

ANNUAL REPORT

2023



TOA
the opportunity agenda

STORY. CULTURE. POWER. FREEDOM.

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vision

We envision a national culture of opportunity, community, and equity, which ensures just and responsible policies for all people in our country regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, religion, or economic status.

mission

To build the public imagination and cultural will to challenge white supremacy and its pervasive impact, advance narratives that support opportunity for all, and work in community to overcome opposition narratives that exclude and divide us.

VALUES

- > **OPPORTUNITY**—Everyone should have access to what it takes to reach their full potential, not only to provide for themselves and their families, but to thrive.
- > **VOICE**—A healthy society depends on the ability of all to participate, and for all to be heard and have ownership in the public square.
- > **COMMUNITY**—We are stronger when we nurture connection with one another and the environment. Further, we are committed to incorporating an anti-racist lens into our day-to-day practices.
- > **EQUITY**—All people are created with equal rights, inherent dignity, and the potential for creativity and growth. Dedication to equity is essential for working toward a more just and anti-racist society.
- > **SAFETY**—Everyone has the right to live safely in their community, their workplace, and their homes. We strive to foster an environment in which people are treated the way they wish to be.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

To all our friends, allies, and supporters,

2023 was a transformational year for TOA, marked by an invigorated network and new opportunities.

To share just some of our highlights:

- We trained hundreds of folks in the art of narrative and cultural power building, helping them weave powerful narratives of truth and justice.
- We launched the Narrative Innovators Lab, the next evolution of our Communications Institute, Creative Change Retreat, and Culture & Narrative Fellowship.
- We developed new research that plants the seeds for welcoming communities for immigrants and rekindles the fire of civic engagement in the South.
- We even launched a new website and brand.

And we've built a stronger foundation, connected with some awesome new funders, and hatched two new projects: the Immigrant Narrative Strategy Table and the Health Equity Communications Lab.

Amidst all of this momentum, the overwhelming feeling for me has been excitement. Real magic happens when we're in community. **Staff, partners, donors, community members—we're all threads in the same incredible tapestry.** We share our struggles, we share our successes, we share our resources, and we develop new and exciting ways to move forward.

Together, we can all build the narrative and cultural power to **realize an irresistible future where all people are welcomed, where creativity and innovation flourish, where our natural environment is cherished, and where all people have a voice in the decisions impacting their lives.**

But the path isn't smooth. **The far-right is going all out to unravel the hard-won progress we've made, by any means necessary.** Violence, dismantling institutions which no longer serve them, everything is on the table. We know the consequences if they achieve their vision of a world where white supremacy, patriarchy, and trans- and homophobia are left unchallenged.

But as the far right becomes angrier, the bright lights of progress continue to shine. Among them:

- Massive victories for organized workers across the country.
- Widespread rejection of censorship of teachers and students discussing race, sexuality, and gender.
- Popular support for reproductive rights and increased scrutiny of a right-wing controlled Supreme Court.
- Continued victories for criminal justice reform prosecutors and other public officials in predominantly BIPOC communities.
- A new growing global consensus about the value of peace and equal justice.

We have only begun to fight. I believe that the social and racial justice battlefield ahead of us is narrative and culture. And that's where you come in. You, our amazing community of partners, whose creativity will help our neighbors see what a brighter tomorrow could look like and how we all can play our part in making it so.

Let us keep building narrative and cultural power. One powerful story at a time, we will bend the arc of history towards justice. Thank you for being a part of it all!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adam Luna".

Adam Luna
Acting President

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OUR PROCESS

We change the narrative so that support for social justice becomes “common sense.” Narratives are the Big Stories that people rely on to make sense of the world. They are built on common values and themes that influence how people process information and make decisions.

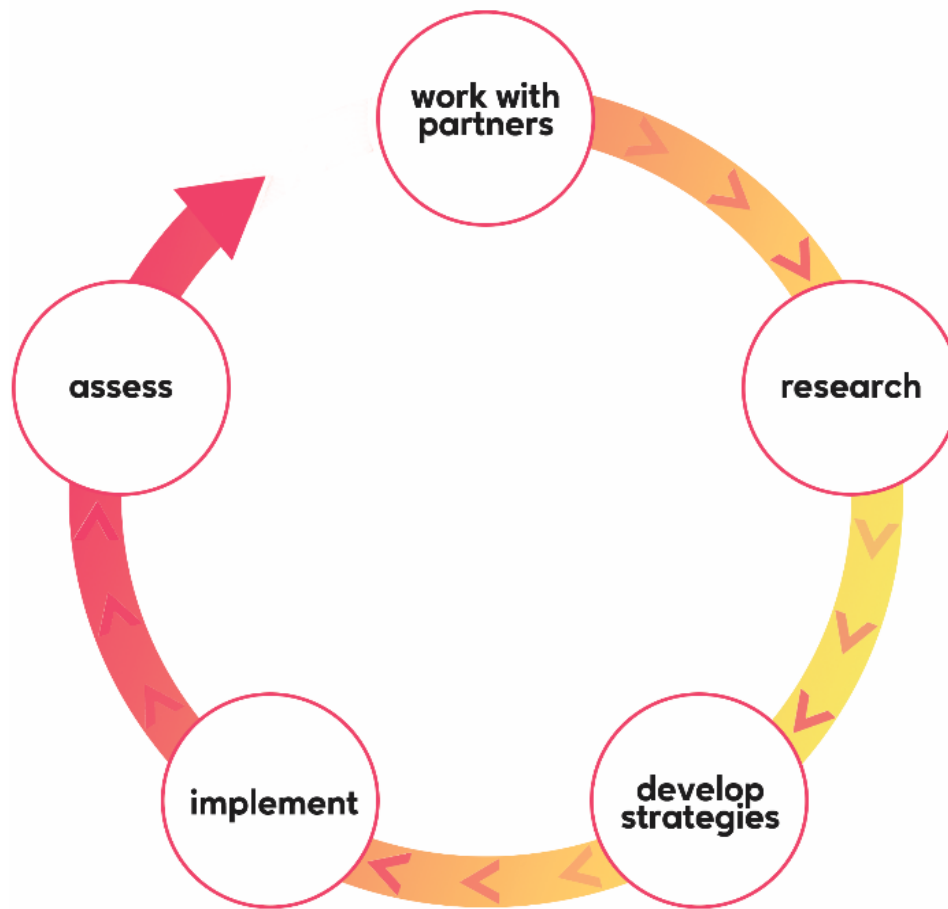
Narratives are conveyed in political and policy discourse, but also propagated through news media, popular culture, social media, and even dinner table conversations. Some narratives are positive (“love is love”) while others are problematic (“anyone can thrive if they just pull themselves up by their bootstraps”) or contested (“America is a land of opportunity”).

Narrative change rarely happens on its own, particularly around social justice issues such as racial justice, economic justice, immigration, and maintaining a multiracial democracy. It results from a sophisticated combination of collaborations, strategic communications tactics, and cultural engagement, all attuned to key audiences and societal trends. It requires both discipline and investment along every step of the journey.

Most importantly, it requires us to have a clear and shared vision of the world we are trying to achieve. We need a vision that can sustain us in the long-term, especially when progress seems to be halted or even reversed. We need to not only identify problems, but also provide solutions. We need to center ourselves in shared values that can inspire and bring people together. And we need to align all our work towards our vision.

A person with glasses and a microphone is speaking at a podium. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm lighting. A large white quote is overlaid on the left side of the image.

“WE NEED TO NOT ONLY IDENTIFY PROBLEMS, BUT ALSO PROVIDE SOLUTIONS.”



narrative wheel

The Opportunity Agenda approaches narrative change as a cyclical process in which we:

- > **WORK WITH PARTNERS** to identify the roadblocks they see when trying to change minds, and what they need to overcome them;
- > **RESEARCH** to identify the stories people are carrying around in their heads, and what new messages are most effective;
- > **DEVELOP STRATEGIES** using communications and culture that identify who we need to reach, who they need to hear from, and how best to reach them;
- > **IMPLEMENT** those strategies by disseminating, training, coordinating, convening, briefing, and supporting leaders who have reach and impact;
- > **ASSESS** what is working and what is not.
- > **And then, back to the beginning...**

The process is a feedback loop because **shifting narratives over time requires listening and learning** from what is (and is not) working, and then incorporating that back into movement goals, more refined research, and narrative evolution.

OUR IMPACT

We believe that the people closest to the pain have the solutions, innovations, and breakthroughs that we need to overcome challenges and win. And so, to make sure our work is not just about getting the right answers but asking the right questions, we need those folks to be part of our work from the beginning.

Our cohorts, comprised of national, state, and local leaders, work with us as partners in designing and implementing narrative strategy by identifying desired narrative shifts, executing research, and creating communications and cultural tools. They make sure that the research we undertake and the tools we produce reflect the challenges faced by leaders on the ground and give them what they need to overcome those challenges.

At the core of our cohort model is a belief that narrative change is not just about providing tools, but more importantly, about leveraging the power of convening. We are cultivating generational leaders from all corners of the social justice movement who gain fresh strategies and join forces to spark innovative solutions.

promoting civic engagement

Brianna Brown, a member of our distinguished Beyond Democracy cohort, is a 4th generation Texan and co-executive director of the [Texas Organizing Project](#) (TOP), the largest grassroots, community-based organization in Texas.

Brianna and TOP are featured in a new documentary, [“Texas, USA,”](#) which highlights Brianna’s incredible work to mobilize voters, champion equitable policies, and make Texas a more inclusive and just place for all while capturing how the political battleground of Texas is shaping the political landscape nationwide.

Brianna is just one example of how our Beyond Democracy cohort members—advocates, activists, and creatives who come from states across the South—build upon each other’s leadership, drive, and creativity as narrative practitioners. Our cohort members work with many BIPOC communities who, for good reason, feel disillusioned with government, politics, and politicians to make meaningful change in their lives.



Shot by Somi Studios

By convening and collaborating, the cohort members develop their individual projects in community, leveraging shared mutual support, knowledge, and innovation. As narrative practitioners who are reshaping how we talk about self-governance in a way that may be more resonant and compelling than “democracy” has ever been, their projects embody the aspiration for the new world we are building. For our part, The Opportunity Agenda provides the cohort members with strategic and financial support to roll out their campaign findings to their communities.



Shot by Somi Studios

shifting public opinion on immigration

This year, The Opportunity Agenda embarked on a three-phase research project exploring regional and national narrative trends in the U.S. to build support for a long-term vision of a multiracial future that is inclusive and welcoming to migrants, immigrants, and refugees.

We worked with cohort members in New York, Michigan, and Iowa to uncover deeply held beliefs around immigration, test messaging frames, and explore how attitudes around immigration map onto peoples’ views about race and the economy. We found that messaging that addressed and countered peoples’ fears through frames about shared, collective safety and prosperity move audiences toward accessible immigration policies.



Photo by Brian Erickson, TOA.
Art by Rommy Torrico and Nando Alvarez

NARRATIVE RESEARCH LAB



Our [Narrative Research Lab \(NRL\)](#) is home for all things related to narrative research within the immigrant justice space. The NRL is comprised of a digital library and a monthly webinar series that brings together leading partners in the field to share their emerging narrative and immigration research and methodologies and expand access to messaging guidance for communicators and advocates. **In 2023, we brought together 700 leaders in the immigration field to share research, develop narrative strategies, and build campaigns.**

Through our monthly webinars, we have expanded our range of narrative experts and intersectional issues, spoke explicitly about the role that white supremacy plays in upholding anti-immigrant sentiment, and shared emerging methodologies and narrative frames for shifting public opinion on immigration.

here's a snapshot of our 2023 NRL webinars:

> JANUARY 2023:

We hosted a conversation with Define American about their report, [Change the Narrative, Change the World 2022: The Power of Immigrant Representation on Television](#), done in partnership with the Norman Lear Center's Media Impact Project. They discovered that the number of immigrants on TV associated with crime has gone up, which has implications for how they are perceived in the real world.

> MARCH 2023:

Representatives of [Immigration Hub](#) and [America's Voice](#) shared insights into the spread of immigration misinformation from right-wing media. They determined that right-wing media's impact on immigration misinformation is massive, consistent, and serves as a pivotal political arm for the Republican party and right-wing groups.

> NOVEMBER 2023:

We talked with the [ACLU](#) to better understand the most prominent fear-based narratives peddled by anti-immigration politicians and groups, why those narratives move people in the "middle," and how to oppose them. The ACLU found that border communities have untapped authority and credibility around immigration issues that reveal a real opportunity reach different audiences and maximize impact.



our impact
building leaders from across
the social justice spectrum



NARRATIVE INNOVATORS LAB

Launched in 2023, the new [Narrative Innovators Lab \(NIL\)](#) – and the bold, forward-thinking communicators and creatives who make up the Lab – move us toward our vision for a multiracial society where every person has the power to shape the decisions that impact their lives.

Through the NIL, fellows in our signature Communications Institute and Culture & Narrative Fellowship learn narrative and cultural strategy skills to develop creative stories, imagery, and other cultural resources that touch hearts and shift perspectives. Innovative in its design, the NIL provides communications professionals the chance to see close-up how artists engage with challenges and opportunities and offers artists the opportunity to see how activists and advocates do the same.



Photos by Carolina Kroon

meet some of our NIL Fellows!



Brittney Cheatham,

Communications Manager, Forward Justice

Brittany Cheatham is a strategic communicator focused on using storytelling and narrative change to propel movements forward, disrupt harmful stereotypes, empower our communities, and fight for racial and social justice. To learn more about her inspiring work, watch [this video!](#)

“[The NIL] has reminded me of our **collective power**... We can use the [cultural] things that we own and develop and define to change and **create a better world for ourselves.**”

BRITTANY CHEATHAM

Alice Tianyi Liu

Co-director of Communications, West Street Recovery;
Gulf South for Green New Deal

Alice Tianyi Liu is a Houston-based writer and organizer working in disaster recovery and climate justice. She is a queer Chinese-American who is fueled by the hope and rage that we must reshape our economy and political system to be oriented towards life and care instead of extraction and death. To learn more about her activism, watch [this video!](#)



“When I think about how I want to bring art to my organizing work, I really want to focus on **how art can be a way of bringing people together** and not just speaking to an audience on the other side.”

ALICE TIANYI LIU



Salomé Egas

Interdisciplinary performer, arts educator, and children’s book author

Salomé Egas is proudly Ecuadorian. In 2022, she was Brooklyn Arts Council grantee, an American Immigrant Council Fellow, and a MOtiVE resident artist with her project “Más que un Pétalo.” See some of her interdisciplinary art [here!](#)

“Something that I’ve learned at TOA is to focus on what values do I want to put forward when creating my work. As an immigrant artist... **we deserve to feel belonging, we deserve to be living dignified lives,** and we deserve to experience joy when creating art.”

SALOMÉ EGAS

the Narrative Innovators Lab aims to:

- Create narrative and cultural power-building innovations to overcome white supremacy.
- Provide high level multi-disciplinary training in narrative and cultural power-building.
- Create a community that enables participants to strategize collaboratively and provide ongoing support to one another.

CREATIVE CHANGE RETREAT

Every year, we bring together a diverse group of leading artists, entertainers, media makers, advocates, activists, and funders to our renowned **Creative Change Retreat**. There, these leaders and influencers build community, share and learn new strategies, and develop creative ideas for creating an irresistible future where everyone is equal.

In 2023, in the beautiful Santa Ana Pueblo of New Mexico, 60 creative leaders came together under the theme “futurescape” to connect with the land, rest under the stars, explore new horizons, and hatch innovative ideas to make a just, equitable future a reality.



Shot by Somi Studios

CREATIVE CHANGE 2023

For over a decade, Creative Change has grown into a beloved gathering where leading artists, cultural practitioners, advocates, and philanthropists can unwind, build relationships, flex their creativity, and develop new cultural interventions to improve our world. Since the first Creative Change Retreat in 2009, many projects and ideas have been seeded or cultivated in discussions and design groups at the Retreat.



Migration is Beautiful Butterfly

In 2012, artist Favianna Rodriguez brought to Creative Change the idea of creating a new image for the immigrant rights movement using the butterfly, a natural migrator. Many of us had seen the butterfly image used in the migrant rights space, but when we discussed it in the Creative Change design workshop, we realized the artwork could be disseminated on a whole new level. It was an extremely powerful metaphor that could spread in the art and culture space. An idea was incubated. See it at www.favianna.com.



Pop Culture Collaborative

The idea for the Pop Culture Collaborative was a network of philanthropic leaders that would expand the impact of their investments by pooling their resources, strategic thinking, and leadership to dramatically increase philanthropic investment in the pop culture for social change field. The fund was realized and now distributes an average of \$3 million in grants a year to United States-based nonprofit organizations, for-profit companies, and individuals working to drive transformative experiences for mass audiences through pop culture stories, mass media, and social networks. Visit them at www.popcollab.org.



Culture Surge

Recognizing the vital moment for our communities, democracy, and shared future in the lead up to the 2020 elections, Culture Surge created a coalition and network of 900 storytellers, artists, organizers, strategists, and creators to serve as a nexus that can breathe life, hope, and representation into civic efforts. In 2020, they reached over 45 million people with inspirational messages about the power of voting and our collective power to change the world. Visit them at www.culturesurge.com.



Abortion Access Front

Abortion Access Front is a team of comedians, activists, writers, and producers that uses humor to destigmatize abortion and expose the extremist anti-choice forces working to destroy access to reproductive rights in all 50 states. The idea grew from the Lady Parts Justice project, which Lizz Winstead brought to Creative Change for workshopping. Visit them at www.aafont.org.

THINGS TO COME IN 2024

immigrant narrative strategy table

Over the last decade, fear stoked against immigrants has become one of the primary instruments to sow societal division. This has led to greater limits on refugee admissions, stricter border enforcement, immigrants being taken advantage of for political stunts, and greater targeted acts of violence. Attempts at reforming our immigration system to make it more humane or to provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants have been entirely stalled. This limits the opportunity of many immigrants, keeping them from accessing the resources and support they need to thrive.

But research tells us that sharing a positive vision of a multiracial future and stories that center immigrants as people can inoculate audiences against the anti-immigrant narratives that are driving policy-making and public fear.

By launching the Immigrant Narrative Strategy Table, we are bringing together advocates and artists to advance much-needed pro-immigrant narratives by developing messaging, multimedia, and more. Working together through a coordinated strategy of collaboration, capacity-building, and investments, the Table uses narrative to counter political headwinds working against this vision of a multiracial society in which migrants, immigrants, and refugees are included and welcomed.



Art by Alex Albadree

health equity communications lab

Health and the resources to live a healthy life are among the most essential human rights, but our country continues to be divided by deep inequities in health, especially across race. Despite the clear evidence of these disparities, there is an expanding effort to use culture, media, influencers, legislation, and judicial decisions to deny this reality, and to discredit and restrict attempts to discuss and address these disparities.

To change the conversation around health equity and advance more equitable policies that can create healthier communities, The Opportunity Agenda has partnered with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to support a health equity communications lab. The Lab will provide advocates with the strategies and tools they need to engage and respond at key moments, bringing people together toward a future in which all communities have access to the resources and opportunities they need to live their healthiest lives.



Art by Rommy Torrico

FUNDER & DONOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are deeply grateful to all the people and organizations who have generously shared their time, labor, and resources to stand side-by-side with us in expanding opportunity for all.

“Unbound Philanthropy is a proud, longtime supporter of The Opportunity Agenda. The Opportunity Agenda’s Creative Change Retreat has been the birthplace of inspiration and collaboration for the cultural power-building movement for over a decade. **The Opportunity Agenda’s shift to integrate all of its capacities – research, cultural and narrative strategy, strategic communications training – positions it to make an even greater impact in the next decade.**”

ADEY FISSEHA, US SENIOR PROGRAM OFFICER, UNBOUND PHILANTHROPY

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Pop Culture Collaborative Fund, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors

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“The Opportunity Agenda is a true “movement utility” organization. **TOA breaks through issue silos by creating spaces for people to come together across immigrant rights, economic and racial justice to learn new strategies to advance narrative change toward a multi-racial, inclusive democracy we need.** TOA’s annual Creative Change Retreat (the most joyous convening of the year!) brings together a diverse group of artists, media makers, advocates, activists, and funders to bring forward new ideas for using culture to drive social transformation. Creative Change’s showcases of innovative work provide fertile ground for sharing, connection, reflection, and cross-movement inspiration.”

TANYA COKE, DIRECTOR, GENDER, RACIAL, AND ETHNIC JUSTICE, FORD FOUNDATION

“There is great power in narrative. The stories we tell ourselves about who we are - as a country, as a nation - influence how (or whether) we move towards greater equity and justice for all. The Opportunity Agenda occupies a unique space. **TOA lifts up the stories, film, and art that show us what’s possible, while helping to amplify messages that unite us.**”

MARITZA GUZMÁN, TOA BOARD MEMBER

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Vincent and Heather Benjamin through The Pinkerton Foundation

Virginia Botelho through TIAA-CREF

WE NEED YOUR HELP

The Opportunity Agenda is a community, and we believe achieving social justice is only possible if each of us contributes in whatever ways we can. We invite you to be part of our work and the work of our partners. **Be part of the conversation. Be part of the community. Together, we make change.**



give

The Opportunity Agenda is incredibly grateful to all the support we receive from our community, from the smallest to the largest contributions. Your gifts allow us to bring together and help our network of partners, ensuring that we can properly support the folks doing the work every day on the frontlines.

Monthly Giving.

To build a just and equitable future, we need a long-term vision and sustained support. Help us maintain and strengthen our foundations by giving monthly!

<https://opportunityagenda.org/donate/>

“At a time of unprecedented division and distrust, **The Opportunity Agenda’s work seeking to find common values and providing resources to help individuals and organizations bridge gaps has become more than important.** Equity, equality, and democracy itself are under severe threats and The Opportunity Agenda offers thoughtful and meaningful ways to preserve and practice the values that we hold most dear. Please help them in this work with your most generous support.”

DENNIS PARKER, MONTHLY DONOR



follow and spread the word

Our social media platforms are our tools to respond to important events with effective narrative and cultural recommendations and to tell more people about the work of our community. We need support to expand our reach and get those narrative change strategies to work. Follow, like, and share!

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[YouTube](#)

[TikTok](#)

[Twitter/X](#)



engage our partners

Through our Culture & Narrative Fellowship, TOA supports artists to create innovative cultural projects that explore new ways to engage people. Check out some of their projects!



From '23 Fellow Marcos Echeverria Ortiz, [Where We Were Safe](#) is an ongoing interactive oral history map/archive that focuses on collecting memories about the lost and destroyed salsa music places in New York City, such as ballrooms, clubs, record stores, and outdoor venues.

Learn more about the project at whereweweresafe.org.



From '22 Fellow Josh Healey and executive producer Rosario Dawson comes the 5-episode web series [Normal Ain't Normal](#). Based on real people's stories, the series explores the struggles, absurdities, and surprising possibilities of working-class people navigating the strange, "post" COVID terrain across the United States

[Watch Normal Ain't Normal](#) on the BuzzFeed YouTube Channel.



From '22 Fellow Annie Del Hierro-Jost, [Flatbush Faces and Voices](#) uses video, photography, and a mosaic mural installation to build relationships and share the lives and experiences of residents of Brooklyn's Flatbush neighborhood, one of the most diverse communities in the city.

Check out the mural on the Parkside Avenue side of [724 Flatbush Ave in Brooklyn](#) and view interviews with community members [@flatbushfacesandvoices on Instagram](#) or [@flatbushfacesandvoices4894 on YouTube](#).



build your own message

Introducing people to a new way of thinking about an issue requires a carefully considered message. TOA provides a proven framework for building a persuasive message: Value, Problem, Solution, Action (VPSA). Our interactive VPSA message building tool will guide you through the process. <https://opportunityagenda.org/our-tools/vpsa/>

The Opportunity Agenda is also proud to have built a library of resources to help folks talk about the issues most important to them.

- > [Ten Lessons for Talking About Race, Racism, and Racial Justice](#)
- > [Social Justice Phrase Guide](#)
- > [Talking About Birthing Justice](#)
- > [Taking Action & Responding to the Attacks on Honest and Inclusive Education](#)
- > [Criminal Justice Reform Phrase Guide](#)
- > [How to Navigate Holiday Conversations](#)