The VISTA Leader Story:
A Resource Guide for Your Journey

Patrick Gruber, VISTA Leader, Albany, NY
Erica Jones, VISTA Leader, Albuquerque, NM
Becca Mandel, VISTA Leader, Seattle, WA
Kristi Synold, VISTA Leader, Sacramento, CA
Carlie Toland, VISTA Leader, Tallahassee, FL
Jean Carroccio, Learning Coach, Denver, CO

There is no greater burden than carrying an untold story.

—Maya Angelou, Poet Laureate

Table of Contents:

I. Background on Digital Storytelling.....1-2

Project Purpose.....1

The Leader Story: Why is it important?.....1-2

II. Narrative Structure for Digital Storytelling.....3-5

The Classic III Act Structure: Key Elements.....3

Important Qualities of Storytelling.....4

Your Audience.....4

Interview Tips.....5

III. Technical Tools for Digital Storytelling.....6-8

Tools to Create.....6

Tools to Edit.....7

Ways to Share.....8

IV. Our Stories in 6 Words.....9

V. Further Resources.....10

I. Background on Digital Storytelling

Project Purpose

Our goal is to create a meaningful resource that empowers Leaders to effectively explore, express, and share their journey as a Leader with others.

We have created this easy-to-use resource guide highlighting the importance of telling the VISTA Leader story, the basics of storytelling, and the tools you can use to create your story. As a companion tool to the resource guide, we prepared a presentation highlighting videos of VISTA Leaders around the country telling their story. We are hopeful that the tools we created will be helpful in your journey of documenting your VISTA Leader story.

WATCH THE VISTA LEADER STORY

The Leader Story: Why is it important?

It gives VISTA Members insight into the VISTA Leader role:

As a VISTA Leader, it is sometimes difficult to describe to members what exactly a VISTA Leader does. Telling your story is a creative way to show your members what your role is in their service year. Additionally, after VISTA Members complete their first year of service and make the decision to serve a second term, they may have questions about becoming a VISTA Leader. Sharing your personal Leader story is a creative tool for members to learn about the VISTA Leader role from your personal perspective.

It gives fellow Leaders project ideas:

In your service year, there may be times when you have a project idea, and want to share it with other Leaders. On the contrary, you may have a time in which you are stuck in your project and need some insight on how to improve your program. Sharing stories with other Leaders gives you the opportunity to learn and grow in your role. Furthermore, telling your story is a great way for other Leaders to compare and contrast their year of service with yours. It gives fellow Leaders an idea of how diverse Leader roles can be.

It serves as a recruitment tool:

Once you have creatively documented your story, consider using it as a recruitment tool. This tool can be used not only for the recruitment of future VISTA Leaders, but also for the recruitment of VISTA Members in your program. After all, what better way to recruit Members and Leaders than to give them a preview of their potential service year?

It can make a great networking tool:

Leaders and Members from all over the country could potentially view your Leader story. As you are sharing your service life with others, you are reaching out and connecting yourself to a large community of AmeriCorps*VISTA Members. Using your story to connect with other members is a great tool for networking.

It is a creative way to reflect on your VISTA year:

Reflection is an important part of service. Ideally, Leaders should document their expectations before service, reflect on key points throughout their service, and reflect on their year at the end of service. Reflecting throughout your service year helps to refresh your memories of your year, and sheds light on how important your role is in the program. At the end of your VISTA Leader year, sharing your story is a creative way to reflect on your year of service. It is a nice way to bring your year of service to a close, and an amazing tool to look back on years down the road.

SUMMARY

Importance:

- **Gives insight into the role**
- **Provides project ideas**
- **Serves as a recruitment tool**
- **Great networking tool**
- **Creative way to reflect**

People don't want more information. They are up to their eyeballs in information. They want faith—faith in you, your goals, your success, in the story you tell…Once people make your story their story, you have tapped into the powerful force of faith.

—Annette Simmons, Author, The Story Factor: Inspiration, Influence, and Persuasion Through the Art of Storytelling

II. Narrative Structure for Digital Storytelling

In order for an idea to pass from person to person, it must be easily transmitted and memorable. With all of the information thrown at us each day, you need to make sure your story is simple, clear, and compelling enough to be re-told.

The Classic III Act Structure

The key to a good story comes down to structure. Everyone is familiar with The Classic 3 Act Structure: set up the story, develop the action, and end with resolution. More specifically, you want to make sure to include and develop the following key elements:

Protagonist

Who is the audience going to follow? This person is crucial, since they are responsible for driving the action. Make sure to introduce them and develop what their world is like before the story is initiated. They will determine the point of view of the story.

Inciting Incident

What kicks the story into motion? This will set a clear goal for the protagonist to achieve. Without this element, you have no story.

Obstacles and Developing Action

These can be internal or external barriers that cause the audience to ask, "What happens next?" Although we love stories, we are also easily bored and don't have time to wait for things to get interesting. Right away you have to make the audience wonder how things will turn out. As your protagonist pursues their goal they must run into obstacles and surprises that create conflict. The more barriers, the more interesting it is.

"A-Ha" Moment

There should be at least one moment when the audience connects emotionally with the protagonist and finds insight or truth.

Resolution

What happens after the hero overcomes the final barrier?

Meaning

What is the lesson learned along the way? The meaning should be clear and the audience should understand why they took this journey with you.

Important Qualities of Storytelling

After you have mastered the structure of your story, it is important to incorporate the following qualities as you continue to develop your story.

Scenes vs. Summary

It is important to develop scenes so that it feels as if action is happening in real time. It is okay to incorporate summary in between scenes, but summary alone tends to keep the audience at a distance instead of letting them experience the story as it is happening.

Let the drama unfold

Don't give all the drama away in the beginning. The audience must stay engaged until the end to learn what happens. Remember, you want the audience to keep asking, "What happens next?"

Give your characters a voice

Characters speak to each other and talk like real people---no engineered quotes. Dialogue is also a way to keep the audience engaged as the story is happening in real time. Direct quotes let the characters speak for themselves with their own voice.

Engage emotions

People tend not to think about things they don't care about. Good stories stir up emotions in order to say to the reader, "This is worth your attention."

Your Audience

Your story ends without an audience to share it with.

Identify your audience

In order to be effective, it is important to have a specific audience in mind as you are developing your story. Take the time to think about who you are speaking to and why you want them to hear your story.

Clarify your message

Once you have identified your audience, you will be able to focus your story in a way that is specifically targeted for them. You can craft your story and incorporate your message based on your purpose for sharing with this particular group of people.

Connect and engage

The more tailored your story is to your audience, the more connected, engaged, and invested they will be. Be sure to use audience appropriate language, humor, images, messages, etc.

Interview Tips

The interview is a crucial part in gathering other people's stories to share. See the tips below to get the most out of your interviews!

Don't accept "we"

Ask your interviewee who specifically is driving the action instead of allowing them to generalize with the word "we". This can be difficult, but try to tease out who exactly did what.

Push past jargon

It is easy for someone to fall into jargon that they feel comfortable with. Instead, push them to use language that is more likely to conjure images for your audience.

Map out a timeline of events

This can be a helpful tool to allow your interviewee to structure the order of events.

Look for moments of vulnerability. Ask questions like, "how did you feel?"

Remember how important emotions are in engaging your audience. Use the interview as an opportunity to delve into the emotions that surround your interviewee's story.

Press for direct quotes

Asking for direct quotes will allow you to stay true to the characters' voices. Developing real characters is a powerful way to engage the audience.

Ask for surrounding details

Ask your interviewee to paint a detailed picture for you so that people can place themselves there and naturally feel more involved.

SUMMARY

The 3 Act Structure

- Protagonist
- Inciting Incident
- Obstacles
- "A-Ha" Moment
- Resolution
- Meaning

Qualities

- Scenes/Summary
- Unfolding drama
- Voice
- Emotions

Audience

- Identify
- Clarify
- Connect

Interview Tips

- Avoid "we"
- No jargon
- Timeline
- "How did you feel"
- Direct quotes
- Details

Storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it.
—Hannah Arendt, German Political Theorist

III. Technical Tools for Digital Storytelling

Now that you have learned why it's important to tell your story and the basics of storytelling, you can start creating materials for your story. In this section you will find some great tools to create, edit, and share your VISTA Leader story.

Tools To Create

Storyboard

A simple, but effective tool to help you create a story is called a storyboard. A storyboard is like a roadmap where you lay out the order of the images or video that will guide your viewer through your story. Just match your images or video to the script or music that you plan to use in an easy to follow storyboard. This tool will come in handy when you are editing and working with your real clips or images.

TIP!

Need ideas for how to structure your story or different ways to develop a video? Then try watching some short films for free on www.hulu.com or www.youtube.com. These might just inspire you or help give you an idea how to develop a meaningful story in a short amount of time.

Voice

Try to capture a voice that will express the feeling and emotion of your story while trying to avoid background noise. This can be achieved by recording a voiceover in a quiet room so as to avoid distracting noises like traffic, people, talking, doors closing, etc.

FREE!
Audacity:
Audio Editor & Recorder

DEVICES:

- *Voice recorder*
- *Camera*
- *Cell phone*
- *Computer microphone*
- *Free online software*

Images

Collect video and photos that will visually illustrate your story. With these images, be mindful of lighting and that you can clearly see your subject. A tip is to keep the sun or light source in front of your subject as this allows for their face or features to be clearly illuminated. Try the "Rule of Thirds". This is a shooting technique in which you divide your frame into imaginary thirds and when filming try to place your object at 1/3 or 2/3 rather than in the center.

DEVICES:

- *Video camera*
- *Digital camera*
- *Flip video camera*
- *Cell phone*
- *Webcam*
- *Built-in computer camera*

Tools To Edit

Editing

Select an editor to help you cut, create, and arrange your story. Often your recording device or computer will already come with an editor.

SOFTWARE:

- *iMovie*
- *Movie Maker*
- *Final Cut Pro*
- *PowerPoint*
- *iPhoto*
- *Photoshop*
- *FlipVideo Editor*

Import

Importing is a process where you transfer data such as a videos or images from your recording device onto your computer. To import, you would attach your device and then select to upload your images or video. Once the images or video are imported then you can drop them into a photo or video editing software and start to place them in order using your storyboard to guide you.

Sound

Add music or sound effects to increase emotion or supplement the story.

TIP!

Be aware of licensing or copy right rules when adding music to your story as depending on the song you may need permission from the artist. Perhaps, someone you know or yourself could even compose a short song through the use of software such as Garage Band to use instead.

FREE!

- ⇒ Freesound Project
- ⇒ Flashkit Sound Loops
- ⇒ Creative Commons

Transitions

To smoothly guide your audience through your story, insert transitions such as fade or dissolve. When inserting transitions, often times less can be more. You want to be careful that your effects and transitions aide the story and not distract from it.

Ways to Share

Export

Exporting is a process that makes your video a complete package and enables you to share it as a file with others. While there are a variety of formats in which to save your video, .mov and .mp4 are the most common.

FORMATS:

- ⇒ ***.wmv***
- ⇒ ***.avi***
- ⇒ ***.mov***
- ⇒ ***.m4v***
- ⇒ ***.mp4***
- ⇒ ***.mpg***

Show

Now that you have a finished product, it's time to get out there and show your creation. To get the word out about your story you can hold a public viewing, publish on social media, or share on a website.

SHARING:

SUMMARY

To Create:

- Storyboard
- Voice
- Images

To Edit:

- Editing
- Import
- Sound
- Transitions

To Share:

- Export
- Show

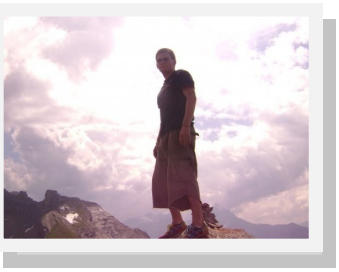
We live in story like a fish lives in water. We swim through words and images siphoning story through our minds the way a fish siphons water through its gills. We cannot think without language, we cannot process experience without story.

—Christina Baldwin, Author, Storycatcher: Making Sense of our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story

IV. Our Stories in 6 Words

Patrick Gruber

"Promoting accountability, ensuring quality, fighting injustice."



"High performing team; first of many."

Erica Jones

"Working hard to empower unheard voices."

"Working towards guiding those in service."

Becca Mandel

"Enhancing our communities with VISTA power!"

"Tell your story, what a gift."

Kristi Synold

"Strong Leaders, strong members, stronger communities."

"Stories, like good milkshakes, need sharing."

Carlie Toland

"Fostering member development. Building VISTA community."

"Everyone has a story, what's yours?"

Jean Carroccio

"Me--- I can't stop at one."

"Creative, Focused, Fun --- Jean's dream team!"

V. Further Resources

Narrative Structure for Digital Storytelling

- Andy Goodman's 'Power of Storytelling' workshop

- Goodman, A. *Storytelling as Best Practice: How Stories Strengthen Your Organization, Engage Your Audience and Advance Your Mission*. Los Angeles, CA: Goodman, 2006
  http://www.agoodmanonline.com/publications/storytelling/index.html

- Margolis, Michael. "Believe Me: A Storytelling Manifesto for Change-Makers and Innovators." *Believe Me: The Art of Business Storytelling*. http://www.believemethebook.com.

Technical Tools for Digital Storytelling

- **Voice:**

Audacity: Audio Editor and Recorder
http://audacity.sourceforge.net/

- **Sound:**

Freesound Project
http://www.freesound.org/

Flashkit Sound Loops
http://www.flashkit.com/loops/

Creative Commons
http://creativecommons.org/

- **Show:**

YouTube
www.youtube.com

Facebook
www.facebook.com

Twitter
www.twitter.com

Tumblr.
www.tumblr.com

Google Groups
http://groups.google.com/

Vimeo
www.vimeo.com

Myspace
www.myspace.com

VISTA Campus
http://vistacampus.org/

- **Technology Site:**

TechSoup:
http://home.techsoup.org/pages/default.aspx