



Washington Women
in Public Relations

From Data to Story: Making Your Numbers Compelling

WWPR Pro Bono Nonprofit Toolkit

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*This resource is part of the **WWPR Nonprofit Communications Toolkit**, a year-long series of practical guides designed specifically for small to mid-sized nonprofits working with limited staff and budgets. Each quarter focuses on a different theme, and each resource is designed to be immediately implementable without prior communications experience or expensive tools.*

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Questions or feedback? probono@wwpr.org

Every Number Has a Story. You Just Have to Find It.

Nonprofits are surrounded by data.

How many people you served. How many volunteers showed up. How many meals you delivered. How much money you raised. How many families received support.

These numbers matter, but on their own, they rarely inspire someone to donate, volunteer, share your mission, or tell someone else about your work.

The organizations with the strongest communications don't necessarily have the biggest numbers. They simply know how to connect those numbers to real people and real impact.

The good news? You already have everything you need.

This worksheet will help you transform everyday data into stories you can use in grant applications, fundraising appeals, newsletters, annual reports, social media posts, media pitches, and conversations with donors.

The Impact Formula

Whenever you're sharing data, think about these three simple steps:

Statistic: What's the number?



Meaning: Why does that number matter?



Story: Who was impacted?

The magic happens in the middle. Most organizations stop at the statistic. The strongest communicators explain why it matters before bringing it to life through a real story.

 **Pro Tip:** You don't need a huge research study or thousands of data points to tell a compelling story. Some of the most powerful nonprofit stories start with a single meaningful statistic paired with one person's experience.

Step 1: Find Your Best Numbers

Don't overthink this exercise. Start by writing down every meaningful statistic your organization already tracks.

Program Impact

- Clients served
- Meals provided
- Scholarships awarded
- Volunteers engaged
- Volunteer hours
- Events hosted
- Trainings completed
- Families supported
- Animals rescued or adopted
- Other: _____

Organizational Growth

- Funds raised
- New donors
- Partnerships created
- Social media growth
- Email subscribers
- Website traffic
- Media coverage
- Other: _____

Write down your strongest numbers:

Now ask yourself...

Which of these would make someone stop and say... "Wow, I didn't know that."

Circle your Top Three.

 **Pro Tip:** The most compelling statistic isn't always the biggest one. Look for numbers that surprise people, reveal a challenge, or show meaningful progress toward your mission.

Step 2: Find the Meaning

Here's where storytelling begins.

Every statistic should answer one important question: **So what?**

Let's look at a few examples.

Statistic	Meaning
We served 600 families.	That's 600 families who didn't have to face a difficult season alone.
We recruited 200 volunteers.	Two hundred people chose to invest their time in strengthening our community.
We awarded 45 scholarships.	Forty-five students had opportunities that may not have been possible otherwise.
We delivered 30,000 meals.	That's 30,000 moments when someone didn't have to wonder where their next meal would come from.

Now it's your turn.

Statistic: _____

So what? _____

Statistic: _____

So what? _____

Ask Better Questions

Instead of asking... *"How many people did we help?"*

Ask... *"What changed because we were there?"*

Instead of... *"How much money did we raise?"*

Ask... *"What became possible because of those donations?"*

 **Pro Tip:** A great statistic is just the beginning. Always ask yourself, **"Why should someone who has never heard of our organization care about this number?"** If you can answer that question, you're on your way to a compelling story.

Step 3: Add the Human Story

Statistics explain the scale. Stories create the connection.

Think about one person whose experience represents the larger impact behind your numbers.

(Protect privacy by changing names or combining stories when appropriate.)

Story Starter

Who are they? _____

What challenge were they facing? _____

How did your organization help? _____

What changed? _____

Before & After

Before: We served 1,200 seniors this year.

Better: This year, 1,200 older adults found support through our programs, including people like Ruth, who says our weekly visits helped her feel connected again after losing her husband.

Before: We helped 350 middle school girls complete our leadership program

Better: This year, 350 girls discovered new confidence through our leadership program. For Maya, that meant finding the courage to run for student council: a goal she never imagined was possible just a few months earlier.

Before: We planted 2,500 trees across the region.

Better: Together with volunteers and community partners, we planted 2,500 trees that will help create cleaner air, cooler neighborhoods, and healthier communities for generations to come.

Before: We provided job training to 425 adults.

Better: This year, 425 adults gained the skills and confidence to pursue new careers. For James, completing our program meant landing his first full-time job after months of searching and being able to provide for his family again.

 **Pro Tip:** Not every story needs a name. If privacy is important, combine details from multiple clients or use first names only, but keep the story authentic and specific. Real experiences create stronger connections than generic descriptions.

Build Your Story

Now put everything together.

My Statistic

Why It Matters

The Story Behind the Number

My Final Story

Use this simple formula:

Statistic + Meaning + Human Story = Compelling Communications

Write your finished paragraph below.

Before You Hit Publish...

Ask yourself:

- Did I include a meaningful statistic?
- Did I explain why that number matters?
- Did I connect it to a real person or real impact?
- Would someone remember this story tomorrow?
- Does it inspire someone to care or take action?

Remember: **People may remember the number for a moment, but they'll remember the story long after they've forgotten the statistic.**

 **Pro Tip: Challenge yourself to tell the same story in three ways:**

- One sentence (for social media)
- One paragraph (for a newsletter)
- One page (for a grant or annual report)

Once you've built a strong story, you can adapt it almost anywhere.



About the Author:

Colleen Gallagher is CEO of OnWrd & UpWrd, an award-winning strategic communications agency specializing in public relations, media relations, and thought leadership for associations and nonprofits. She has spent 20 years helping organizations turn research, data, and expertise into compelling stories that drive awareness, engagement, and action.

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