

Your Story Template

1. Whose story is it?

Identify one person who has benefitted from your organization. What is their name, gender, age, hobbies. Add some identifying personality features.

2. What's happening here?

What brought the person into contact with your organization? What support services did they receive from you?

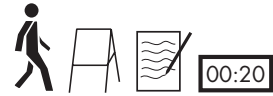
3. What's at stake?

Is your organization breaking a cycle? Saving lives? What would happen if you hadn't intervened?

4. Success!

*What happened once your organization became involved. **What is now possible?***

Six-Word Stories



Ernest Hemingway is said to have written the most famous six-word story: “For sale: baby shoes. Never worn.” Indeed, these six words tell a sad tale succinctly and powerfully.

It’s not easy to write a great six-word story but given a few minutes most people can come up with a pretty good one. Off the top of our heads, here’s an example: “Learned how to ask. Watch out!” Or how about “Wanted: Fundraising chairman. Ours won’t ask.”

Why Do This Exercise?

Fundraising is storytelling—make every word count

Use This Exercise When

You want to end a meeting or training session on a note of creativity

Time Required

If you’re disciplined, about 20 minutes

Audience

All participants in your fundraising campaign: some combination of board, staff, and volunteers

Setting

A room with enough wall or window space to post several sheets of flip chart paper

Materials

- Flip chart paper and markers
- Paper and pens
- Tape (unless you’re using self-stick flip chart paper)

FACILITATING THE EXERCISE

1. Ask if anyone has ever heard a six-word story. Write Hemingway’s famous example—“For sale: baby shoes. Never worn.”—on a flip chart. Ask for opinions about what makes it effective.
2. Hand out a piece of paper to everyone and ask the group to write a six-word story about why your organization matters. Give them no more than two minutes.
3. While they’re writing, post a few pages of flip chart paper on the wall. Post enough sheets so that everyone can write their stories; assume each page will include three or four stories.

4. As people finish, ask them come to the front of the room, take a marker, write their story, and return to their seats.
5. Once all the stories are written, ask each person to read his or hers, going around the room or the table in order.
6. To debrief this exercise, ask the following questions:
 - Which stories appealed to you? Why?
 - What did the most effective stories have in common?
 - Do these stories reveal any message we might use in our donor communications?
7. Collect the stories and recruit someone to compile and distribute them to the participants as a follow-up to the exercise.

We thank our colleague Paula Peter of The Solstice Group for sharing this exercise.

TRAINING TIP Novice trainers sometimes worry their group won't rise to the challenges offered by these exercises. But almost without exception, the people you train will be creative and smart beyond your expectations. As long as you provide the context for the exercise, clear instructions, and the right amount of time (sometimes less time is better than more), a group can accomplish great objectives.

The Case, Simplified



For those who don't know what to say to a donor, this exercise offers a quick and easy way to outline a fundraising pitch. It reinforces the idea that your staff and volunteer leaders already know enough about your work to go out and raise money.

Why Do This Exercise?

To reduce some of the mystery about how to talk with donors

Use This Exercise When

You want a fun, thoughtful activity that engages people and makes them feel knowledgeable

Time Required

30-45 minutes

Audience

All participants in your fundraising

campaign: some combination of board, staff, and volunteers

Setting

Anywhere you gather to work on your campaign plan and train your participants

Materials

- Stopwatch or timer
- Bell or whistle (optional)
- The Case, Simplified—Worksheet (page 69)

FACILITATING THE EXERCISE

1. Photocopy the worksheet on page 69 in advance.
2. Hand out copies of the worksheet with the following instructions: “Please write your name on the top of the page. We’re going to fill in this form one question at a time and do it quickly—so please don’t work ahead. Write as legibly as you can. First question: What are we proud of about our organization? Write down three things you’re most proud of. You’ve got one minute for this question. Go!”
3. After one minute—give them a little more time, if needed—ring the bell. Ask for volunteers to read one or two items on their list; keep doing this until you’ve heard several of the items.
4. Read question two with the same instructions: “You’ve got one minute. Go!”

5. Continue this process through the final question, giving participants two minutes to make notes about their favorite anecdotes. Once they're done, recruit two or three volunteers to tell their favorite stories. You can also ask for feedback: "What made that story effective? How could the storyteller improve it?"
6. Debrief this exercise with the following questions:
 - What was your experience filling in the form? Did you find it easy? Challenging? Why?
 - When we discussed our answers, did you hear any that really stuck with you? Which ones? Why?
7. As you complete the exercise, make the following point: "Each of you just wrote a fundraising pitch, because when we're talking to donors, these are the things we talk about: What makes us proud of our work? What makes our work unique? Who are we trying to involve and engage? And finally: What's the story that sums it all up, that creates the emotional connection?"
8. Collect the worksheets and recruit someone to compile and edit them. When this task is complete, you will have a great two-page summary any solicitor could use during the practice exercises in Chapter 6 or with an actual donor. Thinking more broadly, this case material is also useful for fundraising letters, email appeals, grant proposals, and so on.

TRAINING TIP As with any timed exercise, follow your instincts about how flexible to be on the timing. How many of your colleagues continue writing after one minute? How many are sitting around looking bored? Pay attention to their body language and adjust the time accordingly. As a general rule, it's better to move things along rather than let the exercise drag.

The Case, Simplified

WORKSHEET

What are we proud of? What's our impact in the community?

Write down three things about our organization that you're most proud of:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Differentiation: What distinguishes us from other organizations?

What do we *have* or *do* that no one else has or does? It's okay to think about this geographically: "We are the only group in Washington County that ..."

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Market segmentation: Who are we trying to reach?

List the audiences we want to reach for any purpose: education, service delivery, fundraising, advocacy, collaboration, and the like.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

What's your favorite story?

Write notes about your favorite anecdote or example that describes the impact of our work. Remember, "Statistics raise eyebrows but emotions raise money"—so go easy on the data and jargon. Pretend you're talking to a friend or neighbor.
