

# 2022 Actualizing Equity Narrative Shifts for Powerful Movements

Shaping narratives is an essential aspect of community organizing to disrupt and uproot ingrained systems of oppression. By framing and communicating about our campaigns in strategic and intentional ways, we can more effectively mobilize our communities and engage policymakers to co-create the vision and advance the components of a fundamentally more just world. How are organizers across the Twin Cities integrating powerful messaging in their work? At our June 2022 Actualizing Equity event, we discussed this with Ashley Fairbanks from the 100% Campaign; Corenia Smith, former campaign manager for Yes for Minneapolis; Eleonore Wesserle from We Make the Future; Mari Ojeda from Fresh Energy; and artist / organizer Sebastian Rivera.

## How are you improving or innovating the way you connect with and mobilize community?



### 2nd Grade Liberation

Too often, organizers and advocates speak in jargon and systems — *structural racism, carceral logic, corporate hegemony* — that make our movements feel both exclusive and overwhelming to those outside of our immediate circles. As Ricardo Levins Morales urges us, when we work to make our messaging so clear and simple that it can be understood by a second grader we can be confident that it is inviting and inclusive for everyone.



### Manage urgency

Many of us, as organizers and advocates, came into this work because we felt an urgent need to address important issues in our communities. But, as Ashley Fairbanks emphasized, using urgency to galvanize our base — “*we must act now!*” *over and over again*—can backfire by triggering the fight-flight-freeze reaction in our bodies, which has negative longterm impacts on our health and undermines the growth and sustainability of our movements.



### Envision winning

Because we are so focused on stopping the harm in our communities, we rarely stop to envision what winning looks like — and center that vision in communicating to our audiences. We must make space for that dreaming so that we can describe and encourage others to join the struggle for a vibrant future, not simply a version of the present with *less* harm.



### Solutions not problems

When we envision winning, it fundamentally shifts how we frame our messaging. Instead of starting with and centering the problem, we open up and engage our imaginations by beginning with the destination and invite others to join us in the collective steps to get there, rather than describing the barriers we might face along the way.



### Motivate with hope

Because we recognize the weight and history of oppression in our communities, hope can feel naive. But hope is a far more effective motivator than fear. When we lean into hope, we are not diminishing the significance of the issues we face but amplifying our collective power to make change.



### Everyone has a stake

We know that certain communities have been targeted for oppression and exploitation, but, to scale our movements, our messaging must ensure that everyone sees their stake in the fight for a better future. We must be explicit in naming race *and* connect to universal values that resonate with all community members.



## Examples of powerful narrative in action!

### Mnisota 2055

What if the climate crisis is actually an opportunity to shape a sustainable and just world? Our climate future can mean better homes, more options for keeping connected, fresh food and drinkable water, healthy communities and jobs that sustain us. Conceived by the 100% Campaign, “*Mnisota2055: Postcards from an (im)Possible Future*” is an invitation for Minnesotans to take a step into a portal to 2055 and see how it feels. What will music, fashion, art, look like after we achieve a fossil free future? Taking charge on bringing hope, solutions, and creativity to the battle for this future, the 100% Campaign hosted an immersive art experience during Northern Spark 2022 and created a mailing list for residents to receive monthly artist designed postcards with events and actions. Learn more at [100percentmn.org/mnisota-2055](https://100percentmn.org/mnisota-2055)

### Yes for Minneapolis

The Yes 4 Minneapolis campaign was a Black-led, coalitional campaign that secured and advocated for a 2021 ballot measure to replace the Minneapolis Police Department with a new department of public safety. Starting with the campaign name itself, organizers were intentional and disciplined about their affirmative stance: not defunding police and taking something away, but rather creating a department of public safety as a means to increase safety for all communities. While they centered and amplified the voices of those most harmed by policing they were also explicit in naming the self interest for ALL residents of Minneapolis, building a broad coalition across race, class and neighborhood. While the ballot measure did not pass, polling showed that the campaign had a dramatic impact on the public narrative. Learn more at [yes4minneapolis.org](https://yes4minneapolis.org)

### Connecting Housing and Energy Justice

Housing and energy are currently treated as commodities – designed to take wealth from the many to give it to the few. But the connection between substandard housing and exorbitant energy bills is hard to see, and is often not addressed. A project convened by Fresh Energy, Community Stabilization Project and other organizations was created to intentionally de-silo these conversation about housing and energy to build a powerful, integrated narrative and create new communications materials, like an Energy and Housing Justice Bill of Rights, to serve as resources for ongoing work. Recognizing how renters are often left out of these conversation, the initiative included direct outreach and doorknocking to invite those most impacted into the conversation.

### Comic book about the Public Utilities Commission

While a growing number of people are pushed out of their housing or struggle to remained housed because of increasing energy costs, few recognize the role of corporate monopoly in the utility sector that maintains a tight grip on its right to extract profit. A collaboration of BIPOC artists came together to pull back the curtain on the energy sector and the systems that regulate it, including the Public Utilities Commission, to return power and knowledge to the people to fight back. To make a complex and intentionally hidden process understandable to the public, the group is not only designing and illustrating a free, digital comic book but proactively putting the online product into public space with a mural and stickers featuring a QR code that guides the viewer to the comic book.

**Resource:** The Race Class Narrative is an empirically-tested narrative on race and class that neutralizes the use of dog-whistle racism to win on the issues we care about. Learn more and get resources at [wemakethefuture.us/about](https://wemakethefuture.us/about)

Learn more about Actualizing Equity at [thealliancetc.org/actualizing-equity](https://thealliancetc.org/actualizing-equity)