

HOW TO COLLECT STORIES



Advocacy &
Communication
SOLUTIONS

and use them as strategic
communication tools



Stories are powerful in various ways. Because stories speak to individuals' hearts and fundamental values, they teach people not only how they should act, but can inspire people and give them the courage to act. In addition, stories help people remember complex information by evoking emotion, which makes it easier to recall facts and details. Importantly, humans love to repeat compelling stories, thus passing along the content and the emotion, which over time, can change hearts, minds, and behaviors. You can and should think of story collection, management, and dissemination as fundamental to achieving your organizational goals. This document offers tips and guidelines to help you embark on a strategic story collection effort.

Want more?

This tool is just the tip of the ACS storytelling iceberg. Our team can work with your organization to uncover stories that will reinforce your strategic and advocacy goals; help you realize how communication, strategy development, or advocacy can move your organization forward; or lead your training sessions or conference presentations. Visit us online to learn more!



STEP 01 BIG PICTURE

Before doing any outreach to collect stories, consider the following questions:

- Who needs to hear this story?
- What story am I trying to tell?
- Who is the ideal storyteller?
- What is the ideal format and length?

NOW...

IDENTIFY THE TARGET AUDIENCE

Identify 1-2 messages that will resonate with your audience.

DECIDE WHAT QUESTIONS TO ASK

Use the interview guide below to identify key questions that support your message or frame.

DEFINE YOUR STORYTELLER

What characteristics of your storyteller are needed to support your message or frame?

DETERMINE HOW TO TELL THE STORY

Photos? Video? Audio? Visuals? What should you use to make the story real to your audience?

STEP 02 PREPARE YOUR STORIES

You've identified the types of stories you need to collect, from whom, and in what format. Now it's time to prepare your stories.

NOW...

LIST POSSIBLE STORYTELLERS

Make a list of names and contact information of potential storytellers.

DETERMINE POSSIBLE PARTNERS

Make a list of trusted organizations that may have access to potential storytellers and ask for their assistance in identifying and contacting people who have compelling stories.

DETERMINE THE EXPECTATIONS

Consider if the partner or organization might expect something from you if they supply a storyteller. Do they have any restrictions on how the story is collected and told?

STEP 03 TIME TO COLLECT

- Determine the best person to reach out to each individual.
- Devise the script.
- Meet your interviewee where they are.
- Conduct the interview either in person or on the phone.
- Regroup with your internal team.

NOW...

WRITE THE STORY

Turn the strongest interview notes into narratives with a beginning, middle, and end. Share the draft with the storyteller for approval and updates.

CAPTURE THE STORY VISUALLY

Go back to the storyteller and make plans to capture their story visually or through audio recording.

FOLLOW UP

What are the next steps now that the story has been captured?

INTERVIEW GUIDE

get the most from
your storytellers



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BEFORE YOU BEGIN INTERVIEWING THE STORYTELLER...

Introduce yourself and briefly explaining why you're collecting this story. You can keep it simple but understand that some people may need more time to build trust and understand why you are asking them to share their story in this way. By explaining what you're looking for and why—and perhaps even sharing a short story about yourself—you are increasing the storyteller's comfort level and may open the door for them to share important details they otherwise wouldn't have thought were relevant.

NOW IT'S TIME TO ASK THE QUESTIONS.

STEP 01

GET THE BASICS

- What is your first and last name? Please spell them for me.
- Do you prefer follow up via email, phone, text? If you don't have email or regular access to a phone, is there someone who can get a message to you?
- What is the best phone number/email address to reach you?
- When is the best time for me to call/email/text if I have any additional questions?

STEP 02

GET DEMOGRAPHICS

- Where do you currently live (city/neighborhood/state)?
- If you feel comfortable sharing, what is your race/ethnicity?
- If you feel comfortable sharing, what is your age?
- Ask additional demographic questions based on your goals/needs; be sure to allow people an "out" if they don't want to share this information.

STEP 03

GET PERSONAL

Consider asking specific questions to get information that will help humanize the storyteller (e.g., if they have children or other caregiving responsibilities, how they spend their time, and what they do for fun).

STEP 04

GET THE STORY

- What happened, to whom, when, where? How did they feel?
- How did they respond?
- What was the outcome?
- If you could say one thing to people who have the power to make a positive change for you and others like you, what would you say?
- Is there anything else you would like to say about this experience or topic?

STEP 05

GET PERMISSION

- Are you willing to speak face-to-face with elected officials, such as in a private meeting? Are you willing to testify publicly?
- Are you willing to appear on video or be recorded telling your story so we could play it for decision-makers? What if we shared that video or recording online?
- Are you willing to appear on camera for a TV interview or to speak to a reporter live in a radio interview?
- Are you willing to have your story published in the newspaper or online?
- Are you open to having your story shared on social media and would you share it to your social media pages, as well?

