



TOOLKIT



In January of most years, the President delivers a State of the Union Address highlighting the past year and suggesting priorities for the coming year. It's a broadcast from one to many. But democracy is a conversation, not a monologue. Understanding the state of our union takes We the People reflecting in our own communities on our challenges and opportunities locally, nationally, and globally.

This year, We the People are likely to have many, many stories about this nation's recent past and immediate future, and many reasons to come together across political divides, share our stories, and listen deeply.

The People's State of the Union is an invitation to host a national conversation in our own homes, schools, houses of worship, and community organizations. From January 25-February 3, 2019, individuals and organizations across the U.S. will host Story Circles.

**THIS TOOLKIT WILL GIVE YOU EVERYTHING
YOU NEED TO TAKE PART.**

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURE

HELLO@USDAC.US | USDAC.US

Dear Citizen Artist,

Thanks for stepping up to co-create the People's State of the Union 2019! You're joining thousands of people who understand that to thrive, democracy needs all our voices and all our creativity.

The People's State of the Union has two main parts: Story Circles across the nation to share stories about the state of our union, and arts-based projects you create to share your stories. Together, we'll build a composite picture of the state of our union, celebrating what connects us and bringing our creativity to healing all that pulls us apart.

The U.S. Department of Arts and Culture is dedicated to inciting creativity in the service of empathy, equity, and social imagination. The People's State of the Union 2019 will be the fifth edition of this new civic ritual. (Visit our [website](#) to check out prior editions of the People's State of the Union.)

By taking part, you affirm that all of us make the future, that all of our stories count. When we speak truth and listen deeply, when we begin to turn imagination into action, we can move the world.

Your participation means everything.

In this Toolkit, you'll find all you need to host a successful Story Circle. Please feel free to contact us with questions. You can always reach us at hello@usdac.us.

Together we create!

The USDAC

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ROADMAP

We recommend reading the entire Toolkit, but if you need to prioritize, here's a brief summary of what you'll find in each section, and how you might use the information, depending on whether you're a Story Circle host, facilitator, scribe, or someone working in another role with a host group.

SECTION 1. QUICKSTART GUIDE.....PAGE 3
Dive right into this national action. *For anyone using this Toolkit.*

SECTION 2. WHAT IS #PSOTU2019?.....PAGE 4
This section describes all the elements of the People's State of the Union.
Useful context for anyone taking part.

SECTION 3. PLANNING & PROMOTING YOUR STORY CIRCLE EVENT.....PAGE 8
This section focuses on setting up your event and getting the word out to build participation. *Essential for people handling logistics and outreach.*

SECTION 4. GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR STORY CIRCLE.....PAGE 13
This section offers tips for making people feel welcome and engaged, and building on #PSOTU2019 for the future. *A must for hosts.*

SECTION 5. POSTING & SHARING.....PAGE 16
This section explains how to capture images and texts created by #PSOTU2019 participants and upload them to the Story Portal for sharing. It also describes arts-based events such as staged readings and local poetic addresses you can use to share stories in your community. *For hosts and whomever is going to perform these tasks; others can skip.*

SECTION 6. DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCES.....PAGE 19
Links to free downloadable flyer, social media, instructions, and handouts for #PSOTU2019. *Especially for anyone doing promotion or running elements of your Story Circle gathering.*



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1. QUICKSTART GUIDE

STEP ONE: PUT YOUR #PSOTU STORY CIRCLE EVENT ON THE MAP

Pick a welcoming site. Choose your day and time. Go to the [#PSOTU2019 web page](#) and follow the link, or go directly to the [map listing page](#).

STEP TWO: PLAN YOUR EVENT

If you're hosting multiple Story Circles (rather than holding a single Circle in your own home, organization, or classroom), consider adding performance, refreshments, or other activities, and plan your event flow accordingly.

Download the [#PSOTU2019 Event Checklist](#) from the [#PSOTU Public Folder](#) and follow the steps, finding volunteers to help with Story Circle facilitation and scribing, greeting and registration, set-up and takedown, and sharing. Story Circle Instructions are available from the [#PSOTU Public Folder](#).

STEP THREE: PROMOTE YOUR EVENT

Download the [#PSOTU2019 Media Promotion Checklist](#) from the [#PSOTU Public Folder](#) and follow the steps. Download, adapt, and use the press advisory, model flyer, and social media buttons also available in the [#PSOTU Public Folder](#).

STEP FOUR: HOST YOUR EVENT

Welcome and register people, being sure to capture their names and emails to share with the USDAC at hello@usdac.us. Follow the Story Circle Instructions in the [#PSOTU Public Folder](#).

Upload the stories your Story Circle participants wish to share to the [#PSOTU2019 Story Portal](#), following the instructions in [Section 5 of this Toolkit](#), "Posting and Sharing." Be sure to thank everyone for taking part!

STEP FIVE: USE THE STORY PORTAL

Encourage everyone to visit the [#PSOTU2019 Story Portal](#) to see their own stories online and find others that interest them.

STEP SIX: CREATE YOUR OWN ARTS-BASED #PSOTU2019 EVENT

Consider creating a staged reading of stories, a poetic address for your community, or otherwise working with local artists to create an offering inspired by your [#PSOTU2019 stories](#).

TO DOWNLOAD #PSOTU2019 MATERIALS

[#PSOTU2019 materials](#) are available for download from the [#PSOTU Public Folder](#). When you go to that link, you'll see a button to the upper right of your window saying "Open in Drive." Do that, then click on the document you want. Under the File menu, you'll see "Download as," giving you all available options. Choose the one you want, then download to your computer. After that, you can adapt them as you wish. **Do not attempt to edit any of the documents while they are still in the Public Folder, as that will change them for everyone.**

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2. WHAT IS #PSOTU2019?

FROM JANUARY 25-FEBRUARY 3, 2019, THE PEOPLE-POWERED U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURE, WORKING WITH MANY PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS, WILL HOST THE PEOPLE'S STATE OF THE UNION 2019—#PSOTU2019 FOR SHORT.

WHY THE PEOPLE'S STATE OF THE UNION?

In January of most years, the President delivers a State of the Union Address highlighting the past year and suggesting priorities for the coming year. It's a broadcast from one to many. But democracy is a conversation, not a monologue. Understanding the state of our union takes We the People reflecting in our own communities on our challenges and opportunities locally, nationally, and globally.

The People's State of the Union is an invitation to join in hosting a national conversation in our own homes, schools, houses of worship, and community organizations.

In a year that's seen more polarizing slogans and soundbites, more demonstrations and heated debates than ever, looking each other in the eye and sharing our stories matters even more than usual. In such moments, being able to cross political divides and remain in dialogue is a worthy challenge. Who are we? What touches our hearts and minds? What do our communities need, and what do they need to hear from us? We may know our own answers, but do we know each other?

As Citizen Artists we know that we must change the story to change the world. The People's State of the Union is an invitation to dive in right here, right now. We can tell stories about challenges, about optimism and hope, funny stories and sad ones, angry stories and tales of longing. We can share moments of pride or shame. We can share moments of truth. We can listen deeply to the experience of fellow community members and they can listen to our stories. By doing these things, we can come to know each other.

The People's State of the Union is an act of full cultural citizenship, where every voice counts and every ear listens. Add your story.

TWO PARTS OF THE PEOPLE'S STATE OF THE UNION

The People's State of the Union has two main parts: Story Circles across the nation and local arts-based events you create to share your stories with the community.

STORY CIRCLES

Individuals and organizations across the U.S. are signing up to host Story Circles between January 25 and February 3, 2019. (Over the last four years, people in more than 500 communities signed up to host.)

A Story Circle is a small group of individuals sitting in a circle, sharing stories from their own experience focusing on a common theme. Every story has a beginning, a middle, an end, and a

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teller. Imagine starting this way: “Let me tell you about the time....” Whatever story each person wants to tell is just fine. As each person in turn shares a story, a larger, richer, and more complex story emerges. By the end, people see both real differences and things their stories have in common. A Story Circle is a journey into its theme, with multiple dimensions, twists, and turns.

Each Story Circle for #PSOTU2019 has a facilitator (to moderate and engage everyone in the Circle) and a scribe (to record stories and help people post them to the [#PSOTU2019 Story Portal](#)). Download complete instructions from the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#), sharing them with facilitators, scribes, and any other volunteers who will help to organize and facilitate your event.

Story Circles are often understood as deriving from indigenous traditions. There are many variations. We are grateful to theater makers such as Roadside Theater and John O’Neal, who have been central in developing the practice for use in creating original performance and in community telling and listening projects.

You can invite a half-dozen friends to your home for a Story Circle, plan a large-scale event where multiple Story Circles take place at the same time, do a single Story Circle anytime during the 10-day stretch of #PSOTU2019, or do some every day!

For #PSOTU 2019, Story Circle participants are invited to share their own take on the state of our union by reflecting on any of the following prompts:

- Share a story about an experience that gave you insight into the state of our union.
- Share a story about a time you felt a sense of belonging—or the opposite—to this nation or your community.
- Share a story of an experience that inspired you to take action in the past year.



Story Circles can also substitute specific prompts hosts have created on a theme such as education, environment, or racial justice (e.g., “Share a story about an experience that gave you insight into the state of education in this country”).

Anyone who signs up to host a Story Circle—whether it’s a few folks in your own kitchen or a dozen simultaneous circles in a high school gym—gets this free Toolkit and access to other documents in the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#). Together, they explain absolutely everything you need to know to organize, promote, and pull off your event. Hosts and facilitators are also offered free online training and technical assistance.

When #PSOTU2019 launches on January 25th, the [#PSOTU2019 Story Portal](#) will go live. Scribes from each event (and individuals anywhere) will be able to easily upload stories so they can be

browsed and shared. (You'll find hundreds of earlier stories at the [2016 Story Portal](#) and the [2017 Story Portal](#); scroll down in the [#PSOTU2019 Story Portal](#) to see stories from 2018.)

ARTS-BASED EVENTS TO SHARE #PSOTU2019 STORIES

All previous PSOTUs have culminated in a collaboratively created *Poetic Address to the Nation*, performed and livecast. (Scroll down on [this page](#) for links to watch and read the 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 *Poetic Address to the Nation*.)

This year, that creative act is being decentralized! Instead of single national *Poetic Address*, you're invited to craft your own, or do a staged reading of stories, host an open mic for offerings based on stories, or be inspired to adapt stories for another arts-based presentation. Be sure to post documentation of your event to the [#PSOTU2019 Documentation Folder](#), which contains separate folders to upload video, images, and other materials. And be sure to post your photos to social media using the hashtags [#PSOTU2019](#) and [#USDAC](#).

HOW CAN YOU BE PART OF #PSOTU2019?

- (1) **You can sign up to host a single Story Circle**, inviting people to share stories that say something about the state of our union and being sure their stories are uploaded to the [#PSOTU2019 Story Portal](#) where they can be seen and shared. You can host a Story Circle in your own home, or turn your classroom, congregation, or book club into a Story Circle, engaging people right where they are. (Visit the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#) to download a sample lesson plan to bring [#PSOTU2019](#) into the classroom.)
- (2) **You can work with an organization in your community** to create and invite people to a Story Circle event where multiple Story Circles happen at the same time, planning an introduction and other elements (e.g., music or other performance) to tie them together.
- (3) **You can upload your story** directly to the [#PSOTU2019 Story Portal](#) even if there aren't Story Circles planned for your area.

WHY TAKE PART?

Hosting a [#PSOTU2019 Story Circle](#) is a great way to add engagement, excitement, and power to your community, whether as an individual or through an organization. Here are some of the things taking part in [#PSOTU2019](#) can do:

- Engage people who may not already be involved in sharing their stories or taking part in public forums
- Offer an easy and rewarding way to take part in your arts or organizing work
- Inspire people to do something to improve the state of our union
- Generate stories that reach far beyond the Story Circle where they were first shared, affecting others
- Create goodwill so people want to work together again
- Forge connections between participants, leading to further collaborations.

We like to say that the USDAC is an act of collective imagination. Everything created must first be imagined, and that goes for the future of our communities. Through the USDAC's community-

based organizing and National Actions such as #PSOTU2019, we are crowd-sourcing a vision of communities shaped by the power of art and culture, where creativity, empathy, equity, and justice are ordinary and everywhere.

Locally, Story Circles introduce people to new neighbors and new ways of interacting and collaborating that reinforce the deeply democratic idea that everyone's story counts. Past PSOTU Story Circles have led to new relationships, collaborations, even culture shifts in institutions that have adopted the practice to promote greater dialogue. When people are slinging opinions, it's hard to hear each other across political divides. But sharing stories is a very different thing. Story Circles help us know each other, connecting to overcome the ignorance and fear that divide us. We may not emerge from a Story Circle in agreement, but it will be easier to see each other as people rather than symbols or categories.

The stories contributed to #PSOTU2019 will be translated into concrete ideas for policies and programs. For instance, PSOTU 2015 stories formed the basis for our generative cultural policy recommendations in *An Act of Collective Imagination: The USDAC's First Two Years of Action Research* (you can download that publication [here](#).)

We will also put #PSOTU2019-inspired ideas into national circulation through publications, videos, and social media. Each time they spread, they will bring us closer to the future embodied in our act of collective imagination. It's up to all of us!



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3. PLANNING & PROMOTING YOUR STORY CIRCLE EVENT

CUSTOMIZING YOUR EVENT

A People's State of the Union Story Circle event can be as simple as a few people gathering in a living room or as many as a hundred people coming together in a public space, counting off into multiple circles for sharing, then coming together to talk about what it all means.

At each Story Circle event, the stories shared will reflect the people in the room. If you're hosting a public event, carefully consider whom you're hoping to attract. If you hope certain voices will be present—young people, for instance, or recent immigrants—try to partner with organizations they trust, taking the time to personally invite them into the space so everyone feels welcome.

The Story Circle is the heart of a People's State of the Union event. But it doesn't have to be the only element. Adding other elements can attract participants and deepen engagement. Here are a few other possibilities. You could:

- Invite artists to perform
- Provide materials for making visual art related to the themes
- Host an artistic Open Mic after the Story Circle
- Turn the event into a potluck or ask a sponsor to donate refreshments
- Screen USDAC videos (you'll find them [here](#))
- Post "We The People" customizable posters (download from the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#))
- Generate other good ideas of your own!

CUSTOMIZING YOUR CONVERSATION

Rather than using the general prompts offered on page 5, #PSOTU2019 can be adapted to focus on a specific issue of central importance to the Story Circle event sponsor. You can put a stamp on your event in many ways. For instance, consider these:

- **Customize messaging.** We're invite groups to co-brand #PSOTU2019, such as #PSOTU2019 #ClimateJustice or #PSOTU2019 #FoodSecurity. Thematic Story Circles are welcome!
- **Tailor Story Circle prompts to your own themes and issues.** For instance, if you work on racial justice, your Story Circle could use this prompt: Tell a story about something that showed you the state of racial justice in our union.
- **Provide takeaway information at your event.** Once they've shared their stories, invite folks to learn more about how to respond constructively to what's been shared by picking up literature you've provided.
- **Lead people to easy actions.** We encourage anyone who hosts a Story Circle to offer easy steps visitors can take to move from their own stories to broader engagement.

EVENT FLOW

The flow of your event will depend on what activities are included. Here's a sample flow (download detailed instructions for Story Circles from the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#)):



- **Setup** (1 hour before): Final preparations. Facilitators and Scribes arrive for refresher training.
- **Event begins** (20 minutes prior to announced start time): Arrivals, greeting, sign-in, name tags.
- **Welcome** (15 minutes): Everyone is called together and seated in one big group. The host welcomes people and explains briefly what is going to happen. In your welcome, be sure to explain a little bit about the USDAC and the People's State of the Union. A sample Welcome Script appears in the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#). [If you're planning to feature music or other performance, you may want to do it now, before the Story Circles; or after the discussion and before formal adjournment.]
Be sure to include an acknowledgment of Indigenous lands in your welcome; you'll find easy instructions and relevant resources in the free downloadable USDAC publication, [#HonorNativeLand: A Call and Guide to Acknowledgment](#).

- **Story Circles** (40 minutes): Host introduces Story Circle process (you'll find a sample Introduction script in the Story Circle Instructions downloadable from the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#)), and then people go into small groups for Story Circles, dividing either by counting off, using pre-numbered name tags, or self-selection.
- **Regather** (15 minutes): Reassemble into the large group for brief sharing and discussion.
- **Closing** (10 minutes): Formal event ends. Thanks to all. People are encouraged to stay around for refreshments and socializing, and also to work with scribes if you're capturing stories in real time.
- **Clean-up/breakdown.**

SETTING UP SPACE

FOR SMALL-SCALE EVENTS

Pick a space for your Story Circle that makes it possible for everyone to feel comfortable and welcome. Be sure to greet folks as they come in and make introductions so no one feels lost.

It's nice to offer simple refreshments. Make sure that your seating area can accommodate everyone, either sitting around a table or on chairs and couches in a rough circle. It's important that everyone be able to see everyone else. Be sure to seat the facilitator in a central position so that person can easily make eye contact with everyone else.

FOR LARGER PUBLIC EVENTS

The essence of Story Circle events is making room for all voices to be heard. If your event is open to the public, be mindful of access. Things to consider include:

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- Is the space you've chosen easy to get to? Is there adequate public transit and/or parking?
 - Is the space you have lined up wheelchair accessible? Is there an ADA bathroom on the premises?
 - Are children welcome at the event? If not, it can be easy and rewarding to coordinate volunteer or rotating child care at or near where the event is happening.
 - Do you need interpreters?
 - Is the space you've chosen inviting and easily accessible to members of the community or communities you are hoping to involve? Is there any reason people wouldn't feel welcome there?

If you have more than 10 participants, you will need multiple Story Circles. To avoid wasting time, set up chairs in advance, leaving room between Circles so sound doesn't bleed too much. Try to have extra chairs on hand just in case. But if you don't have enough chairs to seat everyone for the welcome and introduction *and* in Story Circles, individual participants may be asked to carry chairs into areas designated for Story Circles.

Your exact setup will depend on the anticipated number of participants and how you might want to accommodate live performance or food. An optimal size for Story Circles is 8, although 10 will work if need be. Anticipate your attendance, divide by 8, and that will help you estimate the number of Circles you need, and therefore the spaces, facilitators, and scribes.

If you're working with one large room (e.g., a school gym), try to group food and performance space at one end, leaving room for a sufficient number of Story Circles with space in between. These can be formed around tables, or just rings of chairs—either is fine. Use the far corners of the room to get as much space as possible between Circles.

If you're working with multiple rooms (e.g., a multi-purpose room and classrooms), you can set up Story Circles in break-out spaces. But be sure people don't have to travel too far, or you risk delays.

WELCOME STATION: SIGN-IN AND NAME TAGS

Set up a welcome station as people enter the event space. Be sure to greet everyone. You can ask your Story Circle facilitators to arrive early and serve as greeters, or enlist other volunteers. Just be sure no one feels ignored or lost.

SIGN-IN SHEETS

Please record all Story Circle participants' names and email addresses. This will enable us to send all participants information about events based on #PSOTU2019 stories well as updates on future USDAC actions.

If it is possible to have a computer at the welcome station, you can either have someone typing names and emails or ask people to type their own names and email addresses as they enter. Or you can download and print out the Sign-in Sheet in the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#) and ask people to legibly print their own names and email addresses. If possible, we'd appreciate your typing out the names and emails after the event, as handwriting can be hard to decipher. Please send completed sign-in information to hello@usdac.us: either just email us the names/email addresses or scan the sign-in sheet and attach to an email.

NAME TAGS

Provide name tags at the welcome station. It's nice (but not essential) to have a collection of colored markers so people can decorate their own name tags. But even if they are just one color,

be sure to have markers so people can print their names large enough to be read by all the people in their circles.

Name tags can be a great way to randomize Story Circles, ensuring that people who came together don't necessarily sit together. Just estimate the number of Story Circles you will need and number your blank name tags consecutively. (For example, if you'll have three Story Circles, number the blank name tags 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, etc.) When it's time to get into Story Circles, just have people look at their name tags, find the facilitator who is holding up their number, and follow that person to the right location.

ONLINE COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT

For Story Circle facilitators and scribes, the USDAC is offering free training sessions via the easy-to-use Zoom online video conference platform. Shortly after you sign up to host a Story Circle, you'll receive information on when and how to take part.

Each training session will be no more than 90 minutes in length, combining presentations with interactive conversation. You'll learn how to welcome people, manage time and space within the event, and how to prevent anything that might put a strain on the situation. You will meet people from across the country who are taking part in #PSOTU2019, and by the end of your training call, you will be prepared to facilitate a Story Circle or train others to do so.

If you can't take part in the training call yourself, feel free to send a delegate! If you are hosting a larger event with multiple Story Circles, feel free to also invite other facilitators and scribes to take part. It's helpful if at least one person on your team is trained and prepared to navigate the challenges and opportunities that may come up at a Story Circle.

We will send you a reminder of the date and time of your training session and the call-in info a few days before. **If you can't make one of the training calls, you can watch a video instead.** Everyone who signs up to host a Story Circle will receive a link to watch a training call when it's available.



RECEIVING PROMOTION THROUGH USDAC MEDIA

When you sign up to host a Story Circle event, you'll provide details to put your event on the [map](#). Every Story Circle will be listed on the [#PSOTU2019 site](#). If your event is co-sponsored by an organization, we'll gladly list and link that partner organization on the PSOTU site.

The USDAC will push #PSOTU2019 out through newsletters, websites, and social media, and provide you with sample tweets and Facebook posts to do likewise.

The USDAC blog, newsletter, and other press coverage will include a range of #PSOTU2019 events, and we'll provide you with sample press materials to pursue your own coverage (see the next section, below).

PROMOTING YOUR #PSOTU2019 EVENT

In the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#), you'll find customizable templates for flyers, press releases, and social media images you can post to Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram. Feel free to download and use these or create your own. You'll also find a Media Promotion Checklist there offering more detailed advice and information.

For optimal impact, a month before your Story Circle event, begin promoting it in as many of these ways as you choose:

- Contact local media outlets to pitch feature stories and radio appearances
- Collect the deadlines of the relevant publicity outlets and distribute press releases
- Ask local organizations to pitch your Story Circle event to their members
- Create a Facebook page to build participation in your event, and/or promote it on your existing Facebook pages
- Create a Twitter hashtag for your event, using the main #USDAC hashtag too. For instance, #PSOTU2019 #YourTownName
- Adapt the USDAC model flyer and post throughout your community.
- Post "We The People" customizable posters created by USDAC artists for you (download from the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#)).

CHECKLISTS

As you plan your People's State of the Union event, be sure to download the [#PSOTU2019 Event Checklist](#) and [Media Promotion Checklist](#) you'll find in the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#).



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4. GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR STORY CIRCLE

Hosts are key to successful Story Circles. They make people feel welcome, introduce them to #PSOTU2019, lead activities, ensure that a safe and clean space is maintained, and help people to document and upload their stories. Hosts can work in pairs or teams and call on other volunteers for backup. **All your questions will be answered in the free online Story Circle training the USDAC provides.** If you can't take part in a training, we will provide a link to view a training video anytime. If you haven't already, remember to [sign up to host a Story Circle](#). You'll automatically receive information about when and how to take part in a training session and find everything you need.

REGISTERING

It's essential to capture the names and email addresses of every visitor. A signup sheet can be downloaded from the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#); or if you have a computer or tablet available as part of the intake process, you can register people online via the home page signup at [USDAC.us](#).

Have stick-on name tags (or you can use mailing labels) available, along with colored markers and (if possible) decorative items such as stickers. Creating your own nametag can be a fun activity that breaks the ice. On page 11, you'll find a description of how to use name tags to streamline breaking into Story Circles.

ENSURING POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Most people will enjoy taking part in #PSOTU2019, but there are possible challenges. If you're aware of these, you can avoid them.

- **Multigenerational.** The folks that show up at your event may include small children and elders, teenagers and parents. Be aware of making space for everyone. Describe activities so everyone can understand. Model an attitude of cheerful welcome for everyone: you don't want kids to feel their stories don't count or elders to feel no one wants to hear from them.
- **Respecting and including differences.** When strangers show up in the same place, there's potential for awkwardness. As a host, you need to keep an eye out for possible challenges and make a special effort to include everyone. If people look uncomfortable, they probably are. For a large-scale event, it really helps to have greeters on hand to show everyone the way. Volunteers who are showing up for other roles (such a Story Circle scribes and facilitators) can be asked to come early to serve as greeters.
- **Disruptors.** There's always the potential for disruption, innocent (e.g., boisterous young visitors) or not (e.g., people who dislike the ideas being explored during #PSOTU2019). It's not very likely this will happen, but the possibility makes it an especially good idea to have backup: a team of volunteers who've practiced politely redirecting people who are causing disruption.

LINKING REFLECTION TO ACTION

Try to connect people with groups that help them take constructive action on the state of our union. You can have printed materials available for takeaway, or once you've captured everyone's email address, send them a follow-up note with links to relevant sites.

AMPLIFYING YOUR STORIES

You don't have to stop after sharing and uploading stories. You'll find creative ideas in [Section 5, "Posting and Sharing,"](#) below.

GET MORE INVOLVED WITH USDAC ORGANIZING

The USDAC is committed to turning imagination into action year-round. Please join us! If you haven't already signed up as a Citizen Artist, visit our [website](#) to stay in the loop on learning opportunities (like [Citizen Artist Salons](#) and Regional and National Convenings), National Actions (like [#RevolutionOfValues](#)), resources (like [Art Became the Oxygen: An Artistic Response Guide](#), [Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgment](#), [Art & Well-Being: Toward a Culture of Health](#)) and much, much more. Consider starting a [USDAC Outpost](#), a group of four or more Citizen Artists committed to enacting USDAC values in their community.

Be sure to have Story Circle participants share their names and email addresses, so that we can keep them apprised of upcoming events and National Actions. You'll find a sign-in sheet in the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#), or you can sign people up on the [USDAC home page](#).

DOCUMENTATION

Posting. Encourage Story Circle participants to share their stories as described in [Section 5, "Posting and Sharing,"](#) below. It takes a little time to add these to the [#PSOTU2019 Story Portal](#). We recommend that you find a volunteer to assist with uploading, bringing a computer or smartphone for that purpose. A fun title might help: how about Future Keeper or Chief Archivist?

#PSOTU2019 is also being documented for posterity. The more documentation we have, the more we can create and share from it.

What do all these Story Circles look like? How are people describing the state of our union? What are they doing to amplify their stories? If you turn your stories into a staged reading or a local poetic address, please be sure to capture it on video and share (the next Toolkit section tells how).

If you have the space, consider setting up a photo booth or corner as part of your event. Ask participants to fill in the blank on a sign (for example: "#PSOTU2019 The state of our union is _____"), then take their photos holding the signs they've created.

In [Section 5, "Posting and Sharing,"](#) below, we offer easy instructions for taking and sharing video and audio clips for use in documentation. Please use them and accept our gratitude for helping to document this National Action!

FAREWELL RITUALS

If you have the space and help to make it possible, it's wonderful to offer a closing gesture. Here's one possibility:

THE STATE OF OUR FUTURE UNION

Offer a bowlful of Post-its near a sign saying “The State of Our Future Union.” As they leave, ask participants to take a moment to write on a post-it one response to the state of our union that they want to bring into being. The prompt can be “One way I want to build our future union is _____.”) Stick the completed post-its to a bulletin board so everyone can see them on the way out.

HAVE A COMMUNITY POTLUCK AS A FOLLOW-UP.

Hand out a flyer letting visitors know that a few weeks after your Story Circle event, they’re invited to bring food to share to a community space to talk about what emerged and offer ideas about ways local folks could respond.





5. POSTING & SHARING

CAPTURING AND POSTING STORIES

Here are two ways to document the stories that people wish to share as part of #PSOTU 2019.

RECORDING AND TRANSCRIBING

- (1) Pass a digital recorder or smartphone to each storyteller when that person's turn begins. Ask each individual to say and spell the correct name and email address before telling a story, so you can be in touch to ensure accuracy.
- (2) After your Story Circle event, transcribe stories, being careful to attach the correct name and email to each one. Email the typed transcript of each person's story to the teller, giving each teller a deadline to reply with any corrections. Tell people that if they would prefer their stories not be posted or otherwise shared, to let you know so you can omit them.
- (3) Upload stories to the [#PSOTU2019 Story Portal](#) one at a time. **Don't include multiple tellers' stories in one post. Do each one separately.**
 - (a) For each story, first select "Submit Your Story."
 - (b) You'll have to include your name and email in order to post, but this information will not appear on the published post.
 - (c) If you have a photo to accompany the story, choose the "Photo" option, upload your photo, and then include the text of your story as a caption.
 - (d) If you have text only, choose "Text."
 - (e) If you would like to submit video, you may do that too.
 - (f) If the storyteller would like to be publicly identified with the post, please put the teller's name at the top of the post. If the teller would like people be able to get in touch about the story, include that person's email as well. It's also fine for the teller to remain anonymous.
 - (g) Please post your location (city/town and state) at the top of the post.
 - (h) Select any hashtags relevant to your post.
 - (i) Click "Submit Your Story," and you're done! It will appear after moderator approval.

WRITING IN REAL TIME

- (1) Using a computer, do your best to capture the story in writing while each storyteller is telling it. It's even easier to have two scribes for each Story Circle, each equipped with a computer so they can alternate. (Scribes should also take their turns telling a story.) At the end of the Story Circle, connect people with whomever typed their stories and ask them to read the draft text and add or change anything that doesn't capture the story as they wish.
- (2) Be sure each story includes the teller's name (first only, both names, or "Anonymous," as the teller prefers) and location (i.e., city and state). If the teller would like people to be able to get in touch with responses to the story or ideas for its use, please be sure to include an email address. You will find a Word document to use as a story template in the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#).

NOTE: Storytellers can also write up their own stories at or after the event and post directly to the [#PSOTU2019 Story Portal](#) as described above. Just ask them to be sure to include their names (if they want attribution) and put their story title in the subject line.

Detailed instructions for Story Circle facilitators and scribes are downloadable from the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#).

DOCUMENTING #PSOTU2019

In addition to sharing stories, we also want to document #PSOTU2019 as an action. Across the country, what do all those Story Circles look like? How are people making use of them? The more documentation we have, the more we can create and share from it.

Please send us brief video or audio clips for possible inclusion in a #PSOTU2019 short video and other project documentation. We are seeking Story Circle footage that celebrates the rich diversity of your community and the unique stories of its Citizen Artists, including:

- Footage of your event(s)
- Footage of a range of participants
- A brief video or audio description of your Story Circle(s): what happened, who took part, what stood out?

Below, we provide instructions for taking and uploading video and audio clips documenting your #PSOTU2019 event(s).

VIDEO AND AUDIO UPLOADS

Please limit submissions to 30-second clips. (That being said, if you have something absolutely wonderful and it is of a longer duration, please feel free to send it along.) We'd love to have audio to go with your video!

FOR SMARTPHONE USERS:

- (1) Please capture all footage in landscape or horizontal view.
- (2) Please use the rear-facing camera (camera on the back of the phone), as it automatically films in 1080p (preferred quality) vs. the 720p quality of the front-facing camera.

FOR DSLR AND CAMCORDER USERS:

- (1) Please capture all footage in landscape or horizontal format.
- (2) Video recording settings should be 1080p 29.97fps.

PHOTOS

Please consider taking photos documenting your Story Circle(s) and uploading them as directed in this section. We would love group photos as well as interesting photos of individuals and anything else at your event: performances, socializing, etc. Thanks!

HOW TO UPLOAD:

Video and audio recordings and still images as jpgs or pngs can be uploaded to the [#PSOTU2019 Documentation Folder](#). Just click the link, choose the folder for whatever you wish to upload

(videos, photos & other images, or other documentation), click the +New button on the left, and upload your materials.

DEADLINE

Please submit video, audio, and photos no later than February 19, 2018. Thanks!

ARTS-BASED EVENTS TO SHARE #PSOTU2019 STORIES

Anyone who wishes can read #PSOTU2019 stories at the [#PSOTU2019 Story Portal](#), but there are other ways to turn stories into arts-based events that can engage even more people:

- **Create and publish, perform live, or share video of your own local *Poetic Address to the Nation*.** Download instructions from the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#), invite a diverse group of local writers to take part, and share the resulting poetic address as a publication, live performance, or video. Be sure to share it with the USDAC too, uploading it to the [#PSOTU2019 Documentation Folder](#). We'd love to see what you create!
- **Dramatize your stories.** Story Circles often produce moving and interesting stories, the kind that call forth laughter, tears, or both. Work with a local theater, playwright, or drama teacher to select stories and turn them into a staged reading that brings the state of our union to life. If you're inspired, you can think of the staged reading as Act One, then do another Story Circle as Act Two!
- **Host an Open Mic event.** Put out a call for performers to take part in a #PSOTU2019 Open Mic event, signing up for specific time slots to read poetry, share spoken word, sing a song, perform a brief skit or scene, or offer a short dance piece inspired by #PSOTU2019 stories. Your open mic can be a small-scale house party, take place at a community center or school, or use a theater-type venue with fixed seating, stage lighting, and high-quality sound. See the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#) for detailed information on hosting an Open Mic.
- **Bring your stories to a public hearing or meeting on a community issue.** Let people's stories be heard where they have a good influence. Create a one-sheet handout with excerpts of relevant #PSOTU2019 stories and designate specific people on your team to read them at appropriate times.



TOGETHER, WE CREATE.

6. DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCES

AVAILABLE DOWNLOADS

The following materials are available for download from the [#PSOTU2019 Public Folder](#).

When you go to that link, you'll see a button to the upper right of your window saying "Open in Drive." Click that, then click on the document you want. Under the File menu, you'll see "Download as," giving you all available options. Choose the one you want, then download to your computer. After that, you can adapt as you wish.

CHECKLISTS:

#PSOTU2019 Event Checklist
Media Promotion Checklist

SIGNS, BADGES & OTHER GRAPHICS:

Check this folder for #PSOTU2019 social media buttons, USDAC nametags, "I Took Part!" stickers, and other graphics

"WE THE PEOPLE" CUSTOMIZABLE POSTERS

PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS:

Flyer
Press Advisory
Promotional Copy for Partners

STORY CIRCLE MATERIALS:

Signup Sheet
Story Circle Instructions
Story Scribe Template
Welcome Script

OPEN MIC MATERIALS:

Open Mic How-to
Open Mic guidelines for performers

POETIC ADDRESS MATERIAL:

Create Your Own Poetic Address
Prior years' *Poetic Address* texts

OTHER MATERIALS:

Sample Lesson Plan
Scripts for optional performance at PSOTU events





ABOUT THE USDAC

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURE (USDAC) is a network of artists, activists, and allies inciting creativity and social imagination to shape a culture of equity, empathy, and belonging.

To create a just and welcoming world, all of us need social imagination, the capacity to envision and enact change. Yet as a society, we've failed to prioritize the programs and policies that cultivate creativity, empathy, and collaboration. Social institutions seldom allow us to show up as whole, creative humans. Too often, the stories we're asked to accept limit possibility, depicting us only as consumers and workers rather than creators and communicators.

Together, we can rewrite these stories. We affirm the right to culture and pursue cultural democracy that:

- welcomes each individual as a whole person
- values each community's heritage, contributions, and aspirations
- promotes caring, reciprocity, and open communication across all lines of difference
- dismantles all barriers to love and justice

To advance this vision, the nation's only people-powered department*:

- Engages everyone in weaving social fabric and strengthening communities through arts and culture
- Builds capacity and connective tissue among socially-engaged artists and cultural organizers
- Generates momentum and public will for creative policies and programs rooted in USDAC values
- Infuses social justice organizing with creativity and social imagination

Art and culture are powerful means of building empathy, creating a sense of belonging, and activating

the social imagination and civic agency necessary to make real change. When we feel seen, when we know that our stories and imaginations matter, we are more likely to bring our full creative selves to the work of social change. That not only makes our work more effective, we have more fun.

Our national actions invite everyone to perform a future infused with the transformative power of arts and culture. Our local organizing helps communities dream aloud and turn their dreams into reality. We connect people across regions in an ever-expanding creative learning community by sharing vital information, generating inspiring actions, and devising cultural policies and programs to catalyze a profound culture shift in the service of social and environmental justice. Together, we're creating new narratives of our power and possibility and scaling up strategies for equity and belonging.

The USDAC is not an outside agency coming in; it's our inside agency coming out! Radically inclusive and vibrantly playful, the USDAC offers pathways of engagement for any individual or organization eager to deepen a commitment to creativity and social change.

Culture shift is an all-hands-on-deck effort: whether you're already performing this work or new to creative organizing, join the people-powered department today!

THIS IS AN ACT OF COLLECTIVE IMAGINATION. ADD YOURS.

*The USDAC is not a government agency.

TOGETHER, WE CREATE.

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