3 Steps towards Distributing Data Products Equitably

The Basic Idea:

Often, very equitable data projects trip at the finish line by packaging and distributing their information in a way that prioritizes the most privileged audience. What you say, how you say it and how your audience interacts with it matters a lot.

Step 1:

Choose your target audience in a way that reflects the equity you aimed for in the project. Note that "everyone" is not an effective audience target and when people aim for "universal" they usually default to the preferences of the most powerful stakeholders in the project.

Step 2:

Once you've identified your target (or targets, if you can make multiple versions of your data product, by all means go for it!) go through the checklists (on the back!)

Step 3:

Making the choices in these checklists can be done in a variety of ways. The best is to test a variety of styles, mediums, and narratives directly with your target audience.

The next best is to get advice from lived-experience experts that can represent some of your target audience.

Still worthwhile is just imagining what might work best for your audience, empathy is a powerful tool.
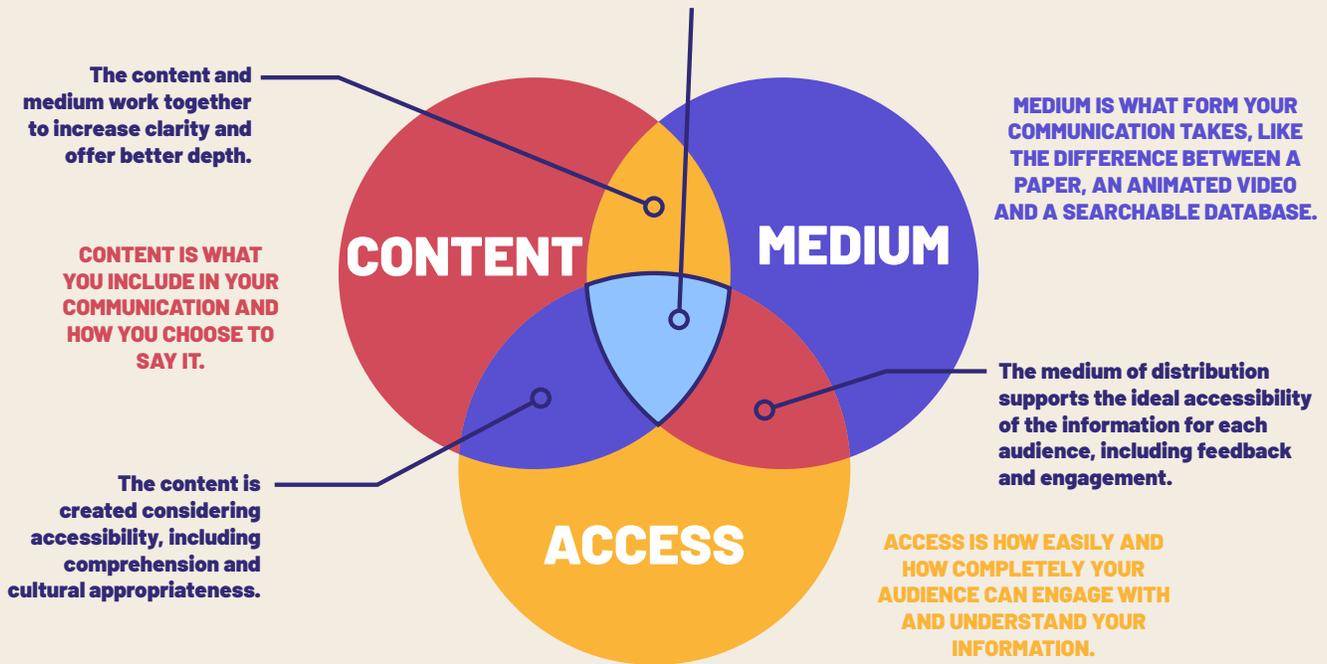
Real-world example:

A large non-profit organization (unnamed for privacy reasons) recently changed the content and format of its Annual General Report to prioritize the communication style and format that's most comfortable for its most marginalized clients (they tested this) rather than its wealthiest donors.

They were quite worried about making the donors mad, but instead, the donors loved the idea, some preferred the new style, *and* the donors shared this AGR more widely and proudly than any others the staff could remember.

WE ALL COUNT

WORKS FOR 'THIS' AUDIENCE

The content and medium work together to increase clarity and offer better depth.

CONTENT IS WHAT YOU INCLUDE IN YOUR COMMUNICATION AND HOW YOU CHOOSE TO SAY IT.

The content is created considering accessibility, including comprehension and cultural appropriateness.

CONTENT

MEDIUM

ACCESS

MEDIUM IS WHAT FORM YOUR COMMUNICATION TAKES, LIKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PAPER, AN ANIMATED VIDEO AND A SEARCHABLE DATABASE.

The medium of distribution supports the ideal accessibility of the information for each audience, including feedback and engagement.

ACCESS IS HOW EASILY AND HOW COMPLETELY YOUR AUDIENCE CAN ENGAGE WITH AND UNDERSTAND YOUR INFORMATION.

WE ALL COUNT

CONTENT

- **Subjects** - what should be included or excluded?
- **Language** - what type of words are best understood?
- **Length** - what is the ideal length?
- **Depth** - how deep into the data and method?
- **Tone** - What is the most equitable emotional undertone?
- **Perspective** - Whose POV is the information presented in?
- **Narrative** - What story type are you telling?
- **Clarity** - Who can understand the information?
- **Complexity** - Is it too complicated? Or too simple?
- **Relevance** - Is there meaning for the audience?
- **Cultural Translation** - Use of appropriate terminology, structure, stories and symbols for the audience.

MEDIUM

- **Digital vs. Print** - what is the audience's preference?
- **Static vs. Dynamic** - video, animation, transitions?
- **Interactive vs. Demonstrative** - dashboard vs. slideshow, etc.
- **Branding** - are there secondary messages?
- **Institutional Presence** - Who vouches for the information?
- **Live vs. Standalone** - Will the information change?
- **Isolated vs. Network** - Is the info in an ecosystem of other info? What is the context?
- **Private vs. Public** - Will the information be experienced collectively or individually?
- **Senses vs. Brain** - Does it engage the eyes? The ears? Does it effectively provoke thought?
- **Appeal** - Is it beautiful? Pleasant to experience?

ACCESS

- **Digital vs. Print** - what tech do you need?
- **Paywall** - do you need to pay to access?
- **Ownership** - who 'owns' the information?
- **Training** - do you need a specific education to understand it?
- **Permanence** - Will it always be available?
- **Depth** - Can you see the methodology? Raw data? Collection tools? Data Biography?
- **Copyright** - What can you use the information for?
- **Ableism** - Providing alternatives for differing ability?
- **Feedback** - How can the audience respond to the content and the creators?