

# Neural Storytelling

Using Brain Science to Trigger Emotion,  
Create Connection, and Inspire Giving



a Nonprofit Storytelling Conference Publication

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## See It, Feel It, Act on It

Your donors don't just *read* stories.

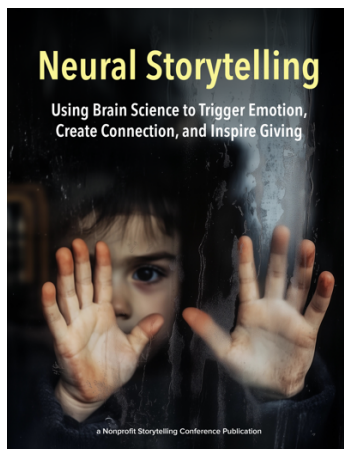
Their brains make them *feel* stories.

This happens because of something called "mirror neurons."

Mirror neurons are why a baby smiles back at you, why you flinch when someone stubs their toe, and why a great story makes you tear up.

### Mirror Neurons Make Emotions Contagious

Fundraising that activates mirror neurons makes donors feel emotionally inside the story - so their brains tell them to act. This is the foundation of Neural Storytelling - the practice of crafting stories that tap into the brain's natural empathy response, making giving feel instinctive.



If the cover image made you pause for a moment, that's proof of how powerful mirror neurons are.

Mirror neurons made you feel something before you even processed why. This same brain science can be used in storytelling to create deep donor connections - - and that's exactly what this playbook will teach you how to do.

You're about to discover how to use mirror neurons in your fundraising.

# How to Activate Mirror Neurons in Fundraising

## 1. Use 'See and Feel' Details (Not Just Facts)

Instead of: "Anna was hungry."

Try: "Anna's stomach clenched as she watched her classmates unwrap their sandwiches."

Why? The sensory details make the donor feel the moment, not just understand it.

## 2. Put Donors Inside the Story

Instead of: "Your gift will provide food."

Try: "Imagine handing a warm meal to a child who hasn't eaten in two days."

Why? The donor's brain experiences the act of giving, making them more likely to donate.

## 3. Use Faces, Eyes, and Hands in Images & Video

- Faces trigger emotional connection - especially direct eye contact.
- Hands create a sense of action - like holding a meal or reaching out for help.
- Video of someone reacting with relief or gratitude mirrors that emotion in the donor.

## 4. Write in First-Person or Deep Third-Person

Instead of: "Carlos needed help with tuition."

Try: "Carlos gripped his textbook, wondering if today would be his last class."

Why? First-person and deep third-person perspectives immerse the donor in the moment.

# Neural Storytelling Swipe File: Ready-to-Use Formulas & Examples

## Formula 1: "If you had been there, you would have seen..."

Use this to transport donors into a moment.

Example:

Instead of: "Many children lack access to clean drinking water."

Try: "If you had been there, you would have seen a mother kneeling by a shallow stream, scooping murky water into a plastic jug for her children."

**Formula 2: “Imagine [doing the act of giving] to [beneficiary].”**

Use this to make the donor feel like they are physically present in the story.

Example:

Instead of: “Your donation will provide meals.”

Try: “Imagine handing a warm bowl of soup to someone who hasn’t eaten in two days.”

**Formula 3: “For a moment, picture [sensory detail].”**

Use this to trigger mirror neurons with vivid sensory descriptions.

Example:

Instead of: “Our shelter helps families in need.”

Try: “For a moment, picture a child curled up on a cold sidewalk, clutching a thin blanket against the wind.”

**Formula 4: “Look at [person’s expression] - that’s the look of [emotion].”**

Use this to draw attention to facial expressions that mirror emotions.

Example:

Instead of: “Thanks to donors, many students can attend school.”

Try: “Look at Mia’s face - that’s the look of a child who finally gets to go to school.”

**Formula 5: “You can be the one to [solve the problem].”**

Use this to create a direct connection between the donor and the solution.

Example:

Instead of: “We need funds to keep our tutoring program running.”

Try: “You can be the one to place a book into a child’s hands and help them read their first sentence.”

## Where to Use These Techniques

- Appeals & Emails – Use sensory-rich details in your storytelling.
- Major Donor Meetings – Help donors see and feel their impact before asking.
- Videos & Social Media – Prioritize faces, eyes, and hands in visuals.

- Event Speeches – Walk donors inside the story before making the ask.

If donors don't feel it, they won't act on it.

Mirror neurons help donors experience your cause in a way that moves them to give. This is the essence of Neural Storytelling - it's not just telling a story, but structuring it in a way that naturally activates the brain's empathy pathways, making giving feel effortless and instinctive.

If you want to master this kind of storytelling at a deeper level, then come to the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference.

At the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference, you'll learn from some of the best nonprofit storytellers and fundraising experts in the world - giving you the tools to create donor experiences that are truly unforgettable.

Join us and transform your fundraising.

Visit <https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com> to learn more and secure your spot!

**If you found this booklet helpful, please forward it to a friend who could benefit from learning about neural storytelling.**

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