



FROM CONTRIBUTORS TO CO-PRODUCERS:

A GUIDE TO PARTICIPATORY PRODUCTION

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ON OUR
RADAR

"When those holding the story and those holding the camera work together as equals, the result can be transformative and inspire a far deeper level of connection among audiences"



Brigitte Sossou Perenyi,
presenter of On Our Radar's My Stolen Childhood
documentary for the BBC

FOREWORD

Collaboration is key to all storytelling projects, whether it's with 'talent' in the shape of a presenter with a strong voice, a director with a clear creative vision, or a partner organisation who have helped to facilitate access.

However, when it comes to contributors - the people who feature in the stories we tell - there's often a desire to keep them at arm's length, away from the editorial decision-making.

Whilst this may be necessary in many cases, collaborating with contributors in a more deliberate way can often help to build greater trust and surface more powerful insights. For groups who have been historically marginalised and misrepresented, or for individuals telling a deeply sensitive and personal story, it can give them the opportunity to help shape how a story is told.

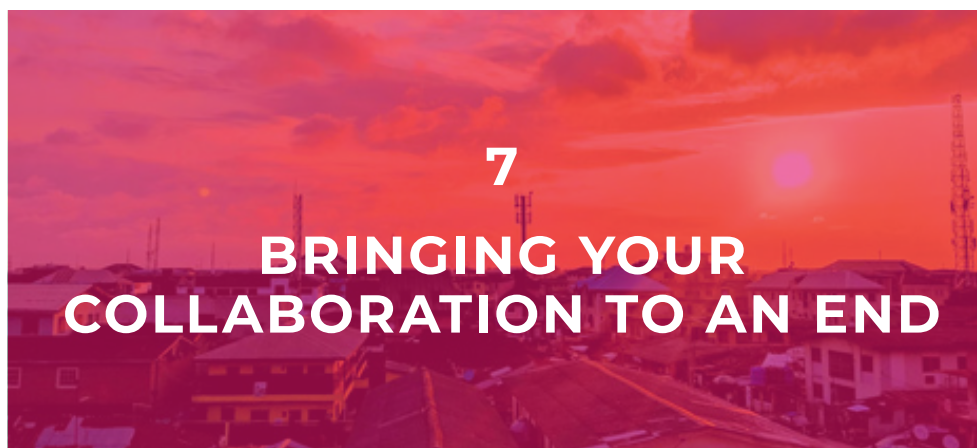
But what about editorial control? Collaborating closely with contributors does not have to mean giving up editorial control, just as it doesn't when collaborating with talent or a partner organisation. It's about opening up the editorial process and being clear about where contributors will be able to feed in, and where not.

This toolkit provides some ideas as to how these collaborations might be structured.



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WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY PRODUCTION?

ALSO KNOWN AS CO-PRODUCTION OR COLLABORATIVE STORYTELLING

Traditional production processes all too often reinforce a division of power between those in front of the camera and those behind it: the filmmaker and their 'subject' or 'contributor'. The involvement of those featured on screen ends as soon as the camera stops rolling, leaving them without the power to shape how their story is told and depriving the filmmaker of the opportunity to further benefit from their expertise.

Co-production is designed to redress this imbalance: making the production process more open and participatory by inviting the people featured in your productions to come on board as joint decision-makers and experts in their own experiences; shifting power back into the hands of communities; opening doors to new forms of storytelling and gaining access to new stories and perspectives.

Participatory production is powered by trust, mutual respect and transparency. It can mean giving up some control, but the benefits can far outweigh any drawbacks. It is an enriching collaboration which allows both the producer and their collaborators to come away with new knowledge and skills, and with a story they could never have produced alone.

Many people do not have the means, confidence or opportunity to tell their stories in their own words on a public platform. Many communities have had repeated negative interactions with the media, seeing themselves misrepresented without the platform or power to challenge how they are depicted. These repeated failures in our industry have resulted in fractured relationships and a deep mistrust of the media. If we are to take a positive role in rebuilding this trust we will have to change the way things have been done historically, telling stories *'with'* not *'for'* communities.

Participatory production storytelling is a tangible commitment to building relationships that are mutually beneficial and respectful; it's about working with people to tell stories with an alignment of values and aims.



PARTICIPATORY PRODUCTION IMPROVES OUR MEDIA LANDSCAPE BY:

- Bringing unheard stories and perspectives to the mainstream, increasing awareness of issues that might be missed or underrepresented by professional producers
- Rebuilding trust with marginalised groups by sharing power over the storytelling process
- Increasing diversity of perspectives on screen, avoiding tokenism by bringing people with lived experience into key decision making roles and developing skills
- Creating raw, authentic content which benefits from unique insights and a fresh take on old formats

- Showing the world in ways we haven't seen it before, working with people close to an issue with deep access to unfolding events
- Creating a system of accountability between the producers and the people they film or record

Participatory production is not only about taking a more ethical or responsible approach. It is also a way of bringing people who care about an issue together to produce exciting stories which have real impact. Producing films, documentaries, podcasts or digital features can be a complicated process; co-producing with a community may help you find information more quickly, gain better trusted access and make creative decisions that you would not have considered on your own. Co-production needn't slow down your production: it can also speed it up while making it richer and allowing everyone to come away with enhanced awareness, skills and knowledge.



SPOTLIGHT



BAFTA-winning documentary, *For Sama*, was made over several years by citizen reporter Waad al-Kateab in Aleppo, Syria, in collaboration with director Ed Watts and produced by Channel 4. Al-Kateab collected hours of footage of her city under fire, capturing intimate and dramatic scenes of life and death in war-torn Syria. Channel 4's team provided expertise and infrastructure to bring the film to an international audience, but it was Al-Kateab's unique access that brought the film to life.

Further examples of inspiring and impactful co-productions in the appendix.

WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOLKIT?

This toolkit is derived from a decade of practice and experimentation, working collaboratively with people who have traditionally been misrepresented or marginalised to produce high-profile and award-winning stories - all underpinned by the values set out in our manifesto.

We have created this toolkit as a practical guide for any producer who wants to work in a more collaborative or participatory way. This toolkit might be useful for those producing:

- Documentaries
- Short films
- News features
- Campaign videos
- Podcasts
- Audio documentaries

From first-time producers to experienced documentarians, this toolkit is designed to act as a practical step-by-step guide. It can also act as an introduction to participatory production for the people you want to partner with, to give them an idea of what to expect from the process (and why).

On Our Radar has a long track record of using co-production techniques to create compelling and award-winning stories. We have created this toolkit so that we can share our knowledge and experience of co-production filmmaking with other storytellers.



WHAT WILL YOU FIND IN THIS TOOLKIT?

In this toolkit you'll find a series of tried and tested techniques which On Our Radar has used throughout the years. Each step will have an accompanying project spotlight, where we show what the technique looks like in action by linking it to one of our past projects.

Co-production takes place on a varying scale; there is no one-size-fits-all approach and the techniques you use will depend on the size and scope of your project, the topic you're tackling and the different skills of the people involved. This guide isn't an exact science but the steps and processes we outline can help pave the way for a more collaborative process.



This is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to production processes - it should sit alongside all of your usual procedures for safeguarding, consent, risk assessment and contributor care (see Channel 4's [Producers Handbook](#) for more detailed guidance).



TERMINOLOGY:

In this toolkit, we call members of the communities you are working with 'collaborators', not 'subjects' or 'contributors'. We use the term collaborators to acknowledge their vital and equal role as 'experts by experience' in bringing the story to life.



WHEN NOT TO DO PARTICIPATORY STORYTELLING:

A participatory approach may not be relevant for every type of production. It might not be appropriate for projects that involve investigating corrupt practices, scrutinising those in power or documentaries about famous public figures; for the obvious reason that these films are about interrogating or exploring the lives of those in power, who often need to be challenged rather than cooperated with.



UNDERSTANDING CO-PRODUCTION AS AN EXCHANGE

"I don't believe that an 'outsider' could travel to Ghana, Togo or Benin to tell the story of the trokosi practice in the same way as me, having lived through the practice. By the same token, I could not have told this story in the way I did without the experience of a professional production team."



Brigitte Sossou Perenyi,
presenter of On Our Radar's [My Stolen Childhood](#)
documentary for the BBC

CO-PRODUCTION IS A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS WHICH RELIES ON AN EQUAL EXCHANGE OF SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE BETWEEN THE PRODUCER AND THE PERSON WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE.

SKILL SETS

COLLABORATOR WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE



PROFESSIONAL PRODUCER

ACCESS:

the trust already established between your collaborator and members of their community means your story can benefit from access which could take months to develop on your own

AUTHENTICITY:

the emotional connection your collaborator has to the topic will give the story a unique voice

EMPATHY AND CONNECTION:

those with personal connection to a topic are likely to have an enhanced ability to relate to others affected by it

ALTERNATIVE VIEWPOINTS:

those from outside the production world are likely to see things in a different way, challenging narratives and bringing new perspectives

DIVERSITY:

meaningful involvement of diverse perspectives helps avoid tokenism. A 'nothing about us without us' approach allowing historically marginalised groups to shape the narrative

SENSITIVITY:

an informed understanding of local contexts and how to operate within them

TECHNICAL SKILLS:

an understanding of production values, sound or picture requirements, knowledge of how to operate equipment

LEGAL SKILLS:

knowledge of media law, industry best practice and other relevant guidance such as Ofcom guidelines and editorial policies

STORYTELLING CRAFT:

an understanding of how to construct a narrative arc and tailor stories for specific audiences

PITCHING SKILLS AND CONTACTS:

connections with commissioners who may fund and/or broadcast the story. Knowledge of outlets' editorial priorities

KNOWLEDGE OF FORMATS:

a sense of how a specific story might fit within a certain strand or for a certain audience.

EXPERIENCE SCREENING FILMS:

an understanding of how to manage and prepare for reactions from the public





TIP: SHOW YOUR COMMITMENT TO BEING ACCOUNTABLE

People who share their lived experiences publicly will have to consider whether their involvement could change their day to day lives or could even put them or others in danger. Having a list of agreed stages in place from the beginning can reassure your collaborator that you take their concerns seriously and that they will not lose control as soon as the camera stops running.

1. FINDING A STORY





If you are just starting out on a project and have no contacts in place, your first task is to make contact with people who can connect you to potential collaborators.

FINDING A COMMUNITY:

WORKING WITH A PARTNER

If you want to work with a particular community that you don't yet have access to, then working with a network, community group or a partner organisation will allow you to make connections with those who might be collaborators on your storytelling project.

- Start by identifying key organisations which are active within the community.

They could be informal entities, such as a parent's forum or a community choir; or they could be a formalised organisation such as an NGO, a union or a front-line support service. The main thing you're looking for is an organisation which has contacts within the community you want to work with.

- Once you have made contact with a partner organisation, find out if they are interested in supporting your project.

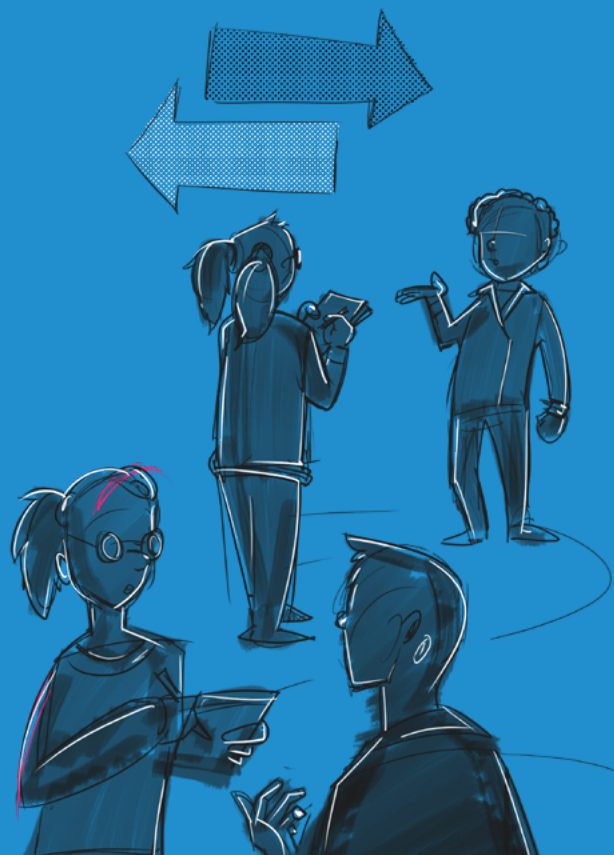
In particular, you should look for an organisation that will help you host events to meet potential collaborators or set up introductory one-to-one meetings with members of their community. Partners may be protective of those they support and represent, so this process can take time to build trust. Talking through your aims and your creative process can help with this.

TIP: MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR PARTNER ORGANISATIONS



Working with partner organisations can be a helpful way to get advice if a safeguarding issue arises, they can often help mediate the relationship between you and your collaborators and can advise about specific concerns which may be important for the community. They may also have services already in place which could support your collaborator throughout the production process, such as in-house therapists, community organisers or legal teams.

Partner organisations can also play a vital role in helping potential collaborators decide if they want to engage with your project.



Once you have gained access to a community, how do you find the 'right' story?

GENERATING STORY IDEAS:

Below are some tools and techniques that will help you engage with community knowledge and networks to surface stories that may not be obvious to you initially.

As well as finding stories you want to cover, this is also a chance to identify topics or themes the community wishes to avoid, which have been overdone or badly managed in the past.



TIP: PRIORITISE ACCESSIBILITY

The following activities revolve around written exercises: always bear in mind that there may be varying literacy levels in a community and you do not want to exclude people on that basis. If you feel this might be the case, consider different ways of gathering information such as recording, drawing or having a designated notetaker.

Running a 'Rapid Eight' brainstorming sprint:

What is it?

This method has been designed to get people to consider multiple ideas without overthinking. Because of the time pressure, participants are forced to write down ideas that they may have dismissed if they had more time to be critical. The story ideas your group generates will become increasingly more innovative as they move past their initial, most obvious ideas and have to start thinking outside the box.



What do you need?

Paper, pens, flipchart and a timer.

Who do you need?

The more, the merrier - this activity works well for medium and large groups. As a story generating activity, it will take place at the beginning of your co-production journey and so the more voices that can feed into this activity, the better.

How do you do it?

1. Bring together a network of collaborators. These could be people you have met through your local partner or through other contacts and should come from a variety of different backgrounds to make sure you are covering the community thoroughly.
2. Distribute paper and pens and explain that they have eight minutes to come up with eight ideas for stories or themes your production could explore. You can ask them to fold their paper into eight sections to do this. It might help to give an initial guiding theme such as 'eight issues which are underreported in your community' or 'eight topics which are frequently misunderstood in reporting about your community'.
3. Make sure your participants know that their ideas do not need to be well thought out or polished, the aim is to get as many ideas down as possible which can later be explored and fleshed out.
4. Set the timer for eight minutes, you may want to give them notice when each minute passes to make sure they don't get stuck finessing their first two ideas.
5. Once the timer is up, bring the group together and identify stories which keep coming up, themes which have surfaced and unusual stories which have been unearthed.
6. Give members of the group three votes that they can use to choose the story ideas they like the most. Explain that the votes can be spread out across different stories, or given all to one story which they absolutely love.
7. Once you've established two or three top story ideas you can use these as a mandate from the group to guide story development in the following stages.



What do you need?

Pens, paper, a space with tables and chairs where you can bring people together or online if that's not possible.

Moving from Macro to Micro:

What is it?

Once you have identified your themes or story ideas, it's time to drill down and find more specific stories that could carry your piece. This activity is designed to engage with community knowledge to source captivating stories.

Who do you need?

This activity benefits from a large group of participants who know the community well and who can speak with authority regarding which topics resonate with the community and who is placed to tell them. A minimum of five and maximum of twenty participants is suitable for this activity, based on the capacity of your team to engage with multiple people.

How do you do it?

1. Bring together your network of collaborators, either in a workshop setting or through individual discussions. List the overarching themes which surfaced through your 'Rapid Eight' story sourcing activities. Ask them for feedback on your selection, making sure that you haven't misunderstood anything.
2. Ask the group to discuss whether they know of any community members that would be well-placed to tell these stories in reference to their own personal experiences. This could be people in the group or people they know.
3. Discuss whether they can think of any unusual or interesting angles to these themes which would make for a good story. In particular, find out if any stories are currently unfolding, rather than events that have happened in the past. The more specific they can be, the better.
4. You should come away with several possible stories you can tell which are more detailed and specific than the ideas generated in the initial ideas stage. You can now continue to consult your collaborators as you develop them into film ideas.



TIP: ASSESS WHEN TO RECORD DISCUSSIONS

If you record the discussions, you will have space to engage more freely in the room. However, you will need to have established trust in order to do that. Bringing any form of recording device into a space will put people's guard up, so you'll need to make a judgement if this is right for your group.

Reporting Sprints:

What is it?

Similarly to the Rapid Eight, the purpose of this exercise is to generate multiple story ideas and identify overriding themes which are concerning the community. However, unlike the Rapid Eight, the reporting sprints can happen over a longer period of time and can have more depth.

Who do you need?

A committed group of collaborators who are already on board with your project. Due to the increased time commitment needed for this activity, it is more suited to working with a smaller group (3 - 10 people) who you can establish a supportive working relationship with. These should be people from within the community with a strong network.

How do you do it?

1. Bring together a network of collaborators. These could be people you have met through your local partner or through other contacts. Try to bring together people with a mix of different backgrounds to make sure you are covering the community thoroughly and remember to make the activity accessible.
2. Give the participants a fixed period of time, for example a week, to generate several story ideas which they should write up or record as short audio or video reports (whichever format they prefer).
3. Make sure they know they shouldn't spend too much time on this or go into too much depth, this exercise is about generating lots of ideas - not about writing up detailed reports. Putting a word limit of 100 to 200 words per report can help stop the urge to go into too much detail.
4. Once you have the reports, come together as a group to assess the stories ideas which have been generated. Pick out common themes and get the group to discuss them, helping you understand why they are important to that community.
5. Rather than coming back together, you might like to set up a Whatsapp group for this reporting sprint so that people can share stories and ideas, and discuss which stories to prioritise.
6. Come to a decision about which storylines the group would most like to take forward.

See On Our Radar's guide to building reporter networks at onourradar.org/resourcehub



TIP: ASK YOURSELF HOW YOU CAN MAKE ENGAGEMENT MORE MANAGEABLE.

If you have the budget you could consider micro-financing the process by offering a payment per report or offering a stipend for the time they spend generating the story ideas.



What do you need?

For this activity your reporters will be working largely on their own. You could support them by providing notebooks, pens or a phone to work from. Some people may also need access to data or have other expenses that they need covered. Make sure your team has the capacity to support your participants during this activity and respond to any concerns during the sprint.

SPOTLIGHT



On Our Radar trained a network of reporters in Sierra Leone, who spent 2 years covering the Ebola crisis via SMS and Whatsapp. As the crisis was coming to an end, their reports had started to take a more reflective tone, focussing on love and loss.

Having received a grant to make a series of eight films looking back at the crisis, we sent the network out on a story development sprint from different communities around the country.

The reports we got back were united by a clear theme: the reconnecting of social tissues after two years in lockdown. From a vibrant market that was now closed; to the first football match in the national stadium for two years; to a gang that had become unlikely heroes; to a woman on a search for her father's grave; the stories from the reporting sprint formed the backbone of our web-documentary [Back in Touch](#) that won several international media awards.





What do you need?

A flip chart or large piece of paper, pens, a space where you can bring everyone together (ideally in person).

Establishing guiding principles:

What is it?

The purpose of this activity is to establish guiding principles which will anchor your project in a set of aims and values that can be referred back to throughout the storytelling process.

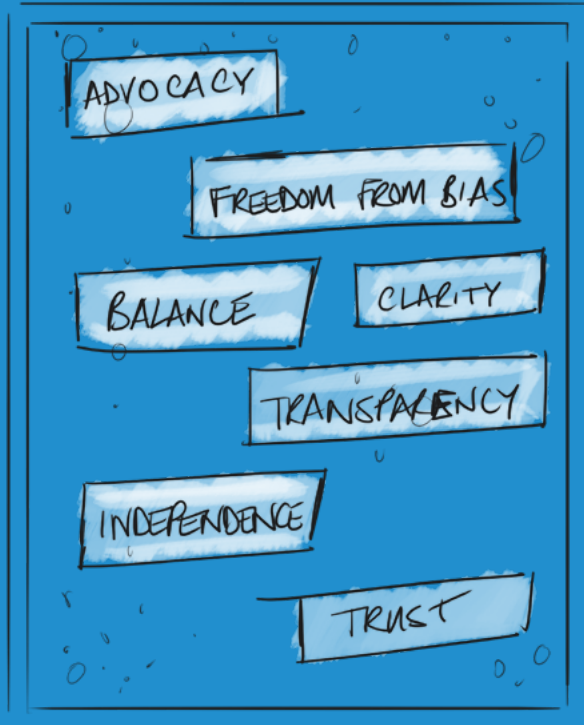
If you get this right, this will boost trust and give you licence to take creative decisions within this set of mutually agreed boundaries.

Who do you need?

This activity works well for small and medium groups, made up of members of the community who are likely to continue to be involved in your story as it develops.

How do you do it?

1. Consider dedicating one person to take notes on a flipchart or a large piece of paper visible to the group.
2. Ask your group questions such as:
 - a. What do they want the piece to achieve?
 - b. What messages do they want it to communicate?
 - c. What audience do they want to reach?
 - d. What stereotypes do they want to avoid?
 - e. What myths do they want to bust?



3. Use their answers to collectively decide upon a set of guiding principles; this could also be seen as a shared statement of vision.
 - a. For example, for our documentary about survivors of abuse, we want to show that our community is resourceful and powerful, we want to avoid portraying members of our community as passive, weak or vulnerable, etc.
 - b. OR For this film about living with dementia, we want to show the condition warts and all. However, we do want to show that there is life after dementia: that we're still human, we still have hobbies and can still do things. We want to show that dementia is about more than just memory loss.
4. Once the principles are agreed upon, write them up and make sure that everyone has access to them throughout production. You should refer back to them regularly to make sure your piece is not straying too far from your initial vision (or to have an open and honest conversation about it if it is).
5. You may wish to repeat this activity to refine your principles as your story idea becomes more concrete.
6. The most important thing is that all key participants in the storytelling process agree upon these principles, so that you know you're all on the same page and so, if down the line you find yourselves facing a challenge, you can refer back to these principles to help guide you towards a decision.



TIP: ASK WHAT THEY DON'T WANT TO SEE

It's just as important to ask what they want the piece to **avoid** saying, as it is to ask what they want the piece to say. There may be stereotypes your collaborators will want to avoid or language that is stigmatising.

SPOTLIGHT



DEMENTIA & US

BBC 2 documentary series

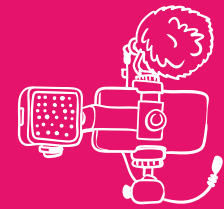
We held a workshop with a community of around thirty people living with dementia, and it became clear that there was a lot of frustration about the way dementia had previously been portrayed in the media. Participants felt that there had typically been too much focus on the final stages of the condition, depicting people with dementia as 'crazy' and lacking in agency. They wanted to shift this perception.

The group helped to flesh out a set of guiding principles for our documentary series. Here are some examples of the guiding principles that were drawn up by the group:

1. We want to show that dementia is not just about memory loss: there are hundreds of types of dementia and a wide range of complex symptoms (e.g. hallucinations, issues with spatial awareness, lack of appetite, sensory overload)
2. We want to show that each individual journey with dementia is unique
3. We want to show what people with dementia CAN do as well as what they can't do
4. We want to show some of the positives: that life does go on and you can still do things and achieve things with dementia
5. However, we don't want to alienate people by presenting an overly rosy picture, we need to show dementia 'warts-n-all'. We need to highlight some of the things that aren't talked about enough e.g. incontinence and aggression
6. We want to show that people with dementia are still human and still have the capacity to laugh, love and emote

We were able to return back to these guiding principles throughout the storytelling process when making difficult decisions about which scenes it would be appropriate to include.

2. PRE-PRODUCTION





We have created these Conversation Checklists to help you structure your discussions and ensure you consider these main points.

CREATING A TEAM:

This phase is all about communication between you and your collaborators. There is no set formula which we can offer to set out exactly how these discussions should take place: you will need to make a judgement based on your relationship and the level of trust you have established.

Step one: selecting your main collaborators

Conversation Checklist

- **Proximity to the story:**
Once you have decided on your story, make sure the people you collaborate with are those closest to the issue who can give you real insights into the topic and can draw from their direct experiences.
- **Time commitment:**
Being an active collaborator in a co-production requires a significant time commitment. It's important to be transparent about your needs and expectations upfront so your collaborator can make an informed decision about their involvement.
- **Emotional capacity:**
Make sure that your collaborator is in the right place to contribute to the film; they might want to be involved but may be dealing with a lot personally at that time. Make sure they know there is no pressure for them to come on board as a collaborator if the timing isn't right for them.
- **Personal exposure:**
Tell your collaborator everything you know about when and where the film will be shown. If it could be broadcast in their home country (including online), make sure you have discussed the implications of this with them and considered whether they need to seek advice from others before agreeing to engage.

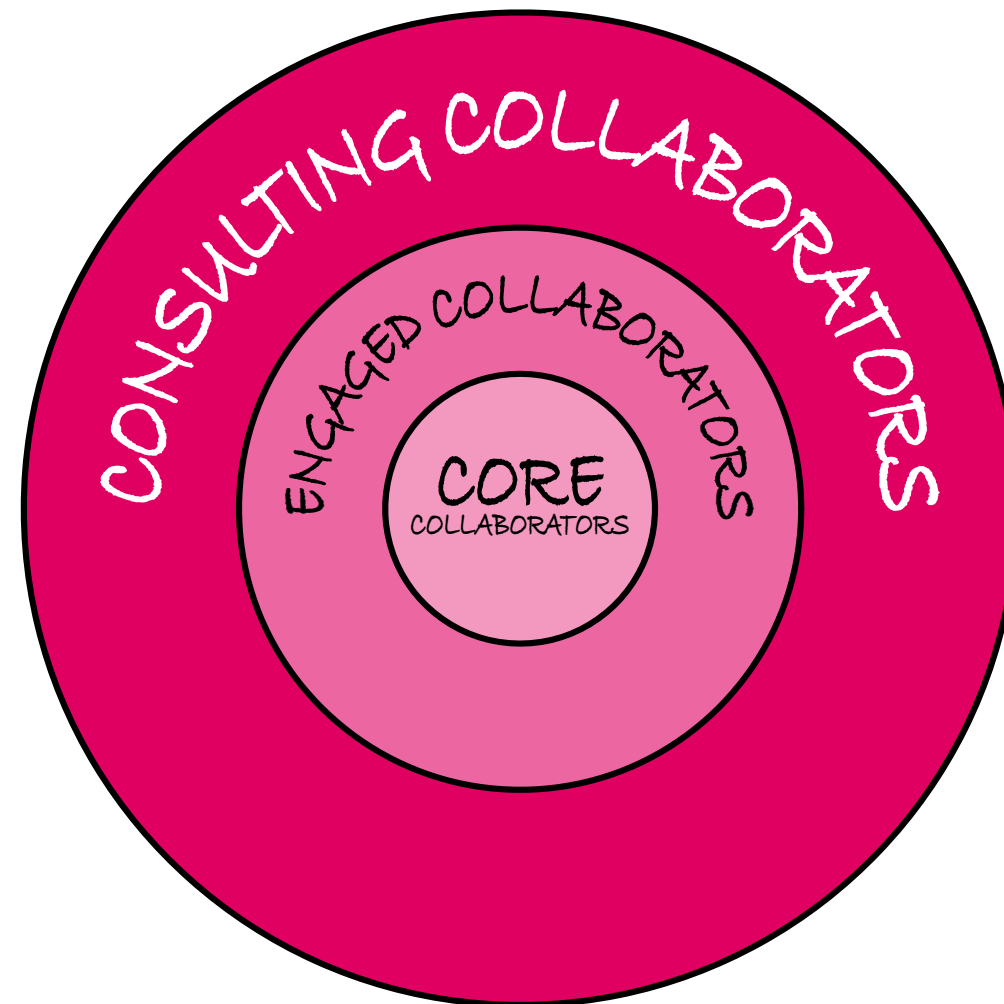


TIP: MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

In these early stages, it's vital that you're as honest and transparent as you can be so that your collaborator can make an informed decision about their involvement. Don't say what you think your collaborator wants to hear, or what will make them agree to be involved. Explain the production process as clearly as you can so that they understand that it can involve obstacles and unexpected turns which you can't always predict.

Understanding different levels of engagement

Your co-production might involve many people in its different stages. These people will have varying levels of engagement in the process, often dependent on the stage of the production that you're at. These circles show the different levels of engagement your production might have with its collaborators and indicates when each level might be appropriate.



Consulting collaborators: a large group of people from the community you are working with who will help generate initial ideas.

At the beginning of your production, this group will help you find your story by generating ideas and helping you gain access to people who know the community and its concerns well. This group should be as large as you can manage to make sure you're hearing from as many people in the community as possible. Members of this group may eventually become your core collaborators or they may stay on as an advisory committee throughout the entire production. It can include community members and partner organisations.

Engaged collaborators: a smaller group of community members who will continue to have a stake in the story and who will provide advice and feedback throughout the production.

This group of collaborators is likely to be smaller and more engaged than your consulting collaborators. They may be family members of your core collaborators or representatives from organisations you have worked with. They are people who are likely to want to be kept in the loop with your production and may want to feed into the decision-making processes. They could form an advisory committee or remain a less formalised group that you call upon for input and feedback throughout the production process.

Core collaborators: a small group of people who are heavily involved in the production.

This will be your core group of collaborators who are likely to become co-producers or appear before the camera and will have decision making powers within your production. This group should be kept relatively small (we recommend no more than 5-10 people) so that you can maintain high levels of engagement and collaboration.





Step two: establishing roles

Once you know who your key collaborators will be, you should establish the roles you will each take in the production.

Conversation Checklist

1. Who leads on what?

It is important that you trust each other to take the lead based on your different areas of expertise. If you've built up enough trust, you should each be able to go away and fulfil separate tasks in the knowledge that you share a wider vision.

2. Who is in front of the camera?

Find out if your collaborators might like to conduct interviews, be a presenter or narrate the piece.

3. Who has ultimate editorial control?

Are you all agreed on where editorial control lies and how you will come to agreements if you disagree? Deciding this at the beginning doesn't mean you can't renegotiate down the line.

Whilst a collaborator may not be able to retain final editorial control, they should always be given a say on any content that makes them feel uncomfortable.

TIP: PROVIDE TRAINING

If you're asking someone with no prior experience to present or narrate, then you will likely need to provide them with training and support.



TIP: DON'T FORGET YOUR COMMISSIONER

If your story is accountable to someone else, for example a broadcaster who has commissioned a film, this will affect who has ultimate editorial control. If this is the case, your collaborators should know early on that they may have to work within the expectations of the commissioner and come to a compromise with them if a disagreement arises.



TIP: COMMUNICATE WHO YOU ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO

Consider who else might feel invested in this story and might want to have a say in editorial decision making, for example partner organisations and wider family members. Make sure they know how and when they will be consulted.

While the input of many people may be valuable, you should decide who you are accountable to at the beginning and make this clear. If your relationship is mediated through a larger organisation, try to foster a direct relationship with your collaborator and keep the number of people you are accountable to limited to a manageable number.



4. What impact could the story have?

Being filmed or recorded will invariably have an impact on a person. Talking through what this might look like and how to manage it will help prepare your collaborator for the process. Consider also the impact the story could have on the topic you are addressing.

TIP: DON'T PROMISE THE WORLD



A film can have a huge impact on policy and public perception, or it can have no impact at all. Be mindful of the lengths you go to to convince your collaborator to come on board and don't promise the world if you can't deliver it.

TIP: MANAGE EXPECTATIONS



If there is a chance people could be cut or featured significantly less in the final piece, be upfront about that possibility early on. This is especially important if you are asking people to share very personal stories.

5. Safeguarding measures

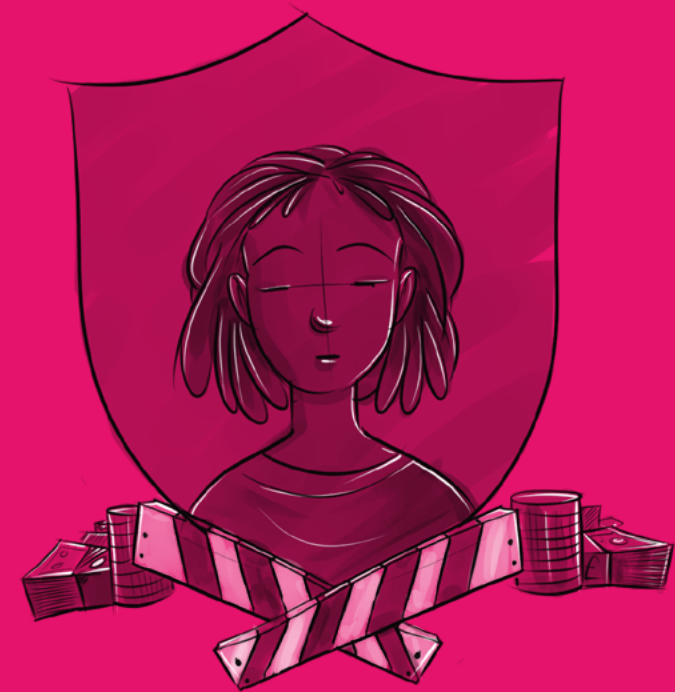
Safeguarding should be at the centre of all considerations during your collaboration, ensure your collaborators are leading on their own assessment of risk and are suggesting ways to mitigate them. Safeguarding should be a live discussion point throughout the creative process.

This guide should be used alongside your usual safeguarding policies and production protocols.

TIP: BE CLEAR ABOUT VETOING POWERS



One of the biggest barriers to someone agreeing to be filmed is the fear of losing control over how they are represented. Remember that your collaborators are your priority: let them know early on that you would never force them to include footage of themselves that they strongly do not want to feature in the piece.



6. Barriers to involvement

Discuss whether there are obstacles holding your collaborator back from contributing fully and consider ways to overcome these barriers together. You may want to make a training plan for your collaborator.

See On Our Radar's [5Cs framework](#) for more information.

7. Credit and remuneration

Collaborators should be credited in a way that acknowledges their full contribution; ask how they would like to be credited.



TIP: FIND SOLUTIONS TO PRIVACY CONCERNS

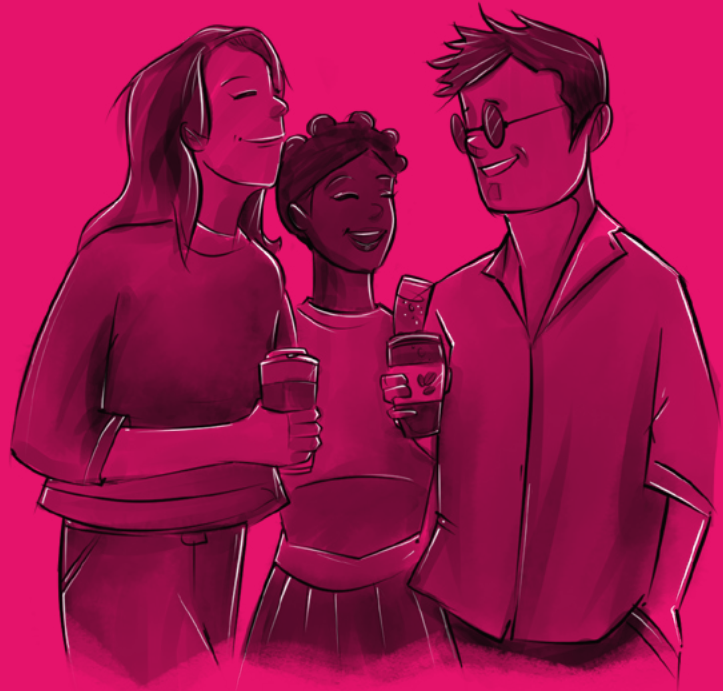
Some collaborators may wish to take part but do not wish to have their name on the project for safety reasons. Make sure they know they can be credited under a pseudonym or remain anonymous if they wish.

If your collaborators are carrying out work and contributing large amounts of their time to the project, then it may be appropriate to discuss how you can remunerate them for this work. This is different from remunerating them for sharing their testimony.



TIP: BE UPFRONT ABOUT REMUNERATION

At times, financial payment may not be appropriate; it may put the participant at risk or impact on benefits, or other domestic or personal situations. In which case, other routes of remuneration, accreditation or learning opportunities should be considered and discussed, such as vouchers, additional credit or data top-up, stipends, or pro-bono service provision. Expenses should always be covered. It is important to clarify this at an early stage as this will not only set the tone but also allow participants to work out whether they can afford to engage.



Step three: Have fun together

Before you jump into the serious parts of production, take some time to break down barriers between you and your collaborators and build trust and rapport. Often, the best way to get people to open up is through having fun together. Consider setting a day aside for some team building activities, or just make time to have a cup of tea and a walk without the cameras.



TIP: OPEN AND CLOSE THE DAY WITH A CHECK IN AND OUT

Start the day with a check in, make the most of the relaxed atmosphere to get your collaborators to open up about how they're feeling that day and to express any reflections they have about embarking upon the project. Ask them one thing they're excited about and one thing they're nervous about. Make sure to be open and honest about your own emotions.

Always end the day with a check out where everyone can express how they feel at the end of the day, and whether their mood has changed.

3. COLLABORATIVE STORYBOARDING





COLLABORATIVE STORYBOARDING

What is it?

Storyboarding is a tool to help you plan and visualise the film before you start filming by laying out the scenes as you want them to appear in the film.

Collaborative storyboarding is a great way to involve your collaborators in making practical and creative decisions, such as which scenes should be prioritised, who needs to be interviewed, and what locations you might film in.

Remember that your storyboard is not set in stone, it can be reactive and can change throughout production as you encounter developments and challenges.

Who is involved?

This activity should take place between the filmmaker and the key collaborators.

How do you do it?

The exact process of how you construct your storyboard is a decision you and your collaborators should make together. There are many good resources online which can give tips on how to make a storyboard. They can be made using free storyboarding software or with a pen and paper.



TIP: USE YOUR GUIDING PRICIPLES

Use your guiding principles to inform your storyboard to make sure you are not deviating from the shared vision for the piece.

SPOTLIGHT



MY STOLEN CHILDHOOD

BBC documentary about ritual slavery

Brigitte Sossou Perenyi was trafficked from her home in Togo at the age of seven and forced into a form of ritual slavery at a shrine as part of a practice called 'trokosi'. My Stolen Childhood is an incredibly personal story about her journey to discover what happened to her as a child.

As part of the storyboarding process, she identified a key aim: to feel more at peace with what had happened to her by getting a better understanding of the practice that had changed the course of her life.

Brigitte worked with us to identify who we might film with in order to achieve this: other women who had been trokosis, people who still believe in the practice, academics and campaigners who have studied the practice, her family who had given her away.

With the help of post-it notes, we were able to map out and plan a journey that Brigitte felt happy with.



TRAINING YOUR COLLABORATORS TO FILM

Once you have storyboarded your film, you will be able to identify areas where your collaborator might need to receive training in order to be fully involved. While they may not need to be trained to film with professional cameras (perhaps you or a professional cameraperson will take on this role) it may still be useful to train your collaborators to film using their mobile phone.

What is it?

Training your collaborators to film using their mobile phone allows them to:

- Capture any moments of unfolding action when the cameras are gone
- Take an active role in shaping the story visually without having to undergo extensive training with complicated equipment
- Capture more intimate moments, for example the people you are filming may feel more comfortable showing their true personality when they are being filmed with unobtrusive equipment and when they are being filmed by someone they know well

Who is involved?

Key collaborators and those who live or work closely to them. For example, if your protagonist is an elderly person in care, perhaps training one of their children to film with them (with their consent) could help capture intimate moments.

How to do it?

Collaborators will likely require some training in order to film strong footage with good production values.

On Our Radar have produced a Visual Storytelling Handbook to train collaborators, get in touch at info@onourradar.org to find out more.

4. MAINTAINING ENGAGEMENT





TIP: ASK OPEN QUESTIONS

Always begin by asking open questions to avoid leading with your own assumptions or preferences.

MAINTAINING ENGAGEMENT

What you capture and how you do it will depend on decisions made in your storyboarding process. While we can't tell you how to carry out your shoot, we can remind you of the importance of carving out time to regularly check in about group decisions and reflect upon your progress. Here are some ways you can do that:

Brainstorming

- Key themes: what elements of the story do you want to portray?
- Narration: who narrates the piece? From whose perspective?
- Narrative structure
- Interviewees
- Visuals: is there an atmosphere or a sense of place that you want to convey visually?
- Locations
- Outlets you would like to pitch to
- Duration/format of the content
- Script or structure for the final piece

Shared reflection and analysis

Build in moments throughout the process where you can reflect as a group on where you are at and how you feel about what you have achieved so far. It may seem obvious but when a production is in full speed you can easily skip this step which could leave problems to grow without an opportunity for them to be aired. It is also a good moment to celebrate what you have done so far and highlight individual achievements.

5. EDITING COLLABORATIVELY





EDITING COLLABORATIVELY

What is it?

Bringing your collaborators into the edit allows them to have control over what goes into the piece, how the piece looks and how the people in it are represented. The edit process is just as important as the production phase, so ending the engagement of your collaborators before the edit means they will miss out on key opportunities to shape the final output.

Who is involved?

This activity should take place between the producer, the key collaborator(s) and the editor (where relevant).

How do you do it?

Collaborative editing can take place on a scale of varying involvement, ranging from someone sitting in the entire edit, to someone coming just at the beginning and end. How you approach this should be decided between you and your collaborator.

TIP: BE TRANSPARENT

The less involved your collaborator is in the editing process, the clearer you need to be about the limits of what they can feedback on. If they are only viewing the rough cut, you need to be clear that feedback probably cannot request dramatic changes to the edit on the basis of stylistic preference, instead it will be an opportunity for them to flag scenes they are uncomfortable with or to identify any inaccuracies. Your collaborator should sign off on this arrangement before the edit begins.

It's also worth making clear that lots of difficult decisions happen in the edit, and it's often not possible to include every interviewee, or remove a scene with a 'bad hair day', as awkward as these things might feel.



TIP: DON'T BE AFRAID OF CONFLICT

Disagreements will occur in any edit, but if you have established a relationship of trust and equality early on then all parties should feel justified in making their case and trying to negotiate with the other. Healthy disagreement can actually be a sign you have succeeded in establishing an equal relationship between yourself and your collaborators, it shows they feel confident enough to voice their opinion and that they feel ownership over the piece. Be aware of power dynamics in the room. Make sure to ground the conversations in the 'guiding principles' documented at the beginning of the process.



6. PREPARING TO MAKE YOUR STORY PUBLIC





PREPARING TO MAKE YOUR FILM PUBLIC

Preparing for broadcast:

This is the moment in the production cycle where your collaborator can feel least in control: their stories are about to go public and they will be feeling exposed and vulnerable. Not only could they face negative backlash, but they are also often sharing intimate memories and insights into their lives which were previously private. Do not underestimate the significance of this and the apprehension they might be feeling.

The following techniques will help give a sense of control back to your collaborators by properly preparing them for what is to come and equipping them with tools and information to support them.



TIP: BE REALISTIC ABOUT HOW MUCH YOU CAN BE RESPONSIBLE FOR

When you're working on stories dealing with sensitive subjects, it's easy to conflate the impact of the story on your collaborators' wellbeing with their general wellbeing. As a producer, not a trained therapist, you are not responsible for someone's general wellbeing. Think specifically about *the impact of the public broadcast* on them and any negative impact that might have on their wellbeing. We strongly advise you to consider including professional psychological support in your budget if necessary for the production (both for your collaborators and for the producers) and to work with collaborators on these issues throughout the production process.



TIP: FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE



A good media briefing will positively affirm your collaborator, reminding them of all that they have achieved with the piece. It's important to focus on the positives and prepare them for the negatives in a way which doesn't give negative criticism more importance than it should have. And make sure the briefing is as personal to your collaborator as possible.

Creating a media briefing pack:

What is it?

This can be a slide deck or a document which you create for or with your collaborator which outlines the key things they should be considering and remembering when your piece goes public. It will prepare them for any questions they are asked in interviews or any negative reaction to reviews or feedback they see online.

Who is involved?

This can be something which you make for your collaborator and present to them, or it can be made together.

How do you do it?

The best media briefings will be personalised for your collaborator. We recommend structuring your media briefing around the following chapters:

1. Legitimacy

Remind your collaborator that only they could have told their story and that they have a right to tell it. Get them to question the extent to which they care about the opinions of those who may criticise them.

2. Aims of the piece

Remind your collaborator of the aims of your project, if you created guiding principles then they'll come in handy here. By reinforcing the aims of the piece you can support your collaborator to identify when criticism is missing the point and should be ignored.

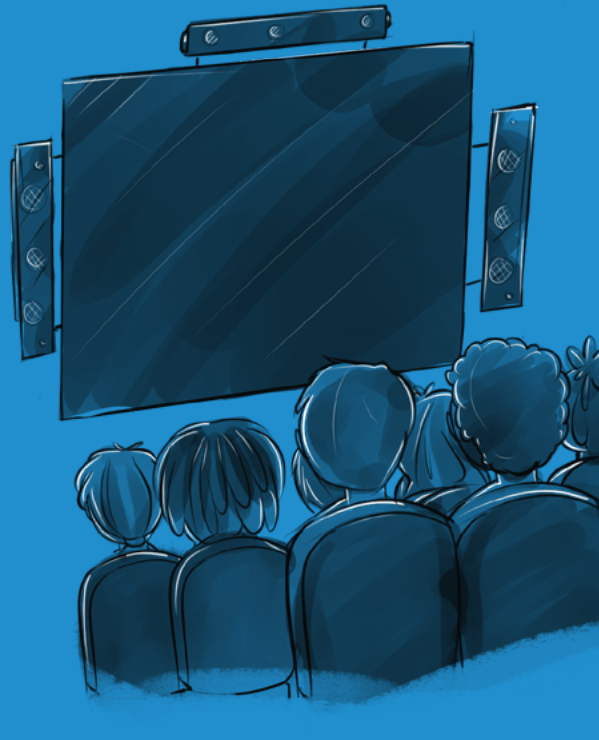
3. How best to react

This section should address how to react to criticism online (on Twitter, Facebook etc), and how to prepare for interviews. Remind them that people will always say negative things online and that they shouldn't take it to heart: it's always advisable to avoid engaging in Twitter wars.

Make sure that you have a system in place where they can report any personal threats or abusive messages quickly to a member of your team or to the police if urgent.

4. Potential critiques and your response

Make a list of some potential critiques people may make of the piece and plan your responses. This way your collaborator will have their go-to responses at the ready.



Public screenings and safety

We recommend having a separate conversation with your collaborators about all public screenings and broadcasts of the piece. Make sure they know:

- Where it will be shown
- What those media outlets or festivals are like and what is the likely reach of their audience
- If the piece will be shown in their own country or community
- If it will exist publicly online

If broadcasting the story could affect the safety of your collaborator, consider how you need to brief and prepare your participants. You may have to turn down opportunities to screen the film where your collaborator does not feel safe. Make sure you have protocols in place to ensure their safety, such as processes for reporting any concerns or threats.



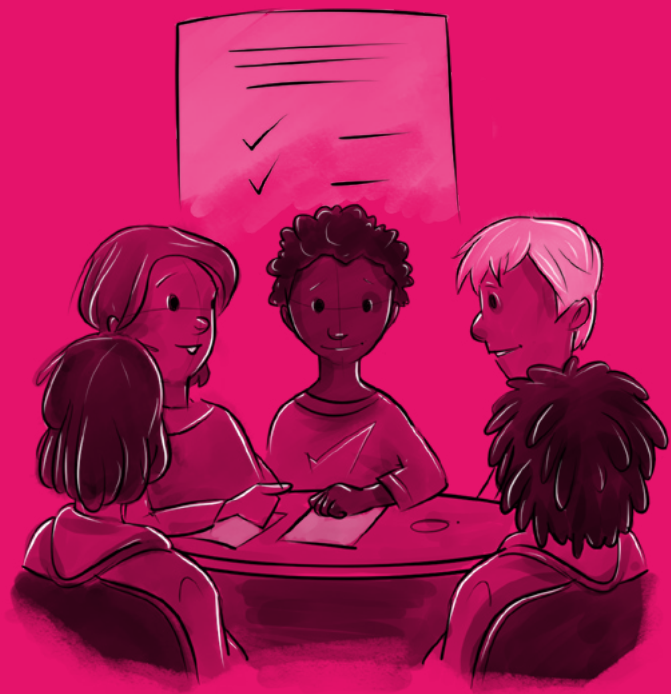
TIP: STAY IN TOUCH

Once the story has been made public, make sure you're continuing to keep your collaborators in the loop regarding:

- Public reception, for example any reviews or articles
- Where the film is being shown, for example if you are being featured in several festivals make sure they know about the screenings and have the option to attend or invite people if they so wish.

7. BRINGING YOUR COLLABORATION TO AN END





BRING YOUR COLLABORATION TO AN END

Closing the feedback loop

You should facilitate the end of your project with the same level of care you gave to its beginning. Be sensitive to the fact that your collaborators may have been let down by people before. Make sure they know that the end of the production doesn't mean the end of the relationship. Find ways to bring positive closure to the project and set expectations for how you will continue to communicate in the future. One technique for doing this is facilitating a closing letter writing session.

What is it?

A way to bring together your key collaborators to reflect on your project and all that it has achieved and to prepare them for the end of the project by writing letters.

Who is involved?

You may wish to keep this to your key collaborators or broaden the pool to include collaborators from other stages in the process.

How do you do it?

1. Ask everyone to come together to discuss the end of the project, distribute paper and pens or recording devices for those who are not comfortable writing.
2. Create a list of points you would like everyone to respond to in their letter. You should personalise the list to your project, we have created the following list as an example:
 - a. List your favourite memory from the project
 - b. List a challenge you have overcome
 - c. List one new skill you have learned
 - d. List a new piece of knowledge you have gained
 - e. List one thing you would do differently if you did this again
 - f. Contribute one idea for how the group can continue to stay in contact
 - g. Tell us one thing that would make the end of the project easier for you
3. Ask everyone to share their letter with the group if they are comfortable doing so.
4. Write up and agree upon the best ways the group can continue to stay in contact, be as specific as possible and set dates to hold yourselves to account.

Sharing successes on a Whatsapp group and/or having a wrap party can be equally effective!

A FINAL THOUGHT...

Even if you don't have the time, the budget or the need to follow every step in this guide, each step that you do take can help to make your production process more collaborative.

As with all creative processes, good relationships and trust are key. Enjoy the collaboration, have fun, and remember to celebrate successes at the end of the process.

When all goes to plan, you'll not only come out with raw, distinct and diverse stories, but also with strong and long-lasting collaborative relationships. Nothing is more rewarding.

"We were treated so compassionately. We felt comfortable at every step of the way, all the way up to when the film was aired and after the broadcast. None of us who participated have felt like a product, it was a collaboration. It's been our film too, told in our words."

Dreane Williams, *Dementia & Us* narrator

APPENDIX

EXAMPLES OF CO-PRODUCTION AT ITS BEST

Co-production is becoming more recognised and celebrated in the sector, here are some examples of prize-winning participatory films.

- For Sama:** this collaboration between first-time Syrian filmmaker Waad al-Kateab and Ed Watts for Channel Four created a unique and intimate perspective of life in war-torn Aleppo which was broadcast around the world. The film, shot by Al-Kateab and following her daily life during the war, was nominated for an Oscar, it won the Prix L'Œil d'Or for Best Documentary at Cannes Film Festival and the Bafta Award for Best Documentary as well as winning awards at SXSW Film Festival and Hot Docs Festival.
- Sandy Storyline:** established in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, Sandy Storyline collects and shares stories about the impact of Hurricane Sandy on individuals, by sharing their story via their website in words, photo, audio or video. The project won the The Tribeca Film Festival's Award for Transmedia, in a new category recognising innovative storytelling.
- Procession:** director Robert Greene collaborated with six men, survivors of childhood abuse perpetrated by members of the Catholic Church, to make a film about their search for healing and justice which seeks to give the protagonists control over their stories. The film has been distributed by Netflix and recently won the Cinema Eye Honors Awards for Outstanding Achievement in Direction.
- My Stolen Childhood:** Brigitte Sossou Perenyi was trafficked from her home in Togo at the age of seven and forced into a form of ritual slavery at a shrine as part of a practice called 'trokosi'. In this emotional and sensitive documentary, Brigitte travelled through Ghana and Togo to find out more about a practice that had robbed her of her family and her childhood, narrating her own journey. The film was distributed worldwide and won an Association for International Broadcasting Award.
- Dementia and Us:** ***Dementia & Us*** is a groundbreaking two-part series for BBC 2 following four people with dementia and their families over the course of two whole years. This is the story of dementia, told by people living with dementia and narrated by Dreane Williams who herself lives with vascular dementia. We see how varied the story of dementia turns out to be when it plays out over time – not just a tale of loss and decline, but also one of hope, humour and those unexpected twists that life can throw in the way. Dementia is a disease many learn to live with, not just die from.



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www.onourradar.org/productions

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On Our Radar is an award-winning production house making films, web-documentaries and digital features that are distinct, raw and intimate.

We work with people to tell their stories in their own words, combining a participatory approach with the highest production values and journalistic standards.



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