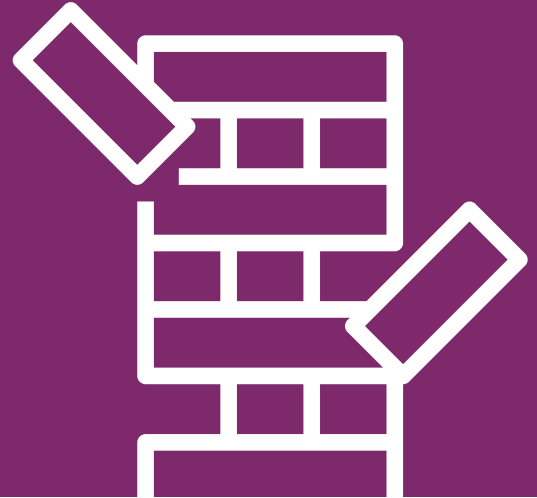


Building blocks: Impactful storytelling



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Storytelling is everywhere

Storytelling is an essential part of how we communicate and connect with other people. It is there just as much when talking to your friend as when discussing a project with a colleague. It is also there in the advertisements you see and at your dinner table with your family. Simply put, storytelling is everywhere.

Diaspora life is no exception. Stories are how we recognise ourselves as part of a diaspora. It is how memories travel across borders and how belonging is negotiated between "here" and "there", wherever those might be.

Meanwhile, for diaspora organisations, stories not only link members, but also can play a central role in achieving objectives. They can frame issues, help audiences understand complex topics and humanise statistics. Using a story can allow an audience to feel the impact of an activity on the people involved.

This document is intended as a first step in what I hope becomes a powerful daily practice for diaspora organisations. In an era when narratives about migration often exclude the protagonists, my hope is that this guide emboldens diaspora organisations to cherish their stories and share them on their own terms.



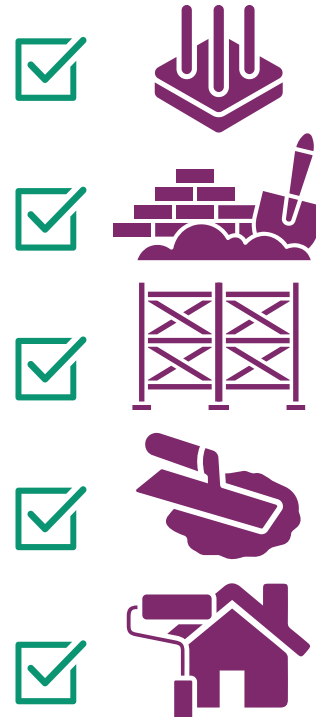
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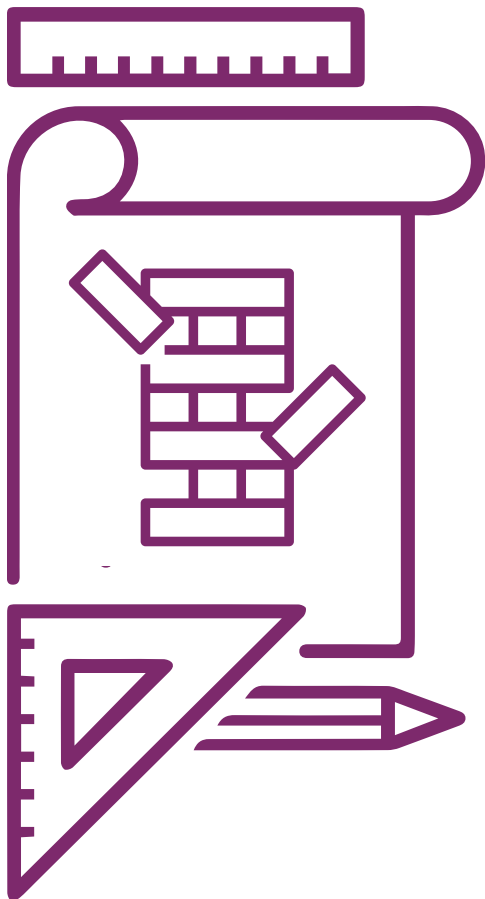
EU DiF communications officer

Why stories matter?

Stories are among the most effective ways to process and connect information. Studies have shown that people are anywhere between **twice** and **more than twelve times** as likely to remember a story than a statistic. In migration and diaspora contexts, where identities, histories and transnational ties are central, stories make abstract or technical issues tangible. They humanise policy debates and reveal dimensions of experience that might be overlooked by data alone.

Storytelling, more than a communication technique, is a form of knowledge production which help shape public understanding and decision-making. When migrants and diaspora members share their experiences, they convey insights, contribute expertise and challenge assumptions.





The stories we tell can shape how issues are framed long before they reach a policy table or a donor meeting. They can inspire people to take action to support those in need and create a positive change in the wellbeing of the wider community.

Through storytelling, diaspora communities are continuously redefining themselves on their own terms, constructing who they are, where they come from and where they are going. This can be crucial in intergenerational context, such as second or more-generation diaspora communities, because storytelling can be a means for sharing and passing on cultural to newer generations.

Therefore, for diasporas, storytelling is a practice of agency and of legacy. This guide offers practical suggestions and a ready-to-use template on how diaspora organisations can use stories build stories for prosocial action and policy influence.



Foundations: purpose, motive and audience

Every story worth telling starts before the first sentence. For a story to be impactful, it is important first to have clarity on its foundations: purpose, motive and audience.

Purpose: what does the story aim to achieve?

To avoid your story drifting and wandering, identify what you want to happen as a result. Ask yourself:

- Do you want to reframe how an issue is perceived, or how a community is seen?
- Would you like to build trust with potential project partners? Donors? Communities you serve?
- Are you trying to influence a specific policy decision?
- Are you aiming to inspire action from individuals or institutions?



For small and medium enterprises, like the ones supported through [our project with the African Foundation for Development](#), storytelling can be a crucial tool for crowdfunding.



Tailoring your story to your audience will make it more impactful. If possible, test different approaches, [like we did for communication activities in our project in Egypt](#), and keep sharpening it.

Motive: why does this story matter?

Motive is what gives a story its energy. It should indicate the reason you are telling this story now and why it should matter to those listening (or reading). If the motive is clear to you, the audience will feel it.

Audience: who is the story for?

Knowing your audience changes everything: the examples you use, the language you choose, the emotions you appeal to, and the action you ask for. The same story about a community integration programme will need to be told very differently to a municipal councillor, a potential funder, or a young person considering joining your organisation. Ask:

- Who specifically are you trying to reach?
- What motivates them?
- What will make them stop, listen, and care?

Audiences will be more sympathetic to messages that promote values aligned to their own. Think about which values you are highlighting in your story. Learn more about [value-based communications from EUROMED](#)





Storytelling building materials

Once your foundations are in place, you need four core elements to build a story that feels human and grounded. Abstract arguments rarely inspire people. A person in a specific situation facing a real challenge, has a better chance.

1

Protagonist

A real person or a small, identifiable group at the centre of the story. A named or clearly described individual whose situation the audience can picture and feel something about.

2

Challenge

A concrete obstacle or situation the protagonist faces. The more specific, the better so the audience can understand the issue why it is a challenge. The challenge helps to highlight the stakes.

3

Action

What the protagonist or your organisation does in response. This is where agency enters the story: it shows who is doing what to tackle the challenge.

4

Change

The result, or the potential result, of the action. Change does not have to be fully resolved. Sometimes showing what could be possible is more powerful than a neat conclusion.



Structure: bringing the materials together

Good materials still need a clear structure. A simple and reliable model for storytelling is:

Before → After → Why it matters → Call to action

1

Before

Set the scene

Describe the initial situation. What was the context or challenge before the action took place? What was the protagonist facing? What did their everyday life look like? This is where you draw the audience in. Make it specific enough to feel real.

2

After

Show the change

What has improved, shifted or been set in motion? You do not need a complete resolution, but can show a turning point, a new possibility or even a different way of seeing the situation.



3

Why it matters

Connect to the bigger picture

This is the bridge between individual experience and collective significance. Why should someone who does not share this experience care? What does this story reveal about a broader issue?

4

Call to action

Guide your audience forward

Every impactful story ends with a direction. What should the audience do, feel or think differently after hearing this? Be clear, specific and, ideally, focus on something accessible that your audience can do immediately after reading/ listening to your story.



The concrete: what holds your story together

Structure and materials are not enough on their own. The following elements are what make a story stick; they are the difference between a story that is heard and one that is remembered.

Connect to people through experience

Frame information through human experience first and then support it with evidence. Numbers have little chance of moving people, but a person's experience, followed by the statistic that shows how many others share it, makes those insights relatable and memorable.

Ground your story in detail

The more specific a story is, the more universal it becomes. Concrete details, such as a place, a sound, a shared meal or a phrase in a mother tongue, bring an audience closer than general descriptions ever can.



At the [Youth Leadership and Innovation Award](#), young migrant activists used storytelling to pitch youth-led solutions to migration challenges and seek funding to enact their projects.



Mushrooms are spawning change in Zimbabwe thanks to a diaspora-local collaboration



How is agency depicted in these interviews?



Solange Lopes on how a diaspora entrepreneur is supporting women and girls empowerment in Cape Verde

If you show vulnerability, show agency as well

When trying to showcase the work helping others, it is easy to fall into the trap of presenting people only as vulnerable and in need of help. Vulnerability can be part of the story, and it can help move people towards action, but it should not be the whole story. Highlight people as actors: organisers, advocates and creators. In that way you can portrait people with more dignity.

Ensure ethical storytelling

It is crucial to get informed consent for sharing a story. Ensure the protagonists understand how it will be used, who will see it, and that they can withdraw at any time. Avoid oversimplification that strips context from a complex experience, and avoid framing that could cause harm, even unintentionally.

Use data to support your story

While statistics are not what people will remember, they can be powerful tools to strengthen your story. Using trustworthy and well-cited data can help your audience understand how this story fits in the world. It takes your story from an individual to an example of a broader situation.



Finishing touches: strengthening your narrative

Once the structure is solid, the final layer is how you deliver it. The same story, told differently, can inspire or leave people unmoved.

Deliver with presence

Whether you are presenting in a conference room, posting on social media or writing a funding report, tone and pacing matter. In spoken contexts, slow down at the moment of change. In written ones, use a short sentence after a long one to create emphasis. Playing with rhythm either in text or in spoken word will make the story feel more present. If in person, use tone, pacing and gestures to reinforce your message and engage audiences. If working with multimedia, vary the intensity and pace of both images and sounds.

Play with senses

The cliché that a picture tells a thousand words is true, but sight is not the only sense you can target. Depending on the storytelling format, consider how image, sound and even smell can bring your story to life. Photos, videos and illustrations help people picture more clearly, while soundbites



Food for thought – Jessica on reconnecting with Malaysia through its cuisine



How are sensory experiences shared in these stories?



Nicole Ulanday on food, parties, names and other ingredients in diaspora community-building



Diaspora youth-led organisations in Europe used storytelling to share their projects at our [Diaspora Youth Pitch Competition](#) at the Future Forum 2023.

of quotes, evocative soundscapes or music can make the audience feel like they are witnessing the story firsthand.

Adapt to context

A story that works in a grant application needs to be reworked for a community meeting and reworked again for a social media post. The core might stay the same. However, by tailoring the frame, the specific words used, the level of detail and the call to action to the audience and format, you can increase the chances of the story resonating with them.

Use clear and human language

Jargon is a barrier, even when it is used with good intentions. Words can feel familiar inside an organisation and completely obscure outside it. Ask: would someone who has never thought about diaspora understand this immediately? If not, find another way to say it.

Be consistent

Individual stories should connect to the broader narrative and vision of your organisation. Look at the purpose of each of the stories that you are considering sharing and look for areas where they align and clash. If a story clashes with your overall narrative, it can create dissonance, which might affect its impact. Instead, if each story builds on the purpose of the previous one and helps paint a more detailed picture.

Telling stories that influence, a lifelong practice

Storytelling can be more than sharing experiences, it can help shape understanding.

The organisations that share the best stories are not necessarily the ones with the most resources dedicated to crafting perfect videos, nor those with the biggest platforms. They are the ones that know exactly why they are telling a story, who they are telling it to, and what they want to happen as a result. They take time with the details. They protect the dignity of the people whose experiences they share. They connect individual moments to the larger questions their communities are navigating.

This guide, far from offering a perfect formula, is a first step into what hopefully becomes a lifelong practice. One in which you become stronger every time you share your own stories.



The Festival of Legends, launched after [our project in Moldova](#), used storytelling to combine concerts with local folk bands, exhibitions of local products and theatrical tours.



Storytelling template

Use this template by yourself or with your team as an exercise to structure and refine your stories when preparing a press release, a speech, a web-article, a pitch or any other communication items!

Foundations



Purpose - What do you want to achieve?

.....
Motive - Why does this story matter?

1

.....
Audience - Who is this for and what will make them listen?

.....

Building materials

Protagonist - Who is the story about?



.....
Challenge - What is the issue at hand?

2

.....
Action - What is being done?

.....
Change - What has improved or could improve?

.....

Structure

Before - Set the scene



After - What changed?

3

Why it matters - Why should people care?

Call to action - What should the audience do next?

.....

Concrete



How does this story connect to people?

4

What sensory details make it vivid?

How does it show agency?

How is it ethical and respectful?

What data or evidence supports it?

.....

Finishing touches

How will you adapt this story to your audience/context?



.....
How will you deliver it?



.....
How will you incorporate different senses?

.....
Is the language clear and accessible?

.....
Is it consistent with your organisation's narrative?
.....



European Union Global Diaspora Facility

ICMPD Brussels Mission

2 Place du Champs de Mars

1050 Brussels

Belgium

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www.diasporafordevelopment.eu



EU-diaspora@icmpd.org