

# Public Narrative

self & us & now



## Instructions:

Write your **story of self** and include 2–3 sentences of your **story of us** and your **story of now** in a separate word document. It should be no longer than 2 minutes when reading it aloud. Use the **Public Narrative Guide** to craft your narrative. You will be using your public narrative in your skill practice assignment as well.

For this exercise you will focus primarily on your **story of self**; however, public narrative is not just a form of self-expression. It is a way to exercise leadership by motivating others to join you in action on behalf of a shared purpose. Although we will focus on your **story of self**, this worksheet will start to get you thinking about your **story of us** and **story of now** as well. The goal is to identify your own motivations—or values—for why you have been called to leadership, because soon you will be calling on others (**story of us**) to join you in action (**story of now**). Public narrative is about learning a process, not writing a script. It can be learned only by telling, listening, reflecting, and telling it over and over again. This worksheet is to help you begin.

1. **A story of now:** What urgent challenge are you calling on others to join you in facing. What is the source of hope that action could be fruitful? What action can they take together to achieve a clear outcome? And how can they begin now, at this moment? **Spend about 5 minutes thinking about and writing down your story of now in only 2–3 sentences.**

2. **A story of us:** Who is the “us” that you will call upon? What shared values, experiences, or hopes will you draw upon when you ask them to join you in action? What stories can you share that express these values? **Spend about 5 minutes thinking about and writing down your story of us in only 2–3 sentences.**



3. **A story of self:** You should spend most of your time focusing on this part of your story for this assignment. Why were you called to take leadership on this urgent challenge? Why do you care? Why do you care enough to act? Why do you care enough to lead? Where did you get the hope? What were the key choice points that set you on your path? What stories can you share that will enable us to experience sources of your caring and your hope, moments that moved you, that will enable us to “get you”? Invest most of your time in this section. Use the following worksheets to help guide you.

**WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF YOUR OWN CALLING?**

**WHAT CRITICAL CHOICES POINTS CAN YOU RECALL?**

**WHAT STORIES CAN YOU TELL ABOUT THESE CHOICE POINTS?**

**Before you decide what part of your story to tell, think about these questions:**

1. What will I be calling on others to do?
2. What values move me to act and might also inspire others to take action?
3. What stories can I tell from my own life about specific people or events that would show (rather than tell) how I learned or acted on those values?

**What are the experiences in your life that have shaped the values that call you to participate**

<b>FAMILY &amp; CHILDHOOD</b>	<b>LIFE CHOICES</b>	<b>LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE</b>
Parents/Family	School	First Experience with Political & Civic Issues
Growing Up Experiences	Career	A Key Moment in Your Work as an Organizer
Your Community	Partner/Family	Role Models/Community
Role Models	Hobbies/Interests/Talents	Current Experience as a an Organizer
School	Finding Passion	
	Overcoming Challenge	

Think about the challenge, choice and outcome in your story. The outcome might be what you learned, in addition to what happened. Try drawing pictures here instead of words. Powerful stories leave your listeners with images in their minds that shape their understanding of you and your calling.

CHALLENGE:	CHOICE:	OUTCOME:

### For Further Reflection

We all live very rich, complex lives with many challenges, many choices, and many outcomes of both failure and success. That means we can never tell our whole life story in two minutes. The challenge is to learn to interpret our life stories as a practice, so that we can teach others based on reflection and interpretation of our own experiences. We should choose stories to tell from our own lives based on what's appropriate in each unique situation.

Take time to reflect on your own public story, beginning with your story of self. You may go back as far as your parents or grandparents, or you may start with your most recent organizing and keep asking yourself why you in particular got involved when you did. Focus on challenges you had to face, the choices you made about how to deal with them, and the satisfactions - or frustrations - you experienced. Why did you make those choices? Why did you do this and not that? Keep asking yourself why.

What did you learn from reflecting on these moments of challenge, choice, and outcome? How do they feel? Do they teach you anything about yourself, about your family, about your peers, your community, your nation, your world around you, and about what really matters to you? What about these stories was so

intriguing? Which elements offered real perspective into your own life?

Many of us active in public service have stories of both loss and hope. If we did not have stories of loss, we would not understand that loss is a part of the world, and we would have no reason to try to fix it. But we also have stories of hope, otherwise we wouldn't be trying to fix it.

A good public story is drawn from the series of choice points that have structured the "plot" of your life – the **challenges** you faced, **choices** you made, and **outcomes** you experienced.

**Challenge:** Why did you feel it was a challenge? What was so challenging about it? Why was it your challenge?

**Choice:** Why did you make the choice you did? Where did you get the courage – or not? Where did you get the hope – or not? How did it feel?

**Outcome:** How did the outcome feel? Why did it feel that way? What did it teach you? What do you want it to teach us? How do you want us to feel?

In the end, you will be asked to **link your story of self, story of us, and story of now into a single public narrative.**

As you will see, however, this is an iterative, non-linear process. Each time you tell your story, you will adapt it to make yourself clearer, to adjust to a different audience, or to locate yourself in a different context. As you develop a story of us, you may find you want to alter your story of self, especially as you begin to see the relationship between the two more clearly. Similarly, as you develop a story of now, you may find it affects what came before. And, as you go back to reconsider what went before, you may find it alters your story of now.

You will not leave this class with a final "script" of your public narrative, but you will learn a process by which you can generate that narrative over and over and over again when, where, and how you need to.

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