

Recommendations for Engaging with Survivors as Speakers and Consultants: Guide Sheet for Agencies, Systems, Faith Communities, and other Community Groups/Members

Thank you for your interest in engaging a Survivor Leaders and Subject Matter Expert in your event or upcoming project. This Guide Sheet is designed for agencies, systems, faith communities, and other community groups/members, to help you understand some of the nuances in engaging with survivors to reduce the likelihood of unintentional re-traumatization or re-victimization, as well as to share appropriate communication and compensation practices.

It is also important to note, that survivors are engaged in many areas of professional work beyond “telling their story.” Survivors have led the anti-trafficking movement and are involved in all areas of it including policy and program development, advocacy, training, awareness raising, direct services, systems change, fund development, social enterprises, art, writing and music, and so much more.

For decades, trafficking survivors have been advocating for change in the engagement practices (or lack thereof) of Survivor Leaders and Subject Matter Experts in the anti-trafficking field. While strides have been made to center the voices and leadership of survivors in the work, improvements, education, and the development of best practices are needed to effectively and respectfully engage, employ, contract, and fairly compensate survivors for their invaluable contributions.

As one survivor shared, “There is no amount of money that will compensate for our experiences.” As systems and professionals working with and engaging survivors, there are policies, practices, and trainings that can be put in place, as well as tools and resources that can be developed to support survivors who choose to become involved in anti-trafficking work. These resources can reduce re-exploitation and re-traumatization experienced by survivors and ensure that other professionals engaging with them are properly trained.

This list is based on insight from Survivor Leaders. Survivors are often asked to tell their stories or speak at events, as well as contribute their experience and knowledge to various projects. Survivors are Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) on their experiences and should be treated as the professionals that they are. Here is a guide on how to build a positive and mutually beneficial working relationship with Survivor Leaders and Subject Matter Experts.

- 1. BE CLEAR ON THE “WHY.”** Make sure the purpose, message and expected outcome of the event or meeting is clearly communicated to the SME. Survivors want to know why they are being asked to speak and what you hope the group will gain from hearing them. Since a survivor may be sharing sensitive information in their talk, it’s important for them to know about the setting and audience they will be presenting to. This also applies to consulting requests.
- 2. PREARRANGE PAYMENT.** Survivors deserve to be paid fairly and in line with professional rates for their professional expertise. Booking a survivor for a speaking engagement or consulting project requires an open conversation before the contract is signed, about the details of the event, the expectations, the accommodations and reimbursements, the time and location that their services are needed, who else is involved in the event or project, and the budget and or fees. Being asked to pay upfront and be reimbursed



later can cause financial hardship for many survivors. For instance, asking survivors to prepay for travel or hotel expenses for an event or conference is not possible for many who are rebuilding their life after trauma. Expect to take on these expenses. It should be an expectation that survivors are paid on the day of their event by check and not in other forms of payment. However, some survivors prefer gift cards or cash instead of a check. Please always ask what they prefer. Be open to compensating a Survivor Leader/ Subject Matter Expert on their terms and in line with what they need to keep doing their important work. If there are invoices or processes at your organization that are required for payment, make this known upfront and handle as much of that as you can yourself so there aren't delays. For example, if you know that an invoice must be submitted a specific way, please provide a template. If there is a waiting time or a specific process required for payment, offer to assist in this process. Don't create obstacles, barriers, and hoops for them to jump through to get paid. **Remember: there is no amount of money that will fully compensate for survivors' experiences and expertise.**

- 3. RESPECT THE MESSENGER AND THEIR MESSAGE.** Survivors who are asked to share their stories in unfamiliar settings are subject to re-traumatization or triggers from attendees who act with ignorance or a Savior Complex. As much as possible, make sure your audience is briefed on the survivor's background and area of expertise before the event. Agree beforehand with the Survivor Leader/Subject Matter Expert on whether they are open to Q & A with attendees. Discuss the Survivor's boundaries— what questions are off-limits? Help hold the line for the Survivor's boundaries in sessions or committees. See the examples of inappropriate questions below.
- 4. OFFER THOUGHTFUL ACCOMMODATIONS.** Some Survivors may need childcare for an event or may ask that family members join them for the engagement as a support for dealing with the emotions and anxieties that surround sharing their very personal experiences with complete strangers. Be respectful of the fact that family and loved ones are often there for moral support as Survivors share about their trauma. It is important to offer time and space for a Survivor before and after their participation in an event for mental and emotional recharging. Assign a staff member from your organization to be the go-to host for the Survivor on the day of the meeting or event and make sure they have this person's contact information.

EXAMPLES OF INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS: WHAT NOT TO ASK OR SAY TO SURVIVORS—PLEASE BE RESPECTFUL

- Do not use the term “prostitute” or less-respectful versions of it—survivors have been sexually exploited – this is something that has happened to them—not a title or identity of who they are
- Relationship questions about children and having to co-parent with traffickers
- Questions about transactional interactions—“Have you ever done...?”
- “What are the fetishes that clients have asked you to do/services you provided”
- “Why didn't you leave or do [fill in the blank]?”
- “How many partners did you have in a day?”
- “How did you feel after having sex with that many partners?”
- “How did you survive? How did you get through this?”
- “What about the people who like this work?”
- Questions about sexual orientation of Survivors or clients
- “Why didn't you go to the police?”
- Movie-based questions (Pretty Woman, Trafficked)—these are so far from the truth and always sensationalize the issue
- “What is the difference between a prostitute and a victim?”
- More details about a story that a Survivor has shared. She/He/They has already chosen what details to share.



UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE REALLY ASKING THEM TO DO

When engaging with a Survivor Leader/Subject Matter Expert, it is not just the time, task, or activity that you are contracting them to perform that will impact them. Common experiences for survivors when presenting or consulting on various projects:

- Can't sleep for days
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Wanting to relapse or escape
- Sadness and pain for days
- Re-experiencing trauma—PTSD episodes
- Feeling like moving backwards or stuck
- Combative and confrontational
- Mad at family (or partners) for the past—resentment
- Feeling loss
- Drained
- Fatigue
- Snappy/irritable
- Depression
- Isolation
- Feeling like no one understands
- Feel like a burden from family and friends
- Escapism and distraction—TV, videos, crime shows, rationalizing
- Difficult to work
- Mental health episodes
- Memories, flash backs, awake terrors, nightmares
- Impacts on family, children, those closest—multitude of ways
- Physical impairment—physical therapy, flare ups, pain, auto-immune
- Dealing with feedback and event surveys—negative or doubtful comments

If you are engaging survivors on any level in your work, it is imperative that you and your colleagues are properly trained and aware of your own policies and practices that should be trauma-informed and prioritize the equitable and thoughtful treatment of survivors as subject matter experts and professionals.

