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POLICY BRIEF

# Changing the Narrative for Multilingual Learners

May 2023



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In California, with the nation's largest number of multilingual learner students and a visionary state policy roadmap supporting their success, the narrative environment is ripe for change. [Recent statewide research](#) found 75% of residents strongly support multilingual education and believe that speaking more than one language will expand the state's future prosperity, perhaps because almost half of Californians are bilingual.

But at the local level, negative and sometimes racist beliefs about multilingual learners are creating significant barriers to progress, according to partners, educators, and students. They believe these harmful narratives are undermining sound policy and support for multilingual learners, the majority of whom continue to [struggle in school](#).

In 2022, California funders focused on multilingual and early education gathered for a series of learning conversations about how narrative change could positively impact the movement for multilingual education. In the sessions, narrative practitioners, advocates, funders, and evaluators offered these key insights for understanding and supporting narrative change:

- Narratives, which shape how people see the world and each other, are at the heart of movements for social change.

- Narrative change is collective work that has more impact when many voices and partners organize themselves around the same narrative.
- In developing narratives to support multilingual learners, it's essential to engage people with lived experience including students, educators, and families.
- When partners embrace a unifying narrative, it can align and accelerate work across policy advocacy, organizing, communications, the arts, and other areas.
- Narrative change is long-term work that requires persistence and multiple strategies to challenge and shift the deep-seated beliefs that uphold injustice.
- Evaluators have many ways to measure the progress and impact of narrative strategies upon organizations, networks, and in the public dialogue.
- Funding narrative change requires a different way of thinking than traditional grantmaking focused on discrete projects with short-term outcomes.

A growing number of grantee partners are eager to learn about narratives and understand the necessity of engaging deep beliefs about immigrants and race in advocating for multilingual learners. Through narratives, they see new possibilities for shaping inclusive school cultures that support policies and practices that create classrooms in which multilingual learners are valued and have every opportunity to thrive.



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## Introduction

Sobrato Philanthropies has a deep commitment to supporting the success of California's 1.1 million students who are learning English. We have [invested](#) in developing a successful [multilingual education learning model](#), funded advocates who have scored impressive wins, and supported expanding the bilingual educator workforce.

And yet, this progress is not translating into greater success in the classroom quickly enough. Nearly half of California English Learner students entering kindergarten [are not proficient in English](#) by middle school.

We need to do more, and have come to believe that investing in narrative change is an essential strategy for closing the gap between sound policy and better outcomes for multilingual learners.

Sobrato's narrative learning journey started in 2020, as we reached out to partners, students, and funders to explore the beliefs and assumptions affecting multilingual learners. We consistently heard that many students continue to struggle in schools that marginalize and exclude them. As one partner said, **"Changing the narrative about English Learners is difficult because it requires us to change deep beliefs about immigrants, people of color, who belongs, and who doesn't."**

To further expand our knowledge, in 2022 Sobrato Philanthropies convened funder colleagues for a year-long series of narrative learning conversations with leading practitioners, researchers, activists, and grant-makers. We learned how narratives accelerate social change through powerful ideas that inspire a new vision for the future. We saw that narrative change requires the power to contend with those who actively seek to undermine equity. And we were energized by the idea that narratives can be 'force multipliers' that align advocacy, organizing, and communications in ways that carry us faster and farther toward our goals.

More than ever, we believe **the time is right for a new narrative for multilingual learners, one that celebrates the lifelong value of knowing more than one language and embraces cultural diversity.** And because we have learned that narrative change is collective work, for both funders and



*Photos courtesy of:  
Californians Together,  
Grail, and Youth  
Leadership Institute*

partners, we developed this brief to share background, summarize key insights from our learning process, provide grantmaking guidance, and offer some questions to keep the conversation going.

**“Changing the narrative about English Learners is difficult because it requires us to change deep beliefs about immigrants, people of color, who belongs, and who doesn’t.”**



We are grateful for the reflections and input from foundation colleagues who helped shape this brief authored by Mary Lou Fulton, a California-based narrative strategist with extensive experience in communications and philanthropy. We also received valuable feedback from Parker Blackman, Executive Director, LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment; Jung Hee Choi, Deputy Director, Power California; and Jacklyn Altuna Willard, Senior Program Officer, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

No matter where you are in your learning journey, we hope these reflections will inspire you to explore investing in narrative change as a powerful strategy for supporting multilingual learners.

## **Why do Narratives Matter and How Can We Change Them?**

Social movements have always been focused on how to change narratives, the invisible compass of beliefs, values, and assumptions that live deep inside every person. That is because **when a critical mass of people shift their understanding about who is worthy, what is just, and what the future could look like, then transformational change becomes possible.**

What is considered “normal” in a society is a reflection of the dominant narratives that shape expectations for how people and systems should operate. For example, a cherished American dominant narrative glorifies the [power of the individual](#) to succeed and overcome any difficulty through hard work (and conversely, blames individuals for their lack of effort should they fail).

Changing narratives involves engaging with the forces that shape beliefs, including family, faith, public education, news and digital media, politics, social groups, popular culture like movies, TV and music, and much more. It takes a long time to shift deeply held beliefs, but it’s possible through a clear-eyed analysis of dominant narratives, the development of new narrative concepts that help people see the world differently, and the resources to push the new narrative forward through organizing, advocacy, arts and culture, and other strategies.

“Having an analysis of power matters because it allows us to understand that narrative change is not just a matter of ‘educating’ people or raising awareness or sharing the stories of immigrant and multilingual learners,” said Jung Hee Choi, Deputy Director of Power California. **“By understanding that we are contending with a set of forces who actively seek to maintain barriers and educational inequity for immigrant students, it allows us to set strategy accordingly and to understand that we must**

**change the narrative set by those with power and those with a vested interest in dehumanizing immigrants and immigrant students.”**

**“...when a critical mass of people shift their understanding about who is worthy, what is just, and what the future could look like, then transformational change becomes possible.”**

A contemporary example of narrative change in action is the fight for acceptance of LGBTQ love and relationships. This movement took on the dominant narrative that marriage could exist only between a man and a woman, an idea codified by the 1996 federal Defense of Marriage Act allowing states to deny same-sex marriages. Activists across the nation worked together to challenge this law through litigation, policy advocacy, organizing, state ballot measures, and more. These strategies made important progress, but momentum accelerated when the narrative strategy shifted from emphasizing gay rights to promoting marriage equality. The strategy came to life through personal storytelling and popular culture strategies that humanized LGBTQ people through the hashtag #LoveIsLove. “The fight for marriage equality wasn’t just about changing policies – it was about changing hearts and minds,” said the [Human Rights Campaign](#), a leader in the movement. “People needed to hear the stories of couples and families across the country impacted by laws that failed to grant them the recognition they deserved.”



Photo courtesy of Grail



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Photo courtesy of Ben Gibbs of Early Edge CA

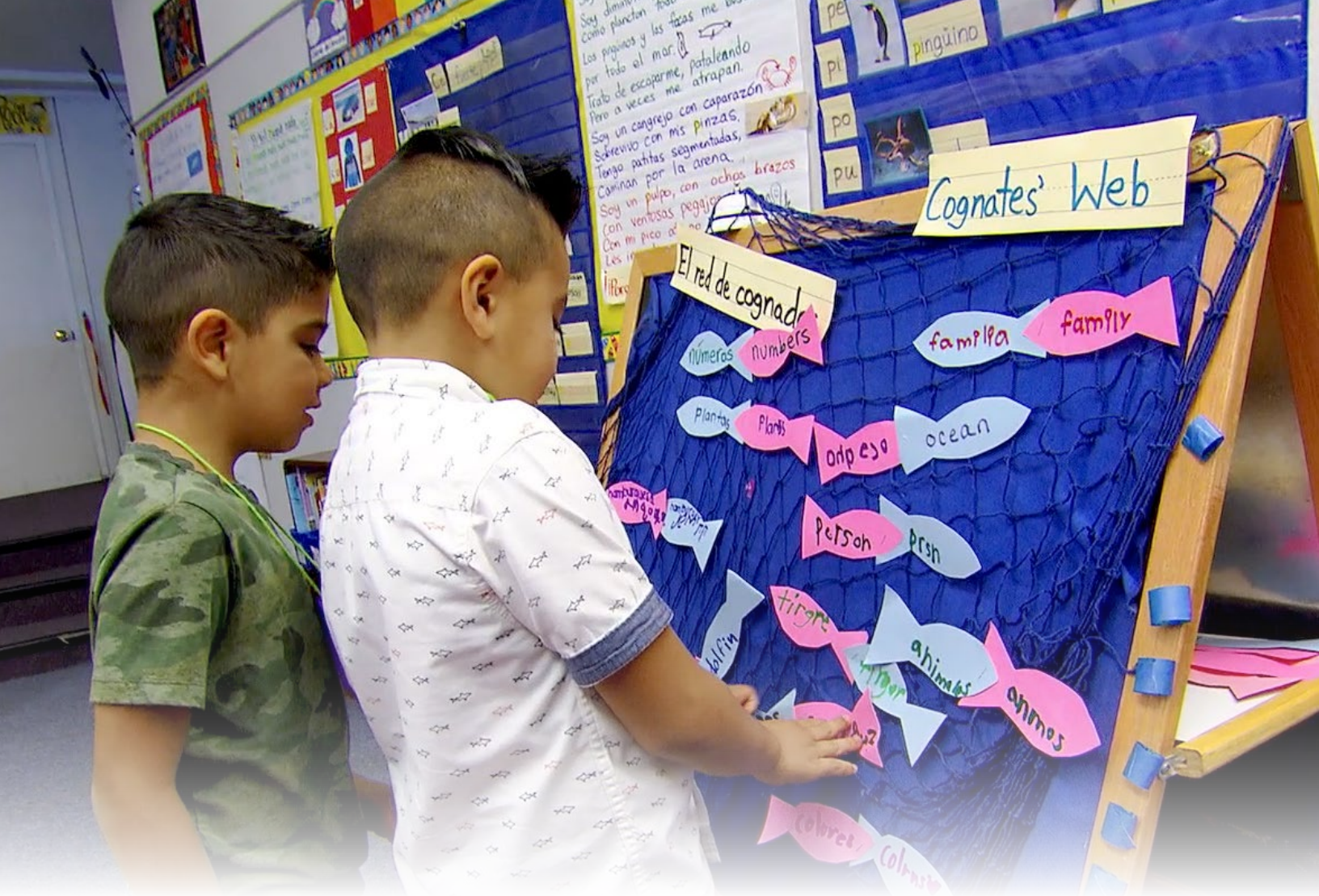


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Foundations were allies in this work through the [Civil Marriage Collaborative](#) and other philanthropic efforts across the country. After decades of activism, in 2015 the Supreme Court granted same-sex couples the right to marry and have full equal recognition under federal law.

The movement for marriage equality also offers an example of how narrative ground is continually being contested. Since 2015, the makeup of the Supreme Court has changed and new justices have shown a willingness to overturn long standing precedents. As a safeguard, marriage equality advocates successfully advocated for Congress to approve the Respect for Marriage Act securing marriage equality for same-sex and interracial couples under federal law in 2022. However, the battle for LGBTQ rights continues, with anti-trans and anti-queer legislation having been [filed in 22 states](#), attempting to limit everything from transgender health care to drag shows.

California offers a case study of another successful narrative strategy, this one focused on expanding health care access for undocumented immigrants excluded from state coverage. A coalition of more than 100 immigrant rights and health care advocates joined forces in 2013 and took a novel approach through [#Health4All](#). Instead of talking about the benefits of health care, #Health4All focused on humanizing immigrants and uplifting the important contributions of undocumented Californians to the

state's communities and economy. This strategy was aimed at countering narratives that falsely portray immigrants as "[takers not makers](#)" who consume more public benefits than other groups.

Grounded in local and statewide organizing along with creative uses of mass media, #Health4All succeeded in persuading California lawmakers to approve the nation's most expansive health care coverage for the undocumented. Progress unfolded over time, with health coverage first extended to undocumented children, then to the elderly, then to young adults, and in 2021 to all adults 50 and older. The #Health4All narrative, supported by \$35 million in funding from The California Endowment and other health foundations, also was credited with expanding support for worker protections and driver's licenses for undocumented Californians.

These examples show how compelling narratives can unify movements and align strategies across multiple domains, as explained in [Narrative Strategy: The Basics](#) from Liz Manne Strategy. When everyone from grassroots organizers to governors act and speak in aligned ways, yesterday's impossible dream can become today's new normal.

## NARRATIVE STRATEGY IS THE ULTIMATE STRATEGY

With Narrative Strategy, we deploy integrated, strategic, storytelling to interrupt shared discourse and shift collective beliefs about how the world works.

Using Narrative Strategy, campaigns can be scaled almost infinitely, working on a single-issue initiative in a small rural county or addressing a global challenge. Narrative Strategy can flexibly handle near-term efforts to change a single policy and long-term movements to change worldwide culture.



Some call it the **ultimate integrated strategy: aligning four powerful ways to engage audiences and change the world.**

By changing narratives, we change norms, conversations, and culture.

We open up space for new ideas, new policies and entirely new ways of thinking that allow us collectively to build a better, more just, more inclusive world.

Source: [Narrative Strategy: The Basics](#), page 10, from Liz Manne Strategy

## Narratives Affecting Immigrants and Multilingual Learners

Multilingual education is part of a conversation about immigrants, race and who deserves to be an American that goes back to the founding of the nation.

White European colonizers believed their culture, race, faith, values and languages were superior to those of indigenous people, the Africans they enslaved, and other immigrants whose labor was needed to build the economy of the nation. America's schools became a vehicle for assimilating immigrant children into White culture, including the forced use of English in the name of "civilization" and social cohesion. This included the [education of Native children](#) in English-only boarding schools where they were punished



for speaking their home languages and calls by President Theodore Roosevelt to deport immigrants who didn't learn English within five years. "We have room but for one language here, and that is the English language," [Roosevelt said](#) in 1907.

These beliefs continued to resonate in contemporary times, as 27 states, including California, adopted [English-only laws in the 1980s](#). California voters have since repudiated anti-immigrant measures and multilingual education is now strongly supported by an [expansive policy agenda](#) and more funding. And yet, attitudes about multilingual education continue to be influenced by "anti-immigrant forces [that] shape the dominant narratives around migrants, immigrants, and refugees, claiming that they are exploitable, expendable, criminal, and unworthy of equal treatment," The [Butterfly Lab for Immigrant Narrative Strategy](#) said in a [2022 report](#).

Through [research and narrative development](#) led by immigrant rights activists and artists, the Butterfly Lab has identified key values for shaping narratives that strengthen support for immigrants. Of particular relevance to multilingual learners are these values:

- **Abundance:** people do not need to continually fight for resources because there is plenty for everyone;
- **Belonging:** respecting diversity and seeing it as an asset; and
- **Freedom to thrive:** to pursue dreams, engage in fulfilling work and live with joy, dignity, and love

These hopeful values compete with fear about an uncertain and ever-changing future in a nation

**While there is no established recipe for undertaking narrative change work, some common elements of successful narrative change strategies include:**

1. An understanding of the dominant narrative, including a narrative power analysis of the people who hold these beliefs and their values.
2. A new narrative, anchored in shared values and brought to life by an easy-to-understand idea or goal that will engage and expand the base of supporters.
3. Compelling stories and storytellers who uplift the new narrative and humanize the urgent need for change.
4. Collective action grounded in organizing and advocacy, with many alliances, networks, and voices challenging the old way of thinking and supporting the new narrative.
5. A big basket of narrative strategies, such as policy advocacy, organizing, arts and culture, events, legal advocacy, social media, videos, news media, advertising, and more.
6. Resources dedicated to consistent amplification and pushing of the narrative.
7. A long-term commitment to the narrative.

that is increasingly multiracial. In schools, this fear can lead to questioning of support for multilingual education and contribute to tension in neighborhoods where immigrant populations are growing and perceived to be displacing longtime residents.

In California, with the largest number of multilingual learners in the nation and an expansive state policy roadmap, the narrative environment is full of possibility.

A [2022 public opinion research project](#) led by [The Education Trust-West](#) found that 84% of those surveyed believed in the career and family benefits of bilingualism, perhaps because nearly half of Californians speak a language other than English at home.

**Californians see multilingualism as an important driver of the state's future prosperity. More than 75% agreed with the statement that "being multilingual leads to growth and opportunity, especially for the more than one million students who are English Learners,"** the research found.

However, challenges remain in how to translate this aspirational support into easy-to-understand narrative concepts that could activate the large number of Californians who support multilingual education.

In the research survey, respondents were confused by the jargon of multilingual learner policy advocacy, including acronyms such as EL (English Learner) and DLL (Dual Language Learner) and new terminology such as "emerging bilingual." Even general terms such as "bilingual programs" were unclear, leading researchers to say that a new narrative with "a more specific and concrete vision of what advocates are calling for is needed."

## Narrative Frameworks for Strategy, Funding, and Evaluation

As narrative change attracts more attention from leaders in social justice and philanthropy, there are a growing number of efforts underway to shape thinking and strategies.



Photos courtesy of: SEAL, Education Trust-West, and Grail

In the sphere of power-building, [The Grassroots Power Project](#) has developed a framework called [The Three Faces of Power](#) that identifies “the power to shape common sense” as an essential element of movement-building and social change. The framework advocates for an integrated approach to narrative change that operates in concert with organizing and political infrastructure.

### THREE FACES OF POWER



**POWER TO WIN DEMANDS**  
Organizing people & resources  
for direct political action



**POWER TO DRIVE THE AGENDA**  
Building movement infrastructure



**POWER TO SHAPE COMMON SENSE**  
Making meaning on the terrain  
of ideology & worldview

Source: Grassroots Power Project, [The Three Faces of Power](#), by Sandra Hinson and Richard Healey

In philanthropy, a growing number of funders are eager to understand narrative and how it can be incorporated into grantmaking. Toward this end, the [Convergence Partnership](#), a national funder collaborative focused on racial and health equity, commissioned [Funding Narrative Change: An Assessment and Framework](#). The authors of the 2022 report interviewed practitioners and funders, and proposed a framework for shifting narratives through funding mass culture, mass media, and mass movements.

### FRAMEWORK FOR FUNDING NARRATIVE CHANGE

**MASS MEDIA**

journalism, non-fiction,  
and analysis

**MASS CULTURE**

popular culture and  
entertainment

**MASS MOVEMENT**

organizing and adjacent  
storytelling, arts, and culture

Source: [Funding Narrative Change: An Assessment and Framework](#), page 5 from Convergence Partnership

As a complement to high-level frameworks, the [Narrative Initiative](#), a thought-leader and knowledge-builder in the field, developed [Four Baskets: Necessary Capacities for Narrative Change](#) with more detail on the “capacities and processes needed to create, implement, and continually strengthen narrative change projects.” The Narrative Initiative suggests organizing work in these four ways can “turn narrative change ideas into high-functioning narrative change projects.”

**Create:** This phase is about understanding the narrative landscape, including current dominant narratives and who upholds them; identifying shared values; developing new narrative concepts; and coming to consensus about the analysis and approach.

**Translate:** Next you “put the narrative you’ve created to work... How does that narrative come to be held in the many voices of your network, coalition, community?” The process of integrating narrative change into coalition strategies is essential given that narrative change is collective work that thrives when many people amplify the same narrative idea in a variety of ways.

**Deploy:** “New narratives only become dominant when they are both put into practice and adopted widely.” This aspect of narrative change work engages the more familiar world of strategic communications and campaigns, with storytelling, videos, social media, news media advocacy, events, and more. Widespread and consistent amplification of narratives is necessary to disrupt dominant beliefs and uplift new ideas.

**Observe Together:** Once a narrative is deployed, measuring and interpreting impact is important, as well as understanding how the narrative can be fine-tuned over time as the environment shifts.

Narrative evaluation is challenging because narrative change unfolds over time with contributions from many people in a variety of ways. Additionally, key narrative shift moments are hard to assess in real time. Many compelling narratives begin with a small group of people whose ideas may seem insignificant at the start, but later prove to be pivotal.

That is why **the latest thinking on narrative change evaluation is multi-dimensional, including both the internal capacity of participating organizations and coalitions, as well as external evidence of narrative shift.**

[ORS Impact](#), a measurement, evaluation, and strategy firm, offers short- and long-term indicators for assessing progress in [Measuring Narrative Change: Understanding Progress and Navigating Complexity](#).

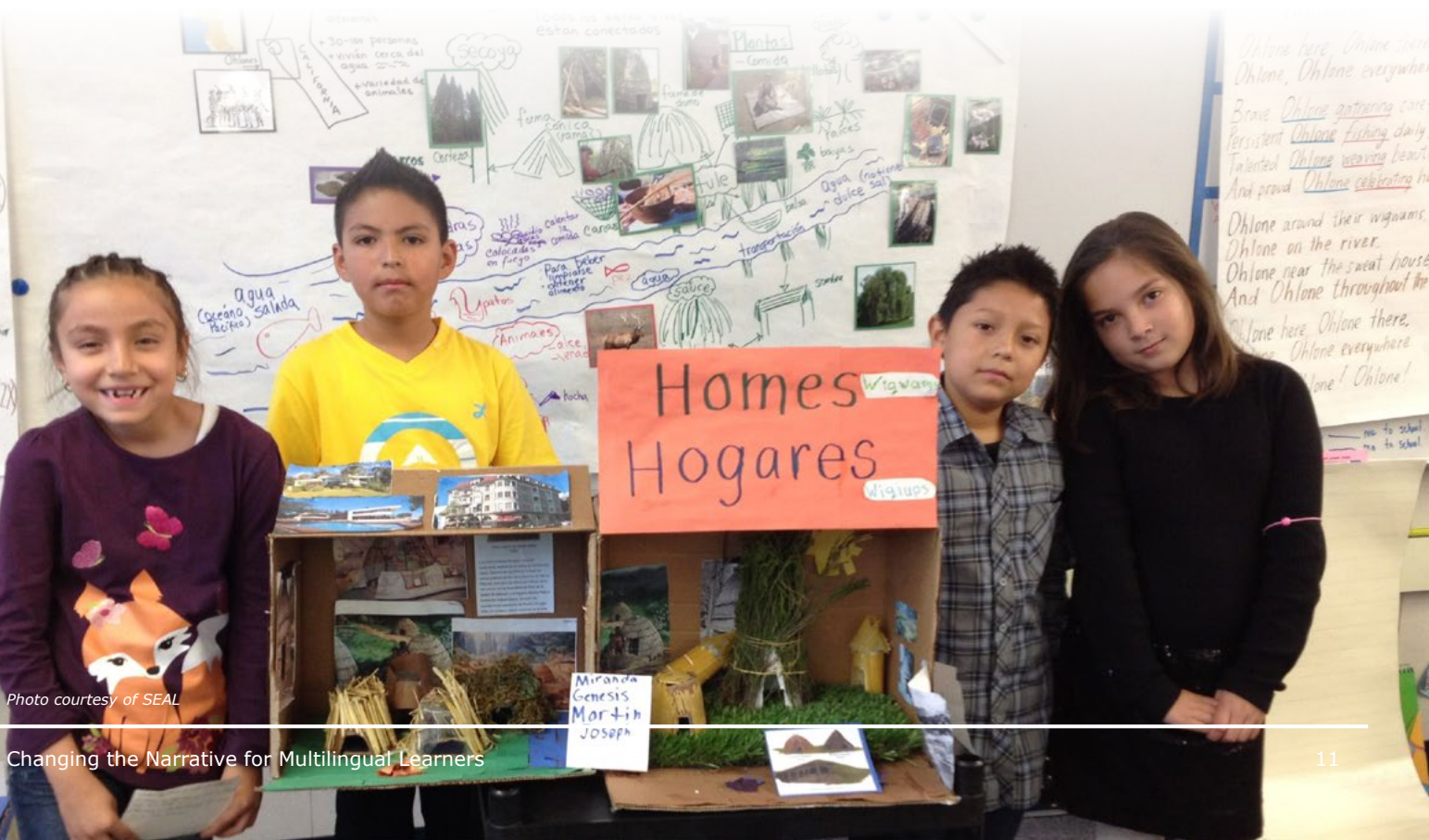


Photo courtesy of SEAL

ORS Impact suggests assessing the capacity of organizations as they learn about narrative change, which initially can be misunderstood as the “job” of communications staff. The engagement of organizational leaders in learning about narrative is vital. Once the deeper role of narrative is absorbed, it can have a ripple effect across an organization internally and externally.

In addition, evaluators offer suggestions for capacity measurement, such as the number of staff trained in skills relevant to narrative change and how those skills are shifting their thinking and strategies. Similar measurements also can be applied to coalitions and networks that integrate narrative change into their work.

Once narrative ideas enter the public sphere, there are many ways to assess impact, such as the development of new language, stories and storytellers; measuring shifts in media and cultural discourse; changes in policies and practices; and ultimately changes in norms.

## Key Takeaways from Narrative Learning Sessions with Funders

In a series of learning conversations, California funders focused on multilingual and early education heard from practitioners, advocates, funders, and evaluators. Here are the key takeaways:

**Narratives are at the heart of movements for social change**  
**Narratives open up new ways for people to understand the world and each other.**

In doing so, narratives “change the norms and



Photo courtesy of Californians Together



Photo courtesy of SEAL



Photo courtesy of Youth Leadership Institute

rules our society lives by,” said Rashad Robinson, Executive Director of [Color of Change](#), in writing about narrative power. For example, “English Only” was once a dominant narrative impacting American schools, but that idea is giving way to bilingual and multilingual education.

### Community perspectives are essential to narratives

Students, parents, educators and others with lived experience hold crucial knowledge about what multilingual education feels like on the front lines. Their perspectives are essential to imagining, shaping, and carrying out narrative change.

### Narratives clarify vision and accelerate work across multiple domains

The development of narratives provides a vehicle through which organizations and alliances can clarify their vision of the future and more effectively align policy advocacy, organizing, communications, culture change, and other strategies. In multilingual education, advocacy can become siloed by function, with state policy advocates working separately from local organizers, who are not always connected to educators. Narratives can provide a common thread through which everyone can convey their actions as part of a larger movement to uplift the value of multilingualism.

### Narrative change is collective work

**Narratives do not shift because of the efforts of one grantee partner or one funder. They change because many people and organizations work together to amplify a central idea consistently over the many years it takes to normalize a new way of looking at the world.**

In developing narratives to support multilingual learners, it is essential to engage people with lived experience including students, educators, and families.

### Narratives make strategic communications stronger and smarter

Narratives provide the big picture, while strategic communications moves the narrative train down the tracks through shorter-term and more concrete goals that can demonstrate progress toward a broader

## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS vs NARRATIVE CHANGES

Strategic Communications	Narrative Change
Time bound 6 months to 3 years	Decades broken into smaller chunks
Attached to current policy processes and demands	Can influence policies, but tries to create a new lasting authorizing environment for ambitious changes
Run by communications directors, content creators, and message researchers	Led by everyday narrators, long term strategists, and organizers
Based on currently shared values	Tries to elevate or establish new values, and get them shared
Is one social change strategy among others, including advocacy, organizing, and culture change	Helps shape storytelling across all social change strategies, including communications

Source: [Funding Narrative Change: An Assessment and Framework](#), page 26 from Convergence Partnership



Photo courtesy of Grail

**“Students, parents, educators and others with lived experience hold crucial knowledge about what multilingual education feels like on the front lines. Their perspectives are essential to imagining, shaping, and carrying out narrative change.”**

vision. Campaigns and stories in support of multilingual learners become more powerful when they are grounded in narratives that uplift the value of language and cultural diversity. This chart articulates how strategic communications and narrative change are complementary.

### **Narrative change can be measured**

New evaluation frameworks offer indicators for assessing capacity growth of organizations and coalitions as they take on narrative change work. And there are a growing number of ways to measure the external impact of new narratives as they become infused in social media, news coverage, through cultural influencers, and policy leadership.

### **Narrative change is long-term work**

Similar to grassroots organizing, longer-term funding commitments are needed to develop, seed, and amplify new narratives. **It takes persistence and multiple strategies to shift narratives. A 5- to 10-year investment timeline is recommended** to provide time for implementation, momentum-building, and evaluation.

## Grantmaking Guidance

Funding narrative change is quite different from a grant to support a program or services with easily measurable outcomes. This emerging field requires more trust in partners to develop narrative strategies and adjust them in response to events and opportunities that may not be known at the time a grant is made.

Narrative and communications work are generally not among the core competencies of most social justice organizations. Investing in narrative strategies is an opportunity to both expand capacity at individual organizations, as well as support new capacity for coalitions to amplify shared narratives.

At the organizational level, statewide policy partners are more likely to have communications staff and expertise than grassroots organizers who are closer to everyday injustice. Funders should pay particular attention to the narrative capacity of community-based organizations to analyze the narratives impacting their work, tell their own stories, and have the capacity to fully participate in coalition tables. Otherwise there is a risk that grassroots partners become tokenized as storytellers rather than full partners in the development of shared narratives and strategies.

Lastly, some grassroots organizations are wary of funder involvement in narrative change, fearing they will be required to take up foundation-led communications campaigns as a condition of receiving funding. At the same time, partners appreciate the unique power and voice of foundations as conveners and relationship-builders. Narrative grantmaking is an opportunity to have honest conversations with partners about how foundations can be helpful and when they should stay out of the way.

### Here are some important focus areas and recommendations for narrative change grantmaking:

#### **Much more narrative change capacity is needed**

Building narrative capacity takes time and starts with a basic understanding of concepts, a narrative power analysis to identify dominant beliefs, and the exciting process of developing new narratives. This work should engage leaders from across the organization or network, not only people with “communications” in their titles. Grassroots constituents with lived experience – especially students, families and educators – are vital to narrative development and strategy.

#### **Invest in the narrative capacity of networks and alliances**

**Because narrative change is collective work, alliances and coalitions are promising venues for developing shared narratives and strategies for amplifying them.** [Power California's Next Gen Fellowships](#) offers an example of how to simultaneously



#### **CAPACITY-BUILDING:**

Fund community-based listening sessions to better understand the narratives that students, parents, and educators experience in their everyday lives, and turn stories into strategy.



#### **NETWORK CAPACITY:**

Fund a narrative strategist role embedded in an alliance to develop a collective approach to narrative change.

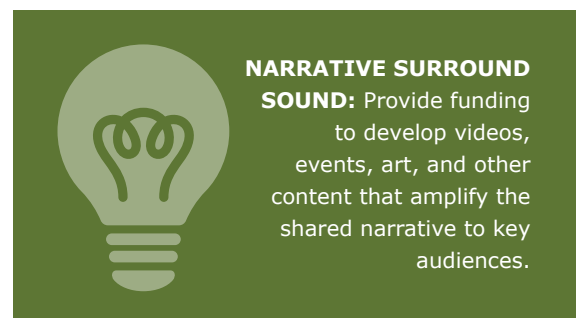


**“Narratives do not shift because of the efforts of one grantee partner or one funder. They change because many people and organizations work together to amplify a central idea consistently over the many years it takes to normalize a new way of looking at the world.”**

expand narrative capacity in organizations and a network. Next Gen trained and developed narrative strategists in grassroots organizations supporting civic engagement of youth of color in local communities, and brought them together in the Power California network to support shared statewide goals such as lowering the voting age. Next Gen provides an example of how to support narrative infrastructure – the processes, skills, and resources that empower networks to develop and amplify shared narratives.

### **Do not overlook funding for amplification**

A powerful narrative that preaches to the choir will not build momentum for lasting change. Consistent amplification through a range of strategies – social and digital media, news media, events, popular culture, advertising, and more – is essential for making narratives “stick.” **“Our audiences should not be able to go anywhere without encountering our ideas and stories. That kind of saturation, combined with clear paths to action, will change the environment and make more ambitious policy achievable and enduring,”** as emphasized in *Funding Narrative Change: An Assessment and Framework*.



### **Consider pooling funds for narrative change grants**

Funders have varying levels of readiness and risk tolerance for supporting narrative change. A pooled approach allows funders to support different elements of the narrative ecosystem, from basic capacity-building to large-scale amplification, while remaining aligned on the overall narrative approach.

### **Counter skepticism about narrative change with concrete grant proposals**

Narrative change is a long-term proposition, but that does not mean progress cannot be measured along the way. Grant proposals can make a stronger case for narrative change by including an assessment of dominant narratives and desired shifts, identifying the specific capacities and skills that will be developed, naming how narrative concepts will be deployed, and specifying the indicators of change that will be monitored. It is helpful to have an evaluation partner at the table from the start.

## Questions to Help Funders Talk About Narrative Change and Multilingual Learners with Grantee Partners:

- Have you heard about narrative change? What comes to mind when you hear this term? What kinds of messages and stories are you hearing about multilingual learners and multilingual education?
- As you develop your vision and strategies, have you reflected on the beliefs and values that affect how people see multilingual learners, their families, and the people who support them?
- Do you participate in coalitions and networks that carry out communications or narrative work together on behalf of multilingual learners? If so, how is that work coordinated?
- Have you engaged with students, families, and educators to understand the beliefs that shape how they are experiencing multilingual education?
- If you had more support for communications and narrative work, what would you do with those resources to support multilingual education? How would you describe your needs in this area?
- How do you carry out external communications such as social media, outreach to journalists, video creation, and similar activities to advance awareness and support for multilingual learners? How would you assess your capacity in this area?
- How can the voice of our foundation be helpful in advocating for multilingual learners, and when does it make sense for us to stand back?

Changing narratives to support multilingual learners requires engagement with the deep beliefs that people hold about immigrants and public schools as America becomes a more diverse nation. This work requires alignment, collective action, resources, and a long-term commitment. But as movements across the political spectrum have shown, **narrative change is possible and even more necessary today as the nation strives to create a multiracial society where everyone belongs and has the opportunity to thrive.**

## Recommended Reading

[Toward a New Gravity](#) is a foundational report from The Narrative Initiative, a thought leader in the field that was among the first to articulate key terms and concepts.

[Narrative Strategy: The Basics](#) from Liz Manne Strategy, January 2022. This is a practical guide to understanding narrative strategy and how it relates to conventional advocacy and strategic communications.

[Changing Our Narrative About Narrative](#) by Rashad Robinson, Executive Director of Color of Change. This is an influential 2018 essay about what the progressive movement needs to build infrastructure for narrative power.

[A Narrative of Rural Abundance](#), a case study of narrative development led by the Grassroots Power Project and the Narrative Initiative. This report includes the worksheets and processes that more than 50 Minnesota advocates used to develop their shared narrative.

[Butterfly Lab Narrative Design Toolkit](#), with worksheets and practical tools for analyzing the narrative terrain, sharpening narratives, and reaching audiences.

[Experimentation and Meaningful Measurement of Social Change](#), with remarks from Shanelle Matthews, communications director of the Movement for Black Lives, about the impact of “defund the police” as a narrative shifting strategy.



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SEAL, Californians  
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**SOBRATO**  
Philanthropies

599 Castro Street, Suite 400  
Mountain View, CA 94041  
650-876-7010

[sobrato.org](http://sobrato.org)