

Communication Basics Toolkit

FOR RURAL ADVOCATES



December 2022

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INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is an introduction and primer on communications basics for sexual violence advocates working in rural and marginalized communities with limited resources. It's the culmination of four workshop sessions done in 2022.

Those workshops are available on YouTube at the links below:

- [Communication Strategies for Sexual Violence Advocates in Rural and Marginalized Communities](#)
- [Social + Digital Storytelling as a sexual violence advocate](#)
- [Communications Workshopping Session 1](#)
- [Communications Workshopping Session 2](#)

Much of the information presented here is also covered or referenced in the workshops, but some of the resources here are not. This toolkit is intended as a quick reference guide and a starting point for building knowledge and skill in how to communicate with the community you serve. It is a collection of guidelines, best practices, tools, and resources to help you quickly build your skill level up to what's needed to effectively support your advocacy work.

What is Communications?

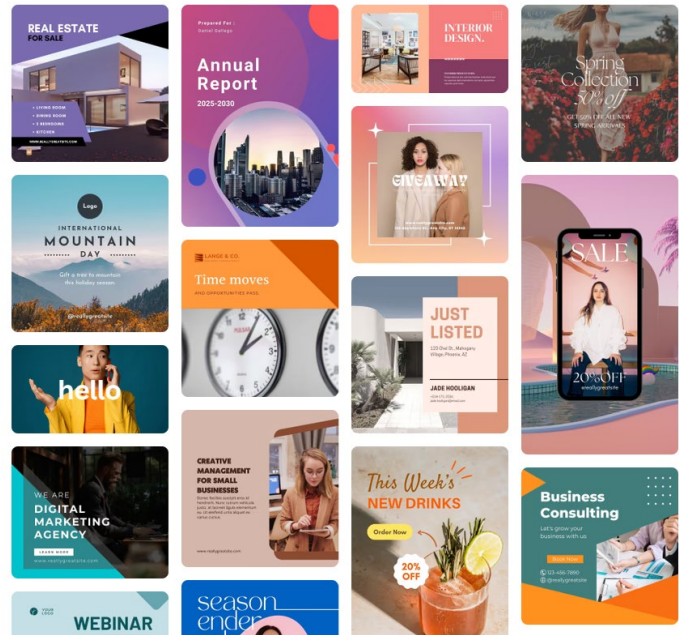
So that we all have the same understanding, we'll begin with a definition of what exactly “communications” is. Communications is all the ways you reach out to the people in the community - for a variety of purposes such as promoting services, announcing events and workshops, sexual violence education, awareness, and much more.

Communications work overlaps a lot with outreach, advocacy, marketing, and even education. The isolated communities we're working with and the taboo nature of sexual violence issues both make relationships very important and a necessary first step to effective communication and further blur the lines between these concepts.

Communications is NOT information technical (IT) support. A lot of comms work is digital but that doesn't mean everything on a computer falls under it. Issues with teleconferencing and other online tools should be handled with the IT department or helpdesks.

CANVA

Canva is a graphic design platform that is used to create social media graphics, presentations, posters, documents, videos, and other visual content. Canva runs in the web browser or as a smartphone app making it very accessible. It includes templates for users to use, and the platform is free and offers paid subscriptions.



Nonprofits can [apply to get a free Canva pro account](#) for up to ten users.

According to their website, Canva for Nonprofits has 420,000+ templates, 75 million+ images, 3.5+ million graphic elements, 3000+ fonts, and 100 GB of storage.

The software has [tools for setting brand colors, fonts, and logos](#). You can load them once and then have them available on any new design.

It's easy to take a graphic done in one size and [resize it](#) to work in countless other formats from social, to print, to video.

[Canva Design School](#) provides free video-based lessons on the basics of using Canva as well as more graphic design topics like [typography](#), [color theory](#), [green screen use](#), and [lots more](#). They also offer a huge amount of well-researched guidance on [marketing](#) and [social media strategy](#)!

You can browse Canva's stock photo collection from within the app or [independently here](#).

MEDIA FORMATS

This section is an overview of common systems for communication, from massive social networks to paper flyers, the format you choose affects who will see your message and how they might respond.

Social Media

There is a wide variety of social media platforms, and they all have their own norms and audiences. Success on any one site means knowing that audience and creating content that's appropriate.

PROS

- ✓ **Built-in distribution**
The point of social media is to share content, so they have ways to follow, share, and engage ready to go.
- ✓ **No cost**
It's free to create an account on almost any social media site. There are costs for running ads and specialized software.
- ✓ **Reliability**
Social media platforms are designed to share resource-heavy content, like video, to millions of people and rarely go down. Because of this, content on social media can be more accessible than on an agency website.

CONS

- ✗ **Lots of other content**
There are a lot of organizations and individuals with accounts creating content every day. It's hard to be seen without creativity, a loyal base of followers, or paid advertising.
- ✗ **Low impact**
Because of the massive amount of content, interactions with your audience are often fleeting and may leave little or no impression on them once they've scrolled past.

General Social Media Tips:

Don't overextend. It's better to **do a good job on one or two platforms** rather than struggle to build an audience and create content for more than that.

Also, **don't create multiple accounts** on the same platform unless there's a compelling reason. Regional or project-based accounts are rarely necessary and split your followers between accounts. It's better to consolidate them all into one account so that engagement with each project or region adds to the entire organization's followers. Having too much to share on social media is rarely an issue, even posting multiple times a day is fine on most platforms.

Many social media platforms are becoming **dominated by video**, especially short clips. Instagram reels and YouTube shorts are direct responses to the popularity of TikTok. Short, user-created, viral videos do well on every platform and are not as hard to make as you might think. Check out the section on TikTok below for more tips on how to make compelling video content.

Many social networks have sub-communities. These don't exist as separate containers of users as much as informal networks of people with shared interests. This can range from identity groups like [Black Twitter and Feminist Twitter](#), politically minded such as [BreadTube](#), pastime-based like [DnDTok](#) or [BeautyTok](#), or learning and self-help focused like [Therapy TikTok](#) and [ScienceTok](#). Finding the communities that align most with your organization's mission and seeing what kind of content they create can help guide your own content.

- [Community Tool Box: Using Social Media for Digital Advocacy](#)
- [Social Media Campaign Measurement in 5 Easy Steps | Social Insider](#)
- [M+R Lab Digital Media Research Blog](#)
- [The complete guide to nonprofit social media: Strategy and design tips for success | Canva](#)

Facebook

PROS

- ✓ **Largest Audience**
More people have Facebook accounts than any other social network.
- ✓ **Community Tools**
Facebook groups and events can be effective tools for organizing your volunteers and community.
- ✓ **More general user base**
Everyone uses Facebook to keep track of family and friends. The people on Facebook tend to be less up on trends. Many of them may not be on any other platform.

CONS

- ✗ **Less active user base**
Many of the accounts on Facebook are accessed less frequently than on other platforms.
- ✗ **Older user base**
If you're trying to engage people younger than 40, they are less likely to be on Facebook.
- ✗ **Anti-page bias**
The Facebook algorithm favors individual profiles over business and organization pages. They want you to pay to run ads and "boost" posts to reach their users.

Facebook Resources + Tips:

Facebook groups are still popular as places to talk about specific topics of interest, from gardening to Star Trek to emotional support. Groups can be an effective way to communicate with a core community and bypass the platform's news feed. [This guide "How to Use Facebook Groups to Grow Your Business and Engage Customers"](#) applies just as well for advocacy organizations where the goal is providing services or raising money rather than selling products.

Events on Facebook are a great way to promote public and semi-public events that are either in person or online. [This guide from Sproutsocial](#) gives some great guidelines on how to set up an effective event.

Instagram

PROS

✓ High engagement

Instagram has the widest demographic range of users among any platform except Facebook, and the average Instagram user is on more often.

✓ Live broadcasting

Instagram has live broadcasting that is easy to use and allows you to [invite up to three others](#). It's the lowest entry way to do online events with just your phone.

CONS

✗ Visually focused

Every piece of content on Instagram requires either a photo or video and the interface prioritizes it over the text. Compelling visuals are a necessity!

✗ No links or reposting

Linking directly to websites doesn't work in feed posts and there is no way to repost someone else's post. You can do both in stories but those only last 24 hours.

Instagram Resources + Tips:

To get around Instagram's **limited link functionality**, referring users to a link in your account bio has become commonplace. There are several services that give you a specialized links page:

- The most popular is [Linktree](#) which offers a free basic version.
- [Tap.bio](#) automatically pulls links from your Instagram post descriptions and offers free pro plans for non-profits.
- There are many [other services available](#), all a [bit different](#).

This [Instagram guide for Nonprofits](#) offers solid guidelines for using your story, tagging other accounts, and using hashtags.

Reels are the Instagram equivalent of TikTok and all the tips for TikTok apply to making reels too.

Twitter

PROS

- ✓ **Access to Decision Makers**
Lots of lawmakers, professionals, and journalists are on Twitter. If your goal is to affect public policy or talk to the media, this platform is worth the time.

CONS

- ✗ **Content limits**
Tweets are limited to 280 characters.
Videos are limited to 2:20.
- ✗ **Trolls**
You are more likely to get harassing or problematic responses to your content on Twitter.

Twitter Resources + Tips:

[10 Twitter Best Practices for Nonprofits | An Ultimate Guide](#)

LinkedIn

PROS

- ✓ **Access to Professionals**
LinkedIn is a work focused platform that can be used to access professionals for anything from board membership, speaking opportunities, or even employment.

CONS

- ✗ **Not Public Focused**
The average person is not often here unless it's time to find a new job!

LinkedIn Resources + Tips:

[LinkedIn for Nonprofits](#)

[Powerful LinkedIn Tips for Nonprofits](#)

TikTok

PROS

- ✓ **Young, engaged users**
As of the writing of this guide in late 2022, TikTok is the “trendiest” of the major platforms. It has the youngest audience and most active engagement right now.
- ✓ **Huge viral potential**
A clever video at the right moment in time can become huge, even from a small account.
- ✓ **Amateur content**
You don’t need highly edited and professionally designed videos, in fact, well-produced content doesn’t do as well.

CONS

- ✗ **Trend heavy**
Traffic is highly dependent on trends, so to be current you have to be on regularly.
- ✗ **Fleeting interactions**
Content on this app comes and goes so quickly that it takes a lot to make a solid impression
- ✗ **All video**
TikTok is video only which means there’s a bit more production work in making content here.

[TikTok for Good](#) is the official portal for Nonprofits on the platform.

This [guide to TikTok for nonprofits](#) is a great place to start.

[This article](#) offers some great content ideas.

TikTok popularized the use of **portrait orientation video**, where you hold the phones upright instead of sideways. There are other social networks optimized for that same format now - Instagram reels and YouTube shorts.

Shorter videos generally do better than long ones. If you keep your video under 90 seconds you can also share it on Instagram reels. If you keep it under 60 seconds you can also share it on YouTube shorts.

YouTube

PROS

✓ Accessible video platform

While YouTube has social elements like voting, comments, and subscribing to channels. Most of the videos are accessible without having an account.

✓ Stable and adaptable

A video hosted on YouTube will be more accessible to more people on a variety of devices and internet connections than anywhere else.

✓ Huge audience

YouTube has more active users than any other network except Facebook.

CONS

✗ Trolls

The comment sections of videos can get pretty nasty. You can turn comments off.

✗ Production value

Low-quality videos don't do as well on YouTube which means you need to invest time, skill, and resources to make your videos more engaging. However, niche content, like online workshop recordings, has a more forgiving audience.

Unlike other video platforms in this guide, YouTube is the home for long-form traditional videos. Educational videos, donor updates, online workshop recordings, and project case studies are all ideal content for this platform.

[YouTube Social Impact](#) provides resources and special programs for nonprofits.

What are the [strategies of top nonprofits on YouTube?](#)

[How Nonprofits use YouTube.](#)

Other Online Platforms

Outside of “social media” there are countless other niche or regional online places you can share information. Here are some major ones to consider.

Blogging Platforms

If you’re interested in mid to long-form written content like storytelling, blogging, or top 10 lists, there are many free and easy-to-use blogging platforms.

WordPress is one of the most established blogging platforms. It has a lot of flexibility around appearance and functionality and wordpress.com has limited social sharing elements. You can install [WordPress on your own server](#) or get a [wordpress.com](#) account for free.

[Medium](#) gives less control over your blog’s appearance, going for a consistent look across all its blogs and offers a robust reader recommendation system

[SubStack](#) is a newer platform that has become increasingly popular. SubStack encourages users to sign up to get blog updates sent to their email.

[Comparing SubStack and Medium - Advantages and Disadvantages of Both](#)

[Tumblr](#) is a social blogging platform that has been around for a long time in internet years - since 2007. Tumblr has been the home of many niche communities most notably LGBTQ+ communities. It’s kind of retro and kind of weird but maybe it will work for you. Here is what some [major nonprofits are doing on the platform](#).

Photo Sharing

If you need to share a set of photos or other graphics such as artwork there are a few options. Within larger social networks, both Facebook and Instagram have good photo-sharing capabilities. On Facebook, you can [create albums](#), and Instagram is all about images.

If you want a **stand-alone photo-centered website** option, like for a gallery of photos from an event, workshop, or art show, your best option is [probably Flickr](#).

Event Calendars

If you want to promote public events and get the word out, there are a few universal options for event listings and then a bunch more that are likely unique to your local community.

Facebook events have the benefit of social sharing built-in but aren't accessible to those without a Facebook account.

[Eventbrite](#) is a good option for both free and paid ticketed events. They have a built-in "popular in your area" functionality and are widely used. [Allevvents.in](#) is a similar service. Events from both websites will show up on Google event searches.

It's likely there are **local event calendars** unique to your city or region. Check your local newspaper and TV news, local arts coalition, and tourism websites to find the calendars relevant to your work. Most of them are free to add events.

Print Media

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Low Tech People in the community don't need any or very little tech to receive your message.✓ Where people are Print materials can be put almost anywhere; coffee shop bulletin boards, community center brochure racks, or even in parks and on the street.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Print cost/waste Printed materials use paper and ink. They also need to be distributed in person. These are all limited resources.✗ Limited reach Print materials are really only accessible to the people reading them and whoever they share them with.

In some communities, especially in rural areas, [technology use may be limited](#) by cultural and infrastructure factors. This means you will need to use other methods to communicate information to the public because online options are limited. And even in urban and suburban areas with solid internet access and high rates of tech use, a flyer or pamphlet can sometimes cut through the information deluge and come across as more “real” than a social graphic or blog post.

General Printing Tips

Consider how you will print it when you're done with your design. Will you be printing it in-house on a printer or copier, or will you be sending it to a professional printer? **If you are printing in-house, consider paper borders and ink usage.** Most office printers have limited or no ability to print borderless; this is where the images and design go right to the edge of the paper. Most offices also have to pay for ink, and even if you don't office printers also aren't very good at printing large blocks of color. It may look splotchy or take forever. So if you're printing in-house key at least a ¼ inch border on your design and keep the background white to save ink.

Print Design Tools

There are lots of choices other there for printing design software. Which you use depends on your comfort level and access to specific software.

Microsoft Word and Google Docs can both be used to make basic print materials with text and images. They both work best with simple designs and often become unwieldy when you try advanced techniques like overlays. Both also offer free templates: [Word templates](#) | [Google Doc Templates](#)

Canva is probably the best option for [designing for print](#). They offer tons of built-in templates, fonts, and images ready to go.

Short Links and QR Codes

These are your tools to bridge the gap from print to digital.

Short links are, well, short links that take a user to a webpage with a longer link. **Short links are easier to remember and type in manually** from a flyer or card. There are [a bunch of services](#) that will help you create and manage your short links. My preference is for [Rebrandly](#), it gives you a lot for free including the ability to set up a branded domain name, so you can have short links like this: [link.youragency.org/EventName!](#) You will need to talk to your IT dept to get this set up.

QR codes are a type of scannable image that contains a link or other text. You can scan a QR code with your smartphone camera app to be automatically taken to the linked webpage. Most short link services can generate QR codes for the links they create. **It's best practice to use short links to make QR codes** because the shorter the link, the less complicated the QR code is and the easier it is to scan. **Always provide the link as text in addition to the QR code for folks who are unfamiliar with them or may not have a smartphone.**

The QR code here was created with a [free online tool](#) and links to <https://fcasv.org>. Try it out.





Skokie Public Library on Flickr
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/>

Flyers + Posters

PROS

- ✓ **Visibility**
Flyers are highly visible in the environment, they can catch a person's attention.
- ✓ **Where people are**
Flyers can be put almost anywhere; coffee shop bulletin boards, community centers, grocery stores, or even in parks and on the street.

CONS

- ✗ **Info overload**
Too much information on a flyer reduces its effectiveness making them unsuitable for sharing complex info.
- ✗ **Limited reach**
A flyer will never go viral, though you can always encourage folks to take a photo and share it online.

Flyers are an awareness tool. They inform people about events and programs that they may be interested in participating in. They should be highly visible and easy to understand. They should usually have a call to action - attending an event or signing up for a program.

Large flyers (letter sized and bigger) are posted up on bulletin boards, walls, telephone polls, and anywhere else you can get away with. Smaller flyers (half and quarter sheets) are generally

put on a table or counter for people to take or given directly to them. Both follow roughly the same format and have similar best practices.

With a flyer, the most important thing is to limit the amount of information you present. The more there is on a flyer, the less likely it is that the viewer's attention will be grabbed enough for them to look more. Besides graphics, a flyer should be limited to a title, time, date, location, signup or more info link and QR code, and a few sentences max describing the event or program. The more text you have the easier it is to dismiss the information presented. On a smaller flyer, you might not have room for any descriptive sentences at all and will have to rely on the title and a QR code linking to more info.

Smaller flyers can be designed to have more than one on a single letter-sized piece of paper. These are called half-sheet and quarter-sheet flyers and can be used as handouts, bag stuffers, or even put on people's doors or cars. You can do this all [in your printer settings](#) but remember your flyer will be considerably smaller and you will need to simplify the design to keep it readable. This means removing small text, increasing the size of fonts, and even removing images.

Zines

PROS

✓ Personal

The DIY aesthetic of a zine can help build trust and connect to folks who are unsure of institutions.

✓ Artistic

Zine creation can be healing. It can even be part of the recovery work done by survivors.

Zines are for creativity, storytelling, and education.

They can be fun to make and are often less stressful than other design work. They tend to have a messy DIY style that goes back to the early days of magazine collages, typewriters, and low-quality Xerox machines.

Zines can be a creative outlet for clients in the program.

With consent, zines can be distributed locally or online.

Consider adding a “zine library” to your office, this can be a small shelf where the zines are made available to read to anyone who comes through.

CONS

✗ Unprofessional

Zines generally do not conform to brand guidelines and can be seen as unprofessional by some. Know your audience.

SUPPORTING A SURVIVOR OF SEXUAL ASSAULT



- [How to make a zine | The Creative Independent](#)
- [How to Make a Zine: A Guide to Self-Publishing Your Own Miniature Magazine](#)
- [Want to Make a Zine? Tips For Getting Started | KCET](#)
- [How To Make a \(Mini\) Zine: A Beginner's Guide](#)
- [Zine shown above: Supporting a Survivor of Sexual Assault by MARC/UBUNTO](#)

STATS + TRACKING

Knowing how to track the effectiveness of your communications work is important, not only so you know if your time is well spent but also to report out to supervisors and grants.



Digital Tracking

Link tracking is simply tracking how many people used a link. Most link shortening services offer this as part of their basic package. You can make multiple links that all go to the same page to track if people are coming from social media, a flyer, a website, or somewhere else.

Analytics are in-depth stats generated by certain software packages. Most social networks give you analytics about the people who interact with your content including demographic info, traffic sources, and how they interacted.

Google Analytics is a robust free tool from Google that tracks information about people who visit a website. It's likely your agency website already has this set up. If it is, you can [add custom information to the end of your links](#) to collect information about where and why someone ended up on your website. Your communications or IT team can then see how many

visits came from each source and you can learn what methods of communication are most effective.

Tracking info can be cross-referenced with signup and attendance records to get a good picture of how people are finding your services and will help you focus on what's worth doing and what's ineffective.



Manual Tracking

There are plenty of ways to manually track the effectiveness of your programs. The more data you have the better you will understand your outreach!

Counting print materials when you put them out either for an event or if being left at a location will help you get a rough idea of how many were taken when you come back to refill them. It only takes an extra couple of minutes and gives you really important data. Here's how it works; let's say you leave flyers for an event at a local coffee shop. If you know how many you left, after your event, when you come back to clean up the leftover flyers, you can count them and know how many were picked up. This can tell you a few different things. How effective is the location? Do you need fewer or more flyers? Are people taking flyers but not attending? This is all important info to save you time and resources in the long run!

Sign-in and sign-up sheets are a great way to gauge interest or attendance. Both are easy to make and can be put out at an event. If it's a public event a sign-up sheet for folks who want more information about your program makes sense. For a closed event, a sign-in sheet is how you track attendance.

Talk to people and ask them for feedback. You can do this through a survey on paper or through a service like [Google Forms](#), or you can just talk one on one and take notes. Anecdotal feedback is qualitative data, and is valuable when taken in context.

- [How to create a survey on Google Forms and share it with others to collect their responses](#)

All this info can be tracked in a spreadsheet like Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets. Over time, you will have enough information to see trends and calculate averages. Maybe more people come to events on weeknights as opposed to the weekend, or more people pick up flyers at the community center than at the coffee shop. This, like all data, is valuable!

CHALLENGES

The Digital Divide

The gap between those who have access to digital technology and those who do not, including, but not limited to, smartphones, computers, and reliable internet.

The Federal Communications Commission estimates that more than 21 million people in the United States don't have a reliable internet connection. That includes nearly 3 in 10 people—27 percent—who live in rural places, as well as 2 percent of those living in cities. - [America's Digital Divide | PEW](#)

Ways to manage limited digital access:

- Use printed materials to share info as much as possible.
- Provide alternative signup methods such as a phone number.
- Keep webpages simple so they work on mobile devices and bad connections, stick to text, and keep images basic and non-essential.
- If you're sharing a video, make sure it's hosted on a service like YouTube that can better adapt to a bad internet connection.
- Create a video with all the information conveyed by the voiceover in case the video quality is degraded and unreadable.



Community Distrust

Many people with marginalized identities are wary of involvement by police, government, or other authoritative entities. Many of our agencies are often affiliated with these groups either directly or through systems work. If your agency is equipped to help these communities while minimizing harm, there are ways you can help assure them that you are a safer option through design choices.

Differentiate your agency from other local entities like the police or city government. Look at their branding and materials and do something different.

Soften your design. Many government entities use design choices that convey authority, modern fonts, capitalization, and professional-looking images. You can do it differently by using lowercase text, bright or soft colors, and more community and care focused images. Look at education design resources for inspiration.

De-professionalize your content by using handmade or handwritten designs, feature survivor art, and let it be a bit messy. Consider throwing out branding and even logos. Zines are a perfect example.

Reading Capabilities

As professional advocates, sometimes we can talk, or write, over people's heads. Know the average reading level of your community and write content that's easily accessible to all.

- Avoid jargon.
- Keep paragraphs and sentences short and direct.
- Provide alternatives for folks who cannot read like a video or audio recording with the content spoken out loud.

Translation

When seeking out someone to do translation work, find someone who doesn't just speak the language but is also a community member. They are more likely to understand the dialect and cultural references of those specific people you are serving.

Use Google Translate as an absolute LAST RESORT! And consider, if you don't have an in-house or contracted translator or staff that speaks all the languages spoken in the community you serve, you may not be able to effectively serve that community.

To avoid miscommunication in translation, avoid technical phrases and flowery language like metaphors. Both can be tough to translate and may not have an interpretative equivalent.



Photo Representation

Stock photos and graphics templates are widely available but can be inappropriate for many audiences.

- Weather and clothing in stock photos should represent the climate region. Avoid mistakes like Winter clothing in Florida, hipsters in rural settings, or beach photos for inland communities.
- People in photos should represent the people in the community. Some stock photos can be outright offensive. (Canva is better than most.)
- Be aware of cultural groups and dress. There are countless distinct cultural groups among Latinx, Asian, and African populations. What is appropriate for one group may not be for many others.
- Avoid photo choices grounded in colorism, ableism, or anti-indigenous biases. Are you choosing photos of light-skinned, skinny people with more European features?

Inclusive photo resources:

- [The Gender Spectrum Collection \(Free\)](#)
- [TONL: Cultural and Diverse Stock Photos \(Paid\)](#)

- [CreateHER \(Paid\)](#)
- [Nappy \(Free\)](#)
- [Allgo \(Free\)](#)
- [Disability Inclusive Stock Photography \(Free\)](#)
- [Canva Natural Women Collection](#)
- [Disabled And Here Collection \(Free\)](#)

Cultural Considerations

Look to the community to understand what events and holidays are culturally important. White culture makes broad and gross assumptions about communities of color and their customs.

- Race (i.e., Latinx, Asian, Black, white) gives us very limited information about a person's culture.
- Celebrations and practices like, for example, Cinco De Mayo and Día De Muertos, are not universally celebrated by everyone (or even most people) within a larger racial or ethnic group.
- Is the cultural symbol appropriate to use? Your attempt to connect might be confusing, offensive, or appropriative.

ADDITIONAL TOOLS

General Sexual Assault Response Team Resources

- NSVRC [SART Toolkit](#).
- OVC [SART Toolkit](#).

Media Evaluation Tools

- Research Sharing Project's Communications Toolkit: [Media Toolkit](#)
- The Communications Network: [Communications Evaluation Guide](#)

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If you have any questions about this toolkit, please reach out to FCASV's Rural Project Manager, Eva Fiallos-Díaz at ediaz@fcasv.org.