

Stories of Change:

Crafting Narratives of Impact

A Job Aid

to help you prepare your story of change effortlessly

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Global Affairs Canada (GAC) Guidance on Stories of Change

From GAC [*International Assistance Results Reporting Guide for Partners*](#), Second Edition, 2018, p. 19-20:

Stories of Change Guidance. (1/2 to 1 page): Provide at least one result story associated with an immediate or intermediate outcome in the Annual Project Results Report, and intermediate outcome in the Final Project Results and Operations Report.

What are stories of change and why are they useful?

- Stories of change serve to illustrate that change has happened or how change is occurring as a result of a project or intervention.
- They are an effective tool for illustrating and communicating complex change, such as in behaviour, practice, performance, knowledge, attitudes, awareness, or motivation.
- They are an effective tool for illustrating how the various activities and outputs of a project combine and work together to bring about tangible, real-life change in the lives of people (beneficiaries and/or intermediaries), thus demonstrating that the theory of change is working.
- Stories of change can describe an individual, group of people, or community affected by the project. While the subject of the story will most often be beneficiaries, a story could also illustrate the change in attitudes, behaviour or decision-making by an individual or individuals (usually intermediaries) opposed to the changes the project seeks to achieve and who have the power to prevent progress.
- Stories of change can bring life to descriptions of and reporting on complex change initiatives for non-specialist and non-technical audiences because they draw on the real-life experience of people or communities affected by a project.

Writing a story of change. A story of change should:

- be concise, clear, engaging, and use evidence, such as personal testimonies, etc., to support their claims;
- be expressed in plain language and be accessible to a broad audience;
- concentrate on one change per result story;
- include interesting information that is relevant, simple, and powerful;
- ensure it is a tangible, human story. Use photos and quotes if not posed or contrived;
- safeguard the security and interests of the individuals and communities implicated in the story.

Ensure you obtain and document consent.

Outline:

Introduction – What is the main point the story intends to make or illustrate?

Baseline situation – What was the situation before the project. Use this section to set the scene and elaborate on the challenge the project seeks to address. [Tip: use a quotation from a beneficiary describing the situation they faced before the intervention.]

Project – What was done? Describe what activities and outputs were undertaken, by and with whom, to contribute to or bring about this change. Note also what was expected to come of these activities [Tip: draw upon the voices and perspectives of beneficiaries as much as possible to elaborate in real-life terms the theory of change].

Results – What change occurred? Use this section to illustrate the results, both positive and negative changes, and other factors contributing to, or limiting these results. The story may also demonstrate a lesson learned. It is important to talk about the enabling and constraining factors influencing the change.

Conclusion – What's next? What was learned and what are the wider implications of the story? How will these be applied in the project? What is next for the people described in your story? How do they move forward now and what challenges remain? [Tip: drawing on the voices and perspectives of beneficiaries lends credibility and authenticity to your story and its conclusion].

Example of a Story of change: International Solidarity Glossary, Quebec Association of International Cooperation Agencies (AQOCI)

*Intermediate outcome 1100: **Increased engagement** of Canadians, especially youth, **in international development and key global issues** in support to Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy action and the Sustainable Development Goals*

The language we use is imbued with values and with relationships of power. This is certainly the case with the terms used in the field of international solidarity, such as "development," "sustainable development," "donor," "beneficiaries," "countries of the Global South..." These terms have been used for a long time, but where do they come from? Who established them? As Solange Musanganya says, "Don't these terms bring a certain supremacy, depending on where you are? We are talking about a feminist government. The person who says 'feminist' evokes a certain horizontality, a certain equality, a certain consensus in the approach. Is there consensus and equality in these terms?" Our understanding of the world, our aspirations, evolve over time: we are therefore also called upon to review the language we use so that it can best reflect the values that we wish to achieve through international cooperation.

This is the issue that led AQOCI to develop an [International Solidarity Glossary](#). The process to develop the glossary took more than two years and involved in-depth dialogue with several members of AQOCI and some forty international cooperation actors from Quebec, Africa and Latin America. This culminated, in June 2023, in the publication of the [glossary in French](#), with a total of 84 definitions. Then in January 2024, AQOCI published the 23 co-constructed definitions in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

Ms. Musanganya was one of the participants in the co-construction process. A Quebec transgender woman originally from Rwanda, former coordinator of the Queer African Youth Network (QAYN), she brought a perspective informed by her international cooperation experience in Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Haiti, among others. Solange explains that she was able to bring to the dialogue the decolonial terms used by QAYN and others, to create as much horizontality as possible. "There was this love of contradiction," she says of the process, "this love of divergence, which, paradoxically, enabled convergence. Everyone was satisfied, because we had the impression of having been listened to, of having listened to others, and of having found common ground.... We found a humility that is often missing in the language we use in international cooperation."

Solange is already seeing the effect of the glossary on discourse. In November 2023, for example, she was a panelist at the Annual Conference of the International Francophone Alliance for Equality and Diversity (Égides). During the preparatory meetings, she expressed sensitivity to certain terms that had been discussed during the development of the glossary. Then, during the conference—which was aimed at the entire LGBT francophone world—she realized that certain terms, such as "donor," were no longer being used, and that terms proposed by the glossary, such as "financial partner," were used instead. "The fact that we had talked about it during the development of the glossary gave me additional strength to influence the use of these terms in the conference. It's not just me: AQOCI and the glossary are with me."

The glossary has only recently been launched. The next step, according to Ms. Musanganya, is to disseminate it worldwide, to distribute it in the most strategic locations. It needs to be used in radio and television broadcasting, to become a reference in schools, for students and university researchers, and for all those who work in international cooperation. In addition, the hope is that it will change the everyday language not only of Quebecers and Canadians, but also of the average citizen in the French-, English-, and Spanish-speaking worlds. We will now be able to say, says Solange: "There is an international solidarity glossary. Go consult it, and go update your terms!"

By Natalie Zend, ZENDialogue, for AQOCI, February 2024

Example of a Story of Change: Superintendent Coordinates Sustainable Development Action, MCIC (Apr. 2024)

*Intermediate outcome 1100: **Increased engagement** of Canadians, especially youth, in **international development and key global issues** in support to Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy action and the Sustainable Development Goals*

A Manitoba Superintendent sought the services of the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC) to help their ESD (education for sustainable development) committee, consisting of a principal and teachers across the division, move forward on integrating the SDGs with their learning communities. Sustainability is still a new term for them. With the advice of a teacher that had significant experience with MCIC, Krista reached out, knowing that sustainability is a new, or conflictual, idea in her community:

“We’ve had an ESD for 10 years. It emerged as a priority. We avoid the phrase ‘climate change’ but we prioritize sustainability, and we are focused on more sustainable communities.”

After an initial day workshop with their committee, the superintendent recognized the need for support to advance real action on sustainability in their schools, and therefore invited MCIC to collaborate on a Generating Momentum conference in their community of Altona. After participation in the Fast Fashion conference, there were noticeable changes that were set in motion, such as a recycled sock puppet show, more thrifting of clothes, and organizing clothing exchanges. It has led to encouraging teachers to include sustainability in everything they do.

“Now we are talking about sustainability issues related to fast fashion as a result of the conference and relating those to curriculum and content. The kids are reminding us of those things and contributing energy toward that. We have grown the profile of MCIC within our staff. More teachers [are] looking to use the services for student workshops. We are having some of the students from the GM to come and participate and share feedback as the division plans forward, as student voices who have thought about sustainability.”



Students from a Manitoba school division pose with the SDG images during the Generating Momentum conference on Fast Fashion.

At a higher level, the division is looking at their practices at a systems level, such as purchasing and procuring, and how to source more sustainable options.

“People now come with their refillable water bottles, we have composting throughout the schools and admin buildings, this is something that MCIC has encouraged us to think about. This goes beyond what is being taught in the classrooms. This is a divisional priority. We get support for this. We do get some pushback, but people come around. We include other areas of sustainability. Teaching inclusively for Indigenous students, areas of literacy and numeracy, creating more inclusive teaching, these are all related to sustainable development. You can’t do one without the other. It’s important because we need to include all aspects of sustainability, from systems, to teaching content, to being inclusive.”

When asked about MCIC’s role in these changes, the superintendent responded by saying,

“I think part of it is it gives us the kick and motivation to keep going. This is a big topic; it feels like we can be stuck and not making progress. Having the GM generated momentum for the kids, yes, but also for the adults. I’m already looking into the next year to continue with this momentum. The more kids we can expose to these things the more we will grow in the area of sustainability.”

Sample email requesting interview

Fill in the blanks and adjust to create your own email:

Re: Request for interview for _____ (Y organization)

Dear _____ (interviewee name),

_____ (Y organization) hired me to support the writing of its annual report to one of its funders, _____ (name of financial partner), in the context of the _____'s (Y organization) program for _____ (year-year). It is for this purpose that _____ (Y organization) asked me to do a 30-to-60-minute interview with you, on _____ (name of video conferencing software).

The objective of the interview would be to provide input for writing a story of change in relation to an outcome in _____ (Y organization's) program's annual results report. Stories of change serve to illustrate that a tangible and real change in people's lives has occurred as a result of _____ (Y organization) activities and outputs.

Our interview would focus on asking to what extent you have experienced or felt the following change: _____ (result statement from the project/program Logic Model)

Below you will find, for information purposes only, an indicative list of questions that I could ask you during our conversation.

The interview can be an interesting time for you to reflect and learn from your experiences with _____ (Y organization). It also gives you an additional way to help _____ (Y organization) learn from its experience and improve its programming.

Your participation in the interview is strictly voluntary. There will be no consequences for refusing to participate. Also, at any time, you may stop your participation or withdraw your consent to the use of information from your interview.

If you would like to grant me the interview, please click here ([link to consent form](#)) to fill out an informed consent form and to indicate your preferred time slot.

Thank you for your consideration.

_____ (interviewer signature)

INDICATIVE LIST OF POTENTIAL QUESTIONS TO GUIDE OUR CONVERSATION*

Project :

- What _____ activities have you participated in? OR What was your involvement in this project/program?
- How did you imagine these activities/this project would change _____ (*relate back to the result in question*)

Results :

- How did this affect _____? (*Write this question so that it clearly refers to the expected result. Changes can be both negative and positive, e.g. "How did these activities actually affect your involvement in international development and global issues?"*)
- What factors contributed to this change, or constrained/limited it?
- (Are there any lessons you learned from the experience?)

Baseline situation:

- *Question that asks about the situation relative to the project result, before project activities. E.g. "What was your level of engagement in international development and global issues, particularly in relation to gender equality, before participating in _____ (Y organization's) activities?"*

Conclusion :

- What is next for you? (*Relate the question back to the result in question, e.g. "Do you plan to continue to be involved in international development and global issues? and in gender equality issues? If so, how?"*)

Additional:

- Do you have any other thoughts that you would like to convey to _____ (*Y organization*) to help it improve its programs (which will not necessarily be included in the report to the donor)?

**Note that the above questions will need to be adjusted significantly depending on the Logic Model outcome that is the focus of the interview.*

Sample informed consent form for interview

Fill in the blanks and adapt to create your own consent form, on paper, or using survey software such as Google Forms or SurveyMonkey:

_____ (interviewer) is requesting your consent to participate in an interview to support the preparation of the annual report of _____ (Y organization).

CONTEXT AND PURPOSE: _____ (Y organization) hired me to support the writing of its annual report to one of its funders, _____, in the context of the _____ (Y) program for _____ (year-year). It is for this purpose that _____ (Y) asked me to do a 30-to-60-minute interview with you, via Zoom.

The objective of the interview would be to provide the elements for writing a story of change in relation to an outcome in the annual results report of the _____ (Y) program. Stories of change serve to illustrate that a tangible and real change in people's lives has occurred as a result of _____ (Y)'s activities and outputs. In addition to the story, I may, if you wish, share in writing highlights of your interview with _____ (Y) to support the organization in improving its programs.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF YOUR PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the interview is strictly voluntary. There will be no consequences for refusing to participate. Also, at any time, you can refuse to answer a specific question, stop your participation, or withdraw your consent to the use of information from your interview.

USE OF DATA: The story will be shared with staff from _____ (Y), _____ (Z), and _____ (any other individual(s) or organization(s) relevant to your context). The story may contain quotes from your interview where you would be named. A section of other comments that will not be included in the story for _____ (Z) will be shared only with _____ (Y) if relevant. In the event of a quote being used publicly by _____, you will not be named without being contacted for permission.

DATA CONFIDENTIALITY: I will treat the interview as strictly confidential: I agree to store the notes and recording of the interview on my password-protected hard drive, and to destroy them after the story is accepted by _____ (Y organization).

By submitting this form, you indicate that you have read the description of the research project and that you agree to the terms described.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at the following coordinates: _____ (email, phone number).

Thank you in advance for your participation!
_____ (interviewer's name/signature)

1. I agree to participate in the interview. I understand the purpose of the interview and I participate freely. I understand that I can withdraw from the interview at any time without consequences.
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
2. I give my permission for the data from this interview to be used to write a story of change and, if applicable, to share highlights for the improvement of _____ (Y) programs. I understand that I will have an opportunity to review the draft story and possibly other highlights for _____ (Y), once written and before their submission to (Y).
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
3. I agree to the recording and transcription of the interview to support the consultant in writing the story.
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
4. The story of change may contain quotes taken from my interview. I give my consent for my name and title to be included in the story (which is intended for _____) (*specify expected readers*).
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
5. Please enter your name below to indicate your consent to participate in the interview.

Please click here to schedule your interview:
_____ (*Calendly or other scheduling link*)

Informed Consent

Standard components should include:

- easy-to-understand explanations of the purpose of the data collection
 - why respondents have been invited to participate
 - the voluntary nature of participation
 - the time it will take to participate, and the form participation will take
 - benefits and risks from participation in data collection
 - the types of data to be collected
 - how the data will be stored and analyzed
 - with whom it will be shared
 - the intended uses of that data
 - how confidential and anonymous respondents' data are
 - the possibility of withdrawing consent at any time
 - contact information of someone leading the study, should respondents have further questions or concerns.
- *From "Responsible Use of Data Collection & Management Technology" handout, Salanga, from Spur Change "Making Data Collection Meaningful" course*

Tips for Preparing a Story of Change (and software/AI that can help!)

TIP 1. Focus on a single result.

- Be clear on which project/program result you are reporting.
- Tell the interviewee what that result is.
- Include the result statement in the story and/or the report.

TIP 2. Obtain and document consent.

- See standard components of consent above.
- Send an email inviting the person to participate in an interview. See sample email above.
- Include a link to a consent form for them to fill out and submit. See sample consent form above.
 - Use **survey software** such as Google Forms or SurveyMonkey.
- In the consent form, include a link to **scheduling software** (e.g. Calendly) so they can book their interview easily.

TIP 3. Take a feminist approach to interviewing. For example:

- Can you be a co-learner and ally...rather than a neutral "expert"?
- Can you bring an intention to support the interviewee's reflection & learning...rather than just extract the data from them?
- Can you listen for unexpected results?

TIP 4. Use photos and quotes if not posed or contrived.

- Ensure it is a tangible, human story.

TIP 5. Use recording and transcription software.

To help you find the key points & capture quotes:

- Use **recording software**.
- Use **transcription software**.
- Some **video conferencing software** (e.g. Zoom) includes both.
- You might *also* find it useful to:
 - take notes by hand;
 - use the **AI summary in Zoom**.

TIP 6. Write clearly and powerfully.

- Be concise, clear, engaging.
- Use evidence (e.g. personal testimonies) to support claims.
- Include interesting, relevant, simple, powerful information.

TIP 7. Review and edit your story.

- Use **grammar and spell check** (e.g. in MS Word).
- Print it out to edit.
- Read it out loud to yourself to edit.
- **Send it to the interviewee** for comment & approval.



Natalie Zend brings over 20 years of experience in international cooperation, working on program design, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting across sectors such as children's rights, global citizenship education, and judicial reform.

An IAF™ Certified Professional Facilitator and a Certified Training and Development Practitioner, she offers training workshops on Results-Based Management, Theory of Change and data collection.

Natalie loves helping organizations strengthen their capacity for data-driven decision-making using participatory and inclusive methods. Her greatest passion is facilitating strategic conversations and multi-stakeholder collaboration to address the wicked problems of our times. Based in Toronto, she works in English, French and Spanish, online and around the world. Learn more about her at www.zendialogue.ca.



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