

TIP SHEET

How to share your library's stories

Every organization that is true to its values has hundreds of good stories. A good story has qualities of emotion, truth and meaning that lift the words up to a story that people will remember. A good story can change minds – and hearts – and get people to take action.

Libraries do have great stories, but...

Yes, libraries do have great stories to tell. But the problem is often with the telling. Stories laced with jargon, acronyms, and statistics can become unrecognizable. To make an impact, our stories must show how real people and families are helped by using the library.

Why is storytelling so powerful?

Stories can inspire and engage people and change the way people think about things. Stories are the single most powerful form of communication because of:

History – Storytelling is what separates humans from the apes. To know and to tell stories is to become an adult in the civilized word.

Identity – We tell stories to describe ourselves and to find out who we are. Our identity is wrapped up in the stories we tell. We listen to and share stories as a way to emotionally connect and identify with each other.

Memory – Stories help us remember. People are more likely to remember facts if they are embedded in a story.

Stories can help create passionate advocates, attract patrons and funding dollars, and re-energize loyal supporters.

What makes a good library story?

1 A good story introduces us to *people like us*.

We need a protagonist — someone we can follow through the story. (Remember, an organization is not a protagonist.) To say *our library values patrons* is too vague to inspire people. But if you tell a story about how you helped a specific patron, you begin to show by actions what this means.

2 A good story includes details.

In storytelling, details serve as proof. They increase believability and persuasiveness. If you want to connect with your audience, set up your story with a few details about the situation, the characteristics of the person, or the timeframe.

3 A good story has a structure that is easy to follow.

A story is more than a sequence of events. A good story will tell us: *What was it like? What happened? What is it like now?*

Put another way, stories answer these questions: *Who is this story about? What does this person want? Is there anything that stands in this person's way? How does this person get past it? What's the meaning or the payoff?*

4 A good story is heartfelt and real.

The best advice is to be yourself. Share stories that you can personally connect with and that you enjoy telling.

How to Create a Storytelling Culture

1 Look, listen, be ready

Stories are all around us. Sometimes we forget to listen. Keep your antennae up, and be ready to hear the stories of how your patrons are using your library. Stories can honour the small moments; they don't have to be heroic or sensational to be compelling.

2 Encourage storytelling amongst staff and volunteers

Set aside staff time each week to share stories with each other. What's happened during the past week? How has the library helped patrons? What's been the pay-off?

3 Decide how you want to use stories

Think about how your library will share your story. Will you write it? Speak it? Live it? Simply talking about how your library helps people can engage new supporters.

4 Invite patrons to share their stories

You can collect stories from patrons in a myriad of ways, both formally and informally. It starts with asking the question: How has the library helped you and your family? Ask patrons if they'd be willing to write their story down or send it via email or an online form. Be prepared to do an impromptu interview if the opportunity presents itself.

5 Create a Story Bank

A story bank is the actual place where you archive stories so that they are accessible. Your bank can be located in a file or Word folder, an Excel spreadsheet, a database, or in any location that you find easy to work with. Ideally, your bank will be filled with stories and testimonials from people who praise and support your library. These stories can then be used when you want to communicate with donors, funders, members, the community, and the media.

Before you add a story to your bank, ask the contributor this question up front: "May we share your story with the public?" You have a responsibility to those whose stories you have been entrusted with, so make sure their comfort and privacy are respected. Always secure permission before releasing someone's story and personal information.

Good Questions to Ask

- * *How have libraries helped you?*
- * *What's your best memory at the library?*
- * *Why do you visit your library?*
- * *Has a library changed your life?*
- * *What's your story?*



Ways to incorporate Storytelling into your library communications:

- ◆ Weave stories into your presentations
- ◆ Share stories at board, Friends, and council meetings
- ◆ Share stories in your annual report, brochures, blog, newsletters, website, and grant applications
- ◆ Use stories to promote specific programs and services
- ◆ Submit your library stories to *Quatrefoil*, where they will be shared on the web and with a distribution list of nearly 200 people