

Story Decision Tree

Is This Story Ready to Share?

Work through each question in order. If you answer “No” to any question, stop and take the indicated action before continuing.

#	Question	Yes	No
1	Has the learner given written, informed consent that covers this specific use?	Proceed to 2	Stop. Obtain consent before sharing.
2	Does the learner know where this story will appear and who will see it?	Proceed to 3	Return to the learner with specific details before sharing.
3	Has the learner been given the chance to review and approve the final version?	Proceed to 4	Share a draft with the learner first.
4	Is the story framed around what the learner accomplished, not their struggles or deficits?	Proceed to 5	Revise the language to be strengths-based.
5	Does the story avoid sensitive personal information the learner did not explicitly offer for sharing?	Proceed to 6	Remove or ask permission for that detail specifically.
6	Does the story avoid presenting this person as representative of all learners in your program?	Proceed to 7	Adjust framing or add context about learner diversity.
7	Would you be comfortable if the learner, their family, or a journalist read this story today?	Proceed to 8	Reconsider what is included or how it is framed.
8	Is the learner’s consent still current? (Not more than 12 months old, and not tied to a context that has changed?)	This story is ready to share.	Refresh consent with the learner before sharing.



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Framing Language Reference	If you did not reach step 8 in the decision tree, return to the learner or to your organization’s process. Informed consent cannot be assumed — it must be confirmed.
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Avoid: Deficit Framing	Use Instead: Strengths-Based
"struggled with reading for years"	"has been developing literacy skills"
"despite not being able to read"	"on her journey to building new skills"
"finally able to..."	"now confidently..."
"was embarrassed / ashamed"	omit — unless in learner’s own voice/words
"needed help"	"chose to invest in her learning"
"at risk"	"bringing strengths to build on"
"couldn't manage daily tasks"	"has developed skills for everyday independence"

Note:	When a learner is telling a story in their own voice, you cannot ‘police’ the language that they use. These language choices are for the organization’s framing of the story, especially in any text introducing or previewing the story.
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