

The Nonprofit Storytelling

FIELD GUIDE & JOURNAL

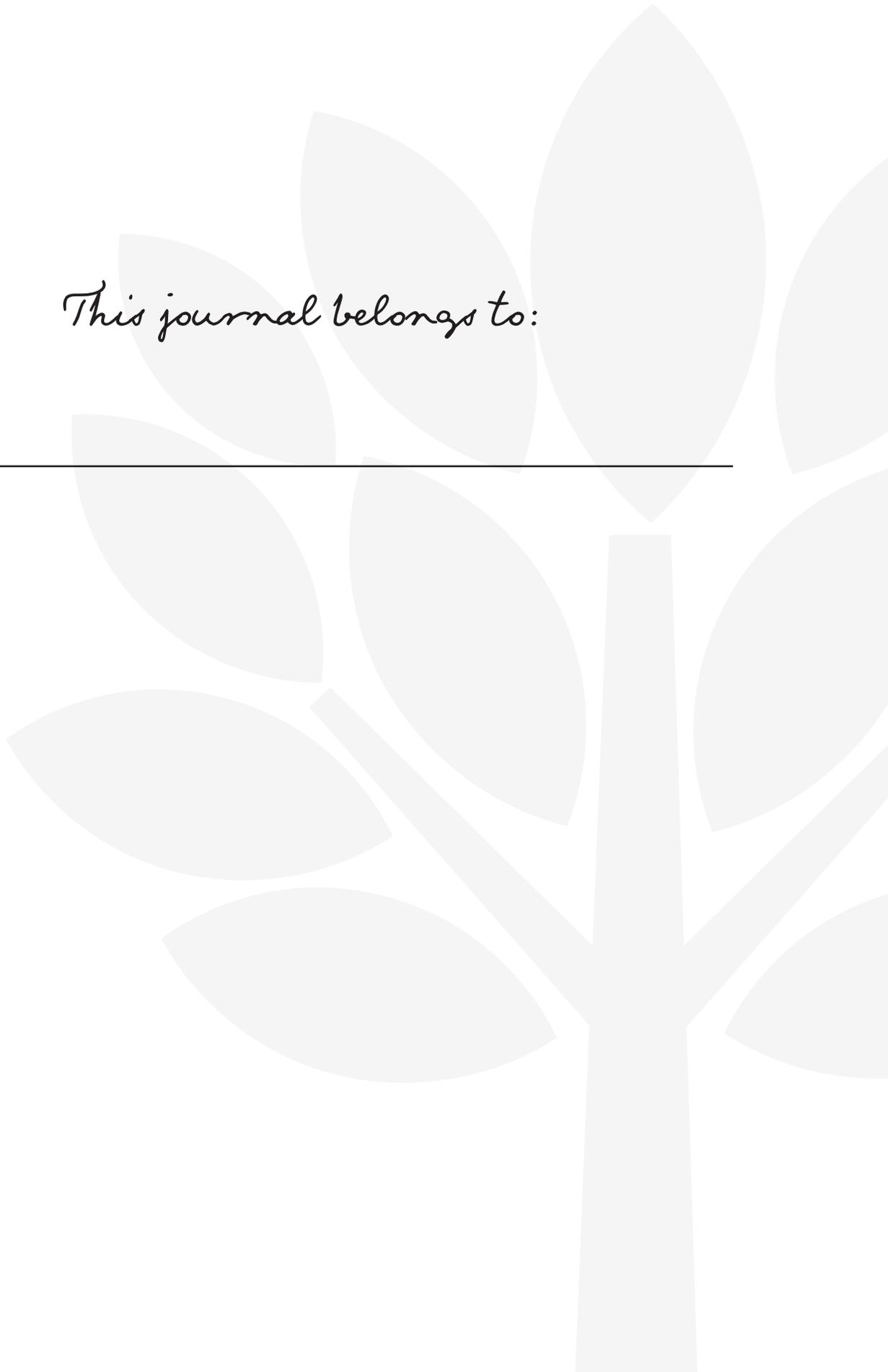
Discover & collect your organization's stories



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The Nonprofit Storytelling Field Guide & Journal

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Definition of a Story

What exactly constitutes a story?

There are countless definitions. So, for our purposes, when it comes to fundraising, I'd like to propose the following definition:

"A story is a vehicle in which to transfer emotion from you over to your donors."

We've all been moved after hearing about a tragic event on the news. People turn out in droves to donate and help the victims.

Giving happens on an emotional level. So, appeal to your donors and potential donors on an emotional level. Stories are a way to do that.

Why Collect Stories

Can you raise money without telling a story?

Donors are motivated to give because of the stories they are told. Stories make donors feel good.

Unlike buying something at a store, when a donor gives you her money, she gets no physical “thing” in return. What she does get in return is a story ...a story she can tell herself and others. A story is proof that she did something wonderful in the world.

In a way, stories are a form of currency.

Each donor is different. You'll benefit from a library of stories to appeal to a variety of donors. By making sure you have fresh stories to share, your current donors will stay engaged longer.

Types of Stories

Your organization tells many different stories.

For now, let's concentrate on only three types of stories. These stories will help you raise more money.

The stories are:

1. Donor Stories
2. Impact Stories
3. Thank You Stories

Donor stories are stories you can collect from your donors. These stories illustrate why your donors give to your cause.

A donor story is a way for potential donors to see your organization through the eyes of one of their peers.

This kind of story works very well when placed on your website, included in your newsletter, or when you bring a donor along with you to make an ask of another donor.

Impact Stories are the stories that focus on the effect you are having in the life of one of your clients. Or, in the case of an environmental or animal organization, it's the effect you are having in the community.

These stories are the stories you would typically tell at a gala, or when talking with a potential donor as you lead up to asking them for a gift.

Thank You Stories are really just impact stories you tell a donor as you are thanking them for their gift. The impact you share with them should be directly tied to the gift they gave. This way, the donor can see the difference they personally made with their gift.

These are the three different types of stories this book was designed to help you collect.

In the journal section of this book, you'll find questions that will help you capture the story information you need.

Once you've captured this information, you'll be able to use it to craft powerful stories that motivate people to donate.

What Makes a Story Motivating

No one story will be engaging or motivating to every person.

The place to start is to know who you will be telling your story to. For instance, let's say you are trying to raise money to build a building for a new school.

For one donor, what motivates him is having the building named after his family. For another donor, what's motivating is knowing she helped change a child's life by providing a better education environment.

To raise the most money, you'll benefit from crafting different stories to meet the need of each donor.

In the case of the donor who wants a building named after his family, a "Donor Story" might be a good story to tell him. It could be about why another donor gave money to have a building named after their family... why putting their name on a building was of value to them.

For the donor who is motivated by kids learning, an "Impact Story" would be more appropriate to tell.

So before you begin crafting your story, first think about who you'll be telling the story to.

Think about what motivates them.

Then start building your story to appeal to what the donor values.

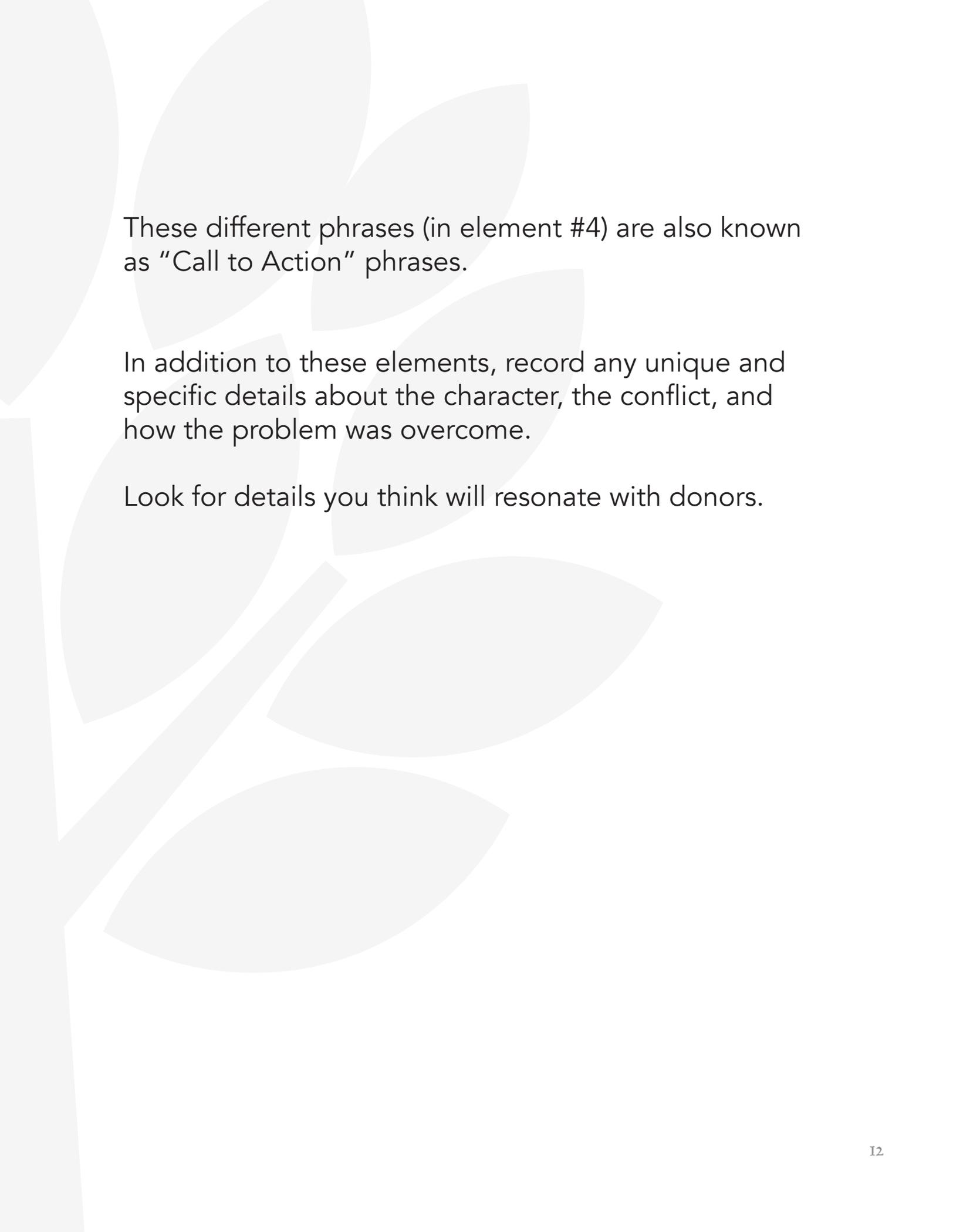
Different Story Elements

A fundraising story in its most basic form follows this four step formula:

1. The main character is introduced
2. A problem arises in the character's life
3. Your organization/donors help the character overcome the problem
4. You invite your audience to help others who are faced with similar problems

As you begin to collect stories, capture at least these elements:

1. Who your story is about (the main character)
2. The problem your character has/had (also known as the "conflict")
3. How your organization/donors helped solve the problem
4. Different phrases you can use to invite potential donors to invest in your nonprofit.



These different phrases (in element #4) are also known as “Call to Action” phrases.

In addition to these elements, record any unique and specific details about the character, the conflict, and how the problem was overcome.

Look for details you think will resonate with donors.



How to Gather Stories from your Staff & Volunteers

by Vanessa Chase

Asking good questions and being a great listener is the secret sauce to getting the best stories.

One way to structure and ask questions is to think about the arc of the story. The beginning, middle and end, as well as the conflict the story's main character was trying to resolve.

You can arrange your questions to guide your colleague through telling this story. This extra guidance can help draw out the nuances of the story and build their confidence in their storytelling skills.

On the next page, you'll find questions you can ask your staff and volunteers to help draw out stories.

1. What problem does this program solve?
2. Tell me about a client who's been helped by this program
3. What was it like meeting the client for the first time?
4. What were they like when they first inquired about this program?
5. How did the client feel when they took the first steps to access this program?
6. What's that client's life like now?

What's the best way to get your colleagues sharing more stories?

Show them gratitude and appreciation for their contributions. Keep a stack of special thank you notes to give to colleagues who share great stories.

One last tip on story collection that is very useful is to model storytelling in your interactions with colleagues.

Tell them about interactions you've had with donors. Pass along an inspirational story that you heard from a donor. Or maybe tell them about positive kudos donors have given to your organization.

Not only is this a way to lead by example when it comes to storytelling, it builds stronger connections and relationships internally that help you collect and tell better stories.

How to Begin Collecting Stories

The next half of this book is set up as a journal...a place where you can start to jot down key elements for different stories.

You never know when the next story will present itself, so keep this little book with you at all times.

After you've collected a story or two, the next time you're at your office, transfer your journal notes over to your computer. Import them into your database and link them up with certain donors, or add them to a story library.

The next time you need a great story to tell a donor, or to write about in your newsletter, use the information collected in this journal as a place to start.

Call to Action Journal

On the next two pages, start collecting different “call to actions”. Having a collection of “call to actions” will help make the transition from your story over to asking the donor to get involved.

Some examples of a “call to action” are:

“...now that you know how we help educate children, would you like to help?”

“...seeing as you have an interest in preserving land, would you like to make a donation to save this park?”

Brainstorm and write down “call to actions” that would work for your organization. These can be used when telling a story face to face or in a newsletter at the end of the story.

Call to Action Journal

Write down different "call to action" phrases

Call to Action Journal

Write down different "call to action" phrases

Story Journal

Story #1

Date:

Who told you the story?

Are there any pictures or video available to help tell the story?
(circle one)

Yes

No

Write a quick summary of the story:

Story Journal

Story #1

Who is the main character in your story?

What problem(s) were they facing?

How did your organization/donors help solve the problem?

Additional details and notes:

Story Journal

Story #2

Date:

Who told you the story?

Are there any pictures or video available to help tell the story?
(circle one)

Yes

No

Write a quick summary of the story:

Story Journal

Story #2

Who is the main character in your story?

What problem(s) were they facing?

How did your organization/donors help solve the problem?

Additional details and notes:

Story Journal

Story #3

Date:

Who told you the story?

Are there any pictures or video available to help tell the story?
(circle one)

Yes

No

Write a quick summary of the story:

Story Journal

Story #3

Who is the main character in your story?

What problem(s) were they facing?

How did your organization/donors help solve the problem?

Additional details and notes:

Story Journal

Story #4

Date:

Who told you the story?

Are there any pictures or video available to help tell the story?
(circle one)

Yes

No

Write a quick summary of the story:

Story Journal

Story #4

Who is the main character in your story?

What problem(s) were they facing?

How did your organization/donors help solve the problem?

Additional details and notes:

Story Journal

Story #5

Date:

Who told you the story?

Are there any pictures or video available to help tell the story?
(circle one)

Yes

No

Write a quick summary of the story:

Story Journal

Story #5

Who is the main character in your story?

What problem(s) were they facing?

How did your organization/donors help solve the problem?

Additional details and notes:

Story Journal

Story #6

Date:

Who told you the story?

Are there any pictures or video available to help tell the story?
(circle one)

Yes

No

Write a quick summary of the story:

Story Journal

Story #6

Who is the main character in your story?

What problem(s) were they facing?

How did your organization/donors help solve the problem?

Additional details and notes:

Additional Resources

Visit these websites for additional resources to help you tell your stories:

NonprofitStorytelling.com

TheStorytellingNonprofit.com

MovieMondays.com

NonprofitBestPractices.com

Meet other story minded folks at the:

NonprofitStorytellingConference.com

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