Telling Stories, Building Support

Using Stories for Advocacy

Tractus Strategic Partners

Virginia Association Of Community Services Boards, Inc.
Making a Difference Together

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Your Facilitators

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Session Objectives

1. Translate your personal “why” into a clear, compelling advocacy message

2. Adapt stories for different audiences (legislators, community leaders, public)

3. Practice delivering advocacy stories with confidence to inspire action for VACSB’s mission

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Today's Agenda

Welcome, Purpose, and Connection

Story Circles – Remembering Our Why

Part 1: From Personal Why to Public Advocacy

Part 2: Tailoring to Your Audience

Part 3: Stories in Action

Commitments, Next Steps, and Close

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SESSION GROUND RULES

- R
- E
- S
- P
- E
- C
- T

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STORY CIRCLES – REMEMBERING OUR WHY

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WHAT IS A STORY CIRCLE?

- Small group gatherings where participants sit in a circle and share stories from their own experiences or imagination, focusing on a common theme

- **Aim**: create a safe space for dialogue, explore commonalities and differences, and surface stories

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STORY CIRCLE RULES

- **Sit in circle facing one another** – no distractions (notepads, computers, phones, etc.)
- **There are no observers** – only participants
- **Speak only when it is your turn** – no cross talk, no questions/observations/debates
- **Listen deeply** – try not to think about what you will say while someone else is talking
- **Own your time** –
  - When it's your turn, you decide when to speak
  - You may pass, knowing your turn will come around again
  - Someone else's story may spark ideas for your story – say, "That story reminds me of…"
- **Use story form** – beginning, middle, end
- **Confidentiality** – no recording stories / no telling someone else's story without their permission

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STORY CIRCLES

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VACSB MISSION

The mission of the Virginia Association of Community Services Boards is to achieve a publicly-funded system of quality public and private services in Virginia that:

- Is ultimately responsive to individuals with behavioral health and developmental disability service needs, and their families
- Focuses on community-based supports for individuals with behavioral health and developmental disability service needs
- Ameliorates and prevents disabling conditions
- Promotes independence, recovery, behavioral health and education of the public about the needs of individuals with behavioral health and developmental disability service needs

Why does VACSB's mission matter to me today?

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FROM PERSONAL WHY TO PUBLIC ADVOCACY

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ADVOCACY AS BOARD RESPONSIBILITY

- Boards exist to champion the mission
- Silence = lost opportunity
- Board members have unique credibility
- Advocacy strengthens sustainability
- Collective advocacy = community impact

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Stories change minds more than data:

Head

+

Heart

+

Hope

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ZACH WAHLS SPEAKS ABOUT FAMILY

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSQQK2Vuf9Q

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DEFINING "ADVOCACY"

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DID YOU KNOW…

These are the gaps we are here to close

…only 52% of non-profit boards actively engage in advocacy?

…54% of non-profit CEOs say their boards don't understand how public policy impacts the organization's mission?

Sources:
boardsource.org
leadingwithintent.org

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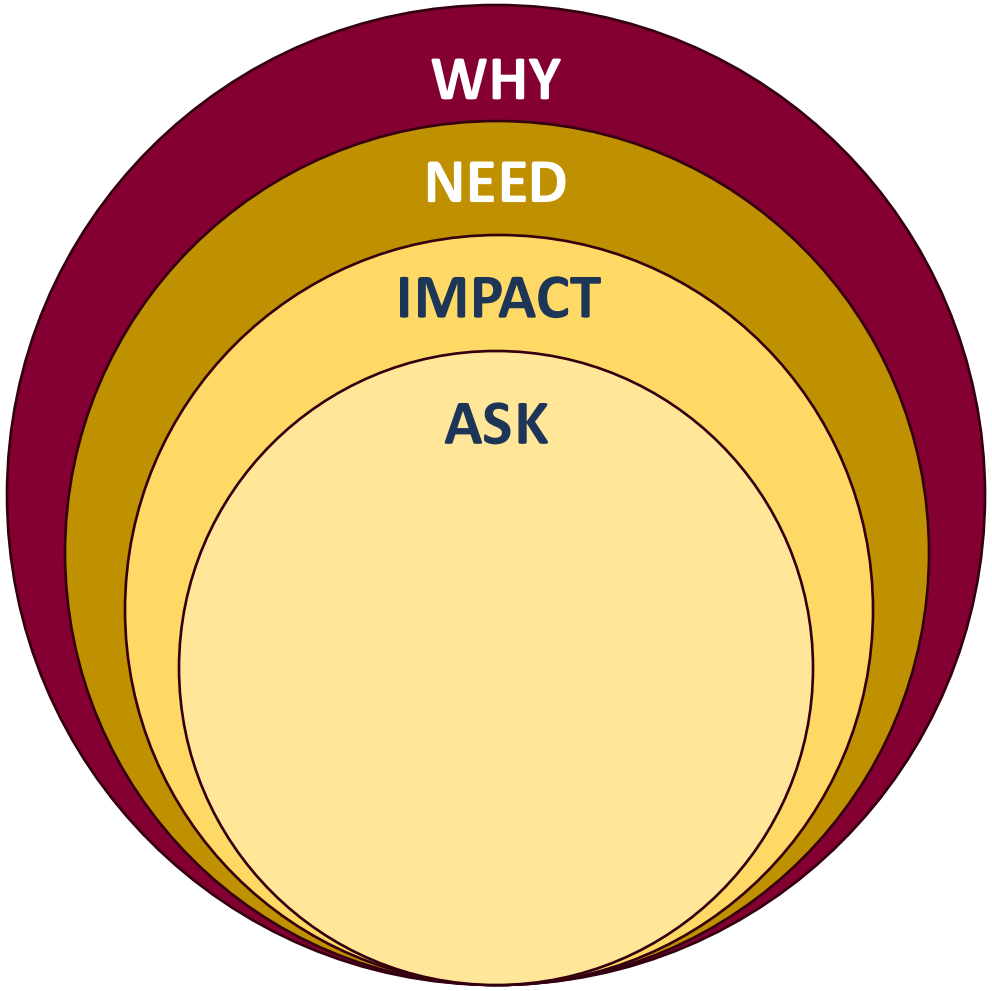
THE ADVOCACY STORY FRAME

WHY:
The personal connection

IMPACT:
What VACSB/CSBs make possible



NEED:
The community's reality

ASK:
The clear, doable call to action

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EXERCISE: FINDING THE CORE

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DRAFTING YOUR CORE ADVOCACY STORY

- Draft a 150–200-word story using the 4-part frame
- Read the draft aloud to your partner
- Partner gives feedback
  - Keep x 2
  - Shift x1 for clarity or punch

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THE ADVOCACY STORY FRAME

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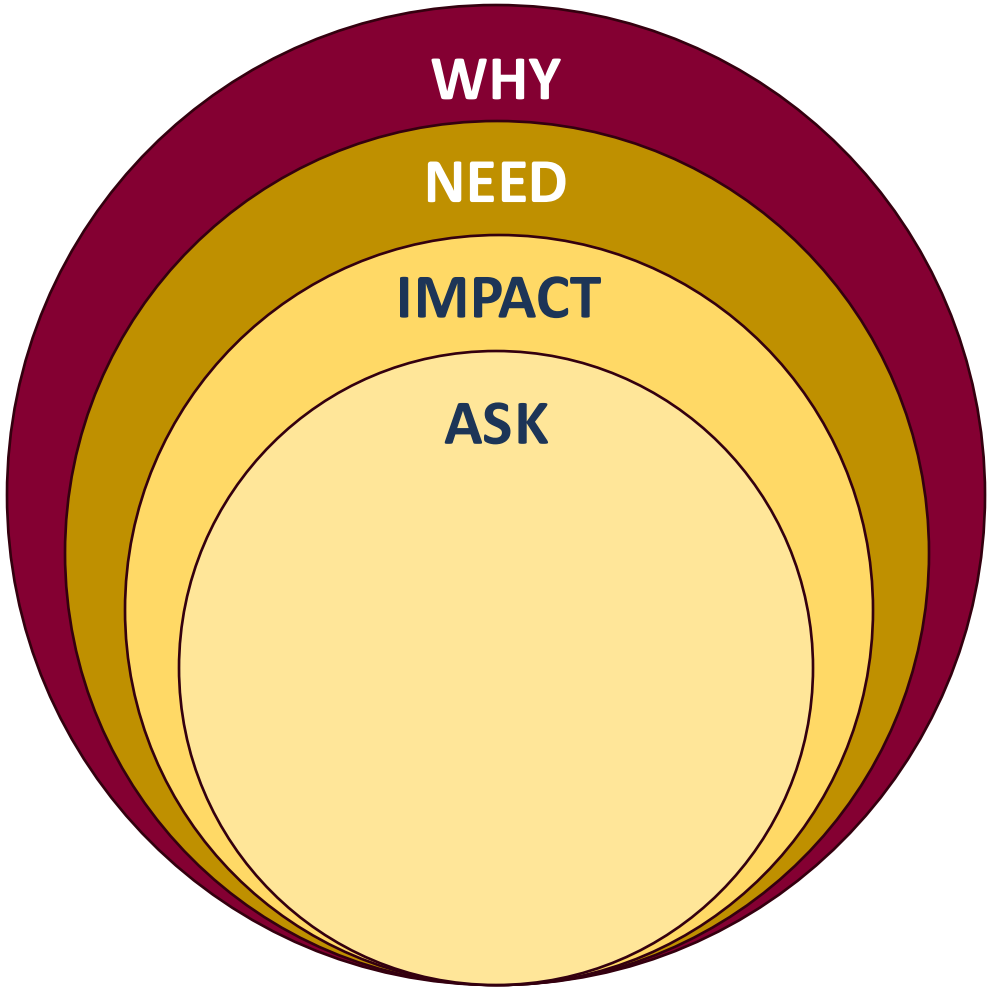

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BREAK TIME

Reconvene in 10 minutes

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AUDIENCE MAPPING:
WHO NEEDS TO HEAR US?

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A VARIETY OF AUDIENCES

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DID YOU KNOW…

…only 31% of non-profits engaged in advocacy in the last five years? (down from 74% in 2000)

…non-profits in collaboratives or coalitions are 5x more likely to advocate (57% vs. 12%)?

Source:
Independentsector.org

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EXERCISE:

MAPPING YOUR AUDIENCES

Group Brainstorm:

Who are VACSB's priority audiences?

What do they each value most?

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TAILORING YOUR STORY

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- Different audience = different priorities
- Same story, different framing (e.g., emphasizing cost savings for policymakers vs. community wellbeing for neighbors)
- Advocacy is translation: keeping the heart while shifting the emphasis
- Goal = a clear, relevant, actionable message

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EXERCISE: ZEROING IN

- **Choose one target audience**
- **Rewrite your story:**
  - Tighten to 90 seconds or less
  - Emphasize what that audience values
  - Refine the ask

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STORIES IN ACTION:
PRACTICING 90-SECOND DELIVERY

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PRIORITIZING PREPARATION

- Policymakers and influencers often have limited attention (typically only a few minutes)
- Practice is about clarity and confidence, not memorization
- What sticks: one vivid detail + one clear “ask”

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EXERCISE: THE FISHBOWL

- Voluntary!
- Choose your audience
- Group feedback:
  - What was compelling?
  - What stuck?
  - What made the ask “actionable”?
- What would you change?

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NEXT STEPS & FINAL THOUGHTS

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Personal commitment card:

In the next 30 days, I will use my story to advocate by _____ for _____.

Closing reminder:

Many voices, one mission

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