


Telling Different Stories, Telling Stories Differently


Lessons in Cross-Cultural Storytelling




Nature of Story

- ▶ Story is not the same as communicating information
 - ▶ Story is personal, human, experiential
 - ▶ Personal experience shared as story fosters empathy
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ECHO Minnesota Story

- ▶ Serving immigrant and refugee communities with life-saving information on emergency, community and health topics
 - ▶ Produced in up to 16 languages
 - ▶ Translated lovingly and with cultural resonance by community members
 - ▶ Long-form talk show format allowed for depth and context
 - ▶ Community-driven discussion gave communities voice
 - ▶ Close relationships and greater understanding = TRUST
 - ▶ Share power, give voice, honor trust
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The Switch to Short Form

- ▶ Budgets shrank, required smaller, lighter programming
 - ▶ Communities are social, so sharable content was key
 - ▶ Purely scripted shorts allowed little room for cultural context
 - ▶ Trapped between content demands and need for cultural context
 - ▶ Desire to tell different stories
 - ▶ Desire to tell stories differently
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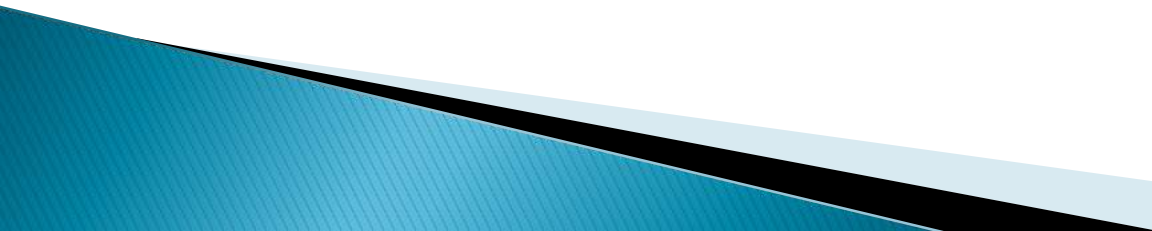
Media Strategy: Asking the Right Questions

- ▶ **What** are we making? **How** will we make it?
 - ▶ **ALWAYS** start with **Why** and **For Whom**
 - ▶ **Why** drives everything, and **For Whom** improves odds of success
 - ▶ Then ask **What** and **How**
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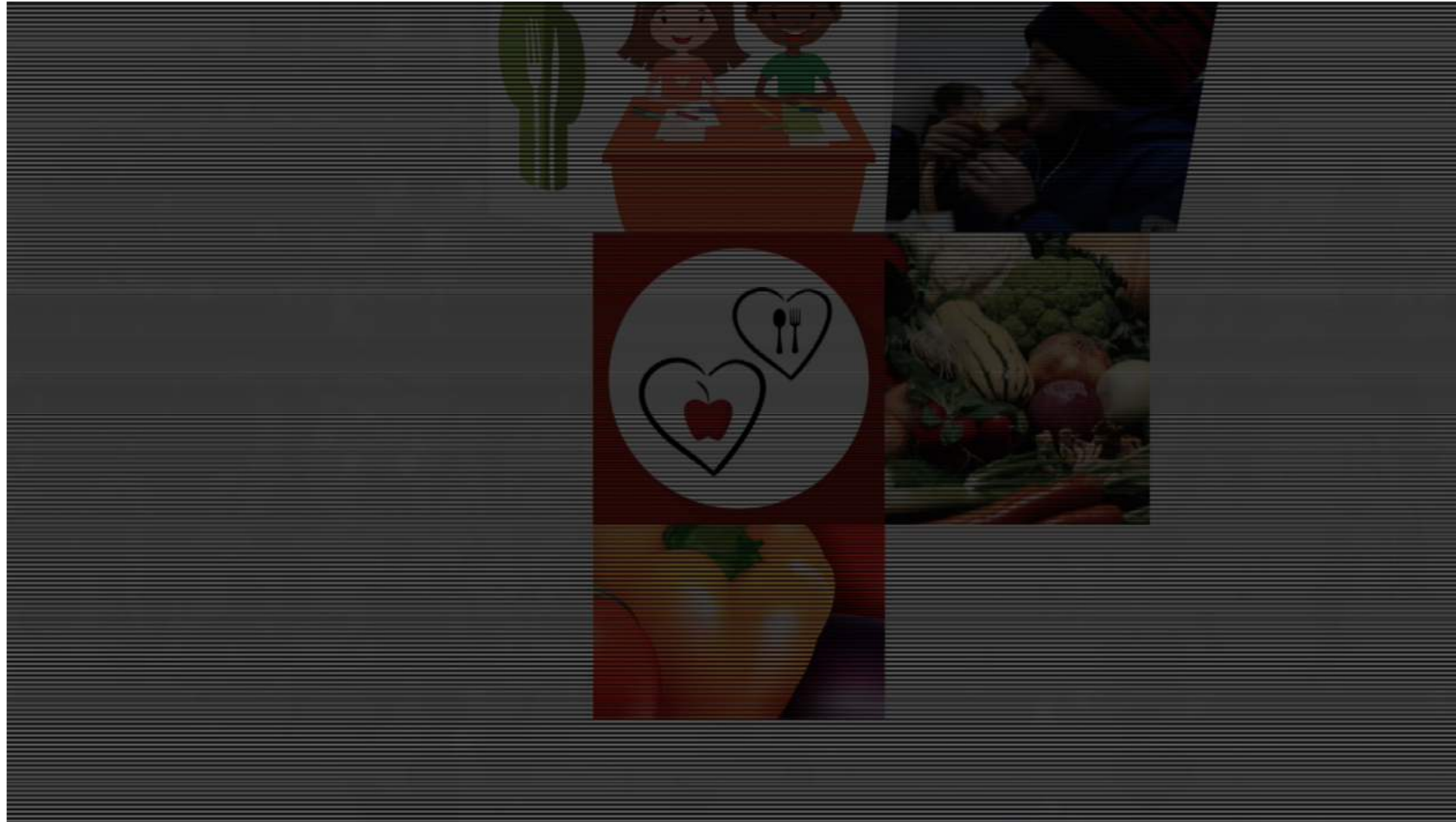
Media Strategy: Forms

- ▶ **Long form (20+ minutes):** best suited for complex issues and deeply personal journeys
 - Challenge to maintain arc, emotional state, visual interest
 - Opportunities for context, depth, truly honor cultural touchpoints
 - Trusts the viewer to follow the story and find empathy for characters
- ▶ **Short form:** best suited to accessible stories or simpler issues
 - Allows you to speak to specific audiences (Food for Every Child, Sold Out)
 - Focus on viewer experience instead of filling time – every second counts
- ▶ **Animation:** surrealized storytelling with creative liberties
 - Many cultures use story and metaphor: fables, folk tales, morality plays
 - Loses specificity of “that person” – everyman avatar characters
 - Doesn’t work for all cultures, topics, situations


Media Strategy: Storytelling Responsibilities

- ▶ Trust is everything
 - ▶ Context is also everything
 - ▶ You cannot tell other's stories without full, willing cooperation
 - ▶ One person can never speak for an entire community or culture
 - ▶ You cannot assume homogeneity within culture or community
 - ▶ You must acknowledge intersections as multifaceted
 - ▶ All stories should be explored with dignity and respect
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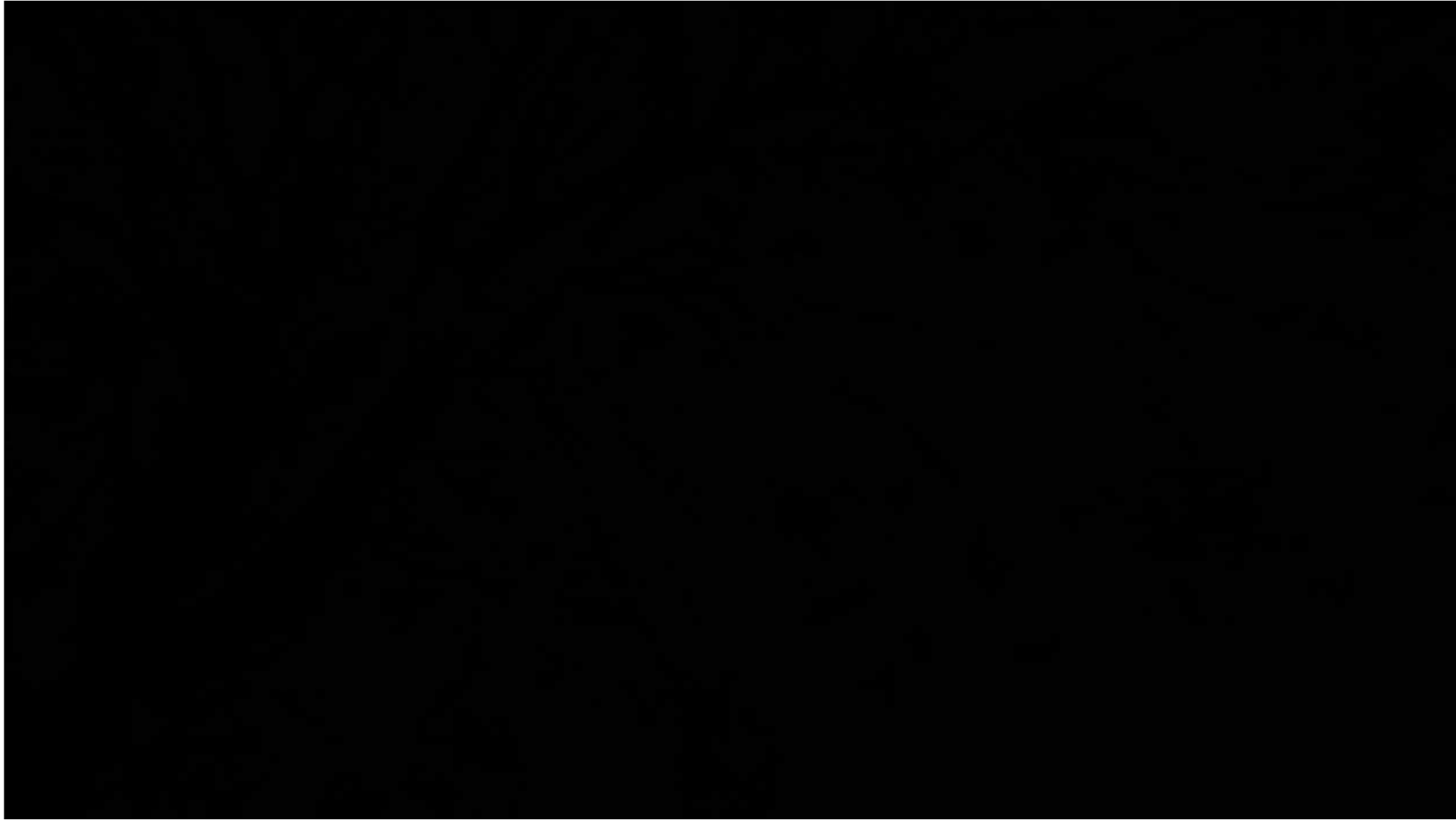
Food for Every Child



“Please say something like this”

- ▶ Great texture of real life
 - ▶ Message drove content
 - ▶ Not dishonest, but slightly contrived
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Caregiving Conversations




“Please talk about this”

- ▶ Less visually interesting, but totally honest
- ▶ Delving into cultural taboos, unspoken challenges

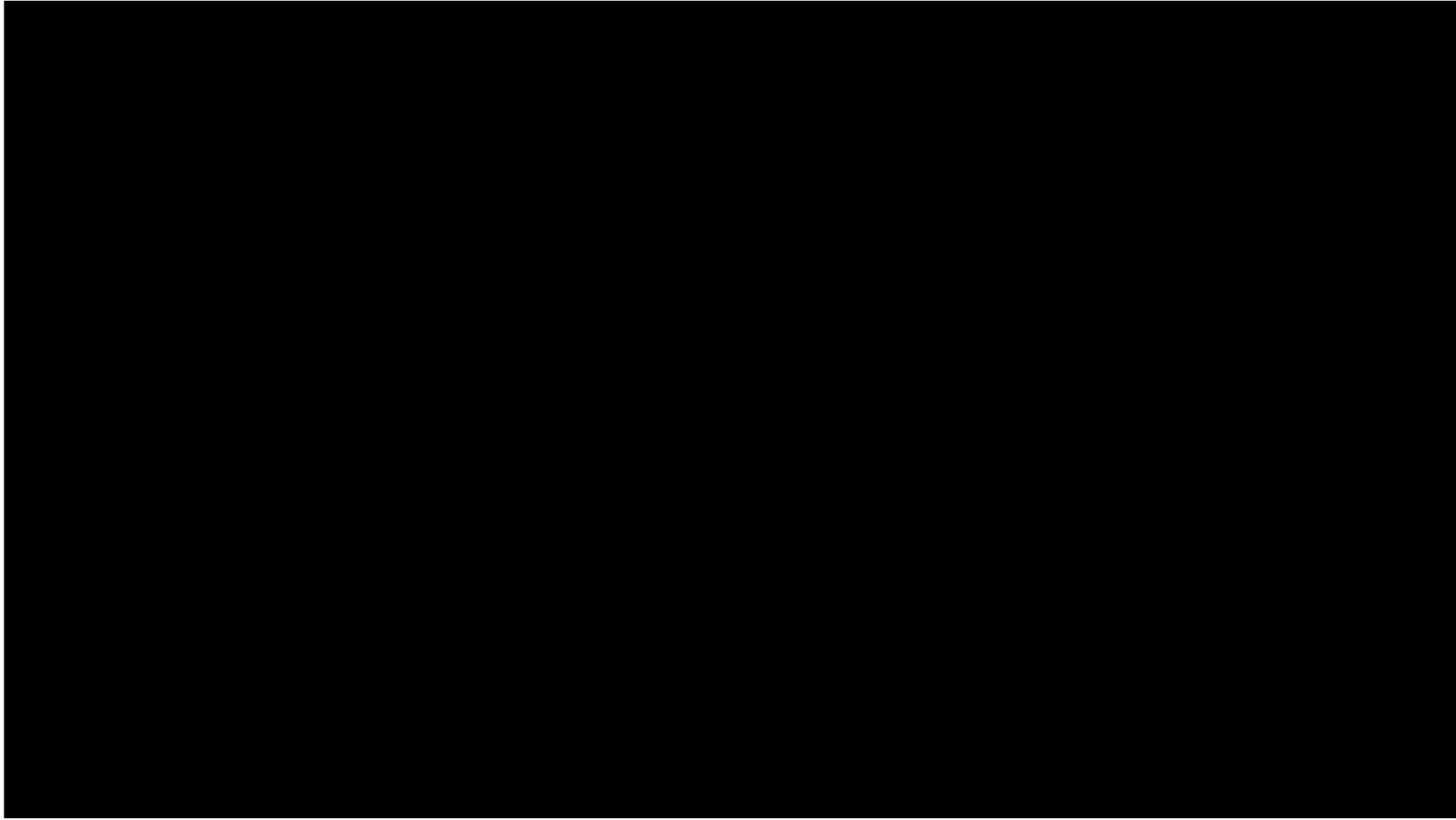
Sold Out: Affordable Housing at Risk



“Tell me your part of the story”

- ▶ Story drives content, not messaging
 - ▶ No guidance, just get them talking
 - ▶ Honor language
 - ▶ Not the whole story, but important voices therein
 - ▶ Blurring of faces, both a compromise and an effect
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Weaving Circles of Health & Well-Being



“Tell me your untold story”

- ▶ Private pain, not usually made available to all
 - ▶ Empathy for real people and their experiences
 - ▶ Honor willingness to be vulnerable
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