

Storyteller Best Practices Toolkit:

Make Your
Voice Heard



ACLU
Kansas

YOUR VOICE MATTERS!



This guidance manual was developed to better support our storytellers and advocates.

Storytelling is the glue of our advocacy work and only exists because of brave Kansans like you who **speak up!**

As you work to defend democracy and protect civil rights and civil liberties in our state, here's what to expect and how to protect yourself.

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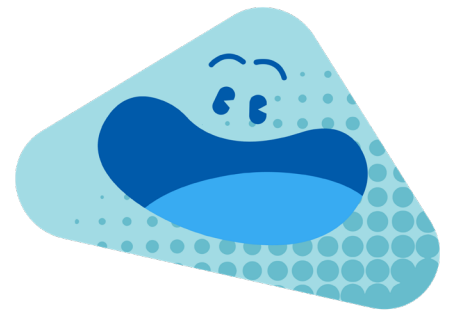
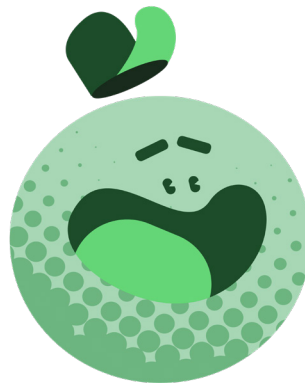
Preparation:

Everyone struggles to figure out what they want to say at times. Here are some helpful pointers to get you started.

What to Expect:

Meet one on one with a staff member to brainstorm topics, discuss expectations, and get comfortable with the ACLU KS storytelling environment. This is your opportunity to ask questions and gain insight into advocacy work, but also our opportunity to demonstrate how we can support you in this process.

The initial one-on-one is NOT your only opportunity to ask questions or work with an ACLU KS staff member. Staff are available at any point in time during your storytelling process.



Public Speaking:

This can come in the form of public speeches, press statements, meetings with officials or roundtables (a meeting/conference promoting a free-flowing exchange of ideas among all participants, occasionally including press).

Prepare remarks of 3-5 minutes including the following content:

- Introduce yourself
- Share why you're involved in this issue, what motivates you, maybe a specific moment that energized you to take action

- Discuss pros or cons of the bill/issue/election/etc.
- Make the ask: veto, support, volunteer, etc.

Op-Eds and Blogs:

If you are putting together an op-ed/blog, please draft 300-500 words, loosely following this outline:

I. Introduction

- 2-3 sentence overview of the issue area
- Who you are and why you care

II. Your Story

- Background of experiences
- Examples (good or bad things about your issue)

IV. Advocacy for change

- Your call to support or oppose the issue
- Urgency of justice: “we must act now because...”
- Draw throughline from your issue to bigger picture, Example: “facilitates anti-democratic practices”
- Ending sentence: Leave them with something to remember!

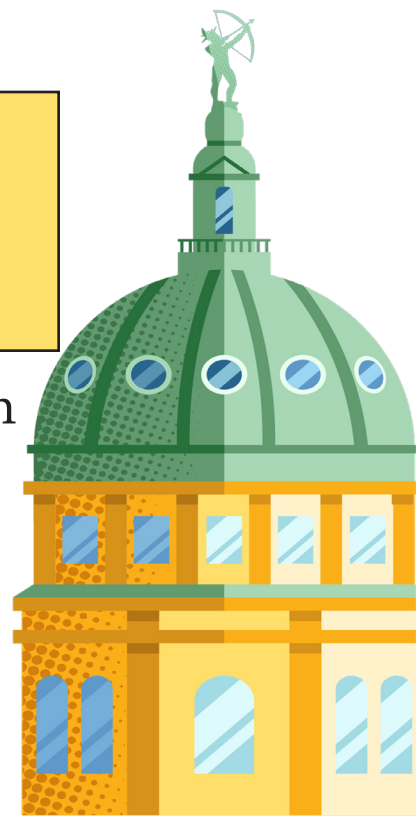
Testimony:

Each committee has their own rules and content may need to be tailored to suit committee rules. To learn what these rules may be, visit ksleg.org or ask an ACLU Kansas staff member to assist.

Written testimony should be brief and clear in the message you want to get across.

I. Introduction

- [Your First & Last Name]
- Regarding [Name of the Committee and/or



- Agency You are testifying about]
- [Date]

II. Introduce yourself and the issue you want to testify about

- Give your first and last name and identify yourself.
Ex. “My name is Robert Jackson and I am a concerned KS resident/a father of three.”
- Tell them what you’re testifying about.
Ex. “I am testifying about how police presence in my neighborhood has made me and my neighbors feel less safe.”

III. Tell your story

- Pick an event or issue that you have worked directly on or been affected directly by that you are comfortable sharing with the public.
- Tell what services caused this event and how it impacted you.

IV. Explain why you felt the need to testify

- Tell why you wanted to share your story and what you want Council to take from your story.
- What would have helped prevent negative experiences or increase positive experiences.

V. Give suggestions for solving the issue or problem you have raised.

- What do you think the Council should do to make sure others do not have the negative experiences you had or that they have the positive experiences you did?
- What do you think will be helpful in dealing with the issue or problem you talked about?

VI. Thank the Councilmembers

- Thank the chair of the committee.

- Tell them you hope they consider your testimony and the solutions you have suggested.

Videos, Interviews & Podcasts:

Our podcast “*Marching On!*” frequently hosts storytellers! Feel free to bring notes/notecards with relevant facts, data, numbers, statistics, or whatever you need to feel fully prepared.



Issue Resources:

The Kansas ACLU is loaded with resources to help you tell your story.

- Our Know Your Rights (KYR) resource page contains KYR information for issues ranging from voting rights to LGBTQ issues.
- Our website’s reports and toolkits page provide data and insight into Kansas issues that may be helpful.
- **Our staff!** Feel free to reach out directly regarding any questions or concerns you may have. Our staff is here to help!

Cyber Security Preparation:

I. Understand your online footprint

- Remember that the Internet is permanent; anything shared is potentially available for everyone to read *forever*.
- Remove any references to your location or physical addresses. Check websites such as *White Pages*, *Spokeo*, *Yellow Pages*, *Family Tree Now* etc.

- Search your own name/images on Google and set Google Alerts.

II. Think before you share

- We appreciate you sharing your stories but understand that others might not if they pertain to personal/complex/controversial subject matter.
- Avoid identifying too much personal information about yourself, or your friends/family, on social media. Never reveal home addresses, places of work or specific locations which could be tied back to you.

Photos can be a very powerful tool for conveying emotion or personalization, but be careful when sharing them, they can be used to identify your personal information or location.

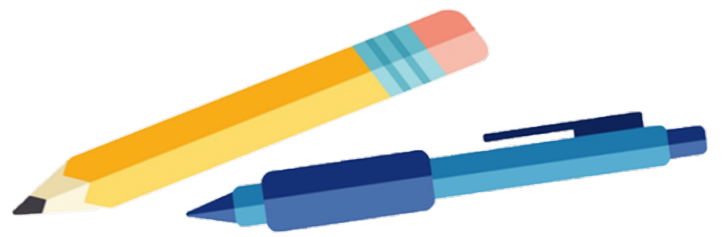


- De-identify real people in your stories or images: avoid full names or use fake names.

III. Protect your social media accounts and data

- Check your social media platform's privacy settings, make sure your settings are updated to your comfort level and avoid sharing more information than necessary.

Writing Process:



Now that we have set a good foundation for storytelling, we can get started on the writing process!

How to Tell a Great Story:

Do:

- Consider your audience — choose a framework and details that will best resonate with your listeners.
- Identify the moral or message you want to impart.
- Find inspiration in your life experiences.

Don't:

- Assume you don't have storytelling chops — we all have it in us to tell memorable stories.
- Overwhelm your story with unnecessary details.

Many of our best stories draw from personal experiences. These stories are important tools for stigma reduction when regarding controversial subjects like abortion or trans rights or criminal legal reform. We believe that giving these stories a platform is one of our most powerful communications tools but understand that the emotional and mental effort required to share these stories may be taxing on someone can be taxing, stressful, and draining. Next, we will learn about the ways to safeguard yourself and the ways we can support you during your writing storytelling process.



How to Write About Complex Subject Matter:

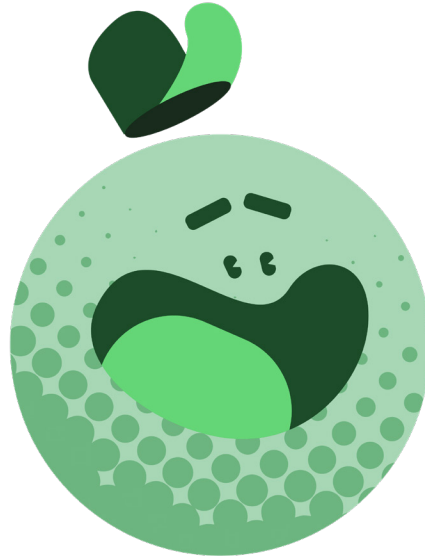
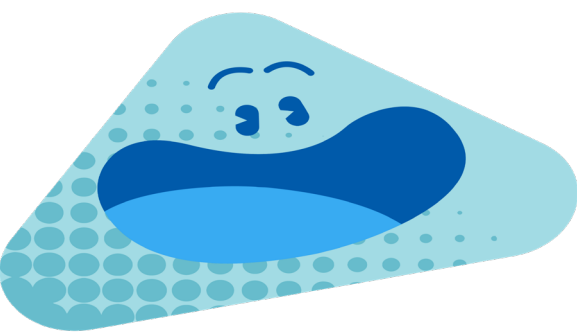
The line between being openly vulnerable about difficult experiences and retraumatizing yourself by resurfacing old memories can be hard to navigate.

- Make sure your writing has a healthy balance of facts and feelings.

Tips for protecting your emotional well-being while writing:

- *Create a space:* Find a place to work without interruptions and organize your environment.
- *Take breaks:* Don't be afraid to step away from a big project if you need to work through something personal.
- *Practice self-care:* Eat well, get enough sleep, and do things that boost your mood.
- *Express yourself:* Writing about difficult situations can help you release your feelings in a healthy way. For example, you can try writing a letter you never send to express your needs and wishes.
- *Don't hold back:* Writing is for you first and foremost, so don't worry about grammar, spelling, or what others might think. Your first draft is yours alone, and you can always go back.
- *Speak from your scars, not open wounds:* You don't owe anyone your story of being impacted by an oppressive system. The choice to share your story to energize, encourage, or empower others is yours alone, and you can change your mind at any time. If you aren't ready to talk about an experience because it is too triggering, give yourself time. Or reframe your story so you can speak from a place of power and not harm yourself by speaking about it in a public setting.

- *Talk it Out:* The writing process can feel isolating at times and can lead to fatigue or depression. Reach out to peers, family members, and ACLU Kansas staff to spur inspiration, garner other perspectives, and remember that you are not alone in this experience.



ACLU Kansas can connect you with resources you may need, ranging from legal services to mental health care. Just ask!

A NOTE ON HOW WE TALK ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY:

Speak from your perspective as a community member and a Kansan:

- While you may be volunteering as a Kansas ACLU member, your experience should be framed at an individual level.

Language:

- Some words have underlying connotations that may be harmful to our overall goals. In those cases, it may be best to swap out those words for others. For example: instead of “felon”, we center people and say “system-impacted people” or “previously incarcerated person”.

Aftermath of Storytelling:

Powerful stories can lead to emotional responses. The cybersecurity preparation we fulfilled prior to platforming your story is one defense against unwanted responses, but there are more steps we can take to protect you and your story.



Responding to comments:

- It's likely that someone who reads your story will relate to what you have to say and want to vocalize their support for your cause. Receiving comments on your story through social media platforms is a great way to boost your content through the algorithm and grow your audience. Feel free to engage with your supporters with professional and courteous replies or by liking comments.
- On the other hand, it's likely that there will be those who do not agree with what you have to say. In the event your story receives negative comments, we recommend you ignore them online and report directly to us.

Doxxing: publishing information that can be used to identify, locate and contact someone without their consent. It usually refers to publishing an individual's home address, email address, phone number and other contact information online.

- The Kansas ACLU recognizes that doxxing is a prevalent issue in online environments today and is deeply committed to do everything in our power to ensure your information and privacy are protected.

- In the event of doxxing, gather and preserve all evidence and report to us IMMEDIATELY so that we can contact the proper authorities.

Your safety above all else is our priority. If you are approached online or in person for comments you made under our facilitation, report this to us IMMEDIATELY so that we can provide you with the best possible protection.

Now that you are an experienced storyteller for the Kansas ACLU, you are ready to become a leader for future storytellers and transfer your communication skills into other forms of advocacy!

Now What?

So, you've been inspired to do more. Grow from a volunteer to a leader by getting involved in our other areas of advocacy:



Volunteer Again: Try a different modum of storytelling or join our beehive to find other ways to get involved.



Train Volunteers: Find new potential storytellers and share what you've learned!



Lead your own storytelling event: Host a Q&A, roundtable, or testimony day with friends and/or family.