



Yes! Access.

Storytelling Guidelines

Why Your Story Matters

We are leading a powerful movement to change the way disability is viewed and understood. One of the ways that humans connect with others and understand experiences different than their own is through story.

Stories connect.

They shift minds, move hearts, and fuel action.

Your lived experience is a vital part of the real story.

By sharing your story, you're helping others understand why access matters, who it affects, and how it affects you.

You don't have to be a professional speaker or activist. You just have to be real. Consider the following:

- Your story is your power.
- When you speak out, others find the courage to do the same.
- Be authentic - don't try to be anyone else.
- Show your personality.

- Talk to us like you would a friend.
- Together, we can change the story and say *Yes!* to access.

What Makes a Yes! Access Story?

A powerful story from our community should be:

- ☐ **Personal** – grounded in your experience, not abstract policy
- ☐ **Values and connection driven** – focused on shared values that drive connection, like fairness, independence, family, dignity, and community
- ☐ **Positive and empowering** – honest about barriers, but hopeful about what's possible
- ☐ **Relatable** – help others see themselves or their loved ones in your experience
- ☐ **Actionable** – it should help people *understand why access matters* and feel like they can help

How to Structure Your Story

Here's a simple way to organize your story:

1. Start with a shared value

Select a value (or two) you want to focus on, like independence, opportunity, family, community or fairness. These are things that others can relate to.

- Consider answering the following:
 - What does that value mean to you?
 - How has that value been reflected in your life?
 - Are there challenges to having that in your life?
- Example: "Independence to me is the ability to go to my favorite coffee shop. To do that, I use my modified car..."

2. Identify a moment

Pick one experience or example. What happened? Be specific.

- Consider answering the following:

- Where were you?
- What were you trying to do?
- How did you feel?
- Example: “At the end of the day, when we had finished serving the food and all the volunteers were sitting around laughing and joking, I really felt a sense of pride and community.”

3. **Show what access means**

Talk about the things that support your access and ability to live your values.

- Consider answering the following:
 - What would have made the situation better?
 - How did lack of access affect you? Or—how did access help?
- Example: “504 helped my son get the support he needed in school. With this support, he has been able to learn and thrive. Without it, he wouldn’t be walking across that graduation stage – something important to his future and for his self-esteem.”

4. **End with a call to action**

You don’t have to give a speech or become a commercial. But leave people with a sense of what needs to change — and why it matters

- Consider answering the following:
 - What is important to keep doing so that you can live your values?
 - What would negatively impact your ability to continue to live your values?
- Example: “Everyone wants to be a part of the community. Access to the community to shop, to work, to connect shouldn’t be optional. It should be a basic part of life. We need the legislation to support making things accessible so that I can continue to be a part of the community.”

Tips on Tone

Our objective is to create the space to make genuine connections and transform understanding. Consider keeping your tone:

- **Honest**, not like an actor
- **Empowered**, not desperate
- **Inviting**, not shaming
- **Real**, not rehearsed

It's okay to be emotional. It's okay to be brief. What matters is *truth + values + vision*.

Pitfalls to Avoid

1. **Avoid pity or becoming a tragic figure**

When people pity others, they do not see them as equals. Even if it inspires sympathy and charity in them, it undermines respect, dignity, and true inclusion. You're not here to be an object of pity— you're here to show your truth and connect with others on shared humanity.

- Consider the following:
 - Everyone struggles.
 - Everyone has challenges.
 - The challenges people with disabilities face are often systemic (could be solved by changes to society, the environment, and systems).
 - Your life is valuable.
 - You have inherent value just as you are.
 - Your life and the lives of those you are connected to are enhanced when barriers are removed and the proper supports are in place.

2. **Avoid “superhero” or “overcoming disability” narratives**

When people frame people with disabilities as superhuman – either by implying that just existing with a disability is heroic and inspiring or by only allowing stories of them where they achieve extraordinary feats – it ultimately isolates and ‘others’ people with disabilities. One advocate calls it “a pedestal of prejudice.” It keeps the larger community from seeing people with disabilities as equal humans and prevents them from recognizing the environmental, societal, and systemic changes that need to be made.

- Disability is a natural part of the diverse human experience.
- You don’t have to appear superhuman to be heard and valued.
- You have value as you are.
- People will connect better with you if they just see you as human.
- This is about *rights and the values we share*, not inspiration or idealization.

3. **Avoid legal jargon or over-explaining**

Don’t worry about naming and/or explaining every law or policy. Keep it simple. Keep it human. Keep it real. That’s what sticks.

- Consider the following:
 - People are unlikely to hold onto a lot of details.
 - Tomorrow we might be advocating for something different.
 - The most important thing is to connect.

4. **Avoid blaming individuals or politicization**

This is about visibility and connection – overcoming long-standing stereotypes and stigmas to make a lasting shift in society’s understanding of people with disabilities. We are trying to connect with and educate as many people as possible into the effort to make changes.

While the disability community is facing challenges at the moment that can be traced to specific people or politics, we need to focus on systems,

structures, and barriers to access. We need to point the way to a better world and avoid getting pulled into divisiveness and identity politics.

- Consider the following:
 - This is an issue that is bigger than any one person, party, or action.
 - Focusing on what we have in common and what we can achieve together is the only way to create a powerful, unified movement.

Ways to Share Your Story

There are lots of ways to share your story and join the movement:

- Record a video (landscape, 1-2 minutes is great). See our guide to filming for pointers.
- Write a short post for social media or the Yes! Access site.
 - Tag us and use one or more of our hashtags: #YesAccess ##KeepItReal #DisabilityRights #WhatsYourStory #Disability #Ally
- Speak at a virtual event, webinar, or local meeting.
- Submit it to a newsletter or media outlet.
- Reach out to us to virtually interview you.
- Encourage others in your network to tell their story.