



Student Storytelling Production Guide

Created by The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs Security in partnership with the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education and the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative

Purpose of This Guide

This guide is designed to help Kentucky's higher education communications professionals, KYSSC Senior Fellows, and other campus-based staff collect compelling, ethical, and student-centered stories that not only illuminate realities of student basic needs insecurity, but also raise awareness about the availability and value of basic needs supports. The Hope Center will turn this content into materials you can easily and flexibly use to raise awareness of basic needs, promote resources, and encourage help-seeking behavior. In June, you and partners will receive a “toolkit” of graphics, video clips, and more to educate your campus, influence policy, and destigmatize help-seeking (in order to increase uptake of available resources)—while always honoring students' dignity and agency.

It's our hope that each partner can collect at least three student testimonials. We realize that some students might have preferences as to how their experiences are documented (e.g. a request for no photography or not using their last name). We've sought to guide you through those scenarios while respecting students and their stories for which we're honored to hear and share.

SECTION 1: Introduction to Interviewing Students

Center Empathy & Trust

You're not just gathering content—you're building trust. Remember:

- Students are sharing **personal and sometimes painful experiences**.
- Respect their comfort level and agency at every step.
- Don't push for trauma. Let them lead the depth of disclosure.

Before You Start

- Explain that their story will be used to raise awareness of basic needs, promote resources, and encourage help-seeking behavior..



- Make space for questions.
- Share something about yourself. It can be uncomfortable to feel like your experiences are being catalogued and observed—speak to your interviewee like a respected colleague with whom you’re having a conversation.
- Get signed consent (see Section 5).

During the Interview

- Start with small talk to ease into the conversation.
- Maintain eye contact and listen without interrupting.
- Ask follow-ups based on what they say (don’t rigidly stick to the script).
- Leave space after responses—don’t rush to the next question.

SECTION 2: Recording the Interview & Capturing Strong Photography/Footage on a Low Budget

Your goal is to collect at least three testimonials. Ideally, one of those testimonials will be recorded on video. We ask that you get a photo of each student—whether through taking it yourself or having the student submitting a preferred photo (through the consent form in Section 5)—along with their testimonial, though we realize some students might not wish to be visually identifiable. In that case, we recommend recording them for potential audio integration in the testimonials.

Even without fancy equipment, you can capture powerful and professional-looking content. Here’s how:

Tools You Can Use

- **Smartphones** (recent models) with good cameras
- [Tripod](#) (or something stable—stack of books, a box, etc.)
- **Lapel mic** or **wired headphones with mic** (for cleaner sound)
- **Natural light** (place the subject so that they face a window) or affordable ring lights
- **Towels, blankets, rugs, or other large pieces of fabric** to block sound leaking from under doors. The more fabric that can absorb sound in the room, the better your audio quality will be.

Best Practices for Audio Recording



- If virtual:
 - [Zoom](#) is still free and still the best way to capture this type of interview virtually.
- If with the subject in real life:
 - iPhone voice memos work very well, as do the Android equivalents.
 - You can purchase a [digital voice recorder](#), but note that most smartphones have better microphones and easier ways of transferring audio.
 - You can open your personal Zoom meeting room and record the same way you record meetings.
 - Your college may have [dedicated spaces and equipment](#) for audio recording. Check with your college's media or communications department.

Best Practices for Photography

Note: In the consent form, we give students an option to also submit a preferred photo of themselves!

- **Lighting**
 - **Use natural light when possible**—but *don't* shoot with the sun or window *behind* the subject. That will put them in shadow.
 - **Face the student toward the light** (e.g., toward a window or sun, ideally not in direct harsh light).
 - **Avoid overhead fluorescent lights**, which can create unflattering shadows.
 - **Framing & Composition**
- **Use portrait orientation** (vertical) for most storytelling uses.
 - Leave a bit of space above the head and avoid cutting off the top of the subject's hair.
 - Position the student **slightly off-center** using the “rule of thirds” for a more dynamic composition.
 - Capture both **posed** and **candid** shots—e.g., studying, walking across campus, using a laptop, or interacting with others.
- **Background**
 - Choose clean, uncluttered backgrounds that don't distract from the subject.
 - Incorporate context when possible (e.g., college signage, dorms, campus walkways), but make sure the student stands out.
 - Be mindful of what's in the background—no trash cans, messy whiteboards, or photobombers.

Best Practices for Video

- **Location:** Choose a quiet, well-lit space. Minimize background distractions.



- **Framing:** Film horizontally (landscape mode), with the subject's eyes at about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way down the screen (rule of thirds). Err on the side of extra room in the shot—the video team can crop your shot if needed, but cannot add more to it. [Example](#) for Zoom interview. [Ideal in-person framing](#). [If space is cramped](#).
 - Keep the area behind your subject's head relatively flat and clear. Avoid [items growing out of your subject's head](#).
 - **Sound:** Eliminate background noise. Test audio beforehand.
 - If you're recording a Zoom interview, ask your interviewee to record audio on their end into Voice Memos if they have an iPhone. Ask them to send it to you after the interview.
 - **Keep it short:** Aim for 2–4 minute responses for each key question.
 - **B-roll:** Capture supporting footage (student studying, walking, eating, etc.) if possible. We also appreciate still shots of places around campus.
 - **Try to avoid:**
 - The subject's head moving out of the frame
 - Glare in the subject's glasses. Try to position them so there is no glare, or ask them to remove their glasses if they feel comfortable doing so
 - Subject's hands half in and out of the frame. Position them such that their hands cannot be seen, or the full movement of their hands can be seen.
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SECTION 3: Interview Guide

Below is a flexible script. Please make it your own; use it as a foundation and adapt based on student comfort and context. With that said, we do want to create continuity across interviews and ask that you be sure to ask those questions in bold.

Warm-Up Questions:

- Tell me a little about yourself—your name, major, and what brought you to this college.
- **What's something you're proud of in your college journey so far?**

Basic Needs Focus:

- Have there been times during college when it's been hard to afford food, housing, health care, transportation, internet, or other basic needs like childcare?
- Can you share what that experience was like?
- Did you try to get help? If so, where did you go—and how did it go?
- **What resources and/or supports have you used that were helpful? How did they make a difference?**
 - *Note:* It would be great for students to first give an initial response to this question, so as to see what resources and supports immediately come to mind.



However, if they need examples of what “supports” are, you could mention that supports might include a food pantry, clothing closet, an emergency grant, financial aid, transportation assistance, temporary housing, mental health support or services, help applying for benefits, etc.

- What would you want other students in your situation to know?
- What do you wish faculty, staff, or policymakers better understood about students’ lives outside the classroom?
- **What has helped you feel seen or supported on your educational journey?**
- **Is there a resource or specific support you would recommend? Something that made your journey easier?**

Closing:

- What does success look like for you right now?
 - Is there anything else you’d like to share?
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SECTION 4: Student Recruitment Language

You can use the sample language to invite students to participate in interviews—via email, text, social media, or flyers. Pro-tip: student governments are great partners in sharing opportunities like these!

Subject line: *Want to share your story to help improve college for all students?*

Body:

Hi [Student Name],

We’re working with The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs to help improve how Kentucky colleges support students like you. We’re looking for students who have used basic needs supports—like a food pantry, housing resource, transportation assistance, mental health care, public benefits, resources for accessing internet and technology, and more—and are willing to share their stories about the challenges and successes they’ve faced and what helped them get through.

Your story can make a difference. It could be shared with policymakers, college leaders, and others working to make campuses more supportive.

Participation is voluntary and supported with a small thank-you gift **[[ADAPT LANGUAGE TO FIT INSTITUTIONAL CAPABILITIES]]**. We understand your stories are personal and also welcome participants who only wish to identify through their first name.



Interested? Email/text [CONTACT INFO] or fill out [FORM].

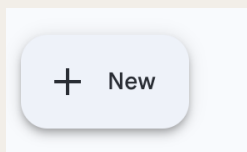
SECTION 5: Media Release / Permission Form

Please share [this link](#) with students to fill out before your interview.

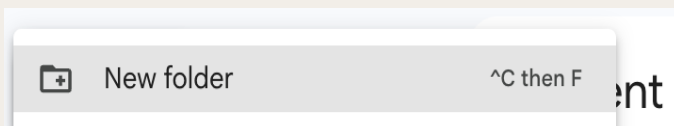
Note: We will match your submitted testimonial content (see section 6) with the media release form through each student's first and last name.

SECTION 6: Submitting Content

1. Please use [this Google Drive folder](#) to submit any content, including notes & transcripts from your student interview, as well as any photos or videos.
2. We ask that you create a sub-folder and title the sub-folder with the name of your institution.
 - a. To do so, click “new”



- b. Then click “new folder” and rename it as your institution. You can then simply drag and drop your files and documents.



3. With each submission, please subsequently alert Joshua Rudolph, a Communications Associate at The Hope Center: joshua.rudolph@temple.edu
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Bonus Tips

- Consider offering students a small gift card or token of appreciation (e.g. an Amazon gift-card) so that students feel compensated for their time.
- Always follow up with gratitude—let them know how their story made an impact.



Questions?

We're here to support you. If you have any questions email us at arion.jettseals@ky.gov and hopectr@temple.edu.