Tips for Writing Success Stories

1. Find "the story" in your work

Focus on progress in advancing educational activities aligned with policy, systems, and environmental change strategies that result in local "impact". Look for the following:

- ☐ **Partnerships** with funded and non-funded programs that ignite community engagement with CalFresh Healthy Living programs
- ☐ **Evaluation** results that illustrate impact
- ☐ **Innovative practices** allowable within SNAP-Ed Guidance
- ☐ **Quotes from participants** that illustrate knowledge, attitude, and/or behavior change are important aspects of a good story.

2. Tell the reader how this program or project changed participant's lives

Document program participant's **knowledge, skills, attitude, or behavior change.**

- ☐ What did participant(s) report as being the most useful or helpful component of the program – example: a particular activity that "stuck".
- ☐ What did participant(s) report as having learned from the program/project?
- ☐ What behavior or attitude changes did participant(s) report as a result of attending your program (frequently seen in evaluation data)?

3. Write a story that is *readable and easy to understand*

- ☐ **Write for a reading level of 6th-8th grade**
- ☐ **Avoid Vague Words**
    - ▪ Vague words, such as *relatively, few, almost, some, usually, approximately, highly, often, appreciable, nearly, many,* and *significant* are arbitrary and do not add much value to a success story.
- ☐ **Use Active Voice Sentences**
    - ▪ In an active voice sentence, the subject of the sentence does the action of the verb. In a passive voice sentence, the subject receives the action. Whenever possible, use the active voice to *emphasize what the program participant did, not what was being done by the program participant.*
        - • Example:
          Instead of: The boy was smiled at by the girl. *(Passive)*
          Use: The girl smiled at the boy. *(Active)*
- ☐ **Be Succinct**
    - ▪ Information should reinforce the main message of the success story.
    - ▪ Use short sentences, paragraphs, and bulleted lists whenever possible.

4. Communicate success in simple terms

- ☐ Write for someone who has never heard of SNAP-Ed – avoid jargon.
- ☐ Tell people how your program changes the lives of people in the first 1-2 sentences.
- ☐ Include the timeframe and any partners who assisted in these changes.
- ☐ When using evaluation data - explain its meaning to the participant/program.
  - Example:
    "Children ate more vegetables after going through the program. 80% ate more vegetables after the program compared to 50% before the program."

5. Stick to the facts and recognized sources

- ☐ Use facts and state/local data from recognized sources.
  - Example:
    Kidsdata; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Rankings, etc.

6. Photos speak louder than words

Use photos to visually showcase your work. When possible, include:
- ☐ 1-2 photos of programming
  - Example:
    Before-and-after photos of gardens or students that are moving through PA
- ☐ **Make sure you have photo releases on file.**
  - ▪ Remember to submit photo releases
  - ▪ Use stock photos or photos without identifiable faces if you cannot obtain a photo release.

7. Quotes add local voice

Quotes from extenders or participants make a story more powerful – adding the community lens.

- ☐ Only use relevant quotes which enrich a story and have detail – why did they "love the class" or what specifically did the student learn that was important?

8. Key Ingredients Checklist

Review the story to ensure basic information is present:

- ☐ What is the program?
- ☐ What is the need the program is addressing?
- ☐ Who is it impacting and how is it addressing their needs?
- ☐ Where and when is it taking place?
- ☐ How it is evaluated?
- ☐ Do you have a quote or photo?
- ☐ Have you acknowledged your partners and those local champions helping to sustain the work?

9. Proofread your story

- ☐ After you have finished writing your story, check it for *typographical, grammatical,* and *spelling errors* and correct them.
- ☐ Congratulations, you have written a success story!

Frequently Asked Questions

Why write a story about your local work?

- Success stories provide an opportunity to document highlights of CalFresh Healthy Living, UC programming.
- It illustrates how the program addresses local need through local eyes. Quotes, or "testimonials," collected from program participants as part of program evaluation are a good source of qualitative data.
- Perceptions and/or opinions that come directly from program participants offer valuable feedback concerning the program for your story. *Don't forget to ask for feedback at sites!*

How are success stories used?

- Success stories are used in local and state reports or to show stakeholders and community members how the program affects community members.
- Select stories are chosen for federal reports or as source documents UC Delivers, or national publications such as SNAP-Ed Connection.

Submitting Your Story for the PEARS Success Story Template

Discuss the story with your supervisor before drafting your story.

Based on the FFY2020-22 County/Cluster Workplan Expectation & Deliverables document, your county has a pre-determined number of success stories to submit each year. More success stories are always welcomed, however, the stories should be entered into the Success Story Excel Sheet as a draft for county and State Office review.
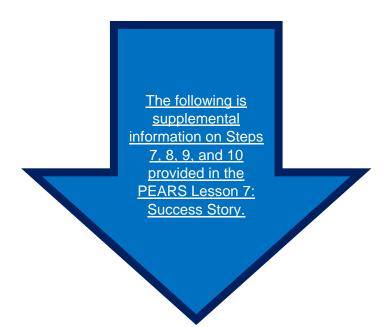
Build your draft story in the Success Story Excel Sheet provided by the State Office.

- The Success Story Excel Sheet has tabs created for each year. Some stories may be entered as a draft in 2021 and build into a larger story in future years.
- The Success Story Excel Sheet allows you and your supervisor to track stories as they develop over time. Stories that are not used in PEARS one year may develop into a story with stronger data in the future.

Once approved, place your story in the PEARS Success Story Template.

Stories should be reviewed by your county supervisor quarterly for potential entry into the PEARS Success Story template. Quarterly meetings with the State Office occur for those counties that have expressed interest and/or have cluster county entries.

- Each section of the Success Story Excel Sheet has specific questions that need to be answered. Please carefully review the section questions and answer these questions in your draft.

- ***Review PEARS Lesson 7: Success Story for instructions on how to enter your story.***
https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/CAFSP/CalFresh/PEARS/Lesson-7-Success-Stories.pdf

The following is supplemental information on Steps 7, 8, 9, and 10 provided in the PEARS Lesson 7: Success Story.

PEARS Step 7: Create a Story Title (see pg. 4, PEARS Lesson 7: Success Stories)

- Story titles should grab a readers interest, be short and to the point.
- Use action words that focus on the solution.
- Capture the key message.
  - Example:
    CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE Advances Community Training to Fight COVID-19 Spread

PEARS Step 8: Describe the Program in the Background field. (see pg. 4, PEARS Lesson 7: Success Stories)

- "Set the stage" in the background section by identifying the issue that needs to be addressed.
- Use key data: the setting, target audience, assessments, curricula used, number of sessions, and partnerships.

  THE NEED: State the need, challenge, or issue that the SNAP-Ed Program Activity and/or PSE strategy addresses. Include assessment information used to identify the issues and specify the target audience impacted.

  [PEARS Step 8 continues on next page]

- How did the work address the need of the community members served through evidence-based approaches used in SNAP-Ed and any innovative strategies? The example below is general to offer story ideas. Your story does not need to highlight as many initiatives.
  - Example: *As the COVID-19 pandemic began to unfold, CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE programs shifted their focus to issues that were of high priority to the K-12 school community. Detailed information about community needs were gathered through school assessments provided by educator extenders as well as polling and interaction data from social media channels. This data allowed UCCE staff to identify the food security and food resource management priority issues they could effectively address.*
- **THE WORK**: Describe how the challenge was addressed, including how community members and partners were engaged and resources/assets leveraged. The example below is general to offer story ideas. Your story does not need to highlight as many initiatives.
  - Example*: In response to the needs identified by educator extenders and their students, CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE staff created videos where they are teaching students how to cook healthy recipes and engage in physical activity. In order to create continuity for the students, staff developed videos with healthy living messages to provide reassuring interaction and a familiar face. School principals distributed the videos to teachers and students.*

    In response to the needs of partnering farmer's market managers and CalFresh Food customers, CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE staff mobilized County resources to support social distancing measures at markets where EBT/CalFresh is accepted. This support includes: signage to direct customers to follow social distancing protocols in both English and Spanish, social media posting, and circulation of a media release to let the community know that the markets are safe, open, and accessible for people with CalFresh benefits.

    To further support the food system and food security efforts, staff continue to maintain and work in established school gardens with approved social distancing measures in place to ensure food does not go to waste. CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE Educators have created videos educating students on what is growing in their school garden and other instructional videos showing home gardeners how to harvest food safely. Crops of lettuce and carrots have been harvested from three school gardens. This food has been delivered through a no contact, drop off system to school food service for use in school meals, or donated to a local food pantry.

PEARS Step 9: Describe the program/activity impact: Sustaining Success

- Provide the findings that resulted from the program activity using statistics or pre/post tests.
- Describe changes in participant's lives or progress in addressing the need.
- Future plans may be provided in this section. The example below is general to offer story ideas. Your story does not need to highlight as many initiatives.
    - Example: *These efforts have resulted in the harvest of over 1000 pounds of produce from three school gardens to date.This food has been distributed to the community to use in school meals and local food pantry distributions. Ongoing harvests and re-planting of these gardens is scheduled to ensure food resources are maximized. At every harvest or maintenance day, CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE staff create videos or photo collages to post as an educational tool for educators and family members to see what is growing in their garden and where their produce is being distributed in the community. Additional impacts include coordination and virtual training with 11 County Disaster Service Workers who have provided over 65 hours of food safety and social distancing support to farmers markets that accept EBT/CalFresh and offer the market incentive Market Match. Further support provided includes: the creation of signage in English and Spanish, technical assistance and provision of food safety equipment including handwashing stations. This collaboration has made it possible for markets to stay open and provide a safe and reliable source of food for CalFresh Food clients. Community members have expressed that farmers markets feel like one of the safest places to shop during the pandemic.*

PEARS Step 10: Favorite Quote

Good quotes are ones that capture specifics about accomplishments and convey community engagement.

- Example: *"I am so thankful for your ongoing guidance through training videos and captioning for our farmers markets. Thank you again."*
    – Farmer Market Manager on the support of workers to keep the markets open and support social distancing efforts.