

GUIDE TO DEVELOPING SUCCESS STORIES



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
STEP 1: DECIDE ON A STYLE	1
STEP 2: GATHER INFORMATION	2
STEP 3: START WRITING.....	3
STEP 4: REVIEW AND REVISE.....	6
STEP 5: SUBMIT AND CELEBRATE	7
PLANNING FOR EFFECTIVE STORY TELLING	7
REFERENCES.....	7
APPENDIX A: DATA COLLECTION TOOL.....	8
APPENDIX B: REVIEWER’S CHECKLIST	10

INTRODUCTION

Success stories. A success story is a narrative that highlights the achievements of a program, intervention, or strategy. Successes of any size should be celebrated. Small successes may add up to larger success stories in future years. Collecting success stories gives you the opportunity to regularly step back and celebrate achievements both big and small. Success stories are also an effective way to move beyond the numbers and connect to your readers.

The Guide. The purpose of this Guide is to provide community organizations with a process and format for developing success stories. It describes a 5-step process in developing a success story. It includes a data collection tool (Appendix A) to help organize relevant information for the success story, and a reviewer's checklist (Appendix B) to make sure the success story accomplishes its goal.

The Guide is based on multiple sources: the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U.S. CDC) guidance for developing success stories, particularly the CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH) "How to Develop a Success Story"; the CDC's Division of Oral Health's "Impact and Value: Telling Your Program's Story"; and the State Public Health Actions Prevention and Control 1305 Evaluation.

STEP 1: DECIDE ON A STYLE

Story focus. Before starting to develop your story, it is important to first determine the focus/theme of the story.

Some questions that may be helpful to reflect on:

1. How has the way you do business changed because of this program?
2. What are you most proud of when you go home at night?
3. Has your work received any recognition or rewards?

Checklist – is the focus of your story:

- ✓ Recent? (*A story that is perceived as 'old news' will receive little attention*).
- ✓ An issue that has priority on the current agenda? (*If not, consider partnering it with a cross-cutting issue that may be higher on the list*).

Story type. When determining the focus of your story, you will want to consider the type of story you want to tell, such as:

- Testimonials – life change “on the street”.
- Organizational and/or partner achievements – coalition, advisory groups, committees.
- Promising practices – practices that are showing progress but are not yet “proven”.
- Infrastructure development – strengthened partnerships, partnerships with non-traditional partners.
- Lessons learned – ideas that programs like yours might learn from or that might suggest future action.

Story format. There are many different formats that you can use to tell your story. While this Guide focuses on the One and Two pagers, you can adapt the framework to any of the various formats.

Guide to Developing Success Stories

<i>Elevator story</i>	This is your best 10-second story that you have ready to verbally tell. You never know when the opportunity will knock, so you are prepared with a strong, concise story.
<i>Paragraph spotlight</i>	These are the last-minute, ad-hoc requests for small items to fill 'news holes.' Usually, these requests will give your program great publicity but only if you can have it ready and out the door the same day. If you aren't ready, another program will fill the void and you will have missed your opportunity.
<i>One-pager</i>	This is a powerful way to catch the attention of policymakers, funders, and other decision makers who are inundated with information and requests for their time. It is a short, concise description of the heart of your program. It typically includes pictures to complete the story and includes partner logos to demonstrate collaborative efforts.
<i>Two-page success story</i>	These offer a more complete picture of your program and are often used as a best practice submission or to highlight a specific program/intervention.
<i>Full brief</i>	Once your elevator story, paragraph spotlight, or one/two pager has sparked the interest of an important agency or person, you may receive a formal request for information. You have your audience's attention and it's your time to shine. You need an effective brief that includes pictures, surveillance data, graphs, anecdotal stories and program achievements.

STEP 2: GATHER INFORMATION

There are four types of information you will need to gather before you start writing.

1. ***Contextual data:*** existing data that describes the setting, the public health concern, and/or the target population. Surveillance reports (such as Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS), Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), Statewide burden reports (Cancer), etc.) are all good sources of information. Newspapers, internet articles, and blogs are generally not viewed as credible data sources.
2. ***Program description:*** a brief, well written summary of the program/intervention you are focusing on. Proposals, funder reports, annual reports, evaluation reports are all good sources of descriptions.
3. ***Program data:*** numeric or narrative information that describes the reach and impact of the strategy. This may be the number of people who participated in an event, their comments and reflections, etc. Funding reports and evaluation findings are good sources of program data.
4. ***Images:*** a picture is worth a thousand words. Images, photographs, etc. help the success story look more inviting.

STEP 3: START WRITING

Sometimes the hardest part is starting to write the story. There is no right or wrong way to do it. While we describe each component in sequential order, you can start anywhere. Many suggest starting with the results and working backwards. The arrows in Figure 1 show the typical work flow that many experienced writers suggest.

Figure 1



1 TITLE

This is your first opportunity to grab the attention of your reader. Often the title and pictures will determine whether or not the reader will continue to read the story. Sometimes it is difficult to present the issue in plain language. However, the use of issue-specific language, or jargon, can be a deterrent to engaging your reader. Well-chosen, descriptive words can help you hold your reader's attention.

Critical components:

- Capture the overall message of the story.
- Include an action verb.
- Capture the reader's attention.

Checklist - does your title:

- ✓ Capture the attention of the reader?
- ✓ Avoid acronyms?
- ✓ Contain a verb?

2 NEED/ISSUE

Clearly identify the issue in a jargon-free, concise, and compelling manner. Use state and local data to explain the issue simply. However, the focus of the document is on the story, rather than the numbers. Numbers should be provided to emphasize community needs, and not be the story itself. The description of the issue must be sufficiently compelling to entice the reader to stay engaged. Pictures, graphics, and quotations put a "face" to the statistics and help define the extent of the health issue in your community.

Critical components:

- Problem: Describe the problem/issue being addressed and why it's important. Make it clear how the problem is addressed by the program.
- Data: Use data to frame the problem. Data that justifies the program's purpose could be used here.
- Population: Specify the affected population(s). This is particularly important if any health disparities are being addressed.

Checklist – does your issue statement:

- ✓ Have a strong lead sentence?
- ✓ Provide local, regional, or state information about the issue?
- ✓ Specify the affected population?
- ✓ Provide an emotional hook?
- ✓ Present a clear, concise statement about a single issue?
- ✓ Relate the issue to the intervention/program?



Don't lose the reader's attention with a confusing maze of facts and numbers. The aim of this section is to provide your readers with context, not to show them how much data you know.

3 INTERVENTION/PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Describe your intervention/program and tell your story clearly so readers can relate to the message on several levels. You want to spark their interest in the issue and what is being done about it in your community through this program. Include any partners you are collaborating with you and the funding sources pertinent to the topic.

Critical components:

- Describe the intervention, including where and when it took place and how it addresses the problem.
- Identify who was involved, including your partners and funders.
- Identify the target audience of the intervention/program.

Checklist – does your intervention/program description:

- ✓ Have a strong lead sentence that transitions the issue section to the intervention/program description section?
- ✓ Identify who conducted the intervention/program?
- ✓ Identify where and when the intervention/program occurred?
- ✓ Specify the steps of the intervention/program?



Describe your program clearly and spark the reader's interest in how your program is addressing this public health issue.

4 RESULTS/SUCCESSSES

What does all this mean? You may be acutely aware of the meaning of your intervention/program because you are involved in working on this issue daily. Your readers are most likely exposed to hundreds of issues that vie for their attention. Do the leg work for them and be concise.

This section is the main part of the success story. Here you describe your most important results either at the participant, program, community, or environmental level. Depending on the focus/theme you determined in the beginning, the results will be testimonials, organizational achievements, program outcomes, strengthened partnerships, lessons learned, or a combination.

Critical components (depending on the focus):

- Most important outcomes (not outputs). It is not sufficient to say that 30 people were trained (output), but rather to describe what was achieved as a result of training 30 people (outcome).
- The barriers to success that were faced and how they were overcome.
- Any unintended results that surprised you.
- Provide a conclusion to the success story that avoids using broad, sweeping statements such as “there was a noticeable increase in healthy eating habits”. Depending on the focus/theme of the story this may be changes in culture/norms, organizations, and behaviors; increased access to proven prevention practices or new products; etc.
- Identify the key elements that made this a success.

Checklist – does your success statement:

- ✓ Give specific outcomes (rather than outputs)?
- ✓ Avoid broad, sweeping statements?
- ✓ Provide conclusions that wrap up the story in a convincing manner?



Quality is more important than quantity when it comes to results. Five or six good outcomes or learnings are sufficient.

5 ACTION SUGGESTIONS

This section is optional. It tells the reader what they can do about this public health issue and where you intend to go next. By reducing the larger problem down to a few specific, realistic, and actionable steps, it provides the answer to: “What can I possibly do?” and encourages your reader to get involved.

6 CONTACT INFORMATION

Provide contact details so the reader can follow up if they have any questions. Often, two people’s details are provided: either the funder and the implementer or the organizational leadership and the program implementer.

7 REFERENCES

Including references adds credibility to your work. It is better to add the references at the end rather than including them as footnotes. The format of the references is a personal/organizational preference. PFH prefers the American Psychological Association (APA) style.

8 IMAGES

Images are optional but highly encouraged. Images may include icons, photographs, drawings, etc. If you include a photograph, be sure you have obtained the expressed consent of the person/people in the photograph.

9 QUOTES

Quotes are optional and are particularly relevant if the theme is a testimonial or lessons learned. Quotes should be brief – maximum two sentences – and be easy to read. You do not have to identify the person whose quote you are using, but if you do, ensure you have their expressed consent.

STEP 4: REVIEW AND REVISE

It is good practice to have at least three people review your success story. The less the reviewers know about your program, the better. Appendix B provides a Reviewer Checklist to ensure your success story has all the right components and is written in clear, jargon-free language.

STEP 5: SUBMIT AND CELEBRATE

Submit your success story at least 48 hours before the deadline. This allows time for troubleshooting and ensures that you have time to respond to any changes in text or format before the due date.

Remember to send everyone a copy of the success story – particularly people who may have sent you data, information, and/or reviewed the story.

Celebrate your success! Success stories take time and effort.

PLANNING FOR EFFECTIVE STORY TELLING

As an organization, you may decide to create a story repository. This ensures that success stories, in different formats, are reliable, valid, and available at a moment's notice. This is achieved by developing a plan that includes the following components:

- ✓ A data collection tool.
- ✓ A plan for collecting both formal and informal stories.
- ✓ Staff responsible for collecting, organizing, analyzing, and writing the stories.
- ✓ A communication plan for disseminating the stories.

REFERENCES

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2007). *Impact and value: telling your program's story*. Atlanta, Georgia: National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Oral Health.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2008). *How to Develop a Success Story*. Division of Adolescent and School Health.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). *1305 State Public Health Actions Evaluation Guidance*.
- Health Services Advisory Group. (n.d.). *Success Story Data Collection Tool*. Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

APPENDIX A: DATA COLLECTION TOOL

Success Story Data Collection Tool	
Success Story Item	Your Answer
Program Information	
Contact name:	
Contact information (phone number, email address):	
Employer/Organization name:	
Focus of the Story	
Proposed Title of the Success Story: This should include your program's name and grab the attention of your audience.	
Focus/Theme of the story: Focus might be on collaboration with partners, a community prevention initiative, advocacy efforts, using data to engage stakeholders, etc.	
Point of view: The story should be from the perspective of those who benefited from the program: a participant, family member, friend, etc.	
Audience(s): Who is the intended audience for the story?	
The public health/community need for this program:	
Background of the Story	
Time period of achievement:	
Location of the story:	
Program target group:	

Guide to Developing Success Stories

<p>How did you accomplish your success?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What actions did you perform? • Who was involved? • How long did it take to accomplish? • Estimated costs and funding source(s). • Partners involved (would they be willing to include their logo in a one-page document?). <p><i>Think in terms of replication. What would your audience need to know to replicate your program?</i></p>	
<p>Environmental context and barriers to success: What is the background of your program (context)? What barriers to success did you face and how did you overcome them?</p>	
<p>Key results or implications of success: Describe your most important results either at the participant, program, community, or environmental level.</p>	
<p>Program impact: Since the program was implemented, how is life different for program recipients? (Changes in culture/norms, organizations, and behavior; increased access to proven prevention practice or new product, etc.) What is the estimated number of people who have benefited from the program? Were there any unintended results that surprised you?</p>	
Implications of the Story	
<p>Next steps: What are the next steps that need to be taken to further or continue this effort?</p>	
<p>Lessons learned: What were the key elements that made this a success? What would you do differently?</p>	

APPENDIX B: REVIEWER'S CHECKLIST

SECTION	IMPORTANT ASPECTS	REVIEWER'S COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS
1 Title	<input type="checkbox"/> Captured the attention of the reader? <input type="checkbox"/> Avoided acronyms? <input type="checkbox"/> Included an action verb?	
2 Need/Issue	<input type="checkbox"/> Made a strong lead sentence? <input type="checkbox"/> Provided local and state data about the issue? <input type="checkbox"/> Specified the affected population? <input type="checkbox"/> Provided an emotional hook? <input type="checkbox"/> Presented a clear, concise statement about a single issue? <input type="checkbox"/> Related the issue to the program?	
3 Intervention/ Program description	<input type="checkbox"/> Provided a strong lead sentence that transitions the issue section to the program section? <input type="checkbox"/> Described how the organization's goals align to the program? <input type="checkbox"/> Identified funder(s), implementer(s), partner(s), contract(s)? <input type="checkbox"/> Identified where and when the program occurred? <input type="checkbox"/> Summarized the steps of the program?	
4 Results/ Successes	<input type="checkbox"/> Gave specific outcomes (e.g., money saved, changes in health outcomes, number of people affected)? <input type="checkbox"/> Avoided broad, sweeping statements? <input type="checkbox"/> Provided a conclusion to wrap up the story in a convincing manner?	
5 Action suggestions (optional)	<input type="checkbox"/> Suggest activities that are realistic?	
6 Contact information	<input type="checkbox"/> Provided a name/number that readers can use to get more information?	
7 References	<input type="checkbox"/> Cited all data? <input type="checkbox"/> Provided a full reference to the data source? <input type="checkbox"/> Used a consistent format (APA/MLA)?	
8 Image	<input type="checkbox"/> Is the use of the photograph allowed (expressed consent/no copyright infringements)? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the image relate to the story?	
9 Quote	<input type="checkbox"/> Are the quotes relevant to the story? <input type="checkbox"/> Is there consent to use the quote if identifiable?	
Overall	<input type="checkbox"/> Avoided wordiness, passive language, and grammatical and spelling errors? <input type="checkbox"/> Used terms that are understood by a non-public health audience (avoided jargon)? <input type="checkbox"/> Used one page if possible? <input type="checkbox"/> Used bullets where possible?	