

Build a Proposal *for* Strategic Storytelling

A 21-day plan to persuade leadership to invest in storytelling infrastructure and system.

How this Plan Works

- **Like physical activity:** Small actions regularly leading to bigger results.
- **Desired Outcome:** Get your Executive Director and Board to say "YES" to investing in storytelling systems.
- **Core Goal:** Gain clearer language, stronger internal alignment, and sharper understanding of what's needed to move forward.
- **Time needed:** 30-60 minutes, 2-3 times per week.
- **What you'll build:** A thoughtful proposal that equips leadership to make an informed decision.

A Note on Cost and Investment

Storytelling infrastructure aren't small tweaks. When done right, many organizations view them as major infrastructure investments. This is on par with building a CRM, major website overhaul, or development systems.

Organizations interesting in full storytelling systems should allocate \$50K – \$150K depending on scope, team size, and timing.

This isn't about "more marketing." It's about building long-term clarity, trust, and fundraising capacity.

Acknowledge Small Wins Throughout the 21-Day Plan

- **After Day 1:** Treat yourself to your favorite coffee.
- **After Day 7:** Tell a trusted friend or colleague you're making real progress.
- **After Day 14:** Celebrate halfway done, you've stayed disciplined.
- **After Day 21:** You've done meaningful leadership work. No matter the outcome, you've elevated the conversation.

Week 01: Quicks Wins

Day 1: Estimate Your Storytelling Cost of Doing Nothing (30 minutes)

Purpose: Get a simple estimate of what disorganized and reactionary storytelling is costing you.

Action: Fill in these blanks (ballpark is fine):

- Hours spent weekly searching for photos/videos: _____
- Hours spent explaining your work to others: _____
- Times you recreate similar content each month: _____
- Missed funding/storytelling opportunities each year: _____
- Times when a story would've support an initiative: _____

Quick Math:

- Total weekly hours: _____
- Hourly rate: _____

Budgeting Note: Staff time isn't just salary. It includes benefits, admin costs, and overhead. Most organizations use a fully loaded rate between \$50–\$75/hour. If you don't know yours, you can start with \$50/hour.

- Weekly cost: \$ _____
- Annualized cost: \$ _____ × 52 = \$ _____

Progress Marker: You now have a dollar figure attached to inefficiency.

Momentum Boost: Write that number down somewhere you'll see it. Quietly let it irritate you in a productive way.

Week 01: Quicks Wins

Day 3: Build Your Talking Points (45 minutes)

Purpose: Prepare simple language you can actually use when leadership asks: "Why now?"

Action: Use these fill-ins to draft your 3 key talking points:

Problem: "We're spending roughly \$_____ a year recreating content and chasing down stories. This slows us down in fundraising, communications, and engagement."

Opportunity: "Other organizations investing in storytelling systems have seen stronger donor engagement, reduced stress, and clearer messaging across teams."

Ask: "I'd like to explore investing \$_____ to build out our storytelling infrastructure. Long-term, this could save us \$_____ annually while supporting [insert specific mission goal]."

Progress Marker: You have usable language for hallway conversations or leadership check-ins..

Momentum Boost: Saying these out loud helps. Do it. You'll feel the words settle.

Week 01: Quicks Wins

Day 5: Find an Anchor Example (30 minutes)

Purpose: Give leadership proof that others have faced (and solved) this problem.

Action: Pick one track:

- **A: Success Examples**
 - Google “[your cause] organization communications strategy results.”
 - Find organizations who invested in content systems or message alignment.
 - Capture: “Org X invested in Y and achieved Z.”

- **B: Struggle Stories**
 - Look for nonprofits facing communications breakdowns or fragmented messaging.
 - Capture: “Org X struggled with Y problem, which reflects where we’re headed.”

Progress Marker: You have a credible external reference to strengthen your proposal.

Momentum Boost: You’re building a case not a complaint list.

Week 02: Build Internal Alignment

Day 8: Identify Your Allies (30 minutes)

Purpose: Find others who benefit if storytelling improves.

Action: List 3–5 people who feel this pain:

- **Development team:** Do they struggle to explain impact to donors?
- **Program staff:** Do they spend too much time explaining their work?
- **Volunteer coordinator:** Do they need better recruitment materials?
- **Board members:** Who understands marketing/communications?

Progress Marker: You have your early circle.

Momentum Boost: Quiet internal buy-in matters more than loud external pitches.

Week 02: Build Internal Alignment

Day 10: Start the Conversations (60 minutes)

Purpose: Invite your allies into the process.

Action: Try saying this:

"I'm pulling together a proposal to strengthen how we tell our story. It could help [insert their pain point]. Can I keep you updated as I build it?"

If they're supportive:

"Would you be comfortable mentioning this positively if it comes up in leadership discussions?"

Progress Marker: You're not standing alone.

Momentum Boost: Support creates courage.

Week 02: Build Internal Alignment

Day 12: Document Real Pain Points (45 minutes)

Purpose: Move beyond abstract problems into specific experiences.

Action: Document 3 real examples:

- A missed opportunity because the right story wasn't ready
- Staff frustration searching for content
- Donor/supporter confusion about impact

For each:

- What happened?
- What did it cost?
- How would storytelling systems have helped?

Progress Marker: You've added real-life weight to your proposal.

Momentum Boost: Leadership often responds to "remember when..." moments more than spreadsheets.

Week 02: Build Internal Alignment

Day 15: Draft Your Proposal Outline (45 minutes)

Purpose: Pull everything together into a clear, practical ask.

Structure:

- **The Problem:** Use your Day 1 estimate + Day 12 stories.
- **The Solution:** Invest in storytelling infrastructure and systems.
- **The Proof:** Share your Day 5 example.
- **The Benefits:**
 - Save \$_____ annually
 - Improve donor engagement / reduce stress / clarify messaging
 - Advance [insert strategic priority]

Progress Marker: Your proposal is drafted.

Momentum Boost: You've moved from frustration to solution-building.

Week 02: Build Internal Alignment

Day 17: Practice the Pitch (30 minutes)

Purpose: Feel comfortable when you finally sit down with leadership.

Action:

- Read it aloud 3 times
- Time yourself (2–3 minutes is perfect)
- Practice with a colleague
- Edit anything that feels awkward

Progress Marker: You're ready to present.

Momentum Boost: Confidence is built through repetition.

Week 02: Build Internal Alignment

Day 19: Schedule the Conversation (15 minutes)

Purpose: Get on your ED's calendar.

Send this email:

"Hi [Name],

I've been reviewing how we approach storytelling and found areas where we may improve efficiency and donor engagement. Could we meet for 15 minutes? I have a brief proposal to walk through.

Thanks, [Your Name]"

Progress Marker: The meeting is booked.

Momentum Boost: You're taking action.

Week 02: Build Internal Alignment

Day 21: Have the Conversation

Purpose: Present your proposal with calm confidence.

Action:

- Open with your cost estimate
- Share one powerful pain point
- Walk through your solution and benefits
- Ask: "What questions or thoughts do you have?"

Progress Marker: You've presented. That's major.

Momentum Boost: You're now inside the leadership conversation, not outside it.

What Happens Next?

After the Conversation

They say yes:

Fantastic. Begin next steps.

They say "maybe":

Ask what additional information would help.

They say "not now":

Ask when would be better to revisit. Stay connected with your allies.

Need Help Building Your Storytelling Infrastructure & System?

If this 21-Day Plan sparked a good conversation inside your organization, but you'd like help turning the proposal into a full roadmap, we're here.

 [Let's start a conversation](#)