



Story Collecting: The Y Shows How

Now entering its second year, "The Rye Y Story Project" offers a useful model for nonprofits that want to collect stories from their members.

Recognizing that stories are uniquely powerful communications tools is an important step for nonprofits, but it's only a first step. Once organizations realize that stories can add a turbo boost to advocacy, fundraising, recruiting and more, they have to find ways to gather them - from staff, members, volunteers, donors, and others.

In 2012 the YMCA of Rye, New York launched a new project to capture stories from its members, and the response was so positive that the "The Rye Y Story Project" enters its second year this month. The challenges the Y encountered and solved along the way provide a helpful example for good causes that may be considering story collection efforts of their own.



Denise Woodin and Lisa Tidball

"We really struggled with finding stories and putting them together in a meaningful way," Communications Director Lisa Tidball said during our telephone interview. She and her colleagues had attempted to solicit

member stories through videotaped group interviews, via a form on their website, and by asking staff to periodically gather them. But they had trouble creating a collection of stories that felt cohesive and really exemplified the depth of the Rye Y's community.

When Denise Woodin was hired as Director of Community Outreach and Social Responsibility last year, she joined the team trying to solve this problem. A long-time fan of [StoryCorps](#), the personal history-

November 2013

Story Collecting: The Y Shows How

An inside look at "The Rye Y Story Project"

Storytelling Meets "American Idol"

A contest caps a yearlong storytelling campaign

Improve Your Outreach and Presentations

December classes at The Goodman Center



About Us

free-range thinking is written by Andy Goodman and Celia Hoffman. To read back issues,

collecting project, Woodin thought the method of one-on-one, in-person interviewing might be the key to drawing out the members' stories the Rye YMCA sought to uncover.

Woodin, Tidball and additional staff members formed a committee to create an event solely focused on story collection via one-on-one interviews. They ultimately decided to hold the event over a three-day period and to call it "Voices of the Community: The Rye Y Story Project." A select group of staff members were asked to conduct the interviews and were briefly trained on interviewing techniques.

To prime the Y's members for this first-time project, the committee used several tactics. Ten days prior to the event, details were posted on the Rye YMCA's website, and as members passed the front desk they were handed a flyer detailing both when and why their stories would be collected. Additionally, Tidball interviewed several staff members and posted their stories at the front desk - each accompanied by a picture - to give members a better sense of what the project would entail.

Everything was in place for the event except one crucial aspect: where the interviews would be conducted. The committee wanted a location that would be highly visible but would also create a sense of privacy for the storytellers. A member of the maintenance staff suggested standing gym mats on their sides and bending them into three-sided compartments. Once a small table and two chairs were put inside the gym mat "story booths," the project was ready to commence.

Though the event was cut short a day due to Hurricane Sandy, it was still a great success. "I was surprised how easy it was to interview people. Right away, members really opened up and talked earnestly about themselves," Tidball said. "They stepped into the booth because they wanted to tell their story," Woodin added. (You can read some of the 27 stories that were collected [here](#)).



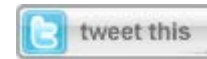
The Rye YMCA "story booth"

Ultimately, collecting the stories was only part of the Rye YMCA's goal. The other part was sharing, and to do this, the committee set up an exhibit of stories and pictures throughout the halls of the facility. Viewing the stories as a collection helped people to fully appreciate the wide and continuing impact that the Rye YMCA has. "When we eventually exhibited the stories, people stopped and really read them. There was a buzz in the hallways. I think it really got people thinking about how special our community is," Woodin said. "It helped our members form new connections with each other. After reading someone's story, if you saw them in the hallway, you felt like you knew them a little bit better," said Tidball.

As the Rye Y Story Project enters year two, Woodin and Tidball are excited both to collect and display more stories. "We could throw out statistics all day long, but it doesn't mean the same thing as the intangibles--the person who ran their first triathlon as a member here,

download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.thegoodmancenter.com.

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



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



The Goodman Center
444 North Larchmont Blvd., Ste.102
Los Angeles, CA 90004
323.464.3956

the senior citizens who find friendship here--and that's conveyed through the stories," Woodin concluded. "It's as important for us to tell those stories as it is for us to hear them."

[^ back to top](#)

Storytelling Meets "American Idol"

The Alliance for Children and Families celebrates a year of collecting stories with "Telling Your Stories Idol".

At its annual conference in October 2012, the [Alliance for Children and Families](#) kicked off a yearlong campaign to collect stories illustrating the positive impact of their members' work.

When ACF and its members reconvened last month in Minneapolis, they celebrated this initiative with a live competition styled after "American Idol." Three finalists were selected from dozens of entries submitted by member organizations, and the winning stories were read on stage during a conference luncheon by their authors, Katie Todd (East End House), Nancy Kortemeyer (Beech Brook), and Joy Leveen (Child and Family Resources, Inc.).



The "Idol" finalists display their prizes

The grand prize winner - selected by audience members who voted by text - was Nancy Kortemeyer, who received a check for \$1,000 and a scholarship to any class at The Goodman Center. You can see all three stories (and the entire 45-minute ceremony, starring yours truly as Ryan Seacrest) [here](#).

[^ back to top](#)

Improve Your Outreach and Presentations

Sign up now for December webinars at The Goodman Center.

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 December 12th and 19th from 11a-12n PT (2-3p ET) each day.

Tuition is \$250 per student and discounts are available for organizations that register 3 or more students. Learn more and register 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 December 17th and 18th from 11a-12n PT (2-3p Eastern) each day. Tuition is \$250 per student and discounts are available for organizations that register 3 or more students. Learn more and register online at [The Goodman Center](#).

[^ back to top](#)

The Goodman Center | 444 North Larchmont Blvd., Suite 102 | Los Angeles | CA | 90004