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31 May 2016

Dear Friends,

We hope this message finds you well! Here at Firelight we are focusing some time on learning how effective story-telling can be a great tool for any organization. Whether you are a larger non-profit or a small community-based organization, telling the story of your group's work is important when writing funding or annual reports, seeking funding, raising awareness, or showing the impact of your efforts. The Newsflash this month reflects that focus, and we hope that you will find some great tips for how to tell the story of your work. Have a great, well-told story about your work to share? Send it to us at [newsletter@firelightfoundation.org](mailto:newsletter@firelightfoundation.org)!

Additionally, we have recently switched our newsletter service, so please let us know if you experience any issues opening or reading this month's Newsflash email!

We hope you enjoy this month's edition of the Newsflash!

Sincerely,

The Firelight Team

*Article: Taking Ownership of Your Story: Maximizing the Impact of Your Annual Report*

*Article: Five Elements of Every Successful Non-profit Annual Report*

*Article: How to Use Stories on Major Donor Visits*

*Open for Proposals: The Noel Buxton Trust (Deadline: Open)*

*Open for Proposals: Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation*

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## **Article: Taking Ownership of Your Story: Maximizing the Impact of Your Annual Report**

The vast majority of nonprofit executives take the time and effort to produce an annual report for their board members, volunteers, consumers, and community stakeholders. This report is generally considered a must-have, rather than optional. Board members tend to regard the annual report as a governance tool, providing them with critical information about the financial well-being of the nonprofit. Volunteers learn about the value of their time and efforts, and consumers understand the programs and services offered. Community stakeholders also use it to keep up-to-date on your nonprofit's mission, activities and progress. Increasingly, funders and donors look to your annual report to both measure your success and investment worthiness, as well as gauge your

overall sophistication in the way you present your information.

### *The Ever Changing Annual Report*

The nature and presentations of the annual nonprofit report have changed over the years. Some organizations used to create expensive books and send them via the postal service to everyone on their lists. (Pro-tip: Don't do that.) The old version of an annual report may have had lots of great pictures of happy kids or volunteers, or someone you can't identify smiling, but maybe not all that much hard data on the nonprofit and what it did in the world.

The way people learn about charities has changed. In the days of yore (say, ten years ago) your supporters and clients may only have had information about your work from one source – and that source was you. The most common vehicles for communications were via newsletter, fundraising letter, speeches and presentations, and – if you produced one – your ho-hum annual report. The digitization of data has changed all that. Nearly every nonprofit's IRS filing is now available at a mouse click. That report may be a bit out-of-date, but if your nonprofit isn't providing some kind of dynamic annual summary, then incomplete, web-accessed information is going to tell your story for you.

### *Take Control of Your Message*

Charities have the option to take control of that message by helping both long-time supporters, funders and first-time visitors find what they need to know about you in an easy-to-access format. A good annual report should be inexpensive to produce (mostly available in electronic format with very few print copies) and answer the questions many ask of nonprofits regarding each component of the nonprofit: mission, operations, finances, services, consumers, results and impact. It also should invite the reader to become more engaged in what you do. Some visitors, such as grant reviewers, are experienced information seekers; others may be novices, but all audiences can benefit from accessing complete, up-to-date and inspiring information about your nonprofit.

### *5 Must-Haves in your Annual Report*

1. Include a summarized message from the lead staff and board

Give your reader some brief context and connection to people. Your organization isn't faceless – go ahead and embrace the faces.

2. Use Metrics

People want to know your nonprofit is making a difference. Show evidence of impact and help them with useful comparisons. Saying you had 10% more clients than last year is interesting, but helping them understand why your nonprofit is growing, and how it is making a long-term change in someone's life, is even better.

3. Highlight relevant pictures

Yes, pictures go a long way, but do not use stock photography if you can avoid it. Most phones will take a decent picture these days, however, if you can afford a real photographer, even better. Try to get real shots of real people impacted by your real work. Remember, including smiling faces is great, but candid photos capturing moments

displaying your good work can be impactful.

#### 4. Show them the money

If you don't talk about money (your financials and other relevant data), some folks will go elsewhere to find that information. Again, context is important here. If you lost money last year, talk about why and what you are doing about it. Don't try to hide information; obfuscation just encourages the curious to dig up skeletons.

#### 5. The "ask" is key

You've included the story of your nonprofit work; be sure to include a request for support. This can include financial support, volunteer support, advocacy support, or whatever else your nonprofit may need.

#### *Customizing your report matters most*

Each nonprofit should identify custom elements to add to its annual report. Be creative; poll your board and volunteer base to find out what information, formatting or "extras" they would appreciate. Don't forget that your consumers may also be readers, and include information important to them. In fact, invite staff, volunteers and consumers to briefly contribute to your report; when you do, your content will come alive. Finally, individual donors and grant makers will be reading your annual report – don't forget to talk about your outcomes, impact and results. Prove that they will see a social return if they invest in your organization.

No matter what additional color and flavor you include, along with the standard requirements, in your annual report, take personal ownership of that uniqueness as you tell your very special story. Use your annual report as a key channel to show that you are making a difference.

Source: Social Solutions, <http://bit.ly/1NSXjwv>

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### **Article: Five Elements of Every Successful Non-profit Annual Report**

All nonprofit annual reports, regardless of size, length, or format, should include these five essential elements.

#### *1. Accomplishments, not activities*

What were the results of your work last year? Why did you spend your time and money the way you did? What differences did you make in the world? Connect the everyday activities of your organization to your mission statement. Don't assume that readers will automatically understand how your activities help you achieve your mission. Connect the dots for them.

Nonprofits often assume that an annual report is a description of activities. That's not quite right. An annual report should be a summary of what you accomplished by doing those activities. You need

to explain the meaning behind the work you do every day and the difference you are making by implementing your mission and goals. It's the difference between saying you went to five meetings and explaining how something changed because you went to those five meetings. Don't just say you released a study on a topic; explain how the study opened the eyes of a certain group of people and how their behaviors changed as a result.

### *2. Real people telling the story*

Supporters want to hear powerful stories about the impact of your work that feature real people, so include people pictures, profiles, testimonials, and little anecdotes that let those voices shine through.

Get away from the institutional voice doing the talking, and make your report a more personal communications piece.

Including personal profiles as sidebars or anecdotes in your annual report, or in a video online, is a great way to tell an important story about your organization, while also recognizing the contributions or successes of specific people. Asking others who have been touched by your organization to share their experiences is a proven way to share your accomplishments without sounding like you are bragging. Let them say how great you are.

Use a “creative nonfiction” style of writing—storytelling where everything is true. Describe the scene vividly to bring your readers into the story and help them visualize what's happened.

### *3. The financials*

The financial section of your annual report needs to tell the story too. Because nonprofit organizations are not legally required to produce an annual report—we are talking about the communications piece to donors, not government forms like your 990—there are no requirements about how you present financial information.

Some nonprofits choose to print full financial statements in their annual reports, while others print only a few simple pie charts. Printing full financials has drawbacks. Readers who are unfamiliar with financial statements will skip them, and even people who know how to read them may skim right by. Financial statements can be easily misinterpreted, especially if you have large one-time income and expense items that skew your bottom line. Finally, full financials take up lots of space, and because annual reports can be expensive to design, print, and mail, every page counts. Unless you feel very strongly that your organization would benefit from printing your full financials, leave them out. Instead, use graphics and a short description of how you raised and spent the money. Include a note that says that your full financials are available upon request or on your website.

### *4. Ample thanks*

Gratitude should permeate the entire report. Give your community of supporters the sense that you are embracing them as partners in bringing about all of the year's accomplishments. In traditional reports, nonprofits often list all of the names of donors, but in shorter formats, that's just not possible. Instead, use the stories you tell, the profiles and photos you include, and your overall tone to convey how important their support is to your success.

#### *5. A call to action*

So you've done a fabulous job telling readers about your accomplishments and financials and inspiring them to get involved in helping you do more. What next? Tell your readers exactly how they can help you. Include a small box or a full page at the end of the report (or a link or form online) with a call to action or request for help. Let readers know the different ways they can support your organization. You may want to list the types of donations you can accept. You can also mention other non-monetary ways people can support you, such as volunteer opportunities.

Nonprofits are experimenting with many different print and online formats for annual reports. You can see many samples of "new and improved" formats at <http://nonprofitannualreports.wikispaces.com>. But regardless of the format you choose, be sure to include these five essentials.

#### *Summary*

Your organization's annual report is a grand opportunity to take your supporters inside the fine work you do and show them the results you achieve. The five elements every annual report should include:

- Accomplishments, not activities. Show the benefits of your work.
- Real people telling the story. Readers respond to personal communications.
- The financials. Show key information in graphic form.
- Ample thanks. Let your community of supporters know you appreciate them.
- A call to action. Remind readers how they can support you.

Source: Kivi Leroux Miller, First Non-profit Foundation <http://bit.ly/1XWH6ZB>

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### **Article: How to Use Stories on Major Donor Visits**

Sharing stories in direct mail, on a website or in social media posts are fairly common these days. These are all great channels to reach many donors, in particular those who are a part of the annual giving segment. But what about major donors?

Recently I received a great question from a reader about telling major donor stories and today I'll be answering it in the Storytelling Q&A.

The reader asked: “I completely understand how important storytelling is to fundraising and am interested in using it more. I’m a Development Officer and all of the donors I work with are my organization’s major donors. Most aren’t receiving our direct mail or other communications, which feature stories. Can you share some tips on how I can tell stories to these donors?”

Although your organization may segment your donors based on financial giving levels (as most organizations do), you’re absolutely right to think that there are ways to be sharing stories with major donors, too. Once upon a time, I was Development Officer and telling stories to donors when we would talk on the phone or meet face-to-face was an important cultivation tool. Here are my top tips for telling more and better stories to major donors.

*Tip #1 Do not assume that they don’t want to receive annual giving solicitations or communications.*

An essential part of being donor-centric is that you know and respect things like a donor’s communications preference. If you have never asked your major donors if they want to receive this additional communications, they might be missing out. Here’s how I would ask them if they want to receive this: “You and I keep in touch pretty regularly and I provide you with a lot of updates about projects that you’ve funded over the years. But our organization has a lot of initiatives and we report about these to donors in things like our direct mail, newsletters and email. You’re currently not receiving any of these and I wanted to check to see if you would be interested in receiving them so that you can see what else we’re up to.”

*Tip #2 Know what makes the donor tick.*

In theory the idea of telling stories is great. But before you go nuts and make every meeting story time, it is super important that you know your donor. Would they like to hear stories? Are they more of a numbers person? What kinds of stories would they appreciate? Take some time to figure out who your audience is and what they would appreciate. Only then can you decide if you should even be telling them stories and what stories to tell.

*Tip #3 Practice telling stories ahead of your meeting.*

Have you ever rehearsed before giving a presentation? You can do this with stories, too! Telling a story is a bit like a performance rather than the usual conversation you might have during your meeting. That’s why I recommend practicing the story ahead of time. Test it out on a friend or family member. Ask them what they thought was most interesting about the story and see if there are any more details you can add to those parts.

*Tip #4 Make it experiential.*

Storytelling is a wonderful tool that can be used in many different mediums. It helps us to share an emotion and a message to our audience. But what can be really impactful is

if the story is experiential. By that I mean that the donor is able to actually experience what you are talking about. Since the donor is a major donor, this might be something special that you can do for them as a part of stewardship or cultivation. Is there some project, program or service that they can experience first-hand? How would you create that experience for them?

Source: Vanessa Chase Lockshin, The Storytelling Non-Profit, <http://bit.ly/1WQYxuY>

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## **Open for Proposals: The Noel Buxton Trust (Deadline: Open)**

### *Purposes of funding*

Trustees would like to focus their limited funds on economic development rather than service provision. Trustees favour work such as small business support and training, and microfinance in both urban and rural settings. Applications in support of initiatives that are building sustainable futures in the semi arid areas of Africa are especially welcome. Trustees also welcome appeals that support and protect street children, and help them find safe and sustainable livelihoods.

The Trust would welcome applications that enable successful practical solutions to be replicated or that aim to bring about relevant policy change through effective advocacy. They would also welcome applications that demonstrate a commitment to strengthening community based organisations and ensuring the voice of poor and marginalised women and men are properly heard and respected.

### *Who can apply?*

Trustees tend to offer grants to smaller, grass-roots organisations and do not generally respond to appeals from large and well-supported charities. The Trustees welcome applications from diaspora led organisations based and registered in the UK. The Trust is willing to consider direct applications from registered civil society organisations in Africa or UK based charities which might be diaspora organisations based in the UK. Applications need to be made in English.

### *Geographical focus*

The Trustees fund work in Africa. At present they favour projects based in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda, Sudan and South Sudan. Within these areas, priority will be given to work with communities living in urban slums and semi-arid regions where economic hardship is most extreme. The Trustees would welcome applications from Sahelian countries as long as they can be submitted in English.

### *Amount and duration of grants*

The maximum grant is £5,000 per year for up to three years.

For more information, please visit: <http://bit.ly/1TIQWOw>

**Open for Proposals: Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation**

The Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation is currently inviting non-profit organizations to submit project proposals, with an aim to protect and promote human rights, children education and protection, scientific and medical research and health, promotion of art and culture, environmental protection and nature conservation.

NPF's mission emphasis on the environment and wildlife conservation, and a focus on humanitarian and charity programs, with a particular attention to first-aid interventions for relieving poverty and suffering.

Thematic Areas: Charity, Educational, Environment Conservation, Medical research, Construction, Cultural/Artistic, Historical Partners, Campaigns

**Eligibility Criteria:**

- Applicants from any country are eligible to apply.
- Applicants must be a non-profit organization (association, foundation, cultural association, university, academic institution, etc.).
- The working language of the Foundation is English. Application forms submitted in other languages will be rejected. Application forms written in poor English will be rejected.

For more information please visit: <http://bit.ly/1ItRah0>

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As part of the Firelight Foundation's Capacity Building Program, Firelight provides "Newsflashes" to share relevant resources and information with our active grantee-partners via weekly emails and via post on a monthly basis. We hope that by facilitating access to information for grassroots, community-focused organizations, programming for children and families, as well as organizational development, is enhanced. Past editions of the Firelight Newsflash can be found on our website:

<http://www.firelightfoundation.org/resources/newsflash>

We welcome your comments, feedback and ideas for upcoming Newsflashes at [newsletter@firelightfoundation.org](mailto:newsletter@firelightfoundation.org)

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