



WNC Civic Hub Operational Guide

Storytelling, Media, and Narrative Quality Assurance

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How the Civic Hub Works in Practice

This Operational Guide outlines the shared systems and expectations for storytelling and media engagement through the Civic Hub. It is designed to support clarity, protect clients, and reduce burden on participating agencies.

This guide does not replace agency policies or professional judgment. It provides coordination standards for working together.

Purpose of the Civic Hub

The Civic Hub exists to help community action organizations work together more effectively when sharing stories publicly.

The Civic Hub:

- Aligns shared language and narrative framing
- Supports ethical, client-centered storytelling
- Coordinates media engagement when helpful
- Reduces duplication and confusion across agencies

The Civic Hub does not:

- Control agency messaging
- Override agency judgment
- Direct client participation
- Require participation in storytelling

Participation is always voluntary.

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Roles & Responsibilities

Clear roles protect clients and staff and support consistent practice.

Agency Responsibilities

Participating agencies are responsible for:
Protecting client dignity, safety, and choice
Determining when a story is appropriate to pursue
Identifying and mitigating potential risks
Ensuring accuracy and context in program stories
Designating a Program Director or Story Steward

Agencies retain final authority to pause or stop storytelling at any point.

Program Director / Story Steward Responsibilities

The Program Director or Story Steward is responsible for:
Holding trusted relationships with clients
Making respectful, pressure-free invitations
Supporting clients in shaping what they want to share
Managing consent and documentation
Coordinating with the Civic Hub when stories move forward
Supporting clients before, during, and after sharing

This role exists to protect people, not extract stories.

Story Lifecycle

All stories shared through the Civic Hub follow a common process:

Agency identifies a potential story
Client invitation and conversation (optional, no pressure)
Readiness and risk check
Consent confirmed and documented
Story shared with the Civic Hub
Coordination and preparation
Media engagement or use
Client follow-up and aftercare
Stories may pause or stop at any stage.

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Media Engagement Basics

When stories involve media:

- Clients are not contacted directly without staff support
- Interview scope and format are agreed upon in advance
- A Story Steward or staff member is present or available
- Trauma-informed practices are expected
- Corrections or withdrawals are addressed when possible

The Civic Hub supports coordination to make media engagement clearer and safer for everyone involved.

Documentation & Consent

- Participation is voluntary and not tied to services
 - Consent is informed, documented, and revocable
 - Consent forms are stored securely by agencies
 - Story use is time-limited and tracked
 - Requests to withdraw consent are honored promptly
 - Clear documentation protects clients and organizations alike.
-

Quality Assurance & Support

- Quality and safety are supported through:
 - Shared narrative standards
 - Clear roles and escalation pathways
 - Ongoing communication across agencies
 - Reflection and learning over time
 - Concerns should be raised early and without fear of penalty.
-

Funding to Support the Collaborative Work

TBD

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Appendix: Checklists & Tools

The following tools support consistent practice across agencies:

1. When Is a Story Appropriate? – Quick Story Readiness Checklist

A short tool to assess client readiness, safety, and timing.

2. Client Story Invitation – Plain Language Script

Guidance for inviting participation without pressure.

3. Consent & Media Use Overview

A simple summary of consent options and client rights.

4. Story Lifecycle at a Glance

A one-page visual of the shared storytelling process.

5. Media Engagement Quick Guide

Expectations and boundaries for working with journalists.

6. Ways Stories From the WNC Civic Hub May Be Used

7. Risk Pause & Escalation Guide

What to do when something feels unclear or unsafe.

Closing Reminder

Narratives shape policy. Policies shape lives.

This Operational Guide exists to ensure that storytelling through the Civic Hub strengthens dignity, accountability, and collective impact.

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Appendix: Checklists & Tools

When Is a Story Appropriate? Quick Story Readiness Checklist

Purpose: To help staff decide whether a story is appropriate to pursue right now. This is about readiness and safety—not importance or worth.

A story should move forward only if all boxes are checked.

Client Readiness

- Client is not in an active crisis
- Client feels emotionally ready to reflect
- Trust is established
- Storytelling will not interfere with services

Voluntary Choice

- Client expressed interest without pressure
- Services are clearly not affected
- Client knows they can say no or stop at any time

Safety & Risk

- No risk to housing, employment, benefits, or safety
- Identifying details can be protected if needed

Consent

- Client understands how and where the story may be used
- Consent can be documented and withdrawn

Staff Capacity

- Story Steward available
- Time and support exist for preparation and follow-up

Decision

- Proceed
- Pause and revisit
- Do not proceed

Reminder: Not telling a story is sometimes the right decision.

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Client Story Invitation

Plain-Language Script

Purpose: To invite participation without pressure or expectation.

Suggested Script:

“Sometimes people choose to share their experiences to help others understand what life is really like and why these programs matter. There is absolutely no pressure, and your services will never be affected either way. Would you like to hear more about what that could look like?”

Key Guidelines

- Ask in a calm, private setting
- Avoid urgency or deadlines
- Make “no” feel completely acceptable
- Be prepared to stop the conversation at any point

Consent & Media Use Overview

What Clients Must Understand

Purpose: To ensure informed, ethical consent.

Before proceeding, confirm the client understands:

- Participation is voluntary
- They can choose what to share and what not to share
- Where their story or image may appear
- How long their story may be used
- Whether their name, image, or details will be used
- They can change their mind or withdraw consent

Good Practice: Explain consent in conversation first—forms come second.

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Story Lifecycle at a Glance

Shared Process Overview

Purpose: To create consistency across agencies.

All stories move through these steps:

1. Potential story identified by agency
2. Client invitation (optional, no pressure)
3. Readiness and risk check
4. Consent confirmed and documented
5. Story shared with Civic Hub
6. Preparation and coordination
7. Media engagement or public use
8. Client follow-up and aftercare
9. Reflection and learning

Note: Stories may pause or stop at any stage.

Media Engagement Quick Guide

Expectations & Boundaries

Purpose: To reduce confusion and protect clients during media interactions.

Before media engagement:

- Interview scope and format agreed upon
- Client prepared and supported
- Story Steward identified

During media engagement:

- Client is not alone
- Trauma-informed practices are used
- Boundaries are respected

After media engagement:

- Client check-in completed
- Corrections requested if needed
- Consent limits reviewed

Important: Clients are never contacted directly by media without staff support.

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Ways Stories From the WNC Civic Hub May Be Used

(Check all that apply)

Journalistic & Editorial Uses

- News articles and investigative reporting
- Radio, podcast, or audio storytelling
- Video journalism or documentary-style content
- Editorial features, op-eds, or series
- Local, regional, or statewide media distribution
- Syndication or republication by partner news outlets

Educational & Public Awareness Uses

- Community education materials
- Trainings or workshops (staff, partners, journalists)
- Presentations, panels, or public forums
- Academic or research-informed publications
- Civic education and voter education efforts (nonpartisan)

Organizational Communications

- Organizational websites and blogs
- Email newsletters
- Annual reports or impact reports
- Program materials or outreach publications
- Donor, funder, or stakeholder communications

Digital & Social Media

- Social media posts (organic)
- Digital storytelling campaigns
- Short-form video or audio clips
- Website features or story hubs

Advocacy & Policy Engagement (Nonpartisan)

- Policy briefs or issue reports
- Testimony or issue education materials
- Briefings for policymakers or public officials
- Community-informed policy discussions

Creative & Narrative Projects

- Narrative change initiatives
- Exhibits or public storytelling installations
- Collaborative storytelling projects
- Community storytelling events

Funding & Sustainability

- Grant applications and grant reports
- Funder presentations or proposals
- Program evaluation and learning materials

Internal Learning & Evaluation

- Program evaluation and impact assessment
- Staff and partner learning sessions
- Continuous improvement and planning

Limits & Protections (Always Apply)

- Stories will not be used for commercial advertising or paid endorsements
- Stories will not be altered in a misleading or harmful way
- Use will follow consent preferences and any limits selected
- Names, images, and organizational affiliation will be used only with consent

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Risk Pause & Escalation Guide

When Something Feels Unclear or Unsafe

Purpose: To support staff in making protective decisions.

Pause the Process if:

- Client expresses hesitation or distress
- New safety, legal, or housing concerns arise
- Media pressure increases unexpectedly
- Consent feels rushed or unclear
- Staff feels unsure or uncomfortable

What to Do:

- Pause storytelling immediately
- Check in with the client
- Loop in Program Director or Civic Hub
- Document concerns
- Decide whether to proceed, delay, or stop

Key Reminder: Pausing is a sign of care—not failure.

These tools exist to support good judgment, not replace it. When in doubt, choose the option that best protects dignity, safety, and trust.



WNC Civic Hub Participation Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

This Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) outlines shared expectations for organizations participating in the Western North Carolina Civic Hub (WNC Civic Hub), a collaborative network of community action agencies, nonprofit partners, media partners, and civic organizations working together to strengthen community voice, trusted information, and coordinated communication across Western North Carolina.

Purpose

The WNC Civic Hub exists to support collaboration and alignment across shared issue areas by:

- Coordinating communication and storytelling efforts;
- Elevating community-informed perspectives and lived experience;
- Supporting ethical, trauma-informed information sharing;
- Strengthening relationships among community-serving organizations and partners.

Participation does not imply advocacy alignment, political activity, or endorsement of positions.

Participation & Communication

Participating organizations agree to:

- Designate a primary point of contact for Civic Hub communications;
- Participate in periodic convenings, working groups, or information-sharing activities as capacity allows;
- Share relevant updates, insights, or emerging issues related to shared focus areas;
- Engage in open, respectful, and timely communication with partners.

Participation is voluntary and flexible based on organizational capacity.

Information Sharing & Media Engagement

Participants agree to:

- Respect confidentiality and sensitivity of non-public information;
- Seek consent before public attribution of statements, stories, or organizational positions;
- Uphold ethical, trauma-informed, and consent-based storytelling practices;
- Coordinate when media or storytelling efforts intersect shared initiatives.

Participation does not obligate any organization to engage in media or public communications.

Values & Principles

Participants commit to shared principles of:

- Equity, inclusion, and respect for lived experience;
- Accuracy, transparency, and ethical communication;
- Collaboration and mutual accountability.

Governance & Independence

The Civic Hub operates through shared leadership and consensus-building when possible. Participation does not confer decision-making authority over another organization's programs, communications, or policies. Each organization retains full independence.

Non-Binding Agreement

This MOU is not a legal contract and does not create financial, legal, or fiduciary obligations. Participation may be discontinued at any time with notice to the Civic Hub coordinator.

Acknowledgement

By signing below, the participating organization affirms its intent to participate in good faith and uphold the shared principles of the WNC Civic Hub.

Organization Name: _____

Authorized Representative: _____

Title: _____

Email: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Media & Storytelling Addendum (Draft)**

This Media & Storytelling Addendum (“Addendum”) supplements the WNC Civic Hub Participation Memorandum of Understanding and applies only when participating organizations engage in storytelling, media production, or public communications through the WNC Civic Hub. Participation in storytelling or media activities is voluntary and not required for Civic Hub participation.

Purpose

This Addendum establishes shared standards to ensure storytelling and media engagement are ethical, accurate, trauma-informed, and respectful of community members and participating organizations.

Consent & Participation

- No organization, staff member, or community participant is required to participate in storytelling or media activities.
- Informed consent must be obtained prior to recording, publishing, or distributing stories involving community members or organizational representation.
- Consent may be withdrawn prior to publication.

Factual Accuracy & Organizational Review

- Participating organizations have the right to review content in which they are directly referenced for factual accuracy, context, and potential harm prior to publication.
- Review is limited to verification of facts, descriptions, and representations and does not extend to editorial control or viewpoint.
- Reasonable timelines for review will be mutually agreed upon to avoid unnecessary delays.
- Journalistic or editorial independence is respected, while recognizing the importance of accuracy and community trust.

Attribution, Names, Logos & Images

- Organizational names, logos, staff images, facilities, and identifying visuals will be used only with prior consent from the organization.
- Attribution language will be reviewed and approved prior to publication.
- No organization will be represented as speaking on behalf of the entire WNC Civic Hub unless explicitly agreed in writing.
- Participation in a story does not imply organizational endorsement of broader narratives or positions.

Ethical & Trauma-Informed Storytelling

Participants agree to:

- Use strengths-based, non-extractive storytelling practices;
- Respect boundaries related to sensitive or traumatic experiences;
- Avoid sensationalism or misrepresentation of lived experience;
- Prioritize dignity, safety, and autonomy of storytellers.

Distribution & Use

- Stories will be distributed only through agreed-upon channels and for agreed-upon purposes.
- Reuse, syndication, or paid amplification beyond the original scope requires additional consent.
- Proper credit will be given to storytellers, organizations, and creators as agreed.

Concerns & Safeguards

- Any partner may raise concerns regarding accuracy, consent, or potential harm.
- The Civic Hub will work collaboratively to address concerns, including pausing publication if necessary.
- Corrections will be made promptly if material inaccuracies are identified after publication.

Non-Binding Nature

This Addendum is not a legal contract and does not create financial or legal obligations. It reflects shared values and good-faith practices among Civic Hub participants.

Photo Use Permission & Journalistic Release Form**

The Western North Carolina Civic Hub (“WNC Civic Hub”) collaborates with journalists and community partners to share accurate, ethical, and community-informed stories. This form explains how photographs may be used and outlines your rights and choices.

Participant Information: _____

Name: _____

Phone or Email: _____

Date(s) Photos Were Taken: _____

Purpose of Photo Use

Photographs may be used in connection with journalistic, educational, and public-interest storytelling related to the work of the WNC Civic Hub and its partners. This may include use in:

- News stories and editorial content
- Digital publications and websites
- Social media posts sharing published stories
- Grant reports, presentations, or public education materials

Photos will not be used for commercial advertising or paid endorsements.

Journalistic Standards & Protections

- Photographs will be used in a manner consistent with accepted journalistic ethics, including accuracy, fairness, and appropriate context.
- Images will not be altered in a way that misrepresents the subject or events depicted.
- Photographs may be accompanied by factual captions to provide context.
- Participation does not guarantee publication.

Consent & Voluntary Participation

Please initial all that apply:

- I understand my participation is voluntary and I may decline to be photographed.
- I give permission for photographs of me to be used for the purposes described above.
- I understand that once a photograph is published as part of a news story, removal may not always be possible.
- I understand that future use of my image may be discontinued upon request.

Name & Identification

- I give permission for my name to be used with my photograph
- I prefer my photograph to be used without my name
- I understand that in journalistic contexts, identifying information may be used when relevant to the story and agreed upon in advance

Limits on Use

- My image will not be used in a misleading, sensational, or harmful way.
- My image will not be sold or licensed for commercial purposes.
- My image will not be reused outside the original journalistic or educational context without additional consent.

Organizational & Editorial Independence

I understand that:

- Journalists maintain editorial independence.
- I do not control final editorial decisions.
- I may request correction of factual inaccuracies related to my identification or representation.

Acknowledgement

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understand this form and give permission as described.

Participant Signature:

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

If participant is under 18 years of age:

I am the parent or legal guardian and give permission for my child's image to be used as described.

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Storytelling & Interview Consent Form**

The Western North Carolina Civic Hub (“WNC Civic Hub”) works with community members, journalists, and partner organizations to share stories in ways that are accurate, ethical, and respectful. This form explains how your story may be shared and gives you choices about your participation.

Participant Information

Name: _____

Preferred Name (if different): _____

Phone or Email: _____

Date(s) of Interview/Recording: _____

Voluntary Participation

- Your participation is voluntary.
- You may choose not to answer any question.
- You may stop the interview at any time.
- Choosing not to participate will not affect your relationship with any organization.

What You Are Agreeing To

By signing this form, you are giving permission for your story to be:

- Interviewed and recorded (audio, video, and/or written notes)
- Used for journalistic, educational, and public-interest storytelling
- Shared through agreed-upon channels related to the WNC Civic Hub
- Your participation does not guarantee publication.

Consent Choices

Please initial all that apply:

- I agree to be interviewed and recorded
- I understand my story may be edited for length and clarity
- I understand my story will not be altered in a way that changes its meaning
- I understand my story will not be used for commercial advertising

Limits on Use

(Optional — Please Check Any That Apply)

I give permission for my story to be used with the following limits:

- No social media use
- No video use (audio and/or written only)
- No audio use (written only)
- No use in news media (organizational or educational use only)
- Other limits (please describe):

If no boxes are checked, your story may be used across standard Civic Hub channels, including news, digital, and educational materials.

Name & Identification

Please choose one:

- I give permission for my full name to be used
- I prefer to use my first name only
- I prefer to use a pseudonym: _____

(We will discuss identification and context with you in advance.)

Accuracy & Review

- You may request to review quotes or sections of your story for factual accuracy and context prior to publication when feasible.
- This review is for accuracy and harm prevention, not editorial control.
- Journalists maintain final editorial decisions.

Trauma-Informed Practices

- You are not required to share details that feel unsafe or distressing.
- We will respect boundaries around sensitive experiences.
- You may pause or stop at any time.
- Support resources may be offered if needed.

Use & Withdrawal of Consent

- You may withdraw consent before publication by contacting the WNC Civic Hub.
- Once a story is published, it may not always be possible to remove it, but future use will be discontinued upon request.
- Your story will not be reused outside the agreed-upon context without additional consent.

Acknowledgement

By signing below, I confirm that:

- I have read and understand this form
- I had the opportunity to ask questions
- I give consent as described above

Participant Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

If participant is under 18 years of age:

I am the parent or legal guardian and give permission for my child's image to be used as described.

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____