

2025

# NONPROFIT STORYTELLING SUMMIT

Knoxville, TN



TENNESSEE NONPROFIT NETWORK

APRIL 23, 2025

BRIDGEWATER PLACE

205 Bridgewater Rd  
Knoxville, TN 37923





# Welcome

On behalf of Tennessee Nonprofit Network and our generous presenting sponsor, the University of Tennessee Knoxville College of Social Work, welcome to the 2025 Nonprofit Storytelling Summit!

This statewide gathering is designed to highlight the essential role of storytelling across every facet of nonprofit work — from data to design, from advocacy to evaluation, and everything in between. Whether you're a communications pro, program director, fundraiser, board member, or intern — you are a storyteller.

Throughout the day, you'll gain practical tools, explore new strategies, and connect with nonprofit peers who are using the power of narrative to elevate missions and inspire change. We're glad you're here — and we can't wait to see the stories you take back to your community.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kevin Dean

President & CEO, Tennessee Nonprofit Network

## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSOR



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
TENNESSEE  
KNOXVILLE

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COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK

# SCHEDULE

<b>8:00am</b>	<b>REGISTRATION &amp; BREAKFAST</b>
<b>8:45am</b>	<b>WELCOME &amp; OPENING REMARKS</b>
<b>9:00am</b>	<b>KEYNOTE ADDRESS: AMBER PARKER</b> (Main room: Henley)
<b>10:00am - 11:00am</b>	<b>BREAKOUT SESSIONS 1</b> (See pages 5 & 6 for descriptions)
<b>11:15am - 12:15pm</b>	<b>BREAKOUT SESSIONS 2</b> (See pages 7 & 8 for descriptions)
<b>12:15pm</b>	<b>LUNCH</b> (Main room: Henley)
<b>1:00pm</b>	<b>LUNCH SPEAKERS</b> (See page 11)
<b>1:45pm - 2:45pm</b>	<b>BREAKOUT SESSIONS 3</b> (See pages 9 & 10 for descriptions)
<b>3:00pm</b>	<b>CLOSING SESSION</b> (Main room: Henley)

*Door prizes will be given away throughout the day!*

# NONPROFIT STORYTELLING SUMMIT

Thank you to the 2025 Summit Committee Members!



**APRIL CARTER - CHIEF PROGRAM OFFICER**



**ANDREA HILL - CHIEF DEVELOPMENT & PARTNERSHIPS OFFICER**



**ANGELA MEEKINS - WEST TENNESSEE REGIONAL MANAGER**

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*Special thanks to our volunteers!*



**KEYNOTE SPEAKER****9:00 AM | HENLEY ROOM****AMBER PARKER, IJAMS NATURE CENTER**

## ***The Stories We Tell: Crafting a Narrative for Nonprofit Success***

Storytelling is at the heart of everything we do in the nonprofit world. From media and marketing to donor engagement and program delivery, the way we tell our organization's story shapes how others see us—and, ultimately—how successful we are. But just as important as the external stories we share are the internal ones we tell ourselves. Too often, we operate from a place of scarcity, questioning our worth and fearing there will never be enough—enough funding, enough support, and enough time. Let's explore how to craft and share powerful stories that inspire action and connection while we take a hard look at the narratives we carry within us. Because when we rewrite our internal story to one of abundance, confidence, and possibility, we don't just transform ourselves—we transform our organizations and the communities we serve.

### **ABOUT AMBER PARKER**

Amber Parker is a seasoned nonprofit leader with a proven track record of guiding organizations through complex challenges to financial stability and operational excellence. As President & CEO of Ijams Nature Center and founder of RootSpark Consulting, she specializes in executive leadership, strategic planning, and organizational change, helping nonprofits build sustainability and amplify their impact. With extensive experience cultivating cross-sector partnerships, Amber has worked with government agencies, academic institutions, and community organizations to drive meaningful change. She has also served on numerous local and national boards, reflecting her commitment to knowledge-sharing and sector-wide growth. A passionate conservationist, Amber finds inspiration in nature—whether hiking, paddling, or birding—and brings that same energy and vision to her leadership.



**KIRAN SINGH SIRAH**

**MAGNOLIA ROOM**

*The Transformative Art and Power of Storytelling*

Storytelling has tremendous power to transform the way we see ourselves and each other. Kiran will discuss the power and artistry of storytelling as an ancient art and as the world's oldest form of communication, and how it can help institutions, large and small, build stronger, healthier, and more cohesive communities. We'll learn of storytelling's unparalleled ability to change the way we interact with one another—how it links us, not just despite our differences, but because of them. Participants will learn the ethical use of storytelling to develop trust and build stronger relationships, how to build stories with others, to foster dialogue in their own communities, and their work to empower others. Participants will understand the art of resilience, as a value, and not just a tool, and how it's integral to collective and communal storytelling, for social change.



**HANNAH WOHLTJEN & JESSICA GIBBONS**

**NEYLAND ROOM**

*Transforming Data into Impact: Leveraging Storytelling for Effective Evaluation Communication*

In this presentation, participants will explore essential strategies for effectively communicating evaluation findings through compelling storytelling. A significant focus of the session will be on the key elements of the storytelling process that can transform data into engaging narratives. Attendees will gain hands-on experience strategically linking narrative goals with supportive data to communicate impact to diverse audiences. Data visualization best practices will be discussed, highlighting how to create clear visuals that enhance understanding. Participants will receive resources to practice these techniques and transform raw data into visually appealing and insightful graphics. Finally, the session will delve into key considerations for equitable storytelling and how well-crafted reports can facilitate learning. By the end of the session, attendees will be equipped with practical skills and knowledge to intentionally leverage data in communicating their impact.



**TYRUS B. STURGIS**

**CHAPMAN ROOM**

*Lessons From My Third Grade Journal on Storytelling and Advocacy*

This presentation merges the musings of a 9-year-old, captured in his third grade journal, with the best practices, experiences, and perspective of a 20+ year communications professional and licensed attorney. The interactive presentation will include a journal workbook for participants to complete to map out strategies to enhance strategic communications efforts. Examples will include the unique challenges of storytelling on behalf of an organization with 4 distinct divisions which include the historic Franklin Theatre, a History & Culture Center, historic preservation and advocacy work, and a \$40M capital campaign for Franklin Grove Estate & Gardens which is currently underway. All done with a balance of instruction, humor, interaction, and collaboration.



**NAOMI ASHER**

**HENLEY ROOM**

*Telling the Deeper Story*

In this session, we'll explore how internal storytelling can strengthen staff connection to your organization's mission, boost engagement, and foster a positive, inclusive culture. By focusing on internal communication, we'll provide practical strategies to improve alignment, teamwork, and reduce burnout. When used effectively, internal storytelling can work wonders in creating a sense of belonging, strengthening the bond between staff and the organization's mission, and fostering a positive, inclusive workplace culture. This, in turn, helps reduce burnout and boosts productivity. We'll dive into how storytelling can become a part of your organization's daily routine, helping reinforce shared values and deepening engagement.





**NAOMI ORIOL**

**MAGNOLIA ROOM**

### *Advocacy Amplified: Using Digital Tools to Drive Nonprofit Impact*

Advocacy and digital storytelling are powerful tools for nonprofits to inspire action and drive change. This session will explore how to craft advocacy-focused narratives that resonate with decision-makers and mobilize communities while leveraging digital platforms and tools to amplify your message. Attendees will learn actionable strategies for using social media, video, and other digital innovations to elevate their storytelling efforts...the session includes interactive discussions and a mini-workshop to help participants begin crafting advocacy-driven, digitally enhanced narratives that deepen engagement and drive measurable results.



**BETH KOFFMAN & HALEY FORTUNE**

**NEYLAND ROOM**

### *Maximizing Storytelling through Employee Engagement*

In today's climate, telling your story successfully as a nonprofit can mean the difference in reaching your organization's goals and objectives. One key area some agencies forget to harness in storytelling is their employees. With their unique perspective of your organization, employees can be a great resource for catching trends, sharing workplace culture, and boosting content interactions. When your staff is more engaged and invested in the values of your organization, you are able to provide better service to stakeholders in your community. This presentation dives into how to build a thriving organizational culture and translate it into content to tell your organization's story. Key Takeaways: Employee Engagement, Storytelling, and Office Culture.



**CAYCI BANKS & MELISSA STROMPOLIS**

**CHAPMAN ROOM**

### *Transforming Your Numbers and Words Into Impactful Stories*

Data can be powerful—but only when it’s transformed into meaningful stories. Nonprofits collect countless metrics that are turned into evaluation reports, research papers, data dashboards, profiles, and even lengthy data reviews. But too often, these data outputs and products sit unused or fail to resonate with intended audiences.

In this interactive workshop, we’ll explore how to combine context, data, and design to craft compelling narratives that build trust and connect data to action. We’ll begin by defining data broadly, recognizing that data is more than just an organizational survey or an evaluation report. Using a structured framework, we’ll discuss how to connect the “why” behind your data with the needs of your key audiences. From crafting the story to selecting the right storytelling outlets, we’ll guide attendees in developing strategies that amplify their organization’s mission and inspire action.



**MATTHEW LEE**

**HENLEY ROOM**

### *Leadership at Every Level: Your Story. Your Impact.*

In nonprofits, true leadership goes beyond a title—it’s about the transformative power of your story. In this session, we invite you to harness storytelling as a dynamic tool to lead, inspire, and drive change regardless of your role.

**Craft Your Authentic Narrative:** Your Unique Voice: Uncover the personal story that defines your leadership journey.

**Inspire Without a Title:** Lead Through Story: Influence your team and community by sharing stories that resonate.

**Enhance Your Storytelling Skills:** Communicate with Clarity: Master techniques that transform ideas into persuasive narratives.

**Your Story Matters:** Every Role Counts: Whether you’re new to the field or a seasoned professional, your story has the power to inspire.



**EMALEA RIECKHOFF & ANDY NIX**

**MAGNOLIA ROOM**

***Crafting Compelling Stories for Aligned Advocacy and Action***

Data alone won't move people—but the right story will. In this interactive, hands-on workshop, you'll learn how to turn numbers into narratives that inspire action, build bridges, and drive advocacy. Discover how to blend qualitative and quantitative data to align organizations, unite diverse stakeholders, and transform fragmented efforts into powerful, collective action. Through real-world case studies—including how Tennessee Nonprofit Network's Day on the Hill successfully influenced legislation—you'll see how compelling stories have secured funding, changed policies, and brought unlikely allies together. By the end of this session, you'll have the tools to craft a persuasive, data-driven story that ignites, unites, and mobilizes for lasting impact. Let's turn data into a movement!



**GRACE LITZAU**

**NEYLAND ROOM**

***Turning Stories into Action: Mobilizing Volunteers & Engaging Supporters***

At Taproot Foundation, we've seen how the right story doesn't just inspire—it mobilizes action, builds movements, and drives lasting change. During this interactive workshop, we will explore real-world insights and lessons learned from mobilizing volunteers, providing practical strategies for nonprofit leaders to strengthen engagement through storytelling. Together, we'll explore how to create shared purpose and partnership, make space for others to contribute to impact, and showcase the long-term value of engagement.





**DR. KEVIN DEAN**

**CHAPMAN ROOM**

***The Six Questions for a Story***

Storytelling is more important than ever for nonprofits, especially in the wake of so many challenges and misinformation surrounding the sector. Stories are essential for any successful nonprofit. They connect us to our mission, inspire action, and demonstrate impact in a way that data alone cannot. But how do you craft a story that truly resonates? This interactive workshop will equip you with a powerful framework – the Six Questions – to unlock and amplify the stories within your organization. Participants will learn how to use the Six Questions—a simple yet effective storytelling tool—to develop compelling narratives about their nonprofit’s impact. We’ll delve into each question, exploring how it contributes to a well-rounded and engaging story. Through guided exercises and peer feedback, you’ll learn to identify and articulate the key elements of a powerful narrative, focusing on a specific story about a volunteer, service recipient, or other stakeholder.

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**ANDREA HILL**

**HENLEY ROOM**

***Storytelling for Strategic Partnerships: Corporations, Funders, and Beyond***

This session is a guide to leveraging the power of narrative to build and strengthen strategic partnerships across all your crucial stakeholder groups. This session goes beyond basic storytelling, providing a deep dive into crafting and delivering compelling narratives that resonate specifically with funders, lawmakers, nonprofit clients, corporate partners, and community partners. Learn how to translate complex data into compelling human stories that: inspire impactful investment from funders by highlighting tangible results and ROI, help educate lawmakers by illuminating the impact on the clients you serve and the economy and so much more. You will leave equipped with the skills to strategically leverage storytelling to not only communicate your organization's unique value but also to develop meaningful partnerships and drive change.

## LUNCH SPEAKERS - 1:00 PM - 1:30 PM

Presented by



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**1:00 PM - MAIN ROOM**

**LNUNCH SPEAKER**

**TN-TALKS SPEAKER**



*Tearsa Smith*


**Good Morning Tennessee**  
*Anchor*

**Voices of the Valley with Tearsa Smith**  
*Host*

**The Power and Importance of Storytelling**

Tearsa Smith has been a trusted voice in East Tennessee since 2002, joining WATE 6 On Your Side as a general assignment reporter. In 2005, she became co-anchor of Good Morning Tennessee, where she continues to greet viewers each morning with a smile. In addition, she hosts numerous WATE special project shows, such as the Hispanic Heritage special, Honoring Black History, and more. Tearsa also serves as the host and executive producer of Voices in the Valley with Tearsa Smith, a half-hour interview show that highlights the diverse stories of those who call East Tennessee home.


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**1:15 PM - MAIN ROOM**

**LNUNCH SPEAKER**

**TN-TALKS SPEAKER**



*Morgan Faulkner*

**CAC AMERICORPS**  
*Environmental Leader*

**Exploring the English Language, Etymology, and the Power of Word Choice in Nonprofit Storytelling"**

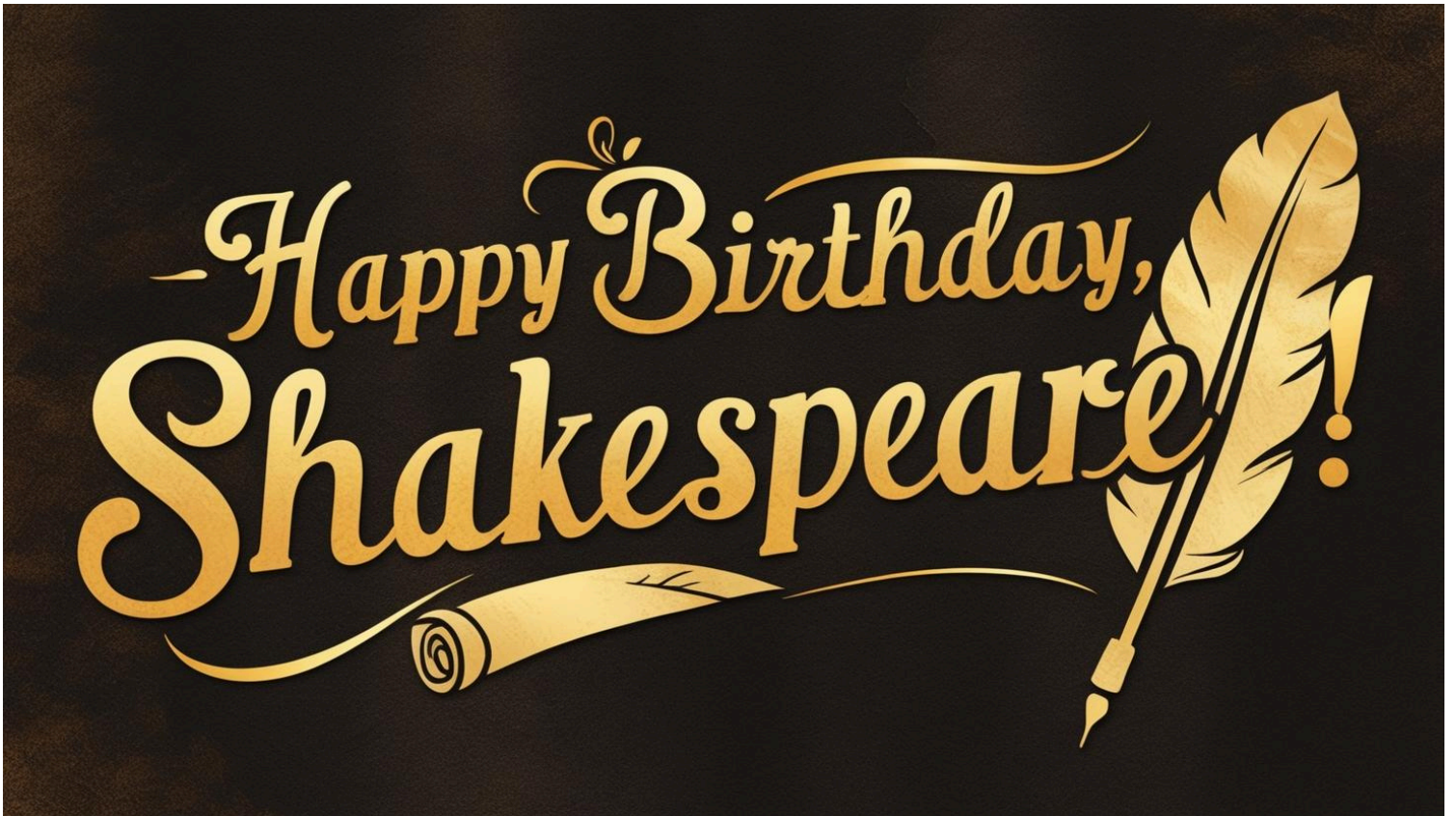
This talk explores how narrative framing and authorial bias shapes public perception by looking at historical accounts and etymological examples to demonstrate the risk of second-hand sources and the importance of community-centered stories in nonprofit storytelling.

## CLOSING SPEAKER

3:00 PM | HENLEY ROOM

**AMBER PARKER, IJAMS NATURE CENTER****THE LAST WORD: TURNING STORY INTO STRATEGY**

As the summit winds down, our journey comes full circle. Amber Parker returns to the stage to weave together the powerful themes of the day—lifting up the insights, voices, and bold ideas that have surfaced. In this closing session, she'll help us move from inspiration to implementation, offering a reflective recap and a compelling call to action. What will you do with the story you now hold? This isn't just the last word—it's your next beginning.





# UPCOMING EVENTS AT TENNESSEE NONPROFIT NETWORK

There are lots of ways to engage with Tennessee Nonprofit Network and your nonprofit peers. See our upcoming events below, visit our website at [www.tnnonprofits.org](http://www.tnnonprofits.org) and connect with us on LinkedIn to learn more about ways to engage.



## NONPROFIT CEO RETREAT: GATLINGBURG, TN

Tennessee Nonprofit Network invites its CEO members to a rejuvenating retreat in the heart of Gatlinburg. Designed exclusively for executive directors and CEOs of 501(c)3 organizations, this two-day experience offers a unique blend of learning and fellowship amidst the scenic beauty of the Smoky Mountains.



Gatlingburg



## WHY WHAT'S GOING ON IN WASHINGTON DC IS IMPORTANT TO ALL TENNESSEE NONPROFITS

The nonprofit sector faces significant and unprecedented challenges due to rapid and unexpected changes in federal policies. This workshop analyzes those changes, what they mean to the sector, and why all nonprofits are impacted and need to respond.



Online



## TNN MEMBER MEETING: FEATURING DIANE YENTEL, NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NONPROFITS

This is a fantastic opportunity to hear from a national leader in the nonprofit sector and learn more about the important work being done to support nonprofits across the country. The National Council of Nonprofits is a trusted resource and advocate for America's charitable nonprofits.



Online

[VIEW THE CALENDAR OF EVENTS](#)

[www.TNNONPROFITS.org](http://www.TNNONPROFITS.org)

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**Thank you for your feedback!**



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