

Module 3: What are the elements of an impact narrative?

Transcript.

Language: English

Estimated reading time: 6:00

Let's look at the essential elements needed to put together your impact-narrative.

We distinguish the following five elements: First is the social issue: what is the problem? Although of course you can also address an opportunity that you think we should seize! Second, the people and organizations most closely involved in the problem. They may experience the problem, but also have a role in solving it. Third are your efforts to address the problem. That's about the solution you propose and how you share that solution. Fourth is the change that results from your effort. What does the situation around the problem look like for those people and organizations most closely involved in the problem? Fifth is the evidence of the change. Of course, the order in which you address these elements can vary. That order depends on your goal with the impact narrative, the target audience of the narrative, and also your personal preference. We will now discuss each element in more detail.

First, then, there is the social issue. Outline the situation for the target audience of the impact-narrative. For example, explain the relevant developments around the problem you are working on. Address the challenges you perceive and the change you seek. Not every reader, viewer, or listener will be equally familiar with the issue. Consider what relevant prior knowledge you can reasonably expect from your audience and begin your

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explanation from that level of knowledge. Make sure you share enough details. That ensures that everyone in the target audience understands what the problem is and what the related challenges are. For example, not everyone may be aware of the relationship between a pregnant woman's health and her child's school performance later in life. In short, explain why your efforts matter!

Second is the appointment of the people and organizations most closely affected by the change you seek. Who is most affected by the current challenges? And who, therefore, benefits most from the change? Besides you, who have a role in addressing the problem? And who, therefore, can complement your efforts? Whether you are conducting research, creating policy, or implementing an intervention, ask yourself who can reap the benefits. The more specific you can be, the better. For example, compare "policy makers" to "policy makers at the local level responsible for sport and exercise. Introducing organizations but especially people brings your narrative to life.

Third is the role you or the organization you work for plays in the narrative. Describe what solution to the problem you propose, how you arrive at this solution, and how you share this solution with others. What research, collaborations and ways of sharing knowledge play a role? For example, was the solution to the problem based on a questionnaire, focus groups or interviews? For example, did you work with others to develop the solution? And how did you share your knowledge with them and others? Did you give advice through presentations and reports? Or did you write an opinion piece, create a serious game or... developed a training course? Again, be specific. For example, indicate in which newspaper and on what date the opinion

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piece appeared. If you are comfortable with it, you can also share your motivation for solving the problem. That makes the narrative personal.

Next and fourth, describe long-term or lasting change. What change in thinking and/or behavior of what people or organizations underlies it? How and why does it lead to the solution of the problem? Figures can help, but do not tell the whole story. A greatly simplified example: 'The city created car-free zones in residential areas. Parents said in a questionnaire that their children aged 4 to 12 now play outside an average of 5 hours more per week than before the zones were introduced. This has helped to reduce the percentage of obese children by 25% since the introduction of the zones.'

Fifth and finally, back up the story with evidence. Quantifying impact with numbers and facts as I just did is an option. Add them to the narrative wherever possible. But don't underestimate the impact of qualitative information to provide insight into how your efforts solve the problem by creating lasting change. Consider shorter or longer quotes from people who have benefited from the solution. Have them share their experiences. But also consider references to your work in a policy paper or media appearance, for example. Depending on the purpose and audience of your impact-narrative, you may also want to use this evidence to focus on what you want to do differently in the future and/or what are next steps.

In summary, the elements of the impact-narrative are the problem, the people and organizations most closely associated with it, your efforts to solve the problem, the sustainable change resulting from these efforts, and the evidence of the problem's resolution through this sustainable change.

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