

Effective Communications for IHC Grantees and Partners

Webinar Transcription (edited)

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John Gattuso: So, what I'd like to do today is a break the presentation up into a couple of parts. In the first section. I'm just going to give you some tips on effective communications for nonprofits.

These are going to be some things that you've heard before, but these are the sorts of things that I encounter when I begin working with nonprofits. I often see the same sort of problems, the same sort of areas that need work, so I'll go through those. Then we'll take a break.

If you have any questions along the way it's probably best if you jot them down in the chat box and we'll address questions about halfway through. In the second half, I'd like to talk a little more specifically about the IHC program and how you might build some stories around what your projects are. And then I can take questions again, at the very end.

All right, let me see if I can share my screen and we'll get to the presentation. Sara, I'm seeing a message that says host disabled participants screen sharing.

Sara Malone: You should be able to do that now, John.

John Gattuso: All right, let's go try. Here we go.

Sara Malone: Okay, good. We can see your presentation now.

John Gattuso: All right, great. Here we go, back to the beginning. So, let me one moment.

00:01:27

Why communications? slide.

Okay, So, I'm just before I dive into things. This should be self-evident but it's probably a good place to start. "Why communication?". Why bother? You probably all have more than enough work to do already; your plates are full, why add this?

Well, again, it should be obvious but one of the things I'd like to impress upon you is that communication is an investment and then it'll help you advance your mission. All too often when I work with nonprofits, especially small ones who maybe don't have a full time communications and marketing person or part time person, communications kind of becomes an afterthought, something that gets tacked on to the end, or sort of an ad hoc affair that you just do as you can, which is understandable.

But it's a worthwhile investment because it supports your mission and the way it supports that mission is by establishing and maintaining relationships.

I'll tell you a quick story about my mother-in-law. She's 87 now. She's still living at home alone. Every afternoon she picks up the phone, and she starts making phone calls, and she calls everybody she knows. Family, friends, everybody. She's got a long, long list. She starts the beginning of the week at the top of the list and makes her way down by the end of the week. And in doing that, she keeps in touch with everybody. But she makes herself a hub of information and at the center of this web of relationships.

And, you know, she's an invaluable source of information. If I want to know what my kids are up to, for example, I call my mother-in-law. But, well actually, I don't have to call my mother-in-law because she calls me. And so I'm usually up on, you know, all the things my kids and other people in the family are doing well before they actually tell me themselves.

And so, in that way, your organizations are sort of like my mother-in-law, and making yourself the center of that hub of communication and relationships is really invaluable.

And then lastly, this doesn't need to be said but I'll say it anyway, which is that you know your work is really valuable, it's really important, and you wouldn't have gotten these grants if the work wasn't important. So, don't hide your light under a bushel. You know, let people know what you're doing. You're providing top quality, top notch services, and your organization deserves, you know, high quality communications to go along with it.

All right, let me move on.

00:04:19

“Part One: 20 Tips for Effective Communications” slide.

So, let's start with these tips. 20 tips for effective communications. Here we go.

“1 – Integrate communications into your work plans” slide.

So number one, this is a theme that you'll hear throughout this presentation, which is to integrate communications into your work plans.

So, what does that mean in practical terms? That means getting it into your strategic plans, putting it on your agendas for committee meetings or board meetings, making sure it's being included in all kinds of budgets, including for grant proposals. There ought to be a line item for whatever your communication needs might be.

00:05:01

“2 – Rinse and repeat” slide.

Rinse and repeat. Once again, think of communications, as a practice. It's not a one and done sort of thing, not an afterthought, not something that you kind of get to at the end. You know, say you've completed a successful project, okay, well now let's write a press release and bada boom that's done, 'don't have to do anything else. Well, communications, and this is certainly true of your IHC projects, is something that you ought to be working on right from the get go, and we'll talk about that in a little more detail a little bit later. And like any skill, communications is something that you get better at the more you do it. You'll develop routines and also develop a library of content that can be reused over and over again.

00:05:48

“3 – Set realistic goals” slide.

Number three set realistic goals. Well, this can be applied to just about anything, but, again, often what I see is that an organization will get hot on the idea of boosting their marketing and communications efforts, and in their enthusiasm, they are maybe a bit overly ambitious, they bite off more than they can chew. And it becomes kind of overwhelming and daunting. They quickly become discouraged and it eventually falls by the wayside. So, always with any big job, it's always good to break it up into manageable tasks and start small and build on your success. So, this might be a good opportunity if you're not already doing much in the way of communications to start with this IHC project and build from there.

00:06:52

“4 – Assign responsibility” slide.

Number four, and this one is really, really important. Assign responsibility.

Again with smaller nonprofits this tends to be the situation where I think executive directors don't necessarily want to burden any one person with this new responsibility. And so they'll sort of ask everyone to contribute, which with all good intentions, they do for a while. But ultimately, when everyone's responsible for something, no one's really responsible for it, and it kind of falls by the wayside. So, once again, it's really important to assign responsibility to one or two people and make it reportable. Put it on your agendas and have those people report out on your progress.

00:07:55

“5 – Clean house” slide.

All right. Number five. Again this is very common situation clean house.

So often, I'll walk through the start -- start a project with an organization. And what I find is that the landscape, the digital landscape, so to speak, is littered with old social media sites or web pages or even brochures that just, you know, aren't being used anymore. So it's important to either get rid of them, or revise them in some way.

And, you know, again it's often the case where one of the reasons these things are hanging around, is that no one can figure out how to log into them because you've lost the login information.

So when I say, be careful who you give the keys to, you know, let's say you have a volunteer, also very common, who who wants to help and sets up a social media site for you but neglects to give you the login information, or it gets lost.

Make sure you've got that information in a safe place. And that way if you need to remove say, a social media site, you can go ahead and do that.

Often when I start with a group, you know, this is the first order of business I have to sort of play detective and figure out who did what and where these things are hosted, and often figure out a way to eliminate all the old stuff that's not being used.

00:09:32

“6 – Be consistent” slide.

Okay, number six. Be consistent. And actually this number six and number seven, be strategic, they sort of go hand in hand. And by this I mean, be purposeful with your communications. That means sitting down and thinking about your goals and building storylines around -- or themes around -- what it is you're trying to achieve with your communications.

00:10:04

“7 – Be strategic” slide.

It also means exercising some message discipline, so that you're staying on message. You're building towards something. Often, if you have more than one person doing, say, your social media messaging, you need to be careful about coordinating what it is they're saying, in order to avoid watering down what you're trying to communicate or worse, you know, actually having contradictory or confusing messages.

Remember that, you know, quality is often more important than quantity. So, if you're going to., if you want to engage in any kind of communications, what you're saying is really important. It's not enough to just be sending lots of social media messages, for example, unless they've got some decent solid content.

00:11:11

“8 – Know your audience” slide.

All right. Number eight. You know, one of the best ways -- most important ways -- to be strategic. One of the first steps is to know who your audience. So who are they? What's important to them? What kind of information do they need? What are their values? What's their worldview? And how can you speak to those things?

00:11:35

“9 – Segment your audience” slide.

If you know your audience, you can segment that audience. And a lot of, I would think, all email marketing platforms, like MailChimp, for example, will allow you to segment your mailing list, so that you can target your messages for different portions of your audience who very well may need, and be interested in different kinds of information.

Consider also that different segments of your audience may require different modes of delivery, right? So not everybody is using a desktop or laptop computer. I would think the vast majority of people are using, if they're using digital devices at all, they may be using cell phones. And of course, some people aren't online at all, and so they're going to require regular mail, or in person presentations. So I'll say a little bit more about that in a second, but keep that in mind that you know simply doing a blog post, or simply doing a social media post, is not necessarily going to reach all segments of your audience.

00:12:57

“10 – Meet your audience where they are” slide.

Along same lines, number 10, meet your audience where they are. Don't expect people to find you, you've got to go to them. So, while putting up a website is absolutely essential, it's probably not enough. Social media? Great idea, but think about what social media platforms you're using, and whether or not your audience -- various segments of your audience -- are using those same platforms. Are they Facebook users Twitter users Instagram, what have you?

For example, you know I'm often surprised at how different social media usage is between various age groups. If you're trying to reach people who are very young, they're likely to use different platforms and folks who are middle aged or older.

00:14:03

“11 – Frame your messages” slide.

Knowing your audience will also help you frame your messages, so that you can speak to the issues that are important to those folks, but also in a way, in a language that they can relate to. I give me an example of this. I was working with an environmental nonprofit group. They do land preservation. It was a fairly young group but they had some good success early on, and had developed a really tight knit group of supporters, most of whom were real committed environmentalist. But at a certain point in their growth, they were finding it hard to expand beyond that community of, rather that circle of, supporters.

Part of the problem had to do with their communications. So, for example, when they would make announcements or communicate about, say a successful land preservation project, they would talk about the natural resources on that piece of land, because that's what was important to this tight knit community. And so they might say, oh, this parcel has a C1 trout production stream and intact old growth cedar forest and habitat for certain kinds of birds or animals or plants, these sorts of things. And for a group of people who felt like, you know, felt that it was enough to protect the environment for the environment sake, those messages made a lot of sense. And it really resonated, but beyond that they were having trouble connecting.

By reframing their messages just slightly, they were able to reach a broader audience. And so instead of talking about, for example, C1 trout production streams, they would talk simply about protecting clean water. They would talk about things like recreational opportunities on these parcels of land. They would talk about natural beauty. Even if you weren't, let's say, a real committed environmentalist and animal habitat and wildlife and such wasn't all that interesting to you, you can still relate to just driving by or walking by a beautiful patch of woodland, for example.

And so, they were essentially speaking to the self-interests of those folks outside their immediate circle of supporters. And in that way and in others, they were able to gradually broaden their circle of support.

00:16:56

“12 – Include a call to action” slide.

All right. Number 12. You've probably heard this a million times: include a call to action! So, is the purpose of your communication to get a response and if so, what? What is it you want folks to do? And it's important to be clear about your needs. Don't be shy. Don't be coy. You really just have to come out and say it. And, I think, most important is to make responding easy.

I'm going to go back to this as kind of a theme, but by this I mean, if say it's, you know, something most of us do in the nonprofit world, which is to do appeals for donations.... Well, if you want folks to donate you got to make it really easy for them to do so. And this often involves, as I mentioned before, what kind of device they're using. So, if you're sending out a message, maybe it's social media maybe it's an email thing, “to make a donation click on this button”. But when you click on that button it takes you to a third party website where folks fill out a form and they actually make the donation. But that website is not well designed for cell phones, for example, and I don't know about you, but I

find it a nightmare to try to fill out forms with my chubby fingers. And to actually, you know, buy something, or make a donation, or what have you. And really, all it takes is just a second or two of frustration or confusion, any little obstacle, will put people off. And, you know, they'll get frustrated quickly and say, "To hell with it, I'll write a check." You know, whether or not they actually do get around to writing that check is questionable. So, make the response just as easy as you possibly can. And be very clear about what it is, or how it is, that you would like people to respond.

All right, let's move on.

00:19:06

"13 – Go mobile" slide.

Along the same lines, number 13 is, go mobile. So, depending on who you ask, the statistics are that something like a half, or even more, of web traffic these days is done on a mobile device, like a cell phone. And so, it's really important to be thinking about whether or not, for example, your website will translate well on mobile devices. So, these days, there are things called responsive websites. There are sites that will rearrange themselves -- the layout will change -- depending on the size of the device you're using to view that website. So, if you're looking on a desktop or a laptop with a wide screen, you see one layout. If you're looking on a narrow screen like a cell phone, well then, you're seeing a much more narrow layout.

And these things work, you know, better or worse, depending on what you're using. And it's even more sophisticated these days; you can do websites, for example, that will give you different content for different devices. So, for example small pictures don't really work very well on a cell phone. So, on the cell phone display, those small pictures might be eliminated. In the same way, long paragraphs don't work very well on a cell phone, it's you know, it's impossible to do a lot of reading on a cell phone. At least I find that to be true. And so, you might trim that content down, that text down, for the cell phone version of your website.

Social media. That's fairly self-explanatory. It works well on cell phones for sure. The other thing I find that people are using a lot more these days are messaging or texting apps, things like WhatsApp, which are really good, especially if you're communicating with a relatively small segment of your audience about something specific. Something to think about to add to your communications tools if you're not already using it.

00:21:28

"14 – Go visual" slide.

Number 14 go visual. So, this means using photographs, videos, charts, infographics, anything visual, with the thought that you're using good quality images. And this is important for a number of reasons. Probably the most important use of visual imagery is that it draws people in. The right picture can really make a quick emotional connection with the content. Sadly, I think fewer and fewer people are spending less and less time actually reading. And so, the images can convey an awful lot of information and make a strong connection even if people aren't delving into the text.

There is one caveat though and that's to avoid the overuse of stock images like cheesy stock images. You probably know exactly what I mean. It can be tempting because they're so inexpensive and sometimes free. And if you need to photo on the spur of the moment, well, there they are.

However, nothing screens inauthenticity or insincerity like an overly polished, overly posed stock image.

I always find it very funny to..., you know, I look at a lot of stock images, so I see the models I will see the same model, advertising, you know, toilet paper at the grocery store, and the next day I'll see the very same model on a website for some nonprofit, and then the next day over at Home Depot, you know, advertising, who knows what -- chain saws and that sort of thing. So, be careful when it comes to the use of those kinds of images.

I mentioned the word insincerity. Authenticity is super important, especially for nonprofit groups that are providing services to the community is to sort of be yourselves. If the first impression people get coming to a website, say, is of one of these kind of phony cheesy pictures, it's off putting.

00:24:00

“15 – Build a library” slide.

Okay, Moving on. Number 15. Build a library. This is kind of a pain in the neck, I will admit, but it is really valuable. Consider that your photos, your videos, your text, whatever you're using, those things are really important. That's intellectual property and you really ought to hang on to it.

We tend to think of these things, especially photos, as kind of disposable. But it's important to hang on to them. And I'll tell you what I often find with nonprofits is that they'll have lots and lots of photos and other kinds of content, but it's just like scattered all over the place, and nobody knows where anything is. It's not labeled correctly; it's usually some sort of code that doesn't tell you anything. And you know, it's a super big scramble when you're trying to put together a brochure or something, and you know you've got that perfect picture, but you just can't find it.

Well, even though it is kind of time consuming and kind of a pain in the neck, if you can hang on to those files, give them a descriptive file name of some sort... You really want to be thorough. Record who shot the photo, who's in the photo, what it's a photo of. If you went to the trouble of doing model releases, you know, photo permissions, for example, hang on to those as well.

You can use online Cloud Storage platforms or you can just stick them in a file on your computer -- make sure you back up that file -- but just stick them all in one place, and that'll really help out when you're putting communications materials together, or when a guy like me walks in your door and is asking whether or not you've got any pictures I can use.

00:25:59

“16 – Invest in design” slide.

Alright, number 16 invest in design. Admittedly, a self-serving piece of advice, but I'm reminded of ... there's an Italian expression, *fare una bella figura*, it means, “to make a good impression”. But it means a little more than that. It means that..., I think that like the underlying premise is that, if you're well put together on the outside, then, more than likely, you're well put together on the inside as well. Appearances matter. So, keep that in mind when you're putting your own materials together. You know, it doesn't have to be super slick -- it probably shouldn't be super slick, super corporate -- but it should be thoughtfully designed and thoughtfully put together.

Keeping it simple is fine. Keep in mind that design..., it's not about making things fancy or pretty, it's not about decoration. It's about communication. And as we said before, anything that slows down a

reader or viewer is a problem because they just won't stick with you; they'll move on to something else. So, when things are presented well, cleanly, clearly well organized, that's an encouragement to dive deeper into the content. The opposite is true, if it's not well designed, that's an invitation to fail.

00:27:37

“17 – Evaluate communications from the user’s point of view” slide.

Okay. Number 17, and along the same lines, is to evaluate your communications material from the users’ point of view. It's going to be really hard, especially if you're involved in the creation of these materials. There's a tendency I think... to want to always include more; you have more to say. Of course, you're the experts on this, on whatever it is you're communicating about, but it's important to exercise some discretion, some editorial restraint, you might say. And one of the things I learned, way back when I started out actually in publishing as a writer and then as an editor and a project manager, is that whether you're editing somebody else or you're editing yourself, you really have to act as an advocate for the reader or the viewer. And, again, to underline this point I made earlier, it's important to remove any obstacles, remove speed bumps, anything that'll slow people down. You got to make it really easy for your audience. You can't expect them to work all that hard to get the information they need, even if you think it's super important.

We're all operating in..., you've maybe heard this phrase, we're operating in an attention economy, which is to say that what all communicators are vying for -- this would include certainly advertisers, and marketers, educators, anybody really -- is just a slice of people's attention. We are all so bombarded with ads and come-ons and information and messages, we're just saturated with the stuff. And so, if you want to engage folks, you've really got to make that connection right from the get-go, and avoid anything that will be frustrating or will slow them down in any way, because you've really got a very narrow window to capture people's attention. And chances are you're not going to have their attention for all that long. Yes, you will have really motivated members of your audience who are going to stick with you. If you want to get beyond those folks, you've got to make it really easy for them to latch on to that information.

00:30:14

“18 – Measure your progress” slide.

All right. Number 18 measure your progress. So, this is not as complicated as you might think. You're probably using, on your websites for example, you're probably using Google Analytics, which will most likely give you far more information than you need, than you can use, and that you can make sense of. I'm not an analytics expert. There are folks who just devote their entire career to this sort of thing. I mean, most of you would, I would doubt, would need that sort of service, but Google Analytics will give you basic information. How many visitors. When they visited. How long they stayed with the site. Bounce rates. Where they went on your site. Where they're coming from... these sorts of things which can be really useful.

Same is true of most social media platforms as well. Keep in mind, however, that success isn't always measured by the number of followers you have or the number of hits you're getting on your website. It's also, you know, it's not just a question of how many people you reach but reaching the right people. And in particular, if you're trying to reach decision makers, say, policymakers, well, you want to get to that right person who can make the decisions that will really impact your organization.

And so that's where strategy and really targeted communications comes in. It's always nice to see that number of followers, say, that number increased, but keep in mind that it's really important to make sure you're reaching the right people.

00:32:08

“19 – Make it personal” slide.

All right, let's move on. Number 19, make it personal. And this has to do again with this notion of authenticity. Of, you know, being who you are as a person, but also as an organization. And there are lots of ways to do this. I often find that, because of the people I work with, either at the university or in nonprofits, are really experts in their field, they tend to want to talk about more technical issues. And those things are really important, but that may not be what you want to lead with. It's often a better strategy to sort of aim for the heart, before you aim for the head, so to speak. Try to make that personal or emotional connection with your audience before you get into those very important technical details. One way to do this is to be conversational in tone. Not necessarily flip or overly casual, but conversational.

Be responsive. So, if people are sending you messages through your website or via social media or by mail, doesn't matter what the media is, answer, respond back. You know, we all want followers on our social media sites, subscribers to our email platforms. Well, that's great, but in return, make sure you're following your followers.

Appeal to the heart. I've already mentioned that. And then lastly, and we'll get into this next, is to tell a story. It's probably the most human, the most... One of the oldest human methods of engagement is to tell a story. It's kind of part of being human is being able to communicate in that way. What we'll talk about that in a second.

Okay. And then last on the list. Let's see.

00:34:30

“20 – Don't forget to say thank you” slide.

All right, so just, again, this, this should be self-evident. Don't forget to say thank you. Gratitude and humility; they look good and everybody. It's good manners and it's good business. So, always acknowledge your partners, your funders, your contributors, anybody who's supporting what you're doing. And one of the ways to do this with communications is make an offer to co-brand. So, you're putting logos at the bottom of your brochures or on your website, or what have you, in some way, make sure that the people who helped you out, you know, they get a nod; they get a thank you. This is really important, obviously for funders, foundations, and so forth. But it's important for everybody.

00:35:19

Okay. So, I think what I'm going to do now is I'm going to stop sharing the screen. Hang on one second. And then if there are any questions, let's break and take those. And then we'll get into the second half of the presentation, which has to do more specifically with your IHC projects and storytelling around it. So, let's see.

Sara Malone: We don't seem to have a lot of questions right now. I see the comments... a couple of people said it is super valuable information so far. And that when you were talking about managing your photos, I included for people to take the time while you're managing your photos to actually

include the alternate texts and descriptions in the photos while you're storing them, so that when you do use them, it's already in there and you don't have add it later. They are much more accessible.

And then Michelle put in a comment about thanks for addressing the issue of inclusivity with alternate text, and when you use video, use captioning. This works for all audiences as many people watch videos with the sound off.

John Gattuso: And social media videos will automatically play off and so you want to make sure you've got those captions that people can follow

Sara Malone: Yeah, and if people need a refresher... John, I don't know if you're aware, but our last program had been on accessible meetings and social media, stuff like that. It was run by someone at Rutgers, Natalia, and her program has been saved on our website. I put a link, at the very top of the chat, to the website where all of the programs will be, the recordings will be, including this one. And in Natalia's recording she actually showed people how to go in and put that text in a photo. So, if anybody needs a refresher they can go there.

John Gattuso: You may find this useful, you may all be aware of this already, so you can help me out here, but what I've been using is a website, and I can't remember the name of it, for some reason I think it's under the University of Utah, but I could be wrong. But anyway, it assesses your website for various accessibility issues. So, if any pictures don't have alternate text or videos don't have closed captioning. If there are issues with contrast. You know, legibility, readability, if you've got print over a picture for example, the contrast may not be right for easy reading.... So, it goes through all of these things and it flags that on your website, it's really really helpful.

If you're not accustomed to doing this sort of thing, it'll bring to your attention, all sorts of accessibility issues that you may not have thought of before. And I'll have to look up the name of it I assume there are more than one of these things. But I was using was really great.

Sara Malone: You could send that to us; we can push it out to everybody on the call.

John Gattuso: Yeah, it was actually the Rutgers efforts at accessibility that prompted me to start using this. So yeah, it's a really good tool.

Sara Malone: Good. If anyone has any questions, please unmute yourself and jump in. Karen, I see that you have unmuted yourself.

Karen Alexander: I just have a comment that I wanted to share, I thought, John, it was so helpful for you to remind people to say thank you to their funders and their supporters. And, um, one thing that I'm always, I don't know why, but I'm always so impressed by, is when people remember to thank their team and their staff. Yeah. And we often remember to thank the people who give us the money and the resources, but I always think it's so gracious, when somebody takes a moment to acknowledge the efforts of whoever is working with them directly. And it makes you look good.

John Gattuso: Yeah. Yeah. I know, and it takes very little effort for big rewards.

Karen Alexander: Yes, it's meaningful.

Sara Malone: So, people, please feel free to unmute yourself and ask any questions or, you know, give your experience with this... with what John's talked about so far.

John Gattuso: I'll just say one last thing, just to underline it one more time, which is that as you're working through this IHC project, you know, hopefully you're already beginning to think about communications. But more than that, if you haven't already started, now is the time. So, what that means in practical terms is, break out that cell phone, take pictures. You know, the camera on your cell phone is really good. They actually take fantastic photos and with a little online tutorial you can learn how to make it to shoot even better photos.

Interview people. And again, you can do with your cell phone. You can shoot video or just do an audio recording of folks. Just sit there with a piece of paper and a pencil and jot down what they're saying.

But along the course of these projects, you're most likely doing focus groups, planning meetings, all sorts of things. And we'll talk about this more in a minute... you're including people with disabilities in this whole process.

Well, these are great opportunities for you to be recording, developing material that you can use now or in the future for various communications efforts.

It's, you know, it can be five minutes, and you'd be super surprised at what people will say when you ask them to comment on something. I'm often knocked off my feet by just how thoughtful and self-aware and articulate folks can be about the things that they're engaged in, the projects they're engaged in, because it's really meaningful for them. And nothing has that ring of authenticity like hearing it from the people who are actually engaged in the process. As I say, well, we'll talk a little bit more about that in a moment, but I urge you to start working on these things now even if you haven't got it all figured out what you're going to do with it. It's great to have that content in hand when you're ready to start.

If you haven't started already, which with any luck you already have.

Sara Malone: Okay, no one, no one else is chiming in right now. Oh, Kate Kelley just wanted to thank you for that last thing about the inclusivity – her comment is in chat. So go ahead, John.

John Gattuso: Okay, I'll go back to sharing my screen. Okay. How's that?

Sara Malone: That works. We see it.

John Gattuso: Alright, so let's get into part two, which is more specifically about your projects and telling your story.

00:42:29

“Part Two: Telling Your IHC Story” slide

“What kind of story should we tell?” slide

So, telling your story. First of all, what does that even mean to tell your story? For professional communicators, I guess, people who do this on a regular basis, that kind of makes sense. But for most people, I think they hear that and they kind of scratch their heads and say, what does that even mean? How do I tell my story? What kind of story?

Well, the good news is that you don't really have to start from scratch here. Storytelling is like the oldest thing in the world, people have been doing it for thousands and thousands of years.

And you probably know more about storytelling than you might think. You know, we all have kind of an intuitive sense of story structure of narrative arcs of various kinds.

It's a little bit like grammar and language, we can put together a sentence spontaneously. But we probably couldn't articulate the rules of putting together a sentence; we just know them intuitively. And the same is true of stories. Most stories follow a formula of some kind, a structure of some kind.

And looking over your profiles on the IHC website and reading the advanced material I had, it seemed pretty clear to me that the story you folks are already starting to tell is really really an old one.

There was a writer named Joseph Campbell, you may have heard of him. He studied myths and folklore and such. And he called this one-story structure the hero's journey. And I think that the archetype for this would be the Aeneid, you know, Ulysses making his way home from war and encountering a series of adventures and challenges and contests and so forth.

You see this story structure it all kinds of storytelling, all kinds of popular culture. So the Hobbit, Star Wars, old westerns, TV shows of all kinds, movies, all have this, this kind of story structure.

I was watching a new TV show. It's one of these Star Wars things; it's called the Mandalorian, I don't know if anybody has seen this, but that was it! That was the hero's journey. It couldn't have been more predictable. But engaging nonetheless, you know, because when a when a story meets these intuitive expectations of ours, we get a sense of completeness, of resolution. It's sort of like hitting that, you know, in music, that C major chord. You know everything resolves and you feel that sense of awe.

And in an opposite way, if a story veers away from our expectations, we get a sense of unease of tension. But, but also of intrigue, you know you lean in a little closer because things aren't unfolding the way you think they might, and you want to know what happens next.

So, my point is, you're not starting from scratch. There are story structures that you can go to that will help you organize your material and turn it into a storyline.

00:46:29

“Where do we start?” slide.

So, what is this story structure, what is this hero's journey? You know, it's basically a very simple formula. The protagonist discovers a problem of some kind, and then goes on, usually a journey from place to place, don't have to be, but usually that's the case, and faces and overcomes a series of challenges, battles, contests, riddles, puzzles..., until finally, they come to some solution.

So, that example I gave of the Mandalorian, I don't know if anyone's heard of it, or seen it. The protagonist in that case is, well of course this all takes place in outer space, but he's sort of like a Western gunslinger type who flies around the galaxy, and he discovers a problem. He discovers that there's a child in danger. The child is, is.... Have you heard of this baby Yoda? Ever seen pictures? Very cute. But anyway, so the child is in danger and then he spends the, I don't know, dozen episodes, going

from place to place doing battle, monsters, bad guys, all kinds of stuff. And then in the end, delivers the child to safety. So, there's a problem. At the end, there's a solution. And the fun of the story is what happens in the middle.

So, this is essentially what you've done already. Just, you know, filling out those grant proposals, but I read up on that website, your profiles do just exactly this. They identify a problem and they propose a solution. Those are the two ends -- beginning and the ending -- of your story. It's the stuff in the middle that we need to work on.

There's something else about, I think, potential for the stories that you're telling, which is that all of your projects involve collaborative problem solving. Right? You're working with people with disabilities to come up with solutions to these problems, the problems that you've identified. And, and I think, that's a great way to approach your communications or your storytelling about these projects. Which is to say, that you can tell the stories from at least two points of view; your own, but also your clients. So that you're getting this kind of double view of the story, and there may be other people as well. And as I was saying before, if you're now engaging in focus groups or planning meetings or what have you, these are perfect opportunities to get the points of view of people with disabilities who are involved in formulating solutions to these problems.

00:49:41

“Break it Down: 12 chapters in 12 months” slide.

So, to get even more specific here, the way you might approach this is to break it down. Since we're talking about stories, I'm calling these chapters, you can call it whatever you want. And you've got what, I think about 12 months left in this program, and so, I just picked that number out of thin air, you can do 12 chapters in 12 months. But again, these are, that number is arbitrary. I just find it -- I think it's just a useful way to break things down in order to make your way through, through this storyline, so to speak.

00:50:30

“Chapter 1: The Problem” slide.

So, what's chapter one? Well, in a sense, you've already written chapter one. Chapter one is the problem. The problem that you've identified in your grant proposals and that's already up there on the website. But rather than that sort of grant proposal language, of course, you're going to want to put this into a language that's, I think, a little more personal, and that's certainly where interviewing your clients is really important.

So, you know, what do these kinds of obstacles mean personally to people who are having trouble with access? What could it potentially mean for them if they had better access? And what does it mean to you as somebody who's working on this project? What are the potential benefits to your organization? What are the potential benefits to your clients?

00:51:41

“Chapter 2: The Vision” slide.

Chapter two, the vision. Kind of grand, but the vision is simply, again, something you've already thought about, and have already written about, which is how are you going to fix this. You know, what's the vision for a better situation? What's the vision for, potentially, a better community, a healthier community? A better world?

00:52:14

“Chapter 3: The Approach” slide.

Chapter three has to do with the approach. And certainly, this is where you'd want to talk about this approach to collaborative problem solving and planning. The issue of inclusivity, for example, bringing people into the process to work on these various projects and solve these various problems.

00:52:50

“Chapters 4-9: The Journey” slide.

So, this is the middle part, right? The journey. Let's say it's going to cover, what five or so, chapters. Five or, so that might be, five or so, blog posts with associated social media posts. Might be five or six email blasts that cover these various things. So, you know, in the hero's journey archetype, the protagonist is slaying dragons, and fighting monsters, and solving puzzles, and all this kind of stuff. So, what are the dragons you've got to slay, right? What are the puzzles that you have to solve? What are the problems you're encountering, and how do you go about solving them? And this is where you're talking about the real, kind of, on the ground boots...on the ground nuts and bolts sort of things that you need to deal with in order to see this project through. So, what are the things you're learning, you know, maybe you hadn't even thought of before, unexpected things, surprises, and how did you sort them out? What are you learning about collaborating with people with disabilities? What are the challenges there? What are the rewards there?

This is really important; how and with whom are you forming alliances? Also, by the way, this is also a common theme in these, you know, even these pop culture stories and myths. That protagonist is always making alliances, often with unexpected people. Think of Lord of the Rings, say, you know what I mean is, a group of unlikely allies, who come together to do something, you know, to better the world.

So, same with you. Who are you forming alliances with? How are you working with them? What do they bring to the table? What can you do together that you would never be able to achieve alone?

And then, you know, I think an honest assessment of things that maybe you messed up -- that you got wrong, that you have you made incorrect assumptions about. Maybe you had certain preconceived notions that were, you know, you found to be faulty. And on the other hand, what did you get right? Sometimes we get things right by accident, and that makes a great story too.

So, you know, an honest assessment of what you got wrong, what you got right, and how you worked these things out -- that's engaging stuff. And it can be really useful for others who you want to work with on similar projects.

Now all these questions, you know, aren't just for you or the people working with your organizations, but also for the people with disabilities who you are bringing into the process. All the same questions apply, and I think it can be really interesting, if you're getting those dual points of view. Maybe you're alternating it; maybe you're mixing them together.

Maybe you're doing blog posts, articles, what have you, where you've got quotes from different people that you lay out, give details about a particular problem or particular aspect of the project that you're working on.

00:56:21

“Chapters 10-12: The Solution” slide.

And then..., wrapping things up. Of course, you've got the solution. So, these are your final chapters. And here you're talking about, what was the experience like? How did it change you? How did your group, grow or evolve? What did you learn about yourselves? How has this project affected your organization, or you personally? And what lessons have you learned that you could potentially share with other folks who want to do this kind of work? Will your project serve as a model for others who want to do this sort of thing?

And once again, these questions aren't just for you, they're for everybody involved in the project. I can certainly see really, moving and engaging material coming from your clients about how this project really changed things for them, as it is enabling them to do things that they might not otherwise have done.

I was reading one of the profiles having to do with access to dental services – oral health. And I was thinking about my nephew. He's what, 16 or 17 years old with autism. And going to the doctor's office, going to the dentist, it's a major deal. I mean, it's like, you know, it has to be organized like a military campaign because it's rough. He's a big kid and, you know, it can be very difficult. So, just getting him to the office is one thing, because he knows what's coming! And then actually having a dentist or hygienist work on his teeth, who, ... that's a whole 'nother thing! So, you know, a service like that, a plan to help folks who are in that situation, it can be really huge and can make a really big difference in people's lives.

The same is true of all the other programs – projects, rather, that I was reading about. I had particular, because of my interest in environmental issues and gardening and so forth, you know, I had a particular connection with those kinds of projects. I can see where access to those sites, to those activities, can really make a difference in people's lives. Not only the clients, but also the people who are providing those services as well as the families of the clients, families and friends, and so forth. So, and for the community at large.

So, there's a whole lot to be said here about the actual impact of your projects on the folks – everybody -- involved as well as the larger community.

I hope this makes sense. This might seem kind of abstract and feel like we can talk a little bit about, you know, the practicalities of actually sort of breaking this down into different kinds of messages. This also may sound really ambitious and time consuming. And, you know, honestly, it will take some time, but it's not nearly as complicated as it may sound. It's pretty doable.

And as I said, even if you're doing this, you know, you're a rank amateur, no problem. You can still make really interesting things happen. It's not about the technical, it's not necessarily about the technical equipment you may have or the technical skills you may have, you know, for shooting pictures or video or writing, what have you. It's focused on the content; on getting good content, on speaking with people, getting them to open up to you a little bit, because you will often be surprised how moving, how insightful, and how articulate folks can be about their own experiences. And it's really worth gathering those things up. That can be really helpful for your organization, for your clients, and I think for the communities that you're working with.

All right, I think I'm going to wrap up there. Let me see what's next.

01:01:01

“Thank you” slide.

Ah, thank you all so much. I'm going to stay on for a while. So if you've got questions about anything in particular I'm happy to address them. And if you got really specific questions about your projects and what you're planning on -- what you're doing in regards to communications, more than happy to address them. If I can't answer it right now, I can, you know, maybe do a little research and get back to you. And of course, you're always welcome to contact me afterwards. My email address is right down there at the bottom, and you can find me on the web. So feel free to contact me. If you've got any questions, let me stop sharing and see if there are any questions. One moment.

01:01:43

Sara Malone: John, Thank you. That was really a great amount of information.

And I think a good map for people to follow in terms of..., especially what to do for the next 12 months of your program. Follow those chapters and do it! So, everyone, please unmute yourselves to join in the conversation and either contribute something that you're dealing with now that you'd like some advice on, or a success you've had that others can learn from, or questions. This is definitely a time to share, and we have a good amount of time left in the program. So please take the time to join in. And let's talk!

01:02:32

Karen Alexander: So, I have a question for John, which is after this terrific presentation..., and we will be, Sara, we will be sharing the deck with people, correct?

Sara Malone: That is correct, yes!

Karen Alexander: ... so that if you, you know, want to review it. If I was going to do three things first, starting from a mess of pictures, some random old flyers, and staff equipped with iPhones. What, what, three like, if I was going to take three baby steps, what three baby steps should I take? I mean, if you want to learn to cook, you learn to boil water, right? And then you learn how to scramble an egg, right?

01:03:14

John Gattuso: Right. Let's see three. Number one? Don't overthink it. Number two? Sit down and write yourself an outline. Think about how you're going to tell the story, what those various--- use that model -- 12 chapters. It doesn't matter if it's 12 or 10 or five or whatever it is. Write an outline and figure out, step one, step two, step three, this is how we're going to find it.

I'm running out of steps ... but it would be to make an outline, make a schedule, and say okay, we're going to do this story this month. It's going to go out. Right. You're not even thinking about what form it's going to take; is it going to be on your website, or social media, or what have you.

Then next, figure out who's going to do it; who's going to work on it. What you're going to need in terms of content, photographs, video, what have you. And then number four, think about, okay, three, three-D, think about, you know, what media ... your delivery form, what delivery form you're actually going to use. But, yeah, just plan things out. But as I say, you know, don't overcomplicate it. Don't

overthink it. Keep it simple. And break out those cell phones, and your computers, and your pencils, and just start jotting ideas down

I think often when people are faced with this sort of thing, they have a bit of that writer's paralysis. When you're looking at a blank piece of paper and you just don't know how to start. You can often work your way around that by starting with interviews. That way, the content is coming from somebody else. You don't have to write it down. But if you can come up with a few good questions. Keep it informal, keep it conversational, and ask people to talk. And sometimes, as I say, you'd be surprised what they say and how great it is. And there's your content right there. So, you've come up with a whole bunch of content, and you haven't really had to put pen to paper all that much. But you can begin to get this out on social media, YouTube, however you want to do it.

Karen Alexander: So it sounds like gather some material and find the themes in that material.

John Gattuso: Yeah, I mean it works the other way around. You want to have some idea of what you're writing...

Karen Alexander: But I mean in terms of this interviewing kind of approach, gathering data kind of approach ...

John Gattuso: Sure, sure! And I think this interviewing approach is really great for these kinds of projects because we want to know what people think and what their experience is like right from, you know, right directly from them.

Karen Alexander: Why are you on the steering committee? What are you hoping is going to happen with this project? That sort of thing?

John Gattuso: Yeah. And then also, those feeling questions,. What's it feel like to be involved? You know, sorting out this issue, what are your hopes? How do you think it's going to affect your life? Or at the end, How has it changed your life? You know, when people work on projects they often get very very connected and it becomes a very personal thing. And that's really engaging,. It's no longer a technical issue, you know, you're out of that kind of grant proposal language, and you're into a much more human, personal language, that folks outside of your immediate community or your media group are going to find engaging.

Karen Alexander: Thank you.

01:06:52

John Gattuso: One other thing is, you know, definitely think about themes and think about storylines, but keep yourself open. As I say, when you interview people, you don't know what they're going to say, and you may be very surprised as to what they're giving you. You may have to rethink. This story is not turning out as expected so I might have to make a change in strategy in order to get the most out of it.

Sara Malone: Please unmute yourself and ask your questions or share your experiences.

01:07:37

Venus Majeski: Hi it's Venus Majeski from NJID. And I was just wondering when you do the interviewing process... I think it takes a certain skill set that I may not have to get people to really open up. To me, the most interesting interviews are those that, you know, go deeper, when people really begin to reveal their feelings, and their understandings, and their perspectives – not just the shallow off the top of the head answers. How do we do that? Would that be..., now I'm thinking out loud, maybe it's all about preparing.... Would you suggest giving the questions in advance, or is it better to do it spontaneously?

John Gattuso: Yeah, I do a lot of video interviewing, so I can give you some practical tips on stuff that I do that I find works. And with video, you know, it's very revealing. You got a close up on somebody's face and you can tell if they're... pardon the expression, but you know, if they're bullshitting you. It's not difficult to tell if they're nervous, apprehensive, or if they're just toeing the party line and not really speaking what they feel. You can see it in the eyes. So, a few things to do. You want to try to relax people and get them talking to you – kind of one-on-one, and forget that there's a camera or a cell phone nearby recording what they say. So, yeah, you can share questions that's always a good idea.

There is a danger in that, however.... You share questions, mostly because you don't want them to feel like they're being blindsided or they're going to be asked things that they would rather not talk about. Assure people that they don't want to answer a question, just don't answer; there's no pressure. And assure them that it's a casual conversation; nothing they need to prepare for. The danger in that is that they will prepare something and sometimes people bring notes, and they want to read their notes. And that doesn't come across very well. But it's worth it letting them know what you want to talk about in advance, one way or another.

Okay. The second thing is, ask really simple questions to begin with. What's your name? Where are you from? Tell me about your family? What do you do every day? Just get them talking. After a few minutes, people begin to relax. You can sense a kind of ease in their face and their shoulders. Everything sort of loosens up a little bit, and they start talking spontaneously.

Often, you know, when I say that I'm often surprised at what people say, it's often not even in response to a question, they just volunteer stuff. Because once they get talking, they can't stop and they kind of like talking about stuff because, hey, they've been thinking about this stuff. It's on their mind and they like the opportunity to get it off their chest. Or, you know, they just find that interesting so they're going to talk about it.

And then, of course, ask open ended questions. If you ask a yes or no question, Have you really enjoyed this program? Yes. Not much of an interview. So, you know, ask them open ended questions. You know, what about this program did you find most enjoyable? What really excited you about this? What was the most unexpected thing that you encountered? What are you going to take with you for the rest of your life? What does it mean to you, deep down in your heart? What's the most fun you had or the most disappointing thing? Anything like that, that will get people to really sort of think and talk spontaneously is good.

And then lastly, don't be afraid of silence. We find silence uncomfortable in conversations. And we have a tendency to jump in and say anything other than suffer through a few seconds of silence. But if you just be quiet... Let them jump in and they'll fill that gap in with something. And you'll often be surprised at what that is, it could be nothing, it you know, but yeah.

And then one last thing while I'm thinking of it is, it's a little bit of a skill to engage people in a conversation but then also be thinking like an editor, in terms of, you know, oooh, what they just said right there is, you know, that's going in the video, that really sounds great.

Remember that editing may be beyond your technical skills. But if you can do some editing of your video or audio or what have you, remember that you're only going to use a very small portion of a long conversation. And so, you can go through 20 minutes of material that may not be all that great, but then you get 30 seconds of pure gold.

So that's what you're going to use. So, think like an editor, and don't be too concerned if you're getting a lot of stuff that's maybe not all that relevant, because you'll be able to mine that later and isolate the things that are good.

One other practical word of practical advice. In this day and age, it's always a good idea to get a model release for photo or video. You don't have to contact your lawyer, necessarily. You can find these things on Google. But just something that says, yes, I give you permission to use my image and my words for this IHC project, at the very least, if not for your website, or something even more than that, so that we can use it for something later. But that's always really a really good idea.

01:14:00

Venus Majeski: Thank you. You know I just, I want to thank you for your presentation. Fantastic. You're a master your craft you really are. Thank you.

John Gattuso: That's very nice. Thank you very much.

01:14:13

Sara Malone: Michelle has her hand up. Yeah, go ahead and unmute yourself Michelle.

Michelle Ruess: Hi, thank you. I just wanted to ask a very practical question actually, I do a lot of my social media posting using Hootsuite. Using Hootsuite, how do I insert the photo description, when I post a photo?

John Gattuso: Oh, that's a good question. I don't know the answer. I'd have to get on Hootsuite and figure it out, and you know I can get back to you. I'm actually not using Hootsuite. I used to use it all the time for myself.

Michelle Ruess: Okay, if I post directly to Instagram or directly at Twitter then, how would I do it? Is there a function on there?

John Gattuso: Yes, tell me again what exactly, what you need to do.

Michelle Ruess: Well, either posting a photo to either Facebook or Instagram or Twitter.

John Gattuso: And you need to put in what?

Michelle Ruess: Well, the recommendation is that we add a description so that people with screenreaders....

John Gattuso: Yes, yes. So yeah, I mean there's ways to add captions and text with the photo on all of those platforms, but the recommendation I think had to do more with websites. So on websites, when you put a photo up, there's an opportunity to put what's called alternate text, so that if you're visually impaired, you'll know what's on the screen, even if you can't see the photo. And sometimes you'll see a little tool tip, if you hover over the image, a box will come up, and it'll give you that text.

Michelle Ruess: I also put in the chat, Trenton Health Team uses a plugin that makes your site accessible regardless of how the user is interfacing with your site. It appears as an icon on your homepage. And if they're using a browser that has accommodations, then it will automatically find that, and then it will automatically provide that in the format that is accessible for them. So, I'm sure it has some glitches, but I think it was a big step for us and it actually was very easy for our web designer to install; it's just a plugin.

John Gattuso: Oh, that sounds cool it's a WordPress site.

Michelle Ruess: Yeah.

John Gattuso: And what's the name of the plugin Do you recall?

Michelle Ruess: I put it in the chat.

John Gattuso: Oh good, good, good. Okay, good. I looked that up.

Michelle Ruess: It's called User way.

John Gattuso: Great.

Michelle Ruess: Okay, so then, as far as like trying to use Hootsuite, or to try to also make any kind of images on social media, accessible, then the best advice is just to try to check with those individual platforms and figure out how to do that.

John Gattuso: Yeah, I mean off the top my head I don't know the steps. I'd have to get on there and figure them out. If you like, you can email me, and we can work on that.

Michelle Ruess: I can look at it. And also, is there anything specific about how to add captions into videos? Is that something that you do before you would upload it to one of those platforms, or can you do it when you're on that platform? Do you know?

John Gattuso: You can do it that way, but much easier.... For example, YouTube has this automatic captioning thing which is pretty great. And, you know, you just want to read it through before you post it. But it gives you an opportunity to edit so you can fix things. And if it transcribed something incorrectly you can fix it.

Michelle Ruess: Some things sound differently. Okay, thank you. Thanks very much. Appreciate it.

John Gattuso: You're welcome. And you're going to output those transcripts as well so it's really useful.

Michelle Ruess: Great. Thank you,

Karen Alexander: Sara, included in our previous training ... a bit about how to use that YouTube captioning. Wasn't that covered?

Sara Malone: Yeah, Natalia covered some of that in her program, and she also talked about how to add the alternate text to photos on websites and things, so there's some tips there.

Karen Alexander: I thought that was also in that content. So, that's another resource, in terms of pulling that off of our website, if you didn't have a chance to actually attend it that day. And that goes for anybody, not just Michelle.

John Gattuso: By the way, another really good use for that function on YouTube -- the transcription function -- is if you are in a position where you want to edit a video, and this this would work for audio file as well, you can have it output a transcription. And it's much, much easier to edit that transcription on paper, than it is to watch the video and try to figure out where you want cuts to be made. And in that way, you can use a -- sort of getting a bit ahead here -- but you can use pieces of a video, and sequence them in such a way that it, it kind of creates a narrative.

Sara Malone: Tiffany, I saw you had yourself unmuted there for a minute. Did you want to add anything there?

Tiffany Lucey: I just dropped it into the chat. Just like Google Slides and Meet Room closed captioning, as well as Microsoft PowerPoint so if you're doing screen recording for the work that you're doing. You can grab the transcriptions that way as well. So it'll close caption everything for you as you're speaking.

Karen Alexander: Great! Thank you.

Sara Malone: Other questions and comments? You've got a great resource here; use it! ... No?

Karen Alexander: Thanks, Diane, for your comment [in chat].

01:20:35

Sara Malone: Okay, well, if no one has any other questions, you guys get some of your day back!

John..., thank you so much! This was really, very wonderful. For everyone on the call, we will capture John slides and the transcript, the recording, and I will get them posted to the website within a week. And again, at the very top of the chat, I included our website address. It's the grantee page, which you should know it! Because I hope you go there all the time and look for stuff; it's really cool! But all the recordings of the previous programs, and this one are there, or will be there shortly as well as upcoming events. Our next event is July 26. I just sent out a notice on our Coffee Klatch, which will be an open discussion about working at the municipal level. So, look in your inbox for that. Our newsletter is also posted on the website, so you can get some other information that's been going on.

And, you know, send us your ideas for other programs you would like help with -- other issues that you would like help with -- other things that we can do programs for, as well as the Coffee Klatch issues. Karen, what else am I forgetting?

Karen Alexander: I just want to say there's lots of nice shout outs going out to John thanking you for your presentation. I want to make sure that that you see those nice things. It's also helpful for Sara and I to know that this is something that's useful to folks in terms of, you know, that this is hitting the mark and supporting you in the work that you're doing. And of course, you know, Jeanne, Sara, and I are always available to the grantees that we're working with. If you have questions or issues or suggestions or ideas, or just want some moral support, feel free to reach out to us.

Sara Malone: Yeah. So thanks again to our interpreters Elizabeth and Andrew. And John again, thank you so much.