

# **Quick Fixes** for **Fundraising Stories**

Solutions to 15 of the Most Common  
Fundraising Story Problems

a Nonprofit Storytelling Conference Publication

# Quick Fixes for Fundraising Stories

Welcome to **Quick Fixes for Fundraising Stories**.

This guide will help you solve 15 of the most common storytelling problems that fundraisers face.

You'll find practical, actionable solutions to improve your stories and boost your fundraising efforts. Each section addresses a specific issue, suggests several solutions, and includes examples, helping you fix your stories quickly.

Whether you're crafting direct mail fundraising letters, impact reports, engaging major donors in conversation, creating stories for events, or sharing on social media and your organization's website, this guide help you make your stories more engaging.

For those looking to dive deeper into the art and science of storytelling, I invite you to join us at the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference. Here, you can immerse yourself in advanced techniques and strategies that will make your donor communications more effective and help you raise more money.

To learn more about the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference, go to the link below:

<https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com>

Ok, let's get started on making your stories more interesting and effective!

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## Problem 1: Your Story Isn't Engaging

Are you finding that your stories are not capturing the attention of your audience? An unengaging story often feels flat, leaving your readers indifferent. This problem can manifest in several ways:

- **Low Donation Rates:** When your fundraising campaigns aren't meeting targets, it might be because your story didn't emotionally connect with your audience.
- **Lack of Reader Feedback:** If you're not receiving comments, emails, or social media interactions about your stories, it could indicate they aren't resonating.
- **Reader Disinterest:** If your website analytics are showing short viewing times, or if people aren't watching your videos all the way through, that indicates your stories aren't engaging.

### Solution: Add More Emotion

Steps to Fix the Problem:

#### 1. **Identify Emotional Moments:**

Look for pivotal moments in your story where emotions naturally occur. These could be moments of struggle, triumph, or heartfelt interactions.

Example: Highlight a moment of struggle, such as "During the harsh winter, John found himself without a place to stay, clutching his thin coat tightly against the biting wind."

#### 2. **Use Descriptive Language:**

Replace bland descriptions with vivid, emotional language that paints a picture and evokes feelings.

Example: Instead of saying "It was cold," describe it as "The icy wind cut through John's thin coat."

#### 3. **Show, Don't Tell:**

Instead of stating facts, describe scenes and actions that allow the reader to experience the emotions first-hand.

Example: Rather than saying "John was happy," show it: "Tears of relief streamed down John's face as he stepped into the warmth of the shelter, his first safe haven in months."

#### 4. **Include Personal Stories:**

Highlight individual stories rather than abstract concepts. Personal stories are more relatable and impactful.

Example: "John's journey from the streets to a warm home illustrates the power of your donations."

For a clearer picture of the improvement, here's a before-and-after example:

- **Before:** "We provided meals to families in need."
- **After:** "Sarah, a single mother of three, broke into tears when she saw the warm meal waiting for her children, knowing they wouldn't go to bed hungry that night."

## Problem 2: Your Story Sounds Monotone

A monotone story can make your readers lose interest quickly. When your narrative lacks variety, it feels repetitive and flat, failing to engage your audience. This issue often manifests in several ways:

- **Dull and Repetitive Narration:** Using the same sentence structure repeatedly can make your story feel mechanical and boring.
- **Lack of Reader Engagement:** If readers aren't finishing your story or seem uninterested, your delivery might be too monotonous.
- **Flat Emotional Impact:** Without variation, your story may fail to evoke the necessary emotional response, leaving readers unmoved.

### **Solution: Vary Your Sentences**

Steps to Fix the Problem:

#### **1. Mix Sentence Lengths:**

Use a combination of short, punchy sentences and longer, more detailed ones to create a dynamic rhythm that holds the reader's attention.

Example: "Our volunteers work tirelessly. They prepare meals, organize events, and provide support. Their dedication is unmatched."

#### **2. Use Active Voice:**

Make your writing more direct and lively by using active voice wherever possible.

Example: Instead of "Meals were provided by our team," write "Our team provided meals."

#### **3. Incorporate Dialogue:**

Break up your narrative with dialogue to add variety and bring your characters to life.

Example: "When asked why she volunteers, Jane replied, 'I see the difference we make every day. It's incredibly rewarding.'"

#### **4. Add Pauses and Emphasis:**

Use punctuation such as commas, dashes, and ellipses to create natural pauses and emphasize important points.

Example: "Every day, countless lives are transformed – from mentoring youths to supporting the elderly – our programs make a real difference."

For a clearer picture of the improvement, here's a before-and-after example:

- **Before:** "We help many people. Our programs are effective."
- **After:** "Every day, countless lives are transformed. From mentoring youths to supporting the elderly, our programs make a real difference."

## Problem 3: Your Story Lacks a Clear Message

A story without a clear message can confuse your readers. It also dilutes your story's impact. This problem often manifests as:

- **Scattered Themes:** Your story jumps between different points without a cohesive thread.
- **Reader Confusion:** Readers are left wondering what the main point or takeaway of the story is.
- **Ineffective Calls to Action:** Without a clear message, it's difficult to lead readers to a specific action.

### **Solution: Focus on One Central Theme**

Steps to Fix the Problem:

#### **1. Define Your Main Message:**

Determine the primary point you want to convey and ensure everything in your story supports this message.

Example: "Our mission is to ensure every child receives a quality education."

#### **2. Eliminate Distractions:**

Remove any extraneous details or subplots that don't contribute to the central theme.

Example: Instead of mentioning multiple programs, focus on the education initiative.

#### **3. Reinforce the Theme:**

Repeat and emphasize your main message throughout the story to keep it top of mind for your readers.

Example: "With your help, a child will get the education they need."

#### **4. Align with Your Call to Action:**

Make sure your call to action is directly related to your main message, reinforcing the desired outcome.

Example: "Donate today to help a child get an education."



For a clearer picture of the improvement, here's a before-and-after example:

- **Before:** "Our organization works in many areas. This year, we've focused on several projects including education, healthcare, and community building."
- **After:** "This year, our main focus is on education. We believe every child deserves the chance to learn and grow, and your support can make that happen."

## Problem 4: Your Story Doesn't Have a Strong Opening

Struggling to grab attention from the get-go?

A weak opening can fail to draw your readers in, making it hard for them to stay engaged. This issue can manifest as:

- **Lack of Immediate Interest:** Readers quickly lose interest if the opening doesn't capture their attention.
- **Reader Disinterest:** If your website analytics are showing short viewing times, or if people aren't watching your videos all the way through, that indicates your stories aren't engaging
- **Missed Opportunities:** A strong opening sets the tone for the rest of your story and can significantly impact its effectiveness.

### Solution: Start with a Hook

Steps to Fix the Problem:

**1. Use a Surprising Fact or Statistic:**

Start with something unexpected to pique curiosity.

Example: "Did you know that 1 in 5 children go to bed hungry every night?"

**2. Ask a Provocative Question:**

Engage your readers by posing a question that makes them think.

Example: "What would you do if you had to choose between paying rent and feeding your children?"

**3. Begin with a Powerful Quote:**

Use a relevant quote that resonates with your message.

Example: "'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.' – Nelson Mandela"

**4. Describe a Vivid Scene:**

Paint a picture that draws readers into the story.

Example: "Imagine a classroom buzzing with excitement, where children are eager to learn and teachers are passionate about their work."

For a clearer picture of the improvement, here's a before-and-after example:

- **Before:** "Our organization has been around for 20 years."
- **After:** "Imagine a child going to bed every night hungry. This was Maria's reality until she received help."

## Problem 5: Your Story Feels Disconnected

Are your stories jumping around without a clear flow? Disconnected narratives can frustrate readers and make it hard for them to follow along. This issue often manifests as:

- **Lack of Coherence:** Your story feels like a series of unrelated events rather than a cohesive narrative.
- **Reader Confusion:** Readers struggle to understand how different parts of your story relate to each other.
- **Weak Emotional Impact:** A disjointed story fails to build a strong emotional connection with the reader.

### **Solution: Create a Logical Flow**

Steps to Fix the Problem:

#### **1. Outline Your Story:**

Plan your story's structure before writing to ensure a logical progression of events.

Example: Start with the problem, introduce the solution, and then show the impact.

#### **2. Use Transitional Phrases:**

Connect different parts of your story with transitional phrases that guide the reader.

Example: "After Maria received her first meal, her grades improved."

#### **3. Maintain a Consistent Timeline:**

Ensure your story follows a clear timeline to avoid confusing your readers.

Example: "First, we met John when he was homeless. Then, we helped him find a job. Now, he has a stable home."

#### **4. Reiterate Key Points:**

Reinforce important messages throughout your story to keep them top of mind.

Example: "Maria discovered a passion for science through the after-school program, reminding us how crucial it is to provide these opportunities."

For a clearer picture of the improvement, here's a before-and-after example:

- **Before:** "We helped Maria with food. She also joined our after-school program."
- **After:** "After Maria received her first meal, her grades improved. She joined our after-school program, where she discovered a passion for science."

## Problem 6: Your Story Feels Too Long

A lengthy story can lose readers' attention and dilute your message. When your narrative feels too long, it may include unnecessary details that distract from the main point. This issue often manifests as:

- **Reader Fatigue:** Long-winded stories can tire readers, causing them to lose interest before reaching the end.
- **Diluted Message:** The core message gets lost in excessive details and subplots.
- **Low Engagement:** Readers may skip over important parts or stop reading altogether.

### **Solution: Be Concise**

Steps to Fix the Problem:

>> **CAUTION:** There needs to be a balance between being concise and emotional. This is where the art of storytelling comes in. While it's important to be brief, don't cut out the emotional elements that make your story resonate. A concise story should still evoke feelings and connect with the reader on a personal level.

#### **1. Identify Key Points:**

Determine the most important elements of your story and focus on these.

Example: Highlight the problem, the solution, and the positive outcome that's possible with a donor's gift.

#### **2. Eliminate Unnecessary Details:**

Remove any information that doesn't directly contribute to your main message.

Example: Instead of detailing every program, focus on one impactful story.

#### **3. Use Clear and Direct Language:**

Avoid overly complex sentences and jargon. Keep your language simple and straightforward.

Example: "John was homeless for years. He now has a job and a home."

#### **4. Focus on Impact:**

Emphasize the results and benefits of your work to keep the reader engaged.

Example: "John getting a job and a home is just one example of the impact your donation had."

For a clearer picture of the improvement, here's a before-and-after example:

- **Before:** "We run several programs, including food distribution, education, and job training. John participated in all of these programs and benefited in many ways. He was able to get meals regularly, improve his skills, and eventually find a job and a home."
- **After:** "John was homeless for years. He now has a job and a home. His transformation is just one example of the help you've provided with your donation."

## Problem 7: Your Story Lacks Visual Elements

A story without visual elements can feel flat and uninteresting. Visual descriptions help your readers to imagine the scenes and connect emotionally. Signs that your story lacks visual elements include:

- **Vague Descriptions:** Your narrative feels bland and doesn't paint a picture for the reader.
- **Low Engagement:** Readers might skim through your story without feeling drawn in.
- **Weak Emotional Connection:** Without vivid imagery, it's harder for readers to connect emotionally.

### **Solution: Use Vivid Descriptions and Imagery**

Steps to Fix the Problem:

>> **CAUTION:** Use these steps sparingly. Do not let your vivid descriptions overpower your main message.

#### **1. Incorporate Sensory Details:**

Describe what characters see, hear, smell, taste, and feel to create a rich, immersive experience.

Example: "The aroma of blooming flowers wafted through the air."

#### **2. Paint a Picture with Words:**

Use descriptive language to create clear images in your reader's mind.

Example: "Bright sunflowers, ripe tomatoes, and fragrant herbs now fill the once-barren lot, creating a vibrant community garden."

#### **3. Highlight Specifics:**

Focus on specific details rather than general descriptions to make your story more engaging.

Example: "The community garden boasted rows of colorful vegetables and a small fountain that gurgled gently in the center."

#### **4. Use Metaphors and Similes:**

Comparisons can help create vivid images and make your descriptions more relatable.

Example: "The children's laughter echoed like a melody through the vibrant garden."



For a clearer picture of the improvement, here's a before-and-after example:

- **Before:** "Our garden project was successful."
- **After:** "Bright sunflowers, ripe tomatoes, and fragrant herbs now fill the once-barren lot, creating a vibrant community garden."

## Problem 8: Your Story Doesn't Inspire Action

A story that doesn't inspire action misses the opportunity to convert readers into supporters. This problem can manifest as:

- **Lack of Donations or Support:** Readers don't feel compelled to take the next step.
- **Weak Endings:** Your story may end without a clear call to action, leaving readers unsure of what to do next.
- **Low Engagement Rates:** Readers may enjoy your story but aren't motivated to act.

### Solution: Include a Strong Call to Action

Steps to Fix the Problem:

**1. Be Clear and Direct:**

State exactly what you want your readers to do.

Example: "Donate \$50 today to provide a week of meals for a family in need."

**2. Highlight the Impact:**

Explain how their action will make a difference.

Example: "Your donation will ensure that no family goes to bed hungry."

**3. Create a Sense of Urgency:**

Encourage immediate action by emphasizing urgency.

Example: "Give now to feed a hungry child today."

**4. Use Compelling Language:**

Choose words that inspire and motivate.

Example: "Feed a family and make a difference in the lives of parents and children."

For a clearer picture of the improvement, here's a before-and-after example:

- **Before:** "Thank you for your support."
- **After:** "Donate \$50 today to provide a week of meals for a family in need."

## Problem 9: Your Story Isn't Relatable

A story that isn't relatable can fail to connect with your audience, making it harder to inspire empathy and action. This issue often appears as:

- **Generic Appeals:** Your story feels too broad and doesn't resonate with specific experiences or values.
- **Lack of Personal Connection:** Readers don't see themselves or their experiences reflected in your narrative.
- **Low Engagement:** Your audience may feel disconnected and uninterested.

### **Solution: Know Your Audience**

Steps to Fix the Problem:

#### **1. Understand Your Audience:**

Research your audience's values, interests, and experiences.

Example: "Our community cares deeply about children's education and future opportunities."

#### **2. Tailor Your Story:**

Use language and examples that resonate with your audience.

Example: "As parents, we know the worry of our children's future. Your donation ensures that children in our community have the educational tools they need."

#### **3. Highlight Shared Values:**

Emphasize common values to build a connection.

Example: "We all want to create a better world for our children."

#### **4. Use Relatable Characters:**

Feature characters that your audience can identify with.

Example: "Meet John, a dedicated father who works tirelessly to provide for his family."

For a clearer picture of the improvement, here's a before-and-after example:

- **Before:** "We help many people."
- **After:** "As parents, we know the worry of our children's future. Your donation ensures that children in our community have the educational tools they need."

## Problem 10: Your Story Feels Generic

A generic story can feel impersonal and uninspiring. Specific details make your story unique and relatable, encouraging a stronger connection with your readers. Signs of a generic story include:

- **Lack of Specifics:** Your story could apply to anyone or any situation, making it less memorable.
- **Impersonal Tone:** Readers don't feel a personal connection to the story.
- **Low Engagement:** Generic stories fail to stand out, resulting in lower reader interest.

### Solution: Be Specific

Steps to Fix the Problem:

#### 1. Include Specific Details:

Provide concrete details that make your story unique and believable.

Example: "Last month, we helped 50 families in our neighborhood secure stable housing."

#### 2. Use Real Names and Places:

Mention specific people, locations, and events to add authenticity.

Example: "Jane from Elm Street was able to move into her new home last week."

#### 3. Highlight Unique Aspects:

Focus on what makes your story different from others.

Example: "Our after-school program includes unique STEM workshops designed by local engineers."

#### 4. Provide Context:

Give background information that adds depth and relevance.

Example: "During the winter months, our shelter provides warm meals and a safe place to sleep for over 100 individuals."

For a clearer picture of the improvement, here's a before-and-after example:

- **Before:** "We help many people."
- **After:** "Last month, we helped 50 families in our neighborhood secure stable housing."

## Problem 11: Your Story Lacks Conflict

A story without conflict can feel uneventful and fail to engage readers. Conflict adds drama and interest, making your narrative more compelling. Signs of a story lacking conflict include:

- **Smooth and Predictable Narrative:** Your story flows without any challenges or obstacles, making it less engaging.
- **Low Reader Engagement:** Without conflict, readers may lose interest quickly.
- **Weak Emotional Impact:** A lack of conflict can result in the audience not caring about the outcome.

### Solution: Introduce a Challenge

Steps to Fix the Problem:

#### 1. Identify the Conflict:

Determine the main challenge or obstacle in your story.

Example: "Anna struggled to keep her children in school while working two jobs."

#### 2. Describe the Struggle:

Highlight the difficulties faced by your characters.

Example: "Balancing work and parenting left Anna exhausted, but she never gave up."

#### 3. Show the Resolution:

Explain how the conflict was resolved and the impact it had.

Example: "Our scholarship program provided financial support, allowing Anna to afford school supplies and tutoring for her children."

#### 4. Emphasize the Journey:

Focus on the journey of overcoming the challenge to make the story more engaging.

Example: "With the support of the scholarship program, Anna's children excelled in school, and Anna was able to work fewer hours, spending more quality time with her family."

For a clearer picture of the improvement, here's a before-and-after example:

- **Before:** "We helped Anna's children stay in school."
- **After:** "Anna struggled to keep her children in school while working two jobs. The scholarship program gave her the financial support needed to keep her kids in school. They are thriving. Also, Anna can finally enjoy more time with her family."

## Problem 12: Your Story Feels Rushed

A rushed story can leave readers feeling disconnected and unsatisfied. Developing your characters adds depth and makes your narrative more engaging. Signs of a rushed story include:

- **Brief Character Mentions:** Characters are introduced but not developed, making them feel flat and unrelatable.
- **Quick Resolutions:** Problems are solved too quickly, without enough build-up or detail.
- **Weak Emotional Connection:** Readers don't have enough time to connect with the characters emotionally.

### **Solution: Develop Your Characters**

Steps to Fix the Problem:

#### **1. Give Background Information:**

Provide details about your characters' history and circumstances.

Example: "James, a veteran, faced homelessness after his service."

#### **2. Show Their Motivations:**

Explain why your characters act the way they do.

Example: "Determined to rebuild his life, James enrolled in our job training program."

#### **3. Describe Their Journey:**

Highlight the steps your characters take to overcome challenges.

Example: "With dedication and hard work, James completed the program and found a stable job."

#### **4. Include Personal Reflections:**

Share your characters' thoughts and feelings to make them more relatable.

Example: "James felt a sense of pride and accomplishment as he moved into his new apartment."

For a clearer picture of the improvement, here's a before-and-after example:

- **Before:** "We helped James find a job."
- **After:** "James, a veteran, faced homelessness after his service. Our program provided him shelter and also job training, allowing him to rebuild his life."

## Problem 13: Your Story Doesn't Have a Strong Ending

A story with a weak ending can leave readers feeling unsatisfied and disengaged. A strong conclusion reinforces your message and inspires action. Signs of a weak ending include:

- **Abrupt Finish:** The story ends suddenly without a sense of closure.
- **Lack of Impact:** The conclusion fails to leave a lasting impression on the reader.
- **Missed Call to Action:** The ending doesn't clearly state what the reader should do next.

### Solution: Conclude with Impact

Steps to Fix the Problem:

#### 1. Summarize Key Points:

Briefly recap the main elements of your story to reinforce your message.

Example: "Maria's journey from struggling student to college attendee shows the power of community support."

#### 2. Highlight the Outcome:

Emphasize the positive results of your donor's donation.

Example: "Thanks to your support, Maria is now the first in her family to attend college."

#### 3. Create an Emotional Connection:

End with a statement that evokes strong emotions.

Example: "Together, we are changing the lives of young women."

#### 4. Include a Call to Action:

Clearly state what you want your readers to do next.

Example: "Donate \$100 to help a young woman go to college."

For a clearer picture of the improvement, here's a before-and-after example:

- **Before:** "Thank you for your support."
- **After:** "Thanks to your support, Maria is now the first in her family to attend college. Please donate \$100 to help another young woman go to college."



## Problem 14: Your Story Is Hard to Follow

A complex or confusing story can frustrate readers and prevent them from understanding your message. Simplifying your narrative ensures clarity and keeps readers engaged. Signs of a hard-to-follow story include:

- **Complex Plot:** The narrative is convoluted with too many subplots or characters.
- **Reader Confusion:** Readers struggle to understand the sequence of events.
- **Low Retention:** Readers may abandon the story midway due to difficulty following along.

### **Solution: Simplify Your Narrative**

Steps to Fix the Problem:

#### **1. Focus on a Simple Structure:**

Stick to a clear beginning, middle, and end.

Example: "Three years ago, Lisa was jobless and struggling. Because of our job training program, she now runs her own business."

#### **2. Eliminate Unnecessary Details:**

Remove subplots and characters that don't directly contribute to the main message.

Example: Focus solely on Lisa's journey without introducing unrelated characters or events.

#### **3. Use Clear Transitions:**

Guide readers through your story with transitional words and phrases that clarify the sequence of events.

Example: "First, Lisa joined our job training program. Then, she learned new skills. Now, she runs her own business."

#### **4. Reiterate Key Points:**

Emphasize important elements to ensure they are understood.

Example: "Our program provided Lisa with the tools she needed to succeed."

For a clearer picture of the improvement, here's a before-and-after example:

- **Before:** "Lisa joined our program and then she met many people who helped her. Later, she started a business and now she is successful."
- **After:** "Three years ago, Lisa was jobless and struggling. With our job training program, she now runs her own business, creating a better future for her children."

## Problem 15: Your Story Feels Impersonal

An impersonal story can make it difficult for readers to connect emotionally. Adding personal insights and perspectives makes your narrative more relatable and engaging. Signs of an impersonal story include:

- **Just the Facts:** The story reads like a report, focusing solely on data and outcomes.
- **Lack of Emotion:** Readers don't feel emotionally invested in the characters or events.
- **Weak Reader Connection:** The story fails to resonate on a personal level.

### **Solution: Share Your Perspective**

Steps to Fix the Problem:

#### **1. Include Personal Reflections:**

Share your thoughts and feelings about the events in the story.

Example: "Seeing the joy on the children's faces when they opened their new backpacks reminded me why our work is so important."

#### **2. Use First-Person Narrative:**

Write from your perspective to create a more intimate connection.

Example: "I remember the first time I met Maria and saw the determination in her eyes."

#### **3. Describe Personal Interactions:**

Highlight interactions between you and the people in your story.

Example: "When I handed John his new suit for his job interview, he smiled and said, 'This is my chance to turn my life around.'"

#### **4. Express Genuine Emotions:**

Don't be afraid to show vulnerability and emotion.

Example: "I was moved to tears when I saw how much our community had achieved together."

For a clearer picture of the improvement, here's a before-and-after example:

- **Before:** "We provided backpacks to children in need."
- **After:** "Seeing the joy on the children's faces when they opened their new backpacks reminded me why our work is so important."

## Additional Storytelling Resources

### **Nonprofit Storytelling Conference:**

The #1 conference in the world to help nonprofit organizations use storytelling to raise money and connect with their community. To learn more go to:

<https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com>

### **Nonprofit Community of Storytellers:**

Wonderful FREE resource. Check out the community of storytellers over at:

<https://nonprofitstorytelling.com>

### **Tactical Thursdays:**

Become a better storyteller in just 10 minutes. Join Tactical Thursdays for a weekly dose of storytelling and fundraising goodness. It's free.

<https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com/tactical-thursday-signup>