

Story Mapping for Systems Change

Using Storymapping as a Catalyst for Change

Story Mapping is inspired by a qualitative research method known as “Institutional Ethnography”:



Reveals Hidden Structures: No matter how much we know about our context or organization, there will always be blind spots. I.E. helps make visible the invisible barriers and opportunities that shape Latino experiences in education, work, health, and community life.



Grounds Advocacy in Evidence: Offers real, firsthand accounts that connect personal stories to systemic challenges, which builds stronger cases for real change.



Empowers Community Voices: IE centers the knowledge and lived reality of people in your organization or community - not just the “experts” or outsiders.

What is Institutional Ethnography?

I.E. is a research method that helps people understand how their everyday experiences are shaped by larger systems and institutions. It starts with personal stories and follows the thread to uncover policies, routines, and power relations that impact communities - especially those who are marginalized.

4 Steps to Implementing Story Mapping

1

Start with real stories:

Invite your target audience to share a “day in the life” related to policy, programs, or social service.

2

Map the connections:

Ask: What rules, forms, policies, or outside decisions shape these experiences? Visual mapping is encouraged.

3

Identify Barriers and Leverage Points:

Where do people get stuck or find support? What texts, policies, or required actions create obstacles or opportunities? Document both problems and bright spots.

4

Turn insights into action:

Summarize findings in plain language or stories. Use the mapped connections and real-life examples in grant-writing, legislative testimony, meetings, or public campaigns to advocate for change.

Questions about I.E and Storytelling?

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