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Introduction

The Alaska Health Education Library Project offers the Alaska Success Story program as a way for primary prevention and health promotion professionals to develop stories to share the results of their work. This interactive tool provides guidance on how to write effective stories, as well as the opportunity to have the success stories reviewed before being posted on the AHELP website.

What is a success story?

A success story is a narrative, usually one or two pages long, that highlights the achievements and progress of a program or activity. A success story can be written at any point in the course of an initiative, and provides an effective way to educate stakeholders about the outcomes and results that you are achieving.

Why you might want to use success stories

A success story can be a very important tool for capturing the accomplishments of your efforts. Specific reasons for developing and sharing success stories include:

1. Putting a “face” to the data.
2. Capturing progress over time.
3. Educating decision makers about the impact of your program.
4. Demonstrating that funds are being well spent.
5. Making the target population aware of the program.
6. Mobilizing needed resources.
7. Sharing best practices with similar programs and efforts.
8. Attracting new partners for collaboration and alignment.

Success stories based on the phase of the program

People often think that success stories can only be written at the end of a project, but that isn’t the case. They can be an effective way to capture and promote progress as it is occurring.

1. **Upstream** success stories can be written in the earlier phases of the project. Although the outcomes are yet to be achieved, success stories are a way to verify your program description, highlight partnerships, document policy changes that are occurring because of the program, and/or illustrate whom the program is serving.
2. **Midstream** success stories are an effective tool when the program is up and running. You may write this type of story to educate your stakeholders on your progress, as well as share stories or examples of early changes. These types of success stories may spotlight
movement within the program based on what you are learning. Process data, as well as immediate outcome data can be used to document the progress being made.

3. **Downstream** success stories occur near the end and/or after the program or project is completed, and focus on how things have changed for the people your program serves. At this stage, stories should provide outcome data, as well as a description of the implications of those changes.

**Instructions for Using AHELP’s Success Story Functions**

While anyone using the AHELP website is able to see the public stories without developing a user account, people interested in using AHELP to write, review and share their success stories need to create a user account.

**Log in**

Starting from either the home page or the success story tab drop-down menu, click to “My Stories”. This takes you to the log in page.

1. **You must establish a user account** by registering as a user. Click on the Register link to set up your initial user account. This takes you to the registration form, where you will be asked to provide the following required information:
   a. Username that you develop.
   b. Email address.
   c. Your full name, capitalizing the first letter of each word.
   d. A password of your choice.
   e. Confirmation of your password.
Your account becomes active when you click the “register” button. You will receive a confirmation email telling you that your user account has been established.

2. **Log in to an existing account**: Once you have established your user account, you can log in at any time from the “Log in” page by entering your user name and password.

3. **Forgotten user name or password**: The Log in page has links in the event you forget your user name or password. You will be asked for your email address and for your user name if you are requesting your password. You will receive a notice that an email has been sent to your email address with a password reset link.
Creating a story

Before entering your story into the AHELP tool, you are encouraged to write it in a Word document to cut and paste into the AHELP Success Story text boxes once you are pleased with the results. Here are some basic pointers that are important to keep in mind as you are constructing your story.

1. **Follow the 80/20 Rule.** Eighty percent of creating a good story is planning and research. Begin with your ending in mind. Identify facts, data and sources to document your information.

2. **Understand your audience.** Use simple, straightforward language, and avoid jargon and public health language. Define technical terms, and clarify acronyms (see [Mini-Style Guide](#) in this document for guidance on using acronyms).

3. **Embrace the human-interest factor,** providing an emotional hook to make your reader care about the topic. Engage the reader early on, starting with your title and the introductory sentence. Consider using a central character and anecdotes to weave throughout the story. This increases the reader’s recall potential.

4. **Create a strong title** that grabs attention and makes a good first impression. Clearly communicate what your story is about, but make the title a slight teaser. Use the KISS Principle – Keep It Simple and Short, and make sure the story delivers what the title promises.

5. **Be concise** and avoid wordiness, run-on sentences and broad statements. Use an active voice as opposed to passive language. Use good grammar and a consistent style. Proofread the next day or later. Here’s an example:

   - **Before** – Our state’s overall seat belt usage rate was 52.4% and the child safety seat usage rate was 64.8% in the year 2000, far below the national average. Overall, more children aged 0—14 are killed by unintentional injuries than by all childhood diseases combined.
   - **After** – More children aged 0 to 14 are killed by unintentional injuries than by all childhood diseases combined

6. **Focus on evidence-based strategies** and briefly describe how you have adapted them to meet the needs of your community. Tested approaches and programs increase credibility, as well as increase your program’s opportunities for success.
7. **Data** are and important to add gravitas to your work. Include one or two data items, using it to help the reader understand the context. Use social math, metaphors, and data comparisons to describe the extent of the problem, and the results of your work.

8. **Quotes capture attention**, and can be an effective way to personalize the story. They can add life and spark to your story. Choose a meaningful, brief quote.

**Entering your story into the AHELP Success Story tool**

You can use the Create Story page as your guide by clicking the New Story tab from the drop down menu. You will be prompted to enter your user name and password if you are not already logged into the system. Click the “Create New Story” button.

1. **Create the title.** You will be prompted to name your story. You want your title to be descriptive and enticing. This is the “first impression” people will have of your story. The criteria used to assess the title include:
   a. Does the title capture your attention and make you want to read further?
   b. Does the title avoid acronyms?
   c. Does the title contain a verb to denote action?
   Click create to get to the Create Story Version #1 page.

2. **Narrative.** The narrative section of has three components consisting of the Public Health Problem, Taking Action (intervention), and Impact. Each section is set up to accept up to 1500 characters, or approximately 150-175 words. This encourages you to be succinct and concise in your writing. Each section has a series of questions to help guide you on elements that will increase the effectiveness of your story. They are noted under each component.
   a. **Public Health Problem.** You will want to keep the following criteria in mind as you write the problem statement. Does the problem statement:
      i. Have a strong lead sentence introducing public health data?
      ii. Provide state, regional, or local information about the issue?
      iii. Tie the health burden, training burden, or degree of threat to a cost burden?
      iv. Specify the affected population?
      v. Avoid wordiness, passive language, and grammatical errors?
      vi. Make a clear, concise statement about a single issue?
   b. **Taking Action (Intervention).** This section is dedicated to your description of the actual intervention. You will want to:
      i. Have a strong lead sentence that transitions the Public Health Program section to the Taking Action section.
      ii. Describe how any evidence-based strategies were used as a foundation for this initiative.
      iii. Identify who performed the intervention and any key partnerships with government, community, business, and voluntary organizations.
iv. Identify both where and when the intervention occurred.

v. Identify the essential steps taken to carry out an effective intervention.

vi. Avoid wordiness, passive language, grammatical errors, and use bullet points to outline the steps.

c. Impact. The impact should do the following:

i. Briefly, wrap up what happened in the target audience as a result of the intervention.

ii. Give specific outcomes using bullet points. (e.g., money saved, change in health status, numbers impacted.)

iii. Avoid broad, sweeping statements. (e.g., noticeable increase in healthy eating habits, a significant amount of money was saved.)

iv. Provide conclusions that effectively wrap up the story, including future plans.

d. Footnotes. Although footnotes are not mandatory, it is important that any sources such as surveillance data need to be footnoted. Footnotes can be manually formatted within the text box. A reference on how to write footnotes is located in How to Format Bibliography and Footnotes of this manual.

e. Success Story Author. Please provide the following information on who wrote the story:

i. Name and title.

ii. Department or affiliation.

iii. Email address.

iv. Phone number.

Example:
Jane Doe, Public Health Advisor
Division of Physical Activity and Nutrition
State Department of Health and Wellness
jdoe@xyz.com
(123) 456-7890

f. Quote. A quote is a great way to personalize the story by helping to put a “face” on the information. This can provide a voice of those affected by the intervention effort, or answer the question, “How has this made a difference, or how will this make a difference?” Be sure you have approval from the person being quoted. Keep a record of the approval in your files.

Specific instructions for the quote are:

i. Enclose the quote in quotation marks.

ii. Include full name, title, and organization or place.

Sample format: "Starting good choices at an early age—like being safe, eating healthy foods and exercising—will make my students’ lives a lot easier when they are teenagers and adults."
g. **Create.** Once you have the story entered, click the create button. Provided you have entered in all of the required fields within the allowable character numbers, you will receive a notice that your story has been successfully submitted.

**SUCCESS:** We have successfully received your submission. Thanks!

**Whats Next?**
While your Success Story has been successfully submitted, it is not yet viewable by the public. Here are the steps you will need to take in order to get your story out there:

1. **Finalize your revision:**
   - Go look at your revision and double-check that everything looks okay.
   - You can edit your revision as much as you want until you hit 'Finalize', then it will be locked for editing and ready for the next step.
   - Once finalized, you can choose to make your revision available to others for review (see below).

2. **Request reviews from your peers:**
   - Send your peers a link to review your story. You can find this link on the revision details page located [here](#).
   - Make your Revision available for review on the Review a Story page by setting the status to 'Available for Review'.
   - **Note:** Only one revision per story can be made available for review on the Review a Story page.

3. **Request the story be made public:**
   - Once you have several positive reviews and are ready to have the story made publicly available, send a request to [HelpRequest@alaska.gov](mailto:HelpRequest@alaska.gov)

You will now find your story listed under the “My Stories” tab.

**Editing versus revising your story**

You have two ways to make changes to your story; by editing an existing version or by creating a new version.

1. **Open the story you want to change by opening “My Stories”, where you will see a list of all the stories you are developing.**

2. **Click on the title of the story you wish to work on. You will then see a list of all versions of the story that you have created, listed by version number.**

3. **You will have several options for each revision; to view the story, edit the story, finalize the story or delete it.**

4. **You also have the option to start a new version. This will open the most recent version of the story in the working screen, allowing you to make whatever changes you would need.**

5. **The difference between editing and revising a story is that the edits, when completed, replace the original text. A revision, however, shows up as a new version of the story, allowing you the option of maintaining the original version.**
Viewing your story

You have the option of both viewing your story as it will appear on the AHELP website, as well as download it into a PDF at any time during the writing process. From the “My Stories” page, click on the title, and then click on view. The Download PDF is in the upper right hand side of the story.

Finalizing your story

Once you are satisfied, you can finalize your story by clicking the title page on “My Stories”. The Finalize button will lock the story into its final version, which means you are no longer able to edit or revise that particular version the story.

You then have the options to view the story, make it available for review, request that the story be made public or delete the story. You still have the option of creating a new version of the story.

It is advised that you have at least one person review your story before you request it be made public.

Success story reviews

Once a story is made available for review, it appears on the “Review a Story” list of the Success Story tab dropdown box. Only registered users are allowed to review stories. It is suggested you ask one or two people to review the story to solicit specific feedback.

Once the reviewer(s) log in and clicks the “Review a Story” page, a list of stories ready for review appears. The reviewer has the options to begin reviewing a new story, or go back and edit a story they have previously reviewed.

The review criteria are a series of yes-no questions for each section of the story, followed by a text box to record suggestions for improvement. The criteria are as follows:

Does the Title:

1. Capture your attention and make you want to read further?
2. Avoid acronyms?
3. Contain a verb?

Does the Public Health Problem Statement:

1. Provide an emotional hook in opening sentences, in addition to public health data?
2. Have a strong lead sentence introducing public health data?
3. Provide state, regional, or local information about the issue?
4. Tie the heath burden, training burden, or degree of threat to a cost burden?
5. Specify the affected population
6. Avoid wordiness, passive language, and grammatical errors?
7. Make a clear, concise statement about a single issue?

Does the Taking Action Statement:

1. Have a strong lead sentence that transitions from the Issue section to the Intervention section?
2. Describe how any evidenced-based strategies were used as a foundation for this initiative?
3. Identify who performed the intervention and any key partnerships with government, community, business, and voluntary organizations?
4. Identify both where and when the intervention occurred?
5. Identify the essential steps taken to carry out an effective intervention?
6. Avoid wordiness, passive language, and grammatical errors, and use bullet points to outline the steps?

Does the Impact Statement:

1. Briefly, wrap up what happened as a result of the Intervention?
2. Give specific outcomes using bullet points? (e.g., money saved, change in health status, numbers impacted.)
3. Avoid broad, sweeping statements? (e.g., noticeable increase in healthy eating habits, significant amount of money was saved)
4. Provide conclusions that effectively wrap-up the story, including future plans?

Terms and Formatting: Does the Success Story:

1. Use terms that are clearly understood by a non-public health audience?
2. Avoid public-health industry jargon?
3. Have information in the appropriate sections (Issue, Intervention, and Impact)?
4. Contain footnotes that are numbered and in an appropriate format?
5. Use indented bullets rather than dense paragraphs?
6. List contact information?

General: Does the Success Story:

1. Read like a story?
2. Contains a quote?
3. Present information in a concise, clear manner?
4. Provide data sources for any information presented as fact or as an evidence-based strategy?
5. Provide the author’s information including name, title, department or affiliation, email address and phone number?

Once completed, you are able to read the review by going back to your story in the “My Stories” page. The version that was reviewed will have a text box below it saying who reviewed it, the date of the review, and a score of one to five stars. By clicking onto that text box, you will be able to open the review, and look at how the reviewer rated your story, as well as any suggestions they may have made to improve the story. **THIS IS NOT INTENDED TO SERVE AS A “GRADE” of your story, but give to you feedback with which to improve the readability and impact of your story. You are encouraged to try to get a minimum of three stars, before requesting that your story is made public. You do this by creating a new version of the story.**

**Finalizing a story for publication**

Once you are comfortable with your story, you can submit it for posting on the public AHELP site. The AHELP Administrator will do a final review, and will notify you once the story has been posted.
Mini-Style Guide

Abbreviations/Acronyms

- Define on first mention in main text. Use abbreviation/acronym for all subsequent uses. Don’t include abbreviations or acronyms for terms used only once.
- The introductory article a or an should match the sound of the abbreviation or acronym.
- Use U.S. as an adjective and United States as a noun.

Age Groups

- Okay (for this publication) to use terms such as adults, youth, adolescents, or infants without defining the specific age range unless you think readers will be confused.
- Use older adults instead of the elderly.
- The style for indicating ages is children aged 2–4 years and adults aged 65 years or older. It’s also okay to drop the word “years” and to use 17-year-old girl.

Bullets and Numbers in lists

- Use bullets rather than numbers for short untitled items that are set off from the text.
  - Capitalize the first word of each bulleted item and put a period at the end, even if the item is only one or two words long.
  - To introduce a list (bulleted or numbered), use a colon only at the end of an independent clause.
- If you use numbered items in a sentence, use both the opening and closing parentheses with the number. Example: “CDC suggests that public health departments (1) assess the problem, (2) report it to CDC, and (3) alert the public.”

Capitalization

- For proper names, titles, and headings, capitalize the first letter of each word, except for articles and conjunctions or prepositions that are four or fewer letters.
- The following words are not proper nouns and should not be capitalized: state, federal, tribe, territory, county, or local.

Number Ranges

- Use en dashes (–) with number ranges. Use the percent symbol with both numbers.
- 25%–50% 2001–2006 75–85 years
- When you introduce a number range with a preposition, you need a joining conjunction: “from... to” or “from... through,” or you can use “during” instead. Avoid “between... and” constructions because they usually don’t represent your time frame accurately.
  - Between 1999 and 2001 = 1 year
  - From 1999 to 2001 = 2 years
  - From 1999 through 2001 = 3 years
  - During 1999–2001 = 3 years
Numerals vs. Spelled-out Numbers

- Spell out numbers one through nine. Use numerals for numbers 10 and higher. Use comma with numbers 1,000 or higher.
- Use the percentage symbol with numerals: 40%.
- Use numerals with money, measurements, and time.
- Use numerals when you have a mix of numbers in one sentence, such as 1, 15, and 100.

Preferred Usage

- **compose, comprise**: *Compose* means to total, form, to go together, to make up (an object); always takes the passive voice. *Comprise* means to include, to contain, to be made up of (always takes the active voice; do not say is comprised of). The whole comprises the parts; the parts do not comprise the whole.

- **continual, continuous**: *Continual* means to recur at regular and frequent intervals; *continuous* means to go on without pause or interruption.

- **due to**: *Due to* should not be used in place of owing to, because of, or on account of. A good rule of thumb is to use *due to* with forms of the verb “to be.”
  - Example: His success was due to [caused by] hard work and great talent. His success, all due to [caused by] hard work, was phenomenal. He succeeded because of [not due to] his hard work and great talent.

- **e.g., i.e.**: Use *e.g.* in place of for example. Use *i.e.* in place of that is. Use comma after both.

- **help**: Use *help*, not *assist with*.

- **insure, ensure, assure**: *Insure* means to guarantee life or properties against risk (e.g., to underwrite; to give, take, or procure insurance). *Ensure* means to make certain or guarantee. *Assure* means to make safe, to give confidence to.

- **leading**: Use *leading*, not *number one*. Example: “The community’s leading health concern was underage drinking.”

- **more than**: Use *more than*, not *over*, with numbers. Example: “More than 30 people participated in the program.”

- **since, because**: Using *since* when you mean *because* can create ambiguity (causal vs. temporal).
  - Example: Since they researched that topic, they found out more about it.

  Does this sentence mean, “*Because* they researched the topic, they found out more about it”? Or does it mean, “Since the time when they researched that topic, they found out more about it”?

- **statistical terms**: Make sure you use statistical terms—such as *percentage, prevalence, or rate*—correctly and consistently.

- **teens, teenagers**: Okay to use *teens* and *teenagers* interchangeably.

- **use**: Use the word *use*, not *utilize*.

- **while, although**: *Although* is more precise when you mean “in spite of the fact that.” *While* also has a temporal meaning of “during the time that.”

Proper Names

- **Check all proper names**—such as the names of departments, programs, and campaigns and the titles of publications—for accuracy and completeness.
Use *italics* for publication titles only. For the names of departments, programs, campaigns, conferences, etc., capitalize the first letter of each word (except for articles and conjunctions or prepositions that are four or fewer letters). Use quotation marks for the title of a symposium.

**Racial and Ethnic Groups**

- Capitalize Hispanic, but not white or black.
- Hyphenate the word “non-Hispanic.”
- Use white, not Caucasian.
- Okay to use black and African American interchangeably or to allow grantees to dictate which term they prefer.
- Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant FY 2012 Success Story Book Tool Kit *Revised 10-15-2011*
- Official U.S. racial and ethnic groups are white, black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. None of these terms is hyphenated as nouns or adjectives.

**Writing Tips**

- Use active verbs. Avoid weak verbs such as “engage” and forms of “to be” and “have.”
- Limit use of acronyms and jargon.
- Whenever possible, give data to support claims of program effectiveness.
- Provide appropriate context for data. If you indicate a change over time, you must give the timeframe. Example: “The percentage of people who get regular physical activity increased from 35% in 2000 to 50% in 2008.”
- *People* take action, not objects.

Correct: County officials studied the problem.
Incorrect: The county studied the problem.
How To Format Bibliography and Footnotes


Book with one author
Footnote:
1. Wendy Doniger, Splitting the Difference (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 64.
Bibliography:

Book with two authors
Footnote:
Bibliography:

Book with more than three authors
Footnote:
Bibliography:

Editor, translator, or compiler
Footnote:
Bibliography:

Chapter or other part of a book
Footnote:
Bibliography:

Chapter of an edited volume originally published elsewhere (common for primary sources)
Footnotes


Bibliography:

Preface, foreword, introduction, and similar parts of a book

Footnote:

Bibliography:

Book published in both printed and electronic forms (N.B.: be sure that it is clear which form was consulted; however, there is no need to indicate “paper” in a citation to a traditional bound book)

Footnote:

Bibliography:

Journal article

Footnote:

Bibliography:

Popular magazine article

Footnote:

Bibliography:

Newspaper article

Footnote:
10. William S. Niederkorn, “A Scholar Recants on His ‘Shakespeare’ Discovery,”

Bibliography:

*Chicago style is for newspaper citations to be made in running text, not in parenthetical notes:*
As William Niederkorn noted in a New York Times article on June 20, 2002, . . .

**Book review**

Footnote:

Bibliography:

**Personal communications**

Footnote:

Bibliography:

*It is also possible to cite an email message in running text:*
In an e-mail message to the author on October 31, 2002, John Doe revealed that . . .

**Websites**

General Information: To document a file available for viewing and downloading via the World Wide Web, provide the following information:
- Author's name
- Title of document, in quotation marks
- Title of complete work (if relevant), in italics or underlined
- Date of publication or last revision
- URL, in angle brackets
- Date of access, in parentheses

**Personal site**

Footnote:

Bibliography:

**Professional site**

Footnote:

Bibliography:
An online book may be the electronic text of part or all of the printed book, or a book-length document available only on the Internet (e.g., a work of hypertext).

Footnote:

Article in an electronic journal (ejournal)
Footnote:

Article in an electronic magazine (ezine)
Footnote:

Newspaper article
Footnote:

Review
Footnote:

Government publication
Footnote: