

USING STORIES IN EVALUATIONS*

Storytelling is a way of sharing experiences about collaborative work. Stories help us explain what we're trying to achieve; dialogue and reflection guide us in learning about our progress. One of the easiest ways to use stories is to incorporate them into evaluations. Stories give voice to how collaborative activities affect people's lives or work and offer surprising insights about what they've learned in the process. Stories provide a forum for describing, explaining, and reflecting on how changes occur. Together, community members and practitioners can share and expand personal knowledge, as well as consider future directions for collaborative projects.

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

A major question many people ask when developing their story is: "Should we tell the not so good stuff, too?" The answer is a resounding, "Yes!" Stories reflect challenges as well as success so that we are pushed to consider further questions and develop insights. Since the storytelling process allows time for participants to reflect on the causes of a problem, there is an opportunity to recognize difficulties as well as assets and strengths. Learning through stories allows others who experience difficulties an opportunity to share not only their own frustrations, but also solutions of how they were able to overcome their problems. ***Remember a story is just a snapshot in time***; situations and players change from the moment the story is recorded.

A Good Story Is One That:

- ✓ Supplies context, setting or surrounding circumstances
 - Explains the reasons you chose your actions including why the issue was selected, how your actions resulted in change, and how your collaborative's structure and internal relationships affected your actions.
- ✓ Demonstrates success and challenges
 - Provides plenty of description including who was involved, what actions were taken, when and where the actions took place, which actions went smoothly or were problematic.
- ✓ Offers some beneficial lessons
 - Provides reflection on your own story including if there was consensus or disagreement about what should be done, what you might do differently next time and why.

* Adapted from: "[Build Communities: Using Stories in Health Promotion](#)" [Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse](#).

ACTIVITY

CAPTURING COLLABORATIVE STORIES

How many times do you wish you could remember the rich stories that have happened in your collaborative work? Sometimes we get so busy documenting factual information for reports and evaluations that we lose track of the countless examples of other ways we make a difference. Many stories pass through our life unrecorded — tales about developing relationships among community participants, personal observations, compliments, successes, lessons learned, and humorous incidents. These add richness and color to the work we do.

Create Your Own Collaborative Story Book

Think of a time each week when your team members meet, and utilize a small part of that meeting to record the week's stories. The Story Book can be a separate journal or a part of the factual data that is regularly collected. You may decide to combine it with a photo album. Consider capturing stories with pictures, graphics, or youth-produced skits. The important element is that stories are entered on a regular basis.

Stories can be told aloud, while a recorder enters them into the Story Book, or the Story Book can be passed around during the meeting for each person to enter their week's memoirs.

Ask yourselves the following questions to create your own Story Book

1. What will the format be?
2. When and how will we enter our stories?
3. Who is responsible for coordinating this project?
4. How will we utilize our collaborative stories?

Telling Your Community Stories

In addition to incorporating stories into your evaluation, there are a numerous ways your collaborative can use your collected stories. For example, stories can be used to develop articles, press releases, website content, grant proposals, and progress reports. Stories can be retold at special events, public meetings, and to engage new partners.