

The Starter Guide to

Nonprofit video storytelling

Learn the process to develop high impact videos

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Thanks for downloading The Starter Guide the Nonprofit Video Storytelling. We're excited to help you do video the right way. Here's a little bit of info about us before we start.

ListenIn Pictures is a media production company specializing in nonprofit visual storytelling. We craft cinematic stories that are personal, intimate, and honest to connect people, build movements and catalyze change. ListenIn has worked with organizations such as Adoptions Together, Achievement First, BRAC, KIPP Charter Schools, Planned Parenthood, and Human Rights Campaign. We're writing about how to make videos that connect to and mobilize your audience.



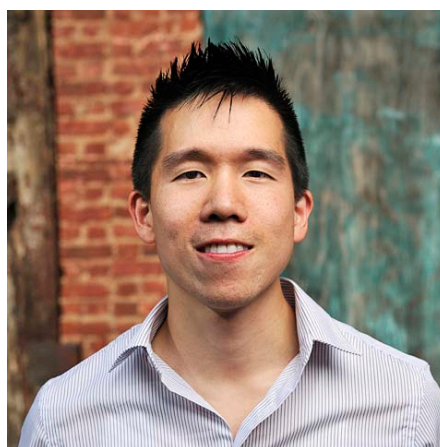
CauseVox is an online fundraising platform for nonprofits. We help nonprofits easily design their own full-featured fundraising sites for campaigns as well as personal/team fundraising. CauseVox believes that every nonprofit's story is unique and unlike any other; their fundraising sites should be that same way too. We're focusing on how to implement effective campaigns.



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“People will forget what you tell them, but will never forget how you make them feel.” — MAYA ANGELOU

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Why video?

When it's done well, storytelling creates an indelible connection that catalyzes online sharing.

The importance of storytelling for nonprofit fundraising and advocacy is not a new concept, but it is evolving quickly. Through their use of social media, nonprofits have begun to realize that storytelling is one of the key ingredients in creating successful online fundraising campaigns, especially peer-to-peer based ones.

Our media habits are changing too. Print media, the traditional medium of non-profit storytelling, are having less impact because printed communications pieces and mail appeals lack the emotional power and instant engagement of online sharing.

Online, video rules.

It offers incredible opportunities for your nonprofit to bring in supporters, engage them in your work, and help you fundraise. Video can help your audience visualize why you exist, move them to feel genuine emotion, and motivate your audience to care, share, and take action.

Nonprofits like charity: water and Invisible Children have used video to propel national movements and raise millions of dollars. The Girl Effect animation helped take a theory of change from obscurity to an accepted and widespread development ideology. These examples demonstrate the power of what's possible, but they seem to be the exception rather than the rule. While many nonprofits are succeeding with video, many others struggle to best utilize this powerful medium.

Perhaps you have decided to use video to draw in supporters and connect them with your cause. You may have started filming videos, but it hasn't been as successful in mobilizing and fundraising as you hoped it would be.

You need to approach video storytelling in the right way. The most important part is getting the strategy, story, and planning right.

You need a game plan – a framework for thinking about how you can create videos that will bring you value.

That's why we are here. We want to help you use the medium of video to its fullest potential.

Let's get started...

- Annie, Ethan, and Rob

The journey

By the end of this e-book, you should have a clearer understanding of the elements necessary to produce effective nonprofit videos. You will also feel more confident in your ability to create a successful video strategy, ensuring that every video you create will achieve its goals.

The Problem

First we identify the biggest barriers that prevent nonprofits from succeeding at video.

The Concept

We help you think strategically. We help you ask the right questions that will help you develop a focused concept for your video. We also give you an overview of what the entire production process looks like from beginning to end so you get the whole picture. We explain what kind of video creates the greatest impact and why. We explore how to identify a plot that will inspire people to action and how to structure that story.

The Implementation

In this section, we explain how to create online campaigns that incorporate your video and help you reach larger fundraising or advocacy goals.

The Logistics

Next, we get practical and explore how you can make your video a reality. We examine what you can produce internally and when you should outsource. We also help you understand the kinds of questions you should ask yourself and what factors to consider in hiring video production professionals.

Writing Your Plan (supplement)

Once you understand what makes a great video, we help you put that knowledge into action in a supplemental worksheet. This helps you take what you've learned and apply it your next video project. After completing the worksheet, you'll be well on your way to creating nonprofit videos positioned for success!

What's not working?

Many organizations struggle to use video to its fullest potential. What are the biggest reasons why nonprofit videos come up short?

Here are three main causes your videos might be falling flat and how to avoid them:

1. *Eagerness without intentionality.* You need a plan before you begin. Don't make a video because you feel like you should. Articulate the outcome you want to achieve and make sure video is the best way to achieve that outcome. Stay focused on making sure your video will inspire a certain action or reaction from its audience.
2. *Staying stuck in the 'day-to-day' internal view of the organization.* Focus on how to represent your work in a compelling way to the outside world by understanding your target audience and their emotional needs. Video is much better at demonstrating impact than explaining programs. Don't focus on facts and information; focus on crafting emotional stories.

3. *Lack of a distribution plan.* Too many nonprofits just put their video out there and hope it'll be seen. Invisible Children, charity: water and the Girl Effect have all been successful in using video because they see video as the first step to inspiring action, not the last. Videos are most successful when used in campaigns because the videos are motivated by a meaningful, urgent goal— and participants know exactly what action to take.

Think strategically

Before you jump into creating a video, think about the big picture to reach your goals and generate the best results.

As the foundation for how your video is developed, the plan you start with guides everything about your final video. To craft a plan that works, go through each of these exercises in this checklist and create a document outlining your vision. Share the end document with everyone involved in the video production and promotion.

EXAMINE MOTIVATION

Articulate why you want to make a video. Are you sure that video is the best way to achieve that outcome?



Sathi, a mother of three that received free legal aid from BRAC to divorce her abusive husband. Capture by ListenIn Pictures for [Courage in the Heart](#).

BUILD THE FOUNDATION

Start with your messaging platform. Write out your vision, audience, personality and positioning statements. Then talk about how you can create a video, which will reflect these core aspects of your organization.

Vision

Visions drive movements by making people imagine a different way that the world could be.

- What idea of the world is your organization working towards?
- What are your core beliefs about the world that influence why you exist?
- How can your video communicate your vision and convince people that they should want to make your idea of the world a reality?

Audience

Different audiences have different attention spans and levels of engagement. Identify what feelings you want your audience to experience and what action you want them

to take after watching your video. Think about how your video can motivate them to take that action. Use a [*persona*](#) or [*empathy map*](#) to help.

- How can you develop a story that they will find compelling?
- How does your video relate to their emotional needs?
- Most nonprofits have three primary audiences: fundraising audiences, program audiences and advocacy audiences. Which one are you targeting? Get as specific as possible.
- What do you predict the mindset of your audience will be when they watch your video? What are their motivations for watching? How will your video reflect that?

Personality

Personality is how you want your audience to experience your organization. It is the feeling and attributes that you convey.

- What is your nonprofit's personality?
- Are you irreverent, funny and unconventional? Passionate, unapologetic and critical? Warm and fuzzy? Positive and excited?
- Think about how the look and tone of your video can reflect your organization's personality.

Positioning

Positioning is how you are different than other nonprofits in your space.

- What position do you want to own in your audiences' mind? What is the one thing you want people to think about when they think of your organization?
- What makes you unique? What makes you different from similar organizations?
- Be able to express your positioning statement in one sentence.

DEVELOP THE MESSAGE AND STORY

- What is the one simple idea that you want your audience to understand when they finish watching your video? Brainstorm and create your basic, short story.
- Decide how the video will visually represent your message. What is the most engaging way that we can communicate it?
- Where is the primary place your video will be seen? An online storytelling platform? Facebook? Front page of website? Gala? How does this space influence the length and tone of your video?
- What are the goals and indicators of success for your video? For your campaign?

FIGURE OUT THE LOGISTICS

- Create a pre-production, production, post-production, and distribution timeline. (Read the [basics of the process](#) in the next section below)
- Identify assets and resources. Do you have archival footage that is useful? Equipment? Access to celebrities? Visual programs? Charismatic leader? Play to your strengths.
- Identify gaps. What staff and equipment are available? Do you have access to editing software? Are your programs non-visual? Do your program participants have privacy concerns? Is your issue very sensitive? Brainstorm how you can creatively overcome these challenges.
- Assign roles. What roles will your staff play? How can they participate as producers for the piece? Which roles will you fill and which will be consolidated? (See [Definitions](#) for an overview of top roles.)
- Budget. What are the projected costs of the project? How will you fund it? Can you seek grants or outside funding sources? Are there pro bono opportunities available?

SPREAD THE KNOWLEDGE

Create a comprehensive document outlining the vision and plan for the creation of the video. Share the vision with all involved.

Section Takeaway

- Before deciding what video you will make, ask yourself what you want to achieve and what core message you want your audience to walk away with.
- To develop your core message, think through your positioning and vision.
- Your personality determines the look, feel and tone for your video that is appropriate for your organization.

Primer: production process

Whether you're doing it yourself or working with a professional video production firm, you need to understand the process of making videos. Here's a short primer on the typical process that you should follow to create videos that work.

1. Pre-production

Now that you have a plan, you'll need to think about how you can visually tell the story. Create a storyboard (See [Definitions](#)) to plan the structure.

- Understand your story. What is the plot? Who will tell the story? Text? Narrator? Multiple interviewees?
- Create a shot-list to map out how you will visually tell the story (see [Definitions](#)).
- Think through what kind of b-roll (See [Definitions](#)) you will need, especially if most of your story takes place in the past.
- Research.
- Secure funding and sign any production contracts.
- Coordinate people and locations for shooting video and/or taking photographs.

2. Production

Production is the main event. You'll take all your planning and actually start shooting video, recording audio, and possibly taking photographs.

- Record images and sound.
- Shoot interviews before b-roll to have a better idea of what b-roll you will need.
- Get releases for interviewees.

3. Post-production

The majority of time will be spent editing the video to create a clear and concise story that articulates your mission, vision, messaging, etc. and is of a high-enough quality to reflect positively on your organization.

- Editing. Create story structure, graphics/titles and motion graphics. Do color correction, sound mastering, find music and secure rights.
- Have at least two rounds of feedback and revisions.

4. Distribution

Distribution is determining where the video will be shown and how to get it in front of people.

- During post-production, begin developing a distribution strategy. What platforms will you release your video on? Bloggers? News outlets? Live screenings?
- Where will the video live? Are you creating an online storytelling or campaign platform?

5. Evaluation

Look at your indicators of success and discuss whether you met your goals. Talk about what you can do better next time but also articulate what went right.

What story should you tell?

It may feel overwhelming to have to come up with a concept for your video. There are so many different kinds of videos you can create – but which kind is right for your organization? Here we show you how to create the kinds of videos that draw audiences in.

The Program Trap

We have been lucky to support some really great organizations. One of the most rewarding projects we've ever had was working with BRAC, the largest anti-poverty organization in the developing world. BRAC raises 80% of their budget through their social enterprises and are run almost entirely by Bangladeshis, but as a result they have very little brand recognition in the United States. This limits their ability to connect with useful and relevant resources.

BRAC is a complex organization, which targets poverty holistically on all fronts. They run comprehensive and expansive microfinance, healthcare, education, human rights, agriculture and gender initiatives, all of which have a profound impact on hundreds of millions of people.

When we started working with BRAC, their brand was really struggling, in part because when they 'told their story' they often were trying to describe everything that they do (which is almost impossible because they do so much) instead of focusing on their theory of change and impact. This is what we call the Program Trap.

Organizations like BRAC put an incredible amount of thought into every element of every program. They do intense research, launch pilots for all their programs and conduct rigorous evaluations. When we came to them they already had an overview video that ran for 20 minutes.

No one wants to watch a video that long. Even if the video had been compacted to three minutes, it wouldn't have made an impact.

Even worse, the goal of that video was to help build brand recognition. If you want to increase brand recognition you

have to figure out what position you want to own in your audiences' mind. You cannot establish your brand by telling people the details of how things get done.

Why? It's because supporters and followers of an organization don't typically focus on your program's existence; they're interested in your program's results. Programs themselves don't make people feel connected to anyone. People respond to

"People don't care about what you're doing, they care about why you do it,"

—JESSE SANCHAK, SMARTBLOG

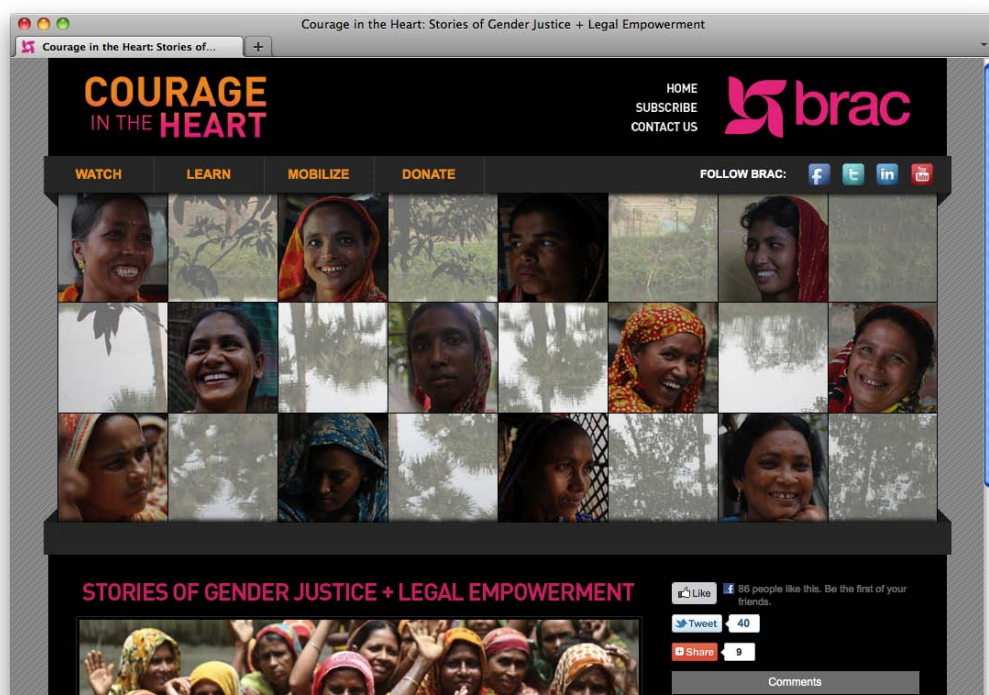
stories about people they can relate to. People like themselves, their colleagues, their neighbors, and their families.

Your audience cares about people, stories and impact. This goes for all target audiences - from grantmakers to casual Facebook followers.

Stories compel us and engage us.

So how did we help BRAC get back on the right track?

We made an [online storytelling platform](#) for BRAC, which features the stories of 12 women in rural Bangladesh. These women include the survivors of human rights abuses, as well as community leaders who are organizing women (with BRAC's help) to demand change. By giving people access to these women's stories, we were able to educate people about the context, demonstrate BRAC's value of grassroots empowerment, and move people to feel a sense of solidarity with the women. Since its launch on International Women's Day in 2011, over 10,000 people have seen the stories, and it has led to several key new partnerships and collaborations, including several BRAC fundraising & advocacy clubs at universities.



The [BRAC Courage in the Heart](#) project features the stories of 12 women in Bangladesh who are radically reshaping the status and role of women.

To demonstrate their scale, BRAC also made a [30-second animation](#) that was shown as an ad on Hulu.com. It explains how poverty is complicated and requires multiple solutions. It invites viewers to become part of the solutions. This was a much more effective way to plant an idea in their audiences' minds than a 20-minute long video.

Both of these storytelling initiatives helped BRAC position their work in interesting and simple ways that are much more accessible than their previous efforts.

Remember: When it comes to video, your programs only matter in how they contribute to your impact. You are communicating your vision about how you think the world should be and why you are the best way to get to that future.

High powered videos

The limits of what you can create to communicate your vision are only bounded by your creativity, but over time we have begun to recognize trends. The following high power videos have succeeded for organizations we have worked with.

Note: All of these videos can be monologic - with one person's voice telling the story - or dialogic - with multiple people telling the story. Even if your story is about one individual's journey, you can have multiple people giving their perspective on what happened, which can often bring depth and nuance to the story.

IMPACT STORIES



Rupa, a BRAC educated barefoot lawyer, educates women in her community about their rights. Rangpur, Bangladesh.

These are the best tools for getting people to care. Impact stories tell the story of an individual whose life has been changed by your organization. Let that individual tell their own story whenever possible. Their own perspective on your work creates credibility and emotional connections.

Considerations

It may be easier to have someone on your staff just read a narration, but the time investment (especially with editing) of having the story come from the person who has been impacted is absolutely worth it. When done right, this video can be a lasting resource that won't expire.

Example: One of the twelve impact stories that we filmed for BRAC.

CAMPAIGN VIDEO

Released at the launch of a fundraising or advocacy campaign, this video often features an impact story or movement portrait (see [page 25](#)), a description of your campaign goal, and a vivid or inspiring call to action.

Considerations

Make sure it won't expire: If your campaign video features an impact story, consider getting two versions of your video — a longer version with a campaign-specific call to action at the end (e.g. You can help us raise \$500,000 to build a new school before Christmas, Start fundraising at www.DonateToBuildASchool.com), and a shorter version which has your impact story and a more general call to action (Help us give more students the education they deserve — donate at www.donate.org).

Example: Campaigning launch video for One Girl's fundraising campaign.



One Girl Australia's campaign launch video for their "Do it in a dress" campaign.

ONLINE ANNUAL REPORTS WITH VIDEO

Some nonprofits (see [case study below](#)) have reallocated resources away from print (and PDFs on the web) to create online annual report websites that feature video as the centerpiece of the web experience.

For your nonprofit, create several impact story videos, which relate to your previous year's focus. Unlike traditional annual reports, these annual report sites can leverage online sharing to drive a large fundraising push.

Considerations

Keep the videos focused on the emotions and use supplementary text to demonstrate scale and data points.

EVENT STORIES

Events are great places to create videos, because they bring large groups of people passionate about your organization/cause to the same place. Think about what unites everyone at the event—a dream, a promise, an experience? The story can be about the significance of the event or it can be about the people who are there. Events are great opportunities to create 'movement portraits' that can help your supporters feel like they are a part of something big and important.



This event video documents Achievement First graduating seniors announcing to their parents where they will be attending college.

Considerations

Events are resource intensive and require a lot from your staff. There are more important roles for your staff to play like networking and making sure things run smoothly than being behind the camera. Events also often have difficult lighting and sound needs.

Example: Student from Achievement First, a network of charter schools, speaking at an event.

MOVEMENT PORTRAITS

One of our needs as humans is to belong. Movement Portraits may feature a collage of your fundraising and advocacy audiences describing why they care or how they've been impacted. These are great tools to rally more supporters because they are a way for you to invite them to your movement.

Considerations

Let the different voices be in conversation with one another. Demonstrate what unites all of your supporters as well as what makes them unique.

Example: We made this video with MobiHealthNews on the mHealth movement last year.



This video tells the story of those at the frontline of the emerging mHealth sector

VISION VIDEOS

These are videos that reveal why you exist and what impact you have on the world. They demonstrate your theory of change in a visually arresting manner.



Education = Freedom video

Considerations:

This is an opportunity to do something conceptual, innovative, or unexpected. Some can be structured more like a commercial. They can use animation, animation, actors, or anything you can think of.

Example:

This simple vision video was filmed for Achievement First in just two hours. They wanted

a collage of their senior class to demonstrate their impact. It was used to motivate teachers and for live screenings.

ADVOCACY VIDEO

These videos explore the context of your issue through individual stories, and also connect the issues to structural injustices or political circumstances. They allow more complexity and depth than a typical impact story. It's much more about the

CASE STUDY: ONLINE ANNUAL REPORT

For this giving season, Team Charter Schools (part of the KIPP Charter School network) partnered with ListenIn Pictures to produce four videos which explore through storytelling the four key questions they answer every year in their annual report (ex: Are we serving the students who need us most?). With the help of the marketing team, we identified students with powerful stories and had spent extensive time in the schools, with families in their homes and around the community. These four videos are the core content of their online annual report.

The project does not launch until December 2011, but it is set up for success in many ways. Their videos do not focus on their programs, but focus on compelling individuals' journeys of empowerment. This end product is much more in tune with how and where their target audience spends their time (as compared to a mailing).

With one month for shooting and one month for revisions and editing, the video production process did not end up being longer than the time spent creating the annual report. With production outsourced, their staff was able to build a strong marketing campaign around the videos. The videos will live on an online storytelling platform, which is designed to keep people engaged and encourage specific actions. Here's one of their stories.



issue itself (the way it affects people) than on the impact your organization has had on tackling it. Some may be aimed at lawmakers and those in positions of power or even everyday supporters.



Boyu's story

Considerations

More than any other videos, advocacy videos require a significant amount of time spent in the community (not just during your programs). They also require a greater level of video production experience, such as knowing how to structure observational style documentaries in which the action/scene unfolds in front of the camera.

Example: We filmed this story about a Liberian refugee in Ghana named Boyu. This video is being used to raise funds to help Boyu return to Liberia to see her daughter and start her own business.

From overview video to vision video

The typical overview video, which often lives on an organization's home page, describes what you do by showing your programs. They often feature an Executive Director talking with clips of visual examples of services. These overview videos are the main source of the Program Trap. Instead of making this type of video, which is predictable and unengaging, make a vision video that communicates why you exist.

One of the best ways to avoid a dry overview video is to leave out your staff and let those you serve lead the video. When you let people speak for themselves, you are moving away from telling and towards showing.

Here's our own example.

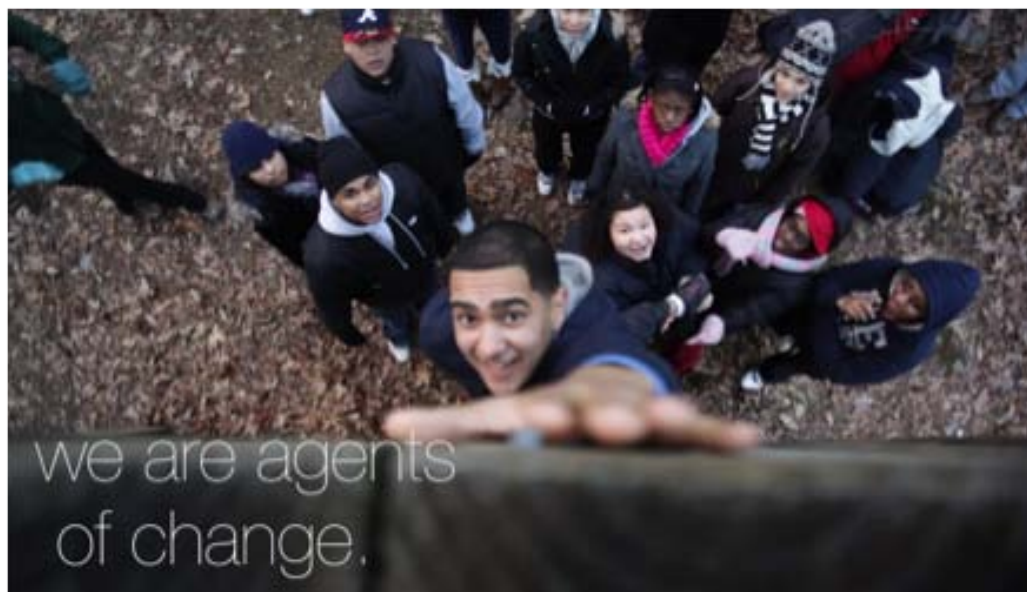
Our team at ListenIn Pictures decided we should make a video for our front page

to immediately connect our website visitors with what we are all about. There were many directions we could have gone.

We could have recorded ourselves in front of a white background talking about how we create video stories for nonprofits featuring individual stories of transformation to mobilize supporters and catalyze fundraising. Then we could have overlaid the narration with b-roll of us interviewing subjects and filming in different locations.

What impression would our audience be left with after seeing it? Probably not the most impactful one.

So instead, we decided to create an experience for our viewers, which would make people feel the sense of connection that our images create, instead of telling them that our media is powerful while we bore them. We made a 2.5-minute video, which combines our best images of humanity with text that explains our vision. Essentially, we wanted to make our audience cry rather than tell them that we can make their supporters cry. Don't make an overview video about what you do, make a vision video about why you do it.



A single frame from the ListenIn Pictures vision video.

Section Takeaways

- Don't fall into the Program Trap, focus on people, stories, and impact.
- Avoid doing overview videos - create vision videos instead. Show, not tell.

How to tell an impact story that sticks

Most nonprofit videos that fail to achieve their intended goals typically aren't actually telling a story. They might think they are telling "the story of the organization," but there is usually nothing there that makes people watch to the end because they are not wondering, "What will happen next?" Stories with plots keep people hooked. We are going to explore how you can create a story that will keep people's attention.

Types of plots

Impact stories have two key ingredients: a protagonist and a journey. These stories are transformative. By the end of your video, audiences should know exactly why they took this journey with you. Your story should leave them with an insight about the way the world is or should be.

One of the best books that we've ever read is Chip and Dan Heath's wonderfully insightful book called *Made to Stick*, which suggests that inspiring stories have three basic plots:

Note: Protagonists are people. Not organizations. If you want to tell the story, for example, of the group of people who did something amazing, then they collectively can be your protagonist. The organizational entity itself is not the protagonist. Again, people care about people, not organizations.

THE CHALLENGE PLOT

This plot is about a protagonist succeeding against an enemy. Obstacles seem insurmountable, but they inspire us by appealing to our appreciation for perseverance and courage. These stories inspire us to act.



Colin's story demonstrates the impact of TEAM schools on his life

The nonprofit version

An individual that your organization serves has faced very difficult challenges, but through their strength and your support, they are doing better. Their story is representative of so many others' and that's why you need continued support. In this plot, the protagonist is someone whose life your organization has touched.

Another version. Your team faces immense challenges to solve your social problem, but you have found a solution that works and now you need support to turn your

vision of a better world into reality. Use this plot to ignite a deeper fire in your audience about the impact your organization is having.

How to use this type of story

This is the plot for most impact stories.

Example: Colin, a student at TEAM schools, had to decide what he wanted to do with his future.

THE CONNECTION PLOT

This plot is about people who develop a connection across a divide—racial, class, ethnic, religious, demographic, etc. These stories make us want to help others. They are about our relationships with others.

The nonprofit version

Your organization has helped connect individuals from different backgrounds and experiences to solve a complex problem. Your protagonists are two people from different walks of life.



Connection plot from Invisible Children

Another version: Your organization started from a bond between your founder(s) and the individuals you serve. This relationship has taught both sides something powerful about life. The story is about what you have learned by working with those you work with. Your protagonist is an individual from your organization.

How to use this type of story

This story works well if you work in peace, mediation, or cross-cultural communications; have a large volunteer base, or have a compelling origin story. This is also a great opportunity to tell a change-maker narrative about how your work has inspired one of your supporters to have a profound realization on an issue that they didn't think affected them and, as a consequence, to take action.

Example: This video from Invisible Children tells the story of how an intern who was passionate about ending the war in Uganda decided to become a Palestinian activist.

THE CREATIVITY PLOT

This plot is about someone making a mental breakthrough or solving a problem in a unique way. Creativity plots make us want to do something different and try new approaches to solve problems.

The nonprofit version

You are tackling an issue that many organizations have tried to solve before, but you have had a profound insight about why previous solutions haven't worked. You are doing something different, new and promising.



The Girl Effect, commissioned by the Nike Foundation, is effective because it is simple, emotional, unexpected and concrete.

How to use this story

Help your audience think about your issue in a new way. This story explains your theory of change and is a great positioning story because it describes what makes you different from other organizations in the space. This is a great place to use motion graphics, stop motion animation, illustrations or any other creative visual idea.

Example: The Girl Effect animation caused huge waves in the

nonprofit world because it took something extremely complex, global poverty, and presented a simple, powerful, emotional solution.

Structuring plots

An impact story offers a real picture of the individuals your organization is affecting. Here is the basic structure of how most impact stories work.

1. INTRO/HOOK

This is the opening that pulls your audience in. Introduce them to the protagonist. Focus on the story, not your organization. Immediately create a reason for your

audience to keep watching. Keeping people engaged is about posing questions and then eventually answering them. For this part of the video, don't ask, "What information do I want to convey?" but rather, "What questions do I want my audience to ask?" We need to open gaps before we close them.

2. STRUGGLE/CONTEXT

Explore your protagonist's story of struggle. Make the struggle feel overwhelming and insurmountable. Take it to the point where the audience wonders how they could possibly overcome their problem. Use details and anecdotes that make the struggle feel real to help your audience understand how hard it was.

3. MOMENT OF CHANGE

Something happens and it changes the protagonist's life forever. It could be that your organization helps them glean insights about their life. They come to you and you help them solve their struggle. Your protagonist grows. Show the change through vivid, personal details of how their life is different now. Most Hollywood movies feature 80% struggle and 20% release and resolution, but from our experience with nonprofit impact stories, they should be about 30% struggle and 70% hope and resolution. You want to inspire, not depress.

4. RESOLUTION AND END

Relate your protagonist's story to a larger context. This might be a chance for someone from your organization to have a sound bite that communicates how your protagonist's story is representative of so many more or relates your vision statement. Focus on creating an emotional response to your story; don't suddenly switch to a rundown of numbers.

5. CALL TO ACTION

Always end with a call to action on what you want the viewer to do. Always. Actions can be to donate, share, sign a petition, or more.

Why Impact Stories Matter

THEY ARE MEMORABLE

In the age of information overload, well-crafted stories are able to cut through the clutter.

When we experience a variety of emotions while following a story, these emotions tap into our bank of existing memories that relate to that feeling. Our brain then categorizes the experience with other related memories.

Think of incoming stories like web pages, which are tagged with a variety of different words and categories. When you hear a new story, your brain “Googles” these stories and pulls up related memories so it can categorize the raw data into something useful. New stories stick because they become accessible via these other meaningful memories. Our senses are the drivers of memory.

THEY ARE EMOTIONAL

Films are cathartic, immersive spaces for us to grapple with the human condition.

This emotion comes by focusing on one individual's story.

Research on the psychology of giving indicates that we are much more likely to give to an individual than to a group. Individual stories are the best way to get people to care about a particular subject. Empathy results from the particular rather than the pattern.

THEY ARE RELATABLE

Tell universal stories. Tell stories which people can relate to their previous life experiences. This will help make your story accessible, tangible and memorable.

Breakthrough research in the '90's revealed that empathy is facilitated by mirror neurons—collections of cells in our brains which fire when we see other humans (or animals) experiencing an emotion which makes us feel the same emotion. “When we see someone else suffering or in pain, mirror neurons help us to read his or her facial expression and actually make us feel the pain of the other person,” argues Marco Lacoboni, author of *Mirroring People: The New Science of How We Connect with Others*.

This is what happens when people see visual stories.

The human mind is practically incapable of comprehending most statistics. We can't relate to them because they don't feel real, tangible or immediate.

People feel sympathy towards identifiable victims but fail to generate sympathy toward statistical victims; We're more likely to care more about one Liberian refugee named Boyu, whose story we've seen and heard, than about millions of people at risk of starvation in Somalia. We can't imagine the numbers, so our brain can't translate them into anything meaningful or memorable. We don't 'tag' them with any labels, because they don't make us feel anything.



Teachers acting out a story for their students in the New Market region of Kolkata, India.

THEY DRIVE SUCCESSFUL FUNDRAISING

Research on the psychology of giving also reveals that emotional thinking prepares the mind to give, while analytical thinking before an 'ask' makes people less likely to give. Your video should not communicate your commitment in terms of metrics. If you want to propel giving and sharing, you need to connect with them on a deeply emotional level.

Will your story stick?

In *Make It Stick*, the Heath brothers came up with these six key elements of “sticky” ideas:

- *Simple*: Find the core of your message and lead with it. Only have one core message. If you try to say too many things, none of them will stick. Tap the power of analogy—substitute something difficult to think about for something easy to think about.
- *Unexpected*: Get people’s attention by breaking a pattern. Unexpected ideas are more likely to stick because surprise makes us pay attention and think. Expose the parts of your message that are uncommon sense and use them in the service of a core message. Use humor! People don’t expect nonprofits to be funny and clever.
- *Concrete*: We forget that other people don’t know what we know. We need to guide our decisions by the specific needs of specific people. Abstraction makes ideas hard to understand and remember.
- *Credible*: Help people believe. We trust the recommendations of people we want to be like. The trustworthiness/authenticity of our sources, not their status, determines if we see them as authorities. Vivid details boost credibility.
- *Emotional*: Make people care. Create empathy for specific individuals. Show how our ideas are tied to what they already care about. Appeal to both their self-interest and identities. Focus on who they are right now but also to the people they would like to be.
- *Story*: Stories get people to act. They can simulate and inspire. Make sure the story is not only great, but reflects your agenda.

How to identify great stories

Your organization needs to develop a culture of storytelling and make it routine. Not only will it help you when you are deciding what kind of video to create, but it will keep your staff connected to your mission year round. Here’s what we recommend:

1. Create a time at least once a month during meetings for people (especially those on the frontlines doing the program work) to share stories that they have heard recently from those you work with.

2. Have someone type these up stories during the meeting to create a database of stories that you can draw on for video, newsletters, your website—a “story bank”.
3. When thinking about stories for video, ask your staff which stories about the organization they tell when talking about their work. Ask them if there is any particular story that they always get choked up when they tell.
4. Listen as your staff tells the story. The way in which they tell it to the group can demonstrate the natural arc of the story and indicate to you how universal the story is, i.e. what the potential for sharing is. You want to identify stories that are easy to remember and pack a punch.
5. Create an online space or have a time during meetings where your staff can share innovative or effective communications strategies that you see other non-profits and businesses doing, including great videos. Have discussions about what makes them work and analyze what probably went into making them. Start a shared file about what lessons you are learning and things you want to try.
6. Creating a culture of storytelling will help your staff feel connected to their work and your vision, whether they are on the front lines or behind a desk.

Section Takeaways

- Impact stories are transformative journeys that a protagonist embarks on. They are usually about challenges, connection or creativity. Use one of these plots to guide how you tell your impact story.
- Impact stories are emotional, memorable, relatable, and tangible. Focus on individuals, not statistics.
- Create a culture of storytelling within your organization to spur creativity and more powerful communications outcomes.

Videos for campaigns

Videos are powerful assets that can propel campaigns to success. They allow you to tell your story in a compelling way that can elicit emotional responses that inspire action. Storytelling is the engine of online campaigns.

Effective campaigns use video to promote sharing; they should be the centerpieces of your campaign. People do not share fundraising websites; they share stories and the emotions that are created from them. They share content that connects to them, moves them, and makes them feel like they are a part of something bigger than themselves.

In this section, we discuss how video fits into a larger campaign strategy, how to select an online fundraising platform to maximize the impact of your video, and tips to make it effective in fundraising.

Creating a strategy

Planning your strategy helps you get the most from your efforts. Create a written document at the beginning of your campaign and like your video plan, make it accessible to your entire team. Come up with a strategy by following three steps.

1. DEFINE GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Before you set out to make a video, define the goal of the campaign and/or video. Goals help you stay focused. Goals also help you determine how to measure success. You can set goals in many areas, not just fundraising. Think about what your goals are related to awareness, actions, and community too.

Your goals should be “SMART”:

1. *Specific*

Goals should be focused, clear, and unambiguous. Specific goals set expectations on the same level and help everyone get on the same page. Specific goals are easier to measure, too.

2. *Measurable*

Goals that are measurable allow you to track and report progress; they help define success for your supporters and stakeholders. In addition, measurable goals let you know if efforts need to be adjusted to be more effective.

3. *Attainable*

Goals should be realistic, yet require a stretch or effort to reach them. The objective can't be out of reach or below what is reasonably achievable. Setting attainable goals sets a meaningful course for the campaign.

4. Relevant

Relevance means that goals are aligned with your mission and cause. Campaign goals that don't further your mission or cause become a distraction from a non-profit's true purpose. Irrelevant goals may even confuse supporters.

5. Timely

Campaigns must have a start and end date. This motivates supporters and creates urgency in the campaign. Break your campaign up into five or more stages - the launch, sustaining interest, urgent final push, evaluation and thank you's. Write your key messages for each phase. Create a promotion calendar that detail when you will release new content. Plan emails, blog posts, video releases, Tweets, Facebook posts, events, etc.

2. CREATE A HOLISTIC VIEWER EXPERIENCE

In order for your video to achieve your desired outcomes, you need to have a clear way for your audience to experience it. View your video as one tool of engagement that needs to be supplemented with other experiences. For example, you can't post a video online and magically expect that donations are going to start pouring through the door.

“The future of fundraising rests on peer-to-peer engagement”

—RUTHELLEN RUBIN, CFRE

Think about the action that you want your audience to take and think through how they will be compelled to take that step. Think about a few questions:

- How do they learn about your video?
- Who tells them about it?
- What is the action they take after seeing it?
- How do they share your video?
- How do they donate?

You don't want viewers to have any confusion about how they can give or get involved. Make your actions as simple, straightforward and easy as possible. Give

them options of actions (the less the better) to take so that they can choose the one that is applicable to their level of engagement. Recognize that some actions are easier for your audience than others. Often potential donors need to be engaged in several ways before they actually give.

Think about how you will create an online experience that will make people take the actions you want them to.

3. IDENTIFY DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS



WorldHelp's Vimeo page that contains their media assets.

Use all your channels to share your video and campaign. Brainstorm with your staff and key supporters about who they have connections to. Find ways to be resourceful and far-reaching. Start with online channels such as email newsletters, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Include offline channels like events and meetings. Avoid creating silos so that your community can work together to help you succeed in your campaign.

You can also use promotion partners to augment the breadth of your distribution channels. Partners may be willing to help you raise awareness and share your video online too.

Selecting an online fundraising platform

Online giving is becoming a greater portion of philanthropy each year. Video is a powerful component to any campaign. Your fundraising platform should support video and its storytelling abilities.

Many nonprofits are using online fundraising platforms to empower their supporters to raise money. When you use a fundraising platform, you are maximizing the impact of your campaign video by supplementing it with the social sharing tools and branding tools it needs to succeed.

Online fundraising platforms should incorporate and enable all the key elements of successful storytelling:

- Your identity should come first. You should be able to customize the platform to integrate it seamlessly with the look and feel of your organization.
- Be explicit about the goal of the campaign and state urgency with a clear deadline at the top of the page.
- Feature a video or photo, which encourages audiences to immediately become immersed in the story.
- Allow your supporters and staff to create personalized fundraising pages where they set a personal fundraising goal. Their pages should feature their personal story about the cause. Personal fundraising is perhaps the most powerful tool to rally small donations from a trusted network.



One Girl Australia's online fundraising platform with integrated video storytelling, powered by CauseVox—<http://www.doitinadress.com>

Tips for campaign videos

In addition to creating a strategy and selecting a fundraising platform, there are a several areas to keep in mind to help increase the effectiveness of video.

MAKE YOUR CAMPAIGN TIMELY

Connect it with something larger like World AIDS Day, an anniversary, a piece of legislation or a crisis. The December giving season might be your reason to have a campaign, but come up with a more compelling reason/goal to spur motivation.

BUILD HYPE

Have a release date. Make people pay attention. Lead up to a campaign by hinting on social networking sites that you will be making a big announcement in the next week (the announcement being your campaign goal, and your video is the medium to communicate that). Host a screening for the premiere of your campaign video.

START WITH YOUR CORE TEAM

Allocate a time during which your core team can promote the video online. Create a sharing plan, and a campaign toolkit (see below).

EMPOWER YOUR SUPPORTERS

They are the engines of the campaign. Identify champions. Reach out to them personally and ask them to promote the campaign, create a video testimonial of support or write an email to their friends and family. Ask them to set a fundraising goal too if you're doing personal fundraising.

LEVERAGE YOUTUBE

After enrolling in YouTube for nonprofits, you can embed links within the video. Link your call to action to a landing page or your campaign platform.



Story Pirate's personal fundraising page, powered by CauseVox.

CREATE A CAMPAIGN TOOLKIT

This toolkit focuses on actions to take during the duration of the campaign. This should be given to your employees, Board members, and top supporters. It should include pre-written emails, Facebook posts, Tweets as well as additional fundraising ideas.

CREATE A FUNDRAISING GUIDE

This guide should be more general and long term, and be posted to your online campaign hub. This should have much broader engagement ideas surrounding the issue at large. It should be heavily focused on your support base by providing fundraising ideas that resonate with them..

GIVE REWARDS

Create a competition to reward your top fundraisers.

SAY THANK YOU

Find innovative ways to say thank you to cultivate a stronger support base and repeat donors.

Section Takeaways

- Use video to launch and communicate the vision of your campaign. People share stories, not asks.
- Have a strategy for your campaign and make sure your whole staff has access to it.
- Propel peer-to-peer giving by using an online fundraising platform that features all the elements of successful campaigns.

Do it yourself or hire?

Many nonprofits are reluctant to hire a video production company because they feel that the cost of producing a video will be beyond their budget. For most nonprofits, funding is a constant question that must be answered in creative ways. If you can't afford to hire a professional, consider seeking a communications grant for a specific project you have in mind.

The guiding principle

Lower equipment and production costs have pushed professional rates drastically lower in the past five years as the production process and access to technology has become increasingly democratized and more affordable. There are many ways for your organization to use video and with it, so many different outcomes that can be achieved.

As a general rule, use professionals for the big stuff and produce the small stuff internally.

Volunteers can help

Pro bono or volunteer video production is another option. College students studying film are often excited to get experience and give their time away for free, but make sure they have a style that is a good match for your organization. Video production work, from planning to post-production, is a time intensive process, so if you find an eager volunteer, make sure they understand the commitment. Be explicit about what you want and need.

Do it yourself

Videos that you produce internally are effective for communicating the personality of your organization and giving your nonprofit a human face. This can help make your nonprofit personable and relatable. You should be posting these types of videos at least once a month.

If you want to personalize your organization, internal video production is a completely feasible goal for most organizations. The technology is cheap, and the software is accessible. It is much less complicated than it used to be and members of your staff are probably already using basic video tools at home.

Although video production may be cheaper than ever, it still requires skill and aptitude and is very time consuming. Think about the opportunity cost of having someone on your team to produce the video. What will be sacrificed by having this staff

member divert their attention from their other responsibilities?

Since most nonprofits do not have the resources to have a video production team on staff, outsourcing your high-impact storytelling to a video production company is one of the best options for nonprofits.

Types of internally produced videos

Most videos can be produced internally, if you have the resources. Here are nine types of videos that you can produce without a professional.

- Testimonials: Create a video series featuring your staff or volunteers talking about why they care about your issue.
- Conversations: Encourage your audience to send in their own video testimonies about why they care.
- Contests: Host a video contest and have your audience create their own advocacy films about your cause.
- Calls-to-Action: Post call to action videos in response to breaking news in your sector. This can really help you establish your organization as an expert on your issue.
- Individualized Thank You's: Create individualized thank you videos for everyday donors and top fundraisers. Give your \$10 donor the experience of a \$1000 dollar donor.
- Group Thank You: If you don't have the time for individualized videos, create a thank you video (have your whole staff say thanks). Have different staff members share the successes of the campaign and let people know how they can continue to be a part of your movement.
- Updates: Release short clips of your programs in action on a monthly basis, which can demonstrate your value of transparency.
- Accountability: In the field updates show how donations are being used. If there is a building project, post updates throughout the process.
- Campaigns: Ask supporters to take a picture with their webcam of them holding a sign with a statement (get creative) about why they care about your issue/why they donated and post it to a Flickr set you create. Edit a video to be released during the last week of your campaign with these photos and an update on your

campaign goal. With your supporters as the stars of the video, they are likely to share it with their friends.

- **Campaign Updates:** Post short campaign updates (“We’ve raised half our goal!”) and highlight great fundraising efforts. Include photos if possible (“Rebecca hosted a dinner party and raised \$500!”). By thanking supporters before the campaign is even over, it will propel peer-to-peer giving and give other fundraisers ideas.

Benefits of outsourcing video

There are a lot of videos that you can do in-house or through volunteers, so why should you find a video production firm to help? Here are the four benefits that you’ll get when working with a firm:

1. EXPERTISE

Creating videos requires expertise in four main areas: storytelling, visuals, audio and editing. Each of these requires hundreds of hours of practice to master as well as a good amount of raw talent. Your communications director may be a great copywriter but that doesn’t mean that their eye is trained or inclined to create beauty from behind the camera. Beautiful cinematography, high quality audio and good pacing in editing all work together to create intimacy, hold attention and create strong emotional reactions. As a nonprofit, identify your strengths and stick to them. It is important to recognize the level of expertise and resources needed to create a professional video that will have the ability to inspire people to action.

2. TIME AND ENERGY

Video production, especially editing, is a time consuming process. In addition to creating a cohesive and concise structure, there are thousands of small actions (creating audio and visual transitions, audio level adjustments, color correction, titles etc.) that go into creating a clean and polished final product. If you dump a video project on your staff that is above their skill set, it will take away from their other work and may require a much larger time commitment than you may anticipate.

3. INTERNAL MOTIVATION

Several of our nonprofit clients have told us even though a video’s purpose was to

mobilize supporters, they have found that the videos have also helped their staff re-connect with their vision. One teacher at Achievement First charter schools told us that she watches our [*Education = Freedom*](#) video every time she is facing challenges. This isn't to say that internally produced videos can't motivate, but using someone externally might help them see their work in a new way.

4. QUALITY

Bad videos just aren't going to be watched. Any video you release is a reflection of your brand and as such you risk weakening your organization's brand if your videos are of poor quality. If poor audio/video quality, amateurish editing and sluggish pacing get in the way of the story and cause your viewer to close the video, they have learned that their click and time weren't worth it. On the other hand, videos that tell your story well and have a professional quality to them will have a better shot at garnering support, raising money, and strengthening your brand.

Considerations when hiring professionals

Decide what is most important to you before you decide whom to work with. We've worked with organizations that have chosen us for vastly different reasons. We've built long-term partnerships with some organizations because their busy communications or marketing staff needs to know that their vision will be implemented right the first time. For them, the value of efficiency—knowing there will be one round of revisions instead of six—is really important. Other organizations are more concerned that the filmmakers they hire will be sensitive, respectful and able to connect with people who have struggled and may still be struggling. Decide what matters most and let that guide the search.

Not every professional production company is the right fit for your organization. Hire a video production company that understands your unique needs and is dedicated to helping you take your vision to the next level. Do your research before hiring. Know that if you develop long-term relationships with production companies you can often get significant discounts for extended contracts.

Put everything out there at the beginning. If you have concerns, voice them. Always sign a contract and assignment confirmation before production begins. No excuses. The contract should outline the details of the project, including:

- Pricing: How much and when will they be paid, what your agreed upon price includes and excludes, and other pricing-related considerations.
- The responsibilities that each side is accountable for.
- Timeline of the project.
- Copyright, licensing and distribution rights.

When deciding whether to hire a professional, think about the intended value of the video you want to create and determine if the benefits of a professional video outweighs the costs. For example, if a \$5,000 video helps you raise \$120,000 then the investment makes sense. If the video is just a regular monthly update, it's probably not worth it. If your organization does advocacy work and the video is helping your achieve your mission then the investment in a professional may also be viewed as a mission-related cost.

Section Takeaways

- Use internal video production for routine engagement and use professionals for videos that need to have a big impact.
- Working with professionals can help your staff focus on strategy and see your organization's work in a new way.
- Don't just hire any 'professional' off the street; focus on finding the company that can best meet your needs.

Wrap up

We know that doing video right isn't easy. But trust us, if you do it right, it can be a brilliant tool to help your organization achieve its mission. Here are the ten big ideas we want you to walk away with.

1. Video storytelling is the most effective way to get people to care, share and give.
2. Video should be viewed as an opportunity to communicate vision and impact, not explain programs. Statistics don't stick. It's all about stories.
3. Stories should be transformative, simple, unexpected, credible, concise and emotional. They should have a hook, tension/question, climax and resolution.
4. Get outside the day-to-day perspective of your organization and try to see what's compelling from your audience's point of view. You might need help from outside the organization to do this. Identify target audiences and make the video about appealing to their emotional needs.
5. Produce internally to increase engagement/build brand, outsource production for fundraising/in-depth storytelling/high stakes goals.
6. Stories about one individual are the best way to create empathy. Let them tell their own story to build credibility and create viewer/subject bonds.
7. Draw people in with the story. Show what's at stake. Don't reveal that the video is about your organization right away. Protagonists are people, not organizations.
8. Don't post it and pray. Have a plan for how your video will be seen and experienced.

9. People share stories that make them feel something, not fundraising pages. A video is not a campaign in and of itself—it is one tool to propel peer-to-peer fundraising.
10. Always have a call to action. Create a ladder of engagement and meet different audiences at their level. Always say thank you.

Definitions

- B-Roll: In documentaries, b-roll is the footage that is shown while an interviewee is talking to tell the visual story of what that person is talking about. It is secondary footage that adds meaning to a sequence or enables you to disguise 'jump cuts' which occur when you eliminate unwanted content while someone is talking.
- Protagonist: The main character around whom the main events of a story revolve.
- Plot: The order of events in a narrative.
- Vision: The idea of the world that your organization is working toward. Your core belief about how the world should be.
- Personality: The list of traits that reflect how you approach your work and how people experience your organization.
- Positioning: Positioning is the place you want to occupy in your audience's mind. The big idea that you hope people will think of when they think of you.
- Animator: Creates motion graphics
- Cinematographers: Whoever is behind the camera.
- Composers: Write music
- Director: Person responsible for storytelling and creative decisions.
- Editors: Cut moving images, audio, and motion graphics together.
- Graphic Designer: Designs graphic elements, titles and text.
- Producers: The person or people who coordinate practical details and funding.
- Sound designers: Audio recordists and editors.
- Shot List: A list that identifies what you will shoot. What visuals you will need and how you want to frame them (wide/medium/up close etc.).