

# Implementation Tips for USAID Partners

Sharing Resources and Knowledge Among the Global CSO Community

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*Stories and photographs are powerful ways to educate donors, prospective partners and the public about your programs and demonstrate their value to the community.*

## References

CIVICUS Toolkit

[Writing Effectively and Powerfully](#)

K4Health

[Communicating your Mission through Photography](#)

USAID

[Success Story Guidelines](#)

## Telling Success Stories to Demonstrate your Impact

**Q.** What is a success story and how do we develop one?

**A.** A success story shows how your organization is making a difference in people's lives. More than a list of events or activities, it describes a positive change and shows how that change helps your beneficiaries and the people of your community.

Telling your story should be an important part of your organization's communication and marketing plan. Why? Because stories and photographs are powerful ways to educate donors, prospective partners and the public about your programs and demonstrate their value to the community. In the process, telling your story lets you give credit to donors and reach a wider audience of potential supporters. Consider developing and disseminating at least one or two success stories about each program you implement.

There are many different types of success stories. The most common type enables the reader to empathize with the problem or challenge that your organization's beneficiaries face. However, success stories may also highlight a specific event or discuss an innovative tool or approach your program has employed. A good success story complements or expands on information provided in your technical reports, repackaged for a wider audience.

The key to many good success stories is your ability to turn the data that provide evidence of your program's results into an engaging personal story. For example, in Jordan, Carnival Play & Learn, a unique woman-owned business, helps mothers and young children who live in an industrial community thrive by stimulating their intellectual curiosity and creativity. The story puts a human face on the impact of the USAID Jordan [Local Enterprise Support \(LENS\)](#) project.

## Items to Consider

### Ask for Permission

Using the names, words and photos of the people in your story makes it more meaningful. Although people are usually happy to share their stories, it is important to respect the privacy of the individual(s) in your story. Always tell people exactly how you intend to use the story (post it on the Internet or share it with local press, donors or others) and request their written permission by having them sign a release form authorizing you to use their names and photos.

### Coordinate with the Donor

As you begin to draft the story, contact your AOR or Activity Manager. Some donors may want to review the story before it is distributed, and they may have other requirements for publicly documenting the programs they fund. This process gives donors a chance to be involved in the story. After all, just as you are proud of your program's success, they too are pleased to be supporting good work.

### Success Story Examples

There are a number of success stories posted on the Web to help you think about what you might want to say about your program and how other organizations have told their stories. For examples, visit [USAID Extreme Possibilities](#): *Stories to inspire an end to extreme poverty.*

## Finding a Good Story

Successes and ideas for stories may come forward at any time during implementation, so it is a good practice to jot them down as they arise and keep a file that you can refer to later when you draft the story. Some ways to find good stories include:

- asking your staff and subrecipients to suggest beneficiaries of your program whom you might include in a success story;
- documenting an innovative approach your program used that allowed you to reach new people or address a need that was previously unmet;
- discussing an event that allowed you to exceed your targets;
- building on pieces of good news about your program that are passed around your office and energize staff; and
- elaborating on a story you often tell colleagues or donors that grabs their attention.

## Writing the Story

A good success story is short, rich in detail and memorable. Although there is no formula you must follow, there are elements that make a story engaging. You do not have to include them all, but here are some that can make your story more interesting.

**Use quotes and photos.** Using the words and pictures of the people in your story can make it much more personal and engaging to the reader. (See sidebar "Ask for Permission.")

**Talk about the Before, After and the Future.** A great way to demonstrate impact is to explain the problem your program hoped to address by sharing a view of what life was like before your program started. Your story then shows how you addressed that challenge by describing what happened after your program was in place. You may also want to talk about the future, too, for plans to expand or sustain your program.

**Do not forget the data.** Though these stories often focus on an individual or group of people for the "story" aspect, do not completely leave out the bigger picture that your data show. Remember, the story gives a human face to the evidence of your program's impact, so you may want to include data as well. Consider using a graph or a chart to make your quantitative data more meaningful for the reader.

**Give credit.** Your program would not be possible without the support of the host government, donors, partners and staff of the organization. Make sure to give credit to those who have supported your program. This can be done in the narrative or by putting the logos of donors and other organizations involved on the printed or electronic presentation of the story.

## For More Information

For this or other issues of *Implementation Tips*, please visit [www.NGOConnect.net](http://www.NGOConnect.net). The Web site is a dynamic and interactive portal dedicated to connecting and strengthening CSOs, networks and CSO support organizations worldwide.

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**Provide contact information.** Success stories are often short—one or two pages (200 to 500 words). Therefore, there is likely a lot of information you do not have room for in your story. Providing contact information allows others who are interested in your story to follow up with you for more details.

## Promoting the Story

Once the story is written, share it with a number of different audiences to communicate your successes as widely as possible. Start by sharing the story with your donors. (See sidebar, “Coordinate with the Donor.”) Then, share the story with your partners, your beneficiaries, the host government and the general public.

Consider the following strategies for sharing your story:

- Post the story on a website—yours, your partner’s and/or donor’s.
- Create a news release and share the story with local media.
- Print copies and post the story and photos at program implementation sites (if appropriate).
- Provide copies to local government officials.
- Submit your story to CSO conferences and forums where you might be asked to share more details about your program with other implementers.
- Use the information as the basis for presentations at technical conferences.
- Share the story with your partners and staff. This is a great way to solicit more stories from your team.

