



Rethinking Your Research Funding: Research Story Arc Builder



A Free Resource by NCFDD



Section 1: Research Story Arc Builder

Funders connect with stories, not just data. Use this worksheet to turn your research into a clear, compelling story you can use in emails, conversations, proposals, and pitches to non-academic audiences.

You will answer a few short prompts in Section 1. In Section 2, you will plug your answers into ready-made story templates.

Step 1: Define the core problem

What is the core problem or challenge your research addresses?

The Problem



Tip: Write this in plain language. Imagine explaining it to a smart colleague outside your field.

Step 2: Explain why it matters now

Who is most affected by this problem, and why does it matter right now?

Why It Matters



Tip: Include urgency if possible. Think about people, communities, systems, or fields.



Step 3: Describe your unique approach

What is your unique perspective, method, or solution?

Your Approach



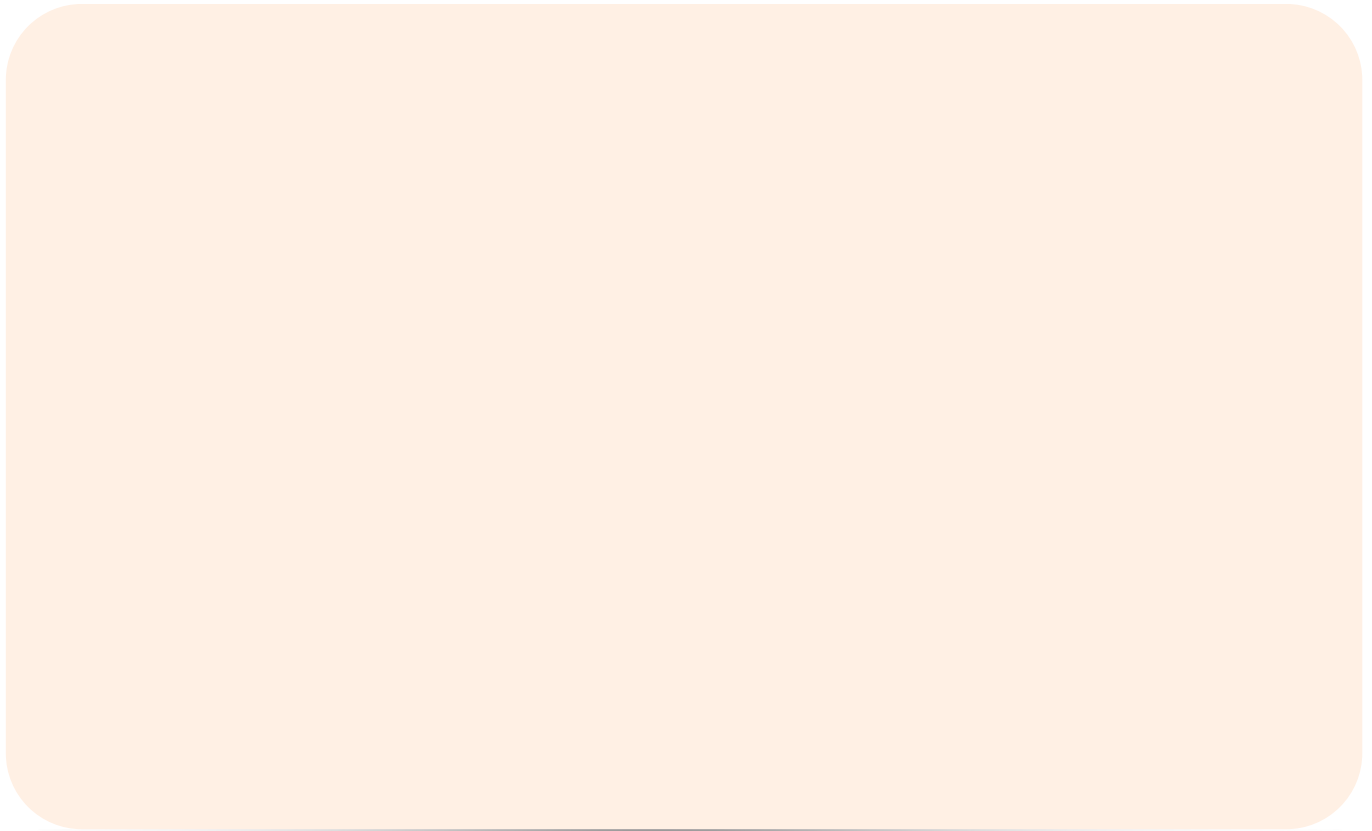
Tip: What do you do differently than others working on similar issues?



Step 4: Name the real world impact

If your research is successful, what will be different in the real world?

Real World Impact



Tip: Think about change you want to see in practice, policy, communities, technology, health, or the environment.



Step 5: Connect to broader priorities

Which broader priorities or impact areas does your work support?

Alignment Areas

Select all that apply.

☐ Community benefit

☐ Equity and justice

☐ Health outcomes

☐ Environmental impact

☐ Economic development

☐ Workforce development

☐ Innovation and technology

☐ Other:

You now have the building blocks of your story. On the next page, you will use these answers to create three versions of your Research Story Arc:

- A short written story
- An expanded story
- A 60 second verbal pitch

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“Faculty bring strong ideas and a commitment to research, but they often work within systems that do not provide the time, clarity, or support needed for sustained proposal development.”

- Redefining Grant Funding in Higher Education white paper

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Section 2: Turn Your Story Inputs Into Story Arcs

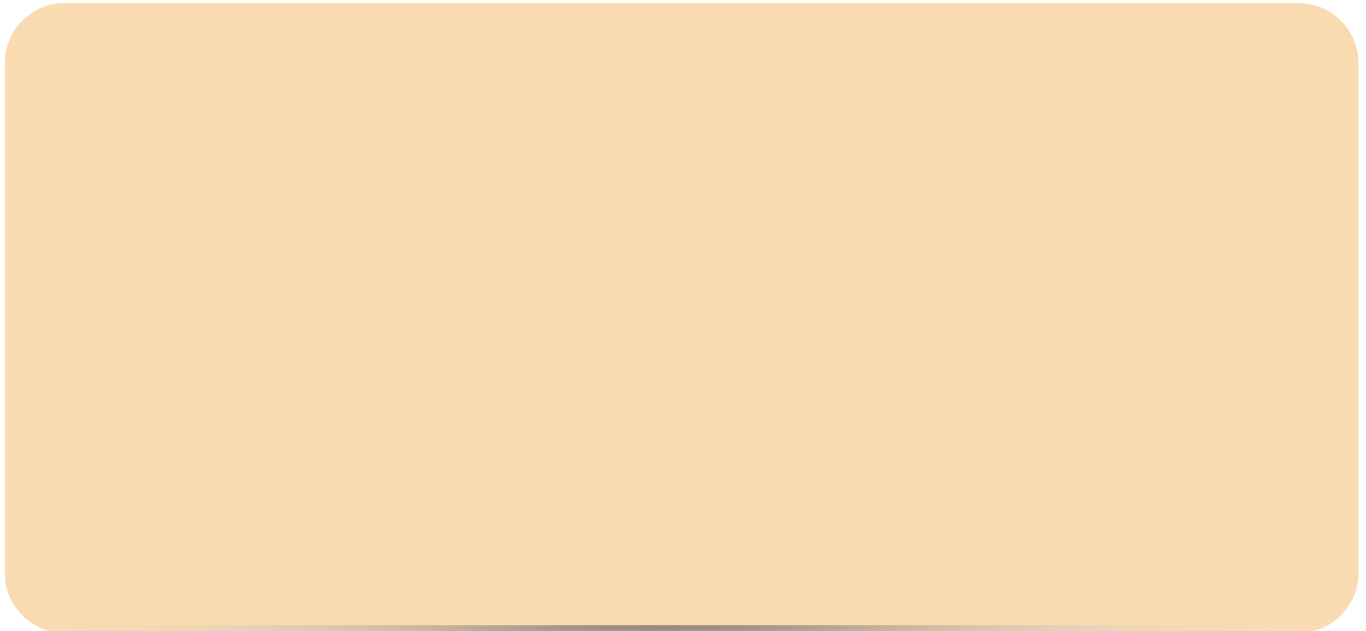
Your Short Research Story

Use this template to create a short written version of your story. You can copy and paste from your answers Section 1, then revise for clarity.

Start from:

- Problem
- Why It Matters
- Your Approach
- Real World Impact
- Alignment Areas

Short Story Version (150 - 200 words)



Tip: Aim for 1 - 2 paragraphs. Imagine this on a web page or in an email to a potential funder.

Your Expanded Research Story

Use this space for a longer, more detailed version. This is useful for bios, letters of intent, or background sections of proposals.

Consider including:

- A stronger description of the context and stakes
- More detail on your methods or partnerships
- A clearer picture of who benefits and how

Expanded Story Version (300 - 350 words)

Your 60 Second Pitch

Use this to draft a short, spoken version you can use at conferences, networking events, meetings with potential partners, or in informal conversations..

Guiding structure:

- One sentence about the problem
- One sentence about why it matters
- One or two sentences about what you do
- One sentence about the impact
- One sentence about the kind of partners or funders you hope to connect with

Verbal Pitch Script



Tip: Practice saying your pitch out loud at least 3 times.

Next Steps With Your Story

Use your Research Story Arc to:

- Open a conversation with a potential funder or partner
- Strengthen the introduction section of a proposal
- Update your professional bio or website
- Share with your chair, dean, or research office to align support

Want more support in rethinking your funding strategy?

- [Download the full white paper.](#)
- [Explore the Rethinking Your Research Funding course.](#)