



DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN THE AGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

**“If we live by stories,
we change by stories”**

Why digital storytelling:

Everyone has the power to tell their own stories and the stories of their community. Stories have the capacity to build relationships and empathy between groups of people. Stories have the ability to compel people to act and stay involved. They hit people in their heart and help take situations beyond a headline or a fact and turn it into something that remains. Especially in the face of the climate crisis, we need storytellers around the world to communicate about their realities, their victories, and their hopes. If we can compel our communities to look, see, hear — then we can engage people to continue to fight for the change we need.

We trust your natural storytelling instincts, and what we want to do with this toolkit is support you to be able to communicate to a wider audiences.

What to expect from this deck of cards and how to use it:

These cards are meant to help you think through the strategic process of planning a digital storytelling project and provide specific tips and tactics for conducting interviews and building an online story.

Deck 1 will walk you through questions you and your team should ask yourselves to help you prepare to build a project that is respectful of your interviewees, supports campaign goals, and reaches the audiences you need. It will also give you guidance on various multimedia tools. By the end, you should be ready to go out and create!

Feel free to write on the cards themselves or answer the questions on another sheet of paper.

There is no single story when it comes to climate change. It impacts everyone in the world, but it impacts everyone very differently. We need a multitude of storytellers around the world to help communicate about the current realities and what we face. We need many perspectives and ideas. In order to create meaningful and long lasting climate action, then we must tell complete climate stories. Not just about disasters and mass marches, but also about resilience and everyday acts of courage.

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KNOW YOURSELF AND YOUR OTHER STORYTELLERS.

Before you dive into a digital storytelling project, it's important to think about what stories mean to your community. You should also spend some time thinking about what are your underlying reasons behind a storytelling project.

Why does storytelling matter to you and why do you want to do this work?

Do you have any traditions of storytelling in your community? What does it look like?

What stories are not being told right now that you can help fill? What stories are already being told that don't necessarily represent your community's truth and how can you help claim back that narrative?

Who will be participating in this project? Will it just be yourself gathering stories and conducting interviews or will you be asking a wide group of people to contribute?

Personal Storytelling vs Community Storytelling:

Do you want to do a storytelling project where it's you going out conducting interviews or do you want to do a storytelling project that invites a larger group of people to contribute?

Personal: If you are the main storyteller, then you have more control over the content and design. A personal storytelling project works well when you have a clear vision for what you want to create. For example: do you want to use your photography skills to document a story in a unique way? Do you have relationships with specific people that you definitely want to interview and share? A singular personal story can be truly powerful and have a large impact.

Community: You could do a storytelling project that invites many people to submit stories and then gather them together in a cohesive way. Or you can focus on a group of people rather than just an individual. This can be useful when you want to share lots of collective voices and perspectives. It is important to plan how people can submit stories in as simple a way as possible — think about people's skills, internet access etc.

In 2016, the Pacific Climate Warriors did a community storytelling project called "Frontline Truths" -- here's one reason why this work was important:

"Frontline Truths mattered because the voices of communities on the frontlines of climate change needed to be elevated. It was a matter of whose stories and whose voices were out there in the world and why it was so important that these stories that existed were shaped by authentic truths from people on the ground. We needed to create a space where communities could tell their own stories and this project allowed us to do that."

Fenton Lutunatabua
350 Pacific Campaigner

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KNOW YOUR INTERVIEWEES AND COMMUNITIES.

It's important to build relationships and trust with the communities and the people you're working with. Transparency is also crucial. Be honest and clear with people about what you will do with the stories and don't promise anything you can't meet.

Who do you want to interview and why? How will you connect with them?

What is your role in the community? Who are you to them and how will they see you?

Are there any cultural traditions you need to respect before, during and after the interviews? Are there any gender or age hierarchy sensitivities you should be aware of?

Are there any security concerns that they have about sharing their story? What reward will this community or person get from opening up their personal experiences?

Are there any security concerns you have?

When storytelling can be harmful:

When it puts people's security at risk: If showing people's faces or sharing their stories puts people at risk from their government or from others.

When there isn't continual consent from the community: You should ensure that you have proper consent from people. Be aware to not do 'extractive' forms of storytelling where you go into a place, take photos, and then leave without further communication. You are accountable to others.

When it showcases people in a way they don't agree with: Do not portray people as victims when they do not see themselves that way. Make sure that the narrative is in line with the principles, values, perspectives of the people you are working with. An important principle of a good storytelling project is mutual ownership -- both the interviewee and interviewer both have a say over the project.

Tip #1: When talking to someone for the first time, get to know them a little bit first. Ask them questions and allow them to answer fully, even if they don't immediately open up and give you the story you want. Listen to what they're really telling you instead of what you want to hear. Listening is key to understanding and building trust.

Tip #2: Don't shove your camera in the person's face. Respect their space and yours too. If needed don't use your camera at all, use a notepad to write down points - or if your interviewee agrees, use an audio recorder or app.

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KNOW YOUR CHANGE OBJECTIVE.

There is value in sharing stories in and of themselves. You can also utilize stories to be a crucial part of campaigns to create change.

In our busy digital era, people often click on a link and then forget about it. But with a powerful story, they will remember it and then want to get more involved. It's empathy and relationships that can often change someone's perspectives and inspire them to act.

It's important to also communicate with the communities and the people you're interviewing about your campaign and how it will be used.

Ask yourself the following questions to begin the process of planning how storytelling can strategically be used.

What are your campaign goals?

Who are you trying to reach with your stories? Who do you want to hear these stories? [Be as specific as possible]

Once people hear these stories, what do you want them to do?

What are you trying to convey so that they will take action?

What is your audience's current level of awareness about the issues?

How will people find these stories? Where will the stories live?

What are the main social media channels used by the desired audience? How much internet access do they have?

During the campaign to push Norway to divest from coal, we asked communities around the world who have been impacted by coal projects to share on social media why it's important to not fund coal. Stories and photos poured in from Indonesia, Turkey, Nigeria and more places. We gathered the stories into a blog and also tweeted them at specific Norwegian politicians. On the day of delivering the divestment petition, the stories were projected in a major public area. We heard from the politicians that they were seeing the stories and very moved. Later that day, Norway announced that they would divest from coal.

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KNOW YOUR TOOLS.

You don't need fancy equipment in order to be a good digital storyteller. It is important though to think about what you have and what works best for the project.

Do you have a mobile phone? What is your internet speed?

How good is the quality of your phone camera? Is there a video function?

Do you have any apps on your phone about audio recording, video shooting or editing?

Do you have access to an audio recorder or a microphone?

Do you have a camera? If it is a photo camera, can it also shoot video? Do you have access to a computer to download the photos?

Do you have access to editing software? Do you know how to use it?

Example: Choosing Audio

For a project about the climate justice movement in North Africa we decided to use an audio recorder for the interviews as well as have a camera to take portraits of people. We used the Zoom H4N which records high quality audio. For portraits we used 2 different DSLR cameras. We decided to focus on audio, because we wanted to reach people throughout Africa and the Middle East and recognized that they may not have the internet capacity to watch long videos.

Example: Choosing Photos

During efforts to share stories from a long march in Bangladesh against the proposed coal plant in the Sundarbans, our team decided to focus on using photos and sharing on Instagram. Internet access was scattered and the simplicity of Instagram helped. Also, because the security situation was tight, being up to just take photos on a mobile phone helped to not draw attention to ourselves

Be Aware of Your Own Time and Capacity

As you think about what you want to create, be aware of your own limitations. If you are new to this work and you have limited time then choose something simple -- aim to just get a single photo and quote. If you have more time and capacity then you can do more elaborate projects. Do not try and do everything, but think of a single thing and plan how you can do it well.

PHOTOGRAPHY.

Here are some things to think about and tips for choosing a photo based story.

When you're sharing a photo online, you have a second to get someone's attention. In order to be successful, it's important that you think of how to capture many elements in a single photo.

-- For portraits: you want to do more than capture their face, but also their personality as well as the messages of the storytelling project.

-- Take time to build up a relationship with people. If you know more about a person's personality and history it will help you be able to shape the portrait. Also, if a person trusts you it, that will often be reflected in the photo.

-- Make sure that they consent to having their photo taken and shared. Photos almost always should have a caption with them. It could be a key quote from the person's interview as well as text about where and when the photo was taken. You could also make a graphic with the text on top, but these can be difficult to get right.

Tips for composing a good photo:

Find the right angle: We see the world at eye level, but try moving to different positions to see your subject at different angles. Crouch down, move left or right. Get photos from also different angles - take a photo where you are close and the face fills the frame, also take photos where you see their body. Take a portrait from a variety of angles.

Be aware of your lines: Our eyes naturally look at where we are guided towards. Look and see if there are any lines that will guide someone to look at your subject. This could be things like train tracks, walls etc.

Framing: You can use natural frames like windows or doorways that help frame your subject and help them stand out.

Show their personality: Do photos where they are doing something that shows who they are. Try and have them do an action. Don't pose people too much, but do think about how to capture who they are. If it helps, have them hold something or use a prop.

What you should be aware of with photos:

Photos are powerful and you can communicate so much in a single photo -- but in general photos are more short and snappy. They are not the best choice if you want to go in depth.

Some people get uncomfortable with their photo being taken or because of security purposes they don't want their faces shown.

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AUDIO.

So many cultures have a rich tradition of oral storytelling, which is one reason why audio is a powerful tool.

Benefits of using audio:

- People often feel more comfortable talking into a microphone than with a video camera in front of them. You can have more in depth conversations about issues.
- Works great if you want to reach audiences without fast internet access. Audio files play much faster than video.
- Most mobile phones come with an app that lets you record audio
- Can also be embedded in a blog or article to add additional context.

Difficulties of using audio:

- It does help to be able to edit audio and create tighter pieces. That takes time.
- Audio stories don't often go as "viral" as videos
- You don't get to see all the facial expressions as you would with a video piece.

Tips for recording good audio:

If possible, record your audio in a quiet place. Try and reduce background noise as much as possible.

Make sure you have headphones so you can hear what it sounds like as you record.

While during an interview, refrain from making noise while a person is responding to your question. Don't say any "umms" or "yeahs" and try not to interrupt.

If your recorder has a monitor, try and have the audio recording around -12 decibels.

Before jumping into a follow up question, allow for some silence - this will let the interviewee have time to think and often they come back with amazing responses.

If you want to edit your audio together, also record 1 minute of ambient sound (the general noise around you), as this will help piecing your recording together.

On average an audio storytelling piece is between 3-15 minutes. Good to also include a portrait of the person if possible. Once you're ready, you can upload on sites like Soundcloud and then share on social media.

You can also ask people to send in audio clips using the voicemail feature on messaging apps like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger. Then download the audio and share. This works when you're gathering stories from communities without fast internet.

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VIDEO.

The world of video is changing fast with more options than ever to pull people in and share stories and updates.

Benefits of using video:

- Video is the most engaging way to tell a story
- A powerful way to tell grassroots stories. You see the organizers, the leaders giving quotes themselves whereas in an article or blog that authenticity isn't as strong. Very visual and often very powerful
- Facebook's algorithm favors Facebook native video
- Can capture so much energy, momentum and personality of people

Difficulties with using video:

- If you want, can be good to find an editor who will help craft the video into something shareable. Though, a high quality video can be more expensive and take more time.
- Can be difficult to play online if people have slow internet speeds.
- Can face more security difficulties — both for the camera person as well as for interviewees.

More Video Options:

Live video: With Facebook Live, Periscope and other apps, more people can now livestream. When doing livestreams it's important to think when will be the peak point of the event? When will there be the most action, tension. Also good to narrate a livestream and explain to viewers what's going on and interview people around you. An ideal livestream from an event is around 10-15 minutes.

Besides a livestream, you could also just film a short **1-4 minute clip** of an interview or an action from an event. Some of the best and most authentic videos on the internet are the raw, unedited videos. But you have to find that right moment that will hit people's hearts and make them want to share.

You can also use **Snapchat or Instagram's Stories** function to share short video updates. This can be a great way to reach people and show the ongoing process of an event. You could also do a Story from someone's perspective — do a 'day in the life of' a person. This could be an authentic way to share perspectives.

Produced videos for social media are still important. While you're editing a video though one of the most important factors as to whether it will be shared or not are **the first 5 seconds**. Put at the start of your video powerful images and music that will pull people in to watch and share. Also important to recognize that on Facebook, most users watch videos without sound - so make plans to include subtitles in your video if possible.

TEXT AND OTHER FORMS OF STORYTELLING.

Writing blog posts or articles can be a great way to communicate stories to a wide audience.

-- Who is your audience and what is their level of understand about the topic? If you're trying to reach a global audience, you might need to explain any local politics or issues. Think about how you can explain issues so more people can understand.

-- What is the arc of the story? How does the story flow from beginning, middle to end?

-- Start with a hook: is there a powerful anecdote or fact that can help pull people into the story? The first paragraph is so important.

-- Include photos and other visuals. This helps break up the text and encourage people to keep on reading. You can also embed videos, audio and social media posts. Include quotes.

-- You can use your own blog or blogging platforms like Medium or Tumblr. With Medium you can also create a 'publication' where many people can submit stories to an online hub.

There are other ways to tell stories besides using people's faces and voices:

Use objects: Objects can be great ways to communicate stories. Choose a theme — it could be as small has a piece of jewelry or clothing or as big as a river. You can ask people to bring an item that matters to them and have them explain why or you can present them with an item.

SMS and short form text: You can engage people through SMS as well. This is also good for communities without advanced mobile phones. You can work with communities to submit via SMS short updates and stories. This can work around climate impacts, actions and more.

Puppetry or Animations: You can take stories you hear from other people and turn them into a puppet show or create an animation.

Plays and Performances: You can also use oral histories and stories and turn into plays or public performances. This is a great way to protect people's identities and engage with the public. If you want, record the performance and share online.

COMPILING AND CREATION.

Now that you have the content -- what are you going to do with it? There's lots of different digital platforms to consider and instead of choosing just one, it's good to think about how each different platforms (websites, Facebook, Instagram etc) can all play their own unique role in sharing a part of the story.

Websites

Often a website acts as the main hub of content for a story. You can make it as complex or as simple as you want. You can work with an existing site or build a new one using easy platforms like Wix, Squarespace or Wordpress. Or you can use blogging platforms like Medium or Tumblr.

Good to be aware of how fast or slow a page loads.

Think about the user experience. After someone watches, listens to or views the stories -- what do you want them to do? Take an online action? Encourage people to share? Or interact and share their own story?

Don't create something too complicated, let your stories be in the front.

Gathering Stories

If you're working on a collaborative storytelling project, then you'll need to think of how to gather the stories together.

You can create a Tumblr where people can submit stories as well as see what others have posted.

You could use a hashtag. And encourage people to share their story on their own social media platforms and then use the hashtag. You can then monitor the hashtag by using programs like Tint or Tagboard.

-- The good part of this is that then whoever posts a story -- it is then seen by their whole network. So you are able to reach more people.

-- The bad part is that if people post it on Facebook and it's not made public (only visible to their friends) then it will be hard to fine.

You could also just reach out to people individually and gather the stories one by one from people and then put on a website and share throughout social media.

Social Media

Social media is also another key home for stories. Think about how different pieces of content work best for different platforms

Example: Instagram is good for place for photos. Snapchat is good for live photos and videos. Facebook you can share photos, videos or text with the 'Notes' feature.

DISTRIBUTION AND FOLLOW UP

You've now created some powerful stories, but you're not done yet -- you now have to think of distribution and how you will get it out there to people.

Who are your partners and allies? Who are the journalists, communities, and other outlets they are in touch with?

How will you let your followers and partners know about this storytelling project?

Plan the timeline for how you will release it. Build up, release, continuing to share and follow up.

Are there campaign targets you are trying to reach? How can you make sure that the politicians, corporations or other targets will see these stories?

Keep on trying new things. If something doesn't seem to be working, and you're not getting the reach you want -- then think of new things.

Follow Up:

Another crucial part of releasing your storytelling project is ensuring that your interviewees and community groups who participated know about the release. Make sure that you follow up with them so that they know when their story is going into the world and that they are still okay with it being released. It's important that people feel like it's theirs to the very end. Even if you have the recordings of the stories -- unless it is your own personal story -- it's crucial to always keep in mind who is the original owner of the story and respect them.

Keep on Trying

Getting people to view your stories can be a challenging process. It's important to keep on trying and never give up. If one thing doesn't work, try something else. Also, keep on reaching out to more people you know and trying to get more people to share. Build a strong network of supporters and use them to help spread the word.