



INTERNATIONAL STORYTELLING CENTER

Connecting the World through the Power of Storytelling

ISC Outreach and Digital Learning Proposal 2024-2025

Introduction

The International Storytelling Center (ISC), Jonesborough, Tennessee, is the world's premier arts and cultural institution dedicated to the art of storytelling. Since 1973, our nonprofit organization has transformed a folk movement into a global storytelling revival. We produce hundreds of hours of live storytelling with top-shelf talent each season, bringing people together to celebrate multicultural traditions and diverse ways of life. We also help lay people use storytelling to build better relationships, learn new skills, and solve real-world problems.

Key Programs

The National Storytelling Festival is ISC's flagship event—the first, largest, and most respected public event devoted exclusively to the art of storytelling. The Festival has spawned hundreds of storytelling programs, festivals, organizations, and activities across the country and around the world. Through the Festival, ISC helped professionalize storytelling as an industry, artistic movement, and academic discipline.

More than 50 years later, the National Storytelling Festival remains the world's premiere storytelling event and the foundation of Jonesborough's standing as the "Storytelling Capital of the World." With an artist roster that far exceeds any other event of its kind, storytelling organizers from across the country count on seeing new talent in Jonesborough to hire for their events. In 2023, the Festival showcased a diverse mainstage lineup of 40 artists and cultural perspectives from South American, African American, Native American, and Northern European traditions. Attendees came from 45 states, Washington D.C., and numerous countries. More than 1,400 households tuned in for the livestream portion of the Festival, with an estimated 3,500 viewers from 25 countries watching in real time.

The National Storytelling Festival's sister series, Storytelling Live, is the only program of its kind in the United States. Each year during a six-month season, ISC offers weeklong storytelling residencies to established storytellers and musicians. World-class performers offer shows to the public every day and engage with the community in other ways for outreach and education. In 2023, 28 artists participated in the program. We recorded one session each week to offer as an online event. In total, the hybrid storytelling program resulted in more than 200 days of arts activities, hosted more than 16,000 audience members, and engaged with 1,260 students and/or youth in subsidized performances and learning opportunities.



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ISC's community outreach initiatives vary from year to year but we endeavor to remain consistent in their quality and diversity of offerings. We actively plan Storytelling Live's residency weeks in conjunction with organizations such as Coalition for Kids, Boys and Girls Clubs of Greeneville and Johnson City, Carver Recreation Center, local libraries, and surrounding school districts, to provide low-to-no-cost storytelling concerts and other educational opportunities each season. We have also worked with East Tennessee State University's Trio program for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including first-generation college students.

Our ongoing "Stories for Change" initiative partners with the Langston Centre to provide a multicultural storytelling curriculum for at-risk children in Johnson City, Tennessee. Langston's summer camp and after-school programs serve students in grades 3-8 and are offered at no cost to students. Our programming has included an "Introduction to Storytelling" multi-session course which culminated in students telling their own stories.

ISC's weeklong Kids Storytelling Institute (KSI) offers an immersive, on-site STEAM (STEM + Arts) experience that is free of charge for area fifth graders. Together with their teachers, the students hear true, historical stories from a professional storyteller and take part in participatory activities with the artist. Educators are given support materials for follow-up lessons in their classrooms. Many KSI students (which include homeschooled kids) come from rural communities in Northeast Tennessee that don't have regular access to performing arts and multicultural events. We expect to host around 900 students for the 2024 program, which is planned for November 11-15.

ISC offers Story Guides on its website, using live footage filmed at the National Storytelling Festival, and made possible by Niswonger Foundation support. Part of our Learning Library, these curriculum additions include links to each video, questions that help explore different facets of each story, activity suggestions based on the performances, and event introductions for how participants can craft their own story. These Story Guides are free to public school teachers, private educators, and the general public to help engage students in grades 3-8, although anecdotal feedback suggests they are often enjoyed by learners of all ages.

Each year, ISC organizes a designated "School Day" at the National Storytelling Festival. This ticketed program allows middle and high school students to experience the magic of live storytelling performances firsthand. Each year, up to 700 students and chaperones can attend this cultural event for free or at a deeply reduced rate. We are also able to offer reduced and pro bono admission for college-aged students.



INTERNATIONAL STORYTELLING CENTER

Connecting the World through the Power of Storytelling

Impact of Niswonger Foundation's Support in 2023

ISC's goal as an organization is to share the power of storytelling as an art with as many people as possible. That goal has been furthered by offering ISC's programming online, which significantly expanded the footprint of the organization and its reach. In 2023, ISC live-streamed the 51st annual National Storytelling Festival's Friday programming in the Library Tent. Viewers from 25 countries tuned in to the virtual broadcast. We also broadcast Storytelling Live for 28 shows, reaching an estimated 7,000 viewers over the season.

Niswonger funds also supported ISC's youth outreach programming in 2023 through our Storytelling Live performance series. ISC hosted pro bono performances for child-centered community organizations and school groups, and engaged with more than 1,260 students and/or youth in subsidized performances and learning opportunities. For many, that was their first exposure to a live storytelling performance. A virtual workshop for teachers was also provided for Niswonger Foundation to distribute to Tennessee schools.

2024-2025 Funding Request

ISC is requesting \$15,000 for the fiscal year 2024-2025 (July to June). This equates to \$9,000 to support virtual access to the National Storytelling Festival and Storytelling Live, which includes expanded production, marketing, archiving, and technical upgrades; \$2,500 for a story-based teacher workshop available free of charge to East Tennessee educators; and \$3,500 to support and expand ISC's youth outreach programming, including "Stories for Change," an expanded Learning Library, and pro bono performances and learning experiences for regional kids, particularly those at risk.

Proposed Project Activities *

Expanded Access to the National Storytelling Festival and Storytelling Live

While thousands of visitors from around the country (and sometimes the world) travel to Jonesborough to attend ISC events each year, there are many who cannot, including East Tennessee residents from underserved populations. ISC is committed to keeping performing arts accessible to our region's distressed and "at risk" communities which include the following target counties as determined by TAC: Cocke, Hancock, Carter, Greene, Hawkins, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi, and Washington. Quality recordings of storytelling performances, including improved quality and viewing standards, help ensure expanded access to ISC's live performance events.

- ISC will record and distribute parts of the National Storytelling Festival as part of the virtual offering of the Festival. We will look to expanded marketing to broaden our reach.
- ISC will record and make available one virtual concert each week for the duration of the Storytelling Live performance season beginning in July 2024 and running through June 2025.



INTERNATIONAL STORYTELLING CENTER

Connecting the World through the Power of Storytelling

A Story-based Teacher Workshop and Resources

In 2024-2025, ISC will offer a complimentary, story-based, virtual workshop for elementary school teachers in order to teach storytelling skills for use in the classroom. The workshop will be recorded and ISC will provide Niswonger Foundation partners access to the recorded material on a limited-use, non-commercial basis for educational purposes. ISC will provide classroom materials in conjunction with the workshop for use as a teacher education resource. In addition, age-appropriate recorded content from the National Storytelling Festival will be made available to the Niswonger Foundation for distribution to its partner network for classroom use.

Continued Outreach and Training for Individuals, Youth, and Teachers

ISC works in conjunction with area schools and community partners to provide complimentary programming each year. Storytelling activities and experiences help children develop language and literacy skills. ISC programming will include as great a breadth and depth of expertise across content areas while showcasing storytelling as a cross-disciplinary STEM learning tool.

- ISC's *Stories for Change* initiative will continue with programming for youth at Langston Centre as well as a multi-week training with Coalition for Kids, both in Johnson City, TN.
- ISC will continue to expand its online Learning Library, particularly with resources for youth.
- Pro bono performances and learning experiences will be offered the Storytelling Live season.

Note: Outreach efforts in 2023-2024 included thirteen (13) subsidized programs for school-age kids.

Measuring Program Impact

Through combined live and virtual outreach efforts in 2024-2025, ISC hopes to provide arts access for 3,000 school-aged children in Northeast Tennessee. Quantitative outcome measures will be based on the number of cultural arts activities hosted by ISC, the number of artists participating, and the number of children/youth in attendance. Qualitative outcomes will be gauged through direct feedback collected from participating administrators, teachers, and students; social media response; and the levels of interest indicated by new requests for information.

*Participating tellers for the virtual festival, outreach, and training will be specially selected to ensure that they possess the skills and expertise to both captivate their young audiences and provide quality, professional learning experiences for students and their educators.