



# Discovering Community Values through Stories in

**Heart & Soul**  
Community Planning

Spring, 2011





## Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Introduction</b> .....  | <b>3</b>  |
| The Role of Stories in Heart & Soul Community Planning .....           | 3         |
| How do Stories Support Community Engagement? .....                     | 4         |
| How do Stories Support Community Decisions? .....                      | 5         |
| <b>Making it Happen</b> .....  | <b>6</b>  |
| The Baker’s Dozen for Success .....                                    | 6         |
| Developing an Approach.....  | 9         |
| Story Methods .....  | 9         |
| Selecting Story Gatherers .....  | 13        |
| <b>Resources</b> .....   | <b>15</b> |
| Examples of Storytelling in Planning.....                              | 15        |
| Multi-generational Interviews: Starksboro, Vermont Town Portrait ..... | 15        |
| Curriculum Integration: Biddeford, Maine Youth Story Gathering .....   | 15        |
| Curriculum Integration: Burlington Then and Now .....                  | 16        |
| Community Conversations and Listening: Golden, Colorado .....          | 16        |
| Biddeford’s Heart Spots .....  | 16        |
| Community Conversations in Damariscotta.....                           | 17        |
| Other Inspiring Story Projects.....                                    | 18        |





## Introduction

### The Role of Stories in Heart & Soul Community Planning

*“Stories can accomplish what no other form of communication can—they can get through to our hearts with a message. In our world of information transfer, data exchange, and media impressions, where we have become callused by so much communication, stories have the power to speak to us about what truly matters”.*

- Will Rogers, The Story Handbook

Everyone can share an experience that speaks to their connection to their community, no matter how long they’ve lived there, what their personal views are or whether they’ve participated in planning activities before. These individual experiences can be woven together to create a common story – one that identifies common ground, discovers what people collectively value, and illuminates what makes a particular city or town special in a way that other planning activities cannot. In addition, you’ll hear about what concerns them in their community and what hopes they have for its future. The process of sharing and listening to each other’s stories also builds the trust and relationships necessary for long-term planning and community action.

Gathering stories in the early stages of a Heart & Soul Community Planning project will help jumpstart the process while casting a wide participatory net. A few early interviews of people from all corners of the community can spark enthusiasm for the project and spread the word about its activities and intent. For example, see this link to the stories of Biddeford, Maine ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p77OpPIN1Xg&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p77OpPIN1Xg&feature=player_embedded)). A community marked by rifts or disconnectedness will find that stories help heal divides and change perceptions around community identity. See this link to the stories from Damariscotta, ME ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ma03I89p3-M&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ma03I89p3-M&feature=player_embedded)).

Stories can also be used throughout a planning project. Workshops can begin with simple story exercises to help set a positive and reflective tone.

Or stories can be gathered around themes that relate to specific planning challenges.

The Foundation’s field experience shows that story sharing is highly valued by project participants: the process fosters new relationships and the products are powerful communication pieces that provide an authentic and engaging way to draw more residents into the project. Hosting story gatherings at community events like block parties and using stories to seed further community conversation proved successful in drawing larger, diverse groups together.

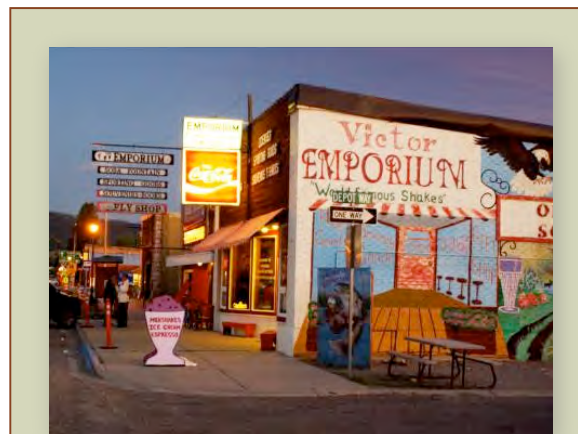
This chapter uses terms like storytelling, story gathering and story sharing. These all reflect parts of how to gather and share the stories of people and their experiences within the context of a community planning process.



## How do Stories Support Community Engagement?

- **Storytelling draws in more voices.** Most planning processes are intimidating to people who have no experience with land use issues or who do not feel comfortable speaking up at the typical public hearing. From youth to elders, storytelling allows people to share their experiences and views in their own words and on their own turf.
- **Story sharing creates connections.** Stories bring out shared experiences and interests and are a great way to build common ground among individuals who typically never connect.
- **Stories build empathy.** How many times have you read a book or watched a movie and found yourself understanding a character that is very different from you? Listening to someone else's story allows us to be open to their views; it gives us a space to reflect on their perspective and grow to see new possibilities. Stories provide a human face to the complex challenges facing communities today.
- **Story sharing reveals common values.** Stories provide a common text for spurring community dialogue about decisions for the future. They can reveal common values for what draws residents and businesses to stay in the community along with possible challenges to staying. They also highlight disconnects or contradictions between groups and individuals.
- **Stories teach us the consequences of our actions.** Stories can illustrate how a community has changed over time. They can illuminate the past and allow us to trace the roots of how we came to be who and what we are today. Stories can deepen our understanding of what is important to our quality of life and whether it is perceived as eroding or improving.
- **Stories give us hope for the future.** A story can also speak to our aspirations for the future in a way that invites others to feel connected to and share in that vision.
- **Storytelling transforms planning.** These activities can be fun, accessible and convenient for people. They also help overcome preconceived notions about planning by first listening to what people care about in their own words.

**Story is action.** Through telling our stories and listening to others' stories, we have an impact on our surroundings, we take a stand, we matter, we participate in our community. Our stories become a part of the living community story.



*"At first I was skeptical about telling stories and getting the feelings of the community. I thought, 'We kind of know all of that.' As it has developed, I think that [storytelling] worked for a lot of folks in town, and it helps bridge that gap between newcomers and old-timers. Those activities worked."*

—Victor, ID Citizen



## How do Stories Support Community Decisions?

Heart & Soul Community Planning is predicated on the belief that once a town identifies and describes its most valued places and qualities it has a better shot at planning for a future that builds on those places and qualities. These highly valued characteristics must be described with enough clarity to allow residents to understand why they are unique to a particular place and how they can be protected and enhanced long into the future.

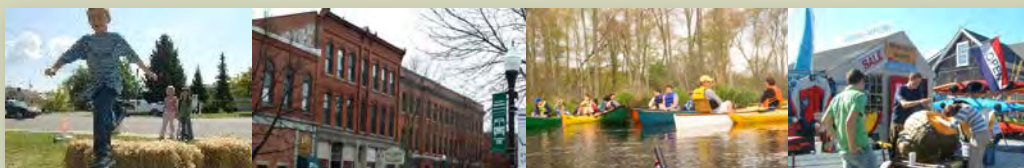
Heart & Soul Community Planning is also predicated on the belief that identifying shared values must grow out of mutual trust; of residents connecting and reconnecting with each other across divides, preconceptions and habits. We have found that stories build relationships and trust for the planning process like no other approach we've used.

Story sharing is a powerful way to identify specific values. Like other forms of community input, stories can be aggregated and analyzed to discover the common values, hopes and concerns that people hold for their community. The Heart & Soul Community Planning process outlines the steps to get from values to action and the Foundation's chapter on values mapping (to be released in June 2011) illustrates how you can take stories and translate them into actionable information. The Quick Guides in this chapter provide an example of how to identify values through two story methods, story circles and story interviews. Stories are powerful prompts for deeper community conversations to more fully explore emerging themes and issues.

When using storytelling in your planning project, watch out for a few potential pitfalls. First, some people may find storytelling too "soft" or be anxious to get to specific planning discussions. For these folks, it's important to 1) clearly show how stories will inform your project and 2) use storytelling in combination more traditional formats (like community workshops). Also, don't get hung up on the term "storytelling", which may intimidate some people. Find ways to describe this work that will resonate locally, like holding "neighborhood conversations."

### What do we mean by values?

Heart & Soul Community Planning first asks people what it is they value about their community; that is, what's most important to them about why they live there. These individual responses inform the identification of common community values—the customs, characteristics and places that create a unique sense of place. These values can also be aspirational—those that people would like to see in the future.





## Making it Happen

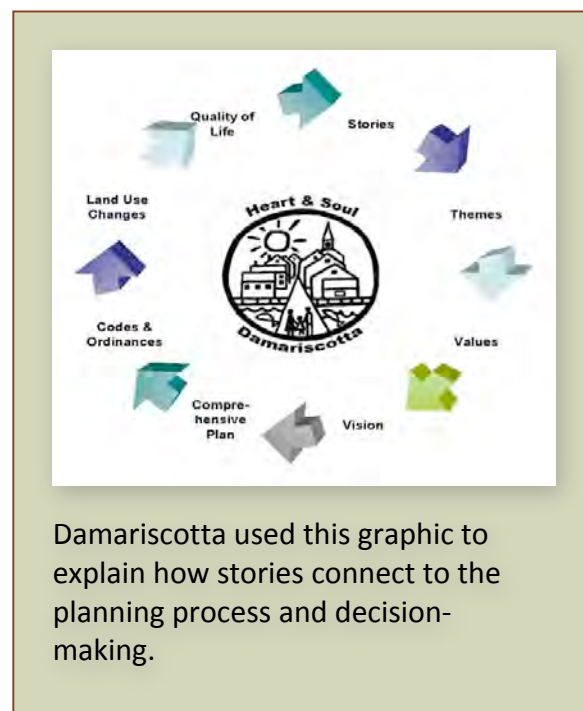
Storytelling activities can be designed as comprehensive, multi-year efforts for gathering and sharing hundreds of community's stories, or they can be designed as smaller discreet activities within a larger community process. Each community will craft an approach based on its local history and culture and the overall goals of its planning project. Here are key tips that we've found helpful for integrating storytelling into Heart & Soul Community Planning.

### The Baker's Dozen for Success

**1. Build a Story-Sharing Team.** Form a Story-Sharing Team to anchor this approach in the community and to leverage the interest and resources of others eager to get involved in this activity. The team also serves as your "test group" for adapting story-sharing efforts and your communications to the local community, and lets you experiment with various tools and methods. The Team requires adequate training to serve as story-sharing "ambassadors" to the public, to facilitate the process and to weave the results into the other elements of the Heart & Soul project. This Team could be a sub-group of your Community Advisory Team ([http://www.orton.org/resources/hs\\_handbook/advisory\\_team](http://www.orton.org/resources/hs_handbook/advisory_team)).

**2. Know your goals and capacity.** Design your approach with your overall project goals in mind as well as your community resources and capacity. These factors will guide your Story-Sharing Team's choices as it considers a range of story gathering options.

**3. Understand your community.** It's essential to consider who lives in your community in order to learn how to engage them in storytelling activities. You can use Community Network Analysis to help with this task (see the Foundation's handbook chapter on this topic [http://www.orton.org/resources/hs\\_handbook/network\\_analysis](http://www.orton.org/resources/hs_handbook/network_analysis)). Your analysis will help you be strategic about who and how you reach out to folks to gather stories. It will also help you identify resources that could be useful in storytelling activities.





**4. Build on local resources.** In many communities, existing organizations have already captured and archived some of the town’s stories. Acknowledge and build from this existing work, even if your project moves in a different direction. Existing resources often live in historic preservation groups, cultural organizations, or schools that may have undertaken community interviewing. Contacting these organizations and inviting them to the table not only adds more resources and volunteers, but also spreads awareness of the project and begins to identify your town’s existing story holders.

**5. Engage schools.** Many story-sharing efforts benefit from partnerships with local schools, colleges or technical programs. Students can assist with storytelling efforts and engage voices that can be difficult or time consuming to reach. Students have the time for interviewing and editing that other volunteers may lack, and a natural facility with new technologies. Students can also be more successful at capturing stories from their peers or from adults reluctant to talk with others they perceive as being biased. Check out the Foundation’s handbook chapter on Engaging Youth for more information

([http://www.orton.org/resources/hs\\_handbook/engaging\\_youth](http://www.orton.org/resources/hs_handbook/engaging_youth)).

**6. Start small and be adaptable.** One of the most important roles of your Storytelling Team is to evaluate the story gathering process and make adjustments as needed. All projects should begin with a pilot process that can be tested before widespread implementation. As the program unfolds, new ideas will emerge and story sharing may take new directions.

**7. Know how you’ll weave your stories into your project.** Make sure to consider how you’ll distill the stories into common values and issues without losing the language and expression that makes these individual stories so valuable. Depending on your story approach, community members may help with this distillation process. Or your Storytelling Team may play the role of “story weavers”—community members who hear stories from all parts of town and start to identify key commonalities and differences.

**8. Know what stories you want to gather.** Based on your Heart & Soul goals, the timing of storytelling within the overall project, and your particular community’s temperament, decide on the degree of thematic focus appropriate to your story-interviewing efforts. If you will be easing into Heart & Soul due to a resistance to change or entrenched positions within the community, start with a more general theme: stories celebrating the people and places of the town. If your planning project has a more specific focus you may be interested in gathering stories about a specific land use issue (e.g. stories of Main Street or recreation resources).



High school students in Biddeford, Maine listening to stories they gathered as part of the City’s Downtown Master Plan Project.



**9. Don't dwell in the past.** Some communities are tempted to capture history only, and forget that children and newcomers as well as those who have been here for some time, have important stories about the now, the here. When capturing stories of the here, you are searching for common ground—what is good and worth preserving as well as what isn't. When planning story sharing, think, also, about future stories—what do people want to see down the road? How do they create that future together?

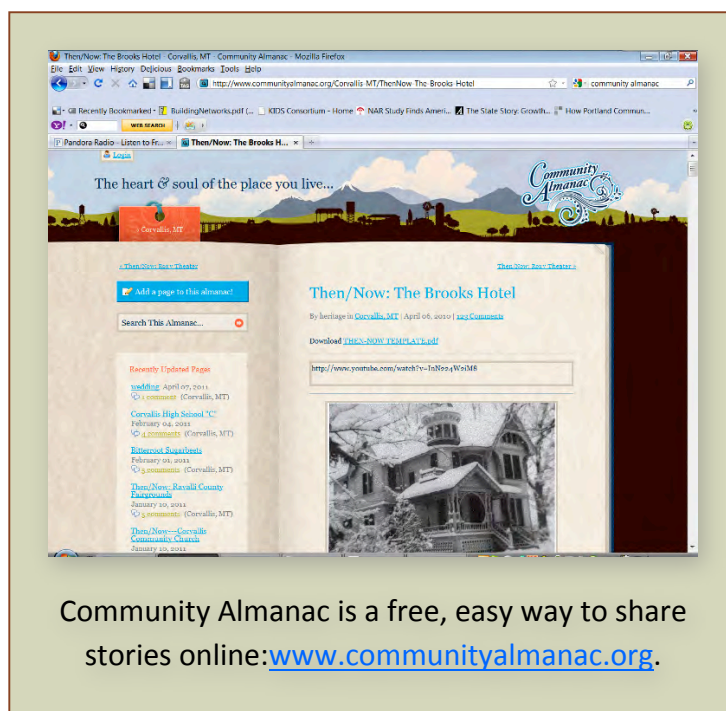
**10. Find your question.** Should your stories have a narrative focus? Should they group around themes? If so, what would those be? Or should your team gather any kind of story residents want to share?

Potential themes for story gathering includes:

- **Place:** stories about important places to save or to study and why, leading perhaps to a map of stories or visualizations about story-intensive places and those with no stories at all; stories about natural locations as they have changed or remained significant or gained importance to the town.
- **People:** the human tapestry of small communities—whose stories must be told if the town's full story is recounted. The why-do-you-live-here or stay-here stories.
- **History:** stories about time passing, positive and negative changes in the town.
- **Futures:** capturing dreams and aspirations.

**11. Listen to all stories.** Not all stories are happy visions for the future. Stories can be full of struggle and conflict and can lead to important insights about your town. Train your facilitators well to be able to work with the hard as well as the easy stories and to create a safe environment for sharing and acknowledging.

**12. Clarification helps.** When using storytelling to identify values, the key challenge is to document them with enough specificity to be well understood and actionable. It's also essential to confirm what you are hearing in the moment with the person who is sharing. In one-on-one sessions, it can be as simple as asking, "What I'm hearing as important is.... did I get that right?" In group sessions you can use simple tools like sticky notes where people can write down what they heard and then aggregate common values or ideas.



Community Almanac is a free, easy way to share stories online: [www.communityalmanac.org](http://www.communityalmanac.org).







**13. Seek broad validation.** It's important to test what you've heard through storytelling by reaching out to even more people. At this point, surveys can be useful, as are community-wide gatherings that review and celebrate what has been learned. This *validation* of the values takes time, but, when done well, it also shows you whether you've heard the community accurately. It can also help residents see whether there is common ground or where there may be conflicting values.

## Developing an Approach

There are numerous methods for gathering stories: low-tech approaches that emphasize the written word and allow individuals to submit their stories independently; facilitated dialogue activities such as story circles which place the emphasis on the event itself; and more labor intensive, higher tech tools such as community video or digital stories that require careful thought on how to share results with a wide audience.

As with any phase in your Heart & Soul project, you'll want to consider the core aspects of choosing any method or tool: 1) the purpose, 2) the participants, 3) the context and 4) the scope (see the Foundation's Project Design chapter for more detail:

[http://www.orton.org/resources/hs\\_handbook/project\\_design](http://www.orton.org/resources/hs_handbook/project_design)).

In addition to those core considerations, the following questions are important to pose as you choose your storytelling approach:

- What **kinds** of stories are you looking to gather?
- How will you **gather** them?
- How will stories be **shared**?
- How **many** stories is enough to identify community values and issues?
- How will the values and issues **be identified**?
- How will the community **confirm** the values and issues?
- How will the stories be used to spark **community dialogue** and lead to **concrete actions**?
- How will the stories be **live on** in the community?

## Story Methods

### Story Interviews

In a *story interview* a trained local interviewer sits down with a community member and captures that person's story, documenting the values and concerns that emerge from the conversation, and confirming that information with the interviewee. With the story sharer's consent, the interview is recorded on audio and/or video, edited, sections perhaps transcribed, and then published (online, through local media or elsewhere). The record of that story is then gathered with other story interviews for comparison further synthesis and integration.





**Pros:** Interviews are great for people unlikely to participate in public events and can establish bonding between the interviewee and interviewer. The recorded stories can be shared and archived. Simple audio equipment can be used along with photographs.

**Cons:** They are time-consuming and require interview and editing training, if the stories are to be shared.

Example from Damariscotta, ME: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ma03I89p3-M&feature=player\\_embedded-at=19](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ma03I89p3-M&feature=player_embedded-at=19)

## Youth Storytelling

*Youth storytelling* engages students to think about their community, the consequences of our actions and their own role in creating positive change. The activity can be structured many different ways – from digital stories to story events.

**Pros:** The youth voice can be included in the larger project and in developing recommendations for the future. A community's youth are, after all, its future. Youth are able to get stories from people who otherwise might not share them, and often have an easier time learning and using the recording and editing technology than adult volunteers.

**Cons:** It requires the vision and commitment of classroom teachers or youth mentors to train and motivate students. It can be a challenge to align youth activities with curriculum standards and academic calendars. Schools don't always have the technology necessary for the project, so finding borrowed equipment and a knowledgeable expert (if it is not the teacher) might be a requirement.

Example from Victor, ID:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tb8\\_4aN27bA&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tb8_4aN27bA&feature=player_embedded)

## Community Video

Any type of video documentary on a local community could fall into the category of *community video*. When used specifically as a tool for planning, community videos typically address certain planning topics or key issues. YouTube and Vimeo make sharing community video quite easy, and some projects have sponsored video contests to involve more residents.

**Pros:** Videos can create lasting records that are useful for planning, build community spirit and pride, and also may help to boost economic development and vitality of a place.

**Cons:** Most community videos require significant time and effort in order to film and interview people, edit footage, and produce a cohesive video. Video equipment can be expensive, though relatively inexpensive hand-held cameras can be used, and equipment is increasingly available through local high schools and colleges and public access television studios.





## Digital Storytelling

*Digital storytelling* includes a digital element in the production and sharing of stories (e.g. digital archival, posting, link among stories and other media). Web-based stories also have interactive potential where other community members can add to the stories through written or audio comments and by linking related stories.

**Pros:** Digital storytelling makes the product (stories) more flexible, because it can be stored and easily shared in many formats, and it allows the story to be recorded in the storyteller's own voice.

**Cons:** It requires time, training and equipment and some technical expertise. Depending on the level of interactivity online the sharing platform may require a moderator.

*Example from Biddeford, ME:*

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjO\\_mol3Uf0&feature=player\\_embedded%27](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjO_mol3Uf0&feature=player_embedded%27)

## Written Stories

Essay contests are used to collect stories or other writing about a community. *Written stories* are most frequently used in schools, but can be public contests open to everyone. Stories can be gathered and shared through newsletters, online forums, postcard stories, a self published book, community displays such as bulletin boards or roadside boxes or in combination with visual media and with public readings, radio or live events.

**Pros:** Essay contests are an easy way to gain information, stories and suggestions from a large number of people, and to get a sense of what is important to them.

**Cons:** If contests are not highly directed, the information received may not be especially useful. Contests are also directed at the "writers," and may only bring out the people confident in their storytelling skills.

## Locative Media

*Locative media* is a term coined to describe information, art or stories that are linked geographically to a specific place. It ranges from websites with interactive maps to information terminals posted on street corners, multimedia art installations with geographic components to audio recordings posted where they were recorded.

**Pros:** By linking the media directly to the places they represent or originate from, the resident gains a greater sense of place than she would if the media were not so linked. Including the place element adds another dimension to stories, images or information, making it easier to convey the intended message. These efforts are often as interesting to visitors as residents and can contribute to tourism promotion efforts.





**Cons:** The more interesting locative media initiatives tend to be high-tech, which are more complicated and expensive for communities to produce. Even relatively low-tech efforts can require significant planning and support.

*Examples:* See the Murmur Project and Biddeford Heart Spots examples later in this chapter.

### Story Circles

*Story Circles* is an event where participants break into small groups (circles) to reflect on a chosen question or topic. Each person in each circle takes a turn sharing a brief story in response to the session topic or prompt. Other participants are asked to actively listen without interrupting. After the circle has been completed, participants ask questions and summarize what was learned from the stories. Each circle then shares these themes with the other circles at the gathering. Story circles are best run with a trained facilitator who can draw the most out of the conversation.



Victor, Idaho used story circles to identify community values and build relationships in town.

**Pros:** Story Circles are a great approach for getting to know each other, building trust and learning about both different perspectives and common concerns or aspirations. They can reach a broad audience fairly quickly, but need the right invitation and venues to draw participants. Story Circles allow for face-to-face dialogue so that the group can explore issues in more depth together. Themes and values from the stories can be drawn out by participants on the spot and confirmed with the story sharer.

**Cons:** Perhaps the greatest challenge is the capturing of stories to prevent them from disappearing after the event. Depending on how the information is captured, it may only allow for the participating group to contribute.

### Scavenger Hunts, Questing

These age-old endeavors have been redeveloped to take advantage of technology and to build community. Several new versions of *scavenger hunts* (like geocaching) are quickly gaining in popularity; many are tied to the special places and resources of communities and/or use spatial technology.

**Pros:** Scavenger hunts (digital or otherwise) are an exceptional way to explore and identify a community's most important physical places. Hunts are an exciting and engaging way to introduce residents to unusual and important aspects of a place, and to gather information about sites that others feel are important. It also lends itself well to youth participation.





**Cons:** On the other hand, they may not identify equally important intangible (or even non-spatial) elements of community character. Many hunts (especially geocaching) are also designed in part to be challenging to reach.

*Example Quests:* <http://www.vitalcommunities.org/valleyquest/index.htm>

## Story Events

*Story events* take many forms. They can be an opportunity to exhibit the stories you've collected through other story methods along with a community discussion. Or schools can offer cross-generational storytelling nights related to a theme of interest to the project. Or a recording booth can be set up to capture stories, which can later be analyzed for common themes.

Another possibility is to make a mobile storytelling booth, story-collection site, or storytelling component available to attach to other public events. Local theater groups can take the stories of a community and create a play that reflects back those stories.

**Pros:** Storytelling events give local decision makers an opportunity to meet and speak with residents and business owners in informal settings. They can be used as a culminating event and a transition to the next phase of your overall project. Or they can easily piggyback on other community events making it easier to capture more people.

**Cons:** Attention spans are short and activities need to reflect the celebratory nature of the events. It can also be time consuming to gather stories at larger celebrations rather than a more focused event.

## Selecting Story Gatherers

No matter the storytelling approach(es) you take, you'll need to decide who will gather the stories. Your community will have to weigh the relative importance of local volunteers against the need for professional assistance. Some towns team with volunteers so community members can accomplish most of the story interviewing. Other towns do not have the same volunteer pool and in these towns, paying a professional to oversee story interviewing could well prove beneficial. You might be surprised by who lives in your community—it is well worth taking the time to advertize for local expertise and interest.

**Paid professional story gatherers.** Communities struggling to enlist volunteers might do well to hire a professional (preferably local) to conduct the first handful of interviews, to edit them and to publish them, and then to train and mentor a cadre of volunteers. These stories will be beautifully told and presented, adding luster to the project, and providing examples of the depth and length of Heart & Soul stories you seek.

Hiring outsiders to do parts of storytelling takes some of the burden off busy volunteers, but you do risk losing important opportunities for building relationships. You also risk intimidating volunteers who will naturally compare their own story gathering skills to those of the professionals and might





balk at participating if they sense that their own interviewing or story editing skills are not up to snuff.

**Volunteer gatherers.** You can also train a core group of volunteers—from across the community if at all possible—as active participants in story collecting. Plan waves of story gathering, as volunteers feel more comfortable and inspired. By spreading the effort across the community, the story-interviewing efforts include many groups, creating a positive buzz about the whole project: stories beget stories.

**Elders and youth interviewers.** Retirees and/or youth are also great resources for story gathering. Both groups often have a bit more time on their hands and youth seem to have a knack of getting people to open up with stories as well as a comfort with technology. Training these groups together creates opportunities for inter-generational understanding and bridging as the youth learn the lessons of the past and the elders learn about growing up today. In practicing together by interviewing one another, the two groups gain new perspectives, and can open hearts and minds of the town as they weave a community experience across the generations.





## Resources

### Examples of Storytelling in Planning

#### Multi-generational Interviews: Starksboro, Vermont Town Portrait

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Starksboro, Vermont launched the first phase of their art and civic engagement pilot by partnering with a Middlebury College class to gather more than 50 stories from community members (link to NYT article or Starksboro stories). The students presented the digital stories at a community celebration attended by more than 250 residents, and published an edited collection in a book that was gifted back to the residents. The story gathering by the Middlebury students inspired others in Starksboro to continue the process. A storytelling committee was trained and conducted numerous interviews that were published in the monthly “Gazette.” The local school trained students to create digital stories of their own. And four teams of Starksboro teens paired with an adult mentor interviewed and documented an individual in town and created a portrait along with that person’s story. The portraits are mixed media wall pieces that are part of a traveling display throughout the town.

#### Curriculum Integration: Biddeford, Maine Youth Story Gathering

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The Biddeford Main Street program, Heart of Biddeford, discovered a local high school teacher who was using digital stories in her English classes. She was approached about involving her students in the Downtown Master Plan and story-sharing program with results that have engaged hundreds of Biddeford high school students and raised awareness among their extended families. In the first wave of student involvement the teens interviewed family members about Biddeford’s downtown. These youths interviewed folks who ordinarily would not have shared their experiences and opinions about Biddeford. The resulting digital stories were featured at a community event attended by hundreds of residents and businesspeople.

This early effort inspired the teacher to develop a curriculum around student story gathering and community participation. One class collected stories about downtown and then held a world-café-style dialogue where students listened to the stories and identified common themes. Another class facilitated youth meetings to solicit stories and ideas about downtown’s future to feed into citywide neighborhood meetings and a community forum. More than 150 students participated in this process. One outgrowth of this student involvement was the creation of a downtown club that encourages students to come downtown for fun and service-oriented activities.





### Curriculum Integration: Burlington Then and Now

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*Burlington Then and Now*, a multimedia project exploring Burlington’s past, present and future. Created by a fourth and fifth grade team at Burlington, Vermont’s Champlain School, Burlington Then and Now was designed to both learn about the history of Burlington neighborhoods and reflect on ways to sustain strong communities in the future.

As a first step, Champlain School students identified photographs of their neighborhoods in the University of Vermont archives, and then selected key locations that they could identify in the present and photographed these sites from the same perspectives as the original image. The exhibit, displayed at the Vermont Folklife Center, includes twenty-one panels, each of which pairs an historic and a contemporary image of the same site with student writing about the changes they observed. The exhibit also features students’ audio essays on learning from the past to plan for the future.

Link: [http://www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/education/vision-voice/exhibitions/vv\\_then-now.shtml](http://www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/education/vision-voice/exhibitions/vv_then-now.shtml)

### Community Conversations and Listening: Golden, Colorado

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The Local Advisory Committee for the Golden Vision 2030 project began its storytelling effort by identifying local groups and individuals considered “missing voices” that were necessary for creating a common vision. Storytelling-specific outreach events were held, such as Block Parties, and story sharing was folded into existing citywide festivals and events, such as the farmers market and movies in the park. The LAC applied more story gathering outreach with Group Story Circuits, Chili Socials, and digital stories by youth. The City then had different groups listen to the gathered stories to identify more than 2000 values. These listening sessions were held at different group meetings and gathering places and included local residents, business owners and employees. Townspeople identified common themes and values at a community summit. The values were used to guide the planning process moving forward, and changed the way business is done by the City.

### Biddeford’s Heart Spots

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After learning about the [Murmur] project in Toronto (see below), Biddeford decided to create its own “heartspots” around the city. Using the special downtown places identified at other events, staff created signs that they posted around the city where passersby can call a phone line and leave a story about that place, which is automatically recorded. These audio stories are then digitized and shared on the project website.



Hanging Heart Spots in Biddeford, Maine.









## Other Inspiring Story Projects

**Stories of Why Where Matters/The Placement Project County Map of Stories – Ukiah, California:** The Ukiah Players Theatre, joined with the Center for Digital Storytelling, to create this website. Throughout the spring and summer of 2005, stories were collected from communities around Ukiah. That October they were produced as a stage production featuring 21 stories, many performed live by their authors. An additional workshop in 2006 collected stories from other parts of Mendocino County, leading to a touring production in August and September. Site users can navigate a map of the region to select videos. This project is part of the Center for Digital Storytelling's StoryMapping initiative that works to link narrative and place.

<http://www.storymapping.org/placemeant.html>

**Saving the Sierras: Voices of Conservation in Action** uses media to explore the geographic, political and philosophical boundaries of the new Sierra Nevada Conservancy. Through public media and citizen storytelling, the project documents community efforts to conserve the environment, culture and economy of the Sierra Nevada. It offers educational materials on conservation in addition to allowing users to listen to audio stories about the Sierras. Although users cannot upload their own stories, they can discuss the project through a blog and comment postings.

<http://www.savingthesierra.org/>

**The Organic City** is a community storytelling project focused on the downtown Oakland, California areas surrounding Lake Merritt. It allows users to search for stories using a map or search function and upload their own stories in text, audio or video. The project seeks to connect with the community to explore the relationships between place, story and community; as well as the ways in which new technologies can enhance our appreciation for these important parts of human identity and experience.

<http://www.theorganiccity.com/wordpress/>

**StoryCorps** is an independent nonprofit project whose mission is to honor and celebrate one another's lives through listening. By recording the stories of our lives with the people we care about, we experience our history, hopes and humanity. Each conversation is recorded on a free CD to take home and share, and is archived for generations to come at the Library of Congress. <http://www.storycorps.net/> City of Memory is StoryCorps Project combining stories professionally edited and stories uploaded by community members: <http://cityofmemory.org/map/index.php>

**Capture Wales** is the BBC's award-winning Digital Storytelling project that arose from a 2001 partnership formed between BBC Wales and Cardiff University. BBC Capture Wales ran monthly workshops from 2001 to February 2008, facilitating people in the making of their digital stories. In this section you can watch the wealth of stories that were created on workshops during that period.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/audiovideo/sites/galleries/pages/capturewales.shtml>





**Rural Voices Radio** is a production of the National Writing Project. The thirteen-part series features original writings by students and teachers from diverse rural regions throughout the United States. Each half-hour program in the series takes listeners to a distinct location through a blend of stories, essays and poems, local sounds, and music. The programs communicate the significance of place as an inspiration for good radio, strong writing, and effective classroom teaching. Listeners and authors alike agree that Rural Voices Radio renews the spirit of community and connects us to shared personal experiences. Key to the effort was the desire to increase local participation and integrate place-based themes in student learning.

<http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/programs/rvr/rvr3.csp>

**[Murmur]**, a documentary oral history project in Toronto, records stories and memories told about specific locations. It collects and makes accessible people's personal histories and anecdotes about the places in their neighborhoods that are important to them. In each of the locations staff installs a [murmur] sign with a telephone number on it that anyone can call with a mobile phone to listen to that story while standing in that spot, and engaging in the physical experience of being right where the story takes place.

<http://murmurtoronto.ca/>

**New Orleans Survivor Council** uses Story Circles as a tool to build and maintain a coordinated network of community leaders, organizers and community-based organizations with the capacity and organizational infrastructure to help meet the needs of people most impacted by Hurricane Katrina. This link provides a description of this organization's approach to Story Circles:

<http://www.peoplesorganizing.org/Volunteer/The Story Circle Model.doc>

**The Vision Vessel** is a novel civic engagement tool used by the City of Portland, Oregon to reach people who normally would be unlikely to participate in government. It is multi-media recording booth where residents can share their ideas about the City as it grows and changes.

<http://www.portlandonline.com/shared/cfm/image.cfm?id=117493>

**Community Video Archives** of Sarasota County, Florida, is a non-profit organization dedicated to archiving community video projects in the area.

<http://suncat.co.sarasota.fl.us/Collections/CommunityVideoArchives.aspx>

**Why Here, Why Now**, which centers on one small Ohio town, includes multiple ways of revealing the heart of the town, among them interviews of residents about what the town means to them. In addition to sharing the stories via the blog/website and in person, Why Here, Why Now has created word clouds from interviews to show the emerging themes/issue/values, and the greater specificity of language people use as time goes on and they see and respond to these word clouds.

<http://whyherewhynow.org/>

