



Bringing the Conversation Home, Using Local or Regional Narratives

People have told stories for generations. They are part of how our brains process information, and create meaning. Stories can be powerful ways to share our problems and solutions as advocates, and can motivate our audience to envision a different future and to help us build that future.

One common story that residents of cities, states, towns and regions share is a history of the place and its unique attributes. These stories can have the power to motivate people, and as advocates, we may try to use these narratives to tell a different story about the place we live in. It may call on times when we came together to solve problems, or it may call on people to be their better selves, and it may help us ask and answer the question of how creating housing opportunity expands on the legacy of the community. This tool will share examples of a narrative, as well as tips on incorporating a narrative into other writing.

Background

People have told stories for generations— stories about nature, about the stars and constellations, our past, and our future. Stories are part of how our brains process information, and we strive to put new information into the context of stories we already know about the world. We have stories and narratives about place — both a local story of our community or state, but also stories and narratives that are cultural and national.

Seeking to create change can be difficult and can often seem overwhelming. By creating a narrative about a place we live, could we access the power of our stories about what makes the place we live in unique? About what has made this place great over previous generations? About the ways we've come together to solve problems and to create this place we live?

Advocates in several states across the country, with the assistance of Public Works, have recently come up with a narrative about the place they live as a way to inspire people in their community — to help them see that the places we live have rich histories and inspire faith that they can have a bright future.

In Oregon, advocates came together and crafted a state narrative. They then tested the message through a range of polling — online and telephone polls. In one poll, nearly eight in ten respondents said the narrative made them curious to hear what was next — what was our solution? What were we proposing? As we work to create new opportunities for dialogue, this curiosity is valuable.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Is there a story about the place that I live now that is hopeful? Could I use part of that story to help people reimagine our community?

Examples:

Ohio: We can create an Ohio that is stronger than ever, where all people and communities can thrive. Our past investments in public structures, industries and innovation built America and a state where opportunity was available to everyone. We have the tools to solve today's challenges and build a bright future for our state. It is time for all Ohioans to work together to protect the public systems that underpin our economy. Making the right choices now will create good jobs and strong communities and the kind of quality of life we want to hand down to future generations.

Oregon: Oregon has a history of ingenuity, innovation, and independence. The beauty and resources of our state have inspired and nurtured us for generations. We have the tools to create a better future. If we harness our spirit and our energy, and invest in people, we can create a better future for the next generation. We can ensure that every person, every family, and every community in Oregon can prosper.

Next Steps

- › Once you've got a first draft of a narrative, share it with others in your community. Does it resonate with them? Would they help make suggestions?
- › Try using pieces of the narrative in opening up writing – does it make a difference? Is your audience more engaged?

More Resources

Read "Wanted: Master Storytellers" by Susan Nall Bates: <http://neighborhoodpartnerships.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Wanted-Master-Storytellers-S-Bales.pdf>

Read "The Pull of Narrative: In Search of Persistent Context" by John Hagel: http://edgeperspectives.typepad.com/edge_perspectives/2011/05/the-pull-of-narrative-in-search-of-persistent-context.html

Exercises

Public Works crafted a set of questions to help people as they consider crafting a narrative:

- › What are the unique characteristics and achievements of our state, or the aspirations we share as a people (specifics are good)?
- › Can most people in the state read the narrative and see themselves in it?
- › How have past achievements been possible and what do we need for a strong future? How have past investments and decisions made our modern state possible? What are the key public structures and systems that underpin our quality of life and economy?
- › How did we do this? By working together and building for future generations, etc.
- › Now, craft a short statement of the problem and challenge.
- › Then craft some strong sentences about solutions. We are bigger than the problems we face. We can come together like we have before. We need an effective and supported government to achieve our goals. We can create the foundations for success and achievement and build an even better future for the next generation.