The Alamance Narrative Playbook

A guide to telling stories that build trust and civic faith.

Why Storytelling Matters

Stories shape how people see their community — its challenges, strengths, and possibilities. When stories are turned outward, rooted in what matters to people, and grounded in real experiences, they build trust and belonging.

This playbook draws from the work of the For Alamance Narrative Team, which developed a community-based approach to storytelling inspired by the Harwood Institute's Telling and Spreading Stories Kit. It's meant to help local organizations, schools and nonprofits tell authentic civic stories that reflect the heart of their community.

1. Turned Outward Storytelling

Start with a turned outward mindset — one guided by what matters to people, not just what matters to your organization. Over time, this approach helps shift the local narrative toward honesty, hope and shared purpose.

Community stories:

- Highlight progress and change that emerge from the community itself.
- Reflect public knowledge — what people care about and are working to improve.
- Acknowledge challenges honestly; avoid "perfect-story" spin.
- Offer proof points that progress is possible.
- Reveal new norms, partnerships and places of connection — signs of civic renewal.

2. Asking the Right Questions

Community storytellers listen first. These eight questions (from Harwood's Making the Invisible Visible) can help uncover deeper meaning in the work:

1. What are you trying to achieve together?
2. What are you building?
3. Why is this important to your community?
4. What wins are you already seeing?
5. What ripple effects have emerged from this work?
6. What challenges have you faced?
7. What's next for you?
8. Again — what are you ultimately trying to achieve?

When used consistently, these questions help shift stories from "what we did" to "what this means for our community."

3. Capturing First-Hand Accounts

Community members are often the most powerful storytellers. Use short surveys, conversations or voice memos to capture their reflections.

Ask before and after an event:

- How did you hear about this?
- What brought you here?
- What did you learn or experience?
- What part of this impacted you most?
- How did this shape your understanding of community?
- Did it inspire you to act or connect in new ways?

These authentic voices help reveal why people show up, what they value and what's changing beneath the surface.

4. Sharing Stories that Build Trust

Distribution is about connection, not promotion. Start small — with your own networks — and grow organically.

- Share through newsletters, partner channels, social media and local email lists.
- Include QR codes or short links (like bit.ly) to make stories easy to access.
- Use community events to introduce story cards or flyers that invite reflection.
- Look for trusted messengers — local schools, congregations, civic groups — to share stories on your behalf.

Each shared story is a touchpoint for civic connection.

5. The Four Powers of Public Knowledge

- **The Power to Reframe:** Use stories to reveal what truly matters to people and shift how problems are understood.
- **The Power to Enlist Allies:** Show how collaboration expands what's possible and invites others to join.
- **The Power to Take Action:** Connect stories to strategies, inspiring others to act.
- **The Power to Align and Sustain:** Use public knowledge to remind the community of its shared goals and renew civic faith.

Closing Thought

Community storytelling isn't marketing — it's movement-building. When people see themselves reflected in real, hopeful stories of change, they begin to believe again in their shared capacity to make things better. That's the work of narrative, and that's the work ahead.