

Storytelling Approaches to Program Evaluation:

An Introduction



Funded by:

THEATER



This document provides a practical introduction to storytelling approaches being successfully applied in grassroots program evaluation.

These approaches can be used in almost any setting, with any number of participants, in any language. They are flexible and can be creatively tailored to the needs and styles of your particular organization or project.



Table of Contents

Introduction		2
Gathering S	tories: Basic Interviewing Approaches	2
	Story Circle	3
	Storytelling Interviews	3
	Oral History Interviews	4
	Institutional Memory	4
Getting Crea	ative: Documenting Stories in Pictures, Writing and Theater	4
	Visual Documentation	4
	Scrapbooking and Story-quilting	5
	Story Theater	5
	Case Studies	6
	Vignettes: Short Stories as Illustration	6
Five Tips for	Gathering and Organizing Stories	6
Evaluation a	nd Beyond: Using the Stories you Collect	7
	Public Relations and Fund Raising	7
	Policy Advocacy	8



There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to program evaluation.

Evaluating the impact of programs aimed at social change and involving diverse constituents demands especially innovative and culturally appropriate approaches.

Introduction

Traditional evaluation methodologies—which rely on formal questionnaires and statistical data that can be scientifically analyzed—fail to give program participants a chance to tell their own stories in their own ways.

Storytelling is an ancient tradition that has, over time and across cultures, served many different purposes, from education and the transmission of values to political mobilization and pure

entertainment. It can take
many forms, from oral and
written narratives to gesture,
movement, art, music,
movies and more.

Storytelling is proving to be a highly effective, culturally appropriate approach to grassroots program evaluation that gives voice to individual and collective experience.

Storytelling is a powerful mode of human expression and a sophisticated form of "meaning-making." It begins with a storyteller, a singular experience, a unique point of view.

This is one reason that storytelling has become such a useful tool in program evaluation: It accommodates diverse voices and perspectives, while making the most of the particular resources and ways of learning readily available in your program. Unlike a traditional evaluation approach that is imposed from outside, the storytelling approach emerges organically from within your own organization, projects and participants.

Gathering Stories: Basic Interviewing Approaches

These basic approaches use a simple interview or question-and-answer format. There should always be a clearly designated interviewer or facilitator guiding the conversation. Ideally the conversation will be recorded (audio or video) or detailed notes will be taken. Using these recordings and notes, you will be able to share the stories you have gathered with others. Before

Why Storytelling Works

- Storytelling values and respects diverse ways of knowing and learning. It is empowering and participatory, and is based on popular knowledge.
- Stories can be used effectively alongside statistics and surveys. Including stories in your program evaluations puts a face on the facts and figures, and helps you figure out what's working, what's not, and why.
- Stories speak to a broad audience. Including your stakeholders' voices and perspectives can help you communicate to your stakeholders, your funders, and the larger community what you are accomplishing and why your program is so important.

you get started, be sure to read "Tips for Gathering and Organizing Stories" (page 6).

Story Circle

At the end of a staff meeting or session go around the group in a circle asking for each participant to share a story. To get the conversation going, the interviewer or facilitator can ask an open-ended question like, "What have you learned from being part of this program?" or "How has participation in this program changed your life?"

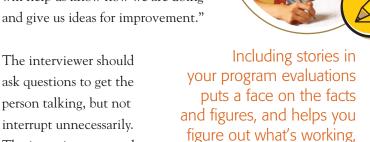
At the end of the session ask the group to summarize the most important lessons learned based on the stories told in the circle, and be sure to record or write these down. You can implement the story circle every three to six months to assess your program progress and involve diverse stakeholders.

Storytelling Interviews

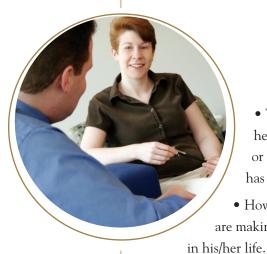
Everyone has a story to tell, but many people need help to get their stories out. One or more staff members can sit down with program participants one-on-one or in small groups to gather their stories. The interviewer can begin by explaining the purpose of the meeting, by saying something like, "Our agency wants to hear from our participants about how our programs are helping them. Hearing your experience will help us know how we are doing

The interviewer should ask questions to get the person talking, but not interrupt unnecessarily. The interviewer can ask the participant to describe:

• The problems he/she is facing that led him/her to come to the agency;



what's not and why.



 The activities in which he/she has participated or the services he/she has been receiving;

 How these services are making a difference his/her life.

The interviews should be taped and then transcribed and edited, cutting out comments that are off topic and focusing on the most compelling stories told by the participants.

Oral History Interviews

Including the voices of the people in a community who have familiarity with its history is a way to gather information on how it has changed over time. It can help to describe the historical, social and cultural context of your program as well as how the community and the program have evolved over time. In addition, it can help you identify community cultural events that existed in the past that can become resources for the future.

Oral history interviews may also be used to collect information on the lives of your stakeholders before you initiate your program activities and then after your program has

concluded, to see how their lives may have changed as a result of their participation.

See "Tell Us Your Story" Handout

This handout can be used to guide your interview and even shared with participants in advance, if appropriate.

Institutional Memory

Collecting and cataloguing stories not only from participants but also from staff can be an excellent way of recording the history and charting the progress of a program and the growth of an organization. For example, staff members can be asked to tell stories about how the program has evolved over time. These stories can be recorded and transcribed. This process can provide program staff a growing archive of stories that can be analyzed to chart growth in individual program participants, staff members, the program and the organization as a whole.

Getting Creative: Documenting Stories in Pictures, Writing and Theater

Visual Documentation

Stories can be told in pictures as well as words. Program staff and participants can be given cameras and invited to create a visual record of their participation in the program. These photos can be organized into a montage on a poster or presented in a digital slide show to demonstrate program activities and growth. This participatory evaluation approach is called "Photovoice." It utilizes photographs taken by program stakeholders to enhance need assessments, discussions and reflection, gather data, promote dialogue, conduct participatory evaluations and communicate results with various audiences, including policymakers. Similar approaches can be done with video cameras, and when shared through computers, the approach is called "Digital Storytelling." With participants' permission, it is best to save the stories as digital files. Stories

can then be selected to depict specific program impacts, successes and challenges, including diverse views and perspectives on how the program has impacted the lives of involved stakeholders and, possibly, the lives of their communities.

Scrapbooking and Story-quilting

Collecting artifacts and images and placing them in an album to document program activities, process and outcomes is a very old practice that has recently become a popular hobby. Participants and staff can be asked to keep a scrapbook throughout their participation in a program to document their activities, challenges, accomplishments and growth. These scrapbooks can then be used as a form of portfolio assessment in program evaluation.

Quilting is another folk craft that can be used for telling stories. For example, in a quilt-making activity, each participant can contribute a square that contains a personal reflection on the program, its process and outcomes. The participants can discuss how to organize their squares to make a quilt that tells the story of their individual and collective experience. Story-quilting can be used to assess and promote community pride, by describing how the community has come together to accomplish activities and make changes that resulted in improved community life and a sense of belonging.

Story Theater

Theater has been used effectively in the fields of health and mental health services and in social movements. Theater can dramatize community concerns and demonstrate possible solutions by ordinary people who are trained neither as playwrights nor actors. Community members are asked to develop stories that they turn into scripts and perform, either for themselves or for the public. Most often, the script emerges from role-play exercises.

Elements of story theater can be adapted into program evaluation. For example, every month or two, you can ask your program participants to role-play the process, challenges and accomplishments, as well as outcomes of a program. If you tape the role plays (audio or video) over the course of a year, they provide a running record of growth.

Story theater can also be an excellent means to inform the community about your program evaluation results. For example, an organization in California called Lideres Campesinas (Farmworker Women Leaders) writes short plays in which they describe the lives of women who have experienced domestic violence and how their lives changed as a result of becoming

Online Resources

Photovoice www.photovoice.com

The Center for Digital Storytelling www.storycenter.org

active members of the organization.



Case Studies

Case studies are more in-depth, written stories of the lives of your stakeholders. They may also depict the places where they live, where your organization is located, and how community life and other factors

such as the environment and the social determinants of health (e.g., employment, race and housing) interact with the processes and outcomes that emerge as a result of your stakeholders' participation in your program. A case study may include:

- Program participants' biographical information;
- Their reasons for being involved;
- The services they received or the activities they participated in; and
- Challenges, successes and outcomes.

Vignettes are strong personal statements that give life—a human face—to collected data.

Vignettes: Short Stories as Illustration

Stories are used to illustrate and

contextualize the points you make
with facts and numbers. For example,
after presenting statistical information
on the activities that you implemented
in the past year, you can add a box that
contains an account told by a staff member
or program participant that describes a
particular event that supports the statistical
data. Vignettes are strong personal statements

that give life-a human face-to collected data.

Five Tips for Gathering and Organizing Stories

1. Be consistent and systematic.

Like keeping a diary, you need to have a place to record your stories; you need to allow time to write them down and you need to keep at it. Do a little at a time rather than waiting until a lot of time has passed and trying to remember and record weeks or months of stories all at once. It's easier to record stories when they are fresh in your mind than to go back and re-construct them.

2. Designate Storytellers and Story-collectors.

Everyone has a story to tell, but not everyone is a good storyteller. Identify the good storytellers among your staff and program participants and encourage them to tell their stories and also to help other, less skilled storytellers, get their stories out. You also need to identify someone who takes primary responsibility for story-collecting. By story-collecting, we mean recording, writing and transcribing stories about your program. This takes time and energy. You may want to train a staff member to be the designated story-collector for your agency or you may want to rotate the responsibility each month or for each event.

- 3. Be strategic in your choice of stories you include in a program evaluation. Everybody has a story to tell, but this does not mean that every story told to you by staff members and program participants needs to end up in your report. Strategically select the stories that are most appropriate for the task at hand—and these may not always be success stories! Certain stories may illustrate problems and challenges encountered by your stakeholders; others may demonstrate your program's successful interventions or barriers to success; and still others may dramatize the particular needs, assets and resources of the communities you serve.
- 4. Stories do not tell "the whole story."

 It is important that you complement the stories you include in your evaluation report with other sources of information. Stories should be combined with surveys, focus groups, observations and other methods of evaluation. Providing multiple forms of data and including the perspectives of the full range of your participants will enhance the quality of your program evaluation as well as the your stories' impact.
- 5. Consider the ethical implications of sharing personal and institutional stories. Always ask participants for permission before recording their stories. Also get their approval to share with others the stories they tell you, explaining that their real name will not be used in connection with

their stories. It is good practice to have written consent (see sample consent form included with this document) to assure confidentiality in the use of personal narratives; and to apply responsible and ethical research practices, ensuring that the human rights, dignity and welfare of human subjects are protected.

Evaluation and Beyond: Using the Stories you Collect

Your participants' stories can serve as a powerful tool in service of your organization's goals. Think about the particular audience that you want to target, from funders and policymakers to the media and the general public.

Public Relations and Fund Raising

Programs can use storytelling for publicity, fund raising and recruitment of new participants, stakeholders, volunteers and staff. The same stories you use for evaluation can be used to explain to potential participants, other community service organizations, potential funders and the media who you are, what you do, what you have accomplished, successes and challenges,



It is good practice to have written consent.

See Sample Consent

Form Included in this Brochure.

and what you need.



Policy Advocacy

Compelling human stories will strengthen your policy advocacy message. Stories of your participants' struggles and how

your program helped to mitigate them can be used to raise awareness of your program impacts. Stories of their resiliency and of the gains they make in your program can be used not just for funding but also for social and systemic change.

How to Disseminate Your Stories

Select statements from your stories that "speak to" specific audiences and present them in the appropriate format for that audience.

- For funders: Write an evaluation report with an executive summary that highlights, in brief, the main stories compiled in your report.
- For policymakers: Write policy briefs that incorporate vignettes of your most compelling stories along with salient facts and figures.
- For the media: Write a press release that includes one or more compelling stories and includes direct quotes from participants.
- For community members and stakeholders: Weave stories and quotes into your organization's publications such as newsletters, brochures and annual reports. Write an article in a popular community newspaper or a community newsletter. Use story theater to dramatize community concerns and potential solutions.



Tell Us Your Story

Hearing your experience will help us know how we are doing and give us ideas for improvement.

•	First, tell us a little about yourself.
	Please describe the problem or problems you were facing that first led you to come to us.
	Describe some of the activities in which you have participated or the services you have been receiving.
	Have these activities or services made a difference in your life?
	Looking ahead, what are some of the new or continuing challenges that you expect to face? Do you plan to continue participating in our programs?



Consent Form

We would like to assess the impact of your participation in our activities and services by making audio or video recordings of your stories. Through this assessment, our organization will learn what worked and what did not work and why. This learning will help us improve our programs and services.

We may also use the products of our assessments to share the stories we collect with our community and other stakeholders or to advocate for our clients' needs. We may use these products to publish our accomplishments and to seek support for our ongoing services, program(s), and/or activities. We may publish information, stories, photographs and artwork through various media—including but not limited to print, electronic and audio-video recordings. Examples of these publications may include but are not limited to newsletters, brochures, reports, Web sites, slideshows, PowerPoint presentations, program photo albums and/or audio-visual public service announcements.

No media shall be used for exploitation or promotion of activities unrelated to the mission of our organization,______.

Please complete and return this form to our office. In order to register for our program, the form must be completed, signed and returned regardless of your decision.				
Your Name/Youth's Name				
Date of Birth	/ (month/date/year) Today's Date/			
I GIVE				
Signature	Program Participant or Parent/Guardian			
Print Name	Program Participant or Parent/Guardian			
Office Use Only:				

STORYTELLING APPROACHES TO PROGRAM EVALUATION: AN INTRODUCTION
Evaluating the impact of programs aimed at social change

Evaluating the impact of programs aimed at social change and involving diverse constituents demands especially innovative and culturally appropriate approaches.





1000 North Alameda Street Los Angeles, CA 90012 800.449.4149 www.calendow.org © 2007 The California Endowment

CPA/Storytelling TCE 1019-07