



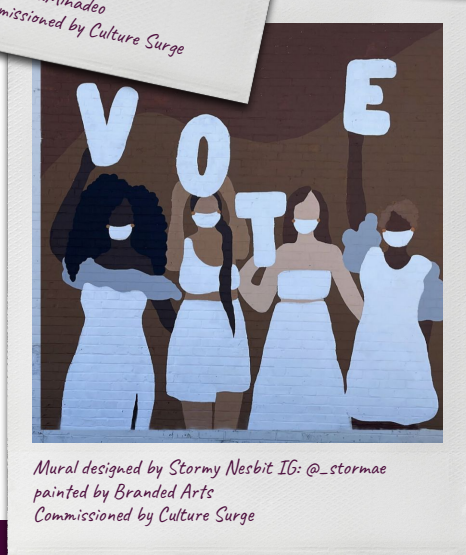
PRACTICAL TIPS *for*
IMPACT
 STORYTELLING:
The FIELD COMPANION to
 The **STORYTELLERS'**
 GUIDE *to* **CHANGING**
our **WORLD 2.0**

Introduction

It's clear that there's a difference between art for art's sake and "impact" storytelling. "Impact storytelling" is intentional, strategic storytelling designed to advance social goals—storytelling with a specific purpose around creating change. **Best practices** say that by creating more impact stories which are narratively connected but varied in content, voice, and tone, we are more likely to see the shifts toward justice and belonging that we seek.

This companion to **The Storytellers' Guide to Changing Our World 2.0** is intended to make creating an abundance of impact stories—a culture surge, if you will—easier. It is especially written for artists and organizers who want to collaborate in telling engaging impact stories in any media to make their neighborhood, state, country, or planet a better place.

What follows are just some of the practical tips and best practices for creating and delivering data-driven artistry—how to marry creative passion with scientific research to find storylines that engage, persuade, and motivate your audiences. We could easily write a book about each of these tips, so please know that this is not exhaustive. And please share what you find works best as you do this work. Culture Surge will continue to support ongoing learning and the creation of resources that generate more impact stories. We're excited to take this journey with you.



Questions to ask as you start your journey

Before anyone begins creating stories to advance any goal, they have to know a few critical things and that means there are questions that need answers. Some of these questions will take time. Some will require external data to discover a final answer. To help you do this more quickly, we list some data and research sources in [The Storytellers' Guide 2.0, Storytellers' Guide 2.0 Resource Center](#) as well as the [Story Samples Online Resource](#).

The most important questions are:

WHAT'S OUR DESTINATION?

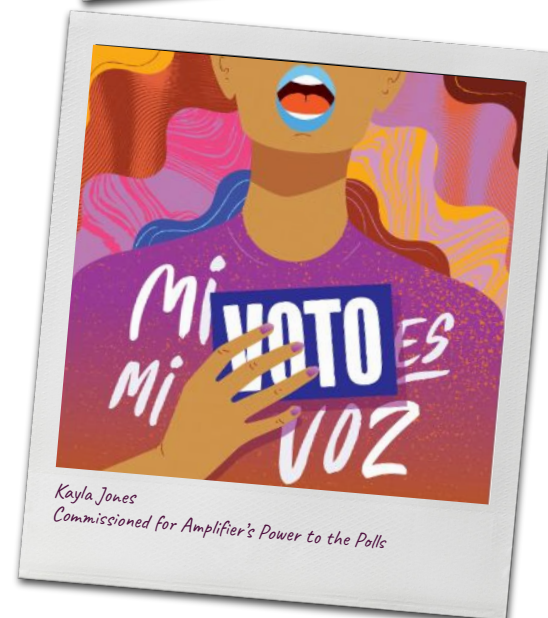
How will people's everyday lives change for the better if we achieve what we want? How will people's everyday lives change once we get there?

WHO DO WE WANT TO JOIN US ON THE JOURNEY?

Who are we trying to reach? What values do they share? What do they care about most deeply? What do they already believe about the concept or the goal we want them to embrace (and how will this help or hurt our efforts)? What exactly do we want them to feel and do once they've seen our stories?

WHERE DO WE FIND OUR INTENDED AUDIENCES?

What media are they watching, reading, and hearing everyday? Where do we build our stories to be sure the audience we want has an opportunity to see them? Facebook? Comic books? Book? Movies? TV? Murals? Sidewalk graffiti? And so on...



Exercises that get us started on the right paths

In many ways, telling more and better impact stories is about developing skills. We don't set out to climb a sheer mountain on day one. We practice with the equipment. We start with shorter walks and gradually build up our strength. In the same way, we can do some simple exercises to get better at impact storytelling.

Consume more stories.

This is an invitation to watch more Netflix and Youtube, listen to more podcasts and music, read more novels and short-stories, and play more story-based video games. These are the stories people choose to consume, so think about how your advocacy programs or ads are different from the stories people select for themselves. We believe the more stories we watch, read, and listen to, the more we understand stories and storytelling. We have to be intentional about it to develop the right muscles. As you consume stories, think about characters and the interplay between them, the worlds that are created in each story, the plot developments, etc. Think about the freedom that artists have to imagine and create the world as it could be. Each of these things help engage audiences.

Hone your practice: Identify, consume, and analyze stories you find out in the world that are related to what you care about most. How did it make you feel? What, if anything, did it make you want to do? If you are a storyteller, how could you have told a similar story? If you are an organizer, how could this story be part of your work to engage audiences to create change? If you are struggling to find stories that are relevant, check out our Resource Center for examples. Then ask friends and colleagues to suggest some or think about keywords that you can use to search for them. For instance, “immigration + fiction + books” pulls up a long list of stories about immigration. Remember to look and listen for stories everywhere; people tell their own stories in every conversation. (**Tip:** Remember that the story you like might not work for audiences that aren't like you. See *Storytelling for Different Audiences* in [The Storytellers' Guide 2.0](#) for more on why.)

Think about how art impacts people who interact with it.

Art is about emotions and so is human decision-making. Changing how people feel has to precede changing how they think. Artists and many scientists agree on this point. Think about a work of art or a personal story you've heard that's impacted you. Why? How did you find it? How did it change your way of thinking? Your behavior?

Hone your practice: Ask your friends and family the same question. Post it to one of your social media channels and see what the answers are. Since friends, families and our social media channels tend to be somewhat similar in cultural affinities, values and tastes, try to make sure that you are asking at least a few people who aren't like you in order to understand their experiences.

Exercises cont...

Explore audiences you are trying to reach.

Harmony Labs, whose mission is incessantly monitoring and analyzing the media that different people living in America consume, defines audiences as groups of people who share the same values and go to the same places to consume the same stories. (See our summary of these audiences in [The Storytellers' Guide 2.0](#).) To better understand audiences, look for the kinds of stories they already consume, where they find those stories, how they get to those spaces. A growing body of research is available on audiences and the stories they consume. (This [article](#) from Harmony, and the fantastic [video](#) embedded in it, are a great place to start.) And remember, your audience probably needs to reach beyond your "base" or the people who already agree with you.

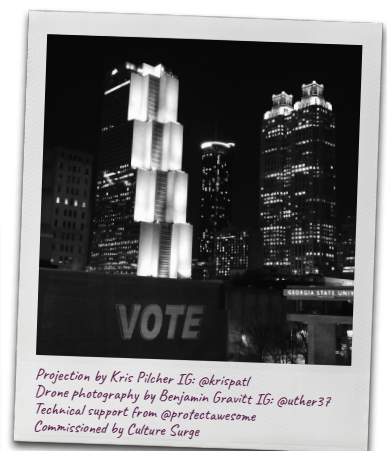
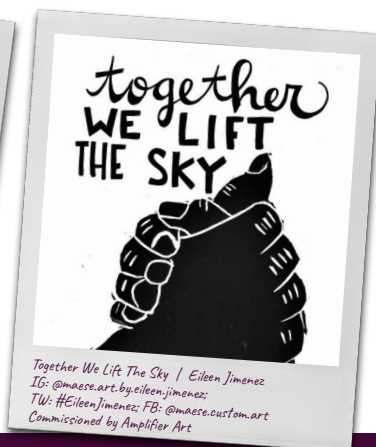
Hone your practice: Consume a few of the iconic stories identified by Harmony Labs as the kinds of stories favored by each of the four distinctive audience groups—or “segments”—that Harmony has found. Some will resonate with you, and some won't. Look for how these stories help people understand the world and their role in it, as well as clarity on how they differ.

Think about how you want to collaborate.

As outlined in [Making Waves: A Guide to Cultural Strategy](#), artists and organizers working together have created [some of the most profound social change the country has ever seen](#). Working well together is critical to how we can produce the type and volume of impact stories needed to shift the culture toward justice. This cannot be done without intentionality and care. Think about what the best partnership between artists and organizers might look like (and even what examples of ones that didn't work). What skills and resources do they each bring to the table that are critical to creating change?

Hone your practice:

Read [13 Key Principles for Working with Artists](#) and [The Prenups for Partners](#) to think deeper about how you want to be in partnership.



Mapping the trail to your creative destination

Creative people in advertising don't know much more than you about telling a persuasive true story, but they do have something you don't have—they have directions that show the way to tell lots of different stories that all accomplish the same goal. They call these "**Creative Briefs.**" Simply put, it is a document that articulates the strategy of a creative effort and the elements needed in each and every story to advance that effort. In progressive politics and social justice, a creative brief can be drafted by artists, organizers, or both. Usually, both is best. In any case, good creative briefs never say, "Use this picture and these words." Instead, they contain the critical information and direction that an artist needs to include as they apply their unique storytelling creativity to achieving a specified goal with different audiences.

Examples of Creative Briefs & Calls for Submissions

[Culture Surge Creative Brief from 2020](#)

[Oakland Futures Creative Brief](#)

[Story at Scale's Sample Creative Brief](#)

[Purpose Labs' Voices for Economic Opportunity Incubator](#)

Implementation Tips

Once you have a Creative Brief, share it with artists. If you don't already have artists you are sharing it with partners, including Culture Surge can help distribute to various artists networks we know.

Holding a group meeting on the brief to answer artists' questions helps them to gather more information and can surface things that are missing in the documents.

A note: Creative briefs are tactical documents used to commission specific impact stories. Another approach to the creation of these stories is long-term investment in and support of specific artists' and organizers' impact storytelling. This is the model of organizations like [Pillars Fund's Muslim Narrative Change Cohort](#), [the Center for Cultural Power](#) and [Harness](#).



*Juntos A Votar
Andrea Rosales IG: @andrealrosales Digital Illustration
Commissioned by Culture Surge*



*Collective Power
Raychelle Duazo
Commissioned by Amplifier Art*

Mapping cont...

The directions Creative Briefs give are invariably answers to all these questions:

CLIENT Who or what is in charge of the project or paying the bills?

CONTACT Who is the primary contact person with answers about the project and what is their contact information?

OVERVIEW What is the background for the project? Describe the problem that needs fixing or the opportunity that must be seized. Explain how people's everyday lives will be better in the future if we succeed.

AUDIENCES Who are we trying to reach?

GOAL What are you trying to accomplish? What do you want them to feel? Turn out 200,000 young people to vote? Change a law to reduce gun permits?

DELIVERABLES What kinds of artistic products do we need to produce? A novel? A feature film? A Facebook ad? An IG account? A mural.

SPECS What are technical production details the finished product must use? Is the mural 100 feet by 30 feet high? In full color? On the outside wall of a warehouse? Is the film 1 minute maximum in mp4 format? And so on.

CORE STORY What is the most powerful emotional heart or throughline of all the possible stories you could tell to advance your specific goal or mission? (Maybe, to pick an overly simple example, the core story is about belonging and the stories you tell will be about wildly different people and what makes them feel they belong in a place or to a group.) We can also outline what we want artists to avoid, like negative or fear-inducing dystopian or violent stories.

AUDIENCE INSIGHTS What do we know about the audience we are trying to reach? Where do they already hang out (online, in real life, etc)?

BUDGET & OWNERSHIP What is the artist fee and production budget? Who owns the final product? When will the artist be paid? (Tip: We think artists should get paid for their work. We also think that commissions like this should be structured so that artists retain ownership of their works, granting license to organizations for use or using [Creative Commons Licensing](#).)

DEADLINES Set deadlines for submissions.

*All of this information can also be contained in a
"Call for Artists Submissions," which is almost identical in content but simplified.*

Planning for share your story

It is critical to also create a distribution plan that outlines how you will get these new stories to the audiences you are trying to engage. Distribution plans, including [this tool](#) from Purpose Labs’ Voices for Economic Opportunity Incubator that helps you create one, revolve around getting your content in front of audiences through paid, owned, shared and earned media (POSE). Below are just some examples of distribution activities in each of these media categories.

Paid	Owned	Shared	Earned
Ads (social, TV, radio)	Email Lists	Organic Sharing	Influencer Campaigns
Boosted Content	Website	User-generated	PR
Billboards	Events & Activations	Content	Public Appearances
	Door Knockers & Deep		
	Canvassing		
	Posters		

Distribution isn’t only putting it on your website and socials, but, as you can see from the brief suggestions above, all kinds of media, events, personal interactions, and other communications efforts from all four media areas in POSE—each customized to the media your intended audience already consumes. You don’t want to buy TV ads if your audience doesn’t watch TV! This kind of paid distribution will cost money, so make sure you have a budget for this that is separate from producing the content. Distribution can seem daunting, but you know more than you think—especially if you have answered the foundational questions above.



Resources for your journey

Culture Surge is a constant resource for your efforts to create impact stories. This includes providing a series of briefings to help folks utilize *The Storytellers Guide* and build capacity around the practice of cultural strategy. Culture Surge will also produce consistent newsletters filled with cultural strategy resources, calls to action, and opportunities to engage for artists and organizers. In addition to our own resources, there are a number of other organizations that continually produce excellent resources and new data. To that end, we have created a robust **Storytellers' Guide 2.0 Resource Center** and **Story Samples Online Resource** on our website that we keep up-to-date with the latest and the greatest.

A special note for organizers: Clearly, if your organization has a budget for research and artists, that helps in the creation of lots of impact stories. But the framework we advocate—the questions to ask, the way to think about audiences, the need to tell stories rather than rely on a tagline or one-line commands (“Vote!”)—are all free of cost. As is reaching out for direction or bits of advice to Culture Surge, to local artists, to strategists whose writing sounds right to you. (While we believe strongly in paying people for their work, we also believe in the spirit of generosity for those who have the energy and resources to help with little or no compensation.)

Arriving at Your Destination

In order to achieve the future we want, we have to create significantly more impact stories and place them in significantly more spaces where our audiences will encounter them. We hope this field guide helps you to accelerate and deepen your practice, to find the space and confidence to experiment and learn, and to find some fellow walkers on this incredible journey. Once you've climbed one mountain and you arrive at the end of one storytelling journey, stop to take in the view. Think about where you've been and what worked and didn't. And then, start planning for the next peak you want to climb; the next impact story you want to tell.



Mural designed by Daniela Melendez (IG: @Danie_Studios); painted by Branded Arts / Commissioned by Culture Surge



The Future We Want
Kiara Sanders IG: @smalldarkandbright
Commissioned by Culture Surge



Defend the Sacred / Jackie Fawn
IG: @jackiefawn; TW: #JackieFawn;
FB: @jackiefawnillustrations
Commissioned by Amplifier Art



Avis Charley IG: @maese.art.by.eileenjimenez
Commissioned for IllumiNative's Natives Vote campaign.

About

This **Field Companion** was co-written in 2022 by Erin Potts and Kirk Cheyfitz, two pioneers of culture-change work who were commissioned by Culture Surge to create a set of create a pathway for artists and organizers to co create and collaborate in telling engaging story in any media to make their neighborhood, state, country, or planet a better place. This new edition adds the audience of field organizers for progressive causes and politics, recognizing that we need coordinated, emotionally moving storytelling from many voices over long periods of time to produce lasting change. This means our long-term success requires mutual understanding and close collaboration between organizers and artists.

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The views expressed here are those of Culture Surge and the guide's authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the project's funders or readers or the institutions where they work.

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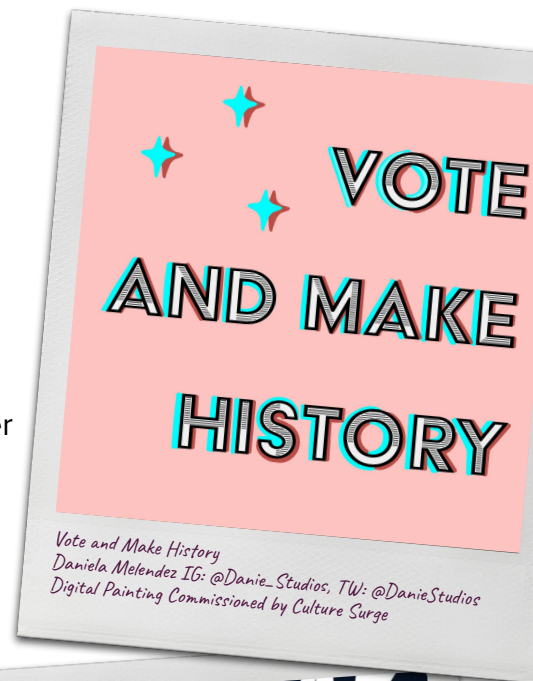
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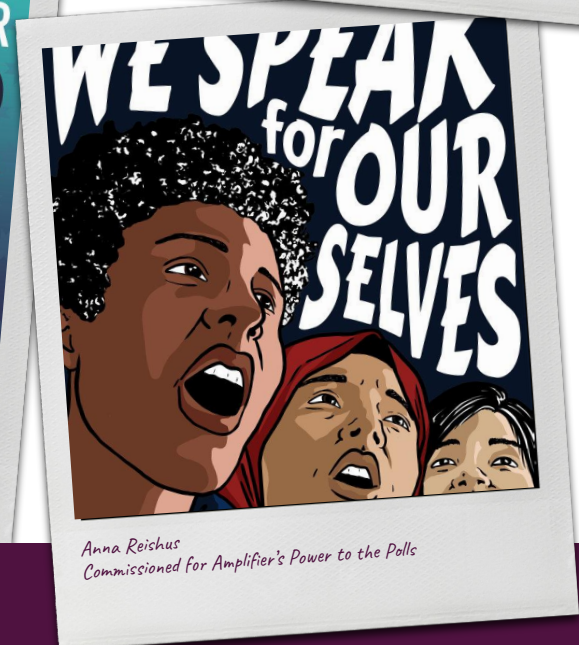
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