



"Maybe it's because we're all so overloaded with information. Maybe it's because we're so starved for meaning. Or maybe it's because, thanks to social media, everyone's become a broadcaster these days. Whatever the reason, we're all getting the same memo at the same time: if you want to be heard, you'd better learn to tell better stories."

- Jonah Sachs, founder and CEO, Free Range Studios and author, Story Wars

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Storytelling 101

How do we educate people on the issue of food security in Alaska? How do we share the good work that our agencies are doing? How do we move potential donors to contribute to the fight against hunger? We usually do this through one of two ways – stories and/or numbers. Stories and data are complementary tools in a non-profit's work belt; stories often get people's attention, while data show that the stories are representative of a larger whole. While data can be invaluable to advocacy work, it is often stories that allow people to emotionally relate to your cause; as non-profit storytelling guru Andy Goodman says, "Nobody ever marched on Washington because of a pie chart." This whitepaper will serve as a follow up to the piece "How to Tell Your Story Using Data," and will focus on storytelling as a medium.

Whose Story?

Often, when anti-hunger advocates talk about using stories, they immediately think about client stories. While client stories have the potential to be very powerful, there are many other people from whom to also draw stories. Consider:

- Volunteers
- Staff
- Board Members
- Donors
- Partner Agencies
- Public Officials

In addition to deciding whose story to tell, we need to think about our audience. What will resonate with them? Will they be most moved by hearing the personal story of one of our clients, or by hearing a story that demonstrates our efficiency as an organization? Stories can be used to inform and inspire staff, donors, funders, and the broader community, but those stories will not necessarily be the same.

Ethics in Storytelling

While our clients' stories and photos are often considered the most powerful of our tools, we need to be careful how we use them. Issues of privacy and confidentiality are very important to consider when we look to use clients' stories, and we must be sure to use them in a way that honors and respects our clients. Some anti-hunger agencies have a strict policy of not using any

client names or photos, while others navigate this issue by actively engaging the clients in the process. Here are some tips on how to solicit clients' stories in a respectful way:¹

- Focus on the part of the story that the client is most proud of or most eager to share
- Pay attention to the client and their body language as they tell their story and gauge their comfort levels
- Let the client read a draft or proof of the copy before it is published or goes live

Mediums for Storytelling²

1. Tell it in pictures.

If a picture paints a thousand words, why do yours look so bad? Consider the quality and content of your photos. Look at them without any supporting captions or articles. What are they saying about your organization? What story do they tell? If the story is "people lined up against a wall in bad lighting," you might want to invest in some better photos. Make sure your photography reflects the action, emotion and excitement of what you do.

2. Tell it in video.

Consider investing in a flip camera and taking short videos to use on Facebook, YouTube and your website. This is a great way to create a personal connection to your organization. Rough, home-grown video is perfectly acceptable, and in fact expected, in social media and can make donors feel more connected to your mission.

3. Tell it in writing.

Create a bank of short stories that you can use in your website, annual report, newsletters and social media. Staff, volunteers and board can also contribute and share stories. Stories can be about those you serve as well as those who support you. They don't have to be more than a paragraph or two. Once you start building the bank, you can use the stories wherever needed.

4. Tell it verbally.

That bank of stories that you wrote in step 3 can also be shared verbally. Arm your volunteers, board members and committee members with stories they can share with their family and friends. Start staff, board and committee meetings with stories...and encourage those in attendance to share their stories as well. Creating this culture of storytelling will make it much easier to add new stories to your bank.

5. Have others tell it for you.

Make it easy for others to tell your story while sharing their own story. Encourage those you serve, your volunteers and board members to share their love of your organization. Social media is a great way to share stories and build your online support community.

¹ The Ethics of Storytelling, or how not to exploit people. Philanthropy for All. <http://pfa-blog.com/home/the-ethics-of-storytelling-or-how-not-to-exploit-people/>

² 5 Ways to Tell Your Nonprofit's Story. 501(c)reative. http://www.501creative.com/5-ways-tell-your-nonprofits-story#.UIWkT7_TnyA

Story Ideas

Here are a few story ideas to help you get started:³

- Profile a client, a volunteer, a donor, or a staff person
- Do a series showing what it's like behind-the-scenes at your organization.
- Speak to the front line people. What story ideas do they have for you?
- Capture a day-in-the-life story from the perspective of a client, a staff member, or a volunteer.
- From one person's perspective, feature key issues and how your organization is tackling them.
- Do Q&A sessions where a member of the community interviews you.
- Feature guest posts from leaders in your field.
- Build legacy stories. Write stories of how your organization came to be. Go back and feature the key people that were part of your early organization or key turning points.

Copies of Alaska Food Coalition White Papers are available online:

<http://www.alaskafood.org/whitepapers.shtml>

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³ Stories Worth Telling: A Guide to Storytelling for Non-Profits. Capacity Waterloo Region.

<http://www.capacitywr.ca/blogs/news/ournewstorytellingguide>

