

An aerial photograph of Santa Fe, New Mexico, showing a dense grid of streets and buildings. Overlaid on the right side of the image are several concentric yellow circles that expand outwards from the top right corner, creating a sense of connection and radiating energy.

culture connects

Storytelling & Engagement Toolkit

A Littleglobe Project in Partnership with Santa Fe Art Institute

Culture Connects: Santa Fe is a community-wide effort to shape the cultural future of our city.

Culture Connects

Storytelling & Engagement Toolkit

[Littlelobe](#) is a New Mexico-based non-profit which consists of artists, facilitators, activists, and cultural workers committed to the practice of socially-engaged, participatory art that galvanizes individual and collective voices, activates empathy, and leads to personal and community agency. We are committed to interdisciplinary, collaborative art projects and we partner with local, national and international communities to create rigorous artistic works that form meaningful relationships, empower individuals and communities, and reflect the power of our social imagination.

Based on [Culture Connects](#), Santa Fe's cultural roadmap and its resident-storytelling *¡Presente!* project, this cross-sector collaboration and toolkit is rooted in the use of community-based storytelling and engagement practices to connect residents and help them share stories. Littlelobe's community of partners are working together to help provide program and technical support to gather and amplify these stories.

This toolkit is designed to be a general framework for implementing a storytelling project in classrooms, organizations and public engagement projects. The toolkit is comprised of three parts: Part I is a guide for how to gather stories using prompts and creative activities. Part II is a guide for how to amplify and disseminate stories to the public, and Part III is about maximizing the impact of these stories by integrating them into policy-making. The toolkit can be adapted to the specificity of each project's needs and constituents.

TOOLKIT PROJECT PARTNERS

Littlelobe (lead)
Santa Fe Art Institute
Santa Fe Arts and Culture
Department
University of New Mexico
Earth Care

PROJECT PARTNERS

Earth Care
Santa Fe Art Institute
Santa Fe Arts and Culture
Department
Santa Fe Economic Development
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Introduction: A Context for Creative Practice

Culture Connects: Santa Fe is a community-wide effort to shape the cultural future of our city. In 2016, through a series of creative, hands-on input sessions, we explored notions of culture, shared our dreams for Santa Fe's future and created a "roadmap" to realize our vision. Leading this effort on behalf of the City was Dr. Estevan Rael-Gálvez, a nationally-recognized leader in cultural strategies.

Culture Connects Santa Fe, the City of Santa Fe's first cultural plan, was developed from a deep engagement process and focused on the intrinsic value of culture and how it can be leveraged for imagining and realizing the vibrancy, health and wellbeing of the community.

Recognizing how important the words are that define this work, from the Latin, *cultura*, is tied to the agricultural practice of cultivating, honoring the life force that comes from nurturing growth and has come to embody every facet of creative expression in society, from which emanate writing, song, performance, painting, sculpture, cuisine, dance, design and above all, story. The word 'connects' — also from the Latin, *conectere*, to join together and establish a relationship — reflects the dynamic of bringing together something, someone, some place with another.

Culture holds the amazing potential to illuminate or awaken the vitality and spirit of a community. It can elevate, but it also grounds individual and collective community voices. When recognized, coalesced and leveraged, culture is transformative. It ignites creativity, consciousness and capacity.

Above all, *Culture Connects Santa Fe* is a living initiative and we invite all residents, cultural organizations, creative professionals and community groups to continue to be involved in realizing the possibilities. This toolkit is designed to support the work of gathering, sharing and responding to each other's story, and to participate in the process of creating a community that is equitable, sustainable, and inclusive of all who live here.



Values/Ethics

Every project that Littlelobe implements is based on our core values. As a community-based multi-arts organization, our values are centered on ethical practices of storytelling and community engagement. Here are the values that are built into our work. Some of these values have been adapted from Storycenter.org.

COMMUNICATION

Ongoing dialogue between storytellers, staff members, partner organizations, and funders about how best to design and implement an ethically responsible project is key to ethical practice. Project partners must maintain ongoing communication with storytellers, to address any concerns that may arise for them following a workshop.

CLARITY

Facilitators and partners must have clarity about project goals, methods, and story distribution intentions. Storytellers must have the knowledge and support they need to make informed choices about workshop participation and the content, production, and use of their work.

CONSENT

Storytellers have the right to withdraw their stories from public circulation at any time (recognizing the particular constraints of withdrawal from Internet forms of distribution).

TRANSPARENCY

Facilitators and partners must be transparent with storytellers about workshop and story distribution goals and methods. This transparency must be woven through the life of a project, from storyteller recruitment, to workshop implementation and eventual story distribution.

ACCOUNTABILITY

If this story work is created with, and/or for, policy-engagement projects with institutions, public agencies or other entities that serve populations, it is imperative that time is taken to connect this story gathering and sharing process with the mechanisms that will be used to affect policymaking.

ITERATIVE PROCESS (ADAPTING TO CHANGE)

This toolkit and the projects that use this toolkit as a template need to build in reflection, assessment and reengineering to ensure that this process improves and remains equitable and effective, and provides access for anyone who wants to use it.



Story Prompts

Think of a story as an arc, with a beginning, middle, and end. It moves along with a life of its own. . . Most stories are driven by a question or questions that are central to the story-gathering project. The process of telling a story is a response to that question.

Prompts are designed to be open-ended so that they can be interpreted in different ways, and should invite people to explore their personal felt experience. Using sensory information can be a great way to discover a story: smell, taste, sound, touch, and vision, and grow a story from there — from the inside out. There is also no wrong way to create a story, especially if it is founded on a person's authentic, honest experience.

The following are examples of story prompts we have used in projects. Note that they are not yes/no questions, but subjective questions that can help inspire a reflective and generative process in the participant. Please feel free to adapt and add to these prompts based on the needs of your specific project, community, and goals.

Examples of Prompts

SENTENCE STARTER/PROMPTS

Begin with one of these prompts and free write for five minutes:

(My) home smells, sounds, feels like _____

The difference between “house” and “home” is _____

When I look out my front door, I (Describe what you see, smell, and hear)

A time when I feel like I didn’t belong was _____ because _____.

The unexpected gifts of this time are _____

OBJECT STORIES

Tell a story about an object that embodies your sense of home.

Here are three objects in my home that I love the most (your pet, your favorite socks, a photo of your grandparents, etc.)

PHOTO PROMPTS

Choose a photo from your life and write or record yourself talking about it. Ask family members to tell what happened before the photo, what happened during the photo, and after the photo.

VISUAL MAPS

Draw a map of your home, neighborhood, community, your life, your school, etc. Write a paragraph or record a story of memories you have which are related to that location.

*Stories surround us like air; we breathe them in, we breathe them out.
The art of being fully conscious in personal life means seeing the stories and becoming their teller, rather than letting them be the unseen forces that tell you what to do.*

- Rebecca Solnit



Creative Activities

These creative activities are examples of different ways prompts can be used to solicit creative content and stories for your project. Below are a set of example activities that utilize different modalities and mediums that can be done in both analog and digital forms.

- 1. Create a questionnaire with a series of prompts and have participants freely fill it out.**
- 2. Looping.** Choose one sentence from one of the prompts and write that on the top of a clean sheet of paper. Then write for another five minutes using that sentence as a starting point. When the five minutes are up, go back through what you have written and circle a sentence or phrase that resonates with you. That phrase or sentence is now going to be the first sentence of your next paragraph. Write for five more minutes using that sentence as a starting point. Repeat at least one more time. This can go on indefinitely! Translate the resulting texts into poetry, formal stories or other story-containers to share.
- 3. Write and Record or perform a poem or song based on one of the above prompts.** Write down on a piece of paper or index card some of the most poignant or emotionally evocative lines from your looping exercise (like “My home smells like bleach and tortillas”) and arrange those lines with other lines into poems. You could also add to your lines “My home smells like fresh made tortillas made by my father and bleach from my sister cleaning the kitchen...”
- 4. Identify an object (or objects) that have meaning for you.** Tell a story about it/them and why it is important to you. Take photos or draw pictures of the three objects and record or write a narration to go with the photos/drawings.

5. Interview a family member about:

- a. A family photo
- b. A hardship they have overcome, and what helped them get through it
- c. Their favorite song and why it is important to them
- d. A family recipe and its meaning
- e. Who else in your family would you want to interview about these things and why?
- f. See: [Interviewing Guide](#)
- g. See: [Mobile Phone Production Guide](#)

6. Create a comic strip of your neighborhood, your daily routine, or the homes of your family's past.

- a. See: [Digital Production Tool Guide](#)

7. Create a map of your neighborhood. Write at least three short stories/memories related to the map. Here are some things to think about:

- a. What is the journey you take to get from your home to your school?
- b. Think of five words that you would use to describe your city/neighborhood; write them down if needed
- c. Write or record a story that relates to the neighborhood or city that you live
- d. Are there any ancestral stories that you know of that relate to the place that you live?

8. Take a look outside your front door. Feel free to respond to or adapt any of the following activities:

- a. Take a photo, or photos, of your view
- b. Record sounds of what you hear
- c. Write a poem. You can start with the line: "Outside my front door..."
- d. Record a conversation with a friend, family member or neighbor who about what you both see outside your front doors
- e. Draw or paint a picture of what you see

One of the functions of art is to give people the words to know their own experience. There are always areas of vast silence in any culture, and part of an artist's job is to go into those areas and come back from the silence with something to say.

- Ursula K. LeGuin



Production Guides & Tutorials

We have created some additional guides and tips related to producing digital media content. Each of these guides are available as a pdf for you to download.

DIGITAL PRODUCTION TOOL GUIDE

A compilation of useful and accessible apps and software for audio, video, photography, and multi-media production.

PHOTO COMPOSITION GUIDE

A how-to guide for taking better photos.

MOBILE PHONE VIDEO & AUDIO PRODUCTION

An extensive guide for how to shoot better videos and record audio using your mobile phone.

LG INTERVIEWING GUIDE

Tips for conducting interviews using audio, video and print.



Gathering & Organizing Content

There are different ways to gather stories from the community, both in person and virtually. It is important to remember that stories are an offering. It is important to treat storytellers and sharers with respect, and honor the gifts they offer. Try to create spaces that are easily accessible and inviting for people to share their stories.

ONLINE PLATFORMS

We have found that one of the easiest ways for soliciting community-generated content is to create an online form that allows users to upload different types of media files. Jotform is a platform that allows you to easily customize your form using any of the hundreds of templates they provide. It has an easy drag-and-drop form builder, and there are many different widgets you can insert. You can integrate the form with dropbox or Google Drive to keep the submissions and files organized.

Submittable, and Submit.com are other possible options for creating forms that allow users to upload media files. Submittable is pretty expensive, but is used by a lot of grant organizations and literary magazines for submissions.

JotForm: <https://www.jotform.com/>

- Hundreds of form templates you can adapt using drag and drop features. Allows you to create forms where users can upload files (audio, video, photos, documents, etc). Very customizable. Some HTML knowledge is helpful, but not necessary.

Submittable: <https://www.submittable.com/>

Submit.Com: <https://submit.com/>

HASHTAGS

For younger populations who may not want to fill out a form to submit stories, you can create a hashtag for them to use when they upload media to their favorite social media site (Facebook, Snapchat, Tik Tok). You will need somebody to go through these sites and search the hashtag to curate the stories.

STORY CIRCLES

A story circle can be conducted in person or virtually (using Zoom or another video meeting software). Our stories are usually shared in group settings, when we are sitting together at the dining room table, around a campfire, on the back porch, in a theater, or in a circle under a tree. Try to find a setting or venue that suits you and your group to share your stories.

Zoom is an easy virtual platform to use and can accommodate small to large groups. You can arrange break-out rooms so the large group can split into smaller groups and then come back together. There is an easy way to chat with other participants and to record the meeting. You can send out prompts for participants to think about and answer beforehand, or wait until the story circle begins to introduce the prompt(s).

1. Start with creating group agreements such as:

- a. Confidentiality. What is shared stays within the group
- b. Feel free to pass on your turn to share. It is just as important to have witnesses to listen as it is to have storytellers
- c. Be yourself, there is no right and wrong
- d. Each story is as important as the other
- e. Remember to be present and listen to each other
- f. Step back/Step forward. Give space to those that are quieter and if you tend to be quiet try to come forward a little

2. Begin with a short, 3-minute check-in. (You can shift this timing depending on size of group).

- a. Find a simple prompt for the check-in. Perhaps it's sharing your name, and where you live, and one word about how you are feeling right now

Think about having a time limit on the story sharing (3-4 mins is usually good). Keep time using your phone and have an audio cue that lets the storyteller know their time is up. Give them time to wrap up their story. You can also give them a 30-second warning before their time is up.

- 3. As the facilitator(s), share a story to the group as a starting point.** You can share the story in any way, using movement, gestures, or song. If you are using movement during a zoom call, position yourself so you can be seen. Be creative. Next, split the group into smaller break-out sessions (<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206476093-Getting-Started-with-Breakout-Rooms>), and ask each group to spend some time sharing their individual stories. If possible, designate a facilitator to guide each small group. As the facilitator(s), ask yourself, “What are the connections arising between the stories?” Find ways to layer these stories into a single story, and collectively prepare to bring this story back to the larger group. Once back in the larger group, each smaller group shares.
- 4. To close the session, the facilitator(s) might ask:**
- How was it to share your story?
 - How did your story change when working in the small group?
 - What are you feeling right now?
 - Close the session by asking each person to share one word or phrase about what they are taking away with them.

Stories move in circles. They don't move in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in circles. There are stories inside stories and stories between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is getting lost. And when you're lost, you start to look around and to listen.

- Corey Fischer, Albert Greenberg, and Naomi Newman of A Traveling Jewish Theatre, *Coming From a Great Distance*



Submission Guidelines and Consent (Media Release)

It is crucial that you are transparent about how the stories you are gathering will be used, and that participants know clearly what they are consenting to.

If possible, give participants the option to remove their stories/media from public circulation if they change their mind. You must get consent from parents and/or legal guardians if the participants are under the age of 18.

THE FOLLOWING IS LANGUAGE WE HAVE USED FOR OUR FORMS AND ONLINE SUBMISSION PLATFORMS:

ALL content (audio only, video+audio, still photos, etc.) is welcomed. However, content must be appropriate for all ages and will be checked to insure appropriateness prior to use. Minors/teens will need permission from a parent/guardian. All participants will receive detailed program guidelines prior and, by uploading, will agree to the terms and our right to broadcast and make public all submitted content.

Littlelobe's [Terms & Conditions](#)



Amplification & Dissemination

After collecting stories and content, the next step is to think about how to disseminate these stories back into the community. This could be done via live performance, film screenings, events or installations throughout neighborhoods, on social media, and other online platforms.

PUBLIC SCREENINGS, PERFORMANCES, EVENTS

Littlelobe has shared content through performances at local venues, like the Lensic Performing Arts Center and Capital High School. We also create events called Neighborhood Fiestas that take place in various neighborhoods, where people can share food, stories, music, and conversation.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Littlelobe uploads our video content to Vimeo and then we share the videos on Facebook and Instagram. We also utilize social media to engage the community in dialogue and conversation.

JOURNALISM/MEDIA OUTLETS

Littlelobe partners with NMPBS, KSFR, and Searchlight NM to help amplify our stories to diverse audiences.

INSTALLATIONS

We try to envision various ways to integrate stories into the physical landscape. One of our favorite projects is called *Fotohistorias*, whereby we collect historical photos and interviews of people in different locations, then create photo banners with QR codes, which link to audio clips that refer to the location where the photo was taken. This installation serves as a “museum without walls”.

CIVIC PARTNERS

We have partnered with various city departments, who have shared our stories on their websites and social media. You can also consider partnering with the local library to share stories.



Conversations/Dialogue

Following the dissemination and amplification of stories, Littlelobe facilitates community engagement opportunities, using the stories themselves as prompts for discussion. People can then interact with and respond to the stories that have been shared. It is through the interaction between storyteller and audience that real impact can take place: participants can engage in dialogue about the emotions, experiences and issues that have surfaced within the exchange of stories.

Trauma-Informed Facilitation

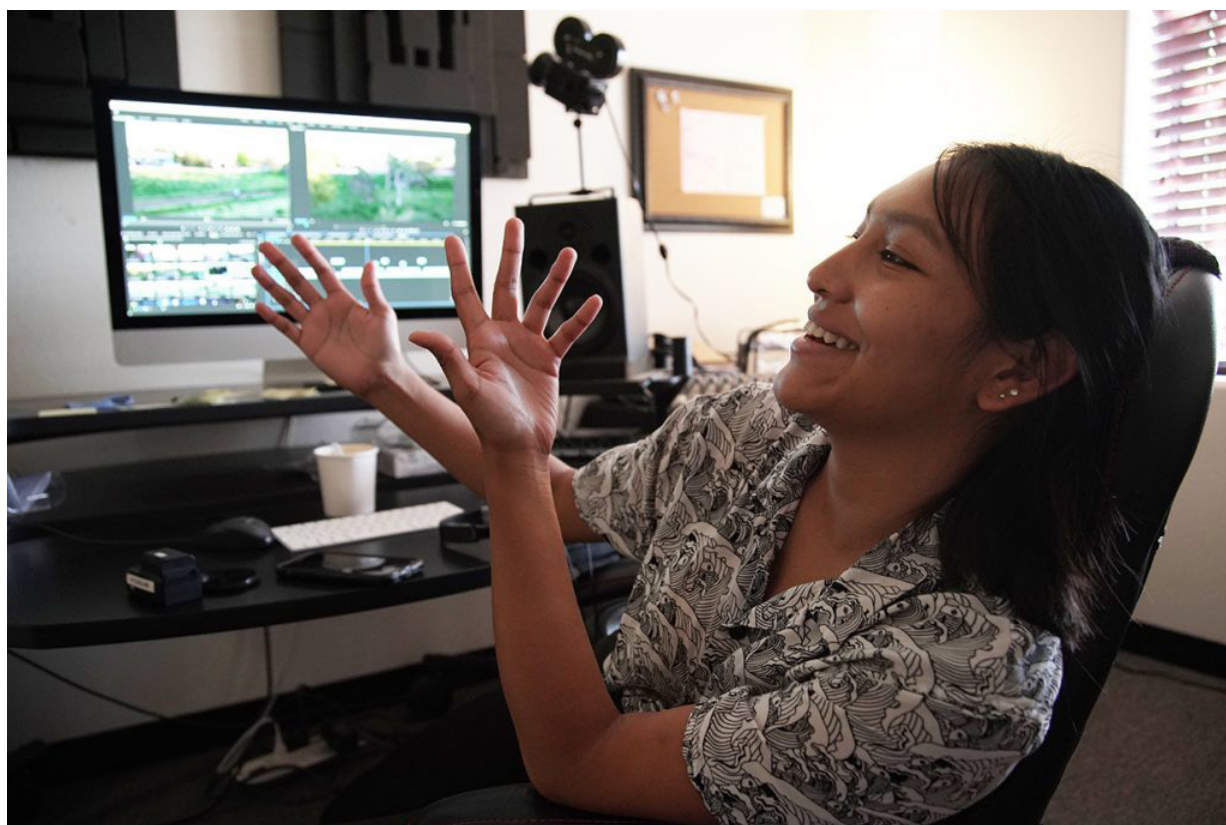
Because Littlelobe often works with communities who have experienced trauma in varying degrees, we try to bring trauma-informed care into our storytelling, community engagement and facilitation work. To engage in trauma-informed care requires you understand the prevalence of trauma in society (very high), the effects trauma has on a person (significant), and how to work with that person in a way that does not bring up again, or trigger, that trauma.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRINCIPLES:

- Safety
- Trustworthiness and transparency
- Peer support
- Collaboration
- Empowerment, voice, and choice
- Cultural, historical, and gender issues

BEFORE HEADING INTO YOUR NEXT FACILITATION, CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS:

- What topics will I cover? How are those potentially traumatic for participants?
- Am I equipped to handle a disclosure of trauma during this training? What would I need to do in order to feel equipped?
- What continuing education can I access to better understand trauma, and triggers?
- What are my triggers, and where am I at in processing them? Can I effectively facilitate these topics, or should I refer a client to another facilitator?
- What can I do to make the environments in which I facilitate feel safe?





Art & Participatory Civic Process

For the past twenty years, Littlelobe has been developing arts-in-community tools, teams and practices. Recently we have been creating and managing partnerships and projects that include an arc of engagement: modeling bottom-up strategies that link individual needs, challenges, dreams, ideas and experiences of the Santa Fe community with the larger frame of civic identity, priorities and policies.

Littlelobe continues its work holding safe spaces to bring to the surface artistically shared stories from within the Santa Fe community. We are now excited to deepen and strengthen the roots of our work more explicitly within the frame of cultivating collaborative civic processes. Over recent years, we have extended this facilitated story work into cross-sector partnerships and events, providing mechanisms, tools and new civic models to bring these stories into the domain of public discourse about policy, recentering power and self-determination back into the neighborhoods themselves.

We never know how our small activities will affect others through the invisible fabric of our connectedness. In this exquisitely connected world, it's never a question of 'critical mass.' It's always about critical connections.

- Grace Lee Boggs

AT THE HEART OF THIS WORK ARE THE FOLLOWING KEY VALUES:

1. Decision makers need to develop mechanisms to hear, understand and respond to the lived experience and cultural history of their constituencies, inclusive of their hopes and needs;
2. Our communities and resident-serving agencies can be most effective if programs are created and delivered through participatory and responsive cross-sector, cross-cultural partnerships;
3. Responsive policy-making requires time and means to build one-on-one relationships and trust across boundaries of history, culture, economics, and power;
4. The public sector lacks the tools and capabilities to hold inclusive dialogue without the abstracting influences of politics and the reductive nature of policy-making;
5. New Mexico has a richly complex history of outside-in program delivery that reiterates the disempowering legacy of colonialism;
6. New Mexico is regularly considered to be a “poor” state. This determination is based solely on monetary measures. However, New Mexico is rich with other forms of capital, including cultural and relationship capital, assets that are deeply underutilized in our state;
7. There is a need to replace the older model of top-down “outreach” programs with the more equitable and two-way notion of programs that instead use “engagement” for area non-profits and service providing institutions;
8. To flourish as human beings, we need to gather in community and build narratives that are optimistic and support our individual, environmental, social, and collective well-being;
9. For residents to engage in public policy in this way provides new points of access, dialogue, self-empowerment and as a result, opportunities for literacy, helping community members to better understand the tools and resources available as our public resources;
10. Participatory mechanisms of democratic decision-making shares tools of dialogue and storytelling, empowering those who take part in such programs and helps to decentralize power and resource allocation to be more equitable and self-deterministic.



Additional Resources

DIGITAL STORYTELLING

- [Storycenter](#)
- [Hackastory](#)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/FACILITATION

- [USDAC Story Circle](#)

MEDIA PRODUCTION

- [Video Phone Production Guide](#)
- [ACMI Online Learning](#)

INTERVIEWING

- [Storycorps](#)

TRAUMA-INFORMED FACILITATION

- [Facilitating XYZ](#)

ETHICAL REDEVELOPMENT

- [9 Principles](#)