UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

**How Nonprofits Can Use Storytelling
and Engagement Metrics to
Improve How They Share their Philanthropy Narrative**

by

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Abstract

Storytelling provides vertical alignment with engagement and connectedness, two important points in philanthropy that can often prove elusive for nonprofit organizations. Comprehensive data supports this idea and although higher education is the primary focus of the study, there are evident results to make the recommendation that this will work for other nonprofit organizations. Academic studies and literature about storytelling and engagement, combined with data and a case study of the University of San Francisco's use of storytelling to engage donors, show that stories lead to engagement, providing an effective strategy for nonprofits to authentically share their philanthropy narrative. This Participatory Action Research proposal was driven by storytelling *and* data, which have been rarely considered together for building an engagement strategy. This reflects the importance of data-driven decision making in all fields, including the nonprofit sector, which will be further professionalized by following this sustainable practice of evaluating the metrics of storytelling. Research on this topic focuses on transparency — the benefits of authentic storytelling over inflated, exaggerated marketing techniques — to maximize philanthropy leadership for social impact.

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Section 1. Introduction

Storytelling provides vertical alignment with engagement and connectedness, two important points in philanthropy that can often prove elusive for nonprofit organizations. Comprehensive data supports this idea and although higher education is the primary focus of the study, there are evident results to make the recommendation that this will work for other nonprofit organizations. Academic studies and literature about storytelling and engagement, combined with data and a case study of the University of San Francisco's use of storytelling to engage donors, show that stories lead to engagement, providing an effective strategy for nonprofits to authentically share their philanthropy narrative. This Participatory Action Research proposal was driven by storytelling *and* data, which are not considered together enough for building an engagement strategy. This reflects the importance of data-driven decision making in all fields, including the nonprofit sector, which will be further professionalized by following this sustainable practice of focusing authentic storytelling while evaluating the engagement metrics of readers. Research on this topic focuses on transparency — the benefits of authentic storytelling over inflated, exaggerated marketing techniques — to maximize philanthropy leadership for social impact. By telling authentic stories, nonprofits are demonstrating social responsibility and focusing more on solutions than problems.

Research on this topic is needed in the nonprofit sector, because audiences are aware of being over-marketed to today and are moving away from organizations that are not transparent and authentic. This project found that storytelling is a way to engage people in an authentic way. By using metrics to measure how content resonates with nonprofit audiences,

combined with anecdotal feedback on stories about giving, the purpose is to show how nonprofits can authentically share their philanthropy narrative for greater engagement and social impact.

This project included three different methods of data collection to obtain a broad range of both quantitative and qualitative data to support the theory that nonprofits can use storytelling to improve their philanthropy narrative. The primary data featured a comprehensive review of academic studies and literature. Additional primary data included expert interviews to gain context and insights on how storytelling can help nonprofits share their philanthropy narrative and increase engagement. This project included secondary data collected from organizational analytics on readership and engagement metrics (from Google Analytics) as part of a case study of the University of San Francisco, as well as secondary data from anecdotal information provided by donor audiences in response to the university's stories about the impact of philanthropy.

The project also explores evidence that storytelling is an effective way for nonprofits to demonstrate they are the agents of change that donors seek. By effectively telling the story of their impact, nonprofits can be agents of greater societal change, supporting their missions to create more just, humane, and sustainable world.

Section 2: Literature Review

A comprehensive review of academic studies and literature shows storytelling is a tool used across subsectors and distributed through multiple channels (print, web, social media) to engage audiences with nonprofit organizations (Schaffer, 2017). Authentic stories connect people with impact and mission and lead to engagement, a key factor for successful nonprofit organizations (Singer, 2011). Nonprofits need to build the relationships they have with donors, and being donor-centric and building engagement are key factors for success — nonprofits can't just appeal for donations and contributions (Waters, 2007). Organizations should use stories to build the relationships they have and connect people back to the organization, over and over (Schaffer, 2017). The following literature review focuses on stories and storytelling as a key component in how nonprofit organizations can use storytelling and metrics to improve how they share their philanthropy narrative and increase engagement. It is worth noting that much of the literature does not focus on using stories in a data-driven way. Using metrics for all story-based marketing is important to ensure that nonprofits are measuring which stories resonate with donors, so that organizations can make this type of marketing effort sustainable. This idea will be the focus of the case study included in this paper.

Why Stories are Important

Stories are more memorable than statistics and they can be "told and retold" (Singer, 2011). They can be used to describe unfamiliar scenes in a way that is more engaging than a more straightforward factual report, (Brophy, 2009). The history of storytelling is as old as the human race, and its impact remains as strong today as it was in Biblical times. **"**The fascination

with stories lies in their connectedness to our own lives," wrote Brophy (2009). There are four

principle reasons for the power of the story (Roche and Sadowsky, 2003):

- Stories are universal, crossing boundaries of language, culture and age.
- They mirror human thought, which is important, because evidence shows humans think in narrative structures.
- Stories define who we are. Identity is forged by the stories we tell ourselves, the ones we come to believe, and those we choose to dismiss.
- Stories build and preserve a group's sense of community, portraying the world in a way that builds emotional connections among constituents, giving them a sense of shared purpose.

Good stories have three components: a strong beginning, a strong end, and a point of

tension, according to Schaffer. For nonprofit organizations, there is one type of story that works

particularly well, according to Singer (2011). "The "personal" story: What are the personal

stories that are being incubated and cultivated within the organization? This is a very different

type of story. This shines a light on *people* rather than the organization" (Singer, 2011). By

focusing on people, the organization can engage with its audiences in an authentic way.

Storytelling should be the top priority of nonprofit organizations (Mansfield, 2014), because

communicating the stories of a nonprofit is the most powerful means of inspiring donors and

supporters.

Authenticity in Storytelling

Nonprofits have a history of using press agentry and outlandish marketing techniques to

raise money and gain attention (Waters, 2007). Press agentry can be thought of as

sensationalism-drawing attention and gaining acceptance through embellishment and was seen

most often in early public relations, wrote Grunig (2014). Traditionally, this could be used

through flashy, boastful announcements or press releases that stretched the truth or even

abandoned the truth (Marsh, 2001). "On the web, press agentry might take the form of

overemphasized claims with no backup or references, or graphic photos, videos, or quotes,

taken out of context, and meant to shock," Grunig found.

Today, though, the nonprofit sector has changed, and it has become a leader in using

storytelling to engage its audiences, focusing on authentic stories about impact, instead of

sales-oriented marketing (Singer, 2011). One theory, *The Dragonfly Effect,* is a framework that

focuses on four key steps, the "dragonfly wings," for using social media (or stories) to drive

social change: focus, grab attention, engage, and take action, (Aaker and Smith, 2010).

Engagement, the third factor, is defined as "truly making people feel emotionally connected to

helping you achieve your goals." Nonprofits have found an effective way to engage is through

storytelling, authenticity, and establishing a personal connection. The best stories are

authentic, (Aaker and Smith, 2010). "You don't have to be famous to tell a good story. Where it

really does come back to the storyteller is authenticity. People have to believe you. And you

have to believe in the story yourself in order to be effective," (Singer, 2011). Waters, too, found

the importance of how strategic communications by nonprofit organizations, not press agentry,

can be used to maximize an organization's impact. In a content marketing analysis in 2007 of

the Chronicle of Philanthropy's Philanthropy 400, the top nonprofit organizations in the United

States, Waters found that the two pieces of information that most of the successful

organizations provided on their websites were descriptions of services (96.9 percent) and

current news stories (91.9 percent). This illustrates the importance of nonprofits not just relying

on personal stories but expanding to also share stories that explain and "help illustrate a point, paint a vivid picture of a situation, or put a complex or wonky issue in human terms" (Holtz and Dagneault, 2011, p.5).

Story Highlight

The story highlighted here is an example of how organizations can use stories to show the impact of their nonprofit work. This type of storytelling builds passion for an organization and its mission, in this case, Water.org.

This is Sabina. She's a farmer, a single mom, and the primary care-giver to her elderly mother. She approaches her days with bold wisdom, keen resourcefulness and a dedication to hard work.

These days used to start early for Sabina. Without any other option, every morning required a long walk to collect water needed for breakfast, bathing, and cleaning — usually from a distant, unsafe natural source. There were only a few occasions on which Sabina purchased water from a vendor. She valued the time saved by just purchasing water, but for her it was unwise and financially unfeasible to do this regularly. Thus, pond water was the family's primary option.

Sabina's home and small farm are located in a rural village outside Nairobi, Kenya. Two long rainy seasons benefit Sabina's crops however it wasn't until recently that she could take advantage of the abundant precipitation for her and   her family's consumption.

Water.org made possible in Kenya what, to a resourceful woman like Sabina, seemed an ideal solution. Through something we call WaterCredit, Sabina financed a rain catchment system. During and after the rains, Sabina can store enough water for her home and crops. This frees her from time spent collecting water. And, her well-fed plants earn her money, some of which she used to repay her loan.
Sabina approaches her days with the same boldness as before, but now she has more say over her mornings. What she does with that time is her choice, and this is why we give water credit for empowering women like Sabina.

The story, featured on the Water.org website, gives readers the opportunity to learn more and also to give to the organization, but most importantly, it connects the reader to the work that the organization is doing. By engaging the reader, it also connects the reader to a shared purpose with the nonprofit, how water can empower women like Sabina.

Stories and Storytelling Lead to Engagement

Public narrative leads to relationship building (Ganz, 2010). What is public narrative? Ganz called it "an exercise of leadership by motivating others to join you in action on behalf of a shared purpose." Stated another way, it is a way of engaging others, on behalf of a shared purpose. One important way nonprofits manifest public narrative is sharing their stories and showing the impact their organizations have. Stories about how nonprofits affect people and how their work makes people feel prove to be particularly successful with audiences, and, often, donors become the heroes of the stories, Schaffer noted (2017). When done well, storytelling will evoke emotions ranging from empathy to anger that will galvanize donors and supporters to take action on behalf of the nonprofit (Mansfield, 2014). In fact, 56 percent of individuals who follow nonprofits on mobile and social networks take further action, the

number one action being making a donation, after they have read a compelling story published by a nonprofit, said Mansfield.

Waters in 2007 found that the top nonprofit organizations in the U.S. were not using strategic communications to maximize their e-philanthropy efforts to engage donors. Instead, he found, nonprofits were relying mainly on one-way communications and were not investing enough resources into creating relationship cultivation opportunities. Schaffer (2017) found this has changed, with storytelling — a two-way form of communication that elicits feelings and empathy from audiences — nearly achieving the status of a buzzword because of its prevalence in nonprofit communications.

Brophy advocates organizations develop a "narrative-based practice." In his 2009 book by that name, he concluded:

> "Rather we need to develop new ways of capturing, sharing and using narrative as a systematic part of service delivery and management. We need to develop narrative based practice (NBP). Using narrative is not an easy option. Very few people are natural storytellers and the art, for surely that is what it is, needs to be learned and practised." (Brophy, p. 154)

This idea of developing communications strategies that focus on narrative and storytelling is linked to the professionalization of the nonprofit sector. No longer should nonprofits engage in sensationalism, when it is evident from the literature that authentic stories and narrative are better communications techniques for engaging audiences and donors.

Measuring Engagement

As Brophy suggested, an evidence-based approach, combined with how organizations

communicate by telling stories, together are important to successful management of organizations. This reflects the importance of data-driven decision making in all fields, including the nonprofit sector, which likely will be further professionalized by following this practice of storytelling and measuring engagement. "It is not surprising in these circumstances that the attention of many management theorists and practitioners is turning to how communication takes place in broader society, which soon suggests that narrative may have a much larger part to play than has previously been acknowledged," (Brophy, 2009, p. 153).

For so long, there was no structure for measuring engagement with stories or content, and there had been a lack of interest in trying to do so. In Singer 2011, Andy Smith dismisses the idea of measuring readership as "meaningless statistics." This literature review revealed little research on how nonprofits can measure engagement with stories as a way to develop major insights for establishing their philanthropy narrative. However, recent literature is beginning to show an interest in the importance of readership measurement, in part because of concerns about buying marketing opportunities on platforms like Facebook, given the unsubstantiated nature of Facebook's reporting on its metrics, Schaffer (2017). Schaffer found that it is increasingly shaky in the nonprofit world to focus solely on buying ads on social media, given this uncertainty about authentic metrics.

Singer (2011), too, advocated that nonprofit organizations that are "simply counting Facebook fans should rethink their approach." Instead, he suggested nonprofits focus on engaging with their audiences by sharing stories that show empathy and emphasize authenticity. There are ways to measure the success of those stories, in terms of engagement,

according to the Nonprofit Times (2014). By using engagement metrics, such as Google

Analytics for website traffic, nonprofits can understand the effectiveness of their

communications messages and stories. Engagement metrics are a measurement of when and

how others engage with an organization. Audience interaction — a click, a view, a forward — is

required in these metrics. The Nonprofit Times article also explored impact metrics, which

measure the behaviors and actions audiences take — whether to make a gift, fill out a form,

send a message to a legislator. Two specific issues need to be addressed with these two types

of metrics: engagement metrics can measure readership, while impact metrics might measure

taking an action. This literature review focuses on measuring readership, which nonprofits have

not traditionally focused on, as a means to engagement. Miller (2016) recommended viewing

measurement and metrics as "everything you do as a communications team or professional

needs to be directly linked to what the organization is trying to achieve."

Engagement as a Strategy for Philanthropy

Passion is contagious, and through storytelling, nonprofit organizations can show their

commitment an issue — and their commitment to transparency, Singer (2011). This is a way for

nonprofits to connect to donors, who can learn about the impact of their philanthropy and also

know how their money is being used. Stories can connect donors directly to the impact of their

giving, providing engagement and a strategy for philanthropy for nonprofit organizations.

Authenticity and transparency are important when tying engagement to philanthropy (Aaker,

Smith, and Adler, 2010). When people "step away from an organization, cause, or goal, it's

often because they feel it's overly manufactured, overly professional, something to potentially

distrust" (Aaker et al.). The relationship with donors can be shaken by a lack of transparency,

and Van Til (1990) found engagement should focus on mission. **"**Philanthropy is most appropriately seen as a relationship between donors and recipients mediated by varying images of the public good" (Van Til, 1990, p. 277).

While the Internet offers nonprofits an inexpensive communications platform where they can lay a foundation to build relationships with interested stakeholders (Elliot, Katsioloudes, and Weldon, 1998), electronic communications provide a double-edged sword to nonprofits that are attempting to share their story in a very crowded communication space. "A subject gets asked to contribute some money or time to a cause. The number of people who delete something like this immediately from their inbox is somewhere around 95 percent," (Aaker, et al). Organizations, then, should focus on engagement and communications as a way to keep donors in the fold, said Waters (2007): "Following up the donation with additional communication, such as Internet or traditional mailings of newsletters, leads to increased likelihood that the donor will give again," (Waters, 2007, p. 62).

Ultimately, donors respond to stories, found Ragsdale (1995), who wrote "people give to people." The analysis that follows supports the results found in the literature review and synthesizes data collected from a case study of the University of San Francisco that focuses on storytelling and engagement, as well as expert interviews. Methods are based on a paradigm that that relies on a research study of Google Analytics to measure engagement and readership of stories that are focused on philanthropy at the university.

Section 3: Methods and Approaches

This project included three different methods of data collection to obtain a broad range of both quantitative and qualitative data. The primary data featured a comprehensive review of academic studies and literature. Additional primary data included expert interviews to gain context and insights on how storytelling can help nonprofits share their philanthropy narrative and increase engagement. This project included secondary data collected from organizational analytics on readership and engagement metrics (from Google Analytics) as part of a case study of the University of San Francisco, as well as secondary data from anecdotal information provided by donor and alumni audiences in response to the university's stories about the impact of philanthropy.

Literature Review

A comprehensive review of academic studies and literature showed storytelling is a tool used across subsectors, distributed through multiple channels (print, web, social media) to engage audiences with nonprofit organizations. Primary literature included academic journals, textbooks, original studies, conference papers, and current nonprofit publications. The literature review focused on exploring why stories are important, authenticity in storytelling, how stories and storytelling lead to engagement, the importance of measuring engagement, and engagement as a strategy for philanthropy. The literature review also provided a story highlight as an example of how organizations can use stories to show the impact of their nonprofit work.

Case Study and Engagement Metrics

An analytics review of readership and engagement metrics provided data on how stories about philanthropy are growing in popularity with audiences at the University of San Francisco, as part of a case study of the university. The review of readership and engagement metrics captured information from Google Analytics that measures pageviews, a standard measure of web traffic, on the university website for 2016 and 2017, during a time when the university was focusing its efforts on storytelling as a way to build its philanthropy narrative and create a culture of philanthropy. This focus on storytelling was part of a communications strategy timed with the university's $300 million comprehensive campaign. Using real-time data, the university has been able to update its content strategy to focus on philanthropy stories that resonate and continually tweak its plan to focus on impact. The analytics review also utilized data from other nonprofit organizations that show the connection between engagement and philanthropy.

Expert Interviews

Four expert interviews were conducted to gain context and insights on how nonprofits can improve their philanthropy narrative. To gather dimensional qualities around theoretical frameworks and empirical data, interviewed experts included: a development leader at a private university, a communications director at a public university, a marketing chief at an international nonprofit foundation, and a nonprofit marketing strategist and writer. The interviews were rooted in principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR). Interviews were conducted over the phone. Interviews were non-scripted and conversational to maintain centrality of the interviewee perspective and their perceptions of what was important and necessary in the nonprofit narrative. A general prompt of the project topic was given. Their comments and observations have been included in the Implications and Recommendations

section of this project, providing both support for the general idea of this project and also raising important questions. In consideration of their requests to remain anonymous, all interviewee names, private information, and affiliated nonprofit organizations will remain confidential.

Section 4. Case Study and Data Analysis

The data analysis for this project included a case study of the University of San Francisco, where the Development Communications team has applied the power of storytelling since 2015 in a strategy to share the philanthropy narrative of the university as part of its $300 million comprehensive campaign. The team tracks readership metrics of the philanthropy stories — compared to all other university news — to measure audience engagement with the university's philanthropy narrative. In 2016 and 2017, the Development Communications team analyzed the metrics to show that the strategy is resonating with all audiences, with a steady increase in readership over two years for stories about philanthropy (Table 1). Analytics supported the team's theory that the new kind of storytelling — focused on authenticity, which is key, according to Singer (2011) — leads to increased engagement, with stories about philanthropy appearing as some of the top stories in the USF news feed, shared on the web, on social media, in e-newsletters and in USF Magazine (Figure 3). The key to the university's engagement strategy has been to develop a new way of telling these stories to create a culture of philanthropy on campus, in a way that is relatable for everyone from students to donors. The stories focus on what motivates people to give to the university and shares with readers more

about the impact of giving on students and in the classroom. Written with an authentic,

engaging style, these stories shy away from exaggerated marketing efforts (Waters, 2007) that

could interfere with the relationship with the university's audiences of donors, alumni, parents,

students, faculty, and staff.

A New Way to Tell the Story

The University of San Francisco, from 2015-2018, was in the quiet phase of a $300

million comprehensive campaign and has followed a schedule of publishing to the university

website gift announcements, or stories about principal gifts of more than $1 million, every six

to eight weeks. This effort, combined with other stories about the impact of philanthropy on

students, programs, and alumni, has served to build a narrative with a steady drumbeat of

content that tells the story of the campaign, without overtly marketing the campaign (a key

strategy during the quiet phase of this effort).

The impetus to tell philanthropy stories in a new way came from the university's

students, who pushed the communications team to consider this strategy. Prior to 2015, some

of the university's first principal gift announcements followed a traditional marketing approach

used by many nonprofits, focusing on dollars and new buildings. Students reacted strongly and

criticized the stories on social media. After returning to the principles of the university mission

and focusing on social impact, the communications team changed the strategy to focus on the

story behind the gift, the impact on students, and who the benefactors are — and less on the

dollars. The result has been successful engagement with all audiences, including students, and

has been key to building a culture of philanthropy on campus. The reaction from students,

especially on social media, has been positive.

An example (Figure 1) shows that other nonprofits and universities continue to use the more traditional, dollars-focused ways of sharing their philanthropy narrative, which can be a barrier to engagement. The approach is leveraged here (Figure 1) by the University of Notre Dame. It provides an apt comparison to the subject of this case study, the University of San Francisco, which received a gift from the same donors in 2017.

Figure 1: Example of Notre Dame gift announcement

The Notre Dame gift announcement follows more traditional ways of sharing the philanthropy narrative. It uses formal photography, standard press-release copy, and a plain layout — techniques that USF has found do not engage audiences.

By comparison, USF's story (Figure 2) about the same people is notable for its more engaging photography and focus on the impact of the gift. The donors appear more relaxed and relatable to audiences, ranging from students to alumni and donors.

Figure 2: Example of USF gift announcement

Supporting Scholarships for Students and Catholic School Educators at USF

POSTED THU, 04/13/2017 - 11:00

Joan and Bob McGrath: Their top priority is supporting student scholarships.

Joan and Bob McGrath have donated $10 million to dramatically expand scholarships for USF's Catholic school teaching programs, create a new multidisciplinary student leadership institute, and expand international student immersion opportunities.

The example (Figure 2) uses photography as a window to the story, showing the couple in a warm and inviting space, their home. This is the first point of engagement with readers and serves to bring them into the story, which focuses right away on the impact of their $10 million gift — supporting students through the creation of new scholarships.

This example shows how USF is expanding its philanthropy narrative, and engagement metrics support this type of storytelling. Data shows that these stories are among the most read in the USF online newsfeed, expanding the culture of philanthropy on campus and across all audiences, including alumni and donors.

Data Collection

The University of San Francisco website receives more than 4 million pageviews each quarter. Pageviews are a standard way of measuring web traffic or audience engagement. Google Analytics for the news pages of the USF website from 2016-2017 were analyzed and showed that stories about philanthropy resonated with all audiences, with a steady increase in readership over four quarters for these philanthropy stories (Table 1). Google Analytics also show the new kind of gift announcements are consistently in the top 20 stories in the USF news feed, growing to represent 30 percent of the 4 million pageviews per quarter. The stories are posted on the web, social media, in at least three to five e-newsletters and in USF Magazine.

The data analysis for this case study is based on quarterly Google Analytics reports that show pageviews for each web page for all news stories published by the university. A pageview is defined as a view of a web page on a website that is being tracked by the Google Analytics

tracking code. Google Analytics is a web analytics service offered by Google that tracks and

reports website traffic, and it is the most widely used web analytics service on the Internet. The

University of San Francisco relies on Google Analytics to track metrics about its website,

including readership of stories. For this study, Google Analytics was used to measure how

stories about philanthropy performed, compared to all other university news stories.

Analysis and Key Findings

The project set out to determine how nonprofit organizations can use storytelling to

improve how they share their philanthropy narrative. The findings are consistent with the

research question, making clear that audiences became more engaged with the organization

that was studied (University of San Francisco) through stories. While the typologies of stories

are not all the same and they can provide superficial examination of the impact of nonprofits

(e.g., just looking at the poverty and not the solutions), the literature supports the data in this

project that shows storytelling focused on impact creates the greatest engagement with

nonprofit audiences.

Data collected from Google Analytics for this project showed that the percentage of

pageviews for philanthropy stories — stories of impact that focus on student outcomes and the

impact on the classroom and campus — in the USF newsfeed grew consistently over 2016 and

2017 (Table 1).

Table 1: Audience Engagement with Philanthropy Stories

University of San Francisco	Q1 2016 Readership	Q4 2016 Readership	Q1 2017 Readership	Q4 2017 Readership

Philanthropy stories	8.41%	17.63%	25.30%	30.50%
General University News	91.59%	82.37%	74.70%	69.50%

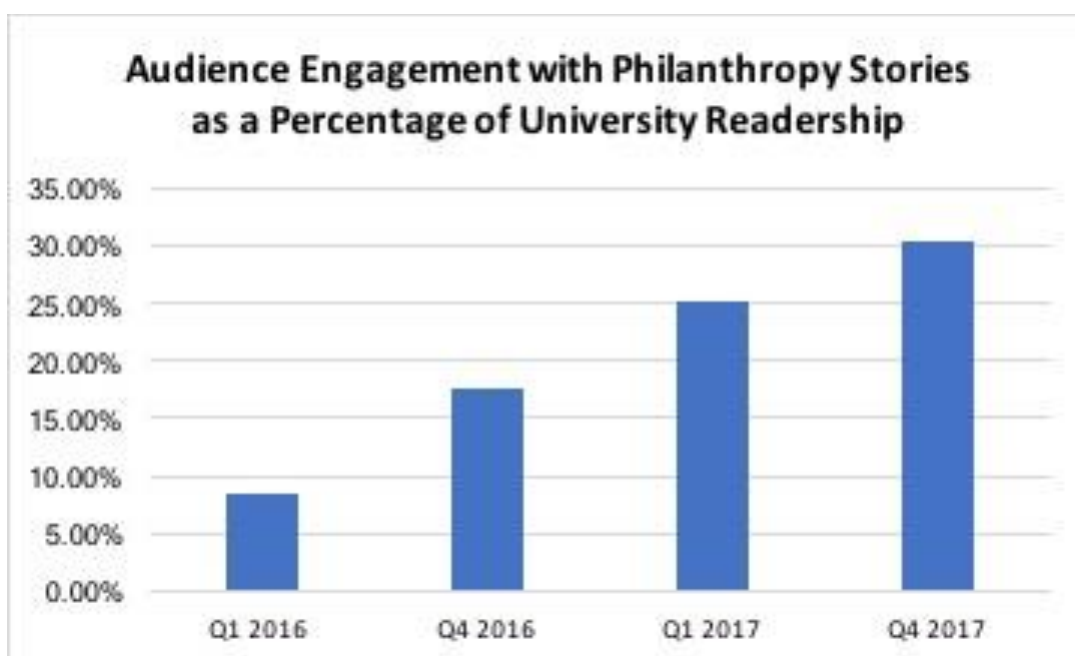*Source: Data from Google Analytics for University of San Francisco*

This data was supported by expert interviews, which were conducted to find out more about the research question. One interviewee, a member of leadership at a private university, observed, "communications provides vertical alignment with engagement and connectedness," which often prove elusive for nonprofit organizations. Secondary data, in the form of anecdotal responses from audience members, including alumni and donors, also supported the idea of how storytelling is linked to the organizational activities and therefore to the engagement of the reader into the social issues represented by the story. During the time studied in this research project, the engagement metrics were supported by responses from alumni and donors that indicated they were interested in volunteering for the university and also, in some cases, giving to the university to support scholarships for students. One such response from a donor was simply, "I want to make a donation." Another, from an alumna, was more elaborative, connecting back to the mission of USF:

> "I love getting the USF Giving Newsletter and reading the stories … without my
> scholarship, my parents would not have been able to afford college for me … It's so
> neat to read the stories of today's USF students ... also the children and grandchildren of
> immigrants and often the first in their families to go to college … And what an education
> for all of the USF students to experience the diversity of our student body, knowing that

they are in a global world with global issues … changing the world from here."

This outcome illustrates the importance of how nonprofits can use storytelling to expand not just their philanthropy narrative but also their mission and engagement with their supporters (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Audience Engagement with Philanthropy Stories

Source: Data from Google Analytics for University of San Francisco

The data supports the strategy of using storytelling to expand engagement. A logic model (Figure 4) was developed to fully explore how the strategy can relate to fulfilling the organization's mission to educate and develop leaders who will fashion a more just, humane, and sustainable world.

Figure 4: Storytelling and Engagement Logic Model
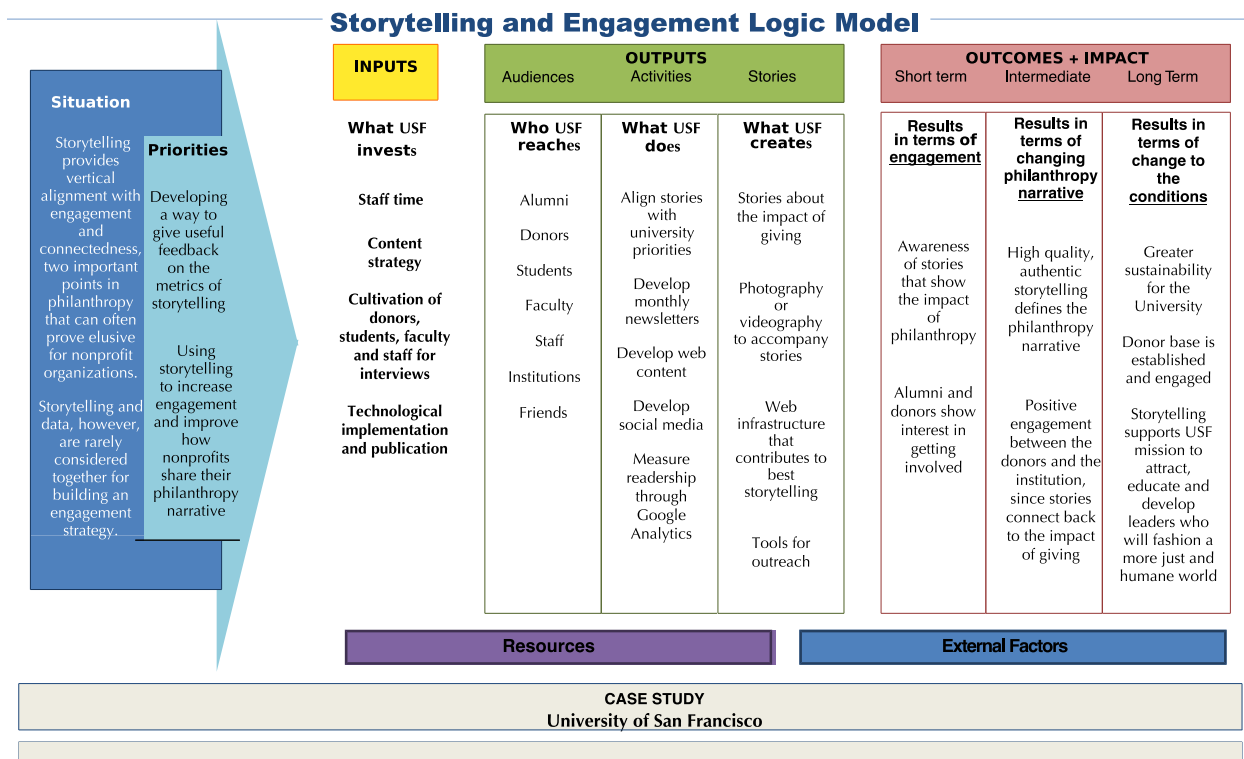
Source: Author's creation, 2018

While higher education is the primary focus of the research, this topic is applicable to most nonprofit subfields. The model focuses on transparency — the benefits of authentic storytelling over inflated, exaggerated marketing techniques — to maximize philanthropy leadership for social impact. The logic model (Figure 4) also supports the importance, too, for nonprofits to focus storytelling about the systemic issues behind the need for philanthropy — and how support ultimately must tie back to the mission. Nonprofit organizations are seen as agents of change, and that's another reason people give. By reviewing secondary anecdotal

responses from readers, this project shows nonprofits can engage supporters with stories and provide a connection for them to give back to nonprofit organizations.

Section 5: Implications and Recommendations

The strategy of authentic storytelling is driving outcomes at the University of San Francisco, engaging more audiences, especially alumni and donors, as the university moves toward the public phase of a $300 million campaign. It also has successfully established key messages for the campaign, expanded core content for all channels, and is creating a rich narrative for the future campaign effort. Development leadership has caught on to the fact that producing a steady stream of high quality, authentic stories attracts and engages the university's audiences.

Perhaps most importantly, the outcomes support the university as it fulfills its mission to develop leaders who create a more just, humane, and sustainable world.

From expert interviews for this project, comments and observations have been included in this section to provide both support for the general thesis idea and also raise important questions. Some questions include:

- Does authentic storytelling about philanthropy resonate more with donor audiences and lead to better engagement?
- What is "authentic storytelling?"
- How can nonprofits improve how they share their narrative?
- Why should nonprofits focus on being authentic and transparent?

Can this improve fundraising results? A nonprofit marketing strategist and writer interviewed for this project said nonprofits should "pair highly emotional, cinematic storytelling with rational facts and figures to paint a full picture of the need — and the impact supporters can make." She used Charity: Water as an example of using storytelling that focuses on outcomes. "Their story leads with the statement: We believe we can end the water crisis in our lifetime. That's pretty powerful — and it's a lofty goal to be working toward. Yet the organization gives its audience the confidence to believe that it can." This project shows storytelling can lead to increased engagement, but does it lead to increased giving? Connecting storytelling to giving can be elusive; connecting it to fundraising results can be impossible. With anecdotal feedback, this project was able to show a donor's engagement with stories related to actual fundraising results. However, tracking how a specific story could inspire an online donation is difficult. And, while nonprofits like USF also use Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram to share philanthropic stories, there are not reliable analytics at this time on these media. It is important, however, to acknowledge and address their role in sharing stories about philanthropy. According to "The Intersection Between Media, Brand and Online Giving" by Sarah DiJulio, March 29, 2018, data showed a strong correlation between the volume of Facebook shares and giving—every additional share on Facebook correlated to 0.4 additional unsourced gifts.

Table 2: Correlation Between Engagement and Giving
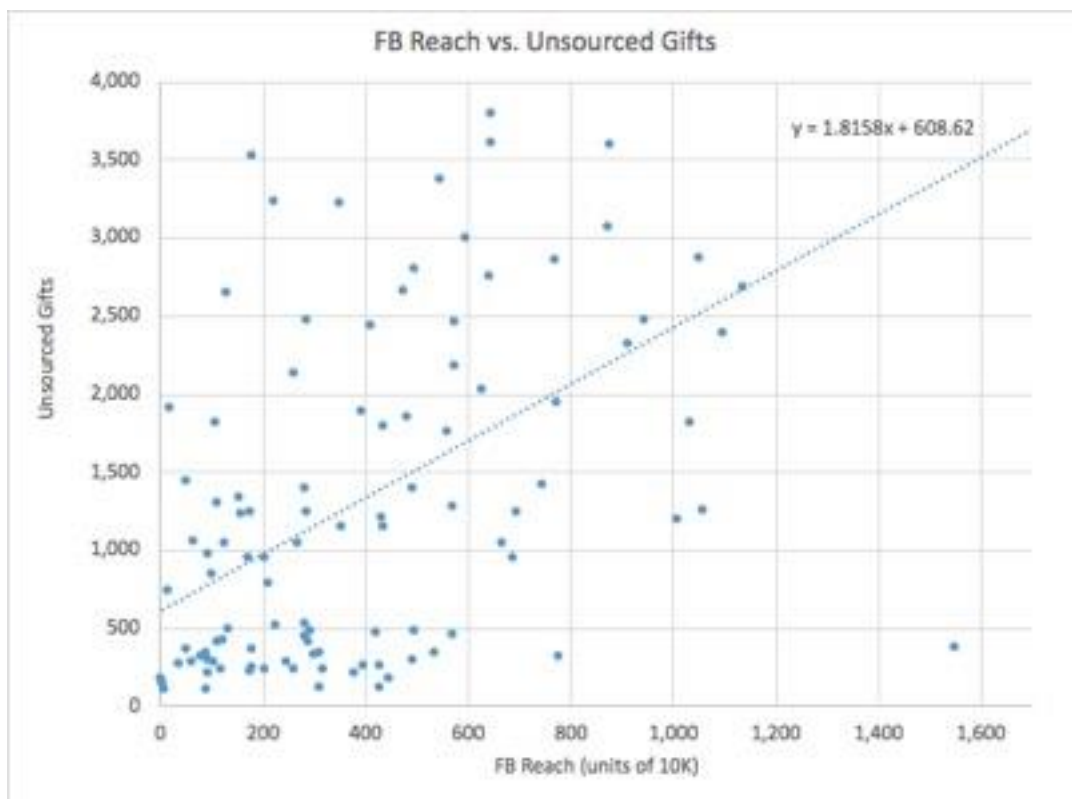
Source: The Intersection Between Media, Brand and Online Giving by Sarah DiJulio, March 29, 2018.

Additional research is needed to learn how storytelling and engagement can lead to increased giving.

A recommendation surfaced during this project for more research on how for-profit organizations, as well as social entrepreneurship organizations, use storytelling compared to how nonprofits use it for philanthropy. What are the similarities and differences? Is there a

difference? Is the emphasis in social entrepreneurship storytelling more on the solutions than the problems? Further research could show these distinctions and provide more knowledge to all sectors in the nonprofit field.

Section 6: Conclusions

Academic literature, readership engagement metrics, and expert interviews are three data points that show: Storytelling leads to engagement, which is important for nonprofits to build their philanthropy narrative. This ultimately connects nonprofit organizations to their mission. Nonprofits that share authentic stories about the impact of philanthropy — instead of using exaggerated marketing techniques — can experience greater engagement, enabling them to fulfill their mission better. This project was driven by data and shared knowledge, and it provides a contribution to the nonprofit field by exploring ways to build the capacity and sustainability of organizations. The project also serves to professionalize the nonprofit sector by moving away from communications techniques that focused on exaggerated claims and press agentry in favor of transparency and authentic storytelling. However, the research also shows it is unlikely philanthropy will completely solve the systematic problems of need and poverty. It has a place in the nonprofit world, but it is not the lone solution. Nonprofits are solving the major problems in the world, but the sector is not solving the problems surrounding extreme poverty. How does this project, focused on storytelling, serve the common good? Storytelling is an effective way for nonprofits to demonstrate they are the agents of change that donors seek. This places emphasis on the sector, not just the nonprofit, to effect change. By effectively

telling the story of their impact, nonprofits can be agents of greater societal change, supporting

their missions to create a more just, humane, and sustainable world.

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Author's Bio

Mary McInerney is the University of San Francisco's associate director of Development Communications, where she oversees the Development division's marketing and communications content strategy for the university website, social media, and other digital and print platforms. A former journalist and magazine writer, Mary has also developed a campaign communications strategy for the university. She is currently pursuing her graduate degree in nonprofit administration at USF, and she has a B.A. in history from the George Washington University. She has been able to apply innovative, strategic, and systemic solutions learned in all of the MNA classes to the work she does in Development at the University of San Francisco, taking on a leadership role on the issue of using storytelling and metrics to improve how nonprofits communicate about philanthropy. In November 2017, she presented on this topic at a national higher education conference, the American Marketing Association Higher Ed Symposium, and she also presented her ideas at the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education at a conference in San Francisco in March 2018.