



Recommendations

for supporting storytellers who have experienced homelessness or unstable housing

- ▶ **Invest time to build relationships** with storytellers. Build trust, be transparent about your work and respect their time and interest in sharing their story. Openly acknowledge your power and privileges, and take steps to mitigate any power dynamics that may exist when asking people to share their stories.
- ▶ **Determine if they are in a good place and able to share their story.** Ask if it is too soon for them to share their story. Do they think sharing their story would do more harm than good? Pay close attention to body language and prioritize their well-being, health and safety.
- ▶ **Ensure they have ownership of their own story and agency in how it is shared.** They are the experts and they should choose what parts of their story to share. Respect their boundaries and do not push for more information. Protect their confidentiality if the storyteller requests any part of their story not be shared publicly and allow them to share anonymously, changing their name and any identifying details if requested. Allow for complexity within the story, and use **asset framing** to focus on their strengths. Respect the narrator's authentic voice, honoring their grammar, speech pattern and word choices.
- ▶ **Get informed, ongoing and enthusiastic consent.** Explain why you are asking them to share their story and ensure they can help determine how and when their story will be shared. Check in regularly to confirm consent at each step of the process. Someone who says, "Yes," at the outset may change their mind as the process unfolds.
- ▶ **Practice empathy and flexibility.** Attentive and empathetic listening can be healing. Honor their experiences. Let them tell their story in the way they choose and be supportive and responsive. If they are showing signs of retraumatization immediately stop and provide referrals for professional support or counseling services like a local mental health provider or the national **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**.

- ▶ **Respect cultural differences and promote inclusivity.** Recognize and respect the cultural background and context of the storyteller. Be aware of potential cultural nuances, sensitivities and differences that may impact their comfort and willingness to share their story. Approach their story with cultural humility and openness, avoiding assumptions and stereotypes.
- ▶ **Provide training, coaching and mentorship.** Many people will feel more comfortable telling their story and/or speaking publicly after receiving thoughtful training, guidance and peer support.
- ▶ **Offer equitable compensation.** Pay for any time spent preparing or training. Be clear about the scope, timeline and expectations from the outset.
- ▶ **Seek feedback** for improvement. Find out what you can do better and thank them for their time and vulnerability in sharing their stories.
- ▶ **Take care of yourself.** As advocates, self-care is crucial. By taking care of ourselves, we can continue to be our best selves for those who trust us with their stories.

“Every individual - you, me, and all the others - want to have our story heard by someone who cares about our story, and won't use our story to harm us. That's called connection and it's among the most basic of human needs.”

- Dennis Larkin, Lived Experience Advisors

HOUSING NARRATIVE LAB

Special thanks to those we consulted in the creation of this guidance, including:

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Sources:

BROKE: *Self-Care for Storytellers, or Your Story is Yours*
Center for Health Journalism: *Keep these seven lessons in mind when interviewing trauma survivors*
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Voice of Witness: *Ethical Storytelling Principles*

