Narrative Initiative

Field Guide

Narrative Research Methodologies

Spitfire Strategies

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Introduction

There are likely thousands of organizations and movements actively at work to promote fair and inclusive societies, trying to win justice and equity on a grand scale. These groups, including nonprofits, tap into our imaginations by organizing and by using visual and verbal language to open new pathways and possibilities. We understand this nexus of efforts as narrative change work. No entity does this work alone. Success is found when work is done in coalition and collaboration. How then do they uncover concepts that will move their audiences to action, build power and stickiness, and lead to lasting change?

Narrative Initiative commissioned Spitfire Strategies to learn more about the research approaches and methods being used to inform and advance the narrative work of social justice organizations. This Field Guide offers lessons from interviews with some narrative change research leaders. Our interviewees presented a snapshot of the field, identified barriers, and offered a starting point to deepening narrative change research.

Due to its emergent nature and the varied traditions feeding into narrative change research, a set of needs arose that we find noteworthy. Interviewees cited the need for boldly embracing equity and diversity, and for collaboration across organizations and disciplines sharing research tools, data, and insights. They also expressed a need for shared research ethics and standards of practice. Both the challenge and the opportunity in this work lies in drawing from multiple sectors that contribute to narrative change practice.

We see this Field Guide as the first edition of a tool for narrative change researchers and those interested in embarking upon the practices detailed below. We also frame this Field Guide as an invitation to dialogue and learning exchange wherein readers help fill in the gaps and point to strong examples of theory and practice informing their own approaches. Ultimately, we want to learn with you how research methodologies are being used to make justice and equity common sense.

This report was written by Inga Skippings, Mark Dessaury, and Alexander (Bob) Boykin at Spitfire Strategies; in conversation with Márquez Rhyne and Rachel Weidinger at Narrative Initiative. We want to thank the following for helping to shape the thinking in this Field Guide:

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Process Overview

Within the field of narrative change, practitioners rely on a wide range of frameworks, tools, and methodologies. This section details the research methodology used by Spitfire Strategies to better understand how research methodologies are being used in the field. To begin developing an accessible and useful index for the field, Spitfire Strategies conducted in-depth interviews, on behalf of Narrative Initiative, with leading narrative change practitioners. We define narrative change as the outcome of efforts intended to shift power and dominant narratives on an ambitious, broad scale.[1]

We interviewed experts in four groups to learn about their approach to research and narrative change:

- Group 1: In-house researchers at nonprofit organizations
- Group 2: Staff at nonprofit organizations outsourcing narrative change research

[1] Learn more about our understanding of narrative change on our blog: https://narrativeinitiative.org/blog/narrative-change-a-working-definition-and-related-terms/

- Group 3: Staff at academic and research organizations studying narrative work
- Group 4: Narrative research practitioners with a broad field perspective

We see the readers of this report as a kind of Group 5. Your input is welcome to strengthen the understanding of the broader field of narrative change practice.

Tailoring our questions for each group, we sought to understand the interviewees' approach to narrative research, the impact of their efforts, and the broader narrative change landscape. Of the 42 requests we made, 18 people agreed to interviews. Notably, experts of color were under-represented in this initial survey of research methodologies.

Our hope is that further work, perhaps carried out collectively with additional partners in the field, could expand this landscaping assessment and index to be more representative of the full array of approaches and actors engaging in this vital work. While a small and less than representative sample of participants means that the results are necessarily partial and tentative, we believe our findings illuminate potential pathways towards greater collaboration and coherence within the narrative change field.

The structure of this Field Guide includes existing methodologies, both traditional and emergent, and pathways forward.

Existing Methodologies

Our conversations with practitioners uncovered a wide range of research methods useful for narrative change strategies. Notably, no single method surfaced as a "silver bullet." Interviewees agreed that the most effective research efforts include a variety of methods that are iterative and complementary. Many noted that the different methodologies were mutually reinforcing and, when deployed together, enabled narrative strategies to refine recommended messages, stories, metaphors, and language.

The research methods can be grouped into two closely related categories: emergent and traditional. Emergent methods are nascent in the field of narrative change, may be intentionally interwoven and purpose-built, and are often enabled by technological advancement. Traditional methods include both qualitative and quantitative approaches, including focus groups, dial testing, behavioral science and other methods. While these

traditional approaches are not new, researchers have continued to refine and evolve them in light of changes in the field.

Emergent Research Methods

As traditional research methods rely upon proven practices with set methods and expected outcomes, emergent research methods are new and often inductive, indeterminate, and open-ended. The findings may vary from traditional methods but can be just as valid as other methodologies. We have listed the most common emergent research methods below:

- Big Listening
- Layered Social and Language Analysis on Big Social Media Data
- Narrative Analysis
- Topos TalkBack

▸ Big Listening

The quantitative monitoring of keywords in public text, on a given topic over time is called Big Listening. The methodology tracks patterns, spikes, and trends in the attention being paid to an issue or topic online. These measures help illustrate shifts and patterns in public narratives. Insights gleaned from this methodology can be used to inform online campaigns and to allow for collaboration underpinned by increased information sharing. In Big Listening, researchers are measuring issue-level attention metrics rather than traditional per-organization campaign-level metrics such as petition signatures, per-campaign news coverage, or individual legislative victories. An example of Big Listening is the work by Upwell to shift the narrative of human impact on the ocean.[2]

▸ Layered Social and Language Analysis on Big Social Media Data

Big Listening looks at a single metric: keyword volume over time. There are a whole set of approaches that are more nuanced. These more complex methodologies are made possible with sophisticated tools and advanced data analysis approaches. Mass communication on public social media platforms has resulted in large-scale data sets that contain images, text, and social relationship network data. For organizations working across pooled and synthesized large data

[2] For more on Upwell's model, see: "Why Your Nonprofit Should Be a Big Listener," November 12, 2012, http://www.bethkanter.org/listener/.

sets, new substantive insights into narrative change and social processes can be discovered through analysis of the various layers of data available. Crimson Hexagon is an example of one of the tools in this space, allowing application of artificial intelligence to analyze current trends, media coverage and consumer sentiment and discourse. The Reframe Mentorship is experimenting with layered analysis, and The Rules has developed a layered analytical methodology as part of its Culture Hack work.

▸ Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis refers to a cluster of qualitative methods for interpreting texts or visual data that have a storied form, which are sometimes further extended into a quantitative approach. These stories can be analyzed to uncover the underlying ideologies embedded in them and the larger culture that creates the narratives. Narrative analysis looks at specific metaphors, terms, or Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) patterns which consists of a subject as an actor, the action performed by the subject and the object of the action. This research identifies narrative patterns. Research on variously sourced narratives could supplement actionable intelligence and give organizations the ability to understanding current narratives around their issue, counter false messages, shape perceptions, and engage audiences using these narratives.

▸ Topos TalkBack

The proprietary Topos TalkBack method measures what people take away from messaging against what is takeaway is intended. The research method is done in either formal or conversational settings where subjects are presented with messaging or ideas—expressed in texts of 80-150 words—and their subsequent understandings and ability to express the messaging/ideas were evaluated in a variety of ways. Rather than language, this method focuses on the key "organizing ideas" that shape thought and determine how we understand the world. The TalkBack method assesses whether a given idea has the capacity to become an organizing principle for thinking and communicating in a new way about the issue – as well as its overall effects on reasoning and engagement.

Traditional Research Methods

Interviewees referenced a number of standard research methodologies at use in narrative change work. These methods are briefly described below. The traditional research methodologies in use, per our interviewees, include:

- Academic Literature Review
- Behavioral Science
- Cultural Models Research
- Field Testing
- Interviews
- Language Analysis
- Market and Political Research Standards
- Neuroscience
- Participatory Action Research
- Surveys

▸ Academic Literature Review

An academic literature review is a comprehensive study, synthesis, and interpretation of literature that addresses a specific topic. The literature review surveys books, scholarly articles, and peer-reviewed sources relevant to a specific narrative and/or narrative change, and potentially 'gray literature' as sources published outside academia are called. This method is useful when starting a project to determine what has been written or studied about this narrative, as it covers current knowledge about this narrative through secondary and peer-reviewed sources and does not report on any new or experimental work. As a methodology, academic literature reviews can provide a description, summary, and/or critical evaluation of these works in relation to the narrative being investigated. An academic literature review can be used as a narrative review to synthesize current use or knowledge of this narrative, or as a systematic review and meta-analysis to identify patterns or trends with pre-existing narrative theories, methodologies, or findings that may lead to new theory development. The latter can provide a new interpretation of old material by tracing the progress and adoption of narrative in this literature and whether counter-narratives were mentioned. A literature review could also take the form of an integrative or scoping review to create an overview of the potential size and nature of the literature on an emergent topic or narrative, reveal any gaps in the literature around the narrative, and highlight where new research is needed.

▸ Behavioral Science

Simply put, behavioral science studies human behavior, particularly as it relates to the influence of external stimuli — including interactions with others — on the way people behave. This qualitative research methodology provides insights critical to any narrative initiative, but

especially those that seek behavior change. Behavioral science incorporates a number of fields related to human behavior, including sociology, social and cultural anthropology, psychology and psychiatry, economics, and political science. The term is sometimes used interchangeably with "social science." Behavioral science uses past data and behavior patterns, controlled studies of responses to stimuli — typically in small-scale experiments that study how a group responds to a specific problem — and, more recently, computer modeling, sometimes combined with the small-scale experiments, to gain a deeper understanding of human behavior and what drives it. Organizations could use this data to develop narratives tailored to motivate specific behavior.

▸ Cultural Models Research

Cultural models research, which is considered by many to be related to cognitive anthropology, examines how people organize and process knowledge to better understand human cultural and cognitive experience. Cultural models research studies how people acquire knowledge through their thoughts, experiences, and senses, and often looks at cross-cultural contexts. Methodologies used in search of cultural models "range from qualitative data collections, for example ethnographic data, semi-structured interviews, collection of life stories, to quantitative data collections such as free-listing tasks, sorting tasks, experimental tasks, surveys, social network surveys. Basically, three types of data are considered necessary: ethnographic, linguistic, and experimental. The analyses conducted on the data are both linguistic and statistical ones, including consensus analysis."[3] Understanding how people process information — especially in various cultural contexts — can be extremely valuable when developing narrative strategies to reach specific audiences, especially if they're defined by a particular culture, ethnic group, or other specific demographics.

▸ Field Testing

Field testing, sometimes known as fieldwork, is closely related to interviews in that it is also a common qualitative form of research used frequently in market research and anthropology. However, rather than asking direct questions (although interviews may be part of it), field testing is more focused on observing the behavior of participants in day-to-day activities or

[3] Giovanni Bennardo and Victor de Munck, "Cultural Models: Genesis, Methods, and Experiences," April 2014, https://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199908042.001.0001/acprof-9780199908042-chapter-4.

specific situations. In market research, for example, product manufacturers might observe exactly how subjects are using a particular product. Anthropologists may spend weeks, months, or years observing people in their natural environment, seeking to understand intimate details of how they live. An important aspect of field testing is that it's conducted in a natural setting rather than a laboratory or focus group-type setting. Despite being considered qualitative research, field testing may have some quantitative aspects. Observing people in specific situations or their real-life environment may yield insights into behavior that can be of benefit in constructing persuasive narratives and identifying existing, but less visible, community narratives.

▸ Interviews

Popular with anthropologists and market researchers, among others, interviews are a form of qualitative research that provide insights into individual beliefs, values, and mindsets. One-on-one interviews, ideally in someone's familiar setting such as their home, will elicit the most candid and least biased responses, although group interviews can be efficient if that is a factor. The content of the interview depends on what the researcher is trying to accomplish. The interview may seek how subjects feel about a particular issue, gain insights about subjects' own personal experiences or, in the case of experts, their professional expertise. Other interview goals seek to gather a sampling of individual viewpoints from a range of individuals — either a diverse group or one that fits into a specific demographic category. All of these are variables in the questioning to get specific answers. Interviews can ask closed questions, such as "Why do you think people tend to be racist?" or open questions such as "Tell me what you think about what causes racism." Both of these are legitimate and depend on exactly what the researchers are trying to accomplish. Face-to-face interviews are ideal, to get not only get answers but also observe physical reactions. However, video-conferencing and, as a last resort, telephone are also options. Interviews provide researchers with direct feedback, which can be extremely useful in understanding people's current thinking on a particular topic in order to tailor narratives accordingly depending on the communication objective.

▸ Language Analysis

A form of qualitative research sometimes called discourse analysis, language analysis is used across a wide array of disciplines, because language is the "principal means of human communication … It is difficult to separate language from the rest of the world. It is this ultimate inability to separate language from how it is used in the world in which we live that provides the most basic reason for the interdisciplinary basis of discourse analysis … The

construction of discourse itself involves several processes that operate simultaneously. Probing into this construction requires analytical tools that derive from linguistics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and even philosophy, according to the nature of these processes."[4] Although it's often used to analyze text, such as literature, language analysis can also be used to study accent, vocabulary and grammar to identify the different ways groups of people speak — including their level of literacy — which may be a benefit in crafting narratives that reach them in language they can relate to more easily. Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be used to conduct language analysis, which can make language measurable in different ways, potentially quantitatively.[5]

▸ Market and Political Research Standards

A number of research methodologies typically used in market and political research can be beneficial in evaluating people's viewpoints, emotions, and values as part of identifying effective narrative strategies.

Dial Testing

Most visibly used during political debates or speeches, dial testing captures the real-time responses of a group of participants to a wide variety of content, including the above but also TV content, advertising, products, and concepts. Dial testing can also be used to gauge responses to closed-ended questions or to measure feelings or opinions on a particular topic. Participants are gathered and given dials to turn up or down to indicate their approval or disapproval, collecting individual input from each one. Dial testing provides quantitative data that captures participants' responses in the moment, which can be used to hone a message or narrative accordingly to help elicit the most beneficial response. Participants' reactions tend to be instinctive — revealing the ideas or content that are most or least impactful — and aren't diminished by memory, as can happen with surveys or other research after the fact. Dial testing can be conducted in person or online. However, some skeptics wonder if dial testing influences participants by forcing them to react to something that otherwise wouldn't elicit a reaction, so

[4] Touria Drid, "Discourse Analysis: Key Concepts and Perspectives," January 2010, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282184078_DISCOURSE_ANALYSIS_KEY_CONCEPTS_AND_PERSPECTIVES.
[5] Charles R. Greenwood et al., "Automated Language Environment Analysis: A Research Synthesis," May 3, 2018: https://pubs.asha.org/doi/10.1044/2017_AJSLP-17-0033

it's worth considering whether participants are responding genuinely or because they think there's something they are supposed to react to.

Focus Groups

A long time standard in marketing, focus groups are a form of qualitative research that involves bringing together a group of people to ask for their feedback on a particular issue, product, slogan, concept, or idea. Focus groups are intended to gauge participants' opinions, ideas, feelings, and beliefs. Guided by a facilitator, participants are asked open-ended questions about the specific topic being studied that can lead to group discussions — often free-flowing, which can prompt participants to weigh in with additional ideas as part of the discussion — with the facilitator making sure participants remain on topic. The facilitator can also observe the dynamics among the group during the discussion, or even leave the room so participants feel more comfortable speaking freely. Focus groups are generally recorded, videotaped, or captured in field notes. Focus groups require a skilled moderator who can be on the lookout for "groupthink" — a potential drawback of this method, in which people are influenced by the opinions of others — or reluctance to provide negative input in a face-to-face setting with someone who has a vested interest in their responses, such as a communications firm. Generally made up of small groups of about 10 people, focus groups can gather a lot of information in an hour or two.

Polling

Polls capture the attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and feelings of respondents at a particular moment in time. Polls can be conducted in person, by phone or online, and the larger the sample, the smaller the margin for error. Questions must be crafted carefully, because the wording and order of the questions can directly impact the responses. They should be clear and avoid "leading" questions that can influence the response. Scientific polls randomly select respondents and should report their results, methodology, and margin of error clearly — and, most important, measure respondents' actual opinions and beliefs rather than influencing them. It's best for polls to be conducted by an unbiased third party. Polls are generally quantitative, unless they are the kind of polls that are available to anyone online or are intentionally biased (such as those sent by political candidates), which is considered unscientific and, therefore, qualitative.

▸ Neuroscience

Neuroscience research is a quantitative study of the structure and function of the nervous system, particularly the brain, and how it relates to behavior, normal physiological processes, and disease. When it's specific to communication, studying what happens in the brain during interactions or in response to various stimuli can help researchers better understand how people are "wired" to respond, react, speak, or behave. Using technology such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), researchers can measure and map brain activity, to develop an understanding of how "neural responses to stimuli relate to attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, receptivity to messaging, and the structure of our social networks."[6] Neuroscience research has also shown that stories in particular stimulate the brain in specific ways, improving comprehension and retention of ideas, as well as eliciting empathy, making narrative structures a proven way to engage audiences and make sure messages leave a lasting impact.[7]

▸ Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research is a collaborative social sciences methodology that involves researchers and participants working together to investigate a situation being faced by participants, often a specific community and/or a particular issue, and develop solutions to improve the situation for the better. Participatory action research is distinguished by the direct involvement of stakeholders, such as a community facing a problematic issue, in deepening their understanding of their own situation so they can take action, developed in conjunction with trained researchers. It frequently focuses on social change that emphasizes democracy and seeks to upend inequality. Although participatory action research can use both qualitative and quantitative methods in its execution, it's not generally a way of gathering data but instead a strategy for solving problems by building knowledge communities can use to improve their own situation. However, it's useful for researchers as a qualitative research method to better

[6] Annenberg School for Communications at the University of Pennsylvania, "Communications Neuroscience," https://www.asc.upenn.edu/research/research-areas/communication-neuroscience.
[7] Paul J. Zac, "How Stories Change the Brain," December 17, 2013, https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_stories_change_brain.

understand the issues and challenges faced by the communities they engage with in participatory action research.

▸ Surveys

Surveys are a list of questions used to collect specific data from respondents. They can be conducted in person, by phone, by mail, or online, either as a questionnaire or an interview, and either with individuals or groups. Surveys are often used to gauge opinions, thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, and feelings, and can be very specific or more wide-ranging in terms of the information being gathered. When they are conducted anonymously, surveys tend to elicit more honest responses, making the findings more reliable. They're generally cost-effective and easy to conduct. Although survey research may be conducted on very large sample sizes, it's becoming increasingly common to identify specific representative samples to survey and use more scientific approaches to the survey method, which can help focus on gathering information from specific demographic groups or communities in a more scientific way to reduce the percentage of error. "Survey research can use quantitative research strategies (e.g., using questionnaires with numerically rated items), qualitative research strategies (e.g., using open-ended questions), or both strategies (i.e., mixed methods)."[8]

The traditional or existing research methodologies have been the backbone of most of the narrative change work in the past decades. These methods have evolved over time from advertising, market research and academics studies. They have been adopted and modified within the narrative change field by for-profit and nonprofit practitioners. While they have served the current field, the emergent research methods and narrative change experts point to underdeveloped and missed aspects of this work that could open it up to new methods, users and outcomes.

[8] Julie Ponto, "Understanding and Evaluating Survey Research," March 1, 2015, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4601897/.

Potential Pathways

In addition to learning more about research methods, the interviews also sought to gain insights on the narrative research field overall. Interviewees shared their ideas for how to strengthen the field and to better create the conditions for broad, progressive narrative research would benefit from learning from some of these more mature fields. Interviewees pointed to the fact that these parent fields have aspects involving audience engagement, building knowledge through activation of target populations. Other suggested the importance of building centers of excellence that promote evidence-based narrative change demonstrating effective and noteworthy experimentation. By developing normative standards of practice, engaging specialists such as linguists, and supporting long-term visioning, interviewees believed that these efforts could lead to deeper impacts and more strategic investments.

While interviewees emphasized "doing the work and measuring the process," they also lifted the need to establish field-wide ethical standards that would demonstrate coherence across organizations and individuals. A few initial ideas shared included:

- Elevating the voices and experiences of those affected by the issues and narratives that we seek to change
- Looking at the assets and amplifying wins particularly among organizations and communities of color
- Centering love, compassion, and polyvocality at scale understanding that "big listening" and other forms of surveillance have been used by corporations and governments to destroy movements.

For the most part, respondents' insights could be grouped into two major pathways to strengthening the field: building organizational-level capacity and building field-scale capacity.

Building Capacity Organization-by-Organization

A number of respondents wanted more attention on the ecosystem of communication between practitioners and the people most affected by the focus issue. They named a need for a

multi-directional mindset and effort to listen, iterate and listen again. The major themes uncovered were:

1) Advance education and capacity-building to expand access to methodologies that lead to effective narrative change.

If the field of narrative change research and application is limited to a small homogenous group, the impact and reach of their work will be limited and possibly ineffectual. Community activists and frontline organizers need to understand this field, their role and capacity to research narrative change and implement it. This would afford frontline organizers and communications specialists to reflect on higher-level cultural narratives and strategic framing, a concept new to most, one respondent finds. The field needs more training and support to change the very culture of communications to win the battle of narrative frames. Training of this sort would have the effect of shifting field actors who promote just and inclusive societies from our present defensive stance. Field actors would be better position for change. For the most part, respondents' insights could be grouped into two major pathways to strengthening the field: building organizational-level capacity and building field-scale capacity.

2) Initiate authentic conversations in the field.

We repeatedly heard from interviewees that their strongest research begins with conversations with impacted people in the communities where they live. Some interviewees framed such discussions as more effective than polling and other quantitative measures that they believe have failed their communities in the past. Others simply saw dialogue as a fruitful supplement to other research methodologies.

3) Focus on persuasion and action, not solely on engagement.

Those interviewed repeated the sentiment that there needs to be more attention and focus given to how the field uses narrative research and how to measure it. First, they posed questions about an emphasis on growing lists and reach. Some said the more valuable focus would be on whether people are motivated and persuaded to take action. That's a higher bar. List-building is a comparatively weak action. If practitioners aim research at understanding persuasion, then it has a higher capacity for implementing action and fostering change.

4) Embrace the role of culture change in unlocking people's imagination

Respondents suggested the importance of differentiating the role that research plays in strategic communications and in culture change. One interviewee posited that strategic communications focus primarily on the short- and mid-term influencing specific moments and are most often connected to campaigns of various sorts. Conversely, culture change unlocks our collective imaginations to better understand past and to imagine more sustainable or adaptive futures. Thus, research may need to perform different functions and answer a different set of questions demanding a different or repurposed set of methods and tools.

Building Capacity at the Scale of a Field

We consistently heard that expanding access to conducting and implementing research to a broader range of organizations on the ground would serve the social justice movement well. Major themes in support of this premise included:

1) Undertake more research collaboration across social justice movements

Changing the narrative requires long-term, multi-actor efforts that go beyond what any organization can do alone. We have more to do to get there as movements advancing equity, inclusion, and social justice more broadly. Interviewees named a need for organizations to share and learn from each other's research, identify gaps, and develop a shared research agenda. They expressed a role for technology as a way to scale existing approaches and increase coordination to challenge dominant narratives at scale. Further, they encouraged resistance to resource scarcity and funding incentives that often promote competition over collaboration.

2) Improve equity and representation in research and investment

A few of the interviewees shared that people who do narrative change also exclude or disregard foundational work undertaken by people of color in the field. Some expressed that people of color face unique hurdles in securing funding for narrative change research, that, as one interviewee put it, "funders don't trust black ingenuity."

Advocacy and solidarity stand out as ways forward. Interviewees called on their fellow practitioners to place greater value on the voices, labor, knowledge, and expertise of people of color. They named equity in the production of knowledge and recognition of achievements as

key sites for change, emphasizing that people of color must be recognized for their role as producers of research rather than consumers alone. Further, field actors can actively advocate for resources that intentionally diversify research.

3) Develop standards around ethics and efficacy of various research methodologies

As an emergent field drawing from a range of disciplines and approaches, narrative change d to advance new frames around the big ideas making possible the worlds we imagine. They would communicate these newly-framed ideas through various communications platforms, benefiting from increased research and development.

4) Advance education and capacity-building to expand access to methodologies that lead to effective narrative change.

If the field of narrative change research and application is limited to a small homogenous group, the impact and reach of their work will be limited and possibly ineffectual. Community activists and frontline organizers need to understand this field, their role and capacity to research narrative change and implement it. This would afford frontline organizers and communications specialists to reflect on higher-level cultural narratives and strategic framing, a concept new to most, one respondent finds. The field needs more training and support to change the very culture of communications to win the battle of narrative frames. Training of this sort would have the effect of shifting field actors who promote just and inclusive societies from our present defensive stance. Field actors would be better position for change.

5) Strengthening the capacity for organizations to conduct and apply research could be a game-changer

Capacity-building would inform narrative change on a much broader scale and empower field actors to work an increasingly ambitious and consequential scale. One way to make this possible would be through the knowledge and technology to conduct narrative research. Interviewees noted that the field needs a democratization of research into organizations and away from external entities, given the proximity of grassroots organizations to the topics being

discussed. Several people posed the question of how we can make research less expensive and more accessible to smaller community organizations.

6) Overcome legacy patterns by funding an ecosystem of nonprofit narrative change work

This theme includes a range of issues endemic to the funding ecosystem of nonprofit narrative change work including:

a) "wasted money" on tactical and repetitive research,

b) need for investment for longer-term projects to build and maintain scale,

c) role of funding in creating competition amongst organizations.

Equity and inclusion play a crucial role here as well. What agency can be taken by the field of practitioners, given these dynamics? Closing the loop between research design, impacted populations, and research implementation can de-fang fears of irrelevant or overly narrow research. This insight closely connects to some of the interviewees' feelings that we need to spend more time on the plan to push and bring the research to life. Also, overall folks seemed to call for more emphasis on measurement and evaluation.

Future Considerations

The success of narrative change requires more in-depth research and collaboration amongst influential groups like the ones outlined in this Field Guide. It won't happen overnight. Taking a deeper look into the narrative change field, this interview process highlights substantial opportunities to strengthen the work.

Insights from key players show the need for diverse approaches to the research that supports narrative change strategies. This work should not be limited to strictly peer-reviewed or academic resources, but engage the community for insights and co-development of narrative research. Engaging the community will amplify important voices and perspectives being represented that can bring their exposure and experience to the core. The growth and development of this field requires education, training and promotion of narrative change

research and tools as a part of social change. This research should be used to build recognition, trust and start a larger and diverse network. In building both organizational capacity and field capacity, there are opportunities to align this field's development with the future of equity and social justice movements. Strengthening capacity, as outlined in the themes in this paper, can be expected to have a direct impact on communities narrative change strategies are seeking to advance equity and social justice within.

In the end, the choice of narrative research methodologies and the insights gleaned from that work have direct impacts on the efficacy of narrative change strategies. If research methods continue in their current, traditional ways, their impact will continue to be limited. If, instead, practitioners make methods more transparent, share power, and both embrace and trust the broader community, then new voices, new impacts, and stronger alignment will be transformative. The open question is who will start, fund, and make this transition.

Where the research function sits in relation to communities, organizations, and the broader cadre of narrative change practitioners ultimately has impacts at multiple levels including the creation of new narratives, the translation of those narratives across many voices, the effectiveness with which the new narratives are transmitted in public, and the ability for collaborations to observe narrative change together. Narrative Initiative plans to take the findings of this report and, in conversation with stakeholders, make recommendations for future activities to benefit narrative change practice.