

The Exodus Road's Style Guide

Vision Statement

A world in which humans are never bought, sold, or exploited.

Mission Statement

We disrupt the darkness of modern-day slavery by partnering with law enforcement to fight human trafficking crime, equipping communities to protect the vulnerable, and empowering survivors as they walk into freedom.

Voice and Tone

The Exodus Road's voice is:

- **Expert:** We are experts and thought leaders in the field of human trafficking intervention.
- **Collaborative:** We believe in the power and importance of collaboration between organizations and individuals to fight human trafficking.
- **Compassionate:** We seek to foster compassion for the exploited and an understanding of the cycles of poverty, abuse, and exploitation that lead to human trafficking.
- **Respectful:** Whether creating content about disparate views on contentious topics or on the complicated cycle of exploitation, we will maintain a respectful, non-dismissive tone.
- **Hopeful:** While human trafficking is among the most serious of topics, we know individuals can take action to create a positive impact. Our brand voice emboldens people with that hope.

The Exodus Road's tone will vary by context, audience, medium, and platform as appropriate, while always upholding our brand voice. Sometimes, given the realities of human trafficking, our tone will be sober, for example in a video on forced child marriage. Other times, our tone will shift to celebratory, allowing people to experience the joy of a successful intervention. Sometimes our tone will be aspirational, for example, when writing about extraordinary abolitionists. Occasionally, on particular social media platforms, we will use light-hearted content to give people a moment of uplift.

We want individuals to join a long-term and sustainable journey towards advocacy, so we embrace both the highs and lows of that journey.

Guiding Principle

We are survivor-centric. We aspire to start with the survivor at the center of our approach to any piece of content. We will not create content that re-exploits the survivor by sensationalizing

their experience. We seek to present authentic, respectful, and honest portrayals of the experiences of exploited people in order to move people towards action.

Style

Ages: When referring to survivors, here are the recommended terms by age. This can vary by context. Generally, specific language is the most impactful: *“A 14-year-old girl.”*

- **Children:** Can be used in general descriptions of minors who are trafficked. In the case of individual survivors, “child” might be a misleading term if 13 or older, even if describing a legal minor; consider using “teen,” “adolescent,” or “girl/boy.”
Examples: “An 11-year-old child was rescued!” “A 13-year-old girl has been rescued.” “Children in extreme poverty are often the targets of human trafficking.”
- **Adolescent/Youth:** While “adolescent” technically refers to all teenagers, this might be a helpful term to use to describe 13- and 14-year-olds who are still quite young. “Youth” can also be used when a survivor is a younger teenager.
Examples: “Two adolescents have been rescued in Brazil.”
- **Girl or Boy:** 18 and younger
- **Teenager:** 13 to 19; referring to an 18- or 19-year-old as a teenager rather than a “woman” or “man,” can reinforce the youth of the survivors, even if they are legally adults. If writing about a 13- or 14-year-old, consider using the term “adolescent,” “youth,” “girl,” or “boy.”
- **Young Woman/Man:** 20+; including “young” can again reinforce the youth of those trafficked, as they are generally in their early twenties.

Capitalization:

- Use “up-style” in headings and titles, capitalizing first and last words, and all other words with the exception of articles, conjunctions, and prepositions of fewer than four letters.
- When headings/titles are complete sentences, use “down-style,” only capitalizing the first word and proper nouns.

Spelling & Hyphenation: Please refer to the [Merriam-Webster online dictionary](#) for spelling and hyphenation, using the first usage listed.

Commas: Use the serial comma in lists, adding a comma before the final item in a series.

Example: “The Exodus Road’s programs focus on three areas: prevention, intervention, and aftercare.”

Dashes/hyphens:

- **Em dash (—):** Used to communicate a change or break in the structure of a sentence. Add a space before and after an em dash. *Example: “Human trafficking — or modern-day slavery — impacts more than 40 million people around the world.”*
- **En dash (–):** Used to signify a span in numbers, dates, and time. *Example: “8:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.”*
- **Hyphen (-):** Used to combine words. *Example: “Modern-day slavery.”*

Numbers: Spell out numbers one through nine, and use numerals for 10 and above. Exception: For headlines, graphics, or as a style element, use numerals when it helps grab attention.

Examples:

- Headline: “3 girls and 10 women freed!”
- Body copy: “In The Exodus Road’s latest rescue in Thailand, three girls and 10 women were freed.”
- List Title: “8 Trustworthy Human Trafficking Nonprofits”

Place Name Abbreviations: When used in body copy, spell out place names, rather than using abbreviations. (Exception: It’s acceptable to use U.S. or United States.) In other settings, such as invitations, use two-letter state abbreviations; use other place abbreviations only as they would be easily recognizable in the given context.

Pseudonyms: We will use pseudonyms to refer to survivors, investigators, and traffickers in the operations that we report. After the first use of a pseudonym, include an asterisk. At the end of the piece, include a phrase such as “Pseudonym used for the privacy and security of the individuals.” or “Representative name and imagery used” (when imagery is used).

Said: In quotations, use “said” rather than “says.”

Example: *“Cellebrite’s solutions have long been mission-critical in digital investigations,” said Laura Parker, CEO of The Exodus Road.*

Facts and Statistics

When referring to statistics related to human trafficking, always include your source and use data from internationally recognized, reputable organizations, such as [The U.S. Department of State](#) and [United Nations](#).

For a collection of statistics on human trafficking The Exodus Road uses, see: [Quick Facts and Stats About Human Trafficking](#).

Glossary

Please refer to the glossary for capitalization, hyphenation, and usage for common terms. For terms related to human trafficking, The Exodus Road follows general definitions outlined by [the United Nations](#). Also see: [What are the different types of human trafficking](#).

aftercare (no hyphen)

aftercare workers

analyst: This term can be used for TER investigators in sensitive contexts in which we need to be careful about communicating The Exodus Road’s involvement in particular cases.

Beyond Rescue: Utilizing a trauma-informed approach and working in collaboration with other NGO partners, our Beyond Rescue program serves survivors and the exploited where we work.

Co-founder: Capitalize ‘C’ and lowercase ‘f’ when used as a title in conjunction with a name; lowercase when referring to the position in general. *Example: “Laura Parker, CEO and Co-founder.” “When our co-founders lived in Thailand, they learned firsthand about the realities of human trafficking.”*

DELTA: The Exodus Road’s team of trained and vetted volunteer investigators. Depending on context, you may choose to use the name “DELTA” or simply call them “The Exodus Road’s volunteer investigators.”

evidence: Use to refer to the target packages that national teams deliver to law enforcement.

firsthand (no hyphen)

Freedom Home

justice in the hands of the ordinary: a phrase we sometimes use to emphasize that everyone can take part in creating a free world; do not use in the context of major donors, influencers, or partners.

International Program

investigators: Our trained national staff and DELTA volunteers who gather evidence of human trafficking and facilitate rescue missions with local police. Refer to our international staff and volunteers, as “investigators,” which is the clearest and easiest to understand, rather than “operative” or “VCIO.”

like-minded (hyphenated)

national: Use to refer to TER’s teams outside of the U.S. Avoid the use of terms like “our field teams,” which is U.S.-centric. *Example: “Our national investigators build relationships with local law enforcement.”*

modern-day slavery: hyphenated; a term we use interchangeably with “human trafficking.”

OK

operation: Use to describe individual cases of human trafficking that TER’s teams are investigating. Each case resulting in a rescue or arrest is given an operation name by Marketing, used in external communications.

partner(ship): Only use in reference to specific law enforcement and non-profit organizations when we are in a formal partnership relationship. Otherwise, use language such as, “collaborate,” “work with,” or “support.”

raid: An operation in which TER’s teams collaborate with law enforcement to remove survivors from situations of trafficking.

rescue (noun): A “rescue” is a “targeted intervention.” However, since “targeted intervention” is uncommon and not understood by the general public, we use the word “rescue” to describe our work with police and its impact on survivors. When we use the word “rescue,” we are speaking of deliverance from a situation of “force, abduction, fraud, or coercion” — qualifying conditions for human trafficking as defined by the United Nations. This can include cases involving restricted movement, trafficking across borders, underage sex work, debt bondage, labor trafficking, or pedophilia. The Exodus Road only works on such cases under the authority of and in collaboration with local police, and only in a support-based role. When we cite a rescue, we are referencing cases in which The Exodus Road had a significant role or impact through supplying investigative support, key evidence, critical technology, or substantial funding resources. See also “rescue (verb)” in “Words to Avoid or to Be Used Sparingly in Public, Donor-Facing Communications.”

Rescue Alerts: Email and text notifications of TER's successful operations.

Search + Rescue: This refers to both our monthly giving program and our intervention model in International Program.

International Program Model: We train local operatives, identify victims, build effective cases, utilize technology and covert gear, and support law enforcement to free survivors and arrest traffickers.

Monthly Giving Program: Sons and daughters will be bought, sold, abused, and enslaved tonight. Your monthly subscription to Search + Rescue deploys operatives, law enforcement, and aftercare workers to rescue survivors.

Search + Rescue Exclusive: A monthly email to our recurring donor program
social workers

survivor: We will refer to people who have been removed from exploitation as "survivors," rather than "victims" in order to uphold their dignity and agency, rather than emphasizing their helplessness. See "victim" for exceptions to this terminology.

target package: The package of evidence delivered to law enforcement by The Exodus Road's investigators. In most uses, "evidence" is clearer, but this term can be used occasionally where appropriate in in-depth explanations of The Exodus Road's work.

TER: Abbreviation for The Exodus Road. Use sparingly, for example in long texts in which the full name becomes cumbersome. If using the abbreviation, always spell out on the first reference and follow with the parenthetical of the abbreviation: "The Exodus Road (TER)." In articles in which "The Exodus Road" is part of a keyword, spell out for SEO purposes.

The Exodus Road: Do not drop "The." Always capitalize "The."

TraffickWatch Academy: Our TraffickWatch training program equips national police, NGO practitioners, students, and local communities with quality counter-trafficking content.

trauma-informed

U.S. office (formerly referred to as HQ)

To come: Our titles for the 3 international programs (Intervention, Prevention, Aftercare)

Words to Avoid or to Be Used Sparingly in Public, Donor-Facing Communications

ALPHA, BRAVO, CHARLIE, ECHO, FOXTROT: In donor-facing public communications, avoid the use of the national team names, as they are "in-speak," meaning they are not immediately clear to new readers; they also have a military connotation, which we would like to move away from. Instead use terms such as, "Our team in India" or "The Exodus Road's Thailand team," etc. These names will continue to be used in internal communications. We will not make this change retroactively to previously published content.

chains/chained: Even metaphorically suggesting that someone impacted by trafficking is "chained" can unintentionally perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

child pornography: Current understanding in the field states that there is no such thing as child pornography, only "child sexual abuse material" or "online sexual exploitation of children."

child prostitute: See above.

client: Avoid referring to survivors who receive benefits from Freedom Home as clients.

“have sex with”: When describing sex trafficking, use phrases that appropriately label the act as abuse, such as “Customers pay to sexually abuse children,” rather than, “Customers pay to have sex with children.”

military jargon: In donor-facing public communications, avoid the use of military jargon, which can be in-speak, less clear, and less compelling to a general audience. In one-to-one donor communications in which this language is appropriate and compelling, it can be used.

operative: Generally, use “investigator,” which is clearer and avoids a military connotation.

prostitute (when referring to any individual who has been trafficked): If an individual has been trafficked, “forced prostitution” is the accurate way to describe their experience. Giving them the title “prostitute” carries the connotation of choice.

rescue (verb): In the case of using “rescue” as a verb (“Women need to be rescued”), use sparingly in contexts in which this verbiage could be seen as condescending or as removing agency from survivors. Other potential words to use could be “freed,” “removed from the cycle of exploitation,” and “liberated.” Also see “rescue (noun).”

save: Saying that operatives or law enforcement “saved” a survivor is generally seen as disempowering language.

victim: Whenever possible, use “survivor” rather than “victim” in order to avoid defining a person based on the worst things done to them rather than the courageous things that they have done themselves. “Victim” is most appropriate when referring to underage individuals currently in an active trafficking situation or in order to emphasize that an individual is the victim of a crime, rather than a criminal. It should never be used when referring to adult survivors in the United States.