

# TRUTH BETOLD

## STORYTELLING GUIDE FOR EQUITY-CENTERED POLICY CHANGE

THE CENTER FOR BLACK HEALTH & EQUITY



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## ABOUT US

The Center for Black Health & Equity (The Center) is the leading nationally recognized public health entity for solutions impacting African American health. We engage health care organizations, public health officials, faith leaders, and African American communities in health promotion and disease prevention work.

Our mission is to facilitate programs and services that promote health equity for people of African descent. We do this by building community capacity, developing community infrastructure, and advocating for equity-centered policies. We are committed to addressing the social and economic injustices that have marginalized our communities and led to deep health disparities.

We apply our proven framework for policy and social change to our work in tobacco control, COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, women's health, cancer, mental health and other health disparity areas and their related causes. Through our equity-centered policy work, we identify, develop, and discuss what it means to center equity in existing and new policies shaping our systems, impacting health outcomes, and determining life expectancies.

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## USING THIS GUIDE

Equity-centered policy requires community inclusion, leadership, and framing. With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, The Center partnered with the Ashé Cultural Arts Center in New Orleans, Louisiana and Making it Count Community Development Corporation in Detroit, Michigan from 2021 to 2023 to assess policies that can disrupt systemic racism driving health disparities in their communities, using storytelling of life experience as a tool for policy identification and change.

This "Truth Be Told" Storytelling Guide for Equity-Centered Policy Change provides a training and engagement framework that can lead to powerful community narratives for equity-centered policy change. Using The Center's work with our 2021 - 2023 community organizations (New Orleans and Detroit), this guide provides an overview on the importance of storytelling for policy change and outlines a process to help communities showcase the voices that illustrate their history, geography, assets, and challenges.

This Storytelling Guide is a part of a broader "Truth Be Told" Toolbox (free to the public) and is a reflection of The Center's funded 5-part training series, policy assessment, and engagement in which we support, train, and produce community-specific resources like the storytelling tools highlighted in this guide for community grantees. If you are interested in our training for your community or the communities that you work with, please contact us at [info@centerforblackhealth.org](mailto:info@centerforblackhealth.org).

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# STORYTELLING FOR POLICY IMPACT

## THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN COMMUNITY-BASED STORYTELLING

**Culture** is the sum total ways of living - the values, practices, traditions, institutions, beliefs, and more - that influence the attitudes and behaviors of a particular community, group or society.

**Cultural Narratives** are the stories shared within, or about, a community/group, that serve to influence beliefs and create, maintain, or reimagine systems, structures, and processes. To this end, culture and the stories we tell are a double-edged sword. It is the foundation of human development, what makes each community unique, and a necessary source of identity, connection, and self-worth. But culture and cultural narratives also fuel the engine of systemic racism, anti-Blackness, ableism, misogyny, and other oppression. This plays a key role in maintaining structural inequities that cause communities to be unwell.

**Community-Based Storytelling** involves using community-based participatory research to craft Personal Narratives (highlighting individual experiences) & Community Narratives (highlighting the people, systems, structures, and processes that impact the social determinants of health within a particular community).

**Equity** is about identifying, reducing, and eventually eliminating social, economic, and environmental conditions that disproportionately face marginalized communities (all of which greatly impact our health and life expectancy). Equity is the vehicle in which we can strive to achieve equality. Community-Based Storytelling is a powerful tool to identify inequity and to advance equity, especially through policy change. Equity-centered policy is effective policy.

**Equity-centered policies** are laws and policies that are created, implemented, and enforced in consideration of quality evidence and the lived experience of the communities most impacted by the issues that the policies and laws aim to address. It requires genuine engagement, consideration, and leadership of disparately-impacted communities throughout the policy/lawmaking process. It is especially important (and not yet common enough) to consider the intersectionality of groups, or understanding that certain groups represent multiple marginalized identities that experience inequity individually and collectively (e.g., Black, women, disabled; Black women; Black and disabled; disabled women; Black disabled women). Focusing on the impact, consideration, and involvement of most-affected people in policymaking is necessary to identify problems early on, avoid unintended consequences, and produce creative and efficient solutions.

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# STORYTELLING FOR POLICY IMPACT

## THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN COMMUNITY-BASED STORYTELLING

Truth Be Told Stories are Community Narratives meant to shift long-standing Cultural Narratives that cause, fuel, and/or maintain structural health inequities. Understanding and incorporating the socio-political, historical, and cultural context of a community into the story is crucial for it to resonate with target audiences. Truth Be Told training acknowledges the need for accessibility in policymaking by helping community members connect their personal stories of lived experiences to the systemic issues reflected in them. The powerful message is: all you need is your story to make a change. For the purpose of Truth Be Told, The Center works with communities to advance Equity-Centered Policies.

Ultimately, narratives must ring true to the real lives of both the subject(s) and the audience. They must reflect deep knowledge and resonate with lived cultural experience. To do this, we focus on portraying the real-life social conditions of an individual or community, within the context of universally shared values.

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# PRODUCTION RESOURCES

## SOFTWARE

Even without extensive post-production knowledge, it's never been easier to create compelling videos with the aid of user-friendly video editing software that doesn't require advanced training.

Here is some of the software you might research for the creation of your video content:

- Adobe Premiere Elements: <https://www.adobe.com/products/premiere-elements.html>
- Apple iMovie: <https://www.apple.com/imovie/>
- Corel VideoStudio Pro: <https://www.videostudiopro.com/en/products/videostudio/pro/>
- DaVinci Resolve: <https://www.blackmagicdesign.com/products/davinciresolve>
- Wondershare Filmora: <https://filmora.wondershare.com>

## B-ROLL & STOCK FOOTAGE

A compelling story has visuals that evoke the tone of the narration, give a feel for the community in which the story is set, and provides action that emphasizes the points being made via interviews and voiceover narration. One key way to do that is to make use of general B-Roll captured while shooting and stock footage that can be found via online repositories.

Here are some sites where you can download b-roll/stock footage and other creative assets, with many assets free or for low cost:

- Alamy: <https://www.alamy.com>
- Pexels: <https://www.pexels.com>
- Pixabay: <https://www.pixabay.com>
- Vecteezy: <https://www.vecteezy.com>
- Videezy: <https://www.videezy.com>
- Videvo: <https://www.videvo.net/>
- Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>
- Unsplash: <https://www.unsplash.com>



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# PRODUCTION RESOURCES

## MUSIC

Having a compelling background and foreground music can make your video come alive, emphasizing the points made in the interviews, enhancing narration, and providing compelling accompaniment to your visuals. Explore affordable or free options to find fitting music that matches the intended tone and focus of your story.

Here are some sites to find royalty-free music:

- Envato Market: <https://audiojungle.net>
- Free Music Archive: <https://freemusicarchive.org>
- Incompetech: <https://incompetech.com/music/royalty-free/collections.php>
- YouTube Audio Library: <http://www.youtube.com/audiolibrary>

Also, the site Pond5 (<https://www.pond5.com>) has both royalty-free music and a range of b-roll, stock footage, and creative assets.

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Community Partners - Assets can often be obtained for no cost through community institutions and partners, such as:

- Media developed or created by community-based organizations and partners
- Health care systems and public health department records
- University Archives
- Cultural Institutions
- Galleries

## GUIDANCE ON FAIR USE

Obtain release forms for participants or artists featured in any storytelling videos. And, when it comes to how to give proper attribution and adhere to fair use laws, see the following resources for further guidance:

- Berkman Klein Center Digital Media Law Project on Fair Use: <https://www.dmlp.org/legal-guide/fair-use>
  - Public Counsel Law Center Copyright & Fair Use Basics for Nonprofits: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5871061e6b8f5b2a8ede8ff5/t/592f3c1117bffc416d297071/1496267795326/fairuse.pdf>
  - Soundstripe Guide for Nonprofits on Using Copyrighted Music: <https://www.soundstripe.com/blogs/a-guide-for-non-profits-on-using-copyrighted-music>
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# SOCIAL MEDIA STORYTELLING

## SHORT, SWEET, & SOCIAL

### Creating Social Media Content From The Community Narrative

When putting content on social media, keep in mind that videos are most powerful when they are short, easily shared, and contain cultural cues that say to the audience, “Hey! This is for you!” The full-length TRUTH BE TOLD community narratives are short documentaries - approximately 8 minutes long, that are best experienced in-person or online (outside of the social media environment and mindset). Social media videos should be between 15 seconds and 3:00 minutes.

Each TRUTH BE TOLD community narrative was created with distinct chapters that are organized within a Narrative Structure. Each chapter is used to highlight specific issues and/or topics and can act as stand-alone content in social media. For example, below are sample chapters from the TRUTH BE TOLD Narrative Structure for Detroit:

1. TRUTH BE TOLD: Detroit - A Teaser for the Community Narrative / Content Series
2. FAR BY FAITH: Revivals, Awakenings & Reform - Detroit Association of Black Organizations & A pastoral legacy of servant leadership in social equity
3. TALE OF TWO CITIES: Structural Racism & Community Instability - The Decline of Detroit's Automotive Industry & The Disappearance of its Black Middle Class
4. DETROIT DREAMS DEFERRED: Structural Racism as “Urban Renewal” - How displacement, masked as “Urban Renewal” disrupted Black economic stability and social cohesion - driving poverty and separate and unequal schooling for Black neighborhoods

#### **When creating social posts, remember:**

- Photos can say a thousand words and can drive an emotional or cultural response that will drive people further into checking out your videos and additional content.
- Links can drive people the further information by directing them to a trusted source
- Text provides an opportunity to further educate the audience on key information without leaving the platform—for instance, pulling statistics that appear in the video out and providing that additional information in the text of your social media posts. Texts also make your content more discoverable through search.
- Audio can pull out especially resonant quotes to tease your main, longer-form content.





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# OPTIMIZING YOUR SOCIAL PLATFORM STRATEGY

## Know The Rules of Engagement & Art of Amplification For Each Platform

As you consider what platform you may want to use, keep in mind that social media performs best when it is provocative, and this feeling drives you to an act of engagement. The higher the production quality and the more tailored your content is to the power of a particular platform, the more likely you are to get higher engagement. As you are thinking about platforms, here's a quick sketch:

- **Twitter:** Controversial, colorful, and funny content gets higher engagement, and content is largely driven by video and text (with a high amount of engagement with back-and-forth conversation). Twitter is an especially important venue for driving discussions about topics, with hashtags allowing content to be discovered when people search for related trending topics.
  - **Instagram:** This highly visual medium attracts a younger demographic and drives content shares through photo and video formats. Engagement is especially assisted by well-thought-out (and often witty) captions, hashtags, and engaging videos; don't neglect to use the "Reels" feature to get the most circulation and the highest amount of engagement. Self-explanatory visuals do especially well on Instagram, and hashtags help those images to be discovered by people searching for their interests.
  - **TikTok:** This video-sharing platform has the youngest audience and the fastest-growing user base. Catchy visuals and trending music tend to drive engagement on the platform. TikTok content especially does well when it showcases real people, talking about and doing real things...but the content must be entertaining.
  - **YouTube:** As one of the longest-running platforms for people to discover and follow video, it's an especially important place to archive content that matters and to build trust through the strength of video storytelling. Keep in mind that YouTube is the second biggest search engine on the internet (behind its parent company, Google)...so including all the relevant tags and text you can is important for content to be discovered.
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# CREATING A #HASHTAG STRATEGY



Across platforms, hashtags are powerful because they:

- Help users find and identify posts related to a particular theme (a real-time event, breaking news, a particular subculture, a trending conversation on a particular platform)
- Help algorithms understand trends that are on the rise and content related to those trends.
- Help content creators track, analyze, and respond to posts related to a particular theme or campaign

However, you must use hashtags carefully and strategically. Platforms may flag content as spam if accounts use the same hashtags on every post, use an excessive number of hashtags, or have a history of using trending hashtags that bear no relevance to the post. Here are a few important rules of thumb:

- Monitor trending hashtags and compare the popularity of hashtags that are relevant to the content of your post.
- The in-platform search function of Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok tells you the number of posts tagged with any hashtag you search.
  - You can just search the hashtag itself on Twitter and Instagram.
  - On TikTok's mobile app, search for the name of the hashtag without including the "#" and then click the "Hashtags" tab to see how many posts bear a particular hashtag.
- Always review what key influencers and similar accounts aimed at the communities you seek to reach are using to get further hashtag inspiration.



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# APPENDIX

## DETROIT NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

The Outline (The Individual Story > Systemic Issues) & Content Strategy

1. TRUTH BE TOLD: Making It Count For More- A Teaser for the Community Narrative / Content Series that begins to establish the socio-political and cultural context of the story
    - a. Walk to Freedom to protest segregation, poverty, joblessness
    - b. The Detroit Black Labor Movement
    - c. The story of Howard Sheffield, II, Civil Rights, and the Black Labor Movement
  
  2. FAR BY FAITH: Revivals, Awakenings & Reform - Detroit Association of Black Organizations and a pastoral legacy of servant leadership in social equity
    - a. Coalition-building; bridging the gap between the Black middle class and the socially vulnerable
    - b. Addressing health disparities
    - c. The Black Church as a social safety net
  
  3. TALE OF TWO CITIES: Structural Racism & Community Instability - The Decline of Detroit's Automotive Industry and The Disappearance of its Black Middle Class
    - a. A legacy of displacement drives community instability
    - b. The demise of Motor City's Black Mecca/ automotive sector collapse
    - c. 80s crack epidemic
    - d. Declining infrastructure and environmental toxins
    - e. Separate and unequal education, poverty
  
  4. DETROIT DREAMS DEFERRED: Structural Racism as "Urban Renewal" - How displacement, masked as "Urban Renewal" disrupted Black economic stability and social cohesion - driving poverty and separate and unequal schooling for Black neighborhoods
    - a. Displacement continues
    - b. Economic exploitation and corruption (inflated tax assessments); Loss of generational wealth through homeownership
    - c. The story of Jennifer Hall
  
  5. "DELINQUENT" & DISPLACED: Coming of Age within Structural Violence & Racism
    - a. Detroit's high rates of gang violence and the systemic injustice that drives it
    - b. Need for alternative penalties; behavioral health resources
    - c. Political, economic, and environmental drivers of violence
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# APPENDIX

6. RACISM & REASONABLE DOUBT: Black Barriers to Quality Care - The persistence of provider bias and neglect in healthcare for Black people

- a. Bias transcends class
- b. The stories of Dr. Susan Moore & Chenita Gary
- c. Hypervigilance, personal accountability, literacy, and advocacy are required

7. YOU MAKE IT COUNT!: On The Road To Recovery

- a. Shifting the Frame - Getting our young people to see things differently/ reimagine the possibilities
- b. Innovation in Public Education + Community Schooling
  - i. Ongoing curriculum redesign through private sector partnerships
  - ii. Vocational programming
  - iii. Alternative schooling for troubled youth
  - iv. Behavioral health wrap-around services
- c. Community-Based Outreach
  - i. Meet them where they are
  - ii. Detroit's behavioral needs gap
  - iii. Mitigation in policing for mental and behavioral health/ diversion programs
- d. Policy for Returning Citizens - Ban The Box
  - i. Civic engagement

## NEW ORLEANS NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

The Outline of Your Story + Content Strategy

1. TRUTH BE TOLD: Righteous Eruption After The Storm - Teaser for the Community Narrative / Content Series that begins to establish the socio-political and cultural context of the story

a. Dr. Imanni Sheppard, Director of Medical Education and Social Scientific Research at The Medical Humanities and Health Disparities Institute and author of the New Orleans Community Environmental Assessment commissioned by Ashé Cultural Arts Center

2. AFTER THE STORM - Part 1 - Establishes Hurricane Katrina as the turning point that plunges New Orleans Black neighborhoods further into deep educational and economic stratification

a. Loss of Black middle-class workforce leads to inadequate healthcare and a 99% Charter school system

b. Displacement and disaster capitalism drive cultural loss, community disunity, and economic instability/income inequality

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## APPENDIX

### 3. AFTER THE STORM- Part 2 - The impacts of long-term socioeconomic trauma:

- a. Trauma and crime
- b. Poor behavioral health and family dysfunction
- c. Expansion of the school-to-prison pipeline

### 4. STRUCTURAL RACISM IS THE NORM: Becoming Well In An Unwell Society

- a. New Orleans/US history: Living within a culture of violence and lack
- b. Weathering and the physiological impact of racism

### 5. CULTURE & WELLNESS: Ashé Cultural Arts Center - Building Immunity In The Community

- a. Culture is “the other vitamin C” - The foundation of human development
- b. Ashe harnesses the power of culture to empower communities and address wellness holistically
  - i. Utilize culture
  - ii. Modify culture
  - iii. Respect culture
- c. A formula for change: Instill radical hope and spark righteous eruption

### 6. I DESERVE IT! - Excerpt from the Ashé Cultural Arts Center’s “I Deserve It! Wellness Manifesto” as read by Sunni Patterson (Poet, Author, Community Health Worker)

