

Storytelling for Reentry Programs:
Using the Power of Story to Build Strong Support for Your Program Transcript

Lisa Bailey Vav...: Welcome, everybody. Thank you for joining us today for this webinar presentation on storytelling for reentry programs. My name is Lisa Vavonese, and I'm happy that you've joined us.

Before I get started, I did want to share a couple pieces of housekeeping. First, this webinar is being recorded and will be posted to the NRRC website. All attendees, you've been muted and you can't unmute, but we welcome you to take full advantage of the chat and Q&A function. Myself and my co-presenter, who I will introduce in just a moment, we'll try to monitor throughout both the chat and the Q&A so that we can answer your questions as they come up.

I'm happy to be joined today with Melissa. Melissa is a project manager for Michigan Works! Second Chance Program, and they were awarded their grant in 2019. Melissa's team assist individuals with felony convictions make the transition from jail to the community. She has worked in workforce development for over 25 years, many of those years working with reentry in jails and prisons. Melissa holds additional certifications in offender workforce development and restorative justice mediation. She also sat on the board of directors for Companions on a Journey, a reentry mentoring program, and The Upper Room, which is a safe house for men and women in substance abuse recovery. I mentioned at the start that my name's Lisa Vavonese. I work at the Center for Court Innovation, and we are currently providing training and technical assistance through BJA for Second Chance Act Programs who want to focus in on evaluation and sustainability. So Melissa and I are happy to have you with us today.

Well, if we're going to talk about storytelling, why don't I start us off with an actual story? And this is a true story. About five years ago, I helped develop and launch the Near Westside Peacemaking Project. And that's a picture of our Peacemaking Center on the screen for you. It was a restorative justice program that diverted cases out of the courts and back into the community. Our very first case was Rose and Clara.

Now, Rose and Clara went from being friends to outright enemies in a matter of weeks. Their arguments built until they were pulling hair, trailing each other home from school, hitting, spitting, getting in fights at the Rite Aid parking lot. Other kids egged them on, called them names, said that they were fairies if they didn't fight. After a particularly bad fight at school when a knife was pulled, both Rose and Clara were kicked out and the police were called. This is where the Near Westside Peacemaking Center stepped in. Our amazing coordinator, Leah, brought together the two girls and their grownups into a peacemaking circle and explained that there was a better way.

Leah invited three volunteer community peacemakers, all women, some young, some mothers themselves, all who knew what it was like to grow up in a rough neighborhood where not standing up for yourself was seen as weak. At first, their grownups were quick to blame and point fingers, but something shifted during circle. Everyone shared their experiences, and that's what Rose and Clara needed. They needed their grownups to say, "I hear you." They needed community members to say, "Knock it off, this is your future." And so, Rose and Clara, they apologized and their grownups apologized. Rose and Clara agreed to stop the fighting. They both were allowed back to school, and the police investigation would go no further. During the very first year of the Near Westside Peacemaking Project, 26 cases were accepted into peacemaking with 56 people in conflict and 23 trained community peacemakers and 27 community support people, the grownups.

All right, I'm going to put you to work right away during our time together, and we're going to launch a poll. You will see this pop quiz on the right side of your screen. We're going to ask you some questions about the story that I just told. Feel free to go ahead and get started. We're going to give you about 45 seconds to answer all three questions. I am going to read those questions out loud if it helps some folks with technology or with vision impairment. So the first question, who was in conflict? You can choose A, two school-aged girls, B, two... Or excuse me, B, gang members, C, moms of infant children. Next, what did the program do? Was it, A, anger management, B, peacemaking circles, or C, art therapy. And the final question, how many cases entered the program in the first year? A, 44, B, 12 or C, 26?

About 10 more seconds to enter your answers. Again, it's on the right-hand side of your screen. All right, I'll have them close out the poll and we'll see the results in just one moment.

All right, so we had quite a few people participate, thank you very much. The first question, overwhelming for those who participated got it right, that the people in conflict were two school-aged girls. What did the program do? I gave it away it was peacemaking circles. Again, a huge number of responses correctly. And then, how many cases... This one's always a little more trickier because it's a number, but we did get a great number of people saying 26, which was the answer. So I think that's an interesting scenario and snapshot for us. We'll start to unravel those results. That question one and two very confident responses, we got almost everybody selecting the correct answer. And then question three about the number was a little bit lower in getting the correct response rate, and we're going to talk through what that means through our presentation.

So why storytelling? I love this quote from Andy Goodman who is one of the thought leaders about storytelling for not-for-profit. And I think his quote says it all, "People can't face facts if they're looking the wrong way." So first, we tell them a story. And this is true no matter what information about your program you're sharing, your program model, your data, your successes, tell it with a

story. For thousands of years, stories have been the currency of human communication, and it's the same today, it's no different. Our identities are derived from stories. They shape our beliefs. They shape our daily decisions. We're guided by the stories we tell ourselves, and the brain science supports this.

According to scientists, information is better retained when it's told through a story. People only retain about one fifth of what they read, but four-fifths of the images that are formed in their mind. And stories form images and symbols in our brain, and they're generally recalled more accurately than facts. Again, the number from the pop quiz was harder to remember even though it was one of the very last things I mentioned than the story that I told about the girls and what the program did. Another example, I have a question for you, what animal ate little Red Riding Hoods grandma? I'm sure most of you know of the answer, it was the wolf. And why do we remember that? Probably most of us haven't read or heard that story in years, maybe decades, because it's the image we have in our mind. Our brain has retained that image.

So what does storytelling mean for your program's data? Why storytelling for evaluation findings? Numbers are critical, and they play an indispensable role in telling the story of your program. They provide legitimacy, and they demonstrate value. After all, I told you that the Peacemaking Program accepted 26 cases its first year. Without the numbers, how would you have known that Rose and Clara weren't the only case? How would you know that the police continued to value the program and referred more cases? Without collecting the data and analyzing it, you wouldn't learn that in the second year of the program, only one participant was rearrested on new charges. Learning how to share your data with a story triggers the connection between the brain and the image being formed. And remember, people remember images, so we need to tell our data with a story.

For today, we're going to break this apart into different sections, and you'll see the agenda on the screen. We are going to first talk about telling a compelling narrative. We're next going to talk about how you would tell a story with your data. So let's get started.

Good stories, they cut through the clutter, they connect with people's hearts, and they open their minds to your point of view. Dull stories, they don't do that. And all too often, what programs are telling are dull stories. I cannot overemphasize this point, that you need to know your audience. Audience is key, and it doesn't matter if you're telling your story in print or you're saying it out loud. So to understand your audience, you need to ask, who needs to know about your program? Who is the audience in the first place? What do they need to know about your program? When do they need to be informed? What's the frequency that they need to be informed? And how should they be informed? Should it be social media? Should it be email, a flyer, a newsletter, annual report, maybe a live presentation? Your audience could be a funder, policymaker, elected official, program partners, program participants,

neighborhoods, communities. Know your audience and get specific about what type of communication will be most effective for that audience. Your presentation should be different depending on your audience. And be prepared no matter who that audience is.

Okay, Melissa, I want to toss it over to you and for you to give us a little bit of information as a sneak peek for our audience today.

Melissa Stolfo:

Hi, everybody. I'm Melissa, and I'd like you to meet Josh. In a 17-year period, Josh had seven felony convictions. He really was in a revolving door in the Berrien County Jail. However, somehow he did not land up in prison. So he is currently on 24 months probation, and that's how he ended up in the Second Chance Program. Now, you're going to hear a lot more about Josh's story later in this presentation, but first I'd like to give you a brief summary of how I learned about storytelling and presentations.

While we were still in the planning phase of our Second Chance Act Program, I was really struggling with putting together a presentation to use as a community awareness informational. I was getting ready to do the rounds to area rotary and Kiwanis clubs, and the presentation I had created was so boring and so bland that I was afraid I was going to lose my audience and they were all going to fall off to sleep on me. And then the timing was so perfect. I saw the RTI webinar Storytelling for Second Chance Act Program, and it just opened new doors for me. I was so inspired.

Now, at that point, we were still in the planning phase. I didn't even have any participants yet. So what I did was I created Chris, and Chris was just a little icon stick figure. I created his story so that it would mirror the life of so many people coming out of incarceration. Well, I have to tell you, the story was a big hit, nobody fell asleep during my presentation, so I know by experience how powerful storytelling can be.

Then about a year and a half later, I was tasked with creating a presentation for an internal audience. Our Second Chance Program is connected to a Michigan Works! One Stop, so we have a lot of things going on at all times. The presentation was meant to be informative, to let all of our coworkers know here's what we're doing, here's who we're helping, and here's how we're doing it. So it wasn't a very big jump. I took Chris, replaced him with Josh, and I was able to use Josh's real story for my internal presentation. I have to say, Josh's story engaged my audience, and it definitely provided education about the program while bringing the people we serve upfront and into real life story. So, I was so excited about that, and I was so excited to be invited here to share Josh's story with you. You're going to hear a lot more about Josh's story later, but for right now, I'm going to turn it back over to Lisa.

Lisa Bailey Vav...:

Thank you, Melissa. Now, everyone today has the benefit of that presentation that you saw that helped you create first your example story using not a real life person but based on your years of experience of working with folks, and then

being able to craft that into an actual program participant story. So I'm going to walk through some of those fundamentals that Melissa learned from the presentation she described, and then we're going to hear Melissa share that story about Josh and some of the lessons she learned along the way.

The first piece that I'm going to start with is to let you know that there's not one way to tell a story for it to be effective. There are many experts in the field of storytelling, and if you Google search it, you will find that list is long. I think it's best to look to advice from those that speak to you in your program. What would you feel natural doing it? If it's not authentic, people aren't going to buy it anyway. So really know that you can look to the field and see whatever expert that you think really touches you and how you would want to describe the story of your program. Today, I'm going to be sharing some of the best advice I've heard over the years, and one of those people is Andy Goodman, who I already read one of his quotes earlier, but I want to share his art of storytelling and really the questions that he hones in that you should ask when you're crafting your story. You really need to ask, who's the protagonist?

No, your organization cannot be the protagonist. Stories are about people. Maybe it's a specific staff member, or maybe it's a program participant, but it should be personal. Then you need to ask, what's the hook? How are you going to draw your audience in that they want to hear more about your story? Ask yourselves, "What's going to keep it interesting?" Characters and stories encounter roadblocks. There's got to be something interesting to listen to. Where is the conflict? There's no drama without conflict. This point is really important. Have you included telling details? Good stories have just enough detail to set the theme, and they bring life to the characters, to the people because that's who your protagonist is, that's the personal part. Ask yourselves, "What's the emotional hook?" Audiences want more than a repetition of facts, they want an emotional experience. Lastly, is your meaning clear? Your story should have a crystal clear role. Your audience should know why you're telling it in the first place.

Now that we talked a bit about crafting your story, and remember I said that could be for print or live presentation, let me share some specifics and some tips around how to effectively deliver a story orally. This part can feel very scary for folks, particularly for folks that are used to working in programs directly with clients, now I need to get up in front of an audience. How am I going to tell this story in a compelling way? So I want to give you some advice on that aspect as well.

So there's a long list here on your screen that you can read through some of the most important pieces around public speaking. I'm going to focus on two that I think are under-emphasized and not easy. One of those is voice modulation, and that refers to how you control your voice. We do this naturally in conversation. When we speak, we change our message by varying the tone, the stress on words, the pitch, and changing the rate of our speech. Voice modulation needs to be practiced because it's not easy, particularly when delivering a

presentation. It really can mean the difference between that sleeping audience Melissa was describing and a captivated audience. In general, speak slowly. There is a power in pausing. You can catch your breath, find your place, but it also conveys importance. It's something you want the audience to sit with. You should stress certain words for emphasis. You should vary your pitch. Maybe try a whisper. Do different things to keep your audience engaged. Also, practice, practice, practice. You want to be natural, you want to flow, and that comes from practicing.

The other bullet point that I want to mention is body language, and that's your gestures, your stance, your facial expressions. I feel like I had to learn it all over again for Zoom and all these virtual webinars because I am one of those hand people that flails their hands around, and over video, it's crazy distracting so I have to be careful. So really think about your body language. Think about if you're standing tall, good posture. You don't want your arms crossed in front of your chest. You want to be open because you really do want to have that connection with your audience. Also, face your audience as much as possible. If you're in person, don't look back. I can't do that on video because you won't be able to hear me with my microphone, but don't look back at a screen. You want to make sure that everybody hears you and you're facing your audience. And if you have some space, if you're in person and you're not a postage stamp on a screen and you have some space, move around. Use that space. Feel comfortable. Most important, be yourself and try to be relaxed and stay positive. So if for you standing behind a podium is what you need, then you do that. Or if you're like me and you want to roam around the room, take that approach.

Some additional advice about storytelling, and this is back again to whether you're doing it in print or you're doing it in person. You really don't want to overwhelm the audience with too many characters, locations, and detail. You want enough, but you don't want too much too soon. Also, your audience should see themselves in the story. Avoid big categories of people and buzz phrases. There's no at-risk use, no disenfranchised senior citizens, it's just people facing challenges. It's not Tim is a homeless man, it's Tim is a son, he's a brother, and he lost his job, and that's what led to his homelessness.

Don't accept we, and I think this goes back to our protagonist. We becomes impersonal. It's really easy to hide behind we. It's important for the listener to know exactly what drove the action. It gives the story clarity and life. Also, show some vulnerability, sharing a mistake or mishap. It creates empathy for the storyteller and authenticity to the story. Also, characters that are flawed are more interesting. Quotes in telling details, they add life to the story and they fix the story and time and place. So really considering using those if you feel like you have something particularly effective. Also mention something about changing belief, because if you are in the business of changing belief, it's important that you try to do that with your story.

I think a good example might be from the early 1990s. This example was shared by Andy Goodman, the expert that I mentioned earlier. But in the early nineties, most Americans supported the idea of the death penalty. There was poll after poll taken that most Americans supported this idea of an eye for an eye. And there was a movement to talk about ending the death penalty, but the moral thing wasn't hitting audiences because they have already spoken that they approve of the death penalty. So this one organization called the Innocence Project knew that they needed to change the narrative around talking about the death penalty in the United States.

So instead of asking if it was morally right or wrong, they started sharing stories about the wrongly convicted based on DNA evidence. Personal, real, authentic stories. And they backed up those stories with the research that showed that those stories were not the occasional mistake but an alarming trend. And this narrative changed the perspective or the belief for the majority of the Americans that there had to be a moratorium or a pause on death penalty cases because of these harms that would be created from wrongful convictions. So if you're in the business of trying to change beliefs, and maybe it's about the population that you're working with with your reentry program, know that storytelling can be a really effective way to do that.

All right, Melissa, I want to go back to you and hear more about Josh.

Melissa Stolfo:

Well, I'm happy to, thank you. The very first time when Josh got out of jail, he had no IDs, no birth certificates, or no social security cards. And you know what? Quite honestly, he had no way to pay for anything that might have had a fine or a fee with it anyway. Also remember, Josh was released right in the height of the pandemic, so you couldn't just walk into an office and get assistance. So what really seemed like what should have been a very simple task for Josh was actually really overwhelming to him. Next slide, please, Lisa.

So it's so important that you get those IDs right away. A sense of urgency has to be applied for those. Employment is a very common term of probation, and over 80% of incarcerated individuals come out of incarceration without the IDs they need for employment. And then, a lot of folks need birth certificates that are out of county or even out of state. That delays the process. Then when you're starting to look to get driver's license, there's all kinds of fines and fees and there's suspensions possibly in other states. And that just causes further delay. Next slide, please, Lisa.

So the very, very first time we met with Josh, we kept that urgency right in the forefront, and we started working with him to fill out the applications he was going to need to get those appropriate IDs. We also sat down and worked with him to identify what documents he needed to submit with those applications, because each form of ID, it seems like it takes different documents to prove it. And then, the most important part, we submitted a check request to our fiscal department, and we tried to put that sense of urgency in there so we could get that check back. Now, we submitted it to Jill, that's Jill's smiling face there, and

she understood that sense of urgency. She worked with us to push that check through almost immediately. So we were able to get those applications in the mail the very next day.

Now, stepping off of Josh's story for just a moment, you might wonder, "Why did I put Jill's smiling face in this presentation that's all about Josh and his story?" Well, if you were recall, this was actually an internal presentation, so it was important to me that I brought all the people and the players in our organization into this story, because then it really set up that feeling of teamwork, and it brought our whole team more into the story. And they became very vested in the story because they were a part of it. So it was really a good strategy and it worked out really well for me. Next slide, Lisa.

And then, again, those partnerships within our organization. During the pandemic, the Secretary of State appointments, and that's in Michigan, that's where you go to get a picture ID, they were almost impossible to get. Another coworker in our organization, Rachel, that's her smiling there at us, she had already formed a partnership with the Secretary of State. She understood the urgency we had to get Josh in there to get that picture ID for him. She called her contacts. She was actually able to get Josh an appointment at the Secretary of State the very next day. And he had his picture ID back and in his pocket within a couple of days. Next slide, Lisa.

So, we got him an ID. Josh was one of the lucky ones. He came out of incarceration with a safe place to live, but not everybody is lucky. People who have been incarcerated are 10% more likely to be homeless than the general public. Although we did not have to help Josh with temporary housing, Second Chance can provide temporary housing for those who may need it. Next slide, please.

But Josh was not lucky when it came to child support. He had some really severe child support issues. He was actually afraid to go get a job because he had so many bench warrants out on him for lack of child support payments. Plus, his payments were set at 80% of his projected income. That does not leave good incentive to run out and get a job when you know you're still going to be totally broke. And, his driver's license had been suspended for years due to delinquent child support payments. That was not connected to any criminal activity, it was strictly connected to his child support payments. Next slide, Lisa.

Again, those partnerships, I cannot say how important they were to Josh's story. Steve, another coworker, had a really good relationship with the Berrien County Friend of the Court. Friend of the Court in Michigan is wherever everything child support goes through. We had to get those bench warrants lifted before Josh could go out and job search. Steve was able to get Josh an appointment within a couple of days. Josh went to that appointment, and the Friend of the Court worked beautifully with Josh. They lifted all his bench warrants, they took the suspension off his driver's license, and they even sat down and worked out a

reasonable payment system based on what his projected income would probably be. Next slide, Lisa.

So that was it, Josh had everything taken care of and he was ready for employment. So the Second Chance team sat down, we worked out a resume. We worked on application completion and some interview skills with Josh. And then the most important thing we did with him was we talked to Paul, and that's Paul, and he's our business serviceman manager. Paul gave us all the information we needed about felon-friendly employers in the area where Josh lived. Josh got really excited to find out he had so many options available to him. He never dreamed they were out there. He picked his top employers that he thought he would really like to work with, and we created a job plan. Josh went out and he started putting on applications. Next slide, please.

And you know what? It didn't take but a few days and Josh got a job. The really cool part of it was it wasn't just any job, it was the job he had targeted from the information that we had received from Paul in the business service team. So from there, all Second Chance had to do is we provided him with some steel-toe boots that he needed for work, a couple changes of work clothes, and Josh began employment not more than three to four weeks after the very first day we saw him. Okay, next slide, Lisa.

And then after a couple weeks of working, he got a couple paychecks under his belt, Josh went to the Secretary of State and he got his driver's license for the first time in years. I cannot tell you how excited he was when he picked up the phone and said, "You guys aren't going to believe what I'm holding in my hand." Next slide, Lisa.

So, it sounds like everything is going really good with Josh. You probably want to know where's Josh and what's he doing now? Lisa, you've got the slide that'll show us that. Okay, he is feeling great. He is sober for the first time in a long time, and he's productive and he enjoys being productive. His child support payments are totally under control. He's driving legally for the first time in years, and he isn't even worried about being picked up on a bench warrant. And that's, again, the first time in years. At the time that this presentation was made, he had celebrated 226 days of employment. Okay, last slide... oh, mope, next slide, please, Lisa.

All right, so you may ask, "How come Josh did so much better this time than he has ever done in the past?" Lisa. Because he's in Second Chance, of course. Would there be any other answer? This was how I ended my internal presentation, and it was very well received and my coworkers really enjoyed how I had wrapped them into the presentation. So before I close, what I would like to do is take a look at Josh's story and let's see, did it fit the art of storytelling? Lisa, next slide. There we go.

So let's ask, who was the protagonist? Well, there's no question, that was on Josh and his seven felony convictions he was dragging along behind him. What's

the hook? He really wanted to move forward but didn't know how and didn't have the means in which to do so. So what kept the story interesting? I think it was the many barriers that he had and what he needed to move forward to overcome those barriers. And then I wondered, what's the conflict? Well, there's no question, that was the barriers themselves and how he had to get over them. And did we include the telling details? I think we did. It told about his struggles. The story told the Second Chance efforts. And it did talk about all the partners that it did take to get him to a successful place. Where's the emotion? I think it's in the whole story. You go up and down, he succeeds, he hits another barrier. I think it's very emotional to see somebody who wants to succeed that way. And then was the meaning clear? I think so. Anyone, you can get success with the assistance of the Second Chance Program and the many partners it took.

I think we did a good job of meeting the art of storytelling. And I will have to say, thank you, Josh, for allowing us to use your story. I think before we go onto section part two we have time for questions.

Lisa Bailey Vav...:

Yes. Thank you so much for sharing, Melissa. I love the presentation that you brought to sharing the story and really the emotion and the clear connection to the story that you brought. If anyone would like to ask a question, we do have the chat function or the Q&A function. Melissa's going to stay on for the whole presentation, so if you're not quite ready to ask the question right now, that's not a problem, we can have Melissa answer at the end of this second part of the presentation.

Well, please, we welcome you to put those questions in as we go, but I'll move on to part two. Part two is: Tell a story with your data. What on earth do I mean by that? Facts and data are more memorable when presented in the form of a story. And this makes sense if we think back to the science that I shared earlier. Stories engage both the left and the right side of the brain. Numbers only engage the left side of the brain, the analytical part.

I want to pull apart to two different concepts at the very beginning of talking about storytelling and data. You may be familiar with the first one, which is data visualization. Generally, you don't share your spreadsheet of numbers during a presentation. Most of us are at the point where we would share a graph or a chart that reflects back what all those numbers we've been tracking in our case management system or on our Excel spreadsheets say. The storytelling part is using words to explain what that data visualization means. It's the story behind your data. It's what the numbers are telling your audience.

Our key concept, surprise, surprise, know your audience. Who are they? What do they care about? What keeps them up at night? Melissa clearly knew her audience. It was internal staff to get them to know about the project, feel connected to the project. She knew that showing faces of coworkers was going to get everybody excited, engaged. So you need to know that audience and make sure that you're directing to that audience things that they would want to

know. Also, directing the audiences, where do you want your audience to look? So when you're sharing the data, what is it that you want them to look at? And you need to do that by eliminating clutter from any of your data visualizations, and do not include any data that's not conveying a meaning. Sometimes we have such fancy case management systems or such fancy charts and graphs or pinpoints of data that we just want to share everything. But if it's not conveying a meaning to your audience, you really don't need to share it.

And lastly, use your words. Words make numbers and pictures understandable to the audience. Use words to explain the key takeaways. Compelling stories follow a narrative arc because you need tension there. So what's the tension, and why does it matter to your audience? And I want to walk through and break a lot of this apart.

Decluttering your data. Your audience can't see facts if they're not looking. That's what Andy Goodman told us. So we want to make it easy for our audience to know what we want them to see when we're sharing our data visualization. And some key tools to doing that are contrast, color, position, and added marks. Almost always, less is more. And, if a piece of data, even if it's fancy, isn't adding to the story you're telling, remove it from your data visualization. Cole Nussbaumer is really good at demonstrating all of these techniques, and she has a large number of YouTube videos online you can watch for free, and they're super fun to watch. So Google her name, watch some of her YouTube videos because they really do a great job of illustrating all of these points, and in particular, how you can declutter your data. So I'm going to move through an example with you.

Okay, so here's a picture. This is something I'm sharing with my audience. This is an example for you all. The thing I want you to know, the piece of data I want you to have, is that there's a fire truck in this picture. Okay, find the fire truck. If you found it, did it take you a second to find it, to find that fire truck in that piece of data I'm sharing, the picture that I'm sharing? Okay, I've put a mark on my visualization. How about now? Now that I've added that mark, isn't it much easier for you to find the fire truck? How about now? That's even better. What I want you to know from this visualization is that there's a fire truck. So what have I done? I've decluttered my data visualization by using contrast and color and added marks. Now you and the audience can focus on the piece of data I want you to have, which is that there's a red fire truck in this picture. Audiences' eyes will be pulled away if there's too much going on. So you can use contrast and color to help them focus. After all, you don't want them to miss the point of why you're sharing a piece of data.

Let's go to something that maybe feels more something like you would do with your program, and that you are going to share a chart or something else to be a visualization. This is really going to go to that important aspect of decluttering your data, and this is another example from Cole. This is a tweet. This image on your screen is a tweet from the Pew Research Center. As it says at the top, more Americans get news on line. 50% of the public now cites the internet as the

main source of national and international news. So below television but above newspaper and radio. So thinking about this, this data is about the internet and the percentage of Americans that cite it as their main source of news. But looking at this graph, it kind of takes me a long point to get to that, to understand it. I'm doing a lot of work here.

There's quite a few labels. There are a little bit all over the place. I mean, newspapers on the left, it's kind of hard to even read it because of the color. Then television is at the top, then radio's down below, and then internet's to the right. If I first look at the graph, which most people are going to do before reading the words, I'm not confident what the takeaway is from these things that they're sharing. I have to go to the words to be able to get any sense of what it is they might want to be telling me.

So this is what Cole did. She redesigned this visual to really help the audience understand what they were trying to say, to eliminate the work that the audience would have to do. So you can see, she got rid of the graph order. She titled the x-axis and she decreased her color intensity with a softer hue. She moved the title, Main Source For News, to the left, and that's because people read left to right from top to bottom. And that avoids a lot of eye jumping. She moved the labels of television, internet, newspaper, and radio all to the right-hand side, and directly next to the key piece of data that they were sharing, which is the current percentage. And, most importantly I think, because the story here is about the internet, only that piece of data has added color, and the color matches the words up the top with a few sentences or words that tells the story of the data.

So here is a before and after, to put them side by side for you. So you really can see the difference. On the left-hand side, that was the tweet that was shared. On the right hand side is how it was redesigned by Cole. What you really can see there is that it's drawing your attention to the piece of data that the person wants to share with the audience. That's the story they want to tell behind all the numbers that they collected.

So we have a couple of questions in the chat, which I'm happy to stop and think through and answer before moving on further. One of the questions was for Tanya. "One of the slides had a bullet point that said, 'That's a goal for the audience.' I think I understand what that means, but can you elaborate a little bit more?" Yeah, I think you need to understand your own goal of conveying a piece of data in order to think through what the goal would be for the audience. So if my take away from the example that's on the screen is to provide this information about internet usage for getting news, I want to make sure that that's what the audience is honing in on. So if you think about your Second Chance Act Program, and you end up sharing data or data visualization, what is your goal for your audience? What do you want them to take away with the data that you're sharing?

And it could be good for your program or not good for your program, but it's the true data of your program. But you don't want to have so much out there that people have to read through it or do work. So I really think when we collect all this data, and it's important in thinking through how you collect data in the first place, are you collecting it in a way that'll eventually be usable to tell the story of your program and what your program is good at? So that would be the goal of sharing a particular piece of data.

There was a question from Chad. "It took a second. My eyes went to the big truck with flames first." Oh, thank you so much, Chad, and offering some feedback about the fire truck example. One of the questions from Mackenzie, "How do you find the balance between telling a story and not being exploitative?" That's really important, Mackenzie and definitely something I think through a lot. I think probably Melissa thought through that when telling the story of Josh. One thing that Melissa said very early on that Josh gave permission and wanted his story to be told, and that's foundational, is getting permission to tell the story.

I also think in the space of working with communities and potentially underserved communities, working with diverse populations, I also try to think through and be careful that I'm not sending a message of white saviorism or troping in white saviorism. And we see this sometimes also in the international context when organizations are going to help in countries that have less means than our country. So really keeping that in mind and being careful that you're not troping in that, I think is probably what you're getting to Mackenzie. I think being authentic can very much help with that. Being aware of it and being careful if you're showing images or pictures. That's really important when sharing images or pictures that you're not engaging in something that might end up being exploitative. So even just having it in your mind, I think, is one of the first steps in that.

All right, well, thanks for the questions. I'm going to keep moving along, but I love getting questions as we go through to make sure that we're hitting the points that are most relevant to you all. I'm just sharing another example here of a data visualization, what I mean about telling a story with your data. This is actually from the organization that I work for. You'll see the graph and you'll see right on the chart we provide you with a piece of data that we want you to know. And it's written in words. There was a 40% reduction in pretrial detention. So then you'll see that in April 2019, there was this number of people incarcerated pretrial in New York City jails. In March 2020, you see a different number.

You with the audience have no math to do. We've done the math for you, which is that was a 40% reduction in pretrial detention. That's what we want you to know. And it's written right there. We're taking away the work, and we're communicating to the audience the message that we want them to have. And this was actually in relation to changes in New York state around bail reform and looking at pretrial jail population.

I didn't particularly help out with this data visualization and the story that went with it. A couple little things that I would mention that I thought were particularly done was that color was used sparingly, very similar to Cole's example. Use color sparingly, but use it for the punch. Have the color help it, not clutter it. One thing that I suggest on here to maybe help a little bit from some of Cole's techniques was I would actually get rid of the grid. I don't think the grid lines are doing anything, and maybe add a little bit of color. I would probably soften up the numbers on the left-hand side and the dates below. Just a little bit of contrast in the coloring so that it adds a little bit more to the visualization. But I won't tell my colleagues that I had tips for them that I'm sharing on a live webinar.

So now I'm going to share a data visualization that I think helps with the point of where too much is just too much, and maybe just goes back to the question about the goals. What would be the goal in sharing this data visualization? In 2017, this is what happens in an internet minute. And then in 2018, this is what happens in an internet minute. I don't know what is being shared with me here. There's just so much on the screen. There's so much work for me to do as an audience to understand what is the data that they're sharing with me and what do they want me to know? I'm trying to understand, are they trying to say one application beat out another, because there's a whole bunch of different applications like Netflix, Google, Twitter, Snapchat? And they're comparing from 2000 to 2018, but were there changes there? Do they want me to know there was a big amount of change? I don't know if there was even any changes unless I start doing some math.

So I feel like this example shows that we don't know what this person wants with sharing this data. They haven't told us the meaning, they haven't told us the story of the data. I would have to do a ton of work and a whole bunch of math. I'm a lawyer by training, I don't like to do math, that's why I'm a lawyer. So I'm like, "Well, Facebook maybe increased 70,000 logins from 2017 to 2018. Is that good? Do I compare that to other applications?" What's the story behind sharing this data? So that's the part of this data visualization that I think makes it confusing. The audience is just left with a whole bunch of questions.

All right, audience, I want to see if you all are still paying attention, so I'm going to launch another pop quiz. It will come out on the right-hand side and you'll see two questions. This is actually going back to the story that I told you about an hour ago. Let's see who remembers what. So question number one, where did Rose and Clara get in many fights? Was it in math class? Was it in the Rite Aid parking lot? Or was it on the basketball court? Question number two, what did the volunteer community peacemakers say to Rose and Clara? A, "This isn't your fault," B, "We love you," or C, "Knock it off, this is your future." I'll give everybody another 10 seconds before we close out the poll. Okay, let's close the poll and see how everyone did.

(silence)

Okay, so for the first question, where did Rose and Clara get into a fight? And it was at math class, the Rite Aid parking lot, or the basketball court. And it was the Rite Aid parking lot. And then finally, what did the volunteer peacemakers say, "Cut it out. Knock it off, this is not your fault," was the correct answer. Thanks for participating everybody. I find it fun to throw in a pop quiz.

Okay, before we end out, we tried to leave 10 minutes, Melissa, for questions, and we did a beautiful job, there is actually 12 minutes left. Thank you for folks who put in their questions throughout, but if you'd like to add any questions to the Q&A or the chat for either myself or Melissa, please feel free to do so.

So Melissa, to give our audience one moment to ask a question, I will toss to you one question, which is, is there anything you'd change about Josh's story for future presentations?

Melissa Stolfo: Well, keeping in mind that was for an internal audience, if I was going to take Josh's story externally, I would have to change a lot of things. Obviously, I wouldn't want to be featuring the coworkers because if you don't know why they're there, that would have no meaning. The original presentation did have more slides to it. I think I would've liked to have seen a little bit more emotion, maybe take it up and down a little bit. It focused more on his success and not as much on how difficult some of those barriers could be. For the sake of time, you can't go into that, but I think that it could have been expounded a little bit more so that it could have been a little more emotionally grabbing.

Lisa Bailey Vav...: Thanks, Melissa, I appreciate that response. Someone asked about the slides. Yes, the presentation is going to be posted on the NRRC website, along with all of the reentry month presentations. So you'll be able to find it there. Oh, and the direct link has been put in our chat. Thank you so much. And that'll be available mid May.

Well, thank you, everyone. We really appreciate your time. It's been fun. Next time I hope it's in person because I quite frankly feel like I can communicate a story much more effectively when I can see my audience. So thank you for bearing with Melissa and I that we're just looking at ourselves on the screen and a PowerPoint slide, but we hope we did make it interesting for you.

Melissa Stolfo: Thank you, everybody.

Lisa Bailey Vav...: Thank you.

(silence)