



The Nonprofit Story Bank Guide

How to build an effective storytelling system



Presented by Jean Boampong

Great storytelling runs on consistency.

Storytelling is one of the best tactics a nonprofit organization (or any organization) can employ. It brings people closer to the heart of the work you do. Furthermore, it allows people to make the connection between what you do and who they are.

Unfortunately, many nonprofit organizations do not make storytelling a priority unless there is a pressing deadline for a grant, launch or some other project. Others simply don't have the resources. And then there are some nonprofits that just don't value storytelling.

However, without storytelling, the presentation of your mission, vision and values via your public work simply becomes inconsistent.

In other words, people may have a harder time receiving your key messages, answering your calls to action or believing in your cause.

Storytelling represents more than just those impact stories you put in your annual report. It represents the branding, messaging, content marketing, communications strategies and fundraising efforts of your organization.

There are stories throughout the work in the nonprofit sector. However, you have to understand storytelling as expansive in order to recognize that. So, how do you do that?

Great storytelling meets your deadline.

You need a surefire storytelling system that doesn't push you to quit before you've even started. The last thing you want is get overwhelmed with it.

This is where the story bank becomes invaluable. A story bank:

- Eliminates the scramble by giving your ideas and stories a home, saving you time
- Increases capacity by inviting other people to be a part of the process, saving you money
- Encourages better content output via the repurpose factor, saving you energy

Ultimately, a story bank helps your nonprofit organize stories from start to finish. By employing it, your stories will always be ready to go for that next grant application, blog, press release, upcoming conference presentation or some other purpose. And your target audience (and your team!) will thank you for it.



I created this workbook because I've been where you are before. Like many of you reading this, I have had to make broken things work and stretch near-empty things as thin as possible. This workbook is my way of paying it forward to the sector that taught me a valuable lesson: The way things are right now is not the way they have to be forever."

Who is this workbook for?

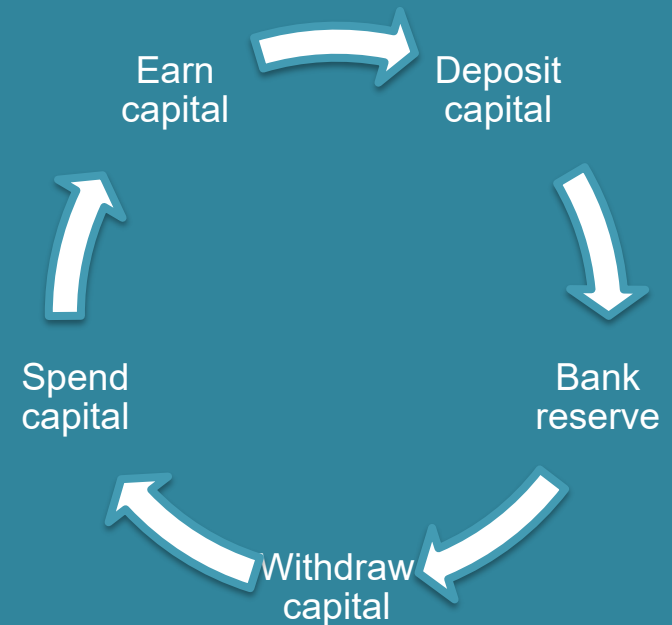
This workbook is for nonprofit communication professionals, teams and departments that are looking to improve their existing storytelling system or create a brand new one. Generally, any company or organization can use this guide to:

- Adjust their storytelling efforts
- Identify gaps in their storytelling process
- Better organize their stories
- Gain insight into tools that improve storytelling

Who is this workbook for?

By following this workbook, you will learn how to create a story bank that works for you.

Chapter 1: What is a story bank?



A story bank is a system that uses a schedule of processes and specific tools to collect, develop, store and share stories.

It's important to understand that a story bank is a system in the same way a "bank" is.

A bank is a literal building and a place that houses people, machines and money within and a part of complex systems to provide a variety of services.

Similarly, a story "bank" is a literal place to store stories and a system that includes processes, tactics and tools that provide a variety of stories.

What is a story bank?

An important thing to remember is that people make story banks work.

Stories don't just appear out of thin air. They are not waiting in the shadows for a nonprofit professional to discover by accident. Rather, people gather and develop because they believe those stories are worth sharing.

With a story bank, the goal is to establish a system that corresponds with – and eventually builds – your capacity for authentic storytelling without breaking the bank (see what I did there?).

So, if you want to be able to choose from a variety of stories, you must be intentional about building your story bank.

What does it do?

A story bank organizes your nonprofit's stories – and the processes that create, store and share them – to avoid chaos and the hassle of last-minute story requests. In other words, a story bank helps you:

- **Find what you're looking for**
- **Develop what's unfinished**
- **Repurpose what's already done**

Additionally, a story bank develops your nonprofit's storytelling rhythm. Once you've got your storytelling processes down, you can adapt where you need to. This makes choosing tools and enacting techniques that best support your actual internal capacity much, much easier.

Lastly, a story bank shows your constituents your values in action. Beyond the actual stories themselves, the story bank process enables you to build and maintain meaningful relationships with the people you serve and the key stakeholders you answer to.

How does it work?

The best way to really understand how a story bank works is through scenarios.



The website blog needs to be updated and you don't know how to repurpose content

A story bank gives you options for repurposing content for your website blog. Because it is a system, it also helps you do this much faster. With the right tool, you can see all of your stories and story content at once, which can help you determine which story is best for your blog at a specific time.



The annual report is due, you're running out of time and you need to show your work

Oftentimes, due to a lack of resources, nonprofits are often scrambling to interview grantees and participants for stories. A story bank allows you to avoid this situation by allowing you to pick from a wide array of stories. By the time your annual report is due, you are picking stories as opposed to developing them.



That grant application deadline is looming and your stories aren't really stories

A story bank eliminates hassle. If your stories are organized by category, such as target audience, for example, you can easily select the right stories from a relevant pool of stories vs. all the stories you have or the ones you want to develop.

Why should you use a story bank?

A story bank positively changes three fundamental things:

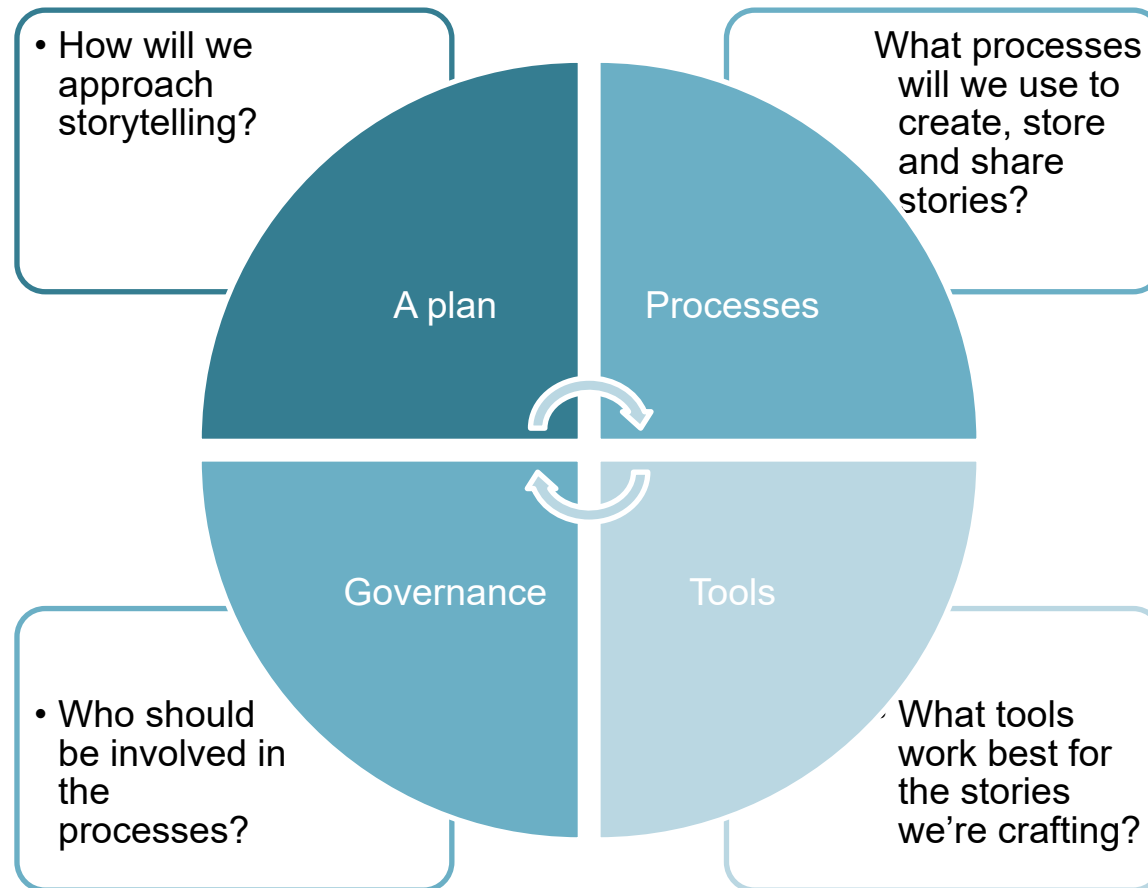
- 1. Storytelling capacity:** A story bank enables you to have a consistent stream of information that can be organized and developed into a story
- 2. Team engagement:** It allows people to take ownership over parts of the process and directs people to specific areas that need support as opposed to general ones
- 3. Repurposing content:** The “bank” gives you more options to increase your content output and use a variety of formats to share

The great thing about story banks is that once you develop them, you don't have to develop them again. Instead, you tweak them according to your goals and needs.

When you build infrastructure that works for everyone, you win every time!

How do I make my story bank?

A story bank works like any other system: It has parts, processes, tools and techniques that serve singular or multiple purposes. A basic story bank consists of:



Chapter 2: Step-by-step guide

Now that you have a better understanding of what a story bank is and why it's important, it's time to make your story bank. Remember: All stories are not made equally; they each serve different purposes. With a story bank, you can choose the right story that best captures whatever you want to communicate. Use this step-by-step to start building the well-oiled machine that will eventually become your story bank.



[Click here to set up a call with me](#) and let's go through your story bank system together. I can assess what you already have and answer any questions you might have.

Step 1: Define your purpose

Before you do anything, define the purpose of your story bank. You want to be clear about what purpose the story bank is serving in your organization and why that's important. Otherwise, the end result is a story bank that functions exactly like a literal bank, a transactional machine rather than as a system.



To define your purpose, ask the right questions. But don't stop there – take your answers and further clarify them with clarifying questions to truly understand where you want to go. Here are some questions to get you started:



Starter questions

What are our goals for the story bank? Why?

Why do we need to create a story bank?

How can we get key stakeholders on board with establishing a story bank?

Clarifying questions

What problems is your story bank addressing?

What does our team need to know to support the establishment of a story bank?

What kinds of stories do we want to collect?

Step 2: Assess your capacity

Once you determine the purpose of your story bank, you now need to assess your organization's capacity. The purpose of doing this is to find any knowledge gaps, additional needs and/or strengths that you already have in order to start from a realistic place that is within your capacity.

Without acknowledging your capacity, you risk building a story bank system you and your team cannot agree on and, by default, a system that just doesn't work for you.



To assess your capacity, jot down information about the things on the next few pages. But don't stop there – be specific and name your needs so that you can prioritize them accordingly.



Capacity assessment

Current state

Budget

Resources

Capacity assessment

Time

Barriers

Other

Step 3: Plan your storytelling system

Once you assess your organization's capacity, you can start planning your storytelling system and how it will work. Here is where you figure out what you need your story bank to do and what capacity you have to achieve that.

Without defining these parameters, you risk major inconsistency among your stories, which can have negative implications for other operations within your organization.



To build your system, I've created a simple fillable matrix for each part of your story bank system. Additionally, I have a list of handy guiding questions you can use to fill in each quadrant of each matrix as accurately and specifically as possible.

Note: It may help to tweak or add your own questions. If so, do so!



Guiding questions



Personnel: Who will be involved? What are the roles and responsibilities of each person?



Guidelines: What guidelines and/or processes do we need to collect stories? What process will we use to vet the stories we collect?



Training: What are the present knowledge gaps among our team regarding collecting stories?



Parameters/Formats/Platforms: What are the parameters of the story (e.g., length, grammar, format etc.)? What are the appropriate formats for the collected information and stories? Which platforms are best suited for our stories?



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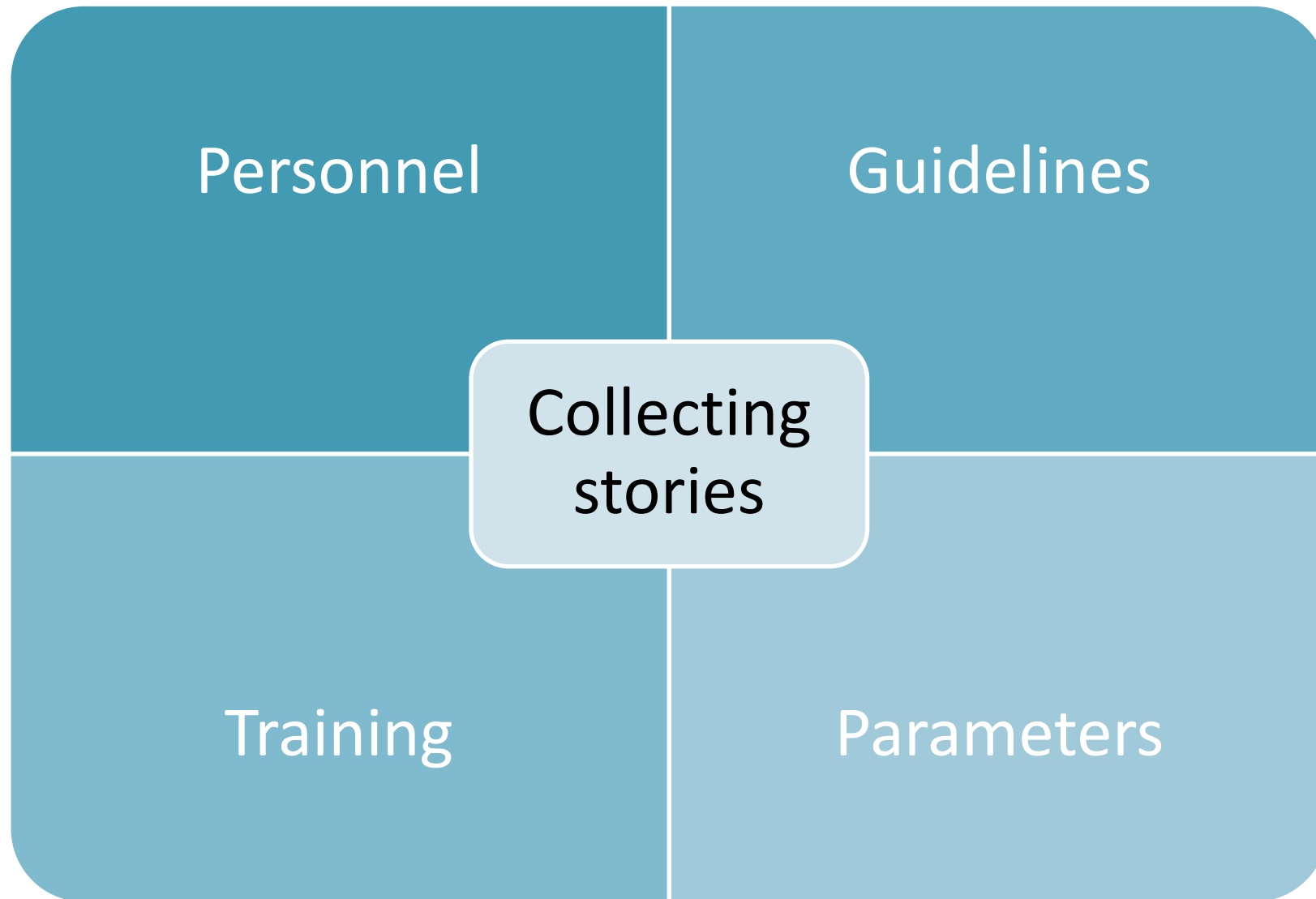
Part 1: Collecting stories


This stage includes brainstorming ideas, choosing interviewees and conducting interviews. Your task here is to define the approaches you'll take to all of those moving parts. By doing so, you are ensuring that anyone on your team who has a story can guarantee that it will be consistent with your organization's identity, brand and values.

Remember – you are not collecting complete stories that are ready for publishing; you are collecting stories from people that require safe handling. Therefore, you want to think about how to do this work because it's likely the work that will be the most repetitive throughout this entire process.



QUICK TIP: Take a look at your editorial calendar and/or schedule. Consider any opportunities you have to collect specific kinds of stories.



 Guiding questions

Part 2. Developing stories

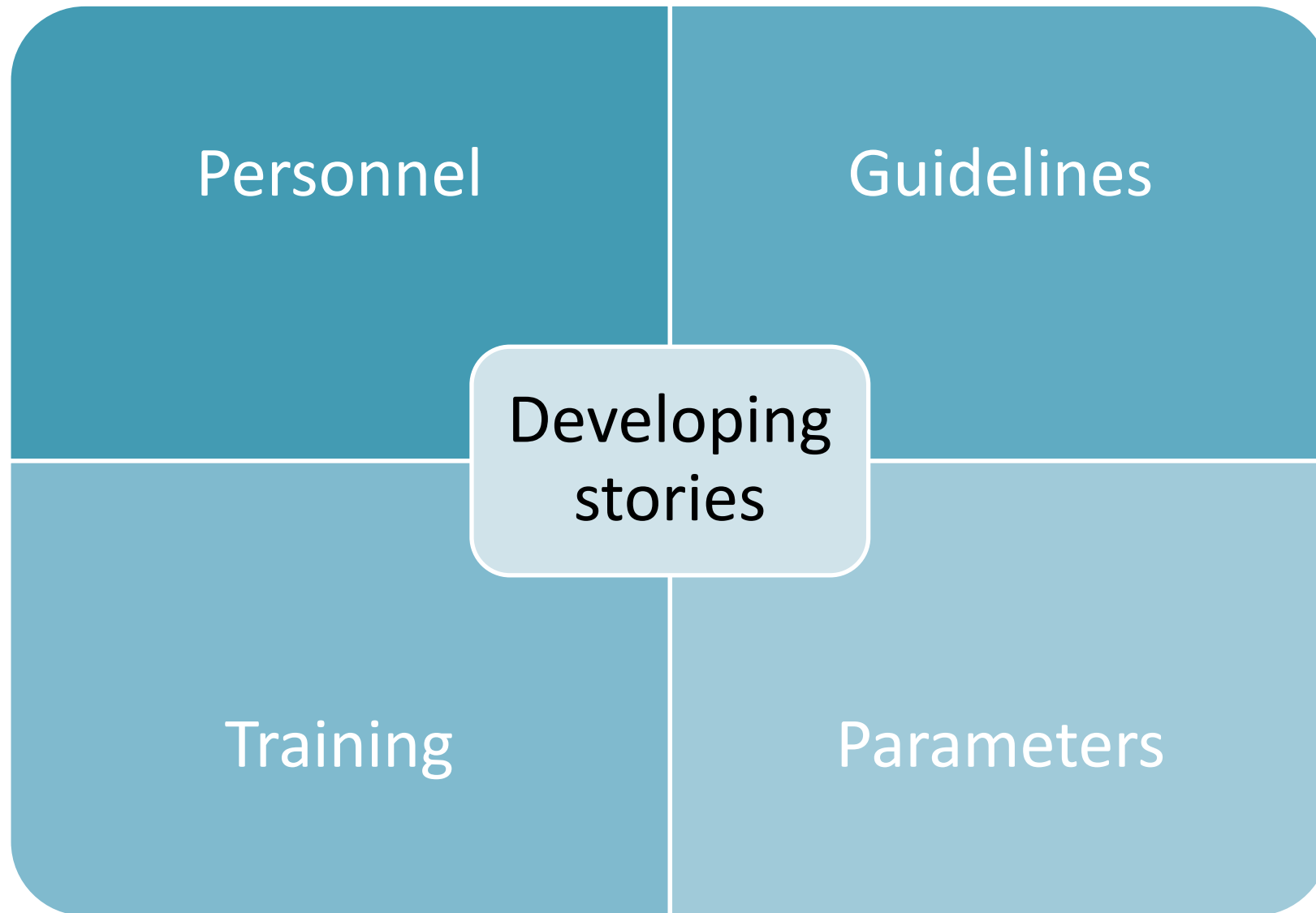
This stage includes the crafting the story. Your task here is to define the processes you'll use to shape the story, including who will do the shaping. By doing so, you are clarifying how your team should go about handling these stories.


Remember – any story you receive can be taken in multiple directions. But the last thing you want to do is remove the essence of the story from the story. Therefore, you want sound processes that reassure the owners of the stories that their stories are in good hands.

Be intentional about how these processes align with what your organization represents. They should represent a standard of work your team and stakeholders should always expect.



QUICK TIP: Consider any permissions you need from your storytellers to change any parts of a story.

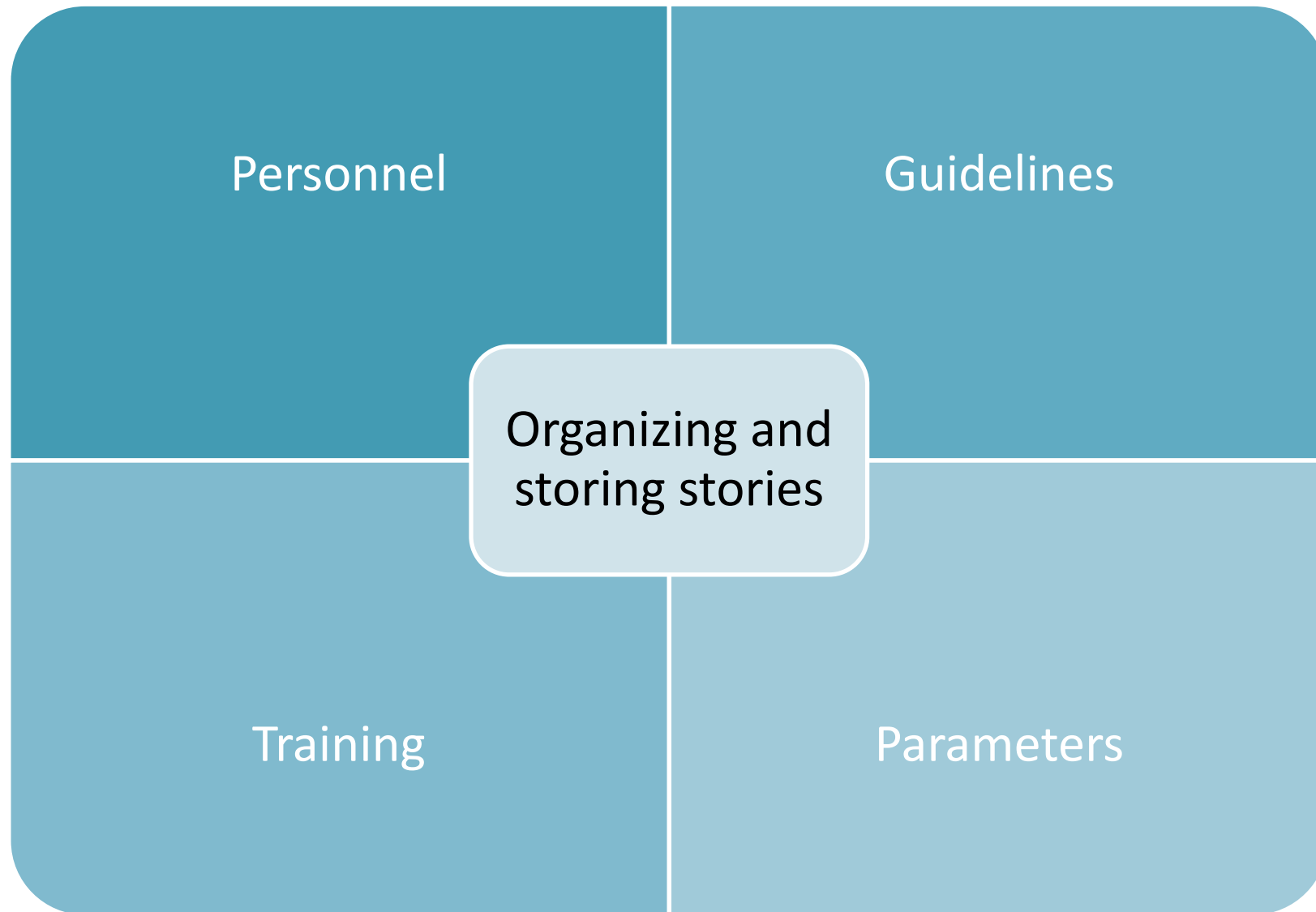



 Guiding questions

Part 3: Organizing and storing stories

This stage includes both organizing and storing stories (consider both complete and incomplete stories). Your task here is to establish ways of organizing stories and then storing them in ways that makes them easy to find and identify. For example, you can organize your stories by length, theme, platform or even type of story. By doing so, you are saving yourself a headache.

The last thing you want to do is put a bunch of unfinished stories, files of multiple formats and any accompanying assets in folders scattered across your drives, clouds, desktops etc. Whatever you decide to do should align with the tools you choose, which you'll be doing at the next step.



 Guiding questions

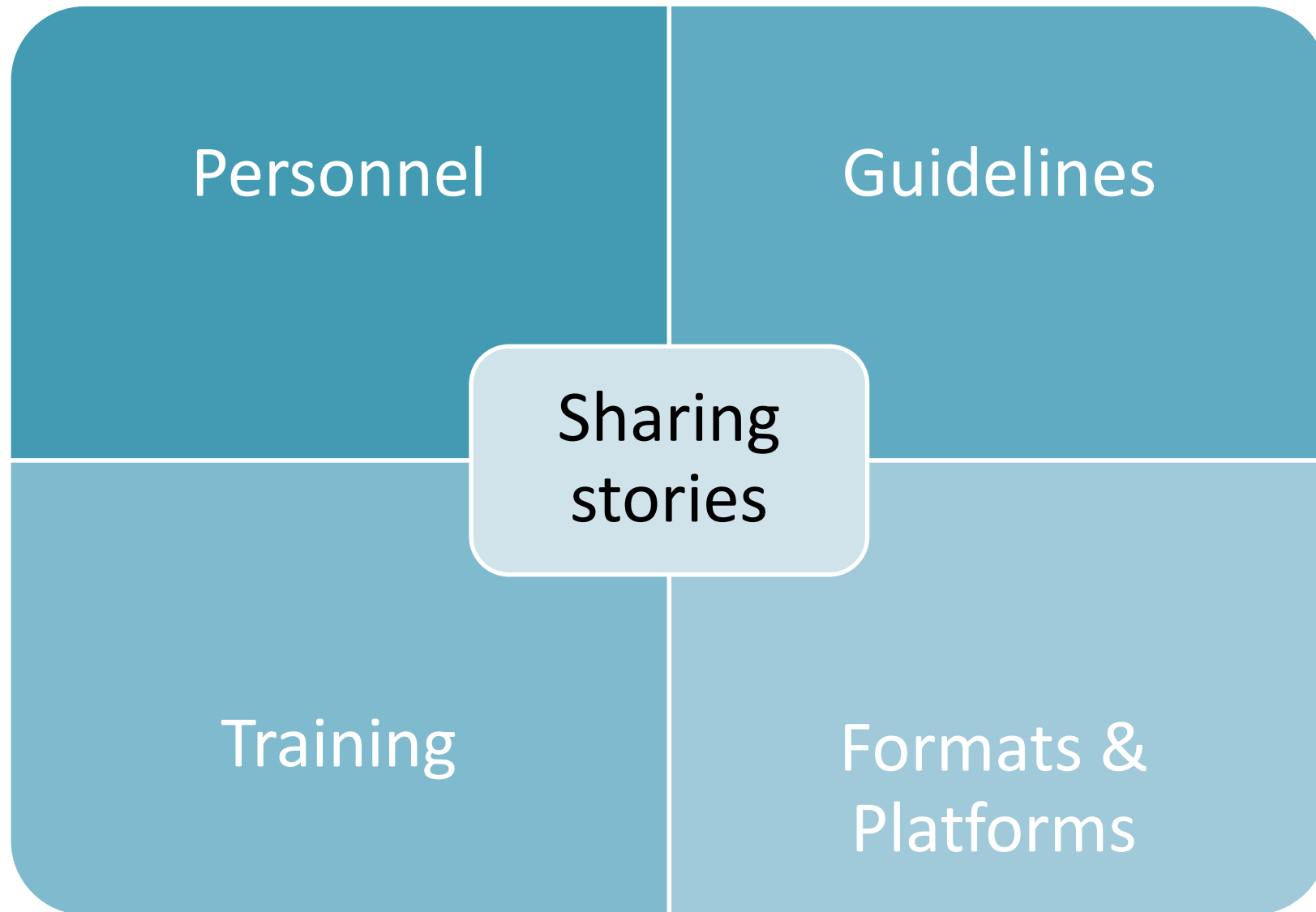
Part 4: Sharing stories


This stage is all about sharing stories externally. Your task here is to determine the best ways to share completed stories. Whatever methods you choose should align with the tools you choose later on. By doing so, you are providing your team with multiple options that fulfil whatever purpose they have for the stories.

Quick link



[Why do stories matter?](#)



 Guiding questions

Step 4: Choose your tools

Once you build your story bank system, you can choose tools that will best support each part of your system and/or your entire system. Here is where you revisit your capacity assessment and consider what already works for you.

While you can and perhaps should choose new tools, I do advise looking around you first because it isn't necessary to reinvent the wheel. If Microsoft Excel, for example, works for your team, figure out how it could work for the system.



QUICK TIP: Make sure whatever tools you choose have search capacity; make it easier for your team to find stories and information.



Choose your story bank tools

To choose your tools, I've created a fillable chart to help you choose the right tools to support each part of your system and/or your entire system. In Appendix A, there is a short list of tools to consider, as well; feel free to glance over those to get you started.

Tool name	Purpose of tool	Best suited for what story format	Previous experience with tool	Third party integration (Y/N)

Chapter 3: Conclusion

Storytelling is an approach that requires care and intention. If your nonprofit organization team wants to improve their storytelling capacity, a story bank is the way to go.

Creating one can seem like a daunting task, especially if you're just getting started. However, it doesn't need to be that way.

Remember, the best kind of story bank is the one that works with the capacity you have right now. You don't need to use all the tools, techniques and processes that everyone else is using. Do what's best for you to start building your capacity and stop the scramble for stories in its tracks.

About me

I'm Jean – a nonprofit program coordinator-turned-nonprofit-copywriter based in Toronto, Canada. I write copy, crafts stories and designs storytelling strategies for the sector. Essentially, I help nonprofits and B2B companies that craft technology solutions for nonprofits create compelling content that converts, communicates impact, amplifies leadership and wins more funding. My specialty is storytelling.

With 10+ years in the non-profit sector, creating marketing content and copy for organizations like Surrey Place, Story Planet and Laidlaw Foundation, my approach to copywriting is unique yet simple: great processes yield great copy. As a naturally curious person, I pride myself on asking you great questions that strengthen our collaboration and set those great processes in motion. Ultimately, I aim to give you fresh, relevant copy that both piques curiosity and converts.



[Click here to set up a call with me](#) and let's go through your story bank system together. I can assess what you already have and answer any questions you might have.



Appendix A: Tools for story banking

1. Trello
2. Microsoft Excel
3. Miro
4. Calendly
5. Asana
6. Skyword
7. Airtable
8. Monday