

# Lost Stories, Hidden Gold

How to Find Overlooked Stories in Your Nonprofit



a Nonprofit Storytelling Conference Publication



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## How to Find Overlooked Stories in Your Nonprofit

Every nonprofit has hidden gold...

...stories waiting to be uncovered, polished, and shared.

But too often, powerful narratives go unnoticed, buried in old reports, forgotten emails, or casual conversations with beneficiaries.

This guide will help you uncover those overlooked stories and transform them into compelling donor communications.

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### Where to Look for Overlooked Stories

#### 1. Your Archives & Reports

- **Annual Reports:** Skim through past reports for impact stories that were only briefly mentioned.
- **Grant Proposals & Reports:** These often contain detailed beneficiary stories used to justify funding.
- **Board Meeting Minutes:** Notes from leadership meetings sometimes reference transformative moments.
- **Case Studies:** Revisit older case studies—do they have an update or a new angle?

## 2. Conversations with Frontline Staff & Beneficiaries

- **Staff & Volunteers:** Ask those on the ground about moments that stood out to them.
- **Direct Interviews:** Follow up with beneficiaries who shared their stories in the past.
- **Support Groups & Community Meetings:** **Listen for recurring themes and emotional moments.**

## 3. Donor Interactions & Letters

- **Thank You Notes from Beneficiaries:** These often contain raw, authentic moments of transformation.
- **Donor Feedback & Responses:** See what stories donors reference in their giving decisions.
- **Event Testimonials:** Donors and beneficiaries may share impactful moments at fundraising events.

## 4. Surveys & Donor Insights

- **Donor Surveys:** Ask donors what moved them to give—often, their reasons contain powerful story elements.
- **Volunteer Testimonials:** Understand why volunteers choose to donate their time and what moments stood out to them.
- **Post-Event Feedback:** Gather reflections from attendees about what inspired them during fundraising events.
- **Social Media Engagement:** Look at donor comments and messages that express emotional connections to your cause.

## Questions to Uncover the Story

Not every mention of impact is a story. To find the real gems, ask:

- What was life like before the intervention?
- What was the turning point or struggle?
- What unexpected moments made this story unique?
- How did a donor's support make a difference?
- What is happening now because of the change?

## Structuring the Story for Impact

Use the classic storytelling structure to bring overlooked stories to life:

1. **The Struggle (Before)** – Introduce the problem and the person experiencing it.
2. **The Turning Point (Change)** – Highlight the intervention, donor involvement, or pivotal moment.
3. **The Transformation (After)** – Show the result, the impact, and the ongoing change.

## Quick Story Extraction Exercises

### 1. The 'One Sentence Story' Drill

Challenge yourself (or your team) to summarize a story in one sentence. Example:  
"Maria's dream of becoming a teacher nearly ended when her school shut down, but a donor's scholarship helped her graduate—and now she's teaching others."

### 2. The "Reverse Engineer" Method

Start with a donor impact stat and work backward to find the personal story behind it.

Example:

- "500 meals served last month" → Who received one of those meals? What was their situation before?

### 3. The "Hidden Detail" Exercise

Take an old report or story and highlight overlooked emotional moments or small but significant details.

Example:

- A report mentions that a homeless shelter provided 1,000 beds last winter. Instead of focusing solely on the number, dig deeper: Who was one of those people? Maybe it was James, a veteran who hadn't slept indoors in months and broke down in tears when he got a warm bed and a safe place to rest. That small, emotional moment can bring the statistic to life and create a powerful donor connection.

## Turning Overlooked Stories into Fundraising Gold

Once you've uncovered these hidden stories, use them to:

- Strengthen your next fundraising appeal.
- Improve donor thank-you emails.
- Create a compelling social media post.
- Add impact to your website's "Why Give" page.
- Share at donor events and meetings.

Your nonprofit's best stories are already there—waiting to be found.

By using this guide to dig into overlooked sources, ask the right questions, and frame stories for maximum impact, you'll unlock a treasure trove of narratives that inspire donors and deepen engagement. Start today, and turn lost stories into fundraising gold!

## Take Your Storytelling to the Next Level

Finding great stories is just the beginning.

The real magic happens when you craft and tell them in a way that moves people to action. If you're unsure how to shape your stories into compelling, donor-inspiring narratives, the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference is the perfect place to learn.

At the conference, you'll learn from expert storytellers, fundraisers, and nonprofit professionals who have mastered the art of storytelling for impact. Whether it's writing more persuasive appeals, creating donor-centered videos, or sharing stories in a way that boosts engagement, you'll leave with practical skills you can apply immediately.

Ready to craft powerful stories and transform your fundraising? Join us at the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference and learn how to make your stories unforgettable.

To learn more, go to <https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com>

**Get help raising more money. Come to the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference.  
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