SUCCESS STORY WRITING 101

Why are success stories necessary?

Success stories are helpful to further educate the public about food assistance programs, particularly to demonstrate the impact that food assistance programs have on peoples’ lives around the world. The stories should describe the food assistance program in non-technical language and explain the results or benefit (where feasible).

What type of stories is Food for Peace (FFP) expecting?

FFP seeks descriptions of successes that go beyond the specifics of how much food was delivered and focus on progress made in reducing food insecurity in the populations receiving food assistance. In other words, they should showcase broad-scale sustainable development projects and/or highlight new, cutting edge innovations. FFP would like success stories from all regions. We welcome stories that focus on transformational impacts of our development programs – for example:

- Reducing stunting
- Raising household incomes
- Increased agricultural productivity
- Regenerating watersheds or other natural resources
- Improving and maintaining community infrastructure
- Empowering women
- Mitigating future disasters or existing threats through disaster risk reduction activities

We also welcome studies of our Title II and EFSP emergency programs and seek compelling stories of:

- Early response that clearly prevents loss of life or mitigates impacts of disasters
- Why flexibility to use cash-based resources was critical to an emergency response.
- Lives saved and suffering alleviated
- Documented reductions in malnutrition or other key indicators
- Food for asset and other activities that protect and/or advance livelihoods while saving lives
- Creative approaches applying technology or other tools that clearly improve response
- Strategic application of multiple resources to improve overall impact (e.g., sequencing EFSP and Title II programs that demonstrate the benefits of both resources and the improved response that results because both are available)
- Resilience building as part of an emergency response
- New opportunities and impacts for beneficiaries as a result of FFP and Feed the Future-funded projects (or other USAID projects including OFDA projects) running together or in close proximity to each other.
- Program outcomes and results. We know this is a much more difficult ask than simple output information (e.g. number of people trained vs. how did that training change a person’s behavior), but to the extent possible, USAID encourages partners to submit stories with this information.

The most effective success stories focus on the following:

- **Individuals Empowered** to help themselves
- **Sustainable change** rather than one-off successes
- Permanent “leave behinds” created, such as new infrastructure, skills that have a lasting impact, or reduced need for outside help in the future due to program results
- A “new” approach to aid, one that empowers targeted groups and works to avoid dependency

Also keep in mind that moral and ethical imperatives are a central part of the motivation for supporting assistance. Americans believe that the U.S. must act as a world leader to live up to its founding ideals. Try to factor this motivation into your story.

Just remember, all success stories should point to results!

*How will my success story be used?*

Selected stories may be included on the FFP website, in the annual U.S. International Food Assistance Report and in other communications products that highlight the work of FFP and its awardees.

*What does a great success story look like?*

The formula is simple: **use powerful statistics; communicate progress; frame your story around USAID’s larger Mission, not a specific program; and bring it to life with a personal narrative.**

Success stories should use the following format:

1. Title or Heading (approximately 5-10 words including country and/or region of project)
2. 1-2 sentences (approximately 50 words) briefly describing the situation in the country that required FFP assistance.
   - Example: In December 2010, violence surrounding the contested Presidential election forced many Ivorians to flee from their homes. There are currently 15,725 internally displaced persons within Côte d’Ivoire and 69,561 refugees in
Liberia, where UNHCR reported 160,000 refugees at the height of the displacement in 2011.

3. 3-4 sentences (approximately 100-150 words) describing the program being implemented in country.
   - Example: FFP is currently supporting an innovative World Food Program pilot program that uses cell phones to facilitate cash transfers to 54,000 people living in impoverished districts of Abidjan. These districts were badly affected in the post-election crisis and the lowest income families struggle to put food on the table. Through this program, more than 10,000 vulnerable households receive text messages on their cell phones alerting them to withdraw money from local cash points. This unconditional cash transfer is being implemented as a pilot program over a two month period, with each household receiving a total of $75 per month, equivalent to the food basket of an average family of five.

4. 1-2 sentences (approximately 25-50 words) describing why that program was the most appropriate response to the situation described.
   - Example: Beneficiaries describe how the cash transfer has allowed them to improve the quality of their family’s meals, by purchasing meat and fish to add protein to their diet.

5. 1-2 sentences (approximately 25-50 words) describing the results and success of the implemented program.
   - Example: This innovative program pioneers new methods of fighting hunger in the technology age and shows how these tools can provide new solutions for providing food assistance in a challenging urban post-crisis setting.

If including a picture, use .jpg or .tiff format and a file that is at least 300 dots per inch (dpi). The photo caption should include the photographer’s name and organization as well as a caption of 25 words or less summarizing what is occurring in the photo, including date, location, and names of person(s) in the photo.

For all beneficiaries named or photographed, verbal consent must be obtained prior to being featured within the story. USAID understands that beneficiaries may ask to use a different name to remain anonymous. This is especially true in situations where naming or photographing individuals accepting U.S. Government assistance poses a potential threat to their life. If this is the case, please note this within the submission.
What are some DOs and DON’Ts of writing Success Stories?

DO…

- DO try to use quotes when possible
- DO use powerful statistics
- DO lead with results
- DO tell stories that demonstrate sustainable change
- DO create emotional/personal connections that bring viewers into the scene
- DO think big picture

DON’T…

- DON’T use acronyms
- DON’T use technical speak
- DON’T use statistics that present numbers or percentages with no sense of context or scale
- DON’T lead with $$ amounts

Last but not least, remember that success stories are a way to tell the world about the great work that USAID and our partners accomplish every day!