MDH Minnesota
Department *of* Health
OFFICE OF STATEWIDE HEALTH IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES

Success Stories Best Practices

Background

What are success stories and why are they important for SHIP and its grantees? Simply stated, these are stories about people and communities that are participating in SHIP. They tell stories of how SHIP is being used, why SHIP is needed and how it affects your community. These are stories of your neighbors that create a personal connection to SHIP. Success stories can go beyond data and statistics to help engage readers who may be potential participants, partners and funders.

What makes a good story?

A good story engages the audience. It could be about a student who has access to fresh vegetables thanks to Farm to School. Maybe you know a senior citizen who is getting more exercise because there are new walking trails in their neighborhood. It could be about someone with asthma who lives in an apartment where smoking isn't allowed and his or her health has improved. Look at the small details, the statistics and who is being affected by the outcome.

Elements of a good success story

- Know your audience and ask yourself what they care about and how it affects them.
- Use appropriate language. When in doubt, default to an 8th-grade reading level.
- Have a clear message. Example: "Kids love Farm to School!"
- Use quotes to add depth and local connections.
- Include photos. Note: All photos that contain recognizable people must have a photo release form completed and signed. A photo release form is available here: http://www.health.state.mn.us/healthreform/ship/docs/photorelease.pdf.

Types of stories

Upstream: This is a story about an effort that is in its early stages. Commonly, upstream stories are process focused. Example: "The business formed a wellness committee." While they tell stories of important achievements, they tend to have little of the emotional impact of a good people-centered story.

Midstream: Stories that are people focused. Example: "Employees are using our new gym."

Downstream: People focused stories that include statistics and outcomes. Example: "Employees are using the new gym, and as a result the staff of 50 has lost a collective 700 pounds."

Developing the success story

Ask yourself these questions:

- What affect is the effort having on the community? If possible, identify someone who is participating in the initiative and talk to him or her about the experience.
- What public health concern are you trying to address with your particular initiative? Do you have data to support that?
- Did the effort lead to policy, systems or environmental change?
- What was your approach/solution and can you document your results?

How will MDH use the content?

Success stories will be used primarily for web content, but they also could be used for talking points, reports and social media messaging.

Keep in mind

- The story must be recent to receive attention.
- SHIP connections must be clear.
- The issue and outcome must be relatable to the reader.
- The story must be jargon-free.
- Make sure the story identifies outcomes and focuses on how those outcomes affected (or will affect) the community.

The importance of good photos

Photos that tell the story are important. They add perspective on what happened and how the initiative has positively impacted your community.
- Show people whenever possible.
- Provide a high resolution jpeg file.
- Provide options in horizontal/landscape format (that format is best for social media).

Questions?

If you have questions, please contact Pete Raeker (651-201-5391; peter.raeker@state.mn.us) or your Community Specialist.

Note: Some of this content was adapted from *Impact and Value: Telling Your Program's Story.* Department of Health and Human Services; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Online: http://www.cdc.gov/OralHealth/publications/library/pdf/success_story_workbook.pdf.