

Restorative Narrative Objectives + Elements

At ivoh we believe that media can inspire us to imagine and create a better world. We partner with journalists, photographers, gamers and filmmakers to teach and create stories that build empathy and compassion, connecting us across differences and orienting us toward hope. Now we are scaling up our work to engage communities, universities, newsrooms and other media in collaborative, place-based efforts to shift the public dialogue from fear and despair to promise and possibility.

ivoh created the Restorative Narrative genre, a strengths-based approach, to train media makers to tell the deeper stories of people and communities experiencing adversity—such as a school shooting or natural disaster, or systemic barriers, like poverty—and tapping into their strength and resilience to cope and grow. Restorative Narrative captures the realities of those working to reclaim or rebuild their lives, by highlighting strengths, potential, healing and growth, instead of only underscoring what is broken as conventional media often does.

Restorative Narrative Objectives

Through thoughtful inquiry and genuine, trusting partnerships among storytellers and individuals and communities, Restorative Narrative is designed to tell stories about individuals and communities rebuilding and renewing after challenging experiences such as crises, disasters, chronic systemic injustices or challenges and civil or moral failures and resulting traumas to:

- ✓ Foster resilience and recovery, basis for new growth, and/or restoration process for some positive/beneficial quality that was damaged, lost or taken for individuals and communities (and for audiences affected by witnessing the trauma).
- ✓ Identify and honor individuals' or communities' desired goals or outcomes for sharing their story.
- ✓ Allow individuals/communities agency through telling their story, while shedding light on the steps that the audience can take in similar situations.
- ✓ Increase individuals'/communities' reliance on, trust of, and partnership with storytellers who can tell more complete, authentic, and accurate stories that are representative of the community.
- ✓ Amplify voices of those who are traditionally unheard through individuals/communities telling their own experience.
- ✓ Illuminate the best aspects of humanity; authentic, relatable and universal truths; and lessons that all can inspire vicarious growth, hope, empathy, restoration, as well as action in audiences.
- ✓ Create sense of connection among individuals/communities (and groups they represent) and the audience by seeing commonalities across differences, which can stimulate changed perspectives and inspire constructive responses on individual and/or community levels.
- ✓ Have restorative effects on storytellers (e.g., reflection, growth, restored fulfillment, hope or sense of purpose) through storytelling partnership with individuals/communities.

Restorative Narrative Elements

To be considered Restorative Narratives, storytellers must incorporate the below elements in their projects:

- ✓ **Are strengths-based** as they inquire into and focus on individuals'/communities' responses to challenges—revealing their potential, strengths and assets (i.e., beyond focusing on the bad situation, loss, blame)—demonstrating to the audience that there are resilient responses to, and possibilities in the face of, trauma.
- ✓ **Reveal restorative experiences** by portraying individuals/communities who are relying on resilience, hope and other strengths to seize opportunities and move from adversity and trauma toward restored beneficial qualities, such as:
 - Personal: dignity, peace, faith, wellbeing, stability, security, independence, persistence, determination, hope, courage, growth, acceptance, truth, meaning, purpose, adaptation, agency, wonder, joy;
 - Interpersonal: care, love, trust, respect, understanding, connection, interdependence;
 - Community: cooperation, collaboration, harmony, justice, fairness, rights, equality.
- ✓ **Are authentic** by remaining true to individuals'/communities' perceived experience (positive and negative characteristics and circumstances) and reporting the reality and facts of their situation, however difficult or dark.
- ✓ **Create empathy** by helping the audience to vicariously experience individuals'/communities' situations through narrative arcs that are character driven.
- ✓ **Emphasize common ground** and shared values of individuals/communities with different groups and society.
- ✓ **Investigate and explain** causes of challenges individuals/communities face, including systemic ones (e.g., injustice/discrimination).
- ✓ **Give voice** to traditionally unheard individuals/communities, providing a counter-narrative to how their group is commonly represented.
- ✓ **Show meaning making**, how individuals/communities are reflecting and trying to understand their experience and cope with impact from the distance of time, enabling a revised life narrative before and after the trauma, shift in perceptions and relationships, possibility for growth, changed role/identity, and reduced distress.
- ✓ **Are sustained inquiries** that portray the breadth and depth of individual's/communities' experience of traumatic impact and recovery—beyond the “breaking news” of the event—which are often long, developmental processes. The project should reflect that period of months/years, both forward and backward in time, that gives individuals/communities the opportunity to heal, but the reporting/writing or creative process does not necessarily have to be many months- or years-long.