

STORYTELLING FOR DISABILITY ADVOCACY WORKBOOK



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INTRODUCTION

“Listen, and you will realise that we are made not from cells or atoms. We are made from stories.” — Mia Couto

Storytelling is a deeply human practice that allows us to share, understand, and value lived experiences. At its heart, storytelling provides individuals and communities the power to define their identities, connect their past experiences with their present realities, and envision transformative futures. For disability communities, storytelling not only creates awareness about personal and collective experiences but also serves as a powerful catalyst for advocacy and social change.

In recognising storytelling's transformative potential, this toolkit has been developed to empower individuals and communities to articulate their stories effectively. Through structured approaches and practical resources, participants are guided in creating compelling narratives that not only convey their lived experiences but also amplify their voices in advocating for greater access to assistive technology.

By equipping advocates with effective storytelling strategies, this toolkit aims to empower communities to drive meaningful conversations, influence policies, and foster environments where misconceptions and negative perceptions of disability can be challenged. Ultimately, storytelling becomes not only a reflection of lived realities but also an active instrument in reshaping a more inclusive future.

INTRODUCTION

Essentially, a story conveys an experience and a journey a person goes through, and since the way our brain understands experience and emotion, a good story that contains characters, facts, and emotions to share an experience is a valuable tool to engage the audience's attention and understanding.

Most storytelling techniques and methodologies are based on the work of renowned philosopher Aristotle, who identified seven elements of compelling storytelling — plot, character, thought (theme), diction (dialogue), melody (overall tone and rhyme of the story), décor (visual elements), and spectacle (a memorable moment).

You should consider the following questions when developing an advocacy story.

- What is the core message?
- Why is it important to communicate this message?
- What is the intended outcome?
- Who is the audience?
- What type of stories would be most compelling to this audience?
- What is the best way to engage with this audience?
- How can the impact of this engagement be evaluated?

THE STORYTELLING TOOLKIT

Who should use this toolkit?

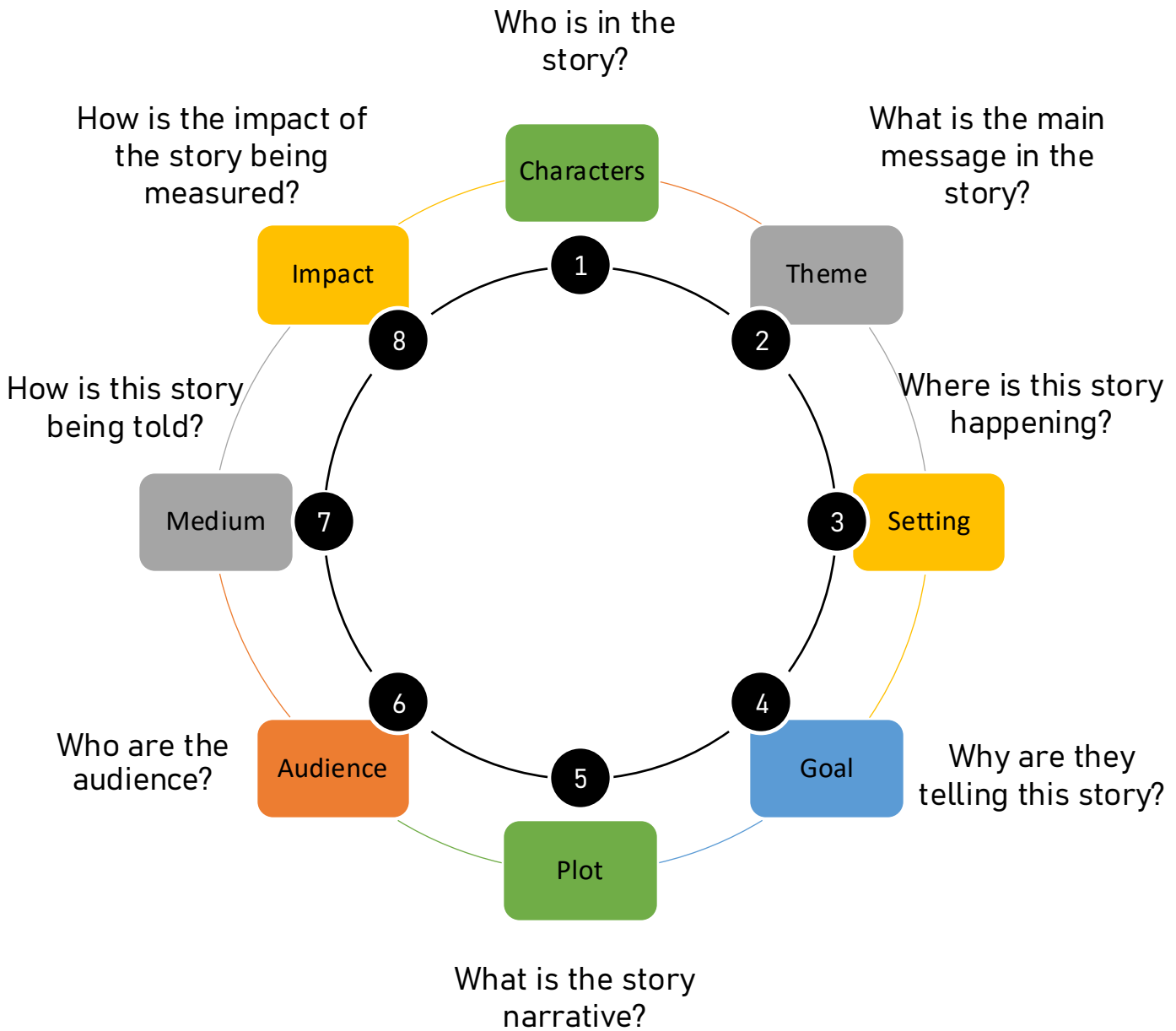
This toolkit has been designed to be generic enough for anyone to develop and share a story for advocacy. It has been designed with and for disabled people but can be used by anyone.

The storytelling toolkit can be used in formal and informal research to create a story. The toolkit has been designed to be exploratory and should be easily adaptable to any context or situation.

The toolkit consists of seven steps in creating a story. Although the steps have been designed in an order, they can be used simultaneously or in a different suitable order.

1. Characters
2. Theme
3. Setting
4. Goal
5. Plot
6. Audience
7. Medium
8. Impact

THE STORYTELLING FRAMEWORK



SETTING

Where is this story based?



The time and place in which the story occurs. The setting helps establish the story's context, atmosphere, and mood. It can influence the characters and the plot of the story.

Key questions to consider:

- What is the context of the story?
- What are the different perspectives in telling this story?
- Where is this story taking place?

Example

1. A busy hospital or clinic where Deaf individuals experience difficulty communicating due to the absence of sign-language interpreters or assistive communication tools.
2. Busy commercial spaces where individuals face obstacles due to narrow aisles, absence of ramps, or poor signage, making everyday shopping difficult for people using wheelchairs or assistive devices.

THEME

What is the main message in the story?

The underlying message or idea that is central to the story. Themes are the broader concepts and topics explored in the narrative. A theme can be a challenge the main character is trying to overcome.

Key questions to consider:

- What is the underlying message or idea being conveyed in this story?
- What does the main character advocate for in this story?

Example

In disability advocacy, common themes can be:

- Social justice and equality
- Access to education
- Access to affordable healthcare
- Financial independence
- Creating awareness and reducing stigma

CHARACTERS

Who is in the story?

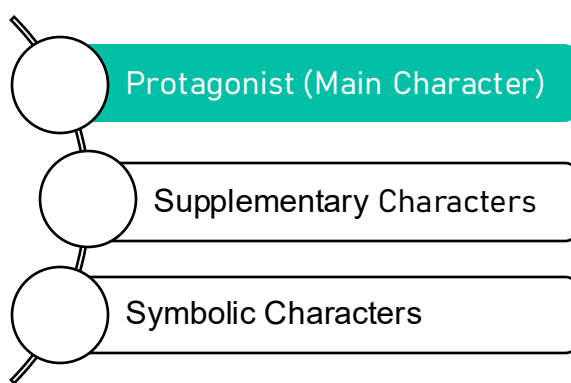
Characters are essential elements that drive the narrative and engage the audience. There are various types of characters, each serving specific functions and adding depth to the story. Here are some common types of characters in storytelling:

- Protagonist or the main character, is the main focus of the story and drives the narrative of the story. In your story, the main character would be the person advocating for change.
- Supplementary or supporting characters facilitate the protagonist in achieving their goal. They are not the main characters of the story but can have a significant contribution to the narrative.
- Symbolic characters can be people, objects, or situation that represents an idea or a value that is relevant to the story.

Example

CHARACTERS

Who is in the story?



The protagonist is the central figure who drives the story forward. The narrative is typically shaped through their experiences, perspectives, and actions. It is through the main character that the audience engages with the emotional journey and key themes of the story.

Key Questions to Consider:

- Who is the main character?
- What are the character's physical appearance, voice, thoughts, and emotions?
- What disability or disabilities does the character experience, and how does this influence their daily life, relationships, and opportunities?
- What goals, dreams, or aspirations motivate this character?
- Why is this character telling their story, and what do they hope the audience will learn or feel as a result?



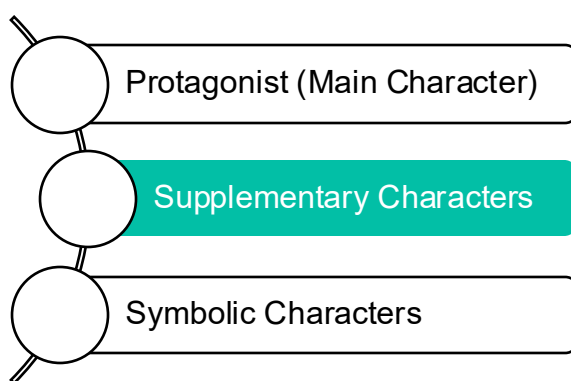
Example

Joseph – Advocate for Inclusive Education

Joseph is a 15-year-old boy living in rural Kenya. He is visually impaired and determined to pursue education despite his community's limited resources. He aims to advocate for accessible learning materials (such as braille books and audio resources) so he and other students with visual impairments can fully participate in education. Joseph's narrative highlights systemic barriers in rural education, inspires empathy, and mobilises support for inclusive education reforms.

CHARACTERS

Who is in the story?



Supplementary characters are essential in supporting the protagonist and advancing the plot. They often provide guidance, companionship, or comic relief, and are instrumental in the main character's development and the overall narrative arc.

These characters can include family members, friends, colleagues, mentors, and other community figures who enrich the story through their relationships with the protagonist. Through their actions and interactions, supplementary characters either facilitate or, at times, restrain the main character's progress, adding complexity and depth to the story.

Key questions to consider:

- Who are the supplementary characters, and what do they symbolise or represent within the story?
- What is the nature of their relationship to the main character?
- How do they support or hinder the main character's journey and growth?



Example

Ms. Njeri (Joseph's Teacher)

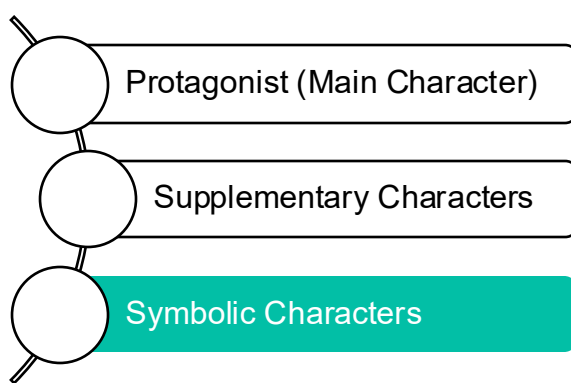
A passionate and supportive teacher committed to inclusive education. She deeply believes in Joseph's potential and actively seeks ways to support his educational needs.

Joseph's Mother (Mrs. Wambui)

A determined and supportive mother who strongly encourages Joseph's educational pursuits and actively participates in community advocacy for accessibility.

CHARACTERS

Who is in the story?



Symbolic Characters

Symbolic characters in a story are characters who represent something larger than themselves — like an idea, a theme, a value, or a societal issue. They aren't just individuals with their own goals and emotions; they also stand for something abstract.

A symbolic character usually:

- Embodies a concept (e.g., justice, greed, hope, loss)
- Highlights key themes in the story
- Helps readers understand deeper meanings without needing it to be spelled out

Sometimes, symbolic characters are pronounced (like Death personified in “The Book Thief”), and sometimes they are more subtle, where the symbolism is only apparent after reflecting on the story. Symbolic characters can be positive or negative. A symbolic character may also be an antagonist (an opposing character who creates a challenge in the story). An example of a symbolic character as an antagonist is included below.

Example

Mr. Barasa – The Dismissive Education Officer

Description: A mid-level government official who believes resources should be prioritised for “normal” students and views inclusive education as too costly or impractical.

Symbolism: Represents systemic discrimination, institutional neglect, and the harmful perception that disabled students are a burden rather than equal learners.

Narrative Role: His attitude becomes a major hurdle that Joseph must challenge, either through community advocacy or by mobilising allies to influence policy change.

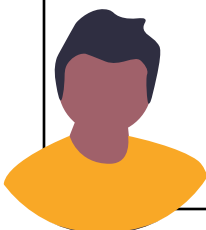
CHARACTERS

Build your characters

Main character



Supplementary character



CHARACTERS

Build your characters

Supplementary character



Symbolic character



GOAL

Why are they telling this story?

A goal is the main purpose for which the story is being told. The main character drives the narrative of the story towards achieving this goal.

Goals can be high-level vision of advocacy or specific enough to be achievable within a set time-frame.

Some examples of generic goals are:

- Raise awareness about disability stigma
- Raise funds
- Access to education
- Access to employment
- Access to assistive technology

Example

Reach 1 million combined views across Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok through an awareness campaign for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities by December 3, 2024, using a mix of organic posts and paid ads targeting youth audiences.

Raise £100,000 to build an accessible community school in Freetown, Sierra Leone by December 2025.

GOAL

SMART GOALS

A SMART goal is a tool for setting goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. This tool helps to create clear and well-defined objectives, making it easier to plan and work towards achieving them. The acronym SMART stands for the following criteria:

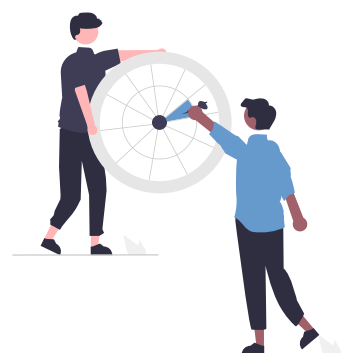
1. Specific: A goal should be clear and unambiguous. It answers the questions of who, what, where, when, and why. It provides a precise description of the goal and what you want to accomplish.

2. Measurable: A goal should be quantifiable and include specific criteria for measuring progress and success. It allows you to track your performance and determine when the goal has been achieved.

3. Achievable: A goal should be realistic and attainable within the resources and constraints available. It should be challenging but not so ambitious that it's impossible to reach.

4. Relevant: A goal should be relevant to your overall objectives and priorities. It should align with your values, and it should make sense within the context of your life or organization.


5. Time-bound: A goal should have a clear timeframe or deadline for achievement. Setting a specific date or time frame creates a sense of urgency and helps in time management and planning.



GOAL

SMART GOALS

Now it's your turn to create a SMART goal you aim to achieve by telling this story.

A large empty rectangular box for writing a story. In the bottom right corner of the box, there is a small illustration of two people. One person in a dark shirt is standing next to a large, light-colored wheel with spokes. The other person in a light blue shirt is standing to the right, pointing towards the center of the wheel. The illustration is simple and stylized.

PLOT

What is the story narrative?

The plot refers to the sequence of events that unfold within a story. It is the structured framework that organizes the narrative, guiding the audience through the journey of the characters and the development of key themes.

A typical plot structure includes the following elements:

Introduction: The beginning of the story, where characters, setting, and the initial situation are introduced.

Rising Action: A series of events that build tension and develop conflicts, leading the story toward its most critical point.

Climax: The moment of greatest tension or turning point in the story, where the central conflict reaches its peak.

Falling Action: Events that occur as a result of the climax, leading toward the resolution. Tensions begin to ease, and the outcomes of the characters' actions start to unfold.

Resolution: The conclusion of the story, where conflicts are resolved, and a sense of closure is provided for the audience.

Example

Opening: Joseph, a visually impaired student in rural Kenya, starts school with hope but struggles due to a lack of braille materials.

Build-up: He falls behind, faces stigma from peers, and is dismissed by Mr Barasaa, who refuses to provide support.

Climax: With help from his teacher and his mother, Joseph works hard to create accessible learning materials and passes his exams.

Resolution: Joseph is able to share these materials to help other visually impaired students. Mr Barasaa realises his mistake and advocates for access to inclusive education for visually impaired students within the Kenyan Department for Education.

Ending: Joseph continues to advocate for inclusive education, supported by his teacher, his mother, and Mr Barasa.

PLOT

THE STORY MOUNTAIN



Phase	Purpose	Example
Opening (Introduction)	Sets the stage, introduces characters, setting, and initial situation.	Introduce the main character and their environment, highlighting their everyday life before encountering a specific challenge.
Build-up (Rising Action)	Develops tension, introduces conflict, and deepens the audience's connection with the character's goals and challenges.	The protagonist encounters barriers or challenges related to accessing assistive technology, illustrating why this issue matters deeply.
Dilemma (Climax)	Represents the turning point or most intense moment where the protagonist faces their biggest challenge or makes a crucial decision.	A key event or moment where the protagonist must advocate strongly, such as confronting policymakers or navigating a significant personal obstacle.
Resolution (Falling Action)	Highlights how the climax's challenge was addressed or resolved, showcasing any immediate changes or actions taken.	Detail the outcomes following the protagonist's decisive advocacy moment, such as securing funding or improving access to assistive technology.
Ending (Conclusion)	Reflects on the journey, emphasizing the impact of the protagonist's advocacy and clearly stating a call to action or inspiring future change.	The protagonist shares their reflections and encourages others to join in advocating for inclusive access to assistive technology, emphasizing the positive changes that can be achieved together.

PLOT

STORYBOARD

Storyboarding is a visual planning tool used to outline and visualise a narrative. It involves creating a series of illustrations or images, typically in a panel or frame format, arranged in a sequence to represent the key scenes, shots, or events of a story.

SCENE #:

SCENE #:

SCENE #:

SCENE #:

AUDIENCE

Who is the story for?

The audience refers to the group of individuals who consume or experience the story. The audience is a crucial component of the storytelling process because they are the ones for whom the story is created. Here are some key aspects to consider about the audience:

- Who are the audience?
- What is their;
 - age group
 - Gender / Sex
 - Profession/occupation
 - Education
- What is their attitude towards disability? Are they an ally or opponent?
- What is their level of influence on the intended goal?

Example

Policymakers and Government Officials

Age Group: 35–65

Gender/Sex: Mixed

Education: University-educated, often with backgrounds in law, policy, education, or public health

Attitude Toward Disability: May be neutral or uninformed; influenceable through evidence and lived experience

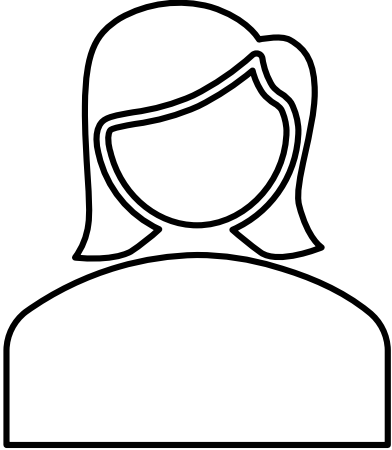
Level of Influence: High — can change policies, budgets, and institutional practices

AUDIENCE

PERSONA

Personas are fictional characters or representations of specific segments of a target audience. Creating and using personas is a way to build a deeper understanding of the audience, their values and interests, motivations, behaviours, likes, and dislikes.

Several templates have been developed to make it easier to create personas. Generally, personas include demographic and relevant psychographic information. Below is a simplified form of a persona template to help you get started.

	DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION	
	NAME	
	AGE	
	GENDER	
	LOCATION	
	EDUCATION	
	OCCUPATION	
	JOB TITLE	
PSYCHOGRAPHIC INFORMATION		
GOALS AND MOTIVATIONS		
HABITS AND INTERESTS		
ATTITUDE TO DISABILITY		

MEDIUM

How is this story being told?

Storytelling can be delivered through various formats or mediums, each offering unique characteristics and methods for conveying narratives. The choice of medium plays a critical role in how effectively the story engages its intended audience and achieves its purpose.

Key Questions to Consider:

- Is the story being told in-person or through another medium (e.g., digital, print, audio, or visual media)?
- What communication platform is most suitable to reach and engage the target audience?
- Does the audience understand the language and cultural context of the message?
- Is the content accessible, inclusive, and relatable to diverse audience?

Example



Text



Image



Audio



Video

MEDIUM

How is this story being told?



Novels and Short Stories (e.g., *The Little Prince*, *Harry Potter*)

Blog Posts (e.g., personal advocacy stories shared on WordPress or Medium)

Social Media Posts (e.g., Twitter/X threads, Facebook stories)

Scripts and Screenplays (for theatre, film, or radio dramas)

News Articles and Editorials (e.g., op-eds advocating for disability rights)



Photography (e.g., photo essays telling the stories of communities or events)

Infographics (e.g., disability awareness statistics in a visual format)

Comic Strips and Graphic Novels (e.g., *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi)

Posters and Campaign Visuals (e.g., awareness posters for International Day of Persons with Disabilities)



Documentary Films (e.g., *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution*)

Short Story Videos (e.g., animated short films shared on YouTube or Instagram Reels)

Feature Films and TV Series (e.g., storytelling through cinema like *The Theory of Everything*)

Live Streaming (e.g., storytelling events streamed on Facebook Live, Instagram Live, or YouTube)



Podcasts (e.g., personal storytelling podcasts like *This American Life*)

Radio Broadcasts (e.g., community radio sharing disability advocacy stories)

Audio Books (e.g., narrated versions of novels or personal stories)

Voice Notes and Audio Messages (especially useful for low-literacy or visually impaired audiences)

MEDIUM

How to choose the best storytelling medium?

Audience Preferences: How does the audience usually consume information?

Reading → Use text (blogs, articles, captions).

Visual → Use images (photo essays, infographics).

Listening → Use audio (podcasts, radio).

Dynamic content and storytelling → Use video (short films, reels).

Accessibility: What accessibility needs must you consider?

Add alt text for images.

Include captions for videos.

Offer transcripts for audio content.

Use clear and simple language if literacy levels vary.

Resources and Capacity: What resources (time, budget, skills) are available?

Limited budget → Focus on text and images (cost-effective, high-quality, with minimal equipment).

Moderate budget → Add audio formats like podcasts or radio storytelling.

Larger budget → Develop professional videos or multi-media campaigns.

Platform Compatibility: Where will the story be shared?

Social media (Instagram, TikTok) → Short videos, images, short text captions.

Websites and Blogs → Longer text, infographics, embedded videos.

Community events → Audio-visual storytelling (live videos, exhibitions, performances).

MEDIUM

Choose your preferred storytelling medium.

IMPACT

How is the impact of the story being measured?

To ensure the goal is achieved and the story is successful in producing the intended outcome. It is important to set realistic criteria or Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to measure the success.

Reach: This measures the number of people who have seen or been exposed to the story across different platforms. High reach indicates that the story has penetrated a broad audience.

Engagement: This measures how audiences interact with the story. It includes metrics such as likes, comments, shares, reposts, saves, and link clicks. High engagement suggests that the story resonates with the audience and stimulates active participation.

Awareness: Awareness can be measured through surveys, polls, or interviews that assess whether the target audience remembers the story, understands its key messages, and can associate it with the advocacy goals. Pre- and post-campaign surveys are particularly effective for measuring changes in awareness and understanding.

IMPACT

Attitude and Behaviour Change: Measuring changes in public attitudes toward disability, inclusion, or the specific advocacy topic. This can be captured through surveys, focus groups, or social media sentiment analysis (e.g., how people talk about disability before and after the campaign). Indicators might include increased expressions of support, reduction in stigma, or greater openness to inclusive practices.

Attitudinal shift indicators might include:

- Increases in event participation.
- Uptake of assistive technologies.
- Enrolment in inclusive education programs.
- Use of accessibility services.

Impact Area	Example KPIs
Reach and Engagement	Number of views, shares, comments, click-through rates
Awareness	Recognition of key messages in surveys or interviews
Attitude and Behaviour Change	Positive sentiment in social media analysis or surveys Increase in service uptake, program participation, or action-taking
Policy/Systems Influence	Policy mentions, official endorsements, organizational changes

IMPACT

IMPACT MAP

An impact map is a visual planning tool that helps you connect your goals with the actions you need to take, showing clearly how your work leads to the change you want to create.

An impact map answers:

What are we trying to achieve? (Impact)

Who do we need to reach or influence? (Target Audience)

How will they need to change? (Outcomes)

What do we need to do to make that happen? (Activities)

Level	Example
Goal / Impact	Greater inclusion of people with disabilities in community leadership roles.
Target Audience	Community leaders, policymakers, general public.
Outcomes	Increased awareness of barriers faced by disabled people; Policy changes to create accessible leadership pathways.
Activities	Launch storytelling campaign sharing experiences of disabled leaders; Host public forums; Create accessible advocacy materials.

IMPACT

Define your outcome metrics and identify KPIs to measure the impact of your story.