



## What Makes a Good Story?

Effective stories that make the case about your accomplishments should include a variety of participant and partner profiles. Collecting stories from individuals and people who represent organizations; and from each partnership area, will allow you to pull the most directly relevant stories for each target audience.

These stories should focus on how your organization works; on the progress individual participants are making; on the experiences of different kinds of partners who are making your work happen; and on your community. Reporters, residents, policymakers and practitioners from other jurisdictions are eager to hear progress on your work, and how those results are relevant to them and their constituencies.

Stories like the examples above should be centered on one key aspect or benefit of your organization really create a clear picture for interested stakeholders – that's why collecting a diverse catalogue is so important – allowing you to pull the most relevant examples from a reserve of stories.

The most compelling stories include key details that make the story real. The story collection form provided with this guide will prompt you to include specifics that will help make these stories come to life for audiences – so they will be able to relate and picture themselves benefitting in similar ways.

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## What Makes Stories Strategic?

Different kinds of stories will produce different kinds of reactions and results. This can be true in terms of selecting different stories to use to illustrate why your organization is necessary, groundbreaking, or effective. It can also be true in terms of deciding *how* to tell a specific story. As you collect and organize stories for use in outreach to press, policymakers, community residents and other audiences, make sure you start with strategy. When choosing a story to share with the press, include in a website or a presentation, consider these two questions:

1. **Who are you trying to influence or persuade?** (A city council member? A funder?)
2. **What do you want to see happen AS A RESULT of your story?** (Create a new ally? Keep partners inspired and committed? Obtain more funding?)

Spitfire recommends that your organization collect and craft stories to complete each of these categories, each of which help target audiences understand different aspects of the program:

**Nature of Our Challenge** – Fundamental nature of the problem you are tackling; the reason you are working so hard every day.

**How We Got Started** – Your creation story; a.k.a. “why I do what I do” story if told from an individual POV.

**Performance** – Stories of the creative ways your team solves problems or the lessons you've learned along the way. The focus of a performance story is on how something happened not what happened.

**Where We Are Going** – The end result you are striving for. The result people will see from your work, a.k.a. "the visionary story".

**Emblematic Success** – Tales of your victories.

**Why We Do What We Do** – This tells the story of something or someone that is so motivational, it drives efforts.

We recommend that all communicators know or have access to at least one story from each of these categories.

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# Spitfire Strategies

## Story Collection Form Template



[Insert Organization Name] is collecting stories that bring to life how [Insert Organization's cause]—and why this is so important.

Please complete this form to share your story with us. This story may be used in the [Insert Organization Name]'s website, speeches, reports and other venues. We will contact you for more information if needed.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Contact Name:

E-mail:

Phone:

Does [Insert Organization Name] have your permission to share this story publicly?

Yes  No

Do you have pictures or video to illustrate the story?  Yes  No

**Please answer the following questions to help us tell your stories. You may use these questions to guide the writing of your story, or submit your story in a few paragraphs. Please keep in mind the need for vivid and specific details, such as time and place, main characters, a plot and lessons learned, in order for a story to be compelling.**

1. Where is your story located? What is the setting? (Include examples for each question if possible)
  2. Who are the main people involved? Is it a single person or a group of people? Describe them including physical details if possible.
  3. What is your main character(s) up against? What is the conflict? (Please be as specific as possible about the specific challenge your character faced).
  4. How did the character(s) overcome the conflict? What services or interventions were provided by you or your partners to help them overcome the conflict?

# Spitfire Strategies

## Story Collection Form Template



5. What is the lesson of the story and why does it matter?
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Here is an example of a story collected by [Insert Organization Name]. Cite where these stories can be found.

(Insert example story here)

Thank you!

**Mail/E-mail or Fax Your Story to:**

Name  
Organization  
Address  
City, State Zip  
Fax (XXX) XXX-XXXX  
Email Address



## STORYTELLING WORKSHEET

**What is the point you want listeners to take away upon hearing this story?**

**What audience would you want to tell this story to?**

**Who is the protagonist of your story?** (Who will the audience follow or identify with throughout the story?)

**What details can you share about the protagonist to make him or her come alive to your audience?**

**What is the protagonist's goal?**

**What barrier(s)/conflict(s) does he or she comes across?**

**How does your protagonist pursue his or her goal?** (What does the protagonist do to try to overcome these barriers? What activities keep the story's momentum going?)

**What is the moment of truth in your story?**

**What is the meaning of the story? What do you want your listener(s) to take away?**

**How does this story relate to your work?** (Is it emblematic of your mission? Does it explain why you do what you do?)



## **HOW TO CREATE A STORYBANK**

A storybank – a collection of compelling stories that you can easily create – ensures that you always have a story at the ready. The following provides tips on how to create a bank of local stories that you can draw upon when faced with media or policymaker requests, or when you need a story to include in your own outreach efforts.

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### **What is a storybank?**

A storybank is a collection of stories. It can be as simple as a folder where you file hard copies of stories. More advanced options include a spreadsheet or basic database stored on your computer, or even an online database that allows visitors to your Web site to enter stories.

### **Why is a storybank important?**

A reporter calls you, and tells you she is working on a story about your issue. She asks if you have any good stories that you can share for her article. Off the top of your head, it may be difficult to come up with compelling stories. If the reporter is on deadline, and it takes you a few days to reach out to your network of contacts to find appropriate stories, you may miss the opportunity to be part of the article.

If, however, you are collecting stories all the time and depositing them into a story bank, you'll be poised to search through your collection and "withdraw" the best stories to answer a reporter's query.

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### **Step by Step: Creating a Storybank**

**Decide what kinds of stories you'd like to collect.** Before you begin to collect stories, think about what kinds of stories would be most useful to you and to the reporters you work with. Ideally, your storybank will include a broad swath of different kinds of stories – involving diverse people, different types of problems and varying outcomes.

**Select your storybanking system.** Decide whether you will collect your stories on paper and store them in a file folder, or collect them electronically and store them on your hard drive or in an online database. Whatever system you choose, make sure it will be easy for you to use and that you will have the resources necessary to maintain it.

**Create a story collection form.** Once you know what kinds of stories you are looking for, take some time to develop a form to ensure that you obtain the same kind of information for each story. The form might be an online form accessible via a Web link, or a Microsoft Word document that can be emailed or faxed to your network of contacts. (*A sample story collection form for a paper-based storybank is included at the end of this document.*)

Your form will likely include contact information for someone who can tell the story such as their name, organization, address, phone number, fax number and email address. Your form can then include room for a story title and the story itself. It's a good idea to include space for the date a story was submitted.

It's a good idea to include some release options on the form. Have a box for contributors to check if they agree that you may release their story to the media and use it in communications materials. Also ask if it's all right to share their contact information with the media. If you decide to leave these options off the form, keep in mind that you will need to check in with the contributor later on if you want to offer their story to a reporter, or include it in a publication.

**Disseminate the story form to your network of contacts.** Mail or email your story form (or a link to it) to allies, coalition members and any other people that you work with on your issues. Encourage your contacts to forward the story form to others they know that have stories to tell. If you have a newsletter or a Web site, be sure to publicize your storybanking efforts in those places.

**Check into the stories that you receive.** Before you add a story submission to your database, it's a good idea to verify it. You want to be sure it is accurate, and also find out whether the contact person will be a credible spokesperson for media interviews. Talk with the story contributor to confirm and add key details. Check in again to be sure they are willing to talk with the press and/or have their story used in written materials. Once you've confirmed that the story is accurate, you can add it to your database.

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## Make the Most of Your Storybank

**Keeping current.** Stories that are more than a year old lose their media appeal, and the circumstances of a particular story may change. Make it a policy to update stories once or twice a year. Get in touch with the contact person and ask if the situation has changed. Update the story in your database or filing system, and add a note about the date it was updated. If you're considering releasing a story to a reporter and it hasn't been updated in several months, think about updating it before you release it, or at least let the reporter know that the story was current as of a specific date.

**Using the stories in media outreach.** When you are talking with reporters, you can mention that you are developing a storybank. As your storybank grows, and reporters call with queries, try to be as responsive as you can. Find out what they are looking for, and search through the stories that you have collected. If you find that you don't have what they need, offer the reporter some alternative contacts. Finally, make a note of what stories you share with reporters. It's not a good idea to share the same story with multiple reporters from competing news outlets in the same market.