



PNW Fellowship Narrative Guide

The Common Thread narrative:
Solidarity stories for a fair economy

Overview

Anyone watching the news lately can tell you that feelings, belonging, and identity matter so much more than facts and figures. Feelings, belonging, and identity live in the realm of narrative, but pinning down a definition of “narrative” –let alone how to implement a narrative strategy –can be like pinning Jell-O to a wall.

In this report, we guide you through the importance of narrative, provide a helpful analogy/schema that can be used to develop a shared narrative, and introduce a new shared economic narrative for use in the diverse communities of King County, Washington.

We are thankful for the concerted investment in shared narrative work by Communities of Opportunity, funded by Public Health Seattle & King County’s Best Starts for Kids initiative and the Seattle Foundation. We are also grateful for the fellows who participated in the second year of the Powerful Narratives Work (PNW) fellowship, which was designed and facilitated by Resource Media. From March to August of 2026, these communications leaders of King County worked to discover and establish a shared economic narrative rooted in fairness and solidarity. This guide is meant to serve as a tool for these groups, their networks, funders, members, and active, concerned residents across the region and the country.

The world we live in

Over the past decades, we have lived in a world of increasing income inequality. It seems everyone is broke: the government is in debt, restaurants can't stay in business, local programs are getting cut, and people are having trouble affording rent, groceries, and childcare. All this, while billionaires garner tax breaks.

At the same time, populism on both the right and the left fuels perceptions of what is possible, what will gain public support and what won't, and those at the forefront of social change (philanthropies, government agencies, nonprofits, and activists) are in constant battle mode. It's evident we aren't just fighting for better policies; we're fighting for hearts and minds, ideas, beliefs, common sense, and identity.

That's why building narrative, storytelling, and media infrastructure is a long-term strategy that requires constant bolstering, adaptation, and support.



Vision and values

The Powerful Narratives Work fellows envision a future in which everyone feels supported enough to pursue their dreams, with the freedom to create and implement solutions that are based in culture, community, and joy. We imagine a future where our cooperation and care for one another makes our economy work better for everyone. We envision a future where communities are safer, schools are better, businesses and our environment are healthier, and local governments make smarter investments that actually work for the people.

Elevating these dreams means we must reckon with three core regressive American economic narratives:

The “bootstraps” narrative: economic mobility is earned individually, so we should not acknowledge collective effort or societal investment

The “storehouse” narrative: natural resources exist to be extracted, and those who seek to protect them thwart wealth-building and progress

The “accumulation” narrative: the creation of wealth (as fast and as much as possible, pursued relentlessly) should be everyone’s #1 economic priority

If we steep ourselves in these regressive narratives, we forget that efforts and policies created for the common good have benefited not just those who have the least, but all of us.

With a powerful new economic justice narrative, we can erode these regressive, disempowering beliefs. That’s a huge job, but it’s doable. In King County, community-based organizations, local governments, businesses, and advocates have shown what’s possible. Showcasing these successes can bolster new, liberatory economic narratives, and that is what the PNW Fellowship set out to do.

Purpose

A shared narrative infuses liberatory values and stories with new meaning. When organizations and leaders foreground a powerful new narrative, they can be more intentional about selecting which stories they share and highlight. Those stories develop additional meaning as they connect to other efforts to dismantle regressive narratives and create new ones.

A shared narrative can show up in our brand, vision, and organizational messages. Core values of connection and care resonate across issue areas, advocacy efforts, and campaigns. This resonance helps engage our base audiences so they feel more powerful, more connected, and more aligned in their work creating an economy that works for all.

The shared narrative framework developed by the PNW Fellowship can be used across sectors, coalitions, and campaigns. Our framework can be used for:

Communications activities
Organizing (base building)

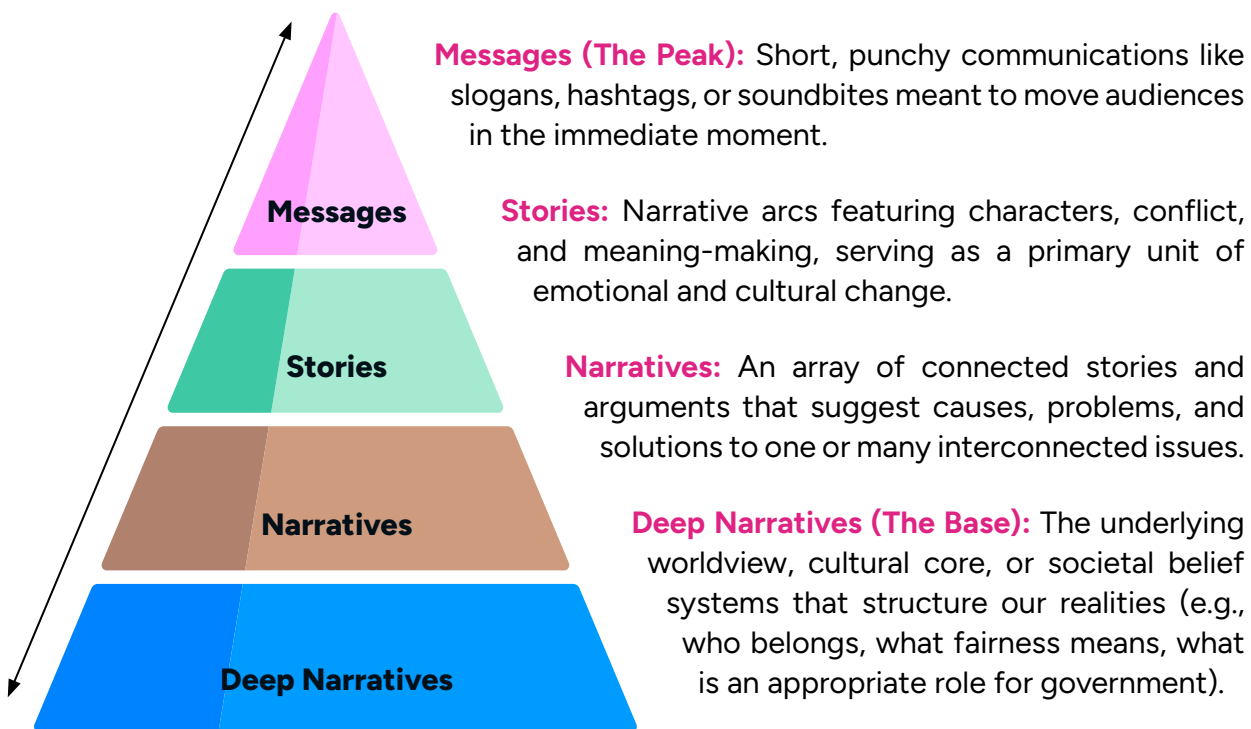
Fundraising and grantmaking
Policy design



DEFINING NARRATIVE

The term “narrative” is often conflated with storytelling, messaging, and branding. All of these things are interrelated, but narrative, and especially deep narrative, functions on a different scale and timespan.

Here, we use the simple but powerful [Race Forward/Butterfly Labs Narrative Pyramid](#) tool for our foundational definitions. The pyramid is built across four interconnected tiers, moving from deep foundational beliefs down to immediate public outputs:



It’s important to note that a fundamental distinction exists between liberatory and regressive narratives, one that structured our narrative creation process.

Liberatory Narratives promote and explore liberation, hope, and possibility, counter oppressive structures, and center marginalized people’s wisdom, agency, needs, and solutions.

Regressive Narratives push the inevitability and thus acceptance of worsening conditions for the majority of people in society or community; for example, in the arenas of economy, identity, culture, or environment. They are often based on fear and mistrust.

USING THE NARRATIVE GARMENT SCHEMA

Building new narratives is complex. At Resource Media, we use the Narrative Garment Schema to help craft and create powerful new narratives. The schema grounds narrative building in the everyday activity of designing and sewing a garment, and connects us to the lineage of seamstresses who have created beauty and function even within conditions of tremendous deprivation. The PNW fellows used this schema to imagine and create a new, liberatory economic justice narrative: the Common Thread Narrative. We used the schema's five basic steps as follows:

1

Visioning: What do you want your narrative to look like? How does it make people feel, and what is its purpose?

Piece cutting: What stories need to be told, and how can they be shaped to fit together? What is each story's function, and how can they be shaped and cut carefully?

3

5

Production & sharing: Create content for your shared narrative, and work with others to provide guidance for larger production.

7

2

Measurement: What sort of landscape will this narrative need to exist in? What are the drivers, signals, and values that are making the world a ripe or hostile place for your narrative? (this could be political, technological, environmental, or societal).

Stitching: Connect various stories with different forms and functions, so they work together to form your envisioned narrative.

4

The Common Thread deep narrative

Deep values structure meaning and worldview, and they underlie our understanding of the human condition and our role in community. Deep values animate our hearts and our actions; they are emotional, not intellectual. Liberatory values awaken feelings of connection, hope, and care. Regressive narratives are based on fear, individualism, and competition. The Common Thread narrative is based on the following five core values:

Interconnection

Care/solidarity

Love

Stewardship

Collective responsibility

(differentiates Common Thread from regressive, individualistic narratives that sow distrust in the role of government)

*“Power is another really misunderstood thing. Power is not a thing you have; it’s an influence created through interdependence. We live in the world **interdependently** with others, and those interdependencies can be very fruitful...But at times, the resources we need are held by others who substitute their will for our own and their interest for our own. That we call power. The challenge in organizing is understanding that power does not exist out there, in some bank or something. Resources are there, but this capacity to grow interdependence into sources of power, that’s what we learned how to do in the [United Farm Workers of America].”*

—Marshall Ganz, SSIR Feb. 2025

The Common Thread narrative

We are all connected, and our connections strengthen families, communities, businesses, and government.

Like tree roots in the forest or a woven basket, support spreads through how we work, play, build businesses, and plan for the future, making all of us stronger.

From the largest corporation to the gig worker living paycheck to paycheck, everyone contributes.

Our ability to survive depends on the strength of our shared community. That community is made up of threads that tie us together—good infrastructure, good schools, a clean environment and affordable healthcare.

Beyond systems and policies, it's friendships, taking care of our families, our elders and our kids, and a feeling of dignity with work.

But the ties that bind us together are being eroded. When we tend to them, and to each other, we all thrive.

The Common Thread narrative spotlights stories that show how these connections benefit us - sometimes in intangible ways. These stories also show where we're seeing some wear and tear; in other words, they show what needs to be repaired to restore the healthy interdependence that sustains a tightly-woven community.



Common Thread stories

A narrative is made up of interconnected stories, and each of these stories can, and should, look different and have a different function. The same is true with clothing, as a pocket serves a different purpose than a waistband, but the parts come together to form a cohesive garment. Storytelling takes many forms, and serves different purposes - such as to advance community building, champion a policy, or elevate creativity. Four important storytelling practices include:

1. Fictional, creative storytelling
2. Finding and amplifying local stories that haven't been applied to movement efforts yet
3. Commenting on or sharing a story from another community in a way that fits into your narrative
4. Forging new stories from a first, second, or third-person perspective

STORIES TO STITCH TOGETHER

Skilled labor

A construction worker who spotted bent columns in a building works quickly to evacuate the building, saving the lives of its occupants. He credited what he learned in a union apprenticeship and his skilled labor training.

Sharing is caring

Brian is an amateur woodworker who volunteers at his local tool-lending library, where he meets people in his community and solves unique problems using cool tools. Having a tool library means community members don't need to take on unnecessary expenses themselves; instead they share resources and can access a broader range of tools to new things (Credit: Seattle REconomy).

Baking together

Vince runs Anh Oi, a Vietnamese American bake shop in Seattle's Chinatown International District, and shares his shelves with other bakers. At the shop's soft opening, customers bought goods from other bakers, which was the whole point. This new model brings bakers and customers together to a shared community table rather than relying on a single brand and competition.

Affordable apartments

When he notices the Arches Apartments across the street were up for sale, Brighton Communities' Executive Director Curtis Brown doesn't wait for the city to take action. As part of a deal he secures to purchase Arches Apartments, the building is protected as affordable for at least 99 years, with rent increases capped and, for some units, rents lowered. Brown's insight from this process is that owning a piece of your neighborhood is the only way to guarantee you don't get displaced from it. (Credit: People's Economy Lab)

Opening doors

Sindy's son Josue is a joyful toddler in our Early Learning Playgroup. She was nervous when a therapist first raised the possibility of an autism diagnosis, as she didn't know what it would mean for her son's future. Through Open Doors for Multicultural Families, she found not just services to help her through her son's diagnosis, but also, a community that welcomed her. Now, when Sindy sees another parent struggling in public with a child like Josue, she carries a toy car or bubbles with her so she can step in and let that parent know they're not alone. (Credit: Open Doors for Multicultural Families)

Solidarity with domestic workers

During the 2026 legislative session, young organizers across different communities in Washington united to advocate for the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, which extends standard labor protections like minimum wage, written contracts, and meal breaks to the state's domestic workers. Many of these young people organized by Washington Bus were the children of domestic workers, and others were not; instead, they showed up in solidarity with the youth advocating for their parents and communities. The bill became law, and young people were present at the bill signing to celebrate. (Credit: Washington Bus)

Protect the Millionaire's Tax

When Washington state passed a capital gains tax on super high earners in 2021, opponents warned that rich people would flee the state, which would dry up revenue for the tax. So far, the opposite is true. In 2026, the capital gains tax brought in the highest revenue yet, totalling \$1.5 billion, more than double what the tax raised in previous years. It turns out that the wealthiest Washingtonians also benefit from living in a place that has well-funded schools, safe buildings, and a promising future for preschoolers. That's why it's important to keep the debate about this historic Millionaire's Tax grounded in reality rather than scare tactics (Credit: Invest in Washington Now).

Common Thread sample messages

EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE

- Quality, affordable schools and childcare are essential infrastructure that make everything else work better—from our families to our workplaces.
- Good childcare and great schools create positive ripple effects through our whole community, helping families stay stable, kids succeed, and businesses thrive. It's all connected.

PROGRESSIVE REVENUE

- When the wealthiest pay what they owe, our communities prosper too, with better schools, better healthcare, and better roads, bridges, and transit. It's all connected.
- Washington's tax system is upside down, but a huge group of people - from nurses to teachers to small businesses to unions - has come together to fix that. The common thread is that fair taxes create healthier families, communities, and economies.

DIGNITY FOR WORKERS

- Cash assistance programs are a way to repair the safety nets keeping families afloat, ensuring kids are healthier and parents are more able to skill up and find good-paying jobs while their housing stays stable.
- When communities get together to buy buildings in their neighborhood, rents stay stable, families can remain in their homes, and the whole neighborhood benefits. It's all connected.

HOUSING

- When we build programs that work, like King County's Health through Housing, formerly homeless people have stable housing and the services that keep them healthy. The whole community benefits from this, with positive ripple effects moving out through families and neighborhoods as people find stability and health.
 - The best programs are based on listening to people who need help. Their knowledge about what doesn't work helps others design programs that do.
- Protecting seniors from predatory lending helps everyone, ensuring they can stay in their homes, which also helps their adult children build generational wealth and make planned transitions for their parents. It's all connected.

MORE VOICES, MORE CHANGE

- In 2026, young people from around Washington found common ground in supporting the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, which extends basic labor protections like minimum wage, meal breaks, and written contracts to domestic workers. Many of its proponents were children of domestic workers, who shared firsthand stories about how human dignity connects to the health and sustainability of the whole family.
- Listening closely to what a person or family actually needs and delivering the right support so they can thrive builds a connected community so no one is left to navigate things alone. This is quiet work that's accomplished one relationship, one conversation, one family at a time. This work is the common thread connecting everything we do to support families with special needs.

PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION: SURROUND SOUND

A new narrative is only as powerful as the effort to share and socialize it. Good messaging alone is not sufficient to reach and activate people. Our movements, organizations, and organizers must use constant repetition –and a variety of tactics including organizing, cultural events, campaigning and of course digital media –to socialize the Common Thread narrative. We recommend three core strategies to engage coalition partners, influencers, and grassroots voices to tap into this narrative in their own words until it becomes cultural common sense.

- 1. Share widely, relinquish control:** Instead of letting the perfect be the enemy of the good, share your Common Thread stories widely through social media, in-person events, news and stories, and in conversations with your people. Don't worry too much about the words, and definitely don't worry about having folks you share the narrative with use the "right" words. Instead, try to strike the right tone and look for where the new narrative resonates or doesn't.
- 2. Experiment and adapt:** As you share Common Thread stories, be purposeful about gathering feedback and impressions from your base audiences in particular. Which stories are most resonant? Which stories perform best on social media, and which ones grab people's attention at in-person gatherings? Use this live testing to refine your stories and how you deliver the narrative. Constant innovation creates stronger connectivity, as long as you stay true to the deep values that animate the narrative.

- 3. Put culture first:** Focus as much as you can on sharing Common Thread stories outside the policy and work bubbles, with friends, neighbors at schools, and community events. Narrative power building gains traction when a coherent set of stories finds its home in places where real people gather to talk about real things. Step outside the advocacy and campaign bubble, weaving art, writing, design, theater, and fun into your socialization efforts.

As Ritti Singh explains so clearly:

“The more people hear the same thing from different sources, the more it feels like reality, and the more they repeat it to others. Our goal isn’t just persuasion—it’s shaping how people interpret their own lives: why their rent is so high, who’s responsible, and how we could change it.

People don’t hold fixed beliefs. The same tenant who’s heard that migrants are driving up rents has also felt the rage of watching their landlord raise the rent while refusing to fix the heat. Which story sticks more depends on what they hear more often, from more sources, in more places.”

As part of the PNW Fellowship’s distribution strategy, fellows were interviewed by [City Cast Seattle](#), who served as content partners with Communities of Opportunity. Through a series of paired interviews on a specific topic, each of the fellows learned how to move from talking points to stories that fit within a narrative. Watch and listen to their stories in the podcast series [Weaving Our Future: Stories for a Fair Economy](#).

On measurement: audience maps

Resource Media built countywide audience maps to inform the creation of the Common Thread narrative. With our best-in-class audience profiling database, we identify audience segments across a wide range of personal, behavioral, values-driven, and demographic characteristics including church attendance, gun ownership, support for healthcare expansion, respect for tradition, and more. These in-depth audience segmentation strategies cut through media noise, resonate with multiple dimensions of people's lives, and markedly increase engagement.

These maps show the concentration of King County residents who are deeply aligned with either the "care" core value or the "equity" core value. The maps point to deep concentrations of women, in particular, who form the base audiences for socialization of this new economic justice narrative. Base-building, succinctly defined as organizing more people into deeper commitment, leadership, and action, should be the first priority for organizations sharing the new narrative. Focusing on largely women in the west and southwest of the county will be most promising.

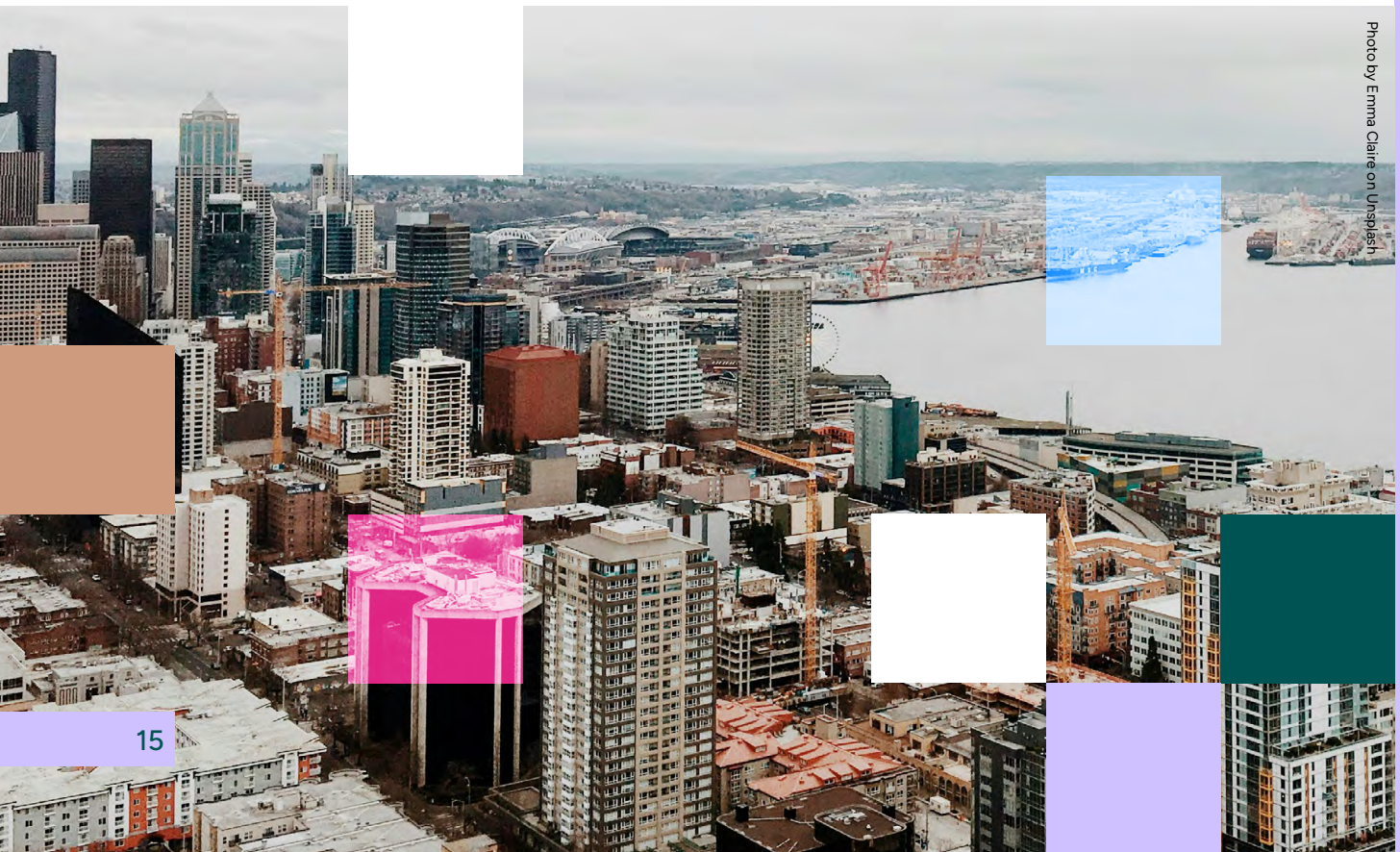
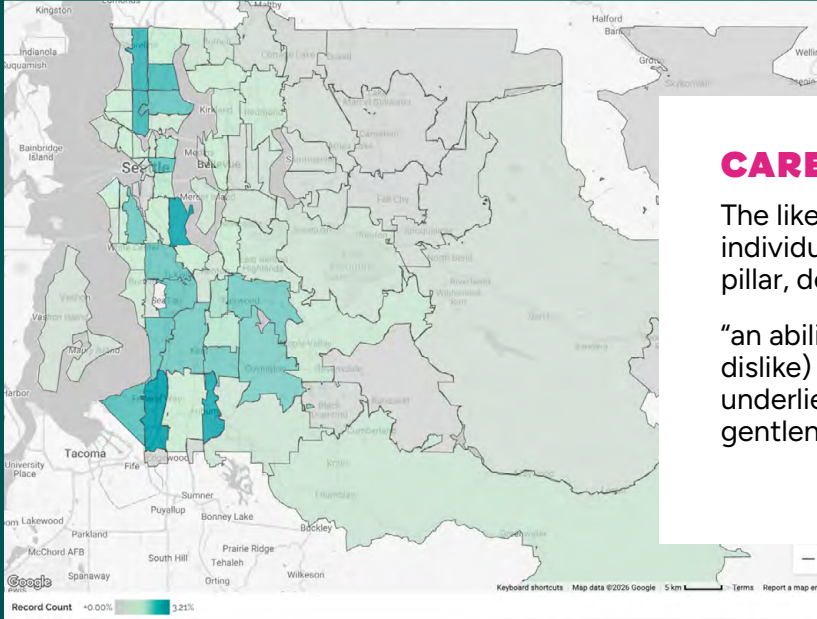


Photo by Emma Claire on Unsplash

King County: *Care*

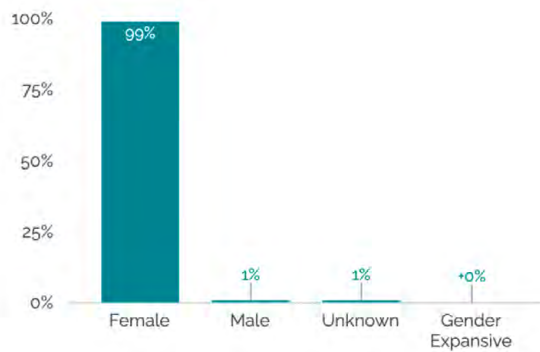


CARE

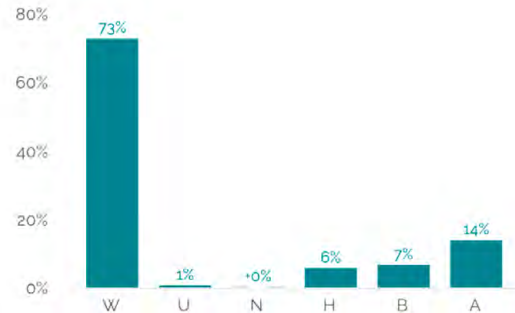
The likelihood that an individual aligns with the Care pillar, defined as follows:

“an ability to feel (and dislike) the pain of others. It underlies virtues of kindness, gentleness, and nurturance.”

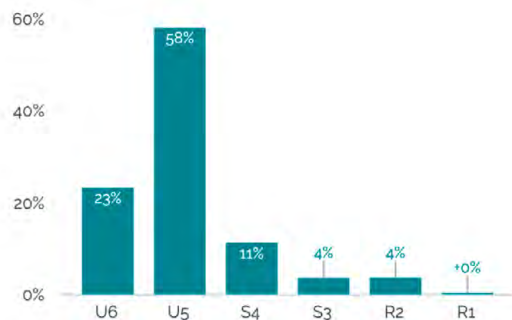
Gender



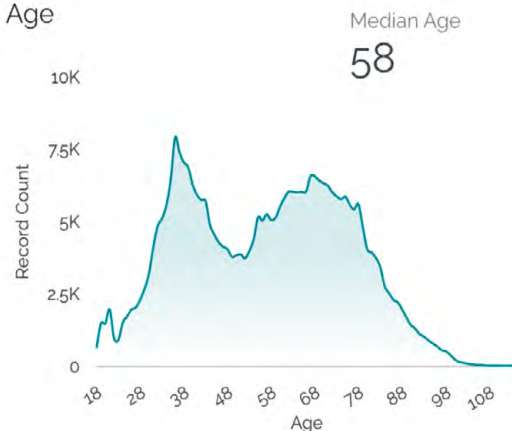
Race



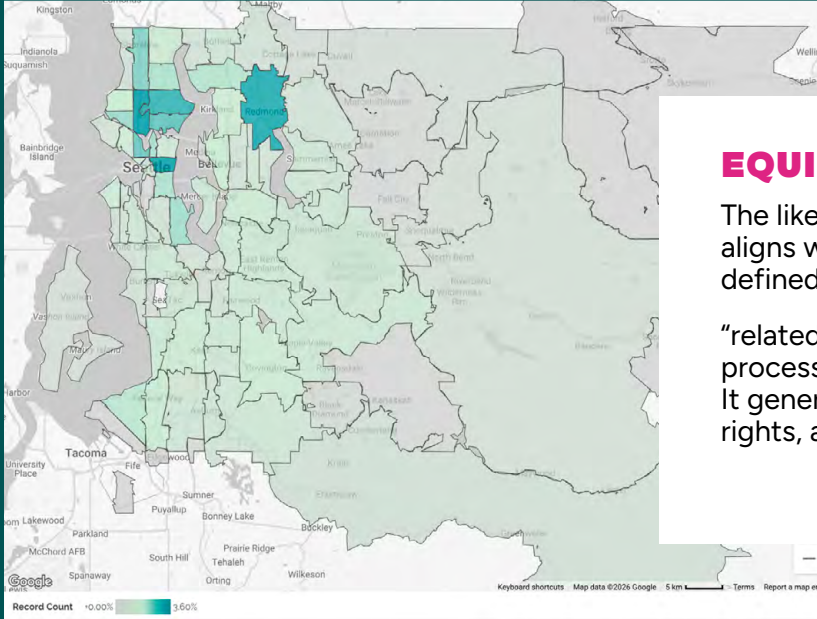
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Age



King County: *Equity*

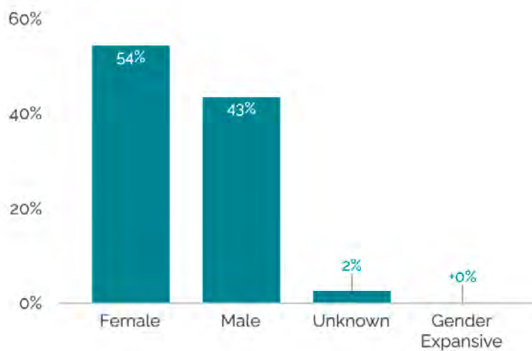


EQUITY

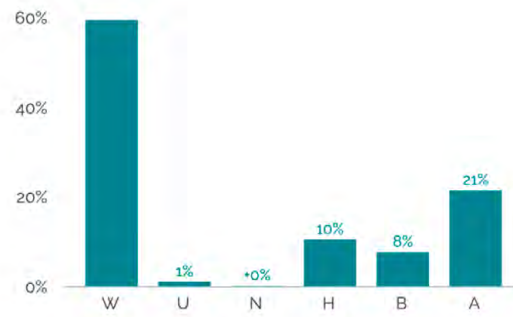
The likelihood that an individual aligns with the Equity pillar, defined as follows::

“related to the evolutionary process of reciprocal altruism. It generates ideas of justice, rights, and autonomy.”

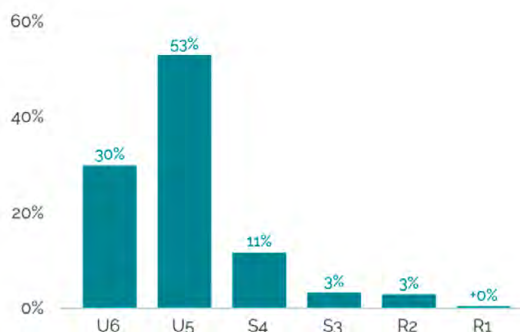
Gender



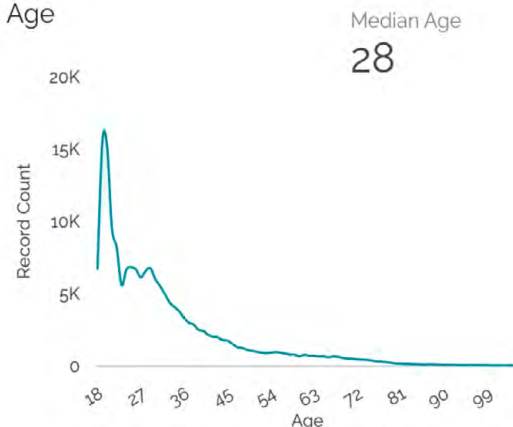
Race



Urbanicity



Age





What's next?

We believe that narrative approaches are essential to building the broad, durable coalitions needed for meaningful change. With continued investment and commitment, we envision that communications strategies can move beyond reactively explaining individual issues and eschewing authenticity in favor of polished talking points that poll well.

Instead, we can listen to the community organizers, educators, and leaders who share their smarts and weave their stories into the Common Thread narrative. We can create opportunities for people with different identities, priorities, and lived experiences to see themselves as part of the same movement. This kind of narrative strategy can dissolve issue silos, elevate voices that are often left out, and replace an "us versus them" dynamic with a sense of shared stake and possibility. For organizations that want to organize across differences, build a bigger tent, and sustain progress, narrative change is essential infrastructure for building the relationships, trust, and collective power.

JOIN US

If you are interested in supporting or joining the Powerful Narratives Work fellowship as it continues into its third year, or you want to contact Resource Media about pursuing a narrative campaign, reach out to Sian Wu (she/her), managing director at Resource Media: sian@resource-media.org or Belinda Griswold (she/her), senior program director at Resource Media: belinda@resource-media.org.

This guide was developed by Sian Wu and Belinda Griswold, edited by Marla Wilson, and designed by Xio Lugo of [Resource Media](#) in August, 2026. Photography by Catherine Hinrichsen, King County.

