

# How to Get Heartfelt Testimonials from Beneficiaries

*A Step-by-Step Guide to Finding, Capturing, and  
Using Stories of Change to Inspire Donors to Give*



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## A Step-by-Step Guide to Finding, Capturing, and Using Stories of Change to Inspire Donors to Give

Alright, let's talk about getting heartfelt testimonials from the people you help.

These real, human stories are incredibly powerful for fundraising but collecting them can feel intimidating.

In this guide, you'll learn a simple process for gathering compelling heartfelt testimonials. We'll break it down step by step, removing the uncertainty and making it easier to capture the voices that inspire donors to give.

### The Simple Path to Success

Before we dive in, let's take a quick look at where we're going. Here's the simple, repeatable process we'll walk through:

1. **Understand Why Testimonials Matter** – So you know why this effort is worth it.
2. **Make It Easy for Beneficiaries to Share** – So they feel comfortable opening up.
3. **Ask the Right Questions** – So you get compelling, emotional stories instead of vague praise.
4. **Get Clear Permission** – So you can use testimonials with confidence.
5. **Put Testimonials to Work** – So you use them effectively to raise more money.

That's it. Five simple steps.

If you follow this, you'll collect powerful testimonials that inspire donors, demonstrate real impact, and strengthen your fundraising efforts. Now, let's take it step by step.

### Step 1: Understand Why Testimonials Matter

#### What a Great Testimonial Looks Like

Let's start by getting clear on the goal. Here are a few examples of powerful testimonials:

- “Before I found this program, I was sleeping in my car and struggling just to get through the day. Now, I have a warm place to stay and a job that makes me feel proud of myself again.”

- “I was scared I wouldn’t be able to afford the medication my son needed. The moment we got help, it felt like I could finally breathe again.”
- “If I could say one thing to the people who made this possible, I’d say: ‘Thank you for believing in me when I couldn’t believe in myself.’”

These testimonials paint a picture, show emotion, and make the impact feel real. That’s what we’re aiming for.

Now that you’ve seen what a strong testimonial looks like, let’s make sure you’re crystal clear on why they’re worth the effort.

A strong testimonial:

- Builds credibility and trust with donors.
- Shows real impact through a beneficiary’s own words.
- Helps overcome donor skepticism.
- Strengthens emotional connection and engagement.

OK, now that you know why they matter, let’s move on to how to get them.

## Step 2: Make It Easy for Beneficiaries to Share

Your job in this step is to initiate the process - to identify the right people and approach them in a way that feels natural and non-intimidating.

You want to ask them to have a conversation with you, where you can hear their whole story, not just asking for a quote.

Here’s how to do it:

- **Identify the right beneficiaries** – Look for people who have a compelling story and feel comfortable sharing (your program people might be able to make some recommendations).
- **Approach them with care** – Let them know you’re interested in hearing about their experience, not putting them on the spot.
- **Ask in person or over the phone when possible** – Written requests can feel impersonal and intimidating.
- **Frame it as a conversation, not an interview** – This reduces pressure and helps them open up naturally.
- **Offer different formats** – Some people may be comfortable on video, others may prefer audio, and some may want to write something down.

- **Set expectations early** – Let them know how their story might be used and that they can opt out at any time.

Alright, now let's move on to the actual interview/conversation and what to look for and what types of questions to ask.

## Step 3: Ask Questions That Draw Out a Story

### Types of Testimonials to Look For

Not all testimonials are the same, and different types can serve different purposes in fundraising. Here are some key categories to keep in mind as you guide the conversation:

**1. Transformation Testimonials** – Highlight how the beneficiary's life changed before and after receiving help.

Example: "Before I found this program, I was struggling to feed my kids. Now, we have food on the table every night."

**2. Donor Gratitude Testimonials** – Express direct thanks to donors, making them feel appreciated and connected.

Example: "If I could say one thing to the people who made this possible, it would be: 'Thank you for believing in me when I couldn't believe in myself.'"

**3. Emotional Impact Testimonials** – Focus on the deep emotions beneficiaries experienced because of the support they received.

Example: "The day I got help, I finally felt like I wasn't alone. That feeling is something I'll never forget."

**4. Specific Moment Testimonials** – Capture a defining moment when the beneficiary realized things were changing.

Example: "I still remember the first night I slept in my new apartment. I cried because, for the first time in years, I felt safe."

**5. Urgency-Driven Testimonials** – Highlight the need for continued donor support by emphasizing what would have happened without help.

Example: "Without this program, I don't know where I'd be today. I was out of options, and this support saved my life."

**6. Community and Support Testimonials** – Show how the nonprofit’s work isn’t just about services—it’s about creating belonging.

Example: "I didn’t just get help here. I found people who care about me and want me to succeed."

**7. Future-Focused Testimonials** – Express excitement or hope for the future made possible by donor support.

Example: "Now that I have stable housing, I can finally go back to school and build the life I always dreamed of."

Now that you have a better idea of what you're looking for, let’s dive into how to set up the conversation and ask the right questions.

This is the step where most people start to feel a little nervous.

You’re about to have a real conversation with someone, and you might be thinking: What if I mess up? What if they don’t want to talk? What if I don’t know what to say next?

Take a deep breath.

This isn’t about being a professional interviewer.

Your job here is simply to guide the person through telling their own story in a way that feels natural and comfortable for them.

Let’s walk through what that looks like so you can picture yourself doing it.

### ► **Step 3A: Set the Scene for a Good Conversation**

Your goal is to help your beneficiary feel safe and open to sharing.

Here’s how to do that:

- Start with a friendly, casual tone. Imagine you’re sitting down with a friend over coffee.
- Acknowledge that sharing personal experiences can be vulnerable. Say something like, “I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with me. There’s no pressure—just share whatever feels right to you.”
- Use body language and tone to show that you’re listening. Nod, smile, and use affirmations like, “That makes sense” or “I can see how that would have been really difficult.”

### ► Step 3B: Know What You're Looking For & Ask Open-Ended Questions

Before you start asking questions, it's important to know what you're trying to capture.

A great testimonial should:

- **Show transformation** – What changed for them?
- **Be emotional** – How did they feel before and after?
- **Feel personal and real** – It should sound like something they would naturally say.

Now, let's get into the questions.

The trick is to ask in a way that invites them to open up rather than just giving short, surface-level answers. Try these:

1. "Can you tell me what life was like before you got help?"
2. "Was there a specific moment when things changed for you?"
3. "How did you feel when you realized you had support?"
4. "If you could say something to the donors who made this possible, what would you want them to know?"

If they struggle to answer, don't rush in to fill the silence. Let them think. If needed, gently rephrase the question or share a small example to guide them.

### ► Step 3C: Guide the Conversation Without Controlling It

This isn't an interrogation—it's a conversation.

If they start telling their story in a way that feels natural but doesn't exactly answer your question, let them go with it.

Follow their lead, and ask gentle follow-ups like:

- "That's really powerful. Can you tell me more about that?"
- "What was going through your mind at that moment?"

Your goal is to help them express their emotions and experiences as vividly as possible. The more detailed and heartfelt the response, the more impactful the testimonial.

### ► Step 3D: Recognize and Capture the Testimonial

Alright, you've asked great questions and guided the conversation well. But how do you recognize when you've actually gotten a strong testimonial?

Here's what to listen for:

- **A clear before-and-after** transformation – Did they describe what life was like before and how it changed?
- **Emotion and personal** voice – Does it sound like something a real person would say, or does it feel scripted?
- **Specificity** – Are they sharing a vivid moment or just general praise?

If their story feels a little too broad or vague, you can shape it by gently narrowing the focus:

- “That’s really powerful. Can you describe the moment when you knew things were changing for you?”
- “You mentioned you felt relief - was there a specific moment when that feeling hit you?”

Once you hear something that fits, capture it immediately. Write it down, record it (if they're comfortable with that), or repeat it back to them to confirm:

- “Wow, that’s really moving. Would you be okay with me sharing that exact quote?”
- “I love how you put that. I want to make sure I get it right - let me read it back to you.”

### ► **Step 3E: Wrap Up with Gratitude**

Once they've shared, thank them sincerely.

Say something like:

- “That was really meaningful—thank you for sharing that with me. I know it’s not always easy to talk about personal experiences.”
- “This will really help people understand the impact of this program, and I appreciate you taking the time to do this.”

Alright, you did it!

You've guided someone through sharing a powerful, authentic testimonial.

## **Step 4: Get Clear Permission and Respect Privacy**

It's important to be transparent and respectful when asking for permission to use someone's words. You shouldn't assume it's okay to use what they've said unless they specifically agree to it.

Here's how to do it well:

## Before the Interview

Let the person know upfront why you're asking for the conversation. You might say:

- *“We’re gathering stories to help show others the impact of this program. Would you be open to sharing a bit about your experience?”*
- *“Sometimes we share stories like these in reports or on our website to help people understand the difference donor support makes. If something you say feels like a good fit, would it be alright if we followed up to ask about using it?”*

This sets expectations while giving them room to say no or change their mind.

## After the Interview

If the person shares something powerful, and you think it would make a great testimonial, ask again—this time with specificity:

- *“What you just said about finally feeling safe again—that was really moving. Would you be okay if we used that in a donor newsletter or on our website?”*
- *“I’d love to share your words with others, but only if you’re truly comfortable with it. Would it be alright if I quoted you?”*

Make it clear they can:

- Ask for anonymity
- Review what will be shared before it goes public
- Say no without any pressure

## Written Consent

Finally, if they’re comfortable, have them sign a simple release form that outlines how their story may be used. This is not about formality—it’s about clarity and consent.

You can download a sample release form from the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference website:

<https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com/testimonial-release-form-doc>

Great!

Now that you have a compelling testimonial, how do you use it?

Let’s go there next.



## Step 5: Use Testimonials Effectively in Fundraising

Now that you've got a strong, emotional testimonial, it's time to put it to work.

A great testimonial is more than just a quote - it's a tool that can inspire action when used correctly. Here's how to make the most of the stories you've captured:

### 1. Showcase Testimonials on Social Media

- Pair short testimonials with compelling images.
- Use video snippets if you captured the testimonial on video.
- Create donor-focused captions: "This is the impact YOU make possible."

Example Post:

[Image of beneficiary]  
"The day I got help, I finally felt like I wasn't alone. That feeling is something I'll never forget." *You can help someone else feel that same relief and hope.* [Donate Now]

### 2. Leverage Testimonials in Events & Live Presentations

- Feature a video montage of beneficiary testimonials before making the fundraising ask.
- Have a speaker read a powerful testimonial to open or close an event.
- Print testimonials on event materials and donor tables.

Example:

"If I could say one thing to the people who made this possible, it would be: 'Thank you for believing in me when I couldn't believe in myself.'"

### 3. Strengthen Donor Reports & Newsletters

- Use testimonials to show impact rather than just stating it.
- Include a mix of before-and-after stories to demonstrate transformation.
- Tie testimonials directly to donor contributions: "Because of your generosity, this person's life has changed."

Example - Donor Impact Email:

- **Subject:** See the difference you made this month!

- **Body:** “Without this program, I don’t know where I’d be today. I was out of options, and this support saved my life.” . . . Thanks to your gift, 10 more families will receive the same life-changing help this month. Thank you!

#### 4. Place Testimonials Strategically on Your Website & Landing Pages

- Add testimonials near donation buttons to reinforce action.
- Use rotating quotes on your homepage.
- Include video testimonials on impact pages.

##### Example:

- A quote above the donation form: “I was scared I wouldn’t be able to afford the medication my son needed. The moment we got help, it felt like I could finally breathe again.”
- A video of a beneficiary sharing their journey placed on the “Why Give” page.

### Final Tip: Keep a Story Bank

Don’t just collect testimonials once—make it an ongoing effort. Keep them organized in a simple document or spreadsheet so you always have fresh stories to use. Consider categorizing them by type (donor gratitude, transformation, urgency-driven, etc.) so you can easily pull the right testimonial for different fundraising needs.

That’s it! You’re now set up to collect and use powerful testimonials that inspire donors and show the real impact of your work. Go get those stories!

#### Want to take your storytelling skills even further?

Join us at the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference, where fundraising professionals gather to learn from the best, refine their messaging, and unlock the full potential of storytelling.

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