

IYRP Story Circle Facilitation Guide

Story Circles are a simple yet powerful way to surface the lived experiences of people connected to rangelands and pastoralist life. They create space for voices often left out of policy and research, fostering community trust, connection, and dialogue. Story Circles can also generate material (with consent) for exhibitions, advocacy, and education during IYRP.

Story Circles:

- Value oral tradition and lived knowledge alongside research and policy.
- Foster connection across generations, genders, and communities.
- Build trust and encourage empathy through respectful listening.
- Create content (with permission) for exhibits, media, advocacy, and community archives.
- Surface themes that can guide dialogue, policy, and public understanding.

Steps

1. Prepare the Space

- Arrange 6–12 chairs in a circle (smaller groups support deeper sharing).
- Choose a quiet, comfortable location free from distractions.
- Provide refreshments, water, or other signs of hospitality to set the tone.
- Ensure accessibility: wheelchair access, interpretation, or translation as needed.

2. Introduce the Purpose

- Frame the circle as a space for storytelling, not debate.
- Acknowledge the importance of each voice and the confidentiality of what's shared.
- Clearly explain how stories may be used (exhibits, recordings, archives) and review consent.

3. Set Ground Rules (with the group)

- Listen without interrupting.
- Speak from personal experience (“I” statements).
- Respect confidentiality: what's shared in the circle stays in the circle unless permission is granted.
- Everyone has the right to pass if they don't wish to share.

4. Opening Ritual (Optional)

- Use a symbolic action to mark the transition into the circle space.
- Options: light a candle, share a proverb or poem, invite silence, or acknowledge the land and community hosting the gathering.

5. Facilitate Sharing

- Begin with an open-ended question (see samples below).
- Move clockwise or counterclockwise so everyone has a turn.
- Allow silence—don't rush responses.

- If time allows, invite short follow-ups or a second round of sharing.

6. Closing Reflections

- Invite participants to share a takeaway, feeling, or hope.
- Thank everyone sincerely for their contributions.
- End with a unifying gesture: clasped hands, shared song, group photo (if agreed), or a collective affirmation.

Sample Questions

- How have rangelands shaped your family or livelihood?
- What wisdom have you inherited from elders about caring for rangelands?
- What changes have you seen in rangelands during your lifetime?
- What challenges worry you most?
- What gives you hope for the future of these landscapes?
- If you could send one message to the next generation about rangelands, what would it be?

Facilitator Tips

- Balance time: Give each participant equal space; intervene gently if needed.
- Honor emotion: Stories may evoke grief, pride, or frustration—validate and hold space.
- Center inclusivity: Actively encourage women, youth, and marginalized voices.
- Secure consent: Record or use stories only with written or verbal permission. Be explicit about how recordings will be used.
- Capture themes: Note recurring ideas, imagery, or quotes for later use in exhibits or advocacy.
- Follow up: Share back transcripts, summaries, or creative outputs so participants feel valued and included.

Integration into IYRP Exhibits & Activities

Story Circle outcomes can directly feed into IYRP storytelling efforts:

- Quotes (with consent) for panels, posters, or digital displays.
- Diversity of voices highlighted—elders, women, youth, herders, ranchers.
- Pair stories with participant photos, artifacts, or field recordings.
- Audio/visual excerpts for listening stations, podcasts, or archives.
- Integrate themes into newsletters, social media, or advocacy campaigns.
- Use insights to inform future programming, policy briefs, or educational tools.

A Story Circle is more than an activity—it's a practice of honoring lived experience. Facilitated with care, it creates a ripple effect: strengthening community bonds, shaping public understanding, and amplifying the voices of pastoralists at the heart of IYRP.