Breakout: Thursday, 2:15-3:30

Climate Storytelling: How To Engage and Move Your Audience



Preeti Desai, Jersey City Birds

Lisa Hardaway, Green Jay Strategies

Nora Schnure, Duke Farms

Elizabeth Sorrell, Green Jay Strategies

Green Jay Strategies

Select Clients

Green Jay Strategies is proud to be a woman- and LGBTQ-owned agency

Consumer Reports

Fundación Jocotoco Ecuador

Jane Goodall Institute

Ocean Conservancy

Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy

Doris Duke Foundation

Agenda

Facilitators:

Elizabeth Sorrell Green Jay Strategies

Lisa Hardaway Green Jay Strategies

Nora Schnure, Duke Farms

Preeti Desai, Jersey City Birds

- Introductions
- Science of Storytelling
- Target Audiences
- Impact Story
- Real World Examples
- Exercise
- Reflections

Introductions

- Name
- Organization
- What drew you to this workshop?

Learning Objectives

- Dig deep into the power of place-based impact storytelling to change hearts and minds.
- Explore the motivations and values of your target audiences to unlock your ability to connect them with climate solutions.
- Understand the elements of impact storytelling.

Takeaways

By the end of the session you should be able to say...

- My target audience is...
- The action I need them to take is..
- My impact story is...

Science of Storytelling: How Stories Affect Our Brains

Why do we crave stories?

Human beings, individually and collectively, often respond more readily to stories than to data.

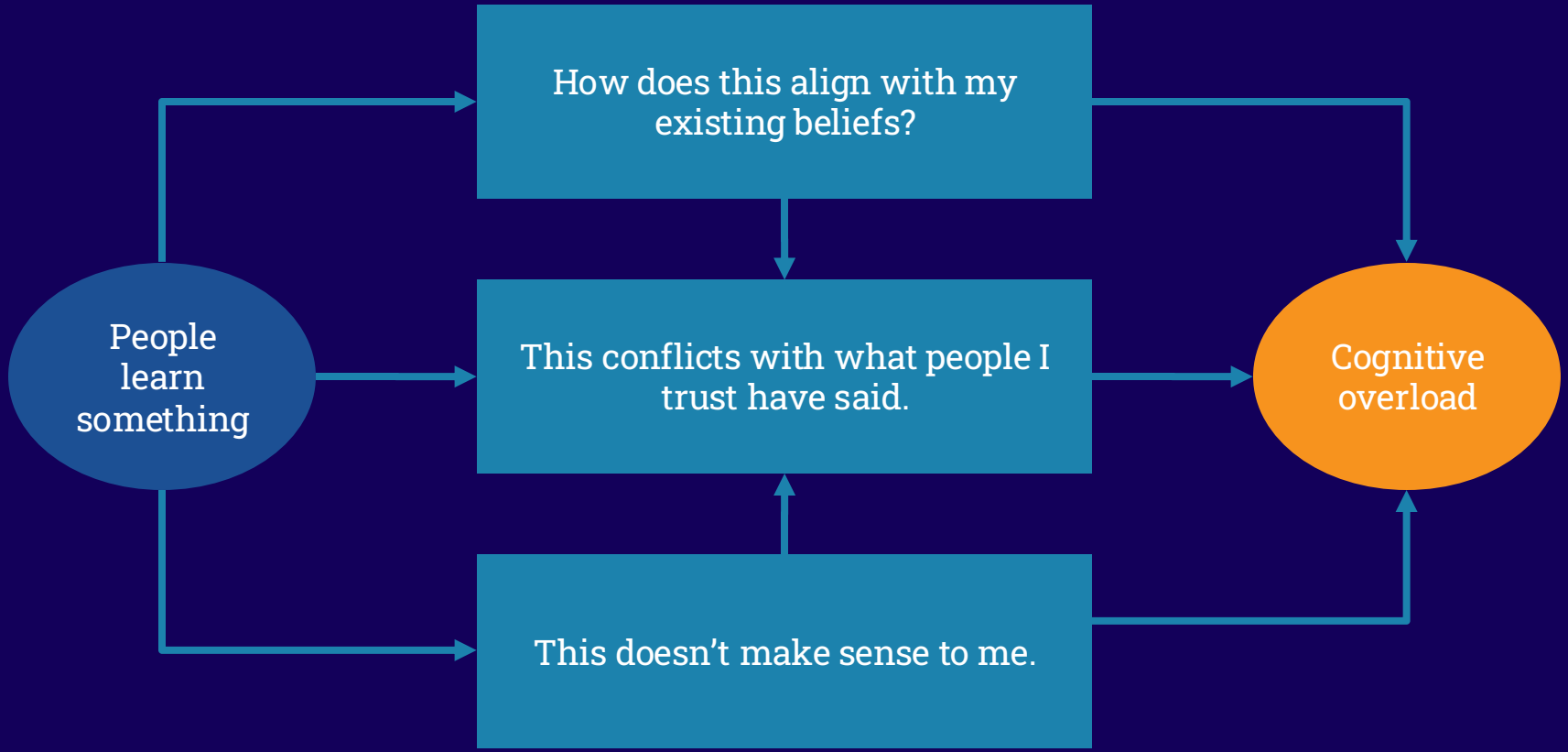
“Character-driven stories with emotional content result in a better understanding of the key points a speaker wishes to make and enable better recall of these points weeks later.” —Dr. Paul J. Zak in Harvard Business Review

Why do we crave stories?



What we think should happen…




How does this align with my existing beliefs?
People learn something
This conflicts with what people I trust have said.
Cognitive overload
This doesn't make sense to me.

Target Audiences: How to Define and Prioritize

Communications As a Tool

- What is your **goal**? And how does it support or feed into organizational goals?
- Which **audiences** do you need to engage to accomplish that goal?
    - Be specific, e.g., “regular voters for whom climate change is a top 3 issue,” instead of “members of the public.”
- What **action** do you need your target audience to take?
- What is the **core message**? What will persuade or motivate your target audience?
    - This is the foundation on which your individual messages will be built.
- What are the best **platforms** for reaching and engaging your target audience?

Defining and Prioritize Your Audiences

1. Who do you need to engage to accomplish your goal?	**Environmentally-motivated visitors**
2. What do you want these groups of people to do?	**Become a member**
3. What do you need to understand about them?	**How often they visit and why.**
4. What do they need to understand about your work?	**Programs that speak to their interest.**

Defining and Prioritize Your Audiences

1. Who do you need to engage to accomplish your goal?	**Board of Directors**
2. What do you want this group of people to do?	**Support a budget resolution for energy transition**
3. What do you need to understand about them?	**They are skeptical as to the ROI.**
4. What do they need to understand about your work?	**Being a leader in this space = more donors and engaged members.**

Defining and Prioritize Your Audiences

1. Who do you need to engage to accomplish your goal?

Municipal elected leaders (Tulipville)

2. What do you want these groups of people to do?

Adopt a master plan that includes residential natural climate solutions

3. What do you need to understand about them?

Half of the council are focused on engineered stormwater runoff solutions

4. What do they need to understand about your work?

How gray and green infrastructure can work together and the budget

Questions?

What is an Impact Story?

What Else Makes an Impact Story?

- The stakes are **clear**
- It captures the **imagination**
- It has a **protagonist**; **characters**
- It appeals to a **common value**
- It makes an **emotional connection**
- It moves beyond what happens and conveys **why it matters**
- The **messenger** matters

Activities vs. Impact

Activities detail **what happened**

Impact shows **what difference was made**

Highest + best, this may be your one shot

What motivates this person/audience?

Activities vs. Impact

What difference was made?

Activities	Impact
Improved fundraising by 20% YOY	Secured $$ needed for forest restoration
Grew Instagram followers by 20%	Briefed key reporters on an emerging issue
Collected 10,000 signature on a petition	Persuaded elected leader to co-sponsor a bill

Real World Examples

Jersey City Birds: From collision monitoring to bird-friendly buildings

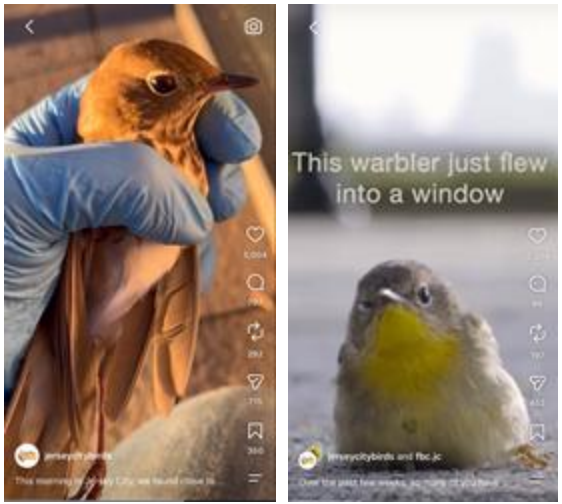


The work: Document collisions and help injured birds

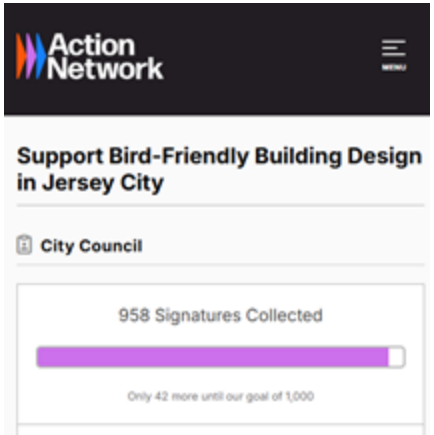
The goal: Secure bird-friendly building requirements

Turning Attention Into Action

Making the problem visible



Building public support

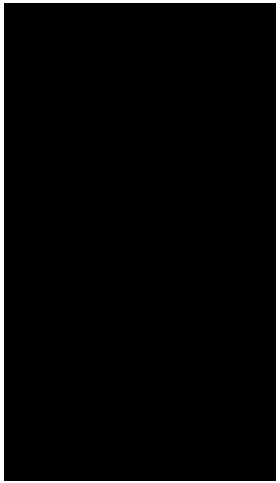


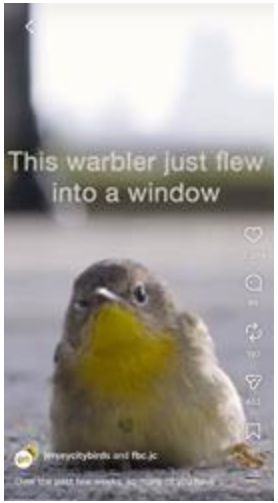
Mobilizing people to act



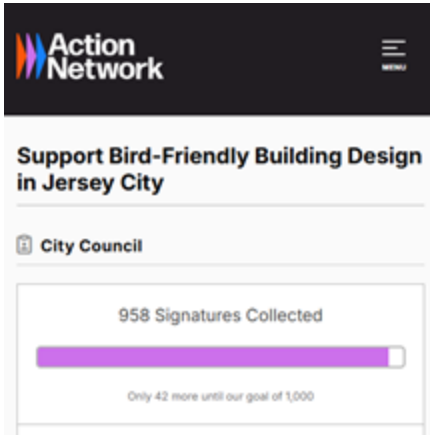
Turning Attention Into Action

Making the problem visible





Building public support



Mobilizing people to act



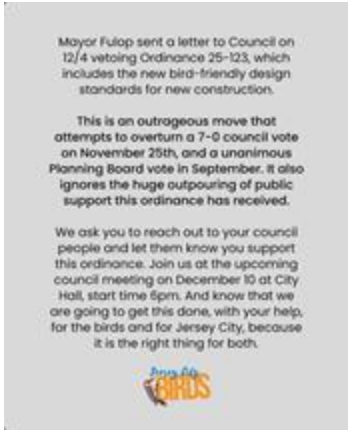
Sustaining the Campaign

Nov 2025
First ordinance passes

Dec 2025
Mayor vetoes ordinance

Jan 2026
Reintroduced to new council




Mayor Fulop sent a letter to Council on 12/4 vetoing Ordinance 25-123, which includes the new bird-friendly design standards for new construction.

This is an outrageous move that attempts to overturn a 7-0 council vote on November 25th, and a unanimous Planning Board vote in September. It also ignores the huge outpouring of public support this ordinance has received.

We ask you to reach out to your council people and let them know you support this ordinance. Join us at the upcoming council meeting on December 10 at City Hall, start time 6pm. And know that we are going to get this done, with your help, for the birds and for Jersey City, because it is the right thing for both.



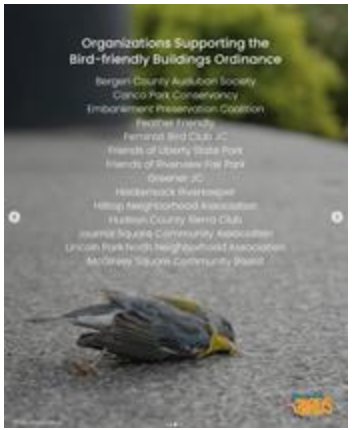

Urge Your Jersey City Council Members to Support the Bird-friendly Buildings Ordinance and Protect Our Birds!

Help us create a better city for birds and people! Jersey City's bird-friendly buildings ordinance is going back to the city council for a vote and it needs your vocal support! Email your city council members (email addresses and sample points below) now.

Birds have migrated through our environment for millennia, and we want to enjoy their voyage for years to come. Recent city development has trended towards more and more glass exterior facades and increased light pollution along our critical location on the Atlantic Flyway, creating an increasingly confusing and deadly environment for birds. **We don't have to keep building a Jersey City that harms birds.**

In 2019, NYC passed a bird safe buildings act, or Local Law 15, instituting design measures that require bird safe design measures in new construction. Many other cities have passed similar measures as well, and we want Jersey City to join our sister cities and create a local network that is safer for migrating species.

Please email your ward's city council member and their aide, and include all three at large city council members who represent everyone. If you're not sure who your council member is, you can check this map. We encourage you to BCC them to avoid reply-all situations.



A Win for Jersey City's Birds



March 11, 2026

Passed unanimously

Bird-friendly design requirements for new construction and certain major building projects.

Duke Farms: More than a pretty place

The work: Restoring landscapes and advancing climate solutions through conservation, research and sustainable operations

The goal: Help audiences understand how environmental conservation benefits people, communities and the climate

The storytelling challenge: Connect the science to what people care about.

Lowlands Restoration

Triple benefits: carbon, biodiversity, community



The work: Restoring 112 acres of former ag land through through natural resource damage funding

The goal: Build understanding of how landscape restoration benefits the environment and surrounding communities.

Target Audience: Local residents and the broader public.

Gothamist

To combat flooding in NJ, conservationists turn farmland into forest



Mike Hayes

Planning - Action - Impact

- Approach: Move beyond technical story, connect restoration to flooding, erosion and community resilience, communicate triple benefits.
- What worked: Made the benefits personal and relevant, connected restoration to issues affecting local communities. Generated positive feedback and engagement.
- Takeaway: The story became more compelling when we explained why this mattered to people, not just what we were doing.

Exercises

Target Audience Worksheet

What is your goal?

Who can help you achieve (or could thwart) your goals?

What do you want the target audience to do?

What do you need to understand about them and their motivations?

What do they need to understand about your work?

Where can you reach your audience? What channels?

Impact Story Elements

What are your most impressive impact statements?

Which of those connects to your audience needs?

What are some of the elements of an Impact Story that you could add in?

Reflections

Which question was the hardest to work through? The easiest?

Did any of your answers surprise you?

What is your next step?

Thank You!

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