Writing an Effective Success Story

Tips & Tricks:

- **Start early**: keep in mind the goals as the year progresses and what activities you will be doing throughout the year. The beginning of the year usually involves organizing data, planning outreach and developing outputs. As the year progresses, outreach will increase and you may come across successes and obstacles, which can all be included in your success story.

- **Develop a plan**: create a system for collecting good information, establish an outline for how you want the story to be given, and plan how you will share the stories.

- **Identify the story**:
  - Planning: early stage stories will focus on process and short-term outcomes.
  - Implementing: how the program is received in the community, partners identified and sharing of progress toward your stated goal.
  - Maintenance: the effects of the program are identifiable, the outcome may not be the adoption of the policy but possibly gaining a key partner for your program going forward.

- **Know your audience**: success stories should also be addressed to people and groups in your community, including policy makers, major businesses, organizations, and coalition members.

- **Promote your program and work**: educate decision makers, show movement in program progress, and provide evidence to garner more support and resources.

- **Write for your reader, not yourself**: should appeal to decision makers and identify the specific geographic areas that benefit from your program.

- **Develop an angle**: what is it that you want your readers to think, do, or feel after reading your story, in other words “what is this story about?”

- **Create an emotional hook**: paint a picture of the people behind the facts.

- **Don’t bury or back into the lead**: engage the reader early on and be direct.

- **Avoid wordiness, run on sentences, and jargon**: avoid unnecessary words and sentences, be concise and to the point, and avoid grammatical errors. Be sure not to use words that the audience wouldn’t know.

- **Focus on facts, not fluff**: using broad sentences make your story sound less credible, be able to get to the point and be knowledgeable about the topic.

- **Give it a rest**: put what you have written aside for a day and then re-read your story with a fresh mind.

- **Success stories are the tip of the program iceberg**: writing success stories is a powerful process.

A Good Success Story

- Describes the results that are valued by clients
- Contains compelling, significant facts
- Catches your attention
- Tells who benefits
- Answers: “So what?”
- Spells out Extension’s role in achieving results
- Is easy to read and understand
- Identifies key partners and funders
WRITING AN EFFECTIVE SUCCESS STORY

**WRITE FOR YOUR READER, NOT YOURSELF**
- Must appeal to decision-makers
- Identify the specific target audience that benefit from your program

**DEVELOP AN ANGLE**
- What is it you want the readers to think, do, or feel after reading your story
- As you write, re-read what you have written and ask yourself “what is this story about?”

**CREATE AN EMOTIONAL HOOK**
- Paint a picture of the people behind the facts.

**START EARLY**
- Keeping in mind the goals as the year progresses

**IDENTIFY THE STORY:**
- Planning
  - Early stage stories will focus on process and short-term outcomes
- Implementing
  - How program is received in community
  - Partners identified and progress toward your stated goal
- Maintenance
  - Effects of program are identifiable
  - The outcome may not be the adoption of the policy but possibly gaining a key partner for your program going forward

**FOCUS ON FACTS, NOT FLUFF**
- Broad statements make it sound less credible
- Be able to get to the point and be knowledgeable about the topic

**DEVELOP A PLAN**
- Create a system for collecting good information
- Establish a template/outline for how you want the story to be given
- Plan how you will share the stories

**GIVE IT A REST**
- Put what you have written aside for a day and then re-read your story with a fresh mind.

**REMEMBER, SUCCESS STORIES ARE THE TIP OF THE PROGRAM ICEBERG**
- Writing success stories is a powerful process.

**DON'T BURY OR BACK INTO THE LEAD**
- Engage the reader early on. Be direct.

**AVOID WORDINESS, RUN-ON SENTENCES, AND JARGON**
- Avoid unnecessary words and sentences. Be concise and to the point
- Avoid grammatical errors
- Don’t use words that audiences wouldn’t know the meaning

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Created for Kansas State Extension & Research
Source: Iowa Department of Public Health
Source: Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/documents/successstorytips.pdf
Success Story Checklist

Situation

- Clearly describe an important issue or concern - why should the reader care?
- Show that issue or need is appropriate for an Extension response.
- Include data demonstrating a need.

Response

- Spell out Extension’s role/contribution.
- Identify participants (numbers and demographics of individuals, businesses, and/or communities reached).
- Identify partnerships, if applicable.
- Identify funding sources, if applicable.

Results

- Tell who benefited and how.
- Use numeric and/or narrative data to describe important outcomes.
- Answer “So what?” (i.e., make value clear to reader).
- Link story to research, if appropriate.
- State future plans based on results.
- Show important progress for the reporting period.
- Link work across years.

Evidence

- Describe data collection method.
- Include sample (number and how selected).
- Provide response rate.
- Tell when data were collected.

Writing Style

- Use active voice.
- Make it read like a story.
- Include compelling and significant facts.
- Avoid jargon or acronyms.
- Use concise, complete sentences.
- Refer to people using names/titles, not “this agent.”

Created for Kansas State Extension & Research
Source: University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources
http://ucanr.edu/sites/CEprogramevaluation/files/113720.pdf