Dear STORY TRAILS Writers,

Thanks so much for joining on to this exciting creative adventure! This packet starts a conversation that will last through your journey with the project. That sense of *journey* will hopefully become emblematic of STORY TRAILS: both for the eventual users of the app and for you as a co-creator on this artwork. I want to create an opportunity for all of us to feel that sense of journey, of motion that is experienced as a collection of thousands of tiny moments of present tense, from start to end.

Over the course of several workshops with the core creative team, we've developed a philosophy for the work to be created, one that I expect will encourage a curious and wandering mindset. A quote that sticks out:

This project is about creating the anti-hustle.

My hope is that this collaboration will feel rich and generative, not aimed solely at being "productive" in a way often required of artistic practice. As such, I've tried to offer insights below into what we've learned, a selection of inspirations that have already informed the app's development, and clear parameters that your creative process and product can usefully bump up against. It's intended to be the right mix of structured provocations to take your initial idea seeds and give them rich soil to grow and expand from. The packet is split into the following sections:

1) A brief overview of the app's features
2) Some creative and philosophical discoveries we've found so far
3) A summary overview through all ten trails with our narrator, The Ranger
4) Research sources that have inspired the work
5) Writing parameters for your story

From now until the end of March we hope you'll take the time to review this information closely. The content in this packet will form the core philosophy of the writer workshop and lays out the thinking behind the parameters for your work in the months that will follow. Feel free to write with questions, comments or other material that you want to share from its provocations.

- Adrienne on behalf of the entire STORY TRAILS team

An Overview of the STORY TRAILS App Features

STORY TRAILS has three modes for the user to experience: EXPLORE, JOURNEY, and EXPAND.

EXPLORE is the first mode users of the mobile app will encounter upon downloading. This aspect of the app contains information in both list and map forms for all ten trails. It includes a brief description of each trail's story (author, genre, content warnings) as well as info about the trail's accessibility by various modes of transportation and physical strenuousness. In other words, this is the section where people can explore the stories they want to hear before going out to trail sites. There will be a main menu option here that includes creator credits, social media info, and links to the project's website. EXPLORE mode will also begin with a short tutorial that introduces the user to The Ranger as a character and gives them insight into a few of the features of how the app works.

The second mode is JOURNEY, which is what our listeners will use when they are on site at a trail. When opening the app within range of a trail, users will see an option appear that allows them to begin their voyage on its path. Directions from The Ranger will offer specifics about how to get to the trail's origin point. Once they've arrived and press START, listeners will get a short preamble from The Ranger that frames the walk in relationship to their progression through the app as a whole, and gives a brief intro to this particular story and trail. Afterwards, the listener will be transported into your world. As they move through the experience, the screen will show a simple progress bar advancing along the route, changing the path's color as they traverse it. At the end of the walk, The Ranger will briefly conclude the experience and invite the user to explore the EXPAND aspects of this trail.

The final mode is EXPAND. This interface for a trail is only available after a user completes a story. In it, the visual trail route changes from the pared down version of the map in the EXPLORE and JOURNEY modes to a more expansive one that includes info about points of interest along the trail, a "behind the scenes" interview with each author, and links to environmental partners invested in the trail's future. This mode marks the progression of the user through the ten stories, gives them something to do on the way back from the end point, and offers them a way to invest deeper in a trail they connected to through your story.

Creative & Philosophical Discoveries

In the year since the core design team started our work on STORY TRAILS we've explored a ton about what parameters best suit this mode of storytelling. While many more remain to be discovered by you, below is an overview of some major tools we've found help tailor a narrative to this unique delivery format.

BALANCE BETWEEN STORY, SOUND & SPACE

It will be helpful to think about the total user experience as a collaboration between three things: the words you create, the sound that will augment it, and the space it takes place in. Ideally, each story will be roughly balanced between all three elements – a rich narrative world, a sonic design of ambient noise and music that brings the words beyond the page, and the user's physical and sensory experience in relationship to the environment they walk through. For the story to allow sound and place to impact it, you might want to imagine more "room" between sections of the narrative or a more expansive writing style. Put another way, if your story feels whole and complete on the page, it's probably too dense to make room for the experience on the trail.

A reference point we explored in our workshops was the difference between aria and recitatif in opera. Recitatif is a song mode that generally communicates plot. Musically, it's much simpler and less underscored with full orchestra so that the

singer can clearly tell the audience what's happening next. Arias, on the other hand, rarely give information that forwards the progression of story through time, but instead offers a chance to dive into the emotions of a given character in lush and complex musical interludes between plot points. It might be helpful to think about how your writing might contain intentional moments of "aria" where the listener gets to sit back and luxuriate in either the music or space that accompanies the words. Feel free to indicate these moments in your script.

CASTING THE LISTENER

STORY TRAILS poses a unique opportunity to consider the "you" that is taking in the story in real time by involving them more directly in the narrative. Below are a few tips to maximize the user's comfort in being cast within your world.

Avoid vagueness. It's tempting to have characters in the writing speak directly to the user, but take care to do so with considered specificity. Tuning a one-sided interaction to be open-ended enough to apply to any listener is tricky and can result in writing that's so generic it frustrates the listener and prohibits deeper story development.

Create a character they can step in and out of. Movies sometimes employ a technique with camera angles, putting the lens on a scene from a single character's perspective. This allows the director to heighten the viewer's connection to one of the performers over the other. It's useful to think about how gently aligning an audience member's perspective with a character's is different from requiring them to actually embody that character. Read the two versions of the sentence below:

You walk ahead defiantly in red pants, anger coursing through your veins.

Nadia walked ahead defiantly in red pants, anger coursing through her veins.

While the first version is tempting to use in STORY TRAILS because it directly implicates the listener in the action, it also sets up the potential for dissonance between the real time reality of the user and the world of the story. If the app user doesn't feel the emotion that the story dictates to them, it can feel like they're doing something wrong. It also means that a specific description may underscore the ways the listener is NOT in your story – say a person isn't wearing red pants, for example – if they are continually reminded about a discordant description that plays a large role in your story. We found in

workshops that our feeling of synchronicity with narrative was greater when the listener had the ability to step into a character's shoes during moments when their experience synced with the narrative, but also had the option to step back and separate from the story when it didn't. Rather than imagining the literal app user within your story, it might be more beneficial to think about a character that occupies the viewpoint they will be walking through.

Don't offer false choices. This project is aimed at giving the user a sense of agency and impact on the world around them. Users can choose what trails they engage with and the pace at which the story will unfold. Similarly, if a narrator tells the listener they have a choice, we want that choice to be meaningful. Saying something like, "You can keep walking this trail or just go home!" sets up a narrative path that you probably don't actually want a user to take. This undercuts their sense of empowerment, because they know there's one "right" answer, rather than having options they can genuinely decide between.

Use caution when asking the listener to perform. On some level, listeners know you can't actually see them. If your story asks a user to do something in the live moment ("jump up and down" or "lay on the ground") the action should be rewarding enough to justify it or users may just ignore the command.

Invoke the senses. One of the opportunities this form offers is the tangible sensations you can count on surrounding the listener as they hear your words. Describing the sound of the wind through trees, the feeling of sun on one's face, the pebbles crunching underfoot, or the sense of motion as one walks pulls a listener into their body and connects them tangibly to the world around them.

WORK WITH YOUR SPACE

Ideally, your trail will not simply be a backdrop but a narratively integrated component of your story. The act of walking is essential to the story experience and it's an obvious way to start getting to know your route. Familiarize yourself with the physical container your story will unfold within: what aspects of the trail are fixed and what aspects change from day to day or month to month. Starting from the most functional choices about what direction the user will walk, where they should enter the trail, and how long a section they will traverse are good parameters to begin with. For reference, our team felt like it took at least three trips to a trail site before we really began to feel like we "knew" it.

Similarly, we're hoping the content of your story is deeply interwoven with the features of the trail. Below are some questions we played with that might be helpful in early stages of imagining your work:

- What metaphoric, historic or plot links can you make to this space?
- Why tell THIS story on THIS trail? Why is this story at this location as opposed to any other trail site?
- What kinds of things do you notice the first time you visit the space? What aspects are only revealed after deeper familiarity?
- What level of knowledge do characters in your writing have with this place? What is their relationship to it? What ownership do they feel?

A reminder that you'll have an opportunity to gain deeper insight into your trail from your environmental non-profit partner, whom you'll be introduced to after the workshop. You'll also be provided with a 360° video of someone walking the trail that you can reference when working from home.

DEFINE YOUR STORY'S RELATIONSHIP TO TIME

STORY TRAILS unfolds as a live experience for the user, meaning your story is in a conversation with time. A term our collaborators at Toasterlab shared with us was "technological ghosting" or the experience an audience has watching a recording of something taking place in the space they currently occupy but at a time other than their present moment. Events you describe in your work might be literal history of these trails, imagined fictional pasts, potential futures, or metaphoric layers of all three stacked on top of each other. Generally, we found it helpful to give the listener a clear understanding of when your story's timeline exists in relationship to their current moment of stepping onto the trail. If your

story *does* take place in their literal present, think carefully about why the events you describe aren't visible to the user.

It might be helpful to know that The Ranger – the narrator who guides users through the app – DOES exist in the present moment. The Ranger will welcome people to the trail when they arrive and may even comment on their surroundings using data we can gather from the phone (time of day, weather conditions, direction the user is walking in, etc). Before the start of each story, The Ranger will instruct audience members to start walking and give them a small intention to carry with them through the experience. (For more detail check out the 10 Trail Ranger Progression below.) The Ranger's introduction also offers an opportunity to transition the listener from their present moment into the world and time period of your story. If there's anything you want The Ranger specifically to say about this shift as someone passes from the "regular" world into your story, feel free to indicate this in your writing.

THE RANGER AS A MYTHIC BEING IN THE SHAPE OF AN APP

Speaking of The Ranger, something we've clarified in working on this character is the idea that the voice that guides users is an entity that is greater than a mere human. We're thinking about The Ranger as a kind of mythical ecological inter-dimensional missionary, taking the form of this mobile phone app in order to bring people back to the natural world. The Ranger is an presence much greater

than the voice you hear, but uses this form – the sound and interface on the phone – because it's what we puny mortals can understand. The Ranger's ultimate aim is to help pull us out of the fractured, disconnected state we currently live in and use the empathic capacity of story to bring listeners back into a deeper sense of connection to other people and the natural world.

The character of The Ranger speaks to the macro vision of STORY TRAILS and connects the dots between all ten stories. In this world, The Ranger has chosen your story because it is uniquely suited to help it deliver another layer of its aim to expand people's understanding of the world. The Ranger LOVES your stories and uses them and the sonic layers that sit overtop them to bring people into self awareness and reflection, drawing people's attention outward towards the world and inward towards their own thoughts and feelings. Part of our check-ins throughout the process will be a chance to get clear on the deeper themes in your work and how The Ranger should talk about what your story aims to do.

INVITE THE LISTENER TO "JUST BE"

As stated above, one major goal of STORY TRAILS is to get people tuned into the world around them in a deeper way. A walk with your story is a chance to suspend the everyday experience the listener has come from, step into a new time/place and be present with it. We hope that by literally walking a mile (or two) in another's shoes, people will begin think more expansively, move away from pre-judging what they encounter, and develop curiosity about what other perspectives exist.

The Ranger will underscore this idea throughout the app experience, particularly by referring to themselves as a plural entity and by employing a verb tense that uses the "habitual be." The habitual be indicates a state of continuous existence, an ongoing relationship or habit. [Here's a link](), if you've never encountered this term before, but perhaps more helpfully, here's an example of some writing Katonya Mosely (who will voice The Ranger) has created:

> *You're a novice in the game, and that's perfect. We be reminding you all the time, but you don't hear us, though.*
>
> *You can't hear us when you're an expert, like usual. You can hear us when you're brand new, like now. So stay new, fool! It looks good on you.*
>
> *We be reminding you that you be, too. You be. Full stop.*

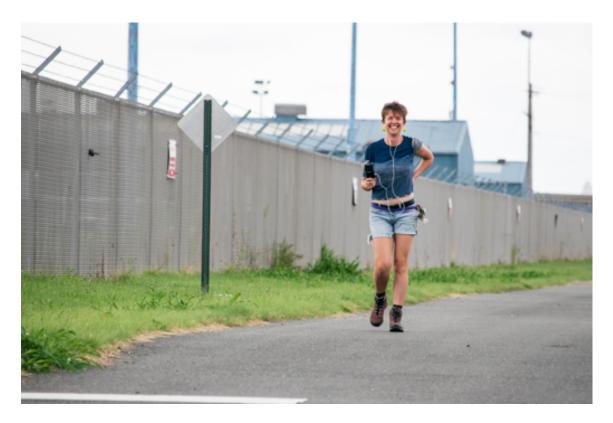*Take Krispy Kremes. The donuts themselves.*

They be.

They be the stars of bakery stores. Displayed and conveyed throughout their formation. They be mixed. They be kneaded. They be shaped and raised, and dipped and fried and glazed. They be important to a lot of people, but they haven't done anything.

We recognize you've done some things to get here today. And we remember also that you be.

Today, you the donut. That's your mantra, fool. You. The. Donut. Skip the verb while noticing your conveyance.

Your job to-day is to be.

While we know you might not use this particular language choice in your own work, we invite you to consider the ways your story also invites the user to step out of themselves and into "being" in new ways.

A FEW LAST TECHNICAL NOTES

If you've ever looked at a map app, you've likely seen a dot indicating your position. You may also have noticed a bubble that grows or shrinks around that dot. This circle represents the precision with which your phone calculates location, the margin of error in pinpointing where you are. If it's overcast outside, if you're indoors, or under tree cover (all of which decrease accuracy), notice that the circle grows, meaning it can't as confidently predict your location. Many factors will impact our app's user position accuracy and we'll need to create choices that are reliably consistent when used "in the wild." A term we've coined internally is NARRATIVE GATE. These Gates will be the virtual doors that usher users from one chunk of story to the next. Users will not be able to go backwards once a gate is unlocked, ensuring stories always progress forward. The residency period will give us time to work with you on linking narrative gates to the spaces they take should place in, making sure they are triggered correctly and regardless of external conditions. Below are a few considerations about how to anchor your narrative to your trail.

Size/distance of gate triggers. GPS can dependably predict the difference in positions a few hundred feet apart, but can't as easily differentiate between just a few feet. In other words, commenting on a particular rock or bench might be difficult. A bridge in the distance is much more reliable.

Timing of trigger points. If you think about that uncertainty circle described above, the triggering of a gate may be impacted by when the phone registers the user. In other words, to avoid someone having passed the spot you want them to notice, we may place gates earlier on the trail to make room for error.

Orienting the listener. A short description of what's around them helps align people with where you want them to be. It also might be helpful to note places with high densities of foot and bike traffic so they aren't run over by other trail users. This has the bonus of getting them to feel that magic sensation that we know where they are, especially at the beginning of the experience.

The shape of your trail. If you plan to create a story that utilizes a trail in a shape other than a straight line, we want to decide this early. It IS possible for stories to have more than one start point, read differently forward and backwards, fork at specific points in a road or adjust in some other way to the shape of a trail, but these should be choices made as early as possible in the process so we can be sure they are capable within the app's code.

The 10 Trail Progression with The Ranger

In the STORY TRAILS Info Packet that came with your application, we mentioned that to frame the entire app experience we've come up with a character called The Ranger who acts as a guide for the overall journey through the stories. The Ranger's voice is meant to invite the listener into the curious and playful feeling of connection when out on the trails. The Ranger's progression makes explicit the underlying aims of the project and marks an accumulation for the user who undertakes multiple trails.

Note that because the order of stories will be up to the user, your story might be preceded by any one of these short introductions.

	Theme
0. BEGIN	This tutorial "walk" is done before the user undertakes their first trail. It can be done indoors sitting or while one is out moving in the world. In this audio The Ranger introduces themselves as a mythic character who has curated the experience contained in the app. They set out general aims: to slow down, to make room for other perspectives, to notice the space one is in, and to invite in new experience, all as a way to connect back to something "you know but don't remember."
1. (JUST) BE	In this walk The Ranger invites the user to spend this story like a Krispy Kreme Donut on a conveyer belt. Life is filled with stuff to do, things happening all around, but for the next few miles, all that responsibility is on hold and the user gets to just experience and be. "You the donut."
2. FEEL	In the second walk, The Ranger praises the user for returning and challenges them to dive into feeling. Whether it's noticing the pounding of one's feet on the ground or the flinch of fear a place provokes, this walk's aim is to open up to the sensorial and empathic capacity we all have, to literally feel what it's like to walk a mile in another's shoes.
3. SEE	The third walk invites the user to observe. As with the previous walk, this is both literal and metaphoric sight, a frame that offers a chance to take in the physical space or description of a character before having to create judgment or opinion. "You don't have to decide about it."
4. HEAR	This walk invites the user to notice where stories carry dissonance (sonic and philosophical) and to resist the impulse to escape that discord. The Ranger frames dissonance as a useful friction, a way to clearly feel oneself in relation to something else. "D'is walk is a diswalk. A chance to feel that heat without deciding, conquering, resolving, correcting or even understanding why it's there."

5. MIRROR	Calling back to discoveries of the fourth walk, The Ranger now asks the listener to notice themselves as imperfect mirrors of the stories they hear. The aim is to get curious about where they "resonate" and "dissonate" with what they hear and what they see around them. To ask if they see themselves mirrored in this landscape and to explore "how you be how you are" in relation to it.
6. RELATE	In this walk The Ranger calls on the listener to imagine themselves in terms of relationships to people, history and place. Seen and unseen, these tiny ships of relation are constantly sailing back and forth between the user and the world. With this story Ranger invites the listener to imagine these threads connecting to everything: "You feel loyal to some things. That's cool, that's fine. You still in relation to them all."
7. EXPAND	Building on the previous walk, The Ranger now asks the user to think about the impact their actions have on the peoples, spaces, and stories around them. The user begins this story imagining themselves like a GPS dot but with a range of influence expanding around them, no longer just a single point but a force that makes visible all the impacts they carry with them all the time.
8. ENJOY	The Ranger begins this walk with kudos for the user. "This has been a lot!" The user is "off the hook" in what is required for this story. This walk is a recess, no work required, until the very end of the trip when The Ranger reveals that the user is now enlisted to become a guide in their own right – a mission(ary) to others about everything they've learned.
9. GO ON	In this walk The Ranger acknowledges the desire for completion but reminds the listener that the larger journey of what they've gained will go on far after this experience is done. At the end of this introduction The Ranger's voice will begin to shift indicating that they are transforming and readying to leave.
10. BE	For this final walk, The Ranger subverts the expectation of the user and does not appear before the story begins. The aim is to demonstrate that the user has now become their own guide through the world, has mastered The Ranger's teachings and will now continue the journey on their own. At the end of the story, the user will get one final goodbye, "And that's how we be."

Inspirational Sources To Check Out

Here is a list of research and creative inspiration sources we gathered throughout the project. Those by collaborators on the project are specially marked with an asterisk.

INSPIRATIONS IN NARRATIVE DELIVERY OR FORM
- [Zombies, Run!](#)
- [The Stanley Parable](#)
- [Griot](#) storytelling traditions
- [Ambient Literature](#)
- [Gone Home](#)
- [Summer of Darkness](#) by Digital Scenographic*
- [The End](#) by Swim Pony*

INTERACTIVE SOUND ART
- [Etiquette](#) by Rotozaza
- [Remote X](#) by Rimini Protokoll
- [The Encounter](#) by Theatre Complicite
- The work of [Janet Cardiff](#)
- [A Machine To See With](#) by Blast Theory
- Michael Kiley's [app-based sound walks](#)*

PLACE-BASED ART, PRACTICE & PHILOSOPHY
- [Invisible 5](#)
- Rebecca Solnit's [A Field Guide To Getting Lost](#)
- [Out Stories](#)
- [Forest Bathing](#)
- [Soundtrails](#)
- [Slow TV](#)
- [Transmission](#)* by Toasterlab
- [Walk Around Philadelphia](#)* by Swim Pony Performing Arts

Writing Parameters For Your Story

Given everything shared above, we've come up with some useful limitations that we think all stories should work within to create the most cohesive experience across the entire app. If you have any questions or concerns about what you see below, please feel free to drop us a line at admin@swimpony.org to chat further about why we've made these proposals or if there's any wiggle room for an idea you want to try.

- Unless agreed upon, you will choose a roughly 1.5 – 2.5 mile section of trail, walkable by an average paced person in around 45 – 60 minutes

- Text for your story should take up around 50% of the total time a user is walking, in other words spoken narrative will be about 25 – 30 minutes and other sound (including music, ambient noise inspired by trails, "B roll" soundscape, etc) will fill the rest of the time.

- Your story should be in active relationship to the trail. For this project we define that to mean a story that feels incomplete when heard without being in the space it is intended for. (For example, listening to an audiobook of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* while walking a trail might have an interesting impact on the experience of the story, but the story is not in an active relationship to the space.)

- Because we want to create a cohesive experience across all ten trails, the music that underscores your work will be composed by our sound designer and share elements across all works in the app. However, when you have impulses about what kind of music you imagine, feel free to suggest this in the "stage directions" within your script. Or, if you don't have particular music in mind but have a strong sense of how the music should make the listener feel you can indicate this.

- The same rule above goes for ambient sounds within the story and background noise that fills out the drama of your world. Imagine the sounds from "B roll" shots in movies – a character riding in a car and hearing car horns or people talking on the radio.

- When you want story to sync with specific spots on the trail, you should indicate this on a visual map of your path. Remember the limitations of GPS discussed earlier, and so having several meters in range around that

point is necessary. Think about whether a landmark is better observed before the user hears about it in a story or if it's helpful for them to realized the story is referring to something they've already seen.

- Try not refer to the listener directly as themselves (aka the person with a phone app who drove to this trail today). Please feel free to cast them from a viewpoint that they will be able to step in and out of or use second person perspective for a "You" that is defined in the story.

- Note if there are potential moments where stopping and starting could be suggested to the user.

- Note if there is any other data the phone might have access to (weather, time of day) where you might want the story to sync with the user experience.