

Elements of Cultural Strategy

Like narrative strategy, **cultural strategy** requires establishing a clear vision and values, powerful and consistent storytelling, and time. Once you've established a strong narrative strategy, how can you develop cultural strategies that resonate, motivate, and inspire?

1. Theory of Change Development

A Theory of Change should outline short- and long-term goals and the activities we need to pursue to get there, allowing us to stay focused on our vision. Think of this as your map. Commissioning a mural? A set of murals? Over 3 years? Your Theory of Change can provide useful context that helps collaborators, partners, and even funders connect the dots between your strategies and your vision. If you're interested in the field of cultural strategy, this is a good place to start. Can you invest in or fundraise for the development of a Theory of Change for your cultural strategies?

2. Cultural Audits

Cultural audits provide a deep understanding of your audiences by analyzing their media choices. They are essential for understanding your audience. USC Annenberg's Norman Lear Center describes stories as the "currency of our culture" and these stories are largely transmitted via media. As such, studying your audience's relationship to different media can provide valuable insight to guide your storytelling as part of your cultural strategy. Cultural audits can help you determine where to find your audience, identify points of connection with your audience, and identify storytelling opportunities and effective and trusted messengers.

Cultural audits can involve focus groups, surveys, social media listening, and interviews. It's important to develop a budget to meet your needs and establish your capacity to conduct an audit as this is best left to the professionals.

3. Content Creation, Live Events

Once you've conducted a cultural audit and understand who is influencing your audience, how, and where, then you can begin to identify potential creative collaborators. Our community has worked with podcast hosts, comedians, faith leaders, food bloggers, musicians, and more. How can you best communicate with your audience? Who will you work with?



Amplifier

Amplifier is a nonprofit media lab building campaigns to amplify the most important movements of our times, by any medium necessary.



THE CENTER FOR
CULTURAL
POWER

The Center for Cultural Power

The Center for Cultural Power is a cultural strategy nonprofit that activates and mobilizes BIPOC artists to envision a world in which cultural, economic, and political power are distributed equitably.



pillars

Pillars Fund

Pillars Fund amplifies the leadership, narratives, and talents of Muslims in the United States to advance opportunity and justice for all.



Scope Of Work (SOW)

Scope Of Work represents early- and mid-career BIPOC creators ages 17-24, including photographers, filmmakers, and designers.



YES. AND
LAUGHTER LAB

Yes, And Laughter Lab (YALL)

The Laughter Lab connects comedians to the entertainment industry, social justice orgs, and activists who can help bring their work into the comedy marketplace and into movements for social change.

4. Creative Networks

At The Opportunity Agenda, we're working toward establishing a society where cultural strategies play a significant role in social change and we're committed to building a community of cultural strategy practitioners. This involves cultivating and supporting a network of artists and creatives among organizers, funders, and other advocates. To do this, we regularly organize national convenings and grow our community through programs such as our Narrative Innovators Lab and Creative Change Retreat. This allows us to facilitate collaboration across issue areas, fields, mediums, and geography.

It can be daunting to try to invest in a cultural strategy that requires artists or creatives if you don't know where to turn! The good news is that there are many innovative and dedicated collectives supporting narrative-forward artists and creatives working in a wide range of mediums from comedy to film. **See sidebar on the previous page for a list of our favorites.**



Photo Credit: Christina Wocintechchat via Unsplash

5. Distribution and Engagement Plan

Just as it's important to be strategic about how you communicate with your audience, it's equally important to have a plan to distribute your content and build engagement. When we partnered with Amplifier in 2020 to develop the [We Can Thrive Together](#) campaign to support educators and students with at-home learning resources during the pandemic, lesson plans were distributed via Amplifier's newsletter to a network of over 15,000 educators across the United States. The open source artwork we commissioned was available for download via TOA and Amplifier's websites in high resolution. Readers were encouraged to interact with us via social media platforms. We were able to track the widespread use of the lesson plans and artwork via metrics, such as open rates, artwork downloads, and social media engagement.



TOA PRO TIP:

Pro Tip for those building cultural interventions: As you move through the steps of the Narrative Framework in the next section, pay special attention to *Step 5: Narrative Interventions*. That's where you'll find guidance on how to activate your values and audience insights through creative, collaborative strategies that move people closer to your narrative vision.

The next section sets the stage for turning your narrative plan and cultural strategy into real-world impact.

As you explore ways to advance change through culture, it's important to ground your work in strong narrative strategy. When aligned, narrative and cultural strategies reinforce each other—moving hearts, minds, and policy together. A strong framework helps you connect your long-term vision to tangible action by aligning your goals, audiences, and tactics—something we'll walk through in the Narrative Framework that follows.

