



BOOK 1: FIVE STRATEGIES TO GUIDE YOUR CONTENT STRATEGY

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ASSIGNMENT 3

TOOLKIT 3:

ONLINE CONTENT STRATEGY



Amplify Mobilise Change is a DG Murray Trust Innovation project designed to help South African civil society shift its thinking about and develop more creative, impactful and efficient online communication and technology practices.

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About this toolkit

Engaging your audiences and helping them take steps towards new behaviours and ways of doing things depends much on your messaging and content strategies. In this toolkit we delve into narrative and content strategies that drive engagement and types of online content formats that work well for impact communication and digital advocacy. We also look at production and management methods that can boost your content production efficiencies.

Please note: Our toolkits use a Book and Chapter structure.

2023 TOOLKIT 3: ONLINE CONTENT STRATEGY

BOOK 1: FIVE STRATEGIES TO GUIDE YOUR CONTENT STRATEGY

Description

As communicators, we need to understand how people make decisions. If we can understand this and some of how humans behave, think and feel in society, then we can become better at building long lasting relationships through our content and messaging. In this book, we introduce you to five empowering strategies that you can use to guide your content strategy.

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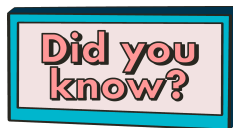
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Strategy 1: Challenging single stories

What do we mean by 'challenging single stories'? Well, stories about how things work help us understand the world around us – history, our countries, how people and our societies work. Stories about our lives and the roles we play in them guide us as we respond to things and find our way. We could call stories, belief systems or world views, too. Stories are made from information as well as our beliefs, ideas, feelings and perceptions. Usually, stories have a beginning, middle and end, and we tend to build ideas about our worlds using a similar model – that things start, move and end (or don't end) in particular ways.

We all get attached to our own stories. Sometimes, when groups of people or big systems create and hold onto stories about the world that are very one-sided or all powerful, these become dominant and can overshadow other less visible ones and often create a 'single story' about how things work or should work. This can limit our sense of what is possible or different.

As communicators in civil society, we have an opportunity to challenge dominant stories with our own storytelling and content and to give life to possibilities, ideas and innovations that may not always be obvious but are necessary for change to happen.



Research has shown that communication that creates powerful alternate stories about situations for people to identify and empathise with is more powerful than communication that attacks existing narratives. Creating compelling counter-stories about situations is a powerful strategy for change.

We can challenge dominant narratives in two different ways:

- **We can use storytelling**, with characters, a sequence of events, scenery, etc to help people see a 'new person's story', which helps build empathy and understanding; and
- **We can reveal the 'truth' behind existing narratives** that society holds and help our audiences see what lies behind the dominant stories by bringing alternative or lesser known stories to light.

Using an empathic and practical narrative to shift the dominant narrative, rather than attacking those who hold the dominant narrative, opens up alternative ways of thinking and makes them more willing to help solve the situation.

Here are two examples to help you visualise these:

Example:

The 'real' history of the US

There is a battle currently in the US about the American national narrative.

Like many colonies, North America's wealth was built on the exploitation of fertile lands with free labour – and the US's came via the trans Atlantic slave trade.

The dominant narrative that America is the 'land of the free' is called into question by activists and historians arguing that the US's true story is one of racial exploitation, theft and greed, that 'freedom' was, and still is, reserved for those of European descent (usually with wealth). Indeed, in the sub-narrative of American 'pioneering' – pioneers are always people of European descent and never native Americans or the millions of Africans who toiled and lost their lives for the America of today to exist.

The 1619 is a narrative project that seeks to redefine this skewed narrative and reframe the story of America's early history, and thus, America today.

[You can see the 1619 Project on the New York Times' website.](#)

The 1619 Project makes visible sets of tropes, themes, characters and a plot that challenges the dominant narrative that America was built on ingenuity and opportunity, but actually on the lives of enslaved people. This is excluded from the dominant, westernised narrative of America's evolution.

By existing, the project gives a tangible story for those fighting for their right to be acknowledged and included in American national narratives, and provides rigorous research and multivocal narrative structures that can offer further support to activists, teachers and citizens as they fight for racial and social justice.

Homelessness is a system

In South Africa (and most of the world), there is a dominant narrative about homelessness, usually amongst the privileged.

A dominant narrative we seek to change: If you are poor and homeless you must have done something to be on the streets. If you tried harder or knew how to work, you would have a job and a home. You just need to work harder to bring yourself out of your situation.

A more empathic narrative: Poverty and homelessness are systems that oppress people who are vulnerable. No one wants to live on the street. Finding a job when you and your family have been at the mercy of an oppressive system for generations is often not possible and the cycle is extremely hard to break without help.

In the next book, we look at some of the ways you can use storytelling in your content. What is important to know is that creating compelling, well-researched and consistent new narratives is one of the most powerful ways we can shift attitudes in South Africa.



QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO CONSIDER:

- What new stories does your organisation actively create about the situations you work in?
- What dominant stories are you aware of in the public imagination that make your work harder to do?
- What dominant or existing stories are you aware of in the public imagination that makes your work easier to do?

Links to further resources:

[Narrative Arts: Public narrative](#)

[Narrative Arts: Story strategy for civil society](#)

Strategy 2: Solutions-based messaging

Having brought an audience around to listen to your message with open hearts and minds using values, you want to inspire positive support and action for your work and vision.

Civil society aims to solve issues in society and in our world. The problems of our world motivate us to exist, of course, but when you think about it, they are not what's at stake. What's at stake is solving them!



So often nonprofit organisations paint a picture of deprivation to make a strong appeal for support or action. But this has shown, time and again, to eventually create apathy and aversion in the public and also, misrepresent the lives of the people and environments we are seeking to support with our work. At the same time, hiding the problem will also not advance your cause.

When you present your solutions and paths to change as the 'hook' in your messaging, you inspire people to participate and see the future with you. You leverage hope and collective action by leading. The problem context supports and gives rise to your solutions, but you want people to get involved in helping solve the problems around them.

At its heart, solutions-based messaging is a brilliant way to encourage action, to help people feel positive about collaborating with you and working towards a different future for our communities, country and planet.



Locally, you can see solutions being yielded for action in powerful ways in the work of the [Grow Great campaign](#), [Youth Capital](#), [GreenPeace Africa](#) and [Fundza](#) – all who are building positive messaging and communities of practice around a solutions-orientated future South Africa.

Solutions are big and small

Each organisation has unique and worthy solutions to existing problems. These solutions are the avenue through which change is made, as well as the avenue through which supporters can collaborate with you. Solutions are both tangible interventions like programmes or services that lead to positive social change. Solutions are also values and ideas that encapsulate social-change thinking and doing. In fact, when you appeal to values, you help people understand what they can draw on in themselves to create positive solutions in return.

Solutions can be big or small – the success of a programme, the great teamwork your organisation has, or the bigger story of your impact and how it improves the systems around us.

Every time you create a new message or piece of content, try to use shared values and solutions as the cornerstone of your messaging. Take people on a journey that they want to be part of, for the long term.

Solutions-based messaging framework

To help you organise your messaging approach, here is a solutions-based messaging framework you can use to workshop your messaging strategy or guide you and your team each time you create new content.

Topic	1. What are you talking about? 2. What theme, issue or situation are you addressing? 3. Where is this message? Are these messages going to be published? What form will it/ they take?
Audience	1. Who is your target audience and what is their content? 2. Who is this message for? Who is your target audience? Who are they in relation to you?

Call to values	These are shared values that create an emotional connection. Here are some questions to help you work through this: 1. What are your organisation's values around this issue? 2. Why should people care about this? What do they value that could be relevant to this issue? 3. What core shared values do you want to use as the rationale for why people should care?
Problem context (Can come before solution in actual context)	Help your audience understand and notice the problem that needs solving. How is the problem you want to fix important to your target audience? Framing the problem as a threat to the values you've just identified will help people understand what's at stake, on a bigger level, and also make an emotional connection with this particular problem (as opposed to blocking it out or ignoring it). Explain the problem with gusto — use strategic messages, stories, powerful graphics and framing devices, like statistics, to paint a complete picture. Remember, the problem is not an individual one; it's a systemic one. People are more encouraged to act when they feel like their involvement will contribute to big, long term change. Here are some questions to help you work through this: 1. What is the (big) problem you are trying to solve? 2. What stories or evidence can you use to tell the story of the problem in a convincing and interesting way? 3. How is this problem a threat to the shared values you have identified? Why should people care about this threat? Contextualise with data, information, visuals, stories.
Solution (Can come after problem in actual context)	Help your audience see clearly how you are going to solve the problem. You want to show and tell how solving the problem will mean saving and protecting the shared values you've introduced earlier. You also want to make it clear — what actions they can take and who is responsible for what: 1. What is your current solution to this problem? 2. What shared values will you protect and how, with this solution? 3. What are you doing now to solve the problem? 4. How can people become part of the solution? Contextualise with data, information, visuals, stories.

Action	Right, so now that people have read this, what do they need to do? 1. What actions must people take right now to help you solve this problem? 2. What can they generally do – either immediate or long term – to help and take action?
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Thanks to [Opportunity Agenda's Build your own message tool](#).



[Download our simple solutions-based messaging framework.](#)

Example:

Avaaz

[Avaaz](#), the powerful global online campaign movement, appeals for donations using a simple, effective, solutions-based messaging to potential donors.

The message below has the core components that mirror the solutions table, which we point out (in brackets). [You can see this on their donations page.](#)

(Topic) Avaaz is an independent, not-for-profit global campaigning organisation that works to ensure that the views and values of the world's people inform global decision-making.

(Solution) Our campaigning works. Together, we've won historic victories on climate change and biodiversity, protected communities from dangerous disinformation, campaigned against conflict from Ukraine to Yemen, and mobilised millions in humanitarian aid to communities devastated by disasters and war.!

(Problem) **We rely entirely on donations and receive no money from governments or corporations.** Our tiny online team ensures even the smallest contributions go a long way. (Solution)

(Action) **Donate now by using the form!** Consider making a recurrent contribution – it will help sustain Avaaz's work all year and ensure we can respond with lightning-speed when the world needs us most.

(Action) PS: If you're planning ahead and would like to consider leaving a gift to Avaaz in your will, [you can find all the information you need here.](#)

Links to further resources:

Opportunity Agenda: [Why solutions and values based messaging?](#)
[A guide to hope-based messaging](#)

Strategy 3: Appealing to what's at stake

Values embody our narratives and feelings about what we think is important in life. In a way, they are metaphors for or of what we think is important and help guide our decisions. Because values tend to be built over time, they form a foundation for many aspects of who we are and why we do things. For these reasons, they provide excellent bridges for us to connect positively with our target audiences and open up people to our conversations and ideas, even if they are arguing for something new or different.

Why are values a bridge?

If you can relate to and share a core aspect of what someone holds dear, then you can find ways to align. Appealing to values in your messaging and content helps people find the connections to what you're saying and other things they find meaningful and relevant. This opens up conversation and allows your audiences to draw on their own experiences and develop a sense of purpose and agency in response to what you are saying. Appealing to shared values also makes people feel included, which in turn makes people more willing to listen to what you might have to say, and be willing to share their ideas and feelings with you in return.

Much has been written about this! Using values as a strategic hook in social change messaging has demonstrated positive effects on building empathy and action with supporters and engaged audiences.

An appeal to values in messaging strategy is a powerful way to open a piece of content or communication.

What are some of the values relevant to our work?

In our line of work, these are some core values that motivate people to try harder and stay involved in socially beneficial activities:

Community strength — shared values: a healthy community, a connected and empowered community, a respectful community, a safe community.

Resilience — shared values: trying again, having stamina, motivated to remain, knowing how to rest and renew, redefining vulnerability as resilience.

Personal health — shared values: making healthy choices, being safe and respectful of your body and others', knowing when to rest, the importance of how to seek the right kind of help.

Safety — shared values: physical or emotional safety, the desire to feel safe, making others feel safe, the right to safety.

Tolerance of others – shared values: wanting to practise tolerance, being empathetic, being curious about others’ experiences.

Help and support – shared values: wanting to be helpful, believing in a supportive community, feeling compelled to help, finding ways to help.

Duty – shared values: doing the right thing, living up to your potential, working for the betterment of others, listening to your calling, honouring those who came before you, abiding by healthy rules, sacrificing for the greater good.

Rebellion and or resistance – shared values: wanting something different, wanting to challenge the status quo, wanting to disrupt for certain valid reasons, positive energy in change, rights and justice.

Inclusion – shared values: wanting to include those on the outside, wanting to build an inclusive system or society, altruism, feeling included, being empathetic, being pragmatic.

Creativity – shared values: wanting to create a project, finding joy in ideas and work creativity, the power of creative solutions, art and beauty as ways of building happier societies, stepping outside the box.

Love – shared values: the human need to create/ express and experience love, love as a way of building new relationships, love and acceptance of others, finding ways to love things we find challenging, forgiveness.

Joy – shared values: the right to joy, freedom of being joyful, the joy of living in freedom, the joy of children or new ideas, joy as rebellion or resistance, how to find joy, how to create joy.

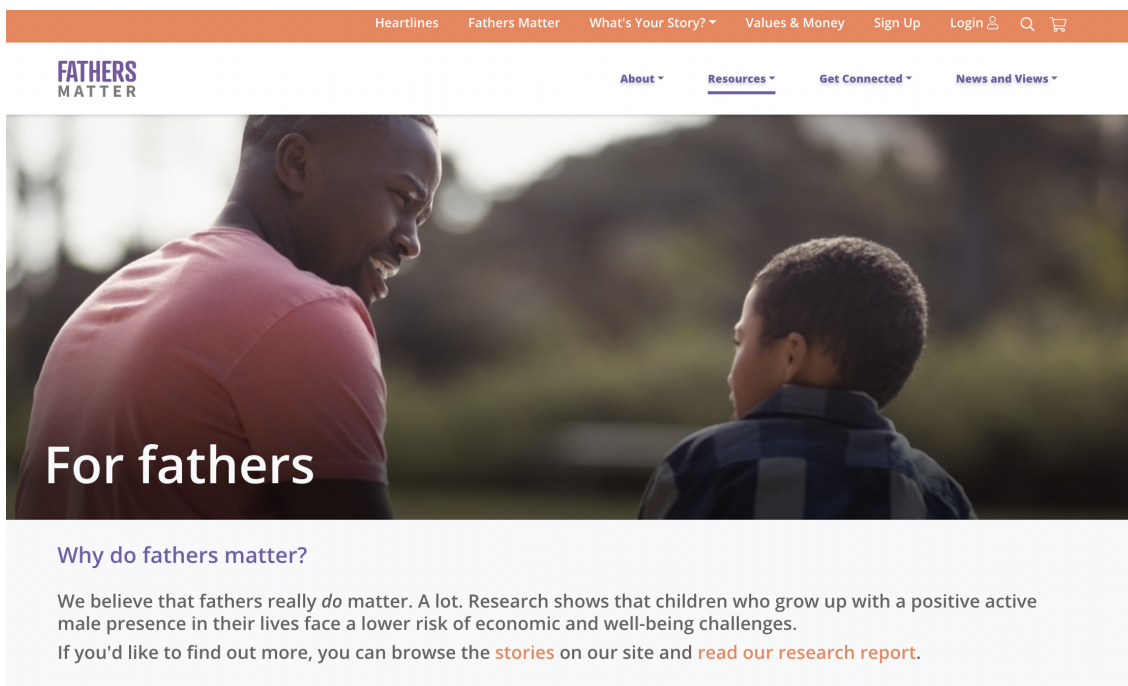
Heroism – shared values: the quests in life, listening to your inner voice, finding your voice, empathy for others as a form of heroism, everyday heroism (acts of kindness), fighting for what’s right, the wounded warrior, protection, leadership.

What does this appealing to shared values look like practically? Before we move onto the solutions-based messaging framework in the next chapter, let’s look at an example:

Example:

Heartlines

Heartlines, a South African-based organisation, uses everyday values around fatherhood to engage and encourage individuals to positively identify with the roles fathers play in our lives. By drawing on the collective value of a stable childhood and engaged parenting, they encourage fathers to grow their skills and identify with fatherhood in more open ways.

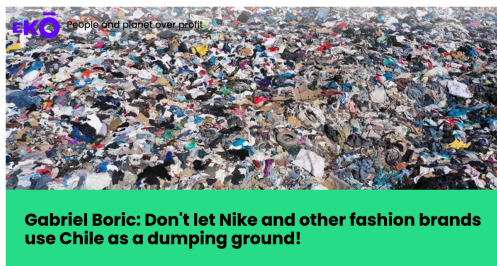


Example:

SumofUs (Now Eko)

SumofUs, the international movement that confronts corporate power through popular campaigning, asks its support base to join them as they compel new, leftist Chilean president, Gabriel Boric, to turn his campaign pledge values of ecology and equality into action by regulating the fashion industry that currently allows tons of clothes to be wastefully dumped in the Atacama desert.

The text for the appeal draws on the SumofUs community's shared values of 'people and planet over profits' and aligns supporters with the same values in the president's winning pledge, thereby allowing us to feel connected to him, hopeful that SumofUs might win a campaign like this and clear in the knowledge that this campaign is aligned with what the global SumofUs community holds dear.



[You can see the appeal for signatures on Eko's site.](#)

A giant mountain of clothing is growing in Chile's Atacama Desert and some of the best-known fashion brands, like Nike and TJ Maxx, are responsible.

But there's hope, with the newly elected leftist president, who is set to take office in March.

Gabriel Boric is currently setting his presidential priorities for the coming months – **so the time is now to amp up the pressure to make sure that regulating the fashion industry is high on his list.** If we gather enough support, **Gabriel Boric and his cabinet won't be able to ignore us.**

This cemetery of clothes is part of a dirty chain of issues: second-hand and unsold clothing that is made in Asia, passes through to Europe and the United States before being dumped in Chile – **all a result of the massive rapid-overproduction that the fashion industry pushes.** Water pollution, leaking chemicals, and microplastics are just some of the environmental hazards that make the fast fashion industry one of the worst polluters in the world, and a clear example of the devastating impact of **corporate neoliberalism that has marked Chile's history.**

For decades, Chilean pro-market policies and tax-free havens have enabled these toxic dumping grounds to grow. The Chilean government has always had the power to put people and the planet before profit, but chose the latter. **But with our community's pressure, change could be on the horizon.**

The president-elect, who millions see as a new symbol of hope, vowed to create a future for Chile that was more equal and ecological during his presidential campaign. And famously proclaimed "Neoliberalism was born in Chile and here it will die". **Let's make sure he keeps his promises!**

More information

[Chile's Atacama Desert: Where Fast Fashion Goes to Die](#)
EcoWatch, 15 November 2021.

[Chile's desert dumping ground for fast fashion leftovers](#)
Al Jazeera, 8 November 2021.

EKO People and planet over profit

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QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO CONSIDER:

- What are your organisation's core values?
- What values inform your work and campaigning?
- What values amongst your core target audiences do you think you would appeal to, to increase participation in your work, content and campaigns?

Links to further resources:

[Opportunity Agenda toolkit](#)

[Effect of values-based messaging on adolescents \(journal\)](#)

[Heartlines values resources](#)

Strategy 4: Framing for your audiences

There are multiple ways you can tell a story, but how you tell it also influences how people understand it. Framing is a term for another strategy communicators in civil society use to build bridges with target audiences. Framing means to present or 'frame' an angle on a situation that presents a version of the story we think is best to show to our target audiences.

Take a look at the media and the way it addresses and presents certain issues, such as those relating to the environment, crime, politics, the economy or education. Through framing, the media can lead the public to think or feel something particular about an issue. We also call this an 'angle'.

Experts in framing stress that if you want to get people to engage with your ideas in open-minded ways, you need to make sure that you build your message and argument using words, images and metaphors your target audience aligns with.



'The wrong cues in a message – words, imagery, ideas – can unintentionally activate the public's "swampy" assumptions and cause a communication to backfire'.

- [The Frameworks Institute](#)

How do we use framing?

We use framing to help our audiences feel aligned with us. Oftentimes it comes down to a simple shift in thinking about a word!

Example:

In literacy organisations in South Africa, we notice that there is a lot of emphasis on the dire nature of our literacy rates. People feel alienated from a situation when they think the problem is too great or that they may be part of the problem. The word 'literacy' is a big word that can mean a lot of things and may alienate the communities that literacy organisations are trying to work with. What if we painted a picture of the underlying joys of reading and the connection it can bring to families? What if we focused on storytelling and pleasure rather than making people feel like reading is a duty?

You may have noticed that much of what is in the idea of framing sits within the idea of 'narrative'. Indeed, these two ideas do overlap.

Narrative refers more to a 'story' or a content series built using classic narrative tools like characters and setting. Framing refers mainly to the angle of a story which is created with words, images and ideas. They compliment each other!

How can we go about framing for change? Let's take a note from our friends at the [Frameworks Institute](#):

Example:

When the [Frameworks Institute](#) and the [Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation](#) set out to help organisations and governments build more support for climate change and its effects on the planet, they found that people relate to the body and to body metaphors really well and more with empathy than to the abstract science. Using imagery of the body and health to explain the need to protect the ocean was particularly impactful. Understanding the ocean as having the same need for health as our bodies do helped the audiences they studied connect and feel deeply for the ocean rather than seeing it as separate and therefore, less needful of protection.

[You can read their report and approach on their Frameworks Toolkit.](#)

The Frameworks Institute again worked with an Early Childhood Development (ECD) organisation in Kenya to understand how Government and nonprofits could best communicate with rural communities about the importance of ECD. Most importantly, the research team wanted to understand how to motivate the communities to actively participate in practices that would help children in their communities reach their social, emotional and cognitive potential, before and during their early school years.

The research work that the team did established that the frames that resonated most with rural Kenyan community members were around community responsibility – appealing to the importance of community participation and connectedness was the best way to get everyone to ‘buy into’ the way ECD practices could become part of the fabric of everyday life in the communities.

[Read more about the Kenyan studies and find resources produced by the team.](#)



QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO CONSIDER:

- What is your organisation’s position on the core issues you deal with?
- How do you currently try to get people to think outside of their frames?

Links to further resources:

[Frameworks Institute, Tools and resources](#)

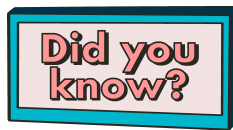
[Frameworks Institute Framing Academy](#)

Strategy 5: Telling system stories for impact

The big picture approach contextualises individual stories as a whole and increases participation. Helping people see how individual actions contribute to change over time is inspiring and affirming for those working to change society for the better – whether community members, funders or your general supporters. And when we see how individual stories affect or come from the wider system, we can start to hold institutions and systems responsible.

We can then draw on our collective responsibility and our collective desire for change and hold the system or greater society accountable rather than a single person, event or entity. Similarly, when we show the effect of certain actions on the whole, we create more inclusive relationships by helping people understand the role we/ they play in a context.

This content strategy works well for campaigns and advocacy! Research has shown that for people to stay invested in a campaign's trajectory and to see themselves as part of a movement, they need to feel like they both understand the system they are fighting to change and also feel like the system can change.



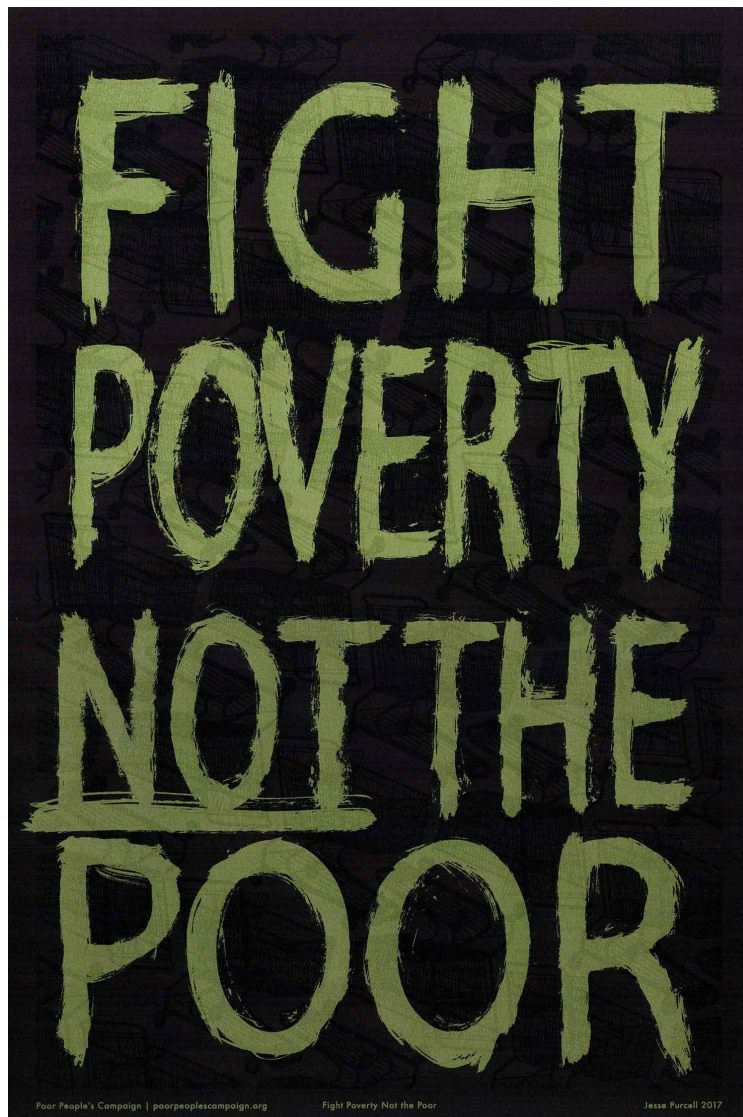
Showing people how their donation or involvement has led to sustained change incentivises people to participate again.

Human stories help us relate to more abstract ideas like poverty or inequality but sometimes focusing on individuals can blind audiences to the root cause of what we are trying to change: unequal systems. Using human stories to demonstrate how the system works, must be changed and has changed due to incredible solutions that allows audiences to visualise the systemic issue clearly, feel empathy and feel motivated to act!

Example:

The Poor People's Campaign

The Poor People's Campaign uses the call to action, 'Fight poverty, not the poor', as a call to justice for those who are caught in the unfair system of poverty. Although this is just a slogan and the system story has much more detail, in this very simple way, the campaign educates people about the fact that individuals are not responsible for their own poverty but are caught in an inherently unjust system that harms those affected by it. This simple shift in lens helps people understand not only the situation but also paints a path to a solution.



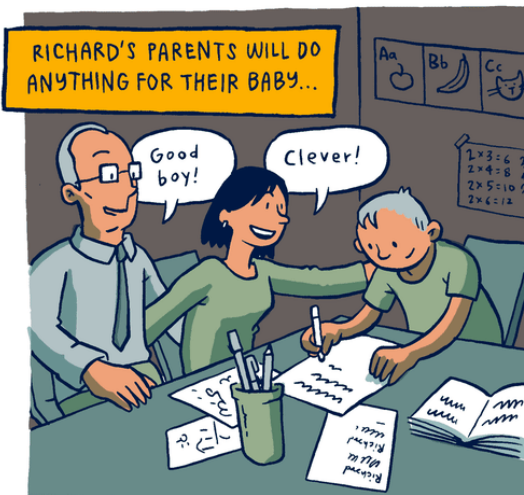
[You can see more about the Poor People's campaign on their site.](#)

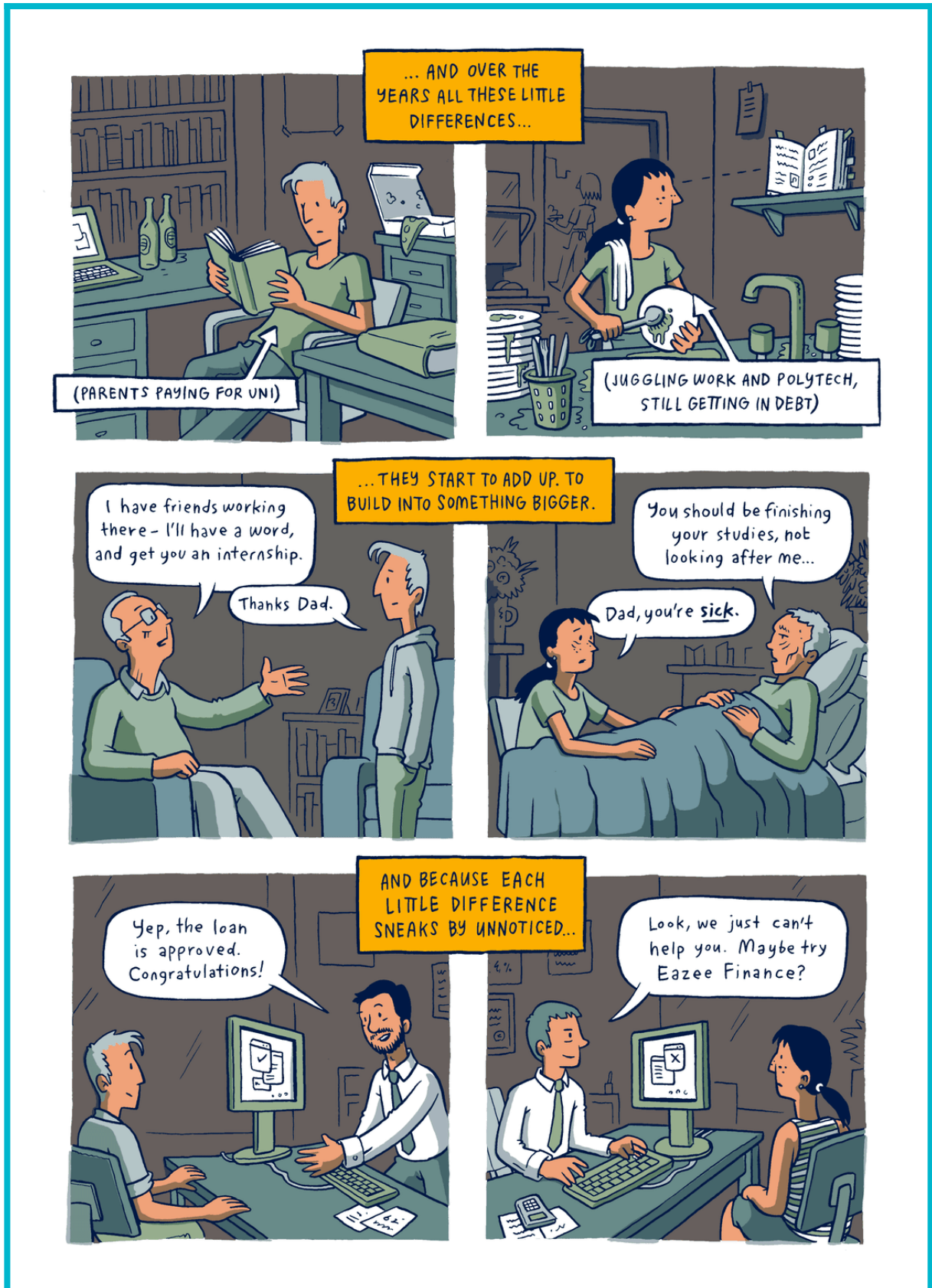
Example:

On a plate

The online cartoon, *On a Plate*, by Auckland Illustrator Toby Morr is a powerful example of how a story told in an episodic way can keep our attention on some big system concepts, like poverty and inequality, and explain the complexities of systemic privilege using a compelling dramatic arc, visual imagery and compelling characters.









FURTHER READING: LOOK UP AUCKLAND CITY MISSION'S 'SPEAKING FOR OURSELVES' BOOKLET

@XTOTL 2015

Links to further resources:

[Using stories to change systems \(journal\)](#)

[Frameworks Institute, Storytelling for change \(thematic vs episodic stories\)](#)

[Frameworks Academy, Wide Angle Lens \(free mini course\)](#)

We hope your mind is full of ideas! Write them down, let them settle and then move to the next book where we get more practical.

This image shows a full page of blank handwriting practice paper. It features approximately 28 evenly spaced horizontal blue lines across the entire page, providing a guide for letter height and placement. The lines are consistent in color and thickness throughout.

2023 TOOLKIT 3: ONLINE CONTENT STRATEGY

BOOK 2: CONTENT TACTICS FOR BOOSTING ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

Description

Now that you have some strategic ideas to mull over and bring into your overall content strategy, let's turn our eye to the practical. In this book, we cover some of the most accessible online content tactics that make for effective online engagement. The content tactics we cover are not exhaustive but are excellent starting points to help you attract and maintain active communities online.

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Chapter 1. Creating a trusted voice

Your organisation's face and reputation play a role in how willing your audiences will be to listen to you.

This means:

- Developing a voice and personality that is authentic and builds a connection with your core audiences through communication.
- Having a clear position on issues and not being afraid to express your position, in the right way.

Similarly, if you use characters or others to help tell a story that is important to you, they too should be able to create the same kind of trust and rapport with audiences.

Example:

Donors and government may be primary audiences in some contexts but if you only speak institutional language or use heavy jargon with your community collaborators, you will risk alienating them.

How do you show local communities that they can be open with you? How can you make them feel comfortable with the journey you are asking them to take with you without losing your brand and style?

Instead of using jargon you can still consider using pertinent social and emotional appeals to generate awareness, interest and engagement, while maintaining your organisational positioning. You can be friendly and open and still play your important role.



Chapter 2. Intentional words and language

Words are the cornerstone of all our communication. When you plan your content, spend time analysing how you want to present yourself to your audiences using language. Is your aim to be inclusive, challenging or gentle? It's worth finding the words that reflect your intentions and the relationships you want to create with your audiences.

Below, we address some of the more high-level points we'd like you to consider when using words in your content.

Home language

We know that words and language can change your relationship with your supporters and audiences. Ideally, you would speak to your audience in their preferred language. If your organisation's chosen language of communication is English, which is common in South Africa, then aim to use the most relatable language possible – that is, a language that people can relate to and understand easily.

Most organisations who have done audience research with local communities, especially in rural and under-resourced areas, find a demand for information in a community's home language – often in tandem with the language of the organisation. Consider translating the text into the home language of your target audience and offer it along with English, if that is your main organisational language. You would do this with intention and in a way that sits well alongside your other languages.

My Vote Counts creates some of its advocacy messages in isiXhosa on their English page, which is aligned with their advocacy work. Using a home language makes it easier to engage with the frames and feelings of isiXhosa-speaking audiences, who are critical in the My Vote Counts advocacy movement.



Relatable words and style

While it is tempting to stick to a style of language with which your organisation is most comfortable (perhaps the academic style of reports or the scientific jargon of hard science-based organisations), your messaging and intentions can be lost if your audience feels like your language is unapproachable. If an online user can't relate to what you are saying in your online communications because of how you are wording your information, they are less inclined to stay attentive and may just leave your page or website.

Language is not simply a neutral device. Language can give away your position and perspective on something and can create or prevent closeness between you and your audience. The way you express something in words can help your argument in more ways than you realise. In our field, our aim is to encourage our audiences to make an emotional connection to what we are doing and saying. Think about the word 'stakeholder'. What does this word actually mean to you? Does it make you feel included and appreciated when you are referred to as a 'stakeholder'? Or would you prefer to be referred to as a community member? Or a supporter? The words we choose are loaded with meaning. If you want to frame your messaging to encourage as much positive engagement as possible, make sure you use words and language that mean what you want it to mean.

Plain language

Using plain language is more inclusive and helps your audience understand your messaging and feel more connected to your cause. If your audience can understand the language you use, they can grasp the issue you're addressing and realise the role they can play in supporting your organisation. For example, adapting your core strategic messages from academic or organisational speak into terms and words that make more sense to the average person. It removes barriers that may exist between organisational practices and the social practices of humans if you want to have emotional connections.

Plain language goes much further on digital channels than organisational or technical language, even when communicating with donors and partners. Remember, even if a big institution donates to your organisation, a human being in that institution will read your report. And so should everyone else!

A useful resource is [the Plain English Campaign: The A-Z of alternative words](#) to help you use everyday, simple language when communicating with your audience.

Active sentences

Similarly, for example, if you use the passive voice a lot, your messaging loses its sense of action and directness. If you use big nouns a lot, instead of verbs, you lose out on the chance to connect and simplify with verbs. This is especially true for online environments. Remember the Gutenberg parenthesis – the online world is an especially social zone, characterised by fluidity and openness. Content and information meant to engage audiences should be easy to understand and access.

Slang and colloquialisms

You may find that using colloquial language, vernacular or slang in your content can have a positive effect on your target audiences. Your language does need to be authentic though and not 'rude'. Do not write colloquially if you can't do it confidently and with integrity. You would also need to do audience research to test any slang or colloquialisms before you introduce them to make sure they have the effect you want and do not come across as patronising or demeaning.

Example:

A few years ago, the City of Cape Town used slang in an anti-litter campaign, which came across as patronising and demeaning to those who spoke Afrikaans and use slang like 'eish' and 'bra' in the Western Cape, which are typically used by people of colour:



Used respectfully and subtly, colloquial language can bring people closer to you and your messaging, as seen in the South African government's use of the #keready hashtag and words like 'vooma' and 'jab' in their vaccine awareness campaign work (mostly on SMS).

Save our Summer! Get vaccinated this Vooma Weekend to keep the holiday season on track! [0800 029 999](tel:0800029999) or www.gov.za

Tone

Along with language, audiences respond differently to the tone of your message. Where possible, avoid using an argumentative tone or scare tactics in your communication, as these can threaten your audience. Consider if your organisation would have a more formal or casual tone. Perhaps it is friendly, informative, assertive or urgent. Your tone carries meaning and elicits emotional responses in people. It's important to make sure that your tone reflects the position and message you want your audiences to engage with.

Example:

[Side-by-Side](#) is a local, national Early Childhood Development (ECD) campaign that promotes the Department of Health's ECD services. While their aim is to see an increase in the use of ECD services and an improved understanding across South Africa of how to care for children between 0 to 2 years old, the campaign frames its information in a way that is relevant for South African caregivers and the needs of their children, as opposed to focusing on and promoting the ECD services themselves.

The campaign uses simple, conversational language and a supportive tone to share helpful and relevant advice on the campaign's 5 pillars – Nutrition, Love, Protection, Healthcare and Extra Care. By relating to caregivers in a language that they understand, the campaign, in turn, builds the caregivers' trust in the Department of Health (DoH) as an expert on ECD as well as in its services.

[You can find their messaging and content resources on the Side-by-Side website.](#)

Inclusive words

Your language needs to take stock of everything you want to say, and don't want to say. Even our spelling is heavy with meaning and often, heavy with power.

Example:

The dominant use of the word 'man' in our language to refer to humankind embeds a patriarchal lens into society. Even the word 'woman' has been found wanting by feminists and nonbinary people – having 'womxn' as a viable alternative to 'woman' shows how one letter can change the way a word makes people feel, and includes those who felt excluded by the concept and history of the word, 'man'.

Even pronouns have power! First-person pronouns like 'you' and 'us' include the whole. 'They', as a gender neutral pronoun replacing the binary of he/ she, represents an important breakthrough in gender framing.

How do we use references to people who are more conscious and empowering? Referring to someone as a 'survivor' rather than a 'victim' allows someone who has experienced sexual violence to choose a path to healing rather than being confined to trauma. In saying this, both terms have their place. If you are an organisation advocating for more convictions of sexual assault perpetrators in the criminal justice system than using the term 'victim' is acceptable and more appropriate.

How about changing how you use the word 'beneficiaries' and use references to people who rather reflect their chosen identities? Calling someone a 'beneficiary' is alienating if the person you are referring to is a mother within a community, for example. Plus, the word beneficiary implies they simply benefit from your services but are we not building active citizens and participating with the people we work with.

A very simple but highly effective strategy is to replace misleading or negative phrases or words with ones that embody your values and shift an audience's perception, giving them new words and phrases to use themselves.

Example:

Reclaim the City

Reclaim the City is campaigning to shift attitudes to the homeless and people living in squats and empty buildings. Their work and campaigns are aimed to help citizens and public servants understand the homeless or the unhomed as people who have as much a right to a home as anyone else. A simple use of words makes their argument clear:



Interested in

homeless glossary?

reading the

<https://blanchethouse.org/homeless-houseless-unhoused-glossary-about-homelessness/>

The gentle mamma

For parents and guardians – whose work is usually hard – our language carries huge importance. Society likes to allocate negative tropes onto children who may not be ‘easy’. Changing the words to describe children who may be challenging us helps society counteract this tendency and develop more understanding, compassion and curiosity about a child’s state of mind. Here is an example from the Gentle Mamma on Instagram:



The Conscious Kid

Another example of how language can be used to create a different standpoint can be seen below, also from Instagram, this time on the activist account.



theconsciouskid 
2.0M followers

[View profile](#)



Janel Cubbage
@JanelCubbage



We are not minorities, we have been
minoritized.

We are not underrepresented, we
have been historically excluded.

Language matters.

[View more on Instagram](#)



112,825 likes



By undoing the noun forms, people who are typecast and locked into a certain position against their will can shake off oppressive labels and become something other or more. Simultaneously, this act of rephrasing removes the accountability carried by those who have been discriminated against and places it back on the discriminatory systems themselves.

This kind of language work is hugely important in activism. Even if your organisation does not have an activist project, you can, in subtle ways, shift perceptions simply by changing word order, converting nouns into adverbs or selecting different phrases!

Language has the power to reinforce or deconstruct systems of power that maintain poverty, inequality and suffering. Oxfam International recently published an [Inclusive Language Guide](#) as a resource to support people in the sector to think about how the way they write can subvert or invertedly reinforce intersecting forms of inequality that we work to end.

Chapter 3. Sound and picture that connects

Imagery helps people step into a situation and imagine it for themselves. A quick way to get people's attention online is to use effective visual and audio content that can create immersive experiences of your subject matter ethically. Imagery may not only refer to visual content – it can also relate to how you paint or describe a scene with words.

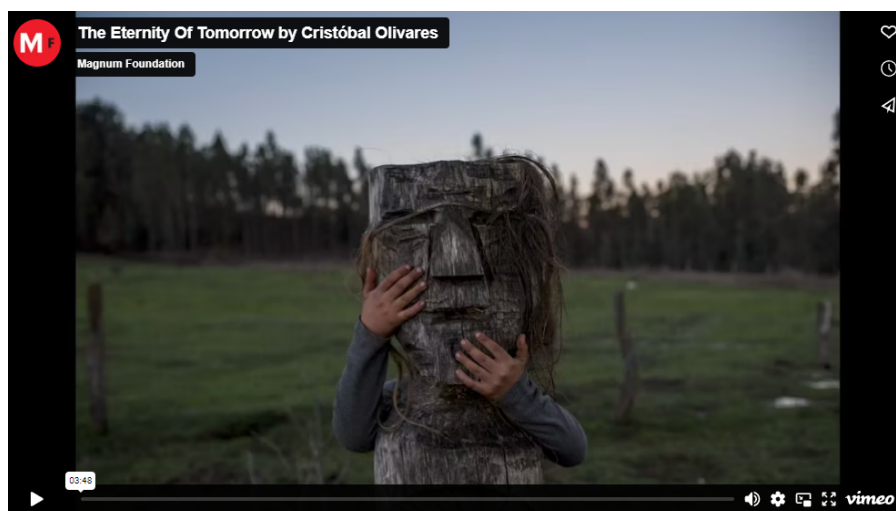
Sound

Sound is also one of the most evocative ways you can open up your audiences' imaginations and create a sense of place. Sound creates visceral, emotive responses and transports us into the story environment rapidly. You can create an immersive experience for your audiences in simple and cost-effective ways.

Example:

The Eternity of Tomorrow

The Eternity of Tomorrow is an award-winning multimedia documentary. Its use of sound (aside from music) is brilliantly yet simply executed – from the 'foley' sounds of cars, guns and nature, to bring us into the place of the story, to the use of voice and music to narrate and create emotional cadence. You can watch the short film below or see it on World Press Photo – a site with excellent sources of immersive, documentary-style multimedia storytelling from across the world.



The African Cypher

The trailer to *The African Cypher*, a documentary about 'township' dancers and the passion they have for their dance, is a brilliant example of editing. The trailer sews together music, rhythm and voices in a rich symphony to reflect the hubbub and strong feelings of the dancers they interview, as well as the places they come from and dance in. The chaotic, orchestral sounds in *The African Cypher* are an ode to the chaos of the city and the energy of the characters and stay with you long after you have stopped watching.



Recording sounds or finding sounds is quite easy. A good sound editor can help you with more sophisticated audio needs but a good cell phone recording can go a long way for creating online content. For example, adding sound to imagery and stories can be done from your phone on apps such as Instagram and Facebook. WhatsApp is a great context for sound and audio files. Many of us have also turned to podcasts to tell our stories.



ROYALTY-FREE SOUND RESOURCES

Finding free-to-use sound for video and imagery is also easier these days – [Creative Commons licences](#) are great for an array of non-commercial sound needs. Just pay attention to the different licences.

An excellent resource is also the [Free Music Archives](#) and, one of our personal favourites for Royalty Free music, Kevin McCleod's [Incompetech](#).

Video that captures your audiences

As we saw above, video is not a single sensory experience — sound and picture come together and transport a viewer into the scenes in ways that a non-moving picture won't. This makes them a good choice for building empathy with your audiences and depicting your stories in a sensory way.

In online environments, videos may engage people deeply but they are also 'easy' in the sense that one doesn't have to work too hard to experience the video story or video content. This typically means that videos perform well on social media, especially if they are short and interesting. Avoid longer videos since statistics show that most viewers' attention wanes online between the first 10-30 seconds. Also, longer videos eat data quickly which does not work for audiences on limited data plans or with limited mobile phone bandwidth.

Gifs, live videos, episodic videos — a whole split into shorter parts, told over time — and sequenced moving images like those seen in Instagram or Facebook stories are particularly compelling for online social media users, WhatsApp and LinkedIn. Longer videos fit better within a web environment but even then, attention wanes pretty quickly unless the video is captivating and short enough to engage with easily. Aim to use video intentionally as a story form to create a certain experience of a topic or a situation rather than simply because you think you should.

If you produce long-form video stories or films for your organisation and are seasoned producers, then you would most probably be showing or distributing your stories in environments that lend themselves better to longer form, like screenings. Then, editing long-form formats into shorter episodic pieces for online audiences is an excellent way to build support and visibility for your work.

Also, make sure if you use a platform like YouTube that you add sufficient tags and a well written description to your videos — this is a critical element of how people find your videos.

Example:

Médecins Sans Frontières

Médecins Sans Frontières produces succinct reportage and video coverage of all their work, in various forms, from interviews to in-depth analyses of war or conflict situations they are present in. It's rare to find a video longer than 3 minutes on their YouTube channel and usually no longer than 30s to a minute on their social media channels.

This does not mean their videos lack energy, depth or focus. With good editing, a mix of recorded footage, graphics, sound and short story arcs, their videos are informative, current and help immerse viewers in situations they would never normally reach. They use video intentionally to break down access to information and create access to situations that often exist on the sidelines of the world's gaze.



Photography

Pictures — whether still or moving — can quickly draw us into an emotional state and allow us to understand and empathise with a scenario that we may be unfamiliar with. Pictures, like sound, are not confined to culture like written language is — they can transcend language and cross boundaries of meaning and understanding rapidly.

When we use visual subject matter that is carefully presented, and ethically considered, we create a bridge between worlds. Images stimulate our visual cortex and draw us into the world and characters portrayed.

Photos offer a communicator a chance to compliment text but they are also an effective device on their own and should be selected to emphasise the core of your message and to create a deeper emotional connection to what you are saying.

Example:

UNICEF

Here is a campaign still from [UNICEF's 'Bring Back the Child'](#) campaign, which was developed in partnership with the Sri Lankan government. The campaign aimed to highlight the illegal nature of recruiting child soldiers in Sri Lanka (and the world).

Words and images are blended in subtle and provocative ways here. 'He wants to be a cricketer, not a child soldier' is positioned alongside this young man's face. We are drawn to the look in his eyes, his reluctance and the tragic irony of his stance. He becomes real to us, we feel connected to his situation; we may even identify with him. When we realise that his cricket bat is also a weapon, the shock of his situation is felt viscerally and the effect of the campaign is achieved; we almost feel what it must be like to be him, to carry a weapon and feel all his feelings. Such is the power of visual imagery.



Ethical imagery

Capturing pictures of human beings needs to follow ethical guidelines and only be done with the full participation and consent of the subject(s), in line with the POPI Act. Looking for some guidelines?

[Oxfam's Ethical Content Guidelines](#)

[DGMT's POPIA Guidelines](#)

[How does POPIA relate to social media images?](#)

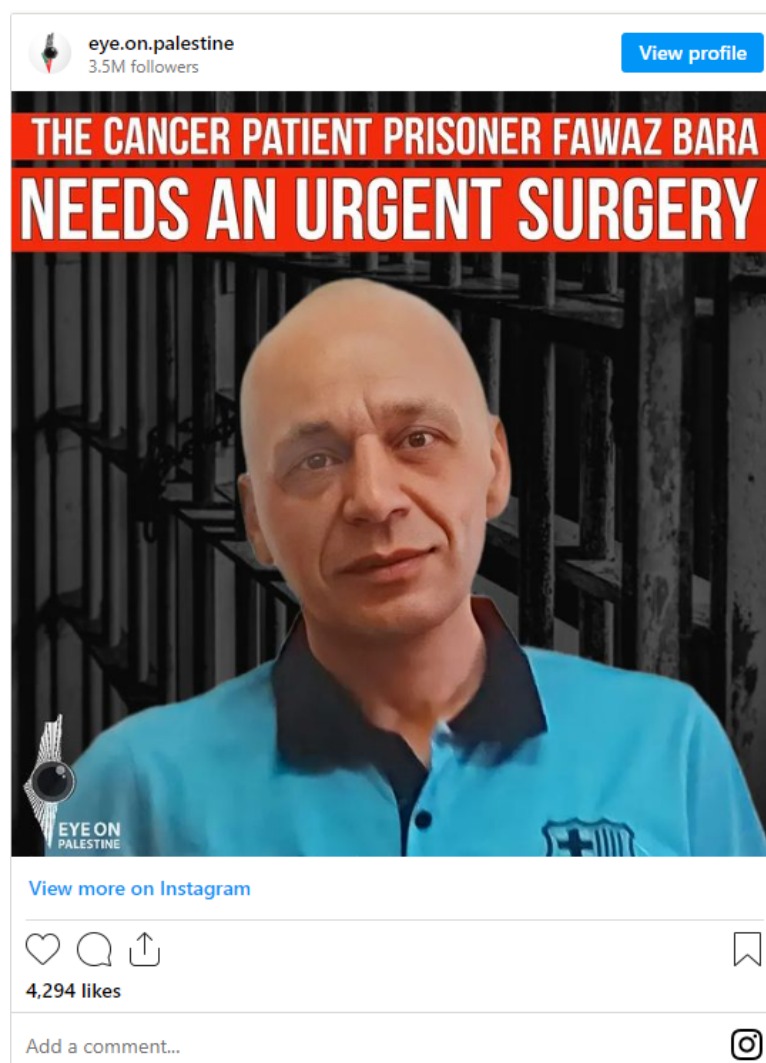
Some more tips for when you want to use photography:

- Think about your formats when you choose your images. For social media, you want to aim for close to medium shots which are best for mobile – bring your subjects close so that your audiences can really engage with them. Remember too that social media is a place of feelings – if you use images of people or things, consider how your picture frames the issue and draws your audiences into a relationship with your story. You don't just want to use images for the sake of imagery – you want your pictures to do as much hard work – if not more – as your text.
- Wider frame images work well for bigger screens – like desktops or tablets and do good work to establish a scene.
- Photo essays are a brilliant way to document a story and let us into someone's life without having to use too much text. Photoessays work well for online media, especially environments like Instagram and TikTok. Accounts like '[Humans of New York](#)' are a brilliant example of how this can be done in a simple yet engaging way.

Example:

Eye on Palestine

[‘Eye on Palestine’](#), is a Palestinian group who uses images and video on Instagram to document the Palestine peoples’ fight for nationhood and freedom, with their input and consent. This is one of the few places we have access to the experience of the Palestinian people, told by those affected:



Example:

New Frame

In '[The year of the pandemic](#)', online social justice news and media publication, [New Frame](#), captures the passing of time with photographs and allows ordinary South Africans to step into a series of images that tell a 'whole' picture of the effects of COVID-19 on the lives of South Africans. Using little text and relying on the power of imagery, we are able to transport into these scenes and identify and empathise with the characters we see in them.



3 April 2020: The first week of the government's Covid-19 lockdown in Alexandra, Johannesburg. (Photograph by James Oatway)



FREE TO USE IMAGE, VIDEO RESOURCES

[Nappy.co](#) (images)

[Unsplash](#) (images)

[DGMT Image bank](#) (images and video)

[Creative Commons](#) (images, video, sound)

Chapter 4. Inclusive, meaningful graphics

Tied in with our unique ability to interpret images is our ability to store and recall images better than we are able to recall verbal and written information.

Well-produced and thoughtful graphics can catch attention and draw out feelings of connection and empathy.

Bright and engaging graphics also draw people to your content on mobile and help distinguish you from the endless lists of information that most people engage with everyday. And graphics can sometimes tell a story better than words.

Sometimes graphics can be complex, and sometimes, bright words on a background. Here are some things to keep in mind as you ideate and create.



Seeing is handled by the visual cortex which is located at the back of the brain. This area is extremely fast and efficient – we can see immediately, without making much of an effort.

Be inclusive and empathic in your character designs

Representation and inclusivity is critical in design work. An inclusive approach to your graphics and illustrations design builds trust and translates your services and relationships into the real world, for the real people you work and interact with. It needs to be genuine, authentic, not appropriative.

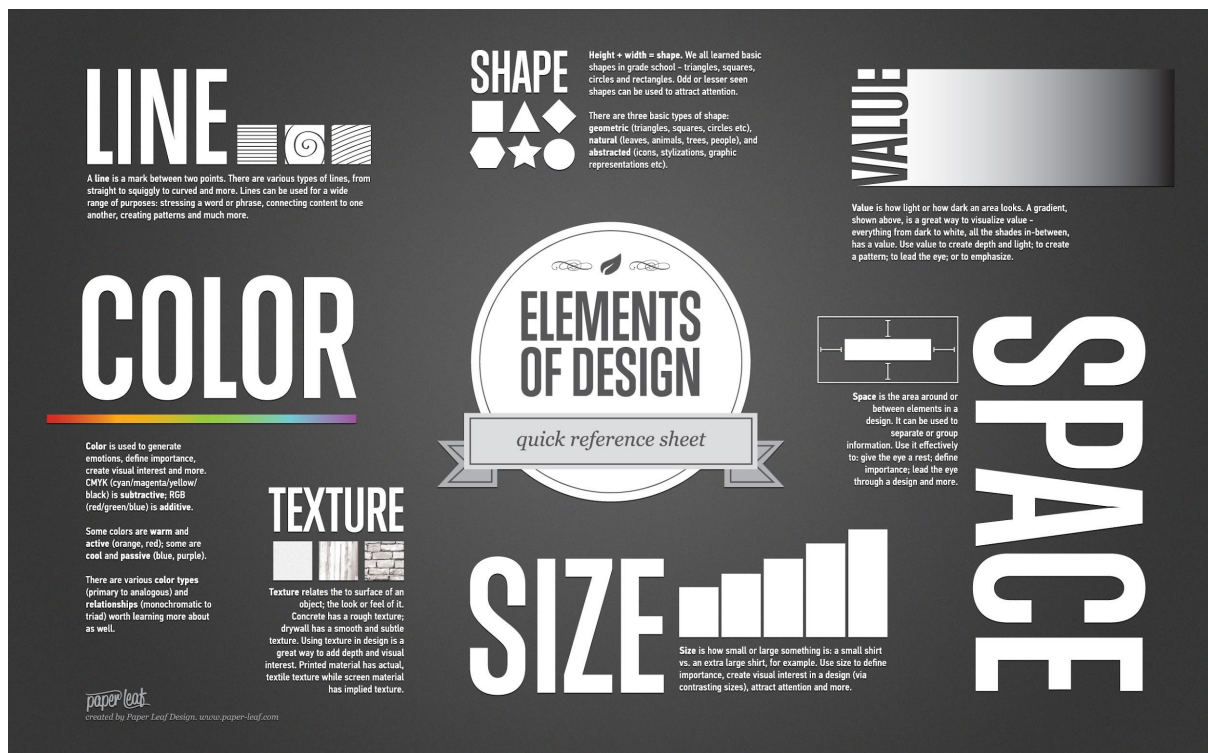
Here are three takeouts from Microsoft's inclusive design toolkit for us to consider as we plan our designs:



Recognise exclusion	When you are designing, you need to realise that we all have biases when it comes to almost everything that we do and essentially, create. These biases need to be recognised so you know how to challenge them in your design.
Learn from diversity	When you create, get other people's ideas and opinions about a topic or piece of content. The more you open up your designs to people who are not like you, the more likely you will create something that represents a wider range of people. [OBJ]
Solve for one, extend to many	You need to draw your inspiration from a pool of people; as you create, you need to ensure your pool represents your target audience and can extend beyond too.

Graphics principles

Design is subjective, but all designers work with some basic principles:



[Download the 7 elements of design reference sheet.](#)

Here is a summary of the above:

Shapes

Odd or lesser-seen shapes can be used to attract attention.

Value

Value is how light or how dark an area looks. A gradient is a great way to visualise value – everything from dark to white, all the shades in-between, has a value. Use value to create depth and light, to create a pattern, to lead the eye or to emphasise.

Space

Space is the area around or between elements in a design. It can be used to separate or group information. Use it effectively to give the eye rest, define importance, lead the eye through a design, etc.

Size

Use size to define importance, create visual interest in a design (via contrasting sizes), attract attention and more.

Texture

Using texture in design is a great way to add depth and visual interest.

Colour

Colour is used to generate emotions, define importance, create visual interest and more. There are various colour types and relationships worth learning more about as well.

Line

There are various types of lines, from straight to squiggly to curved and more. Lines can be used for a wide range of purposes: stressing a word or phrase, connecting content to one another, creating patterns and much more.

Variation and format

Remember, your audiences will be seeing this content from different devices. It's best to keep things simple and in portrait format; too many elements in your graphics can seem cluttered or hard to see on a small screen. Your graphics don't necessarily have to always look the same, but they should belong to the same creative family.

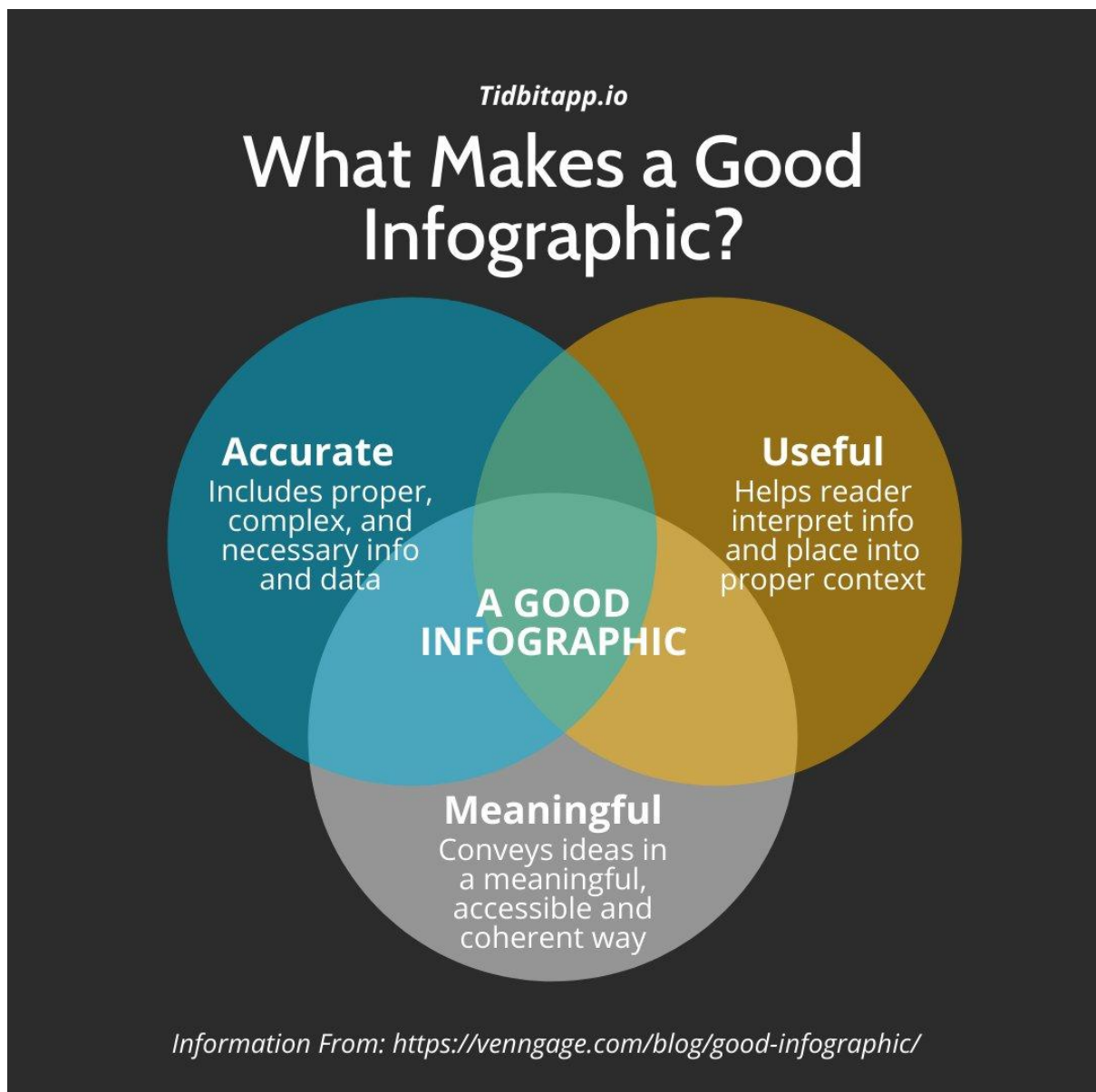
New to graphics and need some help with design basics? We recommend:

- [Canva Graphic Design basics](#)
- [Canva Design Tutorials](#)

Distil data with infographics

Data is all around us. Every single day we receive tons of data in the form of emails, proposals, attendance registers and school grades. How can we make our data more meaningful?

Here is a diagram to represent the principles of powerful infographics:



You need to ensure that your visuals align with your objective. The purpose of the visual needs to be clear even before you start planning the journey and message of the infographic. Once you have answered what the objective of the infographic is, you need to go through the checklist below:

- ☐ Are your infographics as simple as possible?
- ☐ Does the flow focus on the topic from beginning to end?
- ☐ Is it easy to read? (Avoid using too much text, but if you have to, make sure it's easy to read.)
- ☐ Are your colours, icons, font and style consistent?
- ☐ Is this an accurate representation of the data?
- ☐ Is this easy to interpret?
- ☐ Is this meaningful to the audience?
- ☐ Have you cited any sources you used to visualise your data?
- ☐ Is it relevant to the platform?

New to infographics and need some help? We recommend:

- [How to make an infographic in 5 easy steps](#), 2023 (Venngage)
- [How to make an infographic in 30 minutes](#), 2023 (Piktochart)

Remember

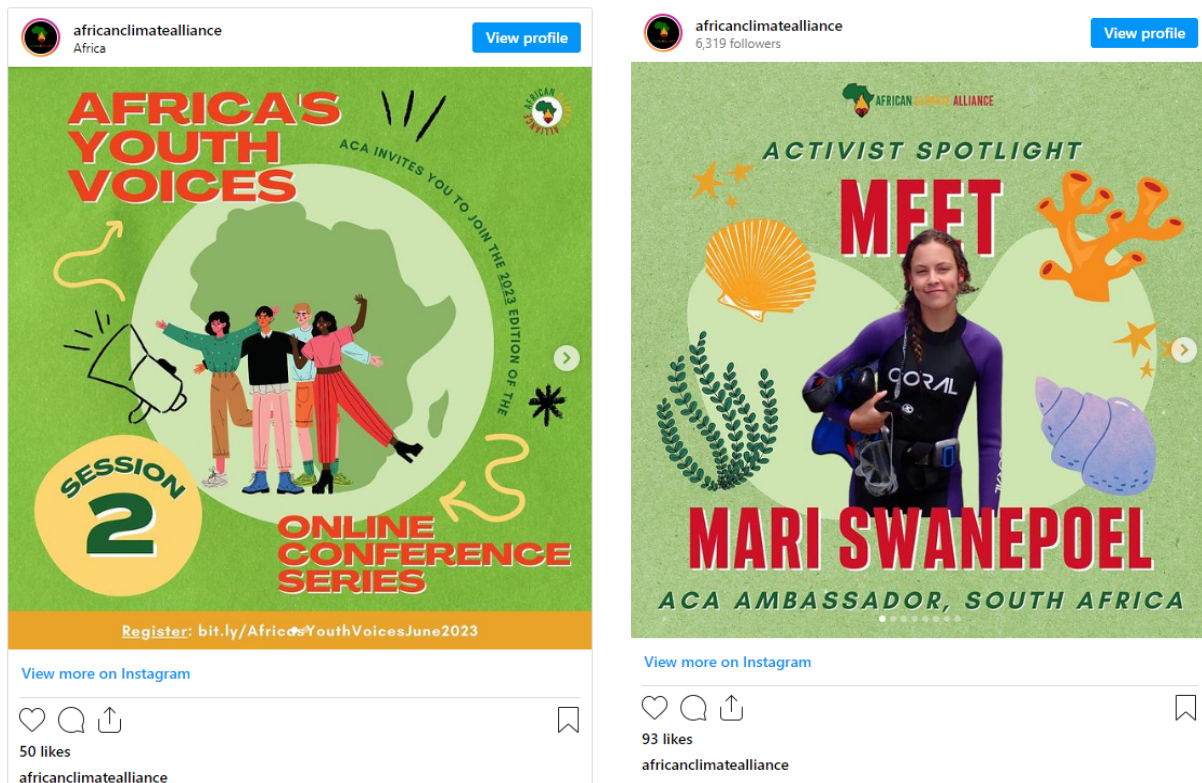
Where are you publishing?

Design for mobile experiences first – meaning, make sure your graphics fit well on a small, portrait size screen. This will make sure you don't exclude those coming in on mobile. This is essential for social media and instant messaging.

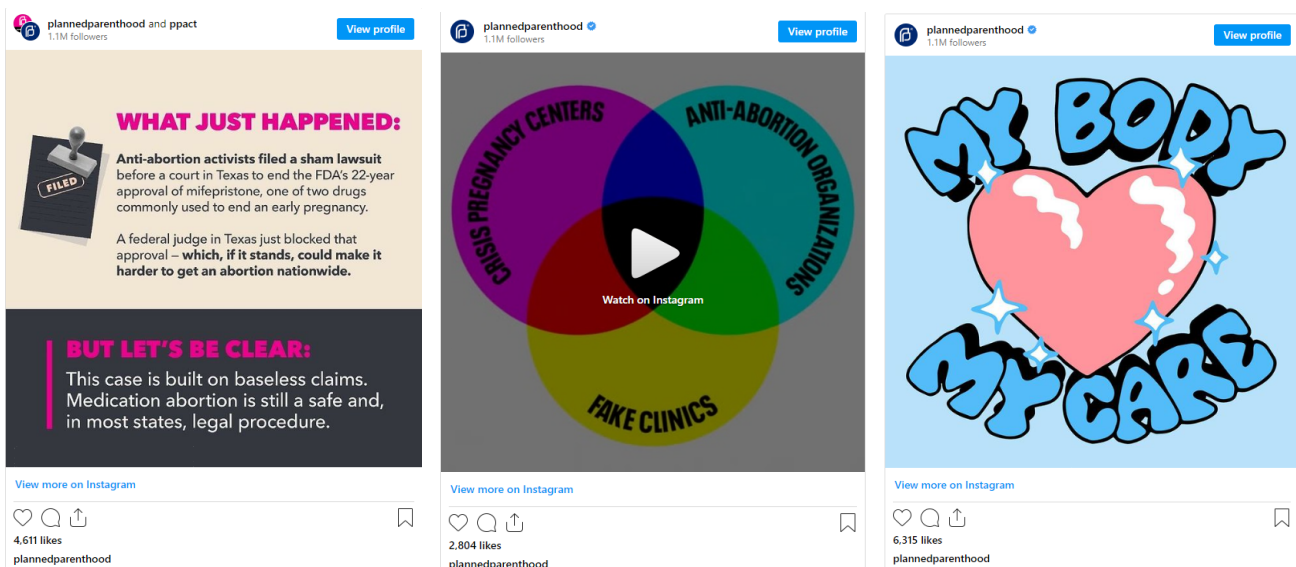
Aim for variation

Many of us create graphic elements for our social media account pages and groups. Even though you have a brand style, you want your account pages to be a vibrant, immersive experience with many avenues to discover content and create connections.

[Africa Climate Alliance](#) is doing wonderful work creating a mosaic of colour and form, with calls to actions, infographics and photography blended together into bright, albeit serious, content about climate justice and resilience. Here are some examples from their page:



Another page that bears beautifully creative, striking content, and shows ease with fun, feel good content for their target audiences as well as more serious advocacy and health-related content with a focus on equity and human rights, is [Planned Parenthood from the US](#):



Chapter 5. Being ethical and sensitive

As an NGO, you likely address sensitive topics, possibly related to rape, abuse or crime, in your information. You also could be representing those who are more vulnerable in society or children. Ethical content and communication planning happen at a strategic level. Your approach to how to represent vulnerable people or situations in your communication is not limited to what you do online but has a particular application that you, in your role as the curator of online content, should manage.

Our online communication should be designed for participation, action and positive engagement. For this reason, when we frame our content online, we need to always find a balance between what we think would make a powerful story and the rights of those who we may be representing. We also always need to be conscious of the way the internet works and how fast information can be distributed and even changed.

You'll need to think critically about what you share online for three important reasons:

- to respect the dignity and reputation of those who have shared their stories on this topic with you;
- to avoid sharing distressing content with your audience for the sake of having content on your digital channels;
- and to acknowledge the permanency of online content; once something goes online, it is not easily retractable.

How to relay information sensitively

Here are a few things to consider when preparing to share sensitive information online:



Ask yourself 'Why am I sharing this'?

What is the purpose of sharing potentially distressing content? Is it to sensationalise an individual's experience or is it to bring about understanding to a broader issue? If it is the latter, consider other ways of sharing the information that aren't as jarring. Perhaps reframe the language so that it is respectful of the matter, while still informative.

Get permission if you are working with those who are vulnerable or at risk

Don't disclose the identities of survivors of rape, survivors of sexual violence or someone's HIV status without their consent.

Avoid contributing to stereotypes or prejudices

Ensure that you respect individuals' race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth or another status in your online communications.

Issue a trigger warning

This warns your audience that the content they're about to see might be graphic and potentially disturbing. If you have to share very sensitive information, a trigger warning preceding the content gives your audience the option to decide whether they want to continue engaging with your content. This also gives them a moment to prepare to engage with distressing content. It ensures that you can create a more ethical relationship with your audiences, which leads to trust, as well as to your source material.

Some of these points were adapted from the Press Council's [Code of Ethics and Conduct for South African Print and Online Media](#). While this relates specifically to media practices, we recommend developing your own organisational code for sharing sensitive information online; the majority of these press practices are transferable to nonprofits' communications.

Adhere to ethical storytelling practices

Should you wish to share stories about people who interact with your organisation as beneficiaries, it is important to protect individuals' identities and respect their experiences, and align your framing with ethical practice and respect. You can do this in the following ways:

- Ensure that the communication piece empowers the interviewee and their community.
- Inform the interviewee of the purpose of the communications piece and the role they will play in it.

- Request permission to share the interviewee's name and have them sign a consent form. (Parents should sign if the interviewee is younger than 18.)
- Conduct interviews in the interviewee's preferred language.
- When possible, share a draft of the communication piece with the interviewee to fact-check and make edits.



Civicus, a 'global alliance of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world' has developed various toolkits to guide ethical media practice. [You can find them on this website.](#)

At the heart of it, we should be practising participatory forms of information gathering, creation and publishing so that by the time we publish, we have already included and made space for those whose lives are informing our stories.



Spotlight on Children: Online Ethical Communication Resources

[Thanda](#), a South African NGO that provides support to children through after-school programmes, shares a comprehensive list of ethical storytelling practices on its website. [UNICEF's *Reporting on children: An ethical guideline for journalists*](#) is also an excellent source of how to frame and write about children and their experiences.

Chapter 6. Character stories

Character stories bring information to life and help us to make sense of people's experiences. Well-told stories that appeal to people's emotions and evoke empathy can shift your audience's interpretation of the world and lead them to take action.

Character stories can be memorable and more engaging than lists of information and data and can help draw support to your organisation's work through a lens of experience.

Character stories can encourage conversation about an issue or put an end to conversations about an issue. They can inspire people to take action or they can leave an audience with a sense of helplessness and despair. And they can also be used to tell stories of the 'big picture' as we discussed in the first book.

What makes a good character story?

There is no single formula for a good character story but there are elements that most memorable ones have. Stories usually follow a classic arc structure, no matter what kind of story you tell.

A compelling story has these features:

- A place or setting that locates the story, immersing your audience in the story and creating context;
- A plot that develops well, over time;
- Characters, who are relatable, authentic;
- Characters who experience challenges and overcome them, and change and grow as a result;
- And an end with a resolution that meets the audiences' expectations.



Pacing (how fast the story goes), setting, imagery and richness in style transform an ordinary story into something transportive. The way a plot develops, how many complications or challenges a character or set of characters face, and how they change and then overcome their challenges heightens your story's power.

Brain research shows that people respond to well constructed stories with a 'drama' with heightened empathy. Neuroscientist, Paul Zak, explains this in 5 minutes:



How can you make a good story in your work?

If you want to use storytelling as a strategic feature of your content, you will naturally need to have a sense of what kind of stories you are going to share with your audiences. Here are the core elements you want to work out before you start producing your story content:

- What kinds of characters and experiences are important to you, and do you know best? Why these characters? What settings, imagery and metaphors will help your audiences understand and identify with your characters and your story? What challenges do your characters face in the story?
- How do they overcome them?
- How do they grow or change themselves or the world around them while overcoming these challenges?

Remember also:

- How are you going to use values to create a connection with your audiences?
- How can you use this story to tell a tale of both characters and systematic change?

And:

- How will you package your stories to make them available and relevant to your audiences online? Are you telling one single story or will you break it up into episodes?
- How can you make your stories without spending a lot of money?

Example:

Sonke Gender Justice

[Sonke Gender Justice](#), a nonpartisan, nonprofit health and human rights organisation, uses stories as an effective way of addressing issues related to gender inequality, gender-based violence and the impact of HIV across the African continent.



Burundian Jeannette Uwiragiye, 29, uses her skills and talent as a hairdresser to promote social cohesion in the community of Delft, Cape Town (Photo: Gadeeja Abbas)

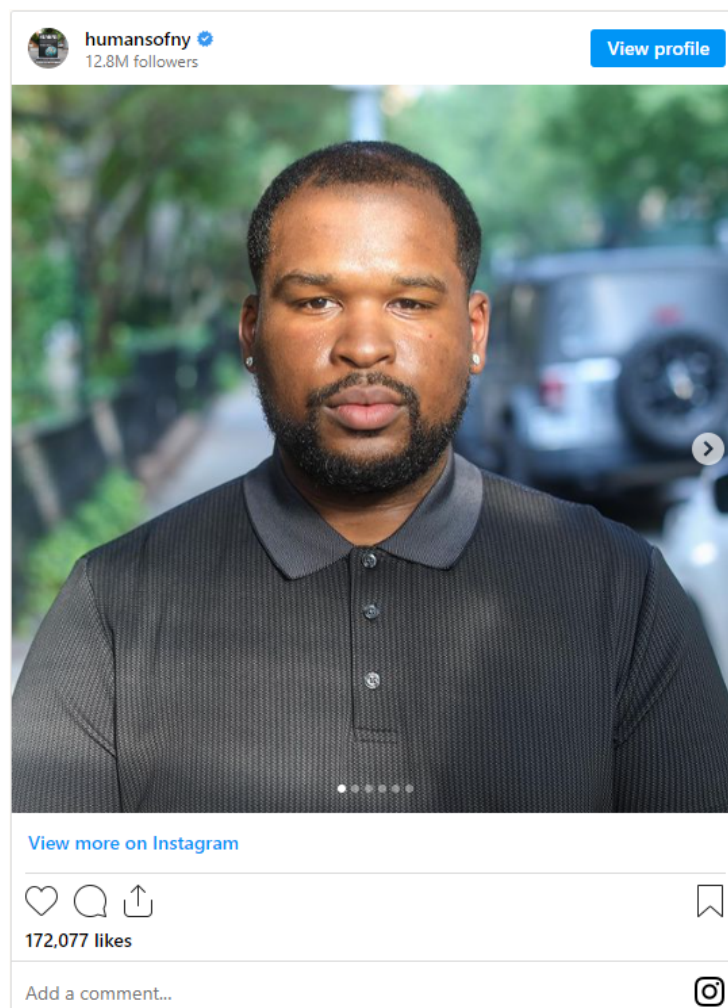
One such article, [Refugee brings love and beauty to Delft](#), shares the story of Jeannette, a Burundian refugee, who experienced various forms of violence and discrimination in her journey to South Africa. The emotive language in the article evokes empathy in the reader and one is left with a sense of having known Jeannette and her struggles and victories personally. The resolution draws the reader's attention to the broader issue, which is that all African women – refugee or not – experience some form of discrimination or gender-based violence. This story is effective in that it humanises the issue while drawing attention to it being a broader, systemic problem.

Example:

Humans of New York (HONY)

[HONY](#) is something of an institution, renowned for its open-minded, considerate stories of people in the city and around the world. Brandon Staunton, the creator, has a simple method of portraits of people with their own stories, typically told in a classic dramatic arc with themselves or someone they love as the main character.

Stories are told in the subjects' own words, in the first person. Images are simple and honest. Through the feed, audiences step into the lives and personalities of a range of people whose humanity comes alive. The images and story of the different people are released in episodes which also builds tension and engagement from audiences online.



Remember

Beware of just writing stories for a story's sake. Remember to use your stories as a way of drawing people into your organisation's headspace, and you into theirs, encouraging engagement and action!

Chapter 7. Community-produced content

Community-produced content is produced primarily by people living within and living in a situation or context, where they record or write about the situation from a position of direct experience to bring insight and knowledge to a wider audience.

The purpose of this kind of storytelling would be to enlighten, educate and reveal the 'real' situation through the unique voices of those experiencing it first-hand. When these stories are told well and produced creatively, they can transform the public's understanding of a situation and boost the voice of the campaign in memorable ways.

Sometimes people in publishing refer to this kind of storytelling as 'User Generated Content' or 'UGC'. In the news world, this is called citizen journalism. This kind of storytelling does not refer to habitual, everyday social media posting from ordinary people unless the intention of the social media posting is to inform and educate others about an urgent, complex or public social situation.



Community-produced stories can be seen as a mobilisation tool to motivate others to participate – which can create a movement – as seen in the Arab Spring. It can be a form of journalism and content production that tells more authentic stories and breaks down the barriers between external viewers and the lived experiences of communities.

If you are interested in telling authentic stories to help outsiders understand a situation and choose to participate in a campaign centred on a situation or community, then community-produced, autobiographical stories can be a brilliant and meaningful path to follow.

Example:

The Children's Radio Foundation (CRF)

The CRF works with young people across Africa, helping them learn how to conceptualise and produce stories for radio about their experiences of their worlds. The purpose of the organisation is to enable young people to tell their own stories of their own lived experiences, to author their own narratives and reach broad audiences with their unique perspectives. Listen to a group of young South Africans talking about LGBTQI experiences on Alex FM, bringing the listener into an authentic space of engagement with the community. This also builds connection and empathy with people, which is not usually possible if someone else (usually an adult or an organisation) is telling their story on their behalf.



Street Talk

[Street Talk](#) is an innovative documentary series that presents uninhibited conversation between participants in discussion groups in a spontaneous way so that the viewer appears to sit in an empty chair in the circle, giving a sense of participation and involvement. Discussions are filmed in informal settings (shebeens, shacks, school classrooms, restaurants) which are both accessible to participants and situate the series in community settings.



Chapter 8. Anecdotes and 'vox pops'

Anecdotes are short, true stories that draw attention to an issue. They are often coupled with data or the NGOs' annual reports as a way of drawing an audience back to the real-life experience of those affected by the issue addressed in the data or report. Anecdotes and quotes make a situation more human and help your audiences connect to the subject matter.

Anecdotes can make your message more relatable and memorable and help to frame your content within the experiences of those who are represented in the anecdote, creating more authentic representation. Anecdotes also look great and stand out!

Example:

[Fundza](#) promotes literacy across South Africa. They featured an anecdote in their 2017 Annual Report that shared a learner's experience of working with Fundza, 'I was a person that didn't like reading but Fundza pushed me to love reading and it has helped me to regain my ability of writing. It keeps me busy all the time. It changed my mindset and the way I was thinking'. This anecdote builds the reader's trust in Fundza's programmes as it highlights the positive and true experience of someone who has interacted with the organisation.



Chapter 9. Making data interesting

Statistics and numerical data

Visualising numerical data can deepen your audiences' understanding of an issue and can make complex data easier to 'imagine'. Often what can stop a person from engaging in an issue is a lack of understanding of the issue itself or the system in which the issue exists. Measurable data is a brilliant way to shine a light on complex concepts, but just showing people statistics does not always create the connection you are looking for.

It may be easier to get people to actively donate to your education campaign if they can easily see in numbers how the government funds its education services, and where the shortfalls may be. But if you can't show this in an engaging way, people may not pay attention.

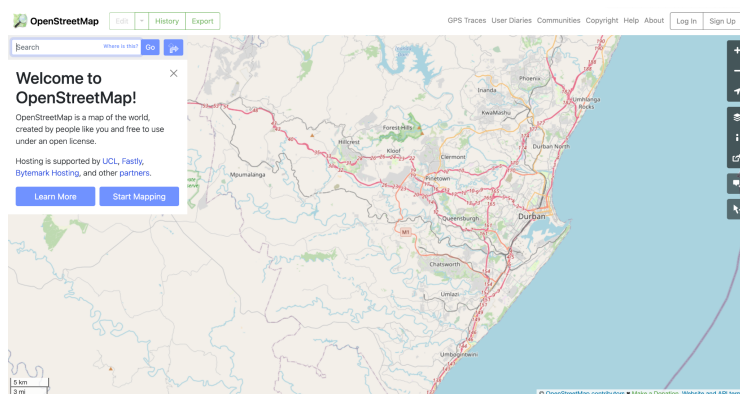
Don't let statistics take the place of the story in your content. Find ways to give your data life by making them as interactive as possible.

Below are two examples of how organisations visualise data and make it more accessible for people, thus enabling a more participatory relationship and more agency.

Example:

Open Street Map

[Open Street Map](#) is an open-source live mapping tool that lets users drill down and find data on streets in all mapped environments. You can also embed searches in your own sites and use them in presentations.

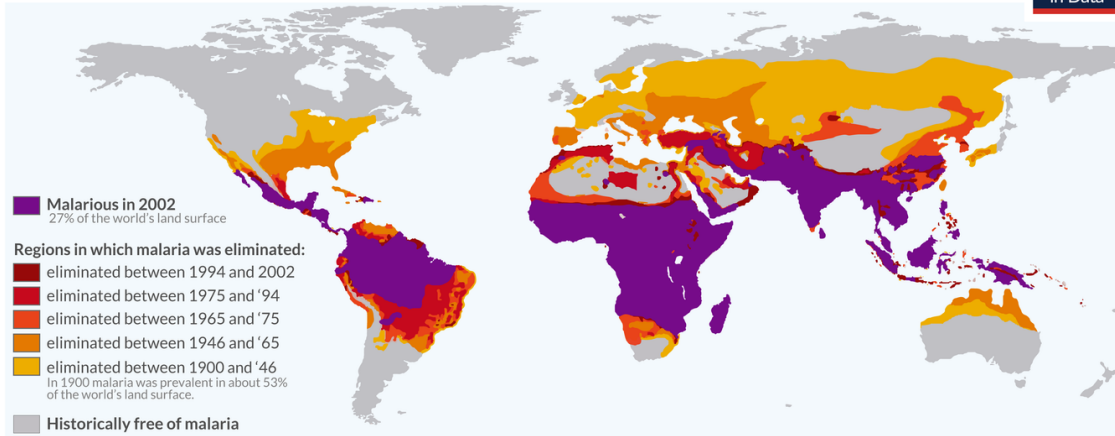


World in data maps

[Our World in Data](#) creates interactive maps that can be easily embedded on any site (open licence). While the maps are not 'creative', they work hard to bring official stats to light and help researchers and citizens interact meaningfully with the data narratives.

Malaria was prevalent in many parts of the world that are free of malaria today

Our World in Data



Source: Hay et al. (2004) – The global distribution and population at risk of malaria: past, present, and future. In The Lancet Infectious Diseases. Redrawn by Our World in Data.
OurWorldinData.org – Research and data to make progress against the world's largest problems. Licensed under CC-BY by the author Max Roser

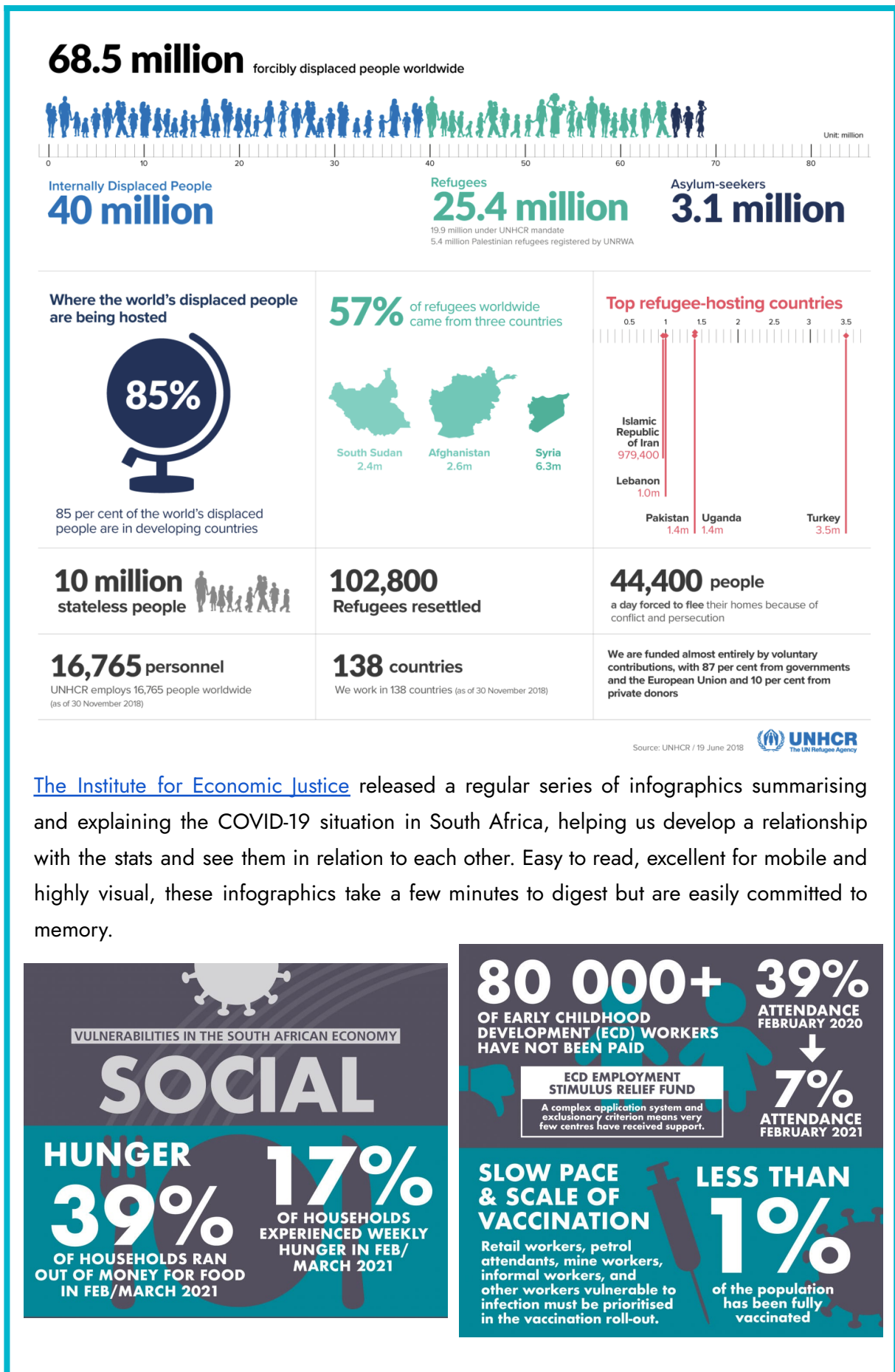
Infographics

Infographics take data visualisation into more of a narrative format. Statistics can be even more powerful if they are represented in a story-like way. They are a wonderful marriage of statistics, imagery and story structure making. The art of infographics is to find a way to frame your information or data in some kind of graphic story-like form so that your audience can understand its meaning in context.

Example:

UNHCR

The UNHCR's 2018 infographic, below, of forcibly displaced peoples, helps create a neat overview of the situation and distils what can be a very complex combination of data into something quite like a story or a map. Without having to try too hard, we understand the situation much better than before, simply by viewing the statistics in relation to each other.



It's good to understand that these graphics enable an audience's connection to the information. The way you position and 'tell' the statistics creates a frame for your data, one you hope will create understanding and empathy for a situation.

Chapter 10. Metaphors and symbols

Complex concepts or processes often benefit from being simplified or summarised. When communicating on complex topics, metaphors can help your audience gain a clearer understanding of the issue and the role they can play in addressing it. This is because it can be easier to understand something when we see it compared to something more familiar or something that is visually evocative. And when we understand something, we tend to be more open to it.

Metaphors are also highly visual; they help create an image in our minds and can translate abstract facts or concepts into something we identify with. Metaphors conjure feelings too and can help you find an emotional connection with your audience.

Metaphors are evocative contextual devices. They hold symbolic meaning and these symbols are often culturally specific. Part of what makes metaphors so important in the framing journey is how much weight they hold with a particular audience.

Example:

The Frameworks Institute worked on climate change policy in the United States and discovered that not many people understood the metaphor 'greenhouse effect' in the way that it was intended. For example, a number of people see greenhouses as good things that encourage plants to grow, which is misleading.

Others didn't know what a greenhouse was. The team tested other metaphors with the same audiences and found that 'heat trapping blanket' was much easier to understand, much more relevant and evocative. This new metaphor now forms a vital part of policy communications around the buildup of CO₂ in our atmosphere.



Aim to use metaphors that carry meaning and relevance to your audiences, as well as those that help them understand what you may want them to. Be careful of overusing metaphors though, you don't want to overload your writing with them. One or two carefully imagined metaphors that you use strategically to emphasise your work and your angle can go a long way.

Metaphors and analogies (both mean when we compare something to something else to improve people's understanding of the first thing) create bridges between ideas and help people see an idea in a new context, often without as much bias, or emotion. This helps shift attitudes and allows people to make emotional or value-based connections they may not have seen before.

Metaphors and analogies of a complex issue are also sometimes easier to talk about than the issue itself; this might make it easier to tell certain stories to audiences and them in turn, to share with their networks easily. Using metaphors and symbols in your content also helps people remember the idea and share it more easily with others; abstract or fluid ideas can become concrete and tangible.

Example:

The Thames Valley Police used an analogy to promote its #ConsentisEverything campaign, which compares sexual consent to offering someone a cup of tea. They used an analogy to throw new light on consent and to educate their target audience, British people, about acceptable sexual behaviour norms. Everyone understands tea etiquette in Britain; not many people understand the nuances of sexual consent. The video went viral and has been viewed almost 10 000 000 times since it was published.



Chapter 11. Interactive content

Interactive content allows people to contribute to your content by being immersed in a visual or audio experience and often, by seeing their responses in the story or feed.

This builds excitement, engagement and a sense of participation. Being innovative also boosts the impact value of your content. Interactivity relies on connected technology and includes things like interactive websites, tools like polls and quizzes, interactive infographic stories and maps, live video with live Q+A, support pop ups and so on.

Often, some of the easiest ways to create interactive content is to use native features within an app (features designed especially for an environment).

Example:

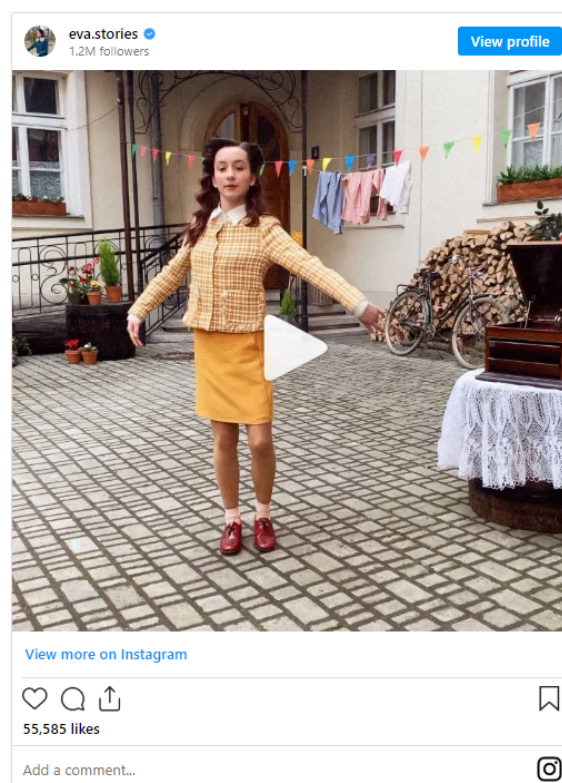
Like Facebook Live, Twitter Spaces are an excellent example of how you can leverage live and interactive native features in a social media app to boost engagement, drive learning and exchanges and field live Q+As.



Interactivity allows your visitors to take charge of their own experiences. It gives them the ability to go through the content at their own pace. It also enables a sense of agency and boosts exploration and reward. Interactivity drives engagement and increases the chances of action to be taken because people feel a sense of ownership over their experience. At the same time, it increases the potential of the information to go viral – when people have a good and new experience. Good use of technology delivers a seamless experience while innovative content impresses audiences and makes them want to share more widely.

Example:

[@Eva.Stories](#), a live, viral Instagram initiative that transported a Holocaust victim's diary to live social media, was created with the support of the Ukrainian city of Lviv. The profile uses Instagram video stories to immerse people in the lived experience of the Holocaust. Complete with emojis, subtitles and spoken commentary, the profile gained almost a million followers within 24 hours of being live, and marked the start of Holocaust Remembrance Day in Israel. The project's designers, Mati Kochavi and his daughter, Maya, set out to raise Holocaust consciousness in an era of short attention spans.



This human-interest story builds an emotional connection between chapters of the past and the present day, building relevance and making it relatable. Stories take audiences out of their own space and time and 'into' another 'space'. This is effective for building a sense of responsibility for the past. History is brought into the present day with technology, bridging the gap between far-off events and the audience's immediate lives.

Live video immerses people into a story and scene which is effective for a campaign dedicated to sharing the experiences of those in the Holocaust. Live video engagement is much higher than other content forms, which are excellent for traction around the campaign; and innovative storytelling compels people to share more widely.

Example:

World Wildlife Fund #endangeredemoji

The idea for the [#EndangeredEmoji](#) campaign was sparked by the discovery that 17 characters in the emoji alphabet represent endangered species. Every time someone tweeted using an endangered animal emoji with the hashtag, WWF added a small donation to a monthly donation fund. At the end of every month, users were given the option to donate an amount based on their activity summary.

[WWF \(@WWF\) May 12, 2015](#)



Chapter 12. Public figure support or endorsement

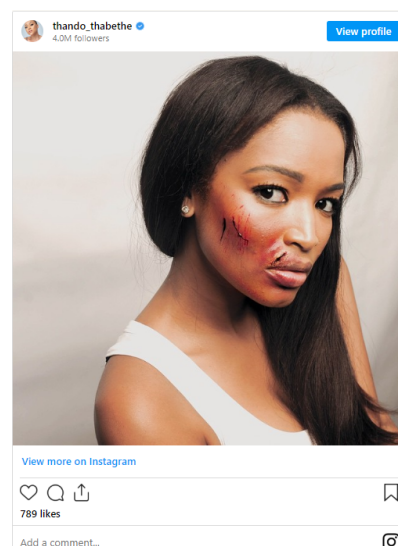
Celebrities or public figures can bring attention to a campaign by leveraging their network. The role of someone well-known can range from public endorsements on their own public information channels, becoming an ambassador of yours, sharing content and hashtags with and for you, even taking over your social media accounts and being the storyteller for a day/ week. For a formal arrangement, some people would expect to be paid, and some would work for free. Some public figures get involved in a campaign because it affects them and they end up helping your campaign in a more organic way. Approaching a celebrity or public figure with a clear strategy and campaign pitch is a good way to get them interested.

Well-liked public figures capture attention quickly. Access to the public figure's information network increases the reach of a campaign exponentially. Prominent public-figure endorsements build trust in the organisation and/ or the campaign. Additionally, imagery of a public figure doing something unexpected creates immediate attention and stops people from scrolling.

Their role and compliance with your social media or media policy would need to be arranged formally if they are engaging with the public on your behalf.

Example:

A few years ago, while at SABC's 5 FM Thando Thabethe spearheaded a Women's Day #MakeitStop campaign in South Africa. The purpose of the campaign was to make visible the topic and realities of domestic violence in South Africa. By using herself as a figure, Thabethe encouraged others to share and get involved in the conversation – not only members of the public but other well-known figures who felt comfortable breaking the culture of silence around domestic abuse.



Chapter 13. Identifying villains (advocacy)

Behind many social-change campaigns lies a 'villain' – something or someone who represents a system that needs to change. Behind the scenes, we tend to build this into our thinking as the 'problem' that we are solving. Sometimes, though, there is an actual villain the campaign wants to address directly – a company, an institution or a person in power who is acting in a harmful way and needs to stop these actions.

Constructing a villain can be a highly effective and captivating campaign strategy, helping to pinpoint actions, like demonstrations on specific sites, which then brings attention to the campaign and issue. Casting someone or an entity publicly as the villain is also a powerful way to hold them to account for their actions.

Not many people or things want to be cast in this role. Being in this role can lead them to shift their behaviour, make policy changes or engage more honestly with campaigners. It can also make them angry, which is perfect if you don't want to be friends with them. This kind of approach works well for dealing with corporations and companies that are abusing power and profits over the health of communities or nature.

Example:

Reclaim the City

[Reclaim the City](#) actively engages in combat with unjust systems, municipal government and bylaws to build support for their campaign to end homelessness in South Africa. They are comfortable making direct statements to councillors and politicians and want supporters to identify that the real 'baddies' are those who protect a system that oppresses and vilifies the poor. Reclaim the City and its parent organisation, have had many successful advocacy campaigns, combat false narratives about the poor and have shifted public perceptions towards fair and just solutions for those needing a home.



Example:

Lush's Animal Testing Campaign

In 2012, [Lush Cosmetics teamed up with The Humane Society](#) to launch a very public campaign calling for an end to cosmetics testing on animals (coinciding with World Week for Animals in Laboratories). The campaign began with a performance that cast certain cosmetic laboratories as abusers of innocents. Jacqueline Traide, a 24-year-old social sculpture student and performance artist, participated in 10 hours of reportedly gruelling tests in public. Restraint, force-feeding, several injections, shaving a portion of her head and having her skin braised and smeared with lotions in the display of Lush's Regents Street store in the UK.



The shock of the performance exposed the cruel and awful truth behind animal testing. This activated the campaign's call for animal testing to be declared illegal in the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Although Lush itself didn't publish the names of companies that were testing on animals, the campaign triggered intense awareness of the villainy of the corporations that do. The Humane Society constantly names companies that abuse animals. The petition was successful and the sale and marketing of all animal tested cosmetics was made into law a year later.

Chapter 14. Saying thank you

One doesn't always think of gratitude as being a campaign tactic but it forms an essential part of your engagement, action and return strategy, and helps build inclusive relationships with your supporters.

It also helps you actively track your relationship with someone online. When someone fills out a form, signs up for something you are offering or makes a donation, for example, the thank you page will register the completion of the action and let them know their action has been recorded. If you set up conversion [goals in Google Analytics](#), you need a thank you web page on your site to mark the end of your goal funnel. Sometimes your thank yous can be automated and sometimes manual, depending on the scale and purpose of your campaign relationships.

Email is an excellent way to create a thank you loop – look at any petition cycle. Thank you emails are not only in place to recognise and register participation; they also include further actions one can take to support a campaign, like sharing the campaign with your own network or donating to help get the petition onto the government's agenda.

Example:

Below is a thank you mail from awethu.amandla.mobi. See how the message recognises the act of signing, reiterates the campaign's goals and then facilitates sharing with a pre-filled message template and sharing buttons.

Thank you for signing the campaign: Tell Government we urgently need a Child Support Grant increase of R500 for the next 6 months.

The more people are behind an issue - the more likely it is that decision makers will pay attention. Each name that is added to a campaign takes it one step closer to succeeding.

Can you help spread the word about the campaign by sharing it with your friends and family?

SHARE ON WHATSAPP

SHARE ON FACEBOOK

SHARE ON TWITTER

You can also share the campaign by sharing the email below.

Thanks for all that you do,

The Awethu team.

Copy this text into an email to share with your friends

Dear Friends,

I just joined the campaign: Tell Government we urgently need a Child Support Grant increase of R500 for the next 6 months

It would mean the world to me if you could also add your name to this important issue. Every name that is added builds momentum around the campaign and makes it more likely for us to get the change we want to see.

Will you join me by taking action on this campaign?

<https://awethu.amandla.mobi/petitions/tell-government-we-urgently-need-a-child-support-grant-increase-of-r500-for-the-next-6-months?share=0b2f2164-61d5-4b7d-9bcb-87f6fd31a8e9>

After you've signed the petition please also take a moment to share it with others. It's super easy – all you need to do is forward this email and share on Whatsapp.

SHARE ON WHATSAPP

Thank you!

Emma

Chapter 15. Stand-out hashtags

Hashtags are not meant to summarise content or simply refer to people or things. They create doorways into specific topics of conversation and centre communities of people around your campaign's main messages and phrases. They stitch conversations together and help people find your work. Hashtags should be used in highly strategic, integrated ways, across all your platforms. They should be short, memorable and catchy. Hashtags have an intense viral quality to them. Well built and consistently used hashtags can help carry and even build a movement or conversation and give it a life of its own.

Example:

The [#MeToo Movement's](#) campaign name and hashtag are some of the most famous in the world. From its inception in 2016, the #MeToo campaign became a social reform movement organised mostly through social media. This hashtag is so synonymous with the movement that it is often just referred to as #MeToo. #MeToo became a rallying cry for people to reveal how they too had been affected by sexual assault.



me too.

@MeTooMVMT · [Follow](#)



#MeToo is the greatest acknowledgment by survivors about the prevalence of sexual violence, ever. Since the hashtag went viral, so much has shifted toward nuanced narratives about survivorhood and the long term, widespread impact of sexual violence.

5:10 PM · May 28, 2022



692



Reply



Share

[Read 693 replies](#)

The hashtag is perfect in its simplicity, gender-neutrality, first-person style and repeatability, contributing significantly to the success of the campaign. It also sums up the entire spirit and goal of the campaign. The #MeToo archive on social media, especially Twitter, where it started, is one of social media's most prolific and rich conversation areas. The campaign and movement show no sign of stopping.

Chapter 16. Resonating calls to action

Helping people take action is a cornerstone of your activation strategy. Every message or piece of content should help people take a step to become part of your solution.

The web enables a great digital action system where we can lead a user to a page, site or online tool through a message and a link or button. In digital marketing speak, the messaging we use when we ask someone to do something online is referred to as a call to action (CTA).

Remember

Conversions or conversion points are where the action takes place – for example, the page you want your audiences to go to or the online form you want them to complete. A call to action, on the other hand, motivates or persuades an online user to convert.

A good CTA finds the balance between persuasion and instruction. You want to inspire someone to follow your CTA but you don't want them to feel they aren't making their own decision. Framing plays an important role in CTAs because you need to understand what nudges your users to respond positively.

A well-placed or well-crafted call to action can have an extremely positive effect on a user's journey online and make your online relationship with them stronger. A badly implemented call to action can easily cause users to turn away and can weaken trust.

The best CTAs are designed to suit the experiences and feelings of the audiences you have a connection with, so creating a powerful CTA depends on your own context. However, all good CTAs have something in common.

Depending on your strategy, your CTAs could:

- **Inspire the bigger action.** Instead of simply trying to get a user to complete an action, you can inspire them with the impact their action will make in the long term.
- **Be written from the point of view of the ones in need.** To create empathy, you could write your CTA in the voice of someone who will benefit from a user taking a particular action.

- **Map out conversion options.** Show options so that your user doesn't have to think too hard; instead of just having one CTA button, for example, you could show different paths of action with different buttons.

Example:

Panthera's newsletter signup page has three layers of action:



Their initial CTA line — 'Get Closer to Big Cats' — captures attention, harnessing the audience's existing love of big cats. It suggests that by becoming a member of the newsletter community, this love can be sustained and you can become closer to these special creatures. Just above the signup form elements, they include a second CTA — 'Join the pride today', which emotionally nudges a potential newsletter subscriber to partake in a relationship rather than something mechanical like a newsletter signup. Again, the CTA is all about emotion. Imagine how much emotional connection would have been lost if this CTA text had said something generic like 'Sign up below' or 'Fill out the form below'. Panthera understands that emotive language, replete with cat references, is more likely to convert someone into a newsletter subscriber.

Each layer of CTA includes a verb or action. A strong, relevant image compliments this page and drives home its messaging.

Chapter 17. Consistency, memorability and memes

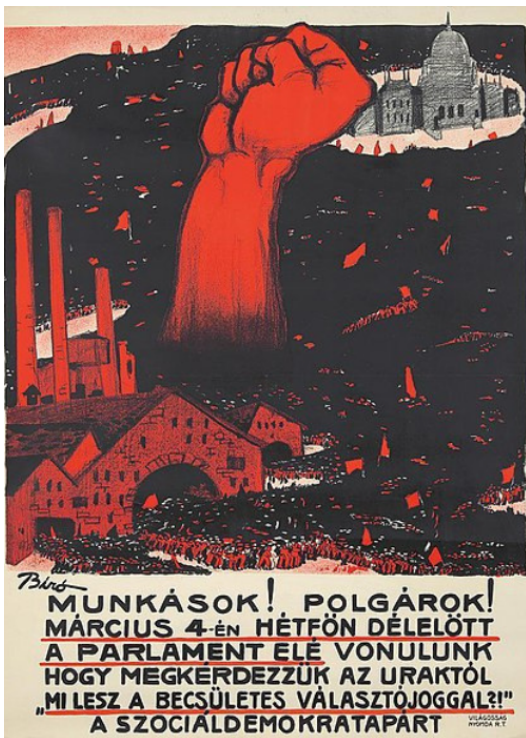
It's not often that you would think about 'memes' in relation to local civil society. Memes are cultural things – images, sayings, songs, objects and so on – that are 'catchy' and are repeated so often by and in the public space (whether actual space, like walls, or internet space) that they take on a life of their own, becoming embedded in popular culture.

Memes become viral because they have something that captures the spirit of a moment and can be embraced by others easily to represent something similar or pertinent in their own lives.

Example:

The raised fist

In the context of activism or social change, think about the raised fist meme, which has come to symbolise agency, resistance, power in multiple contexts and across multiple eras – from South African Women's Day marches in post-apartheid South Africa, to early support for the US Civil Rights Movement at the 1986 Olympics, to worker's resistance strikes in 1920's Budapest, to the recent Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.





Although it may seem unlikely that you will be producing memes all the time, these digital images hold something important for us in civil society, capturing our quest to be memorable. Acknowledging this drive:

- We must use our opportunity to be consistent, relevant and innovative every time we publish content.
- Our words and media should aim to resonate across multiple audiences and be shared easily between people. This happens when what we say and how we say it captures something important that people are feeling.
- Aim to use your content tools to build memorable exchanges between people, spark conversation and create waves of support for who you are, what you do and the people, places and, if relevant, animals you work with. Hashtags, slogans, calls to action – these kinds of devices easily become memes.



Want more inspiration?

Take a look at the [Center for Story-Based Strategy's](#) work on memes in social justice and public campaigning.

Chapter 18. Choose the right format

Each of your online channels and apps gives you special tools and constraints to work with. The formats of your online content need to correspond to the experiences people can enjoy in the given channel.

For example, long form articles work well for websites and can also work for Facebook, but not for Instagram or Twitter. This also does not mean you can't share longer opinions on Twitter. What it does mean is that each channel gives you unique opportunities to do something interesting with its native (its own) features. Interactive content, commentary and sharing tend to happen more on social media than it does on email. This does not mean email should be boring! How can you make your emails more interactive and better for mobile?

Make practical choices! It's no use creating videos if your audiences don't have data to watch them, or if you don't have the budget for good production. If the best place you can create value for your audiences is to write and tell stories with great words and imagery then you should focus on that as your main content output.

Ready to look at some great online content? Let's go!

[illegible]

2023 TOOLKIT 3: ONLINE CONTENT STRATEGY

BOOK 3: AGILE CONTENT OPERATIONS

Description

In this book, we touch on how you can streamline your content operation to support your creative ideas and publishing needs. We take a newsroom style approach to production and publishing and offer some valuable insights into how to organise your scheduling and roles.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Content pipeline
 2. Channel choices
 3. Publishing cycles
 4. Content sharing systems
-

Chapter 1. Content pipeline

All organisations work according to their own schedules and timeline when producing content, but it's useful to look at ways in which you can make your content pipeline move more smoothly so that your ideas can be put into practice, and that you have time for doing other things like audience research or developing new activities.

Everyone needs to play their part and this should be pre-defined. We like to use a newsroom model for roles in the content pipeline. Here is a simple version of the functions people play when getting content produced and published in a typical newsroom setup:

Commission: 'Managing editor'	The person/ people in charge of what is going to be produced and when. This would be whoever is in charge of your communication or who has been designated as the manager. This person signs off on the content and may also be the person who is publishing the content once it has been signed off.
Produce: 'Writer/ producer'	The person/ people who write and produce graphics or multimedia for a story, content or campaigns. This person may be on the comms team or in a different team. Oftentimes, someone with specialised knowledge of the field will write something for comms. If this is the case, everyone needs to work within the content guidelines and the managing editor needs to be given authority to edit written content to suit the voice, personality and formats agreed upon on the content handbook.
Review: Reviewer/ sub-editor	The person (ideally just one person) who will make edits and changes to the piece of content, as per the guidelines. Your reviewer/ sub-editor needs to be comfortable with the content so that they can make edits without compromising anything factual. This person may be the one who publishes the content. Content has tags added to it in this stage, UTM URLs, special links, hashtags, and so on, so all can be reviewed.
Sign off: Managing editor/ sub-editor (just one person)	Content needs to be signed off once it's been approved. All collateral is checked (links, hashtags, etc).

Publish: Relevant person	Approved content is published on specific channels. All collateral is implemented.
Promote: Relevant person	If a campaign or piece of content is to be promoted, it would ideally be done so by the same person who is publishing, or someone who works alongside that person.
Track: Relevant person	Content is tracked as it is live, especially if a campaign. This person is part of a team who creates monthly reports.

Different people can play different roles at different times and the same person can play multiple roles, which is usually the case in our situations given our small teams and limited resources. This is not a bad thing!

When someone plays a role, their role needs to be clear, and unless a writer is also reviewing and signing off, they cannot be the one to make a final decision on what the content looks like. This means that if a specialist needs to write the content or messaging, they need to agree to the publishing pipeline protocols and concede authority to the people responsible for managing and publishing content. This may mean people playing these roles need to upskill or be given more authority. Either way, the key to a solid content pipeline is not having 'bottlenecks' (one person who can hold things up).

Top Tip!

Getting buy-in on the content pipeline process and content handbook makes this process flow. Workshops can help others in your organisation support your operation and play their part.

Chapter 2. Channel choices

Exactly how and why you choose to use your channels together depends on your goals, and the context of your work as well as the needs of your audiences.

For the most part, we are all using a mix of the following online channels:

- One or more website(s) as our central destination for our work and campaigns;
- Social media apps for community management and building engagement with our work (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok);
- YouTube for video publishing;
- Instant messaging like WhatsApp (personal or business versions) for managing direct relationships; and/ or WhatsApp API for managing audiences at scale.

It's easier to manage a unique content strategy per channel or channel set, rather than publishing the same content to each channel and trying to tailor content for different audiences in one place. There are so many reasons why this is so but the main ones are:

- Your online audiences tend to follow you on multiple channels and will get bored if you repeat content.
- Each online channel has features that do certain things well, and it's always a great idea to play to a channel's strengths.

Here is a quick reminder of what each channel can give you, as you aim to build participation and loyal engagement with your supporters and allies:

CHANNEL	USE	GREAT FOR
Website 	Must be mobile friendly, as dynamic as possible, as actionable as possible.	• Organisational representation • Building a knowledge archive (original articles, syndicated content like radio broadcasts) • Longer form articles, stories, news • Press releases/ statements • Calls for action • Online fundraising tools • A well-designed campaign site can also be very successful

Facebook 	A range of content, audience-centric, creative and varied, promoted for higher performance	• Conversations, insights on topics and ideas • Community building • Feature-style storytelling • Asking questions (and tracking responses) • Campaigning • 'Real-time' in stories • News updates (only if highly relevant) • Curating content that aligns with your own • Co-publishing for partnerships • Creating groups • Push platform to web (only if highly relevant action) • Live events • Competitions, calls for donations • Audience research
Instagram 	Images and video, well timed and designed to engage	• Visual storytelling • Campaigning • Reminders about events • Access point to web and other assets (Linktree) 'Real-time' in stories, achieved into Highlights • Permanent posts into Feed
Twitter 	Current bites and streams of information – lots of them	• Advocacy • Data • Breaking news and bulletins • Storytelling • Campaigning • List curation • Calls for action, events, etc • Twitter spaces for live conversations • Live action (events, protests, 'real time')
LinkedIn 	Leadership, connecting, representation	• Thought leadership • Jobs • Organisational representation

YouTube 	Archiving, streaming	• Video storytelling • Video archive • Live events
WhatsApp 	Direct chats, group engagement, broadcasts, interactive journeys (API)	• Maintaining direct relationships • Managing queries (WhatsApp Business) • Direct promotion of information to followers • Automated information flows (API) • WhatsApp 'webinars' (group calls)
TikTok 	Creative interactions, vox pops, experiential videos, campaigns	• Innovative video formats • Connecting with younger audiences • Finding conversations and talking points popular amongst younger audiences • Creative sharing with other content creators and organisations • Honing your innovative, short form video storytelling techniques



FOR BIGGER ONLINE CONTENT PROJECTS

You will want to make sure you have done more extensive research on:

- Your audiences' information needs
- Your product idea
- What your product should do and why it needs to exist
- Your projected timeline
- Your projected costs

Chapter 3. Publishing cycles

Active, daily publishing is essential for maintaining strong relationships with your online audiences and ensuring your channels stay or become engaging, active environments. Here are recommendations on the kinds of cycles you can and should maintain.

Instead of trying to think about what kinds of content to produce regularly, we like to have audiences or topics which we focus on each day and we stick to that cycle. Special reports, breaking news, campaigns and so on, can have their own schedules.

Why topics/ themes?

Themes and topics organise your content strategically and help you build content around keywords and phrases you want to become known for. They can help you build bridges with your audiences and contribute strategically to broader, more public conversations or 'trending' topics. Your core themes and topics would be effectively set up as a long-term strategy, but you can always make room for short term topics, sub themes, new stories, phrases and keywords that emerge in public and online, within your core topic/ theme clusters.

We find a simple table like this to flesh out your thinking can be very helpful:

TOPIC/ THEME (in line with audience needs and interests, core goals and focus areas)	SUBTOPICS/ SUBTHEMES/ STORIES/ ANGLES
Gender rights	List everything that could go in here – stuff you want to create content about (granular, can bring in new and trending topics)
Climate justice	List everything that could go in here – stuff you want to create content about (granular, can bring in new and trending topics)
Cities of the future	List everything that could go in here – stuff you want to create content about (granular, can bring in new and trending topics)
Add topic	Etc

Topics help you track what content works best for your audiences too and stay abreast of conversations happening online. This approach also makes it easy to organise your content around a topic schedule.

Here are some general recommendations and examples of publishing cycles that work well for local nonprofits with fairly limited resources, but with an intention to build traction online.

Sample high level weekly social media content schedule (evergreen) using topics/ themes

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
Facebook	Post Topic 1/ theme community management Monday question	Post Topic 2/ theme community management	Post Topic 3/ theme community management Live Q+A	Post Topic 4/ theme community management	Post Topic 5/ theme community management Friday poll
Tiktok		Topic 1/ theme community management		Topic 2/ theme community management	
Twitter	Topic 1/ theme thread community management	Topic 2/ theme thread community management	Topic 3/ theme community management	Topic 4/ theme community management	Topic 5/ theme community management
Twitter Spaces/ Lives - any time					
Campaigns - any time					
Breaking news, events, happenings, webinars, lives – any time					

Sample high level annual campaign calendar

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
	Back to school	NB dates	Important date			Youth Day		Woman's Day	NB date		16 days of activism	
Community mobilisation / TOPIC												
Fundraising / TOPIC												
Advocacy/ TOPIC	Jan – Mar: Advocacy topic 1											

Sample website, longer cycles

You should aim to publish (valuable) information on your website as frequently as possible. As always, this depends on your capacity and what kind of articles you post. If your website is a priority space for you to build engagement and participation, then aim for at least 2-3 new and interesting articles a week.

These could range from original articles, op-eds, shared articles, media your organisation has appeared in, like a radio broadcast, for example. If you have a dynamic press strategy then you could also publish engaging press releases as frequently as you have a story to tell.

Articles do not include PDFs, like reports. These should just be published whenever you have something to load to the site. If a particularly interesting report is coming out, aim for the 3-tier strategy of publishing the PDF on your site, writing something interesting about it in article form (with imagery and visuals to tell the story well) and also creating a social media story or series around it – conversations, live sessions, infographics, and so on.

The more valuable and well designed content you publish about a subject, the more your website will show up in search engines like Google when people are searching for the content you write about. So, if you want your organisation to feature prominently for the issues and people you care most about, you should aim to publish quality content as often as possible.



IS THIS SEO?

Yes, the strategic work around how well your website performs online is called SEO — Search Engine Optimisation. We don't get into it in this programme as it's a dense subject and a technical art form in itself.

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
Long read	Short read	Infographic	Long read	Short read

Newsletters and emails

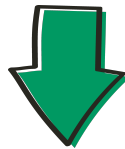
Unless you cover breaking news and current affairs, you should aim to publish your newsletters about once a week or once every two weeks — depending on your audience's preferences and the freshness of the content you produce. If people think you are publishing too frequently then they tend to unsubscribe quickly to the latest newsletter, so this can be a good indicator of how often you need to send your newsletters out. You can also just ask them directly with a simple newsletter poll. A weekly/ monthly email cycle example:

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
Weekly, biweekly or monthly roundup/ curated stories				
+ Once a month: focused story/ special coverage/ human stories				
Campaigns: any time				
Learning series: any time				
Donation appeals: any time				

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is such a customised environment and it depends on what you are using it for. You want to maintain your conversations and keep people engaged, if you are using it as a direct community management tool.

If you are using the API to help people access web content through this channel, make sure you also send information about what's being updated or new, via Facebook, if your audience is similar. You can also send unsolicited messages through the API channel, once people have consented.

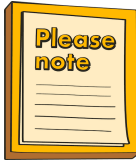


Download the content planning template.

To start your planning journey, using the thematic or topic-based approach, [download our planning template and get creating!](#)

Chapter 4. Content sharing systems

We recommend using free or well-priced Cloud-based file systems like Google Drive tools for storing images, documents, text, and for tracking comments and feedback on content.



Cloud-based apps like Google Drive, Dropbox or Sharepoint are protected and therefore, POPI-compliant.

If you use an enterprise solution like Microsoft Sharepoint, this works well for internal staff but may not be the best solution for content providers.

Google Docs or Google Sheets both give you a simple, effective means to create and store your calendar (and any of your documents). Your document is saved automatically in your Google Drive account. If anyone needs to see, edit or comment on the calendar, they can access the live version and you won't have multiple versions being passed around, potentially creating confusion.



We recommend getting into Google Workspace for Nonprofits – an excellent way to manage content and tools like Ads, using synchronised workspace technology. It's free for nonprofits, and involves a registration process. You can find out all about it on the [Google for Nonprofits](#) page.

You can also sync your Google Drive files on your Desktop and work straight from your desktop environment which means you don't have to log into your Google Drive online environment when editing or creating. Be careful of storage issues though and compromised breaches of sensitive information if someone were to steal your computer. It is best not to sync anything that carries a legal risk should your laptop be compromised.

[illegible]

2023 TOOLKIT 3: ONLINE CONTENT STRATEGY

BOOK 4: HEALTHY AND SAFE CONTENT PRACTICES

Description

Managing content also means managing operations and responsibilities. Having an online media protocol in place protects your team and helps you respond to community voices and needs with clear, ethical practices. We take you through some of the core elements of a publishing and community protocol plan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Online communication guideline/ policy
 2. When information is wrong
 3. When people get upset
-

Chapter 1. Online communication guideline/ policy

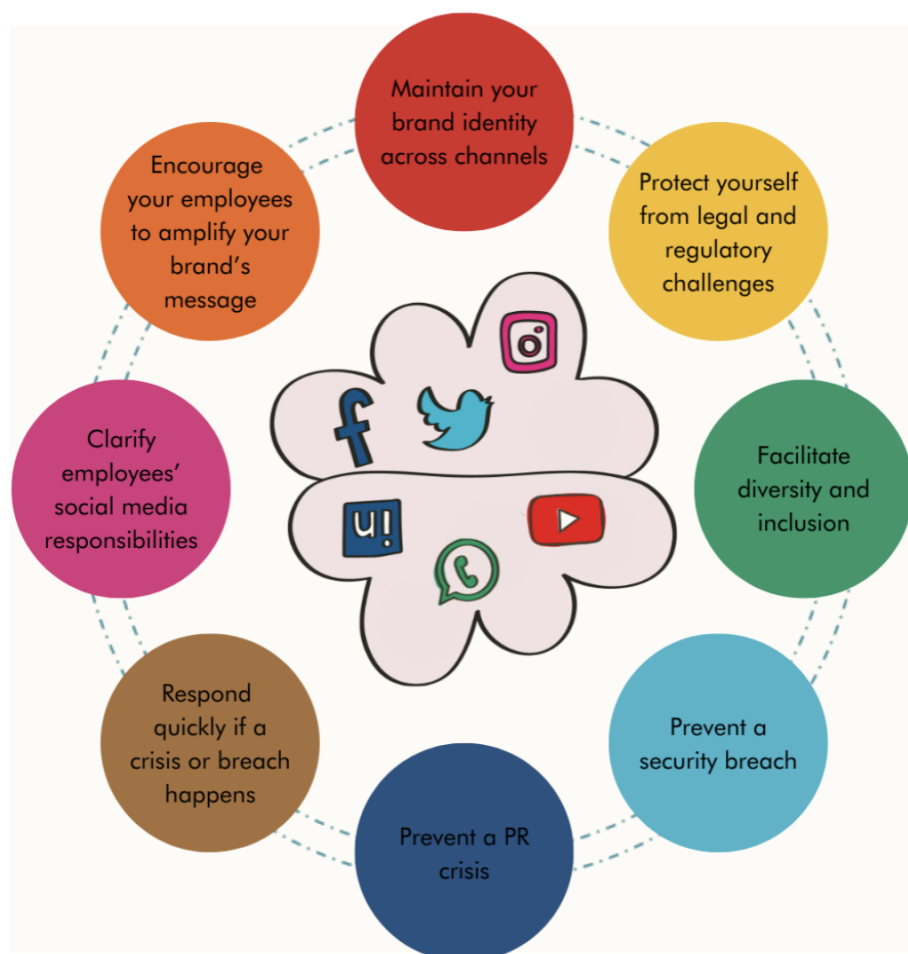
In this book, we talk through some of the ways you can be proactive in your guidelines for the staff or anyone communicating on your behalf in how they publish and engage with the public online.

It's a good idea to map out the rules of how your organisation, and any affiliated staff or partners, publish online when acting on behalf of your organisation. A communication policy will guide staff in basic publishing and community management protocols, and help your organisation handle public issues or conflict, should they happen. It's much easier to manage problems if everyone understands what the codes are first, and when and how to respond to a situation.

Here are some core benefits of having an online communication policy in place:

Maintains your brand identity across channels	A solid guideline or policy keeps your voice and content consistent with your organisation's values and positions.
Protects you from legal and regulatory challenges	A well-crafted and enforced social policy can protect you if you mistakenly publish something in error or are challenged legally.
Facilitates diversity and inclusion	Kansas State University created a social media policy for students to facilitate inclusion and diversity on campus. Among other requirements, it bans cyberbullying and doxing, as well as 'comments or conduct constituting discrimination, harassment [or] retaliation'.
Prevents a security breach	Combined with proper security protocols, your policy helps protect your accounts against phishing, hacking, and impostor accounts.
Prevents a PR crisis	Unclear social policies, or an inconsistent application of these policies, caused problems for The Associated Press when they abruptly fired journalist Emily Wilder. Clearer guidelines for applying policies and steps for addressing breaches would have prevented this from becoming a significant PR concern.
Helps you respond quickly if a crisis or breach happens	Despite your best efforts, a breach or crisis could still happen. A social policy makes sure you have an emergency response plan in place.
Clarifies employees'	You can't assume employees or associates will make the right call

online media responsibilities	on channels like social media unless you specifically spell it out.
Encourages your employees to amplify your brand's message:	You don't want to discourage employees from amplifying your brand message on social media. A clear social policy helps employees know what they can and should share on social media, and what they should skip.



Top Tip!

Your online communication policy does not have to be public but it would be linked to your privacy policy, which is a POPI Act requirement and does need to be publicly available on your website.

Sections in your policy

The details of your online communications policy will vary depending on an organisation's needs but these are some of the core elements you want to include:

1. Setting of terms and explaining context of the policy
2. Communication roles and responsibilities of each role
3. Explanation of the POPI Act and how it affects the way your organisation gathers, stores, processes and shares personal data. A link to your privacy policy.
4. Explanation of POPIA compliance protocols you have in place.
5. Security: explain systems in place, like firewalls, encourage protected passwords, what to do in case of a password breach, phishing, etc.
6. Rules of conduct for engaging with public through online channels: do's and don'ts that apply to anyone affiliated with your organisation representing your organisation directly on your official channels or indirectly through their own channels.
7. A larger section on your social media policy as this is where things tend to get the most out of hand!
8. Communication crisis protocol: lay out careful steps on how to handle a communication crisis (see more tips in the next chapter).

Your document will need regular updates. Networks and channels change, new media sites emerge, and others fall away every year. Your policy should not just sit in a document. Why not make it creative and graphic and have it printed or readily visible to encourage everyone to engage with it and follow it?



RESOURCES

Here are some excellent global sources of online media policies (mostly social media, but you can adapt): [Charity Village](#), [Red Cross](#), [Reuters](#), [Diabetes UK](#)

Chapter 2. When information is wrong

We live in an age where fake news spreads fast and easily. It is, therefore, more important than ever to aim to share truthful and valid information. This requires that you regularly fact-check your content before putting it online and double check people's quotes. If possible, have another colleague read over your content before putting it out in public. While you wouldn't do formal referencing in social media posts, the best practice when referencing reports or articles is to share a link to the article or report in your social media post.

However, there may be times when you mistakenly misquote, mistype or share incorrect information online. While this might go unnoticed by your audience, it can sometimes cause a strong reaction leading many people to share your post. Whether this goes viral or not, it is always best to be transparent about the error. Rather than deleting the post, as others might have already shared it, admit to the error and correct it across your digital platforms. By admitting fault, you both address the issue and build your audience's trust in your organisation.

Correcting information on social media

Messaging can indeed go wrong sometimes. It can happen to even the best communicators.

The various social media channels have different functions for how you can correct information. We recommend editing a post if you have made an error, and recognise the error in your edit. We recommend deleting when the post is causing severe issues, and posting an apology in a new post.



For more information on correcting your content online, read:

[How to correct website and social media errors correctly.](#)

The key is that you do not hide and delete, but rather show up, own up and correct - as soon as possible. Do not take your online audiences for granted. Address them as you would if they were standing in front of you. Words written with honesty and sincerity will always hit the spot.

Chapter 3. When people get upset

What happens when you make a mistake and people get upset?

The more public you are and the more outspoken your voice, it is inevitable that your messaging may offend or upset online users from time to time. While you can't control everyone's reactions to your content or messaging, if someone you are aiming to build trust with and align with gets upset with your messaging, aside from checking your messaging strategy, you will need to ensure you respond in a way that respectfully handles the situation and protects you and them from further harm.

The following questions would typically be mapped out in your policy in your communication in crisis section:

- What type of complaints or crises will we typically respond to?
- Who should handle our communication crises? Designate a small team that knows your organisation and communicates well to represent your organisation in crises. (For example, this may include your director and head of communication.)
- How much time should pass before we respond to complaints or accusations?
- What tone should we use when responding to complaints or accusations?



Sometimes someone may make a complaint or incite a situation on social media in a comment – watch out for all online spaces where voices can be heard.

What should I do if my messaging upsets my audience?

- Determine whether the complaint or complainant poses a reputational risk to your organisation and whether this is a real crisis or whether it is merely aimed at expressing an opposing opinion or getting a rise out of your NGO.
- If you made a simple error, fix it, and let your audiences know you fixed it.
- If the complaint is more serious and poses a reputational risk to your NGO, reach out to the complainant. If one person is upset, reach out to that individual. If a group of people are upset and things have escalated with the media getting involved, you may have to send out a press statement explaining the problem and why the messaging was done in

the way it was. If your organisation does not feel equipped to write a press statement, reach out to a public relations agency to assist you.

- Respond with a well-thought-out answer as soon as you can – preferably within the first 24 hours. This will help prevent online users’ feeling that you are either hiding something or incapable of responding to their complaints.
- To avoid mixed messages being shared with the public, ensure that all your employees understand your NGO’s stance on the matter and can recommend a member from your organisation who will handle all communications with the public. (this will be in your policy)

How to speak to someone who is upset with your organisation for a miscommunication or communication error:

- Start by trying to understand where the complainant is coming from. If you require clarity, ask the complainant for more information before providing a response.
- Try and help the complainant understand what the thinking was behind your message while acknowledging responsibility in events where you were in the wrong or where you miscommunicated something.
- Move the conversation from the public to the private realm as soon as you can. With the option for people to comment and share on public social media posts, issues can escalate quickly. You can reply to the person’s public comment, acknowledging their complaint and taking responsibility where valid, while inviting them to discuss this further with you on a private platform, such as Facebook Messenger or over the phone.
- Explain what measures you’ll take to prevent this error from happening in the future.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



BOOK 1: FIVE STRATEGIES TO GUIDE YOUR CONTENT STRATEGY

BOOK 2: CONTENT TACTICS FOR BOOSTING ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

BOOK 3: AGILE CONTENT OPERATIONS

BOOK 4: HEALTHY AND SAFE CONTENT PRACTICES

CASE STUDIES: FRAMEWORKS INSTITUTE, GUN FREE SA, LOVELIFE

ASSIGNMENT 3

CASE STUDY

FRAMEWORKS INSTITUTE

2023 TOOLKIT 3: ONLINE CONTENT STRATEGY

CASE STUDY: FRAMEWORKS INSTITUTE



[The Frameworks Institute](#)



THE NEED



[The Frameworks Institute](#) needed to **help policymakers change the American public's negative perception of immigrants** and help **build public support for reforming the immigration system** to allow immigrants to become better integrated into American society.

Through research, the Frameworks team learned that **the majority of the Americans saw immigrants as 'other'** and a threat to jobs and public resources.

They also noticed that some Americans didn't know **how the immigration system worked** and so would assume it was broken or flawed.

This prevented the public from being open to considering how immigration processes could and should be reformed to the benefit of all.

Realising the importance of people's values, Frameworks conducted field studies testing the public's reaction to certain values and ideas about the US immigration system.



THE APPROACH



Frameworks tested four values:

Shared prosperity - the idea that improvement to the immigration system will help the nation's economy.

Pragmatism - the idea that immigration reform is the practical thing to do.

Opportunity for all - the idea that everyone should have the opportunity to realise the American Dream.

'What is right' - the idea that the US system should treat all people the same way.

Frameworks ran **on-the-street interviews** where they **tested these values** and several metaphors, which could help **explain policies** aimed at helping immigrants integrate into American society and the labour force.

Amongst the metaphors tested were 'sails', 'solar', 'power', 'team', 'construction' and 'shadows'.



THE SOLUTION



The public seemed to favour the **'It's the right thing to do' value**. Not all societies would respond to the moral argument in the same way, but for the American public, this value was most motivating around collective action.

The team also found that a **highly effective metaphor** to help resistant North Americans visualise the benefit of immigration was of a ship and its sails. America's history of European discovery made this metaphor particularly **powerful and positive**.

US Policy-makers and advocates of immigration reform used these insights and came up with **powerful new messaging strategies to align with the moral value**. They were able to encourage the public to acknowledge the humanity and benefit of immigrants, rather than seeing them as a threat.

They were also able to address basic questions like:

- 'How does immigration reform work?'
- 'What isn't working well?'
- 'How can policy fix it?'

The sailing metaphor helped solidify these concepts into something easily remembered.



WHAT CAN WE LEARN?



Knowing what to say and how - and knowing what to leave out and why - can shape the public's understanding of the key issues and build support for the issue you're addressing. The moral value, when combined with poignant, memorable symbols all highly pertinent to the American public imagination, helped shift audiences closer to newer ways of thinking.

Frameworks Institute's suggested messaging:

Below you can see the kind of messaging Frameworks Institute then recommended to policymakers. They provide the frame behind the message and then suggest the message itself.

Please be mindful that this research was conducted for those working with policy and not in popular communications. You'll see the suggested messages are quite academic and formal. These core messages would need to be reformulated into relevant social or popular language if any of the policymakers wanted to run a media campaign aimed at the general public.

Reframing immigration reform as just and morally 'right'

- Reference our shared humanity and inoculate against the tendency to see immigrants as others:

'We need to treat everyone with the compassion they deserve as human beings. No matter where we were born, we are all people and are all entitled to the same basic respect.'

- Demonstrate how the current system does not recognize immigrants' humanity:

'Our country should not keep family members apart or deny people basic assistance.'

- Connect comprehensive reform to our ability to fulfil our moral obligation to other human beings:

'Treating all people with compassion should be the goal of immigration reform.'

Reframing immigration reform as economically beneficial (use of 'wind in sails' metaphor)

- Explain how reform will improve the system by elaborating on the sail's positioning:
'A well-functioning sail helps us maximise wind power. We need an immigration system that allows us to mobilise all our available labour, skills and ideas to push our economy and our country forward.'
- Show the potential benefits of a pathway to citizenship and avoid 'Us vs Them' thinking with the wind component of the metaphor:
'Immigration is the wind in our country's sails, alongside the wind provided by those who are not immigrants. We need to gather all our energy so that we can propel the country forward.'
- Describe current problems with the immigration system by focusing on the poor positioning of the sail:
'Right now, our immigration system is a sail that's poorly positioned and only partly opened. The system is excluding wind power and keeping our country from moving forward as far or as fast as we could.'

Reframing immigration reform as pragmatic and reasonable

- Highlight the feasibility of comprehensive reform and counter overly partisan and unproductive messages:
'We need to focus on taking reasonable steps toward solutions, rather than adopting extreme and impractical measures that can never actually work.'
- Point out how alternative proposals for immigration reform are not practical:
'It wouldn't make sense to send all the people that are in the country without documentation back to their country of origin - this would be impractical, and wouldn't reform the situation.'
- Appeal to common sense by emphasising how problems with the immigration system can be addressed with practical measures:

'We need a common-sense, practical approach. Solutions should come from carefully considering all possible ideas, and then moving forward with the ones that have the best chance of improving our country.'

WHAT DOES THIS CASE STUDY TELL US?

The Frameworks Institute had to do something very difficult: find a way to convince conservative-minded North Americans that reforming immigration laws and allow more immigrants to legally work in the country and access social services and benefits was a good thing. Instead of trying to **push policy-speak onto them**, Frameworks worked with **two simple but highly effective content strategies and tactics: values and metaphors** to see what ideas and values campaigners could appeal to, to make **meaningful connections** with them. **Values speak to the heart** and **metaphors help people visualise and remember information**. Communicators were able to successfully build empathic messages and content to speak to people's feelings, simplify laws and policies and build more trusting relationships with their audiences, all of which benefited the work of immigration reformers.

**FRAME
WORKS**



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ASSIGNMENT 3

CASE STUDY

GUN FREE SA

2023 TOOLKIT 3: ONLINE CONTENT STRATEGY

CASE STUDY: GUN FREE SA



[Gun Free South Africa](#)



THE NEED



[Gun Free South Africa](#) (Gun Free SA) advocates against gun violence and illegal firearm possession in South Africa. In the past, our messaging **did not distinguish between legal and illegal guns** used in crimes. Instead, our main argument was that **all guns are equally dangerous**.

By doing this, **we struggled to engage with a broad audience**. Our position also made us **more vulnerable to attack from supporters of guns**, especially gun lobbyists who assumed we were against all guns instead of illegal guns only.

We also saw **low levels of click-throughs** on our social campaigns and **low engagement** on our posts. We realised **our content was not packaged in a way that caught and held people's attention**. We weren't **building context** and **lacked depth** in our content.

We understood **we needed to rethink our content strategy**. We needed to re-frame our messaging so that we could **educate the broader public about the difference between legal and illegal guns**.

We wanted people to be able to **make the link** that legal guns need to be protected and stored correctly to avoid being stolen or lost into the illegal pool of guns that are used in crimes.

We wanted to **give attention to why** illegal guns are problematic and should be focused on by law enforcement as well as how to best keep these guns legal. And we needed our **campaign messaging and content to drive engagement and click-throughs on our website**.



THE APPROACH



We spent time **researching our audiences' needs** and their **perceptions** of gun issues. We brought ordinary people who do not own guns into the conversation so that we could have a **wider view** of how guns are perceived in our society.

Through this, we saw that our audiences **wanted to learn things that would practically benefit them** and their families, they wanted **access to information** that would help keep them safe in multiple gun contexts.

We looked to others for help and inspiration. We **reviewed messaging styles** developed by **similar accounts** to ours such as @IANSAnetwork.

We developed our new frames and content using participatory methods in collaboration with young people involved with AlexFm. This helped us tap into a more **effective way** of writing and framing our content.



THE SOLUTION



We tested our new approach with a campaign, aimed to **educate** the broader public around the broader gun picture by **showing the link** between legally and illegally held guns. We made clear how most, if not all, unlicensed guns were once legal before being stolen, lost or given to criminals, becoming a danger to everyone. The campaign **highlighted the life cycle of a gun** and **what can be done at each stage to keep it from getting into the illegal pool of guns**.

We opted to use **infographics** to tell this story **online and in print**, and chose more **interactive presentations** for community events. We used **pictures** and **real examples** of illegal gun violence from the news.

Creating a **highly visual campaign** helped us to depict the **complex life cycle** of a gun and **break down dense research** into small chunks of information that could spark conversations about people's own experiences with gun ownership and gun violence.

💡 WHAT CAN WE LEARN? 💡

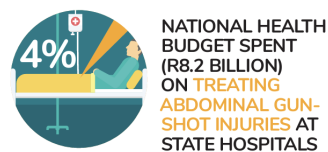
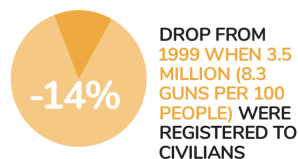
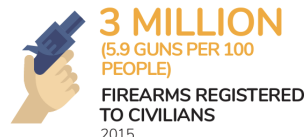
Through our process we learned that **the more educated people are on a topic, the more open they are to engaging with that issue**. We also saw that by bringing more people, and particularly those that don't own guns, into the conversation, we were able to deal better with the **spectrum of issues** around gun ownership.

By bringing in the **perspectives** of people who feared becoming victims of gun violence, we were also able to **draw attention** to the weak enforcement of gun laws in South Africa.

We saw how our approach began **to shift public perception of guns**. We received a lot more **queries from legal gun owners** about how to safeguard their guns and had many more queries from women whose partners had legal guns and used the guns to threaten them.

Our content continues to grow and respond to the voices around us.

Facts



THE NUMBER OF COUNTRIES THAT HAVE SEVERELY RESTRICTED/BANNED CIVILIAN GUN OWNERSHIP
Australia, Botswana, Japan and the UK have severely restricted/banned civilian gun ownership. These countries have some of the lowest gun-related murders in the world — 42, 51, 4 and 23 respectively a year. In SA, 23 people are shot and killed a day.



WHAT DOES THIS CASE STUDY TELL US?

Gunfree SA **struggled to connect to their audiences** because of their hardline approach to gun ownership and use in South Africa. As a result their **content and messaging could not accommodate and engage** with the practical ways in which ordinary South Africans were experiencing gun violence and anxiety. By **researching and developing messaging with allies in their field**, they were able to **consider a new position for their content** - to enlighten and create conversation, which would help them more in their public advocacy work than their previous message position. Aiming more content at public education, and developing visual, interesting material to simplify gun laws and create conversation online, GunFree SA **opened up public discourse** and saw great leaps in their engagement online.





BOOK 1: FIVE STRATEGIES TO GUIDE YOUR CONTENT STRATEGY

BOOK 2: CONTENT TACTICS FOR BOOSTING ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

BOOK 3: AGILE CONTENT OPERATIONS

BOOK 4: HEALTHY AND SAFE CONTENT PRACTICES

CASE STUDIES: FRAMEWORKS INSTITUTE, GUN FREE SA, LOVELIFE

ASSIGNMENT 3

CASE STUDY

LOVELIFE

2023 TOOLKIT 3: ONLINE CONTENT STRATEGY

CASE STUDY: LOVELIFE



[LoveLife](#)



THE NEED



Almost two decades ago, when HIV awareness and reducing the prevalence of HIV amongst young people was [LoveLife's](#) (Now, New Love Life) core focus, we understood that to achieve our goals, **our communication and programme design needed to reflect the feelings and values of the young people we were engaging with** - rather than the institutional attitudes dominating HIV risk-reduction interventions and communications at the time.

This need to **'break through to young people'**, in order to create a more positive impact, drove LoveLife to **research** what we could do differently with our communication and content to help build a society of young people who were equipped to make healthier and safer decisions around sex.

We wanted **our content to speak to what was driving young people** to make risky decisions, as well as what they hoped and dreamed for and needed.



THE APPROACH



We conducted **extensive research** and we realised that young people were motivated by **three core values: one's purpose, a sense of belonging and one's identity, in their immediate contexts.**

We saw that when we **brought these values into our messaging**, and offered young people **opportunities to align with these three values** (in the present tense), young people were more likely to protect themselves and engage in less risky behaviour.

We saw that young people **needed to feel like they belonged to something important** and **had choice and agency in their lives**. We also saw that young people in under-resourced areas were negotiating all sorts of risks everyday and needed help to negotiate them, rather than to be shamed.

For example, HIV was seen as an assembly of risks, along with threats to their emotional and physical health like poor performance at school or living in a dangerous location. We also realised that young people are **motivated by a sense of imminent possibility**, not possibility located far in the future.

We believed that by **tapping into these sentiments** and values in our messaging and content we could positively influence young people's ability to make better decisions.



THE SOLUTION



Lovelife then **implemented a range of programmes and content that shifted the narrative** and frames of the safe sex conversation. We brought youth together through sport and peer-based opportunities and celebrated young people's **need** to connect. We created national campaigns that shifted messaging from off-key commands like instructions like 'Abstain, be Faithful, Condomise' to messages of **inclusion, opportunity and agency**. We addressed young people as the 'Lovelife generation', the 'power to decide generation', the 'got ambition generation' or the 'Don't want HIV generation'. We did something new and **built a movement** of young people who wanted to talk about and practise safe sex.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

Loveline's strategies were often criticised by health bodies and state agencies, who questioned our positive encouragement of choice in sex (rather than discouraging unsafe sex) but our approach was consistently affirmed by the young people we were working with.

We were able to **develop trusting relationships** with our young people. By speaking to them in ways they **understood and resonated most with**, we were able to create a **deeper and more sustained positive impact** with them around the issue of safer sex.

LoveLife **created new ways of thinking** about high-risk sexual behaviour in young people in South Africa.

We responded to what we saw in our research: that attitudes to risk and health are not generic and should rather be understood as relative and contextual, especially amongst the youth. Our campaign and programme messaging and frames tapped into this in active ways and helped us connect with and build positive, lasting change amongst the young people we worked with.

Example:

Below are two billboards from their 2010 phase where they engaged directly with the 'born free' generation's (children born post-1994) perceptions of HIV.

'The don't want HIV generation'



'HIV Loves Skin on Skin'



WHAT DOES THIS CASE STUDY TELL US?

LoveLife knew that their campaign work **needed to speak to the feelings and behaviours of young people** and that encouraging participation in safe sex habits involved more than threats of punishment or dire consequences. Groundbreaking at the time, instead of relying on established frames of what makes young people in South Africa 'tick', Lovelife **forged new paths** into appealing to what mattered most to young people: **being understood** and **part of something meaningful** that they could experience **right now**. Their safe sex campaign work was pre-social media, so they chose billboards to reach young people in public zones, with **highly visual**, emotionally arresting and encouraging posters to **grab the attention** of young people. By understanding that a relationship develops positively through **empathy and feelings of safety**, the Lovelife campaign established **deep loyalty and trust** with the young people it worked with.



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ASSIGNMENT 3



TOOLKIT 3:

ASSIGNMENT

2023 TOOLKIT 3: ONLINE CONTENT STRATEGY

TOOLKIT 3 ASSIGNMENT

Create a recurring weekly content plan using topics/ themes

Your Name: _____

Name of Organisation, Project or Campaign: _____

Download this template to fill in your answers:  **TOOLKIT 3 ASSIGNMENT**

Step 1:

Write out up to 10 Topics/ Themes you want to work with for this assignment (and in your work, ideally):

Think:

- What topics are relevant for your various audiences?
- What are your main themes or topic areas that your organisation works with, and is passionate about?
- What conversations do you want to contribute to online?

THEME/ TOPIC
TOPIC 1:
TOPIC 2:
TOPIC 3:
TOPIC 4:
TOPIC 5:
TOPIC 6:
TOPIC 7:
TOPIC 8:
TOPIC 9:
TOPIC 10:

+ copy and paste the empty table as needed.

Step 2:

Populate this weekly schedule for your social media and web online channels (if you don't currently publish content on your website, you can just strategise around what you would like to do), using topics/ themes you have brainstormed above. Try adding in some more detail on content ideas you have gathered from this toolkit.

Think:

- How often will you publish on each channel?
- How will you distribute your topics?
- Which audiences will you be engaging with as a priority on each channel?
- What kind of content formats will you use?

	CHANNEL	PRIORITY AUDIENCES	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI
WEEKLY (short cycle)	Facebook		Add in topic/ content type ideas	Add in topic/ content type ideas	Add in topic/ content type ideas	Add in topic/ content type ideas	Add in topic/ content type ideas
	Instagram		Add in topic/ content type ideas				
	Twitter		Add in topic/ content type ideas				
	Web		Add in topic/ content type ideas				
	Add channel if you need to		Add in topic/ content type ideas				

Notes:



Amplify Mobilise Change is a DG Murray Trust Innovation project designed to help South African civil society shift its thinking about and develop more creative, impactful and efficient online communication and technology practices.

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