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# STORYTELLING WITH PURPOSE FOR IMPACT

Professional Development Toolbox Webinar  
Series Workbook

As part of our Professional Development Toolbox Webinar Series, we presented our third webinar, *Storytelling with purpose for impact*, on March 30, 2023, from 12pm to 1pm ET.

A huge thank you to all those who attended and participated in our webinar. During this webinar, we were impressed by the level of engagement of our audience! Inspired by the valuable contributions of our participants, we decided to develop a workbook to complement this webinar. In this workbook, you will find examples that participants have shared during the webinar. Thank you for the opportunity to exchange learning!

With gratitude,

Elisabeth (Lis) Huang  
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Research Impact Canada



A special thank you to our reviewers:

Louis Melançon, Bilingual Research Assistant, Research Impact Canada  
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Saba Aslani, Knowledge Mobilization Specialist, Research Impact Canada

# Learning objectives

By attending the webinar, we hope to support you in achieving the following three learning objectives:



Source the most appropriate stories to achieve your impact.



Gain a better understanding of your audience and engage them in the storytelling process.



Increase your awareness of resources that can help you develop stories.



**Did the webinar meet your learning objectives?**

*If not, what learning objectives would you like the webinar to meet if there was a future webinar?*

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# The power of storytelling

How many of you have heard of Shakespeare? Although his plays were written a long time ago (with his last play penned four hundred years ago), Shakespeare's plays are still performed today. The stories of his work evoke a range of strong emotions and the themes of love, ambition, power, fate, mercy, vengeance, and so on, are still relevant today. His stories are well remembered and quotes from his plays are still used today. Examples include:

- "Too much of a good thing" - As You Like It
- "I have been in such a pickle" - The Tempest

Aside from the power of stories from a long time ago, without realizing it, you may be exchanging stories more often than you think.

The stories that we hear or share are at times more memorable than facts. How often have you met someone who can share more than 70 000 digits of pi in a conversation versus someone who recalls the plot of a film?

Our audience provided additional examples of where stories may be heard or exchanged:

- Online meetings
- Classrooms
- Social media
- Books
- Plays
- Movies
- Sitting around with people where conversations and relationships are built
- Podcasts
- Musicals
- Case studies
- Water cooler chats
- Informal settings
- Gatherings on special occasions
- Dinner conversations



Where else have you heard of stories being told?

# The purpose of impactful storytelling

As you may have noticed, stories are all around us. You may either be telling stories or consuming stories both intentionally and unintentionally. They play an integral part of our lives.

Stories can be used to:

1. Engage our attention
2. Help us understand others and ourselves
3. Emotionally connect people to a mission
4. Solve problems

As a result, stories can be effective in:

- Sharing lessons learned
- Advocating for an issue that you believe in
- Fundraising for a cause that you care deeply about

Some reasons that people tell stories at their organization include:

- Raising awareness
- Sharing knowledge
- Demonstrating connections to real life
- Providing context for quantitative data
- Showing the value of your work for grant funding
- Sharing exemplars, promising, and best practices, and successes
- Teaching
- Trying to relate to people
- Building relationships
- Hearing different voices
- Presenting concrete cases
- Reporting
- Training
- Creating human connections (e.g. new connections with community partners)



What are other reasons that you tell stories at your organization?

# Collect, track, and store stories

## Who to seek stories from

Before you begin to collect your impact stories, identify a list of potential people that you would like to collect stories from.



Identify individual(s) who:

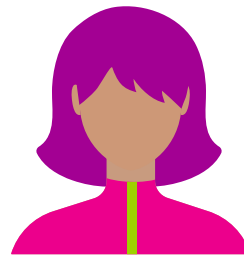
- Represent relevant roles in the context of the story you would like to share (i.e. project, program and/or organization)
- Have significant experience or involvement in the context of the story that you would like to share (i.e. project, program and/or organization)

Examples of people who may be able to share a story with you include:



**A donor or funder**

can share a story of why they give



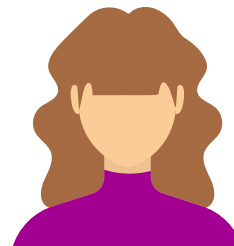
**A participant**

can share a story of the impact that your organization has had on their life



**An employee**

can share a story of why they chose to join your organization



**A volunteer**

can share a story of why they dedicate their energy and time to support your organization

## Who to seek stories from (continued)

Our audience shared other potential people to seek stories from, which include:

- Critics
- Members of the public
- Community members
- Students
- Members of underrepresented groups
- Experts
- Thought leaders
- People who have life experience in the topic/research



Who else can you seek stories from?

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# How to collect stories

After creating a list of people who you would like to gather powerful and persuasive stories from, it is important to find one or more approaches to collect those stories.

Some ideas on how you can collect stories include but are not limited to:



Jot the stories that you hear during team meetings



Create a story form or template that can be shared through [Google Docs](#), a survey link, or a landing page



Interview your prospective storytellers

If you choose to collect stories through interviews, here are some tips:

- Ask your storyteller to tell you about a specific point in time. This is helpful because it:
  - Encourages him or her to detail a relevant experience and emotions
  - Avoids getting unnecessary context or details of the story
- Ask for superlative moments of a story
- To help them feel comfortable sharing a story:
  - Share a story of your own first
  - If needed, ask: “Does that story remind you of anything?”

Our audience shared other potential ways to seek stories, which include:

- Storytelling workshops
- Board and staff retreats
- Art methods
- Message boards
- Video diaries
- Photovoice
- Self-reflection to retrieve your own stories
- Story slam event (e.g. [UCalgary Nursing Story Slam event](#))





How else can you collect stories?

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## Where to track and store stories

It may be challenging to come up with stories on the spot. There are tools that can help store stories that you've collected over time to create a story catalogue. It'll then be easier to pull out relevant stories to refer to or select from when crafting the story to meet your desired objectives.

Some tools to help you develop a story catalogue include:

| Tools                                     | Examples                         |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Customer relationship management software | Salesforce                       |
| Spreadsheets                              | Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets |
| Other repositories                        | Condens                          |

Tips when creating a story catalogue:

- Add tags to filter the stories
- Make it accessible for team members to add or retrieve stories when needed
- Ensure that it is on a shared drive or a cloud document sharing system
- Develop and share a process to track and store stories with team members
- Create a filing system for the key categories and content of your stories

## Example

At Research Impact Canada, the Stakeholder Engagement team spoke with people across Canada who work in the skills and workforce development sector. By engaging in conversations with different people through an initiative called "Conversations to Connections", they were able to gather stories of people's experiences on the Community of Practice platform.

These stories were then shared with the Evaluation and Continuous Improvement team. The Evaluation and Continuous Improvement team uses a software called Condens to centrally store, collaboratively analyze and share qualitative data. Condens can also be used as a repository to archive and retrieve story insights when needed. When the Evaluation and Continuous Improvement team delivered an interim evaluation report, they accessed Condens to retrieve stories needed for the report.

# Know your audience

## Discover your audience

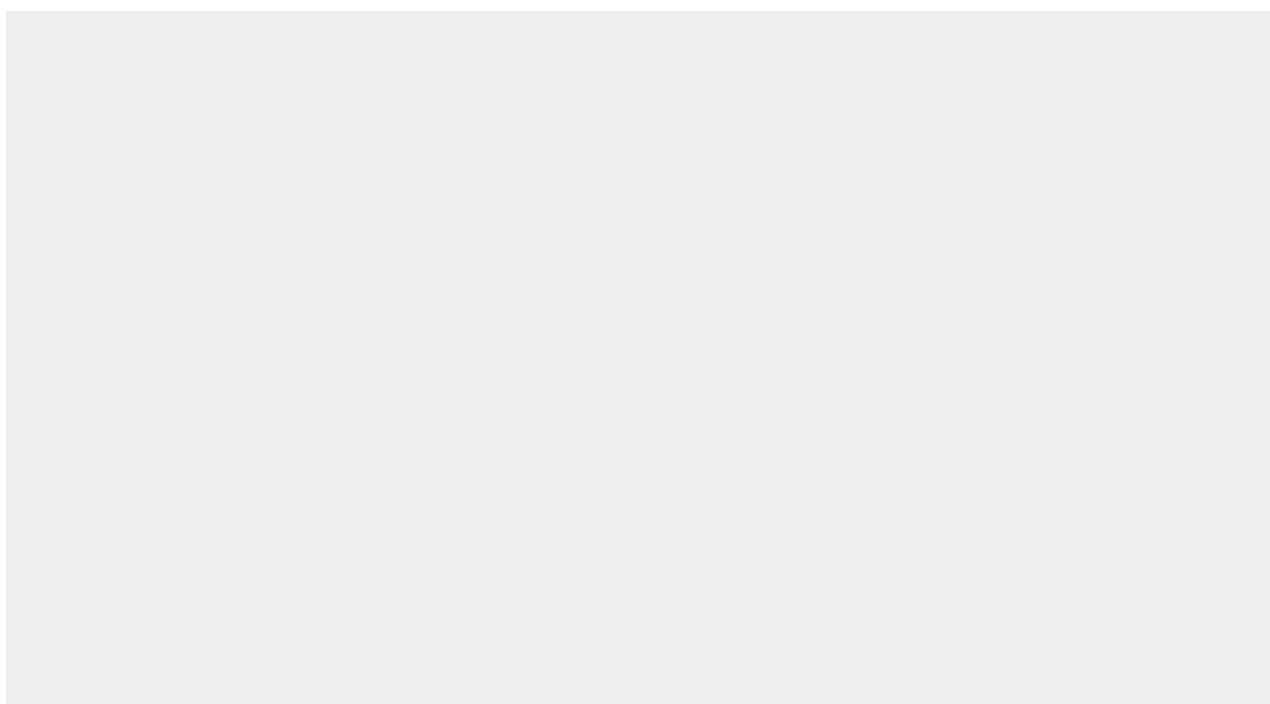
Before asking your audience for more information, look at pre-existing data that you've collected about your audience from various sources (e.g. surveys, event registration forms, mailing lists, member profiles). This pre-existing data can provide insights about your audience.

[Google Analytics](#) can offer insights about your audience. If you have a website, Google Analytics tracks and reports website traffic. If you post a few stories on your site with each story on separate pages, Google Analytics can inform you how long a person spends on that page or how many people viewed that story, for example, which will give you a better idea of if the story was read or not. This can help you determine the kinds of stories people are interested in reading, and more. If you are new to Google Analytics, check out [Google Analytics for Beginners](#).

Finally, although it may be more time and energy intensive to engage and speak with your audience, it is one of the best ways to better understand your audience. You may choose to engage them in an informal (e.g. coffee chats) or formal conversation (focus group or semi-structured interviews). Social events like a speed networking event is also a great idea!



What are other ways to get to know your audience better?



# Create an audience profile

An audience profile can help you clearly define your specific target audience. The audience profile template that we've designed for you below can help you think about data to collect about your potential target audience.

## Demographic characteristics

Age:

Gender:

Geography:

Education:

Occupation:

Income source:

Ethnicity:

Other:

## Psychographic characteristics

Personality traits:

Attitudes or beliefs:

Interests:

Lifestyles:

Values:

Other:

## Other characteristics

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| _____: |  |
| _____: |  |
| _____: |  |
| _____: |  |
| _____: |  |
| _____: |  |
| _____: |  |

## Use audience profiles as a filter

After you've created an audience profile, you can filter it to identify segments of your audience based on their characteristics to help make decisions such as:

- Which story may be most appropriate for your target audience?
- Does this story resonate with my target audience?

# Resources

| <b>Resources</b><br>Click on resource name to access it  | <b>Brief descriptions</b>   |
|--|---|
| <a href="#">Humanize the numbers</a>   | Free online course module that offers a general overview on ethical and inclusive considerations prior to, during, and after collecting stories from diverse individuals.   |
| <a href="#">Impact story toolkit</a>   | A toolkit to guide the process of sharing evidence of change after a specific intervention has been put in place.   |
| <a href="#">Digital storytelling for social impact</a>   | A report to help promote the practice of digital storytelling in 5 key areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strategy</li> <li>2. Capacity</li> <li>3. Content</li> <li>4. Platforms</li> <li>5. Evaluation</li> </ol> |
| <a href="#">IGNITE 2: How co-produced projects impact the community   University of Brighton</a> | A film on University of Brighton UK Ignite <a href="#">community-university partnership programme</a> . If you are interested in learning more about this programme, please get in touch with <a href="#">Dr. Nicolette Fox</a> . |



What other resources would you recommend to help craft a compelling story to meet your impact objectives?



Sign up for [Future Skills Centre Community of Practice mailing list](#) to stay up to date on upcoming Community of Practice events, innovative programs, news and resources to support your organization.

# Canada

This initiative is part of the Future Skills Centre's Community of Practice, supported by the Future Skills Centre Community of Practice Platform (powered by Magnet). The Future Skills Centre Community of Practice offers free access to resources, news and events, as well as the opportunity to meet stakeholders across Canada who are preparing people across Canada for the future of work.