

How to Connect Your Story to the Issue or the “Ask”



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Storytelling is one of the most effective advocacy tools because it connects a person or a community to a policy or issue. It puts a name and a face to the decisions that lawmakers in Congress make every day. As advocates, it is important not just to know how to tell your story but to understand the issue and inform lawmakers what is at stake without their action.

Below are some strategies to help you draw this connection by telling richly crafted, compelling stories based on your personal experience with vision loss and creating an opportunity to do something about it. You may not use all these tactics to have an effective story, but it can help to connect your story with the ask.

- 1. Begin with the ending in mind.** An advocate knows what they want, and a storyteller helps to lay the groundwork for making the ask. Understanding where you want to go can help you decide how to frame your story so you can take the audience where you want them to go.
- 2. Establish the context and describe what is at stake.** Create a “hook” within the first 1 - 2 sentences that draws your audience in. Frame the issue in a way that the legislator understands that if they don’t do what you’re asking, then something (whether bad or good) will happen— but it does not have to be alarmist. Be restrained.
- 3. Use vivid detail that invokes the senses.** What did you smell, hear, taste, sense, see? Use adjectives that describe your situation to help make it real to the listener. This helps to create an emotional resonance with your words and experiences.
- 4. Describe the conflict and create tension.** Advocacy is a battle—whether it’s a funding challenge, legislative inertia, bureaucracy, etc. Likewise, struggles can be mental, moral, emotional, social, physical, philosophical, even internal—there just needs to be tension somewhere, and it can come from both the ask and the story.
- 5. Surprise your audience.** Wait until the right moment, when it will have the most impact, to change the context of your story from the past to the present. Create a before and an after by using a moment of discovery, and then talk about how it impacted your life and the lives of others.
- 6. Create the potential for success and joy.** In campaign politics, a candidate’s slogan creates the success of a win and the joy of participation from the voters. Create that for the legislator by reminding them that they have an opportunity to do something together *with you*.
- 7. Be memorable with your last line.** Use restraint but keep the lawmaker accountable so that they understand the importance of what they were just told. Leave it hanging there—don’t jump in with additional details. It should feel uncomfortable. A last line shouldn’t be the end to a “nice story”— it should be a call to action!

