

How Leaders and Leadership Show up in the Public Discourse: Shaping the Narrative

Guide for Advancing
Conversation



October 2023

Dear Colleagues,

Recognizing that in our daily work we are so often bombarded with negative narratives about the populations with which we work and the work we do, our annual equity convening focused on providing time and resources to build asset-based narratives. Our goal was to have peer-to-peer conversations, share stories, and reflect on the work of communication experts in order to build the “muscle” necessary to shift the public narrative. By pivoting toward asset-based stories and positive frames, we can help advance racial equity goals and increase public trust in early childhood, K-12, and youth development systems.

The convening conversations included many “aha” moments about frames that prevent us from furthering our missions, and we began the journey of creating new asset-based narratives. However, only one or two members of each grantee could attend. Recognizing that a narrative is many voices repeated over time, we are sharing the slides, resources, and guiding questions in an effort to create a resource that can be replicated for others in your organization, department, or team.

We hope you find it empowering.

Sincerely,
The Stone Team (Sara, Chris, Brandon, and Brian)
and Dr. Sherri Killins Stewart

“The secret of change
is to focus all of your
energy not on fighting
the old, but on building
the new.”

– Socrates

WHAT
WOULD
YOU
do?

If there was evidence your communication was limiting your impact, undermining equity or hurting those you want to help...

Trabian Shorters

The Power of Perception

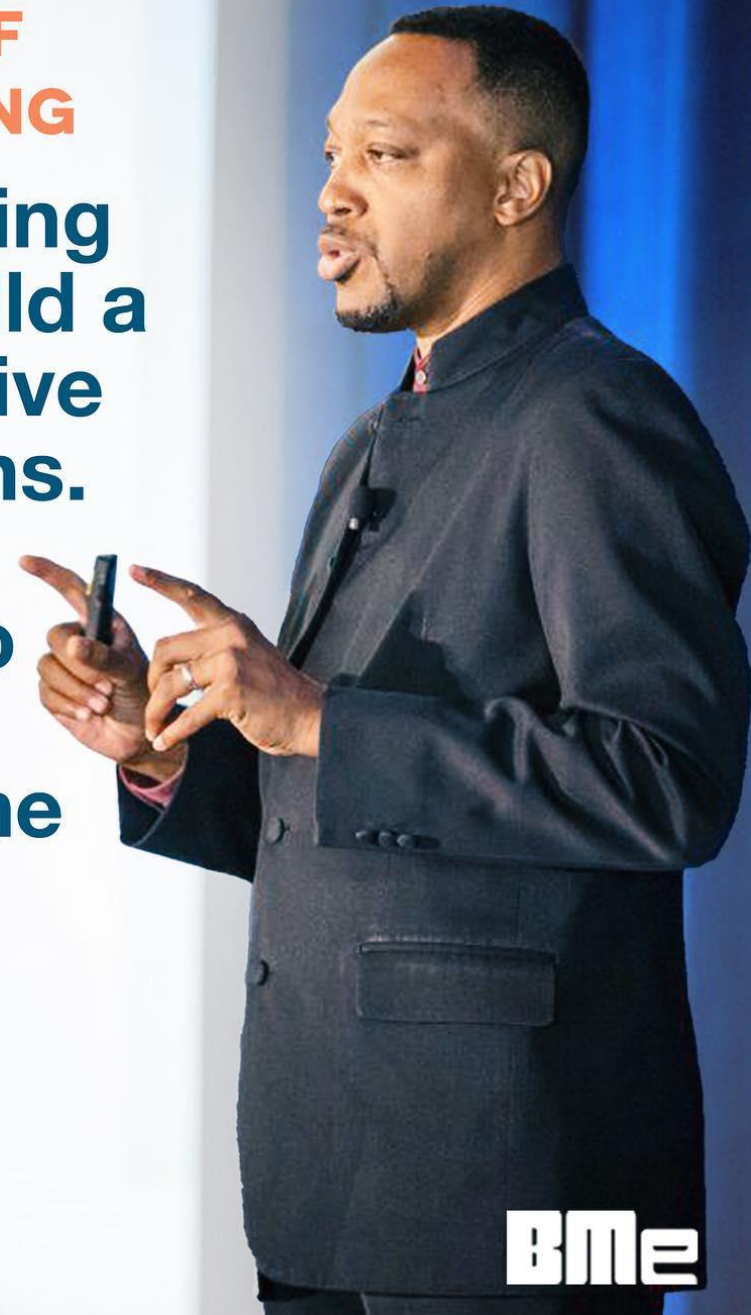
A Cognitive Skill to
Magnify Humanity with
Trabian Shorters

THE POWER OF ASSET-FRAMING

“Asset-Framing helps us build a fuller narrative for our brains. It makes us less likely to stereotype people as the problem.”

| Trabian Shorters

Source: TrabianShorters.com



BMe

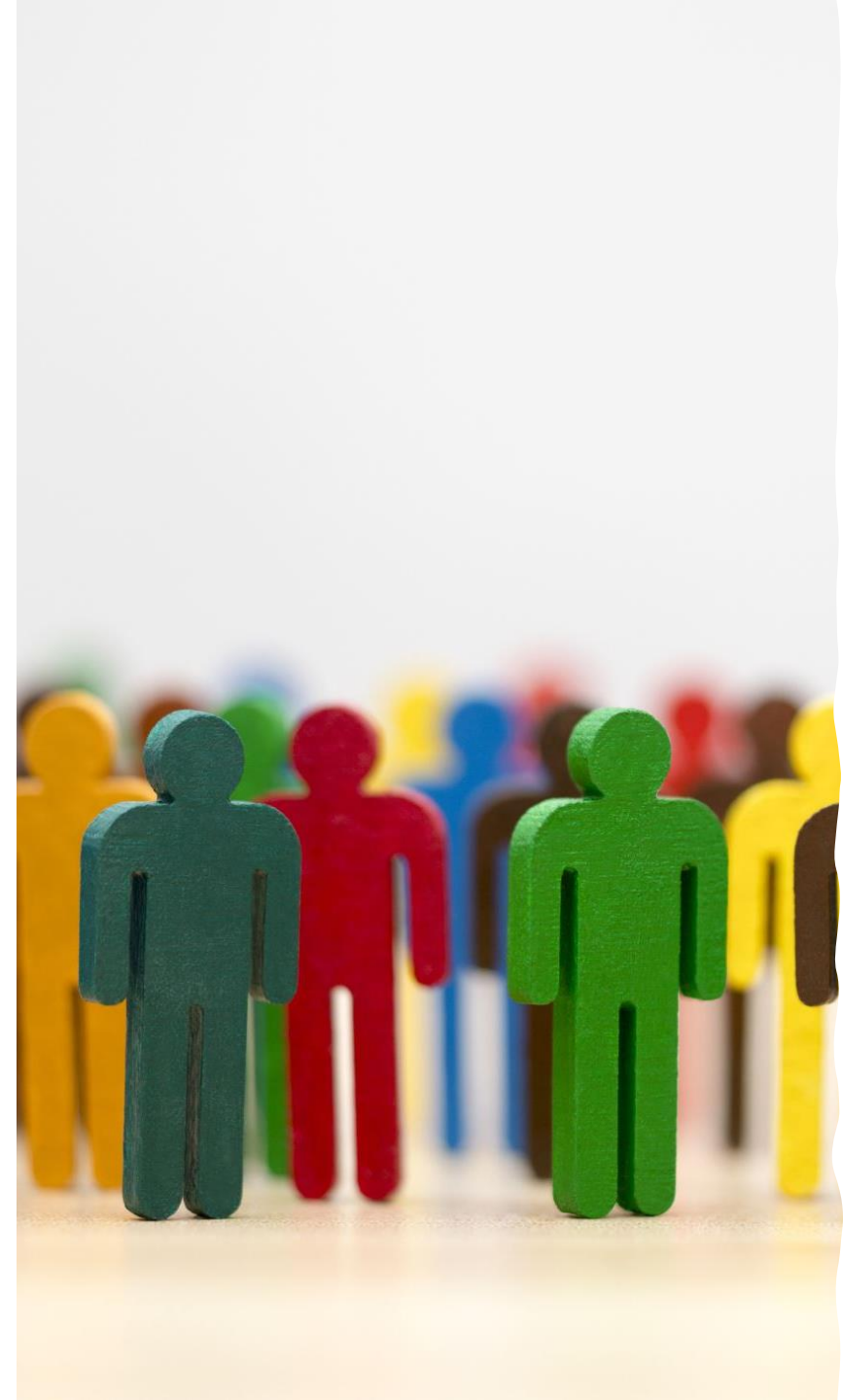
Deficit-framing is “defining people by their challenges, ignoring their aspirations or contributions, then remediating them to be less burdensome on society.”



Deficit Framing

Defining people by their problems...

Creates powerful lasting negative associations that make engagement and equity hard to achieve



From Deficit to Asset Framing

**“Defining people by their challenge as in
“at-risk-youth” and “low-income families”
is the definition of stigmatizing them.”**

**Define by the aspirations and the
environments that threatens the
aspiration.**

**“at risk youth”
vs
“students thriving
to graduate
despite difficult
environments”**

Apply an Asset Lens Instead

Don't tell an inspiring story of one engaged Black dad but cite the CDC data saying Black men are the most engaged fathers in America.

Debunk myths instead of telling of one story.

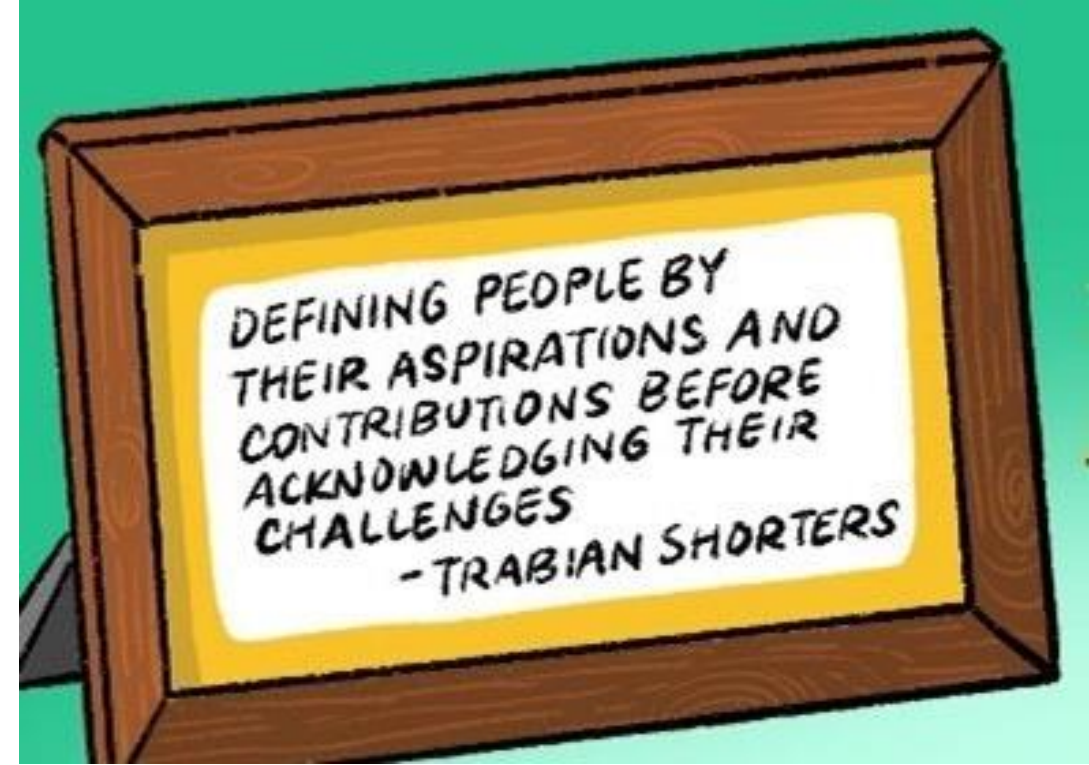


Asset Framing...

Intends to influence investment driven by continued contributions to society

And Considers...

Sequence & Word Choice



“90 percent of patients fully recover” vs “10 percent of patients die”

Three common mistakes

- Substituting Positive Language for the Deficit Frame
Not just a nicer name for “at risk youth”
- Sharing Individual Success Stories
Story of one Black man that defies stereotype vs CDC data on Black men, regardless of marital status and most engaged fathers
- Using Gap Data – e.g. “you’re dumber than your sister, but you’re gaining”
 - Reinforces one group is inferior to another
 - Closing the gap does not mean excellence

Photo by [Michael Dziedzic](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Ask yourself...

Can you speak the same words to the communities with whom you work that you use to describe them behind their backs?

“

Asset framing has advantages over deficit, but I do not believe we must use only one... My point is by relying too heavily on only one we miss possible solutions and accidentally perpetuate stereotypes.

Trabian Shorters

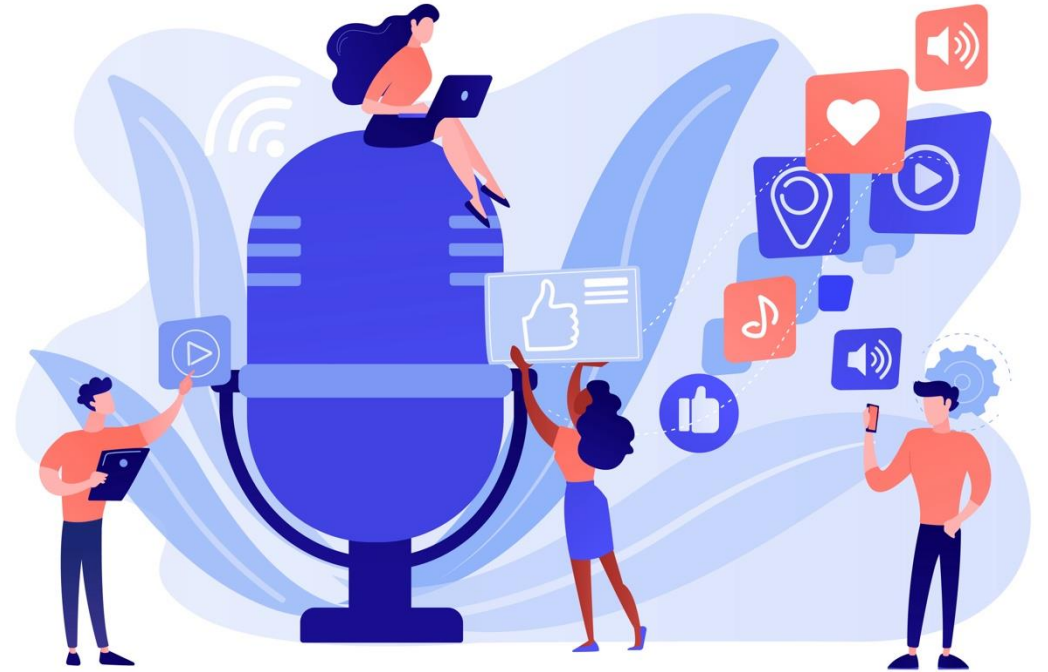


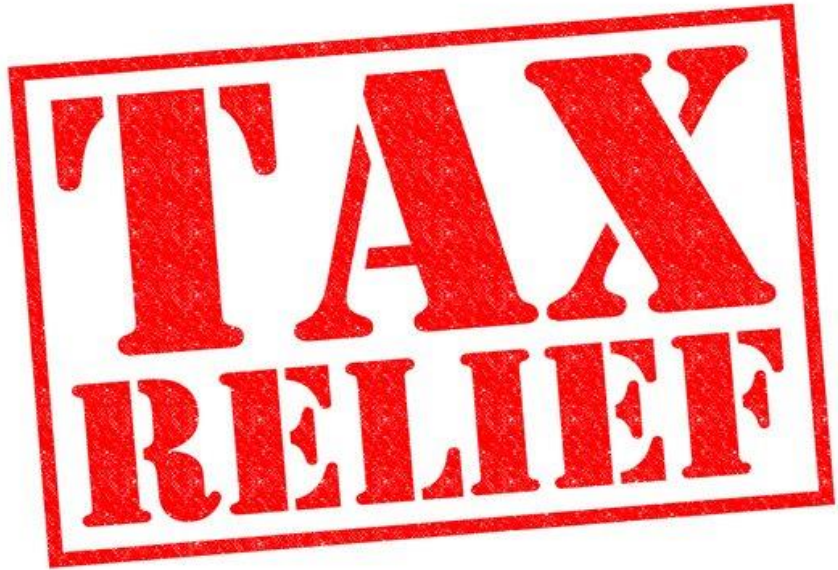
George Lakoff

Framing 101

Narrative

- Narratives matter more than facts
- Narratives tell us which facts to recognize and ignore.





Do not use
their language

Don't use "tax relief" because for
relief there must be affliction.

Problem with Counter Arguments

They attempt to prove the other side wrong, factually or morally



Source: Freepik.com

Our public schools don't teach CRT.

We don't teach white students they are the oppressors.

National polling shows these types of messages do not seem to resonate strongly with the multi – racial working class.

Appeal to Shared Values

- Freedom
- Fairness
- Community
- Belonging

Our values are popular, let's talk and act like that is true.



Paint a Picture of Abundance

The best technology, learning materials, and support for our teachers, leaders and nurses and counselors will prepare students for a bright future.

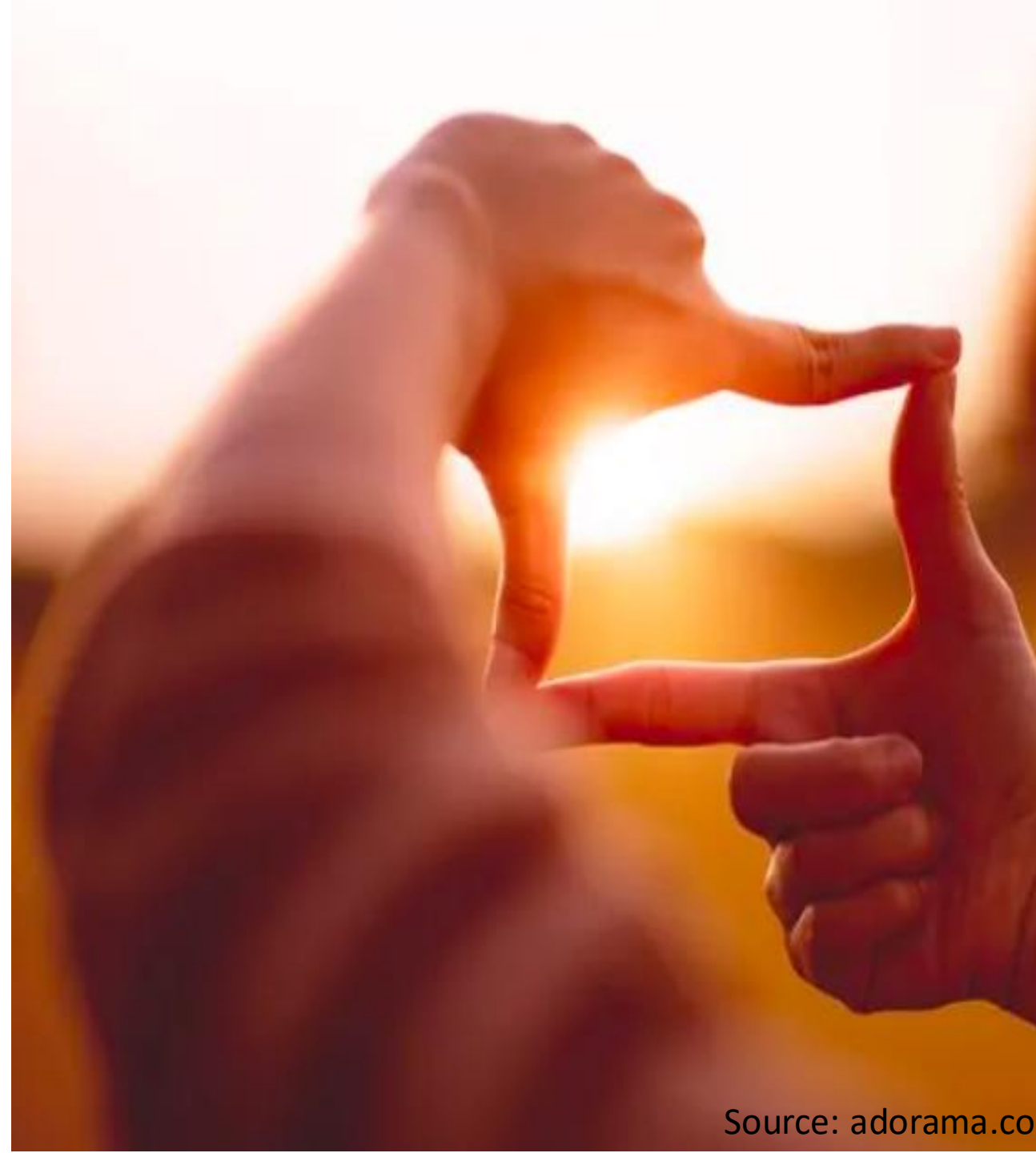
Source: iStockphoto.com



Framing

- Getting the language that fits your worldview.
- Language carries and evokes ideas

“We do not need a permission slip to defend America”



Frames

When we negate the frame, we evoke the frame. Richard Nixon found out the hard way. He stood before the nation and said, “I am not a crook”. And everybody thought about him as a crook.

- George Lakoff's Framing 101



Source: New York Times

<https://archive.nytimes.com/learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/17/nov-17-1973-nixon-declares-i-am-not-a-crook/>

A Lakoff Summary



- Frame issues from **your perspective**
- Create your **own language**
- **Truth is not enough**, frame from your perspective
- Speak from **your values**
- **Understand others' approach**; predict what they will say
- Strategically **think across areas**
- Identity and **values do not need to match self interest**
- **Unite and cooperate**
- **Proactive not reactive**, play offense not defense
- **Speak to base** from nurturant model

john powell & Rachel Heydemann

On Bridging: Evidence
and Guidance from
Real World Cases





Build A Bigger “WE”

- **Build bridges to unite diverse groups.** This requires respect and an appreciation of one another’s shared humanity.
- Disrupt the ways we have been programmed to find “others.”
- **Bridge with targeted universalism** and encouraging collective good.



Popular Comms

Strategic Messaging to Defend
Public Education & Defeat
Authoritarianism:
Recommendations from a
Recent Comprehensive Study

Strategic Messaging



Source: iStockPhoto.com

- Meet them where they are
- Begin with validating people's feelings
- Persuade by finding common ground rooted in shared values

Then use perspectives-taking to persuade and imagine the world from another person's vantage point

Strategic Messaging

- Lead with strong vision
 - Describe a positive future rooted in abundance
 - Ignore the opposition
 - Offensive strategy
- Create a big “us” vs. small them
- Name shared values
- Name the culprits
- Point out motive of the other to divide and conquer
- Invoke a big, inclusive, multi racial “us” more powerful than the small “them”



Source: Information-x.com



Source: Wrike.com

Avoid

- Condescension – superiority, contempt, patronizing
- Don't punch at parents - Focus on powerful actor
- Coming at people with facts
- Introducing vulnerable and targeted victims first

Do

- Name culprits and motives
- Appeal to shared values
- Paint a picture of abundance
- Play offense –defense – offense
 - Start with positive vision
 - Provide a story that inoculates against attacks and stands up groups
 - Bridge back to positive

“

At times in California, as well as in other states across the U.S, it seems there is a cottage industry churning out grim statistics about the lives of young Black and Latino males. ...It's not that ...the data is inaccurate. It's that it is incomplete and fails to account for the success and achievement of young men of color.

Robin White Good

Some Guiding Questions

- **Name a group or population you communicate about** in your work, such as children, youth, the workforce, educators, direct services providers, or principals.
- Based on the resources and discussions thus far, **what is the language you have been using related to that population that you will now drop when talking about that population?**
- **What language will you use more often** to convey the assets of the specific population you described and are serving?
- **How will you reshape your frames or data to be asset-based and solutions-oriented?**
- **How would stories and frames need to shift toward systemic change, reduce othering, and support solidarity?**

References

- Trabian Shorters, Brand-Manager, (September 30, 2021) [The Power of Perception](#)
- Krista Tippett-, (February 2022) [A Cognitive Skill to Magnify Humanity with Trabian Shorters, On Being](#)
- George Lakoff (May 27, 2017) [“Framing 101”](#)
- John Powell and Rachel Heydemann, (August 19, 2020) [On Bridging Evidence and Guidance from Real-World Cases](#)
- Popular Comms, (August 2023) *Strategic Messaging to Defend Public Education and Defeat Authoritarianism Recommendations from a Recent Comprehensive Study*
- Robin White Good, (December 14, 2016) [Young Black and Latino Men Are Thriving, Black Enterprise](#)

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For More
Information

Follow Up Sessions

January 19, 2024 and February 21, 2024

Follow Up Sessions



Additional sessions were held January and February 2024. These sessions continued to support grantees to build the muscle for developing stories that are asset



January – grantees discussed how they were shifting practices based on the information shared at the Convening. Working in Cross Sector Groups grantees, grantees shared efforts to shift stories.



February – focused on processing stories in areas of interest to the grantee to reframe the stories

Tools to BUILD the Muscle

- Below you will find reflective questions and stories used in two follow up sessions to build our muscle.



Levers for Analyzing Our Stories: Reflective Questions

Negative: George Lakoff said that when we negate the [negative] frame, we evoke the frame.

1. Does your story or frame respond to a negative perception without repeating the deficit?
2. Does your narrative or story de-bunk myths or could it inadvertently reinforce perceived stereotypes?

Solution and System: If your narrative or frame is about an individual, does it identify systemic solutions?

1. Does your narrative or frame point to clear solutions?
2. Does the story or frame point to assumptions that close the window on policies and outcomes you are against and open the window to desired results?
3. Could your narrative or frame inadvertently incite polarization, scarcity, competition?

Language: Think of a specific population — children, youth, the workforce, immigrants, educators, direct services providers, principals — and name the group. Deficit framing is “defining people by their challenges, ignoring their aspirations or contributions.” Does your story lead with language that defines assets or challenges?

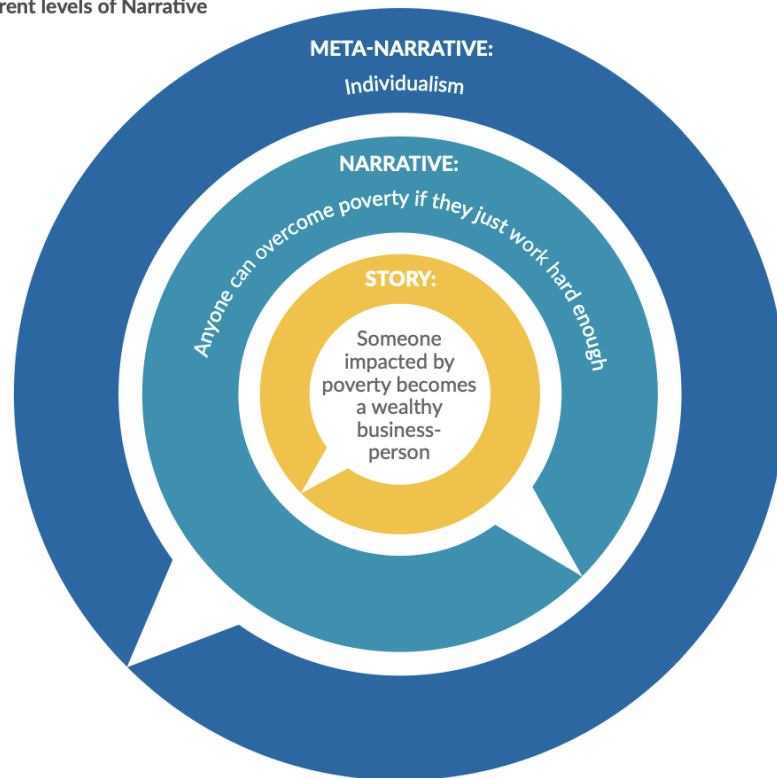
Asset Based: How will you prime the story with assets? Does the story build on the aspirations of the people intended to benefit?

Solution Focused: Does your story offer solutions?

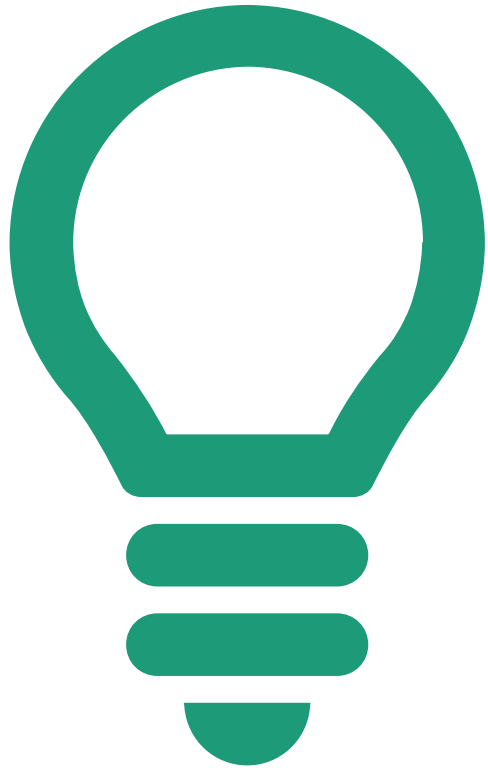
Intersectionality: Who are the partners, programs, services or initiatives that contribute to the outcomes we seek to achieve.

Stories vs Narratives

Figure 1 Different levels of Narrative



- Stories are the foundation for narrative.
- Our stories can lead to the wrong narrative.
- This example demonstrates pull your self up by bootstraps and not a systemic solution.



The following stories were
used for application of levers

Sample Stories: Equity

Negatives: If you do it for them, I/we won't have access.

Meta narrative:

- Every human can contribute to the economy and well-being of the country.
- Every child, youth, and family has the right to well-being
- The country owes a debt to some communities, e.g., Black and Native American, that currently or historically are marginalized by policy and practice.

Story:

Low to moderate-income families become homeowners through a housing program that matches families' savings through individual development accounts. IDAs require a partnership with banking, neighborhood development corporations, cities, states, and families.

Early educators with five years of experience in early care and education received full-cost scholarships to attend college. The educators completed the program within six years due to credit for learning strategies, including accepting credits, professional development, and demonstrating competency in other courses.

Sample Story: Educator Leaders

Negatives- Anyone can teach. People probably end up there by default.

Meta narrative- All educators play a vital role in our world. Educators' roles require programs that support the profession and its pipeline.

Narrative- Early childhood educators lay the foundations for lifelong learning and are a valuable profession.

Story

Through an after-school volunteer program, an undergrad college student realizes their passion for working with young children and learns from her educator supervisor how "guided play" contributes to brain development for the young children in the program. Intrigued, the student explores early childhood education as a career path, and after learning how the field is supported through professional pathways and pay equivalent to K12 teachers, she shifts the major to pursue a BA in early childhood education.

Sample Story: ELL

Negatives- ELLs take time and resources away from "our" students. They are less likely to succeed.

Meta narrative- Bilingualism is a valued skill/attribute

Narrative- Bilingual students develop unique assets when we invest in resources and bilingual teachers.

Story-

A student who recently arrived in the US from a non-English speaking country attends a school program that supports them in learning grade-level academic skills in their native language until they have acquired enough language to achieve academically in English, too. The student graduates from high school with proficiency and literacy in English and their home language, making them bilingual, a skill valued amongst US employers.

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