

## Storytelling at its Best - Three Impactful Approaches for Producing High Quality Media that Captures Authentic Youth Voice

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Youthworkers know that youth are not only eager for their voices to be heard, but are often the best at telling their own stories. Video storytelling produced and led by youth, can be an extremely effective and impactful communications strategy. Many organizations struggle between the desire for authentic youth voice and efficient production quality. You can have both – and here are three different strategies to achieve the best possible results.



**1. Invest in programming, cultivate youth media producers in your organization.** Implement programming that acknowledges the technical skills required to produce media, while maintaining a value for youth development. Ideally this program will balance the youth's discovery process with the deliverables needed by the organization. Priority number one, being the

youth's experience. Priority number 2, the final product. If done with structural investment and care, this approach can produce the best videos for both message and community.

**2. Partner with a youth media group** in your area. These groups usually LOVE earned income opportunities. Additional benefits:

- You are helping to support an eco-system of opportunities for youth.
- Youth media participants have identified an interest in learning production skills;
- and well-designed programs develop competency in both technical skill and youth development.

Collaborating with youth media organizations can be brilliant. You will need to balance any differences in your missions, however I have found that youth development professionals usually share an understanding around youth development and the need for a quality final product. This makes a great fit

for youth-centered stories being told by youth media makers. And everyone stays focused on the programming they do best.

**Hire a media producer, company, or videographer, who mirrors your values for engagement.** The film and video production field is driven by developing entertaining/engaging stories - and selling them. While your organization can benefit from these skills, it is authentic youth voice that enables you to fulfill your mission and deepen the relationships needed to accomplish your work. In addition, the experience of the production may last longer in your organization's memory than the video itself.

That makes it important that you seek out a producer who has experience working with young people. Trust is critical. You know the values you want present in the design of any production, and you know the existing landscape from which your story needs to be told. Articulating these values will help you find a producer who is a good fit for your organization, driving the impact of your mission even further.

Youth can be authentically engaged, without producing the video. Telling a story through video can fall into the same rules for youth and adult partnership that you use to balance the needs to stay on mission and value youth voice. Honor the purpose you have asked the youth to the table. If that purpose is to create media, have them create media. If that purpose is something different, respect their role and expertise by asking them to participate from that agreement.

Authentically engaging youth to highlight their story or a story that they are apart of requires you to establish roles, decision makers, transparency about the power of "expertise" (can be professional, experiential, community), the needs and reason you are invested in telling this story (what key messages will be required) and the invitation and "need" for youth participation. Much like youth can drive or give input to policy or decisions, this can be true of a visual story. But you will need either a strong staff who knows how to guide this process with a producer, or a producer who already has a strong comprehension of why youth voice is critical.

At the end of the day, media is a tool that can be both fun and intensely impactful and strategic. When done right, using media to tell people about your organization and allowing staff and/or youth to reflect on their experiences strengthens and builds the momentum for your work.



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