

Communicating

Impact

A Practical Storytelling Guide for the Social Sector

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Most NGOs and CSOs are doing incredible work — and nobody knows about it. Not because the work isn't worthy of attention, but because the stories aren't being told in a way that moves people. This guide gives you the frameworks, language, and practical tools to change that.

1. Why Impact Communication Matters

Donors don't fund statistics. Governments don't pass policies because of reports. Communities don't change behaviour because of infographics. People are moved by stories — by seeing themselves or someone they care about in the narrative.

Impact communication is the bridge between the work you do and the people who need to understand why it matters. Done well, it unlocks funding, builds trust, attracts partners, and amplifies the voices of the communities you serve.

2. The Story Spine Framework

Every compelling impact story follows a simple structure. Use this as your template:

Once upon a time... Introduce the context. Where, who, what was the situation before your intervention?

Every day... Describe the challenge. What problem were people facing? Make it human and specific.

Until one day... Your organisation enters. What did you do? What changed?

Because of that... Show the immediate result. What happened as a direct consequence of your work?

Until finally... The transformation. What does life look like now for the person/community?

And ever since then... The lasting impact. What's the long-term change? What does the future look like?

3. The 3 Layers of Impact

Every piece of impact communication should work on three levels:

Individual	One person's story. Specific, named (with consent), emotional. This is your hook.
Community	The ripple effect. How did this one person's experience reflect or shift something broader?
Systemic	The policy or structural change. What does this mean at scale? What should funders, governments, and partners do next?

4. Writing for Different Audiences

Donors & Funders

Lead with impact numbers, then humanise with a story. Use the language from their own funding call. Show sustainability and systems change.

Communities

Use local language and references. Centre community voices — let them tell their own story wherever possible. Avoid saviour narratives.

Government & Policy

Frame around national priorities and data. Use technical language where appropriate but always anchor in human outcomes.

General Public / Social Media

Short, visual, emotional. One clear message per post. Strong opening line. Always end with a call to action.

5. The Consent & Ethics Checklist

Before you publish any story involving a real person from your community, ask:

- Have I obtained written or recorded informed consent?
- Does the person understand how and where the story will be used?
- Have I given them the opportunity to review and approve the final content?
- Am I centring their dignity, not just their vulnerability?
- Am I telling their story — or using it to tell our organisation's story?
- Have I considered the potential risks to this person of being publicly identified?

Remember: A story told without consent is not impact communication. It's exploitation.

6. Quick Formulas That Work

The Problem-Solution-Impact Formula

State the problem (specific, human). Show what your organisation did. Quantify AND humanise the result.

The Before/After Formula

Paint a vivid picture of life before. Then show the transformation. Then zoom out to the scale.

The Quote Sandwich

Set up the context. Drop a powerful direct quote from a community member. Then provide your organisation's framing around it.

Need help putting this into practice?

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