

ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT BANK GROUP

# GUIDE TO STORYTELLING



**IsDB**



البنك الإسلامي للتنمية  
Islamic Development Bank



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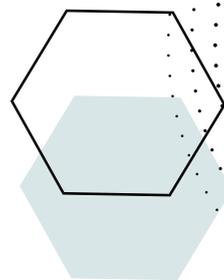
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**Inside each  
and every one of us  
is a natural-born  
storyteller waiting  
to be unleashed**

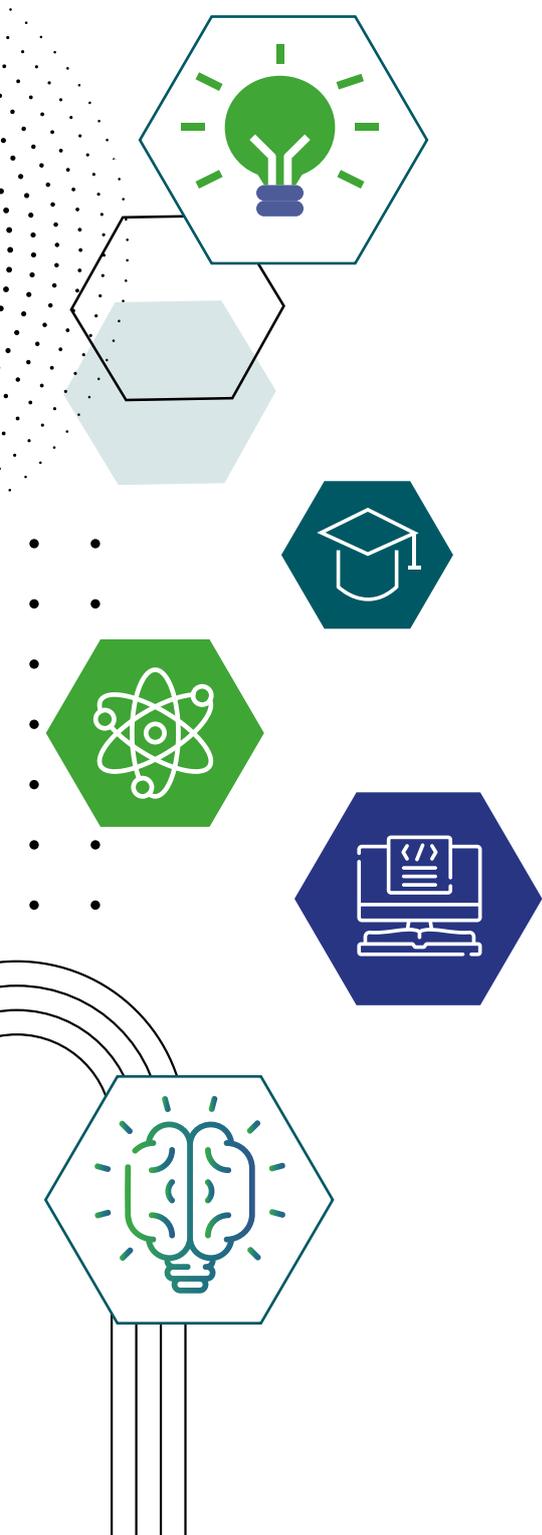


## Introduction to storytelling

Telling a story is like painting a picture with words. It is the process of using facts and narratives to communicate something to an audience. Stories are a universal language that everyone, regardless of identity, nationality or religion can understand. Since we all process emotions and experience feelings of happiness, sadness, anger and hope: storytelling creates a sense of unity even among the most diverse groups of people.

In a multilateral institution such as the Islamic Development Bank, where operations span from Asia, Africa and the Middle East to Latin America and Europe, storytelling offers a unique opportunity to present a different perspective of the world. It allows us to learn from another person's experience, challenge misconceptions and strengthen universal values.

Certain people are particularly skilled at storytelling and often do so on behalf of their organization. These are usually marketers, copywriters or content producers. Yet the truth is everyone can tell a story. But what is it that makes a compelling story and how can we improve our ability to tell one?



# What makes stories so powerful is their ability to draw attention and engage hearts and minds



## The power of storytelling

Storytelling is about making sense of the world around us, connecting with people and inspiring empathy. Telling an authentic story can make our ideas accessible to others and invite them to become part of our evolving journey to create positive change. What makes stories so powerful are their ability to draw attention and engage hearts and minds. The best stories spread like wildfire and inspire others to take action, and that's precisely what makes storytelling such a powerful tool.

## Why create stories?



### Transformation

Storytelling is transformational for both the storyteller and the audience. The process of creating stories allows you to focus on your vision and maintain authenticity. Once you have distilled the core of your story, you can tell it in a multitude of ways, depending on the purpose and audience.



### Connection

Stories allow you to connect with the audience and motivate them to support your cause. A powerful story can transform people's relationship with the issues you're working to address and lead to their long-term support.



### Learning

Storytelling helps with learning because stories are easy to remember. Organizational psychologist Peg Neuhauser found that learning which stems from a well-told story is remembered 20 times more accurately and for longer, than learning derived from facts and figures.



### Action

Stories simplify complex messages and make your project easier to understand. When you share stories with your network through websites, newsletters, email or social media, it can act as a powerful marketing and advocacy tool and move people from awareness to action.

# WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY?

Regardless of the story you wish to tell, there are three proven components that make a good story and act as crucial ingredients.

## CHARACTERS

Every story should feature at least one character, who will be the key to relating the audience back to your story. This is the bridge between you, the storyteller, and the audience.

Your character doesn't need to be particularly heroic. In fact, everyday characters are easier to relate to than someone who seems superhuman. What's most important is that the character's situation has a clear link to what your project is trying to achieve and enables the audience to put a human face to the issues you're trying to address.



### Remember

If the audience can put themselves in your character's shoes, they'll be more likely to follow through with your call-to-action.

## CONFLICT

There is no story without conflict. Conflict is the lesson of how your character overcomes a challenge. It keeps the audience engaged and inspires people to act. To identify the conflict that's driving your story, ask: What does your character want? What's preventing them from having it? What challenges or obstacles must they overcome?

Weave the appropriate conflict through the fabric of your story. While the specifics of your situation are local, the values that underpin the conflict are likely to be universal. Make these values explicit.



### Remember

The audience doesn't need to know the intricacies of your issue to know the difference between what is moral and what is immoral. Express your conflict in terms that will help the audience easily understand it and feel invested in its outcome.

## RESOLUTION

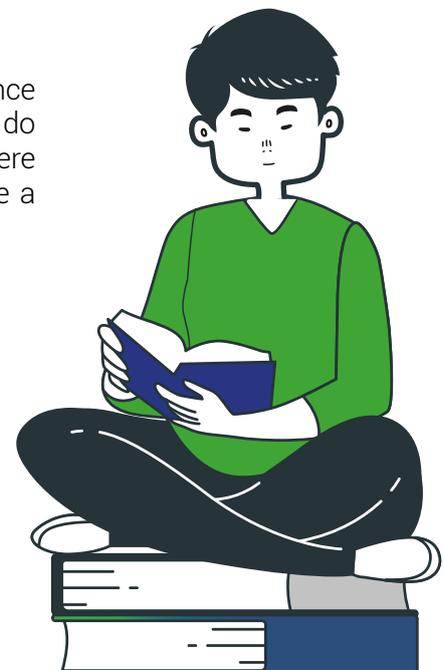
Every good story has an ending. Your story's resolution should wrap the story up, provide context around where the character and conflict currently lie, and leave the audience with a clear call-to-action.

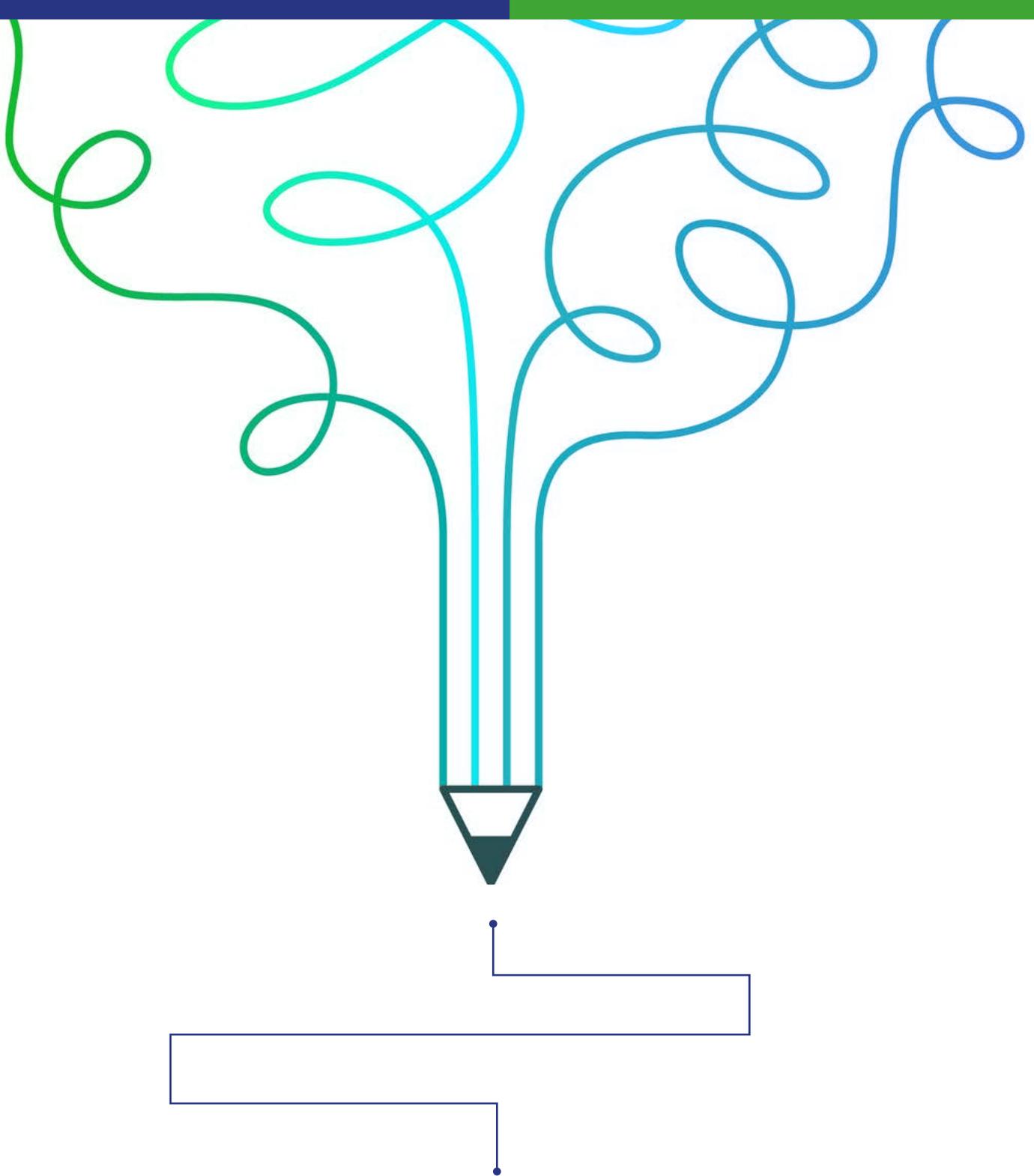
Add a sense of closure or reflection to create the desired audience emotion, impression, or recovery from the story's tension - you can do this by providing evidence of how the conflict and obstacles were overcome. Share the characters final thoughts to give the audience a chance to say farewell - they are just as part of this journey.



### Remember

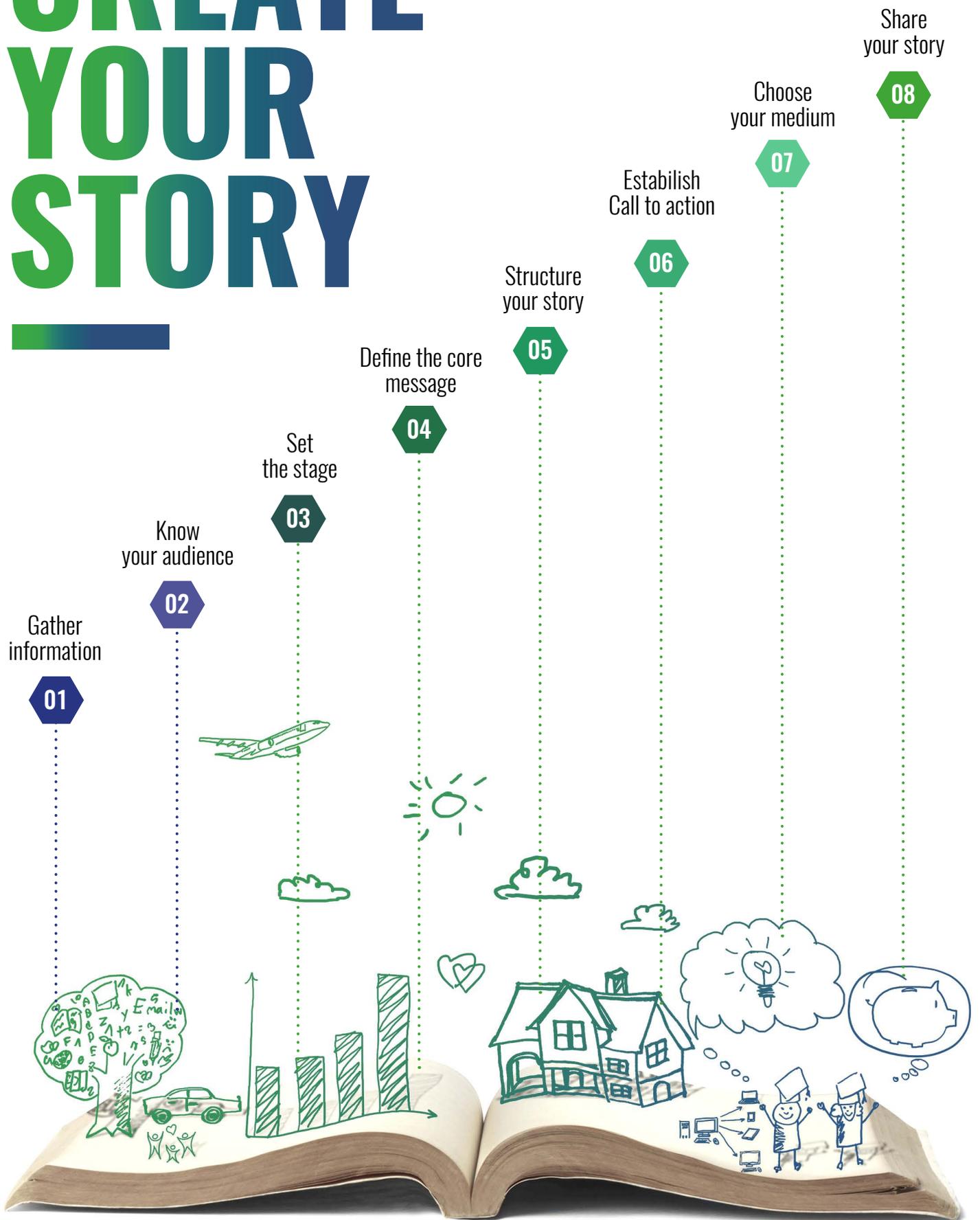
The ending doesn't always have to be a good one. Your character might not overcome their challenge for example, however there are always lessons to be learned along the way.





Certain people are particularly skilled at storytelling and often do so on behalf of their organization. These are usually marketers, copywriters or content producers. Yet the truth is everyone can tell a story. But what is it that makes a compelling story and how can we improve our ability to tell one?

# CREATE YOUR STORY



# 1 GATHER INFORMATION

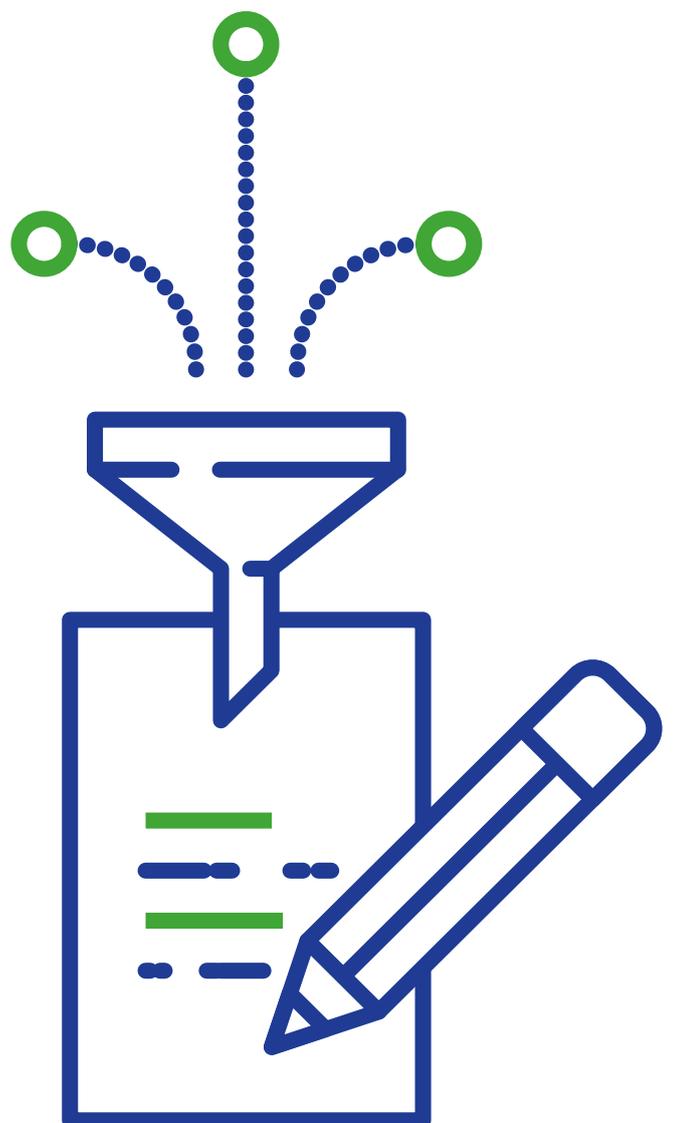
Depending on the format of your story, you will need to gather information from various sources before you begin. You should carry out thorough research into the project or topic that lies at the heart of your story to understand the background and country context.

You may wish to interview key stakeholders involved in the project, as well as the beneficiaries that will ultimately benefit from it. Interviews are a key part of information gathering so it's important to establish trust and build rapport as you may need to ask complex or sensitive questions.

The internet is a great resource for information gathering. Think of it as your personal digital library, full of countless pieces of information and inspiration - all available from the comfort of your own desk.

Everything from encyclopedias, books, newspapers, articles, reports, data and the latest research will be extremely helpful during this process. However, you must always ensure the validity of all sources to sources information is both accurate and up to date.

A picture is worth a thousand words, so consider what photography you could use to compliment your story. Ideally this would be of the main character, the community your project will impact or the location that it will take place. Choose an image that will captivate the audience and put a human face to your story.



# 2 KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Who wants and needs to hear your story? What motivates them to take action?

Do some research on your target audience and define their personas if appropriate. Consider who might be reading, viewing, or listening to your story - and adjust your tone accordingly.

## Common IsDB audiences



Beneficiaries



Executing Agencies



Governments  
of Member Countries



Special Envoys  
(SDGs, Advocacy, etc.)



General  
Public



### Tip

**Capture the attention of the audience quickly.  
Surprise them. Teach them something new.  
Speak to their interests and world views.  
Enable the audience to find themselves inside  
the story you are telling and make it their own.**

# 3 SET THE STAGE

The setting is the world of your story. This is the opening that pulls the audience in and introduces them to the character and context. Think of the place that your character inhabits. What does it look like? What does it smell and sound like?

How does it make your character feel? Are they hopeful for its future? Are they concerned about its present path? What physical details about this place reveal deeper truths? Be creative and specific in your description. It will help bring the world of your story alive for the audience and transport them to a place they may never have visited.

- Introduce your character: From what perspective do you wish to tell their story?
- Paint the scene: Describe the when and where of your story using descriptive and engaging language.



**Tip**

**First person stories tend to be powerful, but you might also consider telling your story from the perspective of a staff member, beneficiary, supporter or community member.**



# 4 DEFINE THE CORE MESSAGE

Whether your story is one page or ten, it should have a core message. Like the foundation of a home, it must be established before moving forward.

Is your story raising awareness of issues faced by a community? Are you trying to explain how your project helps them to overcome these?

What is the point of your story? What is the core message? Combine your solution and mission into one idea that makes it easy for the audience to remember.



Tip

**Try to summarize your story using two to three short sentences. If you can't do that, then you need to work on your core message.**



# 5 STRUCTURE YOUR STORY

To determine the structure of your story, figure out how you want the audience to feel or react as they read it. This will help you weave different elements into the structure of your story, capture the audience's attention and inspire them to take action.

**All great stories usually include the following tried and tested structure:**





## The Challenge: Introducing the issue

This part of the story introduces the challenge through a character. How does this problem impact them or their community directly? What obstacles must they overcome to find a solution?

Describe how the character or community faces seemingly insurmountable obstacles to turn their solution into reality. This should be dramatic, inspiring, accessible, and emotionally moving.

### Things to consider

- What is the need, problem, or challenge you are trying to address?
- How does it affect your character? How has it impacted their life and those around them?
- Use this to build empathy for the community and create a connection with the audience.
- What are the deeper social causes of the problem? Why is there a need for your project?
- Describe the social, environmental, political, or economic climate.

## Exercise



This is the story of Fatimatou Idris, a young Chadian woman who develops a cataract in her eye but cannot afford treatment. The author starts the story with Fatimatou as a young child, so the audience follows her on her journey as she grows up. This immediately builds a sense of empathy and familiarity. Fatimatou's eyesight deteriorates to the point, where she is unable to care for her baby, whom she has never properly seen. Her husband seeks help to alleviate her condition but is unsuccessful.

[Read the full story here](#)



## TASK

Who is the main character in the story? What challenge do they face? How does it impact their life or those around them? What obstacles or conflict must they overcome?



## The Big Idea: A turning point

This part of the story introduces the solution. What is your solution and how does it fit within the bigger picture of creating change? Describe your project and solution, and how they impact the community you are trying to help.

### Things to consider

- What's unique or transformative about your solution?
- How are you seeing the central challenge in a new light?
- How is your approach different from what has been used in the past?

## Exercise



This is the story of Amal Hadid, an Egyptian graduate who struggles to find employment and is encouraged to get involved in agriculture, a sector she knows little about. She joins a training program that provides young rural women with the training, support and resources they need to raise livestock as a means of sustainable employment. The program is tailored to the women's needs and allows them to balance their work and family commitments. They are also given a loan to purchase their own cattle, which they can sell at the end of the program to generate income and start their own livestock ventures.

[Read the full story here](#)



## TASK

What is the solution being implemented here? How does it help those facing challenges? What makes it transformative?



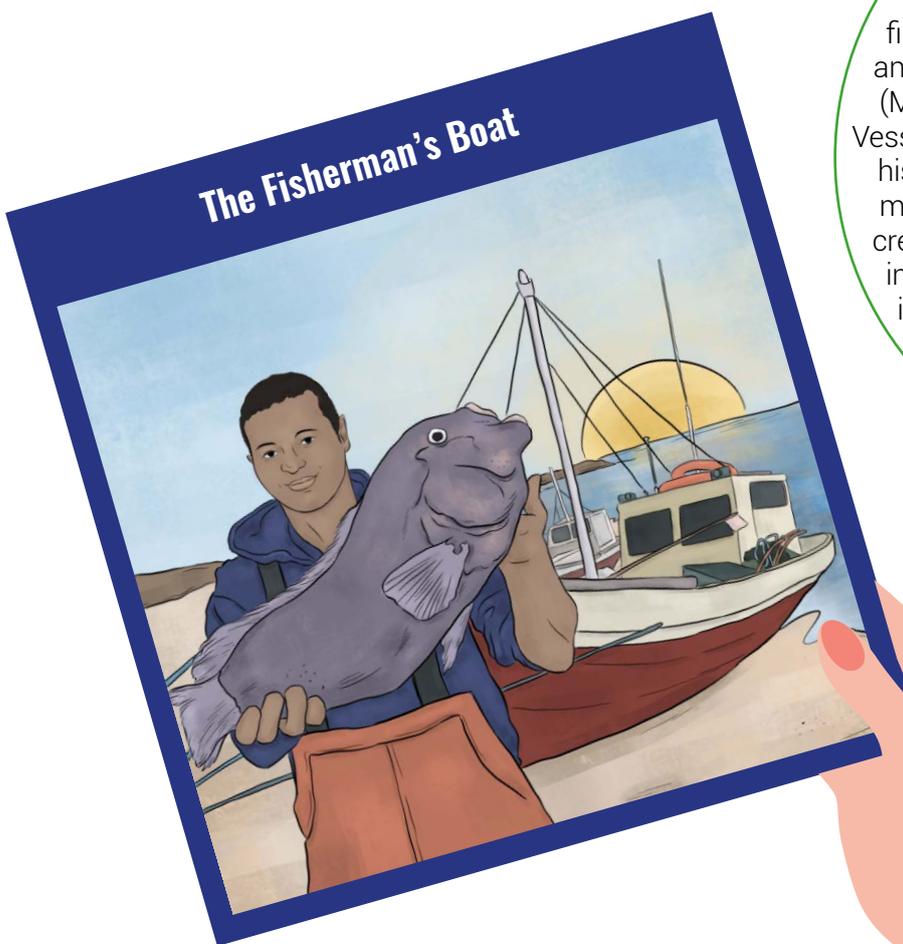
## The How To: Solution in progress

This part of the story focuses on the process of solving the challenge and implementing your solution. It allows you to demonstrate IsDB's values and best practices in a creative and effective way. It should inspire and give hope to the audience by showing them change is possible.

### Things to consider

- How does your solution address the needs that you've identified? What would be a good example or scenario to illustrate this? How is your character's life easier as a result?
- What made implementation challenging and why? How did you work around this?
- How are you involving the people directly affected by the problem - community members, partners, businesses, government, country, etc.

## Exercise



This is the story of Ahmed Zain, a young Maldivian fisherman whose business was badly impacted by the financial crisis of 2009. After hearing about an initiative run by the Maldives Islamic Bank (MIB), Ahmed successfully applies for MIB's Vessel Financing Facility and is able to purchase his own fishing vessel. He starts to generate more income and is able to hire a total of 28 crew members: providing them with a steady income during a troubled economy. Ahmed is also able to sponsor two of his siblings to complete their degrees thus fulfilling his father's dream for all his children to be educated.

[Read the full story here](#)



## TASK

What is the solution to the challenge and how does it work? How does it affect the main character and their community? Is there any collaboration involved?



## The Impact: Transformative change

This part of the story focuses on describing the impact of the solution; providing convincing evidence that illustrates return on investment potential. It includes some measures of impact and shows the audience the difference your project is making.

### Things to consider

- What impact have you made thus far? What qualitative or quantitative data could you incorporate?
- How did people directly affected by the problem respond to your solution? What is the positive difference in their lives? Think about one to three concrete examples.
- Use strong quotes from your character to demonstrate impact in an authentic way.

## Exercise



This is the story of Fatima Al Jadaa, a Palestinian girl who learns to sew after she is no longer able to attend school due to her disabilities. She works hard and saves enough money to open her own tailoring shop. However, one day Fatima's shop is destroyed by Israeli soldiers. Shortly after, Fatima is awarded IsDB's Prize for Women's Contribution to Development. She is extremely happy and uses her prize money to rebuild her business and buy new sewing machines. Soon Fatima is employing over 200 local women and teaching them vital skills; enabling them to support their families and build a better life for themselves.

[Read the full story here](#)



## TASK

What impact does the prize have on the beneficiary's life? What would her situation be if she hadn't received it? What tangible outcomes does she achieve as a result of it? What does the impact mean for her and her community?

# 6 ESTABLISH CALL-TO-ACTION

Your objective and call-to-action are similar, but your CTA establishes the action you want the audience to take after reading your story.

What exactly do you want the audience to do after reading your story? Do you want them to donate money, subscribe to a newsletter, or share the successes of IsDB? Outline this alongside your objective to make sure they line up.

For example, if your objective is to foster community or collaboration, your CTA might be to “Share with friends and family.” Or if you wish to gain insight from the audience, you might ask them to complete a survey at the end of your story or to get in touch with IsDB for more information.



**Tip**

**Consider how you are going to measure the success of your story. Are you giving the audience action steps they understand and can complete? Clearly state the urgency of the action and make it clear what you want the audience to do.**



# 7 CHOOSE YOUR MEDIUM

Stories can take many shapes and forms. Some stories are read, some are watched, while others are listened to. Your story medium depends on your story type, as well as resources such as time and money. Here are a few different ways to consider telling your story.



## Written Story

A written story is told through articles, blog posts, case studies or books. These are mostly text and may include images. Written stories are by far the most affordable and attainable method of storytelling as they simply require a free word processor, or pen and paper.



## Spoken Story

A spoken story is told in person, such as during a presentation, a pitch, or an IsDB Spotlight Session. TED talks are considered spoken stories due to their live, unedited nature. Spoken stories typically require more practice and skill to convey messages and elicit emotion in others.



## Digital Story

A digital story is told through a variety of media, such as video, animation, interactive stories, and even games. This option is effective for emotionally resonant stories, as well as active, visual stories, which is why they're usually more expensive to produce.



## Audio Story

An audio story is spoken aloud but recorded, which is what sets it apart from the spoken story. Audio stories are usually in podcast form, and with today's technology, creating an audio story is more affordable than ever.

# 8 SHARE YOUR STORY

It's important to choose the right channels and medium to reach your target audience. The more you share your story, the more engagement you can expect.

## Digital media

Most organizations use their websites to publish blogs, case studies, whitepapers, infographics and videos. These are just a handful of digital content types available to publish online.

## Social media

These are networking sites your audience visit and where you'll want to promote the content you've created, as well as engage with customers and stakeholders. While digital media is more likely to describe the content itself, social media is one of the places you'll go to promote that content.

## Email

Newsletters and email are a great way to send out highly customized content to a segment of your audience. Because individuals subscribe to receive your emails, they're more likely to be engaged.

## Print

Many organizations are again publishing in print, including beautiful print magazines that offer a look and feel not available online.

## Events

Live events and online events are also considered 'content'. They may be big industry showcases, smaller executive events, or even a webinar-based series, where you can share your stories with attendees.



# APPENDIX

## ● Checklist

- 01** Write like you speak. Read your work out loud.
- 02** Use simple language that's easy to understand but be descriptive.
- 03** Listen to the natural pauses in your sentences and add punctuation.
- 04** Think about pacing. Follow a long, challenging sentence with a shorter and simpler one. Think about rhythm and transitions.
- 05** Be brief but know when and where to add color.
- 06** Consider your audience when choosing your tone.
- 07** Consider the medium you'll use to present your story.
- 08** Proofread your writing to check for typos, grammar, and spelling mistakes.
- 09** Ask someone to check your writing and provide feedback.
- 10** Consider including photography.

# STORYTELLING CANVAS

The storytelling canvas makes it easier to construct a story. This tool allows you to design stories that resonate by harnessing engaging, insightful, controlled, and inspiring elements.

1. Subject		2. Goal		3. Audience	
What is the story about?		What do you want to achieve with this story?		Who is your story's audience? What are their needs?	
4. Before	5. Set the scene	6. Make your point	7. Conclusion	8. After	
What does your audience think, feel, know and want before they have read your story?	What is the context of your story? What should be set up or explained to the audience from the beginning?	Present your core message. What is the point of your story? Deliver your mission and solution in one idea.	The end of your story, how does it conclude? What is your call to action?	What does your audience think, feel, know and want after they have read your story?	

## Subject

What is the title and subject of your story?

## Goal

What is the goal you want to achieve?  
Why are you telling the story?

## Audience

Who is your audience? Map them as a persona e.g. age, gender, profession, likes.

## Before

What does your audience feel, think, know and want before they hear your story?

## Set the scene

Create a context based on emotion, ethics, or facts that will help your audience get into the mood of things.

## Make your point

What is the main message you want to come across which will help support a change of heart with your audience?

## Conclusion

What are the arguments, facts, and anecdotes in your story? Where are you going to place them?

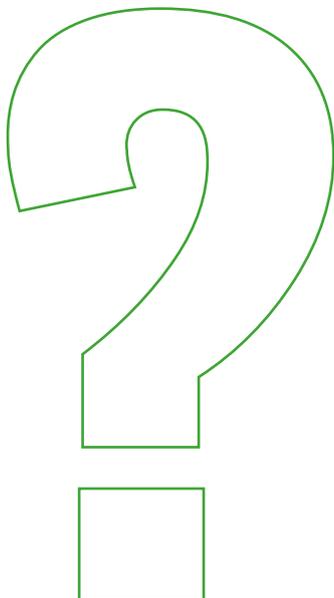
## After

What does your audience feel, think, know and want after they hear your story? Be specific.

# INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

It is important to inform beneficiaries how their information will be used and where possible to obtain signed permission. These questions should be asked in addition to those listed under the story structure section.

Project Name:	_____
Location:	_____
Date:	_____
Beneficiary Name:	_____
Date of Birth:	_____
Gender:	_____
Location: Village/City/Country	_____
Relationship Status: Single/Married/Widowed	_____
Children: Names and ages if applicable	_____
Occupation:	_____
Job Description:	_____
Day to day activities:	_____



## QUESTIONS

1. What are your goals and ambitions?
2. How will this project impact you?
3. What challenges do you currently face?
4. How will this project address these challenges?
5. What kind of help do you want from the IsDB?
6. How will this project benefit you and your community?
7. Have you experienced any issues as a result of this project?

# RESOURCES

Available in IsDB Group Library

## BOOKS

### **Stories at work: Using stories to improve communication and build relationships**

Terrence L. Gargiulo. Gargiulo, Terrence L

### **Appreciative inquiry and knowledge management: A social constructionist perspective**

Tojo Thatchenkery, Dilpreet Chowdhry. Thatchenkery, Tojo Joseph

## JOURNALS

### **Funding Is All About Storytelling**

By: Qureshi, Danish; Sponsel, Elizabeth. Tax Executive. Periodical-Sep/Oct2020, Vol. 72 Issue 5, p20-27. 8p.

### **Corporate Storytelling Perspectives**

By: McLellan, Hilary. Journal for Quality & Participation. Spring2006, Vol. 29 Issue 1, p17-20. 4p.

### **The timeless power of storytelling**

By: Baker, Bill; Boyle, Cookie. Journal of Sponsorship. Dec2009, Vol. 3 Issue 1, p79-87. 9p. 1 Diagram.

### **Restoring a Culture of Ethical and Spiritual Values: A Role for Leader Storytelling**

By: Driscoll, Cathy; McKee, Margaret. Journal of Business Ethics. Jun2007, Vol. 73 Issue 2, p205-217. 13p. DOI: 10.1007/s10551-006-9191-5.

### **Storytelling Defines Your Organizational Culture**

By: Brady, William H.; Haley, Shar. Physician Executive. Jan/Feb2013, Vol. 39 Issue 1, p40-43. 4p. 1 Color Photograph, 1 Black and White Photograph.

### **Managing public affairs through storytelling**

By: Heugens, Pursey. Journal of Public Affairs (14723891). May2002, Vol. 2 Issue 2, p57. 14p. 2 Charts. DOI: 10.1002/pa.94.

## ARTICLES

[www.forbes.com/sites/mikekappel/2018/01/17/5-essential-tips-for-business-storytelling/?sh=6e6808b5454d](http://www.forbes.com/sites/mikekappel/2018/01/17/5-essential-tips-for-business-storytelling/?sh=6e6808b5454d)

[www.hbr.org/2003/06/storytelling-that-moves-people](http://www.hbr.org/2003/06/storytelling-that-moves-people)

[www.skyword.com/contentstandard/from-stats-to-stories-the-evolution-of-data-storytelling](http://www.skyword.com/contentstandard/from-stats-to-stories-the-evolution-of-data-storytelling)

[www.socialmediatoday.com/news/how-to-use-storytelling-to-connect-with-your-audience-on-instagram/556989](http://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/how-to-use-storytelling-to-connect-with-your-audience-on-instagram/556989)



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