Grants 102 Webinar recording

Thu, Jun 08, 2023 08:13:57 • 29:04

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

story, client, donor, work, nonprofit, grant, funder, storytelling, steady state, cecilia, telling, person, incorporate, writing, showing, program, focusing, villains, reader, great

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Now I'd like to introduce our speaker today. Her name is Cecilia landour. You may have seen her earlier, she has presented two webinars for us in the past, and she has worked in public serving nonprofits for over a decade, primarily in the Chicago area. And she has years of experience, and specifically grant writing and grant strategy. And I have to give a shout out. She just graduated from law school at University of Michigan last Friday, so please give it up for her in the chat. We're so thrilled. Cecilia, welcome. And thank you so much for coming back.

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Hello, thank you so much, Sameena. And hello, everyone. Thank you all for attending, we really appreciate it. So this is our second webinar in our grand series. And we're going to be focusing more on the persuasive storytelling framework for your grant writing. And so involved in that we're going to talk about the basics of persuasive storytelling, and how to incorporate persuasive sell persuasive storytelling into your grant writing or other donor writing donor facing work to better educate your funder. So let's jump right in. So why should you incorporate storytelling into your grant writing. So neuroscience is really clear on this, that the way that we learn the way that humans learn is through stories. And so you can just imagine, if you're presented with a story, over kind of a page of statistics or a page of facts, the story is going to be so much more engaging. And that doesn't mean that we can't present all our facts. But it's a way to kind of trick the brain, trick someone's brain into not putting up barriers for certain cliches that they might think of when they first are presented with your story. And for nonprofit work, especially for you know, certain clients who there may be a stigma around that we serve, that is really important. And so it's important to kind of short circuit, people's assumptions about the people that we serve. And so storytelling is a great way to do that. And incorporating stories into your writing.

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Can engages your reader better, and it's a better way to educate your funder because they're going to be paying attention longer. And plenty of this neuroscience shows I encourage anyone to look it up who's interested. It's kind of all over the internet. But it shows great facts about how humans learn through story. And there's a book called story or die to explain how important story is to us because it is the way that we have been taught to learn evolutionarily.

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the elements of story that we're going to want to talk about today are what you'd think of.

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When you think of any kind of storytelling, you know, your main characters, your plot, your setting your story arc, your conflict. So who would that be in your nonprofit? When we talk about main characters, a lot of the times I think, especially when we're doing fundraising work, we think about orienting our writing towards the funder, you know, you funder you foundation, you program officer can help us and here's how, but we really want to make the main character, the client, the person that you are telling the story about is the person that you're serving, and the funder or the program officer, the person that you're asking for money and a potential donor, they are kind of a different role, because the main character in stories is allowed to be imperfect. And so we want the main character, the person that your nonprofit is supporting to be someone whose story that we're telling that the donor is not the hero of it, the client is the hero. But the donor has an important role to play. So what does that look like? In terms of the story arc? The typical story arc of most stories is steady state, a ball and resolution. And so it kind of depends whether you want resolution to be a transformed steady state, compared to how it started, or is it a totally new steady state? So what does that look like? Like, if we take an example of someone who's experiencing homelessness? The steady state might be other aspects of their life. So what kind of job do they have? Or did they have before? What was their family like? Who are they AS a person and the trouble is what has happened that has led them to this position. And then your resolution is going to be what is your nonprofit do? What does your nonprofit do that brings them back to a new steady state, perhaps helps them find housing, or transform steady state, perhaps if it's healthcare, getting them on medication, connecting them with a case manager, providing them the tools to reach success, even if it doesn't so much look like a totally transformed steady state.

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And so AS part of that, the store

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Right. Implicit in all stories is the conflict. And I think when we think about telling a story to a funder or grant,

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the grants organization, it doesn't, it might seem kind of unnatural to be like, Okay, once upon a time like, and then there was a big bad, but it's not so much that AS there is conflict at issue in their lives and in all of our lives, and it's just identifying that so that you can tell a clearer and more coherent story. And so

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for depending on and we'll have time at the end for questions and can talk more about organizations specific questions, but it's worthwhile to spend time at the top thinking about what is the story that I want to tell about this person is it

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you know, person versus person, person versus self, they're trying to come to terms with perhaps if substance use is an issue that your nonprofit focuses on, person versus society, if it's your nonprofit is focused on public benefits, and they're trying to make it work in society, person versus machine, perhaps they're going up against the legal system or another system, and you need to tell their story about them facing something larger than themselves and how they persevere through it. So it really can be

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these can be translated to a lot of different scenarios. And I think just thinking at the top of what, what is my client trying to get to, can really help frame frame your grant thematically, and also just be easier to write because you have a stronger sense of what you're writing about, from when you think about this stuff from the very beginning.

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So then, continuing on with some elements of story. Setting is such an important part for how you can build the story out for your reader, because we do really want it to be engaging for them. So what is the physical setting that your clients experience, the historical one and the cultural one? And, you know, so much stuff that has been going on in the past few years? With the pandemic? Philanthropy has changed, respond to that with Black Lives Matter, philanthropy has changed. So how can yours if there's been something that's going on in our country or world that has been affecting your work? How can you talk about that in a way that incorporates it, but also doesn't force the funder to feel like they have to solve all problems and bringing it back to your client, it's a way to kind of contextualize but also individualize.

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And then you also want to think about a balance of showing versus telling your story. So showing is I think we, we emphasize so much on show over tell, but you want to have a good amount of tell to so what does that look like? So you want to be telling their story and showing details from their lives. But you also want to be telling your reader how you want them to interpret it. So maybe you're telling a story of a client who was working with an after school program, you're going to want to tell maybe, and perhaps incorporate some of the thematics like, person versatile what the conflict type is, and also the setting AS you explain what this person is going through. So just presenting facts, sometimes donor might not know what to do with that. But if you add some of the telling and explaining, you know what, what it is that I want you to see with these facts and presenting you that can balance it more. And it won't just be kind of presenting facts, which is not exactly the point of storytelling, but using more of telling and incorporating the showing to get your argument across. So lastly, in terms of elements of story, let's talk about villains or villains because there aren't really villains. It's not I think that that makes it a little more confusing, because it seems like it doesn't translate AS well to the real world. But the thing about villains and stories that they're they're not usually just totally evil. A lot of times you can see villains AS shapeshifters or gatekeepers, so if they're a gatekeeper, maybe it's the government some some government office isn't letting your clients get the services that they need, and you need money from a foundation to supplement that. The villain then maybe the gatekeeping bureaucracy, or if you're it could be a shapeshifting villain, which kind of takes out that like, evil by nature of it. And, you know, maybe it's not, it's not necessarily that they're bad people, but they have to we understand that AS bureaucrats, they have a certain thing to do, but we still need our clients to be served. So just a way of presenting them. It's not necessarily bad people, because that kind of takes us out of the story and, you know, makes us question kind of the reality of it. It's not AS believable, but painting them AS people who they're not letting our clients get what they want.

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in some form because their clients are the heroes of the story and the person the obstacle that's blocking them from getting that it is important to highlight that, because then your, your donor or your program officer can be the one to fix that problem and help your hero get to the end of their story.

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So, the hero's journey is a great way to think about highlighting an individual client and highlight a individual client is really what you want to do in your storytelling. I think a lot of times, you might want to think about the story of your nonprofit because a lot of nonprofits have really great stories of how they came to be and how, excuse you how they came to do this work that they do. But there it is just so much more powerful, and it will hit so much harder to your program officer or donor if you are focusing on an individual person, because the individual person will allow you to utilize that Hero's Journey story in a way that it will be harder to tell with your nonprofit, because there's no real end goal that you're that you need from the donor in the same sense, that will hit AS emotionally AS the individual that you're describing so AS the hero.

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And so this is a great way to involve your program staff too, because a lot of times if your organization keeps has development staff, separate from your program staff, talk to your program staff about how you can join the two together, get these stories. And so that might look different for your organization. But typically, it might be easier for the program staff who has contracts with a clients to be the ones getting the stories, but you can facilitate how they get them. So that could be you know, perhaps quarterly say do let's connect for a client story. And let's see if you have someone who is willing to share their story who is willing to share or take pictures and have their images shared. And another thing that can be really helpful here is just getting quotes from clients themselves who've experienced your, either your services and using them in your story, because there's nothing more powerful than the words of the client themselves, to finish your story with how your nonprofit has helped them. And it really does help it be client centered. Because there's a delicate line to straddle between, you know, your nonprofit is doing such great work. But you don't really want to come off AS kind of a white savior or like you are trying you are the one who needs everything, it's really you are supporting, providing a supporting role to the client. And so highlighting the individual client with this type of story can be really powerful. And this can be done in a few ways on if you don't have because grants and you know the format of submissions can vary. But this can be done through an just an additional page, you can do a page success story if you don't have a place to put it where it seems natural. But so I would encourage you to be creative about thinking, Where are places that you can highlight an individual client in your grant questions in a letter to donors, or, like I said, just attaching it AS a attachment, including it because it's really important for donors and potential donors to see who that money is going to. And it will

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be so much more so much more meaningful for them to see that actual voice of a person with those quotes. And so working with program staff to build those relationships, because clients may not have the kind of trusting relationships with development stuff that they do with program staff, that can be a really great way to build those bridges in the program. So what kind of heroic archetype might apply this is another way to think about

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kind of the elements of story and applying them to your the story that you'll be telling in your grant or writing. So what think about what the client that you want to highlight what are their what archetype they play in their life.

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And there's so many more other archetypes and there's a ton of content on the internet. And we will be sure to share some of that afterwards about different elements and that you can look up to see what will best fit your client. So warrior if someone is experiencing, you know, battling in the family court system, experiencing homelessness, perhaps a caregiver or someone who works in the foster care system and every person someone who is you know, this one applies to a lot of different kinds of clients who are trying to just make it work in our country. So there's a lot of different ways to employ these type of archetypes that make it clear to your reader.

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You know exactly what the fight

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What's at stake here, and they connect it, they provide an emotional connection for us, AS the reader, you know, to engage with this person that we're reading about. And this is a really powerful way to tell your funder about the clients that you are using, showing them that they are the heroes of the stories and you are presenting the opportunity for the donor to be kind of

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a gatekeeper in a sense to allow them to continue their story.

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Okay, so I want to talk for a few minutes about disrupting stock stories. So this is something that might come up. Depending on what your organization does. There are probably stories, stock stories that are, are assumed about your clients, your client, perhaps your client, is on public benefits. We all know that there's a very long standing wealth or queen stock story in this country about that. And there are many others. And you will probably be best positioned to determine what your stock story is that your nonprofit is facing about the people that it helps. So we want to recognize the stock stories, and we want to disrupt them. Because the issue with telling our stories and using storytelling AS a framework to share information about our nonprofit is that these stories are recognizable, they are common, and we don't want them to be associated with our clients. So it is something that you have to think what are what is it going to bring up for my in the realm that I work in to tell a story for people and this is going to be maybe some brainstorming is required from your team's different audiences for you to figure out and really get to the heart of it, because there are ways, really good ways to disrupt it. But it's really important to make sure that you are recognizing it and doing that because I think this is a way where you do get those assumptions. And in the nonprofit world that is dangerous for us and are getting funding and we don't want people to leave with these generic assumptions. So create an alternative story, you're not going to be telling the story that they're used to hearing, you're going to be telling a story about this individual client. And that's where highlighting an individual really goes very far, because it isn't just a story that they've heard before, they haven't heard the story about your specific client. Another way that really helps is using a different perspective. So there's different ways to do this. One way is kind of a pivot and swoop if you start in a specific place, and then you kind of swoop back

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to give a different perspective. But there's a lot of different techniques to do this, where you're not letting you're kind of short circuiting the assumption of your reader, you're saying this isn't, I know thinking this, but this isn't what we're going to be talking about. And

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so this is a really important thing to make sure that you're thinking about before, you're starting to figure out where you can incorporate storytelling in your story because you don't want your stories to be creating or supporting those kinds of biases. And it can be really good.

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Really good education opportunity for your funders, AS well. And the storytelling aspect of it provides a way for them to come along with it. So they're learning the storytelling method of learning rather than just saying, okay, you know, it's not, it's not what you think it is.

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And so

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I would recommend talking to your talking to your program staff, talking to other potential other people who maybe haven't heard your stories about your nonprofit See, how is this playing? How when I tell you this story, how is how are you reacting to that.

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Details, details, details, these are the most important things and this is what this is one of the ways that you will disrupt your stock story because we're used to stories, stock stories, especially that are generic and cliched. And when you use actual details and you say this is her leg life this is you know, my clients Janet, she woke up at 7am and had to take the train all the way down to her clinic. And then she had to go to her job and you tell details about your your client's life in a way that makes it personal relatable for the audience. And then you do that you do that telling part you don't forget to use the 30,000 foot view when needed. This is you know this is because of the bureaucracy of this office and we're trying to help them

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so you're taking your you're using those really on the ground close small details because that's what has the most of an emotional response and us i

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Um, and then you're also zooming back out and saying, Okay, and this is what this all means for what we're saying.

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So AS part of this, building a success story bank is going to be a really great way to kind of infrastructure eyes, this process. And so meeting with your program stuff, if you create a way to do that, perhaps quarterly, or you say, let me know, if you come across someone who has, you know, a good story that you think would be good for us to share. When you start to build up these stories, you're creating a bank that you can draw on whenever you're writing,

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externally facing work. So grants, donor letters, every time that you want to do that, you can go into your bank, and you can say, Okay, do I have a client who spoke about this? Do I have a client who went through this specific thing that I want to get this program funded again, and you will create such a rich bank of clothes with permission, of course,

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that you can draw on, and it will just create such such vibrancy in your grants, because your program officers are more likely more often seeing the types of grants where it is. Now our programs serve 85% We have 100 clients but but if you come at it from Jane is one of our 100 clients. And she had a great success rate this year, which contributed to our overall success rate, that I'm much more interested in that we're all much more interested in that because we can identify with Jane.

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So just another reminder to be client centered, because we really don't want people to feel like

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you know, this is just we just need their story. And that's it, we want them to feel heard. And so that can be working with your program staff,

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figuring out ways to highlight the clients in ways that they feel like this is telling their story in a positive way. So having them get input into that into your writing, just making sure that we don't feel like we're going to them getting what we need to get Miami and leaving. But this is a really great way that you can use collect your clients experiences from over the years and build a bank that you can just continue to deploy in different ways.

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So lastly, just keep practicing storytelling is a muscle. And it really it's all around us. It's everywhere. So think about when you hear a story you like if it's TV movies, if it's the news, what is it that made you listen a little bit closer? What is it that made you want to hear the end of it, think about that, and try to employ that technique in your stories. And lastly, there's a lot of different tips like this. One of my favorite is write drunk, edit sober, just know your first draft will be bad. Your first second and third drafts will be bad maybe. But that's okay. Because the writing process writing and editing is implied and I think we just think writing is. But editing is 50%, if not more. And so don't be discouraged. If it feels like it's taking you a little bit longer. Good storytelling, it looks really easy to do. It's not always really easy to do. But it's 100% a great way to get people involved and more engaged in your writing and more engaging your nonprofit. So that is our presentation today. And let's turn to the chat. Thank you so much.

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Sorry, thank you so much. The Celia, I do want to just say, Cecilia is not recommending that you start drinking alcohol. That's not what you need to know. But we've I've heard that thing AS well. So it's not a problem. I just want to give that disclaimer. So please keep putting your questions into the chat. Even if we have not had time to answer them. I will we will hand them to Cecilia and hopefully she will get back to you. So first question is Paul has asked what is the ideal length for a story?

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That's a great question. I would say if you are doing a an additional page, like an additional document, I think a page is great. And you can include a picture in there too. And a few quotes and it doesn't need to be super long. I think

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you'll be probably repeating a lot of stuff that you've already said in your grant. And so keeping it short and sweet is great because you want them to read it.

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Thanks so much. Okay, and Simon is asking, in my typical grant application, I'm answering specific questions. So how does the story arc work in that situation?

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Sure. Yeah. So that's a great question because most grant applications

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is our kind of what is the purpose of the grant? What is this? And I think it is just, you really can. And I think people, it seems unusual, but you really can just jump right into it. And you can say, you know, I want to do this by telling you about one of our clients, or you can start by just answering it and then

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in what in the attachment include a story, because I think the way that what you want to think about it AS AS not just try to try not to depersonalized what you do.

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And I think that that is just so easy to do in grant writing, because it that the questions are often so wrote, and they just want you know, what is your budget, what is, but there are ways and I think that is we want to try to short circuit and say you're getting all the information, but it's maybe not going to be in the format you expected. And I think that necessary if you're including all the information that you need, but are also saying

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kind of peppering in different ways to include information about clients and their stories. And so and kind of thinking about that transform state resolute or steady state resolution transform. So what is the transform seat you want to get to and just envisioning that, and describing that for your client, I think, or for your fund, or just kind of, because there are all these ways to incorporate it and really creative. And I know you guys will be so creative in how you do this. But people aren't expecting that. And they're not used to that. And I think they'll like it.

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And they'll be better informed because they'll actually be read during these grants, hopefully.

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Okay, Carolyn is asking, can you share more examples of stock stories? Sure. So this, you'll be able to think about what they are for yours, specifically, but I think you know, some about people who have substance use, it's their fault, and they're not going to get off of it. People who are homeless, it's all you know, it's their fault. It's, it's something we can all like, we're all able to do it they should be to this personal responsibility individualism thing, I think shows up a lot in America. And so where wherever it is, like you'll, if you think about what is kind of the stereotype that you feel like you're fighting for your nonprofit,

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that is the place that you want to go. And sometimes it's uncomfortable, because it's like, I don't want people to be thinking about this. But you want to counteract it directly and say, This isn't what this is, you might think it is, but it's not. And so you'll you'll be best positioned to think about and ask people maybe ask people who who don't agree with what your nonprofit does, that could be a way to to see, well, what are the stories out there that I need to counter? That's a great question.

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Okay, and I think it's mica sorry, if I'm pronouncing it incorrectly? How can we effectively balance the physical, historical and cultural settings in our storytelling?

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That's also a great question. So I would think about what is the most salient and your so if you are working in a time where something something very powerful and cultural is happening, and that's really impacting a lot, maybe you're going to be focusing more on the cultural aspect of it.

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If you were in a physical setting, I'm thinking of Atlanta with cop city. Maybe that's something that you're going to be focusing on or historical. Is there something specific historical historically that's happened in your state or city that has led to what you're trying to fight against today? So I think it's kind of a sliding scale. Which one will you be wanting to focus more on in a given grant, but I think that'll be you know, you AS the program, people are the best position to answer that. And I think you can play around with it and very, because they can, those can all be deployed very powerfully.