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Storytelling for Energy Solutions Toolkit

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Storytelling for Energy Solutions Toolkit

How to Turn Boring Data into an Engaging Story for Change

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Introduction

Statement of Need:

Energy is the leading cause of global emissions which drive climate change, degrade the environment, and deteriorate public health. Furthermore, much of the world is energy insecure, including one-third of the U.S. population (EIA, 2018); this exacerbates national and global inequalities, worsening human rights and social justice issues. Reform of the energy industry is crucial to help solve these problems. Much of the science exists for the needed energy transition; however, there is a lack of clear communication between specialists and the public¹. Furthermore, many energy issues are polarized, those most impacted by energy issues often have the smallest voice, and false narratives are frequently spread to oppose the energy transition². These factors make holistic energy solutions difficult to find. Storytelling for energy solutions can help solve these problems by communicating complex energy topics more understandably, finding common ground on polarized issues, empowering marginalized voices, and rewriting false narratives.

Intended Purpose:

The following paper serves as a toolkit for storytelling for energy solutions. The goal of this toolkit is to provide a framework for gathering and sharing stories to find common ground, empower voices, rewrite narratives, and catalyze positive change for energy solutions. This toolkit is made for those affected by energy issues, pursuing energy action, or who have a role in the energy industry.

Executive Summary:

As a fundamental form of human communication, storytelling can play a powerful role in advancing global energy efforts; that is what this toolkit aims to do. This toolkit is created from academic literature, interviews, and action-based evidence. It includes methods of gathering energy stories, empowering marginalized voices, finding common ground on polarized issues, and effectively communicating energy stories for change. This toolkit also includes an “Improved Energy Dictionary” of problematic or misleading energy words or phrases and better alternatives to use when telling an energy story.

¹ For example, the latest International Panel on Climate Change assessment report AR6 is nearly 3,000 pages long and is filled with technical language that makes it inaccessible to the average person (IPCC, 2022).

² The Exxon internal report of 1970 *Pollution is Everybody's Business* shows a clear understanding that CO2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion are a major concern for global ecology and future reports by Exxon show accurate understanding that fossil fuel combustion will cause global climate change (CIC, 2017). However, Exxon continued to spread false narratives climate change this is not a major concern because Exxon is one of the largest oil companies in the world.

Action-Based Data

The creation of this toolkit included action-based data from storytelling interviews. The interviewees were chosen for their expertise in energy, storytelling, or related subjects, to provide valuable information to incorporate in this toolkit. All interviewees were asked the same set of energy questions at some point in the interview:

“Could you tell me about the biggest energy problem in your life? This could be current or past. Why was/is it impactful? What emotions did/does it make you feel and why? What solutions may fix this problem? Are there any other important details worth noting?”

These questions were picked because they ask about a discrete issue, use superlative language, and spark emotions. Deliberately vague, they yield a wide range of answers from varying interviewees and can be open to interpretation. The reasoning for these types of questions will be explained in the next section. The stories from these questions were then compiled into a story bank for easy access and organization.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic constraints, stories were mainly shared over video meetings or phone calls rather than in person. However, some interviewees were met outside or masked indoors.

Stories varied from losing heat during winter storms, polarized energy policy, salmon loss from dams, camping, and more. A powerful narrative discussed was individual actions versus systematic change for energy solutions. All the data from these interviews inspired this energy toolkit. The story bank of these stories is available at the following link:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/17facNvP3Xzp6l1FOXTjznxNPIA_ZZSi1sZMsqRQCX58/edit?usp=sharing

Below is a list of interviewees:

- **Beau Garreau** – Creative Director at Children of the Setting Sun Productions (CSSP)
- **Brad Edmondson** – Journalist and Author of Ice Cream Social: The Struggle for the Soul of Ben & Jerry’s
- **Charles Barnhart** – Energy Professor at Western Washington University (WWU), Member of Bellingham Climate Action Task Force
- **Darrell Hillaire** – Executive Director at CSSP
- **Emily Larson Kubiak** – Energy and Green Building Program Manager at Sustainable Connections
- **Eric de Place** – Principle at Salish Strategies and Past Director of the Thin Green Line at Sightline Institute
- **Isabella James** – Youth and Indigenous People Podcast Producer and Production Team at CSSP

- **Jan Zuckerman** – Retired teacher at Portland Public Schools, Climate and Environmental Justice Activist, Youth Mentor
- **Jon Carroll** – Production Manager and Filmmaker at CSSP
- **Kristin Forck** – Energy Efficiency Analyst and Outreach Coordinator at Cascade Natural Gas
- **Melanie Plaut** – Methane Gas and Electrification Activist and Obstetrics and Gynecology Specialist
- **Rosemary Vohs** – Storytelling Professor at WWU
- **Sarah Parker** – Environmental Consultant at Peak Sustainability Group
- **Travis Tennesen** – Interim Director for Center for Community Learning at WWU and Convener of Community Engagement Fellows

Gathering Stories

Storytelling can be used to communicate complex energy topics, find common ground on polarized issues, empower marginalized voices, and rewrite false narratives. We can do this by telling energy stories of our own, but also of others. Story gathering can play a powerful role in energy storytelling if done effectively and respectfully. This could include stories from your local community, stories in science, stories abroad, and more. A story can be gathered face-to-face, over a video or audio call, or in writing.

There are draw-backs and benefits to each method of hearing a story. Being able to see the storyteller will give you more information about how the story should be told, heard, or seen. This includes body language, facial expressions, and emotions. However, storytellers may feel more comfortable sharing a personal moment over a phone call or in writing because they will feel less vulnerable. It is important to keep this in mind when gathering energy stories.

But how do you ask to hear someone's energy story?

When asking to hear an energy story there are important ways to phrase your question to get the story you are seeking. For starters, it is helpful to ask about a specific moment in time. You can start your inquiry with a phrase such as, "Tell me about a time that...", to spark the memory of a discrete moment. This encourages sharing of specific experiences, emotions, and details that will create a better story. Next, including superlative (exaggerated) language in your question can be very beneficial. This means using extreme adjectives such as "best moment" or "worst moment" in your question. People often remember extreme moments in their life more than other moments, so this will help the person you are asking to provide a story with more detail. Similarly, emotional moments are remembered well. Thaler Pekar from the Stanford Social Innovation Review article, "How to Gather Stories", refers to emotion as "the 'glue' of memory" because emotional moments are remembered best (Pekar, 2012). This could mean asking about very happy, unhappy, or frustrating moments. It also means asking about what emotions they remember feeling during the discrete moment. Maybe the person you are asking experienced a scary time during a blackout or a feeling of relief when camping without power. Epiphany moments are also remembered very

QUICK "HOW TO"

When asking for an energy story:

- Ask for a specific moment in time.
- Use superlative (exaggerated) language.
- Ask about the emotions felt.
- Ask about a turning point or epiphany moment.
- Share a story of your own.

When listening to an energy story:

- Be vulnerable.
- Be respectful.
- Enter without prior assumptions.
- Maintain an open mind.

Summary: Ask a question that will be remembered well by the storyteller for a vivid story. Be vulnerable, respectful, and openminded when listening to an energy story.

well, so asking about a turning point in their life will likely recall a vivid story.

Vulnerability and respect are important aspects of story gathering as well because they foster the sharing of stories that may be personal. Energy plays a crucial role in everyone's life, so energy stories may be more personal than others. Sharing a story of your own can help inspire stories from others and it will make you more vulnerable so that others feel more comfortable sharing their own story. It may also help them recall a story of their own by giving them an example to reference. When listening to someone's energy story it is important to enter with an open mind and without prior assumptions. Try to put yourself in the storyteller's shoes and think about why this story is significant to them. This will help you respect the experiences of the storyteller and gain a deeper understanding of the story being told.

Sharing Stories

Successfully sharing stories is the most important part of storytelling in the energy industry. It creates opportunities for education, avenues for problem solving, and can overcome false narratives that are preventing needed change. It can also promote healing and make sense of incomprehensible problems (Tibaldi & Govers, 2016). Effective storytelling includes thoughtful use of body language, voice, tone, and visuals. It also requires thinking about your audience, finding key values to focus on, and incorporating proper word choice to fit that audience. Lastly, methods of audience engagement will elevate your story and make a larger impact.

Storytelling Practices:

In person or over video is the most impactful way to share an energy story. This is because it allows you to incorporate body language, facial expressions, tone, voice, and even props in your energy story. Body language can include arm gestures, adjusted posture, leg movements, and any other physical actions while telling the story. Using body language will make you appear more confident and comfortable in the spotlight while also capturing the audience's attention more effectively. Facial expressions add emotion to the story and make the speaker more personable. Widened eyes to express shock, furrowed eyebrows express frustration or confusion, a toothy smile to expresses joy. This adds life to your story and helps the audience understand what you want to convey. Tone and voice are complimentary components of storytelling. While telling a serious or dark energy story, a heavier tone will reflect the gravity of the situation. On the other hand, a story of energy success may use a lighter, energetic, and more enthusiastic tone. This is important to think about when discussing serious energy problems or exciting energy solutions so that you remain appropriate and respectful in your story. Effective voice will add to the tone of the story. You can raise or lower the volume of your voice for added impact of key words or heightened intensity of certain situations. Intentional pauses between words can have a similar effect. You can also change the sound of your voice when taking on differing perspectives which will help the audience understand who is speaking in the story. It is important to remain respectful when changing voices so that serious energy topics do not appear mocked. Lastly, props can be especially beneficial in energy storytelling. This because complex scientific topics can be difficult to grasp solely auditorily. Bringing props to

QUICK "HOW TO"

Storytelling Practices:

Use appropriate...

- Body language
- Facial expressions
- Tone
- Voice
- Props
- Audience engagement

...for your energy story. This will bring the story to life, captivate the audience, give you power and confidence, and make it a more memorable story.

Audience:

Identify your audience and their key values; focus on these values in your energy story.

Engage your audience through audience participation and interaction, questions, and props.

Characters and Narrative:

Tell smaller stories (micro-stories) of the characters and setting within your larger story (macro-story).

convey the energy topic more easily can make the story more understandable for the average audience member. This could look like a lightbulb, an example circuit, a water bucket, or anything else that might make the story more engaging and understandable. The best speakers will use a fitting combination of these elements.

Key Values for your Audience:

Whether you are sharing a story in person, virtually, or in writing, identifying your intended audience is crucial. Likewise, it is also important to focus on key values and words that fit that audience. This is especially important in energy because the key values of the audience will change greatly between groups and energy issues.

But how do you identify the key values of your audience?

Getting to know your audience beforehand is crucial. One way to do this is hearing the stories of members of your audience before-hand, identifying the values they express, and later telling a story that fits those values. The stories you hear from your audience can be saved in a story bank for later use similar to in this toolkit. This way you can continue to improve your energy stories. You could also ask your audience questions that give insight into their values related to the energy issue. These questions should probe at the deeper emotions of the audience. The audience may forget the facts that you tell them, but they will not forget how you make them feel (Zimmer & Harvey, 2020). This means you should ask about the emotions they feel and why; ask them what is most important to them. Furthermore, the best way to identify the key values of your audience is to ask them directly. These values could be independence, love, health, safety, or other important aspects of the human experience. Energy plays a crucial role in everyone's life so it is easily connected to fundamental human values. When you have identified the key values of your audience connect them to your energy story.

Audience Interaction:

Audience interaction can make your story more engaging and help focus the audience on what you are trying to communicate. Rosemary Vohs, a storytelling professor at Western Washington University, emphasizes the importance of audience interaction in story performances. This is because an engaged audience will retain more information, enjoy the story more, and gain a deeper understanding of the story. One way she does this is by having her storytelling class

Sometimes the beginning, middle, and end narrative structure does not work for factual stories. Try a "Three V's" narrative structure (values, villain, and vision) to create an engaging narrative based in truth.

Connect your human struggles to natural struggles like in pourquoi folktales for holistic energy solutions.

Summary:

When telling your story, it is important to identify your audience and use the values and word choice appropriate for that audience. It is also important to create characters and narrative that captivate the audience within your story while staying true to the facts. Incorporate appropriate storytelling practices that will further engage and captivate the audience.

perform interactive tales focused on engaging the audience. Major elements of interactive stories include:

- Asking the audience questions
- Having the audience participate in the story
- Having the audience repeat certain lines
- Having the audience perform certain actions
- Engaging in jokes with the audience

There are other ways to interact with your audience as well, but these elements encompass many major forms of audience interaction. Asking the audience questions will force them to give you their full attention and keep their mind active. A good story will make the audience think. Having the audience participate in the story, repeat certain lines, or perform certain actions will lead to further engagement. This could be having the audience repeat an important phrase every time you say it, having the audience move their body on a specific queue, or bringing a member of the audience into your story to act in it. This will maintain the audience's attention and bring life and humor into the story. If the audience is having a good time, they are more likely to be engaged in your story. Lastly, engaging in jokes with your audience will add even more humor and life to your story and keep the audience wanting more.

When telling an energy story, it is important to recognize when humor is appropriate and when it is not. Energy plays a major role in everyone's life so some topics can be very serious. Sometimes humor can bring levity to heavy situations, but it can also be rude or mocking when used inappropriately. It is important to use best judgement and only incorporate humor when appropriate.

Characters and Narrative:

Stories are the natural way for humans to communicate. Engaging narrative and interesting characters are an integral part of a captivating story. However, academic literature, especially in science, often lacks character development and narrative structures. This causes academic literature to feel unnatural and unengaging to many readers which prevents important research from being read. Energy issues, which often rely on research, are not alien to this problem. Incorporating character development and narrative structures into scientific research and other academic literature may seem unnecessary and time consuming, but it is a powerful way to ensure that energy issues are read and understood by everyone; not just those in the scientific community.

But how do you incorporate characters and narrative into scientific research and academic literature? Creative nonfiction is a powerful tool to do this. Creative nonfiction relies on storytelling elements similar to those in fictional writing such as an exciting narrative and interesting characters, but to tell a story based in truth. This engages the audience like a

fictional story but tells the audience a factual story. One author who is particularly effective at this practice is John McPhee, an American author who helped bring creative nonfiction to popularity in the United States. McPhee has been an author for Times magazine as well as the New Yorker and has written over thirty books on these topics. McPhee is especially skilled at using people and place to make conventionally dull topics more interesting. One work where McPhee does this particularly well is his essay “Encounters with the Archdruid”, which tells the story of environmental activist David Brower and his encounters with three others who stand for everything Brower is against. In this essay McPhee uses rich character development, vivid imagery of setting and place, and engaging narrative with captivating conflict and humor to keep the audience interested in the story while covering important topics such as geology, water issues, power generation, and environmental protection. Furthermore, this essay is based in truth. He takes exciting elements of fictional writing and attaches it to a nonfiction story making it equally engaging but far more educational.

These smaller stories are known as micro-stories and can be told within the larger macro-story (Zimmer & Harvey, 2020). The micro-story is a smaller story that connects to the emotions of the audience and keeps them interested in the larger story. These can be backstories of characters and locations, interesting plot developments, or other smaller stories that add to the larger story being told. The macro-story is the bigger story being told. This is a culmination of all of the micro-stories and is usually linked to key values, ideas, and objectives. A micro-story could be the backstory of a construction worker who is working on a new dam project, while the macro-story could be the destruction of salmon loss from dams across the United States. Including micro-stories within the larger macro-story will make the story more personable, interesting, and emotional.

Energy issues could use creative nonfiction writing similar to the work of David Brower to make scientific research and academic literature more engaging for the reader. Tell the backstory of an interesting energy engineer who worked on this energy project or the family whose livelihood depends on it. Use character development to engage the audience on important energy issues. Incorporate a narrative structure in your energy story that captivates the audience to continue.

But how do you create engaging narrative while staying true to real events?

The “Three V’s Narrative Structure”:

A major difficulty when writing creative energy nonfiction is creating narrative while staying true to the facts. Reality does not follow the classic, three-part narrative structure of “beginning”, “middle”, and “end”, so following this narrative structure may not work for your energy story. However, there is another narrative structure that is particularly effective in energy stories for change. This is the “Three V’s” narrative structure. Rather than “beginning”,

“middle”, and “end”. This structure focuses on “values”, “villain”, and “vision”. These components are outlined below:

Values: What are the key values at the heart of your audience? How do they connect to your energy issue? What emotions are attached to these values?

Villain: What is the villain of your energy issue? How can this villain be personified and strike emotion in your audience?

Vision: What is the solution to your energy issue? What emotions are associated with this solution? How can you access these emotions?

Following the “Three V’s” narrative structure can create a narrative focused on change while staying true to the facts. It can also connect to the emotions of the audience in a powerful way. It is best to use facts to elevate each component of this story rather than telling a story and sneaking facts in. Ask yourself how your energy issue plays to the “Three V’s”. How can the data related to this energy issue connect to the values of your audience? How can it create a villain to oppose? How can it paint the picture of a better future?

Pourquoi Tales:

Educational storytelling has existed long before the recent developments in creative nonfiction. One of the largest examples of this is “pourquoi” storytelling which is French for “why” storytelling. Pourquoi stories are early folktales that have been used to explain the world. They use vivid setting, deep character development, and engaging narrative to understand the world we live in. Pourquoi tales are performed in many cultures globally, but these stories are particularly predominant in Indigenous, African, and Aboriginal folktales. Traditionally, these stories have been passed down orally, but today you can find written anthologies of these stories and several children’s books are based on pourquoi tales. Some example pourquoi tales that you can find in picture books include “How Raven Got His Crooked Nose: An Alaskan Dena’ina Fable” retold by Barbara and Ethan Atwater as well as “Why Mosquitos Buzz in People’s Ears: A West African Tale” retold by Verna Aardema. These picture books have their roots in traditional pourquoi tales which were used to explain the world.

The rich character development and narrative structures of pourquoi tales can be mimicked in energy storytelling to explain the energy issues today. This could look like the creation of fictional or nonfictional characters and a relevant plotline that assists in telling the energy story. These characters should be interesting to the audience and make them care more deeply about the topic. The plotline should be engaging similar to a fiction or creative nonfiction story and keep the audience captivated to continue. Furthermore, the idea that humans are a part of nature is integral to many pourquoi tales. This idea is also integral to holistic energy solutions. Holistic solutions do not hold humans above the health of the planet, but instead understand that the health of the planet is crucial to the health of humans. It is important for energy stories

to intertwine human and natural struggles similar to pourquoi tales to find solutions that target both. Using these pourquoi storytelling practices will help you create engaging energy stories that find people and planet focused energy solutions.

Finding Common Ground

Energy issues are polarizing. This is particularly true regarding power generation, energy efficiency, and electrification. The polarization of these topics is often caused by a difference in worldview. Worldview is a person's philosophy of life or concept of the world that defines how they see it. It is the fundamental factor in their political beliefs and key values of focus. Differences in worldview can cause varying values and goals regarding energy issues. These variations often clash and prevent necessary change in the energy industry. However, finding common ground on these issues can build the foundation for holistic solutions with widespread support. Storytelling can be a powerful way to do this. This section of the toolkit will cover methods for finding common ground on energy issues and why they are important. It is crucial to acknowledge the validity of everyone's worldview and focus on shared key values. Though varying worldviews can cause varying values, they all focus on the human experience and storytelling is a fundamental form of human communication.

An understanding of cultural cognition theory can be beneficial when working to find common ground. Cultural cognition theory refers to the tendency of individuals to judge the risks and facts of important subjects based on their personal and community values. Dan M. Kahan is a professor of law at Yale Law schools, who has thoroughly studied cultural cognition theory. Some of his research includes "Cultural cognition of scientific consensus" (Kahan, et al. 2011) and "Cultural Cognition and Public Policy" (Kahan & Braman, 2006). These use cultural cognition to explain why people disagree on issues widely agreed upon in the scientific community as well as why people disagree on important policy topics. One key point found by this research is that there is a strong correlation between agreement and disagreement regarding specific issues that might otherwise be thought of as independent. Another key point is that people tend to believe scientific evidence that aligns with their worldviews, but don't always believe evidence that doesn't. This means that opinions regarding issues such as climate change and gun control are inherently linked despite being seemingly disparate issues. Furthermore, someone who is against capping emissions for climate change is less likely to believe information that supports it. These worldviews and values are

QUICK "HOW TO"

Do not try to change the worldview of your audience. Instead, tell a story that fits into it.

Recognize that the values and worldview of your audience are valid because they connect to the fundamental human desires and needs.

Focus your story on the key values of your audience. These values are rooted in fundamental human desires and needs (including but not limited to):

- Safety
- Security
- Health
- Love
- Independence
- Community

"A good story hits the head and the heart."

Use your story to play to the emotions of your audience. People respond most to how they feel.

Summary: Connect energy solutions to the key values and emotions of your audience through storytelling. Tell a story that fits into their worldview rather than contradicts it.

often connected to distinct social groups and cause polarization among energy issues.

How can storytelling help find common ground between differing worldviews and values?

How does storytelling overcome the effects of cultural cognition?

A unique characteristic of storytelling is its connection to emotion. People tend to make decisions based on their feelings rather than on information alone. Telling someone information that contradicts their worldview or doesn't align with their key values will not gain their support on an energy issue. However, telling someone a story that brings them emotion can alter their worldview and make them more open to energy solutions.

Understand the key values of your audience and tie them to your energy story. Focus on what your audience cares about most. Create a feeling of excitement for a brighter future or a feeling of nostalgia for a better past. Once your audience is hooked on this destination, paint a path to get to there. If your audience cares deeply about the environment speak to those points. On the other hand, if your audience cares more about money or security focus on that. Often times, an effective energy story will focus on multiple key values at once.

It is important to acknowledge that all values are valid because they connect to fundamental human needs and desires. One powerful example of this is the research of Sarah Parker, an environmental consultant at Peak Sustainability Group, during her WWU master's thesis, "Community Perspectives Regarding Building Electrification as a Climate Mitigation Strategy in Bellingham" (Parker, 2021). This research finds three perspectives regarding building electrification in Bellingham, Washington: "Bold Climate Action Now", "Unregulated Energy Independence", and "Cost Concerned". Parker finds that these perspectives are rooted in varying concerns and key values which either support or oppose the building electrification measures proposed for Bellingham. She argues that policy that is widely acceptable across all perspectives will gain the most support and have the largest long-lasting impact.

All of these values are tied to fundamental human desires and needs such as energy, money, independence, and a healthy climate. Storytelling can connect these values to energy solutions and gain wider support. Rather than just presenting building electrification facts and figures, tell a story that connects those facts to the key values from each perspective. Building electrification can mean bold climate action while maintaining energy independence and keeping costs low. Tell a story that shows how this is true and sparks emotion from each perspective. To build common ground between opposing views, a good energy story must hit the head and the heart.

Voice Empowerment

Often those most impacted by energy issues also have the smallest voice. Empowering the voices of these groups is crucial to prevent false narratives and find holistic solutions. Scientists, economists, and policy makers who work on energy issues are usually not the ones who are most affected by them. Their identity and daily life are detached from the energy issue while those who are most affected by the issue have a far smaller voice. These people are often from marginalized communities.

A powerful example of this is the destructive salmon loss in the Coast Salish region from hydroelectric dams and fossil fuel export terminals. These salmon are not only crucial for the health of the surrounding ecosystem, but also to the lifestyle and culture of the Coast Salish Indigenous communities. The Salmon People Project by Children of the Setting Sun Productions works to use Indigenous storytelling practices and the magnification of Indigenous voices to reverse the damages of salmon loss (CSSP, 2022). This is a three-part project focused on community engagement, academic and government research, and sharing their story. Their story is shared through a documentary and six-part video series on the bleak situation of salmon as well as a path to recovery. This is a powerful example of storytelling being used for positive change in energy and related topics. Hydroelectric dams are often praised for their carbon free electricity generation and instantaneous dispatch speeds. However, they are also extremely destructive to the surrounding ecosystems and surrounding Indigenous communities. The Coast Salish communities have their identity rooted in this issue while the policy makers do not. This is a narrative that must be told to find holistic energy solutions.

How do you facilitate voice empowerment?

A useful facilitation tool for voice empowerment is a strategy known as social learning. Social learning is the practice of learning both from others and with others. Rather than a single person explaining a topic to a group, the entire group learns together. This is important because many discussions regarding energy issues involve one person, the “expert”, explaining a topic to an audience, “non-experts”. However, energy issues are not that simple. There is oftentimes not one right answer to an energy issue, nor is there a holistic expert of energy. An engineer for a dam may be conventionally considered an expert, but they know very little about

QUICK “HOW TO”

Prioritize listening to the people whose identity is rooted in the energy issue; they are affected most. These people are usually not the major decision-makers.

Focus the conversation on what you don’t know rather than what you do. This levels the playing field between those considered “experts” and those who are not.

Learn as a group through social learning techniques and be intentional about equitable sharing.

Use social learning facilitation strategies such as the Design Clinic Format; this can be useful for sharing a story about your energy problem and finding holistic solutions.

Tell a story that gives agency to those most impacted by energy issues and builds momentum for future successes.

how that dam affects the surrounding ecosystem and communities. This is why it is important to learn from everyone involved.

One way to do this is focusing on what individuals in the group do not know rather than on what they do know. This levels the playing field between those who are considered experts and those who are not. It also helps foster vulnerability between everyone connected to the issue. Policy makers, economists, and scientists who often do not have their identity rooted in the issue will not be as vulnerable as those who have their identity rooted in the issue or are affected by the issue on a daily basis. For example, an economist calculating the costs and profits for a new power plant is far more disconnected from the issue than those who live in the community where the powerplant will be built. This gives the economist power over the community members because the community members are vulnerable and the economist is not. Focusing the story on what the economist does not know will level the playing field between the economist and community. This way everyone can participate in the discussion.

The Community Engagement Fellows has numerous examples, tips, and best practices for effective social learning (CEF). Meeting structure can be used to ensure everyone gets to share their story in an energy discussion. Travis Tennesen, the Convener of CEF lists these best practices for effective and equitable social learning in his living document, "Walking the Talk: Building Equity into Meetings Using Social Learning":

- ...participants join in via a clear and compelling invitation.
- ...equity is stated as a guiding value at the outset.
- ...it's clear when participants should talk, and not talk.
- ...it's clear who is facilitating.
- ...the person/people with most formal power are not the facilitator(s).
- ...the facilitator doesn't talk much, just enough to give prompts/instructions.
- ...the purpose of each activity is explained/apparent.
- ...the structure is simple.
- ...the activities highlight shared experiences/passions rather than expertise/deficiencies.
- ...the facilitator(s) participate in the activities, when possible.

These practices will clearly explain the point of the social learning exercise, ensure all voices are heard, and have the most impactful participation from the group. This way social learning can be a powerful tool for hearing and give input on energy stories from many backgrounds.

One useful social learning structure by CEF is the design clinic facilitation strategy. In a design clinic, one person gets two minutes to pose their challenge to the group; the group gets four

Use storytelling to bring people and communities together. Individually someone may feel helpless, but in a community of like-minded people they have power. Use this power for needed change.

Summary:

Use social learning techniques to empower the voices of those around you and level the playing field between those considered "experts" and those not. Use stories to bring people together and tell stories that foster a feeling of agency. This can give small communities power against larger energy entities.

minutes to ask for more information about the challenge; the group then gets four minutes to share their own related experiences and another four minutes to give advice to the presenter. Afterwards, the presenter shares for two minutes about what information from the group stood out to them. When the group is speaking to the presenter, the presenter must remain silent at all times. This forces the presenter to take in the information from the group and gives the group space to speak. Below is the design clinic format listed on the CEF website:

1. **“Could you help me...”**: Presenter asks for help related to a challenge in their ongoing/upcoming work, with brief context/background to provide a frame. (~2 mins)
2. **“Share more about...”**: Group inquires about the context/circumstances surrounding the question. *Note: group members should refrain from offering advice. Note: At the end of this step, the facilitator asks if the presenter wants to share additional context.* (~4 mins)
3. **“This makes me think of...”**: Group members share experiences and stories that this challenge makes them think about, related to work or broader life experiences. *Note: presenter listens quietly during this time.* (~4 mins)
4. **“You might try...”**: Group members provide suggestions about wise next steps to move the work forward. *Note: presenter is still listening quietly.* (~4 mins)
5. **“What struck me...”**: Presenter shares briefly about the most notable, interesting, and/or useful aspects of the discussion. (~2 mins)

The design clinic format can be used for energy problems to find holistic solutions. The presenter can quickly share their energy story before hearing stories from the groups experiences and getting advice for their energy problem. This is effective because it ensures that participants understand the challenge before giving recommendations, encourages equitable sharing of ideas, and allows the presenter to listen and learn rather than immediately respond and defend. It is important to ensure that one member from the group does not dominate the discussion. Otherwise, voice empowerment will not be an outcome of the design clinic format. It is key to be intentional about letting everyone speak for a design clinic to run smoothly.

Lastly, a key point that came up in the interviews for the creation of this toolkit was the need for a feeling of agency. When smaller communities stand against energy giants, it is important that they feel powerful. However, there is often a feeling of powerlessness when a community is hurt by energy issues. This is especially true as a small community standing against a massive energy corporation. Energy stories should be used to give agency to those standing against fossil fuel corporations and other energy giants. One example of this is the Thin Green Line movement by the Sightline Institute which gives agency to the Northwest to stand against the Asian fossil fuel energy industry. This movement tells a story that the Northwest is a barrier between the Asian fossil fuel industry and the North American fossil fuel deposits. This story gives power to the Northwest to face these energy giants and keep that carbon in the ground.

Tell a story of successes and power that shows how communities can stand up to the fossil fuel industry. Use past successes to build momentum for future successes and gain power as a community.

However, along with agency it is important to bring communities together. This is a point deeply emphasized by Darrell Hillaire, the executive director of Children of the Setting Sun Productions. Hillaire travels across the Coast Salish region and brings Indigenous tribes together to speak out against energy issues and other serious problems impacting the Coast Salish region. He argues that individually we feel helpless, but in a community of like-minded people we have power. Stories have a unique ability to build connections and bring people together. Share your own stories and listen to others to bring communities together; this will gain power against energy giants. Elevate the stories of those around you and listen deeply to what they have to say.

Improved Energy Dictionary

Description: There is an abundance of problematic language in the energy industry. This includes confusing industry jargon, misleading or gatekeeping language, as well as buzzwords that have lost their meaning. In most situations where these words are used there are better alternatives that will be more accurate and understandable. This section of the toolkit outlines some of these problematic words and phrases, describes why they are problematic, and offers better alternatives. This dictionary is in alphabetic order besides the first word “sustainable” which is listed first due to its high use.

Summary Table (Table 1):

WORD/PHRASE	PROBLEM	ALTERNATIVE
<p>Sustainable – Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future (Varying definitions exist).</p> <p>Clean Energy – A term for zero-emission energy sources like solar or wind.</p> <p>Developed – Countries or communities that use modern technology and infrastructure</p> <p>Energy Efficiency – Getting the same energy service with lower energy use.</p> <p>Green – A term often used for environmentally friendly practices.</p> <p>Renewable Natural Gas – Natural gas derived from non-fossil sources.</p>	<p>This phrase is overused and has lost much of its meaning.</p> <p>All energy is damaging in some way. No energy source is truly clean.</p> <p>This implies that countries or communities using modern services are superior to countries who do not.</p> <p>This phrase does not clearly describe its benefits to the individual or society and is often confused with energy conservation.</p> <p>This phrase leads to greenwashing and misleading information.</p> <p>This phrase implies that renewable natural gas is similar to renewable energy sources like wind or solar. This is not the case.</p>	<p>Situational alternatives - check section for details.</p> <p>Situational alternatives - check section for details.</p> <p>Modernity – Modernity does not imply superiority between groups, just the use of modern technology and infrastructure.</p> <p>Cheaper Energy – This more clearly describes getting the same energy service at a lower energy cost.</p> <p>Situational alternatives - check section for details.</p> <p>Biomethane – This phrase describes the non-fossil nature of this energy source without grouping it with solar and wind.</p>

Dictionary:

“Sustainable”

The most common problematic word in this energy dictionary is the word “sustainable”. Sustainable has a number of definitions such as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future”, “meeting the needs of the 7th generation”, or simply “being able to be maintained or upheld for a long period of time”. Sustainable is used everywhere to describe products and services that are environmentally friendly or have a smaller than normal footprint; this is not exclusive to the energy industry. However, environmentally friendly has a very loose definition that can be used to make a product or service sound better than it is. Anything can claim to be sustainable. Furthermore, this is not the true definition of sustainable. Below is a comic by American author Randall Munroe regarding the increase of use of the word “sustainable”:

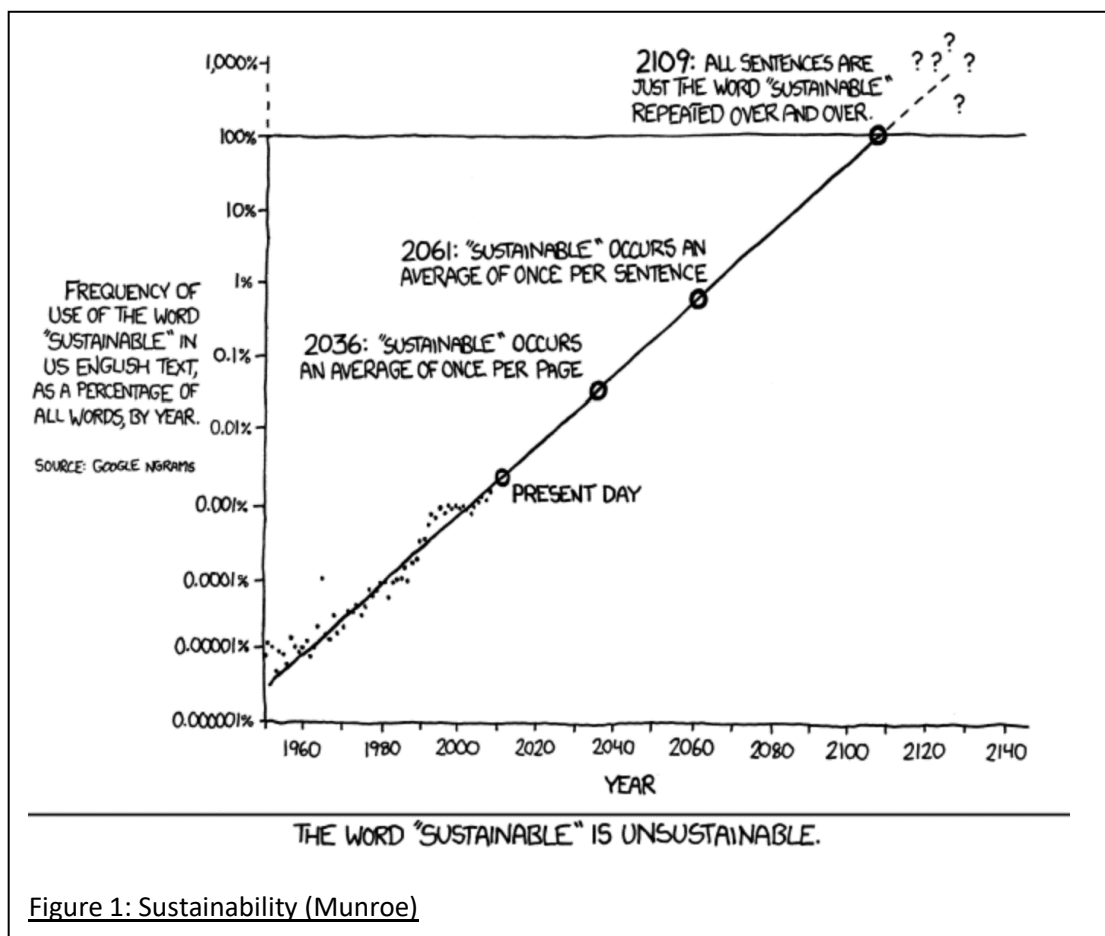


Figure 1: Sustainability (Munroe)

You can see in the figure that sustainable is rarely used in the 1960's and by the 2100 it is the only word spoken. This is exaggeration but accurately describes the increase in use of the word "sustainable" in recent years. Sustainable has become an overarching word to describe things that are "good" and replaces more accurate descriptions which misleads customers. When telling an energy story, it is important to use more accurate descriptions so you do not mislead the audience. These better alternatives are dependent on the situation and audience. Below is a list of better alternatives for a few potential situations:

- Low-carbon
- Low-waste
- Low-pollution
- Non-damaging to the environment
- Non-damaging to human health
- Environmentally regenerative

This is not a comprehensive list of all alternatives to the word "sustainable", but these can be used in many situations to make the same argument in a more accurate and less misleading way.

"Clean Energy"

"Clean" is often used to describe renewable energy sources or energy sources with low pollution. Wind, solar, and other energy sources are often referred to as "clean energy". However, this is word is misleading. There are no true clean sources of energy. Coal energy may be more polluting than wind energy, but wind energy still has its own embodied carbon from the construction of wind turbines, transportation of materials, and other related processes. In fact, according to a recent study by Catapult Offshore Renewable Energy, a single 6MW wind turbine has over 4,000 tons of CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent) embodied in its components (Spyroudi, 2021). Wind is one of the most environmentally friendly sources of electricity, but it is not clean. Furthermore, clean is a word that fossil fuel companies can use to make their product look better. For example, clean coal is a form of coal generation where the plant uses pollution control technologies to reduce its emissions. However, even with these technologies, coal is still polluting and the process of mining coal is extremely environmentally destructive. Clean is relative. Rather than calling an energy source clean, consider using the following phrases:

- Low-carbon
- Low-waste
- Low-pollution
- No emission
- Reduced-pollution
- Low-environmental damage
- Reduced-environmental damage

This is not a comprehensive list of alternatives, but rather a few example alternatives.

“Developed”

“Developed” is often used to describe countries or communities that use modern infrastructure and services. On the other hand, countries or communities that do not use modern infrastructure and services are referred to as “undeveloped”. This is problematic because it implies superiority between countries and communities that use modern infrastructure and those that do not. Furthermore, it is often used derogatorily towards “undeveloped” or “developing” groups which belittles them compared to others. However, this difference in lifestyle is not superior or inferior to the others. Instead, a better alternative is the word “modernity”. Modernity does not imply superiority between one group and another. Modernity simply describes the infrastructure and services in a location as modern or not modern. This can make the same point as the word “developed” without the negative connotations.

“Energy Efficiency”

The next phrase in this energy dictionary is “energy efficiency”. Energy efficiency is often used interchangeably with “energy conservation”. However, these two phrases have very different meanings. Energy efficiency means using less energy to get the same or better services. On the other hand, energy conservation means receiving less services to use less energy. This is important because energy conservation implies scarcity while energy efficiency promotes abundance. People are scared of scarcity. Furthermore, people do not want to lower their services. To gain support for energy issues, it is crucial to maintain the same services or improve them. Energy conservation does not accomplish this.

The average person may not know the exact definition of energy efficiency whether or not they want to support it. Instead of using the phrase “energy efficiency”, a good alternative is “cheaper energy”. This still describes getting the same energy service at a lower energy cost like energy efficiency, but it will not get confused with energy conservation. Furthermore, the average person is cost concerned. This phrase connects to the shared value of lowering costs and promotes a feeling of abundance rather than scarcity. Most people support the energy transition, but they do not want it to hurt their lifestyle.

“Green”

“Green” is a phrase used similarly to “clean” and “sustainable”. Companies may use the statement “going green” to describe using more environmentally friendly practices in their operations. However, there is no strict definition of going green and any company can make this statement. This leads to greenwashing which is a process of providing misleading information regarding the environmental impact of a process or service. By saying that a company is going green, they may make the customer believe that their product has a low impact on the

environment when it actually does not. Rather than saying “green” consider using alternatives such as:

- Low-impact
- Low-carbon
- Low-waste
- Low-pollution
- Non-damaging to the environment
- Reduced damage to the environment
- Environmentally regenerative

This is not a comprehensive list of alternatives, but rather a few example alternatives.

“Natural Gas or Renewable Natural Gas”

“Natural gas” is often thought of as good for the environment and public health because it has the word “natural” in it. However, this is not the case. Natural gas is made of methane which has a global warming potential up to 36 times that of carbon dioxide (EPA, 2021). This means that one ton of methane emitted is 36 times more damaging to the climate than one ton of carbon dioxide. Any methane leaked will cause this damage. Furthermore, the burning of natural gas in homes is dangerous for human health because it releases pollutants such as carbon monoxide (CARB, 2022).

“Renewable natural gas” contains two buzzwords, “natural” and “renewable”. This makes renewable natural gas an even more problematic phrase. “Renewable” is often associated with environmentally friendly. However, renewable natural gas is used by burning methane from biotic sources rather than fossil sources. This makes it more damaging than true renewable sources such as solar and wind energy.

Better alternatives include “methane” for natural gas and “biomethane” for renewable natural gas. These phrases accurately describe the gas that is being burned for fuel without associating it with words that imply benefits for environmental and human health. A study by the Yale Climate Change Communication found that “natural gas” evokes much more positive feelings than the term “methane”, and that “methane” evokes negative feelings across all political groups (Lacroix, K., et al., 2020). This means that using “methane” and “biomethane” will help gain support for the transition away from these harmful gasses.

The Visual Narrative and Auditory Art

Visual Art and Narrative:

Visual art is one of the earliest forms of human communication. Pictures allow people to recreate reality in an easily understandable way. Furthermore, pictures can be quickly processed by the audience faster than they could read or listen to a story alone. Because of this, pictures can play a powerful role in storytelling. Moreover, pictures can be used to create new narratives that challenge and overcome existing fallacies.

A famous example of a picture-based narrative is the photo of a polar bear floating on a small sheet of ice. It can be seen in [figure 2](#) below. This photo is used to illustrate the far-reaching impact of climate change on the natural environment, but through this photo a false narrative has been created. Climate change is not a distant problem that only hurts polar bears on icecaps, but an immediate problem that hurts everyone and everything everywhere. Thinking of climate change as a distant problem may prevent immediate action so it is important to discourage these narratives. However, it is important to note what this photo does well. It engages the emotions of the audience by displaying an animal in trouble and clearly depicts a direct effect of climate change. The size of



Figure 2: Polar Bear (Robertson, 2012)

the ice in comparison to the polar bear is comical which helps illustrate the unreal situation we are in. This is one of the most famous photos regarding climate change and has been used in a number of climate presentations.



Figure 3: Cooling Towers (Alec, 2017)

QUICK “HOW TO”

Avoid pictures that create false narratives. Instead, focus on pictures based in truth.

Clearly explain pictures that could be misleading.

Pictures for energy problems can be problem focused (ex: human health damage from energy generation), solution focused (ex: wind turbine on farmland), or be used to illustrate the people, place, and culture related to the energy issue.

Combine pictures, music, and storytelling for engaging energy presentations. Slideshows with these elements can be an effective way to incorporate important facts and figures along with the energy story.

Pictures and music can engage the emotion of the audience while also making them think. This allows energy presentations to be understandable by a wider audience.

A picture often used in the energy industry to depict the pollution of fossil fuel power generation is a photo of a cooling tower. It will show billows of gaseous material floating into the sky from the tower and darkening the ground below with a manmade cloud. This powerfully displays the direct effect of fossil fuels on the air and captivates the audience. However, this photo also creates a false narrative. Steam emitted from these towers does not pollute the environment, carbon dioxide pollution from smoke stacks does. This steam cloud creates a more dramatic photo than a smoke stack often creates, but it is distracting from the true problem. This can be seen in [figure 3](#) above. In that photo, there are a number of large cooling towers releasing massive clouds of steam, but the two skinnier smokestacks have nothing visible leaving them. This is because the smokestacks are emitting superheated carbon dioxide which is invisible to the human eye. This carbon dioxide is the dangerous pollution and it is the largest contributor to climate change.

Summary:

Pictures can be used to create narratives based in truth, but also fiction. Combining pictures and music in energy story presentations is more engaging and understandable for a wider audience.

This may not seem like a big issue since it demonizes fossil fuels which will benefit the transition to renewable energy. However, even false narratives for good can be problematic because it distracts from the problem of focus. A false narrative, no matter its purpose, leads to an uneducated audience who will not know how to properly solve the energy issue. Instead, it is important to use pictures to create narratives based on truth. These pictures will properly educate the audience regarding pertinent energy issues while helping them understand the need for energy solutions. Pictures that create true narratives could be problem focused or solution focused. A problem focused picture could be of a cancer patient sick from diesel pollution, a worker struck by black lung from coal, or dangerous working conditions in a mine for rare earth elements. These pictures will engage the emotions of the audience like the false narratives above, but will properly educate them too using truth. A solution focused picture could be of a wind turbine on Texas farmland, free weatherization of affordable housing, or the installation of solar panels on a public school. Both problem and solution focused pictures have their place in energy storytelling. Furthermore, pictures can be used to illustrate the people, place, and culture related to the energy issue. These pictures will make the audience more invested in the story and help the audience understand the broader implications of the issue. When using pictures, it is important to avoid misleading information that leads to false narratives or to clearly explain the picture if it could be misleading.

Presentations, Pictures, and Music:

Furthermore, pictures can be combined with music for powerful story presentations. A slideshow of photos connected to your energy story along with matching music will set the atmosphere and tone for your story. Use music from the culture that the story takes place in. Show photos of the land and people affected by the energy issue. When the topic is depressing, pick music and photos to match that emotion, and when the topic is uplifting do the same. This

can engage the emotions of the audience and be more interesting than an oral story alone. Furthermore, combining photos and music with important facts and figures can communicate the data linked to the story while keeping the audience's attention. A good energy story will strike emotion in the audience, but it will also make them think. As mentioned earlier in this toolkit, the best energy stories will hit the head and the heart.

One example of this is professor Xi Wang from Western Washington University. Dr. Wang is an energy professor with a bachelor's degree in English, master's degree in environmental science, and PhD in geology. She is able to effectively combine this interdisciplinary education for powerful energy research and presentations using storytelling practices. Her dissertation thesis was on the overproduction of coal powerplants in China and the treatment of construction workers for those plants (Wang, 2021). She presents this research in three ways: her written thesis, an academic slideshow presentation, and a story presentation. Her written research and academic slideshow presentations are able to engage those in the academic world of energy, however, her story presentation of this research can engage an audience from a wider background.

In her story presentation, she begins with cultural music from Inner Mongolia and tells the history of the land before coal plants were built. She then talks about the lives of the construction workers and the over generation of coal. This illustrates the people and place of the energy issue in a way that engages the emotions of the audience and can be understood by anyone. Along with this music, she also uses pictures of the land, workers, and powerplants in a slideshow presentation to further paint the story. Furthermore, she includes important data about the issue while the emotion and attention of the audience is already engaged. This way the audience gains a deeper understanding of the setting and place of the energy issue and the important facts that go with it. In this way, Dr. Wang is able to use music, pictures, and data to tell an effective and understandable energy story.

Using these elements for energy stories will allow academic research to reach a wider audience. An engaging energy story combined with music and pictures can affect the audience in a more powerful way than an oral story alone. Furthermore, it is more understandable to the average person. Much academic research goes unread because it is not engaging and difficult to understand. This leads to important energy issues being ignored. Music, pictures, and engaging storytelling can overcome this barrier.

Conclusion

Storytelling is an important component of communication for energy issues. However, this aspect of energy science, policy, and industry is often overlooked. This leads to the dismissal of important data, an uneducated public regarding energy issues, and inequity in energy decision-making. Using storytelling practices for energy issues and solutions can more effectively communicate complex topics, find common ground on polarized issues, and empower the voices who need it most. When storytelling for energy solutions it is best to incorporate proper storytelling techniques, include an engaging narrative, avoid problematic or misleading language, and focus on the key values of your audience. Furthermore, when asking for energy stories use questions that will spark specific and vivid memories. People remember impactful, emotional, and lifechanging events best; these will give the best stories. If finding narrative in your energy story is difficult, try using the “Three V’s” narrative structure and find the values, villain, and vision connected to your story. Lastly, when storytelling for energy issues it is important to make your audience feel emotion because emotion is remembered more vividly than fact. If struggling to improve your energy story remember this key point: the best energy stories will hit the head and the heart.

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