



Report on Dignified Storytelling Consultation #3: Working Together for Dignified Storytelling

Facilitated by Altamont Group¹
January 20, 2021
6-8pm GST / 9-11am EST

CONSULTATION SUMMARY

Consultation Participants & Objectives

Thirty participants – representing international and national organizations, foundations, corporations, and academic institutions from around the world – attended Dignified Storytelling Consultation #3 on January 20, 2021. As the third of a six-part series being hosted by Dignified Storytelling, the Consultation focused on “Working Together for Dignified Storytelling” with the aim of gathering best practices for encouraging all storytelling stakeholders to practice and promote dignified storytelling.

The Consultation also provided a platform for a diverse group of practitioners, experts, and supporters to learn from each other’s ideas and experiences across sectors and geographies.

Outcomes from Consultation #3 – along with the others in the series – will help inform the *Dignified Storytelling Guidebook*, which is being developed as part of the wider Dignified Storytelling initiative with support from Dubai Cares, Expo 2020, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MOFAIC).



Some of the Participants in Consultation #3 smile for a screen shot before heading into the breakout room discussions.

Discussion Summary

After identifying the many different stakeholders involved in the storytelling process, Consultation #3 participants split into three breakout discussion sessions for conversations on ways to promote and practice dignified storytelling:

- Within organizations (Group A),
- When working with external partners (Group B), and
- In connecting with audiences, including donors (Group C).

¹ Altamont Group is a boutique advisory firm: www.altamontgroup.ca

Special thanks to the Guest Facilitators for the consultation: Dr. David Girling (University of East Anglia), Nina Ford (Global Fund for Children), and Constance Dykhuizen (JP's Peace Love Happiness Foundation)



In each group, participants first discussed several real-life scenarios, which highlighted dynamics that often arise when collaborating with the different actors involved in storytelling. They then brainstormed a list of priority guidelines, or advice, for ensuring all stakeholders can value, expect, and practice storytelling that is centered on a deep respect for human dignity. The resulting suggestions for guidelines are summarized in the table below:²

Group A: Whole Organization Approaches to Dignified Storytelling	
How can organizations promote a shared understanding and practice of dignified storytelling between senior leadership, various departments, and Headquarters and Field offices?	
<p>Priority Guidelines</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear, accessible guidelines on dignified storytelling need to be available to all staff, across departments. These guidelines should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Include visual examples ◦ List 'dos' and 'don'ts' ◦ Use sensitive language ◦ Be accurately translated into multiple languages, as appropriate ◦ Be accompanied by a toolkit that helps with the practical application • Organizations need to allow time within project plans for the necessary discussions/orientation and consent processes to take place in an authentic and meaningful way. • Appropriate training is required for ALL staff; it should not be limited to certain departments within an organization. • Top-level support for dignified storytelling is also needed from senior leadership. • Promoting dignified storytelling takes regular communication and discussions, both formal and in-formal, within an organization. • Mechanisms need to be built in to encourage organizational learning; this may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Processes that help organizations learn from mistakes and improve their practices based on lessons learned ◦ Case studies that show what works and does not work in dignified storytelling in terms of impact and fundraising ◦ Discussions on organizational values and priorities (for example, on a 'double bottom line' where profits are not the only measure of success) • Organizations may wish to establish a review board with diverse representation; this can help avoid the 'tyranny of the [single] editor' wherein content can lose meaning and nuance during the editing step. • When working with partners, guidelines need to be agreed upon – and ideally signed – at the beginning of a project so that expectations are clear. • Organizational culture needs to emphasize that dignified storytelling is everyone's responsibility – we are all accountable for the stories told.

² Every attempt has been made to represent the points shared with accuracy. Participants are welcome to suggest any changes by email to HQ@dignifiedstorytelling.com



Group B: Working with External Partners

What steps can be taken to ensure a shared understanding and practice of dignified storytelling when working with external photographers/videographers, interpreters, clients, and contributors?

Priority Guidelines

- Informed consent is essential. Contributors must understand the full implications of what can happen once a story is shared, particularly due to the global nature of anything posted on the internet.
- If consent is questionable, or a contributor may be at risk, there needs to be processes and checks in place that allow a decision to be taken to **not** move forward with publishing a story.
- Best practice includes showing story contributors the publisher-ready story and reaffirming consent.
- When possible, select external contractors who already have understanding and experience working with the nuances of the story context. At minimum, request potential contractors to provide work samples with relevance to the story and context.
- Ensure that stories are grounded in empathy, not pity, and depict whole people and whole communities.
- Understand that working relationships with external contractors often require a flexible approach depending on the human and financial resources available.
- Training is required for external contractors to clarify appropriate terminology and messaging with time built in for discussions on dignified storytelling.
- Tailored guidelines are needed for working with specific types of external partners; for example, when working with the media; donors; celebrities and influencers; and/or the Government. Each of these groups has their own agenda and parameters for engagement that may require different steps to align with dignified storytelling.

Group C: Connecting with Donors/Audiences

How can storytellers and organizations help donors and audiences to value and expect dignified storytelling approaches in the stories they consume?

Priority Guidelines

- For any story, first define the audience and consider who is likely to view/read/listen to the story.
- Ensure there is a clear 'why' for telling the story; storytellers can start by asking themselves what they are trying to accomplish through the story.
- Storytellers have a responsibility to educate themselves on relevant cultural and religious norms – and to consider and respond to the potential on-the-ground impact of the story.
- Consent forms must be appropriately tailored for each group or individual.
- Quotes need to be verified with contributors to ensure they are accurate and correct.
- Storytellers and organizations may wish to employ a template for types of stories (for example, success stories) to guide how interviews are conducted and the stories told.



- Ensure that the end **product** and the **process** both get due attention; look for ways to connect with both contributors and audiences during the *process* of developing the story.
- Be open about challenges in the story. These are real people, and audiences want to see the real impacts.
- Let contributors be honest – and provide a safe space for this honesty.
- Remember that audiences and donors have agency; they are not just passive consumers.
- All stakeholders, including staff and donors, need to be educated on what to expect and ask for in stories.
- We also fill multiple roles and are at times audiences, or donors. Storytellers can check in with their ‘audience’ self to check for honest, hopeful, and real portrayals in their stories.
- Organizations and storytellers can hold strategy sessions to consider the possible outcomes of the story; for example, to discuss possible implications if a story goes viral.
- Check in with contributors after the story is published, asking “how did you feel about seeing the story?” Use these contributor responses and feedback to guide future actions.

The next Dignified Storytelling Consultation will be held on March 3, 2021 and will continue to build on first three Consultations with a focus on “Addressing Ethical and Practical Dilemmas in Visual Storytelling.” During Consultation #4, participants will consider the realities of employing a dignified storytelling approach through dialogue around common ethical questions and practical challenges, particularly within visual storytelling.



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Annex A: Dignified Storytelling Consultation #3 Participant List

Sincere appreciation to the following participants for sharing from their wealth of knowledge and experience:

1. Sara Al-Boom, Dubai Cares
2. Suhael Al Owis, Interesting Engineering
3. Khalifa Al Suwaidi, Dubai Cares
4. Maitha AlSaadi, UAE MOFAIC
5. Rodrigo Barraza, Global Fund for Children
6. Peter Chege, Hydroponics Africa Limited
7. Constance Dykhuizen, JP's Peace Love Happiness Foundation
8. Delice Fatiro, Resonate
9. Nina Ford, Global Fund for Children
10. David Girling, University of East Anglia
11. Sabrina Giyasova, UN Expo 2020
12. Rumana Husain, Author
13. Baela Jamil, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA)
14. Michael Kass, Story & Spirit
15. Shelia Kibuthu, Sanergy
16. Leva Kwestany, The Good Side
17. Roman Levchenko, UNAIDS
18. Lucy McCray, The Freedom Story
19. Sally McMillan, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
20. Shermin Mheidly, Dubai Cares
21. Rituu B Nanda, Global Fund for Children
22. Nyo Mee Oo, Doh Eain
23. Waqas Rafique, International Trade Centre
24. Simone Sales, Federation of Asian Storytellers
25. Ragy Saro, Expo 2020 Dubai
26. Nusser Sayeed, Go Read.pk
27. Lilian Sayegh, Dubai Cares
28. Rebecca Swift, Getty Images
29. Elisabeth Waechter, United Nations Department of Global Communications
30. Byrone Wayodi, Asante Africa Foundation

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All queries about Dignified Storytelling can be sent to HQ@dignifiedstorytelling.com

To learn more about the initiative and sign up for future events, please visit the Dignified Storytelling website at: www.dignifiedstorytelling.com