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A partnership of Lipman Hearne and Andy Goodman

Storytelling: The First Big Thing
Story Structure Worksheet

Select one of the points about your organization (or program) that you would commonly make to a particular audience and choose a story that will illustrate that point – something that actually happened, whether it’s an incident in which you were involved, something you observed, or simply a story you heard about from a colleague.

You must be able to answer the following questions about the incident if it is to “rise to the level of story” as we have discussed today. So take a few moments to think about these questions and then write your answers in the spaces provided. (If you cannot answer all of the questions, you may need to select another story.) This will serve as an outline for the story you will write or tell during the next segment of the workshop.

What is the point you want listeners to take away upon hearing this story?

What audience would you want to tell this story to? (Public? Legislators? A combination of these or others? The language you use in writing the story will be informed by this choice.)

Who is the protagonist of your story? (Whom will the audience follow or identify with through the narrative? *Remember, organizations cannot be protagonists!*)

What does the audience need to know about the protagonist and his/her/their situation to understand their “world in balance” as the story opens?

What is the “inciting incident” that upsets this balance in some way?

What is the protagonist’s goal?

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What is the first barrier standing in the protagonist's way? (What are the internal or external barriers?)

How does your protagonist pursue the goal? (What happens as the protagonist encounters subsequent barriers, and if there are no barriers, what is keeping the narrative interesting for the audience?)

What is the moment of truth in this story? (What happens or changes in that moment, and what does it show us about the human condition?)

What is the resolution of the story? (Does your protagonist achieve his/her/their goal or is there another outcome?)

What's the meaning of the story? What do you want the audience to take away?

How does this story relate to your organization's work? (Is it emblematic of your mission? Does it show what a single program does? Does it explain why your organization does what it does? In short, what should the audience see when you "widen the lens"?)