Nonprofit Storytelling: Framing the Message for Compelling Communication

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Nonprofit Storytelling: Framing the Message for Compelling Communication

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of the requirements
For the Murray State University Honors Diploma

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Abstract

Effectively communicating mission, values and social impact within the nonprofit sector is a complex task that can reflect on and shape organizational success. This research explores storytelling as a communication technique by developing best practices and writing advocates’ stories for nonprofit organizations associated with the United Way of Murray-Calloway County. Storytelling develops empathy and allows organizations to share success stories, acting as a springboard for future constituent and stakeholder engagement. By capturing the personal experiences of individuals, it provides evidence of organizational impact in ways that statistics cannot, and supports the organizations’ overall activities by improving fundraising, developing a brand and raising awareness. By drawing on a variety of sources from both practitioners and academics, this thesis identifies best practices for developing effective approaches to storytelling. The stories developed in the framework of this thesis focus on the specific impact each nonprofit organization has had on the advocate’s life, featuring the personal experiences of employees, volunteers and clients. The stories exemplify different approaches to storytelling depending on the nature of each advocate’s experience and align with the best practices of this research. The impact of these stories is analyzed using Facebook metrics and analytics tools to determine potential implications of storytelling through social media channels.
Introduction

Communication within the nonprofit sector is complex. At the same time, it aims to connect constituents with an organization by describing the social impact; draw stakeholders closer to the organization’s mission and cause; and cultivate current and prospective donors. Whether through collateral material, social media posts or face-to-face interactions, organizations are constantly communicating; the most compelling messaging will develop empathy, share measurable impact and ultimately increase engagement with the organization. A variety of approaches can be taken to create compelling messaging that fulfills multiple purposes and most effectively reaches the various audiences of an organization.

Despite the importance of communication for organizational success, marketing in the nonprofit sector has been a controversial topic because of its development in the private sector and focus on profitability (Gainer, 2010, p. 302). Still, nonprofit organizations must effectively communicate their mission to an array of constituents and stakeholders to thrive within the sector. The organization must stand out while at the same time differentiating itself from other organizations with a similar mission, serving the same or similar population. In addition to a financial bottom line, nonprofit organizations must meet a social bottom line by advancing the mission through the contributions of donors, volunteers and other stakeholders. The message that carries the mission, shares the program initiative, or convinces donors that their dollar is needed, must be weighty enough to push through the noise of other organization’s attempting to communicate to the same audience.

Storytelling is a communication technique that today is at the forefront of both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. Storytelling serves multiple purposes; it can be framed to build a brand, utilized to be a fundraising tool or raise awareness. Nonprofit organizations use
storytelling to create an emotional appeal and draw constituents closer to their cause and to take action, highlighting the impact and success the organization has in serving its clients. It can rely on visual formats such as videos and pictures to tell the story as well as on the traditional, written narrative format.

In this thesis I explore the role of nonprofit communication with an emphasis on storytelling as a communication technique for effective messaging. Accordingly, this thesis first reviews the complexity of framing a compelling message that meets the needs of an array of audiences, is measurable and can develop empathy. It then analyzes the role of storytelling in the nonprofit sector from the perspective of both practitioners and academics and focuses in particular on its contribution to branding, fundraising and raising awareness. This review serves to identify best practices by highlighting ten approaches to effective storytelling. By drawing on these best practices, I wrote a brief story for each of the eleven nonprofits partnering with United Way of Murray-Calloway County and posted each on the local United Way’s Facebook page. As the stories are the center of this research, they are included with an explanation as a chapter of this thesis to demonstrate the technique. To further the understanding of storytelling, this thesis concludes with an analysis of Facebook engagement of these stories using Facebook Insights – Facebook’s built in metrics and analytics tool – and discusses implications for sharing stories using social media channels.
Literature Review

Communication in both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors exists to facilitate exchanges with constituencies (Gainer, 2010, p. 325). In the nonprofit sector, communication pertains to an array of audiences, including clients, donors, funders, partners and volunteers (Gainer, 2010, p. 301). As communication should be framed to meet the needs of the audience, it becomes difficult to create messages that are effective for all constituents and stakeholders. Additionally, nonprofit organizations use communication for a variety of purposes within the organization, making it difficult to find one technique that is both effective and compelling to fulfill these roles.

Storytelling has become a popular technique within nonprofit communication. It has been praised as “the key to relevant fundraising” (Barden, 2015), and when done well can be more powerful than statistics, demonstrating that “one is more than many” (Chung, 2014). Despite this, Kanani (2014), for example, emphasizes that storytelling cannot stand-alone as a measure of success. Rather, it should be coupled with relevant data measurements of organizational impact. In this literature review, I examine the role of nonprofit communication followed by an analysis of the roles storytelling can have within the organization. The chapter concludes with best practices for the use of storytelling in the nonprofit sector.

Communicating the Message

At the center of nonprofit communication are fundraising, branding and raising awareness. According to David Williamson (2009), professor at Georgetown University’s Center for Public and Nonprofit Leadership, communication is the means of survival for nonprofit organizations (p. 2). Competition for philanthropic resources and public attention is
fierce as organizations are competing for assets from the same pool of potential volunteers and donors. Communication is about more than brochures and the content on a website. It includes all interactions between the nonprofit organization and its constituents; even when an organization is not producing blog posts or sending e-blasts, it is still communicating a message to constituents as the organization’s voice is lost while another emerges. An important component of effective marketing is utilizing “pull” communication, that is, the messaging provides opportunity for action through different channels such as commenting on a post or using the “donate now” button.

Communication serves many purposes within the nonprofit organization. It supports fundraising efforts, highlights mission impact, demonstrates transparency and builds the brand (Williamson, 2009). Communication can advance the mission of an organization. For example, social marketing, defined as using marketing techniques to change behaviors for the greater social good, is a strategy that lives out the mission of the organization while communicating it to constituents in a way that is memorable and effective. Additionally, people are becoming more intentional about what organization they give their time and money to. When an organization demonstrates its ability to accomplish the mission, individuals become more likely to donate. This is particularly important for a new generation of donors, as millennials (people born between 1981 and 2000) are more likely to donate to organizations that they can experience the work of without being onsite (Pyser, 2014). The way to do this: descriptive, compelling communication.

The duties of an organization’s communication are not limited to one area; rather, from programs to development, all areas of an organization have to use communication to thrive. All messages the organization sends must seamlessly fit together, creating one unified message that
is written from the same identifiable voice of the organization. An effective message is framed for a specific targeted audience. This practice is a craft that occurs with the intentional focus of creating a compelling message with attention to the details that create the organization and language that describes it. A crucial task for nonprofit organizations is to communicate their ability to make a difference, in other words, their social impact. This has become a particularly important issue in recent years because of the increasing attention to accountability and performance measurement.

**Measuring Impact**

Strategies of measuring social impact are key components of the new centrality of performance management within the nonprofit sector. Measuring impact within the sector is necessary for evaluating the effectiveness of organizational performance. Quality measures can increase the effectiveness of services by allowing organizations to learn from past failures and successes and make adjustments; develop accountability among funders; and learn from success to advance the sector (*Connecting Program Outcomes*, 2005, p. 5). Although extremely important, measuring impact is complex and easily overlooked or neglected within an organization because of the subjective nature of program success and the lack of resources (Thomas, 2010, p. 401).

As a measure of impact, nonprofit organizations often measure outputs rather than social impact. For example, in the case of a child sponsorship program, a true measure of impact is not solely the number of children being sponsored – an output – but rather the influence on the lives of the children that develops from acting on the services of the sponsorship, such as graduating high school or getting a job. Often, data relevant to a project’s objectives do not receive the
analysis necessary to actually evaluate impact (Kanani, 2014). Measuring impact is only effective if the most relevant data is measured.

To address this issue, different tools have been created to measure impact. One of the most commonly used is the logic model, which was developed by United Way in the early 2000s to ensure best practices and accountability of its member agencies. The logic model allows organizations to analyze the relationship between resources, activity and outcomes through a systematic visual representation (KF, p. 2). The model describes the intended results that will occur from mobilizing resources and developing activities. The logic model approach creates shared understanding and emphasizes goals that influence methodology to produce quality outcomes (KF, p. 5).

In line with this focus on outcomes and social impact, the Urban Institute and the Center for What Works developed the Outcome Indicators Project in 2006. The research provides a framework for tracking nonprofit performance. The project identifies a standard approach for nonprofit organizations to collect and analyze data from their work to inform practice. The study examined fourteen program areas and developed tools to help measure and understand program outcomes and outcome indicators. These program areas cover a diverse array of social goals, ranging from adult education and family literacy to assisted living and performing arts. Nonprofit organizations can utilize this tool to improve how it measures impact, therefore improving overall communication with constituents about mission impact.

The focus on performance management, however, creates new challenges for the communication and marketing side of the nonprofit sector. A key question becomes how to engage various stakeholders in the organizations’ work, while at the same time, demonstrating impact. A national survey of nonprofits found that organizations communicate data to acquire
new donors, engage their community and promote their brand (Baum, 2015). Organizations have shifted from relying heavily on numerical data to a focus on anecdotal evidence. Concerns arise with both numerical and anecdotal evidence in the nonprofit sector – neither incorporates both human value and statistical analysis. While the use of anecdotal evidence is meant to measure a “changed life,” the parameters around this are difficult to identify. Furthermore, one success story of a “changed life” described through anecdotal evidence does not translate into long-term success, neither for the individual nor the organization. One constituent’s success story does not translate into a successful organization. Michael Smith, director of the United States government's Social Innovation Fund, argues in his TEDxMidAtlantic talk that it is necessary to see if the results found in one success story are consistent for the organization and is not its only success story of “a gangbanger turned MIT nuclear physicist.”

According to Andy Goodman (2015), a public interest communications consultant, a combination of data and storytelling should be used to measure and share organizational success. Neither can stand-alone as an effective measure of impact. The data need to support the story, and by reinforcing each other they have the ability to impact different audiences with a greater punch, as people react differently to different types of data. The story provides the connection; the data backs up the connection and provides depth to the story. Anecdotes humanize a complex societal problem, and the data proves that you have more than one story to tell about the work of the organization.

**Framing the Message**

As an organization must communicate its mission and impact, the framing of the message shapes the potential effectiveness of the content. As described by framing theory, one issue or
topic can be viewed from a variety of perspectives, and the perspective the issue is told from shapes the meaning of the message. According to Dennis Chong and James Druckman (2007), professors at Northwestern University, framing refers to the process people use to conceptualize an issue and orient their thinking about a topic (p.104). A frame organizes reality, showcases societal trends and provides interpretations for the consumer. Framing begins at topic selection, as choosing to discuss one topic and not another assigns value to each topic (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p.106).

Framing a message with the right frame produces effective communication. It is not enough to simply communicate; rather organizational messaging must be communicated well to be compelling. Digital marketing experts estimate that most Americans are exposed to around 4,000 to 10,000 advertisements daily, not including all other messages an individual receives through daily interactions with people (Marshall, 2015). Because of the overwhelming amount of messaging current and perspective constituents are exposed to, messaging must be thoughtfully framed to attract attention in a sea of advertisements and appeals.

Within the nonprofit sector, storytelling is a narrative communication technique to frame a message that is able to fulfill the needs of the organization and communicate with multiple audiences by showcasing a constituent’s experiences. It has a wide variety of application, but at the most basic level, stories are used to share the impact of the organization’s work and evoke emotion that will cause the reader to take action. Storytelling has the ability to be a fundraising tool, develop a brand and raise awareness through a single story. It can be used across different communication channels from social media platforms to mailers and word of mouth. Storytelling is not restricted by budget, but is available for all organizations to utilize. The following subsections describe roles of storytelling within the nonprofit sector.
Storytelling as a Communication Technique

Although the communication technique of storytelling has been common practice for decades, storytelling has become the buzzword within the nonprofit sector within the last five years. According to collaborative research by Georgetown University Center for Social Impact Communication and the Meyer Foundation (2014), storytelling is one of the most talked about, yet least understood topics in nonprofit communications and fundraising today. Eighty-one nonprofits serving the greater Washington, D.C. area were surveyed for the study. The results showed that 59 percent of participants used storytelling with the main goal of increasing fundraising dollars, 25 percent of participants used storytelling as an awareness tool and 9 percent used it as an advocacy tool. The top three channels for sharing the stories were on the organizations website, in an e-newsletter and on Facebook. An additional component of the research included completing an online story audit of 157 nonprofit organizations serving the greater Washington, D.C. area. These results showed that 68 percent of the stories had a clear call to action to either donate (77 percent) or volunteer (50 percent). All of the stories told focused on the mission in action, telling why services are needed, how the mission is delivered or the founding history of the organization.

Not all stories must be told the same way and different approaches can be taken that best fit the content of the story with the delivery method. Five types of stories include: founding, focus, impact, strength and future (Schwarts, 2014).

- **Founding** stories tell the story of the organization’s creation. This type of story tells why the organization was created, and the main character(s) will be the founding member(s) of the organization.
• **Focus** stories tell why the organization continues to exist. These stories connect the dots between mission and constituents.

• **Impact** stories are the testimonial stories that reveal the influence an organization has had on an individual’s life.

• **Strength** stories highlight the work that the organization does well and the particular programs that advance the organization’s mission.

• **Future** stories emphasize the call to action and describe the vision of the organization.

Although these are different types of stories, often they can be combined into one story to highlight different components of the organization.

Julie Dixon (2014), research director of National Journal’s Communication Council, advises nonprofit organizations to create a culture of storytelling within the organization by establishing a “story bank” with a consistent supply of stories that describe the organization’s work. In doing so, she suggests the organization’s work can be shared not only on paper or a computer screen but also by word of mouth, shared during a donor call or at a volunteer appreciation event. These banks become a living portfolio of the organization’s work that are continually updated and in sync with how the organization is actually performing. Organizations of any size can utilize storytelling, as there is no financial tie to the practice.

Organizations must commit to intentionally seeking out and sharing stories internally in order to create this type of culture. One suggested practice is having each director verbally share the stories that developed within their area during staff meetings. Devoting time to this when all employees are together benefits the staff as they hear the influence of their work, and the stories of the organization naturally come together to “fill the bank.” This requires buy-in and
appreciation by all staff members to be effective, and the purpose behind the effort should be shared among the staff before practice.

_Storytelling to Develop Empathy_

A benefit of storytelling is the ability for the reader to connect with one individual and develop empathy. Maya Angelou’s quote, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel,” stands true with storytelling, highlighting the high value placed on emotion (Gallo, 2014). It is easier for donors to believe they can make a difference when they are connecting with an individual, rather than a statistic that may lead the perspective donor to wonder whether “my donation even make a difference.” The readers of the story have the ability to see themselves within the story while placing themselves in the shoes of the main character, thus developing empathy. Empathy allows the reader to see the world from another point of view by developing a shared perspective that results in shared emotion. In contrast, sympathy develops the emotions of sorrow and pity for another person’s conditions, but neglects the shared component of walking in another person’s shoes. Thus, empathy is the emotional response that will lead to action.

In a study by Saerom Lee, Karen Page Winterich and William Ross Jr. (2014), the influence of justice and empathy in giving patterns was examined. According to the study, “it’s not only the characteristics of the giver that determine their likelihood of donating, but characteristics they perceive in the recipient” (p. 4). For causes that do not naturally develop empathy, utilizing storytelling is a technique to draw potential donors close to a cause by developing a connection between reader and character.
Neurologically, storytelling has the unique ability to evoke emotion, develop empathy and inspire action through the response that occurs in the brain when engaging with a compelling story (Zak, 2014). According to this research, the stress hormone cortisol is produced during tense moments of a story, increasing focus, while oxytocin, a feel-good chemical, is produced when a connection is made with the story, developing a sense of empathy. The “happily ever after” of a story stimulates the limbic system and releases dopamine, creating a hopeful and optimistic feeling. The greater the release of these chemicals, the more likely an individual is to respond to a call of action. As social creatures, we desire to relate to others, increasing our likelihood to choose to engage in a story over other communication techniques.

Storytelling as a Component of Branding

The cornerstone of marketing is branding. According to Peter Frumkin (2015), director of the Master’s in Nonprofit Leadership program at the University of Pennsylvania, a brand is the “sum total of perceptions about what a nonprofit stands for, what it does and how much social impact it is thought to achieve.” It is the identity a constituent or stakeholder associates with an organization, and essentially relates to its reputation. The identity a stakeholder associates with an organization can be positive or negative, just as a reputation can be. Frumkin argues that an organization’s brand is its most valuable asset, making it the “gateway to all other assets, both human and financial,” because of the reputation factor.

Emphasis on branding in the nonprofit sector has continued to develop since its emergence in the 1970s. Nonprofit organizations focus on branding for reasons including communicating organizational values; developing trust among constituents through consistency of messaging; ability to attract potential donors and volunteers through appealing marketing
materials; and creating a unique image for the nonprofit organization that allows it to stand out among other organizations with a similar mission. Conversely, nonprofit organizations may hesitate to fully embrace storytelling because they fear of being perceived as too commercialized and because of the difficulty of justifying diverting resources from services (Ritchie, Swami & Weinberg, 1998). Although branding is important, organizations must provide services that reinforce the perceived brand of the organization to be effective.

Frumkin states that one of the building blocks to a successful brand is communication. For a constituent to develop an identity with an organization, they must know something about the organization, which is discovered through interaction with the website and collateral material, participating through volunteering, donating or attending a program as well as interactions with other constituents of the organization. Word of mouth spreads information between people, and stories are often the form of communication people use to share an experience. These stories develop the identity of a nonprofit organization in the eyes of constituents, therefore shaping the brand of the organization. When nonprofit organizations use stories to describe their work, the organization is choosing the stories that will be shared with constituents. Organizations handpick the stories, thus shaping their identity and the public perception of their work. These stories should showcase the organization’s mission and values in ways that readers can align with their own beliefs to develop a relationship between constituent and organization.

_Storytelling as a Fundraising Tool_

As storytelling builds brand identity and shares organizational impact, it is natural for storytelling to be of benefit for grant seekers. The story serves many purposes for the nonprofit
organization, and allows grant makers to develop a connection with the organization. Storytelling provides a creative approach that allows the organization to stand out among other grant seekers that serve the same target population. Storytelling develops a descriptive outlet for sharing unique programs or models in a way that humanizes the approach.

Storytelling may also recruit new donors. Not only can stories be shared on the organization’s communication channels such as social media platforms, e-blasts and newsletters, but these stories may also be shared with potential donors in face-to-face meetings. Fundraising is rooted in relationships that are built on trust that can be shared through stories as they illustrate the past use of funds and how they were used with accountability. Furthermore, sharing stories allows donors to feel a connection with the organization. As the emotional connection develops, the potential donor is inspired and responds to the call to action.

As relationships are cultivated with donors, the organization’s representatives learn to know the donors and thus are able to share the stories that match donors’ specific interest in relation to a particular program of the organization. First, allow the donor to tell their own story and listen intently to find connections between the donor’s experiences and passions that align with the organization. After meeting with a donor, record important information about their life and interests to follow up on, and come prepared to the next donor meeting with a story tailored to their interest. It is important that the organization has multiple stories prepared that describe different aspects of the organization’s work and align with the persona of a variety of donors.

Using the storytelling technique provides a unique approach to the typical campaigns and fundraising approaches. A series of stories can be used as a fundraising campaign to share memorable impact. For example, storytelling could be used as an end of the year campaign to highlight the organization’s stories that developed throughout the year. These stories could be
shared using a multi-channel approach, sharing stories via email, direct mail, website and social media platforms. Stories could be highlighted during online giving events such as #GivingTuesday to make the organization stand out among the hundreds of organizations participating in the same event. Additionally, a special event can be focused on the life of an individual impacted by the organization. The event may be in honor of an individual who has passed away, and the story of their impact and affiliation with the organization can be highlighted as the angle for the story (Chase, 2016).

*Storytelling to Raise Awareness*

Storytelling is also used to shine a light on issues that may be overlooked within society. Sharing a personal experience relating to a controversial topic or rare occurrence humanizes the experience and forces readers to think about an issue they may have otherwise not considered. For example, Global Genes, one of the leading rare disease patient advocacy organizations in the world, inspires those with a rare disease to share their story as an awareness tool. The organization has created a toolkit that guides those with a rare disease or a loved one with a rare disease on crafting their story. The toolkit includes information on how to write their personal story, where to share it and how to use research as supplementary information. These stories are used to provide support to those with the disease by creating a community of people with a similar experience as well as provide anecdotes to researchers, doctors and donors to assist in their understanding of the human impact of the disease.

Additionally, while acting as a tool of advocacy, storytelling can act as an educational tool. Stories share wisdom and showcase culture based on an individual’s experience. A reader has the ability to peak into the world of the storyteller and gain insight from their perspective that
may be different than their own based on the differences in storyteller and audience demographics. As storytelling is a universal experience, it mends a divide between cultures (McCullum, Maldonado & Baltes, 2014, p. 2).

**Best Practices for Nonprofit Storytelling**

Storytelling is a powerful communication technique that can be used to enhance and showcase organizational success. The following practices shape a compelling story from capture to craft.

1. *Tell the story ethically.*

   When individuals trust an organization and allow their stories to be shared, it is important to tell them ethically and respectfully. The storyteller must consider the impact the story will have on the character’s life once the story is published. This should be considered in all components, including verbal and visual.

   This ethical concern has been relevant for decades. The term “poverty porn” was coined in the 1980s to describe images of starving African children in nongovernmental organization’s collateral material to bring in donor dollars. These images strip the children of their dignity and exploit their circumstances for financial gain. When sharing an organization’s story, it is necessary to share the individual’s experiences without bringing shame to the individual. Rather, the story should be used as a tool of empowerment (Gharib, 2015).

2. *Do not showcase the organization as the savior.*

   It is easy to make the organization appear to be the savior of the individual, depicting the situation as if their program or service was the only way these individuals were able to overcome the challenges they faced. Rather, the organization should be characterized as a partner in the
individual’s success. This will deviate from “case example syndrome” that creates a generic story of the work of the organization and will instead showcase the journey of the character within the story (Marple, 2014).

3. **Create an emotional appeal.**

Compelling stories create an emotional response by allowing the reader to empathize with the characters in the story. When choosing the stories to tell, focus on those that naturally draw out emotion. People remember what they feel and are moved by their emotions, making the emotional appeal a crucial component of a compelling story (Wu, 2011).

4. **Showcase an interesting protagonist and let their voice be heard.**

The story will be centered on the character’s experience making it important to have a character that is willing to share their story vulnerably. Stories will personalize the issue the organization is bringing awareness to, so they must be stories worth sharing (Wu, 2011). When writing the story, the storyteller should include direct quotes of the main character to ensure their voice is clear and is the foundation of the story. When the character reads their story after it is written, he or she should be able to identify their personality and experiences within the story (Marple, 2014).

5. **Interview like a journalist.**

The interview is where the story will be captured so it is necessary to come prepared with a framework of questions, background information and audio recording devices. Frame the interview as a conversation so the individual feels comfortable sharing the details of their story, especially as many nonprofits have a mission focused on a sensitive issue. Consider the location of the interview, as some interviewees will prefer to be in a private area. When interviewing, ask
follow up questions, seek clarification and ask about more than just what happened. Ask specific questions regarding emotion, experience and future goals (Tomassini, 2015).

6. *Humanize the story through the details.*

Details make the story intriguing and relatable. Details create the specific connections between the story’s character and its audience. Compelling stories are built on details, and asking specific questions during the interview will reveal this necessary information.

7. *Consider the organization of the story.*

Depending on the character’s experience, the story may or may not follow the traditional narrative arc that has a clear rising action, climax and falling action. Consider featuring the protagonist to showcase their personality when the narrative arc is not appropriate. This method highlights the protagonist’s character in addition to their overall personal impact and experiences associated with the organization. This provides another approach to connection between reader and protagonist.

For stories that do follow the narrative arc, the story should have a clear beginning, middle and end. A simple way to format the story is to highlight a problem and build up to the process of overcoming it, creating suspense as the story builds. The story should develop anticipation as the rising action occurs. Following the narrative arc will ensure all components of the story are told while including the “who, what, when, where and how” of the story (Girardin, 2015).

8. *Create a call to action.*

The conclusion of the story should prompt the reader to take action. This can be as simple as saying where to find more information. The story should show the difference a donation of
time or money can make, and it should provide the opportunity to take part and sign up to volunteer, join a mailing list or donate (Lee, 2016).

9. **Consider the structure of your story.**

The outlet where the story will be published will determine how long the story is and what format is used. The purpose and platform of the story should be decided before conducting the interview. The story must fit the platform of publication, as a Facebook post differs from a printed newsletter in regards to length and ability to incorporate links and other interactive components. For video, one to two minute clips are ideal. No matter the format, the story should have a logical flow and should make it easy for the reader to follow along. (Wu, 2011).

10. **Include a visual.**

If content is associated with a visual it is more likely to be engaged with as humans are visual first, verbal second. Visuals are an effective way to elevate the story and make a connection with the reader as seeing the face of the character creates a sense of commonality despite differences (Girardin, 2015).
Methodology

As the digital age is advancing, utilizing social media channels has become a common approach of nonprofit organizations to communicate with constituents (Creedon, 2012). These channels provide metrics and analytics tools that allow Facebook page administrators to measure the level of reach and engagement of the content they have created. Metrics and analytics allow content creators to identify what is effective for engaging their publics based on what posts receive the most engagement. On Facebook, the level of engagement can be measured in terms of likes/reactions, comments and shares. Other features of these tools allow page administrators to identify behaviors and demographics of their constituents, such as when they are online, where their geographical location is and the viewer’s gender.

I will conduct inductive, primary research through the use of interviews to write brief stories of advocates of eleven nonprofits located in Murray, Kentucky. This work will combine qualitative and quantitative methods, and will focus on qualitative data collected through interviews to write the brief stories. I will use metrics and analytics tools to measure quantitative data as the level of engagement.

Subjects

A variety of 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations are based in Murray, Kentucky, focusing on different causes from developing the arts to providing disaster relief. According to the International Revenue Service (IRS) (2014), 501(c)3 organizations are commonly referred to as charitable organizations and are able to receive tax-deductible contributions. The work done by organizations in this category cannot benefit private interests. Additionally, they are limited in political and legislative actions, including lobbying.
According to Guidestar, an information service specializing in nonprofit organizations, as of the time of writing there are 154 nonprofit agencies in Murray, Kentucky. Volunteer Murray, a website administered by United Way of Murray-Calloway County that lists volunteering opportunities in the Murray community, lists seventy-one 501(c)3 agencies. According to Volunteer Murray, the majority of these organizations focus on meeting basic needs, community development, health improvement and education. Additionally, there are nonprofit organizations in Murray that are not 501(c)3s, such as 501(c)7 fraternal organizations affiliated with Murray State University, 501(c)5 labor, agricultural and horticultural organizations like the Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation and 501(c)4s, such as the International Association of Lions Clubs and Rotary International.

Murray has a large number of nonprofit agencies with a range of diverse causes among them. Because of this, I decided to narrow the focus of my research to the eleven 501(c)3 organizations affiliated with United Way of Murray-Calloway County. According to United Way Worldwide, United Way agencies are required to follow determined performance metrics to ensure sound strategies and measureable results of their work as they receive funding from United Way, proving their work is impacting the community. Rather than arbitrarily choosing organizations to include in this project, featuring United Way partner organizations allows me to tailor my focus while creating a common geographical thread among the organizations that preserves the diversity of causes of Murray’s 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations.

Below is a list of the eleven agencies with a description of its mission:

- American Red Cross: The Murray-Calloway County chapter of the American Red Cross responds to local and national disasters and offers health and safety services.
• Angels Community Clinic: Angels Community Clinic provides free, basic medical care to working, uninsured residents of Murray and Calloway County. Free care is offered to those at or below the 200 percent federal poverty level. This agency also provides pharmaceutical services once a week to patients that meet these requirements.

• Boy Scouts of America: Lincoln Heritage Council: Boy Scouts of America prepares young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetime. Through involvement with Boy Scouts, participants are able to try new activities, provide services to others, build self-confidence and reinforce ethical standards.

• CASA by the Lakes: CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) by the Lakes provides a court-appointed volunteer advocate for a child that has been abused or neglected. The role of a CASA is to advocate on behalf of the child and ensure that their voice has been heard in court.

• Gentry House: The Gentry House is a temporary homeless and emergency housing shelter in Calloway County. Residents at the shelter must be seeking employment or education as well as searching for long-term housing to live at Gentry House temporarily.

• Junior Achievement: Junior Achievement encourages experiential learning for kindergarten through twelfth grade students to develop work-readiness, entrepreneurial and financial literacy skills that allow students to be prepared for post-high school opportunities.

• Murray-Calloway County Senior Citizens Center: The Murray-Calloway County Senior Citizens Center facilitates socialization opportunities for senior citizens by providing programming that encourages wellness and independence.

• Merryman House Domestic Crisis Center: The Merryman House serves the Purchase Area as the only certified domestic violence crisis center. This organization provides different serves to support those who have been impacted by domestic violence, during violence, during recovery and during transition.

• Need Line: Need Line exists to serve those in need of food, utilities and rent money, medication and hygiene products. The organization also has programs to fight hunger in Calloway County.

• Purchase Area Sexual Assault Center: The Purchase Area Sexual Assault Center provides intervention services for those who have been sexually assaulted. The organization is the state-designated rape crisis and child advocacy center in the Purchase Area.

• Soup for the Soul: Soup for the Soul is a soup kitchen in Murray, Kentucky, that provides free meals Monday through Friday to those in need.
**Procedure**

Each story will be crafted around the topic of organizational impact on an individual’s life. No two stories will be exactly the same, but all will answer the question, “*how has the organization impacted the advocates life?*” To answer this question, I will conduct an interview with each advocate. I will connect with an organization staff member to identify an advocate that has a story they feel comfortable sharing regarding the impact the organization has on his or her life. The advocates may hold different roles within the agency, including clients, employees and volunteers, but commonly these advocates will share invested time and influence in the organization they represent. I will use a combination of note taking and audio recording to capture the interview.

I will need to establish a sense of trust between the advocate and myself to create an atmosphere where vulnerability can emerge without fear of embarrassment or shame, especially regarding the stories that will be focused on sensitive topics. If this important component is not established, the advocate will not share the details that create a compelling story. To establish this trust I will create an environment that the advocate feels comfortable in by engaging in casual small talk, using eye contact and active listening techniques, while maintaining professionalism in dress, timeliness and preparedness. I also will discuss my intentions for the interview, that they have no obligation to answer every question and that they will have the ability to read the story before it is published. Without building trust between the advocate and myself, I will not be able to write a compelling story because it is unlikely the advocate will be willing to share their story in depth with me. My meeting with the advocate will be structured more like a conversation than a traditional interview to achieve this.
My questions during the interview will fit into three main categories: experience, emotion and future. Experience questions will pertain to what actually happened in the advocate’s life. The answers to these questions are the concrete facts of the story. Emotion questions will pertain to what the advocate was feeling. The answer to these questions adds depth and detail to the story that will draw the reader in. Future questions will look to the present and be a positive way to conclude each story. The answers to these questions highlight overcoming adversity and giving back to the organization that supported the advocate (Lockshin, 2015, p. 17).

After the interview I will write their story based on information shared during the conversation. Because of my background in newswriting, each story will take a journalistic approach. Each story will be no more than 700 words. The first few paragraphs will be posted on the United Way of Murray-Calloway County’s Facebook page and will link to the rest of the story that will be posted on the WordPress website, myimpactstory.wordpress.com. I have chosen the United Way Facebook page because it is the one component all of the organizations share. In addition, fans of the United Way Facebook page likely anticipate seeing posts related to nonprofits in Murray, making the content of the posts appropriate to the site. Choosing one Facebook page ensures each story will be posted on a page with a similar number of fans, as it is likely the fan base will not drastically change during the time the stories engagement is being measured.

Compelling stories are built on details and emotion that allow the reader to step into the world of the advocate. Chronologically stating facts about the advocate’s life will not create a story that engages readers, no matter how intriguing the heart of the story is. A compelling story creates a connection with the reader, where the reader empathizes with the advocate after reading the story. Communicating shared values and beliefs develops this connection as well as describes
a life experience others can relate to. The power of a compelling story is tuning into these beliefs, value and experiences, and allowing the reader to identify himself or herself in the advocate’s story (Lockshin, 2015).

Facebook is the chosen social networking site for this project because of the demographics and number of users on this social network. According to Zephoria Digital Marketing, worldwide there are more than 1.71 billion monthly active Facebook users. Comparatively, Twitter has 284 million monthly active users. Seventy-one percent of online adults use Facebook and only 23 percent of online adults use Twitter. Facebook is the most commonly used social media platform, followed by Instagram, YouTube and Twitter (Fontein, 2016).

Before publishing the story I will allow the advocate and agency to review the story to ensure the story and agency information is accurately being shared. I will confirm that the advocate feels comfortable with their story, especially for those focused on sensitive issues such as domestic violence and sexual assault. This will act as a “double check” for any ethical concerns or privacy issues. The story will then be published online.

The stories will be posted as a series, with a new story being featured every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at 3 p.m., as this is the peak time to post, according to research by Microsoft and Hubspot (Fontein, 2016). Posting the stories as a series will create structure around the content, creating a plan for publishing rather than randomly posting stories as they are written. In addition, this will allow all stories to be posted at peak times each week.

Engagement will be measured for the three weeks the stories are posted. These stories will include the hashtag, #ImpactStory, a graphic with a pull quote or photo made on the free graphic-generating site, Canva, and will have the organization and/or advocate tagged in the post
if they have a Facebook page. Additionally, I will measure the overall engagement on the United Way Facebook page from the time the series begins. Because Facebook posts often do not include a lengthy amount of text, the post will only display the first few paragraphs of the story, and will link to the complete story on the free blogging site, WordPress. This will allow me to measure the number of users that continue to read the story, further measuring engagement. I will use the WordPress Insights, the website’s built-in metrics and analytics tool, to see the number of views the post received as a result of the Facebook page, and if viewers click to other stories once on the WordPress website rather than being referred from a link on Facebook.

The number of “fans” a Facebook page has does not determine the amount of reach a post will receive. Facebook reach is identified as the number of newsfeeds the post appeared on. This number increases as a post is shared and commented on. For communication professionals, more valuable than reach is engagement as it describes a viewer’s interaction with a post (Smitha, 2013). To measure engagement, I will add the number of likes, comments and shares and divide it by the reach of the post. Reach, likes/reactions, comments and shares are tallied by Facebook Insights – the website’s metrics and analytics tool. I will measure engagement of each story and compare it to the amount of engagement other posts on the same Facebook page received. From my analysis, I aim to discover if stories are an effective technique for nonprofit organizations to use to engage current and perspective constituents on Facebook.

**Limitations**

Considering limitations is important in recognizing potential flaws and obstacles to research outcomes. Identifying areas of bias or differing perspectives is necessary for a balanced approach to the topic of study. Therefore, this section identifies potential limitations to this study
on nonprofit storytelling. These include limitations in the use of social networking sites to collect reliable data and trends in donor behavior.

With social networking sites, there is no control over who views each post and how many times they view it, creating difficulty in collecting reliable engagement data. For example, individuals associated with a featured organization may go to the Facebook site to view their story that normally would never click on the United Way’s Facebook page. Facebook page administrators are unable to identify the motivation of an individual’s engagement with a post. Their engagement may be out of genuine interest in the story or it may be for the purpose of increasing attention of their organization’s story. As the researcher, I cannot determine if someone engaged with a post because of the content of the story, or if they engaged with a post because of their established relationship with the organization. Additionally, stories at the conclusion of the series may get more engagement as momentum about the project grows within the community and as the United Way Facebook page gains more fans. The reach for every story will not be the same, thus impacting the number of potential readers each story will have.

Additionally, Facebook may not be the best social media platform for the demographics of the publics of each organization. Content on social media sites should be tailored to the audience, and if the organization does not have a strong Facebook following, this may not be an effective way to increase engagement. The same content may have more engagement through a different channel, such as through an e-blast or mailer. Furthermore, for the organizations that regularly use Facebook, there is the potential for posts to be “boosted” to appear on more newsfeeds. Facebook has become a “pay to play” platform, meaning to increase non-organic reach you can pay a fee (minimum of one dollar) to appear on increase reach and potentially increase engagement. Some organizations may choose to share the post of their organization’s
story from the Murray-Calloway County United Way Facebook page and then boost the post, increasing engagement for that post, but it is unlikely that organizations will choose to do this.

While public relations professionals measure Facebook engagement as a measure in discovering return on investment, there is some question about how much a “like” really means. “Slacktivism,” completing a simple action online in favor of a political or social cause (i.e. liking or sharing a Facebook post) gives the appearance of engagement but does this action really bring about change? According to a study by Cone Communications (2014), 64 percent of Americans say they are more inclined to support social and environmental issues by volunteering, donating and sharing information, after first “liking” or “following” an organization online. The study also revealed that 58 percent of Americans feel tweeting or posting information about a social or environmental cause is an effective form of advocacy. While each “like” may not always result in a financial return, it may bring return in the form of organizational advocacy and volunteers as awareness grows.

Another component to consider is the starting number of fans on the United Way of Murray-Calloway County’s Facebook page. Currently, the page has 510 fans. Comparatively, CASA by the Lakes, a 501(c)3 in Murray, also a chapter of a national organization, has 745 fans. CASA by the Lakes has two paid staff members. United Way of Calloway County has two paid staff members and two interns – one through the AmeriCorps Vista program and one paid by the Nonprofit Leadership Studies program at Murray State University. Need Line, a 501(c)3 local food pantry with one paid full-time staff member and four paid part-time staff members, has 524 Facebook fans. Compared to other organizations in Murray with similar paid staff, United Way has just below the typical amount of Facebook fans, highlighting the low reach the Facebook
page currently has. Starting with a low reach can potentially lead to low engagement if the reach does not grow throughout the series.

Trends in donor behavior must also be considered alongside the demographics of a typical Facebook user. Sixty-two percent of all American adults are on Facebook. The majority of Facebook users are women, ages 18 to 29. In the past few years, Facebook has had an increase in users of the Baby Boomer generation as they are using this social networking site to connect with friends and family. Younger Facebook users are turning to other social media sites such as Twitter, Instagram and SnapChat as their parent’s have invaded Facebook (Druggan, 2015). Despite this, 91 percent of millennials, people ages 15 to 34, are on Facebook (Smith, 2016).

Single women are more likely to give to causes they care about than single men, according to a study by the Women’s Philanthropy Institute at the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. The study states that women are more likely to give to arts and environmental organizations than men, while men who give are more likely to donate to a combination organization, like United Way. For couples when the females decides where to donate, they are more likely to give to religious and youth and family services causes, where when men decide, they are more likely to give to organizations that meets basic needs (2015). With women dominating Facebook, this may impact which stories receive the most engagement based on the cause affiliated with the organization rather than the content of the story, based on the tendencies of women’s giving found in this study.
The center of this thesis is storytelling as a communication technique. This chapter includes the eleven brief stories I wrote about the advocates from the nonprofit organizations partnering with United Way of Murray-Calloway County. Graphics created on Canva accompany the stories, which were posted on both Facebook and the WordPress website, myimpactstory.wordpress.com. The stories are listed in the order they were posted.

Additionally, a brief analysis of the adopted storytelling approach precedes each story. Each advocate’s story is unique as individuals have a different story to tell depending on their affiliation with the organization and the personal experiences they have had. Because of this, the stories were written with a different approach depending on the content of the story. Overall, the stories take a more journalistic approach because of my background in newswriting, the brevity in length and the intent to only interview one person per story.

CASA by the Lakes

The first story features Jackie Kennedy, advocate for CASA by the Lakes. The volunteers of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) are partnered with a family that is in Dependency, Neglect and Abuse Court. The responsibility of the advocate is to get to know the children and speak on their behalf in court to ensure their wishes are heard. While social workers and other parties speak on behalf of the parents, without a CASA volunteer, children are often overlooked.
Jackie’s Impact Story

With nearly seven years of advocating experience for nearly one hundred children in over thirty cases, Jackie Kennedy, CASA by the Lakes advocate, knows the power of speaking on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves.

“Advocating for children for me is important because they don’t have voices otherwise,” Jackie said. “They are too young to protect themselves and a lot of times people don’t hear what they are trying to say or a lot of times they are too afraid to speak up.”

Jackie grew up in a home with an alcoholic father, and her childhood experiences motivate her to give back through CASA, despite the sometimes difficult memories it brings up.

“We had a lot of problems, but back then they didn’t take you out of the house so quick” she said. “Sometimes when I think of it, I think ‘these kids could have been us,’ and I would have died if they would have taken us from our mom and dad even despite what we went through.”

As a Court Appointed Special Advocate, Jackie has to testify in court on behalf of the children within the case she is assigned. She said she has been torn about decisions she has had to make, and that is a hard to be the person giving an opinion that can change a child’s life. Still, she is passionate about the work and continues to advocate even though it can be emotionally challenging.

“It has made me stronger and wiser,” she said.
She remembers the first time she testified - nervous, she approached the stand. Her faith helps her when telling the judge her suggestions for the child in her court report. Often, her opinion will shape who receives custody of the children.

“I’m not God, how can I write this report?” Jackie said she thought while writing her first report. Now, writing court reports and advocating for the children in her cases is second nature.

“No child should ever have to suffer abuse or neglect,” she said. “I hope I can make some small difference.”

Jackie serves children in Marshall and Calloway County, and every case she has had has been drug related.

“My true belief is if you want to help the child, you have to help the parent,” she said. “But with all do respect, that child doesn’t have time to wait for them to grow up.”

She focuses on not judging the parents and tries to keep a positive relationship with them so she can best serve the children. She plays games with the kids and acts as a friend to them to build trust where the child feels comfortable to share how they are feeling about mom and dad.

“I’ve always been taught to treat all people they are the same,” she said.

Jackie holds a special place for two boys she advocated for in one of her cases. They were trying to keep the boys in foster care, but Jackie knew there was an aunt within the state that was able to take care of the children.

“Those little boys were so sweet, and I wanted what I thought was really best for them,” she said. “They still contact me and thank me.”

Even after seven years of devoting her time to children, Jackie isn’t finished using her voice for those who can’t use their own.
“I feel like it does make a difference. My heart is in it, and I have a passion for helping these kids,” she said. “I don’t have any plans to quit.”

*Story Analysis*

Jackie’s overall experience as a CASA volunteer is highlighted in the story, as well as how the work has impacted her life. Because of this, this story does not follow the typical narrative arc, or chronological construction of a plot. Her story is of overall impact through her seven years as an advocate, not of one specific incident or memory. The goal of this story is to reveal the personal impact volunteering can have on an individual. I achieved this goal by sharing Jackie’s childhood experiences and her reflection on the motivation she has to continue to volunteer. This story could be used to recruit new volunteers and show appreciation of current volunteers.

This story is emblematic of the difficulty of using a traditional narrative arc in storytelling. In fact, this format does not always fit the story someone has to tell when the focus is on broader impact, rather than a specific moment in time. Additionally, this story exemplifies the importance of letting the character’s voice be heard. Jackie’s personality is revealed through direct quotes and attention to her beliefs that guide her work as a volunteer. Without these components, the story would not effectively describe Jackie and her experience.

*Purchase Areas Sexual Assault and Advocacy Center*

Laura Wilson shared her story as a client of the Purchase Area Sexual Assault and Advocacy Center (PASAC). This organization is the state designated crisis and child advocacy center for the eight counties in the Purchase Area. PASAC provides free and confidential
services to survivors of sexual violence and their supportive family members, in addition to prevention education programming.

Laura’s Impact Story

It all started with a secret.

In March 2009, the former boyfriend of Laura Lynn’s daughter called Laura and said he had something he needed to tell her that he heard from a friend.

“I am afraid to tell anybody, but it is something I need to tell,” Laura said he told her.

The secret was heavy, and something Laura didn’t expect to hear. Laura’s former boyfriend, whom she was with for five years, had raped her daughter when she was fourteen-years-old.

After hearing this secret about what happened two years prior, Laura called the Kentucky State Troopers, confused and hurt. The case was turned over to the State, and she and her daughter were advised to go to counseling at the Purchase Area Sexual Assault and Child Advocacy Center (PASAC).

“The first time I went to PASAC I was in shock,” Laura said. “There was so much going through my head and I really didn’t know what to think.”

Even being unable to remember all of the details of that season of Laura’s life, she does remember the very first time she went to PASAC.

“We walked up the sidewalk leading up to the doors, and it was lined in flowers, butterflies everywhere” she said. “I call my daughter ‘my butterfly.’”
“That right then gave me a peaceful feeling, and then we walked in the doors and I got this feeling of home,” she said.

Laura originally began counseling to process her feelings about what happened to her daughter, but through her therapy she discovered the same man that raped her daughter, also had raped her.

“I am actually more sad for my daughter than I am for myself,” she said.

Laura experienced an intimate partner rape, often disguised as “make up sex.” She had caught her former boyfriend fooling around with another, younger girl, and later that night he guilted Laura into being intimate with him.

“He would smack me or get physical with me, and there was a lot of yelling and verbal abuse,” she said.

He is now in jail and has been incarcerated since 2010.

Laura’s said her healing process wouldn’t have been the same without the support of PASAC. In her counseling, she used art to help her express her emotions.

“That is what saved me,” she said.

Today, she paints furniture and cross-paintings using a technique that makes the art look vintage. Many of her pieces have been auctioned off at PASAC’s annual fundraiser, Men Who Cook.

“I don’t feel shame anymore and I do not blame myself anymore,” she said. “That was the hardest part of all of it, letting go of that guilt, because I brought him into the house.”

In 2015, Laura finished her five-year therapy journey with PASAC.

Laura said she felt the most empowered when she was at the Men Who Cook event, surrounded by people who were connected by the same experience.
“It is a lot of confusing emotions, and to know that you are not alone helps,” she said.

Laura is an overcomer and hasn’t let her painful past halt her future. She is engaged to a man that has loved her through the healing process and acted as a father figure to her children.

“I tell him he is my angel and my answered prayer,” she said.

Laura said sharing her story empowers her, and she wants to use her story to let others know they can experience hope and freedom – even when you have had terrible things done to you.

“I believe that God chose me because he knew that I am strong enough to help other people through my experiences,” she said.

**Story Analysis**

This story focused on overcoming the rape of both Laura and her daughter. It was the story with the most sensitive content. Her story is written following the narrative arc, but takes a journalistic approach, as I did not feel comfortable describing her feelings or experiences without attributing them to her specifically because of the nature of the topic. The goal of this story is to empower the advocate through ethical storytelling. I achieved this by interviewing like a journalist to capture important details in a way that highlights Laura’s progress without bringing shame. This was accomplished by creating a private and safe environment during the interview where Laura was able to be comfortable in a vulnerable state and quickly come to trust me as her storyteller. Not attributing PASAC as the savior of Laura’s progress is a component of telling this story ethically.

This story is emblematic of a second, perhaps more critical component of storytelling. While all stories aim to strategically communicate an organization’s message, they can and often
do have an independent value for their protagonists. Sharing stories often was a positive outlet, even therapeutic, for the advocates. Laura revealed to me during the interview that she was searching for an opportunity to share her story, and that she found our interview to be empowering and another step in her healing process. While storytelling is benefits the nonprofit organization telling the story, it also can be of benefit to the protagonist of the story.

**Junior Achievement**

Marshall Ward shared his story from an administrative role at Junior Achievement. This organization provides programming on work-readiness and entrepreneurial skills for students in grades kindergarten through twelfth. This organization exists to inspire young people and prepare them to succeed in a global economy. Volunteers teach within local classrooms on topics that often are not focused on in the traditional curriculum.

**Marshall’s Impact Story**

As a former high school teacher and an education enthusiast, Marshall Ward, Junior Achievement of West Kentucky coordinator, has devoted his career to helping students succeed.

“That’s what I do,” he said. “I have done that for 37 years.”

Junior Achievement inspires the next generation of leaders by teaching financial literacy, work readiness and entrepreneurship in local elementary, middle and high schools.
Marshall’s first interactions with Junior Achievement began in Charleston, South Carolina in 1983. As a teacher, volunteers came into his classroom to teach a few short lessons and lead activities through Junior Achievement.

“My most memorable experience, probably, was when our president of our little student company, made a PowerPoint when they first came out, and it made it to the state technology conference, and he won an award through his own initiative,” he said.

In 1998 Marshall moved to Murray – and he brought his love of Junior Achievement with him.

“Knowledge is power, and all these young kids who are hopefully better understanding the terminology and concepts of economies – and our economy in particular – it will give them power over their own lives, and to me, that is the essential component of schooling in the first place – giving people power of their own lives,” he said. “That is what education is all about.”

Now, as a retired teacher, Marshall is on the administrative side of the work as he trains and coordinates volunteers and spearheads fundraising efforts for our local Junior Achievement. It gives him purpose as he pursues his passion of teaching.

“For me, this is a good chance for a former teacher to go out there and help that process,” he said. “And now I have a better appreciation for how difficult it is in nonprofit.”

In Calloway County, Junior Achievement has a presence in all 3rd or 5th grade classrooms at the elementary schools, a presence in 7th grade at the middle schools and a presence in 12th grade at the high schools. Junior Achievement also has a presence in Marshall County.

“I believe in the program, and I think market place ideas are essential,” he said. “The main thing I see in educating kids – the focus is on STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering
and Mathematics], but if you put all these other things to the side, you aren’t going to have a complete education.”

The curriculum that volunteers follow in the classrooms is hands-on focused. They do activities that allow students to pick careers, practice relationship building, create budgets and even play a less “cut throat” version of Monopoly, Marshall said.

“When you’ve been teaching for 37 years, you are kind of laser focused on those kinds of activities,” he said.

In addition to the financial literacy skills, Junior Achievement helps students and volunteers develop relationships and network with adults in the community. Marshall said bankers often teach volunteer to teach within the classrooms.

“Making connections within your community is extraordinarily important, and Junior Achievement helps with that,” he said.

Supported by his affinity for Junior Achievement, Marshall hopes to get back into teaching – this time at Murray State. He hopes to teach undergraduate education courses in the future.

*Story Analysis*

This story was focused on featuring Marshall’s experience with Junior Achievement over his lifetime, not just in Calloway County. The goal of this story is to highlight the mission of Junior Achievement and the theme of education that is revealed in Marshall’s life through this organization. I achieved this by humanizing the story through the details. This story highlights Marshall’s passion for education to showcase the mission of Junior Achievement.
This story exemplifies a key challenge of the storytelling approach. Selecting the right story to tell is a major difficulty for a storyteller who is outside of the organization. An overall challenge of these stories was not being able to interview multiple people or know which advocate’s had engaging stories to tell prior to the interview. For Junior Achievement I would have preferred to interview a volunteer who teaches the curriculum to describe the work of the organization from a personal experience.

**Gentry House**

Sherece Cole, director of Gentry House, shared her story of overcoming homelessness. Gentry House is an emergency transitional homeless shelter for children and families. Residents receive a two-bedroom apartment rent and utility free during their stay at the shelter. This organization also provides educational programming for residents on a variety of topics such as earning a General Education Diploma (GED) and making homemade cleaning supplies.

**Sherece’s Impact Story**

“I was homeless once,” said Sherece Cole, director of Gentry House.

Sherece came from an impoverished background, growing up in a home with twelve other children, all raised by her grandmother.

At 17-years-old, she knew what it is like to be hungry. She knew what it is like to live out of a car and move from house to house, couch to couch. Not only
was she homeless, but she was also in an abusive relationship.

“You feel worthless, and it really messes with your self esteem,” she said. “I don’t even know how I am here today.”

There was a moment Sherece remembers knowing she wanted to be different, that she didn’t want to continue with the life she was living.

“One day I went into this restaurant and saw people that looked like me,” she said. “They were very educated, and poised, and I remember thinking, ‘I want to be like them, I don’t want to keep being like this, I want to be educated and dress the way they dress.’”

At age eighteen, Sherece was pregnant and a high schools drop out. But at age eighteen, Sherece decided to change her life.

She moved back home and began to live by a quote that she was told in church.

*If you always do what you’ve always done, then you will always get what you’ve always gotten.*

“I woke up everyday and thought about that saying, and when I went to bed I thought about that saying, and I decided that I was going to have to do something different,” she said.

When she was in the abusive relationship, her boyfriend would not let her go to college as part of the control he had over. But she got rid of the relationship, and got an education instead.

Sherece, a first generation college student, got her GED, her bachelor’s degree and master’s degree, and is now considering getting her PhD. She found real love and married her now husband, and is a mom of three children.

“I know if you choose a different path, things can get better for you,” she said. “I always stay humble, I never want people to think I am better, because no matter what degree you have,
you can still be homeless.”

Sherece uses her experiences and passion to better serve those who attend Gentry House.

“Where you are now is not your final destination,” she said. “You can change and do something different.”

Rather than hiding her past experiences, she uses them to encourage and empower those she works with. She pushes them not to give up and pursue their dreams despite their current situation.

“When I first started this job, my heart used to break every single day,” she said. “I wanted to save everybody but it became super exhausting emotionally.”

With time, she learned that she couldn’t cry with every family that Gentry House served. With prayer, she began to find her voice that she uses to empower hurting families.

“I had to just get a little stronger and learn to stand firm, and help,” she said. “And if I couldn’t help I couldn’t beat myself up about it.”

The Gentry House is more than a homeless shelter, as residents must have custody of their children or dependents regardless of age, be residents of Calloway County and be seeking employment or education and permanent housing during their stay. They also provide free programming for residents on topics such as life skill training, budget management, stress management and child development.

“The children watch what the grown ups do, and these little people are going to be big people one day, and the last thing we want to do is make them feel like they are a charity case,” she said.

Sherece said there are several homeless shelters that only provide housing, but the residents leave “still feeling like crap.”
“Anybody can end up in that situation,” she said. “We want them to feel comfortable when they come here because our goal is to help build their self esteem up so they can feel like they can get out of their situation.”

As Sherece continues to create goals for herself, she knows her future is full hope.

“I feel like I have accomplished a little bit and I feel like I can accomplish a lot more,” Sherece said.

**Story Analysis**

Sherece’s story showcases her personal experiences prior to becoming Gentry Houses’ director, and is used to explain the need of the existence of this organization. By sharing a personal story of homelessness, the reader can connect to the mission of the organization and understand why the organization exists. My goal for this story is to be a tool of empowerment for Sherece while developing empathy within the reader. I achieved this by telling her story as a journey and focusing on her own efforts to change her life, never of someone else or another organization saving her from the low point in her life, while emphasizing the details of Sherece’s experiences that lead to and resulted from her homelessness.

Although not entirely, this story follows the traditional narrative arc in order to reveal the protagonist’s journey; the story moves from her past and present experiences to her future ambitions. In contrast to other stories, this story follows the traditional narrative arc to reveal her story, including her past and present experiences and future ambitions. Furthermore, in the case of this story, the narrative arc could be developed more fully if limitations in story length were not present that hindered the ability to fully develop the components of the narrative arc.
Senior Citizens Center

James “Froggy” Gish shares his story as a member of the Senior Citizens Center. The center provides programming and meals to the elderly in Calloway County. Members participate in a variety of activities from those focused on wellness, such as chair volleyball and Zumba, to social focused activities like going on trips and sharing meals. The center aims to add fun and purpose to the lives of seniors.

Froggy’s Impact Story

James “Froggy” Gish stands out in a crowd. Not because of his physical appearance or his demeanor, but because of the joy that overflows from every inch of his being, shining through his smile, warm eyes and the extra pep in his step – even at 72-years-old.

Froggy has been a regular attender at the Murray-Calloway County Senior Citizens Center for the last three years. Everyday he comes to the center to hangout with friends (they play chair volleyball, rummikub and reminisce) and he always sticks around for lunch. He says it’s a real bargain; you can get five meals in one week for just $10, and he loves meatloaf day when the center is especially full as meatloaf is a crowd favorite.

For Froggy, the center is his source of joy and friendship, and when he doesn’t attend, he gets depressed and lonely.

“All my friends are here, they are people my age and they are so interesting,” Froggy said. “I love life and I love people.”
The center serves about 320 seniors daily, and provides food through Meals on Wheels and congregates meals programming, as well as provides opportunities for maintaining wellness and socialization, such as like Bingo, Zumba and discussion groups. The center focuses on socialization, not just meeting needs, to “add years to life and life to years.”

“It is a wonderful place for everyone of us,” Froggy said. “The director Mark and Lisa and Nan, and the people in the kitchen are so nice and they are in tune to what we need and want, they just couldn’t be better people.”

About once a month the center puts on a program, “Grey Matters,” where seniors get together to share memories of a past decade. For October, the decade was the 1950s, when Froggy was in the prime years of his childhood.

“It brings back memories for all of us, going back in time, and it gives us a fuzzy feeling,” he said.

About fifteen seniors sat in a circle, laughing as new memories came to mind, discussing music, history and culture. It wasn’t unusual for the group to break out in song, singing the Hokey Pokey and popular songs by Elvis Presley and Hank Williams.

During the time, listening to the radio all day common, and Froggy said he remembers listening to the radio and tuning into the Grand Ole Opry on Saturday nights. He remembered the “War of the Worlds” radio show by Orsen Wells and how he trusted that the broadcast was real.

“I heard that with my mother and we thought the world was ending, and it scared us to death, and we heard that on the radio,” Froggy said.

As the center has come alongside Froggy during his senior years, he decided to make one of his long-time dreams come true. Froggy is taking a sociology class at Murray State. He audits
the class because he said the tests are too stressful, but he loves taking part in the university. He graduated high school but never went to college as he went straight into the Army and then began working at an aluminum plant to support his family.

“I do like the learning part and I need to keep my mind active,” he said. “I am realizing another dream, it’s a dream for me, its coming true.”

*Story Analysis*

To capture this story I attended a program that the center was hosting called, “Grey Matters.” This program provides a time for the seniors to reminisce together on different time periods; when I attended the theme was the 1950s. Although the entire story does not focus on this single program, it allowed me to see how Froggy interacted with others his age. My story features the impact the center has had on his life during his senior years and touches on the program. The goal of this story is to use the advocate to showcase the organization. I achieved this by bringing Froggy to the forefront of the story, rather than talking about the programs he participated in. As stated in the best practices in the literature review, I focused on having Froggy’s voice be heard to display his personality.

This story exemplifies the way storytelling can be used effectively to feature the life of an advocate through a story that is not focused on one specific event that would fit the traditional storytelling model. For Froggy, his life is his testimony and the Senior Citizens Center provides the framework for this story. This story reveals that organizations can feature unique volunteers, donors and other constituents to showcase their work and the positive influence it has on their lives.
Soup for the Soul

Debbie Smith, the featured advocate for Soup for the Soul, founded the organization in June 2015. This organization is a soup kitchen that anyone in the community is welcome to attend for free. The organization serves dinner five days a week in addition to summer feeding programs. The organization is faith-based and focuses on fellowship as a service coupled with providing a warm meal.

Debbie’s Impact Story

Debbie Smith, executive director and founder of Soup for the Soul, refused to see a need in her community and not meet it. Debbie saw the overwhelming number of people that would attend the family meal held as part of the Bible Study she attended at Glendale Road Church of Christ, and she believed there had to be more people in the community that were hungry.

“If those people are hungry on Tuesday nights, they are hungry on other nights,” Debbie said.

Debbie knew there was a need, so she took to Facebook to see if her friends agreed. She made a status update saying, “let’s have a soup kitchen in Murray, who’s with me?” Twenty-four hours later, there were nearly 200 people wanting to help.

“It was like our town wanted to be asked to do something, and when we asked they just came from everywhere,” Debbie said.

Through a series of informational meetings, Debbie was connected with the pastor at
Murray Family Church who had a diner area already set up utilizing old booths from a Shoney’s restaurant. Now, they just needed the kitchen.

After much fundraising, Soup for the Soul was up and running with a commercial kitchen that met the Health Department’s standards, serving the very first meal on June 1, 2015. Since then, the kitchen has continued to increase the number of people served each day. Today, on average 100 people are fed a hot meal five days a week.

Donations are welcomed but not required, and you never know who paid and who didn’t. Donation jars are left out for people to contribute to. No matter how much they receive in donations, Debbie is certain that Soup for the Soul will continue to keep its doors open whether patrons pay or not.

The dinner table is diverse with people of all ages and demographics attending for supper. Lower-middle class people, homeless people, the elderly, church members and even people who work on the Downtown Square can be seen enjoying the same meal on any given weeknight.

“Some people eat here because they are hungry, some people eat here because they want to fellowship, some people eat here because they don’t want to cook,” Debbie said.

The kitchen manager creates the menu for the week, always incorporating the salad bar, a meat, starch and dessert. A community garden supplies vegetables for the kitchen during the summer months, and the kitchen receives leftovers from the Farmer’s Market, bread from Panera Bread, donuts from Dunkin Donuts and regularly receives community donations often in the form of canned goods.

Debbie was eager to have the doors open the first week school was out for the summer to feed the children who rely on school meals each day. But she didn’t stop once she opened Soup
for the Soul’s doors. This past summer, Soup for the Soul began a community lunch program that delivered sack lunches within Calloway County using a big yellow bus.

In partnership with Taylor Bus Sales, Debbie would go to two locations in the community five days a week to feed the children who lost their two school meals a day. With her team of volunteers, Debbie delivered sandwiches and free books through the Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

“It is so rewarding; I just want to make a difference and give back,” Debbie said. “It just couldn’t be a better place; when I imagined it, I didn’t imagine it this good!”

Soup for the Soul is open for supper from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., five days a week, and everyone is welcome at the table.

*Story Analysis*

This organization’s story is a founding story that focuses on how Soup for the Soul began, as it is relatively new organization to Murray, Kentucky. My goal for this story is to showcase Soup for the Soul as a community partner, not a community savior. I achieved this by using Debbie as the window through which to observe the organization. As the founder, she has a great understanding of the need for the organization, and her perspective provides a framework that reveals the organization’s purpose. Additionally, a story on the founding is appropriate as the organization is relatively new. For other organizations, this format would not be as beneficial.

This story exemplifies the ability to use different types of stories to showcase a variety of aspects of an organization. Soup for the Soul has many other stories to tell, for example those of the individuals who prepare the meals and of those who attend the meals, but still a founding
50

story can be effective and appropriate for this organization. Selecting the type of story to guide the focus is necessary for a clear story. Furthermore, organizations have multiple stories to tell, and they should be divided into numerous short stories rather than compiled into one lengthy story that lacks a clear focus.

American Red Cross

The story for the American Red Cross showcases volunteer Marie Lyons. The American Red Cross is a national organization with local chapters that responds to emergencies around the world. The organization provides many services from collecting blood donations to serving military families. The mission of the American Red Cross is to alleviate human suffering in the face of emergency.

Marie’s Impact Story

As Hurricane Matthew came storming through the Atlantic on September 28, Murray residents Marie Lyons and her husband, Mike, were preparing to be deployed to Jacksonville, Florida to feed people impacted by the storm. They packed their bags and headed out for their two-week disaster relief volunteer trip with the American Red Cross. Not fazed by the experience, as they have served together as a team in similar capacities for the last five years, Marie knew it was going to be an exhausting yet meaningful adventure.
“This is what we do in our retirement,” Marie said about her and her husband. “We have the time now because for 44 years we worked for a living, but now we try to work at living.” Together, Marie and Mike work 14-hour days in Florida. They venture into the neighborhoods for lunch and back again for dinner to provide food to people who have been displaced by the storm. Day after day, they go into neighborhoods devastated by the storms to bring hope and joy to people on their worst day.

“You have to bring some cheer and hopefully some direction about the process of recovery,” Marie said.

Some days the work can be emotionally draining and other days it is extremely humbling for Marie, but she said her social work experience has benefited her on the volunteer field. Her emotional strength adds to her ability to serve, because if she lost focus while in the midst of serving those at their lowest time, Marie said it would be like “the blind leading the blind.”

“You can’t not be affected, but you can’t let it affect you to the point where you don’t bring the hope, and bring the cheer and bring something to them that is positive in all that chaos, that mess and the horrendousness,” Marie said.

Since the onset of the heavy rains and flooding from Hurricane Matthew over two weeks ago, the American Red Cross has provided 371 shelter or evacuations centers for more than 3,200 people in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. With community partners, the Red Cross has served more than 450,000 meals and snacks, distributed over 78,000 relief items and provided more than 85,000 overnight stays in shelters. Marie and Mike are a part of the more than 4,400 Red Cross workers who have been part of the team making the relief work happen.

“I’ve got a warrior spirit,” Marie said. “I go in there and just move forward, but that
doesn’t mean that when I get back to the hotel I’m not crying or really sad or in intense thought about the impact I had on the folks I tried to help that day.”

Marie said she is inspired by the quote by the American Red Cross founder, Clara Barton,

“You must never so much think as whether you like it or not, whether it is bearable or not; you must never think of anything except the need, and how to meet it.”

“Just focus on the need,” Marie said. “That is what we need to do.”

**Story Analysis**

The interview for this story was captured via telephone as Marie was in Florida at the time volunteering with the American Red Cross after Hurricane Matthew hit. This story is an impact story that highlights why Marie chooses to give back with her husband, Mike, to this specific organization. The goal of this story is to give readers an understanding of the role of the volunteer. It can become difficult to comprehend the work of larger organizations if you do not specifically take a role in the organization as a volunteer or donor. I achieved my goal by focusing on both the personal development and hands-on aspects of volunteering. This was accomplished through capturing the details of Marie’s experience.

This story is emblematic of the importance of finding the best channel for the story to produce highest engagement. Although the story did not receive outstanding engagement on the Facebook page, the American Red Cross asked to include the story in its newsletter. This highlights that Facebook may not be the best channel for reaching the American Red Cross audience. Those that may be most interested in this content may already subscribe to the organization’s newsletter. As described in the best practices of this thesis, before beginning the process of storytelling, it is necessary to evaluate the platform the story will be shared on.
Boy Scouts of America: Lincoln Heritage Council

The story on Boy Scouts of America: Lincoln Heritage Council, features employee Reid Parish. Boy Scouts is a youth organization that develops leadership through scouting. The mission of the organization is to prepare youth to make ethical and moral decisions over their lifetime by instilling values of Scout Oath and Law. The organization has numerous programs that target different age groups, each rooted in outdoor adventure.

Reid’s Impact Story

“True boy scouts is youth led,” said Reid Parish, director of AquaBase Adventure Sailing program with the Boy Scouts Lincoln Heritage Council.

That’s why Reid teaches youth ages 14 to 17 how to sail 25-foot sailboats on Kentucky Lake. Not only that, he teaches them how to live on the boat together, working as a team for a week’s span. They cook together, they learn how to sail together and they become leaders and problem solvers through the fun and challenging adventure. While Reid ensures safety, the youth learn hands-on to develop character and respect within the unit.

He sends up to thirty youth in teams of four out onto the lake where they have to figure out how to work together. Often, the scouts have never met each other prior to the adventure, as it is a combination of boys from different troops. He and his staff members follow on a pontoon boat, far enough away to allow them to think critically to solve problems but never too far to put them in danger.
“On Sunday night I tell them that Monday and Tuesday are going to be kind of rocky, but Tuesday afternoon, Wednesday, it gets better,” he said. “By Thursday afternoon, the guys are having a blast.”

Each night there is a “thorns and roses” conversation time where the team discusses what was fun and effective that day. Reid asks open-ended questions to get the scouts thinking about teamwork and leadership and how to make their trip the best it can be by solving problems that arise.

“Monday nobody wants to talk,” Reid said. “By Wednesday, you can’t shut them up.”

Their days are filled from 6:30 a.m. to lights out at 11 p.m. They learn how to set the sails, how to turn the boat, how different winds react with sails, how to anchor and even how to deal with bodily functions while on the boat.

“We will sail out of camp area and into the middle of the lake and that is the first time they will raise their sails and try to figure it out,” he said. “We always tell them that within the troop setting, that is a very safe place to fail.”

For Reid, directing the program combines his love of Boys Scouts with his life-long passion for sailing as he grew up Florida.

“I firmly believe in all of the benefits Boy Scouts has, not just in the way it forms the thinking process of the youth,” he said. “It is in the character that the program instills in the youth. It’s in the patriotism that the program instills in the youth.”

“More importantly, we show them that we treat everyone with respect,” he said.

Western Kentucky is the perfect location for the program, and it is the only inland water program the Boy Scouts have. It is the only program where the scouts live 24-hours on the boat without a leader on the boat with them at all times.
“I love seeing the youth go from Point A to Point B,” he said. I love seeing that growth. I love watching the youth realize what they are doing, to realize their accomplishments.”

Story Analysis

The goal of Reid’s story is to highlight a program the organization does well, making it a strength story. The sailing summer program is the only inland water program in the entire Boy Scouts program, providing an angle for the story founded in the uniqueness of the program. I achieved this goal by using the strength story focus, drawing attention to a program that is not commonly known by the community while bringing awareness to the mission of the organization.

This story exemplifies the diversity of narrative approaches to storytelling, as it varies from the traditional narrative arc and the testimonial impact. The key to storytelling is choosing the best format for the story. Although a testimonial or narrative arc potential could work for this story, showcasing the program allows the organization to approach a story with a new angle, differentiating this story from others the organization has to share. The format should be decided before beginning to write the story, but often can be discover during the interview as the conversation shapes the story.

Need Line

The story for Need Line captures the experience of a client, Donna Slater. Need Line is a cooperative church and community ministry that meets needs to fight poverty and homelessness. It is a food pantry that also provides assistance with paying utility bills, covering travel expenses, receiving medications and acquiring hygiene products. The organization has programs to fight
hunger such as the Backpack Program during the summertime and holiday food baskets during the winter season.

**Donna’s Impact Story**

Murray resident Donna Slater has experienced hardship over the past few years. From losing deeply loved family members, to developing an illness and getting in a car accident, Donna knows what it is like to struggle to make ends meet. She knows what it means to be offered a helping hand when in need, and she knows when to offer her hand to help others who know the same struggle.

Need Line, a local nonprofit that provides food and meets other tangible needs in Murray and Calloway County, has journeyed with Donna since 2007 through her seasons of need. But it is not just Donna who Need Line journeys with. The organization receives approximately 6,000 applications for individual and family assistance every quarter.

Donna has received food in addition to help paying her utility bills through Need Line. She doesn’t go to Need Line regularly, but when she needs the extra support, the employees are always there to meet the needs of her and her son while providing the encouragement she needs to keep pushing on.

“All of them are as friendly as can be – and helpful,” she said. “I know if I do need help with anything, all I need to do is go up there – there is no shame in asking for help at sometime in your life.”
The employees and volunteers at Need Line treat those who come in with a uniform respect. They offer kind words and never act like they are “too good” for those they serve. All are treated with dignity and kindness – no matter the need they have.

“It doesn’t matter who comes in,” she said. “They treat you like you are a friend.”

Before Donna became ill, she used to volunteer at Need Line with her daughter. Together, they would do anything that needed to be done, from bagging groceries to answering phone calls. This was Donna’s way of giving back to the organization that has been there for her during the last ten years. If Donna physically could, she would continue volunteering, but her illness won’t allow it.

“Murray would be in bad shape if it wasn’t for Need Line being here,” she said. “They have helped so many. It’s amazing the impact they have had on this town.”

**Story Analysis**

This testimonial discusses the impact Need Line has had on Donna over many years of experience as both a client and a volunteer. The goal for this story is to showcase the variety of services the organization provides and the ability anyone has to give back to this organization. I achieved this by using Donna’s experience has a gateway to discuss the organization’s role in the Murray-Calloway County community. This was done through making connections between organization and individual, and utilizing details to humanize her experience to more than a casual give-and-take relationship, but as a long-term relationship where Need Line is a constant available service ready in time of need.

This story exemplifies the importance of finding a character that has a story to tell. Just as the case in the Junior Achievement story, I do not think Donna was the best advocate for this
story. Although I had confirmation that Need Line wanted to participate in this series, I had difficulty actually connecting with an advocate. A potential story for the future that could be more effective could focus on the many roles the executive director fulfills at Need Line or could showcase the work of the volunteers that sort the thousands of food items the organization receives.

**Angels Community Clinic**

The story of Angels Community Clinic features the client Eva Lewis. This clinic provides medical, dental and pharmaceutical care to the working uninsured in Calloway County. The clinic opened in 2000, and in 2002 Angels Attic Thrift Store opened to financial support the clinic. Doctors, nurses, pharmacists and most staff members volunteer their services to the clinic.

**Eva’s Impact Story**

Eva Lewis is full of joy. She is warm, outgoing and kind. She is strong-willed and soft-hearted. By the enthusiastic way she speaks, you wouldn’t know she has experienced many hardships in her life and has had a series of health-related problems that have acted as setbacks in her life.

Eva was referred to Angels Community Clinic in 2009 after experiencing a multitude of issues stemming from low vitamin B12, and has been using the clinic as her primary source of medical care for the last seven years. She says Obamacare hasn’t provided her with the medical support
she needs, Angels Community Clinic has become a constant source of medical support throughout the multiple health challenges she has faced.

“I don’t know what I would do without them,” she said. “These people saved my life, and I wouldn’t be able to accomplish my goals without them.”

Angels Community Clinic provides free medical, dental and pharmaceutical services to eligible patients. Patients are required to have at least a part time job, be a legal resident of Murray or Calloway County and be at or below the 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

“When I first started going there, the line was out the door,” she said. “People would camp out two hours before they even opened to get their services.

When she needed B12 shots, Angels Clinic provided them. When she needed new glasses, Angels Clinic provided them. When she needs medication, Angels Clinic provides it, serving her free of charge.

Eva radiates kindness despite the physical and mental health obstacles she has faced. Her goal is to make others feel appreciated and experience a moment of joy each day, which she does easily with her warm smile and outgoing nature.

“Give every moment of kindness you can to others,” she said.

Eva, an avid gardener, offers vegetables from her garden as a way to give back to the employees and volunteers at the clinic. She said the employees and volunteers especially love her zucchini and cucumbers.

“I don’t want to drain the system,” she said. “I want to contribute and give back.”

Something unique about Eva – she always says thank you. She shows her appreciation, even for the littlest bits of help, which have been monumental in giving her hope and transforming her into an overcomer.
“It makes me feel little bit better about asking for help, just to know that I could at least be gracious, and they appreciated that, and that made me feel a little bit of self-worth, and that I could actually overcome the things I have problems with,” she said.

Despite the continual health challenges she faces, Eva has made great strides in her life. She has a steady job taking care of individuals with disabilities. She is a Murray State graduate and a mobile homeowner.

“I wouldn’t have been able to do that if Angels Clinic hadn’t helped me with my medicine and given my that helping hand to help me in the ways that I needed to be helped,” she said. “I just can’t say enough good about these people.”

**Story Analysis**

The story features Eva as an impact story, as she has been a regular client at the clinic since 2009. This was a story that benefited the advocate, acting as a tool of empowerment rather than shame as she has overcome many challenges in her life. The goal of this story is to feature Eva as a person, and highlight the role Angels Community Clinic has had in her life, rather than highlight the clinic as the focus of the story. I achieved this goal by focusing on telling Eva’s story ethically, allowing her voice to be heard that revealed both her personality and her genuine appreciation for the work the clinic has done in her life. My interview with Eva quickly revealed her tenderhearted personality that shined through our conversation. I used this as the inspiration for the story.

This story exemplifies the ability to showcase organizational impact by honing in on one impacted life. Although this cannot attest to the overall, long-term impact of the clinic, it does highlight the positive experience of one individual that can attract others to the organization. It is
more beneficial to have an organizational constituent declare the outstanding work of an organization, than for the organization itself to say “we do great work.” The message is more effective when it comes from someone else’s mouth.

**Merryman House**

The featured story for Merryman House is of an employee, Sara Simon. Merryman House is a domestic violence crisis center that serves women, men and children in the Purchase Area. The organization has a 24-bed emergency housing shelter in addition to intervention and prevention programming. Merryman House exists to save, build and change lives of all individuals impacted by domestic violence.

**Sara’s Impact Story**

Sara Simon’s journey with Merryman House began as a volunteer art instructor. A friend offered her the opportunity to teach the Creative Expressions class in 2013 and she agreed as a Murray State alumna and artist. Today, Sara is a paid employee at Merryman House as the Intake/Exist Coordinator.

“Art is something I am particularly passionate about and drawn to,” Sara said. “I definitely have seen the healing effects of art in my own life, and I really enjoy sharing that with others.”

Creative Expressions is a voluntary art class that meets weekly and uses art as therapy and for stress reduction. She still teaches the class, even in her new role, because it is one of her
favorite programs at Merryman House. Within the class, clients are able to use a variety of modes of expression such as writing, music, painting, drawing and therapeutic coloring. They discuss what they created and the feelings that arise within the calming atmosphere of lighted candles and diffused essential oils.

“We see the need for stress reduction and processing trauma,” Sara said. “The same chemistry in our brain that processes trauma that we experience in life also is used for art making, so it makes sense to use that right hemisphere in the healing process.”

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1 in 5 women and 1 in 7 men will be a victim of intimate partner abuse in their lifetime.

“The statistic carries impact,” Sara said. “Chances are you have five female friends…one in five will have walked in their shoes.”

Each client name she knows, each face she sees, impacts Sara. She is passionate about healing and supporting those she serves.

“I began to get acquainted with our clients and their families, and I began to really develop a heart to connect with them, and see where they are coming from and to see them heal,” she said. “I myself am a domestic violence survivor and so I know personally what they may be experiencing and going through.”

Sara lives by the Christian missionary Heidi Baker’s personal philosophy to “stop for the one.”

“If you look at the enormity of the problem, you are going to get overwhelmed,” she said. “But if we can stop for the one, whoever that person is in front of us – be it a woman, a man, a child, a friend, a family member or a stranger – we are going to have an impact and we won’t get worn out in the process, we will get energized by that.”
Merryman House provides holistic services that benefit the whole family. Sara loves to see the client’s joy when help is received and when progress has been made. She is impacted by the scope of people domestic violence touches. As the Intake/Exist Coordinator, Sara is one of the first and last employees the client will see.

“It has been a great blessing to see the faces that domestic violence touches,” she said. “It doesn’t discriminate.”

**Story Analysis**

This story is a testimonial impact story that shares the experiences of an advocate that has been both a volunteer and employee. The goal of this story is to highlight the influence the art program has had on a non-client member, and reveal opportunities for others to get involved as a volunteer. All stories, no matter their format, have an underlying goal of recruiting donors. I achieved this goal by connecting organizational impact with personal impact by placing attention on how Sara gave back to the organization, and also how the organization gave back to Sara.

Similar to other stories, this story exemplifies the importance of featuring the best advocate for the most effective story. I had difficulty scheduling an interview with Merryman House, which may have led to interviewing an individual that potentially did not have as compelling of a story to tell as a client would. A potential future story for this organization would be to feature a client who has benefited from the services, similarly to the story about the client from PASAC.
Analysis

The complexity of compelling storytelling is finding the right characters and combining their story with the appropriate communication channel. The story is as effective as the willingness of the advocate to share his or her story; if the story is not shared on a platform that aligns with the audience’s behavior, low engagement will result. This analysis reveals that not all stories are effective on Facebook as different audiences utilize different communication channels. Furthermore, this analysis reveals the importance of choosing an advocate that has a compelling story that is both worth sharing and that they are willing to share.

Facebook Insights and WordPress Insights, the built in metrics and analytics tools on each website, were the main tools used to measure post engagement. Overall, the United Way Facebook page received increased engagement while the posts were made. The greatest increase that occurred from posting the stories was organic reach. None of the stories were “boosted” to increase reach using Facebook’s “Boost Post” feature that requires payment. This feature places the post on more newsfeeds – the greater the payment, the more newsfeeds the post appears on and the more targeted the audience can become.

The reach for the stories was organic, determined by the number of unique viewers, calculated by the number of newsfeeds the post appeared on without assistance from Facebook’s boost feature. Reach naturally increases with engagement; the more likes/reactions, comments and shares, the more newsfeeds the post appears on. It is important to note that just because the post appeared on a newsfeed does not guarantee that users read the post.

Table 1.1 shows the reach and number of post clicks on each story posted on Facebook. The stories that received the greatest reach received the most post clicks; Soup for the Soul received the most post clicks, followed by CASA by the Lakes and PASAC. Post clicks indicate
the number of times the story was clicked on by viewers, such as clicking the link or liking the post. There was no clear correlation between day of the week the story was posted and higher Facebook engagement. The stories with the most post clicks were the stories I considered the most compelling stories based on the story the advocate shared. Despite the different focuses the stories have, the stories with the most post clicks had advocates that were most engaging in my interview.

Table 1: Reach & Post Clicks on the Stories Posted on Facebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Reach</th>
<th>Post Clicks</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Red Cross</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels Community Clinic</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy Scouts</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA by the Lakes</td>
<td>1,127</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentry House</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Junior Achievement</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merryman House</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need Line</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASAC</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Citizens Center</td>
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<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soup for the Soul</td>
<td>3,279</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 1.1, the eleven stories posted as a component of this thesis had a maximum reach of 3,279 and a minimum reach of 105. The average reach per post was 636. The stories that had the most reach connected with the audience effectively on Facebook. The stories with less reach likely did not have advocates that were fans of the United Way’s Facebook page. When advocates and organizations did not share their story, overall the story received lower engagement.
The stories that were shared by the advocate and the featured nonprofit organization received the most engagement. This is likely because the story, once shared, then appears on the newsfeeds of people that are likely to be interested in the content because they are connected to the advocate or the organization. For example, people who like the Soup for the Soul Facebook page are likely interested in content pertaining to the organization even if they do not have a direct relationship with the organization as a volunteer or donor.

For Debbie Smith, Soup for the Soul advocate, her Facebook friends are likely interested in the events that occur in her life, making the content of the story particularly of interest to her friends. As the advocate and the organization shared the post of the organization’s founding story, the audience became more targeted to people interested in the content. When other individual’s who were interested in the content but not directly connected to it shared the post, the audience became less targeted as it was shared with people who may have no connection to or interest in the advocate or organization.

Additionally, Debbie seems to be a known figure in the community as she is active within her church and a cancer survivor. It is likely that people reacted to the post because of their relationship with Debbie in addition to the community that rallied around the founding of the organization. The high level of engagement may not be attributed to the quality of the story, rather could be attributed to the community support that upholds the organization. The comments made on this story, as well as all others, were overwhelmingly positive, revealing that storytelling creates an optimistic response as a result from the empathy developed through the story. The ultimate goal of storytelling is to lead to action within the organization, often through volunteering or donating.
There was a wide range of engagement on stories as shown in Graph 1.1. This reveals that it is not only about the content of the story, but is also about who views the content. The different levels of engagement are likely caused by a combination of the advocate’s friends following on Facebook and the level of organizational following on Facebook. Many organizations may not have a strong following on Facebook, such as the American Red Cross and the Boy Scouts of America that are focused on adventure and may pull away from technology. In contrast, the stories that received the most engagement, CASA by the Lakes and Soup for the Soul, are focused on relationships, where Facebook thrives in keeping in communication with peers. When examining engagement, it is important to note this is a percentage. The smaller the reach, the less number of people have to comment, like or share the post to create a greater percentage of engagement.

*Graph 1: Engagement Rate of Stories*
Posts made on the United Way’s Facebook page by other page administers during the same three-week time span as the stories were posted received overall less reach than the stories, show in Table 2.1. The maximum reach of the posts between October 11, 2016 and October 28, 2016 was 204 and the minimum reach for these posts was 12. The average reach for these nine posts was 89. These posts also were not boosted and were mostly regarding upcoming events and news about United Way and its partners; this content typically is less compelling than storytelling, making it predictable for this content to receive lower engagement.

Table 2: Reach & Post Clicks on Posts by United Way between October 11 & October 26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reach</th>
<th>Post Clicks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13-Oct</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-Oct</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-Oct</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-Oct</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-Oct</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-Oct</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-Oct</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-Oct</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-Oct</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The United Way Facebook page also increased in the number of overall page fans. On October 10, the day prior to the first posting, the page had 512 fans. During the weeks that stories were posted the page received 21 more fans for a total of 533 fans, about a 4 percent increase. During this time the page did not lose any current fans. Eleven of these fans were acquired on October 22, two days after Debbie Smith’s story about Soup for the Soul was posted which received the most total reach of 3,279, and engagement measures of 55 likes, 16 shares and 5 comments as seen in Table 1.2. Fans on the Facebook page are most active on the
weekends, around noon and again between 8 p.m. and 9 p.m. Based on this analysis, in future practice, posts should be made during these hours and should tag the story’s main character in the post.

Table 3: Reactions, Comments, Shares & Likes on the Stories Posted on Facebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Reactions</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Shares</th>
<th>Likes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Red Cross</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels Community Clinic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy Scouts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA by the Lakes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentry House</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Achievement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merryman House</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need Line</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASAC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Citizens Center</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soup for the Soul</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because only a preview of each story was included on each Facebook post, a link to the WordPress website – myimpactstory.wordpress.com – was included on each post. A total of 172 views were made on the stories, indicating that these viewers at a minimum went to the site. Eighty-one of these views were directly referred from a link on Facebook. There were 63 visitors that once on the WordPress site clicked on multiple stories. Friday was the most popular day for viewers and visitors to the WordPress site. It is likely that the stories were most actively viewed on Friday evenings because that is when people are not working and potentially surfing the web as a way to relax. Reading stories requires more time than liking a photo, making it more likely for viewers to read this content when they are not at work.
In conclusion, storytelling proved to be an effective technique for improving reach and engagement when used on Facebook. Although the stories didn’t receive outstanding engagement, the Facebook page did increase in fans, average post clicks, likes and comments. Employees at United Way said they plan to continue using storytelling in their Facebook posts because the page received an increase in engagement throughout the Impact Stories series. Based on this analysis, in future practice, I suggest tagging the character of the story in the post and posting during hours of most engagement specific to this Facebook page.
Conclusion

Nonprofit professionals must continually communicate to engage constituents and stakeholders with their organization’s mission. The challenge of this is framing a message that is ethical, professional and compelling. It is not enough to simply communicate – messaging is more than a post on Facebook or a newsletter – as the content of the message is as important as the message itself. Effective messaging is necessary for organizational success.

Storytelling is a communication technique used in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors that fulfills multiple organizational purposes. It has the ability to develop a brand, increase fundraising and raise awareness of a mission or cause. Stories share impact and develop empathy in readers, and in this way lead to action. The technique can be used on a variety of platforms; it can be written, video recorded or shared by word of mouth, and can be posted on social media sites, written in a mailer or shared during a meeting with a donor. There is value in diversity of stories and there are no hard rules for storytelling, meaning stories can find their own shape based on the character’s experience. Storytelling is not restricted by financial budget or organizational size, making the technique a realistic practice for any organization.

Differentiating within the nonprofit sector can be challenging among hundreds of other organizations existing with a similar mission. Compelling communication is the key to finding an organizational niche within the sector. Although measuring and demonstrating organizational impact is necessary for nonprofit organizations to show effectiveness, it can be overlooked or neglected because of the difficulty and time-consuming nature of the practice. Yet without communicating the exceptional work of the organization, constituents and stakeholders will be unaware of the impact being made, despite how effective the programming is. Organizations are expected to communicate, and the more compelling the communication is the more effective the
organization can be in terms of donor and volunteer recruitment and retention. Storytelling is a framework for engaging communication that underlines every component of an organization.

The eleven stories written for this thesis were posted on the United Way of Murray-Calloway County’s Facebook page and were not boosted to increase reach. During the three weeks the stories were posted, the page received overall increased engagement and the page acquired more fans. The stories were linked to a WordPress website that hosted the entire story, as the Facebook post only revealed the first few paragraphs.

The Impact Stories series emphasized broader challenges and characteristics of the storytelling technique, as applied to the nonprofit sector. For example, the story of Debbie Smith, founder of Soup for the Soul, exemplifies that storytelling provides greater engagement when the character within the story is tagged in the post, and then shares the post in addition to the organization. This directs the reach to a more targeted audience that would likely be interested in the content. In contrast, the story of Donna Slater, client of Need Line, a similar organization of Soup for the Soul, exemplifies the importance of finding a character with a story to tell that they are willing to tell.

As the storyteller, getting to know the character beforehand to determine potential effectiveness of the story and match it to the best communication channel can produce more engaging content. For example, the story of Marie Lyons, volunteer at the American Red Cross, showcases that Facebook may not be the best channel for every story as her story received very little engagement. Despite this, the story was included in the American Red Cross’ newsletter where it received more engagement than on Facebook. The channel the story is shared on coupled with the targeted audience effects engagement level. Overall, these stories testify to the
potential storytelling has to be an effective communication technique for nonprofit organizations regardless of size or budget to increase constituent and stakeholder engagement.

In conclusion, organizations must communicate effectively to differentiate within the nonprofit sector. Through the use of stories, organizations engage current volunteers and donors while appealing to prospective constituents to share impact in a way that develops empathy. Storytelling is a successful technique to create compelling messaging that can be communicated through a variety of channels and on multiple platforms to engage constituents and stakeholders. The technique serves the organization beyond the development of marketing materials by sharing organizational success, creating brand identity, raising awareness of the mission and ultimately increasing donors that support the organization’s advancement and mission fulfillment. Storytelling is effective and essential for organizations within the nonprofit sector.
References


measurement/projects/nonprofit-organizations/projects-focused-nonprofit-organizations/outcome-indicators-project


