

STORYTELLING TIPS AND TRICKS



Stories have the power to move people into action. When shared through shared values and vision, personal stories can make the case for housing solutions more effectively than facts alone. They help lawmakers see how their decisions impact real people.

This guide was developed with the help of partners at RESULTS and Housing Narrative Lab. It offers support for anyone interested in telling their story – or supporting others in doing so – as part of their advocacy.

CORE PRINCIPLES

- **Agency:** Directly impacted people should have full control over if, how, and when they share their stories – and with whom. Always seek permission to share someone’s story.
- **Respect:** Ensure stories are told in holistic ways that focus on strengths and honors their full humanity, not focusing solely on their trauma or housing status.
- **Compensation:** When funds allow, individuals asked to share their personal story in a professional or public setting should be offered fair compensation for their time and expertise.

ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE STORY

- **Lived Experience:** Share a personal experience connected to the affordable housing or homelessness issue at hand – your own journey, the impact of stable housing, or your work in the field.
- **Values:** Help listeners connect to your story by naming the values that guide you (e.g., safety, dignity, opportunity, family, community).
- **Call to Action:** End with what you want the lawmaker to do based on what you shared.
- **Tips and Reminders:**
 - Keep it focused and simple – 3-5 minutes is ideal.
 - Be grounded in truth and your own experience.
 - Explain the impact of policies on you and your community.
 - Don’t speak on behalf of a culture or community that is not your own.
 - If you are sharing someone else’s story, get permission and respect their voice.

PROMPTS FOR PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCES

- What does “home” mean to you?
- Describe your home and your living conditions. How did that affect your life?
- Has housing instability or have other housing challenges impacted you, your family, job, education, or health?
- Have you received housing assistance? What changed for you after that?
- What makes you proud to live in the place you call home?
- How would more affordable homes or better protections help your community?
- What are your hopes for the future and how does your home fit into that vision?

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PROMPTS FOR HOUSING OR SERVICE PROVIDERS

- What are the biggest housing challenges your clients or community face?
- How do you see federal affordable housing programs making a difference?
- What stories do you hear that highlight the need for stronger investments?
- What is one moment that made you proud of your work?
- How would more housing assistance improve your ability to serve the community?

AFTER THE STORY

- Be sure the storyteller feels supported before and after sharing. Ask how they're doing and thank them sincerely.
- Let them know how their story will be used and follow up with outcomes when possible.
- Invite them to future opportunities to participate in your advocacy work if they're interested but never pressure them to share again.

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