

BEST PRACTICES IN STORYTELLING

"THOSE WHO TELL THE STORIES RULE THE WORLD." -PLATO

OBJECTIVE OF THIS RESOURCE

- Learn criteria for effective storytelling
- Learn the basics of how public narrative works
- Practice your own story of self and coach others

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This resource walks you through the necessary components of telling a compelling story based on the public narrative model. The worksheets at the end will help you to practice identifying effective storytelling by others and to begin crafting your individual stories based on the audiences you are connecting with. Use this guide in companion with:

[The Power of Storytelling Webinar](#)

[Service Year Alliance's YouTube Channel](#) (We use public narrative framework for our stories)

WHO IS THIS RESOURCE FOR, AND WHY?

Being able to tell your story is a fundamental part of being human. We need to tell our story in interviews, to funders, to our family and friends, on social media, and in all life matters in order to achieve our goals. Here are ways that effective and clearly-articulated stories can support everyone in the service year field:

- For program staff to learn how to effectively describe their program to funders, for recruitment, or to gain other support;
- For service year corps members to tell their service year story tailored to the audience listening;
- For alumni to tell their service year story and how it led them to their current role;
- For other service year supporters looking to gain support for this movement;

And more!

WE ALL HAVE A COMPELLING STORY TO TELL

Each of us has a story that can inspire others. When we do public work – as advocates, public servants, organizers, volunteers – we have a responsibility to offer an account of who we are, why we do what we do, and where we hope to lead. As you cultivate this skill, you will learn to tell your story of self, the story of the community you work with, and the strategies that may motivate others to join you on a similar path or understand your journey.

*"THE STORIES WE TELL LITERALLY MAKE THE WORLD.
IF YOU WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD, YOU NEED TO
CHANGE YOUR STORY. THIS TRUTH APPLIES BOTH TO
INDIVIDUALS AND INSTITUTIONS."*

— MICHAEL MARGOLIS

PUBLIC NARRATIVE IS A PRACTICE OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership is about accepting responsibility for enabling others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty. Narrative is how we learn to make choices and construct our identities and purpose – as individuals, as communities and organizations, and as countries. What does public narrative have to do with this definition of leadership? You can't ask others to follow you if they don't understand what your intentions are and why you're called to lead.

PUBLIC NARRATIVE BLENDS A STORY OF SELF, US, & NOW

Story of Self: How you came to be the person you are

Story of Us: Expresses the values and shared experience of the community you are connecting to

Story of Now: The challenges this community now faces and the actions we must take

STORY OF SELF

By telling a "story of self" you are communicating the values that inspire you to lead. Being able to succinctly convey who you are, why you do and believe what you do, and how that relates to your actions is harder than you may imagine – without practice. Being able to tell your story sincerely and persuasively will help you to share your work with others and invite them to be involved. Generally speaking, people get involved or listen to a story not just because of the mission or the mere fact they like someone, but because a like-minded person persuaded them to get involved through a convincing story.

Take time to reflect on your own story of self. What was your call to serve, either as a service year corps member or as part of the service year movement? Consider all the events and milestones that led you to this moment. Focus on the challenges you faced, satisfaction and frustration you experienced. What did you learn from these outcomes? How do you feel about them today? What did they teach you about yourself, your family, your community, your movement?

STORY OF US

By telling a "story of us" you can convey the values that can inspire others to act together by identifying with each other, not only with you. Just like the story of self, think about key choice moments where values were shared. Telling a good story of us requires the courage of empathy – to consider the experience of others deeply enough to take a chance at articulating that experience.

Consider the service year movement: our diverse constituency is made up of over one million alumni, millions of people who have benefitted from someone's year of service, and countless Americans that believe service is a core value of our country. Think about our common past; then consider our common future. When did you realize that service was important to you? Do you participate in this community because of "fate" or a "choice" or both? What do you plan to achieve?

STORY OF NOW

By telling the "story of now" you can communicate the challenge we are called to face, the hope that we can face it, and the outcome we can create together. You create an action for someone to take or the specific takeaway you want a person to connect in your story. A story of now requires telling stories that bring the action or connection together. What is at stake? Why should I care? A story of now offers hope grounded in real progress, the courage of others' actions, and in the strategic vision of what we can achieve together.

WORKSHEET

LISTENING FOR STORY OF SELF, US, & NOW

One of the best uses of the story of self, us, and now is Barack Obama’s 2004 Democratic Convention Speech. It is not about the politics of Democrat or Republican, but the way he tells his story that is compelling. As you watch, consider the elements that you hear in the story using the listening worksheet and questions below. You could listen to anyone who you think tells a compelling story and use the framework to capture what they do best.

Video: [Barack Obama’s 2004 Democratic Convention Speech](#) (watch through to 8:00)

QUESTIONS (CAN BE USED TO EVALUATE ANY STORY)

What was the speaker’s purpose in telling this story? What was s/he moving people to do?

What values did this story convey? How?

What details or images in particular reflected those values?

What were the challenges, choices, and outcomes in the story?

SELF	US	NOW
<i>What experiences and values call this person to leadership?</i> <i>What choice points does the speaker include to show, rather than tell us her/his values?</i>	<i>Who is “us”?</i> <i>What are the common values the speaker appeals to?</i> <i>What challenges and hopes do we share?</i>	<i>What urgent challenge does this speak identify?</i> <i>How does s/he make the challenge real?</i> <i>What gives us real hope that we can do something?</i>

WORKSHEET

START YOUR STORY OF SELF, US, & NOW

Before you decide what part of your story to tell, consider first:

What will I be calling on others to do or take away from my story?

What values move me and may inspire others to take action?

What stories can I tell from my own life about specific people or events that would show (rather than tell) how I learned or acted on those values?

What are the experiences in your life that have shaped the values that called you to leadership in service years? Use these prompts below to develop your story of self, us, and now.

FAMILY CHILDHOOD	LIFE CHOICES	SERVICE EXPERIENCE
<i>Parents / Family</i> <i>Growing Up</i> <i>Your Community</i> <i>Your Role Models</i> <i>School</i> <i>Beliefs</i>	<i>School</i> <i>Career</i> <i>Partner / Family</i> <i>Hobbies / Talents</i> <i>Faith</i> <i>Overcoming Challenges</i> <i>Beliefs</i> <i>Past Informative Events</i>	<i>Overall service year experience</i> <i>Events and interactions you remember the most / had the most meaning</i> <i>What conditions shaped your experience</i> <i>Connection to key people, organizations, books, stories...</i>

Think about the challenge, choice, and outcome in your story. The outcome might be what you learned, in addition to what happened. Consider drawing pictures instead of using words.

CHALLENGE	CHOICE	OUTCOME
<i>Why did you feel it was a challenge?</i> <i>What was so challenging about it?</i>	<i>Why did you make the choice that you did?</i> <i>Where did you get the courage (or not)?</i>	<i>How did the outcome feel? Why?</i> <i>What did you learn? What do you want to teach us?</i> <i>How do you want us to feel?</i>

Now take all the of the things you outlined and build your story of self, us, and now. You can have multiple stories, so build out individual ones that are two and a half minutes or less. A good narrative should be short, digestible, and built for action / connection that an audience can walk away with.

SELF	US	NOW
<i>What experiences and values shape you?</i> <i>What will you show instead of saying?</i>	<i>Who is "us"?</i> <i>What are the common values you and others had together – a sense of service?</i> <i>What challenges and hopes do we share?</i>	<i>What action or connection do you want the listener to take away?</i> <i>How do you make the ask real?</i> <i>How do you convey hope for your story to be heard?</i>