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Issue Alert: "Speaking Louder with Numbers"

"Because nonprofits work directly with people and communities, they have a unique view of how policies play out; information that is needed by government decision makers."

— Tips on Advocacy for Publicly Funded Nonprofits [\(1\)](#)

Public policies often impact the progress of nonprofit organizations that seek to improve outcomes for children. When decision makers discuss such a policy, **nonprofit organizations may play an important role in educating policymakers** and community members about the effect of their decisions on children and families. In fact, nonprofit organizations may even advocate or lobby for the programs or children they serve.

The most important first step in **educating, advocating** or **lobbying** is to create a **strong message** – make your case. Effectively using research and credible data, along with your organization's stories and anecdotes, will help you educate decision makers and community members about the issues and policies affecting youth programs and childhood well-being in your area.

[Advocacy resources](#)

Here are **eight tips** on how to be more effective in communicating your message, whatever cause your organization holds dear:

1. Use reliable (unbiased or peer reviewed) sources and cite them

Make sure to be clear about the source of your data. **Using reputable, nonbiased data sources will reflect well on the validity of your statements.** Policy changes often make numbers rise or fall abruptly. If the changes over time don't make sense to you, be sure to look into the history and measurement of the statistic so your readers can't discount the importance of your statements.

2. Do not be afraid of "old" data

Keep in mind that data obtained from government organizations are often on a time lag – meaning that in 2011, the most recent data available may be from 2007. **But it is still useful!** Even "old" data can be a reliable source of information; just make sure you clearly state the year of data and use a phrase like "the most recent year available" in text.

Nonprofits Can Advocate

501c3 nonprofits have limits, but can advocate and lobby without losing nonprofit status. [\(2\)](#) Advocacy and lobbying are often used interchangeably, and both create awareness of the positive or negative impact that a public policy may have on a community.

- **Advocacy** refers to **any** activity that attempts to change government policy
- **Lobbying** is a subset of advocacy that aims to influence **specific** legislation, and is aimed at directly at a legislative body.

3. Use a percentage or rate instead of a raw number



Raw Number – The number of individuals who fall into any certain category.

Example: 512,754 public and non-public school students in grades K-12 received free or reduced lunch in 2009.



Percentage – How many individuals, out of a **hundred**, fall into any certain category.

Example: 41.8% of public and non-public school students in grades K-12 received free or reduced lunch in 2009.

Rate - How many individuals, out of a **thousand**, fall into any certain category.

Example: The free/reduced lunch rate for public and non-public school students in grades K-12 was 418 per thousand (2009).

Exception: "graduation rate" is really a percentage

How to make a percentage

The **raw number** of public and non-public school students in grades K-12 who received free or reduced lunches: 512,754

The **total number** of public and non-public school students in grades K-12: 1,126,684

Divide the total number by the raw number:

Multiply your answer by 100:

Add a percent sign:

Percentage

$$\begin{aligned} 512,754 \div 1,126,684 \\ = 0.418 \\ 0.418 \times 100 = 41.8 \\ 41.8\% \end{aligned}$$

"41% of Indiana K-12 students received free or reduced price lunches."

How to make a rate

The **raw number** of public and non-public school students in grades K-8 who received free or reduced lunches: 512,754

The **total number** of public and non-public school students in grades K-8: 1,126,684

Divide the raw number by the total number:

Multiply your answer by 1,000:

Say "per 1,000" after the number:

Rate

$$\begin{aligned} 512,754 \div 1,126,684 \\ = 0.418 \\ 0.418 \times 1000 = 418 \\ 418 \text{ per } 1000 \end{aligned}$$

"418 out of every 1000 Indiana K-12 students received free or reduced price lunches."

When to make a percentage or rate

Raw numbers are abstract and often don't mean much to a reader. **Percentages and rates help readers understand** how many people are affected compared to the total number of people in an area.



Make a percentage or rate when the raw number and the total number of individuals are both known. Choose percentage when the raw number divided by the total number is *greater* than 0.10; choose rate when it is *less* than 0.10.

Example: For free/reduced Lunch you would use percentage because 0.418 is greater than 0.10. A common indicator that uses rate is teen births: 22 per 1,000 teen females gave birth in 2007.

4. Use words in addition to numbers to show how much

In general, it is best to **avoid terms like some, most, a few, or many** because they are **too vague**. However, certain words do have **specific number meanings** that can be used in text to show how many or how much. See the chart at right for some useful measurement words and when they should be used.

Half	Typically used between 49% and 51%
A third	Typically used between 30% and 35%
The majority	Anytime a percentage is greater than 50%
A quarter	Typically used between 24% and 26%
Unanimously	Used only at 100%
A fifth	Typically used between 19% and 21%

You may also use words/phrases such as “nearly,” “more than,” “just over,” “just under,” or “fully” to modify a measurement word when your percentage is close.

5. Use “one in __” statements

How to change a number or percentage into a “one in __” statement

There are approximately 1,558,493 youth under age 18 in Indiana; 310,140 of them (or 19.9%) lived in poverty in 2009.

If you know the **raw number** and **total number**

Divide the raw number by the total number:

Round to the nearest whole number:

Create statement:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{"One in"} \\ \hline 1,558,493 \div 310,140 \\ = 5.03 \\ 5 \end{array}$$

"One in five Indiana children under age 18 lived in poverty in 2009."

If you know the **percentage**:

Divide 100 by the percentage:

Round to the nearest whole number:

Create statement:

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{"One in"} \\ \hline 100 \div 19.9 \\ = 5.02 \\ 5 \end{array}$$

"One in five Indiana children under age 18 lived in poverty in 2009."

When to change a number or percentage into a "one in __" statement

Use a one-in statement when using a percentage or rate just **doesn't get the message across** about how many individuals are affected. It may be more concrete for someone to imagine 5 people, one of whom is poor, than to visualize 20%.

6. Use percent change to show increase over time

How to figure percent change

"Percent change" indicates how much change has occurred **between two points in time**. This can be done with **raw numbers or percentages**. In 2008 the under-18 population of Indiana was 1,591,833. In 1998 it was 1,551,960.

Subtract the old value from the new value:

Then divide the answer by the old value:

Multiply the answer by 100:

Add the words "percent increase":

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{Percent Change} \\ 1,591,833 - 1,551,960 \\ = 39,873 \\ 39,873 \div 1,551,960 \\ = 0.026 \\ 0.026 \times 100 = \\ 2.6\% \text{ increase} \end{array}$$

"There was a 2.6 percent increase in child population (under 18) between 1998 and 2008 - or - Child population increased 2.6% between 1998 and 2008."

What to watch for when reading reports

When percent change is based on a small raw number, the true impact of the change **can be overstated**. For example, if a particular ailment went from affecting 2 children in a school of several hundred students to affecting 4 children in the school, you could say the problem increased 100%, or doubled. However, the problem still only affects a very small percentage of the total population of the school.

There is a big difference between percentage *point* increase and percent increase. While percent increase shows proportional growth over time, percentage *point* increase only shows the number difference between the first and second percentage.

Example: The 2006 graduation rate in Indiana was 76.1%, but in 2009 it was 81.5%.

- The percent increase is $(81.5 - 76.1) \div 76.1 =$ Indiana's graduation rate increased 7.1% between 2006 and 2009.
- The percentage **point** increase is $81.5 - 76.1 =$ Indiana's graduation rate increased by 5.4 percentage points between 2006 and 2009.

7. Use a time measurement instead of people



How to turn a statistic into a time measurement

In 2008 there were 17,529 substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect in Indiana.
There are 525,600 minutes in a year
There are 8,760 hours in a year

If the **raw number** (of times something happened during one year) is larger than the number of hours in a year >(8,760), use minutes for the calculation; if it is not, use hours. For child abuse and neglect, 17,529 is larger than 8,760, so we will use minutes.

Divide the raw number by the number of minutes or hours in a year:

Since we used minutes, the statement will read:


$$\begin{array}{r} \text{Time} \\ 525,600 \div 17,529 \\ = 30.0 \end{array}$$

"A child in Indiana is abused or neglected every 30 minutes."

When to use a time measurement

Best used when a number denotes how many times something happened, not how many people it happened to.

8. Consider talking to an expert

There are many rules and considerations when you start recalculating and rewording data. A data expert can help you find a solid statement that is meaningful to readers. To contact IYI's Data Team, email data@iyi.org or call 1-800-343-7060.

1 - [Speak Up: tips on advocacy for publicly funded nonprofits - The Center for an Urban Future](#)

2 - Individual funders may impose additional restrictions on using grant money for lobbying or advocacy work.

Advocacy Resources

To find out who Indiana's legislators are, check out the [Indiana General Assembly](#): or the [federal site](#).

What bills are coming up in the Indiana General Assembly this year? [Look at the state's bill watch](#).

For basic information on nonprofit advocacy, take a look at the following resource from [Independent Sector: The Basics of Nonprofit Advocacy](#).

IYI Resources

The latest data is at your fingertips with [IYI's DataCenter](#). Search statistics and gather data to improve your program planning and grant writing.

Or, request [customized data](#).

Get the most **comprehensive overview of children's well-being** in Indiana.

[Download](#) the 2010 Kids Count in Indiana Data Book.

Want **in-depth information** on youth or nonprofit advocacy? Check out the free resources at IYI's [Virginia Beall Ball Library](#). We will mail you the library materials and include a postage paid return envelope.

Have a quick question or want to bounce an idea around?

Contact IYI's free [Youth Service Help Line](#), and get the answers you need: **1-877-IYI-TIPS**.

Need **one-on-one assistance** with planning, evaluating, or expanding your organization? Benefit from IYI's Consulting Services and receive professional help at affordable hourly rates – discounted far below market value.

[Browse project examples](#).

For long-term coaching or large-scale projects, IYI's [Custom Solutions](#) offers assistance at market rates. Contact customsolutions@iyi.org to begin crafting a project that is custom designed to meet your need.

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