Crafting Anti-Racist Narratives for Community Development

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A toolkit to analyze dominant narratives and develop anti-racist narrative strategies in community development.

The toolkit utilizes tools designed by Storytellers for Change, aiming to guide users through a five-step process to analyze dominant narratives in community development and devise anti-racist narrative strategies.

ThirdSpace Action Lab, a grassroots solution studio dedicated to prototyping innovative, place-based solutions for socio-economic problems impacting communities of color, collaborated with Storytellers for Change, an organization focused on using narrative and participatory engagement to build an equitable world, to develop this toolkit.

Dominant narratives in community development play a significant role in shaping policies, funding decisions, and resource allocation. To create and implement equitable and anti-racist community development practices, it is essential to critically analyze and challenge these narratives by identifying and deconstructing their underlying biases, assumptions, and stereotypes. By actively engaging in developing anti-racist narrative strategies, community development practitioners can reshape the discourse around racial equity, amplify community-driven efforts that exemplify anti-racist community development practices, and dismantle structures that perpetuate racism.

Land Acknowledgement

A just storytelling journey starts with acknowledgment.

We acknowledge the creation of this toolkit unfolded in the traditional home of the Coast Salish people, the traditional home of all tribes and bands within the Duwamish, Suquamish, Tulalip, and Muckleshoot nations. We thank this land's original stewards and storytellers who are still here. We invite you to acknowledge the land and Indigenous Peoples where you live. Our collective responsibility is to raise the visibility of Indigenous communities and, in this process, heal our stories and memories.

Learn More + Take Action

- **Native Land –** This website, designed by Native Land Digital, allows you to enter any address and find territory acknowledgment information.
- **What is a Land Acknowledgment? –** This toolkit, created by meztli project, provides an overview of land acknowledgments and offers resources and calls to action for event organizers.
- **#HonorNativeLand Guide –** This guide, created by USDAC, offers various resources, artwork, and calls to action to honor Native land and support Indigenous-led movements.
- **Beyond Land Acknowledgement: A Guide –** Crafted by the Native Governance Center, this guide offers concrete steps to create an action plan highlighting how organizations can plan to support Indigenous communities.

Introduction

Since time immemorial, storytelling has been how humans create meaning and weave our cultural fabric. Narrative shapes our policies, institutions, and cultural norms. This is why any intentional effort to advance explicitly anti-racist approaches in community development must include a strategic approach to narrative.

We created this toolkit for community development practitioners, consultants, communication professionals, and changemakers to engage in a five-step process to analyze dominant narratives in community development and develop anti-racist narrative strategies.

Dominant narratives in community development play a significant role in shaping policies, funding decisions, and resource allocation. To create and implement equitable and anti-racist community development practices, it is essential to critically analyze and challenge these narratives by identifying and deconstructing their underlying biases, assumptions, and stereotypes. By actively engaging in developing anti-racist narrative strategies, community development practitioners can reshape the discourse around racial equity, amplify community-driven efforts that exemplify anti-racist community development practices, and dismantle structures that perpetuate racism.

At Storytellers for Change, we conceptualize narrative strategy as the process of imagining, crafting, and sharing stories to reinforce and amplify equity-centered narratives. This toolkit will guide you through this process to help you identify storytelling principles to center equity and anti-racist practices, analyze dominant narratives in community development, develop your narrative goals, and craft an implementation and evaluation plan for your narrative strategy.

Lastly, we invite you to embrace this learning journey as one not bound by a linear path but rather one that flows cyclically. One of the most critical outcomes of engaging in narrative work is the learning that unfolds when we reflect critically on our connections to the stories we seek to counter, impact, or amplify. After all, narrative change starts within each one of us.

Thank you for joining us. Thank you for learning with us along this journey. Thank you for your commitment to co-build an equitable and just world.

How to Navigate the Toolkit

The toolkit is divided into five sections: Reflect, Unpack, Envision, Implement, and Evaluate. Each section introduces storytelling resources, frameworks, activities, and worksheets to guide you through the steps below. In addition, worksheets include recommendations for concrete action steps individuals and organizations can take.

STEP 1: REFLECT

Your journey starts by introducing core principles of equity-centered storytelling, emphasizing anti-racist storytelling, asset-based framing, critical hope, healing, and radical imagination, which lay the foundation for crafting a narrative strategy.

STEP 2: UNPACK

Then, you'll critically examine the dominant narrative ecosystem impacting the community development sector. Understanding how these narratives impact our communities and organizations will help you to devise counter-narratives to advance equity and racial justice.

STEP 3: ENVISION

In the next step, you'll envision alternative narratives that challenge dominant narratives, rooted in equity-centered storytelling and uplifting community-driven efforts exemplifying anti-racist practices in community development.

STEP 4: IMPLEMENT

Now, you'll set specific objectives for your narrative project, map your audiences, and determine what channels and approaches you can use to amplify stories effectively.

STEP 5: EVALUATE

The final step involves ongoing evaluation, critical reflection, and learning, allowing you to assess the impact of your narrative strategy, refine your approach, and reflect on your learning.

Terms & Definitions

The following terms and definitions are offered to cultivate a shared vocabulary amongst narrative practitioners in community development. However, it is vital to recognize that these definitions pertain to concepts that undergo continuous evolution, which requires our persistent examination of the dynamic interplay between language and culture.

STORIES have a beginning, middle, and end. Stories contain a plot or story arc, a setting (time and place, context), characters, and a moral (Ganz, 2010).

SINGLE STORIES are a one-sided point of view of something or someone. Single stories have the power to tell false interpretations of the actual story (Adichie, 2014).

NARRATIVES are patterns of stories that are held by individuals or groups and contain beliefs about the way the world works. They can be harmful, beneficial, or both (Manne et al., 2022).

DOMINANT NARRATIVES are stories serving the interests and ideologies of the dominant social group. These tales, prevalent and privileged in mainstream institutions, shape racial dynamics to support the status quo (Bell, 2010).

COUNTER NARRATIVES refers to the narratives that arise from the vantage point of those who have been historically marginalized. The idea of "counter-storytelling" itself implies a space of resistance against traditional domination (Delgado, 1989).

TRANSFORMING STORIES are newly imagined and crafted narratives that challenge dominant narratives, amplify systematically marginalized and resistance stories, and catalyze action against racism and social injustice (Bell, 2010).

EQUITY-CENTERED STORYTELLING is a critically reflective and intersectional practice that involves analyzing, imagining, co-crafting, and sharing stories and narratives to eliminate racial hierarchies and advance collective healing and liberation (Ortega, 2021).

NARRATIVE STRATEGY is sharing connected stories to forge, spread, and reinforce beneficial narratives and counter harmful ones. These stories must be aligned to have a cumulative impact. And to be effective, they must take us on a journey from where we are today to a better future, revealing a new way the world can and should work (Manne et al., 2022).

Terms & Definitions

NARRATIVE CHANGE is a change in the narratives circulating within public discourse: either in the set of narratives in circulation (i.e., which narratives are used), their relative prevalence (i.e., which narratives are used more or less frequently), or both (FrameWorks, 2021).

AUDIENCES are a group of listeners or spectators, groups we consider to be fundamentally critical to our narrative change work. We seek to engage them to achieve the narrative change we envision. Audiences can include supportive groups (core audiences), groups that are beginning or almost ready to support you (emergent audiences), and groups you want to reach (stretch audiences).

COMMUNITIES are groups with shared places, values, or cultural characteristics. We seek to center communities' experiences, knowledge, and agency to ensure our narrative change work is equitable. Communities and audiences can overlap; however, as we map these groups, we must pay close attention to power dynamics and the local historical context of each community.

COLOR-BLIND NARRATIVES are collections of stories founded on the belief that racism is no longer a problem and that we all have equal opportunities. Sociologist Bonilla-Silva (2003) references four narrative frames that support color-blind racism: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization.

ABSTRACT LIBERALISM involves using ideas associated with political liberalism (e.g., "equal opportunity," the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy) and economic liberalism (e.g., choice, individualism) in an abstract manner to explain racial matters (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

NATURALIZATION is a frame that allows the white dominant culture to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences (Kendi, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

CULTURAL RACISM is a frame that relies on culturally based arguments and stereotypes to create "Single Stories," one-sided views of racialized communities that flatten their identity and reduce their lived experiences to overplayed racist tropes (Adichie, 2009; Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

MINIMIZATION of racism is a frame that suggests discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting BIPOC communities' life chances ("It's better now than in the past" or "There is discrimination, but there are plenty of jobs out there") (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

Narrative Strategy Toolkit

Reflect

Principles for Equity-Centered Storytelling

OBJECTIVE

- Reflect on the core principles of Equity-Centered Storytelling and consider how they can help you to develop an anti-racist narrative strategy.

OVERVIEW

Our journey starts with reflecting on our principles. The Latin roots of the word principle are *principium* and *principalis,* which mean "source" and "first." Consider these definitions as an invitation and reminder that whenever we engage in narrative work, we need to go to the source first. In other words, by reflecting on what influences and shapes the origins of the stories we tell, we can become more critical crafters and receivers of narratives. So consider the following questions: What is the source of the stories and narratives shaping community development? What informs how you approach storytelling in your field? What values are represented in how we engage with the narratives of the communities impacted by your work?

In this activity, you'll reflect on these questions by reviewing the core principles of equity-centered storytelling. These principles emphasize the importance of anti-racist storytelling, asset-based narratives, critical hope, healing, and radical imagination. By reflecting on these principles, you can start laying the foundation for the reflective work required when crafting a narrative strategy.

A note about embracing "not knowing" an answer: Throughout this toolkit, we'll invite you to reflect on various questions. Traditional schooling in Western culture often centers on the belief that we must possess a definitive "answer" for every question. Within mainstream educational and learning settings, having the precise "right answer" is highly regarded as a sign of intelligence. Nonetheless, this approach to learning and inquiry can be problematic. As you approach the exercises and questions in this toolkit, embrace what you are familiar with as much as what is unknown to you as an opportunity for introspection and collective learning. Declaring "I don't know" in response to any of the questions in this toolkit can become powerfully revealing as long as we continue searching for understanding with curiosity and humility.

Reflect

STEP 1: Read

Read the definition of equity-centered storytelling and the following article, *__Principles for Equity-Centered Storytelling: Engaging in Critical Reflection to Transform and Heal Our Narratives.__*

When reviewing this article, focus on the section outlining equity-centered storytelling principles. Underline or highlight any passages that resonate with you, and keep track of any questions you may have.

STEP 2: Reflect

After reading the article, spend at least ten minutes reflecting on the following questions:
- What if any principles resonate with you? Why?
- What if any principles generate tension for you? Why?
- How can you implement these principles within your work?
- Are there other principles that influence or shape how you approach community development? Why are these principles important to you?

STEP 3: Share

On your own: Write a reflection about what these principles mean to you. In your reflection, you can:
- Share why you want to craft an anti-racist narrative strategy.
- Articulate your opinion about what engaging in equity-centered storytelling means to you.
- Share any resonances or tensions with these principles.

With your team: After taking time for individual reflection, you can take turns sharing your thoughts as a team.
- You can also use Worksheet 01 on page 13 to identify ideas or concrete commitments for how your team can practice the equity-centered storytelling principles.

Reflect

01 - Your Principles

PRINCIPLES

What principles resonate with you? Why?

IMPLEMENTATION + ACTION STEPS

How will you implement these principles within your narrative strategy? What concrete actions can you take to ensure you are embedding these principles across your work?

ADDITIONAL PRINCIPLES

In addition to the equity-centered storytelling principles, are there any additional values or principles that you want to articulate?

Unpack

Dominant Narratives in Community Development

OBJECTIVE

- Critically deconstruct eleven dominant narratives in community development, closely examining biases and stereotypes that uphold inequity. This process will provide you with a deeper understanding of their far-reaching implications.

OVERVIEW

There's a growing consensus that prevailing narratives within the community development sector often reinforce notions of community deficit, scarcity, and risk, disproportionately affecting communities of color. These narratives, unfortunately, contribute to shaping practices that perpetuate the very challenges the sector aims to alleviate. The report, *__Toward An Anti-Racist Paradigm in Community Development: High-Level Research Findings,__* created by ThirdSpace Action Lab and commissioned by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, identified eleven such narratives (Appendix 1). In this activity, you'll explore and unpack these eleven narratives. Exploring these narratives' historical context and implications is necessary to devise counter-narratives to advance equity and racial justice.

STEP 1: Read

Go to Appendix 1 on page 33 to read the eleven dominant narratives identified in the report, *Toward An Anti-Racist Paradigm in Community Development.*

STEP 2: Reflect

Choose one or two of the dominant narratives, and then spend at least ten minutes reflecting on the following questions:
- What first comes to mind when you consider these dominant narratives?
- In your experience, how do these narratives show up in the community development field?
- What stories, messages, or policies reinforce this dominant narrative?
- What do you want to explore further to understand the role of these narratives in shaping the community development field?

Unpack

STEP 3: Share

On your own: Write a reflection about what these dominant narratives mean to you. In your reflection, you can:

- Write about what countering these dominant narratives means to you.
- Share any resonances or tensions with these narratives.
- Explore additional experiences or connections you have to these narratives.

With your team: After taking time for individual reflection, as a team, you can take turns sharing your thoughts on the questions in step 2.

- You can also use Worksheet 02 on page 16 to map out how these narratives appear within your context.
- **NOTE:** As you review the 11 dominant narratives in Appendix 1, you can choose which dominant narratives you want to map. Some of these narratives may be more relevant to your context than others.
- After completing the mapping exercise, please take a moment to reflect on what it means to acknowledge the impact of these narratives.

Questions for Further Inquiry:

- **Individual -** How have these narratives impacted your own lived experience? Can you recall specific moments or events where these narratives were pivotal in your decision-making?
- **Relational -** How have these narratives impacted how you relate with others? Within your family? Within your community? Within your work? With neighbors?
- **Organizational -** How have these narratives impacted, guided, constrained, or supported the work of your organization? How do these narratives manifest in your organization's day-to-day operations and priorities?
- **Systemic -** What are examples of how these narratives have shaped the culture of the systems you operate within? What are these narratives' legacy and current impact on community development? How have these narratives influenced the power dynamics within the systems in which you operate?

Unpack

02 - Mapping Dominant Narratives

DOMINANT NARRATIVE
What dominant narrative are you mapping? Why did you select this narrative?

MESSAGES
What messages reinforce this dominant narrative? What messages are communicated through this narrative?

STORIES
What stories reinforce this dominant narrative? What stories have you heard that use the logic of this dominant narrative?

POLICIES & PROGRAMS
What policies and programs are informed by or reinforce this dominant narrative?

QUESTIONS + INSIGHTS
What questions do you have about this narrative? What insights have you gained from completing this exercise?

Envision

Identify, Uplift, and Imagine Anti-Racist Narratives

OBJECTIVE

- Identify opportunities to create alternative narratives and uplift community-driven initiatives that exemplify anti-racist practices in community development.

OVERVIEW

Identifying and unpacking dominant narratives is critical, but more is needed. A narrative strategy will go beyond naming harmful stories and actively counter them by creating opportunities to imagine and amplify stories that embody a much-needed paradigm shift in community development. Consider what stories can move us from a scarcity mindset to an abundance mindset or from a colorblind to an explicitly anti-racist approach. Imagine stories to reinforce the importance of decision-making processes that are of, by, and for community residents. Amplify stories to reaffirm communities' cultural wealth and the value of resident-led journalism and storytelling traditions.

In this activity, you'll continue investigating narratives' role in either reproducing or challenging structural racism in community development. By exploring the power dynamics and interplay between dominant stories and counter-storytelling, you'll start to map the narrative ecosystem you seek to impact. This exercise will also uplift areas of opportunity to amplify community-driven stories that exemplify anti-racist storytelling and community development practices.

DIG DEEPER, GO FURTHER

The activities in this step leverage an adapted version of the Storytelling Project Model (Bell, 2010) to investigate the role that storytelling and narratives play in reproducing or challenging structural racism in community development. The Storytelling Project Model offers a practical framework for thinking about and acting on stories about racism and other forms of injustice. The framework also helps groups to connect historical and contemporary stories, identify opportunities for action, and build common ground to advance social justice work. Review Appendix 2 on page 36 to learn more about this framework.

Envision

STEP 1: Reflect

Spend at least ten minutes reflecting on the following questions:

- What stories (and histories), particularly those of communities of color, have been systematically undermined, concealed, or marginalized within your community context?
- What historical and contemporary examples of stories, movements, policies, or messages challenge the dominant narratives you discussed in the previous step? What are examples of these stories within your community context?
- What community-led emergent or transforming stories create opportunities for or foster anti-racist community development work within your community context? What are examples in other contexts or regions?

STEP 2: Share & Map

On your own: Write a brief reflection about what this exercise revealed for you. In your reflection, you can:

- Reflect on how concealed, resistance, and transforming stories can impact the community development field. See Appendix 2 on page 36 for definitions of concealed, resistance, and transforming stories.
- Address any additional questions, tensions, or resonances that emerged for you throughout the exercise.

With your team: After taking time for individual reflection, as a team, you can take turns sharing your thoughts on the questions in step 1.

- You can also use Worksheet 03 on page 19 to map these stories and identify opportunities to create alternative narratives and uplift community-driven stories.

Additional Resources:

- Culture Surge's ***The Storytellers Guide to Changing Our World 2.0*** contains many powerful examples of resistance and emergent stories.
- Culture Surge's ***Practical Tips for Impact Storytelling*** contains more examples of impact stories.

ENVISION

03 - Identify, Uplift, and Imagine Anti-Racist Narratives

DOMINANT NARRATIVE
What is the dominant narrative you want to counter?

CONCEALED STORIES
What are the "concealed stories" that are marginalized and suppressed by this dominant narrative?

RESISTANCE STORIES
What are examples of community-driven movements, projects, and other efforts to resist or counter this dominant narrative?

TRANSFORMING STORIES
What are examples of community-driven projects and other efforts to uplift concealed stories, recognize resistance stories, and advance anti-racism?

ANALYZE
What insights did you gain from completing this activity?

NEW NARRATIVE
What community counter-narratives can you uplift? What new narratives can you co-create?

Implement

Objectives, Audiences & Channels

OBJECTIVE

- Establish objectives for your narrative strategy, identify your audiences, and assess what mediums and channels you will use to communicate or amplify counter-narratives.

OVERVIEW

At Storytellers for Change, we conceptualize narrative strategy as imagining, crafting, and sharing stories to reinforce and amplify equity-centered narratives. To facilitate this process, this narrative strategy model (see Appendix 3 on page 37) guides groups through five essential areas of inquiry:

- **Objectives, Values, & Principles -** What impact objectives do you want to accomplish through your narrative strategy? Why? What values and principles will guide how you develop and implement your narrative strategy?
- **Communities & Audiences -** How will you center systematically impacted communities' voices, leadership, and agency in your narrative strategy? Who are the audiences you need to influence, persuade, or inspire to achieve your narrative strategy objectives?
- **Historical Context -** What is the historical context of the narratives you seek to shift, counter, affirm, or amplify? What historical context needs to be addressed and provided when implementing this narrative strategy?
- **Channels & Tactics -** What channels and approaches can you employ to share and amplify your narratives? What partnerships and collaborations can you leverage to implement your narrative strategy?
- **Racial Equity -** What are the specific racial equity frameworks that you need to embed across your narrative strategy work intentionally? How are these racial equity frameworks informed by the local history of community-driven efforts to foster equity, healing, and social justice?

By setting objectives, mapping your audiences, and identifying narrative channels and tactics, you can take tangible steps toward challenging dominant narratives and advancing anti-racist community development. The worksheets in the next pages will help you to create your narrative strategy.

Implement

04 - Objectives, Values & Principles

BIG-PICTURE GOAL

What is the big-picture goal of your narrative effort? Complete this sentence: "By stewarding this narrative strategy, we will...."

VALUES & PRINCIPLES

What values and principles will you center as you implement this narrative strategy? Return to STEP 1 and Worksheet 01 on page 8 to see your notes.

OBJECTIVES

What specific objectives do you want your narrative strategy to accomplish? Articulate one to three objectives. Be as specific as possible.

Implement

05 - Audience & Community Mapping

CORE AUDIENCE
Who is the main audience you need to engage to achieve your narrative goals? Why are you focused on this audience?

TRUST & INFLUENCE
What or who influences your audience? What or who do they trust? What media, art, or influencers do they engage with?

VALUES & PRIORITIES
What values and priorities shape how your audiences view the world? How do they articulate these values and priorities?

KNOWN & UNKNOWN
What does your audience already know about your narrative? What might be unknown to them (think about concealed stories)?

CALLS TO ACTION
What specific actions do you want your audience to take?

Implement

05 - Audience & Community Mapping (Cont.)

COMMUNITIES

Who are the communities that your narrative strategy and storytelling will impact, involve, and/or engage? How will you center systematically impacted communities' voices, leadership, and agency in your narrative strategy?

LISTENING

How are you listening to the stories and narratives of these communities?

VALUES & PRIORITIES

What are the values and priorities of these communities?

AMPLIFYING

In what ways can you uplift and amplify community-driven storytelling?

ACTIONS

What specific actions can you take to collaborate and support these communities' storytelling?

Implement

06 - Historical Context

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

What historical context needs to be addressed and provided when implementing your narrative strategy and in your storytelling?

POSITIONALITY

From what perspective are you approaching your narrative strategy and storytelling? What is the historical context and positionality of your organization? **NOTE:** An organization's positionality refers to its stance, perspective, and relationship to various social, cultural, and political contexts.

Implement

07 - Channels & Approaches

NARRATIVE PROJECT + OBJECTIVES

What is your narrative project? What are your objectives? Revisit Worksheet 04.

CHANNELS & TACTICS

Based on your insights from Worksheets 05 and 06, what are the best channels and approaches to reach your core audience and engage with your communities? Appendix 4 on page 38 contains additional examples of various narrative approaches.

Implement

07 - Channels & Tactics (Cont.)

ACTIVITIES

What specific activities and actions will take place? When and where will these actions take place? What resources will you need to implement these activities? Remember, your strategy can also include supporting and amplifying community-led narrative work.

AUDIENCE EXPERIENCE

How will your audience experience your narrative project? How will your narrative project move your audience? Be as descriptive as possible. You can also sketch the experience you are envisioning.

Implement

08 - Racial Equity Frameworks

COMMITMENT

How will this project reaffirm your commitment to racial equity, healing, and advancing anti-racism in community development?

NARRATIVE STEWARDSHIP

Who will be stewarding this project? How will you ensure you collaborate with your communities, especially communities of color, as you implement this project? How will your collaboration approaches center racial equity and healing?

ACCOUNTABILITY IN PRACTICE

What specific choice points or practices will you engage in to pay attention to racism and racial equity as you craft and implement your narrative strategy? We recommend reviewing Race Forward's ***Five Key Criteria for Identifying and Shortlisting Racial Equity Choice Points***, which is highlighted in their Creating Cultures and Practices for Racial Equity Toolbox.

Evaluate

Critical Reflection & Ongoing Learning

OBJECTIVE

- Assess your progress, identify critical insights, and reflect on your personal learning to refine and adapt your narrative strategy continuously.

OVERVIEW

The concluding step in this toolkit involves identifying concrete actions to evaluate your narrative strategy and create space for ongoing critical reflection and learning. In addition to tracking the progress of your narrative efforts, committing to prioritizing the need for reflective space will allow you to recognize lessons learned personal and collective growth, and foster a deeper understanding of the nuances of narrative change work.

In this activity, you'll identify milestones to help you assess the process and outcomes of your narrative work. Lastly, you'll also reflect on the key insights, challenges, and lessons learned that emerged for you throughout crafting and implementing your narrative strategy.

STEP 1: Individual Reflection

Spend at least ten minutes reflecting on at least two of the following questions:
- What were the most significant insights you gained while crafting and executing the narrative strategy?
- How did your engagement in narrative change work contribute to your personal growth, healing, and understanding of the importance of narrative transformation in community development?
- How did this process impact your perception of your role in shaping narratives?
- Were there any unexpected outcomes that deeply resonated with you?
- How did your individual experiences contribute to the broader narrative change efforts?
- How can you leverage your unique perspective to enhance future narrative strategies further?

Evaluate

STEP 2: Group Reflection & Milestones

Reflect on the following questions to determine the significant milestones you aimed to achieve through your narrative strategy. These milestones serve as markers of progress.

Before Implementing Your Narrative Strategy

You can use Worksheet 09 on page 30 to draft your evaluation plan.

- What key milestones do you want to reach as you implement your narrative strategy?
- Within what timeframe do you want to reach these milestones?
- How will you collaborate with community stakeholders and partners to evaluate your progress?
- How will your storytelling principles (review notes from STEP 1) inform how you approach your evaluation work?

While Implementing Your Narrative Strategy

Creating reflective space is crucial for individuals and organizations to engage in the necessary introspection and critical work that narrative change requires. Reflect on these questions, and use Worksheet 10 on page 31 to identify how you can engage in ongoing reflective work.

- How did developing a narrative change strategy foster collective growth and learning within the organization?
- What mechanisms can ensure ongoing critical reflection and learning among team members?
- How can the organization's capacity for narrative work be strengthened based on shared insights and learnings?
- What are the most valuable takeaways from the process that can guide future organizational narrative efforts?

Additional Resources + Reading:

- ***The Four Pivots: Reimagining Justice, Reimagining Ourselves*** by Shawn A. Ginwright, Ph.D., offers a robust framework for ongoing reflection.
- ORS IMPACT's ***Measuring Narrative Change: Understanding Progress and Navigating Complexity*** contains a wealth of resources to navigate the different ways narrative work can be evaluated.

Evaluate

09 - Evaluation Plan

MILESTONE

What are the key milestones in your project? When will you reach these milestones? How will you evaluate your impact? How will you gather feedback? Use the suggested milestones before or create your own.

MILESTONE 1: PLANNING PROCESS
Date:
Expected Outcome:
Evaluation Method:

MILESTONE 2: PROTOTYPING
Date:
Expected Outcome:
Evaluation Method:

MILESTONE 3: IMPLEMENTING
Date:
Expected Outcome:
Evaluation Method:

MILESTONE 4: REFLECTING
Date:
Expected Outcome:
Evaluation Method:

Evaluate

10 - Ongoing Reflection

PRIORITIZING REFLECTIVE SPACE + TIME

When and where can you dedicate time to reflect individually and collectively about your narrative work?

STORY-LISTENING WITH THE COMMUNITY

How will you engage in ongoing story-listening to learn with and from the communities you serve? How can this process foster healing, trust, and well-being?

SUSTAINING & EVOLVING

How are the insights and lessons that emerged from your narrative strategy project helping your organization to sustain and evolve its narrative work? What's next in your narrative work?

"Language is often our first act of resistance. It matters how we talk about the work we do; the words we use and the words we create matter to describe the world."

- DeRay Mckesson

Appendix

Appendix 1: Dominant Narratives

"We found widespread recognition that dominant narratives in the sector continue to perpetuate notions of community deficit, scarcity, and risk in communities of color – narratives that can lead to practices that perpetuate issues the sector aims to address. We identified eleven."

- Toward An Anti-Racist Paradigm in Community Development: High-Level Research Findings

Dominant narratives refer to the stories that uphold the interests and ideologies of the prevailing social group. These narratives, which are pervasive and favored within mainstream institutions, mold racial dynamics to reinforce the existing status quo (Bell, 2010). The report, **_Toward An Anti-Racist Paradigm in Community Development: High-Level Research Findings,_** identified eleven such dominant narratives. The following descriptions offer additional insight into the belief systems and reasoning that are used to sustain these harmful narratives.

Risk + Risk Aversion Narrative. Investments in leaders of color + communities of color are inherently risky, while investments in white leaders and white-majority communities (and/or gentrifying communities) are less risky. Funding innovative work is inherently risky, and we should focus on funding work that is already proven. Averting risk is an important (and even driving) feature of long-term community development funding. When presented with a choice between two clearly different risk levels, a community development funder should choose the less risky, even if the "riskier" investment offers more potential for long-term social impact.

Trickle-Down Narrative. If functioning properly, markets will eventually address inequities, including among the most marginalized residents + organizations in our communities. Responses need to be regional or statewide in order to make substantive change. National organizations are better equipped to build field infrastructure than local organizations. It is important to standardize best community development practices across the entire field, rather than allowing for variation or local contextualization of approach.

Bootstrap + Public Dysfunction Narrative. Public benefit recipients will take advantage of the system if they're not incentivized to improve their own situation. People who are poor should be satisfied with whatever they get, even if that means

cheap, substandard, and toxic housing. Residents ask for too much + dream too big. Public housing has been a universal failure; it's a money trap and doesn't warrant additional investment. Public investments in failing schools, distressed public spaces, and poorly attended arts + sports programs aren't prudent uses of public funds.

Sanctity of Scale Narrative. Resident solutions might work well in a small geography, but they're not easily scalable. The affordable housing crisis is so urgent that the sector really needs to focus on production of units over community planning or power-building. The level of economic need in communities of color means we need to bring in whatever kind of development that we can (without attention to what kinds of businesses + jobs residents are actually seeking).

Incremental Change Narrative. If community demands are too great or we push too hard, we'll scare people away from longer-term coalition work. If we call out the bad behaviors of major community development players + private market players too directly, they might not invest here over the long haul. Community members need to recognize that work can't happen that quickly. The numbers suggest there isn't displacement pressure here now, so we don't need to think about anti-displacement strategy yet.

Universal Opportunity Narrative. Race-neutral community development approaches can do a lot of good + with a lot less friction. We should be less concerned about being race-explicit + more about ensuring that there's equal opportunity for all (without an acknowledgment of how systemic inequity has manifested + continues to manifest in access to opportunity). If people are given equal opportunity, over time, that will be enough to address disparities in outcomes by race.

Blank Slate Narrative. The level of disinvestment in communities of color make them ideal places to test new ideas (with an attention to outside visionaries rather than resident visionaries). Communities of color tend to have a deficient base of assets (without attention to assets that aren't valued by markets or to how resources are in fact extracted from communities). The largest institutions in communities of color are the ones that we should really build our strategies around + leverage, even if they are disproportionately white, affluent institutions,

and even if this means less investment or attention for smaller anchors + assets led + developed by people of color.

Problematizing Residents Not Systems Narrative. Community members lack the technical capacities to do community development work. Community members don't seem well-prepared to go through basic government processes. If we want to seriously address community safety, we have to start by acknowledging Black-on-Black crime. A big part of the problem with distressed properties is residents not paying attention to upkeep or paying their bills.

Equating Direct Service and Support Infrastructure Narrative. Community Development Financial Institutions are the modern evolution of community development. Community Development Corporations are too geographically limited to do the real work of community development. Economic development can accomplish everything that community development does but at a greater geographic scale.

Magic Leadership Narrative. If we can get more community practitioners of color in positions of leadership, that by itself should solve a lot of the structural inequities in the system. Leaders of color are well-situated to support the learning + racial equity journeys of white staff, board members, and community members. Leaders of color can thrive in pushing reform in community development, even without a lot of professional or financial supports or broader attention to structural racism.

The Prototypical Community Narrative. The community development sector is focused almost exclusively on Black + brown communities of low incomes in larger cities. The vast majority of community development funding already goes to these communities. Supporting the movement of residents of color into predominantly white communities, particularly suburbs, should by itself solve a lot of structural inequities. Community development either doesn't exist or doesn't work in rural, suburban, or tribal settings. Indigenous communities are too sparse for community development infrastructure + are supported anyway through federal treaties.

Appendix 2: The Storytelling Project Model

The Storytelling Project, a collaborative creation of Professor Emerita Lee Anne Bell of Barnard College, Columbia University, is a dynamic and practical framework for contemplating and responding to narratives surrounding racism and various forms of injustice. This model is rooted in the research elaborated in Bell's book, "Storytelling Project: Learning about Race and Racism Through Storytelling and the Arts."

At Storytellers for Change, we employ the Storytelling Project model to facilitate reflective processes within groups. This approach encourages linking historical and contemporary narratives, identifying actionable opportunities, and establishing mutual understanding to propel social justice initiatives forward. The model empowers us to delve critically into various stories, including stock, concealed, resistance, and emerging stories. It provides a structured medium to dissect and interact with the multiple narratives, allowing us to derive deeper insights into the multifaceted aspects of racial and social injustices. To elaborate, Bell's seminal work categorizes stories into four distinct types.

- **Stock Stories -** "Stock stories... are the most public and ubiquitous in the mainstream institutions of society... Stock stories are the tales told by the dominant group, passed on through historical and literary documents, and celebrated through public rituals, law, the arts, education, and media" that "explain racial dynamics in ways that support the status quo" (Bell, 2010).
- **Concealed Stories -** "The term concealed refers to stories "that are just beneath the surface; not so much unknown as constantly overshadowed, pushed back into the margins, and conveniently 'forgotten' or repressed" (Bell, 2010).
- **Resistance Stories -** Resistance stories "narrate the persistent and ingenious ways people, both ordinary and famous, resist racism and challenge stock stories that support it in order to fight for more equal and inclusive social arrangements" (Bell, 2010).
- **Emerging/Transforming Stories -** Transforming stories are "new stories we construct to challenge stock stories, build on and amplify concealed and resistance stories, and take up the mantle of antiracism and social justice work through generating new stories to catalyze contemporary action against racism" (Bell, 2010).

More Resources + Information
- **About the Storytelling Project Model by Organizing Engagement.**

Appendix 3: Narrative Strategy Framework

Storytellers for Change's Narrative Strategy Framework (Ortega, 2013):
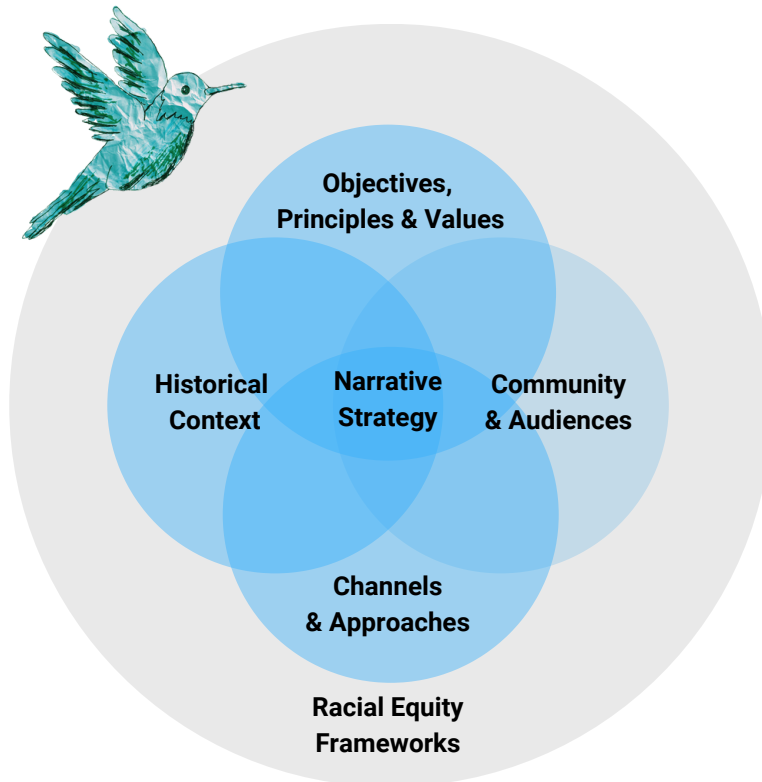
Objectives, Principles & Values
The process of developing your narrative strategy starts with identifying your "Why," "How," and "What." Your "Why" are your values and reasons which you are commitment to narrative change. Your "What" and "How" are your objectives (what you want to accomplish through your narrative strategy) and your principles (how you will approach your narrative work.

Community & Audiences
Traditional communication approaches will invite you to map your audiences, which is a crucial component of crafting a narrative project. However, it's just as important to map and center the communities, especially BIPOC groups, that will be impacted by your narrative work. Communities and audiences can overlap; however, as we map these groups, we must pay close attention to power dynamics.

Historical Context
The stories we tell are influenced by and exist within systemic and cultural structures, many of which are deeply inequitable. A crucial component of crafting a narrative strategy is surfacing the historical context, often concealed by dominant narratives, that acknowledges the experiences, leadership, and knowledge of the communities most impacted by systemic racism and oppression.

Racial Equity Frameworks
There is no such thing as a "one size fits all" approach to implementing a racial equity framework for a narrative strategy. Language is also continuously evolving, so our narrative strategies need to be adapted, revised, and co-crafted by the communities we work with, especially BIPOC communities, to ensure our good intent to tell equitable and anti-racist stories is not having an inequitable impact.

Channels & Approaches
Narratives can be imagined, crafted, uplifted, disseminated, and amplified through a great variety of channels and approaches. These approaches can include murals, videos, poetry, theater, journalism, newsletters, memes, podcasts, community fairs, and so much more. Identifying your objectives, organizational positionality, and audience and community will help you to select your channels and approach.

Appendix 4: Narrative Approaches

Narrative Change Approaches: There are a variety of approaches (Nikki, 2021) organizations, artists, and culture practitioners can employ to shift narratives. These are a few different approaches you can consider:

- **Narrative Countering -** Countering and explicitly calling out an unfavorable narrative and propagating an alternative narrative that decreases its impact.
- **Narrative Reframe -** Changing the logic of an unfavorable narrative to support a favorable narrative.
- **Narrative Defense -** Protecting and sustaining an anti-racist narrative.
- **Narrative Seeding + Amplification -** Supporting and articulating an existing narrative more widely to increase its impact.
- **Narrative Attachment -** Revising an existing narrative to connect it more explicitly with your issue and desired framing.
- **Narrative Correction -** Historicising and contextualizing through stories to shift our previous mainstream understanding of a narrative.
- **Narrative Creation -** Leveraging an "empty" space in the current discourse or narrative landscape to grow a brand new narrative.

Narrative Power Building Framework: This framework, as presented in Funding Narrative Change (Moore & Sen, 2022), offers three areas where narrative power building can happen: Mass Media, Mass Culture, and Mass Movements.

- **Mass Media:** "Shift narratives through journalism and non-fiction media, such as books and documentary film."
  - **Example for Illustration Purposes:** GRIST + UPROOT / "a network for journalists of color who cover environmental issues."
- **Mass Culture:** "Shift narratives through storytelling in entertainment venues such as TV, film, and music."
  - **Example for Illustration Purposes:** HARNESS + DEAR HOLLYWOOD / "Demanding Equal Access and Representation in Hollywood."
- **Mass Movements:** "Shift narratives through new stories by organizing and inspiring collective action, art, and culture."
  - **Example for Illustration Purposes:** DEFINE AMERICAN + STORYTELLER ADVOCACY / "We support and advocate for immigrant storytellers through community-building, art world advocacy, and our fellowship."

Appendix 4: Narrative Approaches (Cont.)

Additional Examples of Narrative Projects, Work & Approaches: For illustrative purposes, the following list showcases various forms of narrative projects and work.

- **All My Relations Podcast -** "All My Relations is a team of folks who care about representations, and how Native peoples are represented in mainstream media. On each episode, hosts Matika Wilbur (Tulalip and Swinomish) and Adrienne Keene (Cherokee Nation), delve into a different topic facing Native peoples today."

- **Black in Alaska Project -** "Through storytelling, this project aims to dismantle stereotypes and create a deeper connection between the Black community and fellow Alaskans. Stories, photos, and other media will live on Black in Alaska's website, blackinalaska.org, and be shared on social media."

- **Inequity for Sale -** Social practice artist Tonika Lewis Johnson's project memorializes the legacy of land contract sales in Black Chicago communities. Johnson states, "My goal with this project is to map the evidence of historic legalized theft in Greater Englewood and engage the public in action-oriented conversations that ultimately bring this unresolved crime to justice."

- **Intelligent Mischief -** "Founded in 2013, Intelligent Mischief is a creative studio unleashing the power of Black radical imagination to share the future. Intelligent Mischief's purpose is to boost invention & imagination, realign action logic and experiment with new forms of culture and civil society to create atmospheres of change."

- **National Zoning Atlas -** "The National Zoning Atlas is a collaborative of researchers digitizing, demystifying, & democratizing ~30,000 U.S. zoning codes. It is housed at the Cornell University Legal Constructs Lab, led by Professor Sara Bronin."

- **New Monuments Initiative by ArtWorks Cincinnati -** "Monuments make a public statement about the ideas, values, or individuals a community thinks their society should remember or honor. ArtWorks, along with partnering community organizations, will work to ensure that Cincinnati's statement is one of equity, justice, and truth-telling."

- **Pop Culture Collaborative -** "The Pop Culture Collaborative is pleased to share an array of learning tools in the form of case studies, essays, podcasts, visual reports, digital magazines and more. Each product is designed to help field members and funders immerse themselves in visionary narrative change strategies, groundbreaking field building approaches, and critical new insights around pop culture for social change."

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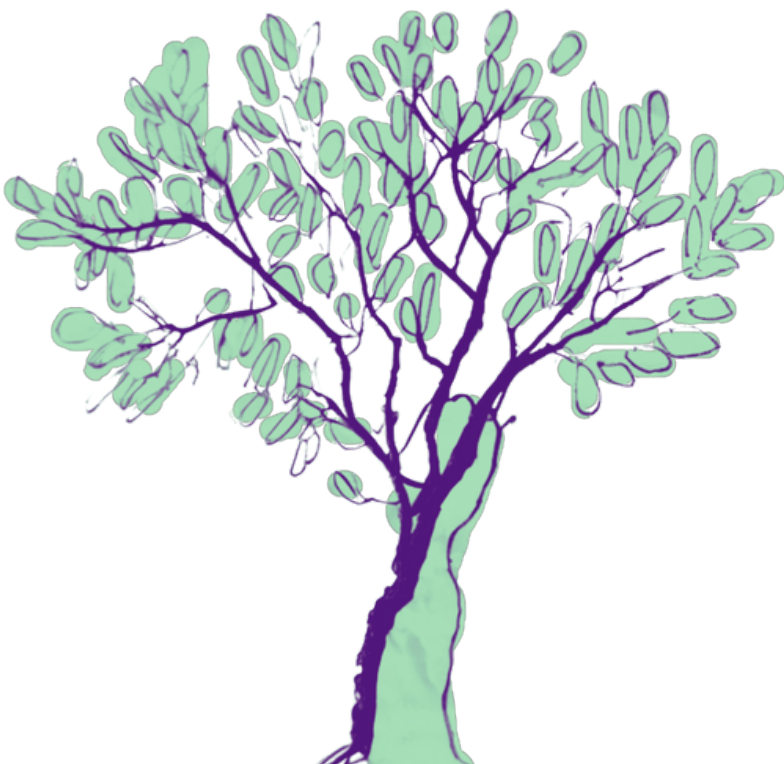
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This toolkit was written and designed by:
Luis Ortega (he/them)
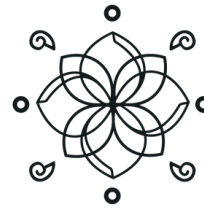**Storytellers for Change.**

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