

Funding Narrative Change: How Communities are Shaping and Wielding Narrative Power

Executive Summary

Welcome to the CliffsNotes version of *Funding Narrative Change: How Communities are Shaping and Wielding Narrative Power*! We hope when you're through, you will be inspired to tackle the [full report](#).

After we released our 2022 report, *Funding Narrative Change: An Assessment and Framework*, many funders and practitioners asked if we had good examples of what it looked like to build community narrative power.

Convergence Partnership believes that shifting harmful narratives is critical to advancing priorities like racial justice, health equity, abortion access, and trans rights. Narrative change is essential to shift the conditions that shape public will, policy outcomes, and cultural norms. And to be effective, it must be driven by the communities most impacted.

As funders, we are eager to understand how we can do this work better collectively. We wanted to learn and share: What, exactly, is community narrative power building? How do mass movements create narrative change? And how can we invest in both? So, we surveyed our partners and grantees and found five efforts to focus on. What we learned is the core of *Funding Narrative Change: How Communities are Shaping and Wielding Narrative Power*.

Community narrative power is not just about telling stories, but about having the agency, infrastructure, and credibility to shape which stories are told, how they are framed, and who they reach. As funders, we have a responsibility to our partners to support this essential work.

Learn more about each of these stories and findings in [Funding Narrative Change: How Communities are Shaping and Wielding Narrative Power](#)

CASE STUDY #1

ELEVATED CHICAGO: Shifting Perception of Development and Transit

Elevated Chicago asks a simple question: What if development in Chicago neighborhoods worked for all residents? The key to achieving this vision is something they call Equitable Transit Oriented Development, or ETOD for short.

At a time when many organizations are experimenting with social media, Jannice Newson cracked the code. But her success went beyond mere engagement; her narrative work reshaped the way the public thinks about transit issues in Chicago.

Content Decisions

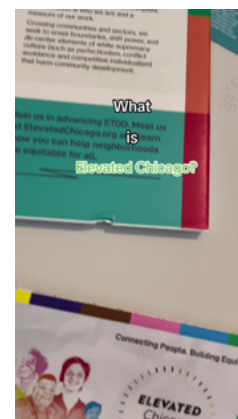
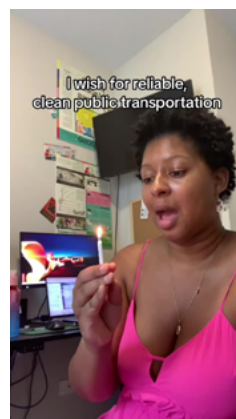
The Elevated Chicago TikTok account, created to share information about transit issues and ETOD, features four types of videos: walking, explainer, in-group humor, and events.

Narratives

Inequality, racial diversity among transit advocates, people-first in transit policy, and systemic change.

Key Takeaways

1. Find an informed, authentic, and relatable host.
2. Prioritize connecting with the audience over organizational promotion.
3. Avoid insider jargon, which shuts out new audiences.
4. Acknowledge real challenges and frustrations; this helps build credibility.
5. Navigate neighborhood change with integrity and awareness.
6. Develop deep familiarity with the platform(s)
7. Find your formula for maintaining audience trust, and stick to it.



Images from TikTok videos showcasing walking content, explainer, humorous moments, and event coverage.

CASE STUDY #2



BEGREAT TOGETHER: Amplifying Black and Brown Communities' Realities and Solutions

In Kansas City, Missouri, the education advocacy nonprofit BeGreat Together, eager to use storytelling as a way to build community narrative power in Black and Brown communities, launched DocuCourse. It currently offers four courses, broken into categories: Arts, Justice, Family, and Health. Each course shares a common structure. At the center is a feature-length documentary film starring a community changemaker, who tells the story of how and why they became advocates. For this case study, we focus on one DocuCourse, *Bails & Bonds*. This feature film is built around one woman's story.

Content Decisions

DocuCourse is deliberate about how it seeks to build narrative power and create narrative change. These are decisions BeGreat made in creating this tool: centering a story, choosing the storyteller, combining story and data, and creating special moments to share these stories.

Narratives

System failure, false choice, resilience, mutual aid, and avoiding right-wing tropes.

Key Takeaways

1. Keep narrative control and decision-making rooted in the community.
2. Often the message is the messenger. All storytelling draws from broader narratives, but first-person accounts carry a unique power.
3. Even powerful stories can do harm, narrative change requires intention to reinforce positive narratives while rejecting harmful tropes.
4. Bridge grassroots energy with policy and public influence. This both invites the community at large to join movements and encourages local leaders to prioritize specific policies and solutions.
5. Narrative change is the long game. It unfolds gradually and can be difficult to measure.



Images from the DocuCourse film *Bails & Bonds*, featuring Justice Gatson, Founder and Director, Reale Justice Network.

SPOTLIGHTS



In addition, the full report shares more about community narrative power building efforts by Hutch In Harmony in Kansas, Ujima Company in Buffalo, NY, and Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability in Fresno, CA. Each leveraged a different form of storytelling as a narrative change vehicle, including public artwork, community theater, and local media engagement. Collectively, it was encouraging that so many different approaches have found success, even while our window into these efforts was relatively small.

We hope you will dive into the [full report](#) and learn more about each of these stories and how the key takeaways can support your own work creating or supporting narrative change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of these case studies and spotlights was to better understand how movements and organizations are building community narrative power. We did our best to draw on a diversity of approaches, which shared a desired narrative outcome around building power but differed in their methods and goals. So, what did we learn?

We identified three key components that make up community narrative power:

1

Stories by and about the community

2

Intentional efforts to both promote narratives that uplift the community and push back against those that cause harm

3

A method through which to accrue narrative power and exercise it moving forward

Recommendations for Funders

Narrative change is not an overnight process; it requires sustained commitment, resources, and time to take root. To build and maintain narrative power in communities, funders play a critical role in enabling persistence, consistency, and strategic weaving and strengthening efforts over the long term.

1

Support community control and ownership of production. Building narrative power requires consistent creation and distribution of stories, and it is far more effective when the community controls both. Community ownership creates lasting assets that can be leveraged for advocacy, engagement, and sustained change. Funders and organizations can strengthen community narrative power by prioritizing investments in cultural tools and platforms that remain under community stewardship.

3

Break the competition cycle, fund collaboration. Some of the most impactful efforts relied on forming strong coalitions. Broad coalitions amplify narrative impact by bringing together diverse perspectives and stories, extending a campaign's reach and deepening its impact. Collaboration also enables resource-sharing, sparks creative content, and increases visibility across sectors. Funders can play a critical role in fostering these partnerships, especially with unlikely allies. Providing long-term, collaborative funding, and making it clear that the goal is resource the whole network, can reduce competition for resources and encourage alignment.

2

Start with the narrative, not just the story. We found that while storytelling is a requisite for building narrative power, it must be anchored in intentional narrative strategy, distinct from strategic communications. Even before collecting or identifying stories, aligning around the desired narrative is critical; without this, it is possible to create a robust communications infrastructure that fails to build narrative power. Organizations need funding for this proactive planning, to intentionally assess the narrative landscape they operate in and clarify their goals.

4

Narrative power is the long game, fund it to last. Without sustained investment, the infrastructure and relationships that make narrative power possible will erode. Lasting change depends on long-term strategic storytelling, capacity development, and the structural support to keep these narratives alive. Funders should prioritize multi-year commitments and capacity-building grants over single-year projects, and encourage organizations to plan for maintaining and scaling narrative efforts over a five-to-ten-year horizon—then match those plans with the funding to realize them.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS



In *Funding Narrative Change: How Communities are Shaping and Wielding Narrative Power* we provide a snapshot in time of each project. These projects show what is possible, but don't explore what a sustained effort would look like, or could accomplish, over a decade or more. What we know is that sustained, coordinated efforts to link narratives will require bold investments, creative vision, and unwavering commitment.

We hope [the report](#) and its takeaways are one part of the many contributing to powerful communities, driving their own narratives, and shaping the just and vibrant future we all deserve.



**Convergence
Partnership**

About Convergence Partnership

Amplifying and aligning the power of people and philanthropy toward racial justice and health equity.

Convergence Partnership is a national funder collaborative working to advance racial justice to reach health equity. Convergence is one of the only collaboratives to focus on this intersection, with all of our efforts moving us toward a future where communities shape decisions, resources and solutions for their optimal health and well-being. In the last 18 years, Convergence Partnership has granted over \$13 million to almost 50 organizations and foundations across the country, and leveraged \$2 billion in local and federal funding. Learn more at convergencepartnership.org.