



**CASSANDRA**

SOCIALLY ENGAGED STORYTELLING

# MANUAL

Deliverable D.2.3



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# Introduction

## Overview

This manual provides a practical guide to creating an artist development program for socially engaged storytellers, inspired by the Cassandra project model. While there are, of course, many ways to approach this kind of work, this manual will walk you step by step through the process the Cassandra team used to build and support an international network of young storytellers as they each creatively explored European values, to develop and stage a solo performance, fit for professional, international stages.

The manual is divided into four key phases:

- **Set up and Recruitment**
- **The Laboratory**
- **Social Engagement and Research**
- **Going Public**

Each phase focuses on a vital part of the process—from identifying collaborators and shaping the creative foundation to engaging communities and delivering impactful public performances. We encourage you to adapt the advice to fit your community, culture, and organisation.

### **Who is this manual for?**

This manual is for storytelling festivals, organisations and independent storytellers who are passionate about socially engaged storytelling and creating opportunities for others to grow. If you're involved in mentorship, creative development programmes, or using storytelling to inspire social change, we hope this guide will be a valuable resource to support and spark your work.

### **This Manual is based on the Cassandra Project - What Is That?**

The Cassandra Project is a European initiative designed to support the next generation of socially engaged storytelling. Running through 2024 and 2025, it brought together young storytellers (aged 18 - 30) from Belgium, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, and Poland for hands-on training, mentoring, and performance opportunities. In their own ways, the young storytellers creatively explored European values, by which we mean;

- Human Dignity and Equality
- Freedom and Democracy
- Rule of Law and Human Rights

- Sustainability and Climate Action
- Cultural Diversity and Inclusion
- Mental Health and Well-being
- Digital Freedom and Responsibility

Through their stories and research, these young voices reflected on these values - sometimes challenging how society navigates them, sometimes celebrating them, but always engaging deeply with what they mean in today's world.

Each country's team of three storytellers was guided by an expert mentor, with additional support from their home country's international storytelling festival, where the storytellers staged their final performances. These festivals formed the Cassandra organising team, working together in a peer-support network to explore creative ways to reach new audiences, promote storytelling for social change, and spotlight emerging talent.

As well as supporting the 15 young storytellers, at its heart, The Cassandra Project aimed to create something lasting: **This training resource and tool kit!** We hope it will support others as they champion socially engaged and/or youth-led storytelling for years to come.

The project is led by the Federation for European Storytelling (FEST). For more about the Cassandra project and the organisations and artists involved, follow this link to the Cassandra page on the FEST website: <https://fest-network.eu/project/cassandra/>

Throughout the manual, you can find hyperlinks to useful materials from the Cassandra project such as workshop plans, case studies, and publicity material. **You are invited to follow the links.**

This document will be the basis for the Cassandra online toolkit – on the project website - offering a dynamic guideline for engaging in socially engaged storytelling with texts and many (more) links to multimedia input with examples, interviews, presentations ...

### **Why Do Projects Like This Matter?**

We believe this work is urgent: Although at FEST we consider storytelling to be a *master art form* - foundational to creative expression, timeless in its power to connect, and vital for shaping culture, identity, and human understanding, in reality, European storytelling often struggles to convey its value - not just to the arts community but to the public at large. With limited diversity and an ageing practitioner base, storytelling risks losing relevance in Europe, placing this ancient art form at a crossroads. By nurturing young storytellers, fostering creative development, and investing in fresh voices and bold ideas, storytelling can be reimagined for today's world - keeping it vibrant, diverse, inclusive, and impactful as a powerful force for connection and change for generations to come.

Some of the storytellers from the Cassandra Project met online to discuss these issues, and the conversation was recorded in a podcast. You can access it via the toolkit or through the following link: [CASSANDRA STORYTELLERS - PODCAST EPISODE 1: RELEVANCE](#)

## Glossary Of Terms

### **Storytelling**

Storytelling is an interactive and performative art form where a storyteller shares narratives directly with an audience. It uses voice, gesture, imagination, and presence to bring characters and landscapes to life in the audience's minds, often without props, fixed scripts, or elaborate staging. Through vivid language, pacing, and emotional resonance, the storyteller creates a connection that draws listeners into the story. Storytelling can take many forms - traditional folk tales, autobiography, myths, legends, or contemporary stories—and thrives on the shared experience between teller and listener.

Described by the Federation of European Storytelling (FEST) as the master art form, storytelling is the foundation of linguistic expression and learning and the source from which many other art forms have emerged. As such, it shares traits with poetry, which uses language and imagery to create beauty and insight; stand-up comedy, which uses humour and wit to entertain; and theatre, which evokes characters, dialogue and transformative plot journeys.

However, storytelling stands apart in its ability to transport listeners into imaginary worlds and in its adaptability, the storyteller can shape their narratives in response to the audience and setting, creating an experience that feels immediate and personal. It can stir the full spectrum of emotions while nurturing imagination, safeguarding cultural traditions, and inspiring meaningful conversation.

At its heart is the connection between the storyteller and the audience, one that, at its best, transcends the limits of time and place.

### **Socially Engaged Storytelling**

For the Cassandra team, socially engaged storytelling is a performance art form in which stories are created and told that matter personally to the teller on topics that matter on a global level; it's staging stories that are deeply researched, created in conversation with others and which address and promote awareness of social issues, encouraging further conversation and positive change. It goes beyond entertainment, aiming to inspire action and create a more inclusive and just society.

*Socially engaged storytelling* differs from *applied storytelling*, which uses narrative techniques for specific practical outcomes in fields such as education, therapy, social work, and

community or organisational development, and where performance may be an outcome but is not the overall goal. For more on applied storytelling in sensitive contexts, please see our sister program, 3. [THE AURUS PROJECT](#).

### **Performance storytelling**

Performance storytelling is the art of bringing stories to life through a carefully crafted and engaging performance. It focuses on how a story is told, using voice, movement, and stage presence to captivate and connect with an audience and can take place in front of larger audiences often in performance settings like theatre stages, or amphitheatres. Where traditional storytelling often values the content or preservation of oral traditions, performance storytelling emphasises the artistry of its presentation.

### **Participant-led Mentorship**

In a participant-led mentorship approach, the role of a mentor is to act as a supportive guide, helping storytellers take charge of their own creative journey. Rather than steering the process, teaching specific techniques, or imposing a particular style or approach, mentors empower artists to find their own path and develop their unique voice. We'll dive deeper into this approach in the Set-Up and Recruitment chapter of this manual.

### **International Storytelling/Storyteller**

In storytelling, the term 'International' literally means the teller has performed professionally in numerous countries, but it is also a mark of excellence and recognition. An international storyteller works at the highest level of skill and artistry, creating performances that are both meaningful and unique. They often represent the richness of their own cultural heritage while finding creative ways to make their stories relevant and accessible to global audiences. This balance of individuality and universality is at the heart of international storytelling.

## Phase 1 - Setting up and Recruitment

Getting the project off the ground starts with understanding the need and potential scope of your project and bringing together the right people - it's what makes everything else possible. Based on what we learned through Cassandra, we've gathered some practical insights about building these crucial relationships early on - from finding your first collaborators to planning where your storytellers will eventually perform. Here's what worked for us and what we discovered along the way.

### The Foundations of the Project

**Identifying the Need and Defining Your Goals:** Is there a Gap in your storytelling scene that you think a project like this could help fill? For example, a lack of access to professional development opportunities or a narrow audience base? Identifying the Gap will help you define your project goals and understand who you might need to involve, who you want to reach, and what you are hoping to achieve. Here are some examples;

- Creating better access to training, mentoring, and professional development for younger storytellers
- Developing storytelling as a tool for activism
- Exploring ways to use storytelling as a catalyst for social awareness and change
- Facilitating dialogue through storytelling
- Developing platforms and events for new storytellers to showcase their work
- Amplifying diverse voices and perspectives in storytelling
- Supporting experimental and innovative storytelling styles
- Establishing a strong storytelling network and peer support community
- Expanding outreach to engage new and younger audiences in storytelling

### Defining the Scope and Reach of Your Project

Defining the reach of your project will be the next essential step to understanding its structure and practical needs. It will help clarify who needs to be involved, where they need to be located, and how often they can come together.

For example, the Cassandra Project had an international geographic reach. A primary aim was to lay the foundations for a new European network - a caring and supportive community of the next generation of storytellers who could support, promote, and collaborate with one another across borders.

Your project might also have a geographic focus, whether local, national, or international. Or, its reach may be shaped by other factors, such as shared interests, cultural heritage, or artistic

approaches rather than geography. Understanding the scope of your project and the nature of its reach will guide decisions about partnerships, logistics, and long-term sustainability.

### **Where and when will the public performances take place?**

Deciding where and when your final performances will take place is another key step in shaping your project.

We recommend embedding the final performances within the existing festivals or established events of the partner organisations. They will provide ready-made infrastructure, including technical support, marketing, and an established audience base. This can help your project gain visibility, reach broader audiences, and connect with established cultural networks. Being part of an existing event can also help you align your project with their schedule and resources.

If you choose not to work within a festival, you may need to plan for technical support, marketing, and building an audience from scratch. While this takes more effort, it gives you the freedom to tailor the event to your vision. You can design the setting, tone, and partnerships to suit your project and engage audiences who might not have been reached before.

Think about who you want to experience your work with and how the event's context will shape its tone and appeal. Are you aiming for bold, forward-thinking events that celebrate innovation? Or would your project thrive in a setting that honours cultural heritage? Collaborating with other art forms, such as theatre, music, or visual arts, can also broaden its reach.

For the Cassandra team, all 15 storytellers performed in Amsterdam, hosted by project partners The Storytelling Centre, and in Rome as part of the FEST annual conference. Additionally, the storytellers showcased their work in smaller groups at the international festivals hosted by project partners. These high-profile satellite events were celebrated in the March 24 Cassandra Newsletter, find out more about them here:

[NEWSLETTER 3: FOCUS ON FESTIVALS](#)

### **Who should you work with?**

We will go into more detail shortly, but in summary, in order to run your project, we think you will need;

**Project Lead:** The person, people or organisation who is responsible for overseeing the whole project, driving it forward and supporting everyone involved. They are ultimately responsible for securing funding and delivering evaluations. (If you are reading this manual, this might be you!)

**Project Partners:** These are the storytelling or performance organisations that may recruit mentors and participant storytellers, manage and support the artists, promote their work, and physically host the final performances.

However, not all projects will require partners in this way. In some areas, there may not be many established storytelling organisations, and the focus might instead shift to working directly with independent artists, community groups, or other creative practitioners.

**Mentors:** Experienced storytellers who guide and support emerging artists through the creation process as they develop their own craft, stories, and performance skills.

**Storytellers:** The emerging artists who will each research, develop and perform socially engaged storytelling performances.

Let's go into more depth about the people and organisations who could be involved.

## Project Partners

You might already have strong connections with potential partners, or this project could be an opportunity to find new collaborators and networks and explore fresh approaches. Either way, we would recommend that the focus is on finding partners who have the long-term capacity for committed involvement, who value storytelling's distinct artistic qualities, who are dedicated to art form development, and who bring their own perspectives and expertise to the work.

The following criteria may help identify suitable partners for a strong, sustainable collaboration:

### Criteria for Project Partners

- **Alignment with Project Goals**  
Ensure the organisation's mission and values align with your project's objectives, whether it's fostering social change, promoting cultural exchange, or developing artform development. Look for partners who share a genuine enthusiasm for the purposes of the project.
- **Capacity to Host Events**  
The organisation should have experience organising storytelling (or very similar) performances with access to venues and rehearsal spaces.
- **Resources and Stability**  
Ensure they have the capacity, the financial, logistical and administrative capability to follow through on commitments for the duration of your project. Ability to appoint and manage a mentor.

- **Openness to Collaboration**  
Flexibility, clear communication, and willingness to share resources and decision-making. For international partnerships: cultural sensitivity and language capabilities.
- **Commitment to Diversity**  
Interest in reaching broader and more inclusive audiences and willingness to explore programming that fosters inclusivity.
- **Interest in Social Engagement**  
Commitment to using storytelling to address social challenges and foster community connections.
- **Existing Networks and Influence**  
Strong connections to target artists, audiences or communities. Established partnerships within local, national, or international networks to amplify impact.
- **Capacity for Audience Development**  
Experience or interest in engaging new, underrepresented, or diverse audiences and a willingness to experiment with outreach and programming strategies.
- **Commitment to Professional Development**  
Openness to learning and growing alongside the project in a peer-to-peer environment.
- **Network and Promotional Reach**  
Strong ties to the arts/cultural scene and established audience base. Capacity for marketing and promotion to maximise visibility.
- **Financial and Technical Management**  
Experience handling budgets, meeting funding requirements, and ensuring financial transparency. Technical support for events, documentation, or online platforms if needed. Adequate health and safety protocols, insurance coverage, and contingency planning. Compliance with child protection and data protection policies.

**Find out more about the five international storytelling festivals who were partners on the Cassandra Project by following this link:**

[CASSANDRA'S INTERNATIONAL PROJECT PARTNERS](#)

## Mentors

Mentors are the experienced artists who will guide and support the new storytellers throughout their creative development.

In the Cassandra Project, it was the responsibility of the project partners to select and contract mentors. Each partner chose mentors from within their existing, local or national professional networks, basing their decisions on proven track records and individuals they knew possessed the ideal blend of artistic skill and mentoring ability.

We found that the mentors' commitment to a participant-led approach, along with the strong and trusting relationships they built with their three mentee storytellers, was central to the success of the Cassandra Project.

Below is a checklist of the core criteria we would recommend for your mentors;

### **Core Criteria**

- Demonstrated storytelling expertise and performance experience
- Strong track record of mentoring or similar
- Understanding of participant-led learning approaches (see more below)
- Understanding of boundaries and ethical practice
- Commitment to inclusive and accessible storytelling
- Cultural sensitivity and awareness

### **Professional Practice**

- Experience managing performance projects
- Ability to run effective rehearsals and workshops
- Knowledge of venue requirements and technical needs
- Competent with invoicing and financial documentation
- Professional communication and time management skills
- Knowledge of various storytelling traditions
- Understanding of story adaptation and creation
- Experience in performance development
- Ability to support voice and presence work
- Skills in narrative structure and technique

### **Additional Considerations**

- Active connections within storytelling networks
- Experience working with target communities
- Understanding of safeguarding and inclusion
- Flexibility with scheduling and communication
- Digital skills for online mentoring if needed
- Public liability insurance and relevant certifications

## **Participant-Led Mentorship VS Traditional Apprenticeship**

The Cassandra Project took the view of mentorship as a participant-led, collaborative relationship designed to empower emerging storytellers to take ownership of their own creative process. This mentorship approach prioritises the new storyteller's autonomy and

creative vision. The mentor acts as a guide and facilitator, providing support and feedback while allowing the storyteller to drive their own development.

This approach differs from a traditional storytelling apprenticeship, in which a younger or less experienced storyteller learns within the mould of a 'Master' of the craft. The apprentice develops their skills by following the Master's established techniques and cultural wisdom, often working within a specific framework or branch of the art form. The apprenticeship model emphasises mastery of specific foundational techniques and respect for the craft's lineage.

Both approaches are valuable and necessary for the continuation of the art form, and it's important to recognise there is space for both in the sector. In the Cassandra Project, we chose a participant-led mentorship model because we felt a need to foster diverse and original storytelling in Europe and nurture creative exploration, self-discovery, and the development of authentic narratives. The participant-led approach allows emerging voices to challenge conventions, push boundaries, and create stories that reflect their experiences and perspectives. This model celebrates the idea that every storyteller is the master of their own journey, and our role was to support them as they carved their unique path.

There is more information on how the mentors helped structure and plan with the new storytellers in the **Research and Social Engagement Phase**.

**Find out more about how the Cassandra Project's mentors were introduced to the project, its timeline and given their brief through the following link:**

[CASSANDRA MENTORS INFORMATION SHEET](#)

## Storytellers

Once the project has been clearly defined in terms of its **goals**, the **people involved**, **timescales**, **performance opportunities**, and the **scope and reach of the project**, you'll be in an excellent position to recruit storytellers. At this stage, you'll also be able to give potential participants a clear sense of the commitment they are making and what will be expected of them.

There are a number of ways to approach recruitment, depending on your network and the type of storytellers you want to attract. For example, you might focus on:

- **Aspiring professionals:** Individuals who you are already aware of and are on a professional storytelling track, actively seeking further training or opportunities to perform.
- **Emerging or established activists:** voices in social justice movements who want to use storytelling as an accessible platform for their messages.

- **Diverse and intersectional storytellers:** People from underrepresented communities who want to share their unique experiences and perspectives.
- **Undiscovered talent:** People who have raw potential or who are working in storytelling but haven't yet connected to the larger network.
- **Established professionals in other fields:** Individuals who are experienced in other creative or professional disciplines (e.g., writers, poets, actors, or educators) and are looking to explore storytelling as a new medium.
- **Community voices:** People with lived experiences or unique perspectives who might not have formal training but can bring authenticity and richness to socially engaged storytelling.

Recruitment methods used in the Cassandra project in the five countries demonstrate a good range of options when it comes to finding your cohort:

- **Belgium:** Invited candidates with an interest in performance to submit two short videos—one introducing themselves and their motivation and one sharing a short story. Shortlisted applicants had an online interview to discuss their interests, storytelling experience and social engagement.
- **Poland:** Reached out to individuals from diverse creative backgrounds via theatre groups, universities and art schools and prioritised openness to multicultural collaboration and mobility.
- **Sweden:** Contacted former students, participants from earlier projects, and members of local theatre groups, focusing on individuals with basic storytelling knowledge and commitment.
- **Norway:** Shared a detailed nationwide call via social media, focusing on artistic development and social engagement. They looked for storytellers with "something to say" and a commitment to the project.

In the toolkit, and through the link provided, you can see an example of a call-out used by the Norwegian team from the Fortellerfestivalen to attract potential applicants.

[STORYTELLER CALL OUT - NORWEIGIAN TEAM](#)

**Find out more about how the Cassandra Project's Storytellers were introduced to the project and given their brief, including the project timeline, in the Tool Kit or through the following link: [CASSANDRA STORYTELLERS INFORMATION SHEET](#)**

## Phase 02 - Laboratory

The Laboratory is an immersive block of time where storytellers, mentors and partner organisations come together to build the foundation of the project and train, bond and enter the storytelling community. Ideally, the laboratory would take place over a few days, as a residential, hosted by one of the partner organisations at the same time as a festival or event in order for the young storytellers to gain practical experience, meet professionals, and see precisely the kind of platform they are working towards during the project. The laboratory can be collaboratively facilitated by mentors, festival representatives and organisers, drawing on their diverse range of skills. For the Cassandra project, this phase was a defining feature.

**Find out more about the Cassandra team's residential Laboratory during the Alden Bisen Storytelling Festival by following this link: [NEWSLETTER - ALDEN BIESEN](#)**

This chapter offers practical steps to help you design and deliver a Laboratory phase that equips storytellers, strengthens partnerships, and sets the stage for impactful final performances.

### How to Structure Your Time

We suggest a 4-day residential program offering a mix of workshops, group discussions on specific themes, and self-directed time (Pick and Mix), giving participants the chance to explore their interests and grow their abilities. Each day begins with a check-in and fun warm-up activities to build energy and connection and laboratory as a whole builds to a sharing of short individual stories in development on the final day.

Evenings are an opportunity to find inspiration and enjoy creative moments together. Participants will experience professional storytelling performances and have a chance to relax and share their own talents during a participant cabaret night.

Your schedule will be tailored to meet the specific goals and context of your project but as an example, below is the skeleton plan we used in the Cassandra Project; for the Alden Beisen Laboratory in April 2024.

**For a larger version follow this link; [Cassandra Laboratory Schedule.](#)**

**SCHEDULE - ALDEN BIESSEN (APRIL 17 - 20, 2024)**

| DAY     | AM                   |   |       |  | PM    |  |   |        |   |
|---------|----------------------|---|-------|--|-------|--|---|--------|---|
|         | 9.00 - 9.30          | 9.30 - 11.00  | Break | 11.15 - 12.45  | Lunch | 1.45 - 3.00  | 3.15 - 5.00   | Dinner | 7.30 - 9.00   |
| WED 17  | Welcome, Led by FEST |   |       | <b>Workshop 1:</b><br>Identifying Your Values As an Artist |       | <b>Workshop 2:</b><br>Stage Presence                   | Pick and Mix  |        | Choice of Performances  |
| Thur 18 | Check-in, warm-up    | <b>Workshop 3:</b> Finding your meaning in Folk tales                         |       | <b>Group Discussion:</b><br>Ethics and Safety              |       | <b>Workshop 4:</b><br>Nature Connection                | Pick and Mix  |        | Choice of Performances  |
| FRI 19  | Check-in, warm-up    | <b>Workshop 5:</b><br>Dramaturgy with personal stories                        |       | <b>Group Discussion:</b><br>Form and Audience              |       | Mentor Group Check-in and Individual Story Development |   |        | Cabaret for Cassandra participants and festival performers (not public) |
| SAT 20  | Check-in, warm-up    | <b>Workshop 6:</b><br>Multilingual Storytelling for an international audience |       | Individual story development                               |       | Individual story development sharing                   | <b>Group Discussion:</b><br>Closing and Evaluation, including future practicalities |        | Choice of Performances  |

We will describe each of the sessions that we would recommend to be part of your Laboratory, why we think they are important and offer links to example exercises and session plans, outlining how each session can be designed and delivered.

As you can see in the above schedule in summary, we would recommend:

- **A Welcome Session:** Introducing the Laboratory and setting the tone for the journey ahead.
- **Check-ins and Warm-ups:** These are simple daily activities to help participants connect and share how they are feeling.
- **Workshops:** Creative sessions to build skills, share ideas, and work together.
- **An Informal Cabaret:** A fun and supportive space for participants to share their creative work.
- **Pick and Mix Sessions:** Flexible sessions where participants can choose from a selection of activities that suit their interests or needs.
- **Professional Performances:** Opportunities to be inspired by experienced storytellers and performers.
- **Individual Project Development Time:** Time for participants to focus on their own projects and apply what they have learned
- **Closing and Evaluation:** A reflective session to celebrate achievements and bring the group’s journey to a meaningful end and inform them about future practicalities.

Let’s go into more detail.

## Workshops

We will start with the Workshops as these form the centrepiece of the laboratory and it's around these that the rest of the program is built. They offer participants the essential skills they need to develop as storytellers, establish the foundations for the project and also provide a space for participants to explore their creativity and begin shaping their personal journey toward the final performance. The workshops can be led by the project's mentors and festival organisers, who should have the level of expertise necessary to draw on their experience to create a vibrant and comprehensive programme, blending professional guidance with an encouraging and inspiring atmosphere.

For the Cassandra Project, the team designed our workshops using FEST's Storytelling Competence Model. This model helps us understand the key components of storytelling in professional practice and provides a clear framework for developing storytelling skills. It is built around four main competence domains that reflect the storyteller's journey:

1. **The Researcher:** The storyteller as a researcher is **curious and reflective**, driven by a desire to explore, search, and broaden the horizons of storytelling. Researchers gather, analyse and reflect, offering the answers needed to build a story or develop creative work.

This domain develops the storyteller's ability to:

- Search for and discover meaningful story material.
- Research the background and cultural significance of stories.

By mastering this competence, storytellers can relate deeply to their target audience, identify the right story, and craft imagery that aligns with the core message or idea. Stories in this domain can serve as powerful metaphors, helping to communicate the 'unspeakable'—concepts or emotions that cannot be addressed directly.

2. **The Craftsman:** the storyteller focuses on **preparing material with care and precision**. Craftsmen aim to master their tools and techniques, developing a clear and effective way of working. The craftsman's work is guided by a focus on quality.

This domain includes the competences:

- Mastering narrative and language.
- Mastering oral storytelling techniques.

These competences allow the storyteller to:

- Craft narratives that connect with audiences and inspire action.
- Use spoken language and narrative structures that are appropriate and effective.
- Incorporate descriptive language and vivid imagery to enhance engagement.
- Apply oral storytelling techniques suited to the story, the audience, and the context.

This competence enables the storyteller to connect deeply with their audience, finding the perfect entry point, imagery, and narrative to align with the core message. It uses metaphors and vivid images to express what cannot be said directly, creating a powerful, engaging, and unforgettable experience.

3. **The Artist:** The artist experiments and creates from an inner drive. Artists want to express themselves in a personal way, to interpret, and to offer a personal touch.

This domain includes the following competences:

- **Empathise:** To have insight into a story character, to embody different moods and ideas, to understand a socio-cultural context.
- **Experiment:** To think outside the box, to improvise within a framework, to try out different possibilities.
- **Create:** To concretise and realise ideas, to imagine, envision, conceive, and to make artistic choices.
- **Express personal drive:** To share a message, to transmit history, to respond to a socio-cultural context.

4. **The performer:** The storyteller seeks to communicate with and move an audience. They aim to reach and engage their listeners with confidence and preparation.

In this domain, we focus on the following competences:

- **Connect with story and audience:** To engage with the audience, to affect the audience, to respond to the moment.

Find out more about The Competence Model by following this Link:

[STORYTELLING IN 8 COLOURS](#)

### Workshop Example 1: FINDING YOUR MEANING IN FOLKTALES: INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

The "Finding Your Meaning in Folktales" workshop, was led by Jakob Elofsson from [Sweden's Sagobyden, Land of Legends Storytelling Organisation](#), is was an inspiring and interactive session designed to explore the power of storytelling as a form of intangible cultural heritage. Participants worked with traditional fairy tales, learning to preserve their cultural essence while creatively adapting them to reflect personal meanings and contemporary values. This

process allows storytellers to connect with their traditions, find new layers of relevance, and craft stories that resonate with today’s audiences.

Intangible cultural heritage, as defined by UNESCO, includes the living traditions, skills, and knowledge that communities pass down through generations. It encompasses oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, and craft-making, forming a vital link between the past and the present. This workshop highlights the importance of safeguarding these rich traditions while recognising their adaptability and evolution in modern contexts.

### Examples of a Session Plan

**LED BY:** Jakob Elofsson

**SESSION OVERVIEW:** A workshop and presentation on intangible cultural heritage where we modify existing fairy tales to make them have different meanings.

**SESSION AIMS:** To be able to both preserve an intangible cultural heritage and find new ways of connecting the storytellers other reasons to tell them.

**REQUIRED MATERIALS:** Pen and paper, (If your storytellers are beginners and don’t possess a repertoire of stories: Printouts of short traditional fairy tales for everyone, 3-5 different stories)

**REFERENCES:** [UNESCO'S APPROACH TO INTANGIBLE HERTIGAE](#)

| EXERCISE DESCRIPTION   | PURPOSE/DESIRED OUTCOME  |
|--|--|
| <p>Warming up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Greeting the participants. Tell them that we are going to talk about Folktales and Intangible Cultural Heritage, but we are also going to improvise quite a lot so let’s warm up first.</li> <li>● Warm-up exercise: The Expert               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The participants are split into groups of three or four.</li> <li>2. One is declared the ‘expert’ of a certain topic. This topic is decided by the other participants, such as: Rocket Science, Mesopotamian History, Childcare and so on. It doesn’t matter if the expert doesn’t know anything about this.</li> </ol> </li> </ul> | <p>Small warm up with a focus on improvisation so that the participants will be ready to improvise during the exercises.</p> |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. The expert should then talk for 90 seconds about the subject. However, the other participants can always interrupt the expert by saying 'No'. If this happens the expert must change what they just said.</li> <li>4. When the 90 seconds are over, the next expert is chosen.</li> </ol>   |   |
| <p>Introductory exercises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● (Discussion) Why do you tell stories? Think first for yourself, then discuss with your neighbor, then we have a group discussion.</li> <li>● Tell the participants that one consequence of telling stories, fairy tales and legends is that we are preserving an intangible cultural heritage.</li> <li>● Tell the participants the session overview and aims.</li> <li>● Talk about intangible cultural heritage and what it is. (Methods, knowledge, skills, traditions that lives and transfer between people. Rituals on holidays, craft-, food-, or work traditions, songs and games, fairytales, and legends.</li> <li>● (Exercise) So, let's practice this: Tell your favorite fairytale to another participant. Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel .... Summarize, take 3-4 minutes to tell it so you remember it. (Alternatively, have 3-5 stories ready that they can quickly read and then tell each other, but then skip the warmup)</li> <li>● We can preserve stories for the story's sake. But sometimes it's hard to find a connection to a story. Sometimes it might not align with the reason why we tell stories. You should like the story you're telling, otherwise it will lack (your) energy.</li> </ul> | <p>This is to help participants think about why storytelling is important to them. Is it an expression of their creativity, to preserve an artform, to improve as a speaker, to share ideas and thoughts with an audience.</p> <p>This is also to help them reflect on what stories we tell and what they say.</p> <p>The fairy tale they tell will be the foundation for the rest of the workshop. Only tell a short version! Then the story still is moldable into different forms.</p> |
| <p>Main exercises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● (Discussion) Together with your partner, analyze your stories, find the "messages" in them. What the story wants to say. Try to find a few different things the story wants to say.</li> </ul>   | <p>This is for the participants to find the reason to tell the story, the message they could convey.</p>  |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● (Exercise) Retell the story with another partner and focus on one of the messages you discussed previously; how does it change the story?</li> <li>● Now think about your characters in the story. A story will often make the main character most sympathetic. Discuss the different characters in your stories and find someone who has a different perspective than the main character.</li> <li>● (Exercise) Tell the story from that character’s perspective to another person in the group.</li> <li>● (Discussion) Did the message of the story change?</li> <li>● Find one scene in the story and focus on one of the characters’ feelings in that moment.</li> <li>● Some volunteers can tell it to the whole group.</li> </ul> | <p>When they tell the story with the focus on a message, the story should change a little bit. This way the same story can be molded into something we care about.</p> <p>The change in perspective can also change the emotional center of the story. A story with values or messages we don’t agree with can become a protest against those values if we use a different point of view or character.</p>            |
| <p>Reflection/closing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● (Discussion) When can/should we use this technique?</li> <li>● (Discussion) What is the dangers of using it?</li> <li>● (Discussion) Is this preserving an Intangible Cultural Heritage or is it changing it? Where do we draw the line?</li> </ul>  | <p>These questions are for the participants to think about both the responsibility you have when you’re adapting existing material and how it’s part of traditional tales to change.</p> <p>At the end of the workshop the desired outcome is that the participants have got a few different ways of processing traditional tales as well as an understanding of Intangible Cultural Heritage and its importance.</p> |

You can find a printable version of this plan by following this link;

[WORKSHOP - FINDING YOUR MEANING IN FOLK TALES,](#)

Below are the descriptions of several more session plans. You can access the full plan by following the links below:

- **IDENTIFYING YOUR VALUES AS AN ARTIST**

Led by the Fortellerfestivalen's Lina Teir (NO), this workshop explores personal and collective values to inspire socially engaged artists. Through meditation, creative exercises, storytelling, and discussions, participants will reflect on their identities, values, and visions for their work in a global context.

The session encourages participants to connect with themselves and each other, exploring the intersection of personal experiences, artistic practice, and global issues. By engaging with tools like self-portraits, storytelling, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, participants will gain clarity on their values and how they can act as agents of change through their art.

This reflective journey fosters connection, inspiration, and a deeper understanding of how our values shape us as artists and changemakers.

- **NATURE CONNECTION**

Led by Adam Markuszewski from Studnia O (PL), this outdoor session focuses on strengthening bonds with yourself, others, and nature through sensory immersion. Inspired by forest bathing practices, participants will explore how being present and connected to the natural environment can enhance storytelling.

Through grounding exercises, mindful walking, and sensory exploration, participants will develop their imagination and gain tools to integrate nature's influence into their stories. By identifying symbols and interpreting the atmosphere of a place, storytellers will deepen their connection to their narratives and create more vivid, meaningful performances.

- **MULTILINGUAL STORYTELLING FOR AN INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE**

Led by Tom Van Mieghem from Alden Beisen Storytelling Festival (BE), this workshop explores the universal power of emotions in storytelling, focusing on the connection between storyteller, story, and audience. Participants will discover how meaning is conveyed not just through words but also through sounds, gestures, and body language, enabling stories to transcend linguistic barriers.

Through exercises using "gibberish" (nonsensical language) and emotional expression, participants will learn to connect with audiences by focusing on the essence of their stories. The session highlights the importance of nonverbal communication in international contexts and encourages participants to explore new storytelling styles and approaches.

By the end, participants will better understand their storytelling strengths and gain tools to engage diverse audiences through the shared language of emotion.

- **FORM SPACE AND AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT**

Led by Lina Teir from the Fortellerfestivalen (NO), this workshop explores how form, space, and audience involvement shape storytelling and performance. Through experiential exercises, discussions, and creative exploration, participants will discover how spaces evoke emotions, influence narratives, and reimagine how stories come to life.

The session highlights the role of the audience, encouraging artists to think critically about audience engagement. By experimenting with site-specific storytelling and reworking tales like *Little Red Riding Hood*, participants will leave with innovative tools to create meaningful, immersive performances that foster connection and engagement.

Now we have gone through some of the workshops, we will move on to the other sessions which we think are key to building a strong skills base and strong network of storytellers;

## Welcome Session

The welcome session should take place first thing on day 1 and is at the heart of setting the tone for the entire program, focusing on creating a warm, inclusive, and playful atmosphere. Begin with light-hearted name games or icebreakers that encourage laughter and help participants learn each other's names in a relaxed way. These activities should be non-competitive, prioritising connection and teamwork over performance. Follow with a group discussion or creative exercise to establish individual and collective goals, ensuring everyone feels heard and valued. This is also the perfect time to share an overview of what will happen during the week, giving participants a clear sense of the schedule, key activities, and opportunities for personal growth. Emphasise that this is a safe, supportive space where collaboration thrives. By the end of the session, participants should feel part of a cohesive team, excited to embark on the journey together with a sense of clarity and anticipation for the program ahead.

## Warm-Up and Check-Ins

Following the day 1 welcome session, each day should also begin with a fun warm-up activity and a check-in to create a positive and welcoming atmosphere. These activities help energise participants, foster creativity, and build a sense of community, ensuring everyone feels engaged and ready for the day ahead. Warm-ups encourage collaboration and set a lively

tone, while check-ins give participants the chance to share their thoughts, reflect on their progress, and connect with the group.

For organisers, warm-ups and check-ins are equally valuable. They provide insights into participants' energy levels, needs, and experiences, allowing organisers to adapt the programme and ensure it remains supportive, effective, and enjoyable for everyone.

### **Pick and Mix**

The Pick and Mix sessions offer participants valuable time for self-directed learning, personal reflection, networking, or simply relaxing and digesting the experience. These flexible sessions are designed to empower participants to take ownership of their learning journey and engage with the program in ways that are most meaningful to them.

During this time, participants can:

- Arrange one-on-one meetings with mentors and festivals to seek advice or feedback.
- Take a walk or rest in private to clear their minds and find inspiration.
- Write in their journals to reflect on their learning and creative process.
- Practice and implement new skills learned that day by creating storytelling material or drafting ideas for their performances.

During the Cassandra Project, we also used Pick and Mix sessions to highlight the exceptional storytelling talent at the Alden Biesen International Festival where our Laboratory was held. Participants attended Q&A sessions with professional storytellers, gaining insights into their biographies, interests, and practices. These conversations provided inspiration and context for the performances participants enjoyed in the evenings.

### **Recommendations for Setting Up Pick-and-Mix Sessions**

To ensure these sessions are effective and enriching:

- **Encourage Goal-Setting:** Suggest that participants think ahead about how they might use this time—whether practicing a skill, brainstorming ideas, or seeking feedback from mentors.
- **Promote Balance:** Highlight the importance of rest and relaxation. A refreshed mind can lead to creative breakthroughs.
- **Foster Connections:** Create opportunities for informal meetups or mentoring sessions to inspire collaboration and exchange ideas.
- **Leverage Expert Access:** If professional storytellers or guest speakers are available, arrange Q&A sessions or discussions. Encourage participants to ask questions and learn from their expertise.

- **Support Reflection:** Offer prompts or tools for journaling, helping participants track their growth and explore their creative process.

Pick and Mix sessions are designed to be adaptable to participants' needs, whether they choose to work, connect, or recharge. By providing guidance and creating a supportive environment, these sessions can foster creativity and personal growth while making the overall experience more enriching.

### Professional Performances

We strongly recommend that, if possible, the Laboratory takes place in parallel with a high-quality professional storytelling event or festival. This provides participants with the valuable opportunity to experience the professional level of storytelling we are ultimately working towards. For many, it might be their very first encounter with the magic of live storytelling, so why not set the bar high and encourage them to strive for excellence in their own creative work?

Experiencing professional performances will support the participants to:

- **Network and connect** with performers, festival organisers, and the wider storytelling community, helping them feel part of the scene and build professional relationships.
- **Learn from professionals** by gaining insight into storytelling techniques, styles, and practices, which they can explore and experiment with during Laboratory sessions.
- **Use live performances as reference points**, enriching group discussions and practical exercises with a shared vocabulary and providing examples to reflect on and draw inspiration from.

### Laboratory Cabaret

A cabaret platform is an important part of the project, creating a supportive and informal space where participants can share their creativity. Since all participants have joined with an interest in performing solo on stage, this platform gives them the chance to get that ball rolling and perform in front of the group in a fun and low-pressure way. It helps them connect with each other, express themselves, and explore their creative potential.

Participants are encouraged to bring their own skills and interests to the stage. Some might already be storytellers, while others might play an instrument, write poetry, perform stand-up comedy, or dance. This platform allows them to share their talents, explore new ideas, and gain confidence in a relaxed and friendly environment.

In some storytelling traditions, this might be called a cabaret, while in others, it could be a ceilidh or a simple *circle*. Whatever the name, the goal is the same: to create a welcoming space for creativity, self-expression, and connection.

### **Individual Story Development and Sharing**

The Laboratory could include individual Story development sessions and end with a final sharing, where each participant presents a short piece they have created. These sessions are a key part of the process, giving participants the chance to put what they have learned into practice. By creating and sharing their own work, they can process new knowledge, explore their ideas, and develop their creative voice.

The final sharing is a special moment in the Laboratory. It gives participants a sense of achievement and marks the end of their journey together. It is a chance to celebrate their growth, reflect on their development, and connect with the group in a supportive and encouraging space.

### **Evaluation and Closing**

The final stage of the Laboratory focuses on evaluation and closing, providing an opportunity to reflect on the journey and gather valuable feedback. This step is essential to ensure participants have the space to share their thoughts, experiences, and takeaways from the program.

Evaluation sessions can include group discussions, individual feedback forms, or creative ways for participants to express what they have learned and how they have grown. These reflections not only help participants consolidate their new skills and insights but also provide organisers with important information to improve future projects.

Closing the Laboratory with a simple yet meaningful ending helps to bring the group together one last time. Whether it is through a shared activity, words of encouragement, or a moment to celebrate everyone's contributions, the closing creates a sense of completion. It leaves participants with a feeling of accomplishment and inspiration as they prepare to take the next steps in their storytelling journey.

**The Tool Kit will provide examples of an evaluation session plan we used in the Cassandra project. You can also access it through this link; [EVALUATION SESSION PLAN](#)**

## Phase 03 - Social Engagement and Research

This section explores how to bring the research and social engagement phase to life. It focuses on helping new storytellers develop the skills to gather and share diverse stories with care and respect. It offers practical tips and links to exercises for creating meaningful conversations within communities and turning deep research into powerful, engaging performances.

### What is Social Engagement?

Social engagement in storytelling is more than just gathering information- it's about building relationships and creating safe spaces for stories to emerge. It requires empathy, openness, and a genuine commitment to understanding the lives and experiences of others.

At its core, social engagement involves:

- **Building Trust:** Ensuring people feel safe and respected when sharing their stories.
- **Collaborating with Communities:** Working together to shape how stories are told and represented.
- **Exploring Complex Themes Creatively:** Using metaphors, symbols, or other imaginative approaches to make abstract or difficult topics accessible.

This approach allows storytellers to go beyond the surface, uncovering layers of meaning and multiple perspectives and creating authentic narratives that resonate with individuals with lived experience of the theme and broader audiences with no experience.

Find out more about how the Cassandra Team Approached Social Engagement, chose their story themes and dealt with challenges along the way in the tool kit or through the following link: [SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY](#)

### Balancing Agency and Responsibility

Socially engaged storytelling allows artists to explore their own creative expression while connecting deeply with real-world themes. The storyteller is not a community facilitator but an artist with the agency to interpret and express stories in a unique way. However, this creative freedom comes with the responsibility to approach others' experiences with care, respect, and authenticity.

By embracing the dual pillars of artistic and ethical storytelling, we can create work that amplifies voices, explores complex themes, and remains true to artistic visions while honoring the stories and people that inspire it.

## Building Ethical Frameworks

We recommend creating an Ethical Framework with your participants before research and social engagement has begun. Working within an ethical framework in storytelling means balancing the creative freedom and interpretive nature of the craft with a responsibility to respect the people, communities, and subjects involved. While storytelling allows for imagination and artistic license, it does not exempt storytellers from ethical considerations, such as:

- **Respecting Consent and Privacy:** Ensuring that individuals whose stories are being shared (directly or indirectly) have given informed consent and that their privacy is upheld.
- **Avoiding Harm:** Being mindful of how stories, even fictionalised or metaphorical, might perpetuate stereotypes, misrepresent communities, or cause emotional harm to those involved.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Remaining respectful of cultural narratives, traditions, and histories, mainly when drawing on experiences outside of one's own.
- **Transparency:** Acknowledging the artistic choices made in shaping the story, especially when blending fact and fiction.
- **Accountability:** Taking responsibility for how the story might impact audiences, subjects, or broader societal conversations

**In the toolkit or through the following link, you can see an example of an ethical Framework developed for the Cassandra Project: [CODE OF ETHICS](#)**

**In the tool kit, we have also provided a session plan about how to collaboratively create an Ethical Framework for your Socially Engaged Storytelling. You can also access it via this link [BUILDING A CODE OF ETHICS](#)**

## Whose story is it? Am I allowed to tell it?

A central question in socially engaged storytelling is: *Whose story is it?* While storytellers maintain full creative agency, their work often involves engaging with the experiences, identities, and histories of others. This requires great care to avoid appropriation or misrepresentation.

When navigate this it may be useful to consider the following:

- Understand the Story’s Origin: Acknowledge the individuals or communities whose experiences inform the work and approach them with respect and care.
- Balance Representation and Ownership: While the storyteller shapes the narrative, they do not “own” the experiences of others. Their role is to interpret and express these stories responsibly, not to exploit or misrepresent them.
- Reflect on Biases: Regular self-reflection—asking “Why am I drawn to this story?” or “How might my viewpoint shape the narrative?”—helps storytellers remain thoughtful and self-aware.
- Seek Support: Engage mentors, peers, or collaborators to navigate emotional or ethical challenges without compromising the integrity of the work.
- Honor Creative Freedom: Recognize that the work is ultimately the artist’s own creative expression. This means taking responsibility for how the story is shaped while respecting the people and themes involved.

## Choosing a Theme

Often, storytellers report feeling that they don’t *choose* a theme—it chooses them. A theme might spark in an everyday moment: a conversation with a stranger, a magazine article, or a statistic from a news headline. These small encounters take hold in the artist’s imagination, growing until they feel compelled to explore them.

Themes can also emerge from deeply personal places. A storyteller may draw from their own life, family history, or the landscapes and communities they are connected to. Many are driven by a deep concern for a social issue or a connection to a specific topic or group of people. These personal and emotional ties often fuel a storyteller’s passion and authenticity, bringing richness and depth to their work.

In socially engaged storytelling, the artist is not a passive observer but an active participant. They are “switched on” to the world around them—curious, open, and deeply engaged. This approach is often political, with the artist positioning themselves within the discussion, reflecting their own experiences, values, and concerns. They may have opinions they want to express, questions they want to explore, or injustices they want to expose.

For storytellers who are unsure how to choose a theme, it can help to encourage reflection and exploration. Consider these strategies:

- **Pay attention to what resonates emotionally:** What new stories, conversations, or observations spark curiosity, anger, or passion? What issues feel too important to ignore?

- **Explore personal connections:** If they feel comfortable doing so, encourage storytellers to think about their own life experiences, family histories, or communities. What stories feel untold or underrepresented?
- **Be open to serendipity:** Sometimes, themes emerge unexpectedly. Suggest that storytellers remain curious and attentive to the world around them, noting moments that capture their imagination.
- **Research and experiment:** Encourage storytellers to read widely, watch films, visit exhibitions, or engage with other socially engaged art forms. Exposure to other worlds and works can spark inspiration or help refine their focus.
- **Collaborate with others:** Conversations with friends, mentors, or peers can help clarify ideas. Collaborative brainstorming can uncover connections or angles they might not have seen on their own.

Ultimately, choosing a theme is an organic process. It often begins with a seed of an idea—something that feels urgent, fascinating, or deeply personal—and grows as the storyteller delves into research, reflection, and experimentation. Supporting storytellers in this process means helping them trust their instincts while staying open to exploration and discovery.

In the Cassandra project, the types of themes which emerged were:

- **Identity & Self-Discovery:** Stories about coming of age, gender, sexuality, body image, and cultural belonging, reflections on personal own transformations and journeys of self-discovery.
- **Family & Relationships:** Parent- child dynamics and cultural inheritance, how patterns within families influence identity and emotional resilience.
- **Mental Health & Wellbeing:** Anxiety, depression, PTSD, and neurodiversity, creative explorations of personal struggles can connect the artist to broader societal pressures.
- **Power, Rights & Belonging:** Stories about migration, diaspora, LGBTQ+ experiences, and religious freedom highlighted the struggles for rights and belonging in a complex world.
- **War, Violence & Historical Trauma:** Storytelling can tackle the heaviest of contemporary issues, such as the impacts of war, political violence, domestic abuse, and displacement
- **Climate & Environmental Concerns:** Climate change and environmental degradation emerge as urgent themes. Storytellers may explore the human and ecological impacts of climate collapse, the role of industries such as oil, and the emotional toll of living in a world facing an environmental crisis.

## Making a Research Plan

Once a theme has been identified, the next step is to create a plan for your research. Begin by defining a research period. The time you'll dedicate to gathering information before or alongside the creative process.

The length and structure of your research phase will depend on:

- **Your timeline:** How much time do you have before your first tryouts and performance? A shorter timeline means focusing on essential sources, while a longer one may allow for deeper exploration.
- **Your process:** Are you someone who prefers to complete research upfront before creating, or do you like to research and create simultaneously? Both approaches are valid, but your research plan should reflect your working style.
- **Access to sources:** Consider how quickly you can reach the people, places, or materials you need.
- **Familiarity with the theme:** If the theme involves familiar topics or personal experiences, the research may feel more intuitive and require less time. For new, less familiar territory, allocate extra time for discovery.
- **Level of detail and challenges:** Themes requiring technical expertise, cultural context, or sensitive material may demand more thorough research, especially if sources are difficult to access or the topic is complex.

As you go, we would recommend documenting as much as possible. Keep detailed notes, recordings, drawings, mood boards or photos to reference later.

The Next step is asking.

***Who or what might hold the key to these stories?*** We recommended identifying a variety of potential sources. These could be:

- **Individuals:** Local storytellers, elders, or community members with personal experiences and unique insights.
- **Support groups and charities:** These are Organisations that can provide valuable perspectives and background knowledge without requiring direct engagement with individuals who may be too vulnerable to participate.
- **Experts:** Historians, researchers, or specialists who can provide context, verify facts, and point you toward additional resources.
- **Archives:** Libraries, museums, historical societies, or online collections where you can uncover documents, photographs, and recordings.
- **Places:** Significant locations tied to your theme, such as historic buildings, landscapes, neighbourhoods, or landmarks that hold cultural or historical meaning.

- **Cultural or community groups:** Organisations that preserve folk traditions, oral histories, myths, and rituals, offering insight into collective memory and shared heritage.
- **Folklore and traditions:** Myths, legends, stories, and superstitions associated with your theme, which can reveal deeper cultural, historical, or symbolic meanings. Folklore can often be accessed through books, the internet, cultural groups, and, of course, individuals who are keepers of oral traditions.
- **Other art inspired by the theme:** Literature, films, music, visual art, or performances that explore the same theme. These works can provide creative interpretations, highlight different perspectives, and inspire new ways of approaching your research.

By drawing from these sources—including artistic representations—you'll gain a well-rounded understanding of your theme, uncovering both factual and imaginative dimensions that can enrich your storytelling.

## Creating With Consent

Consent is essential but not always straightforward in storytelling. It means asking for clear and informed permission before including someone's story in your project. Be honest about your intentions and how the story might be used, even if you are unsure of all the details. Give people the freedom to say no, set boundaries, or change their minds later. Consent is not a one-time action; it is an ongoing process.

If you cannot get permission, prioritise the person's privacy by removing or altering details that could identify them. Alternatively, you can create composite stories, fictionalise elements, use metaphor, or focus on your own reflections rather than directly using someone else's words. Always prioritise respect and avoid putting pressure on anyone to share their story.

As artists, we are not bound by the strict legal rules or formal codes that guide journalists, lawyers, or academics. Instead, we work in a space of creativity and subjective interpretation. For us, consent is not just about filling out forms—it is about understanding and respecting the human connection behind the story.

At the same time, it is important to stay mindful of the potential consequences of your choices. Think carefully about the impact of sharing a story. Could it cause harm? Could it provoke a strong reaction from a powerful group, such as a multinational company? You might decide that you are comfortable taking that risk, but it is important to make informed and thoughtful decisions. Balancing creative freedom with respect and responsibility is key.

Key Reminders:

- Be clear and honest about your project and how you might use the story.
- Respect privacy by anonymising or adapting stories if consent isn't possible.
- Avoid pressure and make it easy for people to say no.
- Find alternatives like fictionalising or blending multiple stories.
- Legal codes may not apply to storytellers; however, care, respect, and accountability do.

## Working With Support

Support is essential for new storytellers engaging in socially engaged storytelling, especially when navigating complex, sensitive, or deeply personal themes. This work requires emotional resilience, ethical responsibility, and collaborative networks, which is why a robust support system is critical for both the storytellers and the communities they engage with.

**Mentors** are Key to this and will play a vital role in supporting new storytellers, especially when the work involves exploring sensitive or personal themes. It is essential that the mentors are experienced in working in sensitive contexts with vulnerable people, have excellent listening skills and be able to offer thoughtful feedback and provide guidance without judgment. They must also have the ability to create and maintain safe, supportive, and positive working atmospheres where storytellers feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and emotions.

Alongside the festivals, the mentors will also be able to open doors when it comes to research, connecting the storytellers to relevant people, networks, and organisations, as well as providing expertise and resources.

**Partnership Working:** These partners can include charities, community groups, advocacy organisations, health and social care providers, and others with direct experience supporting specific groups or communities. These organisations can bring valuable expertise and insights to projects, but their primary responsibility is to ensure the safety, dignity, and well-being of those they support.

New storytellers who may lack experience in sensitive contexts can benefit greatly from the ethical guidance provided by these organisations. In some cases, organisations may decide not to grant storytellers direct access to their service users—a decision that is often necessary to safeguard those involved. Instead, they can offer alternative resources, such as:

- **Case studies** that provide anonymised or generalised insights.
- **Their own expertise and experiences** help storytellers build a broader understanding of the complexity of the issues being explored.

By working in partnership, storytellers ensure their work is **respectful, responsible, and ethically sound** while protecting both service users and themselves from potential harm.

### Peer Support

A key aim of initiatives like the Cassandra Project is to cultivate new communities of storytellers. By fostering trust, collaboration and a shared vocabulary early on - through creative laboratories and workshops—participants can build a network of mutual support.

This sense of community can be strengthened throughout the project through regular in-person or online meet-ups - a space to share progress, discuss challenges, and exchange ideas with peers on a similar journey. Also, creating and encouraging opportunities for the group to work alongside each other through shared rehearsal spaces, on or offline writing cafes and group feedback sessions. Such peer support helps storytellers feel less isolated, providing a shared space for reflection, constructive feedback, and motivation.

## Social Engagement Research Methods and Approaches

When gathering stories, there are many ways to connect with people, places and communities meaningfully.

Simple **Interviews** can be a great starting place, helping you hear personal stories directly from individuals. Open questions like “Can you tell me about your life here?” encourage people to share in their own words, revealing unique perspectives. In the right context, more creative questions like, “If this place were a person, what kind of personality would they have?” can help people move out of normal thought patterns and introduce a more playful interaction.

**Workshops** provide a structured, collaborative space where groups can come together to share, explore, and create stories. Using activities such as story circles, drawing timelines, creative mapping, or handling and talking about meaningful objects, workshops encourage democratic contribution and active listening, ensuring that multiple voices contribute to shaping the story. The opportunity to develop workshop facilitation skills is also especially useful for storytellers working in collaborative or socially engaged settings.

Sometimes, quietly **observing** can be just as powerful. Observations allow you to notice how people interact, what they do, and the overall atmosphere of a place. These small details bring stories to life. Reading and **archival research** are invaluable for adding context and depth. Exploring books, photographs, letters, or records uncovers the history and culture of a place, grounding the narrative.

For broader input, **surveys** can gather perspectives from a larger group. Simple questions like “What does this place mean to you?” highlight shared experiences and themes. Meanwhile, keeping **field notes** ensures you record what you see, hear, and feel. Writing down impressions in real-time or reflecting on them later keeps your observations fresh and organised.

When words aren’t enough, **visual storytelling** uses photos or videos to access material. Documenting daily life or events visually adds richness, and asking people to share their thoughts about the images deepens the connection. Similarly, **cultural immersion** invites you to experience the life, traditions, and activities of a place, community or culture firsthand. Participating in festivals, volunteering, or attending events helps you understand values and rhythms.

Find out more about how we supported our storytellers to research in the community in the tool kit or by following this link: [RESEARCHING YOUR STORY IN THE COMMUNITY](#)

### Lessons from the Cassandra Project:

Without a doubt, the Young Storytellers were exploring highly sensitive social issues and inevitably encountered several logistical and social barriers while conducting their research. Access to vulnerable or protected communities was difficult at times as institutional and social barriers emerged when approaching protected groups; most research required careful navigation to engage with community gatekeepers or a change in approach.

Additionally, some personal topics - such as religious identity, sexual identity, experiences of displacement or mental health - required building careful trust relationships before meaningful dialogue could begin; this was one of the reasons that many of the YST turned to existing relationships with family and friends.

While the young storytellers demonstrated a remarkable ability to engage with these complex subjects, they didn’t have the extended time frame useful for relationship building, particularly when working with vulnerable groups or addressing historically unspoken experiences.

This observation suggests future iterations of such projects might benefit from more extended timelines that better reflect the rhythms of community engagement and the sensitivity required when working with personal narratives of trauma, transformation, and resilience whilst allowing time for the YST to build skills and trust in new communities

## Placement of Social Engagement

The plan for the Cassandra project initially, was for young storytellers to create their pieces by researching within and engaging directly with the communities they were representing in a more immersive way. However, it became clear that because of the timescales and the importance of the YST's personal relationship to their theme, a more self-reflective approach was necessary for many. As one young storyteller said,

*"The biggest restriction turned out to be the specific time frame that we had to do research, create and perform in try-outs. My initial idea was to interview a refugee amateur football team in [my home city] that I support, but I quickly realised that it would take great care and time to reach out to people I have never met before and to form such a bond that they would trust me and support me in creating a story around them. Above that, I also realised that their story was probably not mine to tell, as I don't have a refugee background." YST*

The YSTs had to learn more about their subjects from different angles while recognising their own biases and emotions related to those topics. This process involved establishing their own boundaries. For some, it involved creating small, controlled "circles" of trusted participants before expanding their reach. Some YSTs focused on personal and family histories to develop their narratives.

With this groundwork laid, they can now approach broader social engagement with their own ethical framework and clarity about their themes and strategies for creating safe spaces for difficult conversations. The 20-minute performance they created is now a tool, in its own right, for building trust and creating dialogue spaces, particularly when approaching vulnerable groups. While some YSTs have already made significant contributions to their communities, for others, the most impactful social engagement lies ahead.

**Find out more about how the Cassandra project participants approached social engagement and research by following this link:**

**[CASSANDRA PROJECT PARTICIPANT'S SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT](#)**

## Audience development

For socially engaged storytelling to be effective, it should be accompanied by strategies that ensure the message reaches the right people and sparks meaningful engagement. So, apart

from professional development opportunities, festivals also play an important role through audience development: the process of attracting, engaging, and retaining audiences.

Socially engaged storytelling, when effectively paired with audience development strategies, can lead to several positive outcomes:

- Increased Awareness – Audiences gain deeper insights into social issues, fostering empathy and critical thinking.
- Community Mobilization – People are inspired to take action, whether through advocacy, or policy change efforts.
- Cultural and Social Change – By amplifying marginalized voices and challenging dominant narratives, socially engaged storytelling contributes to broader societal transformations.
- Sustainable Audience Relationships – When audiences feel a personal connection to a story, they are more likely to stay engaged and share it within their networks.

Storytelling festivals play a crucial role in socially engaged storytelling and audience development by fostering community connections, creating spaces where stories serve as catalysts for dialogue, and empathy, amplifying diverse voices, and creating immersive cultural experiences.

- Festivals often collaborate with local organizations to address pressing community concerns.
- Festivals provide a space for audiences to engage deeply with stories that might challenge their views and encourage meaningful discussions.
- Personal narratives shared at festivals often resonate strongly with audiences, leading to increased social awareness and advocacy.
- Festivals curate storytelling performances that highlight values and social issues.
- They provide a stage for storytellers from underrepresented communities, ensuring diverse voices are heard.
- By blending traditional storytelling with contemporary themes, festivals make complex social issues more accessible and relatable.
- Many festivals partner with community organizations to support local storytelling initiatives.
- They often offer storytelling workshops or training programs to empower individuals to share their experiences and advocate for social change.
- By prioritizing local voices and grassroots storytelling projects, festivals ensure that social issues are addressed from a bottom-up perspective.
- They can make it interactive and participatory by hosting story circles where attendees share personal experiences related to the festival's theme.

## Phase 04 - Going Public

The "Going Public" section is your guide to bringing a socially engaged storytelling project to life in front of an audience. It provides clear, actionable steps to deliver compelling international standard performances, promote work, and manage technical requirements and staging. The section also considers evaluation and the various potential futures for this kind of work.

### Rehearsal Planning

For a long-term project, storytellers need to take the lead in shaping a rehearsal process that works for their lives and creative goals. Whether building on completed research or creating alongside it, they should drive the process, ensuring steady progress while managing other commitments. Here are some things to help them keep in mind:

Set the Foundation: Logistics and Scheduling

- **Clarify Deadlines From The Start:**
  - When and where will the final performance and any try-outs take place?
  - Does your venue have any deadlines for requirements such as publicity material or technical information?
  
- **Structure Your Meetings**
  - Will rehearsals happen independently, one-on-one with mentors, in groups, or a mixture of these approaches?
  - Where will rehearsals take place? Who will book or organise the spaces?
  - How often will meteor and group meetings take place?
  - Will this schedule stay the same or change over time?
  
- **Plan for Breaks and Busy Periods:**
  - Think ahead about times when life might get busy. Are there major holidays, festivals, or school breaks coming up?
  - What other commitments, like work deadlines or family events, might affect availability?
  - Be honest about how much time and energy you can give, and encourage others to do the same.
  
- **Prioritise Self-Care:**
  - Working on emotionally rich stories can be demanding, so make self-care part of the process.

- Flexible options, such as online rehearsals or shorter sessions, can help when schedules get tight.
- Regularly check in with your team to share progress and make sure everyone is working towards the same goals.
- If challenges arise, use the support systems that were put in place during the social engagement phase: mentors, festivals, partners and peers.

### **Define Milestones for Each Stage**

Breaking the process into clear stages will make it easier to manage and track progress, and every milestone is an achievement. Celebrating these moments keeps energy and enthusiasm high.

#### **Early Stage**

- Create the outline for your story structure.
- Identify the key emotional moments in your story.
- Share your early ideas for feedback.
- Practice storytelling techniques, such as pacing, tone, and delivery.

#### **Midway Stage**

- Complete a full run-through of the story, even if it's still rough.
- Hold a small try-out with trusted peers to get constructive feedback.
- Use this feedback to refine your story and performance.
- Start introducing simple technical elements, such as props, staging, or lighting.

#### **Final Stage**

- Prepare a polished version of your story, with all creative and technical elements in place.
- Run a dress rehearsal in the performance space.
- Organise a preview performance for a wider audience, including the communities whose stories are part of the work.
- Use audience feedback to make final adjustments before the public presentation.
- Celebrate progress at every stage to keep energy and enthusiasm high.
- Keep communication open and honest, addressing any challenges or conflicts as they arise.
- Share tasks such as organising feedback sessions, managing materials, or coordinating logistics to lighten the load and build teamwork.

## Developing Stage Craft

Growth as a performance storyteller comes through practice, by stepping onto the stage time and time again. The artform comes alive in the connection between the teller, the material and the audience. In the early stages, when a performer is still finding their footing, an idea is just beginning to grow, or the subject is especially sensitive, the choice of audience is vital. These first steps should be taken in front of a supportive and understanding audience, where performers feel safe enough to explore and stumble. Feedback, too, must be handled with care—given graciously and thoughtfully with a focus on the positive, as these are delicate but formative moments.

**In the tool kit, we will pull together some exercises and techniques to support stagecraft:**

**[WORKSHOP - STAGE PRESENCE](#)**

## Publicity and Marketing

Good publicity is more than just promotion—it's about connecting with people and inviting them to be part of your story. It will help you reach the audiences, build interest, and share the message behind your work. A good marketing plan ensures that people know about your performance and feel inspired to come and take part.

**For Organisers:** At an early stage, project organisers should carefully consider the branding of the project. Does it have a clear title, a distinctive logo, a consistent colour scheme, or an eye-catching poster? Thoughtful branding not only creates a strong, cohesive identity but also makes the project more recognisable and appealing—particularly on social media, where engaging visuals and a clear message are essential for reaching wider audiences and generating interest.

To maximise impact, organisers can also develop a social media strategy that identifies target audiences, selects the most appropriate platforms, and plans regular, engaging content to maintain visibility and build momentum.

**Led by a marketing professionals, the Cassandra Project created an in-depth communication tool kit covering everything from colour scheme to tone of voice. You can find it through the following link: [COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION PLAN](#)**

**For Storytellers:** Even if someone is managing this part of the project, storytellers, as both performers and creators, will need to provide publicity information; after all, they know their work best.

They will need to provide:

- **Blurb:** short, engaging description of their performance. The blurb should capture the main idea or theme in a way that makes people curious and excited to attend. Keep it simple and clear, around 50–100 words.
- **Artist Biography:** A short introduction about the creators or performers. This should include background, experience, and connection to the project. Write in a friendly and accessible tone, focusing on what makes your perspective unique.
- **Headshot or production shot:** A clear and professional photo of the performer or creator. This will be used in programs, online promotion, or press materials.
- **Social Media Posts:** Creators should provide a selection of content designed for social media, including images or videos. These posts should draw attention to the project by showcasing its most compelling aspects, whether that's a sneak peek of rehearsals, a striking visual from the performance, or a personal message from the creator.

**For our international showcase in Amsterdam, The Cassandra Project created a digital program with information about each of our storytellers; you can find out more about them in the tool kit or via this link: [PERFORMERS BIOS AND BLURBS](#)**

## Technical Requirements

Storytelling is a remarkably versatile art form, capable of thriving in any setting where a teller and an audience come together. At any scale—whether it's a grandmother sharing a story with her grandchild or a performer captivating an auditorium of thousands—storytelling can be an incredibly powerful and transformative form of social engagement.

However, storytelling is increasingly being celebrated as a virtuosic solo performance art form with a rightful place on professional theatre stages. Initiatives like Cassandra aim to showcase storytelling's ability to captivate audiences in such performance settings. At these larger scales, the use of light and sound amplification becomes an important consideration.

While such technical elements may not always be necessary for smaller or socially engaged performances, it is valuable for storytellers to have a basic understanding of performance technology and the information they would need to provide should the opportunity arise.

### Tips For Creating A Technical Plan (Tech Spec)

Creating a technical plan (or tech spec) doesn't have to be complicated, even if you're not familiar with technical terms. If you don't know the technical terms, focus on the mood or atmosphere you want to create—technicians are skilled professionals who can translate your vision into lighting, sound, or staging effects. If you're unsure about any details, don't hesitate to ask someone with technical experience for guidance.

Storytelling performances are often flexible and adapt to the audience, which can make cueing less predictable. This might be unfamiliar to lighting and sound operators who are used to fixed timings you may find in theatre. To make things easier, provide clear signals or visual instructions rather than relying on exact timings or cue lines. For instance, you could say: *"When I step centre stage, fade the lights to black,"* or *"When I lift my hand, begin the music."* These types of cues are straightforward and easy to follow.

Time is another key factor to keep in mind. Setting up technical elements for a theatre or festival performance can be time-consuming and occasionally costly. Be respectful of the time allocated for your technical rehearsal, and if you are managing the schedule, ensure there's enough time for this process during rehearsals and on the day of the performance.

By collaborating with technicians, communicating clearly, and planning carefully, you can ensure your technical setup runs smoothly, helping to create a performance that is both polished and impactful.

**The Tool Kit will provide a step-by-step guide about how to create your own Tech Spec - which you can also access via this link. [HOW TO BUILD A 'TECH SPEC'](#)**

**We have also provided examples of some of the Cassandra Storytellers Tour packs, which include a biography, blurb, production images and tech specs; you can find them through the following links;**

- [TOUR PACK WITH TECH SPEC - EXAMPLE 1](#)
- [TOUR PACK WITH TECH SPEC - EXAMPLE 2](#)

## Final Words

We hope this manual has given you some of the tools and inspiration you need to recruit and support emerging socially engaged storytellers effectively, helping your project flourish. Storytelling is a powerful way to connect people, share experiences, and spark creativity, and we're excited to see the work you'll bring to life.

The content of this manual will come back in the online project toolkit in a different format and with much more extra multimedia input. This will support you in the development of the different phases in the process of introducing socially engaged storytelling and fostering professional development and audience development.

If you have any questions, need further guidance, or just want to share your progress, we'd love to hear from you! Feel free to reach out to FEST for advice or to tell us about your project. Your stories and experiences help strengthen the storytelling community, and we're always here to support you along the way.

Good luck with your project, and happy storytelling!

The Cassandra Team

Contact: [festeurope@gmail.com](mailto:festeurope@gmail.com)

## Hyperlinks - Short Cuts

### Introduction

- [FEST WEBSITE/ CASSANDRA PROJECT](#)
- [CASSANDRA STORYTELLERS - PODCAST EPISODE 1: RELEVANCE.](#)
- [THE AURUS PROJECT.](#)
- [NEWSLETTER 3: FOCUS ON FESTIVALS](#)

### Phase 1 - Set up and Recruitment

- [FEST WEBSITE/ CASSANDRA PROJECT](#)
- [MENTOR INFORMATION SHEET](#)
- [STORYTELLER CALL OUT - NORWEIGIAN TEAM](#)
- [YOUNG STORYTELLER INFORMATION SHEET](#)

### Phase 2 - The Laboratory

- [NEWSLETTER ALDEN BIESEN](#)

- [CASSANDRA SKELETON SCHEDULE](#)
- [STORYTELLING IN 8 COLOURS](#)
- [UNESCO'S APPROACH TO INTANGIBLE HERTIGAE](#)
- [WORKSHOP - NATURE CONNECTION](#)
- [WORKSHOP - IDENTIFYING YOUR VALUES AS AN ARTIST](#)
- [WORKSHOP - FORM, SPACE AND AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT](#)
- [WORKSHOP - MULTILINGUAL STORYTELLING FOR AN INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE](#)
- [WORKSHOP- RESEARCHING YOUR STORY IN THE COMMUNITY](#)
- [EVALUATION SESSION PLAN](#)

### **Phase 3 - Research and Social Engagement**

- [CODE OF ETHICS](#)
- [SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY](#)
- [RESEARCHING YOUR STORY IN THE COMMUNITY](#)
- [WORKSHOP - STAGE PRESENCE](#)
- [CASSANDRA PROJECT PARTICIPANT'S SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT APPROACH](#)

### **Phase 4 - Going Public**

- [COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION PLAN](#)
- [PERFORMERS BIOS AND BLURBS](#)
- [HOW TO BUILD A 'TECH SPEC'](#)
- [TOUR PACK WITH TECH SPEC - EXAMPLE 1](#)
- [TOUR PACK WITH TECH SPEC - EXAMPLE 2](#)



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