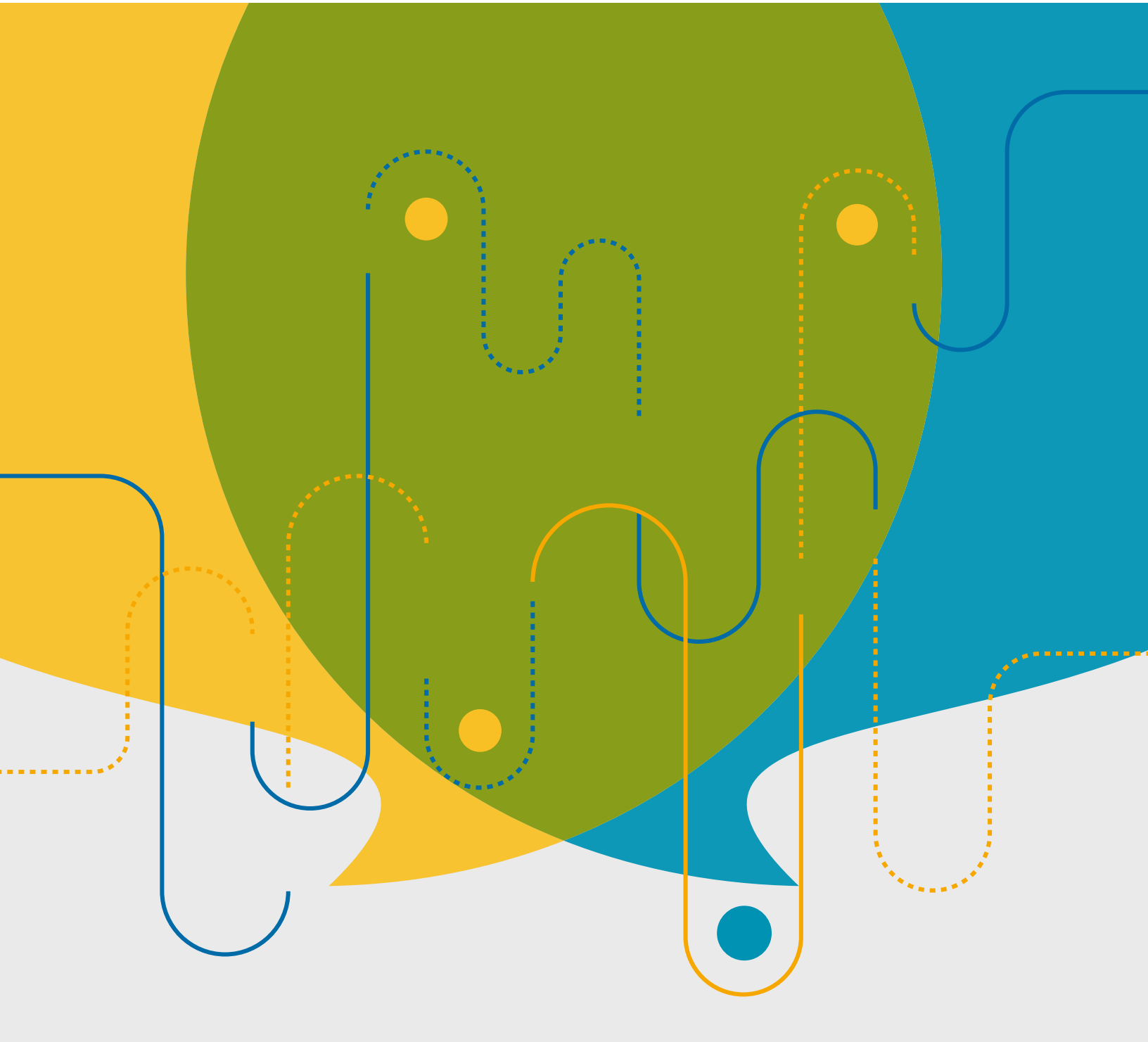


Measuring Narrative Change

Understanding Progress and Navigating Complexity



Thank you

In July 2019, we released *Measuring Narrative Change 1.0*. This was an initial response to a need we saw in the field, to help organizations and funders have more shared ideas around the measurement and evaluation of this kind of work. In it we compiled existing frameworks, resources, and tools, but as the name suggests we knew it was a start, and not the end, of thinking on this topic.

This new version of the brief reflects our updated thinking. We dig deeper into the concepts that underlie narrative change work and what these mean for measurement; think more about measuring narratives as part of complex systems; and offer further consideration of issues of equity and power. It is really a new iteration, not an update of the prior document.

While this reflects how our thinking has evolved, that evolution did not happen in a vacuum: it was fueled by sharing that initial brief, having the opportunity to use concepts, and engaging in various conversations. This second iteration has benefitted greatly from the generous feedback of many colleagues in the field. Jewlya Lynn of PolicySolve and Neha Singh Gohil at the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation provided invaluable input on the original piece, setting the stage for this one. The Hewlett Foundation also provided financial support for both this piece and its predecessor. We received extremely helpful early feedback from a webinar with colleagues at Equal Measure and Innovation Network. We refined our thinking through ongoing conversations with Liz King and Tyler Lewis at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Karla Pleitéz Howell and Katie Smith at Advancement Project, Adenike Huggins, Hal Smith, and Robyn Ince and at National Urban League, Terra Wallin at The Education Trust, and Betty Chang at Education Resource Strategies. The opportunity to present on this topic for Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies and the Georgetown Certificate in Social Impact Storytelling similarly helped us to clarify and sharpen our content. We are grateful for the insights and experiences shared, the questions asked, and the ways that deeper engagement with the content made the work stronger. In developing this brief, we are also grateful to Tracy Wilson for editing and to Laura Gilbert for design.

While we know we haven't been able to individually name everyone who has touched this work in one way or another, the opportunity to learn from others in dialogue has been hugely beneficial. We hope this piece can be one contribution to an ongoing conversation and look forward to continued engagement.

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Introduction

In recent years, narrative change has become an increasingly visible and widespread approach among advocates, activists, funders, and others working to advance more just and equitable societies.

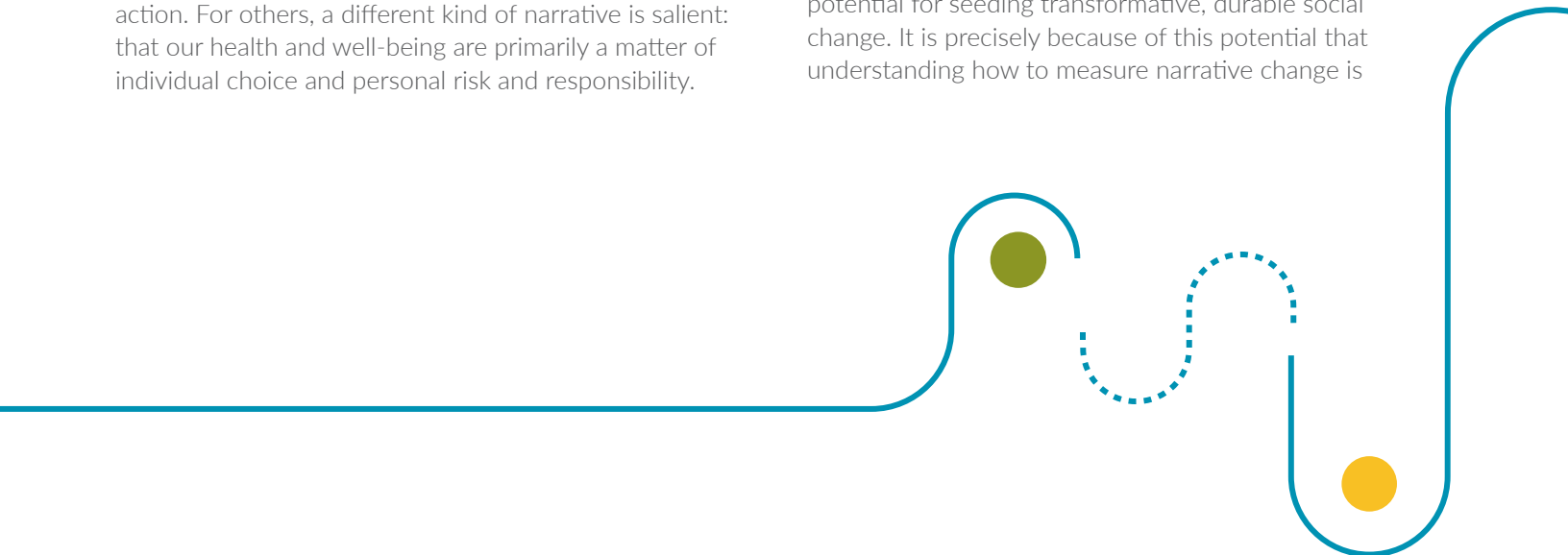
Those engaged in social change efforts have long recognized the power of shifting the shared stories that we tell, and of re-shaping the lenses through which we perceive events, causes, and issues—of changing narratives.

Take our current moment. In 2020, the world found itself in the grip of a devastating pandemic. As we have collectively struggled to make sense of COVID-19, we have seen the emergence of disparate, conflicting beliefs about the virus and a range of responses to the crisis—from how people behave in their day-to-day lives to which policies are implemented and enforced. And the way we understand the pandemic, the way we think about its causes and solutions, are all heavily shaped by the pre-existing mental models we use to make sense of the world—those familiar frames through which we interpret what’s happening around us and how we should react to it. For some people, this experience speaks clearly to an understanding of health as something shaped by social and systemic forces, requiring collective and coordinated action. For others, a different kind of narrative is salient: that our health and well-being are primarily a matter of individual choice and personal risk and responsibility.

As we’re seeing right now, which narrative frames are dominant can have profound consequences for our lives.

And this isn’t limited to particular moments of shock or crisis. While narratives often sharpen or crystallize around certain issues or events, they are just as often the product of decades (even centuries) of construction and reconstruction and they shape how we perceive and respond to any number of today’s most pressing social issues. It is the effort to reshape the instinctive way that we think about those issues—and in doing so, to shift our understanding of what can or should be done about them in order to achieve a more just and equitable future—that lies at the heart of narrative change efforts.

Narrative change is, therefore, an approach with great potential for seeding transformative, durable social change. It is precisely because of this potential that understanding how to measure narrative change is



important: **it's not enough to implement your strategy and then hope for the best.** That said, the complex, long-term nature of this kind of work makes measurement a challenge. Among those doing narrative change, there is a desire to better understand what works, how, and with who—and these are not straightforward questions.

→ How do you articulate the progress and value of the work you're doing **in the short term, when its full effects aren't likely to be seen for some time?**

- What signals can you look for **to indicate you're moving the needle in the right direction?**
- And how do you understand the reach and impact of your work **when it's happening in a dynamic system, and there's so much that lies beyond any one organization's control?**

These are important questions for practitioners of narrative change, and they also have implications for those who fund it, particularly when it comes to setting realistic expectations around what narrative change looks like and what it takes in terms of time and resources.

Topics Explored in This Brief

This brief aims to provide insights into these questions, offering guidance for individuals and organizations—whether practitioners or funders—who are interested in measuring their narrative change efforts. It includes:



Foundations for Measurement and Learning

Considerations and reflections for laying the groundwork for measurement



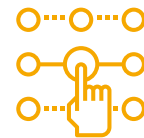
Developing and Driving Narratives

Guiding questions for better understanding your process, or how you're going about your strategy



Outcomes and Indicators

Example outcomes and indicators for narrative change work, both short- and long-term



Tracking and Responding to Changes in Context

Approaches for sensing the system around you

Recognizing the challenges and complexities inherent in this work, our hope is to help practitioners and funders have more shared language and tools for thinking about the progress and measurement of narrative change efforts, with the aim of strengthening their impact.

This brief focuses on measurement and is not intended as a how-to guide for narrative change. For those looking for this kind of guidance, the appendix includes some links to resources developed by other organizations with experience and expertise in this area.

→ What is narrative change?

This brief is primarily about measuring narrative change, but, before we get to measurement, it's helpful to think about what narratives are and how they influence social change.

Narratives shape the world we live in, and the ways in which we inhabit and understand that world. They are “collections” of related stories and ideas¹—shared and reinforced through the culture we participate in, the media we consume, and interactions with our communities—that coalesce to inform our perceptions of ourselves, other people, and our social world.

Narratives are powerful. They are also a product of power.

As Rashad Robinson puts it, many “dominant narratives help to legitimize existing power relationships, prop them up, and make them seem natural.”² Through constituting certain truths about society—and shaping the way people define right and wrong, good and bad, deserving and undeserving, even possible and impossible—they often work to entrench inequities and reinforce the status quo.³

“*The narratives that build the public imagination of a country are in the hands of people who already have a lot of power. They are the ones who dominate in the production and distribution of narratives. They play a role in keeping things as they are.*”

—Elena Mejia Julca⁴

As we define it here, narrative change is about shifting that kind of definitional power to advance broader social change. It is the effort to challenge, modify, or replace existing narratives that perpetuate inequity and uphold an

unjust status quo, through the creation and deployment of new or different narratives.⁵

“*Narrative change is not about...changing which news reports get broadcast. Rather, narrative change is about reworking the stories that come to mind after we hear that news. It's about rerouting the path between what we hear and how we make meaning of [something].*”

—The US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty⁶

In part, then, narrative change is geared toward changing people's hearts and minds, shifting the “underlying values and beliefs” that get activated around a certain issue.⁷ It is also, importantly, about developing the infrastructure to make those shifts powerful: to “create leverage over those who set the incentives, rules, and norms that shape society and behavior”, opening the space for new narratives to “achieve real impact at the policy, politics, and cultural levels.”⁸

1. Narrative Initiative. (2017). *Toward new gravity*. <https://narrativeinitiative.org/resource/toward-new-gravity/>

2. Robinson, R. (2018). Changing our narrative about narrative: The infrastructure required for building narrative power. *Nonprofit Quarterly*, 25(4), 36-43. <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/changing-our-narrative-about-narrative-the-infrastructure-required-for-building-narrative-power/>

3. Oxfam International. *Narrative power and collective action: Conversations with people working to change narratives for social good*. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/narrative-power-and-collective-action-conversations-with-people-working-to-change-narratives-for-social-good-621020>

4. Ibid

5. While we refer here to narrative change as a vehicle for driving social justice, it is also important to acknowledge that this is not always the case. Narrative change can also entail deploying or redeploying harmful, divisive narratives, and this may happen in direct response to efforts to advance more accurate, equitable ones. We consider this further later on in the brief—see our note on neutrality and section on sensing the system.

6. Poo, A and Shaafir, E. (2018). *Changing the narrative*. <https://www.mobilitypartnership.org/changing-narrative>

7. Narrative Initiative. (2017). *Toward new gravity*. <https://narrativeinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/TowardNewGravity-June2017.pdf>

8. Robinson, R. (2018). Changing our narrative about narrative: The infrastructure required for building narrative power. *Nonprofit Quarterly*, 25(4), 36-43. <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/changing-our-narrative-about-narrative-the-infrastructure-required-for-building-narrative-power/>

As a result, narrative change strategies can draw on a wide range of different approaches, from strategic communications and media engagement, to art and cultural production, to community engagement and organizing, to coalition building, network weaving, and advocacy. While it's easy to fall into definitions (and measurement tools) that focus on communications, an organization seeking narrative change may choose to use one or several approaches, depending on their strategic focus, strengths, and resources.⁹

Changing hearts and minds—and developing the mechanisms through which such changes work to disrupt existing power structures—is difficult to do. As noted, it's also difficult to measure, requiring thoughtfulness and intentionality. Narrative change takes many different actors doing many different things. Though certain efforts may have distinct aims and timelines, narrative change as a strategy is deep, long-term work because you're trying to change people's closely-held, highly internalized world views, and endeavoring to translate those changes into durable institutional and political changes. Its trajectory and impacts are often non-linear;

for example, the influence of narratives might run from individuals to institutions, or the other way around, or—as is often the case—this influence might be iterative and multidirectional.

“*[Narrative change] is much more than a campaign and goes far deeper than simply creating and using new messages. Narrative change happens through a wide variety of actions, experiences and settings that combine to shift the dominant story people receive, internalize, and act on, consciously and unconsciously.*” —First Nations Development Institute.¹⁰

This kind of complexity understandably raises questions about how to think about and demonstrate progress. The remainder of this brief dives deeper into measurement, starting with overarching considerations for measurement to help set the stage, before moving on to how you understand the progress of your work in terms of process, outcomes, and the broader system around you.



Considering Power and Equity

Throughout this piece, we aim to provide helpful guidance for practitioners and funders who want to learn more about measuring narrative change. We do not approach this as purveyors of neutral information, as we believe that those of us in the social sector must reckon with power and seek equity in all the work that we do. This is particularly true in the case of narrative change, given that so many of our most pervasive narratives are rooted in white dominant culture and serve to perpetuate harm against currently and historically marginalized people and places. You may notice that, throughout this brief, we provide a point of view about the ways in which we think measurement can be approached in order to advance equity. It is impossible to be neutral when it comes to these issues, and our writing reflects this.

9. For more on different approaches to narrative change, see Lynn, J and Kathlene, L. (2020). Narrative change for health and racial equity: Exploring capacity and alignment. https://5305ca2b-97be-4380-be9c-72ae81b07007.filesusr.com/ugd/5a867c_388e7b7d45b24184992d7603fc724d80.pdf. For more on the distinctions between narrative change and strategic communications, see Executives' Alliance for Boys and Men of Color. (2018). *His story: Shifting narratives for boys and men of color— a guide for philanthropy*. <https://perception.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/HisStory-Narrative-Toolkit.pdf>

10. First Nations Development Institute, & Echo Hawk Consulting. (2018). *Reclaiming Native truth: A project to dispel America's myths and misconceptions*. <https://www.firstnations.org/publications/narrative-change-strategy-from-the-reclaiming-native-truth-project/>



Building the Foundations for Measurement and Learning

To measure your narrative change efforts, it may be helpful to clarify several aspects of your approach upfront in the interests of setting a firm foundation for measurement. These include:

- **The level of narrative you're working at**
- **How you think your narrative will function in the broader narrative context**
- **The elements of the existing narrative you're interested in changing**
- **Who you are targeting with your work**

→ What levels of narrative are most relevant to your work?

Narrative operates at different levels. Many of the narratives that practitioners seek to change are rooted in overarching metanarrative. At the same time, it's also possible to focus on a more bounded, specific manifestation of a larger narrative in your work.

According to the Narrative Initiative, if **narratives** can be thought of as existing across collections of related stories, **metanarratives** (or deep narratives, as they can also be called) permeate collections of related narratives.¹¹ They offer the following helpful example of how this works:

- » The movie Jaws is a **story** about an insatiable man-eating shark.
- » All the stories about insatiable, man-eating sharks add up to a broader **narrative** of sharks being dangerous and predatory creatures.
- » The narrative and stories about sharks rest on powerful **metanarratives** about the human relationship to nature and a fear of the unknown.

Source: [Narrative Initiative](#).

Figure 1 Different levels of Narrative



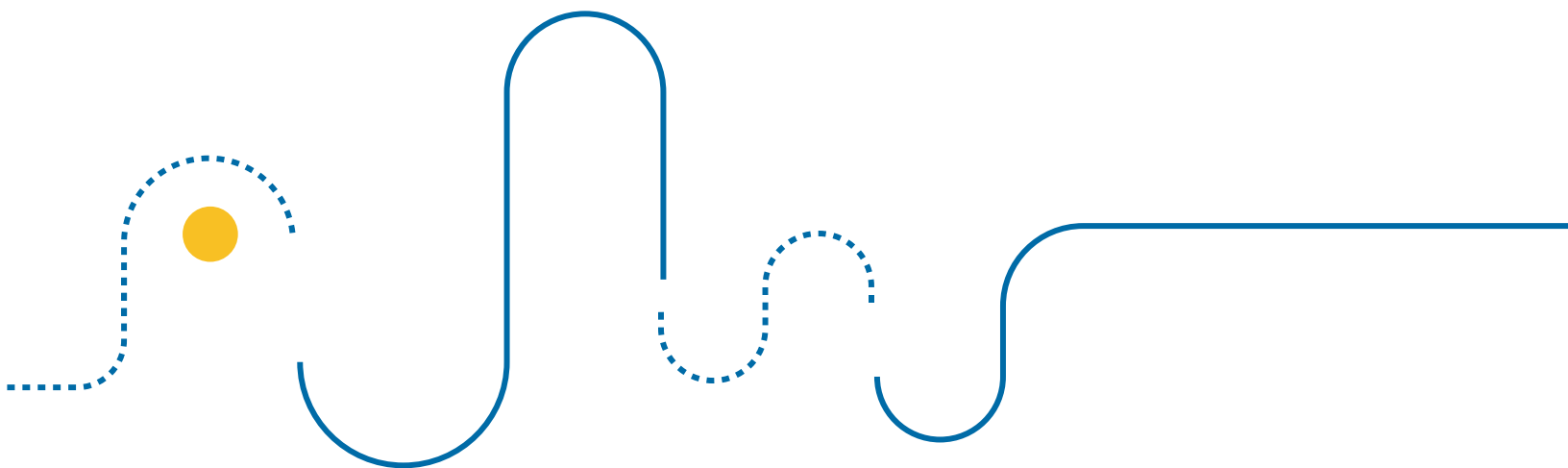
11. Narrative Initiative. (2019). *Narrative change: A working definition (and some related terms)*. <https://narrativeinitiative.org/blog/narrative-change-a-working-definition-and-related-terms/>

We see these levels play out across many social issues. For example, the metanarrative of individualism and personal responsibility can be seen in any number of narratives that permeate our current social reality: that escaping poverty is about pulling yourself up by your bootstraps; that people's health is determined by the lifestyle choices that they make; that police brutality is a result of "a few bad apples."

It's also worth noting that within narratives about any of these issues, you might be working on tackling a sub-narrative or more bounded element of the narrative. For example, within broader narratives about poverty or health, you might be focused on changing (sub)narratives

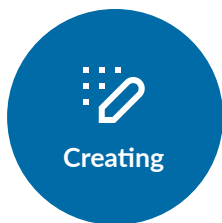
about social safety nets, which are important component parts of larger narratives.

In practice, of course, none of this is likely to be as distinct, linear, or clear-cut as it's presented here. There is always a complex interplay between different levels of narrative, and recognizing this is important for understanding progress. When it comes to measurement, it can be helpful to be alert to signals beyond those of your specific narrative strategy; for instance, you may want to map relevant sub and meta narratives that relate to your narrative frame, or even narratives around other issues that reflect the same metanarratives, and factor these into what you will look for when it comes to measurement.



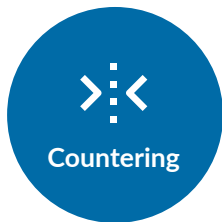
→ How will your narrative function?

New narratives are deployed into complex contexts that are already populated by a range of other narratives. Maybe the dominant narrative you're up against is entirely antithetical to the one you're trying to drive; maybe it's one that needs to be reshaped and refined, but offers a foundation to build upon. **Drawing on work from narrative analytics company Protagonist, there are a few ways you might think about how your narrative might function:**



Taking advantage of white space in the current landscape to grow a brand new narrative.

This doesn't happen very often, but would be a situation in which you would be focused on creating a new narrative around an issue where no prior narrative exists.



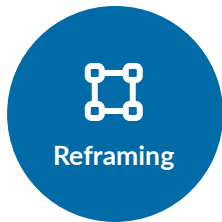
Undermining an unfavorable narrative and propagating an alternative narrative that decreases its impact.

This is a more familiar situation for many practitioners of narrative change. In this case, the development and deployment of a new narrative requires understanding and responding to the existing narrative and offering an explicit alternative.



Articulating an existing narrative more widely via new messengers and channels to increase its impact.

Maybe there is a positive narrative out there, but it's only shared among a select group of people or organizations. Your work in this case would not require the development of a new narrative, but would focus on expanding the reach of an existing one and winning new audiences.



Changing the logic of an unfavorable narrative to support a more favorable one.

Overall, maybe the dominant narrative is harmful, but some elements can be reimagined to advance a more positive one. In this case, you would subvert the implicit logic of an existing narrative to offer a new interpretation of the issue.







Revising an existing narrative to connect it more explicitly with your issue and desired framing.

This relates somewhat to the idea of narrative levels from the previous section, but refers to instances where there might be a broader narrative at play that generally supports your work, and your efforts are focused on specifically connecting the issue you are working on to that narrative, or expanding the narrative space to include that issue.

→ What elements of narrative are you trying to change?

Narratives are made up of many different, mutually reinforcing elements, and unpacking these may be helpful in identifying where you expect to see changes that will indicate that you’re making progress. You might be interested, for example, in tracking changes in any of the following:

Table 1. Elements of Narrative

Element	How does this relate to narrative change?	Examples
 <p>Language</p>	<p>Language is an important building block of narrative; the words we use to describe or talk about something affects the way we and others make sense of it. Changing the vocabulary used to describe or talk about an issue can therefore be a key part of narrative change strategies, serving to shift the cues, assumptions, and concepts that are evoked when people hear or read about an issue. As such, looking at the increased use or salience of language that aligns with the narrative you are trying to drive might be something to consider when it comes to measurement.</p>	<p>In their Social Justice Phrase Guide, The Opportunity Agenda and Advancement Project demonstrate how specific language and phrases can be used to put personhood first, and emphasize our shared humanity and interests instead of reinforcing an “us vs. them” mentality.</p>
 <p>Stories</p>	<p>The relationship between narrative and story is a close one: narratives are essentially “collections” of interrelated stories¹². Stories have beginnings, middles, and ends; they have heroes and villains, implicit lessons and morals. They are used transmit culture and social ideas from one person to another. Changes in the salient stories that are told about an issue can have a profound impact on the way people interpret and respond to it, as well as engendering empathy and understanding.</p>	<p>In her article Using Story to Change Systems, Ella Saltmarshe highlights the different ways in which stories can function to spur change: through “illuminating the past, present, and future”; “building community through empathy and coherence”; and, ultimately, “reauthoring the web of narratives we live in.”</p>
 <p>Voice</p>	<p>Who tells the stories is also important. Part of narrative change is shifting definitional power. The power imbalances that lead to the dominance of harmful narratives mean that, very often, the voices of those most affected by an issue are not heard, and white-dominant assumptions about what counts as knowledge or expertise sideline lived experience. Changing whose voices are amplified and considered authoritative is part of narrative change.</p>	<p>Our Climate Voices is an organization that works to center the voices and leadership of those most impacted by the climate crisis, in order to reclaim climate narratives from industry and meaningfully connect the issue to grassroots experiences and solutions.</p>
 <p>Frames</p>	<p>The framing of an issue can be understood as “the subtle selection of certain aspects of an issue in order to cue a specific response”,¹³ such as language, stories, and messengers, but also a range of other things: the images that are used in materials, the metaphors that are employed to talk about something, even the order in which information is presented.</p>	<p>In their toolkit for Talking about Early Childhood in Kenya, FrameWorks lay out framing guidelines that include phrasing, metaphors and imagery to use in discussing childhood development, as well as underlying values that can be called on to build buy-in and understanding.</p>

12. Narrative Initiative. (2017). *Toward new gravity*. <https://narrativeinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/TowardNewGravity-June2017.pdf>

13. Frameworks Institute. (2018.). *Talking about early childhood in Kenya*. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/kenya_earlychildhood_brief.pdf

Table 1. Elements of Narrative

Element	How does this relate to narrative change?	Examples
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Messages



Messages are the takeaways that flow logically from the language, stories, and frames used to talk about an issue: what is the specific interpretation, ask, or action that the target audience comes away with?¹⁴

Protecting Immigrant Families developed [COVID-19 Relief Messaging Guidance](#), highlighting a core message, a related set of topline messages, and key talking points for each.

As is probably evident, these elements aren't mutually exclusive; there often is substantial overlap between them. Moreover, narrative change isn't about changing any one of these things in isolation; it's more about cumulative, reinforcing shifts across these elements.

Understanding what elements of your narrative you intend to change, how those changes relate to broader narrative shifts, and which of them you want or are able to measure, can be a helpful step in figuring out your measurement approach.

14. Race Forward. (2014). *Moving the race conversation forward*. https://act.colorlines.com/acton/attachment/1069/f-0114/1/-/-/-/1/Racial_Discourse_Part_1.PDF.

→ Who are you targeting with your work?

While narrative change is aimed at engendering broad shifts in the way societies understand and respond to particular issues, in practice it’s not possible to target everyone, everywhere, all at once. As such, **it’s important to think about whose mindset is most vital—or feasible—to change and why.** This will inform both your strategic approach and what you measure; you’ll be able to refine your unit of measurement by looking for changes in the specific audience/s you were targeting. Later down the line, you might be interested in looking for larger scale effects on other audiences or bigger populations, or even expanding your targets based on the information you’ve gathered.

There are various ways of segmenting your audience that might make sense. For example, you might target particular segments of the population by meaningful demographic characteristics; you might choose to look for change among stakeholder groups, for example community members, parents, business owners, policymakers, or similar; or you might consider an audience in a specific geography or place. Alternatively, you might think about this in terms of people’s relationship to the narrative you’re trying to change. The Social Change Initiative splits potential audiences into the following categories:

The Choir:	Members, activists, and others who are working with you.
The Base:	Your supporters (though not to be taken for granted).
The Persuadable:	The “middle” who are often considered the most important group, as they are conflicted or undecided about the issue.
The Opposition:	Those who tend to disagree with what you are saying and doing but are not as intransigent in their opposition is.
The Unreachable:	Those who are unlikely to be moved or persuaded. ¹⁵

Source: Social Change Initiative

Narrative change efforts often target persuadables. For example, the International Center for Policy Advocacy outlines an approach based around engaging the “moveable middle”¹⁶—but there may be situations in which you might want to target other segments. For example, thinking back to how narratives might need to function, if you were looking to attach an existing narrative to a pre-existing one that still broadly aligned with your work, it might make sense to target the base, or even the choir. On the other hand, if you are working to counter a harmful narrative, it might be necessary to drive change not just among the persuadable middle but also the opposition.

There are no hard and fast rules for defining who you expect to see changes among; this will vary according to the context you’re working in, the narratives that already exist, and where you see the greatest potential or leverage for your strategy. However, it’s helpful to document the assumptions and rationales behind these decisions to understand what you’re measuring and why, the types of information this is giving you, and how you can use this information to see whether your assumptions hold, or whether course corrections are needed.

15. Social Change Initiative. (n.d.) *Narrative change*. <https://socialchangeinitiative.com/narrative-change>
 16. International Centre for Policy Advocacy. (2018). Reframing migration narratives toolkit: Finding a focus and opening. <http://www.narrativechange.org/toolkit/step-1-finding-focus-and-opening>.



Reflecting on Process: Developing and Driving Narratives

When measuring narrative change work, it can be tempting to get straight down to outcomes related to narratives themselves: are we seeing them change, in what ways, and with what effects?

That is of course really important, and something we'll consider in more depth later on. But we also think it can be helpful to reflect, in an ongoing way, on the process by which you're trying to achieve these kinds of outcomes.

In this section, we offer some guiding questions around developing and driving narratives. These are not intended to be prescriptive about the particular approach or strategy you're employing, but instead to aid reflection on how the way you're doing that work is likely to contribute to the equitable outcomes you hope to see. Some of these have direct implications for what you'll choose to measure, while others can help you better understand and articulate your approach to narrative change, and share that back with partners, funders, grantees, or other relevant stakeholders.

Note: While we've laid out developing and driving narratives sequentially here, this is an iterative rather than linear process and one you'll likely be continually refining based on the information you gather from your measurement efforts. For an illustration of the iterative nature of narrative change practice, see the [Narrative Initiative's Four Baskets Field Guide](#).



→ Developing narratives

An important first step in many narrative change efforts is to develop the narrative that you ultimately want to deploy. There are many ways to go about this, from conducting narrative landscape and power analysis, to message research and testing, to collecting and curating stories from communities—you might choose to foreground one approach or use them in combination, depending on your aims. For those currently engaged in this work, more concrete guidance on narrative development can be found in some of the resources in the appendix to this brief.

As you work on developing narratives that aim to advance equitable outcomes, it may be helpful to think through some of the following guiding questions:

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What are the current dominant narratives about the issue you are working on?

» Where or how did they originate? Who is propagating them? What functions do they serve?

?

How will your narrative be responsive to current dominant narratives?

?

Who currently holds power in and over the dominant narrative/s, and what implications does this have?

» What can you do to address and challenge power imbalances in the way you articulate a new narrative?

» How are you considering root causes and the history of the issue at hand? Differences in current experiences among people with different intersectional identities?

?

Who is involved in developing the new narrative?

» In what ways are the people who are most affected by the issues the narrative aims to address central to its development?

» Do some organizations or communities need additional supports to participate fully in the process of narrative development?

» How will you use the contributions of different groups—will you weight the input of certain groups more heavily than others?

» Are there ways you might track or measure who has been involved in developing the new narrative, and how their contributions are reflected?

?

To what extent does the narrative reflect or resonate with the experiences and expertise of those most affected by issues the narrative aims to address?

» Are you considering ways of measuring resonance with these constituencies, such as through message testing, focus groups, interviews, or other means?

» Whose voices, stories, and preferences are being lifted up, even within these groups?

?

How is the narrative being translated or adapted for different audiences?

- » Who are the different audiences that you want your new narrative to reach and how do you adapt your language, messages, frames, etc. accordingly?
- » Are there any implications of adapting the narrative in terms of its fidelity to people's lived experience?
- » Are there implications of adapting the narrative in terms of the types or nature of the outcomes you might expect?

?

Can you anticipate any potential harms or negative consequences? How will you know if these are occurring, and what mechanisms are in place for changing course?**NARRATIVE POWER ANALYSIS**

Narrative Power Analysis, as described in the Beautiful Trouble toolbox, deconstructs the elements and assumptions of status quo narratives and helps to identify the particular points of intervention where they can be challenged or where a new narrative can be inserted. It centers on several key questions:

Conflict	How is the problem being framed, and who is the conflict between?
Characters	Who are the characters in the narrative and what roles do they play? Who are the messengers for the story?
Imagery	What does the narrative show to be important? How does it engage our values?
Foreshadowing	What is the vision that it offers for resolving the conflict?
Assumptions	What does someone have to believe to accept the story is true?
Interventions	Where are the vulnerabilities, limits, or contradictions in the narrative? How and where can these be exposed?

Source: Dr. Pop's Narrative Power Analysis Worksheet

This is a helpful exercise to inform the development of narratives; it can also be very helpful in telling a coherent story about your narrative strategy and articulating what decisions were made and why. You might also use these categories later to show where change is happening: are you, for instance, seeing changes in the characterization of certain groups of people; are different underlying assumptions at play; is the conflict being framed in new ways? Periodically engaging with and iterating on these questions can be a useful tool in targeting your strategy, navigating and responding to the narrative landscape, and thinking about the outcomes of your work.

→ Driving Narratives

Once a narrative has been developed, a next step is putting it out in the world (although this is likely to be an iterative process of ongoing testing and refinement). When it comes to driving narratives, the first things that tend to spring to mind are the tools of strategic communications. However, driving a narrative is also, to use Rashad Robinson's term, about developing a broader narrative infrastructure that doesn't just get the narrative on the front page, but makes its "presence on the front page...powerful".¹⁷ Building that infrastructure might include coalition and network building; leadership development; engaging communities to share and spread messages in various forums; cultural production such as art, music, and film; and even restructuring or realigning internal organizational processes in line with the narrative change you are trying to effect.

Across these domains, it may be helpful to think through some of these broad considerations as you go about this work.

?

Who will be the messengers of the narrative?

- » To what extent are people most affected by the issue acting as messengers for the narrative?
- » To what extent are they engaged in developing the modes and means through which the narrative will be disseminated?
- » Do those who should or will be acting as messengers for the narrative have the training and support they need to do the work, without undue burden?
- » How might you measure not just who receives supports, but how relevant and responsive those supports are?

?

Who are your target audiences?

- » Why have you chosen these audiences as targets, and what are the implications of choosing these audiences over others?
- » Are you disseminating your narrative in ways that are culturally or otherwise responsive to the needs of your target audience? Are you planning to translate content into different languages, make products accessible, offer alternative mediums for communication, etc.?
- » How will you reach your audiences—which channels will be most appropriate to who, and what data can you collect that will tell you whether or not your assumptions hold true?

?

Who are the partners and collaborators involved in the work?

- » What roles do or will they play in the broader narrative change strategy, and who is involved in making those decisions?
- » Do some organizations, communities, or partners need additional supports to participate fully in collaborative processes?
- » How will the contributions of different actors be documented and recognized?

17. Robinson, R. (2018). Changing our narrative about narrative: The infrastructure required for building narrative power. *Nonprofit Quarterly*, 25(4), 36-43. <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/changing-our-narrative-about-narrative-the-infrastructure-required-for-building-narrative-power/>

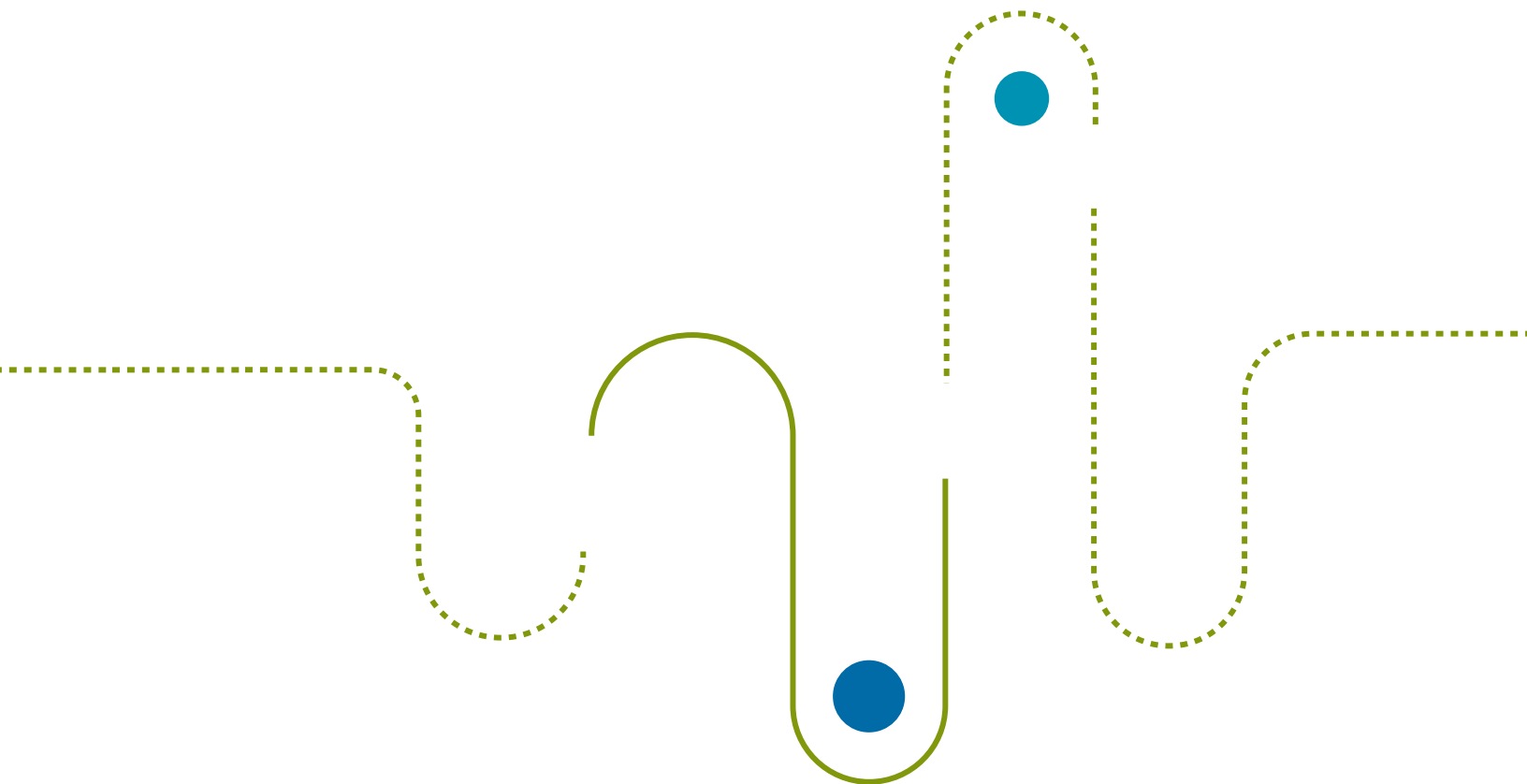


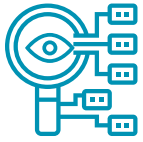
Outside of the specific narrative change campaign or strategy, to what extent is your narrative frame present in your own organization’s documents, products, and messaging?

- » To what extent is the narrative reflected in the way your organization speaks and goes about its work internally as well as externally?
- » Are there internal capacities (e.g., skills, knowledge, resource availability) that you could measure, that may shed light on how narrative frames are supported and reflected by your own organization?

While these questions won’t tell you what your narrative change strategy should look like (which is itself an area in which best practices are still being developed and tested) we hope they provide a way of reflecting on process

that will help to set the stage for the identification and achievement of equitable outcomes, and strengthen the story you’re able to tell about your work.





Narrative Change: Outcomes and Indicators

Asking questions about your process will help you to better understand how you're doing narrative change work—but how can you show what's happening as a result of those efforts?

As we've established, when you're engaged in a deep, systemic effort like this, it can take a long time to see the kind of outcomes you're ultimately looking for: shifts in the narrative itself, and beyond that the social, cultural, and behavioral changes you might expect such shifts to engender.

.....
In this section, we revisit some of these issues to help you think about the outcomes of your narrative change work. Given the breadth and scope of narrative change, what types of changes might you expect to see, where might they be happening, and on what timeframe? We begin by suggesting some outcome areas for narrative change, then provide some sample short- and long-term outcomes and indicators for each of these areas.



→ Outcome Areas for Narrative Change

When thinking of outcomes, it's helpful to first think about the broad areas in which you might expect to see change as a result of your narrative change work. **While these outcome areas are not exhaustive, you might consider looking for changes in:**



Organizational capacity. Narrative change requires many different capacities, so which are relevant to your organization is going to depend heavily on your strategy. Whatever you land on, your organization will need to develop a particular set of resources and skills to do the work most effectively. And because narrative change work isn't carried out in isolation, partners, communities, and other stakeholders may also need to build relevant capacities for developing and disseminating narratives too. While organizational capacity is not necessarily an end in itself, it's an important part of successfully implementing narrative change strategy, and outcomes in this area can still help to tell the story of the progress that you're making.



Reach. Many practitioners default to familiar metrics of reach when it comes to thinking about the measurement of narrative change. While these have some limitations in terms of getting to the heart of narrative change (which is about more than simply getting the message out), they are still useful for understanding if the work you're doing is, in fact, reaching its intended audiences.



Media and cultural discourse. One area in which narrative change might become apparent is in shifts in public discourse, which is heavily shaped by the news media, social media, and various forms of popular culture. Narrative change efforts may be reflected in the way an issue is talked about through these media, and this can be both a marker of and the inspiration for changes in the way people think about, understand, and respond to that issue.



People's attitudes and beliefs. As part of changing hearts and minds, narrative change efforts can be aimed at changing people's attitudes and beliefs about an issue, or strengthening or activating ones that might be latent or less salient than others that they hold. Such changes are important to look for because they can lead to changes in people's behavior, both in terms of their interpersonal interactions and their professional or political actions—and ultimately it's anticipated that these will build to broader systemic goals.¹⁸

18. Davidson, B. (2016). *Narrative change and the Open Society Public Health Program*. <https://onthinktanks.org/articles/the-role-of-narrative-change-in-influencing-policy/>.



Behaviors

People's behaviors. If you're seeing changes in people's attitudes and beliefs about an issue, you might also want to look at if and how that's translating into changes in their behavior; whether the ways in which people are acting align with the aims of your narrative change strategy. It can be difficult to attribute changes in behavior to changes in narrative—narrative change strategies aren't necessarily geared toward specific asks or expectations, instead focusing on creating the underlying conditions that will make these behaviors more likely. That said, because narratives offer particular interpretations of an issue—and, importantly, what can or should be done about it—there's still scope to make convincing links between the two in thinking about the kind of impacts your work is having.



Social
Norms

Social norms. Changes in discourse, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors can all work to shape broader social changes, such as generating new norms—the perceptions, assumptions, and influences that operate at a community or population level and set standards for collective behavior. Alongside spurring changes in how individuals interpret and respond to issues, narrative change also seeks to have more cumulative, knock-on social effects, which means considering shifts in norms can be another way of understanding whether and what progress is being made.



Policies

Policies. Changes in other outcome areas can also shape the development of new policies. As policy influencers, decision-makers, and other relevant stakeholders become aware of and engage with new narratives—and see changes occurring in the way that the public is thinking and speaking about issues—those narratives can embed themselves in decision-making processes and be reflected in resulting changes in policy. Again, because narratives provide alternative visions for the kinds of solutions that might be advanced around particular social issues, it's possible to see where narrative change may be underpinning these kinds of systemic changes.¹⁹



Institutional
Practices
& Power

Institutional practices and power. Changing narratives changes understandings of issues, their root causes, and their solutions. It also shifts definitional power—whose stories are valued and who gets to tell them, who is considered an expert, and who needs to be at the table in setting priorities and developing responses. As such, another area in which narrative change outcomes may be seen is in institutional practices and power, including allocation of resources and shifts in engagement and representation in decision-making processes and structures.²⁰

19. For more on measuring and evaluating policy change, see [ORS Impact's advocacy and policy evaluation resources](#).

20. For more guidance thinking through these types of changes, see ORS Impact's [I2L2: A formula for change](#).

→ Identifying Outcomes: Changes to Look for in the Short- and Longer-term

Having considered these outcome areas, next comes identifying some shorter- and longer-term outcomes that might provide signals of progress for your work. In Table 2, we provide some examples of outcomes for each of the areas, as well as sample indicators for measuring progress towards these outcomes.

These examples aren't exhaustive, and are intended as a starting point to be refined, modified, or added to. Nor should you expect to be measuring them all; **it makes sense to think carefully about your strategy, and from there identify a few key areas in which you can actually expect to see change.** In addition, there are a few other considerations it may be helpful to bear in mind as you think about outcomes:

Contextualizing short- and long-term outcomes

When it comes to narrative change, the idea of short and long-term needs to be carefully considered and contextualized. There is a certain implied sequencing to the outcome areas we propose—from the organizational capacity to do the work, to the reach of that work, to shifts in discourse that imply the narrative is changing, to the effects of that changing narrative on people, policies, and practices. As such, when we refer to some of these outcomes and indicators as short term, this is still relative, particularly when we think about outcomes around people's attitudes and behaviors, social norms, and changes in policies and institutional practices. It's worth remembering that in some cases, even short-term outcomes in these areas might take several years to see.

That said, this sequencing is by no means set in stone and there isn't necessarily a linear relationship between, or progression through, these outcome areas. As such, it is worth thinking about sequencing in your own strategy: it may be the case that your strategy assumes that increased

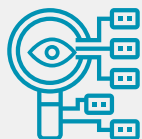
reach will lead to changes in media discourse that will have a knock-on effect on attitudes and behaviors later on. On the other hand, perhaps your work is focused on the voice aspect of narrative change in a particular context, and anticipates that strengthening representation of key groups in specific institutional practices will lead to broader shifts in cultural understandings of and responses to an issue.

It's also the case that the who and where of your efforts will likely have an impact on what you expect to see in the short or longer terms. For example, it may be that you can achieve changes in people's attitudes and beliefs in line with your narrative on a shorter timeframe with a very specific target population, but it would take much longer within a larger population. Similarly, changes in policy or practices could happen more quickly at a local level than a national one, or may be realized in specific institutions but take longer to spread into practice more generally.

Thinking about change

Outcomes articulate the changes you want or expect to see as a result of your work, and it helps to get clear on the nature of that change too.

- » Any anticipated change implies that you're starting out from somewhere. Once you have identified a meaningful set of outcomes and indicators for your work, it's helpful to **establish the baseline** from which you're going to measure change. Ideally this would be done before you start to implement your strategy but, if not, you can assess it at whichever point you're currently at—do your best with the data you have.
- » For the most part, measuring outcomes will involve measuring **change over time**: from whenever you start your strategy (or measurement!) to a pre-defined point in the future—in a year's time, for example, or at the end of the strategy. However, there may be other comparisons it's helpful to make. For example, as noted, many narrative change efforts have specific audiences and if that's the case, you might find it helpful to look at **differences between groups of people** you targeted vs. those that you didn't.
- » In the table that follows, we phrase many outcomes **in terms of increases** in something: increasing visibility of your narrative, audiences increasingly thinking or behaving in ways that reflect the narrative. However, there may be cases where you want to consider outcomes **in terms of decreases**: the decreased salience of harmful narratives, for example, or the decreased legitimacy of certain messengers. If this make sense for your work, the exemplar outcomes and indicators should be easily adaptable to capture these kinds of changes too.








In this section we aim to provide a conceptual underpinning for identifying outcomes and indicators for narrative change, as well as examples that you can build from and adapt in order to do that. More practical guidance on how you might think about measuring some of these outcomes, including existing tools and resources, is provided in Appendix 2. You can also find these resources in [the earlier version of this brief](#).

Table 2. Examples Outcomes and Indicators of Narrative Change

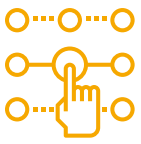
Changes in...	Shorter-term Outcomes and Indicators	Longer-term Outcomes and Indicators
<p>Organizational Capacity</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increased skills and knowledge relevant to narrative strategy among organization’s staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of staff trained in skills relevant to narrative change • Number of staff reporting increase in relevant skills • Number of external stakeholders reporting on quality/utility of activities and outputs » Increased capacity of relevant partners/ stakeholders (e.g., community members) to act as messengers for narrative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of trainings held/Number of participants in trainings • Number of participants demonstrating increase in knowledge or skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increased thought leadership/expertise around narrative change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of staffing reporting confidence/expertise in narrative change capacities • Number of publications, presentations, materials developed on narrative change • Number of requests from other organizations/partners/ stakeholders for support in narrative change efforts • Capacity strengthening provided to other organizations/ partners/stakeholders working on narrative change » Increased adaptive capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pivots made in narrative strategy in response to external context and opportunities
<p>Reach</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increased reach of messaging, products, etc. that reflect narrative among target audiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of views/downloads of online content • Number of social media likes, shares, posts, comments, and etc. • Number of opened newsletters, click-throughs • Number of people attending events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increased awareness of issue among target audiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people reporting they are aware of the issue • Number of people demonstrating basic knowledge/ understanding of narrative frame
<p>Media/Cultural Discourse</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increasing visibility of issue that narrative is targeting across different forms of media²¹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of articles, op-eds, comments on issue • Number of key commentators or influencers engaging with issue » Increasing visibility of narrative frame across different forms of media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of uses of specific language and messaging in print and broadcast media • Number of uses of relevant research and data in print and broadcast media • Volume of specific language, phrases, hashtags, and graphics on social media • Use of specific language and messaging by key individuals/ influencers on social media » Messengers for narrative have increasing visibility and authority <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of requests from journalists for comment, made to community representatives • Number of comments from organizations and community representatives appearing in print media • Number of media appearances by representatives of organization, partners, or communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Issue increasingly framed in desired ways across different forms of media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of media articles using broader narrative framing to talk about issue • Number of broadcast media articles or segments that use desired framing to talk about the issue • Share of voice on social media compared to other narrative framings • Storylines, themes, characters in television/film etc. reflect desired framing of issue

21. When tracking the discourse around your narrative, at first you may not see your narrative frame becoming more prominent but may generally observe an increase in the volume of discourse around the issue your narrative targets—even if it’s reactionary or not aligned with your framing, that could still be a signal that your work is having an impact. This is also worth keeping an eye on because it may alert you to potential harms or negative consequences.

Changes in...	Shorter-term Outcomes and Indicators	Longer-term Outcomes and Indicators
<p>Attitudes/ Beliefs</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increased recognition of issue among target audiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Number of people reporting they are aware of the issue</i> • <i>Number of people demonstrating basic knowledge/ understanding of narrative frame</i> » Increased salience of issue among target audiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Number of people considering issue very important or urgent</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increased alignment of attitudes and beliefs with narrative framing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Number of people using desired language to speak about issue</i> • <i>Number of people in agreement with narrative framing:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Agree with explanation of root causes of issue</i> - <i>Agree with proposed solutions</i> » Values increasingly reflect narrative framing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Number of people expressing intention to act in ways that reflect internalization of new narrative</i> • <i>Number or proportion of people expressing feeling of shared interests, mutual responsibility etc.</i>
<p>Behaviors</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increased engagement of target audiences in behaviors that support organizations or coalitions engaged in narrative change work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Number of people participating in relevant events/ workshops/trainings</i> • <i>Number of people making financial contributions</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increased engagement by target audience in behaviors in support of issue, that reflect narrative framing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Number of people reporting changes in their behavior in line with new narrative framing</i> • <i>Number of people participating in actions that support issues</i> • <i>Frequency of people participating in actions that support issues</i>
<p>Social Norms</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Outcomes and indicators for attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors among a larger population. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Outcomes and indicators for attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors among a larger population.
<p>Policies</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Policy or other debates frame issue in alignment with narrative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>New policy debates emerge around issue (in cases where issue was not on the agenda)</i> • <i>Desired language used to describe issue and communities</i> • <i>Problem and solutions framed in ways that reflect changed narrative</i> » Increased political will <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Number of decision makers indicating increased willingness to take desired action on issue</i> • <i>Legislation introduced that reflects framing of problem and appropriate solutions</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Improvements in policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Community representation and engagement in policy mechanisms and process</i> • <i>Policies that reflect framing of problem and appropriate solutions passed</i> • <i>Policies that reflect framing implemented</i> • <i>Harmful legislation or policies averted (reflecting narrative change efforts)</i>

Changes in...	Shorter-term Outcomes and Indicators	Longer-term Outcomes and Indicators
<p>Institutional Practices/ Power</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increased representation of key stakeholders in decision-making <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Inclusion of communities around specific decisions</i> » Increased commitment to resource allocation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Number of written or spoken commitments to allocating resources in a way that reflects narrative framing</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Institutionalization of mechanisms for representation of key stakeholders in decision-making <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Number of institutions with structures for increased representation</i> • <i>Frequency of community engagement in decision-making</i> » Shifts in resource allocation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Increased public funding for issues that reflect narrative framing</i> • <i>Increased private for funding for issues that reflect narrative framing</i>

For further guidance, tools, and resources around measuring some of these outcomes, please see Appendix 2.



Sensing the System: Approaches for Tracking and Responding to Changes in Context

Narrative change work doesn't happen in a vacuum—quite the opposite.

Narratives function as part of a broader social, political, and economic system, and when you deploy a narrative, you do so into complex and dynamic context. It's rarely (if ever) the case that narratives, once put out into the world, proceed along an unimpeded trajectory. External environment factors are likely to have a big role in slowing down or accelerating progress. Your work is likely to have unintended consequences that you couldn't have foreseen from the outset. And, importantly, the system is going to respond to your efforts—often in reactionary ways. As John A. Powell notes, "structural adjustment and resistance is part of nearly all interventions in a complex system. We do not make a single intervention and then stop. We must see how the system and actors in the system respond and make the necessary adjustment."²²

As such, it is very important to be alert to signals from the broader context, and to think flexibly and iteratively about narrative development, deployment, and measurement. In this section, we offer some approaches and practices that can help organizations to do this kind of work. While they're not specific to narrative change work, they are intended to be adaptable to any kind of complex systems work.

→ How do you sense the system to adapt and learn as you go?

As you implement your strategy, you will need to employ ways to sense and gather real-time intelligence about what is happening along the way. Doing this systems sensing will require ongoing reflection and iteration over the course of your strategy, and an openness to learning, adaptation, and strengthening your approach over time. As adrienne maree brown says in her work on emergent strategy, “change is constant”, and we need to engage in intentional adaptation to continue to grow and stay purposeful in the face of this.²³ She highlights the need for collaborative innovation, which she likens to murmuration in nature:

“ *Here’s how it works in a murmuration/shoal/swarm: each creature is tuned in to its neighbors, the creatures right around it in the formation. This might be the birds on either side, or the six fish in each direction. There is a right relationship, a right distance between them—too close and they crash, too far away and they can’t feel the micro-adaptations of the other bodies...In this way thousands of birds or fish or bees can move together, each empowered with basic rules and a vision to live...There is an efficiency at play—is something not working? Stop. Change. If something is working, keep doing it—learning and innovating as you go.*”

To help you to change, learn, and innovate as you go, it is useful to reflect on different types of data—not just at the end of the effort, but early on and at regular intervals throughout its implementation. This might include whatever data you collect against the outcomes and indicators you have defined, as well as surfacing your own experiences and latent knowledge about how change is

happening, and keeping track of what’s happening in the external environment. It might also mean broadening your vantage point so that you are considering how the context is changing and how the external context is responding to your work, creating opportunities for larger than expected change, or less ripe conditions.

23. maree brown, a. (2017) *Emergent strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*. Chico, CA: AK Press.

Real-Time Sensemaking

While carrying out sensemaking in a system can be challenging, there are some approaches that can make sure things don't get overly complicated and time-consuming. In a [blog post from early 2020](#) (just as the particularly fast-moving and unpredictable pandemic was emerging), Chris Corrigan set out a relatively straightforward process to guide collective reflection on real-time information and its implications²⁴:

1 Observe the situation.

Watch things for a while. Have people in your organization (or outside of it, as relevant) gather notes, observations, and data objects (stories, tweets, news items, stats) and then meet to share and collate what you've gathered.

2 Look for patterns.

Have the group sort through the data and find what's similar.

3 Inquire.

Drill down a little further to spot patterns, using these starting points:

- » Generalizations: "In general, I notice..."
- » Exceptions: "In general I notice...but..."
- » Contradictions: "On the one hand I notice...but on the other hand..."
- » Surprises: "I am really surprised that..."
- » Curiosity: "I wonder if..."

4 Look at what is keeping patterns in place.

Corrigan proposes identifying and unpacking:

- » Attractors that are holding things together
- » Boundaries that act to separate them out
- » Connections between agents in the system
- » Exchanges, or the information, power, and resources flowing through connections
- » Identities and how they function in the system, e.g. with regard to power and voice

5 Make adjustments.

Once you have identified some of these constraints and factors that cause patterns to stick, list the ones that are most important to your work and in your control to change—then think through what adjustments you might make as a result.

Source: [Chris Corrigan](#)

24. Corrigan, Chris. (2020.) *Sense-making in real time*. <http://www.chriscorrigan.com/parkinglot/sense-making-in-real-time>

Emergent Learning

Organizations might also consider tools that facilitate learning throughout your strategy’s lifecycle. The Emergent Learning approach aims to help organizations deepen and institutionalize their ability to think about and learn from their work in the context of change and unpredictability.²⁵ Fourth Quadrant Partners have developed two Emergent Learning tools: Before and After Action Reviews and Emergent Learning Tables.

Before and After Action Reviews

Before and After Action Reviews are helpful tools for real-time learning. They “build a team’s capacity to perform by comparing actual results with intended results, exploring causes of those results, identifying successful practices to sustain and improve, and planning for how to apply insights to future performance.”²⁶ Table 3 lists some

guiding questions for Before and After Action Reviews. The exercise is most helpful when used as a repeated practice in dynamic environments because they help teams enter experimentation with eyes wide open and to look back to learn from what really happened.

Table 3. Guiding Questions for Before and After Action Reviews

Before Action Review	After Action Review
What are our intended results?	What were our intended results?
.....
What will success look like?	What were our actual results?
.....
What challenges might we encounter?	What caused our results?
.....
What have we learned from similar situations?	What will we sustain or improve?
.....
What will make us successful this time?	What is our next opportunity to test what we learned?
.....
When will we do an AAR?	When will we do our next BAR?
.....

25. Fourth Quadrant Partners. (2018.) *The 4QP Emergent Learning Platform*. <http://www.4qpartners.com/4qp-el-platform.html>
 26. Ibid.

Emergent Learning Tables Sessions

Emergent Learning Tables Sessions are meant to help participants make collective knowledge visible and then apply it to future work. The process begins with a framing question, followed by filling out an Emergent Learning table with four parts or quadrants:



Source: [Fourth Quadrant Partners](#).

Emergent Learning practices are helpful for pulling together stories, experiences, and data to extract salient insights and apply them to your work in a timely, responsive way.

Additional Considerations for Measurement

In this final section, we offer up a few more considerations for better understanding your narrative change efforts. They focus on clarifying what you expect to see as a result of your work, through both articulating the role you play in narrative change efforts and thinking expansively about the concept of progress and what that might look like.

→ What role are you playing in advancing narrative change?

As we've discussed, narrative change isn't something that any one organization does in isolation; it generally requires the work of many different actors employing various different strategies toward a shared goal. Different organizations are positioned to make different contributions to narrative change efforts based on their focus, skills, resources, and connections. Thinking about what role you are playing in this space—and how that fits into the grander scheme of things—can help you make a fairer assessment of what change you can expect to see. It also helps to focus measurement not on the amount of change that occurred (which isn't a helpful way to think about change in complex contexts), but rather whether and how well you made the contribution that you expected to, and what happened as a result.

For guidance and suggestions on understanding different roles in narrative change, the following resources may be useful:

- » The [Active Voice Lab's horticulture metaphors](#) for actors engaged in narrative work helps answer questions about what role an organization is well positioned to play. These roles include trowels (who dig deep into issues to plant seeds of change) and sprinklers (who facilitate new growth in narratives from a wide array of storytellers).²⁷
- » Jim Coe and Rhonda Schlangen's [No Royal Road](#) (2019) provides a framework for assessing contributions to advocacy campaigns that is highly applicable to narrative change efforts. This framework suggests different roles an organization can play in this type of work, from seed sower (the initiators of an effort that goes on to build a momentum of its own) to primary actor (an organization that coordinates and spearheads an overall approach) to over-the-line-getter (actors who make a niche but vital contribution to an effort).²⁸

27. Active Voice Lab. (n.d.) *Horticulture tools*. <https://www.activevoice.net/how-do-we-know/home/horticulture-tools/>

28. Coe, J., & Schlangen, R. (2019). *No royal road. Finding and following the natural pathways in advocacy evaluation*. <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/No-Royal-Road.pdf>

→ What do you expect progress to look like?

When we're engaged in social change work, it's easy to think about progress as a linear, positive, directionally upward change—for example, from a harmful narrative about an issue to the dominance of the one we'd like to see instead. In reality, though, progress can look different depending on the existing status quo, the context in which you're working, and sudden shocks or external factors that have big implications (either positive or negative) for what you might expect to see.

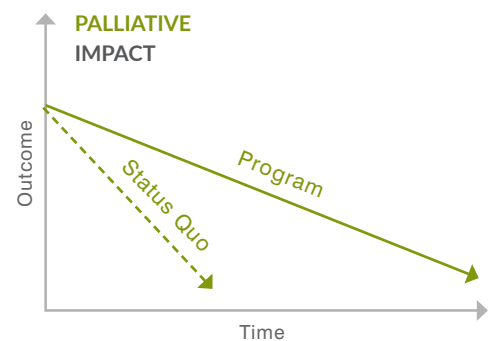
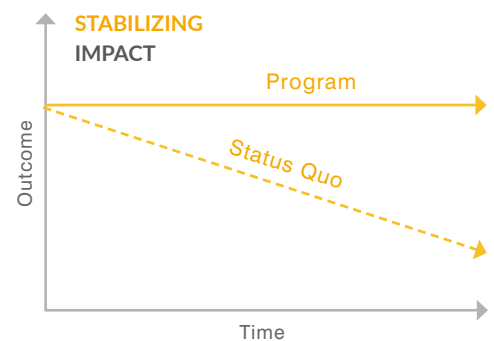
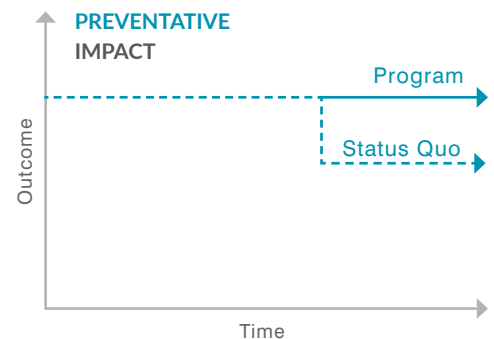
In *Six Models for Understanding Impact*, Liz Reudy encourages us to think beyond a positive upward trajectory and offers some alternate visions of progress:

- **Preventing further setbacks when the status quo changes suddenly for the worse (preventative impact)**
- **“Holding the line”, or maintaining desired conditions if the status quo is worsening (stabilizing impact)**
- **Lessening the gradient of a change that is directionally negative due to profound or rapid deterioration in the status quo (palliative impact)**

For example, in recent years we've seen an increasingly hostile climate created around immigration in Europe and the US and the narrative status quo worsened profoundly—that is, the dominant narratives about immigrants, migrants, and refugees became markedly more inaccurate and harmful. In this context, many organizations seeking to change the narrative around immigration found themselves working to counter the demonization and dehumanization of these groups, rather than advancing more transformational narratives; trying to hold the line, or even achieve a palliative impact, given a deteriorating status quo.

These kinds of contextual effects aren't always negative, and you also may find yourself in a position to capitalize on certain emergent changes. For instance, when it comes to articulating progress you might actually anticipate a sharper upward trajectory than you'd previously expected, due to a particular window of opportunity opening up (opportunistic impact.) An example here might be new space created by the COVID-19 pandemic in how we think about the value of care, service, transportation, and supply chain work, increasingly being understood as “essential” to society, and the opportunity to foreground workers' access to rights and recognition, safe working conditions, and better wages.

When measuring progress, being mindful of these different pathways can be helpful in considering what kinds of outcomes are realistic or desirable, and on what timeframes. That said, given the speed with which changes in context can happen (and the complexity this often engenders), it's not always clear how exactly things are playing out in real time. In those cases, the six impact models may be more helpful as you look back and seek to interpret and account for the progress that was made.



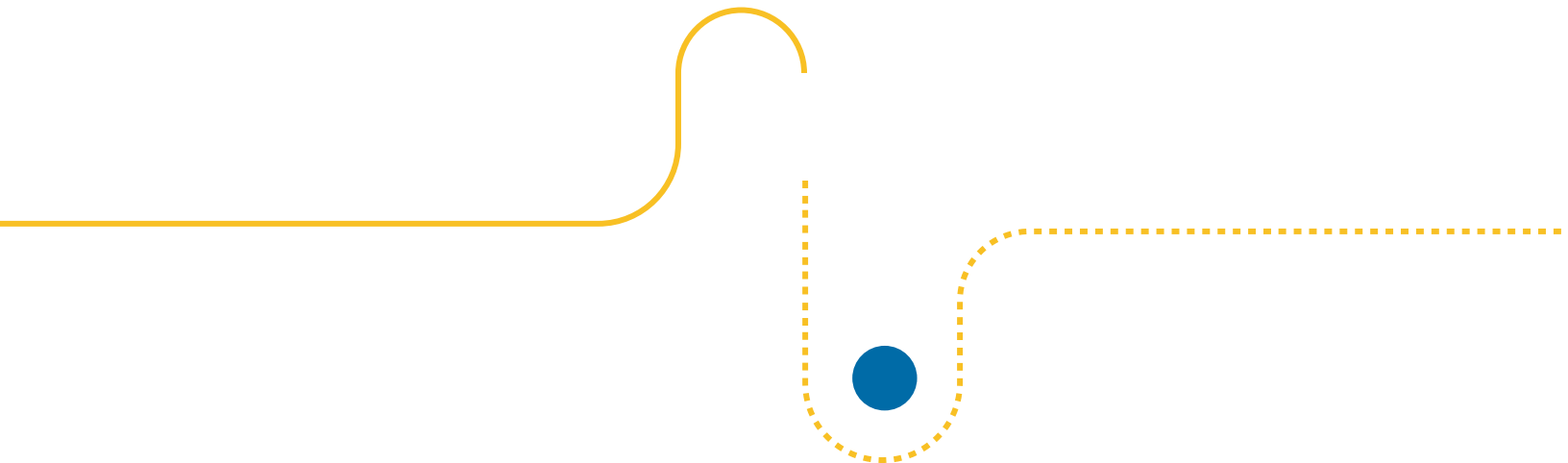
Concluding Thoughts

Narrative change is complex and challenging work, and we'll be the first to admit that measuring it isn't easy. But it's a powerful strategy in our efforts to achieve a more just and equitable society—and it is precisely because of its potential for impact that we should think seriously about how to measure progress and track the results of our efforts.

In this brief, we offer several ways for practitioners to get clearer on their strategy and goals for measuring narrative change. There are likely certain questions you can answer already about your strategy and what's going to be important to measure, or some initial outcomes and indicators you can identify and begin to track. Everyone starts somewhere! You don't have to do everything all at once: you can always add new elements to your approach as you learn more about your strategy and context, and as measurement starts to get more routine and established as part of your work. For those funding narrative change, we'd highlight the need for flexibility and responsiveness given the dynamic and iterative nature of the work,

for setting realistic expectations about time horizons and when you might expect to see change, and for an openness to emergent insight and outcomes.

We hope this brief is helpful to those interested in measuring narrative change, but we know that there is still more work to do in building out this field and that there are many other people thinking about these questions. We hope that this piece can contribute to ongoing conversation, innovation, and experimentation in this space, which will help to strengthen narrative change efforts and their potential to drive change.



Appendix 1

→ Narrative Change Planning and Strategy Tools

While this guide is focused on the measurement of narrative change rather than how you go about it, there are many other resources that exist to help organizations plan their narrative change strategies:

→ **Color of Change: Building Narrative Power**

A series of publications and presentations on a range of topics, focused on narrative strategy, infrastructure, and content.

→ **Executives' Alliance for Boys and Men of Color and Perception Institute: His Story: Shifting Narratives for Boys and Men of Color Toolkit**

A resource that breaks down narrative change into nine distinct strategic domains and provides guidance about their components: research, rapid response, media monitoring, engaging influencers, cultural strategy, content generation, dissemination, engagement, and evaluation.

→ **Frameworks Institute: Toolkits**

Toolkits drawing on research conducted by Frameworks on a range of social issues, which include talking points, quick-start guides to incorporating core framing elements into messaging, model responses, slides, and editorials.

→ **International Center for Policy Advocacy: Reframing Narratives Toolkit**

A step-by-step resource for building a narrative change campaign. Provides guidance and targeted questions to consider in five key areas: finding a focus and opening, building out elements, preparing for responses, running the campaign, and evaluating reach and uptake

→ **National Association of County and City Health Officials: Advancing Public Narrative for Health Equity and Social Justice**

A comprehensive toolkit that provides a range of prompts and activities for making existing narratives visible, developing critical observation skills for recognizing and disrupting these narratives, and connecting these insights to developing transformative alternative narratives

→ **National Criminal Justice and Public Health Alliance: Developing a Transformational Criminal Justice Narrative Toolkit**

A toolkit providing a six-step guide and a set of exercises for developing transformational public narratives: finding people, building relationships, developing shared understandings, identifying existing narratives, developing transformational narratives, and developing an action plan

→ **The Opportunity Agenda: Vision, Values, and Voice Communication Toolkit**

A toolkit providing framing principles and strategies “that support the long-term movement of hearts and minds,” guidance on applying them to short-term victories, and tips and examples of tactics and messaging strategies

→ **Public Interest Research Group:**

Framing Equality Toolkit

A toolkit containing highly practical guidance, activities, and tools that can be used for understanding existing frames, creating new ones, and then testing and refining them.

→ **Reclaiming Native Truth: Narrative Change Strategy**

An example of a comprehensive narrative change strategy, outlining a framework for and theory of narrative change and identifying a set of objectives, stakeholders, and activities across several key areas: media, pop culture and the arts, philanthropy, policy and practice, education, and collaborative support structures

→ **ReThink Health: Toolkit for Developing a Public Narrative**

A selection of materials including videos, group exercises, and worksheets for developing individual and community stories and linking these together to create a public narrative.

Appendix 2

→ Tools and Resources for Measuring Narrative Change Outcomes

Resource	When to use it	What it is	Level of lift
ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY			
<p><u>Measuring Impact: An Organizer's Toolkit to Evaluate Communications Effectiveness</u> Center for Media Justice</p>	<p>When you're looking to assess improvements in your organization's infrastructure and capacity for communications-related work and to better understand if that work has been planned and executed well</p>	<p>A toolkit providing a series of self-assessments of organizational capacity for carrying out communications strategies as well as for evaluating the appropriateness and effectiveness of strategies themselves</p>	<p>Medium ■■■</p>
<p><u>Informing Advocacy and Communications Capacity Building Efforts: A Culturally Responsive Tool for Assessment</u> ORS Impact, Using Evidence, Sawayya Consulting, The Khana Group</p>	<p>When you're looking for an example of a tool that measures organizational capacity in areas that are broadly applicable to narrative change</p>	<p>A survey instrument and interview protocol that can be used in tandem for assessing advocacy and communications capacity</p>	<p>Medium ■■■</p>
<p><u>Organizational capacity assessment tools database</u> Hewlett Foundation</p>	<p>When you are looking for existing tools that can be used to assess capacity, which may contain components relevant to narrative change</p>	<p>A spreadsheet of organizational capacity assessment tools There is also a document providing guidance on which might be most appropriate for a given context</p>	<p>High ■■■ (many different tools to review and potential modification needed)</p>
REACH			
<p><u>Communications monitoring, evaluating and learning toolkit</u> Overseas Development Institute</p>	<p>When you are looking for a framework and sample metrics that can help you ascertain the reach of your narrative interventions</p>	<p>A toolkit for thinking about communications monitoring, evaluation, and learning, which provides example questions, indicators, and tools</p>	<p>Low ■■■ (review and identification of indicators) Medium ■■■ (implementation)</p>

Resource	When to use it	What it is	Level of lift
<p><u>Integrated Evaluation Framework</u> Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication</p>	<p>When you are looking for an example of a framework, which includes metrics and methodologies, that can help you ascertain the reach of your narrative interventions</p>	<p>A guide to aligning communications objectives, devising strategy, setting targets and measuring outputs and impact of communications work; provides example metrics and methods for each step</p>	<p>Low <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> (review and identification of indicators)</p> <p>Medium <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> (implementation)</p>

<p><u>A pragmatic guide to monitoring and evaluating research communications using digital tools</u> Overseas Development Institute</p>	<p>When you want to identify existing tools for tracking and monitoring mentions of specific language or messaging across a wide range of digital platforms</p>	<p>A list of digital tools for monitoring strategic communications as well as offering suggestions of metrics to use</p>	<p>Low <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> (review and identification of tools)</p> <p>Medium <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> (implementing any of the tools)</p>
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MEDIA/CULTURAL DISCOURSE

<p><u>Content Analysis Guide</u> Colorado State University</p> <p><u>Guide to Qualitative Content Analysis</u> Zhang and Wildemuth</p>	<p>When you want to analyze the content of media to understand how an issue is being talked about or framed</p>	<p>Guides to conducting content analysis: a method for coding texts and quantitatively and qualitatively analyzing the presence of language or concepts, comparing them to alternative ones, and assessing the meanings they convey</p>	<p>Medium / High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (depending on the volume of content)</p>
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<p><u>Moving the Race Conversation Forward</u> Race Forward</p> <p><u>Africa in the Media</u> <u>Immigration Nation</u> Media Impact Project</p>	<p>When you want to see examples of how other organizations have assessed aspects of narrative using content analysis</p>	<p>Case studies of content analysis examining representations of particular communities and regions across various media</p>	<p>Low <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> (review)</p>
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ATTITUDES, BELIEFS, BEHAVIORS, AND NORMS

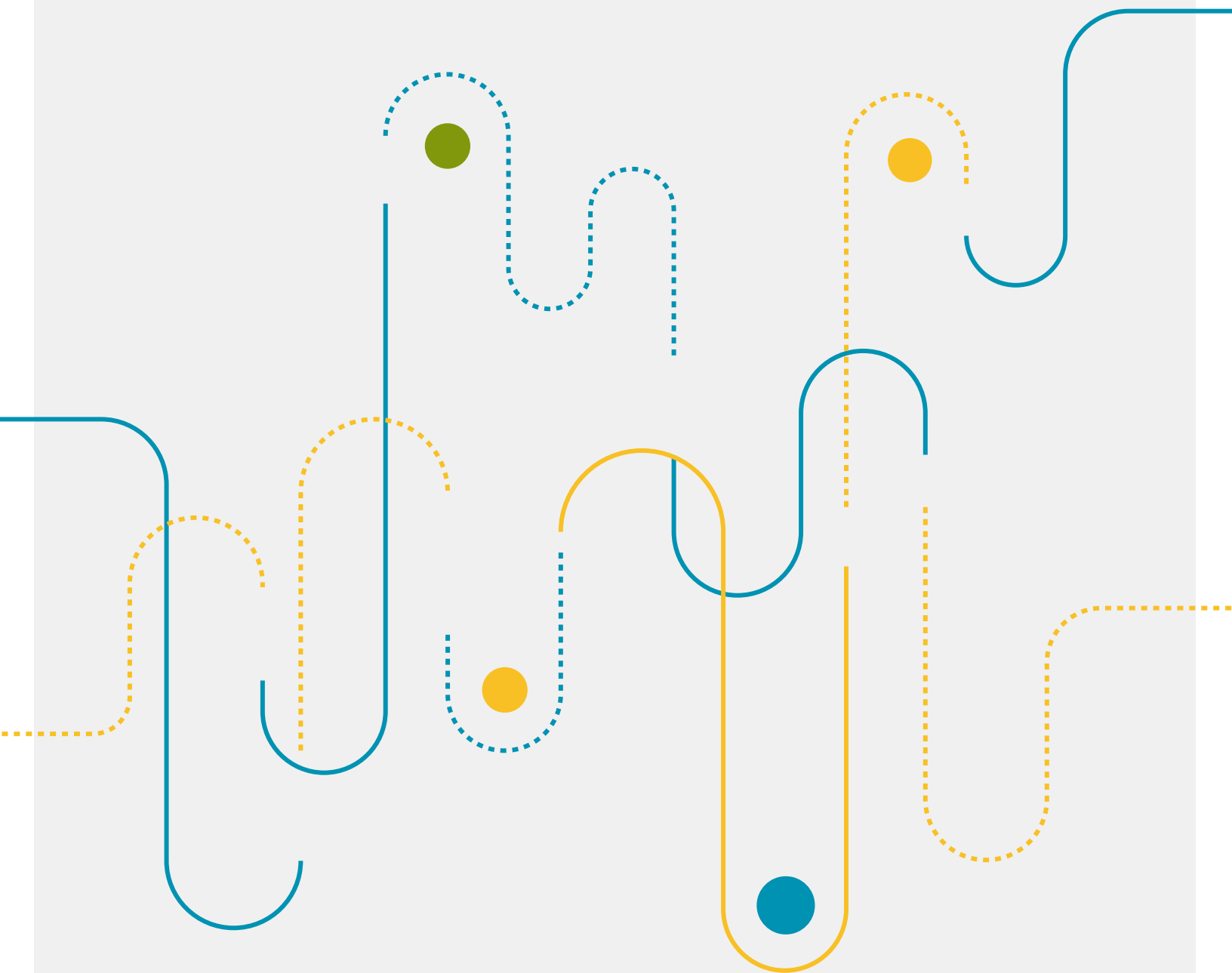
<p><u>Methods of Measuring Public Opinion</u> Russell G. Brooker and Todd Schaefer</p>	<p>When you are trying to decide which methods to use to capture information on people's values and attitudes toward or beliefs about a social issue</p>	<p>A paper that gives an overview of qualitative and quantitative, and formal and informal methods of measuring public opinion, including when each may be appropriate</p>	<p>Low <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> (review)</p> <p>Medium / High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (implementing any of the methods)</p>
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Resource	When to use it	What it is	Level of lift
<p><u>European Social Survey Source Questionnaire</u> <u>World Values Survey</u></p>	<p>When you need inspiration for or examples of existing survey questions about people’s values and attitudes toward or beliefs about a social issue—for examples, root causes, proposed solutions, attitudes toward communities</p>	<p>Questionnaires used in the European Social Survey and World Values Survey, used to monitor changing attitudes and values across a range of social topics</p>	<p>Medium / High ■■■ (implementation; depends on length of survey, sample sizes, etc.)</p>
<p><u>Handbook of Data Collection Tools: Shifts in Social Norms</u> ORS Impact</p>	<p>When you are trying to decide which methods to use to capture information on people’s values and attitudes toward or beliefs about a social issue</p> <p>When you need inspiration for or examples of existing survey questions about people’s values and attitudes toward or beliefs about a social issue</p>	<p>Examples of data collection tools for measuring social norms: includes interview protocols for individuals and focus groups, participant observation checklists, and survey samples, as well as methodological notes</p>	<p>Low ■□□ (review)</p> <p>Medium / High ■■■ (implementation; depends on length of survey, sample sizes, etc.)</p>
<p><u>Constructing a Theory of Planned Behavior Questionnaire</u> Icek Ajzen</p>	<p>When you need ideas for developing a tool to understand people’s intentions to act or behave in certain ways</p>	<p>Guide providing methodological guidance on and examples of people’s understandings of and intentions to engage in particular behaviors</p>	<p>Medium / High ■■■ (implementation; depends on length of survey, sample sizes, etc.)</p>
<p><u>Community toolbox: Behavioral surveys</u> University of Kansas</p>	<p>When you want to get an overview of the steps involved in surveying people’s behaviors</p>	<p>A short resource providing an introduction to behavioral surveys, when they can be used, and how to conduct them; also includes a checklist of their main features</p>	<p>Low ■□□ (review)</p>
<p><u>Measurement Instrument Database for the Social Sciences (MIDSS)</u> Search: “behavior”</p>	<p>When you are looking for existing examples of or inspiration for surveys used to assess behavior</p>	<p>A database of social science survey instruments</p>	<p>Medium ■■■ (several examples to review)</p> <p>High ■■■ (implementation)</p>

POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE

<p><u>I2L2: Impact= Influence+ Leverage+ Learning</u> ORS Impact</p>	<p>When you are trying to identify which policy and institutional outcomes or indicators might be most relevant to your work</p>	<p>A resource that provides concrete examples of systems-level outcomes and an overarching framework for understanding the types of change they represent (and how these interact)</p>	<p>Low ■□□ (review and identification)</p>
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Resource	When to use it	What it is	Level of lift
<p><u>Unique Methods in Advocacy Evaluation: Policymaker Ratings</u> Coffman and Reed</p>	<p>When you are looking for an approach for understanding political will towards an issue relevant to your work</p>	<p>A framework for rating policymakers according to their political will or support for an issue, their influence, and how confident the user is of their assessment</p>	<p>Medium / High ■■■ (carrying out the approach)</p>
<p><u>Handbook of Data Collection Tools: Improved Policies</u> ORS Impact</p>	<p>When you are looking for examples of modifiable tools that can be used to track policies, their components, and their implementation</p>	<p>Examples of data collection tools for measuring changes in policy</p>	<p>Low ■□□ (review)</p> <p>Medium / High ■■■ (carrying out tracking, depending on tool)</p>
<p><u>Narrative Policy Framework (NPF)</u> Jones and McBeth</p>	<p>When you want to understand more about the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of assessing which narratives are shaping policy changes and through which mechanisms</p>	<p>An article introducing the methodology for NPF, which empirically tests for connections between how narratives impact public opinion and how that then impacts elite and institutional decisions</p>	<p>Low ■□□ (review)</p> <p>High ■■■ (carrying out the analysis)</p>



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