

Telling our stories for a fair and generous Australia

What is our role in creating a fair and generous Australia?

Last month we made 71 [submissions](#) to the [Foreign Policy White Paper Taskforce](#). They came from every Australian state and territory and were part of a national effort that saw over 9,000 submissions made in total. The submissions made clear the values we share as a community; **fairness, justice, sustainability, boldness and generosity**. This month we are building on this effort and developing our own personal, powerful stories that communicate those values and move others to act.

What has storytelling got to do with ending poverty?

As Howard Gardner said, *“Stories are the single most powerful weapon in a leader's arsenal,”* and we know that significant leadership is required to tackle problems like extreme poverty or the size of Australia's aid program. *Why do you think storytelling is a vital leadership skill?* If you think about some of the great leaders you admire, it's likely they are also excellent speakers and storytellers, able to inspire people to do things. As advocates - and therefore as leaders - **we want to inspire people to do all sorts of things**; join our group, make a speech, give a donation, support a funding pledge, print our opinion piece, attend our function...To do this we need to engage both the head and the heart - inspiring people with *why* their action is important, as well as *what* it is that needs to be done.

Story of Self, Us and Now

We tell stories to make meaning of the world around us and **communicate our values**. Consider the stories we tell children; they often have a moral, such as *“slow and steady wins the race”* that teaches a valuable life lesson. We tell stories to **connect to other people**; consider the stories we tell when we catch up with friends, where we bond over our shared experiences or reactions to our stories. We tell stories to **convey urgency and provoke action** - consider how you might approach a friend and ask for help (not in a life-threatening emergency obviously!) by telling the backstory of how you came to need their help. And think of how they may encourage and support you by telling stories of their own. We are intuitive storytellers, and we all have a compelling story to tell.



Image from New Organizing Institute

Storytelling for social change follows a structure described by Marshall Ganz as the [story of self, us and now](#). These elements are woven together to create a compelling story that provokes hope and action. A brief description of each element follows:

- **Self** - Who are you? Why have you been called to leadership? What moments in your life have led to you being here now? What challenges have you faced, and choices have you made, that illustrate the values you wish to highlight.
- **Us** - Who are we? What makes us an 'us'? What values do we share?
- **Now** - What shared values are being violated, and what needs to be done about it? What does your listener need to do, now? Why is this urgent? Why should your listener have hope that their action will matter, and the problem can be overcome?

Contact RESULTS

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Take Action Now

- Create your story of self, us and now.
- Tell your story in a letter (to the editor or MP) or a conversation (with a friend or MP).

Some tips and advice for crafting your story:

1. You have a compelling story to tell. Everybody does - even if it takes a while to find it!
2. You likely have many stories, and your story will change over time. That is OK.
3. Brainstorming helps a lot - write down everything, even if it seems irrelevant to start with.
4. You don't need to tell your entire life story - pick a key moment and tell it in detail.
5. Aim to (eventually) be able to tell your story in about 2 minutes. Be concise (eventually!)
6. Make your story rich with imagery. Help the listener feel like they are 'in the story' experiencing it with you. "The rain dripped off my nose" can be better than "It was raining".

How to create your story:

The goal is to identify your own motivations - or values - for why you have been called to leadership, because soon you will be calling on others (story of us) to join you in action (story of now). Public narrative is about learning a process, not writing a script. It can be learned only by telling, listening, reflecting, and telling it over and over again. These steps will help you begin.

1. A story of **now**: What urgent challenge are you calling on others to join you in facing? What is the source of hope that action could be fruitful? What action can they take together to achieve a clear outcome? And how can they begin now, at this moment? **Think about and write down your story of now in just a few sentences.**
2. A story of **us**: Who is the "us" that you will call upon? What shared values, experiences, or hopes will you draw upon when you ask them to join you in action? What stories can you share that express these values? **Think about and write down your story of us in just a few sentences.**
3. A story of **self**: Brainstorm the experiences and influences you have had that have led you to where you are today - being a leader in the movement to end extreme poverty. What moments helped define you? What people shaped you?
 - a. A good story is drawn from the series of choice points that have structured the "plot" of your life – the **challenges** you faced, **choices** you made, and **outcomes** you experienced.
 - i. **Challenge**: Why did you feel it was a challenge? What was so challenging about it? Why was it *your* challenge?
 - ii. **Choice**: Why did you make the choice you did? Where did you get the courage – or not? Where did you get the hope – or not? How did it feel?
 - iii. **Outcome**: How did the outcome feel? Why did it feel that way? What did it teach you? What do you want it to teach us? How do you want us to feel?
4. **Practice** telling your story and **listening** to the stories of others: tell it to your RESULTS group and any other people you trust. Ask for feedback - which parts of the story really connected with your listener emotionally? What parts do they want to know more about? How did your listener feel hearing your story? Do they feel hopeful and motivated to act?
5. **Need further resources?** Find a Public Narrative Worksheet [here](#), online narrative training [here](#), and RESULTS' own resources on how to write letters to the editor and MPs [here](#).

Don't forget to report your action at www.results.org.au/Report

Join our Action Call on March 26. Conference ID 707690#
Melbourne 9999 5000 Sydney 8999 0900 Brisbane 3177 2900 Perth 6555 0600 Adelaide 7070 0600
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