

National Journal Communications Council

**Media  
University**

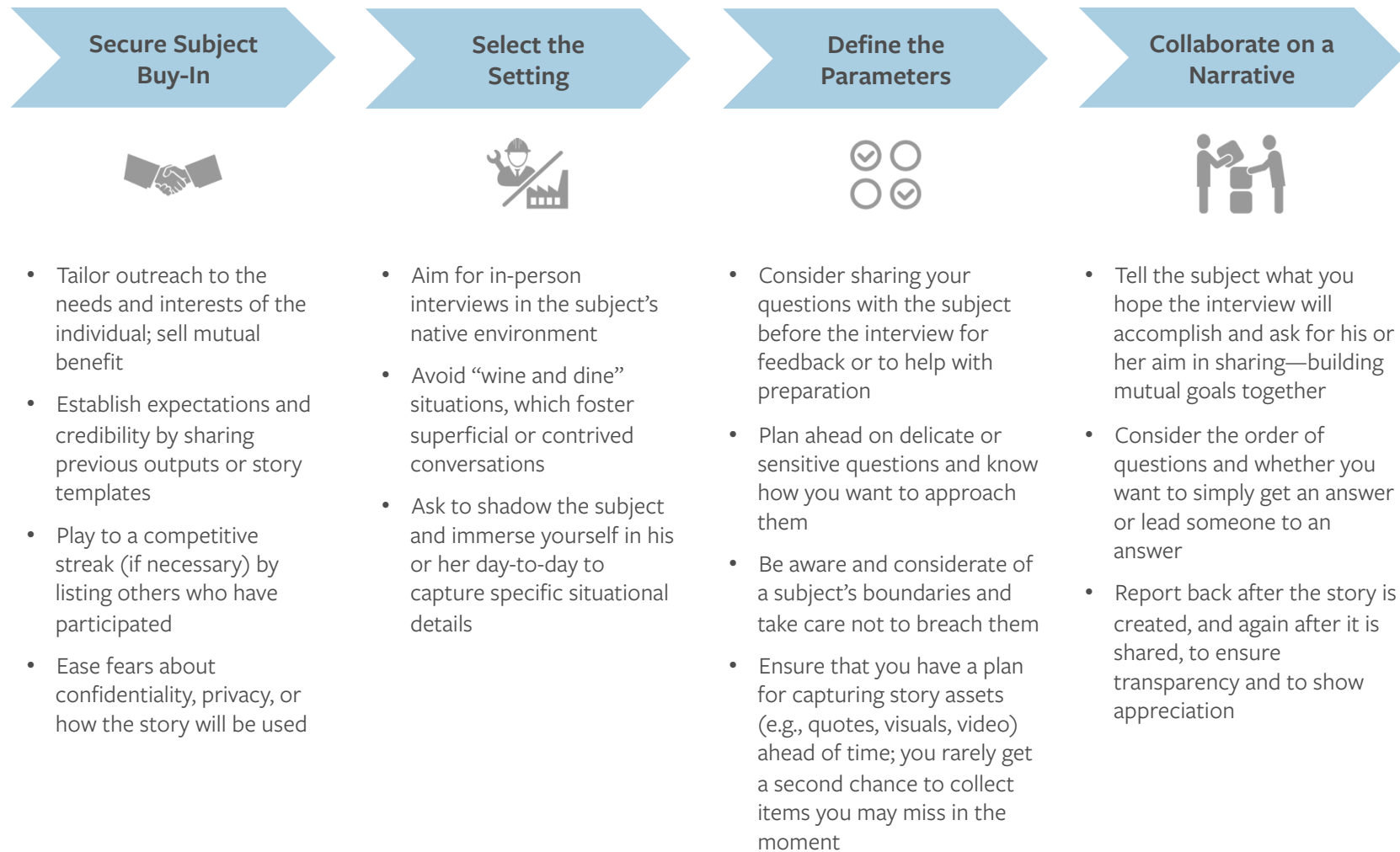
AMU 401: Narrative Storytelling in the Digital Age

# Interviewing Techniques

February 13, 2015

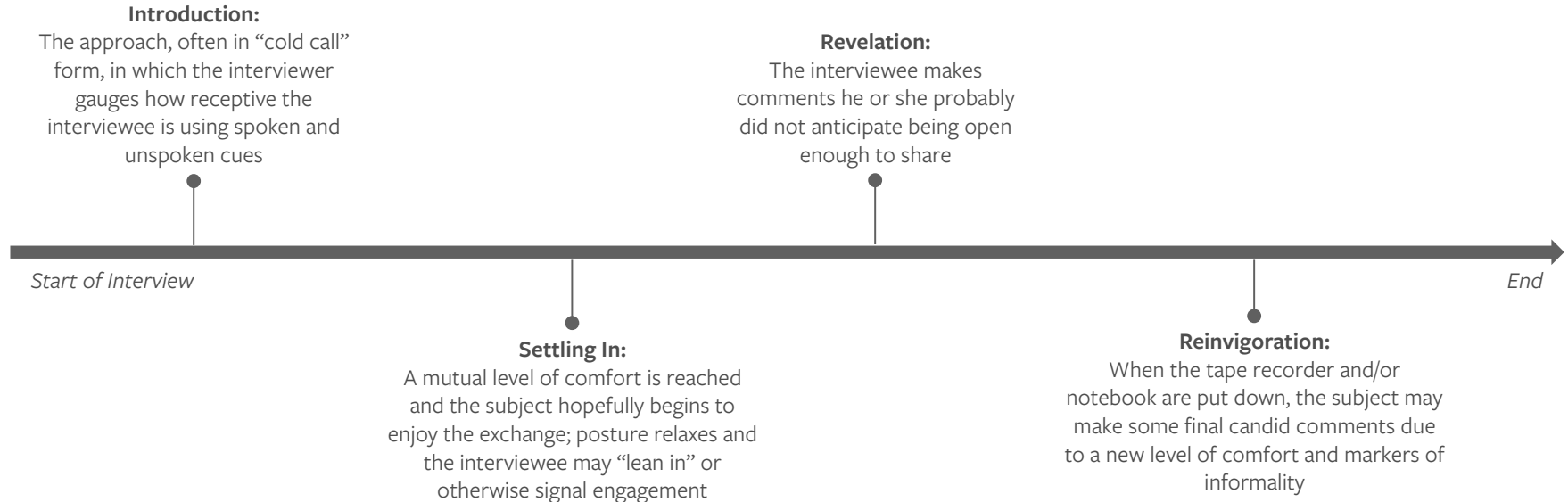
# Interview Success Hinges on Preparation

Process of Building Trust Begins Before the First Question is Asked



# Effective Interviews Marked By Key Trust-Building Phases

Verbal and Visual Cues Can Help Gauge Level of Intimacy Between Interviewer and Interviewee



## Tips from the Newsroom: How Atlantic Media Journalists Approach the Interview Life Cycle

### Transcend the Feeling of Transaction

*"Signaling that you are interested in them as more than just a source... establishes a baseline of trust."*

### Introduce Other Perspectives

*"I'll often bring up other view points I've heard from other people that I've interviewed from the same story (without giving names)."*

### Keep Conversation Fluid


*"Keep your ears open for follow-up questions during the interview. Be open to straying from the script."*

### Give an Opening

*"I ask at the end if they have something they want to say that they feel like they haven't discussed, or if there's anything important that I'm missing."*

# Spend a Majority of Interview Time in the “Sweet Spot”

Careful Question Framing Can Ensure Direct, Detailed Responses

		Framing of the Subject	
		Broad	Narrow
Framing of the “Ask”	Broad	<p><i>“What did you think about President Obama’s State of the Union address?”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prompt is open-ended but doesn’t elicit specific, focused feedback</li> <li>• Sound bites are limited to platitudes; interviewer must ask additional, more targeted follow-ups</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>“What did you think of President Obama’s State of the Union assertion that ‘the shadow of crisis has passed?’”</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prompt is open-ended (e.g., why, how, describe, explain), but targeted</li> <li>• Subject can provide specific details, opinions and explanations about a hyper-focused topic</li> </ul> 
	Narrow	<p><i>“Did you watch President Obama’s State of the Union address?”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prompt directs subject to a simple “yes” or “no” answer without providing an opportunity for elaboration</li> <li>• Question adds unnecessary length to interviews by creating continuous need for follow-ups</li> </ul>	<p><i>“Do you believe President Obama’s State of the Union assertion that ‘the shadow of crisis has passed?’”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prompt is focused, but provides an easy out for subjects who don’t wish to offer specific details or examples</li> <li>• Interviewer can effectively use this question type to test topics that may be uncomfortable or controversial</li> </ul>

# Reconstructing the Character Interview

## Analyzing Policy Story Sound Bites Can Reveal Common Question Structures

Quotes that Illustrate Character

...and the Questions that Elicit Them

**The Department of Transportation wants truckers to sleep more. Congress said no.**

The cromnibus temporarily rolled back some limits on how long drivers can go without a rest.

By Lydia DePillis December 16, 2014

Dick Pingel has a long wait ahead of him.

He's sitting in the cab of his 18-wheeler at a warehouse in Norfolk, Neb., at about 3 in the afternoon, waiting to drop off an order of frozen juice. The warehouse had stopped taking deliveries at about 1 p.m. and doesn't start again until early the next morning. So now, he has to wait at this way station between Omaha and Sioux Falls, where he'll empty the rest of his load and make his way home to Plover, Wis. — a day later than he'd planned.

For an owner-operator on contract with a distributor that pays for each delivery — rather than by the hour — taking longer to do any given job means a smaller paycheck at the end of the month.

"If the wheels aren't turning, you're not earning," says Pingel, 61. And he thinks the government is making the problem worse, with its restrictions on the number of hours he can drive.

"It's real nice to think you'll be sleeping that whole time," he says. "All you're doing is being tense, thinking about how you're going to get your hours in."

"IT'S REAL NICE TO THINK YOU'LL BE SLEEPING THAT WHOLE TIME," HE SAYS. "ALL YOU'RE DOING IS BEING TENSE, THINKING ABOUT HOW YOU'RE GOING TO GET YOUR HOURS IN."

Last week, however, something unusual happened: The federal government actually made the rules less strict, suspending the requirement that the 34-hour rest include two early morning stints, and effectively bumping the 70-hour restriction back up to 82 (even though few drivers actually reach that maximum). Along with other measures tucked into a \$1.014 trillion spending bill, it passed at the last minute with little discussion.

time on the roads, which reduces accidents (the National Fraternal Order of Police agreed, supporting the delay of the rules, while the International Association of Chiefs of Police disagreed, opposing it). That's why it wants another study of the law's "unintended impacts," and the rollback expires at the end of next September, giving the DOT time to do some extra research.

In the meantime, the trucking industry is expected to become more productive, and Pingel has a little more freedom to make some extra cash for the holidays. He grosses about \$220,000 a year, but with maintenance and gas, he's left with about \$35,000. Enough to live modestly, but not enough to recover if anything were to happen to his truck — itself a powerful incentive against reckless driving.

"I've got \$200,000 invested in a business that I've had for 35 years that I could lose by one accident," he says.

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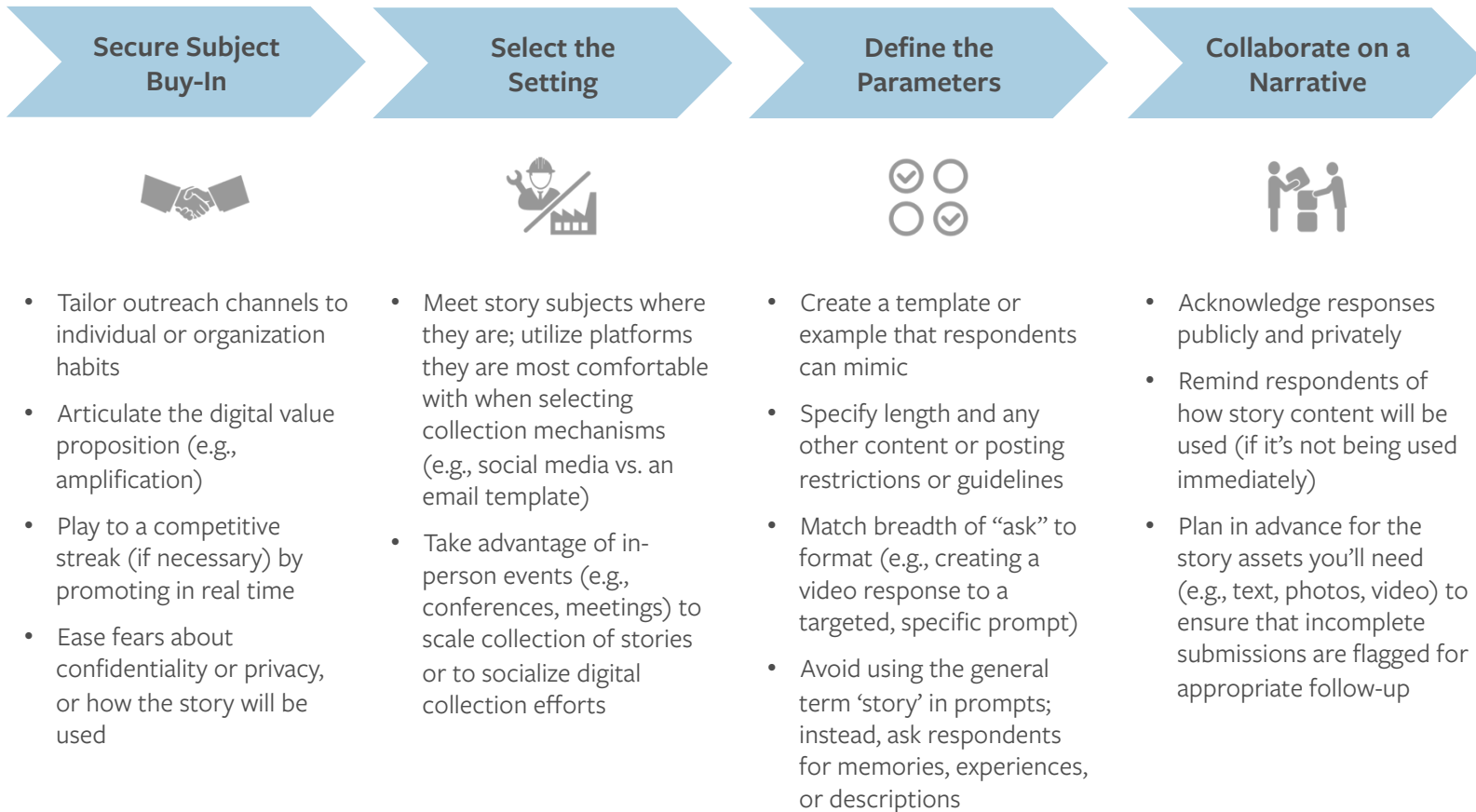
- ✓ Tell me more about how you're affected by government restrictions on the hours you can drive...
- ✓ How is your life different now than it was before the restrictions?

- ✓ What goes through your mind when you have to take the government-mandated breaks?
- ✓ Describe for me how the effects of the regulations are different than policymakers intended...

- ✓ What do you wish policymakers knew about how truck drivers approach their jobs?
- ✓ Explain why you think the recent legislation won't have the effects on drivers that people fear it will...

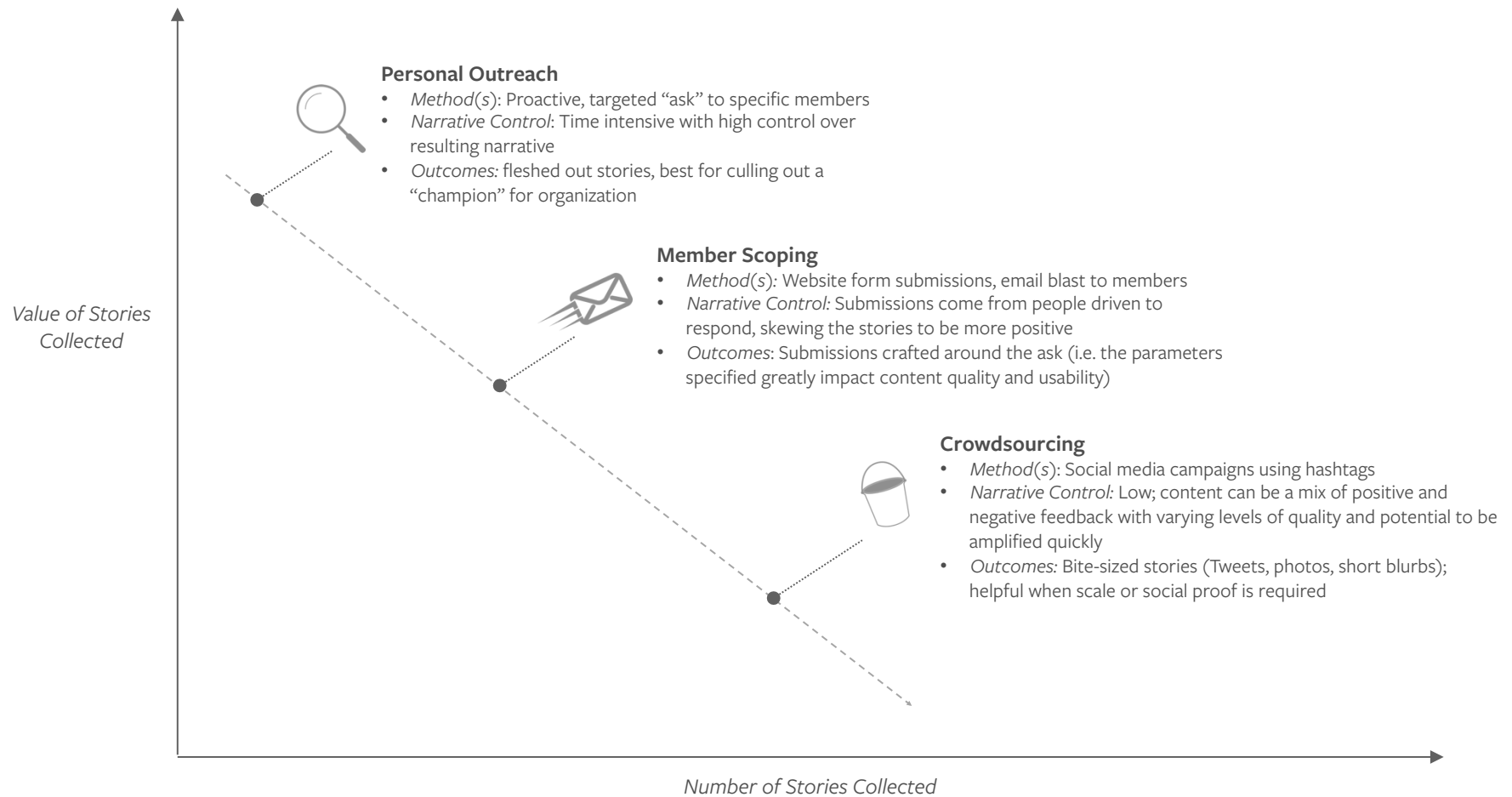
# Incorporating Interview Principles Across Platforms

Story Collection Mechanisms Should Mimic Effective In-Person Experiences



# Collection Mechanism Dictates Tradeoffs

Variety of Options When Collecting Stories, Balancing Quality, Quantity and Usability of Outcomes



# Optimizing for Stories That Write Themselves

Effective Digital Story Collection Tools Can Reduce Content Creation Time

Prompts for experiences and memories, rather than stories, and provides guidance on appropriate length of submission

Promises follow-up, building comfort with subject and guaranteeing their personal submissions won't go unrecognized

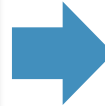
Provides helpful clarifying details that help elicit descriptive "after" experiences

**Please write a paragraph or two about your experiences at SMYAL. Include your favorite memories, what you learned, and what you've taken with you after. \***

You will be contacted by SMYAL staff for further information.

**Where are you now? \***

Please include information about your job, school, family, or other information about your current life.



**RAYMOND LIN, SMYAL YOUTH CLASS OF 1988**




**Q: TELL US ABOUT YOUR TIME AT SMYAL:**

**A:** When I first attended the SMYAL coming out group, I was both ecstatic and scared so many people are when first looking for resources. It was a great safe space on SMYAL's way to talk with peers about similar concerns and I met lots of great people who helped me learn more about myself and about the diverse LGBT community. It was great to feel "normal" with people who had similar concerns and questions. It's now over 20 years later and I'm still great friends with someone I met at SMYAL!

**Q: WHERE ARE YOU NOW?**

**A:** I'm now a federal government contractor serving as a Technical Software Project Manager and Team Lead. My husband and I have been together for over 21 years and were married in Vancouver BC over six years ago. We were fortunate to have 30+ friends and family join us at our wedding ceremony and subsequent Alaskan cruise; attendees included our parents, my brother and sister-in-law, cousins, aunts, uncles, my 88 year old grandmother, and our closest friends. We love to travel—favorite destinations are Hawaii, Las Vegas, Whistler Canada (snowboarding), Europe, and Walt Disney World.

**Q: WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE CURRENT SMYAL YOUTH?**

**A:** Life will throw lots of challenges your way and those are opportunities for growth. Choose wisely and learn from mistakes when you don't choose wisely. Pickle, everything doesn't have to be perfect right now—you have time.

**STEVEN GELLMAN, SMYAL YOUTH CLASS OF 1989**




**Q: TELL US ABOUT YOUR TIME AT SMYAL:**

**A:** Around 25 years ago I saw an ad in the Washington Post Woodard section for SMYAL. Having just come out to my good friend Laurie, and in return her coming out to me, we thought we should go check out the support group. Both of us were still very much in the closet, both of us were terrified! We walked into the gay community center on a Saturday morning and our lives were changed forever. We walked in holding hands, pretending to be boyfriend and girlfriend just to "see what's going on." The counselor Bob saw right through our disguise and invited us to join the circle. We did. Within ten minutes we were no longer holding hands and we found ourselves coming out to these new friends and strangers and we never looked back. It is not an understatement to say that day changed my life forever! Once I went to that meeting, within 15 minutes my whole life changed—radically just changed. The acceptance, the freedom I felt—I guess the camaraderie was what I felt! I never looked back. It was a springboard for me, for everything—for my music, for activism, for being ok with myself. And I would imagine if I didn't find SMYAL, I would've eventually gotten there, but I can't imagine any scenario where it would've happened so quickly.

**\*SMYAL IS COMMUNITY THAT'S THE FIRST WORD THAT COMES TO MIND. SMYAL IS FRIENDS. SMYAL IS FUN. SMYAL WAS MY WORLD FOR THOSE YEARS.\***  
—STEVEN GELLMAN

**Q: WHERE ARE YOU NOW?**

**A:** Both Laurie and I are married now. I am a performing singer/songwriter with six recordings under my belt and my seventh CD due out at the end of the year. I have written songs about coming out and issues of bullying in schools among many other topics. Twenty five years ago I couldn't have imagined that one day I would be legally married to a same-sex spouse and playing music for a king. SMYAL is responsible for this in so many ways.

**Q: WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE CURRENT SMYAL YOUTH?**

**A:** It's easier said than done, but you are okay the way you are. That doesn't necessarily mean being gay or lesbian, or transgender—it's just okay to be who you are. If you don't want to play sports, you don't have to play sports, and that's okay. You are okay, whoever you are.

Allows for seemingly unfiltered presentation of character voices

Translates almost seamlessly from the original digital prompts

## Case in Brief



**Profiled Story:** Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL)

**Organization Type:** Non-Profit Organization

**Format:** Online Story Collection Form



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