



# HOW TO USE STORIES TO WIN YOUR CAMPAIGN

Stories inspire people. They allow someone to absorb issues through the eyes of another. They can teach people about issues and motivate them to action.

Many of us have a story from our personal or professional lives about how tobacco use has impacted us or motivated us to get involved in efforts to prevent tobacco from hurting our communities. Perhaps a close family member or friend has died from smoking. Maybe you're motivated by the opportunity to create a safe future for your children or to just improve public health. Perhaps you're motivated to help reduce health disparities driven by tobacco use and the industry that promotes it.

Stories can help to educate communities and decision makers, create conversations, and to help recruit new supporters, advocates, and non-traditional stakeholders.

## STORIES SHOULD BE:

- > Personal
- > Impactful
- > Understandable
- > Brief



*"My grandfather was a chain smoker and would constantly smoke in our home, exposing my family and me to the thousands of toxic chemicals that soon killed my grandmother. She was only 51 when she died from lung cancer. Her death caused great turmoil in our family. My grandmother was the heart and love that kept our family together. The tobacco industry took her away from me when I was eleven. I will never forgive or forget what tobacco has done to my grandmother, so today I am fighting for smoke-free multi-unit housing in our city. Growing up in a low-income Asian American immigrant household, my family didn't learn about the damaging health effects of secondhand smoke. Everyone deserves to keep their loved ones and breathe clean air in their homes."*



## BE SENSITIVE

It is recommended that you start a relationship with a potential storyteller and build trust with them before presenting an ask, like requesting a personal story. When collecting stories from community stakeholders and those impacted by tobacco use, it is critical to demonstrate empathy, respect, and a strong sense of cultural sensitivity. Collaborating and working with people from marginalized communities requires humility and the will to listen to their personal experiences. People may have a unique story based on lived experiences, so it is critical to amplify their words with a genuine tone. Encourage people who are sharing their stories to actively participate in the campaign and contribute their narratives and voices to the coalition. This will help avoid false narratives, tokenizing, and playing a “savior” role.

WHO TO COLLECT STORIES FROM:	EXAMPLES:
<b>People who are personally affected by an issue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents with children who use tobacco or vaping products.</li> <li>• A youth who sees their friends using e-cigarettes.</li> <li>• People with health conditions exposed to secondhand smoke in multi-unit housing and public areas.</li> </ul>
<b>Your coalition members</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People with personal stories that also connect to their professional involvement in tobacco control.</li> <li>• Colleagues, family, and friends who have been personally impacted by tobacco use.</li> </ul>
<b>Your strongest allies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizations with a pool of resources and contacts and other local groups.</li> </ul>
<b>People or organizations who have the greatest credibility on this issue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doctors and nurses</li> <li>• Health experts</li> <li>• Researchers</li> <li>• Patient advocacy organizations</li> <li>• Public health advocacy organizations</li> </ul>
<b>People who decision makers listen to</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key community leaders and stakeholders (Heads of labor, business groups, nonprofits, etc.)</li> <li>• Other decision makers, political leaders</li> <li>• Big names</li> </ul>
<b>Diverse voices</b>	<p>People relate most to someone they can see themselves in. Think about the people you are trying to reach and find stories that echo those demographics.</p> <p>When you are collecting stories, ask yourself if they are representative of different:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Genders and non-binary supporters</li> <li>• Ages</li> <li>• Geographical area (Urban, suburban, rural, etc.)</li> <li>• Priority populations (LGBTQ, Black/African American, Asian American Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, and rural)</li> <li>• Faith-based organizations or community organizations</li> <li>• Socioeconomic status</li> </ul>
<b>People who can rebut opposition arguments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think about what your opponents’ main arguments will be and find someone who can rebut that argument due to their personal experience, education, etc.</li> </ul>

# HOW TO COLLECT STORIES

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## 1. GET CONSENT. BE SURE TO FIND OUT IF THE PERSON IS COMFORTABLE HAVING THEIR STORY MADE PUBLIC

Clearly outline the details about how you will be publishing their stories for the future and obtain their consent for any/all uses by your organization.

Ask if you can share the story with organizational partners. You must obtain written consent and keep this on file.

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## 2. PLAN AHEAD. ALWAYS BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR STORIES

Collecting stories is an ongoing process. It takes time to find people to tell their stories to build a robust bank of quality stories that support your campaign's message. Planning for upcoming events and building your bank to use for short-notice events reduces scrambling and resorting to stories that may not fit your needs. Use every opportunity to gather stories throughout your campaign - this could be at coalition meetings, Zoom calls, or community events.

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## 3. ASK YOUR COALITION MEMBERS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTERS TO TELL THEIR STORY

Think about who is on your side already. Coalition members and other organizational partners are the best resources for story gathering. They joined your group for a reason, find out what that story/reason is! What other organizations are you already working with or have worked with in

the past? Can you ask them to reach out to their members or supporters for stories?

Think about schools, clubs, and other groups where they have asked your campaign to table at events. Have senior centers, children's organizations, voluntary health organizations, small business organizations, trade associations, or community health centers asked you to come speak to their members? Are you issuing a survey or holding a focus group soon? Use these opportunities to talk to people and ask them why they support your campaign. Attendees or event organizers may have stories you could use.

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## 4. LOOK OUT FOR THOSE WHO HAVE SPOKEN ON BEHALF OF YOUR CAMPAIGN BEFORE

Think about the last city council hearing or community organizing event you attended, were there supporters who testified on behalf of your campaign? Follow up with those people and ask why they support your campaign.

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## 5. USE SOCIAL MEDIA AND/OR YOUR WEBSITE

Use your social media accounts and/or website to solicit personal stories or request your followers to post a story on their social media accounts. You may receive stories from supporters you were not expecting.

Spend some time searching out related hashtags or topics to find people already posting about tobacco control, engage with them, and build

rapport. For example, the California Tobacco Endgame Center for Organizing and Engagement uses #VoicesAgainstTobacco. Once you feel comfortable, you can reach out and let them know you appreciate all the work they are doing and ask if they would be interested in joining your campaign or sharing their story. If someone has already posted their story online, reach out and ask if you can share it (give them credit, of course) and if they would be willing to be included in your database of storytellers for future needs.



#### **6. USE EXISTING MATERIALS YOU ARE ALREADY DISTRIBUTING TO SOLICIT STORIES.**

Work smarter, not harder. Think about materials you already have available to distribute to supporters or potential supporters that you can use to solicit stories. Do you have a form that you use to sign up supporters? Edit it to add in a section at the bottom where supporters can tell you their story and give you permission to use it. When someone signs up for your email list, can you add in a section to their welcome email that asks them to share their story with you? Add a line at the bottom of flyers you distribute to have supporters email you with their story.



#### **7. TALK TO PEOPLE AND GET TO KNOW THEM.**

Have conversations at your in-person or virtual community events. Set up one-on-one phone calls or online meetings with potential coalition members to get to know who they are and if they seem like a good fit with your coalition/work group. Take this opportunity to let them know who you are as well so they can learn about your story and why you are working on your campaign. By starting a conversation with someone about your campaign, you can determine if they have any personal stories you can use to help your campaign win.



#### **8. SET A REALISTIC AND SIMPLE GOAL.**

At the beginning of your campaign, or even as you are reading this, set a goal of how many different stories you want to gather. Keep that goal simple and achievable. Understand that story collecting is hard, and you may need to change your approach and methods according to who you are working with or who your target is.



## HOW TO BUILD A STORY BANK

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### 1. START A STORY DATABASE

**Include:**

- A brief description of the story.
- Who the story is from?
- Storyteller contact information
- A link to any supplemental materials like photos, videos, or graphics.
- If they have been trained to talk to media, speak in front of hearings, press conferences, or other events.
- Whether a signed media release is needed and if there is one on file.
- The last time the story was used in any outreach materials, events, or social media posts.

The database will help keep the stories and your storytellers organized, for engaging them and sharing their stories.

### 2. KEEP IT UPDATED

It goes without saying, but make sure to keep your database updated! When you get a new story add it to the database immediately, so you have all your stories easily accessible and up to date when you need them.

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### 3. CONSIDER SHARING YOUR DATABASE WITH OTHER TOBACCO CONTROL PARTNERS

Sharing your story database with other tobacco control partners and supporters can help expand your campaign's reach. Do not forget to ask if they can share their database with you as well! Maybe one of your supporting groups has the perfect story for your campaign. Make sure to obtain the consent of your storytellers to share their story with partner organizations and store the consent in your story bank.

## HOW TO USE YOUR STORIES

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A simple story that is personal and relevant to your campaign can be applied to many aspects in the campaigning process, such as:

- Social media posts
- Public comment before a city council meeting
- Media interviews
- Speaking at a community organizing event or rally
- Authoring an op-ed or letter to the editor
- Authoring a blog post for your website

Do not limit the stories to one box. If you have someone write a letter to the editor, maybe they can speak on behalf of your campaign at an event as well. Also think about different ways you can use that story to make an impact for your campaign. Did you get a media interview on TV or radio? Post that clip on social media or your website or include it in your next newsletter, etc.

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**PAIR THE STORY WITH YOUR CAMPAIGN'S STRONGEST ARGUMENTS.** Weave stories into your campaign's messaging. Think about how different parts of a story can be used to bolster your arguments. For example, the story featured above uses their grandmother's death from lung cancer to support their argument the city should enact smoke-free multi-unit housing policies.

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**PAIR THE STORY WITH DATA TO MAKE THE BIGGEST IMPACT.** Use data people can easily understand and make it as relatable as possible by creating a mental picture or visuals. For example, instead of saying, "31% of high school age youth use tobacco," you can say, "three out of 10 youth use tobacco." Help draw a picture for your audience.



### SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SHARING YOUR STORY WITH DECISION MAKERS.

- Create a personal connection. Are you a constituent of the decision maker(s)? Do you live in the same neighborhood? Do you have children that go to the same school as the decision maker's children?
- Before you share your story, clearly state why you are meeting with the decision maker or speaking in front the council. For example, are you informing them about a tobacco-related problem?
- Make sure to keep your story brief. You will only have a few minutes to share your story.

Do not forget to make it clear why the stories you are sharing matter and what changes can be made in the future to improve the wellbeing of your community.

## PRIORITIZE VISUAL STORYTELLING

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*Visual imagery has a profound effect on people and photos or videos are some of the best ways for your campaign to tell personal stories that resonate with decision makers and the public. Below, we'll provide some tips on what a good photo or video to use for storytelling looks like and how to compose these visuals to help your campaign.*

### PHOTOS

A good photo can help your campaign connect with supporters without them even reading a word about it. But what makes a good photo?

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#### KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

**Think about the story you want to tell, or the emotion you want to convey before you start taking or collecting videos.** What do you want your video to convey to someone who is unfamiliar with your campaign? How would you draw them in and make them read your social media post or visit your website? Do you want to show how your smoke-free multi-unit housing campaign would benefit renters? Film a real person showing how their health suffered due to living next to a neighbor who smokes.

#### Compose your photo in a visually appealing way.

- Use real people. People respond to photos that look like their friends, family or community. Make sure to get their permission to use their photo beforehand.

- Make sure those people come across as real and genuine. People are really good at looking at a photo and determining if it's an over-produced advertisement.
- Use the rule of thirds to draw the viewer's eye to the speaker or frame the person in the center of the photo. Imagine an image divided into nine equal parts by two equally spaced horizontal lines and two equally spaced vertical lines. Place your key photo elements along these lines or where they cross. See above photo as an example.
- Make sure to have good lighting and hold your camera horizontal.
- Do not use horizontal photos for social media stories on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat. Hold the camera vertically for these photos.

#### Practice. Practice. Practice.

Remember that you do not need to be a professional photographer. Viewers may respond better to a less-produced photo with a compelling story attached than a slick looking photo with a generic story.



## VIDEOS

Videos are a great way for you to spread your message in a more dynamic and eye-catching way.

### KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

**Think about the story you want to tell, or the emotion you want to convey before you start taking or collecting videos.** What do you want your video to convey to someone who is unfamiliar with your campaign? How would you draw them in and make them read your social media post or visit your website? Do you want to show how your smoke-free multi-unit housing campaign would benefit renters? Film a real person showing how their health suffered due to living next to a neighbor who smokes.

**Think about how to convey your message in the shortest amount of time.** Most people only watch a video online for 15 seconds before moving on to something else. Think about how you can get the

most information about your campaign into that time frame or how you can front-load the video with the most important information - **the HOW and WHY?** You want the viewer engaged and willing to watch the rest of your video to find out more about your campaign.

### Compose your video in a visually appealing way.

- Use real people. People respond to videos featuring people that look like their friends, family, or community. Make sure to get their permission to use their video beforehand.
- Use the rule of thirds to draw the viewer's eye to the speaker or frame the person in the center of the video. Refer to the instructions provided earlier.
- You can easily capture good video with your cell phone nowadays that can be used on social media, given to reporters, or even used for paid media.
- Make sure to have good lighting and hold your camera horizontal.
- Use horizontal videos unless you are using



it for social media stories on Facebook and Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat. Then, hold the camera vertically.

- Make sure your audio is ok. Cell phone video is good for getting up close to someone to make sure the audio is at an appropriate level. There are also inexpensive microphones you can attach to your cell phone to help pick up sound.

**Practice. Practice. Practice.** Remember that you do not need to be a professional videographer. Viewers may respond better to a less-produced video with a compelling story attached than a slick looking video with a generic story.

**Remember – Keep it simple.** Do not worry about coming up with the most intricate, detailed picture or video for your campaign. Focus on the message or emotion you want to convey. This will help your campaign move supporters to act.