

Introduction to Digital Storytelling

Traditional stories connect American Indians and Alaska Natives to their past, present, and future; they remind communities that—like their ancestors and elders—they can rise above the stress and pain of the moment. Digital storytelling can connect youth and communities to these important teachings and promote healing, resilience, and action.

Getting Started: The Power of Digital Storytelling

American Indian and Alaska Native communities traditionally used and continue to use storytelling to promote values, teachings, and cultural resilience. They are now using technology, that is, digital storytelling, to tell stories. Communities have developed digital stories to preserve language and culture, to engage youth, and to promote prevention programming. Digital storytelling has the potential to promote healing, hope, and community support. Training in digital storytelling is available through the SAMHSA Tribal Training and Technical Assistance Center.

Digital stories can be used to increase awareness and community readiness. You can fulfill objectives from your agency's Action Plan; you could use a digital story to showcase data and evaluation outcomes. Your digital story could be used to increase support and collaboration and to secure additional funding.

Story and Storytellers

Digital storytelling can be used as a tool in a social marketing prevention campaign, to explain agency services, to promote a specific event, or as a youth engagement activity. Everyone has a story to tell.

Possible storytellers include a team from your agency, community stakeholders, youth, tribal council members, traditional leaders, veterans, and recipients of mental health and prevention services. A digital storytelling workshop is fun and learning the technology is not difficult. However, it does take a commitment of time. Workshops take between 12 and 15 hours. Training takes place over several days across one or two weeks. Schedules can be adjusted to best fit the needs of the storytellers. Workshops can accommodate up to 10 storytellers, depending on several factors. This should be discussed with your workshop trainers.

What you need for a workshop

1. A commitment of time (12 to 15 hours plus planning time)
2. Internet access
3. A device, such as a computer, tablet, or smartphone
4. Adult chaperones and parental permission if youth trainees are under age 18

Defining Your Purpose and Identifying Your Audience

You should define the goals for a digital storytelling training and the audience for the final stories. Potential audiences can include youth in the community, tribal leadership, school staff, parents, collaborative partners, recipients of services, or the entire community.

Workshop Participants

Participants can be aged 14 to elders. Youth younger than 18 will need to be accompanied by an adult and will need parental permission. Technological skills are not necessary but familiarity with computers is helpful. Participants will need internet access. Although digital stories can be made using a cell phone, it is easier to use a computer or a tablet.

Next Steps

Once you decide to host a digital storytelling training, you will schedule a planning call with the trainer(s). It will help the planning process if you have made several key decisions before the planning call. Use the Digital Storytelling Game Plan shown in Table 1 to start planning a storytelling workshop, then schedule a call with a trainer to discuss your ideas and schedule the training.

Table 1. Digital Storytelling Game Plan

Digital Storytelling Game Plan	
What is the goal or purpose of the digital storytelling workshop	
Who will we train?	
Who is our audience?	
How will we recruit participants?	
When and where will the training take place?	