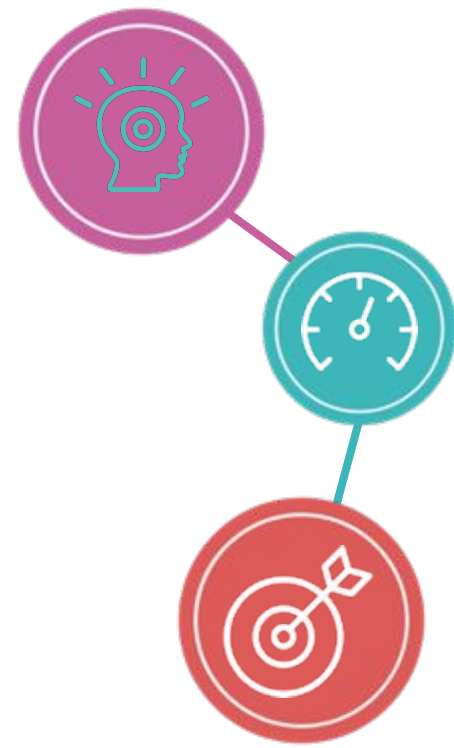# ...But it Might Not Be on There Yet

Risk-aversion

Capacity and time constraints

Incomplete programming

Fear of criticism

Where to start?

HOW TO TELL A STORY
(THAT MAKES PEOPLE WANT TO LISTEN…AND ACT)

What Makes a Story?

INAY VS WIFM

What Makes a Story?

INAY VS WIFM

COMPELLING DATA

What Makes a Story?

INAY VS WIFM

A HUMAN FACE

COMPELLING DATA
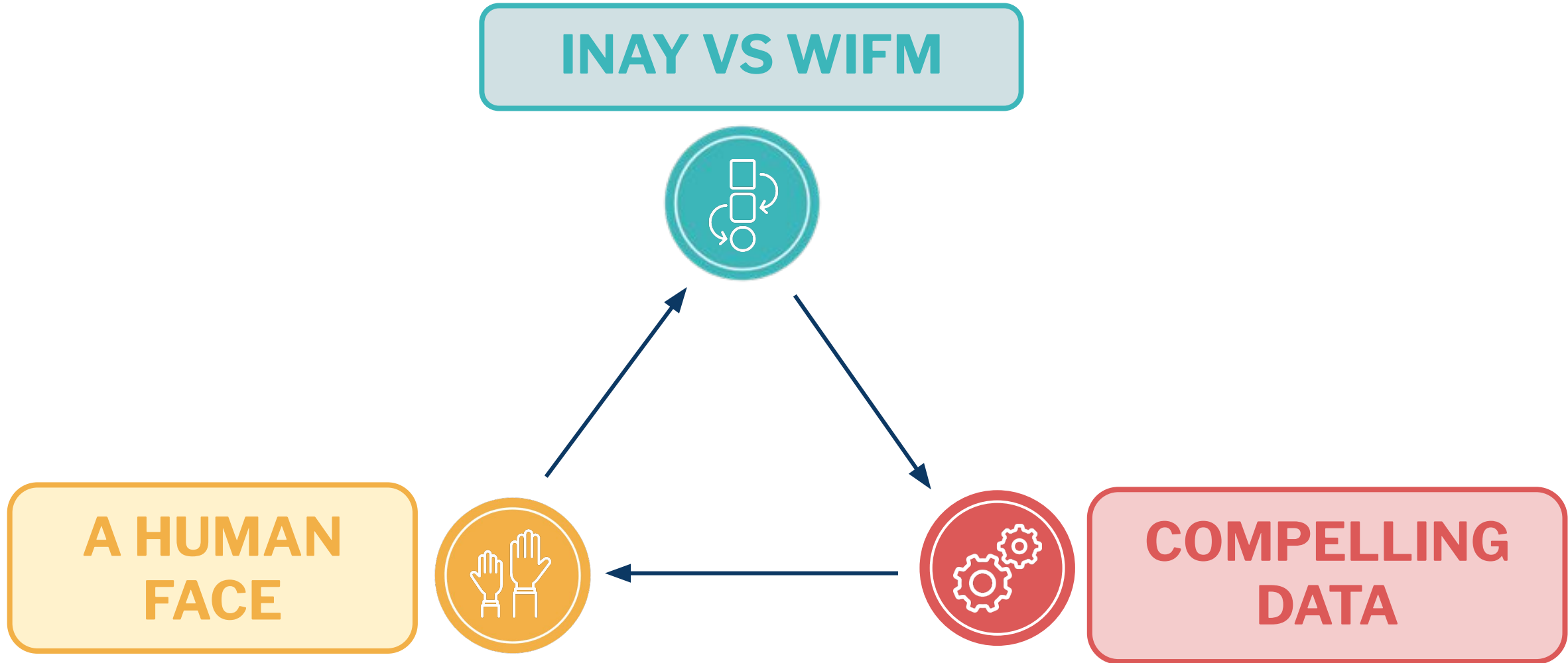
The 7 Storytelling Fundamentals

Create a narrative

Share numbers

Make it digestible

Demonstrate progress

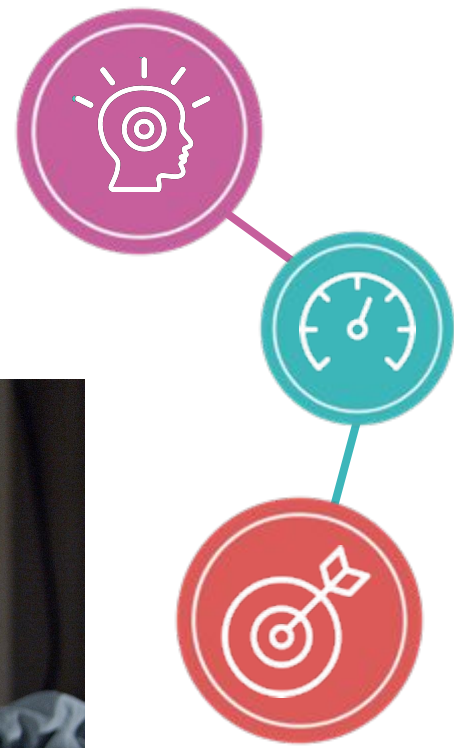*Find your message-carriers*

Involve stakeholders

Don't be dull

Create a Narrative

- Narrative: plot, characters, setting

- Our brains are better at taking in information in story form!

Share Numbers

- Make your narrative stronger with quantitative facts

- TIP: Always follow up with an ask about the numbers:
  - Do you know how many people you've served this year?
  - Think Equity: Who? Which communities?
  - How many employers did you engage?
  - What percent of budget was shifted?
  - How long did employees stay in their position?

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Make it Digestible

- How would you explain it to a 5-year-old?*

- Not about dumbing it down—it makes your story more engaging, simple and relevant
- TIP: Take a policy word and use thesaurus.com to find a word you'd hear at the grocery store.
  - Utilize → use; ecosystem → system; advance → promote

*(Yes, seriously)

Demonstrate Progress

- What counts as progress?
  - Not just having solved a problem, it's any step forward

- Creates buy-in

- Shows commitment

Identify Message-Carriers

- You!
- City Council Members
- City Staff and Frontline Practitioners
- Business Leaders
- Academics
- Nonprofits and Community Organizations
- Workforce Advocates
- Media

- Leverage the power of compounding interest

Involve Stakeholders

- Early and often

- Ask project participants to support your communications strategies

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Don't Be Dull

To show value to your audience, you have to cut through the noise.

3 EXAMPLES OF STORYTELLING THAT WORKED

MEMPHIS
SHOWING WHY IT MATTERS

- Digestible data stories about issues that affect residents

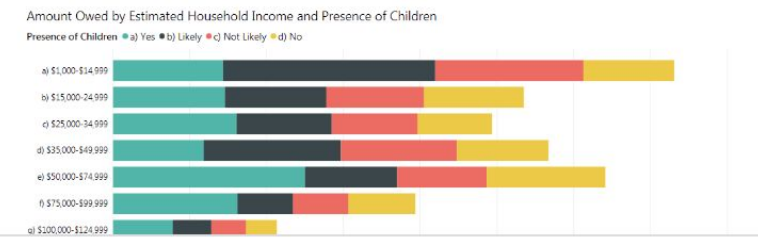## Ending Overdue Library Fines to Support Literacy

Background: Memphis Public Libraries (MPL) seeks to serve as a hub for literacy, learning, and access to the economy for all Memphians. Like most library systems, MPL has long charged overdue fines as a way to encourage timely returns, so that books and materials can remain available to everyone. In the past few years, these fines have generated about $82,000 per year, less than 1% of MPL's total budget. However, charging fines also comes with costs. Processing each fine takes time and resources, and (more importantly) national research shows that as fines grow, they can become an obstacle that prevents people from participating in library services. But is this true in Memphis? MPL dug into the data to find out.

Service Question: How do fines affect access to library services for all Memphians?

Analysis: MPL created a "heat map" of overdue library fines and matched it with census data to better understand who was most impacted. This led to an important realization: fines were disproportionately affecting the Memphians who rely on library services most. While households earning under $25,000 make up about 27% of the population, they accounted for 33% of all unpaid bills. Households in these areas were also more likely to have children under age 18, for whom literacy supports are especially important.

Amount Owed by Zip Code
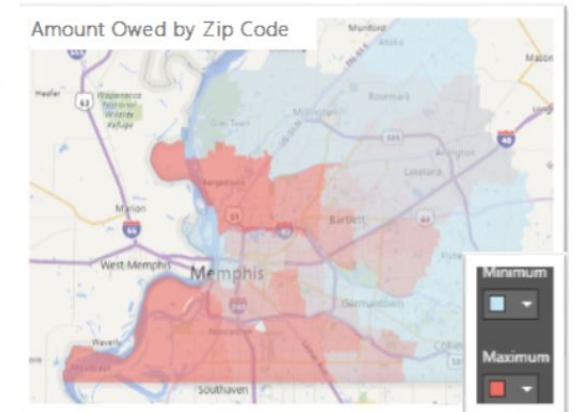
At the same time, only 20% of fines ever received any money – more often, people simply stopped checking out books, or the fines were cancelled for policy reasons. A poll of library visitors at outreach events also found that having overdue fines was the number one reason for not having a library card

Amount Owed by Estimated Household Income and Presence of Children
Presence of Children ● a) Yes ● b) Likely ● c) Not Likely ● d) No

a) $1,000-$14,999
b) $15,000-24,999
c) $25,000-34,999
d) $35,000-49,999
e) $50,000-74,999
f) $75,000-$99,999
g) $100,000-$124,999

LONG BEACH
EQUITABLE OUTREACH

- A 40% increase in engagement with non-English speaking business owners

GILBERT, AZ
HAVE FUN
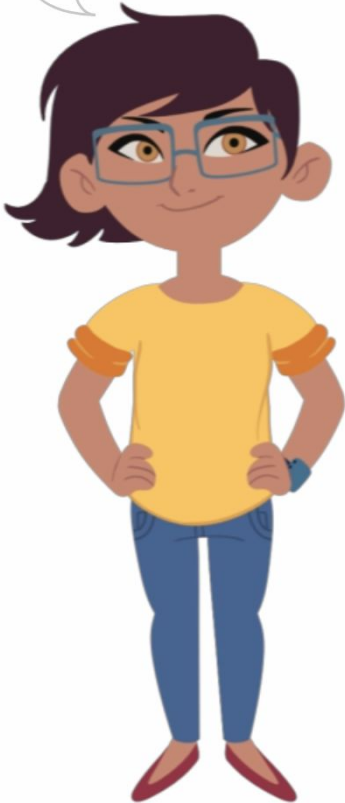
Activity: Storytelling Worksheet

Storytelling Worksheet

- Share-out

- Takeaways

What Counts as Comms?*

- City and county newsletters
- Grant applications & reports
- Coffee with stakeholders
- Booths at events
- Op-eds & letters to the editor
- Social media (yours and your jurisdiction's)
- Blogs
- Mayoral/executive speaking opportunities
- Local media
- Podcasts
- Partnerships
- & more!

*More than you think—communications is a core function of your job!

Activity: Communications Timeline Worksheet

Communications Timeline

- Share-out

- Takeaways

THANK YOU!

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