

Nonprofit Storytelling Tips

Your nonprofit's story and message is what it's all about: Good storytelling is what gets people interested in the work you do, inspires them to donate to your cause, and keeps them invested. Stories are even more important to **GAgives on #GivingTuesday** because you're raising funds under a deadline. To ensure that your nonprofit is driving traffic to your fundraiser and getting the donations you need to reach your funding goal, your story needs to be immediate, impactful, and well-planned.



This guide will take you through the process of figuring out your story and how to tell it.

What's your angle?

Your nonprofit does a *lot*, and it can be tempting to try to talk about all of it on a day like #GivingTuesday. However, you will be more successful if your campaign and your story are laser-focused. So the first step in telling your story is coming up with an angle for your day's fundraising efforts.

What that means is deciding what you are trying to accomplish on #GivingTuesday. You're raising money, of course, but *for what*? Do you have a particular need right now, like upgrades to your facilities or getting a new program off the ground? Is there a specific fund that needs refilling? Does your nonprofit have an organizational priority you want to push?

You'll want to make sure whatever angle you choose is:

- Simple to communicate
- Easy to understand
- Broad enough that you can tie multiple related stories (such as testimonials) back to your theme
- Easily translated into visual storytelling; and
- Tied to your nonprofit's mission.

What's your message?

In order to tell a cohesive story, you'll need to do a little digging into your nonprofit's messaging. Identifying your nonprofit's key messages and weaving them into all of your communications is how you make ideas "stick" in the mind (and heart!) of your supporters.

There are three steps your team can take to ensure that your key message rings loud and clear for GAgives on #GivingTuesday.

Step one: Define your key messages.

Your nonprofit's key messages are the ideas at the core of the work your nonprofit does. They are your bedrock principles: simple ideas that explain why you do the work you do.

Ultimately, as a nonprofit, you are not just asking your community to support your programs and services — you are asking them to buy into the ideas and principles that *fuel* your programs and services.

If you've already created a communications plan for your nonprofit, you will already have these defined; if you don't have these written out, it should be the first part of planning your communications. **Pick 2-3 key messages about your organization** to share. (You may want to include more in a full communications plan, but for a giving day, 2-3 will help keep your messaging tight.) These should be broad, speaking to your *why* rather than your *what*. That is, avoid getting bogged down in the programs and services your nonprofit provides, and think instead about *why* you provide them.

What's a good key message? Let's say your nonprofit is a food bank. You may be tempted to make the number of people your food bank feeds every year into a key message — but that's a *what* and not a *why*. Instead of discussing what you're doing to address hunger, your key message might be, "We believe that all people should be free from hunger." Another might be, "Communities need to work together to serve those in need of a helping hand." If you're not sure where to begin, you can refer to your nonprofit's mission statement if you're not sure where to begin.

Key messages should be approved by the organization's leaders, so make sure your executive director has a chance to weigh in when your team comes up with them.

Step two: Define 2-3 messages specific to GAgives on #GivingTuesday.

Your key messages are broad; your refined GAgives on #GivingTuesday messages will help you develop content specific to that campaign.

What do you want to define in these messages? Think about the impact of supporters coming together for your cause; a specific program or issue you are focusing on; a suggested donation amount and the impact it makes; or a message closely related to your campaign's angle. At the same time, you don't want to get *too* specific; remember that you will be touching on these messages again and again, so they need to be broad enough to weave into all of your GAgives on #GivingTuesday storytelling: every email, social media post, and video.

Again, if I'm working for a food bank, my GAgives on #GivingTuesday messages might be:

- On #GivingTuesday, we come together to work toward ending food instability in our community.
- A gift of just \$25 can feed a family of 5 for a week.
- Our community has a responsibility to help those among us who are suffering from hunger.

Step three: Put it together

Your messages work as a funnel, refining your key messages into your GAgives on #GivingTuesday messages, and refining those messages into specific content for your campaign.

To clarify: When building your content, start with your key messages, and go through the processes discussed below with those key messages at the center : When you're choosing which stories to tell, when you're picking testimonials, when you're scripting and editing your video, when you're drafting an email, your key messages should be the foundation they are built upon.

Your GAgives on #GivingTuesday messages should then be woven into each story you tell. These are the bells you want to ring over and over again. Of course, they don't have to be transcribed *verbatim*, they just need to be present. You'll want to communicate these ideas in all of your communications about GAgives on #GivingTuesday.

When you and your team go through this process, you will find that these messages often result in content that more-or-less writes itself – a great guiding light as you prepare to connect with your supporters around GAgives on #GivingTuesday.

Who are your characters?

Every great story needs great characters. In nonprofit fundraising, relatable characters are essential because they bring the lofty issues your work addresses down to a personal level. It can be hard for the average person to relate to hunger, animal welfare, or humanitarian work: Because they are big, overwhelming topics, they can cause the general public to tune out. To reach them, you must connect these issues to a human story that provokes an emotional reaction: a family your food bank helped feed, an animal your shelter found a home for, or a refugee in crisis that your organization helped to safety.

For an example, The Humane Society of the United States' 2013 year-end campaign was one of the organization's most successful. To help raise awareness and funds for dogs in puppy mills, they told the story of one little dog rescued from a puppy mill. This allowed a big, complex, often controversial issue hit home for people. They were able to take a big issue and make it feel personal. And that is precisely what you should aim to do with your nonprofit storytelling.

So, as you're preparing for GAgives on #GivingTuesday, you'll want to follow that example and find characters that help tell your story. The characters may be obvious to you, but you'll need to identify the potential characters (those your nonprofit has worked with) who will help you tell your story. Leave no stone unturned while looking for great characters! Scroll through old emails, photos, and social media posts, and ask your coworkers.

Here are some things you'll want to consider when choosing characters:

- Can we easily contact them?

- Does their story help us tell our nonprofit's story?
- Can we easily get their permission to use their story?
- Are they available to tell their story in their own words (either in quotes or on camera)?
- Do they represent a unique angle that hasn't become cliché or overused by similar organizations?

During the GAgives on #GivingTuesday planning process, reach out to anyone whose story you wish to use in your campaign. Get their permission and their quotes so you can begin building content.

How will you tell your story?

This is where you'll start putting your prep work together and building content for GAgives on #GivingTuesday. To get started, identify what you'll need to tell your story.

Here's what we suggest you start with:

- **A video.** Having a video is recommended because you can use it in so many different ways – on your website, on social media, in emails, and on your GAgives.org page. You can even show it at an in-person event! If you're not sure how to go about making one, put a call out for a volunteer videographer over social media and email. Even if you can't find a videographer, you can DIY a video by splicing together photos and video footage (which iPhones are actually pretty great at capturing) using a free online video editor like YouTube Editor, apps like VivaVideo, or websites like Kizoa.
- **Photos.** Gather photos you can use for GAgives on #GivingTuesday. Photos are especially helpful for keeping things interesting on social media, where they perform well. Ration out your content so that you don't run out of steam during the 24-hour giving marathon. They can also spice up your emails, add interest to your story on Mightycause, and be added to your website and/or blog.
- **Social media "share graphics."** Use the photos you've gathered to create some shareable graphics for GAgives on #GivingTuesday! Add a quote from your testimonial or a call to action, along with the GAgives on #GivingTuesday logo. These can help build buzz and generate shares. Online tools like Canva can make it easy and affordable (many options are free) to create eye-catching share graphics already formatted for social media.
- **Draft emails/blog posts.** These will be a bit more long-form than your social media posts, so you can add in all the details and flourish you'd like. These longer pieces can also help inform the shorter pieces you'll need to produce, such as social media posts.

Where will you tell your story?

When you've got much of your pre-planned content ready to go, the next step is identifying your channels of communication and tailoring your story to suit each channel. Make a list of all the

different ways you'll communicate with the public about GAgives on #GivingTuesday, and on the day of the event, including:

- Your GAgives.org page
- Email
- Social media
- Website
- Blog
- Traditional media (print, TV, radio, etc.)
- In-person events
- Direct mail marketing
- Fliers
- In your facility

Once you've identified your channels, you'll want to think through a strategy for each. For instance, how are you telling your story on GAgives.org? What's your email schedule? Where on your website will you promote GAgives on #GivingTuesday? How many blogs will you post? What media contacts can you use to help publicize your campaign? Do you have any opportunities to market your campaign at upcoming in-person events? If you have an event planned for the big day, how will you tell the story there? Can you add GAgives marketing to your upcoming direct mail campaigns? Do you have any fliers or posters in your nonprofit's facilities, and do you have the foot traffic to make these effective?

While it helps to cast a wide net, it also helps to identify the most meaningful channels of communication. If you only have a handful of Twitter followers, but you have a robust Facebook following, devote more of your time and energy to Facebook. If you get a lot of traffic in your lobby but your email list is a little thin, spend time and money creating promotional materials for your lobby, and encourage visitors to sign up for your email list. Tailor your strategy to what works for your organization. You don't have to give equal weight to all communication channels.

Put it together – and then edit

Now you can build out and polish your content for GAgives on #GivingTuesday. Schedule social media posts, schedule blog posts, update your website, get the fliers and posters for your lobby printed, test and schedule your emails, and then dot your i's and cross your t's for the big day!

Your nonprofit probably already has an editing process in place, but if you're a one-man or one-woman show and you're preparing everything, it helps to have other sets of eyes on the content you're building. We recommend:

1. **A content edit.** During a content edit, you'll want to have another person (preferably someone familiar with your key messages and mission) look at your content with a critical eye to make sure everything in your story is clear, aligns with your mission, and that your key messages shine through. A content edit will also focus on optimizing your word choice and making sure that your copy is as strong as it can be.

You should have someone take a look at your emails, blog(s), any social media posts you've scheduled.

2. **A copy edit.** As a last step, make sure you have a grammarian take a look at your content to ensure there are no typos or grammatical errors. Ideally, this should be someone other than the person who does your content edit.

If you follow these steps, you can make your nonprofit's story the centerpiece of your GAgives on #GivingTuesday campaign and inspire donations by moving your followers to act.