

STORYTELLING

Marketing & Communications Module



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About Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC)

Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado is the oldest and largest outdoor stewardship organization in the state. We work to connect people to Colorado's outdoors in ways that inspire them to be caretakers of the state's natural resources. This is especially important because the demands on our outdoor resources are extensive and Colorado's stewardship needs are reaching a near-crisis level. VOC is playing a leading role in addressing these challenges in three ways. First, we're fostering statewide collaboration on issues and solutions. We're also expanding stewardship efforts by helping others build and grow successful volunteer programs. Finally, we're continuing to engage 5,000 volunteers each year in on-the-ground, hands-on stewardship work.

Executive Summary

Storytelling is a powerful tool for talking about your programs and projects in ways that motivate and inspire your audiences – while also communicating valuable information about where your work takes place, what the volunteer experience is like, and why this work matters. This guide offers a variety of materials, tips and techniques for helping you launch or expand your organization’s storytelling efforts.

- ▶ **Develop Your Strategy:** Develop a strategy that identifies your storytelling goals/objectives, audiences, and the process you will follow to develop your stories. Use stories to introduce your work to the public, past successes/achievements, present progress, a challenge your organization overcame, subject you’re passionate about, an individual’s impact within your organization, etc.

- ▶ **Selecting & Writing:** When beginning to write a story, select a specific problem you want to highlight that your work addresses, the language you’re going to use depending on who your audience is, and how you want readers to perceive your organization after reading the story.

- ▶ **Distributing, Engaging, Writing:** Identify which channels your audience uses and provide multiple ways to access your story. Beyond simply sending out your story, get people to interact in person with your organization and use your stories as a starting point for a conversation with your audiences. Evaluate the success of your stories. Track the likes, comments and shares on social media, and gauge which types of stories are the most attention-getting or popular. The most effective stories have these six key ingredients:
 - ▶ **Protagonist** - the hero or being we follow through the story
 - ▶ **Challenge, obstacle, or villain** that stood in the way – something that needs to be overcome
 - ▶ **A solution** that can be explained – such as application of a service, program, or technology
 - ▶ **Demonstrable impacts** – tangible or intangible benefits
 - ▶ **Human connection** – emotions, feelings, relationships
 - ▶ **Plenty of good visuals** – especially action shots (not posed)

- ▶ **Alternative Storytelling Methods:** Create online photo albums, collages and campaigns using program/project photos. Produce a photo slideshow/video with music. Share your story orally on video. Get others to tell their story in person (see [Step 5](#) for more detail on each alternative storytelling method).
 - ▶ **Beyond telling your organization’s story**, you can also tell the stories of those who have been impacted by your organization’s work. This requires seeking out these stories and getting individuals to tell them at events, through written articles, or video recordings. This lends a human side to your work.

- ▶ **Tips for Taking and Using Great Photos to Accompany Stories:** Having a reliable collection of photos is essential for creating visually compelling stories. Consider recruiting a volunteer photographer, so that you have some consistency in the way your photos are captured.

- ▶ **Once You Have a Collection of Stories, Share Them:** Utilize websites, social media, newsletters/emails, grant applications, annual reports, magazine/newspaper articles, flyers/posters, and events/meetings.

Introduction

Storytelling is a powerful tool for talking about your programs and projects in ways that motivate and inspire your audiences - while also communicating valuable information about where your work takes place, what the volunteer experience is like, and why this work matters. This toolkit offers a variety of materials, tips and techniques for helping you launch or expand your organization's storytelling efforts.

This toolkit will be valuable for staff members responsible for communications - including marketing, public relations or development. If your organization does not have a role dedicated to these functions, a staff member who has excellent writing skills, information-gathering skills, and a flair for talking with other people about their experiences will find a variety of useful tips and advice for storytelling.

Please Note:

- You will find that other guides in the *Stepping Up Stewardship Toolkit* contain additional marketing and communications tips and resources that are specific to each guide.
- The other guides in the *Marketing & Communications Module* - *Strategic Communications Planning, Community Outreach, News Releases & Media Advisories, Media Relations, and Messaging* - contain further guidance and resources for communicators in those topic areas.
- All of the *Stepping Up Stewardship* guides are intended to be complementary and not mutually exclusive. You may need to evaluate all the various resources to determine which offer the most appropriate fit for your specific program or project.

VOC recommends using this guide in tandem with the additional guides found in the **[Marketing & Communications Module](#)**:

- ▶ [Strategic Communications Planning](#)
- ▶ [Messaging](#)
- ▶ [Community Outreach](#)
- ▶ [News Releases & Media Advisories](#)
- ▶ [Media Relations](#)



Recommended Steps

This guide is organized into eight "steps" to help your organization develop a successful storytelling effort.

These are not "linear" steps that must be followed in a specific order. Rather, think of them as sections of information that you can choose to implement based on their relevance.

Step 1:

Outlines a three-phased approach to developing your storytelling strategy, from planning, to selecting and writing story ideas, to distributing stories, engaging audiences and measuring success.

Step 2:

Describes the role of storytelling to inform, inspire, and engage others in your work.

Step 3:

Outlines the elements of a great story, including key ingredients and the "story arc".

Step 4:

Discusses stories as "moments in time" – or opportunities to talk about your professional moment, your organization's moment, and an individual's impact story. Also gives tips for "digging for the story".

Step 5:

Offers several alternative storytelling methods – such as video, photography and speaking events – when original writing is not an option.

Step 6:

Offers tips and ideas for sharing and multipurposing stories across different communication channels.

Step 7:

Offers tips for taking and using great photos to accompany your stories.

Step 8:

Features tips for creating a storytelling culture in your organization.



This Guide is accompanied by extra resources, called Supplemental Materials, that you can use to develop your storytelling initiatives. They are mentioned throughout the guide and listed at the end, but provided separately.

Step 1: Developing Your Strategy

Before pursuing a storytelling initiative, it is recommended that your organization first develop a strategy that identifies your storytelling goals and objectives, audiences, and the process you will follow to develop your stories. We recommend a three-phased approach that includes **1) Planning**; **2) Selecting and Writing**; and **3) Distributing, Engaging, and Measuring**.

At first glance, it may look like a lot of work – and it can be. However, your investment in storytelling will be hugely rewarding and will not only take your communications efforts to a new level, it will take your organization’s way of thinking about its work and its impacts to new heights.

▶ **Phase I: Planning**

- ▶ **Organizational goal:** Ask yourself: "What are the key challenges our organization is facing in terms of growing and succeeding?" For example, stories can be used to:
 - *Introduce your work* to the public
 - *Educate others* about how your area of work affects individuals in your community or the environment
 - *Raise awareness* of external issues (e.g. political, economic factors) influencing your work
 - *Educate influencers* on innovative aspects of your approach
 - *Modify or influence opinions* or perspectives around an issue you’re dealing with
- ▶ **Topics to highlight:** Ask yourself: "What do we want people to know about? What aspects of our work are most important to talk about?"
 - *Stories can focus on past* (successes and achievements), present (progress and momentum), or future (aspirational).
 - *What kind of content or subject matter* to feature:
 - *A challenge you overcame* or helped someone else overcome
 - *A subject you are passionate about* that has faced changes or obstacles
 - *A subject someone else is passionate about* that has changed their life
 - *An issue to which known adversaries* once voiced opposition and now voice support
 - *A technology, service, or program* that helped someone (a person or a community) or something (animals or a landscape) that was at risk or in pain.
 - *A good goal is to have a collection of stories* that tell about:
 - *Your organization’s history*, early beginnings, founding, why you started
 - *The general nature* of the challenge your work is tackling
 - *A unique program or initiative* you are rolling out or implementing
 - *Major accomplishments or successes* that illustrate the power/impact of your work on people, places, or things
 - *Extraordinary people* who are making a difference, i.e. staff, board member, volunteer
 - *A vision for the future*, what will define success - aspirational and inspirational

▶ **Phase II: Selecting & Writing**

- ▶ **Specific program, challenge, or obstacle:** Ask yourself: "Which specific problems do we want to highlight? What challenge are we addressing with this work?"
 - *Name the problem, challenge, or obstacle*
 - *Explain why it’s important*
 - *Explain who or what it impacts*
 - *Identify what "thing" or moment* happened (and when) that caused you to pay attention to the issue or caused you to want to solve it
- ▶ **Audience:** Ask yourself: "Whose perspective do we need to influence? Who needs to take action? Who will resonate most with what we want to say?"

Step 1: Continued

- *Who you want to reach changes how you tell the story – what language and what messages you use, and how you frame the messages*
- ▶ **Framing:** Ask yourself: "How do we want readers/viewers to perceive us differently after reading/viewing our story?"
 - *Based on what you know about your audience, use message framing to appeal to and connect with your audience's shared values*
 - *Gain-framed messages describe the benefits of an action*
 - *Loss-framed messages describe the costs of inaction*
 - *Framing should illuminate the problem in general terms that all audiences can relate to and understand – e.g. common themes might be around struggles related to economics, health, technology, education*



See the [Messaging Guide](#) for further guidance on developing and framing your messages.

- ▶ **Your solution:** Ask yourself: "What did we do to address or solve the problem?"
 - *Identify what your solution is and what makes it different and unique*
 - *Choose moments in time, events, or instances that led up to solving the problem*
 - *Choose which facts you'll use to illustrate your solution (the most interesting facts make the most interesting stories)*
- ▶ **Impacts:** Ask yourself: "Who or what benefited from what we did?"
 - *Determine who or what was impacted or overcame the challenge – could be a person, place or thing (humans, trees, rivers, fish, wildlife)*
 - *Identify who will help shape the content and be involved in delivering it via interviews and conversations – Project partners? End users? Community residents? Youth? Local/regional government reps?*
 - *Develop targeted questions to provide clarity and direction for the story you want to tell*
 - *Use specific names, places, unique experiences and struggles.*
 - *Tell their story – use quotes and paraphrasing to convey their emotional responses and positive experiences*
 - *Use statistics and data to back up your claim*
- ▶ **Vision for success or improvement:** Ask yourself: "What do we want people to take away at the end?"
 - *What should people know or understand?*
 - *How should people feel about the transformation they witnessed in the story?*
 - *What's on the horizon for the program or the characters?*
 - *What action could readers or viewers take next?*
- ▶ **Phase III: Distributing, Engaging & Measuring**
 - ▶ **Channels of communication:** Ask yourself: "How do our audiences get their information?"
 - *Identify which channels your audience uses – and go there*
 - *Are they using social media? Is the best way to reach them through a conversation at the local coffee house or in their living room? Do they spend time at the local rec center? Do they prefer receiving a letter in the mail?*
 - ▶ **Engagement & two-way dialogue:** Ask yourself: "How can we involve others beyond simply delivering our story to them?"
 - *Give people many different ways to interact or get involved with your organization based on their needs, interests and availability. Invite them to come observe a project for a day. Recruit them to volunteer. Ask them to consider joining your board.*
 - *Use your stories as a starting point for a conversation with your audiences. Don't just share your messages, ask them to share their experiences and stories too.*

Step 1: Continued

- ▶ **Measurement:** Ask yourself: "How successful are our efforts?"
 - Evaluate the success of your stories
 - Track the number of hits on your website
 - Track the likes, comments, and shares on social media, and gauge which types of stories are the most attention-getting or popular
 - Ask people what compelled them join your cause – and see if their feedback tracks back to your storytelling
 - Ask people if they think or feel differently about your cause after reading your story

Step 2: The Role of Storytelling

According to the National Storytelling Network, "Storytelling is the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener's imagination." In other words, storytelling is the creative use of words and images to inform, inspire and engage others.

As humans we are capable of connecting with each other through shared experiences, backgrounds, and emotions. More than simply passing information along, storytelling helps us express those experiences so that others can relate to and understand what we are saying. It is a powerful tool for nonprofits, government agencies, philanthropic groups and other organizations that need to communicate the meaning and impacts of their work.

Storytelling is a tool to:

- ▶ **Tell about events that happened** (in the business world, they are not fiction!)
 - ▶ **Stories share information about a moment in time**, about something that happened, with facts and details that are strung together and form a picture in the mind of the listener about what took place.
- ▶ **Demonstrate how what we do in this world influences and affects people, places and animals**
 - ▶ **Through language, pictures, and data**, we can help people make sense of the world and help them understand how their actions and decisions have an impact – positive and negative.
- ▶ **Illustrate complex subject matter or make "drier" subjects more interesting**
 - ▶ **Stories put facts into a context** people can relate to and understand.
- ▶ **Share the human experience and create emotional connection**
 - ▶ **Stories come to life when people pass them on** to each other, repeat them over time and across generations, and spark thoughts and feelings around common experiences.

As an organization, you can use stories to:

- ▶ **Motivate others to act**, get involved, and become part of your solution
- ▶ **Influence others'** perspectives
- ▶ **Engage others** in conversation and dialogue
- ▶ **Create empathy** and understanding
- ▶ **Get people to remember you and your cause** when giving
- ▶ **Spark hope** for the future

Step 3: Key Ingredients of a Story & Story Arc

When we think about stories we love - a song, movie, book, poem or folktale - we immediately conjure up images in our mind of what that story was. We visualize the characters and setting; we might remember how we felt when we heard the story; it continues to live in our memory, even months or years later. The best stories have drawn us in, captivated us, engaged our curiosity - that is the power of storytelling!

We can be equally powerful in our storytelling about our work.

- ▶ **The most effective stories have these six key ingredients:**
 - ▶ **Protagonist** - the hero or being we follow through the story, can be a person or animal
 - ▶ **Challenge, obstacle, or villain** that stood in the way - something that needs to be overcome
 - ▶ **A solution** that can be explained - such as application of a service, program, or technology
 - ▶ **Demonstrable impacts** - tangible or intangible benefits
 - ▶ **Human connection** - emotions, feelings, relationships
 - ▶ **Plenty of good visuals** - especially action shots (not posed)

- ▶ **Two other important building blocks in storytelling:** Ira Glass of the National Public Radio program "This American Life" is one of America's most famous storytellers. According to him, there are two important building blocks of a story that make it compelling: the anecdote and the moment of reflection.
 - ▶ **The anecdote - the "What":** This is a sequence of actions that flow together one after the next, as opposed to a mere series of facts. The sequence includes raising questions, either express or implied, that you (the teller) answer along the way. It keeps the listener or reader engaged.
 - ▶ **The moment of reflection - the "Why":** This is the key point, the meaning, the newness or uniqueness of the story for the listener, viewer or reader.



"There's the plot, where someone goes through some experience. And then there are moments of reflection, where this person (or another character in the story, or the narrator) says something interesting about what's happened. Or, put another way, there's the action of the story and there are the conclusions. And both have to be pretty interesting. A person can walk through lava, cure a disease, find true love, lose true love, discover he was adopted, discover he was NOT adopted, have all manner of amazing experiences, but if he (or the narrator) can't say something big and surprising about what that experience means, if the story doesn't lead to some interesting idea about how the world works, then it doesn't work for radio ... one way to get an ailing story to work (and to determine if it's a story at all) is to figure out what surprising conclusions about the world might come from that story."

- Ira Glass, source: bguest.blogspot.com/2012/03/storytelling-tips-from-ira-glass.html

- ▶ **The story arc:** Once you have identified the six key ingredients you need to tell a good story, and understand the value of the anecdote and the moment of reflection, how do you put it all together? There is some rhyme and reason to it. Having a structure or a format is helpful in crafting your story so that all of the essential elements are strung together in a way that makes sense - all the while creating a level of suspense to keep the audience engaged and wondering what happens next.
 - ▶ **The classic story arc** contains a beginning, a middle and an end. The most well-known and commonly used structure is Freytag's Pyramid. Having this structure as a basis will not only help you organize your thoughts and ideas, it will strengthen your storytelling across many different formats, whether you are writing, creating a photo collage or producing a video. The next page breaks down the story arc, and provides a visual example of what Freytag's Pyramid looks like when applied to the well-known story, "The Three Little Pigs".

Step 3: Continued

→ Beginning

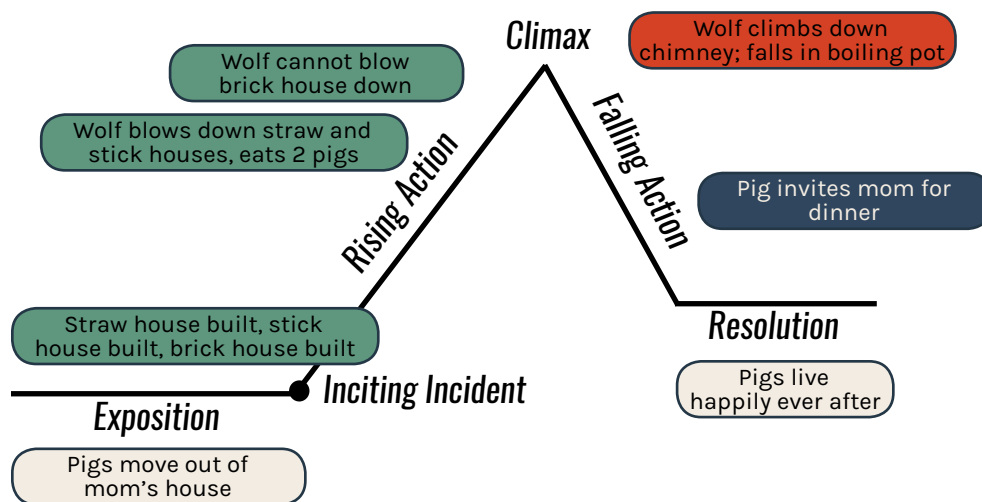
- **Exposition:** The characters/protagonists, setting and goal are introduced
- **Conflict or Incident/Rising Action:** Something unexpected happens to complicate the story; the central conflict, challenge or villain is introduced (something arises and prevents the character from getting what he or she wants)

→ Middle

- **Rising Action:** A series of events unfolds, showing how the problem gets worse or the situation escalates
- **Climax:** The turning point is unveiled, when the situation changes or the protagonist's fate changes; this is the most exciting point

→ End

- **Falling Action:** The problem begins to get better; the characters deal with what happened or make choices to respond to the change
- **Resolution:** The situation is resolved; this is how it all ends



Step 4: Moments in Time

Storytelling focuses on a moment in time. The story unfolds when the events and actions surrounding that moment are exposed. It is a "moment" in your memory or in your history because something interesting happened. And as a significant moment, it evokes some kind of emotion in you - for example, a desire to succeed, a joy for life, a fear of failure, the pain of being separated from someone or something you love.

This section describes three types of stories you can develop for your organization. They are stories about **1)** your professional moment, **2)** your organization's moment and **3)** impact on an individual. Below is a brief summary of each.

- ▶ **Your Professional Moment:** There is a reason you are doing this work - you were drawn to it, you are compelled to help fulfill a mission, and you live and breathe this work. What drives you? Why is it important? Why do you keep coming back?
 - ▶ **Tell your story!** You ARE part of the organization's story. Sharing your connection helps others relate to it, see themselves in it, and feel inspired to get involved themselves.
 - ▶ **In addition to telling your own story,** get your colleagues to share theirs - board and staff members as well as volunteers. They each have different experiences and levels

Step 4: Continued

of engagement with your organization, as well as their own unique narrative. As a collection, these diverse viewpoints will strengthen and complete your organization's storytelling as a whole.

- ▶ **Your Organization's Moment:** Your organization has dozens of stories to tell! If you think about how long your organization has been around, all the people who have been involved, and how many projects and initiatives you've worked on, there are so many different stories tucked away in the corners just waiting to be told. It's your job to dig them out and give them some exposure.
 - ▶ **Telling the story about specific moments** and experiences that have shaped your organization is important to helping others understand what you do and make sense of your impacts.
 - ▶ **As an author, you have an opportunity** to tell your organization's story from different vantage points:
 - *Then:* Your history and evolution, why you came to be (explains why you exist)
 - *Now:* Your progress, momentum and impacts (demonstrates sense of urgency, gives something tangible to relate to)
 - *Future:* Your aspirations - what will happen in the future because of what you are doing today, what help you need to make that happen (gives hope and gives call to action)
 - *Ultimately,* your organization's story should be told from all of these vantage points to make it complete

- ▶ **Individual Impact Story:** An essential skill in storytelling is the ability to put the spotlight on someone else's experiences - these are stories of the individual people whose lives your work is affecting. Getting individuals to share their story reinforces the messages you are already sending out about what you do, and lends credibility to your organization, because the story is coming from someone who is not paid to say these things about you. Individual stories tend to be the most powerful, because ultimately, the story really isn't about you - the interesting stuff is about the people, places and animals that are benefiting from your work. How to go about it? Where to find the stories? How to tell someone else's story if you don't know what happened or what their experience was? You need to dig for it!

- ▶ **Digging for the story:** Finding good stories to tell and then being able to tell them in a compelling way takes some work. Two skills to develop in generating thoughtful storytelling opportunities are **1)** listening for story opportunities in everyday moments, and **2)** capturing the details and specific facts you require to tell the story.
 - *Listening for stories in everyday moments:* There are stories happening right in front of us all the time - it's our job to unearth and share the stories that inspire us. Because if we feel inspired, others will, too. Some are easy to miss unless we are watching and listening for them!
 - **Watch:** Seek out the stories of people around you and your work every day - volunteers, program participants, community members - who directly benefit from or influence your work. What about their experience or background inspires you?
 - **Listen:** Pay attention to situations in which circumstances have changed.
 - *Capturing the details and facts you require:* The facts shape the backbone of the story - they provide the essential information you want people to know. It will



Step 4: Continued

be your job to draw the details you need out of your interview subjects. Do this with two approaches: **1)** Use advance preparation to strategically guide the story, and **2)** Develop your sense of curiosity and inquisitiveness.

- *Use advance preparation to strategically guide the story.* It's wise to map out a plan for your story so that it matches up with the goals you have set out for yourself.
 - ♦ *First define your goals, themes, and interests for the story:* What do you want the story to say? What aspect of your work or organization do you want to highlight? What areas of your work have gotten the least attention and need some extra spotlight? What aspects of your work are most misunderstood and need clarification?
 - ♦ *Then develop questions that guide the conversation:* What will you ask the interviewee? What questions will reveal the facts and details? What questions will lead to quotable statements? What questions will lead to a revealed emotion?
- *Develop your sense of curiosity and inquisitiveness.* Whether or not you use a prepared list of interview questions, it is very important to connect and engage with your interview subject – demonstrate that you are interested and paying attention. This will encourage your subject to open up and share his or her honest experiences with you. Try ditching the list of questions and let your instincts guide you through the conversation. Try these tips:
 - ♦ *Allow yourself to be inspired!*
 - ♦ *Listen for interesting nuggets of info*
 - ♦ *Ask questions along the way based on what the subject tells you*
 - ♦ *Listen for turning points – what changed for them*
 - ♦ *Probe for details, data, anecdotes*

When getting people to share their story, avoid asking closed or yes/no questions, and instead ask open-ended probing questions that encourage them to open up. For example:

- ♦ *What inspired you to do that?*
- ♦ *How did you do it?*
- ♦ *What was your reaction when you saw that?*
- ♦ *Tell me more about that.*
- ♦ *What happened next?*

Worksheets to help you develop your three moments in time, as well as examples of everyday moments to look for and sample questions/prompts are in [Supplemental Materials](#).

Step 5: Alternative Storytelling Methods

Not a writer? **No problem.** You don't always need to write the story yourself. Get other people to tell the story for you – especially those who are impacted by your work and are willing to share their experience publicly. This is a highly effective form of storytelling because it's genuine and comes from the heart. Also, you don't need to limit yourself to producing fully fleshed-out written stories. Stories are powerful in many different formats, whether delivered in the written word, orally, or via video or photos.

Below are a few ideas to try out:

Step 5: Continued

- ▶ **Create online photo albums, collages, and campaigns.** Assign a staff person to take photos whenever they're out in the field, or ask your volunteers, program participants and board members to take photos and send them to you via email. Be sure to have them include short captions with each photo to describe the project and its purpose, the location, the date, who was involved, and what the outcome was. Use the photos and captions to create a Facebook campaign or photo album.
 - ▶ See the [Community Outreach Guide](#) for guidance on Facebook campaigns.
- ▶ **Produce a photo slideshow/video with music.** Use your smartphone or tablet to collect photos and videos that document a project in progress, an event, human emotions in response to an event or a "day in the life" of your work. Combine images a short video set to music for additional emotional appeal.
- ▶ **Share your story orally and transcribe it.** Say your story out loud and have someone else transcribe it as you are speaking. Or, use a voice recorder to record what you say, then transcribe it. Be sure to edit for grammar and rearrange for clarity if needed (or ask someone else to edit it for you).
- ▶ **Share your story orally on video.** Are you an animated speaker? Ask a colleague to take a short (2-4 minute) video of you sharing your organization's story out loud – sitting in the comfort of your office, speaking to a small group of people gathered around, or visiting a project site.
- ▶ **Seek video and photo submissions.** Ask volunteers, participants and community members to submit photos and short (1-2 minute) videos to you, which you can then share on your social media platforms or present at events.
- ▶ **Videotape your partners or program participants.** Hire a professional to capture video of other people who will share their story, either in a formal interview format or through brief statements about your work and impacts.
- ▶ **Get others to tell their story in person.** Hand-select participants in your program who have a good story to tell and who would be good ambassadors for your organization. Ask them to speak or present at your next event or meeting. If they need guidance, offer them suggested talking points, but otherwise encourage them to run with it.
- ▶ **Transcribe others' oral stories.** Interview people involved with or impacted by your program – volunteers, community members, partners – and record them with your smartphone's audio recorder. Then transcribe the interview notes, select the most interesting quotable statements, and combine them with photos to share in your newsletter, website and social media.
- ▶ **Publish Q & A's.** Interview your staff, board, interns or volunteers either verbally (in person or by phone) or by sending questions via email. Post the Q & A, along with a photo or two, on your social media or in your newsletter or annual report (just be sure to edit for grammar, spelling and clarity first!).



Step 5: Continued

Sample Q & A prompts are available in [Supplemental Materials](#).

Step 6: Sharing & Multipurposing

Once you've got your collection of stories, it's time to share them – and share them widely. Stories can be used and reused across multiple communications channels. The possibilities are endless.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- ▶ Websites/blogs
- ▶ Social media
- ▶ Newsletters/emails
- ▶ Grant applications
- ▶ Funder/annual reports
- ▶ Magazine/newspaper articles
- ▶ Flyers/posters
- ▶ Marketing collateral
- ▶ Events/meetings
- ▶ News releases/media pitches



There are so many to choose from – what are the most effective channels? According to "The State of Storytelling in the Nonprofit Sector" (download it at networkforgood.com/non-profit-fundraising-resources), the top three most popular channels for storytelling are: social media (72%), newsletters (68%) and website (67%).

With the addition of a few minor wording modifications, introductions and transitions, different elements of stories can be extracted and used as one-off posts, integrated into campaigns, or used to enhance or explain an organization's work within a larger context – and shared across all of these channels.

For example, three paragraphs that explain the history of your organization can be reused in new grant applications, event programs and community meeting handouts. A half-page testimonial about one of your program participants or beneficiaries can be shared with photos on social media, in funder reports and in partner newsletters.

See examples of multipurposing an impact story in [Supplemental Materials](#).

Step 7: Photo Tips

Having a reliable collection of photos is absolutely essential for creating visually compelling stories. Taking great photos and creating a collection your organization can regularly access and use is an investment of time and resources – but thanks to smartphones and tools like Google, this can be done fairly efficiently and cost-effectively. Here are some tips to consider:

Step 7: Continued

- ▶ **Resident and volunteer photographers:** If possible, assign a person to be your "resident photographer", or recruit a volunteer photographer, so that you have some consistency in the way your photos are captured – and ensures the job gets done. Make sure your photographer captures shots whenever your organization is out in the field, on a project, facilitating or participating in meetings and events, and spending time with partners and community members.
- ▶ **Action shots:** Use action shots! Photos of people doing things rather than posing for the camera are more visually interesting and tell a more compelling story about what was happening.
- ▶ **Permission:** Ensure you have permission from the subjects to take and use their photo for marketing purposes. Get them to sign a permission form. Parent or guardian signature is required for minors.
- ▶ **Editing:** Sometimes the editing process is just as important as the content when it comes to creating a great photo. Use an image editing tool to do basic editing. Two good free programs are FastStone Image Viewer, which has a host of essential features and functions (faststone.org/FSViewerDetail.htm), and Aviary.com, a simple app that is very user-friendly and requires no download. Tips include:
 - ▶ **Crop your photo** to put the focus on your subject and to eliminate extraneous or distracting information, such as the room's ceiling or overhead lighting, a person's head in the foreground, or half of a person on the left side of the shot.
 - ▶ **If your aim is to emphasize** the tree or the rock or the person, zoom in to the subject so that it is visible and not too small to see.
 - ▶ **Don't place your subject in the middle** – put it in the left or right third portion of the photo.
 - ▶ **Correct and balance** the photo's colors and lighting so it doesn't appear too yellow, blue or green, or too dark or light.
- ▶ **Storage:** Create a Google Drive to house and share your photo collections with your staff and others who need to access and use them. Create a different album for each event or activity as a way to organize and access your multiple collections. For each album, include a quick description of the activity, the date and the location. Don't forget to credit the photographer!



VOC's Volunteer Photographer Guidelines and Agreement Form are included in **Supplemental Materials**.

Step 8: Creating a Storytelling Culture

Creating a storytelling culture in your organization will help you uncover new and interesting stories, hone your storytelling abilities, and ultimately improve your storytelling efforts as a whole. Create a storytelling culture by following these tips:

- ▶ **Create a storytelling strategy:** Select the core stories you are going to tell, ensure everyone on staff knows them, and encourage everyone to bring out their storytelling abilities.

Step 8: Continued

- ▶ **Encourage others to tell your story:** Get staff, board members, volunteers, family members and participants in your program on board with crafting and sharing their collective and individual stories.
- ▶ **Create a practice of sharing stories at every staff meeting:** Set aside 5 minutes every day for staff to share a "mission moment", observations from the field, testimonials, and anecdotes.
- ▶ **Create a story archive:** Make it accessible and refresh it with new stories regularly.
- ▶ **Use storytelling at every opportunity:** Tell your story at meetings and events, in mailings, newsletters and thank-you notes – and most of all, in your daily contacts with people.



Conclusion

This guide provided tips and ideas to help your organization start or expand its storytelling initiatives. It outlined a three-phased approach to developing your storytelling strategy; outlined the elements of a great story, including key ingredients and the story arc; discussed stories as "moments in time"; offered several alternative storytelling methods – such as video, photography and speaking events; offered tips and ideas for sharing and multipurposing stories across different communications channels; offered tips for taking and using great photos to accompany your stories; and featured tips for creating a storytelling culture in your organization.

A list of [Supplemental Materials](#) is provided below.

- ▶ **"Moments in Time" Worksheets**
Individual, fillable worksheets to craft your professional story, your organization's story, and individual impact stories.
- ▶ **Everyday Moments to Watch & Listen For**
A list of moments to look and listen for to help you uncover the stories of people around you and your work.
- ▶ **Sample Conversation Prompts**
A list of questions and conversation prompts that can be used to help guide and uncover others' stories.
- ▶ **Sample Q & A's**
A list of sample prompts you can use to draft Q & A's.
- ▶ **Examples of Multipurposing an Impact Story**
A demonstration of how you can repurpose an impact story for different audiences and communication platforms.
- ▶ **Volunteer Photographer Guidelines & Agreement Form**
VOC's Volunteer Photographer Guidelines and Agreement Form, covering photographer requirements, types of photos desired, and necessary permissions.

Check out the rest of the guides for
Marketing & Communications

Messaging

Storytelling

Media Relations

Community Outreach

Strategic Communications Planning

News Releases & Media Advisories

