STORYTELLING FOR ORGANIZATIONAL

IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

by

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Abstract

Nonprofit organizations are continually trying to figure out ways to 1) sustain and support their work over the long-term and 2) improve and demonstrate their impacts in effective ways. Storytelling is a way that organizations can do both. Previous research on storytelling supports the benefits for organizations to connect with audiences and drive campaigns. The research collected for this project serves as a model to frame storytelling as a catalyst towards organizational sustainability. Organizations that have a robust, intentional storytelling culture help to cyclically preserve and reinforce their mission and impacts in society. Storytelling becomes a way forward for organizational sustainability because the approach preserves impacts over the long term and helps to grow the organizational legacy within the sector and throughout broader society. During a time where storytelling has proven results, this project benefits nonprofit organizations that are already using stories as a communications tool and helps them refine their efforts and reframe storytelling as core strategy of their organization that will demonstrate impact over the long-term leading to organizational sustainability.

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Section 1. Introduction

Throughout history storytelling has been used by indigenous cultures to share, preserve, and pay tribute to their histories, so that future generations can continue their legacy. How does the use of storytelling help preserve an organization's mission and impacts in society? This project is a data-driven analysis of how storytelling can be used to shape organizational sustainability including the preservation of impacts and legacy within the sector and broader society. The objective of the research is to demonstrate how organizations can integrate storytelling into their culture.

An exploration of traditional uses of storytelling are used to lay the foundation and concretize the importance of stories bearing witness to history and culture. The project reviews the cross-sectorial aspects of how storytelling has evolved as a mechanism for building strong cultures and forming the ways in which institutional knowledge has been passed through organizational structures.

The outputs of this project include a literature review that synthesizes best current thinking around the influence stories have on building effective organizational cultures, a storytelling model that frames storytelling as a catalyst to organizational sustainability, and an assessment questionnaire organizations can use to evaluate their storytelling strategies and assess how they are building an organizational culture around storytelling. This project benefits nonprofit organizations that are already using stories as a strategy allowing them to refine their efforts and reframe storytelling as a way forward towards demonstrating sustainable impact.

Nonprofit organizations are continually trying to figure out ways to 1) continue their work and 2) improve and demonstrate their impacts in effective ways. Essentially, nonprofits are constantly striving for sustainability. The literature on what it means for a nonprofit to be sustainable mostly points to three indicators: effective leadership, strong financial planning, and capacity. For the purposes of this report, organizational sustainability means the continued ability of an organization to fulfill its mission while generating lasting impacts. Under this definition, the organization can sustain its operations and programming while successfully demonstrating its impacts. This definition of organizational sustainability moves beyond longevity and financial competence. Sustainability in this sense incorporates a comprehensive organizational culture and vision and moves the organization to the successful fulfillment of its mission through demonstrated impacts. Organizational stakeholders, beneficiaries, staff, donors, volunteers, and other audiences see the sustainable organization as the model for its work.

For an organization to achieve sustainability, its leaders must implement systems that generate impacts by balancing both long-term visioning and day-to-day operational processes. Most importantly the leaders must seek ways to communicate the organizations purpose and reason for existence to the world. Stories can be the mechanism organizations use to both communicate organizational impact and simultaneously reinforce culture and purpose. Additionally, storytelling can serve as the link between the vision and the operations of the organization and more importantly, serve as the binding force the organization needs to sustain itself, or the continuation of fulfilling its mission with lasting impacts. There have been ongoing studies about the importance of storytelling strategies that help organizations demonstrate and communicate impacts with their stakeholders.

With this project, my goal is to synthesize storytelling strategies and reframe storytelling as an essential part of defining an organization that is used as an overarching mechanism towards achieving organizational sustainability. Storytelling can be used to bind and solidify organizational culture by bolstering human-centered systems, detailing impacts at every level of the organization, and giving stakeholders effective ways of communicating. Storytelling also produces a sense of belonging for the people at the center of the organizational mission such as the beneficiaries. It is exactly this component of storytelling that will be critical to proving the hypothesis of the project.

The assumption is that storytelling is used at most nonprofits as an effective strategy to lift their day-to-day operations, demonstrate impacts, and communicate efforts to an external audience. This goal for this project is to move beyond the traditional uses of storytelling in organizations and position storytelling as a mechanism that preserves culture binding the organization's core values and mission which in turn works to root its impacts in society over the long term.

Section 2. Literature Review

Research conducted to date has explored the role of storytelling in problem solving and action research (Mitroff & Kilmann, 1975), organizational renewal (McWhinney & Battista, 1988), socialization of new employees (Louis, 1980, 1983; Brown, 1982), collective centering (McWhinney & Battista, 1988; Boyce, 1996), sensemaking (Boje, 1991, 1995), learning (Helmer, 1989), and innovation and new product development (Buckler and Zien, 1996). The following literature review takes a different approach to storytelling. It reviews literature that explores storytelling as the centerpiece of an organization's culture. It does not focus on storytelling as a strategy for communications, fundraising, or awareness raising but rather how organizations are using or can be

using storytelling to advance their missions and move towards sustainability by demonstrating ongoing impacts. Indigenous cultures play a significant role in using stories to preserve history. The review begins with a small sample of the vast amount of literature available on this subject. It is used here to highlight the potential for organizations to understand the importance of stories in connection to cultural preservation and is not intended to represent the full scope of indigenous oral traditions.

Storytelling and Historical Archiving

The following literature illustrates the complex and highly effective ways in which two cultures have preserved their histories though storytelling. It reviews the practice of storytelling as cultural heritage and a way in which to transfer important information about survival. The impact of storytelling has been used in native traditions as a mechanism for long-term cultural preservation.

Native Americans as Storytellers

Traditional uses of storytelling demonstrate the importance of stories to bear witness to history and to preserve culture. According to the literature reviewed, most indigenous cultures root their history in the oral tradition of storytelling. Native Americans used storytelling to both pass down important survival information to future generations and during times of war and looming genocide to preserve their cultures (Saddam & Yahya, 2015, p. 1). Because there were usually no written histories of the tribes in past centuries, everything was passed through storytelling (Saddam & Yahya, 2015, p. 1). According to Saddam and Yahya (2015), "Native American verbal art was an oral performative tradition in which stories were used as a means for the perseverance and delivery of cultural knowledge and societal values."

Most notably, Native Americans used storytelling to pass down their time-honored traditions, such as local customs, how to live of the land, and how to survive in the natural environments they lived in. Saddam and Yahya (2015) note that "Storytellers educated people "about the —roles of trees, the —roles of medicinal plants, and the —behaviors of animals and people when they speak about nature". These stories served as maps for survival for the generations who came later etching powerful messages about how to deal with the natural environment enabling them to survive and sustain their tribes. For Native Americans, this use of storytelling provides a path to sustainability.

For centuries, storytelling served as the most culturally important activity in Native American culture. Storytellers were revered and were tasked with passing the traditions from generation to generation through performance. Storytellers conveyed "the most essential and sacred principles of the institutions upon which their society is founded and depended for its successful continuance." (Saddam & Yahya, 2015, p. 1) The storytellers purposefully performed the stories in dramatic and intense ways. This served to make sure the stories would be remembered (Saddam & Yahya, 2015, p. 2) and thus transferred onto the next generation. Storytelling was used as a sustainability model to educate and pass down morals and values from the elders to the youngsters (Saddam & Yahya, 2015, p. 1).

In addition to passing important survival information from generation to generation, storytelling was also used during periods of instability to pass down entire culture. According to Rajotte (2010), when colonizing forces started to settle in their land and Native Americans were forcibly relocated, storytelling was a way to remain connected to each other and their homeland and enabled them to keep their customs, language and religion alive.

Aborigines as Storytellers

The aboriginal people of Australia also used storytelling to preserve thier culture. Dreamtime stories are the oral textbooks of the Aborigines' accumulated knowledge, spirituality, and wisdom, from when time began (Hanna & Henry, 1995, p. 201). The tribe appointed a storyteller custodian whose role was that of cultural educator, passing important information from generation to generation. The use of storytelling was the way to keep their culture alive.

> "The most important qualities of our culture are our language and our stories. In oral traditions, such as ours, telling stories is how we pass on the history and the teachings of our ancestors. Without these stories, we would have to rely on other people for guidance and information about our past. Teachings in the form of stories are an integral part of our identity as a people and as a nation. If we lose these stories, we will do a disservice to our ancestors – those who gave us the responsibility to keep our culture alive." (Hanna & Henry, 1995, p. 201)

The literature reviewed concludes that storytelling is an important part of oral traditions in traditional cultures. Histories were passed down from generation to generation through stories and these stories were integral to people's identity and culture for generations to come. Organizations can learn from these traditional storytelling models and reframe their own storytelling as a historical archive that can be passed down through organizational structures.

Storytelling and Organizational Sustainability and Impact

Storytelling has taken the nonprofit sector by storm in the last 15 years. In fact, according to Dixon (2014), 96% of nonprofits regard stories as central to their communications, and most expect the importance of stories for their organizations to increase. Most often stories are being used as strategies to increase awareness, solicit fundraising and demonstrate impacts. According to *The State*

of Storytelling in the Nonprofit Sector, "stories have been a huge trend in the nonprofit sector in the past five years, but our sector has been telling stories for much longer." (NetworkforGood & Chase, 2015)

Network for Good and Vanessa Chase, of the Storytelling Non-Profit, teamed up to survey more than 400 nonprofits about storytelling and published a report outlining the results in the report entitled, The State of Storytelling in the Nonprofit Sector (Chase and NetworkforGood, 2015). The data collected focused on use of storytelling to acquire and sustain donors. The survey first looked at what the budgets were for storytelling across different nonprofits and which platforms the nonprofits were using to disseminate stories. The data from the survey suggests that the nonprofit sector is using stories and obtaining positive results.

Survey participants from across the nonprofit sector reported that 82% have used stories in fundraising materials. 75% said they use stories in donor communications. The report also surprising results regarding how nonprofits are using stories. According to the report, the top three most popular channels for storytelling are: social media (72%), newsletters (68%), and website (67%). "The State of Storytelling" is just the beginning of a sector-wide conversation about the next frontier of storytelling. Similarly, the Meyer Foundation (2014), conducted story audits of more than 150 nonprofits and found that 96% of survey respondents agree that storytelling is an important part of their organization's communications.

Nonprofits are committed to telling people about their work, progress, and needs. Similar to traditional storytelling explored above, the paper sees the act of storytelling as building a culture. Each story shapes the organization. Chase (2015) writes, "each time we communicate these things, we are

communicating pieces of the larger narrative about our organization." As the report notes, the

practice of storytelling and therefore culture building is becoming more and more intentional across

organizations (NetworkforGood & Chase, 2015, p. 3).

> "This renewed interest in an ancient genre of communication is perhaps a result of the
> realization of the importance of knowledge in organizations and the recognition that
> knowledge cannot be completely abstracted into categorical and analytical forms and is
> inadequately conveyed in such forms. Instead, organizations seek communicative forms that
> synthesize rather than analyze. Stories are such a communicative form. (Sole & Wilson, n.d.)"

Storytelling is viewed as a highly effective way to share information in a variety of domains.

Stories can be a very powerful way to represent and convey complex, multi-dimensional ideas.

According to Snowden (2000), "well-designed, well-told stories can convey both information and

emotion, both the explicit and the tacit, both the core and the context". There is a strength to

storytelling that has endured generations and even in the era of nonstop data, nonprofits are returning

to connection on a more individual level through stories. Jenson (2014) writes:

> "The ancient art of storytelling may seem quaint in an era when many outreach efforts are
> driven by big data, with results measured in Facebook "likes" and Twitter retweets. But more
> and more charity leaders and communication consultants are concerned that nonprofit
> organizations spend too much time numbing audiences with numbers instead of stimulating
> them into action through stories. (Jensen, 2014)"

According to Scott et al (2016), effective storytelling should be easy for social impact

organizations because stories are easy to generate from the social good perspective. "Social impact

organizations (SIO's) operate in settings that naturally produce empathy-generating stories, making

the emotional aspect of SIO stories especially powerful and persuasive." (Scott et al., 2016) It is our sector's mandate to tell the stories of the work that we do and to connect to our audiences. Storytelling is a way to connect audiences and take them on a journey from thinking to feeling. That powerful journey and place of feeling is what connects them to our work in the nonprofit sector (Chase, 2016, p. 5).

The literature points to use of storytelling in three signification ways: soliciting donations, demonstrating impact and building organizational culture. Below is a further exploration of storytelling to build organizational culture. This is a jumping off point for the literature that follows about how stories can build a culture since literature points to turning that around to build a storytelling culture.

Storytelling and Organizational Culture

The literature on building organizational culture through storytelling is vast and is one of the pillars of organizational sustainability. Organizational culture is a system of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs, which governs how people behave in organizations. The exploration to define and express these shared assumptions lends itself well to the art of storytelling. In a Physician Leadership Journal article called Storytelling Defines Your Organizational Culture, the authors explored building dynamic and strong organizational cultures through storytelling. The article defined organizational culture as "a system of shared meaning held by its members that disguises their organization from other organizations" (Brady & Hanley, 2013). The authors made the case that stories are the history bearers of our organizations and that, "stories anchor organizations past to its present" (Brady & Hanley, 2013).

According to the article, these shared values have a strong influence on the people in the organization and dictate how they dress, act, and perform their jobs (Brady & Hanley, 2013). Stories can be used to understand an organization from the inside out and used to illuminate its core and its authenticity. In Transformative stories: A Framework for Crafting Stories for Social Impact Organizations, Scott et al., (2016) writes about storytelling as a way to bring organizational internal structures together and a framework to hold a common core of understanding. He states that, "organizational policies, procedures, and practices must safeguard and uphold story authenticity" (Scott et al., 2016). In other words, in order to build an authentic storytelling strategy it is essential for organizations to put proper structures and practices into place in order to support that stratecy. This way of thinking puts storytelling and its supporting structures in the center or core of an organization from which everything in an organization diffuses outwards.

Teambuilding has been used by organizations to build strong cultures. Storytelling can be used in this context as well. Teambuilding can share norms and values across organizational divides and build staff confidence in each other and the organization over the long-term. These shared experiences can bear witness to the past, present, and future of the organization and allow for deep sense of connection among staff of the organization (Brady & Hanley, 2013). Shared stories also develop trust and commitment and can share knowledge enabling an efficient exchange of institutional knowledge.

Another way to build organizational culture through storytelling is by designating a storyteller. Much like the story holders of traditional cultures, Brady and Hanley (2013) determined that for-profit companies such as NIKE have executives who spend most of their time telling stories to serve as the "team storyteller" or holder of the stories in the corporation. This level of investment in storytelling

generates revenue through the creation of visible and compelling advertising, shares

successes of the products or services, and it also helps organizations share norms and values across

generations of the organizations. The article pointed out that storytelling defines organizational

cultures by creating a shared vision of the organization.

Scott et al. (2016) points out that by working with an organization's history and by

understanding an organization's culture, a story can be found. Disseminating that message reinforces

the organizational culture and makes the institution a desired place of employment and keeps the

employees engaged (Scott et al., 2016). Lastly, stories can generate an emotional connection. (Wilson,

& Sole, n.d.) and these connections make for healthy team culture. According to Wilson & Sole (n.d)

STORY HIGHLIGHT

At critical time at Ford where the company was considering filing for bankruptcy employee morale was low. New processes needed to be implemented to save the company but employees were resistant. The Board of Directors led a storytelling campaign. They wanted to change attitudes about the company and remind people of the resilient company they all worked for. They needed to instill hope and a sense of belonging to unify the divided global operations division. The board shared the story of what Ford as a shared vision reminding the employees of what it was and what it could. Giving this historical context and hope for the future changed the minds of the employees around the new processes and they got on board and essentially recreated the culture. (Hanley, & Brady, 2013)

stories that emphasize the more empowering aspects of an organization's past can facilitate the

identification of future opportunities. The story highlight above is an example of how organizations

can use stories to build organizational cultures internally. This type of storytelling builds

internal momentum and therefore helps build a more sustainable team culture.

Taking storytelling from team building to a central component of an organization requires both

internal and external storytelling strategies to come together. Storytelling should become the

centerpiece of the organizational culture rather than just a strategy to facilitate a culture. Organizations

often identify stories as a vital marketplace tool that can provide insight into the intersectional social

problems they address and secure audience attention, engagement, and action (Goodman, 2015).

Storytelling can be used as a strategy for engagement by donors, volunteers and staff. Building this

type of engagement is a traditional use of story in an organization. How the engagement is then turned

around to become a pillar for organizational sustainability and long term impact is the focus of this

report. The literature on this aspect takes storytelling one step further reframing storytelling not just as

a strategy but rather as the authentic core strategy of an organization.

According to the Meyers Foundation report, Stories Worth Telling (2014), in order to use

stories for maximum impact, organizations need to foster a culture of storytelling. Story permeates

through the organization from the board of directors to management, staff, volunteers even partners.

Each of the internal and external stakeholders should know and share the stories of an organization.

Furthermore, designing a storytelling culture takes time and intention. The Rockefeller Foundation

Report Digital Storytelling for Social Impact (2014) points out that the whole organization needs to be

invested in storytelling for it to function as a core strategy. Therefore, the organization's leadership

must show investment. The report states that, "senior managers need to understand the importance of

dedicating time, talent and resources to designing content strategies and producing ongoing content." (Rockefeller Foundation, 2014)

Scott et al (2016) agreed that stories are the centerpiece of culture for organizations and uses social impact organizations (SIO) as the basis for his argument. He sees storytelling as a way for an organization to accomplish and to demonstrate how it is living its mission (Scott et al., 2016). Stories should be viewed as an aggregate total of an organization and that over time these stories reinforce how the organization is accomplishing and living up to its mission. Furthermore, stories need to be told and disseminated regularly to achieve full impact. He argued that stories presented as "one-off" messages not connected to the organization's mission or social impact, potentially "diminishing the impact of such stories" (Scott et al., 2016).

The Rockefeller report (2014) concludes, "vibrant storytelling culture within a nonprofit can mean the difference between having one, somewhat stagnant story that represents the organization's impact and a living, breathing portfolio of different stories told from different perspectives." Each individual story is part of the larger organizational story that should be interconnected in communicating what the organization is about. An individual story can be powerful and emotionally charged. The most effective storytelling however, should relate to its mission and connect to relevant content about the organization (Scott et al., 2016). If this does not happen, the impacts from a strong storytelling culture are not being fully realized.

Storytelling and the Organizational Narrative

Connecting the dots from one story to the next should reveal a coordinated effort by the organization to tell the full story of its purpose and impacts. Scott (2016) made the case that

organizations have an "overarching" story or "metanarrative". Stephens and McCallum

(1998) define a metanarrative as a story about a story. This metastory encompasses the entire network

of stories the organization has and unites the "little stories" into an integrated whole (Scott et al.,

2016). This concept is further expanded to include the organization's mission. An organization uses a

mission statement to tell the story of its purpose. What issue is the organization working on and why

does it exist? According to Scott (2016), *"a mission-focused metanarrative is itself a story—and, as*

such, it should possess the structural components of stories: character, chronology, and

causality." (Scott et al., 2016)

Bringing back authenticity, Scott writes, "Each individual story should be authentic, genuine,

and cognizant of the key features of a good story, including a narrative hook, strong character

development, and a climactic plot." A well-crafted metanarrative can aid in the development of brand

equity, or a distinct brand identity that is clearly differentiated in the marketplace, which is

increasingly important for organizations as they compete for resources (Becker-Olsen and Hill 2006).

Furthermore, organizations metanarrative and story portfolio can also advance authentic and genuine

portrayals of itself, which helps combat skepticism among consumers (Scott et al., 2016). Authenticity

is about an SIO practicing what it preaches and being clear about what it is and what it does best.

When an SIO's storytelling rhetoric is out of sync with consumers' actual experiences, the brand's

integrity and future persuasiveness suffers. Thus, an SIO's transformative story practices must be built

on organizational truths and be compelling enough to persuade the different audiences of an SIO that

its actions are consistent with the SIO's objectives to be considered authentic (Grayson and Martinec

2004).

Creating the story becomes very important then and it needs to be an organizationally recognized and supported process. According to Scott (2016), an organization begins by crafting a metanarrative by being intentional with each individual story. The metanarrative becomes the overarching umbrella and point of connection for each individual story. This story is then the master story and guides future stories. As in the example about NIKE above, organizations need someone to take charge of this process to identify, construct, and disseminate individual stories. Again, these stories should connect to and be consistent with its mission-focused metanarrative. Communicating stories with impact enhances the likelihood of SIO success in engaging an audience, motivating behavior change, and transforming individuals and society (Scott et al., 2016). "Many organizations are founded by a person with the heart, passion, and drive to make an impact. Subsequently, this founder's story of why and how (s)he formed the SIO is a key story. However, the SIO also needs a mission-focused metanarrative that serves as the organizing center for every story it tells" (Scott et al., 2016).

The literature review reveals some major insights to storytelling as a strategy. For storytelling to become a successful core strategy of an organization it must be intentional, led by leadership, and supported by transparent organizational processes. Stories must be authentic, developed with the audience in mind and connect to the mission, vision and values of the organization. The analysis that follows picks up here and synthesizes data collected from nonprofit sector reports and via expert interviews to support the results found in the literature review.

Section 3. Methods and Approaches

To achieve the broader objectives of this project, both primary and secondary data was collected and analyzed. In addition, a thorough literature review was conducted.

Literature Review

An in-depth literature review included summarization and analysis of more than 30 relevant articles and reports. The literature selected for this topic outlined storytelling in indigenous cultures, storytelling as way to communicate mission, vision and values and lastly reports detailing best practices in implementing a storytelling culture in an organization.

Primary Data Collection and Procedure

Primary data was collected from three expert interviews with key players in the nonprofit storytelling field. Two of the interviews were conducted with nonprofit consultants who use storytelling as a way forward in their work in fundraising and organizational development. One participant in this group (male, 60 years old) founded and serves as the lead partner for a team of strategists and designers who partner with organizations to tackle complex social and environmental issues around the world. The second consultant (female, approx. 30 years old) lives in Canada and founded a storytelling nonprofit that works with a select number of people and organizations to consult, coach, and advise them in their storytelling efforts. The last expert interview (male, 45 years old) was conducted with the Executive Director of a youth-centered tech organization in Oakland who uses stories as a core approach to their work.

Each interview lasted one hour and was conducted over Zoom Conference Service. All the interviews were recorded. The questions were prepared in advance and arranged in themes that emerged based on the literature review and the gaps found around storytelling and its uses for organizational sustainability and long-term impact. During the interviews a series of questions was asked to each participant exploring storytelling per this initial framework but more importantly within the context of their work. The central themes represented a coding frame for analysis and questions were designed around these frames. The original six coding frames and relevant questions under each are illustrated in the following table.

Table 1. Coding Frame Themes and Questions for Expert Interviews

Coding Frame Themes	Questions
Why Stories?	• Why is storytelling important to your organization? • What do the stories you tell convey about your organization and its impacts?
Use of Stories / Expected Outcomes	• How are organizations typically using stories? • What are your expected outcomes for using stories? • What types of stories have you seen audiences be the most responsive to? What have you seen to be the most innovative use of stories? • Have you been surprised by what's been successful?
Story Reach	• What type of reach are you seeing and what platforms seem to be the most successful for distribution? • Can storytelling help social impact organizations advance their missions? • Can stories be used to create collective vision? • Can stories build and/or renew trust in organizations? • How can stories be used to transfer organizational knowledge?
Story Management and Preservation	• How does your organization collect and preserve stories? • How does your organization use stories to transfer organizational knowledge? • How does your organization illustrate its mission, vision and values through storytelling?

	• What is the importance for your organization to preserve stories over time?
Story Transferability and Evolution	• Should or does your organization's story evolve or change over time? If so, how so and why? • How do you reuse and repurpose stories? • Does this help demonstrate long-term impact?
Storytelling and Sustainability	• How can organizations do to make storytelling a part of their cultures? • How can using storytelling lead to organizational sustainability? • Can organizations use stories as part of sustainability –long-term impact plan?

These questions were also designed to flesh out how the participants have seen their own organizations and others build a culture of storytelling and how organizations are preserving their stories. Lastly, questions were designed to understand how and if organizations are using stories to reinforce their overarching narrative (mission, vision and values) and if organizations were consciously trying to use stories to connect to and build larger social movements. This method and sequence of questioning was used intentionally to 1) build a storytelling argument for organizations then 2) move into the practical applications of current storytelling strategies and 3) gather additional information around how storytelling can be used more broadly in organizations.

During the interviews, extensive notes were taken and selected parts of the recorded interview were transcribed. The data collected was then analyzed by aligning relevant answers under each frame and entering corresponding answers onto a spreadsheet. The answers were then aggregated into one spreadsheet to compare answers and to extract overall themes from the full data set. Different themes emerged from the overall analysis than were originally used in the coding frames so the frames changed slightly in the findings. The answers relevant to each refined frame were grouped and

reviewed for themes. Each emergent theme was then counted according to how many respondents had similar answers. For example, the code "Why Stories" stayed the same since all respondents answered these questions accordingly and it was found that three respondents out of three answered "to engage funders" during the interviews. These like answers under each coding frame were then tallied and reported as findings. It is important to note that some of the framing codes were dropped in the findings because they simply were not answered in the interviews or the data given was found to fit better into other themes.

Table 2. Coding Frame Changes: Planned vs. Reported

Planned Frames	Reported Frames	Reason for Change
Why Stories?	Why Stories?	Remained the Same
Use of Stories / Expected Outcome	Expected Outcomes	More clearly represented the findings
Story Reach	Distribution Approach/Story Collection	More clearly represented the findings
Story Management and Preservation	Storytelling Evaluation for Impact	More clearly represented the findings
Story Transferability and Evolution	N/A	Inconclusive data – eliminated REPORTED AS DATA GAP
Storytelling and Sustainability	Building a Storytelling Culture	More clearly represented the findings

Secondary Data Collection and Procedure

In addition to the primary data collected, two reports were used to support the expert interviews. The Rockefeller Foundation's report entitled Digital Storytelling for Social Impact was analyzed and broken down into same big bucket coding frames as the primary data. The second report entitled A

Guide to Strategic and Sustainable Nonprofit Storytelling written by the Meyer Foundation

was also used in the same way. These reports provided key data that bolstered the expert interviews

and helped frame the initial data codes and influenced the questions asked. The contents in each report

were analyzed in same way as the primary data. The relevant data that matched the coding frames and

answered each of the corresponding questions was entered into a spreadsheet. The data was then

reviewed for emerging themes based on the broader coded frames or buckets. This data was then

transferred and integrated with the primary data collected. The answers were tallied where they were

the same or similar in each of the primary codes. Like the primary data, the secondary results did not

answer every question and some framing codes were found to be inconclusive and therefore dropped.

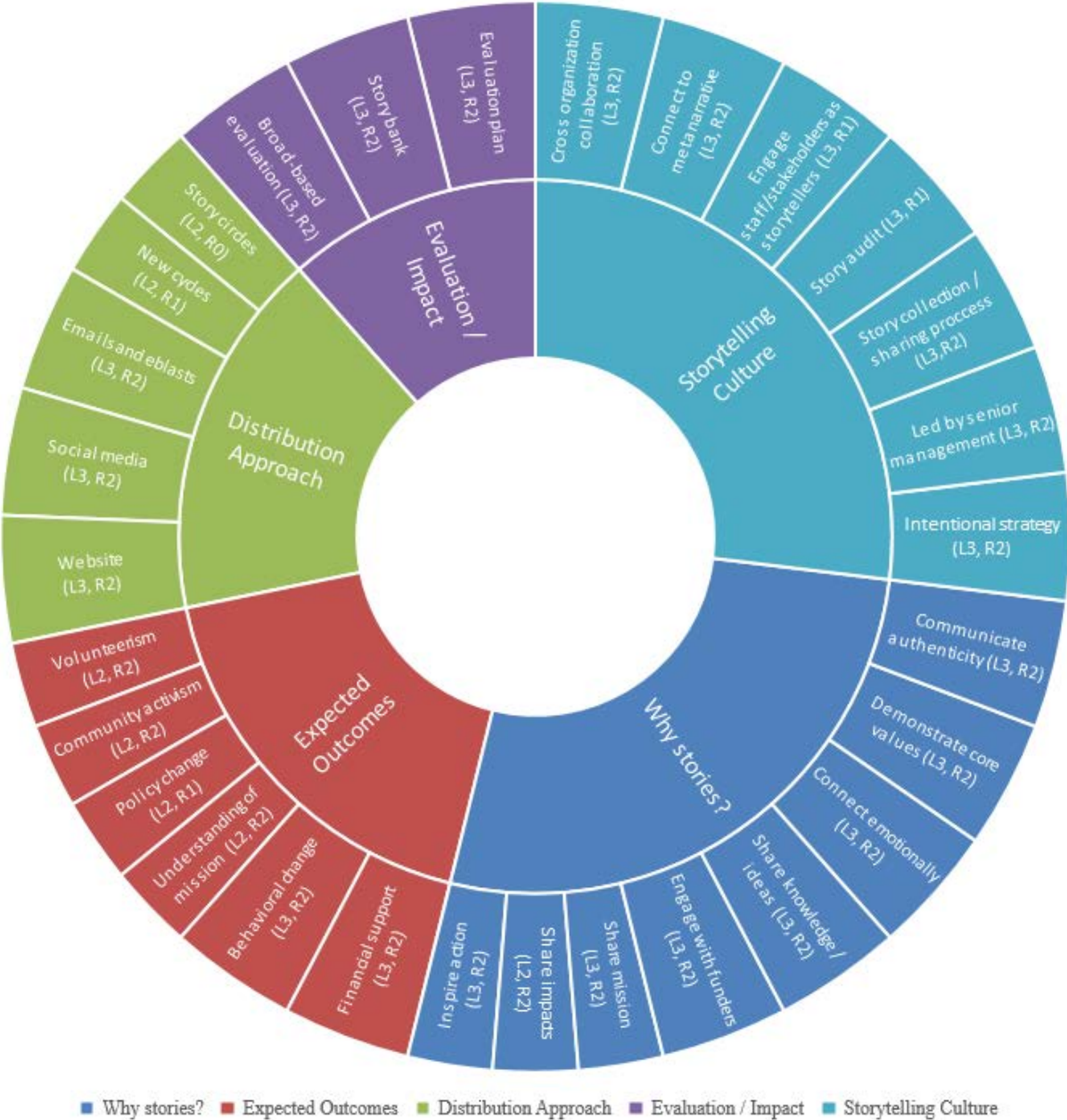Table 2 reviews the frames and the changes that occurred.

Method Limitations

Expert interviews require dedicated time to transcribe and extract relevant data. It is a time-

consuming process and the information cannot be pinpointed as accurately as in survey. Conducting a

survey would have allowed for a larger data set which could have been beneficial to the outcome and

more easily assessed. There was also not enough time to engage organizations to review the model and

take the storytelling assessment (Appendix A) which could have helped to evaluate and refined the

effectiveness of outputs from this project and allow for additional information around the

organizational storytelling practices.

Section 4. Data Analysis

The project set out to determine how organizations could use storytelling for demonstrating long-term impacts and longevity or sustainability. The findings are consistent with the research question as it makes clear the need for organizations to take a more intentional and holistic approach to storytelling. The data collected for this research includes results from three key experts in the field of storytelling for nonprofits and two secondary reports. The themes that emerged under each coding frame were tabulated and are reported as graphs and in the theme wheel below (Figure 1). The thematic wheel visually represents the data uncovered by this analysis. It groups the resulting themes under each code frame and gives the tabulation count of the findings L for leaders (primary data) and R for reports (secondary data). This wheel represents the aggregate total of the results and was included on the poster and in the oral presentation.

Figure 1. Storytelling Thematic Wheel

Key Results

The key results are reported below within the major code frames that were determined: Why Stories, Expected Outcomes, Story Collection/Distribution Approach, Story Evaluation and Building a Storytelling Culture. There is a table to accompany each frame that shows the results of the raw data count and the key words or phrase that were used to determine the emergent themes.

Why Stories?

The first set of questions in the interviews centered on why it is important for organizations to engage in storytelling as an overall strategy. The idea was to get a high-level vision from the respondents as to why stories are important. The next data set on Expected Outcomes focuses more specifically on what the outcomes are for using stories. Although these questions are correlated, it is important to note that *Why Stories* is supposed to reflect the higher-level purpose of storytelling and *Expected Outcomes* is geared towards the specific results desired or seen from the used of storytelling in organizations. There were nine major themes that emerged here which is more than any other subject area and the responses were elaborate and ranged across several topics.

Under the Why Stories theme, one respondent answered, "The universe is made of stories and each story it its own universe. Stories are what glues the organizational culture together." Another respondent said that the use of stories was an "authentic way to transmit information about what we are doing." One respondent referred to Marshall Ganz' work on public narratives citing that, "Stories are how we learn to access the moral and emotional resources we need to face the uncertain, the unknown, and the unexpected mindfully. Because stories speak the language of emotion, the language

of the heart, they teach us not only how we "ought to" act, but can in inspire us with the

"courage to" act" (Ganz, 2013).

Table 3. Why Stories?

Why stories?	(L)eaders Out of 3	(R)eports Out of 2	Key Words / Phrases	Percentage
Engage with funders	3	2	funders (L2, R1), philanthropy (L1, R1)	100%
Share knowledge / ideas	3	2	critical knowledge (L3), share information (R2)	100%
Inspire action	2	2	affecting change(L1,R1), move to action (L1), advocacy(R1),	80%
Connect emotionally	3	2	emotions (L1, R2), feelings (L1), connection (L1)	100%
Share impacts	2	2	impacts (L1, R2), "outcomes and successes" (L1)	80%
Demonstrate core values	3	2	core values (L3), share values (R2)	100%
Share mission	2	1	"mission, what we do, who we are" (L1), "A story shares the 'why' our organization exists"(L1), metanarrative (R1)	60%
Communicate authenticity	3	2	authenticity (L2, R2), "real life examples" (L1)	100%

All the respondents included "to engage with funders" and to "demonstrate core values".

During the interview one respondent merged both commenting that the concept of philanthropy can be

seen as "values in action". The respondent added that, "People give to causes because the

organization's mission aligns with their values so communicating those values back through stories

illuminates the concept of values in action." Another respondent agreed and added, "Stories can

communicate value and vision and ability to engage inspire and connect to people. Stories have an

emotional quality."

The results table for <u>Why Stories</u> shows that 100% of the respondents stated that stories were important to:

- Engage with funders
- Share critical knowledge/complex ideas
- To connect emotionally with audiences
- To demonstrate core values

While 80% stated that stories were important in organizations to inspire action and to share impacts. Conversely, it is important to note considering the research question of this paper, only 60% stated that stories were important to share the mission of the organization. Building trust with internal and external stakeholders also emerged as a theme with 80% of the respondents linking stories to trust. One respondent talked about how Engineers without Boarders produces an annual failures report that tells stories about projects that failed that year. The respondent noted that, "There is a level of authenticity that really works with this transparency and therefore builds trust with all stakeholders. They use this transparency to tell everyone that they will tell the truth!"

Expected Outcomes

The next set of questions originally focused on <u>Use of Stories</u> but when analyzing the data, a strong theme of <u>Expected Outcomes</u> emerged. The code frame was changed accordingly for reporting purposes. The expected outcomes correlate closely with the data collected from the *Why Stories* theme however, it is much more geared to the result of using stories rather than the reason organizations use stories in the first place. As noted below in Table 4, the primary and secondary data reported behavioral change and financial support as the strongest expected outcomes for storytelling in

organizations. Secondly, the respondents named volunteerism and community activism as expected outcomes at an 80% response rate. It is important to note that sector wide understanding of values and understanding of mission was understood at an 80% response rate as an expected outcome. This will be discussed more in the conclusion section of the report.

Table 4. Expected Outcomes

Expected Outcomes	(L)eaders Out of 3	(R)eports Out of 2	Key Words / Phrases	Percentage
Behavioral change	3	2	influencing behaviors	100%
Financial support	3	2	fundraising, funders	100%
Volunteerism	2	2	volunteer, giving back	80%
Community activism	2	2	community, advocacy	80%
Policy change	2	1	legislation, policy, political advocacy and "making changes"	60%
Understanding of mission	2	2	mission, vision, values	80%

One respondent noted that effective storytelling is one of the biggest challenges facing the organizations and that the expected outcome is only a result of good storytelling. The Meyer Foundation report fleshes out the essential building blocks of a compelling story: an effective character, trajectory, action-oriented emotions, a hook, and authenticity. The report stressed the importance of knowing the elements of a good story and as one respondent put it, "the effectiveness of the story will drive the outcome."

Another respondent noted that behavioral change was important to organizations who are focused on advocacy or public awareness and that existing research verifies that storytelling is an effective way to move people to action. It is important to note here that 80% of the respondents

included an understanding of values and mission as an expected outcome for storytelling. This is a higher result that in the *Why Stories* question.

Story Collection/Distribution Approach

The respondents were asked a series of questions pertaining to how organizations were collecting and distributing stories. One respondent shared that, "We tell stories nonverbally as well verbally so we should also be aware that we are constantly collecting and disseminating stories in different ways." They added that story collection needs to be part of the larger storytelling strategy so that story opportunities are not missed. Another respondent added that the "Collection and curation of stories is critical to successfully executing strategic storytelling but organizations lack capacity to do it well."

In terms of distribution, the Meyer Foundation's data collection uncovered that the top three most popular channels for storytelling distribution are: social media (72%), newsletters (68%), and website (67%). One respondent shared that storytelling in real time by livestreaming on social media was the "wave of storytelling's future and takes an innovative approach to video storytelling.

One respondent shared that survey by Center for Social Impact Communication in 2012, found reading a story on social media was the number one motivator of the more than 50 percent of respondents who made the leap from supporting a cause online to also supporting it offline. One respondent shared how their organization holds internal story circles on monthly basis. The organization invites the full staff to sit and share stories about themselves, each other and their work. The respondent added, "Stories that share a person's professional timeline, an intense transition period of life or role model and their effects on their life lend themselves to a place of deeper connection and

understanding within the team. If I see you more clearly, I will understand you and we will

connect." They add, "This is true at the individual level as well as the organizational level."

Table 5. Story Collection / Distribution Approach

Story Collection / Distribution Approach	(L)eaders	(R)eports	Key Words / Phrases	Percentage
Emails and eblasts	3	2	email campaign, newsletter	100%
Social media	3	2	FB, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Livestreaming	100%
Story circles	2	0	"story circle" "staff stories"	40%
New cycles	2	1	press release, "news of the day"	60%
Website	3	2	website	100%

Storytelling Evaluation and Impact

The next coding frame was storytelling evaluation and impact. The four themes below

emerged for each respondent at 100% response rates. This is the only frame where the data was the

same across the board. The respondents all agreed that developing a robust monitoring plan was

essential to storytelling. Additionally, stories need to be evaluated across the platforms of distribution.

Another theme was that stories and storytelling assets (raw video footage, images, raw data on

interviews, etc.) need to be archived in a story bank and managed so that they are made available for

future use. The Meyer's Foundation report pointed out that developing a centralized place to store the

organization's stories is important for several reasons.

"From a process standpoint, it can allow for ease in transferring stories from those collecting,

to those producing, to those sharing. It encourages consistency in branding, as well as measuring and

reporting on story successes. And, it can contribute to a greater organizational appreciation

for stories—since everyone knows where and how to find them."

The guide goes on to explain how to design a story bank and suggests designing it with the

end-user in mind based on the following:

- How will s/he be searching for stories?
- How can file structures, names and/or tags make this process easy?
- Encourage consistent naming practices across all users.
- Develop a short "read me" file or guide to inform users of how to add and name content.
- Utilize available technology, whether that's a shared hard drive, Google Drive, internal wikis, content management systems, databases, or other file systems currently in use.

According to the Meyer Foundation, "Organizations that evaluate the impact of their

storytelling accurately can learn what's working and strengthen their storytelling—and also build a

body of evidence about the merits of investing in storytelling." On a sector level, respondents agree

that evaluation on storytelling would be more impactful if there was a drive to work together with

other like-minded organizations.

Table 6. Evaluation and Impact

Evaluation and Impact	(L)eaders	(R)eports	Key Words / Phrases	Percentage
Evaluation plan	3	2	measure, plan (R2), evaluate across platforms (L1), metrics (L1), "built - in analytics" (L1)	100%
Story bank	3	2	story bank (R2), archiving (L1), saving media assets (L2)	100%
Broad-based evaluation	3	2	more data - overall impacts (L3,R2)	100%

"A story bank is centralized place to store stories where everyone can find and use them!"
- Ease of transferring/sharing/using stories
- Encourages consistency in branding
- Contributes to a greater organizational appreciation for stories
- Design should consider end user – how will they be searching for stories, good file structure and relevant names make process easier

Building a Storytelling Culture

Throughout the literature review it became apparent that one of the main ways to ensure maximum positive impact with storytelling was to make sure the organization had a robust and effective strategy around building a storytelling culture. As one of the respondents pointed out, "an organization that has a strong culture has stronger impacts." Data on how to build a storytelling culture in organizations was collected and analyzed. The following analysis points to the most common themes that came from the interviews and report findings. Several subthemes in this category were identified by the respondents. The first subtheme pointed to the need for organizations to have an intentional strategy for storytelling. "Storytelling should be intentional and part of the overall organizational strategy," said one respondent. The respondents also agreed that this strategy should be led by the senior management of the organization. One respondent said, "The first job of a leader is to define the reality and tell the story of the organization and make sure that its stories are being told to others." Along these lines, the respondents said that identifying a story collection mechanism was an important part of building a storytelling culture. Conducting a story audit scored 80% among the respondents citing the importance of "knowing what you have and what you don't have" as a necessary step towards building a storytelling culture.

Table 7. Storytelling Culture

Storytelling Culture	(L)eaders	(R)eports	Key Words / Phrases	Percentage
Intentional strategy	3	2	overall storytelling strategy (L2, R1), strategy (L1, R1)	100%
Led by senior management	3	2	leadership (L1, R2), "educate senior management to lead"(L1), "First job of a leader is define reality and tell the story" (L1)	100%
Story collection / sharing process	3	2	collection (L3, R2)	100%
Story audit	3	1	audit (L2, R2), "find out what you have and how you can use it!" (L1)	80%
Engage staff/stakeholders as storytellers	3	1	ataff involvement (L1), educate staff (L1), train staff (R1), "staff know your best stories: engage them!" (L1)	80%
Connect to metanarrative	3	2	metanarrative (L1, R1), overarching narrative (L1, R1), "connect to larger purpose" (L1)	100%
Cross organization collaboration	3	2	"work with other organizations to tell stories" (L1), "501c3 space coalitions and collective work" (L1) "sector-wide collective storytelling" (L1), collaborate (R2)	100%

Section 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The research set out to demonstrate the importance of storytelling as a strategy for organizational sustainability and demonstrated impact over the long-term. The literature review positioned storytelling as powerful tool used by organizations to engage audiences and solicit donations and provided context on how organizations should be using stories in a broader context to

reinforce mission, vision and values. Storytelling in the age of digital communications is an easy way for nonprofits to demonstrate impacts. The Rockefeller Foundation's Digital Manager says, "If anyone is going to be good at storytelling it should be our {nonprofit} sector, where there should be no lack of honest, hopeful, inspirational, and impactful stories."

It was also demonstrated that storytelling is a way to connect to audiences, stake holders and staff. Stories are powerful at the individual level and at an organizational level and have been used throughout history to convey and transform experiences into a collective understanding and shared vision. "The telling of our stories becomes powerful in its ability to convey the experience to others, in its ability to connect us to the human experience, while simultaneously having the ability to teach us about ourselves" (Johnston, 2016). The success of organizational storytelling then depends on the commitment to authentically communicating the human experience in an intentional and organized way. Being intentional about the use of stories in organizations is paramount to the success of any storytelling effort.

The culmination of the data presented in this research concludes: **organizations that are intentional about storytelling as a core strategy are better positioned to preserve and sustain their mission and impact over the long-term.** The research demonstrates how organizations can go from using stories as a communications tool to using storytelling as an intentional core strategy for sustainability. To do this, an organization must first build a strong and supported storytelling culture. However, because of time constraints and other limitations mentioned in the introduction, this research could not evaluate the impact of storytelling as a core strategy, therefore further research is needed to

evaluate the impact that a clear storytelling strategy has on organizations and the sector. The synthesis of this research and main recommendations are outlined using a model that demonstrates how to build an intentional core storytelling strategy. Additionally, an organizational assessment can be found as Appendix 1. This assessment can aid organizations in determining what is needed to create a core storytelling structure in their organization.
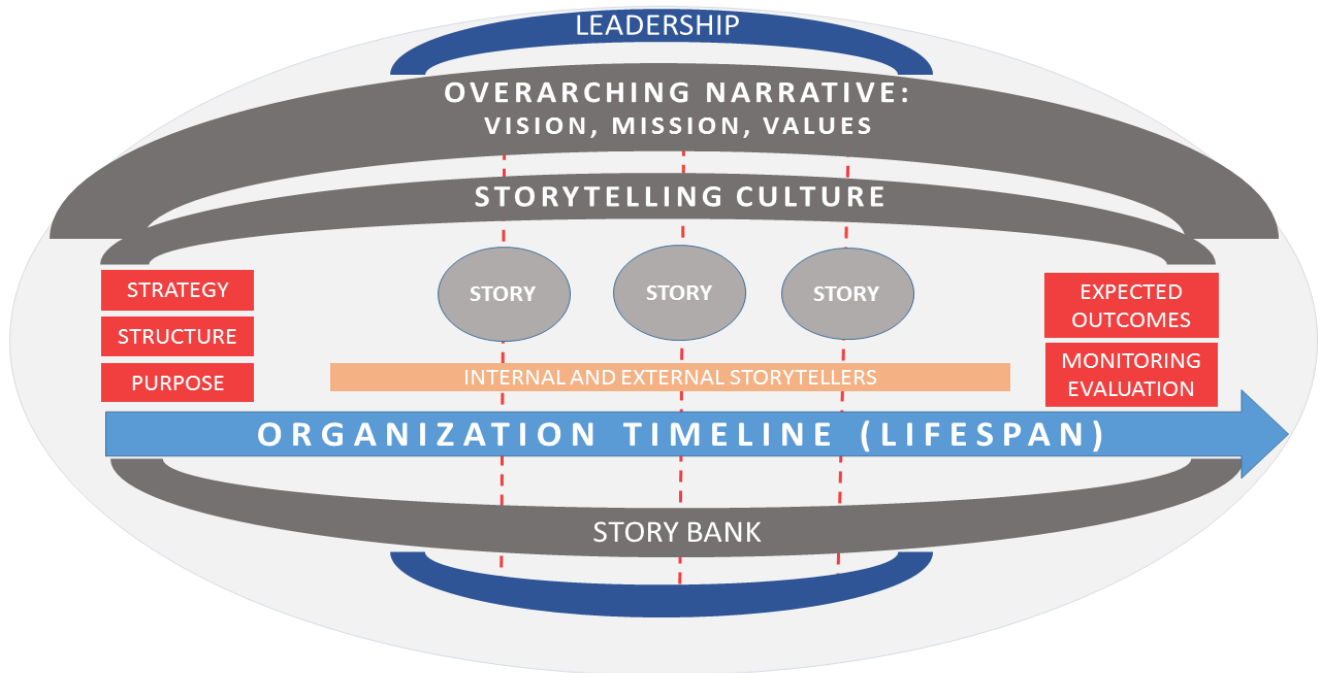
Model: Storytelling as a Core Organizational Strategy

The model presented in Figure 2 details the synthesis of the research collected and analyzed for this report and outlines storytelling as a core strategy. It begins with leadership which is depicted "as the handle" that holds the storytelling strategy for organizations together. Leadership is the pivotal determinant to the success of the storytelling strategy because as the data pointed out, leaders need be intentional about setting the direction and tone of the organization and making sure storytelling is used as a core strategy. Leaders are the holders and disseminators of the organizational story and play a key role in supervising and reinforcing the key structures that support storytelling throughout the organization. As the "story holder", leaders need to make sure that stories are constantly reinforcing the overarching narrative of the organization, clearly and authentically communicating the organization's vision, mission and values. Building a storytelling culture within an organization requires operationalizing the use of stories and setting up the appropriate framework and processes to make that happen successfully. Each story needs to be strategic taking audience, purpose, and strategy for dissemination into consideration. Additionally, mechanism for evaluation should be set up according to the expected outcomes set forth. A key piece of setting up a storytelling structure is having a story bank. The story bank is simple yet powerful component of this model. Digital assets

such as photos, videos, blogs, archived newsletters, etc. should be organized and stored so

that all staff has access to them. This enables the organization to perform easy audits on their

storytelling strategy and allows staff to access stories on an as needed basis. The existence of a story

bank could significantly increase the use of stories across the organization. A story collection process

needs to be determined and operationalized. This piece requires engaging internal and external

stakeholders as storytellers. Involving and encouraging staff and external stakeholders such as

program participants as storytellers is an important part of this model and will increase the number of

stories collected and perpetuate the cycle of storytelling throughout the organization. The entire model

sits on the timeline or life span of the organization. The collection of stories over the life of an

organization is the historical archive of its work and can demonstrate its impacts over the long term.

For storytelling to demonstrate long-term impact and organizational sustainability or longevity, it is

recommended that the organization apply the model and be intentional about using stories as a core

strategy.

Figure 2. Storytelling as a Core Organizational Strategy

KEY ASPECTS OF THE MODEL / RECOMMENDATIONS

1) **Leadership** constantly reinforces the organization story, actively participates in the strategy

2) **Overarching narrative** connects all stories to mission, vision and values of organization

3) **Organizational timeline** each story captures impacts during the organization's lifespan

4) **Storytelling culture**

- Develop a clear **strategy** for stories across the organization functions
- Build a storytelling **structure** – develop processes on story collection, hold staff trainings on storytelling, hold space for story circles, conduct an overall storytelling audit
- Define the **purpose** for stories - what, how, why and for what audience?

- Define **expected outcomes** for stories – what do you want to achieve?
- **Monitor and evaluate** the use of stories – report the impact!
- **Engage** internal and external parties as storytellers
- **Story bank** archives stories and media assets over the long-term

Additional Research

Additional research is needed to capture some missing data that was addressed by the literature review but not by the analysis of the results. Specifically, it would be important to gather evaluation data from organizations that use storytelling as a core strategy. It would also be important to revisit how stories used as a historical archive for organizations and how those histories are passed down through the organizational structures. Storytelling also needs to be part of an organization's budget in order to set aside the resources to facilitate that. In addition, large foundations and other funders need to understand that stories matter and need to be educated about what it takes to make them part of the organizational strategy. This approach can be costly but the outcomes can outweigh the financial implications. More research is needed on financing storytelling as a core strategy.

Organization - level

1) Evaluate impacts of having robust storytelling strategy
2) Educate organizations on how to build a storytelling strategy
3) Test effectiveness of storytelling assessment and questionnaire
4) Develop a robust financial plan to support storytelling as a core strategy

Sector - level

1) Review process on how to build larger storytelling networks
2) Review and identify storytelling structures for cross organization collaboration

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Appendix A: Organizational Storytelling Assessment Tool

This assessment will identify where your organization is in terms of storytelling and the areas for

improvement as the organization moves to using storytelling as a core strategy.

Storytelling Culture

- Does the organization value storytelling and support its use throughout the organization? How

  is that apparent or not apparent?

- Does leadership take an active role in supporting storytelling throughout the organization?

- Are there mechanisms in place to support storytelling?

- Is there a staff member that oversees the organization's storytelling efforts?

- Are staff encouraged to share stories internally and externally? If so, what are the structures

  that support that?

- Do staff feel confident in their abilities to share stories?

- Does the organization provide training on storytelling?

- Are stories in alignment with the mission, and do they collectively create a cohesive picture of

  the organization's overarching narrative?

- Are stories used across the organization in internal and external communications?

- Is story collection and integrated part of the organizational communications strategy?

- Do staff meet at regular intervals (weekly, monthly) to share and discuss stories?

Funding for Stories

- Is there a dedicated amount within the annual communications budget for producing stories?

- Are stories being regularly shared with funders and other stakeholders that donate to the organization?

Collection and Archiving Stories

- Has your organization undergone a storytelling audit?

- Does your organization have a **Story Bank** or is there an organized system for storing storytelling assets (videos, photos, blogs, newsletter, social media posts, testimonials etc.) that is easy accessible to all staff?

- Is there an organized system for transferring this information from one to the other?

- How are the impacts of storytelling evaluated throughout the organization?

Author's Bio

Lorena Gomez-Barris is Senior Manager of Operations at Rise Up. She has 20 years of experience in the nonprofit sector building human-centered financial, administrative and storytelling systems. Her expertise includes financial management, storytelling, strategic planning, international contracts development, and marketing. Passionate about storytelling, Lorena works to connect global audiences to the stories of the nonprofit sector. She has directed and produced over 20 videos in the nonprofit sector. In 2013 she co-produced the award-winning documentary film PODER. Lorena holds a bachelor's degree in Business and Environment Studies from Sacramento State University and a graduate degree in Nonprofit Management from the University of San Francisco. She speaks fluent Spanish and French and loves to travel.