

# Storytelling

Community organizers tell stories to communicate values and motivate people to take action. Marshall Ganz, known for his research and teaching on effective community organizing, has created a Public Narrative framework based on stories told by successful organizers. It is comprised of three stories:

- A story of self: why you were called to what you have been called to
- A story of us: what your constituency, community, organization has been called to: its shared purposes, goals, vision
- A story of now: the challenge this community now faces, the choices it must make, and the hope to which “we” can aspire

Ganz believed that stories: “move to action by mobilizing sources of motivation, constructing new shared individual and collective identities, and finding the courage to act.” Stories are about people. The storyteller asks audiences to identify with a character, to feel empathy for the character’s circumstances and needs, and to act in response. In order to create successful community stories, incorporate the main elements of a good story:

**CHALLENGE:** Like any good story, community-led campaigns for change include conflict. Identify the conflict you want to focus on and define the stakes of the conflict in your own terms and language.

**CHARACTERS:** Messengers are often just as important as the message. Cast your characters carefully. Who is receiving the most attention in the story (an everyday person or a leader?). Who do you want to hold up as the heroes and why?

**CHOICE:** Everyone likes to make up their own mind—as opposed to being told what to think and feel. Make sure that your message is part of an organic and compelling story in its own right. Hitting your audience over the head with a message rather than a real story can make people upset and frustrated with you.

**OUTCOME:** What happens at the end of your story? Try to make sure that you both end a story well; but also, use foreshadowing to suggest an alternative future that is in line with your values and vision. It should give your audience a sense of trust in you and also call on them to act.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Works cited: Ilyse Hogue and Patrick Reinsborough smartMeme Strategy and Training Project, 2004; Marshall Ganz, “Telling Your Public Story: Self, Us, Now,” 2007.