



3rd Annual POVERTY INNOVATION SUMMIT

Solutions Circle Recap Narrative Strategy for Systems Change

"Language is often our first act of resistance. It matters how we talk about the work we do; the words we use and the words we create matter to describe the world." - DeRay Mckesson

Narratives shape public perceptions of problems and solutions. Dominant narratives play a significant role in shaping policies and resource allocation in our communities. When narratives frame poverty as the result of a lack of hard work and personal responsibility, it reinforces negative stigmas and leads listeners to think of solutions through an individual lens. It's up to all of us to shift how we think and talk about the work. When we shift the narrative, we can highlight the agency of residents, the root causes of poverty and structural racism, and focus on policies that support a foundation of economic security for all residents.

In this session, Mordecai Cargill (Co-Founder + Chief Creative Officer) and Evelyn Burnett (Co-Founder + CEO) of ThirdSpace Action Lab (TSAL) shared TSAL's research on narratives that perpetuate inequitable systems and harm communities of color. They shared some harmful dominant narratives that emerged from the research and shared resources for how to create alternative, explicitly anti-racist narratives to drive systems change. This is a summary of the information shared in the session.

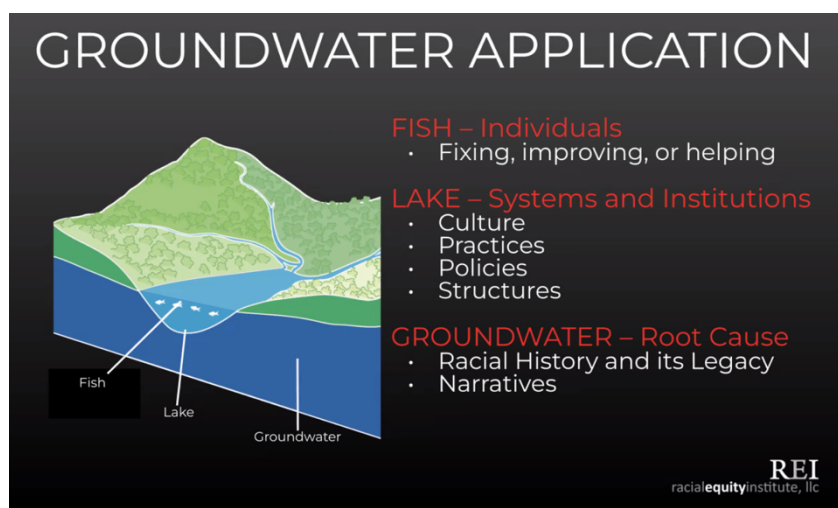
Third Space Action Lab:

Third Space Action Lab was established to counteract the cycle of disinvestment and displacement affecting low-income communities of color. Their approach combines multidisciplinary research with evidence-based strategies, activating third spaces to co-create liberated environments for people of color.

Groundwater Analysis:

If you came to the shore and noticed one dead fish, what questions would you ask about the fish? What if you noticed 10,000 dead fish on shore? What different questions might you ask?

The Racial Equity Institute, a TSAL partner, uses the metaphor of groundwater contamination to illustrate systemic racism. Rather than blaming individuals ("a fish"), the focus should be on systemic issues ("the groundwater").



Addressing individual needs is important. And, systems change requires deeper, structural analysis and action. The groundwater analysis encourages us to focus on the root causes, including the racial history and its legacy as well as dominant narratives. TSAL reminded participants that ***narratives are not just words; they are also mindsets.***

Together, We Can Change the Narrative

To dismantle harmful narratives, organizations need to develop a narrative strategy to promote new anti-racist narratives that center our shared values of dignity, equity, and inclusion. Luis Ortega with Storytellers for Change developed a toolkit called "***Crafting Anti-Racist Narratives for Community Development***" that outlines five key steps to develop a new narrative (this is also relevant to local health and human service organizations and organizations working on public policy change):

Step 1: Reflect

Learn more about core principles of equity-centered storytelling, emphasizing anti-racist storytelling, ***asset-based framing***, critical hope, healing, and radical imagination, which lay the foundation for crafting a narrative strategy.

Step 2: Unpack dominant narratives

Examine the dominant narratives that impact the sector you work in. What messages are communicated through this narrative? What stories reinforce this narrative? What policies and programs are informed by or reinforce this narrative?

Example: Let's unpack the "Bootstrap and Public Dysfunction" narrative

The Bootstrap and Public Dysfunction narrative suggests that people who participate in public benefits are taking advantage of the system and should be satisfied with substandard healthcare and housing. This narrative also reinforces that programs that support the health and economic stability of residents with low wages (cash, food, housing, childcare or healthcare assistance) are not worthwhile investments. These narratives often place the blame on individuals rather than systemic issues, undermining the need for systemic solutions and community-level solutions.

Resources for further learning: The People's Practice project identifies ***several harmful dominant narratives*** that hinder community development, policy change, and systems change work. To create and implement equitable and anti-racist practices and solutions, it is essential to critically analyze and challenge these narratives by deconstructing their underlying biases, assumptions, and stereotypes.

Step 3: Envision a new narrative

What new narratives can you co-create? Ensure narrative work is led by those with direct experience of poverty and racism. What are alternative stories that resonate with impacted residents and challenge dominant narratives?

Step 4: Implement

Now it's time to think differently and tell a new story. Your organization can set objectives for your narrative work, map out your audiences, and determine what approaches you can use to amplify stories effectively. TSAL suggests making narrative work relevant and accessible through local culture, history, and through popular education.

Step 5: Evaluate

After doing the work, ongoing evaluation and critical reflection will allow you to assess the impact of your narrative strategy. Does the new narrative resonate with directly impacted residents? Does

the new narrative shift how people think and talk? Does the new narrative challenge implicit dominant narratives? This creates an opportunity to refine your approach and reflect on your learning.

Conclusion

Creating an equitable Franklin County requires challenging harmful narratives and creating new narratives. By thinking and talking differently and incorporating narrative strategies centered on dignity, equity, and local engagement, we can build a community where every resident has the resources and opportunities to thrive.

Additional Resources:

- o ***The People's Practice***: this website is dedicated to anyone who wants to be part of the movement to advance anti-racist practices.
- o ***Chocolate City Cleveland*** – a multigenerational, multimedia, multidisciplinary experiment intended to preserve the collective memory of a better past, celebrate the richness of Black communities, and imagine a brighter future for Cleveland's Black neighborhoods (a project that is experimenting with and implementing narrative change in practice).

The 3rd Annual Poverty Innovation Summit hosted by RISE Together Innovation Institute took place on Thursday, June 20th, 2024 in Columbus, OH. Learn more about RISE Together at rtiico.org.