

As with any university fundraising campaign, telling your story is of the utmost importance – at both an institutional and individual level. However, collecting and showcasing these stories in a compelling way can present some interesting challenges. At the on-campus launch of Impact: The Campaign for York University, the Division of Advancement used a social media photo contest.

The “Share Your #YorkUImpact” photo contest invited student, faculty and staff participants to display and share their stories of impact by taking pictures of themselves holding signs. In the end however, the contest relied primarily on direct stakeholder engagement, a popular incentive and an existing campus event to encourage meaningful content submissions from the audience. The contest also mobilized the involvement and expertise of staff volunteers to cultivate stronger understanding of the campaign purpose and priorities among participants.

More than 200 photos were collected as part of the contest, creating a bank of succinct, shareable stories that could be built upon for future communications and would serve as a starting point for further engagement. These statements have since been adapted not only as more fulsome stakeholder profiles, but also for use on the impact website ([impact.yorku.ca/yorkuimpact-is](http://impact.yorku.ca/yorkuimpact-is)), at alumni/institutional events and on York’s direct mail collateral.

The success of the photo contest presented several important lessons:

- Everyone has a story worth telling and a voice worth hearing
- Direct engagement with your audience is key
- The greatest asset you have is your team
- Capitalize on what your institution is already doing
- Clear, simple and short is vital to digital storytelling
- Use interactions as the starting point of a longer conversation

