MAKE IT HAPPEN WITH Big Local



Find your Voice:

HOW TO TELL POWERFUL STORIES



INTRODUCTION

Great storytelling will help spread the word about your project and celebrate your achievements. It also means that you connect authentically with your audience and inspire people to get involved with your project.

> **"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."**
> Maya Angelou

Why is storytelling important?

Stories play an essential role in how we make sense of the world. We are all hardwired for storytelling and it has played an integral part of human communication from cave paintings to Tik Tok.

Science shows that when we hear a well-told story, our brain reacts as if we are experiencing it ourselves. This boosts our feelings of empathy and builds a sense of connection with others.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY?

1 Know your audience

Who is your story for? Tell stories that matter to your specific audience. What do you want them to **think**, how do you want to make them **feel** and what do you want to motivate them to **do**? For example, do you want them to volunteer with your project?

2 Grab their attention and keep it

Hook people in from the beginning and build an emotional connection. Take them on a journey - you want your audience to ask themselves what will happen next?

3 Be human

Look for storytellers in your community who will share their experiences in a way that will emotionally resonate with the audience. Give them ownership of their story and involve them in your storytelling project.

4 Think about structure

- Start with the issue or challenge you were facing
- What actions did you take? What happened next?
- How does the story resolve? How did things change?

5 Make it shareable

You'll want to make your story shareable so that it's easy for people to engage with and share with others. You'll find tips about how to do this on p12.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What stories do you want to tell from and why
- Can you find ways to crowd-source your stories from people in your local area?
- What creative elements can you bring to your storytelling project? For example, spoken word, songs, animation, comic strips? Can you work with artists to do this?
- Do you have consent to use people's personal experiences and voices in your story?
- Think about how you can make your stories accessible to all. For example, provide transcripts for audio, captions for videos, and alt text descriptions for images.

See pages 14-15 to find out more about our communications and media support offer.

WRITE!

Writing is one of the simplest ways to tell your stories. It doesn't have to be an essay, you can start with a Facebook post, a blog or a poem.

Keep in mind that English isn't everyone's strongest skill. In the UK, the average reading age is nine years-old so aim to use straightforward language that appeals to range of people.

How-to: WRITE A BRILLIANT BLOG

You could write a blog about a recent event or project at your Big Local, or share some tips on running community events for others to learn from.



1 Brainstorm and warm up

People often want to know **who** your story involves, **what** it's about, **when** it happened, **why** it's important and **how** your story developed. Make some notes under the headings who, what, when, why, how.

Other ideas to get your writing juices flowing include:

- Draw or doodle your ideas on a piece of paper and use them to create the structure of your blog
- Select a photo and write a story about it

2 Get straight to the point

Include an 'attention-grabber' right away to draw people in. This can be a memory or emotion. Or you can pose a question, or introduce a juicy nugget of information that will leave your readers wanting more.

3 Be direct, be human

Before you start, think about who you are writing for. Sometimes it's useful to imagine you're talking to a specific person. This can help you make your writing sound warmer and more direct. Above all, use your own voice and don't be afraid to say "I".

4 Make it easy to skim

People and are more likely to skim-read online. Increase the chances of them paying attention to your blog by keeping it short and sweet.

Sentences and paragraphs should be concise and include subheadings and bullet points. This will help your reader easily navigate through your blog.



5 Images are your friend

Remember, a picture is worth a thousand words. Include photos or a video with your blog to create breathing space around the words

6 All good things come to an end

Why not end with a question to keep a conversation going? Or a call-to-action? For example, you can suggest they share your blog, or join your mailing list.

OTHER THINGS TO TRY:

- You could keep a diary. For example, write a diary of a week
- Commission a writer to tell the story of your place, drawing on conversations with lots of residents.
- Ask local residents to write a postcard from your Big Local area. You could pick a theme, or a prompt to get people started.
- Write a haiku inspired by your Big Local. A haiku is a three line poem originally from Japan. It has five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the third. Here's an example:

I write, erase, write
Erase yet again, and then
A vibrant rose blooms.

Inspired by **Katsushika Hokusai**

SNAP

Photos are a great way to document the changes you are creating in your local area and in the lives of the people who live there. They will breathe life into your content and show the impact of your work.

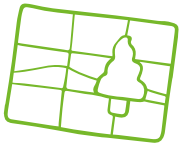
Keep in mind that you need people's written consent if they feature in one of your photos. For those under 18 you'll need written consent from their parent or legal guardian.



How-to: TAKE YOUR PHONE PHOTOGRAPHY TO THE NEXT LEVEL

1. **Clean your lens**
   Wipe your lens on your phone with a soft cloth to get a sharper shot.

2. **Rule of thirds**
   Switch on gridlines in your photo settings to see a 3x3 grid. Aim to get the most interesting parts of your images in or along these thirds, either horizontally or vertically.



3. **Choose where to focus**
   Choose where you want your phone camera to focus by tapping the screen in the specific place where you want the image to be sharpest.

4. **Focus on one subject**
   Build in plenty of negative space (the background to the photo, which shouldn't compete with your subject). This will help your subject stand out more. Consider using the portrait mode setting. This sharpens the focus on your subject and creates a slightly out-of-focus background.

5. **Avoid zoom**
   Try to get as close as possible to your subject.

6. **Use natural light and turn off flash**
   Natural light is your friend. Avoid indoor photos if you can. Turn off flash in your settings to avoid harsh, unflattering shots. Remember to hold your phone really steady when there's less light.

7. **Take candid shots**
   When documenting an activity, try and capture the feeling and emotion of the moment by taking as many photos as possible. It's best to avoid staged group shots and instead take photos of people doing interesting things.

8. **Edit**
   Use your phone's editing tools to touch up your photos. For example, use an exposure tool to help make darker images slightly brighter.

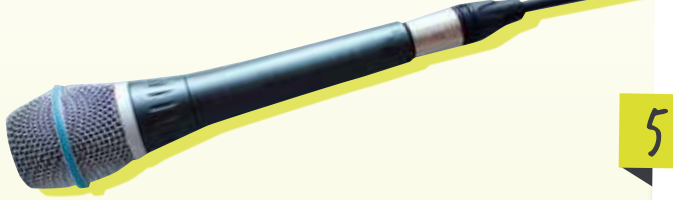
9. **Have fun!**
   Take as many photos as you can and work out what you would improve next time. Explore some photo editing tools and have fun practising.



GET STARTED

- Commission a photographer to capture the spirit of your area.
- There are other ways to illustrate your work. For example, commission an artist to create a map of your area.

RECORD



By capturing people's voices on audio, you can create a record of oral histories and stories from your local area, told by those who know them best. This could be as simple as using a voice recorder on your phone and uploading the stories to an app like SoundCloud.

Podcasts are becoming one of the most popular ways to share stories and developing your own podcast is easier than you might think.

How-to: PODCAST LIKE A PRO

1 Know your purpose (and your audience)

This will help you decide what stories to tell, whose voices will feature, how to structure your episodes and what to call it.

2 Think about kit



Get hold of an external microphone to record higher quality sound. Recording on a phone will give you better sound than a computer if recording an audio podcast by Zoom. Remember to turn off notifications. It's a good idea for the guest to have their phone's voice recorder running too, in case the sound drops out on the call.

3 Choose where to record

Record in places where you are surrounded by soft furnishings and materials - not wood and hard surfaces. Your bedroom, with your duvet wrapped around you, for example. Cars also work, especially if you put in some soft material like a duvet too.



5 Pick interesting guests

Whose stories have gone unheard? Think about the kind of questions that will encourage them to share their stories. Ask your guest a warm-up question first to make them feel at ease and test their audio.

6 Structure your episode

Hook your listener in at the start of the episode to build their interest. It can be helpful to write an episode outline and share it with your guests. Don't forget to include a call to action for your audience at the end. Ask them to like or share the podcast.

7 Editing takes time



Use software like Audacity, Garageband or Audition to edit your podcast and take the time to make the listener experience as good as possible. Choose rights-free music for your intro and outro jingles.

Choose your platform

Choose a podcast hosting platform like Podbean who will distribute it to Spotify, Apple, Google Podcasts etc. Create your podcast artwork using Canva.

GET STARTED:

- Rather than asking people to fill in forms about what they want for their Big Local, record their voices and capture their hopes and aspirations.
- Are there older people in your area with stories to tell? Record them talking and create an oral history archive.
- Do you have any local songwriters? Could you work with them to create an anthem for your local area?
- Is there a community radio station in your area? Could you partner with them to create a show?

FILM

Film can capture the true spirit of a place and videos have the highest levels of engagement of all types of social media content.

From DIY shorts, stories and reels for social media through to films for your website, it is possible to make video content yourself on a phone. If you have the budget, it's also worth considering working with a videographer.



How to: COMMISSION A FILM

1 Decide your purpose

Is it practical? e.g sharing information about a service. Or is it emotional? e.g encouraging people to feel pride for their local area. Film types can include: case studies, volunteer stories, fundraising campaigns, or celebratory highlights from your project. Be clear about what you want your audience to **think**, **feel** and **do**.

2 Where to share it?

Different platforms use different formats. For example, on YouTube you'll want a landscape format, but on Instagram you'll need portrait format for reels. Dimensions are always changing so double check before you start. You might want a couple of final versions e.g a longer version for YouTube and the shorter the better for social channels.

3 Write the brief

Use the information above to write a short brief. Include messages you want the film to get across, and the look and feel you'd like to achieve.

Ask around for some recommendations of videographers and have a look at their work. Share your brief and discuss a fee.

5 Shape the story

Work with the videographer to shape the story and think about filming locations. How will you hook your audience from the start and make it short and sweet to hold their attention?

Think about a wow moment to engage your viewers. This could be a person, a live moment or special event or a piece of music that drives the narrative.

6 Lights, camera, action!

Support the videographer on the filming day(s) and get the right people in the right place at the right time. Help your interviewees to relax and don't forget to get their written consent to feature in the film. Share the film with participants before you release it, to make sure they are happy with how they are represented.

7 The final stages



The videographer will share a first cut with you. Expect to have two rounds of edits or so and take the time to get everything right. They will advise on rights-free music to give your film pace and emotion.

Include your logo, funder logos and credits at the end of the film. When you have agreed to the final edit, create closed captions so your film is accessible to all.

GET STARTED:

- Create your own stop animation using a free app, for example Stop Motion Studio. You could use this technique to show progress on a building project.
- Set up a mobile phone film competition on a theme inspired by your local area.
- Film an introductory tour of your Big Local area highlighting all the things that are unique about it.
- Collaborate with media / film students at a local college to tell stories about your place.

HOW TO SHARE YOUR STORIES

Local stories have the potential to inspire lots of people. Now you know how to create a great story, it's time to think about how to get them out in the world.

Your communications channels are an important way to do this. Another way to get your stories heard, is to share them in the media by getting in touch with journalists.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR OWN CHANNELS

Social media

- Share stories in a way that engages your audience in a conversation with you.
- Be consistent and regular about posting on social media, rather than feast and famine.

Email

Don't forget that you can get your messages and content directly into the inboxes of your audience via an email newsletter.

- You'll need to start by building a mailing list via Mailchimp and encouraging people to sign up.

Website

- Make the most of your website as this is the first place people will come to find out more about you.
- Focus on good quality content such as stories with lots of human interest that share your aims and your impact.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR STORIES BY WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Target

Identify the newspapers, programmes, blogs, online news and local groups on facebook you would like coverage in.

Key messages

What do you want to say? Develop two to three key messages and use them consistently. Be clear about how you tell your Local story and what change you're making, and keep reminding people of this in really human terms.

Journalists need stories

Think about how you will interest the journalist in your story? What's the human interest? Is it relevant and newsworthy? Can you provide facts and real-life examples? Is there a great photo or video opportunity?

Is it news?

- Write a press release - remember to include all the important information in the first couple of paragraphs. Let them know if you can provide images and video.
- Offer an interview or comment on a relevant news story or what's happening in your local area
- Ask a high-profile person to help tell your story e.g. your local MP, or someone with links to your area. They might be able to provide a comment for your press release.

Timing

Different media have different lead-in times and deadlines. Think about the best time to approach a journalist or media outlet with a story.

AND FINALLY

Evaluate your communications activity so you can measure what has had the biggest impact. For example, if your aim was to reach new volunteers, are you seeing an increase in volunteer sign-ups? If nothing has changed do you need to try a different way of reaching them? Focus your resources on what works.

GOOD LUCK!