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The U.S. flag flies in front of the Capitol dome Sept. 12, 2017, in Washington. (CNS/Reuters/Joshua Roberts)



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The U.S. Department of Arts and Culture hosts a People’s State of the Union. I only recently learned that there is a U.S. Department of Arts and Culture. Well, it is people-powered, not a government agency. Its purpose is to incite creativity and social imagination "to shape a culture of empathy, equity, and belonging."

For the past three years the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture has hosted a People’s State of the Union. This year, from Jan. 25 through Feb. 4, groups will gather in Story Circles to offer our take on the state of the union. The department's webpage for the People's State of the Union calls it "an annual civic ritual and participatory art project," and invites participants to

- "Share a story about an experience that gave you insight into the state of our union.
- Share a story about a time you felt a sense of belonging — or the opposite — to this nation or your community.
- Share a story of an experience that gave you hope in the past year."

There's a toolkit to download and a way to post on the USDAC Story Portal.

Finally, on April 15, there will be a reading of a collaborative poem which draws from the thousands of stories posted. Over 350 communities have participated in the project since 2015.

I like this project. I like that it is rooted in our experience. What experience have I had that gives me insight or a sense of belonging or hope? We are in the middle of hard times that did not just begin a year ago. Where do we find insight, belonging and hope? What stories can we offer?

I plan to participate.

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