Data Presentation Activities to Empower People

Here are short descriptions of four activities you can run that empower people to find and present a data story. Each activity includes a short description of why you would run it, and a step-by-step explanation.

Remix a Visualization Using Different Presentation Techniques

The goal of this activity is to practice the various techniques for presenting data. This gives participants a “toolbelt” of techniques they can use to tell a data story, helping them feel more confident that they can present data creatively.

*How you do it:*

1. Introduce an existing visualization and explain its audience, goals, and content.
2. Break the participants into groups of 3 or 4 people each. Assign each group a specific technique (personal story, data sculpture, map or creative map, chart or creative chart, data game). Give each group a copy of the visualization you introduced.
3. Let the groups work for 10 minutes to brainstorm and sketch one example that uses the same data in the visualization, but presents it using the technique you assigned to them.
4. Bring everyone back together and go around the room letting each group share their favorite idea.

Make Some Word Webs

Abstract ideas are hard to picture, and even harder to draw. A word web is a tool for exploring abstract ideas. This activity gives participants a way to turn abstract ideas into concrete images, allowing them to move from numbers to pictures to engage new audiences.

*How you do it:*

1. Spread out large pieces of paper, each with an abstract concept written in the middle.
2. Break the participants into groups of 5 or 6. Each person should have a pen. Each group should have one of the pieces of paper you just showed.
3. Tell the participants they should start by drawing a line from the central word and writing another word that they associate with that one. Keep adding words connected to the first word or to the ones that other people add.
4. Give the groups 6 minutes to brainstorm and write words. You can force them to do this in silence, so they are focused on the words written down and nothing else.
5. Bring everyone back together, hang the sheets of paper on the wall, spend a few minutes letting everyone walk around looking at them to find words that inspire images.
**Build Data Sculptures**

The idea of playing with data is new to most people. This activity lets people quickly build sculptures that tell a simple data story with craft materials. The playful approach to the data helps engage the participants in thinking about how stories can be found and presented quickly and helps people feel more freedom and flexibility about data presentations.

*How you do it:*

1. Gather a collection of cheap craft materials – plastic bottle tops, wire, small fuzzy balls, markers, colored paper. Include ways to attach these together, like tape and glue.
2. Introduce the group to two related “normal” charts of data. One can be a single fact, and the other a medium-sized set of information.
3. Ask the group to pair up, preferably with someone they don’t know.
4. Show participants a large central table full of the materials you have gathered. Give them 6 minutes to quickly build a physical representation of the data you presented earlier.
5. Stop everyone when the time is up.
6. Give each group 1 minute to share what they made.

**Make Data Storybooks**

Storytelling is an art form, and we don’t get to practice it very much. This activity lets participants practice putting a data story together into a narrative, like a storyteller would. It lets people sketch their story and play with different ways to tell it in a fun storybook form, creating a narrative that can tell their stories in a convincing way.

*How you do it:*

1. Introduce a small set of data, and one story you have found in it.
2. Break the participants into pairs or threes, giving each a piece of paper and some pens. Have each group fold their piece of paper in half. Use big pieces of paper if you have them available.
3. Give the groups 10 minutes to sketch out a story on their paper. Encourage them to use drawings, words, shapes, and color creatively.
4. Bring everyone back together to share the stories they made.