Planning and Preparing a Digital Storytelling Project on the Legacy of Residential Schools
These guides are produced as a part of a grant awarded to the Oral History Centre at the University of Winnipeg by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. The Foundation’s mandate is to provide resources to address the unresolved trauma experienced by residential school Survivors, their families and communities. The Foundation helps Survivors and their families to speak about their experiences on the legacy of residential schools and to be heard. Digital storytelling encourages understanding about the residential school legacy and contributes to healing for Survivors, their families and communities.

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Creating and Sharing Digital Stories on the Legacy of Residential Schools

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Guide 2: Planning And Preparing
A Digital Storytelling Project On
The Legacy Of Residential Schools

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Planning the Digital Storytelling Project

Digital storytelling is a powerful form of storytelling that has the potential to impact individuals and communities. This guide sets out to plan and prepare a digital storytelling project with children who have been parented by a residential school survivor.

Little is known about the intergenerational effects of residential schools because this is an area that is rarely discussed. One reason for the silence surrounding the subject has been the lack of space available for children of survivors to safely and comfortably tell their stories. As children of residential school survivors journey through the digital storytelling process, they may move towards greater healing across the generations and intergenerational reconciliation.

“We all, collectively, went through so much together … that healing power of having gone through a digital storytelling project. Even in the two-hour increments once a week for three months, or for however long it was … it was incredible, the kind of healing and strength and closeness that we developed.”

The quotations included throughout these guides are the voices of Sylvia Boudreau, Dan Highway, Lorena Fontaine, Mike Fontaine, Lisa Forbes, Wendy McNab, Lisa Murdock, Linda Murphy, Clayton Sandy, and Roberta Stout.
Benefits for Participants

There are a number of benefits to being involved in a digital storytelling project. Project participants will have an opportunity to:

» express and share their experiences through group discussion and storytelling with other participants whose parents are residential school survivors;

» engage in story-based and arts-based healing processes;

» create a video about one of their own life stories that will be theirs to keep, and it will be their decision whether they want to screen their videos publicly, or keep them private; and

» learn the techniques of creating a video story, so they can produce more digital stories in the future, and they can teach others how to make digital stories.

"You’re either going to want to focus on just the children of survivors, or survivors, because I think that the emotional requirements, or the emotional impacts, are going to be completely different ... they are interconnected, but from my perspective [as a child of a survivor], from my history and my background, the person [who survived residential school] is completely different from the person hearing about [surviving residential school] ... You’re either telling the survivors’ stories, or the children of survivors, or the grandchildren of survivors. Like, how do you mesh that?"

"I can tell you that, had there been a survivor in my group of people when we were getting our stories, my story would not have been the same ... There’s no way that I would have said anything critical about survivors or, like, about my parent ... I could say the things that I could [because] there were no survivors there ... Everybody who was in the room was in the same situation as me, and there’s no way that I would have said what I said, because I just feel that survivors’ stories are so much stronger than mine and that I don’t really have the right to tell my story over theirs."
The digital storytelling project is participatory in several ways. In addition to being the ones to decide on how their digital stories will be used, shared or disseminated (resources permitting), the project participants are the ones who generate the digital stories.

The project teaches participants how to use digital editing software, so they are the ones editing their own videos, rather than having a technical support team to do the technological aspects of the project for them. Nevertheless, this is an option for the project facilitator and participants to consider, when planning the digital storytelling project.

"When I came to this project, I didn’t realize you could do something like this. The first day I sat in, I didn’t know what was going on…After we were done the project, [I thought] ‘Oh man, I can do this’…once you learned, it was easy. You master it pretty quickly. Anybody can learn technology.”

Time Commitment

The time allotted to a digital story process will depend on the specific needs of each group. Generally we have found that a minimum of 20 hours are required to do a digital story project. This can take place over consecutive days, weekends or other time periods as determined by each group. The following breakdown provides a sample of a 5 day digital workshop (35-40 hours):

**Workshop Day #1**

A.M.: Sharing circle discussion on the intergenerational effects of residential schools
P.M.: Presentation on Finding your Story
Tutorial: Storyboarding

**Workshop Day #2**

Finalizing and recording scripts for digital stories
Tutorials: Working with images using Photoshop

**Workshop Day #3**

Continued work with your images and begin the rough edits of your digital stories on the computers.
Tutorial: Introduction to digital editing software including insertion of audio and images into timelines, lining up audio and images.

**Workshop Day #4**

Finalizing and polishing digital videos.
Tutorial: Inserting music, transitions, credits and titles into timelines.

**Workshop Day #5**

Introduction to sharing and distributing digital stories with others
Tutorial: Burning copies of digital stories to DVD, setting up YouTube channels etc.
Viewing of the digital stories created over the workshop
Feast and celebration

Independent work: Create/finalize a storyboard, scan images into a computer and begin image preparation.

“Copyright”

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The time commitment required by project participants is critical, given the nature of the discussions and the progressive learning involved with each workshop session. Participants need to fully understand the goals and objectives of the project, and they must be willing to actively participate in all of the workshops.

When possible, a small honourarium (i.e., cash or a gift card) can be given to the participants as an expression of appreciation for their time commitment to the project, and to help offset any costs incurred to participate in the project. Childcare needs of participants should also be carefully considered.

**An Indigenous Approach**

There are some other important issues to consider when planning the digital storytelling project. At the forefront are Indigenous methodologies.

The digital storytelling project is grounded in the belief that First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples’ stories are intellectual traditions. The importance of Aboriginal peoples’ self-determination, their sense of ownership, control, access and possession in the project, must be acknowledged.

The value of respect – for Aboriginal communities, leadership and peoples – and the commitment to ensure First Nations, Inuit and Métis voices are fore-grounded in the project and that the project is carried out by and for Aboriginal peoples must be honoured.

Good relationships between facilitators and participants are built on mutual trust, and nurtured through open lines of communication and a shared responsibility for decision-making.

The outcome of the digital storytelling project will depend, to a large extent, on the relationships that exist going into the project, and the relationships that are built and nurtured through the project. Good relationships are an essential component of the digital storytelling project. The project facilitator, participants and collaborating organizations, as well as support technicians and funders, need to have good relationships with one another, in order to develop a shared vision for the project and collaborate in a respectful, ethical and productive manner. Given the digital storytelling project is a multi-week process and participants will be sharing their life stories with each other, good relationships, trust and friendships will form between project participants over the course of the project, but it will take time for these connections to develop (Stout et al., 2012).

“Trust needs to be established – and this doesn’t happen quickly. For the second project, it took us upwards of a month of meeting with the women to get to that point.”
Refer to Guide 4: Logistics, Checklists, and Resources for Digital Storytelling Facilitators, which provides a “Facilitator and Support Team Care Checklist” and a “Participant Care Checklist” to assist with organizing supports when doing a digital storytelling project.

Each workshop day should begin with a check-in and conclude with a debriefing. This allows time to ensure that participants have the time to reflect on what they are experiencing as they go through the project.

Participants should not leave the workshop sessions in a state of distress. A list of accessible resources should be prepared in advance of project activities and be readily available for participants, in the event they need referral to subsequent counselling services.

“I do think it’s really, really important to have support ... If people are sharing a piece of their history that maybe they’ve never disclosed to anybody, and it just slips out you’ve kind of opened up a floodgate there. I think it’s really, really important [to have support], especially for folks who might not have gone as far down the road in their healing.”

Emotional and Cultural Supports

While storytelling is an extremely therapeutic process, the telling of stories, especially ones that are so deeply personal and close to the heart, can be an emotionally difficult process to go through.

Thinking and talking about sensitive issues such as the legacy of residential schools may trigger memories of painful life experiences for some participants. For their own personal reasons, project facilitators also may experience compassion fatigue and secondary trauma.

Extreme care for everyone involved in the digital storytelling project is vital. Project facilitators must ensure that there are adequate supports available, such as health support workers to provide emotional support to participants, throughout the duration of the project.

“Part of healing is you have to uncover your memories. You’ve got to bring out those memories. That’s what these stories are doing. Once the memories come out, then you can heal ... If you don’t remember stuff, you’re just going to keep behaving unconsciously, for the rest of your life.”

The proper protocols for working with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and communities, such as passing tobacco, smudging, drumming, feasting, gift giving and other practices, should be incorporated into all aspects of the project and followed throughout the life cycle of the project. Such protocols vary across Canada and amongst different First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities.

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Confidentiality and Anonymity

The digital storytelling project involves group participation, and as such, anonymity is not possible. Still, every effort should be made to ensure the confidentiality of project participants.

While the project will require participants to maintain the confidentiality of other project participants, there is the risk that some participants may not honour their confidentiality, by talking about personal matters that may have been shared or discussed by other participants. This issue will need to be addressed verbally, as well as in writing, through participant consent. See participant consent forms included in Guide 4: Logistics, Checklists, and Resources for Digital Storytelling Facilitators.

Consent

There are three levels of consent involved with the digital storytelling project.

01. Participant acknowledgement of the goals and objectives of the project, what they will be asked to do in the project, and their voluntary agreement to actively participate in the project, as anticipated.

02. Obtaining permission to use photographs or video-recorded images from any individuals who are being photographed or videotaped by the participants in this project.

03. Participant release of their digital story for public screening and publication purposes.

Rights of the Participants

» Despite the expectations of the project, participation must be strictly voluntary.

» Project participants need to understand that they are not simply subjects in the project, but partners in the digital storytelling process and contributors of vital knowledge.

» Participants must not be forced to answer any question that they do not feel comfortable answering, and they should be permitted to withdraw their agreement to participate in the project at any time, for any reason, without penalty of any kind.

» Any concerns raised by participants should be promptly addressed.

» Participants need to know that they have a say in what happens to the stories they create and how their stories will be used.

» Whether it’s through the resources they get back, their say in how their words are used, or the individual time they spend with the project facilitator, participants should benefit from going through the digital storytelling process.

IT IS A PRIVILEGE TO GET TO HEAR THE STORIES THAT ARE CREATED AND SHARED BY THE DIGITAL STORYTELLERS. AS SUCH, THESE STORIES – AND THE CHILDREN OF SURVIVORS WHO STEP FORWARD TO TELL THEIR STORIES – MUST BE HONoured.
**Recruitment**

Once the specific criteria and number of participants have been determined, recruitment can take place. Projects may be tailored to any group composition. For example, your project may have a specific focus on one of the following groups:

» Daughters of survivors

» Sons of survivors

» Grandchildren of survivors

» Mixed groups

» Educators working with descendants of survivors

Whatever the decided composition of the group, recruitment can take a variety of approaches. Posters can be distributed to local community organizations such as Friendship Centres, community centres, Aboriginal student centres, libraries, etc. Social media can also be a good way to find participants for your project.

See Invitation to Participate template included in **Guide 4: Logistics, Checklists, and Resources for Digital Storytelling Facilitators.**

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**Budget**

Whether through grant funding or in-kind supports such as technological equipment and supplies, meeting and production space, or even professional expertise, adequate resources to support the project – and to help with sharing the digital stories after the project has ended – need to be sought and secured prior to commencing with project activities.

To determine the amount and type of resources that are needed to support the project, and to establish a realistic timeline to complete the project, it may be helpful to develop a project budget and work plan outlining the tasks that need to be done, how long each activity will take to finish, and the required resources or costs associated with each activity.

Writing a brief outline which includes scheduled dates and times of the planned activities for each workshop session may help with keeping the project on track. It may also help to ensure that no details of the project planning and activities are overlooked. The project work plan may be organized in accordance with the different stages and workshop sessions of the project.

See Project Work Plan and Project Budget templates included in **Guide 4: Logistics, Checklists, and Resources for Digital Storytelling Facilitators.**

"Communities would have to know what they need for this project and how much it would cost to bring somebody in, that kind of stuff."

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See also "Guide 4: Logistics, Checklists, and Resources for Digital Storytelling Facilitators."
Facilitating a Learning Circle Discussion

A learning circle is a meeting or gathering in which a group of people comes together to talk, share personal knowledge, and learn about a particular issue of interest. This differs from a focus group discussion in the sense that it begins from Indigenous ideas about knowledge and the uses of generating knowledge. It is a conversational method based in oral storytelling. It involves relational and dialogic participation, and as such, it is a useful method and process for facilitating the remembering of stories, experiences, teachings, traditions and connections. What’s more, in addition to generating information, a learning circle encourages sharing, relationship-building, capacity building, harmony and healing (Absolon and Willett, 2004; Dion, 2004; Kovach, 2010).

The learning circle can begin with an opening prayer or other community protocols, followed by an introduction of each of the project participants.

The project facilitator will then lead the group through a discussion on the intergenerational effects of residential schools.

Some examples of questions can include:

- When did you first start hearing about residential schools?
- What was it like to be parented by a survivor of a residential school?
- How has your family experienced the legacy of residential schools?
- How has your community been affected by the history of residential schools?

In facilitating the learning circle, it is essential for project facilitators to show they are listening and paying attention, and to make sure that no one participant dominates the conversation.

“The whole goal of this project is about going through the healing journey together and to start talking about things that aren’t talked about.”
The learning circle will help to prepare participants for drafting their own story that they will use in their digital video.

“The thing about finding the story and finding the emotions and having the chance to tell your story, and doing it within a group of people is the thing that was the most touching. And then having that conveyed to other people. That’s the most important part.”

Following the learning circle discussions, participants will be guided through a process of finding the story that they would want to share in a digital video. This process is outlined in full in Guide 3: Creating and Sharing Digital Stories on the Legacy of Residential Schools.