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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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