

The Shared Prosperity Narrative
for Family Economic Wellbeing

NARRATIVE PLAYBOOK



PROJECT COORDINATED BY:



Metropolitan Group
the power of voice

Please visit SharedProsperityNarrative.com
For a project overview, background research
and testing, and other resources.



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Metropolitan Group is a social impact design and implementation firm that works at the intersection of public health, environment and sustainability, and social justice.

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Quick-start guide:

A NEW NARRATIVE TO ADVANCE FAMILY ECONOMIC WELLBEING

Families can no longer just “hard work” themselves into prosperity, which today’s narratives falsely claim. Changing the system so that all families can thrive requires a new narrative that acknowledges how much pain the status quo causes, shifts from individual blame to shared prosperity, lifts up positive actions, and builds hope and demand for change.

“It’s possible to create a system where all families have a fair shot at prosperity.”

This overview summarizes a flexible model for this narrative. It provides tested messages that work as is. But it’s a playbook not a prescriptive message frame. Use what works and add your own voice, cultural context, stories, and activations. The narrative is purposefully adaptable so you can meet and expand—if that’s your goal—your audience.

Values: Ground the narrative; connect it to what people care about; increase adoption.

FAMILY	FAIRNESS AND EQUITY	INTERDEPENDENCE
HOPE	FREEDOM	PROSPERITY

Themes and messages color coded to values: Core ideas of the narrative. May be used verbatim, or as examples to guide your own words and language.

1. Vision: All people and families should share the prosperity we build together. This includes financial security so they can enjoy today and plan for the future. And it includes thriving together through public resources like clean air and water, great schools and child care, safe neighborhoods, and quality health care.

2. Shared experience: But the current system is built to help people in power gain excessive wealth at the expense of everyone else. For most people, chasing prosperity has gotten too hard. Families are struggling today and deferring their plans for the future. They should not have to.

3. Agency and action: Most people know the economic system doesn’t work for most families, and they want it to change. It will take all of us—people, business, government—to create a system where all families and children have economic wellbeing, now and for generations to come.

4. Evidence and hope: Big changes are possible. Around the country, people are reinventing the economy. They are increasing living wage jobs and affordable housing. They are making banking and taxes more fair. They are building employee-owned businesses, creating debt-free education and health care, and more. They are creating a system where all families and children have a fair shot at prosperity.

Stories that build evidence and hope: The narrative sparks curiosity about what changes are needed and how change can occur. As you add examples from your work, consider the survey* data below that shows how to move people from the familiar to the new.

Start here: These examples have strong support and resonate with most people.

- Fair taxes, where everyone pays their fair share
- Job training for the jobs of the future
- Ways for more people to save for retirement
- Affordable ways to care for older adults at the end of life
- Free or affordable health care, without medical debt
- A living wage for everyone
- Welcoming and fair banking, with low fees and rates

Layer in: These examples are supported by about half the population.

- More opportunities to own a home, or to build wealth through renting
- Free or affordable higher education, without debt
- Free or low cost child care
- Tax credits that benefit families with children
- Easier ways for people to start their own business
- Ways to build wealth together, like through employee-owned businesses

After you build trust: These examples may require some relationship building and case making first, unless your audience is already supportive.

- “Baby bonds” or savings accounts for all children
- Reparations to repair the damages done to Black and Indigenous people

Audiences for the shared prosperity narrative: This narrative can help you engage a broader audience of potential champions if your strategy calls for that. Our research found two groups that are especially ready for and influenced by the shared prosperity narrative:

Potential champions (27.5 percent of U.S. population)* who say the current economic system should be replaced AND that it does not allow most people and families to prosper. The narrative can activate them and give them language to rally others.

Persuadables (35.8 percent of U.S. population)* who say the current economic system should be preserved, reformed, or replaced AND that it does not allow most people and families to prosper OR they are not sure. By leading them from what they know to the new possibilities you offer, you can shift them from accepting current narratives to seeing and demanding something new.

* Based on our national survey of 1,013 U.S. adults (census-representative by gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, and geography). See the research for details.

THE NEED FOR A NEW NARRATIVE ABOUT WEALTH

All families deserve to prosper every day, and to be able to build the future they want. But today's economic system was created, and is maintained, to benefit a few and exclude many, including children and families. Our team asked: What stands in the way of transformative changes?

Of the many answers we heard in our initial research, one that rose to the top was the need to shift damaging narratives about wealth that block systemic change. Families can no longer just "hard work" themselves into prosperity, which today's narratives, shown here, falsely claim. In reality, it is the system that makes it nearly impossible for many families to thrive.

EXISTING NARRATIVES ABOUT WEALTH



The American Dream is available to everyone who works hard.



Money and spending are good.



The system is rigged or broken.



Excessive wealth and billionaires are bad.



The American Dream is no longer attainable.



The rich are getting richer at the expense of the working class and poor.



Wealth is more than money.



Collective wealth, shared prosperity, and other visionary narratives.

LESS DOMINANT NARRATIVES

INDIVIDUAL WEALTH

COLLECTIVE PROSPERITY

This playbook offers a new shared prosperity narrative that acknowledges how much pain the status quo causes, shifts from individual blame to collective prosperity, lifts up positive actions already in motion, and builds hope and demand for change. It also identifies a significant audience that responds to the narrative, helpful if you seek to broaden awareness and support for your work. It's based on 18 months of research, creating, testing, and adjusting, and built to both meet the moment and set up a long arc of narrative change. We hope it becomes a resource for anyone interested in expanding economic opportunity and prosperity, with a focus on families and children.¹

THE THEORY BEHIND NARRATIVE CHANGE

As more people adopt a new narrative, they start to see an issue or situation in a new way, and shift their actions accordingly. This project aims to interrupt current narratives about wealth at a societal level. In their place, it offers a new narrative that builds curiosity, belief, and conviction that a different system is possible, broadly desired, and something to demand. This creates a more fertile environment for both midrange and generational changes.



Of course, it's not enough to identify and test a new and effective narrative; it's the activation that can shift norms and actions. This narrative can be customized and leveraged through every channel, from grassroots conversations to news and social media, to entertainment and pop culture, to the financial sector, to experiences people have in communities every day. We're eager to hear how this playbook supports those activations, and are seeking ways to continue supporting this work.

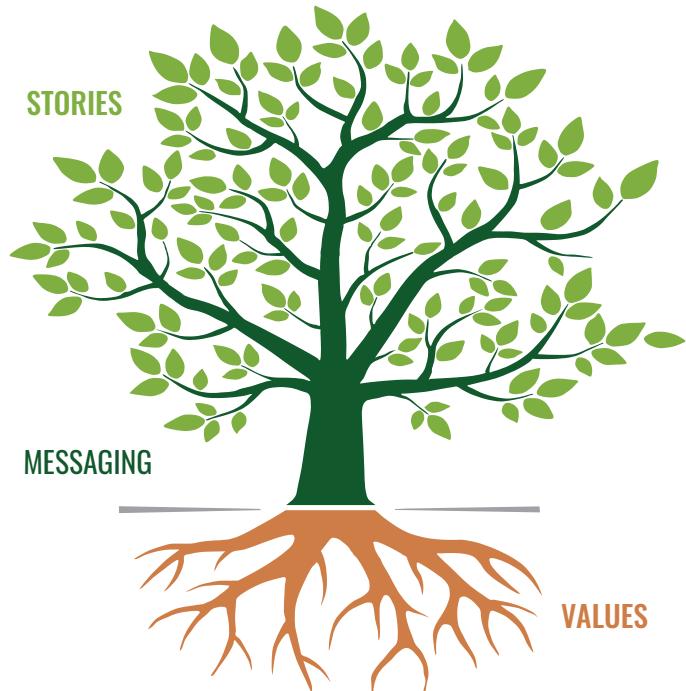
1. Family can mean something different to different people. This project has intentionally not defined family; rather, we listened to how people define it. Broadly, it's a person's connection to and responsibility to their most important relationships, both born and chosen.

ELEMENTS OF A NARRATIVE

A narrative is a collection of stories (seen, heard, and experienced) that shapes how people understand a particular issue.² Narratives are often used to protect entrenched power and privilege; shifting them can be a powerful tool for social change. Narrative change is a long-term play to influence mindsets, norms, and actions over time, not a short-term strategy to win an election tomorrow.

Each narrative is made up of three main parts, which we envision as elements of a tree:

- **Stories, the “leaves.”** People take in thousands of data points, experiences, and other inputs every day both literally (e.g., through social media, oral tradition, etc.) and figuratively (e.g., through policy, the built environment, etc.). These aggregate to create or reinforce a particular narrative.
- **Messages, the “trunk.”** Core ideas embedded in a narrative define a problem, solution, benefit, and call to action. They create the structure to connect numerous stories within a shared concept.
- **Values, the “roots.”** These deeply held beliefs ground the narrative; connect it to what people care about; and increase their likelihood of attention, adoption, and action. Understanding the closely held values of a community is a core part of developing more effective narratives and messaging.



2. For more on narratives and narrative change, please see [Narrative: A Powerful Lever for Social Change](#) or watch [this video](#).

HOW TO APPROACH THIS PLAYBOOK: A TESTED RESOURCE WITH FLEXIBILITY

This is a narrative playbook, not a prescriptive message frame. The narrative sits at the big idea level and can take on many different forms, articulations, voices, cultural contexts, and solution sets. It provides tested messages that work as is. But there's no mandate to use these messages verbatim. The narrative is purposefully adaptable so you can tailor it for your mission and strategy, and to meet your audiences with respect, hope, and a relevant call for action.

For individual organizations interested in expanding their reach, connecting their stories to this narrative can help them engage a broader audience of potential champions. And for the collective of organizations working for family wellbeing, linking their work through a shared narrative helps people see a critical mass of solutions, and evidence that many people want those solutions, rather than isolated examples. This helps draw people away from competing individualism and scarcity narratives toward something resonant and new.

The research and testing behind the shared prosperity narrative

Our exploration, detailed in the research report at SharedProsperityNarrative.com included the following:

- An exploration of innovative ways to build family wellbeing, and barriers to those ideas. This led us to narratives.
- A scan of existing dominant narratives about wealth.
- Development, with a group of family and economic wellbeing advocates, of two new narratives for testing.
- Testing via focus groups, a survey, and creative “rapid test” experiments in theater, social media, journalism, youth voice, and activism.
- Analysis of all inputs and development of a flexible new narrative.

A FLEXIBLE NEW NARRATIVE

A BIG IDEA TO EXPRESS IN YOUR OWN VOICE

This section starts with the core narrative, which combines the tested values and message elements into a concise idea. Then we break it down to show how the pieces of the narrative provide a flexible model for organizations to make their own.

It's possible to create a system where all families have a fair shot at prosperity.

All people and families should share the prosperity we build together. This includes financial security so they can enjoy today and plan for the future. And it includes thriving together through public resources like clean air and water, great schools and child care, safe neighborhoods, and quality health care.

Core values key

FAMILY
FAIRNESS AND EQUITY
INTERDEPENDENCE
HOPE
FREEDOM
PROSPERITY

But the current system is built to help people in power gain excessive wealth at the expense of everyone else. For most people, chasing prosperity has gotten too hard. Families are struggling today and deferring their plans for the future. They should not have to.

Most people know the economic system doesn't work for most families, and they want it to change. It will take all of us—people, business, government—to create a system where all families and children have economic wellbeing, now and for generations to come.

Big changes are possible. Around the country, people are reinventing the economy. They are increasing living wage jobs and affordable housing. They are making banking and taxes more fair. They are building employee-owned businesses, creating debt-free education and health care, and more. They are creating a system where all families and children have a fair shot at prosperity.

VALUES DETAIL

Because we are aiming for a shift in dominant, societal narratives, we need an option that can be broadly relevant and engaging for many people. For this reason, our approach is to create a narrative that has a toehold in existing values so it's relevant and credible, then quickly bridges toward the visionary values.³ From a scan of initial narratives, build-out of draft narratives, and testing, we arrived at the following values that anchor the new narrative:

- **Family** (born, created, or chosen; respect for ancestors, present day family, future generations)
- **Fairness and equity** (everyone has a fair shot, gets what they need, are not cut off from opportunity)
- **Interdependence** (recognizing both individual and shared responsibility; community, care, and love; belonging)
- **Hope** (possibility; space to dream and create; belief that things can change)
- **Freedom** (agency, choice, opportunity; dignity)
- **Prosperity** (thriving in all dimensions of well-being, including economic security, today and in the future)

3. We acknowledge that this is one of many approaches to narrative. Other narrative practitioners, including some we interviewed, dismiss the existing narratives entirely and focus on seeding a transformative new narrative. The narrative and audience analysis in this research can also be helpful for that approach.

THEMES AND MESSAGES

Our research identified four themes that need to be part of the new narrative, and tested messages for each that resonate with champion and persuadable audiences and help bring more people into the work. While the language used in the grid below is tested and can be used where it works for you, the most important thing is to convey the big ideas. You can adapt these messages to use language that works with your specific audiences and stakeholders and that highlights the solutions you're working to advance.

For example, we used the phase “fair shot” because it came up organically in many of our testing conversations and people described it as “the way people actually speak” versus jargon. It tested well in the survey. But if “fair chance,” “fair shake” or other language fits your audiences better, you have flexibility. The key is to use all four themes so you echo and reinforce the narrative.



Theme	Top message from survey, color coded to show where the core values appear	Other effective message options from testing ⁴
Vision Starting with positive vision helps avoid getting stuck in the current problem	<p>All people and families should share the prosperity we build together. This includes financial security so they can enjoy today and plan for the future. And it includes thriving together through public resources like clean air and water, great schools and child care, safe neighborhoods, and quality health care.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All people, families, and children should benefit from our hard work and share the prosperity we build together. Every family and child needs prosperity, not just survival. This includes financial security, the ability to create a better future, and equal rights and protections for all people. All people are worthy of dignity and prosperity. People participate and contribute in many ways, including caregiving and time with loved ones. Families have their own unique plans and goals for today and for future generations. They need many ways to reach their goals, in a system that gives them a fair shot.
Shared experience Solidarity in shared experience; focus on systems, not individuals; recognize blame of existing wealth narratives	<p>But the current system is built to help people in power gain excessive wealth at the expense of everyone else.</p> <p>For most people, chasing prosperity has gotten too hard. Families are struggling today and deferring their plans for the future. They should not have to.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For many people, the pain of a broken economic system is a daily reality. Some families struggle against barriers that are built in front of them to create unequal opportunity and threaten freedom and prosperity. Almost everyone gets messages from social media, ads, and entertainment that say excessive wealth is good, that if you work hard enough you can find it, and that something is wrong with you if you don't have it. This is especially relevant for young people. These messages hold an unfair system in place, often by design. Families can no longer just "hard work" themselves out of this—and they shouldn't have to because the system can change. There are laws and social practices that place more value on some lives than others, based on race and class. <p><i>The last message is for organizations and efforts ready to name structural racism as the cause of the broken system, based on RWJF's Structural Racism and Health Message Guide, which also has insights on when and how to use this message.</i></p>

4. Please see the research report for more on these messages.

Theme	Top message from survey, color coded to show where the core values appear	Other effective message options from testing
Agency and action Tangible, doable actions (or even an invitation to look for and support changes)	<p>Most people know the economic system doesn't work for most families, and they want it to change. It will take all of us—people, business, government—to create a system where all families and children have economic wellbeing, now and for generations to come.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We all do better when we all do better. Families and children prosper when everyone has more opportunities. And everyone prospers from investments and decisions that support people and families today, and that plan for children and future generations. • Look for and support changes that give people and families more access to wealth now, and that shape a more fair system for the future. • Economic wellbeing for families means the ability to meet daily needs today and build for the future. It's the ability to make choices and changes, and develop resilience to weather challenges. It's joy, time with loved ones, and quality of life.
Evidence and hope Show that change is already happening and can spread	<p>Big changes are possible. Around the country, people are reinventing the economy.</p> <p>They are increasing living wage jobs and affordable housing. They are making banking and taxes more fair. They are building employee-owned businesses, creating debt-free education and health care, and more. They are creating a system where all families and children have a fair shot at prosperity.</p>	<p>This is where examples are essential. Many people agree with this narrative and then ask: How can you show me this is true? How would this happen? What can we do about this? To build evidence that change is happening, and more is possible, you might do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share what your organization is doing. • Offer examples that, in our testing, are widely understood and supported. Here's one example; see the next section for more. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>They are increasing living wage jobs and affordable housing. They are making banking and taxes more fair. They are building employee-owned businesses, creating debt-free education and health care, and more.</i> • Share other actions, relevant to your audiences, that show change is happening in many ways and places. • Reinforce why prioritizing prosperity for children and families is a priority in policymaking. • Include specific actions your audience can take to advance the change you seek.

EXAMPLES THAT BUILD EVIDENCE AND HOPE

The narrative generates agreement, relevance, and willingness to share. It sparks curiosity about what specific changes are needed and how change can occur. People agree in theory, are leaning in, and seek more information. That's where you come in. The final theme of the narrative is building evidence and hope that change is underway and can grow.

Depending on the audiences you prioritize and want to engage, you will often use examples from your work, the work of allies, or other actions that align with your theory of change. And, if you are communicating more broadly or engaging audiences you don't yet know well, you can use examples from our testing.

Start here: These examples are supported **across all three audience segments in the survey at an average 70 percent or higher. They are examples with strong support to draw most people into conversation.**

- Fair taxes, where everyone pays their fair share (79 percent average support across the survey sample)
- Job training for the jobs of the future (79 percent)
- Ways for more people to save for retirement (79 percent)
- Affordable ways to take care of older adults at the end of life (78 percent)
- Free or affordable health care, without medical debt (77 percent)
- A living wage for everyone (75 percent)
- Welcoming and fair banking, with low fees and rates (72 percent)

Layer in: **These examples are supported by over 50 percent of people in the survey.** You could start here with supportive or persuadable audiences. Garnering engagement and support is easier after you get nods in response to the list above.

- More opportunities to own a home, or to build wealth through renting (68 percent average support across the survey sample)
- Free or affordable higher education, without debt (66 percent)
- Free or low cost child care (63 percent)
- Tax credits that benefit families with children (60 percent)
- Easier ways for people to start their own business (58 percent)
- Ways to build wealth together, like through employee-owned businesses (53 percent)

After you build trust: These examples are supported by over 30 percent of survey respondents. They may require some relationship building and case making first. For audiences that are already supportive, you can start here. For others, leading with ideas from each of the lists above, then coming here, may help more people stay in the conversation.

- “Baby bonds” or savings accounts for all children (39 percent) (it is worth noting that 42 percent of the likely opposition supports this change compared with 36 percent of persuadables and 39 percent of potential champions)
- Reparations to repair the damages done to Black and Indigenous people (35 percent)

Beyond the survey: Storytelling ideas from other research insights and community work

Offer evidence that rapid action and big change has happened before, and can happen again.

In rapid testing, people talked about how big changes can happen in a crisis, or how changes in the wrong direction can actually create hope for change. “We’ve let political discourse make it sound like changes through the government are crazy,” said one interviewee. “But we’ve used government at many different times to advance important policies and transform our country.” Here are some examples:

In times of crisis, we share what we have and support one another. Our economy doesn’t usually work that way. It’s set up to put us in competition with each other rather than sharing in the wealth and prosperity we all help create. (In the survey, 84 percent of potential champions agreed; persuadables agreed somewhat.)

We gather around our neighbors during natural disasters, sickness, and loss. This doesn’t have to happen in just a few places, or only in an emergency. It can be the way we do things every day and everywhere. (From rapid tests; not survey tested.)

We have seen that tax and economic codes can be changed quickly and in big ways to benefit the very rich. We can flip this to demand that the federal government change the tax and economic system to benefit all families. (From rapid tests; not survey tested.)

You can add examples here from your own community or nationally. For example: During the pandemic, the federal government expanded access to health care and vaccines, child care, food, and emergency assistance. Red tape that had stuck for decades moved in a matter of months.



Make the connection from proven to promising to transformative approaches.

Informed by our literature review and interviews, here are two examples of how you might structure this:

Issue: Universal care

- **Proven**

- *Caregiving makes almost everything in this country possible. All caregivers want the time and resources to give their families the best opportunities, but their contributions often go unrecognized and unrewarded.⁵*
- *To keep child care providers' doors open and help keep families afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government approved unprecedented onetime investments in the child care sector. These resources were used to improve access, support providers, make care more affordable, and enable long overdue policy improvements across states. Their impact was tremendous. This works—but the investment in shared prosperity did not continue.⁶*

- **Promising**

- *Universal care means that all families have access to the free care they need. New Mexico became the first state to make this a reality, showing that it's possible. Starting in late 2025, New Mexico extended access to families regardless of income, saving families an average of \$12,000 per child each year. This historic investment strengthens family stability, supports the workforce, and builds a sustainable, high-quality early learning system.⁷*
- *Other examples of states extending resources, access, and workforce investments are highlighted on the [Center for American Progress website](#).*

- **Transformative**

- *Prioritizing care as a public good would include investments in affordable child care, Medicaid, Medicare, paid family leave, and aging and disability care. Care that is currently unpaid—caring for children in the home, supporting older adults and people with disabilities—would be recognized and compensated as a public resource.*

5. [RWJF Caregiving Library](#)

6. [The Center for Law and Social Policy](#)

7. [New Mexico Early Childhood Education & Care Department](#)

Issue: Asset building in the current system

- Proven

- *Homeownership and individual savings and retirement accounts are cornerstones of household wealth building. Continuing to expand access, fairly, benefits many families.*

- Promising

- *Employee ownership and community-owned real estate expand options for people to build net worth together, which makes it easier to get started and benefits whole communities.⁸*
- *Relationship based lending makes loan decisions based on a person's history, character, and other factors that provide a fuller and more fair picture than a credit score alone, especially since opportunities to build credit are far from equal.*

- Transformative

- *Guaranteed housing aims to provide housing for every person in need. In a liberation economy, racial inequalities within the housing market will be dismantled via a federal homes guarantee. All people of color and people in need will have an assured right to safe and secure housing, free from economic exploitation.⁹*
- *Collective wellbeing is a way of planning that honors the interconnections between people and systems. Boston's Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative created a coalition of residents committed to "development without displacement." Their initiative has revitalized a blighted neighborhood with affordable housing, parks, community facilities, and new businesses.¹⁰*



8. Adapted from the Aspen Institute's Financial Security Project, [Ownership Investing: Financing the Future of Wealth](#)

9. This is one of [Liberation in a Generation](#)'s guarantees.

10. [Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative](#)

THE EXPANDED AUDIENCE THIS NARRATIVE CAN ENGAGE

Dominant narratives, by definition, exist broadly; they are baked into the culture. To find a foothold in that very broad world, we used the survey to identify two audiences who resonate with the new narrative. For organizations that want to broaden their audience and support, engaging these groups can create change in social norms, expectations, and culture.

Potential champions: Could amplify the narrative within their channels and networks.

- Represent 27.5 percent of the U.S. population.¹¹
- Say the current economic system should be replaced AND that it does not allow most people and families to prosper.
- More likely to do their own research on what they've read about in the survey; strongly support both narratives; and strongly support most of the actions we tested (e.g., fair taxes, employee-owned businesses).
- Most likely to:
 - Be age 18 - 34 (GenZ + millennial)
 - Identify as female
 - Not be registered to vote
 - Be African American or Black
 - Earn < \$50,000
 - Not have a college degree
 - Identify as Democrat

Persuadables: Can be drawn in by the narrative and then engaged in actions to shift policies and practices.

- Represent 35.8 percent of the U.S. population.
- Say the current economic system should be preserved, reformed, or replaced AND that it does not allow most people and families to prosper, OR they are not sure.
- After narrative exposure, more than a quarter (28 percent) move toward saying the system does not allow most people and families to prosper. More than half support the actions we tested.
- Most likely to:
 - Be GenX (44 - 60)
 - Identify as female
 - Not have a college degree
 - Be without children under age 18
 - Be single
 - Identify as Independent

Please see the research report for more details on these audiences.

11. Based on our national survey of 1,013 U.S. adults (census-representative by gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, and geography). See the research report for details.

Other audience considerations

You will have insights about people within your audiences who need a “dialed up” or “dialed down” message. Three groups for consideration, based on discussions in focus groups and rapid testing, include the following:



Your committed champions

In focus groups, several participants noted that they focus only on activating their base. Others wanted a narrative with more direct abolitionist, liberatory, and/or reparations language. Certainly, if you are talking with people who are already champions for your specific work, use the framing and language that engaged them initially. And if your champions struggle to engage others and bring them into the work, they might find the narrative a helpful place to start.



People who are struggling to survive in the broken system

In the survey, people who earn less than \$50,000/year are more likely to be “potential champions,” agreeing that the system needs to be replaced and supporting most of the proposed changes. We balance that with the wisdom in the focus groups and rapid tests, where people expressed concern that talking to people crushed by the system about prosperity and future planning may create shame and self-blame exacerbated by “bootstrap” narratives.

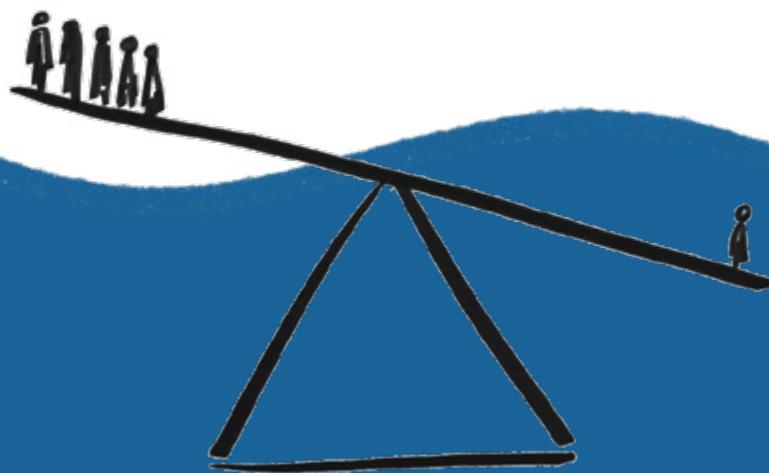
People who hold or influence significant wealth

We tested the narrative with people working for economic opportunity—in banks, economic development institutions, investment firms, and philanthropy—who are interested in economic inclusion. They battle intentional, fiercely reinforced individual and meritocracy wealth narratives and related practices in their field, in their organizations, with their clients, and among influencers.

One interviewee said: “So many people hope a better system is possible but are being told ‘that’s not how it’s done, it won’t work, you don’t know enough.’” This is especially true, they said, for younger philanthropists (either next-generation stewards of family wealth or new-wealth holders), who start out idealistic but are quickly called back by advisors, trustees, and others. This maintains the status quo and its harms, including long-held assumptions about creditworthiness and collateral, particularly among borrowers of color, driven by biases, structural barriers, and systemic racism.

They see their potential to shift the narrative, and want to do so. The new narrative could help them break through. If you’re working in or with this field, consider how you might:

- Share alternative wealth-building practices that work, especially those that go beyond tried and true wealth-building approaches to shift systems and build shared prosperity.
- Help people in this field see their interest and potential not only in creating better banking products, but also bringing their voice and influence to advance shifts in policies, public resources, and systems that would significantly impact family economic wellbeing and change the enabling environment for their core business.



PUTTING THE ELEMENTS TOGETHER

EXAMPLE #1 OF THE NARRATIVE IN ACTION

Inspired by the work of [Better Life Lab](#) reporters during our rapid test, along with other sources, here's an example of how to use the narrative to advocate for child care policies.

Theme	<i>Customized message and story points, using the narrative, for an audience that includes some potential champions and mostly persuadables or unknowns.</i>
Vision	All people and families should share the prosperity we build together.
Shared experience	<p>But the current system is built to help people in power gain excessive wealth, and most people and families don't have a fair shot. Chasing prosperity has gotten too hard. A major barrier to family prosperity is the cost of child care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Over 40 percent of U.S. households are unable to afford basics, forcing them to make impossible choices and risky trade-offs every day.• Since 1990, child care expenses have more than tripled, outpacing wages, groceries, and even housing. This is a problem parents are left to solve on their own. Child care costs push an estimated 134,000 families into poverty each year.¹² Still, child care providers often earn poverty wages themselves, and our system fails to recognize the many ways people contribute, including caretaking and spending time with loved ones.• The high cost of care, and unreliable incomes for child care workers, mean that families are deferring their plans for the future. They should not have to.

12. Ross, Kyle, and Kennedy Andara. "Child Care Expenses Push an Estimated 134,000 Families Into Poverty Each Year." Center for American Progress, 21 Oct. 2024.

**Agency
and action**

Most people agree that the economic system doesn't work for most families, and they want it to change.

The high cost of child care is a big part of that, and (insert your specific program or policy) is an effective solution. In this case, public funds are essential. Businesses, organizations, and communities also play a role.

**Evidence
and hope**

Big changes like this are possible and already happening.

- During the pandemic, American Rescue Plan funds¹³ saved the jobs of more than 1 million early educators and maintained care for as many as 9.6 million children.¹⁴ Many states continued that funding, seeing the positive impact on workers, families, and the economy.¹⁵
- New Mexico recently became the first state to offer no-cost child care to all families. This saves families an average of \$12,000 per child each year, makes families more stable, and supports the workforce.¹⁶
- Vermont's child care act benefits both working parents and the working people who support them. More families qualify for child care subsidies, and providers earn more.¹⁷

It is possible to create a system where all families have a fair shot at prosperity, wellbeing, and time with their loved ones.

13. Gale, Rebecca. "[Why Is Child Care So Expensive? And What Can We Do About It?](#)" The 74.

14. Kashen, Julie, Laura Valle Gutierrez, Lea Woods, and Jessica Milli. "[Child Care Cliff: 3.2 Million Children Likely to Lose Spots With End of Federal Funds](#)." The Century Foundation, 21 June 2023.

15. "[Impacts of the Expiration of Federal Child Care Stabilization Funding and the Mitigating Effects of State-Level Stopgap Funding](#)." Archived from the Biden-Harris White House, 27 June 2024.

16. [New Mexico Early Childhood Education & Care Department](#)

17. Gale, Rebecca. "[Building a Better Future Through Child Care—Vermont Leads the Way](#)." The Thread, New America, 1 Aug. 2025.

SPREADING THE SHARED PROSPERITY NARRATIVE

A new narrative starts to stick as people gather stories and experiences that back it up. There are so many ways for organizations to use this narrative to shape the stories and experiences they create.

First, ask yourself the following:

- What can I do to reflect the shared prosperity narrative in my communications or in my work?
- How can I make sure I don't reinforce dominant narratives of individualism and scarcity, or fuel cynicism that the system is rigged or broken without offering how it's broken, and how it can change?

Then, create storytelling, actions, and experiences that prove the narrative to be true. Here are a few ideas:

- Weave the narrative throughout your messaging—communication tools, advocacy platforms, research studies, events, and services.
- Invite artists and creators to use the narrative values and themes in their work. See the rapid tests for inspiration.
- Use the narrative themes and values to shape policy proposals and legislative agendas.
- If you're hosting discussions in community-based settings, use the narrative themes as an outline. In rapid testing, inviting groups to explore these ideas helped build solidarity and conviction that change is needed and possible.
- Use the narrative themes to set up social media calendars, with a series of posts illustrating each theme, showing that change is happening, and guiding people to action.
- If you work with the news media, share story ideas that support the new narrative.
 - *If you see a story that perpetuates the old narratives, contact the reporter and/or submit a letter to the editor that uses the new narrative themes to paint a more accurate picture.*
 - *If you have a good relationship with a reporter, ask for a meeting to share this new information and the narrative, and ask them to move away from reporting that reinforces old tropes.*

- Use the new narrative in your conversations with decision-makers in education, law, business, entertainment, pop culture, the arts, and other sectors. Ask them to commit to advancing the new narrative and disrupting the old ones through their work.

Funders can support this work too, by supporting narrative infrastructure, including the following:

- Developing narrative hubs or cohorts that create space for creative collaboration across sectors, networks, and movements.
- Engaging in capacity building that sits alongside organizations to build their narrative skills in real time, test the results, and adapt and strengthen the narrative. (This was one of the leading asks from the field in interviews and focus groups.)
- Providing funding and support to build persuasive, clear examples of alternative approaches to wealth building and economic inclusion for family prosperity and wellbeing.
- Funding grassroots leadership and engagement and supporting organizing and power building as critical components of shaping and shifting narratives. (This was one of the leading asks from the field in interviews and focus groups.)
- Engaging in ongoing narrative mapping and analysis to track dominance of the new narrative against harmful current narratives; sharing, learning, and collaborative adjustment with the field.
- Funding artist/creative expression of the narrative; investing in organizations, companies, and platforms that influence or control content distribution.



Do you have more to share?
Visit **SharedProsperityNarrative.com**
and send us an email!

APPENDIX

WORKSHEET FOR THE SHARED PROSPERITY NARRATIVE

You can use this worksheet to apply the narrative in your strategy, communication, and actions. It's a flexible tool, not a prescriptive message frame. You can use the words, voices, cultural contexts, examples, and solutions that work for you. Or, you can use the tested messages as is, if they work for you.

Goal for your communication or action

What do you want people to do?

Audiences and values

Who do you need or want to take action?

Channels, activities, and messengers

What channel(s) will best reach your intended audiences? What are the strengths and limitations of these channels? Who is the most trusted or influential messenger?

Audience	Channels or activities	Messenger

Your message in the narrative frame

Using the narrative themes, you can combine the tested messages, other message options, and/or your own language to best reach your audience. Using the narrative structure, and pulling through the main ideas will align you with the narrative. This helps you engage broader audiences if that's your strategy, and connect your work with other transformative solutions. You will likely need slightly different versions for different audiences.

Audience: _____

Most important values to emphasize:

<input type="checkbox"/>	FAMILY
<input type="checkbox"/>	FAIRNESS AND EQUITY
<input type="checkbox"/>	INTERDEPENDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/>	HOPE AND POSSIBILITY
<input type="checkbox"/>	FREEDOM
<input type="checkbox"/>	PROSPERITY

Theme	Tested message	Your message, examples, and stories
Vision What's the positive vision you want to put forward for children and families in your work? This helps people avoid getting stuck in the current problem.	<p>All people and families should share the prosperity we build together.</p> <p>This includes financial security so they can enjoy today and plan for the future. And it includes thriving together through public resources like clean air and water, great schools and child care, safe neighborhoods, and quality health care.</p>	
Shared experience What can you say or do to build solidarity in shared experience? This also helps people focus on the system, not individuals, and negates the blame of existing wealth narratives.	<p>But the current system is built to help people in power gain excessive wealth at the expense of everyone else.</p> <p>For most people, chasing prosperity has gotten too hard. Families are struggling today and deferring their plans for the future. They should not have to.</p>	

Theme	Tested message	Your message, examples, and stories
Agency and action What tangible, doable actions can you offer? This might even be an invitation to look for and support changes.	<p>Most people know the economic system doesn't work for most families, and they want it to change.</p> <p>It will take all of us—people, business, government—to create a system where all families and children have economic wellbeing, now and for generations to come.</p>	
Evidence and hope How can you show that change is already happening and can spread?	<p>Big changes are possible.</p> <p>Around the country, people are reinventing the economy. They are increasing living wage jobs and affordable housing. They are making banking and taxes more fair. They are building employee-owned businesses, creating debt-free education and health care, and more. They are creating a system where all families and children have a fair shot at prosperity.</p>	

All resources available at
SharedProsperityNarrative.com



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