



Telling Stories with Respect



Resource for All

Ethical storytelling is the practice of honoring subjects when sharing narratives. At Feeding America West Michigan, the people we serve are at the center of all we do. As such, we treat neighbors with the utmost respect, sensitivity and care. We aim to communicate all stories ethically—and we are continually learning how to do this better.

WHY TELL STORIES?

It's not always easy to tell a story in a way that honors everyone featured—so some may ask why try? We believe telling stories is important because they build new perspectives, deconstruct stereotypes, illustrate the impact of our work at a deeply personal level and humanize hunger. Stories give the food bank a way to advocate and fundraise. Ultimately, stories amplify the diverse voices of those who give and receive food in our community.

HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN RESPECT IN STORYTELLING?

We know sharing the deeply personal and emotional details of a time facing hunger can be very challenging, so we ensure the neighbors being featured in videos or written materials are comfortable with the process and respected at all times. We do this by:

- **Ensuring accuracy and authenticity** by telling stories through the voices of neighbors—in their own words—whenever possible.
- **Ensuring neighbors are comfortable** by never forcing them to discuss anything they don't want to.
- **Collaborating with neighbors** to craft a story they feel most accurately represents them. Interviews always allow neighbors to tell their own story.
- **Sunsetting stories** after three years to guarantee out-of-date information is no longer being shared across our channels and to respect the fact that a neighbor's situation can drastically change in that amount of time.
- **Providing compensation to neighbors** who share their time with us. A neighbor's time is incredibly valuable. As a thank you, we provide gift cards for each household we speak with.
- **Ensuring neighbors are comfortable** with story usage. Anyone we capture in a story, photo or video signs a Feeding America national media release, and we make sure potential usage of the story is clearly explained before starting a project.
- **Respecting neighbors' desires in terms of usage.** If any particular usage makes a neighbor uncomfortable, we honor their wishes and don't use it in that way (e.g. if someone doesn't want their story shared on social media but is okay with it being used in other ways).
- **Restricting corporate partners' use of neighbors' stories** to ensure that no story is used to sell a product.
- **Working closely with our partners** to seek out neighbors who are interested in having their story captured.
- **Working with creatives who take the utmost care** when working with the people we serve.
- **Requiring food bank staff to consult** with the communication team before sharing client images or stories.

Important note: We firmly believe that neighbors' stories are always theirs. They have the right to give, withhold and withdraw consent at any point in the storytelling process.

Feeding America West Michigan is an equal opportunity provider.