

How to Write Successful Success Stories



Vernesia Wilson, MPH
Office of Health Data and Research
Mississippi State Department of Health

What is a Success Story?

- **Description of a health program's....**
 - Progress
 - Achievements
 - Accomplishments
 - Impact
 - Lessons Learned
- **Communicates the Return on Investment of Health Program**
 - Health issue defined
 - Program intervention that was carried out
 - How intervention impacted the issue
- **Shows the program's action to the health problem**



Types of Success Stories

- **Upstream**

- Describes early successes in program implementation

- *Usually a new program*

- **Midstream**

- Describes promising practices and achievements of short term goals

- *Usually a program that is at least 1 year old*

- **Downstream**

- Describes successes and outcomes of program

- *Usually an existing program (older than one year)*

- *Can describe actual number of people reached*

Your Audience

You are writing for audiences external to your program staff.

- **Media**
 - Newspaper, TV, Internet
- **Partners**
 - Non-profits, Civic Organizations
- **Funders**
 - MSDH, CDC, etc
- **Policymakers**
 - City gov't, state legislators
- **Public**
 - Program participants, taxpayers, health advocates, etc
- **Advisory Boards/Councils**



Benefits of Writing Success Stories

- Provides avenues for more funding
- Increases partnerships/participation
- Increases program visibility
 - May lead to local, regional, and/or national duplication of your successes
- Increases support by external partners
- Provides avenues for obtaining more program resources



Processes for Writing Success Stories

Four Main Components

- Title
- Issue
- Intervention
- Impact

Keys to Remember:



- ✓ Keep success story descriptions simple but informative.
- ✓ Record all successes whether big or small.
- ✓ Make sure program outcomes are captured.
- ✓ Present and/or publish successes as frequently as possible.

Writing the Title

- **Be creative**
 - Make the reader want to continue reading
- **“Catchy” Title (Emotional Hook)**
 - Captures readers attention in the beginning
- **Short-phrased**



Example Titles

“Mississippians Working to Keep Employees Healthy”

“Get Up and Do Something: Slowing the Obesity Trend in Delaware”

“Smoke Alarms Saves Lives Thanks to Injury Prevention Funding”

“How to Get 'em Back: Senior Flu Clinics after a Flu Shortage Season”

“Arizona Sun Safety Program Reaches 700,000 Children and Becomes Law ”

Writing the Issue

- Attention Getter for the reader
- Outlines health and cost burdens
- Gives state specific data about the issue



Example Issue

Most people do not think that schoolchildren are at risk for skin cancer when they are playing outside during the day, but that is not the case in Arizona. Arizona is second in the world in skin cancer incidence rates, and sunburn & exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays are the primary causes of skin cancer, with the deadliest form being melanoma. The majority of this exposure occurs before the age of 18, making children our most vulnerable population for developing skin cancer.

- Melanoma, the most fatal of all skin cancers, is rising faster than any other preventable cancer in Arizona.
- Melanoma has increased approximately 150% since 1973.

With Arizona's more than 300 sunny days each year, children face repeated exposure to ultraviolet radiation at school during the middle of the day--when UV is most intense and harmful. This exposure has a tremendous effect on Arizona residents:

- 1/3 of Arizona communities exceed the national average in melanoma rates.
- Arizona has 77% more melanoma deaths than California on a per capita basis.
- Melanoma mortality has increased 44% since 1973.

Writing the Intervention

- Description of how grant funds were used
- Identifies specific steps taken in implementing the intervention
 - Can assist other states if they are interested in similar interventions



Example Intervention

In 2003, Block Grant dollars enabled the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) to develop a sun safety program for K-8 students. ADHS adopted a free *SunWise* sun safety curriculum developed by the Environmental Protection Agency in 1998. ADHS has strengthened and promoted the program for the past three years by visiting schools and creating:

- Arizona-based handouts, brochures, stickers, posters and animal-themed activity sheets
- Curriculum for physical education teachers and school nurses
- School assemblies where ADHS educates the entire student body, 120 assemblies to date
- A state-wide sun safety education poster contest with 3000 annual entries
- Partnerships with after-school programs, pools, summer camps, zoos, science centers, newborn and pediatric programs, media, colleges, volunteer groups who items, sports teams and dermatologists

Writing the Impact Statement

- **Outcomes**

- How much money, time, lives were saved
- Did the intervention decrease human suffering from a health condition
- The extent of the change in health status among a community, county, population, etc.

Impact

Example Impact

The success of ADHS's free sun safety program resulted in Arizona becoming the nation's first state to mandate sun safety education. The law took effect August 2005.

More than 707,000 children are learning sun safety in the state's 1100 K-8 public schools. Prior to block grant funding, Arizona schools did not teach sun safety. Within three years of block grant funding, the number of schools teaching sun safety jumped from 0 to 650 schools and jumped again to 1100 schools with passage of the new sun safety law. ADHS is reaching more educators through free district workshops to help schools become self-sufficient for a lifetime of sun safety instruction. School requests for workshops, assemblies, handouts and emails and telephone calls have doubled in three years.

Evaluations of the Arizona program have shown marked improvement in students' sun safety attitudes. Reducing childhood sun exposure is the single most important step in preventing skin cancer and through block grant funding, Arizona has made great strides in this effort

Success Stories: Methods of Distribution

- Organization Web Sites
- MSDH Program Pages
- Information Kits
- News releases
- Conferences/Annual meetings
- Brochures
- Speeches
- Newsletters
- Congressional and/or Legislative Reports
- Coalition meetings



Closing Quote

“Good stories cut through the clutter and connect with people’s hearts, opening their minds to our point of view.”

--Andy Goodman, author

Why Bad Ads Happen to Good Causes

