

Five Tips for Telling Nonprofit Stories

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“Storytelling” is a common buzzword on social media and blogs, but few really explain how to tell a story that will drive engagement and donations. Here are five practical tips for aspiring nonprofit storytellers.

1. Create Characters

There’s a reason why books and movies are often just a character’s name—think Harry Potter or Citizen Kane. You watch and read because you get to know a person or a group of people and you care about what happens to them. If your work affects people or animals in any way, then there’s a good chance that your story already has a star that your supporters will care about.

2. Introduce a Problem to Solve

What’s a story without conflict? Your characters need to overcome obstacles and maybe even suffer setbacks. This is why storytelling is so effective. Once we care about a character we want them to succeed, but struggles create suspense—we keep watching or reading because we have to know whether they made it.

3. Think About Story Structure

Good stories take time to develop. You need to introduce your characters and explain the problem. It’s also important that you show all the hard work that goes into finding and carrying out a solution. Shakespeare’s plays follow a five-act structure—exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution. No one expects you to be Shakespeare, but if you follow this general structure your supporters will likely follow the story from start to finish.

4. You Are Not the Hero

Yes, you do good work, but no one likes a showoff. Besides, the point of telling a story to your supporters is to get them to help in some way—to share information, donate, or volunteer. To take that leap they need to be able to imagine themselves in your story. Your supporters need to see how their action is making a difference.

5. Don’t Bury the Call to Action

We all know that feeling of finishing a good story and wishing there were more. When your story ends, give your supporters a chance to write the next chapter. Prominently offer a volunteer sign up or donation link at the end to build momentum for your work.