



No Numbers Without a Story: *Case-Making When Trust Is Fragile*

Datathon!

Genna Styles-Lyas, EdD
Randy Cohen

April 29, 2026

Agenda

- **Welcome + Container**
- **What Is Case-Making?**
- **Mini-Framework: The Case-Making Scaffold**
- **Lab Build**
- **Practice**
- **Exchange**
- **Next Steps + Beyond the Session**

Why This Matters Now

- **Data alone isn't persuasive**
- **Story alone isn't credible**
- **Trust is fragile, attention is scarce**

***The challenge isn't information.
It's connection.***

Welcome + Container

Community Invitations

- We love cookie dough
- Sharing is caring in so many ways
- Hold confidence, amplify lessons

We're not here to defend every stat. We're here to build trustworthy, relevant knowledge.

Purpose

To strengthen case-making by helping participants pair data and story in ways that resonate with audiences and lead to action.

“Case-making = _____”

Case-making

**The deliberate pairing of evidence and story—
delivered by a compelling messenger—to move
a specific audience toward a specific action.**

Think of a time
your case worked
– *and a time
when it didn't.*

What was different?



Golden Rule

“No numbers
without a story.
No stories without
a number”

3 Core Questions

1. What’s the message?
2. Who gets the message?
3. Who delivers the message?

*If one of these is unclear,
the case won’t land.*

The Case-Making Sandwich

- **Data (bread)**
- **Meaning (jelly)**
- **Relevance (peanut butter)**
- **Action (bread)**



Translation Chain

Data → Meaning → Relevance → Action

*The work is the middle.
Most case-making fails here.*

The “So-What” Bridge

Data → Meaning → Relevance → Action

- **Your job: translate the “so what”**
- **Don’t make your audience do the work.**
- ***It’s not what you say. It’s what they hear.***

Choose Your Case + Set Your Research Goal

Lab Build

- 1. Issue**
- 2. Audience**
- 3. Message**
- 4. Messenger**
- 5. Draft**

Arts Impact Explorer

- Arts intersection with 32 sectors
- Impact Points
- Publications
- Factsheets
- Project Examples

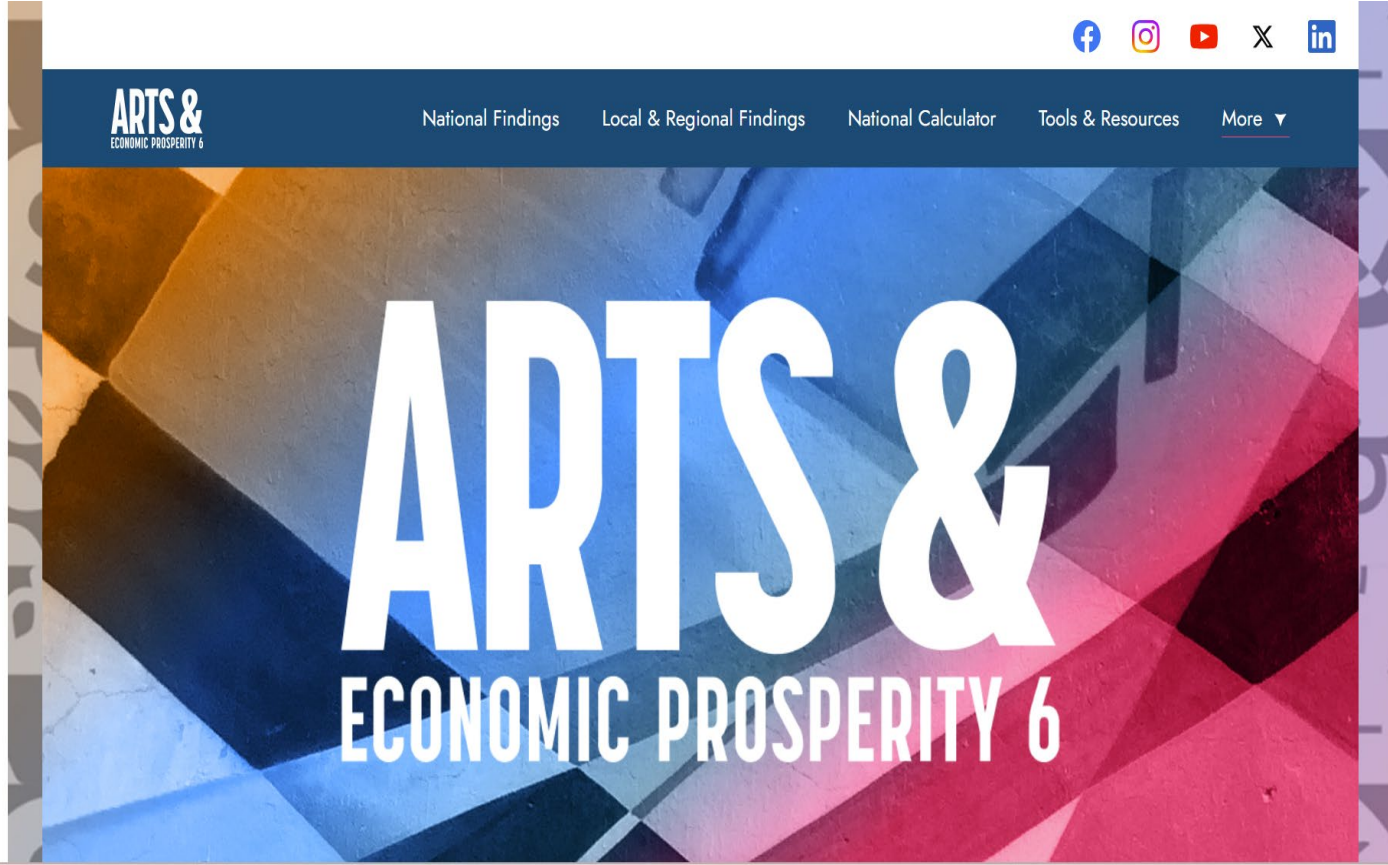


Public Opinion Poll

Americans Speak Out About
The Arts in 2023



Americans
for the Arts



AEP6 National Calculator



Practice:

One Number + One Story

Say it out loud

Choose . . .

- **1 data point** (or data *type* you need)
- **1 story** (who/what illustrates it)
- **1 target audience**
- **1 action**

5-minute “build” + 15-minute “try it out” in trios:

- Person A shares their pairing (60–90 seconds)
- Persons B/C responds:
 - ✓ ***What* landed?**
 - ✓ ***What* felt shaky?**
 - ✓ ***What* would your target audience ask?**

Lab Time

- **Issue:**
- **Audience:**
- **What they care about:**
- **Message:**
- **Number:**
- **Story:**
- **Messenger:**
- **Desired action:**

- **What landed?**
- **What felt shaky?**
- **What question would your audience ask?**

EXCHANGE

- **Resonates**
- **Breakdowns**
- **Needs /Gaps**
- **Messengers that work**

Who Delivers the Message Matters

- **The most effective messenger may not be you!**
- **Credibility comes from proximity and trust.**

The goal isn't better talking points.

It's building messages people recognize
as true, relevant, and worth acting on.

The messenger is the filter.

Next Steps + Beyond the Session

Two Commitments

- 1. What data will you gather and verify next?**
- 2. Who will you test the message with (and by when)?**

Thank You!

Randy Cohen

VP of Research

rcohen@artsusa.org

 @artsinfoguy

Genna Styles-Lyas EdD.

Director of LAA Community Engagement + Equity in Research

Glyas@artsusa.org

 www.linkedin.com/in/genna-styles