Data Storytelling 101: Laying the Groundwork for CBO Impact
Best Practices for Ethics and Equitable Data Storytelling For Community-Based Organizations

This document provides a concise reference to uphold ethical principles and promote equity in data storytelling for Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). Remember to consider your diverse audience including stakeholders, participants, and the wider community impacted by your storytelling.

1. Empowerment in Narratives
- **Purpose**: Use data stories to give voice and power to those represented, not just to illustrate data points. Highlight community strengths and positive outcomes, even when discussing challenges.
- **Practice**: Feature stories that highlight community strengths, resilience, and positive outcomes.
- **How**: If data shows a high rate of substance abuse in a community, also present stories of recovery and support systems. For instance, alongside statistics, share a narrative of a local support group's success in helping individuals recover. This balances the narrative by showing problems with solutions and resilience, encouraging a hopeful perspective.

2. Informed Consent and Privacy
- **Purpose**: Respect individuals' autonomy to choose whether their data is included in your narratives and personal details are anonymized.
- **Practice**: Obtain explicit consent, explain the use of data, and ensure participants understand their rights.
- **How**: Before publishing a success story of someone's recovery journey, obtain their explicit consent through a clear, understandable consent form. Explain how their story will be used and ensure anonymity by changing names or omitting identifiable details unless they wish to be named.

3. Accuracy and Factual Integrity
- **Purpose**: Ensure the reliability and credibility of your storytelling. Present data stories based on verified, accurate information.
- **Practice**: Fact-check, cross-reference data sources, and transparently communicate any limitations.
- **How**: For example, if using data to illustrate the effectiveness of a new mental health program, organize a simple pre-and-post survey that measures participants' mental health status before and after the program. After collecting these surveys, calculate the average improvement and share these results in a clear, concise format, like a chart or graph. Briefly describe how you collected this information (e.g., "We asked 100 participants to rate their mental health before and after our program."). Make sure to mention any survey limits, such as the number of people surveyed, to give a full picture of your findings. This method provides a clear, easy-to-understand snapshot of your program's success.

4. Bias Recognition and Fair Representation
- **Purpose**: Acknowledge and address biases to prevent skewed narratives and misrepresentation.
- **Practice**: Diversify data sources and include multiple perspectives to balance the story.
- **How**: Conduct an internal review of your data collection methods to ensure they don't inadvertently exclude specific groups. If presenting data on community health services usage, compare the demographics of service users with the broader community demographics to identify and address any disparities.

5. Cultural Sensitivity and Context
- **Purpose**: Honor the cultural nuances and contexts of the communities you serve.
- **Practice**: Present data in a culturally aware manner and avoid reinforcing stereotypes. Respect cultural differences in how data is presented and interpreted.
- **How**: For example, when creating a data story about mental health awareness in a community with strong cultural stigmas around discussing mental health, use culturally sensitive language and visuals. Engage cultural leaders in the storytelling process to ensure the narrative respects and understands community norms and values.

6. Accessibility and Comprehension
- **Purpose**: Make data stories accessible and understandable to all segments of your audience.
- **Practice**: Use clear language, appropriate visual aids, and provide explanations for technical terms.
- **How**: For example, design infographics that simplify complex data about community health outcomes, using clear visuals and simple language to explain statistics. Offer these infographics in multiple languages relevant to your community, ensuring wider accessibility. This approach clarifies data, making the findings more approachable and meaningful to a wide range of people.

7. Equity of Impact
- **Purpose**: Aim for your data stories to have a beneficial impact across all communities.
- **Practice**: Consider how different groups might be affected and strive for stories that promote equitable outcomes.
- **How**: If data highlights disparities in access to mental health services, use your storytelling to propose targeted solutions that address these gaps. For example, if certain areas lack services, advocate for mobile health units to reach underserved areas, using data to support your proposal.

8. Transparency and Accountability
- **Purpose**: Be open about your goals, methods, and the origins of your data.
- **Practice**: Disclose funding sources, methodologies, and any conflicts of interest.

- **How**: When sharing data on the impact of community programs, include a methodology section that explains how data was collected and analyzed, any potential biases, and the limitations of your findings. This builds trust and accountability with your audience.

9. Responsive Feedback Mechanisms
- **Purpose**: Engage in a two-way dialogue with your audience regarding your data stories.
- **Practice**: Create channels for feedback, review it constructively, and be willing to alter your approach.
- **How**: For example, after presenting a data story on social media, actively invite comments and questions. Use this feedback to inform future stories, acknowledging the community's input and demonstrating that their perspectives matter in shaping the narrative.

10. Ongoing Education and Training
- **Purpose**: Ensure continuous improvement in ethical and equitable storytelling practices.
- **Practice**: Invest in training for team members and stay updated on best practices and ethical guidelines.
- **How**: Set up seasonal training for your team on new data storytelling tools and ethics. For instance, you could have a bi-annual session with a data ethics expert. Keep a shared digital folder with guides and articles on storytelling best practices. Encourage your team to explore these resources and discuss what they've learned in team meetings. This keeps everyone updated and skilled in presenting data responsibly and engagingly.

As you create and share data-driven stories, use this reference sheet to ensure they are ethical, equitable, and respectful, thus fostering trust and confidence in your organization's commitment to community well-being.