



# Narratives for Health

## *In Action: Build Relationships from Within*

Since 2021, [Narratives for Health](#) has worked with hundreds of public health departments and nonprofits, advocacy organizations and others across the country. The goal is to develop a shared understanding around narrative to shift mindsets on what drives health and equity and to organize for and operationalize the changes we seek.

[Narratives for Health](#) has compiled more than 60 examples of ways narrative change has been implemented into health and equity work — examples that can inspire and advance your narrative efforts. This document highlights one of five categories. View the [full resource here](#).

### **What are narratives?**

Narratives, or values-based themes of stories, help us understand our world and what is possible. They call attention to what Frederick W. Mayor states as “who we are, what we believe and what we value.” Narrative change is an organizing tool to see shared values actualized in our communities and in the decisions we make.

### **How does Narratives for Health support narrative change?**

Regardless of where you are on your narrative change journey, Narratives for Health can support. After completion of a [Narratives for Health training](#), participants can join our monthly community of practice sessions. The community of practice is a space to share and learn from others on how to diffuse and deploy narratives and discuss how to lead with shared health equity values in conversation with others. Narratives for Health also offers paired support with narrative organizers and partners. [Contact us](#) to join a training or learn more about the support we offer.

### **What are transformative narratives and the transformative narrative draft?**

Through rounds of engagement within the train-the-facilitator series, Narratives for Health, along with over 300 organizations, created the Health Equity Transformative Narrative draft to elevate shared values that reflect a world where everyone can thrive and affect decision making. Because there are harmful narratives used in society that influence how we operate, the draft offers shared values that uplift health and equity to change what is possible.

Find that and more in our [Narratives for Health guide](#), which is a free, public resource that includes concepts, models, recommendations and tools to aid organizations delving into narrative change.

# Build Relationships from Within



Leadership, organizational support and engagement in narrative-related work is critical to implementing change. Some of these strategies aim to generate solidarity and shared understanding within organizations. In addition to applications in professional settings, some examples reflect ways individuals can use narrative to gain understanding of others' perspectives and to bridge across identities.

**Create buy-in.** Organizations need some amount of internal alignment before being able to change organizational policy and culture and pursue next steps with external partners. For example, a state health department staff member gave a presentation to the agency's senior leadership team where participants learned the definition of narrative, the department's related work and how they could support next steps. In another example, a national public health technical assistance organization led their advisory board through a presentation to show the value of narrative change and gain approval to require new staff to complete a deeper training.

**Increase narrative and skills of your organization's staff.** Organizations often start narrative work by completing interactive, internal training and discussions. This often leads organizations to create a narrative guide or a written transformative narrative. Here are three examples:

- A local health department held a staff narrative training and created a guide on how to communicate about their work internally, with partners and with the people they serve. They started by gauging awareness and then built buy-in by having staff create their own narratives.
- A state health department, in the context of a state health improvement planning process, trained hundreds of staff on narrative. Staff created narrative statements specific to their division's work, such as occupational health or environmental health.
- All new contractors and staff at a national population health technical assistance organization go through interactive discussions, or narrative cohorts, to infuse their work with the values in the health equity transformative narrative.

**Use narrative skills in difficult professional and personal conversations.** To shift mindsets, we need to get comfortable with discomfort. Narrative skills can help people have difficult conversations. A private foundation staff member reflected that they have leaned on their understanding of narrative at work and beyond. They find they have transformed how they operate by leading conversations with curiosity, sharing their own feelings, actively listening, identifying shared values, and connecting meaningfully with others' interests.

**Consider incorporating storytelling in a training, a group discussion, or when engaging media.** Stories can be an effective approach to narrative change. A statewide health education organization and a community development corporation serving an Indigenous community both shared how they are using storytelling as part of narrative strategy.