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Reflection Questions for Developing a Speaker Compensation Policy

Before drafting a testimonial speaker compensation policy, we recommend creating space for reflection. Policies are strongest when they are rooted in shared values and shaped by the people most affected by them.

These questions are designed to spark conversation. You don't need perfection. You might use them:

- In one-to-one conversations with key staff or leadership
- As part of a team meeting discussion
- During your next all-staff meeting
- In a small working group tasked with drafting the policy

We encourage you to include a mix of perspectives:

- Staff across departments (development, programs, communications, operations)
- Volunteers or board members involved in events
- People who have previously served as testimonial speakers
- Organizational decision-makers who will ultimately approve or implement the policy

Hearing from those who have spoken for your organization — especially individuals who have shared lived experience — can be particularly illuminating.

Purpose & Intent

1. What is prompting us to create a testimonial speaker compensation policy at this time?
2. What do we hope this policy will communicate about who we are as an organization?

Values & Principles

3. What organizational values should guide this policy?
4. Where might our current practices be out of alignment with our stated values?
5. How do we define expertise in the context of testimonial speaking? How do we understand lived experience as expertise?
6. What does fair compensation mean in our context?

Power & Dynamics

7. What power dynamics are present when someone shares their story at our event?
8. How do race, class, gender, immigration status, disability, or other identities shape those dynamics?
9. In what ways might testimonial storytelling become extractive, even unintentionally?
10. How do donor expectations influence how we think about testimonial speakers?

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Current Practices

11. How do we currently decide whether or not to offer compensation, and what assumptions guide those decisions?
12. How do we treat keynote or professional speakers compared to testimonial speakers, and what message does that send?
13. What factors currently influence compensation decisions (time, preparation, emotional labor, travel, revenue generated, etc.)?

Harm Prevention & Care

14. What support should we provide beyond payment (preparation, childcare, transportation, accessibility, emotional support)?
15. How does/will our policy for testimonial speakers differ or align with what we do for other areas of our work
16. How should we handle consent, recording, and reuse of someone's story?
17. What boundaries should be in place to protect speakers from harm before, during, and after the engagement?

Decision-Making & Accountability

18. Who should have authority to determine compensation levels, and how should those decisions be guided?

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[Organization Name]

Testimonial Speaker Compensation Policy Template

Why We Have This

Clearly state your why, it might sound like:

When someone speaks on behalf of our organization — whether at a fundraiser, rally, workshop, community gathering, training, panel, press event, or campaign — they are contributing time, energy, preparation, and often vulnerability.

We believe that sharing lived experience or expertise is an exchange of labor/service and we value it as such. This document outlines how we approach compensating speakers in a way that reflects our values.

Our Guiding Principles

What values or principles guided the development of this policy and will guide compensation decisions in the future? For example:

Lived experience is expertise.
We recognize that community members and program participants bring knowledge and insight that deserve to be valued.

We avoid extractive storytelling.
We do not expect people — especially those from communities directly impacted by injustice — to share their stories for free simply because it benefits our mission or because gratitude is owed.

We center dignity over optics.
Our priority is the well-being and agency of the speaker, not how their story lands with donors, media, or event attendees.

We are transparent and consistent.
We communicate clearly about expectations, boundaries, compensation, and how stories may be used.

We budget for this work.
Compensating speakers is not an afterthought — it is part of the cost of doing our work responsibly.

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When We Offer Compensation

Describe the types of events and activities for which you'll compensate speakers, for example:

- We offer compensation when someone:
- Shares personal lived experience
- Speaks publicly at our invitation
- Participates in a panel, workshop, rally, or training
- Appears in a video or media story arranged by us
- Engages in preparation or rehearsal time

We recognize that preparation time, travel, emotional labor, and vulnerability all matter.
If someone declines compensation, we respect that choice, but we make the offer.

How We Think About Amounts

Be as specific as possible, providing ranges for hourly rates or honoraria. Provide guidance on what to consider when determining the amount. Indicate whether you'll compensate for preparation time. For example:

Speakers are compensated for the time they put into preparing for the event (e.g. writing and practicing their remarks, preparing their home or workspace for the interviewer and film crew, making childcare arrangements), for rehearsals, and for the time spent at the event where they are speaking.

We pay between $40 and $50 per hour. When determining the appropriate rate, we consider:

- Time involved (including preparation)
- The nature of what is being shared
- Emotional labor and vulnerability
- Event type and audience
- How we compensate others in similar roles

We aim to compensate testimonial speakers fairly and avoid valuing professional credentials over lived experience.

Support Beyond Payment

State whether speakers will be reimbursed for additional costs incurred from their speaking engagement. For example:

In addition to compensation, we will reimburse speakers expenses for

- Travel and transportation
- Childcare
- Interpretation or language support
- Lost work time

We discuss needs directly with each speaker and aim to remove barriers to participation.

We'll assist speakers in documenting and submitting their expenses for reimbursement.

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Payment Process

Describe how payments are processed. Include:

- Method of payment (check, direct deposit, other)
- Timeline for payment (e.g., within 30 days)
- Required paperwork (if any)
- Contact person for payment questions

If speakers choose to decline compensation or donate it back, describe how that will be handled.

Sample:
We aim to make compensation simple and timely. In most cases, speakers are paid at the event or immediately following their participation. Payment is typically provided by check at the event. If a speaker prefers another method, arrangements can be made in advance.

If required, speakers may be asked to complete a W-9 prior to payment. We will provide this in advance whenever possible.

If a speaker declines compensation, we document that choice. If they choose to donate the honorarium back, we issue the payment and record any donation separately for transparency.

Consent & Boundaries

Describe how you will ensure that everyone involved fully understands the expectations for this engagement and the steps you will you take to minimize harm and protect the agency of the speaker. For example,

Before confirming participation, we:

- Clarify expectations and format
- Discuss boundaries and topics
- Explain how stories will be recorded or reused
- Confirm compensation details in writing
- Share how speakers can revoke their consent for their story to be used at any time.

Participation is voluntary. Speakers can adjust their content or decline to answer questions at any time.

Accountability

Share how you'll make sure you're living into your principles and policy. For example,
This approach is guided by our values and reviewed regularly. We welcome feedback from speakers and staff to ensure we are acting with integrity and alignment.

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