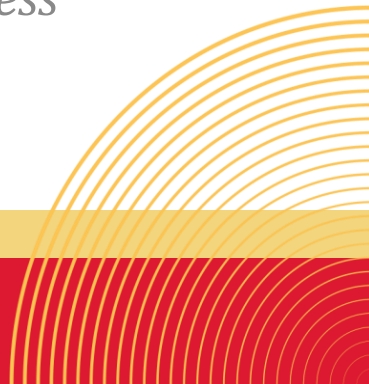# Storytelling with Data:
How to make your insights resonate

Dr. Elizabeth Housholder

Associate Director

Office of Assessment, Research, and Divisional Effectiveness

Learning Outcomes

- Participants will be able to explain the impact of storytelling over reporting

- Participants will be able to apply storytelling principles to real-world datasets to drive data-informed decision-making

- Participants will be able to recall the key elements of a good data story
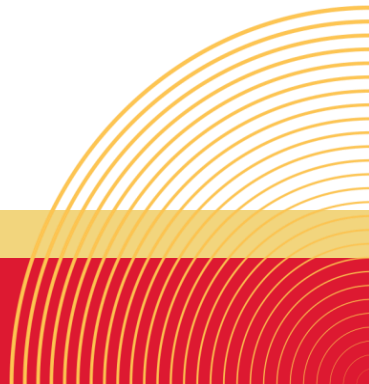
Let me tell you a story....

What happens when students select their own roommate?

17%

Higher satisfaction
with roommate

22%

Less likely to
consider switching
roommates

Students who are satisfied with their roommate are 23% more likely to return to living on campus again next year
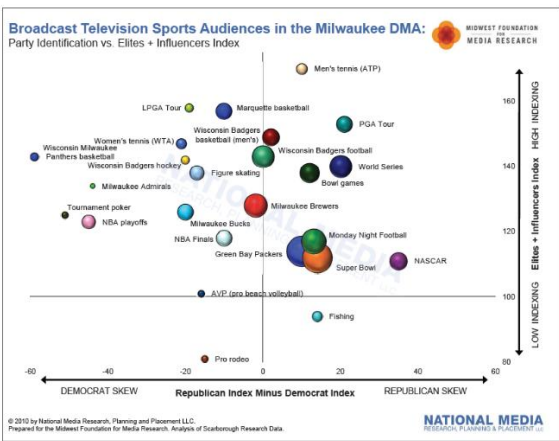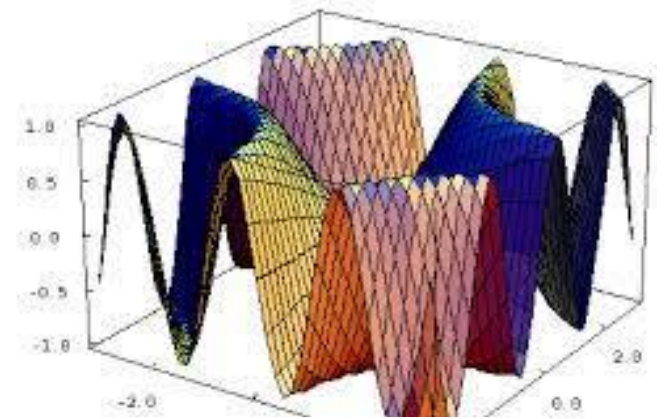
Why does storytelling matter for assessment?

GOOD DATA ARE PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION
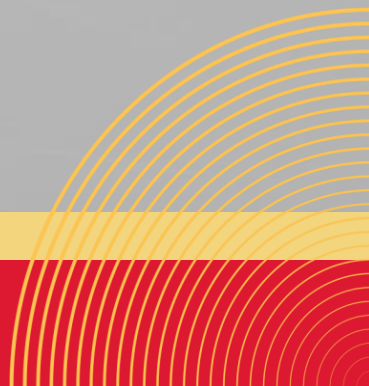
Why does storytelling matter for assessment?

Stories are more memorable

Stories are more persuasive

Stories provide an emotional connection to the audience
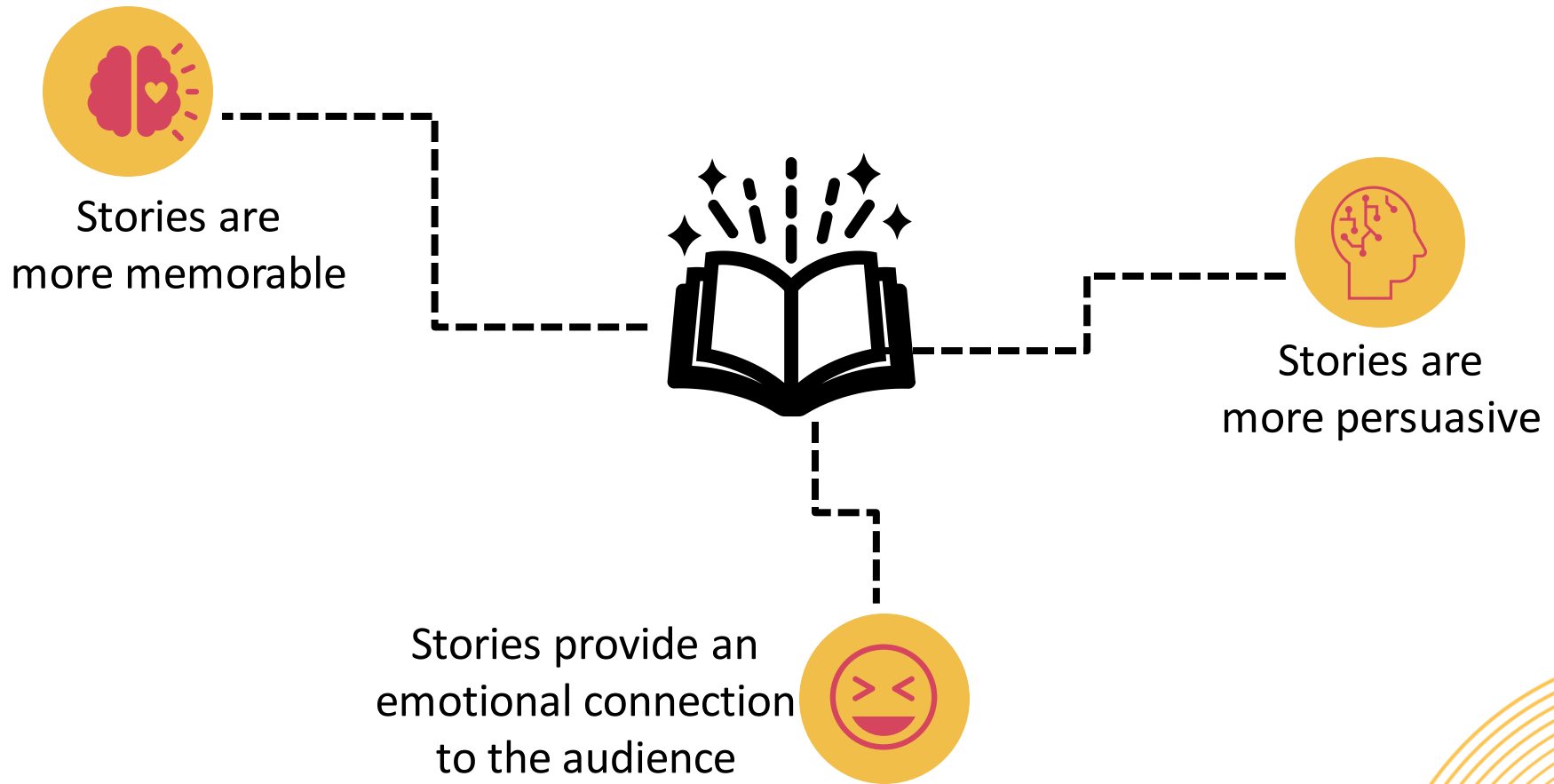
Stories

Data

What data do you currently collect?
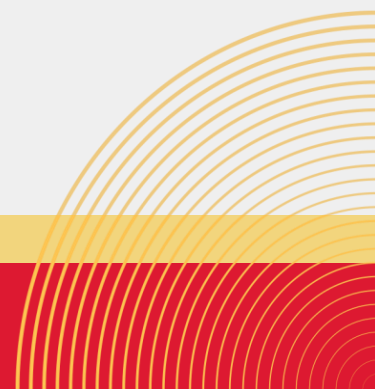
Types of Data

Contact time with students
- ❑ Total number of students served
- ❑ Average number of visits per student
- ❑ Average time spent with students
- ❑ Percent of university population served

Faculty Experience
- ❑ Ease of working with office
- ❑ Understanding of process
- ❑ Referring students to office
- ❑ Training on accessibility

Exam center statistics
- ❑ Total number of students served
- ❑ Number of participating departments
- ❑ Number of participating faculty
- ❑ Percent of university population served

Student Experience
- ❑ Student satisfaction
- ❑ Understanding of process
- ❑ Classroom experiences
- ❑ Support provided by staff

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Stories

Data

A good data story should:

IDENTIFY
What problem are you trying to solve?

EXPLAIN
How are your data relevant to the problem?

SOLVE
What are possible data-informed solutions to the problem?

Identifying important problems

Thinking about your audience, your program, and your customers will help you identify important problems

AUDIENCE

PROGRAM

CUSTOMER

Audience considerations

ROLE

- Who is receiving this information?
- What is their role at the university?
- How much technical knowledge do they possess?

RELEVANCE

- What type of information is most relevant to each role?
- What problems are each role trying to solve?
- How do people in each role interact with your office?

REACTION

- What do you want your key audiences to do with the information you share?

Program considerations

Why are you assessing your program?
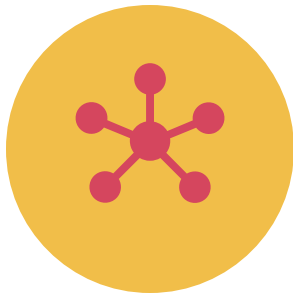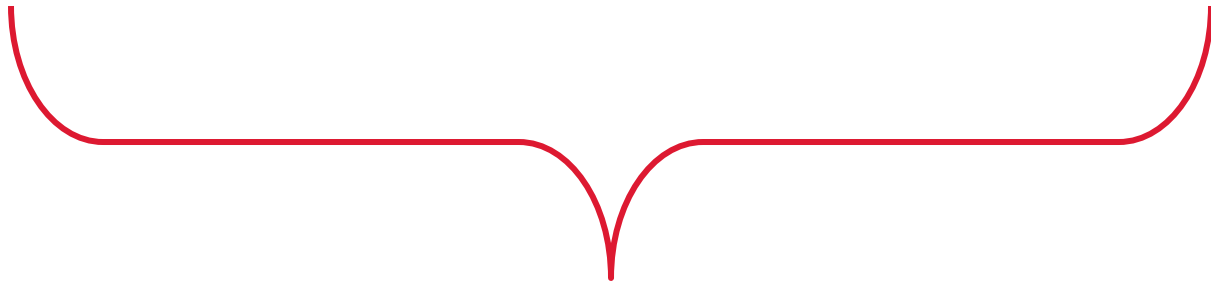
SCOPE

STAFFING

BUDGET

Customer considerations

How do you know what your customers want?
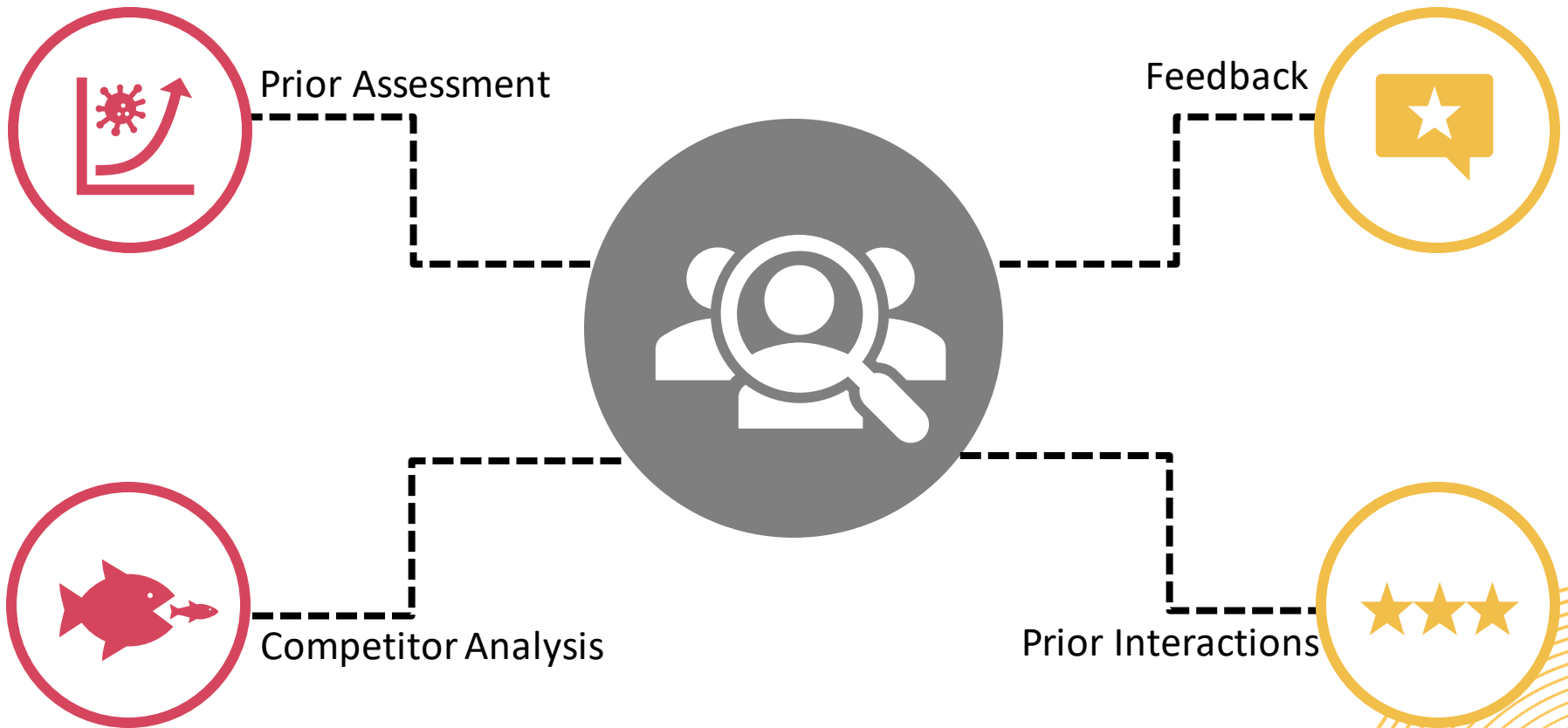
Prior Assessment

Feedback

Competitor Analysis

Prior Interactions

A good data story should:

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What are possible data-informed solutions to the problem?

HOW TO EXPLAIN SO PEOPLE WILL REMEMBER
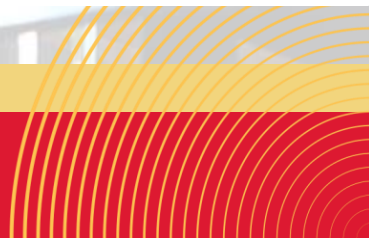
Connect emotionally with your audience
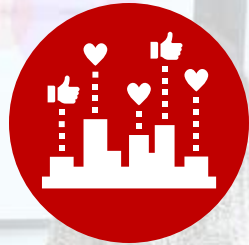
Select data that tell your story

Simplify visual data

HOW TO EXPLAIN SO PEOPLE WILL REMEMBER
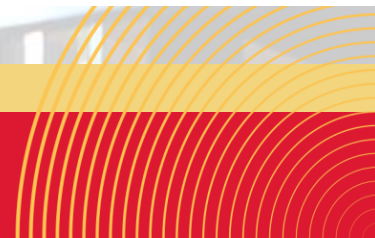
Connect emotionally with your audience
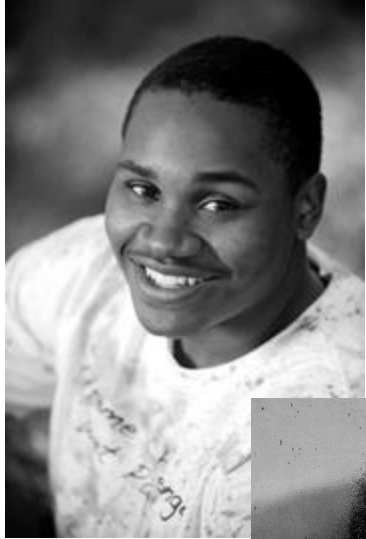
ANDY
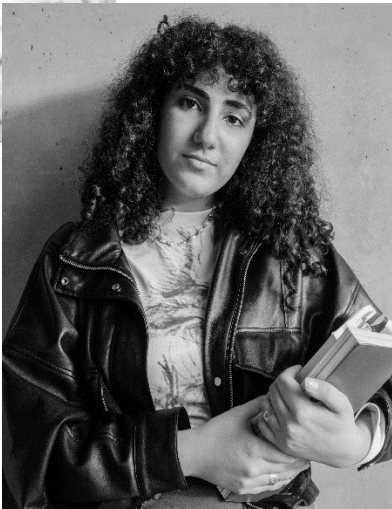
CHRISTINA

Use personal stories and customer testimonials to humanize data

Simplify visual data

	RH	APT
My RA is visible in the community	3.99	3.43
My RA has made an effort to get to know me	3.61	3.18
My RA abides by the same rules and regulations	4.40	3.82
My RA enforces policies	4.18	3.63

Resident Ratings of Their Community Advisor

■ Hall   ■ Apartment
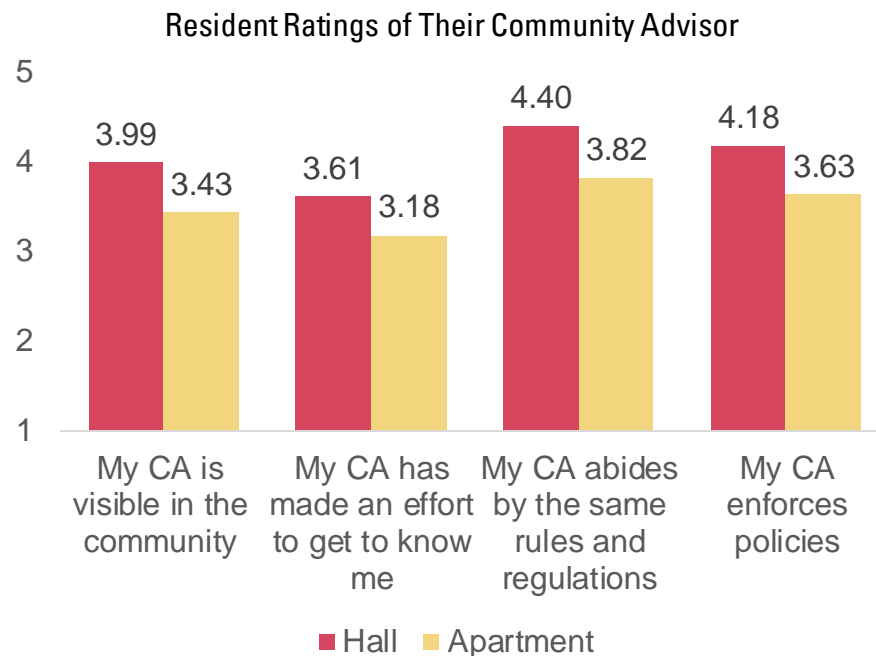
Simplify visual data

AVOID CHART JUNK

Simplify visual data

MAINTAIN HIGH DATA-INK RATIO

Resident Evaluations of Community Advisor

My CA is visible in the community — 3.99 / 3.43
My CA has made an effort to get to know me — 3.61 / 3.18
My CA abides by the same rules and regulations — 4.40 / 3.82
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Resident Evaluations of Community Advisor

Strongly Agree 5 — Strongly Disagree 1

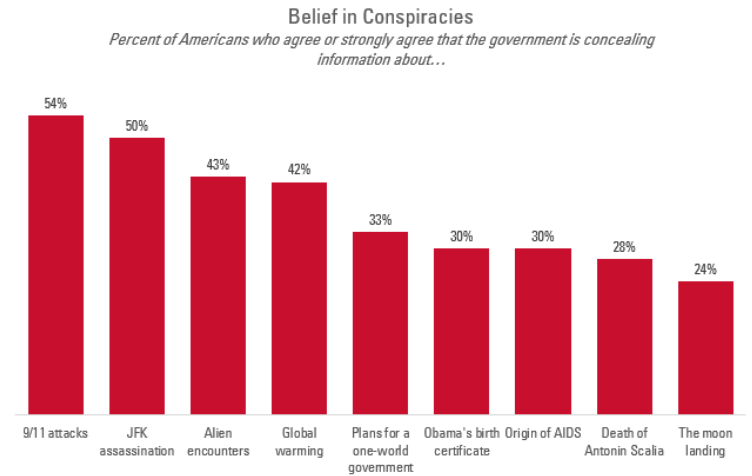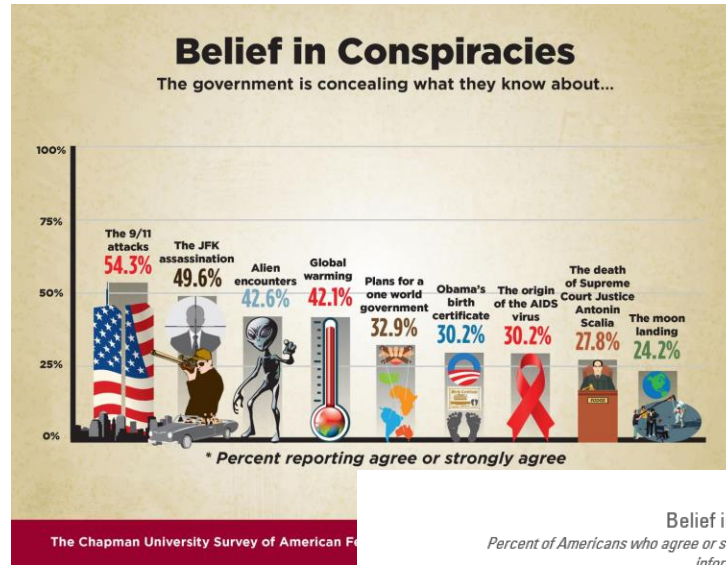My CA is visible in the community — 3.99 / 3.43
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Hall — Apartment
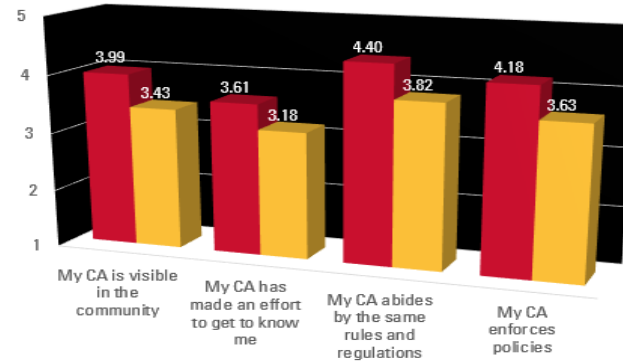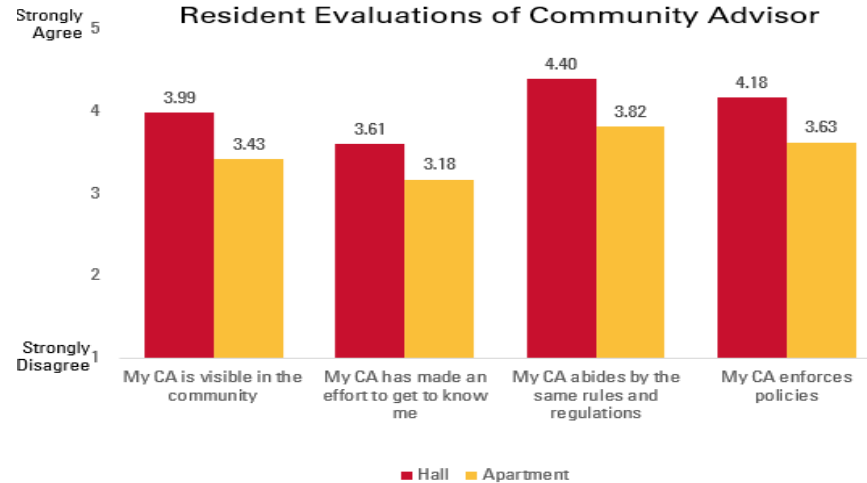
Simplify visual data

AVOID AMBIGUITY

Title

Labels

Legend

Resident Evaluations of Community Advisor

Strongly Agree 5

4

3.99
3.43

3.61
3.18

4.40
3.82

4.18
3.63

2

Strongly Disagree 1

My CA is visible in the community

My CA has made an effort to get to know me

My CA abides by the same rules and regulations

My CA enforces policies

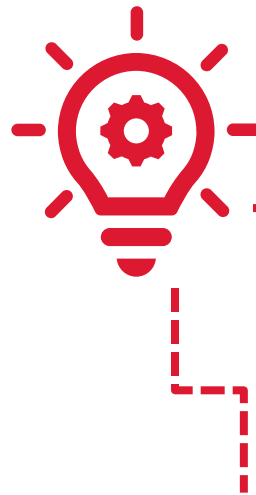■ Hall   ■ Apartment
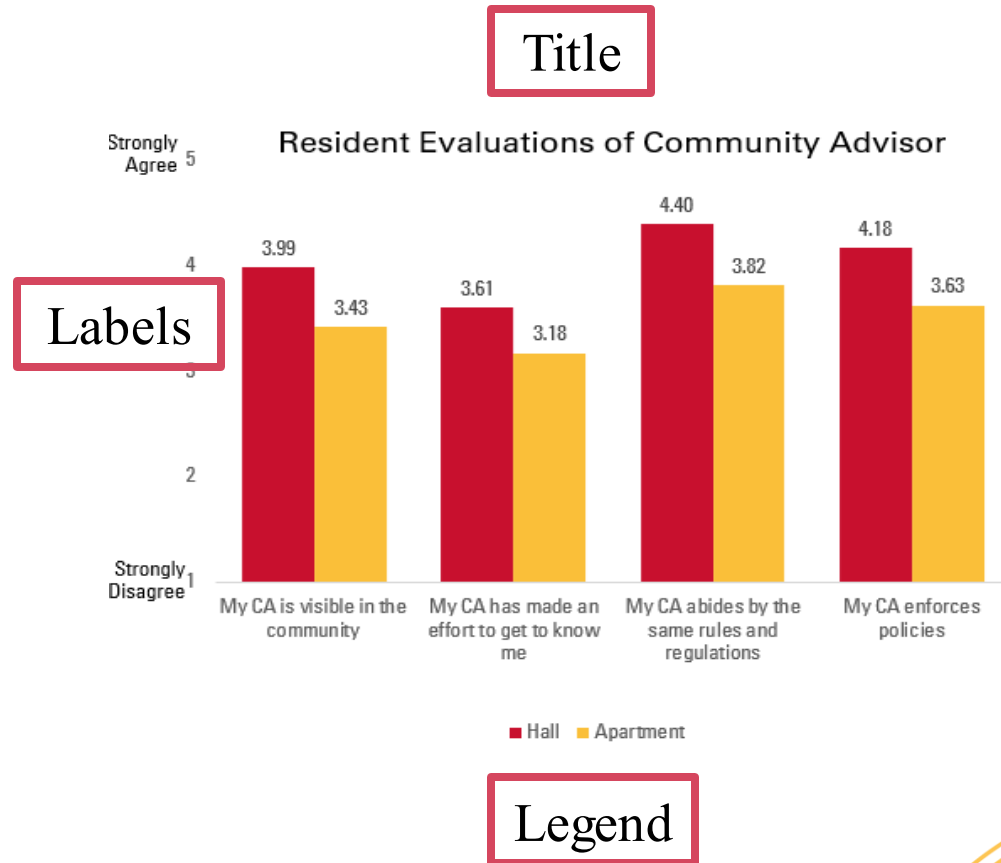
Share relevant data

Is this data important to solving the problem? How?

Does this add to my story?

Who am I presenting to and what can they accomplish?

A good data story should:

IDENTIFY
What problem are you trying to solve?

EXPLAIN
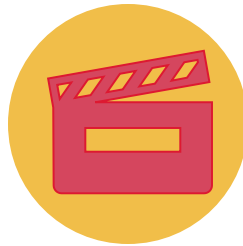*How are your data relevant to the problem?*

SOLVE
What are possible data-informed solutions to the problem?

Turning insight into action

Restate key conclusions

**Suggest data-informed actions**

Plan for follow-up assessment

Key Takeaways

1. Stories about data are more memorable, relatable, and persuasive than statistical reports

2. A good data story will do the following:
    - Identify a problem
    - Explain what you know about a problem
    - Offer solutions to the problem

3. Storytelling should be considered an essential part of any assessment project, not just an afterthought
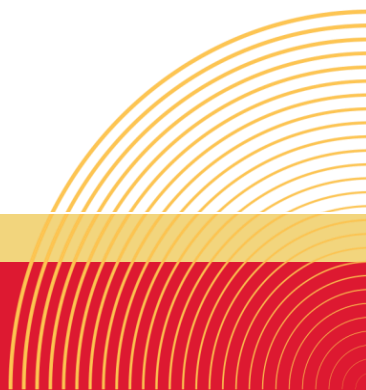
THANK YOU!

Dr. Elizabeth Housholder

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Office of Assessment, Research, and Divisional Effectiveness

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