

# DEVELOPING A SUCCESS STORY



This guidance provides an overview to help you develop success stories to highlight your program's achievements. A success story can be a powerful tool to communicate your program's accomplishments and garner support from current and potential partners, decision-makers, and funders. Including success stories in your program evaluation can strengthen your communication of findings, as they illustrate, personalize, and give meaning to data and facts.

## WHAT MAKES A COMPELLING STORY?

Compelling success stories are memorable, relatable, and inspiring. They touch your audience at an emotional level and motivate them to take action. Good stories show change and paint a mental picture of how this change is making a positive difference in people's lives. As you write your program's success story, keep your audience in mind, and consider the most effective way to convey your story in a way that matters to your audience and inspires them to become involved in your program's efforts.

## WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?

Identify your audience before you begin writing a success story. Recognize their interests, needs, and concerns. What is important to them? What do they care about? What achievements will be meaningful to them? Your audience can include:

- » Current and potential partners
- » Decision-makers
- » Funders

## SUCCESS STORY CRITERIA

Success stories should be concise, informative, focused, and impact-oriented. Consider including the following components when developing your program's story:

## TITLE

This is your first opportunity to grab your reader's attention. A good title is simple, jargon-free, and captures the overall message and success of the story. Use an action verb to bring your story to life.

## SUMMARY

Think of this as your "elevator speech." Provide a quick overview of your story, including key points about the challenge, solution, and results. Present the most exciting and compelling information.

## ISSUE/CHALLENGE

Describe the health issue being addressed. Clearly explain why this issue is important. Use state or local data to make the information relatable to your audience. Make sure to consider the following:

- » Focus on a single issue.
- » Use data to describe the problem, including health and economic burden.



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- » Specify affected or vulnerable population(s) impacted.
- » Share testimonies or stories about individuals personally affected.

## INTERVENTION/SOLUTION

Describe the intervention or activity that was implemented. In detail, describe the specific steps and components of the intervention, including the following information:

- » Description of target audience.
- » **WHERE** and **WHEN** it took place and **HOW** it addressed the problem.
- » **WHO** was involved, including major partners who were critical in achieving accomplishments.
- » Use of innovative approaches and culturally tailored activities.

## RESULTS/IMPACT

Present key outcomes that demonstrate how the intervention or activity had an impact (e.g., policy change, number of people reached) on the issue. Be sure to consider the following:

- » Use numbers to quantify your results and outcomes.
- » Contextualize your data and discuss implications to put results into perspective.
- » Include quotes, personal stories, or testimonies to show impact.
- » Provide conclusions that help wrap up the story in a convincing manner.

## SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

Describe how the program is planning to build on this story's success. What are the next goals and steps, and how does your program plan to achieve those goals?

## YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Indicate how your reader can become involved in your program's efforts. What would you like them to do after reading your story?

## FORMATTING TIPS

- » Two-page success stories can be easy to read while providing enough detail about the program; however, consider your audience and the purpose of your story to determine the best format and length.
- » Keep paragraphs short. Consider using bullets to break up blocks of text and to highlight important points.
- » Consider using graphic displays of your data and photos that complement your story to make it more visually engaging.
- » Avoid wordiness; use plain language.
- » Include references to data or publications cited.
- » Provide contact information for your organization.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- » [Success Story Desktop Publishing Tool](#) – National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP)
- » [Impact and Value: Telling your Program's Story](#) – Division of Oral Health, NCCDPHP



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For more information, contact Rene Lavinghouze, OSH Evaluation Team Lead at [Rlavinghouze@cdc.gov](mailto:Rlavinghouze@cdc.gov). Additional OSH surveillance and evaluation resources are available at: [http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tobacco\\_control\\_programs/surveillance\\_evaluation/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tobacco_control_programs/surveillance_evaluation/index.htm)