



Equity Principles for Storytelling

Language and other methods of communication shape our worldview. Stories provide voices to their authors. Imagery provides a visual link between the photographer and the viewer. These connections are powerful. Storytelling creates power dynamics, and we want to ensure our communication techniques and tools embed equity. This chart was created to support the work you're already doing, providing some consideration and question to pose when you are doing storytelling. This is an evolving document as we listen, learn and progress. Please contact CFC if you have any feedback.

CONSIDERATION



QUESTIONS TO ASK...



FOR EXAMPLE...



1

People are powerful, we do not empower them.

People working on the ground are resilient and our language must recognize their capabilities and strength.

- Who is doing the work in this situation?
- Does this framing focus on the funder or those doing the work?
- Does this language create a helping dynamic and is there a way to reframe?

Language like "pulling people out of poverty" or "moving people forward" does not recognize peoples agency. Situate funders as "proud to stand behind orgs that are making a difference on the ground" or similar language that places funders in secondary position.

2

Storytelling is not storytaking

Some equity-seeking groups have had their experiences co-opted. Organizations can sometimes use the stories of people in a way that does not give them ownership.

- Do I have their consent to share their story?
- Have I given them as much information as possible about where and how the story will be shared?
- How can I use their own words?
- Will they have a chance to review the final product?

Storytaking could be having a grantee sharing their story in a final report and then paraphrasing their experience to include in an annual report. Whereas Storytelling in this situation could mean, ensuring the grantee is aware that their response may be used in this way, reaching out to them ahead of time to say you'd like to include their story, explaining how it will be used and adding the story in their own words.



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Nothing about us without us

People finding solutions and sharing stories should be representative of the communities being served.

QUESTIONS TO ASK...



- Who is the messenger of the story?
- Does the messenger represent the community being served?
- Has the equity-seeking group been involved in the storytelling process?
- How can you appropriately engage the messenger to ensure their voice is captured in the story?

FOR EXAMPLE...



You are developing a story about an organization's program that serves individuals experiencing disability. To tell the story, you can choose between the organization's CEO, who has been less involved in the program, or you can choose the person leading the program, who is a part of the equity-seeking group being served. To capture the nothing about us without us principle, the best person to select would be the program lead.



Realistically assessing impacts

If you use language that embellishes the impacts you are making, you risk minimizing the realities that communities are facing.



- How can you avoid totalizing language that inflates the impacts made?
- Can you be more specific about the impacts made?
- Does the story minimize the ongoing challenges faced by communities?



Language like "hydroponic greenhouses in the Arctic are solving food insecurity" conflates the impacts made by your organization's solutions. A better framing would be more specific "hydroponic greenhouses in X community are helping to address food insecurity".

3

4



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATIONS
OF CANADA

FONDATIONS
COMMUNAUTAIRES
DU CANADA

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QUESTIONS TO ASK...



FOR EXAMPLE...



Content Accessibility

To ensure stories are shared amongst communities, it is important to consider whether a story is accessible both from a language and technical perspective.

- Should this be translated and shared beyond our direct community?
- How do we adapt the translation to reflect the specific cultural, historical and social context of the audience it is intended for? (For example using different examples, stories, links, etc.)
- Is this story accessible to individuals experiencing disabilities?
- Should I ask for advice for a translation? Some language points can evolve very quickly, e.g. 2SLGBTQ+ terminology.
- Should I use non-gendered language for this content? (Especially for translation into French, which is a very gendered language)

You are creating a factsheet about a new granting program and realize that some people in your community are French language speakers. To embed these questions, you ask the translator to consider the questions above when translating. This ensures that your factsheet is accessible to francophones in your community.

5





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Limited resources and time

Time is a precious resource. Intentional and thoughtful collaboration requires considering the capacity of those involved in co-developing a story. Providing space and recognizing that not everyone's path forward takes the same amount of time is a compassionate starting point.

QUESTIONS TO ASK...

Ask them:

- How can I best support you during this process?
- How would you like to be compensated for your time? (Is it possible to provide an honorarium?)
- Can we co-develop a workplan that feels good for you?

Ask yourself:

- What burdens am I putting on them and does it respect their time?
- Do we have clear shared instructions and expectations?
- Have I made myself available for support?
- Will I make the final product accessible for them to use on their own channels?



FOR EXAMPLE...



You are co-developing a story alongside a volunteer-run, grassroots, organization, that is currently juggling many tasks and deadlines. You ask if this is a good time to carry out the storytelling or if they would prefer another. You ask them what deadlines they feel make sense. You provide clear instructions on what will be needed from them (30 min phone call, review of the story which will be approximately 800 words and 3 high-quality photos of their team at work). Once the story is complete you share the final product with them and allow them to use it on their website.





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QUESTIONS TO ASK...



FOR EXAMPLE...



Making imagery and videos inclusive

An image is worth 1000 words and selecting appropriate imagery to go along with your story is critical. Imagery can also foster belonging by allowing people to see themselves reflected in visuals. You should also be conscious of acknowledging the photographer or artist.

- Does this imagery represent equity seeking groups in a negative way or reinforce stereotypes?
- Have I consulted the individual(s) about how they wish to represent themselves visually?
- Did I make every attempt to source images by members of the community being represented and give appropriate credit?
- Does the imagery have symbols, images or logos that may trigger or offend the audience?
- For accessibility am I making sure photos have alt-text added and videos are epilepsy friendly and have subtitles?

You're choosing a photo to accompany some storytelling from the Cree community for National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. You find a Cree photographer who has photographed their community and find a powerful image you'd like to use. You run the image past the individual who's story it is for their feedback. After their positive feedback, you decide to use the image and when you publish it you add alt-text describing the photo and add a line to credit the photographer under the photograph.

Conscious use of language

Language is a powerful tool that can draw out strong emotions in readers and listeners. We want to ensure we avoid inciting negative emotions and adverse reactions. This can include avoiding violent language, outdated terminology, urgent language etc.

- Am I using words that may trigger my audience?
- Am I using idioms that contain racist, violent, sexist, ableist, xenophobic, homophobic, transphobic or violent connotations?
- Is there someone I should consult about the most up-to-date terminology?
- Why am I choosing this word?

Instead of saying "fighting racial stereotypes," you could say "debunking racial stereotypes." Some commonly used violent words to avoid would be: fight, tackle, conquer, crush and combat. Ask yourself why you chose those words and what emotions they invoke. If I am using the phrase "fighting for gender equality," why am I using this word?