

# Our Story



# Why Narrative?



# Why Narrative?




- Stories are the oldest technology we have for conveying information.
- We are hardwired for stories. We internalize stories much better than we do facts.
- The confidence people have in their beliefs **is not a measure of the quality of evidence but of the coherence of the story.**


# Our Story Goals




Achieve better alignment.




Develop a shared story of who we are and a vision for the world we are striving to create,



Identify shared values around what we are fighting for/what we believe in.



Explore the diversity of our policy demands and lay the groundwork for further collaboration.



Identify and ensure the development and proliferation of narrative vehicles to better project the above.



**All in the interest of growing and strengthening the broad progressive movement**



# Outcomes



**A strong working example of our shared story, fundamental values, and vision connecting the organizations at the Fight Back Table and beyond.**



Sample narrative and messaging for intra- and cross-organizational collaboration and various audiences within the progressive movement (e.g. organizers, candidates, talking heads, etc.) to help us tell our shared story.



As determined, outward facing, engaging communications materials for communicating shared principles (e.g. videos, social content, etc.).

# Timeline



WIN  
•WITHOUT•  
WAR



ActLocal



mijente

GREENPEACE

nextgen  
america



United We Dream®

MomsRising.org  
Where moms and people who love them go to change our world

PEOPLE'S  
ACTION

Demos



DREAM CORPS

OUR  
REVOLUTION

MOVE ON



THE  
MOVEMENT  
FOR BLACK LIVES

WORKING  
WF  
FAMILIES



COLOR  
OF  
CHANGE

CREDO  
action

BLACK  
LIVES  
MATTER

350

DEMOCRACY  
FOR AMERICA



NATIONAL DOMESTIC  
WORKERS ALLIANCE

BEND THE ARC  
a jewish partnership  
for justice

# Our Partners

# Values

Identify and define  
shared values underpinning our work





# Love

**Love** -- We are compassionate, empathetic, and care for our fellow humans and for our planet. Our futures are bound up with one another. We treat our neighbors and newcomers as we would hope to be treated: with dignity, warmth, and respect.



# Freedom

**Freedom -- We believe people should have the tools and equal opportunity to live to their fullest potential.** We value community and self-determination, the ability for individuals to express themselves in whatever way feels best; where people can make decisions that they believe are best for their bodies and their futures, and where communities can determine for themselves how they function.





# Inclusivity

**Inclusivity -- We believe our diversity is a strength, and all are welcome.** We celebrate differences enthusiastically and believe everyone is valuable, has a perspective worthy of learning from, and has the ability to change for the better. We make space for all voices, especially those closest to the problems: they are often also closest to the solutions. We got here in many ways at different times, but we are united in believing that we can make tomorrow better than today for ourselves, our families, and our neighbors.





# Equality

**Equality -- We believe that all people are of equal value.** We recognize that this is not currently, nor has it been historically, accepted in our country or in the world. We strive to actively dismantle the systems, institutions and beliefs in our society and in ourselves that say some people are less human than others. We will build a fair, just world based on truth. A world where no matter the color of our skin, our gender, religion, who we love, or how much money we have, we can live on a safe, healthy planet for generations to come.



# Dignity

**Dignity -- We recognize the inherent humanity of every person—and believe everyone should be valued, treated with respect and enjoy a basic quality of life.** We know that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, so we show up for one another despite differences to ensure that all people can meet their basic needs, and live on a healthy planet, with self-determination.

# Democracy

**Democracy -- We believe in a country where every person has an equal voice and where people can come together to build and challenge power.** We believe society works best when all people are heard and have the power to shape their communities, workplaces, and governments to work and be accountable to them.



# Co-Existence

**Co-Existence -- We know we share this earth with people around the globe as well as with future generations.** We shape our institutions to work to create a fair, just world that represents and fights for all. We treat our world so that the generations to come may inherit an environment where they can enjoy clean water, clean air, and a healthy planet.

# Ok, but how do I use it?



**Ground messaging and framing in common values to make people more receptive and feel more connected to us and our campaigns.**



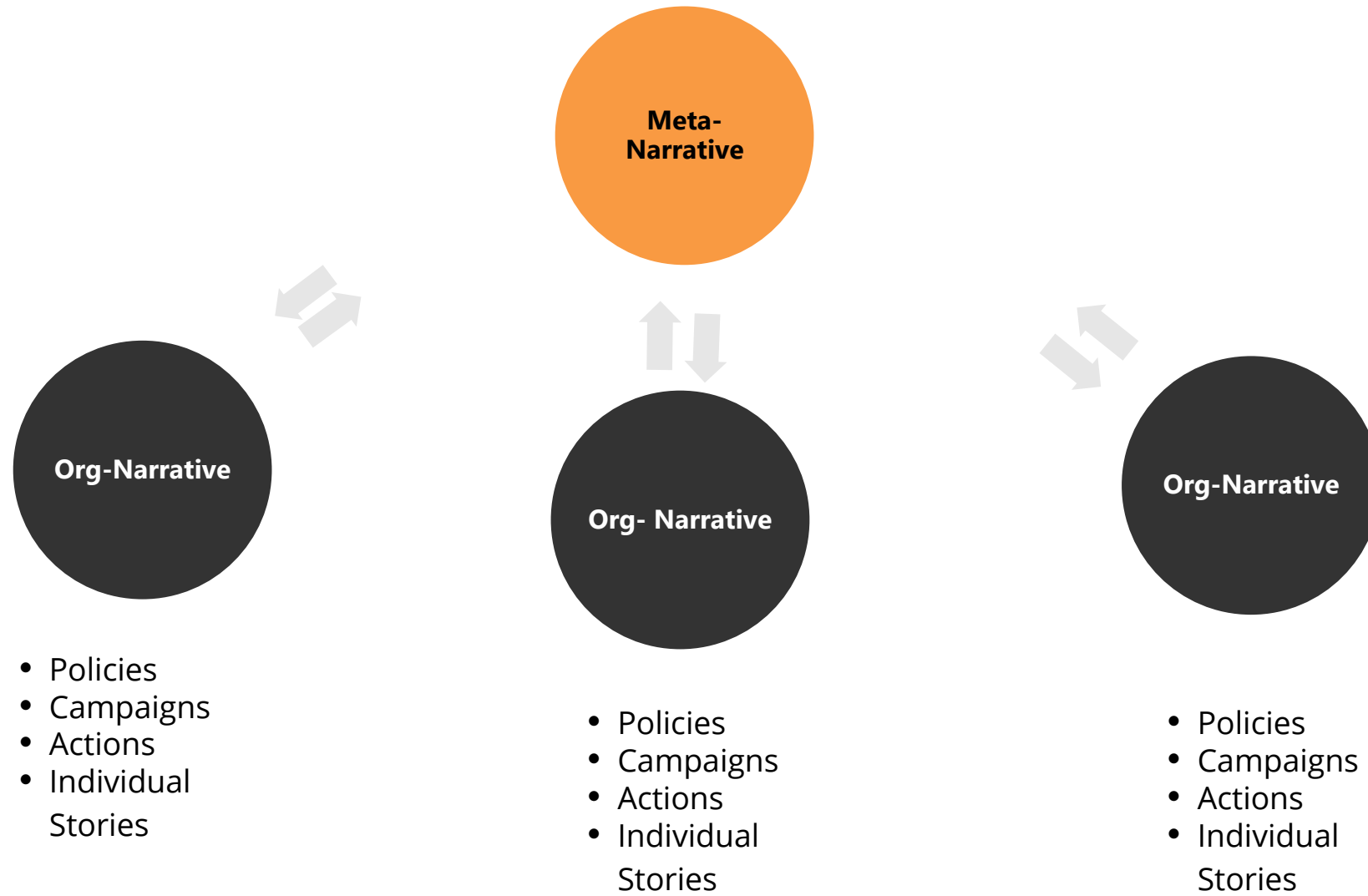
When appropriate, share our definitions for values to define these values on our terms.



Reference shared values as justification for our solutions: "We must reform the criminal justice system because we believe in dignity and equality for all."

# Meta-Narrative

An overarching interpretation of events and circumstances that provides a pattern or structure for people's beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences.





# Meta-Narrative

**Goal is not uniformity, not for us to use the same words but to communicate this story in genuine, authentic ways to our members and work and to link into a shared destiny.**

# Meta-Narrative



## Now

What is going on in the world as it is?

## Us

Who is on our side?

## Choice

Action. What is it we want people to do?

## Problem

What is the problem we are addressing?

## Them

Who are the people responsible for the problem?

## Vision

Future we want. What does it look like when we tackle the problem?

# Now

Most of us work hard to make a better future for our loved ones. We have a dream for equality, opportunity, and freedom for our families, friends and neighbors. But we are at a crossroads in our history. Long-standing power imbalances are dimming the bright light of potential of our country. A select few get wealthier and more powerful while our futures are threatened.

Many of us are unable to make ends meet. Climate chaos is devastating our communities, we are anxious about our futures, stressed about ourselves and those we love having enough to get by, and worried about being able to keep our families together. We're struggling to survive, but still a part of us hopes that if we work at it and keep faith, we can make a brighter tomorrow.



# Now

- **Start with shared values**
- **Acknowledge grievances and struggles. Talk explicitly about the relatable hard times people are having.**
- **Allude to history, this is not a new phenomenon.**

# Problem

A few political and economic elites are making things difficult by doing what they've always done—**choosing** to stoke fear and divide us against one another in order to keep power and rig the rules in their favor. Meanwhile our communities suffer, changing climates are devastating our communities, and life get harder. Things are reaching their breaking point.

# Problem

- Racist Capitalism
- Economic Exploitation at Large
- Xenophobia
- Military Industrial Complex
- Environmental Destruction
- Gender Inequality
- Voter Suppression
- Gun Control
- Religious Discrimination
- A lot more



# Co-Existence

**Co-Existence -- We know we share this earth with people around the globe as well as with future generations.** We shape our institutions to work to create a fair, just world that represents and fights for all. We treat our world so that the generations to come may inherit an environment where they can enjoy clean water, clean air, and a healthy planet.



# Us

We are Americans, the people who call this place home. Most of us work hard for the people we love, help people in need, and believe in treating others as we would like to be treated. We are the many. We have different genders, different colored skin, different faiths, and different backgrounds. We got here in many ways at different times, but we are united in believing that we can make tomorrow better than today for ourselves, our families, and our neighbors.

- Unite the “us” with values and things in common.
- Name our differences explicitly.

# Them

The few wealthy, political and economic elites who have **chosen** to do what they have always done: sow division amongst us by pointing the finger at poor people, black people and new immigrants in order to rig the rules in their own favor and keep power and wealth in their hands.

- Defines the “them” by the choices they are making, not their intractable qualities
- Names political and economic elite/ establishment as the problem
- Names the division they are creating between the “us” and the hierarchies of deserving and undeserving that the “them” create, exacerbate and inflame to maximize their profit

# Choice

We can either let them continue to divide us and concentrate power in their hands, or we can come together across our different races and backgrounds to [take control of our destiny]. It's not only achievable, we've done it before—it's in our history. All we have to do is come together as one, like courageous Americans in the past who fought for civil rights, women's suffrage, and better wages. Together we can break the cycle, [take control of our democracy], and make America a place where "liberty and justice for all" is truly for all of us.

- Foreshadows our past to show that we can do this again.
- Names coming together across differences.
- Inclusive vision of the future to be won.

# Underlying Assumptions

This isn't about left vs. right, it's about right vs. wrong, a country for the few vs. a country for all of us..

We are not all impacted equally or in the same way but we all live together in this country and we all do better when this country works for all of us. We must end the systems and cycles of violence that harm people based on our gender, the color of our skin, our faith, how much money we have, how recently we arrived here, or who we love. We must make justice real for everyone and ensure people of all backgrounds are valued the same.



## Imagery

- People of different backgrounds help celebrating, co-existing, working alongside each other.
- Children of different backgrounds learning alongside one another.
- People of different backgrounds in nature.
- Women leaders.

## Tone

- Hopeful, optimistic, and unafraid.
- Grounded in history, we know what we are trying to do is possible—history tells us so. Welcoming and friendly.

# Vision

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The world we're trying to create



# Vision

**We are working for a fair, just America where all people have equal value. We envision an America where everyone has the freedom to thrive on a healthy planet, no matter the color of their skin, gender, religion, or whom they love.**





We believe America can be a country where everyone can live with safety and dignity in their communities. Where everyone has a roof over their heads and basic needs met, and we are free and able to pursue and realize our full potential.

We believe America can be a place where we take care of our planet and those in need. Where we treat each other as we would like to be treated. We believe we can live in a compassionate country where we are proud to take care of our neighbors, old friends and newcomers alike.

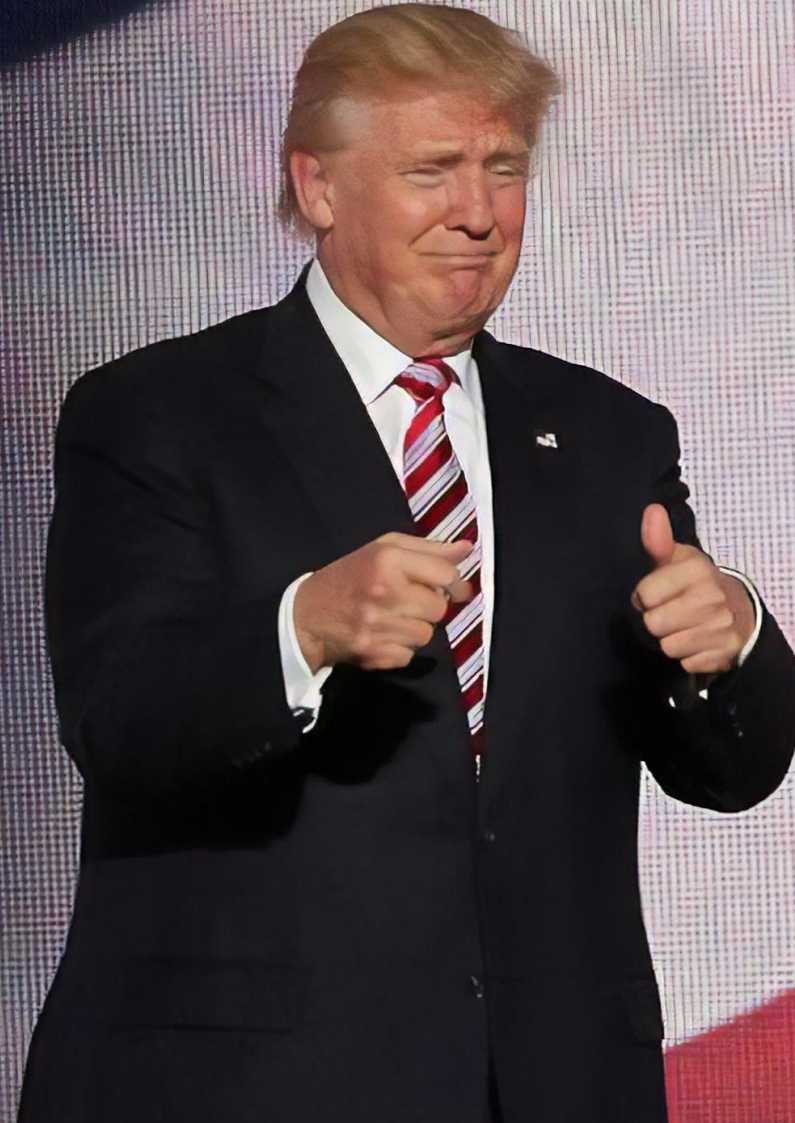
We want to create an America where we respect one another's beliefs, cultures, and expressions of self. Where we enthusiastically celebrate and grow stronger from the richness of our differences, and connect deeply over our shared humanity.

We believe America can be a place where we have the power to control our own destinies and bodies. An America where we can come together to shape our institutions, workplaces, and government to represent us, reflect us, and listen to every voice.

In short, we believe in the promise of America and believe that together we can lead America to reach its fullest potential: a place where "we the people" means all of us.

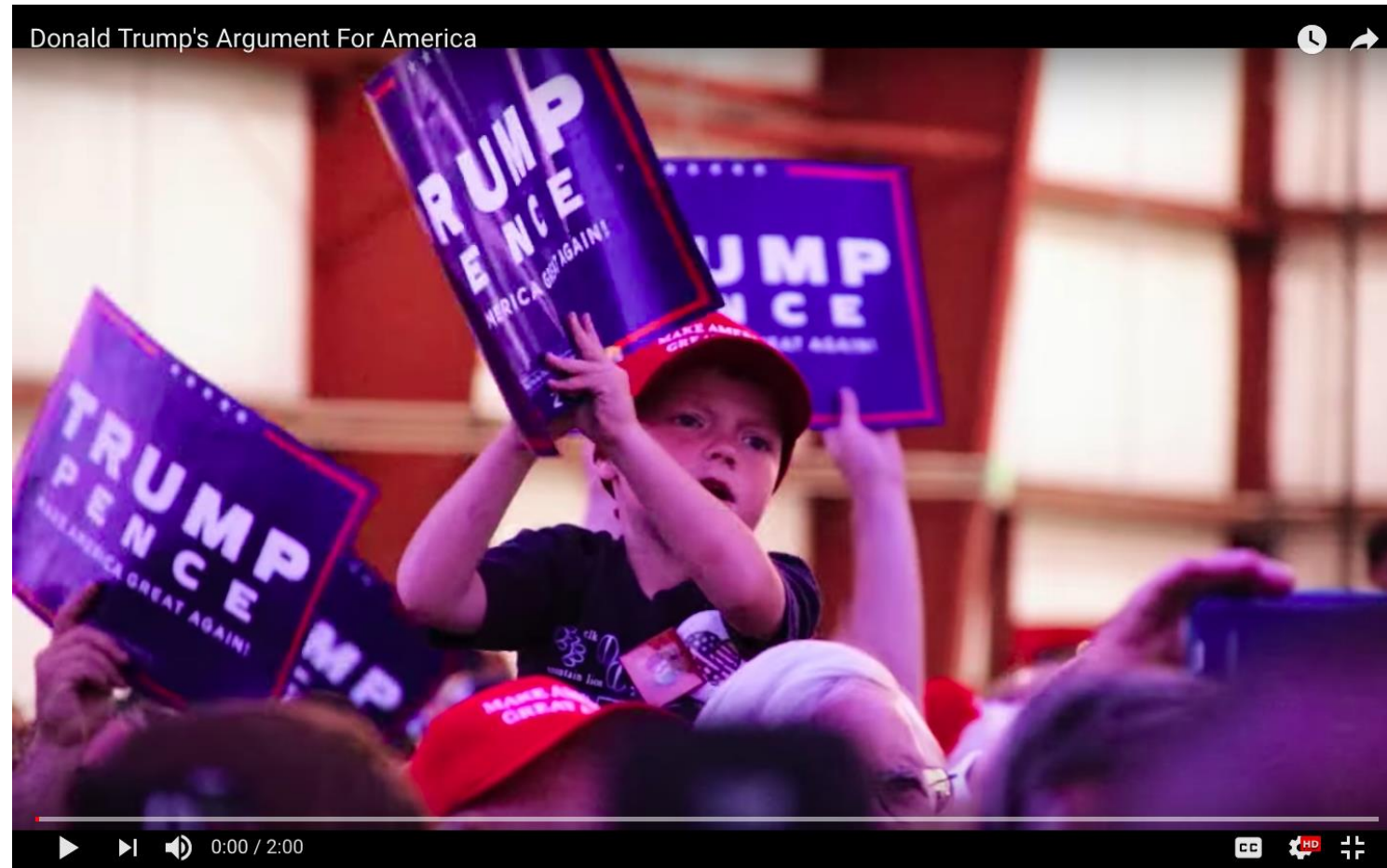


# Our story and Trump's Narrative





# Trump's Narrative



# Things are worse off today than they used to be

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Things use to be great for us. But Hillary Clinton, global elites, and corporations have totally screwed hard-working patriotic Americans over. They have created trade deals that are taking away your jobs, and now are opening the border to immigrants to overrun this country and now Hillary and the establishment are about to take control. But we can stop them. This November, we can make a stand for hard-working *real* Americans and take back control of this country by electing me, the only person who can restore this country to its former greatness, President.



# Trump's Narrative

- **Now:** Things are worse off today than they used to be. We used to be united (and white). Things used to be great for us.
- **Problem:** Wealthy global elites are taking jobs overseas. They are changing things and we (white, real Americans) are being left behind, less powerful than we once were. They care more about themselves and immigrants than they care about you.
- **Them:** Hillary Clinton, global elites (anti-Semitic dog whistles), and corporations, immigrants, foreign workers.
- **Us:** Hard-working patriotic Americans, Factory workers. Little guys unrepresented in the political moment.
- **Choice:** Vote for Trump and gain economic prosperity, safety, jobs or perish under global elite.
- **Vision:** This is the moment we rise. We will tear down the establishment and return to a time when America was great.

# How it is being reinforced

- Talking about the booming economy.
- Vilifying immigrants then cracking down on immigration, and building a wall as ways to demonstrate he is taking on external threats and keeping America safe.
- Stating his intention to solve opioid epidemic, a problem that is impacting \*real\* Americans.
- Casting journalists, the media, political opponents, the “deep state” as the **enemies within**, undermining his agenda to restore America.

# His weaknesses

- He is elite himself.
- He loves the wealthy and elite and corporations.
- His policies have gone to benefit the 1% not the average hard-working American.
- His narrative relies on stoking fear of the other (immigrants).
- His narrative is built on overt and dog-whistle racism and anti-Semitism and blatant Islamophobia and xenophobia.

# How the “Our Story” narrative undermines the Trumpist narrative

- Grounds in shared values and common humanity.
- Points out the purpose of fear-mongering and division is to misdirect anger so that elites can continue to rig the rules in their favor.
- Acknowledges hardships and anxiety and points to true culprit— Trump’s allies, the wealthy few, choosing to rig the system in their favor.
- Describes an inclusive future that is better for everyone.




# Strategy for undermining the Trumpist narrative

- Talk about Trump's coziness and kickbacks to the 1%.
- Talk about the strategy of why Trump and the right wing apparatus is sowing division and stoking fear.
- Point out how regular Americans are still struggling under Trump, and how he is making things harder by taking away healthcare and increasing consumer costs.
- Talk in detail about how our plan is to take on the real culprits—the political and economic establishment—and make a better future for everyone.

# Communicating “Our Story”



**Not a one-time communication,  
continuously reinforced in our actions,  
policies, campaigns, and by our  
members. They must be reinforced  
with integrity**



# What to say

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# Topline

- Paint a picture; talk about the world we want in detail. Don't leave things up to the imagination or up for interpretation.
- Talk about what *\*is\** in the future, not what's not in the future or the absence of things or systems.
- Be explicit that our future is diverse and inclusive and all sorts of people belong there. People will not fight for a future they don't feel includes them.
- Name the culprits causing the problem and the tricks they are using to hold onto power.

# Embrace and Replace

Embrace	Replace	Notes
Most of us work hard to make a better future for our loved ones, but times are tough and many of us are unable to make ends meet. We are anxious about our futures, stressed about ourselves, our parents or our children having enough to get by.	America is already great.	We need to see and name grievances and struggles that people are experiencing, and not gloss over them. This helps people see themselves in the story and trust that we see them in their struggles. Specify this to your particular context where possible.
We're struggling because wealthy political and economic elites choose to sow division and rig the rules for their own gain as they always have done.We can come together and make this country a place where all can thrive.	We're struggling, but we can come together and make this country a place where all can thrive.	We need to name that there are people responsible for this system, who are shaping the terrain in their favor against most of us. Failure to name and explain a culprit damages credibility with impacted communities who have been living in an unfair system for generations. It also glosses over real forces causing inequality over time.



# Embrace and Replace

Embrace	Replace	Notes
The political and economic establishment are doing what they've always done—choosing to rig the rules in their favor to take from working people and keep power and wealth in their hands.	Systemic inequities	"Systemic inequities" assumes a certain level of knowledge about what systems of inequities are and how they operate. Instead, talk about <b>what is happening</b> in the system itself and the people who are shaping the current system.
The political and economic elites are doing what they've always done— <b>choosing to rig the rules</b> in their favor to take from working people and keep power and wealth in their hands.	Working for everyone, not just for those at the top.	Naming that the system has been rigged matters. It isn't happenstance that the system only works for people at the top, it was built that way intentionally.

# Embrace and Replace

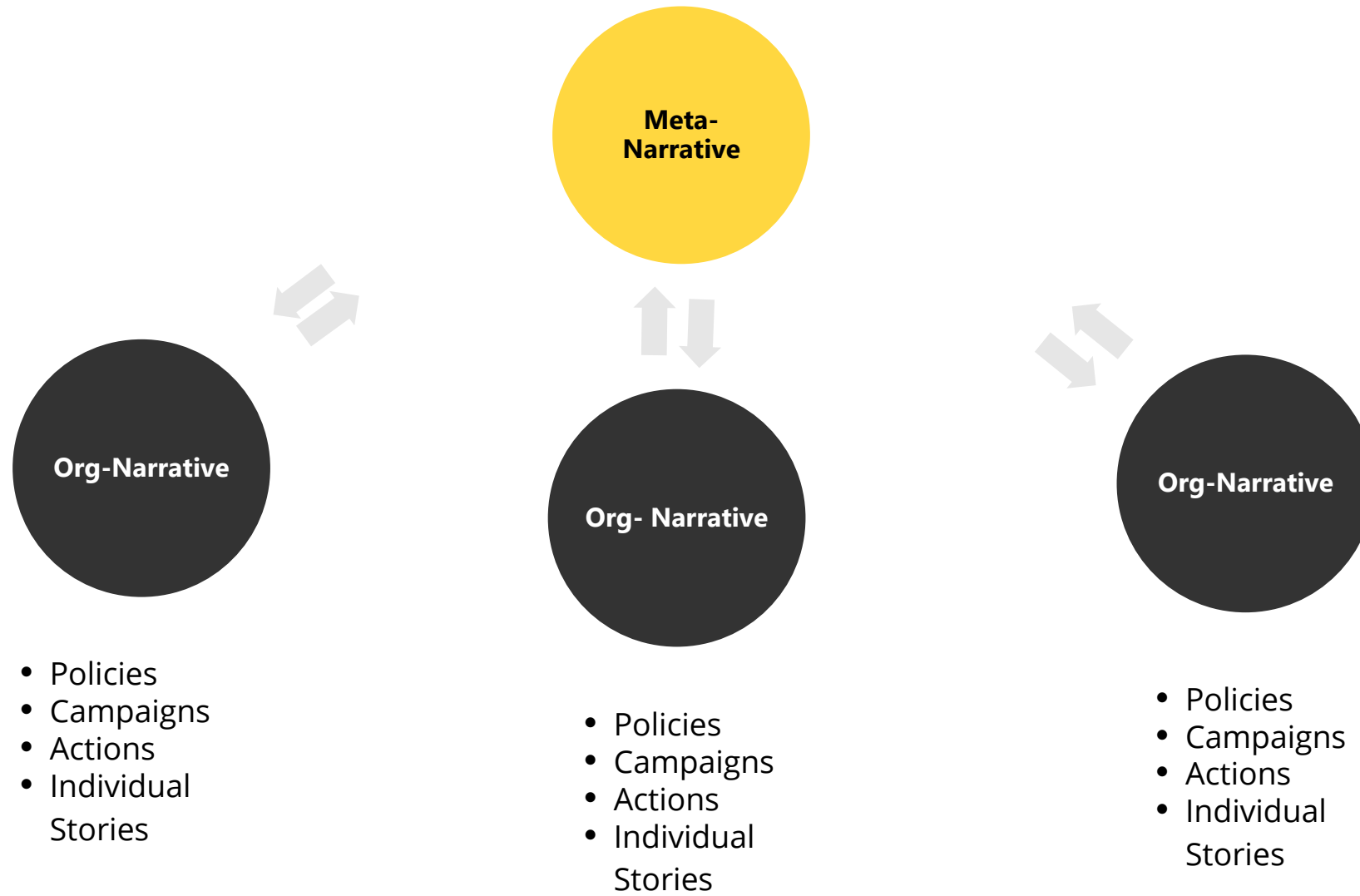
Embrace	Replace	Notes
The establishment divides us against one another, blaming new immigrants, or the poor, to keep power and wealth in their own hands and enrich their friends.	Stoke division and divide us against one another	Explain the causation, the <i>reason</i> why people are being encouraged to fear others. Exposing the rationale behind the fear-mongering and the powerful few who benefit from that fear helps inoculate people against fear-mongering and divisive messaging, and makes clear the “worthy” and “unworthy” paradigm the elites seed and maintain for their own gain.
We can take control of our destiny, like courageous leaders in the past who fought for civil rights, women’s rights, and better wages before us.	We are going to transform our society	Unknown, untested transformation makes people nervous. Ground in historical examples from the past to demonstrate that we can create this transformation and we can do it again.This is called foreshadowing and it helps overcome fatalism and pessimism.

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# How to make “Our Story” come alive

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## **Gloria E. Anzaldúa**

**“**

Nothing happens in  
the “real” world unless  
it first happens in the  
images in our heads.



**See->Feel->Act**

# Campaigns

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# Campaigns



# Images

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**Hands up,  
Don't shoot**

# The wall





# **Action**

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**#Enough - Gun Reform**

# Freedom Riders







## Feinstein Action



# Creative

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# Membership

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NOW  
THIS  
ORIGINAL


YOUNG JEWS REJECT TRUMP'S  
EMBASSY OF OCCUPATION

 JNF NOT NOW  
*we do not support the move of the U.S.  
embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.*



- **Common Values**
  - **Story**
  - **Call to Action**
  - **Specific Vision of Tomorrow**
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# Example for an invented Climate Org



Most of us do our best to make a bright future for the people we love.

But we are at a critical moment in our history. Our planet is warming and climate chaos threatens our homes, communities, jobs, and food supply. Many of us are anxious about our futures and worried environmental changes will make it even harder for our families and loved ones to get by.

This is all happening because the fossil fuel industry and their allies in the political and economic elite are doing what they've always done—choosing to write the rules in their favor to profit off the devastation of our planet while they seed fears of scarcity of resources, new immigrants and people of different skin colors and backgrounds, as our communities suffer, our planet warms, and things get harder for our families.

We can either let them continue to use fear to divide us or we can come together across our different backgrounds, races, genders and faiths, like courageous leaders in the past who fought for civil rights, to transform our energy system and make America pass bold new policy like the New Green Deal to ensure a sustainable, equitable, prosperous, future for ourselves, the people we love, and future generations.

Join together so we can make a future where everyone has clean air, fresh water, and the chance to live to their full potential—no exceptions.

**Crafting your own  
story to link to  
“Our Story”**



# Story of Self, Us, and Now

- Ties the individual story to larger systemic problems.
- Helps people see their own stories as related to the big problems we need to face.
- Inspires people to take action and make the right choice to unite and tackle our problems.
- Allows “Our Story” to breathe and be communicated in ones’ authentic voice and experience.

# Story of Self

- What is the reason you are inspired to take action with your organization or movement?
- The key focus is on choice points, moments in our lives when our values become real.
- When did you face a challenge and then have to choose in the face of uncertainty?

# Story of Us

- Communicates why we should lead.
- Situates the “Us” as having collective values and stake in solving the crises of our time.
- Draw from the “Us” and foreshadows what we have done when we came together in the past.



# Story of Now

- Lays out the urgent crisis we must respond to now and why we must choose to act now.
- Draws from the "Now," "Problem," and "Choice" section of the Meta-Narrative.
- Lays out the vision of the world that is possible after our action.

# Story of Self, Us, and Now

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# 2020 candidates and what they are doing right

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# Elizabeth Warren

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- Roots in shared values
- Shares her story to link the personal to the collective
- Names the “Them”
- Uses imagery to show the “Us”
- Explicitly names vision
- Explains that hate is being stoked to create profit



# Joe Biden

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- Names the stakes of this moment
- Grounds in history of trying to live up to national values
- Names Trump is spreading hate
- Talks about dignity
- Unites "Us" around values





# Bernie Sanders

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- Lays out Us vs. Them (Economic elite and political establishment)
- Explicitly names a future that works for all
- Names struggle and grievance
- Talks about coming together across differences
- Foreshadows that transformation is possible



# Beto O'Rourke

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- Leans into crossroads and stakes of this moment
- Describes some details of what the future look like
- Foreshadows coming together across difference with examples in Texas





# Cory Booker

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- Comes together across differences (explicitly, race)
- Ties his history to what is possible when we come together across differences
- Shares history of collective action by courageous leaders
- Concrete description of Vision
- Imagery to show diversity



# Kirsten Gillibrand

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- Connecting her messaging to American Values and qualities (brave)
- Foreshadowing future bravery by drawing on history
- Imagery and news clips to show the diverse "Us"
- Naming Fear



# Kamala Harris

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- Names American values and the stakes of this moment
- Shows diverse America through representation
- Talks about diverse people coming together to fight for shared values



# Our Story in Other Media





# Green New Deal

- Vividly describes the future
- Uses imagery to convey diversity of the Us
- Names the “Them” and their *choice* to rig the system
- Uses foreshadowing
- Lays out stakes of the moment



# Labour Voices: Guy Matthews

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- Describes relatable everyday problems in detail
- Names the “Them” and their *choice* to stoke racial division to enrich themselves
- Unifies the “Us” through what we share
- Talks about uniting across difference to take on real culprits
- Uses an authentic voice

