

Amplifying Community Stories

Radical Imagining: Communities shaping health as we emerge from the Pandemic

What is this initiative?

Through the Amplifying Community Stories project, Empire Health Foundation and the Empire Health Foundation Community Advocacy Fund are engaging a diverse set of community partners from across our region in the development of critical community stories. Specifically, we would like to resource community-based organizations to develop stories that can help shape community health and vitality coming out of the Pandemic. In particular, we are interested in partnering in communities that are not often afforded the opportunity to invest in developing and understanding their own stories about health and vitality. At the discretion of these organizations, these stories might provide critical information about where we and others might:

- Build deeper and more authentic relationships with these communities and organizations
- Invest in community-defined capacity
- More effectively support advocacy and organizing towards increased community health and vitality

Why storytelling?

This project is premised on the notion that stories are a powerful mechanism by which communities shape their identity and engagement in the broader region. It is driven by the belief that community leaders and organizations, particularly in our Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color, our LGBTQ+ communities, our neighborhoods with the highest concentration of people struggling in poverty, and in our rural towns and economies, are not afforded the same privilege as others to pause and take the time to identify what is important to their prosperity and how to go after it. It is also based on the reality that storytelling has always been a powerful expertise by which Indigenous communities have transmitted information, knowledge, and wisdom. The Amplifying Community Stories Project works to create space for this successful and time-honored practice.

Why now?

The COVID Pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, and the social justice protests across the country and throughout our region have all acted like external forces shifting the landscape upon which we stand. As we come out of the Pandemic, organizations and communities alike are beginning to radically imagine the future we want to be a part of. EHF believes every community should have the opportunity to engage in this imagining and to craft the stories and narrative that can both make this future visible and enlist others in supporting the effort to make it a reality. This initiative is intended to ensure that lack of resources and space are not barriers to this important work.

What are the hopes?

These hopes are an attempt to communicate our interests and values in approaching this initiative and serve as a guide for us as we implement this project and work together with our communities.

What this is:	What this isn't:
An opportunity for community leaders to inform the development of this initiative.	A performative exercise for our benefit.
An opportunity to develop a story with authentic value to the organization and community that creates it.	An extractive process to tell other people's stories for them.
An opportunity to honorably incorporate other stories into our own understanding and story of our role in this region.	An uninformed telling of EHF's story without listening first to the stories of others.
A process that places leaders, organizations, and communities at the center of design and implementation.	A centering of the same institutions, organizations, and communities that are predominantly at the center of contemporary stories.
An opportunity for the story-tellers to define the right medium, content, and context.	A cookie cutter approach to telling diverse stories in a uniform way.

Who should apply?

Not-for-profit or public organizations that work on behalf of a specific community that has not been afforded the same opportunity to incorporate story-telling into the development of their visions, strategies, advocacy, and programs. While not limited solely to not-for-profit organizations, the intent is to partner with organizations whose mission is to serve a community and whose leadership and origin is reflective of this community. If a group has a community-centered/community-driven mission but is not formally incorporated, we will also support applications with an identified fiscal sponsorship. Only organizations operating in and representing story development and work within the Inland Northwest Region will be accepted. See additional definitions below.

We will invite applications from a group or organization that identifies with a defined community. **For us, community means a group with a shared sense of identity and belonging, and possibly of history and culture.** A community might be defined by geography, race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other shared lived experience. Our priority will be communities that have been under-supported by systems in our region and have been subject to persistent health inequities. We will ask you to describe how this is true for your community.

What are the funding amounts?

The funding amounts are \$25,000 - \$50,000 dependent on the scope and scale of your story-telling project. Based upon previous work, we anticipate that most projects will cost \$25,000. We trust that you will ask for the amount of funding your project will require. We know making the space for this type of project requires money. We know that there are many other competing interests for your energy and leadership at this time. We want to provide the right amount of money to support this work and we want to fund as many grantees as possible. Grants will be made from the Empire Health Community Advocacy Fund, a social welfare organization that is a partner entity of Empire Health Foundation.

What types of projects will be funded?

We will prioritize organizations who can articulate an ability to develop a story focused on health and vitality in their community and can complete this project by the end of the calendar year. We will prioritize organizations that serve a community that has been under-supported by systems in our region and has been subject to persistent health inequities.

Questions we will be asking when reviewing individual applications will include:

- Is this a grassroots effort that brings historically disadvantaged community members together to tell their stories and radically imagine futures they want for themselves?
- Does this project create space for community to tell their story in the medium(s) that are most meaningful to them?
- Is the grantee's leadership reflective of the community they hope to bring together?

Questions we will ask when selecting projects for the fund as a whole include:

- Does this fund elevate the stories of many distinct communities across the region?

These questions are reflective of our priorities for this initiative, and we will use these questions as the criteria for selecting grant recipients. Our intent is to engage as many diverse and distinct communities as possible, and this may mean we choose between applicants who serve the same community. We anticipate that this will be a competitive grant process and not all applicants will be awarded.

What is the application and review process?

The application cycle will run June 11, 2021 - July 9, 2021. Interested organizations will be asked to respond to a simple set of questions in 1-2 pages. We anticipate projects will begin no later than August and be completed by December 2021. We have allocated \$500,000 to be granted to organizations for this project. If you plan to apply, please let us know by June 25, 2021 via stories@empirehealthfoundation.org with the email subject: Intent to Apply for Amplifying Community Stories Initiative. We will prioritize review of those organizations that have submitted this notice.

We will prioritize applications from organizations whose mission is to serve a community and whose leadership and origin is reflective of this community. Local non-profit organizations and community coalitions/groups fiscally sponsored by non-profits operating in and representing story development within the Inland Northwest Region are eligible to apply. This process is subject to change.

To develop your proposal, please use the following format and provide responses to the questions included here:

Example Format

Email To: stories@empirehealthfoundation.org

Name or organization
Year of IRS Determination
Tax ID #
Executive Leadership
Board Leadership
Grant Contact Person

1. What community do you represent? Describe the relationship between your organization and this community. Include a description of how your organizational leadership (Board and Staff) is reflective of this community.
2. Generally, what story do you want to tell? How (what medium) will you tell or document this story?
3. How much funding are you requesting?
4. Is your organization interested in additional funds or technical assistance to access American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) resources? If yes, what ARPA resources is your group interested in and what support would be needed?

Total Funds Available: \$500,000
Grant Range: \$25,000-50,000
Typical Grant Size: \$25,000
Est. No. of Grants: 16-20

Grant Type: General Operating
Eligible: Non-profits, public organizations & fiscally sponsored groups

Application Open: June 11, 2021
Application Deadline: July 9, 2021
Project Start: August 2021
Projects Due: December 2021

Application Format: 1-2 pages
Storytelling Mediums: You decide
Application Questions: See below

Contact these folks with questions:

Zeke Smith, EHF President
zeke@empirehealthfoundation.org
(503) 453-2832

Jeri Rathbun, EHF Program Officer
jeri@empirehealthfoundation.org
(509) 919-3047

What storytelling mediums will be accepted?

While we are open to a diverse set of mediums for these stories, we would anticipate most of them will be documented in writing or through audio/video recordings. Other mediums might include development of

a community mural, a performance piece, or an approach we have not considered. If an organization would like to tell a story in a medium not identified above, we will invite them to share this idea as part of their application.

We will provide any interested grantee examples of story-telling tools and a workshop about different approaches to story development, story-telling, and the use of stories as an advocacy strategy. It is our hope to foster an environment where grantees can share their ideas, approaches and experience with each other in this workshop, as well as through a gathering (in person or virtual depending on public safety) at the end of this project.

Commonly Asked Questions

Can we partner with others, hire consultants, or pay the people who are telling our stories? Are there restrictions on the money?

Funding will be issued as general operating grants, by which we mean we will not be asking you to tell us what you are budgeting for up front, nor will you need to seek approval for the budget. We are interested in understanding how you use the money, but the decision and discretion for what you spend it on will be yours.

What kinds of supports, tools or coaches would you be willing to provide?

We are still in the planning phase of outlining a variety of tools and supports to make available to our grantee partners, including offering storytelling workshops facilitated by effective story-tellers. We are also exploring contracting with story-telling coaches and photographers/videographers as a paid service to interested partners. These added supports would be voluntary, as we know many of you already have the expertise and a process designed and are just seeking the financial resources to make it come to life. Additional input would be appreciated as we solidify our technical support for community partners: What kinds of support make sense? What kinds of supports, tools or coaching would you want access to? Who is an effective story-teller you know who might be interested in working with us as a coach on this project?

What does reporting look like?

We don't believe in over-burdening you with significant reporting or story-telling for our behalf. We do want to understand the process you use and to hear/see the stories you develop. In fact, we may want to seek your permission to relay your story as part of our learning about the communities in our region, but we won't do this without seeking permission and understanding about how we might tell the story. We also are more than happy to amplify your stories by sharing them through our platform if that is something of interest to your organization/community.

We hope to collect the information about processes and stories developed through a gathering of all of the initiative grantees at the end of the year. The group gathering would replace the need to write a traditional end-of-grant report and support our hope that the collective sharing might create space for collaboration and learning.

How can participants learn from one another? Will a formal learning cohort be offered?

We would appreciate your guidance in answering these questions. If enough organizations/communities are interested in developing a cohort approach where all project participants are

brought together for learning and sharing a few times during the course of this project, we would be happy to support that effort. Many of us have been a part of funder-led cohorts that feel as though they are designed for the funder's benefit more than the grantees. This kind of approach does not interest us. By providing us input we can shape this together.

Definitions of Frequently Used Terms

Community – For the purpose of this project, we would invite applications from a group or organization which identifies with a defined community. For us, community means a group with a shared sense of identity and belonging, and possibly of history and culture. A community can be defined by geography, race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other shared lived experience. Our priority will be on communities that have been under-supported by systems in our region and have been subject to persistent health inequities.

Fiscal Sponsor – A nonprofit organization that provides fiduciary oversight, financial management, and other administrative services to another entity in order to provide public benefit to a community. This sponsorship must be codified through a formalized agreement outlining the terms of the relationship and the services which will be provided.

Health equity – A state of being of a community or collection of communities that represents a self-determined sense of health and vitality for all of its members. A mindset within these communities that we are better together, that we can build greater health by working together, and that health and power are expansive when held in relationship and collaboration. A system of equilibrium and balance between and amongst these communities that assures no one community falls through the cracks or is persistently less likely to have their needs met by the very systems that should be nurturing and supporting our continued health.

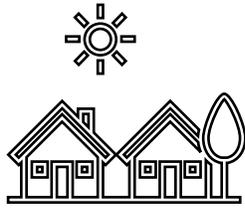
Health inequities – The presence of disparate health outcomes between a community and the predominant community in the region. For the purpose of measurement of health inequity in a region, we typically use the average in the same region as a comparison or benchmark. Depending on what demographic you are focusing on - race, gender, religion, income, sexuality, urban/rural - you might choose a different comparison or benchmark based on the predominant community.

Historically Disadvantaged Community - Groups who have been socially, economically or educationally underprivileged by past discriminatory laws or practices.

Inland Northwest – For this project, we define the Inland Northwest as the seven counties of Adams, Ferry, Grant, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, and Whitman, and the lands of the Colville Confederated, Kalispel, and Spokane Tribal Nations.

Nonprofit organization – An organization that is actively registered with both the IRS and the State of Washington as a not-for profit-organization.

Public organization – A governmental entity operating on behalf of a defined community. This might be a municipal agency, a local education agency, or a Tribally-run entity.



Amplifying Community Stories

Summary of May 2021 Feedback

Introduction

In developing our Amplifying Community Stories project, we reached out to a variety of individuals, communities and organizations to gauge interest and seek input on how we could further clarify our intent and description of the opportunity. The input we received is reflected in our application materials. A summary of that feedback is included below.

1. What do you think we are trying to accomplish with this initiative?

We heard that many organizations think that this initiative is meant to amplify the voices of overlooked and often disadvantaged communities, especially those most affected by COVID-19, in the Pacific Northwest. That Empire Health Foundation wants to support organizations that communities have determined are trusted. That this opportunity is a place where artists, filmmakers, journalists and others can partner with community-led organizations to share their stories and dream of vibrant, visible lives. We also heard that some organizations think that this is a place where Empire Health Foundation is seeking to better understand community and build trust, especially among historically disadvantaged communities. That they are hopeful that we are intending to develop meaningful relationships that center equity and meet communities where they are.

2. Can you see your organization or community participating in this initiative?

We heard that many organizations see themselves participating in this initiative. That some of these organizations recognize value in sharing individual stories while others see value in elevating a collective voice. We also heard that it is a delicate thing to ask community members most harmed by injustice to share those injustices because they are still at risk. We heard that trusted organizations will be excited to share these stories when community is ready to do so.

3. What community do you identify with?

We heard that you identify with Black, Native American, Asian, LBGTQIA2S+, disabled, justice impacted, and White communities. That you are leaders from Spokane, and you represent the neighborhoods of Logan, Mission, and Hillyard. We also heard that one of you is a social activist and another an environmentalist.

4. Would you change anything about the initiative?

We heard that many organizations would not change this proposal framework and think we should release it as is. Responding organizations asked that Empire Health Foundation elevate conversations about youth violence, criminal issues, environmental trauma, and mental illness. We also heard that “gender conformity” would be better named “gender identity” in the definitions of community because some members with differing gender identities belong to the same community. Other organizations reminded us that stories are powerful. That some stories have been used to dehumanize and abuse our community members and their families. And other stories, often too far and few between, have been used to create collective power, connection, and healing. We also heard about the value of sharing how individual transformations lead to community transformations.

5. Is there anything else you want to share?

We heard that the idea of this initiative is exciting to most leaders. We also heard that it has called for pause among a few leaders. Those organizations most excited about the direction of this work find promise in the un-silencing of historically disadvantaged community members and their families. They hope to help bring light to existing community strengths and offer opportunities to imagine a better world. Those organizations experiencing pause are intimidated by health equity work. They want additional clarification and guidance. They are also concerned that this initiative’s priorities might intend to elevate minority led organizations over non-minority led organizations. And if this is the case, they worry that Empire Health Foundation will exclude capable, well intentioned white led groups. We also heard that the June to December timeframe might be a tight turnaround for some.