

Facilitating Participant-Centered, Trauma-Informed Communications

Background

Our work in communications around homelessness has required us to interview individuals for various storytelling opportunities, whether they are for video, written articles, — or facilitate interviews through third parties, like corporate partners or journalists.

In this work, we may find ourselves in situations where we will interview people about experiences that can be sensitive or traumatic for the individual, including but not limited to their own experiences of homelessness. We consider it our responsibility to ensure we — or the individuals conducting the interviews — are designing our interview and engagement with those individuals to be participant-centered, respectful, and trauma informed.

This document contains resources and guidance we follow when conducting or facilitating these kinds of opportunities.

Resources

- [A Guide to GPRA Data Collection Using Trauma informed Interviewing Skills](#), SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)
 - [A Trauma-Informed Approach to Working with Survivors of Sexual Assault \(Slide Deck\)](#), Kate Watson, M.A., Ed.M., Watson Wellness Center
 - [Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview Overview](#), FETI Certification
 - [Trauma and Resiliency Informed Care Toolkit](#), Downtown Women's Center
 - [SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#), SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)
 - [Homelessness and Traumatic Stress Training Package](#), Homelessness Resource Center and The National Center on Family Homelessness
 - [Utilizing Trauma-Informed Approaches to Trafficking-related Work](#), Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute
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Suggested Practices

- Build trust by being transparent about the expectations and process. All participants should sign a consent form, but that should not be the extent of the discussion. Have a conversation that enables both parties to come to a shared understanding on the following before conducting the interview:
 - **Why the interview is occurring**
 - **What questions will be asked:** we suggest proposing questions and discussing with the interviewee what topics should not be broached, and what they feel comfortable with.
 - **All of the ways the participant can indicate that they want to end the interview**
 - **What you will do with their information, what will and will not be confidential, and how their privacy will be protected:** we suggest asking questions like whether they want their full name used and offering options to use just a first or last name, or a pseudonym, if they feel more comfortable.
 - **What they will and won't receive at all stages of the interview:** we recommend building in processes for individuals to review any communications they are featured in and ensuring they are compensated for their time. We pay individuals \$75 an hour.
- Build a safe environment:
 - Set up interview in a safe, accessible, familiar space with clear pathways to exits
 - Provide clear avenues for interviewee to stop and exit space at any point
 - Consider how much traffic interviewing area receives
 - Allow the interviewee to have someone on site for support.
- Practice empathy and integrity — avoid invalidating interviewee's emotions and experiences.
- Be alert to body language indicative of trauma response (changes in body language, long pauses, lack of eye contact, etc.); listen attentively and take notice of any shifts. Take these shifts in body language and signs of dissociation as opportunities to slow down/stop/shift questions.
 - Know the [Fight, Flight, and Freeze Responses](#)
- Let interviewee lead conversation, give them agency (provide options when possible, let them know they can stop the interview at any point)
 - Consider any barriers to empowerment, get feedback on process
 - Open-ended questions give power back to interviewee
 - Once the interview is over, give them an opportunity to review and approve the content that features them
- If the interviewee is participating in a video/photo shoot, or any type of interview involving props, provide all props for scenes in advance — do not require the

interviewee to provide any items themselves or assume they will have any particular items available for use.

- Provide self-care opportunities to combat stress for interviewers
- If we are not directly conducting interviews, interviewers should follow similar protocols and avoid actions which may break down established levels of trust.