



How to Build a Storybank

Good stories should be told more than once, so you need a safe place to keep them. Here's how to build a bank that is guaranteed to generate interest.

Since 1982, FamiliesUSA has been fighting for high-quality, affordable health care for all Americans. As part of this effort, the nonprofit has collected over 900 stories of individuals and families that put human faces on this issue. These stories are provided to journalists looking for local angles, to congressional staff who want to see the impact in their districts, and to administration officials who need reminders of what a long-term, nationwide challenge looks like on Main Street today.

Elizabeth Prescott has been supervising the FamiliesUSA storybank for four years. In that time, she's helped to double its size, and she has led a transition into a cloud-based format that lets her colleagues find and "withdraw" stories from any location with Internet access. What follows are her recommendations for building and running an effective storybank in your organization:

First, gather your stories.

Start by collecting the low-hanging fruit - those stories that your colleagues already know well and routinely share with each other (or with donors) to illustrate the importance of what you do.

Some organizations go so far as to require every staff member to collect a minimum number of stories per month, per quarter, et cetera. The side benefit is motivating even those employees who don't regularly interact with the people you serve by exposing them to your raison d'etre. Whether you provide direct services or organize in the field, integrate story collection in all the work you do.



Elizabeth Prescott

June 2012

How to Build a Storybank

Tips from a veteran storybanker

July Classes at The Goodman Center

The perfect way to spend a summer day!*

**Depends on your definition of "perfect."*



About Us

free-range thinking is written by Andy Goodman and edited by Lori Matsumoto. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.agoodmanonline.com and www.thegoodmancenter.com.

Find a place to keep them.

Many organizations already have a wealth of stories through the work they do every day - they just don't save them anywhere. That's like having all of your money scattered around your house. So where do you deposit them? Create a central place where every staff member who runs across a great story can write up notes about it and create a permanent record. If all you have is a filing cabinet or a shoebox and some index cards, start with that.

At FamiliesUSA, we use [TrackVia](#), a cloud-based service, to host a pretty basic, self-designed database. Many groups use spreadsheets like Excel or Google docs, but that gets unruly quickly if you want to note each time you call a story source (and, again, you really should). Of course, not every budget can accommodate a service like TrackVia, so you may want to consider other resources you already have in place - the ones designed to track donors, program activities, volunteers, or media contacts. If you can differentiate the records or build a separate application, you may be able to build your storybank with what you have. In the absence of such software, Access (from Microsoft) can sometimes do the trick. See if any of your staff or volunteers has experience designing a good Access database.



[Read more about the FamiliesUSA storybank](#)

Know in advance how you will use these stories.

Many groups have come to me wanting to build storybanks, but when I ask them what they'll do with the stories, they have no real answers. Will you use these stories on your web site? (Not sure.) In newsletters and fundraising appeals? (Probably.) As anecdotes for speakers at your events? (Hadn't thought of that.) Having at least a general sense of what you'll do with the stories will make it easier to acquire them and ensure that you don't waste a lot of time. I frequently receive requests from reporters who want to interview people in our storybank. We also connect participants with speaking

engagements and Congressional testimony, and I occasionally have them write blogs or op-eds. When I explain these options to potential story sources, they are eager to participate because they can see what a difference their story can make.

For each story, track dates, demographics and times used.

Whenever I ask an experienced storybanker, "If you knew then what you know now..." their answer almost always relates to the records that accompany each story. "I would have tracked the story's media appearances more closely," someone will say. Or, "I wish I had captured more details of the storyteller's demographics." It may not seem as important when you only have a few stories, but the bigger your bank gets, the more you'll wish that you had some good search terms so that you could find just the right person to speak about a particular topic or from the perspective of a particular social group. You'll also wish that you had noted the date that you entered them into the story bank, each time you talked with them, and each time you used the story.

To reach Andy directly, please call (323) 464-3956 or send an email to andy@agoodmanonline.com.



FOLLOW ME ON TWITTER



To subscribe to this newsletter, [click here](#). To unsubscribe, [click here](#).



a goodman

GOOD IDEAS FOR GOOD CAUSES

a goodman

444 North Larchmont Blvd.,
Suite 102
Los Angeles, CA 90004
323.464.3956

(Special thanks to Elizabeth Prescott for this month's guest column.
If you'd like to reach her directly to learn more about storybanking,
reach her via email at eprescott@familiesusa.org.)

[^ back to top](#)

July Classes at The Goodman Center

Registration is now open for classes on strategic communications, presentation skills, and running better webinars.

Strategic Communications: Cutting Through the Clutter shows how three classic public interest campaigns engaged and motivated their target audiences and achieved remarkable results. In reviewing these success stories, we'll cover:

- The basics of framing
- Message creation and delivery
- An easy-to-use template for campaign design



Classes will be held on July 17th and 24th from 11a-12n PT (2-3p ET) each day. Learn more and register online at [The Goodman Center](#).

Why Bad Presentations Happens to Good Causes is a two-hour online class designed to help presenters at all levels, from newbies to seasoned veterans. Curriculum in this webinar includes:

- The three most common characteristics of excellent presentations
- The five most frequent mistakes (and how to avoid them)
- How to structure presentations to ensure your audience learns more
- Why PowerPoint should never be used as a presentation and a handout
- Techniques to help you deliver talks with greater confidence



Classes will be held on July 19th and 20th from 11a-12n PT (2-3p Eastern) each day. Learn more and register online at [The Goodman Center](#).

The Webinar on Webinars is a one-hour class on July 27th from 11a-12n PT (2- 3p Eastern) that will teach you:

- How to keep participants engaged from beginning to end
- The fine details of creating a good online experience
- How to use your two assets (voices and visuals) to maximum advantage
- What else we learned from talk radio that makes webinars even better



You can learn more and register online at [The Goodman Center](#).

[^ back to top](#)

[Share this newsletter with a colleague](#)



Try it FREE today.

This email was sent to lori@agoodmanonline.com by andy@agoodmanonline.com | [Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

a goodman | 444 North Larchmont Blvd., Suite 102 | Los Angeles | CA | 90004