

Guidelines for Shifting Narratives

DO

- Expose – Name the dominant narrative when you see it at work. Point out that what you just saw on the news or heard from a friend, or the law that was just passed, was based on particular values and beliefs. “The way you are talking about public health makes it sound like it is solely about access to health care.”
- Elevate – Name the values and beliefs that you want to see lived out in the world. Connect it to places where your audience may see that happening already. “I believe that public health is about ...”
- Contrast – Lay out what might be different if your values or convictions were the ones shaping what happens in the world. Be specific about how we have the choice to approach situations through a different belief system. Invite a rethinking of the situation. “I guess we have to decide if land is simply a commodity or if it has more value to our community and we should be treating it and those who live on it differently.”
- Draw on your own journey – While it’s important to personalize this, it’s also important to do it in a way that anyone can see themselves in it. Describing your own realizations and shifts will help others find their own way in the conversation. “I can understand your reaction, there certainly is a lot of pressure to quantify the value of land – we get lots of messages that reinforce that idea. It’s taken me a while to really understand the importance of land in my life and to our community.”
- Sustain your efforts and connect with others – Shifting narrative does not happen quickly. It takes sustained effort, over time, with many people working at it.
- Demonstrate narrative – Don’t just write or talk about it. Our actions say as much or more about our values and beliefs as our words.

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DON'T

- Focus on challenging facts or interpretations of information – This will not challenge narrative thinking. Your arguments, as convincing as they may be, will ultimately lose out to the dominant narrative.
- Attack people for their narrative – Many people operate out of the dominant narrative, even if unconsciously. Shifting public narratives will take personal conversations and transformation. You cannot move people if you attack them.
- Name the dominant narrative as “wrong” – Our assumption is that competing values & beliefs live within people. We want to provide people a chance to choose the ones they want to live out and/or balance competing narratives (e.g. the desire to have personal financial security with the desire to see new farmers on the land).
- Try to convert or convince people – We are trying to bring out the best of what is already in people, help them find the resonance for themselves. This is, in part, an emotional journey and our usual approaches to argument and logic don't work so well in this arena.