

# A Story in Progress



## A Mission and Vision Statement



INTERNATIONAL  
STORYTELLING CENTER

*Founded 1973*

# A Story in Progress

Our mission at the International Storytelling Center has always been to enrich lives through story. It is a mission that's grounded in tradition, but that tradition is always flowing, flexing, and emerging in different forms. Our changing world constantly presents new ways to craft and share stories. As an organization, we're excited by these possibilities.

We call this document "A Story in Progress" because that's what it is. Technically, it was borne of a strategic planning session with our board, but it's been more than 40 years in the making. This is an especially important time in our history. As we nurture new relationships with partners in the arts and beyond, it's time to expand our programmatic reach regionally, nationally, and globally. We invite you to join us in this important work as we build a better world through the power of storytelling.

## **Previously, at the International Storytelling Center...**

The International Storytelling Center (ISC) was established as an educational and cultural institution dedicated to building a better world through the power of storytelling. In just over 40 years, ISC has:

- Transformed a grassroots movement into a national storytelling revival
- Professionalized the storytelling industry
- Built a beautiful storytelling campus in Tennessee's oldest town
- Formed key partnerships and collaborations with influential institutions like the Smithsonian Institute, Library of Congress, the National Endowment for the Arts, and Google

## **So What's Next?**

We have a long legacy of promoting storytelling through our flagship event, the National Storytelling Festival. Now it's time to grow our audience in new ways. We've spent some quality time breaking down our big dreams into actionable steps. We're excited to share how we plan to leverage some of our proudest accomplishments to build a bright and bold future for one of the world's most ancient traditions.

*We're focusing on seven key strategies. Turn the page to learn more.*

# Step 1: Innovate

ISC is best known for its live storytelling events. Our signature programming includes the National Storytelling Festival, which is held the first weekend of October each year, and the *Storytelling Live!* series, which hosts a new storyteller-in-residence each week from May through October.

While we're proud of our public-facing performances—and their positive economic impact on the region—we're excited about all the other kinds of stories that are just waiting to be discovered and explored.

## **Expand and Rethink Live Events**

Our world-class live events are critically acclaimed and well attended, but we're always pushing to make them even better. We intend to:

- Introduce new modes of storytelling to events (recent examples include spoken word poetry, our annual Story Slam, and new digital partnerships)
- Invite more international voices to participate in ISC programming
- Strengthen and expand marketing strategies for live performances
- Provide additional opportunities for live storytelling events throughout the year (especially in the “off season,” which runs from November through April)

## **Diversify Programming**

While live programming has long been ISC's specialty, we're excited to redouble our programmatic efforts in areas such as education and multicultural development.

Our plans include:

- Launching a wide variety of new educational programs, including classroom materials, support for teachers, digital archives, and more
- Exploring the power of applied storytelling in different fields and disciplines

## Step 2: Engage

ISC always keeps a sharp eye out for new ways to engage our audience. Stories tell us who we are and where we come from—and conversely, who other people are and where they come from. So it's not surprising that oral traditions offer many benefits to individuals and communities.

We're excited to explore new ways in which stories can forge connections and promote healing and growth in East Tennessee and around the world.

### Find New Voices and Platforms

Dinner tables, bedsides, porch swings, theaters, classrooms, museums, boardrooms and even hospitals—all of these are places where stories tend to thrive. As storytelling “goes viral,” ISC is actively seeking out fresh voices and unexpected performance platforms. We will:

- Find new ways to bring storytelling into unconventional settings (building on projects like Stories for the Soul [a storytelling channel for hospital patients] and Veterans' Voices [a project that collected veterans' experiences])
- Support interdisciplinary exchange—in education, in healthcare, and in other applications—through events like conferences and workshops
- Watch and learn from other storytelling initiatives

### Deepen International Connections

ISC has participated in a number of important cultural exchanges, sending storytelling delegations to China, Comoros, and Singapore, among other places. We're excited to explore more cross-cultural opportunities and initiate more outreach efforts in different parts of the world. Our plans include:

- Building on ISC's work in peace-building and reconciliation, including our recent collaborations with the United Nations, MasterPeace, and the Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation-USA
- Promoting world peace and cross-cultural understanding through diverse and inclusive storytelling experiences
- Helping people around the world find ways to connect to storytelling and use it to produce positive change in their lives, their workplaces, and their communities

## Step 3: Grow

In order to evolve and grow, the International Storytelling Center needs to beef up its organizational capacity. Slowly but steadily, we plan to expand and strengthen our human resources across three key areas: staff, volunteers, and the ISC Board of Governors.

### Staff

Our dedicated, skilled staff is headquartered in the ISC campus in downtown Jonesborough. Our strategy is two-fold: to make strategic new hires and to better support existing staff. Plans include:

- Hiring essential staff positions (including communications, marketing, and development)
- Inspiring innovation and professional development through opportunities such as workshops, seminars, and conferences
- Providing all staff with adequate and up-to-date tools and technology

### Volunteers

ISC works with more than 500 volunteers each year. We will reevaluate our recruitment, training, and placement practices for maximum satisfaction and efficiency. We also plan to:

- Identify new opportunities for internships and volunteer support
- Recruit new interns and volunteers
- Provide additional training and support for volunteers

### Board of Governors

ISC's board currently features seven board members from across the country. These talented individuals bring diverse backgrounds, valuable leadership, and vital insights to the table. We need to take steps to ensure our board remains healthy and high functioning in perpetuity, including:

- Pursuing ongoing recruitment efforts (as appropriate) and succession planning
- Identifying new strategic opportunities for board engagement
- Providing additional opportunities for board development

# Step 4: Connect

ISC has collaborated with many prestigious partners and collaborators in diverse fields such as technology, art, science, healthcare, education, and international development. We're excited to build on these existing relationships—and to explore new ones!



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## Step 5: Educate

From early oral histories to today's college classrooms, storytelling has always been a vital learning tool. For decades, the International Storytelling Center has worked on the cutting edge of education, collaborating with partners such as NASA's Jet Propulsion Lab to develop custom tales and other storytelling tools that educate kids, specialists, and the general public. Moving forward, ISC plans to leverage technology to delve even deeper into education.

### In Schools

ISC will nurture the next generation of storytellers and story listeners through educational tools, programming, and events. Here are some projects we have started or will start soon:

- Pilot new technologies, including a live streaming storytelling event, for classrooms across the country
- Work with organizations like the Tennessee Arts Commission to increase students' access to programming through ticket subsidies
- Increase outreach in schools, including teacher training and support, and performances by master storytellers
- Develop a broad range of digital storytelling tools and learning programs
- Build out the Learning Library resources (including lesson plans and toolkits) on ISC's webpage

### In the World

As one of the nation's premiere cultural institutions, ISC proudly supports, nurtures, and elevates storytelling as an art. We also intend to:

- Build on the reputation of the ISC campus as a learning laboratory by hosting more workshops that are open to the public
- Digitize our extensive collection of archival storytelling recordings—a new resource that will make performances accessible to students, fans, and new listeners around the world
- Develop enrichment materials for learners of all ages alongside the digital archive

## Step 6: Communicate

Storytelling enriches lives. Now more than ever, there are so many tools we can use to communicate with different kinds of people. With a special focus on youth and diversity, ISC is planning special outreach efforts in our surrounding community and beyond.

### Digital Communications

ISC is renewing its digital communication strategy. Joining the ranks of the White House and The Louvre, our organization was recently profiled by the Google Cultural Institute. Also, in the first half of 2014, we rebooted our blog and crafted a monthly e-newsletter to supplement e-blasts and other promotional materials. We intend to:

- Develop a digital media plan that outlines resources, stakeholders, and partners in multimedia storytelling initiatives
- Better leverage Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms to reach new audiences (and to keep our existing audience better informed)
- Form strategic partnerships to access new mailing lists and other key data
- Expand ISC's website to include more interactive opportunities, information, resources, and opportunities for involvement

### Traditional Outreach

ISC staff and storytelling consultants will pursue more media appearances and in-person engagements, as well as make local events more inviting to a wide variety of people. We will:

- Develop staff by participating in more professional conferences, more speaking engagements, and more publications
- Building on a radio show pilot, seek new ways to leverage mass communication to share live storytelling performances
- Tweak event planning to better accommodate diverse participants (including improved access for people with disabilities, increasing the number of ASL-interpreted performances, and more)
- Reach out to underserved members of the community by offering subsidized access to storytelling events, including concerts

## Step 7: Earn

ISC's growing profile has helped to strengthen its financial position, allowing us to enrich more lives and impact economic growth in our region and beyond. After completing the last three years with a budget surplus, we're turning our thoughts to new and exciting long-range financial goals. Our strategy is simple: we plan to boost our revenue streams and pursue sponsorship, donor and funding opportunities.

### **In-House Revenue**

We're actively pursuing new ways to add new revenue streams and supplement old ones by:

- Strengthening revenue streams for existing programs like Storytelling Live! and the National Storytelling Festival
- Creating new revenue-generating events and programs
- Increasing facilities rentals and attract more year-round visitors to the ISC campus

### **External Funding Sources**

We plan to hire development support positions to sustain an active fundraising culture and pursue new opportunities for growth. We will also:

- Establish new partnerships, seek out in-kind support, and secure more sponsorships (locally and nationally)
- Create new funding initiatives and campaigns
- Pursue new grants, endowments, and donations from institutions, organizations, and individuals
- Develop interdisciplinary funding streams with partners across the arts, establishing mutually beneficial growth

# For Further Reading

The International Storytelling Center transformed Tennessee's oldest town into the storytelling capital of the world. In addition to coverage from news outlets like CBS, PBS, *Al Jazeera America*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and NPR, we're proud to have been featured in the following publications.

## Chicago Tribune

CHICAGO TRIBUNE: [articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-08-20/travel/sc-trav-0820-storytelling-festival-20130820\\_1\\_jonesborough-three-day-festival-rock-concert](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-08-20/travel/sc-trav-0820-storytelling-festival-20130820_1_jonesborough-three-day-festival-rock-concert)



PBS

PBS: [www.pbs.org/newshour/art/national-storytelling-festival-turns-40/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/national-storytelling-festival-turns-40/)



NPR: [www.npr.org/2012/10/07/162461959/thousands-hold-fast-to-tradition-of-oral-storytelling](http://www.npr.org/2012/10/07/162461959/thousands-hold-fast-to-tradition-of-oral-storytelling)



NEW YORK TIMES: [www.nytimes.com/1985/09/15/travel/the-storytelling-capital-of-tennessee.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1985/09/15/travel/the-storytelling-capital-of-tennessee.html)



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS: [lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/legacies/TN/200003548.html](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/legacies/TN/200003548.html)



GOOGLE CULTURAL INSTITUTE: [www.google.com/culturalinstitute/exhibit/national-storytelling-festival/AQlaxdkI](http://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/exhibit/national-storytelling-festival/AQlaxdkI)



PITTSBURGH GAZETTE: [www.post-gazette.com/life/travel/2014/10/05/Storytelling-Festival-draws-crowds-to-Tennessee/stories/201410050087](http://www.post-gazette.com/life/travel/2014/10/05/Storytelling-Festival-draws-crowds-to-Tennessee/stories/201410050087)

## Also seen in:





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INTERNATIONAL  
STORYTELLING CENTER

*Connecting the World through the Power of Storytelling*

116 West Main Street, Jonesborough, Tennessee 37659

**800-952-8392**

**[www.storytellingcenter.net](http://www.storytellingcenter.net)**

*In association with the Smithsonian Institution*