

INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC NARRATIVE

Each of us has a compelling story to tell.

Each of us has a story that can move others to action. As you learn this skill, you will be learning to tell a compelling story about yourself, the community you organize with, and your strategy that encourages others to join you in creating change. In addition, you will gain practice in listening, and coaching others to tell a good story.

Public narrative as a practice of leadership

Leadership is about accepting responsibility for enabling others to achieve purpose in the face of uncertainty. Narrative is how we learn to make choices and construct our identities – as individuals, as communities, as nations.

Why Use Public Narrative? Two Ways of Knowing (And we need both!)

Public leaders employ both the “head” and the “heart” in order to mobilize others to act effectively on behalf of shared values. In other words, they engage people in interpreting why they should change their world – their motivation – and how they can act to change it – their strategy. Public narrative is the “why” – the art of translating values into action through stories.

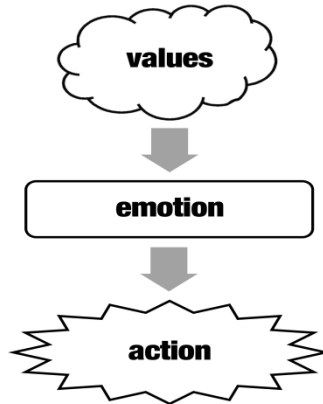


Two Kinds of Knowing

The key to motivation is understanding that values inspire action through emotion.

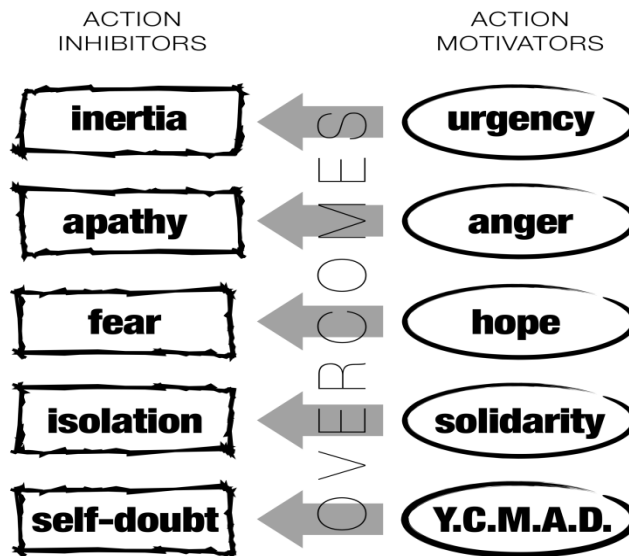
Emotions inform us of what we value in ourselves, in others, and in the world, and enable us to express the motivational content of our values to others. Stories draw on our emotions and show our values in

action, helping us *feel* what matters, rather than just thinking about or telling others what matters. Because stories allow us to express our values not as abstract principles, but as lived experience, they have the power to move others.

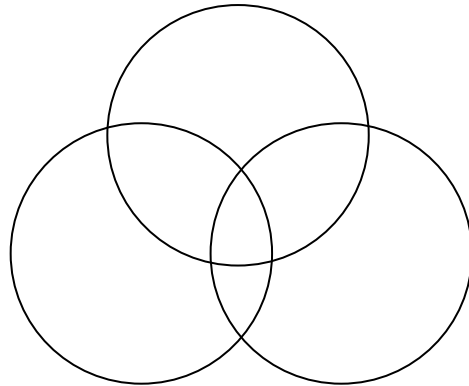


Some emotions inhibit action, but other emotions facilitate action.

The language of emotion is the language of movement—they actually share the same root word. Action is inhibited by inertia, fear, self-doubt, isolation, and apathy. Action is facilitated by urgency, hope, YCMAD (you can make a difference), solidarity, and anger. Stories mobilize emotions of action to overcome emotions that inhibit us from action.



Public narrative combines a story of self, a story of us, and a story of now.



A “story of self” tells why you have been called to serve.

Every one of us has a compelling story to tell. We all have heroes in our lives—maybe parents or grandparents or teachers or neighbors—who modeled leadership for us in some way, and who shaped our values and our ability to act on those values. We have also all made unique choices that shaped our life’s path—who to build relationships with, how to respond to injustices we saw as children, whether or not to take leadership in our places of worship or our unions, or our schools, etc.

The key focus is on choice points, moments in our lives when our values are formed when we have to choose in the face of great uncertainty. When did you first care about being heard, about concern with others, about abuses of power, about poverty, about the natural world? Why? When did you feel you had to do something about it? Why did you feel you could? What were the circumstances? The power in your story of self is to reveal something of yourself and your values—not your deepest secrets, but the key shaping moments in your life.

A “story of us” communicates why our community in particular is called to act, and why we in particular have the capacity to lead.

Just as with your story of self, the key choice points in the life of the community are those moments that express the values underlying the work your organization does. The key is to focus on telling a story about specific people and specific moments of choice or action that shaped your organizing community. Tell a story that invites others to join you in this community.

A “story of now” communicates the urgent challenge we are called upon to face now

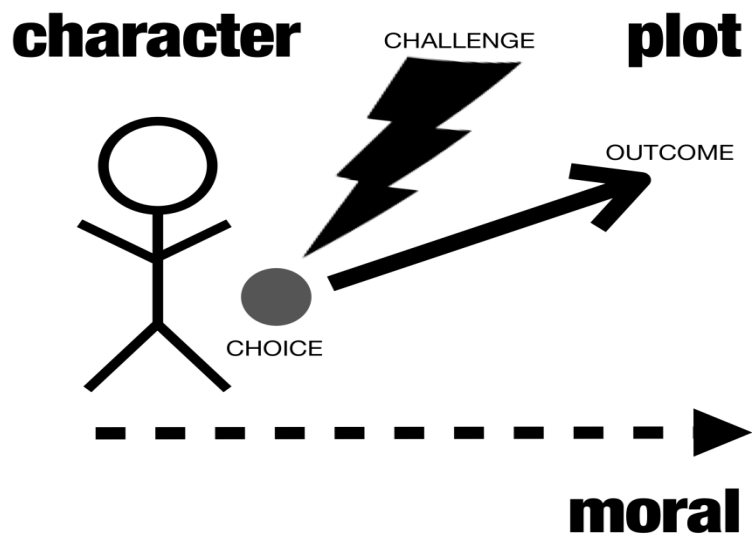
The story includes a description of the path to take to achieve goals relative to the mission – the unique strategy that we believe will help us to overcome the challenges we face and succeed. The story also invites your listeners to make a specific *actionable* commitment now to help build your campaign and movement.

The Three Key Elements of Public Narrative Structure **Challenge – Choice – Outcome**

A plot begins with an unexpected challenge that confronts a character with an urgent need to pay attention, to make a choice, a choice for which s/he is unprepared. The choice yields an outcome -- and the outcome teaches a moral.

Because we can empathetically identify with the character, we can “feel” the moral. We not only hear “about” someone’s courage; we can also be inspired by it.

The story of the character and their effort to make choices encourages listeners to think about their own values, and challenges, and inspires them with new ways of thinking about how to make choices in their own lives.



Narrative Structure

Incorporating Challenge, Choice, and Outcome in Your Own Story

There are some key questions you need to answer as you consider the choices you have made in your life and the path you have taken that brought you to this point in time as a leader. Once you identify the specific relevant choice point, perhaps your first true experience of community in the face of challenge, or your choice to do something about injustice for the first time, dig deeper by answering the following questions.

Challenge: Why did you feel it was a challenge? What was so challenging about it? Why was it your challenge?

Choice: Why did you make the choice you did? Where did you get the courage (or not)? Where did you get the hope (or not)? Did your parents or grandparents' life stories teach you in any way how to act in that moment? How did it feel?

Outcome: How did the outcome feel? Why did it feel that way? What did it teach you? What do you want to teach us? How do you want us to feel?

A word about challenge. Sometimes people see the word challenge and think that they need to describe the misfortunes of their lives. Keep in mind that a struggle might be one of your own choosing – a high mountain you decided to climb as much as a valley you managed to climb out of. Any number of things may have been a challenge to you and be the source of a good story to inspire others.

CREATING SHARED STORY:

STORY OF US

Originally adapted from the works of Marshall Ganz, Harvard University and modified by the New Organizing Institute.

STORY OF US

Linking Story of Self and Story of Us

A story of self tells people who you are and why you are called to do the work that you are doing. On its own, the story of self is insufficient to set the stage for collective action. Since organizing is about collective action, your public narrative needs to make a connection to the “us” with whom you are engaged.

Our story of self is interwoven with stories we share with others.

These include stories of our family, community, faith tradition, school, profession, movements, organizations, nations and, perhaps world. It is through shared stories that we establish the identities and express the values of the communities in which we participate (family, faith, nation) and of emergent communities we are forming (new social movements, new organizations, new neighborhoods).

Telling a "story of us" requires learning how to put into narrative form the experiences that the “us” in the room share with each other. Telling a “story of us” is a way to engage a community in acting together, based on values that we share as a community.

For many years our progressive community has often been fractured in issue silos, rather than uniting around shared values and common vision. We face the challenge of defining ourselves as a community and movement, articulating our values, and joining together with a common vision for the future. Learning to tell a story of us is one critical piece of building community around values rather than just issues or interests alone.

A word about power

Often after we’ve hear others’ stories of self and we’ve started building relationships with others we discover that we face similar challenges that are rooted in very deep systems of power inequality. Learning to tell stories of Us is a way to begin to join our stories together and acknowledge those shared challenges and the roots of the problem. However a good story of us doesn’t just convey the root of our challenges, but also lifts up our heroes and stories of even small successes. Those stories give us hope that if we come together and take action nas a community we can uproot some of the underlying causes of our suffering.

STORY OF NOW

Developing Your Story of Now

Now we know why you've been called to a particular mission, we know something of who it is you want to call upon to join you in that mission, so what action does that mission require of you right here, right now, in this place?

A "story of now" is urgent, it requires dropping other things and paying attention, it is rooted in the values you celebrated in your story of self and us, and requires action.

The Elements of a Story of Now

- The strategy – your plan to achieve your goal.
- A strategic "hopeful" choice that each person in your audience can make
- A specific ask for each person that involves a commitment of time, resources before they leave.
- A description of what collectively can be achieved.

Why It Matters

The choice we're called on to make is a choice to take strategic action now. Leaders who only describe problems, but fail to identify a way to act and bring others together to address the problem, aren't very good leaders. If you are called to address a real challenge, a challenge so urgent you have motivated us to face it as well, then you also have a responsibility to invite us to join you in action that has some chance of success. A "story of now" is not simply a call to make a choice to act – it is a call to "hopeful" action.

Tying Together all of the Pieces into a Successful Public Narrative

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?

When I am only for myself, what am I?

If not now, when?

- Hillel, 1st century Jerusalem sage

Pirke Avo

As Rabbi Hillel's powerful words suggest, to stand for yourself is the first but insufficient step. You must also find or create a community to stand with, and that community must begin acting now. To combine the stories of self, us and now, you have to find the link between why you are called to this mission, why we as a community are called to this mission, and what our mission calls on us to do now.

That linking may require you to rethink the stories of self, us, and now that you have been working on.

Storytelling is a dynamic, non-linear process.

Each time you tell your story you will adapt it – to make yourself clearer, to adjust to a different audience, to locate yourself in a different context. As you develop a story of us, you may find you want to alter your story of self, especially as you begin to see the relationship between the two more clearly. Similarly, as you develop a story of now, you may find it affects what went before. And, as you go back to reconsider what went before, you may find it alters your story of now.

Storytelling takes practice.

Our goal this weekend is not to leave with a final “script” of your public narrative that you will use over and over again during your campaign. The goal is to help you learn a process by which you can generate your narrative over and over and over again, when, where, and how you need to in order to motivate yourself and others to specific, strategic action.

TEAM BREAKOUT SESSION: STORY OF SELF, US, and NOW PRACTICE WORK

GOALS

- Practice telling your Story of Self and get good, constructive feedback
- Learn to coach others' stories so they become better storytellers.

AGENDA

TOTAL TIME: 75 min.

1. Gather in your team. **Choose a timekeeper. Have your facilitator tell their 5 minute story of self, us, and now** as an example. 5 min.
2. Take some time as individuals to **silently develop your "Story of Self, Us, and Now."** 10 min.
Use the worksheet that follows.
3. **Choose a partner.** 15 min.
Practice telling your story
 - 5 minutes each to tell your story
 - * Focus on the values you want to convey—what specific experiences shaped those values in your life?
 - * Be specific & give lots of details
 - 2 minutes each for feedback:
 - * What values did the storyteller convey? How specifically?
 - * What is the **Challenge, Choice, Outcome** in each story?
 - * Were there sections of the story that had especially good details or Images (sights, sounds, smells, or emotions of the moment)?
How did those details make you feel?

4. As a team **go around the group** and tell your story one by one.

45 min.

For each person:

- 5 minutes to tell their story
- 2 minutes to offer feedback from the group

NOTE: You have just 5 minutes to tell your story. Stick to this limit. Make sure your timekeeper cuts you off. This encourages focus and makes sure everyone has a chance.

WORKSHEET:

INSTRUCTIONS FOR GROUP FEEDBACK

When listening to the stories of others, listen and pay attention to how the story resonates within you. During the feedback portion, comment on the following:

Public Narrative #1

What connects with me?

be specific: choices, feelings/values, images

What would I like to know more about?

· *focusing in: what details and moments do you want to hear more about?*

· *bridging parts of the story: what gaps in the story did you want to know about?*

Public Narrative #2

Public Narrative #3

Public Narrative #4

Public Narrative #5

Coaching Your Team's "Story of Self"

As you hear each other's stories, keeping track of the details of each person's story will help you to provide feedback and remember details about people on your team later. Use the grid below to track your team's stories in words or images.

Name	Values	Challenge	Choice	Outcome

For Further Reflection

We all live very rich, complex lives with many challenges, many choices, and many outcomes of both failure and success. That means we can never tell our whole life story in 2 minutes. The challenge is to learn to interpret our life stories as a practice, so that we can teach others based on reflection and interpretation of our own experiences, and choose stories to tell from our own lives based on what's appropriate in each unique situation.

Take time to reflect on your own public story, beginning with your story of self. You may go back as far as your parents or grandparents, or you may start with your most recent organizing and keep asking yourself why you in particular got involved when you did. Focus on challenges you had to face, the choices you made about how to deal with them, and the satisfactions – or frustrations - you experienced. Why did you make those choices? Why did you do this and not that? Keep asking yourself why.

What did you learn from reflecting on these moments of challenge, choice, and outcome? How do they feel? Do they teach you anything about yourself, about your family, about your peers, your community, your nation, your world around you - about what really matters to you matters? What about these stories was so intriguing? Which elements offered real perspective into your own life?

What brings you to this campaign? When did you decide to work on immigration reform? Why? When did you decide to volunteer? Why? When did you decide to give up three days for this session? Why?

Many of us active in public service have stories of both loss and hope. If we did not have stories of loss, we would understand that loss is a part of the world, we would have no reason to try to fix it. But we also have stories of hope. Otherwise we wouldn't be trying to fix it.

A good public story is drawn from the series of choice points that have structure the “plot” of your life – the **challenges** you faced, **choices** you made, and **outcomes** you experienced.

Challenge: Why did you feel it was a challenge? What was so challenging about it? Why was it *your* challenge?

Choice: Why did you make the choice you did? Where did you get the courage – or not? Where did you get the hope – or not? How did it feel?

Outcome: How did the outcome feel? Why did it feel that way? What did it teach you? What do you want to teach us? How do you want us to feel?

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WORKSHEET:

DEVELOPING YOUR STORY OF US

The purpose of the story of us is to create a sense of community among individuals who may or may not yet see themselves as a community and to give them hope that they can make a difference. It builds on shared experiences and outcomes of previous actions to establish the context in which to take future action. Your goal here is to tell a story that evokes our shared values as your audience, and shows why we in particular are called to take responsibility for action now.

Your story of us may be a story of what we've already done together, challenges we've already faced and outcomes we've achieved. Or it may be a story of some of our shared heroes, challenges they faced and outcomes they've achieved. Hearing how we've met challenges in the past gives us hope that we can face new challenges together.

Brainstorm all the stories you know of about your audience and their collective story and experience. Your story of us may change each time you are talking to a different group of people as you create new community with them.

What values do we—our community of “us”—share?

What specific experiences have you had with this community that reflect those values?

What stories from this audience have emerged during the training to give you a sense of the shared values and challenges of the people in this room?

What are some stories of your previous work or of the work of this community that give you the belief that together others could work to join you in creating real tangible change in the world?

Now choose one of the stories you brainstormed above to flesh out in vivid detail. Remember, you can use this space to draw pictures instead of writing words, to help you think about where to add detail and nuance in your story.

CHALLENGE What was the challenge we faced? What's the root of that challenge?	CHOICE What specific choice did we make? What action did we take?	OUTCOME What happened as a result of our choice? What hope can it give us?

**WORKSHEET:
DEVELOPING YOUR STORY OF NOW**

Use these questions to help you to put together your story of now. You should draw on the work your team has been doing in the earlier strategy sessions to fill in the answers to the questions below.

Why is it urgent to work for immigration reform now? What stories can you tell to make the challenge real for your listeners?

What will the outcome look like if you are successful? Paint pictures with vivid detail as Martin Luther King, Jr. did in his "I Have A Dream" speech.

What choice are you asking people to make? What form will their commitment take? Is it clear what they should do? Is it clear when they should do it? Is it believable that if they make that choice it can help lead to the vivid image of an outcome you painted?



COACHING TIPS: STORY OF SELF

The following questions will help you coach each other in your small groups as you practice telling your stories of self.

Remember to balance both positive and constructively critical feedback. The purpose of coaching is to listen to the way stories are told and think of ways that the storytelling could be improved.

Story of Self Coaching Questions

- VALUES:** Could you identify what this person's values are and where they come from? How specifically?
- CHALLENGE:** What were the specific challenges the storyteller faced? How were those challenges made most vivid? What details would help make the challenge even more real?
- CHOICE:** Was there a clear choice or choices that were made in response to the challenge? How do those choices make you feel? (Hopeful? Angry? In solidarity?)
- OUTCOME:** What was the specific outcome that resulted from those choices? What does that outcome teach us?
- DETAIL:** Were there sections of the story that had especially good details or images (e.g. sights, sounds, smells, or emotions of the moment)? How did those details make you feel? Where would you like to know more?

Record Feedback/Comments from Your Team Members Here:



COACHING TIPS: STORY OF US

Remember to balance both positive and constructively critical feedback.

Story of Us Coaching Questions

- Who is the “us” in this story? Do you feel included in this “us”? Why or why not?
- VALUES: Could you identify what this community’s values are and how this community has acted on those values in the past? How specifically? What values do you share with this community?
- CHALLENGE: What were the specific challenges we have faced? How were those challenges made most vivid? What details would help make the challenge even more real?
- CHOICE: Was there a clear choice or choices that were made in response to the challenge? How do those choices make you feel? (Hopeful? Angry? Etc.)
- OUTCOME: What was the specific outcome that resulted from those choices? What does that outcome teach us?
- DETAILS: Were there sections of the story that had especially good details or images (e.g. sights, sounds, smells, or emotions of the moment)? How did those details make you feel?
- INTERWEAVING SELF AND US: Did the story of self relate to the story of us? If so, what was the common thread?



COACHING TIPS:

STORY OF NOW

- ☑ **ACTION:** Are you clear what choice or action the storyteller is asking you to take? Are you motivated to take it? Why or why not?
- ☑ **VALUES:** What values do you share with the storyteller and this community? Does the story of now appeal to those values? How? Just by telling you to care, or by showing you the choice to be made?
- ☑ **CHALLENGE:** What is the specific challenge we face now? What details of specific events or people make that challenge vivid and urgent? What details would help make the challenge even more real?
- ☑ **CHOICE:** Is there a clear choice we are being asked to make in response to the challenge? How does that choice make you feel? (Hopeful? Like you can make a difference? Etc.)
- ☑ **OUTCOME:** What will be the specific outcome that could result if we all make that choice together? Is there a clear vision of how the future could be different if we act now?
- ☑ **DETAIL:** Were there sections of the story that had especially good details or images (e.g. sights, sounds, smells, or emotions of the moment)? How did those details make you feel?
- ☑ **INTERWEAVING SELF, US AND NOW:** Did the story of self relate to the story of us and the story of now? If so, what was the common thread? If not, what thread could the storyteller use to rethink the connections between self, us and now?

WORKSHEET: DEVELOPING YOUR STORY OF SELF

Before you decide what part of your story to tell, think about these questions:

1. What will I be calling on others to do?
2. What values move me to take action like that and might also inspire others to similar action?
3. What stories can I tell from my own life about specific people or events that would show (rather than tell) how I learned or acted on those values?

What are the experiences in your life that have shaped the values that call you to leadership in this campaign?

FAMILY & CHILDHOOD	LIFE CHOICES	ORGANIZING EXPERIENCE
Parents/Family	School	Introduction to civic work
Growing Up Experiences	Career	First Experience of organizing
Your Community	Partner/Family	Connection to key books or people
Role Models	Hobbies/Interests/Talents	Role Models
School	Experiences Finding Passion	
	Experiences Overcoming Challenge	

Think about the challenge, choice and outcome in your story. The outcome might be what you learned, in addition to what happened. Try drawing pictures here instead of words. Powerful stories leave your listeners with images in their minds that shape their understanding of you and your calling.

CHALLENGE:	CHOICE:	OUTCOME:

For Further Reflection

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