

PUBLIC NARRATIVES

A public narrative is a story that, when told in many different ways, can shift public consciousness and change what is possible

Public narratives are a way of communicating and/or reinforcing a worldview and engaging people in considering their own understanding of the world around them.

Among other things, *public narratives*

- provide an understanding, interpretation of people and situations
- are grounded in and reflective of a larger set of values and beliefs, a worldview
- are designed to shape possibilities and outcomes – serve a purpose
- are most powerful when they draw on what is already in people, even if it is buried

Public narratives can be developed for multiple purposes. A story can operate at a meta-level to shape how we see our lives together (e.g. ‘you’re on your own’ and ‘government is bad’).

A public narrative can be developed to shape how we see a specific aspect of our lives together (e.g. agriculture and food systems).

And public narratives can be developed to shape a specific frame of a particular problem (e.g. what do we want to change in the farm bill).

Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed.

Consequently he who moulds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions. He makes statutes and decisions possible or impossible to be executed.

- Abraham Lincoln

RELATIONSHIP OF NARRATIVES AND MESSAGING

Worldview refers to the rich variety of values, beliefs and assumptions, both formal and informal, that we draw upon and inherit from the larger social world in which we live.

Public Narratives are a way of communicating and/or reinforcing a worldview and engaging people in considering their own understanding of the world around them.

Frames are like lenses that bring some aspects of a picture, or situation, into focus while distorting others. Part of the power of a frame is that it points the audience toward particular solutions that are grounded in a particular narrative and worldview.

Messages are how we communicate the story we want specific audiences to hear. We use verbal and non-verbal messages to communicate frames, narrative and worldview – often times we use personal stories, or narratives, to deliver messages. Messages may vary with audiences and situations, but they should be consistent.

SHIFTING DOMINANT NARRATIVES

- Unmasking the dominant narratives
- Uncovering and elevating new narratives
- Contrasting the narratives, offering a choice

Shifting narratives is not about winning an argument. It is engaging people to illuminate values, beliefs and assumptions that are already in them.