



Community Impact Agenda Setting

Class 4 - Responsible Storytelling

Table of Contents - Community Impact Class 4

Module 1: Staying Focused on the Long-Term Vision.....	1
Module 2: Feedback Loops for Continuous Improvement.....	2
Module 3: Roles & Responsibilities of a Board Member.....	3
Module 4: Roles & Responsibilities of a Nonprofit.....	4
Module 5: Roles & Responsibilities of a Staff Member.....	5
Module 6: Responsible Storytelling.....	7
Module 7: The Science Behind Storytelling.....	8

Estimated time to complete: 1 hour

Class Objectives

- Learn about effective, equitable feedback loops and data collection methods – with staff, board, grantees, community leaders.
- Balance the grantor/grantee power dynamic and the grantee/client power dynamic.
- Establish a culture of learning and center learning at the heart of your organization.
- How to do ethical storytelling - Respect the voice of the human impacted and avoid exploitation of nonprofit organizations.
- Effectively communicate with your stakeholders – national funders, board, donors, staff, community leaders, grantees, etc.
- Build bridges across the community – rising tide lifts all boats.

Module 1: Staying Focused on the Long-Term Vision — A Community Foundation's Role

Community foundations are crucial in keeping community leaders aligned around a shared vision and agenda. Even when faced with challenges or changes, such as leadership turnover or external critiques, community foundations can help navigate through these obstacles and maintain a focus on long-term, sustainable investment in successful approaches.

One key strength of a community foundation is the ability to maintain momentum in the face of leadership changes, whether at partner organizations or within local government. By staying close to the community, you can foster trust and continue the work, even as circumstances evolve.

The most effective community foundations embrace transparency, invite feedback, and communicate in ways that are both authentic and compelling. When you engage with the community in this way, trust grows, and your work becomes more impactful and enduring.

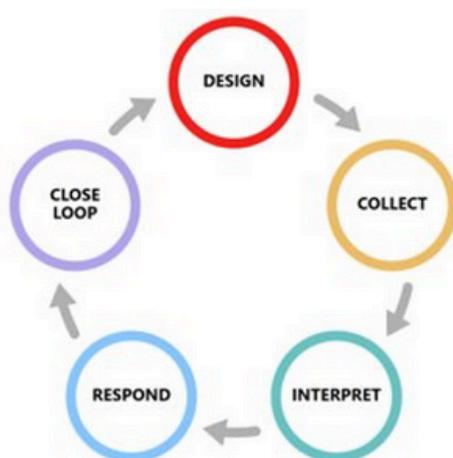


Community Impact Agenda Setting Class 4 - Responsible Storytelling

Self-Reflection: How do you currently ensure that your communication with the community is transparent and authentic? How could you improve these practices moving forward?

Module 2: Feedback Loops for Continuous Improvement: Engaging Stakeholders

It's essential to give your grantees and stakeholders regular opportunities to provide feedback.



Design

Work collaboratively to develop a survey focusing on client experience using Listen4Good core questions as a foundation.

Collect

Prepare the clients to offer candid opinions and tailor data collection to what works best for them.

Interpret

Use proven analytical tools to draw insights from client responses, with an emphasis on voices least heard.

Respond

Make organizational, programmatic, and operational changes based on client feedback.

Close Loop

Share results with your clients and explain how you're responding to what you've learned.*

Listen4Good Suggested Core Questions

1. How likely are you to recommend this organization to a friend or family member?(0-10 scale)
2. What is this organization good at? (open-ended),
3. What could this organization do better? (open-ended)
4. How much of a positive difference has this organization made in your life? (1-5 scale)
5. Overall, how well has this organization met your needs? (open-ended)



Community Impact Agenda Setting Class 4 - Responsible Storytelling

Module 3: Roles & Responsibilities of a Board Member



Grantmaking Oversight

- Establish committee
- Review grant recommendations
- Evaluate effectiveness

Board members establish committees to review and recommend grant investments in the community. Approval by size of grant should be outlined at the discretion of the board, in addition to follow up funding considerations.

As a community foundation, you'll be engaging with a diverse group of stakeholders, each offering unique perspectives. One key group is your **board members**. As discussed earlier in this training, board members hold fiduciary responsibilities, making them integral to upholding the mission and vision of the foundation.

Self-Reflection: How often do you actively seek feedback from your board members on the effectiveness of your grantmaking strategy? What kind of feedback do you think is most valuable to collect?

Consider creating a committee to review grantmaking efforts and evaluate the effectiveness of funded initiatives. This committee can also help with grant approval and follow-up funding decisions. The size of grants that require board approval should be clearly outlined, ensuring that larger grants are reviewed with due diligence.

Self-Reflection: Think about the composition of this committee. Who should be part of it? Consider a balance of lived experience and professional expertise. How can you ensure different perspectives are represented when making decisions that impact the community?

Remember, building a feedback loop helps your community foundation adapt and improve over time, leading to better outcomes for your grantees and the community as a whole.



Community Impact Agenda Setting

Class 4 - Responsible Storytelling

Module 4: Roles & Responsibilities of a Nonprofit



Community Ambassador

- Lift up issues
- Feedback loop

When opportunities arise, nonprofits can share their stories and impact of the Community Foundation, as well as engage community members in the advancement of the mission of the Community Foundation

Engaging Nonprofit Partners: Essential Feedback for Growth

Feedback from your nonprofit partners is crucial to the long-term success and improvement of your community foundation. Nonprofit leaders play a unique role in both implementing programs and advocating for change within the community.

Advocates and Ambassadors:

Nonprofit leaders are often the first to identify issues within your process, the broader community, or even the approaches of other funders. By providing them with a platform to voice concerns and share insights, you ensure that your foundation's work is constantly evolving to meet community needs.

When opportunities arise, these nonprofit leaders can also help amplify the work of the foundation, sharing compelling stories of impact. They can support learning initiatives, recommend process improvements, and support the foundation's mission in the broader community.



Community Impact Agenda Setting Class 4 - Responsible Storytelling

Module 5: Roles & Responsibilities of a Staff Member



Continuous Improvement

- Trust with community members
- Internal Systems Understanding

In many cases, staff members are responsible for reviewing and recommending grants. They can identify opportunities for illustrating impact and solutions from the community.

Your staff members are invaluable sources of feedback and insight for your community foundation. Not only do they have a deep understanding of your community foundation's internal systems, but they also often have strong, trusted relationships with community members. This unique position allows them to offer critical feedback that can drive positive change both internally and externally.

Staff as Key Evaluators:

Staff members play a crucial role in reviewing and recommending grants. Their hands-on experience can provide you with a clear understanding of what is working and where improvements are needed. They can also identify opportunities to highlight the impact and solutions that are emerging from the community. Their feedback can shed light on where systems may be faltering or where more attention is needed to ensure the success of the foundation's initiatives.



Community Impact Agenda Setting

Class 4 - Responsible Storytelling

Self Reflection: How do you currently encourage feedback from your staff members? In what ways can you create more opportunities for them to share their experiences, challenges, and ideas for improvement?

Consider one recent project or initiative. How could your staff have provided valuable input throughout the process? What systems or processes can you put in place to make it easier for staff to share their thoughts and feedback with leadership moving forward?

Action Activity: Reflecting on Your Motivation for Philanthropy

Take a moment to pause and reflect on why you chose to become involved in philanthropy. This reflection will help you reconnect with your purpose and the impact you wish to create.

Steps:

1. **Personal Reflection:** Find a quiet space and take a few deep breaths. Write down the following:
 - a. Why did you decide to become involved in philanthropy?
 - b. What is it about this work that resonates with you personally?
 - c. How do you hope to make a difference in your community or the world?
2. **Your Core Values:** Reflect on your personal values and how they align with your philanthropic work. Consider these questions:
 - a. What values guide your decisions and actions in your role?
 - b. How do these values show up in the projects or causes you support?
3. **Vision for Impact:** Think about the change you want to see. Answer the following:
 - a. What would success look like to you in the context of your philanthropic work?
 - b. How will you know if you've made a meaningful impact?

Optional Activity:

If you feel comfortable, share your reflections with a colleague or peer. Discuss how your motivations align with the broader goals of your community foundation or organization.

This reflection will help you stay grounded in your purpose and ensure that your work continues to be aligned with both your personal values and the needs of your community.



Community Impact Agenda Setting

Class 4 - Responsible Storytelling

Module 6: Responsible Storytelling

1. Put people first. Build bridges across the community.
2. Empower the people you serve. Respect the voice of the human impacted and avoid exploitation of nonprofit organizations
3. Be transparent
4. Avoid stereotypes
5. Focus on solutions
6. Nothing for me without me

Principles of Respectful Storytelling

Storytelling is a powerful tool that can connect your organization with the community you serve. However, it's important to tell stories in a way that honors the dignity and humanity of the people involved. It's essential to be transparent about your intentions and methods, ensuring that your storytelling is aligned with the values of respect and understanding.

Here are some guidelines for responsible and thoughtful storytelling:

Put people first:

Nonprofits often work with individuals and communities that are facing significant challenges. Always prioritize the privacy and dignity of those you serve. Before sharing anyone's story, ask for their consent, and respect their wishes if they choose not to participate. It's important to remember that individuals should have control over how their stories are shared.

Empower the people you serve:

Your role as a nonprofit is to empower the communities you work with. Whenever possible, give individuals the chance to share their personal experiences and perspectives. Encourage participation in storytelling efforts and make space for community members to share their voice and contribute to how their story is told.

Be transparent:

Honesty is key. Always be clear about why you are telling a particular story and how it will be used. If using photos, videos, or any personal details, make sure that individuals are informed and have provided their consent. Consider using free or low-cost stock images that reflect your message without compromising privacy.



Community Impact Agenda Setting Class 4 - Responsible Storytelling

Avoid reinforcing stereotypes:

Be mindful of how you portray individuals and communities. It's important to avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes or presenting people in a way that might perpetuate harmful views. Always portray individuals with respect and complexity, acknowledging both challenges and strengths.

Focus on solutions:

Instead of positioning your organization as the sole "rescuer," frame your storytelling around collaboration and community-driven solutions. Highlight the collective efforts to address challenges, showing how your organization is working alongside the community to create lasting positive change.

Crafting a Story that Lands

Cortisol: stress chemical that is released and tells us to "listen up; there's something to learn." May be it is a character that we connect with who is struggling with something.

Dopamine: pleasure reward chemical when we understand what a character's goal is; makes us really feel something

Oxytocin: the key to evoking empathy; what is released when a family member holds their child / it is released when audiences hear about a moment that shows investment, mutual trust

Module 7: The Science Behind Storytelling

As Philipp Humm writes in "Storytelling and the Brain: Understanding the Neuroscience Behind Our Love for Stories," storytelling has the power to affect our emotions and trigger specific responses in our brains. By carefully crafting a narrative, you can engage the brain's chemical responses, such as the release of cortisol, dopamine, and oxytocin. These chemicals help drive emotional engagement and connection, making your stories more memorable and impactful.

Here are the key elements that trigger the release of these chemicals in the brain, helping your audience connect more deeply with your story:



Community Impact Agenda Setting Class 4 - Responsible Storytelling

Main Ingredients for Effective Stories:

Character-driven narratives:

A strong, relatable protagonist (or main character) is essential. The audience needs someone to root for, someone whose journey they can connect with. This connection creates a deeper emotional investment.

Clear traits:

The protagonist should have well-defined characteristics, qualities, or values. When the audience understands the traits of the character, it becomes easier to empathize with their journey.

A compelling need:

The character's desire or goal should be clear. What does the character need, and why is it important? This creates a sense of purpose and motivates the audience to invest emotionally in the character's journey.

An obstacle:

No story is complete without challenges. An obstacle that stands in the way of the protagonist's goal adds tension, creating suspense and keeping the audience engaged.

Emotional arc:

The character's emotional journey is essential. Great stories move from one emotional state to another, such as from sadness to joy or from fear to hope. This transition helps create a lasting emotional impact on the audience.

Pain to pleasure:

Effective stories often show the character moving from pain, fear, or sadness to moments of relief, joy, or fulfillment. This arc not only engages emotions but also mirrors the way people process and overcome challenges in real life.

Joy to MORE joy:

Positive stories that lead to continued happiness or success create an uplifting and satisfying emotional response. This positive reinforcement can make your story feel rewarding and inspiring.



Community Impact Agenda Setting

Class 4 - Responsible Storytelling

Storytelling Case Studies:

Case Study 1: Wytheville, VA: Frankie

Key Insights:

- Character-driven narrative: Frankie's personal story provides a relatable figure, creating an emotional connection.
- Clear traits and needs: Frankie's journey of personal growth is built around the need for community support and resources.
- Obstacles and transformation: The obstacles he faces and his eventual success drive the emotional arc from struggle to triumph.

Case Study 2: Abilene, Texas: Functional Zero

Key Insights:

- Collaborative approach: This case emphasizes the power of collective action in tackling systemic issues.
- Focus on solutions: The story moves from identifying the problem of homelessness to describing the solutions being implemented.
- Impact and outcomes: This case study highlights measurable changes that stem from a community-wide effort, showing the importance of working together to make meaningful change.

Conclusion

In this class, we've explored the importance of maintaining a long-term vision, creating feedback loops, and practicing responsible storytelling in philanthropy. By staying focused on your community's north star, you ensure that your initiatives remain relevant and impactful despite challenges. Regular feedback from stakeholders — including board members, nonprofit partners, and staff — helps strengthen your strategies and build trust. Responsible storytelling enables you to share the true impact of your work in a transparent and respectful way, fostering greater connection with your community. As you continue in your philanthropic efforts, remember that success comes from consistent reflection, open dialogue, and a commitment to long-term growth.