

SELF-CARE FOR STORYTELLERS, OR YOUR STORY IS YOURS

As storytellers and practitioners, we have to approach the work of sharing stories with an ethic of care. This short guide will remind story owners of their rights and offer guidance about retaining control of their stories. This guide is designed to help you either create boundaries for your own needs as a storyteller or work with communities to tell their stories.

The worksheet is divided into two parts, inspired by two different pieces of research. The first is about how to build relationships with storytellers from **a love ethic**. This work is inspired by cultural theorist bell hooks and her book **All About Love: New Visions**.

The second part of this worksheet is directly pulled from the work of Sarah Lowe, Adrián Escárate, and Valeria Rodriguez at Define American, an organization working to change the narrative on immigrants. In their 2021 report **American Dreaming: The Road Map to Resilience for Undocumented Storytellers**, they interviewed undocumented immigrant activists about their experiences and needs. The report offers recommendations for engaging immigrant activists in storytelling for social change. This guide translates those recommendations into question to apply to your own work.

PART 1: QUESTIONS TO ADOPT A LOVE ETHIC

- 1 Have you invested time to build a relationship with the community and the people you are asking to share their stories?
- 2 Have you invested time with the community to learn from them and have them guide your approach to strategy and storytelling?
- 3 Have you been vulnerable with the community and shared your own story and motivation for the work?
- 4 Have you given space for the storyteller to share what is true for them, without leading them to tell a particular type of story?
- 5 Are you showing respect to your storyteller by listening with an open mind and heart to their story and knowledge?
- 6 Are you careful not to try to conform the storyteller's experience to a particular trope, stereotype, or eurocentric way of telling the story?
- 7 Are you sharing this story to serve the greater good? Or are you telling the story to serve the bottom line or profile of your organization? If the latter, reassess why you are telling stories.
- 8 As you design your strategy and partnership with storytellers, how can you build in trust, transparency, care, and respect?

PART 2: QUESTIONS TO TAKE CARE OF STORYTELLERS

You can ask yourself or the storyteller the following questions:

- 1** How are you feeling currently? (Consider the emotional cost of sharing the story.)
- 2** Is now a good time to share your story?
- 3** Do you feel comfortable sharing your story now? (Use your/ the storyteller's answer to set healthy boundaries and scope of engagement.)
- 4** In what capacity do you feel you can share your story? (If you or the storyteller do not feel now is a good time, respect the boundaries and do not push it.)
- 5** Would you like training or guidance for telling your story? What sort of support do you need?
- 6** Ask what the compensation, scope of work, and timeline are. Ask for/offer equitable compensation. Offer what you offer any other contributor to the project. For example, when Invisible People interview people who are homeless, they offer them an actor's day rate.
- 7** Ask/offer to be included in strategic planning around the use of the story.
- 8** Ask for/offer ownership of the rights to the story. The storyteller will have the right to request that the story not be used at any time. The storyteller can request to be notified when a story is being used.
- 9** Ask/offer to have a final sign-off on copy and images before the story is released.
- 10** If you are telling someone else's story, honor their contributions by:
 - a** Telling them from the beginning why you want to share their story
 - b** Ensuring correct pronunciation and spelling of names
 - c** Honoring gender identity and pronouns
 - d** Being transparent with what is "on" or "off the record"
 - e** Thanking them for their time, vulnerability, and sharing their story