

# How to tell your story

## Elements of compelling evidence-based storytelling



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**A catchy title:** that grabs the attention of the reader

**A strong opening:** your first paragraph should draw the reader in

**Effective scene-setting:** make the reader understand why library action was necessary

**A clear narrative:** a description of what the library did

**A meaningful ending:** how did library action make a real, provable difference?

# Coding for Kids in Libraries

**Since January 2017, Progress Foundation, Etic Association and 29 rural librarians, with the funding support and partnership of the Romanian American Foundation are developing the coding skills of over 450 kids from Romania. Coding for Kids in Libraries or shorter said CODE Kids has managed to bring together a large array of stakeholders and is due to continue after this pilot year.**

It all started with an understanding and an acknowledgement: Romania has one of the fastest growing IT sectors in Central and Eastern Europe, however its education system and human resources development policies are far behind of what the economy needs. In 2014 for example, according to the Commission's Directorate General for Communications Networks, Content & Technology (DG CONNECT), 23% of the EU population had no digital skills, while Romania's number is 50% (the highest in Europe), and 85% of the Romanians had low digital skills. Also, by 2020, Europe may experience a shortage of more than 800,000 professionals skilled in computing/informatics. Coding skills will be a key



To mitigate this situation is a task beyond the capacity of two organizations or one funder, but one needs to start somewhere. Project partners decided to focus on secondary school kids from 10 to 14 years old and piloted an intervention

educational purposes, librarians are more confident in working with youth and, due to better communication, services they offer to kids are more diverse. At the same time, project partners have already witnessed some incipient community development

**Great illustrations:** use pictures and video to bring your story to life!

# So how can you turn your idea into a great story?

There are a few key elements:

## 1. A catchy title: that grabs the attention of the reader

## 2. A great story

- A strong opening: your first paragraph should draw the reader in
- Effective scene-setting: make the reader understand why library action was necessary
- A clear narrative: a description of what the library did
- A meaningful ending: how did library action make a real, provable difference?

## 3. Great illustrations: use pictures and video to bring your story to life!

### Take Inspiration from examples:

#### Mobile Libraries for Peace

This SDG story is about the programme in Colombia where the National Library and National Network of Public Libraries are aiming to help demobilised soldiers step back into civilian life after the end of the armed conflict. The title of the story includes the keyword of this activity: Peace, which corresponds with the SDG 16 goal to promote peaceful and inclusive societies.

#### Public libraries in Romania facilitate access to agricultural subsidies

This SDG story is about the library programme helping farmers to fill in applications for subsidies. This story supports SDGs 2 (Zero Hunger) and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). The title of the story in this case mentions important keywords like agriculture and subsidies.

## Title

### **Recommended number of words: maximum 10**

It is good to have a catchy and meaningful title for your story. Try to avoid long descriptive titles, rather use a slogan if your story has one, or a short description that provides clear information on what the story is about.

As your story will be linked to the SDGs to which your activity, project or programme is contributing, we recommend that you use some relevant keywords. When deciding on the title of your story, it may be useful to recall the ultimate goal that your activity, project or programme was designed to achieve.

## Narrative

### **Recommended number of words: 350 (maximum 500)**

Remember that most people will not read more than 250 words before they start to skip the lines, so you should give them all the information quickly. Bring out the human angle – make the reader empathise with the library and the people it is serving. The simpler your story, the more impact it can have on people.

You should start with an introductory paragraph of 25-30 words. This should be a ‘hook’ that draws the reader in by grabbing their attention for long enough to make them want to read or listen to the rest of the story. You can ask a question, surprise the reader with a fact, or make people wonder.

### Looking for writing tips?

Even if you’re not planning to write a book but just a very short story, it can be useful to learn and gain inspiration from writers.

What is and what is not the hook? Learn more from Writers to Authors in their blog post “[Seven Point Story Structure: The Hook](#)”

[5 Secret Tips to Writing A Successful Short Story](#) from Writer’s Relief staff.



## Overall, your story must provide answers to the following questions:

### Why?

Description of a problem or challenge in the community that this activity, project or programme was designed to address.

### Who did what, how and when?

Brief description of an activity, project or programme.

### So what?

Description of impact on the community and evidence of its contribution to local, regional or national development needs.

**i** **Community needs assessment** is a combination of information-gathering, engagement and focused action with the goal of community improvement. It is aimed at identifying community issues and priorities as well as creating and discussing solutions (e.g. new or improved library services targeted at under-served community groups). The goal of community needs assessment is **to make sure that the service, activity, project or programme you are developing and delivering fits the needs of the community you serve.**

Librarians do a lot to measure the needs of their community whether they know it or not. Some of the existing data sources may be:

- Library use statistics
- Suggestion box/comment cards
- Public records and statistics
- Information gathered from reports, newsletters, and newspapers
- Casual conversations with community members and library users
- Surveys, interviews, discussions, key opinion-formers in the community
- Observations in the community and library

### Why?

Spend more time to describe the “why” than the “who did what, how and when”. Your readers may know nothing about your community and what’s important for you. To feel part of your story, it is important that the reader can picture themselves in the situation you are describing, and that they understand the problem or challenge in your community that your library activity, project or programme aimed to address.

This does not need to be difficult. You will have had a reason for organising your activity, project or programme, based on your knowledge and understanding of what your community needs.

To do this, you can talk about community demographics (older/younger, male/female), social and/or economic characteristics (rich/poor, well-educated or not, rural/urban), problems and/or issues that your community experiences and how your library contributes to solving these. Knowing the conditions in your community and an issue, problem or challenge that your activity, project or programme was designed to address and contribute, you can talk about the changes that you expected to see.

Remember that the community problem or challenge that your library service was designed to address can be closely related to existing local, regional or national development needs and priorities that may be described in policy documents or development plans. If these exist, try to put things into context to demonstrate how your activity, project or programme is contributing to the goals mentioned in these documents and link to the SDGs, thus helping to meet local, regional or national development needs.

### Who did what, how and when?

In a concise way, describe your activity, project or programme. Who was involved and how? What did they learn or gain from participating? What did you do that no-one else did, or could have done? Include the names of the organisations involved (and descriptions if necessary), describe partnerships, and provide some information about the timeline so readers know whether your activity, project or programme has just started, is ongoing or already ended.

Re-read what you have written – does the description contain only necessary information? Would it make sense to someone who knows nothing about your library or your community?

Ideally, you should include some statistics on the results of activities and services provided. These are numbers that will provide the reader with an idea of how many were served, were trained, were reached, have participated, etc.

### A Meaningful Ending

What makes a story different from just a simple narrative is that the story has a meaning. The most important part of your story is to tell what happened as a result of your activity, project or programme. The ending of your story can deliver the meaning and show value by demonstrating that the activity, project or programme led to a significant and worthwhile change in people's lives.

To tell a compelling story you should add to your story some quantitative and/or qualitative evidence that could demonstrate the real impact of your library's contribution. While you may have won over the heart of your reader by describing your situation, their head will only follow if you provide hard evidence that you made a difference to individuals and the community.

There are various ways of doing this. You can use both the results of feedback or evaluation surveys that you may have carried out before and/or after your project or programme (Do participants feel more confident? Better informed? Have they changed their own behaviour? Has this helped them improve their health? Find a better job?). You can include testimonials or quotes from those who took part in an activity (with names, if they allow) to make your story more personal.

# Remember: The simpler your story, the more impact it can have on people.

**i** **Impact** is the effect your library activity, project or programme has on an individual or a group. It **is about change** to people's lives, to how groups and/or organisations behave, and to communities.

As the result of participating in your library's activity, project or programme depends on your activity, project or programme's objective, the following could change (outcomes):

- Knowledge and understanding (e.g. learning something new or improving)
- Competencies and abilities (e.g. doing things better/faster)
- Behaviour (e.g. doing things differently)
- Attitudes (e.g. confidence, feeling empowered/involved)
- Quality of life (e.g. in areas of employment, health, education, social life etc.)

It is easy to measure outcomes if you have a clear impact objective from the beginning – i.e. you know what you are trying to achieve with your activity, project or programme and why. Before starting any activity, project or programme, you should define the data and evidence you need to collect that will demonstrate if and to what extent the change happened. The way you collect data will depend on the type of data/evidence you need.

- For quantitative data: surveys based on questionnaires, tests, or measurement (use of resources, school results, etc)
- For qualitative evidence: interviews, user stories, testimonies, drawings and sequences of photos

Need help with outcome measurement? Free online resources and tools provided by [Project Outcome](#) can make it easy. Try it out!

### Checklist

This checklist will help you to prepare for the submission of your story to the Library Map of the World.

Use the checklist to review if the narrative and visual elements of your story include all crucial elements and meet the minimum requirements set for each part of the story.

- The title reflects what the story is about and how it is linked to selected SDGs
- The title is maximum 10 words long
- The description contains answer to why the activity, project or programme was implemented (description of problem or challenge in community)
- The description contains answers to who did what, how and when (concise description of activity, project or programme)
- The description contains some quantitative data and/or qualitative evidence of impact that the activity, project or programme had on individuals or community
- The description explains how the activity, project or programme contributes to selected SDGs and helps to meet development needs
- The description is at least 350 words (maximum 500 words) long
- The story has at least one picture or video
- People on attached photos/videos are consulted and willing to be included (and are informed that pictures will be published online)
- I understand the conditions of CC BY 4.0 licence and I'm ready to attach a CC BY 4.0 licence to my story
- If using my own pictures, I have applied a CC BY 4.0 licence. If using other people's pictures, I have sought permission to publish them in a work licensed under CC BY 4.0, and if necessary have included any necessary licensing information (including name of photographer and title)
- If using my own video, I have applied a CC BY 4.0 licence. If using other people's video, I have sought permission to publish them in a work licensed under CC BY 4.0, and if necessary have included any necessary licensing information (including name of videographer and title)

### Notes

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