Anatomy of a Chart

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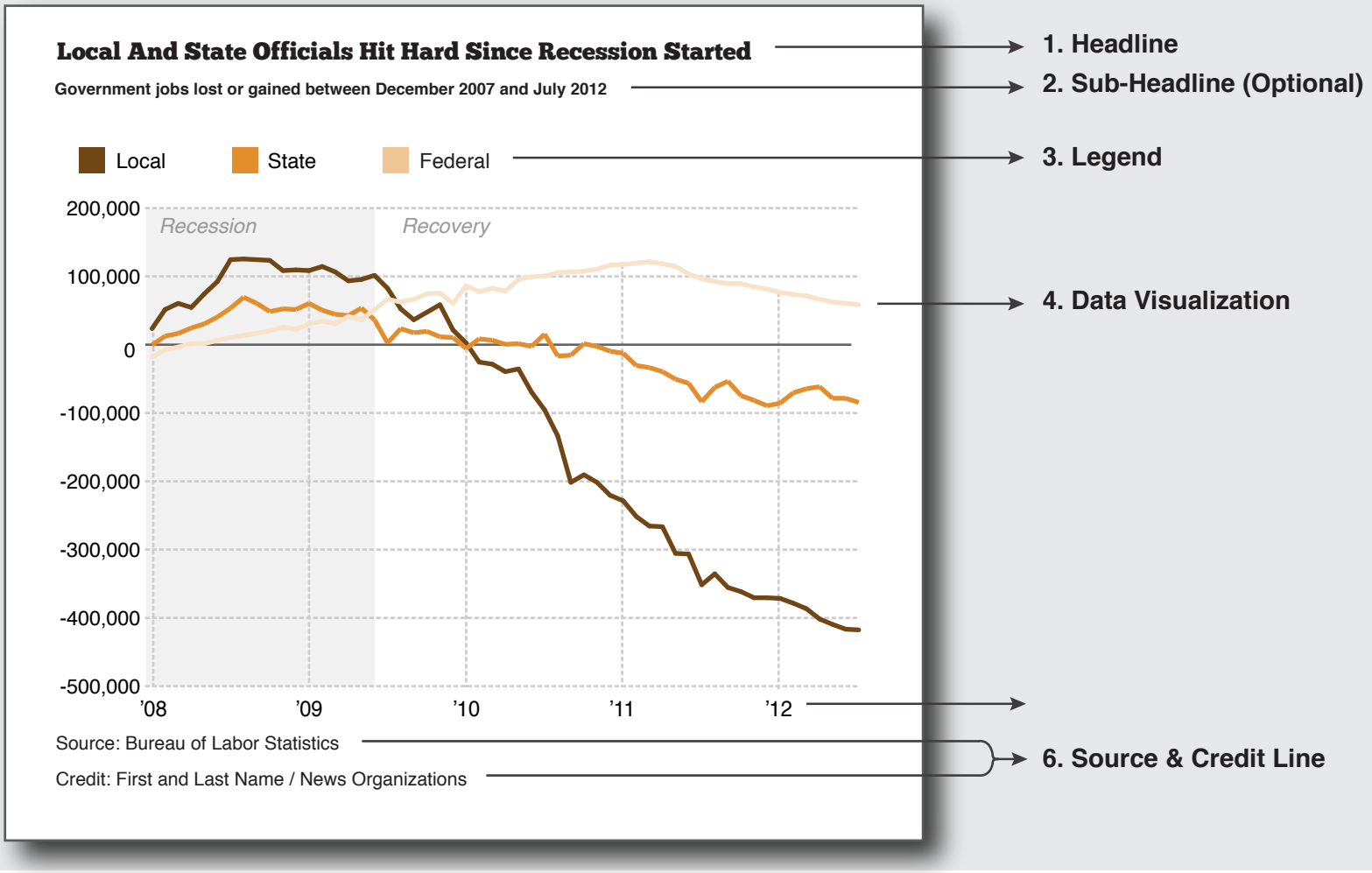

Definition of Terms

1. Headline
Headlines need to succinct and give you an immediate sense of what your data story is about (this is not different from any other story). If you are not using a sub-headline, you will want to accurately describe the content you are graphing.

2. Sub-Headline (Optional)
If you choose to use a sub-headline as a supplement to a vaguer, but catchier headline, make sure you accurately describe the content you are graphing.

3. Legend
If you assign colors to several categories of data you want to use a legend to describe what the colors stand for. Legends should be placed close to the top of the chart.

4. Data Visualization
The data visualization should give you an immediate understanding of a data set. Be selective with the data you graph. Showing one or few good ideas is far better than showing all the data that is available.

5. Axes
In a time series you will have two different axes, which give the viewer a sense of scale and time. You need to make sure you label your axes in logical increments.

6. Source & Credit Line
You need to tell your viewers which data source you used for your graphic. You can also to put down your byline and organization.

Graphics Checklist

- [ ] **1. Have you triple checked your math and your numbers?**
- [ ] **2. Did you label your axes and did you check their accuracy?**
- [ ] **3. Did you check the numbers on your graphic with the numbers in your data set?**
- [ ] **4. Have you added all the text (headlines, labels, source and credit lines)?**
- [ ] **5. Have you checked all your visual elements? Are all the colors and styles correct?**

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