

COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE Sharing the story of government's impact

Your experience as a public servant or as a recipient of federal services or benefits gives you a unique perspective on how the federal government impacts the communities you serve and belong to. The Partnership is working on numerous activities to educate and engage the public on the federal government's role in people's lives, and to show how cuts to federal personnel, grants and infrastructure impact individuals and their communities.

As an expert in your field and leader in your community, you can contribute valuable insights to these efforts. People in your community may only now be seeing how cuts to government are affecting them—but you can help them understand the deeper, lasting consequences.

<u>That's why your voice matters</u>. No one understands the importance of your work better than you do. Your stories equip people with the information they need to understand what is at risk and can empower them to take action.

Stories to engage and educate may include:

- Personal accounts from federal workers about the tangible impact of their service
- Stories of specific harms inflicted by cuts to government programs, funding or staff
- Reflections on what is lost when public service and federal programs are weakened, politicized or hollowed out

This communications guide is intended to help individuals and groups craft and amplify the stories of federal employees, offering resources and examples to help bring these narratives to the forefront of public understanding.

"Too often, public servants believe their work is too ordinary to matter, but these are the moments that hold communities together...Telling these stories isn't about seeking credit, it's about helping others understand what service looks like and why it matters." - A conversation with author Casey Cep



Why your story is important

Many communities around the country are tuning in to decisions made by elected officials in Washington, D.C. However, they struggle to understand how decisions made at the federal level will affect their daily lives.

When you share what your work accomplished and who it impacted, or how federal services, benefits or funding makes a difference, you're clarifying the work of the federal government and inspiring people to share their own experiences and support a more effective government.



The Partnership for Public Service's research shows that these types of stories are compelling and relevant. Did you know:



Most Americans oppose the Trump administration's firing of career federal employees, and 64% say they are worried about the loss of experience.



Americans across the partisan divide believe that an <u>effective government and</u> <u>competent civil service</u> are important to a strong democracy.



Despite continued criticism, most people support civil servants, with <u>55%</u> saying they have a favorable opinion of federal employees.



In focus group experiments, showing participants videos featuring federal employees <u>improved their perceptions of government</u>.



How to write your story

Storytelling prompts for former federal employees

- What drew you to public service?
- What are the most important public impacts of your role and work?
- Can you share a specific example or story that illustrates your impact?
- What is one thing about your work or the federal workforce that you wish more people understood?



Storytelling prompts for recipients of federal services

- How have recent or proposed grant or funding cuts, staffing reductions or agency closures affected your ability to carry out your work for your community?
- What does your community stand to lose if these harms are not reversed? What will the impact be?
- How have delays or disruptions affected critical services that you or your neighbors rely on—like health care, disaster response, Social Security, veterans' services or public safety programs?
- When did a federal worker or agency deliver a service above and beyond for you? What difference did that make in your life?
- What loss of federal expertise or talent have you witnessed that has made it harder for government to deliver?
- What programs have been weakened or delayed where you live? What regulations or protections have been rolled back?

Impact story: K from Nevada

2/2

"My mom recently started Social Security, and she had a slightly complicated case due to a payout from a land-grant university. She went through a few hiccups to get the correct Social Security rate, but she was fortunate to find a great case manager that caught a very obvious detail that ensured she would receive her duly owed check, with \$500 per month more than the original estimate. The extra money gave her more confidence..."



Key elements of effective storytelling

Set a clear objective

Every effective story begins with a <u>clear objective</u>. Before you tell your story, identify who your audience is and what you want them to know, feel and do. Your story is not just about sharing what happened—it's about moving people toward action.





Consider this formula to guide your focus: Who must do what to achieve what goal?

Story sharing example:

As a working parent, I've leaned on the Aspire Afterschool Learning program in Arlington, Virginia, to keep my child safe, fed and learning while at work. When my daughter started at Aspire, she was testing behind grade level. Now she's advanced tremendously, thanks to Aspire's targeted tutoring and support.

The AmeriCorps leaders went above and beyond to make sure the kids in our community were taken care of. It's the only free after-school program in our country! And yet here we are trying to raise money to fill the gaps the federal government made when they revoked AmeriCorps funding.

If you're a parent, teacher or community member whose family depends on after-school programs, contact Congress now. Tell them that cutting AmeriCorps funding weakens the communities that working families depend on.

Learn more about how federal funding cuts are affecting Aspire.



Key elements of effective storytelling

Use narrative framing

Once you've identified your audience and clarified what you need them to know, feel and do, propose a solution that speaks directly to their concerns and values.

Your storytelling should create a clear, coherent picture that helps your audience understand the stakes and see themselves within the story. Your goal is to inform, engage, motivate and ultimately mobilize your audience. To do that, think about your audience's everyday experiences, goals and aspirations. You'll get people's attention and inspire action when you show how an issue affects their families or their communities.



Consider this formula when developing your narrative:

Goal + people + problem + solution

Story sharing example:

When Sgt. Andrew Worrall responds to overdose calls in Ashland, Missouri, he is not only a first responder, but he is also connecting people to recovery resources and reducing the stigma that keeps families suffering in silence. That's because specialized training is made possible by a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant, which is now facing elimination.

This federal program has transformed how Missouri handles the overdose crisis. Without this lifesaving program, Missouri health leaders will have to start to triage and ration supplies to figure out who needs it the most, forcing impossible choices about who gets access to a \$30 naloxone kit that prevents a \$3,000+ emergency room visit.

If you're a former SAMHSA staff member, a state health official, a recovery advocate or someone whose life was changed by access to these services, share this story and post your own experience. Or go one step further: Contact your members of Congress. Let them know your community can't afford to lose these critical services.



Key elements of effective storytelling

Keep it simple

When people easily understand what you're saying, they're more likely to trust it—and act on it. Complexity raises questions or suspicions in response to jargon or ideas that are more difficult to understand.

Metaphors make it easy!

Metaphors help people process

complex information by relating

it to a familiar concept that is

Deep metaphors are used by

people of all backgrounds to

understand their world. Here are

common in their culture.



Balance: A state of physical, psychological or social equilibrium

"When they cut our regional office and moved everything to a centralized call center three states away, our small business loan office was thrown off balance—now we wait weeks for answers that used to take days."



Connection: The yearning to relate to others, feel a sense of belonging or be part of something larger than ourselves

"Behind every Social Security check that arrives on time and every emergency alert that reaches your phone, there's a federal worker making sure the system holds because when government works, it's because someone showed up to make the connection."



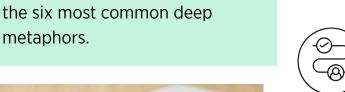
Container: Containers can represent safety and inclusion (being inside the system, community or support network) or exclusion and isolation (being left out or locked out).

"When we close offices or eliminate in-person services, we're essentially locking people out of a system that was built to include them but no longer has a door they can walk through."



Control: Mastery over issues that affect us

"Having control during a crisis isn't about stopping the tornado—it's about having the information to protect your family. But if funding cuts minimize or eliminate local weather offices, families lose that critical early warning."



Journey: A sense of moving forward, which can be physical, social or psychological

"My public service career meant protecting children from lead poisoning and ensuring families had clean water, but that journey ended abruptly when I was notified via email that my team was being dismantled and my last day as a civil servant was that Friday"





Resources: Resources are capacities or abilities used to achieve a desired outcome

"The Food Bank depends on steady federal funding to keep trucks full and shelves stocked, but cuts lead to canceled shipments, which means families go hungry when they need help most."



Where to tell your story

Media outlets and social media outreach

You can use the media and social media to share your story and help the public understand the value of government employees and the services they provide.

Personal impact stories are especially important for reaching people who pay little or no attention, but care about the ways the federal government impacts their lives and communities.



Here are six practical ideas for bringing government stories to life in your local media, on social media or with your community networks.

Post on social media platforms like X, Bluesky, Instagram Threads, LinkedIn and Reddit are popular for sharing personal experiences and connecting with others affected by recent changes.

• Hashtags like #federalemployees and communities like r/fednews on Reddit offer space to discuss concerns, share insights and build solidarity.

Create a 30–60-second video that explains what you did in government, the impact of your work and the harms that have resulted from cuts to it.

 Authenticity is key—real stories told with honesty and heart are more likely to connect and be shared beyond your network.

Reach out to respected voices in your community or content creators online and offer to talk about your experience.

• These trusted voices could be local teachers who post educational content, nonprofit organizations who advocate for civil servants or small business owners who are active on TikTok.

Draft an op-ed with a local angle about the impact of government services in your community and share why residents should care.

• There are helpful tips for letters to the editor and op-eds in the appendix.

Pitch yourself to podcasts with a compelling story angle, such as what being a civil servant entails, what your work truly looks like and how the work of the federal government strengthened your community or solved a real problem.

• Look for shows that focus on issues related to your expertise.



Advocacy groups, unions and nonprofits

Organizations that advocate for the civil service and federal employees often look for real stories to highlight in their advocacy efforts, newsletters or events.

Here are a few ways federal employees can share their stories right now:



#ISUPPORTFEDS STORY WALL

Current and former federal employees and members of the public who have been positively impacted by the work of civil servants can share those experiences with us at <u>FedSupport.org</u>, explore our library of <u>submitted stories</u> for inspiration or reach out to us directly at yourstories@ourpublicservice.org.



FEDERAL EMPLOYEES AND CONTRACTORS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

This initiative is collecting and archiving hundreds of oral histories from federal workers and contractors to amplify the work and stories of public servants.



DEPARTURE DIALOGUES

This project is a nonpartisan initiative from the POPVOX and other partners to collect stories from departing federal employees in an effort to help inform future Congressional action to strengthen federal programs.



THE IMPACT MAP

This interactive data visualization tool allows visitors to contribute personal stories to a map that tracks the localized impact of and response to federal policy, funding and workforce changes.



SILENCED SCIENCE STORIES

This collection of visual stories shares the important work of current and former federal scientists and the impact of federal cuts.



After you tell your story

Seven actions you can take today

Write or call your member of Congress

Let your representatives know that you support an apolitical civil service that is committed to serving constituents and to upholding the Constitution. You can <u>craft your message here</u> or look up your members of Congress here, and call or email their office directly.

Contact the White House

Urge the Trump administration to be more thoughtful and transparent, and to work in partnership with career civil service leaders. Contact the administration here.

Write a letter to the editor

Submit a letter to the editor or commentary to your local news outlet, and share how the federal workforce affects your community. Most local outlets have a submission process, which you can find by searching "letter to the editor" + [outlet name]. View the appendix for writing tips.

Write a message of support

Let civil servants know you appreciate them and the work they do on our behalf. Leave a message here.

Sign up for our newsletter

Get timely updates and resources by signing up for our weekly newsletter. Consider sharing it with other current or former federal employees in your network. Sign up here.

Support the Partnership's work with a donation

The Partnership for Public Service is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that relies on support from generous donors. Please consider a gift to help us support federal employees and champion effective government. Your donation will help us publish critical research, share stories of federal service and its impact, and educate policymakers about the importance of a modern civil service and strategies for building a more effective government. <u>Donate here</u>.

Make sure policymakers and leaders across the country know your views and understand the importance of the nonpartisan federal workforce.

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Click on the icons below to connect with us on social media and share our latest content with your networks.



Check out the Partnership's sample social media messaging and graphics here.















Appendix

Helpful tips for letters to the editor and op-eds

Letters to the editor are a quick, simple and timely way to share your opinion and story.

Here are some tips to help you get started:

- Include your contact information. Most publications will want to verify the letter's authenticity by phone or email.
- Be timely. Reference the article that you are responding to in your opening sentence. Most newspapers will only publish letters that refer to a specific article.
- Follow up. Once you submit the letter, don't be afraid to call the editor and ask if it was received and will be published.
- Make it local. Editors will be more interested in letters that have a local angle.
- Write concisely and in an active voice.



One of the best ways to gain visibility about an issue is through an op-ed. Remember these tips as:

L.E.T.T.E.R:

Length-Engage-Topic-Tone-Enlighten-Relate

Length: Limit the length of your op-ed to between 600 and 750 words.

Engage: Avoid jargon and clichés. Use concise, direct sentences and short paragraphs that engage people conversationally.

Topic: Make a single point clearly and persuasively. Have a clear editorial viewpoint. Including too many topics might be overwhelming and cause an editor to overlook your letter.

Tone: Be respectful, even if you're critiquing the news outlet or a government official. If you use language that comes off as angry, aggressive or accusatory, you're more likely to be turned down. Importantly, just because it's your opinion doesn't mean you shouldn't check your facts.

Enlighten: Tell readers why they should care. Provide insight and educate readers about your position. Make recommendations.

Relate: Many people are personally affected by the issues you intend to write about. Be sure to say how you've been affected—and how your experience reflects the experiences of other people in your community, region or country.