

NationalJournal COMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL

MEDIA UNIVERSITY

Storytelling Strategies for Purpose, Promotion, and Advocacy—Part One

March 1, 2016

An Abundance of Pressure From All Sides

Internal Demand for Stories Extends Across Functions, Stakeholders

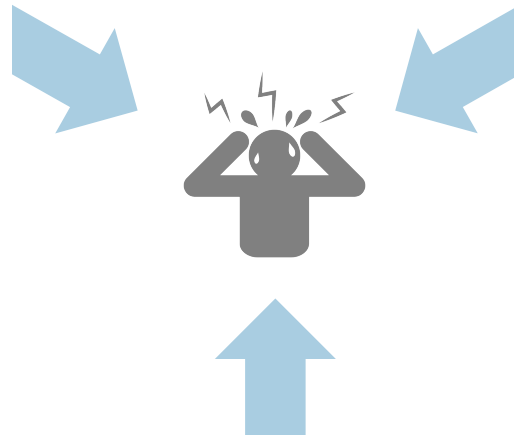
To change industry perceptions among the public



Increasing pressure from boards to “tell our story”



Calls from members to create unified industry brand narrative



To support or change policy



Desire for stories to illustrate real-life, human impacts of issues



Need for training, nurturing grassroots advocates

And to accomplish organizational objectives



Requests for stories that demonstrate organizational value to members



Calls for stories to support fundraising efforts

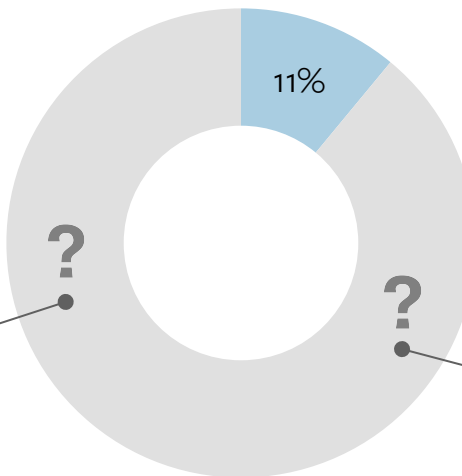
An Underutilized Supplier of Stories

Little Recognition Among the Policy Community for the Role Advocacy Organizations Can Play

If They're Not Getting Them from Us, Where are They Getting Them?

Seek Out Content from Associations, Nonprofits, Think Tanks Because They Provide a Human Face

Percentage of 2015 WIA Respondents



The Narrative Differential

“Strategic storytelling is what separates the men from the boys up here. I’ve seen hundreds of advocates come in with graphs and case studies and it goes in one ear and out the other. Any packet they gave you goes in the trash. Telling a story is memorable. Just like telling a good joke, you don’t forget it. That’s what moves policy.”

- Senior Professional Staff, Hill

A Grounding in Reality

“Storytelling makes policy more real. Too often we get stuck in these very theoretical conversations...But [stories] humanize it in a way that these 30,000-foot arguments don’t. [It] brings it home in terms of someone who looks like them or has a similar story as they do or someone who maybe is very different from their experiences but they can relate to them because they’re a mother or they’re a teacher.”

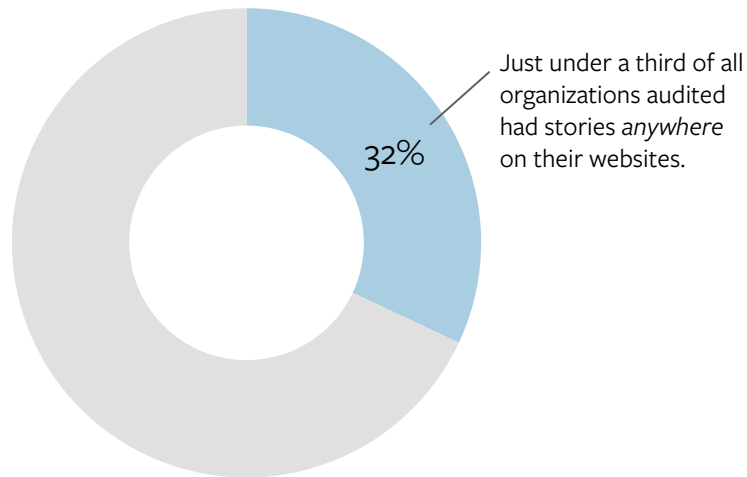
- White House

An Observable Gap Between Existence and Accessibility

Stories are Not Always Easy to Find in the Formats Audiences Consume Most

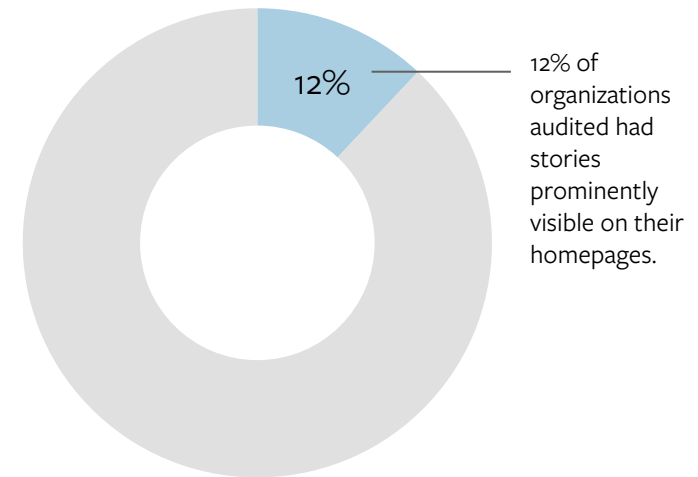
Stories Present on Websites

Online Audit of Associations and Advocacy Organizations, N=201



Stories Present on Website Homepages

Online Audit of Associations and Advocacy Organizations, N=201



If a Tree Falls...

64% of organizations with stories anywhere on their websites* did not feature them on the homepage, making them extremely difficult to find or engage with for most casual web visitors.

*Why websites? The 2015 WIA data showed that websites are the go-to source of content from associations, think tanks, and advocacy organizations. 72% of respondents reported seeking content from an organization's website in the previous 12 months.

Pinpointing the Underlying Challenges

Interviews Reveal Common Organizational Barriers

Barrier

Lack of a clear, unified definition of “story”

Sounds Like...

“Everyone knows what a story is.”
“All content we produce are stories.”

Manifests As...

- Internal misalignment that hinders collection efforts
- Stories that are boring and lack human angle audiences need to be relatable

Barrier

Lack of coordination, cooperation among internal departments

Sounds Like...

“No one else in my organization understands the value of stories.”

Manifests As...

- Low investment and support for efforts
- Stories that aren’t strategic, and are more difficult to collect and use when others aren’t engaged

Barrier

Lack of skills/talent

Sounds Like...

“It’s easy to tell a story. We all took writing classes in school.”

Manifests As...

- Stories that are riddled with jargon, policy-speak
- Organization is prioritized as the hero
- Stories that aren’t compelling and don’t achieve desired engagement

Barrier

Lack of member/advocate participation

Sounds Like...

“Members should want to share stories with us because of our national platform!”

Manifests As...

- Stories that are transactional
- Potential storytellers think their stories don’t matter
- Missed opportunity for further cultivation/engagement

Barrier

Lack of optimization when sharing

Sounds Like...

“All set—I pushed our story out to all our channels.”

Manifests As...

- Stories that only get one chance to reach audiences before more content must be created
- Stories that aren’t shared as widely as desired

Barrier

Lack of meaningful metrics

Sounds Like...

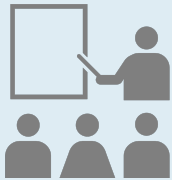
“Our latest story got X likes on social media; that’s more than XYZ association!”

Manifests As...

- Standard social metrics that don’t demonstrate behavior or opinion change among target audiences
- External benchmarks that are artificial proxies rather than internal drivers of innovation

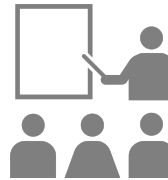
A Three-Part Framework to Address Key Challenges

Today's Session: Part One



- ✓What is a story?
- ✓How do we make ours better?
- ✓How do we coordinate efforts with our peers?
- ✓Who should be involved, and how do we get them to value it?

April 28th Session: Part Two



- ✓How do we collect stories more effectively?
- ✓How do we share them more effectively across channels?
- ✓How do we engage others in the sharing process?
- ✓How should we be measuring success?

Coming in March: Companion Toolkit



- ✓Workbook with two dozen individual resources spanning the life cycle of a storytelling effort
- ✓Can be used to train members or advocates in addition to internal staff
- ✓Planning tools include:
 - Audience Persona Worksheet*
 - Story Bank Selection Guide*
 - Plot Development Worksheet & Emotion Map*
 - Advocate Amplification Toolkit*
 - Channel Selection & Tailoring Worksheet*

Storytelling Strategies for Purpose, Promotion, and Advocacy

Lessons from Washington's Most Effective Storytelling Organizations

Crystalizing the Organization's Approach to Telling Its Story

I. Establishing Common Organizational Story Language

- Defining story as distinct from content
- Translating the literary world to the policy world
- Identifying the types of common organizational stories

II. Refining an "Ear" for Compelling Stories

- Pinpointing the right heroes to feature
- Developing authenticity through appropriate emotion and details
- Achieving narrative simplicity in the face of complexity

III. Embracing an Iterative Process

- Reallocating toward smaller story "moments"
- Measuring, learning and successively adapting

Strengthening a Storytelling Culture Through Smart Collaboration

IV. Identifying Ideal Story Management Processes

- Understanding the assets and barriers of extra-functional colleagues
- Selecting a model that maximizes efficiency and application of relevant resources

V. Socializing a Storybanking Tool

- Identifying needs driven by volume, user habits, and trackable data
- Recognizing key points of strategic evolution
- Pairing technology with offline encouragement of adoption

VI. Encouraging Organizational Buy-In

- Embracing a data-driven approach to proving story success
- Translating qualitative successes into quantitative proof
- Involving skeptics in the process to promote mutual understanding

An Exercise in Anatomical Dissection

Lack of Clarity Around Story Definition Stems from Entrenched Assumptions that Defining it is Child’s Play

1

2

3

4

Story (n): How **what happens** affects **someone** who is trying to achieve what turns out to be a difficult **goal**, and **how he or she changes** as a result

1

In Literature

Plot

2

Protagonist

3

Story question

4

What the story itself is actually about

In Our World

The series of events/interactions that illustrate how “someone” achieves (or doesn’t achieve) his or her goal

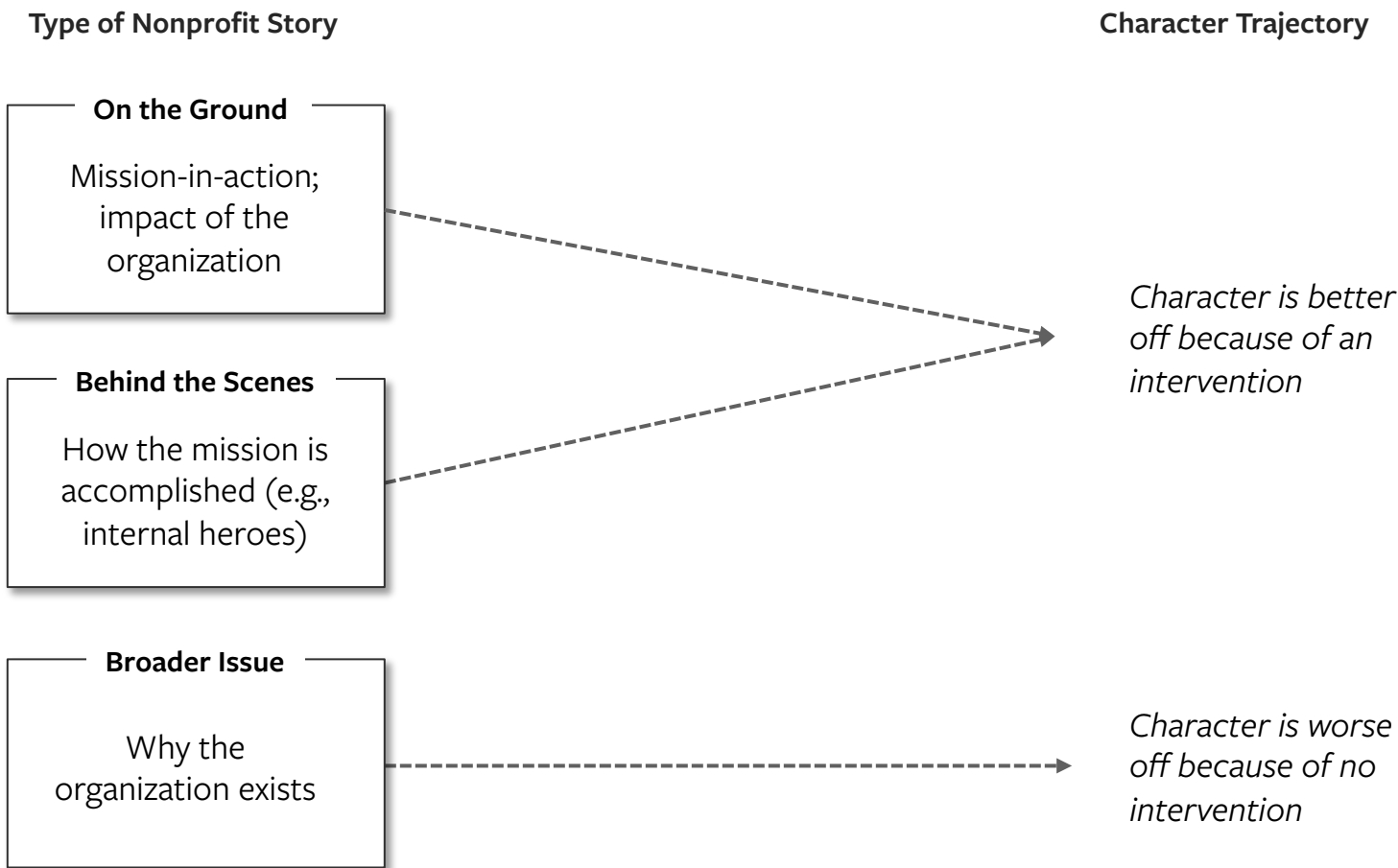
A member, an advocate, someone impacted by an issue we support (or oppose), someone impacted by our industry, our founder, a donor, etc.

A universal want or need that “someone” is trying to fulfill

The impact, journey, or “before and after”

Simplifying the Broader Categories of Stories

Most Organizational Stories Follow One of Three Common Narrative Arcs



Witness the Five Deadly Sins of Washington Storytelling

Narratives that Incorporate These Sins Risk Alienating Audiences—Or Worse

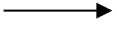
How the Organization Sins

How the Audience Responds

1. Pride

The organization becomes the central character in a story.

“We gave \$10,000. Without our donation, thousands would have gone hungry.”

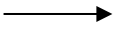


Unimpressed

2. Detachment

The narrative is emotionally detached, or lacking in description.

“Jane saw a puppy. She picked it up. It barked.”

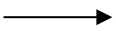


Indifferent

3. Pretension

A story uses technical explanations and industry jargon without defining these terms in plain language.

“The family’s two solar PV models’ MC4 connectors broke, leaving the home without energy.”

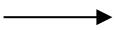


Dazed or Confused

4. Monotony

Nothing is at stake in the narrative.

“In 2010, the industry had strong financial standing. After our 2012 campaign, it continued to have strong financial standing.”

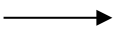


Bored

5. Subservience

The story’s only characters are organizational leaders.

“Vice President John Doe, as a father and veteran, knew how to solve the problem. He took action and ultimately saved the day.”



Skeptical

A Primer on Turning Sins into Virtues

Simple Narrative Changes Can Translate Into Big Audience Engagement Gains

Storytelling Virtues Replace Sins

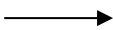
How to Make Them Habits

1. Instead of Pride, Humility

The organization recognizes the humanity and influence of the people they serve.

Pride: *“We gave \$10,000. Without our donation, thousands would have gone hungry.”*

Humility: *“Jane knew her family would starve if she didn’t act quickly.”*



Put Your Message Last

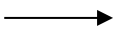
Before there can be a solution, there has to be a problem. Paint a complete picture of an issue then close with the organization’s involvement.

2. Instead of Detachment, Compassion

The narrative reflects the thoughts and feelings of its main characters.

Detachment: *“Jane saw a puppy. She picked it up. It barked.”*

Compassion: *“Jane saw a puppy, alone and neglected. She picked it up, and her heart leapt as she looked into its sad eyes and it gave a little yip.”*



Always Ask “Why”

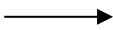
People are motivated by their thoughts and feelings. We need to understand motive to understand actions.

3. Instead of Pretension, Education

A story’s language is easy to understand for all audiences. Any difficult terms are explained.

Pretension: *“The family’s two solar PV models’ MC4 connectors broke, leaving the home without energy.”*

Education: *“The family’s two solar panels broke, leaving the home without energy.”*



Prepare Definitions for Commonly-Used Jargon

Keep them handy so you can be ready with an easy explanation

A Primer on Turning Sins into Virtues (cont'd)

Simple Narrative Changes Can Translate Into Big Audience Engagement Gains

Storytelling Virtues

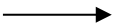
How to Make Them Habits

4. Instead of Monotony, Adventure

The narrative has unexpected events, and its characters face challenges.

Monotony: *“In 2010, the industry had strong financial standing. After our 2012 campaign, it continued to have strong financial standing.”*

Adventure: *“In 2010, the industry had strong financial standing, but in 2011, new regulations put all of that into jeopardy.”*



Practice “But Then” Narratives

If your story can’t be summed up with the sentence “_____ happened but then _____ happened and it became better/worse,” then rewrite it.

5. Instead of Subservience, Independence

The story is three-dimensional, drawing from voices in and out of the organization.

Subservience: *“Vice President John Doe, as a father and veteran, knew how to solve the problem. He took action and ultimately saved the day.”*

Independence: *“Jim Smith, a father and veteran helped by the program, says he felt that the actions of VP John Doe and others helped his family. Jane Smith, his wife, agrees.”*



Develop Relationships Outside of the Organization

Over time, these people may become sources.

The Heart of Any Good Policy Story is an Individual

But Too Many Organizations Prioritize the Issue—or Themselves

Representative Perspectives on Proper Story Focal Points

Personal Arguments Trump Economic Ones

“If you can tell a personal story, tie it to an actual human being who is affected by the care—instead of necessarily linking it to employment—that is an easier way to cut through...it gives the Member a reason to go out there and become a champion.

Those stories give them the one-minutes on the floor or talking points at a press conference. The most effective messages are ones that go beyond economic impact and talk about the impact that they are having on people’s everyday lives. I’m not discounting the economics but the human element is more memorable.”

- Chief of Staff, House (D)

Distinctions Between Corporations and People

“We hear all the time that some regulation is going to put a company out of business...Most people in government see corporations as not being people. I think the best way to get to that is to tell a good story, with real information, real facts. Otherwise there are a lot of people in government who don’t ever get past the corporate angle; this isn’t going to hurt that person at all, it’s just going to be the company.”

- Department of Labor

Starting at the End

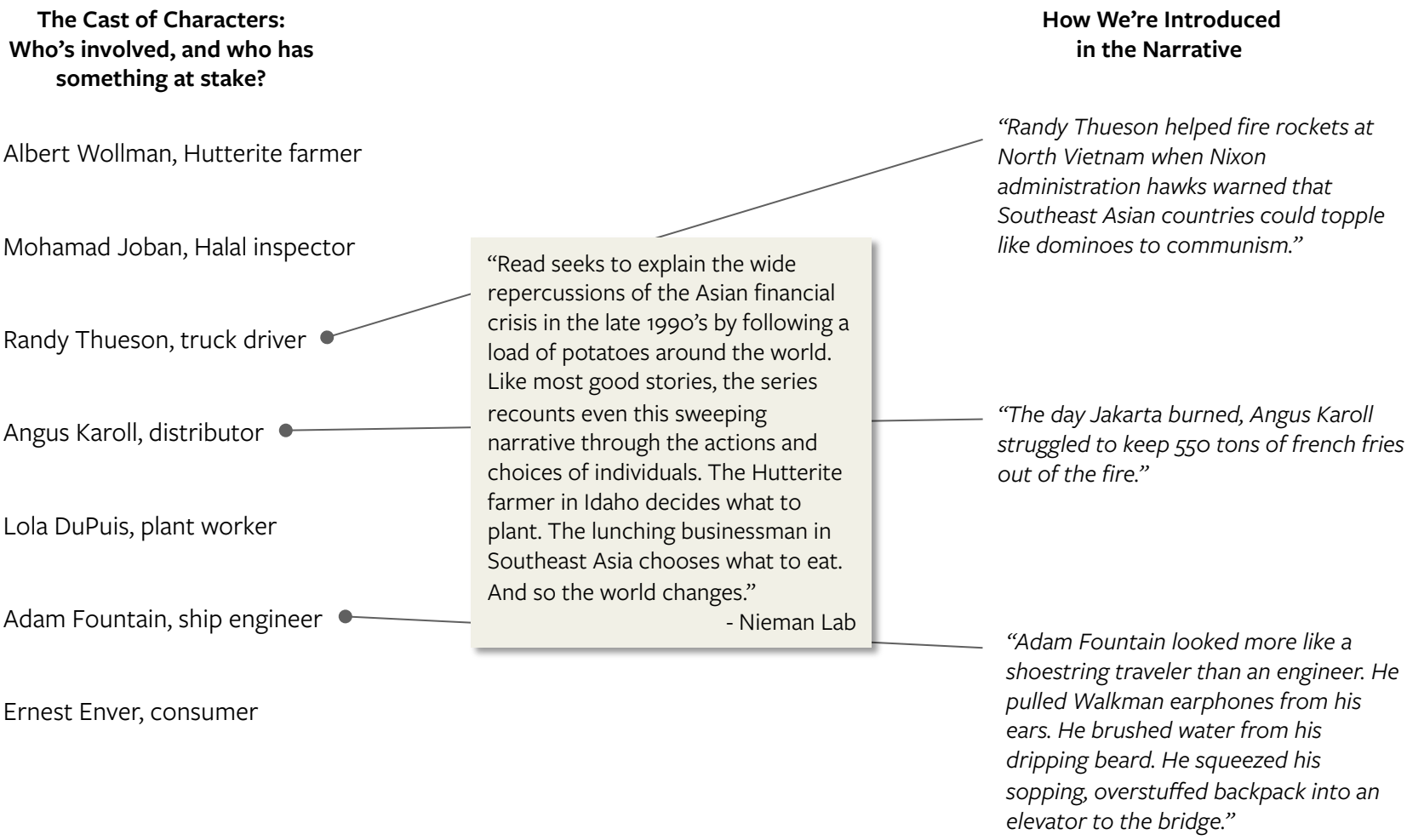
“There is a person at the end of the pipeline. There is a human being that is interacting with your product, or service or industry, and you start there. Not at the industry level, not the lobbyist level. Start at the person level.”

- Brad Fitch, Congressional Management Foundation

When A French Fry Can Explain the Asian Financial Crisis

Look to An Issue’s Supply Chain to Uncover Diverse Characters

The French Fry Connection: A Pulitzer Prize-Winning Lesson in Finding Characters in Your Supply Chain



Surfacing Stories from “Boring” Industries

Sometimes the Best Stories Come from Unlikely Places or Industries

Putting a Human Face on Auto Glass Installation

“Stories should focus not on how great you are as an organization, but on how great your audience can be with your support.”

- Jonah Sachs, CEO, Free Range Studios




Kanyon’s Story, Safelite AutoGlass


- Sample Questions**
- ☐ What are our core values as an organization?
As an industry?
 - ☐ What examples of exemplary (or everyday) actions demonstrate these values?
 - ☐ What is the most interesting/inspiring thing that has happened in the past year?

When a Good Story Finds Its Audience


It engages competitors...

 **Auto Glass Beaumont** 6 months ago
Safelite is both my distributor and my competition but I was happy to hear this wonderful story way to go Kanyon and Amanda!!!!
Reply · 👍 🗨️

...potential customers & employees...

 **Maureen Rough** 2 years ago
very inspiring;type of company I would enjoy working with :)
Reply · 👍 🗨️

...and the policy community

 **Maura Gillespie** @Maura_Gillespie · 18 Mar 2015
Just watched the @safelite commercial re Kanyon's story. Love how they're bettering service for the deaf & hard-of-hearing community.
🔄 ❤️ 2 ⋮

Source: Safeligh AutoGlass; National Journal Communications Council research interviews and analysis

Allowing the Tide of the Industry Story to Lift All Members

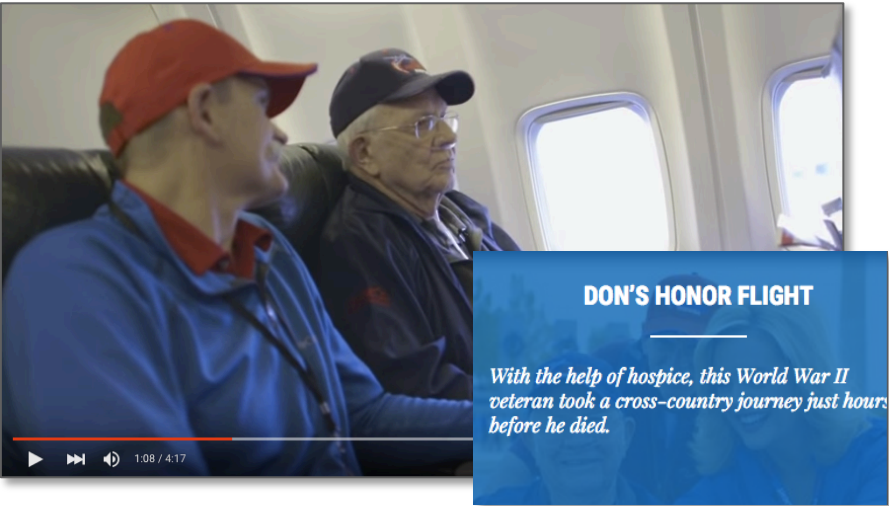
Addressing Challenges in Story Collection When People—Not Individual Brands—are the Focus



Member companies forgo product placement and brand mentions in all of PhRMA’s “I’m Not Average” campaign stories.

“We’re very adamant on that because we’re not showing favoritism to one company vs. another, or one drug vs. another.”

– Ieva Augstums, Deputy VP,
Communications & Public Affairs



NHPCO stresses to members submitting stories that they should not be marketing materials—even going as far as returning footage and asking for re-shoots if they focus too much on the organization and not enough on the experience of hospice.

“Audiences want to be moved, not marketed to.”

– Anita Brikman, SVP of Communications

Answering the “What’s in it for me, then?” question for members

- ✓ “A rising tide lifts all boats,” advises NHPCO: Members will see benefits when industry is better understood, better represented, etc.
- ✓ Stories and related content can be repurposed or shared by individual companies
- ✓ Local media outreach can bring added attention to specific company or member

We Don't Need to be Afraid of Emotion in Our Stories

Appropriate Use of Details Can Forge Much-Needed Connections With Characters, Build Drama and Excitement

Consider the Following Story Opener...

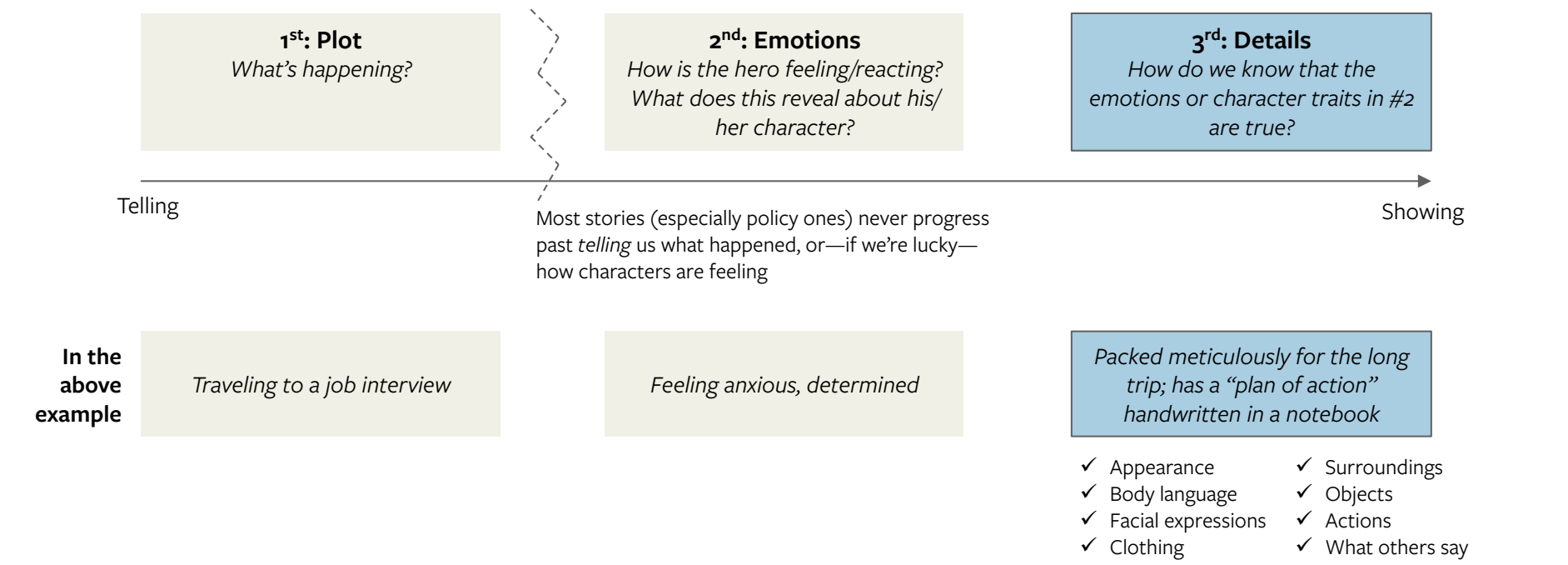
SHE SET OFF ON THE LATEST DAY OF JOB HUNTING WEARING tiny star-shaped earrings that belonged to her 18-month-old daughter and frayed \$6 shoes from Walmart that were the more comfortable of her two pairs. In her backpack she had stashed a ham and cheese sandwich for lunch, hand sanitizer for the bus and pocket change for printing résumés at the public library. She carried a spiral notebook with a handwritten list of job openings that she'd titled her "Plan of Action for the Week."

What do we know?

- ✓ She's a mother
 - ✓ She's been job-hunting for a long time
 - ✓ She really needs this (or any) job
 - ✓ She's diligent and thorough
 - ✓ She makes do with what she has
- Biographical details

Character traits

And more importantly, *why* do we know it?



Think Smaller Stories for Greater Issue Impacts

Audiences are Compelled by the Relatable, Rather than the Dramatic

The Extreme



The Setup

Man spends 10-12 hours per day commuting back and forth to work

The Issue

Failed transit policy in metro Detroit

The Outcome

A new car courtesy of Ford, and \$360K in donations from individuals

The Everyday



Woman realizes she needs to relinquish driver's license after a near accident with children in her car

The effects of multiple sclerosis

Conversation & engagement on MS Connection, the MS Society's patient and caregiver portal

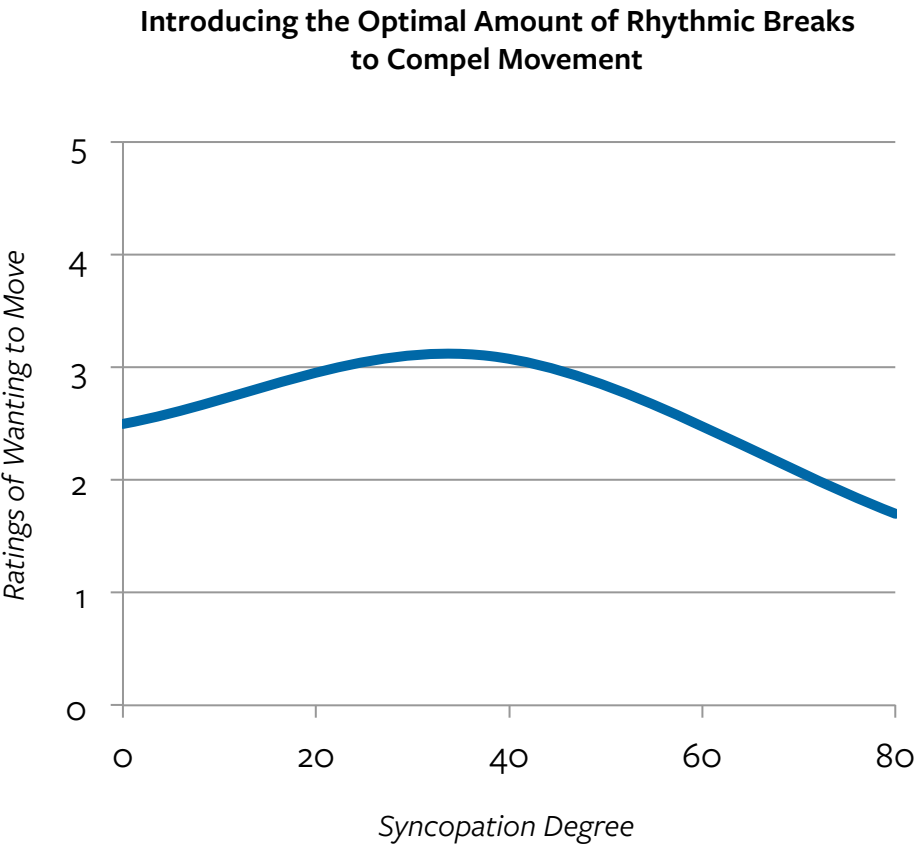
Fixing the Person, or Fixing the Problem?

“The stories that really have a lot of impact are not the dramatic ones. They’re the stories that are really pretty run-of-the-mill and that a lot of people can relate to. Often, if people hear a really dramatic story then they want to help that person, but if they hear a run-of-the-mill story that showcases a pretty average problem, then they want to fix that problem.”

- Liz Prescott, Storybanking Consultant

What Dance Music and Storytelling Have in Common

Taking “Beats” Away Makes People Want to Move



**It’s Not What We Hear,
It’s What We Don’t Hear**

“Gaps in the rhythmic structure, gaps in the sort of underlying beat of the music — that sort of provides us with an opportunity to physically inhabit those gaps and fill in those gaps with our own bodies.”

Maria Witek, Aarhus University



Translation to storytelling? It’s OK to leave things out of the story. (Or to leave it incomplete.)

The First Thing to Go in Achieving Simplicity? Jargon.

We Are Often the Worst Judges of Our Audiences' Desired Levels of Sophistication

What's Simple to Us



Organic agriculture, which is governed by strict government standards, requires that products bearing the organic label are produced without the use of toxic and persistent pesticides and synthetic nitrogen fertilizers, antibiotics, synthetic hormones, genetic engineering or other excluded practices, sewage sludge, or irradiation.

Organic farmers understand that what you put into the soil has a profound impact on what you get out of it. That is why they rely on such practices as hand weeding, mechanical control, mulches, cover crops, crop rotation and dense planting, rather than toxic and persistent pesticides, herbicides, and synthetic nitrogen fertilizers, to enrich the soil in which they grow their crops.

They recognize that doing so provides plants with the nutrients they need to grow. Plus, it enables the absorption of major and micro-nutrients like Vitamin C, resulting in a higher nutrient content and often a better tasting crop.

VS.

What's Simple to Them



The difference between organic oats and conventional is they spray and we till.

- Brian Krumm, Clif Bar Oat Farmer

Are We Too Paternalistic?

"Sometimes we get too caught up in the information we're trying to deliver to somebody, and forget that we're trying to inform them in an entertaining way. We're trying to jam a story down someone's throat and give them all the details and all the background and depth, and we don't trust our audiences enough to fill in the gaps and form their own conclusions."

Colin Moffett, Managing Partner, Artemis Ward

Strategies for Achieving Simplicity in a Complex Industry

Rockefeller’s Approach Emphasizes that All Staff Play a Role in Changing How the Organization Shares Its Story

1

Setting Precedence

Rockefeller’s head of digital used the redesign of the website as an organization-wide moment to reset expectations on acceptable web content

- ✓ When new content is submitted, the digital team benchmarks against existing content with instructions to edit for consistency if necessary (e.g., “the rest of the website is written like this, so we need to make it more plain”)
- ✓ The team also offers proof via website analytics that shorter and simpler is better

2

Providing Rules

Along with the website re-launch, the organization mandated that any program work will be shared from a topic-focused perspective, rather than an initiative

- ✓ As a rule, they no longer allow the use of any acronyms on the site
- ✓ Any references to “as part of our (xx program name) initiative” get reframed as “as part of our work in (xx issue area)”; this effectively eliminates the prioritization of wonky program names and emphasizes the work itself

3

Shifting Norms

Organization-wide, staff are encouraged to think in “tweet lengths”

- ✓ Try having a day in which staff can only communicate with each other in 140 characters or less (but no resorting to acronyms!)
- ✓ Emphasize clarity and preserving meaning, especially when dealing with data

Case in Brief



Profiled Organization: Rockefeller Foundation
Organization Type: Philanthropy

The Rockefeller Foundation has successfully avoided the typical trappings of the philanthropic sector by embracing a three-pronged approach to ensuring all staff—not just communications or digital staff—can communicate simply, concisely, and engagingly.

Scripting Simplicity into Conversations

Look for Opportunities to Empower Members and Advocates to Carry More Simple Stories

American Chemical Society Creates Online and Offline Touchpoints to Train Industry Ambassadors

Conversation Starters

Prompts and examples that walk members through creating a personal tagline—e.g., a 10-second description of their job

“I’m a chemist and I help make the paints people use in their homes, and on things like the Golden Gate Bridge, or railroad cars, or inside military airport fuel tanks.”
- Anne Andrews

“I’m a chemist and I use lasers and mirrors to measure the amount of different chemicals in the atmosphere in order to keep us all safe.” - John Frost

Speaker Training

Opportunities at conferences for members to be videotaped while they practice describing their work in simple terms



Sample Scripts

Scenario-specific prompts for speaking with a variety of audiences about their work (e.g., during a taxi ride, at a neighborhood BBQ, on a business flight)

Barbeque Guest: So, our host tells me you’re a scientist. What kind of science do you do exactly?

Chemistry Ambassador:
Well, I’m a chemist and I work in an area called Green Chemistry. My clients are chemical companies and what I do is...

Case in Brief



Profiled Organization: American Chemical Society
Organization Type: Professional Association

ACS created its “Speak Simply” program to educate its Chemistry Ambassador members on communicating in every day language about the importance and impact of their work, and to empower them to understand why communications and advocacy is so valuable.

Extending Simplicity to Character Choice

“Avatars” Provide Compelling Visuals, Critical Distance from the Organization

Representative back-and-forth with an influential WSJ reporter





Libby and Art
@SmartColleges FOLLOWS YOU

Sharing info, tips & REAL tweets about the #LiberalArts college life so you can choose wisely! Libby offers student insights, counselor Art tweets the facts.


📍 Washington, D.C.
🌐 liberalartspower.org
📅 Joined September 2013

Measuring Klout
@SmartColleges is among the top 0.1% of all social media users talking about colleges and universities and top 0.5% of users talking about careers and financial aid


**Christopher Mims** @mims




Liberal arts degrees are the privilege of people who don't need to think about what they'll make after college wsj.com/articles/paren...

**Libby and Art** @SmartColleges · 4 Nov 2015


@mims It's irresponsible to discourage low-income students from applying to schools & from earning degrees where data shows they succeed.

**Libby and Art** @SmartColleges · 4 Nov 2015


@mims See WaPo Magazine for data: washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/maga... & Forbes: forbes.com/sites/jeffreyd... & Inside Higher Ed: forbes.com/sites/jeffreyd...

**Christopher Mims** @mims · 4 Nov 2015

Lobbying group for liberal arts schools really did not like this tweet twitter.com/mims/status/66... ...Data here:

**Libby and Art** @SmartColleges

@mims See WaPo Magazine for data: washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/maga... & Forbes: forbes.com/sites/jeffreyd... & Inside Higher Ed: forbes.com/sites/jeffreyd...

**Libby and Art** @SmartColleges · 4 Nov 2015


@mims You got that right! Thanks for sharing this data. There's a lot more of it, if you're curious.

With Simplicity Comes Freedom

“Having the avatars was one step removed from CIC, so it gave us a little more leeway. You can be more edgy, more funny, even if you’re disagreeing with them.”

- Cecily Garber,
Communications Officer, CIC

Case in Brief



Profiled Organization: Council of Independent Colleges
Organization Type: Membership Association

CIC’s “The Power of Liberal Arts” campaign features two cartoon avatars, Libby (a college student) and Art (a counselor). They share stories, challenge attacks and correct misinformation via Tweets, as well as tell the visual stories of member institutions via crowdsourced images.

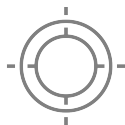
Source: Council of Independent Colleges; National Journal Communications Council research interviews and analysis

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Stories No Longer Need to be Perfect to be Effective

Paradigm Shift Impacts Story Planning, Timing, and Measurement



From “Ready, Aim, Fire!” ...



...to “Read, and React”

We have one shot at reaching our audience, and need to make it count



We have multiple “shots” to reach our audience and accomplish our objectives

Insights derived from extensive pre-testing: focus groups, message testing, audience research



Insights derived from continuous, real-time tests

Expensive production; entire budget allocated to one story



Budget allocated toward many smaller, lighter pieces of content, spreading out the risks and minimizing the size of any one “moment”

Planned a long time in advance, timed to rigid campaign dates



Responsive, capable of reacting to topical story opportunities as they arise

External benchmarks for success



Internal benchmarks for success

When Perfect is the Enemy of Good

“There’s a fundamental shift in how we think about creating, pushing, and evaluating content—but we also need to realize that perfect is the enemy of good. It’s OK to test things, to push things out that aren’t the most polished things. It’s OK to make mistakes—it’s all just learning and optimizing and reacting to what you’re getting.”

- Colin Moffett, Artemis Ward

Using Digital Feedback to Make Smart Adjustments

AFGE Adapted its Video Storytelling Approach to Bring the Environment to the Audience

March 2014



Process

Testimonials filmed during the annual fly-in, edited to incorporate photos and b-roll news footage

Results

Average views per video: 970
Average likes per video: 8

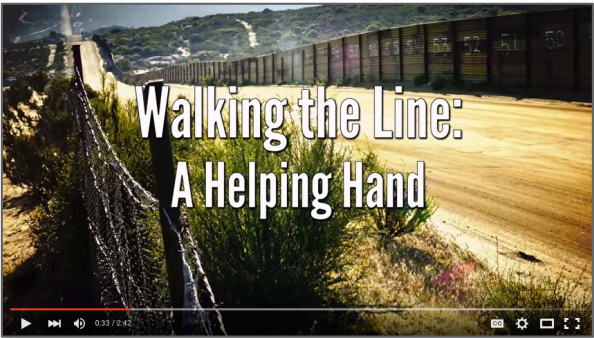
A “Productive Failure”

It wasn’t the *content* of the first campaign that hindered its success—it was the *context*, according to AFGE.

“[We] are trying to immerse you in the story itself...so you feel like you are more a part of it. Otherwise you are just being talked at.”

Applying the Learnings

August 2014



Process

Filmed on location, featuring action shots of members doing their jobs in addition to “talking heads”

Results

Average views per video: 1180 (22% lift)
Average likes per video: 10 (25% lift)

Case in Brief



Profiled Organization: American Federation of Government Employees
Organization Type: Union

In March 2014, AFGE kicked off its “I Am AFGE” video campaign, meant to raise public awareness for the role of its members in keeping America safe. Just 5 months later, it incorporated its learnings on the importance of location into “Walking the Line,” a series of video stories chronicling Border Patrol agents.

Reading and Reacting on Even the Largest of Stages

NRF Acknowledges the Tradeoff Between Perfection and Responsiveness

National Debate Advertisements: “Not Perfect, But We’ll Get it Right Next Time”



NRF Strategies:

- ✓ **Repurposing with Purpose**
“It’s about doing it narrowly for one moment, vs. being able to use it in multiple ways,” says Bill Thorne, NRF’s SVP of communications, of the process of translating existing stories into advertisements that aired during the fall democratic debate.
- ✓ **Making National Stories Local**
Prior to the advertisements airing, NRF coordinated outreach to local media in the cities in which the featured stories originated, resulting in more coverage for the businesses profiled in the ads.

Case in Brief



Profiled Organization: National Retail Federation
Organization Type: Industry Association

NRF’s two self-produced 30-second advertisements aired during the November 2015 democratic debate. It took the NRF team just four days to create the edited versions of longer stories NRF has collected during its “This is Retail” campaign.

Storytelling Strategies for Purpose, Promotion, and Advocacy

Lessons from Washington's Most Effective Storytelling Organizations

Crystalizing the Organization's Approach to Telling Its Story

I. Establishing Common Organizational Story Language

- Defining story as distinct from content
- Translating the literary world to the policy world
- Identifying the types of common organizational stories

II. Refining an "Ear" for Compelling Stories

- Pinpointing the right heroes to feature
- Developing authenticity through appropriate emotion and details
- Achieving narrative simplicity in the face of complexity

III. Embracing an Iterative Process

- Reallocating toward smaller story "moments"
- Measuring, learning and successively adapting

Strengthening a Storytelling Culture Through Smart Collaboration

IV. Identifying Ideal Story Management Processes

- Understanding the assets and barriers of extra-functional colleagues
- Selecting a model that maximizes efficiency and application of relevant resources

V. Socializing a Storybanking Tool

- Identifying needs driven by volume, user habits, and trackable data
- Recognizing key points of strategic evolution
- Pairing technology with offline encouragement of adoption

VI. Encouraging Organizational Buy-In

- Embracing a data-driven approach to proving story success
- Translating qualitative successes into quantitative proof
- Involving skeptics in the process to promote mutual understanding

Seeking Valuable Inputs from Other Functions

Strategic Storytelling Incorporates Cross-Functional Perspectives, While Minimizing Risks

Organizational Players the in Storytelling Process

Membership or Program Teams



Assets

- Trusted relationships with and frontline access to potential storytellers within membership or programs/initiatives
- Deep understanding of concerns and values of potential storytellers and how organization impacts them

Fears

- Lack of storytelling confidence, skills
- Unsure of what role to play in process
- Lack of priority/time to devote to storytelling activities

Communications Team



Assets

- Skills in planning, packaging, and sharing stories in effective ways
- Distance from in-the-weeds knowledge, relative objectivity leads to better judgment on story-worthiness

Fears

- Access to information, contacts hindered by silos
- Incomplete understanding of organization’s strategic needs
- Low resource allocation due to lack of demonstrable success

Government Affairs or Policy Teams



Assets

- Deep understanding of specific issues and how they impact stakeholders
- Access to grassroots advocates for both collection and sharing opportunities
- Key relationships with policymaker audiences for stories

Fears

- Priorities that are sometimes at odds with comms team
- Lack of storytelling confidence, skills
- Unsure of what role to play in process

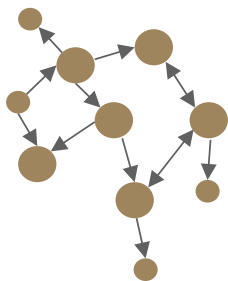
When the Obligation is Shared

“Stories are for everyone. It’s a shared responsibility and it’s not something we’re going to approach in silos, but we’re going to be strategic and thoughtful for when we go out to the network and when we get those stories. We’re not duplicating efforts but we’re...complementing each other’s work.”

- Anya Alexander, Communities in Schools

Knowing How and When to Involve Everyone Else

Story Management Models Parallel Digital Management Models, With Some Key Modifications



Decentralized

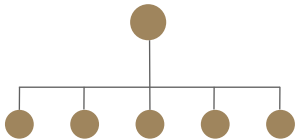
No one owns storytelling; efforts are ad hoc and scattered across the organization

The Good:

- Everyone feels empowered (to some degree) because they have total ownership over their own stories
- Diversity is generally good; stories come from unexpected audiences since no one department has a monopoly over collection

The Bad (or Sometimes Ugly):

- Often duplicative, redundant, or inefficient
- Similar stories collected by multiple units, leading to storyteller burnout
- Widely varying skill levels means no standardization of content quality



Centralized

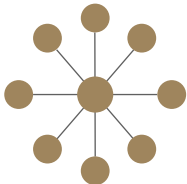
One department manages all storytelling-related activities and acts as the clearinghouse for all needs

The Good:

- Standardization of quality
- Skills are applied most efficiently relative to training
- Standardization of archiving and organization

The Bad (or Sometimes Ugly):

- Inefficiency or lack of speed/responsiveness if one must approve the activities of everyone else
- Promotes monopoly of information and creates silos among non-controlling departments
- Requires detailed intake forms, thoughtful communication to ensure needs being met



Hub and Spoke

Cross-functional team sits in a centralized position and helps other units meet their needs

The Good:

- Best chances to apply strategy across story activities since multiple voices are present in the process
- Consensus means storytelling activities will be uniformly supported throughout the organization

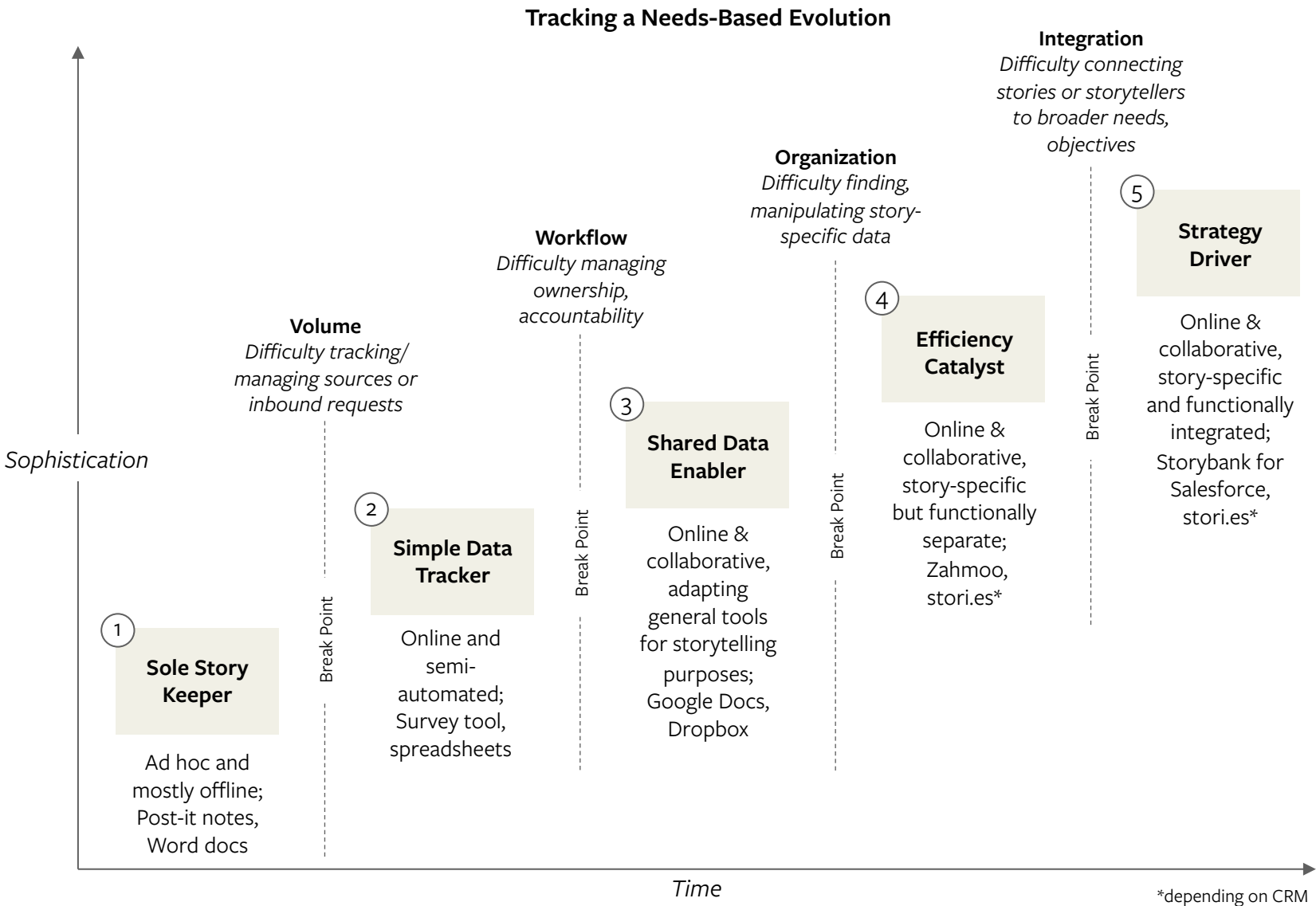
The Bad (or Sometimes Ugly):

- Decision-making can be slow or unwieldy
- Time intensive review process by in-house comms experts to ensure stories meet standards
- Skills still applied inefficiently relative to training

Unlike when managing digital (in which Hub and Spoke is both the most adopted and generally the most effective), when managing stories it appears a hybrid between Centralized (for control and standardization) and Hub and Spoke (for the committee functionality that reinforces strategic priorities) is most effective. This is likely because of the much steeper skills gap.

Enabling Involvement Through Smarter Tech Solutions

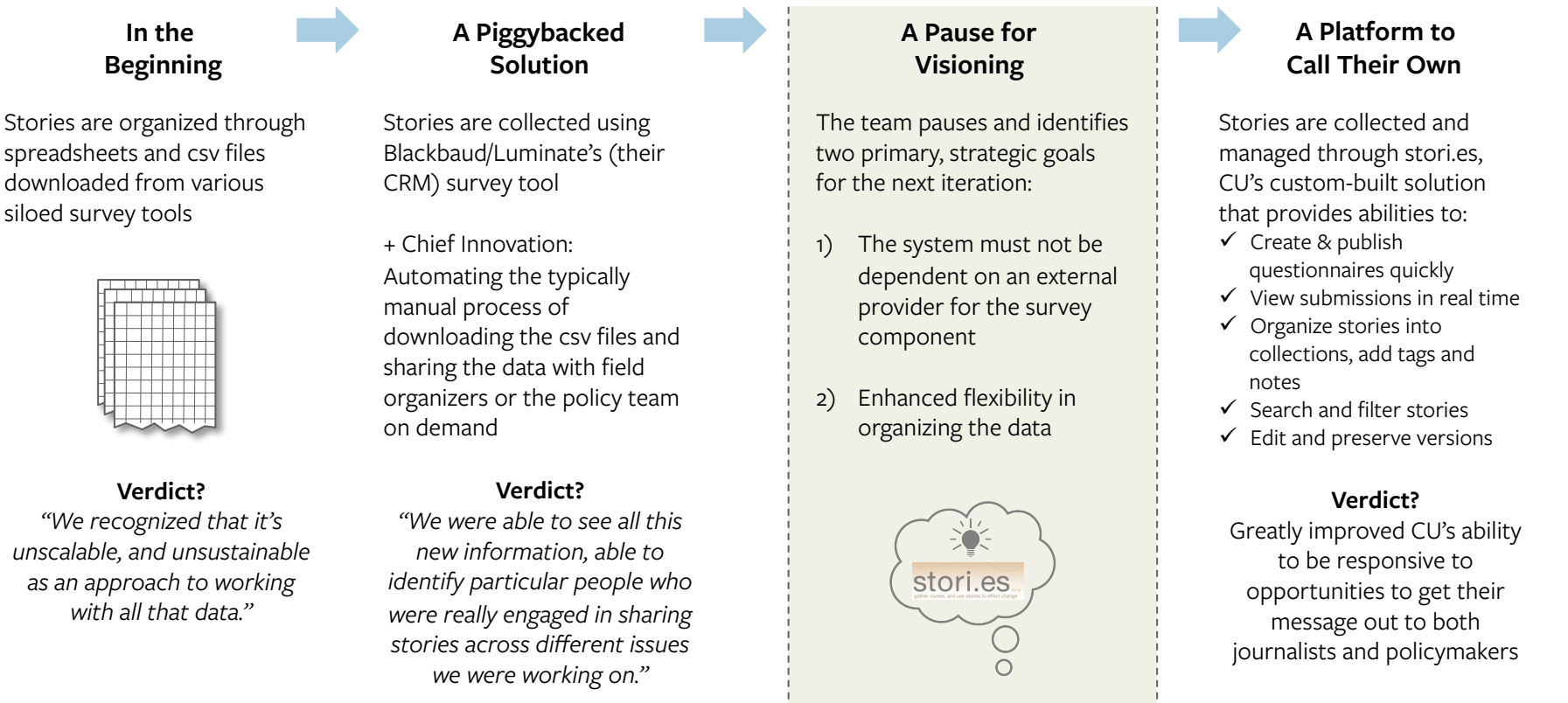
Initial Selection of Story Bank and Subsequent Evolution Follow Key Decision “Break Points”



Source: National Journal Communications Council research interviews and analysis

How a Tool Can Evolve Alongside an Organization

When Selecting a Storybanking Tool, Let Strategy Guide Technology—Not the Other Way Around



Case in Brief



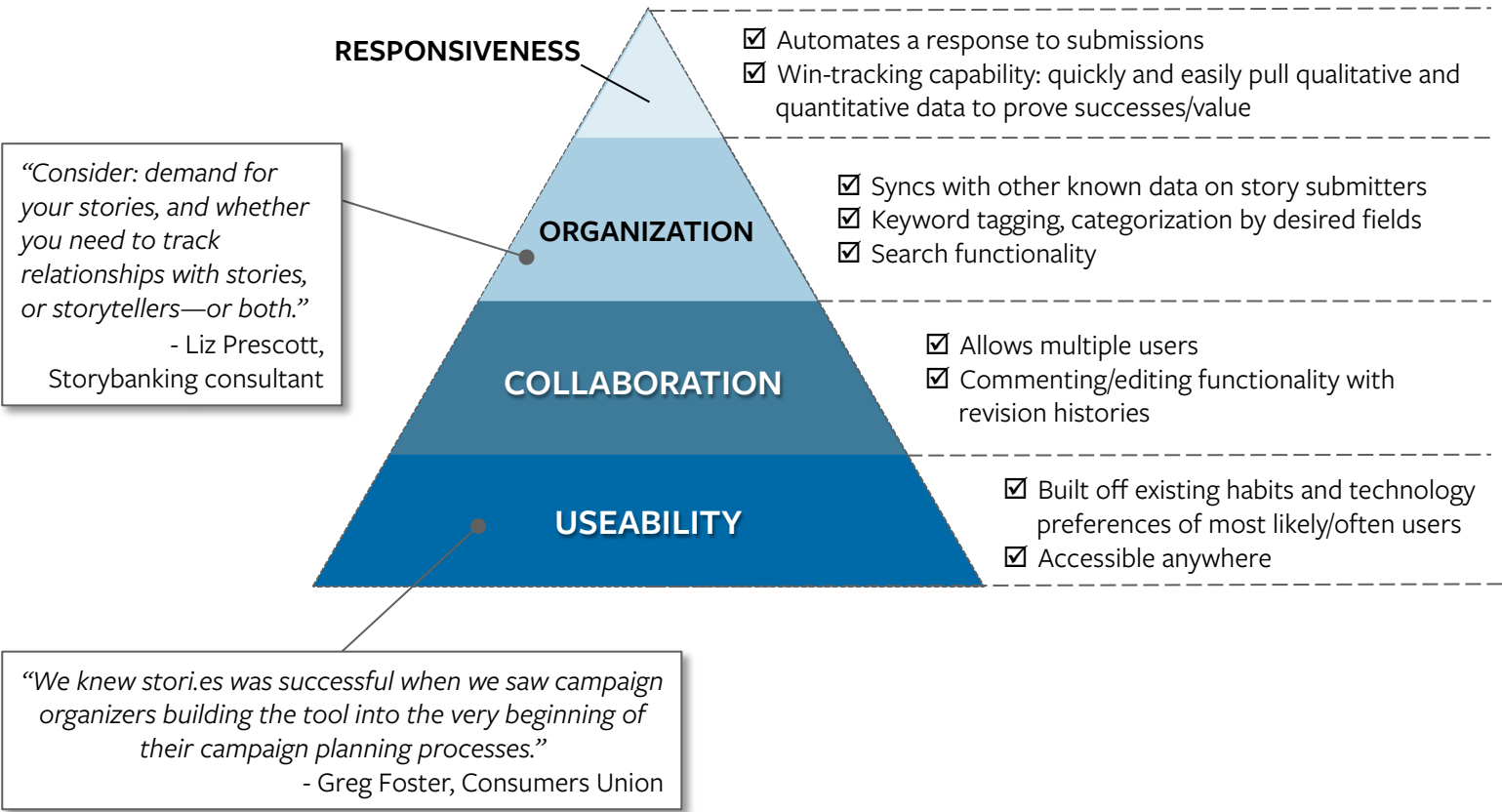
Profiled Organization: Consumers Union
Organization Type: Advocacy Organization

Consumers Union created a proprietary story management tool, stori.es, which it uses to house more than 130,000 consumer- and advocate-submitted stories. The platform is open source and available for other organizations to license.

Building System Criteria According to Needs

Aim to Build Your System With Future Needs in Mind

NJCC’s Hierarchy of Story Management System Benefits & Needs



Having a System is One Thing, But Encouraging Use is Another

Approaches Directly Address Barriers, Fears Present Across Non-Comms Staff

#1
Specificity



Barrier addressed:

Gaps in knowledge, skills

Approach:

Provide concrete guidance (e.g., “5 tips on how to capture a story via video,” “1 photo to take on a site visit”) to greatly enhance participation, alignment, and quality. This applies both to standalone training opportunities, and to equipping frontline program staff with the right prompts, technology, etc.

Outcomes:

Non-story native staff gain confidence, familiarity with story efforts

#2
Commitment



Barrier addressed:

Lack of time to devote to non-essential job duties

Approach:

Conduct a “storybanking day,” in which all staff spend time working on the bank in some way: conducting outreach, responding to media, conducting interviews, etc.

Outcomes:

Organization-wide gains in appreciation for the work that goes into maintaining the bank; a reminder of why the organization does the work it does; and momentum for future efforts

#3
Recognition



Barrier addressed:

Low interest, feelings that stories aren’t appreciated

Approach:

Encourage staff who take the time to submit stories to the bank by posting one story per week on its internal Google+ group, along with a note of thanks to whoever submitted the story

Outcomes:

Greater understanding of how stories are used and what the impact is; reinforcement of what good stories look/sound like

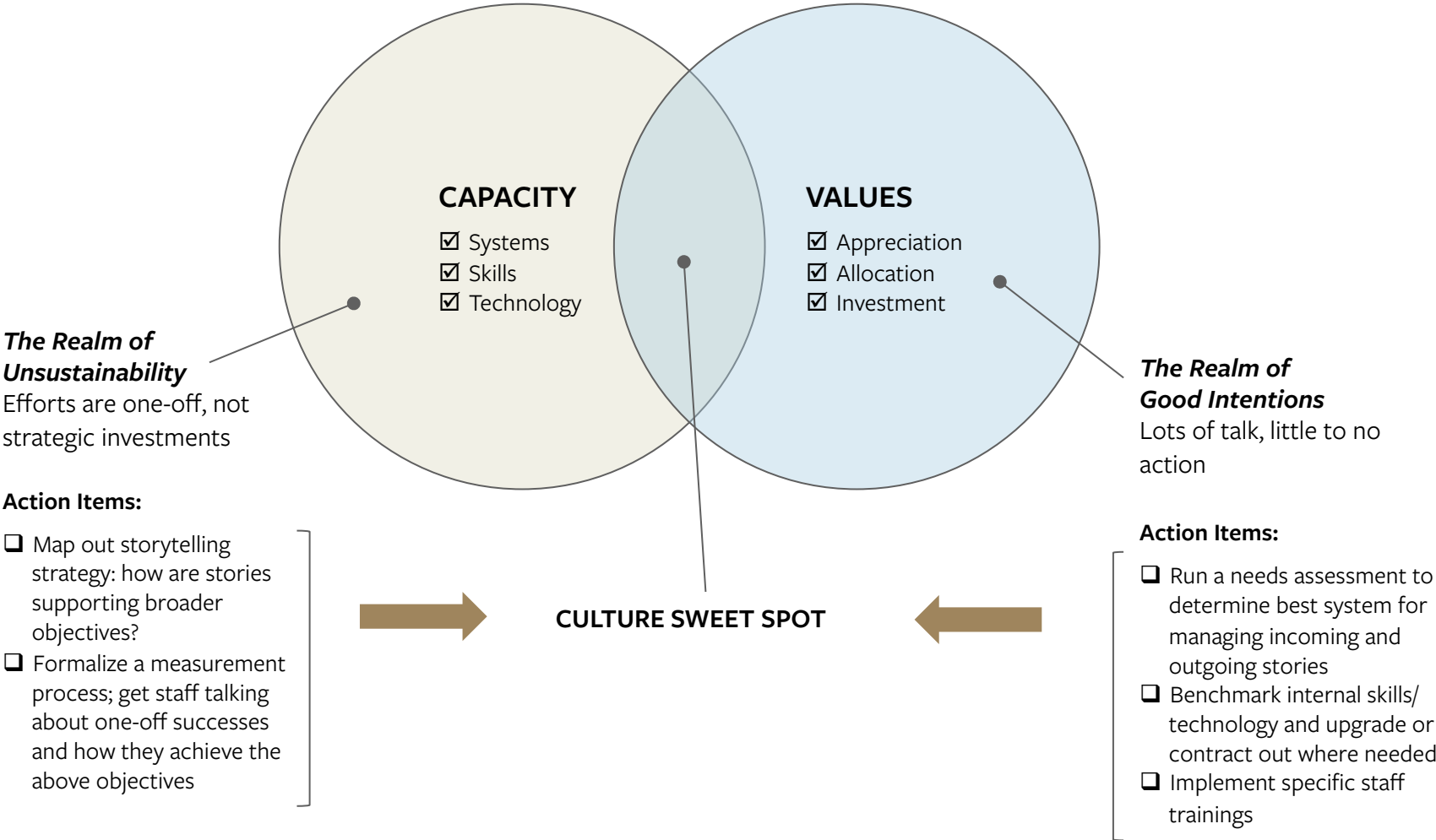
Not Adding Work, But Doing Existing Work Differently

“The answer is having people think about their day-to-day jobs differently, especially people who aren’t in communications. It’s not about adding more work to your plate—it’s about what you’re doing differently about the work you’re doing.”

- Jay Geneske, former Director of Digital, Rockefeller Foundation

A Working Story Bank Alone is Not a Culture

Strong Storytelling Cultures Strike a Sustainable Balance of Capacity and Values



Source: National Journal Communications Council research interviews and analysis

The Ultimate Irony

Despite Our Best Efforts, Stories Can't Sell Themselves; Use Data to Convince Skeptics

Using Regular, Curated Data Reports to Demonstrate Success and Spur Continued Investment

Council of Independent Colleges
Sample Report for Board Members

Digital Media Report

GOALS

- Challenge attacks and correct misinformation about the liberal arts
- Amplify positive messages from students, graduates, allies and news sources

OUTCOMES TO DATE

Twitter _____

Takeaway _____

Facebook _____

Takeaway _____

Microsite _____

Takeaway _____

CIC begins every report with an articulation of overall campaign goals

Analytics are broken down by platform with key insights (both positive and critical) highlighted

Sample content illustrates engagement that meets stated campaign objectives

Don't forget qualitative data! Organizations like the National Retail Federation track report contact with local lawmakers after stories are shared—and “it's important to count these as victories, too.”

Making Sure They See the Trees (and the Forest)

“If a tree falls in the woods and no one’s around to hear it, did it happen? This is my constant mantra. Falling trees are heard, seen, and admired—and people are excited to see the next tree. It’s my job to make those trees admired.”
- Bill Thorne, National Retail Federation

Participation and Buy-in Go Hand-in-Hand

Look for Opportunities to Involve Others in Offline Facets of the Storytelling Process



On the Road Again



Since 2014, National Retail Federation has visited and produced member stories in 14 different states. At times, they have included members of their policy team on the road trips, and the result is a deeper understanding of the impacts of NRF’s storytelling efforts.



The Voice of the Audience

Encore.org wanted to develop a comprehensive FAQ page to accompany its online story collection form, knowing that its target audience of seniors may have some unique questions. It turned to its program staff to provide input and shape the final content, and as a result they were more bought in to the story collection initiative as a whole.

FAQs for Encore Storytellers

Why is Encore.org gathering these stories?

How do I submit my story?

What should I write about?

There are four questions on the story submission form to guide you. When you sit down to write, make your story personal and anecdotal, but avoid reciting your CV.

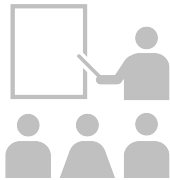
What length should my story be?

What happens to my story after I submit it?

What are the specifications for the required photo?

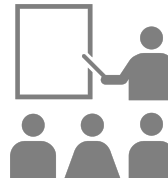
And Yet There's More To Come...

Today's Session: Part One



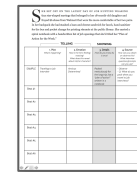
- ✓What is a story?
- ✓How do we make ours better?
- ✓How do we coordinate the process with our peers?
- ✓Who should be involved, and how do we get them to value it?

April 28th Session: Part Two



- ✓How do we collect stories more effectively?
- ✓How do we share them more effectively across channels?
- ✓How do we engage others in the sharing process?
- ✓How should we be measuring success?

Coming in March: Companion Toolkit



- ✓Workbook with two dozen individual resources spanning the life cycle of a storytelling effort
- ✓Can be used to train members, advocates in addition to internal staff
- ✓Planning tools include:
 - Audience Persona Worksheet*
 - Story Bank Selection Guide*
 - Plot Development Worksheet & Emotion Map*
 - Advocate Amplification Toolkit*
 - Channel Selection & Tailoring Worksheet*

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MEDIA UNIVERSITY

Storytelling Strategies for Purpose, Promotion, and Advocacy—Part One

March 1, 2016