



# Ethical Storytelling

## Guidelines and Resources



Welcome to Unit 2A Canadian Content, “Ethical Storytelling Guidelines and Resources.”

### Guidelines for Ethical Storytelling

- Avoid problematic narratives, such as the White Savior Complex
- Portraying communities from a ‘deficit’ perspective, to support sole objective of raising funds

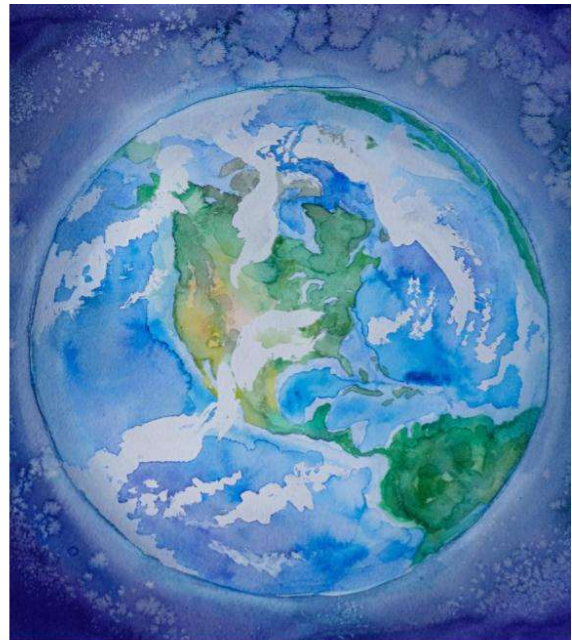


Image by [Elena Mozhvilo](#) on [Unsplash](#)



In International Cooperation spaces, stories about communities that are being supported need to be told with the utmost care, and in a way that doesn’t reinforce harmful narratives. An example of a problematic narrative that can be reinforced through communications is the White Savior Complex, this idea of white people helping or saving black, brown, and racialized communities from oppression and poverty, based on a sense of superiority.

The International Cooperation sector has long been criticized for communication practices that overemphasize a ‘deficit’ narrative, or narratives that focus solely on poverty or deprivation, for the sole

objective of raising funds or demonstrating impact. Stories of communities are not often represented in all their complexities and can lead to perpetuating harmful stereotypes. With the decolonizing aid movement, further critiques have been raised, including the power dynamics that influence the way stories are told.



## Principles and Practices for Ethical Storytelling

- Obtain consent to conduct and share a story
- Uphold confidentiality when needed
- Transparency and honesty
- Don't exaggerate harmful dynamics
- Develop internal communications policies
- Abide by ethical commitments every step of the way

Photo by [Amir Hanna](#) on [Unsplash](#)



There have been efforts to develop principles and practices when it comes to ethical storytelling in the International Cooperation sector, and in this video, we would like to highlight a few:

When sharing stories or images, ensure consent to share a story has been obtained by the person the story is about. When necessary, confidentiality must be upheld. The concept of consent should be carefully considered and thoroughly explained to potential participants. Do they understand how, when and to what purpose images or words will be used? Do they understand that they can withdraw consent at any time? Have you looked for ways to highlight your work's impact that do not require individual stories to be told?

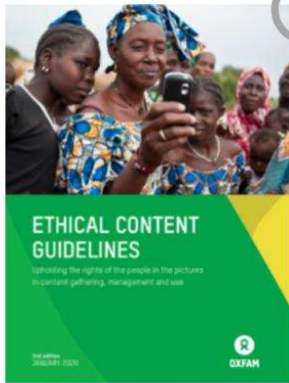
Ensure that communications are transparent and honest and ensure that communications do not exaggerate harmful dynamics. Show people and tell their stories in a way that is authentic and shows their personality. Don't make poverty and hardship the main focus, assuming this will appeal more to donors.

In fact, in a recent study conducted by the Development Engagement Lab, it was demonstrated that people's intention to donate after being presented with negative vs positive messaging in fundraising appeals didn't differ, and in fact, revealed that participants felt their contributions would not make a lasting difference when presented with the negative messaging.

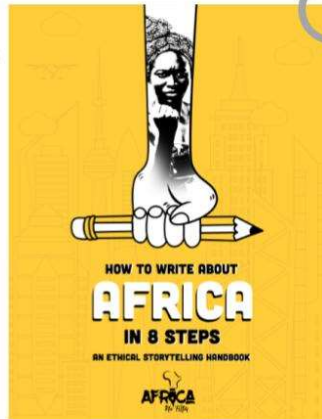
Consider developing internal policies around communications, following existing guidelines that have been developed; we will refer you to some specific guidelines in the next slide.

It is important to ensure that all of those who are involved in creating communications for your organization abide by ethical commitments every step of the way. The best practice is to have communications contractors sign codes of conduct or other guidelines.

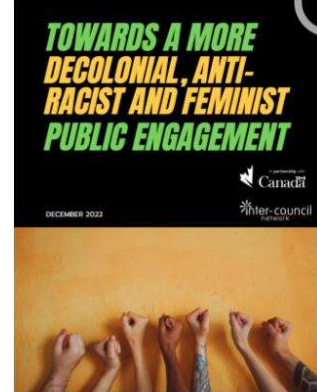
## Helpful Resources



*Oxfam*



*Africa No Filter*



*Inter Council-Network*



Finally, as mentioned here are some helpful resources you can refer to in developing your own communication guidelines. Refer to handbook developed by 'Africa No Filter' for more guidance on ethical storytelling. Oxfam has also developed some very strong ethical content guidelines. Another excellent resource is the Inter-Council Network's recent research on public engagement. Published in December 2022, towards a more decolonial, anti racist and feminist public engagement provides five key areas of action for working to ensure that public engagement communication reflects these values.

This video is part of the Building Equity: Resource Mobilization for Impact training series.

The series is available online via the Spur Change Resource Library. Made possible in collaboration with JNC Consulting and Change the Game Academy.



Thank you