

# Telling Your United Way Story

## Know Your Audience

Who you're talking to determines the tone and focus of your content. For example, a younger audience may be moved by a story from the point of view of one of their peers. A company might want you to consolidate the entirety of your work in a single infographic. Nevertheless, while certain audiences may have different expectations or preferences, they're all human. Someone working at a partner company may want the statistics, but you also have to tell the human story behind those statistics.

## Focus on Interconnected Building Blocks of Education, Income, Health and Basic Needs

The ideal story highlights more than one of the three building blocks and shows how they interconnect. You can connect the dots for people by explaining how positive change in one area can impact another (e.g., healthy kids are more likely to succeed in school). Donors, supporters and stakeholders care deeply that United Way is looking at the big picture, and linking education, income, health, and basic needs. In the words of one donor, "Thank goodness someone is focusing on more than Band-Aid solutions!"

## Don't Dwell on "The Problem"

Don't fill your story with depressing statistics about poverty, crime and other social ills. People hear about these problems on the news every day. Our research shows people get overwhelmed and assume the problems are too big to put a dent in – and that's when they tune out. You have limited real estate to sell your story, and your story is one of hope, showing that our way – the United Way – creates lasting solutions that build opportunity for all.

## Weave Individual Stories into Bigger Picture

You may have an inspiring personal profile story of someone in your community, but his or her story doesn't speak to our mission of community change unless you combine that "portrait view" of one person's success with the "landscape view" of the community's success. Consider starting with an individual, and then showing how that individual's success is just one example of the larger community change taking place (e.g., he or she is one of x number of students who have improved their attendance). Then you can loop back to end your story with the individual again. You've provided the audience with the bigger picture, but that human face is a compelling note on which to end the story.

## Other Tips

United Way brings people together to solve problems that affect us all. And people love that about us. So don't be afraid to talk about the idea of interconnectedness. "We're all in this together" is a powerful idea that takes people right to the unique value-add of United Way.

People don't always connect the dots. It's clear to us that reading volunteers for 2nd graders helps boost high school graduation. But not everyone gets it. Use common-sense language to show the causal relationship.

*Example: Kids who start to fall behind find it harder to catch up each year and get increasingly frustrated. That's why simple solutions like volunteer readers and tutors at young ages have proven to be so successful in increasing graduation rates later on.*

Donors are frustrated with "Band-Aid" approaches to pressing social problems. The fact that United Way is about lasting change instead of charity resonates with them – if we say it explicitly. Using that idea, if not that phrase, signals that United Way is doing something unique and important, and connects to our work and our goals. It generates excitement, and leads to greater engagement.