

STEP 3:

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

WHY TELL STORIES?

Telling stories can be a compelling way to encourage people to visualize and empathize with migrant experiences.

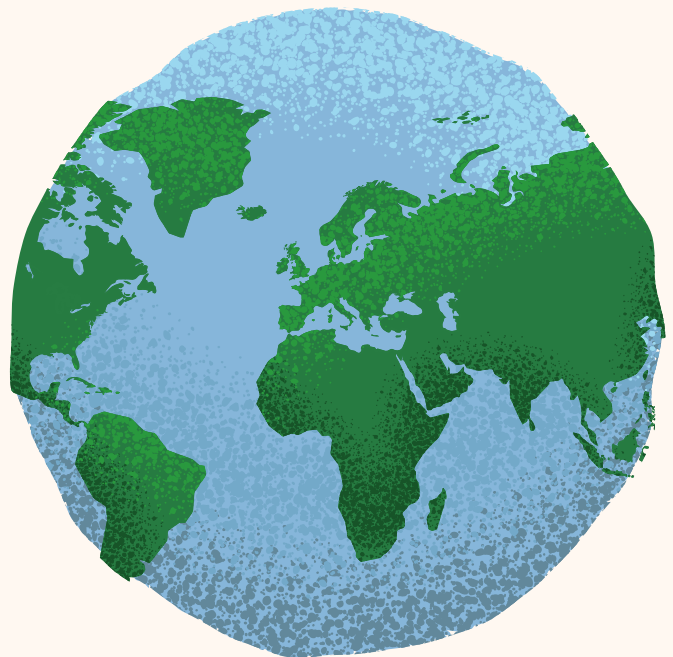


The Relationship Between Storytelling, Shared Values & Our Vision

Stories underpin all human activity. Every culture has its own storytelling traditions. Stories bring abstract concepts to a human level, which engenders greater empathy and understanding in our audiences. Stories help shape the narrative on issues and influence decision-making. By telling stories and listening to individual migrants and people in communities that welcome them, we can counter harmful stereotypes and emphasize our common humanity.

All stories are situated within a values system. Think about it: a story is comprised of characters taking actions that are motivated by their values.

The stories we communicate should be a natural extension of our shared values and reinforce the vision of the world we want to see. It is important to note the direct connection these stories have with our two previous key elements.



What Types of Stories Should We Share

The Vision of The World You Want To See



Vision of the World We Want to See:

This is a clearly defined idea of what we are advocating for, based on hope, solutions and opportunities. It is composed of our values, the narratives we promote and the stories we share that embody these values and narratives.


Values: Values, or what we care about most, are reflected in stories and narratives.

Narrative: Narratives are made up of stories we use to navigate and make sense of the world around us. Narratives are embedded in our values system and become stronger through repetition over time.

Stories: Stories are what we see, hear and experience, bringing abstract ideas and emotions to life. Many stories that reinforce the same values, beliefs and actions strengthen a narrative.

Do Tell Stories that:	Avoid Stories that:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Emphasize individuals● Draw upon our shared human experiences● Demonstrate the many dimensions that make a person unique● Build upon shared values● Are authentic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Reduce migrants to their migrant-ness● Portray migrants as either helpless victims or super-heroes● Focus on the negative or reinforce fear- and problem-based narratives● Play into stereotypes and generalizations

Activity: Story Ideas

 Write the Vision of the World You Want to See and the Shared Values you have outlined in Step 1 and 2 in the table below. Inspired by these, then brainstorm ideas for potential stories that embrace these values. They can be stories of individuals from your community or hypothetical stories.

Vision of the World We Want to See				
Shared Value	Shared Value	Shared Value	Shared Value	Shared Value
Story Ideas:				

Who Should Tell the Story?

The person who tells the story is as important as the story itself. When considering who might be the best messenger for your audience, think about the audience's value system. Who embodies this value system? Whom does your audience trust? Your messenger will likely change depending on your target audience.

This might be a person from a local faith-based organization, a leader in the community, a sports personality or a teacher. Some audiences might trust an average person that looks like them over a person in authority.

For example, if your audience values tradition consider who is a carrier of tradition.

If they value service, the narrator could be someone who is a fire fighter, a nurse or doctor, or someone who volunteers in the community. If the audience values authority, the narrator could be a political leader or an academic researcher. If your audience values family, the narrator could be a mother, a son or someone who represents family.

Personal narratives can be very powerful because there is an authenticity involved with someone sharing their own experience in life. This includes both migrants and members of receiving communities.



The Importance of Migrants Sharing their Own Stories

Migrants are important messengers but often lack platforms or spaces to share their own stories and participate in designing storytelling activities on migration. Make sure your story is inclusive of migrants and empower individuals to share their stories in a way that is authentic to their own experience without any pressure on what they should say.

It is important not to reduce migrants to just their “migrantness”; allow space in the narrative for migrants to tell their whole story beyond how and why they came to be a person on the move. Similarly, do not just tell the stories of migrants; tell the stories of their families, neighbors and friends, their employers and their teachers, their faith communities. An authentic narrative must be multi-dimensional and have broad appeal.

It is also important to understand any context that might cause a person to be vulnerable in sharing their story. We need to keep migrants’ interests at the center of our work. Sharing their story should benefit and not cause them harm. Spend the time needed together to understand the context, history and goals of sharing the story.²



Fadak Alfayadh began her TED talk, “[Harnessing the Power of Storytelling](#)” by explaining that for too long her story had been told and dissected on behalf of her rather than by her. Through her project [#MeetFadak](#), she has travelled across Australia to engage with local communities, and advocates for shifting the narrative around how people relate to refugees by narrating her own individual story and empowering others to do the same.



The organization [Migrant Voice UK](#) works to empower and support migrants to share their own story through providing media training for migrants, a supportive network and creating connections between the media, public and policy platforms and individuals from migrant communities. View videos from Migrant Voice UK [here](#).



[United We Dream](#) is a youth-led migrant community organization in the United States working to engage, support and empower young migrants, regardless of their status. United We Dream’s focus on training prepares young people to narrate their own story of migration and advocate for policy change. This training has been key in engaging with the media and in the group’s advocacy work to lobby Congress for legislation protecting young people in the United States.

Activity: Messengers

Refer to your audience outlined in [Step 2](#).



Consider your audience's value system. Who are they likely to trust based on their value system?



How can you make your story inclusive of the perspectives and experiences of migrants?

What Makes a Good Story?

Who, What, Where, When, Why, How: These are the basic foundations of storytelling. Not all stories contain all of these elements but a number of them must be there.

People: The power of stories lies in the human component. People are drawn to stories by identifying the protagonist. By connecting with the stories and the people in them, they will develop an understanding and feeling towards the individuals in the story. It is important to include the perspectives of migrants when telling stories about migration. Hearing directly from those who have migrated is vital to understanding the diverse and unique experiences of migrants and fostering empathy.

Relatable: Similar to the people component, it is important that the audience can relate to the individual in the story in some way and feel a sense of joint purpose. Consider your target audience and their values when crafting a story.

Sequence of Events: Events need to be tied together in a logical way. There must be a beginning, middle and end.

Momentum / Timing: Stories that connect with a current event or something on your audience's agenda have a hook to catch their attention. While this is not needed for all stories, it can be advantageous for gaining momentum.

Memorable: This is the certain something that makes the story resonate with the audience long after they have heard the story. Things like strong imagery, emotions or narration can make a story more memorable. As discussed in [Step 1](#), positive emotions such as hope and joy are more likely to remain with the audience and inspire action versus negative emotions such as fear and pain.



Activity: Developing your Story



Select a favorite story idea from the exercise above.
Fill out the following components for this story:

Who, What, Where, When, Why, How? In one sentence summarize the who, what, where, when, why and how of the story.	
People: Who is the protagonist in your story? Who are the other characters?	
Relatable: How is this protagonist relatable to your audience? Which shared values does the protagonist embody?	
Sequence of Events: What is the beginning, middle and end of the story?	
Momentum / Timing: Is there a news peg or issue relevant to your target audience that connects to the story? What is this?	
Memorable: What will make this story resonate with your audience long after they have heard it?	

Storytelling Methods & Mediums

There are many diverse and exciting mediums available for storytelling, including street art, graphic novels, street plays, podcasts, video, films, animation, photographs and many other creative outlets.

Consider your audience when selecting a medium for sharing a story. For example, if your audience spends significant time online it is a good idea to use a method that will reach them online. If your audience is in a very specific local neighborhood, perhaps a musical performance or street art installation in this geographic area might be a good method. By thinking about your audience's interests and where they spend time you can make a more informed decision about the method for storytelling.

Are there methods for storytelling outside of this list you would like to share with UN Human Rights? Share your ideas on social media with the hashtag #StandUp4Migrants.

Humor

Humor can help address complex issues related to migration, as the irreverence of comedy can be a good way to break down barriers between people. Especially comedians who are themselves migrants have often used humor, such as stand-up comedy, to highlight migrant experiences and challenges.

Do not be trapped into thinking all stories need to be serious. Humor is an excellent way to welcome more people to the discussion and create an experience united by laughter.



Watch UN Human Rights' "[Stand-Up For Migrants](#)" comedy special. The event featured comedians sharing their own stories of migration in celebration of International Migrants Day. You can also listen to a podcast version of the show broadcast on the [Guilty Feminist](#) podcast [here](#). This podcast version features the Guilty Feminist's host Deborah Frances-White in conversation with Uma Kondabolu and Hari Kondabolu about their family story of migration.

Graphic Novels & Graphic Journalism

Graphic novels and illustrations are a great way to create engaging stories. The illustrated format can also enable migrants with an irregular status to share their stories because it is not necessary to reveal their identity. Another term used under this medium is graphic journalism. Graphic journalism adheres to the principles of journalistic integrity: gathering interviews, stories and facts but transforms these stories into graphic novel format.

💡 For example, Empathetic Media used a combination of graphic journalism and 360-degree video to share the stories of garment workers who moved to Gawair, outside of Dhaka, due to climate change. To produce the story, called *Life in Gawair*, Empathetic Media transformed individual audio interviews with migrants in Gawair into the speech bubbles narrating the graphic novel. You can learn more about the project [here](#) and watch a Knight Fellowship talk given by Empathetic Media's Dan Archer [here](#).

Street Art

Street art brings storytelling to public spaces and can transform a community space. It also engages an audience that otherwise might not actively seek out migration related issues and content. Make sure you adhere to local laws regarding public art and seek any permission required.

💡 French photographer and street artist JR thinks of the street and public spaces as the "largest gallery in the world." JR seeks to bring people together through installing large-scale portraits in public spaces, emphasizing our common humanity especially across divisions. In 2017, following the news about constructing a border wall between the United States and Mexico, JR installed a large-scale portrait of a playful and innocent child peering over the wall at the Mexican city of Tecat. The installation called [Giant Kikito](#) was named after the toddler pictured. JR also organized a picnic for Kikito, his family and people on both sides of the fence to eat and enjoy music together. You can learn more about JR's work [here](#).

Puppet Shows and Street Theatre

Many cultures have strong and vibrant traditions of puppet shows and street theatre. This is an excellent opportunity to share stories around migration with a wider audience. Like street art, puppet shows and street theatre can engage an audience who might not otherwise actively seek out stories of migration. By engaging with local theatre groups, you can ensure your performance resonates with local audiences.

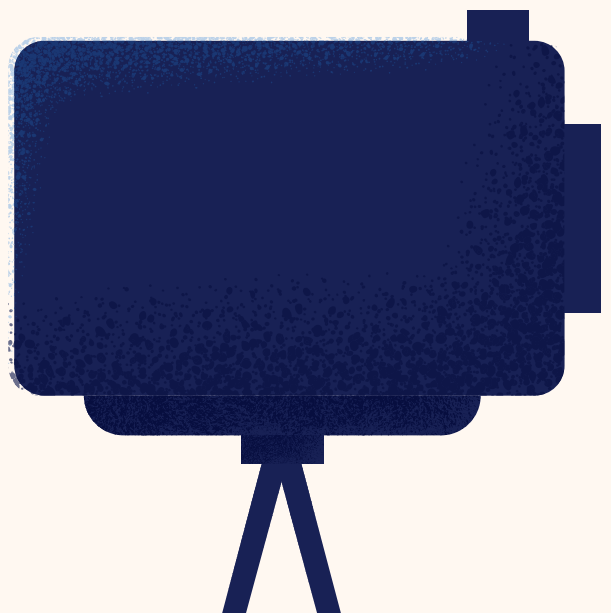
💡 The [Metropolitan Group](#), a social change creative and communications strategy agency, used street theater performances and public art installations as part of its Public Square Initiative. Through creative expression and humor, the Public Square Initiative aimed to engage and mobilize people in Mexico to achieve social and civil justice. More than 300,000 people visited the exhibit. Learn more about the Public Square Initiative [here](#) (Spanish only).

💡 [Sidekick](#), a Bangkok-based creative social change agency, used Electronic Dance Music to reach migrant women facing workplace exploitation. The project “[Migrants and Music](#)” released a song in December 2019 in Thai, Khmer, Burmese and Lao. The song emphasizes that mistreatment and sexual harassment in the workplace are not the woman’s fault and encourages victims to call the hotline number in the video and seek assistance.

Musical Performances and Spoken Word

Spoken word, poetry readings and musical performances can take many formats and the settings can range from a very informal setting in the local neighborhood to a more formal performance space. Musical performances and spoken word provide great opportunities to amplify the performance by sharing a video online to watch or an audio file.

💡 Los Angeles-based musician [La Marisoul](#) performed “[A Serenade for the Undocumented](#),” a narration and musical performance sharing the story about [Los Jornaleros del Norte](#), a band made up of former and working day laborers, whose cumbias and norteñas have become a soundtrack for the labor movement. The video also features beautiful illustrations by artist Arianna Vairo. This video elevates migrant voices and experiences by blending narrative storytelling, music and illustration.



Podcasts and Radio

Audio is an excellent storytelling method for producing authentic stories at a lower cost. Podcasts are an increasingly popular method for delivering content and are accessible to anyone with a smart phone or internet connection. Community radio plays an important role in disseminating messages in many geographic and particularly rural areas and to audiences with varying levels of literacy. To ensure your story is heard, identify which audio method will best connect with your audience.

- 💡 The [Afroqueer Podcast](#) produced by [None on Record](#), shares stories of queer Africans from across the continent. The show includes stories about individuals who have migrated or feel pressure to migrate to escape discrimination related to their queer identity and seek a better life. The podcast celebrates stories of queer love and explores issues surrounding laws, migration, media, race, class, censorship, family and sex.

Video, Animation and Film

Video, animation and films are popular methods of storytelling and can be shared via social media, streaming services and screened in person. Video production can be more accessible now that most smartphones include high-quality video recording. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations switched to filming on mobile phones and recording on digital screens because social distancing requirements made filming with groups impossible.

Animation is a great method to create engaging visual narratives while also providing the opportunity for individual migrants to share their stories without the pressure to reveal their identities.

- 💡 UN Human Rights produced a series of [15 animated shorts](#) that showcase the unique stories of migrants from around the world and the communities that welcome them. The series pairs interview audio of migrants sharing their own stories with animation. Animation was selected to help protect the identities of migrants who wanted to share their story but may have felt vulnerable being identified due to their undocumented status. The series emphasizes our shared values and experiences of love, family, friendship, struggle and belonging.



Summary

- By telling stories of individual migrants and people in communities that welcome them, we can counter harmful stereotypes and emphasize our common humanity.
- The stories we communicate should reflect our shared values and reinforce the vision of the world we want to see
- The person who tells the story is as important as the story itself.
- It is important not to reduce migrants to their “migrantness”; allow space in the narrative for migrants to tell their whole story beyond how and why they came to be a person on the move.
- There are many diverse and exciting mediums for creative storytelling. Consider your audience and where they spend time when determining the best storytelling method.



Take Action

- When planning to produce a story, have a discussion about how it can be inclusive of migrant perspectives.
 - Share your stories with us on social media by using the hashtag #StandUp4Migrants
- In the next step, Think Local, find out how to build to bring your stories and vision to life in your local area and community.