



Communities
In Schools®

The Site Coordinator's Guide to Supporting Students to Share Their Stories



Our Mission: To Lift Up More Student Voices

As a site coordinator, you are often called upon to identify students who have compelling stories to share. These stories are used in a variety of forums — from fundraising efforts to social media posts.

We understand that approaching a student to participate in these storytelling efforts can sometimes feel challenging and even uncomfortable. You want to be sensitive to their lived experiences and ensure they feel comfortable with where their information will be shared, for how long, and with what audiences.

This guide will provide you with tools for engaging students so they can experience storytelling as a path to empowerment, develop clarity about their futures, and inspire others to take action. You will also find new resources from the Communities in Schools® (CIS®) National Office that can help your students create first-person stories and answer interview questions about what's most important to them.

Our goal is to work together to advocate for as many student voices as possible as part of our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, and allow them to speak their truth while sharing their concerns, desires, and hopes for the future.

Step 1: Set a Goal for Lifting Up Student Voices

Imagine if every site coordinator across the country inspired students to share their stories on the local and/or national level. What goal can you set to gather stories that can inspire change across the country to accomplish our mission? We encourage you to set your own goals and set a calendar reminder and prioritize these efforts!

Step 2: Neutralize Any Bias

Sometimes we find ourselves subconsciously sourcing stories that seem familiar — they may be from children with similar histories, backgrounds, circumstances, and outcomes. Before identifying students to approach for storytelling, you can take a moment to check biases and resist tokenism to help us reach our goal of encouraging diverse voices:

- **Check any biases** — Have I approached students with a similar profile before? Who might I not be considering? Am I making any assumptions or creating separation or division? Here is the implicit bias test from Harvard <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>
- **Resist tokenism** — Why am I selecting this student? The storytelling you request from your students should represent the real current diversity among students at your site.



Step 3: Prepare to Uplift the Student

The best way to encourage a student to tell their story, and to see the benefits for themselves and the organization, is to “walk with them” — meaning put yourself in their shoes. Before you meet (in-person or virtually), consider what concerns they might have about sharing their story, where their story might be shared, or how they might feel challenged to articulate their experience with English as their second language.

Reflect on how their story will empower them. Writing is a cathartic experience that has the power to connect a student to their own strength and resilience. And how would they feel if their story inspired someone else to tell theirs or to overcome their own circumstances? By thinking through the considerations a student may have, as well as how they might grow from storytelling, you will be well prepared to approach the conversation as a partnership.

Step 4: Share the “Student & Alumni Storytelling Guide”

Once you've gotten the student excited about sharing their truth, CIS National has created a four-page guide you can share with them, which offers tips for crafting memorable stories, a worksheet for organizing thoughts, options for storytelling (being interviewed or submitting a first-person narrative), and a first-person story from an alum about the benefits of sharing their CIS experience with others. [Scan the QR code to access the guide and print and share with the student.](#)



Step 5: Follow Up Until and After Publishing

Give the student a deadline to complete their story and check in to see how they're progressing. Ask if they need more support and how you can help them. Make sure to walk with them as they write their story. You can submit the story to the National Office here: <https://www.communitiesinschools.org/cisstory/>. Once submitted, the National Office will work with the student to identify where they would like their story to appear, as well as identify the terms of use — how long the story may be used, what artwork (if any) would be appropriate, and more. If their story is being told locally for your affiliate, note that the National Resource Center has tools available for download that include Photo and Content Guidelines and Consent Forms which can be found via the [QR code](#).



Final Considerations

Sometimes we ask students to attend fundraisers or events to share their stories live with others. Again, the best practice is to put yourself in their shoes to prepare them for success. Ensure they have the following details:

- Ask yourself, how can they feel comfortable going to this event?
- Do they have all the necessary information to attend this event?
- Who is the event audience?
 - How many people will be in the audience?
 - How will the audience be dressed?
- What dress is appropriate for the student and family?
- How will they get to the event?
 - Can we provide transportation and an escort who will be their buddy and support throughout the evening?
- Do they have everything they need to feel comfortable in the setting?
- Can you provide an opportunity for the student to rehearse their story with you before the event?

Summary

We hope this guide helps ease your conversation about storytelling with your students. It is important to be self-aware and empathetic during the process of engaging students, as their voices can truly impact the future of CIS and educational equity in the United States.

Uplifting underserved voices will support all students and families to feel connected, give them a sense of belonging, and provide students with the opportunity to speak their truth about their hard work and victories. It is time to change the narratives about people of color, those with mental health and learning disabilities, the LGBTQ+ community, those who have overcome the challenges of poverty and hunger, and so many more.

This can be accomplished when we provide platforms for our courageous students to open the hearts and minds of others by amplifying the powerful messages they share. Please make sure you show them appreciation for their efforts, and always treat them with dignity. They are the reason why we fight the good fight.

