


TELLING OUR EXTENSION STORY: PLANNING & DEVELOPING STORIES

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- A wooden picture frame with a light brown, slightly distressed finish is held up by two hands at the bottom corners. The frame is empty, showing a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds. The hands are positioned at the bottom edge of the frame, with fingers gripping the wood. The background is a solid, vibrant blue sky.
- Aiming for **CONSISTENCY** and clarity throughout Extension
 - Establishing a common definition for Extension impacts and stories
 - Developing a standard framework for compiling impacts and developing stories (ERS updates, etc.)
 - Providing guidance and resources to get everyone in sync

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Why Tell Stories?
2. What's an "Extension Story"?
3. Outcomes vs. Impacts
4. Story Development Steps
5. Storytelling Tools for You!



Find more storytelling resources at:

go.ncsu.edu/Extension-Storytelling

Why Tell Stories?

“Stories and storytelling are an essential element of what it means to be human... Stories help us make sense of the world, and pass on universal lessons and wisdom.”



– *Kate Forsyth, author and storyteller*

What Can Stories Do for Extension?

Bring data
to life
(make it relatable)

Forge
emotional
connections

Reinforce key
information /
issues

Make what we
do memorable
(lasting impression)

Grow the brand

What is an
Extension Story?

DEFINITION:

Extension stories are intentional, strategic and rooted in our mission to grow North Carolina.

Our world-leading faculty and exceptional field faculty — who are at the forefront of innovation and discovery — provide high-tech, high-touch expertise to serve the unique needs of diverse clients.

Our extensive partnerships with agriculture, business, industry, education and government create a unique culture of collaboration that increases productivity and fuels economic development.

Our trusted research-based programs and technical assistance provide solutions and empower clients to make better-informed decisions.

Our leadership in experiential education equips clients to effectively transfer knowledge and skills into practical application.

Brand Promise

Enrich the lives, land and economies of North Carolinians
... in short, *we grow North Carolina*

- ✦ Leadership in experiential education

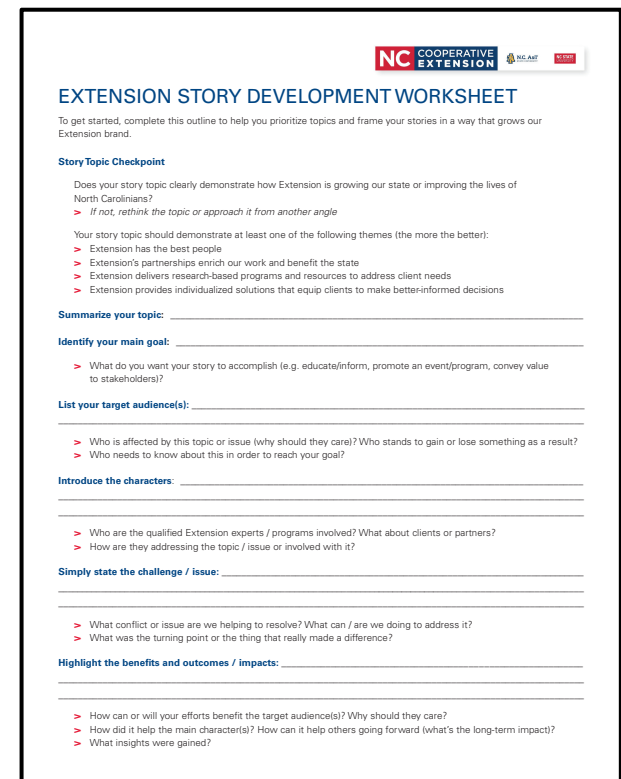
Brand Personality

- ✦ Innovative
- ✦ Intellectual
- ✦ Purposeful
- ✦ Trusted
- ✦ Caring



Identifying a Good Extension Story

Must reinforce our mission to grow North Carolina, always

- Highlight our people (best in the business)
- Convey breadth / value of our partnerships
- Demonstrate trusted, research-based resources and programs
- Emphasize hands-on / experiential education and individualized solutions



The image shows a screenshot of a worksheet titled "EXTENSION STORY DEVELOPMENT WORKSHEET" from the NC Cooperative Extension. The worksheet is designed to help users prioritize topics and frame their stories. It includes sections for a Story Topic Checkpoint, summarizing the topic, identifying the main goal, listing the target audience, introducing characters, stating the challenge/issue, and highlighting benefits/outcomes. Each section contains guiding questions and bullet points to help the user think through their story.

NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION  

EXTENSION STORY DEVELOPMENT WORKSHEET

To get started, complete this outline to help you prioritize topics and frame your stories in a way that grows our Extension brand.

Story Topic Checkpoint

Does your story topic clearly demonstrate how Extension is growing our state or improving the lives of North Carolinians?

- > If not, rethink the topic or approach it from another angle

Your story topic should demonstrate at least one of the following themes (the more the better):

- > Extension has the best people
- > Extension's partnerships enrich our work and benefit the state
- > Extension delivers research-based programs and resources to address client needs
- > Extension provides individualized solutions that equip clients to make better-informed decisions

Summarize your topic: _____

Identify your main goal: _____

- > What do you want your story to accomplish (e.g. educate/inform, promote an event/program, convey value to stakeholders)?

List your target audience(s): _____

- > Who is affected by this topic or issue (why should they care)? Who stands to gain or lose something as a result?
- > Who needs to know about this in order to reach your goal?

Introduce the characters: _____

- > Who are the qualified Extension experts / programs involved? What about clients or partners?
- > How are they addressing the topic / issue or involved with it?

Simply state the challenge / issue: _____

- > What conflict or issue are we helping to resolve? What can / are we doing to address it?
- > What was the turning point or the thing that really made a difference?

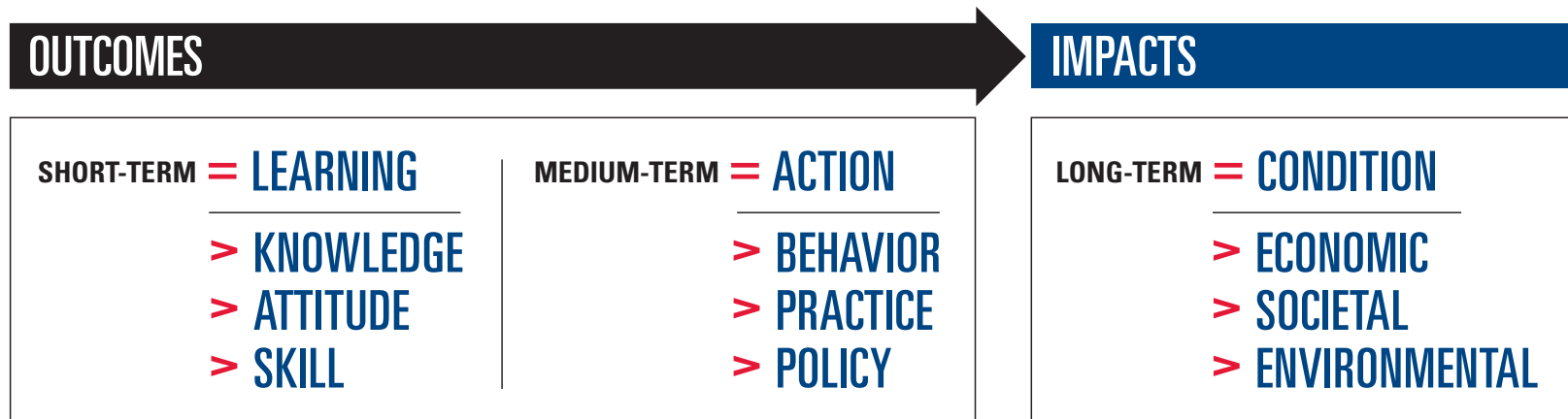
Highlight the benefits and outcomes / impacts: _____

- > How can or will your efforts benefit the target audience(s)? Why should they care?
- > How did it help the main character(s)? How can it help others going forward (what's the long-term impact)?
- > What insights were gained?

View Story Worksheet at:
go.ncsu.edu/Extension-Storytelling

Understanding Meaningful Impacts

Outcomes vs. Impacts



Conveying **short/medium-term outcomes** in your stories is important (e.g. number of workshop attendees or people buying from farmers markets), but it does not reflect long-term value and opportunity.

Strive to demonstrate significant **long-term impacts** as well, which illustrate meaningful change or the potential for such change (e.g. economic growth, reductions in obesity or improvements in environmental conditions).

Outcomes vs. Impacts

OUTCOMES

- > Reflect short- to medium-term results
- > Quantify changes in learning and actions/behaviors
- > Doesn't show future change or potential impact
- > Answers the question: "What have we done lately?"

EXAMPLE

- > Number of workshop attendees
- > People shopping at farmers markets
- > Participants engaging in more physical activity

IMPACTS

- > Reflect long-term change (or the potential for meaningful change)
- > Illustrate shifts in broader societal conditions
- > Answers the question: "Why should this matter to me?"

EXAMPLE

- > Reductions in obesity
- > Improvements in climate conditions
- > Economic growth

Connect to and Support
Your Local Goals



Building an Effective Marketing Plan

go.ncsu.edu/LocalMarketingPlans

WHAT IS THE **GOAL?**



What are you trying to accomplish?
What should happen as a result?

Seeking funding?

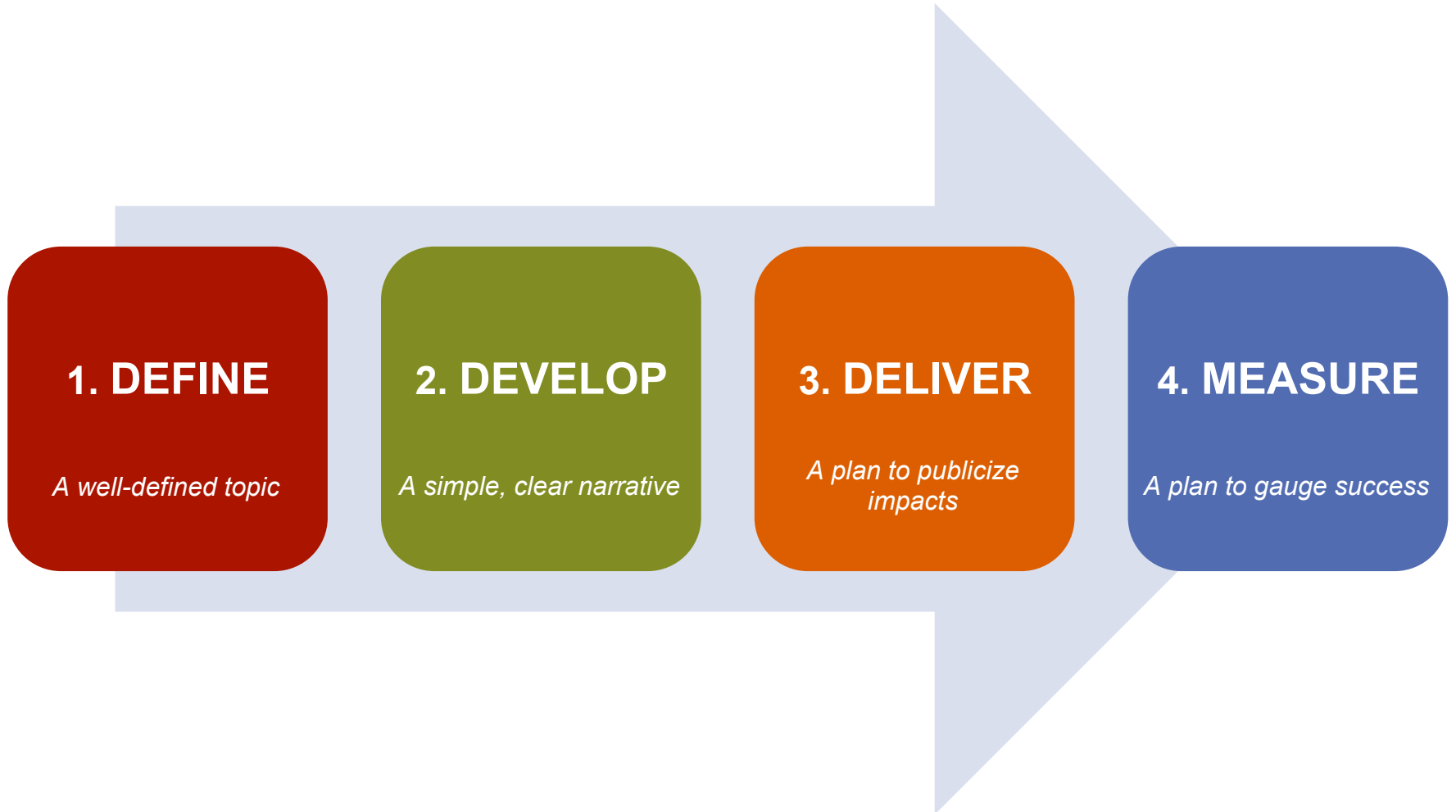
Promoting impacts?

Increasing participation?

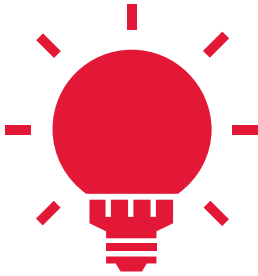
A spiral-bound notebook with a silver pen resting on a yellow background. The notebook is open to a blank white page. The pen is silver with a black grip and is positioned vertically to the left of the notebook. The text "Getting Started on Your Extension Story" is written in a large, bold, black font in the center of the page.

Getting Started on Your Extension Story

Story Development Steps



Story Development Steps



1 DEFINE A well-defined topic

- > Confirm the story topic
- > Ensure it supports our mission
- > Identify your audience



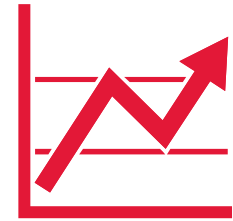
2 DEVELOP A clear, simple narrative

- > Filter and frame the story using Extension Story Checklist
- > Introduce the characters, setting and challenge
- > Highlight benefits and impact for target audience



3 DELIVER A plan to publicize impacts

- > Select relevant external communication channels
Where does your target go for information?
- > Identify internal communication channels
Where should your story be posted internally?
- > Identify your audience



4 MEASURE A plan to gauge success

- > Define your success metrics up front during program planning
- > Compile available data/metrics (based on where you distributed your story)



DEFINE

DEVELOP

DELIVER

MEASURE

Confirm the story topic

- Does the topic show how Extension is growing our state and/or improving lives of North Carolinians?
- Do we have a practical, research-based solution or information to offer?

Identify your audience

- Who needs to know about it?
- Who is affected – why should they care?



**Reinforce one or more of these themes –
use our Story Development Worksheet!**

- Extension has the best people
- Our partnerships enrich our work, benefit N.C.
- Extension is a leader in hands-on education and individualized solutions
- Deliver trusted, research-based resources (equip people to make better-informed decisions)



DEFINE

DEVELOP

DELIVER

MEASURE

Introduce your characters and setting

- Who are the Extension experts involved? Clients / partners too?
- How are they involved with the issue?

Simply state the challenge

- What issue are your “characters” working to resolve?
- Why does it matter (what are the implications for audience)?

Highlight benefits / impacts for the audience

- How are / did Extension address issue? Why should audience care?
- Make the outcomes / impacts relatable (what does it mean for their family, community, constituents, etc.)



DEFINE

DEVELOP

DELIVER

MEASURE

Make a plan to publicize your story

- *Where does your target audience go for info (social media, newspaper, radio/TV, community groups)?
- How could this be shared internally? (Newsletters, webpages, reporting systems, etc.)



DEFINE

DEVELOP

DELIVER

MEASURE

Was your story heard?

- Compile available data / metrics (based on where story is shared)
 - Social media channel user analytics (views, likes, shares)
 - Newsletters subscriber figures (open / click rates)
 - Media outlet online ad kits (subscribers, viewers, impressions)
- Determine your success metrics as part of your program plan
 - E.g. If it's a web-based goal, make sure you have Google Analytics
 - If you need staff to “count” something, plan ahead of time

Q: When Do I Develop an Extension Story?

A: As You Plan Program Efforts
(or as Events Unfold)



Andrea Gibbs

Extension Agent

Full Story: go.ncsu.edu/StoryExample_Gibbs

Find more storytelling resources at:

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QUESTIONS?

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[GO.NCSU.EDU/EXTENSION-MARCOMM](https://go.ncsu.edu/extension-marcomm)

