

2024

ETHICAL STORYTELLING REPORT

FOR NONPROFITS DEDICATED TO TELLING
GREAT STORIES, ETHICALLY & AUTHENTICALLY

CREATED BY  **memoryfox**® WITH CONTRIBUTIONS
FROM 30+ STORYTELLING EXPERTS
& BOOTS-ON-THE-GROUND
NONPROFIT PROFESSIONALS

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WELCOME TO THE CAMPFIRE

In December 2023, we sought to answer the question: *What do I do if the people I serve have sensitive stories they don't want to share?* This question launched our team on a whirlwind learning journey. We spent the last 12 months: sharing the inaugural Ethical Storytelling Report, hosting five "Narratives With Integrity Panels", and sharing everything we've learned through 50+ panels, webinars and podcast appearances.

Because that is what it's all about. A commitment to continuous learning and consistently sharing with others. Today, I invite you to join us around our campfire - to learn how to tell great stories, ethically and authentically. In this 2nd iteration of the Ethical Storytelling Report, you will see much that is familiar:

- **A survey**, seeking to understand the ethical storytelling's current state within the nonprofit sector.
- **A collection of intriguing questions**, sourced directly from nonprofit professionals, paired with answers from 30+ seasoned storytellers.

You'll also see new additions:

- **A revised structure** of three sections, each with four parts, so you can quickly find what you're looking for.
- **Five Ethical Storytelling Case Studies**, submitted by nonprofits, so you can learn directly from your peers.
- **Six actionable lists**, summarizing the contributors answers into single pages, so you can see a snapshot of the broader learnings.

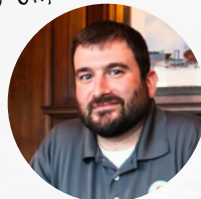
We always remind our storytelling community that ethics is a journey, not a destination. There aren't always clear "right" or "wrong" answers. Commitment to ethical storytelling, however, is an intrinsically optimistic and loving endeavor - and we need both more than ever these days!

I would like to extend enormous gratitude to everyone who contributed to this report. A simple "thank you" could never be enough for the effort you took to submit your answers. I'd like to give a special shoutout to Carly Euler, and the entire MemoryFox team, for putting this resource together and for taking these learnings to heart.

Finally, I'd like to thank YOU - the reader - for setting aside the time to learn with us. Please let us know what you think! Share your feedback, your top takeaways and your commitments to ethical storytelling, by [submitting a video, photo or written testimonial here](#), or by scanning this QR code.



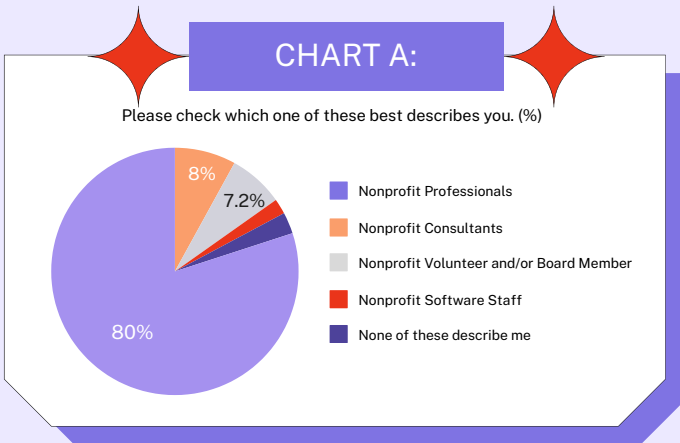
KEEP PRESSING ON,



CHRIS MIANO
Founder & CEO, MemoryFox

STATE OF THE SECTOR

The 2024 Ethical Storytelling Survey was answered by 250 respondents. When asked to identify their relationship to the nonprofit sector, the vast majority were nonprofit professionals (80%), followed by consultants (8%), with volunteers and board members closely behind (7.2%). Nonprofit software staff identified themselves as just 2%, and 2.8% of respondents did not feel these categories described them (See Chart A).



THE IMPORTANCE OF ETHICAL STORYTELLING

At MemoryFox, we believe that **collecting and sharing community stories ethically should be of the utmost importance for nonprofits**. That is why the first thing we aimed to explore whether respondents saw ethical storytelling as an essential part of how they represent their community - both individually and from an organizational standpoint. We understand that one's individual values may differ from what they perceive the values of their organization to be. Therefore, we hypothesized that ethical storytelling would be slightly more important to individuals, and that a faction of respondents would feel their organization does not feel as strongly about the importance of ethical storytelling.

Chart B: On a scale of 1-5, how important is ethical storytelling to you? (%)

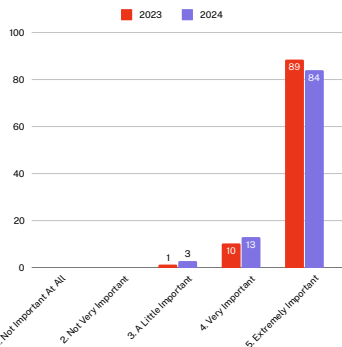
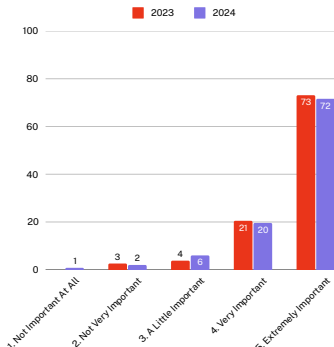


Chart C: On a scale of 1-5, how important is ethical storytelling to your organization? (%)

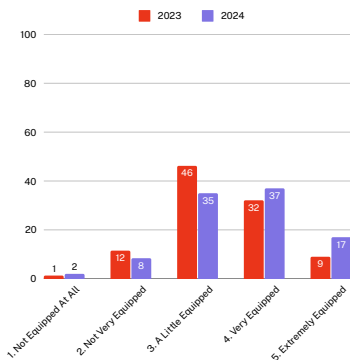


We are proud to report (Chart B) that every single person surveyed rated ethical storytelling as a 3 (*a little important*) or greater in 2023 and 2024. In 2024, the vast majority, 84% of the community, views ethical storytelling as *extremely important*, while 13% believes it is *very important*.

When compared to Chart C, answers skewed lower all on the scale, with only 72% reporting that they believe their organizations finds ethical storytelling to be *extremely important*, while 20% think their organization finds it *very important*. Notably, responses remained consistent across the board for 2023 and 2024, meaning there have been **no improvements** in the realm over the past year.

ETHICALLY COLLECTING & SHARING STORIES

Chart D: On a scale of 1-5, how equipped do you feel to collect & share stories in an ethical, trauma-informed way? (%)



Ethical storytelling begins during the story collection process.

For the second year in a row, no single category dominated when assessing respondents' preparedness to collect and share stories ethically.

However, we are pleased to report that respondents feel *more* equipped (more likely to rate themselves as 4 or 5), in 2024 than they did in 2023.

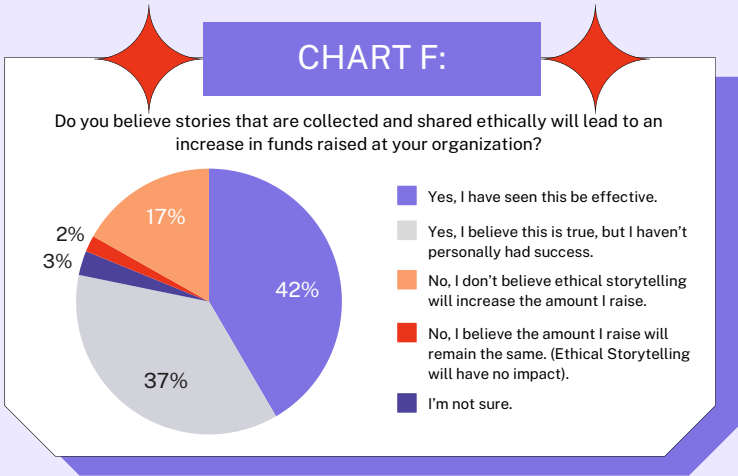
We understand that feeling “equipped” can mean a variety of things. We wanted to better understand what actions nonprofits are currently doing that ensure stories are collected and shared ethically. This portion of the survey was an optional fill-in-the-blank question that 138 out of 250 people chose to answer. Our team analyzed each answer and sorted them, in hopes of finding common actions. The following word cloud conveys every theme, with the biggest words representing the most common answers.

CHART E: What steps does your organization currently take to ensure stories are collected and shared ethically?



The five most reported themes were *Collect Consent* (58 responses), *Remove Identifying Information* (20 responses), *Obtain Final Story Approval* (14 responses), *Explain The Process* (12 responses) and *Maintain Trust* (11 responses).

ETHICAL STORYTELLING & FUNDRAISING



This year, we wanted to determine if nonprofit professionals felt ethical storytelling would have a positive impact on fundraising efforts. Historically, fundraisers have been asked to share “poverty porn”-style stories, because it has proven successful in driving donations. **We believe that sharing stories that have been collected and edited ethically is a crucial aspect of building a community of donors** that will inspire recurring giving, but we were not sure if the nonprofit sector agreed.

In accordance with Chart F, we are pleased to share that 42% of respondents have seen ethical storytelling be an *effective fundraising strategy* to raise more funds, while 37% believe it is an *effective fundraising strategy*, but have not personally had success (yet!). A mere 17% do not think ethical storytelling will increase the amount they raise, and just 2% do not think ethical storytelling will have any impact. It is our hope to see an increase in respondents answering “yes” to this question in the years to come.

STORYTELLING CONSENT

The most important part of story collection is capturing consent.

But many feel their organization does NOT have a solid system in place.

Chart G: On a scale of 1-5, how important is consent when it comes to sharing stories from my community? (%)

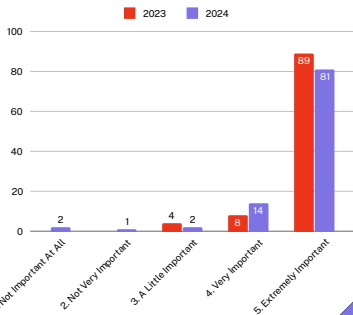
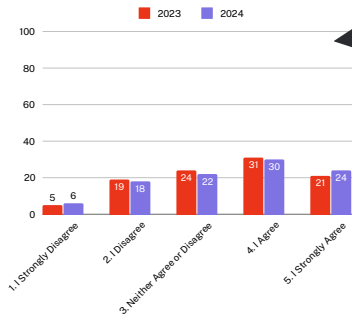


Chart H: On a scale of 1-5, I feel my organization has a solid system in place when it comes to collecting consent for stories. (%)



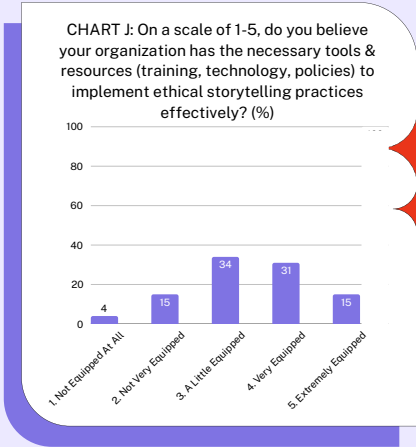
We’re pleased to share that nonprofit storytellers agree (Chart G)! 81% of survey respondents stated that consent is *extremely important*.

Even so, many feel their organization has not taken the necessary steps surrounding consent collection. Respondents were most likely to *agree* (30%) or *neither agree or disagree* (22%) when asked if they felt their organization had a solid consent collection system in place (Chart H). Only 24% felt strongly about in their current method. The contrast displayed in Charts G & H are staggering but, thankfully, this report will explore the multi-faceted aspects of consent starting on page 44.

ETHICAL STORYTELLING CHALLENGES

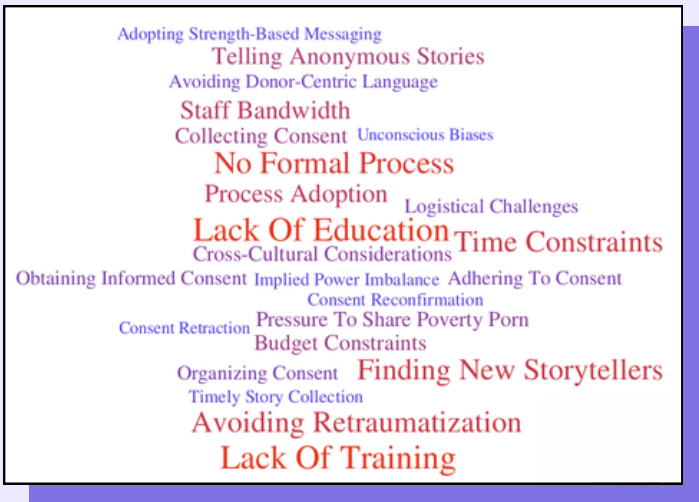
We sought to better understanding the challenges nonprofits are facing when it comes to adopting and adhering to ethical storytelling practices. When asked if they felt their organization has the necessary tools and resources to ethically tell stories, the results varied across the board.

Respondents were most likely to answer that they felt *a little equipped* (34%), closely followed by feeling *very equipped* (31%). Respondents were just as likely to identify as *extremely equipped* and *not very equipped*, at 15% respectively.



Next, we dug deeper to explore the exact challenges nonprofits are facing. This portion of the survey was an optional fill-in-the-blank question that 125 out of 250 people chose to answer. Our team analyzed each answer and sorted them, in hopes of finding common themes. The following word cloud conveys every theme, with the biggest words representing the most common answers.

CHART K: What are the biggest challenges your organization faces in adhering to ethical storytelling practices?



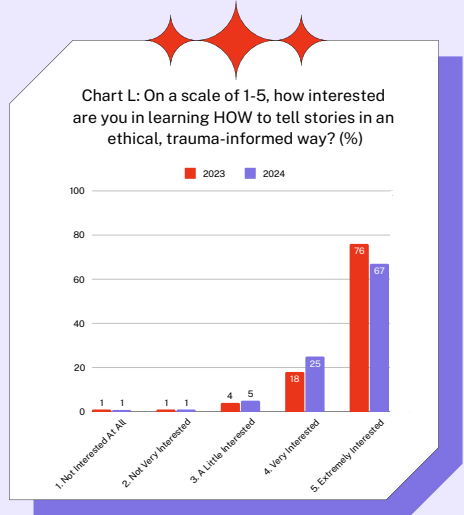
The six most reported themes were *Lack Of Education* (16 responses), *Lack Of Training* (16 responses), *No Formal Process* (14 responses), *Avoiding Retraumatization* (13 responses), *Finding New Storytellers* (13 responses) and *Time Constraints* (13 responses).

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Despite these challenges, we believe the outlook is largely positive! **New strategies and language are emerging everyday.** Thus, a willingness to learn is an essential aspect of ethical storytelling. According to Chart L, a strong majority, 67% of respondents, are extremely interested in learning how to tell stories in an ethical, trauma-informed way, followed by 25% recognizing that they are very interested.

We concluded our survey with 12 statements, asking respondents to choose which ones they felt applied to them. We are delighted to report that more than half of respondents feel the *culture of storytelling at their organization is trauma-informed* (59%).

However, the most reported negatively charged feeling in 2024 is struggling with wanting to collect stories while *doing no harm* (39%).



Top Feelings of 2024

Positively Charged Feelings:

- 59%:** I feel the culture of storytelling at my organization is trauma-informed.
- 50%:** I do *not* feel pressured to collect sad, traumatic stories to raise more funds.
- 50%:** I am confident that I collect stories that do not do harm to my community.

Negatively Charged Feelings:

- 39%:** I struggle with wanting to collect stories while doing no harm to my community.
- 16%:** I feel pressure to collect sad, traumatic stories in order to raise more funds.
- 15%:** I do NOT have time set aside to educate myself about ethical storytelling.

How do we overcome these negatively-charged feelings? You've come to the right place. In the following pages, 30+ storytelling experts answer your toughest questions about ethical storytelling strategy and adoption. Let's get started!

MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

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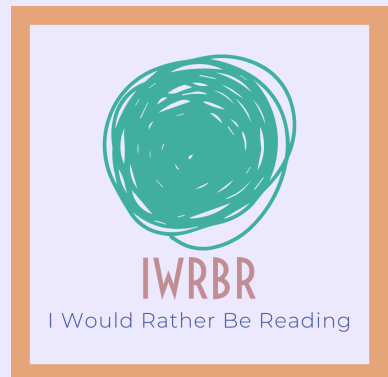
MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

ETHICAL STORYTELLING CASE STUDIES

ArtistYear

SHIVE *Charities*

THE SEATTLE
C LEMENCY
PROJECT



CLICK TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THESE ORGANIZATIONS

SECTION ONE

STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION

- **ETHICAL STORY COLLECTION**
- **ETHICAL STORY SHARING**
- **TRAUMA-INFORMED STORYTELLING**
- **STRENGTH-BASED MESSAGING**

PART ONE: ETHICAL STORY COLLECTION

WHAT DO I DO IF THE PEOPLE WE SERVE HAVE SENSITIVE STORIES THAT THEY MIGHT NOT WANT TO SHARE?

Our most important duty is to do right by the people we serve, and that goes beyond financial support. It means staying informed, connected, and understanding what makes them feel best when we speak about them. Finding ways to empower storytellers to guide us on how they want their stories told, while also exploring other angles through different community members, can be just as powerful.

- **Danielle Miano**

First of all, the interviewer should remind themselves to **“do no harm.”** If the person doesn't want to share their sensitive story, then they are most likely emotionally and mentally not in a place to share it. Therefore, the interviewer should not try to coerce the story out of them. That would be harmful. - **Frank Velásquez Jr.**

You should first ask the storyteller's advice and guidance on what is working and what needs improvement. Only then should you ask how personal experience influences their guidance.

- **Marshall Stowell**

Deep down, every one of us has a story that we don't want to share. Think - it could be a moment when you felt completely helpless, or a painful memory you've never told anyone. Maybe it's about living in your car, getting your card declined at the grocery store, or losing a loved one — personal experiences that make us feel vulnerable or deal with traumas we've experienced. Our stories are unique to each of us, but that feeling of vulnerability when we choose to share them is universal. When people trust us with their sensitive stories, we're not just collecting content — *we're being entrusted with pieces of their lives.* Watch for signs they aren't comfortable — body language, missed meetings, hesitation — and respect their unspoken 'no'.

- **Diana Farias Heinrich**

You never really know if those you serve want to share or not so asking (sensitively!) is the first step. Making sure they know that they can say no is critical - remember that there may be a power dynamic at play and they may

CONTINUED: WHAT DO I DO IF THE PEOPLE WE SERVE HAVE SENSITIVE STORIES THAT THEY MIGHT NOT WANT TO SHARE?

feel like they have to participate! Be clear about the specific ask: how their story will be gathered, where will it appear, how long will it be used, and what are the parameters that they can set (will their name be used, how much detail is necessary, etc.) are really key. Above all, if someone does not want their story told (or you perceive any reservation), it is best to respect their privacy. - **Susan Kirkpatrick**

The disability community made popular the phrase “nothing about us without us,” which applies to ethical storytelling too.

Many missions deal with sensitive situations that result in sensitive stories. It’s essential to partner with those whose stories you want to tell. Be clear about what you’re looking to share, and assure them that they can be told anonymously if they prefer. If they’re comfortable with sharing just a piece of the story or even one or two sentences, let them know that that’s okay too.

Remember that no one owes you their story,

even if your organization made it possible. When you partner with your storytellers, rather than approaching them as subjects, the possibilities of how to share them may open up to both of you. - **Jordana Merkin**

Talk with the person to make sure telling their story is something they truly want to do and not something they feel obligated to do. Understand what their goals and hopes are for sharing their story. Talk through the different aspects of their whole life story; there is so much more to us than our points of trauma.

Is there another story they could share that might be less sensitive while helping them reach their goal in storytelling? Offer storytellers the option to use just their first name or remain anonymous. Make sure the storyteller has ownership over how they tell their story and clear understanding of how it will be shared and what they can expect or request after publication. - **Holly Beech**

Consider asking if there’s a level of sharing with which they’d be comfortable. Perhaps they have reservations about being on video, but they might be okay having their story told in written form. Maybe they don’t want their name identified with their story for confidentiality considerations, but maybe they’d be open to their contribution being part of a composite story. Clear communication is key, and offering alternate options may allow someone to consider something they hadn’t previously. - **Natalie Monroe**



Nonprofit Photo Credit: Wreaths Across America, 2024 Foxie Award Winner, Campaign of the Year

WHAT ARE YOUR TIPS FOR HELPING PEOPLE FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE AT THE START OF AN INTERVIEW?

Before the interview, allow the story owner to invite a support person to join. Break the power dynamic by starting with genuine, grounding conversation. Share a brief personal anecdote or ask about their day to create connection. Use a warm, conversational tone and clearly explain they can pause, skip questions, or stop at any time, reinforcing their control and safety. - **Maria Bryan**

When I began my journey in storytelling within the nonprofit space, I learned that comfort is key to authenticity:



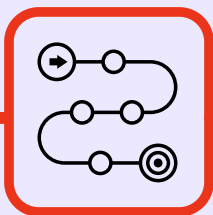
Begin with gratitude:

Thank them for their willingness to speak, emphasizing the value of their perspective.



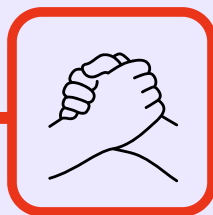
Break the ice:

Start with casual, non-invasive questions or shared experiences to ease into the conversation.



Explain the process:

Let them know what to expect, reassuring them that they're in control & can pause at any time.



Mirror their energy:

Match their tone to build rapport. Show that you genuinely care about their story.

Comfort leads to connection, and connection leads to stories that resonate deeply with their audience. - **Sabrina Walker Hernandez**

CONTINUED: WHAT ARE YOUR TIPS FOR HELPING PEOPLE FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE AT THE START OF AN INTERVIEW?

Begin by practicing informed consent: clearly explain the purpose of the interview, how their story will be used, and who will see it. Use simple, jargon-free language and check for understanding by asking, “Does this make sense? Are you comfortable moving forward?”

Reassure participants they can pause or skip questions at any time. Build rapport by starting with light conversation or a check-in. Create a comfortable environment with a quiet, neutral space and small comforts like water. Be transparent about why their story matters and emphasize their control throughout the process.

- **Cody Hays**

I focus on creating a welcoming, no-pressure vibe to help people feel at ease. I start with light small talk to break the ice and explain the process upfront so they know what to expect. I kick things off with easy, low-pressure questions and make sure to acknowledge that interviews can feel nerve-wracking, offering encouragement and reassurance along the way. I also use positive reinforcement throughout, affirming their responses to build confidence. It's all about making the conversation feel natural and comfortable.

- **Erik Tomalis**

First off, I call it a 'chat' or 'conversation'. An 'interview' sounds formal and can make people nervous. I let people know it can be short - just 15 or 20 minutes long. I schedule the time - but also allow for extra time in case the conversation is flowing. Make sure people know they will get full approval of any part of their story that is used.

I start with easy, conversational questions, like "tell me a bit about yourself" or "tell me how you first connected with our organization" - just to see what comes up. I engage with personal connections of my own throughout. For example, if they mention they have kids - I'll mention that I have kids as well. I like to ask questions that focus on feelings, rather than facts or figures. - **Rachel Zant**

Start the interview by dedicating time to get to know the person.

Asking a few conversational questions can help build rapport and make them feel more comfortable sharing potentially sensitive information.

If you plan to record the conversation — whether using an AI notetaker or another recording device — always ask the interviewee for their permission beforehand. - **Mike Esposito**

CONTINUED: WHAT ARE YOUR TIPS FOR HELPING PEOPLE FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE AT THE START OF AN INTERVIEW?

We are always looking for their "person". Who do they trust the most to be a part of their interview? We typically do a couple of interviews so they feel comfortable with the camera. We practice sitting, we share with them to wear the clothes that make them feel the best. We also promise they are in control of the story in the end. If they don't like the final cut, we pull it. It is about creating trust between us all. - **Beth McGorry**

Interviews are, at their base, conversations. So, making a person feel comfortable will yield the best results. Open the interview with an introduction, offer refreshments and a cozy seat. Begin with polite conversation and open body language (i.e. relaxed and approachable). Keeping your tone calm and inviting. - **Angela Powers**

When you're interviewing someone, you're interacting with them on a person-to-person, human level. You're not interviewing someone as an organization, you're interviewing someone as yourself. To start, it's important to approach the conversation about the human first - without your organization in the forefront.

The best interviews I've ever had have always been the ones that started with

me approaching the conversation as if this person was my friend, and lead with your own vulnerability. You might want to share how you are feeling at that moment: For example - I'm a little nervous, and/or share something about your own personal journey. This way, people are put at ease and allowed to engage in the conversation from a place of mutual respect. - **Candace Cody**

Creating a comfortable interview environment starts with trust and respect. Thoughtful planning is key, from scheduling, to explaining consent forms and choosing the setting. Begin warmly — greet the interviewee by name, thank them for their time, and offer the option to decline. Break the ice with casual conversation, explain the interview's purpose, and emphasize their control, including the ability to stop anytime. Review consent forms in plain language and normalize nervousness by acknowledging their courage. Start with easy questions to build trust and respect boundaries by noting verbal/non-verbal cues. Always end with a heartfelt thank-you! - **Derria Ford**

One tip that comes to mind, is to ask the storyteller if they would like to have a support person to join them. Having a family member or a close friend present is an extra layer of comfort they might not think they needed until it's too late. - **Carly Euler**

IS THERE AN ETHICAL DILEMMA ASSOCIATED WITH PAYING PEOPLE, EITHER DOLLARS OR GIFT CARDS, FOR THEIR STORIES?

Providing payment to storytellers can be a great way to say thank you. But before you do so, it is important to consider the potential impact it may have on their eligibility for government benefit programs.

Many benefit programs, such as Medicaid, are based on an individual's income. A payment that you provide could be treated as income and affect their eligibility. This doesn't mean that you should never provide payment for someone's story. But if you plan to provide such payment, you should always have a conversation with the storyteller to inform them that the payment could be considered income.

- Allie Levene

No. If anything, it is unethical to use other people's stories for an organization's financial gain without compensation.

An organization must be clear about what they are asking for from a "main character" - how much time and emotional labor will be provided in retelling/recounting the story and through the editing and refinement process? Then, they should offer some type of compensation for the main character's contribution. If that person chooses to decline compensation, that is their choice. - Rachel D'Souza



Nonprofit Photo Credit: School Year Abroad, 2024 Foxie Winner, Photo of the Year

THE SEATTLE CLEMENCY PROJECT

Paying It Forward: How The Seattle Clemency Project Crafted a Compensation Model

ABOUT THE SEATTLE CLEMENCY PROJECT

The Seattle Clemency Project (SCP) is committed to increasing access to justice for reformed individuals serving sentences that no longer serve a purpose and preventing deportations that fracture communities in Washington State. By advocating for systemic change and amplifying the voices of those impacted, the organization works to create fairer, more compassionate outcomes for individuals and families.

WHAT PROBLEM DID THEY SEEK TO SOLVE?

SCP recognized a critical gap: they had no formal model for compensating individuals with lived experience who participated in communications projects. This became especially evident when the organization began work on a book to share the redemption stories of former SCP clients and people who were granted early release or post-conviction relief in Washington State. The team understood the time, expertise, and intense emotional labor that their contributors faced when sharing their story, so they sought a way to adequately honor their experiences and investment in the storytelling process through fair compensation.



WHAT DID THEY DO?
DEVELOP A LIVED EXPERIENCE
COMPENSATION MODEL.

The team worked closely with people who had lived experience in the criminal legal system to create a compensation framework that valued their voices as experts in the fields of incarceration, legal injustice, harm reduction, and policy reform. The communications lead collaborated with the executive and development directors to secure budget approval, ensuring the model was financially sustainable.

The nine-month development process involved thoughtful deliberation to balance organizational budget constraints with respectful compensation for participants. The resulting model applies to both short- and long-form communication projects, as well as speaking engagements. It also includes a participant agreement to formalize the process, empowering contributors and elevating their roles as vital partners in SCP's advocacy work.

HOW DID IT GO? FEWER IMPLICATIONS, MORE TRUST.

The new compensation model transformed SCP's approach to storytelling. It moved them beyond the implicit expectation that clients, in exchange for free legal services, would "gift" their stories to the organization. Instead, the model underscores two key principles:

1. Their work exists to combat systemic injustice and undo harm without any expectation of repayment.
2. Stories of lived experience hold intrinsic value, and those who share them deserve recognition and compensation as experts in their field.

By implementing this framework, SCP strengthened trust with their clients, highlighted the importance of ethical storytelling, and set a new standard for respect and equity in their communications.



“We are treating stories of lived experience with the reverence and respect they are owed. These stories are critical resources for understanding the issues, solutions, and outcomes of second look advocacy work.”

-Brooke Kaufman, Communications Specialist

5 KEYS TO ETHICAL STORY COLLECTION

1. Give Your Community the Microphone

Modern technology lets nonprofits empower communities to share their own stories. By giving individuals the chance to express their experiences in their own words, you amplify authentic voices and respect their autonomy. This approach allows them to shape the narrative and highlight what matters most to them.

2. Encourage Sharing When & Where They Are Comfortable

A safe, comfortable environment is key to genuine storytelling. When storytellers feel at ease, they're more likely to share openly without feeling vulnerable. Let them choose the setting, time, and medium — whether that's face-to-face at a park, through a written submission in a letter, or by video submitted from the comfort of their own home.

3. Be Upfront About How You Intend to Use Their Story

Transparency is vital in ethical storytelling. Storytellers need to know how their story will be used and in what contexts. For instance, someone might be comfortable sharing personal details for a grant report but not for social media. Clearly communicating your intentions empowers them to decide what they're comfortable sharing, fostering trust and mutual respect.

4. Use Prompts With Strength-Based Messaging

The questions you ask shape the stories you receive. Strength-based prompts focus on resilience, achievements, and positive outcomes, encouraging storytellers to share empowering, hopeful narratives. By framing questions this way, you receive uplifting stories that celebrate community strengths while supporting storytellers in sharing what makes them proud.

5. Capture Stories in Real Time & All Year Long

Memories fade, and emotions change. Capturing stories as close to the actual event or experience as possible helps to retain the authenticity and passion of the moment. Real-time storytelling ensures vibrant, accurate narratives. This approach ensures that your narratives are rich, engaging, and genuine. Provide opportunities for immediate reflection, like recording videos or audio clips on-site or offering digital options for quick sharing while the moment is fresh.

PART TWO: ETHICAL STORY SHARING

HOW DO I TELL IMPACTFUL STORIES THAT ARE BOTH ENGAGING TO MY AUDIENCE, WHILE STILL DOING NO HARM TO MY COMMUNITY?

When asking clients to share their stories, prioritize transparency, consent, and empowerment. By clearly explaining how their story will be used, it ensures they understand it's optional, and emphasizes that they have control of what, how, and when to share. Connect their stories to your mission, highlighting the value of their voice, and allow them to review the final version to ensure accurate representation. - **Danielle Miano**

Imagine the subject of the story you want to write about is you. How would you want your story told? An impactful story, in my opinion, is a story that elicits empathy, not pity. So don't write stories that focus on deficiencies; write ones that readers can relate to. When they see themselves in the story, that is where impact lives.

- **Frank Velásquez Jr.**

I think it's very important whenever possible to speak directly with the people whose stories you are telling, to ensure you're using appropriate and authentic language and content.

- **Rachel Zant**

Recent research shows that **depicting people as capable contributors** creates the perception that communities are competent, that programs are more effective and that organizations that listen to communities are more successful in meeting their mission.

- **Marshall Stowell**

It is so important to remember that these are THEIR stories and their agency, successes, and positive attributes are critical to both the story and respecting them. While your organization has likely helped this person, the story will be more effective if you share how this person overcame their barriers with the help of the tools, skills, and knowledge that you gave them access to, rather than making it all about how wonderful your organization is. By using asset framing - portraying people by their aspirations, dreams and positive attributes rather than by their challenges (no one wants to be labeled "at-risk"), you can draw more people into the story while showing respect.

- **Susan Kirkpatrick**

HOW DO WE BALANCE THE SENSE OF URGENCY FROM LEADERSHIP TO "CREATE CONTENT" WITH THE LONGER PROCESS OF BUILDING TRUST WITH PEOPLE WHOSE STORIES WE HOPE TO SHARE?

Urgency and trust can coexist when we recognize that meaningful storytelling is a marathon, not a sprint:

- **Set expectations with leadership:** Communicate that rushed storytelling risks harm and may not yield authentic, lasting impact. Propose a timeline that honors trust-building while meeting organizational goals.
- **Establish relationships ahead of need:** Build rapport with individuals and communities year-round, so they feel comfortable sharing when opportunities arise.
- **Leverage other content:** In moments of urgency, use previously consented stories, testimonials, or broader organizational data while continuing the trust-building process for future stories.

- **Sabrina Walker Hernandez**

There's no shortcut to building trust. It takes time, and it can be lost in an instant. But you can streamline the story collection process to make it efficient. A few tips:

- Create a succinct summary of what your interviewees can expect
- Make scheduling easy
- When they're interested, move quickly to keep up the momentum
- Clearly articulate how you'll use their story, and how they can revoke consent

Then create a tracking system you can share with your leadership team to show the stories you have in the pipeline. This can help them see your progress without rushing the process. - **David Hardstein**

Despite feeling pressure to generate stories,

I think the importance should be on the quality of stories told, not the quantity.

I've seen one powerful story carry an organization for a year!

I think the thing to focus on is leaning into a few stories, and telling them in parts: This way, you can capture a larger overarching story, and release them over time.

- **Candace Cody**

CONTINUED: HOW DO WE BALANCE THE SENSE OF URGENCY FROM LEADERSHIP TO "CREATE CONTENT" WITH THE LONGER PROCESS OF BUILDING TRUST WITH PEOPLE WHOSE STORIES WE HOPE TO SHARE?

Balancing leadership's urgency to "create content" with the longer process of building trust requires fostering a culture of storytelling within your organization. By embedding storytelling into your daily practices, you can **"bank" stories over time**, making it easier to access authentic, trust-based narratives when needed.

Encourage staff to view storytelling as a continuous process, not just a task for events or documents. Regularly discuss and document stories from clients, staff, and community members. This proactive approach builds trust and ensures a steady flow of meaningful stories, allowing you to respond quickly to urgent requests without sacrificing authenticity or relationships. - **Derria Ford**

It's all about balance and transparency. I prioritize building trust first — without it, the content won't resonate. I explain to leadership that while urgency is important, rushing the process can harm authenticity. Open communication, realistic timelines, and showing the impact of trust-driven storytelling help align both goals. - **Erik Tomalis**



Nonprofit Photo Credit: Blessman International, 2024 Foxie Award Winner, Storyteller of the Year

DO PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THE FULL IMPLICATIONS OF AGREEING TO SHARE THEIR STORY, EVEN IF WE EXPLAIN WHERE & HOW IT WILL BE USED? ARE THERE PROMPTS WE COULD ASK TO HELP THEM FULLY UNDERSTAND THIS?

Oftentimes, people don't understand the full implications of agreeing to share their story. In addition to sharing a written explanation, organizations should be clear about:

1. Where and how they are sharing stories and photos
2. How long the story will be used (time limited or in perpetuity)
3. Any policies or guidance the organization follows around communications and engagement.

From my experience, some prompts include:

- "What do you want people to learn or understand from your experience?"
- "What parts of this story, if shared publicly, might embarrass or cause harm to you or people who know and care about you?"
- "How often would you like to be contacted to update your story?"

- **Rachel D'Souza**

Even with clear explanations, participants may not fully grasp the long-term implications of sharing their story. To help, clarify visibility by asking, "Are you comfortable with this story being shared on [specific platforms]?"

Discuss potential emotional impacts and encourage reflection with prompts like, "What do you hope people will take away from your story?"

Check their understanding by having participants summarize in their own words.

Ensure they know they can revise, retract, or anonymize their story if needed,

emphasizing their agency at every step. - **Cody Hays**

Ensuring the person that is sharing their story now, that the story will live on in print. Having them look at where they want to be, their long-term life goals and if having that printed story out there will still fit. - **Angela Powers**

CONTINUED: DO PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THE FULL IMPLICATIONS OF AGREEING TO SHARE THEIR STORY, EVEN IF WE EXPLAIN WHERE & HOW IT WILL BE USED? ARE THERE PROMPTS WE COULD ASK TO HELP THEM FULLY UNDERSTAND THIS?

I don't think the storyteller or the organization sharing their story can predict the full implications of sharing the story. Here are a few things that are helpful to discuss beforehand:

1. Is there anything you would like to talk through with your family/friends/loved ones before they hear or see this story published? It's best when people close to the story aren't surprised when it comes out.
2. Stories on the internet spread across international borders. Are there any potential threats to you or loved ones we should talk through before publication?
3. Are we being respectful of other people's privacy in this story? Even if the storyteller has agreed to share, be mindful of the information they are revealing about the other people in their story.

- Holly Beech

It's important to ensure participants fully understand the implications of sharing their story. Transparency at multiple stages of the process is key. I recommend clearly communicating where and how their story will be shared at several points:



Extending the Invitation:

Clearly outline the intended use of their story, the platforms where it may appear, and the audience it will reach.



Before the Interview:

Reiterate the purpose and usage, emphasizing their control and right to withdraw if they feel uncomfortable.



Before Publication:

Give them the opportunity to review the story in its final form, ensuring they are comfortable with how it's presented.

- Mike Esposito

5 STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE PROGRAM STAFF TO SHARE STORIES

Strategy # 1: More Stories = More Funds, & More Funds = More Resources

Stories drive donations — there's no denying it. By sharing more stories, especially impactful ones directly from the people you serve, you are opening the door to increased resources for your programs. Let program staff know that the more often you are able to share powerful stories, the more likely you are to secure funding that supports the essential work they do.

Strategy #2: Build Trust By Proving You're a Good Story Steward

One of the best ways to ease hesitation from program staff is to demonstrate your commitment to ethical storytelling, and by extension, your commitment to being a good story steward. Explain to them how you handle consent, keep stories secure, and respect the dignity of storytellers. When program staff see you have processes in place to treat stories with care, they'll feel more comfortable making introductions.

Strategy #3: Bring Them Into The Process By Elevating Their Stories

Don't forget - Your program staff also have incredible stories to tell! They are the individuals who experience the impact of your nonprofit's work firsthand and are the first ones to see transformations over time. Don't miss the opportunity to tap into their knowledge and passion. Recognizing their experiences and efforts through storytelling not only boosts morale but can also bring a unique and authentic perspective to your fundraising campaigns.

Strategy #4: Promote Transparency By Sharing Your Storytelling Plan

It's important to be transparent with your colleagues. Explain the full storytelling process — from obtaining consent to maintaining confidentiality, to outlining the timeline for publication. When program staff know what to expect, they'll feel reassured and be willing to connect you to potential storytellers.

Strategy #5: Make It An Organization-Wide Policy

Ethical storytelling isn't just a tool for fundraising — it's a crucial part of spreading your nonprofit's mission and values both internally and externally. Create an organization-wide [Ethical Storytelling Standards Guide](#) that outlines the steps your organization is committed to taking as it relates to ethical storytelling. See page 38 to learn the 8 things to include in your guide.

PART THREE: TRAUMA-INFORMED STORYTELLING

HOW CAN I ASK CLIENTS TO SHARE THEIR STORIES IN A WAY THAT IS TRAUMA-INFORMED?

Start by acknowledging that sharing can feel vulnerable and remind participants they control what they share. Frame questions gently and avoid probing too deeply, using prompts like, “What would you like to share about this experience?” Normalize boundaries by saying, “Feel free to skip any questions or take a break.” Highlight their strengths with affirmations like, “Your resilience is inspiring.” Always offer support resources for post-interview care and follow up to ensure they feel respected and heard. This approach creates a safe space for honest storytelling.

- **Cody Hays**

When someone has experienced trauma, they fundamentally lose two critical psychological resources: control and safety. Trauma-informed storytelling must intentionally restore these elements throughout every stage of the storytelling process — from consent conversations to interviews and reviews. - **Maria Bryan**

Ask if recounting trauma is both actually necessary and if so, people should be free to decide when and how often to share their stories.

- **Marshall Stowell**



MemoryFox Staff, Natalie Monroe and Joshua Parrish, with MemoryFox Storytellers at the 2024 Nonprofit Storytelling Conference

HOW DO YOU BALANCE BEING EMOTIONALLY APPEALING TO THE AUDIENCE WITHOUT EXPLOITING TRAUMA?

Think of your favorite TV show - it probably isn't watching episode after episode of suffering. (Remember, even *Game of Thrones* gave us Tyrion Lannister). The same goes for impact storytelling. While acknowledging challenges is important, we focus on growth, triumph, and transformation. **Show donors both the 'before' and 'after' of their support** - how someone moved from living in their car to having a home, from isolation to community, etc. Balance the hard parts with humor, humanity, and heart. Let people share their strengths, their laughs, their pride, and their aspirations. After all, great stories aren't just about surviving tough times - they're about the amazing humans who emerge on the other side (and even become the Hand of the King). - **Diana Farias Heinrich**

I'm sensing a real shift in our industry toward telling stories of transformation. These stories are told through a positive lens and with a focus on outcomes. Not only do these success stories resonate strongly with readers, they additionally give the storyteller space for reflection -- to recognize personal progress, an obstacle they've overcome, or tangible goals they have for their future. In this way, they serve a dual purpose. And simultaneously they are a purposeful way to share community stories that do no harm. - **Natalie Monroe**

One thing storytellers don't want is to be pitied. Their stories of value aren't solely based on their trauma experience. What are stories they can share that represent their whole humanity? Let them shape what they share, and consider stories of hope and triumph, confusion, laughter, learning something new, feeling uncertain or embarrassed, feeling comforted in a time of grief, finding one's voice or confidence, etc.

These are the stories that bring connection, because listeners can see themselves in the storyteller. If the storyteller is in a healthy place to share more deeply about their experience of trauma, be mindful of the purpose of sharing and if it will be beneficial for both the storyteller and audience. - **Holly Beech**

I feel like there is a big difference in letting someone tell their own story in their own words, and featuring their journey: not necessarily focusing on the dark parts, but featuring both dark and light elements in equal importance: because they are.

You can tell when a story is overly gratuitous, or focuses too much on the specific details of a traumatic moment, which may be traumatizing for them to speak to, and aren't necessarily helpful. - **Candace Cody**

CONTINUED: HOW DO YOU BALANCE BEING EMOTIONALLY APPEALING TO THE AUDIENCE WITHOUT EXPLOITING TRAUMA?

Striking this balance requires us to shift from exploiting pain to amplifying resilience. Here are a few ways you can make this shift:

- **Focus on Strength and Agency:** Highlight the individual's journey of overcoming challenges rather than fixating on the trauma itself.
- **Empower the Storyteller:** Allow them to shape their narrative and decide what parts to emphasize.
- **Be Intentional:** Use stories to inspire action and understanding, not pity or guilt. When we frame stories through hope, resilience, and possibility, they resonate emotionally without crossing into exploitation.

- **Sabrina Walker Hernandez**

Strength-based approach! Balancing emotional appeal with ethical storytelling means focusing on the strength and resilience of the individuals you highlight rather than emphasizing their trauma.

Donors don't need every detail of a traumatic story to grasp the importance of your work.

Instead, share stories that celebrate progress, empowerment, and impact, framing individuals as active participants in their own success. Donors can fill in the gaps in the stories with their own empathy and understanding, allowing the story to resonate without the need for graphic details.- **Derria Ford**

Trabian Shorters' work on asset-based framing is an invaluable resource for this approach. Start the story by highlighting the aspirations and contributions of the individual you're profiling, focusing on their strengths and achievements. When addressing challenges, frame them as barriers they've faced, rather than personal failures or traumas. - **Caliopy Glaros**



Nonprofit Photo Credit: Gulf Coast JFCS



Nonprofit Photo Credit: Blessman International, 2024 Foxie Award Winner, Storyteller of the Year

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO SHARE STORIES WHILE REMAINING SENSITIVE TOWARD TRIGGERING OTHERS?

The short answer is to state upfront that the following story may be triggering to the reader due to the sensitive nature of the content. And, of course, the story itself shouldn't be purposely written in a way that is harmful. Remember, do not harm. - **Frank Velásquez Jr.**

Be diligent with content warnings that inform the audience about potentially sensitive topics, that way they can decide if they want to engage. Framing the story with a focus on resilience, healing, or purpose rather than sensationalizing trauma, and using empowering, person-centered language. Highlight hope, strength, and growth where possible. Consider also providing resources for support in case the content affects someone unexpectedly.

- **Danielle Miano**

The story reader's perspective does not get considered enough when it comes to telling stories ethically. In today's world, you never know who might be triggered by something your organization shared when they are just doing their daily scrolling. Give your audience the ability to decide NOT to consume your story by providing a content warning.

Here are some instances where **content warnings** are a must:

- Sexual assault
- Domestic abuse or child abuse
- Animal cruelty or animal death
- Self-harm or suicide
- Eating disorders
- Violence

- **Carly Euler**



Prioritizing People: Chive Charities' Shift to Trauma-Informed Storytelling

ABOUT CHIVE CHARITIES

Chive Charities is a profoundly impactful organization that provides life-changing grants to Veterans, military families, first responders, and individuals with rare medical diagnoses. Their grants fill critical gaps where insurance and other resources fall short.

WHAT PROBLEM DID THEY SEEK TO SOLVE?

Since its founding in 2012, Chive Charities has recognized the power of storytelling to connect its grantees with supporters. Each recipient's story has the potential to inspire and uplift others facing similar challenges.

However, many of these stories are rooted in trauma, and Chive Charities became concerned that collecting them might retraumatize the individuals they aim to support. They sought a way to honor the courage and vulnerability of their grantees without causing harm.

In 2023, Chive Charities implemented a trauma-informed, ethical storytelling process to address this concern.



WHAT DID THEY DO?
A COMPLETE REVAMP!

The transformation began with the grant application process. Now, prospective grantees are asked about consent at every step in the process, ensuring stories celebrate recipients' resilience authentically. Chive Charities also introduced a collaborative storytelling approach, enabling grantees to feel safe, supported, and empowered by staff members throughout the storywriting process.

Additionally, the Chive Charities team underwent trauma-informed training, led by their Program Director, who holds a master's degree in social work and trauma-informed care. This training aimed to instill a deep understanding of the new procedures and reinforce the organization's commitment to a recipient-centered approach.

HOW DID IT GO? WIDELY SUCCESSFUL, DESPITE OPERATIONAL OBSTACLES.

The staff's dedication made the transition smooth, although Chive Charities faced some operational challenges, such as updating systems, communications, and website application forms. With board support, they successfully integrated the changes into daily operations.

Recipient feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing gratitude for the collaborative storytelling process. These updates have also fostered greater mindfulness among staff members, deepening their appreciation for the resilience and bravery of their grantees. Over time, Chive Charities anticipates that these improvements will enhance trust and strengthen relationships with recipients, ensuring they feel respected, empowered, and valued throughout their journey.



"Adopting a trauma-informed, ethical storytelling approach allowed us to prioritize curiosity over criticism, ensuring recipients felt safe, supported, and truly heard while sharing their stories."

-Cory Hall-Martin, Program Director

PART FOUR: STRENGTH-BASED MESSAGING

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON WORDS THAT MIGHT POINT TO TOKENISM, AND WHAT ARE GOOD ALTERNATIVES?

Think about how people would label themselves and ask if they would say they are "poverty-stricken," "at-risk" "troubled" etc. Highly unlikely! When telling stories or describing those you help, be sure to describe their challenges as just that - barriers they are working to overcome, rather than labeling them by that challenge.

A student who dreams about going to college and becoming a doctor, and an inner-city youth at risk of failing out of school can be the same student. How you portray them paints a picture so be careful about the stereotypes you might be perpetrating. Draw your reader in to be a cheerleader by describing aspirations and positive language! - **Susan Kirkpatrick**

Language, terminology, and labels are constantly evolving, and there's no guarantee that specific words will always accurately represent the people they describe or remain relevant over time. What matters most is that the words you use come directly from the individuals in your stories.

Focusing solely on finding the "perfect" terms, rather than prioritizing genuine feelings and meaningful impact, can itself be a form of tokenism. There are no shortcuts — **doing the work means asking people how they want to be represented** and honoring their choices in your language.

- **Caliopy Glaros**



Nonprofit Photo Credit: SYMCA of Northern Alberta, 2024 Foxie Winner, Creative Storyteller of the Year

CONTINUED: WHAT ARE SOME COMMON WORDS THAT MIGHT POINT TO TOKENISM, AND WHAT ARE GOOD ALTERNATIVES?

Tokenism often appears in language that generalizes, objectifies, or oversimplifies.

Language to Avoid:

- "Inspiring" or "overcomer" (if used to frame someone's existence as remarkable solely because of their identity or adversity).
- "The poor," "the needy," or "the disadvantaged" (dehumanizing and reductive).
- "At-risk" (focuses solely on challenges without acknowledging potential or agency).

Better Alternatives:

- Use specific terms like "community members," "individuals navigating [specific challenge]," or "people experiencing [specific circumstance]."
- Shift to strength-based language, e.g., "resilient," "innovative," or "advocates."
- By choosing words that honor complexity and humanity, we create more respectful and authentic narratives.

- Sabrina Walker Hernandez

HOW DO YOU TELL COMPELLING STORIES ABOUT POPULATIONS RECEIVING SERVICES WITHOUT CONTRIBUTING TO STEREOTYPING?

Talk about the systemic disparities that have created the gaps.

We must connect these disparities to their systemic causes

Because when we don't, we perpetuate harmful stereotypes that will further embed in the minds of many.

Historically, we have not connected these dots. And because we often subconsciously attribute a person's struggles to their character rather than their circumstances, we have to work harder to break out of this thought process. - **Frank Velasquez Jr.**

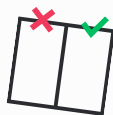
Start with featuring their advice and guidance. Cast them as capable contributors vs. grateful or damaged recipients. - **Marshall Stowell**

Tell stories *with* your community, not just about them. Create space for them to share their experiences in their own words, focusing on their strengths, aspirations and uniqueness, not just challenges. Collaborate throughout the process, from story collection through final review. By telling stories alongside those you serve, you amplify their voices and reduce the risk of stereotyping. - **David Hardstein**

8 ETHICAL STORYTELLING GUIDE MUST-HAVES



1. Deficit-based phrases to avoid. Commit to avoiding harmful deficit-based language by creating an exhaustive list. Share this list with your community to emphasize the shift to strength-based language.



2. Strength-based alternatives and replacement phrases. Provide a clear "use this/not that" list of strength-based terms to replace outdated language, to empower your community to represent your mission confidently.



3. Mission-focused terms. Develop examples that integrate new language with your nonprofit's mission. These terms can serve as quick reference points for social media, emails, and networking.



4. Communications guidelines, sorted by channel. Tailor your communications guidelines by platform, noting exceptions like grants requiring deficit-based language. Provide clear rules to navigate these scenarios.



5. Examples of inspirational nonprofits. Share examples of nonprofits excelling in strength-based messaging to inspire your team. Provide links for reference and to illustrate best practices.



6. Exercises to practice the new language. Include exercises to practice the updated language with your staff and board members. Repetition builds confidence and helps embed these practices into everyday communication.



7. Commitment to reevaluation. Regularly review and update your messaging, committing to reevaluations every 6 months or 2 years to keep practices relevant.



8. Team Signatures. Foster accountability by having staff, board members, and volunteers sign the guide, showing their commitment to ethical storytelling practices.

CONTINUED: HOW DO YOU TELL COMPELLING STORIES ABOUT POPULATIONS RECEIVING SERVICES WITHOUT CONTRIBUTING TO STEREOTYPING?

By focusing on individuality by highlighting unique, nuanced experiences rather than generalizing a group, you can spotlight your community in a really special way. Take time to collaborate with the real people you support to ensure their perspectives are authentically represented, and place their stories within broader systemic contexts to avoid framing them as personal failings. - **Danielle Miano**

Let the storyteller truly shape the direction of the story. Provide thoughtful prompts to help with the story flow without overly influencing the story itself or having an agenda. Talk with people, not about them - and even better pass the microphone so they can share for themselves. - **Holly Beech**

This is an opportunity to provide education to your community/consumers of your marketing and communication. Often, a population receiving services didn't come to be that way because of individual or personal choices alone - for many, their circumstances are:

- A result of both historical and present-day local, state and federal policy, and
- A lack of social safety nets and community infrastructure.

Organizations should strive to help their communities understand how a problem came to be and what they are doing to alleviate or remedy that problem. Supporters can be compelled to respond or act beyond an individual story when we are clear about history, context and how their support will make a long-term impact. - **Rachel D'Souza**

WHAT DO YOU RECOMMEND SAYING TO STAKEHOLDERS WHO REQUEST "POVERTY PORN"-STYLE STORIES?

The last time we put a recipient on stage during our gala, they were very emotional and could not share their story. It was traumatizing for them. A donor asked me a few years later "Why are we showing a video instead?" She asked because she missed the emotional moment from our recipient. I told her we traumatized one of our parents and we will never do that again. We want our recipients to own their story and be able to control their moment. Now this donor is the first to say:

"We don't do that. We honor our parents, instead."

- **Beth McGorry**

CONTINUED: WHAT DO YOU RECOMMEND SAYING TO STAKEHOLDERS WHO REQUEST "POVERTY PORN"-STYLE STORIES?

When stakeholders request "poverty porn"-style stories, it's essential to say no and **explain why these narratives are harmful** and counterproductive. Such stories exploit individuals' struggles for shock value, reducing their humanity and perpetuating stereotypes. Instead, share stories that highlight resilience, growth, and transformation. Stories like these are far more impactful.

For example, when working with incarcerated individuals, stories of personal triumph — like overcoming addiction or discovering self-worth — resonate deeply with supporters and inspire meaningful engagement. These narratives preserve dignity, challenge biases, and align with ethical storytelling principles while still moving audiences to act.

- **Cody Hays**

Staying on the course of the human element, that each human should be viewed with respect and compassion.

- **Angela Powers**

I think it's important to be empathetic and remember that fundraisers are under tremendous pressure to stand out in the attention economy. Let's face it - "poverty porn" is called what it is for a reason - "sex" sells.

We must first admit that we live in a world where most important fundraising channels demand that we play their exploitative algorithm game to boost their user metrics. The way the human brain itself works is no small culprit either - the fear of loss is a much greater motivator than the anticipation of gain. Look at current politics - catastrophizing works!

But does it? And what is the opportunity cost? Does showing a Veteran crying about the shame of failing their family build lasting positive relationships with recurring donors in the same way as highlighting the more current contributions of that Veteran to their community? That crying Veteran story is a product, and people are not static products! When you portray someone in this manner you separate them and remove the very thing that makes them human - motion.

Rather than thinking of ourselves as product salespeople, **let's think of ourselves as community builders**. Let's focus on the things that unite us and make us all human. These days people are inundated with shock and shame every time they open up their phone - let us be the light and the hope of a better and more positive world, not driven by our basest emotions but our highest aspirations. - **Chris Miano**

CONTINUED: WHAT DO YOU RECOMMEND SAYING TO STAKEHOLDERS WHO REQUEST "POVERTY PORN"-STYLE STORIES?

I approach these conversations with empathy and education. I explain that “poverty porn”-style stories might provoke a quick emotional reaction, but they often harm the people we’re trying to help and undermine long-term trust.

Instead, I advocate for dignity-centered storytelling that highlights resilience and impact. I show stakeholders how authentic, empowering stories foster deeper, more meaningful connections with donors and better align with our values. It’s about building understanding while staying true to ethical storytelling.

- Erik Tomalis

The concept of poverty porn is not a new one, and has been the nonprofit storytelling norm for many years. While it may feel uncomfortable, the first step of shifting the way narratives are presented is to have tough conversations as a group and make a conscious decision to say:

“I know we’ve done this in the past, but we will not do this moving forward”.

Start by sharing the definition. Journalist Matt Collins first defined the term in 2009 as “any type of media, be it written, photographed or filmed, which exploits the poor’s condition in order to generate the necessary sympathy for selling newspapers, increasing charitable donations, or support for a given cause”.

The simple fact is that organizations, and the stakeholders involved, cannot make a change without first educating themselves.



Nonprofit Photo Credit: Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids

If you continue to receive push-back, challenge your stakeholders to picture themselves or a loved one as the main “character” of the poverty porn-style story. Ask them: **How would it make you feel to see YOUR life written in this way?**

With tough conversations like these, the hardest part can often be getting started. Afterward, you, and your stakeholders, will likely feel relieved and empowered.

- Carly Euler

ArtistYear

A New Lens: How ArtistYear Aligned Messaging with Its Values

ABOUT ARTISTYEAR

ArtistYear is an incredibly important nonprofit that addresses inequities in K-12 education with creative learning. They recruit and train artists from all disciplines to serve as full-time Resident Teaching Artists in Title-I funded schools across America.

WHAT PROBLEM DID THEY SEEK TO SOLVE?

Since their founding in 2016, ArtistYear's external materials used deficit-based terms like high-poverty communities, at-risk youth, and low-income schools to describe those that received services. They recognized that it was time to describe the communities they worked with as they saw them - through the lens of their inherent strengths - rather than continue to focus on the deficits.

So, in 2023, ArtistYear began a shift to strength-based messaging!

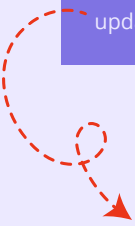


WHAT DID THEY DO?
A 12 MONTH ROLL-OUT.

To determine the new terms, ArtistYear's External Affairs team researched how similar organizations describe their communities and made decisions that aligned with the ArtistYear's overall vision.

The changes rolled out over a 12 month period, starting with a language audit of their collateral, including their website, informational one-pagers, elevator pitch, and recruitment materials.

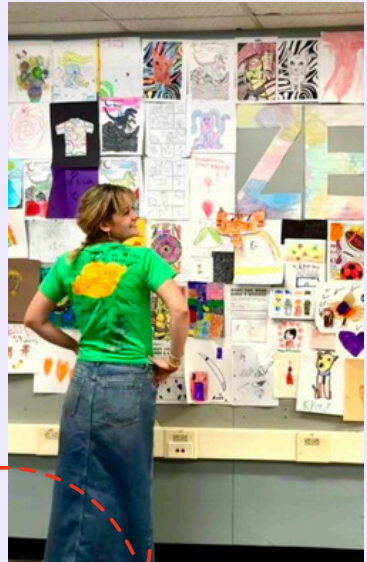
The External Affairs staff introduced the new terms to ArtistYear's staff and teaching artist training sessions. To make the guidance concrete, the language updates were added to ArtistYear's brand guide.



HOW DID IT GO? BIG STRIDES, BUT THE JOURNEY CONTINUES.

As ArtistYear continues to engage with new communities, the team remains committed to be mindful of potentially harmful language and to building new relationships with care.

While the staff at ArtistYear is familiar with the updated language and terminology, big changes across the board are ongoing. ArtistYear has found that some of the new phrases are not consistently understood by all external stakeholders, so they are focused on continued education.



“Because community is one of ArtistYear’s core values, it feels essential to talk about the communities where we serve in a positive way.”

-Stephanie Mayen, Chief Partnership Officer
& Director of Communications



SECTION TWO

STORYTELLING CONSENT

- **CONSENT LANGUAGE & BUILDING
CONSENT FORMS**
- **BEST PRACTICES FOR CONSENT
COLLECTION**
- **INFORMED CONSENT**
- **CONSENT EXPIRATION & RETRACTION**

PART ONE: CONSENT LANGUAGE & BUILDING CONSENT FORMS

HOW CAN WE ENSURE OUR CONSENT AGREEMENT INFORMS AND PROTECTS EVERYONE INVOLVED?

Make sure it's clear and agreed upon where and how their story/photo/video will be used: website, social media, printed materials, newsletters, shared with the media, etc. Set a shared expectation for a timeframe in which the material can be used. Agree that they can request for removal if they choose in the future, but make it clear that once it's published by the media we no longer have control of removal or changes.

Provide a translated and/or orally interpreted consent form when appropriate. Talk through the form and provide an opportunity for them to ask questions before signing. Be clear on whether or not payment is involved for the use of the material. - **Holly Beech**

I once worked with a young mother through her journey from high school to earning two AA degrees. When I sent her a story draft to approve, she said "This sentence makes it sound like my parents don't support me. I wouldn't want to show this to them." They were shocked when she became pregnant, but her parents became her champions. The way I'd written it didn't honor them.

A consent form alone can't protect everyone mentioned. An **informed consent process** plus a stakeholder test (questions that put the story in the context of the storyteller's everyday life) helps us understand how stories might impact family, friends, and community.

Ask: Who else appears? How might they feel? Stakeholder tests are critical to every storyteller's toolbox.

- **Diana Farias Heinrich**

Be very specific. In addition to asking to use their story, make sure you are clear about:

- What you will or will not include.
- What specific mediums that story will be shared on.
- What the agreed upon time period for use is.
- Any specific parameters that the subject can request.

Make sure the agreement works for both parties. Then, have a process in place for continuous review so that the agreement is followed - particularly if there is a specific time frame for use in place.

- **Susan Kirkpatrick**

WHAT SHOULD OR MUST BE INCLUDED ON STORYTELLING CONSENT FORMS?

I feel strongly that the ability to withdraw consent is something that must be included on consent forms.

- **Marshall Stowell**

There's a lot that goes into these forms, but as we know not everyone is going to read everything. Start with the most important details at the top: explain where the story will be shared, who will see it, and why it matters. Be transparent about the purpose of collecting their stories so they understand how their contributions will be used. This approach not only respects their time but also builds trust and encourages participation, as they know exactly what to expect and how their story will be framed. - **Danielle Miano**

A good consent form helps protect the dignity of the person sharing their story while keeping things clear and transparent. It should explain how their name will be used - whether it's their full name, first name, or a pseudonym - and outline how long the story can be used and for what purpose. It's also important to share where the story might appear, such as on social media, websites, or in print. Let them know they can ask the organization to stop using their story anytime and **explain the challenges of removing digital stories** once they're shared. Providing clear details and a contact for questions ensures they feel informed and respected throughout the process. -**Derria Ford**

CAN A SINGLE CONSENT FORM COVER MULTIPLE USES? SOMETIMES OUR PROJECTS EVOLVE FROM SOCIAL MEDIA POST INTO MORE FORMAL PUBLICATION. IS THIS ACCEPTABLE?

Drafting a single consent form that covers all media is the best practice. It helps ensure the most recent updated document is used and allows for the material to be used on other platforms that may not have been the focal point at the time. - **Angela Powers**

of what they are consenting to. They need to consent to what information will be shared, whether it's their name, image, or personal details. And they also need to consent to how that information will be shared.

The most important part of the consent form is the actual consent. This should clearly explain what the individual is consenting to. Informed consent means that they understand and appreciate the nature and significance

There is a big difference between using someone's image on your annual report versus on a billboard along the highway. The consent should be as specific as possible as to what will be shared and how it will be shared. - **Allie Levene**

CONTINUED: CAN A SINGLE CONSENT FORM COVER MULTIPLE USES? SOMETIMES OUR PROJECTS EVOLVE FROM SOCIAL MEDIA POST INTO MORE FORMAL PUBLICATION. IS THIS ACCEPTABLE?

A single consent form can cover multiple uses, but must be flexible and transparent:

Include future uses: Use language like, "I consent to the use of my story, photos, and/or recordings for this project and related materials, including social media, newsletters, and publications."

Notify participants of changes: If the scope expands significantly, from small-scale to widely distributed, seek renewed consent to ensure the individual's comfort.

Balance flexibility with respect: The form can cover various uses, but the storyteller's comfort and understanding remain paramount.

Ethical storytelling requires revisiting consent as circumstances change, even when legal agreements permit broader use.

- **Sabrina Walker Hernandez**

Yes, it can—and it must. Over time, you will inevitably need to repurpose content in various formats. To ensure transparency, clearly outline the overarching purpose of your communications and the different ways the story may be used in your consent form. It's impossible to seek approval for every photo, social post,

or piece of content, so focus on ensuring that the constituent fully understands the breadth and scope of how their story will be shared.

Additionally, provide a clear method for them to contact you if they change their mind and no longer wish to have their story used. - **Caliopy Glaros**

Every nonprofit is at a different stage of the journey so there are going to be exceptions but the simple answer is "no". Ideally you will want to have a unique consent process based on several different factors -- how you plan to use their story, any timelines for use, etc.

Consider having multiple "consent blocks" or "consent workflows" that you can use based on your target storyteller. - **Joshua Parrish**

A single consent form may cover multiple uses if they're explicitly outlined, but a new agreement is needed if the scope expands or the original consent expires. For example, if a story evolves from a social media post to a formal publication, participants must be informed and give fresh consent. This ensures they remain comfortable with how their story is shared and preserves trust in the process. Always err on the side of transparency to respect participants' rights and agency. - **Cody Hays**

PART TWO: BEST PRACTICES FOR CONSENT COLLECTION

WHAT ARE SOME STANDARDS YOU SUGGEST FOR OFFERING INCENTIVES FOR STORIES?

We've wrestled with how to pay fairly without making money the main motivation for storytelling. With our Refugee Speakers Bureau, either our office or the hosting organization pays speakers for their speaking engagements to compensate them for their time, skill, and emotional labor. We base payment around time commitment and complexity of the speaking engagement. We do not pay people to be guests on our podcast, which is an interview-style podcast, as that is more of a journalistic endeavor and we don't want guests to feel obligated to us on what they should say. - **Holly Beech**

Incentives can value someone's time, but must be offered ethically:

- **Ensure transparency:** Communicate that incentives are for participation, not payment for their story. This avoids coercion.
- **Keep incentives equitable:** Offer the same amount to maintain fairness.
- **Avoid influence:** Individuals can withdraw without losing the incentive.
- **Consider context:** Tailor incentives to needs, such as gift cards, transportation support, or tokens of gratitude.

Incentives should express appreciation without compromising the voluntary nature of storytelling. - **Sabrina Walker Hernandez**

The key to an incentive is that it's pure in intention, and doesn't force the storyteller into feeling coerced into participating. Keep in mind that an incentive doesn't have to be monetary or a physical good. When I oversaw storytelling collection at Farmer Veteran Coalition, we celebrated the collective years of service of veterans in our community on Veteran's Day; hundreds were compelled to participate because the incentive was being included in our website "collection of veteran features". Being recognized on Veteran's Day was a bigger incentive than any dollar amount. Consider what is meaningful to your community that would genuinely encourage story sharing, and keep that as your North Star. - **Natalie Monroe**

HOW DO WE MAKE SURE OUR CLIENTS FEEL VALUED DURING THE STORY COLLECTION PROCESS AND NOT AS A MEANS TO AN END FOR FUNDRAISING?

Reframing the term "client" or "beneficiary" to "advocate" can shift the narrative and foster a sense of empowerment. This language acknowledges their agency and positions them as a partner in the storytelling process rather than passive participants. By putting the person and their experience at the center, you'll create a process that feels respectful, empowering, and truly collaborative.

- Joshua Parrish

One way to ensure your storytellers feel valued during the story collection process is to check back in again before their story is published. Although well intentioned, it is possible that a story has been altered too much during the editing process. That is why it is essential to **give storytellers the chance to approve - or decline - the final version of their story**. Respect their timeline and boundaries, prioritizing their well-being over any deadline or campaign needs. - Carly Euler



Nonprofit Photo Credit: Gulf Coast JFCS

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO COLLECT CONSENT DURING THE INTERVIEW AND STORYTELLING PROCESSES?

The best time to collect consent during the storytelling process is at multiple points to make sure the person feels comfortable and in control. Start by getting their consent before the interview, explaining how their story might be used. During the interview, check in if sensitive topics come up to make sure they're still okay moving forward. Afterward, share the final version or key details with them so they can approve or make changes. - **Derria Ford**

Often. **Ahead of the interview:** Give your storyteller a general idea of the purpose and where you anticipate publishing their story. **During the interview:** Remind them of these details and reconfirm they are comfortable with this. Acknowledge it's ok if their answer has changed and also understandable if they need space to think further.

Let them know they will have the opportunity to review the final piece before it's live. **After the interview, before the piece goes public:** Share the final draft. Allow them to offer edits to more accurately reflect their story or to retract their consent altogether. People may not realize initially they don't want to give consent so it's important to give them that opportunity later. - **Natalie Monroe**

Consent should be collected before, during, and after the storytelling process to ensure participants feel in control at every stage. Before the interview, explain the purpose and intended uses. During the process, check in to confirm they're still comfortable sharing. Afterward, secure final approval for any edits or uses. Continuous consent shows respect, helps prevent harm, and fosters trust between the storyteller and your organization. - **Cody Hays**

Before and then after an interview and outlining how the assets will be used. - **Marshall Stowell**

It is critical to collect consent at the beginning of the process, when the individual has agreed to take part in the interview, to ensure clarity and mutual understanding about the scope and purpose of their involvement. - **Mike Esposito**



Nonprofit Photo Credit: Linc Housing



Leading with Strength: How Cameras for Girls Redefined Their Stories

ABOUT CAMERAS FOR GIRLS

Cameras For Girls is an innovative nonprofit that equips young women in Africa for journalism and photojournalism careers through targeted photography and storytelling training. By providing access to both technical skills and creative outlets, the organization empowers these young women to challenge societal norms, document their realities, and amplify their voices on a global stage.

WHAT PROBLEM DID THEY SEEK TO SOLVE?

Cameras for Girls recognized that their storytelling strategy often emphasized only the challenges their students faced. While these stories were important, they didn't fully reflect the community's strength and resilience. Thus, the organization sought to change this narrative to better represent the dignity and determination of the young women they serve.

To do so, they knew they needed to create and adopt ethical storytelling policies.



WHAT DID THEY DO?
A POLICY-BASED,
ORGANIZATION-WIDE COMMITMENT.

In response, Cameras for Girls developed an Ethical Storytelling Standards Guide and shifted to strength-based narratives. The team also implemented a robust consent process, ensuring that students' voices are represented with dignity and agency. These changes fundamentally transformed the way they shared their students' journeys and how the students themselves ethically captured stories in the field.

As the organization grew, they incorporated ethical storytelling into their training curriculum. Cameras for Girls' leadership researched best practices, consulted with experts, and created their guide collaboratively with staff and volunteers.

A significant challenge arose in navigating consent across diverse cultural contexts. To address this, the team developed culturally sensitive consent practices, including using language guides and enlisting students fluent in local dialects to facilitate understanding. This ensured clarity and mutual respect in their storytelling approach.

HOW DID IT GO? STRENGTHENED TRUST FROM STUDENTS, TO DONORS & BEYOND!

The students eagerly embraced this shift! Adopting ethical storytelling standards has built trust, empowering young women to lead their narratives with dignity and clarity. These practices have also enhanced Cameras for Girls' credibility and deepened relationships with stakeholders.

Looking ahead, Cameras for Girls anticipates that this approach will foster deeper connections with diverse audiences, attract increased support for their mission, and inspire students to capture stories that challenge stereotypes and amplify underrepresented voices. By operating at the intersection of cultural diversity, gender inequality, and storytelling, Cameras for Girls aims to create systemic change in how stories are told and whose voices are heard.



“Making this change felt empowering. It reminded us that ethical storytelling is not just a practice but a responsibility to ensure every voice we share is treated with dignity and respect.”

-Amina Mohamed, Founder & Executive Director

PART THREE: INFORMED CONSENT

HOW DO I OVERCOME LANGUAGE BARRIERS WHILE GETTING INFORMED CONSENT FROM CLIENTS?

Informed consent requires that the written consent and any conversations you have with the individual about consent are in a language that allows them to understand and appreciate the nature and significance of what they are consenting to. This means that you **may need to utilize a translator**. - **Allie Levene**

To overcome language barriers, I would work with a **trusted translator** to ensure clear and accurate communication. It's also important to provide all consent forms and key information in the client's preferred language, allowing them the time and space to ask questions or seek clarification. - **Mike Esposito**

IS WRITTEN CONSENT ALWAYS NECESSARY? CAN VERBAL CONSENT BE SUFFICIENT?

Written consent provides a clear opportunity for participants to agree or decline without feeling pressured, fostering autonomy. Verbal consent can feel more immediate but may unintentionally create a sense of obligation. Written agreements ensure both parties have a documented record of terms, promoting transparency and accountability. - **Cody Hays**

Always, always, always get it in writing of some form. - **Angela Powers**

Written consent is best to protect both the storyteller and your organization. Having a document with clear expectations can be useful to look back on if any confusion or disagreement should arise after publication.

We don't just hand over a consent form, though. We talk through it with the storyteller and offer to answer questions. When needed, translations are provided, and we would also provide oral interpretation if needed. - **Holly Beech**

HOW DO YOU MANAGE CONSENT FROM CHILDREN OR OTHER INDIVIDUALS WHO MAY NOT BE ABLE TO GIVE CONSENT IN A "TRADITIONAL" WAY?

Obtaining consent from children or individuals with limited capacity requires care:

Parental/guardian consent: Obtain written consent from a parent or guardian when involving children.

Assent from the child: In addition to guardian consent, seek the child's agreement (assent) in language, ensuring they feel comfortable participating.

For individuals with limited capacity: Involve guardians and explain the process in terms to the individual, respecting their understanding and autonomy.

Document the process: Record who provided consent, how it was obtained, and considerations.

Consent prioritizes the dignity and rights of individuals, ensuring they are respected and protected.

- **Sabrina Walker Hernandez**



Nonprofit Photo Credit: Linc Housing

First we talk with our parents. But we give our kids final say. I ask permission and share with the kids where I might share the story and why I'm sharing it. I promise to never use their names. The kids ask me why I ask so many questions about sharing their stories. I am very open with them that I'm sharing their stories and people should always ask for permission to share their stories especially if they can do it themselves. - **Beth McGorry**

I would obscure children's faces - photograph from behind, etc. Parents may feel obligated or pressured to provide consent, children have no choice. - **Marshall Stowell**

Managing consent from children or individuals unable to provide traditional consent requires extra care and responsibility. Always check local laws and ensure you obtain consent from a legal guardian. In addition, take the time to explain to the child - in age-appropriate language - the potential positive and negative impacts of sharing their story. It's essential to prioritize the child's understanding and comfort, even if the guardian has given consent. As an advocate, your primary responsibility is to act in the best interest of the child and or storyteller, ensuring their dignity and well-being are protected throughout the storytelling process. - **Derria Ford**

PART FOUR: CONSENT EXPIRATION & RETRACTION

DO YOU THINK CONSENT "EXPIRES"? AT WHAT POINT SHOULD WE SUNSET MATERIALS?

The easy answer to this question is “yes, consent does expire”, but there is not one “right” way to do so. My advice is for your organization to create and adopt a policy that takes two things into consideration:

- **Your Mission:** Some missions lend themselves to evergreen stories, or stories that can be told again and again while remaining relevant (like a veteran service organization or food bank), while other missions are more naturally suited for one-time, limited storytelling (like granting “wishes” or working with students who eventually graduate). When choosing an expiration timeframe, ask yourself how long you realistically will want to use the stories you collect.
- **Your Staff’s Bandwidth:** Nonprofit professionals are extremely busy, so it’s essential to choose an expiration timeframe that is reasonable to track and manage. There is no point in implementing a procedure that you are unable to realistically do!

One organization I admire, Feeding America, shared that their storytelling consent expires after three years of sharing the story. Then, if they wish to continue using the story, they ask the storyteller to re-agree to the consent on an annual basis. Through this process, their stories tend to naturally sunset after 5-6 years.

- **Carly Euler**

I think that setting a specific time period for use that both parties agree to can eliminate the uncertainty of expiration. Also, circumstances sometimes change. So, if a participant changes their mind about use, I recommend respecting that and taking down anything they are uncomfortable with. If you are keeping up with impactful storytelling, your organization should have new stories to share, giving you the opportunity to “retire” stories that may be in need of sunsetting.

- **Susan Kirkpatrick**

CONTINUED: DO YOU THINK CONSENT "EXPIRES"? AT WHAT POINT SHOULD WE SUNSET MATERIALS?

The duration of the consent, and the ability to retract it in the future, should be part of the established agreement when the original consent is given. The advice I've received is one year.

- **Holly Beech**

Consent can and should expire.

Change is constant and nonprofits must be adaptable to an ever-shifting reality. I believe consent should be sought annually and consent forms should be updated at that frequency as well. Not only do stories change and grow with time but technology and tools change as well.

Platforms like Meta have removed fact checking from their corporate responsibility. If your post/story/communications piece is reshared or shared with incorrect context, who is responsible for protecting the story or communicating with the individual who provided consent? If we want to be trusted with stories that engage our community, we have to be willing to put in the work to maintain the integrity of the stories.

- **Rachel D'Souza**

Include language that this consent is in effect for say a 5-year period. Then it will be retained and archived with the organization. However, we are not liable for copies or postings that may still be in circulation after that date.

- **Angela Powers**

Yes, consent can and should expire. Materials should be sunsetted if the participant no longer feels comfortable, if their circumstances change, or if the original agreement's timeframe or purpose has passed.

Regularly review and revisit permissions, especially for stories used in evolving projects, to ensure they remain aligned with ethical practices. - **Cody Hays**

Yes, consent should expire.

I strongly believe you should have an organizational sunset policy, and you should always go back to clients to regain consent when reusing content. Clients should always have the option to choose how, where, and when their stories are shared. Adding an expiration date to stories ensures your organization creates a culture for story telling because it requires that you continually incorporate new stories.

- **Derria Ford**



Nonprofit Photo Credit: Memphis Teacher Residency

WHAT DO YOU DO IF SOMEONE PREVIOUSLY GAVE CONSENT AND YOU PUBLISH THEIR STORY, BUT THEN THEY RETRACT IT?

For me, the true nature of consent didn't totally click until some of the prominent thought-leaders in ethical storytelling shared the concept that,

consent is not in perpetuity.

This is a paradigm shift for a lot of us older folks who grew up pre-internet. We live in a brave new world where content manages to be both ephemeral and permanent at the same time. I am tremendously grateful to these leaders for highlighting this issue, and we have built consent withdrawal into the **MemoryFox** system because of it.

The potential implications of public-facing stories are obvious and well documented. On a basic level, life situations change and people may no longer feel comfortable with that old vision of themselves. However, one aspect that is often overlooked is a matter of what to do with the physical content and files themselves. **As a veteran, this makes me cringe** - how many hard drives and cloud drives are out there filled with deeply personal videos of veterans sharing experiences that they would now find humiliating?

We are not static. Change and growth are a part of the human experience. If you deny someone that growth or change by tethering them to the past, you deny them their humanity in a way that makes them more akin to products

rather than people. We must give an avenue for storytellers to withdraw consent for both the public and private (or incidental) presentation of their story. A person entrusting their story to us for fundraising is a tremendous honor and it should be treated as such. We actually also find that providing clarity on consent withdrawal has real ROI value - it helps build community trust and increases the amount and quality of stories you'll get in the future. - **Chris Miano**

When someone retracts consent, or a story needs to come down for safety reasons, act quickly to remove it from media you control (i.e. social posts, website content, toss printed materials, etc.). The critical part: from the beginning of the storytelling process, be clear with your client about what going public with their story means - once it's out there, it's out there.

Even if you remove content quickly, you can't take back shares, emails, or damage already done. Have a dedicated staff member ready to respond. The informed consent process must include multiple discussions about how stories can live on in ways you can't control. Your client needs to know they can say 'no,' and understand what 'yes' really means in a digital world. - **Diana Farias Heinrich**

CONTINUED: WHAT DO YOU DO IF SOMEONE PREVIOUSLY GAVE CONSENT AND YOU PUBLISH THEIR STORY, BUT THEN THEY RETRACT IT?

Nonprofit professionals have a significantly higher bar than their for-profit counterparts. Due to the nature of their work, consent is never in perpetuity.

Ideally you should be 1.) Giving your storytellers an easy way to withdraw their consent at any time, and 2.) Proactively reconfirming consent in situations where you are repurposing previously shared content. - **Joshua Parrish**

From a legal standpoint, this will depend on what they consented to.

This is one reason why having a written consent form is important. A consent form should state whether it is being given irrevocably or not. You should also include a provision that states whether or not they have the right to review the final product before it is put out to the world. - **Allie Levene**

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY STORYTELLER HAS PASSED AWAY? CAN I STILL USE THEIR STORY?

Using a deceased storyteller's story requires sensitivity and careful consideration:

- **Check initial consent:** If they provided consent during their lifetime for ongoing use, you may honor their wishes.
- **Consult their family or representatives:** Reach out to next of kin or legal representatives for guidance and additional permission, especially for new uses.
- **Use discretion:** Avoid using the story if it could cause harm or discomfort to surviving loved ones or the community.

Respect for the individual's legacy and their family's feelings should guide your decisions. - **Sabrina Walker Hernandez**

I believe the crux of this question mostly depends on the mission of your organization. There are many nonprofit organizations, like ones performing disease-related research or granting wishes to children with terminal illnesses, where sharing the stories of those who have passed away is a way to honor their journey, their life and their legacy. You can, and perhaps should, continue to share their story as long as you have captured the proper consent from the storyteller initially and/or family member posthumously.

However, for nonprofits with missions that have no direct relation to death or dying, I believe it is most respectful to no longer share that story after they have passed away. If you feel truly unsure what to do, reach out to their trusted family member and ask how they feel about the story continuing to be told. - **Carly Euler**



SECTION THREE

STORY TYPES & SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- FAMILY & YOUTH STORIES
- AVOIDING STORIES THAT STEREOTYPE
- ANONYMOUS STORYTELLING
- AI & ETHICAL STORYTELLING

PART ONE: FAMILY & YOUTH STORIES

HOW SHOULD STORYTELLING CONSENT FORMS FOR YOUTH DIFFER FROM THOSE FOR ADULTS?

While some states may allow a child to consent in certain circumstances, the best practice is to get consent from the child's parent or guardian. The consent form should include statements which indicate the signer is attesting that they are the parent or guardian of the child and that they give their consent on behalf of the child. - **Allie Levene**

HOW DO WE COMMUNICATE THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF OUR MISSION WITHOUT EXPLOITING THE TRAGIC & VULNERABLE STORIES OF THE FAMILIES WE SERVE?

Don't make the story about your organization. Let the storyteller shape the direction of the story. Include their whole humanity and their agency as a person. Don't just focus on the tragedy that happened to them and how your organization 'saved' them. Stories are much more interesting and relatable when they are focused on a real person and the nuances of their journeys, rather than centered on an organization's mission. The power of the mission will come through more tangible when that person's complexities and triumphs can shine through.

- **Holly Beech**

Frame stories, and those who are the subject of them, as real people with positive attributes and aspirations that are facing challenges (many not of their own making). Demonstrating how they used their agency and personal attributes to overcome these challenges is critical.

While the temptation may be to portray your organization as the hero or fixer, it may be damaging to the subject without acknowledging how they helped themselves. **Highlighting the structural barriers they face is more effective** than portraying them as lacking personal attributes to overcome their challenges. This strategy allows you to highlight *something (not someone)* that needs to be fixed!

- **Susan Kirkpatrick**

HOW DO YOU TELL COMPELLING FUNDRAISING STORIES FEATURING THE CHILDREN WE SUPPORT WITHOUT MAKING THEM FEEL “LESS THAN”?

This is all about language. We talk about walking alongside our families, not providing services or serving people. We talk about their potential and how we can level the playing field.

- **Beth McGorry**

I focus on storytelling that highlights the strength, potential, and humanity of the children we support. Instead of framing them as victims, I center their resilience and achievements. I also ensure they or their guardians are fully informed and give consent, respecting their dignity throughout. It's about showing how our work empowers them, not defining them by their challenges. This approach builds trust, honors their worth, and resonates deeply with donors while staying true to our mission. - **Erik Tomalis**

Feature them in their power, not their need. - **Marshall Stowell**

Whenever possible, let the children tell their own stories in their own voices. This empowers them to share their experiences authentically and highlights their strengths. Always involve their families in the process, ensuring they review and sign off on the story before it's shared. Focus on the child's growth, resilience, and potential rather than framing them as victims. This approach maintains dignity and avoids exploitative narratives. - **Cody Hays**

Some great advice that I heard this past year was to shift the focus of your storytelling to uplifting shared experiences your audience inherently understands, instead of “othering”. This is a great way to showcase the stories of children without making them feel “less than”!

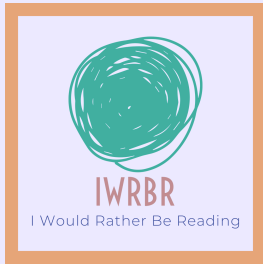
For example, instead of focusing on how a family cannot afford to send a child to summer camp or participate on a sports team, focus on the joy felt and the life lessons learned from these activities. It's likely that your audience of potential donors will remember the feelings they associate with those activities and be inspired to provide those opportunities! - **Carly Euler**

Tell their whole story.

What are their hopes? What are their aspirations? What's keeping them from reaching their dreams? What barriers need to be removed so that they can achieve their goals? Just make their stories whole.

- **Frank Velásquez Jr.**

Highlight the child's strengths, talents, and aspirations. Frame the story around how your mission supports their goals without defining them by their hardships. Involve the child and their family in the storytelling process to ensure authenticity and mutual respect. - **Sabrina Walker Hernandez**



From Trauma to Triumph: How I Would Rather Be Reading Raised More Funds With Storytelling

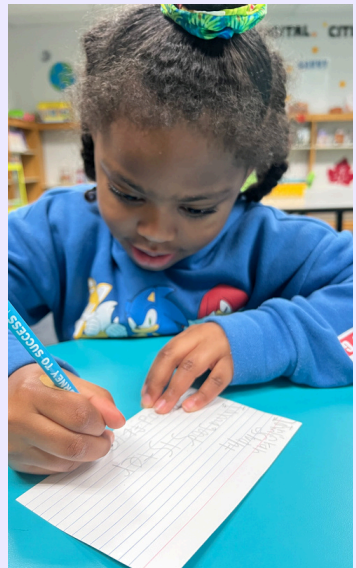
ABOUT I WOULD RATHER BE READING

I Would Rather Be Reading (IWRBR) is a remarkable nonprofit that provides after-school programs and summer camps free of charge to families living in Louisville, Kentucky. Their work is centered around the belief that quality education should be equitably accessible to all.

WHAT PROBLEM DID THEY SEEK TO SOLVE?

Like many nonprofits, the COVID-19 pandemic challenged IWRBR to find new funding sources.

Since one component of their program is trauma-informed literacy support, they knew all too well the sensitive nature of the traumas their students deal with. And while they knew storytelling was a successful way to spark donations, they did not want their families to feel shame or embarrassed to share their stories.



WHAT DID THEY DO?
A STORYTELLING SHIFT.

IWRBR made the conscious decision to focus their storytelling efforts on the progress their students have made, as opposed to the needs caused by their trauma. They adopted a story collection strategy that focused on the students sharing what they have learned, their experiences and their accolades.



HOW DID IT GO? TRUST BUILDING, CONSISTENT STORY SHARING & MORE FUNDS RAISED.


IWRBR was able to collect compelling visuals that painted the picture of their mission better than any written mission statement ever could. These stories were real-life successes, showing their mission in action, and the triumphs of the very communities they work so hard to serve.



This shift led to an increase in parental involvement. It became easier to get the parent's consent to share a story involving their child because they are highlighting success and not broadcasting their traumas.



Over time, donors have become accustomed to seeing the children's stories, and often look forward to witnessing the progress of their programming. One impact video, featuring students in the Educate & Elevate Program, raised 75% more than originally anticipated, when shown at their Hearts for Hope Impact Breakfast.



"This change made us very proud, because we knew we were taking the right steps in making our families feel safe, seen and served."

-Allison Ogle, Co-Founder & CDO

PART TWO: AVOIDING STORIES THAT STEREOTYPE

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO TELL SOMEONE ELSE'S STORY, INCLUDING HARDSHIPS, WITHOUT CREATING AN EXPLOITATIVE NARRATIVE?

The BEST way to tell someone else's story is to imagine you're the subject of the story. How would you want your story to be told? When you lead with this approach, your framing shifts and the stories that emerge are ethically powerful. - **Frank Velásquez Jr.**

Start before the hardship. Share things that illustrate who this person is: their background, their memories, their hobbies, their aspirations. Be mindful of the broader context around the hardship: the historical and systemic factors that played a role in this person's life. Highlight their agency in making decisions, their growth, healing, and progress, after the hardship, and what they are doing now to make a difference for themselves and others. - **Holly Beech**

**In their own words,
it's their story.**

- Angela Powers

The best way is to approach storytelling with empathy, respect, and transparency. I prioritize obtaining consent and involve the person in shaping how their story is shared, ensuring they feel empowered, not exploited. Instead of focusing solely on hardships, I highlight their resilience, strengths, and progress. I frame the story to show impact and hope, emphasizing the partnership between them and our mission. This approach honors their dignity while inspiring donors authentically.

- Erik Tomalis

I try to make sure any stories with hardship that I write also share how the person impacted was able to lift themselves out of that hardship, with support from donors and the organization. I try to share stories from a place of empowerment and ownership rather than victimization or exploitation. People like to read narratives that feature a journey -- from hardship to a more positive outcome, or something learned or gained from that hardship if at all possible. - **Rachel Zant**

HOW CAN WE ENSURE THAT WE AVOID THEMES OF WHITE SAVIORMISM, ESPECIALLY WHEN TELLING STORIES ABOUT THE IMPACT AND RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE VOLUNTEERS, STAFF, AND THE COMMUNITY WE SERVE?

To avoid white saviorism, prioritize stories that center the community's strengths, agency, and contributions over those of the volunteers or staff. Ensure the interviewer or storyteller has a genuine connection with the interviewee, such as shared cultural experiences or lived realities. Highlight collaboration rather than charity and portray the relationship as one of mutual respect and partnership.

- **Cody Hays**

Feature people expressing their agency or power, offer advice or guidance, and then tie that into how the organization is following the lead of the community. Call people advocates, not recipients. - **Marshall Stowell**

Combating white saviorism requires a fundamental shift in storytelling perspective. It's about recognizing the inherent strengths and agency of communities we support. Instead of portraying volunteers as rescuers, we must represent partnerships built on mutual respect and shared goals. The narrative should flow from the community's understanding of their challenges and solutions.

Key strategies:

- Center community voices
- Highlight local leadership
- Portray volunteers as collaborators
- Use empowering language
- Showcase community-driven solutions
- Include direct community perspectives
- Demonstrate reciprocal relationships
- Challenge narratives of helplessness
- Emphasize community resilience

- **Sabrina Walker Hernandez**



Nonprofit Photo Credit: Memphis Teacher Residency

4

THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN WRITING AN EMOTIONAL STORY

1. Consider the “Golden Rule”

When crafting a story, consider the universal principle often introduced in childhood: treat others as you would like to be treated. This guideline is invaluable in storytelling. Before sharing a story, reflect on how it would feel if you or a loved one were its main character. Would you be comfortable having the story presented in this way? If not, make adjustments to ensure respect and dignity are maintained.

2. Positive Emotions ARE Emotions

The term "emotion" is not limited to feelings of sadness, despair, or anger. The emotional spectrum includes hope, joy, and relief, all of which can resonate deeply with audiences. Stories that evoke hope for a brighter future, or demonstrate the long-term solutions provided by your work, can inspire donors to engage and give repeatedly, because they feel like they are a part of the bigger solution.

3. “Big” Trauma is Not a Necessity

Emotionally compelling stories do not always need to center on significant trauma or severe adversity. Stories of smaller, everyday victories are equally powerful, and often easier to capture. By embracing creativity and trusting in the strength of storytelling, organizations can connect with audiences in meaningful ways without relying solely on narratives of extreme hardship.

4. Words Matter, Even if You Don’t Know the “Right” Ones

Language is a critical element of storytelling, especially when discussing sensitive topics or representing individuals from diverse backgrounds. If you are uncertain about using the "right" terminology, approach the situation with transparency and humility. Share your uncertainty with your storytellers, acknowledging that you are committed to learning and respecting their perspective. Honest, vulnerable communication fosters trust and ensures that stories are told with integrity.

PART THREE: ANONYMOUS STORYTELLING

WHAT PRACTICES SHOULD WE FOLLOW TO PROTECT THE PRIVACY & IDENTITY OF THOSE WE SERVE, ESPECIALLY WHEN SHARING ONLINE?

Protecting privacy starts with clear, informed consent. I ensure individuals understand how their story will be shared and allow them to set boundaries. When sharing online, I anonymize details like names, locations, or any identifying information unless explicitly approved.

Using **composite stories or stock imagery** when necessary can also safeguard privacy. Above all, I prioritize their dignity and safety, ensuring our storytelling aligns with ethical practices and builds trust without compromising their well-being. - **Erik Tomalis**

WHEN WE CHANGE A STORY TO PROTECT ANONYMITY, DO WE STILL NEED TO OBTAIN CONSENT FROM THE PERSON?



Nonprofit Photo Credit: School Year Abroad

In general, if the person can be identified based on the information you are sharing then you need their consent. That tends to be a pretty blurry line. You have to figure out whether you have stripped enough identifying details. So, don't leave it up to chance. Get consent. - **Allie Levene**

Yes. No person should ever be surprised by seeing their recognizable story in publication, even if it is anonymous. - **Holly Beech**

Absolutely. No one can guarantee absolute anonymity and consent must be gained if a story is changed. - **Rachel D'Souza**

HOW DO YOU USE VISUALS (VIDEO/PHOTO) WHILE NOT BEING ABLE TO SHOW FACES OF THE PEOPLE WE SERVE?

Protecting individual privacy while telling powerful stories requires creative visual storytelling approaches. By shifting perspective, we can capture meaningful narratives without revealing specific identities. A shelter bag packed and ready to go can tell a story of courage without showing a face. **Effective visual storytelling strategies:**

- Use silhouettes capturing emotion
- Create close-up shots of hands
- Capture environmental context
- Develop abstract illustrations
- Highlight symbolic objects
- Use creative narrative angles
- Create landscape emotional shots
- Develop metaphorical imagery
- Leverage light and shadow

These techniques center human experiences while maintaining privacy, ensuring dignity remains at the forefront of storytelling.

- **Sabrina Walker Hernandez**

Focus on creative alternatives that protect anonymity while still telling a compelling story. Use close-ups of hands, silhouettes, or backlit shots to convey emotion and context. Incorporate symbolic visuals, such as objects or environments that represent the story's themes. Pair these visuals with powerful quotes or voiceovers to maintain engagement and storytelling impact. - **Cody Hays**

There is no doubt that some organizations have to tell their story without being able to show the faces and identity of those they serve. However, we have seen many organizations overcome this challenge in innovative ways that I think are part of a larger trend that I am very excited about. In fact, I think this is one of the biggest opportunities in nonprofit marketing and fundraising.

Instead of always focusing on the people your nonprofit serves and putting the onus on them to perform, proactive social good organizations are taking a route more focused on community building. They share mission stories not just from one perspective, but from the perspective of the entire community - inclusive of staff, board members, volunteers, donors, friends, etc.

We think of these types of composite stories as a lighthouse. Not only are you building better connections with your community members by bringing them into the conversation, but you are also inviting others to join your community. There is a real joy in reframing storytelling in this more positive manner that has an abundance mentality rather than that of deficit. - **Chris Miano**

CONTINUED: HOW DO YOU USE VISUALS (VIDEO/PHOTO) WHILE NOT BEING ABLE TO SHOW FACES OF THE PEOPLE WE SERVE?

One way to avoid sharing the faces of the people you serve is to tell the story from YOUR perspective! Selfie-style videos (one person talking directly to the camera) are the most effective on social channels in terms of engagement and reach. For nonprofits, whose marketing budgets can't match those of for-profit companies, it's more vital

than ever to create content that aligns with these algorithms and captures viewers' attention. Here are

[10 tips to take great selfie-style videos](#)

using your smartphone.

- **Carly Euler**



I KNOW WRITING COMPOSITE STORIES IS A STRATEGY TO ENSURE PRIVACY, BUT ARE THERE ETHICAL CONCERNS WHEN SHARING STORIES THAT ARE NOT "TRUE"?

Composite stories are an ethical way to protect client privacy when done transparently. The key is to clearly indicate that the story represents synthesized, anonymized experiences to protect the safety and well-being of clients and beneficiaries. - **Maria Bryan**

Sharing composite stories is a highly effective way to show what your organization's beneficiaries might be going through, while still ensuring privacy. They are true representations, based on the many stories you witness each day. Your donors want to hear these stories and feel connected to the people that you serve. - **Rachel Zant**

Yes, if we are representing a piece as factual, but changed to protect one's identity, then the facts of the story must run parallel to the actual events.

- **Angela Powers**

Composite stories walk a fine ethical line. While they protect privacy, they can blur authenticity. The key is transparency. Disclose that the story combines real experiences to represent shared truths. Done right, it honors dignity without compromising trust. Think of it as a mosaic — each piece is authentic, and together, they create a larger, truthful picture.

- **Cherian Koshy**

7 ANONYMOUS STORYTELLING STRATEGIES

1. Record a Voiceover Testimonial.

If your storyteller is willing to write their story, use your own voice to turn that testimonial into an audio clip. A voiceover is an easy way to repurpose a written story for a new medium without revealing the storyteller's identity.

2. Share the Story From Another Perspective.

Tell the story from the viewpoint of someone close to the situation, such as a staff member, volunteer, or community leader. This approach allows a fresh perspective that still highlights the significance of the original story.

3. Craft A Composite Story that Represents Your Community.

Combine elements from several real-life stories to create a narrative that reflects common experiences within your community. Composite stories protect individual identities while illustrating the broader impact of your work.

4. Use Short Clips to Create A Composite Video.

Create a video using brief clips of your mission in action. This can be done effectively without ever showing an individual's face. Blend 3-5 second clips that highlight the collective impact of your organization without focusing on a single person.

5. Generate Images and Video Using AI.

Leverage AI tools to create visuals that align with your stories while maintaining privacy. Whether it's creating illustrative images or generating video content, AI can convey the essence of your message without exposing real identities. See pages 71-74 to explore ethical considerations for using AI.

6. Use Visuals That Relate To Your Mission.

Incorporate imagery that reflects the theme of your mission, rather than featuring specific individuals. A video of someone packing a suitcase can represent a domestic violence survivor moving out of their home. A timelapse of painting coming to life can symbolize a transformation taking place over time. Get creative!

7. Tell The Story of An Object.

Shift the focus from a human to an object that plays a meaningful role in the story. A nonprofit that builds homes can share the story of a hammer. An after school program can share the story of a nutritious snack that provides nourishment. A food bank can explore the journey of a food delivery truck. This approach humanizes your mission without revealing any personal details.

PART FOUR: AI & ETHICAL STORYTELLING

WHAT IS YOUR TAKE ON USING AI-GENERATED IMAGES & VIDEOS? COULD THIS BE SEEN AS MISLEADING TO POTENTIAL DONORS?

If AI-generated content is used, it's important to clearly share this to donors, either within the content itself or in the captions comments. Given how realistic these images and videos have become, failing to provide this context could unintentionally mislead donors and diminish their confidence in your organization. - **Mike Esposito**

Authenticity resonates with donors, so **using a real image or video will always be more powerful** than an AI-generated one. That said, there may be circumstances or limitations that prevent an organization from sharing a real image. In such cases, the most important thing is to communicate that the image or video is AI-generated and provide transparency about the reasons behind that decision. The key is to ensure this does not compromise the trust that has been intentionally built with donors over time. - **Natalie Monroe**

As with anything, making the genesis of the image clear to the viewer is critical. If it's AI-generated you have a responsibility to let the viewer know that. - **Marshall Stowell**

Using AI-generated images and videos can be misleading if context isn't provided. Transparency is key. Clearly disclose that the visuals are AI-generated and explain why this choice was made.

For example, emphasize that protecting the privacy of participants is a priority and that AI images allow for storytelling without compromising anonymity or consent. Framing this through a consent lens demonstrates ethical decision-making and reassures donors that privacy and dignity are being upheld. This honesty helps maintain trust while effectively sharing impactful stories. - **Cody Hays**

AI can be a helpful tool for creating images that protect the identities of clients who prefer to remain anonymous. BUT, it's important to be transparent about the use of AI in content creation. If AI-generated visuals are used, they should clearly align with the message and distort the reality of the cause. Being honest with potential donors about the purpose behind using AI can help maintain trust. - **Danielle Miano**

CONTINUED: WHAT IS YOUR TAKE ON USING AI-GENERATED IMAGES & VIDEOS? COULD THIS BE SEEN AS MISLEADING TO POTENTIAL DONORS?

My initial reaction is I don't like it, but that could just be because I'm not super familiar or comfortable yet with AI. With the goal being real human connection, trust, and transparency, I lean toward not using AI images. But if they are used, I think it should be labeled as such.

- **Holly Beech**

I would shy away from using AI, in a world where we are working to connect human to human, those real stories, it diminishes the authentic quality of the work. - **Angela Powers**

AI can be a helpful tool for creating images that protect the identities of clients who prefer to remain anonymous.

BUT, it's important to be transparent about the use of AI in content creation.

If AI-generated visuals are used, they should clearly align with the message and distort the reality of the cause. Being honest with potential donors about the purpose

behind using AI can help maintain trust. - **Danielle Miano**

I always recommend including a disclaimer if your organization decides to use AI-generated videos. In most cases, AI videos are used to protect the identity of clients, and being transparent with donors about the who, what, and why can help build trust and understanding. In some instances, an AI-generated persona can be just as effective as using a real person. For example, telling the story of a child who has been abused by a family member is no less heartbreaking simply because a stock or AI image was used. The impact of the story remains powerful, and often, a photo isn't necessary to convey its importance. Donors who genuinely care about the cause and mission will continue to support, regardless of whether AI or real images are used. - **Derria Ford**

HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHEN AN ANONYMOUS STORY THAT USES AI-GENERATED IMAGES & VIDEOS IS WORTHWHILE, APPROPRIATE & ETHICAL?

Deciding to use an anonymous story with AI-generated visuals requires careful consideration. I assess whether it protects privacy without compromising authenticity. It's worthwhile when it allows us to share the impact without risking harm or identification. Transparency is key — I **disclose when visuals are AI-generated** to maintain trust. I ensure the story reflects truth, aligns with our values, and avoids sensationalism. Ethical storytelling should always prioritize dignity and accuracy, even with innovative tools. - **Erik Tomalis**

HOW CAN WE ENSURE THAT AI-GENERATED OR AI-ASSISTED STORIES DO NOT PERPETUATE BIASES OR STEREOTYPES ABOUT THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE?

First, it's essential to identify the biases and stereotypes that exist. If these are not immediately apparent or have been challenging for your organization in the past, engage with your community to gain clarity.

Then, seek feedback on your communications from individuals who share the identities represented in your stories. This is where having a clear set of standards becomes crucial. For example, I work with an organization that avoids using the word "empower," even though it's a favorite suggestion from AI tools like ChatGPT. Having well-defined standards not only improves your communications but also enhances your use of AI tools. - **Caliopy Glaros**

To avoid perpetuating biases, start by training AI tools with diverse, accurate data and reviewing outputs for unintended stereotypes. Pair AI's efficiency with human oversight rooted in cultural humility and an asset based approach to the communities you serve. Think of AI as a compass, not the map — it can guide but must be checked against ethical judgment and lived and learned experience to ensure stories uplift and represent communities authentically. - **Cherian Koshy**

In 2005 (pre-ethical storytelling days), my boss sent me and my brother, a photographer, to Cambodia to document our organization's work.

He showed me two photos of a boy, taken just seconds apart. In the first, the child is on a trash heap looking miserable - the kind of poverty-porn photo we've all seen.

In the second, taken just a moment later, the same boy is beaming at the camera. The trash was blurred, the kid was in focus. Same kid, same place, but a completely different story. The most crushing part of poverty is its shame, and that second photo shattered it. Whether through traditional photography or AI today, our stories shouldn't just avoid harm, they should create good. The camera got it right; blur the trash to keep the smile in focus. - **Tim Lockie**

Unfortunately, AI is a flawed tool created by humans with bias.

Even when we enter the clearest of prompts, the information generated is only as good as what the AI can find and read. It is important to test any and all communications with a subset of your population.

This can happen through a diverse committee of volunteers or paid workers. Even then, we may find ourselves sharing a story that could perpetuate biases. In this case, we must be prepared to retract a story and provide our community with truthful context as to why.

- **Rachel D'Souza**

CONTINUED: HOW CAN WE ENSURE THAT AI-GENERATED OR AI-ASSISTED STORIES DO NOT PERPETUATE BIASES OR STEREOTYPES ABOUT THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE?

To ensure AI-generated or assisted stories do not perpetuate biases or stereotypes, it's crucial to acknowledge that AI is created by humans, and as a result, it can carry the biases of its creators. This means we must take a proactive and intentional approach.

Vet AI tools carefully to identify potential biases, and involve diverse stakeholders — those who understand the communities we serve — in reviewing content. Their perspectives can help ensure narratives are accurate and respectful. Avoid overgeneralizations or relying on tropes; instead, prioritize storytelling that highlights the authenticity, strengths, and complexity of the people represented. Thoughtful use of AI can enhance storytelling while respecting the dignity of all involved. - **Sabrina Walker Hernandez**

WHO OWNS THE RIGHTS TO STORIES CREATED OR EDITED WITH THE HELP OF AI? HOW DOES THIS AFFECT CONSENT AGREEMENTS WITH THE PEOPLE FEATURED IN OUR STORIES?

This depends on the AI tools that you are using. Before using any AI tools, you need to **read the terms and conditions**. It's important to know what happens with any data or information that you put in. - **Allie Levene**

AI-generated images or videos are no different than using stock images. Attribution and transparency is important to note that the images or video are stock.

As for the rights of stories created or edited with AI - All stories posted by an organization should always be reviewed. So assuming that's true, the editing by AI shouldn't be treated any differently than editing by a human. Getting approval and consent of the final version including what imagery is going to be associated is something organizations will need to do. It would be misleading to have someone consent for their story to be used and not know what imagery or video their story is going to be shared with. - **Geng Wang**

TOP 10 TAKEAWAYS

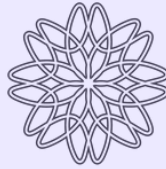
Finally, each contributor was asked to share their “#1 rule for ethical storytelling”. While every individual has a unique perspective, as shown throughout the report, there were several themes that were reiterated time and time again.

Here are the **Top 10 Ethical Storytelling Takeaways**, according to the 2024 contributors:

1. Honor the storyteller’s dignity, voice, & agency.
2. Obtain informed consent.
3. Tell stories *with* people, not *about* them.
4. Do no harm.
5. Build relationships based on trust.
6. Provide ongoing support & follow up regularly.
7. Ensure transparency in usage.
8. Respect the storyteller’s ownership & comfort.
9. Create mutually beneficial storytelling.
10. Prioritize ethics over short-term gain. 

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CLICK THE LINKS BELOW TO LEARN MORE & CONNECT WITH OUR CONTRIBUTORS



THANK YOU

TO OUR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

4 Da Hood
4-H Alberta
541 Eatery & Exchange
826 Valencia
A Village for One
A.H.A.V.A.
Abraham's Children Foundation
Adopt an Inmate
Afya Care Foundation
Alliance for Youth
Always Mercy
Amani Center CBO Kenya
Animal Welfare Investigations Project
AP-OD
Arc Human Services
Archaeology Southwest
ArtistYear
Assemble
Austin Region Justice for Our Neighbors
Avenue of Hope Association
BCA
Beth Interactive
Bethlehem University
Birth to Five Illinois
Black Hills Works Foundation
Blessing Bags of Warmth
Boise Rescue Mission
BookSpring
Boston Center for the Arts
Botswana Network of AIDS Services
Organization
Boys' Haven
Breast Cancer Coalition
Bridge Refugee Services
BridgeYear
Brooke's Place for Grieving Young People, Inc.
Brothers On The Rise
Buda's Brightside
Buenaventura Art Association
Burke Hammons Consulting, LLC
Cameras For Girls
CancerGRACE
Capstone Adaptive Learning & Therapy Centers
Carden School of Fresno
Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton
Celebrate with a Cake
Center for Creative Living
The Center for Victims of Torture
Child First
ChildSafe Colorado
Chive Charities
Clowns Without Borders
The Cloud Foundation
Code of Support Foundation
The Collaborative for Teaching and Learning
Community Action of Southern KY
Community Connections, Inc.
Community Culinary School of Charlotte
Community Hospice & Health Services Foundation
Community Housing
The Council of Southeast Pennsylvania
Courage and Confidence: Self Defense
Crescendo Academy of Music
Crezco Foundation
The Crossing
Cristians Dream Corp LLC
Cystic Fibrosis Association of North Dakota
Deaconess Pregnancy and Adoption
Delicious Spoonfuls Fl Inc
Development Alert
Differently Abled Entertainment
Donor Relations Guru LLC
Downtown Painesville Organization
Dumas Wesley Community Center
Dwelling Places
Elevation Outdoors
Empowerment Plan
Equity Legal Services, Inc.
EverTrue
Exden Impact
Eyrie Editing and Author Services
FAWE Uganda
Feeding GA Families
Firespring
Food Link, Inc.
For Purpose Foundation
Fresh Start Home Community Development
Corporation FSHCDC
Friends of Franbarnie International (FOFI)
Friends of the Fonta Flora State Trail

THANK YOU

TO OUR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS, CONTINUED

Gaston Hope in Christ Ministries, Inc.
Girl Scouts of the Commonwealth of Virginia
The Giving Grove
GloriousLiving.org
Grandmothers' Village Project, Inc.
Grantmakers for Girls of Color (G4GC)
Greenlight Family Services
Grow Our Faith
The Harbour School
Harmony 4 All, Inc.
Healing Justice Project
Healing Ribbons
Hear Their Voice Initiative (HTVI)
Hearthfire Farm
Herbalists Without Borders
Holy Kingdom Africa
Hope's Door
Horizons at St. Richard's Episcopal School
Horizons Hampton Roads, Inc.
The Illinois Coalition to EENDPP.org
I SEE ME
I Would Rather Be Reading
The International Association of Sufism
Impact Campus Ministries
Infinitely More Life
Infofeedback Solutions
Inland Empire Latino Lawyers Association
Intent on Impact, LLC.
Jezatu Foundation
Joseph Thomas Foundation
Josiah White's
Judeo-Christian Outreach Center
Junior Achievement of Southern California
Kadejah's Playhouse
KAVI (Kings Against Violence Initiative)
The Kindness Experiment
Larkspur Consulting
Leap to Success
Liberia Animal Welfare and Conservation Society
Lift Community Based Organization
Lighting the Path Enterprises
Love146
Maddie Tudor Consulting
The Margaret E. Moul Home
Market on Market
Marshall University Foundation
MemoryFox
Mengo Children's Foundation US
MERAKI WAYY
The Miami Valley Nonprofit Collaborative, Inc.
Motoskate Foundation
The MOV2GO Foundation
Move Beyond Surviving
Mukono District Farmers
Mummy Marho's Children, Teenagers & Youth Foundation
The Museum of Flight
Music Concepts
National Center for Teacher Residencies
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
Neighborhood Centers Association
NEMHS Charitable Foundation
Noble Community Agency for Peace & Development
Nonprofit Accelerator
The Nonprofit Institute
NWA Gives
Odd Jobs Ink
OIC of Oklahoma County
Ontario Cultural Society of the Deaf
Operacion San Andres
Operation Zero Homeless
Orcas Island Children's House
Organización No Gubernamental de Desarrollo Casa del Pueblo
Papa's House, Inc.
Peacekeeper Society
Pen with a Purpose
People Working Cooperatively
Plant Power Foundation
Plus Media Solutions
The Pregnancy Center of Dillon County
ProAction/Immunize El Paso
Prosperity Connection
RedRover
Refugee Together for Social Transformation (RTST)
Remote Area Medical
Seabe Same

THANK YOU

TO OUR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS, CONTINUED

The Seattle Clemency Project
Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida
ShadeOutDM Foundation
The Social Enrichment Mission
Solar Sister
Soulful Seeds
Soysambu Health Community Based Organisation
Splendid Consulting
St. Mark Youth Enrichment
Stand in the Gap
Stillwater Hospice
Streets
TDM
Texas Campaign for the Environment Fund
Third Sector
This Is My Brave
Tiny House Community Development
TrueNorth Community Services
Twisted Pink
UNF Foundation
Union Station Homeless Services
United Ways of California

University of Miami
Vanguard Voices
VARP, Inc.
Veterans' House Canada/Maison du vétéran Canada
Village of Moms STL
Walden Family Services
Water4Life Global
WCEMS
WeCare
WEEMA International
WeGo Together for Kids
Wesley Chapel Mission Center
West Virginia Prevention Solutions
The Wily Network
Wired Impact
World Impact
Ycube Avon Shop
Yew Dell Botanical Gardens
Youth Apostles
YsMen US Area
ZERO TO THREE
Zoweh

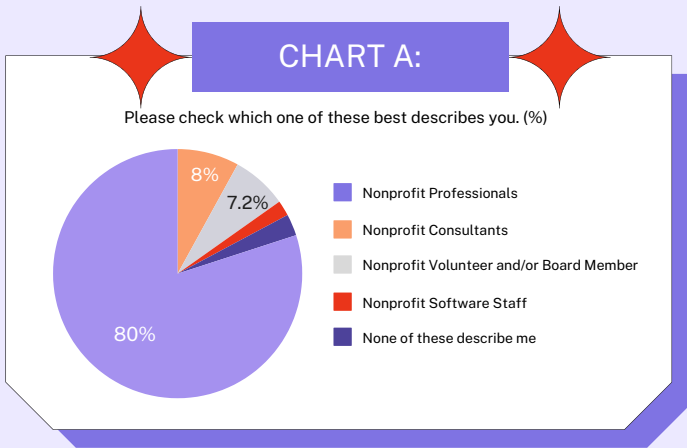


Nonprofit Photo Credit: School Year Abroad

METHODOLOGY

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The survey of 250 respondents was conducted online during the months of November and December of 2024. Respondents were asked to self identify how this topic related to their professional lives (see Chart A below). Survey respondents represent a wide spectrum of organization sizes and missions. Those surveyed use a wide range of technology solutions, and are not required to use MemoryFox. Respondents were sourced via MemoryFox’s email list, organic social media channels and paid social media ads. All data in this survey is self-reported, not transactional.



ABOUT THE WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS & CASE STUDIES

The written submissions and case studies for this report were collected online during the months of December 2024 and January 2025. Written submissions & case studies are the advice of the contributor & have not been influenced by MemoryFox. Submissions were edited in accordance with Standard American English. The questions posed in this report were sourced from nonprofit professionals who registered to attend a “Narratives With Integrity” Ethical Storytelling Panel, hosted by MemoryFox. Case studies have been written by the MemoryFox team, using information provided by the contributor. Case studies were approved by the submitting nonprofit prior to publication. Contributors were sourced by MemoryFox staff via email & LinkedIn. All submissions were voluntarily submitted with no exchange of goods or funds.

ABOUT MEMORYFOX

THE **#1** ETHICAL STORYTELLING TOOL FOR NONPROFITS

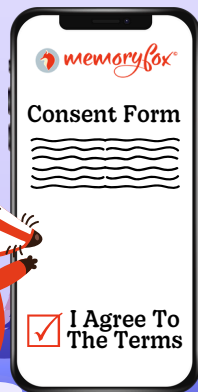
MemoryFox is a technology platform built specifically for nonprofits to collect, organize, and share stories directly from their community. Since 2017, MemoryFox's mission has been to elevate the authentic stories of real human beings, in an ethical way. To date, MemoryFox has empowered 400+ mission-driven organizations to bring their mission to life through 100,000+ photos, videos & written testimonials.

For more information, visit www.memoryfox.io or follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok.



"We've never done this before & I don't think we would have thought to do this before MemoryFox. It makes it easy to capture what we need in a time-conservative way. We actually get to show event attendees the kids we work with. It's so important for people to actually meet our kids."

-Ashley Dearing, CEO/Co-Founder, I Would Rather Be Reading



TAKE A TOUR

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Share your feedback, your top takeaways and your commitments to ethical storytelling, by [submitting a video, photo or written testimonial here](#), or by scanning this QR code on page 3.