



## ETHICAL STORYTELLING GUIDELINES

### About ethical storytelling

**As part of sharing about Next Up’s work, we sometimes ask members of our community to share their stories with us in a way that we can share more broadly with the public.** However, sharing someone else’s story can be ethically and morally complicated, especially when sharing that story with a purpose in mind (such as encouraging people to learn more about our work or to donate).

There are many harmful, but common, patterns in nonprofit storytelling, including: reinforcing tropes or stereotypes, over-focusing on struggles and not people’s strengths, misrepresenting or misquoting stories, or not sharing enough information about how the story will be used for the storyteller to give full consent.

**Instead, we seek to tell stories in a way that celebrates people and uplifts their strengths.** Rather than trying to take credit for someone’s accomplishments, we share stories to show how our strengths and goals align. We share people’s experiences in their own words rather than summarizing into our own narrative. We also want to make sure any expectations around sharing are clear from the beginning, by asking people for their consent.

### Inspiration & Resources

- [Community Centric Fundraising](#) - Blog and resource hub
  - [“7 Ways to Tell Stories Ethically”](#) by Nel Taylor
- [Ethical Storytelling](#) - Resources and pledge

### Best practices for gathering stories

Here’s how we ask for people’s stories.

### Who to ask

- Ask people to self-select to share their stories via an open call for submissions internally, such as an email blast to all board members and cohort members – rather than focusing on specific people and asking them to share.

## Questions to ask

- Ask open-ended questions, like “What did you learn from being part of XYZ program?” (not yes/no or leading questions) to give people flexibility to share their thoughts.
- Ask people how they want to be referred to: their name, pronouns, “headline” (how they want to be introduced – for example, “Student at ABC High School” or “[Role] at XYZ Organization”), and social media handles they want tagged if any.

## Consent

- Make sure it’s clear how stories will be shared, saved and published when asking for stories. Ask people to explicitly give their consent, such as by signing or by submitting a form.

## Compensation

- Pay people for taking the time to share their stories, especially when it’s doing us a favor in our fundraising or communications efforts. No unpaid labor!
- A guideline we’ve used in the past was \$25 per story shared with us via a Google Form (taking about 10-15 minutes to complete). We paid by sending a Visa gift card. For anything taking longer than the Google form, we paid another \$25.

## Best practices for sharing stories

Here’s how we share people’s stories.

### Accessibility

- Always [enable captioning](#) (for video) and add alt text (for social media, website and newsletter images)

### Giving credit

- Tag people and credit them based on how they wish to be credited! (see the part above about what questions to ask)

[Here’s an excellent example](#) showing how our previous intern, Caroline Gao, shared stories in 2021. Stories were shared one at a time on social media, collectively in a blog post (shared in an email to our subscribers), and in our Annual Impact Report. One story was also shared as a video interview, which was linked in the blog post.