Overview

It's important to begin any storytelling project with intention. Before you start making things, you should have a clear sense of who you're trying to reach, what you're trying to say and the scope of your project on all platforms.

This project blueprint is designed to help. Fill it out at the beginning of the planning process when you have some idea about what you want to do. Once completed, it should serve as a "North Star" that will help you focus and prioritize throughout the creative process. Added bonus: It will also provide a framework for pitching your idea to other people.

INSTRUCTIONS

01   Read through the entire blueprint first.

02   When you're ready to dive in, gather some supplies (like sticky notes, markers and pens) and start answering the prompts. We suggest completing it in the order presented.

03   If you're stumped — or have a question/thought you want to come back to later — make sure to note it in the "parking lot" section on page 14.

ADVICE FOR USING THE BLUEPRINT

Consider this a take-home assignment that will never be graded. (A+s for everyone)

Use it to guide discussions with your mentor over the next few days.

You don't have to love your first answer to anything and you should feel free to make changes later (we have extra pages if you want to start over).

Use any materials you'd like, from sticky notes and markers to drawing directly on the worksheets.

① **What are you calling this project?**

Use your sticky notes to brainstorm different ideas. Save your favorites on this page.

② **Describe your project in one memorable sentence.**

This description is both an elevator pitch and statement of purpose. We put it near the front of the blueprint so you have a chance to describe what you're making before you go into more detail later on.

After you've spent some time with the blueprint, come back to this section and keep honing it. When you're happy with it, post it in a visible place so you can reference it often. Use it as a gut check against what you're doing, wherever you are in the process. It can help you prioritize, protect against "scope creep" and stay focused.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

③ ## Define your audience.

Before you dive into your project, it's important to know who you're intending to reach. You'll adjust this over time, but starting with a sense of who your audience is, what they need and where they are will help ensure you're informed as you approach this work. Consider not just people who will be seeing/hearing your work, but stakeholders, influencers and competitors.

INSTRUCTIONS

01   Find a space, a wall or table where you have space to spread out and generate a lot of ideas.

02   Imagine a few types of listeners, readers, and/or viewers who you intend to reach with this project. Write one audience type down on a sticky note (one idea per sticky note).

       Examples: Parents of elementary school students; early-career millennial women; first-time voters

03   Now prioritize them. Who is most important? Choose 1-2 that are your main audience for this project. Assume everyone else is a supporting audience.

04   When you're done, add your curated sticky notes to page 5. Stick the most important audience(s) in the "main" area and add all supporting audiences to the right.

PUT YOURSELF IN THE AUDIENCE'S SHOES. ASK:

What unique value or perspective can you add to their lives?

Where are they when they listen?

What are they doing? How are they feeling?

After listening, what will they talk about? Who will they share this with?

Project Blueprint

③ **Define your audience (cont.).**

Main audience(s)

Supporting audience(s)

④ **What do you *think* you're making?**

When you consider what you're making, it's important to take a moment to think more broadly about its characteristics — from who it is intended to reach to what differentiates it from existing projects and coverage. It's OK if that means you question your original assumptions.

Take a few moments to respond to each question in the boxes below. This may feel hard! But know this is just a first draft. There are questions later in the blueprint that will help you hone this section.

[A: FORMAT]
What format might this take? Will it be a single story, radio series, podcast, etc.?

[B: NEED/OPPORTUNITY]
What might your audience need from your project and why? What is the opportunity?

[C: KEY BENEFIT]
How might this project address the audience needs you identified in B?

[D: ALTERNATIVES]
What are alternate ways the audience might get this information (from you or others)?

[E: ADVANTAGE]
How is your approach different and/or better?

④ **What do you *think* you're making? (cont.)**

Now take the answers from the previous pages and copy them into this "Mad Libs"-style statement. You may not end up with poetry, but that's okay!

_____ is a _____

[PROJECT TITLE]   [A: FORMAT]

that _____ for _____

[C: KEY BENEFIT]   [AUDIENCE]

who _____.

[B: NEED/OPPORTUNITY]

Unlike _____ our project _____.

[D: ALTERNATIVES]   [E: ADVANTAGE]

⑤ **How might your audience benefit from this project?**

Will it inform them? Empower them? Connect them to other people? Inspire them to take action? Improve their lives? Change policies?

⑥   **Outline a sample episode or story.**

Now it's time to test drive your concept by outlining a sample story or episode. You can do this however you'd like (on a whiteboard, with sticky notes, etc.), although it can help to talk it out first.

Use these discussion prompts as needed:

1.   What is the story's premise? Is it supported by pre-interviews, reporting, science, etc.?
2.   Is there enough depth to the story to sustain the length you've envisioned?
3.   What essential story elements do you need? Consider: character(s), conflict/problem, setting, universal theme / idea that rises above the story, etc.
4.   Does this story have a central question? Can you ask it in one sentence?
5.   How does this story help fulfill your overall concept?
6.   How does this story serve your audience and its needs (as defined previously)?

Once you've answered those questions — and if you have enough material — try these activities:

●   List the essential ingredients you need to make the best story (such as: reporting and information, voices, scenes, etc.).
●   Story map and/or storyboard the piece to figure out its narrative arc.
●   Describe the potential format. For example, is it scripted narrative, loose, unscripted, non-narrated?
●   If there is a host/narrator, what does that person do and how do they sound?
●   List things the story *is not* about. What rabbit holes should you avoid? What subjects will take you off topic? What aspirations are unrealistic?

⑦ How might you engage your audience?

It's not enough to build something — you have to bring it to your audience. How will you initially connect with them? And after you find them, think about how you might use things like callouts, social media groups and live events to engage and reach them outside of the "main event," wherever they are (which won't always be plugged in to your storytelling).

⑧ **What do you need to represent this project on different platforms?**

Knowing where your project will appear will help you plan and allocate resources accordingly. Think through all the forms your storytelling could take, like a website, on social media, podcast, etc. What assets and help will you need? Consider: audio, video, data, social, illustrations, photographs, brand marks/logos, etc.

⑨ **Who's on the project team and what are their roles? Who are your stakeholders? Supporters?**

It will likely take teamwork to get your project off the ground — and it will be easier if you can identify those players (and their roles) ahead of time.
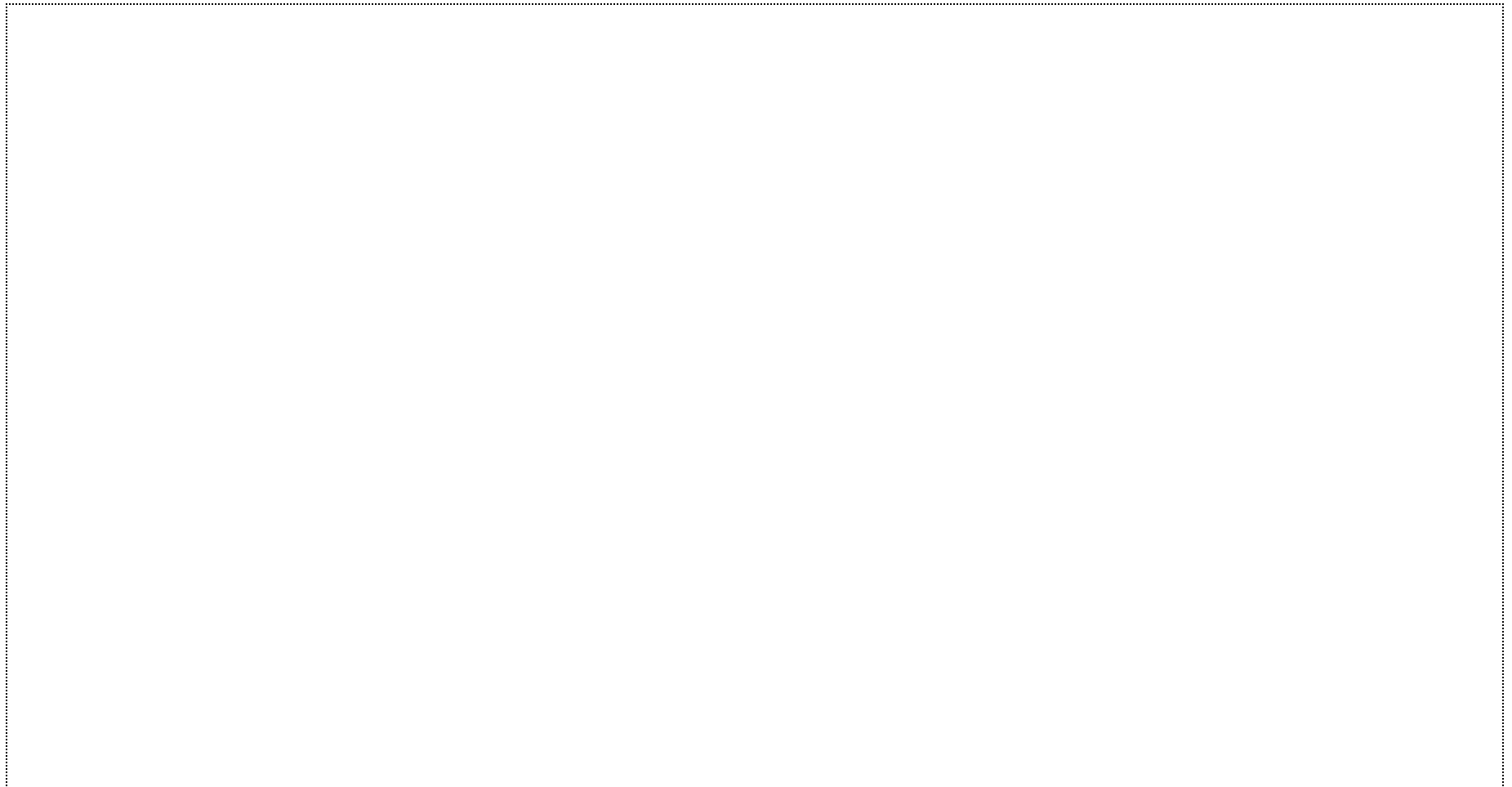
On your team, consider who will own each part of the project (revisit your answer to question 8, "what do you need to represent this project on different platforms?" to make sure you have all your bases covered). List your stakeholders — like your news director, production partners, etc. — and indicate their roles, too. Finally, write a diverse list of supporters who can act as an advisory board and do things like review drafts, provide feedback and cheer you on.

Project team	*Stakeholders*	*Supporters*

⑩ **What does success look like? What are your obstacles?**

Think about different types of goals: short- and long-term, tangible and intangible, measurable and immeasurable. At the same time, think about what stands in your way — what obstacles do you anticipate and how will you overcome them?

Examples of success: Newsroom buy-in results in stories airing on the station; XX podcast downloads, page views or social media mentions; broadcast awards; collaboration with or pick-up by other stations or NPR; people copy you (imitation = flattery and all that), etc.

✪ APPENDIX: Parking lot

Use this section to capture the ideas and questions that come up as you work through the blueprint, but can't address right away.

Roadmap

You did it! Now that you have an idea of what you're making and a blueprint to guide you, it's time to sketch out a building plan with a roadmap and deadlines.

Your timeline should be realistic and feasible (you probably *won't* be able to launch a podcast in two weeks, for example). It can be helpful to set a tentative launch date and backtime the week-by-week work from there. We've included a sample week below and templates you can photocopy on page 16.

Sample Week — May 14-18		
Goal: *What you want to accomplish this week?*	**To-do:** *List the action items necessary to meet your goal.*	**Obstacles:** *What stands in the way of meeting your goal?*
• Complete script for first episode	• Finish pulling tape • First edit • Rewrite • Second edit	• Getting time with editor • Troubleshoot licensing issue with ProTools

Final tip: Communicate — and iterate

As your project starts to pick up steam, make sure you build in space for **check-ins** and "**retrospectives**."

Check-ins can be held daily or weekly, depending on where you are in the production cycle. Everyone on the team should share what they've worked on, what they're focusing on next and what stands in their way. These should be short — 15 minutes max.

After you've completed an episode/story or hit some other milestone, hold a retrospective meeting where you can talk as a team about what worked, what didn't and what you'll try differently next time.

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