



Photo Credit: Caroline Kroon

Why Narrative Strategy Matters

Narrative and cultural strategies work together to shape beliefs and move people. You can't shift public narratives without also shifting the culture that holds them in place.

TOA's Narrative Framework

The Opportunity Agenda's Narrative Framework is a step-by-step guide to help you disrupt harmful narratives and replace them with those that support your values and vision. Whether your work is in policy, organizing, storytelling, or art, this framework helps you design strategies that shift mindsets and inspire action.

Our Narrative Framework provides a structured approach to:

- Help you design a clear narrative strategy that aligns with your vision.
- Lay the groundwork for powerful narrative interventions—campaigns, artworks, stories, or cultural moments that reach the right audiences.
- Strategize how to bring those audiences with you, turning them into amplifiers and champions of your vision.

How to Use the Narrative Framework

STEP 1

Identifying Your Future Narrative & Shared Values

Your **narrative vision** is the big-picture story you want to help bring to life—the long-term shift in worldview that your work aims to support. It should be rooted in your core values and paint a clear picture of the future you're working toward. This is your **Future Narrative**. Use it to guide all messages and actions.



TOA PRO TIP:

As you begin identifying your Future Narrative, take a look at the examples we included in the *Future Over Fear* section in this toolkit (page 22).

ASK YOURSELF:



- > What story should lead the public conversation?
- > What values and communities are centered?
- > What does the world look like if this narrative prevails?

STEP 2

Identifying Prevailing Narratives & Underlying Beliefs

Understand the **prevailing narratives** already shaping public perception of your issue. Prevailing narratives are the dominant ideas and overarching stories that influence what people think is normal, acceptable, or inevitable. They're often repeated in the media, culture, politics, and everyday conversation, and they reflect deeply held beliefs about how the world works and who belongs.

Narratives are built on **underlying beliefs**—ideas about who is deserving, what's possible, and what's broken. These beliefs are often rooted in history, bias, and cultural norms, and they can be reinforced without people realizing it.

ASK YOURSELF:



- > What overarching stories are currently shaping how people understand this issue?
- > What beliefs, values, or emotions are embedded in these stories?
- > Where are these narratives showing up—in the media, pop culture, or public discourse?

STEP 3

Setting Your Narrative Goals

Define the shifts in beliefs or mindsets you want to spark. **Narrative goals** link your Future Narrative with real-world change and guide your tactics, messaging, cultural projects, and organizing efforts. Think of your narrative goals as the strategic bridge between where things are and where you want them to go.

YOUR GOALS SHOULD:

- > Reflect your Future Narrative.
- > Challenge harmful underlying beliefs.
- > Inform your strategy and interventions.

Identifying Priority Audiences

Know who you're trying to reach, how they relate to the issue, and what motivates them. This isn't just about demographics—it's about understanding people's values, beliefs, cultural context, and emotional connection to the issue. Your goal is to meet people where they are and give them stories, messages, and cultural experiences that resonate.



TOA PRO TIP:

You can go deeper into audience strategy and segmentation in the *Audience Segmentation* section of this toolkit. Page 15.

ASK YOURSELF:



- > Who has the most potential to shift the narrative?
- > Who can you activate or equip to speak out?

Identifying Narrative Interventions

Narrative Interventions are intentional, creative actions designed to disrupt prevailing narratives, challenge harmful assumptions, and bring your audience closer to your Future Narrative.

Interventions can take many forms: messaging campaigns, murals, short films, storytelling series, reports, or community events. What matters most isn't the format—it's the purpose. These aren't just communication tactics. They're strategic disruptions that shift beliefs, engage emotions, and activate values. They help your audience see the issue differently—and begin to imagine and support something better.

To count as a narrative intervention, your tactic should:

- > Be rooted in your narrative goals.
- > Target a clearly defined audience.
- > Intentionally challenge or reinforce key beliefs and values.
- > Be part of a broader strategy (not just a one-off moment)
- > Be measurable, with some way to track impact.

Measuring Narrative Impact

Narrative change takes time—but that doesn't mean we can't track progress along the way. Even if your ultimate goals are long-term shifts in culture or policy, short-term signals can tell you whether your interventions are starting to land.

This is about figuring out how you'll assess what your intervention is doing—not just in terms of outputs (what you created), but also outcomes (what changed because of it).

Why Evaluation Matters

Narrative change is never a straight line. Evaluation gives you the chance to listen, reflect, and adjust—because not every message will land the way you expect, and not every audience will respond the same way.

Once you've built your narrative strategy using our framework, the next step is putting it into action.

In the next section, we'll walk through three key ways to get your message out: creating content for social and digital spaces, working with traditional media, and collaborating with creatives.