

DATA-INFORMED ADVOCACY FOR COLLEGES

TRANSFORMING NUMBERS INTO NARRATIVES

NORTH CAROLINA ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

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ROADMAP



Current higher education climate



Why data -informed advocacy?



3 key lessons in data-informed advocacy



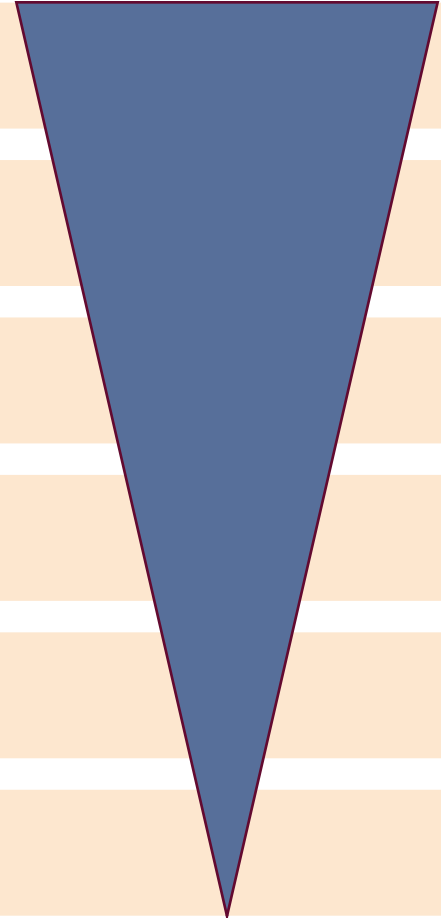
Starting with why and the importance of storytelling



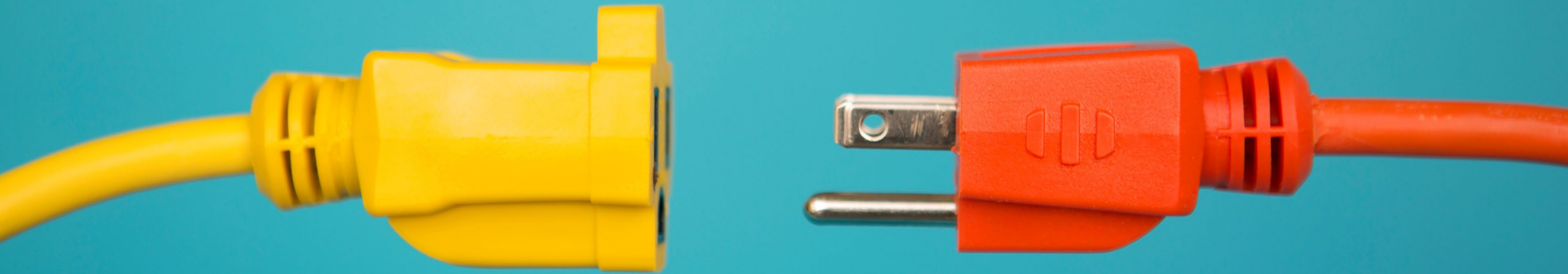
Data that resonate - with examples



Where's the data?



IF THE DATA IS ON OUR SIDE, WHY DO WE STRUGGLE IN GETTING OTHERS TO MAKE THE SAME CONNECTIONS?



WHY INFORMED ADVOCACY?



Increased scrutiny and funding limitations threaten colleges and state systems.



Policymakers need evidence to support higher education initiatives.



Data translates mission into measurable impact.



Advocacy is stronger when rooted in facts and narratives.

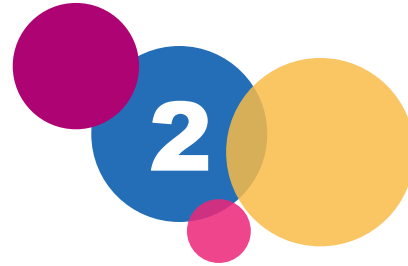
3 KEY LESSONS

MANTRAS I REMIND MYSELF IN ADVOCATING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

LESSON 1: KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE



Tailor your data to what your audience values – same data point, different message.



Some stakeholders may care more about job placement or ROI than academic accolades.



Others might prioritize economic development and local partnerships.

THE AUDIENCE

Campus leadership

State agencies & system offices

Accreditors

Employers & regional partners

WHAT THEY CARE ABOUT

Student success momentum

Alignment with state priorities (workforce, attainment, affordability)

Clear assessment and continuous improvement cycles

Retention of graduates locally and sector alignment

HOW TO FRAME

Compared to peers, here's where we're outperforming/underperforming

Our outcomes directly support the state's priority of X (attainment/workforce)

Here's the trend, the interpretation, and the specific improvement implemented

Our graduates are staying local and filling roles in your sector

LESSON 2: NOT ALL DATA IS WORTH THE SQUEEZE



Complex data/information can confuse rather than clarify for the audience.

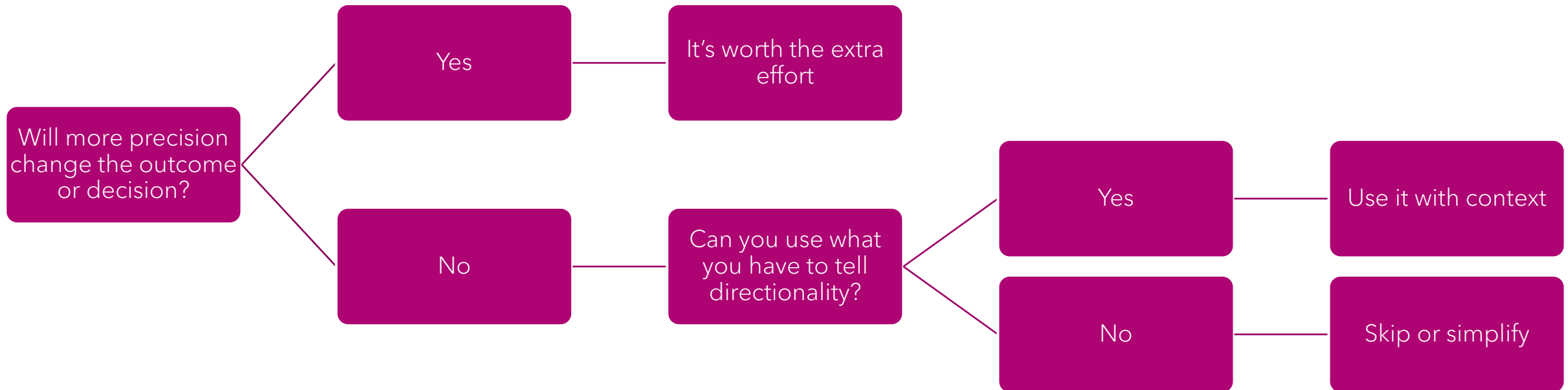


Consider the time and effort required to extract meaningful insights. When is enough, enough?



Focus on data that is timely, accurate, and clearly supports your message.

FLOWCHART: HOW MUCH JUICE TO SQUEEZE?



LESSON 3: START WITH THE “WHY”



Numbers alone
won't move hearts
or budgets



Contextualize every
data point with a
story, trend, or
community impact.



Lead with purpose,
then support with
data.

Data is the *proof*. But your *why* is the point.



The Difference

- a) Our graduation rate is 62%.

- b) Six out of ten students—many of them first-gen or Pell-eligible—are crossing the finish line, entering the workforce, and contributing to our state economy.

THE STATISTIC

42% Pell eligible students

60% of grads stay in state

20% transfer from community colleges

Average student debt \$7k below national average

WHY IT MATTERS

Expanding access to underserved students

Retaining local talent in workforce

Strong 2- to 4-year pathways

Lower financial burden on graduates

THE IMPACT

Upward mobility for families

Boosts state economic growth

Maximized completions across systems

Graduates with freedom to thrive and low default rates



The Difference

- a) 60% of our graduates stay in-state to work.

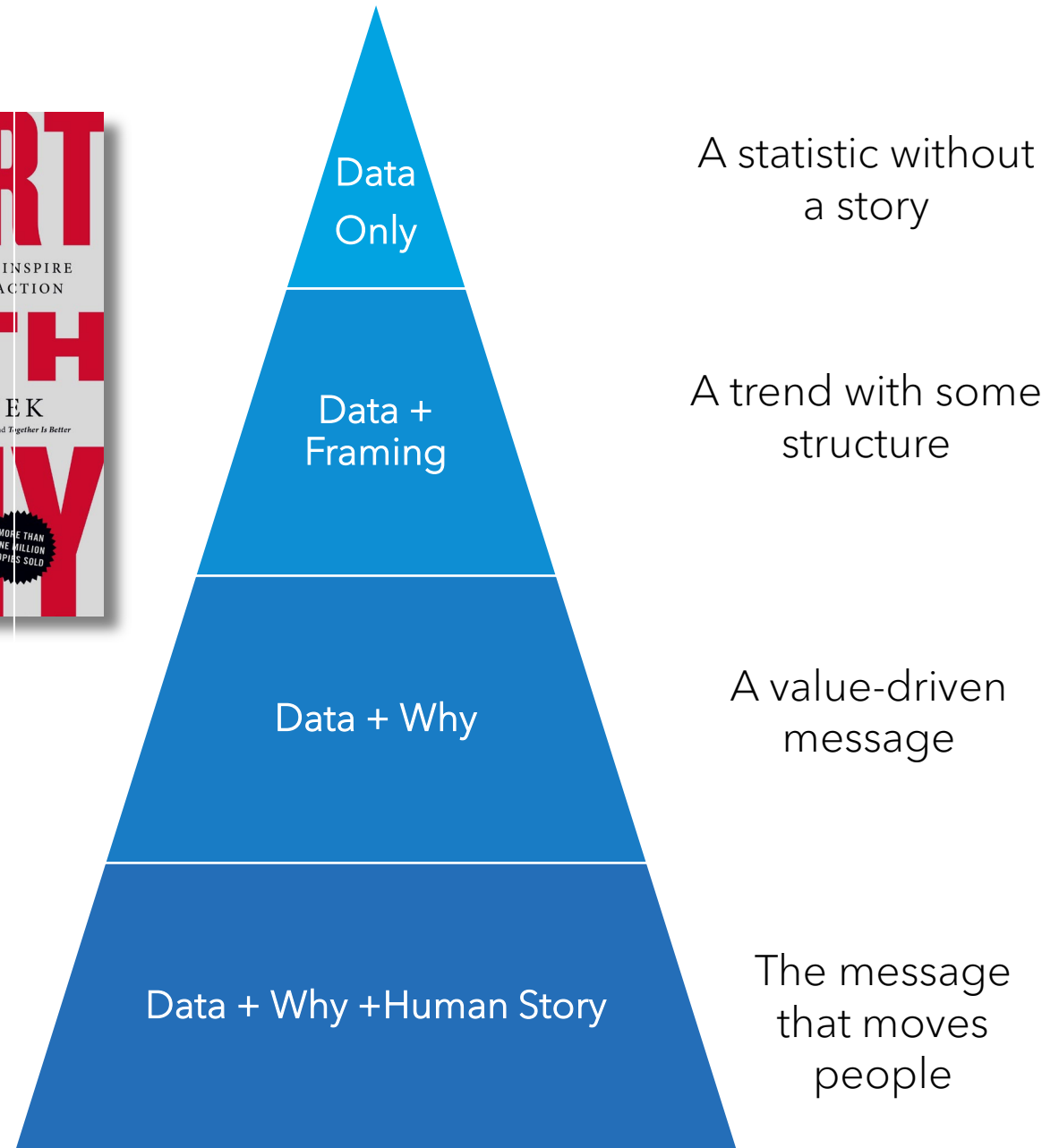
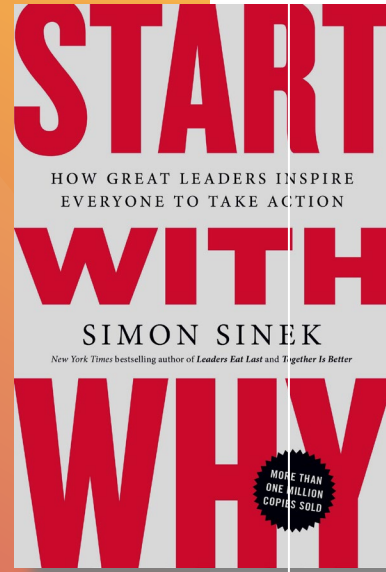
- b) More than half of students who graduate from our colleges remain in the state. We're not just educating students—we're investing in the local workforce pipeline.

THE POWER OF 'WHY'

Framing data around values builds emotional connection.

Helps stakeholders and the public connect to your institution's mission.

Elevates statistics into a compelling story.



STARTING WITH “WHY”

People don't buy what you do—they buy why you do it

Emotions drive decisions—data justifies them

Purpose > policy details

Start with values, end with validation

WHY DATA MATTERS IN ADVOCACY

01

Data is crucial for highlighting the value of higher education.

02

It helps in crafting narratives that resonate with stakeholders, especially amidst budget challenges.

03

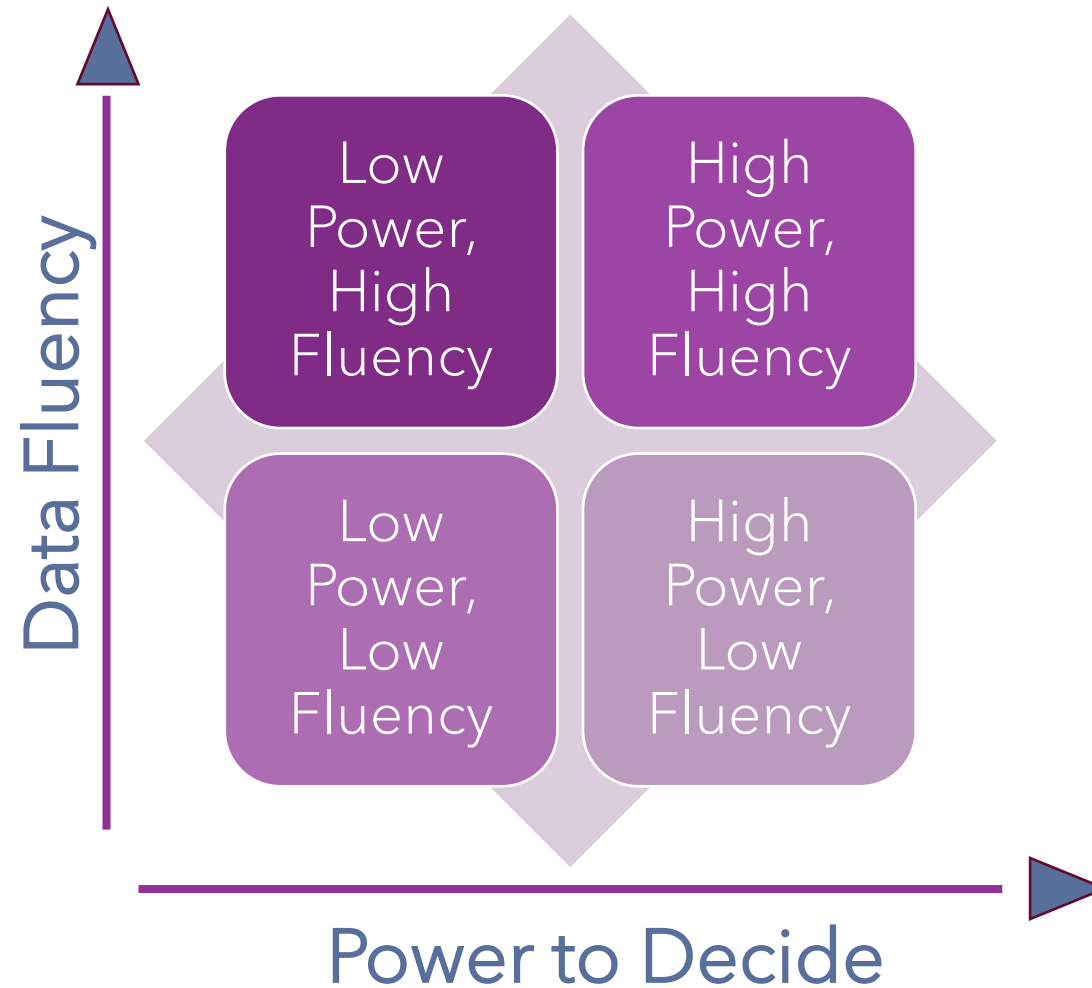
We know our story - they don't.

04

Even when people don't care about data, they care about data.

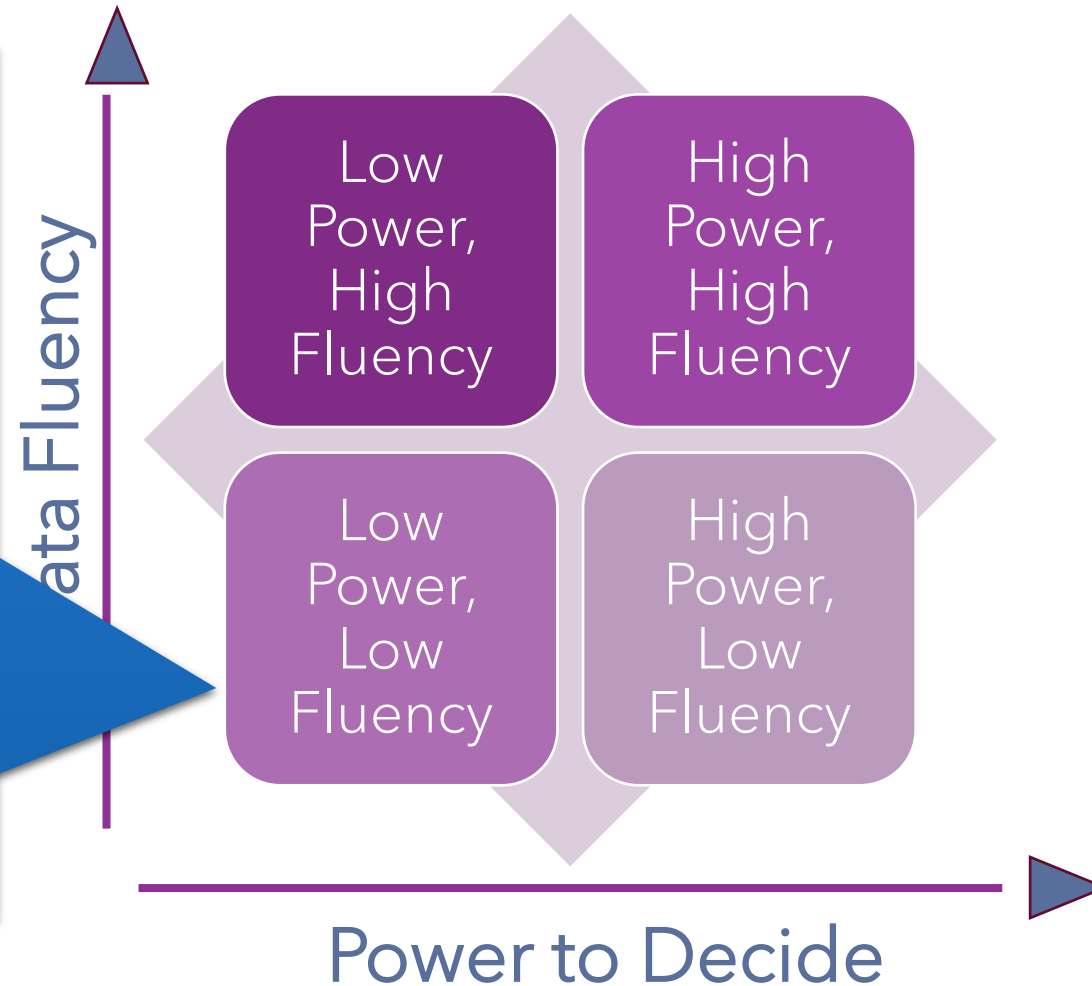
When do we get in the weeds and when do we fly at 30,000 feet?

AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION GRID



AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION GRID

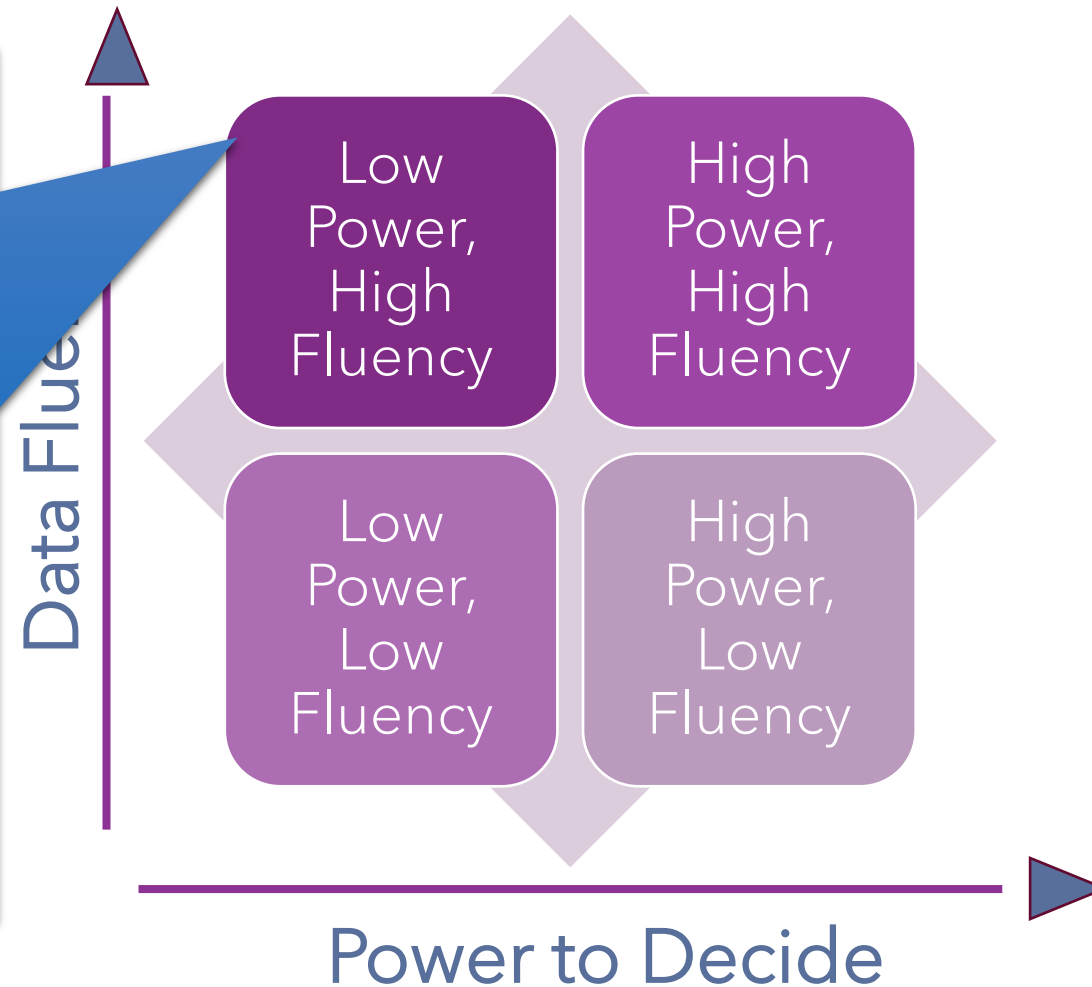
Local community leaders and public audiences:
Lead with the story, hook them emotionally, use visuals, short quotes and infographics. Goal is awareness and support.



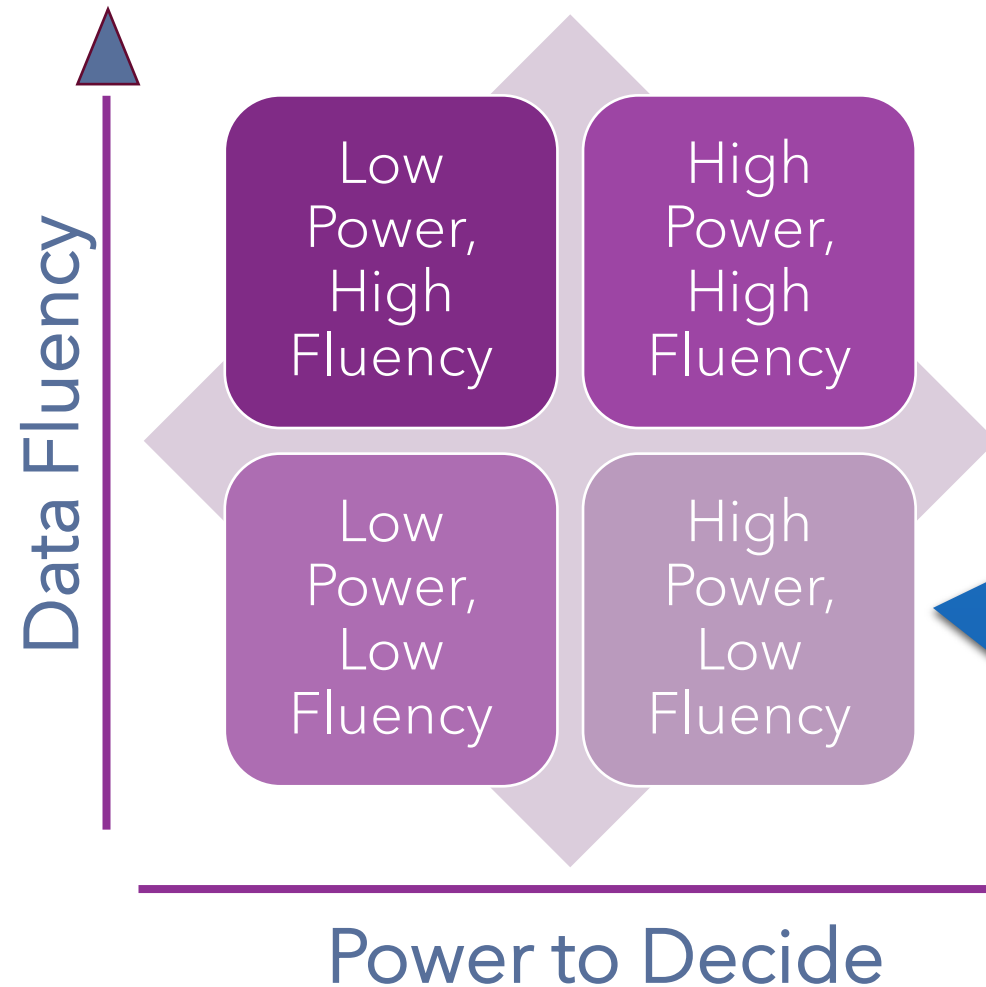
AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION GRID

Analysts and research partners:

These are your allies – bring them into the fold. Test your message for scrutiny, and use them to help you dig deeper to refine the why.

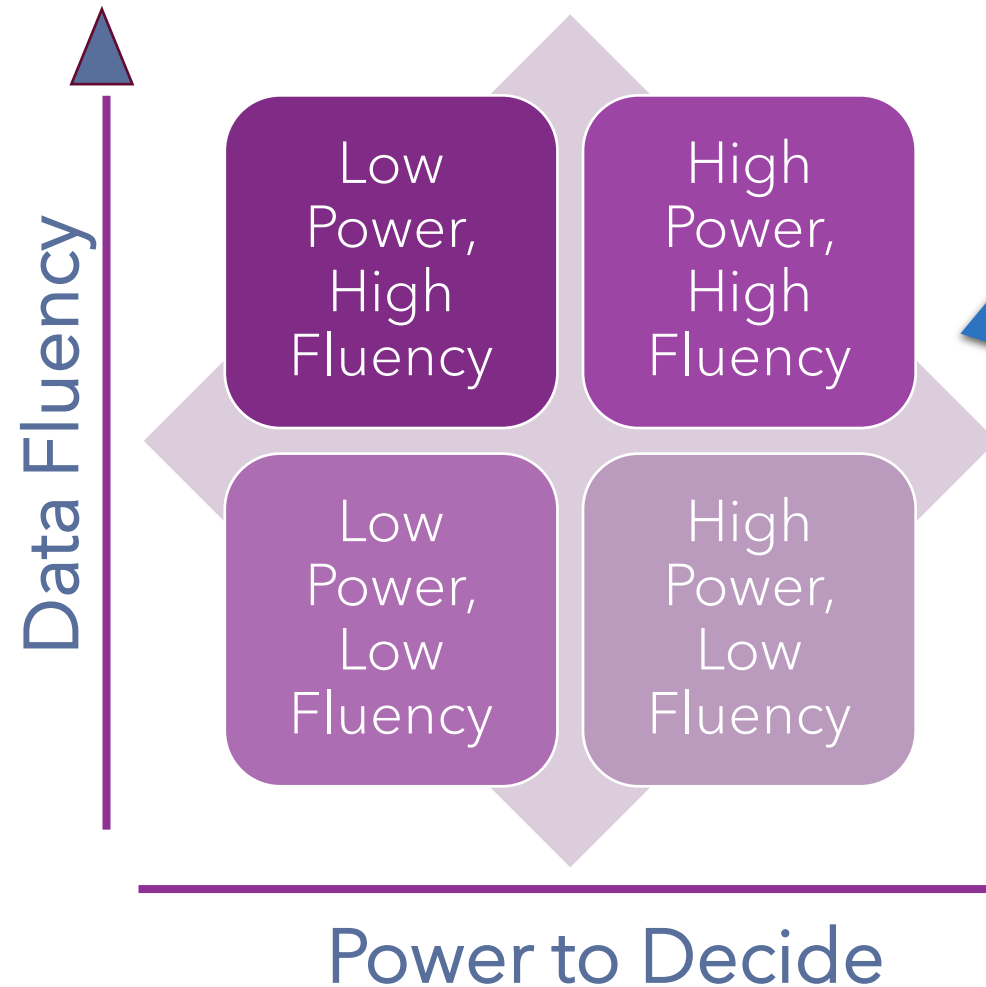


AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION GRID



Legislators, trustees, board members: Avoid charts that need a legend. Use compelling headlines, one big number, and a clear "why this matters to you" message. Let a single chart or stat do the work and make it memorable.

AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION GRID



Data-savvy state higher ed official: You can go deeper with data and still make a strong case, use dashboards, comparisons, or ROI analyses, but still: frame it with mission and impact. They want both story and stats.

WHAT RESONATES?

THE DATA THAT SPEAKS TO MOST AUDIENCES

TYPES OF DATA THAT RESONATE



Enrollment trends and demographic shifts



Student success metrics (retention, graduation rates, completion)



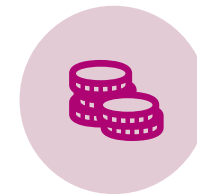
Employment outcomes



Workforce alignment



Access and equity (Pell, first-gen, rural divide)



Savings to the state



Affordability and cost transparency



Institutional and state-level economic impact

WHERE'S THE DATA?

HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

Enrollment trends and demographic shifts

Student success metrics (retention, graduation rate, completion)

Employment outcomes

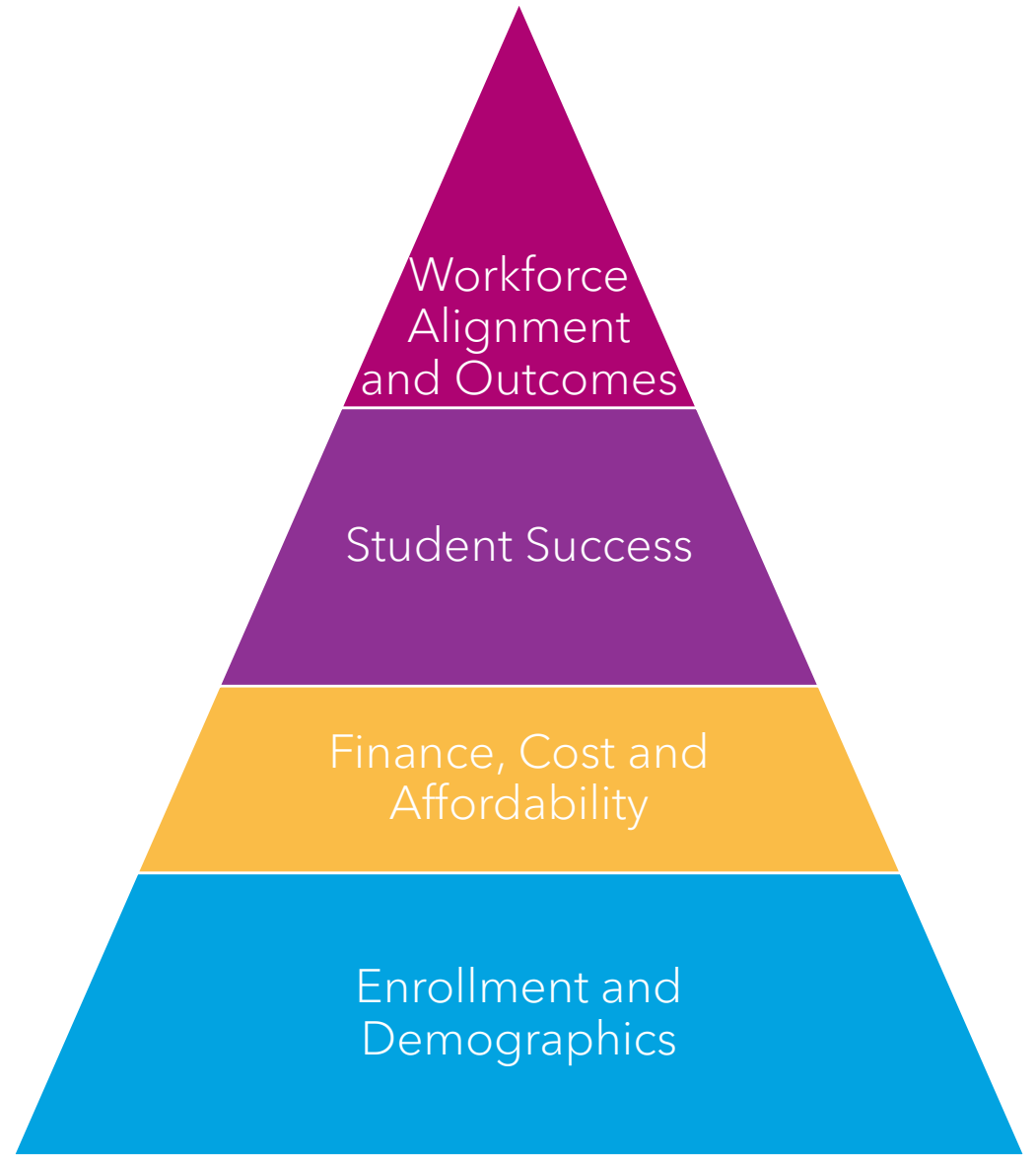
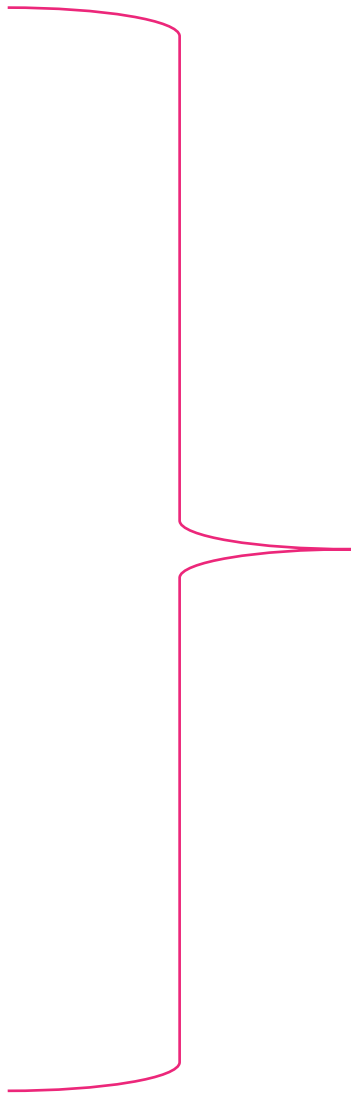
Workforce alignment

Access and equity (Pell, first-gen, locale)

Savings to the state

Affordability and cost transparency

Institutional and state-level economic impact



ENROLLMENT AND DEMOGRAPHICS

IPEDS/NCES: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>

IPEDS Net Migration:

<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/search/viewtable?tableId=36099&returnUrl=%2Fsearch>

WICHE Knocking at the College Door: <https://www.wiche.edu/knocking/>

Census: <https://www.census.gov/topics/education/educational-attainment.html>

Pell Institute: <https://www.pellinstitute.org/>

SHEEO SHEF State Profiles: <https://shef.sheeo.org/state-profile/georgia/>

SREB Fact Book: <https://www.sreb.org/fact-book-higher-education-0>

National Bureau of Economic Research: <https://www.nber.org/>

NCES DataLab: <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/>

FINANCE, COST AND AFFORDABILITY

State Appropriations: Varies by state

NACUBO: <https://www.nacubo.org/Research/2024/NACUBO-Tuition-Discounting-Study>

NCES DataLab NPSAS: <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/>

IPEDS: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>

CATC: <https://collegecost.ed.gov/>

FSA Federal Student Aid Data Center: <https://studentaid.gov/data-center>

College Scorecard: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>

TICAS: <https://ticas.org/ourwork/student-debt/>

CollegeBoard: <https://research.collegeboard.org/>

CollegeBoard Trends in College Pricing: <https://research.collegeboard.org/trends/college-pricing>

CollegeBoard Trends in Student Aid: <https://research.collegeboard.org/trends/student-aid>

FSA Data Center: <https://studentaid.gov/data-center>

InformedStates: <https://informedstates.org/data>

College Scorecard: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>

SHEEO SHEF: <https://shef.sheeo.org/data-downloads/>

STUDENT SUCCESS

IPEDES (Graduation Rates & Outcome Measures): <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>

National Student Clearinghouse: <https://nscresearchcenter.org/>

NSC PDP: <https://www.studentclearinghouse.org/solutions/ed-insights/pdp/>

College Scorecard: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>

Lumina Foundation Stronger Nation: <https://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/credentials-of-value>

TICAS Quick Facts: <https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Postsecondary-Attainment-Quick-Facts-August-2024.pdf>

WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT/OUTCOMES

State high demand job lists – map the SOC code to CIP codes of IPEDS Completions

College Scorecard: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>

Census PSEO: https://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/pseo_experimental.html

State SLDS Systems

Bureau of Labor Statistics: <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm> and <https://data.bls.gov/oesmap/>

CollegeBoard – Education Pays: <https://research.collegeboard.org/trends/education-pays>

NACE – First Destination Survey

O*Net OnLine: <https://www.onetonline.org/>

Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis: <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/>

SREB Fact Book on Higher Education: <https://www.sreb.org/fact-book-higher-education-0>

WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

TELL THE STORY

Advocacy = Facts + Framing + Why it Matters

Use data to:

- Clarify your value
- Support your ask
- Humanize your mission

Advocacy works best when:

- You start with why
- You show outcomes
- You center the student/community impact

Data Advocacy Checklist

- ✓ Did I start with "why"?
- ✓ Did I choose the right audience-specific data? Did the juice equal the effort of the squeeze?
- ✓ Did I keep the message visual and digestible? Was it consumable?
- ✓ Did I translate the statistics into impact?
- ✓ Did I tell a story? Did I address what they care about?

THANK YOU!

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