

Best Practice Profile

Storyteller Talent Agency

NationalJournal LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

CASE IN BRIEF



Problem

Story collection initiatives aren't yielding enough good stories to match with target audiences. They too often surface stories that are low-quality or about the wrong topic altogether.

Tactic

A roster of qualified storytellers who are proactively recruited in a phone campaign and matched to target audiences based on their strengths and audience fit.

Outcome

520 storytellers recruited to share stories 5-8 times annually for government affairs and the rest of the corporation.

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Story collection initiatives aren't yielding enough good stories to match with target audiences.

Story collection initiatives too frequently unearth stories that are off-the-mark: stories about a non-priority topic or stories that are barely even stories at all. Well-meaning constituents submit these stories when they don't understand who or what the organization is looking for. Most often, this happens because story collection initiatives aren't focused on the right people, or they aren't prompting constituents with the right questions. Even when good stories do emerge, they don't last forever. Once policy priorities change, those stories may not be applicable to the next policy priority.

Common Member Challenges

Have stories, but not the ones we need

"We can never find a story when we need one. Our most recent request was from the White House, and—as always—we had to scramble to find the right person."

Re-using a few good stories *ad nauseam*



Stories have a short shelf life



Problem Drivers

Collection process shortcomings

Asking the wrong people



Online collection forms seek stories from anyone willing to fill out the form.

Asking the wrong questions



Generic request for stories from advocates receives half-baked ideas, flimsy narratives, and irrelevant topics.

Inflexible stories

Stories collected for campaign go stale when policy priorities change.

eBay built a roster of qualified storytellers who are matched to target audiences based on fit.



More than 500 storytellers were recruited in a proactive interview campaign with the goal of finding a relatable storyteller for every district. Focusing on storytellers, not stories, helped justify the larger resource commitment to the initiative. After eBay's policy priorities shift, storytellers continue contributing with different stories.

Key Elements of “Storyteller Talent Agency”

More versatile than stories

When policy priorities change, storytellers can tell different stories.

Roster of versatile storytellers, not stories



500+ storytellers recruited to share stories related to policy priorities.

Proactive recruitment campaign



3 staff conducted 4-month telephone interview recruitment campaign.

Storytellers deployed based on strengths



A catalog of each storyteller's strengths enables GA director to place them in a position to succeed.

Fit for target audiences prioritized



Storytellers need to be relatable to a policymaker.



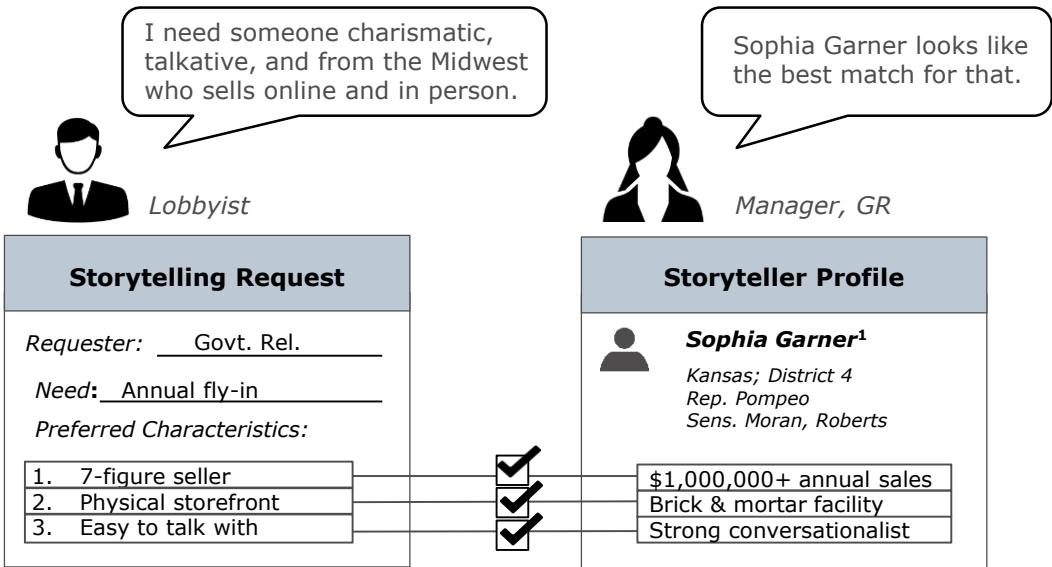
Storyteller Talent Agency in Brief

- A roster of 500+ vetted storytellers who are deployed to fulfill requests in accordance with each individual's strengths
- Grassroots director matches storytellers to requests, moderates access to storytellers, advises storytellers before appearances, and converts stories to written form when applicable
- Storytellers recruited and qualified in 4-month interview campaign of 1,000 candidates conducted by 3 staff

Storytellers are matched to inbound requests based upon their strengths, experiences, and relevance to the target audience. Research and the interview process surface these factors, which are catalogued in a database. Thorough vetting enables the “talent agent” to focus on matching the right storyteller to the right audience instead of fixing stories or training weak storytellers.

“Talent Agency” Matching

Illustrative Example



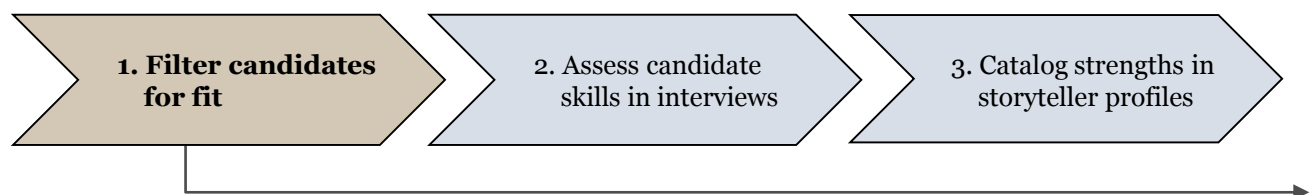
Adopting a matchmaker mentality

By recruiting only good story storytellers, government affairs can focus its energy on matching storytellers to policymakers and other audiences.

Ensure you're talking to the right people by first qualifying candidates for audience and issue fit.

Many organizations wait until after stories are collected before determining whether they are a good fit for their target audiences. But delaying this step in the process results in stories that are less relevant and risks wasting resources on stories that are unlikely to be useful. Frontloading the qualification step in the process ensures that every candidate who is interviewed has a good chance of being a good fit.

Storyteller Recruitment Process at eBay



Getting audience fit right at the front end of the process will focus your interviewing resources on candidates more likely to be a good fit with your target audience. Of the 1,000 candidates eBay interviewed, more than 500 were recruited and retained.

Three qualifications are most important to get right: are they a good match for the target audience; are they a good fit for how you want to represent the organization; and are they substantively impacted by the organization’s issue set. Indicators of each qualification are going to vary from organization to organization, with the exception of priority districts.

Candidate Filters


Desired Qualifications	Filter Criteria												
	<table> <tr> <th>Desired Characteristics</th><th>Indicator</th></tr> <tr> <td>Geographic Relevance</td><td> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Priority district <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brick-and-mortar facility </td></tr> <tr> <td>Civic Engagement</td><td> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Involved in local civic affairs </td></tr> <tr> <td>Accountability</td><td> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Family-owned business <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Seller-rating </td></tr> <tr> <td>Leadership</td><td> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 50+ employees <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Age of business </td></tr> <tr> <td>Issue Compatibility</td><td> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sales Volume <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sells 10% Internationally </td></tr> </table>	Desired Characteristics	Indicator	Geographic Relevance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Priority district <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brick-and-mortar facility	Civic Engagement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Involved in local civic affairs	Accountability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Family-owned business <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Seller-rating	Leadership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 50+ employees <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Age of business	Issue Compatibility	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sales Volume <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sells 10% Internationally
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Are they a good fit for Washington?													
Will they represent the organization positively?													
Are they affected by the policy and issue-set?													

eBay drew a list of candidates from its internal database of sellers on the eBay marketplace. Other datasets to identify and qualify storytellers include membership lists and performance reviews.

Ask interviewees questions that reveal their storytelling strengths and weaknesses.

eBay used open-ended questions, seen here on its interview guide, to encourage interviewees to tell stories. But interviewers weren't looking to record stories. Rather, they were trying to encourage natural storytelling so they could evaluate interviewees for their storytelling ability.

Interview Questionnaire

Government Relations

eBay Marketplaces Interview Questionnaire

This questionnaire should be used when interviewing eBay sellers.

Background/General Info:

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself and your background?
2. How do you support your local community through your business?
3. Looking back 5 years, could you have imagined your business being where it is today?
4. What makes you energized/motivated to come to work every day?

Connected Commerce:

1. Can you think of an example or two of where, through your business, you have been able to connect meaningfully with people that you otherwise might not have connected with (i.e. customers, suppliers, other entrepreneurs, employees, etc.)?

Cross Border Trade:

1. What challenges have you faced with cross-border trade (shipping, customs, etc.)?
2. Can you remember any compelling trade stories (you sold a product to a country you weren't expecting, you found it ironic you sold a specific product to a specific country).
3. Have you formed any meaningful connections with customers around the world because of your ability to sell internationally?

Open-ended questions prompt story answers that reveal interviewee's storytelling strengths and weaknesses...

...and reveal connections to other issues.


“

You can tell when an interview is going to go well because the advocate sells his or her own story. Good storytellers think their stories are cool and tell them in a way that makes me think so too.

Federica Rabiolo, Manager, Global Government Relations

The results of each interview were recorded in profiles for each storyteller, which were organized in a database. Whenever a storyteller request comes in, the government relations manager pulls up these profiles in order to deploy storytellers where they fit best.

Storyteller Strengths Profile



Tim Johnson
Sparta, Tennessee – TN-6
Rep. Diane Black; Sens. Alexander & Corker

☐ **Live Media Comments**
Comments: *Gary seems less comfortable speaking before a crowd.*

☒ **Written Media**
Comments: *Well-spoken, good voice for Op-Ed on trade issues.*

☒ **In-District, In-Person Meeting**
Comments: *Good journey story, early eBay user with growing business.*

☒ **Fly-In**
Comments: *Could handle pressure but don't need his district this year.*

☒ **Case Study**
Comments: *Top-tier candidate, good for 1-pager. Highlight int'l sales.*

Issue Relevance

☒ Global Trade

☒ Internet Sales Tax

☐ Net Neutrality

☒ Postal Reform

☐ Cybercrime

☐ _____

Document each storyteller's strengths and weaknesses in individual profiles.

Record the storyteller's connections to other issues so you can call on them when your policy priorities change.

Deploying the right story for every occasion.

eBay's Storytelling Talent Agency has become a tremendous asset, both for its Government Affairs office and the organization at large. Through their unique story collection process, eBay identified hundreds of quality storytellers, and now due to their "Talent Agency", eBay engages each storyteller 5-8 times per year and fills multiple internal requests per week. The Talent Agency allows eBay to effectively match storytellers to unique requests, and always have just the right story told at just the right time.

eBay's Storytelling Capability

520

**Vetted storytellers
in roster**

5-8

**Annual storytelling
moments per year for
each storyteller**

1-3

**Weekly requests
from other
departments**

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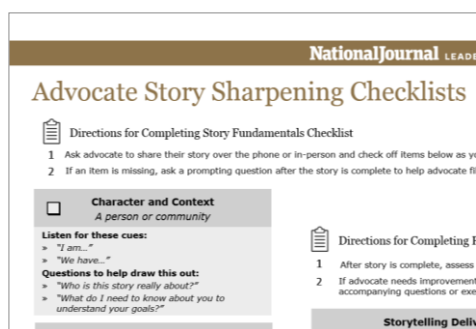


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