

PRACTICAL GUIDE

# Telling Your **Impact Story** with Data

A Practical Guide to Data Visualisation for NZ and Australian Not-for-Profits

Version 1.0 | 2025 | [AmplifyData.org.nz](https://AmplifyData.org.nz)

Data Visualisation

Impact Reporting

Annual Reports

Funder Acquittals

Board Papers

Accessible Design

Cultural Responsiveness

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# Introduction

Why data storytelling matters for not-for-profits

## Why Data Storytelling Matters for NGOs

Every day, your organisation creates positive change in your community. But how do you communicate that impact effectively to funders, supporters, board members, and the public? Data visualisation transforms complex information into compelling stories that resonate with your audiences.

For not-for-profit organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, effective data storytelling can:

- Strengthen grant applications and acquittal reports
- Build donor confidence and increase giving
- Demonstrate accountability to beneficiaries and communities
- Support strategic decision-making at board level
- Amplify your organisation's voice and reach

## The Data Storytelling Journey

- 1 Data**  
Raw numbers and facts
- 2 Analysis**  
Finding patterns and insights
- 3 Visualisation**  
Choosing the right charts and graphics
- 4 Narrative**  
Crafting compelling stories around data
- 5 Action**  
Inspiring stakeholder response and change

# The Power of Data Storytelling

From numbers to narratives that inspire action

## From Numbers to Narratives

Data alone rarely moves people to action. It's the story behind the data that creates connection and inspires change.

### Data Only

"In 2024, we served 1,247 clients across 15 locations."

### Data with Story

"Last year, 1,247 families walked through our doors seeking help -- a 23% increase. Behind each number is a person like Sarah, a mother of three who came to us after losing her job. Today, she's back in work and her children are thriving."

## The Impact Story Framework

- 1 Context**  
"Here's the situation"
- 2 Action**  
"Here's what we did"
- 3 Result**  
"Here's what changed"
- 4 Impact**  
"Here's why it matters"
- 5 Call to Action**  
"Here's how you can help"

## Key Principles of NGO Data Storytelling

PRINCIPLE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
<b>Human-Centred</b>	Connect data to real people	"Each dot represents a young person who found housing"
<b>Honest</b>	Present data accurately	"While 78% succeeded, we're investigating why 22% disengaged"
<b>Proportionate</b>	Match complexity to audience	Simple charts for social media, detailed for boards
<b>Culturally Safe</b>	Respect data sovereignty	Follow Maori Data Sovereignty principles for iwi partnerships
<b>Accessible</b>	Everyone can understand	Colour-blind friendly palettes and alt text

# Understanding Your Audience

Different stakeholders need different data presentations

## Audience Needs Matrix

AUDIENCE	PRIMARY NEEDS	VISUALISATION APPROACH
Board Members	Strategic overview, risk indicators	Dashboards, trend lines, KPIs
Major Funders	Accountability, progress evidence	Outcome tracking, budget vs actual
Government Contracts	Compliance data, service volumes	Detailed tables, demographic breakdowns
Individual Donors	Emotional impact, value for money	Simple infographics, stories with data
Media/Public	Headline stats, human interest	Bold single numbers, comparison visuals
Beneficiaries	What's available, how to access	Simple icons, clear language
Staff/Volunteers	Operational data, success stories	Workload charts, celebration stats

## Audience-Specific Tips

### Philanthropic Funders

- Focus on outcomes, not just outputs
- Show connection between funding and results
- Include honest reflection on challenges
- Demonstrate value for money

### Government Funders

- Meet specific reporting requirements first
- Provide demographic breakdowns as required
- Show compliance with contract deliverables
- Include data quality assurance statements

# Chart Selection Framework

Choosing the right visualisation for your data

## Chart Selection Decision Tree

### What Are You Trying to Show?

#### COMPARISON

Few categories: Bar chart  
Many categories: Horizontal bar

#### COMPOSITION

Static: Pie chart  
Over time: Stacked area

#### RELATIONSHIP

Two variables: Scatter plot  
Three+: Bubble chart

#### DISTRIBUTION

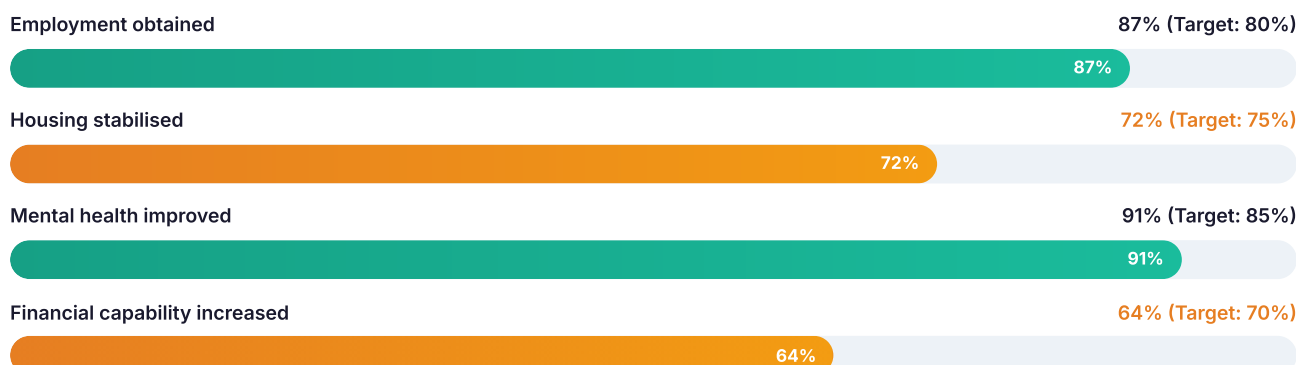
Single: Histogram  
Multiple: Box plot

## Chart Types for Common NGO Scenarios

SCENARIO	RECOMMENDED CHART	WHY IT WORKS
Comparing outcomes across programmes	Horizontal bar chart	Easy to read programme names
Showing change over time	Line chart	Shows trends clearly
Breaking down budget allocation	Pie chart (max 5-6 segments)	Familiar parts-of-whole format
Demonstrating reach by region	Map visualisation	Geographic context is clear
Before/after comparison	Paired bar or slope graph	Direct visual comparison
Comparing to targets	Bullet chart or progress bars	Clear goal vs actual

## NGO-Specific Examples

### Outcome Tracking



# Data Visualisation Principles

The core principles for effective visual communication



## The 5 Core Principles

### 1. Clarity Over Cleverness

Your visualisation should communicate instantly. If viewers need to study it carefully, it's not working.

**Bad:** 3D pie chart with 12 segments and patterns

**Good:** Horizontal bar chart sorted by value

### 2. Data-Ink Ratio

Maximise the proportion of ink devoted to data. Remove:

- Unnecessary gridlines
- Decorative elements & 3D effects
- Excessive legends when labels work

### 3. Honest Representation

Never manipulate visualisations to exaggerate impact. Start Y-axis at 0, not at a value that makes small changes look dramatic.

### 4. Consistent Design

Use a consistent visual language: same colour palette, fonts, chart styles, and iconography across all communications.

### 5. Progressive Disclosure

Layer information from simple to complex: headline number first, supporting chart second, detailed data available on request.

## Colour Guidelines

### Semantic Colours (Consistent Meanings)

**Green:** Positive/success/target achieved

**Amber/Orange:** Warning/approaching threshold

**Red:** Negative/concern/below target

**Blue:** Neutral/informational

### Colour-Blind Friendly Combinations

GOOD COMBINATIONS	AVOID
Blue and orange	Red and green together
Blue and yellow	Purple and blue together
Purple and orange	Red and brown together
Black and any bright colour	Relying on colour alone

# Accessible Design Guidelines

Ensuring your impact story reaches everyone

## Why Accessibility Matters

Approximately 1 in 5 people in NZ and Australia have some form of disability. Accessible design ensures your impact story reaches everyone.

## WCAG 2.1 Compliance

### Level A (Minimum)

- All images have alt text
- Information not conveyed by colour alone
- Text is resizable without loss of function

### Level AA (Recommended for NGOs)

- Colour contrast ratio at least 4.5:1 for text
- Contrast of 3:1 for graphical elements
- Focus indicators visible for interactive elements

## Accessibility Checklist for Charts

### Before Publishing Any Chart or Graph

- Alternative text provided for all charts
- Colour is not the only differentiator (add patterns, labels, or icons)
- Sufficient colour contrast (use online checker tools)
- Data table available as alternative
- Clear, readable fonts (minimum 12pt body, 14pt chart labels)
- Interactive elements keyboard accessible
- Screen reader tested (NVDA or VoiceOver)
- Responsive design for mobile

## Writing Effective Alt Text

### Poor Alt Text

"Chart showing data"

### Good Alt Text

"Line chart displaying youth programme outcomes from 2020 to 2024. Employment rate increased from 45% to 78%. Education completion rose from 52% to 71%."

### Alt Text Template

[Chart type] showing [what the data represents]. [Key finding or trend]. [Most important data point or comparison].  
[Time period if relevant].

# Culturally Responsive Design

honouring Te Tiriti, Maori Data Sovereignty, and cultural diversity

## Maori Data Sovereignty in Visualisation

### Rangatiratanga (Authority)

Iwi/hapu have authority over their data presentation. Seek permission and approval before publishing.

### Whakapapa (Relationships)

Data connects to people and place. Show context and connections, not isolated statistics.

### Whanaungatanga (Obligations)

Present data in ways that benefit Maori. Avoid deficit framing that reinforces stereotypes.

### Kotahitanga (Collective)

Consider collective as well as individual impact. Reflect collective ownership of outcomes.

## Avoiding Deficit Framing

DEFICIT FRAMING (AVOID)	STRENGTH-BASED FRAMING (PREFERRED)
"Maori worse than..."	"Maori participation grew..."
"Gap between Maori and..."	"Maori outcomes improved..."
"Maori overrepresented in..."	"Maori leadership in..."
"Maori lack..."	"Maori bring strengths in..."

## Bilingual Labels and Te Reo Terms

ENGLISH	TE REO MAORI
Results/Outcomes	Nga Hua
Participants	Nga Kaiuru
Data/Information	Raraunga / Mohiohio
Impact	Panga
Target	Whainganga
Achievement	Tutukitanga
Wellbeing	Hauora
Community	Hapori

#### **Pacific and Australian First Nations Considerations**

- Use imagery and colours that resonate culturally
- Translate key information into relevant community languages
- Involve community members in reviewing visualisations
- Acknowledge Country in Australian reports
- Align with Closing the Gap data sovereignty principles

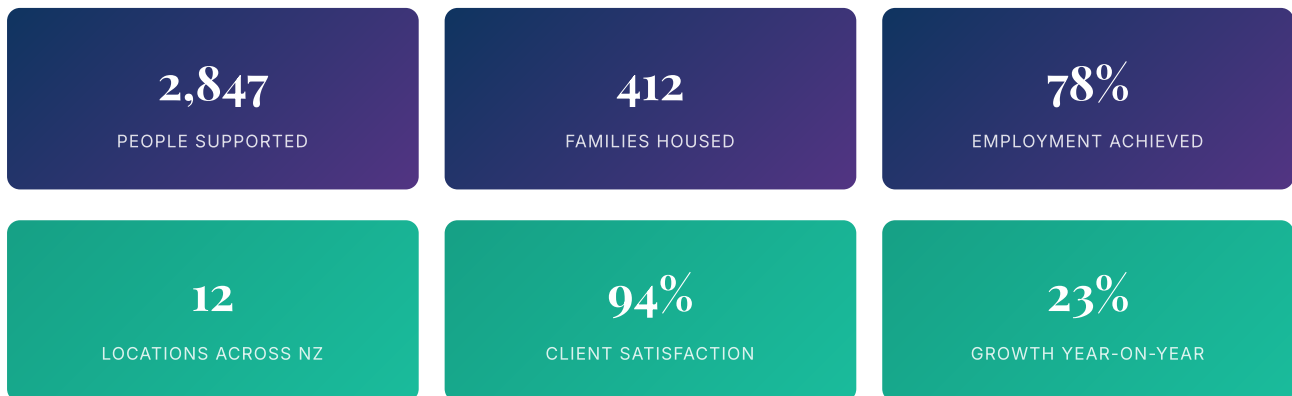
# Annual Report Visualisations

Structuring your data story for maximum impact

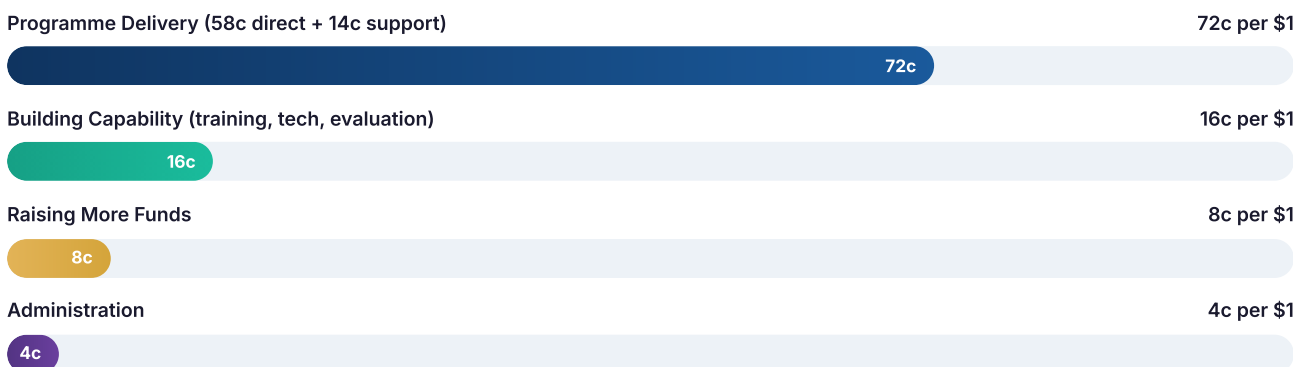
## Annual Report Data Structure



## "At a Glance" Template



## Financial Summary - "Where Your Support Goes"



# Under Acquittal Reporting

What funders want to see and how to visualise it

## What Funders Want to See

- 1 Outcomes Achieved vs Planned**  
"Did you achieve what you said you would?" -- Progress charts, target vs actual comparisons
- 2 Financial Accountability**  
"Was the money spent as proposed?" -- Budget vs actual tables, variance explanations
- 3 Reach and Coverage**  
"Who did you help and how many?" -- Demographic breakdowns, geographic reach
- 4 Honest Reflection**  
"What worked, what didn't, what will you change?" -- Challenges with responses, learnings
- 5 Stories and Evidence**  
"Can you show us the human impact?" -- Case studies with consent, participant quotes

## Funder-Specific Tips

### Lotteries NZ / NZ Lottery Grants

Align outcomes with their focus areas. Use their terminology. Include community benefit narrative and clear financial reconciliation.

### DIA Community-Led Development

Focus on community ownership and leadership. Show capacity building outcomes. Document engagement process and include participant voices.

### Australian State Government

Meet Data Exchange (DEX) requirements. Use standard demographic categories. Provide data in required formats. Include client feedback.

### Philanthropic Trusts

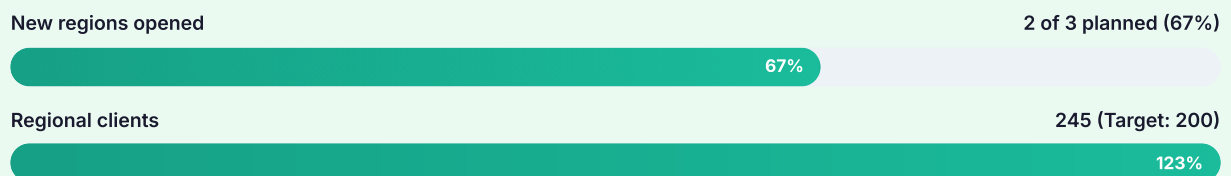
Tell the human story. Show theory of change progress. Be honest about challenges. Demonstrate learning and adaptation.

# Board Papers and Governance

Executive dashboards, KPI reporting, and risk visualisation

## Executive Dashboard Design

### Strategic Priority 1: Expand Regional Reach -- On Track



### Strategic Priority 2: Improve Client Outcomes -- Needs Attention



## Risk Visualisation for Boards

	LOW IMPACT	MEDIUM IMPACT	HIGH IMPACT
High Likelihood		Staff Turnover	Govt Contract Renewal
Medium Likelihood	IT Upgrade	Funding Diversification	Premises Lease Expiry
Low Likelihood	Brand Reputation	Data Breach	

# Social Media and Digital Content

Platform-specific visualisation guidelines

## Platform-Specific Guidelines

PLATFORM	IMAGE SIZE	BEST TYPES	TIPS
Instagram	1080×1080 / 1080×1920	Single stat, infographic	Bold numbers, brand colours
Facebook	1200×630	Infographic, milestones	More text ok, shareable
LinkedIn	1200×627	Professional charts	Data-focused, credible
Twitter/X	1200×675	Single stat with context	Punchy, newsworthy

## Impact Carousel Content (5 Slides)

### Slide 1: Hook

**"What happened when you donated \$50 last year?"**

Swipe to see...

### Slide 2: Context

"That's about 10 coffees. But you didn't buy coffee. You invested in someone's future."

### Slide 3: Data

**\$50 =**

2 weeks of skills training for a young person seeking work

### Slides 4-5: Outcome + CTA

**78%**

found employment within 3 months. "Your support works."

# Tools and Software

Recommended tools by budget and skill level

## Tool Selection Guide

### Beginner / Free

- **Canva** (Free tier) - Infographics, social media, templates
- **Google Sheets Charts** - Basic bar, line, pie
- **Piktochart** - Infographics, NGO discount
- **Datawrapper** - Professional charts, no design skills needed

### Intermediate / Low Cost

- **Power BI** - Interactive dashboards (free in M365 Nonprofit)
- **Looker Studio** - Free interactive dashboards (Google)
- **Flourish** - Animated, interactive charts
- **Infogram** - Nonprofit pricing

### Advanced / Investment

- **Tableau** - Enterprise-grade analytics (nonprofit pricing)
- **Adobe Illustrator / InDesign** - Custom design (requires design skills)

## Microsoft 365 for Nonprofits

### Power BI

Interactive dashboards. Connect to Excel, CRM, databases. Free for up to 10 users.

### Excel

Improved chart options. PivotCharts for dynamic analysis. Power Query for data prep.

### PowerPoint

Chart animation. Design Ideas for layout. Export slides as images for social media.

### Canva for Nonprofits

Free Canva Pro access for registered charities includes premium templates, Brand Kit, resize feature, team collaboration, and infographic/chart templates.

# Templates and Examples





Ready-to-use templates for impact reporting

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## Template 1: One-Page Impact Summary



## Template 2: Social Impact Infographic - The Ripple Effect

-  **You Gave \$100**
-  **Which Provided**  
10 hours of job search support for Tama
-  **Leading To**  
A full-time job in construction
-  **Which Means**  
Stable income, housing security, confidence for future

### **The Bigger Picture**

78% of our clients like Tama find employment. \$4.20 returned to the economy for every \$1 invested. Families breaking cycles of disadvantage.

# Case Studies

Examples from NZ and Australian organisations

## Case Study 1: Te Whare Awhina (NZ)

### Community Support Organisation - Bilingual Impact Reporting

**Challenge:** Demonstrate impact to government funders while maintaining cultural appropriateness for Maori client base.

**Approach:** Co-designed outcome framework with Maori advisory group. Used bilingual Te Reo Maori / English reporting. Strength-based framing with whanau outcomes alongside individual metrics.

### Nga Hua o te Whanau / Family Outcomes



**Results:** 40% increase in funder satisfaction. Framework adopted by regional funders. Recognised as best practice by Hui E! Community Aotearoa.

## Case Study 2: Regional Youth Services (Victoria, AU)

### Employment Programme - Dual Reporting Strategy

**Challenge:** Demonstrating employment outcomes to state government while telling a compelling story for philanthropic funders.

**Approach:** Two versions: compliance-focused for government, story-led for philanthropy. Interactive Power BI dashboard for board.

**Results:** Maintained \$450K state government contract. Secured additional \$80K from philanthropic funders. Board engagement increased.

## Case Study 3: Environmental Conservation Trust (NZ)

### **Multi-regional - Layered Communication Strategy**

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**Challenge:** Communicating complex environmental outcomes to diverse audiences.

**Approach:** Layered communication: headline stats for general audience, detailed data for technical audience. Maps for geographic impact. Before/after visualisations.

**Results:** 200% increase in social media engagement. DOC cited as exemplar. Volunteer recruitment increased 45%.

# Common Mistakes to Avoid

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the top 10 data visualisation mistakes for NGOs

## The Top 10 Mistakes

### 1. Too Much Data

15 different metrics on one page

3-5 key metrics that tell your story

### 2. Wrong Chart Type

Pie chart with 12 segments

Horizontal bar chart for comparison

### 3. Misleading Axes

Y-axis at 90% exaggerating 5% growth

Y-axis starting at 0 for honesty

### 4. No Context

"We served 500 people"

"500 people, +25% YoY, 80% of target"

### 5. Colour Overload

10 colours with no clear meaning

2-3 colours consistently used

### 6. Missing Accessibility

Red vs green only, no patterns

Colours + patterns + labels + alt text

### 7. Decoration Over Clarity

3D effects, shadows, unnecessary art

Clean, simple, focused on data

### 8. Ignoring Your Audience

Same visual for board and social

Tailored formats per audience

### 9. No Call to Action

**Wrong:** "Here's our data" (end)

**Right:** "Here's our data -- and here's how you can help"

### 10. Outdated Information

**Wrong:** Using data from 3 years ago

**Right:** Most recent data with clear date labels

## Quality Checklist Before Publishing

### Accuracy

---

- Data verified and correct
- Source cited or available
- Date of collection clear
- Sample size indicated

### Design

---

- Chart type is appropriate
- Axes clearly labelled
- Colours accessible and meaningful
- Design clean and uncluttered

### Accessibility

---

- Alt text provided
- Colour not only differentiator
- Font size readable (12pt+)
- Data table alternative available

### Story & Approval

---

- Key message immediately clear
- Context provided
- Honest representation
- Reviewed and approved for release

# Resources and Further Reading

Tools, books, and learning opportunities

## NZ and Australian Resources

### Data & Impact Measurement

- Hui E! Community Aotearoa
- Centre for Social Impact (Australia)
- Social Value Aotearoa - SROI guidance
- Impact Investment Ready (NZ)

### Maori Data Sovereignty

- Te Mana Raraunga
- Data ILG - Indigenous data governance
- Te Ara Whakamana - Maori research ethics

## Recommended Books

**Storytelling with Data**  
Cole Nussbaumer Knaflic

**The Big Picture**  
Steve Wexler

**Better Data Visualizations**  
Jonathan Schwabish

**Information is Beautiful**  
David McCandless

## Quick Reference Cards

### Chart Selection Quick Reference

I WANT TO SHOW...	USE THIS CHART
Comparison between items	Bar chart (horizontal)
Change over time	Line chart
Parts of a whole	Pie chart or donut
Progress toward goal	Bullet chart / progress bar
Geographic data	Map
Before and after	Slope graph / paired bars

### Te Reo Maori Data Terms

ENGLISH	TE REO MAORI
Data	Raraunga
Results / Outcomes	Nga Hua
Impact	Panga
Target / Goal	Whaingā
Wellbeing	Hauora
Report	Purongo

Published by AmplifyData.org.nz | [Contact@AmplifyData.org.nz](mailto:Contact@AmplifyData.org.nz)

*We acknowledge the guidance of Te Mana Raraunga and NGO sector partners across Aotearoa and Australia who contributed examples and case studies.*