

# Silence Speaks > Methods

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Our workshops rely on unique combinations of oral history, creative writing, art therapy, leadership development, and participatory media practices to assist people in telling stories as short digital videos, radio pieces, and in other formats. While we determine the specifics of workshop planning, agenda development, and follow-up through extensive dialogue with collaborating partners, a typical session brings together a group of eight to ten people who are guided through a process of:

- sharing personal experiences from their own lives and offering feedback to one another during a carefully facilitated “Story Circle”;
- recording individual voiceover narration;
- gathering and/or creating still images (through on-site or location photography and/or drawing and painting activities) and video clips; and
- learning via hands-on computer tutorials to edit -- or guiding the editing of -- these materials into completed videos.

We conclude each workshop with a story screening, appropriate closure activities, and time for storytellers to celebrate their accomplishments. Within 10-12 weeks, they receive copies of their stories in whatever form of media is most accessible to them.

Our teaching philosophy is grounded in the popular education technique of starting from where people are. In the Story Circle, we support participants in reflecting on their own memories and life circumstances as well as on those shared by others in the group, thus building connections and solidarity. Careful one-on-one work with participants focuses not only on technical concerns but also on embodied and emotional experience, and on teasing out the relationship between personal experience and historical and political context. Our collaborating partners are always on-hand to assist with all aspects of the workshop process, and sometimes coordinate additional educational, technical training, or skill building activities. When necessary, we bring in local co-trainers to provide language interpretation/translation support and other assistance.

Our work differs markedly from video production and technology training methods that emphasize the creation of a highly polished media "messages" or the intricacies of equipment and software rather than the potentially revelatory and joyful process of art and media *making*. We give workshop participants a sense of agency and control in the telling of stories about situations wherein they may have had little or no control. The experience can be transformative both personally and collectively, as storytellers confront memories, explore what it means to represent themselves in media, identify and discuss systems of power and privilege at family, community, economic, cultural, and political levels, and gain increased capacity for addressing health and rights issues .

*Note:* Our processes are **not** appropriate for individuals who are currently in crisis or are having severe symptoms of [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder](#). While we have found that most people come to storytelling when they feel ready to do so, some are unable to make this decision on their own. We work closely with our partners to determine methods for (1) ensuring informed consent about what a workshop will entail and how and where stories may be shared, once they have been created; (2) screening potential participants carefully, to assess their readiness to tell a story in a workshop setting; and (3) building in follow-up support where necessary.