



AUSTRALIAN  
COUNCIL  
FOR  
INTERNATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT

FACTSHEET

# INFORMED CONSENT

## What is 'informed consent'?

'Informed consent' means contributors (the people sharing their stories) understand why you want to document stories about them, how the stories might be used, and who the audience of their story is likely to be. Once they understand this, they are better able to consent (or not consent) to sharing their story.

## Why it's so important

The girls, boys, women and men who generously share their time, experiences and images with us have a right to know why their story or image has been collected and how it's likely to be used. As well as being ethically right, taking the time to ensure people understand and are comfortable with the process is likely to result in better stories and images being gathered.

## What does the Code say about it?

ACFID members are **expected to have** a policy, statement or guidance document that includes a requirement for free, prior and informed consent, and acknowledges people's right to information.

It is also part of the **ACFID Fundraising Charter**. As part of the Charter, members agree to not use images and messages for fundraising without the free, prior and informed consent of the person/s portrayed, including children, their parents or guardians.

It is up to your organisation to decide how you will obtain and keep records of consent, as long as the information is kept **securely**.

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## Key principles of good practice

- **Informed consent is mandatory.**
- **Stories and images belong to contributors.** Contributors must be able to have a say on how their story is told.
- **Always obtain consent before interviewing or filming a contributor.** Ideally, this should be done well in advance of a visit or interview, which gives the contributor time to consider their decision carefully. In **high-risk situations**, the informed consent conversation may need to start a couple of weeks before the interview date.
- **Explain both the opportunities and risks associated with sharing their story.** As much as you can, reduce any duress (ie the sense they 'must say yes').
- **Explain how a contributor's story might be used.** This includes showing examples of how their story might be used and published.
- **Contributors must be able to withdraw their consent at any time.** However, because of the permanency of the internet, withdrawal of consent may not always lead to removal of all versions of their image online. This should be explained at the start of the informed consent process.
- **Contributors do not have to be identified if they don't want to be.** And some contributors shouldn't be identified for **protection purposes**. Ensure you explain how they can reveal or conceal their identity.
- **There are different ways to document consent.** Consider what might be most appropriate for the context and the contributor. Written consent is often preferred, but if this is not possible or appropriate, oral consent may be obtained and documented. Always use consent forms in the contributor's language or consider using pictorial forms.
- **Always gain consent from a child's parent or guardian.**
- **After publishing, show contributors how their story was used.** Once a contributor's story has been published, make sure the contributor (and, if necessary, their guardian) understands what they have agreed to. Show them an example of how their story has been used and give them printouts of images of them. If printouts are not available, a smartphone could be used.
- **Make sure your organisation has a process for removing images from your image library or records.** Terms of consent should include a period of time for which consent is given. Circumstances change – information should not be used indefinitely. Many organisations have a time period of 3 or 5 years. This should be decided based on your organisation's context, potential risks and contributors.
- **It's an ongoing conversation.** Best-practice informed consent requires an ongoing discussion between contributors and staff. It's a multi-stage process, from initial scoping before a trip; to before and after an interview/shoot; to the days, weeks and years after the story has been published. It's essential contributors are comfortable to contact staff regarding consent at all stages of the process. Ideally, they would have one point of contact during the entire process.

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## Learn more

Save the Children's [The People in the Pictures](#): A research report on best-practice informed consent

[NGO Storytelling podcast](#)

Storytelling Risks [factsheet](#)

Privacy law [factsheet](#)

Protecting identities [factsheet](#)

Learn more about [EDMFs](#)