Data-Driven Narratives: Showcasing Your Mission, Not Just Metrics

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE KNOXVILLE

Agenda

- Introduction
- Learning Objectives
- Building a Data Mindset
- 4-Step Process for Data Driven Narratives
- Resource Toolkit
- Closing and Q&A

Introductions

- In the chat, share:
  - Name
  - Role
  - Location
  - Favorite Fall Activity

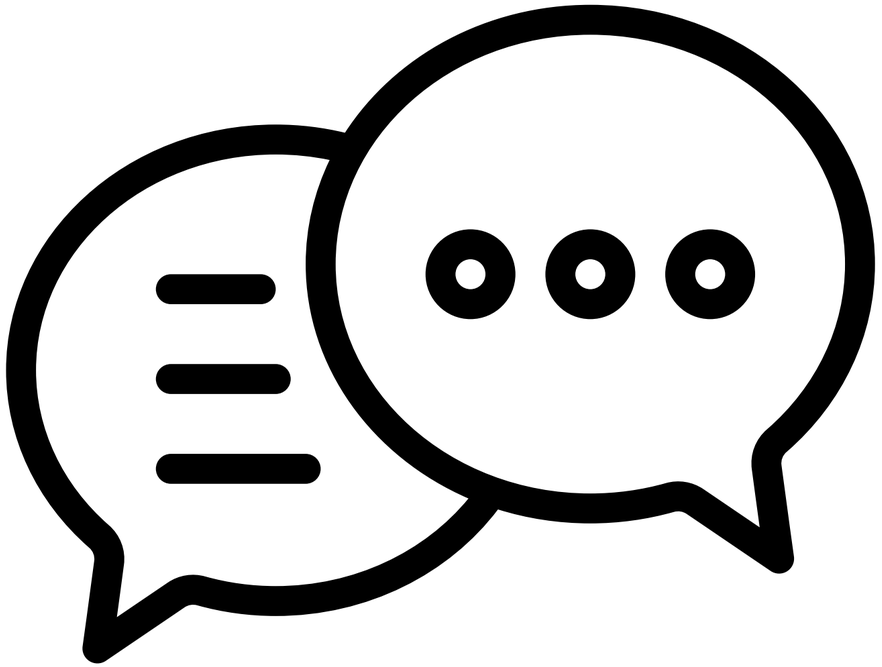
Learning Objectives

- Describe the importance of data mindset in creating data-driven narratives.
- Apply the 4-step storytelling process to interpret program data.
- Combine numbers and family voices to create mission-driven narratives that highlight program impact and actionable insights.

Building a Data Mindset: From Pieces to Meaning

Share in the chat...

What are a few words that come to mind when you think of the word “data”?



Raw Data – Just the Pieces

Rental Assistance

Individual Therapy

Resume Building

Utilities Paid

Stories & Feedback from Families

Sorted & Arranged: Finding Patterns

Housing Supports

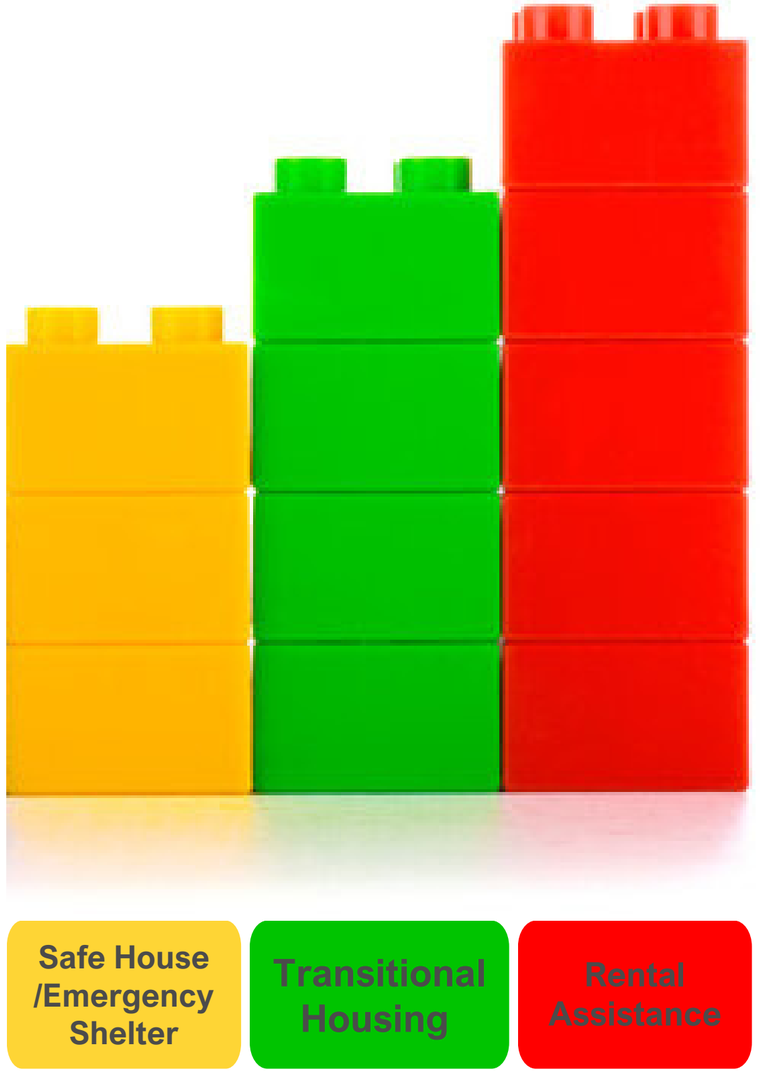
Financial Supports

Emotional Supports

Education Supports

Presented Visually – Seeing the Big Picture

Housing Supports



Explained with a Story–
Making it Matter

1

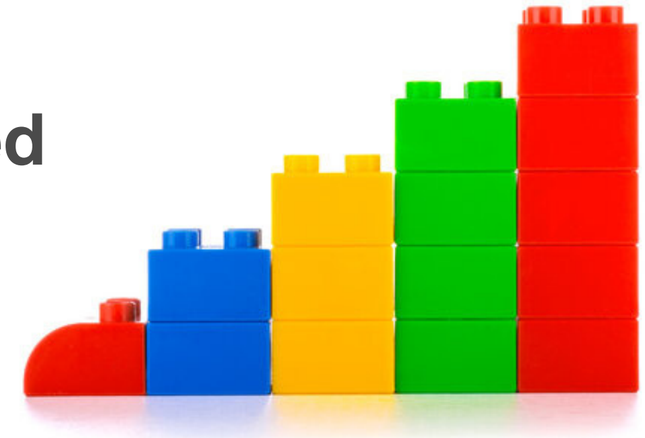
Raw Data

2

Sorted & Arranged

3

Presented Visually



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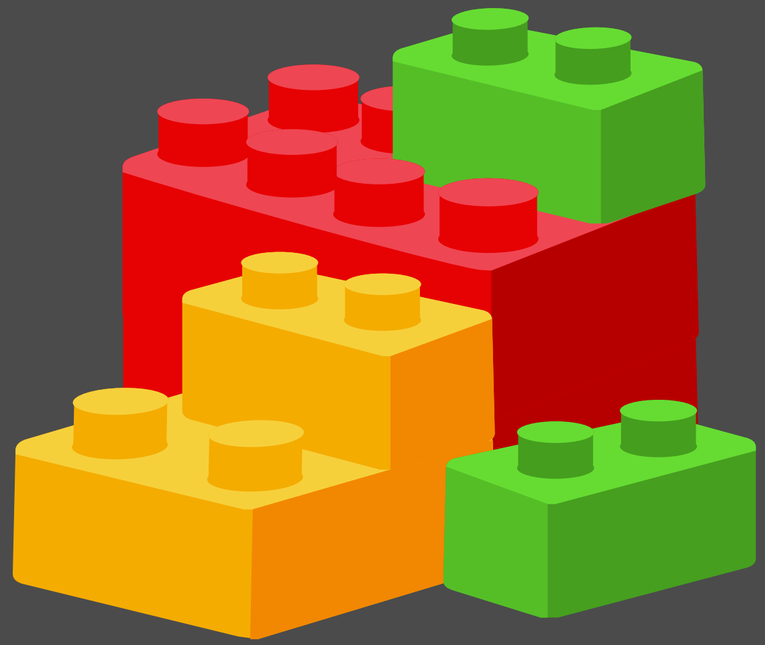
Explained with a Story

4-Step Process for Data-Driven Narratives

- What
- Here’s What
- So What
- Now What



Showcasing Your Mission, not Just Metrics

Data Storytelling Guide

What	Here's What	So What	Now What
Question	**Observe**	**Infer**	**Act**
Begin with a key question the data should answer about families.	Observe and share the facts from the data.	Draw inferences from the facts by identifying what it suggests about families' experiences and highlighting what the numbers and family voices together reveal.	Act on the insight by identifying what the program should do next.

What (Question)

- Begin with a strong question:
  - Specific to one program area or activity
  - Open-ended (more than yes/no or a number, asks “how” or “in what ways”)
  - Focused on family outcomes, not just numbers

What (Question) Examples

✗ Closed Questions (Numbers Only)	✓ Open-Ended Question (Family-Centered)
How many housing services did the program provide?	In what ways do housing supports influence families' stability and well-being?
How many financial services did the program provide?	In what ways does financial assistance impact families' stability and ability to meet essential needs?

What: Anatomy of a Strong Question

Starter (Open-Ended):
"In what ways…" → invites more than yes/no or a number.

Program Area/Activity: "… housing supports…" → ties directly to one service area.

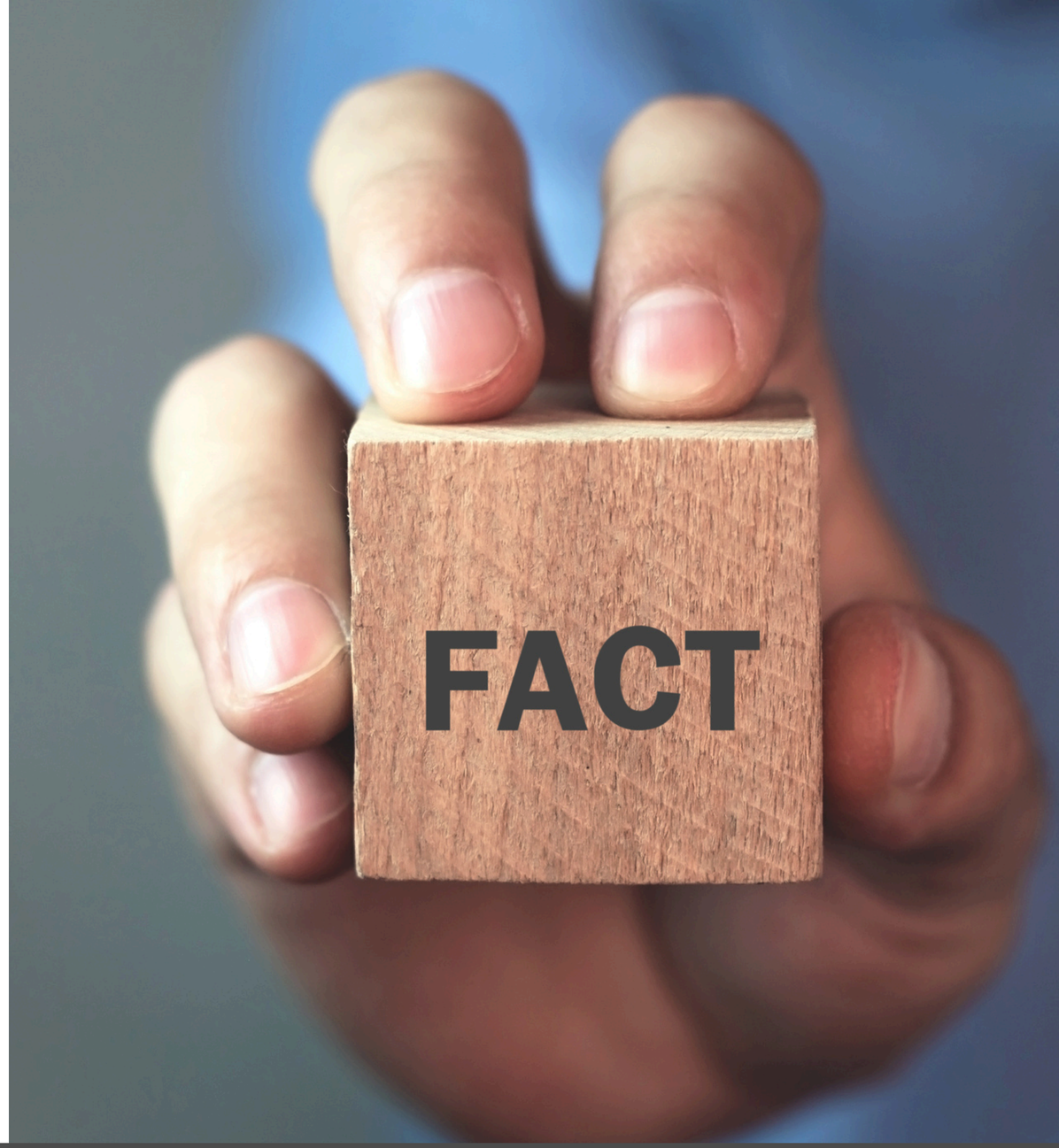
In what ways do **housing supports** **influence families' stability and well-being?**

Family Focus:
"…influence families' stability and well-being?" → centers on family impact, not just numbers.

Here's What (Observe)

What does the data say factually?

- Look at the data and share the facts
- Summarize totals or averages
- Include what families say
- **Why?** → It helps us observe patterns before jumping to conclusions



Here's What (Observe)

Example:

- In total, **128 families received** housing support this year.
- On average, **32** families per quarter.

- **Family voice:**
  - "The rent help kept us from being kicked out. It gave me time to catch up."
  - "Staying in transitional housing gave us a safe place while I looked for work."
  - "The shelter was the only option when things got bad at home. I don't know what we would've done without it."

So What (Infer)

What conclusions or inferences might you draw from the facts?

- Draw conclusions or inferences from the facts.
- Identify what the data suggests about families' needs and experiences.
- Highlight what the numbers and family voices together reveal.
- **Why?** → It helps us move from facts to insight.

So What Narrative (Numbers + Voices + Meaning)

Here's What: Start with Numbers

This year, 128 families received housing support through our program, 80 received rental assistance, 25 found stability in transitional housing, and 23 turned to safe houses during crisis.

Behind every number is a story. One parent shared, "The rent help kept us from being kicked out." For others, transitional housing gave time to find work, and safe houses provided protection when home was not a safe.

Families in our community face real challenges with housing stability. These supports didn't just provide shelter, they prevented evictions, offered safety, and gave families the stability to begin rebuilding their lives.

So What Narrative (Numbers + Voices + Meaning)

Here's What: Start with Numbers

Here's What: Share What Families Say

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So What Narrative (Numbers + Voices + Meaning)

Here's What: Start with Numbers

Here's What: Share What Families Say

Now What: Infer the Meaning

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Now What (Act)

What internal and external action steps will the program take?

- Decide what should happen because of what we learned
- Turn meaning into action for families and programs
- Why? → It helps move from insight to impact

Now What: Examples of Action

Internal Action (within program)

- Adjust or improve how services are delivered.
- Train staff or volunteers based on what the data shows.
- Update policies, forms, or tracking tools to capture better information.
- Add reflection time so staff can learn from the data and family voices.
- Reallocate resources (time, staff, funds) toward the biggest needs

External (with partners/ community)

- Share findings with community partners, funders, or policymakers.
- Build or strengthen partnerships to address gaps.
- Raise awareness in the community about families' needs.
- Advocate for new or expanded resources.
- Work with other organizations to coordinate services more effectively.

Resource Toolkit

- What, Here's What, So What, Now What Template
- Question Ideas for Families

Thank you!

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