



## Forward

Storytelling is such a hot buzzword these days that every marketing person, it seems, is struggling to figure out how to make it work for their organization.

But the best stories are simple, and easily shared.

And the beautiful thing about social responsibility is that the stories practically speak for themselves, if you let them.

Employee volunteer and giving programs offer a deep well for compelling experiences that underscore your organization's values, engagement and impact. Whatever your business mission may be, the social mission you choose to pursue through the support or (better yet) leadership of your employees can create a relatable narrative that inspires customers, employees and stakeholders.

But when it comes to storytelling, I see program administrators often failing to create the right breeding ground for authentic storytelling, missing out on the opportunity to capture these stories, and neglecting to properly distribute their stories to employees and wider community. America's Charities helps streamline and strengthen corporate volunteer and giving programs, empowering our clients to cultivate real, amazing and impactful stories that touch everyone involved.

Over the many thousands of years since storytelling began, we have seen how stories can change perspectives, change lives, change the world. If you prioritize storytelling - and if you have the right tools to harvest them - then you're giving your company the purest path possible to connect with the world in deeper and more meaningful ways.

And if you pursue storytelling through your efforts to *improve* the world, you're encouraging every person who reads about your experiences to do likewise.

Now *that's* a story worth telling.

— [Lindsay J.K. Nichols](#)

Vice President, Marketing and Communications,  
America's Charities

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## Introduction

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***We reach everyone from janitors to fighter pilots and when we are able to find the right story, we are able to move them to take action.***

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When Susan Wright encourages the 23,000 employees at America's Charities client [Lockheed Martin Aeronautics](#) to take part in her company's giving program, she doesn't just appeal for money.

She tells a story.

Often, it's the powerful story of a child or a family that has been helped by employee donations — the story of lives that have been improved by the simple act of giving.

When told well, these stories inspire tears, smiles and action. They carry emotions that cannot be expressed through facts or numbers.

“We reach everyone from janitors to fighter pilots and when we are able to find the right story, we are able to move them to take action,” Wright says of the giving program, which is called AERO Club.

But finding — and telling — the right story is not easy.

Companies and nonprofits that manage employee giving and volunteering programs are quite adept at the processes and practices that keep these programs humming. Yet they often struggle to find and tell stories that show how the generosity of employees is making a difference.

But at a time when you can reach employees through myriad channels — from posters on bulletin boards to postings on Facebook — storytelling is becoming more important than ever. It can inspire employees to give for the first time, offer rewards for those who have already given and show customers and clients that your company is making a difference.

If your company is looking to more effectively tell its story to employees and customers — or if your nonprofit is looking to provide your corporate partners with ready-made stories that will help inspire more giving — this guide can help.

You'll learn how to identify good stories, explore the key ingredients you need to tell those stories well and discover tactics that will help you deliver them in a number of formats and mediums.

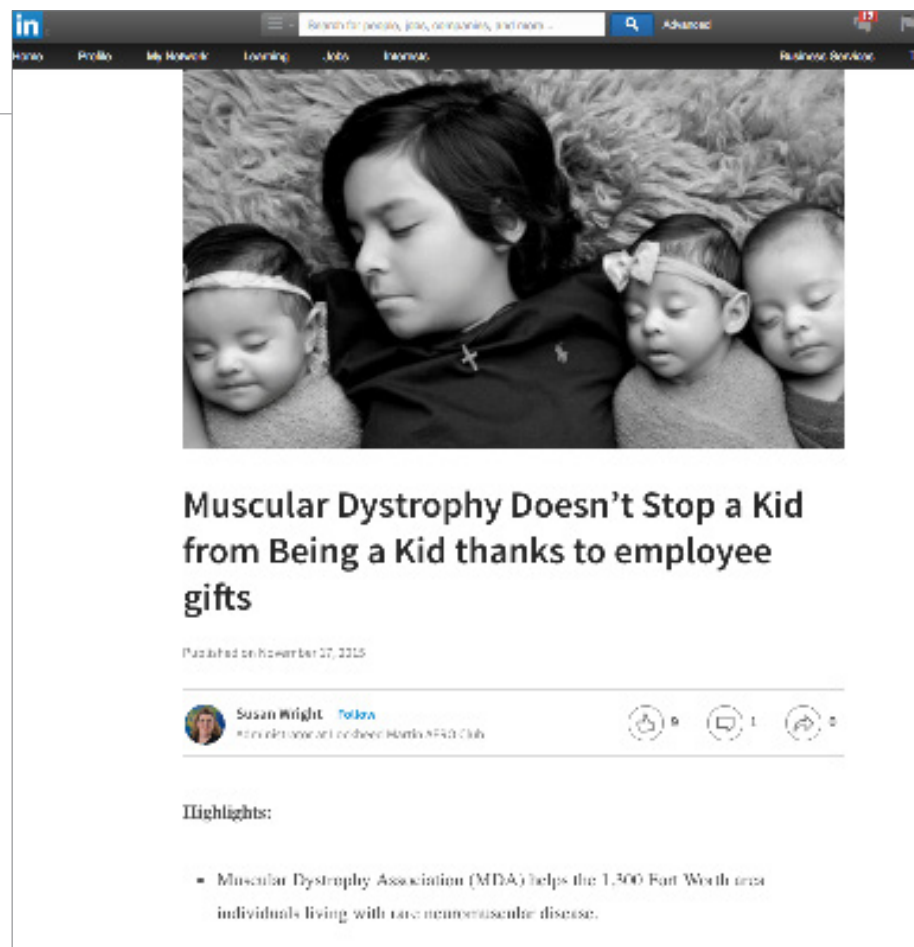
While it takes time and practice to become an expert storyteller, this guide will give you the tools you need to get started on your journey.

## Example: Compelling Visuals

Strong images are a vital component of strong storytelling.

Look for photos that tell a story of their own — and that inspire your audience to want to know more.

And don't limit yourself just to photos. Sometimes, a graphic or chart can add color and context to your story.



**Muscular Dystrophy Doesn't Stop a Kid from Being a Kid thanks to employee gifts**

Published on November 27, 2015

Susan Wright [Follow](#)  
Marketing and Communications Manager at Lockheed Martin AFD Club

**Highlights:**

- Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) helps the 1,300 Fort Worth area individuals living with rare neuromuscular disease.

Courtesy Lockheed Martin Aeronautics

## The Basics



*While it's tempting to think that splashy graphics or colorful language will be enough to carry your story, investing in these elements alone will likely be an expensive waste of time and money if you're not taking the time to identify stories that will resonate with the people you're trying to reach.* ”

Think about your favorite movie. What makes it your favorite?

Depending on the movie, your first instinct might be to focus on the visuals, or the action, or the humor.

But if you dig deeper, the movie likely qualifies as your favorite because it speaks to you. It validates something you believe in. It moves you to feel something.

And it does all of those things through its story.

The other elements — the sweeping panoramas, the explosions, the jokes — are there to amplify the movie's core essence, which is the story it tells. But without a strong story, those other elements will ultimately fall flat.

The same will be true of the messages you are trying to convey about your employee giving program.

While it's tempting to think that splashy graphics or colorful language will be enough to carry your story, investing in these elements alone will likely be an expensive waste of time and money if you're not taking the time to identify stories that will resonate with the people you're trying to reach.

So how do you find — and ultimately tell — those stories?

We'll get to those answers shortly. But before you can really begin the process of searching for and sharing stories, you need to first answer a few important questions of your own. These questions include:

### What Are Your Goals?

The stories you choose to tell will depend, in part, on what you're trying to achieve.

As a result, it's best to take some time up front to define what you want to accomplish with your stories.

Are you looking to inspire more of your employees to give? Position your company as a great place to work? Showcase your business as a good corporate citizen?

You might have one or all of the goals above — or perhaps some others.

But knowing and articulating those goals will help you determine the types of stories you tell — and how you tell them.

If you're looking to inspire employees to give, for instance, you might choose to tell stories that show the impact of the charities your organization supports — or the stories of co-workers who have made a difference with their gifts.

### Who Are You Trying to Reach?

Once you've identified your goals, take some time to identify which audiences are most important to helping you achieve those goals — and think about what types of stories are likely to appeal most to those audiences.

The most effective stories are really about the audience. As a result, you need to help them see themselves in the story you are telling.

If your primary audience is your employees, then dig deeper and figure out what those employees value.

The most important thing to remember is that your stories need to connect with the people you most want to reach. If you try to tell a story that appeals to everyone, you probably aren't going to speak directly to anyone. There is no such thing as targeting the general public.

If you have the time and resources, develop personas — or composite profiles — for those key audiences that include information about their values and interests, the types of media they consume, their level of education, and other traits that might help you identify how to connect with them through your storytelling.

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story.”

When America's Charities member [Thurgood Marshall College Fund](#) — a charity that provides scholarships to students at *publicly-supported* Historically Black Colleges and Universities — looks to share a story with one of its corporate partners, it takes time at the beginning of the process to research the company and learn about its corporate values and its employees. It does so, in part, to learn about that company's audience and goals.

“We look at its website and see where its values and our values line up,” says Kevin Schultz, the organization's director of marketing. “It's about putting those puzzle pieces together so we can find the compelling story.”

### What Resources Do You Have?

As you begin your storytelling journey, it's also important to take an inventory of your resources.

While your financial resources are certainly important, we're speaking more about what you have available to help deliver those stories. This inventory should include:

- Print – Do you publish an employee newsletter or annual report? Do you send regular mailings to employees or customers?
- Email marketing – Does your company send an email newsletter or have email lists for the audiences you've identified?
- Online – Do you have a blog? A section of your company's website devoted to giving? An employee portal? Do you have the capability to create online video or audio?
- Visual – Do you have the capacity to take quality photos or videos? Do you work with organizations that can provide images or videos? Does your company or organization have a media library? Do you have a budget for stock photos?



- ☑ Impact Statements – Do you have access to succinct statistics or facts about your organization's community impact, or examples of what specific donation amounts can help a nonprofit accomplish?
- ☑ Social – Do you have access to social media channels that can connect with your target audiences?
- ☑ Employee giving platforms – Do you have a web portal for your corporate giving? Do you have the ability to share stories across the platform?

Modern technology platforms like the [portfolio of solutions](#) offered by America's Charities help employers address many of these storytelling needs in one place and streamline the management of employee volunteer programs. With a comprehensive suite of tools, employers can instantly create cause awareness campaigns, employees can share stories through their own words and photos, and volunteer and giving experiences become an ongoing, interactive conversation that are easily refreshed and kept relevant.

### Example: Reaching Your Audience

Understanding who you're trying to reach is a vital component of effective storytelling. Lockheed Martin's AERO Club uses stories of employees who take part in its giving program to help inspire their co-workers to contribute.



Courtesy Lockheed Martin Aeronautics

## Finding Your Stories

Every two weeks for six years, CBS News correspondent Steve Hartman would throw a dart at a map of the United States and travel to the town wherever the dart stuck. Once he'd arrive, he would find a local phone book, open it to a random page and pick a name.

He would then do a profile on the CBS Evening News of someone who lived at the address.

The series was called "Everybody Has a Story." And it was true to its name. Each installment offered an interesting story — full of color and charm. Along the way, Hartman profiled a small-town funeral director who kept the mummified remains of a murder victim in his garage, a 5-year-old boy in Tennessee who would send balloons to his grandmother in heaven, and an 87-year-old woman who still did her son's laundry.

The nearly 100 people who were profiled during this series proved one thing —everyone has an interesting story to tell.


You just have to know how to find it.

Luckily, you don't have to rely on serendipity to find your stories. You simply have to look for people and examples that align with your goals and speak to your target audiences.

For example, if you manage a corporate giving program and are looking to inspire more employees to give, you have three easy places to go to find stories:

- Your employees – You can start to identify employees who are taking part in your giving program, talk to them about why they give and how they feel, and tell their stories.
- Nonprofits – One powerful way to inspire your employees to give is to show them the impact of their donations. By working with the nonprofits that receive donations through your program, you can find stories that show that impact.

**“  
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”**

 [Federations](#) – Federations like America's Charities work directly with nonprofit members to collect and distribute stories, photos, dollar buy statements, and other content, to help employers engage and inspire employees through giving campaigns.

Lockheed Martin's Wright says she relies heavily on nonprofits for the stories she shares with her company's employees — and she rarely struggles to find pieces that will resonate with her target audience. She simply looks for stories that show how the nonprofit helps transform the lives of those it serves.

If the nonprofit works to provide meals to hungry schoolchildren, she looks for a story that shows how donations helped provide food to a child. If it is an environmental charity, she looks for an example of how it is improving conditions in a community.

America's Charities partner [National Cooperative Bank \(NCB\)](#) takes a different approach — focusing instead on pairing thank you letters sent to employee donors from charities with photos of the employees who give. Its stories — often told very simply — make a clear connection between the action of an employee and the lives that action helps.

Some of the most compelling stories come from employee volunteers themselves, in their own words, and story capture tools offered in [America's Charities Engage CSR Solution](#) make this easy by prompting employees to share their volunteer experiences while the memory is still fresh, adding to an interactive conversation with other volunteers from their organization. The company-wide practice of documenting and sharing personal perspectives of volunteer experiences inspires even more employees to volunteer and creates a rich library of authentic stories to contextualize and pull from as needed.

The approach you take will largely depend on your goals, audience, and resources. But we've found that the most effective stories told about corporate giving and volunteering programs have three essential elements:

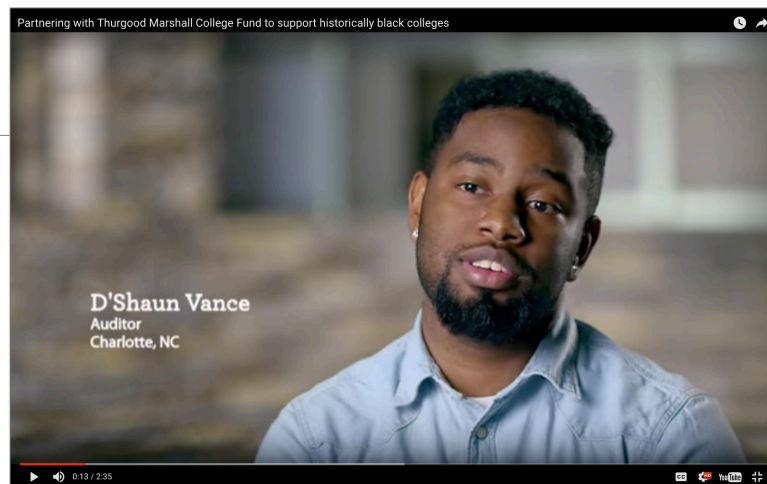
**“ Some of the most compelling stories come from employee volunteers themselves, in their own words. ”**

## Human Interest

Even if they tackle big issues, the most effective stories focus not on the issue — but on a person (or a small group of people). Look to identify a person or people you can focus on to help set the scene or deliver your key message.

### Example: Profile a Person

When Wells Fargo created a video to promote its partnership with the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, it focused on the story of D'Shaun Vance, an auditor who earned his degree with support from the organization.



Courtesy of Wells Fargo

## Emotion

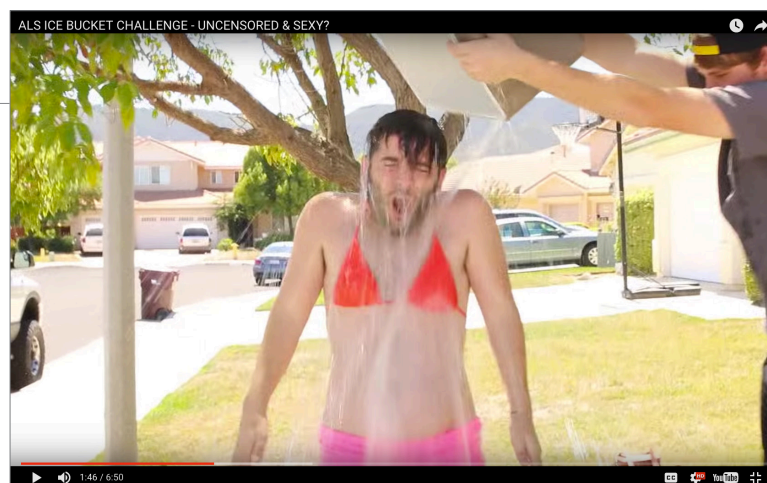
Look for stories that make your audience feel something. It might make them swell with pride. It might move them to tears.

Laughter is not as often used in corporate giving storytelling, but it can be just as powerful as tears.

Chances are, if you're moved as you're gathering your story, your audience will be as well.

### Example: Laughter and Tears

Moving people to laughter or tears is a surefire way to get them to take action. Anthony Carbajal did both in a video in support of the Ice Bucket Challenge, offering a heartfelt appeal about the impact of ALS. His video raised more than \$3.8 million.



Anthony Carbajal

## Impact

If you're looking to get people to take action, it's important to show them the results — or the possibilities — of their actions. And the more transformational, or life-changing, those results are, the better.

You can quantify the impact of the work you're doing by showing the number of kids who didn't go to bed hungry or the number of lives that were touched or changed.

If you're looking to get people to aspire to something, get them to think about the possibilities of what they can accomplish. A great technique to use to do this is to use the words "Imagine if ..."

Ex. "More than 1,000 families in our communities are living in poverty. Imagine if our employees came together and each contributed \$\_\_\_. We could provide daycare to \_\_\_ children enabling their caregivers to go to work or school."

## Example: Get Personal

When we discuss impact, we often think about statistics. But personal stories can sometimes convey much more. Share Our Strength used letters from children who have been helped by its summer meals program to show how its program is making a difference.



Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry



## Presenting Your Stories

Once you've decided on the story you want to tell, now it's time to actually tell it.

Here's where your initial questions come in to play. For instance, if you're trying to reach your employees during the workday with a story that will motivate them to give to your year-end fund to support local charities, and you know that they respond well to email communications, consider sending a short story via email.

Ideally, you'll choose to send it during a time of day when you know they're most likely to pay attention (or need a short break from their work).

Or, let's say your goal is to show potential customers that you're committed to making a difference in their community. Depending on who those customers are — and what resources you have — you might instead choose to create a short video that will be shared through social media.

The key is to find a way to deliver your story of impact to the people you most want to reach — in a format that meets their needs.

And while you may know your target audience extremely well, many storytellers are surprised by the results they get when they test various delivery methods and messages.

Don't assume anything. Test, test, test, whether it's telling a story by email or social media, using emotion or a human interest angle to motivate your stakeholders—even what time of day to get the story in front of your audience can affect how the story is received and acted upon.

Use data such as email open and click-through rates, percent of participation and dollars donated, social media shares and so on to help you understand what is most effective with your target audience.

“  
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And, no matter what the format, you'll want to make sure you focus on including the following elements:

### An Eye-Catching Headline

Every story — whether it's delivered as an article, a video, or on Facebook — needs a title or headline. And, ideally, the headline will inspire them to open your email, click on your story, or watch your video.

If your headline is flat, chances are most people won't take that next step.

But if you can provide them with something that shows that your story is of value, they're more likely to take a look.

The first rule of effective headline writing is to make it about the audience — not about you. Think about how the story will affect the audience and construct your headline with that in mind.

The best headlines are short (ideally shorter than 60 characters without any unnecessary words), accurate, and offer a clear call to action.

[Lindsay J.K. Nichols](#), America's Charities' Vice President of Marketing & Communications, recommends Twitter as a tool for helping draft potential headlines. Because of its 140-character limit, Twitter forces writers to use only necessary words.

"I find drafting headline copy on Twitter helps me get rid of extraneous content, like adjectives and jargon, and forces me to get to the most important and compelling part of the headline," Nichols says. "I don't necessarily Tweet the headline when it's ready. Instead I copy and paste it into a Word document or elsewhere and expand my story from there. Twitter just helps me get to the crucial elements."

Numbers help, as well. An email subject line that says "5 Easy Ways You Can Fight Hunger From Your Desk" is more likely to get your employees to take action than a headline that says

“

*The best headlines are short (ideally shorter than 60 characters without any unnecessary words), accurate, and offer a clear call to action.*

”



“Give to the Acme Company’s Anti-Hunger Campaign.”

So, too, do online tools like [Headline Analyzer](#), which helps you optimize headlines for the web.

And, when in doubt, use one of these 10 words to help get you started (a tip from Matt Thompson at [The Poynter Institute](#)): Top, Why, How, Will, New, Secret, Future, Your, Best, Worst.

## Clear Language

Clear Language Be direct and clear with your words. This is true whether your story is written or spoken.

Avoid jargon and business-speak and, instead, aim to use words that very clearly show your audience what you mean. It’s not about dumbing it down. In fact, that can actively work against you, depending on your target audience. Instead, it’s about making it clear and concise.

Just because a word is bigger, doesn’t mean it’s better.

## Brevity

It’s important to try to keep your story as short as possible without losing its essence.

No matter what the medium, the best stories are often tight and brief.

This is especially true when you’re trying to reach people at work — where your audience has other priorities beyond engaging in your story.

Write a first draft of your story or script and then edit and re-edit it to make sure it only includes the most necessary elements.

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## Sharing Your Stories

Today's social media tools make it easier than ever for your stories to reach beyond your existing audiences.

As a result, many organizations and companies aim to make their stories easy to share through channels like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

If you're writing a story for a blog or creating a video to share with employees or customers, take some extra time to think about and present that story in social media, as well. This will give your existing audience an easy way to help share your story with others and extend your reach.

America's Charities member [Share Our Strength](#) uses social media extensively to help bolster its corporate partnerships around its programs to reduce childhood hunger.

Not only does the organization invest heavily in telling stories that put a face on the issue of hunger in the United States, it also takes aggressive steps to make sure its stories are sharable on social media — and it makes sure that those assets are available to its partners. It creates social media-ready images, provides suggested tweets and Facebook posts, and offers them videos that they can use and share in their channels.

In turn, its partners — which include companies like Arby's and the Food Network — have a library of materials they can use to talk about their work with Share Our Strength.

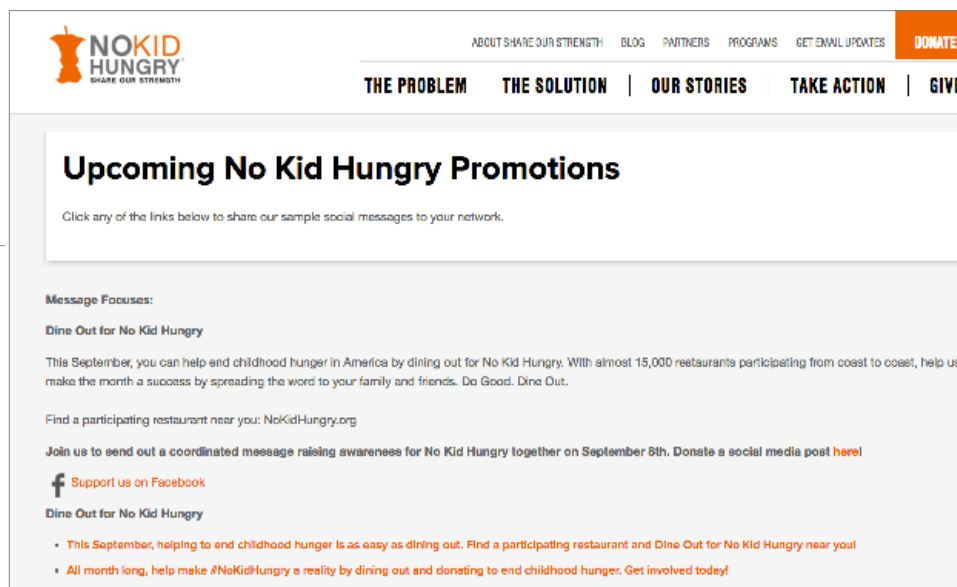
“Every four to six weeks, we go out to our partners with a set of messages, with images, that they can work into their own messaging stream, especially with social media,” says Clay Dunn, Share Our Strength's Chief Communications Officer. “We're giving them a framework that allows them to reposition content in a way that works for them.”

As you develop your own stories, think about how you can make them more sharable by your partners, employees, and customers.

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**Give your existing audience an easy way to help share your story with others and extend your reach.**”

## Example: Get Social

Share Our Strength helps its corporate partners tell stories by regularly providing them with social media messages that they can repurpose for their own Twitter feeds and Facebook pages. These tools make it easy for Share Our Strength to spread its story well beyond its own network.



Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry



Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry

## Privacy and Permission

It is not always easy to capture stories from your employees or the beneficiaries of your nonprofit partners, as there are real privacy concerns at play. Specific details—names, donation amounts, period of giving—are often meant to stay secure. Many times nonprofits work with protected populations—children, survivors, and others who do not want their details shared.

At all times, it is important to understand the disclosure requirements of the various players before capturing and sharing stories, and to make sure your employees understand these parameters as well.

## Conclusion

“  
*The most important  
thing is to try.*”

There are work-arounds, however, that enable you to tell a compelling story while maintaining confidentiality and privacy. Sometimes you can capture a factual story but change the names and other telling details. Other times just requesting permission can give you access to populations and stories that can lead you to a richer narrative.

Recognizing employees for their contributions is often a big part of employee engagement storytelling, so understand the implications of naming employees before including them in your storytelling. And, as we have discussed, foster an environment where employees are encouraged to share their own volunteer stories themselves.

Like all disciplines, storytelling requires practice. The more stories you tell, the better you'll get.

As you build your program, pay attention to what works for your audience. You'll quickly learn which types of stories are most appealing to them — and which techniques perform best.

You'll also make some mistakes along the way. Not every story is likely to hit the mark. And you can learn important lessons from those duds, as well.

But the most important thing is to try.

By taking the time to tell and share stories about your work, and by empowering employees to do the same, you'll inspire more of your employees to give, you'll validate the generosity of those who are already contributing, and you'll provide important recognition to your partners and the causes they support.

You'll also be helping change lives.

By calling attention to the issues and causes that your company and its employees care about, you'll be helping advance solutions to important problems.

## Acknowledgements

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## America's Charities: Your Partner in Community Impact Storytelling

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The impact of employee giving on employers, employees, nonprofits and the people and communities they serve cannot be understated. Employee giving generates more than \$5 billion annually—much of which is unrestricted, sustainable support that enables nonprofits serve communities throughout the nation. Employers are increasingly becoming the nation's most valuable asset for serving unmet needs, not to mention providing competitive advantages in a crowded marketplace.

America's Charities does more than engage employees in giving. We partner with employers and nonprofits to increase their collective social impact. We sit squarely at the intersection of the private and public sectors and distinctly understand how to translate and leverage the work of the two sectors. Our employee engagement solutions focus heavily on storytelling, enabling you to easily share your stories across target audiences. Contact Kim Young, Vice President of Business Development, at [kyoung@charities.org](mailto:kyoung@charities.org) or 703-674-5358 to learn how you can make telling your exceptional stories easy.

America's Charities inspires employees and organizations to support causes they care about. We do this to bring more resources to the nonprofits that are changing our world. Learn more at [www.charities.org/portfolio](http://www.charities.org/portfolio), and download our research from over the last decade identifying current trends, attitudes and perceptions in employee giving.



# Storytelling Strategy Worksheet

Use this worksheet to brainstorm and develop your storytelling strategy.

[Click here to download this worksheet in MS Word format.](#)

## Goals:

List your program's top 2-3 goals

What role will storytelling play in accomplishing those goals?

## Audience:

List your top 2-3 target audiences

What do your audiences value?

What types of stories are most likely to appeal to these audiences?

## Resources:

What resources do you have to deliver stories to your target audiences?

### Direct Marketing

Print newsletter

Annual report

Customer mailings/direct mail

Email newsletter for employees

E-mail newsletter for customers

### Visual

Photo library

Infographics

Stock imagery

Video

### Online

Company website

Blog

Employee portal

Employee giving platform

### Facts and figures

Community impact data

Nonprofit partner data

Impact of donations

### Social media

Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn,  
Instagram, YouTube, other

## Implementation:

How will you implement the following key elements of good storytelling?

Human Interest

Emotion

Impact



# Telling Your Story: A Worksheet

Use this worksheet as a checklist to ensure the individual stories you compose meet best practices outlined in this guide.

[Click here to download this worksheet in MS Word format.](#)

## The Basics:

What is your key message?

Which of your target audiences are you trying to reach?

What medium are you using to tell this story?

What is your headline/title?

When are you sharing your story?

## The 6 Key Questions:

**Who** is the subject of the story?    **When** is it taking place?

**What** is happening in your story?    **Why** is it important to your audience?

**Where** is it taking place?    **How** should your audience take action?

## Don't Forget To...

- Get permission to use images and quotes
- Get facts/data to support your key points
- Review for accuracy
- Double check the spelling of every name

## Final Review:

- Brevity – Is your story and message short and succinct?
- Strong Visuals – Do the images or videos grab your attention?
- Shareable – Is it shareable on social media
- Accuracy – Triple check every name and fact