



# Storytelling Toolkit

*Lessons Learned from NHT's "Where Will We Live?"*

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NATIONAL  
HOUSING  
TRUST

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## WHY STORYTELLING IS NECESSARY FOR ADVOCACY

*“Storytelling is fundamental to human societies - and therefore, to social change.”<sup>1</sup>*

Kathleen Palmer’s story begins in Columbus, Ohio, where she lived in a dilapidated apartment with no gas or electricity. It was her third apartment in less than a year. Since the birth of her daughter and becoming a single mother, Kathleen struggled to maintain a job and shuffled from one poor quality home to the next. She feared that the Department of Social Services would take her child if they observed their current living conditions, so she made the wrenching decision to have her daughter live apart from her with a friend. Once wary of receiving government aid, Kathleen quickly realized that housing assistance would be the only way to prevent the choice between child custody and living on the streets.

To increase public support for societal investment in affordable housing, we need to change the way we advocate and build a broader coalition beyond traditional housing stakeholders. We strongly believe that conversations about housing policy must include community members who can demonstrate that affordable housing benefits more than residents but their neighborhoods as well. By lifting and amplifying their voices, we can build awareness of affordable housing needs, and influence and create policy that works better for everyone.

### **This is where storytelling comes in.**

In 2017, the National Housing Trust (NHT) and Enterprise Community Partners (Enterprise) launched *Where Will We Live?*, a campaign designed to shift the narrative around affordable housing in support for housing resources. In the following year, we traveled across the country and listened to the stories of residents and community members about the powerful impact that access to affordable housing had on their lives. We spoke to a marine veteran in Saco, Maine who lived in his car for two years after a developer acquired and demolished his humble apartment to make room for a luxury condo. We spoke to a nurse in Cedar Rapids, Iowa whose back



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<sup>1</sup> FrameWorks Institute (2019), [“Storytelling for Social Change”](#)

surgery left her unable to care for herself or others. We spoke to a young woman working to finish her degree so that she and her daughter could have better opportunities in their future. In total, we spoke to more than 160 residents, staff and community members and across their varied backgrounds and experiences, one element was prevalent in every story that we collected: Stable, affordable housing made a positive impact upon each individual and the community in which he or she lived.

We took these stories and developed a story gallery to share with elected officials and community leaders to highlight how affordable housing directly impacts residents and their surrounding communities. These are not just numbers, facts or figures. The stories present real people: nurses, students, immigrants, refugees and single parents. Sharing their stories helps to educate and advocate for additional resources to help break the poverty cycle and ensure everyone has access to an affordable, quality home.

**Storytelling is an effective tool that communicators can use to shift the narrative when discussing affordable housing resources.**

The stories in the [Where Will We Live?](#) gallery paint a vivid picture that help to deconstruct and explain a complicated issue, demonstrating that a well-documented story can change perspectives and inspire action through empathy and shared experiences. We want other housing advocates to be able to do the same. This toolkit is a guide for advocates to replicate the National Housing Trust's efforts and successfully employ digital, visual and audio storytelling strategies within their advocacy tactics. This contents within this toolkit will provide communicators help with the following:

- Storytelling basics: how to develop an audience, key message and framework for stories;
- Tools, methods and resources for collecting stories;
- Establishing relationships to collect resident stories; and
- Producing and distributing stories for outreach and communications efforts.

Storytelling provides a compelling personal perspective to complement hard facts and data. We hope that the information included in this guide will help housing advocates looking to effectively include the resident narrative within their communications.

## STORYTELLING BASICS

Storytelling is one of the most effective means of communication. A good story takes an important issue and makes it interesting, and, if done well, these stories can engage audiences, convey information and influence action. In short, effectively incorporating storytelling into your education and advocacy efforts can help enact change. In order to do this, it is important to understand the basic elements of the story that you are trying to tell.

### Who is your audience?

Every story has an audience, which is comprised of the individuals, groups, and communities that have leverage or power over the situation that you are trying to change. It is the responsibility of the communicator to bring a story to life by connecting with their audience. But who is your target audience?

Some campaigns will say that their target audience is “everyone” or “the general public”, but we urge you to resist this temptation! There is no such thing as the general public! Everyone has a varying degree of interests, beliefs, concerns, and most importantly, influence or power. If you tried to shape your message to reach everyone all at once, you would have nothing to say at all. Additionally, not everyone will be interested, no matter how passionately you believe in and pursue your message. Spending all your time, money and resources to reach the general public will spread your message thin and yield a lower success rate than if you concentrate your efforts and resources on a targeted, actionable group that is more likely to yield more significant results.

#### **Lessons Learned:**



#### **Identifying Audience**

*In its genesis, Where Will We Live’s primary goal was to highlight the benefit of affordable housing to protect federal funding for affordable housing programs. Because the House and Senate Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development (THUD) Appropriations Subcommittees vote on funding for these programs, we determined members of Congress on these subcommittees were among our primary audiences and to whom we would focus the campaign. This made a huge impact on where we collected our resident stories, what questions we asked those residents and the tone of the stories we decided to adopt for the campaign itself.*

## Primary Audience

Your **primary audience**, also known as the **target audience**, are the decision makers. These are the people who make decisions directly affecting the outcome of your campaign's goals and to whom the campaign will be directly communicated. Ask these questions about your campaign to determine who your primary audience members are.

**What is the overall goal of your campaign?**

**What needs to change in order to make this happen?**

**Who has the power to make this change happen?**

In order to strategically develop a story that will compel your targeted audience to act, you must consider their biases, language, media consumption habits and characteristics. All these components will directly affect the content and distribution strategy for the stories you plan to tell. Knowing who your audience is will also shape your message so that you can persuade your audience to follow your call to action. For example, do you know what compels your audience? Do their inherent biases give your campaigns goals an advantage or disadvantage? Where is your audience located? How will this affect how you deliver your message to them or the very message itself?

### **Lessons Learned:**

#### **Location Location Location**



*Determining who your audience is may determine where your videos will take place. If you are conducting a national campaign, your messaging may be broad and encompassing, but if you're conducting a local campaign, specific nuances such as local traditions, businesses or colloquial terms may resonate with your audience more effectively.*

*NHT owns a few properties along the east coast and as far west as Minnesota, but not all of them encompassed the 15 key states we needed to reach the congressional members we identified including in Ohio, West Virginia and Michigan. Our grant funding and partnerships with the members of NHT's Policy Working Group (PWG) and the Stewards for Affordable Housing for the Future (SAHF) made it possible for us to reach those states in the first year of the campaign. In our second year however, our funds limited us to stay closer to our home in Washington, DC.*

*Consider where your target is from. Do you have the capacity to travel there or any relationships/partnerships with people who are already there? How will this limit or enhance your campaign's capabilities?*

## Secondary Audience

You will also want to determine your secondary audience members before starting a campaign. Your **secondary audience**, also called the **hidden audience**, are the people who can either influence your primary audience or play an important role in their decision making. They cannot make the decisions or enact change the way the primary audience can, but they will still be affected by your message. Ask yourself these questions to determine who your secondary audience is:

Who can influence your target audience?

How will they be affected by your message?

For *Where Will We Live's* case, our primary audience (the Members of Congress on the THUD Appropriations Subcommittees) would be greatly influenced by their constituents and other congressional leaders who either supported or questioned affordable housing. This impacted our approach to our campaign—we made the decision to collect resident stories directly from constituents of THUD subcommittee members and vocal supporters of housing programs in Congress with the plan to present these videos in our first year of the campaign.



## What Is Your Message?

What are the goals of the campaign you are working on? What change do you hope to create through it? How do you plan to communicate that to your audiences?

The Public Relations Society of America identifies key messages as<sup>2</sup>:

**The takeaway, master narrative, elevator pitch; essence of what you want to communicate.**

**What's needed to engage people.**

**Bite-sized summations that articulate: what you do, what you stand for, how you are different and what value you bring.**

A well-developed key message can help prioritize information, ensure consistency and continuity in all external and internal communications (whether you're discussing the campaign with your colleagues, stakeholders, or our target audience), and measure successes. It may be tempting to skip this part, but short of collecting stories, developing your key messages is the most important step in forming a campaign.

What are your messaging needs? An effective campaign is built around clear messaging that states the problem, the solution proposed (by the campaign goals), and the action the audience can take to reach the campaign goal. The best key messages are clear, concise, credible, and designed to be a catalyst for the change you want to see. They should be relevant, compelling, memorable, and active. Overall, your key message should reflect what your call to action will be.

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<sup>2</sup> PRSA (2001), "[Key Message Development: Building a Foundation for Effective Communications](#)"

## **Lessons Learned:**

### **Multiple Audiences, Multiple Messages**



*If your campaign has multiple audiences, you may need to develop multiple messages for the campaign. The Where Will We Live? campaign not only directed resident stories to congressional members to shift the narrative around affordable housing, for example, it also focused on giving resident leaders the resources and knowledge to advocate for affordable housing on their own behalf and later expanded its audience to include community leaders as well.*

*In addition to the overarching message that affordable housing is important and needed increased funding, our team needed to develop messaging intended specifically for our congressional members and separate messaging designed specifically for our resident leaders.*

**Message 1: (Congress-Targeted) Federal funding for affordable housing is beneficial and must be prioritized.**

**Message 2: (Resident-Targeted) We need resident leaders to advocate for affordable housing.**

**Message 3: (Community Leader Targeted) Federal funding for affordable housing not only supports low-income residents but the surrounding community as well.**

Avoid conflating or combining the various messages into one—your different audiences will likely be associated with discrete goals and objectives. Their messages will need to be tailored specifically for the audience in mind and the goals and outcomes that you hope to see from them.

## **How will you frame your message?**

Remember: not all stories resonate with every audience. You would not explain most concepts to a child the same way you would an adult. Similarly, when using storytelling to promote advocacy, it is important to bear in mind that different audiences will vary in topic comprehension, inherent biases and a variety of other details that will shape your messaging, including what their call to action will be. This will determine what questions to ask during the interviews, which residents to interview, and what elements are necessary to include in the final edited video.

Housing advocates face a particularly difficult challenge in having to frame their messaging to both broaden public support for affordable housing and enact policy policies and programs that promote equity and inclusion. In order to avoid messaging frameworks that often backfire on housing communicators, we highly recommend reading “You Don’t Have to Live Here,” a study conducted by Enterprise and FrameWorks Institute, which equips housing and community development advocates with evidence-based messaging recommendations that can be used to frame a strong affordable housing and community development agenda.<sup>3</sup>

**Once you have established your audience, your message, and your plan to present the stories, it is time to begin.**

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/PDF/You\\_Don't\\_Have\\_to\\_Live\\_Here.pdf](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/PDF/You_Don't_Have_to_Live_Here.pdf)

## STORY PREPARATION

As you determine your scope of work, reflect upon what tools you will need to accomplish your goals. Storytelling is a process that can be replicated by any organization. Your budget and staff capacity will ultimately determine the scale of production. Consider what you can afford and what you can accomplish when gathering the tools necessary for producing your stories.

Tools and Methods: What resources do you have?

| What WWVL Worked With |  | The Bare Minimum   |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| <b>Main Resources</b> |  |  |
| <i>Video</i>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 DSLR Camera &amp; tripod</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Smartphone</li> <li>&amp; cell phone tri-pod</li> </ul>   |
| <i>Audio</i>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 external audio recorder</li> <li>Lapel microphone</li> <li>Wireless audio receiver</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A second smart phone dedicated to for audio</li> </ul>  |
| <i>Personnel</i>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 dedicated videographer</li> <li>2 part-time coordinators</li> </ul>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 part-time staff</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Main Resources</b> |  |  |
| <i>File Storage</i>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>External 1T Hard Drive</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One Drive</li> <li>Google Drive</li> <li>DropBox</li> </ul>   |
| <i>Video Editing</i>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adobe Audition, Adobe Premier</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VideoPad,</li> <li>Hit Film Express</li> <li>Openshot</li> <li>iMovie</li> <li>Microsoft Movie Maker</li> </ul> |
| <i>Stock footage</i>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pexels Video</li> <li>Pixabay</li> <li>Vedevo</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pexels Video</li> <li>Pixabay</li> <li>Vedevo</li> </ul>  |

## Story Formats for Storytelling Tactics

### **First-Person Interview**

Footage is primarily a one-on-one interview between the interviewer and the subject. B-ROLL and supporting images can be used to provide additional context.

### **Documentary Style (Long Form)**

Like compilation videos with B-Roll and supporting images used to provide additional context. Narration is typical.

### **Compilation Interviews**

Like the above, but a combination of multiple interviews cut and edited together to form one video.

### **One Pagers**

Don't have equipment to edit film? Document the stories in print instead. A one pager is also useful for supplementing information with the videos.

Like writing an outline for a research paper before you begin creating a storyboard will give you a visual of what your next steps will be while keeping in mind the messaging and framework you developed in the beginning. A **storyboard** is a shorthanded visual outline that represents the shots that will eventually be filmed. Storyboarding is often used in television and film, and advertisers will use it filming<sup>4</sup> a commercial or short to make the production period more efficient. It also ensures you collect all the necessary elements for the video, beyond the basic audio and visual information, including but not limited to:

- Additional interviews and soundbites;
- Text and call out boxes for context or emphasis;
- B-ROLL images and videos;
- Transitions between scenes and cuts;
- Background music;
- Intro/outro;
- And other effects or note that will further enhance the narrative.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://smallbusiness.chron.com/advertising-storyboard-25265.html>

## IDENTIFY YOUR SUBJECTS

By the end of its first year, WWWL interviewed more than 160 low-income residents and property staff members about their experience in affordable housing and the importance of maintaining its federal funding. Our colleagues often ask how we managed to get in touch with so many people, and our answer is always the same: **make use of your connections to go straight to the source.**

Strangers cannot simply walk into a community and ask people to share their stories. Collecting personal stories, particularly from residents living in affordable housing, requires **significant** communication on the front end. This includes coordinating the interviews and identifying residents who can meet the parameters that you

### Lessons Learned:

#### Leveraging Connections

*Where Will We Live? campaign's property and community visits were made possible through pre-existing relationships. Our organization owns and manages some of properties in the states we intended to visit and thus we had easy access to those residents in Virginia, Maryland and Washington, DC, but we had little to no presence in half of the targeted states.*

*On our own, we would not have been able to achieve the goals we set for the campaign, but we were fortunate to have a wide network of housing developers and advocates to call upon. As a result, our visits were facilitated with the help of local partners to reach residents at their own properties in the states we would not have been able to reach otherwise.*



determined at the beginning of this process. In many cases, this means directly contacting the property manager of the community that you wish to visit and asking for their help. Larger organizations may prefer having a representative facilitate the interview, so that residents recognize a familiar face and know that their property owner or manager supports the project.

### Identify Your Connections

Reach out to the following to gauge interest and willingness to participate in your campaign:

- Properties you own/developed
- Partners' properties
- Connections through membership organizations or other groups
- Connections with organizations connected with other owners/developers/property managers
- Connections with organizations/groups associated with properties through resident services, supportive services, or other on-site programs

## Establish Your Connections

Ask your contact to connect you directly with property staff to set up a preliminary discussion to get them on board. Be deliberate about setting up a pre-interview or a pre-screen conversation on the phone. This helps, more than emailing back and forth, to solidify the visit and

establish relationships with the party you will be working with. A pre-interview conversation also may help you determine if the interviewee is a good fit for your scope of work.

## Coordinating Logistics

If you are working with a property, ask your connection to select residents with stories that best fit the scope of work you hope to accomplish. If you are conducting community interviews, you will likely have determined who is the best fit for your project during the initial call. Depending on the desired length of your finished product, each interview will take between 20 to 45 minutes to conduct, including time to set up and break down before and after each interview. Be mindful of this and try not to overschedule the number of residents you will interview. We recommend three to four interviews per property. A higher number may be time consuming especially when working with limited resources and personnel.

### **Lessons Learned:**

#### ***Property managers and resident service coordinators***



*If you are searching for residents to interview at different properties, you will most likely be put in touch with the property manager (PM) or resident services coordinator (RSC). PMs/RSCs spend the most time with residents and will be able to identify those residents most likely to be willing and effective at telling their stories.*

*Be very clear with the PM/RSCs about your project's goals and how you hope to achieve them. Explain how and why you have defined your goals, audience, and messaging strategies. Create and share a one pager as a reference.*

## Lessons Learned: Coordinating Logistics



1. Be very clear what your parameters are for your interview. If you want to reach a specific group (e.g. seniors or someone who can speak on a particular topic) mention this upfront. If your final product features the audio of the interview, your interviewees should be able to articulate their experiences, in addition to having a story that helps make the case for affordable housing<sup>5</sup>.
2. It is preferable to conduct the interview in the interviewee's home environment to make them feel comfortable and to obtain some footage of their personal domain. If you must conduct interviews in a community room, request that the room be reserved for the time you plan to conduct interviews, to prevent noise and interruption.
3. If you are collecting resident stories, schedule a time that works with the resident's schedule. This will likely be an evening. Be prepared for the issue of child care to come up. Conducting an interview with a child in the room can be distracting, but in many cases, a single parent does not have the luxury of childcare.
4. Share your interview questions and information sheets in advance, so your interviewee remembers why they are talking to you and what they should be ready to discuss. Be prepared to bring more with you on the visit in case they do not receive it!
5. Above all else, **ensure that the media-release form is acquired and signed.** This is the form that legally allows you to record someone and redistribute it for your own purposes. This includes people in pictures and b-roll footage as well. If there is no media release form, you will be required to block out the person's face or exclude that sample of media altogether. The form also should include details of what you intend to do with their likeness and image as well as space for contact information and any additional addition you may need to know.

<sup>5</sup> If you're in a multi-lingual community, don't be deterred if the PM/RSC recommends someone who speaks a different language—rather, consider adding someone to the team for that visit who can translate between both parties so that all voices (English-speaking or not) can be represented.



## Making a Selection

When asked to select residents for interviews, property managers/resident coordinators may ask for criteria to follow. Reference the goals, objectives and framework of the project when determining these criteria and keep in mind the following characteristics of a great story and storyteller:

**RELATABILITY:** the more people identify with a story, the more likely they are to be persuaded. Below are angles people often identify with:

**Geographic location**  
**Socioeconomic status**

**Race and Age**  
**Family Size**

**DRAMA:** Stories with emotional dynamics catch the audience’s attention. For our purposes, stories should have a barrier that the storyteller needs to overcome, such as:

**Job loss**  
**Divorce**  
**Domestic violence situations**

**Sudden illness**  
**Loss from natural disaster**  
**Other unexpected lifestyle changes**

**IMMERSION:** The more the audience can put themselves into a story, the more likely they are to change their opinions. A story with a “that could happen to anyone” component is very powerful. Some examples are:

**Sudden illness**  
**Job loss**  
**Chronic illness or disability**

**Single Parents**  
**Mental Health Challenges**  
**Elderly**

Not all stories have to contain all, or even any, of these characteristics to be powerful. Some stories don’t fit into a box or archetype, which is what makes them powerful. These descriptions are merely observations of what typically works well.

## STORY COLLECTING

Conducting resident and community interviews can be both fulfilling and exhausting at the same time. Collecting and producing personal anecdotes of people's experiences requires respect, patience and open mindedness. Even if property managers think residents are good candidates for the project, individuals may be hesitant to share their experiences. It is the interviewer's role to relate to them and make them feel comfortable sharing their stories. Because of this complicated dynamic, it is important to choose an interviewer with high emotional intelligence.

You cannot predict what will happen during an interview. Storytellers might become emotional or have stories that may be difficult to hear. Interviewers should be prepared for the unexpected and feel confident in their ability to respond appropriately. Sometimes it helps to have someone on the team who resembles the community with whom you are speaking. This individual should be able make strong gut decisions and be able to relate to property managers and residents as easily as they can with executives and property developers.

### Property Visit Tips

- 1.** Be prepared to be both punctual and flexible with schedules.
- 2.** Collect B-ROLL (supplemental video or photo footage of your interviewee, location or anything else mentioned in context of the video) before and after conducting interviews. Capture the surroundings and places that will most likely be mentioned in the interview (e.g. the building, public space, rooms, kitchens, etc.), and double back to capture B-ROLL of specific things mentioned.
- 3.** If possible, ask questions about the property prior to your visit so that you have as much context as possible before visiting. E.g. How many families/residents are in the building? What is their demographic profile, e.g. families, seniors, single parents, etc. What is special about the community/building? What federal programs support the building or residents? How long are the property's affordability restrictions? Has the property benefited from energy efficiency or renewable energy improvements? What is the surrounding community like?

## Interview Best Practices:

- 1.** Silence your cell phone and all others' in the room. If possible, limit the people in the room to just yourself and the interviewer.
- 2.** Conduct the interview in a closed or separate room to ensure there is no distracting background noise (HVAC, refrigerator, noisy road/hallway). These will be difficult to edit out during post-production and should be avoided whenever possible.
- 3.** Remember to get a complete introduction: Name, age, occupation, and property name if applicable.
- 4.** Focus on asking open-ended questions instead of "yes" or "no" questions. If the interviewee answers briefly, don't be afraid to ask them to elaborate on the subject.
- 5.** Do not cut off the interviewee. Let them finish their sentences and thoughts.
- 6.** Do not be afraid to ask the interviewee to repeat themselves if the sound bite was distorted in any way, such as an interruption, unexpected noise, or equipment malfunction.
- 7.** Only use non-verbal feedback during the interview to avoid background noise (e.g. nod head, exaggerated facial expressions, hand gestures, etc.).
- 8.** Be respectful/professional, but light-hearted. People are more likely to be open to share when they feel comfortable with the company they have.
- 9.** Reference your questions but avoid reading them as a script. Engage more in a conversation, rather than a Q&A, and don't be afraid to ask follow-up questions.
- 10.** Ask permission before discussing sensitive topics.

## STORY PRODUCTION

Once you have completed your interviews, upload everything you collected to your backup drive. Remember, organization is key! The more effort you put toward creating a system at the outset, the more streamlined your post-production process will be in the end. Everyone's system is different, but for each interview you should have the following files:



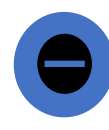
AUDIO



VISUAL



RELEASE FORM



B-ROLL (IF APPLICABLE)



NOTES  
(IF APPLICABLE)



PHOTOS  
(IF APPLICABLE)



TRANSCRIPTION

After the files are uploaded, check them for quality assurance and make any necessary edits before integrating it into advocacy or outreach efforts. This may include:

- Color correction;
- Improving audio quality and sound level by enhancing the volume or removing background noise; or
- Combining visual and audio files into one .mp4 file.

### Lessons Learned:

#### **File Storage and Organization**



*Consider where you are storing your information and how much space you'll need to allocate for your work. Video files can easily take up a lot of space without careful planning on the forefront. The Where Will We Live? team worked with their high capacity IT team to secure a separate backup server with a terabyte of information and three back up files. If you are working with fewer people or a limited budget consider looking into cloud storage applications like Dropbox, Google, or OneDrive.*

## Transcriptions

While it can sometimes be a tedious process, we recommend transcribing all interviews whenever possible before storyboarding or editing your interviews into stories. Block out time for the transcription process or consider hiring or assigning this role to someone else, as transcriptions will assist with:

- Identifying soundbites that will help you clearly and effectively illustrate your message.
- Storyboarding your final product efficiently. In most cases you will be editing a 20-minute interview down to a three- to five-minute clip or shorter. If you are planning to share these on social media, Twitter only allows video uploads less than 2 minutes and 20 seconds long. Storyboarding up front will make this a faster and easier process.
- Providing summaries for a “story bank”. If you are working with a small team and have several interviews to conduct, it is likely you may not get to work on your story immediately after completing the interview. Creating a detailed list of the interviews you’ve had with a summary of what was covered will make it easier to resume your work after long periods of time.

## Review Your Storyboard

Review and adjust your storyboard as necessary to visualize what your next steps will be while keeping the **messaging** and **framework** you developed in the beginning in mind. This can be used as a reference when editing your videos to make sure you have all the necessary elements beyond the audio and visual information (*See page 10*).

## DISTRIBUTION

### **Lessons Learned:**

#### **Distribution**



*Now that your organization has collected its own stories from residents, staff, and community members, it's time to share them with your intended audiences. The National Housing Trust began the Where Will We Live? story gallery two years ago with the intent to share the stories of residents, staff and community members with their Members of Congress to support federal funding for affordable housing. We introduced our stories to Congress through in-person meetings, congressional briefings, and a digital campaign, which included sharing the videos on social media, launching a monthly newsletter, and maintaining an online gallery on the NHT website. Congress not only maintained, but increased funding for federal housing programs for Fiscal Years 2018 and 2019.*

*This was a victory for our campaign, but the work doesn't stop here. As the cost of living continues to increase in the United States, so too does the need for stable affordable housing for low-income Americans and the federal funding to support it. The affordable housing industry must shift the narrative around affordable housing, not just when talking to policy makers but to the constituents who elect them. Use the following steps to distribute your stories within your community and to your elected officials to further draw the connection between access to housing and education, health, and economic development.*

Distributing your stories should be relatively easy at this point; your target audience is defined, and your stories have been framed for them. Your next step is to reach out to them through their primary means of communication. If you have not already, analyze how and where your target audience members obtain their information and ask yourself the following questions:

- Where do they receive their information?
- What papers, newsletters and news outlets do they read? Do you have access to any of them?
- Does someone else consume and report their media for them?
- How much spare time do they have in their schedule? Would it be easier to present the stories in person?

There are many ways to distribute a story through social media, local news outlets or in-person meetings. Below are examples of NHT's "Where Will We Live?" distribution efforts.

## Advocacy

Once your stories are complete, they can be valuable advocacy tools. During its initial launch, Where Will We Live? intended to share individual resident and staff stories with their corresponding Members of Congress. This would enable new and returning members to hear directly from their constituents on the importance of investing in affordable housing.

- But affordable housing advocacy through story telling does not have to have a federal or congressional focus. Storytelling can be used to amplify support for affordable housing at the state or local level. Some possibilities include:
- Advocacy Events (Roundtables, Seminars, Conferences, forums etc.)
- State or Local Political Events (Town Halls, Briefings, etc.)
- Community gatherings (state or county fairs, Night Outs, etc.)

## Education & Outreach

### **Lessons Learned:**

#### **Education & Outreach**



*Resident and staff stories also can be effective tools for education and outreach to secondary audience members, including residents and other stakeholders.*

*Work with your communications and policy teams to identify what tactics would work best to accomplish the goals and objectives of your campaign and organization. The below examples are tactics WWWL used in their education and outreach efforts and may vary in your campaign depending on your organization's resources and connections.*

- *Leadership workshops*
- *Workshops and conferences*
- *Local Community Events (Block parties, parades, neighborhood meetings)*

## Traditional Media

Traditional media can bring the spotlight to your work, raise broader public awareness of your story collection and influence decision makers to achieve the goals and objectives you set in the beginning of the campaign. Work with your communications team to identify media outlets from which your target audience receives information and an angle for pitching stories. For example, because part of the Where Will We Live? campaign's key messages centered on the fact that access to affordable housing provides access to cross-sector opportunities, we identified partners in those non-housing sectors to write op-eds highlighting the connection between housing and health care, education and energy efficiency.



## What Makes a Story Newsworthy?

Your pitches will need to be newsworthy in order to be placed, but what makes news newsworthy? There are five factors to consider when deciding if a story is worthwhile. When pitching a story, try to find an angle that includes at least three of these qualities:

### Timing

Immediate, current information and events are newsworthy because they have recently occurred. It's news because it is "new."

### Conflict

When people disagree about actions, events, ideas or policies, people take note. Conflict and controversy attract our attention by highlighting problems or differences within the community.

### Proximity

Local information and events are newsworthy because they affect the people in the community and region. People care more about things that happen "close to home."

### Prominence

Famous people get more coverage simply because they have a high profile.

### Relevance

People are attracted to information that helps them make good decisions. If you like to cook, you find recipes relevant. If you're looking for a job, the businesses' news may be relevant. We depend on pertinent information to help us make decisions.

## Digital Media

Digital marketing is a popular branding and communications tactic that can be used to raise broader public awareness among invested stakeholders and those seeking to gain more information in our highspeed digital world. With platforms like Facebook and Twitter, email marketing tools like [Mailchimp](#),

[Phone2Action](#) and [EveryAction](#), digital marketing provides a quick way to distribute your work. Similar to video production, however, its reach, ability to prompt further action, and influence decision-making will depend on your target audience, what resources you have, and the digital marketing capacity of your team.

Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are useful tools for boosting your campaign and sharing the videos with your followers as you complete them. If there are several videos in the campaign, releasing them on a consistent schedule to encourage followers to anticipate your stories and look forward to each new addition to the campaign. If there is additional room in the budget and someone on your team with the knowledge and capacity, consider setting up a digital marketing campaign that boosts your videos. This can help generate a following of people most interested in the topics you are covering and can be easily produced by a digital media amateur.

Be mindful that social media algorithms may make it difficult for followers to see what you post on your feed if you do not use additional funds to boost the post for additional views. Relying solely on social media also may create an echo chamber effect, meaning it may receive a lot of interaction, but only from followers within the same industry bubble as your organization. If your goal is to address a general misunderstanding of housing, tweeting clarifications to people whose job it is to do the same thing will not elicit those results. Instead, think outside the box and reach your target audience where they are more likely to receive information to inform them about the campaign and its importance and rely on digital and social media as means for them to stay in the loop.

Promoting videos through your website or e-newsletters is another effective digital media tactic for distribution. It allows people who have already expressed interest in your campaign to continue receiving updates and provides a point of reference for people who are new to the campaign, so they can research the background and find all the stories in one place.

## CONCLUSION

When the National Housing Trust launched *Where Will We Live?*, resources for affordable housing were at great risk. We needed to develop a more effective strategy behind our outreach and advocacy efforts and build a broader coalition beyond traditional housing stakeholders. We had the facts, we had the figures, we just needed one thing to shift the narrative: stories.

To tell the story of the need for affordable housing resources, we turned to low-income residents of federally-assisted housing. When strategically crafted, these stories can leverage the case for affordable housing by engaging key audiences, conveying information and putting context to an otherwise complicated topic. The [Where Will We Live?](#) story gallery demonstrates that a well-documented story can change perspectives and even inspire action through empathy and shared experiences. The team educated new and uninformed Members of Congress, provided resources to other affordable housing allies, and highlighted the connection between housing and cross-sector issues including health care, education and workforce development.

We hope that in using this toolkit, organizations can replicate the National Housing Trust's efforts and successfully employ digital, visual and audio storytelling strategies within their advocacy and outreach tactics. Together, our efforts can help low-income families move out of poverty and live in affordable, quality, healthy homes that provide them with access to opportunity.