HOW TO WRITE A FAILURE REPORT

Failure Reports are a great way to begin work on a culture of speaking honestly, openly, and productively about failure. By publishing a Report, you demonstrate that your are dedicated to learning, innovation, and risk taking.

What A Failure Report Can Do

How do you create an organizational culture that encourages risk-taking, creativity, and the adaptation required for innovation? A Failure Report creates open dialogue about failures as well as organizational acceptance of them -- giving your employees and volunteers incentives to try; to innovate.

We know that failure happens. It's those who recognize it, learn from it, and adapt with learning that prove successful. A Failure Report demonstrates that you are transparent, agile, and self-aware. Organizations demonstrate true strength and courage when they speak openly and honestly about their failures.

A FAILURE REPORT DOES NOT REPLACE A LEARNING STRATEGY OR EVALUATION PROCESS

Process

Time Estimate
Based on a 12-15 story Report

Process	Time Estimate
Ask for Stories Share Your Vision	25 hrs
Support Authors Avoid Pitfalls + Write Great Stories	15 hrs
Publish! Edit, Translate, Design, Print, Distribute	10 hrs

BEFORE YOU START

IS YOUR ORGANIZATION READY TO SPEAK OPENLY ABOUT FAILURES?

How will people feel about this?
What are possible reactions?
What support do you need?
Whose opposition might prevent this?
Who needs to be consulted?
What benefit would this bring?
What risks would this bring?
What support will your peers need to contribute?
What does success of your report look like?
How will you evaluate its impact?

We can help you create a personalized plan to get your organization ready to write a Report > **info@failforward.org**

STEP ONE: ASK FOR STORIES

SHARE THE VISION

Your first Failure Report can feel exciting, daunting, or both. Either way, it's going to be a lot of work. Make sure you're clear on **why and how** it will impact your culture and reputation -- and share your thoughts with your teams.

SUPPORT THE ASK

Think about your communications channels and ensure you are asking all parts of your organization. Set deadlines for first and final copies, and set the expectation that writers will receive feedback.

Download our FREE **Communicating Failure** Resource to share best practices with your Report writers > **failforward.org/resources**

STEP TWO: SUPPORT AUTHORS

COMMON PITFALLS

Despite best intentions, elements of **blame** have crept into the story

The actual **failure** is unclear -- the author describes an issue or complaint, not a story of a time that they failed

The story provides too much context, instead of focusing on consequences and learning

The story exceeds 500 words

GREAT STORIES

Have zero **blame**. Anyone implicated has read and approved the story

Clearly describe what happened -- and **why it was a failure** -- in a few sentences

Focus on why the failure matters, what was learned, what will change, and relevant patterns or trends

Are approximately 350-400 words

"A ship in a harbour is safe, but that is not what ships are built for."
- John A. Shedd

STEP THREE: PUBLISH!

COPY EDITING
A professional copy editor gets your stories ready for design and publication.

TRANSLATION
Does your Report need to be available in another language?

DESIGN
Send finalized text(s) with some great high-res photos of your authors and projects.

DISTRIBUTION
In print? Emailed? Posted online? How you share is up to you!

Go From *Good* to *Great*.

Insist authors consult every implicated stakeholder before publishing the story.

Write a Success Report to showcase how applying your learning enabled success!

Add workshop templates or reflection questions that use the failure stories as case studies.

Publish an external Report with project-related stories and an internal one with operational or leadership failures.

Present failures as a dialogue, not a single-voice story, to represent multiple perspectives on one event.

Use a series of Reports to analyze stories over time. Look for trends to spot your failure modes and take action.

Explore the Failure Reports of other leading organizations!

failforward.org/services /#failurereports