



# VOICE

**shifting narratives  
to create a just and  
sustainable world**



Metropolitan Group

the power of voice  
la fuerza de la voz

# Narrative for Social Change

**For those seeking to change a status quo rife with inequity and injustice—and to advance a more just and sustainable world—narrative can be one of the most powerful tools. That’s because narrative shapes our mindsets, what we see as normative, what we accept without challenge, and what we tolerate (or actively promote and protect) in the systems, policies and practices that surround and impact us.**

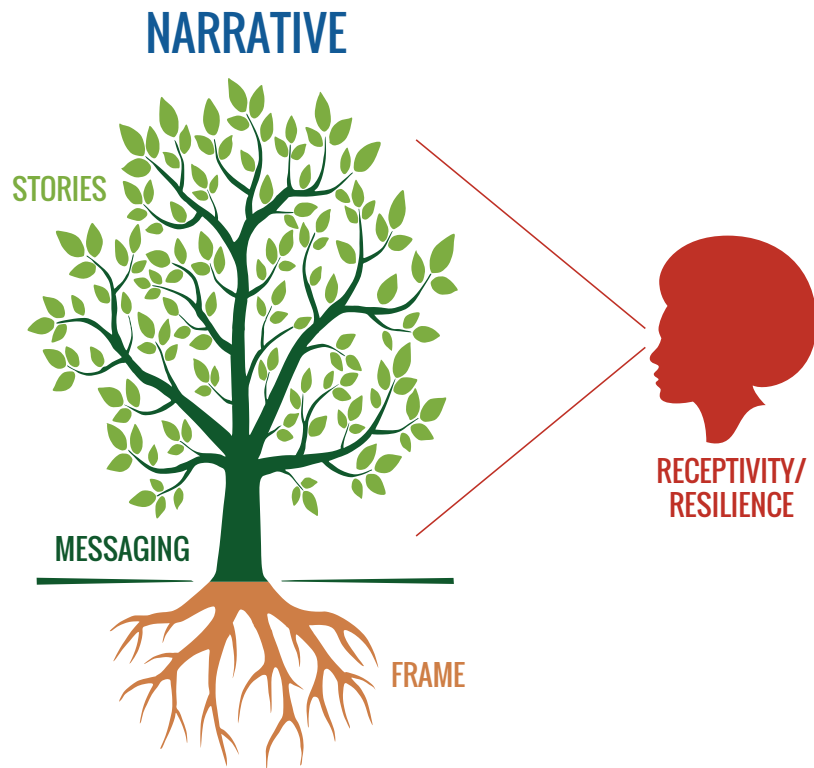
The narratives we accept—and the narratives we reject—reveal something about ourselves, the world we see, and the change we seek to create or the status quo we strive to protect.

For example, depending on the narratives we embrace, the forced migration occurring on an unprecedented global scale is either a humanitarian crisis that requires compassionate help for displaced people as part of a global community, or a slippery slope that invites disruption and violence into our own countries and dilutes our cultural identity. Public health is either the world’s best hope of achieving lasting health improvements for people, or an invitation for government intrusion in our private lives.

Global climate change is either a proven fact requiring urgent and sustained action, or an unsound theory pushed by environmental alarmists and anti-business extremists.

In these and countless other instances, **NARRATIVE** is a way of seeing—the world, issues, other people—that is accepted as true by a critical mass of people. And this way of seeing informs what we accept as normative, what we think, what we believe and what we do. The narratives we accept as true also shape our response to our own lived experience and become narratives that we sustain and advance through our own storytelling.

Often created and maintained to protect entrenched power and privilege, narrative can be a powerful tool of social change, since the stories and the emotions it stirs are more persuasive than an appeal grounded only in facts and data. The arguments in favor of marriage equality, for example, were powerful and persuasive, and many countries around the world took action to recognize and legalize it. But marriage equality only became the law of the land in the United States after the underlying narrative was shifted away from a logic-based argument focused on rights (which was polarizing) toward a focus on the universal value of love.



**NARRATIVE:** A way of seeing that shapes what we think, believe and do.

**STORIES:** What we see, hear and experience over time that aggregates to create or reinforce narrative.

**MESSAGING:** The articulation of the narrative frame that serves as the strategic foundation for storytelling.

**FRAME:**

- Core values
- Definition of the problem
- Identification of the solution
- Assignment of blame or responsibility

**RECEPTIVITY/RESILIENCE:**

- Lived experience
- Environment
- Echo chamber(s)

Narratives represent the aggregation of **STORIES** we see, hear and experience over time. These stories can be passed down in oral tradition from one generation to another, repeated endlessly in our preferred sources of news, reflected in pop culture, and manifested in our environments and lived experiences. A stroll through a public park in a country with a monument to an authoritarian leader standing at its center, for example, reflects a narrative about existing power structures and normalizes systemic oppression just as the monuments to Confederate generals do in front of many public buildings in the southern United States.

The stories we tell—and the narratives they aggregate to create—have their origins in a specific **FRAME** comprised of a set of core values, a definition of the problem and its solution, and the assignment of blame or responsibility to address it. In the United States, for example, the dominant narrative on the issue of guns is grounded in the core values of personal freedom and safety. In this narrative—and the stories it inspires—the problem is succinctly and memorably reflected in the slogan, “Guns don’t kill, people do.” The relevant solution, therefore, is to focus on the people committing crimes with guns rather than on guns themselves and the policies that govern their manufacture, sale and use.



**Narratives can be used to inspire, educate and lift up, or they can be used to dishearten, mislead and beat down.**

Regardless of the worldview they reflect and help to sustain, narratives don't just happen. They initially arise either **organically** or in an **orchestrated** fashion. Many dominant narratives have a long history of being orchestrated and reinforced by institutions (religion, government, business, media, etc.) or by movements (independence from colonialism, civil rights, environmental, etc.). In an

orchestrated narrative, a dominant storyteller or group of collaborating storytellers advance a set of stories with the specific intention to advance a desired outcome they share.

Organic narratives, on the other hand, often result from individuals who tell similar stories from their

own vantage point without necessarily being consciously motivated by a desire to manifest a particular outcome.

Regardless of their original source, organic and orchestrated narratives are often inter-connected. In fact, the marriage of organic and orchestrated narrative offers the best hope of challenging the status quo and advancing a sustainable counter-narrative. Organic narratives can evolve into an orchestrated narrative by the intentional aggregation of individual stories to serve a larger purpose. At the same time, an orchestrated narrative will be more successful and sustainable if it can motivate robust organic storytelling by authentic voices.

Effective stories carry **MESSAGING** that is grounded in the narrative frame. In organic storytelling, this message might not have been thought out in advance, reflecting instead the instincts of the storyteller and the "moral" they intend.

In an orchestrated narrative, however, this message is often captured in a detailed framework designed to ensure consistency in how the message is reflected in the stories used to advance the narrative.

Our **RECEPTIVITY** to—or **RESILIENCE** against—narrative is influenced by our lived **experience**, the **environments** that surround us (both literal and figurative) and the **echo chambers** from which we seek information or validation. It is understandable, for example, that a Mexican citizen concerned about the level of violence in their country might feel helpless because most crimes go unpunished. Having heard endless propaganda disparaging human rights organizations for defending the rights of even those accused of a crime, this same Mexican citizen might therefore be inclined to accept the narrative that "human rights defenders protect criminals." It is no surprise then that advancement of a narrative promoting justice in Mexico needs to address fundamental issues of security and living without fear.

As with all forms of communication, narratives can be used to inspire, educate and lift up, or they can be used to dishearten, mislead and beat down. The power of dominant narratives represents a major challenge to change agents, just as disrupting and shifting narrative is a powerful opportunity and point of leverage. Articulating a values-based narrative—and supporting activists, advocates and people directly impacted in telling stories that reflect the narrative—can not only change the public dialogue on an issue but also shift power dynamics and drive changes to mindsets, societal expectations, policy and practice that advance a more just and sustainable world.



# Questioning Narrative

*Shifting narratives or advancing a new counter-narrative relies on understanding the current narratives on an issue. While any successful narrative should be based on solid research, think about a narrative that impacts your own work as a change agent and ask yourself these questions:*

**What is the frame for this narrative?** What values are at its core? How does the narrative define both the problem and its solution? Who does the narrative blame for the problem or hold up as responsible to resolve it?

**What purpose does the narrative serve?** Does it strive to protect entrenched power and privilege at the expense of a more equitable solution? Does it seek to promote change in a positive direction?

**Where did this narrative come from?** Who or what put this narrative forward and why? To what extent were its origins organic or orchestrated?

**How is this narrative advanced and sustained?** Who benefits from the reinforcement of this narrative? What institutions orchestrate it? What role is being played by organic storytelling? Who is telling these stories and why?

**How are experience, environment and echo chambers reinforcing and helping to sustain this narrative?** How are existing power structures, systems, policies and practices defining our **lived experience**? How are our **environments** (built, natural, cultural, interpersonal) reinforcing the narrative? How are the **echo chambers** we rely on for information and validation (from media to cultural influencers) carrying this narrative?


**What opportunities exist to advance a new narrative?** What alternative narratives are being (or have been) attempted? What opportunities exist to leverage and aggregate existing storytelling at the grassroots level to advance a new counter-narrative? What influencers or champions might be engaged to help advance a new narrative?

There are many other questions to ask. The key to changing narrative is to map the narrative landscape, ask questions that lead to additional questions, and use the power of this knowledge to build and advance new values-based narratives. What questions are you asking? What narratives are you changing? And what are you learning along the way?

*Engage with us to share what you are learning:*

*[ShiftNarratives@metgroup.com](mailto:ShiftNarratives@metgroup.com)*

# Narratives in Action

A photograph of the White House at night, illuminated with vibrant rainbow-colored lights. The central portico is lit with yellow and orange, while the wings are lit with green and blue. The lights create a strong contrast against the dark night sky and the white facade of the building.

Narrative takes many forms and often signals what is valued and promoted by those in power. Statues of Confederate generals in front of court houses and city halls signal a dominant power structure narrative that the Rumors of War statue by Kehinde Wiley counters. Similarly, the rainbow-colored lights on the White House after the U.S. Supreme Court ruling legalizing gay marriage countered a long held dominant narrative narrowly defining marriage by reinforcing the #LoveisLove and #LoveWins narratives.

# NATIVE TRUTH:

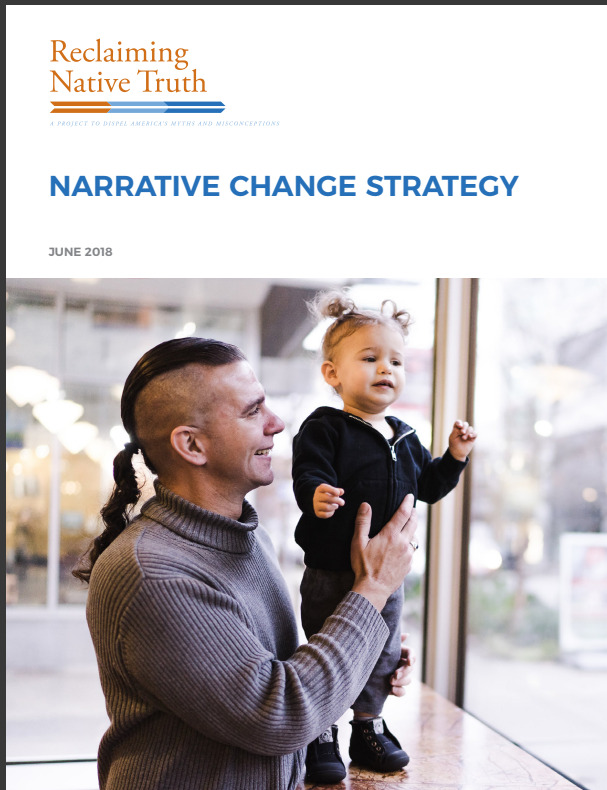
## Reclaiming the narrative about Native peoples in the United States

The dominant narrative about Native Americans in the United States is false, often filled with negative stereotypes and misperceptions that rely on inaccurate history, romanticized notions, racist assumptions and/or erasure of Native peoples. This narrative fuels racism and biases, hinders Native peoples' ability to access opportunities, puts Tribal sovereignty in question and leads to harmful experiences for Native children, from bullying to trauma. Even well-meaning allies—including organizations serving Native Americans—often unintentionally spread this false narrative by focusing on deficits rather than assets in an attempt to build urgency and support for funding, policies and programs.

*Reclaiming Native Truth (RNT)* represents a narrative change initiative to end the dehumanization and invisibility of Native Americans, and break down structural and institutional racism.

Grounded in unprecedented public opinion research, Native storytellers, artists, advocates and Indian Country leaders collaborated on the design of a new narrative and narrative change strategy. The new narrative proved to be highly effective in building support on key issues important to Native peoples. A new Native-led initiative, IllumiNative, has emerged from this work—one that uses a “movement of movements” approach to advance the new narrative to promote systemic and cultural changes across multiple sectors. When used consistently over time, across different sectors—from education to pop culture and media—this more positive, accurate, forward-moving narrative will become the story people are used to hearing.

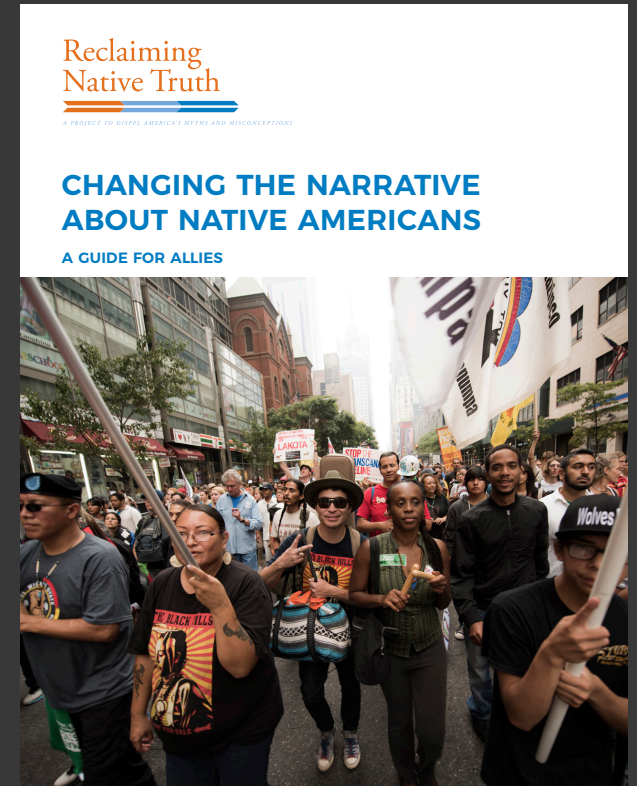




Narrative Change Strategy



Narrative Change Guide (for Native peoples)



Narrative Change Guide (for allies)

Metropolitan Group (MG) was privileged to collaborate on Reclaiming Native Truth, the largest public opinion research and strategy-setting project ever conducted by and for Native peoples. We worked with stakeholders across Indian Country to create and test a new narrative, design a narrative change strategy, and develop message guides for Native peoples and organizations—as well as non-Native allies—who want to apply the new narrative in their work. To see the full report, narrative guide for Native peoples and organizations, and narrative guide for allies, visit [illuminatives.org](https://illuminatives.org).

# REPRODUCTIVE WELL-BEING:

## Embracing opportunity as a core component of the narrative

Narratives about pregnancy prevention are often wrapped in perceived or real stigma and shame, judgment about who “should” have a child and a long history of gender discrimination and racism. Further, the notion of “unplanned” pregnancy fails to recognize the systems inequities that pose barriers to true reproductive autonomy.

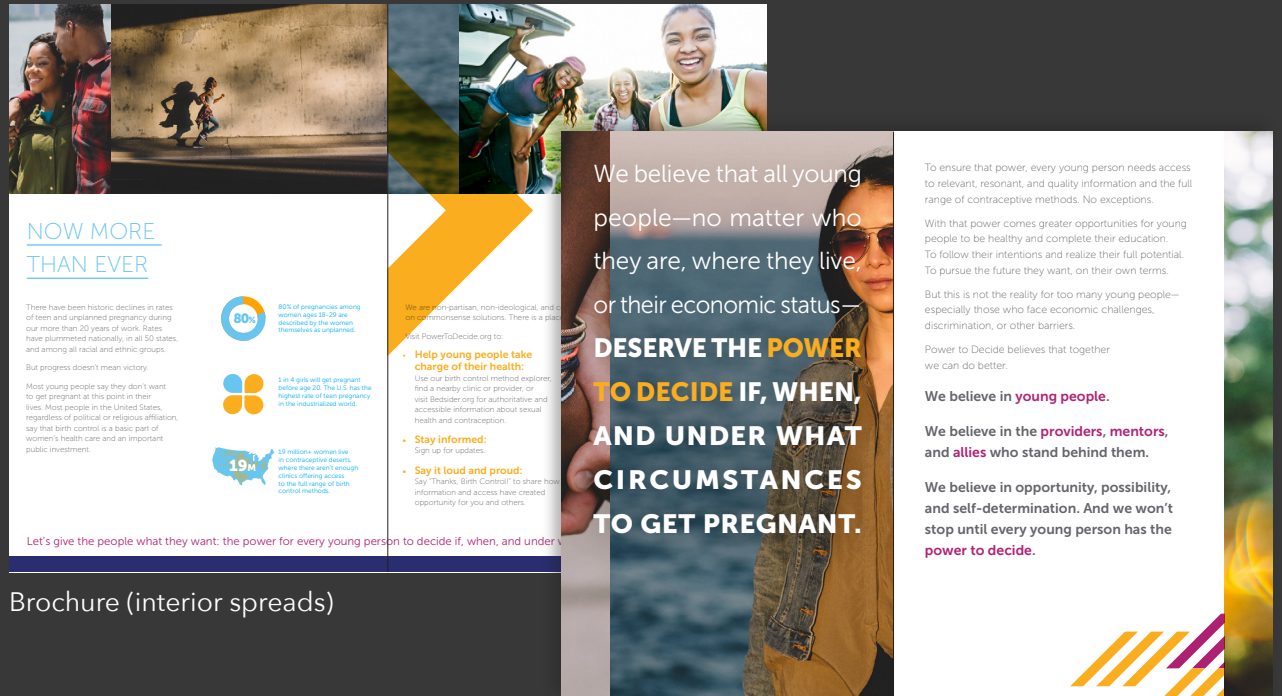
Power to Decide, formerly called the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, rebranded to reflect a strategic imperative to disrupt this harmful narrative and create a new reality of information, access and autonomy. The shift moves from “preventing something bad” to creating opportunity by ensuring that every person has the power to decide if, when and under what circumstances to get pregnant and have a child.

Informed by extensive engagement with people in communities across the country, as well as influencers and allies, this strategic shift and the strategies that support it are establishing a new narrative: that all people must have the information, services and support they need to have control over their bodies, and to make their own decisions related to sexuality and reproduction.

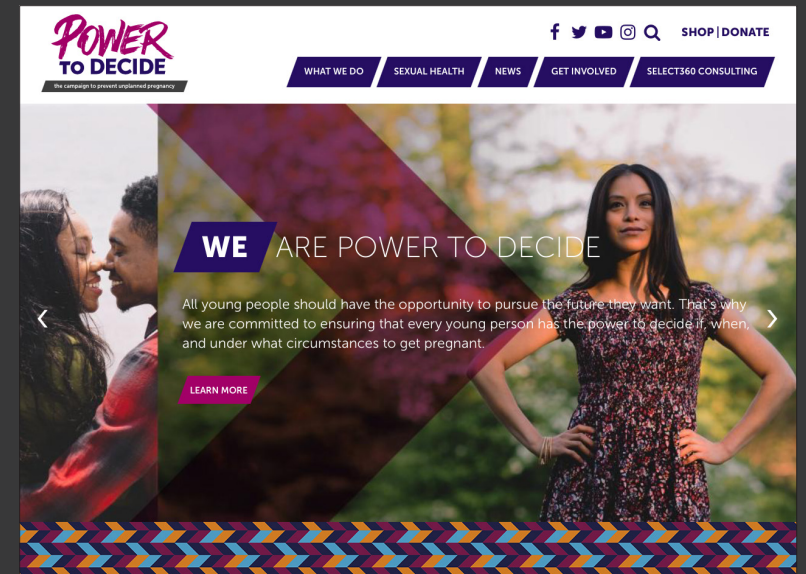
The new narrative is holistic, empowering and relevant to all people over their lifetimes. Establishing this new idea of “the way things should be”—built on aspirational values such as power, autonomy, inclusivity and equity—can lead to new attitudes, behaviors, practices, policies and realities.



Brochure (cover)



Brochure (interior spreads)



Website

To create their new brand identity, Power to Decide engaged MG to work with their staff, partners, supporters and young people across the country to identify and elevate the organization's unique value as a trusted resource for information, access and opportunity. Their new brand reflects an "opportunity and empowerment" narrative and a commitment to ensuring that all young people have the power to decide if and when to get pregnant.



# GOALS FOR JUSTICE:

## Creating a narrative that demands a justice system we can trust so people can live without fear

Corruption and impunity are longstanding realities throughout Mexico. In the lead up to the 2018 Mexican presidential election, at least four coalitions of civil society organizations wanted to position a justice agenda in the public conversation and force the presidential candidates to take a stance on their proposals. The coalitions also wanted the candidates to integrate this agenda into their campaigns and government platforms.

Civil society leaders in Mexico helped to develop a #Goals4Justice campaign that launched during the warm-up period to the World Cup in the lead-up to the 2018 presidential election, the most consequential in a generation. The campaign focused on reaching and activating people between 18 and 25 years old who were mostly new voters. Tapping into the culture, the World Cup allowed the campaign to create contrasts in terms of violence, impunity and justice with the countries that the Mexican national team faced in warm-up matches and the World Cup. This positioned the agenda of the NGOs to promote justice and safety in Mexico during the presidential campaign.

A series of digital content was used to engage the broader public in anti-impunity discourse for the purpose of creating social pressure on the presidential candidates.

We also launched the Public Square Initiative that **uses creative expression to engage and mobilize people in Mexico to achieve social justice and civil society**. In the busiest pedestrian thoroughfare in the Americas, we coordinated an interactive art exhibit, live street theater performances and activations with dozens of civil society organizations. We conveyed a powerful justice and solidarity-based narrative that both advanced the value of civil society and a set of social justice proposals. Three hundred thousand people visited the exhibit, more than 120 media stories conveyed its messages nationwide and we reached 4.5 million people through social media. After experiencing the piece, 94 percent of the people thought it was worth supporting the work of civil society organizations.

These campaigns were part of a larger effort to create an anti-impunity narrative and public will building initiative throughout Mexico.



Website



Public Square Installation

Impacto Social Metropolitano Group (ISMG), with funding from the Ford Foundation, developed and led the communications strategy with a core group of civil society organizations to position the anti-impunity agenda leading up to the presidential election. The campaign included social media, earned media and a major partnership with change.org. As a result, several candidates took an anti-impunity position during the presidential debate.

# CLEAN ENERGY:

## Framing the narrative to translate support into action

In the United States, a significant body of research has shown that the issue of climate change is politically polarizing. Yet, policies and practices aimed at facilitating the transition from dirty to clean sources of energy—a core strategy to address climate change—typically generate wide, bipartisan support. Even so, actions to clean up our energy system were nowhere near proportional to the urgency to act, and did not ensure an equitable transition to a clean energy future.

The advancement of such policies and practices was not succeeding to the extent necessary in part because advocates for clean energy tended to frame their narrative around the polarizing issue of climate change and the need to mitigate against it. A new narrative was required to help convert support for clean energy into action by framing the opportunity differently, articulating the tangible benefits of the transition, providing evidence that clean energy is already working and delivering doable calls to action.

Drawing on robust new research and significant stakeholder engagement, the Sierra Club developed a multi-year strategy for its *Ready for 100* campaign led by a new narrative grounded in the core values of health, family, legacy, practicality and equity. The new narrative positioned mitigation of climate change as one of the benefits of the transition to clean energy rather than the driving force behind it.

The new narrative has been embraced by a broader, more diverse movement to advance an equitable transition to a clean energy future. And today, one in four people in the United States lives in a community committed to a transition to 100 percent clean, renewable energy.





MG and Sierra Club designed *Ready for 100*, a long-term strategy grounded in three interlocking approaches: inspiring a national narrative demanding that 100 percent clean and renewable energy becomes the new social norm; convincing key institutions to make policy and systems changes that lead to 100 percent clean and renewable energy by 2050; and contributing to a broader and more diverse movement to advance an equitable transition to 100 percent clean and renewable energy for all.

# PROMOTING MIDWIFERY:

## Addressing infant and maternal death in Mexico by changing the narrative about midwifery

A dominant narrative conveyed in Mexico over decades created a mindset that giving birth in a hospital with a doctor was an indicator of social standing and assurance of safer birthing practices. The narrative resulted in stigma around midwifery, creating the mindset that it did not belong in modern medicine. This mindset had the unintended consequences of setting up a zero sum dichotomy between midwifery and doctors, reducing access to and quality of care for reproductive and prenatal care in rural and marginalized communities, and overwhelming the public health systems of many states. Furthermore, Mexico's rate of infant and maternal deaths exceeded that of many other Latin American countries.

Based on extensive research showing that the integration of professional midwives into the public health system improves quality of care for women and babies; creates more sustainable patient loads; and increases equity by deploying midwives to underserved rural communities, a new narrative was developed to support this change. Integration brings the services of professional midwives to improve prenatal care and to deliver

babies with mothers whose pregnancies are without complications, with the support of doctors when needed. It reduces stress on the health system and provides doctors with more time to focus on patients with complications and other needs.

Advancing this new narrative required a deep understanding of the current narrative and mindsets that reinforce it, including the need to counter myths about midwifery among doctors and other health personnel by increasing awareness and clarity about the training and certification of professional midwives, and communicating the mutual benefits to providers, the health system, women and families. It was also critical not to stigmatize traditional midwives in the process. The new narrative was developed through collaborations with leading UN agencies, the Mexican Secretariat of Health and representatives from 11 state public health systems. By engaging early adopters and champions to demonstrate and use the new narrative in videos, on social media and in communication for state-based policy work, currency has begun to be built for this integrated approach.



Message Guide (cover)



Findings Report (cover)

In collaboration with 11 state public health systems, two United Nations agencies, two foundations and a coalition of 63 nonprofit organizations, MG worked to advance the integration of professional midwifery into the public health system, including clinics and hospitals. Our work included conducting extensive research into the values and perceptions of midwifery by medical personnel across Mexico, creating a shared narrative and communication tools (from message guides to videos), and leading a national awareness media campaign that carefully navigated the entry of a new presidential administration that would want to disengage from work that was done by a previous administration.



# REDUCING CHILDHOOD OBESITY:

## Using a new narrative to address issue fatigue and reinvigorate the movement

Leading up to its second major investment in childhood obesity prevention, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) recognized two challenges: issue fatigue among policymakers and the public who assumed the issue was “solved,” and ongoing individual blame and shame about childhood obesity. To reinvigorate the issue and the movement, and to keep the focus on environment and systems change, childhood obesity needed a new narrative.

With extensive engagement and research, RWJF confirmed the power in shifting the narrative from “preventing childhood obesity” (which sparks individual blame and shame) to “helping all children grow up at a healthy weight” (which helps people focus on community, systems and policy solutions). The foundation—and others in the field, including then-First Lady Michelle Obama—quickly embraced this as the new frame for the issue.

RWJF also recognized the need to shift the narrative among parents and their support network, helping them see and demand needed changes in their communities rather than feeling attacked or defensive about their children’s weight. To do so, the foundation needed to hear from parents, health care providers, child care providers and faith leaders across the country about barriers in their communities that make it hard for their children to be healthy, what would help and what action they could take. The guide that emerged from this research, *Inspiring Parents to Demand Communities Where All Children Can Grow Up at a Healthy Weight*, helps organizations working on policy change to engage parents as powerful allies, and it is being used by the foundation’s grantees and others in their social marketing, policy change and movement-building efforts.

## MESSAGE GUIDE:

# Inspiring Parents to Demand Communities Where All Children Can Grow Up at a Healthy Weight



© Matt Moyer



Message Guide (cover)

## Message Guide Overview



### MESSAGES CREATED WITH PARENTS, FOR PARENTS

All children deserve to be healthy and live up to their full potential.

But children today could be the first generation to live shorter lives than their parents.

We want to change this. We want every child to be able to eat healthy and play active where they live, learn, worship, and play.

We aren't alone! When we work together we have more power than we realize to create change.

Across the country, parents and families are leading the way to creating places where all children can grow up healthy, no matter who they are or where they live.

It's up to us to make changes like this happen here, and each of us can help. What can we do? Here are some ideas:

- Notice what needs to change.
- Talk about it with other parents, neighbors, and friends.
- Ask for the changes you want—from your corner store owner, your child's teacher, your spiritual leader, the park manager, and so forth.
- Thank businesses that offer healthy options, and do your best to support them.
- Join the efforts of organizations in your community working on the kinds of changes you care about.

### TELLING A GREAT STORY

Stories that show what parents have done to demand and create change are powerful motivators. Great stories will:

- Come from your community and have cultural relevance.
- Feel close and focus on small steps that parents can take.
- Show that people are working together to create change.

Use the conversation guide to get parents thinking and surface the stories in your community.

### WORDS TO EMPOWER, WORDS TO AVOID

Use this	Rather than this
"Helping children grow up at a healthy weight"	"Preventing childhood obesity"
"Healthy food and places to play in the community"	"Weight"
A clear description of "community" (neighborhood, school, church, family)	General "community," which means something different to each person
Clear facts about the magnitude of the problem	"Bombard," "avalanche," and other words that trigger trauma

### POWERFUL FACTS AND DATA

- This generation of children could be the first to live shorter lives than their parents.
- One in every three children in our communities is at risk for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes—conditions that used to affect only adults.
- Half of African-American and Latino children born after the year 2000 will develop diabetes or other chronic conditions.

Use local data to paint a picture of health and opportunity in your area. Good sources include:

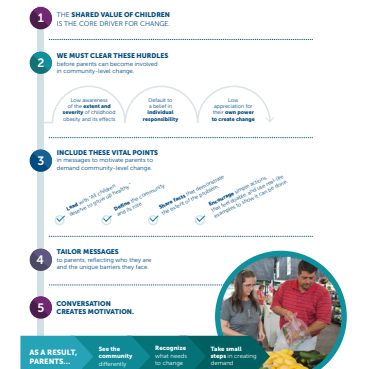
- County Health Rankings and Roadmaps: [www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org)
- The State of Obesity: [www.stateofobesity.org](http://www.stateofobesity.org)

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Message Guide (interior pages)

## Shared Values Drive Change

When it comes to sparking demand among parents and shifting the focus from individual to community-level change, five lessons emerged from the research, summarized below and detailed on the following pages.



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## Messages in Spanish

These messages were created in Spanish with parents, rather than merely translating the English messages. They are similar in content, meaning, and flow, with some subtle but important changes in wording.

**MENSAJES EN ESPAÑOL**

Todos los niños merecen la oportunidad de estar sanos y de alcanzar su máximo potencial.

Pero los niños de hoy podrían ser la primera generación que vive menos que sus padres. Esto se debe a que uno de cada tres niños corre el riesgo de sufrir presión alta, colesterol alto y diabetes, enfermedades que antes solían afectar únicamente a los adultos.

Uno de cada dos niños hispanos nacidos después del año 2000 tendrá diabetes.

La mayoría de nosotros desea algo diferente. Queremos que todos los niños puedan comer sanamente y mantenerse activos.

Necesitamos comida sana que podamos pagar, lugares en donde los niños jueguen de manera segura, y comunidades en donde podamos caminar y mantenernos activos. Necesitamos escuelas y guarderías que ofrezcan a los niños comida sana y tiempo para moverse.

¡No estamos solos! Cuando trabajamos juntos tenemos más poder para hacer que nuestras demandas se conozcan.

En todo el país, los padres se están encaminando a crear comunidades en donde cada niño tiene la oportunidad de crecer sano, sin tener en cuenta quiénes sean y en dónde vivan.

Se pueden generar cambios como éstos aquí también y cada uno de nosotros puede ayudar.

Por ejemplo, algunas ideas de lo que podemos hacer:

- Fijar qué cambios necesita. No suponamos que las cosas serán qué quisiéramos que estén.
- Hablar de esto con sus amigos, otros padres y vecinos.
- Pida los cambios que desea al dueño de la almacén, al director de la escuela o al maestro o la maestra, al supervisor del parque o a su conserje espiritual.
- Agradezca a los negocios que ofrecen opciones saludables y haga todo lo posible por apoyarlos.
- Unase a los esfuerzos de las organizaciones de su comunidad que están trabajando para lograr los cambios que son importantes para usted y su familia.

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MG worked with RWJF to explore a new strategic imperative: changing the narrative about how parents and communities thought about childhood obesity in order to activate communities to demand change. Through a national poll, focus groups with parents and discussions with experts across the country, we explored what parents thought about their community's impact on their child's health, what they would most like to change, and how to support them to ensure that all children can grow up at a healthy weight.

# CREATING CONNECTION:

## Using narrative to shift mindsets about the arts and culture

Surveys routinely show that a majority of Americans engage in some form of creative expression on a regular basis. And the benefits of engagement in all forms of the arts and culture are widely recognized and valued.

Yet, the dominant mindset about the arts and culture is that they are “a nicety rather than a necessity.” This mindset often drives decision-makers both public and private to put the arts at the top of the list of programs that are the first to be cut and the last (if ever) to be restored, and creates often insurmountable barriers to arts access, experiences and education.

Shifting the mindset that so often puts the arts on the defensive requires the creation and sustained use of a new narrative. Starting in 2012, a group of arts funders, service providers, cultural institutions, educators and others have been collaborating to research, develop, test and disseminate this new narrative.

Research found this new narrative in the recognition that creative expression and experiences are unique in connecting us to ourselves, each other, our cultural heritage and the world around us.

Since it was articulated and validated by testing, thousands of individuals and organizations from across the country have been introduced to—and trained in the application of—this new narrative. Evaluation of on-the-ground pilots in California, Massachusetts and Oregon has found that arts and culture organizations are successfully applying the new narrative and changing their program and service offerings to provide the opportunities to connect what their communities want and expect.

To access the research and message guides visit [www.creatingconnection.org](http://www.creatingconnection.org).



Employing our public will building model, we have researched and examined the deeply held values that motivate engagement; developed a new narrative and supporting message frame, trainings and tools; and are partnering with leaders and communities nationwide. The research and tools are free as a public resource at [creatingconnection.org](http://creatingconnection.org).

Connect with people and the world around you by exploring, sharing, and supporting creative expression.

Exploring and experiencing creative expression enriches our lives and communities by contributing to our happiness.

Exploring and experiencing creative expression enriches our lives and communities by promoting our health and well-being.

Exploring and experiencing creative expression enriches our lives and communities by empowering everyone to find and share their voice and enabling us to experience the voice of others.

Exploring and experiencing creative expression enriches our lives and communities by helping us grow and find personal fulfillment.

CREATING CONNECTION

Enriching lives through the power of creative expression



Message Guide: SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

A resource to support effective communication in making creative expression a recognized, valued, and expected part of everyday lives

CreatingConnection.org

Arts Midwest

Metropolitan Group

Examples that illustrate the message

Employees at The Standard, an insurance company based in Portland, Oregon, participate in a pop-up gallery in their offices, showcasing employees' visual and textile art, poetry, and fashion pieces. The show breaks down barriers among departments, fosters better relationships among coworkers, and encourages innovation in the workplace.

Public art, like Cloud Gate ("The Bean") and the Crown Fountain in Chicago's Millennium Park, draws people of many ages, ethnicity, class, and geography to connect with one another.

Universities across the country are promoting summer learning programs that incorporate creative expression into science, technology, engineering, and math activities, based on the premise that such programs help address the summer learning slide.

San Jose's Operas sometimes-stuffy reputation. The opera's San Jose brought a neighborhood together for a free evening of opera performances during which attendees were able to try on costumes and take photos in front of a backdrop from La bohème. One audience member was brought on stage to assist as a (singing) performer during Musetta's waltz. By bringing opera to the community, Opera San Jose helped people to connect with each other and to learn that opera is steeped in history, it's fun, and it's for everyone.

San Jose's Discovery Museum of San Jose, California goes beyond providing passive encounters with art by offering hands-on "Creation Stations" in the museum and mobile "Discovery Carts" in the community to encourage people to get their own creative juices flowing, experience others' creativity, and celebrate San Jose's unique cultural diversity.

The University of Iowa's College of Engineering hosts a collaborative program called NEXUS, which explores the mutual impacts of artists working with engineers. The college notes that engineering itself is an inherently creative endeavor that is enhanced by artists' creative vision.

A Voice

BENEFITS MESSAGING

5

Growth

BENEFITS MESSAGING

4

Happiness

BENEFITS MESSAGING

6

Well-Being

BENEFITS MESSAGING

7

The Office of Cultural Affairs in San Jose, California engaged Metropolitan Group to build on its experience as part of the Creating Connection initiative. The effort included an outreach and engagement campaign to build recognition of and support for creative expression as an essential element of residents' lives.

Launching this October

CELEBRATE CREATIVITY EVERY DAY!

Join WeCreate408, a virtual challenge to inspire creativity and celebrate San José

 We'll send you a creative prompt every day in October

 Let it inspire you

 Share whatever you make

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## About MG + ISMG

We are inspired by people and communities working to build a more just and sustainable world. We exist to amplify the power of their voices.

We do that in two ways. We serve as a strategic and creative resource to change agents by designing, implementing and evaluating campaigns and initiatives that change narratives, attitudes, behaviors, practices and policies. And we build the capacity of change agents, ensuring that they have the strategies, relationships, tools, infrastructure and organizational culture needed to achieve positive impact.

Recognizing the complex interconnections among issues, we often work at the intersections of public health, environmental sustainability and social justice.

With 30 years of experience driving innovation in the social purpose sector, we are committed to authentic, collaborative engagement with clients and stakeholders, and to crafting tailored strategies that meet their unique needs.

## Authors

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## Select Clients

American Heart Association

American Public Health Association

Ford Foundation

Kaiser Permanente

Land Trust Alliance

Power to Decide

NASA Earth Science Division

National Immigration Forum

National Park Foundation

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Sierra Club

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

The James Irvine Foundation

The JPB Foundation

U.S. Forest Service

W.K. Kellogg Foundation



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# STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION MULTICULTURAL ENGAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY AND INNOVATION

Metropolitan Group crafts strategic and creative services to amplify the power of voice of change agents in building a just and sustainable world.

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