A Snapshot of the Care Narrative Change Landscape

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Introduction

At some point, every one of us will need care or need to provide care. This became even more clear as the COVID-19 pandemic allowed us to witness the extraordinary contributions of caregivers and exposed the failings caused by our nation's lack of care policies, especially for communities of color. At the height of the pandemic, the United States made unprecedented progress on care policies, but the progress was temporary and insufficient, especially compared to the need. Today, advocates, philanthropy, organizers, and policymakers have an opportunity to build on the heightened awareness in the United States of the central role care plays in families, communities, and the economy to set the stage for ongoing, sustainable policy progress. Leaders are aleady engaging in a wide variety of smart strategies and tactics. One of those is narrative-change strategies.

Deploying narrative-change strategies across care issues – child care and early learning, long-term services and supports for older adults and people with disabilities, paid leave, support for family and friend caregivers, and improving the quality of paid care workers' jobs – will help create the conditions for cultural and policy progress. Coming together for the first time across issues and constituencies, with support from Care for All with Respect and Equity (CARE) Fund, a group of six philanthropy support organizations – **Asset Funders Network, Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, Economic Opportunity Funders, Grantmakers In Aging, Grantmakers In Health, and Disability & Philanthropy Forum** – agreed to collaborate to develop a national landscape analysis of care economy narrative-change efforts. Their goals were to learn and share with funders what kinds of narrative-change strategies and tactics are being employed, which care funders and grantees

are already supporting and using them, where the most significant gaps and opportunities for learning and action are, and how philanthropy can best support this work.


In order to identify the promising narrative-change practices already being supported and deployed for care issues, we reviewed publicly available information (such as websites, reports, and articles), conducted a funder survey, interviewed selected care economy narrative-change field experts and ran a focus group with selected funders. The results in this report reflect a snapshot of the work happening at this moment in time based on this research.

Framework

This analysis defines "narrative" as "the themes and ideas that permeate collections of stories"[1] and as "a story people already know; a story template recurring in a culture over time that people widely recognize and understand, and to which they have a predictable response."[2] "Narrative change" involves shifting these stories and requires building narrative power through mass media, mass culture, and mass movements, as defined by the Convergence Partnership. According to Rashad Robinson, the President of Color of Change, narrative power is "the ability to change the norms and rules our society lives by."[3] Similarly, the Convergence Partnership describes it as "the ability to shape public discourse, debate, and imagery."[4]

Our analysis includes efforts that meet the following criteria:(1) narrative change efforts and/or strategic communications efforts across the United States and (2) address child care and early learning, paid family and medical leave, and long-term services and supports for older adults and people with disabilities, with a focus on users of care, paid care workers, and unpaid family and friend caregivers.
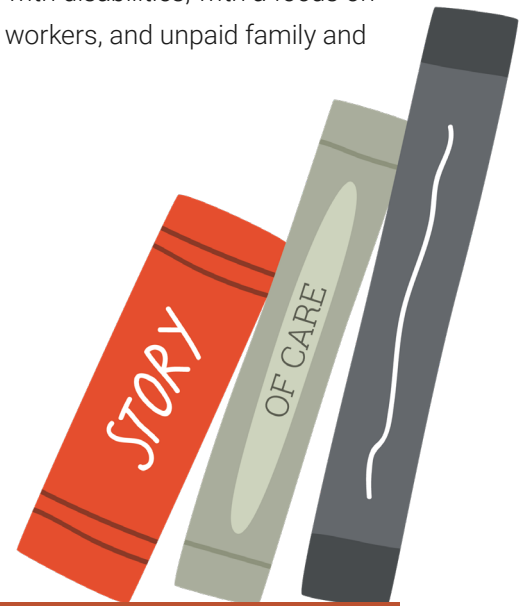
Key findings

- Our analysis found 81 care economy narrative-change organizations and projects from 2017 to the present, representing a mix of projects with varying focus areas, sizes, scopes, and structures. Of those, the majority are projects that work on at least two areas of the care economy. An online, searchable table of these projects can be found **here**.

- The two most common tactical approaches and types of products were storytelling and research/reports, followed by video, messaging guidance, and film.

- Most of the projects (70) employed narrative-change strategies, with a smaller number (24) employing strategic communications strategies. Of those engaged in narrative change, 27 used the narrative power-building approach of mass culture, 21 used mass movements, and 16 mass media. Only four projects were using two of these power-building approaches, and one was using three.

- A selected group of field experts and funders interviewed for this report recommended that philanthropy could best support groups advancing care economy narrative change by providing funding in a format that allows for launching and sustaining true narrative-change efforts – those that are long term and focused on creating a combination of new values and conditions that enable change (see table 1).

<div style="background:#b85c38;color:white;padding:4px 10px;display:inline-block">**TABLE 1.**</div>

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHILANTHROPY FROM FIELD EXPERT INTERVIEWEES AND FUNDER FOCUS GROUP

RECOMMENDATION	FIELD EXPERTS	FUNDERS
Provide sustained, multiyear, general operating support	✓	✓
Support evaluation approaches that are appropriate for narrative change	✓	✓
Center people experiencing the greatest inequities and having lived experience	✓	✓
Fund collaboration	✓	✓
Use grantmaking dollars and influence to eliminate scarcity paradigm	✓	✓
Foster experimentation and innovation	✓	
Communicate transparently	✓	
Learn about grantees' issue areas	✓	
Convene grantees and support them to convene with each other	✓	
Fund across care sectors	✓	
Foster experimentation and innovation	✓	
Fund 501 (c)(4) organizations	✓	

Conclusion

The field of narrative change is relatively new and evolving, as is the engagement in this strategy within the care movement. One thing we do know is that doing it well requires significant resources. While philanthropic funding has been invaluable in supporting the projects highlighted here, significant philanthropic investments are needed to move forward, innovate, and catalyze synergy across the care field.

REFERENCES

1. Mik Moore and Rinku Sen, "Funding Narrative Change: An Assessment and Framework by the Convergence Partnership," September 2022, https://convergencepartnership.org/publication/funding-narrative-change-an-assessment-and-framework.

2. "Pop Culture for Social Change Terms and Definitions," accessed July 12, 2023, https://popcollab.org/learning/pop-culture-for-social-change-terms-and-definitions/.

3. Tracey Van Slyke, "Want Narrative Power? Invest in Narrative Infrastructure," accessed July 12, 2023, https://popcollab.medium.com/want-narrative-power-invest-in-narrative-infrastructure-afd55e35da02.

4. Moore and Sen, 2022.