Beyond the Numbers

Turning Library ROI Data into Stories That Build Public Support

Webinar · Part 2 of 2 · October 27, 2026

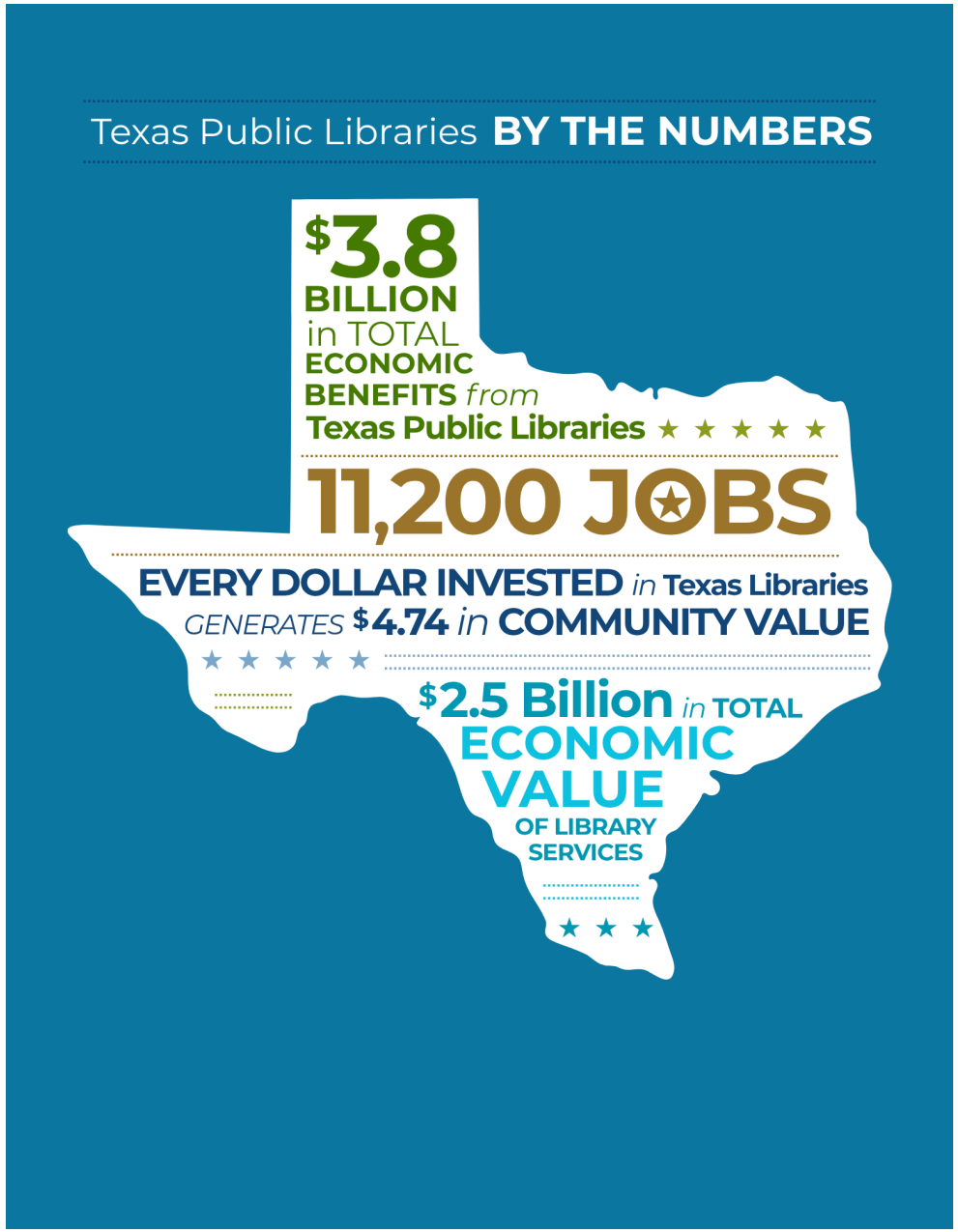
Jonathan Alba · JBK Economics Group

Prepared for the Texas Library Association



$4.74

returned to Texas communities for every $1 invested in public libraries



We have the numbers. Now what?

Beyond the Stacks gives every Texas library new evidence of its value. The next step is putting it to work.

WITH THE PEOPLE WHO SHAPE YOUR LIBRARY'S FUTURE

- **Elected officials**
- **Funders**
- **Community partners**
- **Residents**

A report doesn't change minds on its own. How you communicate it does.

Creating value and communicating value are two different things

WHAT YOUR LIBRARY CREATES

$3.83B

in total economic benefit from Texas public libraries, FY2024

GED testing. Job applications. Tool lending. Emergency shelter. Voter registration.

GAP

WHAT YOUR COMMUNITY SEES

?

Do the residents, partners, and decision-makers who shape your library's future know any of that?

Most community organizations under-communicate their value.

Not by a little. By a lot.

Storytelling is how you close the gap.

Before your next big meeting: think, feel, do

A quick rhetorical check before you prepare anything

THINK

What do I want them to think?

For example

"The library is a smart public investment."

FEEL

What do I want them to feel?

For example

"Proud of what our library does for this town."

DO

What do I want them to do?

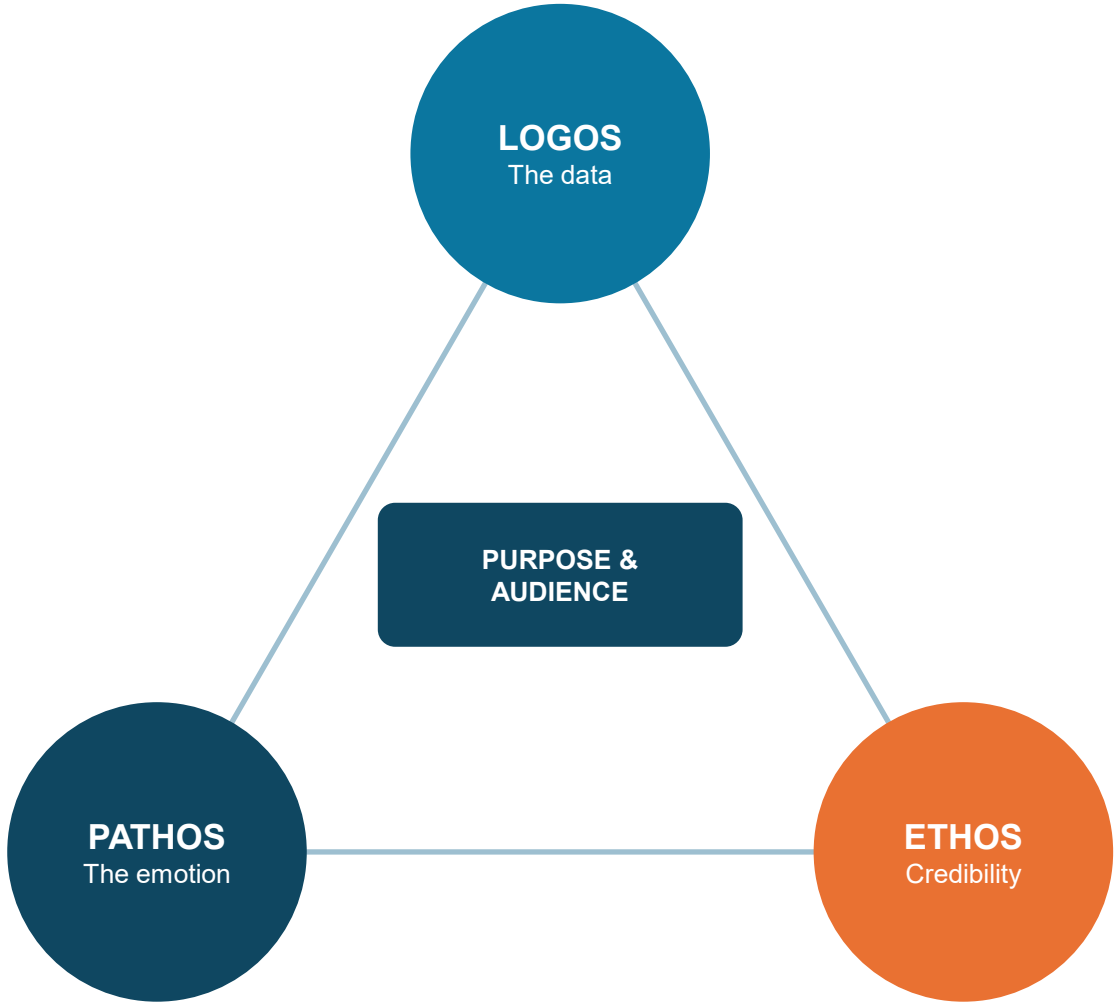
For example

"Vote to increase library funding in next year's budget."

Then: use logos, pathos, and ethos to get them there.

Three ways to persuade

Aristotle's appeals, with your purpose and audience at the center

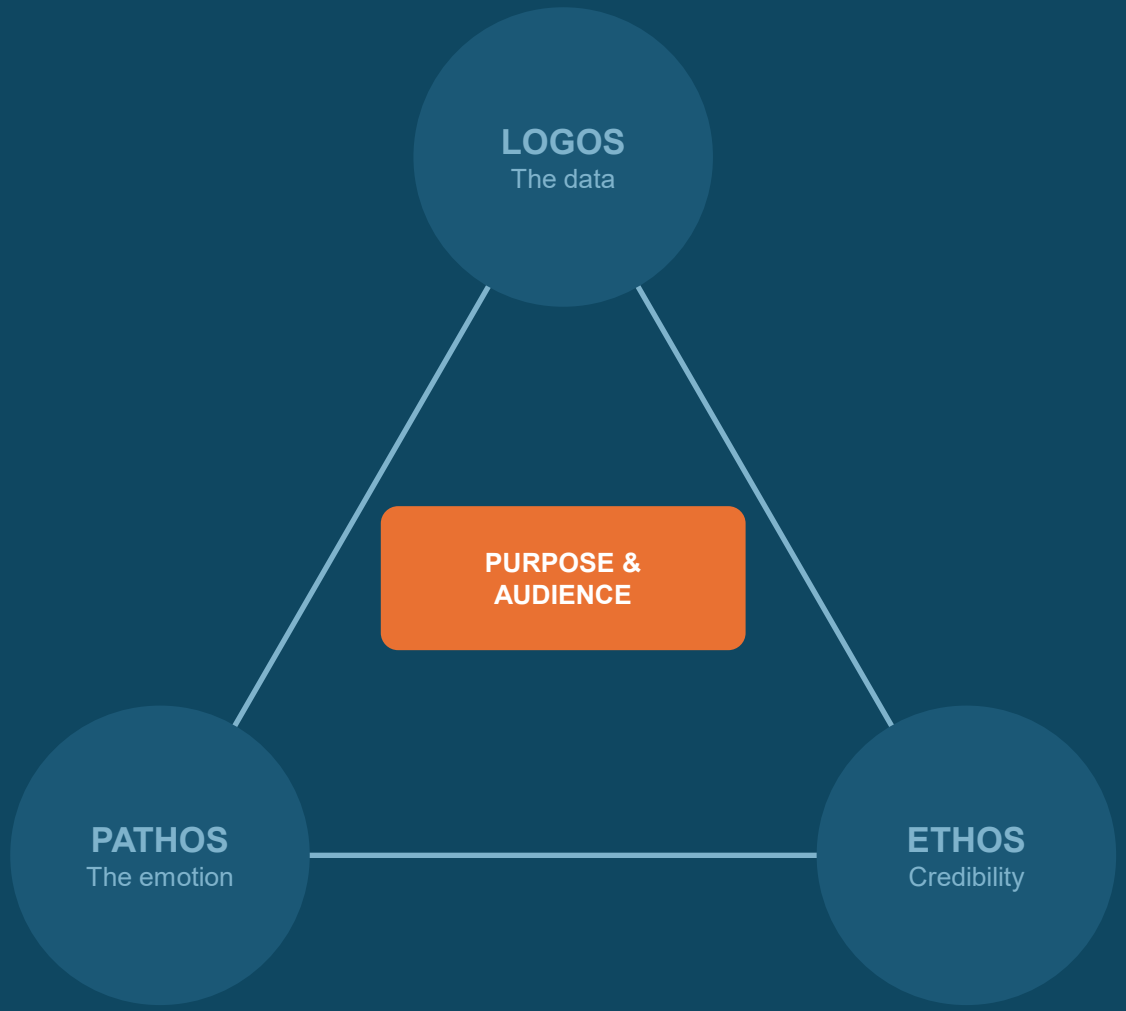


LOGOS · the data
Makes the argument

PATHOS · the emotion
Makes them care

ETHOS · credibility
Makes them believe you

All three start with: what do I want this person to do?



Purpose & audience

What do you want, and who are you talking to?

Start with what you want

Inform, but with a specific goal

Before you share a single number, ask:

What do I want this person to do?

Fund

A budget line, a grant, a sponsorship

Partner

Co-host, co-fund, refer people to you

Show up

Attend, enroll, volunteer

Remember

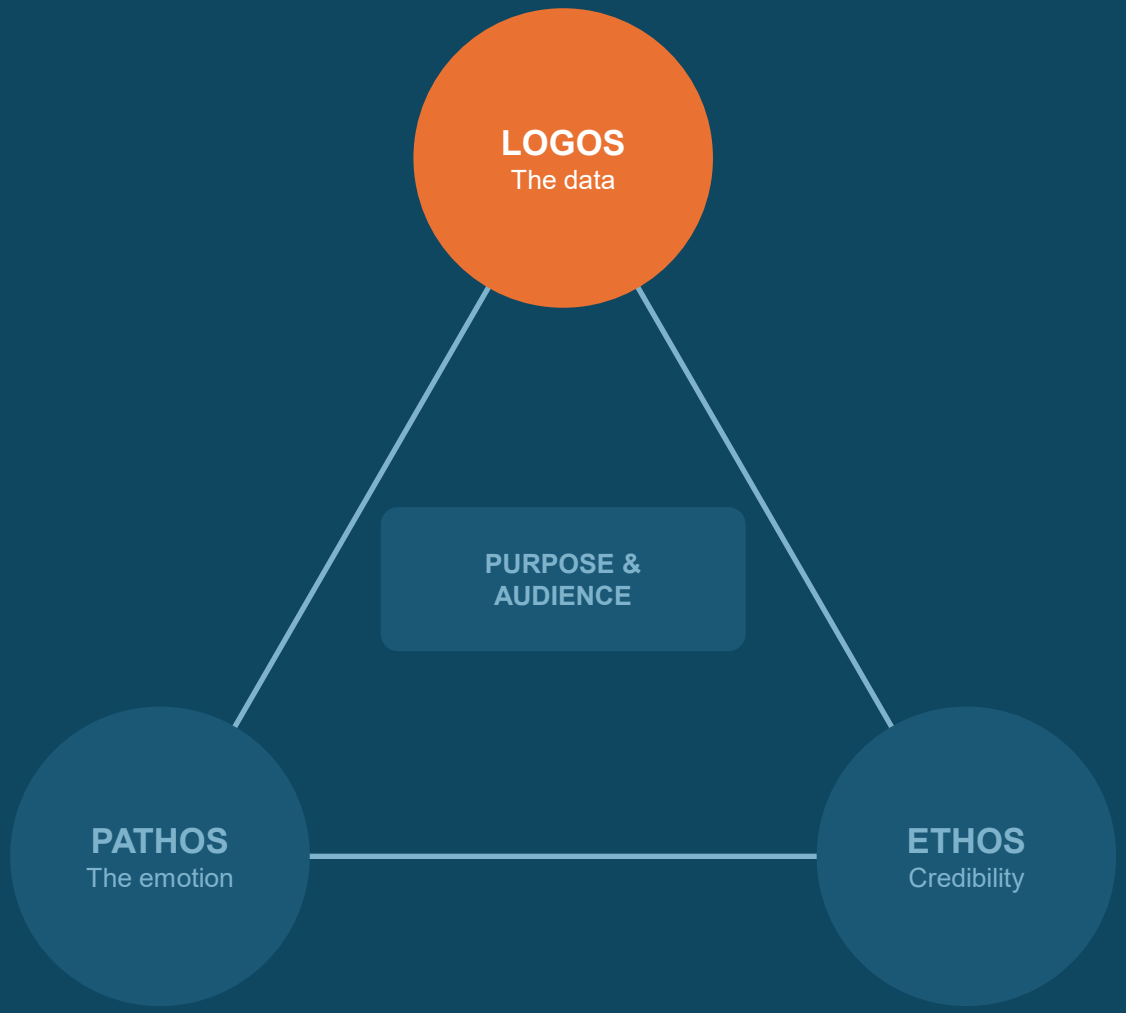
Know what the library does, and repeat it

Not just "to inform": inform so that something happens. "Brief the council so the library line holds in next year's budget."

Know your audience

Lead with what they already care about

WHO	WHAT THEY CARE ABOUT	LEAD WITH (FROM THE REPORT)
City council, commissioners	Budgets, return to taxpayers	**$4.74 returned for every $1 invested**
Economic development, employers	Jobs, a ready workforce	**11,200 jobs supported; 82% help residents apply for jobs**
Emergency management	Preparedness, safe places	**29% serve as weather-related emergency shelters**
Grantmakers, funders	Results they can point to	**Program outcomes, like 1,500+ exams at Terrell's testing center**
Media, residents	Something surprising, local pride	**About the same economic footprint as the film and recording industry**



Logos: the data

Pick the figures that work, and make them memorable.

Pick the figures that work

Turn findings into simple lines people can repeat

Every $1 invested returns $4.74.

Statewide return on investment

$3.83 billion in total economic benefit.

Value of services plus economic activity

7,994 Texans work in public libraries.

Library employment statewide

Library spending supports 11,200 Texas jobs.

Direct, indirect, and induced

$164 million in taxes in a single year.

Federal, state, and local

Borrowing alone is worth more than $1 billion a year to Texans.

$1.01B value of physical circulation

8 in 10 libraries help Texans apply for jobs.

82% of responding libraries

Nearly 1 in 3 opens as a shelter when the weather turns.

29% of responding libraries

All figures statewide, FY2024, from Beyond the Stacks. Survey figures are shares of 298 responding libraries.

Make the numbers memorable

Four rhetorical techniques that help a figure stick

COMPARISON
Measure it against something familiar

Instead of
$3.83B in total benefit · 7,994 library jobs

Say
"About the same economic footprint as the Texas film and music industry."

"Texas libraries employ about as many people as the state's paramedics."

METAPHOR
Name what the library is in a new way

Instead of
82% help with job applications · 37 million Wi-Fi sessions · 53% offer business workshops

Say
"The library is the front door to the job market."

"The library is the town's economic hub."

CONTRAST
Set two ideas against each other

Instead of
$4.74 for every $1 invested

Say
"Libraries aren't a cost. They're an investment that pays back $4.74 for every dollar."

RHETORICAL QUESTION
Let the audience finish the thought

Instead of
$4.74 for every $1 invested

Say
"What else in your budget returns $4.74 for every dollar?"

Use comparisons the report supports. Library staff: 7,994; Texas paramedics: 8,410. Industry figure is the report's rough comparison. Wi-Fi sessions are the report's FY2024 estimate.

Then make it local

Statewide data, local story

> "Across Texas, libraries return $4.74 in community value for every $1 invested. Here in [our town], that looks like [our story]."

THE REPORT SAYS

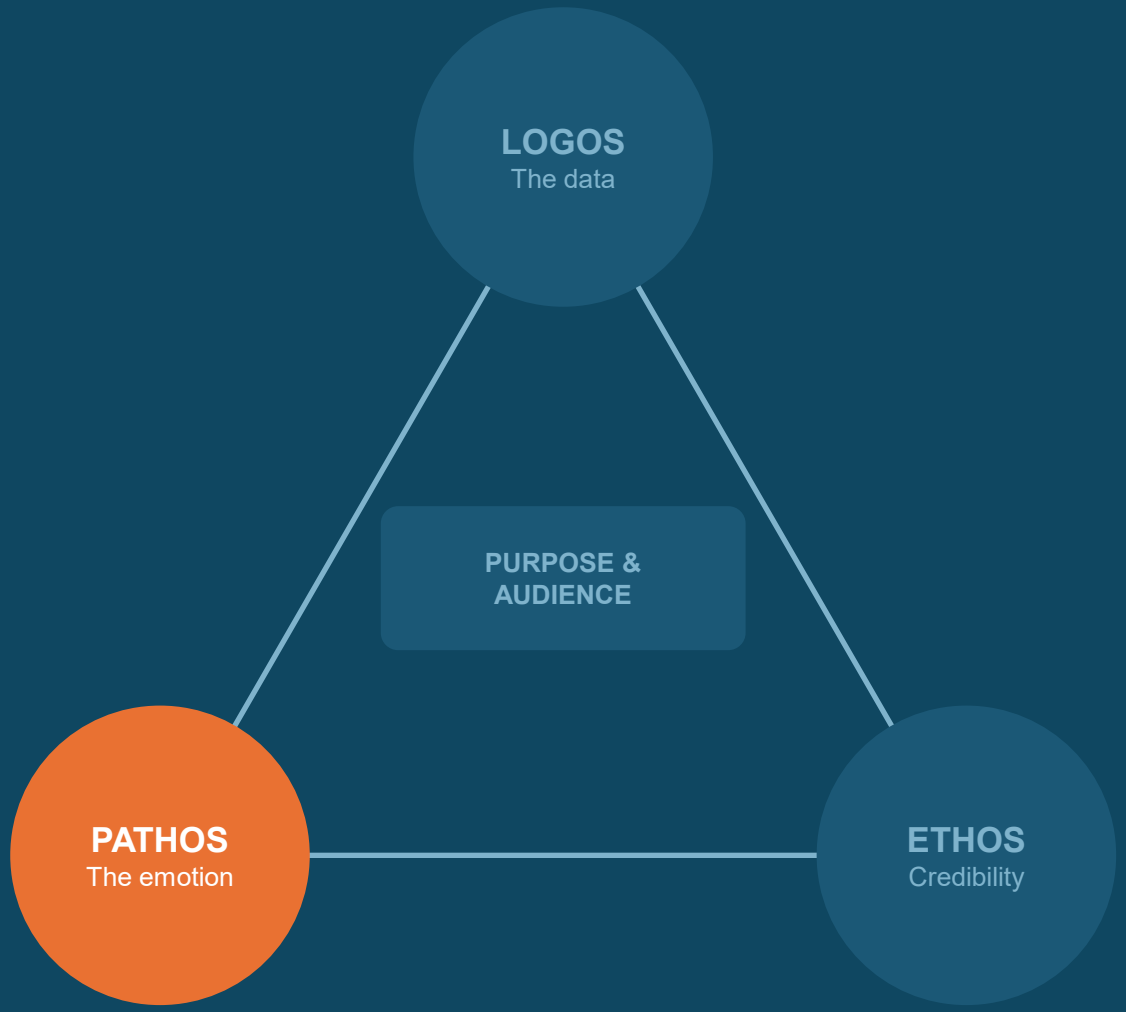
What's true across Texas

OUR LIBRARY SHOWS

One local program, person, or partnership that proves it here

SO WE'RE ASKING

One specific thing, from one specific person



Pathos: the emotion

Make them feel it. Then show them what to do with it.

Pathos is the emotion

What you want your audience to feel, so they act

EMOTION
What they feel

→

JUDGMENT
How they see the issue

→

ACTION
What they decide to do

Organizations lead with it.

Nonprofits open with a person, not a percentage, because people act on feeling and use logic to justify it.

People remember stories over facts.

In a Stanford exercise described in Made to Stick, 63% of students remembered the stories from short speeches. Only 5% remembered a single statistic.

Story is how you deliver it. The emotion is what moves them.

Questions to consider before you share a story

Three questions

1

Who is my audience?

A council member, a funder, a neighbor?

2

What do they care about?

Budgets, jobs, their kids, their town?

3

What do I want them to feel?

Hopeful, proud, grateful, concerned?

Tell the story of what you do

Situation, action, result: a program your library launched

SITUATION	ACTION	RESULT
What was going on? Who was affected?	What did the library do?	What changed?
A longtime patron began losing her eyesight, and Gatesville had few resources for people with vision loss.	**Director Shea Harp surveyed local optometrists, then launched Vision Connect: a free monthly support group with guest speakers and Texas Workforce Commission trainers.**	**About 10 patrons a month plus caregivers, some from as far as Waco and Temple. Isolated patrons made friends and gained confidence; caregivers got time back.**

Start with the need. Show what you did. End with what changed.

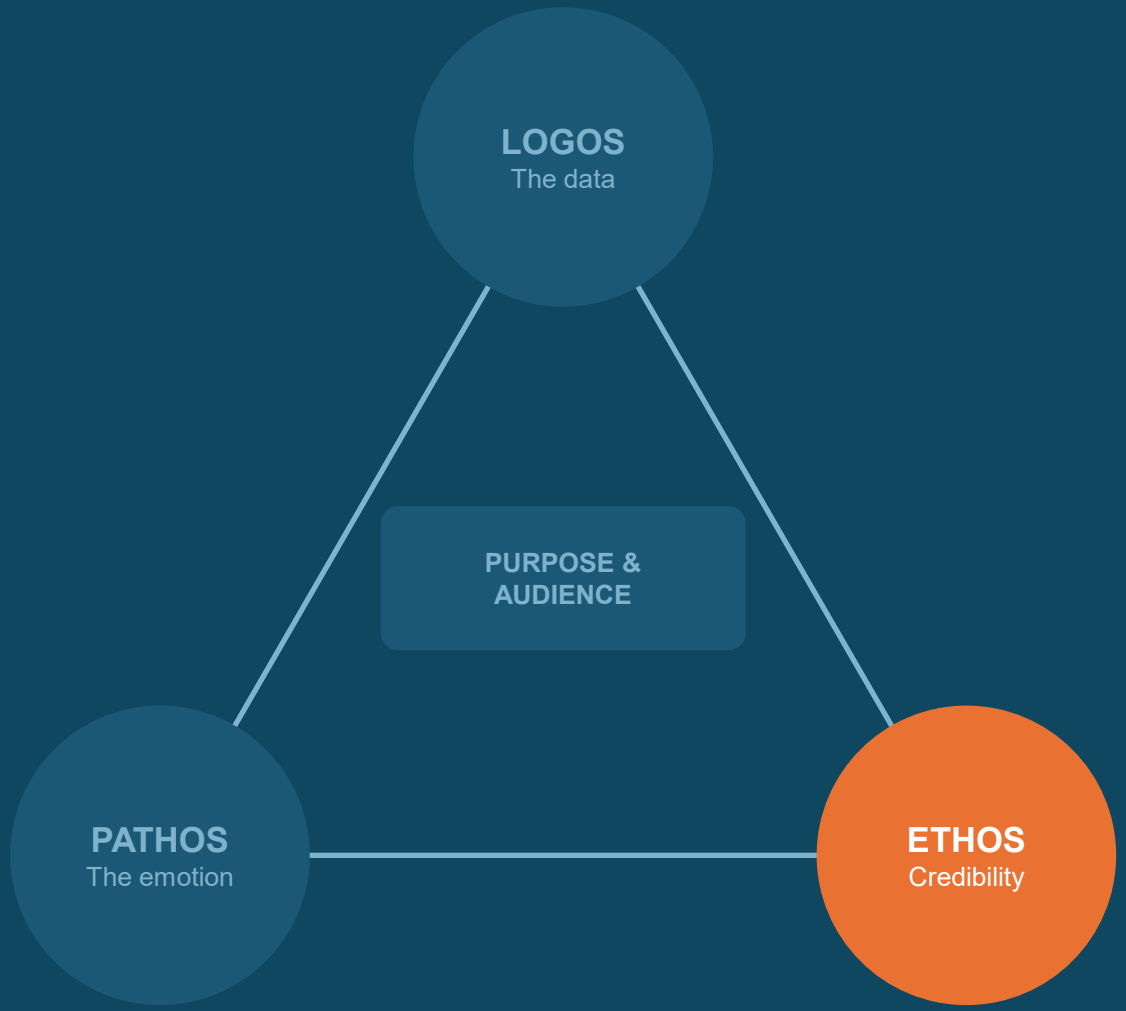
Example: Gatesville Public Library, Vision Connect profile, Beyond the Stacks.

Tell the story of how you transform your community

Here's what Texas libraries offer. Here's what changed.

WHAT WE OFFER		WHAT CHANGED
Books, e-books, and materials *81 million items checked out*	→	**Texans got more than $1 billion worth of books and materials without having to buy them.**
Wi-Fi and public computers *37 million Wi-Fi sessions*	→	**Residents get online for jobs, school, and benefits, a service worth $367 million.**
Help with jobs and benefits *82% help with job applications · 68% with benefits*	→	**Job seekers change careers and provide for their families.**
A space to gather, meet, and learn *95% host events · 82% offer meeting space*	→	**Libraries enrich the quality of life in their communities.**
A safe place when the weather turns *29% serve as emergency shelters*	→	**Neighbors have somewhere to go during heat, cold, and storms.**

Statewide figures, FY2024, from Beyond the Stacks. Dollar values are what Texans would otherwise have paid; survey figures are shares of 298 responding libraries.



Ethos: credibility

Show that you serve the community, and that you're good at it.

Credibility = goodwill + competence

Show that you serve the community, and that you're good at what you do

GOODWILL

How Texas libraries serve their communities

Share of 298 library directors responding to the 2026 statewide survey

93%	offer voter registration
84%	partner with local social service agencies
68%	help residents apply for government benefits
29%	serve as weather-related emergency shelters

COMPETENCE

What Texas libraries do, and do well

Statewide totals, FY2024

81 million	physical items checked out, including 72 million books
40 million	e-books, audiobooks, and other digital items borrowed
9.3 million	reference questions answered
6.3 million	attendees at library programs

Your turn: How does your library serve your community? And what are you really, really good at?

Let your partners tell your story

You're a trusted institution. Others will vouch for you, if you ask.

WHO CAN TELL IT

- Economic development corporation
- Local employers
- Social service partners
- Schools and colleges
- Elected officials
- Patrons and families

HOW THEY CAN TELL IT

- A quote or letter in your grant application
- Speaking at the council or commissioners meeting
- A co-authored op-ed or guest column
- A joint announcement or co-hosted event
- Sharing your story on their own channels

Statewide: 84% of Texas libraries already partner with local social service agencies. Those partners can speak for you.

Putting it together: one argument, one ask

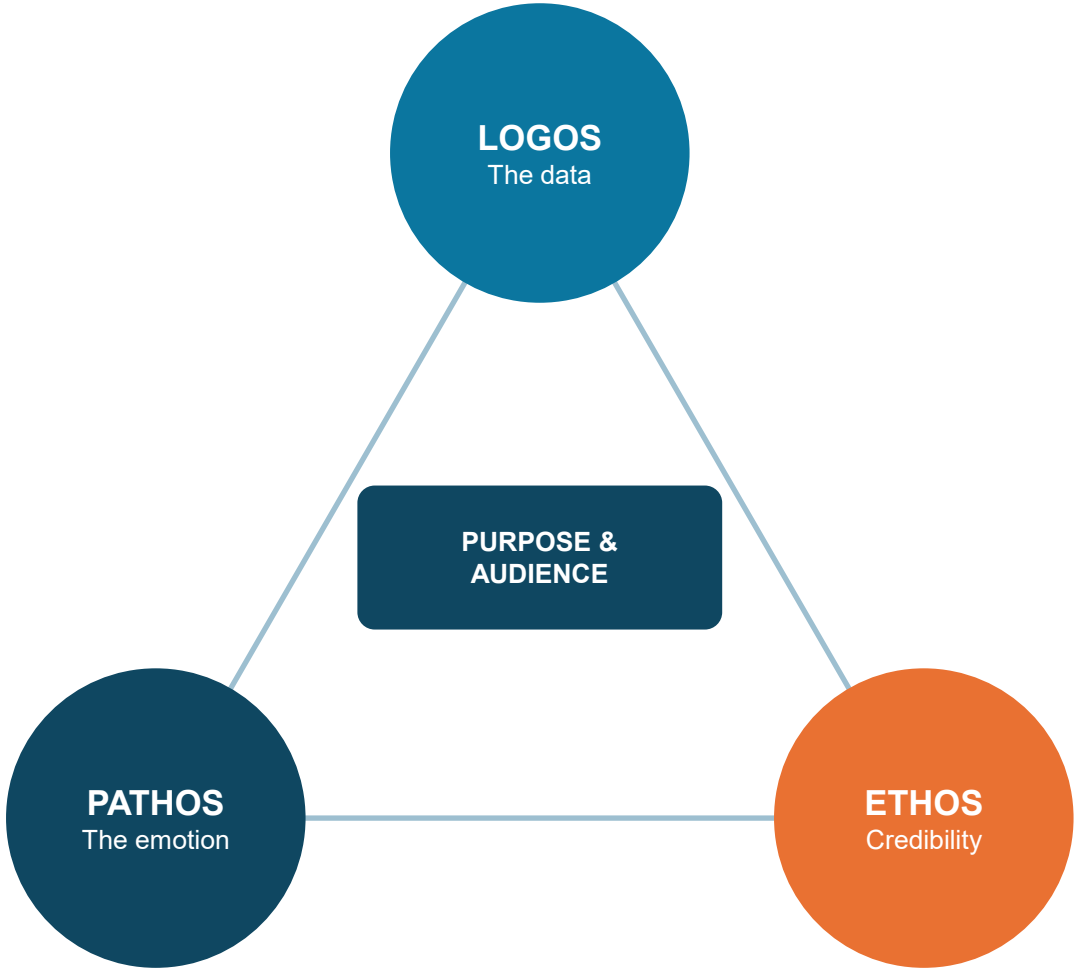
Hypothetical: a library asks its EDC to co-fund a new job-skills lab

PURPOSE What we want	**$25,000 from the EDC to launch a job-skills lab at the library**
LOGOS Why it matters	**Statewide, 82% of libraries help residents apply for jobs, and library spending supports 11,200 Texas jobs. Locally, we helped [#] job seekers last year.**
PATHOS Who it helps	**After a plant layoff, a resident used our computers three days a week. Staff helped her rebuild her résumé, and she was hired at [local employer].**
ETHOS Why us	**For [#] years, we've been the trusted place for job seekers. People already come to us because they trust us, and [partner] sends clients our way.**
ASK What we need	**“Will you invest $25,000 to co-fund the lab with us, so we can help more residents get hired and support job creation?”**

Hypothetical example. Statewide figures from Beyond the Stacks; bracketed items are where your local facts go.

Beyond the numbers

Best practices for communicating the report



Purpose & audience

Know what you want them to do, and lead with what they care about.

Logos

Pick the figures that fit, and make them memorable with comparisons.

Pathos

Choose the feeling, then tell stories of what you do and how you transform your community.

Ethos

Show goodwill and competence, and let your partners tell your story.

Beyond the Numbers

Turning Library ROI Data into Stories That Build Public Support

Q&A

Thank you for attending. Please send questions or comments to jonathan.alba@austin.utexas.edu or Bruce@jbkeconomics.com.

$4.74

returned to Texas communities for every $1 invested in public libraries

LIBRARIES
TRULY TEXAS

Scan or visit website for full report and resources



trulytexas.txla.org