

Guide to Changemaking Through Family-Centered Storytelling

Start with the Storytellers

Relationships, partnerships, and co-creation are the key to maintaining an ethical and family-centered storytelling process. It's important to fully invest in partnerships and build trust before requesting family stories. Support people's ability to shape and tell their stories, and honor their truth by demonstrating empathy and compassion, as well as prioritizing storyteller agency and dignity. Once you have gathered the stories, the process is not over. Continue to engage storytellers and maintain relationships by connecting them to organizations, movements, and more opportunities to share their stories if they are interested.

Gathering Family Stories

Before starting the story gathering process, storytellers should fully understand the scope and purpose of their participation, how the stories will be shared, and the audience(s) for the story. Ensure that storytellers know they can opt out or retract use of their stories at any time. Storytellers can be anonymous or use pseudonyms to protect their privacy and safety. Most of all, the owner of the story is the storyteller.

Asking someone to share their story can be painful and lead to re-traumatization. It is extremely important to be supportive and committed to listening. Prepare in advance by researching the history, current events, and context of the storytellers' communities. It is important to understand the complexities of the situation of each storyteller.



Additional Considerations – Compensation

If engaging a storyteller in additional speaking opportunities, whether in person or virtual, the storyteller should be compensated for their time and expertise.

Compensation should include travel, prep time, and other costs like child care or parking for in-person engagements.

Key Takeaways

- Get permission for every instance of sharing part or all of the family story.
- Maintain privacy for the storyteller as needed.
- Tell the story as the storyteller intended; do not shape the story to fit your needs.
- Stories should not portray people as one-dimensional beings, but instead they should challenge implicit biases, resist simplicity, and use strength-based framing.
- Ensure stories are accessible to the storyteller and their community. Be thoughtful and work with the storyteller to determine what media is used and how that can impact access.
- Follow up with your storyteller. Show gratitude, celebrate accomplishments, and/or offer support. Connect them with additional opportunities to share their story.

