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# The International Resource for Impact and Storytelling



A donor collaborative launched with the Children's Investment Fund, Compton, Ford, Open Society, and Skoll Foundations

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## The Opportunity

Technology has democratized storytelling. The form has the ability to change societies by bringing powerful stories of communities and locally-driven solutions to billions of people through channels old and new. Independent storytellers, civic leaders, and social innovators around the world are looking to expand their collaborations and deepen their cultural impact. Rapidly-evolving new media genres like virtual reality and social media—together with a proliferation of accessible digital distribution platforms—have raised the potential of local stories to accelerate progress toward more socially-just societies with their immersive power and global reach.

## The Initiative

Independent storytellers—including filmmakers, visual journalists, and artists—are indispensable in a strong civil society. Their stories spark our imaginations, build moral courage, highlight our connectedness, and increase our understanding of the vulnerable among us. When their stories are able to plug into, or counter, societies' most deeply held narratives, they serve as our civic imagination, dreaming a future worth living in. But, historically under-resourced and marginalized, these storytellers now



Illustration by Luis Carlos Redondo | In-House International  
As a part of IRIS' [SaferStorytellers.org](https://www.saferstorytellers.org) project

face a crisis of survival in increasingly hostile societies where they are often cut off from supportive ecosystems and communities.

In mid-2021—after a two year incubation to model and pilot grants within the Ford Foundation's International programs—the International Resource for Impact and Storytelling (IRIS) launched as a new donor collaborative for philanthropy focused on strengthening civil society through narrative strategies and creative storytelling for impact.

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With current emphasis on building knowledge and networks within and across Global South regions, IRIS will also have activities in the US.

IRIS supports donor partner efforts to deepen collaboration between storytellers, movements, and civil society leaders and foster inclusive, independent story ecosystems anchored in community impact. IRIS connects the dots between issue areas including gender and racial justice, environmental protection, and work to strengthen civil society.

## IRIS Aims and Approaches

IRIS is designed to support and work with donor partners as they integrate creative storytelling and narrative strategies into their work. The work is composed of four critical approaches:

- **Supporting and protecting creators:** developing resources, policies, and models for the safety and security of increasingly embattled independent storytellers internationally.
- **Bridging storytellers and frontline civic leaders:** building new and stronger international networks and convenings between storytellers, narrative shift expertise, civil society organizations, leaders, movements, and communities whose stories need to be told and who can directly benefit from the telling.
- **Identifying effective narrative analysis to inform transformative storytelling:** learning how entrenched cultural narratives across multiple themes undermine fairness, tolerance, and inclusion, and identifying frameworks and approaches to counter them.
- **Diversifying storytelling approaches and distribution models for greater impact:** expanding beyond traditional genres for civically-engaged storytelling, including fiction, animation, comedy, satire, webisodes, and immersive/VR, while demonstrating how these stories reach, educate, and mobilize audiences using meaningful evidence frameworks.

## IRIS Impact

IRIS contributes to stronger, more equitable and inclusive communities, establishment and protection of human rights and fostering social innovation through narrative strategies and storytelling that results in community benefits. Within these, IRIS focuses on five integrated impact areas:

- **Aligned Donors:** increased and accelerated funding for and knowledge about transformative storytelling, narrative analysis toward stronger, more inclusive and equitable communities.
- **Strengthened Networks:** deepened collaboration between creative storytellers and civil society leaders as part of a global ecosystem working to establish narratives that help to dismantle inequality.
- **Greater Voice, Agency, and Authorship:** validation of the process of building representation, visibility, and power in communities most affected by inequality through supporting storytelling abilities and content creators.
- **Visible Benefits in Communities:** increased community engagement with storytellers and the storytelling process to bring tangible social, economic, and policy benefits to those communities.
- **Systems Change:** focus on how existing support, funding, and distribution systems can better serve independent storytellers and the co-creation of new models and paradigms with the storytellers who rely on them.

## IRIS Highlights

