



Democratic National Committee

PLAYBOOK

**A GUIDE FOR COORDINATED
CAMPAIGNS & STATE PARTIES**





REAL PEOPLE. REAL STORIES.

**A Campaign Toolkit for Storytelling that
Moves People**

**PORCH
LIGHT.
MEDIA**

A guide for campaigns, causes, and organizations ready to find real people, capture authentic stories, and produce content that actually moves audiences.

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INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

WHO WE ARE

PORCH LIGHT MEDIA is a full-service strategy, content, and production company led by **Amy Romanow, Ashley Bearden, and Miriam Arkin** — award-winning producers, directors, and strategists who've built campaigns and created content across politics, brands, film & TV, and non-profits at the highest levels.

What sets us apart is our unmatched expertise working with real people and real stories. We built the largest real people and stories program in political history across Biden (2020) and Harris (2024), and we've continued developing story programs for campaigns and IEs up and down the ballot.



BY THE NUMBERS:

Made **8 of the top 10** most persuasive ads for Harris in 2024

Made **the most effective ads** for Biden in 2020

Our work **moved vote choice by 4%+ across 3 cycles** — Nearly 3x the national average.

INTRODUCTION

WHO THIS TOOLKIT IS FOR

Campaign staff at any level who want to build or improve a storytelling program. Works whether you have a big budget and a dedicated team, or you're one staffer with an iPhone and a Google Sheet.

This toolkit is designed to be genuinely useful, not just inspirational. You'll walk away with frameworks, strategies, and action steps you can start implementing immediately.

HOW TO USE IT:

- Read front to back for the full playbook
- Jump to the section most relevant to where you are now
- Use the "First 30 Days" plan in Getting Started to get started fast
- Reach out to us via Work With Us if you want expert support

WORKING WITH STORIES



WORKING WITH STORIES

WHY STORYTELLING WORKS

THE PROBLEM:

We're in an unprecedented attention crisis.

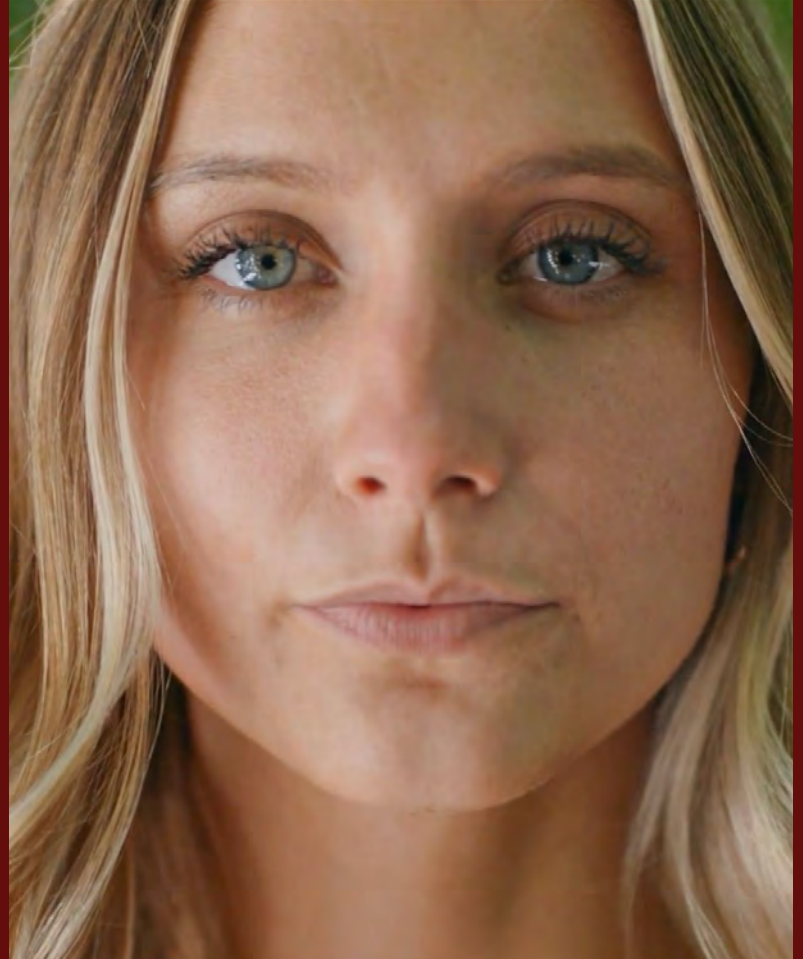
People are bombarded with content, skeptical of institutions, and tuning out politicians, pundits, and talking heads. The audiences that have trended away from Democrats – working-class voters, young men, rural communities, Latino voters – are ones the party has struggled to persuade, not just reach.

THE SOLUTION: REAL PEOPLE

We know from extensive data that stories are the most powerful persuasion tool we have. And real people are by far the most effective messengers.

- **You trust and empathize with your neighbor** more than a politician
- **Stories bring abstract policy to life** and they make the stakes real and felt
- **Testimonials humanize shared experiences** (economic struggles, health care fears, feeling left behind)
- **Real people can deliver messages** that a candidate or random voice over can't or shouldn't

With skeptical and disengaged audiences, storytelling isn't just effective – it's essential. It's how we bring people in and move them to action.



WORKING WITH STORIES

YOUR STORYBANK SERVES YOUR ENTIRE CAMPAIGN

Your storybank is a campaign asset that serves every department. **The earlier you build it, the more utility it has.**

A storytelling program isn't just for paid media. The storytellers you find can be deployed across every department:

- **Paid Media:** TV, CTV, digital, radio, OOH
- **Social Media:** Organic social, UGC, platform-native content
- **Events & Surrogates:** Speeches, rallies, town halls, etc.
- **Earned Media:** Press conferences, op-eds, interview subjects
- **Speeches & Rollouts:** Weave real stories into remarks, policy announcements, launches & major moments
- **Rapid Response:** Deploy real people within days of news breaking

BUILDING YOUR STORYTELLING PROGRAM



BUILDING YOUR STORYTELLING PROGRAM

SET UP YOUR STORYBANK

A storybank is your centralized casting catalog. When an opportunity arises – a new ad buy, a debate response, a speaker at an event – you search your bank first. If you don't have the right person, you go recruit.

CREATING YOUR DATABASE:

Storybanking doesn't need to be fancy. Google Sheets or Excel works. Track:

- **Name, contact info, location** (state, city, CD)
- **Story summary** (2–3 sentences)
- **Issue bucket(s)** (health care, cost-of-living, education, veterans, etc.)
- **On-camera viability notes** (telegenic? good communicator? natural warmth?)
- **Source** (how you found them)
- **Status** (new lead → pre-interviewed → vetted → filmed → shipped)
- **Point of contact and vetting status**

PRO TIP:

Log everyone, even people who aren't right for this moment. Someone you pass on in April could be exactly who you need in October.

BUILDING YOUR STORYTELLING PROGRAM

DEFINE YOUR BUCKETS AND CASTING SPECS

ISSUE BUCKETS

Define the key themes that will be core to your narrative. These are your standing recruitment priorities: health care, cost of living, education, seniors + Social Security, small business, veterans, immigration, reproductive rights, etc.

CASTING SPECS

For each bucket, define the ideal messenger:

- **Demographics** (age, race, gender, geography)
- **Target audience** (who needs to hear this, and who will they relate to?)
- **Tone** (fiery? quiet and devastating? funny? matter-of-fact?)
- **Political identity** (an apolitical person is often more powerful than a partisan one)
- **Placement** (debate night show buy? TikTok? Rally or fundraising event?)

KEY INSIGHT:

It's a two-way process: sometimes the narrative drives the messenger (you need a health care story in Wisconsin). Other times you find an amazing person and their story drives where you deploy them. Stay flexible.

BUILDING YOUR STORYTELLING PROGRAM

FINDING YOUR STORYTELLERS: THE RELENTLESS RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

Finding the right storytellers requires creative sourcing from multiple channels at once.

YOUR OWN CAMPAIGN

Everyone on your campaign is coming across potential stories, even if they don't realize it. Field staff, organizers, event teams, social media managers, comms, fundraising.

- Brief your teams on what you're looking for
- Make it frictionless to flag a lead (a Slack channel, a shared form, a quick text)
- This is **not** adding work, it's simply noticing when a great story is right in front of them

PROGRESSIVE ALLIES AND PARTNERS

Which groups in your county, district, state, etc. do you already have existing relationships or want to build a relationship with that you can mine for storytellers? It's worth taking time to do a thorough brainstorm from the jump.

- Labor unions, health care advocacy groups, education groups
- Small business networks, community coalitions, faith orgs
- National orgs with public-facing, existing storybanks that you can mine

BUILDING YOUR STORYTELLING PROGRAM

FINDING YOUR STORYTELLERS: THE RELENTLESS RECRUITMENT STRATEGY (CONTINUED)

LOCAL MEDIA

Who was profiled on the 5pm news? Who wrote a letter to the editor? Local media is gold because you often get to see people on camera before you ever reach out.

ONLINE COMMUNITIES

- Facebook groups (e.g., “Girl Dads for Harris,” “MI Moms Helping Moms,” community groups, etc)
- Reddit, Twitter/X, TikTok – people share their stories publicly all the time
- State unemployment offices on social media (people literally post their hardship stories)
- GoFundMe campaigns related to your issue areas

“SHARE YOUR STORY” CAMPAIGNS

Work with your digital team to solicit stories:

- Geo-targeted digital ads asking people to share their experience
- Simple free surveys (Google Forms), “Share Your Story” page on your website
- Email/SMS asks to your existing lists

PRO TIP:

Even a modest ad spend surfaces leads. Keep copy simple and specific: “We’re looking for people in [STATE/CD] who have a story about [TOPIC].” Include a short intake form. Your team can geo-target by state, CD, or media market.

Go the Extra Mile.

Community events, county fairs, farmers markets.

And always end every conversation with: “Do you know anyone else who has a similar story?”

That one question has surfaced some of our best storytellers.



BUILDING YOUR STORYTELLING PROGRAM

DEVELOPING YOUR STORYTELLERS

BEFORE YOU REACH OUT

Don't waste time chasing unusable leads. Quick checks first: Can you find current photos/videos? Do they seem telegenic? Vibe check: do they feel relatable? Any immediate red flags?

THE PRE-INTERVIEW CALL (15-30 MIN)

- Let them tell their story in their own words. Listen for **how** they tell it, not just what they say
- Cover logistics: address, availability, comfort level with filming
- Touch on core messaging points (without putting words in their mouth)
- Jot down strong quotes and memorable phrases to inform your shoot packet
- Feel out red flags: camera comfort, alignment, potential issues

THE DECISION

Ask yourself: Will they connect with the target audience? Do they feel authentic? Are they right for this moment? **Be decisive but not impulsive.**

GREENLIGHT AND VET

- Draft a brief write-up for leadership, if required
- Work with your campaign to follow or devise vetting protocol and timing
- Share strong leads with other teams. Someone not right for video might be perfect for an op-ed

BUILDING YOUR STORYTELLING PROGRAM

BUILDING TRUST AND RELATIONSHIP

When you ask someone to become a storyteller it is a big ask. These are real people with no experience being public. They're nervous, they're being vulnerable, and they're doing this as an act of service.

BUILDING TRUST:

- Be honest about the process: this may or may not happen, timelines might shift
- Explain how their story will be used and where it might appear
- Acknowledge the vulnerability of what they're doing
- Be responsive – don't leave them hanging
- Maintain the relationship after filming: check in, thank them, keep them updated
- Give social media lockdown guidance before anything goes live
- Send the final cut 24-48 hours before content is released so they're not surprised

OUR PHILOSOPHY

Treat every storyteller the way you'd want someone to treat your loved ones if they were in this position. **Building trust isn't just the right thing to do – it leads to a dramatically better product.** People open up when they trust you. That's when powerful moments happen.

PRODUCING CONTENT WITH STORYTELLERS



PRODUCING CONTENT WITH STORYTELLERS

THE SHOOT: LOGISTICS AND SET UP

LOGISTICS

Location: Film in the home whenever possible. It's cheap, easy, and authentic.

- Offer to pay for a cleaner. Assure them they do NOT need to tidy up – authenticity rules.
- Alternatives: Airbnb, park, their workplace, somewhere meaningful to their story

Priority: The interview is BY FAR the most important part. Prioritize it above all else.

B-roll: B-roll (footage of their life, surroundings, activities) is secondary, but valuable for the edit.

THE SHOOT PACKET

Interview Questions: The secret sauce. Reverse-engineer research and polling into conversational questions that yield on-message answers naturally. Ask yourself: “What question can I ask that will get the line I want, in their own words?”

Wild Lines: Your insurance policy. Short, tight messaging bites delivered at the end. Safety net if the interview didn't yield a clean enough version of a key message.

Scripts: Scripts can be helpful tools for speed and for scaffolding in the edit, but don't let them take you away from capturing realness and authenticity.

Shot List: Plan b-roll in advance. What shots will emotionally illustrate the story? Much easier to have a list than wing it on set.

PRODUCING CONTENT WITH STORYTELLERS

THE SHOOT: DAY-OF

PRO TIPS

- Do a real interview if you can. It's worth it. Gives you so much to play with in post and for your library of content.
- Two cameras if possible (even a cheap second cam on tripod). Makes cutting between takes dramatically easier.
- Collect personal photos and iPhone videos from the storyteller to add warmth and intimacy.
- Take copious notes during the shoot. Mark the strongest bites. Invaluable for post.
- Jot down pick-ups before wrapping – anything you want to revisit while you're still there.
- Don't forget to get your talent/media release signed!

CREATIVE APPROACHES

Testimonials don't have to be "person sits in chair and talks."

When the airwaves are cluttered, something that feels different is a huge advantage:

- **Documentary style:** follow someone through their day
- **Social media-inspired:** GRWM (Get Ready With Me), day-in-the-life, etc.
- **Cinematic:** high production value when the story and moment warrant it
- **Scrappy:** sometimes iPhone-quality feels more real than polished production

PRODUCING CONTENT WITH STORYTELLERS

POST-PRODUCTION: TELLING THE STORY AND EDITING

AUDIO FIRST

- **Transcribe everything.** Start with paper edits from the transcript.
- **Start big and scale back:** first cut might be 3 minutes, keep paring down.
- **If budget is tight, try AI-assisted tools** (Trint, Descript) before hiring an editor.

VISUAL PHILOSOPHY

- **Show, don't tell.** Don't be heavy-handed with ominous VO or dramatic music.
- **Give people space to feel.** A good story and a good messenger do the heavy lifting.
- **Build around a moment.** A single pause, a laugh, a crack in someone's voice can carry an entire ad.

MAXIMIZE YOUR FOOTAGE

One shoot should yield multiple pieces:

- :60, :30, :15, :06. They don't need to be exact cutdowns. Different beats, different audiences, different placements
- Long-form for YouTube or press releases
- Social media cuts (vertical, captions, platform-native)
- Audio for radio/podcast ads
- Stills for direct mail, web, social
- BTS content for organic social

PRO TIP:

One shoot can and should yield 5–10+ pieces of content across formats. Plan for it from the start.

PRODUCING CONTENT WITH STORYTELLERS

POST-PRODUCTION: DIGITAL AND PLATFORM TIPS FOR USER-GENERATED CONTENT

User-Generated Content (UGC) is cost-effective but can easily disappoint without the right guidance

TIPS FOR CREATING UGC AND SELF-TAPES

- **Provide clear, simple filming instructions** (lighting, framing, audio, background)
- **Give messaging guardrails:** key points to hit, not a full script; any hot buttons to avoid
- **Consider a virtual directing session over Zoom**
- **Use tools like VocalVideo or Greenfly** to standardize the process
- **Always review/edit the raw footage.** Don't just post what they send

WORKING WITH YOUR DIGITAL TEAM

- **Collaborate on platform optimization:** what formats/specs work for each placement
- **Test different cuts with different audiences;** refine based on data
- **Use paid campaigns to solicit new stories** (geo-targeted “Share Your Story” ads)
- **Plan for rapid response:** have stories ready to deploy when news breaks