

TELLING YOUR STORY

A TOOL FOR CREATING A SUCCESS STORY

Prepared for:



Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Maine Department of Health and Human Services

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SUCCESS STORIES

A success story is a narrative – usually between one and two pages – highlighting the achievements and progress of a program / intervention. Success stories do many things. They -

- ✓ Document program improvement over time.
- ✓ Demonstrate the value of the program activities.
- ✓ Educate stakeholders about the outcomes of your work and the results you are achieving.
- ✓ Educate decision makers about the impact of your program – the more educated policymakers are about your program’s goals, activities, and successes, the more likely they are to support your program.
- ✓ Share your achievements.
- ✓ Share ‘best-practices’ with similarly-funded programs.
- ✓ Attract new partners for collaboration.
- ✓ Show movement in your program’s progress over time, its value and impact.
- ✓ Serve as a vehicle for engaging potential participants, partners and funders.
- ✓ Are a basic tool in your comprehensive “tool box” of products used to promote your program and tell your story.
- ✓ Are an effective means to move beyond the numbers and connect to your reader; a cause they can relate to and want to join.
- ✓ Provide the opportunity to step back and celebrate achievements both big and small.
- ✓ Put a “face to the numbers” of surveillance, research, and evaluation data by bringing to life a program’s impact at the street level. What does it really mean when you report that you have provided “X” amount of services to “Y” amount of people? How are the lives of the program participants changed because of your services?
- ✓ Facilitate learning for all staff through the collection process.

CREATING YOUR SUCCESS STORY

The following format is based on the US CDC’s guidance for developing success stories, particularly the CDC’s Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH) “How to Develop a Success Story” and the CDC’s Division of Oral Health’s “Impact and Value: Telling Your Program’s Story”. References for both are included in the Resource List at end of document.

Choosing an Intervention / Program

Some programs / interventions are easier to use to describe success stories. These tend to be programs/interventions at a more mature state of implementation. If you choose to use a newly implemented intervention / program as your success story, you might want to provide a description of proposed activities and the anticipated outcomes. It is advisable to emphasize short-term outcomes when highlighting accomplishments in early-stage activities.

Programs / interventions that you have worked on for awhile may have more promising stories and examples of early change. While you haven’t achieved the long term outcomes, your story will highlight that you are on the right track and your partners and stakeholders will know that you are making progress.

Format of a Success Story

Title

This is your first opportunity to grab the attention of your reader. Often the title and pictures will determine whether or not the reader will continue reading or will discard it. Sometimes it is difficult to present the issue in plain language. However, the use of issue-specific language, or jargon, can be a deterrent to engaging your reader. Well chosen descriptive words can help you hold your reader's attention.

Critical components:

- Capture the overall message of the story.
- Include an action verb.
- Capture the reader's attention.

Checklist - does your title:

- ✓ Capture the attention of the reader?
- ✓ Avoid acronyms?
- ✓ Contain a verb?

Focus / Theme of the Story

- Testimonials – life change “on the street”.
- Organizational and / or partner achievements - coalition, advisory groups, committees.
- Promising practices – programs that are showing progress, but these are not yet “proven” practices.
- Infrastructure development – surveillance, state and / or local plans, burden of disease document, partnerships.
- Lessons learned – ideas that other programs similar to yours might learn from or ideas that might suggest future action.

Issue Statement

In the document, clearly identify the issue in a jargon-free, concise, and compelling manner. You may include local, state, or national data if appropriate. However, focus the majority of the document on the story rather than the numbers. Numbers should be provided to emphasize community needs and not the story itself. Don't lose the reader's attention with a confusing maze of facts and numbers. The definition of issues must be sufficiently compelling to entice the reader to stay engaged. Pictures, graphics, and quotations put a “face” on the statistics included in the section and help define the extent of the health program in your community.

Critical components:

- Problem: Describe the problem being addressed and why it's important. The problem should be able to be addressed by the objective.
- Data: Use data to frame the problem, including health burden and economic costs. Data used to justify the objective could be used here.

- **Population:** Specify the affected population(s). This is particularly important if any health disparities are being addressed.

Checklist – does your issues statement:

- ✓ Have a strong lead sentence?
- ✓ Provide local, regional, or state information about the issue?
- ✓ Tie the burden (health, training, or threat) to a cost burden?
- ✓ Specify the affected population?
- ✓ Provide an emotional hook?
- ✓ Present a clear, concise statement about a single issue?

Intervention / Program Description

Describe your intervention / program or tell your story in a clear manner so readers can relate to the message on several levels. You want to spark their interest in what is being done about this public health issue. Articulate which partners are collaborating with you and specific funding sources pertinent to this specific audience or theme.

How did you accomplish your success? Think in terms of replication. What would your audience need to know to replicate your intervention?

Critical components:

- Describe the intervention, including where and when it took place and how it addressed the problem.
- Identify who was involved, including your partners.
- Identify the target audience of the program/intervention.
- How did the State HMP Initiative support and/or contribute to the intervention.

Checklist – does your intervention / program description:

- ✓ Have a strong lead sentence that transitions the issue section to the intervention section?
- ✓ Identify who conducted the intervention?
- ✓ Identify where and when the intervention occurred?
- ✓ Specify the steps of the intervention?

Success Statement

What does all this mean? You may be acutely aware of the meaning of the program / intervention because you are involved in working on this issue on a daily basis. Your readers are most likely exposed to hundreds of issues that vie for their attention on a daily basis. Do the leg work for them. Say what you mean. Be concise.

Critical components:

- Describe your most important results either at the participant, program, community, or environmental level by identifying the short-term or intermediate outcomes that demonstrate how the program addressed the problem (e.g., change in policy, use of curriculum, change in practices, and establishment of additional funding). NOTE: Outcomes not outputs are required.

It is not sufficient to say that 30 people were trained (output) but rather to describe what was achieved as a result of training 30 people (outcomes).

- What barriers to success did you face and how did you overcome them?
- Provide a conclusion to the success story that avoids using broad, sweeping statements such as “there was a noticeable increase in healthy eating habits.” Depending on the focus / theme of the story this may be changes in; culture / norms, organizations, and behaviors; increased access to proven prevention practices or new products; etc.
- What is the estimated number of people who have benefited from the program?
- Were there any (unintended) results that surprised you?
- What are the next steps that need to be taken to further or continue this effort?
- What were the key elements that made this a success?
- Do you have any specific quotes from participants or partners that would support this story? Please include the full contact information for the person(s) being quoted and a signed release form.
- Please attach photo (jpg. file) and consent form.
- Please attach an electronic copy of your logo.

Checklist – does your success statement:

- ✓ Give specific outcomes (e.g., money saved, changes in health outcomes, number of people affected)?
- ✓ Avoid broad, sweeping statements?
- ✓ Provide conclusions that wrap-up the story in a convincing manner?

OVERALL, does the success story:

- ✓ Avoid wordiness, passive language, and grammatical and spelling errors?
- ✓ Use terms that are understood by a non-public health audience (avoids jargon)?
- ✓ Use one page if possible?
- ✓ Use bullets where possible?
- ✓ Include contact information?

TEMPLATE

CONTACT INFORMATION

HMP:

HMP website:

Contact person:

Name:

Email:

Office number:

STORY TITLE

FOCUS / THEME OF THE STORY

- Testimonials
- Organizational and / or partner achievements
- Promising practices
- Infrastructure development
- Lessons learned

ISSUE STATEMENT

INTERVENTION / PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

SUCCESS STATEMENT

RESOURCE LIST

THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES WERE ADAPTED FOR THIS PUBLICATION:

1. CDC Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH)

How to Develop a Success Story

CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH) defines a success story as a narrative—usually between one and two pages—highlighting the achievements and progress of a program/activity. A success story can document program improvement over time and demonstrate the value of program activities. When presented effectively, success stories can be a useful tool for educating your stakeholders about the outcomes of your work and the results you are achieving.

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/stories/index.htm>

http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/stories/pdf/howto_create_success_story.pdf

2. CDC Division of Oral Health

Impact and Value: Telling Your Program's Story

This workbook and the ample data collection tool can be used by program managers to create success stories that highlight their program's achievements. Although its examples are from state workers in oral health promotion, the methods for collecting and writing success stories can be applied to any public health program.

http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/publications/library/success_stories_wbk.htm

http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/publications/library/pdf/ss_data_collection_tool.pdf

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

3. 50+ Ways to Tell a Story

<http://50ways.wikispaces.com/StoryTools>

This website shares great resources, organized by type, to help with presenting slideshows, creating timelines, mapping content, fixing audio, editing video, and creating stories. Each is sorted by type and you can click through to get a brief description with a direct link to the relevant site where the tool is available for free.

4. Richard Krueger on Evaluation and Storytelling

Richard Krueger defines an *evaluation story* as “a brief narrative account of someone’s experience with a program, event, or activity that is collected using sound research methods.” When used as part of a traditional mixed-method evaluation, Krueger contends we can use stories to help programs and organizations make sense of their programs.

Read more about Richard Krueger’s storytelling advice for evaluators on his [website](#), as well as in his chapter on evaluation stories in the *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*.

<http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rkrueger/story.html>

5. Promising Practices from the Evaluation Exchange, Harvard Family Research Project, Vol. IX, No. 4, Winter 2003/2004

<http://www.hfrp.org/var/hfrp/storage/original/application/f1be9c61c5a4011b6637bb5d1a3190ed.pdf>

6. CDC WISEWOMAN Program

WISEWOMAN Works is a collection of success stories highlighting some of the ways that CDC–funded WISEWOMAN Programs are making a difference for financially disadvantaged women participants. Through success stories, WISEWOMAN Works provides a method for health professionals to share information about grassroots efforts to promote the health of women in need. By including sections on how to use success stories, writing your own success stories, and adapting your stories for multiple purposes, WISEWOMAN Works provides technical assistance to help health professionals capture success stories.

<http://www.cdc.gov/wisewoman/> Scroll down the page to *Wise Woman Works* and explore the two volumes of collected success stories.

http://www.cdc.gov/wisewoman/docs/success_stories.pdf

http://www.liebertpub.com/media/content/jwh_wisewoman/p616.pdf



Paul R. LePage, Governor

Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner

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