

# Phillips MediaSource WhitePaper

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## Nonprofit Storytelling for Fund-raising

Nonprofit storytelling can help you stand out from the pack.

Here's the cold hard truth —

donors do not want to hear about your organization and the programs you provide.

They want to hear about the social impact that is made possible through their donations.

### Elements of impactful nonprofit storytelling

There are many reasons why we find stories compelling and once you know what those are, crafting stories becomes as much of a science as it is an art.

#### Have a purpose

When embarking on a nonprofit storytelling project, it is crucial that you know what the purpose of that story is. What do you want to achieve with it? What do you want readers to feel? How do you want readers to act as a result of that feeling? If you don't have a clear sense of what's happening you are only going to leave the reader feeling confused.

#### Add details

Stories can easily fall flat if there are not rich details that paint a full and beautiful picture in the reader's mind.

#### Be emotive

Putting emotions on full display is part of what makes stories such an effective tool for nonprofits. Keep these elements in mind as we move into the next section on the mechanics of crafting a story.

### 5 steps in crafting an impactful story

Once you have made the decision to tell stories, it is natural to feel uncertain as to what to do next. Couple your enthusiasm with these five steps to be on your way to telling great stories.

#### 1. Define your message

You likely have a fundraising or awareness goal. Take time at the beginning to define the purpose and the message you want to communicate. Having this clarity will make it far easier to craft a story.

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## **2. Define your audience**

Much like defining your message, it is important to define who your audience is. Ask yourself – who do I want this story to speak to? Just like your cause might not be for everyone, every story might not appeal to everyone in your audience. Think about who you want to reach and what kind of story will appeal to them. Jot down some characteristics of this audience.

## **3. Determine what kind of story you need**

Think about what story you need. Will it come from a client, a donor, a staff member or someone else? There are a variety of viewpoints you can showcase in a story, so think about your audience and what they are most likely to respond to.

In addition to deciding whose story you will use, you will also need to think about the nature of the story. Is it about overcoming adversity or achieving a transformation? Will it be a story about your founding or your impact? Or will it be a story about the future of your organization?

## **4. Find story leads and conduct interviews**

There are a couple of ways that you can go about finding story leads. You can simply let other staff members know about the project you are working on and ask if they know of anyone who might fit the bill. If you have potential interviewees in mind, you can also contact them directly, explain the project and ask if they would be willing to volunteer some time. Spread the collection net far and wide.

Once you've identified a story lead (or two), arrange an interview. Think of this as a casual conversation to get to know the person a bit better so that you can share their story. Do your homework ahead of time and come prepared with potential questions to keep the conversation going.

## **5. Tie it all together**

Your job now is to package it all together. Begin the process with a “hook” – a particularly captivating part of your story. Imagine that you are writing this out in a letter or an email to a friend; use a similar tone and style. Then, gently weave in the other pieces of information to make it cohesive and give it additional structure.

A good way to think about packaging your story is to think about the types of stories you could tell.

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### Creating a Culture of Nonprofit Storytelling

One of the big impediments to nonprofit storytelling can be collecting stories. If you do not have the opportunity to regularly participate in your organization's service delivery, you can feel once removed from where the stories are. This might sound like a big task, but there are little things you can do to shape organizational culture and make storytelling an integral part of it.

### Know your funding priorities

To start, decide at an organizational level what your priorities are for program development and fund-raising and then create some strategic messaging around those priorities. Once those have been set, you can clearly communicate to all staff members what kind of stories you are looking for. This clarity is absolutely necessary when you are trying to achieve organizational buy-in. Everyone needs to understand where the organization is heading.

### Educate everyone on the value of stories

Consider holding a staff meeting to openly discuss what nonprofit storytelling is, why it matters and why all staff members play a vital role in it. This kind of forum and education can help break down any hesitations people might have about telling stories.

### Tell each other stories

Taking this a step further, if you want to tell your community stories start by telling each other stories. Schedule the first 15 minutes of staff meetings to exchange stories. Allow yourselves to be inspired by the amazing work your board and staff are doing.

### Let's talk.

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