

Writing Great Impact Stories

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Much More Than 1,000 Words



- What do you see?
 - Dorothy
 - Toto
 - Yellow brick road
 - Munchkins
 - Munchkinland
 - Kansas House
 - A celebration
- Story in this scene versus the complete story

What is an impact story?



- A snap shot of your project
- A scene that shows the positive impact you're having in your community
- A story told from the personal level, preferably from the perspective of someone who has benefitted from your work
- Brief (100-150 words)

Who reads the stories?



VISTA Members



CNCS State Team



Local Publications



CNCS Nationwide

Where do I find my stories?



- Everywhere!
 - What am I excited about?
 - What do I tell my family when I tell them about my work?
 - Some people are just too amazing, weird, funny, generous, etc. to be true...
 - Listen to your coworkers
 - Look through local newsletters
 - Watch the news, read the paper – ask yourself “what’s hot?”

Where do I find my stories?



- Stories get categorized into:
 - Harnessing Baby Boomers' Experience
 - Mobilizing More Volunteers
 - Ensuring a Brighter Future for America's Youth
 - Engaging Students in their Communities
 - Disaster Response and Recovery
 - Outreach/Collaboration
 - Other

When do I think about these?



- Always be looking!



Why am I writing these?



- To share your stories with others
- To promote your project, work, organization and AmeriCorps*VISTA
- To inspire others to serve
- Good thing you don't care it's required



How do I write these?!?



The Grabber



- Your opening sentence
- Make it memorable
- Use action words
- Remember James Bond
 - Opening scene isn't about the plot of movie
 - It just shows James Bond doing something awesome, which grabs our attention
 - Show us a person right away!

Ex.) The Grabber



Zzz...

The Stuffandsuch School District has experienced a 10 percent increase in reading scores over the past two school years.

This year's grant cycle from the Really Nice Foundation has helped dozens of local organizations.

Ooh...

Sally Simpson sits with her third grade son, Alex, as he reads her a chapter from a fifth grade book.

Kids learning the danger of smoking, prisoners learning to paint in art therapy, the unemployed getting free access to computers – all thanks to the Really Nice Foundation grant cycle.

Paint Me a Picture



- Quick overview of the issue and its need for a solution
- Set the stage – who is your community?
- Show the reader **WHAT** the problem is, **WHO** it affects, and hint at **HOW** it can be fixed



Ex.) Paint Me a Picture



Zzzz...

The company was founded in December 1965 and has been issuing insurance policies since 1973 through a network of independent agents throughout the state.

Ooh...

The town of Simple, Ariz. has one of the highest rates of uninsured drivers in the state, caused in part by a lack of education on the benefits of car insurance. However, through InsureAll's network of independent agents, the situation is turning around.

The Hero Emerges



- Introduce VISTA member(s)
 - NOT “volunteers”, NOT “VISTAs”, NOT “AC*VISTAs”
- Introduce site organization
- Introduce project
- Introduce specific activities that tie into the problem(s) addressed in
Paint Me a Picture



Ex.) The Hero Emerges



Zzzz...

VISTA members in Someplace County are developing a volunteer program at the Someplace Community Center.

Ooh...

Laura Cox is a second year VISTA member serving at the Someplace County project to develop a sustainable volunteer program at the Someplace Community Center, which provides assistance to impoverished youth through afterschool activities.

Throw It In Reverse



- Time to back up and fill in the detail
- Specific target populations, activities, accomplishments
- Include all the data (numbers, %, \$) that can show impact
- This is often the driest section of a story, but we need the specifics



Ex.) Throw It In Reverse



Zzzz...

Job centers in the city of Adams have benefitted from VISTA members helping to bring more clients in and helping them find the jobs they want.

Ooh...

The city of Adams' VISTA project is in its first year and empowers local vocational rehabilitation centers to better serve its low to moderate income population in locating employment or building job skills to acquire better paying jobs. In the first year alone, VISTA members have helped the city expand its client base by 200 percent.

Spotlight Section



- Tell an anecdote that drives it home
- Don't tell a sob story unless it has a happy ending!
 - Remember, the point of the anecdote is to show how your program is helping people
- Mini story format example:
 - Beginning--where did they come from?
 - Middle--what are the specifics of their problem?
 - End--how did your project help them?
- Quotes are great!

Ex.) Spotlight Section



Zzzz...

One family who used the VISTA site at the Taxtastic Center filed their two years of back taxes, earning their EITC credits for three years total.

Ooh...

Max and Cindy Sherman hadn't filed their taxes for three years, fearing having to owe taxes they could not afford. Despite their hard work, the Shermans have struggled to keep their family afloat. "I can't believe Taxtastic got us all three years of our EITC credits," Cindy said with tears in her eyes. "This program is our lifeboat."

Would You Read It?



- Try to imagine someone skimming dozens of these stories. What will make yours unique?
 - **The Grabber** – Does my first sentence stand out from the rest? Is there a person involved right away for your reader to see?
 - **Paint Me a Picture** – Can I identify the problem in my community? Can I see who is hurt by this problem? Is there a hint of how to fix it?
 - **The Hero Emerges** – Who is the VISTA member? What is the organization? What is the overall project?
 - **Throw It In Reverse** – Are there specific activities described? Are specific numbers included (how long, how many, how much)?
 - **Spotlight** – Could I write an afterschool special about this section? Does their story have a beginning, middle and end?

Other General Tips



- Assume your reader has never heard of your organization or project.
- Avoid using *italics*, **bold**, ALL CAPS or exclamation points(!!) for emphasis
- Use action verbs; try to avoid forms of the verb “to be” (is, are, was, were, am)
 - “ABC is a provider of...” versus “ABC provides...”
- Once you’ve mastered the basics, feel free to improvise

Ex.) Combining the Elements



Grabber
Paint Me
a Picture

Hero
Emerges

In recent years, Phoenix has become a safe harbor for refugees from all over the world. From a refugee's frightened first steps onto the escalator at Sky Harbor Airport to their initial attempts at complete English sentences, the road to successful resettlement can be a difficult and intimidating one. Member Matthew Dolamore, serving with Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest's Refugee Resettlement Program, focuses on assuring that the community capacity is there to make the challenging transition to American urban life as smooth as possible for refugees.

Ex.) Combining the Elements



Throw
It In
Reverse

The largest group of refugees currently coming to Phoenix are from the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan. To address their needs, Dolamore has recruited and organized a diverse group of local professionals to instruct, mentor and support these new residents. Employees from Washington Mutual Bank have volunteered to explain checks, bank accounts, credit and the importance of budgeting. **One of the first Bhutanese families Dolamore met, the Pokhrels, managed to secure jobs within a month of arrival. Following classes conducted by the WaMu volunteers, they opened a joint bank account, signed up at work to receive their checks via direct deposit and began a family savings plan that has resulted in the recent purchase of a car – a milestone that many families need at least 12 months to reach. The Pokhrel family is an example of success within not only the Bhutanese community, but the entire refugee community.**

Spotlight

Now You Try a Story



5 minute total

- Think of something you felt successful about in the past week
- List the who's
- List the where's
- List the what's
- List the when's
- List the why's

10 minute total

- Write a sentence or two for Paint Me a Picture
- Write a sentence or two for The Hero Emerges
- Write two to four sentences for Throw It In Reverse
- Write three to five sentences for Spotlight
- Go back and write The Grabber

Additional Resources



- ACF VISTA Impact Story Worksheet
- Style Guides
 - *Strunk and White*
- Obituaries (really)
- Arizona State VISTA Facebook Group will start an Impact Story of the Week
- Heidi Ernst, VISTA Project Director, Arizona Community Foundation, hernst@azfoundation.org