Transforming Health Narratives to Drive Community Change
Public Health in the Rockies

Purpose and Vision: thriving communities in which all participate, prosper, and reach their full potential
Mission: to create the conditions for the many to work as one for the good of all
Build Relationships
Develop Capacity
Catalyze Collective Action

Core Beliefs
Every individual matters and contributes.
Communities are filled with assets and solutions.
The answers emerge from the collective.
Civil society is a place of caring, compassion and love.
Learning Objectives

- Learn about the power of stories in shifting narratives, focusing on the social determinants of health.
- Build skills in developing shared messages that promote systems change related to social issues.
- Consider how you can take steps to build a more community-driven approach to narrative shifting and storytelling.

Why Words Matter

Communicating for Social Change

The Danger of a Single Story

Ted Talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
Tabletop Discussion (5 minutes)

What does this tell you about the power of stories and how they influence our understanding of the world and other people?

How does our culture play a role in how we form stories and narratives?

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But first…some definitions

**Social Norm:** Value, belief, and/or attitude shared by a group of people.

**Narrative:** Shared interpretation of how the world works—who plays a role, where accountability and power lie.

- Dominant Narratives: mainstream narratives which are pervasive and deeply-rooted, driven by economic and social power.

**Story:** A recollection of events that happen in a particular time and place.

**Message:** Information and phrases strategically developed to inform, share, and promote action.

Sources: Narrative Initiative, Center for Story-based Strategy.
“What tiles are to mosaics, stories are to narratives. The relationship is symbiotic; stories bring narratives to life by making them relatable and accessible, while narratives infuse stories with deeper meaning.”

-Toward New Gravity, Narrative Initiative

Narrative and Power Structures

- Our “dominant narratives” are shaped disproportionately by powerful institutions and those stories shape our political and social agendas.
- These dominant narratives can exclude and erase stories from history, along with fostering unimaginable actions.

But the power of narrative can also shift when harnessed by the power of the many working as one for the good of all.

Quick Reflection: Outdated Stories

- What are some outdated stories in our work around public health?
- Who still believes these stories?
- What do you see being done to change these stories? How can you play a role?
Outdated Story: American History begins with signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776

Source: History Colorado, Pueblo

Outdated Story: Only certain populations spend time in the outdoors.

Outdated Story: Rural Colorado isn’t diverse.

Museum of Memory Exhibit

Source: History Colorado, Pueblo
The Science of Storytelling

The psychology of stories, narratives, and human behavior

The subconscious mind can absorb 20 million bits of information through our 5 senses in a single second. That data is then filtered down so that the conscious mind focuses on only 7 to 40 bits.

Mental Models
Vehicle

- VW Bus
  - Big
  - Violent
    - Guns
    - Hurt good people

Vehicle

- VW Bus
  - Big
  - Peace
    - Hippy
    - 1960's
Activity: Personal Mental Model

Think about your own life and consider something you had certain understandings about as a child and how it may (or may not) have changed over time.

- How much of this story is rooted in fact?
- How have the cultures you are a part of influenced this?
- How has it shifted over time? Any lightbulbs you’re having right now?
- How much does your own model apply to our society as a whole?

“One way to think of culture is as a matrix of shared mental maps that define how we collectively create meaning and interpret the world around us.”
-Re:Imagining Change

Dominant Narratives

What is the “default” in the United States when it comes to social issues?
Dominant Narratives

Individualism
Success and/or failure is a result of personal actions and responsibility. Individual is the fundamental focus of moral concern.

Us vs. Them
Needs of one group are paramount to needs of other groups. Identity group is the fundamental focus of moral concern.

Fatalism
Whatever happens is unavoidable. Social problems are too big and complex to be solved.

Dominant Narrative (and Outdated Story): Health

Health

Physical health

Obesity

Doctors

Lazy people

Eating as a ritual

November 06, 2018
Racial Disparities Observed in Childhood Obesity Rates
Share this content: Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, Email
A New Narrative

FOR THE GOOD OF ALL

- Our environments and relationships shape us
- Shared roles and accountability
- Everyone’s voice matters for problems to be tackled effectively

A New Story and a New Narrative: Health

Health

Community health

Healthy at Home
Healthy at Work
Healthy at School

Access to healthy food
Healthy mental health support
Employee wellness coverage
Communicating about the Social Determinants of Health

Driving better conversations about health equity and social determinants

Core Tenants of Stories for Good

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explain</th>
<th>Explain, explain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Move</td>
<td>More from selfie to landscape mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchor</td>
<td>Anchor with shared values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive</td>
<td>Drive solutions, and don't leave them for the end!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know</td>
<td>Know who you're talking to and the right messenger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**EXPLAIN and fill story “holes”**

- When you leave holes in your stories, people will fill them with their existing biases and dominant narratives.
- Telling more complete stories:
  - Prevents bias from creeping up
  - Helps people see and understand the full context of an issue or experience
  - Helps create and inform new narratives

**Explanatory in Action**

Source: Building Healthy Communities

**MOVE from selfie to landscape mode**

- Make sure that people are part of your stories, but ALSO make sure to include environmental and systemic context
- If someone is experiencing a challenge or a milestone and you want to use that story to drive change to the system, people need to see the system as a player
**Selfie vs. Landscape**

A new study found children with developmental delays are up to 50 percent more likely to be overweight or obese compared with the general population.

http://ow.ly/DBmC0VpYkFl

**A Landscape Story**

*A silent sorrow: Rural Colorado’s high suicide rate, and what’s driving it*

Isolation and lack of mental health services put residents of farm and mountain towns at greater risk than city dwellers.

*Source: Colorado Independent*

**ANCHOR with Values**

Justice  Prosperity  Ingenuity  Opportunity  Dignity  Liberty  Potential
Values in Action: Center for Health Progress

Health Equity

Our health should not be determined by the color of our skin or the size of our paycheck.

Values in Action: Estes Valley Investment in Child Success

Everyone depends on someone who depends on Child Care

Drive Solutions

- Ensuring our stories include solutions (early and often) can mitigate against fatalistic narratives and also ensure your audience can take action.
- Even if you don’t include a specific action or actions, make sure your story invokes the possibility of an issue being solved.
**SOURCE:** Reimagine St. Louis

**KNOW:** Audiences and Messengers

- Think about your audience(s), and be specific.
- Who is the best messenger?
  - Whose story has been the dominant story?
  - Whose stories have been left out? Erased altogether?
  - How can these stories feed into a new narrative around health?
A New Narrative

**OUTDATED STORIES**
- Our personal choices drive our ability to be healthy.
- Inequalities are a result of personal circumstances and are a fact of life.
- Some problems facing our communities are too big and complex to be solved.
- Organizations and agencies are the best voices for the communities they serve.

**NEW STORIES**
- Our communities play a vital role in our ability to be healthy.
- Inequalities are a result from systems built to support the few at the expense of the many.
- When we come together, we can change and rebuild systems of health that work for everyone.
- History has erased the stories of many members of our communities. Organizations and agencies can play a key role in passing the mic and illuminating those stories.

**Reflection**

- How might you take this back to your organization or community?
- What actions might you take first?
- Any barriers you might need to navigate?
Want to dig deeper?

- Narrative Initiative: read their report Toward New Gravity
  - www.narrativeinitiative.org
- Using Story to Change Systems, Stanford Social Innovation Review
- Center for Story-based Strategy
- Book: Re:Imagining Change
- Racial Equity Tools, section on framing racial equity
  - www.racialequitytools.org
- FrameWorks Institute: visit their site and sign up for their email list
  - www.frameworksinstitute.org

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