STORYTELLING & SOCIAL CHANGE

A Strategy Guide for Grantmakers

NARRATIVE ARTS

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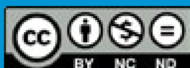

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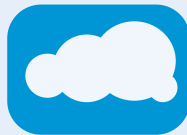
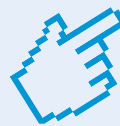
ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is a project of Narrative Arts. Throughout the guide you'll see icons denoting **quotes**, **ideas**, and **media**.

On the website and in future editions of the guide, you'll find additional features, case studies, interactive maps, webinars, and a knowledge center on supporting and evaluating storytelling projects for social change.

Please visit **www.narrativearts.org** to join the conversation. We are available for consulting and speaking engagements. Contact us at info@narrativearts.org.

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FOREWORD

Photo by Mary Ellen Mark

For 30 years I've been listening to the stories of thousands of people I've interviewed in the U.S. and abroad. I'm listening for people to do what I call "singing"—that's when a person's language comes alive in a way that is absolutely particular to them, as distinct as a fingerprint. Sometimes their speech is fluid and clear, and sometimes it stumbles as the person searches for words to express themselves. Whatever the case, the vital moment is when a powerful need to communicate emerges; the need to tell their story, and to be heard. I'll reenact parts of their interviews onstage, in shows organized around a theme.

Long ago I took to heart something my paternal grandfather used to say: "If you say a word often enough, it becomes you." So each time I repeat a person's story in rehearsal or in performance, I try to hear it anew. My aim is to learn something about their identity—and American character—through the language they use. I put these stories in conversation with each other and with the audience. Think of it as a democracy of stories that are all meeting, bumping, clashing, joining, splitting, fitting together. My work is one among many methods of using narrative to animate our civic life.

The vibrant storytelling that I'm talking about here doesn't just happen all on its own. It calls for writers and artists to create and interpret stories. Educators to help people tell their own stories and appreciate others'. Public squares where people can assemble. Technologies to record and share stories. Public policies that guarantee free speech. The work you'll read about in these pages demonstrates how we can use stories to invigorate our democracy and promote justice worldwide. You as a grantmaker have an important role to play in this process, by giving of the intellectual, social, and financial resources at your disposal. This guide assembles valuable wisdom that I am confident you will be able to use to help make the change you want to see.

Anna Deavere Smith is a playwright, author, and actress, and a professor at New York University. Her one-woman shows blend journalism and theater, using text from interviews she conducts to explore race, identity, and community in America. She is the founder and director of the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue at New York University.

Learn more at www.annadeaveresmithworks.org.

INTRODUCTION

We live by stories. For evidence of this, you need look no further than the past two or three hours of your own life. During that time, you've probably heard, told, or thought of a number of stories. Maybe you listened to a radio news report, read a grant proposal, went to a 12-step meeting, attended a religious ceremony, watched a web video, had a therapy session, mentally rehearsed a conversation you're anticipating, or daydreamed about a vacation. Or you may have plotted a course for how the organizations that you as a grantmaker support will apply pressure to the arc of the moral universe.

Story is sometimes described as a powerful "tool," and it certainly can be that. But for a moment, think of stories less as a discrete instrument or product, and more as a fundamental aspect of human consciousness; they're an essential part of how we think, feel, remember, imagine, and relate.

Storytelling has always had tremendous currency, of course, but it—or the study of it—seems to have grown enormously in many sectors over the course of the past 20 years. Consider the boom in storytelling in pop culture, as is evidenced by the ever-growing reach of StoryCorps, *This American Life*, and the Moth. Together, these programs have inspired millions to share their own personal stories and to value those of others. Meanwhile, narrative studies have emerged in diverse academic disciplines, such as sociology, the law, psychology, neuroscience, and medicine.

Storytelling has also exploded in activist and nonprofit organizations working for social change. Consider efforts that use oral history to expose human rights abuses, first-person documentary films to push for prison reform, telenovelas to advance immigrants' health, or digital storytelling to prevent LGBT youth suicide. Activist conferences now have workshops on storytelling. Many nonprofits in all issue areas are geared towards "telling our story" on their websites and in outreach campaigns. And grantmakers are active in the field by supporting organizations that use storytelling, and by activating their own communications apparatuses to tell stories as well.

These and other organizations have recognized something essential: *If we live by stories, we change by stories*. As we'll explore in this guide, funders and nonprofits have used storytelling in doing needs-and-strengths assessments, community organizing, public education, and program evaluation. They've used such diverse forms as plays, books, films, web videos, story circles, radio programs, oral histories, museums, walking tours, journalistic reports, and even story-based video games.

"Good stories are not necessarily simple ones, with unambiguous moral punch lines. Rather, narrative's power stems from its complexity, indeed, its ambiguity. ... Following a story means more than listening: it means filling in the blanks, both between unfolding events and between events and the larger point they add up to." —Francesca Polletta, *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics*

This guide is not so much about how to tell a good story, but about how to use "narrative strategies"—strategies that use storytelling to advance social change. In these pages, grantmakers will find guidance and considerations regarding how and why to:

- make story grants to advance their own program goals in any issue area, and evaluate the impact of funded work;
- tell or solicit stories as a foundation to communicate effectively with prospective grantees, prospective donors, local communities, and other stakeholders; and
- use storytelling internally to sharpen the foundation's focus.

While this guide is aimed primarily at grantmakers, it is also hoped that nonprofits, activists, and storytellers of all kinds will find it to be a useful point of departure as well.

Jot down a short list of favorite social-change stories you've heard, told, or participated in, and notes about what form the stories took and how they affected you.

THE "IT GETS BETTER PROJECT"

Fifteen-year-old Billy Lucas never said he was gay. But some other kids in his Greensburg, Indiana school thought he was and repeatedly bullied him for it. On September 9, 2010, he hanged himself in the family's barn. His mother was the one to find his body. Lucas's was just the latest in a string of headline-making suicides by gay (or presumed gay) teens, who are at greater risk of suicide than their straight counterparts. And it was the last heartbreaking straw for sex advice columnist Dan Savage, who created a YouTube channel and uploaded a video of himself and life partner Terry Miller talking about their own lives, and letting young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered viewers know that "It Gets Better." Savage encouraged LGBT adults and straight allies to share their personal stories to help young people to survive the especially difficult teen years, so they can get to the good stuff. Since that first post, over 50,000 video stories have been made by everyone from President Obama to professional sports teams to everyday people and uploaded to a dedicated website called the It Gets Better Project. The videos have been viewed over 50 million times. Selected stories were compiled into an *It Gets Better* book, the proceeds from which have been used to support an LGBT youth crisis hotline. The project was not grant-funded, but it has become a model for other organizations wanting to use grassroots storytelling for the public good.

ANDY GOODMAN: "STORIES ARE WHAT WE'RE WAITING FOR"

Andy Goodman is director of The Goodman Center, "a communications consulting firm that helps public interest groups, foundations, and progressive businesses reach more people more effectively." He offers online workshops and is the author of *Storytelling as Best Practice* and other publications on communications. Clients such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Hewlett Foundation have him train their grantees in storytelling. Goodman says, "There's a special benefit of training a whole cohort of grantees at once, because when you get 30 or 40 organizations together in a room, they see the impact."

Why is storytelling important?

Storytelling is the single most powerful communications tool that we have available to us, bar none. You could make the case that the story is the fundamental unit of human communication—more than the fact or the word or the sentence. As much as we have new tools to work with today—Facebook and YouTube and the rest—if you don't have the kinds of stories that people want to tell and retell, you haven't gotten the most basic skill. In any kind of public presentation, stories are what people are waiting for.

What's an example of how stories work?

If you want to change someone's mind, you have to provide them with a story that will lodge in their brain and maybe supplant the story that's already there. Take capital punishment as an example. People fighting against it would say, "It's immoral and unconstitutional," but most people have a story in their minds that says, "It's an eye for an eye." As long as they have that story in their mind, you're not going to change their opinion. But the Innocence Project came along in the 1990s and said, "We have executed innocent people, are you okay with that?" And the vast majority of people would answer "no." So the Innocence Project said let's slow things down before another innocent person is executed. That changed the conversation, or changed the story.

What makes for a good story?

There has to be a protagonist. A common mistake people make is to think that a nonprofit organization can be a protagonist. It can't. To enter the world of a story, we've got to hold the hand of one person we can identify with, and we see what they want. A second mistake is when there are no barriers. For example, "I woke up, I went to work, I came home, I went to bed"—that's a sequence of events, but it's not a story. What's interesting is the challenges the protagonist faces. So it's got to have a protagonist, goals, barriers, and choices the protagonist makes. And it's got to have an ending—was it a victory, a defeat, or what?

How do you build storytelling into the culture of a foundation or other organization?

For one thing, you have to have buy-in at the top. You also have to create demand for stories. If you say, "Let's tell stories," then people may agree but go back to business as usual. But if you have stories every week at your staff meeting, or in your newsletter, or on your website, then you're creating demand, and people have their antennae up. So now you have all these stories, and you build a story bank. If you do those three things—get buy-in, create demand internally, and have a place to store stories—there's a good chance you'll have a storytelling culture. Stories are like gold, whether they're about your grantees, or your mistakes, or the work of your own people. You collect them, you put them in a safe place, and you never know when you're going to need what story.

How can foundations use stories?

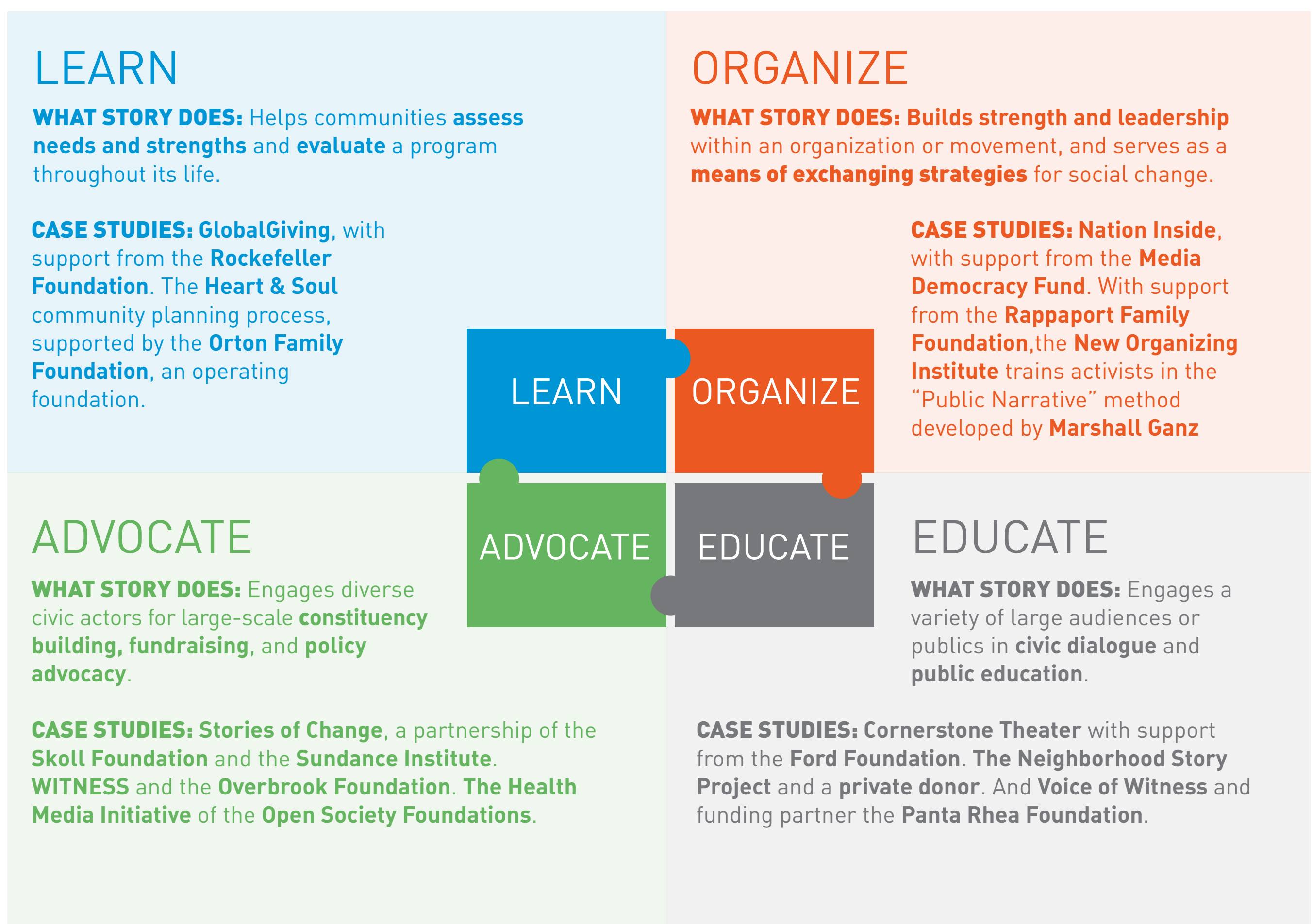
Foundations can have their grantees trained in storytelling. In addition, foundations can explain their own work by telling the stories of the organizations they support. The other thing is, foundations do not often tell the story of what they bring to the party other than the funding they give. But their grantmaking decisions have stories behind them. Those stories show the expertise the foundation brings, and without those stories the foundation is just a pile of money with names on it like "health" or "civil rights."

Some foundations are reluctant to tell stories about themselves. Why is that?

Too often foundations think that telling stories about themselves is immodest. But according to studies by the Philanthropy Awareness Initiative, the average awareness that people have of what foundations do is disturbingly low, even in-the-know people in Washington, D.C. Most foundations are a mystery. That doesn't serve the goal of the foundations, because if there's ever a push to regulate foundations more tightly, they don't have the constituency.

THE USES OF STORY
INTRODUCTION TO CASE STUDIES

Broadly speaking, we can think about the functions of storytelling as being to **Learn**, **Organize**, **Educate**, and **Advocate**—and thereby effect change in public attitudes, behavior, culture, and policy. These four functions often overlap, and most of the organizations profiled here use storytelling in more than one way. Below is a diagram outlining these four functions. In the following pages are case studies of organizations and their funders that use storytelling in one or more of the four ways. Storytelling may play a central or a supporting role in the work of the organizations profiled here; regardless, it is hoped that their experience will give grantmakers a theoretical and practical basis for understanding the uses of narrative.



LEARN

GLOBALGIVING / ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

OVERVIEW

Project summary: Method of gathering "micro-narratives" from large numbers of people in areas where partner organizations work in order to yield qualitative data for program assessment and growth. Also serves the field of international development.

Narrative challenge: Keeping the stories coming in organically, with only volunteer field staff managing the scribes.

Evaluation metrics: Number of organizations that use the story data in grant proposals and for decision making.

Websites: GlobalGiving.org RockefellerFoundation.org

Courtesy of Marc Maxson

"Rebecca's life has come to an end with doctor's announcement that she was pregnant. Her father immediately disowned her and her mother ran short of options…" That could be the first couple lines of a gripping novel. Instead, it is the start of a paragraph-long story by a 30-something woman in Kibera, Kenya. It's one of over 40,000 "micro-narratives" collected in Kenya and Uganda by GlobalGiving, a website that allows users to donate to vetted development projects around the world. (Since 2002, more than 300,000 donors have given over $85 million to some 8,000 projects.) In 2010, the organization launched its Storytelling Project with the intention of learning about the experiences of the people in areas where beneficiary groups are located. The project was supported by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.

"Most of the organizations that raise money through our site are low-budget grassroots groups," says project coordinator Marc Maxson. "So it only makes sense for the story-gathering process to be equally grassroots." GlobalGiving's local partners hire and train "scribes," who then have community members fill out a GlobalGiving storytelling form, which asks, "Tell us about a time when a person or an organization tried to change something in your community." Storytellers also give their age, gender, and location and tell what the story is about, how it makes them feel, and so on. All that information gets fed through a host of tools the organization built to produce data about community needs, possible solutions, and innovative organizations that it might add to its online platform.

The benefits of this method are many, says Maxson. It gets groups invested in the process of evaluation. It helps overcome the "self-report bias" that hobbles so many international development projects—in other words, it collects stories from more than just the people who are already motivated to share their experience. What's more, by analyzing word frequency and other aspects of enormous numbers of stories, it neatly combines anecdotal and statistical data. And, not least of all, it's fun for the storytellers, in a way that filling out a questionnaire is not. Visitors to the organization's website can use interactive tools like maps and word clouds to view and analyze stories themselves. Maxson says, "Our goal is to shorten the survey and make the mapping questions more flexible so each organization can use a personalized version of it."

There's another big advantage to this system: It's relatively cheap. "There are thousands of small organizations that will never be able to afford or manage typical monitoring and evaluation functions," Nancy MacPherson, managing director of evaluation for the Rockefeller Foundation, told the Stanford Social Innovation Review in 2011. "This could be a way to help smaller grantees be more systematic." Rockefeller's investment in the project may benefit the entire field of development, and other fields as well, as the project expands. The ongoing challenge, says MacPherson, is "how you use a body of stories to provide rigorous qualitative evidence." GlobalGiving is still wrestling with how to deal with a bias toward "optimism," which compels people to tell stories with a happy ending. The organization's findings will be a set of principles on the use of narrative.

And Rebecca, from the story at the beginning? Vocational school turned her life around, and she became a hairdresser. Once rejected by her family, Rebecca now pays for her three siblings to attend school, supports her sick father, and opened a shop for her mother. She even has a car, and her "bouncing baby boy goes to a good school." That's not just a nice story about an individual striver; together with thousands of other micro-narratives, it may enable GlobalGiving and the groups on its website to change, well, history.

"This project addresses the challenge of how to evaluate a portfolio with many small discrete projects that were not planned together. It combines the human aspect of individual stories with an analytical way of analyzing trends and patterns across the body of stories to see the bigger picture. What's next is setting standards for evaluating the quality of stories—for accuracy, completeness, representativeness."
—Nancy MacPherson, Rockefeller Foundation

HEART & SOUL / ORTON FAMILY FOUNDATION

OVERVIEW

Project summary: Story-collecting and story-sharing process for use in small cities and towns, which enables residents to articulate shared values and vision for purposes of community building and community planning.

Narrative challenge: Using stories not just in the initial phase but throughout the planning and development process. Streamlining the process of harvesting values from stories to use in the planning process.

Evaluation metrics: Nearly 30 indicators on community participation, capacity, articulation of values and vision, action taken, stewardship, and scaling up.

Website: communityheartandsoul.org

Courtesy the Orton Family Foundation

Damariscotta, Maine is a gorgeous little town of 2,000 people on the banks of a river that feeds into the Atlantic Ocean. There are about a dozen mom-and-pop oyster operations, a farmer's market, a community theater, an independent bookshop, an old-fashioned Rexall drugstore.

Enter Walmart.

In 2005, the big-box retailer proposed to build an outlet just outside of downtown; in response, voters passed a ballot initiative in a special election limiting retail outlets to 35,000 square feet—smaller than the average Walmart. The crisis had passed, but a deeper problem remained. "Town residents realized that they knew what they wanted to say 'no' to, but not what they wanted to say 'yes' to," says Betsy Rosenbluth. So town leaders hired a planner and formed the Damariscotta Planning Advisory Committee, with the goal of understanding what residents wanted for their town. The committee teamed up with the Orton Family Foundation, an operating foundation in Vermont, to use the foundation's Heart & Soul Community Planning process. The four-step process leads participating towns through the steps of getting organized, exploring shared values, developing options for planning, and taking action.

"Every community has characteristics that can't be reduced to budgets or statistics or ordinances," says Rosenbluth, director of projects for the foundation. "Maybe it's a local ice cream shop where you had your first date. Or maybe it's the fact that people say hello to you on the street. Those things can be shared in the form of stories. And when people begin to share those stories, they get to know each other better, and they also develop a set of shared values about what they want for their town." Both those things can create a strong basis for a community-driven planning process.

Orton trained a committee of Damariscotta residents in how to gather, share, and use stories. Committee members captured stories in one-on-one interviews and potluck story circles and at a story booth at the local library. One lifelong resident, Buzz Pinkham, told stories from his boyhood, jumping from ice block to ice block on the river and feeling safe having people always looking out for one another.

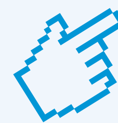
But how do such heartwarming anecdotes hold up against major developers who have the financial and political muscle to open new stores? "If community members have a shared vision that's been developed democratically, then they can hold their leaders accountable and stand up to commercial pressure," says Rosenbluth.

Those stories were combined with issue-specific workshops and a town survey to identify core community values, such as "having culture and nature in close proximity" and "living locally." Idyllic as the values may be, the process of arriving at them was not without friction; conflicts arose over the importance of inviting businesses and creating jobs versus preserving the small-town feel of the place. Those values were then incorporated into a design charrette to plan for growth in the town and eventually into the town's comprehensive plan, which covers principles of growth, land use, and so on.

In Damariscotta, storytelling played a role primarily in building trust between old-timers and newcomers and identifying shared values and vision. Since then, however, the foundation has started to explore how a continuous stream of stories could help in later stages of project planning and implementation. Rosenbluth says that Orton also has been collaborating increasingly with community foundations in the areas where they work to ensure that a community's values and outcomes are stewarded for the long term.

"The success of Orton is that people are still coming to the table," says Mary Kate Reny, a business owner in Damariscotta. In other words, the town has built capacity to decide on a shared vision for the future of their community. Another resident, river advocate Steven Hufnagel, adds: "I would want in 50 years, 100 years, for oysters to grow and thrive in the Damariscotta River. That would be a test of our water quality, but it would also be a test of our planning."

"Some stories are about the past, and some are about the future. We're interested in exploring how stories can be used to 'choose your future'—to evaluate alternative visions and choices that will drive community decisions."
—Betsy Rosenbluth



Watch a short video about Damariscotta's Heart & Soul community planning work.

ORGANIZE

NATION INSIDE / MEDIA DEMOCRACY FUND

OVERVIEW

Project summary: A web platform and story training program for people in the movement to challenge mass incarceration. Storytelling boosts people's personal investment, deepens organizing, and builds power for policy change.

Narrative challenge: Connecting people's personal stories to policy change and to larger challenges in the growth in incarceration in the U.S.

Evaluation metrics: Number of people trained and stories uploaded, movement growth, survey feedback, policy changes.

Websites: NationInside.org MediaDemocracyFund.org

Courtesy of Nation Inside

"Nearly everyone in America is connected to the criminal justice system, some more directly than others," says Nick Szuberla. "When you talk with people, the stories emerge—maybe they have a loved one who is incarcerated, or they live in a prison town, or teach in a school where kids are racially profiled by police."

Szuberla has been hearing those stories since 1998, when he started a weekly radio call-in show in the Kentucky coalfields for people to speak directly to their family and friends in the two super-max prisons within broadcast range of the station. Since then, he's produced radio, film, and theater projects on the nation's ever-growing population behind bars. His organization, Narrative Arts, has launched a project called Nation Inside, which partners with state and national campaigns on mass incarceration to marshal stories to push for policy change.

"Telling stories is not the first thing you'd think of to tackle this huge social problem. But it works," Szuberla claims. For starters, the organization trains partner campaigns in using narrative. Training topics include how to conduct story circles, shoot video, and get compelling testimonials. "First off, it's just plain fun to shoot a video on your phone, and post it online. People feel empowered, they see their voice really matters." As people share their stories—at Nation Inside events or on its web platform—they make connections. "They'll say, 'Oh, you have a son in prison on drug charges too?' And they'll realize that it's not just coincidence or bad luck that they're in that state.

"The challenge is to link people's personal stories to the national narrative about mass incarceration," he continues. That story? The country has been locking up youth, adults, and immigrants at an ever-increasing rate—most of them poor, people of color, and nonviolent drug offenders—even as crime has decreased. "This system has been decades, or really centuries, in the making," says Szuberla. "Social policy, racism, the profit motive have conspired to make the U.S. the world's largest jailer. The big story is how we got to this place and how we're going to get out of it."

In order to connect people to one another and the larger story of incarceration, Nation Inside hosts a story-driven web platform for its partner campaigns. Each campaign gets its own site under the Nation Inside banner, with pages for stories, actions, press, and more. People who contribute stories to a campaign feel more invested in it. Campaigns learn from those stories about what policy agendas to pursue. Campaign managers get access to database and email tools that they can use to organize. Stories beget stories, and campaigns build momentum over time.

It's not all easy going. "This is a personal and very painful issue for a lot of the people in the campaigns," says Szuberla. "There are plenty of obstacles to telling or gathering stories." Some people don't know what to say; others are worried about retribution from the justice system; many are intimidated by video; and some campaigns think it takes too much time to gather stories. "At every point, we try to remove obstacles," Szuberla explains. "Not all stories have to be public; sometimes it's enough to tell your story to one person at a conference. We provide video, text, and phone options for people to share their experience. We hold national gatherings to exchange strategies." Not least of all, the organization provides what Szuberla calls "pathways to action," so that tellers don't just air grievances but contribute to change. "This is an enormous issue," he explains. "To keep people motivated, we celebrate the small victories."

Nation Inside has attracted funding from beyond just the field of criminal justice. One such supporter is the Media Democracy Fund, which awards grants that "protect the public's rights in the digital age." "Digital policy—the policies that govern how people communicate—is tied to just about every issue you can think of," says MDF director Helen Brunner, ticking off examples such as economic development, the environment, and human rights. "We want to broaden the base of people involved in digital policy," she explains, which Nation Inside does by mobilizing constituencies such as people of color and low-income people. "And the Nation Inside platform facilitates the exchange of information and ideas. We want to support those structures because they enhance our democracy."

"Some people make media about organizing, and that's great. But increasingly, folks are realizing that making media is itself a form of organizing."
—Nick Szuberla

Listen to a series of short testimonials about the high cost of staying in touch with prisoners, part of the Campaign for Prison Phone Justice on the Nation Inside platform.

ORGANIZE

PUBLIC NARRATIVE / RAPPAPORT FAMILY FOUNDATION

Courtesy of Marshall Ganz

OVERVIEW

Project summary: Leadership framework devised by organizer and Harvard professor Marshall Ganz, adapted as a template by the 2008 Obama campaign for its volunteer teams, and now used by organizations worldwide. The New Organizing Institute has drawn heavily on Ganz's framework for its Public Narrative trainings and tools.

Narrative challenge: Creating an environment conducive to people being vulnerable in telling their stories, which is important because vulnerability leads to connection and commitment.

Evaluation metrics: For the New Organizing Institute, number of people trained, increase in leadership capacity of trainees, qualitative feedback in pre- and post-training surveys, and headway in engaging the progressive "emerging majority" of people of color and unmarried women.

Website:
MarshallGanz.com

"I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story." That's Barack Obama in his 2004 Democratic National Convention speech. No wonder that the speaker of these words, and the author of a thoughtful memoir, would have storytelling be a central part of his presidential campaign four years later. A template used for training of volunteer leadership teams in his 2008 campaign was devised by organizer and Harvard professor Marshall Ganz and was based on teams sharing the "story of self, the story of us, and the story of now." Ganz now teaches the practice—which he calls Public Narrative—to civic associations, community organizations, and advocacy groups worldwide.

For social-justice activists, the New Organizing Institute (NOI) offers online tools and two-day trainings in Public Narrative. NOI has done customized trainings for such groups as J Street, the Truman National Security Project, Greenpeace, and Planned Parenthood. The Rappaport Family Foundation made a grant for NOI to train community-college students (and future activists) in California. "We've got the most progressive generation of community college students in decades," says foundation vice president Catalina Ruiz-Healy. "We want to equip them to be lifelong activists. At NOI's Public Narrative trainings, students learn leadership skills they'll carry for a lifetime, and that means a high return on our investment."

Trainees learn how to tell their own stories to motivate others to action, how to coach others in telling their stories, and how to apply stories in stump speeches, at house meetings, on social media, and in other settings. NOI draws heavily on Ganz's frameworks in their trainings. In the following interview, Ganz discusses Public Narrative.

MARSHALL GANZ: "THE STORY OF SELF, US, AND NOW"

Marhsall Ganz is a senior lecturer in public policy at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He volunteered as a civil rights organizer in Mississippi, then in 1965 began a long tenure with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers, where he became Director of Organizing. He completed his Ph.D. in sociology in 2000.

Your interest in storytelling goes way back.

I grew up in California. My father was a rabbi, my mother was a teacher, and so I grew up in a world of story. Being raised in the Jewish tradition introduces you to story from when you are very young. The Haggadah at the Passover seder is called "the story," and the story is told as a response to four questions posed by the youngest person there. The whole deal is about telling the story so the next generation can learn it and interpret their own times in light of it.

How did this translate into your later work as an organizer?

When I got involved in organizing and the Civil Rights Movement and the United Farm Workers, again I found myself in the world of narrative in action. It became clear to me that there was this question of motivation that went along with the questions of strategy. Motivation—the sources of courage and solidarity and hope—was just as important as coming up with the right boycott target, because you couldn't do one without the other. So I began to see that there was head-work and heart-work that were required for the hand-work to be done—the actual organizing. And it was also clear to me that a piece of that heart-work was done in the form of narrative interpretation of what we were doing, of who we were, of who other people were, and where we were going.

You taught a class on "Organizing" at the Kennedy School of Government. From that you developed a course on "Public Narrative," which you began teaching in 2005. What were the underpinnings for it?

The course had these three components which for me went back to the questions of Rabbi Hillel, the first-century sage, which I'd learned about as a child: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am for myself alone, what am I? If not now, when?" That was the underlying framework to the story of self, the story of us, and the story of now. If you go back and read the account in Exodus about Moses and the burning bush, you will find the same three questions right there. And in Obama's 2004 Democratic National Convention speech, sure enough, there they were in the first seven minutes. What I've backed into here is a deep structure of how storytelling works in a leadership setting.

What was the role of Public Narrative in the 2008 Obama campaign?

Public Narrative was used in campaign training camps, called "Camp Obamas," and through that it became the basic template that the campaign used as a whole. Out of these two-day workshops would come leadership teams equipped to tell their stories, engage others, strategize, and all the rest of it. People would come to Camp Obama thinking that they were going to learn how to tell Barack's story or how to become policy experts. And the first thing was to learn to tell your *own* story about why you are here, and you will then be able to engage others and their stories, and out of that will come the "story of us," and out of *that* will come the motivation to deal with the challenge that we face now. People come thinking that they have a deficit and they are coming to a training to acquire assets they don't have; they leave realizing they have within their life experience what they need to be able to make an impact in the world. It's a very different kind of experience, and I think that's why it was so energizing.

You've said there's a difference between a community-organizing model and a nonprofit-service model. Is there a role for philanthropy in supporting Public Narrative?

One of the concerns I have is people using Public Narrative as a marketing device, because for me marketing is the opposite of movement building. Marketing is all about getting somebody to buy your thing, whatever it is. And movement building is all about enabling people to act on their thing and discern what their thing is by engaging with others. One of the unintended consequences of a lot of well-intentioned foundation support has been to sustain groups that wouldn't exist without the foundation. The real challenge of community organizing is that the community sustain it. How do you invest in developing leadership but not in creating dependency of that leadership upon you?

> "Public Narrative is a way of translating values into the motivation for action. It is one of a triad of leadership skills engaging the hands (action), the head (strategy), and the heart (narrative)."
> —Marshall Ganz

CORNERSTONE THEATER / FORD FOUNDATION

OVERVIEW

Project summary: Socially engaged theater company that involves L.A. residents and visitors as sources of dramatic material, actors, audiences, and participants in dialogue.

Narrative challenge: Making choices—the ones that characters make on stage, and the ones that the author and other artists make about what stories are, or are not, included in a given play.

Evaluation metrics: Number and demographics of people engaged, and qualitative feedback throughout the life of a project. The theater hosts reunions and other opportunities to glean the long-term impact, such as community projects that have sprung from its process.

Websites:
CornerstoneTheater.org
FordFoundation.org

Photo by John Luker

It's 2007, and tensions are running high at the day laborers' site on the corner outside the GIANT Hardware outlet in Los Angeles. One of the workers who frequents the site, Lalo, has been accused of and arrested for assault and robbery of a woman he worked for. Though the accusation is false, the GIANT store closes down the day laborers' site, causing more hardship for the already struggling workers there. Matters get even more complicated with conflicts among the workers, guards, police, and activists on both sides.

These events are inspired by real life, but, strictly speaking, they're a fiction—part of a bilingual Spanish-English play *Los Illegals*, written by Cornerstone Theater artistic director Michael John Garcés. The drama unfolds in a Pasadena parking lot, with a temporary trailer and surrounded by a chain-link fence; the audience sits in folding chairs in the center of the action. Like much of Cornerstone's work, the play is site specific, and was developed in close collaboration with the people it portrays (partners included the National Day Laborer Organizing Network).

Community members are not just audiences but participants in Cornerstone plays, from start to finish. Diverse "story circles" from the very beginning of the writing process inform the play and generate material. "If you provide a good space and a context," says Garcés, "people are usually eager to talk about what's going on in their lives and communities." Cornerstone is also careful to include diverse perspectives in the story circles—such as pro-life and pro-choice activists for a play on reproduction.

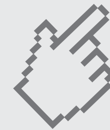
The company holds multiple readings of works in progress and invites community feedback. Much if not most of the cast of any given show is made up of community members, such as a homeless woman, a punk-rock musician, and a store clerk in the play *Attraction*. "In auditions we set people up for success and to have a good time, rather than to be judged. That creates good faith in the communities," says Garcés. "We're committed to being at that table for the conversation and to not changing anything in the play that someone might disagree with."

The dialogue extends to performances of the plays, when the company holds audience discussions on the social issues they raise. "Our play development process is an audience development process," says Garcés. "There's no real secret to the process; it's just very grassroots. That's Cornerstone's ongoing practice—to go out into the community, and to have art be a meaningful part of people's lives."

If this sounds like theater that's good for you—an obligation more than a pleasure—it's not. "There's a false dichotomy between social and aesthetic impact," Garcés says. "I evaluate our work the same as I would a show at Lincoln Center—is it good, does it excite me, does it bore me?" While other groups can use Cornerstone's methods to move a policy agenda or increase literacy, says Garcés, "that's not what we do. What we do is make socially engaged theater that will create dialogue."

Ford Foundation arts program officer Roberta Uno, herself a former longtime theater director, focuses on "developing and sustaining vibrant arts spaces." Cornerstone is a former grantee, and the theater's space is "all of Los Angeles," Uno says, which means the stories it tells are fully integrated into the very landscape. That fact embodies a central principle for Uno: "Art *is* the change we seek." It can be unnerving for grantmakers to experiment with funding socially engaged art, especially if they don't have specific impact measures. "But," urges Uno, "we should also be investing in these artists for what they do—and *that* is the experiment."

"The stories we tell ourselves are how we live in the world. It's incorrect to separate the stories we tell from how we act politically."
—Michael John Garcés



Watch this short video profile of community actor Renee Guntner, who had a role in Cornerstone's play SEED, part of its cycle of plays on hunger and food.

EDUCATE

NEIGHBORHOOD STORY PROJECT / PRIVATE FUNDER

OVERVIEW

Project summary: High school students and others report and write nonfiction stories from New Orleans, publish them in high-quality books, and earn royalties. Promotes media justice, and fosters civic dialogue on issues facing New Orleans.

Narrative challenge: Steering authors towards a place that's both truthful and healing.

Evaluation metrics: Number and diversity of its publications, total book sales (over 40,000 to date), continuing involvement of book authors in the organization, and such factors as the use of the books in the 9th-grade curriculum by the New Orleans Recovery School District.

Website: NeighborhoodStoryProject.org

Courtesy of Neighborhood Story Project

In 2003 a shooting at John McDonogh High School (JMHS) in New Orleans left one teen dead and several others injured. A reporter for the local newspaper interviewed two local students and the resulting story "twisted our words around," as one of the girls later said, making it sound as if they disliked the people involved in the shooting. The two girls' mothers feared for their safety and pulled them out of school for the remainder of the year. That prompted two teachers, Rachel Breunlin and Abram Himelstein, to do something better.

"Our stories, told by us." That's the slogan of the Neighborhood Story Project (NSP), which the two founded in 2004 and now codirect. The organization works with JMHS students to produce high-quality books of stories, interviews, and photographs about the places where they live and the people who populate them. The group has since expanded its practice of "collaborative ethnography" outside the schools and has produced other books, posters, and other publications that tell stories about New Orleans culture and life—workers at the local racetrack, or the Nine Times Social Aid and Pleasure Club, for example. Block parties are held to celebrate the release of each book or set of books, which have become citywide best sellers.

"What we do is part education, part citizen journalism, part civic dialogue—and all about justice," says Himelstein. The organization's curriculum first has students read books that place them on a continuum of citizen journalists. Then students are trained in writing, editing, interviewing, and photography and in "defining their own struggles," which Himelstein says is the stuff of all great literature.

Ownership of one's story is more than just academic for Himelstein. He self-published a novel at age 28, having been inspired by the "chutzpah" of his great-grandfather, who had published his own poetry and autobiography upon emigrating to the United States. NSP authors get royalties on their books (over $60,000 in royalties paid out to date), and some get speaking fees. "They're now seen as experts, and not just sources," Himelstein says.

That's a basic issue of media justice for Himelstein. "The people we work with have a fraught relationship with the media. Middle-class reporters go into poor neighborhoods and tell stories about them, and don't pay, and in fact use those stories to sell advertising and subscriptions. The more incendiary the stories, the more profitable the enterprise. We do the opposite: People tell their own stories, and tell them correctly, and get paid for it."

"The books help change New Orleans' conversation about itself," he continues, estimating that about 10 percent of the city's homes have at least one of the books. And the authors themselves, though few in number, are changed by their experience. One of the first authors, Ebony Bolding, is a mother now. "And as her daughter grows up, one of the things she will see her mother as is an author," says Himelstein. "And she will consider that to be among the jobs that are familiar to her family. I'm interested in the seeds that are sown by having these books exist."

Philanthropist Jamie Schweser worked with a group of funders to support social-justice efforts in the Gulf region after Hurricane Katrina. In order to recruit more funders to the group, Schweser would give out NSP books as an illustration of the issues they were trying to address. "You can tell people, 'Racism! Classism!' But if I could just hand a funder a book by a kid about the block they grew up on, they could see, 'These are people with stories like me.'" Though the group did not make grants to NSP, Schweser himself did fund them. For Schweser, the books were more than just a personal touch in a funding campaign, they're a demonstration of a central principle of his: "There's a false idea in philanthropy that philanthropists have what is needed, and we give it to people who need it. The truth is that we all have part of what's needed. Stories help philanthropists connect with other people in other places and understand the value."

"People are at work on creating and moving their own narratives forward, and hopefully creating lives of beauty and interest. Their time and energy is fundamentally meaningful, and their ownership of stories is at the crux of where that conversation should be."
—Abram Himelstein

VOICE OF WITNESS / PANTA RHEA FOUNDATION

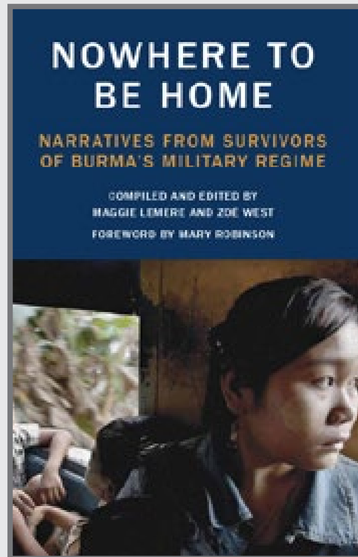
OVERVIEW

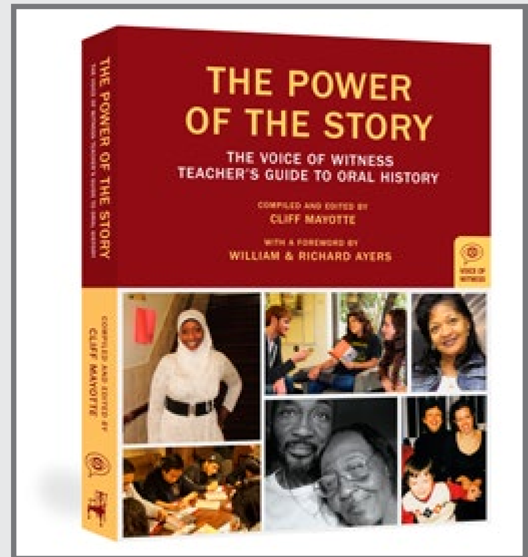
Project summary: Oral-history book series that educates a mass readership of students, teachers, and others on human rights crises; outreach is done via educational organizations, class visits, workshops, book talks, and other events.

Narrative challenge: Developing strategies with partner organizations and invested communities to ensure that the books have an ongoing positive impact.

Evaluation metrics: Number and diversity of audiences reached, books sold, and schools and organizations incorporating the books into their curricula and advocacy work.

Websites:
VoiceOfWitness.org
PantaRhea.org





Courtesy of Voice of Witness

Hla Min tells a story about when he was 9 years old. "It was a school holiday on the full moon day in November, and we were making a picnic. ... At around 8 p.m., one of my friends and I went out to buy some chicken. At that moment, an army truck came and took us." The two children were being taken as soldiers in the armed conflicts in Burma.

His account is one of 22 life stories in the book *Nowhere to Be Home: Narratives From Survivors of Burma's Military Regime*, compiled and edited by Maggie Lemere and Zoë West, for the Voice of Witness oral-history book series. Lemere recalls the interview, which took place in a dusty hotel room in southern Bangladesh when Hla Min was a teen: "We pulled together several chairs and sat in a circle. He spent the whole night speaking to us, because he knew he would have to return the next day to the tobacco farm where he worked, so this was his only chance to get his story out." There's a similarly urgent feel to many of the stories in Voice of Witness's growing catalogue of oral-history books about human rights crises around the world, such as undocumented workers in the U.S. or displaced people of Sudan.

The organization's executive director, Mimi Lok, says the books provide a "nuanced look," almost "novelistic" in their depth, so that readers "end up spending time with a person and their life experience over the length of a long-form narrative." This is vital to understanding human rights, which mean nothing unless one has a sense of the humanity of the people whose rights are being violated.

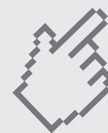
Voice of Witness's education program uses the stories in their book series to introduce teachers and students to socially relevant, oral-history-based curricula. Offerings include *The Power of Story*, a teacher's guide on oral history; "Amplifying Unheard Voices," a four-day oral-history workshop for educators and cultural workers; "Our Town, Our Voices Summer Lab," a two-week program for teens; and other supports such as consultations with teachers, classroom visits, specialized trainings, and lesson plans. To extend the reach and impact of its books, the organization is increasingly partnering with educational and rights groups such as Facing History and Ourselves, Aim High, Human Rights Watch, and the Fred T. Korematsu Institute for Civil Rights and Education.

The result: "For students participating in oral history for the first time, it can be a potent realization that history does not always emanate from the top down," says Voice of Witness education program director Cliff Mayotte.

For the Panta Rhea Foundation, the interest in Voice of Witness has to do with how the arts can enable young people to "open a space between the way things are and our desire for the way things ought to be," as the foundation website paraphrases educational philosopher Maxine Green. General operating support was used, among other things, for *The Power of Story* guide; and a project grant funded a collaboration between Voice of Witness and the Magnum Foundation to "use words and photos to bring the books to life in a new way—as visual poems," says Panta Rhea's executive director, Diana Cohn.

Panta Rhea assesses the organization's concrete progress—its publications, teacher support, partnerships, and organizational effectiveness. But the foundation also is curious about what other effects may surface in time. Cohn paraphrases Emily Dickenson, saying, "Imagination lights the long fuse of possibility." That may be the same spirit that animated a young Hla Min, who spent hours lighting a fuse with his words, one dusty, humid night years ago in Bangladesh.

"The first thing we encourage our interviewers to ask is 'What was your childhood like?' We're determined to represent the whole person and their whole life, so we start from the start. Otherwise the narrator can feel violated—that the only interesting thing about themselves is the fact that they were victimized."
—Dave Eggers, co-founder, with Lola Vollen, of Voice of Witness, as quoted on the Haas Jr. Fund website



Watch "The Words of Kyaw Zwar," the first short video by Voice of Witness and the Magnum Foundation.

ADVOCATE

STORIES OF CHANGE / SKOLL FOUNDATION AND SUNDANCE INSTITUTE

OVERVIEW

Project summary: A partnership between the Skoll Foundation and the Sundance Institute that supports films about social entrepreneurs and the global challenges they deal with.

Narrative challenge: Creating the mechanisms to successfully move film viewers through a "funnel" of engagement—to get them more and more deeply involved in the issue of the film.

Evaluation metrics: Quality of the film, size and demographics of the target audiences, cost-per-viewer expense, and specific outcomes pertaining to the issue that a film deals with.

Websites: Sundance.org SkollFoundation.org

Still by Nicole Newnham from *The Revolutionary Optimists*

"We talk about investing in, connecting and celebrating social entrepreneurs, in order to have a large-scale impact on the world's most pressing problems," says Sandy Herz, the Skoll Foundation's director of strategic alliances. "For us, celebrating is about storytelling, not about glorifying. It's about engaging people in the larger narratives of the world we could and should be living in, and how we get from here to there."

What better storytellers to team up with than the folks at the world-renowned Sundance Institute? Their collaborative five-year initiative, Stories of Change: Social Entrepreneurship in Focus Through Documentary, funds films about social entrepreneurship and convenes filmmakers and social entrepreneurs; the goal is "to create new possibilities in democratic practice and contemporary public thought." Skoll provides the money, the portfolio of social entrepreneurs, and convening opportunities at the Skoll World Forum; and the film experts at Sundance provide the storytelling expertise, foster connections at the Sundance Film Festival, and handle the day-to-day operations of the initiative. The partners communicate frequently on strategy.

The partnership with Sundance is just one of the more recent incarnations of a foundation-wide focus on storytelling. Skoll has developed a range of partnerships that have resulted in radio, television, print, and film treatments of pressing social issues and the social entrepreneurs who address them. These include a book series in partnership with HarperCollins; the PBS broadcast of the program *The New Heroes* about social entrepreneurs; a series of short films about Skoll award recipients; and other partnerships with the PBS *NewsHour*, NPR, and BBC World.

In the course of its storytelling work, Skoll developed the concept of a "funnel" of how a film can move audiences to progressively deeper action. In the case of the campaign around *The New Heroes*, the challenge was how to move people from the wide end of the funnel (seeing the program on PBS), to the middle section (attending any one of 1,600 house parties worldwide to watch the DVD), to the narrow end (at a house party, making a matched donation to the enterprises profiled in the film). Skoll learned from the *New Heroes* campaign that it hadn't been able to create "a logical progression from seeing the show, to visiting the PBS website, to signing up for a house party, to making a donation," says Herz. With that and other experiences, Skoll has learned to target audiences more precisely, determine outcomes for each point, and, where appropriate, to create the means for audiences to move more easily from the wide end of the funnel to the narrow end.

Skoll has carried these experiences into its Stories of Change work with the Sundance Institute. Cara Mertes, the director of the Documentary Film Program and Fund, says that foundations can be understandably nervous at times about funding media: "They *should* be asking questions before doing it." Mertes says she works with filmmakers to plan their engagement strategies at the earliest stages of making the film, so that story and impact are tightly woven together. That's something other grantmakers might consider too. "Funders like Sundance now give audience engagement grants at any time during the production cycle—potentially at the same time we give a grant to develop the film," she explains. "Yes, there have to be some stringent filters, so you're not supporting engagement on a film that will never get completed." Still, she says, it's critical to think about engagement and impact from the get-go.

All the better to get from here, where we are now, to "there," the world we envision.

"Most people need to see before they can believe, and nothing makes social change more real than a good story well told." —
Sandy Herz

ADVOCATE

WITNESS / OVERBROOK FOUNDATION

OVERVIEW

Project summary: Human rights organization that engages advocates, citizen witnesses, and key stakeholders in policy, law, media, and academia on the use of video to address diverse human rights issues around the world.

Narrative challenge: Ensuring that the changing media and technology landscapes better protect human rights, and that people using video to create change can do so safely and effectively.

Evaluation metrics: Number of training resources created, and activists and citizen witnesses trained and supported; adoption of new human-rights-friendly standards and practices in the technology and international criminal-justice fields.

Website: Witness.org

Photo by George Henton/Demotix

The 1991 beating of motorist Rodney King by Los Angeles cops might have been just another incident relegated to police logs had it not been for a witness. Standing on his apartment balcony, a man named George Holliday recorded the episode on his Handycam, and the resulting video quickly made its way onto TV screens worldwide, igniting public outrage over police brutality and racism.

The video's powerful impact helped propel an idea that musician and activist Peter Gabriel already had; WITNESS was formally founded in 1992 to "give cameras to human rights activists around the world," and has since grown into a much larger organization using what it calls "video advocacy."

"Stories are a critical part of our overall strategy on human rights," says WITNESS executive director Yvette Alberdingk Thijm. For a video clip to make sense—much less to effect change—she says it needs to be "put in the context of a larger story about a human rights situation." The video of the Rodney King beating, though not connected to WITNESS, demonstrates the point: It resonated precisely because it was widely understood as an example of a pattern of abuses by the L.A.P.D., or, using a wider lens, as part of a centuries-long history of institutional racism in the U.S. How a story is framed, then, shapes the impact that a witness's video will have.

From its inception, WITNESS worked to outfit human rights groups worldwide with video cameras, at a time when such equipment was more of a luxury; the organization soon started to complement the technology with hands-on training, so as to best support partner groups on their issue-driven campaigns. In the U.S., for example, the Elder Justice Campaign, conducted with the National Council on Aging, successfully used video stories to fight for elder-abuse protections to be included in health care reform. As the landscape changes yet again, WITNESS is shifting its focus once more.

"Our strategy has to keep pace with the changes in technology," says Alberdingk Thijm. In an era when people can shoot video on their mobile phones and distribute it online, access to technology is no longer the biggest challenge. Instead, she says, the big question is how to "work with allies to build a safer and more conducive 'ecosystem' for human rights."

To that end, WITNESS has developed soup-to-nuts resources that support the entire human rights field. These include a free online Video Advocay Planning Toolkit and curriculum, which includes a module on "Storytelling for Change"; the ObscuraCam and InformaCam phone apps made in partnership with the Guardian Project; successful advocacy for YouTube to add an anonymity feature to its platform; a partnership with Storyful on the YouTube human rights channel; an ever-growing archive of human rights video footage, and a guide to how to archive such footage; as well as a peer network and other programs to support video-for-change activists.

For the Overbrook Foundation, which funds human rights and environmental conservation, the interest in WITNESS springs from a belief that "the advocacy organizations that are going to have the biggest impact are those that are either making media, influencing media, or providing media tools and training to other organizations," says the foundation's president, Stephen A. Foster.

"In contemporary communications, you have to abandon the traditional ideas of big media mentions," he adds. "The question now is, how do you get your messages out to your constituencies, and how do you *hear from* those constituencies in ways that will bolster your work?" The better that WITNESS addresses such questions, the more George Hollidays will be equipped to expose—and contextualize—the Rodney King incidents happening worldwide.

"Millions of people use video to expose human rights abuses. For a video clip to have impact, it needs to be authenticated, seen by the right people, and put in the context of a larger story about a human rights situation." — Yvette Alberdingk Thijm

ADVOCATE

HEALTH MEDIA INITIATIVE / OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

OVERVIEW

Project summary: Media and communications support for grantees of the Open Society Foundations' Public Health Program; the stories empower the storytellers personally and make a case for policy change.

Narrative challenge: Creating the conditions so that members of marginalized groups participate in making the policy decisions that affect them, rather than them being given a voice in policy debates *only* to tell their personal stories.

Evaluation metrics: Content produced, exposure gained, change in policy or conditions, and the increased strategic communications skills of grantees.

Website: OpenSocietyFoundations.org

Courtesy of Here I Am Campaign

Stanislav "Stas" Tcaci is 15 years old and lives in Straseni, a village in Moldova. He studies geography, math, biology, English, and Romanian. "The only difference between me and other people," he says in a short flip-cam video shot by his brother, his mother, and himself, "is that I have physical problems, and they don't. But they may have other problems." The video is part of a larger media campaign by Keystone Human Services International Moldova Association (KHSIMA), which advocates for the deinstitutionalization of people with intellectual disabilities. The campaign is funded in part by the Health Media Initiative of the Open Society Foundations Public Health Program.

"For the participants who tell their stories on video, it's a lovely experience, and it's challenging personally," says Brett Davidson, director of the Health Media Initiative. "But that's not the reason we're doing it. The goal here is to support the advocacy effort." KHSIMA advocates for people with disabilities by raising awareness, promoting rights, fighting discrimination and stigma, and supporting "self-advocacy." A critical part of that effort is for people with intellectual disabilities to tell their own stories, for use in a media campaign and a film festival.

"The stories fit into an already existing strategy," says Davidson. "Whether it's to close the institution and reintegrate people back into regular schools, or change the government's policies, or raise money for community housing.

We need to hear from these children and their families in order to boost these efforts." For example, stories help allay teachers' fears about integrating children with intellectual disabilities into the classroom, or they persuade policy makers by using emotional arguments.

Moldovans with intellectual disabilities—or anyone else in programs funded by the Health Media Initiative—are not necessarily natural-born storytellers or videographers. In order to help grantees communicate effectively, Davidson contracted with two groups: a production company called Purple States that trained participants in producing video; and a group called Narativ, which trains people on how to listen and how to tell stories and envisions "a world connected through listening and sharing personal stories."

"When you tell a story, you make yourself vulnerable," explains Davidson. But self-empowerment is central to Narativ's methodology. "People can make choices about what they do or don't want to tell. Many people we work with are already very marginalized, so it's very powerful when they come to feel that their story is as important as anyone else's. They also help change the story that is told about them."

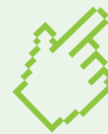
Purple States and Narativ have both worked with Health Media Initiative grantees worldwide. Purple States produced stories for the Here I Am campaign to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. And Narativ had sex workers from South Africa produce "story cards" as part of the campaign by SWEAT, Sisonke, and others to decriminalize sex work in that country. In both campaigns, the aim is to get the voices of people most directly affected into the policy debate.

The Public Health Program, of which the Health Media Initiative is a part, "is not a traditional health program," says Davidson. "We're more of a human rights program that works in the area of health," on issues such as access to essential medicines. The Health Media Initiative has a few of its own unique grantees but mostly provides technical assistance, training, and some media capacity-building grants to existing grantees in the various Public Health Program portfolios.

"We measure our success by the extent to which we are able to help grantees engage in strategic communication and media work—that is, start with strategy, and let strategy dictate their tools and tactics," says Davidson. "Too often it starts the other way around."

When storytelling is described as "powerful," this often implies an emotional resonance. But in the Health Media Initiative's work, it also points to political strength. "Storytelling is an empowering process in itself," says Davidson, "and the stories that come out of it can be used to help change policy."

"Simply presenting the 'evidence' will not bring about change. You first have to make people care about the problem. And that is what storytelling does."
—Brett Davidson

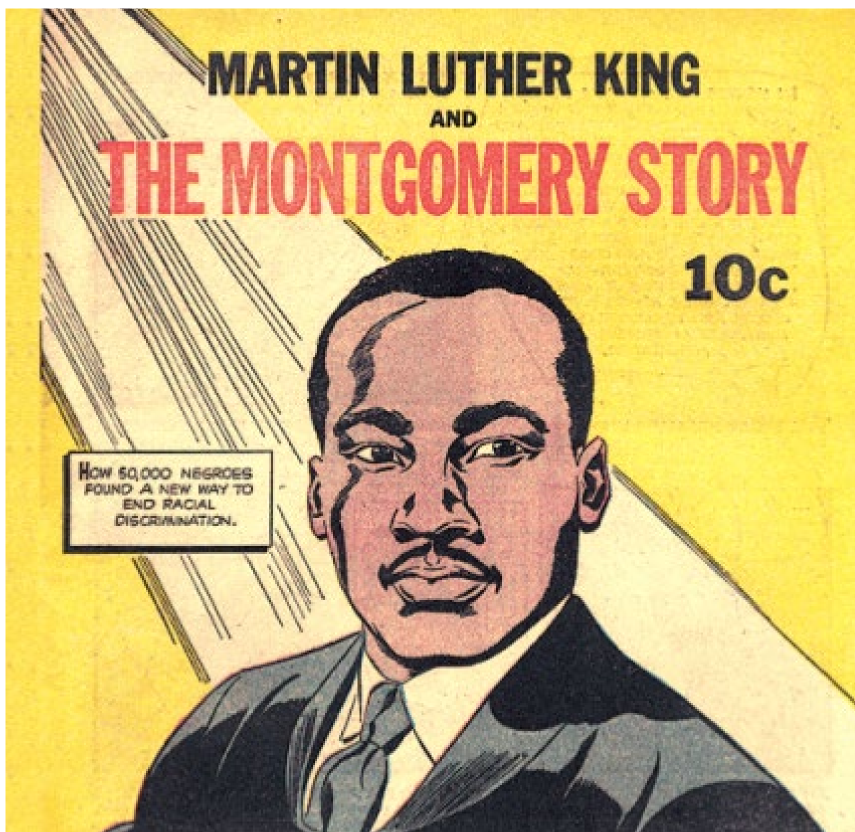


Watch Stanislav "Stas" Tcaci, a Moldovan teen with intellectual disabilities, tell his story in an OSF-funded project.

SNAPSHOTS

On the following pages are short write-ups of a handful of stories-for-change projects. These "snapshots" present another perspective on how groups use storytelling to learn, organize, educate, and advocate.

STORYTELLING AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN HISTORY



Courtesy of Fellowship of Reconciliation

Storytelling as a means of effecting social change has a long history. Consider just a few historical examples from the United States.

Slave narratives appeared during the antebellum period and beyond in the form of books, speeches, and sermons, catalyzing public support for abolition; Harriet Beecher Stowe's much-debated 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had a similar effect.

Many years later, slave narratives were recorded by the Federal Writers' Project, providing a training ground for socially conscious writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Studs Terkel, and Richard Wright.

In 1958, the Fellowship of Reconciliation published a 16-page comic book called *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story,* which documented that city's bus boycott and prompted readers to take action for racial equality. It has been translated into multiple languages, and the Arabic translation was used by Egyptian activists before the Arab Spring as a point of departure for discussion about nonviolent social change.

El Teatro Campesino was founded in 1965 amid the grape strike of the United Farm Workers and performed short skits in union halls and on flatbed trucks to dramatize the struggles of farmworkers and rally support for their cause.

BANKING ON STORIES

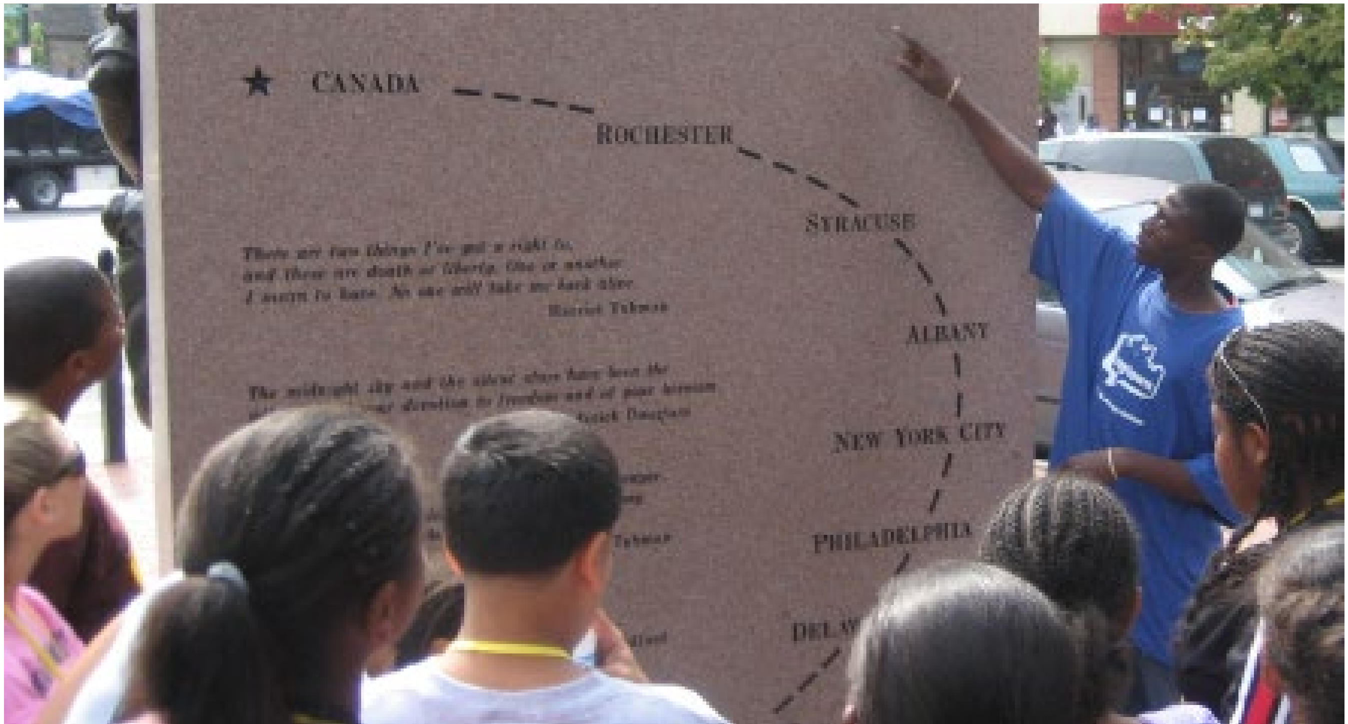
You never know when you'll need stories, Andy Goodman says by way of explaining the value of a "story bank." Consider how the following organizations bank and share stories to work with the press, raise funds, or develop a constituency.

Bolder Giving works to inspire and support people to give at their full lifetime potential. As part of that effort, the organization gathers stories of people from across the economic spectrum who give away large percentages of their money and shares these stories through its online story library and other means. Says cofounder and board member Anne Ellinger: "It's not our stories alone that create the change. Maybe someone hears nine stories of giving, and then our story, the tenth, just happened to tip the balance."

The Earned Assets Resource Network (EARN) provides matched savings accounts for low-income people saving for education, business, or housing; it's the stuff of drama. A grant from the Levi Strauss Foundation enabled the organization to build a "story engine" into its database, so the entry for each person—a saver, a donor, or other constituent—contained new fields about their story, public-speaking skills, and so on. EARN could now easily retrieve stories to respond to press inquiries, motivate savers, or cite in fundraising letters and on its website.

The National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH) uses stories in various ways. Its campaign ¡Soy Pderosa! (I Am Powerful!) asks supporters to be photographed holding signs on which they've written "Soy poderosa because…." Gathering these micro-stories helps the organization learn about and develop its base. "In our constituency, not everyone votes," says the organization's deputy director, Maria Elena Perez. "Stories are a way for them to make their voices heard in other ways."

MOVEMENT STORIES



A social change movement is defined in part by what stories it unites around. Whether as history or legend, the stories of movements are told, retold, contested, and continually adapted. The following projects use narrative to affirm the importance of movement organizing, and offer visitors the inspiration that comes from being part of history.

During its 15 years of operation, MYTOWN trained nearly 400 Boston youth to create and lead historical walking tours focused on the city's ethnic and immigrant communities, including their political activism. The tours inspired youth guides to see themselves as active participants in both writing and changing social movement history.

The GLBT History Museum in San Francisco tells not just one story but multiple stories on themes such as the search for companionship and the struggle for self-determination.

The Community Organizer Genealogy Project attempted to chart how organizers, especially in labor and economic justice, influenced and supported one another.

The ACT UP Oral History Project started as a corrective to the notion that Americans just "came around" to having compassion for people with AIDS, and asserts instead that thousands of people dedicated years of their lives to effecting a social transformation.

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience is a "worldwide network of historic sites, museums, and initiatives dedicated to remembering past struggles and addressing their contemporary legacies."

PIGGYBACKING ON POP CULTURE

Courtesy of the Harry Potter Alliance

Harry Potter defeated Lord Voldemort—a guy so evil you weren't even supposed to utter his name—through magic and smarts and help from his friends. A group called the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA) has mobilized legions of the fictional magician's fans to address real-world problems that might concern Harry himself—child labor, or anti-LGBT discrimination. HPA founder and executive director Andrew Slack has been awarded a Nathan Cummings Foundation Fellowship to launch the Imagine Better Project, which expands the organization's work to other popular books, films, and TV shows. They energized fans of the summer 2013 *Superman* movie to work on immigration reform, for example, given that the hero is an undocumented immigrant from the planet Krypton. "I call it 'cultural acupuncture,'" says Slack. "We look for where the energy is in the culture and try to redirect it to heal the body politic."

A similar principle was at play in another organization's work. The 2011 Hollywood film *The Help* was about a group of African American maids serving white families in 1960s Mississippi. Some considered the movie politically regressive; all the more remarkable, then, that the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) capitalized on public interest in the Oscar-nominated film with a campaign called Be the Help. That campaign invited moviegoers and others to help improve legal protections for the 2.5 million domestic workers in the U.S. The campaign included Oscar-watching parties nationwide, video stories of domestic workers, and social-media outreach, and it garnered coverage in pop-culture media such as *Entertainment Tonight*. Melanie Cervantes of the Akonadi Foundation, which supports the NDWA, says the campaign "piggybacked on a film that people were already talking about to publicize their campaign and expose the structural racism that domestic workers face. It's a strategy that other movement partners are learning from."

"I believe that for the Foundation's work to be successful, the Arts and Culture Program must work to change the zeitgeist, a necessary precondition for policy change. Storytelling is a powerful way to do that. We create the desire to act."

—Maurine Knighton, senior vice president of operations and program director, Arts and Culture, Nathan Cummings Foundation

GRANTMAKING

Storytelling can be a part of any grantmaker's portfolio and strategy. Here we look at how grantmakers can **EXPLORE** narrative strategies; **ENGAGE** with applicants and grantees; and **EVALUATE** programs in such a way as to generate valuable learning for grantees, grantmakers, and the field.

EXPLORE

TALK WITH CURRENT GRANTEES:

Where to begin with funding storytelling? One grantmaker suggests starting right in your back yard. "Ask your grantees," says Taryn Higashi of Unbound Philanthropy, "because some of them may already be using storytelling and can help grantmakers understand." She knows whereof she speaks. "It turned out that some of our community organizing grantees were using theater, music, art, and culture, but as our conversations with them had focused on other strategies, we didn't know about it."

Expand the conversation by inviting a narrative strategist to your next grantee conference, convening a group of issue advocates and filmmakers, or attending a story-related conference session.

MAKE EXPERIMENTAL GRANTS:

"You don't necessarily need a complete theory of change to get started," says a grantmaker who works on public-policy reform. "I've made some small experimental grants to media and storytelling projects. Even if some of the grants didn't turn out to be very high impact, they answered some questions I had about strategy."

Identify 2-3 strategy questions you would want to answer, such as ones addressing the effectiveness of different levels of engagement.

INTEGRATE STORYTELLING FROM THE START:

Storytelling can be used at any phase of grant-funded work; but grantmakers say that thinking about how to integrate it from the very start helps them identify opportunities for impact. Denise Brown is executive director of the Leeway Foundation, which funds women and transgender artists creating social change. "For some people, storytelling and other art forms are an afterthought. They might need a poster for their rally or a performer for their show"—in other words, someone to add sizzle to a plan they've already worked out. Those are legitimate needs, but Brown adds: "My question is, What would it be like to have a storyteller in the room when setting the agenda?"

Expand the conversation by convening a group of issue advocates and filmmakers, inviting a narrative strategist to your next grantee conference, or attending a story-related conference session.

DEVELOP A "STORY OF CHANGE":

How does change happen? And how do you as a grantmaker support that change? Answers to those questions might take the form of a theory of change. Or they might take the form of a story. Indeed, theories of change might just be abstract versions of deeply embedded narratives. Regardless, grantmakers might use storytelling to explore how they think change happens and therefore to develop a grantmaking strategy.

Write a story that illustrates how you think change happens and another story that tells of change happening in a very different way. Explore the differences in the characters, settings, conflicts, and endings.

ENGAGE

TELL THE FOUNDATION'S STORY:

Communicating the foundation's story—its values, history, priorities, and programs—can help attract a strong pool of applicants. Consider the example of the Kentucky Foundation for Women, which has two programs that offer arts-and-social-change grants. Executive Director Judi Jennings says that in her region "the community really nurtures the pace of storytelling and understands how you can make your point indirectly through storytelling"; that goes double for women and feminists, who Jennings says have a "dialogical" sensibility. Staff members tell the story of the foundation so well—such as at grant workshops around the state where staff and participants talk about their backgrounds—that the application process becomes almost "self-selecting," depending on whether prospective applicants can see themselves as part of the KFW community.

SOLICIT STORIES IN GUIDELINES:

Application guidelines might call for stories—in addition to whatever other materials—as another way to inform grantmaking decisions. The Leeway Foundation, which funds individual artists committed to social change, does just that. "We don't ask grant applicants for a résumé," says Executive Director Denise Brown. "Instead, we ask them to tell stories about up to 10 experiences that were transformational for them. It could be personal, professional, political, anything. Applicants rarely write about jobs, but instead they might tell stories about a trip, or their childhood, or maybe their first experience of racism. I'm always humbled by how much people share."

CONSIDER YOUR TYPE OF ENGAGEMENT:

Below are described four overlapping facets of stories-for-change work that grantmakers can support with funding and/or technical assistance.

TYPE OF ENGAGEMENT	EXAMPLES
Research Research on narrative strategies and activities.	The Opportunity Agenda's research on effective framing and messaging. Animating Democracy's Arts & Social Change Mapping Initiative.
Storytelling Creation and distribution of films, books, plays, etc., or the facilitation of popular storytelling.	Films and engagement campaigns in the Stories of Change partnership. Orton Family Foundation's Heart & Soul community planning method.
Infrastructure Systems, structures, and policies that support safe and effective storytelling.	Nation Inside's story-sharing platform on mass incarceration. WITNESS phone apps to support and protect video-for-change activists.
Training and convening Online and offline work that helps groups share ideas and tell effective stories.	New Organizing Institute's Public Narrative trainings and tools. Creative Change retreat on culture-change strategies.

DEPLOY THE FOUNDATION'S COMMUNICATIONS STAFF:

It's not just grantees but also grantmakers who can tell stories. The Pittsburgh Foundation, a community foundation, uses storytelling to support grantees and to engage donors and the broader community. Christopher Whitlatch, the manager of marketing and communications, says the foundation ponied up for flip cams and storytelling workshops so that grantees could tell their own stories; those stories needed a distribution platform, so the foundation sponsored an online nonprofit news magazine called *Unsung*. They also wanted to take the pulse of the community they were serving, so Whitlatch—a fan of the Moth's storytelling podcast—organized live storytelling events called "Tell Me Pittsburgh," on themes including struggle and hope. The foundation also collects donor stories, which it then puts in ads in newspapers, bus shelters, and elsewhere, under the banner of "The Face of Giving." Says Whitlatch, "We have less money than some other foundations to spend on pushing an issue, and we can rally other resources by telling stories."

EVALUATE

IDENTIFY WHERE IMPACT CAN BE OBSERVED:

Interviewees for this guide offer a word of caution: It is difficult, even impossible, for grantees to conclusively answer broad questions about their impact, such as "How has the zeitgeist on same-sex marriage changed because of your film?" Instead, grantmakers might identify more specifically where impact can be observed. Animating Democracy—a program of Americans for the Arts that fosters civic engagement through arts and culture—has created a framework for understanding the "Social Impact Indicators" of the arts. Examples of each category of change come from case studies in this guide.

- **Knowledge:** People gain new awareness and understanding. **Example:** Participants in a Cornerstone Theater Company production learn about immigrant communities.
- **Discourse:** People communicate in new ways, whether through deliberation, dialogue, or media. Example: The Neighborhood Story Project's books and public events generate grassroots dialogue about issues facing New Orleans.
- **Attitudes:** Individuals change how they think and feel. **Example:** Young LGBT viewers of the It Gets Better Project videos feel more hopeful about their futures. Often, attitudinal change is a precursor to action—those LGBT youth will commit suicide at lower rates—but it can also be a social good in its own right.
- **Capacity:** People experience a change in what they can have and do, be it social capital, leadership, creative skills, or civic engagement. **Example:** The Orton Family Foundation's "Heart & Soul" method for community planning helps foster new community partnerships.
- **Action:** Individuals behave in a new way, such as by voting, donating, volunteering, taking some other positive action, or stopping a harmful action. **Example:** The OSF-funded organization KHSIMA has a story-driven campaign that may help teachers integrate students with intellectual disabilities into the classroom, or prompt the students' classmates to act more tolerantly towards them.
- **Policies:** Corporations, governments, or other entities change their policies, procedures, or practices—all of which affect what and how change is sustained. **Example:** Nation Inside hosts a story-driven campaign that is pushing for policy changes that will lower what some call the "exorbitant" rates of phone calls between prisoners and their loved ones.

Depending on the type of impact, the mechanisms of evaluation may include surveys, focus groups, comments on social media, voting patterns, web traffic data, fundraising data, or reviews of policy changes.

MERGE DATA AND STORIES:

When it comes to appraising and demonstrating impact, "stories don't do it on their own, and numbers don't do it on their own," according to Wendy Levy, an expert in art, technology, and social justice. Levy co-founded Sparkwise, a free web platform that enables users to combine raw numbers with video, audio, and text to tell a data-supported story about impact. Stories help us filter and judge the data we're constantly receiving, says Andy Goodman, head of the communications consulting firm The Goodman Center. "A good analogy is a courtroom," he says. "Research shows that jurors reach decisions by weaving stories, and by what makes sense or doesn't make sense in the context of that story. Story is what gives data meaning." Given that relationship, funders might ask grantees to put their evaluation data in the context of a story.

HELP GRANTEES IDENTIFY PROBLEM POINTS ON THE "STORYLINE":

Many storytelling projects report facing similar challenges along a continuum that we'll call the "storyline." Grantmakers can provide encouragement, technical support, and additional monies for grantees to "bake" evaluation into the work of storytelling at any point along this continuum, so that they can gather data that will be useful to themselves and the entire field. For example, a foundation might lend its staff technologist to a story-sharing website so that the organization could judge at exactly what points users decide to get more deeply involved and exactly when they opt out.

STORYLINE

TELL	SHARE	ACTIVATE
Narrative Challenges	**Narrative Challenges**	**Narrative Challenges**
Reluctance or inability of people to tell personal stories. Uncertainty of grantees about what stories they need. Lack of time, space, and money for professional storytellers to work.	Lack of adequate mechanisms or venues to share stories. Dangerous conditions for sharing stories. Poor sense of who needs to tell, hear or share in stories.	Failure to connect personal stories to larger social issues. Shortage of "pathways to action" that lead from story to action. Lack of partnerships to create sustainable change.
Grantmaker Role	**Grantmaker Role**	**Grantmaker Role**
Support professional storytellers, and storytelling trainings.	Support media infrastructure, safety measures, and narrative strategy.	Support strategy development, and encourage partnerships.

HAVE GRANTEES ANSWER A NARRATIVE-STRATEGY QUESTION:

Many grantmakers are understandably concerned about overwhelming their grantees with data-collection requirements; however, such requirements might be less burdensome if they prompted the grantee to generate useful data for themselves, the grantmaker, and the field. For this reason, grant application guidelines could call for applicants to state a question about strategy or tactics that they will address over the life of their project. (Such questions might originate with the grantmaker or the applicant.) Applicants might propose to address such questions as: What kinds of stories raise the most money in funding appeals? What types of activities most empower "citizen journalists"? What storytelling media (web video, cell-phone stories, a call-in line) are most effective in communicating with target audiences? Such questions could also be phrased as hypotheses. Regardless, organizations would then collect the appropriate evaluation data to answer those questions or hypotheses. The results could be published on grantmakers' websites, or assembled together with the outcomes of other foundations' grantees, adding to collective knowledge for the field.

INSIDE STORY: WHAT GRANTEES WANT TO TELL GRANTMAKERS

Some organizations (not the ones featured in case studies) shared their thoughts anonymously on such topics as applications and reporting; funding priorities; impact; and relationships with funders. Some quotes are composites.

APPLICATIONS AND REPORTING

Many organizations know the language of story but not the language of foundations. Support applicants by putting concrete examples of desired outcomes on your website or by hosting a webinar on the application process.

Writing a lengthy grant report that we're pretty sure no one will do anything with is frustrating. What might be more useful is to agree in advance with funders on reporting about something that actually concerns our work.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH FUNDERS

Grantmakers should know the stages of making a movie and at what points they'll be consulting on a funded project. The same goes for other kinds of story projects.*

As an organization that works on public policy, we need additional money to learn to tell stories about the work that we do. It doesn't come naturally.

FUNDING PRIORITIES

Foundations have a bias toward large organizations. My own bias would be to support lots of small, local storytelling projects, even if it's through an intermediary. It's more democratic that way and more likely to spur innovation.

Read *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* for a critique of the "nonprofit industrial complex." Paul Kivel's chapter asks readers to explore their own personal stories about class and social-justice struggles.

IMPACT

A film, play, book, or story-bank needn't follow a "party line" to have an impact on the funder's program area. There is value in letting stories unfold in a more complex fashion.*

Yes, we know how many people take part in a story training or post a video. But the impact we have doesn't often fit into the narrow categories that foundations indicate.

Grantmakers seem to have a relentless focus on innovation. I'm as curious as anybody about the new storytelling apps and websites, but sometimes the old ways work best. Effectiveness first, innovation second.

*Adapted from *The Prenups* by Active Voice; see resource listing at end.

TELLING TO WIN: HOW ONE FOUNDATION DECIDED TO SUPPORT STORY

"The Compton Foundation had a history of good grantmaking in peace, the environment, and reproductive rights," says Executive Director Ellen Friedman. The foundation admired and even loved its grantees. And yet board members weren't seeing the social or environmental change they envisioned, Friedman recalls. "The bottom line was, we weren't winning." So Compton embarked on a change of its own.

"What's the most inspiring social-change work you see happening, whether or not Compton has anything to do with it?" That's the question a facilitator asked the foundation's board in 2011.

Many of the examples that arose had to do with culture change—dramatic shifts in the public's hearts and minds on issues the family foundation had addressed since 1946.

Over the course of a strategic-planning process, the board arrived at a new two-prong strategy that would focus on "transformative leadership" and on "courageous storytelling" about "who we are, how we should live, and our purpose on this planet."

As of this writing, the foundation is in the middle of a two-year experiment to test the new strategy. Grantees include storytelling projects like Exhale's national Pro-Voice speaking tour, intermediaries such as Air Traffic Control, and more "experimental" endeavors such as MapLight's work to tell the story of the influence of money on politics.

"The hardest part of this is letting go of our previous grantees that just don't fit with the new focus," says Friedman. The flip side of that challenge has been for the foundation to articulate exactly how it sees storytelling as a strategy rather than just an activity. "We're trying to create a climate of trust with our grantees so that we can all learn together," Friedman explains. "Culture change is a long-term strategy."

"THE BIG STORY": ALAN JENKINS AND THE OPPORTUNITY AGENDA

Courtesy of the Opportunity Agenda

Alan Jenkins is executive director and co-founder of the Opportunity Agenda, and former director of human rights at the Ford Foundation. The Opportunity Agenda builds "the national will to expand opportunity in America" and works with partners to "tell a new story to the American people." It achieves this through communications, media, research, training, and policy advocacy.

The Opportunity Agenda works with both "narrative" and "messages." What's the difference?

Narrative is the big story with strong themes and values that are repeated over and over again. So if I were to say to you, "This election is a classic David versus Goliath story," I don't have to explain much more to you; you might have to figure out who's David and who's Goliath, but you know there's a hero and a villain. The same is true with social issues. On the issue of immigration, the anti-immigrant narrative is law and order, and scarce resources. We've worked with advocates and policy makers to develop a pro-immigrant narrative, which has to do with practical solutions, upholding our nation's values, moving forward together, the idea that immigrants are already part of us. That's the big story, but then there are lots of specific messages coming out of that. So one message might be, "We can't deport 11 million people; we need to move toward things that are actually going to work." There could be a thousand different ways of articulating those [narratives], so that, for us, is the difference between narrative and message.

So these larger narratives are flexible and can be used in different situations?

Yes. For example, "practical solutions" is a narrative element that cuts across lots of different issues; it's relevant in immigration, in racial inequity, the economy, job creation, fixing our criminal justice system. Americans are looking for practical solutions. Similarly, the "limited government" narrative that conservatives have had, they've managed to apply to hundreds of different issues—from taxes to welfare reform and the like. So there are certain key stories that are broadly applicable.

In one area of your work, you promote "accurate and positive" stories of African American men and boys, and you make public the structural barriers that they face. Are there stories that are both positive and about structural barriers?

One kind of story is the "enlightened insider," about someone inside a system; he or she is a health-care provider, or a pastor, or a community organizer, and looks around and sees that there's a structural problem that needs to be addressed. Another type of positive structural story is the "empowered change agent." Rosa Parks would be an example of that. Or some of us are old enough to remember *Norma Rae*, the movie. *Erin Brockovich* is a more recent example. This person starts out as a worker or homemaker, looks around and realizes her kid has cancer at a young age, lots of kids in their community have cancer, there are fumes wafting over from the factory nearby, there's a toxic-waste dump, a light bulb goes on that we're getting targeted for all of the toxic waste in our community. She then organizes her community to oppose it. That's a positive story of people overcoming systemic challenges. Whether or not she ultimately wins in her struggle, the struggle is still about a structural problem that requires a structural solution.

"CREATIVE CHANGE"

"Part of the Opportunity Agenda's DNA is changing hearts and minds. One way you do that is through culture, writ large," says Betsy Richards, the organization's creative fellow, and coordinator of its Creative Change Initiative. (Richards is also a former program officer in the Media, Arts and Culture program at the Ford Foundation.)

Creative Change convenes, connects, and supports artists, media makers, and advocates to develop shared visions and strategies for positive social change. As part of that undertaking, each year Creative Change invites a select group of people to a retreat that features an inventive mix of performances, panel discussions, pop-up exhibits, cultural collaborations, and more. The retreat includes what Richards calls "an incubation space" for ideas and projects that will tilt the culture in favor of greater and more equal opportunity in the U.S.

More than a few of the artists who have participated in Creative Change work in narrative forms. Alumni include playwright Cassandra Medley (*Cell*), author Gan Golan (*The Adventures of Unemployed Man*), filmmaker Angad Singh Bhalla (*Herman's House*), comedian Negin Farsad, singer-songwriter Toshi Reagon, novelist and journalist Amitava Kumar (*Nobody Does the Right Thing*), and hula-dance master Vicky Holt Takamine, who talked about storytelling.

"At the Opportunity Agenda," says Richards, "we support the notion that in order to change policy, you need to change the culture—you need to change the stories we tell."

CONCLUSION

Though it may not always feel this way (especially in the midst of preparing program budgets), grantmakers are engaged in struggles so dramatic as to attain the level of myth. No matter how great the resources any foundation brings to bear, they often pale in comparison to the immensity of the challenge. David meets Goliath.

Funders who were interviewed for this guide are anxious to win the battles they're fighting. In fact, it was a recurring theme. The other big question from interviewees was about evaluation; many find storytelling pretty slippery stuff, and they wanted to understand how they could *know* that it would help them win.

In an effort to address these concerns, grantmakers and storytellers are reaching out productively in all directions. They're interested in...

stories that are at once personal and grand, from first-person testimonials to glosses on national history.

methods that involve preaching to the choir (clergy do it every week) and reaching beyond it by connecting with people in unexpected moments and social spaces.

technologies old and new, from face-to-face story circles to oral history books to cell phone journalism, that are treated as means and not ends.

funding that is concerned with the prosaic realities of people's lives, as well as the desires and narratives that make those realities meaningful.

evaluation that is both artful and scientific, that allows magic to happen even as it uses numbers and neuroscience to understand how people respond to stories.

The Narrative Arts website is a place for grantmakers and storytellers to come back to after their explorations. What's the future we will create through our stories? And what's the future of storytelling and social change? Please join us at www.NarrativeArts.org to add to and learn from the collective wisdom on these vital questions.

AFTERWORD

In over 15 years as a grantmaker, I've been privileged to work closely with a number of the groups discussed in this terrific guide and to oversee many grants for film, radio, theater, and many other forms of capturing the rich stories of communities worldwide. As the chair of the board of StoryCorps, the national oral-history initiative, I am keenly aware of the transformative power of stories both in our own lives and in the larger civic discourse. I hope you'll use this guide as a basis for conversations about how to leverage that power.

To ground your work in the personal. Accountability and integrity have been key issues since the birth of institutional philanthropy. One way for grantmakers to foster those values is to ground their work in the personal. From my early days at the Open Society Foundations, we gathered all staff around a table, from the receptionist to the program officer, to share their personal stories about the issues we were dealing with in our grantmaking—from school to immigration to health.

To learn how to affect large cultural narratives. At OSF and the Atlantic Philanthropies, we were trying to effect big changes in public policy, and to do that, changes in public attitudes and understanding. Our grants to, say, a youth-media initiative were made not only to support participants and their communities but also to affect a larger public narrative that said urban youth of color were dangerous and dysfunctional. The act of telling stories through media was itself valuable, and our grantees were able to shift the narrative to show what terrific capacities these young people had.

To demonstrate impact. We've seen an increasing focus in philanthropy on metrics and outcomes. Not only are data and storytelling complementary, but all the data in the world is useless if those collecting it do not use it to tell a story: How are immigrants enriching the communities they join? What impact has school reform had on the daily lives of students and their parents? What changes are we seeing as a result of a job-training program? Demonstrated impact is not a substitute for storytelling—it is the story.

These are a few of the ways to use this guide. You might also use the case studies and advice contained here as a tool to educate your board and staff colleagues; learn more about grantees' communications strategies; or solicit reactions and ideas from the communities you serve. Storytelling is central to all aspects of grantmaking. Foundations and grantees have great stories to tell and an urgent need to tell them; through these stories we can envision and bring about a more just world.

Gara LaMarche is a senior fellow at New York University's Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service. Previously he has served in leadership positions at the Atlantic Philanthropies, the Open Society Foundations, Human Rights Watch, and the American Civil Liberties Union. Learn more at his blog or at NYUWagner.

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MYTOWN
Nathan Cummings Foundation
Nation Inside
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Storytelling Network
Native Americans in Philanthropy
Neighborhood Story Project
New Organizing Institute

Open Society Foundations
Opportunity Agenda
Orton Family Foundation
Overbrook Foundation
Panta Rhea Foundation
Pittsburgh Foundation
Provisions Library
Rappaport Family Foundation
Reader's Digest Partners for Sight Foundation
Resource Generation
Rockefeller Foundation
Seventh Generation Fund
Skoll Foundation
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