

# Guide to Data Storytelling

Compiled and synthesized by Vangie P. Garcia, PE, PMP

GPC Forum: "Drawing the Story Out of Numbers" on March 3, 2017

## **Engage your audience**

1. Ask "why does it matter?" Start with a broad, unbiased question to which you do not know the answer. Interesting story ideas come from good questions.
2. Personally acknowledge your bias at the start. Sometimes stories reveal itself as you gather the data.

## **Build the Scene**

1. Use reliable sources and valid analysis – know the limitations of that data.
2. Seek multiple perspectives on results and interpretation.
3. Consider what the desired conditions are. What are the standards that people are comparing to? What are the expectations?
4. Present the existing conditions as clear and unbiased as possible.

## **Build Tension and Release Tension**

1. Use qualitative data to anchor and humanize story.
2. Answer the questions: Who cares? What is the impact? What is the significant difference between the existing and desired conditions?
3. The tension should not be the difference between existing conditions and desired conditions but acknowledgement that there is work required to get there. There should be a resonance that the desired conditions are generally accepted or needed.

## **Focus on what is important**

1. Build story around most important results – maintain this focus even if you broaden coverage. Do not overwhelm people with too much data.
2. Identify factors, if removed or altered, would change what is happening.

## **Keep the flow logical**

1. Choose appropriate visualization to clarify the story
2. Using graphics for data helps answer "What am I looking at?" Build on prior graphics to lead audience through the logic.
3. Call attention to detail afterward. Possibly use animation to show changes.

## **Make it feel conclusive**

1. Conclude with the intent of what you are trying to say or what you want to happen.
2. Bring the audience full circle in seeing that what you are trying to do or asking for results in something they ultimately desire, as well.

*"Metrics can only tell you what has happened and what might happen based on their circumference of the world. Eco-systems are fragile and they require balance. People are not the same as numbers and they definitely don't always add up to their sum; however, they are capable of exceeding their value when they are treated right." – Ellen Woods, Consultant for Innovation and Customer Journey*