Narrative Change

WORKBOOK

Shift Beliefs.

Build Alignment.

Drive Change.

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THE ACS Narrative Change Workbook

The Narrative Change Workbook, developed by Advocacy & Communication Solutions (ACS), provides six practical tools to help organizations identify and shift existing narratives, engage priority audiences, and measure progress. The tools can be used together to guide a comprehensive narrative change strategy or independently to address specific organizational needs.

The Six Narrative Change Tools

1. **Narrative Barriers:** Identifies existing narratives, the barriers they create, and the narrative an organization wants to establish.
2. **Audience Identification:** Helps organizations identify and prioritize the audiences they need to reach and the shifts they want to achieve.
3. **Audience-Specific Messages:** Guides organizations in developing messages tailored to their priority audiences.
4. **Stories to Move the Narrative:** Helps identify and develop stories that reinforce the desired narrative.
5. **Messenger Network:** Identifies credible messengers who can help carry the narrative to priority audiences.
6. **Track Narrative Change:** Helps organizations establish indicators, monitor progress, and assess whether their narrative is gaining traction.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK:

For a comprehensive approach, complete the tools in the order presented: identify narrative barriers, prioritize audiences, develop messages and stories, engage messengers, and track progress.

Organizations may also use individual tools based on their existing strategies and needs. Each includes instructions and worksheets to guide implementation. Revisit the tools regularly to assess progress and adjust your approach as needed.

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NARRATIVE CHANGE TOOL

Narrative Barriers

Identify beliefs that may limit audience understanding or support for change.

How to Use This Tool

Step 1: Identify Your Barriers

Identify up to five beliefs or assumptions that make understanding or supporting change difficult. Describe how each appears in conversations, decisions, or actions. Include real examples when possible and flag unconfirmed beliefs for testing.

Step 2: Rank Your Priorities

Rank your barriers based on their impact and your organization's ability to address them over the next 12 months. Enter 1 for the highest priority.

Step 3: Put Your Results to Work

Use your highest-priority barriers and desired narratives to guide audience identification, messaging, communications, and advocacy efforts.

Optional: Use the Narrative Barriers Summary Chart

Use the chart on the last page to summarize your barriers, examples, and desired narratives in priority order. This provides a quick reference for team discussions and communications planning.

BARRIER 1

PRIORITY:

Narrative Barrier: What belief is getting in the way?

What This Looks Like: How does it show up in conversations, decisions, or actions?

Narrative to Build: What do you want people to understand or believe instead?

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BARRIER 2

PRIORITY:

Narrative Barrier: What belief is getting in the way?

What This Looks Like: How does it show up in conversations, decisions, or actions?

Narrative to Build: What do you want people to understand or believe instead?

BARRIER 3

PRIORITY:

Narrative Barrier: What belief is getting in the way?

What This Looks Like: How does it show up in conversations, decisions, or actions?

Narrative to Build: What do you want people to understand or believe instead?

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BARRIER 4 PRIORITY:

Narrative Barrier: What belief is getting in the way?

What This Looks Like: How does it show up in conversations, decisions, or actions?

Narrative to Build: What do you want people to understand or believe instead?

BARRIER 5 PRIORITY:

Narrative Barrier: What belief is getting in the way?

What This Looks Like: How does it show up in conversations, decisions, or actions?

Narrative to Build: What do you want people to understand or believe instead?

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Priority	Narrative Barrier	What This Looks Like	Narrative to Build

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NARRATIVE CHANGE TOOL

Audience Identification

Identify who your organization can realistically reach and what you want them to think, understand, expect, or believe differently.

How to Use This Tool

Before You Begin

For the strongest results, complete the **Narrative Barriers** first. Use the barriers and desired narratives you identified to determine which audiences you need to influence. If you are using this tool independently, begin by considering which beliefs, expectations, or decisions your organization wants to change.

Step 1: Identify Your Audiences

Identify the people, groups, or organizations you want to influence and can realistically reach, such as funders, decision-makers, community members, or other stakeholders.

Step 2: Complete Each Audience Section

For each audience, identify:

- **Audience and Role:** Who is the group, and what role does it play?
- **Target:** Which specific person or organization do you want to reach?
- **Current/Likely Position:** What does the audience currently think or believe? Note any unconfirmed assumptions.
- **Desired Narrative Shift:** What do you want the audience to understand or believe differently?
- **Desired Action:** What action do you want the audience to take?
- **Priority for the Next 12 Months:** Rank audiences, with 1 as the highest priority.

Step 3: Prioritize Your Audiences

Focus on the audiences most important to your narrative change goals. Consider how much their understanding or actions matter, your ability to reach them, and opportunities to engage them over the next 12 months.

Step 4: Put Your Results to Work

Use your completed **Audience Identification** to develop tailored messages, identify opportunities for outreach, and guide relationship-building and advocacy. **Audience-Specific Messages** can help you take the next step.

Optional: Use the Audience Summary Chart

Use the chart on the last page to summarize your priority audiences, current beliefs, desired shifts, and actions. You do not need to complete both the individual sections and the summary chart.

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AUDIENCE 1

PRIORITY:

Audience and Role:

Target:

Current/Likely Position:

Desired Narrative Shift:

Desired Action:

AUDIENCE 2

PRIORITY:

Audience and Role:

Target:

Current/Likely Position:

Desired Narrative Shift:

Desired Action:

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AUDIENCE 3

PRIORITY:

Audience and Role:

Target:

Current/Likely Position:

Desired Narrative Shift:

Desired Action:

AUDIENCE 4

PRIORITY:

Audience and Role:

Target:

Current/Likely Position:

Desired Narrative Shift:

Desired Action:

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AUDIENCE 5

PRIORITY:

Audience and Role:

Target:

Current/Likely Position:

Desired Narrative Shift:

Desired Action:

AUDIENCE 6

PRIORITY:

Audience and Role:

Target:

Current/Likely Position:

Desired Narrative Shift:

Desired Action:

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Priority	Audience & Role	Target	Current/Likely Position	Desired Narrative Shift	Desired Action

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NARRATIVE CHANGE TOOL

Audience-Specific Messages

Use this tool to develop messages that connect with each audience, address narrative barriers, and encourage action while reinforcing a consistent overall narrative.

How to Use This Tool

Step 1: Start with Audience Identification

Start with your completed **Audience Identification**, if available. For each audience, identify the narrative barrier to address, the belief you want to build, and the action you want the audience to take.

Step 2: Develop Audience-Specific Messages

For each audience, complete the following:

- **Audience:** Who are you trying to reach?
- **Narrative Barrier(s) to Address:** What beliefs or assumptions are you trying to change?
- **Desired Narrative Shift:** What do you want this audience to understand or believe differently?
- **Key Message:** What would you actually say to this audience? Write one or two clear sentences using language that will resonate with them.
- **Why It Matters:** Why should this audience care about the issue?
- **Define the Ask:** What specific action will you request from this audience?
- **Program Example/Evidence or Story to Gather:** What facts, examples, or stories will make your message credible?
- **Trusted Messengers:** Who would this audience be most likely to trust? Identify potential messengers if you have not yet completed **Messenger Network**.
- **Communication Channels or Opportunities:** Where and how can you reach this audience?

Step 3: Tailor and Align Your Messages

Adapt the language, examples, and approach for each audience while maintaining the same overall desired narrative. Make sure each key message is clear enough to be used in an actual conversation, presentation, or communication.

Step 4: Put Your Messages to Work

Use your completed messages to guide communications, relationship-building, outreach, and advocacy efforts. Review and update them as you learn more about your audiences.

Optional: Use the Audience-Specific Messages Summary Chart

Use the chart on the last page to summarize your messages and outreach plans. For more detailed messages, use the individual worksheets.

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MESSAGE 1

Audience:

Narrative Barrier(s) to Address With This Audience:

Desired Narrative Shift:

Key Message:

Why It Matters:

Program Example/Evidence or Story to Gather

Define the Ask:

Trusted Messengers:

Communication Channel(s) or Opportunity:

MESSAGE 2

Audience:

Narrative Barrier(s) to Address With This Audience:

Desired Narrative Shift:

Key Message:

Why It Matters:

Program Example/Evidence or Story to Gather

Define the Ask:

Trusted Messengers:

Communication Channel(s) or Opportunity:

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MESSAGE 3

Audience:

Narrative Barrier(s) to Address With This Audience:

Desired Narrative Shift:

Key Message:

Why It Matters:

Program Example/Evidence or Story to Gather

Define the Ask:

Trusted Messengers:

Communication Channel(s) or Opportunity:

MESSAGE 4

Audience:

Narrative Barrier(s) to Address With This Audience:

Desired Narrative Shift:

Key Message:

Why It Matters:

Program Example/Evidence or Story to Gather

Define the Ask:

Trusted Messengers:

Communication Channel(s) or Opportunity:

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MESSAGE 5

Audience:

Narrative Barrier(s) to Address With This Audience:

Desired Narrative Shift:

Key Message:

Why It Matters:

Program Example/Evidence or Story to Gather

Define the Ask:

Trusted Messengers:

Communication Channel(s) or Opportunity:

MESSAGE 6

Audience:

Narrative Barrier(s) to Address With This Audience:

Desired Narrative Shift:

Key Message:

Why It Matters:

Program Example/Evidence or Story to Gather

Define the Ask:

Trusted Messengers:

Communication Channel(s) or Opportunity:

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Audience	Narrative Barrier(s) to Address With This Audience:	Desired Narrative Shift	Key Message	Why It Matters	Define the Ask	Example/ Evidence/ Story to Gather	Trusted Messengers	Comm. Channel(s) or Opportunity

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NARRATIVE CHANGE TOOL

Stories to Move the Narrative

Use this tool to identify, collect, and share stories that reinforce your desired narrative, connect individual experiences to broader issues, and help audiences understand why change matters.

How to Use This Tool

Step 1: Review Your Narrative Goals

If available, use your completed **Narrative Barriers** and **Audience Identification** to identify beliefs to change and audiences to reach. The **Audience-Specific Messages** can help identify stories that reinforce your messages.

Step 2: Identify and Prioritize Stories

Identify stories you have or can realistically collect that support your narrative and show why change matters. Rank them by importance over the next 12 months, with Story 1 as the highest priority.

Step 3: Complete Each Story Section

For each story you choose to pursue, identify:

- **Story Idea/Title:** What experience, example, or situation could become a story?
- **Status:** Is the story available, still to be collected, or on hold?
- **What It Demonstrates:** What message or idea does the story reinforce?
- **Story Source and Consent Status:** Who is the source, and has permission been obtained for the intended use? Identify consent as secured or pending.
- **Date Collected:** When was the story gathered? Enter "Not yet collected" if applicable.
- **Intended Audience:** Who should the story influence?
- **Supporting Evidence:** What reliable facts, examples, or evidence strengthen the story?
- **Messenger/Use:** Who could credibly share the story, and through which communication channels or opportunities?

Step 4: Put Your Stories to Work

Collect stories in written, audio, or video formats when appropriate. Obtain the necessary permission before sharing identifiable stories. Use these stories to support audience-specific messages, reinforce your desired narrative, and demonstrate why change matters.

Optional: Use the Stories Summary Chart

Use the chart on the last page to track story ideas, collection status, intended audiences, supporting evidence, and planned uses. List stories in priority order. The individual worksheets provide more room for detailed planning.

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STORY 1

Story Idea/Title:

Status:

What it Demonstrates:

Story Source and Consent Status:

Date Collected:

Intended Audience(s):

Supporting Evidence:

Messenger/Use:

STORY 2

Story Idea/Title:

Status:

What it Demonstrates:

Story Source and Consent Status:

Date Collected:

Intended Audience(s):

Supporting Evidence:

Messenger/Use:

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STORY 3

Story Idea/Title:

Status:

What it Demonstrates:

Story Source and Consent Status:

Date Collected:

Intended Audience(s):

Supporting Evidence:

Messenger/Use:

STORY 4

Story Idea/Title:

Status:

What it Demonstrates:

Story Source and Consent Status:

Date Collected:

Intended Audience(s):

Supporting Evidence:

Messenger/Use:

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STORY 5

Story Idea/Title:

Status:

What it Demonstrates:

Story Source and Consent Status:

Date Collected:

Intended Audience(s):

Supporting Evidence:

Messenger/Use:

STORY 6

Story Idea/Title:

Status:

What it Demonstrates:

Story Source and Consent Status:

Date Collected:

Intended Audience(s):

Supporting Evidence:

Messenger/Use:

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Story Idea/Title	Status	What it Demonstrates	Story Source and Consent Status	Date Collected	Intended Audience	Supporting Evidence	Messenger/ Use

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NARRATIVE CHANGE TOOL

Messenger Network

Use this tool to identify and prioritize people or organizations that can credibly share your narrative, reach important audiences, and help advance your goals. A messenger is someone who actively carries your narrative to others, rather than someone you are simply trying to influence.

How to Use This Tool

Step 1: Review Your Previous Tools

If available, use your completed **ACS Narrative Barriers** and **Audience Identification** to identify beliefs to change and audiences to reach. The **Audience-Specific Messages** can guide messenger talking points, while the optional **Stories to Move the Narrative** provides supporting examples.

Step 2: Identify and Prioritize Messengers

Identify 3–5 trusted people or organizations that can credibly reach your audiences. Consider their credibility, reach, alignment with your narrative, and ability to engage. Rank them for the next 12 months, with 1 as the highest priority.

Step 3: Complete Each Messenger Section

For each messenger, identify:

- **Messenger Type/Group:** What kind of person or organization could carry your narrative?
- **Specific Person or Organization:** Who specifically could serve in this role?
- **Stage:** Are they Active (already carrying your narrative) or Potential (aligned with your narrative but not yet sharing it)?
- **Role in Narrative Change:** How could they help advance your narrative?
- **Audiences They Can Help Reach:** Which audiences can they credibly influence?
- **Influence:** Rate their ability to reach or influence those audiences as High, Medium, or Low.
- **Alignment:** Rate their support for your desired narrative as High, Medium, or Low.

A potential messenger is a candidate, not an active messenger. Someone whose beliefs your organization is still trying to change should remain a target audience until they begin carrying the narrative themselves.

Step 4: Put Your Messenger Network to Work

Focus on engaging and supporting your highest-priority messengers. Provide clear messages, relevant stories, and useful opportunities for them to share your narrative. Continue building relationships with potential messengers who could become active supporters.

Optional: Use the Messenger Network Summary Chart

Use the chart on the last page to summarize your priority messengers, their influence, alignment, audiences, and potential roles. The individual worksheets provide more room for detailed planning.

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MESSENGER 1

Messenger Type/Group:

Priority for the Next 12 Months (1 = highest priority):

Specific Person or Organization:

Stage (Active or Potential):

Role in Narrative Change:

Audience(s) They Can Help Reach:

Influence:

Alignment:

MESSENGER 2

Messenger Type/Group:

Priority for the Next 12 Months (1 = highest priority):

Specific Person or Organization:

Stage (Active or Potential):

Role in Narrative Change:

Audience(s) They Can Help Reach:

Influence:

Alignment:

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MESSENGER 3

Messenger Type/Group:

Priority for the Next 12 Months (1 = highest priority):

Specific Person or Organization:

Stage (Active or Potential):

Role in Narrative Change:

Audience(s) They Can Help Reach:

Influence:

Alignment:

MESSENGER 4

Messenger Type/Group:

Priority for the Next 12 Months (1 = highest priority):

Specific Person or Organization:

Stage (Active or Potential):

Role in Narrative Change:

Audience(s) They Can Help Reach:

Influence:

Alignment:

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MESSENGER 5

Messenger Type/Group:

Priority for the Next 12 Months (1 = highest priority):

Specific Person or Organization:

Stage (Active or Potential):

Role in Narrative Change:

Audience(s) They Can Help Reach:

Influence:

Alignment:

MESSENGER 6

Messenger Type/Group:

Priority for the Next 12 Months (1 = highest priority):

Specific Person or Organization:

Stage (Active or Potential):

Role in Narrative Change:

Audience(s) They Can Help Reach:

Influence:

Alignment:

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Messenger Type/Group	Priority for the Next 12 Months (1 = highest priority)	Specific Person or Organization	Stage (Active or Potential)	Role in Narrative Change	Audience(s) They Can Help Reach	Influence	Alignment

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NARRATIVE CHANGE TOOL

Track Narrative Change

Use this tool to identify and track signs that your organization's narrative is changing what audiences think, say, believe, and do.

Before You Begin

Review your completed **Narrative Barriers**, **Audience Identification**, and **Audience-Specific Messages**, if available. These help identify the narrative, audiences, and messages you want to track. The **Stories to Move the Narrative** and **Messenger Network** are optional resources.

How to Use This Tool

Step 1: Identify What You Want to Track

Choose up to six indicators of narrative change, focusing on audience language, beliefs, actions, and decisions rather than just engagement or reach.

Step 2: Complete Each Indicator

For each indicator, identify:

- **Indicator:** What change are you measuring?
- **Definition:** What does it measure?
- **Data Sources:** Where will you find evidence?
- **Starting Point (Baseline):** Where are you today? Record the date and current conditions.
- **Success Signals:** What does progress look like?
- **Tracking Method:** How will you measure change over time?
- **Owner/Review Cadence:** Who is responsible, and how often will you review?

Step 3: Review Progress Quarterly

Every three months, assess what has changed, where resistance remains, whether your organization's actions reinforce the narrative, and how community input has influenced decisions. Identify needed adjustments, next steps, owners, and deadlines.

Continue tracking supporting organizational outcomes, recognizing that improved outcomes alone do not demonstrate narrative change.

Optional: Narrative Change Summary Chart and Quarterly Tracking Chart

The **Narrative Change Summary Chart** on page **31** provides an alternative way to complete this tool, capturing the same information as the individual indicator worksheets in one place.

Use the **Quarterly Tracking Chart** on page **32** to document quarterly progress, evidence of change, and next steps. Organizations may use their existing tracking systems instead.

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INDICATOR 1

Indicator:

Definition:

Data Sources:

Starting Point (Baseline):

How Indicator Will Be Tracked:

Success Signals:

Owner/Review Cadence:

INDICATOR 2

Indicator:

Definition:

Data Sources:

Starting Point (Baseline):

How Indicator Will Be Tracked:

Success Signals:

Owner/Review Cadence:

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INDICATOR 3

Indicator:

Definition:

Data Sources:

Starting Point (Baseline):

How Indicator Will Be Tracked:

Success Signals:

Owner/Review Cadence:

INDICATOR 4

Indicator:

Definition:

Data Sources:

Starting Point (Baseline):

How Indicator Will Be Tracked:

Success Signals:

Owner/Review Cadence:

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INDICATOR 5

Indicator:

Definition:

Data Sources:

Starting Point (Baseline):

How Indicator Will Be Tracked:

Success Signals:

Owner/Review Cadence:

INDICATOR 6

Indicator:

Definition:

Data Sources:

Starting Point (Baseline):

How Indicator Will Be Tracked:

Success Signals:

Owner/Review Cadence:

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Indicator	Definition	Data Sources	Starting Point (Baseline)	Success Signals	Tracking Method	Owner/Review Cadence

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Optional: Quarterly Narrative Change Tracking Chart

After completing your indicators and tracking plan, use this optional chart every three months to review progress. Record evidence of narrative change, identify where progress or resistance remains, and document any adjustments, next steps, and responsible parties. **Completing the chart is optional.** Organizations may use their existing tracking systems instead.

Indicator / Priority Audience	Definition / Data Sources	Starting Point/ Success Signals	Tracking Method / Owner & Review Cadence	Quarterly Progress/ Next Steps

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Narrative change is an ongoing process.

Use these tools to strengthen your strategy, engage the right audiences, and assess whether your efforts are changing how people understand and respond to important issues.

Shift Beliefs. Build Alignment. Drive Change.

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